



Time to
RELAX

True quality is close at hand, as a recently-restored Victorian riverside hotel gave **Ruth Supple** the opportunity to indulge herself in a spot of luxury.

Weekends away are lovely but spending hours getting to your destination isn't much fun.

However, you don't have to travel miles to enjoy fine dining and a luxurious overnight stay as The Embankment in Bedford proves.

Around half an hour's drive from Northampton, The Embankment occupies a stunning position on Bedford's beautiful riverside and offers the perfect Valentine's break.

The mock-Tudor half-timbered inn enjoys gorgeous views over the River Great Ouse and last year was overhauled beyond belief. What was described to me as a 'spit and sawdust' pub by friends had seen little investment for decades and was in dire need of some tender loving care.

Now the landmark hotel is unrecognisable from its past life thanks to Peach pubs and freeholders Charles Wells.

Today's Embankment is stylishly chic with a large patio at the front overlooking the river, a series of large but cosy reception rooms downstairs with roaring log fires and snugly sofas. There's also restaurant and a private party room which can be booked out for all sorts of occasions.

We'd booked in for an overnight stay at the 20-bedroom Embankment, which was built in 1891 by a local brewer, and our riverside-facing room was sheer luxury.

Understated opulence created a romantic French feel in the room, which had a king-sized bed with an enormous gold mirror above it, a couple of leather armchairs, dressing table,



enormous chandelier and plasma TV. The bed was against a dividing wall, which separated the large en-suite with its roll-top bath and selection of complementary toiletries.

The Embankment has teamed up with The Therapy Club to offer a wide range of beauty treatments for guests to enjoy.

We hadn't been able to reach the inn until late afternoon but within half an hour I was chilled out thanks to a 20-minute back massage performed in our room by one of The Therapy Club's therapists.

She'd recommended I take a long soak in a hot bath after the treatment to relieve the muscles she'd pummelled. I took her advice and nearly missed dinner because I stayed in there so long.

A stroll downstairs took us to The Embankment's spacious new bar which was previously hidden at the back of the pub. My husband and I enjoyed aperitifs here before being shown to our table.

Staff at The Embankment are superb, friendly and attentive without being overbearing. We were shown the daily specials board and given menus to make our choice while tucking into hot bread and olives.

The Embankment's head chef, Christophe Perney, hails from France and trained in Paris

under the multi-Michelin-starred Joel Robuchon. He draws his influence from his background in classic French cuisine and a passion for cooking with British seasonal produce.

All the chicken and eggs are free-range as is the pork. The steak is 28 day dry-aged Aberdeenshire beef from Catering Butcher of the Year Aubrey Allen, who supplies many top restaurants.

Christophe has devised a varied menu combining traditional dishes and pub classics with a twist, as well as some more sophisticated options. The Embankment also offers a roast of the day served with seasonal vegetables.

We started our feast with wild mushroom risotto (£5.50) for me, as it's one of those dishes I find hard to make so never do, and a fish board (£9.50) for my husband. This is one of a selection of deli boards offered at The Embankment, which can be shared or eaten alone. The fish board contained small pots of lemon potted shrimps, taramasalata, chilli and garlic mayo squid, beetroot cured organic salmon, cucumber and carrot sticks, and bread and chutney.

I plumped for that Aberdeenshire steak for my main course, which arrived with chips, salad and béarnaise sauce, and was delicious. My husband

had a blade of beef meal (£15.95) with mashed potatoes, which he said was tender and tasty.

After such filling meals and being in no hurry to move on, we asked to wait for quarter of an hour for desserts. I chose a light but refreshing combination of vanilla and a surprisingly vivid green shade of mint choc chip ice cream (£5), while my husband had cheese, accompanied with a glass of Tanners late-bottled vintage port (£10).

When we're travelling within easy distance of Northamptonshire one of us would normally be driving home. So it was a real treat for both of us to be able to enjoy a bottle of red wine with our dinner and retire to the leather sofa in front of the log fire for digestifs.

After a good night's sleep we enjoyed a lazy Sunday morning reading newspapers over our breakfast in The Embankment's restaurant. Only trouble was, we were still full from the night before so we couldn't finish our fry-ups.

Whether you want an overnight stay, breakfast with friends or a tasty meal out, The Embankment is well worth a visit.

■ *The Embankment, Bedford, 01234 261332, www.embankmentbedford.co.uk*