

# COUNTRYSIDE IS

# GREAT

## BRITAIN



A guide  
for international media  
February 2015

Brought to you by



VisitBritain™

*Gairloch*  
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## Countryside guide at a glance

- From **stargazing** to **pub-lunching**, the great outdoors is a place to get out and do, eat, enjoy and holiday – read about 10 must-do countryside experiences on p5.
- Did you know you can sleep in a **windmill**, a **treehouse**, a **gypsy wagon**, a **pineapple** and a **chocolate boutique hotel** in Britain? Read about quirky accommodation on p8.
- There's nothing like a **road trip**, and four wheels makes it possible to pack in Michelin-starred restaurants, cosy pubs, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Parks, Thomas Hardy country, distilleries, beaches and so much more. Be inspired on p11.
- **Hundreds of castles** dot Britain, all characterised by their infinite variety. From romantic ruins to edifices you can banquet at, find your favourite castle on p15.
- Downton Abbey isn't just for the rich and long-gone – you can stay in or even hire out a stately home or country pile and **enjoy the pursuits of lords and ladies**. Carson! Tea please. See p20.
- Food is truly glorious throughout Britain: find **restaurants** and **pubs** to Instagram about, **distilleries** to get tipsy in and **picnic spots** to propose at. See p25, plus p32 for 10 **roasts** to boast about, and p34 is for **delicious drinking experiences**.
- Take over a castle or even the Old Course at St Andrews – see p37 for **exclusive and unique** experiences.
- Britain knows how to show off a good **garden**. Read about 15 fantastic examples of landscape design you can enjoy (naked, if you like) on p39.
- **Hikers**, come hither – Britain is strewn with paths, trails and open countryside to traverse, enjoying stunning mountains, gorgeous valleys, friendly locals, and unusual pitstops. See p44.
- Survival courses with Bear Grylls, zip lining at 100mph and horse riding in the enchanting New Forest are just three ways to go on your own **outdoor adventure** – p51 has 6 more.
- Heard of Stonehenge? It's just one of Britain's 28 **UNESCO Heritage Sites** – visit those you didn't know about on p59.
- AONB stands for **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**, and there are 46 of them in the UK, from the gorgeous Gower peninsula in Wales to the pretty Cotswolds region of England, up to scenic Dumfries and Galloway and across to Northern Ireland's Mourne Mountains. See p61.
- You can lap up old school luxury at Gleneagles or celebrity-spot at Babington House, but however you like to **unwind**, there are splendid hotels in Britain's countryside to do it in. See p66.
- If you like to get wet, there are plenty of options for a dunk, including wild swimming, **coasteering**, **waterfall-wandering** and **water trampolining!** Find out more on p48.
- Culture isn't synonymous with the city – Glyndebourne and Garsington offer world-class **opera in idyllic country surroundings**, and there's an outdoor option for cinema, music and theatregoers too. See p78.

AND MORE... Turn the page and start being inspired!

## Countryside is GREAT - why?

Britain's countryside is 'not just a pretty face', as the saying goes. Sure, it *is* pretty - from chocolate box villages in The Cotswolds, England, to magnificent film-backdrop glens in Scotland through to 'world's-best' beaches in Wales, there's plenty to look at. But there's also so much to do, eat and be entertained by. It's the wealth of experiences on offer that makes Britain's countryside so great, and so memorable to visitors.

Plan your unique countryside experience. **Big foodie fan?** Be blown away by your dinner, night after night - from amazing restaurants at boutique hotels to pubs that are reinventing the meaning of 'pub grub'. **If what you drink matters** just as much to you as what you eat, choose from whisky - not just in Scotland, but Wales and Northern Ireland too - or gin with the perfect tonic, cider in Somerset and excellent wine made across England and Wales. Drink these in situ, at the distillery or vineyard, as well as opting for eateries outside of the city, and you'll no doubt encounter people passionate about their product - and you may just give your perception of British food and drink a shake up.



*Reinventing the meaning of 'pub grub' - 2 Michelin-starred The Hand and Flowers.*

For **thrill-seekers**, and those who like to 'earn' their delicious pub meal, there are myriad ways to feel exhilarated in Britain. North Wales is becoming known as an 'adventure playground', with Zip World, Bounce Below (an underground trampoline in a slate mine, obviously) and brand new Surf Snowdonia. Meanwhile, **hikers and walkers** will find inviting paths and trails all over the UK, and **wild-swimmers, waterfall-wanderers and water-trampoliners** can get as wet as they like.

**Culture vultures** might think their entertainment lies within the confines of the city, but they'd be wrong. Head to Glyndebourne and Garsington for world-class opera houses plonked in the middle of the countryside, surrounded by beauty. Add to that a horde of elegant men and women in black tie and ballgowns, and you have a truly unique experience to rave about when you get home. The grounds of stately homes like Chatsworth in the Peak District act as **art galleries**, with contemporary artists showcasing grand-scale works at historic homes across the country.



*Take off into the great British outdoors.*

And where to stay? Open your mind to **treehouses, windmills** and **art projects** to lay your head in at night. Or go for something more conventional but just as memorable, picking a **boutique hotel** with interiors straight from a design magazine, or a **cosy B&B** where the owners are their very own local tourist board and will direct you to their favourite pub for dinner.

We've put together this, the 4th edition of Countryside is GREAT - a guide for international media, to inform and inspire you to go out of the cities and discover something new. We hope you like it, and more than that, we hope you love where it leads you to discover.

If you have any comments or queries, get in touch with the International Destination PR team at [pressandpr@visitbritain.org](mailto:pressandpr@visitbritain.org).

# 10 must-do countryside experiences

For adventure lovers and families, for star-hunters and garden-lovers, the British countryside offers a wealth of opportunities to explore the great outdoors.

## 1. Reach for the stars

Navigate the night skies in Scotland's Dark Sky Park. Part of the 75,000-hectare Galloway Forest Park, in south-west Scotland, two-and-a-half hours' drive south of Glasgow, Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park was accredited by the International Dark Sky Association in 2009 - the first in Britain to receive the distinction. The visitor centres run regular events such as Stargazing for Beginners in summer. Although the centres close during winter, the park is still accessible.

In 2011 Exmoor National Park in south-west England was named the first International Dark Sky Reserve in Europe, with the Brecon Beacons in Wales receiving the same title in 2013.

[www.forestry.gov.uk/darkskygalloway](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/darkskygalloway).

## 2. Enjoy a traditional pub lunch

A trip to the east of England's region of Norfolk not only offers a taste of our traditional countryside but is also the home to *The Good Pub Guide's* Pub of the Year 2015. The Rose and Crown in the quintessentially English village of Snettisham is all old beams, log fires and cosy corners serving traditional ales, excellent wine and a delicious menu using local, seasonal produce such as samphire, oysters and samphire from nearby Brancaster and fruit and vegetables from local farmers. You can also stay overnight in one of its 16 rooms.

[www.roseandcrownsnettisham.co.uk](http://www.roseandcrownsnettisham.co.uk), [www.thegoodpubguide.co.uk](http://www.thegoodpubguide.co.uk)

## 3. Take to the water

From gentle canal cruises to swimming in rivers and over to leisure sports on lakes, Britain's waters offer recreational opportunities for all. But to get the adrenaline pumping, head to Wales, the birthplace of coasteering. Take part in a unique mixture of shore-scrambling, rock-hopping, cave-exploring, swell-riding and cliff-jumping, to make the most of Wales's spectacular coastline. Book through an accredited operator, such as Anglesey Adventures,.

[www.angleseyadventures.com](http://www.angleseyadventures.com).



*Blue skies, blue sea, blue flag beach - Portstewart Strand in Northern Ireland*

## 4. Relax on a Blue Flag beach

National Trust-managed Portstewart Strand, in Northern Ireland's County Londonderry, just over an hour's drive from Belfast, is one of the destination's most picturesque beaches. Two miles of golden sands are backed by an ancient dune system that is a haven for wildlife and flowers, where clearly marked nature trails invite you to explore.

Wales's Rhossili Bay, under an hour's drive west of Swansea, was voted one of TripAdvisor's top 10

beaches in the world not long ago and you can see the beauty for yourself, on a walk, swim or surf.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/portstewart-strand](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/portstewart-strand), [www.visitswanseabay.com/rhossilibay](http://www.visitswanseabay.com/rhossilibay)

## 5. Visit a glorious garden

A nation of garden lovers, Britain is home to some of the most famous green spaces in the world. About five hours by train and transfer from London the Lost Gardens of Heligan in Cornwall are bursting with history. After falling into disrepair when the people who cared for them left to fight in World War I, they were rescued from obscurity in the 1990s. Gradually restored, they now offer 200 acres to explore, including a lush sub-tropical jungle, Victorian productive gardens, romantic pleasure grounds and a pioneering wildlife project.



*The Lost Gardens of Heligan, home to a sub-tropical jungle and Victorian pleasure grounds*

[www.heligan.com](http://www.heligan.com)

## 6. Hike our highest peak - or its baby brother



*Ben Nevis, Scotland - and Britain's - highest peak. Spot a Highland cow from the top*

You don't have to be a climber to tackle the highest mountain in the British Isles, Ben Nevis, in the Scottish Highlands, almost four hours north by train from Glasgow. Although 125,000 people attempt a complete ascent of its 1,344 metres every year, don't be tempted to take the Mountain Path unless you're prepared. Glen Nevis, at the foot of the Ben, is a more leisurely prospect, with a variety of trails, including the Riverside Path, Wishing Stone Walk and the Nevis Gorge and Steall Falls. <http://ben-nevis.com>

## 7. Pack up a picnic

When the sun's shining, the British love to spread their blankets on the ground for a picnic with friends - we even have our own National Picnic Week in June ([www.nationalpicnicweek.co.uk](http://www.nationalpicnicweek.co.uk)). The organisers of this annual celebration of outdoor eating voted Avon Valley Country Park, near Bristol, just under two hours by train from London, one of the top three picnic locations in Britain. Choose your spot in 50 acres of grounds, including marked nature trails, a river walk along the banks of the Avon and a boating lake. [www.avonvalleycountrypark.com](http://www.avonvalleycountrypark.com)

## 8. Travel back in time at an ancient site

Stretching 73 miles across the north east and north west of England, the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site is the most famous frontier of the Roman Empire, about two hours by train from Edinburgh. One of Britain's national treasures, the site allows visitors to explore 2,000 years of history through the remains of the forts and towns scattered along its length. Vindolanda, which predates the wall, has some of the best -



*Hadrian's Wall - the northernmost frontier of the Roman Empire*

including temples, bath houses and the Vindolanda Tablets - which give an insight into the life of a Roman.

[www.visitnorthumberland.com](http://www.visitnorthumberland.com)

### 9. Nuzzle up to nature at a wildlife reserve

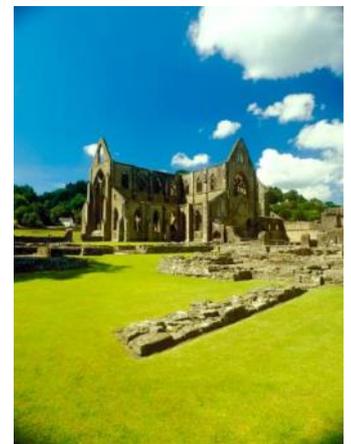
Wolves and wildcats, polar bears and red pandas, you'll meet Scottish wildlife and the endangered animals of the mountains and tundra from across the world at the Highlands Wildlife Park, close to Aviemore in northern Scotland. Hop in a Land Rover to experience indigenous wildlife and rare species, or embark on a photography tour with a guide and enjoy 'behind the scenes' treatment, where you can photograph the tigers and the polar bear while they eat their early morning breakfast. Whatever tour you take, you'll enjoy the magnificent wild scenery of the surrounding countryside.

[www.highlandwildlifepark.org](http://www.highlandwildlifepark.org)

### 10. Visit a quintessential British village

The British countryside is peppered with picture-postcard pretty villages and you'd be hard pressed to visit the destination without happening upon one, each with their own unique charm. Tintern, in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (straddling the border between England and Wales), is just one example; take in the spectacular ruins of Tintern Abbey - the best preserved medieval abbey in Wales - explore the dramatic natural landscapes that surround the village, enjoy wine-tasting at its Parva Wine Vineyard or feast on a traditional Sunday lunch at one of the village inns.

[www.tinternvillage.co.uk](http://www.tinternvillage.co.uk)



*Tintern Abbey is a beautiful ruin, set in a quintessentially charming British village*

## 14 weird and wonderful British boltholes

It's not all cutesy cottages and baronial country hotels, you know - accommodation options in the British countryside also number spheres, shipping containers and sea fortresses. Here are some of the quirkiest places to bed down:

**The Eye Pod.** Despite the name, this wacky spherical unit - claimed to be a world-first - isn't owned by Apple, but rather The Willows, a far-North Wales caravan park and campsite, three hours' drive from Liverpool. While Wi-Fi access, dimmer lighting and a DVD player provide techno creature comforts, the headline-grabbing glass dome allows for a more old-fashioned distraction: glorious stargazing. [www.the-willows-abersoch.co.uk](http://www.the-willows-abersoch.co.uk)

**A House For Essex.** Living Architecture commissions unique properties across southern England, then opens them up for rental. Due in spring 2015, this typically colourful vision of abstract British artist Grayson Perry hopes to evoke traditions of pilgrimage chapels. Lining the River Stour, it's close to the North Essex coast, 75 minutes north-east of London by train. [www.living-architecture.co.uk](http://www.living-architecture.co.uk)



*Stay in artist Grayson Perry's House for Essex.*

**The Old Church of Urquhart.** Always wanted to sleep in a church? Then your prayers have been answered. Dating to 1843, the imposing, perpendicular 'Parrandier' is now a homely B&B, complete with two lounges, a restaurant and original windows overlooking gardens and 'a sea of stormy farmland'. Known for malt whisky and Elgin Castle, this corner of Scotland is accessed via Inverness's international airport, 40 miles away. [www.oldchurch.eu](http://www.oldchurch.eu)



*Have a peaceful night's sleep in the Old Church of Urquhart in northern Scotland.*

**The House in the Sea.** Once home to Oliver Joseph Lodge, inventor of the spark plug, and accessed via a 70ft-high suspension bridge, this red-roofed Cornish marvel has become a luxe

B&B, one complete with two decks, a storm-watching snug, billiards and a 40" telly. Essentially a private island, it's close to south-west England's surf capital Newquay, which has air links to London. [www.uniquehomestays.com](http://www.uniquehomestays.com)

**Cove Park.** To be invited to stay in these Scottish steel shipping containers, part of a serene 50-acre site overlooking western Scotland's Loch Long, two hours' drive from Glasgow, one must be an artist. Cove Park supplies residences and programmes for visual artists, designers, writers, performance artists, musicians and so on. Hailing from as far afield as Nigeria and Taiwan, past guests have included novelist Margaret Atwood. [www.covepark.org](http://www.covepark.org)

**La Corbière Radio Tower.** Originally built as part of Hitler's defences during World War II, this clifftop observation building was later restored in modernist Bauhaus style. Its six floors are climbed via an exhausting spiral staircase, and culminate in a spectacular lounge

with panoramic seaside views. One of the Channel Islands and now British territory, Jersey can be reached via one-hour flights from London. [www.jerseyheritage.org](http://www.jerseyheritage.org)



*YUM - arrive with an appetite and a sweet tooth to the Chocolate Boutique Hotel.*

**The Chocolate Boutique Hotel.** What with its chocolate Martinis, chocolate fountains, chocolate/wine pairing masterclasses, chocolate portrait-painting sessions and a DVD selection including *Chocolat* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, no sweet-tooth could accuse this boutique hotel - in the south-coast town of Bournemouth, two hours via train from London - of ever drifting off-theme. All 13 chic rooms stock free chocolate bars, of course. [www.thechocolateboutiquehotel.co.uk](http://www.thechocolateboutiquehotel.co.uk)

**Nink's Wagon.** This bright and beautifully preserved 1920's gypsy wagon once housed a Circus Ringmaster.

Today, glamorous wood-panelled interiors accompany a kitchen, bedroom and fireplace-heated lounge, but no bathroom: that's located metres away in a separate building. A small garden overlooks The Mere, a lake where rowing boats can be hired. The Welsh border is close by, while Birmingham and Liverpool are both within 50 miles.

[www.qualityunearthed.co.uk](http://www.qualityunearthed.co.uk)

**Big Green Bus.** Named with admirable matter-of-factness, this large and lime-coloured double-decker accommodates up to six. Among its perks are board games, outdoor decking and a fireplace (logs are supplied), while facilities include baths, showers, bunk beds and a kitchen. The location is a West Sussex woodland site where yoga and creative-writing retreats regularly take place, while nearby Lewes is 70 minutes away from London by train. <http://biggreenbus.co.uk>



*Inside the simply named Big Green Bus in Sussex.*

**Helen's Tower.** There are towers, there are magical fantasy towers and there are magical fantasy towers about whom Robert Browning and Alfred, Lord Tennyson have BOTH titled poems. In the latter category is this three-storey beauty, which overlooks the wooded hills of Northern Ireland's County Down, an hour east of Belfast, and is available for couples to rent. On clear days, its roof terrace has views as far as Scotland. [www.irishlandmark.com](http://www.irishlandmark.com)

**The Pineapple.** Life doesn't throw up too many chances to stay inside a giant tropical fruit - but that's exactly what's on offer at Scotland's Dunmore Park, a stone-built folly around 45 minutes north of Edinburgh. Boasting a private garden, this pavilion typifies the sorts of eccentric property rescued and made available for rental by the Landmark Trust. Harbour defences, prisons, pigsties and abandoned railway stations are also on offer.

[www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)

**Campbell's Cottage.** Sure, it might be Grade II listed and five centuries old. It might even have a high-flung setting amid the Snowdonia National Park, north-western Wales, and a cascading garden. But cosy Campbell's Cottage's indisputable USP is an exclusive halt on which residents can flag down passing Ffestiniog Mountain Railway steam trains. Imagine that:



*You get your very own station platform if you stay at Campbell's Cottage.*

your very own station, only a minute away. [www.campbellscottage.co.uk](http://www.campbellscottage.co.uk)

**Cley Windmill.** White latticed sails? Check. Dreamy setting? Check. Charming original interiors like beamed ceilings? Check. Ticking all the main windmill boxes, this 18th century tower turned nine-room hotel-and-restaurant also boasts an ideal eastern England location: within sight of Blakeney Point, where thousands of seal pups spend winter. King's Lynn, a gateway town for North Norfolk with its direct trains to London, is 40 miles away. [www.cleywindmill.co.uk](http://www.cleywindmill.co.uk)



*Your very own windmill to call home - Cley is an unusual place to sleep for the night.*

**Spitbank Fort.** Thanks, Lord Palmerston. It was the paranoid Prime Minister who, in 1859, commissioned three gun emplacements within southern England's Solent Strait - a half-hour boat-ride from Southampton - in fear of French attacks. These days, Spitbank Fort is available to any invader at £5,000 a night. That brings exclusive access to a champagne bar, restaurants, a rooftop hot pool, a sauna and nine luxurious suites. [www.amazingvenues.co.uk](http://www.amazingvenues.co.uk)

## Driving holidays in the British countryside

“For there is good news yet to hear and fine things to be seen/Before we go to Paradise by way of Kensal Green.” That is how the celebrated British writer GK Chesterton paid tribute to our winding lanes in his 1913 poem *The Rolling English Road*.

With chic places to stay and cuisines that make the most of fresh, local produce, now is the time to take a driving tour of the British Isles. Here are a selection of itineraries that cover the length and breadth of the nation. Whether you prefer dramatic mountain passes, rolling hills or stunning coastal drives, you will find a suitable route here.

### **South-west England: New Forest and Jurassic Coast**

A long weekend or three-day jaunt that offers unmatched variety is easily accessible from London. Within a couple of hours, heading south-west takes you into the New Forest with its eponymous ponies that roam freely among heaths and ancient woodlands.

In under an hour's scenic drive from there, you'll find yourself in the rolling Dorset hills of Thomas Hardy country, named after the novelist inspired to write his Wessex series of books about this gorgeous region. Among the many quaint thatched cottages, you can visit the one where Hardy himself was born (adult £5.50). Drive on for a further hour through Dorset's officially designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty before crossing into Devon. Unwind in style at the Salutation Inn - a venerable hostelry with contemporary features and elegant dining at Topsham on the River Exe.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hardys-cottage](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hardys-cottage), [www.salutationtopsham.co.uk](http://www.salutationtopsham.co.uk)

Devon is home to more rugged vistas, including the brooding expanse of Dartmoor. Head south for half an hour through rolling farmland to the county's major foodie destination, Dartmouth. Its stunning estuary location is home to many fine restaurants, none more stellar than top chef Mitch Tonks's The Seahorse. [www.seahorserestaurant.co.uk](http://www.seahorserestaurant.co.uk)

Head back along the winding Jurassic Coast roads that link east Devon and Dorset, perhaps one of England's most scenic routes, with natural features such as the phenomenal shingle bank known as Chesil Beach and the limestone arch of Durdle Door. A full day with stops to take in all the views.

### **Northern England: a treehouse with all mod cons**

This four-day journey shows off the best of northern England's bracing countryside. From Manchester, you are only an hour's drive from the Lake District National Park, a magical landscape that has inspired everyone from the Romantic poet William Wordsworth to children's author Beatrix Potter. At the heart of this unique region, Surprise View near



*The Sky Den is not just a place to stay, it's a treehouse that's also a work of art*

Ashness Bridge offers a hidden panorama of picturesque Derwent Water before you reach the spectacular vistas displayed below Honister Pass.

An hour and a half's drive takes you through the wild open spaces of the North Pennines into Northumbria. You will know you are near Scotland (but not quite) when you hit Hadrian's Wall, the best preserved boundary of the Roman Empire. See how legionaries coped at the most complete British fort,

Housesteads (adult £6.40). [www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/housesteads-roman-fort-hadrians-wall](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/housesteads-roman-fort-hadrians-wall)

For more tranquillity, head further north for an hour to the Kielder Water and Forest Park. Take advantage of light-free skies at its Observatory (booked events only; prices vary). [www.kielderobservatory.org](http://www.kielderobservatory.org)

You will find many cool places to stay nearby, though nowhere as unique as the Sky Den, a contemporary take on a treehouse. [www.canopyandstars.co.uk/britain/england/northumberland/calvert-trust-kielder/sky-den](http://www.canopyandstars.co.uk/britain/england/northumberland/calvert-trust-kielder/sky-den)

It takes two and a half hours to head south into the softer scenery of the Yorkshire Dales, though you still find photogenic locations such as Hardraw Force, England's tallest single-drop waterfall. The county of Yorkshire is famed for its ales and Masham has two rival breweries: at Theakston's sample their delectable Old Peculier (adults £7.25) [www.theakstons.co.uk/Visitors](http://www.theakstons.co.uk/Visitors). You can enjoy your well-earned rest in one of the cute, hand-crafted shacks nearby at The Bivouac. [www.thebivouac.co.uk](http://www.thebivouac.co.uk)

### **Fife and Perthshire: Scotland's Big Tree country**

In three days, you can see the best the Scottish lowlands have to offer. Crossing the Forth Bridge to leave Edinburgh, head east into the Kingdom of Fife, home to broad beaches and colourful fishing villages - an hour and a half away in Anstruther you'll find the Fish Bar, one of the country's best fish and chip shops. [www.anstrutherfishbar.co.uk](http://www.anstrutherfishbar.co.uk)

An hour and three-quarters north and away from the coast, you enter the solitude of Perthshire's wild forests. You can be sure of a warm welcome at Edradour, Scotland's smallest distillery (open mid-April to mid-October, adults £7.50). Twenty minutes further on, beautiful Blair Castle is worth a stop in its own right and is surrounded by elegant conifer plantations (adults from £5.80; open from April). [www.edradour.com](http://www.edradour.com), [www.blair-castle.co.uk](http://www.blair-castle.co.uk)

For discrete luxury, head west for an hour and a half, then down a single-track lane to the boutique hotel Monachyle Mhor, with individually designed rooms and a chef that sources ingredients from its surrounding estate. [mhor.net/monachyle-mhor-hotel](http://mhor.net/monachyle-mhor-hotel).



*Relax and unwind at Monachyle Mhor after a glorious road trip in Scotland*

### **Loch Lomond and Oban: High roads and sea views**

Scotland is rightly famed for the quality of its fresh fish and seafood with some of the best places to sample this fare easily accessible with this three-day excursion from Glasgow. Within 45 minutes, you find yourself in Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park, passing serene, wooded hills and the peaceful lake, Britain's largest stretch of inland water.

Your route then meanders along Argyll's rugged coastline for two and a half hours via Lochgilphead to Oban, known for its restaurants as Scotland's seafood capital - check out the fishing boats in the harbour, before a walk to McCaig's Folly for its grand seaward panorama. The historic Oban Distillery, meanwhile, is at the heart of the community (adults £8). Stay outside the town at the Isle of Eriska Hotel, a castle with restaurant that has

recently been awarded a Michelin star. [www.discovering-distilleries.com/oban](http://www.discovering-distilleries.com/oban), [www.eriska-hotel.co.uk](http://www.eriska-hotel.co.uk).

An hour's drive takes you to Fort William, with its dramatic location by Loch Linne and in the shadow of Britain's highest mountain, Ben Nevis. This area is renowned for outdoor activity, but if you don't want to bother setting up your own tent try a traditional Mongolian yurt. [www.greatglenyurts.com](http://www.greatglenyurts.com)

### **South Wales: Mountains, beaches and a Michelin star**

Wales boasts three stunning national parks, all with natural, unspoilt wonder, yet easily accessible from major cities - Wales' capital Cardiff to the south, and Liverpool, England, to the north. The Brecon Beacons are just 40 minutes from Cardiff.

En route, watch out for the immense pink sandstone walls of Raglan Castle. The Brecon Beacons national park features bucolic villages such as Crickhowell, nestling amid green valleys. Abergavenny is Wales' foodie capital, boasting the relaxed, yet Michelin-starred Walnut Tree Inn, where you can rest in style and comfort for the night [www.thewalnuttreeinn.com](http://www.thewalnuttreeinn.com).



*Pampering with a view - and what a view - at St Brides Spa Hotel in Saundersfoot*

After Brecon, the A40 swings south for an hour and 40 minutes to the gorgeous Pembrokeshire coast. Stay at the cool St Brides Spa Hotel in the small seaside town of Saundersfoot, for a spot of pampering and an infinity pool with some of the best views around. From here, head for an hour into the Pembrokeshire National Park, with its stunning cliff-top views and long beaches before reaching Britain's smallest city, St Davids. [www.stbridesspahotel.com](http://www.stbridesspahotel.com)

### **North Wales: Castle towers and towering peaks**

A two-day tour from Liverpool that takes you into the peaks and lakes of Snowdonia National Park. Start with an hour and 50 minute drive that heads south to pick up the A5, the smoothest route through its towering peaks and a testament to the talent of famed engineer Thomas Telford.

You will also pass another monument to British ingenuity - the impressive Pontcysyllte Aqueduct that carries a canal dizzyingly high over the River Dee. Then it's into the park and the pretty village of Betws-y-Coed with its varied craft shops. The road over Pen-y-Pass takes you through some of Britain's most majestic views, including the highest mountain in Wales, Snowdon.

On the far side of the park (an hour without stopping) lies the curious village of Portmeirion, the Italian-style vision of architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis. Stay in luxury at Castell Deudraeth Hotel and enjoy matchless views across Cardigan Bay. [www.portmeirion-village.com/stay/castell-deudraeth](http://www.portmeirion-village.com/stay/castell-deudraeth)

Driving back via the north coast, you soon reach Porthmadog where you can board a steam train ride on the Welsh Highland Railway. History is also preserved in stone, with the formidable ramparts of Caernafon Castle (half an hour from Porthmadog) and the mile-

long town walls of Conwy (another half hour) to admire before you head back to England.  
[www.festrail.co.uk](http://www.festrail.co.uk)

### **Belfast and the Causeway coast: giants, ruins and whiskey**

Two days gives you plenty of time to explore Northern Ireland's breathtaking Causeway Coast from Belfast to Derry/Londonderry. The fine vistas begin just outside the former with the soothing Belfast Lough shoreline at the mouth of the River Lagan.



*Shola Coach House makes the cosiest pit stop after adventures at the seaside in Northern Ireland. Enjoy the Ulster Fry in the morning!*

Half an hour away, stop off at the pretty seaside town of Carrickfergus, dominated by its 12th-century Norman castle, then head 15 minutes inland to the dramatic Glenoe waterfall, a torrent flowing down from the majestic Glens of Antrim. Northern Ireland's famous Ulster Fry breakfast should set you up for the next day, so stay at a B&B, such as the beautifully restored Shola Coach House on the edge of Portrush, just over an hour away.

[www.sholabandb.com](http://www.sholabandb.com)

Also, you will be a few minutes from the village of Bushmills that gives its name to the whiskey still made at the world's oldest distillery - well worth a tour (adults £7.50).  
[www.bushmills.com/#BMTheOldBushmillsDistillery](http://www.bushmills.com/#BMTheOldBushmillsDistillery) Then it is a giant's stone-throw to the unforgettable Giant's Causeway. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, you can imagine the astonishing basalt columns leading out to sea were built by mythical figure Finn MacCool to reach Scotland (adults £7.50 online). [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway)

Only ten minutes west, yet way from the crowds, lies the romantic ruin of Dunluce Castle, accessible only by stone bridge and offering its own sweeping views (adults £5).  
[www.discovernorthernireland.com/Dunluce-Castle-Medieval-Irish-Castle-on-the-Antrim-Coast-Bushmills-P2819](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com/Dunluce-Castle-Medieval-Irish-Castle-on-the-Antrim-Coast-Bushmills-P2819)

For a visual feast and exquisite food, it is 20 minutes to Harry's Shack on the beach at Portstewart (its chef learnt under celebrity restaurateur Heston Blumenthal).  
[www.facebook.com/HarrysShack](http://www.facebook.com/HarrysShack)

## 20 glorious British castles: Do battle! Join a feast! Sleep like a king...

There are hundreds of castles all over Britain - 647 in Wales alone! - each of them with their own unique character and history. Whether it's romantic ruins in dramatic landscapes, or intact beauties where you can learn their history via interactive displays, castles you can sleep in or castles you can joust in, here's the lowdown. The British countryside is somewhere you can *experience* things, not just see them.

### **Medieval Feasts - Ruthin Castle, Denbighshire, north Wales**

Originally constructed in the late 13th century by Dafydd, brother of Prince Llywelyn, Ruthin's gory history is still evident from its dungeon, whipping pit and drowning pool. Luckily those days are long gone, and the castle is now a romantic hotel that holds medieval banquets - complete with a fully costumed Court Steward, jest and goblets of wine - where you can feast like Henry VIII, who once called this castle his own.

The castle is located in acres of parkland near the medieval town of Ruthin, in north Wales, approximately an hour via train from Manchester, north-west England.

[www.ruthincastle.co.uk](http://www.ruthincastle.co.uk)

### **History Buffs - Caerphilly Castle, South Wales**

Covering 30 acres, Caerphilly Castle is one of the greatest surviving castles in the medieval Western world and the second largest in Europe. It was a highpoint in medieval defensive architecture with its massive gatehouses and water features. Built by Earl Gilbert de Clare in 1268 to frighten Llewelyn, the last native Prince of Wales from fighting the Normans in the southern part of Wales, it was used as a model for Edward I's castles in North Wales. Famous for its 'leaning tower' and impressive great hall, today you'll also find an informative Castles of Wales exhibition in one tower, working replicas of siege engines and audio/visual tour.

Caerphilly is in south Wales, 30 minutes by train from Cardiff. [www.visitcaerphilly.com](http://www.visitcaerphilly.com)

### **Valley Views - Powis Castle, Powys, mid Wales**

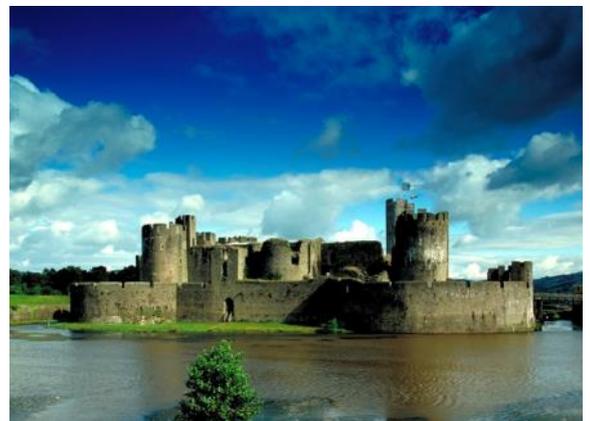
Powis' steeply terraced gardens - planted in the early 18th century in both French and Italian styles - offer stunning views across the valley. Adorned with plants, an orangery



*Wander through the deer park, visit the castle and stay in an Edwardian cottage at Powis Castle*

and its original lead statues, there is even a medieval deer park to wander through before heading inside to explore one of the finest collections of paintings and furniture in Wales. You can also stay in one of the beautiful Edwardian cottages on the castle's grounds, which have fantastic views over the gardens.

Powis Castle is a pleasant half-hour walk from Welshpool in the centre of Wales, itself approximately



*The second largest castle in Europe, Caerphilly transports you to medieval times*

2.5 hours by train from Cardiff. [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

### **Dylan Thomas Fans - Laugharne Castle, Carmarthenshire, South Wales**

Forever associated with Dylan Thomas, who escaped writer's block at the 11th-century ruins, Laugharne is the perfect place to discover the world-famous poet's inspiration. Wander the Victorian gardens, where Thomas wrote *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* in the gazebo and relax near the Boathouse and Shed where poetry was once in motion.

Laugharne Castle is located in the Taf Estuary in Carmarthenshire, approximately one hour's drive from Cardiff International airport. [www.cadw.wales.gov.uk](http://www.cadw.wales.gov.uk)

### **Wild Countryside - Carreg Cennen Castle, Carmarthenshire, south Wales**

Located in the Brecon Beacons National Park, Carreg Cennen Castle (meaning Castle on the rock above the Cennen) is perhaps the most romantically situated of all native Welsh castles, perched on its craggy, limestone hill. Its isolated locale on the edge of the Black Mountains only adds to the wildness of the castle, with its steep cliff that plummets down to the bucolic valley of the River Cennen below.

Carreg Cennen Castle is in Carmarthenshire, just north of Swansea and approximately one hour's drive from Cardiff International airport. [www.carregcennencastle.com](http://www.carregcennencastle.com)

### **Exclusivity - Crom Castle, County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland**

Set in rolling parkland where Jacobite battles once raged, the Crom Estate enjoys an unrivalled location in Ireland's Lake District. The historic seat of the Earls of Erne, the castle was designed by the English architect responsible for sections of Buckingham Palace. Today, it can be rented for exclusive use and guests can go butterfly spotting among the 2,000 acre demesne of tranquil islands and ancient woodlands.

Exclusive rental is from £4,000 per week; Crom is approximately two hours via car from Dublin and Belfast Airports. [www.cromcastle.com](http://www.cromcastle.com)

### **Dramatic Ruins - Dunluce Castle, County Antrim, Northern Ireland**

Perched dramatically close to a headland that plunges straight into the sea, Dunluce Castle was constantly fought over before it eventually succumbed to the power of nature and part of it fell into the sea one stormy night in 1639 and was abandoned shortly afterwards. Once the headquarters of the MacDonnell Clan, evidence of a village surrounding the castle (destroyed by fire in 1641) makes exploring the site even more exciting - as does the rumour that the castle was the inspiration for Cair Paravel in C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* - something children will love to know while enjoying a 'hidden treasure' tour that encourages them to find replicas of artefacts discovered there.

Dunluce Castle is in County Antrim in the north east of the island. [www.doeni.gov.uk/niea](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea)

### **As Seen on TV - Eilean Donan Castle, Scottish Highlands**

Having driven, walked or cycled through glorious Scottish countryside, you can't escape the feeling that you've been to Eilean Donan Castle before, it's so instantly recognisable. A true Scottish icon, the remote fortress has featured in many films and TV shows, most notably *Highlander* and James Bond's *The World Is Not Enough*. Situated on its own little

island overlooking the Isle of Skye, it's as stunning in real life as on film, with the added bonus of the chance of spotting porpoise, dolphins, otters and birdlife too.

Eilean Donan Castle is in the Western Highlands of Scotland, accessible via ferry from the mainline, it's on the main tourist route to the Isle of Skye, approximately 216 miles from Glasgow. [www.eileandonancastle.com](http://www.eileandonancastle.com)

### **Medieval Turrets and Towers - Aldourie Castle, Inverness, Scottish Highlands**

The only habitable castle on the southern shores of the famous Loch Ness, the historic Aldourie Castle's Scottish Baronial style can be seen in its many turrets and towers, hidden doors and old family portraits. Remaining a medieval castle at its core, today it is a luxurious 15-bed hotel full of traditional opulence, complete with roaring log fires and fine wines from the castle's cellar, all set within a 500-acre private estate.

Aldourie is five miles from the city of Inverness and 30 minutes by car from Inverness airport. [www.aldouriecastle.co.uk](http://www.aldouriecastle.co.uk)

### **Historical Artefacts - Blair Castle, Perthshire, central Scotland**

The ancient seat of the Dukes of Atholl and home to the Atholl Highlanders (the last remaining private army in Europe) Blair Castle has a fascinating history as shown by its collection of historical artefacts. There are 30 rooms full of historical artefacts showing Scotland's cultural history, from architectural design, period furnishings, family portraits and landscape paintings. If that's not enough, the castle grounds feature a walled garden of fruit trees and vegetables, complete with Chinese bridge, gothic folly and a trail of 18th-century sculptures.

Blair Castle is in Perthshire in central Scotland, approximately two hours by train from Edinburgh. [www.blair-castle.co.uk](http://www.blair-castle.co.uk)

### **Royal Connection - Glamis Castle, Angus, East Scotland**

Not just a museum but an incredible family home that was the birthplace of Princess Margaret, and where HM Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother, spent her childhood, anyone entering the gates at Glamis can't fail to be impressed by the majesty of its many turrets and towers nestled at the end of the mile-long drive. The family home of the Earls of Strathmore and Kinghorne, and the legendary setting for Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, today there is plenty at the castle to keep visitors busy, with guided tours and specially created walks through parkland and formal Italian Gardens.

Angus is 12 miles from Dundee Train Station in east Scotland, approximately 1.5 hours by train from Edinburgh. [www.glamis-castle.co.uk](http://www.glamis-castle.co.uk)

### **Gorgeous Gardens - Alnwick Castle, Northumberland, north-east England**



England's second-largest inhabited castle - and one you might recognise as Hogwarts from Harry Potter, Alnwick has been the home to the Earls and Dukes of Northumberland since the 14th century. The current inhabitants built the beautiful Alnwick Gardens (to the tune of £42 million) in recent years. Featuring a grand water

*Roar - lions aren't the only beast that have graced these grounds, that hosted Hippogriffs as the Hogwarts in Harry Potter!*

cascade, 'poison' garden (look out for the huge cannabis plant!), architectural landscaping, topiary and decorative gates, on your wander around the grounds you'll also find a giant treehouse restaurant - one of the biggest in the world!

Alnwick, in Northumberland, is only one hour by train from the the city of Newcastle in north-east England. [www.alnwickcastle.com](http://www.alnwickcastle.com)



*A dramatic coastline makes a beautiful backdrop to Bamburgh Castle*

### **Sea Views - Lindisfarne and Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland, north-east England**

Not one but two majestic castles reside on the beautiful Northumberland coast. Once home to the kings of ancient Northumbria, a fort has existed on the site of Bamburgh Castle since prehistoric times. Set atop a vast swathe of dune-fringed sands, its dramatic beachside location make it a popular venue for wedding planners and film makers; you'll see why if you get up in time to watch the sun rise over the sea. On nearby Holy Island - an island on a rocky outcrop above the North Sea which can only be

crossed at low tide (check the timetable or you could find yourself being carried out to sea!) - sits magical Lindisfarne, where miles of sandy rock-pools and rugged walks means you'll never be bored.

Bamburgh is in Northumberland, approximately 60 miles between Newcastle and Edinburgh, while Lindisfarne is located nearby on Holy Island. [www.lindisfarne.org.uk](http://www.lindisfarne.org.uk); [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk); [www.bamburghcastle.com](http://www.bamburghcastle.com)

### **Become a Soldier - Rye Castle Museum, East Sussex, south-east England**

Built in 1249 under the orders of Henry III, you'll find spiral stone staircases, panoramic views and horrific medieval instruments of torture at Rye Castle. Try on helmets and armour and lie on a bed in one of the cells in the narrow turrets to truly experience how a soldier might have felt all those years ago. Children are kept busy with competitions or treasure hunts and outside they can clamber over canons in the Gun Garden too.

Rye is approximately three hours by train from London. [www.ryemuseum.co.uk](http://www.ryemuseum.co.uk)

### **Art Attack - Windsor Castle, Berkshire, south-east England**

The oldest castle in the world and the Queen's official residence, Windsor Castle's rich regal history spans almost 1000 years. Used as a royal residence since the time of Henry I, take a tour of the magnificent state apartments where you will find treasures from the Royal Collection, including arms and armour, as well as famous artwork by Rubens, Rembrandt and Gainsborough and the famous Queen Mary's Dolls House.

Windsor is approximately one hour by train from London. [www.royalcollection.org.uk](http://www.royalcollection.org.uk)

### **Kids Castle - Warwick Castle, West Midlands of England**

Built by William the Conqueror in 1068, you can still experience the gruesome sights, sounds and smells of mediaeval England at Warwick Castle. Kids old and young can meet a crowd of weird and wonderful characters plagued by poverty and join in on their action-packed and gory games, explore dingy dungeons and listen to a ghost story or two.

Warwick is in the west of England, approximately 1.5 hours via train from London. [www.warwick-castle.com](http://www.warwick-castle.com)



*You might get into a sword fight at Warwick Castle! Get your shield ready...*

### **Romance - Bodiam Castle, East Sussex, south-east England**

One of Britain's most romantic and picturesque, this 14th-century castle is set in the heart of 1066 country. With spiral staircases, battlements and a portcullis, it boasts one of the most perfect moats in the country, which was built so that the reflection of the entire castle would appear bigger in the water. Step back in time by peeping through windows where arrows were once fired and stand in a tower that was once a look-out before settling down to a romantic picnic among ruins once walked upon by knights.

East Sussex is approximately three hours by train from London. [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

### **Doggie Delight - Beeston Castle, Cheshire, north-west England**

There are not many family friendly attractions in the UK that allow pet dogs within their grounds, but Beeston Castle is one exception. Explore the grounds, woodlands and bat caves with your pooch before picnicking on the pretty sloping lawns, which often host re-enactments and interactive demonstrations for children.

Cheshire is approximately three hours via train from London. [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

### **Most Haunted - Muncaster Castle, Lake District, north-west England**

Muncaster Castle is said to be haunted by the ghost of a mysterious White Lady as well as by Tom Fool a jester who worked in the castle 400 years ago (and who now likes to play tricks on visitors!). Parties of six to eight people can arrange for an all-night ghost sit-in the Tapestry Room, said to be the castle's most haunted spot. Paranormal researchers also conduct field experiments here and you can even participate in an all-night vigil... spooky!

The Lake District is approximately 3.5 hours by train from London. [www.visitcumbria.com](http://www.visitcumbria.com)

### **Mock Battles - Tintagel Castle, Cornwall, south-west England**

Each summer, hundreds of enthusiasts come to relive the days of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table during mock battles at Tintagel Castle, which was built 800 years ago by the Earl of Cornwall, brother of the King of England. The earl was intrigued by the legends of King Arthur and his infamous Camelot and the castle was constructed to resemble the court where it's believed he reigned. Get ready to step back in time...

Cornwall is approximately 5.5 hours from London. [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

## Country piles to visit - and even stay in!

Britain boasts hundreds of stately homes and castles, once the exclusive privilege of royalty and landed gentry, which are now open to the public. These spectacular country pads were built in some of Britain's most beautiful countryside and are framed by rolling hills, landscaped gardens and wild parklands. Wander the estates and get lost in the wilderness before relaxing in front of a log fire and falling asleep in a grand four-poster bed, just like a real Lord or Lady.

### ENGLAND

#### **Cliveden, Berkshire, south England**



*Cliveden, whose walls have seen many a famous person party within them throughout history*

Cliveden is one of the stateliest of stately home hotels. For more than three centuries it has been home to English nobility, and past guests include Charlie Chaplin, Winston Churchill and George Bernard Shaw, and every king and queen since George I - it was also famed for the part its swimming pool played in the Profumo Affair, when in 1961 Secretary of State John Profumo saw Christine Keeler bathing nude in there. Explore the gardens, from the formality of the Parterre with its vibrant floral displays to the quirky statuary and topiary in the Long Garden, there is even a winding maze to get lost in. The formal gardens give way to secluded glades, tree-lined avenues and picturesque riverside with

miles of woodland walks to discover.

Where to stay: Sleep in this stately home's elegant, classically decorated rooms, filled with antiques, Persian rugs and old oil paintings.

*Location: 35 minutes via train from London*

[www.clivedenhouse.co.uk](http://www.clivedenhouse.co.uk)

#### **Castle Howard, Yorkshire, north England**

Best known as the fictional home of Sebastian Flyte in the TV adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, Castle Howard is, in fact, the historic seat of the Earls of Carlisle. The house boasts 145 rooms, many of which can be explored, idyllic gardens and even an adventure playground. The grounds alone, littered with follies, fountains, a mausoleum and the dainty Temple of the Four Winds, are worth the admission price alone and, depending on when you visit, you can catch the annual displays of daffodils, rhododendrons, delphiniums and roses.

