

Norwegians detect a good thing at Hotel Crème de la Crime

Mystery castle makes a killing



By **COLETTE HUME** and
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MURDER is on the menu at a North-East country hotel – but detectives are being drafted in from Scandinavia to work out whodunnit.

Norwegian tourists are so keen on the mystery weekends at Lumley Castle, near Chester-le-Street, County Durham, that they are arriving in droves for the Agatha Christie-style experience.

The weekends have proved such a hit that about 400 overseas sleuths have already tried their hands at unmasking the murderer.

During the course of a candlelit dinner at the 14th-Century castle, guests are transported back in time



to an event that took place there 100 years ago.

They are introduced to the fictional owners of the castle, Sir Ralph Lumley and his beautiful wife Lilly, their house guest Jack Horner and Dinah the maid.

In between courses the plot thickens and it soon becomes clear that each of the characters has a reason to kill.

When one of them is discovered dead, it is up to the dinner guests to work out whether the deed was done by Sir Ralph in the conservatory with a candlestick or Dinah in the library with a piece of lead piping.

Actor Chris Goulding writes the mysteries and plays Jack Horner, a multi-millionaire toffee maker from Chester-le-Street.

He said: "The Norwegians love these weekends so much. Lumley Castle is their idea of a typical English country house and it is the Agatha Christie factor that attracts them."

Murder By Candlelight is part of a Medieval Memories weekend run by the 62-room luxury hotel.

Hotel sales and marketing director Sybil Cox said: "I think it's the fact that it's a dinner with a difference which really makes it so special - that and the fact that Lumley is such a spectacular place."

"The plot unfolds during a three-course candlelit dinner. There are lots of clues to the murderer, but it's a real whodunnit with a twist in the tale."

"The Norwegians really do love coming over here and we do our best to make sure they experience something out of the ordinary from the moment they step off the plane at Newcastle Airport."

Mrs Cox dons full Elizabethan dress to greet the visitors. She is



accompanied by a piper from the Houghton-le-Spring Pipe Band.

During their stay, guests are also treated to a five-course Elizabethan banquet.

Mrs Cox said: "It's a shock for them coming through Customs to

be met by us, but the costumes really add to the whole atmosphere of the weekend."

The Scandinavians are given a whistle-stop tour of Newcastle before arriving at the hotel, which is the ancestral home of the Earl of

Scarborough. Mrs Cox said the guests were hungry to learn about the history of Lumley and the area.

She said: "I seem to spend a lot of time reading history books, but they are so interested in the area and its past that it's essential."

Norwegian Vice-Consul Gerd Judy McNamara said she wasn't surprised that the weekends at Lumley were so successful.

She said: "I think it's the Englishness of it all which makes it so popular. They love the castles and the traditions which are so strong here."

She said imported British detective serials were popular across the North Sea.

"When I was growing up we had all the big detective programmes on TV and a lot of people read the translations of popular detective stories like the Agatha Christie series."

Scandinavian big spenders visiting the North-East have also been credited with helping Newcastle rise to 13th most popular place to visit in Britain ahead of Stratford-upon-Avon and Canterbury.

■ Latest figures from the British Tourist Board show 210,000 tourists visited Newcastle last year, making it the second fastest growing city for foreign tourists. At the top of the list is Glasgow.

■ **Whodunnit?** Top left, actor and mysteries writer Chris Goulding at Lumley; above, the plot darkens; and left, the scene of the crime.

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