COUNTRYSIDE IS GREAT BRITAIN

A guide for international media
Edition 3 - December 2013

Lighthouse
Llanddwyn Island, Anglesey, Wales

visitbritain.com/media
## Contents

Quick facts about the British Countryside ................................................................. 2  
Countryside is GREAT - why? .................................................................................. 3  
10 must-do countryside experiences ........................................................................ 4  
Country piles to visit - and even stay in! ................................................................. 7  
Eat, sleep and work (!) at Britain’s busy farms ......................................................... 11  
10 great family adventures ...................................................................................... 15  
Step back in time - Britain’s best-preserved towns and villages ............................... 17  
Lights, camera, action! The British countryside on screen ...................................... 20  
Bye bye Beverly Hills, hello British countryside ..................................................... 24  
Countryside Chic: Get the celebrity look ............................................................... 27  
Live out your love story in Britain: where to propose to the man or woman in your life! 28  
National Parks - Britain’s ‘breathing spaces’ .......................................................... 31  
UNESCO Heritage Sites and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty ......................... 36  
The Open Road - Great British Car Journeys ......................................................... 37  
Car-free countryside getaways ................................................................................ 43  
Thrills in the countryside ...................................................................................... 50  
Soft adventure - enjoying the outdoors ................................................................. 52  
Walk on Britain’s wild side ..................................................................................... 54  
Keeping Britain’s land green and pleasant - eco-friendly holidays ......................... 62  
Great Gardens of Britain ....................................................................................... 66  
Britain’s seasons - what to see year-round, from blossom to snow ......................... 72  
Get lost in a forest ................................................................................................. 74  
Meet native wildlife ............................................................................................... 76  
Dive down deep - scuba-diving in Britain .............................................................. 78  
Small is beautiful - Britain’s Islands ..................................................................... 80  
Seaside escapes: from goth to glamour ............................................................... 88  
Lakes - monsters, adventure sports and relaxation .................................................. 90  
Star-spotting in Britain’s National Parks ............................................................... 93  
Access all areas - a countryside for everyone ....................................................... 96  
Accommodation in the countryside - a guide ....................................................... 98  
Organisations taking care of Britain’s countryside ............................................ 109
Quick facts about the British Countryside
Did you know..?

- You can stay in a cottage in the vast grounds of Alnwick Castle, where Harry Potter's Quidditch lessons were filmed. Read about country piles to visit and stay in on p7

- The British countryside is one big, green film set! From *The Da Vinci Code* to *Skyfall*, *Pride and Prejudice* to *Fury*, there are lots of places to trace the action of your favourite movie moments. Read about countryside filming locations you can visit on p20

- The Cotswolds is the celebrity capital of Britain's countryside - Kate Moss, Damien Hirst, Lily Allen and many more have made their homes there. Read about more A-list countryside hangouts on p24

- Joules, Hunter, Cherchbi, Peregrine... all brands to know if you want to get the countryside look shared by British high society. See p27 for a guide to country chic

- You can propose to your loved one at St Bride’s Hotel in Wales, to get the message across loud and clear! Get ideas for other places to propose in the countryside on p28

- Loch Lomond has 37 islands, many of which are privately owned, and four of which still receive their post by mail boat. You can board the boat for a leisurely Loch morning and visit them. Read about more inspiring car-free countryside getaways on p43

- 2014 is Shakespeare's 450th anniversary, and to commemorate the occasion, you can walk 'Shakespeare's Way'. The route stretches from the dramatist's hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon to Shakespeare's Globe theatre in the capital, and takes seven days - take the complete works with you! Read about soft adventure holidays on p52

- Keep energy levels high while walking the Six Dales in Yorkshire, by stocking up on sweets at the Oldest Sweet Shop in England, at the quaint village of Pateley Bridge - a family run business since 1827. Read about wonderful walks on p55

- From putting a historic house 'to bed' at the end of a season, to making cider, there are plenty of conservation vacations offered by the National Trust. Read about them, and other eco-friendly holiday destinations on p62

- Think gardens are just for flowers? Think again. In Britain you can visit one run by naked gardeners! Read about that, and more cool gardens on p66

- Did you know there's a forest at the end of the London Underground's central line? Read about that, and more forests you can explore on p74

- There's a lot more to accommodation than hotels! 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 updated countryside accommodation guide from p98.
Countryside is GREAT - why?

Britain might be a small island, but it's characterised by a huge variety of landscapes. From rolling hills and rough peaks in England's Midlands, to fantastic beaches and bays in Wales. At its northernmost extreme, Scotland's Highlands offer impressive mountains and fascinating bird and sealife, while over the Irish Sea the dramatic Giant's Causeway - which mixes myth with millennia-old volcanic history - is quite understandably the most popular visitor attraction in Northern Ireland.

We've updated VisitBritain’s Countryside guide for international media: this is the 3rd edition of the guide, which has more than doubled in length, with plenty of new content designed to inform and inspire travel in Britain. Check out some of our new stories, with lots more inside the guide:

Ditch the car to explore the great outdoors

There are plenty of countryside getaways you can make without needing a car in Britain, making it easy to combine a city break with a dose of fresh air and bracing walks. The 15 National Parks are all accessible by public transport - so when in Manchester, carve out time for a trip to the Lake or Peak District; when in London head to the beautiful South Downs, or from Glasgow escape to pretty Loch Lomond in just 40 minutes.

See p43 for information on car-free country getaways, and p31 for what to do in each of Britain’s National Parks. If you do have the car, see p37 for great car journeys in rural Britain, with itineraries suited to couples, families and groups of friends.

Take a tip from the top

Though you'll often see pictures of celebrities living the high life in London, many A-listers love nothing better than Britain’s fresh country air, cosy pubs and simpler way of life. From Hollywood stars to pop stars, find out where British celebs choose to make their homes in the country, and where international stars love to visit. See p24 for more.

Fun for the family

The countryside is the perfect place to explore with kids in tow, with plenty to amuse them from discovering dinosaurs on the Isle of Wight, to stomping through Sherwood Forest, hot on the heels of the Robin Hood story.

Read about 10 great family adventures on p 15.

Island living

Britain is surrounded by more than 6000 islands, 140 of which are inhabited. They're wildly different from each other, and often from the mainland, so hop on a ferry for a real adventure - will you choose the Isle of Wight, with its famed Garlic Festival? Or the Scilly Isles, with their sub-tropical climate and supermodel gardens? Or perhaps the Orkneys, right at the top, where you might make friends with a seal!

See p80 for the full feature.
Camp, ‘glamp’, sleep in a lighthouse, a treehouse or a castle!

There’s no better way to get back to nature than sleeping among it – but these days, there’s no need to rough it. ‘Glamping’ in Britain began at festivals, but has gained in popularity and there is now a yurt, wigwam, a canalboat or even a treehouse to suit all tastes in accommodation. If you want to live it up, there are country house hotels, castles and historic properties to suit you.

Read our comprehensive guide to finding a countryside accommodation option to suit you from p98.

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.

2. Enjoy a traditional pub lunch

England’s smallest county, Rutland, just under two hours’ drive from Birmingham, offers a taste of our traditional countryside and is home to The Good Pub Guide’s Pub of the Year 2014. The Olive Branch, in the pretty village of Clipsham, serves classic pub food alongside sophisticated dishes, delivered with a passion for local produce. Sloe gin, damson vodka and mulled wine, made with berries from the surrounding hedgerows, complement the list of excellent real ales and fine wines. It even has rooms across the road.

www.theolivebranchpub.com, 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, child/adult, £25/£40.

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 sand 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 last year - beating Hawaii! See the beauty for yourself, on a walk, swim or surf.


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.

www.heligan.com

6. Hike our highest peak – or its baby brother

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 (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 for 2013. 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. Open between April and October.

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

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

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
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 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

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 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
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.

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 upon Tyne in north-east England

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, approx 50 minutes by train from London

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, approx 90 minutes via train from London www.longleat.co.uk

Countryside | 8
Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, central England

You may recognize 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.

