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Room Service

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Tourists of a ghoulish disposition visit Pendle Hill at night to summon the Pendle Witches, ten men and women tried and hanged in 1612 for witchcraft-related murders

A homely hotpot of a hotel

Hotel Review BY JAKE BROWN

Name: Northcote
Where: Langho, nr Blackburn
Official rating: Four stars
Cost: Double rooms from £200. Gourmet Overnight breaks for two, including room, five-course dinner, canapés, half-bottle of champagne and breakfast, from £260 per room
Contact: Tel: 01254 240555, www.northcote.com



Why go there: Northcote offers luxurious accommodation in a Victorian manor house set on the edge of the well-heeled Ribble Valley beauty spot. It's compact with 14 rooms, each individually designed with ultra-modern bathrooms, 200-channel TVs, Bose stereos and Molton Brown accessories. Some have views of the wide, green plain of the valley and craggy Pendle Hill looming in the distance. Our room was wonderfully large and luxurious, perfect for lounging. The staff were warm and informative, and clearly picked up on celebrity chef Nigel Haworth's enthusiasm for the place.

He co-owns the hotel with Craig Bancroft and their empire also includes four gastropubs and hospitality at Blackburn Rovers, while Northcote offers cookery courses ('a 20 per cent increase in blokes this year,' says Haworth) and the annual, ten-day Obsession food festival, celebrating its tenth anniversary this month. The rooms and hotel in general are lovely but Northcote really is all about the food.

Why we like the hotel: In short, the food. Northcote is a great choice for a pampered foodie break. The restaurant has retained a Michelin star for 14 years. Haworth has

represented the north-west on BBC2's Great British Menu for the past two years and Northcote's food was voted the best in Britain in this year's Harden's survey. The Sunday night we stayed saw the restaurant packed – no mean feat considering many would have had to drive miles to get here – but the staff and kitchen handled the numbers with aplomb. And what an experience. Over canapés in the lounge, we opted for the five-course Gourmet Menu 'designed for leisurely dining' and were seated to be spoiled for nearly three hours. The immaculately presented courses, including 'roast parsnip consommé, mushrooms, parsnip foam and onion bhaji' and 'rare-breed suckling pig, pasta, chestnuts, kale and medlar jelly' were each accompanied by wines selected by Bancroft. Also available were a seven-course tasting menu and à la carte menu, which included Haworth's Lancashire hotpot. Even the room-service soup of the day was a joy: butternut squash with ginger and toasted seeds.



What we didn't like: A car is essential to get out to the surrounding villages: with the hotel sitting just off a noisy A59/A666 roundabout, the immediate area is not one of rural tranquillity. The traffic backs up regularly on the approach from the mainline station at Preston, though the friendly drivers of the hotel's preferred Ribble Valley Chauffeur Company

made even this delay a pleasure. **What else can you do in the region?:** For hikers and hunters, the remote, peat moorland and fells of the Forest of Bowland begin just north of here. Also nearby are the ancient town and castle of Clitheroe and picturesque villages such as Whalley. Manchester and the Yorkshire Dales lie a little further afield.