



Mark and Claire Smith (top) have created a modern boutique bed and breakfast



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get on my scooter and head out into the countryside.”

Back at home, it seems that daughter Tansy is already shaping up to become a gourmet to rival her dad. “I love it when I bring her into the kitchen when we are busy cooking,” says Simon. “She just opens her mouth like a little bird and wants a taste of everything!” And, as anyone who has eaten Simon’s cooking will agree, she’s the luckiest baby in town.

For more details call 01803 200044 or see www.elephantrestaurant.co.uk.

The boutique b&b

Think Blackpool bed and breakfast and you might conjure up an image of tatty chintz, hankies on heads and a 9pm curfew supervised by a dragon of a landlady. But Number One Blackpool aims to challenge all your preconceptions. This boutique b&b tucked away in a quiet residential street was created by hoteliers Mark and Claire Smith to provide a haven of style and comfort, with facilities to rival the best hotels in the country.

The rooms ooze contemporary elegance, each equipped with king-

size beds and Egyptian cotton bed linen – “an absolute nightmare to iron,” laughs Claire – and Siberian goosedown pillows. There are just three en-suite bedrooms, which enables the couple to offer a truly personal, though never intrusive, level of service. “I want people to relax here, not feel someone’s looking over their shoulder,” insists Claire.

In-room entertainment includes a 42-in plasma TV, DVD recorder, CD player, and Sony PlayStation. And if your image of a seaside b&b involves a chilly, towel-clad queue for the communal bathrooms, you’ll be dazzled by the five-star luxury of the en-suite facilities here.

According to Claire, Number One is all part of a new design-conscious, modern, regenerated Blackpool. “People have such lovely homes these days and work incredibly hard for their money. When they come away they want as a minimum what they have at home but preferably a little more,” explains Claire. “Yes, Blackpool has always been a party town and always will be, and we love that about it, but there’s a new feeling about the place these days.

It is definitely more sophisticated.”

Claire cites the fact that three years ago the South Beach area was given a multi-million pound makeover, including landscaping the beach, lightshows and sculptures. “There is definitely a change of mood and style,” she says. “I think the town is increasingly upbeat, exciting and there is a real positive attitude.”

Number One’s guests range from business people to young couples wearing designer clothes and driving Range Rovers booking in for the weekend. “In fact the bulk of our new business is couples in their twenties,” admits Claire. “People from all over the world come to Blackpool. They love the nightlife, the glitter and the sense of fun in the town.”

There’s also the fact that it has the cleanest beaches in Europe and the beautiful countryside of the Lake District within reach. “We really do have so much to offer here,” says Claire, who can’t resist pointing out the city’s eight golf courses, as well as its many trendy bars and restaurants. “Anyone who wants to experience those things certainly doesn’t want to stay at

some tatty b&b.”

Both Mark and Claire were brought up in Blackpool and are fiercely loyal to their home town. They previously ran award-winning hotels, but decided that the restaurant part of the business was not for them, and so decided to reinvent the guest house. Claire admits that, at £120 per room per night, Number One is expensive for Blackpool, but not, she says, for the quality of the accommodation.

And if dinner isn’t on offer? “Our guests come to Blackpool to go out, not stay in!” laughs Claire. Besides, each room has a hamper of fruit, fresh coffee and pastries, while a three-course breakfast is served in the red-walled dining room.

I dare to ask if there is a curfew, so beloved of traditional seaside landladies. “There most certainly is not,” laughs Claire. “Each guest is free to come in and out just as they please. We have had guests over the years that come in for breakfast at 9pm and then go to bed!”

For more details call 01253 343901 or see www.numberoneblackpool.com.