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A stay in the city of smiles

Wayne Ankers finds a resurgence in Sheffield, making it an exciting place to visit ... with no frown factor!

EVER since the mid-1400s there has been a bitter rivalry between the white and the red rose counties. That is why you will struggle to find a born and bred Lancastrian with a good word to say about the enemy across the Pennines.

But I am afraid I am now going to break that tradition, for after a weekend stay in Sheffield, I will have to grudgingly admit that Yorkshire really has a city to rival – if not better – Manchester.

Not only does it have stunning shops, lively bars and award-winning hotels and restaurants, but it has the people – whose smiles make a mockery of the glum Mancunian frown that I regularly come face to face with every week.

After a one-hour hop over the Snake Pass we dropped into Sheffield on a Friday evening to check into the Leopold Hotel, which is right in the heart of the city centre.

The hotel hosts 90 stylish rooms in a historical and architectural gem of a building, which was home to Sheffield Technical School in the 1800s. The rooms are cosy and air conditioned and offer en-suite facilities, an iPod docking station, fridge and Wi-Fi.

It was the winner of the 2010 White Rose award for large hotel in Yorkshire and perhaps this is

down to the relaxing atmosphere and the approach of the staff, who always seemed happy to

help during our two night stay. The only downfall with the hotel is the lack of on-site parking – although free parking is provided at a nearby secure multi-storey car park, which is approximately two minutes from the hotel.

But what we found sets Sheffield apart from not only rival cities in Yorkshire – but across the north west – is the fantastic restaurants and bars that have sprung up over the last decade.

When the Meadowhall shopping complex opened in 1990 the city of Sheffield struggled to cope with the loss of some major high-street retailers as well as the loss of thousands of people exploring the city centre each weekend.

But over the last ten years there has been a resurgence in the city, making it a thriving, bustling and exciting place to visit. With this resurgence has come some excellent restaurants and one of the best is Silversmiths, which opened in 2008.

Silversmiths is just a five minute cab ride from the Leopold Hotel and is tucked away in the ‘cultural quarter’ of the city, close to the theatres, City Hall and Carling Academy.

But it is not the location which makes it the award-winning restaurant it has become.

The Yorkshire-inspired menu

makes the eating experience sublime, with exceptional dishes such as Round Green Farm home-made venison sausages with Henderson’s Relish onion marmalade and spring onion mash.

Not only do the chefs promise local produce, they visit several farms in Sheffield and its surrounding towns to hand-pick the best meat, cheese and vegetables to ensure every dish has that authentic white rose taste.

It does not stop there, as Silversmiths is the first restaurant I have come across to offer a full menu catering for people with coeliac disease, with plenty

of gluten-free and dairy-free options. And if there is a dish that is not gluten-free, the chef is always happy to try his hand at making a gluten-free alternative.

Another highlight on Sheffield’s restaurant scene is The Milestone gastro pub. Fresh from reaching the semi-final of Ramsay’s Best Restaurant programme, the Milestone is continually excelling itself with fine

home-made dishes, including pastas, chutneys, ice creams and puddings.

The chefs use a mixture of local fresh produce from farms and allotments as well as meat from their own hand-reared pigs, making sumptuous dishes such as scallops with lobster mayonnaise and pea shoots for a starter and beef



rump served rare with ox liver and chestnut faggot and a tea-infused fondant.

All the dishes can be washed down with some fine wines or local ales and the chefs are so proud of some of their dishes they have even created their own recipe book.

And after sampling some of the city's best restaurants you can either take to the nearby countryside to walk it off – or take the short drive to Meadowhall to shop until you drop.

And if all that makes the feet ache, why not pop along to the Appyfeet store for a fish foot spa – just 15 minutes soaking your feet in water as they are nibbled at by shoals of the Garru Rufa brings all sorts of feelings, starting with the tickling sensa-

tion and tears of laughter to the relaxation and therapeutic treatment which results in baby soft skin.

If shopping is your thing – and Meadowhall is too much to face – you can always pop along to the Devonshire Quarter in the city centre to check out the latest boutiques and fashion stores.

After cramming in two restaurants, shopping and the foot spa – as well as a wander through the city centre to soak up the happy atmosphere – we made our journey back across the Pennines.

And as we dropped into Glossop from the Snake Pass it dawned on me why the War of the Roses rivalry is very much still alive today – perhaps we Lancastrians are slightly envious of what some of the white rose cities have to offer.

FACTFILE

FOR more information for a trip to Sheffield go to yorkshire.com. Prices for a two-night weekend stay at the Leopold start at £66 for B&B per room per night.



HIGHLIGHT
The Milestone and its staff with Gordon Ramsay.
Right: A vaulted room at the Leopold Hotel

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