

THE ESCAPIST

The ultimate staycation guide — from Cornwall to the Cotswolds

A record number of us are holidaying at home this summer — but it's not too late to book something wonderful. Rosalyn Wikeley rounds up the best of British

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The Boathouse

Lost baggage, delayed flights with broods in tow, the refund customer service maze – all familiar trappings of the so-called (and much-anticipated) travel renaissance.

A recent shocking statistic from Sykes Holiday Cottages' suggests 77% of Brits will holiday in the UK this year, courtesy of Europe's airport circus. Not only will this be a boon for the British economy, it's an opportunity to fully explore our fair isles without the covid restrictions of yore.

From palladian country piles to secluded destination restaurants clinging to the banks of a loch, here's our ultimate guide to this year's splendid and spontaneous Great British staycation.



Alex Collins

Cornwall

Cornwall's scrubby, wildflower cliffs, invigorating swims and time-warp fishing villages are a siren call for the UK staycation set. They come for the seafood, the ice cream, the surf, and the sense that they've fallen off the edge of the earth in a salty delirium.

Do: Hop between storybook fishing villages such as Port Isaac and Mousehold to sample the mussels and bohemian art scenes.

Cornwall's glorious coastal walks pass wild moorland and weathered farmhouses, (The Lizard Coastal Walk and St Just in Roseland to St Mawe being two standouts). While The Eden Project, Saint Michael's Mount and The Minack open-air amphitheatre are well worth a visit, the essence of Cornwall lies in that first lick of rich ice cream amid a cacophony of gulls and peeled down wetsuits.

Stay: While the Pig's Cornish outpost, Harlyn Bay, tends to book up fast, the building's previous owners have opened Altana Trevone: five family-friendly, softly modern cottages overlooking a private bay, with horse-riding and shoreline foraging on offer. Three Mile Beach has recently cropped up in the dunes of Gwithian Towans Beach – a cultish, brightly coloured beach houses with hot tubs. Penzance's bohemian Artist Residence and exquisitely dressed Georgian beauty, Chapel House lures in the design set, while the traditionalists and multigenerational broods coalesce at clipped Cornish institutions: Hotel Tresanton, Idle Rocks and St Mawes. Spa bunnies will relish The Scarlett's indoor-outdoor pool and clifftop wooden sauna, those keen to get under Cornwall's skin (and save a few bob) can trawl Airbnb for affordable white-washed fisherman houses or pile into Latitude 50's The Boat House, in Rock with its own private beach.



Chapel House

Eat: Cornwall's foodie scene is fully-fledged and radically local. Seafood naturally takes centre stage, in high-octane fashion at Restaurant Nathan Outlaw in Port Isaac and Rick Stein's The Seafood Restaurant in Padstow. Head to The Star & Garter in Falmouth for Salt Hake Fritters and BBQ Monkfish, to St Ives' Source Kitchen for Cornish Lamb and local lamb, and for elevated fish and chips with a cool pint, The Tolcarne inn in Newlyn.

USP: Seafood, surfing and turquoise coves.

Dorset

With its magnificent Jurassic coastline, artsy market towns, and relatively short trip from London, Dorset is top-drawer staycation material. While Sandbanks and the surrounding, glossy coastal sprawl can be pricey, head west into Thomas Hardy country for bucolic scenes of meadows, white cliffs and cream tea.



Aller Dorset

Do: Along with its natural phenomena, Dorset is imbued with a profound sense of history. The once mighty Corfe Castle's ruins, Durdle Door and Lulworth Cove can all be achieved in one afternoon, with old ale and Purbeck ice cream pit stops. Visit Brownsea Island and its castle, Enid Blyton-style from Poole Harbour or take sprogs to Abbotsbury Swannery and Farmer Palmers. This is fossil hunting country, where fields abruptly give way to layered cliffs and beaches (Chesil Beach, West Bay and Lyme Regis) and, unbeknownst to many, vineyards (such as Langhams) comb the sun-doused hills.

Stay: For a reimagined Edwardian beach house with cocktails, stay at the Seaside Boarding House with its far-reaching sea views, and superlative, silver service seafood. While a little more mainstream, the Pig on the Beach's clifftop setting over Studland's Shell Bay and locavore Orangerie menu are hard to resist. As is Aller Dorset, where two haute huts peer over a lake with luxe lampshades and alfresco bath tubs in a ritzy spin on rural. Dorset's plethora of low-key B&Bs such as Stapehill Lodge and classic country hotels Plumber Manor, peer into its rural, cider-drenched soul, while Fleet's recently renovated Moonfleet Manor remains a favourite amongst families.

