



**The dream American road trip**  
Plus In Agatha Christie's well-travelled footsteps

# Weekend

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**20 romantic walks**

**25 sexiest restaurants**

**24 hideaways for two**



**Love is in the air**

**What to eat  
to shrink  
your waist**

By Dr  
Michael  
Mosley



Suzi Godson's  
weekly  
sex column





# Love is in the air 20 romantic



Sweeping views, charming woodlands, windswept beaches and tranquil trails. Plus — where to go for a drink near by

## Fir Tree Copse Dunsfold, Surrey

The ancient woodland of Fir Tree Copse is a magical place for a secluded stroll. Follow the narrow path through oak and ash trees and alongside a small stream, where if you look up you may see tawny owls or willow warblers between the bare branches. Wild daffodils will be growing here soon — enough to inspire the most romantic of poets.

**Details** Open daily, free; [surreywildlifetrust.org](http://surreywildlifetrust.org)

**Where to eat** The Crown Inn, Chiddingfold, has a seasonal menu and is just over ten minutes' drive away; [thecrownchiddingfold.com](http://thecrownchiddingfold.com)

## Joy's Wood Moseley, Birmingham

This enchanting wood was the childhood playground of JRR Tolkien, who said it was the inspiration for the "old forest" in his beloved books *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. You may not spot elves or dragons, but take a walk through the gnarled old trees and admire the lichens and mosses glistening in the frost. Very soon the bluebells will be appearing.

**Details** Open daily, free; [bbcwildlife.org.uk](http://bbcwildlife.org.uk)

**Where to eat** The Covered Wagon pub, a short walk away. Gourmet Indian food; [thecoveredwagon.co.uk](http://thecoveredwagon.co.uk)

## Longis Reserve Longis, Alderney

The later sunrises in winter make early mornings the perfect time for a walk together across Longis Bay, watching the colours change in the sky and hearing the calls of hundreds of different birds. No matter what time of year you visit there are picturesque views of France across the Channel.

**Details** Open daily, free; [alderneywildlife.org](http://alderneywildlife.org)

**Where to eat** The Blonde Hedgehog hotel is a five-minute drive away, with a rustic and relaxed restaurant offering farm-to-table meals; [blondehedgehog.com](http://blondehedgehog.com)

## Baker's Pit Penzance, Cornwall

Walk through the Cornish heathlands, under seemingly endless skies, and feel part of the history that has shaped the landscape. The flooded clay pit, from where the vital economic resource was dug, is now a still and beautiful spot for the birds to visit, such as hen harrier, snipe, peregrine, merlin and woodcock.

**Details** Open daily, free; [cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk)

**Where to eat** The White Hart is a ten-minute drive away serving pub classics; [whitehartludgvan.co.uk](http://whitehartludgvan.co.uk)

## Letcombe Valley Wantage, Oxfordshire

This beautiful piece of ancient woodland has a rare chalk stream running through it, which means it is a haven for wildlife. Stand quietly together, looking out over the clear waters of the Letcombe brook, and you may spot kingfishers, herons, water voles and otters. At this time of year look out for herons that come together to breed. They often return to the same nest each year.

**Details** Open daily, free; [bbowt.org.uk](http://bbowt.org.uk)

**Where to eat** The Greyhound Inn, Letcombe is five minutes' walk away with an à la carte menu; [thegreyhoundletcombe.co.uk](http://thegreyhoundletcombe.co.uk)

## Peterstone Wentlooge Marshes Newport, Gwent

A wonderful windswept, coastal route with panoramic views of the Severn

Hickling Broad, Norfolk



estuary. Walk along the sea wall, past a shining landscape of rippling pools and marshy islands, and see flocks (charms) of goldfinches feeding on teasel, wheeling flocks of waders and maybe a peregrine soaring above you.

**Details** Open daily, free; [gwentwildlife.org](http://gwentwildlife.org)

**Where to eat** Y Maerun Pub & Dining, a few minutes' drive away. Hearty meals, burgers and sandwiches; [ymaerun.co.uk](http://ymaerun.co.uk)

## Fontmell Down Shaftesbury, Dorset

The sweeping views from Fontmell Down, over the rolling hills beloved by Thomas Hardy, are spectacular. Enjoy a winter walk together, the bare tree branches and swathes of grass dusted with frost, and the ravens tumbling overhead.

**Details** Open daily, free; [dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)

**Where to eat** The Fontmell, serving pub classics, is a five-minute drive away; [thefontmell.co.uk](http://thefontmell.co.uk)

## Tring Reservoirs Tring, Hertfordshire

Beautiful, still expanses of water, fringed with low trees and with vast skies above. While this spot is big enough to escape from other people, you won't be entirely alone as you walk along the banks. In colder months Tring Reservoirs, which

## ABERSOCH TO HELL'S MOUTH, GWYNEDD

### Bear Grylls

The Wales Coast Path from Abersoch to Hell's Mouth is one of the most rugged and beautiful I know. It is special for my wife and me because we get views of Snowdonia and the St Tudwal's islands, where we live.



comprises four waters — Startop's End, Marsworth, Tringford and Wilstone — teems with wildfowl migrating here.

**Details** Open daily, free; [hertswildlifetrust.org.uk](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk)

**Where to eat** The Akeman in Tring town centre, a short drive away. Wood-fired pizza and Sunday roasts; [theakeman.co.uk](http://theakeman.co.uk)

## Thorswood Stanton, Staffordshire

Thorswood, between Ashbourne and Oakamoor, is one of Staffordshire's most scenic spots, with views over rolling hills, and a landscape that was shaped by the mining industry and is now reclaimed by nature. Take a walk up to the highest point following a marked trail and enjoy a well-earned rest together on the circular stone seat that has been placed there.

**Details** Open daily, free; [staffs-wildlife.org.uk](http://staffs-wildlife.org.uk)

**Where to eat** The Star at Cotton, a 16th-century pub a ten-minute drive away serving seasonal food; [thestaratcotton.co.uk](http://thestaratcotton.co.uk)

## Benshaw Moor Elsdon, Northumberland

In terms of romance, Benshaw Moor has it all — big skies, wild, windswept moorland and magnificent views. Sit together beside the limestone-stepped waterfall, listening to the skylarks and



# walks — with a pub lunch

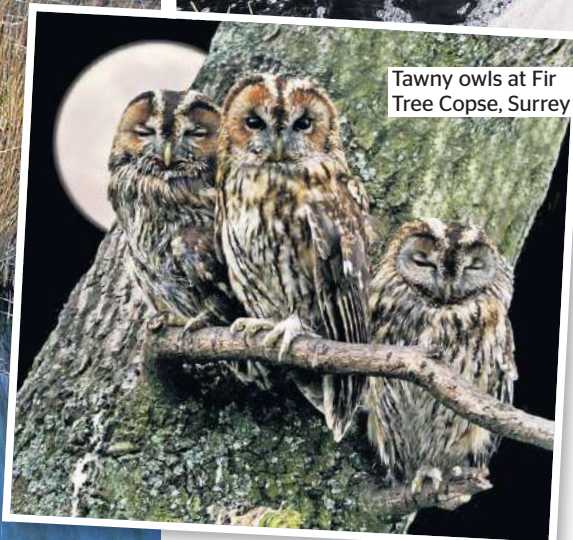
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Benshaw Moor, Northumberland



Joy's Wood, Birmingham



Tawny owls at Fir Tree Copse, Surrey

gazing at the snow-covered Cheviot Hills in the distance

**Details** Open daily, free; nwt.org.uk

**Where to eat** The Coach House Hotel is a 15-minute drive away serving seasonal food; coachhouseotterburn.co.uk

## Ravensroost Wood Malmesbury, Wiltshire

This ancient woodland is home to a huge variety of trees, including the rare wild-service tree. Follow the tree-lined pathway and you'll find an old shooting hut, built in the 1930s, where you can cuddle up and shelter from the elements.

**Details** Open daily, free; wiltshirewildlife.org

**Where to eat** Saints & Sinners at the Old Bell Hotel is a 15-minute drive away and serves local, seasonal food; oldbellhotel.co.uk

## Brook Vessons Snailbeach, Shropshire

Escape from the crowds and take a walk through the Brook Vessons nature reserve, listening to the wild cry of the curlew. Lying just below the Stiperstones, rocky outcrops that are always popular with walkers, this spot has towering hedgerows, tiny meadows and a cluster of giant trees — rowans, birches and hollies. The bases of the old trees provide ideal spots to sit and take in the views of the rocks above and the wooded valleys below.

**Details** Open daily, free; shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk

**Where to eat** The Bridges Pub is a six-minute drive away serving pub food using homegrown vegetables; thebridgespub.co.uk

## Bowesfield Nature Reserve Stockton-on-Tees, Co Durham

Take a walk through this tranquil spot nestled in loops of the River Tees and you'll find a series of beautiful lakes and pools, fringed with reedbeds and full of wildlife — look out for deer, otters and kingfishers. As the sun goes down you may be lucky enough to see a starling murmuration against the rosy sky.

**Details** Open daily, free; teeswildlife.org  
**Where to eat** The Masham is a family-run pub in Hartburn village that serves pub classics; themasham.co.uk

## Ayr Gorge Woodlands Wildlife Reserve Ayr, Ayrshire

The poet Robert Burns and his lover and muse Mary Campbell (Highland Mary) are said to have met in these woodlands to exchange vows of love, before her untimely death. The path runs along the bank of the River Ayr (look for dippers and kingfishers) through the ancient woodland and past outcrops of red sandstone. Highland Mary's Monument stands near by above the Failford village.

## HOLKHAM BEACH, NORFOLK

### Ben Fogle

This long, wild beach stretches as far as the eye can see. There is nothing like a bracing winter's walk, listening to the waves sweeping in and out as seagulls wheel overhead. The romance is exaggerated by the wildness — at times it feels like you are the only people in the world. Occasionally you'll see horses and riders galloping through the surf too. Beautiful.



**Details** Open daily, free; scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk

**Where to eat** The Black Bull at Tarbolton is a short drive away, and serves locally sourced food; blackbulltarbolton.com

## Potteric Carr Doncaster, South Yorkshire

Potteric Carr is a wild oasis in the heart of Yorkshire. At 580 acres, it has plenty of quiet spots and it's wonderful for watching starling murmurations whirling out over the golden reedbeds. Look out for the yellow splashes of colt's-foot flowers dotted around the fringes of the marshes and fields or hunt for snowdrops in the woodland.

**Details** Open daily (9.30am-5pm), free for Wildlife Trust members, adults £4.50, children £3; ywt.org.uk

**Where to eat** Annabel's Café on Loversall Farm, a ten-minute drive away, serves brunches and sandwiches; 07472 681284

## Lunt Meadows Maghull, Merseyside

Escape together to this wild wetland landscape and beautiful big skies. An atmospheric three-mile circular walk will give you views over farmland and woodland. Stay till dusk and see the vast skies turn into a canopy of brilliant stars.

**Details** Open daily (car park open 9.30am-5pm only), free; lancswt.org.uk

**Where to eat** Ego at the Punchbowl is a pub a few minutes' drive away, serving Mediterranean food; egorestaurants.co.uk

## Hauxley Reserve Low Hauxley, Northumberland

Enjoy some wildlife spotting together on a gentle wander through Hauxley reserve at Druridge Bay in Northumberland. At this time of year it's a wonderful place to see spectacular flocks of starlings and water birds, including greylag and pink-footed geese.

**Details** Open daily (car park locked 4.30pm), free; nwt.org.uk

**Where to eat** The Old Storehouse bar and restaurant, serving seasonal food, is a five-minute drive; parkleisure.co.uk

## Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park Colchester, Essex

Here there are panoramic views over the shimmering water of the vast Abberton Reservoir and many trails to follow together. Spot some other devoted couples — pairs of smew, goosander and Bewick's swans that spend the winter on the reservoir together.

**Details** Open daily (discovery centre 10am-4pm), free; essexwt.org.uk

**Where to eat** Less than a ten-minute drive away, the Hare and Hound pub and restaurant serves seasonal food; thehareandhound.co.uk

## Meeth Quarry Hatherleigh, Devon

Meeth Quarry's gigantic former clay works are now enormous bodies of water, sparkling in the winter sunshine. Take a romantic stroll along tree-lined paths to view blue lagoons and winter wildfowl. The Tarka trail runs through here and is also a bike path — you could even ride here on a bicycle made for two.

**Details** Open daily (car park open 9am-5pm only), free; devonwildlifetrust.org

**Where to eat** The Bull and Dragon is a few minutes' drive away and serves simple pub food; thebullanddragon-meeth-business.site

## Hickling Broad and Marshes Stalham, Norfolk

Visit Hickling as the sun sets on a winter's afternoon and you might see as many as 60 cranes flying in to roost in one evening. Watch the sun glinting on the golden reeds beside the lake and take a stroll along the woodland paths.

**Details** Open dawn till dusk daily, free for Wildlife Trust members and children, or adults £4.50; norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk

**Where to eat** The Ingham Swan is a 10-minute drive from Hickling Broad and serves pub dishes using locally sourced ingredients; theinghamswan.co.uk

For more information and to find your nearest reserve visit [wildlifetrusts.org](http://wildlifetrusts.org)



# 25 sexiest restaurants Where

Whether it's elegant fine-dining or a cosy candlelit corner, **Andy Lynes** finds the best spots for an intimate meal for two

## Littlefrench Bristol

With its bentwood chairs, banquette seating and exposed-brick walls, you could imagine yourself in a backstreet Parisian bistro at this charming neighbourhood restaurant run by the husband-and-wife team Freddy and Nessa Bird. There's more than a hint of old-school French cooking on the menu, with dishes such as roast scallops with garlic and sauternes butter sauce, and rabbit leg with Morteau sausage and Dijon mustard.

**Details** 01179 706276; littlefrench.co.uk

## The Secret Garden at the Witchery Edinburgh

This secluded dining room, just minutes from the castle, is the perfect place to treat someone. With its hand-painted ceiling, ancient tapestries and candlelight, it is full of atmosphere. Start with Scottish oysters and champagne, then perhaps share a chateaubriand or a venison Wellington for two. Follow this with a sharing platter of the most popular desserts, such as bitter chocolate torte with blood orange sorbet and pear tarte Tatin with praline ice cream.

**Details** thewitchery.com

## Garden House Cambridge

The interior of this chic hotel dining room is as romantic as its location on the River Cam, with floral-patterned upholstered chairs, sage banquettes, an abundance of greenery and views across the terrace to the punting station. The menu, much of it sourced from East Anglia and cooked over an open flame, might include a grilled tranche of lemon sole served with crab sauce.

**Details** 01223 259970; gardenhousecambridge.co.uk

## Panoramic 34 Liverpool

There are 360-degree views from this smart, contemporary restaurant and bar located 34 floors above the city and close to Liverpool's famous docks. Sip on a Berry Cross the Mersey gin, elderflower and blackberry cocktail in the glamorous bar area, then head to the elegant dining room for the menu of modish dishes such as roasted carrots with date, tamarind and dukkah spices or monkfish with cauliflower and dulse seaweed.

**Details** 0151 236 5534; panoramic34.com

## The Samling Windermere, Cumbria

You couldn't wish for a more special setting for a meal than a dining room in the Lake District with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Windermere and out towards the Old Man of Conistone mountain. The contemporary tasting

menu of locally sourced produce, some from the hotel's grounds, might include the classic combination of deeply flavoured Lake District Herdwick lamb with peas, broad beans and shallots, as well as lavish creations such as scallop with caviar and shellfish butter sauce.

**Details** 0153 943 1922; thesamlinghotel.co.uk

## The Station Kitchen Bridport, Dorset

A disused railway station and vintage carriage a pebble's throw from Bridport's beach and surrounded by rolling Dorset countryside has been reimagined as a wonderfully idiosyncratic seafood restaurant. Enjoy a pre-dinner drink in the old waiting room before taking a table in one of the wooden railway carriages decorated with vintage clocks and mirrors, for fillets of lemon sole with chicken butter sauce and crispy leeks.

**Details** 01308 422845; thestationkitchen.co.uk

## Henry Robertson Dining Room at Palé Hall Bala, Gwynedd

Travel back to a more romantic time at this Victorian mansion set in a 50-acre estate close to Snowdonia. Eat canapés to the soothing sound of a live harpist before dinner in the elegant dining room, with its ornate plaster ceilings and marble fireplace, crystal chandeliers, gilded mirrors and antiques. However, there's nothing old fashioned about the restaurant's tasting menu, which draws on global influences for dishes such as roasted turbot with porchetta, mussels and preserved lemon.

**Details** 01678 530285; palehall.co.uk

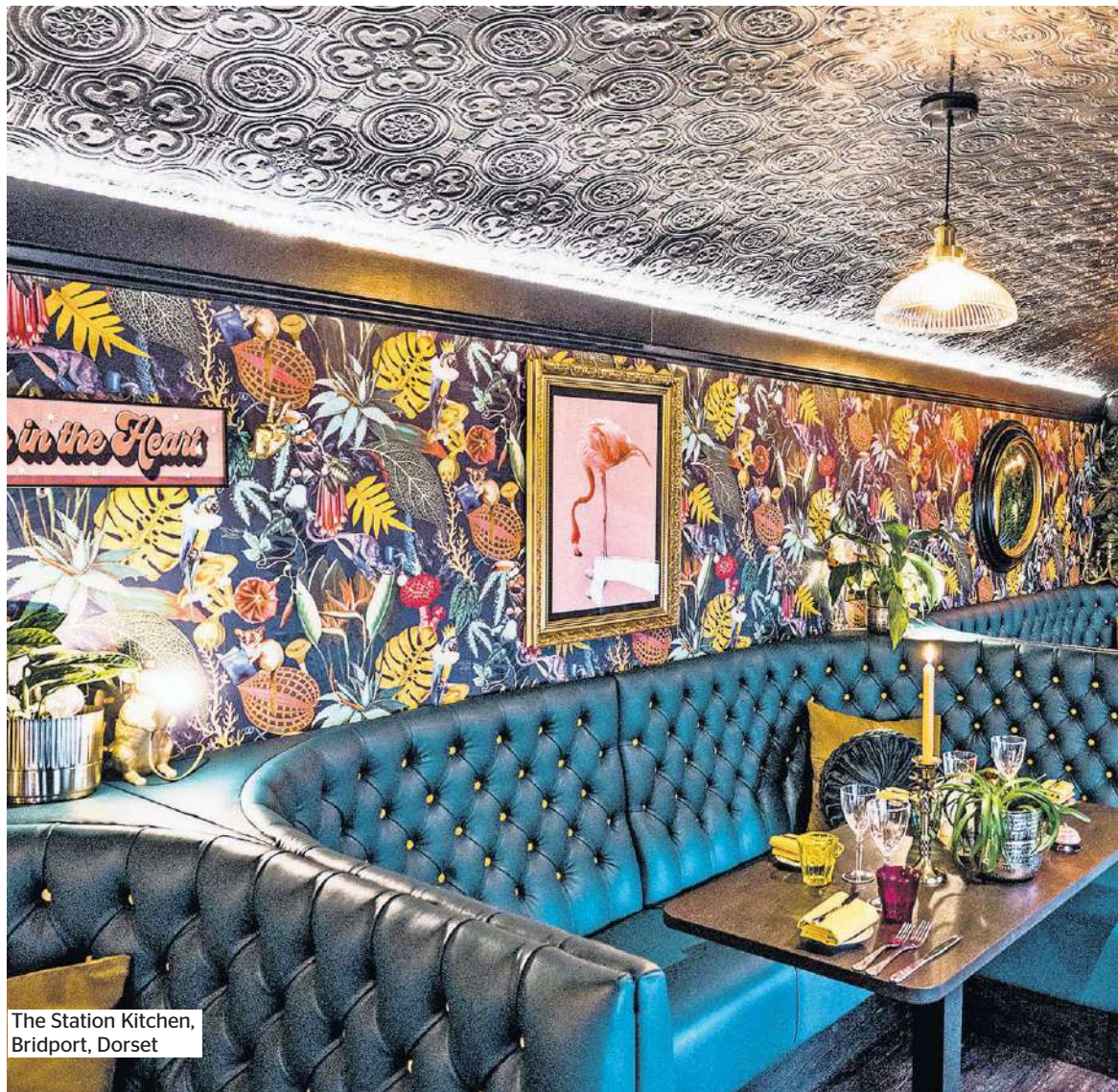
## The Saloon Restaurant at Hawkstone Hall Weston, Shrewsbury

The lavish dining room of this converted 18th-century grade I listed mansion overlooks the manicured grounds of an 88-acre country estate through soaring arched windows and could serve as the setting for a period romance film. Real-life lovestruck protagonists can take advantage of the hotel's one-night Valentine's Day package, which includes a seven-course tasting menu with dishes such as lobster ravioli with miso dashi (from £400 per couple).

**Details** 01630 685242; hawkstonehall.co.uk

## Freemasons at Wiswell Clitheroe, Lancashire

With its flagstone floors and antique rugs and furniture, this rural village pub is surrounded by the beautiful countryside of the Ribble Valley and is an atmospheric and romantic setting for chef Steven Smith's award-winning food. On Valentine's Day he'll be serving a celebratory six-course menu as modern



The Station Kitchen, Bridport, Dorset

and sophisticated as any metropolitan gastronomic destination, including a seductively luxurious dish of Manx lobster and scallop gratin with champagne and caviar.

**Details** 01254 822218; freemasonsatwiswell.com

## Raby Hunt Darlington, Co Durham

In an elegantly modernised grade II listed Victorian inn in the village of Summerhouse near Darlington, this two Michelin-starred fine-dining restaurant is the ideal spot for serious foodies to celebrate Valentine's Day. Dine on 15 courses of globally inspired dishes, such as razor clams served with almonds and celeriac, in the dining room or at the chef's table, where you can watch the kitchen team at work.

**Details** 01325 374237; rabyhuntrestaurant.co.uk

## Wild Flor Hove, East Sussex

Set over two floors, this smart, friendly neighbourhood restaurant with exposed brick, polished wood floors and bentwood bistro chairs is a charming setting for a romantic meal à deux. Select a bottle from one of the best wine lists in the city and enjoy the

Valentine's menu of modern British dishes based on impeccably sourced ingredients, including Jersey rock oysters with lemon and shallot vinegar.

**Details** 01273 329111; wildflor.com

## Green Park Brasserie Bath, Somerset

This converted Victorian booking hall in the beautifully restored Bath stone-built Green Park railway station (disused since 1966) is one of the UK's most romantic restaurants — and is the distinctive setting for a candlelit Valentine's dinner accompanied by live jazz. The menu of pleasingly familiar brasserie classics might include dishes such as calamari with garlic aioli and a selection of steaks from cattle reared three miles from the restaurant's door.

