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IN AND AROUND THE CAMBRIDGE'S CLOISTERED CORRIDORS

IT'S been a stellar year for the ancient university town of Cambridge. Basking in the afterglow of the birth of Prince George, the UK is rubbing its hands at the prospect of a jump in tourist numbers. And with the Cambridge name now attached to the most famous baby on the planet, the city hopes that his fledgling celebrity star power will rub off.

Not that visitors have ever been lacking. The mediaeval maze of streets at the heart of the old town are jam-packed with tourists from the opening of the first daffodils in spring to the Indian summer months of September and October when it's nigh on impossible not to take breathtaking photos of the River Cam even with a low pixel camera.

If you stay at The Varsity Hotel and Spa, one of the few luxury hotels in the city

views of sporting fields, botanic gardens and the historic rooftops of Cambridge. www.thevarsityhotel.co.uk.

Cambridge's history stretches back to Roman times and it was very much a commercial centre before Latin-speaking refugees from riots at the Sorbonne arrived to kickstart a new life as a college town in the 13th century. A two-hour stroll will take you through the oldest of Cambridge's central colleges from Jesus to Emmanuel. The revamped Polar Museum at Cambridge University's Scott Polar Research Institute was re-opened last June and is one of the most important museums of polar artefacts in the world, including Captain Scott's diary from his tragic expedition to Antarctica. There's an Australian element, too, in the form of a collection of polar-themed artworks from the 1960s by Sir Sidney Nolan. If quirky is more your style, Kettle's Yard is made

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centre, you can even snap away without leaving the premises. The property was established by four merchant bankers - all Cambridge graduates. The 48 suites have New York-style minimalist decor and each is named after a different college (Oxford and Cambridge). Portraits and prints of notable alumni adorn most walls and the college theme continues in the grading of the rooms.

The building is also home to River Bar Steakhouse and Grill, which does double duty as the hotel restaurant and provides great views of the River Cam as you chow down on meals featuring East Anglian regional produce. Steak and wine master classes are a popular local activity and the wines are reasonably priced and interesting. During my visit the wine of the month was a Pinot Noir Domaine de Cabrials from Languedoc, which proved that warm climates can deliver the goods. A communal terrace showcases magnificent

up of four rustic cottages once owned by H.S "Jim" Ede, an early collector of major modern artists such as Brancusi. He bequeathed the collection to the university on the condition that everything should be preserved as it was during his lifetime.

Peter Cook, Germaine Greer, Eric Idle, Hugh Laurie, Stephen Fry and the Daily Show's John Oliver are just a sprinkling of the famous names who have trod the boards at the Cambridge University Footlights Dramatic Club, popularly known as Cambridge Footlights. It's still an incubator of up-and-coming comic talent. As is the Haymakers in Chesterton (thehaymakerspub.com) for indie rock bands. And if you thought the streetscapes of Cambridge mirror the sort of ethnic make up featured on *Midsomer Murders*, head for the multicultural bar and restaurant scene on Mill Rd where Douglas Adams of *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* fame was born.

Perhaps scholars traditionally gained most of their sustenance by feeding the mind in past centuries because until recently Cambridge's dining scene was bleak. There's plenty of cafes serving cakes and a fast lunch such as Stickybeaks (near Sidney Sussex College). Atmosphere fans should get a table near the windows at the Cambridge Chophouse for full-on views of King's College Chapel as they eat. The menu is very British and includes daily specials such as suet pudding of the day, steak and ale and whole bass with new potatoes, lemon and dill. Real ale is available on tap and there's a whitewashed walls and oak beams cellar filled with carefully selected wines from all over the world. A brother restaurant - St John's Chophouse - housed in a ye-olde 17th-century building has one of the best outdoor eating areas in town. Just outside Cambridge in the picture postcard village of Hemingford Grey you'll find The Cock, voted *The Good Pub Guide's* 2013 Pub of the Year and Cambridgeshire's Dining Pub of the Year.

For gourmets, though, the name to memorise is Alimentum. Opened six years ago, it is far and away the best restaurant in town and serves up perfectly cooked English fare such as grilled sirloin with bone marrow. Other Michelin-rated - not starred - dining tables to seek out include Restaurant 22 and Midsummer House where the first floor overlooks the River Cam. Hand-crafted brews are the lure at Leaky Pete's Oyster and Wine Bar.

Cambridge Wine Merchants has four shops in town and took out the International Wine Challenge 2012 Wine Merchant of the Year Award. The company's New World buyer, Stewart Travers, is a mate of some of Australia's leading independent and cellar door labels. Another treat of a visit is that Cambridge Wine Merchants is the leading fortified wines specialist in the UK and also stocks rare bottlings from Romania, Lebanon and England in addition to those from the world's major wine regions. 