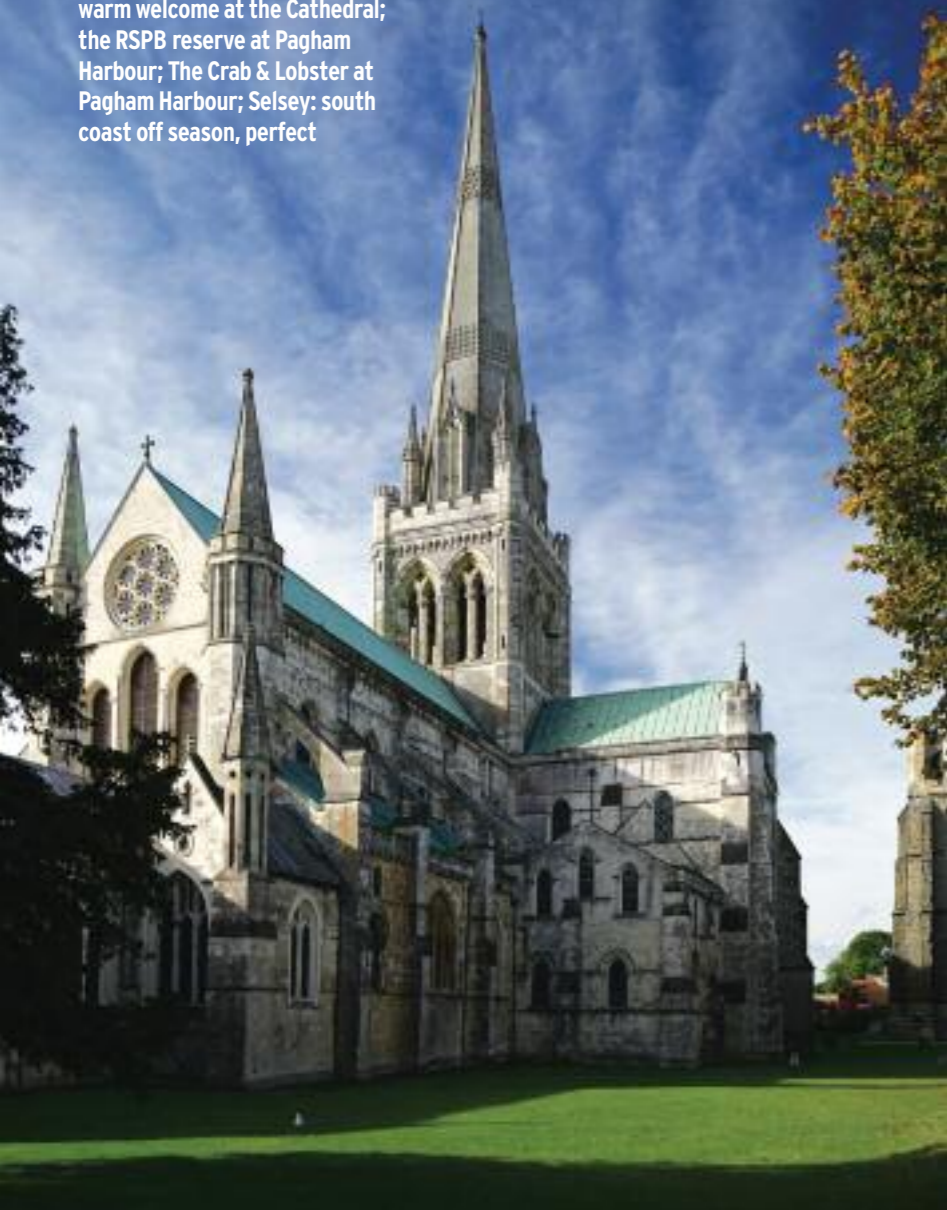


Fine dining, and a walk on the wild side

In the first of a two-part feature on Sussex
gastro pubs, **Clive Nicholls** stops off at
The Crab & Lobster at Sidlesham

PHOTOGRAPHY: CLIVE NICHOLLS

Clockwise: Chichester Cathedral has dominated the city for 900 years; you are guaranteed a warm welcome at the Cathedral; the RSPB reserve at Pagham Harbour; The Crab & Lobster at Pagham Harbour; Selsey: south coast off season, perfect



