

Perfect place for good pampering

British Break

By Adrian Caffery

YOU know the scene, it's Friday afternoon and friends at work start asking what you've got planned for the weekend.

"I'm off to Basingstoke," I excitedly revealed.

Eyebrows were raised.

Basingstoke? Really? Why? Was I visiting relatives? Did I have a wedding to attend? Had I simply lost my marbles?

The north Hampshire town, I admit, does not exude glamour in the way that, say, London or Paris do and is probably best known for its myriad roundabouts, a little like Redditch.

But we all scoff at the foolishness of people who are too quick to ignore the delights of the West Midlands, so maybe we should be more open to what Basingstoke has to offer.

And there's never been a better time to do that than now.

A selection of luxury, boutique and chain hotels in Basingstoke and the surrounding countryside have got together for a 'Relax & Recharge' promotion, offering great deals on short breaks.

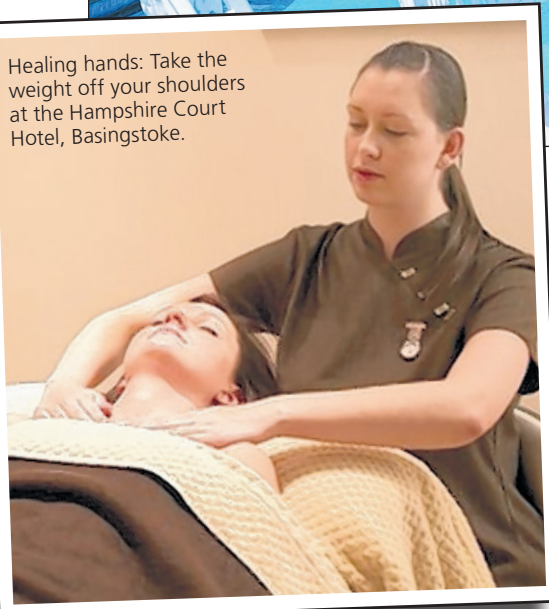
At the Barcelo Basingstoke Country Hotel, for instance, a two-night break including dinners, breakfasts, wine and chocolates on arrival and a choice of two spa treatments costs from £139.50 per person.

My wife Jayne and I sampled two hotels over a weekend.

At the 4-star Hampshire Court Hotel, just outside Basingstoke, our Deluxe Room, which had a large balcony overlooking a courtyard garden, cost just £89 (saving £35) and included break-



Healing hands: Take the weight off your shoulders at the Hampshire Court Hotel, Basingstoke.



Sun trap: Cocktails by the pool at the magnificent Tynley Hall.

garden, a water garden and a lake.

Jayne and I were upgraded to a luxurious suite with views across the sweeping lawns and enough room to swing the entire cast of the musical *Cats*!

We made a beeline for the hotel's heated outdoor pool, which had a real Mediterranean feel, then moved to the adjacent indoor pool, health spa and gym when it clouded over.

Other leisurely pursuits included tennis, snooker, croquet, mountain biking, archery and clay pigeon shooting, while golf is available at an 18-hole course next door.

We enjoyed afternoon tea on the terraces and a sumptuous evening meal, coupled with exemplary service, in the award-winning, wood-panelled restaurant, with views of the gardens.

Our stay, on a dinner, B&B basis, cost £285 and, as part of the 'Relax & Recharge' promotion, included complementary back

massages plus fruit and hand-made chocolates.

What's more, guests at any of the eight 'Relax & Recharge' hotels are given a 'passport' filled with money-saving vouchers for 14 local attractions.

These include 2-for-1 entry to Jane Austen's House Museum, Hampshire's Living History Museum and Whitchurch Silk Mill plus 50 per cent off Winchester Military Museums.

As for Basingstoke, it's got world class music at the Anvil theatre, top shopping at Festival Place and the glorious South Downs countryside with pretty villages on its doorstep.

So whether your idea of relaxation is pampering, walking, fine dining or a spot of retail therapy, north Hampshire is a smart move.

Basingstoke? Amazing-stoke more like!

Getting There

To find out more and book your 'Relax & Recharge' short break visit www.destinationbasingstoke.co.uk/relax

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Managing director of Monarch Airlines, Tim Jeans said "We have seen overwhelming demand for online check-in, with over 20 per cent of scheduled customers taking advantage of the service, in order to spend less time queuing at the airport.

"The service will allow customers on a 14-night trip to check-in for both their outbound and return flights, and print off all their boarding passes prior to leaving the UK."

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