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Gastropubs

Gourmands are guaranteed a feast at any one of these foodie haunts. Get there early for an aperitif (and to bagsy a seat outside)

55 The Crown Amersham, Buckinghamshire

Why it makes the grade

This stunning Elizabethan building sits on the high street in Old Amersham. An outdoor kitchen in the cobbled courtyard attracts customers when the sun shines, and big log fires draw them inside when it doesn't. In the kitchen, local ingredients are cooked with deceptive simplicity whilst elsewhere, the bedrooms and communal areas have been freshly made over by style goddess Ilse Crawford.

Signature fare

Proper seasonal, local food is preceded by outstanding homemade breads. Sample dishes include brown shrimp, white cabbage and chervil;

lemon sole with lemon, parsley and Jersey royals; fruit cake with cashel blue cheese. Starters are £5-£8, mains £9-£16, desserts around £5. Weekday "slap bang" lunches are £12 for two courses. Book ahead for a full-on Sunday lunch. There are some well-kept local ales, and a thoughtful wine list with lovely, low mark-ups and bin-end bargains.

We love the landlady because ...

Rosie Sykes (formerly Guardian Weekend's Kitchen Doctor) is bright, beautifully warm, endlessly interested and

interesting, and a past mistress at making everyone feel special. In the kitchen her head chef, Mark Bristow, cooks brilliantly deft dishes with a lightness of touch that allows his quality ingredients to shine through.

Meet the locals

A nicely eclectic mix of real

people from Amersham that can't believe their luck in having such a well-priced, outstanding local; international design mavens; musicians and murder-mystery authors; extended families on a big lunch out.

Pub trivia

Room 12 is where Andie MacDowell bedded Hugh Grant in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. The room also has an exposed, hand-painted wall, dating back to approximately 1550, which is registered at the British Museum. **KG**



Open 7.30am-midnight - Food 7-10am (Sat-Sun 7.30-10.30am), 12.30-3pm (Sun to 4pm), 7-10.30pm (closed Sun evening) - 37 rooms from £89 - 16 High Street, HP7 0DH - 01494 721541, thecrownamersham.co.uk

56 The Albion Bristol

Restaurants and delis abound in Georgian Clifton but no one had, until 2005, quite mastered the gastropub idea. Step forward Owain George, who has given the student boozier down a pretty cobbled alley the classiest of makeovers. Outside, vast parasols; inside, a long, stylish bar serving Butcombe (£3.30 a pint) plus three other guest ales, big oak tables, leather sofas fronting a winter log fire, and a relaxed, chatty vibe. A chef with pedigree delivers some cracking modern food from an open kitchen. Call by for mussels in

cider, parsley and cream (£7), or pork pie and pickles (£6.50) at lunch, or linger over whole crab, aioli and chips (£12) or share a plate of Aberdeen Angus ribeye steak (£19.50 each). Finish off with a hot chocolate fondant (£6.50). **DH**



Open Mon 5pm-midnight, Tue-Sat 12-midnight, Sun 12-10.30pm - Food 12-3pm, 7-10pm (no food Mon or Sun eves) - Children welcome until 9pm - Dogs welcome in the bar - [Enterprise Inns](#) - Boyces Avenue, BS8 4AA - 0117-973 3522, www.thealbionclifton.co.uk

57 The Royal Oak Maidenhead, Berkshire

Head chef Dominic Chapman is getting a lot of praise for his "British food done well" (his words). He picked up best restaurant for England in the current AA Restaurant Guide, and a Michelin Bib Gourmand recently - not to mention the gushing column inches from the food critics. Think roast grouse, line-caught sea bass, and oxtail and kidney pie, with fish dishes such as roast Scottish halibut with samphire, cockles, and mussels (£21). Puddings consist

of possets and trifles (£6.50), and a fantastically fragrant British cheese board (£8.50). There's a sommelier, too, Michael Trenga, who has also turned heads with his wine list. Lest you think this is a restaurant masquerading as a pub, manager Glerras Mo makes sure the pub atmosphere rules, meaning you can enjoy just a pint if you so wish. **FS**



Open Mon-Sat 11am-3pm, 6-11pm, Sun 12-4pm - Food Mon-Sat 12-2.30pm, 6.30-9.30pm, Sun 12-3.30pm - Paley Street, SL6 3JN - 01628 620541, theroyalokpaleystreet.com

