



**AllWays**  
Traveller

Hunstham Court, Devon, UK

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## Moments to cherish at this Victorian grande dame

Hunstham Court is a magnificent, 150 year old, Victorian Baronial manor house sitting in six rural acres in the English county of 'glorious' Devon.

The whole of this magnificent, 35 bedroom, Gothic property is available for exclusive use hire by groups of around 80 people.

This offers a genuine opportunity for birthday celebrations, a reunion of family and friends, wedding parties or corporate hire.

The chance to 'own' a manor house like Hunstham Court - lock, stock and barrel - for a couple of nights can make for a truly unique experience - at a surprisingly affordable price tag.

**Ashley Gibbins**  
Commissioning Editor  
**AllWays traveller**





# Social season is open to all at Huntsham Court

By Ashley Gibbins

**The grand country houses that scattered the UK during 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries provided the landed gentry, aristocracy and, laterly, the industrial nouveaux riche, with exclusive leisure and entertainment hubs.**

During the annual 'social seasons', the owners of these manors and stately homes would strive to outdo each other with the scale and opulence of their spring and summer balls, shooting party weekends and gatherings for the festive season.

Those favoured with an invite could expect pampering, with the finest food and wines and the chance to relax in the sort of sumptuous surroundings that only the very fortunate could aspire to.

## Huntsham bucks the trend

While many of these large country houses have long been demolished or converted into private homes, corporate complexes or luxury hotels, Huntsham Court has bucked the trend.

For this Victorian, baronial manor house is offered as a 'home-from-home for groups to get together in style for a short while.'

## And what style

Ann and I were fortunate enough to spend a couple of nights at Huntsham Court as part of a familiarisation visit, and we have seldom enjoyed a short break as much.

While the house itself is so impressive, it is the relaxed ambiance of friends getting together that pervades the occasion and so enhances a stay.

Those hiring Huntsham Court are able, indeed encouraged, to have complete run of the whole house, as if it were their own.

This is not a hotel, with clearly demarcated public and private areas and, unlike a hotel, there is also the chance to determine the level of service and support.

The house can come fully staffed and catered or hired on a completely self-catering basis - for those guests happy to be chief cooks and bottle washers

Guests can also stock the larder and cook the meals in the kitchen bring in wines, beers and spirits for the bar and serving at table, without corkage.

This is a great option for those who would enjoy planning and preparing meals and mucking in with the chores.

Alternatively, there is the chance to opt for full valet, bar tending and housekeeping support, and/or to call upon a range of top notch local catering suppliers.

These can be called upon to drive a fish and chip van to the Court or to cook and serve a gourmet dinner with fine wines on a sale or return basis.

And finally the house can be themed to the occasion be it a wedding, murder mystery weekend, 70s disco marathon or mini summer jazz festival.

Whatever the occasion the basic hire of Huntsham Court comes with seven hours of free advice and support from an event organiser.

# A house befitting the Baron's daughter

Hunstham Court was first built by a certain Charles Troyte, between 1866 and 1868, when it replaced an Elizabethan mansion that stood crumbling on the site.

Troyte had asked for the 'hand' of Katharine Mary Walrond of Cullompton but, as the daughter of Baron Sir John Walrond Walrond, the existing pile would just not do as her marital home.

And so Troyte built Hunstham Court, having obtained the Act of Parliament needed before the work could begin.

In doing so, much of the original Jacobean wood panelling was reused in the main hall where it remains to this day



## Hitchhikers home

Hunstham Court has changed hands a number of times over the years, and was used by author Douglas Adams in 1984.

Adams used the house as a base to work on *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish*, the fourth book in The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy 'trilogy', although few words were written.

In M. J. Simpson's biography of Adams, he notes in fact that "no progress was made towards the novel and instead the author focuses on his drinking of expensive wines during the stay".

When the book was finally published Adams placed a dedication to Hunstham Court and its owners at the front.

## Best days behind

By the second decade of the 21 Century, Hunstham Court had seen better days and was struggling to make a go of it as a hotel.

A proverbial 'knight in shining armour' was badly needed to save the day and the house from inevitable decline.

## Damian and Chris to the rescue

It fact is received two such saviours, in Damian Llambias and Chris Badham, and was again the result of a couple coming together.

