

where to stay



From left: the hotel's 17th-century façade; one of the rooms restyled by designer India Mahdavi

The weekender The Peacock at Rowsley, Derbyshire

The pride of the Peaks

WHAT IS IT? A newly refurbished country-house hotel in a small village in the heart of the Peak District. Built in 1652, it belongs to Lord Edward Manners of nearby Haddon Hall, of which it was once the dower house.

BEHIND THE SCENES The house had become an inn by the 19th century. The Duke of Rutland, Lord Manners's father, acquired it in the 1940s but sold it a few years later. Lord Manners bought it back in 2002 and hired interior designer India Mahdavi to restyle it. The result is a gorgeous, contemporary retreat with a touch of the eccentric. Ian and Jenni MacKenzie run the hotel, but Lord Manners is often seen pottering about in the background.

EAT The kitchen is run by ambitious 25-year-old local chef Matthew Rushton, who trained under Gordon Ramsay.

Dinner is served in three plum-coloured dining rooms, all with oak tables and white linen, enlivened with quirky features such as a huge photograph of the Havana seafront and chandeliers made of clustered glass pipettes. The food is very good, and very rich. We began with scallops, asparagus and sautéed potatoes, and marinated tomato, mascarpone and goat's cheese stack, followed by loin of venison, bubble-and-squeak and bitter chocolate sauce, and loin of beef, Dovedale blue-cheese potatoes and morel *jus*. We couldn't manage a third course, but others enjoyed a classic savoury among the desserts: Welsh rarebit with pickled walnuts.

SLEEP There are 16 good-sized bedrooms, three of which – numbers 3, 5 and 6 – are substantially bigger than the rest. All have lattice windows, warm, honey-coloured

wool carpets, slate-grey entrance passages and 'feature' walls – turquoise in one, plum in another, a bright, patterned wallpaper in a third. Seven rooms have fireplaces. Dark-wood headboards and dressing tables are offset by white-linen-covered, king-sized beds, and armchairs upholstered in Ralph Lauren tweeds and velvets in burnt orange or purple. With 19th-century lithographs and family portraits, potted orchids, flat-screen TVs, DVD players and Mahdavi-designed white ceramic bedside tables, the effect is historic, homely and chic.

WHO GOES THERE? Urban foodies in search of a comfortable countryside fix; rambblers; posh fishermen; bemused locals who come to gawp at the transformation; delighted locals who come for dinner, or drinks in the cosy bar.

WHAT'S THERE TO DO? Hunting, shooting and, especially, fishing; the Haddon estate has a seven-mile stretch of river famous for rainbow trout. The hotel is in the world's second most popular national park (only Japan's Mount Fuji is busier), renowned for its excellent walking. Two of Britain's most exquisite stately homes are nearby: Haddon Hall is a five-minute drive away, Chatsworth House a 15-minute drive.

WE LIKE Sitting by a roaring fire in the bar with a Bloody Mary; the friendly staff; the organic cooked breakfasts.

WE DON'T LIKE The tiny bathrooms – except room 16's, which is considerably larger.

PRICE Doubles from £110 B&B and from £170 half-board (which is a very good deal).

FRANCESCA SYZ

THE PEACOCK AT ROWSLEY, NR MATLOCK, DERBYSHIRE (01629 733518; FAX: 732671; WWW.THEPEACOCKATROWSLEY.COM)