**Details** 01225 338565; greenparkbrasserie.com

## Tyddyn Llan Llandrillo, nr Corwen, Denbighshire

This rural restaurant with rooms occupies a converted Georgian house set in four acres amid beautiful north Wales countryside. The traditionally elegant dining room, with painted wood



Cherry macaron dessert at Simpsons, Birmingham



# to go for an evening à deux

MATT AUSTIN; JODI HINDS

Claude Bosi at  
Bibendum, west London



crossing of the River Wyre against the stunning backdrop of Fylde countryside and Bowland Fells since the 17th century. There's an open fire in the bar and warm, earthy tones in the dining room, where the former Fat Duck chef Chris Bury serves a menu of the finest Lancastrian produce. Dishes include a rich, comforting short rib of beef served with a dripping-fat croissant that's sure to win any food-loving Valentine's heart. **Details** 01995 670166; thecartfordinn.co.uk

## Henne Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire

Located in a charming honey-stone building in the historic Cotswolds market town of Moreton-in-Marsh, the cosy dining room of this sustainably run restaurant is the perfect setting for a romantic meal. Ingredients for the six-course tasting menu are sourced as close to the village as possible and might appear in dishes such as Creedy Carver duck with parsley root and spiced bacon. **Details** 01608 544603; restauranthenne.com

## Claude Bosi at Bibendum West London

Every meal at Bibendum is one of dazzling invention and deliciousness created by Claude Bosi, one of the finest modernist chefs on the planet. Take a seat in one of London's most distinctive and elegant dining rooms, decorated with stained-glass windows depicting the Michelin Man (the restaurant is in the landmark Michelin building near South Kensington), for a mind-blowing tasting menu of luxurious culinary magic that might include the signature duck jelly with onion, smoked sturgeon and caviar. **Details** 020 7581 5817; claudebosi.com

## Above at Hide Central London

Ask for a window table in the stunning light-wood dining room for beautiful views over Green Park while you enjoy celebrity chef Ollie Dabbous's refined and imaginative Michelin-starred cuisine. The seven-course tasting menu encapsulates the light and natural style of cooking here, with dishes such as golden turnip shavings with borage flower honey, pine and marigold, and Orkney scallop with white radish and shiso blossom. The Valentine's tasting menu includes decadent dishes such as Wagyu beef in two servings: slow cooked and glazed with violet mustard, and in a steamed dumpling with black truffle. **Details** 020 3146 8666; hide.co.uk

## The Compasses Inn Salisbury, Wiltshire

Hidden in Wiltshire's idyllic Nadder Valley, this quintessentially British historic pub with rooms is overflowing with atmosphere, with flagstone floors, ancient wooden beams, pew seating and brick-lined fireplaces. The modern British menu will delight food lovers too, with simple yet sophisticated dishes such

as smoked eel with crispy pancetta and beurre blanc sauce. **Details** 01722 714318; thecompassesinn.com

## Orwells Nr Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

This highly acclaimed sustainable restaurant is housed in an 18th-century former pub set in unspoilt Oxfordshire countryside. Inside, you'll find a smart, contemporary dining room to match the modern cooking of chefs and partners Ryan and Liam Simpson-Trotman, who might offer on their 11-course Taste the Season menu creative dishes such as Périgord truffle, Jerusalem artichoke, lemon and duck liver. The menu for Valentine's night (£90pp) includes leek and truffle mille-feuille with Ogleshiel cheese, and Orkney scallop with celeriac, bacon and XO sauce. **Details** 0118 940 3673; orwellsrestaurant.com

## Purefoy Arms Preston Candover, Hampshire

Take a romantic stroll through beautiful Hampshire countryside then head to this attractive Victorian red-brick pub, nestled in the heart of Preston Candover village, with its cosy corners with real wood fires and a menu created by the award-winning chef and owner Gordon Stott. The menu of sophisticated modern dishes might include torched mackerel with pickled fennel, apple and parsley butter. The Valentine's tasting menu is available on Saturday, February 12, and Monday, February 14 (£62pp) and includes gurnard with chorizo butter sauce, and a pudding of caramelised white chocolate doughnut with pear jam. **Details** 01256 389514; thepurefoyarms.co.uk

## The George at Alstonefield Nr Ashbourne, Derbyshire

Set among the tranquil scenery of the White Peak area of the Peak District National Park, known for its outstanding beauty, wildlife and walking and cycling trails, this charming 18th-century inn is a romantic setting for a meal for two. Inside, there's exposed stonework and wood beams, rustic farmhouse furniture and a menu made with ingredients sourced from within 15 miles of the pub, with dishes such as Peak District pigeon with beetroot textures, malted barley and quail scotch egg. **Details** 01335 310205; thegeorgeatstonefield.com

## The Swan Tarporey, Cheshire

Take a stroll through stunning Cheshire countryside along the Sandstone Trail, then head to this 400-year-old former coaching inn with rooms in the heart of a characterful village. Warm up by the log-burner and enjoy a classic cocktail in one of the atmospheric dining rooms, then share a generously proportioned tomahawk steak for two. **Details** 01829 733838; theswantarporey.co.uk

The Samling,  
Windermere, Cumbria



panelling, dark wood chairs and linen-covered tables, overlooks the well-maintained grounds and is a romantic setting for the chef Bryan Webb's sophisticated local, seasonal cooking, exemplified by dishes such as wild bass with laverbread beurre blanc. **Details** 01490 440264; tyddynllan.co.uk

## Simpsons Birmingham

The tastefully refined interior of this fine-dining stalwart, set in a grade II listed Georgian townhouse in a leafy suburban street, provides a chic Nordic-style setting for an intimate meal for two. The restaurant's tasting menu includes barbecued lobster with hispi cabbage, cauliflower and caviar. **Details** 0121 454 3434; simpsonsrestaurant.co.uk

## The Boat Inn Lichfield, Staffordshire

Exposed beams and brickwork and an antler chandelier contrast with opulent button-back designer chairs to create a rustic yet refined ambience at this award-winning pub and restaurant. The chef and owner Liam Dillon has appeared on the BBC's *Great British Menu* series. His menu here features produce grown in the pub's garden; dishes could include belly pork with spring onion croquettes and Jospier-burnt

apple puree, or roast lamb loin, confit belly, cured and roasted baby gem with salsa verde. The Valentine's tasting menu features dishes such as roast scallop served with artichokes, sea leeks and bordelaise sauce. **Details** 01543 361692; theboatinnlichfield.com

## The Hollist Arms Lodsworth, West Sussex

There are plenty of dishes to share with the love of your life on the Valentine's menu at this rustic 17th-century stone-built pub in a chocolate-box South Downs village. Feast on slow-roasted suckling pig shoulder with sauerkraut followed by a pistachio soufflé for two before relaxing with a post-meal drink in the cosy, low-ceilinged bar. The unashamedly carnivorous menu changes regularly; dishes could include braised rabbit, bacon, mustard and buttered potatoes, or glazed ox cheek with mash and red cabbage. **Details** 01798 861310; thehollistarms.com

## The Cartford Inn Little Ecclestone, Lancashire

This cosy and atmospheric former coaching inn has stood on the historic

Wild Flor, Hove,  
East Sussex



Roast lamb loin at the  
Boat Inn, Staffordshire



# 24 perfect hideaways in the countryside

Stay in a castle by the sea, or in a secluded cabin in the woods. Chosen by expert Andrew Eames

## Sea and seclusion at Seymour Tower Jersey

If it's your idea of romance to wake up marooned on a tidal outcrop, Seymour Tower on Jersey is the place for you. Hike a mile out at low tide across the seabed past oyster beds and crab pools, and clamber up the steps into this sturdy 18th-century watchtower in time to view the water's return. Facilities inside are basic but adequate, and a log-burner (and your companion) will keep you warm as the winter storms rage outside. **Details** One night's self-catering for two from £400; jerseyheritage.org

## Visit Old Harry Rocks and stay at a chic hotel Dorset

The chalk stacks of Old Harry lurk under the grassy-topped white cliffs of Purbeck. They are the counterpart to the Needles of the Isle of Wight, visible across the water. There's something momentous about standing here, watching boats heading for the safety of Poole Harbour, for this is the beginning of the Jurassic Coast and the 630-mile South West Coast Path, which stretches from here all the way around Land's End. Meanwhile, to the north is the beach at Studland, and the Pig on the Beach, with its free-standing shepherd huts, tailor-made for lovers. **Details** Room-only dovecote double from £295; thepighotel.com

## Stay in a castle on the coast Co Antrim

*Game of Thrones* fans are regular pilgrims to Northern Ireland's Dark Hedges, that tangle-tunnel of beech trees that line a country lane in northern Antrim. Pair it with the nearby Giant's Causeway, a tessellation of basalt that was apparently created by a giant putting down stepping stones in an attempt to cross to mainland Britain. End the day by following the coastal causeway south to Ballygally Castle Hotel, a fine conversion of a 17th-century fortification. **Details** Room-only doubles from £120; hastingshotels.com

## Sunsets at Avebury and a cosy inn Wiltshire

In many ways, Avebury is more enchanting than Stonehenge. Here, in

the largest stone circle in the world, you can get within hugging distance of the ancient megaliths. It's not just Avebury that's compelling: the surrounding countryside is dotted with mysterious neolithic bumps such as Silbury Hill, while not far away is the immaculately preserved village of Lacock, a backdrop for series including *Cranford* and *Downton Abbey*. Stay in the quirky, wood-beamed 15th-century inn, the five-bedroom Sign of the Angel. **Details** B&B doubles from £110; signoftheangel.co.uk

## Paddleboard on the River Monnow and stay the night Monmouth

With the Forest of Dean on one side and the Wye Valley on the other, the sleepy River Monnow leads the Wales-England border on a slow dance through placid countryside. Yet this is a location for energetic couples. Go west and there's a spectacular walk up the Cat's Back near Llanveynoe, on the flank of the Brecon Beacons. Go east and Symonds Yat has opportunities for stand-up paddleboarding. Stay by the Monnow in the Bell at Skenfrith, a 17th-century coaching inn with a menu enhanced by a productive kitchen garden. **Details** B&B doubles from £150; thebellatkskenfrith.co.uk

## Coleridge Way and a cosy pub Exmoor

With your poetry book in hand, walk part of the Coleridge Way, which runs for 51 miles over Exmoor from Lynmouth to Nether Stowey. Choose the more sheltered and woodland section up through the Lyn Valley past Watersmeet. Eventually you'll emerge by the beautiful little Oare church and ancient Robber's Bridge, in the Doone Valley. As you walk, recite Coleridge's imaginative vision of an earthly paradise. "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan / A stately pleasure-dome decree." Your own day's end pleasure-dome is prettily thatched Porlock, where you can get cosy in the multiple inglenooks of the old Ship Inn. **Details** B&B doubles from £80; shipinnporlock.co.uk

## Sleep in a tower on the Trellisick estate Cornwall

The National Trust's Trellisick estate lies on the banks of the Fal estuary on the Roseland peninsula of Cornwall's south coast. Falmouth and posh St Mawes are close at hand, and there's a small beach on the estate itself. Stay here in a Rapunzel-style water tower,



A shepherd hut at the Pig on the Beach, Dorset

surrounded by gardens, just perfect for plighting one's troth. With a conical roof and circular rooms linked by a spiral staircase, the tower is four storeys high yet has only one room on each floor, with the kitchen at the top. **Details** Three nights' self-catering for two from £747; nationaltrust.org.uk/holidays

## A boutique winery with rooms Oxfordshire

Chiltern Valley Winery & Brewery is a conversion of old farm buildings immersed in beech woodland, with the handsome estate village of Hambleden down the road and the Thames Valley and Henley beyond. Regular winery tours allow for multiple celebrations with all manner of refreshment, so there's little chance of leaving the property in a straight line. Hence the guest rooms, one of which has its own sauna and swimming pool. **Details** B&B doubles from £115; chilternvalley.co.uk

## Punting on the Cam Cambridge

The River Cam winds gently through the heart of Cambridge, soaking the "Backs" of many of the biggest and oldest colleges. It passes the soaring chapel at King's and St John's, with its delicate Bridge of Sighs. The charming grounds that slope down to the river are usually pricked with early crocuses in February

and are best explored by the Cambridge equivalent of a Venetian gondola — the punt. Hire bikes to explore the surrounding countryside, following paths through meadows to the village of Grantchester (citycyclehire.com). Stay at the Varsity hotel, right by Scudamore's punt station. **Details** B&B doubles from £144; thevarsityhotel.co.uk

## Foodie heaven and a stay in a Georgian farmhouse Shropshire

The attractive market town of Ludlow, with its castle, cobbled streets and classy restaurants, seems made for romance. Moreover, just to the north is the fairytale Stokesay Castle, a fortified manor house that is about to feature in a new historical love story starring Billie Piper. Star in your own romance by staying at Old Downton Lodge, a restaurant with rooms concocted from former farm buildings — half-timbered, medieval and Georgian — assembled around a courtyard crammed with herbs. **Details** B&B doubles from £123.95; olddowntonlodge.com

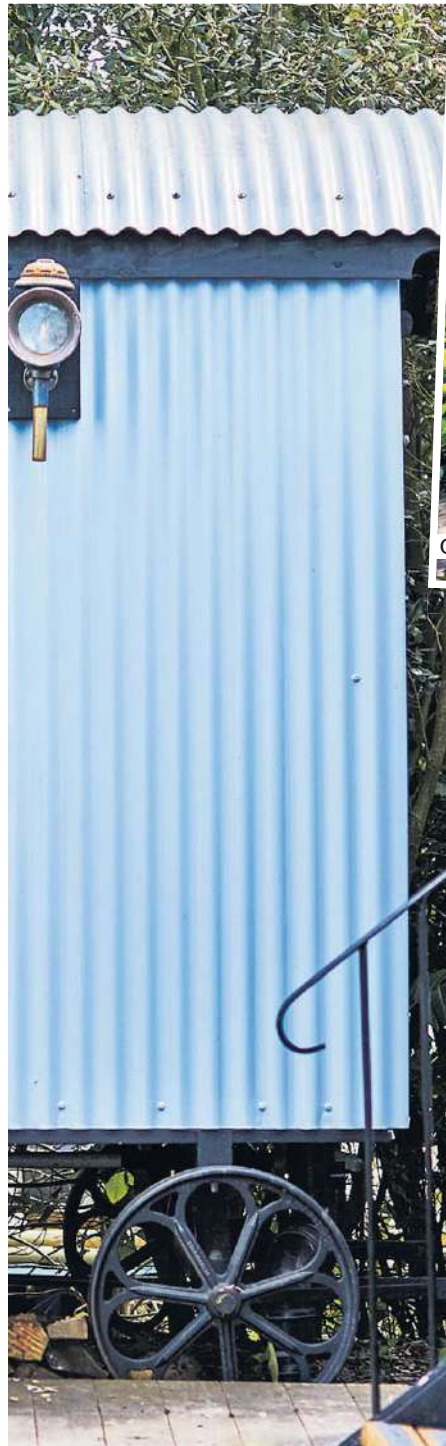
## Stargazing at a remote cabin Ceredigion

Log-burner, check. Hot tub, check. Stargazing skylight, check. Great view, check. Handcrafted cabin, check. The Hiveaway sits in a high meadow overlooking the Teifi Valley about

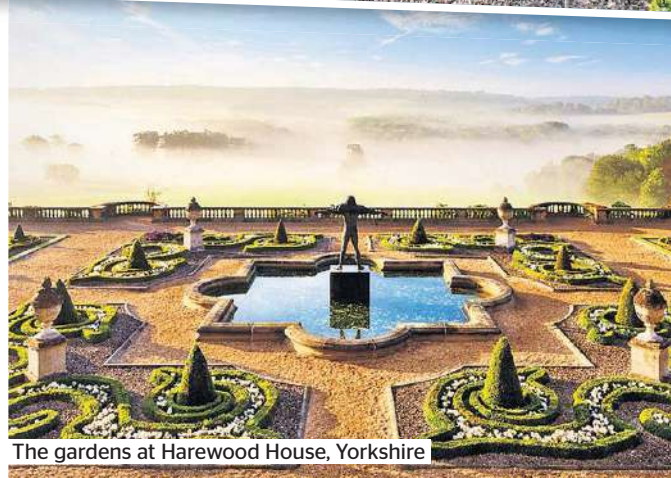


Punting on the River Cam





Old Downton Lodge, Shropshire



The gardens at Harewood House, Yorkshire

companions stepped out of their carriages. These days the city's key attraction, its Unesco-registered Roman spa, still gets pretty steamy, but bathing in its waters is forbidden. Not so at the adjacent Thermae Bath Spa, with its rooftop pool and its intimate Cross Bath, available for exclusive use. Where else to stay other than the Royal Crescent? **Details** B&B doubles from £390; royalcrescent.co.uk

### Cottage hideaway Norfolk

Time has pretty much stood still in the 18th-century market town of Reepham, full of independent shops, with impressive Georgian properties lining its central square. The town is ideal for gentle outings along the Marriott's Way, a former railway line that is now an art-lined green corridor running 18 miles into the heart of Norwich. To counter the cold easterly wind, Old Oaks cottage has two wood-burning stoves, one in the sitting room and one in the kitchen, as well as a hot tub in the courtyard outside. **Details** Three nights' self-catering for three from £478; norfolkcottages.co.uk

### The tiny island for lovers Anglesey

Tiny Llanddwyn Island, reached by low-tide causeway from Anglesey's sweepingly empty Newborough Beach, is said to have been the home to Wales's patron saint of lovers, St Dwynwen, known as the Welsh equivalent of St Valentine. Legend has it that a visit to her ruined church and a "bubbling" well on the island can bring good fortune, and from the lonely Twr Mawr lighthouse you will certainly be rewarded with magnificent views of Snowdonia across the water. This part of Anglesey is rich in holiday cottages, such as at Tan Twr Farm, overlooking the Menai Strait. **Details** Three nights' self-catering for four from £342; menaiholidays.co.uk



Glamping bothies, Stirlingshire

20 miles north of Carmarthen, with Wales's west coast resort of New Quay and the National Trust beach of Penbryn about 25 minutes away. But this is primarily a place to hunker down and make local sorties to inns and waterfalls, and to relish a unique cabin in which pretty much everything is antique, reclaimed or handmade. **Details** Three nights' self-catering for two, £470; thehiveaway.co.uk

### The Minack open-air theatre and a cottage with a hot tub Cornwall

If ever there was a place for extemporising your own *Romeo and Juliet*, for whipping out a ring and going down on bended knee, then the stage of Cornwall's open-air Minack Theatre is it. The extraordinary creation of one woman, Rowena Cade, the theatre is cupped in a granite gully on Cornwall's furthest shore, with passing dolphins regularly upstaging performers. Stay along the shore at Dovecote Cottage in Lamorna Cove, which has an outdoor hot tub. **Details** Three nights' self-catering for two from £297; oneoffplaces.co.uk

### A Roman spa and a grand hotel Somerset

Bath, surrounded by beautiful countryside and with its graceful Georgian crescents, seems little changed since Jane Austen and her genteel

### A loughside tower in secluded woodland Co Down

Strangford Lough in Co Down, the largest seawater inlet in the British Isles, is thronged with 80,000 birds in winter. Twice a day, the lough's huge volume of water tries to escape through its narrow entrance, attracting playful otters and seals. Survey it

all from the elegant Temple of the Winds at Mount Stewart, then retreat to your own castellation, Helen's Tower — a lookout that was praised in verse by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

**Details** Two nights' self-catering for two from £296; hostunusual.com

### A weekend on the Holkham estate Norfolk

With the Earl of Leicester in Holkham, the Marquis of Cholmondeley in Houghton and the Queen regularly in Sandringham, North Norfolk is clearly a classy place to spend a weekend.

Handsome villages and generous beaches add to the appeal, especially for those who go to ground in Palmer's Folly, a grade II listed gatehouse on the Holkham estate. It is a place of grazing deer and peaceful woodland, and the salt marshes of its nature reserve make a welcome shelter for migrant birds.

**Details** Three nights' self-catering for two from £555; originalcottages.co.uk

### Tors, waterfalls and sleeping in a castle Dartmoor

England's most southwesterly wilderness is legendary at any time of year, but you may want to avoid the topmost tors in February. Head around the western edge to where the lonely, wind-blasted 13th-century church of Brent Tor is perched on top of what is thought to be the lava plug of a volcano, with majestic views. If it's too wild, try the adjacent Lydford Gorge, with its waterfalls, then retreat to the turreted top-floor apartment of a castle of your own, the grade II listed Haldon Belvedere.

**Details** Three nights' self-catering for two from £585; oneoffplaces.co.uk

### Stay in a romantic boathouse Angus

Anyone favouring a bit of Mr Darcy-style action should hightail it to Scotland's eastern flank, where an intimate lake is waiting for someone to splash in and make a statement. This is Forbes of Kingennie, not far from Dundee, where the Leannan Boathouse has a romantic balcony. The boathouse is part of a country resort with its own golf course, restaurant and bar, while Arbroath, famous for its smoked fish, is on the coast 15 miles to the east.

**Details** Three nights' self-catering for two for £600; forbesofkingennie.co.uk

### High tea and history at a country house hotel York

York's ancient centre, the Shambles, transports visitors with its tottering,

half-timbered houses hanging over the lanes. At street level they're shored up by chocolatiers and tearooms such as Bettys, famous for its Fat Rascal hybrid of a scone and a rock cake. Loved-up couples percolate through the streets to end up at the Minster — legend has it that if you kiss under the cathedral's Heart of Yorkshire window you will be together for ever. Stay at the Pavilion Hotel in quieter, quainter Fulford, and walk into town on the riverside towpath. **Details** Room-only doubles from £75.60; yorkpavilionhotel.com

### Stay in the glorious gardens of Harewood House Yorkshire

A courting couple stepping out onto the ornamental terrace of Harewood House, between Leeds and Harrogate, could be forgiven for thinking that the world had been artfully arranged for their pleasure. It's all down to the visionary skill of Capability Brown, who transformed this gentle scoop of Yorkshire countryside by introducing a lake, a ha-ha and carpets of oaks that unroll themselves to the horizon. Hidden away in Harewood's grounds is a selection of rental cottages, including Lavender, which has a private patio with a fire pit.

**Details** Three nights' self-catering for two from £395; harewoodholidays.com

### Ennerdale: the quiet side of the Lake District Cumbria

Ennerdale is one of the quietest and most remote valleys in the Lake District, sufficiently romantic to inspire Bill Clinton to propose to Hillary here. There are plenty of deer, red squirrels and Highland cattle, and its long, deep lake is a habitat for rare species. At its highest, most easterly point is the YHA's Black Sail hostel, reputedly the most hidden away in the country, while down at the western end is the village of Kirkland, where Hillcrest Cottage is a house with beams, inglenooks and a conservatory, plus three wood-burning stoves.

**Details** Three nights' self-catering for three from £357; sallycottages.co.uk

### A luxury break in a historic hotel North Yorkshire

There's nothing quite like the vaulted remains of a ruined abbey for stimulating contemplation. Fountains Abbey in North Yorkshire's Studley Royal Park has something extra, because the ruin is set amid a spectacular water garden of cascades and tranquil moon ponds, in crescent and full-moon shapes. Stay starry-eyed just up the road in the luxurious stately pile Grantley Hall, with its own spa and gardens, plus a Michelin star for its food.

**Details** B&B doubles from £600; grantleyhall.co.uk

### Winter glamping in the forest Stirlingshire

The Trossachs, within easy reach of Glasgow and Stirling, have a dreamy mix of lochs and glens, slathered in misty forest and laced with walking trails. Aberfoyle is one of its community centres, with a sculpture walk around adjacent Loch Ard. Near the village of Drymen, the sculptor Rob Mulholland has created his own reworkings of traditional Scottish bothy designs, rich in creative detail and found objects.

**Details** Two nights' self-catering for two for £380; arcadiaglamping.co.uk



## 8 Body + Soul

# Want to shrink your waistline?

GETTY IMAGES; JOHN LAWRENCE FOR THE TIMES

Losing weight is easy if you cut down on overprocessed food and eat more fresh food and protein, says [Dr Michael Mosley](#)

**I** don't think that most people get fat simply because they are eating a lot of rice and potatoes. It is also hard to blame sugar for the present obesity crisis — as a nation we've been eating less of it over the past decade, while rates of obesity have been rising. In my view the reason so many people struggle with weight is that we are eating too much ultra-processed food, the sort of brightly packaged, aggressively marketed products that fill our supermarket shelves. Typically they are high in both fat and sugar, along with mysterious preservatives and emulsifiers (E numbers).

In 2009 a team at the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil published an important paper called *The Issue Is Not Food, Nor Nutrients, So Much as Processing*. They argued that while people have, for decades, been blaming fats and carbs for the rise in obesity, they have largely ignored the extent to which the foods we eat have been manipulated and altered by the big food manufacturers before they reach our plates. To illustrate their findings they identified three categories of food: "unprocessed foods", which largely remain as nature intended apart from packaging, such as rice, eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables; "processed foods", to which salt or sugar have been added, such as fresh bread, cured meats, butter and cheese; and "ultra-processed foods", foodstuffs made from formulations, designed to imitate the taste and smell of fresh or minimally processed foods, while actually being factory produced out of cheap industrial ingredients and additives. These foods include chicken nuggets, pizza, shop-bought biscuits and sweetened cereals.

## What highly processed food does to your waistline

The rise in obesity, worldwide, which began in the 1980s, coincided with an increase in the marketing and consumption of such ultra-processed foods. In the 1980s the average UK family diet contained roughly 26 per cent convenience foods. But by 2014 us Brits were getting 57 per cent of our calories from ultra-processed food.

There have been a number of studies that suggest eating more ultra-processed food increases your risk of blood pressure, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

In 2020 I undertook my own ultra-processed diet experiment, for an Australian documentary. I didn't go crazy; I just

moved on to a fairly typical Australian diet in which at least half my calories came from ultra-processed food. I went back to eating cereal for breakfast, fruit yoghurts, plenty of snacks and some microwaveable frozen meals. Several times a week I went to a fast-food restaurant and had a burger and chips, with Coke to wash it down, or fried chicken and chips, again with a sweet, fizzy drink.

I had my weight, waist, blood sugars and blood pressure measured before starting on this diet, and then at the end of two weeks. At the start I quite enjoyed it, eating the sort of food I hadn't had for a long time. One of the things I quickly noticed was that within hours of eating I would get really hungry and crave more junk food. I soon started sleeping badly, snoring loudly, and I felt far more lethargic than normal. Within a few days my blood sugar levels started to rise, alarmingly. I was more anxious than normal, and that contributed to my need for more comfort food. After two weeks I had put on 3kg, my waist had expanded by about 3cm and my blood sugar levels had gone into the diabetic range. My blood pressure had also soared to 140/90.