Where to stay: Try the colourful, modern Devonshire Arms

[http://devonshirebeeley.co.uk](http://devonshirebeeley.co.uk)

Location: *Derbyshire, in the East Midlands, is approx 2.5 hours from London by train.*

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

Culcreuch Castle, Lanarkshire, central Scotland

Built between 1296 and 1320, the castle was the ancestral seat of the Scottish clan Galbraith for over 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](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

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

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

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 which was 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 offer 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

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 cozy 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 £600 per week, Honeysuckle Cottage, four bedrooms, from £1,200 per week (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

*Bake your own cupcake around the Aga oven, in the heart of the Cheshire countryside*
WWOOFers from May 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).

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 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 £60 per night (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. Be a Farmer for a Day, £50; Granary Cottage, sleeps four, from £300 per week; Straw Cottage, sleeps four, from £500 per week (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 £315, midweek stays from £245, and week breaks from £445, April to October (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; Goldsmithing lessons from £25 (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-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’ (£90) and ‘Cooking the perfect roast dinner’ (£175) and has just 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 £330 for a weekend break (www.daylesford.com).

**Riverford Organics, Devon, south-west England**

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 butternut squash, spinach, red onion and feta baked in pastry. Free family friendly events, for example ‘Pumpkin Day’ in autumn, keep the kids amused, too, with vegetable-themed arts and crafts. Riverford also runs cookery classes off site, with evening sessions at the Vegetarian Cookery School in Bath (£45), and The Cooking Club in north London (£45) (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 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 £50 per night (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 grazing). Enjoy a taste in the Kilnford Kitchen Café, which spills out onto a sun terrace in the warmer months. (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. The farm’s latest 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).
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 10 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). Nearby, the National Showcaves Centre for Wales offers great value, with entry to ten attractions with one ticket, child/adult, £8.50/£13.75 (www.showcaves.co.uk).

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, £3.70/£6.20 (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, £19.12/£26.77 (www.longleat.co.uk).

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. Suitable for children from seven years old. Open weekends, 11.00 - 16.00; day pass £5 (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 (www.sherwoodpinescycles.co.uk, 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.

**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 £38 per day (www.bunkcampers.com).

**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).

**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 £284 for a three-night weekend (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 £21.15/£9.45 (www.edenproject.com).

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

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)

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

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
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 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.

[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)

**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 17th- and 18th-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

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

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

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

Have a Brief Encounter at Carnforth Station
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

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 cozy 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.


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, recently. 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. The eagerly anticipated movie is set for release in November 2014 but to experience a real-life film set before then, 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

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 plays 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

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://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

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 recent 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-butressed 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.visityork.org](http://www.visityork.org)

*Country-side* | 23
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. In fact, the region is home to more stars per acre than anywhere outside the capital with around 50 celebrities with hide-aways in the area. (www.cotswolds.com)

Supermodel Kate Moss celebrated her wedding to rocker Jamie Hince at her country estate in Little Farringdon, 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).

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). 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 & Lleyn sheep. Liz has even been seen at Cirencester Market personally selling her Gloucester Old Spot sausages. (www.cirencester.co.uk/market.htm)

Other celebrities with homes in the Cotswolds include actress Kate Winslet, who owns a £3.5million Grade II-listed manor house in Church Westcote, just outside Cheltenham; 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.

THE LAKE DISTRICT: Pop-star paradise

Pop stars Taylor Swift and One Direction’s Harry Styles were spotted together in 2012, in the midst of their brief romance, enjoying the quaint town of Bowness-On-Windermere in the Lake District.
Situated in England’s north west, the area is a huge hit with nature lovers who like to get out on the lake, hike in the hills or simple cosy up in a cottage; you can’t fail to relax among the inspirational mountains, lakes and secret valleys.

The pop pair were spotted feeding swans by Lake Windemere (which, at ten and a half miles long and 219ft/67m deep, is England's largest lake), proving it’s the simple pleasures in life that even international stars enjoy the most. ([www.lakedistrict.gov.uk](http://www.lakedistrict.gov.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, is proving a particularly popular Hollywood hotspot.

Actresses Goldie Hawn and daughter Kate Hudson, who is engaged to Matt Bellamy, a local farm owner who also happens to be frontman of rock band Muse, have livened up the quiet town of Topsham. 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 – no wonder they love it so much! ([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.

Rumour has it too that Bafta-winning actress Carey Mulligan has been looking for a farmhouse in Devon for her and new husband Marcus Mumford, singer of folk-rock band Mumford and Sons. ([www.visitdevon.co.uk](http://www.visitdevon.co.uk))

Julian Fellowes, Oscar-winning creator of Downton Abbey, lives in Devon’s neighboring 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!

The Grammy award winning singer Adele has also splashed out on a sprawling grade II-listed countryside mansion in the county, drawn no doubt by the area’s wide range of scenery, including woodland, chalk hills and coastline. (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)

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)

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)

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)

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

Atmospheric Northern Ireland was chosen as the set for Game of Thrones
club so if you want to see it you’ll have to join the waiting list. (www.carnegieclub.co.uk/index.html)

NORTHERN IRELAND: Fantasy land

Elijah Wood recently 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)

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)

**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)

**Barbour**: When style icon Alexa Chung stepped out wearing a traditional wax jacket by Barbour, she sparked a trend for these practical, yet cool, cover-ups. (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)

**Mulberry**: The only bag to be seen carrying into rustic country pubs à la Duchess of Cambridge. (www.mulberry.com)

**Pringle of Scotland**: One of the hottest tickets at London Fashion Week, this Scottish brand is known for its high-quality knits and famous fans including David Beckham, who has admitted his favourite hobby since retiring from professional football is a long walk around the British countryside. (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))

**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)

Rhossili Bay in south Wales beat competition from Hawaii to make it into TripAdvisor’s top ten beaches in the world, and came third in a similar list of European beaches, as well as being voted the world’s best picnic spot. 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 was recently refurbished, and is tastefully furnished, with a luxurious spa and an infinity pool looking over the sea to fully immerse you in romance. 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

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). 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).

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, 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)

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! [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)
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

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 fifteen 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

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 (9 – 24 May 2014). 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 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.

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](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.

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

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.


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

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

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

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

The Peak District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks will both feature on the route of the 2014 Le Grand Départ of the Tour de France, and both are excellent places to ‘go before the pros’ and test out 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; 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 over 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.


Remember the Romans in Northumberland National Park, England

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 the most peaceful areas of Britain and enjoying excellent pubs serving good food and local ales.

www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk

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.


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 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.

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

*Purple heather stretches out for miles on end in the North York Moors.*

*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)

**UNESCO Heritage Sites and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

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.

*Countryside* | 36
Britain also has its own rating for special places called Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. These are exactly what you’d imagine: precious landscapes whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation’s interest to safeguard them. There are 46 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (the scheme doesn’t run in Scotland), and include the Isle of Wight off England’s south coast, famous for its laid-back charm and summer music festivals; the pretty Isle of Anglesey off the coast of north Wales, which the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge once called home before moving to Kensington Palace in London this year; and the Kent Downs in southern England, where you can taste your way around hop farms and orchards before taking in the White Cliffs of Dover.

The Open Road – Great British Car Journeys

Britain is a brilliant place for a road trip, whether your base is the capital, London, or you start from any major airport and get stuck into your adventure straight away. Within an hour on the road you’ll have shed your pre-holiday cares, the reality of everyday life giving way to relaxation and rolling hills, dramatic coastlines, whisky distilleries, vineyards and – of course – cosy pubs aplenty.

We’ve put together a few three- to four-day driving trip ideas to get you inspired. Just pack your 1950s sunglasses and headscarf, start browsing ‘Aston Martin hire Britain’ and slide those driving gloves on.

Cotswolds & mythical Somerset
Three nights/four days

Picturesque villages and idyllic countryside, with traditional pubs and tea-rooms at every turn, the Cotswolds – around two hours’ drive west of London – offers a glimpse of England at its most traditionally picturesque. South of the Cotswolds lies the county of Somerset, steeped in myth and history and, together, these regions make the ideal choice for a romantic few days away, discovering British traditions and history.