Eat: Dorset was well-versed in provenance before it became voguish London menu-speak. Restaurants forge strong links with local farmers and fishermen, creating menus worth driving miles for, notably the understated (and exquisite) Yalbury Cottage and The Acorn Inn (both in Thomas Hardy country). The Wimborne Pig’s pulled pork burgers and garden-plucked salads puts the photogenic market town on the foodie map, while Rick Stein’s elevated Sandbanks seafood feast and The Parlour’s sensationally scruffy farmyard pizza and Dorset burrata epitomises the county’s east-vs-west split personality

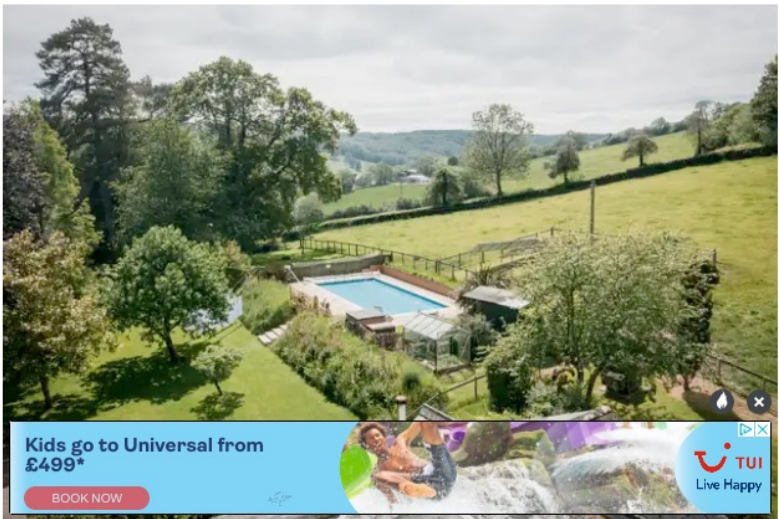
USP: Fossil Hunting, castles and cream tea.

Devon

Glassy shallows, beautiful blonde beaches, and vast, misty national parks prepped for hikes, Devon is the south west at its most splendid. The county’s quirky, bohemian spirit permeates its galleries and independent shops (particularly in Exeter and Salcombe), and pubs lining harbours tell maritime tales over local spirits.



Do: Pack your walking boots and head for the heather-carpeted Dartmoor National Park, where Becky Falls rushes through ancient woodland, or hire a bike and attempt the picturesque Coast to Coast route from Ilfracombe to Plymouth. Devon is blessed with several Blue Flag sandy beaches with turquoise waters, such as Mothecombe, Blackpool Sand Beach, and kayak-friendly Beer Beach, as well as pretty fishing towns such as Salcombe and Ilfracombe (catch the boat from here to Lundy island). Children can see bees at work on Quince Honey Farm, gawp at sharks at Plymouth’s Maritime Museum or learn how to paddleboard at numerous spots along the coast.



Glebe House

Stay: Olga Polizzi’s Hotel Endsleigh and Lymptstone Manor are elegant spots to put your espadrilles up in (the latter with its own vineyard), while boutique boltholes, The Cary Arms and Gara Rock set a more laid-back-luxe tone with direct access to the beach. Glebe House’s playful old-meets-new interiors and farm-to-fork ethos has already gripped the urban set, as has the affordably chic Ginger Peanut, a pub-with-rooms in Tiverton, and cottage on the River by Sand and Stone Escapes, which honours sumptuously simple design (and your wallet).

Eat: River Cottage's rustic restaurant sits high on the Devonshire foodie pilgrimage, as does the Oyster Shack on Milburn Orchard Farm in Bigbury and The Elephant in Torquay (an informal-yet-formidable bistro). The Beachhouse on South Milton Sands is an underrated spot for seafood with knockout sunsets, and posh pub-lovers will love The Mason Arms 13th century character and Michelin star menu of duck liver parfait and black pudding bon bon.

