

# ‘An historic gem in Britain’s oldest city’

She may live in the city, but that didn't stop Danielle Lett from jumping at the chance to stay in one of its finest hotels...

**A**s a Colchester girl, I will preface by saying I'm pretty biased. I was born here, and while I haven't lived my whole life here (I've flitted between Florida, Frinton, and Leicester), I moved here in 2016 for work and somehow haven't left.

And I will always say it's probably the nicest place in Essex to live. It's got a great local music scene, plenty of independent businesses, and centuries' worth of history and heritage. And if I'm honest, it's a surprise it's taken so long for Colchester to finally be granted city status.

But as someone who lives here, I've obviously never really had a chance to stay in one of the local hotels.

Until last week, as I was offered a chance to spend a night at the historic The George Hotel, and was more than eager to head there.

It's one of the places I've always walked past but had never been into.

To give you some context, The George Hotel actually goes back 500 years, and its owners have done a wonderful job retaining its character and heritage. Think period features throughout, and beautifully-preserved beams. There's even an exposed section of wattle and daub wall, with a plaque explaining that it dates back to the 14th century.

As guests enter the hotel, you can't but fall in love with its modern (yet tastefully chosen) interiors. Gold mirrors, colourful



**LEFT:**  
The George Hotel in Colchester

Picture: RICHARD BLAXALL/PHOTERIOR

**RIGHT:**  
Inside The George Hotel's restaurant

**INSET BELOW:**  
A pornstar martini cocktail and an amaretto sour cocktail

Picture: DANIELLE LETT

velvet armchairs with monogrammed cushions, and pops of turquoise throughout.

Head up the staircase (which splits into two), and you arrive at the equally lavishly-decorated landing which is painted grey, with a gold chandelier in the middle, a sofa, chest coffee table, and contemporary paintings of the royal family adorned in kitsch graffiti scattered across the walls.

The George is comprised of 49 rooms, all with en-suites, and lucky me was in room 212, also known as The Curved Suite (aptly-named thanks to its curved wall).

Situated at the end of the hotel, the suite features a king-sized bed (with a gorgeous turquoise headboard), a smart TV, plush furniture, plenty of wardrobe space, a coffee machine, and a bright and modern en-suite (with

complimentary eco-friendly toiletries).

The room ticked all the boxes, and I knew I'd have a great night's sleep there.

But my plus one and I (my mum) had a dinner reservation at 7:30pm downstairs in the restaurant, so we dumped our bags, quickly got changed, and headed downstairs.

As someone who had previously walked past The George more times than I could count, I had no idea how huge it was inside. It's really like a Tardis. As we made our way through the festively-decorated bar and restaurant, we were ushered past groups enjoying Christmas meals before being sat down near the back.

Our waitress promptly came over to us, handed us our menus as she took our drink orders.

We went for a bottle of the Fontana D'Italia Trebbiano (£19) as we made our way through the starters menu.

I opted for the moules mariniere (£9.45), while mum had the truffled wild mushroom fricassee (£8.45). My starter was heavenly - anyone who knows me knows I go mad for seafood, and these mussels were served in the richest white wine, cream, chilli, and garlic sauce. With two slices of toasted fresh bread for dipping, of course.

And the fricassee was delightfully creamy - and they certainly didn't skimp on the mushrooms.

For mains, I had the honey glazed pork belly (£17.95), which was served with pak choi, sweet potato wedges, pickled shimeji mushrooms, and drizzled with a sweet chilli dressing; while mum had the crayfish and crab linguine (£17.95).

I'm a big fan of pork belly, and this one couldn't have been any



**LEFT:**  
Inside The George Hotel

**RIGHT:**  
Malted panna cotta

Pictures: DANIELLE LETT







more perfect - and the portion of crackling on top was heavenly. The four sweet potato wedges were crispy on the outside and fluffy on the inside, while the dressing really gave the whole dish a kick. Compliments to the chef are certainly due here.

I didn't have any of the linguine but judging by mum's empty plate, she loved it. She said it was creamy, with plenty of crayfish and crab pieces throughout. There's nothing worse than a stingy seafood pasta dish, and this was far from that.

We were stuffed, but we still (just about) had room for dessert as we finished off our wine. Usually I'm a creature of habit and tend to go for cheesecakes and brownies but the malted panna cotta (£5.95) really caught my eye. Served with roasted candied peanuts, banana, chocolate, and coco nibs, it was moreish and not overly sweet. It made a change from the usual desserts I go for, and I definitely recommend this if you fancy a dessert but don't have a massive sweet tooth.

As mum finished her wine, she picked at the Baron Bigod cheeseboard (£7.95), which came with two cuts of brie, compressed grapes, celery, quince jelly, and malt loaf. You can't go wrong with local artisan cheese, and I especially liked how the chef swapped out your usual, run-of-the-mill crackers for malt loaf.

Presentation and taste were both fighting for the top spot with this meal - and both jointly nabbed first place. Everything looked as good as it tasted, and everything tasted as good as it looked. In the New Year, I will certainly be rushing to make reservations at this restaurant again. I just can't get enough of that pork belly and crackling.

Before heading back up to the room, we headed to the bar for a quick cocktail. The cocktail menu caught my eye at dinner, and I knew I had to see how well they could make an amaretto sour and a pornstar martini. Ten out of ten to the barman who made our drinks, they were shaken to perfection, and the best way to end what ended up being a fantastic meal.

It was a Thursday night and we both had work the next day so once we finished our drinks, we headed up and had an incredibly cosy sleep.

The next morning, we headed down and had breakfast. Neither of us are massive breakfast people, especially that early, but I managed to put away a bowl of porridge with fruit compote (washed down with a black coffee, of course) while mum had a full English (sans egg), with a few pastries from the continental breakfast buffet. From what I saw, the buffet had a pretty decent selection of what you'd usually expect - fresh fruit, juice, cereal, pastries and toast, and the two other menu items were a full vegetarian breakfast, or egg on toast.

For anyone like me, who's local to Colchester, and has walked past The George loads but has never been in - I highly recommend heading in. Whether you fancy a night away from home, or a slap up meal with drinks, this is the place for just that.

And if you're coming from out of town, make a weekend of it and check out to see what this wonderful newly-crowned city has to offer. You're only a stone's throw away from Colchester Castle, and being on the high street means you've got a number of bars and shops at your disposal.



**LEFT:**  
Baron Bigod  
cheeseboard

Picture: DANIELLE  
LETT