A friend of mine, Chris van Tulleken, did a similar self-experiment for the BBC for a programme called *What Are We Feeding Our Kids?* For a month 80 per cent of everything he ate came in the form of ultra-processed food, such as cocoa-flavoured breakfast cereals, chicken nuggets and microwaveable lasagnes. Like me he soon started piling on the weight. He slept badly, felt sluggish and became constipated. He also started craving more and more junk food. In four weeks, he put on 6.5kg (over a stone), and there was a marked rise in his appetite hormones. But the most striking changes took place in his brain. To his horror, research into his brain connections showed they appeared to have been reprogrammed to seek out and eat even more of these unhealthy foods.

## How eating processed food makes you consume more than you need

Another experiment was carried out by Kevin Hall, an American researcher, who was initially sceptical about how much difference eating ultra-processed foods would make. In 2018 he took ten men and ten women and asked them to spend two



weeks eating meals that were made up of ultra-processed foods (such as a bagel and cream cheese and bacon for breakfast) then two weeks eating minimally processed foods (such as porridge with bananas, walnuts and milk). All the meals contained exactly the same balance of calories, sugars, fibre, fat and carbohydrates. The results were striking. Hall found that when the volunteers were eating the ultra-processed food they consumed about 500 calories more per day and put on an average of 0.9kg, or 2lb, over the two weeks. They lost roughly the same amount while they were on the unprocessed diet.

Hall is not entirely sure why this happened. The volunteers ate the ultra-processed food faster. And the faster you eat, the more you eat. Then there is the role of fibre. Foods that are high in fibre, such as veggies, legumes, fruit and wholegrains, not only provide volume and stop you getting constipated but also delay stomach emptying and slow down the passage of food through your intestines, which means that you feel full for longer on fewer calories. Another possible explanation for why the volunteers ate more on the ultra-processed food was because they contained less protein. Fourteen per cent of the calories in the ultra-processed foods were made up of protein, versus 15.6 per cent in the healthier meals.

We know that fat is vital as an energy

## How much ultra-processed food is in your diet?

### Unprocessed or minimally processed foods

These are foods that are fresh, frozen, pasteurised, fermented, bottled or packaged. Whatever processing they have been through is minimal and there are no added sugars, oils or fats. They include fruit, vegetables, rice, lentils, chickpeas, meat, poultry, fresh or frozen fish and seafood, eggs, oats, pasta, couscous, polenta, nuts without added salt, herbs and spices, milk and plain yoghurt, tea, coffee and water.

### Processed foods

These are foods with a bit of salt or sugar added. They include salted, cured or smoked meats, fresh bread, tinned fish and fruit, butter, cheese, wine and beer.

### Ultra-processed foods

These are not so much foods as factory-made formulations designed to imitate the taste and smell of fresh foods, while actually being produced from cheap ingredients and additives.

They contain sugars, fats and salt, as well as dyes and other colours, colour stabilisers, flavours, flavour enhancers, sweeteners, and processing aids such as carbonating, firming, bulking and antibulking, defoaming, anticaking and glazing agents, emulsifiers and humectants. These are added to give products a long shelf life and to make them "hyper-palatable". Think chicken nuggets, burgers, chips, pizzas, hotdogs, prepackaged meals, vegan sausages, fizzy drinks and packaged fruit juices. Also most mass-produced ice cream, breads, shop-bought biscuits, cakes and sweetened breakfast cereals, fruit yoghurts, chocolate, sweets, crisps, energy bars, margarine and "instant" foods.

### How do you spot an ultra-processed food?

Read the label. If there are more than five ingredients, and those include numbers or have names you don't recognise, the food is likely to be ultra-processed.



Dr Michael Mosley



# What to eat



Orange juice ✘



Cereal ✘

reserve, for insulation and protection of our organs, and for absorption and transport of fat-soluble vitamins. Carbs provide energy for our muscles and central nervous system during movement and exercise. Carbs, in the form of grains, fruit and veg, are also our main source of fibre. But protein is, in many ways, even more essential. We need it to build muscles, enzymes and much of the infrastructure of our bodies. Every cell in our body contains protein, and eating enough of it is absolutely vital for growth and repair.

Ultra-processed foods, particularly snacks, normally contain little quality protein, because protein is expensive. Instead the manufacturers use artificial flavourings to try to fool our taste buds into thinking we are eating it. Beef-flavoured crisps, for example, taste as though they contain lots of protein, but actually consist mainly of carbs and fat.

## Protein-light food will make us want to binge

Two leading Australian researchers, David Raubenheimer and Steve Simpson, based at the University of Sydney, suggest that we have a specific appetite for protein and that the relatively low levels of protein in ultra-processed

foods have been one of the big drivers behind the current obesity epidemic. They suggest humans have five appetites: one each for protein, fat, carbs, calcium and salt. We have sensors in our mouth, in the lining of our gut and within our brain that detect the presence of these nutrients. If we don't get enough of any of them, we develop cravings.

However, it is the need for protein that dominates the others. Or, as they put it: "We overeat fats and carbs not because the appetites for these nutrients are stronger, but because the appetite for protein is strongest of all. If protein is diluted in the food supply, we overeat until we satisfy our protein appetite." In other words, if we are surrounded by foods that are rich in fats and carbs, but low in protein, we go on eating until we have satisfied our protein hunger.

That's why it's so easy for some of us to polish off a big bag of crisps or a packet of biscuits in one sitting. On the other hand, if I was offered a plate of fish or chicken, which comes in at close to 30 per cent protein, I wouldn't be able to eat anything like as much, calorie wise. My protein appetite would soon be satisfied.

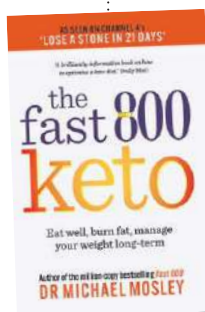
Simpson and Raubenheimer recruited healthy volunteers to be given meals containing different amounts of protein over four-day experiments. The meals first contained 10 per cent protein, then 15 per cent, then 25 per cent. What the scientists wanted to see was whether this would make any difference to how much the volunteers ate. It certainly had an effect. Without realising it, the volunteers ate, on average, 210 calories more per day when they were on the low-protein diet. The volunteers also reported feeling much hungrier a couple of hours after eating the low-protein breakfast, despite eating the same number of calories as on higher-protein days. That is certainly what I find. When I eat eggs or fish for breakfast, I stay full until lunchtime. If I eat the same number of calories of cereal or toast, I am craving a snack by mid-morning.

## What protein we should be aiming for

Guidelines say women should be aiming to eat about 45g of protein a day, and men should be aiming for 55g. But many experts think these numbers are far too low. A recent review of the evidence concluded that "higher intakes of high-quality protein — 1.0-1.5g/kg of body weight per day — evenly distributed throughout the day, may maximally stimulate muscle protein synthesis, thereby contributing to maintaining muscle mass in older adults". This means that someone who weighs 80kg, as I do, should be aiming for at least 80-120g of protein a day.

Protein keeps your bones healthy too. The International Osteoporosis Foundation says eating more protein "is associated with higher bone density, a slower rate of bone loss, and reduced risk of hip fracture, provided that dietary calcium intakes are adequate".

**The Fast 800 Keto** by Dr Michael Mosley is published by Short Books at £9.99



# Do you hate running but still want to blast the fat? Go rucking

MICHAEL LECKIE FOR THE TIMES. SPORTS TOP FROM NEW BALANCE AND TRAINERS FROM UNDER ARMOUR

## Phil Hilton tries a military-style fitness technique

I am roughly halfway through a 17km walk when the weight on my back starts to take ownership of my entire body. It has made me keenly interested in terrain (pebbly beaches are evil), it has corrected my posture instantly (no choice) and it has made me stride along like... well, like a hero. My shoulders are back, my chest thrust forwards and each step is deliberate and assured. Welcome to rucking.

Walking with a weighted backpack (mine had 10kg nestling inside it) has become a global phenomenon. What began life as something soldiers did with their heavy backpacks has turned into a passion for thousands of men and women — a way to exercise, lose weight and gain confidence.

It sits between walking, which always feels as if it partly belongs on dating profiles alongside open fires and pub lunches, and distance running, which just isn't that pleasant for many of us. So, if you hate running but want to lose weight, embrace the weighted backpack. Depending on your body weight, and the speed of your ruck, you can expect to burn 40 per cent more calories with 20kg on your back than conventional walking. On my ruck I was burning about 170 calories every 30 minutes.

The fear when carrying any load is its potential to damage your back. However, in the case of rucking the opposite is true. Walking with good form and a weighted backpack can actually be therapeutic. Dr Stuart McGill, distinguished professor emeritus at the University of Waterloo in Canada, explains that having a weight on your back relieves the strain on the muscles.

"The muscles are like cables that pull bones to hold posture. The spine joint is like the fulcrum of a seesaw. The backpack is like the weight on the other end of the seesaw, decreasing the load on the back."

Like most of us I spend a lot of time bent over a keyboard, and when I'm not doing that I have the posture of a sulking adolescent. When I put the weighted rucksack on it pulled me upright. My horrendous round shoulders were cranked painlessly into a far more dignified and healthy position.

Rucking strengthens the core, and indeed the whole body. It's about three times easier on the knees than walking because you are not striking the ground so hard when you move. If you raise the pace or head uphill it also becomes a powerful cardiovascular workout.

I was soon to discover that walking and carrying a load feels very natural and comfortable from the moment you start, in a way that lifting weights or gym classes do not. This is possibly because we are built



Phil Hilton rucking with a 10kg weighted backpack

## How to start rucking

- Any strong rucksack will do. Ideally choose one with waist and chest straps and tighten all the fastenings. Start with 4.5kg. You can use filled water bottles, sandbags from a DIY store, bricks or magazines — anything that can be wrapped and contained so it does not move when you do.
- The weight should be up on the middle of your back and evenly distributed with tight bindings.
- Start with a two-mile walk. Then build the number of rucks you attempt with each passing week, moving to three two-mile walks in week two and on to three four-mile rucks in your sixth week. Add 5 per cent to your weights around this stage.
- To push on with the challenge, and if you are already used to strenuous exercise, you can walk faster, increase the weight or introduce bear crawls and burpees. However, do not increase the weight too quickly or attempt very lengthy rucks without first building your capability. This is important and will prevent injury.

to do this. *Runner's World* reported that anthropologists have found that we are unusually good at carrying things as a species. Hunter-gatherers were not only very well suited to long-distance treks, but they were also evolved to carry heavy loads back to their dependants.

Start by packing your rucksack with about 10 per cent of your body weight. I used two 5kg weight plates wrapped in a towel. I weigh about 70kg, so my 10kg was heavy for a beginner. I have embarrassingly short legs (30in) and set out genuinely nervous that I would be brought down by thigh/back/foot/knee issues miles from the nearest taxi or pub.

I hit the Suffolk coast, and its huge beaches, both sandy and stony, conspired to sap my self-belief and rob me of my very limited supply of grit. The deal I'd made with myself was to be fast and continuous with as little dilly-dallying as possible. It quickly became clear that I was not on a walk, I was doing something my body recognised instantly as a serious fitness challenge. Also I started to experience a distinct and fresh sensation I believe is at the heart of rucking's popularity — outdoor discomfort.

In a world that is heated, seated, Ubered, escalatored and carpeted, taking on something that requires you to access that toughness you'd forgotten you possessed is very satisfying. On my Suffolk adventure the straps dug into my shoulders, my thighs stung and I never want to see a shingle beach again, but I'm proud to say I did it. And I will do it again.

My ruck culminated in a slab of coffee and walnut cake the size of a wardrobe. I have no idea whether this element has been factored into Navy Seal training. If it hasn't it certainly should be.

**Phil Hilton is cohost of the Manatomy podcast with Danny Wallace**



## 10 Body + Soul

# My flatmates get in the way of our sex life

**Suzi Godson**  
Sex counsel

**Q** My girlfriend and I share a flat with two other couples. We both feel self-conscious about having sex when they're in the house. Even though we're going back to the office, everyone is still at home quite a lot, and our love life is really suffering.

**A** The capacity to be aware of other people's feelings is an important quality. It's what makes you a considerate partner and a good flatmate. However, you could be worrying more than you need to. Research shows that we all routinely overestimate how much other people notice us — a phenomenon that psychologists call "the spotlight effect" — and this feeling is exacerbated when we are doing something atypical, such as having sex in a place that doesn't offer us as much privacy as we would like. You are feeling anxious and self-conscious about disturbing your friends or being on show by having sex while they are in the house. The truth is, your flatmates are probably much more concerned about their own lives than yours. But if you're going to be more comfortable making less noise, there are ways to minimise it.

A lot of bedroom noise comes from furniture rather than people. I'd highly

recommend a duvet and pillows on the floor, which makes a soundproof — and cosy — nest. If either of you is vocal during sex, try positions such as spoons that allow you to direct sound into the pillow. Having sex in the shower is also a good option because the sound of running water masks the noise, but that is probably viable only if you have an en suite bathroom.

Playing music is very effective and if you have a TV in your bedroom, you could try putting on a film. I know some people who use white noise machines as a relatively inexpensive and effective way of disguising sound. The other option is, of course, to sometimes lean in to silent sex, which many find highly erotic. Silent sex can help to keep you in the moment and heighten your senses. In silence, it's possible to intensify sexual charge. You create more space for non-verbal communication, which is, of course, the sine qua non of intimacy.

Since you live with two other couples, they are likely to be in exactly the same position. We've all been working from

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Perhaps lean in to silent sex, which many find highly erotic

home on and off for two years now, so if your flatmates did happen to overhear you making love, I would hope they are not going to judge you at this point. And what could they possibly be judging you for — apart from being a couple that have sex? Is that so bad? Since you are all in the same boat, why not work out a system to give each other more privacy. When I was a student my flatmate and I used to hang a "Do not disturb" sign on our door when we had a man staying. It was kind of a joke, but it ensured that neither of us burst in on each other unannounced.

If you are feeling like this, the chances are that your flatmates are too. Perhaps if you spend the odd afternoon or evening out so that they get to have some peace and quiet in the flat, they will hopefully take the hint, reciprocate and give you a bit of space every so often as well.

Send your questions to [weekendsex@thetimes.co.uk](mailto:weekendsex@thetimes.co.uk)



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Singer Joss Stone struggled to find love, until a chance meeting on tour.

By Michael Odell

**W**hat do you do if you're looking for love yet your dating history consists of "a bunch of bastards"? How do you change if you're susceptible to "a one-night stand with an arsehole and then thinking you want to be with him for ever"?

The singer Joss Stone has the answers. Last year the 34-year-old Devon-raised singer discussed finding true love on her podcast *A Cuppa Happy* and she's elaborating further now.

"When I reached 30 I did a lot of therapy. I realised that, around men, I was making myself smaller or acting cuter than I am," she says. "Like not wearing high heels on dates in case I looked too tall [she is 5ft 10in in bare feet] or being a bit girly. I thought, 'That will get me my man.'"

In the end the changes she had to make were simple. "I became honest. I started to tell my dates, 'I want seven children,' just to see how they reacted. Because I do, I want loads of kids. But if, like me, you have a pattern of dating older men then seven sounds like a lot to them."

And there was one more crucial sacrifice she had to make. "You have to give up the fairytale. All women want that, and some men too. The feeling of being head over heels and feeling it's new and great the whole time. At some point the honeymoon is over and you have to find something authentic."

Well, what Stone has found looks pretty real and authentic. In 2019 she met the "perfect man", Cody DaLuz, and last year they had a baby, Violet.

Stone, DaLuz and Violet are at present living on a tour bus sitting in a car park in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. We're talking on Zoom. I can see Violet's fold-down cot and her toys in the bus's narrow gangway.

"It's her first birthday next week and I want to bake her a cake, right here on the bus," enthuses Stone, who is co-headlining a US tour with her British compatriot Corinne Bailey Rae (who is on another bus with her kids, aged four and two). After Florida they will make their way through Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. No hotels. Just the bus.

"I'm not letting motherhood stop me doing things," Stone says. "I am exactly where I want to be. I'm in love with a wonderful man, I've started the family I always wanted and I'm still doing what I love most: singing."

Stone met DaLuz in the airport in Belize, Central America, while she was performing there as part of her extraordinary *Total*

Joss Stone in 2004



Joss Stone; above right, with her partner, Cody DaLuz



## I met my perfect man in an airport

*World Tour* (between 2014 and 2019 she played in 200 countries, including North Korea and Libya). DaLuz, 31, is a former US marine who used to work in diplomatic protection in Iraq — he was in Belize on leave from the army. Forget everything you've heard about love at first sight. In her podcast Stone reported having "uterine contractions" when she first set eyes on him.

"We met at the airport. But I was still in a relationship, which wasn't working very well, so nothing happened. And nothing happened for months."

Not to be rude, but how is DaLuz so different?

"Simple. He listens. For so long I've been with men and they think they're getting this hippy chick who's laughing and fun the whole time and you can see them switch off when they finally realise it's not quite true. Some

men think I'm stupid and I'm not. I have edges. That's the difference. When I say I want seven children and a cow he takes it seriously."

Stone has an extraordinary zest for life. It's almost two decades since her multimillion-selling debut album, *The Soul Sessions*, made her a star, aged just 16. Her powerful, bluesy voice attracted a queue of legends wanting to endorse her and she sang with Mick Jagger, James Brown and Stevie Wonder, subsequently selling 15 million albums, winning a Grammy and meeting President George W Bush at the White House (she memorably greeted him with "Hiya, George. Wassup?").

"I'm quite a happy-go-lucky person," she says. "It was all great and exciting until I thought about what I really wanted, then it wasn't any more."

When it didn't feel right, Stone pulled the plug, paying her record company EMI between £2 million and £5 million to get out of her contract because she didn't like the way it controlled her sound, her look, even her tattoos.

"I go with gut feelings. Like in relationships, never forget you have a choice."

Stone saw Britney Spears on TV not so

### Joss Stone's perfect weekend

**Devon or Cornwall?** Devon every time  
**Instagram or screen-free?** Screen-free  
**Bali or Val d'Isère?** Bali  
**Gym workout or country ramble?** Country ramble  
**Boris Johnson or Keir Starmer?** Not sure who the second one is — but neither because they're all lying bastards  
**Rowdy pub or candlelit dinner?** Rowdy pub  
**Cat or dog?** Dog  
**I couldn't get through the weekend without...** My baby

long ago. The American star's battle to regain control of her career from her father serves as a warning, Stone says. "When I watch Britney and think about Amy [Winehouse] I think, 'I never want to turn out that way.' I met Amy a few times and she was so lovely. I wish I'd said to her, 'Look, I'll f\*\*\*ing talk to these people that are trying to control you and damaging you!' You're young and people with power think you're stupid. It does take some bollocks to say to yourself, 'Get the f\*\*\* out while you can.'"

The same goes for romantic relationships. A few years ago Stone gave an interview in which she said she was in a relationship so turbulent it wasn't safe to have children. She has often spoken about her pattern of dating older men too.

"In a way that's not surprising. I was in the industry aged 14 [Stone won a BBC talent contest at that age]. I was bossing older male musicians about. I was always with older people and that fed into my love life."

Now, though, she finally has the life she wants. As well as her baby, her relationship, her tour and her podcasts, not to mention a Facebook cooking show (she presented a cooking segment on ITV's *Lorraine* recently), Stone has also managed to fly to the Bahamas and write songs with her friend and mentor Dave Stewart, formerly of the Eighties band Eurythmics. They then decamped to his second home in Nashville, Tennessee, to record a new album, *Never Forget My Love*, which perhaps unsurprisingly explores the grief of a break-up and the elation of new romance.

Stone and her family will remain in the US for another year, then she'll come back to Devon, where she lives in the family home she grew up in. When she was 18 her parents split and planned to sell the house — she then bought it with her earnings because she couldn't bear to let it go.

"When Violet is old enough I want to be at home cooking and doing the school run," she says. "And I want more kids. Cody and I have agreed, some will be adopted. 'I just ask myself... am I happy? Sometimes you just have to be brave in confronting what isn't working for you.'"

That leads her to the final instalment of her plan: once she's back in Devon with seven kids and a cow, Stone wants to go to university. "I never had that chance because music took me away so young. But I'd love to study. I'd like to be a midwife or help women in some way. But going to college is one thing Cody does challenge me on. He says, 'Why would you want to do that?' But I've always been guided by own logic. My answer is: 'Because it feels right.'" **For details about Joss Stone's tour, see [jossstone.com](https://www.jossstone.com)**



## 12 Food + Drink

# How to go to the farmers' market — without leaving your house

A new app from the founder of Depop lets customers order food from small-scale producers. By [Harry Wallop](#)

**S**imon Beckerman is one of Britain's most successful retailers of the past decade. If you haven't heard of him, your children will have — or rather of the company he started in 2011 and sold last year for \$1.63 billion (£1.22 billion): Depop.

The website where youngsters buy and sell second-hand clothes was the driving force behind the popularity of vintage fashion among Gen Z, who associate cast-offs with saving the planet rather than charity shop hand-me-downs.

So if anyone can detect a big trend, it should be him. "If I am not mistaken, the food industry is three times the size of the fashion industry," he says. "And I believe in the next ten years there will be much more consciousness around how we consume fashion and how we consume food. My assumption is that people will start to spend more on food and less on fashion."

It explains why his latest venture isn't in clothing, but beer, bagels, pickles and pain au chocolat. He has launched an app called Delli, which he hopes will transform Britain's food scene in the way that Depop revolutionised the second-hand clothing market.

In simple terms, it is an online delicatessen, but instead of offering the usual range of biscuits, cheese and cured meats you might find in a decent high street deli, the app hopes to offer genuinely local food.

Crucially — in the same way that Depop encouraged teenagers to sell their unwanted clothes — Delli hopes to encourage small producers, people making jams or pickles from their kitchen table, to sell on the platform. All they need is a licence as a food producer from their local authority.

Beckerman, 48, came up with the concept on his regular walks around his north London neighbourhood with his wife, Chiara Ugo Baudino, a fashion editor at *Marie Claire Italia*. "We noticed how many small-batch food makers there were in London and how good the food was. We realised there was a potential to bring all these people together, all these people who cared about eating food and making food that was more sustainable, more local, more healthy."

“It is an online deli, but instead of high street food, it's local and handmade

It's a neat idea, but part of the joy about going around a great farmers' market is seeing all the produce, maybe even being given a free sample. Can an app be as enjoyable?

"There are times, I think, when I want to get dressed, go out for a nice walk and shop locally, but there are other times when I don't feel like it and want to buy online and get it delivered," says Beckerman, who grew up in Italy, coming to the UK in 2011 to launch Depop.

He also hopes that while no app can recreate the experience of smelling great food on a market stall, it can whip up excitement by borrowing a technique from the fashion world: the drop. The idea is that consumers will be told in advance when a limited product, maybe a new type of fermented kefir or a batch of freshly baked pastries, is going to hit the app. He hopes that the anticipation, which leads to teenagers queueing for hours outside sneaker shops or online, can be replicated on Delli.

It was a formula that helped Beckerman to become a very rich man. When he sold Depop to Etsy, the online marketplace for craft makers, he netted himself an estimated £48 million. He admits he never needs to work again. "Luckily, yes, but I am not that kind of person. I like to build teams, build products, build stuff." And apart from treating himself to a new Tesla — "I wanted an electric car" — he hasn't done much with the money.

He tells me he had been plotting Delli for many months before the sale. "The day Depop sold, the money arrived in the bank — it was a very nice day," he says, laughing. "I looked at the bank account, I told my wife it had arrived, and then I picked up my backpack and headed to the We-Work [shared workspace] to start Delli."

To help him manage the app he has hired Natalie Lee-Joe, who used to run Jidori, a popular Japanese restaurant in Dalston in east London where Beckerman was a regular before it was forced



Harry Wallop with products bought on the Delli app

to close down because of the pandemic. She is partly in charge of getting all the small-scale producers on board.

Can Delli come close to matching the success of Depop, with its 30 million registered users and 32 million items for sale? To find out, I spent a week on Delli, which is in beta, or test, mode. As a result it is small, with just 750 customers signed up and 43 producers. A more substantial launch is happening soon — the app goes live on February 14. Some products will remain local-only delivery; many will be nationwide.

It is already slick, however. Browsing through the items was significantly more enticing than shopping on the Ocado or Tesco apps. You can't (for now) search for specific items; instead you scroll, as if you were on Instagram, looking at large pictures of all the lovely products. And buying was easy, a genuinely "frictionless" process, to use the term people in the tech industry love to use but rarely fulfil. One swipe, thanks to Apple Pay on my phone, and pickles, chilli oil, granola and wine could be ordered and paid for.

