

## Home: Rutland

▶ JOANNE TYNAN



**PERFECT FOR A STAYCATION** Ramadale Lodge Hotel was converted in 1989 and is set around a courtyard. The restaurant serves locally sourced produce where possible

# Small but perfectly formed

ENGLAND'S smallest county will have to forgive me for not knowing much about it.

In fact, I didn't even know Rutland was a county until I spent a weekend exploring this hidden gem just an hour and 15 minutes away from Cambridge.

In my defence, it only became a county in 1997 when it decided it wanted independence from Leicestershire. I knew it had "a big, lake type thing", which is actually Rutland Water and Anglian Water's main drinking water reservoir.

I also didn't know anything about the controversy surrounding the origin of the Rutland name with some locals claiming it is named after a local - Rota - who owned a large estate in the area. Others maintain the name stems from the rich red soil found in the county and that, over time, the name became Rutland.

No-one knows which theory is correct but I do know Rutland is worth putting to the top of your

"staycation" list before everyone discovers this beautiful, unspoilt part of England.

My partner Chris and I looked into the Ramadale Lodge Hotel, a very pretty former farmhouse with croquet rooms all over the brick building which completes its chocolate box image.

It is located between Oakham and Stamford on the north shore of Rutland Water. The cycle routes around the water have recently won a national accolade naming it as one of the best trails in the country so for bike enthusiasts the hotel is particularly well located.

The hotel has been in the Thomas Noel family since 1760 and formed part of the adjoining Eaton Park, west of the Fairs of Gainsborough.

It was converted in 1989 and is set around a gorgeous courtyard full of gorgeous flowers. The layout is clever: fellow guests are well spaced out to ensure a degree of privacy.

There are even padded loungers for those who

are really determined to relax.

After we checked into our simple, but charming double bedroom which overlooked the hotel's croquet lawn we headed back to the courtyard for afternoon tea. We relaxed in the sunshine with the papers until an array of small triangular sandwiches and scones arrived. Smoked salmon and cream cheese followed by clothed cream is enough to put anyone in a good mood. But rather than retiring to have a siesta we went for a potter around Oakham.

There were lots of little independent shops to explore, but Stamford - where we visited the next day - definitely got my vote as the market town to explore as it is more picturesque.

A brisk walk along Rutland Water rounded off the day nicely before we headed back to the hotel for a magnificent three-course meal in

its formal dining room. There is a large function room for events in a converted barn and the rest of the hotel is full of nooks and crannies, which gives the place an ever-changing air.

The management endeavours to source local produce wherever possible and it is rightly proud of the quality of its offerings. We tucked into bread from the Hambleton Bakery before we embarked on a treat which included scallops with chorizo followed by fresh Rutland Water trout for me and prime Rutland beef raised on the nearby Hambleton Farm for Chris.

I rounded off my meal with a decadent panna cotta and fresh coffee was served to us back in the courtyard. The service was friendly throughout our stay and the staff were all knowledgeable about the local area and all it has to offer. The fresh air from our walk around the reservoir had clearly won us out.

We slept like logs in our comfortable room before we had a full cooked English breakfast to give us the energy to pack our bags.

Ramadale Lodge is a lovely hidey-hole of a hotel which is high on charm and magic but less on airs and graces. This makes it a perfect rural hidehole when the gets too stressful.

We were eager not to end our adventure around Rutland too soon so after a trip into Stamford we headed off to explore Burghley House, the nearby stately home.

The house is one of the largest and grandest from the first Elizabethan Age and it has starred in many Hollywood blockbusters including *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Da Vinci Code* and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*. Its Gardens of Surprise are also well worth a look. Rutland is an idyllic rural destination offering a perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life - so visit now before everyone hears about it.

## travel file

● Ramadale Lodge Hotel and Restaurant: The North Shore, Rutland, Oakham, LE15 8AA. Tel: 01571 724678. Email: reception@ramadalelodge.co.uk

● Prices start from £96 per night for a double room including a full English breakfast.

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