Begin in the North Cotswolds; take tea on the village green in Bourton in the Water or take a stroll along Chipping Campden’s historic High Street lined with designer shops and boutiques. Stop for lunch at the Fox in Lower Oddington (www.foxinn.net), and indulge in a truly luxurious night at the Lords of the Manor (www.lordsofthemanor.com), a beautiful Cotswolds manor house with a Michelin-starred restaurant.

On day two, head through the southern Cotswolds to the beautiful Georgian city of Bath. The city has been a spa destination since Roman times; take the waters in the stunning rooftop pool at the Thermae Bath Spa (www.thermaebathspa.com) and try a traditional Bath Bun at Sally Lunns Tearooms (www.sallylunns.co.uk), unchanged since the mid-17th century. A short drive away lies Castle Combe, often called Britain’s prettiest village, with a high street dating back hundreds of years. Stay at the village’s historic pub, The Castle Inn (www.castle-inn.info).

From here, it’s an easy drive into Somerset and the town of Glastonbury. Famed for its annual music festival, it is also the
Countryside | 38

spiritual heart of Britain; Glastonbury Abbey (www.glastonburyabbey.com) is said to be the final resting place of the legendary King Arthur, while the isolated hill of Glastonbury Tor is one of Britain’s holiest places (and offers great views over two English counties and also over Wales). End the trip with a night at luxurious Babington House (www.babingtonhouse.co.uk) in Frome, part of the Soho House chain, a short drive from the motorway M4, and around two hours back to London.

An excellent resource for anyone wanting to explore The Cotswolds with a car is the Cotswolds Vintage and Modern tours website. Billed as the place for lovers of ‘the retro, the vintage and (whisper it) for those with a tendency to all things hipster’, it details four inspiring routes to discover a new side to the Cotswolds. Anyone who likes to browse a vintage store and stumble upon secret tea-rooms needs this as their guide. www.cotswoldsvintagetours.com

For more on the Cotswolds go to www.cotswolds.com
For more on Somerset go to www.visitsomerset.co.uk

Castles & vineyards, Surrey and Kent
Two nights/three days

The south east of Britain is rich in history and beauty, with thousand-year-old castles, medieval villages and wooded hills criss-crossed with ancient drover’s trails. The chalky soil is identical to that of France’s Champagne region, making it the centre of Britain’s growing wine industry. Distances are short and there are some wonderful campsites and farm bed and breakfasts, making this a great family trip.

Head south east from London and spend a day taking in the castles and gardens of Kent. Built on a lake and surrounded by 500 acres of parkland, Leeds Castle (www.leeds-castle.com) is one of the most beautiful in the country, while the world-famous garden of Sissinghurst, created by writers Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson, offers the chance to see a truly classic English country garden. In the village of Cranbrook, the George (www.thegeorgehotelkent.co.uk) is a great place for lunch or to stay overnight; Queen Elizabeth I stayed here in 1573.

The following day choose from 14th century Bodiam Castle or the historic town of Battle, site of the 1066 Battle of Hastings, before heading west into East Sussex and the spectacular coastal landscapes at Beachy Head and Cuckmere Haven. This area is home to the vineyards of comically named Breaky Bottom (www.breakybottom.co.uk) and Ridgeview (www.ridgeview.co.uk), while the Bull at Ditchling (www.thebullditchling.com) is a historic pub that’s great for a cosy lunch. It has rooms too, or if you have the kids in tow stay at the wonderful Blackberry Wood (www.blackberrywood.com), a beautifully situated campsite at the foot of the South Downs.

On the last day, head over into West Sussex, to the historic town of Arundel, dominated by a fairytale Norman castle (www.arundelcastle.org). Take a boat out on the tranquil Swanbourne Lake, and stop for lunch at Belinda’s Tea Rooms, a 16th century café that is an institution in the town. North of
Mountains and beaches of south Wales
Three nights/four days

If you’re heading to Cardiff for the rugby, or just want to discover some of Britain’s most unspoilt scenery, this is the route to choose. From the Welsh capital, both the brooding, mountainous landscapes of the Brecon Beacons National Park and the wide sandy beaches of the Gower peninsula are within easy reach. Ideal for those who love exploring the great outdoors, this trip offers walking, horse-riding, surfing and coasteering (scrambling, jumping and diving your way around a coastline), with plenty of cosy pubs in between.

From Cardiff, head into the Brecon Beacons National Park, through the pretty market town of Abergavenny, which hosts the world-famous Food Festival every September. Stop for lunch or afternoon tea at the elegant Angel Hotel (www.angelabergavenny.com) before exploring the dramatic Black Mountain scenery on the eastern side of the park. Spend the night at cosy gastropub The Felin Fach Griffin (www.felinfachgriffin.co.uk), or for a slice of luxury, head to country house hotel Llangoed Hall in time for a Welsh cream tea (www.llangoedhall.co.uk).

From here it’s an easy drive north if you want to visit Hay-on-Wye, location of the world-famous literary festival and second-hand bookshop capital of the world, or else head west to the pretty town of Landelo, which makes a great base for exploring the dramatic castles and lovely gardens in this area. Choose from Dinefwr Park and Castle or the spectacular Carreg Cennen Castle, perched on a 100-metre cliff. The Fronlas, in Landelo (www.fronlas.com), is a stylish bed and breakfast that is an easy walk from the town’s eateries, including the historic Cawdor, a boutique hotel with a fantastic restaurant (www.thecawdor.com).

On the third day, head south to the spectacular Gower peninsula, which stretches out from the city of Swansea. Have lunch at the Bay Bistro (www.baybistro.co.uk) overlooking the spectacular beach of Rhossili Bay, before exploring the pretty harbour town of Mumbles and 12th-century Oystermouth castle. To really experience the beauty of the Gower, it’s best to stay somewhere rural; Parc Le Breos (www.parc-le-breos.com) is a former Victorian hunting lodge that offers bed and breakfast accommodation in the heart of a Norman deer park.

From the Gower, it’s an easy drive back to the M4 motorway and around three hours to London.

For info on Dinefwr and Carreg Cennen visit www.cadw.wales.gov.uk
For Brecon Beacons visit www.breconbeacons.org
For the Gower visit http://visitswanseabay.com/gower
Heritage and hidden gems of Scotland
Two nights/three days

Glasgow is a great base for a road trip, but don’t miss a spin around the city itself, used as a location in *Fast and the Furious 6*, with chase scenes filmed on Cadogan and Wellington Streets and Broomielaw (a major street through the city that runs adjacent to the River Clyde). If you’re short on time, this route still gives the chance to discover Scotland’s stunning lakeside scenery and glimpse its rich history.

From Glasgow, it’s an easy drive east to one of Scotland’s most important heritage sites; the village and surrounding area of Bannockburn, near the city of Stirling. Bannockburn was the site of the pivotal defeat of the English army by Robert the Bruce in 1314 ([www.nts.org.uk/Property/Bannockburn](http://www.nts.org.uk/Property/Bannockburn)) and in 2014 a new visitor experience will launch on the site, re-enacting the Battle of Bannockburn in glorious 3D. Nearby is the vastly impressive 16th-century Stirling Castle ([www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk](http://www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk)), a great family attraction with plenty to keep kids interested as well as adults. Keep to the heritage theme with a stay at Culcreuch Castle Hotel ([www.culcreuch-castle-hotel.com](http://www.culcreuch-castle-hotel.com)), one of the oldest in Scotland.

On the final day, take in the Gothic spectacle of the National Wallace Monument ([www.nationalwallacemonument.com](http://www.nationalwallacemonument.com)), built to recognise the achievements of William Wallace, who led the bid for Scottish independence. Then head east to Loch Lomond, stopping off at the Glengoyne Distillery for the chance to taste Scotland’s national drink, whisky. The Old Mill in Killearn ([www.old-mill-killearn.co.uk](http://www.old-mill-killearn.co.uk)) makes a great lunch stop, before heading up the eastern side of the Loch to the small town of Balmaha.

From here you can take boat trips or strolls along the waterfront and, for a really memorable overnight stay, take the boat from Balmaha to the tiny island of Inchcailloch, where it is possible to camp overnight. Alternatively, stay at the cosy Winnock Hotel ([www.winnockhotel.com](http://www.winnockhotel.com)) in the nearby village of Drymen, overlooking the pretty village green.

