



Crown affair

It may not be easy to find, but Helen Renshaw discovers an award-winning coaching inn in the wilds of Suffolk, run by self-taught chef Chris Lee (left), that's worth getting lost for



MEMO TO ANYONE MAKING THE DECISION

TO DINE at The Bildeston Crown: take a good map. Buried deep in rural Suffolk, this 15th century coaching inn can be tricky to find. But it's definitely worth the effort.

As you step through the door, the exposed beams, ancient brickwork, oak floors and open fires place you firmly in a classic country inn setting. But there's also a surprising whiff of sophistication in the air, which is confirmed by a menu that's a million miles from 'pub grub'.

In fact, Chris Lee – an ambitious self-taught chef whose wife Hayley runs front of house – has created a menu that would look more at home in London's swankier restaurants, yet the prices are a fraction of what you'd expect to pay for such food in the Big Smoke.

Chris specialises in modern British cuisine with quirky flavour combinations. Dishes such as seared scallops and lobster with chutney, and confit of duck with Earl Grey tea jellies sum up Chris's vision – and the sheer yumminess of the food quickly banishes fears of pretension.

We especially loved the 'pork head to toe' with its eight different cuts of 'piggy delight', starting with crispy cigarillos from the ear and ending with a parcel of trotters topped off with a whisker of brittle crackling.

So enlist the help of an Ordnance Survey map and get yourself there. Oh, and leave space for dessert – the peanut butter parfait will haunt your dreams for weeks. **d.**

The Bildeston Crown, High Street, Bildeston, Suffolk IP7 7EB. Tel: 01449 740510; thebildestoncrown.com.

Beef stew with dumplings

SERVES 6

TAKES 2 HOURS 20 MINUTES TO MAKE, PLUS OVERNIGHT MARINATING

- 1kg beef braising steak (we use local Red Poll beef at the pub), cubed
- 75cl bottle good red wine
- 3 fresh thyme sprigs, plus extra
- 2 tsp vegetable oil
- 1 litre tomato juice or passata
- 2 tbsp tomato purée
- 1 tbsp plain flour
- 1 litre good-quality beef stock
- 1 onion, diced
- 4 carrots, thickly sliced
- 2 celery stalks, thickly sliced
- 2 large potatoes, diced
- 1 small swede, diced
- 50g beef suet, chilled and cubed
- 100g self-raising flour
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
- Bunch of fresh curly parsley, chopped

1. In a bowl, marinate the beef overnight in the wine and thyme. Drain, reserving the marinade.
2. Heat the oil in a large casserole over a medium heat. Brown the beef and add the tomato juice and purée, flour, stock and marinade. Bring to the boil and simmer, partly covered, for 1½ hours.
3. Add the onion, carrots and celery and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the potatoes and swede and simmer for another 10 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, rub the suet into the flour. Stir in the lemon zest and half the parsley, with 3-4 tablespoons cold water. Divide into walnut-sized balls.
5. Sit the dumplings on the stew, cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Garnish with parsley and a sprig of thyme.

PER SERVING 620kcal, 24.4g fat (8.5g saturated), 48.9g protein, 46g carbs, 15.8g sugar, 2.4g salt