

Travel



COUNTRY KITCHEN: Northcote is comfortable, set amid pleasant scenery and you'll dine in style. Inset: Northcote's Michelin-starred food is a real treat

Dinner with the Michelin marn

FOOD lovers rejoiced to the news that Merseyside was at last home to a Michelin-starred restaurant when Chef Marc Wilkinson landed the honour for Fraiche in Oxtou.

At last - the chance to savour the flavour without traipsing off to London (heaven forbid we should spend our hard-earned cash in Manchester). A trip to a Michelin star winner is one of life's special pleasures.

So it was with some glee that I received an invitation to take the short trip up the M6 to Blackburn to sample Chef Patron Nigel Haworth's legendary kitchen at Northcote. Only 30 minutes or so from Switch Island, Northcote

combines a beautifully appointed 14-bed country-house hotel with a nationally-reputed restaurant that has one star and is closing in on another. It was everything I hoped it would be. Accessible,

comfortable, restful - the rooms have all been recently refurbished - and it has the most amazing food. I suggest a quick stroll

Foodie heaven? Ray McAllister finds paradise just 30 minutes up the M6

around the gardens - just to work up an appetite.

Then repair to the cosy bar and lounge for pre-dinner drinks and canapés. Push the boat out - don't even glance at the prices. We don't - can't - do Michelin every week, so don't let penny-watching spoil the experience.

The cholesterol police could have a night off. I chose the Black Pudding and Buttered Trout in mustard and nettle sauce as my starter. Divine. Then came exquisite, melting mutton. Haworth's style is faithfully Northern and passionately seasonal.

Lynne forked me a mouthful of halibut. It tastes like Seahouses' she said. Seahouses was the North East coast venue for childhood holidays. A trawlerman's village of biting winds, salty spray and fish you'll struggle to match if you

TRAVEL FACTS

Northcote is to be found in Northcote Rd, Langho, near Clitheroe and Blackburn.

You can book by calling 02154 240555. A variety of prices and packages are available, including special gourmet breaks. Northcote has a specially equipped room for disabled guests.

More details are available by calling the hotel or by visiting their website at www.northcote.com.

scour the globe. She was right. It tasted like memories.

Dessert? Ginger pudding for Lynne. Rhubarb for me. We chose from the a la carte menu, but there is a spectacular tasting menu if you're dead set on a trip to foodie heaven.

We got the chance to talk to Chef Haworth. He is rightly proud of what he and partner Craig Bancroft have achieved at Northcote and excited by the

new menu they have just introduced.

He's upbeat too, by the way things are progressing at the Haworth spin-offs - The Highwayman at Kirby Lonsdale, The Clog and Billycock at Pleasington and the Three Fishes at Mitton.

Northcote though, remains the master brand. Set in gentle Lancashire countryside at the village of Langho, it's ideal for a break given its proximity to the tourism and shopping opportunities of Liverpool and Manchester. Nearer still is Clitheroe - well worth a visit for its castle, museum and specialist shops.

Northcote is a member of the Pride of Britain Hotel Group but isn't one of those small, peaceful retreats that throws up its hands in horror at the suggestion of children.

There's not much for kids there, admittedly. But they are very welcome and Sunday lunch is a popular family occasion. And yes - they will cook the stuff kids eat. It will, though, taste better than what you give them at home. I promise.

Sharkbait Reef has me hooked

● From Page 19

in the Alton Towers Hotel, or Caribbean chaos in the Splash Landings Hotel. All hotel guests receive exclusive benefits, including an early ride time, giving guests and their families a head start on day guests.

We stayed in Splash Landings where the indoor water park Cariba Creek ensures the thrills continue outside the theme park.

It has tropical temperatures, waterfalls, daring rides and sun loungers for those who simply want to chill.

To see some rides in action and get a glimpse of Sharkbait Reef log on to www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/video

ECHO
co.uk

After our swim we dined at Flambois Feast restaurant which offers a great buffet selection from around the world so even the fussiest child will find something to their taste.

What made our stay at the hotel and theme park even more memorable was the friendliness and professionalism of the staff. They were great with the kids and went that extra mile to make sure we had an enjoyable time.

And by the end of our stay, it wasn't just the children who were asking how soon we could come back.



LATE RUN: The French resort of Tignes is open until May

Still time to ski

EASTER is over - but you still want to keep skiing?

Thanks to huge snowfalls and enough snow fans to make it worth their while, there are plenty of Euro-resorts where you can stay on the snow for a month or two yet.

Here's our guide on where to ski and board for the next four to eight weeks, and more.

● **Austria:** At least a dozen Austrian ski areas are open into May, including St Christoph above St Anton and Ischgl. Half that number continue in to June and beyond. The Kitzsteinhorn glacier above Kaprun currently has more than 12ft of snow, the Pizizal Glacier almost 13ft.

● **France:** Five resorts are open in to May with Chamonix and Tignes lasting the longest - to May 10. Then, after a few weeks break, Val d'Isere and Les Deux Alpes join Tignes for summer skiing from June to

August. Tignes currently has a 5ft snow base and Les Deux Alpes has more than 6ft on upper slopes.

● **Italy:** Italy has four spring and summer snow choiles. Val Senales has more than 8ft of snow. It closes, like Cervinia, on May 3, but re-opens on June 13. Passo Stelvio re-opens for summer skiing on May 30 through to August.

● **Spain:** After peaking with a snow base of more than 17ft in March, Spain's Sierra Nevada - Europe's most southerly major ski area - has extended its season two weeks longer than planned, to mid-May. The snow is still more than 10ft deep on the higher slopes.

● **Switzerland:** Zermatt is one of the few resorts that can offer skiing all year round.

● For daily updates on where to ski all year round, log on to www.skiinfo.com.