Damian and Chris were trawling venues for civil partnership celebrations and were looking for somewhere special within a manageable travelling distance of London.

The suitable stumbled upon Hunstham Court and decided it was just the place.

But the pair got more than they bargained for when opting for the house for their partnership weekend.

They were so lured by the old house they bought it and set about its renaissance.

That was in 2012 and, since then, the now happily married couple have embarked upon a renovation and rejuvenation of Hunstham Court.



## A labour of love

It has been a remarkable and ongoing 'labour of love' renovation of the old house with time, energy and resources never spared in getting the place just right.

As a result, Hunstham Court has been imbued with a character, warmth and personality that reflect Damian and Chris's approach to life.

This is one of the UK's premier party houses, in glorious countryside, and just over two hours by train from London.

A stay here will be well worth the extra effort in gathering a number of people needed to make it viable.



## Hiring Hunstham Court

A two-night weekday exclusive hire of the house starts from £7,220 (based on 44 guests in 19 bedrooms) and includes five hours with an event planner.

[www.hunsthamcourt.co.uk](http://www.hunsthamcourt.co.uk)



# All the mystery and magic of an Agatha Christie

By Ann Mealor

**The invitation to Huntsham Court evoked all the mystery of an Agatha Christie novel.**

Twenty couples, strangers to each other, invited for a weekend away to a grand, baronial mansion on the borders of Exmoor, by unknown hosts.

It was the stuff of stories, and Huntsham Court does have a wonderful story to tell!

Following a multi-million pound refurbishment, Huntsham Court has been lovingly and beautifully restored to more than its former glory.

## Back to its former glory

A home that's better than home - a slice of Downton Abbey to be enjoyed by the many.

On entering the Grand Hall, I quickly took in the grandeur of the place; Jacobean wood panelling; rich tapestries and furnishings and a large open fireplace.

We followed our case up a magnificent sweeping staircase to our room, Peanut, situated in the attic.

There are no lifts at Huntsham Court, so I did pity the chap who had to lug our heavy luggage up a steep, narrow set of stairs.

An attic location is not what you think at Huntsham Court. No pokey room here, tucked away beneath the eaves.

We opened our door into a huge expanse of space – a vaulted ceiling complete with oak beams.

There is wrought iron light fittings, open brickwork, colourful woven rugs, crisp linen bed sheets, a dressing table stocked with locally sourced refreshments and a crystal decanter of sherry – so civilised and welcoming.

## All have something special



All the bedrooms have something special to offer: turrets; double free standing baths; hand painted wall paper; large four poster beds with silk drapes.

For a large house, all rooms are surprisingly warm, but guests can still help themselves to hot water bottles if needed.

Once settled, we were free to roam the mansion at our leisure and explore.

There were five main reception rooms, all with beautifully appointed period features giving each a charm of its own.

The Drawing Room with its fine, mural ceiling and stunning parkland views was bright and sunny, decorated in rich golds and buttery yellows.

## The Great Hall

The Great Hall impressed with its original Jacobean oak panelling and large stone fireplace whilst the traditional Library, with its hundreds of books, was quietly comfortable, the home of centuries of knowledge.

The Dining Room was long and light with rich tapestries hanging from the ceiling, elegant mirrors and large windows overlooking the parkland.

The Snug Bar was cosy and comforting, a place to relax, sip brandy and catch up on the days events, in front of a blazing log fire.

An amazing double height vaulted octagonal kitchen was where we helped ourselves to a delicious, locally prepared curry and rice supper on our first night.

The Butler's Pantry stocked with 24 hour teas, coffees and help yourself goodies was the place we tucked in to homemade cookies and delicious cheese platters.

Huntsham Court was indeed a home from home – but much more magnificent!

# Downtonesque dining in memorable style

By Ann Mealor

Dining in the luxurious splendour of a baronial home puts great expectations on the food - would the meal live up to its sumptuous surroundings or would it be a let-down, a disappointment?

Our glamorous black tie dinner evening started with a wine tasting in the Library, hosted by Majestic Wines.

This was a fun and informative event, giving all us guests the chance to try, and learn more about, different grape varieties.

