CHRISTMAS is only seven weeks away. Is that enough time to plan your perfect family gathering? Food is an important part of the festivities but, let’s face it, the Christmas Day dinner can be stressful. With vegetarian, relatives on special diets for medical reasons or just the downright fussy eaters, whoever has the task of preparing this feast is not going to please everyone.

So why not let someone else do it for you? This is the view of Sue Sutton from The Red Lion, in Thorncliffe, who is taking bookings for Christmas day dinner now. She asks where else will you be able to relax with the family by an open fire and eat fresh, locally-sourced produce while someone else does the hard work?

She says: “I think everyone deserves a special treat now and again. This has been a very difficult year to get through for most people, especially mums having to juggle family life with very demanding jobs. Rushing round the shops, worrying about food shopping and then preparing the meal is not worth thinking about. So why not let us take the hassle out of your Christmas?”

Many establishments will advise it is better to book now rather than later. This ensures you get the restaurant of your choice. This is especially true if you have a large group, which is often common at Christmas as Debra Blades, the catering manager at Rudyard Hotel, which is also open on Christmas day, says. She adds: “More than anything we mainly get very big parties so the extended families can get together. It gives the opportunity for all the family to meet up in one place where there’s room, and mum doesn’t have to get in the orders and put meals together. Everybody can be wired and dined out rather than having to stand over a coocker.”

What may stop some eating out at Christmas is the cost. The increase is due to paying staff for working on their Christmas day. However, Debra says it is worth it to see the family together in a stress-free environment: “I would say, particularly if you have got a large family, especially yes because you cannot squeeze 20 into a room. I think they need to talk to people who do go out on a regular basis on Christmas day and see what they are missing. If you look at the stress levels and preparation for Christmas we can lift it all from you, so it’s worth the money. So if you dread cooking the Christmas dinner, it’s simple – don’t do it. Let someone else do it instead.

Early booking is advisable if you want to let a restaurant take the strain this Christmas.