

The Swan Inn, Bridgnorth



Reviewer's rating ****

Let's clear up a few housekeeping issues before we start.

Reviewers are often criticised more than the venues they visit for engaging in the dark arts in their search for the county's finest eateries.

We're characterised as a bunch of partisan, noses-in-the-trough, ne'er-do-wells, easily knobbed by chefs, restaurateurs and shadowy food industry types. All bunkum, of course.

But, in the interests of fairness, let's strip away any sense of mystique.

We're reviewers, not rocket scientists, looking for simple things like this: Good flavours; artful presentation; efficient and friendly service; well-judged flavour combinations; immaculate hygiene, a certain je ne sais quoi; value for money and ingredients that are local, of good provenance, seasonal and of high quality.

We look for other stuff too, like whether venues bombard long-suffering customers with microwaved ready meals, music by Lady Gaga and have chefs lacking in skill, but that covers most of it.

If those are the boxes we want venues to tick, The Swan Inn, at Bridgnorth, pretty much gets full marks.

The food is flavoursome and fresh with much of it from local suppliers; the meat, for instance, is from Bridgnorth's highly-reputable butcher Keith Alderson.



The portions are generous, the service friendly and well-mannered, the flavour combinations sensible without being revolutionary and there's an emphasis on seasonal, fresh ingredients.

There are good views across the Severn Valley from the dining room, the food is well presented and it's all as cheap as chips.

Put simply, The Swan Inn offers restaurant-quality food at pub prices, a fantastic concept.

Little wonder it's one of the county's busiest eateries, packed to the rafters at weekends and other busy times.

The Swan Inn is a classic case of how to run a dining pub. Other licensed premises owners from across the county ought to descend on it to learn how it's done.

My wife and I visited for a Saturday afternoon lunch, arriving early to avoid the crowds. We'd intended to enjoy one course and a drink but, the menu was so appetising, we enjoyed three courses.

I started with the satay chicken, which was served neatly on a triangular plate and featured moist, tender chicken in a warming peanut sauce with a garnish of salad. It was delicious.

My wife opted for the mushroom crostini, another winning dish, featuring a creamy mushroom stroganoff with salad and garlic bread.

The presentation and flavour of both dishes was immaculate.

My wife's main course was lasagne. She trusted the venue sufficiently to order it, knowing that the mince was from Keith Alderson's, rather than the freezer of an anonymous supermarket.

The layers of meat sauce and cheesy bechemel were mouth-wateringly tasty while the garnishes of garlic bread and salad meant it was big enough for two.

My gammon steak, meanwhile, was oozing with porky sweetness and was served with the best beer-battered onion rings I've ever tasted, as well as sweet, roasted cherry tomatoes, a portobello mushroom and plenty of home-cooked chips.

We really shouldn't have eaten dessert. But my firm belief in the benefits of burning calories in the gym helped me square the circle.

My wife swooned to the summery melodies of a strawberry and cream meringue while my Mars Bar-infused toffee and chocolate cheesecake was a decadent treat.

The service, throughout, was attentive and the prices ridiculously low.

The acid test of any venue is whether people like it enough to return. Without question, my answer to that is yes.

What's not to like? Generously-proportioned, locally-reared rib eye steaks, for instance, are cooked with skill and presented with panache at £13.95. Where else can you get that?

The fact The Swan Inn doesn't, on this occasion, achieve a five-star rating probably says more about the reviewer - who has only ever awarded one - than the venue. It's among the top two or three dining pubs in the county.

Book now.

By Andy Richardson

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