



A winter retreat

With the evenings drawing in, **Simone Hellyer** gets cosy by the fire on a winter break at De Vere Selsden Estate

Steeped in 1,100 years of history, De Vere Selsden Estate is a great place to spend a festive break, and not just for the potential to spot the Ghost of Christmas Past.

The estate, which sits just outside the urban hub of Croydon, was first settled in 861 AD by the Earl of Surrey, no less. Since then an Anglo-Saxon hall, a medieval estate of the Knights Templar and a Victorian country seat have been just a few of its former lives. In 1924 racing car driver

and business man, Alan Doble Sanderson, bought the estate and turned it into a luxury hotel. The transformation took several years and was finally completed in the 1930s, with architect Hugh Mackintosh adding an east and west wing and creating the neo-Jacobean style and red-bricked statement mansion that today stands out so impressively from the rest of Selsden's suburban surrounds.

We visited on a crisp November day, which turned out to be

ABOVE:
De Vere Selsden Estate sits in 200 acres of grounds

great timing as our room offered a stunning panorama of the estate's late autumnal treetops. With the weather at this time of year rarely playing ball, those feeling adventurous can pop down to reception to borrow a pair of Hunter wellies in order to enjoy the 200 acre grounds in all their glory. But there is plenty to see indoors too.

I took my mum along with me and our impressively large twin room was tastefully decorated in a contemporary and calming grey

BELOW:
There are lots of great places to get cosy and put your feet up



GOOD TO KNOW

To celebrate the festive season in style, De Vere has launched a winter offer of a two-night stay from just £250.00 for a family of four. The offer includes breakfast on both mornings and a two-course dinner on one evening in the hotel's restaurant. On arrival, adults will be given a voucher for a complimentary glass of Fitz English sparkling wine to enjoy at the hotel's bar. devere.co.uk

hues, while maintaining historic touches like the mullioned windows. One word of warning, the frosted glass of the bathroom door means you will need to know your roommate rather well, or you soon will. We made a makeshift privacy screen with a towel (luckily there were plenty in the room).

In recent years the hotel underwent a multi-million-pound renovation project to create a suite of newly-designed bedrooms and a new restaurant and bar, as well as restoring many event spaces. One of the most impressive spaces is the Orangery, with its beautiful Victorian-style tiled floor and views of the grounds. Popular in fashionable residences from the 17th to the 19th century, an Orangery was used to house fruit trees in the winter months but was also a great indicator of wealth. Today, guests can enjoy a daily afternoon tea here, served on pretty vintage crockery.

The hotel's 1042 Restaurant & Bar is beautifully decorated too; my mum had a great time inspecting several of the country house style ornaments to find out where she could buy them herself. We did find the food quite simple, but it all tasted good and there was a nice wine selection too. The atmosphere of the bar and restaurant was very

relaxed but we were impressed by the attentiveness of the staff. On Sunday's during the festive period, guests will be able to enjoy Christmas favourites like roast turkey and Christmas pudding and there will be a visit from Father Christmas too.

Back to our visit and once dinner was digested, we popped over to the hotel's gym and spa to check out the sauna and lounge by the pool before retiring for the night. The gym – equipped with a range of cardiovascular and resistance training equipment – swimming pool, sauna, steam room and jacuzzi are open every day for use by hotel guests as well as members – useful if you want to work off that afternoon tea or sleep off a full stomach on a lounge by the pool.

The hotel is probably most well known in the area however for its golf course, which was designed in 1929 by five-time British open champion, JH Taylor. Cut from the thick forest that dominated the hotel grounds at the time, this challenging 18-hole par 73 golf course takes around four-and-a-half hours to complete if walking. In addition to the nine par 4 holes, there are five par 5 holes, four of which measure over 500 yards and look out for the 17th hole – a memorable par 3 from an elevated tee across a valley.



ABOVE:
The hotel's rooms are very generous in size

Those who prefer to work out the mind can borrow board games from reception – a great way to spend a winter's evening and good entertainment if you have the kids with you.

Selsden is a big hotel yet we found it to have a cosy, relaxed vibe and it was very peaceful at night so we slept exceptionally well (the comfy beds may have helped too). Breakfast was a buffet-style affair, with both hot and cold options and lots to choose from. Feeling relaxed and fortified, we ended our trip with a morning constitutional in the leafy grounds before heading into Croydon to do a spot of early Christmas shopping. ♦

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