Where to stay: The White Swan in Pickering for hearty cuisine and warm welcomes.

<http://white-swan.co.uk>

*Location: 15 miles from the historic town of York, in northern England*

[www.castlehoward.co.uk](http://www.castlehoward.co.uk)

## Alnwick Castle, Northumberland, north-east England

The original location for Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films, for a thousand years Alnwick has been home to the Percy family. The Duke of Northumberland and his wife restored the walled garden (which was opened by their friend Charles, Prince of Wales, and which includes a 'Poison Garden' containing cannabis plants), and opened their doors to the public, who can also eat at the famous Treehouse restaurant.



*Alnwick Castle, Northumberland, where you can stay in the grounds and imagine Quidditch matches being played!*

Where to stay: in a cottage in the Castle's vast grounds, which stretch as far as the eye can see from its gothic towers.

*Location: Alnwick is half an hour by train*

*from Newcastle in north-east England*

[www.alnwickcastle.com](http://www.alnwickcastle.com)

## Burghley House, Lincolnshire, central England

Built for Sir William Cecil, Elizabeth I's chief advisor, the lavishly-decorated state rooms at Burghley House contain portraits of the Cecil family, Elizabeth I, Henry VIII and Oliver Cromwell. The grounds of the estate were designed by 'Capability' Brown, who created the Serpentine Lake and planted intimate groups of trees to indulge the sport of game shooting. Elsewhere, rows of lime trees, a deer park and a number of gardens, including the 'garden of surprises' and sculpture garden, make Burghley the perfect countryside escape. And if you need even more reason to visit, the House was also the setting of Castile Gandolfo in the film adaptation of *The Da Vinci Code*.

Where to stay: Historic coaching inn, the George of Stamford

<http://georgehotelofstamford.com>

*Location: Close to the village of Stamford near Peterborough in Lincolnshire, approximately 50 minutes by train from London*

[www.burghley.co.uk](http://www.burghley.co.uk)

## Longleat House, Wiltshire, west England

Built in the 16th century and currently home to the eccentric 7th Marquess of Bath, Longleat has a number of attractions to entice visitors, including 900 acres of parkland, a maze, and an extensive safari park, home to rhesus monkeys and white rhino. Dozens of the rooms are open to guests, each filled with valuable paintings and furniture.

Where to stay: Quirky country inn, The Bath Arms on the Longleat Estate

<http://batharms.co.uk>

*Location: Near the town of Warminster between Bath and Salisbury, approximately 90 minutes by train from London [www.longleat.co.uk](http://www.longleat.co.uk)*

### **Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, central England**

You may recognise Chatsworth as the home of Mr Darcy in the popular 2005 film adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Sitting close to the River Derwent in 1,000 acres of parkland, the large gardens receive 300,000 visitors each year while the house contains dozens of antiques and artwork. From waterworks to sculpture, rockeries to roses, you could spend days exploring the vast gardens around Chatsworth and still find something to delight you.



*Chatsworth House - the ideal place for a budding Miss Bennett and Mr Darcy to visit*

Where to stay: Try the colourful, modern Devonshire Arms

<http://devonshirebeeley.co.uk>

*Location: Derbyshire is around 2.5 hours from London by train.*

[www.chatsworth.org](http://www.chatsworth.org)

## **SCOTLAND**

### **Mellerstain House, Scottish Borders**

Mellerstain House stands within acres of beautiful parkland, first laid out in 1725 by the great Scottish architect William Adam. Enter the gardens through an early 18th-century courtyard to discover Italianate terraces and herbaceous borders. Experience breathtaking views over the lawns and ornamental lake to the distant Cheviot Hills then wander among majestic Beeches and sturdy Oaks, a haven for wild birds and animals. Look out for red squirrels and roe deer or the flash of a kingfisher as you enjoy a peaceful stroll beside the Eden Water.

Where to stay: A number of holiday cottages can be rented close to the estate, complete with grand four-poster beds.

*Location: Eight miles north of Kelso, in the Scottish Borders, only 43 miles from Edinburgh.*

[www.mellerstain.com](http://www.mellerstain.com)

### **Culcreuch Castle, Lanarkshire, central Scotland**

Built between 1296 and 1320, the castle was the ancestral seat of the Scottish clan Galbraith for more than 700 years and was even used to garrison Oliver Cromwell's troops in 1654, before being turned into a hotel in the 1980s. There is plenty to explore around the castle, including spotting salmon leaping up a waterfall to spawn at Pots of Gartness or the spectacular 94ft/29m waterfall of the River Endrick. Hillwalking and golf are also very popular in the area so you'll be sure to get plenty of exercise before relaxing in the castle's four-poster beds.

Where to stay: There are ten elegant rooms to stay in the castle itself with the décor a vintage delight, and fresh Scottish produce is served in the castle's two restaurants.

*Location: Fintry, a 45-minute drive from central Glasgow. <http://culcreuch.com>*

## **WALES**

### **Erddig House, north Wales**

Widely acclaimed as one of Britain's finest historic houses, Erddig is a fascinating yet unpretentious early 18th-century country house reflecting the upstairs/downstairs life of a gentry family over 250 years. Outside, an impressive range of outbuildings includes stables, smithy, joiners' shop, sawmill and 18th-century walled garden, set among a romantic landscaped park.

Where to stay: Nearby villages including Wrexham have a range of cosy bed and breakfasts to choose from.

*Location: Two miles from Wrexham in the north of Wales.*

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/erddig](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/erddig)

### **Powis Castle, Welsh Borderlands**

This superb house and gardens is set in a wonderful terraced location in the Welsh borderlands, with fabulous views across the valley. In the grounds are steeply terraced gardens planted in the early 18th century while the Clive of India Museum houses a wonderful collection of artefacts, which bring to life the days of the Raj.

Where to stay: The beautiful Edwardian cottages on the castle's grounds have fantastic views over the garden.

*Location: One mile from Welshpool in the centre of Wales.*

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/powis-castle](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/powis-castle)

## **NORTHERN IRELAND**

### **Florence Court, County Fermanagh**

There is something for all the family at this warm and welcoming 18th-century property, the former home of the Earls of Enniskillen. A peaceful setting with a dramatic backdrop of mountains and forests, there are glorious walks to enjoy, as well as play areas and a charming walled garden and sawmill.

Where to stay: For a well-rounded experience, spend the night in the old staff quarters, the Butler's apartment overlooking the 18th-century laundry courtyard.

*Location: Eight miles south-west of Enniskillen in County Fermanagh, set in the foothills of Cuilcagh Mountain.*

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/florence-court](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/florence-court)

### **Colebrooke Park, County Fermanagh**

Colebrooke Park is first and foremost a family home, the seat of Viscount and Viscountess Brookeborough and one of region's most important and historic stately homes that has featured on British TV show, *Country House Rescue*. If the luxurious spa isn't your thing

and you prefer to be more active, Colebrooke also offers deer stalking, snipe and woodcock shooting and trout and salmon fishing in the beautiful countryside of County Fermanagh.

Where to stay: Open to the public to stay, experience a night as a Lord or Lady in one of 12 comfortable double bedrooms decorated by Lady Brookeborough.

*Location: Set in a lush 1,000-acre working estate, Colebrooke Park is only 90 minutes from Belfast, 40 minutes from the West Coast of Ireland and a short distance from beautiful Lough Erne.*

<http://colebrooke.info>

## Exceptional countryside foodie experiences

Calling all food-lovers! And wine, whisky and cider lovers, come to think of it. Britain's countryside is home to cool bars, boutique hotels boasting fantastic restaurants, pubs that feel like home, restaurants that will impress you and cookery courses that'll make *you* want to impress the folks back home. Find your foodie experience here.

### Distilleries

Britain's gin scene has been boosted recently by the opening of two headline-making distilleries.



*A gin distillery, the likes of which you won't see anywhere else - Heatherwick designed Laverstoke Mill, home of Bombay Sapphire.*

Designed by celebrated architect Thomas Heatherwick, Bombay Sapphire's **Laverstoke Mill** offers cocktail masterclasses alongside explorations of its renovated heritage buildings. And, despite the rural Hampshire setting, nearby Overton's train station is only an hour from London Waterloo. Newer still is the **Lakes Distillery** in north-west England's Lake District, which also produces vodka and whisky. Tours reveal why water from adjacent Bassenthwaite Lake is crucial to these tipples. The former farm is a three-hour drive from Manchester or Liverpool up in north-western England.

<http://distillery.bombaysapphire.com>, [www.lakesdistillery.com](http://www.lakesdistillery.com)

In the beautiful foothills of Wales' Brecon Beacons, **Penderyn Distillery** produces vodka, gin and a creamy liqueur but is best known for a smooth single malt. As well as masterclasses and tasting experiences, its chic visitor centre teaches guests about the history of Welsh whisky-making. Cardiff is 25 miles south-east. [www.welsh-whisky.co.uk](http://www.welsh-whisky.co.uk)

Among Scotland's many offerings, the **Glengoyne Distillery**, 40 minutes north of Glasgow, has experiences during which visitors get to design their own bespoke whisky in the Sampling Room, taking it home in a 200ml bottle. Further north, the region of Speyside not only produces our planet's two best-selling malt whiskies in Glenlivet and Glenfiddich, but hosts the world's sole **Malt Whisky Trail**, combining seven distilleries. Speyside's around an hour from Inverness Airport, which has connections to London.

[www.glengoyne.com](http://www.glengoyne.com), [www.maltwhiskytrail.com](http://www.maltwhiskytrail.com)

### Cookery courses

Among the myriad cookery courses available across Britain, some preach specific, vital skills. Situated beside Lough Erne in Northern Ireland's Co. Fermanagh (around a two-hour drive from Belfast), **Belle Isle Cookery School** has courses galore for both complete beginners and old-timers. Fish and seafood lovers can receive the local catch to fillet, prepare and poach. Would-be supperclub hosts can enrol on two-day dinner-party cooking classes. And clueless gents can try

'Men in the Kitchen', which involves baking bread, butchering meat and wizarding up a three-course meal. [www.irishcookerschool.com](http://www.irishcookerschool.com)

At **Assington Mill** - a 70-acre organic farm in Suffolk, an hour from London by train -



*Gorgeous Assington Mill in Suffolk is an idyllic place to learn to cook up a feast.*

courses range from jam and chutney-making to bread-baking for beginners, and visitors can stay in a cottage within the 17th century, timber-framed farmhouse complex. Accommodation is part of the package for students at Scottish luxury hotel **Kinloch Lodge**, on Skye, where celebrated chef Claire Macdonald runs three day residential cookery courses blending instruction with exploration of this beautiful island. Skye sits 60 spectacular Scottish Highland miles from Inverness, which has an international airport.

[www.assingtonmill.com](http://www.assingtonmill.com), [www.kinloch-lodge.co.uk/cookery.aspx](http://www.kinloch-lodge.co.uk/cookery.aspx)

In Oxfordshire, an hour's drive north from London, celebrated chef Raymond Blanc's **Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons** school occupies the same magnificent grounds as his 13th century manor-house hotel and restaurant. Providing tailored classes to all levels, including children, it's the world's only cookery school utilising in the kitchens of a two-Michelin-starred restaurant. [www.manoir.com](http://www.manoir.com)

## Picnics

No British outdoor excursion is complete without a picnic. But what to pack? Try for as much local, Royal Warrant produce as possible: some sourdough crispbread from London's **Fortnum & Mason**, perhaps, or an artisan sandwich platter courtesy of **Fisher & Donaldson**, a Scottish bakers based the towns of St Andrews and Dundee, both around an hour north of Edinburgh. [www.fortnumandmason.com](http://www.fortnumandmason.com), [www.fisheranddonaldson.com](http://www.fisheranddonaldson.com)

Some picnic-perfect British foods have their homes in one particular place. Pastry tarts packed with almond flavouring topped with raspberry or cherry jam, **Bakewell Puddings** are said to have originated in 1860 in the attractive Derbyshire market town of Bakewell, and specifically the Old Original Bakewell Pudding Shop, which still uses the same secret recipe. A bus ride away, Matlock is 2.5 hours from London's St Pancras by train. To get vintage **Cornish Pasties** - meat and veg inside pastry, crimped on one side - meanwhile, head to the south-western county of Cornwall and seek out a branch of the award-winning Rowe's Bakeries. The pretty coastal town of Falmouth, 4.5 hours by train from London, has four alone. [www.bakewellpuddingshop.co.uk](http://www.bakewellpuddingshop.co.uk), [www.rowesbakers.co.uk](http://www.rowesbakers.co.uk).

A classic British coastal pursuit involves eating takeaway fish-and-chips somewhere with a fantastic seaside view. In the North Yorkshire fishing port of Whitby, an hour's drive from York in north-eastern England, order from award-winning **Quayside**; on the Scottish west-coast Isle of Mull, two hours from Glasgow, the waterfront **Tobermory Chip Van** specialises in seared king scallops and has won a prestigious Les Routiers award, normally reserved for restaurants. Just watch out for the envious seagulls. <http://quaysidewhitby.co.uk>, [www.tobermoryfishandchipvan.co.uk](http://www.tobermoryfishandchipvan.co.uk)



*Rightly proud of their fish n' chips at Quayside in Whitby -can you smell the salt and vinegar?!*

## Vineyards

Scooping a series of awards from international wine boards, English and Welsh wine producers are earning a high reputation. While most are found in southern and eastern England, the **Ryedale Vineyard** is located just a half-hour drive from York in the north-west. Regular events see its wines paired with Yorkshire cheeses, while B&B accommodation is available in the Grade II listed farmhouse. Self-catering



*Ever thought you would write a postcard (or tweet!) from an English vineyard? Believe your eyes - and palate.*

accommodation's also available at the **Camel Valley Vineyard** in Cornwall (a 90-minute drive from the international airport of Exeter, south-west England) via two stone-built holiday cottages. If you fancy a spot of fishing too, the award-winning vineyard also has its own private stretch of the Camel River. Salmon and sea trout are found in the water. <http://ryedalevineyards.co.uk>, [www.camelvalley.com](http://www.camelvalley.com)

Considered Wales' premier winemaker, **Llanerch Vineyard** doesn't stop at self-guided tours and sampling sessions of its dry and medium-dry whites. Additionally, the 22-acre site, found in sloping Vale of Glamorgan hills ten miles west of Cardiff, boasts a luxury hotel, wedding facilities, a bistro and cookery demos and masterclasses by food writer (and former chef to Andrew Lloyd Webber) Angela Gray. Visitors can even volunteer to help out with the annual harvest. [www.llanerch-vineyard.co.uk](http://www.llanerch-vineyard.co.uk)

## Cider

Though 'scrumpy' is also produced in counties such as Herefordshire and Cornwall, south-west England's Somerset is considered its true home. Various experiences await visitors. At **Burrow Hill Cider's** farm, for example, aficionados can walk 30-minute orchard trails and, in autumn, see the yard piled photogenically high with red apples. Or try the **Perry's Cider** farm, where there's a small cider museum and tasting experiences on offer. Both specialists are located within five miles of Crewkerne, which has direct, two-hour train connections to London Waterloo. [www.ciderbrandy.co.uk](http://www.ciderbrandy.co.uk), [www.perryscider.co.uk](http://www.perryscider.co.uk)

Or how about attending a cider festival, and sampling an array of Somerset scrumpies? Held every June, the **Somerset Cheese, Cider & Moozic Fest** welcomes 30 varieties available, along with cheddars - another local specialty - and boisterous music. Bring aspirin for the morning, though - those local-brewed fares can be mind-bendingly strong! [www.somersetciderandcheesefest.co.uk](http://www.somersetciderandcheesefest.co.uk)

## Amazing eats

'Michelin-starred' equals 'worth making a detour for'. So it's natural that many of Britain's best-rated restaurants are nestled in the countryside, their meals usually served with a side of panoramic views, fresh air and relaxation. To wit: the three-star **Ynyshir Hall** in far-western Wales, a three-hour drive from Liverpool. Adjoining one of Britain's finest bird reserves, this white manor house once belonged to Queen Victoria but is now famed for its Welsh lamb, organic pork and foraged mushrooms and samphire. Ten bedrooms lend an overnight option. [www.ynyshirhall.co.uk](http://www.ynyshirhall.co.uk)

Among the two-star stand-outs are **The Hand and Flowers** and **L'Enclume**. The former's a pub in the quaint, central-England town of Marlow, two hours up the River Thames from



*The art of food - Simon Rogan has perfected it, at L'Enclume in beautiful Cumbria.*

London, specialising in game - treacle-cured chateaubriand in red-wine sauce, partridge with morello-cherry 'ketchup' - and cosy interiors. L'Enclume is the dream of culinary magician Simon Rogan, and benefits from an idyllic riverside location in the medieval Lake District village of Cartmel, a half hour drive from Windermere. Both also have a handful of luxury rooms. [www.lenclume.co.uk](http://www.lenclume.co.uk), [www.thehandandflowers.co.uk](http://www.thehandandflowers.co.uk)

Gourmands: places which wise Uncle Michelin says offer 'exceptional good food at moderate prices'. One new addition is **The Old Schoolhouse Inn** in Northern Ireland's Co. Lisbane / Ards, situated scenically amid the Castle Espie wetlands, beside Strangford Lough. Also just added is York's **Le Langhe**, an artisan Italian restaurant championing the Slow Food movement. [www.theoldschoolhouseinn.com](http://www.theoldschoolhouseinn.com), [www.lelanghe.co.uk](http://www.lelanghe.co.uk)

### Eat then sleep

Sometimes after a lovely dinner, there's only one thing to do: sleep. Praise be, then, for places like

**The Felin Fach Griffin**, a 'dining pub with rooms' which concentrates as much on its comfortable beds as the divine food. It's located near the literary-festival town of Hay-on-Wye in eastern Wales, just north of the Brecon Beacons and a two-hour drive from Cardiff. A similar ethos governs **The Wild Rabbit**, recent winner of the Michelin Eating Out In Pubs guide, with 12 bedrooms done up in country-luxe style. The classic Oxfordshire Cotswolds location, in Chipping Norton (less than an hour's drive from Oxford), adds extra wow. [www.eatdrinksleep.ltd.uk](http://www.eatdrinksleep.ltd.uk), [www.thewildrabbit.co.uk](http://www.thewildrabbit.co.uk)



*The Felin Fach Griffin will lure you back time and again with its hearty pub food and ultra-relaxing accommodation.*

**The Pig near Bath** is a country pad famed for its 25-mile menu sourcing as much grub as possible from local producers. Guests can undertake a guided tour of the beautiful kitchen garden, then try the local Bath Chap - pig's cheek or jaw - before nodding off in a shabby-chic room. The beautiful spa town of Bath, two hours by train from London, is nine miles away. Snoozy vegetarians, meanwhile, should head to **Lancrigg** and its exclusively meat-free menus. With lace-draped four-poster beds and whirlpool baths, the bolthole's dozen rooms are aimed at couples. Nearby town Grasmere sits in the heart of the Lake District, a three-hour drive from Manchester. [www.thepighotel.com/near-bath](http://www.thepighotel.com/near-bath), <http://lancrigg.co.uk>



*Forget your wellies? That's obviously ok at gourmet hotel The Pig Near Bath*

### Teas in the countryside

Comprising numerous small fancies, afternoon tea is a vintage British tradition, first dreamed up in the 19th century by a hungry Duchess of Bedford to plug the gap between

light lunches and very late suppers. Two centuries later, one of the countryside's best options is Scotland's five-star golf and spa hotel **Gleneagles**, 35 miles north of Edinburgh, where savoury sandwiches render a subsequent three-tier cake stand marginally less guilt-inducing. Equally decadent is **The Angel Hotel**, a cosy coaching inn fringing Wales's Brecon Beacons and 45 minutes from Cardiff. Here, guests may scoff pastries prepared by a specialist baker inside a gorgeous Wedgwood tea room. [www.gleneagles.com](http://www.gleneagles.com), [www.angelabergavenny.com](http://www.angelabergavenny.com).



*Delectable scones, and a tower of cakes and delicacies - head to Davenports for some top-rated teatime treats.*

Cream teas, meanwhile, consist of pots of tea plus fruit scones slathered with jam and clotted cream. In Cheshire, a 30-minute drive from Manchester and Liverpool in northern England, **Davenports Tea Room** makes delectable scones using a top-secret recipe - part of the reason it clinched the venerable Tea Guild's final national award in 2013 - and boasts *Alice in Wonderland*-themed décor for good measure. Pretty villages in Kent, south-eastern England, are also a safe cream-tea bet. Try **Fir Tree House** in Penshurst, 90 minutes' drive from London, with a large garden and a fireplace to warm wintertime visitors. <http://davenportsfarmshop.co.uk>, [http://penshurst-online.co.uk/f&d\\_fir\\_tree\\_house.htm](http://penshurst-online.co.uk/f&d_fir_tree_house.htm)

The south-west England counties of Cornwall and Devon are considered the spiritual home of cream teas, however. Consider the **Old Walled Garden Tea Rooms**, tucked behind a thatched guesthouse in Dunsford, just inside Dartmoor National Park and seven miles from Exeter. But remember: Devonians always put their jam over the cream (it's the reverse in Cornwall)! [www.churchcottagedunsford.co.uk](http://www.churchcottagedunsford.co.uk)

### Food-famous places

Some British towns are simply renowned for their food. Down in far south-western England's Cornwall, the town of **Padstow** is often called 'Padstein' thanks to a proliferation of seafood restaurants by chef and TV personality Rick Stein - most notably The Seafood Restaurant, which does what it says on the tin. [www.rickstein.com](http://www.rickstein.com)

Other locations are synonymous with one particular foodstuff. The seaside **Loch Fyne** on the west coast of Scotland for instance, is known for its oysters. Certified restaurants are found around the country, but eat the very freshest fare at the lake's Restaurant & Oyster Bar. It's 1.5 hours by car from Glasgow to the beautiful loch. Or there's the Lake District town **Kendal** - 1.5 hours' drive from Manchester and home to an eponymous mint cake, or the Leicestershire town of **Melton Mowbray** - almost exactly halfway between London and Manchester - and its revered pork pies.

[www.lochfyne.com](http://www.lochfyne.com), [www.visitcumbria.com/sl/kendal](http://www.visitcumbria.com/sl/kendal), [www.meltononline.co.uk](http://www.meltononline.co.uk)

### Food festivals

Among Britain's hundreds of annual food festivals, some stand out. Held on the second weekend of September, the **Ludlow Food Festival** includes sausage trails, brewery tours, chocolate-tasting and coffee masterclasses among its hoopla, all of which takes place in ruined Ludlow Castle's grounds. Ludlow is in Shropshire, 3 hours by train from London.

Taking place a week later, **Abergavenny Food Festival** is known for its celebrity guests: Mark Hix, Antonio Carluccio and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall have attended in recent years. Stalls spread across town, and there's a Children's Food Academy. Getting to Abergavenny is easy, just over two hours from London by train.

[www.foodfestival.co.uk](http://www.foodfestival.co.uk), [www.abergavennyfoodfestival.com](http://www.abergavennyfoodfestival.com)

The first weekend of September witnesses the **Loch Lomond Food & Drink Festival**, at which visitors can milk cows and meet a one-man mini-zoo - and that's just the kids' attractions. Music, whisky-tasting and a ten-foot chef are also promised at this Scottish shindig, but the real sells are the artisan producers (fudge, smoked meats and chocolate-and-chilli burgers in 2014), free entry and glorious location, right beside Britain's largest lake and under an hour by car, or just under two by train, from Glasgow.

<http://lochlomondfoodanddrinkfestival.co.uk>

### **Exceptional locations**

A memorable setting or sensational view raises the bar of any meal. Ever eaten inside a treehouse, for example? At northern England's Alnwick Gardens, two minutes from Alnwick Castle - aka Harry Potter's Hogwarts, with much of the film franchise shot there - you can: crafted from redwood, cedar and pine, the fairytale **Treehouse Restaurant** is accessed via high walkways and wobbly rope bridges. The menu is just as wizard, with lots of local produce and fresh fish. The Gardens are less than two hours' drive south of Scotland's capital Edinburgh.



*Makes a change from just walking into a restaurant on the high street - the Treehouse is accessible by rope bridge.*

[www.alnwickgarden.com/explore/whats-here/the-treehouse/restaurant](http://www.alnwickgarden.com/explore/whats-here/the-treehouse/restaurant)

Alternative, hop aboard the vintage **British Pullman**. Plying its lucky guests with champagne, fine wines and seasonal dishes, this sister train to the Venice Simplon-Orient-



*Enjoy fine dining aboard the British Pullman while the changing scenery provides your during-dinner entertainment.*

Express departs from London Victoria on a circular choo-choo through the British countryside. Each course is inspired by the views from the window, the chefs crafting menus using local produce from the regions the train is whizzing through. Sister train the **Belmond Northern Belle** offers a similarly creative five-course lunch, while racing through the stunning countryside of northern England, with departures from Leeds, York and Manchester.

[www.belmond.com/british-pullman-train](http://www.belmond.com/british-pullman-train),  
[www.belmond.com/northern-belle-train](http://www.belmond.com/northern-belle-train)

For true 'destination dining', little trumps the **Old Forge**, on Scotland's west coast. This gastropub is solely reachable via an 18-mile hill hike or a choppy 20-minute ferry... and all that only once you've reached Mallaig, itself five hours north of Glasgow by train. Hand-dived scallops and Loch Nevis views make it very worthwhile, though. Equally far-flung is **The Station House**, located beside Corrour Station, one of Britain's remotest railway stops, also in Scotland. A popular starting point for hill-walkers, it's inaccessible by road - the nearest one being 17 miles away - and

trains from London Euston take 12 hours. Home-cooked meals champion local fare like Corrour venison and Sutherland mountain hare, while three en suite bedrooms have views out over wild Rannoch Moor. [www.theoldforge.co.uk](http://www.theoldforge.co.uk), [www.corrour-station-house-restaurant.co.uk](http://www.corrour-station-house-restaurant.co.uk)

## DIY

As retro as it comes, the prehistoric activity of foraging - gathering food from nature - has regrown in popularity among Britons during the last decade. Among the huge variety of options are 12-hour courses Canterbury, Kent in south-east England, around 90 minutes by train from London. Wild-food experimentalist **Fergus Drennan** intersperses searches for edible plants, seaweeds and fungi with advice on pickling, smoking and salting, cookery demonstrations and meals. <http://fergustheforager.co.uk>

After a gourmet foraging weekend? **Fat Hen** in Cornwall, south-west England - run by sustainable-living guru Caroline Davey - involves guests in making elderberry cocktails and nettle frittata ahead of a Saturday-night candlelit feasts. Children-focused courses are also available. The nearest train station is Penzance, a five-and-a-half-hour journey from London. [www.fathen.org](http://www.fathen.org)

Over in Northern Ireland's capital Belfast, Mary and Dermot Hughes run a variety of seasonal courses as **Forage Ireland**. Topics include 'edible flowers' in June; 'fruit: jams, jellies and desserts' from August to October and 'wines and sloe gin' from August to November. <http://forageireland.com>

## In Search of the Perfect Roast

The British eat 1.2 billion roast dinners each year, and experiencing the full roast is as British a foodie experience as it gets. A roast dinner typically includes meat and vegetables, with complementing condiments (mint sauce for lamb, horseradish for beef), and a beer or ale on the side. Nowadays it's not just meat-eaters that are catered for, with moderns twists on the original, and the tradition has been a springboard for many a creative chef to create something delicious and memorable - just add a cosy fireside setting, and you're ready to indulge!

Here are ten of the most interesting roasts around.

**1. The Star @ Sancton.** A village inn dating back to 1710, The Star sits scenically amid the gentle Yorkshire Wolds, making it a perfect stop for day-trippers from York, just 20 miles north-west. Sunday roasts here span pork loin, free-range chicken and high-quality beef, all hailing from this pocket of northern England. Only beef incorporates The Star's headline draw, however: chef Ben Cox is a two-time winner of the Great Yorkshire Pudding Challenge. Wash his fluffy, puffy puddings down with a pint of micro-brewed ale, another specialty. [www.thestaratsancton.co.uk](http://www.thestaratsancton.co.uk)

**2. Ye Olde Bull's Head Inn.** "I have never in my life known somewhere as beautiful and as welcoming as Anglesey." So said Prince William after he and Kate left the island in 2013, following a three-year residence there. The description perfectly coins Ye Olde Bull's Head Inn, a protected building in the castle town of Beaumaris, on the island's southern edge, and 50 miles west of Liverpool along the top of North Wales. Roast beef and lamb are served in the convivial Brasserie every Sunday and there's swanky accommodation upstairs. You'll be in good company: long, long ago, novelist Charles Dickens stayed here.

<http://bullsheadin.co.uk>



*Ye Olde Bull's Head Inn is warm, welcoming and serves delicious roasts. It's so inviting you'll wish you could stay there long after dinner's over... and you can!*

**3. The Wheatsheaf Inn.** With its half-timbered houses and late-Gothic churches, the market town of Northleach is an exercise in Cotswolds perfection. And it's here, 25 miles west of Oxford in south-western England, where one encounters the Wheatsheaf: once a coaching inn patronised by mysterious highwaymen, now a hip restaurant-with-rooms. On Sundays, a trio of rave-reviewed roasts are available in the shape of pork, chicken and overnight-roasted Aberdeen Angus beef accompanied by - as all roast beef should be - horseradish sauce. Local ales and an excellent wine list make leaving all the harder.

[www.cotswoldswheatsheaf.com](http://www.cotswoldswheatsheaf.com)

**4. The Inn.** A pretty village less than an hour's drive east of Belfast, Crawfordsburn is home to a 400-year-old, thatched-roof institution. But while The Inn's past clientele might include famous highwayman Dick Turpin and gloried novelist CS Lewis, none of those A-Listers had the option of Sunday's current 'Toast to the Roast' menu, pairing soup and wine with a chosen meat. There's sirloin beef, chicken or, for a belated taste of Christmas, a County Antrim turkey, filled with cranberry and chestnut stuffing. Think twice about visiting if you're easily spooked, however: the building is supposedly haunted.

[www.theoldinn.com](http://www.theoldinn.com)



*Mmmmm... The Hand & Flowers serves more than your average roast - it's almost too pretty to eat (almost)*

**5. The Hand & Flowers.** This is the place for the fanciest roasts. Set in the quaint, central-England town of Marlow, two hours up the River Thames west of London, Tom Kerridge's establishment is the UK's only pub with two Michelin stars. The hearty Sunday lunch menu ranges from an upscale roast beef - a treacle-cured chateaubriand in red-wine sauce - to rarer Sunday game treats, like the classically-aristocratic partridge, inventively accompanied by black-pudding purée and morello-cherry 'ketchup'. If you can barely move afterwards, don't fret: the pub has eight luxury suites close by.

[www.thehandandflowers.co.uk](http://www.thehandandflowers.co.uk)

**6. The Cross Keys.** 'Pub. Food. Rooms. Log fire.' So reads the Cross Keys' website, perfectly capturing the simple pleasures of an establishment dating to 1703, and located only one hour's drive from Glasgow in the village of Kippen. A whitewashed building - which makes a perfect base for exploring Loch Lomond and surrounding woodland glens - the building has three spruce, modern bedrooms and two convivial bars, all wood beams, chatty locals and blazing fires. There are two roast options each Sunday, often including rare rib-eye beef, and lively folk concerts held on the same day every fortnight.

[www.kippencrosskeys.com](http://www.kippencrosskeys.com)

**7. The Bush Inn.** A couple of hours' drive from Cardiff, if this archetypal Vale of Glamorgan village pub looks familiar, it's for good reason: Benedict Cumberbatch filmed scenes from *Sherlock* under its handsome, thatched roof. A focal point for tiny village St Hilary, the Bush is as snug as they come, with wooden furniture, stone walls, crackling fire and tables illuminated by flickering candles. Alongside local ales, scrumpy cider and homemade pies sit three Sunday roasts - the vintage trinity of lamb, beef and chicken.

[www.bushinn-sthilary.com](http://www.bushinn-sthilary.com)



*First feast your eyes on the splendid setting... then move onto the spectacular roast within*

**8. The Gunton Arms.** Owned by art dealer Ivor Braka, The Gunton Arms is a heady combination of striking Anthony Caro sculpture, Damien Hirst paintings and Tracey Emin neons, and excellent, very meaty meals. The Elk Room, so named because the skull of an ancient elk is mounted above the fire, hosts a fire that cooks your meal before your very eyes - and nostrils: come with an appetite. On Sundays though, the Elk Room fire is off, and roasts are *on*. If you're in a group, go for the whole chicken (for two-four people), served on a spectacular platter with stuffing and roasted garlic bread sauce, carrots, cabbage and roast potatoes. The pub is in a deer park in Cromer, Norfolk, and an hour's drive from Norwich (itself a two-hour train journey from London/three hours by car).

[www.theguntonarms.co.uk](http://www.theguntonarms.co.uk)

**9. The Lodge at Carfraemill.** Located just 30 minutes away from Edinburgh in the Scottish Borders, yet feeling a world away from any capital city, The Lodge at Carfraemill is perfectly situated for some rural exploration - and maybe a hearty walk pre- or post-roast. The family-run hotel makes a great base to stay, and its restaurant makes the most

of 'local farmers, craft butchers, farmhouse kitchen creators, artisanal independents and organic producers', which for you means: deliciousness. Scotch beef is roasted in the Aga on Sundays, and is you're in a group of eight or more you can pre-order roast beef, lamb, turkey, chicken, pork, gammon or venison - the perfect family meal (with no washing up). [www.carfraemill.co.uk](http://www.carfraemill.co.uk)

**10. Y Ffarmers.** Near North Wales's Aberystwyth, set in the pretty village of Llanfihangel y Creuddyn (hopefully you won't have to ask for directions!) is Y Ffarmers, a cosy and convivial pub where the chefs change the menu regularly, but you're in more than safe hands with their choices. Roasts on a Sunday are a real treat, and as well as hearty food you'll find the atmosphere warm and welcoming - giving you a chance to hear and try out Welsh! The pub is in north-west Wales, about 2.5 hours' drive from Cardiff through some beautiful quintessential rolling hills and cute little market towns. [www.yffarmers.co.uk](http://www.yffarmers.co.uk)

## Delicious drinking in the countryside

Gin made in the heart of Wales, a test bed for the latest cocktails in the heart of the Hampshire countryside or an idyllic countryside pub with over a hundred different malt whiskies or its own microbrewery. Whether it's a pint in a sun-dappled beer garden or a sophisticated cocktail that tickles your taste buds, here are some of Britain's best countryside drinking spots.



*The Drunken Duck in Cumbria has it all - views, log fires and brewed-on-site beer. Settle in!*

### **The Drunken Duck, Cumbria, north-west England**

Britain's pubs can often have unusual names and this one is no exception. It dates from a time when a duck developed a taste for beer, not surprising when there's an award-winning micro-brewery on site. Stay upstairs and you'll find luxurious, contemporary rooms and some of the best views the Lake District has to offer, but downstairs in the bar, it's all about tradition with log fires in winter and decorations of fresh hops. Rooms start at £105 including breakfast; you can get to nearby Windermere by train - it takes around three hours from London Euston.

[www.drunkenduckinn.co.uk](http://www.drunkenduckinn.co.uk)

### **The Bell Inn, Sussex, south-east England**

Join the London commuters as they head home to Ticehurst village in Sussex. An hour by train to nearby Stonegate, the best pubs in Britain are community hubs and this is no exception - they've just reinvented it for the 21st century with film and quiz nights and philosophy discussions. Harveys of Lewes, a brewery from a nearby town, is the bedrock, but there's also a regularly changing roster of guest beers, all from local producers. The bedrooms - with rates from £75 a night - are luxurious but fun - each has a tree trunk growing through it. Rooms from £75.

[www.thebellinticehurst.com](http://www.thebellinticehurst.com)

### Venner Bar, Dorset, south-west England

A drinking den reached through a secret door. Bridport is a small town in Dorset (it takes just under three hours from Paddington station in London to nearby Dorchester) and there you'll find the Bull Hotel - a small, cosy pub and hotel in a fine Georgian building. Its bar - the Venner - is stocked with many cult brands of spirits, including Sipsmith and Hendricks Gin. Regular sessions from visiting mixologists and a top resident bartender results in inventive, well-made drinks such as the Red Snapper; featuring horseradish-infused gin with tomato juice, lemon juice, cucumber and spices. Rooms upstairs start at £156, including breakfast.



*Let the bartenders and mixologists at The Venner mix you a special brew - you can always sleep upstairs if you've had too many!*

[www.thebullhotel.co.uk](http://www.thebullhotel.co.uk)

### The Cross Keys Inn, Toomebridge, Northern Ireland

Half an hour's drive from Belfast, this pub is tiny, thatched and has a musical heritage that stretches across Northern Ireland. Dating from 1654, housed in low-slung white-washed building was once a coaching inn on the route from Belfast to Londonderry, it's now one of Northern Ireland's most famous pubs - especially for its music, always on Saturday nights, often on other nights too. Naturally, there's a full selection of Irish whiskies - and Guinness - behind the bar.

028 7965 0694 [no website]

### Verzon House, Herefordshire, west England

It's not surprising that the bar of this hotel in Ledbury takes cocktails seriously - it's owned by the nearby Chase distillery. Based on a nearby farm in Herefordshire - some of the best - and most beautiful farmland in England, Chase is a single-estate distillery producing its own acclaimed vodka and gin. Its offerings, including rhubarb and elderflower liqueur, are also showcased in the hotel's bar. Dinner bed and breakfast start from £160 per room and you can go by train; Ledbury is an hour outside Birmingham.



*Relax in style at Verzon House - just add gin, for the ultimate evening unwind*

[www.verzonhouse.com](http://www.verzonhouse.com)

### The Swan with Two Necks, Lancashire, north-west England

The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) has been supporting British pubs for more than 40 years - and its annual pub of the year award is designed to celebrate the nation's best hosteleries. The most recent winner is the Swan with Two Necks, a pub in the Lancashire village of Pendleton - an area famous for its association with witches trials in the 17th century. The reason why the Swan won? The excellence of the house beer Golden Pippen alongside guest ales from micro-breweries such as Phoenix, Dark Star and Salaman and its classic pub ambience, including beer garden and village setting. Stay at the Shireburn

Arms in nearby Clitheroe (a four-hour train journey from London) from £95 a night. [www.shireburnarmshotel.co.uk](http://www.shireburnarmshotel.co.uk), [www.swanwithtwonecks.co.uk](http://www.swanwithtwonecks.co.uk)

### **The New Three Mariners Inn, Carmarthenshire, south-west Wales**

Laugharne is a village in west Wales with a huge literary tradition; poet and writer Dylan Thomas called it home. The Three Mariners is the village's hub - a traditional pub with live music and regular quiz nights. Alongside its local beers, you'll also find Penderyn whisky - including single malt and peat plus Brecon gin. All of them are made in Wales, using water from the Brecon Beacons. Rooms cost £70 a night, including breakfast. The nearest station Carmarthen, 13 miles away, is a four-hour journey from London Paddington.

[www.newthreemarinersinn.co.uk](http://www.newthreemarinersinn.co.uk)

### **The Stein Inn, Isle of Skye, Scotland**

The oldest inn on this Scottish island dates back to the 1700s and, in some ways, things have hardly changed. A quaint white-painted building perched above the water, with sunset views over to North Uist - there's plenty to keep you by the bar's peat fire too. There are over 125 malt whiskies on offer and beer fans won't be disappointed either; Reeling Deck is brewed on the island specially for the Stein. Not easy to reach - it's a five hour bus trip from Glasgow - but you can bed down here; there are four rooms and one self-catering apartment - and a restaurant that specialises in local seafood; rates start at £38.50 per person including breakfast.

[www.steininn.co.uk](http://www.steininn.co.uk)



*The Bombay Sapphire Distillery in beautiful Hampshire is the place for your G&T*

### **The Mill Bar, Hampshire, south England**

Thomas Heatherwick, the designer responsible for the 2012 Olympic caldron and the new Routemaster bus, got botanical with a more recent project; a new distillery for Bombay Sapphire gin in Hampshire that opened in 2014. A tour takes you around the glasshouses where the herbs and spices needed - ranging from liquorice to juniper and cassia bark - are growing but anyone can turn up to the Mill Bar. Open until 6pm in winter and 8pm in summer, on the banks of the River Test -

it's part cocktail laboratory. The train to nearby Whitchurch takes just over an hour from Waterloo.

[www.distillery.bombaysapphire.com](http://www.distillery.bombaysapphire.com)

### **Moulin Hotel, Perthshire, central England**

Visitors and locals have been heading to this inn for more than 300 years - settling around the same bar and fires in this tiny village with a huge history - there are Iron Age remains here. Just outside the town of Pitlochry, a two hour train journey north from Edinburgh. A former stables became a microbrewery in 1995, producing a variety of beers including Ale of Atholl, Braveheart and Old Remedial, which has local honey in its ingredients - as well as a fine selection of whiskies. Rooms from £70 including breakfast. <http://moulinhotel.co.uk>

## Exclusive experiences for high flyers

Hey big spender. From taking over an island to getting taken around Harrods with a stylist, to one-upping the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Britain offers an array of extravagant experiences for travellers to whom money is no object.

In terms of golfing grandeur, nothing trumps playing the legendary Old Course at St Andrews, an hour up Scotland's east coast from Edinburgh. Costing £3,245 over summer, five-night Old Course Experiences also feature rounds at four other prestigious links courses (including Carnoustie), privileged driving-range access and five-star hotel accommodation ([www.oldcourse-experience.com](http://www.oldcourse-experience.com)). Sporting VIPs might also like to do their best Lewis Hamilton impression at Britain's Grand Prix venue, Silverstone, where, for £199, one can whizz about in an F1-like single-seater ([www.silverstone.co.uk](http://www.silverstone.co.uk)).



*Take on the iconic Old Course at St Andrews.*

Named after a John Buchan novel, the MacNab has become a classic hunting challenge for members of the Scottish elite. In a luxury, contemporary take, River & Green's 'Caledonian MacNab' affords participants to try to shoot a Highlands stag, fly-fish a salmon and shoot at least a brace of grouse during a three-day stay at an opulent Edinburgh hotel. Transport's via limousine or helicopter, and it all costs around £5,500 ([www.river-green.com](http://www.river-green.com)).

Helicopters are also the best way to experience southern England's Chewton Glen, located an hour west of Southampton inside the New Forest. The luxury hotel's Helicopter Breaks pair two nights' in a romantic treehouse, private breakfasts and dinner and spa and pool access with a 45-minute champagne flight over the Isle of Wight ([www.chewtonglen.com](http://www.chewtonglen.com)).



*Soar above Loch Lomond in a seaplane, then come down to earth and dine on Michelin-starred cuisine.*

Or how about a personal plane? Nothing screams 'A Lister' like a private jet, and criss-crossing the UK using companies like Air Charter ([www.aircharter.co.uk](http://www.aircharter.co.uk)). Alternatively, glide above Scotland's western coastal islands with Loch Lomond Seaplanes. Flights last 55 minutes, cost from £139 and depart beside the five-star, lochside Cameron House hotel, 20 miles northwest of Glasgow and boasting a Michelin-starred restaurant ([www.lochlomondseaplanes.com](http://www.lochlomondseaplanes.com)).

Out in south-western England's Solent strait and a half-hour boat journey from Southampton, Spitbank Fort is was originally a gun emplacement built to repel attacks by Napoleon III. Now a luxury private island, it costs £5,000 to exclusively hire for 24 hours. Where once muzzleloaders greeted guests, now await eight bedroom suites, a champagne bar, a rooftop hot pool and a sauna ([www.amazingvenues.co.uk](http://www.amazingvenues.co.uk)).

Back on the mainland, hire an entire hotel. Forty minutes London by car, consider chucking all the other guests out of Cliveden House, and having the 376 garden acres, spa and fine dining all to yourself for £55,570 a night ([www.clivedenhouse.co.uk](http://www.clivedenhouse.co.uk)). Or hold an exclusive-use house party at the Mount Stuart estate on west-coast Scotland's Isle of Bute, 33 miles

from Glasgow. With room for over 70 in the spectacular neo-gothic House and surrounding cottages, a night costs £25,000 and affords access to normally-private facilities like the Victorian-era indoor pool and original billiards room ([www.mountstuart.com](http://www.mountstuart.com)).

Better yet, make it a castle: an Irish castle, in the style of Kim Kardashian and Kanye West. Set beside Lough Erne and a 2-3 hour drive south-west from Belfast, the whole West Wing of Northern Ireland's stately, five-star Crom Castle - drawing room, terrace, lakeside setting, evening sunsets, Aga cooker, barrel-vaulted ceilings and all - is bookable on a self-catering basis from £2,000 per weekend. ([cromcastle.com](http://cromcastle.com)).



*Hire out Crom Castle and enjoy being the lord of your very own manor.*

Renting a personal shopper for the day is equally Kardashian-esque; after all, you're far too valuable to be carrying things yourself, right? And there's no ritzier place to do it than London's Harrods department store. "Only offered to Harrods' top clients", the By Appointment service covers jewellery, watches, luggage and couture; better yet, book The Penthouse for one-to-one designer appointments ([harrodsbyappointment.com](http://harrodsbyappointment.com)). Get there via limo with the help of chauffeur service VIP Mayfair ([www.vipmayfair.com](http://www.vipmayfair.com)).

