

ALPINE LODGE AT THE OLD GOVERNMENT HOUSE HOTEL



What better way to immerse yourself in the Christmas spirit than a visit to the Old Government House Hotel's Alpine Lodge? **Anna J. Brehaut** and friends went to find out

Grange Lodge Hotel www.grangelodgehotel.com ★★★ Metro

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The terrace of the OGH has been transformed into an alpine ski chalet for the festive period. (Pictures by Steve Sarre, 23241317)

That festive feeling

CHRISTMAS. There is no doubt about it – it is my favourite time of the year. From the jolly songs on the radio to the bright lights, cheerful decorations and the smell of real Christmas trees and chestnuts roasting, it's a time of year that truly awakens your senses. When I think of Christmas, I think of a warm fireplace, mulled wine, carols, food and laughter. It is a warm, cosy and happy time of year when you get to relax and spend some valuable time with your loved ones and best friends.

So when I had the opportunity to visit the Alpine Lodge at the Old Government House Hotel, I was simply delighted. In truth, I didn't know what to really expect. I knew it would be Christmassy – but as I walked in with my guests, I was pleasantly surprised with just how Christmassy it was.

The hotel has transformed its outdoor terrace with stunning decorations, warm lighting and modern furniture along with blankets for your lap, festive scenes being played on TV screens positioned like windows, and familiar classics such as Wham's Last Christmas playing in the background, the lodge encapsulates everything we all love about this time of year.

Of course, it would be amazing if the roaring fire being shown on a television was real, but we can't have everything. My guests were my partner Adam, my brother Rob and his girlfriend Abbie. Rob and Abbie had never been with me on a

food review before but they were more than up for the task. When we arrived we were given our 'ski passes', which entitled us to our meal, a free glass of mulled wine or mulled cider, one other drink and a schnapps. Once we had our passes, we were ushered to a table in the corner of the 'chalet'. With other visitors wearing their festive attire, drinking their mulled wine and sat around the television 'fire', it was like a scene taken from one of those expensive glittery Christmas cards. I must admit, I was slightly jealous of those wearing a warm festive knit though, as it was a little chilly.

But there were blankets to help heat you up if needed and the Christmas cheer from those enjoying their evening certainly did help to make you feel a little warm inside – as did the thought of the food to come...

Meals in the lodge are served as a platter, with a selection of dishes for each diner, and we began by tucking into a hearty hot soup. My companions were each served a Swiss gratyere and onion soup, while my gluten-free option was celaric and parsnip. It was also vegetarian and vegan, though it was so rich and creamy I wouldn't have known. There was a sweetness to it, but it also had a hearty thick texture. Abbie said the onions in their soup were sweet and caramelised while Rob said it took him back to his memories of a ski

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In front of the blazing log 'fire'.

(23241285)

resort he had once been to in the French Alps. Adam said it was a light start which warmed up the palate nicely.

Next up on the platter were the mains. Rob, Abbie and Adam each enjoyed a bowl of turkey and chestnut mushroom cheese – along with a bratwurst sausage served with sauerkraut in a brioche bun. Abbie called her pasta the perfect comfort food – far from our average cheesy pasta dish. The burger, Rob added, was made with good quality meat and served with a nice soft bun and the sauerkraut was the perfect accompaniment. Adam particularly liked the presentation of the dishes – each served in a lovely little boat-shaped dish.

For my main course, I had sweet potato gnocchi with mild spiced cumin Napoli sauce and herb croutons – not something I would normally opt for, but it was tasty and comforting with a rich, spicy sauce. My second dish was a vegan chorizo and red pepper sausage with 'currywurst sauce', which sounded intriguing. The sausage, although vegan, had a meaty texture while the sauce, as the name implied, owed something to Indian cuisine. Once we had finished our main courses,

we delved into our desserts. Black Forest gâteau slice for Abbie, Rob and Adam and stollen granola topped with pear and vanilla for me.

The gâteau slice was sweet and light and the perfect end to the meal, said my guests. My dessert was perhaps the only course where I noticed it was a vegan offering.

While the granola was nutty and full of crunch and the pear sweet and warm, a small side offering of ice cream would have finished it off perfectly.

As we finished our evening with a schnapps, we took a peek outdoors where a snow machine was helping to create a picture-perfect wintery backdrop for photographs and then we got dressed up to take a quick picture for the #OGHLodge selfie competition.

All in all, it's a fun evening – and at just £39 for three hours of food, drink and festive atmosphere, the ski passes are definitely good value for money.

Do remember though to layer up and wear your winter woollies so that you can cosy up and properly enjoy the Christmassy delights that the lodge has to offer.

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