The selection of goods is almostly comically hipster: kefirs, kombucha, "100 per cent spontaneously fermented

Tarla pains aux raisins bake-at-home kit, £15 for six, from @tarla on the Delli app



beers aged in oak barrels", "natural and artisanal wine", "waste-free vegan food" made by producers "with a mission to nourish the world". Is it just for those with beard oil, tattoos and beanie hats?

"It may look like that at the moment, but that's definitely not the goal," Lee-Joe says. "It's true that a lot of the community on Delli are from east London, but that's mostly because it's products we have personally tried from producers we have met."

Once it is up and running in London, the intention is to spread out across the UK. "Birmingham is a key area that I'd like to focus on. There are a large number of small-batch producers there that I follow," Lee-Joe says.

However, after I had stopped rolling my eyes and ordered some products, I was impressed by the quality. I did not have high hopes for the courgette and cacao nib granola from Husk & Honey, a "premium granola" maker from south London (£6.80 for 450g). It looked like bird food and sounded gimmicky, but it was one of the best granolas I've tried. The scarlatto dolce, a vegan, gluten-free chilli jam (£12 for 210g) from Pasquale's Peppers really does go "with everything", as it says on the tin. I've started slathering it on any passing sandwich.

Tarla Bakes is a company started in lockdown by a former boss of Camden Town Brewery, Adam Keary. It sells croissants, pains au chocolat and other pastries in a kit — you have to roll the pastry out, prove it, then bake. His kits are fantastic quality, but they are not cheap: £13.50 for six pains aux raisins is £2.25 a pastry — only fractionally less than buying a freshly baked one at a good coffee shop or deli.



KATIE WILSON FOR THE TIMES



The Root Co ginger beer, £30 for a case of 12, from @the.root.co on the Delli app

Restaurants are in on the act too. The popular north-east London dim sum house My Neighbours the Dumplings is selling its dumpling meal kits on Delli with nationwide delivery, along with jars of its punchy chilli oil.

At the moment delivery is up to each producer. Sometimes they offer next-day delivery; some deliver on just one day a week because of the “drop” model; some are local, some are nationwide. For now, Delli is only taking on producers who have delivery set up, although they intend to team up with a third-party delivery service so they can support smaller businesses. They’re keen for this to be by bike where possible, or by foot. One product I bought, from On Root’s GTB, was a 50cl bottle of a ginger, turmeric and black pepper “mega shot”. It cost £11 and was delivered by the maker, who lived a few streets away.

It was a punchy, invigorating morning

My Neighbours the Dumplings trio of sauces, £25.50, from @myneighbours thedumplings on the Delli app



shot. But, again, not cheap. Per litre it’s about the same as I would spend on a special bottle of wine.

Yet unlike many similar drinks, these juices aren’t largely filled with apples.

Many of the producers are food businesses that started in lockdown at their kitchen table — one of the silver linings of the pandemic. And, it’s true, I am often too busy or hungover to make it to the weekend farmers’ market. I may not want to buy kefirs or kombucha, but an app introducing me to the cereal, jam and chocolate makers producing great products within a few miles of where I live is a great idea.

And Beckerman hopes that Delli will encourage more. “We hope we can incentivise many people to become food entrepreneurs, get their own permit, create their own food brand. And if they do very, very small batches that doesn’t matter. They could open their little shop on Delli and start selling.”



## The burgundy bottles to snap up now Jane MacQuitty

What’s the one French wine we just cannot get enough of and pay ever-escalating prices for? It’s not

champagne, it’s not bordeaux or increasingly modish rhônes; it’s burgundy. The proof is in the scramble for the just-launched, oddball 2020 vintage by thirsty burgundy fans happy to splash out up to a quarter more for this year than they did for the 2019.

Both the white and red 2020 burgundies have the warmth of a sunny year yet, remarkably, retain the freshness, terroir expression and acidity of cooler vintages essential for longevity. Even the growers are amazed by how vibrant and energetic their whites are, with restrained alcohol and crisp, concentrated, floral, citrus and white-peach verve.

Despite various blips, the intense, succulent, spicy, beetroot, plum and red-cherry reds that canny growers have made — with infusion, not clunky extraction — has resulted in starry wines that some burgundy watchers feel

“The whites are vibrant, the reds are intense and succulent

will be legendary. Equally exciting for bargain hunters, some of the best-value 2020 reds come from cooler sites that usually struggle to ripen. Of the more than 400 wines that I tasted, Maranges and Chorey-les-Beaune stood out, and even humble 2020 bourgogne rouge hit the spot; it’s young as yet, but Louis Latour’s 2020 Bourgogne Pinot Noir is already a fine, leafy, meaty, truffle mouthful (majestic.co.uk, £16.99), as is the rich, velvety damson fruit of Louis Jadot’s 2020 Couvent des Jacobins Bourgogne Pinot Noir (Morrisons, £15).

Good white appellations to home in on include Chassagne-Montrachet, Meursault and St Aubin, especially this trio’s premier cru wines. Chablis was a success with premier cru Fourchaume a hot tip. The Co-op has limited stocks of Jean-François Bordet’s gorgeous, stony, citrus-spiked and mineral-edged 2020 Seguinot-Bordet Chablis Premier Cru Fourchaume, £20. Also aim for the cheapest white Côte d’Or village, Maranges and Franck Lamargue’s concentrated, nutty, citrus-fruit 2020 Maranges Vignes Blanches with surprising weight and gravitas (montrachet.co.uk, £21); it’s worth every penny.



### Top 2020 burgundies

2020 La Chantrie Chablis Premier Cru, Laroche, 14.5 per cent

Tesco, £25  
With a dusting of oak, this is a mouthwatering, stylish, steely, appley '20.

2020 Bourgogne L'Aurore Pinot Noir, 13 per cent

Waitrose, £9.99 (down from £11.99)  
A brilliant, cut-price, light, zesty, cranberry-stashed pinot noir.

2020 Chorey-Les-Beaune, Vieilles Vignes, 13 per cent

majestic.co.uk, £24.99  
Snap up this superb, savoury, smoky, red berry-fruit and leaf mould-finished 2020.

2020 Pernand-Vergelesses 1er Cru Sous Frétilles, JJ Girard, 13 per cent

montrachetwine.com, £36  
This is a gorgeous, toasty, nutty 1er cru 2020. It has terrific length and acidity.

## This week’s best supermarket bottles



2018 Château Dasvin-Bel-Air, Haut-Médoc, France, 14.5 per cent

Co-op, £13.50  
Punching well above its weight, this humble merlot-led claret overflows with elegant, scented, laurel-leaf fruit.

2021 Villiera Sauvignon Blanc, South Africa, 13 per cent

Marks & Spencer, £8.50  
Enticing, vibrant, verdant, lime zest-edged South African sauvignon blanc from a cooler vintage and a good site.

2020 Taste the Difference Gewurztraminer, France, 14 per cent

Sainsbury’s, £9  
Off-dry, floral gewurz with lashings of crystallised lychees, roses and violets to the fore.

2021 Summer Road Old Vine Grenache, Australia, 14 per cent

Waitrose, £6.49 (down from £8.49)  
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# Outside

## Create a magical pond with my easy guide

From choosing the best location and materials to attracting wildlife, [Joe Swift](#) has everything you need to know



**T**here's nothing better than a weekend project at this time of year to keep you warm while building up the excitement of the forthcoming spring and summer out in the garden. How about a small pond? Water adds a magical element to a space — whether it's a moving surface that sparkles, or it's a still, glassy mirror, bringing the sky and ever-moving cloud-scape down into the garden.

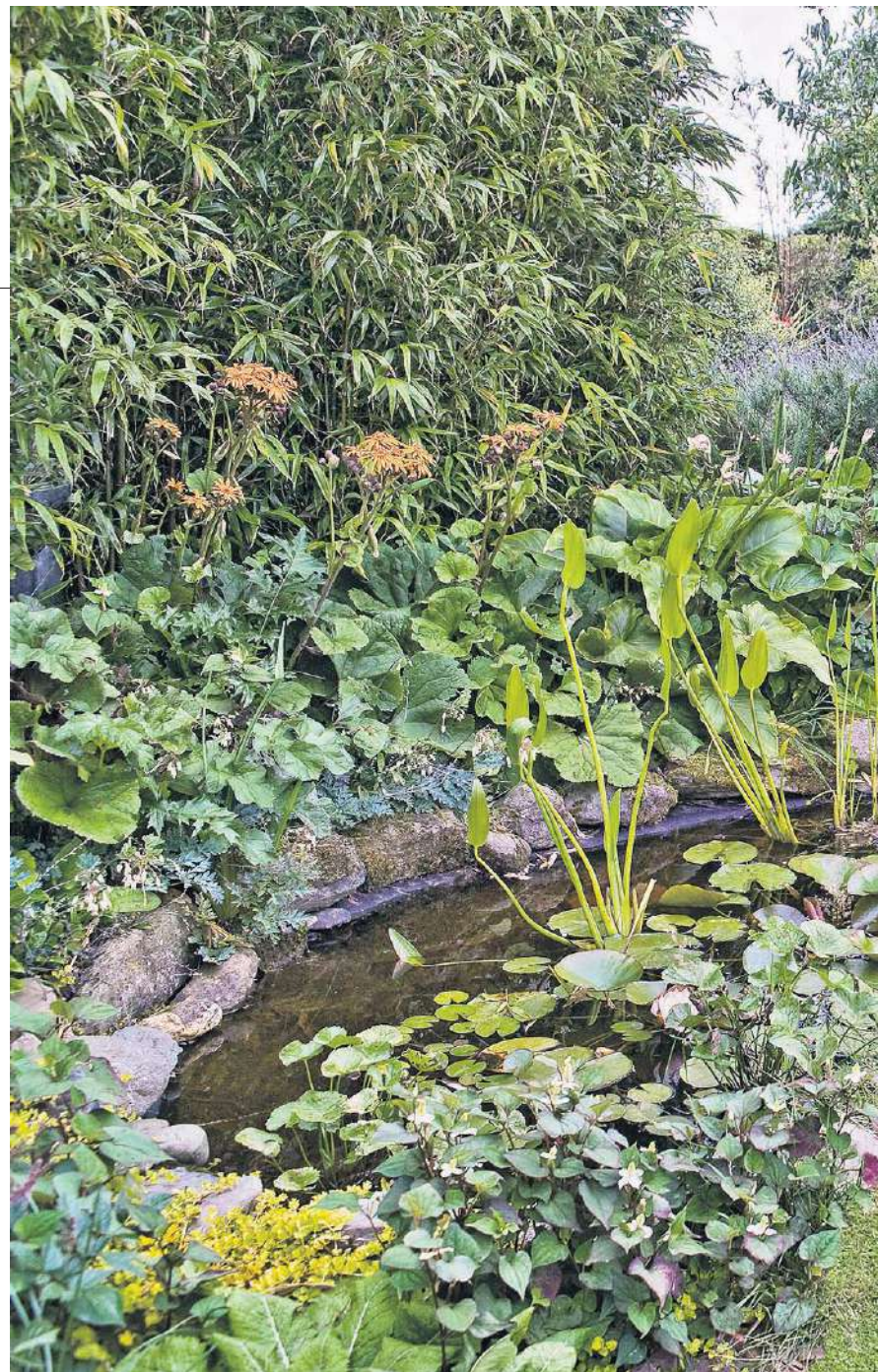
Water's a magnet for wildlife too because birds, frogs, newts, damselflies, water beetles, pond skaters and others turn up without a formal invitation, and in turn so do those that feed on them, such as bats and hedgehogs (all part of the cycle of

life). A pond can be as simple or elaborate as you like. Here are some things to consider before you start digging.

### Where to put it

Ponds placed in full sun mean you can grow a wider range of aquatic plants (eg lilies need plenty of sun) but they can warm up quickly in spring and lead to algae problems (not such an issue if you're installing a filtration system).

Ponds with a degree of shade lead to good water clarity. Avoid planting under deciduous trees and shrubs because leaves falling into the water will decay, making it cloudy and smelly, although small ponds are easily netted over in autumn. Ideally site the pond where there's plenty of plant-



ing around it at ground level (rather than in the middle of a lawn) to provide cover for wildlife and a picture for reflection.

### Size and depth

The size will depend on the space available, and the dimensions and proportions of

your garden. Once you have an idea of shape, play about on the ground using string/hosepipe/sticks/builder's line spray to get an idea of the size. There are no set rules on this, but round ponds may look enormous once dug and filled with water but quickly shrink visually once planted



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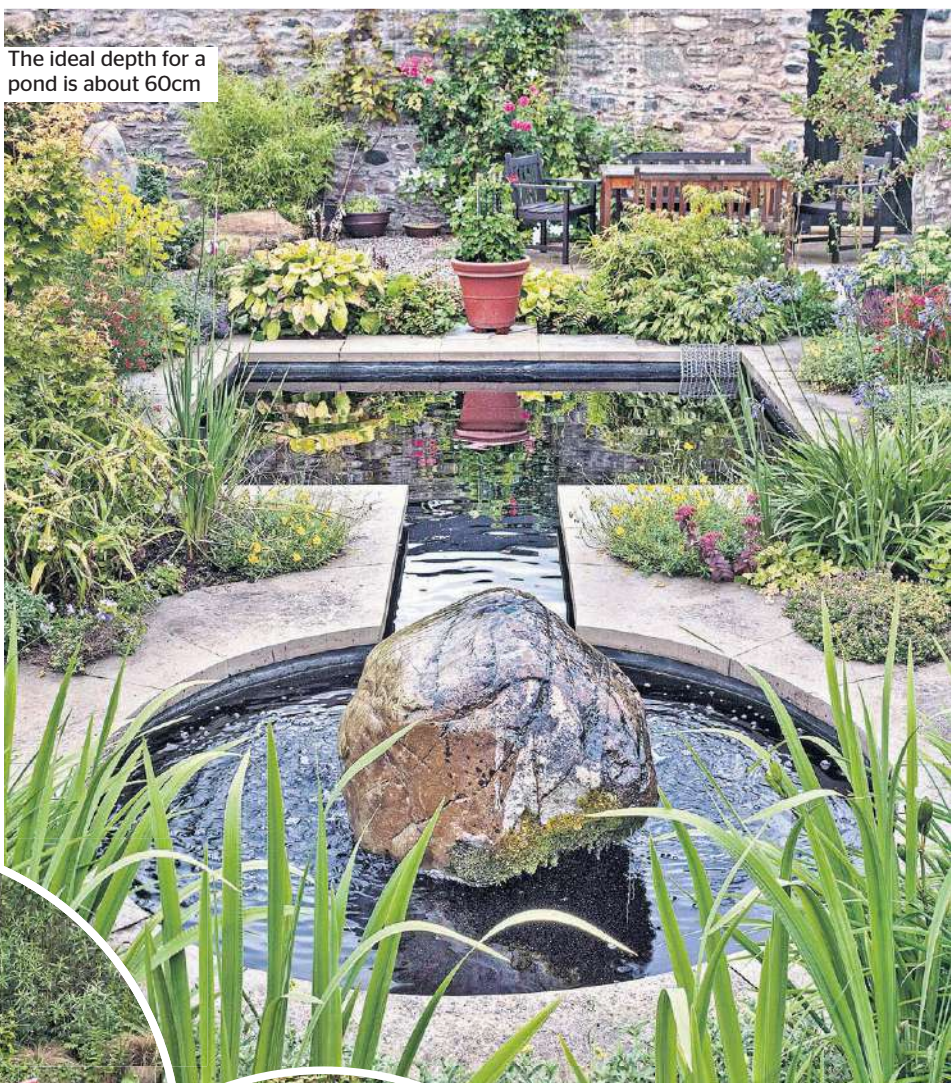
Try to use rainwater when you first fill your pond



Page 19

## 'Down in the steep-sided valley catkins bobbed along the neatly laid hedges'

Christopher Somerville's good walk



The ideal depth for a pond is about 60cm

## Weeder's digest

Sheets of little yellow aconites (*Eranthis hyemalis*) are in full flower. While you can't divide them singly now, like snowdrops, they are very happy to be spread around the garden in 5-10cm clumps with the soil attached. If the weather is cool and the soil moist, there is no need to water them in. **Summer clematis are raring to go and shooting already. Time to cut down last year's great tangle to knee-high. Early varieties can be treated less severely, cutting back to a higher framework of young stems. Add compost to keep them happy.** Be sure that your wisteria has been pruned now, taking back the wands of last year's growth to two or three buds. **Wild celandines can be a huge nuisance if they get in borders among small garden plants. Fork them out now, just as the leaves appear, carefully lifting out the bundle of minute white dahlia-like tubers and binning them without dropping any along the way.**

Think of all those shrubs you prune hard every spring, taking away so much of their hard-won growth again and again: buddleia, coloured-stemmed dogwoods, *Hydrangea* 'Annabelle' and paniculata, topiary pieces – even formal hedges. To keep them strong and making flowerheads of a good size, feed them now with a slow-release fertiliser such as bonemeal, working it into the top few centimetres of soil where it will start to work in the coming weeks.

**If you prefer to see the pink, white and yellow hybrid hellebores flower leafless then now's the time to cut away the foliage. Sickly plants with black-spotted foliage should not be cut with the same secateurs as clean plants, for fear of transmitting disease.** SA

with marginals, so be bold and go as big as you can, although even a small puddle is beneficial to wildlife. Consider what's underground (pipes/electric cables). A pond should be a minimum of 45cm deep but ideally about 60cm. Water will always find its perfect level. Use a spirit level and straight edge to determine the finished water level and how it works with the surrounding ground.

### Lining and edges

Pond liners come in a range of materials, sizes and prices. They can be ready to drop in and fold to work with the hole you've dug, or come in prefabricated shapes in fibreglass with built-in shelves for planting. Here are the basic approaches.

### Butyl liners

These come in sheets or rolls and can be welded together for larger sizes or "box welded" to drop into a more formal shape without the need to fold the corners. They are ideal for irregular-shaped ponds and below-ground ponds. They require an underlay beneath and there are size calculators online.

Don't skimp on the size, you can always cut excess off after the pond has been filled. Install on a sunny day so the liner is warm and malleable, filling the pond with water as you go to keep it tight fitting. Very carefully fold the liner as best as possible around corners or curves. With liners make a shallow beach on at



Use rope to plan the shape of your pond



Use stones to hide the pond liner's edges

least one side for wildlife access, and perhaps cover with pebbles or stones to hide it.

### Prefabricated fibreglass pond shapes

These can be bought online or in store, delivered and ready to go. They are good value and can work well for the smaller informal pond (up to about 2m across), although there are usually round and rectangular shapes available too. Most have shelves built in for marginal plants and are easy to level up. The disadvantage is that you have to choose an existing size and shape in stock. Black works best visually (it makes the pond more reflective and you can't see the bottom). If you have a tank or pond with vertical sides build up a ramp inside by stacking some stones or small boulders on top of each other to come up and over the edge. Think nooks and crannies that are ideal hideaways for wildlife.

### Alternative ways to build your pond

This one is good for more formal shapes. First build the structure of the pond using bricks or concrete then apply a fibreglass application on the inside.

Or, if you want to go super-simple, recycle an old plastic cold water storage tank or half barrel, sink it in the ground and cover its edge with stones.

“Ponds placed in sun mean you can grow a wider range of plants

## Joe's do's and don'ts of pond building

### Do

- Try to use rainwater. If tap water, leave it a week before planting. Top it up in summer if needed.
- Try to get a bucket of good pond water from a friend to add as a "starter", which will be full of beneficial micro-organisms.

- Keep an eye on blanket weed. Clear it by hand, leaving it on the side for a while so critters can crawl back into the water.

### Don't

- Use chemicals in the pond.
- Introduce wildlife yourself. They will come

naturally. Moving them (like frogspawn) can spread disease.

### Safety

Water can be very dangerous with children around. Products such as safapond.com can be installed while they are growing up and removed at a later date.



## 18 Outside

# Remove tree branches like an expert

Master an essential gardening skill with these top tips from [Stephen Anderton](#)

**D**on't you just hate it when you're sawing off a branch and instead of coming away cleanly, the darned thing tears and rips away a strip of bark below it? And you thought you were being so careful...

So what is the proper way to remove a branch? Make three simple cuts in the right order and you will never have that torn bark haunting you again. The principle is simple enough. You remove most of the branch using the first two cuts, so that all the weight and unpredictability is dispensed with, and then with the last cut you remove the remaining stub closer to the trunk. Even if it's a big branch and you've got professionals in to do the job, they will still work along these lines, but right here we're talking about smaller branches suitable for a hand saw. So, here's how to go about it.

Consider distance from the trunk and the weight of the branch when you begin to cut. The most important question, really, is how far from the trunk to make

that first severance, when you remove the bulk of the branch. What matters is to be able to support the weight of the remaining stub with your other arm when you finally cut it off. So, what — roughly 30cm from the trunk?

Now, the removal of that main bulk starts with two cuts. The first cut is made from below, cutting about a third of the way through. If you're lucky you might even get halfway

before you feel the saw start to bind as the weight of the branch begins to close the cut, and you don't want to keep cutting then, or the saw will become trapped or, at worst, the branch will break.

Now you can make the second cut, exactly opposite and above the first one. At some point, almost certainly before the two cuts meet, the branch will snap and fall away, but there should be no tearing below it. Your undercut obviated that problem.

With all that weight gone, you can now finish the job by removing the last short stub of the branch. Unless it's heavy it won't need undercutting first and you can simply saw down from above while sup-



Cut the main part of the branch first



Consider the weight of the branch when you begin to cut

porting the stub with your other hand until it comes free.

Sometimes, if a branch arises at a very steep angle from the trunk there may be no room to get the saw in from above at a suitable angle, but you can always saw from below, still supporting the stub with your other hand. Upwards or downwards really doesn't matter.

“ You remove most of the branch using the first two cuts

What does matter, however, is quite how close to the trunk you cut. The aim is not to leave a perfectly parallel-sided trunk; trees are not drainpipes. The place to cut is at the narrowest point of the shoulder, where the branch proper begins. As if you are leaving a shoulder but taking an arm.

This cut might well be angled a few degrees outwards from the trunk but that's fine: cut here, the circular wound will be smaller and callus over faster than the great oval-shaped wound that would have been made by removing the shoulder to create a parallel-sided drainpipe trunk. In a few years, the bark will have closed over the wound completely. No ugly scars to haunt you.

## Question time

**Q** I have a large oak tree outside our house, which results in many leaves on the flower beds. Is it better to leave them to protect plants and emerging bulbs or rake them off to stop any rotting/mildew underneath? *S Simpson*

**A** They're doing a good job rotting down there, feeding the soil and the worms and ultimately your plants. Plants will always push through a modest scattering of leaves unless they're sensitive little alpines, iris rhizomes or evergreens that require the light and air. The only reason to take them all off is if you have a slug problem and they are nibbling off the shoots of bulbs and perennials under that carpet of leaves before they emerge, in which case you may wish to selectively remove the oak leaves and compost them or throw them under large shrubs as a mulch. If there are thick drifts of leaves, then yes of course remove them, but there's no need to be too scrupulous about it — between plants and under shrubs is fine.

**Q** I've had some potted bulbs covered with boards to keep them safe from mice and when I went to check them last weekend I found the bulbs had come through but had started to go mouldy. Will they survive? *G Castello*

**A** It depends what bulbs they are. Daffodils usually survive anything and should still flower. If they are planted out after flowering, you should find them totally unaffected next year. Fine-leaved species such as crocuses and *Iris reticulata* may well rot back into the bulb and I'd not hold out much hope for flower this year. Tulips should still flower but leaves that have been damaged by fungal infection, even when restored to health by fresh air, will still look distorted and fail to feed the bulbs well. Expect to scrap the bulbs after flowering.

Send your questions to [stephen.anderton@thetimes.co.uk](mailto:stephen.anderton@thetimes.co.uk)

## Seven chic garden benches

► Green and pink woven bench, £365, [made.com](http://made.com)



► Folding garden bench, £99, [laredoute.co.uk](http://laredoute.co.uk)



► Cast-iron black bench, £72.99, [garden-sanctuary.co.uk](http://garden-sanctuary.co.uk)



▲ Habitat pink metal bench, £100, [argos.com](http://argos.com)



▲ Sage green metal bench, £149, [marksandspencer.com](http://marksandspencer.com)



► Bench with green seat pad, £279, [greenfingers.com](http://greenfingers.com)



▲ Faux rattan and black metal bench, £215.50, [maisonsdumonde.com](http://maisonsdumonde.com)





# A good walk Kilcott Mill, Hillesley and Alderley, Gloucestershire

## How hard is it?

6½ miles; easy but muddy; field and woodland paths

**A** windy winter day in south Gloucestershire, the sun a nacreous ball behind fast-driving clouds. The recent mild weather had encouraged a couple of daffodils to raise their heads along the crooked lanes at Hillesley, a village tucked down in a fold of the Cotswold escarpment. Hillesley's Fleece Inn is owned and run by the community, an excellent initiative that has kept the place alive.