On day three, it’s an easy drive back from Loch Lomond south to Glasgow. Make time to visit the impressive art gallery at Kelvingrove, on the northern outskirts of the city, a magnificent museum that features a giant organ inside its main entrance.

For more info on Scotland go to [www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com)

Coast to coast – Northumberland and Cumbria
Three nights/four days

This route begins on the eastern side of northern Britain, taking in the vast, rugged landscapes of Northumbria and the World Heritage Site of Hadrian’s Wall, before crossing over to the iconic landscapes of the Lake District in Cumbria. Ideal for families and those looking for an active few days, this is a route that brings together some of the most wild and beautiful corners of Britain.
Head north from Newcastle to discover the rich history of the Northumberland coast; the dramatic ruins of Bamburgh Castle (www.bamburghcastle.com), right by the sea, and the medieval Alnwick Castle, with its beautiful gardens. Take lunch among the treetops at Alnwick’s Treehouse restaurant (www.alnwickgarden.com) before heading up to the mythical island of Lindisfarne. Known as the ‘Holy Island’, Lindisfarne historically housed a monastery and was where the Lindisfarne Gospels – an illustrated Latin copy of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – were probably made. These manuscripts date back to the early 700s. Stay at the Ship Inn (www.theshipinn-holyisland.co.uk) and explore the 7th-century monastery, Lindisfarne Castle and the fascinating visitor centre, before treating yourself to a crab sandwich – the island’s delicacy.

On day two, head south through the beautiful landscapes of the Northumberland National Park and stop off at Kielder Water, northern Europe’s largest man-made lake. There are several places to eat around the lake, including the lovely Boat Inn, with all sorts of outdoor activities to try. Finish the day in Hadrian’s Wall Country, with a stay at the award-winning Tantallon House (www.tantallonhouse.co.uk) in Gilsland, which actually overlooks the wall.

From here it’s an easy drive into the Lake District, and the pretty town of Keswick, which lies at the region’s heart. Discover the peaks of Scafell and Helvellyn or the tranquil waterside scenery of Windermere and Coniston, while kids will love the white-knuckle mountain bike trails in the Whinlatter Forest Park, and a visit to Hilltop, former home of the famous children’s author Beatrix Potter. (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hill-top). The 18th-century Royal Oak Hotel (www.royaloakhotel.co.uk) in nearby Borrowdale is a lovely, rural place to stay, and it’s an easy two-hour drive back to Newcastle or else two hours to Manchester, heading south.

For info on Northumberland go to www.visitnorthumberland.com
For Hadrian’s Wall go to www.visithadrianswall.co.uk
For the Lake District go to www.golakes.co.uk

Travel the Atlantic Highway

Two nights/three days

Breathtaking coastal scenery, historic attractions and dramatic natural landscapes – it’s all here on south-west England’s Atlantic Highway (known as the A39 in less glamorous terms!). But whatever name you choose, this stretch of road from Barnstaple in north Devon to Newquay in Cornwall, promises some of the most spectacular scenery in south-west England.

On day one, drive south from Barnstaple (taking in quaint fishing villages such as Appledore on the way) towards the picture-postcard village of Clovelly. Set on a steep hillside, it has a single cobbled high street that winds all the way down to the historic harbour that is peppered with whitewashed cottages. You’ll have to leave your car at the top of the high street as it’s too steep to drive up; in fact, donkeys were used to transport people up and down the street in the past and children can still take donkey rides there in the summer. Embrace the village’s history with a stay at the Red Lion Hotel.
(www.clovelly.co.uk/stay-in-clovelly/red-lion-hotel) on the quay by the harbour – created from three cider houses, the building dates back to the 18th century.

The next day, head down into Cornwall and stop off at the lovely town of Bude, known for its expanse of white sandy beaches. Take a dip in the open-air sea pool of Summerleaze Beach or hit the surf at Crooklets Beach before staying the evening at one of the town's newest hotels, Tommy Jacks Urban Beach Hotel (www.tommyjacks.co.uk). Opening in March 2014, guests can choose from 'snooze pads' or 'romantic loft suites', and sip on craft beers in its surf-inspired Brewpub.

This drive is a real treat for foodies; as you drive on down to Padstow in Cornwall, as well as stopping off for the must-have Cornish cream tea, you’ll find the seaside town literally bursting with top restaurants by leading chefs Rick Stein and Jamie Oliver. For sumptuous seafood, head to one of Rick Stein’s four restaurants-with-rooms in the town; the Seafood Restaurant, St Petroc’s Bistro, Rick Stein’s Café and Stein’s Fish & Chips (www.rickstein.com). Elsewhere, Jamie Oliver’s Fifteen restaurant is found on Watergate Bay, nestled between Padstow and the surfing paradise of Newquay (www.fifteencornwall.co.uk). And to walk off those gorgeous meals? Head to Elizabethan manor house Prideaux Place (www.prideauxplace.co.uk), overlooking the harbour at Padstow, home to beautiful gardens, and overlooking a deer park, thought to be the oldest in England.

For info on Devon go to: www.visitdevon.co.uk

For info on Cornwall go to: www.visitcornwall.co.uk

For the Atlantic Highway route go to: www.atlantic-highway.co.uk

You can hire cars at any major airport and in many city centres all over Britain. Most well-known companies (Enterprise, Avis, Hertz, Europcar) will allow you to pick up at one place and drop off at another within Britain (and often from one country to another, though this is obviously reflected in the price), and will also be able to hire out GPS navigation systems and car seats for kids.

www.avis.co.uk, www.enterprise.co.uk, www.hertz.co.uk, www.europcar.co.uk
Car-free countryside getaways

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 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 £20.60/ 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 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
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, £29.50 for an off-peak day return). For more information on the South Downs see 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 March to October) 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 £20.30.

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 Spring 2014).

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 £10.90.

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
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 £25.40.

*Make a night of it:* Should you wish to make a night of it, Wheelers hires out a simple beach hut, which is £50 to hire for a night, £80 for the weekend or £150 for the week.

[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 run 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 £22.10.

**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 house itself is grand and beautiful, and the grounds are good for deer-spotting. An off-peak day return costs £5.80.

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 £9.60.

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

**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

**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 at 09.30 in the summer months, getting to Housesteads at 11.00. From there it’s an easy walk to the topmost part of the Wall at Hotbank Crags. 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

**FROM BELFAST**

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

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. An all day ticket costs £5.50 for an adult

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 Carrick-A-Rede rope bridge is a thrilling prospect, even more so on a windy day!
the more tranquil eastern side of the Loch. Buses depart every two hours from Balloch to Balmaha, a sweet lochside village 25 minutes' drive away. It's the ideal place to appreciate the beauty and tranquility 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 day return costs £5.80.

**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 £23.25.

[www.visitarran.com](http://www.visitarran.com) [http://www.scotrail.co.uk/railsail](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 £13.10.

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

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/2155-T4_Route_leaflet_Brecon_1v.pdf A day rover ticket costs £8 for adults, £6 for a child.
**Thrills in the countryside**

The rolling hills and picturesque lakes of Britain aren’t just there to be looked at – why not roll down those hills and dive in the lakes? There are lots of ways to exercise in Britain’s great outdoors and also push your adrenalin levels to their limits. Here are some suggestions.

**Sea kayaking in Scotland.** The kayaking expedition from Loch Linnhe to the Sound of Arisaig on Scotland’s magnificent west coast was voted the ‘Tour of a Lifetime’ by *National Geographic.* Wilderness Scotland runs induction courses for those with little or no experience to get a taste of the beautiful coastlines edging Scotland’s Highlands and Islands. Courses are based from a private bunkhouse so you always have somewhere warm and dry to return to at the end of the day. Those with more experience can head off on five- or six-day excursions, with wild camping on remote beaches and islands for a genuine wilderness experience. If travelling by air, Inverness is the best airport to access wilderness trips. By rail, Inverness, Mallaig, Aviemore or Fort William are easily accessible from Glasgow and Edinburgh, and form the start for most sea-kayaking expeditions.