This was followed by a champagne reception in the Great Hall, where delicious canapés provided by talented local chef, Peter Mundy, were served.

## Attention to detail

I love the daintiness and attention to detail that goes into a canapé and my favourite mini morsel that night was the miniature prawn & crayfish cocktail in a filo basket with wild rocket.

We were called into dinner around 8pm and seated on one very long, oval, beautifully decorated, candlelit table.

It was very Downtonesque.

We had all chosen from the menu in advance and I hoped I had chosen well.

For starters, I went for potted salmon mousse & kiln roasted salmon, pickled fennel & cucumber, organic leaf salad, preserved lemon crème fraîche, which was plentiful, yet fresh and light.

For mains I picked the pan fried sea bass fillet, char-grilled cauliflower, seasonal greens and champagne sauce.

The fish was delicate, but not overpowered by sauce which complimented it perfectly.

Dessert was a slice of the very decadent and chocolatey Huntsham Court 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary cake which made a spectacular entrance festooned with sparklers.

I enjoyed each of my courses, and as I quickly scanned the table, every meal looked delicious with diners enthusiastically 'tucking-in' and scraping their plates.

Peter Mundy did us proud and I can reassuringly say that the cuisine certainly wasn't the 'underdog', but a perfect partner to its baronial surroundings.



## Country pursuits at the Court



What better way to compliment a weekend at Huntsham Court than to indulge in some traditional country pursuits.

I took the opportunity to try my hand at all on offer including archery and clay pigeon shooting

I really enjoyed learning the basic techniques for both, and as a group, we praised each others successes and commiserated on the near misses.

The shooting took place off site, but the archery was set up in the grounds of the mansion.

This allowed for hot chocolate to be served throughout and a brazier to be lit, not just to warm cold hands, but to toast marshmallows, chocolate and other treats.

## The Ginger Peanut



Peter Munday

**In contrast to the large group hire of Huntsham Court, Damian and Chris have partnered with Chef Peter Munday and opened *The Ginger Peanut* in the Devon village of Bampton Devon.**

This is a restaurant and bar, with rooms, which showcases Peter's talent to perfection.

Peter is trained in Classic French and Modern English cuisine, and has developed his own style and approach to his dishes.

He is a passionate advocate of the value of working in harmony with local suppliers and to ensure the best fresh, seasonal, locally sourced ingredients.

### Lunch at The Ginger Peanut

By Ann Mealor

The dining room at *The Ginger Peanut* is relaxed and modern yet still retains the homeliness of the traditional town house in which it sits.

With its large, comfortable upholstered chairs, 'duck egg blue' wooden slatted walls, friendly staff and fine, locally sourced food, Chef, Peter Mundy, is doing his utmost to give guests a memorable dining experience.

The menu is carefully thought through, using all the flavours of the South West to create dishes that fill the stomach and the lift the heart.

My delicious pre-lunch pink gin and tonic was served in a huge, polished, oval glass.

The bar has a great selection of ales, beers and ciders, many from local breweries.

For starters, four of us shared a platter of deep fried poached duck egg with pancetta, fennel and butter dressing; pan-fried sardines, portuguese style with crispy shallots; beetroot salad with walnuts, blue cheese mousse and balsamic dressing.

I sampled just a little from the variety of flavour-filled dishes, so as not to spoil the main course.

I chose the 6oz 28 day matured Himalayan salt aged rib rump of beef, portobello mushroom, vine cherry tomatoes and twice cooked chips. My beef was tender, juicy and cooked exactly to my liking.

The chunky chips were extremely moorish and the tomatoes sweet and colourful.

I chose the stilton sauce which complimented my beef perfectly without overpowering it.

My lunch companions were very happy with their choices too, commenting on how succulent the lamb was and how tasty the trout.

*The Ginger Peanut* serves breakfast, lunch and dinner and the bar is also open to those not dining.



### Staying at the Ginger Peanut

*The Ginger Peanut* has five well furnished bedrooms, which include access to a guest pantry where there are snacks with tea and coffee making facilities.

You can also stay at the *Ginger Peanut* without dining for 76.50 per room.

### More information

[www.gingerpeanut.co.uk](http://www.gingerpeanut.co.uk)

## A snapshot of the Huntsham Court



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