As we climbed the squelching muddy path through the trees behind the village, I spotted a solitary celandine among the hart's-tongue ferns. At the top the prospect opened out into a landscape typical of these southern Cotswolds, an undulating upland with snaking valleys invisible from on high. On the ridge ahead rose a tall column with an elaborate cap, built in 1846 in honour of Lord Robert Somerset, one of Wellington's bravest Peninsular War officers.

A crowd of tiny, animated birds rushed past with a swish of wings — goldfinches, feebly twittering, forming a little cloud that balled and elongated

like a miniature murmuration of starlings. We left them to their winter manoeuvres and turned aside down the roadless declivity of Long Coombe, where rosettes of primrose leaves were showing in the shelter of hedge roots.

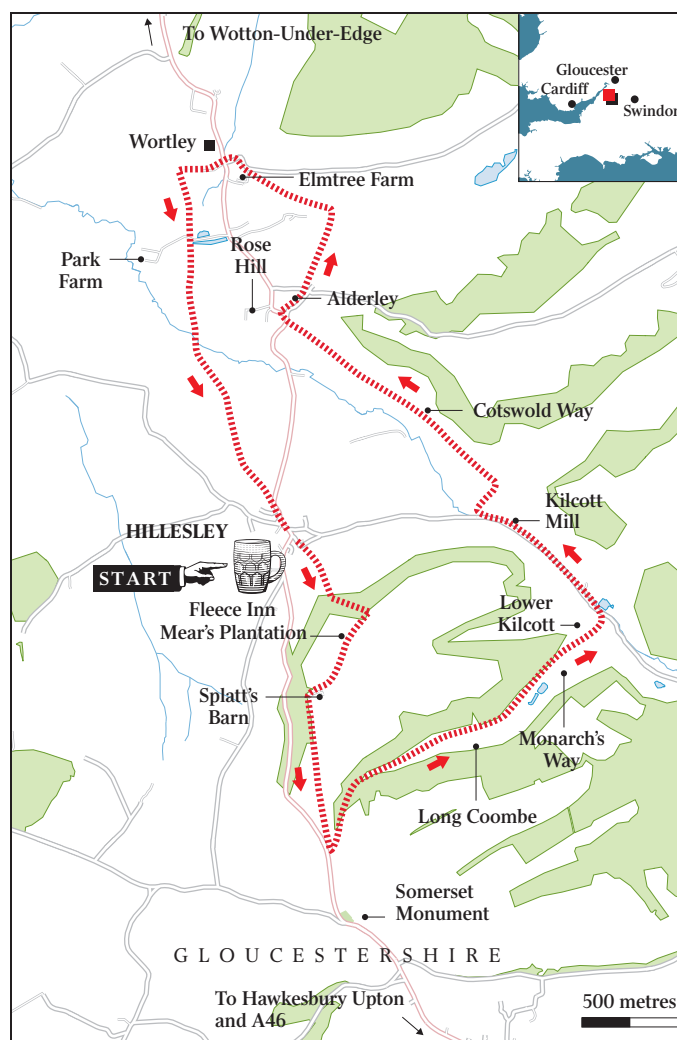
Spring pools shivered in the wind on the grassy slopes. Down in the steep-sided valley at the bottom, green lamb's-tail catkins bobbed along the neatly laid hedges around Lower Kilcott. A pair of buzzards swung out of a spinney, the pale "headlights" on their wings lit by the sun. Above them a pair of parallel contrails drew themselves lazily and soundlessly across a patch of blue in a sky rapidly darkening from the southwest.

At Kilcott Mill we joined the Cotswold Way, a mudbath that took us slithering up the valley. Under a coppiced hazel a squirrel had dug out the last of its nut hoard (or someone else's) and nipped the crowns off each one to get at the kernel, leaving a scatter of empty shells on the bank.

Beyond Alderley in a spit of rain we turned along the homeward path to Hillesley, passing the magnificent Cotswold stone mansion of Rose Hill, with its ranks of windows and stalk-like

“

We turned along the homeward path, passing the mansion of Rose Hill



chimneys. A tractor grunted up the nearby lane, carrying a bale of hay on its praying mantis arms for the sheep whose rain-pearled fleeces were suddenly silvered by a low ray of sun escaping from the clouds.

**Start** Fleece Inn, Chapel Lane, Hillesley GL12 7RD (OS ref ST 770896)

**Getting there** Bus 84 (Yate–Wotton-under-Edge).

**Road** Hawkesbury Upton is signed from A46 Bath–Nailsworth road; Hillesley is signed from Hawkesbury Upton.

**Walk** (OS Explorer 167) from pub, left; at bend, ahead up footpath via Mear's Plantation. At top, right to Splatt's Barn (770888); south along drive for ½ mile. At road, left (771880); fork left on Monarch's Way for ¼ miles via Long Coombe to road at Lower Kilcott (786892). Left; in ½ mile pass Kilcott Mill; in 150m, right off road (779897). In 200m, left on Cotswold Way for nearly 1 mile to road at Alderley (770910). Right ("Tresham"); in 150m cross road (771909); follow Cotswold Way for nearly ¾ mile to road by Elmtree Farm (768916). Left; in 200m cross road (766916). Follow marked detour past Lacys; in field beyond, left (764916) on path south (passing east of Park Farm, west of Rose Hill school) for ¼ miles to Hillesley.

**Lunch** Fleece Inn, Hillesley (01453 520003; thefleecehillesley.com)

**Accommodation** Swan Hotel, Wotton-under-Edge GL12 7AE (01453 843004; swanhotelwotton.com)

**More information** nationaltrail.co.uk/cotswold-way

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Christopher Somerville



# Own the official Royal Mail coin cover issued to mark Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's historic Platinum Jubilee Anniversary

This weekend, on Sunday 6th February 2022, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II will celebrate her landmark Platinum Jubilee – the 70th anniversary of her accession to the throne. Never before in the history of the British monarchy has a king or queen ruled for seven decades. Plans are in place to make 2022 a year of unparalleled celebration – culminating with a four-day national holiday in June.

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The luxurious Chesterton corner sofa and matching glass-topped coffee table set is perfect for entertaining outdoors. Generously proportioned with deep, anti-fade cushions you can seat 5 people in comfort. It's so easy to look after – the seat and back cushions all feature removable covers (see website). With a maintenance-free construction of thick polyrattan and a galvanised steel frame, the set can even be left out all-year round, making it the ideal addition to your outdoor space this year. Normally £999, now available at an amazing £699\*, but only when you quote your £300 discount code **TMFEB22A** at checkout.



SAVE  
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## Murcia - 5 Seater Lounge Set

This chic garden lounge set is made from high quality artificial resin which makes it virtually maintenance free. Comfortable and stylish made easy, the Murcia includes a 3-seater sofa, 2 armchairs all with seat and back cushions and a coffee table finished off with a clear tempered glass top creating a functional centrepiece, perfect for drinks and snacks in the garden. Includes a 12 month warranty. Was £999, it's now just £699\* for readers when you quote your £300 discount code **TMFEB22A** at checkout.



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## Marbella - 5-Seater Corner Lounge Set

The ideal addition to your outdoor space, this stunning lounge set offers comfort and style at an affordable price. Bang on trend in gorgeous shades of grey, this set is designed with a contemporary feel. It's hard-wearing, woven in strong polyrattan on a galvanised steel frame making it virtually maintenance-free. The comfy cushion covers can be removed and hand washed with care. The sofa and armchair seats 5 easily, and includes a tempered, glass-topped coffee table so you can entertain outside with ease. Normally £999, it's now available for just £699\*, when you quote your £300 discount code **TMFEB22A** at checkout.



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## Santorini - Lounge Set with Side Cushions

This sleek modular looking lounge is truly versatile and can be arranged in several different ways. Consisting of one left hand and one right hand sofa, two ottomans and a compact coffee table, a simple rearrangement of the pieces enables you to turn it into 2 chaise longues, 2 day beds or keep all 4 pieces separate for a more sociable outdoor lounge space. Also available in Blue and includes a 12 month warranty. Normally £999, it's now available at an amazing £699\*. To receive your £300 discount quote code **TMFEB22A** at checkout.



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## Havana - 6 Seater Patio Dining Set

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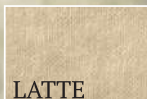
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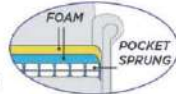
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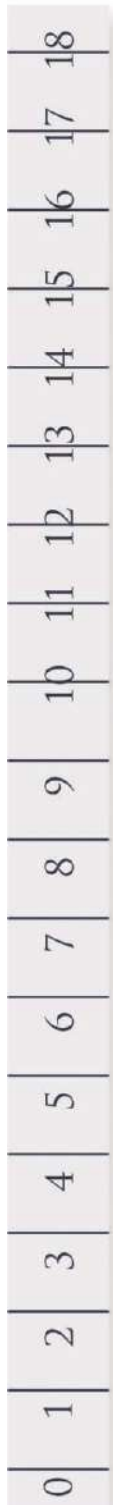
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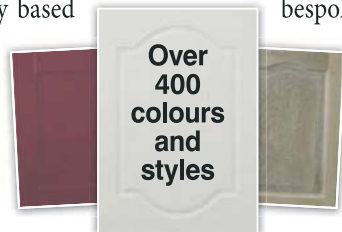
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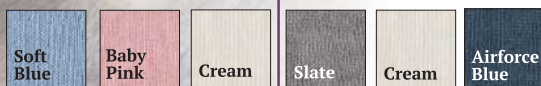
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BBC NEWS  
12/10/21

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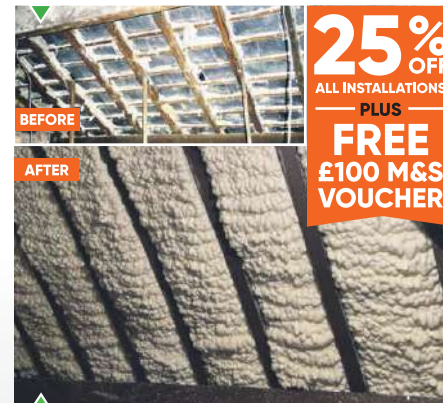
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Updating and modernising the furniture we love and are comfortable with has become extremely popular over the last decade.

In a bid to save money and help the environment many of us have turned our hand to upcycling our treasured furniture instead of buying new, cheaply made and mass-produced items. One of the main benefits of this trend is we save our furniture from ever growing landfill sites and instead give new life to old gems.

One of the most popular forms of upcycling is reupholstery. Reupholstery allows you to take an out-dated or worn out sofa or chair and create a truly bespoke item more in keeping with the rest of your home. Any type of furniture can be reupholstered

including Club, Wing and Recliner styles. Your furniture is literally transformed to look like new again and can save you the stress and risk of buying new furniture which may end up being less comfortable.

Older furniture tends to be made of higher quality wood and so can be perfect for reupholstery. If you're unsure about the quality of your piece, it's best to speak to an experienced reupholstery firm who can talk you through every step of the reupholstery process. They will also be able to assess the joints, frame and foam, and carry out any necessary repairs. Seat cushions can also be replaced making your furniture secure and comfortable once again.

Another benefit of recycling over buying new is you'll get exactly

what you want for your home. For example when reupholstering your chair or sofa you can choose from a vast choice of fabrics and designs including florals, stripes, patterns and plains, so your newly updated furniture is sure to co-ordinate perfectly with your décor. You will end up with a truly unique and special piece of furniture for your home.

Reupholstery is a complex and skilled craft which is why you should always ensure you use a trusted firm with experienced craftsmen such as Plumbs. You will also benefit from the reassurance of a 3 year guarantee and the choice of high quality branded designs.

By using expert upholsterers you can be sure your furniture will last for many more years to come.





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**The Sales are here!** At Plumbs we've been in business for 60 years and now we are delighted to be offering 20% off reupholstery in a fantastic selection of top designs. For this month we are also offering up to HALF PRICE OFF ALL Curtains. Plus claim a FREE Marks & Spencer gift card worth £30 when you place an order. We can reupholster virtually all styles of furniture including: • G Plan • Multiyork • Parker Knoll • Buoyant • Christie Tyler • Ercol and many more.

Totally handcrafted, they are available in a beautiful quality selection of fabrics from leading design houses such as **Swaffer, William Morris, Linwood** and **Sanderson**. Plus, we have an advanced Aquaclean fabric range that means stains can be easily cleaned with just water. When you request our reupholstery service, our expert craftsmen, often local to your area, will inspect and repair your furniture, before reupholstering it to its former glory.

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# HOMES AND INTERIORS

Changing your home – whether physically moving, renovating or simply making modest improvements – is among the more fulfilling things you can do with your time. Here is a variety of ideas for better living for you and the family

**checklist** 

## Stay charged during cold weather

With temperatures dropping and many people working from home, it is a worthwhile precaution to charge your car battery.

Don't be stuck on the drive – get going by charging the battery with a Ring award-winning Smart Charger. They feature an easy-to-use single button function and large display for feedback on the charging process, Ring SmartChargers are available as 4Amp, 6Amp and 8Amp units. With a seven-stage charge cycle, the units not only charge, but will fully optimise the life of the battery.

Cold weather charging mode helps protect batteries in cold temperatures, and the supplied O-rings allow quick connection to motorcycle batteries. The chargers are compatible with lead acid, gel, calcium, EFB and AGM batteries, making them ideal for stop-start batteries. They also feature many



in-built safety features to prevent damage from misuse.

Connect and be sure – the chargers will automatically adjust to a long-term maintenance mode when the vehicle's battery is full, so they will never overcharge your battery. This is the complete healthcare for your battery. Prevention is better than cure, especially when you consider the cost to replace a car battery these days.



Ring Smart Chargers are available at [amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)

## Welcome to NIBE's smart future

Make your home smarter and more sustainable with the help of a NIBE heat pump. NIBE's S-Series heat pump technology offers the perfect indoor climate, whilst creating a great opportunity to save energy and maximise comfort. Simple to manage and elegant to look at, the S-Series models become a natural part of your connected home – running smoothly in the background and adapting to your family's lifestyle.

Always on the go? You can control your heat pump using a stylish touchscreen interface or from your smartphone or tablet at any time, from anywhere. As a companion to the NIBE S-Series, you can enjoy the myUplink app at no extra cost.

Complement your heat pump installation with NIBE's smart home accessories, giving you even greater precision and comfort, room by room. Easily mounted on the wall, the accessories allow you to sit back and relax while



your heating system works seamlessly to adjust the temperature, humidity and CO<sub>2</sub> levels in a room or climate zone – or you can adjust them manually to suit your needs.

With NIBE's S-Series heat pumps and accessories, it's easy to be smart. Ready to step into the world of heat pumps and lower your carbon footprint? The government's new Boiler Upgrade Scheme is due to launch this April – meaning you could be eligible to claim £5,000 for a NIBE air source heat pump, or £6,000 for a NIBE ground source heat pump.

**NIBE**

Explore the full range at [nibe.co.uk](https://www.nibe.co.uk)



## Zebedee® any angle clothes rail



Zebedee® is quite simply the only hanging rail designed specifically for sloping ceilings. It has a unique spring coil which allows you to hang your clothes, or any item, with style, from virtually any angle of ceiling.

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Find out more at [zebedee.co](https://www.zebedee.co)

## What lies beneath?

With outside spaces being more valuable than ever, safety under foot is paramount.

As temperatures plummet, that combination of black lichen, white fungi and green algae, saturated by the winter's rain, and hidden by wet leaves, rapidly turn your patios, pathways and access steps into potential death traps.

This is a hidden danger to adults, children and grandchildren. Remove the danger now! Buy Patio Black Spot Remover®. It is delivered in two days and works in two hours. Minimum pressure washing – maximum safety. Simply spray on to the affected areas, and be amazed as the product does all the work, gently lifting those layers of organic growth, without damaging the surface.

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## Action where nature most needs it – what you could do for the planet as a WLT friend

Imagine there was a way to protect the planet, whatever comes next. Imagine that conservationists could always be ready to act at a time of climate crisis.

No need to imagine – that world is very possible, and World Land Trust (WLT) Friends are helping to bring it about every year through WLT's Action Fund. Regular donations to their programme always go to WLT partners' most urgent projects, and last year alone they delivered a staggering series of conservation wins.

WLT partner, Fundación Guanacas, knew time was running out to expand a reserve in Colombia where a Critically Endangered bird, the Antioquia Brushfinch, had been seen in the wild for the first time ever. With fewer than 50 of these birds left, donations from WLT Friends in 2021 allowed their partner to safeguard 302 acres of the Brushfinch's cloud forest home.

And that wasn't all. Over 34,000 acres were protected in Ecuador; reserves were expanded in Brazil, Kenya and beyond; land leases were funded in a Caucasian Leopard haven in Armenia; a Sarus Crane conservation programme launched in India; a brigade was equipped and trained to save Mexico's old oak forests from a catastrophic fire – all of this last year, all of this made possible by WLT Friends.



Credit © AESMO



Credit © Paul B Jones

This crucial work goes on in 2022. This year and beyond, wildfires, logging and poaching will never be far from WLT-backed reserves, but their partners won't have to face these threats alone, if you help them. By becoming a WLT Friend and committing to regular support, your Action Fund donations will always go where the danger is greatest for endangered species, fighting climate change and mass extinctions where it is most needed in this pivotal decade for the planet.

**ACTION FUND**

**WORLD LAND TRUST**

Become a WLT Friend today, for a world where it's never too late for nature. Visit [worldlandtrust.org/appeals/wlt-friends](https://worldlandtrust.org/appeals/wlt-friends)

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Credit © Lou Jost, Fundación EcoMinga



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## The next-generation, eco-smart solution for zero-emissions travel

As the UK accelerates its transition to electrification, drivers nationwide are ditching their dated diesels for efficient, reliable, electric alternatives.

According to data from Zap-Map, EV drivers now have immediate access to more than 48,000 public charging points. But while this makes plug-in options more accessible than petrol stations, research suggests that nearly 80% of charging still takes place at home\*. Like mobile phones on wheels!

A global leader in next-gen energy technology, myenergi is renowned for pioneering the world's first British-made, solar compatible, eco-smart EV charger – zappi. Intelligent and sophisticated, zappi is the perfect solution for smart electric car charging.

Simply plug in and go, or take full advantage of zappi's unique eco charge modes, which allow you to maximise your energy savings both through smart off-peak tariffs, and through 100% self-generated renewable energy sources



such as solar panels or domestic wind turbines, meaning

you have the potential to charge your vehicle for free. This technology equally reduces the risk of overloading the grid system, whilst allowing you to enjoy emissions-free travel. All-in-all, a simple solution that benefits the planet and your pocket.

Looking for total energy independence? Look no further. For more information about zappi, or to get a quote including installation, visit [myenergi.com/zappiquote](https://myenergi.com/zappiquote)



\* Electric Vehicle Charging in Residential and Non-Residential Buildings (HM Government, 2019).

## Artisan designer-makers

Payne Vigour are award-winning creators of stunning live-edge tables. These bespoke statement pieces are handcrafted using traditional techniques, beautiful hardwoods such as walnut, oak and elm and unique resin-embedded items such as large ammonite fossils to reflect each client's story.

The tables embody the biophilic trend of bringing the natural world into 21st century



homes to create a sense of calm and connection – the natural qualities and textures of the wood are celebrated giving them a warm, tactile personality. From the word go, clients are closely involved in the design process of creating a centrepiece of home life that will stay with their family for years to come.

Call 07967 541185 for a chat, visit [handmadeinbrighton.com](https://handmadeinbrighton.com) and follow @handmadeinbrighton



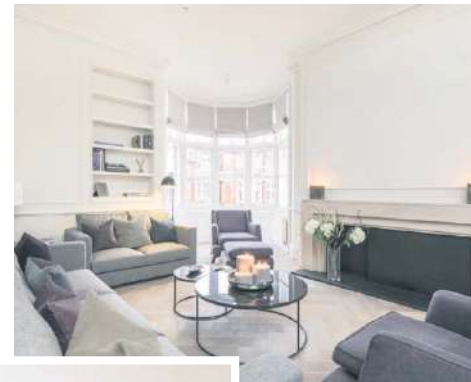
## Create your ideal home

Opsis Design are a small team of architects, interior designers and project managers specialising in residential design and execution. They deliver residential properties for private and investor clients in prime central London locations.

The Opsis Design mission is to provide a carefree end-to-end service allowing clients to tailor services to their exact needs. They have a passion for elegant design and quality craftsmanship and work closely with clients to deliver their ideal home.

Their growing experience and specialisation in central London properties has given them the ability to efficiently reorganise plan arrangements to meet the requirements and needs of modern living.

Over the past two years, due to the pandemic, the needs of city living have changed with remote working and more time spent at home. This brings the team's spatial planning



skills to the forefront of the value they bring to their clients. By creating intelligent and well-organised floor plans, they have been able to transform wasteful layouts into usable and efficient spaces.

From a stylistic point of view, they are a versatile design studio that adapt to their clients' requirements and tastes, infusing them with their ideas and design values. Their genuine inclination towards modern and clean cut designs is often blended with the inherent traditional

styles found in London properties, to create warm and inviting environments.

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**CUNARD**



# Travel

Page

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'It's a cross between Soho House and the modern desert hotels of Palm Springs'

Monique Rivalland at Palm Heights, Grand Cayman

GETTY IMAGES; ALAMY

Highway 1 twisting along the Pacific Coast



## America's highway to heaven

**Chris Haslam** takes the green route on a classic road trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles at the wheel of a Bentley hybrid

The fog was in the bay, the pylons of the Golden Gate Bridge poking out of the blanket like depth gauges. It was 7am and I had to myself the streets of San Francisco, on which to re-enact the high-speed pursuit from the 1968 classic *Bullitt* — the greatest car chase in the history of cinema.

In ten minutes and 53 seconds Steve McQueen and the stunt driver Bill Hickman delivered a paean to the engineering technology that, for better or worse, freed America. The Ford Mustang represented righteousness, while the Dodge Charger was a more powerful servant of evil. But both were gas-guzzling planet killers, with an average fuel consumption of 17mpg and the carbon emissions of twin Chinese

cities. The fact that I was chasing their ghosts in a hybrid that could outperform them was a sign that the great American road trip is finally going green.

Until now the big hire companies have shunned electric and hybrid vehicles, limiting the low-emission options to their luxury ranges. When I was planning this trip there wasn't a green car of any colour available anywhere in California. The peer-to-peer car-sharing platform Turo had a Tesla, but it was in Alaska.

All that is about to change. In October Hertz announced that it had placed a £3.1 billion order for 100,000 Tesla Model 3s. It was a decision forced as much by climate concerns — it came a month after research by Yale

University revealed that 58 per cent of Americans were either alarmed or concerned — as it was by the need to meet the corporate social-responsibility goals of its big clients. Its competitors Avis and Enterprise have little choice but to follow suit, and with the first deliveries scheduled for this year, your next American road trip could be fully electric.

Will the infrastructure exist to support such low-carbon, clean-conscience travel, though? I was on a mission to find out, but on the day I arrived in San Francisco I still didn't have a ride. Rental companies had sold their fleets to survive the pandemic and their lots were empty. As for an electric or hybrid, I was California dreaming, said the guy at Enterprise. ▶



Avila La Fonda Hotel



► Then came news that a hybrid was available. All I had to do was deliver it to the Los Angeles motor show, which is how I ended up driving down SR-1 — aka the Pacific Coast Highway — in a £155,000 factory-fresh Bentley Bentayga.

America's — and arguably the world's — most scenic drive, the highway runs for 451 miles from San Francisco to Los Angeles. If you're a purist, sticking to the ocean all the way, it's a little longer and a little weirder. It starts in a neighbourly way in Santa Cruz County, with pick-ups full of bearded fishermen and barefoot children with surfboards. It gets twisted and dramatic at Big Sur, then rolls through market gardens and ranchland to the slow-mo freeways of LA.

Charging points, some paid and others free, seem more numerous than Starbucks branches, with 350 and counting on SR-1, according to the lobby group Plug In America. Bear in mind that in 1920, when Ford sold 1.4 million cars, there were 15,000 petrol stations in the US. By 1930 there were more than 100,000. America catches up fast.

Range anxiety soothed, I fired up *Boys of Summer* and sat back to enjoy a drive that felt like

a sun-bleached, salt-crusted dream. The road soared above beach after surf-battered beach, creeping coyly beneath the stumbling Santa Lucia Mountains, vaulting steep canyons and snaking gleefully across the vast, flat farmlands where workers from Central America labour like Steinbeck's Joad family.