Auction hall Sotheby's is another British institution. Little-known is that exclusive, behind-the-scenes private tours are available: a rare chance to see the valuation process in action, handle artworks, hold the iconic hammers and scoff a three-course lunch inside the elegant Boardroom as Damien Hirst's butterfly paintings look on. Able to be tailored to particular interests - such as modern art, master paintings and sculpture - they cost £15,000 ([trulyexperiences.com](http://trulyexperiences.com)).



*Be inspired by Henry VIII and throw a banquet at Hampton Court.*

Older still is Hampton Court, a London palace where Henry VIII once lived. Do as the famously gluttonous (and amorous) ruler once did by booking out the entire Great Hall for a banquet - perhaps even a Tudor-style feast of 20 courses (*removes*) featuring foods like peacock and venison. England's last and greatest medieval hall, this spectacular space fits up to 400 and costs £11,000 + VAT.

([www.hrp.org.uk/hamptoncourtpalace](http://www.hrp.org.uk/hamptoncourtpalace)).

To imitate contemporary royalty, make for Anglesey, an island on which the Duke & Duchess of Cambridge rented a cottage for three years. Their former home is currently unavailable, but how about the very luxurious Rhoscolyn House? Set in isolation beside a sandy beach, the spectacular, spacious home rents at £2,950 a night over summer and especially suits families. Anglesey is in north-western Wales, a 2-3 hour drive from Liverpool ([www.sheepskinlife.com/relax-at/rhoscolyn-house](http://www.sheepskinlife.com/relax-at/rhoscolyn-house)).

Wales-going families could also splash out on a four-person Lotus Belle Tent at Festival No.6, held every September in the Venetian-style seaside town of Portmeirion. During this magically madcap party, known particularly for its music - Grace Jones and Belle & Sebastian headline this summer - these indulgent tents will provide welcome respite in the

form of shagpile carpets, magical lighting and memory-foam mattresses. Sleeping up to four, they cost £1,100 for the four days ([www.festivalnumber6.com](http://www.festivalnumber6.com)).

It's always nice to take a souvenir to take home, and how about your own whisky? On five-hour, £125 Masterclasses at Scotland's Glengoyne Distillery, just outside Glasgow, lucky visitors not only get to sample various malts and sherries, but concoct a bespoke new tippie in the Sampling Room. Following lunch, a 200ml bottle of your one-off creation is presented. Sláinte! ([www.glengoyne.com](http://www.glengoyne.com)).

## **15 Brilliant British Gardens: natural to naturist**

Britain knows how to make a garden absorbing - spend any amount of time, from 10 minutes to a whole day surrounded by greenery, riotously coloured and carefully arranged flowers, and the scents and sounds of nature, and you'll emerged refreshed and inspired. Here are 15 fantastic gardens to start you off, from the quintessential to the quirky (complete with naked gardeners!)



*Explore the edible and useful garden at the Chelsea Physic Garden in London.*

### **Healing flower power in London**

The Chelsea Physic Garden, located only a few streets away from the Chelsea Flower Show, is a hidden oasis in the capital and the second oldest botanic garden in England. Founded in 1673, the garden was originally created to promote the study of botany for medicinal purposes. It's a fascinating as well as incredibly beautiful space, with a wonderful and award-winning café, *Tangerine Dream* whose cakes and afternoon teas are delicious. The Garden is open all year excepting Saturdays and a few weeks of December. Wednesday late openings in July and August. [www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk](http://www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk)

### **Romantic strolls and mountain views in North Wales**

An enchanting experience, created by five generations of one family, Bodnant Garden is 32-hectare (80-acre) and superbly located, with spectacular views across Snowdonia. Most famous is its 180-foot long laburnum arch, which flowers in late May, providing a romantic and lush archway. There are also plants from all over the world grown from seed and cuttings collected over a century ago on plant-hunting expeditions. The new Winter Garden has 10,000 new plants, making Bodnant a place not only for the sunny months but perfect for a winter stroll and then a bowl of warming soup at the lovely café. There are strategically placed benches around for people with restricted mobility.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden)

### **...to a blossoming array of tropical flowers in south Wales**

Only around an hour's drive from Cardiff, you can escape city life and explore a magnificent collection of more than 8,000 different plant varieties, spread across 560 acres of beautiful countryside, in the National Botanic Garden of Wales. Themed gardens, medicinal plants, learning about plant evolution - it's all here. The Garden also has the world's largest single spanned glasshouse, designed by Lord Norman Foster, which has a wonderful display of Mediterranean climate plants.

*Getting there: Located in Carmarthenshire, you can either drive from Cardiff in an hour or in 90 minutes from Bristol.*

[www.gardenofwales.org.uk](http://www.gardenofwales.org.uk)

### **Exotic blooms at the top of Scotland...**

One of the most northerly British gardens, Inverewe is located North of Skye and involves a beautiful drive with stunning views over the Scottish Highlands. Thanks to the warm currents of the Gulf Stream that flows along the west Scottish coastline some exotic plants flourish at Inverewe. You can get a train to Inverness (3.5 hours from Edinburgh), and then a coach, however it's worth hiring a car and making the spectacular drive if you're on a road trip. [www.nts.org.uk/property/inverewe-garden-and-estate](http://www.nts.org.uk/property/inverewe-garden-and-estate)

### **...and sup-tropical conditions at the tip of England**

The very tip of Britain is called Land's End, and is also visited by the Gulf Stream that allows plants to flower year-round. Tresco Abbey Gardens is located on the Isles of Scilly, 28 miles off Land's End and round even at the height of winter, more than 300 plants will be in flower, with species from Brazil and Burma, New Zealand and South Africa. Tresco doesn't feel like England - it doesn't feel like anywhere! The National Geographic voted the Isles of Scilly number two in their Top 10 Islands of the World list, ahead of Tahiti, Capri and the Canary Islands. You need to get to Tresco by ferry from Penzance in Cornwall, which is 5.5 hours from London. You can also fly to Tresco from Exeter, Newquay and Land's End. Visit [www.tresco.co.uk](http://www.tresco.co.uk) to find out how to arrive, and more on the gardens.

### **Rainforests and biomes in Cornwall, England**

The Eden Project was created in 2001 out of a vast disused china clay pit in Cornwall, and has two huge geodesic biomes (conservatories). Now one of Britain's top attractions, The Eden Project is a great place for families, as children and adults can't fail to be amazed by the world's largest rainforest in captivity in one biome, and the fascinating and beautiful plants from the Mediterranean in the other. There are also outdoor landscaped gardens and in the summer the venue hosts a series of concerts featuring major bands. It's in Cornwall, at the South of England and on the coast, a perfect place to discover quintessential England - famous for tea and scones and Cornish pasties (hand-held pies stuffed with meat, potatoes and carrots) as well as pretty beaches and excellent pubs. Get there from London on the train in 4.5 hours (to St Austell station).

[www.edenproject.com](http://www.edenproject.com)

### **...to treehouses and poison gardens in Alnwick, north-east England...**

A garden for every season, Alnwick Gardens, in the grounds of Alnwick Castle - home to the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland - are a good example of gardens created with contemporary vision. An ornamental garden makes clever use of a criss-cross of pathways, fruit trees and flowers and two secret gardens; a beautifully crafted Treehouse sits among lime trees, with sky high wooden walkways and wobbly rope bridges, and comes complete with a restaurant serving locally inspired food. Its Cherry Orchard is home to more than 300 Tai Haku cherry trees, the only place in Britain to see these trees in such numbers, making April or May a perfect time to visit when they are in



*The suspended walkway at Alnwick Gardens*

blossom. And behind the locked gates of the Poison Garden more than 100 deadly plants grow - you can look, but certainly do not touch!

*Getting there: Alnwick Castle and Gardens are less than an hour's drive north from the city of Newcastle or less than two hours' drive south of Edinburgh.*

[www.alnwickgarden.com](http://www.alnwickgarden.com)

### **...and over to garden artistry in County Down, Northern Ireland**

Mount Stewart, an 18th-century house and garden located in the countryside outside of Belfast, has one of the most visionary gardens in the region. Edith, Lady Londonderry had a fun and ambitious approach to gardening artistry in the 1920s and 1930s and so created elegant gardens using plants from all over the world; the micro-climate of Strangford Lough allowed for a spot of planting experimentation. There are formal gardens with a more Mediterranean character, and wooded areas growing a huge variety of plants that flower in different seasons. And, if you visit during winter, catch the garden's Festival of Light, featuring a glorious illuminated trail putting the beauty of the Lake Walk and surrounding areas under the spotlight.

*Getting there: Mount Stewart is around a half-hour drive from Belfast.*

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mount-stewart](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mount-stewart)

### **A Victorian garden with a museum inside in Belfast, Northern Ireland**

First established in 1828, the Botanic Gardens in Belfast have been enjoyed as a public park by the people of Belfast since 1895 and form an important part of the city's Victorian heritage. There is an extensive rose garden and long herbaceous borders and the tree enthusiast can seek out the rare oaks planted in the 1880s. Lots of birds and an exotic Tropical Ravine make it a transporting experience, right in the middle of the city, and the fantastic Ulster Museum is located inside the gardens.

[www.visit-belfast.com/things-to-do/member/botanic-gardens](http://www.visit-belfast.com/things-to-do/member/botanic-gardens)

### **Edwardian romance in Wales's Vale of Glamorgan**

Dyffryn Gardens in beautiful South Wales has just been taken over by the National Trust, and is a romantic spot, with several garden 'rooms', each with their own horticultural character. These are surrounded by a pleasure ground of sweeping lawns dotted with statuary, water features, a rockery and kitchen garden and many rare and exceptional trees, including some of the UK's 'champions'. Don't be surprised if you see a bride and groom sharing a kiss at the canal in the Great Lawn - it's a popular place for people to tie the knot. Dyffryn is only 20 minutes away from Cardiff by road.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens)

### **Great gardens and a ghost in the Lake District**

Muncaster is an intriguing spot, home to the World Owl Centre, 70 acres of beautiful gardens and... a mystery resident (or two). The court jester at the historic home in the 16th century, Tom Fool (aka Tom Skelton) is said still to be causing a stir today, and he's not the only one. You can stay in the Tapestry Room on a 'Ghost Sit' for an all-night watch (complete with coffee to keep you awake), where ghosts are often reported. In the daytime and the spring and summer months, there's nothing better than the beautiful gardens, with fabulous displays of bluebells from April to May and rhododendrons through to June. Muncaster is on the edge of the Lake District in the North West of England, and can be

reached by train (to Ravenglass), about 5 hours from London, or else by car on a trip through some of the prettiest parts of England. See [www.golakes.co.uk](http://www.golakes.co.uk) for information on getting there.

[www.muncaster.co.uk](http://www.muncaster.co.uk)



*Glorious sunsets set the scene for some Austen-inspired romance at Chatsworth*

### **A garden fit for Mr Darcy in Derbyshire, England**

Chatsworth's gardens have evolved over 450 years, and are well known for their waterworks including the 300 year old Cascade, the trough waterfall in the rockery and the enormous gravity-fed Emperor fountain. As well as the huge maze, the rockery and the rose, cottage and kitchen gardens, there are over five miles of walks with rare trees, shrubs, streams and ponds. Chatsworth has featured in a number of films, including most famously *Pride and Prejudice* - the house was said to have inspired Pemberley, Mr Darcy's home in the novel. Chesterfield station, close

to Chatsworth, is connected to Derby, which in turn is connected by regular trains from London (2hrs 15mins).

[www.chatsworth.org](http://www.chatsworth.org)

### **Glorious colours at an Italianate village in Wales**

Portmeirion is a curious place, that international visitors will be surprised to stumble upon in Wales. It's in the north of the country, in Gwynedd, and was designed and built by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis between 1925 and 1975 in the style of an Italian village. Not many people go on holiday to Italy and come back attempting to recreate their surrounding - in Wales - but Sir Clough did, and the result is a special place with a totally unique character. The grounds contain an important rhododendron collection as well as other exotic plants, and the colours in Autumn and Spring are particularly magical. You can reach Portmeirion by train from London to Llandudno or Bangor in just a few hours, and then take a connecting train to Blaenau Ffestiniog and be collected by taxi, or else take the atmospheric narrow gauge steam railway to Minffordd station and then a short taxi. You need to pay to access the village (£5-10) and there are hotels if you want to stay.

[www.portmeirion-village.com](http://www.portmeirion-village.com)



*Rhododendrons worth visiting - and a kooky Italianate village too - at Portmeirion in Wales*

### **Kent, the garden of England**

Kent is known as the garden of England so there are plenty to visit, and it contains one of the world's most celebrated gardens, Sissinghurst, the creation of Vita Sackville-West and her husband Sir Harold Nicolson. Sissinghurst is famous for its White Garden, a majestic atmosphere combining several species of flower on a white theme. Elsewhere in Kent you can take in the romantic Scotney Castle's surrounded by a moat and stunning gardens, or else the Secret Gardens of Sandwich - an oasis of calm, where you can have an



*The golden jubilee palm house at UNESCO World Heritage garden, Kew*

audio tour through the plants and finish with a cream tea in the gardens. Regular trains from London run to Kent in one hour.

[www.visitkent.co.uk/explore/gardens.asp](http://www.visitkent.co.uk/explore/gardens.asp)

### **A UNESCO World Heritage garden in London**

With its historic glasshouses, and its world famous plant collections, Kew Gardens is also a world leader in plant science and conservation and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The site in west London also holds a number of events including a series of summer concerts. Despite being very popular, especially in summer, it's still possible to lose yourself in a hidden corner, while the kids will enjoy knowing how giraffes feel at the Treetop Walkway 18 metres high among the topmost leaves.

<http://www.kew.org>

### **Landscaped calm in the heart of Glasgow**

Glasgow is an exciting, vibrant cultural hub, with music at every corner and a museum for every day of the month, not just week! But if you want to escape from city life and get away from it all, the Botanic Gardens in the West End of the city are a treat for the senses. If you like to mix your nature with your culture though, there are plays at the gardens in the summer, and talks for those interested in knowing more about the plants rather than just admiring and inhaling their scent. The beautiful Kibble Palace glasshouse is a 19th century wrought iron structure, whose 2004 restoration gave it its original splendour and give the gardens a stately air. The gardens couldn't be easier to reach by public transport within Glasgow, or else as one of the stops on the excellent Hop on-Hop off bus tour.

[www.glasgowbotanicgardens.com](http://www.glasgowbotanicgardens.com)

### **Flower markets in London - take your own garden with you!**

Just as much of a riot of colour and scent are to be found at two of London's most iconic flower markets, so you can take a little bit of the garden around with you, whether as a hair accessory or romantic gesture for your travelling companion. Covent Garden flower market is where the pros go, at the crack of dawn, to source a range of blooms of all colours and varieties from midnight to 6am, whereas the hipster East London types like to stroll down Columbia Road at a more palatable hour (Sundays, 8am-3pm) where everything from the humble rose to 10 foot banana trees can be bought. Both are a fun experience, with plenty of great coffee and food options nearby, and it's a great, out-of-the-ordinary experience to see London streets transformed into tapestries of colour.

[www.newcoventgardenmarket.com/flowers](http://www.newcoventgardenmarket.com/flowers), [www.columbiaroad.info](http://www.columbiaroad.info)

### **Last but not least - naked gardeners in Wiltshire, England**

Ian Pollard says his epitaph will read 'Why not?' because that's the first thing he thinks when an idea comes to his head. So - a garden tended by people who happen to wear no clothes? Why not?! Ian and his wife Barbara have been tending to the gardens of Abbey House in Malmesbury, Wiltshire, since 1994 and they are now the proud owners of beautiful green spaces, with pretty waterfalls and a large outdoor chess board. Ian and Barbara are 'dressed for visitors' except on pre-arranged 'clothes optional days'. Why not?

Reach Malmesbury by car in just over 2 hours from London. The town is west of London in the Wiltshire region, and very close to Bristol (only 40 mins by car).

[www.abbeyhousegardens.co.uk](http://www.abbeyhousegardens.co.uk)

## Hikes and walks for explorers

Why not challenge yourself to a trek in Britain's beautiful outdoors - or just a leisurely stroll to work up an appetite for lunch? From multi-day trudges to gallery-hopping jaunts, here are some of the country's finest hikes.



*Barafundle Bay is breathtaking in its sweeping views*

([www.lydsteptavern.com](http://www.lydsteptavern.com))

**Broad Haven South to Skrinkle Haven.** Traversing Britain's only coastal national park, this typically dramatic 11-mile section of the dramatic Pembrokeshire Coast Path in southwestern Wales incorporates wild Barafundle Bay, a regular in countdowns of the world's most beautiful beaches, plus Bosherton's Lily Ponds and its otters. In between, expect steps, steepness, sand dunes and sea caves galore. (<http://nt.pcnpa.org.uk>)

**PIT STOP?** The route finishes near the Lydstep Tavern, a traditional pub where homemade crab cakes are normally available.

**John Muir Way.** This new coast-to-coast long-distance path across southern Scotland opened in 2014 to commemorate the centenary of local conservationist John Muir's death (<http://johnmuirway.org>). Reversing Muir's steps from Helensburgh - from where he set sail for America - on the Scottish west coast back to his birthplace, Dunbar in rural East Lothian, the wide-ranging 114-mile route takes in Loch Lomond, the Antonine Wall and the outskirts of Edinburgh.

**PIT STOP?** On the Loch Lomond stretch, stop off for a sandwich, scone or meringue (naughty) at the acclaimed Wee Blether Tearoom ([www.weeblethertearoom.co.uk](http://www.weeblethertearoom.co.uk))



*Walk the John Muir way and get views like these? Yes please!*

**Coastal Culture Trail.** Down on England's south coast, three modern art galleries team up on the 20-mile Coastal Culture Trail (<http://coastalculturetrail.com>). The hike stretches from Eastbourne's Towner Gallery via Bexhill's De La Warr Pavillion to the charcoal-black Jerwood Gallery in Hastings with piers, level crossings, vintage shops and marshlands in between. While it's all do-able in a strenuous, fast-paced day (with London two hours away by train), supporting B&Bs can arrange luggage delivery for more leisurely striders.

**PIT STOP?** Opposite the Jerwood, gobble Dover sole at the excellent Rock-a-Nore Kitchen, half classic 'chippie', half modern-British restaurant

([www.facebook.com/Rockanorekitchen](http://www.facebook.com/Rockanorekitchen)).

**Lundy Island Wildlife Walk.** A speck in south-western England's Bristol Channel, Lundy once launched its own currency while claiming autonomy. Today it's more famous for puffins and seals; bring binoculars and you'll see both on this easy three-hour loop



*It's not every walk that takes you to see showstopping artworks along the way. Credit Pete Jones*

([www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lundy/visitor-information/article-1356404764652](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lundy/visitor-information/article-1356404764652)). Lundy is accessible for day-visitors only between April and October aboard ferries from the towns of Bideford and Ilfracombe, each about 40 miles north of Exeter.

PIT STOP? The walk ends in the cosy Marisco Tavern, the island's lone pub. Plates of Lundy Pork sausages and creamy mash usually do the refuelling trick.



*Spot a seal on the Lundy Island Wildlife Walk.*

**Arthur's Seat Walk.** A proper hill walk right in the heart of Edinburgh ([www.walkhighlands.co.uk/lothian/arthurs-seat.shtml](http://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/lothian/arthurs-seat.shtml)). Featured in the book *One Day's* closing scene, Arthur's Seat is a craggy parkland hill inside the Scottish capital, with fabulous views in every direction, including over Edinburgh Castle. Sheer in parts, this circular walk is 2.75 miles long and starts and finishes at Holyrood Palace.



*Climb Arthur's Seat and be rewarded: Edinburgh lies beneath you*

PIT STOP? Head into central Edinburgh and dine at the award-winning Wedgwood restaurant, found on the city's hallowed Royal Mile. Reservations are essential.

([www.wedgwoodtherestaurant.co.uk](http://www.wedgwoodtherestaurant.co.uk))

**Mount Snowdon: Miner's Track.** A two-hour drive into north Wales's western corner from Liverpool, Mount Snowdon is Britain's third-

highest peak but remains surmountable in a day. Of six possible routes up, the Miner's Track is the most interesting: it passes Llyn Llydaw, a glacial lake around which the remains of copper-extraction mills can still be seen, before zigzagging steeply to the 3,560ft summit. ([www.eryri-npa.gov.uk/visiting/walking](http://www.eryri-npa.gov.uk/visiting/walking))

PIT STOP? Descend aboard the Snowdon Railway, then head south to the village of Beddgelert, where Hebog does excellent fish-and-chips. ([www.hebog-eatandsleep.co.uk](http://www.hebog-eatandsleep.co.uk))

**The Thames Path: Henley-Marlow.** West of London, the River Thames' upper reaches are quiet and glorious, and none more so than this section ([www.nationaltrail.co.uk/thames-path/routes](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/thames-path/routes)). Linking two charming country towns, it takes in water mills, locks, lodges and silvery church towers. Henley-on-Thames and Marlow both have train links to London Paddington (each about a 90-minute journey), making this is an easy day-trip for capital-based visitors.

PIT STOP? Halfway along is Hurley. Catering to ramblers, the village's Rising Sun pub does Ploughman's lunches, jacket potatoes and burgers. ([www.risingsunhurley.co.uk](http://www.risingsunhurley.co.uk))

**North Antrim Cliff Walk.** Northern Ireland's Antrim Coast is a wild stretch of sheer cliffs, rare flowers, salmon fishing huts and - according to legend - lost gold, from when Spanish Armada boats floundered on the rocks. Begin this five-mile hike at Giant's Causeway, moon-like basalt columns stretching into the Atlantic, and finish beside ruined Dunseverick Castle. ([www.walkni.com/walks/400/north-antrim-cliff-path-to-dunseverick-castle](http://www.walkni.com/walks/400/north-antrim-cliff-path-to-dunseverick-castle))

PIT STOP? The nearest town is Bushmills, an hour's drive north of Belfast. And the cosy Bushmill Inn's prime Ulster sirloins of beef amply reward a hard day's graft. ([www.bushmillsinn.com](http://www.bushmillsinn.com))

**Ingleton Waterfalls Trail.** One of England's finest national parks, the Yorkshire Dales is especially renowned for its waterfalls. See seven of them while astride this Waterfalls Trail, including the 14m-high and oft-photographed Thornton Force ([www.ingletonwaterfallstrail.co.uk](http://www.ingletonwaterfallstrail.co.uk)). There's a small entry fee (family tickets, for up to three kids, cost £14) and, allowing time for bathing, the loop takes about four hours. Found in northern England, Ingleton's a 90-minute drive up the A65 from Leeds.



*Even if you don't discover the lost gold on the North Antrim Cliff Walk, the views and landscape are treasure in themselves*

PIT STOP? The Falls Café serves hot meals beside the entrance. Or pack a picnic and settle in one of many scenic spots.



*Tread the paths Neanderthals used to take, with bison, rhinos and mammoths replaced with beautiful beach walks and fish n chip stops!*

**Norfolk's Prehistoric Coast.** Fancy finding some mammoth teeth? Walkable in a day, the Norfolk Coast Path's 16-mile West Runton-Happisburgh section treads where Neanderthals first arrived, 900,000 years ago, in eastern England to hunt bison, rhino and mammoth ([www.visitnorfolk.co.uk/inspire/Norfolk-prehistoric-coast.aspx](http://www.visitnorfolk.co.uk/inspire/Norfolk-prehistoric-coast.aspx)). Some 20,000 animal bones and prehistoric tools are now found annually, and the vast beaches will more than compensate should souvenirs prove elusive. Twenty miles to the south, Norwich is less than two hours by train from London.

PIT STOP? Although it's the first town after West Runton, be sure to stop in Cromer. Opened a year ago by Michelin-starred chef Galton Blackiston, No 1 Cromer specialises in fish and chips ([www.no1cromer.com](http://www.no1cromer.com)).

**The South Loch Ness Trail.** While Loch Ness's northern side hosts the A82's constant traffic, the waterfalls, pine forests, beaches and humpback bridges hugging its enchanting southern shores are much less trodden. A 28-mile challenge launched in 2011 and finishing just outside the east coast city of Inverness - a three-hour drive north of Edinburgh - the Trail includes a tough climb to the 1,200ft-high Suidhe Viewpoint, from which you can scan obsessively for the Loch Ness Monster. ([www.visitlochness.com/south-loch-ness-trail](http://www.visitlochness.com/south-loch-ness-trail))



*The spectacular South Loch Ness Trail is instagrammers paradise... especially if you snap Nessie!*

PIT STOP? Cottage-like in appearance, the lochside Dores Inn offers rejuvenating steak sandwiches ([www.thedoresinn.co.uk](http://www.thedoresinn.co.uk)).

**Gondola & Parkamoor Trail.** Appreciate the Lake District's best qualities on this leisurely half-day jaunt ([www.nationaltrust.org.uk/gondola/things-to-see-and-do/article-1356405573132](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/gondola/things-to-see-and-do/article-1356405573132)). After riding the beautiful Steam Yacht Gondola across Coniston Water, amble almost five miles across pine forests and rugged open fells before re-boarding the

boat. In the near-distance looms Coniston Old Man, one of north-western England's most celebrated peaks. Tomorrow's challenge, perhaps?

PIT STOP? Five miles north of Coniston town and booked up weeks in advance, the Drunken Duck Inn delivers hearty British classics like pork belly with faggots ([www.thedrunkenduckinn.co.uk](http://www.thedrunkenduckinn.co.uk)).

**Tintern Abbey & The Devil's Pulpit.** Initially forming England and Wales' southerly border,



*Tintern Abbey makes for a striking place to start this three-mile loop walk*

the River Wye is chiefly flanked by expansive wooded valleys. Stride around the Welsh side on this three-mile loop, beginning beside the magnificence of 12th century Tintern Abbey's ruins and climbing to The Devil's Pulpit, a high outcrop from which Satan once supposedly tempted weak-willed monks ([www.walkingbritain.co.uk/walks/walks/walk\\_b/1272](http://www.walkingbritain.co.uk/walks/walks/walk_b/1272)).

PIT STOP? In Tintern, the Anchor Pub is known for wholesome beef, ale and mushroom pies ([www.theanchortintern.com](http://www.theanchortintern.com)). Bristol is less than an hour's drive south-east.

**Beinn Alligin.** Munros are Scottish mountains more than 3,000ft high; 'Munro-bagging' involves climbing as many as possible. Tick off two inside one day on this tough hike in north-western Scotland, which will probably demand some scrambling ([www.walkhighlands.co.uk/torridon/Beinnalligin.shtml](http://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/torridon/Beinnalligin.shtml)). Beinn Alligin means 'Mountain of Beauty' in Gaelic; drink in the constant, gasp-inducing views over Loch Torridon out towards the Isle of Skye and you'll understand the name.

PIT STOP? From the Abhain Coire Mhic Nobuil car park, which is five hours' drive north from Glasgow, drive back around the loch to The Torridon, a luxury hotel with a fancy restaurant ([www.thetorridon.com/restaurant](http://www.thetorridon.com/restaurant)).

**Mount Stewart Lake & Garden Walk.** Here's a stroll for horticultural fans. Lying 15 miles south-east of Belfast in Northern Ireland, neoclassical country house Mount Stewart is famous for gardens planted in the 1920s by Lady Londonderry and since nominated for World Heritage status. This gentle, 2.3-mile walk circuits the central large lake, taking in Himalayan rhododendrons, azaleas, magnolia and much more ([www.walkni.com/walks/114/mount-stewart-lake-garden-walk](http://www.walkni.com/walks/114/mount-stewart-lake-garden-walk)).

PIT STOP? In nearby Newtownards, Roma's is an elegant bistro specialising in locally-caught fish and steak ([www.romas.co.uk](http://www.romas.co.uk)).

## Water based holidays in Britain

As an island surrounded by 12,000 kilometres of coastline and home to the dramatic beauty of the Lake District as well as canals that loop around scenic countryside, there is plenty of water-based fun to be had around Britain. Punt down calm Cambridge canals, learn to surf in cool Cornwall or wander through waterfalls in wild Wales - there's simply nothing as nice as messing about on the water.

### **Coasteering in Anglesey, North West Wales**

Coasteering is a daredevil's dream way of experiencing the coastline at close-quarters. Pioneered in Wales, it is a blend of rock-hopping, shore-scrambling, swell-riding, cave-exploring and cliff-jumping for the ultimate aquatic adventure. An experienced guide will help adrenaline-junkies and families alike discover hidden coves amongst 125 miles of beautiful Anglesey coastline - known as the jewel in the crown of Wales.

Anglesey is an island off the North West coast of Wales; half a day for under 16s is from approx. £30pp and £48pp for adults; [www.coasteering-wales.co.uk](http://www.coasteering-wales.co.uk)



*The foot of the Sgwd Ddwli Falls in the Brecon Beacons - take a dip, and look for the rope swing!*

### **Wild swim in the Brecon Beacons, South Wales**

In the South West hills of the [Brecon Beacons](#) are some of the most amazing plunge pools in Britain. There are more than 20 pools along five miles of the Fechan and Mellte rivers, so you could try dipping in every one of them on a long day's walk. Lower Ddwli Falls is a huge open pool with a great arc of a waterfall where spray lifts up through the leaves and rainbows appear as if by magic. Just downstream is Horseshoe Falls, with a great jump and rope swing too.

Lower Ddwli Falls is in the Brecon Beacons in South Wales, approx. 1 hour via train from Cardiff and 2 hours from London; [www.breconbeacons.org](http://www.breconbeacons.org)

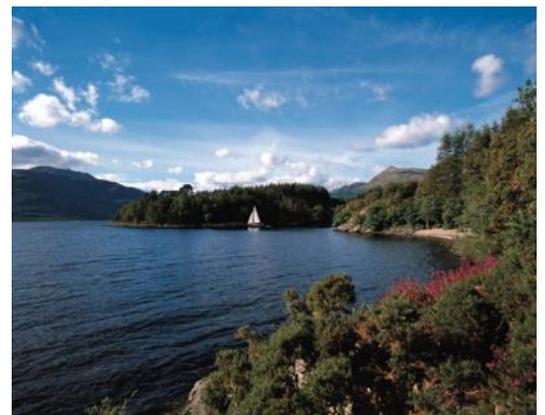
### **Water trampoline on Fermanagh Lakelands, Northern Ireland**

This lush, aquatic portion of Northern Ireland is ribboned by rugged woodland and freckled with lilliputian islands and watery coves. An extraordinary backdrop for thrill-seekers to enjoy not one but *three* water trampolines, all connected by various walkways and logs floating on the beautiful Upper Lough Macnean. Test your balance on the moonwalk, whizz down 4m high water slide and send your friends flying off from a catapult. Whether you accessorise your holiday with boats, canoes, kayaks, or even inflatables, it's a lakeland utopia.

Belfast International Airport and Belfast City Airport are both approx. 2 hours' drive from Fermanagh; [www.fermanaghlakelands.com](http://www.fermanaghlakelands.com)

### **Cast off in Loch Lomond, Central Scotland**

Scotland, with its huge number of lochs and rivers, offers anglers some of the best fishing in Europe. The largest surface area of fresh water in the UK, a huge variety of fish



*Go fishing at Loch Lomond and soak up stunning scenery.*

can be found swimming in Loch Lomond, making it an ideal habitat for anglers. Salmon and sea trout return up the River Leven into the Southern reaches of the Loch, whilst brown and rainbow trout, pike, perch, roach, chub and dace offer variety for every angler. A glorious surrounding to practice your sport, there's plenty of opportunity for casting off in glimmering waters.

Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park is in Central Scotland, approx. 2 hours via train and car from Glasgow; [www.lochlomond-trossachs.org](http://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org)

### **Punt along the River Cam in Cambridge, East England**

Punting (meaning 'to push') is a quintessentially British way to enjoy the River Cam, which runs through the heart of Cambridge. Enjoy fantastic views of the world famous Cambridge College 'Backs', King's College Chapel, The Wren Library at Trinity College and the Bridge of Sighs while meandering along the river in a traditional Cambridge Punt. Take a picnic of strawberries and champagne to enjoy on the river for the full experience.

Cambridge is in the East of England, approx. 1 hour from London via train; A large punt is approx. £109 and a small punt approx. £69 with Cambridge Blue Punting; [www.cambridgebluepunting.co.uk](http://www.cambridgebluepunting.co.uk)

### **Wander through waterfalls in the Lake District, North West England**

A tranquil haven of towering peaks, serene waters and undulating hills, Ullswater Valley is truly breathtaking, with its beautiful lake nestled amongst towering fells. There you'll find Aira Force, a tumbling waterfall dropping an impressive 65ft that can be reached by taking a stroll through ancient woodland and landscaped glades. It's no wonder that it was while walking here that Wordsworth wrote 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'. The perfect place for a



*Ullswater in the beautiful Lake District may inspire you as it did Wordsworth*

family walk and picnic, water-sports enthusiasts will be kept busy with canoeing, sailing, fishing and even swimming for the more intrepid explorers.

The Lake District is a mountainous region in Cumbria, North West England, approx. 3.5 hours via train from London; [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

### **Enjoy slow living on the Norfolk canals, East England**

Sit back and enjoy the scenery or get busy handling the locks on a narrowboat holiday full of classically English charm. Gently travelling along the Norfolk Broads - Britain's largest protected wetland - enjoy idyllic Norfolk villages and market towns and the historic city of Norwich

on your journey. Plenty of waterfront eateries, endless options for scenic countryside walks and numerous water sports activities should keep the whole family happy.

Norfolk is in East England, approx. 2 hours via train from London; Boat hire from approx. £797 for a six-berth boat for four nights, including fuel. [www.waterwaysholidays.com](http://www.waterwaysholidays.com)

### **Escape to the magic of Mersea Island, South East England**

Mersea Island has become a favourite haunt for day-trippers searching for Colchester native oysters. But there's more to this sleepy island in the Blackwater estuary, which is

linked to mainland England by an ancient causeway. Enjoy crabbing from the pontoon, atmospheric walks across the saltmarshes with their wading birds and weatherboarded fishing huts, sailing, and, of course, be first in the queue at the Company Shed in West Mersea for one of its famous seafood platters.

Mersea Island is an island in Essex, South East England, approx. 1.5 hours drive from London (approx. 70 miles); [www.visitessex.com](http://www.visitessex.com); [www.the-company-shed.co.uk](http://www.the-company-shed.co.uk)

### **Fulfill teenage surfer dreams on the Cornish coast, South West England**

The golden sands of Harlyn Bay near Padstow, a sheltered crescent shaped beach and one of the safest in Cornwall, is the perfect place for teenagers to become a surfer dude or chick. Harlyn Surf School runs surf camps every summer for teenagers and children; and offer private, improver and group lessons too - so there's no excuse for even the biggest 'barney' (an inexperienced surfer) to hit the waves and cry "Cowabunga!".

Cornwall is on the South West coast of England, approx. 5.5 hours via train from London; Surf lessons start from approx. £40pp from Haryln Surf School; [www.harlynsurfschool.co.uk](http://www.harlynsurfschool.co.uk)

## Outdoor adventures

Much more than 'just a pretty face', the British countryside is also a playground for fun, thrilling and memorable experiences. An array of activities are possible, be it bog-crossing in remote Scotland or cantering along England's sandy south coast.

**Geocaching.** A modern-day form of treasure-hunting, geocaching involves seeking out tiny containers using only a GPS device - a smartphone, say - and common sense. It's great fun for families *and* educational, with most caches deliberately hidden somewhere with a fascinating back-story. Britain's cities are full of 'caches', but head out to the countryside to really enter into the game's spirit. The south-eastern corner of Northern Ireland has many: there are caches atop various Mourne Mountain summits, for instance, while eight line the sleepy Quoile River, close to St Patrick's burial place in Downpatrick and a few hours from Belfast. All can be found inside a day, with time for a pub lunch besides. [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com)



*Hone your bushcraft skills with Bear Grylls - encompassing shelter-building, self-defense, fire-starting and foraging, you'll be ready to survive in the wilderness!*

**Survival courses:** The world might not end anytime soon, but it's still good to be prepared! Among Britain's many bushcraft courses, Scotland is a favoured location thanks to the challenging terrain. Outdoor expert and TV star Bear Grylls designs five-day courses in the Highlands' Alladale Wilderness Reserve - brown-green heather bogs, hill lochs, crags and squalls - an hour's drive from the northwestern coastal city of Inverness. After learning shelter-building, self-defense, fire-starting, foraging and even riverbank-jumping, participants undertake a 36-hour expedition to test their new skills. <http://beargryllssurvivalacademy.com>.



*Canoe the splendid River Wye - the perfect mix of scenery, heritage and excitement when you hit the rapids!*

**Canoeing adventures.** Get away from it all by gently paddling along the scenic Wye River, located in south-western England near to the Welsh border. Ideal for small groups or families with teenagers, four-day guided or self-guided trips from Hereford to Redbrook are available, with camping or guesthouse accommodation along the way and no experience required, not even for the rapids encountered on Day 3. Along the way, admire the majesty of Hereford's cathedral, gasp at the Forest of Dean scenery and look out for Holme Lacey, a

village sitting above a formation of red sandstone cliffs. [www.wyecanoes.com](http://www.wyecanoes.com)

**Rock-climbing.** Newly popular after Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson's ascent of Yosemite's famous Dawn Wall in America, rock climbing is readily available across the UK. While Britain's most feted climb is A Dream of White Horses on Wales's north-western isle Anglesey, rock enthusiasts are directed to the



*Feeling weak at the knees? Climbing Napes Needles might not be for you. Feeling excited? Go for it!*

beautiful Lake District, in north-western England, the place where rock-climbing was supposedly 'invented' 160 years ago. Here there's something for everyone: extreme, iconic routes like Napes Needle or Pillar Rock, technical ascents such as Big Chamonix, easy road-side routes at Borrowdale and pre-bolted climbing for beginners at Coniston and the coastal St Bee's Head. [www.golakes.co.uk/adventure-capital/climbing.aspX](http://www.golakes.co.uk/adventure-capital/climbing.aspX)



*See those two red blobs in the picture? That could be you, flying down a zip wire at 100 mph!*

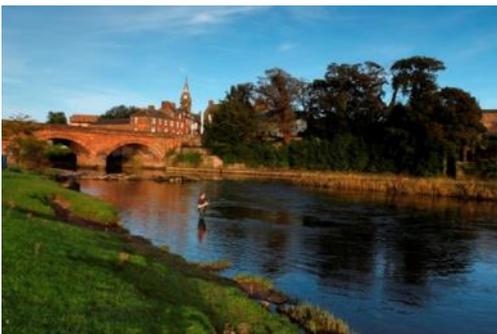
**Zip-lining:** If travelling at up to 40 mph for 500 metres, all while 72 feet up in the air, sounds terrifying, then you should probably avoid Penrhyn Quarry's Zip World! Because that's only the 'Little Zipper' at this former slate mine in Snowdonia, a beautiful national park in north-western Wales, two hours' drive from Liverpool. The Big Zipper, meanwhile, is Europe's longest zipline: it's a whopping 500 feet high, a whole mile long and daredevils can travel at - deep breath - 100 mph. Now that's fast. [www.zipworld.co.uk](http://www.zipworld.co.uk)

**Surfing.** Surfing locations are plentiful in Britain, with some of the best including Northumbria on England's north-eastern shores and Portrush in Northern Ireland. But the hotspot is Cornwall, at the tip of south-western England, and the lively town of Newquay, a surf hub with flight links to London and an array of beaches. The Cribber, an exposed and rarely-seen reef break, makes a good challenge for veteran boarders, while beginners should head to Watergate Bay and Lusty Glaze in search of gentler seas and lessons.

[www.visitnewquay.org/activities/surfing](http://www.visitnewquay.org/activities/surfing)



*Don't worry, your surfing lesson in Newquay will involve getting wet at some point!*



*Wade in the water - fish on the Annan River and enjoy solitude and scenery*

**Wild fly-fishing.** Drive 90 minutes from Glasgow along the A74, and you'll reach the small Scottish town of Moffat. Stretching still further south from here are the Annan River's remote upper reaches, which afford superb summertime opportunities to fly-fish for trout. Guided trips are possible, or you can go solo; either way, another angler might not be encountered all day in this pretty wilderness. Experience is a must, though: these trout are 'educated', and hooking them requires precision casting. While waiting for a take, scrutinise the Annan's banks - rare red squirrels are often spied along them.

[www.annan.org.uk/activities/fishing-scotland.html](http://www.annan.org.uk/activities/fishing-scotland.html)

**Stargazing.** Thanks to a lack of light pollution, Northern Ireland's night skies make for excellent stargazing. In particular, make for the southern shores of Lough Neagh, Ireland's largest lake, and only 20 miles west of Belfast. Found on Oxford Island, the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre became Northern Ireland's first Dark Sky site last April. Visitors can see the Milky Way, as well as the Andromeda galaxy, our nearest neighbour and home to some 200 million stars. [www.oxfordisland.com/discovery-centre.asp](http://www.oxfordisland.com/discovery-centre.asp)

**Horse-riding.** Down in southern England, the vast New Forest – comprising bracken-covered heathlands, dense woods, exposed hill meadows and coastline – is the perfect place for a relaxing hack, hence it boasting so many stables. Amateurs and veterans alike are catered for, as are children. Keep an eye out for deer and wild New Forest Ponies and, for a truly magical experience, canter along the beach at Hordle Cliffs or Milford on Sea (October to March only). The city of Southampton lies only a few miles from the National Park's eastern flanks.

[www.thenewforest.co.uk/activities/horse-riding.aspx](http://www.thenewforest.co.uk/activities/horse-riding.aspx)



*Giddy up in the New Forest and keep your eyes peeled for wild ponies*

## National Parks – Britain's 'breathing spaces'

There are ten National Parks in England, three in Wales and two in Scotland, with one covering practically every corner of Britain, as you can see on the UK National Parks' map.

[www.nationalparks.gov.uk](http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk)

Dubbed 'Britain's breathing spaces', these free-to-visit parks are the places to get away from city lights and the fast pace of normal life... that is, unless you fancy rocketing down a mountain on a bicycle in the rugged Peak District? Or riding through the New Forest on horseback? Britain's National Parks may be incredibly beautiful – and indeed, they're a photographer's dream – but there's more to all of them than just what meets the eye. As well as pretty backdrops, they are literary muses, adventure playgrounds, history classrooms, whisky distillers and film locations. Even better, you can reach most of them easily from major cities including London, Manchester, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

*Did you know?* **All 15 of Britain's National Parks are accessible by public transport.** The National Parks Authority website tells you how to get to each National Park by public transport from nearby cities

[www.nationalparks.gov.uk/visiting/gettingtonationalparks](http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/visiting/gettingtonationalparks)

Each National Park has a unique character, offering many possibilities of things to do. Here are some ideas.

### **Boat your way around the Broads National Park, England**

The Broads, in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk in the east of England, is a unique network of rivers and lakes that makes up the largest wetland areas in the UK. So naturally, your mode of transport should be a boat. Birdwatch, relax or just moor at a pretty pub and stop for a hearty lunch. There are lots of companies that hire boats out for the day or longer, some of which are electrically powered and therefore less damaging to the environment.

Norfolk has some of the oldest churches in Britain, as well as some of its oldest pubs. A good time to visit is mid-May, when the Norfolk and Norwich Festival takes place (8 – 24 May 2015). Internationally renowned musicians, artists and performers combine to give the whole region a buzz, so it's a great time to combine nature and culture.

*Getting there: The nearest city to the Broads is Norwich, just under two hours from London; you can then take a connecting train to Hoveton & Wroxham, where there's an information centre on the Broads and a booking centre for boat trips.*

[www.enjoythebroads.com](http://www.enjoythebroads.com) [www.broads-authority.gov.uk](http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk)

### **Follow in the footsteps of Beatrix Potter in the Lake District National Park, England**

Beatrix Potter spent many childhood holidays in the Lake District, in the north of England, and the area influenced her work. Her character Squirrel Nutkin sailed on the Derwentwater (a lake) and the pretty village of Hawkshead was the setting for *The Tale of Johnny Townmouse*. As she gained success as a writer, Beatrix Potter bought Hill Top farm as well as others in the Lake District, and became an expert Herdwick sheep breeder. When she died in 1943 she left sheep, 4,000 acres of land and 14 farms to the National Trust that are now open to the public to visit. Hill Top, her 17th-century farmhouse appears as if Beatrix had just stepped out for a walk. Much of the 2006 movie *Miss Potter* was filmed around the Lake District, and a visit around the area will conjure up the magic of both her books and the film.



*Beautiful and romantic - the Lake District.*

The Lakes are also great for outdoor adventure activities like cycling, swimming, flying and paragliding. See [www.golakes.co.uk](http://www.golakes.co.uk)

*Getting there: The Lake District is about two hours' drive from Manchester, and accessible by train from Manchester (two hours to Windermere) and London in under four hours.*

[www.lakedistrict.gov.uk](http://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk)

### **Enjoy an opera in the newest National Park, the South Downs, England**

The South Downs National Park, located in the south east of England, covers a beautiful area of the country. It's also home to Glyndebourne, the opera experience that combines relaxing in the countryside with enjoying sublime performances and the best in culture. A visit to Glyndebourne is totally unlike a visit to any opera in a city, as grand as that may be. In keeping with its location in stunning countryside, the atmosphere at Glyndebourne at Festival time (May - August) is particularly special, with a long 90-minute interval providing the perfect time to picnic and explore the art and sculptures in the gardens. The standard of opera is infallibly excellent, but you don't have to be an opera buff to enjoy it, and schemes for £30 seats for the under 30s have opened up opera to a new audience.

The South Downs is also a great place to just escape the hustle and bustle of the city, and get fresh air and country pubs, maybe spotting a roe deer in the meadows or a red kite swooping ahead.

