

# *a jewel in* **Bath's crown**

Kate Duggan heads to **The Queensberry** for some much-needed rest and relaxation



Steeple and spires: Bath's city skyline CREDIT: VISIT BATH

**A**fter a hectic few weeks, a night away in Bath with my friend Penny was just what I needed. And I can't think of anywhere I'd rather have stayed than The Queensberry hotel.

### **The hotel...**

'No stilts, pogo sticks, space-hoppers, flaming torches or whips at the bar.' So reads one of The Queensberry Rules. The tongue-in-cheek rules are just one indication that The Queensberry doesn't take itself too seriously. Yes, the hotel is decidedly upmarket (or as my teenage daughter would say, 'bougie') but there's zero pretension. You feel at home within minutes of walking through the door and can stretch out in comfort in the drawing room, make yourself a cuppa and enjoy a good chinwag without worrying that your attire is more Primark than Prada.

The combination of elegance, charm and quirkiness is so uniquely British, I can't imagine finding a hotel quite like The Queensberry anywhere else in the world. Originally four townhouses, the hotel is an enticing higgledy-piggledy warren of rooms. Around every corner there's a cosy snug or inviting sitting room begging you to pull up a seat and curl up with a book. We found ourselves memorising the route to our room through the wallpaper and paintings: Head for the peacock, turn right at the cockatoo, when you spot the storks, you've reached your destination.

The owners and interior designers have clearly had a lot of fun with the décor. Rather than stick rigidly to one period, they've drawn inspiration from across the decades. Think maximalist wallpaper framing velvet headboards in rich jewel tones, and 1920s lamps set against Georgian wood panelling. It's eclectic, but it works. There's a real sense of joy and playfulness, and oodles of charm.

The Old Q Bar, for instance, is reminiscent of a gentleman's smoking lounge, with wing-backed armchairs and an Art Deco bar stocked with a variety of small-batch spirits.

Named for the 8th Marquess of Queensbury, who commissioned the townhouses in 1771, The Queensberry is the brainchild of Helen and Laurence Beere. The husband-and-wife team took on the hotel back in 2003 and have ensured the playful branding is evident in everything from the décor to the wine list. Take those aforementioned 'rules', which include phrases such as 'Anyone attempting to secure bar staff's attention by clicking their fingers will be scowled at, perhaps even ignored. Our bar staff may be cute, but they are not puppies.'

The Beeres clearly value their staff, and it shows. From the doormen, who were happy to chat and recommend their favourite eateries, to Restaurant Manager Aisling Bury and every other member of the team we met, The Queensberry colleagues all seemed genuinely proud of the hotel and eager to help.



**Helen and Laurence Beere**



**The Old Q Bar**



**The Lower Bar**



Room 26 – where Kate and Penny stayed

### ***The room...***

There are 29 rooms at The Queensberry. Each one is individually decorated in a masterful blend of historic charm meets contemporary comfort. Laurence and Helen Beere's philosophy is, "We believe a room in a unique and slightly luscious hotel should be a little like a beautiful guest room in the house of stylish friends. But each room should look like it's in a different house, belonging to different friends. No two the same; all of them gorgeous."

We stayed in a master deluxe room, which had an incredibly comfortable super-king-size bed. Decorated in a calming shade of forest green, with gold accents and thoughtfully chosen Art Deco accessories, it did indeed feel like a gorgeous guest room, and the bathroom had echoes of a 1920s Hollywood filmset. If we'd stayed for longer, I'd definitely have made use of the free-standing roll-top bath.

As it were, we were content to tuck into the complimentary chocolates and have a good look through the dossier of places to visit, dine and explore that The Queensberry helpfully provides.

### ***The restaurant...***

The Queensberry boasts Bath's only Michelin-star restaurant – an accolade it's held since 2018. Last year, the restaurant also gained four AA rosettes. The Olive Tree is in the hotel's basement, and the décor matches the hotel's perfectly. Vintage-style surrealist wallpaper adorns the walls. There's plenty to look at, without too much visual 'noise' detracting from the food or the company.

Executive Head Chef Chris Cleghorn has led The Olive Tree since 2013. His career includes stints in three other Michelin-star restaurants, including under Heston Blumenthal at The Fat Duck and Michael Caines at Gidleigh Park.

While Cleghorn focuses on the food, Restaurant Manager and Sommelier Aisling Bury makes sure everything is running smoothly in the dining room.