Work on the highway began in earnest in 1919, when convicts from San Quentin and Folsom were pressed into construction crews, earning 26p a day — about £4 now — to scrape, hack, dig and blast a road along the coast in defiance of climate, topography and geology.

It was declared complete in 1937. Some 85 years later it's a potholed, crumbling, two-lane anachronism, a souvenir of an era in which America thought it could build anything it wanted anywhere it damn well liked — including the boundary

Golden Gate Bridge



Downtown San Francisco

of two tectonic plates — with only determination, dynamite and cheap labour. That arrogance and ambition, at its apogee at the Bixby Creek Bridge, somehow enhances the astonishing beauty of the coastline. This thin white line, as insignificant and fragile as a lost ribbon, provides a human reference point in a mighty wilderness.

It's a wilderness you must explore. More than a million acres of land are protected here, and 854 square miles of ocean lie within marine conservation areas. Humpback whales can be seen from the road from April to December. Grey whales head north in the autumn and south in the spring. Sea otters play in the kelp forests off remote beaches, and in Monterey, where

you should stay at the waterfront Portola Hotel and Spa, you'll be kept awake by the Frankie Howerd impersonations of a thousand sea lions (room-only doubles from £167; portolahotel.com).

There are hundreds of miles of well-maintained trails, ranging from half-mile strolls through redwood cathedrals to spectacular slogs such as the Cone Peak Trail, a 21-mile round trip that hikes high above the Pacific to the 5,155ft summit of America's highest coastal mountain. And there are, by my count, 134 beaches, ranging from primordial Pfeiffer, with its tree-trunk driftwood, to the fishing camps at Half Moon Bay, and from the wild country surf at Sand Dollar to San Simeon, where two-tonne, 16ft elephant seals have colonised the sands.

The few towns you'll encounter haven't got a hope against such outstanding natural beauty, but at least they know. Santa Cruz beats Monterey; Carmel-by-the-Sea is unspeakably twee; Santa Barbara is shopping, surfing and —

especially in the seaside suburb of Montecito — ladies lunching.

One spot worth a night or two is Avila Beach in San Luis Obispo County. It lies at the foot of the oak-shaded See Canyon, where winding lanes lead to vineyards specialising in oaky pinot noirs and crisp chardonnays. They make cider there too, while down at the shore it's so purely small-town, surf-bum SloCal that it looks like the setting for a David Lynch movie — in a good way. Stay at the hacienda-style Avila La Fonda, just back from the pier (room-only doubles from £175; avilalafonda.com). From here you have a choice of routes. With the pretty stuff behind them, most tourists pick up the 101 just before Pismo Beach and chase it all the way to Hollywood. It's more interesting, though, to stick with SR-1, because this is where the weirdness begins. You'll drive through fruit-picking towns such as Guadalupe, where there are strawberry fields for ever; past Vandenberg air base — headquarters of Space Force — and Oxnard, home of the

### Need to know

Chris Haslam was a guest of Visit California (visitcalifornia.com) and Cox & Kings, which has nine nights' B&B on its California's Golden Coast road trip from £3,295pp, including flights and car hire (coxandkings.co.uk). The Bentley Bentayga plug-in hybrid is an ultra-luxury SUV with CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 78g/km, from £155,000 (bentleymotors.com)

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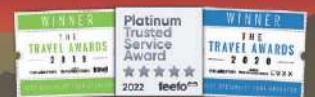
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GETTY IMAGES; ALAMY



## 10 of the most exhilarating road trips in the US

### Route 66

The 2,448-mile Mother Road was decommissioned in 1985, but it soon became clear that they couldn't kill a highway that Congress called a "symbol of the American people's heritage of travel and their legacy of seeking a better life". It crosses eight states and three time zones, offering a fleeting glimpse of the American dream that's somehow enhanced by kitsch roadside attractions set up to profit from Route 66 nostalgia. On this two-week trip you'll be guided by the song: through St Louis, Joplin, Missouri and Oklahoma City all the way to the sea at Santa Monica.

**Details** Fourteen nights' room only from £2,595pp, including flights and car hire ([bon-voyage.co.uk](http://bon-voyage.co.uk))

### Hit the Tamiami Trail

Like Route 66, Route 41 used to be something, taking sunseekers, salesmen and snowbirds south through a glitter gulch of roadside attractions from Jennings on the Georgia border all the way to Miami. Then I-75 stole all the traffic, turning 41 into a memory lane beset with irresistible diversions. Spend two nights in glitzy Tampa, then head south on a 15-night itinerary visiting the magnificent beaches at Clearwater, St Pete, Sarasota and Captiva, with two nights in Naples before taking Alligator Alley east for two nights in Miami.

**Details** Fifteen nights' room only from £2,499pp, including flights and car hire ([trailfinders.com](http://trailfinders.com))

### Hiking in Yellowstone

In 1872 President Ulysses S Grant signed an order turning Yellowstone into the world's first national park, and it celebrates its 150th anniversary on March 1. Better, though, to hold off paying homage to this geothermal wonderland until the summer, when nondrivers can join a guided road trip. Over eight days on the road you will hike to Mammoth Hot Springs, watch Old Faithful, see the Mud Volcano and float on the Snake River in Grand Teton National Park.

**Details** Seven nights from £2,125pp, including five breakfasts ([explore.co.uk](http://explore.co.uk)). Fly to Salt Lake City

### National parks of the southwest

This self-drive through the cinematic landscapes of America's southwest begins in Vegas — staying at the Four Seasons — goes east to the Grand Canyon, then north across Utah via the canyons of Zion National Park to the snow-capped Wasatch Mountains. You spend three nights at Sundance Mountain Resort, founded by Robert Redford, before looping back via Sorrel River Ranch in Moab and the Navajo-owned the View in Monument Valley, to end with three nights at Amangiri at Lake Powell.

**Details** Thirteen nights (ten room only and three full board) from £6,900pp, including SUV hire and flights ([scottdunn.com](http://scottdunn.com))

### Alaska by camper van

This 11-night trip through the former Russian colony of Alaska takes the 1,300-mile clockwise



Beale Street, Memphis



Bryce Canyon National Park

circuit from Anchorage on the Parks Highway through the endless taiga to the Denali National Park. You then push north to Fairbanks for a spot of gold panning before turning south to Glenallen and the Copper River Basin. The icescapes of Valdez, 120 miles south, might be the highlight, or the 300-mile drive back to Anchorage on the magnificent Glenn Highway.

**Details** Eleven nights' self-catering from £2,040pp, including flights and motorhome hire ([discover-the-world.com](http://discover-the-world.com))

### Old Man River

This two-week trip along the Mississippi, North America's second-longest waterway, begins in Chicago, from where a 300-mile drive through rural Illinois brings you to Hannibal, Missouri, the boyhood home of Mark Twain — one of many sons of Old Man River. The road points south: to St Louis, Memphis, Clarksdale, Natchez and

river towns that will capture your imagination as you head downstream on this 1,235-mile, 15-day journey to New Orleans. **Details** Fourteen nights' room only from £1,780pp, including car hire, one-way drop-off fee and flights ([americaasyoulikeit.com](http://americaasyoulikeit.com))

### New England without the crowds

Tradition says New England is at its best in the autumn, when it's colourful, crowded and expensive. Much better to come in leafy June, when there's space to breathe and it's already warm enough to make the most of the region's spectacular coast. On this 12-day trip you'll drive from Boston through White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire to Woodstock, then south through Massachusetts to posh Newport, Rhode Island, then out to charming Chatham and gorgeous Lighthouse Beach on the Cape Cod elbow.

**Details** Eleven nights' B&B from £5,290pp, including car hire ([steppestravel.com](http://steppestravel.com)). Fly to Boston

### Texas Triangle tour

The Texas Triangle is the name given to the fast-growing Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio and Austin metropolitan areas: an urban mega-region that's home to

60 per cent of Texans. This two-week exploration takes you from the Fort Worth Stockyards to the music city of Austin. From here you head to Bandera in the Hill Country — cowboy capital of the world — San Antonio, Galveston, Houston for the Space Center, and Dallas, for a couple of nights out in Deep Ellum. **Details** Fourteen nights' room only from £1,799, including flights and car hire ([theamericanroadtrip.company.co.uk](http://theamericanroadtrip.company.co.uk))

### Discover the Pacific Northwest

If you've already driven the lower section of the Pacific Coast Highway you might wonder how the road lies north of San Francisco. This 1,400-mile journey begins with two nights in Seattle, picks up US-101 in Port Angeles and follows it along the coast through Portland to Newport — where you head inland to spend a night at Crater Lake National Park. Rejoining the 101 at Klamath after a thrilling 214-mile drive along the Redwood Highway, you continue south to cross the Golden Gate Bridge into San Francisco. **Details** Fourteen nights' room only from £2,075pp, including flights and car hire ([completenorthamerica.com](http://completenorthamerica.com))

### Deep South highlights

Such is the allure of the Deep South that you'll spend much of this two-week trip promising that you'll come back to Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana and stay longer, rather than just pass through. The truth is, though, you probably won't, so make the most of Nashville, where you can find live music at breakfast time; Memphis, home of the blues; Vicksburg, to watch the sun setting over the Mississippi River; and New Orleans, recommended by the legendary musician Dr John as a suitable spot for "doing some living before you die".

**Details** Twelve nights' room only from £2,955, including flights and car hire ([audleytravel.com](http://audleytravel.com))

**Chris Haslam**

superb Mullin Automotive Museum, where, with all due respect to Bentley, the exquisite 1937 Talbot-Lago T150 proves they don't design cars like they used to.

The last stretch, through Ventura County, is the spookiest — especially when the fog is rolling in. The road crawls like a guilty dog along the base of the Santa Monica Mountains, a few feet above the Pacific shore, and for a few, lonely miles it feels as though you're on the ledge at the edge of the world: America on the left, emptiness on the right. Then you roll into LA, and you wonder if anyone ever truly believed that a city of 7.6 million fossil-fuelled vehicles could not have a catastrophic effect on the environment.

The LA sky looks like the ceiling of a 1970s backstreet boozier; its air quality the second worst in America; and the freedom-giving engineering technology that the Pacific Coast Highway was built to serve is now an agent of its doom, its emissions causing the climate change that is tearing the road apart. Rising temperatures in California have increased the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. In 2021 some 8,835 wildfires burnt more than 2.5 million acres of the state. They left scars, weakening slopes and making it easier for heavy rains to trigger landslides. In 2017 two such slides closed the highway for 14 months.

In January 2021 it was closed — this time for three months — after mud and rock punched 150ft of road into the sea. In December rock falls closed the road in Santa Monica County and as I write in late January 2022, the highway is closed again because of what meteorologists have called a "surreal" winter forest fire north of Bixby Creek.

Gary Griggs, a professor of Earth and planetary sciences at UC Santa Cruz, wonders how long America's most scenic highway can survive this onslaught. "Projections for the future include hotter, drier summers with more frequent wildfires, more concentrated winter rainfall and more frequent landslides," he says. "We may reach the point when SR-1 will not be economically feasible to repair."

So if you want to drive the PCH, ask your tour operator to let you do it in an electric car. And come sooner rather than later, because America's most beautiful road won't be here for ever.

For more great American holiday ideas see tomorrow's Sunday Times



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# Luxury Caribbean

## A glamorous new hotel has arrived on Grand Cayman

Palm Heights on the island's Seven Mile Beach has a Hollywood buzz and stylish bohemian looks. No wonder it's attracting the jet set, says **Monique Rivalland**

From my sunlounger I have a front-row view of the morning show. I'm lying under a yellow and white striped umbrella at the Coconut Club, the beach bar at Palm Heights hotel, watching a continuous gulf stream of ramblers, runners and residents and all their excited dogs parade along Grand Cayman's Seven Mile Beach. For them it's a blissful dawn ritual; for me it's an important exercise in reconnaissance. Who are the people on this remote Caribbean island, a British overseas territory known primarily for its status as a tax haven?

Well, some of the people in the beach parade match my conjectures — there are lots of Americans, plenty of sporty silver-haired sun-seekers and a strong contingent of yachters (many are all three) — but some don't. There are a surprising number of millennial expats (are they digital nomads?) as well as an unexpected fashionable crowd, who I later learn are artists, models and designers who are almost all here because of Palm Heights, the stylish hotel where I am staying.

Palm Heights opened on this blockbuster stretch of shoreline in 2019 (bad timing) and relaunched in November after the long Covid drought. The Cayman Islands, a trio of small, flat limestone ridges between Jamaica and Mexico, had one of the strictest Covid policies in the world. Their borders were closed from March 2020 until November last year. At one point anyone entering the country had to wear a location-tracking bracelet for 14 days of quarantine, and today you cannot enter without quarantining unless you are double vaccinated, even if you are one month old, which means I can't see anyone under the age of 12.

Despite the isolationist strategy, at the crest of the September wave last year 10 per cent of the population were thought to have the virus.

Come 2022 and slowly, slowly the sun-loungers are filling up, the harbours are coming to life and business is returning to George Town, the capital. Here at Palm Heights there is a party going on at Tillies,

the beachfront restaurant. It's Sunday, mid-morning and the bottomless brunch has begun. I'll have a picante, please. That's a twist on a margarita: lime, smoky mezcal and scotch bonnet chilli. A real morning zinger.

Tillies has the glow of a nostalgic Hollywood hangout. Outside, glossy guests and visitors are in a garden of palms and fig trees, sitting on vintage rattan chairs and eating lobster in the shade of white umbrellas. Inside, the carpet is leopard-print and every surface is covered in art, bamboo and curios. The effect is a cross between Soho House and the mid-century modern desert hotels of Palm Springs. The clue's in the name. "I really wanted to capture that moment of jet-set glamour," the founder and creative director Gabriella Khalil tells me. And indeed, staying at Palm Heights is like stepping into a Slim Aarons photograph of 1970s California.

A New York-born, Notting Hill-based art curator, collector and interior designer, Khalil has sourced every last picture, pot and plate in the hotel. It is a love letter to mid-century modern design. Original pieces such as curvy De Sede sofas and Ettore Sottsass neon-pink mirrors lift every wall and corner. And the yellow and white striped motif of the beach umbrellas is everywhere: on beach towels, cushions, pool sliders, silk eye masks. What is it about the stripy beach towel? Palm Heights joins Soho House, the Beverly Hills Hotel and Il Pellicano in Tuscany, where celebrities have been living la dolce vita since 1965, as a member of the stripy towel set.

It was Khalil who spotted the potential of what looked like a drab and dated hotel building, but which was in fact a modernist structure ripe for revamp. It started life as the beach suites of the Hyatt Regency in the Sixties, which, unlike the main body of the hotel, stayed upright when Hurricane Ivan swept across the islands in 2004. After a lick of white paint its cubic design and wooden-latticed exterior is conspicuous among the other hotel-palaces on the strip.

All of the 52 rooms at Palm Heights are suites, divided into five price categories. I

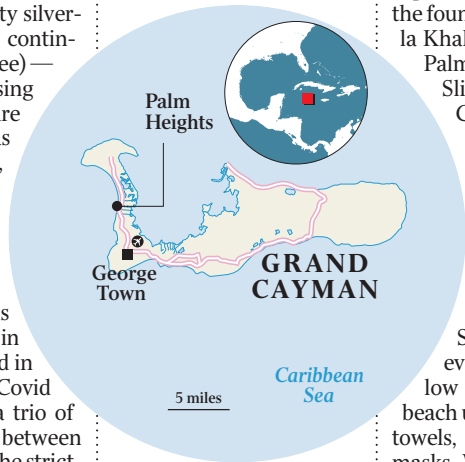


A bar at the hotel's restaurant, Tillies

“Glossy guests and visitors are eating lobster in the shade of white umbrellas

am staying in a mid-range ocean-front suite with a terrace at £850 a night. Yes, it's pricey, with a splash-out beachfront penthouse suite from £2,020 a night. But all the suites feel luxurious — the interior inspiration, Khalil says, is a swanky Seventies beach mansion — and they all have separate bedrooms and living rooms, with modular sofas and cool white-tiled bars.

On the coffee table in my room is a selection of books tailored to my interests (which I am asked about before I arrive),







Seven Mile Beach

“Curvy De Sede sofas and neon-pink Ettore Sottsass mirrors lift every wall and corner

on Seven Mile Beach are mega-resorts such as the Ritz Carlton and Kimpton Seafire. I get the sense that Palm Heights is a return to a more bohemian Caribbean charm. It has certainly attracted a different crowd.

There have been a string of sexy events since its relaunch, including fashion shoots and artist residencies, yet I wonder whether this destination hotel is enough to lure tourists all the way to the Cayman Islands. If you're happy to do little other than sun, sea and relaxation, it's a stylish way to do it, especially if you are only 90 minutes away in Miami. From London, however, it's 12 hours on a direct-ish flight (the BA route touches down first in Nassau, but you don't have to disembark), and you may prefer to go to an island that retains more of its West Indian heritage. The Cayman Islands can feel a bit like Florida with a Caribbean twist. It may have all the essentials — palms and panoramic turquoise — but it also has infrastructure and a populace more reminiscent of east coast America. The hotels are huge, the roads are wide, the lawns manicured and the harbours modern and polished.

For attractions, marine life is the main event. One morning I go on a catamaran to Stingray City, a pastel blue sand bar where, if you're brave enough, you can walk with friendly giant stingrays. The snorkelling, scuba and sailing opportunities on the Cayman Islands are world class, and turtles are basically guaranteed. So abundant were they when Christopher Columbus arrived here in 1503 that he named the islands Las Tortugas, and turtle-fishing became its first industry. Later they were called Los Lagartos, meaning large lizard, before being given the Carib word for alligator, Caiman, as their name.

There's also the National Museum in George Town, which is otherwise a place for duty-free shopping and late-night drinking. For a taste of local cooking the place to go is a brightly coloured bamboo shack in West Bay called Heritage Kitchen, where you can try fish tea soup and fried plantain. Cycling (Palm Heights supplies bikes) is safe and easy and, the island being 22 miles from east coast to west, a fun way to explore the other beaches such as Rum Point and East End.

After that effort I try sunset sound healing on the hotel rooftop and a deep-tissue massage in the makeshift spa. The real spa, wellness and fitness centres are still under construction, set to be completed this year. The fitness centre will be indoors and out, and there will be an athletics club (cue guests in PH tracksuits and headbands) and outdoor boxing ring. The spa will be inspired by ancient gardens and bathing rituals with hedging to create a maze-like effect encircling six or seven different pools (mineral, heated, ice etc).

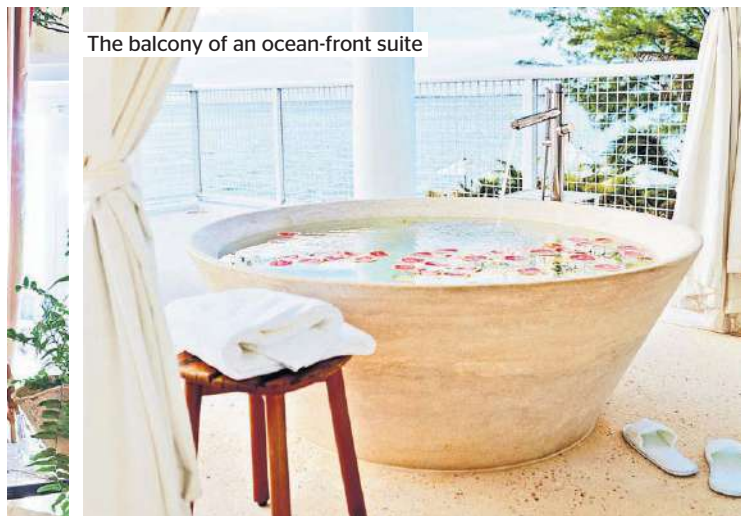
When I return to my room I find a plate of freshly sliced aloe vera to soothe my sun-startled skin and a PH-branded vitamin C sheet mask waiting on my pillow. All these delicious details make staying at Palm Heights feel as if you're part of an exclusive club. And by day three, there's another club I'm ready to join: the dawn beach parade.

(and former professional boxer) Jake Brodsky, who uses his Michelin-star training to blend local ingredients such as callaloo (a stewed green leaf dish a bit like spinach) with more classic five-star hotel cooking. Brodsky will probably be disappointed by my highlight, seeing as the menu includes beautiful whole red snapper stuffed with crab, strung up and fired on the coals, and delicate cassava crisps with seaweed dust, but his conch fritters are a total knockout. The sea snail, it turns out, is an unofficial national dish.

Another night we eat at Paradise Pizza, formerly a pandemic pop-up in the hotel car park for islanders, which proved so popular they decided to keep it. On Saturday nights it's a full-on party at a kitsch Italian trattoria, where cacio e pepe pasta is served in a giant wheel of parmesan, and the kitchen has a "secret weapon" who comes out to kick off the karaoke with Frank Sinatra's *New York, New York*.

Soon the hotel will open a raw bar at the Coconut Club, and there are plans for a candlelit cocktail bar called Bambi's, a chef's table/test kitchen-style restaurant, and a retail space, where Palm Heights merch — PH athletics socks, beach bags, tracksuits — will be sold, along with Khalil-chosen homewares.

The next day, on a drive around Grand Cayman, I don't see anything comparable to Palm Heights. The other luxury hotels



The balcony of an ocean-front suite

one on tennis, another on style and an obligatory tome on Slim Aarons's photography. The selection is part of the hotel's Library Fetish, an actual library in the hotel and another product of Khalil's collecting, this time of vintage books and magazines. The detox fridge is stocked with organic sodas and non-alcoholic seltzers, while the detox fridge has a range of natural wines.

At Tillies that evening a banquet is served by the American executive chef

### Need to know

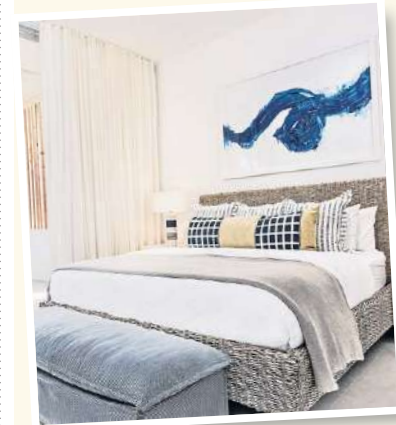
Monique Rivalland was a guest of Palm Heights. Room-only doubles from £650 (palmheights.com). Fly to Grand Cayman

## 3 more Caribbean bolt holes

### Eclipse at Half Moon

One of Jamaica's best-known resorts has opened a luxury boutique hotel within its grounds. Eclipse was designed by the New York architects Hart Howerton and offers 57 new rooms and suites, two restaurants, a spa, infinity pool and a natural swimming cove. Most rooms are inside the Great House, which is surrounded by guango trees and has a modern Caribbean aesthetic — the view of Montego Bay's aquamarine sea can be concealed by elegant shutters and the furnishings are all dark wood with white linen and tropical prints. The signature restaurant, Delmare, is a fine-dining seafood experience, while Lester's Bar has a wall of premium Caribbean rums to sample.

**Details** Room-only doubles from £420 (halfmoon.com). Fly to Jamaica



### Beach Enclave, Turks and Caicos

Only eight of the 40 coral islands that make up the Turks and Caicos archipelago are inhabited. On the gateway island, Providenciales, or Provo as locals call it, Beach Enclave, above, is a series of modern, white and wood fully serviced beachfront villas that sleep between 2 and 12. Most of the villas have private butlers and private infinity pools and inside the design is cool and contemporary, with state-of-the-art kitchens. Wall-to-wall glass slides open for luxurious indoor-outdoor living and, of course, spectacular ocean vistas.

**Details** B&B doubles in a two-bedroom villa from £1,999 (beachenclave.com). Fly to Turks and Caicos

### Le Carl Gustaf, St Barts

This is the latest super-luxe hotel to open in the celebrity favourite St Barts. Designed by the French architects and interior designers Gilles & Boissier, all 21 of the chic rooms have views of the ocean and the twinkling port of Gustavia. The restaurant, Le Fouquet's, is based on the famous Parisian brasserie on the Champs Élysées with a menu devised by Pierre Gagnaire, who has 12 Michelin stars across his various French restaurants. Down at the beach club on fashionable Shell Beach, Shellona serves simple but beautifully executed Mediterranean food to tables or sun loungers in the pristine Caribbean sand.

**Details** Double rooms from £750 (hotelsbarriere.com). Fly to St Barts



# Whodunnit? In Agatha Christie's

With the new *Death on the Nile* film opening on Friday, **Andrew Eames** has the favourite haunts of the crime queen

**E**gypt, the setting for *Death on the Nile* (the film, directed by Kenneth Branagh and starring Gal Gadot, is released next week), is by no means the only exotic location featured in Agatha Christie's novels. For somebody primarily known for her very English storytelling, she ventured far and wide, particularly after her messy divorce from Archie Christie in 1928.