*Getting there: There are lots of train routes into the Park from London; Lewes (for Glyndebourne) is only an hour away from the capital. [www.southdowns.gov.uk](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk), <http://glyndebourne.com>*

## Walk the award-winning Pembrokeshire Coast Path, Wales

Last year the Pembrokeshire Coast Path was voted number three in the top ten trails in the world and, in 2011, *National Geographic* voted it the second best coastal destination in the world. Go there and be converted to the same view; 186 miles of scenery that will not cease to awe and inspire, as well as challenge. The 35,000ft (10,600m) of ascent and descent is said be the equivalent of climbing Everest! You don't have to take it all on at once though, and in shorter sections it's accessible to people of any age or ability, with villages dotted along the way, and there's also a great bus network that services the entire length of the path.



*Whitesands Bay near St. David's on the Pembrokeshire coast.*

Pembrokeshire is also a great destination for extreme sports lovers - 'coasteering' was pioneered here (scrambling, climbing, jumping and diving your way around the coastline) and makes for an exhilarating holiday activity.

*Getting there: The Pembrokeshire coast is around a two-hour drive from Cardiff.*

[www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk](http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk), [www.visitwales.co.uk](http://www.visitwales.co.uk)

## See the night sky in the Brecon Beacons, Wales and Exmoor, England



*Dark sky and a stag at Exmoor National Park, an International Dark Sky Reserve.*

The Brecon Beacons in Wales was awarded the prestigious status of International Dark Sky Reserve earlier this year and was just the fifth place in the world to be granted the title - Exmoor National Park (that straddles Somerset and Devon in the west of England) was granted the status in 2011. This means the beautiful parks, come nightfall, are among the darkest places to be in the world and therefore perfect to stargaze and appreciate the heavens free from light pollution. Whether you feel romantic, want to teach your children about the universe beyond planet Earth or just seek a totally different experience, these are the

places to do it.

Combine a visit to the dark skies by night with a trip to Monmouthshire by day, which encompasses the eastern side of the Park. The town of Abergavenny is a particular draw for food lovers, with a splendid market, amazing food festival (in September) and fantastic pubs and restaurants, like The Hardwick pub and The Walnut Tree, described by one UK food critic as 'one of the culinary wonders of Wales'.

*Getting there: The Brecon Beacons is just over an hour's drive north of Cardiff, which is, in turn, just two hours by train from London. Exmoor National Park is a two-hour drive from Bristol or Bath.*



*See the sky at night, and the rolling hills in the day in the Brecon Beacons National Park*

[www.breconbeacons.org](http://www.breconbeacons.org), [www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)

## **Whisky and walking in the Cairngorms National Park, Scotland**

Some of the most famous Scotch whisky distilleries are located in the Cairngorms National Park, which encompasses Britain's highest mountain range, large forests, sparkling rivers and lochs and lots of wildlife. Nothing beats a day's mountain activity - from walking to biking, skiing to golfing - followed by whisky tasting at a distillery. World-famous distilleries in or near the Cairngorms National Park include Glenlivet, Macallan and Drambuie to name just a few; distillery tours are a fantastic way to get to know the history of the drink, how it's made and what it tastes like in its true setting. You'll undoubtedly experience some of the warm Scottish hospitality while you're at it.

*Getting there: Cairngorms National Park has a train link to Inverness, Glasgow, Edinburgh and a direct service from London and the south to Aviemore and Aberdeen.*

[www.cairngorms.co.uk](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk)

## **Do some Munro-bagging in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, Scotland**

What's Munro-bagging you might ask? Climbing Scotland's highest peaks of course! Adrenalin junkies will be suitably thrilled by this activity. A Munro - named after Sir Hugo Munro who produced the first list of such hills - is a mountain in Scotland over 3,000ft (914m) high. The most well-known is Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in the British Isles (which is 4,409ft/1,344m). There are 21 Munros in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park (and 18 in the Cairngorms), with 282 in total across Scotland. Once you've done them all you'll be given the title 'Munroist'! Notable Munro-bagging records include the youngest - Ben Fleetwood - who in 2011 completed the round aged ten years and three months. The fastest round as of 2010 was completed in 39 days and nine hours.

You don't have to be so dedicated and can, instead, just bag a couple! You need the right equipment, a map and a compass. There's a lot of information about Munro-bagging on the internet, including a site devoted to naked Munro bagging - perhaps not advisable in Scotland's winter months!

If you've done the Munro's, there are always the 221 Corbetts (peaks between 2,500ft/762m and 3,000ft/914m) and the 224 Grahams (peaks between 2,000ft/610m and 2,500ft/762m) to work on next.

[www.lochlomond-trossachs.org](http://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org)

## **Go back 900 years in time at the New Forest, England**

William the Conqueror, the first Norman King of England, reigned from 1066 to 1087 and set aside the New Forest (so called because it was new then!) for hunting more than 900 years ago. Much of the forest as it is today would be recognisable to William, and there are still birds of prey, deer and ancient oaks to roam among; it's the largest remaining area of lowland heath in Europe. You can explore on foot, bicycle or horseback.

*Getting there: Catch the 90-minute train from London to Brockenhurst, hire a bike at the station and get stuck into the countryside straight away.*

[www.newforestnpa.gov.uk](http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk)

## Cycle where the pros will go in the Peak District and Yorkshire Dales, England

The Peak District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks both featured on the route of the 2014 Le Grand Départ of the Tour de France, and both are still excellent places to take your wheels - and your nerve. Tour de France 2012 winner and Olympic gold medalist Bradley Wiggins and his team mates have been known to train in the Peak District; plus its 70-mile network of off-road cycling trails is great for family cycling. There are cycle-hire centres offering bikes to suit all ages and abilities and, likewise, the Yorkshire Dales offers excellent facilities for budding bikers and experienced cyclists. The picture-perfect landscapes of the Dales offer great road and mountain biking options, and there are lots of lovely villages to rest in and enjoy great pub lunches and nights' stays.

The Yorkshire Dales and Peak District are both famous. They've been the backdrop for blockbuster films despite being more than 5,000 miles from Hollywood. For example, the Dales was seen in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1*, where Harry and Hermione camp out; the Peak District's amazing viewpoint Stanage Edge featured in *Pride and Prejudice* starring Keira Knightley, where Elizabeth Bennett gazes out for miles and miles over stunning countryside.

*Getting there: The city of Leeds is right in the middle of the two National Parks (just over two hours from London by train) and Manchester (also about two hours) is also very close to both.*

[www.yorkshiredales.org.uk](http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk), [www.peakdistrict.gov.uk](http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk). Also see [www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/outandabout/movies](http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/outandabout/movies) for more about the Dales on screen.

## Remember the Romans in Northumberland National Park, England



*Hadrian's Wall seen from Cuddy's Crag, near Housesteads Fort*

One of Britain's most famous attractions is in Northumberland in the north east of England. The nearest city is Newcastle, a three-hour train journey from London. Once there, if you want fresh air and a history lesson, drive up to Hadrian's Wall, which once stretched the length of the country and can still be explored intact in the National Park. The contrast between ordered patchworks of farms and fields on the southern side, and the wilder and more spare countryside to the north, evokes the age, centuries gone, where the 'barbarians' lay to the north and Roman civilisation everywhere from the Wall down.

Cycle, walk or ride a horse around the countryside, staying in some of Britain's most peaceful areas and enjoying excellent pubs serving good local food and ales.

[www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk](http://www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk)



*A cyclist takes a moment to look over the beautiful Peak District.*

## Discover why Spielberg fell in love with Dartmoor National Park, England

Steven Spielberg filmed much of the 2012 blockbuster *War Horse* in Dartmoor and said "I have never before, in my long and eclectic career, been gifted with such an abundance of natural beauty as I experienced filming *War Horse* on Dartmoor. And, with two-and-a-half-weeks of extensive coverage of landscapes and skies, I hardly scratched the surface of the visual opportunities that were offered to me" - quite a recommendation! Dartmoor is fantastic terrain for riding, and the area is home to its own particular breed of ponies, which have lived in south-western England for centuries and are particularly hardy steeds.

*Getting there: Dartmoor is close to the city of Exeter, which is just over two hours from London by train.*

[www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/aboutus/war-horse](http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/aboutus/war-horse), [www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk](http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk)

## Visit Snowdon and Britain's highest visitor centre, Wales

Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon) at 1,085 metres is the highest mountain in Wales (and England), and is also home to the highest visitor centre in Britain. Once you've made it to the summit, you're welcomed by the visitor centre, made of granite and with a wall of glass - the 'window to the world' - that makes up the front of it. It's the terminus of the Snowdon



*Snowdon's peaks make for a dramatic picture at every turn*

Mountain Railway, which provides a good way to get up if you're unable to walk all the way, or just want to admire the scenery as you puff up on a steam train.

Snowdonia is also a great place to immerse yourself in Welsh culture and the area is bilingual, with 62% of the Park's population calling Welsh their mother tongue.

*Getting there: Snowdonia is around a two-hour drive from Manchester or just under five hours from London.*

[www.snowdonia-npa.gov.uk](http://www.snowdonia-npa.gov.uk)

## Take a steam train and see a river of purple at the North York Moors National Park, England

The North Yorkshire Moors steam railway chugs through some of England's prettiest countryside, and you can get off at various stops in rural England and explore secret valleys hidden among red-roofed villages, and get back on board to gaze out at ridge upon ridge of purple heather moorland. It's quite a spectacle. If all that's too pretty for you, head to Whitby right in the middle of the Park (ok, still a pretty place) where you can feel the chill at the Bay Royal Hotel where Bram Stoker wrote much of *Dracula*.

*Getting there: The North York Moors are in north-eastern England, and easily accessed from the city of York (under an hour by car. There's also the Moorsbus that takes you from York to the heart of the Moors).*

[www.northyorkmoors.org.uk](http://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk)

## Britain's UNESCO Heritage Sites

Five of Britain's 28 designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites are natural, and a further five are surrounded by beautiful landscapes, like iconic Stonehenge in Wiltshire, just two hours west of London, and the spectacular so-called 'stream in the sky', Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal in Wales, around an hour's drive south-west of Manchester. The UNESCO sites aren't made for just studying online - get out among them! Kayak down the Jurassic Coast in Dorset, southern England, for breath-taking views and a live lesson in geology (approximately 185 million years of the Earth's history are on view) or walk among the hundreds of polygonal basalt columns that make up the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland, caused by an ancient volcanic eruption.

So whether it's natural wonders, biospheres, cities of design or man-made spectaculars, Britain is packed with UNESCO-protected locations. We reveal why you should include some of these unmissable sights on your trip to Britain.

### Stonehenge, Avebury & Associated Sites

Ninety three stones in a circle: what's so special about that? Only the fact that this is a Neolithic henge, dating back around 3,500 years, containing 30-foot (9-metres) high and 25-ton 'sarsens', and with its initial purpose still hotly disputed. Stonehenge's wild setting, on an exposed plain (around two hours by car from London), only adds to the mystique. The prehistoric monument forms part of a wider UNESCO World Heritage specification, also encompassing Avebury - where three more stone rings await - and the Woodhenge timber circle.

[www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/stonehenge](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/stonehenge),  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/avebury](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/avebury), [www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/woodhenge](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/woodhenge)



*Stonehenge's original purpose is still shrouded in mystery. @VisitBritain/Stephen Spraggon*

### Blaenavon Industrial Landscape

The amazingly well-preserved mines, quarries, railways, canals and workers' homes around Blaenavon - a town located at the upper end of the Afon Llwyd valley in south Wales, 20 miles north of Cardiff - pay fitting testimony to the fact that this area was the 19th-century world's chief producer of iron and coal. Admire the Blaenavon Ironworks furnaces and Big Pit museum during self-guided walks or bike rides. [www.visitblaenavon.co.uk](http://www.visitblaenavon.co.uk)



*Savour the majesty of the 12th-century ruins you'll discover at Fountains Abbey. Credit National Trust*

### Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal

If you want value for money, then make for this man-made double-header, about an hour's drive north of Leeds in Yorkshire, north England. Not only are there the 12th century, Cistercian ruins of Fountains Abbey to savour, but also the neo-gothic castle and 18th-century water gardens of Studley Royal - plus added 19th-century vistas, a vast deer park and St Mary's Church, a masterpiece of High Victorian gothic architecture.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fountains-abbey](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fountains-abbey)

## Dundee

This east coast Scottish city became a UNESCO City of Design in December 2014. The accolade attests to Dundee's many creative innovations over the years, ranging from aspirin to orange marmalade, Beano comics plus the Lemmings and Grand Theft Auto video games. A very modern brainwave is the Tayside city's ongoing, £1billion waterfront regeneration, revolving around an attention-grabbing new V&A Museum of Design, due to open early 2018. [www.dundee.com/visit-dundee](http://www.dundee.com/visit-dundee).

## Pontcysyllte Aqueduct

This 11-mile-long water-carrier in north-eastern Wales - a 90-minute drive south from the English city of Liverpool - makes for superb modern-day photo opportunities. Taking the Llangollen Canal over the River Dee atop classical wrought-iron arches, Thomas Telford's design epitomises the 18th century's Industrial Revolution. [www.pontcysyllte-aqueduct.co.uk](http://www.pontcysyllte-aqueduct.co.uk)

## A pair of Cathedrals

Home to the Archbishop of Canterbury and first built in 597, south-eastern England's Canterbury Cathedral is a fantasia of romanesque and gothic styles. Just under an hour's train-ride from London, this hallowed church also boasts the shrine of martyred archbishop Thomas Becket. Up in north-eastern England, meanwhile, Durham Cathedral reflects the very best of Norman architecture. New exhibition spaces will open inside its cloisters next year, showcasing amazing collection items like the Treasures of St Cuthbert and a first edition of Samuel Johnson's Bible.

[www.canterbury-cathedral.org](http://www.canterbury-cathedral.org), [www.durhamcathedral.co.uk](http://www.durhamcathedral.co.uk)

## Giant's Causeway

Consisting of some 40,000 interlocking basalt columns, mostly hexagonal, stretching out into the sea and recognised for its natural importance, Giant's Causeway fringes on Northern Ireland's north-east coast, a two- to three-hour drive from Belfast. Featured in *Game of Thrones*, the legend has it that the Causeway was built by mercurial Irish giant Finn McCool to enable him to walk out to a pre-planned battle with Scottish counterpart Benandonner.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway)



*Legends are made here - Giant's Causeway, Northern Ireland. Credit National Trust*

## Two Cities of Literature

Scotland's capital Edinburgh became the world's first-ever UNESCO City of Literature in 2004, honoured for its provision of authors from Robert Burns and JM Barrie (of Peter Pan fame) to JK Rowling and Ian Rankin. In 2012, Norwich - two hours north-east of London via train, and a gateway to the scenic Norfolk Broads - followed suit, its own pedigree including *Black Beauty* author Anna Sewell and current literary starlet Eimear McBride. Go in June to experience the annual World Literature Festival. [www.visitscotland.com/edinburgh](http://www.visitscotland.com/edinburgh), [www.visitnorwich.co.uk](http://www.visitnorwich.co.uk)

## St Kilda

One of Britain's most mystical locations, Scotland's St Kilda holds joint status for its natural and cultural significance. The former comes via the archipelago's volcanic landscapes, with some of Europe's highest cliffs housing endangered puffins and gannets. And the culture vote because it provides, via habitation evidence dating back four millennia, extreme examples of what UNESCO dramatically terms "storm-swept isolated island living." Truly remote, the archipelago sits 40 miles west of the next nearest Hebridean isle, North Uist, and some 160 miles from the north-western city of Inverness.

[www.kilda.org.uk](http://www.kilda.org.uk)



*Mystical, cultural, remote - St Kilda is something special. Credit National Trust for Scotland*

## North Devon Biosphere Reserve

Covering 55 square miles, the UK's first designated Biosphere Reserve centres on the vast sand-dune system at Braunton Burrows and surrounding scenic grasslands. Also part of this protected pocket of south-western England is the stunning Hartland Peninsula, Bideford Bay's uniquely diverse coral reef, the tiny island of Lundy, parts of Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks, and the Taw-Torridge estuary, where migratory birds gather in January. Main town Barnstaple is about 40 miles north-west from Exeter's airport.

[www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk](http://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk)

## Lots in London

Unsurprisingly, London is packed with UNESCO-protected heritage sites. From Westminster Abbey, one can head east to Tower Bridge, whose past prisoners include Anne Boleyn, William Wallace and famous plotter Guy Fawkes, west to Kew and its Royal Botanic Gardens, or south to Maritime Greenwich, where Baroque and Palladian buildings vie for attention with the astronomic Royal Observatory - aka the 'home of time'.

[www.visitlondon.com](http://www.visitlondon.com)

## Glasgow

Another of UNESCO's Creative Cities is Glasgow, recognised as a City of Music. The south-western Scotland hub hosts the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Scottish Opera and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, as well as hundreds of weekly musical events spanning classical, Celtic and country sounds. One premier gig venue is the Barrowlands Ballroom, where Mogwai and Future Islands will be among the visitors in late 2015.

[www.visitscotland.com/glasgow](http://www.visitscotland.com/glasgow)

## Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

From wild moors and towering peaks, to gently rolling hills and sandy beaches, each of Britain's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (or AONBs) has something different yet equally spectacular to offer visitors. Exactly what they say they are, AONB are landscapes whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so precious that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them. Visit them all to experience Britain's most luscious, living, working landscapes.

## Dramatic coast – Causeway Coast, County Antrim, Northern Ireland

Eighteen miles of spectacular coastal scenery with dramatic cliffs, sandy beaches and dark volcanic rocks aren't even the most memorable part of Northern Ireland's Causeway Coast. The area is also home to the Giant's Causeway (Northern Ireland's only UNESCO World Heritage Site) – a place where geology, history and old Irish legends merge – and whose dramatic landscape made it the perfect location for filming of popular TV series *Game of Thrones*. Discover small harbours, fisheries and farms along the coastline on a road trip of a lifetime, stopping off along the way to spot wildlife on the offshore islands and rocks. [www.causewaycoastandglens.com](http://www.causewaycoastandglens.com)

*Getting there:* Belfast is approximately 1.5 hours by car.

*Where to stay:* Luxury four-star boutique hotel, The Bushmills Inn, is a great base from which to explore gorgeous beaches, hike in unspoilt countryside or play golf on some of Ireland's finest courses before relaxing in front of an open fire. [www.bushmillsinn.com](http://www.bushmillsinn.com)

## Adventure seekers' dream – Mourne Mountains, County Down, Northern Ireland

Twelve glorious peaks, including Northern Ireland's highest mountain, the 850 metre high Slieve Donard, combine to make the Mourne Mountains the mountain biking capital of Ireland. Boasting two national mountain biking centres and excellent cycling trails encompassing famous lakes, a stunning Victorian Castle, incredible panoramic views and flowing singletracks make it a must-visit for mountain bikers of all ages and abilities. Walkers, climbers and horse-riders also love exploring the area's rivers, lakes and reservoirs, while at the top of the adventure scale the Life multi-activity centre offers bouldering, canoeing, kayaking, climbing walls, archery and laser clay pigeon shooting.



*Northern Ireland's Mourne Mountains – a paradise for walkers, climbers and horse-riders. ©VisitBritain – Britain on View*

*Getting there:* The Mourne Mountains are in County Down, only an hour's drive from Belfast.

*Where to stay:* Mountain biking groups will love the comfort of a self-catering cottage after an energetic day cycling the Rostrevor Mountain Bike Trails. Choose from child- (and dog!) friendly cottages in varying sizes – all with added Irish charm. [www.rostrevorholidays.com](http://www.rostrevorholidays.com)

## Wildlife watchers – Strangford and Lecale, Northern Ireland

One of Europe's most important wildlife sites and representing the largest sea lough (lake) in the United Kingdom and Ireland, Strangford is known for its exposed coast and sheltered bays – a natural haven for its rich variety of species. The coastal area extends inland by Quoile River, dominated by the historical town of Downpatrick, and then south along the shore of the Irish Sea. Surrounded by picturesque towns, pretty villages and historic sites, the contrast between the expansive open waters and the surrounding hills is an experience never to be forgotten.

*Getting there:* Strangford and Lecale are in County Down, Northern Ireland, easily accessible by bus from Belfast.

*Where to stay:* Anna's House bed and breakfast is a spacious, eco-friendly country house set in gardens with views over a lake from a glass-walled extension. Warm hospitality and home baked bread add to its charm. [www.annashouse.com](http://www.annashouse.com)

### **Romantic riverside retreat - Wye Valley, Monmouthshire, south-east Wales**

William Wordsworth sighed over its "steep woods, lofty cliffs and green pastoral landscape", while JMW Turner immortalised it in his paintings. Over two centuries later, the Wye Valley is still as enchanting as ever. Particularly beautiful in spring as buds are beginning to bloom, and unforgettable for the rich colours of ash, beech and oak come autumn, Wye Valley is one of Britain's finest riverside landscapes. Attracting canoeists, climbers and riders, the stretch of the River Wye between Monmouth and Tintern is serenely romantic with mist rising over the water on crisp autumn mornings.

*Getting there:* Lying on the border between Monmouthshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, Wye Valley is approximately 1.5 hours' drive from Birmingham and three hours from London.

*Where to stay:* Hafod Glan Gwy (meaning summer house by the river) is a stylish cabin complete with faux fur throws, a wood burning stove, floor to ceiling windows and private patio by the River Wye. [www.sheepskinlife.com](http://www.sheepskinlife.com)

### **Sun, surf and salty air - Gower, south Wales**



*The sheer beauty of the Gower Peninsula - including Three Cliffs Bay here - will take your breath away. credit VisitBritain - Andrew Pickett*

With cliffs and woodlands ringed by sparkling beaches, Gower is adored by walkers, birdwatchers, sunbathers and surfers. Rhossili, a three-mile stretch of gleaming white sand, is the pride of the Gower Peninsula and - when conditions are right - you'll find some of the best surf in Wales off Gower's beaches and bays. Looping network of lanes, cycle routes and footpaths lead through breezy coastal landscapes scented with bracken, sea salt and wild garlic, while hours can be spent spotting blackcaps, warblers and goldcrests in the woodlands.

*Getting there:* Within easy reach of the busy urban areas around Llanelli and Port Talbot, Gower is only five miles from Swansea city centre, 3.5 hours by train from London.

*Where to stay:* Self-catering with style, The Towers (the lodge at the gates to Penrice Castle above Oxwich Bay) has a turreted bedroom and access to acres of parkland. [www.penricecastle.co.uk](http://www.penricecastle.co.uk)

### **Family fun - Llŷn Peninsula, north-west Wales**

Tucked away beyond Snowdonia's craggiest peaks with the Irish Sea on one side and Cardigan Bay on the other, the Llŷn has a distinctive, unspoilt character. The AONB protects around a quarter of the area, including wild stretches of coast, long-extinct volcanic peaks and grassy hillsides dotted with Iron Age forts. Its sunny southern coast draws walkers and wakeboarders but it's the Llŷn's family-friendly resorts and laidback beaches that draw visitors every summer. Pwllheli and Abersoch are both busy sailing

towns, which host Wakestock every July, a youth-friendly festival of wakeboarding and pop music, and an annual Regatta in August complete with dinghy races, crab-catching, sandcastle-building and beachhut-decorating.

*Getting there:* Llyn Peninsula is in north-west Wales. The A55 road provides a quick and easy route along the north Wales coast from Chester to Bangor and the M54 and A5 roads through the scenic heartland of North Wales give the best route from Midlands and southern England. Manchester, in the north-west of England is approximately 2.5 hours by car.

*Where to stay:* A good budget option for families, the Glan Morfa Ganol converted stable and barn cottages are located on a working farm in Pwllheli and has a children's play area plus easy access to the beach. [www.stayinwales.co.uk](http://www.stayinwales.co.uk)

### **Quirky and remote - Northumberland Coast, north-east England**

This bright, wild, lonely coast sweeps along some of Britain's finest beaches and is internationally noted for its wildlife. The AONB, a narrow coastal strip, stretches from Berwick-upon-Tweed to Amble and is the perfect spot to explore miles of beautiful beaches and dunes. Explore Lindisfarne and its treacherous inter-tidal flats, the small islands and rocks of the Farne Islands and the protected sea bird sanctuary further out from the coast, as well as the dramatic setting for Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh Castles, before dining on fresh potted crab from the harbour village of Craster.



*Wild and rugged, you can easily have this narrow strip of Northumberland coastline to yourself on an invigorating walk. ©VisitBritain - Britain on View*

*Getting there:* Northumberland is located in north-east England, with the nearest major city being Newcastle upon Tyne, approximately two hours by train from Edinburgh and three hours from London.

*Where to stay:* For something a little different to camping, get comfortable in a wigwam on a camping site just over half a mile from the sea and a mile from the village of Seahouses. Including all the mod-cons, the wooden holiday homes are inspired by the upturned boat sheds at nearby Holy Island and offer a novel way to enjoy a seaside holiday. [www.springhill-farm.co.uk](http://www.springhill-farm.co.uk)

### **Picturesque villages - The Chiltern Hills, south-east England**

Gentle rolling chalk hills dotted with agriculture woodlands, hedgerows and small traditional English towns and villages make the Chilterns the perfect place to unwind in picture-postcard surroundings. Explore the region's pretty villages on foot, stopping along the way in a traditional English pub after an amble through woodlands dotted with bluebells. Be sure to visit the beautiful village of Turville, home to the windmill in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and explore castle remains, manor houses and gardens along the way.

*Getting there:* The Chilterns fall within four of the central-southern English counties: Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire, and are approximately two hours by train from London.

*Where to stay:* For a good mid-price option, check in to the Stag & Huntsman B&B in Hambleden, a lovely pub in the heart of one of the prettiest villages in Britain that has good-value double rooms within staggering distance after indulging in too much hearty pub grub. [www.thestagandhuntsman.co.uk](http://www.thestagandhuntsman.co.uk)

### **Luxury lodging in a celebrity hideout - The Cotswolds, south-west England**

With its honey coloured cottages, sleepy country pubs, and gently sloping green hills, The Cotswolds is Britain's largest designated area of natural beauty. A world away from the hustle and bustle of London, it is a favourite rural retreat of celebrities including supermodel Kate Moss and her friend fashion designer Stella McCartney, film stars Hugh Grant and Liz Hurley and artist Damien Hirst.



*There's a good chance you'll spot a celebrity while wandering around the Cotswolds! @VisitBritain - Tony Pleavin*

*Getting there:* Motorways make the Cotswolds, in the south-west of England, accessible to visitors from Bristol, London and the West Midlands (central England). Trains from London run regularly to Cotswold stations with most journeys taking between one to two hours.

*Where to stay:* Dormy House boutique hotel is a 17th-century farmhouse given a 21st-century twist with retro-chic rooms reflecting the hotel's cosmopolitan clientele. Enjoy the nearby Broadway Golf Club and the locally lauded country pub. [www.dormyhouse.co.uk](http://www.dormyhouse.co.uk)

### **Eco-retreat - Dumfries & Galloway, south-west Scotland**

Dumfries and Galloway is home to three of Scotland's National Scenic Areas (the Scottish equivalent of an AONB) including the Nith Estuary, the East Stewartry Coast and the Fleet Valley. Experience the history, wildlife, farmland and views of the varied landscape, with land rising gently from the coast, through the narrow wooded valley, to the open heather clad hills. With so much to explore, there's no chance of getting bored.

*Getting there:* Dumfries And Galloway is in the south-western corner of Scotland, approximately one hour's drive from central Glasgow and about 1.5 hours from Edinburgh.

*Where to stay:* 3Glens is an eco-friendly B&B with a wall of windows that open on to spectacular views across the three glens (hence the name!) of Dla What, Castlefern and Craigdarroch. Expect full Scottish breakfast and luxurious bedrooms. [www.3glens.com](http://www.3glens.com)

### **Magnificent mountains - Ben Nevis, Scottish Highlands**

The highest mountain in the British Isles, Ben Nevis stands 1,344 metres above sea level in the Scottish Highlands, close to the town of Fort William. Popular with walkers (though the mountain's quickly changing climate means the mountain is intolerant of inexperienced or ill-prepared walkers), it provides a dramatic backdrop to the small Highland town community of Fort William - the perfect place for tea and cake after a long day's walking in the shadow of the mountain.

*Getting there:* Fort William is 100 miles from Glasgow airport and 145 miles from Edinburgh.

*Where to stay:* Lochy Holiday Camping and Touring Park in Fort William provides a peaceful riverside location with great views of Ben Nevis and separate pitches for tents, touring caravans and motorhomes. [www.lochy-holiday-park.co.uk](http://www.lochy-holiday-park.co.uk)

## **Pamper yourself in the countryside**

The British countryside isn't all about stunning views, stately homes and scenic picnic spots. It's also the perfect place to relax and indulge in a little pampering after a long rambling walk through ancient woodland or across sandy beaches.

### **Quirky - Ruthin Castle Moat Spa, north Wales**

The spa at Ruthin Castle rests in the rustic woodland grounds of the ancient castle's moat, dating back almost 700 years to the legend of King Arthur. Bringing together nature and luxury in a unique set-up, as well as ESPA facials, scrubs and wraps, there are plenty of hidden surprises too, including a sauna tent and a cocoon seat hanging from the trees outside. The perfect place to indulge in a natural spa treatment, with plenty of fresh country air to really add to the relaxation. [www.ruthincastle.co.uk](http://www.ruthincastle.co.uk)

*Getting there:* Ruthin is approximately two hours by train from central England's Birmingham, and Liverpool and Manchester in north-west England.

### **Seaside views from the pool - St Brides Hotel, Saundersfoot, south-west Wales**

Pembrokeshire's only spa hotel has the enviable accolade of having stunning views from its infinity pool, from which you can gaze out at the wide and sandy beaches of Saundersfoot, a small, characterful seaside resort. Rooms have luscious throws by Welsh wool label Melin Tregwynt and splashes of contemporary Welsh art, much of which is for sale, while the spa's 'Comfort Zone' treatments do exactly what they say with facials ranging from purifying to nourishing and anti-ageing. [www.stbridesspahotel.com](http://www.stbridesspahotel.com)

*Getting there:* Saundersfoot is in Pembrokeshire, approximately three hours' drive from London.



*Be healed and pampered in a castle - Glandyfi has experts on site to relax you.*

### **Eccentric romance - Glandyfi Castle, near Aberystwyth, west Wales**

Glandyfi Castle, with its towers, turrets, ramparts and octagonal rooms (not to mention spectacular views over the mountains of Snowdonia) is a quirky, romantic and unpredictable boutique guesthouse. Stay in the Osprey room, with its original painted cornices, king size four poster bed, views of the estuary and a circular Jacuzzi bath in an octagonal room. The castle can also arrange for an experienced therapist to give pampering and holistic

treatments including massage, reflexology, Reiki healing or guided meditation in the privacy of your own room. [www.glandyficastle.co.uk](http://www.glandyficastle.co.uk)

*Getting there:* Aberystwyth is in west Wales, around three hours by train from Birmingham in central England and four hours by train from the Welsh capital, Cardiff.

## Old-school luxury - Gleneagles, Perthshire, central Scotland



*Gleneagles boasts a world class spa in beautiful Scottish surroundings.*

The ultimate countryside retreat, Gleneagles spa is as famous as its world-class golfing greens. After a long day fishing, cycling, horse-riding or shooting in the grounds, relax in the spa's crystal steam rooms, tropical showers, chilling ice rubs, saunas and a vitality pool. Unwind fully in a luxurious suite complete with tartan throws and incredible views before dining on fresh Scottish salmon in one of their award-winning restaurants. [www.gleneagles.com](http://www.gleneagles.com)

*Getting there:* Perthshire is in central Scotland, around one hour's drive from Edinburgh and just over six hours by train from London.

## Relax in a castle - Stobo Castle, Peebles, Scottish Borders

A 200-year-old castle perched on a hill among rolling grounds, shaded by trees and set around a picturesque loch, visitors can watch the sun set over the Scottish hills while relaxing in the pool. Scotland's only destination spa, Stobo Castle has a new mixed sauna providing traditional dry heat for men and women as well as 'The Dream Water Massage' - in which two high pressure jets of water are used in place of the therapists hands.

[www.stobocastle.co.uk](http://www.stobocastle.co.uk)

*Getting there:* Stobo Castle in Peebles is in the Scottish borders yet only half an hour's drive from Edinburgh.

## Complete spa experience - Lucknam Park, Bath, south-west England

Set in 500 acres of parkland, Lucknam Park is a country house retreat surrounded by walled gardens, avenues of beautiful trees and manicured lawns where stresses and strains naturally ebb away. As well as five thermal cabins, salt-water plunge pool, experience showers and relaxation room, a new Wellbeing House, located in a Cotswold stone house at the back of the main Spa building, offers a studio for yoga and pilates, Haslauer Reflective Sunlight Therapy, Dry Floatation and 'burn-out' treatment for stressed souls.

[www.lucknampark.co.uk](http://www.lucknampark.co.uk)

*Getting there:* Bath is around 1.5 hour's by train from London.



*You're in Luck(nam) if you want to relax in style...*

## Celebrity favourite - Cowshed at Babington House, Somerset, south-west England

Oscar-winning British actor Eddie Redmayne recently married at private members' country club, Babington House, where most bedrooms feature freestanding baths, views of the grounds and fireplaces. The Cowshed Spa there is the ultimate in luxury, offering a mud

room, scrub room, sauna and plenty of Cowshed products for use in reflexology treatments, pedicures, massages and facials. [www.babingtonhouse.co.uk](http://www.babingtonhouse.co.uk)

*Getting there:* Somerset is in south-west England, approximately 165 miles from central London.

### Small and exclusive - Gilpin Hotel & Lake House, Lake District, north-west England

A unique spa experience set by a beautiful private lake, Gilpin Hotel & Lake House recently launched the 'Jetty' Lake House Spa. Designed to complement its environment, the spa is tucked among a canopy of trees beside the waters' edge and its two cosy treatment rooms come complete with wood-burning stoves and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the private lake. The private Lake House, a mile from the hotel, sits upon its own private lake with an indoor pool, sauna and large outdoor cedar wood hot tub. [www.thegilpin.co.uk](http://www.thegilpin.co.uk)



*The tranquil setting of the Lake House at the Lake District's Gilpin Hotel guarantees guests a relaxing stay*

*Getting there:* The Lake District is a mountainous region in Cumbria, north-west England, approximately 3.5 hours by train from London.

### Thai experience - Thai Spa, Lough Erne Resort, Fermanagh, Northern Ireland

This five-star spa hotel brings the only wholly Thai Spa experience to Ireland and the UK with Thai treatments by therapists who originate from, and are expertly trained in, Thailand, using traditional Thai therapies. The thoroughly modern spa uses the Ytsara range of Thai products, offering a unique approach to age-old Asian holistic practices. Ten treatment rooms, including The Royal Thai Ritual Room (which features a hand-carved artisan wall depicting Thai lotus blossom), are perfect for indulging in treatments such as the 75-minute Royal Ritual Reflection, which begins with a contemplative meditation, followed by a sedative oriental head massage, before being gently awakened with a blossoming tea ceremony. [www.loughernereresort.com](http://www.loughernereresort.com)



*Thailand comes to Northern Ireland - allow yourself to drift away and be pampered, then awoken with tea.*

*Getting there:* Lough Erne sits on the border of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and is equally accessible from Dublin or Belfast, being only a two-hour drive from both international airports.

### Relax in privacy - Galgorm, County Antrim, Northern Ireland

Set in 163 acres of lush parkland, Galgorm's beautifully rustic riverside log cabins or quaint fisherman's cottage are a short walk from the main hotel yet offer the privacy and

flexibility of self-catering rooms. Overlooking the fantastic River Maine, activities include fishing with Galgorm's resident Gillie, golf at Galgorm Castle, clay pigeon shooting at Carnview Farm and the beautiful Causeway Coast just a short drive away. The spa, which is hidden in the woodland by the river and constructed from local stone and wood, has all the usual treatments as well as a hammam, thermal spa and the added bonus of a 'Boudoir' for extra privacy. [www.galgorm.com](http://www.galgorm.com)

*Getting there:* Galgorm is in County Antrim in Northern Ireland, only 30 minutes' drive from Belfast.

## Live out your love story in Britain: where to propose to the man or woman in your life!

If you're ready to make the leap and ask for your beloved's hand in marriage, the British countryside is the ideal backdrop. Make your declaration of love with either picture-perfect landscapes or rugged, wild scenery around you, the beauty of which should help to elicit a 'yes' from the object of your affections. Follow VisitBritain's ideas for where to propose.

### On the beach, at sunset

The sand at **Bamburgh Beach** turns a pinky hue at sunset, so pack a champagne picnic, pick a sand dune for privacy and ask the question that's been burning a hole in your pocket all day. Bamburgh is home to a beautiful castle of the same name, and is located an hour's drive north of Newcastle. In the same locale are the **Farne Islands**, an alternative option for your moment of romance, just a short ferry hop from Seahouses (itself a five-minute drive from Bamburgh). Go in the summer months and you can see thousands of puffins, who could bear witness to your proposal! [www.visitnorthumberland.com](http://www.visitnorthumberland.com)



*Bamburgh Beach at sunset - the setting's right for romance!*

**Rhossili Bay** in south Wales is regularly voted one of the world's top beaches and best picnic spot. And it's little wonder; the water is refreshing and clean, and there's a National Trust property, The Old Rectory, to stay in nearby - it's the National Trust's most popular holiday cottage. [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/rhossili-and-south-gower-coast](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/rhossili-and-south-gower-coast)

### **St Bride's Hotel or The Wedding Ring - make your intentions clear**

For a beach option with a hotel on site, choose the aptly named **St Bride's Hotel and Spa**, also in south Wales - by the time you've arrived at the hotel, if you're popping the question to a woman, she might have guessed what's in store! If not, the hotel looks down on the beach and some people have written 'will you marry me in the sand' in the past, so you can get the message across that way. The hotel is tastefully furnished, with a luxurious spa and an infinity pool looking over the sea so it's easy to fully immerse yourself in romance. [www.stbridesspahotel.com](http://www.stbridesspahotel.com)

White stones mark out a heart shape known as **The Wedding Ring** in Lochgoilhead, Scotland (just over an hour's drive north of Glasgow). It's where the gypsies of Argyll used

to hold wedding ceremonies, and those that have stepped inside are said to feel the strength of the thousands of lovers that have stood in the same place over the years.

### Living out great loves of history and literature



*The North Yorkshire Moors - get down on one knee in the purple heather*

If you want to follow in the footsteps of great lovers in history and literature, you can. Head into Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire if you're a budding **Robin Hood or Maid Marian** - the pair are said to have been married in Edwinstowe Church, and there's a statue marking the site of the event ([www.experiencenottinghamshire.com](http://www.experiencenottinghamshire.com)). Fans of *Robin Hood Prince of Thieves* should make a pilgrimage to Hadrian's Wall (the section of wall in Northumberland), where they'll see the solitary tree immortalised in the film, which also makes a nice proposal spot.

Or else if your passion is matched by the love between **Heathcliff and Cathy** of *Wuthering Heights* (though with a happier ending in sight), you've got to propose on the Yorkshire Moors, in the north of England. Explore Haworth and Brontë Country by steam train, and go for a walk in the wild moors before getting down on one knee among the characteristic purple heather ([www.yorkshire.com](http://www.yorkshire.com)).

The ultimate dream for many women all over the world is to be swept off her feet by **Mr Darcy** though, so for Jane Austen fans, Pemberley (where Darcy lives) is the place to go. Of course Pemberley is fictional, so for fans of the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, head to the stately home Lyme Park, or for those who loved the 2005 film, it was Chatsworth House that stood in for the mansion. Both are in the Peak District in the north west of England, and easily accessible by car from Manchester. Of course any budding Darcy would also have to strip to a billowing white undershirt and jump in the lake, perhaps emerging with a ring ([www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lyme-park](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lyme-park), [www.chatsworth.org](http://www.chatsworth.org)).

### On the move - trains, planes and balloons!

Taking off and landing on water with a **Loch Lomond Seaplane** is truly special - but of course it's what happens when you're gliding over the Scottish landscape that really matters. You'll cover 80 miles in 30 minutes, which should be enough time to ask your all-important question. Then, when you land just outside Cameron House, you can surprise your new fiancé(e) by having made a booking for the night at the luxury hotel, and its Michelin-starred Martin Wishart restaurant. [www.lochlomondseaplanes.com](http://www.lochlomondseaplanes.com), [www.devere.co.uk/cameron-house](http://www.devere.co.uk/cameron-house)

Or else glide over beautiful Britain in a balloon. Take your pick from a choice of patchwork landscapes beneath you, or cities that are best seen from the sky, such as Bath - you can really appreciate the curvaceous design of the Royal Crescent from above. **Bailey Balloons** organise flights in south-west England and Wales, from Bath and Bristol, or else Llanart in south Wales; launch from there and you can take in the Usk Valley, Brecon

Beacons or the spectacular Sugar Loaf Mountain before turning your attention to more pressing matters ([www.baileyballoons.co.uk](http://www.baileyballoons.co.uk)).

Really want to impress the number one person in your life? Book onto the **British Pullman** or **Northern Belle**, sister trains of the Venice Simpleton Orient Express, and the two of you will be whisked back in time to the heyday of rail travel. Relax in the vintage carriages that ran in the heady 1920s, sip champagne, enjoy a gourmet lunch and glide from 'marital status: single' to 'engaged' in one glamorous journey! [www.orient-express.com/web/uktr/british\\_pullman.jsp](http://www.orient-express.com/web/uktr/british_pullman.jsp)



*If you're proposing in Woburn Abbey's grounds, chances are only your 'dear' and the deer will bear witness to your moment!*

[www.blenheimpalace.com](http://www.blenheimpalace.com)

**Woburn Abbey** in Bedfordshire, an hour's drive from London, has stunning gardens, including a particularly romantic Camellia House, which was locked to the public until 2008, but is now open. The real draw is the deer park, with nine species of deer you can distract your dear with until you're ready to ask him/her to marry you.

For something truly unique, transport your love to Italy-within-Wales, **Portmeirion**, an enchanting village unlike anywhere you'll have ever been. Architect Sir William Clough Ellis created the Italianate village in north Wales between 1925-1975 and, as well as the pastel-coloured buildings and dinky little alleyways, you'll be stunned by the rhododendrons and exotic plants. Go in Spring or Autumn when the colours are magical, or in summer when you can take a dip in the sea. Make the most of it by booking into the Portmeirion Hotel, one of the quirkiest luxury hotels you'll ever experience. [www.portmeirion-village.com](http://www.portmeirion-village.com)

### Say it with flowers

The British are renowned for their love of beautiful gardens, which make lovely proposal spots. Follow in the footsteps of Winston Churchill - or at least do it where he *tried* to propose to his darling Clementine, at the **rose garden at Blenheim Palace** (it was raining, so the pair sought shelter in the nearby Temple of Diana and he did it there). The scents are intoxicating and the colours spectacular, so get on bended knee so he/she can see your face surrounded by blooms!



*Portmeirion - one of the most unusual villages you'll ever see*

## 10 great family adventures

From exploring historic sites to encountering wildlife and following themed trails, Britain's countryside is one big adventure playground filled with fun for the whole family. Here are ten of the best suggestions.

### Feed the red kites at Bwlch Nant yr Arian Forest Visitor Centre, Ceredigion, west Wales

Help conserve the national bird of Wales, the red kite, by joining a daily feeding session at the Bwlch Nant yr Arian Forest Visitor Centre in Ceredigion. Three hours by train from Birmingham, this expanse of woodland also features gentle walking trails. Kite-feeding sessions are free ([www.forestry.gov.uk/bwlchnantyrarian](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/bwlchnantyrarian)).

Nearby, the National Showcaves Centre for Wales offers great value, with entry to ten attractions with one ticket, child/adult, £9.50/£13.75 ([www.showcaves.co.uk](http://www.showcaves.co.uk)).



*The red kites at Bwlch Nant yr Arian visit every day in their hundreds*



*Picture the Romans building their wall at Housesteads Roman Fort*

### Step back in time at Housesteads Roman Fort, Northumberland, north-east England

Situated in one of Britain's most historic locations - Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site - Housesteads Roman Fort is just over two hours' drive from Edinburgh. In this dramatic hilltop setting with panoramic views, visitors can explore the remains of the centurions' barracks - including the oldest toilets in Britain. The recently reopened museum houses a collection of Roman artefacts and uses 3-D models, film and illustrations to bring the past to life. Child/adult, £3.80/£6.40 ([www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)).

### Walk on the wild side at Longleat Safari & Adventure Park, Wiltshire, south-west England

Did you know that Longleat, just 80 minutes from London by train, was the first safari park outside Africa? One of Britain's top animal attractions for more than 40 years, this country estate is home to more than 100 species - from monkeys to meerkats, lions to lorikeets and wildebeest to warthogs. Take a Jungle Cruise past the Gorilla Colony, witness the fastest animal on land in the drive-through Cheetah Kingdom, and feed the giraffes in the African Village. Visitors can also brush up on British history at Longleat House. Child/adult online ticket, £19.50/£27.15 ([www.longleat.co.uk](http://www.longleat.co.uk)).



*Longleat Safari & Adventure Park - the first to open outside Africa*

### Test your agility at iSurvive, Cheshire, north-west England

Kids and adults alike will love the scramble nets, rope swings, tunnels and climbing frames on the Confidence Course at iSurvive in the Chester Lakes, a one-hour drive from Manchester. Take the fresh-air fitness challenge: jump ditches and overcome obstacles on this one-kilometre route through the woods. It will be moving location later on this year;

keep an eye on its website for updates. Suitable for children from seven years old. Open weekends, 11.00 - 16.00; day pass £5 ([www.i-survive.co.uk](http://www.i-survive.co.uk)).