Penny and I had booked the eight-course tasting menu with drinks pairing. Course after course was delivered, each one beautifully presented and extremely delicious.

The highlight for me was the crapaudine beetroot served with a creamy onion sauce, pink pepper, rose, black garlic and horseradish. Who knew beetroot could taste so good or that those ingredients could possibly work together? I also adored the pureed delicata pumpkin, which was served with a spoonful of richly flavoured seeds called tonburi (also known



The Olive Tree restaurant



as vegan caviar), topped with smoked cream, pecans and a drizzle of maple syrup. I certainly didn't feel like the poor vegetarian cousin.

Penny's standout dish was the Isle of Skye langoustine, which was cooked over white charcoal made from oak (known as binchotan) to intensify the flavour. It was served with chargrilled leeks, jalapeños, lemon verbena, lovage and lime. Other highlights included the cured trout starter and the fallow deer, the latter being served with black pudding and beetroot.

All this said, every dish was a delight.

We were served by Assistant Restaurant Manager and Junior Sommelier Daniela Leroni, who clearly loves her

chosen career and is very knowledgeable about the food and drink served in the restaurant. She was able to talk us through each dish and the wine that was chosen to go with it. Wine that ranged from a Hungarian barrel-aged dry white to an English pinot noir.

One refreshing point to note is that Daniela informed us there was no need to leave a tip as the restaurant staff are paid well and the full cost of salaries, pension contributions and so on are covered by the menu price. So, the price on the menu is the price you pay at the end of the night.

## The city...

Undoubtedly one of the prettiest cities in the UK, Bath is both large enough to keep you thoroughly occupied, and small enough that you can take in most of the sights by foot. While the pale honey-coloured stone buildings may be quintessentially British, Bath also has a distinct cosmopolitan feel, aided by the variety of accents you hear as you're wandering the streets.

I'd only visited Bath once before, so we decided to take a free tour led by one of the Mayor of Bath's Honorary Guides. Gary clearly knew his stuff and managed to impart his knowledge with a good dash of humour in a way that really brought Bath's history to life. During the two-hour whistlestop tour of the city, he told us about some of the historical figures who made Bath what it is today and shared lots of fascinating tidbits that you'd struggle to find in a typical guidebook. Along with key tourist spots like the Royal Crescent, he showed us places we'd never otherwise have thought of visiting.


Bath is one of just two UNESCO World Heritage Cities in Europe. There are a number of reasons for the status, including the city's Roman baths, which were constructed almost 2,000 years ago to take advantage of the location's hot springs.

The Roman Baths are open to visitors, and I recommend taking the time to explore them. While they're housed in 18th-century buildings, some of the original structures can still be seen and the museum displays thousands of Roman and pre-Roman finds. The audio guide is well worth using, as it provides a fascinating glimpse into day-to-day Roman life.

The Roman Baths are no longer open for public bathing. However, the nearby Thermae Bath Spa uses water from the same mineral-rich hot spring and offers both an indoor pool and a rooftop one.

Fans of Jane Austen will likely already know that the author lived in Bath for several years and that the city is home to the Jane Austen Centre and the annual Jane Austen Festival. What you may not know is that 2025 marks Austen's 250th birthday, or that Bath is planning even more Jane Austen related celebrations this year. Find out more at [visitbath.co.uk](http://visitbath.co.uk)

Along with the museums, architecture, landscaped gardens and, of course, Bath Abbey, there are plenty of bars, restaurants and shops to keep visitors busy. We particularly enjoyed the indoor market, independent gift shops and cosy cafés.

Bath has so much to offer, and we had limited time. While we could no doubt have ticked most of the 'must-sees' off our list if we'd dashed around, we were here to relax, so preferred to take a more laid-back approach to our weekend (including plenty of breaks for cocktails). Which just means we have a reason to visit again soon... 



The Royal Crescent



Bath's iconic Pulteney Bridge at night



The Roman Baths

## Stay here

The Queensberry, 4-7 Russell Street, Bath, BA1 2QF  
[thequeensberry.co.uk](http://thequeensberry.co.uk) | 01225 447928

Until the end of March, you can **enjoy an overnight stay, 3-course dinner and cooked breakfast at The Queensberry and Olive Tree from £372 for two people**. For the best rates, sign-up as a Queensberry member for free. To help plan your stay, head to [visitbath.co.uk](http://visitbath.co.uk) for details of top attractions and events.