Her travels provided her with many of the characters and compelling settings for her books. They also furnished her with a second husband, Max Mallowan. The pair met on an archaeological dig in southern Iraq, which she reached via a combination of luxury trains that sadly no longer exist today. Thanks to Mallowan, she became a regular on those trains, spending many a season in what is now northern Syria, doing her shopping in Aleppo.

Many of her favourite locations, in the UK and overseas, from Devon to Tenerife and Barbados, still cherish her memory — even though in several cases she was going there to avoid the attentions of the press. So to follow in her footsteps is to unravel the story of her life.

## The Grand Torquay

Agatha Miller was born into a well-to-do family in Torquay and after her wedding to first husband, Archie Christie, she spent her wedding night at what was the resort's signature hotel. The Grand, which has an Agatha Christie suite, still dominates the esplanade and is part of the Agatha Christie Mile, along with the graceful art nouveau seaside pavilion where she went to dances with Archie. The hotel was rocked 25 years ago by the mystery of an unidentified guest who committed suicide using cyanide, one of the author's favourite poisons. **Details** B&B doubles from £89 (grandtorquay.co.uk)

## Moorland Hotel Dartmoor

Christie wrote much of her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, during a two-week stay in the Moorland Hotel on Dartmoor. The hotel has extensive gardens and a great location on the moor by Haytor, but it doesn't make much of a song and dance about its Christie connections. It is popular with overnighting walkers, as is its brasserie, the Tinpickle & Rhum, so called because a tin of pickle and a bottle of rum were all that was found on the premises before its recent refurbishment.

A suite on the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express



Gal Gadot and Ali Fazal as Linnet Doyle and Andrew Katchadourian in *Death on the Nile*

**Details** B&B doubles from £130 (moorlandhoteldartmoor.co.uk)

## The Imperial Torquay

This hotel, which has over the years counted European royalty and the Beatles among its guests, hosted regular society occasions for Torquay's beautiful people in Christie's day. It features as the Majestic in *Peril at End House*, where she describes it "in its own grounds on a headland overlooking the sea". Although it's not quite the highest-end joint it once was, the hotel still reflects the elegance and grandeur of the period, and has a wonderful view across

Torbay from its terrace and restaurant. **Details** B&B doubles from £90 (thehotelcollection.co.uk)

## Old Swan Hotel Harrogate

The big mystery in Christie's own life took place in 1926, when her marriage to Archie fell apart and she disappeared for 11 days. By then she was already a celebrity, so the event made front-page news, especially when her car was found abandoned by a Surrey lake. Eventually she was recognised by a maid working in a genteel spa hotel in Harrogate, where Christie had checked in using the surname of Archie's

A room at Hotel Illa d'Or on Mallorca



mistress. The hotel, now renamed the Old Swan, retains its traditional gentility; a film about Christie's disappearance, *Agatha*, starring Vanessa Redgrave, was made here in 1979. **Details** B&B doubles from £89 (classiclodges.co.uk)

## Burgh Island Devon

It's an archetypal setting for a Christie murder: a property on an island cut off from the mainland by the tide. And the art deco Burgh Island hotel, with immaculate 1920s and 1930s detail, is ideal for anyone looking for total immersion in a Christie world. So many



# well-travelled footsteps...

BELMOND; VICTORIA GIBBS; ALAMY; GETTY IMAGES



Palm Court lounge at the Burgh Island hotel

dramas and documentaries have been made here that there's a good chance you'll meet a film crew coming down the corridor. Christie herself was a regular guest, writing *And Then There Were None* and *Evil Under the Sun* in a hotel to which she gave the rather less-dignified name, the Jolly Roger.  
**Details** B&B doubles from £425 (burghisland.com)

## Brown's Hotel London

Upmarket hotels and their closed communities made ideal settings for Christie — especially when she herself was a regular customer, as she was at Brown's, the Mayfair inspiration for *At Bertram's Hotel*. When she wasn't staying, she would drop in for tea. She had a weakness for drinking cream, and kept her own mug at Brown's, decorated with the words "Don't Be Greedy". Given that she was also largely teetotal, the hotel has devised a "Don't Be Greedy" mocktail in her honour. One of London's oldest hotels, Brown's was founded by James Brown, Lord Byron's butler, using money the poet bequeathed to him. Book the London leg of the itineraries Black Tomato has created to replicate Christie's 1922 grand tour, and you'll stay two nights at Brown's and have tea with the historian Lucy Worsley or Christie's

great-grandson James Prichard (from £1,995pp; blacktomato.com).  
**Details** B&B doubles from £493 (roccofortehotels.com)

## The Venice Simplon-Orient-Express

*Murder on the Orient Express* takes place on the Istanbul-Paris train, stuck in a snowdrift in eastern Croatia. Christie was a frequent traveller on this iconic train, particularly after she met her second husband, the archaeologist Max Mallowan, out on a Mesopotamian dig in modern-day Iraq. Today's train may not do the original routes, but the glamour and the authenticity of the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express makes it very special. Its itineraries crisscross spectacular parts of Europe, with the 34-hour journey from London to Venice its signature route.

**Details** One night's full board from £4,120pp (belmond.com)

## The Leas Folkestone

Christie would set off on her travels from Folkestone harbour, taking the boat train

across to France. In those days the resort was a society retreat, particularly because King Edward VII used to stay in the Grand with his mistress Alice Keppel. Christie wrote part of *Murder on the Orient Express* while staying in the hotel. Alas, the Grand has recently been sold, and its upmarket neighbour, the Metropole, is now luxury flats. But near them on the Leas, a grassy promenade once much frequented by the aristocracy, is the Best Western Clifton Hotel. Look out for those illustrious names remembered in plaques on benches along the Leas.  
**Details** Room-only doubles from £49 (bestwestern.co.uk)



## The British Pullman

Not everyone can afford the time or the prices of the Orient Express, so Belmond's British Pullman makes an excellent substitute. Sumptuous on-board decor recalls the era of luxury rail travel, much enjoyed by Christie — expect brocade curtains, marquetry panelling and a repertoire of day trips around the UK (including murder

mystery specials) with the finest wine, cuisine and scenery. It's a chance to dress up and savour the tinkling of crystal glassware as the train gets under way — and the crescendo of excited conversation as the champagne kicks in.  
**Details** Day trips, departing from London Victoria, from £400pp (belmond.com). B&B doubles near Victoria from £122 (georgianhousehotel.co.uk)

## Midland Hotel Morecambe

Although Christie never stayed here, the art deco Midland by Morecambe Bay very much looks the part, curving with the coastline. It made an obvious location for the filming of the "Double Sin" episode of the *Poirot* TV series, in which the bored detective announces that he is going to retire and suggests that he and Captain Hastings go for a short holiday by the seaside. Recently the ITV series *The Bay* has been filming here, among the hotel's acres of curved, red-carpeted corridors and the Arts and Crafts stone frieze of Odysseus and Nausicaa in the lobby.  
**Details** B&B doubles from £218 (englishlakes.co.uk)

## Greenway Devon

Christie described the holiday home she bought with her second husband, Max, as "the loveliest place on earth". This Georgian mansion stands high up on the eastern shoulder of the River Dart, with its own woodlands, jetty, walled garden and commanding views. Now run by the National Trust, with accommodation in the main house and lodges in the grounds, it has a big archive of everything Christie, from her books to her handbags, and her slightly creepy favourite doll (£13). Road access is narrow and can be tricky, so a better choice is to arrive by the ferry from Dartmouth (£8; greenwayferry.co.uk).  
**Details** Two nights' self-catering for two from £324 (nationaltrust.org.uk)

## Kingswear paddle steamer Devon

During her regular holidays at Greenway, Christie and her guests were inevitably passengers on the paddle steamer that provided a regular river service connecting Totnes with Dartmouth, and points in between, including the Greenway jetty. These days, the 98-year-old Kingswear Castle is the UK's only coal-fired paddler, and still works the Dart, pistons gleaming and wheel thumping, but mostly on sightseeing cruises. The decks quiver, the captain banter and the Paignton-to-Kingswear steam railway chunters along the far bank, tooting companionably. Stay on the river at the Steam Packet Inn.  
**Details** One-hour cruise £9.50 (dartmouthrailriver.co.uk). B&B doubles from £135 (steampacketinn.co.uk)

## Puerto de la Cruz Tenerife

Shortly after the break-up of her first marriage and her disappearance to

More haunts next page





Coral Reef Club on Barbados

Harrogate, Christie escaped the press by booking a holiday to Tenerife, arriving by steamer from the UK with her daughter, Rosalind. They stayed in the Gran Hotel Taoro, where she wrote part of *The Mystery of the Blue Train*. The Taoro has since closed, but a similar heritage property, the Hotel Botanico, stands by Puerto's botanical gardens.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,029pp, including flights (jet2holidays.com)

### Las Palmas Gran Canaria

Dissatisfied with the sea swimming in Puerto de la Cruz, Christie and her daughter crossed to Gran Canaria — the island capital, Las Palmas, has its own city beach, Playa de las Canteras, which was far more to her liking. Las Palmas recently named a city square after Christie to commemorate her visit. The story she set here, *The Companion*, features two mysterious drownings. The Metropole, where she stayed, has closed, but the Santa Catalina, another five-star property, also claims her as a guest.

**Details** Four nights' B&B from £496pp, including flights (tui.co.uk)

### Hotel Illa d'Or Mallorca

After her Canary Island experiences, Christie tried Mallorca, but when she arrived in Palma the best hotels were full. The taxi to Hotel Formentor, supposedly the next best thing, took her through Pollensa. She was immediately enchanted by the bay, and decided to stay instead at the shoreline Illa d'Or, surrounded by pine and tamarisk trees. She would walk out to the lighthouse at Cap Formentor, dropping in on the Mar i Cel (now apartments) en route. She used both hotels, renamed the Pino d'Oro and Mariposa, in *Problem at Pollensa Bay*.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £625pp, including flights (sovereign.com)

### Pera Palace Istanbul

Christie would regularly join Mallowan on his archaeological digs, which were mostly in Syria. En route, she would

Mena House, near Giza



change trains where Europe ends and Asia begins, breaking the journey with a stay in room 411 of the colonial-style Pera Palace in Istanbul. There was a persistent rumour that she'd hidden in that room a secret diary relating to her 11-day disappearance, so fans regularly booked 411 and pulled up the floorboards. Audley Travel's Historic Tour of Turkey can include a stay at the Pera Palace.

**Details** Eight nights' B&B from £4,355pp, including flights and excursions (audleytravel.com)

### Classic Nile cruise Egypt

In 1933, Christie travelled the Nile on the SS Sudan, launched as a passenger ship in 1920 at the behest of Thomas Cook. The journey inspired her to write *Death on the Nile*, renaming the ship the SS Karnak. The paddle steamer

is still plying its trade up and down the river. Its 23 cabins are wood-panelled and parquet-floored, its service is refined, and it has Hercule Poirot and Agatha Christie suites. In Aswan, drop in for tea at another of her favourite properties, the dowager Old Cataract Hotel, in a fabulous location on the riverbank, where many scenes were shot for the 1978 film *Death on the Nile* starring Peter Ustinov.

**Details** Five nights' all-inclusive on the SS Sudan and four nights' B&B in a hotel from £3,565pp, including flights (originaltravel.co.uk)



Pera Palace in Istanbul

### Mena House Egypt

For much of the early 20th century, this luxury lodge out by the Pyramids was the hotel of choice for heads of state and wealthy socialites visiting Egypt, which at that time was a very

fashionable destination. The hotel was away from Cairo's noisy scrum and it was the first in Egypt to have a swimming pool. Churchill, Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-shek met here in 1943, while in 1979 it was the turn of presidents Sadat and Carter and the Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin. Poirot spends some time here in *The Adventure of the Egyptian Tomb*.

**Details** Room-only doubles from £210 (marriott.co.uk)

### Bohinj Slovenia

Christie disliked the press, so in 1967 she and her husband chose to holiday on Lake Bohinj in the hope that she wouldn't be recognised. They stayed at the Bellevue, which had a view of the lake, but their presence had been noted. An ambitious young journalist, Janez Cucek, booked the room next door and climbed across from his balcony to theirs. Mallowan was outraged but Christie was gracious enough. When Cucek asked what she was writing, Christie replied that Bohinj was "too beautiful for murder". Today the Bellevue is defunct, but there's a new sustainable hotel, the Bohinj, which offers short breaks.

**Details** Three nights' half-board from £1,020pp, including flights (regent-holidays.co.uk)

### Coral Reef Club Barbados

Christie discovered Barbados late in life, when air travel allowed. She used to stay at the Coral Reef Club, which she renamed the Golden Palm and used as a setting for *A Caribbean Mystery*. The hotel, set in 12 acres of beautifully landscaped gardens, is still run by the O'Hara family and still has one foot in an era of old-world elegance. Generations of the well-to-do have holidayed here, so it's the sort of place where you might catch glimpses of a member of the House of Lords, barely recognisable in T-shirt and shorts.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £5,222pp, including flights (britishairways.com)





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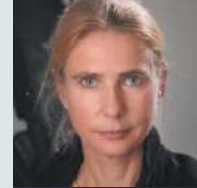
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# Travel *checklist*

Whether you'd like to travel to the other side of the world, or enjoy a cosy staycation with loved ones, these destination ideas are sure to fire up the imagination

## The Bluebell Railway – more than a train ride

Escape into the heart of the Sussex countryside on a vintage steam train adventure at Britain's oldest passenger-carrying, standard gauge preserved railway line. Journey in the style and comfort of a bygone age through the High Weald – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

From delicious afternoon teas to the Golden Arrow Evening Dining Train, experience the sumptuous luxury of these first class and Pullman coaches. There is something for everyone at the Bluebell Railway.

All-Day Rover tickets allow you to get on and off the trains as much as you like, giving you time to visit their accredited museum, get some lunch, or visit the locomotives in the SteamWorks! interactive exhibition, where kids can climb on real engines and explore the science and stories behind steam. Discover their four period stations, much featured in film and television, including *Downton Abbey* and *The Larkins*.



Look out for family-friendly events like Road Meets Rail – including working steam traction engines and steam driven fairground rides as well as Model Railway Weekend, featuring huge layouts that don't fit in the spare room, and the Bluebell Railway Beer Festival with over 100 beers, cider and perry plus great music.

Home fleet and visiting locomotives star in their Steam Galas. Start the year with a celebration of Terrier 'Fenchurch's' 150th birthday.

Bluebell Railway is just 30 minutes north of Brighton, and just one hour from London by car, with plenty of free parking. Why not travel by main line train direct from East Croydon, London Bridge and Victoria? Family friendly events start this February half term with the Kids for a Quid travel deal and ice skating in the locomotive shed.



Visit [bluebell-railway.com](http://bluebell-railway.com) or call 01825 720800 to find out more.

## Ireland's iconic heritage sites

Discover the remains of prehistoric tombs. Imagine the thrill of defending a castle. Wander through medieval halls. Soak up the serenity of old-world gardens and the splendour of great historic buildings.

With over 90 amazing places to visit, you'll never be stuck for adventure. From ancient monuments to monastic hideaways, imposing castles to revolutionary battlegrounds, Ireland's heritage has something to offer everyone. Follow in the footsteps of thousands of voyagers on a journey into Ireland's epic past.

Two of Ireland's most extraordinary historic places have attained UNESCO World Heritage Site status. On Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, Skellig Michael is a magnificent island monastery, one of the earliest monastic foundations in the country. The beehive-shaped huts made of stone that the monks of St Fionan lived, prayed and slept in, remain intact, perched on the summit of an awe-inspiring rocky island that dominates the surrounding seascape. The fabled Brú na Bóinne is Ireland's richest archaeological landscape. It is the location of the ancient ceremonial passage tombs of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth, built some 5,000 years ago. Containing the largest collection of megalithic art in Western Europe, they are among the most important Neolithic sites in the world.

Maybe you've already visited Ireland's most iconic sites, or maybe you just like to dig a little deeper to discover a truly unique experience. Off the beaten track, there are many hidden gems waiting for you to explore.



Brú na Bóinne – Knowth



Custom House Visitor Centre, Dublin

Book now at [heritageireland.ie](http://heritageireland.ie) and follow [@heritageireland](https://www.instagram.com/heritageireland) to find out more.



**OPW** Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí  
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## 47 Boutique Hotel in Rome



47 Boutique Hotel is located in the heart of Rome, just a few minutes away from the Circus Maximus, Colosseum and Roman Forum.

Modern and stylish rooms, on five themed floors, allow guests to choose a special stay surrounded by Roman history, photography, 60s icons, fashion and Italian design. The hotel also includes two restaurants. 47 Circus Roof Garden, a panoramic terrace on the sixth floor, offers an amazing view of the Eternal City and its treasures. Parole in Libertà Bistrot, is perfect for special aperitifs and exclusive drinks, thanks to 50 international gins and 200 Italian wine labels.

Moreover, guests can enjoy all the comforts of common areas, including a Turkish bath, gym, outdoor courtyard, tea room, private cinema, conference room and snooker, plus complimentary use of bikes.



The hotel is located at Via Luigi Petroselli 47, Rome. Call (+39) 6678 7816 or email [reservations@fortysevenhotel.com](mailto:reservations@fortysevenhotel.com) to contact the team. Find out more at [fortysevenhotel.com](http://fortysevenhotel.com)

## Luxury holiday homes in south Devon

Leaving with wonderful memories of a fabulous holiday with friends or family takes luxury to the next level. And put simply, the Salcombe Finest team will help you create those memories.

They're a locally-based company who want to share their knowledge of Salcombe and surrounding areas. Just ask a friendly member of the team: they will be more than happy to give you the inside scoop on what's best to do, where to eat, where to go and when.

Each of these luxury holiday homes in south Devon has been handpicked to exacting requirements. Exceptional views of the estuary or countryside and great interiors are key features of their homes, closely followed by access to the waterfront and stunning sandy beaches. They look for the magic which sets them apart from your average home from swimming pools and cinema rooms to a private sanctuary overlooking the sparkling blue water of the estuary.



**SALCOMBE FINEST**  
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Visit [salcombefinest.com](http://salcombefinest.com) to find out more.

## Help Children's Air Ambulance to save lives

The Children's Air Ambulance team know that when you are making your Will your loved ones will come first. But they hope, once you have taken care of your family and friends, that you will consider including a gift in your Will to the Children's Air Ambulance.

A gift in your Will can help them to save lives – it will help them be there for families in their greatest hour of need. It will give people futures that they might otherwise have had snatched from them – what a legacy!



Should you choose to include a gift to them in your Will, they will always respect your privacy and handle your wishes with care. They will ensure your gift will be used for the greatest impact, and they can also offer you a choice of how and where your gift is used.



Visit [childrensairambulance.org.uk/will](http://childrensairambulance.org.uk/will) for more information. Registered Charity No. 1098874



## Fall in love with Austria this winter

You're ready to ski – and so is Austria. From Tirol to SalzburgerLand, the top winter destination for British holidaymakers means snow-sure, perfectly groomed pistes, modern lifts, professional ski schools, authentic family-run hotels and guaranteed beloved Austrian Gemütlichkeit.

Tirol boasts over 80 ski areas and 3,000km of skiable land, from expansive and famed resorts to local hidden treasures. The 300 ski school programmes and hotels designed with children in mind make it an ideal destination for family holidays, while spotlessly maintained slopes, thrilling off-piste and fun parks ensure winter sport fun for skiers of all abilities and preferences. Warm up in a cosy hut with farm-to-fork Tiroler Gröstl and sweet Kiachl while planning tomorrow's adventures



with your friends and family. No matter how you spend your holidays here, you're always guaranteed a warm Tirolean welcome.

SalzburgerLand in winter is a symphony of fresh snow underfoot, the whistling of wind while gliding down slopes, glasses tinkling in cosy mountain huts serving up organic delights and gleeful cheers from children on toboggans. With 1,140km of blue runs, 1,305km of red and a tremendous 305km of black – all accessible with the Salzburger Super Ski Card – this region is a playground for every kind of skier. From snow-biking to airboarding and ice-climbing, SalzburgerLand's multitude of unique winter activities promise to enthral, and its many well-appointed hotels guarantee rest and relaxation.

**Austria's snow-sure slopes are waiting for you. Find out more on [austria.info/winterlove](http://austria.info/winterlove)**



## Ready to travel again? Purple Summer have the perfect luxury escape for reuniting with loved ones

After the extraordinary last two years, things are finally starting to look up, and what better way to celebrate than with a luxurious poolside escape?

Purple Summer offer exclusive villas providing the perfect space for you to reconnect with friends and family and enjoy some quality time together, while your chef prepares magnificent meals tailored to your preferences, and their team of dedicated and professional staff help to guarantee that your trip is unforgettable.

Purple Summer's dreamy collection of villas is ideal for escaping the drizzle back home. It features properties in prime locations in the desirable French Riviera and breathtaking Mallorca, and new for 2022, a beautiful retreat in Ibiza.

Each villa is uniquely decorated with traditional French and Spanish accents and



surrounded by beautiful terraces and mature gardens, so you can entertain friends and family with some al fresco dining or take a dip to cool off in your own swimming pool. Other facilities available include jacuzzis, hammams, playrooms and tennis courts.

The passionate and experienced staff are always ready at hand to make your stay as seamless and enjoyable as possible; whether they are organising your boat trip or beach club reservation, or handing you a glass of champagne as you step into the villa, their service is unparalleled and makes Purple Summer holidays that extra bit special.

**PURPLE SUMMER**

Visit [purplesummer.com](http://purplesummer.com) to find out more or call the team on 01885 488799.



## Make your Devon holiday epic with The Devon Concierge Club

The best part about going on holiday is actually being on holiday – it's the planning that can get complicated. Fortunately, endless phone calls and Google searches can now be a thing of the past. From a coastal adventure to beach yoga, a big family get together or a couple's retreat, The Devon Concierge Club can take the hassle out of holiday planning, and make everyone's Devon dream come true.

With their incredible range of local trusted suppliers, they can help you arrange everything from practical necessities to a full holiday itinerary – all created entirely bespoke for you.

Ever wanted to try wild swimming? Or crash through the waves in a RIB (rigid-inflatable



boat)? Why not explore the secrets of Dartmoor on horseback with a local guide, or discover hidden coves for a private picnic? Go foraging with the kids, or arrange a spa treatment just for you.

The DC Club can organise a range of experiences, trips and services – even child-care and dog-walking! Together with their trusted suppliers, they make sure that birthdays, anniversaries, hen-weekends or just a break with the family are events to remember.

So, if you've got a Devon dream you want to make reality – or just want a hand with the boring bits – then give them a call. At the Devon Concierge Club, it's all about you.

Contact The Devon Concierge Club and get the most out of Devon.

**To start making your Devon holiday epic, visit [thedeviceconciergeclub.co.uk](http://thedeviceconciergeclub.co.uk) or call the team on 01803 220732.**



## Escape to the north Cornish Coast this spring



The Point and the Point Holidays offer a range of premium self-catering holidays in Polzeath,

Rock, Roserow, Trebetherick and Daymer Bay ranging from one-bedroom apartments to seven-bedroom family homes.

With lots of beaches within walking distance, the South West Coast Path on your doorstep as well as all the Point facilities including the health club, restaurant, bar and golf course there is plenty for the whole family to do.

Relax in the comfort of your holiday home or explore all that Cornwall has to offer. Spring generally arrives early in Cornwall, there is an abundance of wildflowers on all the footpaths and the beaches are quieter, plus there is always a warm welcome.

The local area is a gastro hub with a choice of restaurants; take a short ferry ride over to Padstow or a short car journey or walk to Rock or Port Isaac. Eat out and avoid any washing up. Alternatively



brace yourself for a winter dip in the ocean, a winter surf lesson on Polzeath Beach or maybe a round of golf at either St Enodoc or The Point.

Their range of holiday homes offers dog friendly properties, many with stunning sea views and cosy log burners. Call their friendly team, who all live locally, for advice on the best property and activities to suit your family.

Visit [thepointholidays.co.uk](http://thepointholidays.co.uk) to find out more or call the team on 01208 869430.



## Smart Screen – your perfect travel companion

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\*The cloth contains Blue Shield® technology, which is a high efficiency and broad-spectrum inorganic nano-silver antibacterial product capable of killing 99.9% of bacteria.