### Explore Sherwood Forest on two wheels, Nottinghamshire, central England

Three hours from London by train is Sherwood Forest Country Park, the largest area of woodland in the east Midlands. Hire bikes at the visitor centre and choose from the two family routes through this historic forest park, once the domain of the mythical Robin Hood and his Merry Men. Its 3,300 acres are also home to Robin Hood's hideout and adventure playgrounds. Bike hire, from £7 per hour for children, £8 an hour for adults ([www.sherwoodpinescycles.co.uk](http://www.sherwoodpinescycles.co.uk), [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)).

### Hug a hedgehog in Powys, Wales

Good Day Out organises a range of fun, educational activities that raise money for local causes such as wildlife sanctuaries and rescue centres. Spend a morning at Howey Hedgehog Sanctuary, a 90-minute drive from Cardiff, where you will clean, feed, bathe - and even exercise - orphaned hoglets (hedgehog babies). Hedgehog Helper Mornings take place on dates throughout spring, £20 ([www.gooddayout.co.uk](http://www.gooddayout.co.uk)).



*Mind the prickles and hug a baby hedgehog!*

### Design your own tourist trail, Belfast, Northern Ireland

What better way to travel than at your own pace? Pick up a Bunk Camper in Belfast, pack in the family and set off to explore the rugged coastline of Northern Ireland. Stop where you choose and wake up to stunning views. Bunk Campers come fully equipped with gas hobs, sinks, dining area, cooking utensils, beds, heating and electricity (showers/toilets in some vehicles). Family-size campervan, from £65 per day ([www.bunkcampers.com](http://www.bunkcampers.com)).



*Dinosaur hunting on the Isle of Wight*

### Discover the dinosaur capital of Britain, the Isle of Wight, off the south coast of England

A short ferry ride from Portsmouth, just 90 minutes from London by train, will bring you to the Isle of Wight, the best place in Europe to follow in the footsteps of the dinosaurs that once ruled the Earth. Named by London's eminent Natural History Museum as Britain's 'Dinosaur Capital', this island offers opportunities for visitors to try hunting for fossils along its sandy beaches

themselves, or to join an organised tour led by an expert who will identify any discoveries. Two-hour Footprint Tour, child/adult, £3/£5 ([www.islandbreaks.co.uk/attractions/dinosaurs](http://www.islandbreaks.co.uk/attractions/dinosaurs)).

### Experience unspoilt natural beauty, Argyll Forest Park, western Scotland

Book a short break with Forest Holidays in Argyll, just 45 minutes' drive from Glasgow, and you'll be on the doorstep of 720 square miles of lochs, mountains and forests. In the heart of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, its new timber and glass cabins (most with outdoor hot tubs) offer breathtaking views of Loch Long and the Arrochar Alps. Family-friendly activities include mountain biking, archery, canoeing, rock climbing, gorge walking and Forest Ranger-led walks. A Silver Birch cabin, sleeping four, starts from around £445 for a three-night weekend from March ([www.forestholidays.co.uk](http://www.forestholidays.co.uk)).

## Take to the treetops in the rainforest canopy, Cornwall, south-west England

In our most southerly county, four hours by train from London, is one of Britain's top attractions. The Eden Project's two huge adjoining domes house thousands of plant species. The world's largest rainforest in captivity features steamy jungles and waterfalls and a new, fully accessible Rainforest Aerial Walkway, with amazing views across the Rainforest Biome. Buy online tickets in advance for greater discounts, child/adult from £11.50/£19.95 ([www.edenproject.com](http://www.edenproject.com)).



*Kids love getting a flavour of the rainforest at the Eden Project, set across two 'biomes' - large golf-ball structures housing thousands of plants*

## Step back in time - Britain's best-preserved towns and villages

Georgian townhouses, thatched cottages and spectacular views over the rolling countryside; Britain's most beautifully preserved towns and villages share a sense of history and charm that makes them the perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of modern life.

### The Cotswolds, south-west England

Nestled amid the gently rolling hills of the Cotswolds you will find the quaint village of Lacock. Once a centre of the medieval wool trade, it still reflects those times today - there are no TV aerials, overhead cables or yellow lines to spoil the scene. Wander back into the 18th century and feast your eyes on thatched cottages and Tudor half-timbered black and white buildings before retiring to a cosy cottage for the night.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lacock](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lacock)

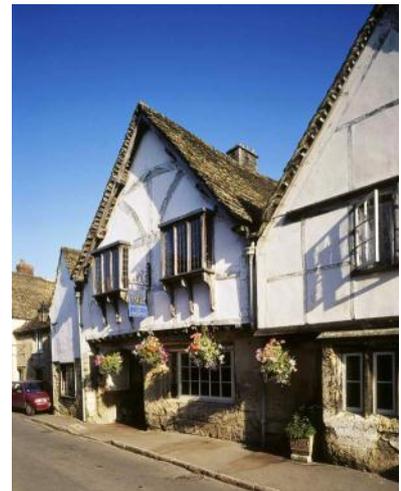
*Insider's tip: No visit to the Cotswolds would be complete without a trip to the old spa town of Cheltenham. One of the most complete Regency towns in Britain, the Pump Room overlooking the sweeping lawns and ornamental lakes of Pittville Park, feels like you've stepped back in time.* ([www.visitcheltenham.com](http://www.visitcheltenham.com))

**Location:** *The Cotswolds is an easily accessible area around 100 miles north to south, which lies west of London and is reachable by rail or car in 90 minutes.*

[www.cotswolds.com](http://www.cotswolds.com)

### Rye, East Sussex, south-east England

One of the best preserved medieval towns in England, Rye is home to the enchanting cobbled Mermaid Street, the impressive Norman church of St Mary's, a rich selection



*The village of Lacock in Wiltshire, a haven of thatched cottages and cosy tea rooms*

of specialist shops and a thriving fishing fleet. Discover its architectural treasures and narrow passageways then climb the tower of St Mary's Parish Church for fine views to Rye Harbour Nature Reserve where Camber Castle is located. Always a magnet for writers and artists, Lamb House was once the home of Henry James and today a wealth of art and photography galleries thrive in the town.

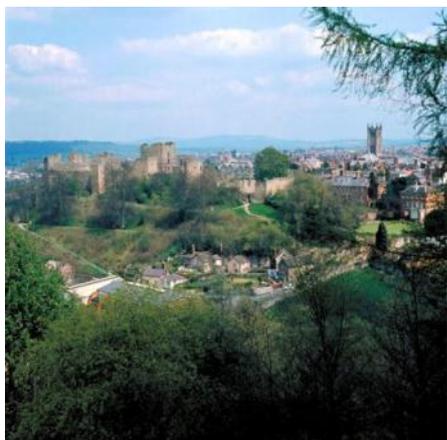
*Insider's tip: Visit the nearby Camber Sands, the only sand dune system in East Sussex, which is renowned for its outstanding natural beauty, safe bathing and water sports.*

**Location:** *England's south-east coast of Kent and Sussex has five former ports, the "Cinque Ports" where Rye is located, only 40 minutes by train from London.*

[www.ryesussex.co.uk](http://www.ryesussex.co.uk)

### **Ludlow, Shropshire, west England**

An architectural gem with a lively community feel, Ludlow is a thriving market town surrounded by the unspoilt hill-countryside of south Shropshire and the Welsh border country. Excellent walking and cycling opportunities are right on the doorstep, while the



*Ludlow in Shropshire - home to some of the UK's best food producers and an imposing Norman keep*

town centre's layout and architecture is evidence of the 900-year-old Norman-planned town's history. A long wide market square and a "shambles" of alleys add to the town's charm, as does its glorious mix of building materials and styles. You can even stay in a 16th-century timber-framed Inn at the Feathers.

[www.feathersatludlow.co.uk](http://www.feathersatludlow.co.uk)

*Insider's tip: Ludlow has acquired an excellent reputation for the quality of its food and every September the Ludlow Food and Drink Festival attracts food lovers from all over the world. There is also the Ludlow Medieval Christmas Fayre to look out for ([www.ludlowmedievalchristmas.co.uk](http://www.ludlowmedievalchristmas.co.uk))*

**Location:** *On the border of England and Wales, Ludlow, in the West Midlands, is reachable by train from London (three hours) and Manchester (90 minutes.)*

[www.ludlow.org.uk](http://www.ludlow.org.uk)

### **Presteigne, Powys, Wales**

The remote town of Presteigne, which straddles the border between Wales and England, has retained its beauty over the centuries. Surrounded by unspoiled countryside and filled with streets of old-fashioned shop windows, it is home to gardeners, writers, and even a maker of clarinet reeds. Well worth a visit is the Judge's Lodging museum, which has been called 'a fascinating social document - an amazing survival' and 'the most remarkable survivor of all UK court buildings.



*The Judge's Lodging - history intact*

[www.judgeslodging.org.uk](http://www.judgeslodging.org.uk)

*Insider's tip: Visit in late August to enjoy the annual Presteigne Festival, a mecca for those seeking contemporary classical music in the idyllic surroundings of the Welsh Marches. ([www.presteignefestival.com](http://www.presteignefestival.com))*

**Location:** 90 minutes by train from Birmingham and the beautiful coastline of West Wales.

[www.presteigne.org.uk](http://www.presteigne.org.uk)



*Cute and compact - Crail is the ideal place for a fresh fish lunch with pretty views*

### **Crail, Fife, east Scotland**

Crail is a pretty, vibrant seaside village on the Fife coast with a history as an important trading and fishing port in the 12th century. Cobbled streets tumble down to the miniature harbour, which is sheltered by cliffs and surrounded by fishing cottages. Three medieval streets in the village are home to fine 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century townhouses and the handsome old tollbooth probably dates from the late 16th century. Tuck into traditional fish and chips by the harbour before resting weary heads in a charming bed and breakfast or cottage in the village in this picture-perfect village.

*Insider's tip: Learn more about the fascinating history of the area at the Crail Museum and Heritage Centre, before picking up some hand-painted earthenware from local potters Crail Pottery. ([www.crailmuseum.org.uk](http://www.crailmuseum.org.uk))*

**Location:** Crail is a seaside village on the East Neuk of Fife coast, two hours by train and bus from Edinburgh.

[www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com)

### **Strathpeffer, Scottish Highlands**

The leafy Victorian spa town of Strathpeffer beautifully combines Victorian Regency with Highland tradition. A popular base for walkers to explore the Scottish Highlands, it is surrounded by wooded hills. During its heyday the town was a renowned European health resort and the restored Pump Room is still where visitors drink water from wells to treat their ailments. The Highland Museum of Childhood, located at the restored Victorian train station, looks at growing up in the Highlands and is a great way to explore the area's local history and traditions.

[www.highlandmuseumofchildhood.org.uk](http://www.highlandmuseumofchildhood.org.uk)

*Insider's tip: There are several times throughout the year when tourists flock to Strathpeffer: The world's most extreme 24-hour mountain bike race takes place there every January and attracts more than 400 competitors. And one of the longest-established Highland Games in Scotland takes place in the grounds of Castle Leod every August, while local Highland dancers perform in the square on Saturdays from the end of May to September.*

**Location:** Four miles west of Dingwall on the Black Isle in the Scottish Highlands. Inverness is the gateway airport to the Highlands, and just over 90-minutes' flight from London,

*while trains connect the Highlands with Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh.*

[www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com)

### **Whitehead, County Antrim, Northern Ireland**

The pretty Victorian seaside village of Whitehead on the east coast of County Antrim is the perfect spot to be restored by the Irish Sea air. The base for the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland, its steam engines and rolling stock are on view to the public and, as well as the famed Portrush Flyer, the old steam locomotives and carriages can be seen travelling to many parts of Ireland. While colourfully painted houses on the seafront add to its charm, for a truly unforgettable stay the Blackhead Lighthouse keeper's cottage is the only one you can stay at in Northern Ireland and has spectacular views of the coast.

[www.irishlandmark.com](http://www.irishlandmark.com)

*Insider's tip: The rugged and varied Antrim Coast is nowhere better appreciated than from along Blackhead walker's path. For the more energetic, the climb up the stone steps to the lighthouse brings ample reward.*

**Location:** *Just 20 minutes by car from Belfast.*

[www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com)

## Cultural countryside

Article also appears in the VisitBritain guide to Culture for international media.

What better way to spend a British summer evening than enjoying a picnic, surrounded by beautiful gardens or rolling hills, and getting the chance to enjoy a Shakespeare play or some live music? In recent years there's been an explosion in alfresco culture, with everything from movie showings to opera recitals staged in historic castles, stately homes and even rural woodland. Whatever your taste there's something to suit, so pack up the hamper and settle in for an evening of culture beneath the stars.

### Cinema

Every summer, **Luna Cinema** puts on a series of alfresco cinema events at stately homes and parks around the country, offering a chance to enjoy a great movie in classically British surroundings. The season runs from 2 July until 28 September and, in 2014, offered the chance to view everything from vintage musicals such as *Grease*, through to kitsch classics like *Dirty Dancing*, and to the more recent releases such as *Gravity* and *The Wolf of Wall Street*. Venues range from central London locations to a range of gardens in south-east England including Sissinghurst and Leeds Castle in Kent. Check the website for further details of the 2015 programme. [www.thelunacinema.com](http://www.thelunacinema.com)

One of the most beautiful alfresco cinema locations is **Somerset House** in London. Every August, a two-week film festival brings together classic movies, new releases and avant-garde favourites; in 2014 the programme included Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and Wes Anderson's classic *The Royal Tenenbaums*. Its website will reveal the 2015 programme in the new year.

[www.somersethouse.org.uk](http://www.somersethouse.org.uk)



*Cinema under the stars; London's Somerset House screens classic movies in classic surroundings*

### Opera

When it comes to alfresco opera, **Glyndebourne** is a must; a pre-performance picnic is an integral part of a visit to the beautiful Sussex estate, but the performances themselves are actually inside the purpose-built theatre. Glyndebourne has been staging opera in the heart of the South Downs National Park in south east England since 1934, after John Christie built an opera house for his soprano wife, Audrey Mildmay. The Festival is recognised as one of the most beloved European opera Festivals and runs from 21 May to 30 August consisting every year of six operas; 2015's bill includes *Carmen* and Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*. Lewes station is just over an hour from London Victoria, and there is a regular shuttle bus to the venue. [www.glyndebourne.com](http://www.glyndebourne.com)



*Something to sing about; Garsington Opera is set in the beautiful Wormsley estate, home of the billionaire Getty family*

To see opera performed in an outside space, one of the best choices is **Garsington Opera**, which runs from early June until the end of July at the beautiful Wormsley Estate, home of the billionaire Getty family. The 2015 programme will feature *Così fan Tutte*, *Intermezzo*, *Death in Venice* and *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*. With Wormsley within easy reach of Oxford, it makes it ideal for a short-break out of London. Garsington is 20 minutes by taxi from High Wycombe station, itself around one

hour from London Marylebone by train. [www.garsingtonopera.org](http://www.garsingtonopera.org)

In London, **Opera Holland Park** is a long-running alfresco festival that offers classic opera by the likes of Puccini and Benjamin Britten, while the capital's Royal Opera House show live relays of performances at venues around Britain, including outdoor locations in Belfast and Cardiff, among others. [www.rbkc.gov.uk](http://www.rbkc.gov.uk), [www.roh.org.uk](http://www.roh.org.uk)



*Going to the open-air theatre in London's Regent's Park is one of the must-dos on the alfresco cultural calendar.*

## Theatre

Open-air Shakespeare is a classic alfresco choice; the most famous location is the long-running **Regent's Park Open Air Theatre** in London, home to the New Shakespeare Company. The 2015 season will run from 15 May until 12 September, with a combination of Shakespeare plays, musicals and family productions. In Wales' capital, Cardiff, the **Everyman Open Air Theatre Festival** takes place. Expect everything from classics to children's theatre to musicals; 2014's programme included the likes of *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Sweeney Todd* and the *Little Mermaid*. In Scotland, the **National Trust for Scotland** hosts a range of Shakespeare plays at its castles and stately homes. [www.openairtheatre.com](http://www.openairtheatre.com), [www.everymanfestival.co.uk](http://www.everymanfestival.co.uk), [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk)

Britain is home to several touring theatre companies that put on a range of plays at castles, stately homes and gardens around the destination. **Illyria** is staging four plays in summer 2015; with *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Three Musketeers*, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* and *Iolanthe*. Historically Illyria's plays show in a rich variety of venues; in the past they've been performed everywhere from Drumlanrig Castle in Scotland to Chepstow Castle in Wales and Corfe Castle in Dorset on the south coast of England. **Chapterhouse Theatre** is a similar company that also offers dates in Northern Ireland; in summer 2015 Chapterhouse will stage *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*, among other plays, around Britain. [www.illyria.uk.com](http://www.illyria.uk.com), [www.chapterhouse.org](http://www.chapterhouse.org)

Of course, alfresco theatre is not a new invention; the spectacular **Minack Theatre** in Cornwall, south-west England, has been running since 1931, perched on the cliffs high above the Cornish coastline. The theatre season runs from April through to September, with matinees on Tuesdays and Thursdays and storytelling mornings for children in school holidays. Minack is around 20 minutes from Penzance station by taxi, itself around five hours from London Paddington. [www.minack.com](http://www.minack.com)

## Contemporary Music

For lovers of pop music, you don't have to attend a weekend festival to see your favourite artists perform under the stars. **Forest Live** is a programme of concerts hosted by the Forestry Commission who look after some of England's most beautiful woodland. There are outdoor concerts at seven sites, from Sherwood Pines Forest in Nottingham, around two hours north of London, to Westonbirt Arboretum, near to the beautiful city of Bath (90 minutes from London Paddington by train). Artists



*Lush, green locations are the backdrop to some top pop acts during Forest Live's summer concert programme*

confirmed for 2015 include Irish pop and rock band, The Script. [www.forestry.gov.uk/music](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/music)

In Cornwall, the world-famous **Eden Project** holds the 'Eden Sessions' every summer, with a huge outdoor stage and A-list names performing. The guest list for 2014 included Ellie Goulding, Elbow and Dizzee Rascal and, while the line-up for 2015 is still to be announced, early bird tickets are now available from its website. St Austell station is around five hours from London Paddington and there are buses connecting the station with the Eden Project. [www.edensessions.com](http://www.edensessions.com)

Jazz lovers visiting Northern Ireland should head to **Mount Stewart House** in the summer, for an afternoon of Jazz in the Gardens, just 15 miles south of Belfast. Mount Stewart is just one of dozens of National Trust properties that have alfresco music and arts events over the summer; for specific dates and locations visit its website. [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

## Contemporary art at historic houses

*Article also appears in the VisitBritain guide to Culture for international media.*

Thanks to the growing importance of contemporary art in Britain's cultural landscape, you find it popping up in the most unexpected locations, with Britain's stately homes providing sympathetic backdrops for bold artworks.

### Stately homes

Collaborations with contemporary artists bring a sense of fun to these historic homes; in 2014 **Chatsworth House** in the beautiful Peak District (a 30-minute drive from Chesterfield railway station, itself a two-hour train journey from London) featured Michael Craig-Martin sculptures on its elegant lawns, while indoors saw the arrival of a permanent ceramic installation by Jacob van der Beugel. Meanwhile, the Artist Rooms scheme continues to promote the installation of contemporary art away from major institutions. [www.chatsworth.org](http://www.chatsworth.org)



*From June 2015 the grounds of Waddesdon Manor will be home to contemporary sculptures as well as the classic*

Increasingly known for its displays of contemporary art is **Waddesdon Manor** in Buckinghamshire, south-east England, thanks in part to the inspiration of its previous owners, the Rothschild family, still involved in its running. Around the extensive gardens of this French-style chateau you will find sculptures from the family's collection along with commissions that add to the manor's interior and its own collection. From June 2015 the grounds will host contemporary art by Simon Periton, who will design two sculptural bedding installations, continuing the tradition of three-dimensional bedding begun by Alice de Rothschild. A pair of sculptures by Joana Vasconcelos will also be installed on the manor's North Front in 2015; the giant pair of candlesticks made of glass wine bottles (from Château Lafite Rothschild) will symbolise the Rothschild family's connection to the world of wine. Waddesdon Manor is less than two hours' drive from London. [www.waddesdon.org.uk](http://www.waddesdon.org.uk)



*Cool and contemporary; from Burghley House's 'Elemental' exhibition in 2014, 'Lunicycle' by Pete Rogers*

One of England's grandest houses, **Burghley House** in Stamford, Lincolnshire (around two hours by train from London), is devoted to promoting contemporary sculpture in a historic setting - so much so that it has its own dedicated sculpture garden. Annual exhibitions of sculptures run from April to October - 2014's exhibition was entitled 'Elemental' and explored sculptures that responded to elements such as the wind or sun. There are also permanent pieces, which can be viewed all the year round, including the grass maze designed by Peter Randall Page. [www.burghley.co.uk](http://www.burghley.co.uk)

In Cornwall, in the south-west of England, the National Trust-owned **Lanhydrock** is a glorious Victorian country house and estate. Among the magnificent gardens visitors will discover some more contemporary additions - metalwork sculptures that have been installed by local professional artists and blacksmiths. Here you'll discover Matisse-inspired figures, giant creatures made from recycled materials and large geometric structures. [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lanhydrock](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lanhydrock)

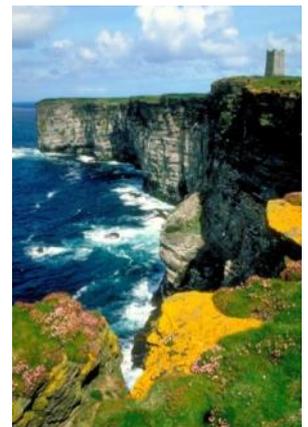
### Trust New Art

Many collaborations between modern artists and stately homes arise thanks to the **National Trust's Trust New Art** annual programme of events, residencies and commissions that aims to bring different experiences to its historic properties based across the country. Recent collaborations in late 2014 included the Paradise exhibition at Tyntesfield and Leigh Woods in west England, when Trust New Art Bristol collaborated with Bristol's leading contemporary art gallery Arnolfini. For updates on the 2015 programme as, and when, they are announced, see [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk).

### Artist Rooms

Another initiative bringing modern art to unlikely places is **Artist Rooms**, which seeks to ensure the bequest of influential art dealer Anthony d'Offay is displayed as widely as possible. The east England-based medieval fortification of Norwich Castle will be hosting an exhibition of work in its Museum & Art Gallery by influential and controversial American artist Jeff Koons between 9 May and 6 September 2015. Norwich is just under two hours by train from London.

Artist Rooms also helps support smaller museums in remote areas of Britain, allowing them to exhibit high-profile works that would otherwise be beyond their reach. One such is the Pier Arts Centre on the far north Scottish island of Orkney, which will host a selection of Damien Hirst works between 20 June and 12 September 2015. You can fly to Orkney from major Scottish airports or catch the ferry from Aberdeen in northern Scotland. [www.artfund.org/what-to-see/artist-rooms](http://www.artfund.org/what-to-see/artist-rooms)



*Thanks to Artists Rooms, leading contemporary artists will exhibit in remote areas of Britain, such as Scotland's Orkney Islands*

## Lights, camera, action! The British countryside on screen

The British countryside is full of wonderful locations featured in many famous films. From the wilderness of the Scottish highlands, to the beautifully manicured gardens around Highclere Castle (or Downton Abbey as it's also known!), follow in the footsteps of your favourite TV and movie stars with a tour around some of the British countryside's most beautiful and iconic locations.

### **Miss Potter - The Lake District, north-west England**

The beautiful Lake District landscape in north-west England that inspired Beatrix Potter's beloved children's books, is showcased in the 2006 film about the author's life, *Miss Potter*. Retrace the steps of the film's star, Renée Zellweger, and discover the unsurpassed scenery that inspired Potter and countless other writers and artists, including William Wordsworth and Alfred Wainwright, with a tour around the magical filming locations featured in the film. Experience breathtaking mountains and sparkling lakes, internationally renowned gardens, historic houses and magical lake cruises and, for something totally unique, you can also stay in one of Potter's original farmsteads. [www.visitmisspotter.com](http://www.visitmisspotter.com)

### **Brief Encounter - Carnforth, Lancashire, north-west England**

The pretty town of Carnforth is home to the train station in David Lean's classic 1945 film *Brief Encounter*. Surrounded by picturesque countryside and close to the sweeping sands and breathtaking cliff paths of Morecambe Bay, the area around Lancaster Canal is a wildlife haven and paradise for walkers and cyclists. One of the few locations where you can get a real flavour of the original film and the period it was shot, the station was recently refurbished to be an exact replica of its portrayal on screen and there's even a visitor centre with a permanent exhibition about the film.

<http://carnforthstation.co.uk>



*Have a Brief Encounter at Carnforth Station*

### **Calendar Girls - Kettlewell, Yorkshire Dales, north England**

A small village nestled in the Yorkshire Dales, Kettlewell is a walkers' delight with its panoramic views and cosy bed and breakfasts. The entire village doubled as the town of Knapely for the 2003 film *Calendar Girls*, which is itself based on the real-life story of a group of women in nearby Rylstone, who raised millions for the charity Leukaemia Research. The charming village has friendly locals and isn't far from other locations that have graced the nations' screens over the years - TV shows *Heartbeat*, *All Creatures Great And Small* and *Last Of The Summer Wine* were all shot on location around the Yorkshire Dales. (The nearest major cities to the Yorkshire Dales are Leeds and York.)

<http://kettlewellvillage.co.uk>

### **Downton Abbey - Oxfordshire and Berkshire, south England**

Become Lord or Lady Grantham for the day on a visit to the film locations used for the Bafta-winning period drama *Downton Abbey*. The charming Oxfordshire village of Bampton that has been featured as Downton Village, is where you can see locations such as

Downton hospital, the village pub, the former home of Matthew Crawley and the local church, and is the perfect place from which to explore to surrounding countryside. Also well worth a visit is Highclere Castle, in Berkshire, the stately home that is used as the main *Downton Abbey* set. Enjoy lunch in the majestic grounds before a stroll in 1,000 acres of spectacular parkland. Oxfordshire and Berkshire border each other in south-east England, approximately an hour by train from London. [www.highclerecastle.co.uk](http://www.highclerecastle.co.uk), <http://britmovietours.com>, <http://visitoxfordandoxfordshire.com>)

### **Fury - Buckinghamshire, south-east England**

Brad Pitt and Shia LaBeouf took over the Buckinghamshire countryside to shoot scenes for their new Second World War movie, *Fury*. The showbiz pair spent two days camping in a forest in Buckinghamshire so they could bond just like real war comrades, with rumours abounding that they even had to leave behind their mobiles and forage for food themselves. To experience a real-life film set, the beautiful county is the perfect destination for a walking holiday. Explore County Parks, ancient oak woodland and prehistoric geological landforms at Stockgrove Country Park, or head to Bacombe Hill, noted for its orchids and butterflies. Buckinghamshire is less than an hour by train from London. <http://visitbuckinghamshire.org>

### **The Edge of Love - Wales**

Wales is perhaps best known as the location for the filming of popular BBC series *Dr Who*, but the charming seaside town of New Quay is where Keira Knightley, Sienna Miller and Matthew Rhys made famous when they filmed *The Edge of Love* there. Based loosely on events in the life of the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, the beautiful beach is the perfect spot from which to ramble inland on a range of coastal circular walks. The National Trust property in Llanerchaeron, with its estate and walled garden, is well worth a visit, as are the nearby gardens of Aberglasney and the National Botanic Garden of Wales. You can also stay in the same place as the film's stars at Ty Mawr Mansion in Cilcennin, Lampeter. New Quay is around a two-hour drive from Cardiff. [www.tymawrmansion.co.uk](http://www.tymawrmansion.co.uk)

### **Game of Thrones - Northern Ireland**

Much of the Emmy-award winning show *Game of Thrones* was filmed along the stunning Causeway Coast and Glens in Northern Ireland (90 minutes' drive from Belfast airport). Michelle Fairley, who played Lady Catelyn Stark in the show, was even brought up in the area, which represents everything from Winterfell to the King's Road, The Iron Islands to Stormlands on-screen. There is even a *Game of Thrones* tour of the area that not only brings to life the drama of the series, but also provides a front row seat at locations steeped in local myth and legend, where ancient warriors walked long before leading men. <http://causewaycoastandglens.com>



*The West Highland Railway or the Hogwarts Express?*

### **Harry Potter - Scotland**

The rugged beauty and natural drama of the Scottish Highlands were the perfect background for the first two Harry Potter films, based on the J. K. Rowling books and starring Daniel Radcliffe and Emma Watson. The Quidditch matches were filmed against the backdrop of Glen Nevis (also used for *Braveheart*, *Rob Roy* and *Highlander II*) in the Scottish Highlands.

You can also experience one of the finest rail journeys in the world in a Hogwart's Express-style steam locomotive during the summer season. Push further inland to see Glencoe, Scotland's most famous and most scenic glen, where the dramatic landscapes around Hogwarts were filmed. [www.glencoescotland.com](http://www.glencoescotland.com); <http://westcoastrailways.co.uk>

### **The Da Vinci Code - Roslin, Scotland**

This church in the village of Roslin, just seven miles south of Edinburgh, has garnered a lot of fame over the last decade, all because of a role in the blockbuster movie, *The Da Vinci Code*, starring Tom Hanks. The story attracts visitors to the site, eager to explore its connections to the Knights Templar and freemasons. Rosslyn Chapel, which features in the movie, sits atop a small hill just outside the peaceful village, the ideal base for exploring Midlothian and the Scottish Borders, and is particularly good for nature lovers who can enjoy a walk through Roslin Glen Country Park.

[www.roslinvillage.com](http://www.roslinvillage.com)



*Crack the code at Roslin Church, near Edinburgh, where *The Da Vinci Code* was shot*

### **Pride and Prejudice - Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, central England**

The setting for Mr Darcy's Pemberley in the 2005 film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, Chatsworth House in Derbyshire is one of Britain's grandest stately homes and its doors are open to visitors. It is believed that Jane Austen actually based her idea of Pemberley on Chatsworth House as she wrote the novel while in Bakewell. Home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, it has one of Europe's leading art collections in a stately home, plus there are more than 30 rooms to explore, ranging from the Painted Hall and State Rooms to the newly restored Sketch Galleries. And there's plenty to admire in the stunning 105-acre garden. Visitors can take advantage of Chatsworth's location in the heart of the Peak District this wild and beautiful terrain is perfect for walks, cycling and horse-riding, as well as great locations for climbing. [www.chatsworth.org](http://www.chatsworth.org), [www.visitpeakdistrict.com](http://www.visitpeakdistrict.com)

### **Skyfall - Scotland**

The rugged natural beauty of Scotland was used to great effect in the most recently released James Bond film, *Skyfall*. Glen Coe and Glen Etive in the Highlands and their rugged charm and brooding atmosphere (much like Bond!) are perfect for walking in the summer, skiing in the winter. Glen Coe's highest peak is the three-buttressed Bidean nam Bian, while Glen Etive is more tranquil and secluded. If you're in the area you can stay the night or just pop in for a wee dram at one of Scotland's oldest licensed inns - the Kings House Hotel, which dates back to the 17th century. [www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com), [www.kingshousehotel.co.uk](http://www.kingshousehotel.co.uk)

### **Brideshead Revisited - Castle Howard, Yorkshire, north England**

Both the film (2008) and the legendary TV series (1981) were both shot at the magnificent 18th century stately home, Castle Howard, set within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Howardian Hills, in Yorkshire. You'll be as impressed as Charles Ryder was when first entering 'Brideshead'. Discover 300 years of family history within the house, plus there are 1,000 acres of grounds and gardens to explore, with tempting woodland walks, temples, lakes and fountains. And from here it's an easy journey to visit one of

Britain's most captivating landscapes, the North Yorks National Park, plus it's within half an hour's drive of the historic city of York. [www.castlehoward.co.uk](http://www.castlehoward.co.uk), [www.northyorkmoors.org.uk](http://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk), [www.visit-york.org](http://www.visit-york.org).

## **Bye bye Beverly Hills, hello British countryside**

When celebrities crave downtime they head to the British countryside for breathtaking scenery, bracing fresh air and relaxed country living – the perfect antidote to jet-setting lifestyles.

Head to these British bolt-holes to experience countryside relaxation celebrity-style.

### **THE COTSWOLDS: Celebrity capital of Britain's countryside**

With its honey coloured cottages, sleepy country pubs, and gently sloping green hills, the Cotswolds is a world away from the hustle and bustle of London and, being only a two-hour drive away, means it's an easily accessible destination for celebrities to chill out.

Maybe that's why the area, in the west of England, is luring so many seeking a rural retreat. Supermodel Kate Moss and her rocker husband Jamie Hince regularly spend time at their country estate in Little Farringdon - and are often spotted in local pub The Swan - while her friend and famous fashion designer Stella McCartney lives an hour's drive away in Pershore. Both areas are just 45 minutes from the Regency town of Cheltenham, the perfect base to explore much of the scenic Cotswolds ([www.visitcheltenham.com](http://www.visitcheltenham.com)).

Film star Hugh Grant owns a home in the picturesque village of Stinchcombe, a favourite destination with golfers keen to admire the views ([www.stinchcombehillgolfclub.com](http://www.stinchcombehillgolfclub.com)). The actor's ex-girlfriend, model and actress Liz Hurley also owns a 72-acre working farm in the hamlet of Ampney Knowle near the Cotswold town of Barnsley, four miles north east of the market town of Cirencester (often referred to as the Capital of the Cotswolds). The farm is stocked with Gloucester cattle, pigs and Shetland & Lleyne sheep. Liz has even been seen at Cirencester Market personally selling her Gloucester Old Spot sausages. ([www.cirencester.co.uk/market.htm](http://www.cirencester.co.uk/market.htm))

Other celebrities with homes in the Cotswolds include singer Lily Allen, who moved to a £3million manor house in the tiny village of Cranham, where she also had her wedding in 2011; and artist Damien Hirst, who owns Toddington Manor, a 300-room gothic mansion set in 124 acres, which houses his vast art collection.

### **BERKSHIRE AND BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, south-east England: on the celeb map?**

While it's yet to be confirmed, a certain Mr and Mrs Clooney have reportedly bought a house in the picturesque village of Sonning in Berkshire. Human rights lawyer Amal and her husband, Hollywood star George Clooney were apparently spotted at The Bull Inn, a gastropub with boutique bedrooms, located in this Berkshire village, where they were also spotted looking at properties. Even if they don't move it, this part of the country has been in the spotlight - around 90 minutes' drive from London, *The Good Pub Guide* describes The Bull as a 'picture postcard 16th century inn by the Thames' (<http://bullinssonning.co.uk>).

And following their wedding in Venice, the Clooneys hosted a reception party at Danesfield House & Spa in the pretty riverside town of Marlow, Buckinghamshire, around an hour's

drive from London ([www.danesfieldhouse.co.uk](http://www.danesfieldhouse.co.uk)). Marlow is also home to Tom Kerridge's two Michelin-starred pub The Hand and Flowers ([www.thehandandflowers.co.uk](http://www.thehandandflowers.co.uk)).

### **THE WEST COUNTRY: A coastal haven**

Only three hours from London on the west coast of England, a long list of the great and the good have crowded to this picturesque paradise to relax and unwind.

Devon, an English county reaching from the Bristol Channel in the north to the English Channel in the south, has proved a particularly popular Hollywood hotspot. Actresses Goldie Hawn and daughter Kate Hudson gave their approval to the quiet Devon town of Topsham; they were both spotted there when Hudson was engaged to Matt Bellamy, a local farm owner who also happens to be frontman of rock band Muse. An attractive town on the Exe estuary, Topsham offers river walks, beautiful wildlife, a quaint Saturday morning market, many characterful shops and inns and a quiet space to sit and watch the sailing boats go by! ([www.topsham.org.uk](http://www.topsham.org.uk))

Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts is also a fan of the area, and is regularly seen driving in the lanes near his home in the tiny village of Dolton, north Devon.



*The famous chalk man resides in Dorset, as does Julian Fellowes*

Rumour has it too that Bafta-winning actress Carey Mulligan and husband Marcus Mumford, singer of folk-rock band Mumford and Sons, bought a farmhouse in Devon. ([www.visitdevon.co.uk](http://www.visitdevon.co.uk))

Julian Fellowes, Oscar-winning creator of Downton Abbey, lives in Devon's neighbouring county of Dorset. Famed for its huge naked chalk giant as well as being England's first Natural World Heritage Site and home to the largest hillfort in Europe, the TV writer is often spotted walking near the coast's magnificent cliffs with his beloved dogs. ([www.visit-dorset.com](http://www.visit-dorset.com))

### **WEST SUSSEX: Rockers retreat**

To see where rock 'n' roll history was made, head to West Sussex in the south of England. Since the 1960s, Rolling Stone Keith Richards has owned Redland House, in West Wittering, infamously known as the location of the 1967 drugs bust in which he and Mick Jagger were arrested and Marianne Faithful was led away wearing only a fur bed cover! ([www.westsussex.info](http://www.westsussex.info))

### **GODALMING, SURREY: Celebrity central**

The charming town of Godalming in Surrey – or celebrity central as it has been dubbed – is at the heart of a group of villages, all within a nine-mile radius of the town, which have become home to rock royalty including Ringo Starr and Eric Clapton. ([www.godalming-tc.gov.uk](http://www.godalming-tc.gov.uk))

Only 30 minutes from London, the unspoiled countryside around the town in the south east of England has proved attractive to celebrities looking for an easily accessible escape. For a chance of spotting your favourite star, head to the White Horse pub where they can often be found enjoying a tipple. ([www.whitehorsepub.net](http://www.whitehorsepub.net))

### **WALES: A royal refuge**

The beautiful scenic Gower Peninsula in south Wales caught the eye of Hollywood star and Welsh native Catherine Zeta Jones who owns a home in Mumbles near Swansea, just over an hour's drive from the Welsh capital Cardiff.

From pop royalty to actual royalty, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge famously set up home on the island of Anglesey, off the north-west coast of Wales; the winding lanes and spectacular coastline that can be reached from Manchester in under three hours by car proved to be a breath of fresh air as the Royal couple lived there relatively undisturbed. ([www.visitwales.com](http://www.visitwales.com))

### **SCOTLAND: A-list hideout**

Hollywood A-listers Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie are renowned Anglophiles who enjoy holidaying with their family when they are filming in Britain. They were spotted staying at Carnell Estate, in Ayrshire, Scotland, during the filming of *World War Z*. The area - around an hour's train journey from Glasgow - is home to glorious walks in the Highlands, miles of unspoiled coastline and many golf courses. ([www.carnellestates.com](http://www.carnellestates.com))

Another favourite A-list retreat is Skibo Castle (meaning Fairyland of Peace), which is renowned for tasteful elegance and all-out pampering. The hotel, hidden deep within the Scottish Highlands, is the epitome of refined luxury and has hosted celeb weddings including Madonna's marriage to Guy Ritchie. It's now a members-only club so if you want to see it you'll have to join the waiting list. ([www.carnegieclub.co.uk/index.html](http://www.carnegieclub.co.uk/index.html))

### **NORTHERN IRELAND: Fantasy land**

Elijah Wood enjoyed a trip to the stunning coastline near Belfast, where popular TV show *Game of Thrones* is filmed. A huge fan of the programme, the actor enjoyed sitting on the Iron Throne and even bought a Winterfell candle to commemorate his trip.

Follow in his footsteps by exploring the rugged grasslands, mountain waterfalls and dazzling coastal road with majestic cliffs, golden sands and the unique glory that is the Giant's Causeway, where 40,000 basalt columns create an eerie landscape jutting into the ocean. ([www.causewaycoastandglens.com](http://www.causewaycoastandglens.com))



*Atmospheric Northern Ireland was chosen as the set for Game of Thrones*

## Countryside Chic: Get the celebrity look

The A-list love embracing the great outdoors by wearing all things heritage inspired, from tweeds to tartan. For a weekend away in the British countryside, classic country staples by these cool British brands will keep you cosy on long walks and looking stylish in the country pub.

**Joules:** Originally selling at equestrian events, the brand has grown to be a favourite among the countryside set who love their colourful, yet practical, clothing. ([www.joules.com](http://www.joules.com))

**Hunter:** Wellington boots are essential for muddy country walks and Hunters are the brand of choice for the fashion conscious, including Kate Moss. ([www.hunter-boot.com](http://www.hunter-boot.com))

**Barbour:** The traditional wax jacket by Barbour are perfect for practical, yet cool, cover-ups. ([www.barbour.com](http://www.barbour.com))

**Burberry:** This heritage brand, a favourite with model-of-the-moment Cara Delevigne, leads the global fashion scene and its iconic tartan pattern on the inside of a classic trench is the perfect countryside coat. ([www.burberry.com](http://www.burberry.com))

**Mulberry:** The only bag to be seen carrying into rustic country pubs à la Duchess of Cambridge. ([www.mulberry.com](http://www.mulberry.com))

**Pringle of Scotland:** This Scottish brand is known for its high-quality knits and famous fans including David Beckham, who has admitted that one of his favourite hobbies since retiring from professional football is a long walk around the British countryside. ([www.pringleScotland.com](http://www.pringleScotland.com))

**Peregrine:** Originally set up in 1901 by the great-grandfather of the current owner, Peregrine's modern take on classic knitwear pieces and waxed cotton jackets are perfect for country walks and boast a high level of craftsmanship. ([www.peregrineclothing.co.uk](http://www.peregrineclothing.co.uk))

**Cherchbi:** An accessories brand that makes bags from Northern Irish cowhide and tweed woven from the wool of Herdwyck sheep. ([www.cherchbi.com](http://www.cherchbi.com))

**Private White VC:** A menswear label inspired by family heritage and born out of a devotion to British manufacturing, they produce quality everyday menswear using the finest British materials and craftsmanship. ([www.privatewhitevc.com](http://www.privatewhitevc.com))

**Heritage Research:** The 'Handmade in England' brand for men for whom looking cool and cutting edge is of the utmost importance, whatever the weather and terrain. ([www.heritageresearch.co.uk](http://www.heritageresearch.co.uk))



*Cherchbi bags - practical and pretty all at once*

## Countryside by public transport

Who said you need a car to get to beautiful places? More often than not in Britain, the train or bus will transport you into the heart of nature in an hour or two, meaning you can easily combine the urban and rural on your visit. We've put together ideas for short country getaways - day trips and one-night stays - from major gateway cities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It is usually a lot cheaper to book rail tickets in advance, and to travel on an 'off peak' ticket (departing after 9.30am). See [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk) for train times and prices.

### FROM LONDON

London is the ultimate city for urban buzz - but when you need a break from shopping, sightseeing and people, there are plenty of places all around the capital primed to sooth you.

#### Due South

The South Downs National Park is within striking distance of the capital, yet feels like a world away. It's 1,600 square kilometres of rolling hills, ancient woodlands, cosy pubs and fresh air. There are plenty of entry points into the park by train.

**Hassocks** is a good location for cyclists (just under an hour from London Victoria and London Bridge stations) with a community cycle hire centre directly outside the station. There are five circular cycle routes recommended that range from eight miles/13 km to 14.5 miles/23 km, so you can pick the route to suit your level. Two of the routes take you to Ditchling, a cute village with a pub well worth stopping for lunch at, The Bull. It's a great hotel if you want to stay the night - it featured in *The Sunday Times* 'Ultimate 100 British Hotels' and its 'Top 10 Best Pubs to stay at in the UK'. An off-peak day return costs £21.90

[www.hassockscommunitycyclehire.com](http://www.hassockscommunitycyclehire.com), <http://thebullditchling.com>

*Tip* - try some local tipples. The South Downs has the same chalky subsoil found in the Champagne region of France, so it's no wonder the area's sparkling wines are developing a reputation for excellence - the Ridgeview Winery is just up the road from The Bull in Ditchling, and its gold-medal sparkling wine is a treat. The pub also stocks great local real ales made at Sussex breweries.

A nice day trip or overnight stay suited to those who prefer strolling to cycling is **Arundel**, 90 minutes from London. Wander five minutes from the station into town and visit the



*Arundel is a breath of fresh air from the big city*

stunning Norman castle, browse the antique shops on the beautiful old high street and wander along the splendid River Arun. If you want to stay overnight, travel five minutes further on the train to the next stop, **Amberley**. Here you're right in the middle of the National Park, in one of its prettiest villages, complete with thatched cottages and an atmospheric castle that doubles as a luxury hotel. You can get onto the South Downs Way, a trail that runs through the whole National Park, by climbing up Amberley Mount, a steep escarpment that takes you so high you can sometimes

see the gliders of the local gliding club dipping and diving beneath you! An off-peak day return to Amberley costs £23.70; to Arundel £28.90.

[www.amberleycastle.co.uk](http://www.amberleycastle.co.uk)

*Tip:* Go in winter and you'll see the special sight of the mist over the River Arun, which is best seen on the train line between Arundel and Pulborough (Amberley's in the middle). The line takes you through countryside that cars can't easily access, through flooded fields and the aptly named Amberley Swamp - you can then return to your castle for a warming hot chocolate!

There are plenty more places to access the South Downs, including **Eastbourne** at its easternmost point - go there to marvel at Beachy Head, Britain's highest sea cliff and a marvellous cross section of the country (90 minutes' journey from London Victoria, £31.40 for an off-peak day return). For more information on the South Downs see [www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoying](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoying)

### Commute to Kent

Lots of Brits choose to make their money in London and their life in Kent, preferring the picturesque countryside for their evenings and weekends. Kent is only an hour or so on the train so it's the perfect choice for visitors based in the capital who wish to do the reverse, dipping into the countryside while on their trip.