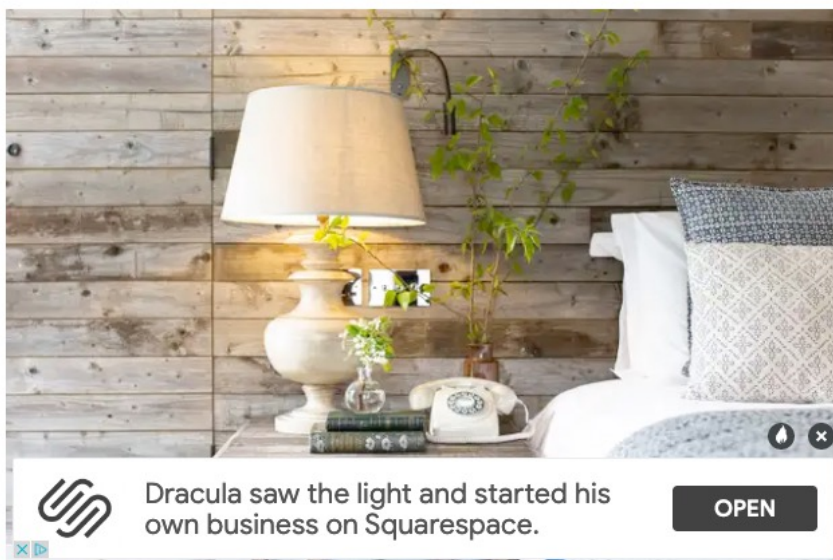
USP: Blue Flag beaches and National Parks.

Yorkshire

Head north, to God's own county, where understated people roam overstated hills once carved by glaciers, grey stone walls trace the curve of the Dales and towns and cities thrum with cutting-edge restaurants, art and culture.

Do: With its Roman and Viking heritage, its Medieval abbeys and Norman castles, Yorkshire offers a strong dose of antiquity. Feel dwarfed by York Minster then dive into its surrounding warren of delicious cafes and independent boutiques, before heading to Jorvik Viking centre for some Nordic lore. The 12th century Cistercian monastery, Fountains Abbey in Ripon and rambling country pile, Castle Howard, north of York, are terrific day trips, while miles of purple-grained valleys, waterfalls and woodland can be scaled in the North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.

Stay: Palladian beauty, Grantley Hall puts on a Northern Ritz with marbled floors, chandeliers and landscaped gardens, while Ripon neighbour, Middlethorpe Hall, offers a more affordable slice of blue-blooded life. Just outside Richmond, family-friendly Middleton Lodge will shortly be opening an impressive spa for those holing up in its stylish cottage-style rooms. Yorkshire excels at good pubs-with-walks, such as The Sportsman's Arms, on the fringes of pretty Pateley Bridge and the Dales, while esign hotels have crept into its cities' grand Georgian bones, such as No 1 by GuestHouse, York with its art studded walls and restrained elegance.



Middleton Lodge

Eat: Lauded for its generous portions, Yorkshire's gastro-pubs and fine-foodie haunts in town make the most of the coastal plunder and surrounding farms. On the fringes of the North York Moors, celebrity chef Tommy Banks whips up a creative menu of grown or foraged ingredients at Michelin-starred The Black Swan at Oldstead. Lower-key but no less lovely, Magpie Cafe, is the Whitby's feted fish and chips spot (go early to avoid a snaking queue). Highlights of York's vibrant foodie scene include The Star Inn (occupying an old engine house), Roots and Le Cochon Aveugle.

USP: Hikes through the Dales and Moorlands and historic house hopping.

The Cotswolds

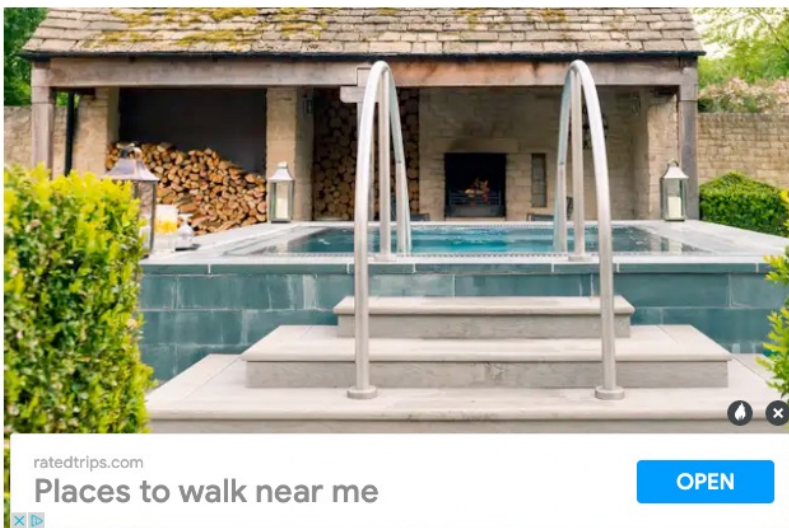
Soft, manicured country dotted in grazing sheep, fairytale villages of honey-hued thatched cottages and flagstone pubs with roaring fires, the Cotswolds is a relentless heart-stealer.