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

**Walk with giants.** The Giant’s Causeway in Northern Ireland is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, presenting myth, legend and geological wonder in one stretch of coast. The hexagonal basalt columns that form the Causeway are a spectacular site, either taken in all at once from afar or up close while exploring the terrain on foot. The coastal path that extends 12 miles from the Giant’s Causeway ends at the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge, which presents the bold with an exhilarating experience. Traditionally, fishermen erected the bridge to Carrick-a-Rede island over a 23m-deep and 20m-wide chasm to check their salmon nets. Then, the rope bridge consisted of a single rope hand rail that has been replaced by a two-hand railed bridge by the National Trust. Once you reach Carrick Island, you’re rewarded with a diverse array of bewitching birdlife and an uninterrupted view across to Rathlin Island and Scotland. There is only one way off the island – back across the swinging bridge – don’t look down! It’s best to get to the Giant’s Causeway by road, either by car (just over an hour from Belfast) or with a coach tour.

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

**Coasteering in Wales.** One of the most adventurous activities you can do, and Wales is the place to do it. What is it? In essence, coasteering is working your way round a coastline at sea level in whatever way possible. Swim, climb, scramble, and claw your way across the course, jumping into the sea from height where it is safe to do so. Wales has mile upon mile of stunning natural coastline, hidden coves, award-winning beaches, towering sea cliffs, sea caves and secret beaches – discover it like a real explorer. Coasteering was pioneered in Pembrokeshire, on the south-western tip of Wales, which is easily accessed by road and rail.

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

**Surf in Newquay.** From beginners to pros to veterans, there’s a wave for you to catch in Newquay, Cornwall, around a five-hour drive
south west of London. At the centre of Newquay’s surfing status is Fistral Beach, which has a reputation as one of the best beach breaks in the country. Lusty Glaze, Towan, Great Western and Tolcarne beaches also provide high-quality surf waves – but it’s the surf culture that makes Newquay special. One of the nation’s most laid-back towns, surf culture has even permeated its schools, making every second person a surf-lover, and their passion for their beach is infectious.

www.visitnewquay.org

Take on the Three Peaks challenge. The challenge involves scaling Britain’s highest peaks in one day: Ben Nevis in the Highlands of Scotland (4,409ft /1,344m), Scafell Pike in the Lake District, north-west England (3,209ft/978m,), and Snowdon in north Wales (3,560ft/1,085m). Each mountain takes about five hours to climb and descend on average, and most people start in the evening up north at the highest - Ben Nevis - ending the following day at Snowdon. The challenge made it into Lonely Planet’s recent guide to the world’s greatest adventures.

www.thethreepeakschallenge.co.uk

Wild swimming. Secret sea caves, hidden waterfalls and gorges, as well as rivers and lakes are dotted all over Britain, if you know where to look. Website www.wildswimming.co.uk unlocks the portal to hundreds of beautiful and off-the-beaten-track bathing spots. They also organise late night swims for charity. Embrace your inner water baby and jump in.

www.wildswimming.co.uk

Ride across the country. The north-western England region of Cumbria is home to excellent riding trails, with a 100-mile route that takes you across the whole region ‘from Fell to Sea’. If you rather two wheels than four legs, go biking in Grizedale Forest, also in the Lake District, where you can spend the day careering between the trees over rock-strewn descents. Hire your steed at Grizedale Mountain Bikes, where you will be furnished with a map – and off you go! Routes range from moderate to demanding - “the Black” is a new downhill section for real thrill seekers (and experienced mountain bikers only). The Lake District is in north-west England, around a three-hour train journey from London; by air it is best served by Manchester airport.

www.golakes.co.uk/adventure-capital

Cyclists look at Ullswater from the hilltop near Martindale in the Lake District.
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).

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). 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).

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.boudiccaway.co.uk).

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).

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).

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]). Other top wild-swimming destinations include Waterfall Woods, Brecon Beacons, south Wales, a network of falling water and forest lidos ([www.breconbeacons.org](http://www.breconbeacons.org)) and the Faerie Pools on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, a six-hour drive north of Glasgow ([www.wildswimming.co.uk](http://www.wildswimming.co.uk)).

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 450th anniversary of the birth 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

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. Half-day, £125 for two people. Dates in spring/autumn 2014 ([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](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)).

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](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).

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).

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 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).

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). 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).
Walk on Britain’s wild side

There’s nothing quite like a bracing walk in the great British outdoors; rolling hills, lush fields, jagged coastlines and spectacular views. Here are some fantastic places to explore on foot...and places to stop off for well-deserved refreshment or to enjoy a spot of history!

1. Ingleton Waterfall Trail, Yorkshire, north England (three hours)

Perfect for families and more relaxed ramblers, this eight-kilometre (four-mile) route begins at the picture-perfect village of Ingleton in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Divided into nine trail areas, you’ll come across a range of waterfalls, including Thornton Force, one of Yorkshire’s greatest waterfalls. Kids will love the interactive Waterfalls Trails Challenge; they can claim their prize at the Falls Café at the end of the trail – this will certainly motivate them to complete the walk! You’re also perfectly placed to explore the Yorkshire Dales National Park if you feel like exploring the glorious countryside a little more – or you could return to Ingleton and tuck into a traditional British roast with Yorkshire puddings followed by tasty desserts in front of log fires at The Old Hill Inn.

Getting there: The nearest station to Ingleton is Bentham, four miles away. There are direct trains to Bentham from Leeds with a journey time of around 90 minutes.


2. Striding and Swirral edges, Cumbria, north-west England (six hours)

One of the most adventurous days out to be had, this 13-kilometre (eight-mile) circuit begins at the village of Glenridding in the Lake District National Park and climbs to the summit of Helvellyn via an exciting knife-edge ridge. Not for the beginner, this a route for those with mountain walking experience and who relish a challenge. Once you’re at the summit, the far-reaching views all over the Lake District are incredible. You’ll need a good rest when you finish - head back to Penrith and reinvigorate yourself at The Agricultural Hotel and Pub with a pint of real ale and a meal of Cumberland sausages in front of the roaring fire in the winter or in its lovely garden in the summer. And, if you’ve still got the energy, explore the charming, historic market town of Penrith; two of its oldest streets, Burrowgate and Sandgate, date back to the 13th century and the imposing ruins of Penrith Castle are well worth a visit.

Getting there: The nearest main train station to Glenridding is Penrith, which can be reached in under two hours from Manchester directly.

www.golakes.co.uk

3. Hadrian’s Wall Path, northern England (seven days for the full trail)

The Roman wall that runs nearly the whole width of northern England is one of Britain’s best-loved ancient monuments and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Walkers can follow a 135-kilometre (83-mile) National Trail that runs from coast to coast in the shadow of Hadrian’s Wall, taking in bleak moorland, wildlife-rich estuaries and history every step of the way, plus the lively northern cities of Newcastle and Carlisle.
Starting off in Carlisle, you can explore the city’s cultural quarter on a walking tour to get a flavour of Hadrian’s Wall – both the 14th-century cathedral and Carlisle Castle were built with masonry from the Wall. When you finish the walk in Newcastle, you’ll still be surrounded by centuries of history; the Norman Keep built on the site of the Roman fort of Pons Aelii, the 16th- and 17th-century merchants’ house, and the Tyne Bridge. Cross over the River Tyne using the Gateshead Millennium Bridge and visit the BALTIC, the centre for contemporary art, and the Sage music centre.

**Getting there:** Trains to Newcastle run directly from London in three hours and to Carlisle from London in around three-and-a-half hours.

[www.nationaltrail.co.uk/hadrianswall](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/hadrianswall)

### 4. Beacons Horseshoe, Brecon Beacons, south Wales (five hours)

The Brecon Beacons National Park in the south of Wales was recently made the world’s fifth Dark Sky Reserve and is also famous for its twin summits of Pen-y-Fan and Corn Du, as well as the Black Mountain range. You can discover the Park’s appeal on an 11-kilometre (six-mile) challenging walk that starts at the historic market town of Brecon and takes in the highest peak in south Wales, Pen y Fan. Along this walk you’ll get to admire the sheer scale of the glacial valleys. Return to Brecon to catch your breath back and admire beauty of another sort - the town has fine examples of Georgian architecture and, if you’re visiting in August, you’ll find Brecon buzzing with its annual Jazz Festival.

