

Sample British puddings in the heart of England's Cotswolds



KATHERINE RODEGHIER/Special Contributor

Three Ways House Hotel is the home of the Pudding Club. Meetings are held on Friday evenings, but the hotel restaurant always has puddings on its menu.

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MICKLETON, England - Do you consider yourself a spotted-dog lover or are you more of a gooseberry-fool fan? Perhaps your tastes run more toward jam roly-poly or treacle.

Discover the sweet world of oddly named British desserts at a gathering of the Pudding Club in the heart of England's Cotswolds. The Friday night meetings of the club, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, tend to be a bit quirky, but all-around entertaining as the Brits celebrate these traditional English desserts. Visitors are welcome to reserve a seat at the table and sample from the pudding buffet.

The Pudding Club's humble beginnings in 1985 were the fruit born of the frustration of Keith and Jean Turner, who operated Three Ways House Hotel in the town of Mickleton, near Chipping Campden. They were fed up with the puny desserts offered in local pubs and restaurants during the height of the nouvelle cuisine craze. Fearing their beloved puddings faced extinction, they gathered like-minded friends and served a feast of puddings at the hotel.

"As a result of one evening of fun, the Pudding Club was duly formed with the aim of 'Preserving the Great British Pudding,' " says Jill Coomb, who bought the hotel with her husband 15 years ago and took up the hosting duties of the club. The Coombs added pudding-theme guest rooms and packages combining Pudding Club meetings with overnight stays and activities. On a Cotswold Walking Weekend, for example, guests can "indulge a little with puddings and walk through some beautiful Cotswold countryside to salve the conscience," Jill says.

In [Britain](#), the word pudding covers a wide range of dishes. The savory variety, such as Yorkshire pudding, are batter-based entrees, while the dessert puddings, such as ginger syrup, charlottes and crumbles, usually have a flour and egg base and are steamed, baked or boiled. Their consistency is more like cake than pudding to the American palate.

The club indulges only in the sweet variety, often served with lashings of custard, cream or chocolate.

"Sussex Pond Pudding, Kentish well pudding, Exeter hat pudding and Manchester pudding are great examples of regional variations," Jill says, and there's Christmas pudding on Dec. 24 and 25, of course.

Seasonal puddings take advantage of fresh ingredients, such as blackberry and apple layer pudding in September, and summer pudding made with berries that ripen in June and July. Rhubarb comes into season in February when Jill looks forward to her favorite winter comfort food: "hot and steamy rhubarb crumble with custard, delicious!"

English puddings have had a revival in British restaurants in the 25 years since the club was formed. Nostalgia may be one reason. Many Brits fondly remember puddings they ate while away at school, such as college pudding served at Oxford and Cambridge, as well as homemade puddings they enjoyed as children.

"Mum used to make delicious crumbles and a fantastic bread and butter pudding," Jill says. "With seven children to feed, Mum did very well on the pudding front." Her husband, Simon, remembers his granny's steamed syrup sponge pudding with a touch of lemon.

Seven puddings are prepared for each Pudding Club gathering, presided over by a master of ceremonies who wields a giant spoon.

"The club is a bit eccentric and Pudding Club meetings are a bit indulgent," Jill says.

Frequently featured on British television, meetings often draw participants from all over the world. After a light meal, the puddings are ceremoniously brought out from the kitchen and the club rules are read: You may eat just one pudding at a time and may take another helping only when you have finished. You may not hide puddings under your napkin. The current record holder has consumed 24 helpings.

At the end of the evening, the Pudding of the Night is proclaimed. Sticky toffee and date pudding, syrup sponge and crumbles are frequent winners.

Because the Pudding Club meetings are so popular, visitors must reserve well in advance to attend, especially if they aren't hotel guests. If an overnight stay isn't possible, the hotel always has puddings on the dessert menu in its restaurant. A buffet of four puddings is set out for Sunday lunch.

Three Ways House Hotel has 48 rooms, seven of them with a pudding theme incorporated into the décor. Among the choices are the Chocolate Suite, the Spotted Dick and Custard Room, the Sticky Toffee and Date Room, and Lord Randall's Bedchamber, named for the pudding inspired by an old British ballad telling of the lord's caddish ways.

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When you go

Pudding packages

- Two-night Silver Anniversary Pudding Club Break, offered through 2010 at Three Ways House Hotel, includes the Friday night Pudding Club meeting, breakfast and dinner Saturday, and Sunday morning checkout with a goody bag containing an anniversary apron, bottle of pudding wine and three of the hotel's packaged puddings. Rates start at \$335 per room per night, based on a two-night stay. Silver Sunday Breaks cost about \$120 per person for Sunday night accommodations with breakfast and either Sunday lunch or dinner.
- Two-night Pudding Club Breaks in 2011 will include a club meeting and overnight Friday with breakfast and dinner Saturday, and breakfast Sunday. Rates start about \$320 per couple.

Contact

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www.threewayshousehotel.com, www.puddingclub.com.