Lygon Arms

Do: The ultimate Cotswoldian activity is chocolate-box village-hopping via long, style-studded walks, rounded off with a good pub lunch. Visit Stow-on-the-Wold for antiques, Whichford for pottery (and the local Cotswolds distillery), Broadway for art galleries and Kington for film set charm. While urbanites beeline for Soho Farmhouse or Daylesford's ever-growing eco-chichi empire, authentic Cotswoldian rhythms endure in rickety tea rooms and pubs that tie up scenic hikes such as The Five Valleys Walk and Cleve Hill and Common Walk.

Stay: Family-friendly Calcot Manor has just reopened its spa after an impressive overhaul, and equally smart spots, Barnsley House and the Painswick, pair historic character with modern furniture and philosophies. The Fox at Oddington is the latest earthy, foodie creation from Daylesford, and the Lygon Arms has preserved its squire-like spirit as a historic pub with fresh farmhouse-style rooms. Privacy is within reach at Bruern Cottages (a favourite for those with young children) and the Cotswolds' Hampton's style Lakes by Yoo. Affordable and Cotswolds rarely share the same sentence, but Close in Tetbury (design) and the Bell Inn in Langford (food) are two remarkable exceptions.



Calcot

Eat: Amid wrinkled beams, old fireplaces and a zhuzhed up bar, The Pottingshed in Crudwell serves up clever spins on classic pub fare. Daylesford disciples will love The Wild Rabbit in Kington, where the estate's meat and veg is put to good use, and this 'posh-pub-with-good-food' theme continues at The Lamb Inn in Burford and the Wheatsheaf Inn in Northleach. The Ox Barn at Thyme honours farm-to-fork ideology while Cheltenham's YOKO offers a sushi and sake breather from the partridge and pork chops.

USP: Storybook villages, refined gastro-pubs and pin neat countryside.

Pembrokeshire

This is Wales at its most enchanting – a wild, invigorating coastline of sun-soaked bays, empty beaches and meadow walks tracing the cliffs and brushing past maritime taverns. Dolphins and seals circle islands cast adrift in the Irish Sea and surfers take to the waves at Whitesands, Newgale and Freshwater West Beach.

Do: With 186 miles of winding coastal path (Pembrokeshire is lapped by the Irish Sea on three sides), this is walking country. Tensby's coloured houses cling to the cliffs above its golden beaches like a painting and Saundrestfoot's wide beach a little further along is backed by tasty ice cream trucks. Having inspected the pocket-sized city of St Davids' cathedral and craft boutiques, take on the heather and gorse-strewn Preseli Mountains for its prehistoric sites and weather-beaten taverns. Pembroke's walled and turreted castle sits on a rocky promontory dating back to the Normans, and as the birthplace of Henry Tudor, is worth a visit for the history buffs.

Stay: Tipping over cliffs sprinkled in wild flowers, Druidstone Hotel is an eccentric Victorian beauty with far-reaching views out to sea and bags of character. Slebech Park has received a more rustic-chic treatment on the DauGleddau Estuary. The Grove in Narberth strikes a comforting, home-from-home chord in its self-catered cottages, which welcome walkers back from rambles through Pembrokeshire National Park. Pembrokeshire's cottage form, overall, is fantastic (book through Sykes Cottages, West Wales Holiday Cottages or Airbnb, with Haverfordwest's Rose Cottage a firm favourite).



The Grove Narberth

Eat: Coast in Saundersfoot shows off Pembrokeshire's just-caught seafood with an adventurous menu, as does more low-key Food at Williams on Pembroke's main stretch (along with delicious pancakes and scones). Buttoned down, The Shed crowns the small harbour village of Porthain with its legendary cod, monkfish fish, haddock or hake fish and chips devoured on a terrace overlooking the water. Gastronomes should book into Chef Matt Powells' new restaurant, Annwn Potting Shed near Cleddau Woodlands, which flaunts Pembrokeshire's treasures with a foraging experience and 10-course seasonal tasting menu.

USP: Coastal walks, authentic pubs, broad sandy beaches.

The Scottish Highlands

Howling winds, the North sea whipping layered rock and glens covered in ancient caledonian forest that slope down to meet flat, glassy lochs, The Scottish Highlands are a geological marvel with splendid hotels of fireside whiskies and tumultuous clan lore.

