

CAPTION AND CREDIT
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Suite dreams

The Gainsborough Bath Spa

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Oh, the Bath traffic on a weekend. That said, pulling up at the Gainsborough Bath Spa and transferring the traffic trauma onto the fresh-faced valets is a real pleasure.

Entering the stately foyer of the renovated 19th century hospital, my wife and I are immediately swept up in the hotel's personable five-star service. Open since September, the Gainsborough has been creating a buzz as the UK's first hotel with its own private thermal waters. Even the borehole, from which the mineral-rich water seethes forth, is exclusive to the property.

Our spacious suite echoes the overall aesthetic of restrained luxury; the unfussy modern styling, respectful of the classical Grade II-listed edifice. The odd touch, like the pastoral print headboard, offsets the grandeur while the typically soaring Georgian ceilings are

emphasised by Wagnerian floor-to-ceiling curtains. Sunlight floods the room. Champagne floods my glass. My wife squeals: underfloor heating in the bathroom.

Downstairs to the cosy bar for a pre-dinner cocktail (and tropical mocktail for my expectant wife). A Sacred English Negroni is served in the grail. If this is what eternal life tastes like, I can handle the tedium. Appetites whetted, we move through to the restaurant overseen by Austrian chef Johann Lafer. The word 'fusion' causes the Michelin-star chef's moustache to frizz, so his locally sourced, Asian-influenced cuisine is designated 'Dining Without Borders' instead. My wife is warned off of the raw mackerel. The Cornish king crab with tomato ginger mousse and coconut cucumber cream is my second masterful cocktail of the night, while the stand-out flavour is the searing seasonal clarity of the pear sorbet in

my milk chocolate mousse dessert.

Back in the room, lavender sprigs and Shakespeare's Sonnet LXI adorn our pillows. England crashes out of its own Rugby World Cup. Perhaps the Champagne was premature, but since it's open...

Come morning, come a hangover of sporting despair. To the spa. One of the couples' treatments on the menu is called "Bespoke Couple's Surrender". It's another whiff of S&M after the room's bedside Robert's stereo in dominatrix black.

Spa begins with the Aroma Bar where Michelle, our modern apothecary, whips up a custom bag of salty relaxation for my wife while I procure a zesty pouch for focus and euphoria. We're to sniff these during our bathhouse circuit. My wife is advised on temperatures and treatments suitable for expectant mothers.

The two-level basement spa is a sunken isle

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of temperate calm while, somewhere out of sight, Bath's Sunday crowds jostle. The design hits a high: Roman to the hilt, without a toga in sight. A lion's head spits lavender ice chips, and shots of hot chocolate and chilli are a warming delight. The hotel has three private spa suites with a glorious third thermal tap installed on your private bath, but I think I'd miss this spa.

After my superb 90-minute Swedish Massage, I regain equanimity towards sport. The Renew with Rose facial transforms my wife into a burnished rosehip. We step out into the autumn sunshine for some shopping, a spring in our step. Eternal life might be a stretch, but the Gainsborough certainly adds a year or two. ☑

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