**Getting there:** The Brecon Beacons are a 45-minute drive from Cardiff.

[www.breconbeacons.org](http://www.breconbeacons.org), [www.breconjazz.co.uk](http://www.breconjazz.co.uk)

### 5. West Highland Way, Scotland (routes vary from one/two hours to seven/eight hours)

Both the Scottish Lowlands and the Highlands form the route of the West Highland Way. Linking Milngavie, just outside of Glasgow, to Fort William in the Highlands, this walk follows ancient and historic routes of communication including drove and military roads as well as disused railway tracks. Walkers will pass along the shores of Loch Lomond, across Rannoch Moor, past Bauchaille Etive Mor to the head of Glencoe (who can forget the memorable scene of James Bond driving through there!) – ensuring a whole host of impressive views; also keep your eyes peeled for indigenous wildlife en route.

You can break up your walk with a stay at the Bridge of Orchy Hotel, highlighted in *The Good Pub Guide 2013*. It has recently added 22 ensuite rooms and, even if you don’t stay the night, re-energise for the next part of the walk by choosing meals from its tasty menu of Scottish west coast seafood and local game.

**Getting there:** Milngavie is a 20-minute drive from Glasgow.

[www.west-highland-way.co.uk/home.asp](http://www.west-highland-way.co.uk/home.asp), [www.bridgeoforchy.co.uk](http://www.bridgeoforchy.co.uk)
6. Durdle Door and White Nothe, Dorset, south England (four hours)

Want to take your own picture of one of the most photographed spots in Britain? The limestone arch of Durdle Door, formed in the Jurassic period over 140 million years ago and now an UNESCO World Heritage Site, is just one of the magnificent sights you’ll see on the Durdle Door and White Nothe 11-kilometre (six-mile) walk, forming part of a dramatic section of the south-west coast path as it runs through the southern England county of Dorset. Although a challenging walk, there are unforgettable coastal views, including chalk stacks and arches, along this walk’s high paths – don’t forget to bring your camera! Nearby Lulworth Cove – another most photographed spot – has some charming bed and breakfast accommodation; The Old Barn, situated on the southern edge of the quintessential English coastal village of West Lulworth, has stunning views over the Dorset hills while Bindon Bottom is a Victorian country house just one mile from Durdle Door.

Getting there: Dorset is around a three-hour drive from London.


7. Loch Coruisk, Isle of Skye, Scotland (just over two hours)

At the heart of the Isle of Skye off the north-west coast of Scotland is the country’s most remote freshwater loch. This walk around it starts with a dramatic boat ride across the sea from the fishing village of Elgol and winds for seven kilometres (four miles) through awe-inspiring mountainous landscape, made even more beautiful with regular changes in the natural light and weather. Build up an appetite for the walk with a bite to eat in Elgol, at Coruisk House. Fill up on the freshest seafood that has been caught that day - oysters, mussels, hand-dived scallops, langoustine and lobster are regularly on the menu.

Getting there: The Isle of Skye is a three-hour drive from Inverness.

www.skye.co.uk, bellajane.co.uk/boattrips.asp, www.coruiskhouse.com

8. Rhossili Bay, Gower Peninsula, south Wales (two hours)

Stretching along the western edge of the Gower Peninsula, a remote strip of land just below Swansea in south Wales, Rhossili Bay is a three-mile stretch of pristine golden sands, easily circumnavigated through a short but spectacular six-kilometre walking circuit starting at the Gower Rhossili Visitor Centre. If you’re taking the walk at low tide, you’ll see the remains of the Helvetia, a ship wrecked on that coastline in 1887 and, on a clear day, views across the sea to west Wales, Lundy Island and the north Devon coast can be seen from the highest point on the Gower. Continue admiring the breathtaking views when you stop off for a coffee and cake at The Bay Bistro and Coffee House, or pop down to the beach itself; Rhossili Bay was recently voted one of the top ten beaches in the world by reviewers on TripAdvisor.
Getting there: Rhossili Bay is around a 90-minute drive from Cardiff.


9. Cape Wrath Trail, Highlands, Scotland (18 days for the full trail)

Dubbed Britain’s toughest long-distance path, the Cape Wrath Trail winds for more than 300 kilometres (186 miles) from Fort William (itself 100 miles north of Glasgow) to far north-west Scotland. Tackle the full path on an exciting multi-day backpacking route, or complete the first leg to Glenfinnan in a long and strenuous day. The trail avoids road walking and walkers will tread on existing footpaths, which protects the environment. And, if you’re embarking on the full trail, there are plenty of places to stay along the way. The Good Pub Guide 2013 highlights the Ben Nevis Inn at Fort William, describing it as a ‘roomy, well converted, raftered stone barn in a stunning spot by the path up to Ben Nevis’, and the Old Inn in Gairloch a ‘stunningly set hotel with exceptional views, real ales and enjoyable food’. The area is also one of the top spots for whale-watching in Britain.

Getting there: Fort William can be reached from Glasgow in around two-and-a-half hours by car or by direct train in just under four hours.


10. North Down Coastal Path, County Down, Northern Ireland (eight hours)

Follow this long but undemanding 25-kilometre (15-mile) route as it loops around the Northern Ireland coastline. The path begins at Holywood in the north-eastern suburbs of Belfast and takes in points of interest such as Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Pop in and learn about the way of life in Northern Ireland 100 years ago, and walk among the historic cottages, farms, schools and shops that portray these times, alongside learning how traditional crafts were made. Continue along the route and you’ll step into Crawfordsburn Country Park; admire the views across Belfast Lough before heading down to Helen’s Bay and through to Crawfordsburn Beach. If you want to stop for the night here, check out The Old Inn, one of Northern Ireland’s oldest hotels – it’s been receiving guests for 400 years.

The next day you can then follow the path round to Ballyholme Beach, which leads to the National Trust area of Ballymacormick Point, a rocky outcrop located between Ballyholme and the small village of Groomsport, the perfect place to get some well-deserved refreshment. Head to The Stables where you can enjoy a meal or drink with views across the bay.

Getting there: Holywood is just a ten-minute drive from central Belfast.


11. 1066 Country Walk, East Sussex, south-east England (two days for the full trail)

The year of 1066 was a turning point in British history. It saw William, Duke of Normandy, wrest power from the Saxon King Harold and begin a new line of royal succession. This gentle 50-kilometre (31-mile) walking route along England’s south coast explores the area where Normans landed, as well as the castles at Pevensey - one of the last and strongest of the Roman ‘Saxon Shore’ forts, two-thirds of whose towered walls still stand – and
Herstmonceux. Famed for being a magnificent moated castle, Herstmonceux also boasts themed gardens including its own ‘Woodhenge’, 300-year old chestnut trees and a secret garden.

The route is not without that other great British tradition – the pub! From the 16th-century Red Lion Inn in the village of Brede and the 300-year old, Grade II-listed Ship Inn in the village of Rye to the Tiger Inn in Beachy Head, whose history stretches back to the 1400s, you’re never short of a place to enjoy a local ale in a venue that has been serving thirsty customers for centuries.

Getting there: Hastings is around 90 minutes by train from London.


12. Great Glen Way, north Scotland (five to six days for the full trail)

Whether you’re a novice walker or a more experienced one, the Great Glen Way is a walk suitable for everyone. The 127-kilometre (78-mile) stretch between Fort William and Inverness is mainly low-level and follows woodland tracks and towpaths. However, there are more challenging sections for the more experienced walker - close by are a few Munros (peaks over 3,000ft/914.4m) to get hiking up! But everyone can enjoy the Way’s sights such as Inverlochy Castle, one of Scotland’s oldest castles, the Abriachan illicit whisky still (unfortunately not in working order – bring your hip flask along instead!) and the 30m drop Divach Falls, one of the highest falls in the Highlands. And, while you’re looking out for Nessie once you hit the shores Loch Ness, also check out Cherry Island, the loch’s only island.