Kent is home to some beautiful historic properties and castles, one of which has been dubbed 'the loveliest castle in the world'. Despite its name, **Leeds Castle** *is* in the region of Kent (not the north of England in the city of Leeds!), and you can hop on the train from London Victoria and find yourself at Bearsted station in just over an hour. From there, it's a short shuttle bus (running April to September) to the castle. The property will thrill history lovers, or those just keen to see a 'proper' castle with a moat! If the walls could talk...six medieval queens and Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon would have given it plenty to say! An off-peak day return to Bearsted from London costs £17.50.

[www.leeds-castle.com](http://www.leeds-castle.com)

*Quirky!* Leeds Castle is home to a very unique museum, devoted to dog collars! The only one of its kind, the collection spans five centuries of canine couture (closed until late Spring 2015).

A few miles west of Leeds Castle is **Hever Castle**, which was the childhood home of another of Henry VIII's wives, Anne Boleyn, and there's no doubting its castle status - it's double-moated! There is also a water maze as well as a more traditional maze, which kids especially love. Take the train 40 minutes from London Bridge to Edenbridge, and then a short taxi, or else you can get to Hever station in the same time and walk one mile to the castle. An off-peak day return costs £11.90.



*Hever Castle, the childhood home of Anne Boleyn*

*Make a night of it:* If you want to spend even longer at Hever you can stay in apartments or luxury bed and breakfasts in the grounds.

[www.hevercastle.co.uk](http://www.hevercastle.co.uk)

Head for romance in **Whitstable**, fuelled by those aphrodisiacs, oysters. The fishing and harbour town is peppered with art galleries and independent shops, but above all a haven for seafood lovers. Wheelers Oyster Bar in the heart of town is famous for good food - you can't miss it, the façade is a garish salmon pink colour. The menu and décor inside are simple, with six starters, six mains and six desserts. There's no license, so you can bring your own wine. Whitstable is one-and-a-half hours from London Victoria. An off-peak day return costs £27.80.

[www.wheelersoysterbar.com](http://www.wheelersoysterbar.com)

## **FROM MANCHESTER**

The city of Manchester has plenty to offer, so you may just forget to sleep it's so exciting. Recharge your batteries in some dramatic nearby National Parks - the Lake District and the Peak District are easy to get to from Manchester.

### **Lake District**

One of the most progressive regions in terms of sustainable transport, the Lake District is most definitely possible to do 'car-free', and there are countless websites and blogs devoted to exploring the area on public transport. Many Mancunians (the name given to Manchester residents) take to the lakes on the weekend, and with fantastic rail connections it's easy to do a trip in a day or overnight. The eastern side of the district is home to **Windermere**, reached by train from Manchester in less than two hours. From there, you can take a cruise on the largest lake in England, or else hire your own boat and do it yourself. Mountain Goat Tours run excellent trips that enable visitors to see it all, but without the car, departing from Bowness-on-Windermere and taking in Beatrix Potter's house Hill Top, William Wordsworth's school and the pretty village of Hawkshead. The company runs a variety of guided tours of the Lakes, reaching every corner of the National Park ([www.mountain-goat.co.uk](http://www.mountain-goat.co.uk)). See [www.golakes.co.uk/travel/bus-itinerary-windermere.aspx](http://www.golakes.co.uk/travel/bus-itinerary-windermere.aspx) for info on exploring the Lakes from Windermere using local buses, should you not wish to go on an organised tour. An off-peak day return costs £23.40.

### **Peak District**

The Peak District, another of Britain's 'breathing spaces', as National Parks are known, is geographically much closer to Manchester than the Lakes. Less well-known to tourists, it's nevertheless very popular with walkers, cyclists and romantics - the 2005 version of *Pride and Prejudice* was filmed in the Peaks. The area has great rail connections to Manchester, on the charmingly named Hope Valley Line, which runs through the High Peak area, stopping at various stations in the park, including the pretty villages in the Derwent, Hope and Edale valleys. Get off at **Edale** to get stuck into some walking in characteristically dramatic Peaks terrain: it's the starting point for the Pennine Way walking trail, and offers low level ambles and more challenging hikes.

[www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/pennine-way)

*Pride and Prejudice*/Colin Firth fans should head straight to **Lyme Park**, a short walk from Disley station (30 minutes from Manchester by train), which is where the famous shot of Darcy emerging from the lake was filmed in the 1995 BBC adaptation of the book. The



*The sunsets are worth getting the later train back for at Whitstable*

house itself is grand and beautiful, and the grounds are good for deer-spotting. An off-peak day return costs £6.10.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lyme-park](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lyme-park)

**Buxton** is a beautiful spa town, reached by an hour's straight train ride from Manchester that takes on some of the steepest railways - and prettiest scenery - in the country. Once you're there, admire the Crescent, inspired by the Royal Crescent in Bath, take in tropical plants at the exuberant Pavilion Gardens and, if you want to stay in the (reportedly) oldest hotel in England, you can book in at the Old Hall, where Mary Queen of Scots stayed, and even scratched her famous couplet '*Farewell to Buxton*' with a diamond ring on one of the window panes. An off-peak day return costs £10.10.

[www.oldhallhotelbuxton.co.uk](http://www.oldhallhotelbuxton.co.uk)

The Peak District has a comprehensive bus network across the National Park that links with railway services at major centres including Buxton. Bus tickets often entitle you to reductions across attractions in the National Park.

[www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/visiting/publictransport/peakconnections](http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/visiting/publictransport/peakconnections)

*Tip:* Music lovers should board the 'Folk train' from Manchester to Glossop or Hathersage. Local folk musicians play on the train, and when it reaches its destination, passengers are all invited to get out and hear more music in a local pub.

[www.hvhptp.org.uk/folktran.htm](http://www.hvhptp.org.uk/folktran.htm)

## **Newcastle**

If you're visiting the north east of England's buzzing city of Newcastle, you may have been shopping, clubbing and indulging your arty side - want to go back in time and encounter some greenery for a bit of a change of scene? **Hadrian's Wall** is one of Britain's most popular sites, yet it is possible to visit the northernmost frontier of the Roman Empire and feel totally alone. It might be to do with the fact it stretches the width of the country! Get to the Wall by bus, the aptly named AD122 - the year construction work on the wall began - which departs Newcastle daily in the summer months, getting to Housesteads 90 minutes later. From there it's an easy walk to the topmost part of the Wall at Hotbank Crag. Look south, and the land is neatly farmed and resembles a patchwork quilt - look north and it's far wilder and more barren, making the Wall feel like a real frontier. The same journey can be made from Carlisle, which is just north of the Lake District. A one day ticket costs £9.

[www.visithadrianswall.co.uk/hadrians-wall-country/ad122-hadrians-wall-country-bus](http://www.visithadrianswall.co.uk/hadrians-wall-country/ad122-hadrians-wall-country-bus)

## **FROM BELFAST**



*The Carrick-A-Rede rope bridge is a thrilling prospect, even more so on a windy day!*

The capital of Northern Ireland may have entertained you with its lively music scene, filled your arms with shopping bags at its boutiques, and absorbed you with its history - but when you want to discover a legend and geological phenomenon in one place, or else head for green mountains, you're well placed to set off and explore.

## Causeway Coast

The Causeway Coast, the north coast of Northern Ireland, is home to UNESCO World Heritage Site the **Giant's Causeway**. Whether created by the legendary giant, or by geological phenomenon - there are lots of theories for the stones' formation - the hexagonal basalt columns are mesmerising and dramatic. Take the Antrim Coaster (Ulsterbus Service 252), which calls at the Giant's Causeway. Further bus services, like the Causeway Rambler (Ulsterbus Service 402) connect the Causeway with the thrilling Carrick-A-Rede Rope Bridge, atmospheric Dunluce Castle and the Bushmill's Whiskey Distillery.

*Make a night of it:* Stay at the four-star Bushmill's Inn and while the night away sipping the (very) locally made whiskey, dining sumptuously and enjoying live music in the bar.

[www.bushmillsinn.com](http://www.bushmillsinn.com)

## Mourne Mountains

Narnia was said to have been inspired by the **Mourne Mountains**, which lie south of Belfast - the author of the Narnia stories, CS Lewis, was born in Belfast, and wrote of the mountains: 'I have seen landscapes, notably in the Mourne Mountains and southwards that under a particular light made me feel that at any moment a giant might raise his head over the next ridge.' If you too would like to get a sense of the mythical and magical, get the Ulsterbus Goldline 237 from Belfast to Newcastle (which takes just over an hour), then you can pick up The Mourne Rambler (also known as Ulsterbus Service 405). It takes you to stops whose names seem worthy of stories themselves, including Trassey Road, for Hare's Gap, Ott Mountain, Silent Valley, Bloody Bridge and Maggie's Leap. Get off at Silent Valley for a walk at two impressive, huge reservoirs - there's a path to follow, or else Heritage, Challenge or Nature trails. The Mourne Rambler runs in the summer months. Buy a Freedom of Northern Ireland ticket, available from stations, which offer unlimited travel on all Translink services.

[www.discovernorthernireland.com/Getting-Around-A84](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com/Getting-Around-A84)

## FROM EDINBURGH AND GLASGOW

Edinburgh and Glasgow are Scotland's biggest cities - the former known for its famous festivals and the latter a UNESCO Heritage city of music. The chances are, both cities will entertain you and maybe give rise to some late nights - the perfect excuse to escape to Scotland's countryside, a side of the country that will stir your soul and put colour in your cheeks (especially if accompanied by a dram of whisky...). Edinburgh and Glasgow are connected by an hour's train journey, so you can reach the destinations below from either city.

## Loch Lomond

Scotland's first National Park, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, covers a large stretch of land north of Glasgow, but its centrepiece, Loch Lomond itself, is within easy reach of the city by train. The southernmost point of the Loch is Balloch, connected by a 40-minute train that departs half hourly. You can get hire canoes and pedaloes there, or else bikes, but if you prefer to seek the path less travelled, use Balloch as your starting point to get to the more tranquil eastern side of the Loch. Buses depart every two hours from Balloch to



*Beautiful Loch Lomond - escape for a day of lake-side living*

Balmaha, a sweet lochside village 25 minutes' drive away. It's the ideal place to appreciate the beauty and tranquillity of the area and, when here you can say you stood on the boundary between the Highlands and the Lowlands - the village lies on the fault line. Walkers can get onto the West Highland Way from here - the trail stretches all the way to the foot of Ben Nevis, the country's highest mountain - though to get there on foot you'll need about a week. An off-peak one-way ticket costs £4.

*Tip:* Loch Lomond has 37 islands, many of which are privately owned, and four of which (Inchtavannich, Inchmurrin, Inchcruin and Inchfad) still receive their post by mail boat. You can board the boat for a leisurely Loch morning and, in the summer months, have an hour's stop over on the island of Inchmurrin for lunch. The same company also hires out boats for you to explore independently - take yours with a picnic to Inchailloch, managed by Scottish Natural Heritage, which has a fun two-mile signposted walking trail you can follow.

[www.balmahaboatyard.co.uk](http://www.balmahaboatyard.co.uk)

*Tip:* Scottish Natural Heritage has a free app that will take you on a journey of discovery around Scotland. If you're travelling by train to Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park from Glasgow or Edinburgh, you can get to know your surroundings by listening to the rich history of the landscape that is all around you. You can download the app here [www.snh.gov.uk/enjoying-the-outdoors/year-of-natural-scotland-2013/view-from-the-train](http://www.snh.gov.uk/enjoying-the-outdoors/year-of-natural-scotland-2013/view-from-the-train)

## The Isle of Arran

You may not think you can get to Scotland's famed isles in just a day trip, but you'd be wrong! Buy a Rail & Sail ticket from Glasgow to Brodick, on the Isle of Arran, which gets you there in just two hours (roughly an hour on the train and an hour on the boat). Once you're there, you've the whole island to explore - but don't worry, it's only 50km from top to bottom. Often described as 'Scotland in miniature', Arran has it all, from castles, ancient standing stones, quaint villages and pubs, as well as plenty of wildlife and stunning landscapes. If you're tempted to spend the night on the island, the Visit Arran website lists plenty of options, including hotels, bed and breakfasts, self-catering and camping. A return Rail and Sail ticket to Brodick usually costs around £20.

[www.visitarran.com](http://www.visitarran.com) <http://www.scotrail.co.uk/railsail>

## FROM CARDIFF

### Brecons by train

From Cardiff, take the train for just 40 minutes and you're in beautiful Abergavenny, which lies on the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park. If you're lucky enough to be visiting in Autumn, you should catch the Abergavenny Food Festival, one of the best in Britain and a hotspot for anyone with an interest in eating. Even if you don't come for the festival, there are plenty of great places to eat, including the weekly market on a Tuesday, for those who like to graze on local produce, or for a sit-down meal head to The Angel Hotel, a pub that also focuses on local fare.

If you're into cycling, you could take on the Black Mountains and ride from Abergavenny to the book town of Hay-in-Wye at the top of the National Park - it's a 21 mile (just under 40km) route. When you get there, reward your efforts with a meal at the Three Tuns restaurant and bar, which has seen its fair share of celebrities eat within its 16th-century walls, but despite its starry guests, retains the feel of a homely country pub. An anytime day return to Abergavenny from Cardiff costs £13.90.

[www.three-tuns.com](http://www.three-tuns.com)

*Tip:* If your decision to go car free is for ecological reasons, you can rent a car guilt-free to explore the Brecons. The Angel Hotel offers two-seater electric Renault 'Twizys' as part of its two-night 'green and groovy' package.

[www.angelabergavenny.com](http://www.angelabergavenny.com)

### **Brecons by bus**

Dubbed 'the route with a view', the T4 bus that departs daily from Cardiff is designed to show you the beauty of the Brecon Beacons in a day. It takes you to six of the National Park's main attractions, including the market town of Brecon itself, the spa towns of Builth Wells and Llandrindod Wells, with plenty of walking opportunities on the way. The bus itself is kitted out with leather seats and free Wifi! Take a look at the map, with suggestions of where to go here [www.trawscymru.info/leaflets/2014-04-28-29-1-2155-t4-route-6m.pdf](http://www.trawscymru.info/leaflets/2014-04-28-29-1-2155-t4-route-6m.pdf).



*The Brecon Beacons lie before you on the 'route with a view' T4 bus*

## Soft adventure - enjoying the outdoors

Want to try something new, but not looking for an activity that's too strenuous? From culinary classes to wine tours, to gentle pursuits such as walking, bird-watching and fishing, Britain offers plenty of soft-adventure possibilities.

### Superb for seniors

Join an **English Vineyard Walking Weekend** and discover the delights of the South Downs, in Sussex, an hour by train from London. Stroll off the beaten track for five to ten miles each day, stopping for exclusive tastings at some of England's best wine estates. Summer/autumn dates, from £635pp. [www.winetours.co.uk](http://www.winetours.co.uk)

Sandwich in Kent, two hours by train from London, is home to top sites for **birdwatchers**, including the Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, which is set in a unique sand dune habitat, while the Sandwich and Pegwell Bay Nature Reserve is of international importance for its waders and wildfowl. These are best seen over winter, or during spring and autumn migrations ([www.visitkent.co.uk](http://www.visitkent.co.uk)). Other top spots for birdwatching include the RSPB's Belfast Lough Reserve; just ten minutes' drive from the capital city, it consists of a lagoon and mudflats on the shores of Belfast Lough, backed by grassland. [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com)



*The Boudicca Way - stroll through some of the prettiest parts of England*

Gently explore one of England's prettiest pockets: a two-hour train journey north of London, Norwich, in Norfolk, is at one end of the award-winning long-distance footpath, the **Boudicca Way**. Beginning at the railway station and continuing to the town of Diss, it's divided into four sections that pass quaint market towns, historic sites and spectacular scenery. [www.boudiccaaway.co.uk](http://www.boudiccaaway.co.uk)



*Navigate the night sky on an Astronomy Evening in the Brecon Beacons International Dark Sky Reserve*

Learn how to observe the night sky on a **Dark Skies Astronomy Evening** in the Brecon Beacons National Park, Wales, just two-and-a-half hours by train from London. Held on one of only five accredited International Dark Sky Reserves, the course teaches participants about the familiar constellations and how to use binoculars and telescopes to navigate with star-maps. Winter and spring, £55pp. [www.gooddayout.co.uk](http://www.gooddayout.co.uk)

### Cosy for couples

Tap into the 'glamping' trend and **snuggle up in Nink's Wagon**, a vintage Showman's Wagon. Set in 60 acres of tranquil private grounds, in Ellesmere, Shropshire - it's around 90 minutes' drive from Manchester - it dates from the 1920s and retains original features such as intricate interior paintwork. Its peaceful lakeside location offers plenty of opportunities for wildlife spotting while sitting around your own fire pit in a garden illuminated by fairy lights. Sleeps two, from £182 for two nights. [www.qualityunearthed.co.uk](http://www.qualityunearthed.co.uk)

Head to the Hills organises a number of wild-water swimming packages in the Lake District in Cumbria, two hours' drive from Manchester. Try the Windermere Wild Swimming Weekend, where you can slip on your wetsuits and make the most of your romantic surroundings, taking dips in one of England's most beautiful lakes (July to September, from £299pp [www.headtothehills.co.uk](http://www.headtothehills.co.uk)). Other top wild-swimming destinations include Waterfall Woods, Brecon Beacons, south Wales, a network of falling water and forest lidos and the Faerie Pools on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, a six-hour drive north of Glasgow. [www.breconbeacons.org](http://www.breconbeacons.org), [www.wildswimming.co.uk](http://www.wildswimming.co.uk)



*Wild swimming - literally immerse yourself in beautiful surroundings!*

What better way to take in 360° views of some of the natural wonders of south-west England than from a **hot-air balloon**? Take off from Salisbury, Wiltshire, just over two hours' drive from London, and sip Champagne as you drift over some of the region's most spectacular scenery. From £99pp ([www.ballooning.co.uk](http://www.ballooning.co.uk)).

Commemorate the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare by walking **Shakespeare's Way**. The route stretches from the dramatist's hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon, two hours' train journey from London, to Shakespeare's Globe theatre in the capital. Stroll footpaths, bridleways and towpaths at your own pace, stopping overnight along the way. Seven nights, from £535pp, including a book of Shakespeare's sonnets. [www.celtic-trails.com](http://www.celtic-trails.com)

### Good for groups



*Forage with the experts in Gloucestershire*

Head to Gloucestershire, about three hours' drive north west of London, for a **foraging trip**, led by mushroom and foraging expert Raoul Van Den Broucke. Based at the historic Tudor Farmhouse Hotel, you'll scour the Forest of Dean and the Wye Valley for delicious ingredients. [www.tudorfarmhousehotel.co.uk/foraging.html](http://www.tudorfarmhousehotel.co.uk/foraging.html)

Award-winning organic Tour De Belfort winemaker Muriel Lismonde has brought a taste of her south-west France vineyard to leafy Hale in Cheshire, just 30 minutes by train from Manchester. She takes guests on an **insider's tour from the grape to the glass**, as well as teaching food and

wine pairing. Wine tastings, from £25pp, cookery classes from £36pp. <http://tour-de-belfort.com/index.php/le-vin-la-table>

Fancy a spot of peaceful **fly-fishing** on an exclusive stretch of the River Test in Hampshire, in the south of England? The Old Swan & Minster Mill in Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire, a two-hour drive from London, is in the heart of the Cotswolds. Catering to all levels, from beginner to experienced, this historic inn makes the best of its location on the banks of the River Windrush and hires rods for the day to all guests. Alternatively, book its two-night "Cast a Line" package for two people, from £495 per room. [www.oldswanandminstermill.com](http://www.oldswanandminstermill.com)



*You might make some four-legged friends on your Mourne Mountains cycle tour*

Take a **food cycle tour** in Northern Ireland, setting off from the Enniskeen Country House Hotel, County Down, one hour's drive south of Belfast. It offers gentle cycling, with the Mourne Mountains as its backdrop, stopping off at local producers to sample the best of the county's food and drink. £28pp, including bike hire, advance booking essential. <http://enniskeenhotel.co.uk/MourneFoodsCycleTrail.html>

### Fun for families

The New Forest, Hampshire, just 90 minutes south of London by train, offers 160km of approved cycle routes to suit all abilities. Follow peaceful country roads and old railway lines, passing historic villages such as Beaulieu and varied wildlife, including the famous New Forest ponies. Plan a day trip or make it a short break, including bike hire. (<http://www.thenewforest.co.uk/activities/cycling.aspx>)

If Go Ape's high-ropes are too challenging, then a **Forest Segway Safari** might be an easier option. Segways are a self-balancing, electric mode of green transport offering a gentle way to explore ten of England's best forest locations. Riders must be over ten years old and weigh more than 44kg, £30pp. [www.goape.co.uk](http://www.goape.co.uk)



*Forest Segway - once you've tried it, you'll want to take it home!*

Holnicote House lies at the heart of a 12,500-acre estate in the Exmoor National Park, near Taunton, in Somerset, about two-and-a-half hours south west of London by train and transfer. A choice of up to four **gentle guided walks** each day gives families the chance to spot red deer and ponies and to follow the cliff railway from Lynton to Lynmouth. Three to seven nights, throughout August 2014, adults from £325pp; children under 11 free; older children 50% discount. [www.hfholidays.co.uk](http://www.hfholidays.co.uk)

### Suitable for solos

Celebrate solitude on a **self-guided walking trip** across the Scottish Highlands. Starting at Fort William, a scenic three hours and 45 minutes by train from Glasgow, the Great Glen



*The Great Glen Way - find perfect solitude and let the views take your breath away*

Way takes hikers past the foot of Britain's highest mountain, Ben Nevis, skirts the shores of Loch Ness and ends in Inverness, Scotland's northernmost city. April to October, seven nights from £690pp. [www.sherpa-walking-holidays.co.uk](http://www.sherpa-walking-holidays.co.uk)

Single travellers can explore the beauty of Wales on two wheels on a guided group trip.

Saddle Skedaddle's **Road Cycling Weekend** is a moderate-level, four-day break that makes the most of the deserted roads in the hills of north-east Wales, one of Britain's premier areas for road cycling, about three hours' drive from Cardiff (from £355pp [www.skedaddle.co.uk](http://www.skedaddle.co.uk)). Meanwhile, Drover Holidays' Radnor Ring tour begins in Rhayader, just less than two hours by train from Cardiff. It follows a loop through mid-Wales, over three nights, and offers gentle cycling in tranquil surroundings, from £345. [www.droverholidays.co.uk](http://www.droverholidays.co.uk)

## Keeping Britain's land green and pleasant - eco-friendly holidays

Protect the environment and choose sustainable, energy saving trip options in Britain that will offset your carbon footprint. Whether it's an environmentally conscious five-star city hotel, an eco-friendly holiday village, organic produce or ethical attractions, there are plenty of ways to have an ecologically sound trip.

### Camping

Sleeping under the stars is one of the greenest choices available and Britain is peppered with good-quality campsites, many of which have taken steps to become even more eco-friendly. Camping is at the heart of **Comrie Croft** in Perthshire, central Scotland. While you can cook sausages and toast marshmallows over an open campfire with views over the hills or birch woods, its green credentials extend further with shower block lighting run from wind and solar power and a strong focus on reusing and recycling throughout its campsite.

[www.comriecroft.com](http://www.comriecroft.com)

**La Rosa**, a quirky campsite in the North Yorkshire Moors National Park, north England, has constructed everything from recycled, reclaimed and found objects since it began operating. Its 20-acre site, containing vintage and classic caravans, is designed to be low impact and environmentally aware. It's low energy - come evening there are candles and fairylights everywhere; it's low pollution - no chemicals or generators are used; and showers are taken in a converted byre (cowshed), with the option of an open-air bath in the orchard area. [www.larosa.co.uk](http://www.larosa.co.uk)



*Camping at Comrie Croft - sleep well knowing you're being as friendly to your surroundings as possible! © Comrie Croft*

### Glamping

Want to stay under canvas but still have home comforts? Then choose 'glamping'. **The Really Green Holiday Company**, based on the Isle of Wight, off the south coast of England, is home to seven luxurious yurts (teepees), where guests will find cooking utensils, proper beds, china and cutlery. As well as each yurt having its own outdoor cooking and seating area holidaymakers can use the "Dome", a large undercover tented area providing weather-proof cooking, eating and seating facilities and a communal area for guests to mingle. As well as ensuring its products are both ethical and sustainable, the company advocates responsible travel, arranging free transport to and from the Isle of Wight ferry terminal as well as discounted cycle hire and bus rover tickets - no need for a car! Plus there are miles of footpaths in the vicinity for walking and cycling holidays.

[www.thereallygreenholidaycompany.com](http://www.thereallygreenholidaycompany.com)

Go one step further and renounce modern-day gadgets during your holiday. **Eco Retreats** in central Wales provides yurts, private bathroom facilities - but absolutely no electricity or wi-fi. Instead, guests can appreciate the nature of the surrounding Dyfi Forest, and the 1,300-acre organic farm on which the site lies. Complementing the stunning



*An Eco Retreats yurt - who said eco-friendly couldn't mean luxury?!*

scenery is holistic therapy offered at the retreat- including twilight meditation. [www.ecoretreats.co.uk](http://www.ecoretreats.co.uk)

### Holiday villages

For zero-carbon holiday homes, head to Cornwall, in south-west England, where you'll find **The Emerald**, a small private holiday estate centred on five, luxury, purpose-built holiday properties designed to meet the toughest environmental standards on energy efficiency and sustainability. The Emerald features rainwater harvesting and smart water recycling systems, 150 native trees and its guests can make use of an indoor heated swimming pool, a tennis court, gymnasium, orchards, and enjoy the serenity of the koi carp lake. [www.emeraldcornwall.co.uk](http://www.emeraldcornwall.co.uk)

The beauty of staying at an eco-friendly holiday village is, of course, the surrounding nature. Guests staying at the **Kelling Heath** holiday park in Norfolk, east England - set among 250 acres of woodland - can take advantage of its 'eco-gym'. This trail through the forest offers natural 'stations' for pull ups, sit ups and balance beams. Guests stay in the park's eight eco-lodges and 34 luxury holiday homes - but can also bring their tents or caravans to pitch up on site. Whichever accommodation option you choose, everything is designed to be eco-friendly; the water in the shower buildings is heated by solar energy, and rainwater is collected for flushing the toilets while all taps and showers have reduced flow rate fittings to conserve water. Where lighting is needed it is low energy and the holiday village also hosts star parties for both the spring equinox and autumn equinox. The Village Store has a 'Naturally Norfolk' section to showcase locally-sourced products and reduce food miles. [www.kellingheath.co.uk](http://www.kellingheath.co.uk)

Across the five English **Center Parcs** locations - Whinfell Forest in Cumbria, north-west England, Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire, central England, Elveden Forest in Suffolk, east England, Longleat Forest in Wiltshire, west England, and Woburn Forest in Bedfordshire, south England - sustainability is key. As each of its villages is set in around 400 acres of natural woodland, Center Parcs aims to enhance and protect the natural environment; it has installed solar panels in three of its villages, champions recycling throughout and its newest village in Woburn, which opened last summer, will feature biomass district heating. [www.centerparcs.co.uk](http://www.centerparcs.co.uk)

### Hotels

You don't have to holiday in the fresh air to keep your carbon footprint to a minimum; eco-chic is prominent in accommodation from five-star hotels to charming inns. At the core of London's five-star **One Aldwych** is environmental friendliness from the vacuum-flushing lavatories and chlorine-free swimming pool to its LED lighting, responsible sourcing policy in its kitchens and bathroom amenities from natural range Plantation. [www.onealdwych.com](http://www.onealdwych.com)

Strict eco-guidelines are adhered to at Cornwall's luxury **Scarlet Hotel** in south-west England. As well as rain-water harvesting, a biomass boiler and its high use of recyclable and recycled materials, it also boasts a sea thrift roof - a local durable plant covering that reduces the heating and cooling loads of the hotel through its



*The Scarlet Hotel in Cornwall where a stay equals ultimate relaxation (and a minimal carbon footprint)*

insulating properties. [www.scarlethotel.co.uk](http://www.scarlethotel.co.uk)

Conserving energy is a priority for the **Mercure Bristol Holland House Hotel & Spa** in Bristol, west England. In addition to its sensor activated lights and guest recycling schemes it offers guests free bicycle rental as an eco-friendly way to explore the maritime city.

[www.mercure.com/gb/hotel-6698-mercure-bristol-holland-house-hotel-and-spa/index.shtml](http://www.mercure.com/gb/hotel-6698-mercure-bristol-holland-house-hotel-and-spa/index.shtml)

It's not only hotels in contemporary buildings that can offer energy efficient accommodation. The **Slieve Donard Resort & Spa** in the Northern Ireland town of Newcastle, an hour's drive south of Belfast, lies within a Victorian building, yet the hotel is decidedly modern in its sustainability programme. It boasts an electric car charging point, plus its luxury spa facilities are powered by a wood pellet boiler.

[www.hastingshotels.com/slieve-donard-resort-and-spa](http://www.hastingshotels.com/slieve-donard-resort-and-spa)

### **Conservation vacations**

Safeguard the future of the planet, meet new people and learn something new on a conservation holiday in Britain. **The National Trust**, for example, offers working holidays to travellers from the EU, where participants get to preserve the environment and British heritage. The holidays range from cleaning the spectacular beaches around the coastline to learning how to handle historic collections, archive material or put a historic house to bed at the end of the season, through to learning traditional skills such as hedge-laying, coppicing woodland, developing green wood work skills or making cider.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/holidays/working-holidays](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/holidays/working-holidays)

If your interest lies in protecting wildlife and marine life, help future generations of seals by surveying the seal population in Findhorn Bay on the north-eastern tip of Scotland; travel company **Responsible Travel** offers a wide range of this type of conservation holiday. Or help restore forestry to its natural glory - **Trees for Life** looks for volunteers to help it restore 1,000 square miles of Caledonian Forest, in the Scottish Highlands to the west of Loch Ness and Inverness back to wilderness. It also offers Wildlife Weeks for conservation volunteers who want to learn more and observe the Caledonian Forest's wildlife. [www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com), [www.treesforlife.org.uk](http://www.treesforlife.org.uk)

### **Sustainable attractions**

You might think that attractions use up a lot of electricity - but even roller coasters can be people-powered! **Greenwood Forest Park** in Snowdonia National Park, north Wales, has the Green Dragon family rollercoaster, a 20-person, five-car train travelling along a 250-metre track, including a 360 degree horizontal loop around a hill and through the woods. Greenwood is designed as a giant eco-playground, there's plenty of adventure play including mazes, archery, jungle boats and the Great Green Run - a 70-metre sledge run.

[www.greenwoodforestpark.co.uk](http://www.greenwoodforestpark.co.uk)

More family fun can be found at Cornwall's **Eden Project**. Nestled in the south-west of England, its two gigantic biomes are the largest conservatories in the world and are home to whole ecosystems - wander around the steamy jungles and waterfalls of the world's largest rainforest in captivity. Stunning garden displays, a Rainforest Aerial Walkway, and local, fair-trade food in its restaurants all add to the eco experience. [www.edenproject.com](http://www.edenproject.com)

To experience Scottish wildlife and see endangered animals of the world's mountain and tundra regions, head to the **Highland Wildlife Park**, located close to Aviemore in north-eastern Scotland. As well as indigenous wildlife such as red deer, pine marten, wildcat and red deer, wolves, lynx, beavers and wild horses, the park has expanded its species collection to fulfil its mission in conservation and now provides a home to rare animals of the world's mountains and tundra regions. You'll discover Amur tigers, snow monkeys, red pandas, Bactrian camels and Walker, its polar bear. [www.highlandwildlifepark.org.uk](http://www.highlandwildlifepark.org.uk)

Of course, all holidays need that relaxing element! If you want this, but want to remain environmentally conscious, the **Titanic Spa** in Yorkshire, north England, allows you to save the environment at the same time as treating yourself. Set within a traditional textile mill on the edge of the stunning Pennines, you can relax safe in the knowledge that the spa's 100m-deep water bore hole provides the water for the chlorine-free pool and showers. Those fluffy towels? Washed using energy efficient laundry systems. Spa products are organic and menus are packed with seasonal, organic produce. [www.titanicspa.com](http://www.titanicspa.com)

### **Getting around**

Keep your carbon footprint to the minimum and leave the car behind, exploring Britain's beautiful countryside, cities and towns by train, bus or bike! By using a BritRail GB, Scotland or London Pass you can take unlimited train travel, save money and save the environment. BritRail passes are available to purchase from the VisitBritain shop [www.visitbritain.shop.com](http://www.visitbritain.shop.com)

Cycling enthusiasts can easily explore the destination on two wheels; check out the National Cycle Network that covers 14,000 miles across the UK. [www.sustrans.org.uk/ncn/map/national-cycle-network](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/ncn/map/national-cycle-network)

### *Useful information*

[www.ecofriendlytourist.com/index.php/site-map/uk-accommodation](http://www.ecofriendlytourist.com/index.php/site-map/uk-accommodation)

[www.organicholidays.co.uk](http://www.organicholidays.co.uk), [www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk](http://www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk)

[www.greenholidaysinwales.co.uk](http://www.greenholidaysinwales.co.uk), [www.farmstay.co.uk](http://www.farmstay.co.uk)

[www.uniquehomestays.com/unique/search.asp?by=type&data=activity&activityID=7](http://www.uniquehomestays.com/unique/search.asp?by=type&data=activity&activityID=7)

## Britain's seasons - what to see year-round, from blossom to snow

The British countryside is a special place to visit whatever the time of year, thanks to the changing seasons. From winter in the snowy Scottish Highlands to summer on the sun-kissed beaches of England's south-west coast, spring in the lush mountains of Wales to autumn in the shady glens (valleys) of Northern Ireland, the rhythm and beauty of nature is evident in this landscape. Be sure to pack a warm coat in winter, a raincoat in spring and autumn, sunglasses in summer...and an umbrella, just in case!

### Spring - blossoms and bluebells (mid-March to mid-June)

By mid-March, hearts lift at the tell-tale signs that winter is over and the days begin to lengthen. A sure sign of spring is the explosion of **pink and white blossom** in Britain's orchards, particularly on cherry, apple and pear trees. Follow a blossom trail through one of Britain's horticultural hubs, such as the Vale of Evesham in England's Midlands, two-and-a-half hours by car north west of London ([www.blossom-trail.org.uk](http://www.blossom-trail.org.uk)). The sunny **daffodil**, Wales' national flower, also comes into bloom this season, with hosts of the yellow trumpets to see at Colby Woodland Garden in Wales, an hour and 45 minutes' drive west of Cardiff ([www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)). Another sign of spring are the thousands of delicate **bluebells** carpeting the floors of Britain's ancient woodlands, creating a blue mist that sweetly scents the air. There are around 1,300 bluebell woods in Britain, many with paths through them to follow. Glen Finglas in Scotland, 45 minutes by car north of Glasgow, Coed Cefyn in Wales, an hour's drive north of Cardiff, and Carnmoney Hill in Northern Ireland, 30 minutes by bus north of Belfast, are among many recommended by the charity the Woodlands Trust ([www.visitwoods.org.uk](http://www.visitwoods.org.uk)).



*Bluebells in Coed Cefn - cast your eyes over a sea of purple blooms*

**May Day** is the cultural highlight of this season, celebrated with festivals in country towns and villages across the nation. Watch the Morris dancers dressed in waistcoats and breeches, frockcoats and top hats, revive this medieval tradition, wielding handkerchiefs and jingling bells as they jig to folk tunes played on fiddles, pipes and drums ([www.themorrisring.org](http://www.themorrisring.org)). At the Jack in the Green festival in Hastings, on England's south coast, 90 minutes by train south of London, the dancing begins at dawn, traditionally on 1 May ([www.hastingsjack.co.uk](http://www.hastingsjack.co.uk)).

### Summer - beachcombing and music festivals (mid-June to mid-September)

Discussions about the weather in Britain reach a peak with the arrival of summer in mid-June, as the nation hopes for long, hot days. Nature is in full bloom, with bright-red **poppies** lighting up the lush green fields (the north Norfolk coast, three hours' drive north east of London, is nicknamed "poppyland" after its seas of red petals) and heaths and moors turning purple with **heather** (best seen on the North Yorkshire Moors National Park, two hours by car north east of Manchester). Enjoy bursts of yellow from the coconut-scented **gorse** - head to Brownsea Island, off England's south coast, two hours 30 minutes by car south west of London to see this in all its glory.

By late July, people head to the seashore with buckets and spades for building sandcastles and kids' fishing nets for scooping up creatures from rock pools for closer inspection. In Dartmouth, south-west England, just under five hours by car from London, Monty Halls, a former soldier turned writer, broadcaster and marine biologist, offers outdoor adventures called **Great Escapes**, ideal for embracing the summertime. These fun experiences include guided shore walks, where the dramatic marine ecosystem is enthusiastically revealed, and thrilling trips in an RIB speedboat out to sea to see the grey seals ([www.montyhalls.co.uk](http://www.montyhalls.co.uk)).



*Monty Halls Great Escapes - a fantastic way to embrace summer*

Summer is **festival season** with farmers' fields providing outdoor venues for little-known country shows and world-famous music concerts - from Glyndebourne, less than two hours' drive south of London, to Rock Ness on the shores of Scotland's Loch Ness, just over three hours by train from Glasgow. In the first week of August, thousands flock to the National Eisteddfod, which takes place in different locations around Wales (the Montgomeryshire and the Marches area in mid Wales will play host in 2015). This is the climax of the Welsh cultural calendar, celebrating the country, its language and culture, with music, dance and visual arts displays ([www.eisteddfod.org.uk](http://www.eisteddfod.org.uk)).

#### **Autumn - changing colours and food festivals (mid-September to mid-December)**

As the days shorten, consolation is found in the sheer beauty of nature as she prepares for winter. Low mists greet the morning and the sun burns golden red at sunset, while crisp star-filled skies cloak the night - **admire the heavens** in the Kielder Forest in Northumberland, officially the darkest place in England, two hours by car south of Edinburgh. Berries and fruits, nuts and mushrooms burst forth, making this an excellent moment to learn the art of **foraging** - try one of the sessions run by the Wild Food School in Lostwithiel, Cornwall, four hours by train from London ([www.wildfoodschool.co.uk](http://www.wildfoodschool.co.uk)), or head to Lime Wood in the New Forest, under two hours' drive from London, to spot the many edible varieties of mushroom amid the red carpet of fallen leaves and return to the five-star property to enjoy the fruits of your labour cooked by the Head Chef ([www.limewoodhotel.co.uk](http://www.limewoodhotel.co.uk)).

This is a time of arrival, too, as geese flee the Arctic wastes for these shores in their tens of thousands from September. Marvel at one of Britain's largest displays of wildfowl, when 400,000 **pink-footed geese** swoop on the marshlands of RSPB Snettisham in north Norfolk ([www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)). This is harvest time, too, and **food festivals** celebrate the bounty of the land, with workshops on how to turn it all into delicious dishes - two of the best can be found at Abergavenny in Wales, 40 minutes by train from Cardiff, and Ludlow, famed for its sausage and ale trails, on the England and Wales border, 90 minutes from Cardiff by train. In October, the leaves on the trees turn from green to brown through a thousand shades of red and gold. See stunning displays at the national arboretum at Westonbirt, just over an hour by train from London



*The Lewes bonfire - warm yourself as winter approaches!*

([www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)), and at National Trust properties including Sheffield Park Garden, an hour's drive from London, and Stourhead, two hours 30 minutes' drive from London ([www.nationaltrust.org](http://www.nationaltrust.org)).

The highlight of the season's calendar is **Bonfire Night** on 5 November, when Britain remembers Guy Fawkes' failed attempt to blow up the House of Lords in 1605. Huge bonfires and fireworks light up the sky, while traditional treats include chewy treacle toffee and buttery gingerbread. One of the biggest bonfires is held in Lewes on England's south coast, an hour by train from London ([www.lewesbonfirecelebrations.com](http://www.lewesbonfirecelebrations.com)).

### Winter (mid-December to mid-March)

The shortest day arrives on 21 December and the coldest weather begins to bite. Birds braving the perishing temperatures can be more easily spotted in the bare branches of trees, including the red-breasted robin, a harbinger of the Christmas season. The green holly leaf with its bright red berries, as well as mistletoe and ivy, adorns the landscape and Christmas decorations are now on sale in the many festive markets that set up stall through December around the countryside. Catch a traditional winter **fire festival**, such as Up Helly Aa, when men dressed as Vikings bearing flaming torches process through the towns and villages of Scotland's Shetland Islands, an hour and a half by air from Glasgow ([www.uphellyaa.org](http://www.uphellyaa.org)).

It's not until late January and February that the very first signs of new life appear, when the shy **snowdrop** raises its head through the frost-hardened ground. Eye-catching displays of these pure white drifts can be seen at Fountains Abbey in northern England, just under two hours' drive from Manchester, and other historic properties run by the National Trust around the country ([www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fountainsabbey](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fountainsabbey)).



*Snowdrops -signs of new life in the new year*

Embrace the snow and head for the Scotland's ski resorts, from a couple of hours' drive north of Glasgow, where skiers and snowboarders are increasingly attracted by short lift queues and substantial dumps of the white stuff in December and January ([ski.visitscotland.com](http://ski.visitscotland.com)).

## Eat, sleep and work (!) at Britain's busy farms

The British are a nation of farmers - almost three-quarters of the country's fertile soil has been put to work to produce delicious food and drink. In recent years, farmers have also been opening up their homes to give guests an authentic flavour of British country life, renovating barns and stables to create cosy retreats in charming rural surroundings. It's not just about a bed for the night; Britain's farmers are also catering for the growing taste for fresh, seasonal food that has made the short journey from farm to fork, with no added ingredients.

There are plenty of ways to enjoy the traditional and contemporary accommodation and dining experiences that Britain's farming community is offering to entice us down the country lanes. Here are some of the best.

### Sleep

#### **Get on top of the world at Bluebell Croft in the Highlands, Scotland**

The wilds of the Scottish Highlands, three hours drive from Glasgow, are the setting for this working croft (a type of Scottish farm) where countryside equals comfort. Two houses are available to hire, with well-equipped kitchens, spacious living areas and en-suite bedrooms - there's even a hot tub from which you can enjoy spectacular mountain views. You'll get a taste of the farm on arrival from the generous hamper prepared by the owners, which includes homemade scones and jam. Fruit, vegetables, meat and eggs from the croft are available to buy - order one of Chrissie's casseroles to give the cook a night off. Guests are encouraged to embrace life on the croft. Young children will love helping to collect fresh eggs for breakfast and seeing the newly hatched chicks. Rose Cottage, two bedrooms, from £720 per week, Honeysuckle Cottage, four bedrooms, from £1,440 per week ([www.bluebellcroft.co.uk](http://www.bluebellcroft.co.uk)).

#### **WWOOF at Old Sleningford Farm in North Yorkshire, north England**

A strong desire to show a low-impact way of life inspires this smallholding in the northern county of Yorkshire, two hours' drive from Manchester. A 17-acre plot on this farm is dedicated to sharing ideas and resources, with courses, events, and volunteer days laid on for all ages. Old Sleningford also runs weeks for WWOOFers from April to October - the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms scheme - when practical help is rewarded with food and accommodation, in a large bell tent. Get to work helping rear the pigs, sheep, chickens, geese, and turkeys, tending the beehives, growing food in the forest garden, curing meats, pressing apples and learning traditional crafts such as making willow chairs. Many activities are free, with some courses charged at low prices ([www.oldsleningford.co.uk](http://www.oldsleningford.co.uk)).

#### **Bake a cupcake at Harrop Fold Farm in Cheshire, north-west England**

This smallholding, set in a valley a 40-minute drive from Manchester, has been farmed for almost a thousand years. These days, the Stevenson family tends a small herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle, pigs and hens that provide the eggs served up at breakfast to visitors staying in the farmhouse's three guest rooms. But the



*Bake your own cupcake around the Aga oven, in the heart of the Cheshire countryside*

main attraction here is Leah's Pantry, where the Stevensons' daughter serves up 'food experiences', including a chance to roll up your sleeves and get baking for the day, making cupcakes and the even trendier cake pop. Gather around her traditional Aga oven with a glass of fizz in hand to watch and learn - and eat the mouthwatering results. Cupcakes Galore and Cake Pops Couture courses each cost £65 per person, Cookery Demo & Lunch/Dine £60; rooms from £50 per night ([www.harropfoldfarm.co.uk](http://www.harropfoldfarm.co.uk)).

### **Shear the sheep at Ty Gwyn Farm, central Wales**

Deep in the heart of Wales, two hours' drive north of Cardiff, Ty Gwyn Farm offers traditional farming pursuits for visitors. Be a farmer for a day, shearing sheep, helping with the calving, feeding the livestock and driving farm machinery. The farm has two lovely cottages to stay in - Granary Cottage, with its own lawn, and Straw Cottage, an unusual structure made of straw bales, with a roof insulated with sheep's wool, where you can leave modern life behind in the beautiful setting of a flower-filled meadow. Join a course for dry stone walling from £85; Granary Cottage, sleeps four, from £395 per week from May; Straw Cottage, sleeps four, from £600 per week from May ([www.tygwynfarm.co.uk](http://www.tygwynfarm.co.uk)).

