

WEEKEND
BOLTHOLE:
Queen's gaff



In a Windsor wonderland

By **DARREN LEWIS**

SOMETIMES you arrive in places you simply never want to leave. Charming Windsor is one such location, a delightful enclave just outside London, where the Queen likes to spend the weekend and where commoners like you or I won't find a more pleasant spot than the recently-refurbished Runnymede-on-Thames hotel.

In fact, I was rather reluctant to write this review, because I'd rather keep the Runnymede for myself.

But the truth is that the millions pumped into improving it have transformed a quality hotel into one so outstanding its name should be preceded by a drum roll.

Warm and efficient staff, uber-comfy rooms and food to die for in the two restaurants all combine to create an experience you will wish goes on and on.

Manager Andrew Duggan has a great feel for the needs of the hotel's clientele, having worked in every area of the gargantuan complex apart from the spa rooms.

Indeed every area of the hotel met the needs of myself and my family to the letter. In particular the excellent leftbank restaurant, a family buffet the likes of which are all too rare.

The idea is that between 5.30pm and 6.30pm on Fridays, Saturdays, Bank Holidays and school holidays, families are given the run of the restaurant, to enjoy the extensive selection of hot and cold child-friendly food, before being thrown open to the adults at 6.30, when the cooks are on hand in the open plan

kitchen just in case they haven't already cooked something you fancy.

As if that weren't enough, the Runnymede's other restaurant is The Lock. It's a classy place where kids are well catered-for - but if you really want to enjoy it properly you might want to come back after getting a babysitter.

And don't miss the spa, including a state-of-the-art gym, swimming pools and jacuzzi. The

It's a hotel so outstanding its name should be preceded by a drum roll



BLOKE ON THE WATER. Darren takes a boat trip

Runnymede-on-Thames has it all. With three children under three, my wife and I made it our base as we sampled, over three days, the many attractions and activities around Windsor.

Day one was easy. Legoland is just a 15 minute drive from the hotel and will enthrall kids, with its rides, journeys through Lego jungles, and driving lessons.

On day two the children were fascinated by the Changing of the Guard and charmed by the Queen Mary's Dolls' House at Windsor Castle.

Then we refuelled at the excellent Mamma Mia cafe - where there are 20 different flavours of ice cream - on River Street, before enjoying some of the best views of Windsor from one of the French Brothers' riverboat trips.

At this point I suppose should be recommending one of the many superb restaurants in town for dinner. But we had been so impressed by the leftbank at the hotel that we went back there for dinner on Saturday night too.

I earned myself some brownie points with Mrs Lewis on the morning of the third day by booking an appointment for her at another spa, The Body Firm, while the kids ran rings around me at the hotel.

We then headed to Dorney Lake, at the Eton College Rowing Centre, will host the rowing and kayak events at the 2012 Olympic. We slurped on some ice-creams while watching eager hopefuls.

Mrs Lewis has already made a mental note to lunch at the child-friendly pub The Bounty next time and I'll leave the kids with her while I enjoy The Body Firm.

Because for me it's not a question of if we would go back, but when. Her Majesty has got the right idea.

FACT BOX

General information: www.windsor.gov.uk 01753 743907.
Runnymede Hotel 01784 220960
www.runnymedehotel.com
Legoland Windsor www.legoland.co.uk
Windsor Castle 020 7766 7304.
www.royalcollection.org.uk



BEST TIME TO GO: A year-round winner