Getting there: Fort William is a two-and-a-half hour drive from Glasgow.

www.greatglenway.com

13. The Six Dales Trail, Yorkshire (three days)

Yorkshire is certainly having its moment - host of the Tour de France’s Le Grand Départ next year and home county of 2017’s UK city of culture Hull - but it’s a county as much for walkers as it is for cyclists and culture enthusiasts. For 38 miles you can amble through the Yorkshire Dales National Park’s beautiful countryside and charming villages on the Six Dales Trail, whose terrain (which, naturally, crosses six of the dales) is slightly off the beaten track and ranges from steep pastures and high heather moorland to river banks and 18th-century parkland around the ruins of Jervaulx Abbey. Starting in the market town of Otley in west Yorkshire walkers progress through to the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and end at Middleham, in north Yorkshire. Keep energy levels high by stocking up on sweets at the Oldest Sweet Shop in England when you stop at the quaint village of Pateley Bridge - a family run business since 1827 you’ll find rows of glass jars filled with handmade traditional sweets weighed out into old-fashioned scales.

Getting there: Otley is 11 miles from Leeds, which can be reached from London in just over two hours by train or three hours from Edinburgh.

14. Edges and Ales Walks, The Peak District (four to five hours or one day)

The stunning Peak District National Park and its dramatic landscapes, lying across central and into northern England, have a whole host of walks designed to suit any level of walker. The Edges and Ales Walks embrace everything a walker could want from a day out. The seven-mile Edges and Ales circular walk not only covers natural beauty spots but takes in the stunning Chatsworth house, the home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and a treasure trove of paintings, furniture and other artefacts. The eight-and-a-half mile Edges and Ales circular walk allows for stops at four real ale pubs en route, while the easy five mile route takes you past Linnacre Reservoir, built in 1855, and the village of Old Brampton - with a couple of real ale pubs thrown in along the way for much-needed refreshment!

*Getting there: You can reach the Peak District in under an hour's drive from Manchester or just under two hours from Birmingham.*

www.visitpeakdistrict.com

Take part in a walking festival

The Isle of Wight Walking Festival, south England

From guided fossil tours to active speed dating, this four-day festival has no end of exciting events to take part in. As well as a festival in May, it also hosts a walking weekend in October. Seasoned ramblers and leisurely walkers alike can check out its 300 guided walks to suit all abilities…and tastes! The 2013 festival included quirky walks such as fire-walking, tai chi and meditation walks, following in the footsteps of dinosaurs (the Isle of Wight has a rich heritage of dinosaur discoveries), ghost walks, food walks and garden walks, plus special Pram and Toddler Walks for the younger rambler.

It makes perfect sense that the island holds a dedicated walking festival; there are 500 miles of well-maintained and signposted footpaths and around 30 miles of Heritage Coastline, plus more than half the island is recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Cameras and binoculars at the ready!

*Getting there: The Isle of Wight is a short ferry ride from the city of Southampton on England's south coast.*

www.isleofwightwalkingfestival.co.uk

Snowdonia Walking Festival, north Wales

Explore the mountains and valleys of Snowdonia National Park at this friendly walking festival, which traditionally takes place in October. Every level of fitness is catered for and every walk is guided by a local expert. Suitable for beginners are the Betws-y-Coed walks; the 2013 festival took in forests and the forgotten village of Rhiwddolion - there was once a slate quarry and a community here - and across the disused workings of Aberllyn Lead Mine. Discover the beauty of Llyn Elsi (Elsi Lake) with a tranquil, scenic walking route around it, admiring dense woodland and mountain scenery, and you'll begin to understand why the first artists' colony was formed in Betws-y-Coed in the Victorian era.

*Getting there: The festival kicks off in Betws-y-Coed in north Wales, a two-hour drive from Birmingham. www.snowdoniawalkingfestival.co.uk*
Mourne International Walking Festival, County Down, Northern Ireland

The date for the 2014 festival has yet to be announced but there's plenty to look forward to at the Mourne International Walking Festival. The programme includes walks to suit all abilities, unguided lowland walks and guided mountain hikes, but everyone can enjoy this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with its diverse flora and fauna, and also learn about the area's wealth of heritage, myth and legends along the way.

The Mourne Mountains are unique because their peaks are grouped together, stretching 24 kilometres (14 miles) from Newcastle to Rostrevor and, unlike the rest of County Down, the mountains are made of granite. History buffs will also be particularly fascinated with the area's long history of human settlement; there are more than 350 ancient monuments to discover, some dating back to the Mesolithic period (7000-3500BC).

*Getting there:* The event focuses around Warrenpoint on the east coast, an easy one-hour drive from Belfast.

www.mournewalking.co.uk

Cowalfest, Scotland

More than 80 walks are usually available during the Cowalfest festival, which in 2014 kicks off on 4 October. One of the biggest of its kind in Scotland - with a packed programme of walks that cover areas of interest ranging from wildlife, bird watching, history and heritage to drama, photography, art, folklore and tai chi - walking enthusiasts can tackle the six-day walk along the long-distance trail 'The Cowal Way'. One walk already announced is the Glenbranter Night Walk, where you can discover the mystique of this beautiful area after dusk, bringing a whole new dimension to the walking experience. There are plenty of other activities on offer too; horse riding and cycling and a whole host of music and arts events will keep you busy for the entire festival.

*Getting there:* The festival base is at Dunoon, a 90-minute drive from Glasgow.

www.cowalfest.org

Always remember to make sure you have the proper equipment required; these walks vary in nature and difficulty. For even more ideas, The Guardian worked with the National Trust to put together a directory of Great British Walks, with 100 to choose from! See www.guardian.co.uk/travel/series/great-british-walks
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

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

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 six 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

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 scenery is holistic therapy offered at the retreat— including twilight meditation.

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.perfectstays.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

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 (opening July 2014)—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 new village in Woburn will feature biomass district heating.  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
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 insulating properties.

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.


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 recently installed an electric car charging point, plus its luxury spa facilities are powered by a wood pellet boiler.

www.hastingshotels.com/slievedonard-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

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. This year it also introduced new Wildlife Weeks for conservation volunteers who want to learn more and observe the Caledonian Forest’s wildlife.


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

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

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

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

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

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

Useful information

www.ecofriendlytourist.com/index.php/site-map/uk-accommodation
www.organicholidays.co.uk www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk
www.greenholidaysinwales.co.uk www.farmstay.co.uk
www.uniquehomestays.com/unique/search.asp?by=type&data=activity&activityID=7

Countryside | 65
**Great Gardens of Britain**

Tucked away among the wild beauty of Britain's natural landscapes are spectacular gardens that welcome visitors whatever the season. You’ll find indigenous and exotic flora and fauna, blossoming orchards and sturdy shrubs, ornamental grounds and towering trees. So whether you're looking for somewhere to watch nature spring back into life, while away the long summer days, somewhere to watch the changing colours of nature or a place to warm up in the winter, a trip a British country garden is always inspirational.

**From romantic strolls and mountain views in north Wales...**

An enchanting experience, created by five generations of one family, the 32-hectare (80-acre) Bodnant Garden is superbly located, with majestic views across Snowdonia. Most famous is its 180ft/55m 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 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.

*Getting there: Situated near Colwyn Bay, north Wales, Bodnant Garden is only 90 minutes’ drive from Manchester, or it’s under four hours by train from Cardiff.*

[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)

**From exotic blooms at the top of Scotland...**

One of the most northerly British gardens, Inverewe, is located in north-west Scotland 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 many exotic plants flourish at Inverewe.