Do: During summer, serious walkers and climbers head for the mighty monroes of Fort William (base camp for Ben Nevis), Glen Coe and Aviemore, where skiers flock to as soon as the powder drops later in the year. Unbeknownst to many, when Scotland switches on the sunshine, there's nowhere quite like it – particularly Achmelvich Bay and Sandwood Bay, with their Caribbean-grade water. Intrepid souls spilling out to the Isles such as Mull, Skye and Islay are rewarded with Fairy Pools, mossy emerald hills and the occasional minke and orca sighting.



Fife Arms

Stay: Live like a Laird, with full kilts-and-tartan trimmings at Fort William's dark and brooding Inverlochy Castle, or for an artsy Hauser and Wirth spin on Caledonian classic, head to the Fife Arms in Braemar, which brushes the grounds of the Queen's Balmoral Estate. Scandi-Scot Killiehuntly and its cluster of cool cottages are not far, engulfed by the Cairngorms, while an hour North of Inverness, on the west coast, Glenmorangie House Hotel is a brilliantly bonkers plush pink house whose design cleverly honours its fabled whisky (the distillery is a 15-minute drive away). The thrillingly remote Kinloch Lodge and sumptuously simple The Three Chimneys are largely responsible for bestowing Skye its foodie pilgrim status. Those on a budget can lean into the Highlands' renovated bothy scene, (try Canopy and Stars' The Bothy Project) or pile the whole family into a white-washed cottage like Rose Cottage in Badachro. North Coast 500 players can bed down at one of Highland Coast Hotels' six sustainable pit stops en route.

Eat: Inver plays to the gastronomes in a remote, wildly beautiful setting along the banks of Loch Fyne with a refined, New Nordic menu of But Lamb and the most inventive, near alchemic take on fish and chips. Another far-flung (and considerably less fussy) foodie pilgrimage, Lochinver Larder, lies conveniently on Scotland's route 500, with venison pies and haggis placating the critics, then there's Loche Torridon's Gille Brighde, whose mountainous drive is a dramatic precursor to smoked venison and cullen skinks. Back in the city, The Gannet has become a Glaswegian institution, serving up Gigah oyster with buttermilk, smoked eel and Girolle broth, Cairngorm red deer with beetroot and plates cleverly showcasing Scottish's seafood and game.



Glenmorangie

USP: Resplendent wilderness and remote, whisky-stocked hotels.

Northumberland

Perhaps the UK's most underrated county, wedged quietly between the borders and the well-documented beauty of the Lake District, Northumberland is at last getting the air time it deserves.

Do: Spend afternoons on wild, empty beaches such as Bamburgh, where surfers can be spotted as the winds pick up, and Seahouses, where Farne Island, with its seals and puffins, can be reached by ferry. A trip to Northumberland is incomplete without visiting Hadrian's Wall, which is best combined with rambling walks through Northumberland National Park's mosaic of heather and rolling woodland, with ale and teahouse pit stops. Cheviot Hills and Kielder Forest should be on any walker's radar, while historians should head for Alnwick Castle, which puts on a slew of family-friendly events within its turreted stone walls.

Stay: The Calcot Collection, behind the Cotswolds Calcot Manor and Barnsley House, ventured far north to Blanchland, where they gently revived the Abbot's lodging of a Medieval priory and cottages scattered around it. The building's 13th century spirit works with the chic heritage design – expect wood burners galore, fishing rods for the hotel's own beat along the River Derwent and polished pub grub. The Landmark Trust has a few Northumberland gems up its sleeve, notably Brinkburn Mill and Causeway House, while Kip Hideaways' Morpeth Eco Huts are a new, affordable arrival worth jumping on.



Lord Crewe Arms

Eat: Northumbrian pubs have survived urban notions of the countryside, clinging onto their fire-and-flagstone spirit without the gimmicks. The Feather Inn is one of them which stretches out to surrounding farms and gamekeepers for hearty, cockle-warming menus. Equally authentic spot, Deyn's Deli (and café) in Berwick-Upon-Tweed, is a local favourite for affordable seafood and Felton's The Running Fox is a Victorian-style tearoom with cakes to stock up on for bracing Northumbrian walks. The Potted Lobster's seafood menu should accompany Bamburgh Castle visits, while Northumbrian-Nordic Hjem's wildly imaginative tasting menu of cod and chicken skin is an adventure in itself.

USP: Empty, untamed beaches, forts that kept Vikings at bay, ravishingly rugged countryside.