

of northwest England. Blackpool attracts around 11 million visitors a year. Which sounds a lot until you consider that there were some 20 million each year in the 1980s. Many hopes are now resting on the investment expected to follow should the resort attract the country's first mega-casino.

It was all very different 27 years ago when Claire Smith was a 15-year-old chambermaid, working weekends and holidays at the Seaview guesthouse, run by the couple who would become her in-laws. "When I went home at the end of my shift, I had to walk on the road because there was no room on the pavements," Claire recalls. "The town was heaving in those days." She's 42 now and a landlady herself, although she would rather be called a hotelier. Anyone less like Les Dawson in drag it's difficult to imagine, and the establishment that she runs with husband Mark belongs very much to the 21st century. Number One, as it's called, is an Art Deco house in a road of sturdy villas near the South Shore.

There are 42-inch plasma screen televisions in every bedroom and a sound system that pipes music from any CD of your choice into luxury en-suite bathrooms with power showers, Jacuzzi baths and his 'n' hers basins. Heated towel rails, needless to say. Oh yes, and heated hangers for the white bathrobes. Downstairs in the dining room, the tables and chairs wouldn't look out of place in a stylish loft apartment. On the sideboard is a big, polished box

inscribed with the logo of Fortnum and Mason, packed with packets of tea – Darjeeling, Earl Grey and Ceylon orange pekoe as well as English breakfast. And talking of breakfast, you can have the full English or Continental, kippers or poached haddock. Alternatively, a hamper can be delivered to your room in which are delicacies such as smoked salmon bagels and half a bottle of champagne. The hamper would add another £15 to a bill of £60 per head per night for two people sharing.

Times have changed, to put it mildly, since Claire's mother-in-law, Elaine Smith, started in the business. Born in 1935, she was just 11 when her parents opened a guesthouse near the Tower. En-suites? Don't be daft. "There

Claire Smith's stylish B&B is a world away from the guesthouse her mother-in-law (below) was raised in

