



## The Grand - York

### Bouncing back from lockdown

THE GRAND has bounced back from lockdown with offers of immersive experiences to tempt the domestic market.

With a new general manager at the helm, York's only five-star hotel has created new packages to appeal to families, couples, cyclists and even chocoholics.

Simon Mahon who joined in April said the offers had attracted 200 bookings within three days.

He hopes to build on that by attracting more local residents into the hotel for events and activities, from supper and film clubs, to bottomless Sunday brunches with Prosecco and shellfish bars, to classes in the Cookery School.

"I want The Grand to be a hub of activity, as hotels should be and used to be in the grand days of hospitality.

"We have a great opportunity within the industry to make hotels experiential again. It's not just about visiting the hotel to just sleep in and get out and discover. There should be things in the hotel to delight and excite our guests."

Before joining The Grand, Simon was the director of operations for Europe's fastest-growing aparthotel company edyn. Prior to that he was general manager of the Lancaster Hotel in Bangkok, having previously held roles with Park Plaza and Whitbread.

“I genuinely missed being close to my guests and to my team and wanted to get back to a role where I was more involved in the day-to-day offering of hospitality,” he said.

Because York had lost international and corporate travellers, along with the meetings and events industry not yet operating, Simon said the city had two clear markets; the quiet mid-week sector and the busy weekends with people celebrating and spending time with friends.

He believes ‘York stands a very strong chance of recovering’ as it is well loved domestically, but he stressed the importance of promoting its strengths effectively to the domestic market.

“It’s a great city for education, it’s an easy city to travel to, it’s the happiest place to live, it’s Britain’s most beautiful city - we have the history, the architecture.

“We are lucky in York in terms of some of the economic and commercial factors in our favour; York has got industries that will recover quickly - creative, digital and IT.

“The whole tech industry will bounce back quickly. We have bio-sciences and health care innovation and we have financial and professional services. Those areas will rebound. York is well placed to recover, and we really need to amplify that.”

Simon said The Grand’s staycation packages included B&B, ultimate romance, a family explorer package, York by bike, a gourmet offer, and one for chocoholics.

He is also keen to see more local residents in the hotel.

“As soon as we are able I want to launch our Sunday brunch; that’s a bottomless Prosecco Sunday brunch with shellfish counters, oysters, and people listening to music outside and having a family occasion.

“I want to make more use of the Cookery School. We can do it socially distanced, it’s immersive and we can push the family element. We already run parent and child classes and that’s really popular.

“We are looking at a supper club, family film nights. It doesn’t matter if you’re a guest with us or someone who lives in York but come in and visit us and let’s be part of society. I want us to have a running club. We just have to wait to make sure we are safe on things like that.”

Simon who started at the hotel in April during the lockdown said: “I have joined at the strangest of times.”

Although he is a new-comer to the city, he said his late father David Mahon had worked at The Yorkshire Evening Press as his first job in the early 1960s and ‘talked about it quite literally to his dying day’.

“He loved York,” he said.

The Grand Cookery School hosted a virtual cookery class every Friday evening for the team, making dishes from fish and chips to Nasi Goreng.

There was also a weekly quiz evening and The Grand’s Got Talent with staff at home sending in videos of themselves singing, doing gymnastics and doing football tricks.