

The evolution of tourism

Andy Link, chef/patron at The Riverside Inn, Aymestrey

It's very interesting to see how the needs of both diners and weekend guests have changed over the decade or so since I took up the reins at The Riverside. In terms of food, our diners are keen to sample food with a local provenance that gives dining here a sense of place. When you are in Herefordshire you want to see meat from local farms on the menu, regional cheeses, fruit, vegetables, and local beer.

Over the last 12 months we have also noticed that increasingly people want to experience new and different dishes and flavours. For example, snails, sea robin (a fish, considered to be the new salmon) and stout parfait have become some of our most popular dishes.

For those staying for the weekend, more and more guests come with packed itineraries, so that they can see as much as possible in the time available. Even a few years ago, people were more likely to let their weekend unfold organically.

Many tie in their visit with specific attractions, such as the 1940s Christmas experience that is taking place at Croft Castle this year, or the festive decorations at the lovely medieval manor Brockhampton. Other guests ask us to prepare an itinerary for them, which we enjoy doing, especially when visitors are delighted with the sights they have seen..

Local people are also expecting more from their village pub. At the Bateman Arms, our sister pub in Shobdon, we have introduced Christmas wreath making classes, and next year we will be running a cocktail making masterclass, and a foraging session in spring.

In this fast moving, digital age, an interest in the past, and disappearing traditions seems to have had a revival, and classes that celebrate historic traditions and skills are very popular. Similarly, Slow Food's Forgotten Foods programme, which aims to preserve Britain's food heritage inspires interest. This is something I believe passionately in, and I try and incorporate produce in our menus. It's a simple message of eat it or lose it.

Some products have become well known now, such as Gloucester Old Spot pork and samphire. Others are less well known, such as the Herefordshire Beefing Apple, renowned for its rich flavour, and firm flesh that works well in pies and

tarts. There's also the Worcester Black Pear, which cannot be found in shops, but a few trees remain in Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

With everyone so busy with day to day life, it's good to stop and learn a new skill or just meet up with friends, family or colleagues over a meal cooked with care. Our lovely Herefordshire is one of the best places to escape from everyday pressures as the remnants of rural life still cling on in many corners of the county. And our pubs are beyond compare!