WITH HARDLY a breath of wind the rain-laden clouds hang over Chichester Harbour. The rain starts, not heavy driven rain, but light and gentle, like that from a fine rose on a watering can. Just then the rays from the sun force their way through the leaden skies and cast a rainbow across the harbour. It's a fleeting moment, the rain stops and the sky brightens but it was a magical couple of minutes. Yes, I'm a bit wet, but that's a

small price to pay for being witness to a special scene. If I owned that little yellow yacht at the rainbow's end I would be pumping the bilges looking for my pot of gold. I'm in West Sussex, on a short break staying at a couple of our country's finest pubs. This month I'll be covering my stay at The Crab & Lobster at Sidlesham and the coastal region around Chichester. Next month I'll move inland a few miles to The Halfway Bridge near Petworth. The 350-year-old Crab & Lobster sits on the banks of Pagham Harbour and the nature reserve that benefits from this

unspoilt stretch of coastline. The nearby RSPB visitor centre is open between 10am and 4pm every day and there's plenty of advice on what to see and when to see it. The walks here are brilliant and generally easy and the birdlife varied. A more experienced birdwatcher pointed out a Spotted Redshank wading in the shallows and a Great White Egret, like a big white heron, on the wing. Even I couldn't miss the Kingfisher as it flashed along the bankside. It was brilliant to forget about the car for the afternoon and stroll back to the pub with

an appetite and a thirst. The Crab & Lobster is all oak beams and log fires and I've left plenty of time for pre-dinner drinks while I study the menu. Fish is the speciality here, but I decide to mix it up a bit. My starter is Selsey Crab and Tiger Prawn Cocktail with Black Caviar and Shellfish Mayonnaise (I'm off to Selsey in the morning) followed by Roasted Rump of Lamb, Garlic Pommes Anna, Butternut Squash Purée, Baby Leeks and Madeira Jus. Yes, it tasted as good as it sounds. In the morning I stroll along the waterfront before breakfast and a flash of turquoise

signals the arrival of another Kingfisher looking for his breakfast, too. Then for me it's just a three-mile drive down to Selsey. The wind has picked up a bit, and a walk on the seafront is bracing and quite wonderful in equal measures. Seagulls float effortlessly on the wind and the shingle beach rumbles a bit as the breakers push the pebbles forwards and back. I often think that the best time to visit the coast is out of season. Parking is so much easier and having the beach to yourself is a real treat, and that's just how it was at Selsey. As I head inland to

Chichester I pass St Peter's Church on the outskirts of Selsey. Originally 13th-century and built in Church Norton, it was dismantled 150 years ago and moved stone-by-stone to its new location. It's a pretty church in a great location with a fascinating story – spare ten minutes to take a look. When I reach Chichester, about ten miles north of Selsey, I get locked into the one-way system that won't let me go. Third time around I manage to break free and find a car park. A small mortgage later I can relax and enjoy Chichester. The



Passport to Sussex

- Pallant House Gallery houses one of the best collections of Modern British art in the country as well as temporary exhibitions. There is free entry to all exhibitions and displays on the ground floor. An admission charge (students and children under 16 free) applies to the main exhibition spaces (www.pallant.org.uk), tel: 01243 774557
- Chichester Cathedral, tel: 01243 782595 (www.chichestercathedral.org.uk)
- Pagham Harbour Nature Reserve, website: (www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/seenature/reserves/guide/p/paghamharbour/index.aspx).

◀ Cathedral is magnificent. For 900 years it has dominated the city centre and has welcomed visitors from across the world. It is a truly inspiring building, and you are guaranteed a welcome there.

On the Cathedral website they say “whatever has brought you to Chichester, we welcome you to this place, where people have brought their joys and sorrows for 900 years. Whoever and wherever you may be, welcome to Chichester Cathedral”. Call in and enjoy the tranquility.

The shopping is good, they have retained some of the independent shops that are missing from most high streets and there’s plenty of choice for cafés and restaurants. For art lovers the Pallant House Gallery (in the city centre) offers a break from shopping.

I took in the highly acclaimed British Surrealism exhibition. A pleasant interlude in a busy day. West Sussex is a hidden gem and The Crab & Lobster is pure indulgence in a fantastic location.

If you’re looking for a treat this will take some beating – next month I’ll cover the second part of my visit as I move inland and take in the fabulous Petworth House.

From main: Pagham Harbour, the pub’s back yard!; The Crab & Lobster’s Selsey Crab and Tiger Prawn Cocktail and melt-in-the-mouth Roast Rump of Lamb



Reader offer

The Crab & Lobster is enticing nature lovers with 30 per cent off of winter stays and guided walks around Pagham Harbour with a wildlife expert. Valid until March 30, 2017, the offer applies to Sunday to Thursday stays*, with prices from £57.75 per person per night (based on two sharing) including a full English breakfast. The pre-bookable guided walks cost £30 for two for a morning or afternoon.

■ Tel: 01243 641233, (www.crab-lobster.co.uk).

*Valid between October 30 and 30 March 30, 2017, the offer is 30 per cent off the rack rate including bed and breakfast. The deal is available on Sunday to Thursday stays excluding December 15, 2016 to January, 1 2017 and February 14, 2017. Standard Room including breakfast is £115.50 per room per night based on two sharing, including the discount of £49.50. Deluxe Room including breakfast is £129.50 per room per night based on two sharing, including the discount of £55.50. Crab Cottage including breakfast has a lead-in price of £59.50 per person or £238 per night based on four sharing, including the discount of £102.