

TRAVEL TIPS

EAT: Simple, traditional dishes in the restaurant, under the guidance of chef Simon Hopkinson

DRINK: Order your wine from the iPad list, with notes on character and country

VISIT: The Cheltenham Jazz Festival, 27 April to 2 May. The Jamie Cullum gig on 1 May has sold out, but the hotel has the best-seat tickets when you book a weekend package, from £295 for two

BUY: Montpellier Walk has been described as the nicest shopping street in the country, with a host of independent shops and boutiques

DO: Download the Walking Tours guide to your iPod and find out about Montpellier for an hour on foot



Incorporating technology is important to Swire, so take your laptop and your iPod. You can also play music and movies from the internet through the TV.

The contemporary,

relaxed feel is immediately obvious – there's no fusty reception with pigeonholes and keys, rather a large artwork masquerading as the check-in desk with a single laptop on it. Artist Alison Crowther has hewn what could be a giant walnut kernel from one and half tonnes of English oak, which is impressive and functional. The young man in the uniform of casual brown trousers and Converse trainers, simply tapped my name into the laptop and off we went. The 'desk' is one of 160 pieces of art curated by Jane Lee, Fine Arts course director at Central Saint Martins, which all adds to the on-trend flavour.

The Montpellier does manage to blend the here-and-now with the building's heritage. The lounge, bar and library are soft and welcoming, with walls painted in grey eggshell, swathes of chocolate drapes, velvet sofas in moss and sage chairs. The original Victorian conservatory is charming and perfect for afternoon tea. When summer comes, I expect the newly-created inner courtyard will be a great place for lunch. And as for a lazy Sunday breakfast – order the full English in your room and it will arrive beautifully presented, accompanied by yoghurt, muffins and fruit salad. If art has been a focal point of the hotel, then this, too, looks a picture. ■

Rooms from £140 per night including breakfast (01242 527788; chapterhotels.com). First Great Western (firstgreatwestern.co.uk) fares from London Paddington to Cheltenham Spa start from £9 each way.

Montpellier CHAPTER CHELTENHAM

Laura Ivill discovers a quintessentially English fabulous new work of art

As the concept of the boutique hotel continues to take the world by storm, Cheltenham has a new one of its own – and one that's contemporary, relaxed and, yes, affordable. It's the first from Chapter Hotels, backed by Swire Hotels of the Far East, which knows a thing or two about creating architectural and artistically chic hotels and has opened this in the Montpellier district of Cheltenham, hence the name, Montpellier Chapter. Mixing the old with the new, the hotel has plenty of warm chocolate notes and deep rugs in the historic part of this Grade II* listed building, with light oak and open-plan bathrooms in the new wing.

Originally built in 1847 as a private villa, it was previously a hotel before MAKE architects gave it a new look, a whole new wing and opened it at the end of last year. There are 45 rooms in the old building, with

high ceilings and original detailing, and 15 in the new wing, a crescent-shaped building incorporating an inner courtyard. And there's a penthouse suite. The rooms in the old building are warmer and cosier, in chocolates and moss, whereas the contemporary 'feature rooms' are light and bright with a palette of white and cream. They are open-plan, with my bath taking centre stage. Thankfully there was a diaphanous curtain to pull across, so there was still a feeling of airiness, but I wasn't living in my bathroom the whole time.