### **Meet Dolly the cow at College Farm in Norfolk, east England**

Young families will delight in life at College Farm, three hours' drive from London. It's one of the farms featured in the Feather Down Farms collection of 31 independent smallholdings across the country that offer luxury camping - known as "glamping". At each farm, guests stay in Feather Down's signature super-size family tents, with a master bedroom for the adults and bunk beds for the kids, a kitchen with stove, a dining area hung with candlelit chandeliers...and your own private toilet! There are lots of farmyard friends for the children to make at College Farm, including cattle, horses and hens and Dolly the pet cow. Visit in August or September and your tent will be amid a glorious sea of sunflowers. Weekends from £399, midweek stays from £269, and week breaks from £499, April to October ([www.featherdown.co.uk](http://www.featherdown.co.uk)).

### **Go for gold at Barn Cottage in Cornwall, south-west England**

At the very tip of Cornwall, England's most south-westerly point, this organic farm sits in a peaceful hamlet near the rugged coast, five hours by train from London. Here they rear rare breeds, including Dexter cattle and Maran chickens, and look after a woodland of broad-leafed trees. But it's not all about tending the land. At this farmstay they offer the quite unusual chance to try your hand at goldsmithing. One of the owners is a goldsmith and, by special arrangement, you can learn how to work with this most precious metal. The lodgings stand out, too. Guests stay in a stylish three-bedroom barn conversion where attention to detail is evident. The space has been well designed with a large open-plan kitchen and dining room and large living room. Many furnishings have been handcrafted from wood, including oak tables and mahogany chests. From £362 per week. ([www.cornishcottagesonline.com/cottages-cornwall/Ruan/BarnCottage](http://www.cornishcottagesonline.com/cottages-cornwall/Ruan/BarnCottage)).

## **Eat**

### **Daylesford, Gloucestershire, central England**

To create good food you need to care for the land. That's the philosophy of the organic farmers behind one of Britain's favourite group of farm shops, the multi-award-



*Daylesford, learn to cook - or simply eat - organic treats in the heart of the Cotswolds*

winning Daylesford in Gloucestershire, two hours' drive from London. The organic food and drink on sale in its stores is sourced from its farm and artisan suppliers that are equally committed to quality and sustainability. As well as meat, produce and dairy, there's a cafe where you can sample delicious produce from the farm. For inspiration, Daylesford runs a cookery school with courses including 'From field to fork', 'Best of British' and new for 2015 'Eat to be Healthy' (all £175) and has published its first cookbook, *A Love For Food*. Stores are located at the farm and in London, with online orders also available. The farm has four cottages from £492 for a weekend break ([www.daylesford.com](http://www.daylesford.com)).

### Riverford Organics, Devon, south-west England



*Delicious - it's always fresh at Riverford Organics, whether you make it yourself or leave it to the experts*

Pull on a pair of Wellington boots and trample through the fields on a self-guided tour of the home of one of Britain's favourite suppliers of organic fruit and vegetable boxes. This farm, four hours' drive from London, is the nerve centre of a scheme that delivers produce direct from the farm to the nation's homes, championing fresh, seasonal fare. See for yourself the acreage of crops and taste the dishes concocted in the Field Kitchen restaurant, for lunch or supper, such as griddled butternut squash, walnut and blue cheese salad with home-made sourdough. ([www.riverford.co.uk](http://www.riverford.co.uk)).

### Bodnant Welsh Food Centre, Conwy, north Wales

Try a flavour of Wales at Bodnant Welsh Food, where you'll find a farm shop, tearoom, restaurant and cookery school dedicated to the region's fare, three hours by train from Manchester. The centre is as pleasing to the eye as the palate, set in beautifully restored agricultural buildings at Furnace Farm, on the historic 18th-century Bodnant estate. Among the artisan food showcased here is produce and livestock grown and raised on the



*Bodnant Farm's own cheese - try it on site, among dozens of other homegrown delights*

property, such as mountain lamb, butter and ice cream, as well as honey from the National Beekeeping Centre of Wales, which just happens to be located in the farmyard. Enjoy breakfast, lunch or a snack in the Tea Rooms, with views over the nearby river and hills. Or stop for dinner in the Haybarn Restaurant, where Welsh Black steaks are typical of the choices on the menu. The Cookery School runs various courses in a state-of-the-art kitchen - for young cooks as well as adults. There's bed and breakfast available at the farmhouse too, from £55 per night ([www.bodnant-welshfood.co.uk](http://www.bodnant-welshfood.co.uk)).

### Kilnford Barns, Dumfries, south-west Scotland

'Know the farmer, know your food.' That's the motto at Kilnford Barns, a 90-minutes' drive from Glasgow. It's a philosophy based on the fact that the owners, the Rome family, have been farming these pastures for 300 years and have always supplied the local community with meat, vegetables, milk and eggs. So why change now? Except these days, visitors come from far and wide to stock up in the farmyard shop, where the butcher's counter includes home-grown Galloway beef and grass-fed Blackface cross lambs (follow the nature trail to see them



*Some of the sights you might see on a visit to Kilnford Barns*

grazing). Enjoy a taste in the Kilnford Kitchen Café, which spills out onto a sun terrace in the warmer months. ([www.kilnford.co.uk](http://www.kilnford.co.uk)).

### **Ballylagan Organic Farm, County Antrim, Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland's first organic farm is just 20 minutes north of bustling Belfast by car – the Prince of Wales cut the ribbon when it opened in 1999. In those days, the 'shop' was the farm gate, today it's a specially built store bulging with organic beef, pork, chicken, eggs and seasonal fruit and vegetables grown and reared on this land untainted by artificial chemicals and hormones. By 2011, the farm had opened its Tea Room, where lunch choices includes gammon sandwiches from the farm's free-range pigs and afternoon teas feature home-made jams, all prepared fresh in the kitchen. Out in the field the conservation work continues. A recent project is a plot of newly planted woodland, which visitors can take a walk around. Stay the night, too, in the Guest House. Bed and breakfast is available from £95 per night ([www.ballylagan.com](http://www.ballylagan.com)).

## **Get lost in a forest**

Britain's most atmospheric green spaces are home to trees, wildlife and lots of the nation's history. From Robin Hood's stomping ground, Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire, to the



*Sherwood Forest park, where you can cycle, horseride and pretend to be Robin Hood*

forest at the end of London Underground's Central Line providing instant escape from city life, Britain's forests are worth heading to with a picnic and sense of adventure. There are many, with unique characters and things to do in them; here's a flavour of how to enjoy them.

### **Escape the city in Epping Forest, London/Essex, England**

Unusual because it is a large area of woodland and grassland right on the north-eastern fringes of London and partially spilling into England's capital; you can get there from central London on the underground's Central Line. Go straight from the Selfridges Food Hall at Oxford Circus, where you've picked up a gourmet picnic, and get off at Epping where you've swapped busy people for birds, trees and fresh air. Epping Forest was mentioned in the 11th-century land survey The Domesday Book.

[www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/eppingforest](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/eppingforest)

### **Star gaze in Galloway Forest, Dumfries & Galloway, south-west Scotland**

One of the best locations to stargaze in Scotland is Britain's first Dark Sky Park in Dumfries & Galloway, which was awarded the status in November 2009 by the International Dark Sky Association. The park, under a two-hour drive from Glasgow, is the largest forest park in Britain spanning 300 square miles and an area of outstanding natural beauty which offers almost unrivalled stargazing opportunities. VisitScotland has created a pocket guide for stargazers full of insightful tips and star-gazing packages.

[www.darkskyscotland.org.uk](http://www.darkskyscotland.org.uk)

## Take a gourmet retreat at the New Forest, Hampshire, south-east England

Despite its name, the New Forest is an ancient place. It was designated the “new hunting forest” almost 1,000 years ago by King William I and, in many ways, remains unchanged from that time. It’s a great place to explore on foot, by bicycle or on horseback, and when it’s time for some R&R it’s hard to beat The Pig. Describing itself as more of a restaurant with rooms than a hotel, what hasn’t been grown in the walled garden or foraged is sourced from within a 25-mile radius. There’s a spa in what was once a potting shed, and every room has a forest or garden view for the ultimate countryside getaway.



*Horseriding in the Blue Lagoon in the New Forest, one of England’s most beautiful and ancient woodlands*

[www.thenewforest.co.uk](http://www.thenewforest.co.uk), [www.thepighotel.com](http://www.thepighotel.com)

## See the planets at Kielder Forest, Northumberland, north-east England

More stargazing opportunities are on offer in England’s largest forest in north-east England, which covers an astounding 250 square miles. Head to the Kielder Observatory in the Forest Park and see galaxies in winter, and the Milky Way, comets and shooting stars in summer. The forest is also home to the country’s largest remaining population of rare red squirrels. Kielder is around a 90-minute drive from Newcastle.

[www.forestry.gov.uk/kielderforestpark](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/kielderforestpark), [www.visitkielder.com](http://www.visitkielder.com)

## Play at Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire, east Midlands, central England

Sherwood Forest is famous as the home of the legendary Robin Hood. He and his medieval outlaw band were said to have taken refuge here to resist the rule of the tyrannical Prince John. Today, the beautiful woodlands interspersed with heathland, less than an hour’s drive from the city of Nottingham, still call to mind the drama and magnificence of the story. Head over to the forest in August for the annual Robin Hood Festival.

[www.experiencenottinghamshire.com](http://www.experiencenottinghamshire.com)

## Tree-spotting at Tollymore Forest Park, Mourne Mountains, County Down, Northern Ireland

An atmospheric forest set in the heart of the Mourne Mountains – around an hour’s drive south of Belfast – that is open to the public all year round. There is a caravan and camping ground set within a mature wooded landscape, so take a few days to get to know a nature-lover’s paradise. There are lots of curious follies, like a barn dressed up as a church, and grottoes and caves dotted along the Shimna river that runs through. Trees include redwoods, pines, eucalyptus and monkey puzzles, and the oak wood from the forest went into the fittings of White Star liners including the *Titanic*.

[www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com)

## Meet native wildlife

There are plenty of places to spot wildlife in Britain, with a wealth of natural spaces for creatures large and small to roam, fly and buzz about in, as well as lakes, rivers and seas for those who prefer to swim. From species you'll only get in Britain to some you'll be surprised to find in the middle of London, here's a quick guide to our wildlife.

### Deer

You might think London is just for art galleries, shopping and clubbing, but you'd be wrong. There's a four-legged creature that brings a slice of the countryside to the capital, specifically in **Richmond Park**. The area was actually a deer-hunting park originally, and there have been deer roaming its grassy expanse since 1529. During autumn the deer 'rut' (breeding season) takes place and you might catch sight of red stags and fallow bucks competing for hinds and does. It's quite a spectacle: the large males roar, bark and clash antlers in a spectacular way to fight off their rivals and attract as many females as possible. Richmond Park is in south-west London and you can get the tube or train to Richmond station.

Another idyllic deer-spotting spot is **Magdalen Grove** in Oxford. One of the oldest, biggest and most famous of the Oxford colleges, Magdalen's grounds are splendid and tranquil. Its deer population is 300 years old and rumour has it the number of deer is equal to the number of Fellows at the College. Oxford is a two-hour bus ride from London or about an hour by train.



*Seal spotting on Blakeney, home to Grey and Common seals.*

### Seals

Britain is home to Grey seals and Common seals, and the most popular place to spot them is Blakeney in Norfolk, east England. From April to October you can catch a ferry from **Blakeney Quay** to the National Trust-run Blakeney Point, encountering lots of seals along the way. The animals are curious and friendly and it's fun to see them flopping about - you'll also have a good chance of seeing pups since both Grey and Common seals live in this part of Britain and

raise young at different times of the year. Blakeney is best accessed by car and is about three hours from London.

West Wales is home to about 5,000 Grey seals, mostly in **Pembrokeshire** and **Skomer Island** where you can also spot puffins. Around 160 seals are born there each year between September and December so go then for a guaranteed collective 'aaaah'. Pembrokeshire is around a two-hour drive from Cardiff, the capital of Wales; Skomer Island is a 15-minute boat ride from the mainland.

If you want to make friends with a seal, the **Orkney Islands'** population are known to be quite friendly, and will happily follow you around - especially if you whistle to them! The Orkney Islands are right at the top of Britain, and you can get there by air, or a combination of car/train plus ferry.

## Dolphins

Speaking of the Orkney Islands, if you want to spot dolphins, porpoises, Minke whales and even Humpback and Killer whales, you can do it all there too. See [www.visitororkney.com/cetaceans](http://www.visitororkney.com/cetaceans) for information.

## Birds

Birdwatching used to be seen as a less-than-trendy hobby, but in today's busy, technology-driven world many people are finding there's nothing more relaxing than swapping tweeting on your phone for 'twitching' with a pair of binoculars - the term given to birdwatching. One of the most interesting places to do it is Tresco, on the **Isles of Scilly**, off the south-western tip of England. October is the month to go, when rare and vagrant bird species flock to the island in phenomenal sums, with especially large numbers from North America. You can get to the Isles of Scilly by plane from Land's End in Cornwall (five hours from London by train) or else the ferry takes two-and-a-half hours.

Scotland is home to an abundance of birdlife, including some rather fashionable pink-footed geese, which you can see in the RSPB **Loch Leven Reserve** in Kinross, a two-hour drive north of Glasgow. Wales is home to some other colourful creatures, including the red kite, which had been eliminated from Britain except from a nearby isolated **Mid-Wales** valley. Thanks to conservation efforts the red kites were rescued from extinction and now you can catch them swooping over many parts of Wales, including the lovely Brecon Beacons National Park.

## Warthogs

Not native to Britain of course, but you might be surprised while jogging the length of Regent's Canal in north London from Kings Cross across to Paddington by the sight of snuffling warthogs sunbathing in their enclosure of the **ZSL London Zoo**, visible from the canal banks. You will also pass by the aviary, which was built in 1962 and has become a distinctive part of the city's architecture. It was also the first ever walk-through aviary to be built. Head into the zoo to see more exotic animals, including Sumatran tigers in the all new Tiger Territory enclosure, from April.

[www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo](http://www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo)

## Love nature? Go on a date with it!

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is running a fun programme called A Date with Nature; events set up for you to view birds and wildlife in their natural environment. From birds of prey swooping over your head, to rutting red deer and tiny chicks on nests, these events are run all over Britain, giving you a chance to get really close to some of the nation's most exciting wildlife. Choose the perfect time and place for your 'date' on the RSPB website and don't forget to wear appropriate clothes; it's a date after all!

[www.rspb.org.uk/datewithnature](http://www.rspb.org.uk/datewithnature)

## Dive down deep - scuba-diving in Britain

Discover the mystery of historic shipwrecks, the majesty of indigenous marine wildlife and some of the most spectacular scenery while scuba-diving off the British coast.

Armed with a wetsuit and a keen sense of adventure, you'll find exploring the seas of Britain brings manifold attractions. Safety is paramount, of course, and the British dive scene is well regulated, with the British Sub Aqua Club monitoring many of the dive operations. So don the mask, fins and scuba unit and jump in!

### South England

Pirates, smuggling, shipwrecks; it's the stuff of romantic legends around the rocky coasts and bays of **Cornwall, Devon and Dorset** in south-west England. With clear underwater visibility there's plenty of good diving off the coast of Cornwall, particularly around The Manacles, a marine conservation area. Here, you'll find shallow reefs, pinnacles and drop offs and, as the area is tidal, the marine life is diverse, ranging from jewel anemones to dead-man's fingers. Or explore the 3,800 ton steamship wreck, the *Enrico Parodi*, that sank in 1916 off the coast of St Ives, or



*Rainbows under the sea, in the Scilly Isles. Image courtesy of St Martin's Dive School*

the area around the Lizard Peninsula - this is one of the best sites in Britain for observing basking sharks, particularly in early summer.

Around the **Scilly Isles**, 28 miles off Land's End (the most westerly point of mainland England), the nearby gulf stream means the waters are crystal clear, perfect for viewing beautiful underwater landscapes of colossal underwater rock formations, reef walls, sponges and corals. You'll probably also be joined by a friendly seal or two.

**Lundy Island**, off the coast of North Devon, is also a big draw for divers. There are more than 40 dive sites of reefs and drop offs, plus eight shipwrecks, including the 1906 wreck of *HMS Montagu*.

Wreck enthusiasts should also check out the coastlines **Kent, Sussex and Hampshire** in south-east England; there are plenty of large wrecks. The *SS Moldavia*, which was a huge ship with 1,000 portholes, sank in 1918 during the First World War and lies 26 miles out into the English Channel at a depth of 45 metres, while the largest wreck off the Sussex coast, the *SS Alunina*, which sank in 1916, still has its 20ft/6m anchor hanging. Conger eels, starfish and dead man's fingers have taken up residence at the wreck.

*Getting there: It's just over five hours by train or car to St Ives in Cornwall and to reach the Scilly Isles, take the ferry from Penzance or the Skybus to the islands from Land's End, Newquay and Exeter airports.*



*Seal spotting in the Scillies. Image courtesy of St Martin's Dive School*

*Reach Lundy Island by boat from Bideford in north Devon, which is just over an hour's drive from Exeter International Airport or two hours from Bristol International Airport.*

*The Kent, Sussex and Hampshire coasts are around two hours' drive from London.*

## **North England**

With a coastline exposed to the North Sea it's small wonder that there is an abundance of wrecks lying on the seabeds off the north-eastern coast of England. While visibility can vary, the waters around the **Farne Islands**, off the coast of Northumberland, are pretty clear, good for exploring the shipwrecked *SS Somali*. Sunk in 1941 by a German bomber, divers may come across items such as cutlery, bottles and ingots. The 30 islands and rocky outcrops of the Farne Islands also make it rich in marine and bird life, and they are also home to one of the largest colonies of grey seals in Britain.

*Getting there: The nearest rail station is Berwick-upon-Tweed, around 45 minutes from Edinburgh or Newcastle. From there, take a bus, times depending on the prevailing tide. Holy Island is linked to the mainland by a long causeway.*

Favourable diving can be found off the shores of the **Isle of Man**, off the north-west coast of England. Good visibility means great conditions for spotting common seals and basking sharks, while for the wreck enthusiast, the regularly dived wreck sites here include the *Albatross* at 23 metres, the *Ballina* at 33 metres and the *Peveiril* at 40 metres.

*Getting there: Flights to the Isle of Man operate from Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London Gatwick, Luton, Liverpool, Manchester and Southampton international airports. Alternatively, there are ferry services from Liverpool and Belfast.*

## **Scotland**



*The breathtaking view of the Orkney Islands - but underneath is even more captivating*

Considered one of the best cold-water diving locations in the world, Scotland has many wrecks to keep divers captivated. Particularly popular are the wrecks of the German First World War High Seas Fleet, which were destroyed at Scapa Flow in the **Orkney Islands** in 1918. Another main wreck diving site is at **Oban**, plus this is the departure point for dives going out to the UNESCO World Heritage Site **St Kilda**, just over 40 miles west of the Outer Hebrides. Here, in one of the most remote places of Britain, you'll find spectacular scenic diving in clear waters.

Head to the **Isle of Skye** for diving around the dramatic sea stacks MacLeod's Maidens. Or, for some great shore diving, travel to St Abbs Marine Reserve off Scotland's North Sea coast where divers will spot the double archway of Cathedral Rock, just 50 metres offshore, teeming with marine life.

*Getting there: Fly to the Orkneys from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness or you can take passenger ferries from Aberdeen. Oban is just over two hours by car from Glasgow while you can reach the Isle of Skye by flying to Inverness in north Scotland and from there it's a three-hour drive.*

## Wales

**Anglesey** diving is among the best in Britain with a variety of wrecks and reefs attracting plenty of fish and marine life. Trearddur Bay and Holyhead are popular launch sites - the



*Getting ready to dive off the Pembrokeshire coast © Crown copyright (2013) Visit Wales*

wreck of *The Missouri*, lying at a depth of 14 metres in Trearddur Bay, was the largest vessel ever wrecked close inshore on the west coast of Anglesey - and the numerous coves around Holy Island make for great shore diving because they are protected from hazardous offshore currents.

**Pembrokeshire** in west Wales has its own Marine Nature Reserve at Skomer Island, one of only a few underwater reserves in Britain and, also off Skomer Island, divers can catch the wreck of *The Lucy*, a Dutch coaster that sank in 1967. Just along the rocks from this ship is the *Dead Eye Wreck* at a shallower depth of 15 metres, which lies close to a bay that attracts seals. Dolphins, porpoises, basking sharks and leatherback turtles are also regularly seen off the Welsh coastline.

For more information on diving in Britain, visit: [www.ukdiving.co.uk](http://www.ukdiving.co.uk), [www.bsac.com](http://www.bsac.com)

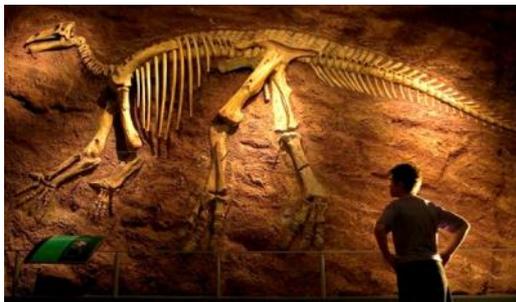
## Small is beautiful - Britain's Islands

Around the coast of England, Scotland and Wales lie more than 6,000 islands, 140 or so inhabited. Each unique in its own way, Britain's quirky assortment of islands are truly destinations to treasure.

### ENGLAND'S SOUTH COAST

#### **Isle of Wight**

Dinosaurs, festivals, regattas...there's more to the Isle of Wight than its glorious beaches and bays. Anyone with a passing interest in palaeontology will be thrilled with the 'dinosaur capital of Britain', so named because the island is one of the richest areas of dinosaur fossil discovery in Europe. This prehistoric wonder is documented in museums such as the Dinosaur Isle, while there are also fossil hunts



*The Isle of Wight is home to prehistory - discover dinosaur bones and fossils*

and footprint tours. Visit Brook Beach, one of whose unmissable features is the fossilised forest of trees that appear from beneath the waves at low tide, as well as a sandstone ledge containing fossilised dinosaur footprints. Britain's oldest theme park Blackgang Chine further marked the island's rich dinosaur heritage with the opening of dinosaur attraction Restricted Area 5.

The Isle of Wight has also gained a favourable reputation as a festival island. June sees thousands of people stream over by ferry to attend the Isle of Wight Festival - it's always an impressive line-up of bands, 2014 alone hosted Red Hot Chili Peppers, Biffy Clyro, Rudimental and Calvin Harris - while September is Bestival time! This festival has more of a boutique flavour, and fancy dress is heartily encouraged. Foodies might be interested in the island's Garlic Festival - cookery demonstrations, children's entertainment, live music and, of course, huge garlic marquees, all take place at the bulb-inspired festival every August.

The summer months also make it a popular time to visit the island during Cowes Week - a sailing regatta that, since 1826, has played a major part in Britain's sporting summer calendar, staging up to 40 daily races for around 1,000 boats. It's certainly one way to experience the island's stunning Heritage coast but if you don't have sea legs, why not explore this island - half of which has been recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - during May's two-week Walking Festival? Featuring more than 250 walks for all ages and abilities there are more than 500 miles of footpaths on which you can amble and ramble.



*Beautiful views at Freshwater Bay on the Isle of Wight*

*How to get there: Ferry services leave from Portsmouth, Southampton and Lymington, with up to 350 crossings per day. Travel time from London to the ports is just under two hours.*

[www.visitisleofwight.co.uk](http://www.visitisleofwight.co.uk)

## Isles of Scilly

Would you be surprised to hear that Britain has its very own tropical islands? It's true - nestled in a Gulf Stream, 28 miles south of Cornwall, the five inhabited



*Exotic blooms and plants at sub-tropical Abbey Garden on the Scilly Isles*

islands and countless uninhabited islands in the archipelago of the Isles of Scilly experience a sultry climate. The warmer climate has resulted in a stunning array of flora and fauna on the islands. Tresco - the second largest isle, which boasts white sandy beaches - is home to the exotic, outdoor Abbey Garden. Walk among palm trees, flame trees and tropical flowers in the brightest colours.

As well as the sheer diversity of the tropical vegetation, the largest island - St Mary's - is peppered with ancient monuments, ranging from Neolithic chamber tombs to Civil War fortifications. And why not hop on board a boat for a day trip to the third-largest island, St Martin's, where, after a

day on the stunning beaches, you can fortify yourself with a glass of white wine from the island's vineyard.

*How to get there: Passenger ferries leave from Penzance in Cornwall on a regular basis or you can experience a bird's eye view of the island by taking the Skybus to the islands from Land's End, Newquay and Exeter airports.*

[www.simplyscilly.co.uk](http://www.simplyscilly.co.uk)

## Lundy Island

If you're holidaying in north Devon, take a day trip to the unspoilt wilderness of Lundy Island, 11 miles off the coast. Immerse yourself in its wilderness on snorkelling safaris or rockpool rambles, wildlife and seabird walks. Spot grey seals, the Lundy ponies and the island's Sika deer, as well as the diverse flora and fauna and the 'Lundy cabbage', endemic to the island.

And if you're in search of refreshment after all the exploring, you'll be pleased to know you can order a pint at The Marisco Tavern, one of England's most isolated pubs. You can also spend the night right by the island's castle, built in 1244 by Henry III; the ruinous keep was renovated into cottages by The Landmark Trust ([www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)). Or you can stay in the disused lighthouse - built by Bristol-based merchants in the 18th century to stop the many shipwrecks on the island, the keepers quarters have been transformed into flats with spectacular views.

*Getting there: Either on board the island's own boat the MS Oldenbury, which departs from Bideford in north Devon, or by helicopter during good weather. Bideford is just over an hour's drive from Exeter International Airport or two hours from Bristol International Airport.*

[www.lundyisland.co.uk](http://www.lundyisland.co.uk)

## ENGLAND'S NORTH-EAST COAST

### Holy Island and Farne Islands

For thousands of years Holy Island in the North Sea, a tidal island off the coast of Northumberland, has been a beacon for visitors, once attracting pilgrims to the



*The atmospheric Lindisfarne Castle, looking out to sea from Holy Island*

Benedictine Priory, which was later destroyed by Henry VIII in the 16th century to build Lindisfarne Castle with the monastery stone. This romantic fortress is now looked after by the National Trust and underwent renovation by the architect Edwin Lutyens in the early 1900s, although some of the Tudor fort can still be seen.

Keen ornithologists should take a boat out to the nearby Farne islands; witness 37,000 pairs of puffins that call the islands their home as well as more than 20 varieties of birds including guillemots and razorbills. Also keep your eyes peeled for the large grey seal colony and enjoy fantastic views back to Bamburgh Castle, which looms over the Northumberland coast, and the Cheviot Hills.

*Getting there: The nearest rail station is Berwick-upon-Tweed, around 45 minutes from Edinburgh or Newcastle. From there, take a bus, times depending on the prevailing tide. Holy Island is linked to the mainland by a long causeway.*

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lindisfarne-castle](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lindisfarne-castle),  
[www.visitnorthumberland.com/coast/farne-islands](http://www.visitnorthumberland.com/coast/farne-islands)

## ENGLAND'S NORTH-WEST COAST

### Isle of Man

There are some outstanding beauty spots on the Isle of Man, located in the Irish Sea, just west of the Lake District in north-west England. More than 40 per cent of the land is unpopulated and there are 18 coastal or mountainous glens to discover. In addition to wild natural beauty, there are beautifully maintained gardens on the island; the Tynwald National Park and Arboretum is 25 acres of picturesque countryside, while the Milntown Estate - parts of which date back to the 16th century - boasts wonderful blooms in its 15 acres of gardens and woodlands.

History buffs should head to the island's capital, Castletown. Visit the imposing Castle Rushen, one of the most impressive medieval castles in Britain, or you can join a Story of Mann trail, which will take you to Peel Castle - believed to be the first place Christianity was brought to the Isle by St Patrick in the early 13th century. Take a ride on the Douglas Horse Trams - on the island since 1876, even Royal visitors to the island such as the Queen and the late Queen Mother have been carried on the tramway.



*Medieval majesty - Castle Rushen, on the Isle of Man*

Yet the island is very much living in the 21st century; in 2014 the destination hosted its Island of Culture, the largest such celebration in the island's history, honouring its varied artistic and cultural creativity, a legacy which lives on. Plus there's the annual spectacle of the TT motorcycle races, one of the world's most exciting road races.

*Getting there: Flights to the Isle of Man operate from Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London Gatwick, Luton, Liverpool, Manchester and Southampton international airports. Alternatively, there are ferry services from Liverpool and Belfast.* [www.visitisleofman.com](http://www.visitisleofman.com)

## SCOTLAND'S WEST COAST

### The Inner Hebrides

There is a real sense you're getting away from it all on the islands of Scotland's Inner Hebrides. Contrasting landscapes, from countryside to mountains to beaches, can be found across the islands. Enjoy a flavour of the Highlands on the largest of them, the **Isle of Skye**; it boasts lochs, moors and 20 Munros (mountains over 3,000ft/914.4m) so there's plenty of scope for walking and climbing. Key sights on the island include Loch Coruisk, which lies under the mountain Black Cuillin, the sea cliff of Kilt Rock and rock pinnacles such as the Old Man of Storr.

Adventurers might like to try gorge walking on the **Isle of Arran**. Explore hidden waterfalls, plunge pools and natural slides, climb up the rugged peaks and coastal crags. For that extra challenge, climb Arran's highest peak, Goatfell, which stands at 2,866ft/874m. Looking for a more gentle stroll? Head to the island's Brodick Castle, Gardens and Country Park, the only island-based country park in Britain.



*Tobermory on the Isle of Mull - a paintbox of houses line the seafront*

The **Isle of Mull** is a haven for visitors with a penchant for gorgeous beaches, and its largest town, Tobermory, is picture-postcard pretty, with an attractive port and multi-coloured houses, while the nearby island of **Staffa** is home to the dramatic vertical basaltic columns and Fingal's Cave, the inspiration behind works of art such as Turner's painting of *Staffa, Fingal's Cave* and Mendelssohn's Hebrides Overture. Or head on a boat trip around the **Argyll Islands** and

chances are you'll catch a glimpse of minke whales, porpoises and dolphins in the water.

*Getting there: There are passenger ferries to the islands from the mainland Scotland ports of Oban and Kennacraig in Argyll, and Mallaig and Ullapool in the Highlands.*

### The Outer Hebrides

Wildlife enthusiasts will be enthralled with the sheer scale of species and habitats that are dotted through the Outer Hebrides. Take a cruise around the **Uists, the Barra Isles, and Eriskay**, and spot whales, seals, dolphins and basking sharks in their natural habitat, while seabird colonies and gigantic sea cliffs will greet visitors on the remote volcanic archipelago of **St Kilda**. A National Nature Reserve, these islands are a UNESCO Dual World Heritage site with the secluded islands of the Rona and Sula Sgier National Nature Reserve.

*Getting there: Fly from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness to the Outer Hebrides or take passenger ferries from ports on islands in the Inner Hebrides.*  
[www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com)

## SCOTLAND'S NORTH COAST

### Shetland Islands

Sandy beaches, rocky inlets, heather-clad hills and sea caves - the landscape of the Shetland Islands' is as varied as it gets! Shetland's northerly location means some of Britain's rarest plants grow there. The **Isle of Feltar** alone, known as 'the garden of Shetland', is home to 300 species of flowering plant.

*Getting there: There are daily flights to Shetland's Samburgh airport from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness or you can take passenger ferries from Aberdeen.*

<http://visit.shetland.org>

### Orkney Islands

Eighteen hours of daylight during summer - the islands' position high up in the northern hemisphere means the sun doesn't set until 22.30 - ensures plenty of opportunity to explore the 600 miles of coastline, sandy beaches and dramatic sea stacks (the giant 450ft/137m Old Man of Hoy is one of the most impressive).



*Standing stones give Orkney an air of mystery*

*Getting there: Fly to the Orkneys from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness or you can take passenger ferries from Aberdeen.*

[www.visitororkney.com](http://www.visitororkney.com)

## WALES' NORTH COAST



*Ba Gwyn, a natural arch on the island of Anglesey, Wales © Crown copyright (2013) Visit Wales*

### Anglesey

Majestic sums up the island of Anglesey, lying off the north coast of Wales; mountains - such as the stark beauty of Parys Mountain - vistas as far as the eye can see, beautiful coastal walks, romantic gems, the village with the longest name in Britain (Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch - give pronouncing it a go!) and royal connections thrown in for good measure.

Once the former home of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge before their son Prince George was born in July 2013, Anglesey has long had a strong royal heritage. Back in 1295 Edward I

ordered work to begin the last of the 'iron ring' of castles in north Wales, designed to be a perfectly shaped fortress on the 'beautiful marsh' (*beau marais* in Norman French) - Beaumaris Castle. Although it wasn't completed, the medieval fortress is one of the island's most magnificent sights.

Explore the burial chambers at Barcloddiad Yr Gawres, while Llys Rhosyr, the site of what was once the royal court of the most powerful and charismatic Welsh medieval princes, Llywelyn Fawr, Prince of Gwynedd, has been discovered near the village of Newborough. Learn about the many shipwrecks that occurred off Anglesey's coast at the maritime museum in Holyhead, the island's largest town.

Even the island's romantic appeal is deep-rooted in history. The beautiful Llanddwyn Island, off the tip of Anglesey, is the home of St Dwynwen, the Welsh patron saint of love, who lived in the 5th century. The ruins of St Dwynwen's chapel, built in the 16th century, can still be seen today.

*Getting there: London to Holyhead by train takes around four hours while Liverpool and Manchester in England's north west are around a two-hour drive.*

[www.visitanglesey.com](http://www.visitanglesey.com)

## WALES' WEST COAST

### Caldey Island

Buy perfume, chocolate and shortbread made by...monks! This picturesque island off the coast of Pembrokeshire has been home to various orders of monks since Celtic times. It is now owned by the Cistercian Order and the monks make these goods to sell. Wander through the Old Priory and attend one of the chanted services in the Abbey church, plus explore the medieval churches of St David and St Illtud. Why not finish up your trip with a walk up the island's lighthouse, where you'll get fantastic views of the Pembrokeshire Coast, the Gower Peninsula and Lundy Island?



*Caldey Abbey on Caldey Islands, where monks whip up perfume, chocolate and shortbread*

*Getting there: Take the boat from Tenby harbour. Tenby is just under two hours by road or rail from Cardiff.*

[www.caldey-island.co.uk](http://www.caldey-island.co.uk)



*Boats head out for puffin-spotting, at 'puffin paradise' Skomer Island © Crown copyright (2013) Visit Wales*

### Skomer Island

Skomer is puffin paradise. Thousands of puffins make their home on this small scenic island - which, in May, is blanketed in bluebells and pink campion - as do many other bird species. Along with its sister island, Skokholm, the waters

around Skomer are rich in marine wildlife that shelter in the bays and inlets, all which can be spotted on special safaris.

*Getting there: Take a ferry from Martin's Haven on the Pembrokeshire coast, around a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Cardiff.*

[www.visitpembrokeshire.com](http://www.visitpembrokeshire.com)

## CHANNEL ISLANDS

### Jersey

100 miles south of mainland Britain, Jersey - the largest of the Channel Islands - is the most southerly island of the British Isles. While the island is packed with heritage attractions - the well-preserved Mont Orgueil Castle, the Jersey War Tunnels (the Channel Islands were occupied during World War II), and the Neolithic dolmen La Hougue Bie - Jersey is also famed for its delicious food. It has an enviable natural larder - the renowned Jersey Royal potatoes, Jersey Jewel tomatoes, Jersey black butter, its tasty seafood - and visitors to the island during six weeks of autumn can enjoy it for purse-friendly prices during Tennerfest. More than 100 restaurants in Jersey (and almost the same number in neighbouring Guernsey) can enjoy wonderful meals created from the islands' natural produce for fixed prices.

[www.jersey.com](http://www.jersey.com)

### Guernsey

A pretty harbour and cobbled streets make the capital of Guernsey, St Peter's Port, an appealing town to visit. But its attractions go much deeper. For the fourth consecutive year, 2015 will see the return of the Guernsey Literary Festival (16 - 20 September), drawing big names from the literary world; past speakers have included Louis des Bernières (*Captain Corelli's Mandolin*) and Michael Morpurgo (*War Horse*). Events take place throughout the capital and range from talks and workshops by authors to poetry masterclasses and story writing sessions.

For a more sporty adrenaline rush, Guernsey's spectacular coastline is ripe for coastering, climbing, diving, kayaking, surfing, windsurfing and sailing. Or to enjoy the island's great outdoors in a more gentle way, book a local guide and embark on foraging for natural produce.

And if you're really looking for peace and tranquillity? Head to the neighbouring islands of Herm, Sark and Alderney. Herm (20 minutes by ferry) and Sark (50 minutes by ferry) are both traffic-free. Explore the beautiful coastal views and unspoilt beaches from the saddle of a hired bicycle.

[www.visitguernsey.com](http://www.visitguernsey.com)

*Getting there: Flights to the Channel Islands operate from many British airports. Regular ferry services operate from Portsmouth, Poole and Weymouth on the*

*south coast of England to Jersey and Guernsey; depending on which port you depart from journey times vary between four and ten hours. All these ports are within two- to three-hours' drive from London.*

## **Seaside escapes: from goth to glamour**

Britain is top-to-toe beaches and coastline. Some of our beaches have even made it into the top ten beaches in the world (Rhossili Bay, south Wales, as voted by TripAdvisor users). Here are ten highlights of Britain's eclectic mix of seaside spots.



*Brighton Pavilion is an iconic landmark in bohemian Brighton*

**For the bohemian lifestyle...**head to Brighton on England's south-east coast, 45 minutes by train from London. Rocking as a party town since the 18th century when the Prince Regent built his extravagant pleasure palace, the Brighton Pavilion, in the fashionable resort, it's now as quirky as it is fun. Looking for shops with a difference? Walk down the twisting paths of The Lanes, a shopping quarter packed with creative, independent shops. Want to stay somewhere unusual? Try the mix of vintage and contemporary styled rooms at Snooze ([www.snoozebrighton.com](http://www.snoozebrighton.com)). Searching for an alternative drinking spot? Head to Bohemia Bar for a molecular cocktail. If you want to chill out, people-watch and dance into the early hours after a day at the beach, Brighton's the place to go.

[www.visitbrighton.com](http://www.visitbrighton.com)

**For 1930s glamour...**stay on Burgh Island. Its hotel, situated on a small tidal island off the coast of south Devon, south-west England, exudes the type of Art Deco glamour that once attracted leading lights such as Agatha Christie and Noel Coward. The hotel has the look of an ocean liner and access is on foot across the beach at low tide or guests can take a bracing ride on the hotel's sea tractor. Take a dip in the Mermaid Pool, play billiards in the restored 1930s billiards room and dress in black tie for dinner. An effortlessly elegant seaside location just an hour from the city of Exeter. [www.burghisland.com](http://www.burghisland.com)

**For quirky festivals ...**try Whitby. Perched on the North Yorkshire coast, the town of Whitby - just over an hour's drive from the ancient city of York - is fortunate to have beautiful beaches and classic seaside charm yet is right on the cusp of the stunning wilderness of the North Yorkshire Moors National Park. It's also the coastal town where Bram Stoker's character Dracula arrived by ship during a storm - and its connection with the evil count spawned the Whitby Gothic Weekend held in the town each Spring and Autumn. [www.visit-whitby.com](http://www.visit-whitby.com)

**For artistic inspiration...**The wide open skies and expansive shorelines of Southwold, on the Suffolk coast, east England - a two-and-a-half hour drive from London - has inspired some of Britain's greatest artists, including JMW Turner, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Stanley Spencer. The picturesque town sits on an attractive sandy beach dotted



*The Suffolk coastal town of Southwold has inspired some of Britain's greatest artists*

with brightly coloured beach huts and many of its pubs and restaurants serve locally produced food and drink; think fresh shellfish and fish, Salt Marsh Lamb and Red Poll Beef, plus ale from the seaside town's Adnams brewery. [www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk](http://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk)

**For island charm...**take a trip to Anglesey, an island off the coast of north Wales, just a two-hour drive west of Manchester. Much of its coastline is renowned as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and, with 26 spoilt beaches on the island - from the long, sandy stretches of Red Wharf Bay and Llanddwyn to small intimate coves of Porth Swtan and Moelfre - and the Isle of Anglesey's Coastal Path walk, you'll really understand why the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge once made it their home. [www.visitanglesey.co.uk](http://www.visitanglesey.co.uk)

**For birdwatching...**do as 100,000 gannets do each year and flock to North Berwick, less than an hour's drive north of Edinburgh, Scotland. The seafront is lined with charming Victorian villas and is complemented by the rugged coastline and pleasant beaches, which are the perfect spot for birdwatching, more so as the Scottish Seabird Centre is based here. Get closer to puffins with a boat trip out to the Bass Rock, where they congregate. [www.seabird.org](http://www.seabird.org)

**For old-fashioned family fun...**take the kids up to Llandudno in north Wales, with its two spectacular beaches perfect for beach frolics and picnicking. This seaside resort has maintained the elegance of its Victorian and Edwardian influences and cherishes British seaside traditions. Take a stroll along the longest pier, ride on Britain's only cable-hauled tramway and check out the views from Britain's longest passenger cable car. [www.visitllandudno.org.uk](http://www.visitllandudno.org.uk)



*Original medieval walls are still standing at the Welsh seaside town of Tenby*

**For medieval connections...**enter through the surviving medieval town walls in Tenby, west Wales, and visit the Norman castle at the heart of the seaside resort, less than a two-hour drive from Cardiff. A boat trip to explore nearby Caldey Island also presents the perfect opportunity to take in the scale of Carew Castle. Amazing beaches stretch to the north, the west, and the south of the town, which itself is a whirl of narrow cobbled streets crammed with cafés, shops, restaurants and pubs. [www.visitwales.co.uk/regions-of-wales/areas-holiday-destinations-in-wales/pembrokeshire](http://www.visitwales.co.uk/regions-of-wales/areas-holiday-destinations-in-wales/pembrokeshire)

**For fairytale beaches...**head to Calgary Bay on the Isle of Mull, Scotland for a beach that seems truly tropical and not what you'd expect to find in Scotland. The sea is azure, the sand is powdery white and the beach is fringed by a forest that is also home to Calgary Castle, which is rented out as a holiday home. Alternatively, stay in one of the nearby guesthouses, self-catering cottages or hotels with easy access to this unforgettable beach. [www.isle-of-mull.net/attractions/scenic-attractions/calgary-bay](http://www.isle-of-mull.net/attractions/scenic-attractions/calgary-bay)

## Lakes - monsters, adventure sports and relaxation

There aren't many links between Romantic poetry, monsters, water ski-ing and gyrocopters but all have a compelling connection with the magnificent bodies of water that are Britain's lakes. Whether they've been immortalised in some of the most famous poetry ever written, fostered a host of conspiracy theories as to whether a legendary monster lives in their depths, or are the perfect base for adrenaline-fuelled sports, lakes are a treasured part of Britain's landscape.



*Ullswater lake, the second largest in England. You can hike around it, sail on it or take a dip*

From England's Lake District to the celebrated lochs of Scotland, via lakes in the heart the Welsh mountains, here are just a few of the highlights and why their attractions extend beyond boat trips.

### **Lake District, Cumbria, north-west England**

Home of England's deepest and largest lakes, the lush natural environment of the Lake District in the north-west of England is one in which you can't fail to embrace the great outdoors. Hike around England's largest and second-largest lakes - Windermere and Ullswater respectively - set off on a fell walk around Grasmere Lake or take a gentler walk around some of the smaller lakes, including Derwent Water and Rydal Water.

Walking aside, the Lake District is renowned as the ultimate adventure playground; enjoy views over Buttermere, Crummock and Loweswater with Via Ferrata Xtreme in Honister, an adventure activity destination that's highly rated by all those who've had a go. As well as experiencing vertical climbs and cliff-edge ladders, adventurers can walk along Europe's longest Burma Rope bridge, suspended 2,000ft/610m over the valley.

There are great views to be had on a spectacular gyrocopter flight over Derwent Water or Ullswater; take the controls of the gyrocopter or just look out of the window, this is a wonderful way to gain a birds' eye perspective of the Lakes.

Alternatively, swing through the trees at Windermere's TreeTop Trek, a ropes course built into the canopy of ancient oak trees with amazing views of the lake and the Langdale Pikes from 50ft/15m up. Avid hikers can climb Scafell Pike, the highest mountain in England, and one of the Three Peaks Challenge mountains.

Once the daredevil in you has been satisfied, enjoy one of the many picturesque towns in the region - check out Keswick, Bowness-on-Windermere or Ambleside, all with close association to the Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

*Getting there: The Lake District is under two hours by train from Manchester and there are direct trains from London Euston to Oxenholme (half an hour from Windermere) in just under three hours. Driving from London to Lake Windermere takes around five hours.*

[www.cumbriatourism.org](http://www.cumbriatourism.org), [www.golakes.co.uk/adventure-capital](http://www.golakes.co.uk/adventure-capital)

## Snowdonia National Park, north Wales

The largest natural lake in Wales - Llyn Tegid - lies in Snowdonia National Park - along with 100 others. The National Park is heaven for watersports' enthusiasts, with sailing, canoeing, kayaking, rafting, wakeboarding and windsurfing all up for grabs. And, if you're looking to indulge a passion for outdoor swimming, check out Gone Swimming ([www.goneswimming.co.uk](http://www.goneswimming.co.uk)). The company specialises in adventure swimming holidays, some of which are in the lakes of Snowdonia. So grab your goggles and a wetsuit, and admire spectacular scenery while perfecting your strokes.

