A WINTER TABLE BY THE SEA

At The Bay Restaurant in Kewstoke, seasonal produce, south coast seafood and warm hospitality make for a memorable coastal supper

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There is a wonderful simplicity in succumbing to the shorter days and settling in for an unhurried evening meal. All the better if it's on the coast, after a brisk walk to blow the cobwebs away.

The Bay Restaurant, at the South Sands Hotel in Kewstoke, is just the place to indulge that feeling. The hotel sits between Worlebury Woods and the National Trust nature reserve at Sand Point and, although just a short drive from Weston-super-Mare, it feels a world away from the hustle and bustle. Its spacious dining room, bright and airy in the summer, turns cosy with the softer winter light. I'd brought my father as my guest, and was looking forward to some lively conversation to accompany a delicious meal – neither my father nor the restaurant disappointed.

We were welcomed by manager Kayleigh, who was as knowledgeable about the menu as she was passionate, enthusiastically explaining the provenance of the ingredients and able to offer advice on choices.

Starters included heirloom tomatoes with buffalo mozzarella, seasonal soup with homemade olive focaccia, and ham and parmesan croquettes with a piccalilli aioli but my eye was immediately caught by the scallops, roasted in their shells with wasabi butter and panko breadcrumbs. My father confessed he'd never tried scallops, so ordered them too.

It's so easy to overcook scallops but these were tender, plump and light – and where a garlic butter can sometimes overwhelm, the wasabi proved a more delicate accompaniment. My father's verdict was simple, to the point and the ultimate compliment. 'I'd have those again,' he said.

For a main course, we were equally spoilt for choice, and could have opted for rosemary marinated beef sirloin, a roasted salmon fillet with pistachio romesco and crispy crushed baby potatoes, a slow cooked Greek lamb shoulder, butternut squash, ricotta and sage ravioli, or a slow roasted pork belly in a sticky

Korean barbecue sauce. However, Kayleigh had been so passionate about the special – lobster from South Devon, served ready dressed in its shell, with garlic butter and parmesan fries – that it was impossible for me to resist. My father opted for the Cold River cider-battered cod, with crushed and minted peas, homemade tartare sauce and thick cut chips.

The lobster was beautifully cooked, the herb and garlic butter complementing it well and the parmesan fries proved a very more-ish side dish. My father's clean plate spoke for itself.

The meal was perfectly paced, leaving just enough time between courses to begin to anticipate the next, so we had no hesitation in saying yes to a look at the dessert menu. We could have chosen a dark chocolate delice, with white chocolate and hazelnut ice cream, a classic warm sticky toffee pudding or rhubarb poached in elderflower, but crème brûlée is a particular favourite of mine, so I was intrigued by The Bay's twist on it. The classic vanilla flavour really punched through, with the popcorn topping a novel addition. My father, meanwhile, made short work of the generously-sized Amaretto tiramisu.

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The chef at The Bay is Chris Wade-Hayes who says his inspiration is simple: 'My general rule is "Is it something I'd like to eat?" It sounds like a cliché but it's so true that you can taste the love and care that's gone into your food.' Chris leads a young team and says it's all about igniting their passion for food. 'I'm really lucky with the team here, they are all very young but have been here with me a long time now, it's amazing to see them get excited and learn how to prepare the food.'

His attention to detail is evident in the thoughtfully created menu and emphasis on seasonality. The lobster I so enjoyed had been carefully selected, as Chris explains. 'We only use lobster from the south coast, never Atlantic ones. We only use 700g plus as anything under that won't cook nicely. They're only special while in season.'





Ditto, the scallops that impressed me and my father. 'The scallops come up from Brixham, always hand dived. We serve them in the shell with wasabi butter and panko breadcrumbs. The wasabi is really mild, it makes the butter rich and slightly warmer in the mouth and is amazing with a squeeze of lemon. We have had variations of this dish on the menu since opening five years ago.'

Night had well and truly set in by the time we peeled ourselves away, replete with the contentment that comes from an excellent meal, in very good company. ●