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COUNTRYFILE

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Where to eat, drink and shop

By Clare Hargreaves

Taste
Chilterns

Traditionally the market town of Aylesbury, on the northern edge of the Chilterns, has been famous for its webbed footed inhabitants, domesticated **Aylesbury ducks**. The white-plumed birds were walked from the Vale of Aylesbury to London, a waddle of around 40 miles. Each morning they would be driven through a cold tarry solution in a shallow ditch then through a layer of sawdust, providing the birds with a crude set of shoes to protect their feet. In London the meat of the ducks was considered a delicacy, while their feathers were used for quilt filling.

In 1873 the **Pekin duck** arrived in Britain and was subsequently crossed with the Aylesbury duck, so the pure breed virtually disappeared. Other choice meats you can find here include **turkey**, bred by the Copas family in Cookham; **rare breed beef**, reared by the Fine Beef Company in Prestwood near Great Missenden; and **pork** from Stockings Farm near High Wycombe. **Game** and **venison** from the area's grand estates are as tasty as they are plentiful, and dairy is good here too: look out for **Beechdean Farmhouse Dairy Ice-Cream**, made in the village of North Dean; **Wigmore** and **Waterloo** cheeses from Riseley near Reading; and **Barkham Blue cheese** from the Two Hoots dairy near Arborfield. Also delicious is **Rowan Tree goats' cheese** from Chesham. Wash it all down with locally-produced **wines** from Chiltern Valley Wines in Hambleton, or **ales** from the Chiltern Brewery in Terrick, near Aylesbury.



The Olde Bell

Hurley, Berkshire SL6 5LX
☎ 01628 825881
www.theoldebell.co.uk

History oozes from every beam of this 12th-century coaching inn in a sleepy village on the banks of the Thames. Whatever time of year, this place casts its spell. Come here in the depths of winter and enjoy a plate of roast duck with lentils in front of a roaring fire in the relaxed limewashed bar; in summer, sip Pimm's in the vast garden that dissolves into woods.

The Grade II-listed inn was recently given a facelift by designer Ilse Crawford but it lost none of its nook-and-canny character. Crawford's skill has been to keep

things simple and to use natural materials. Bedrooms have bare floorboards and vast beds with luxury linen and wool blankets. Welsh blankets are used downstairs too as cladding for the highbacked settles in the restaurant, an original touch. Chairs are from the Ercol factory in High Wycombe.

The menu is overseen by the dynamic Rosie Sykes, formerly of the Carved Angel in Dartmouth. Rosie uses local and seasonal produce and is tireless in seeking out new Chilterns producers. There's no fuss, no complicated jus or foams, just good, honest, tasty food. The Irish soda bread that's served with it alone makes a visit worthwhile.

Also worth a try is the Bell's sister inn, The Crown, in Amersham. The food and décor (Sykes and Crawford again) are equally good, as are the prices. The Slap Bang Lunches, including two courses for under a tenner, are a bargain.



Must-try

Damian Allsop has been making chocolate in Michelin-starred restaurants for nearly 20 years but he's now set up shop near Marlow. His technique is unique as it involves mixing water with chocolate to preserve its flavour. Seek his ganaches at local delis and restaurants, or online.

► Find out more
www.local-food.net
www.damianallsop.com



The Hand and Flowers

Marlow, Buckinghamshire SL7 2BP
☎ 01628 482277
www.thehandandflowers.co.uk

This area is the stomping ground of Heston Blumenthal, so culinary standards around here are seriously high. Tom Kerridge's cooking at this Michelin-starred roadside gastropub does not disappoint. Food is beautifully presented, bursting with flavour, and sensibly priced.



Rumsey's Chocolaterie

Wendover, Buckinghamshire HP22 6EA
☎ 01296 625060
www.rumseys.co.uk

Inspired by the film *Chocolat*, chef and patissier Nigel Rumsey opened this chocolate shop on Valentine's Day 2004. The joy of this place, apart from the delight of munching your way through Nigel's handmade confections, is that you can watch the chocolatier at work.



Sir Charles Napier

Chinnor, Oxfordshire OX39 4BX
☎ 01494 483011
www.sircharlesnapier.co.uk

Nestled in the beech woods, this handsome inn is a winner, even before you sample its top-notch food. Fires crackle in the grates while statues adorn the tables and extensive lawns outside. The food is classy without being pretentious, and makes ample use of local produce.