If you'd rather sit back and enjoy the tranquil scenery Llyn Tegid is also ideal for fishing; the freshwater lake is packed with pike, perch, grayling and roach. And, like the Lake District, Snowdonia's terrain is perfect for fell walking. Head away from the busier parts of Snowdonia and enjoy a more tranquil walk on the footpaths around Bala Lake. Embark on the entire 14-mile circuit walk or split it into two and jump onboard the Bala Lake Railway for return transport; either way, walkers will observe Snowdonia's spectacular lake views, farmland, moorland, mountains and forests.

*Getting there: There are direct trains to Llandudno Junction and Bangor - the closest mainline stations to Snowdonia National Park. Journey time from London Euston is three-and-a-half hours; from Birmingham three hours; from Manchester two-and-a-half hours; from Cardiff four-and-a-half hours.*

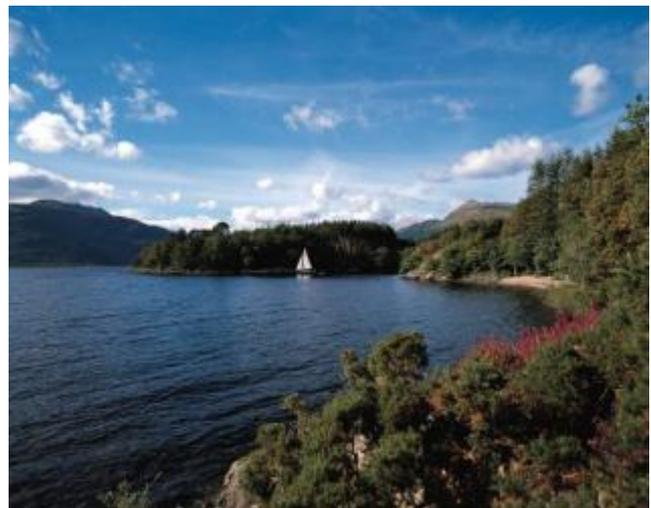
[www.visitsnowdonia.info](http://www.visitsnowdonia.info), [www.visitwales.co.uk/regions-of-wales/national-parks-in-wales/snowdonia-national-park](http://www.visitwales.co.uk/regions-of-wales/national-parks-in-wales/snowdonia-national-park)

## Scottish Lochs

Mystical legends, traditional songs and poetry have all found their inspiration on the banks of Scotland's lochs (lakes).

Bring your binoculars, your camera and a side order of optimism and set out to find 'Nessie', the fabled monster said to live in the depths of **Loch Ness** in the Scottish Highlands, south of Inverness. However, it's not just Nessie you should be looking out for; from on board a boat on this majestic stretch of water (37kms/22miles long) you can spot Urquhart Castle as well as small villages and farms and watch out for leaping trout and salmon.

Not far from the bustling city of Glasgow is the serene Trossachs National Park, home of **Loch Lomond** ([www.lochlomond-trossachs.org](http://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org)). Mountains loom to the north, while a scattering of islands can be found at the south end of the loch. Pretty villages such as Luss line the loch's western shores, all of which inspired the traditional Scottish song *The Bonnie Banks O' Loch Lomond*. The area was also much loved by Scottish writer and poet Sir Walter Scott, whose famous poem *The Lady of the Lake* was inspired by Loch Katrine in the National Park, which you can cruise on the steamship *SS Sir Walter Scott*.



*Sailing on Loch Lomond, a beautiful lake in the Trossachs National Park, not far from Glasgow*

*Getting there: Loch Ness is just over a three-hour drive from Edinburgh, or a 40-minute drive from the international airport at Inverness. Loch Lomond is less than an hour's drive from Glasgow.*

[www.visitscotland.com/about/nature-geography/canals-rivers-lochs](http://www.visitscotland.com/about/nature-geography/canals-rivers-lochs)

### **The lakes of Northern Ireland**

Where can you go if you're sports mad but travelling with a history buff? Head to the banks of **Lough Neagh** in Northern Ireland, Britain's largest inland lake with a shoreline of more than 145kms/90 miles. Not only is it a watersports' fan's dream - canoe in its many bays and inlets around the lough or the huge expanse of open water or powerboat, jet-ski, water-ski or even learn to fly a light plane across it all - the shore is also sprinkled with ancient relics that will delight lovers of history. For a true sense of Northern Ireland's ancient past visit Antrim round tower, the remnant of a 10th century monastic site standing 28m high, and Ram's Island round tower.

For a spot of five-star luxury on a lakeside shore, Lough Erne - two connected lakes in County Fermanagh - is home to the Lough Erne Resort. After indulging in the resort's luxury indoor facilities, it provides a great spot from which to explore the lake. Helicopter and seaplane tours can introduce the lake from up high, while cycling, horse-riding, watersports, caving and golf - the resort has two Championship courses - are all available.

*Getting there: Lough Neagh is a 40-minute drive west of Belfast city centre and just 15 minutes from the city's international airport. Lough Erne is around a two-hour drive west of Belfast.*

[www.discoverloughneagh.com](http://www.discoverloughneagh.com)

## Star-spotting in Britain's National Parks

What could be more mesmerising, more fascinating, more romantic, than gazing up into the night sky and seeing thousands of stars twinkling back in all their glory?

Yet we don't often get the chance to experience the true darkness of the night sky and the inspiring glow of the stars; the very nature of modern life means light pollution is everywhere - simply put, the vast number of artificial lights in use in our towns and cities blocks out the darkness and it can be difficult to see the stars.

Fortunately, there are parts of Britain that are well-protected against light pollution and therefore make perfect locations to go star-spotting. In fact, the Brecon Beacons National Park in Wales was awarded International Dark Sky Reserve status by the International Dark Skies Association (IDA) last year, only the fifth destination in the world to achieve this. The park joins Mont Megantic in Quebec, Canada; Exmoor National Park in south-west England; Aoraki Mackenzie in New Zealand; and Nambiarand Nature Reserve in Namibia with the status.

Britain also has IDA-approved Dark Sky Parks, such as the Galloway Forest Park in Scotland. Here is the difference between Dark Sky Reserve status and Dark Sky Park status: a park has exceptional starry night skies and natural nocturnal habitat where light pollution has been lessened while a reserve has a long run of quality starry nights and protected nocturnal environment, plus has lighting controls in place to prevent light pollution.

Here we pinpoint the best areas in Britain to find exceptional night-time beauty - don't forget to bring a telescope!

### The Brecon Beacons, Wales

The latest location to win International Dark Sky Reserve status, the wide skies over the Brecon Beacons National Park is a perfect viewing platform for the Milky Way, major constellations and even meteor showers. There are dozens of easily accessible spots to enjoy the night sky from, including the atmospheric Llanthony Priory along the Offa's Dyke Path (that runs along the border of England and Wales) and Sugar Loaf Mountain, close to the lovely market town of Abergavenny on the eastern side of the Park. By day the Park is a haven of green valleys, stunning mountain ranges and secret waterfalls to explore, and active visitors can choose from horse riding, kayaking, climbing, walking, sailing and windsurfing to entertain them before settling in for some star-spotting.

*Getting there: Trains from London run to Abergavenny to the east of the Park and Merthyr Tydfil, to the south. The Brecon Beacons are roughly one hour from Cardiff by car. There is a 'Beacons Bus' that takes visitors around the Park; see [www.breconbeaconstourism.co.uk](http://www.breconbeaconstourism.co.uk).*

*Watch a video on the Brecon Beacons' Dark Skies here [www.visitbritain.tv/wales/brecon-beacons-dark-skies.html](http://www.visitbritain.tv/wales/brecon-beacons-dark-skies.html), [www.breconbeacons.org/darkskies](http://www.breconbeacons.org/darkskies)*



*Star spotting in the Brecon Beacons, an International Dark Sky Reserve. Images copyright of Michael Sinclair and available by emailing [press@darkskyeditions.co.uk](mailto:press@darkskyeditions.co.uk)*

## **Galloway Forest Park, Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland**

Scotland hosts some of the darkest skies in Europe and is a fantastic place to spend a peaceful evening stargazing. Sitting in the heart of Galloway in southern Scotland, and covering 300 square miles, Galloway Forest Park was Britain's first International Dark Sky Park. On a clear night in any given city you'll see 200 stars; here, you'll see about 7,000, including the Andromeda Galaxy, 2.5 million light years away. With binoculars, you can even see the Whirlpool galaxy, more than 20 million light years away. VisitScotland's guide to the Park offers advice on making the most of the park at night, and highlights other things to see and do in the unspoilt region of Dumfries & Galloway, including visiting Scotland's National Book Town, Wigtown; the Red Squirrel Walk in Balbeattie Forest; historic attractions such as Drumlanrig Castle, and a glorious gardens section.

*Getting there: Galloway is just under two hours' drive from Glasgow.*

[www.forestry.gov.uk/darkskygalloway](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/darkskygalloway)

## **International Dark Sky Reserve, Exmoor, south-west England**

The rugged interior and dramatic coast that inspired Coleridge and Wordsworth, Exmoor National Park is home to some of the darkest skies in the country, so it's a great place to gaze at the stars. It was the first place in Europe to be dubbed an International Dark Sky Reserve. On a clear night many astronomical sights can be seen with the naked eye and even more can be seen through a telescope. You can even go on a 'Dark Skies Safari' to discover the secrets of the skies, where you'll be provided with a star chart, compass and abundant hot drinks on the three-hour tour (Autumn-Spring only).

*Getting there: Exmoor is in south-west England, close to both Devon and Somerset. It is under an hour from the city of Exeter by car, or else you can make a trip from Bristol in 90 minutes.*

[www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/visiting/things-to-do/stargazing](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/visiting/things-to-do/stargazing)

## **County Antrim Coast, Northern Ireland**

Home to the dramatic Giant's Causeway, the County Antrim Coast in Northern Ireland was also visited by the other-worldly spectacle of the Northern Lights on several occasions last year. The *aurora borealis*, as the Northern Lights are technically known, were photographed against the backdrop of the beautiful Mussenden Temple, Dunluce Castle and the hexagonal stone piles of the Giant's Causeway as well. Head over to the area and enjoy beautiful green hills and rugged coastline by day and perhaps green and purple swathes of light by night. The stars are always bright in that stretch of the world, so even if you don't get to see the Northern Lights, there will be plenty happening overhead to keep you interested.

*Getting there: The County Antrim coast is just around a 90-minute drive north of Belfast.*

[www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com)

## **Kielder Observatory, Northumberland, north England**

Kielder Forest is officially the darkest place in England, with more than 250 square miles of wooded beauty. It has its own state-of-the-art, wood-clad observatory on the slopes of

Black Fell above Kielder Water. The striking-looking observatory is Kielder's most recent art and architecture project, developed to provide a permanent base for amateur astronomers. The observatory runs regular events for adults and children, with entertaining talks by resident experts and you can even learn how to take stunning pictures of distant objects in the universe.

*Getting there: Kielder is a 90-minute drive from Newcastle, in England's north east.*

[www.visitkielder.com](http://www.visitkielder.com)

### **Royal Observatory, Greenwich, London**

The Royal Observatory, Greenwich is home to Britain's largest telescope, and the ideal place to explore the fascinating history of the stars. The Planetarium, which the Observatory dubs the 'tour bus of the universe' takes visitors all around the night sky in a journey of discovery, showing you the heart of the sun, distant galaxies and the birth of a star using real images from spacecraft and telescopes and advanced computer-generated imagery. The Observatory is also the home of Greenwich Mean Time, the Prime Meridian of the world, making it the official starting point for each new day.

[www.rmg.co.uk](http://www.rmg.co.uk)

*The **National Trust**, the organisation that looks after stunning historic properties all over Britain, has a guide to night walks for dark skies at some of its properties, including Stonehenge. Read about them and download walking guides here.*

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/article-1356401373154](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/article-1356401373154)

*See the UK National Parks Association's Dark Skies page*

<http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/visiting/outdooractivities/dark-skies>

## Access all areas - a countryside for everyone

The government is committed to making tourism in Britain ‘the most accessible in Europe’; already it works with a raft of disability charities such as Tourism for All (see below) to make access better for disabled visitors, while the Scottish government and VisitScotland have been working with Capability Scotland for several years in a bid to tackle the barriers faced by disabled tourists.

Britain offers a diverse range of activities and attractions that disabled visitors and their families can enjoy throughout the countryside, from gentle walks to adrenalin-pumping sports.

### The Great Outdoors

**The Wales Coastal Path** is a world first, providing a walking route around the entire coastline of Wales; joining up with the Offa’s Dyke Path you can encircle the whole country. Much of the path is accessible; there are wheelchair and baby buggy friendly routes along it, with access paths and boardwalks provided at several of the most spectacular points.

[www.walescoastpath.gov.uk](http://www.walescoastpath.gov.uk)

**The Giant’s Causeway** is one of the most popular attractions in Northern Ireland, thanks to its stunning, ragged landscape - which earned it the status of UNESCO World Heritage Site - and the legendary tales that accompany it. Its Visitor Centre is now being managed by the National Trust and was designed in consultation with Disability Action and other major access organisations to ensure access for all. In addition to a fully accessible cliff-top path for wheelchair access, the centre also features hearing loops and an ‘interpretation area’ suitable for visually impaired and wheelchair users. You can take a bus down to the hexagonal stones that characterise the Causeway.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway)

**Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest** in Kent, south-east England, has been developed into an ‘activewood’ by the Forestry Commission and much of its 15 miles of trails, adventure play areas and exceptional collection of pine trees are accessible. Trails are well surfaced and the Pinetum Trail is generally level with many rest stops. Its other trails - Forest and Family Cycle - may be more hilly but are still fairly accessible - check the access guide available. Elsewhere, the children’s pirate-themed play area offers equipment accessible to children of all abilities (with the exception of the giant sand pit) and there is a raised walkway through the trees for wheelchair users. And all abilities can try the archery on offer, while the onsite bike shop hires out adapted bicycles, tricycles and powered off-road scooters. The forest is around a 90-minute drive from London.

[www.bedgeburypinetum.org.uk](http://www.bedgeburypinetum.org.uk)

**Brockholes Nature Reserve** near Preston, a 45-minute drive from Manchester, has been highlighted by the *Rough Guides Accessible Guide* for its first-rate accessibility. Three trails - two of which are wheelchair accessible - take you through birds and animals’ habitats, and include some accessible bird hides. A further highlight includes the floating Visitor Village boasting visitor centre, restaurant and shop, all of which are accessible. *Rough Guides Accessible Guides* points out its “low counters and exhibits, interpretation

boards, tactile features, large-print displays, hearing loops and an accessible toilet".  
[www.brockholes.org](http://www.brockholes.org)

*See the Sport guide for information on activities that are accessible in Britain, available to download from [www.visitbritain.com/media](http://www.visitbritain.com/media)*

## Organisations

**Tourism For All:** The national charity that aims to overcome barriers faced by disabled people, older people, carers of young people or disabled and older relatives. Its website covers important elements such as great places to go in Britain and how to plan your trip, information on where there are accessible toilets and parking, events, offers and more.

[www.tourismforall.org.uk](http://www.tourismforall.org.uk)

**The Calvert Trust:** A fantastic organisation that organises adventure holidays for people with disabilities, together with their families and friends, to achieve their potential through the challenge of outdoor adventure in the countryside, across several locations including the beautiful Lake District and Exmoor.

[www.calvert-trust.org.uk](http://www.calvert-trust.org.uk)

**iDID Adventure:** Another great organisation that offers inclusive adventure sports experiences for disabled individuals. There are taster sessions, structured lessons and conferences covering a range of adventure sports activities available through to major sporting events and competitions aimed at widening access and participation in sports such as wakeboarding, skate/BMX, rock climbing, surfing and kayaking.

[www.ididadventure.co.uk](http://www.ididadventure.co.uk)

### Further useful links

The UK National Parks Association's page on accessibility includes a downloadable guide featuring accessible activities in all 15 of its parks

[www.nationalparks.gov.uk/visiting/outdooractivities/accessforall](http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/visiting/outdooractivities/accessforall)

[www.hudsons.co.uk/open-britain.aspx](http://www.hudsons.co.uk/open-britain.aspx)

[www.accessibleguide.co.uk](http://www.accessibleguide.co.uk)

[www.accessiblebritain.co.uk](http://www.accessiblebritain.co.uk)

[www.capability-scotland.org.uk](http://www.capability-scotland.org.uk)

[www.disabledholidayinfo.org.uk](http://www.disabledholidayinfo.org.uk)

## Accommodation in the countryside - a guide

There's a lot more choice in Britain than just hotels for sleeping - ever wanted to sleep in a helicopter? Or else a tree 'temple'? Or maybe a castle, or historic home shaped like a pineapple. Well ladies and gentlemen you can: presenting the countryside accommodation guide.

We've split the guide into sections, types of accommodation ranging from glamping to historic homes. Within each section we've listed companies that are useful for booking that kind of stay, and then provided some particularly good individual examples.

### **1. GLAMPING**

Who says camping has to mean going back to basics? Glamping offers an unbeatable mix of all the outdoorsy charm of being under canvas, along with fluffy duvets, proper bathrooms and comfortable beds. Choose from Native American tipis, Mongolian yurts or safari-style tents with kitchenettes and separate bedrooms. Camping, gone glam.

#### **Featherdown Farms**

The perfect choice for a family break, where the kids can run free and parents don't have to feel they're roughing it. There are over 40 farms in England and Wales that have Featherdown's luxury tents, each sleeping up to six with two small bedrooms, a cooking area and bathroom facilities.

[www.featherdown.co.uk](http://www.featherdown.co.uk)

#### **Canopy and Stars**

A fantastic collection of glamping sites that really offer something different, from yurts perched on stilts above a Shropshire hillside to safari-style tents to sleep whole families or vintage tents full of bohemian charm.

[www.canopyandstars.co.uk](http://www.canopyandstars.co.uk)

#### **Cornish Tipi Holidays, Pendogget, Cornwall Best for: Families**

Perfect for families, Cornish Tipi Holidays is idyllically situated in a wooded valley, with differently-sized tipis dotted through the 16 acres of countryside. The site has a wonderful, rural feel, freckled with wildflowers and with a peaceful lake at its heart. It's a place to feel completely off-grid; the only concessions to 21st century life are toilets and hot showers. Pendogget is around five hours' drive south-west of London.



*A cluster of Cornish Tipis - immerse yourself in nature*

Three-night breaks from £210, [www.cornishtipiholidays.co.uk](http://www.cornishtipiholidays.co.uk)

#### **Long Valley Yurts, Great Langdale, Cumbria Best for: An Activity Break.**

A fantastic way to experience the raw beauty of the Lake District, the yurts and bell-tents at Long Valley come with futon-style beds, warm duvets, wood-burning stoves and

twinkling fairylights, for a little added romance. Heaven for outdoorsy types, rock climbing, gorge scrambling, canoeing and mountain biking can all be arranged nearby. Sleeps up to eight. Great Langdale is just under five hours' drive north of London.

From £235 per night, [www.long-valley-yurts.co.uk](http://www.long-valley-yurts.co.uk)

### **Trossachs Yurts, Scotland** **Best for: Spectacular Scenery**

Wood burning stoves, thick pile rugs, cosy duvets on a proper bed - there's no scrimping on the luxuries in the three Trossachs Yurts, which also have fantastic, big-sky views across to the mountains of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. Sleeping up to five, they're ideal for a family break, with the spectacular Scottish countryside waiting to be discovered.

From £75 per night, [www.trossachsyurts.com](http://www.trossachsyurts.com)

## **2. CAMPING**

There's nothing like waking up under canvas, with dew on the ground and the sun just starting to rise. Whether you want mountain scenery, a waterfront view or glorious isolation there are thousands of campsites around Britain, from simple farmer's fields to full-service sites with swimming pools, shops and restaurants. All share one thing; the chance to really experience the beauty of the British countryside.

### **Camping and Caravanning Club**

With more than 100 camping sites up and down Britain, the CC is a fantastic resource. Membership costs £41 per year and although non-members can stay at many of the sites, membership includes reduced rates and access to 1,500 smaller sites which are members-only.

[www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk](http://www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk)

### **Cool Camping**

A great site that cherry-picks the best sites around Britain, from back-to-basics farmer's fields to sites with everything from wi-fi to hot-tubs.

[www.coolcamping.co.uk](http://www.coolcamping.co.uk)

### **Hollands Wood, Brockenhurst** **Best for: Public transport**

A beautiful, wooded site in the heart of the New Forest, there is something magical about Hollands Wood. Ponies roam freely, you can fall out of your tent and walk for miles through undisturbed Forest and the pretty village of Brockenhurst - with a couple of good pubs and a station with good connections to London (around 90 minutes' journey) - is just ten minutes' walk.

From £15.70 per night, [www.campingintheforest.co.uk](http://www.campingintheforest.co.uk)



*Camping and caravanning - a wealth of sites to get back to basics across the UK*

## Glenbrittle Campsite, Isle of Skye, Scotland

### Best for: Spectacular Views

One of the most dramatically located campsites in the country, Glenbrittle is a swathe of open land at the foot of the glowering Cuilin mountains, with astonishing views both of the peaks and the long sandy beach that is just a stone's throw from the site. Don't come expecting luxury, this is about nature at its grandest, although there is a shop and toilet block with steamingly hot showers.

From £8pp per night, [www.dunvegancastle.com](http://www.dunvegancastle.com)

## Nantcol Waterfalls, Gwynedd, Wales

### Best for: Families

Surrounded by the spectacular landscapes of Snowdonia, Nantcol is a great site if you've got the kids in tow, with the River Nantcol to splash and play in and miles of open countryside to explore. Fall asleep to the sound of the waterfalls, after an evening spent by the campfire, while the beautiful beaches of Shell Island are just two miles away. The site is just less than three hours' drive west of Manchester.

From £9pp per night, [www.nantcolwaterfalls.co.uk](http://www.nantcolwaterfalls.co.uk)

## 3. QUIRKY

Cottage not cool enough? Bored with bed and breakfasts? How about staying in a shepherd's hut, a traditional gypsy caravan or even a double-decker bus? The countryside is dotted with restored, quirky properties that are perfect for an unforgettable weekend away.

### Under the Thatch

Whether you want to stay in an old railway carriage or a gypsy caravan, Under the Thatch will have something to suit, with a wonderfully eccentric collection of properties around Britain. There are more conventional options too - converted barns and cottages - but all are interesting historic properties that have been carefully restored to offer comfortable accommodation.

[www.underthethatch.co.uk](http://www.underthethatch.co.uk)

## The Helicopter, Blackberry Wood, Sussex

### Best for: *The wow factor*



A beautiful rural site in the South Downs, just a stone's throw from Brighton, Blackberry Wood offers the chance to stay in a 1965 Search and Rescue Helicopter. The Copter sleeps two adults and two children, with an outside kitchen area, complete with pots and pans, and bathroom facilities just across the field. Blackberry Wood is just over an hour's drive south of London.

From £80 per night, [www.blackberrywood.com](http://www.blackberrywood.com)

*Always wanted to stay in a helicopter?! Now you can!*

### **The House in the Clouds, Thorpeness, Suffolk**

*Best for: A sense of the extraordinary*

One of the most spectacular follies in Britain, the House in the Clouds is a former water tower for Thorpeness village that has been converted into a unique holiday cottage. Rooms are over five floors, with 67 stairs linking the kitchen and the fifth floor games room; hard work on the legs, but the views are worth it. Sleeps up to ten, around two-and-a-half hours' drive north-east of London.

From £525 per night, [www.houseinthecLOUDS.co.uk](http://www.houseinthecLOUDS.co.uk)

### **Gypswtch, Camarthen, Wales**

*Best for: Romance/Public Transport*

Stay in an authentic gypsy wagon, or 'vardo' that dates back to the 19th century and has been restored to keep all the traditional Romany touches. The slide-out bed is made up for guests' arrival, with a range stove under a brass mantelpiece to heat the wagon. 300 metres from the caravan, there is a grassy platform carved out of the hill where you can laze in a hammock, or have an evening barbecue. Trains from Paddington to Camarthen take four hours, taxi from the station to Gypsy Cwtch around 20 mins.

Two-night breaks £165, [www.gypswtch.co.uk](http://www.gypswtch.co.uk)

## **4. COTTAGES**

Always fancied your own thatched cottage, with roses up the wall and village life right outside your door? It's easy to make the dream a reality, whether you're looking for a romantic bolthole for two surrounded by rolling hills, or a family-friendly house and easy walk from shops and facilities. Many cottages offer truly luxurious accommodation, with well-kept gardens for summer days and fire-lit lounges for winter nights.

### **Brecon Cottages, Wales**

Brecon Cottages have a great choice of properties across the Brecon Beacons and South Wales, from converted stables to rolling farmhouses, many with fantastic walks from the front door.

[www.breconcottages.com](http://www.breconcottages.com)

### **Coastal Cottages, West Country**

A fantastic range of top-end properties across the West Country, with beautiful cottages in the seaside towns, rural villages and rolling countryside of Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall.

[www.coastalcottages.co.uk](http://www.coastalcottages.co.uk)

### **Unique Cottages, Scotland**

Whether you're looking for a fisherman's cottage in a loch-side village or a mountain retreat for a family week, Unique will have the cottage to suit. Many can be booked for short-breaks as well as full weeks. [www.unique-cottages.co.uk](http://www.unique-cottages.co.uk)



*For anyone wanting to re-enact Rapunzel - head to the House in the Clouds*

## Imagine Ireland

A wide range of cottages in Northern Ireland, including pet-friendly houses, cottages for families and gorgeous beachfront retreats.

[www.imagineireland.com](http://www.imagineireland.com)

### Smugglers Cottage, Dittisham, Devon

*Best for: Riverside walks*

A 400-year-old cottage on its own quay in the picturesque village of Dittisham, exposed timbers, flagstone floors and woodburner stoves all help create a period feel. There's a small garden and terrace overlooking the water and there are some lovely pubs and cafes in the villages. Dittisham is just over three hours' drive south west of London.

From £667 per week, [www.toadhallcottages.co.uk](http://www.toadhallcottages.co.uk)

### Mochrie 1, Angus, Scotland

*Best for: Glorious isolation*

If you want to really get away from it all, but not compromise on style or comfort, Mochrie 1 is the perfect choice. In a secluded location with high moorland views, the cottage has been restored with antique furniture, scrubbed wooden floorboards, copper baths and a wonderful firelit lounge. Sleeps six; Edinburgh and Glasgow are around two hours' drive.

From £600 per week, [www.cottages-and-castles.co.uk](http://www.cottages-and-castles.co.uk)

### The Smithy, Abercastle, Wales

*Best for: A beach break*

An idyllic bolthole for two, The Smithy is a quaint cottage with slate floors and exposed stonework that makes a sturdy backdrop to a mix of contemporary furniture and antique pieces. The house is ideally situated right on the coast, with the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path right outside the door, and fishermen landing their catch on the beach below. Abercastle is around two hours' drive west of Cardiff.

From £386 per week, [www.coastalcottages.co.uk](http://www.coastalcottages.co.uk)

## 5. COUNTRY HOUSE HOTELS

### Pride of Britain Hotels

A collection of over 40 individually run properties, including some of Britain's most luxurious country houses, all privately owned and offering a very individual, very British welcome.

[www.prideofbritainhotels.com](http://www.prideofbritainhotels.com)

### Handpicked Hotels

From the mountains of Snowdonia, to Edinburgh in Scotland and the far south east of the country, Handpicked offer a good selection of mid-range country house hotels, many with excellent spa facilities.

[www.handpickedhotels.co.uk](http://www.handpickedhotels.co.uk)

## Welsh Rarebits

Named after the classic Welsh cheese-on-toast dish, Rarebits brings together the best accommodation in Wales, many of them charming country houses dotted around the valleys or by the coast. [www.rarebits.co.uk](http://www.rarebits.co.uk)



*Beech Hill House is an elegant Georgian Mansion - explore the nearby countryside on horseback*

### **Beech Hill House, Derry, Northern Ireland**

***Best for: A foodie weekend***

An elegant Georgian mansion on the outskirts of Londonderry, Beech Hill offers old style elegance, with antique filled rooms and 32 acres of unspoilt countryside to explore. Dinner in the Ardmore restaurant is a particular highlight, with the accent on traditional Irish dishes and locally sourced produce. Derry station is a ten-minute taxi ride away.

Doubles from [www.beech-hill.com](http://www.beech-hill.com)

### **Chewton Glen, Hampshire, England**

***Best for: A Romantic Escape/Public Transport***

To experience English country house living at its gracious best, there are few places to rival Chewton Glen. Guests return year after year for the impeccable service, beautiful firelit lounges, Michelin-starred food and the gorgeous New Forest countryside that spreads out around the hotel.

The hotel is an easy five-minute taxi hop from New Milton station, which is around two hours' by train from London Waterloo.

Doubles from £325 B&B, [www.chewtonglen.com](http://www.chewtonglen.com)

### **Kinloch House, Perthshire, Scotland**

***Best for: Houseparty Feel***

The best country house hotels feel like a home from home, and Kinloch strives to offer a real houseparty feel, with 15 rooms that have been designed to re-create the feel of a grand, sporting lodge in its Victorian heyday. The firelit bar is the perfect place to curl up with a whisky or two, while the restaurant offers the best Scottish produce, and there are some wonderful walks from the door. The hotel is around 90 minutes' drive from Edinburgh or two hours from Glasgow.

Doubles from £215 B&B [www.kinlochhouse.com](http://www.kinlochhouse.com)

## **6. HISTORIC**

Britain is littered with historic properties that have been transformed into places to stay, from simple worker's cottages to ornate follies, dining towers and grand mansions.

### **National Trust**

Britain's largest heritage charity, the National Trust also owns hundreds of holiday cottages - some on grand country estates, others on clifftops or in national parks.

[www.nationaltrustcottages.co.uk](http://www.nationaltrustcottages.co.uk)

## Landmark Trust

The Landmark Trust has some of the most unusual, impressive and downright quirky historic buildings in its portfolio, all carefully restored to offer comfortable accommodation while maintaining a period feel.

[www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)

## Vivat Trust

The Vivat Trust is a charity that exists solely to rescue historic buildings, restore and convert them into unique holiday homes. There are 22 properties in England, Scotland and Wales, including a Civil War arms store, an 18th-century folly and an Elizabethan banqueting tower.

[www.vivat-org.uk](http://www.vivat-org.uk)

### The Pineapple, Dunmore, Scotland

*Best for: Garden Lovers*

English eccentricity at its best, the Pineapple is an elaborate summer house that was built in the 18th century. It overlooks a beautiful walled garden that is open to the public, but there is also a private garden behind the property for guests only. The Pineapple sleeps four, and is around 45 minutes' drive north of Edinburgh.

Four nights from £217, [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)

### North Lees Hall, Hathersage, Derbyshire

*Best for: Literature Fans/Public Transport*

Fans of the great British novel *Jane Eyre* will love North Lees hall - supposedly the inspiration for Thornfield Hall, home of Mr Rochester in the novel. The spectacular tower dates back to the 16th century and has a wonderfully isolated location in the heart of the Peak District. Rooms have a suitably historic feel with antique furniture and imposing four poster beds. The Hall is a ten-minute taxi ride from Hathersage station, which is around three hours train journey from London St Pancras. Sleeps six.

Three-night breaks from £562, [www.vivat.org.uk](http://www.vivat.org.uk)



*Who wouldn't want to sleep in a house with a pineapple on top?! You can rent out this Landmark Trust property*

## 7. CASTLES

### Castles

Fancy playing king and queen for a day? The British countryside is dotted with spectacular castles that have opened their doors to paying guests - from sprawling Norman fortresses to firelit Tudor palaces - all of them offering the chance to really feel that you are living a little piece of British history.

## Celtic Castles

Celtic Castles has a huge range of properties available to book, in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The site also offers suggested itineraries for touring the country and staying in castles and calls can be arranged with 'The Castle Man' who can talk through different options and find the best castle to suit.

[www.celticcastles.com](http://www.celticcastles.com)

## Historic-UK

Historic-UK is a website focusing on historic accommodation throughout the British Isles, with a comprehensive section on castles, with full booking facilities for each one.

[www.historic-uk.com/castlehotels](http://www.historic-uk.com/castlehotels)

### Amberley Castle, West Sussex



*Amberley Castle - stately splendour, just over an hour outside of London*

***Best for: A romantic night away/arriving by public transport***

Hidden away between the rolling hills of the South Downs, Amberley is a 900-year-old privately owned castle that just oozes indulgence, from the firelit lounges to the cosy bedrooms filled with antique furniture. There are twelve acres of beautifully manicured gardens to stroll in, while dinner in the 12th-century dining room is an event in itself. Amberley village has its own station, just over an hour's train journey from London Victoria.

Doubles from £195 B&B, [www.amberleycastle.co.uk](http://www.amberleycastle.co.uk)

### Thornbury Castle, Gloucestershire

***Best for: Families***

The only Tudor castle in England operating as a hotel, Thornbury is part of the Luxury Family Hotels Group, making it the perfect choice for those travelling with children. Kids will love exploring the building with its secret panels and hidden staircases, while outside activities include archery and croquet. Early suppers are available for younger children, while babysitters mean that parents can enjoy a relaxed meal later in the evening. Thornbury is around two hours' drive west of London.

Doubles from £230, dinner, B&B, [www.thornburycastle.co.uk](http://www.thornburycastle.co.uk)

### Ruthin Castle, Denbighshire

***Best for: A history-themed break***

Steeped in 700 years of history, Ruthin dates back to the legend of King Arthur and has been owned by Edward I, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. One of the highlights is the medieval banquet, which tends to end up as quite a party night; fortunately the tranquil Moat Spa is the perfect place to recover. Many of the rooms are furnished as they would have been in medieval times, creating a



*Budding knights should book into Thornbury Castle*

wonderfully authentic period feel. Ruthin is around 20 miles from Chester, and just over four hours drive north-west of London. Doubles from £80 B&B, [www.ruthincastle.co.uk](http://www.ruthincastle.co.uk)

## 7. Huts and Bothies

If you really want to discover the most unspoilt landscapes in Britain, bothies are a great option; disused huts and shepherds cabins that offer shelter and a place to stay in the most isolated corners of Britain. Accommodation is basic and visitors need to bring their own bedding and cooking utensils, but they do guarantee an unforgettable - if not always the most comfortable - night.

### Huts and Cabins

A useful website that brings together a huge number of huts, cabins, lodges and bothies throughout Scotland, from the very basic to the completely luxurious.

[www.hutsandcabins.co.uk](http://www.hutsandcabins.co.uk)

### Mountain Bothies Association

The MBA maintains around 100 bothies around Britain, with many in the most rural and spectacular parts of Scotland, although there are bothies in Wales and England. Bothies are free to stay in, but cannot be booked, and many offer no facilities beyond a roof and four walls!

[www.mountainbothies.org.uk](http://www.mountainbothies.org.uk)

### Trannish Island Bothy, Lough Erne, Northern Ireland

*Best for: An outdoor adventure*

Slightly less basic than many bothies, Trannish Island Bothy comes with a wood-burning stove showers and camping platforms to sleep on. Trannish itself is a large island on Upper Lough Erne that offers a wonderful sense of escape, and is a stopping point on the Lough Erne Canoe trail, making it a great place for to overnight after an evening barbecue.

£8pp/£80 exclusive use, [www.sharevillage.org/caravan-and-camp-site/trannish-island-bothy](http://www.sharevillage.org/caravan-and-camp-site/trannish-island-bothy)

### Westland Farm, Exmoor Devon

*Best for: Peace and quiet*

Stay in a brand new shepherd's hut in its own clearing, right by a stream on the peaceful Westland Farm in the heart of Exmoor. The hut can sleep two adults and one child in compact comfort, with a small kitchen area, woodburning stove and antique table and chairs. Westland Farm is around four hours' drive west of London.

From £70 per night, [www.westlandfarm.co.uk](http://www.westlandfarm.co.uk)

### Coed Owen Bunkhouse, Merthyr Tydfil, Wales

*Best for: A walking break*

Bunkhouses are a step up from bothies, with bunk beds in shared rooms, and full kitchen facilities and a shared space for relaxing in. Coed Owen is in the heart of the beautiful Brecon Beacons National Park, which offers fantastic walking and cycling trails and is also

home to some of the darkest skies in the country. Coed Owen is around 45 minutes drive north of Cardiff. From £20pp per night, [www.breconbeaconsbunkhouse.co.uk](http://www.breconbeaconsbunkhouse.co.uk)

## **8. Treehouses**

Who said treehouses were for kids? These days, an eyrie in the trees can be a luxurious bolthole for two, or a spacious network of rooms sleeping up to ten. Treehouses can be found around Britain, in locations from the grounds of luxury hotels to unspoilt forests.

### **Forest Holidays**

Forest Holidays offer treehouses in five locations around England, from Cornwall in the far south west to Yorkshire in the north. Ideal for a big family or a group, the treehouses can sleep up to ten, with a spacious lounge area.

[www.forestholidays.co.uk](http://www.forestholidays.co.uk)

### **Center Parcs**

A great choice for a family break, with a huge range of activities on offer for kids of all ages, Centre Parcs now offers treehouse accommodation at its sites in Longleat Forest in Wiltshire and Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire.

[www.centerparcs.co.uk](http://www.centerparcs.co.uk)

### **West Lexham Treehouses, *Best for: A romantic break***

Alongside two beautiful treehouses, there are also two tree 'temples' to book at West Lexham, all offering luxurious and romantic accommodation, with beautiful wooden beds and furniture, lots of candles and fairylights and even a guitar for serenading each other. Outside there's a fabulous outdoor kitchen with several gazebos, oven and hob and wood-fired pizza oven, while each house has its own camping barbecue. West Lexham is around two hours east of London.



*At West Lexham you're almost camouflaged*

Short-breaks from  
£226,  
[www.westlexham.org](http://www.westlexham.org)

### **Harptree Court, Somerset *Best for: A decadent night***

A spectacular hideaway for two, perched among the trees on the edge of a wood in the grounds of Harptree Court. There is a wide verandah that's perfect for lazing on and taking in the views, while inside the feel is decadent luxury; king-size bed, traditional copper bath and full kitchen facilities - although you can come down to earth and make use of all the hotel facilities if desired. Harptree Court is just less than three hours' drive west of London.



*Get a birds' eye view when you wake up at Harptree Court!*

From £250 per night, [www.harptreecourt.co.uk](http://www.harptreecourt.co.uk)

### Gwdy Hw, Powys, Wales

*Best for: An Outdoor Adventure*



*Not your average hotel lobby...  
Gwdy Hw in Wales*

A treehouse that really is all about living in the woods, getting to Gwdy Hw involves a short hike through a wooded valley and then a dramatic spiral staircase up to the unique cabin. Inside, all is simple; a comfortable bed, wood-burning stove, and outdoor space for sitting and simply basking in the silence. The hot-water shower is back down the stairs, while the toilet has a separate deck, across a short walkway.

From £203 per night, [www.canopyandstars.co.uk](http://www.canopyandstars.co.uk)

## 9. Lighthouses

Britain is an island nation and, as such, its coastline is dotted with lighthouses - there to guide ships through dangerous or deceptive waters. These days many have been replaced by technological guidance systems, leaving the buildings as empty shells. Many have been lovingly restored to offer bed

and breakfast or self-catering accommodation, all offering spectacular views and a wonderful sense of space.

### Rural Retreats

A specialist in upmarket cottage accommodation, Rural Retreats also has 26 lighthouses and lighthouse keeper's cottages to rent, from Cornwall to Yorkshire and Wales.

[www.ruralretreats.co.uk](http://www.ruralretreats.co.uk)

### Trinity House

Trinity House is the General Lighthouse Authority in Britain and has been since 1514. They manage the working lighthouses in Britain, but their site also has information on those that have been converted into holiday cottages.

[www.trinityhouse.co.uk](http://www.trinityhouse.co.uk)

### Belle Toute Lighthouse, Eastbourne, Sussex

*Best for: Public Transport/Spectacular Views*

Built in 1832, Belle Toute overlooks the spectacular coastline at Beachy Head, in the far south-east corner of England. Cleverly converted into a six-room bed and breakfast, guests can even stay in the original Lighthouse Keeper's bunkroom (although it is a little cosy). All rooms have wonderful views over the sea and the South Downs and some have log fires. No children under 15 are allowed. The lighthouse is a 15-minute taxi ride from Eastbourne station, which is 90 minutes by train from London Victoria.

Doubles from £145 B&B, [www.belletoute.co.uk](http://www.belletoute.co.uk)



*Yes that's a Tardis by your hot tub - West Usk is in Wales after all, where Doctor Who is filmed!*

## West Usk Lighthouse, Newport, Wales

*Best for: A family adventure*

Another lighthouse bed and breakfast where the diverse views mean you could sit by the window for an entire day and never get bored. West Usk overlooks the Bristol Channel in the south west of the country, where the second-highest tidal range in the country surges up river twice a day. There are ten quirkily elegant bedrooms, an outdoor hot-tub and beautiful views of the surrounding countryside. Located just outside the Welsh city of Newport, West Usk is just under three hours' drive west of London.

From £145 B&B, [www.westusklighthouse.co.uk](http://www.westusklighthouse.co.uk)

## Mull of Galloway Lighthouse, Dumfries & Galloway

*Best for: A sense of escape*

High on top of a cliff on the most southerly point of Scotland is one of the Stevenson's great lighthouses, which first shone in 1830. Superb mountain, forest and coastal scenery await. There are three holiday cottages but the old lightkeeper's cottage offers the most spectacular coastal views, across the Irish Sea to the Mountains of Mourne.

[www.lighthouseholidaycottages.co.uk](http://www.lighthouseholidaycottages.co.uk)

## 10. ...A BIT OF EVERYTHING!

**Sawday's** is a fantastic family business originally known for its 'Special Places to Stay' collection of guidebooks. The books and easy-to-use Sawday's website are perfect for those who want to book a real countryside gem. From **B&Bs, self-catering and inns**, to **treehouses, cabins and yurts**, through to **pubs** to sleep at, the team selects places that are unique, individual and high quality. The onus is on the owners too, so it's good for people who like to meet the locals and get their tips for the best place to eat, or go for walks in the area. Search by collection and sort by places that are good for groups, family friendly, just for two, close to coast and ethical.

[www.sawdays.co.uk](http://www.sawdays.co.uk)

## Organisations taking care of Britain's countryside

### UK National Parks Association

The Association works with all 15 National Parks, are areas of protected countryside that everyone can visit, and where people live, work and shape the landscape

Each one has an organisation that looks after the landscape and wildlife and helps people enjoy and learn about the area. [www.nationalparks.gov.uk](http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk)

### The National Trust

A charity that works to preserve and protect historic places and spaces, the National Trust was founded over 100 years ago, by three passionate Victorians who wanted to preserve outdoor spaces. They say 'We protect historic houses, gardens, mills, coastline, forests, woods, fens, beaches, farmland, moorland, islands, archaeological remains, nature reserves, villages and pubs. Then we open them up forever, for everyone.'

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

## **The National Trust for Scotland**

The National Trust for Scotland was established in 1931 in order to protect and promote Scotland's natural and cultural heritage. [www.nts.org.uk/Home](http://www.nts.org.uk/Home)

## **Scottish National Heritage**

Looks after the country's landscapes and wildlife. Their website has useful information on places to see and how to get there. [www.snh.gov.uk](http://www.snh.gov.uk)

## **Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (formerly CAAN)**

An organisation responsible for developing, managing and promoting outdoor activities including walking, cycling, canoeing and adventure activities throughout Northern Ireland, by working in partnership with a wide range of organisations.

[www.outdoorrecreationni.com](http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com)

## **Countryside Council for Wales**

The Countryside Council for Wales (CCW; Welsh: Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru (CCGC)), a Welsh Government Sponsored Body, and Wales' wildlife conservation authority. As a statutory advisory and prosecuting body, the Countryside Council for Wales champions the environment and landscapes of Wales and its coastal waters as sources of natural and cultural riches. [www.ccw.gov.uk](http://www.ccw.gov.uk)

## **The Royal Horticultural Society**

The Royal Horticultural Society is Britain's leading gardening charity dedicated to advancing horticulture and promoting good gardening. It organises the world-class flower shows at Chelsea, Hampton Court Palace and Tatton Park. The RHS has gardens in Harlow Carr in North Yorkshire, Hyde Hall in Essex, Rosemoor in Devon and Wisley in Surrey.

[www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)

## **The Forestry Commission**

Once Britain was covered entirely by forest, known as the "Wild Wood", but the impact of human activity over the millennia, clearing space for agriculture and settlements and using wood for construction and industry, reduced forest cover to just 5%. To turn this around, the Forestry Commission was established in 1919 to protect and expand Britain's forests and they plant around 24 million trees each year. Britain's forest cover has now grown to 12% and visitors are encouraged to explore and enjoy these woods. The Forestry Commission also runs a programme of live music concerts featuring well-known bands every June and July in eight of their forests. [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)

## **The Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways)**

The Canal & River Trust cares for a unique 2,000-mile network of canals and rivers. Dating back to the world's first Industrial Revolution these waterways are among the finest examples of working heritage in the world and are a British national treasure. Today they provide a welcome escape for walking, cycling, wildlife spotting and leisure boating.

[www.canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk)

## Natural England

The government's independent advisor on the natural environment, helping to make sure the public and tourists can enjoy the diversity of England's wildlife and landscapes. Their work includes establishing and caring for England's main wildlife and geological sites, ensuring that over 4,000 National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest are looked after and improved. [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

## English Heritage

English Heritage helps people understand, value, care for and enjoy England's unique heritage, and though much of this is 'built heritage', it ranges from prehistoric stone circles - like Stonehenge - to a 1960s nuclear bunker and includes Hadrian's Wall, Charles Darwin's diaries and the Duke of Wellington's boots. Taken together, over 400 properties cared for by English Heritage help to tell the story of England.

[www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)