*www.nts.org.uk/Property/Inverewe-Garden-Estate*

You’ll find plants from the southern hemisphere thriving at Logan Botanic Garden in Port Logan on the south-western tip of Scotland. Keep your eyes peeled for Himalayan poppies, New Zealand forget-me-nots and African daisies as the weather becomes warmer. [www.scotlands-garden.org.uk/logan.html](http://www.scotlands-garden.org.uk/logan.html)
Native and tropical plants alike grow in gardens across western Scotland, and you'll find exotic flora and fauna blooming in Argyll and the Isles. Crarae Garden, a 50-acre woodland garden looked after by the National Trust for Scotland, is home to an array of rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias and magnolias. Centred around the Crarae Burn, visitors can also enjoy this rocky gorge peppered with woody plants, shrubs and bridges.

www.nts.org.uk/property/crarae-garden

Getting there: A train to Inverness takes three-and-a-half 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. Logan Botanic Gardens is just over two hours from Glasgow while Crarae Garden is just under two hours.

...to sub-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 the south coast of Land’s End and, 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 Ten Islands of the World list, ahead of Tahiti, Capri and the Canary Islands.

Getting there: Take the ferry to Tresco from Penzance in Cornwall, which itself is five-and-a-half hours from London. You can also fly to Tresco from Exeter, Newquay and Land’s End.

www.tresco.co.uk

From rainforests and biomes in Cornwall, south-west 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. Its location in Cornwall makes it the perfect place to discover quintessential England - famous for cream teas and Cornish pasties (hand-held pies stuffed with meat, potatoes and carrots) as well as pretty beaches and excellent pubs.

Getting there: The train from London takes four-and-a-half hours to St Austell station.

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 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

…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

A Victorian garden with a museum inside, Belfast, Northern Ireland

First established in 1828, the Botanic Gardens in Belfast have been enjoyed as a public park by the city’s people since 1895 and form an important part of its 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, while the fantastic Ulster Museum is located inside the gardens.

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/parksandopenspaces

Edwardian romance in Wales’s Vale of Glamorgan

Dyffryn Gardens in beautiful south Wales has recently been taken over by the National Trust and is a romantic spot featuring 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 Britain’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.

*Getting there:* Dyffryn is just a 15-minute drive from Cardiff.

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

**Great gardens and a ghost in the Lake District, north-west England**

Muncaster is an intriguing spot, home to the World Owl Centre, 70 acres of beautiful gardens and… a mysterious resident (or two). The court jester at the historic home in the 16th century, Tom Fool (aka Tom Skelton) is said to still 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 during 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 and can be reached by train (to Ravenglass), about five hours from London, or else by car on a trip through some of the prettiest parts of England.

*Getting there:* See [www.golakes.co.uk](http://www.golakes.co.uk) for information on best routes.

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

**A garden fit for Mr Darcy in Derbyshire, central 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 more than five miles of walks with rare trees, shrubs, streams and ponds. Chatsworth has featured in a number of films, including *Pride and Prejudice* – the house was said to have inspired the creation of Pemberley, Mr Darcy’s home in the novel.

*Getting there:* Chesterfield station, close to Chatsworth, is connected to Derby, which in turn is connected by regular trains from London. Journey time is just over two hours.

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

**Glorious colours at an Italianate village in north 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 surroundings – in Wales – but Sir Clough did, and the result is a special place.

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

*Glorious colours at an Italianate village too – at Portmeirion in Wales*
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 need to pay to access the village (£5 - £10) and there are hotels if you want to stay.

Getting there: 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. Alternatively, take the atmospheric narrow gauge steam railway to Minffordd station and then it's a short taxi ride.

www.portmeirion-village.com

Kent, the garden of England, south England

Kent is known as the garden of England so there are plenty to visit, plus 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 audio tour through the plants and finish with a cream tea in the gardens.

Getting there: Regular trains from London run to Kent in one hour.

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; it’s 18 metres high and hidden among the topmost leaves.

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 over the summer months, and talks for those interested in knowing more about the plants rather than just admiring them 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 now 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
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 06.00, whereas the hipster East London types like to stroll down Colombia Road at a more palatable hour (Sundays, 08.00 - 15.00) where everything from the humble rose to 10ft/3m 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.


Last but not least - naked gardeners in Wiltshire, west 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 indeed!

www.abbeyhousegardens.co.uk

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

For more information on gardens visit:

www.visitscotland.com/about/nature-geography/gardens-parks
www.visitwales.com/things-to-do/attractions/gardens-country-parks
www.discovernorthernireland.com/gardens/Great-Garden-Days-Out-A2184
www.rhs.org.uk
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). 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). 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).

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 jog to folk tunes played on fiddles, pipes and drums (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 on 1 May 2014 (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).

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 (Llanelli in Carmarthenshire will play host in 2014, 90 minutes by train from Cardiff). 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).

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), 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).

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). 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 (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).

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).

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).

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).

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).

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 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 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
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

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.

www.thenewforest.co.uk, 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, 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. In 2015 a new attraction, Discover Robin Hood, will bring the story to life with indoor and outdoor experiences in the heart of the forest, including a medieval village, outdoor theatre, a Knight’s School, maze, 4D film and more. If you can’t wait, head over to the forest in August for the annual Robin Hood Festival.

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

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, 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.

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.visitorkney.com/cetaceans](http://www.visitorkney.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

**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 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 Alaunia_, 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.
**Countryside**

**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.

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 **Peveril** 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**

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 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 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 will further mark the island’s rich dinosaur heritage in 2014 with the opening of dinosaur attraction Restricted Area 5.

*The Isle of Wight is home to prehistory – discover dinosaur bones and fossils*
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, 2013 alone hosted Bon Jovi, The Killers, The Stone Roses, Bastille and Emeli Sandé - 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.

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

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 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

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). 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

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 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.*


**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.

Yet the island is very much living in the 21st century; in 2014 the destination will host its Island of Culture, the largest such celebration in the island’s history, honouring its varied artistic and cultural creativity. 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
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.

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
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 Sumburgh 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).

Getting there: Fly to the Orkneys from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness or you can take passenger ferries from Aberdeen. www.visitorkney.com

WALES’ NORTH COAST

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 (Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch - 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

**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?

*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

**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
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.

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 third consecutive year, 2014 will see the return of the Guernsey Literary Festival (15 – 18 May), 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 coasteering, 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.

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.

www.jersey.com
www.visitguernsey.com
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.

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.snozebrighton.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

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

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

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 with dunes and 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

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 or 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

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. A town where the seafront is lined with charming Victorian villas 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. You can get closer to puffins with a boat trip out to the Bass Rock, where they congregate. 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

For medieval connections...enter through the surviving medieval town walls in Tenby, west Wales, and visit the Norman castle that is at the heart of the seaside resort, less than a two-hour drive from Cardiff. A boat trip out 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 and shops, restaurants and pubs.

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
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.

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
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). 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

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). 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.

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

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
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 Nambirand 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).

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

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.exmoordarksaries.com

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

Kielder Observatory, Northumberland, north England

Kielder Forest is officially the darkest place in England, with over 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*

[www.nationalparks.gov.uk/visiting/outdooractivities/dark_skies.htm](http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/visiting/outdooractivities/dark_skies.htm)
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

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 recently received a major overhaul and, as well as now being managed by the National Trust, it 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

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

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

See the Sport guide for information on activities that are accessible in Britain, available to download from 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

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

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

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.htm

www.hudsons.co.uk/open-britain.aspx
www.accessibleguide.co.uk
www.accessiblebritain.co.uk
www.capability-scotland.org.uk
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

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

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 southwest of London.

Three-night breaks from £210, 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)

---

*Countrywide* | 99
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

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

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

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.

Always wanted to stay in a helicopter?! Now you can!

From £80 per night, www.blackberrywood.com

Countryside | 100
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)

Gypsycwtch, 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.gypsycwtch.co.uk](http://www.gypsycwtch.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)
Imagine Ireland

A wide range of cottages in Northern Ireland, including pet-friendly houses, cottages for families and gorgeous beachfront retreats.

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

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

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

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

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
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, 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

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

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

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

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

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

Amberley Castle, West Sussex

*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 cozy 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 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

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

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.


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

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
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

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

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.

Short-breaks from £226, 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.

From £250 per night, www.harptreecourt.co.uk
Gwdy Hw, Powys, Wales  
**Best for: An Outdoor Adventure**

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)

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)

---

**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.’

**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

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. The Royal Chelsea Flower Show celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2013.

Press contact: Nicola Osmond Evans nicolaosmondevans@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

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

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