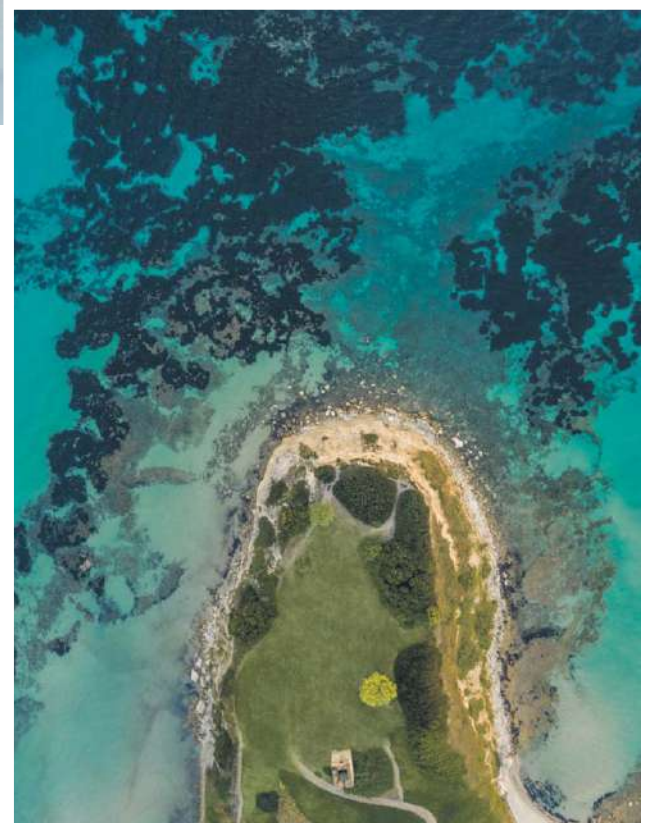
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*Book your next getaway at [SANI-RESORT.COM](https://www.sani-resort.com)*





# Morocco is back on the menu



Kasbah Ait Ben Haddou

How to see the best of the reopened country on an ethical luxury tour.  
By **Lorna Parkes**

**A**s if a dam had burst on the horizon, light spilt over the crest of the mountains and drenched the valley. “Sunrise!” my guide said happily, raising his arms skywards. Following fresh mule prints left behind by farmers and car-less commuters, we negotiated the arid hillside to reach a plateau. Amber earth rippled in valleys beneath us, their natural salt reserves pooled in the crevices like early morning frost.

We’d been hiking for an hour in the High Atlas Mountains from our base in Ouirgane, a lakeside mudbrick village that has yet to make it onto the radar of Marrakesh daytrippers. Carefully selected village stays such as this are a trademark of the B-Corp-certified tour company Intrepid, which supports social-enterprise projects, particularly those promoting gender equality and economic empowerment. The difference with this trip was that it was one of the company’s new Premium tours, which offer upmarket comfort as well as genuinely responsible and sustainable tourism, a combination that’s been hard to find in Morocco previously.

The chief architect of this itinerary was the company’s Moroccan managing director in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Zina Bencheikh, so it promised to be something special. The full 15-day trip takes in all the country’s highlights, including art in Casablanca, walking tours around Chefchaouen, dune-camping in the Sahara and cooking lessons in Marrakesh.

Last November — just before the imposition of a flight ban, which will be lifted on Monday — I went with a small group for a

preview. We started with languid rooftop pools and a roaring houara music session with local women in Marrakesh, before moving on to Morocco’s hiking heartland.

Ouirgane’s relative obscurity is one reason that we were the first foreign tourists our village hiking companion, Chirif Lamzodi, had seen for almost two years. The main reason is, of course, Covid. Our tour leader, Fouad Oulmyr, who is also from these mountains, hired Lamzodi to accompany us on this hike to help get money flowing back into his community.

Lamzodi, a mountain guide for 30 years, picked lemon thyme and peppermint as he walked, popping it into our hands, and beckoned us to poke our heads into gated courtyards to see the goats and chickens that provide milk, butter and eggs for the local households. “These walls are to keep out the wild boar. They forage in the mountains for acorns, but they come here at night,” he explained as we skirted the fortified hilltop gardens that supply the village with fruit and vegetables.

The villages of the High Atlas are a stronghold of Morocco’s Amazigh (Berber) people — tight-knit, self-sufficient communities with traditions that pre-date

Islam and the Roman armies that swept through north Africa after the fall of Carthage in 149BC. Like many, Ouirgane’s fortunes are dictated by annual crop yields and a smattering of tourism.

Our hilltop hotel here has been chosen because it’s the only one owned by a village resident, Mohamed Idel Mouden. It was moved to higher ground after a government-built dam consumed lower parts of the village 20 years ago; in this area, on the cusp of desertification, water was needed to irrigate farmers’ fields.

The traditional mudbrick Chez Momo II employs 15 local families. It feels luxurious, but is also deeply rooted in Amazigh culture. Plump olives hang low on trees framing a large pool, and there’s rooftop sunset yoga. Fireplaces in every room are lit on chilly nights. At bedtime, I was lulled to sleep by the scent of woodsmoke and orange blossom, and a soothing crackle and pop from the glowing hearth.

Here in the High Atlas, hiking with Oulmyr was the obvious thing to do. At this elevation, about 1,000m, the walking was



relatively easy going, rising and falling with the curves of the valley through a green ribbon of juniper, walnut and olive trees. Our ten-mile hike delivered us into Asni, a little mountain town of terrace cafés and apple orchards, where Intrepid supports the school project Education for All. Some 83 per cent of women in rural areas of Morocco are illiterate and the organisation helps girls from remote mountain villages into full-time education, typically leading to employment.

On a four-hour drive to the desert ksar (fortified village) of Ait Ben Haddou, we left behind the relative fecundity of the Asni Valley and entered the Ounila Valley, motoring along smooth roads that have been upgraded with Middle Eastern investment.

Pomegranate, walnut, willow and carob trees gave way to date palms and bald mountains as the dirt beneath our wheels got thirstier. Tagines, lids clamped down by plump mandarins, bubbled at roadside stalls. I caught a distant glimpse of sure-footed goats running full-pelt down a sheer escarpment like scuttling beetles. Decorative minarets announced clay-hewn, camouflaged villages, and crenellated towers signalled our arrival in the “valley of the kasbahs” — a route along the ancient trade path that once greased palms all the way from southern Africa.

The winter sun was hot on our faces as we caught our first glimpse of Ait Ben Haddou. Its mudbrick construction, climbing streets and 17th-century kasbah turrets are so preposterously perfect that it spawned a local film industry. *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Gladiator* and *Game of Thrones* are just some of the productions shot here since the 1950s.

Pre-pandemic, this Unesco site could attract 5,000 tourists a day in peak season, but in 2020 months elapsed without a single visitor. It was still eerily quiet as we crossed a long bridge to the flat-roofed hive of turmeric-coloured buildings, our only company a solitary pair of tourists and a swaddled man on a donkey crossing the parched riverbed. Lunch was at another female social enterprise, ▶



Chez Momo II hotel in Ouirgane



## 56 Travel

► Tawesna, tucked into a section of the ksar's mudbrick outer crust. Over chicken tagine with spicy almond-crusted pumpkin dumplings, and coffee with Amazigh herbs from the café courtyard, we met the chef Nadia and manager Leila. Together they lead a part-time workforce of 40 women, supplying vegetables from their gardens for the kitchen.

"During Covid we had to innovate," said Hicham Guenoun, a co-founder of We Speak Citizen, the Moroccan NGO that set up Tawesna in late 2018. When the pandemic hit, the NGO helped the community to launch virtual tours of the famous ksar and sell handicrafts through Tawesna's Instagram page. "The women here understand the importance of being resilient," Guenoun said.

Despite the drop-off in tourism caused by the pandemic, we found hope everywhere. Next year an "orality house" will open in Ait Ben Haddou telling the folk history of the ancient community, where Jews, Christians and Muslims lived side by side for centuries. And in a wood-beamed house transformed into the Tiwirga gallery by We Speak Citizen, we met Hafida Zizi, an artist and single mother of three who has developed a following for her monochrome naive art and joyous depictions of women of Islam.

Outside Ait Ben Haddou, we had a private preview of another fledgling gallery space with local artist Aissa Joud, sporting a black fedora, ripped skinny jeans and a pink Calvin Klein hoodie. Smoked almonds and silver teapots were laid out for us in a cavernous space with arched ceilings, carved cedarwood doors and 1950s radios, and Arabic dance music bouncing off the gallery's giant canvases.

Fresh from an exhibition in Casablanca, Joud has been pegged as an artist to watch but he has returned home to set up Tamart Space. His hope is to stem the flow of migration out of the region by providing lodging and studio space for photographers, painters, animators and musicians from southeast Morocco. Soon, tourists will be able to stop here en route to the Sahara for refreshments as they browse artworks, some of which will fetch more than £3,000.

That night we stayed on the edge of the Ouarzazate desert in a luxury *Arabian Nights*-style riad, built in the style of a ksar and grafted onto an ancient turreted ruin. But our trip also took us into local homes to feast. We spent an afternoon at a delightful rural cooking school that's training girls from the surrounding villages to teach, grow vegetables, and make cheese and bread. And in the belly of Marrakesh's medina we met local artisans who are breathing new life into traditional crafts such as embroidery, to help broker incomes for disadvantaged communities.

On our final night in Marrakesh, we stayed at the new Riad Elegancia, a symphony of classical Moroccan craftsmanship with a private hammam, rooftop pool and 19th-century patios perfumed by exquisite restored cedarwood carvings. But for me the stars of the show were always the people. As tourism returns, a more sustainable, empowering path feels possible for communities in Morocco. Like dawn in the mountains, the future looks bright.

## Need to know

Lorna Parkes was a guest of Intrepid Travel, which has 14 nights' B&B from £2,420pp, including some extra meals, on its Premium Morocco in-depth trip (intrepidtravel.com). Fly to Marrakesh



The medina in Chefchaouen

## 8 more trips to Morocco — from surfing to eco-Marrakesh

## Surf and yoga at an eco-lodge

There's a longstanding surfing scene along Morocco's sandy, wave-ridden Atlantic seaboard. Especially convenient is Paradis Plage, a large eco-lodge 20 miles north of Agadir. Devoted to sustainability, including reducing energy and water consumption, it offers a five-lesson package to beginners, and another that combines surfing with daily yoga classes. Spa treatments are available, and most of the chic, airy suites face the pool or ocean.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £735pp, including flights, private transfers and the beginners' surfing programme (healthandfitnesstravel.com)

## Trek remote gorges

Nomadic camel herders traverse the narrow ravines and high plateaux around Morocco's third-highest peak, Jebel M'Goun, but tourists are a novelty. That's what makes this vigorous trekking trip — journeying southwards across the arid High Atlas before finally emerging into the pink-petalled Valley of Roses — so exciting. Expect plenty of river wading and vertiginous rock faces. You'll see two classic kasbahs and finish in Marrakesh after the seven-day walk.

**Details** Nine nights' B&B from £1,230pp, including flights, transfers and some extra meals; departing on May 20 and October 7 (mountainkingdoms.com)

## Expert-led photo safari

Learn from the professional photographer Toby Savage how best to capture southern Morocco's highlights. Suitable for all camera owners, the trip roams from multicoloured spice stalls in Marrakesh's dense medina to the sun-baked kasbah of Ait Ben Haddou and the fortified fishing port of Essaouira. You'll even spend a night camping in the Sahara.



A garden suite at Jnane Tamsna

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,245pp, including transfers and some extra meals (responsibletravel.com). Fly to Marrakesh

## Family mule train

Bookended by three nights (and a horse-drawn carriage ride) in Marrakesh, this small-group adventure focuses on the rugged terrain below Toubkal, Morocco's highest mountain. Children will mostly ride mules as parents hike, with everyone enjoying fabulous views, clear air and picnic lunches. Staying in a mountain guesthouse, you'll learn about life in quaint Amazigh (Berber) farming villages and ascend to what's said to be the mausoleum of the supernatural king Sidi Chamharouch.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £849pp (£799pp for ages 6-12), including flights, transfers, activities and some extra meals; departing on April 2, May 28, July 30 and October 22 (familiesworldwide.co.uk)

## Eco-friendly Marrakesh

Jnane Tamsna recycles water, glass, energy and more. Happily, this 24-room boutique hotel in Marrakesh's tree-lined Palmeraie suburb is as stylish as it is

sustainable: ringed by heated pools and flamboyant greenery, each yellow adobe building has homely, boho-chic interiors — artisan ebony bookcases, vintage rugs, Moorish arches and ample space. No wonder Tom Cruise and Hugh Jackman have visited.

**Details** B&B doubles from £226pp (i-escape.com). Fly to Marrakesh

## Southern Morocco for solos

This sociable tour is for a maximum of 14 solo travellers who must be aged 30-49. Unique experiences abound: camel rides; Sahara desert sand-bathing treatments; a sidecar journey to the 1,300m-high Kik Plateau; and time in the aromatic "saffron capital" of Taliouine. Based in good-quality hotels, you'll also tick off rust-red kasbahs and date-growing valleys before a late-night Marrakesh food tour.

**Details** Ten nights' B&B from £2,420pp, including transfers, some extra meals and carbon offsets; departing on April 30, June 4, July 2 and September 3 (flashpack.com). Fly to Marrakesh

## Atlas mountain biking

The Atlas Mountains offer cyclists spectacular scenery along with a dose of indigenous Amazigh culture. Keeping to little-visited areas, this small-group tour follows single tracks past palm-grove oases, mountain-village SUV routes and hairpin muleteer paths through ancient passes. Highlights include Tafraoute's blue-painted rocks and a final, exhilarating descent to the Atlantic for a swim. You'll average 50km a day, most of it off-road, and stay in traditionally decorated hotels.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,199pp, including flights, transfers, some extra meals and bike hire (exodus.co.uk).

Departs on March 12, then regularly October-April

## Literary tour with Bri Lee

The Aussie author Bri Lee is leading a literary trip to Morocco this spring, encompassing writing workshops and a Tangier tour retreading William S Burroughs's steps, but broadened out with goat's cheese tastings, desert yoga and an Eid feast with a women-only restaurant collective. Blue-hued Chefchaouen, ancient Fez, Marrakesh and art deco Casablanca all feature, while accommodation ranges from cool bubble tents to a lakeside lodge.

**Details** Nine nights' B&B from £2,530pp, including transport, tours, workshops and some extra meals; departs on April 26 (aweventure.com). Fly to Marrakesh

Richard Mellor



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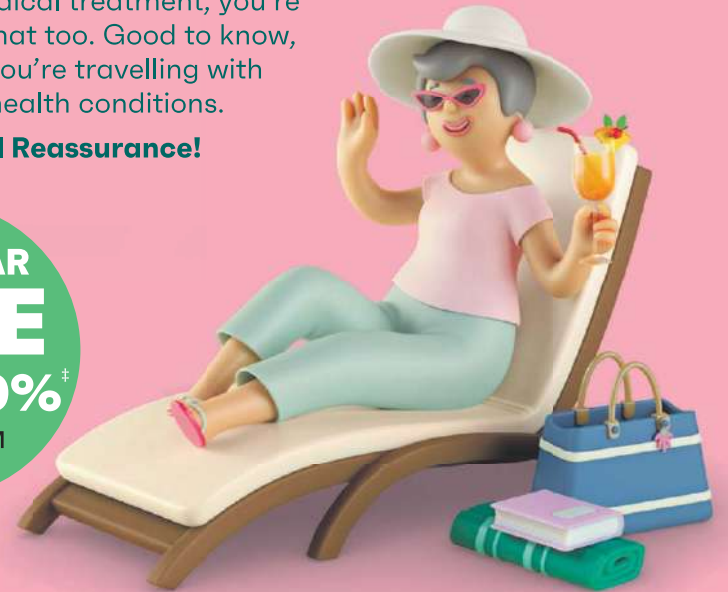


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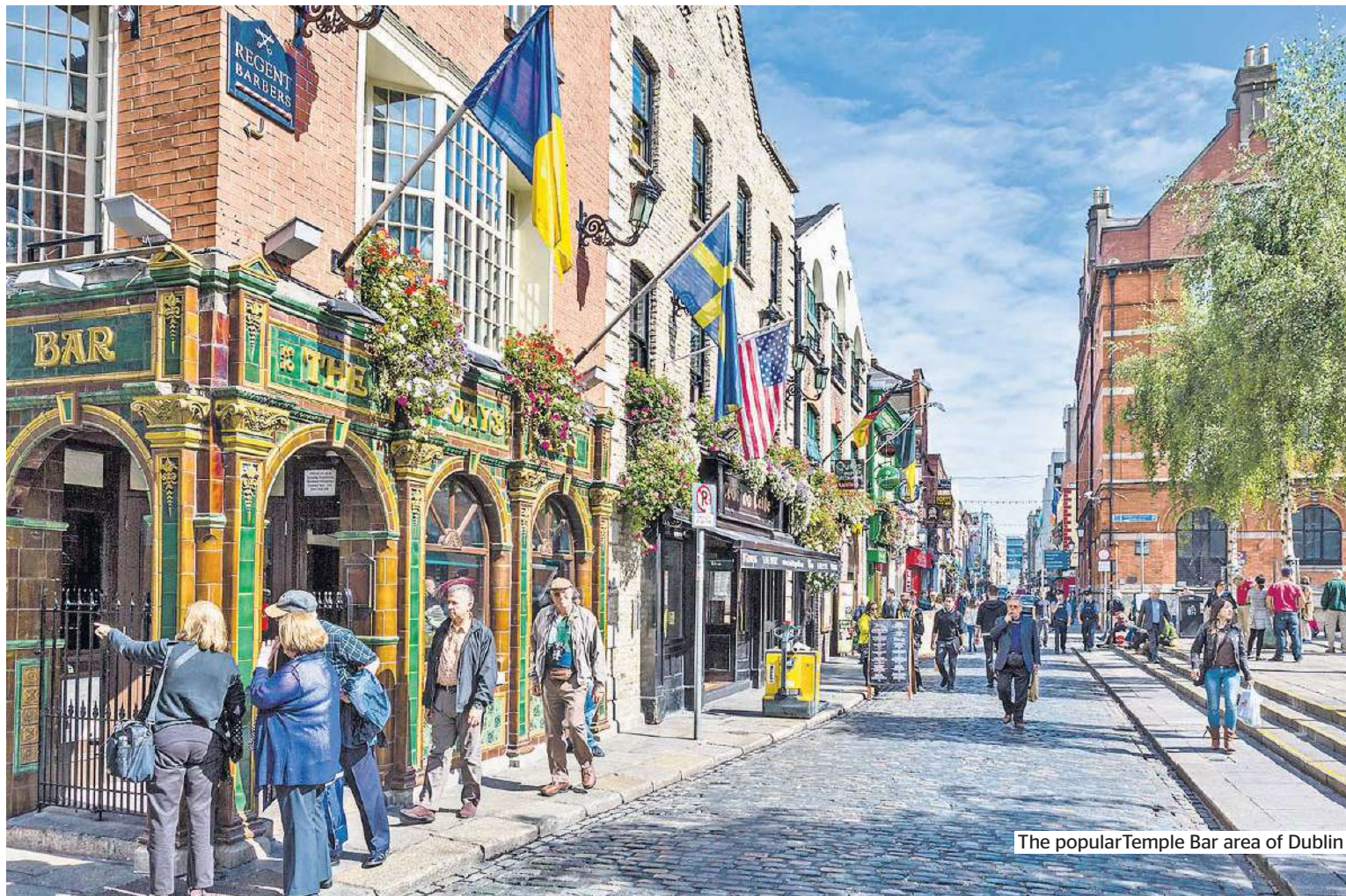
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# Dublin has reopened and it's celebrating a literary giant

**Rob Crossan** marks the centenary of James Joyce's *Ulysses* with a tour of the key city sights linked to the book and its author

At what page did you give up? Did you send a cheap paperback edition of *Ulysses* twirling through the air in frustration at the prospect of another chapter awash with allusions, word puzzles, puns and obtuse references? Or did you keep pace with James Joyce's famously impenetrable novel — in your cloth-bound, mint-condition first edition — right to the end? Either way it's going to be hard to escape the modernist masterpiece in this, its centenary month.

*Ulysses* was printed in an (error-strewn) run of just 1,000 copies by the Shakespeare and Company bookshop and publishers in Paris on February 2, 1922. But it had already been serialised in the American literary journal *The Little Review* and attracted the attention of Joyce's fellow modernists TS Eliot (*The Waste Land* would be published the same year) and Ezra Pound, who edited out some of Joyce's more scatological and obscene passages.

Eliot later said that *Ulysses* had “killed the 19th century” with its tale (in brutally simplistic terms) of two men — the introverted poet and teacher Stephen Dedalus and the extrovert advertising salesman Leopold Bloom — and their movements in Dublin on June 16, 1904.

Sounding uncannily like an ambitious travel writer, Joyce claimed that he wanted to “give a picture of

Dublin so complete that if the city suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book”.

He neglected to mention the city's football news of the day (Bohemians were just concluding a dog of a season in the Irish football league at the time), but 100 years on many of Joyce's alluring Dublin visions remain.

## Belvedere College, Great Denmark Street

Young James and his brother Stanislaus were educated in this solid 18th-century mansion, which then — as now — is a Jesuit fee-paying school for boys. James became a huge fan of Ibsen,

Byron and Shaw while studying here, but also developed a penchant for bunking off to spend time in the Monto brothel quarter of Dublin — a habit prompted partly by hormones, but also, perhaps, as his brother once wrote, by “suddenly finding himself among boys bigger and older but less intelligent than himself”.

[belvederecollege.ie](http://belvederecollege.ie)

## Sandymount Strand

With views over the pretty seaside town of Howth and the lonely Poolbeg lighthouse, Sandymount may look quietly charming, but this beach got Joyce into waters considerably hotter than those lapping against the sands. Aroused by the sight of the sexually liberated Gerty MacDowell exposing her lingerie, Leopold Bloom goes into full Peeping Tom mode, to a soundtrack of rockets, in the most notorious scene in *Ulysses*. Joyce's lines “And then a rocket sprang and bang shot blind blank and O!” got the publishers of *The Little Review* prosecuted, and prompted the UK director of public prosecutions to pronounce the book “filthy”. It wouldn't be officially published in Britain until 1936.

## Sweny's Pharmacy, 1 Lincoln Place

Fiction and reality cross paths at this

chemist's store, where both Joyce and Leopold Bloom were partial to the lemon-scented soap sold there. The store has retained its original Victorian apothecary interior (and still sells the soap) but it's now a Joyce cultural centre with a packed weekly schedule of readings from his novels. Many are led by the local actor Jack Walsh and some are broadcast live on Zoom. No booking is necessary unless you're part of a large group; readings are free but donations are appreciated. You may also bump into some of Ireland's contemporary creative talents who adore the place — the singer Imelda May was here for a reading just last week. [sweny.ie](http://sweny.ie)

## 7 Eccles Street

On Bloomsday (as June 16 is known in Dublin) scores of Joyceans in Edwardian regalia drink their way around the city. First-timers often ask where they can find Eccles Street, the home of Leopold and Molly Bloom, and the base for her affair with her manager, Blazes Boylan. Sadly the house (lived in by Joyce's university friend John Byrne and frequently visited by the author) was demolished in 1967 to make way for the Mater hospital. But the front door was salvaged and is on display at the James Joyce Centre on North Great George's Street, with some of the writer's furniture and a re-creation of the cramped study rooms he kept in Paris and Trieste while writing *Ulysses*. [£4; jamesjoyce.ie](http://£4;jamesjoyce.ie)

## Davy Byrne's pub, 21 Duke Street

Leopold has a queasy experience in what is now a Parisian-looking city-centre boozier during the “Lestrygonians” episode of *Ulysses*, pondering images of greedy diners while enjoying a gorgonzola sandwich and a glass of burgundy. Davy Byrne's serves this precise pairing only on Bloomsday, but the pub — complete with starched-white tablecloths inside and rattan chairs on the front terrace — is worth visiting any time. It's a fair bet that the stern, aesthete modernist Joyce would have ordered the Irish black pudding with charred tomatoes over the wagyu beef burger. [Mains from £17.50; davybyrnes.com](http://Mains from £17.50; davybyrnes.com)

## James Joyce statue, North Earl Street

Despite Joyce's obsession with Dublin, it's worth remembering that he left at the age of 22 and never set up home in Ireland again. He spent the rest of his life sending letters and postcards to friends in the city, checking on microscopic details about shopfronts and street addresses. A century on, opposite a burrito shop and a noodle bar on the pedestrianised North Earl Street, Joyce stands immortalised in brass and resplendent in a jaunty hat, left, leaning on his cane and with an expression that some describe as wry. Others, however, call the statue “the prick with the stick”.

## Need to know

The centre is closed until the end of February because of Covid restrictions; check the website for opening dates and online *Ulysses* 100 events





# The Times hotel guide Fairmont Windsor Park Egham

Food ★★★★★  
Location ★★★★★  
Rooms ★★★★★

## What's the story?

It's a big year for the Queen, and it's quite big for one of her neighbours too. Surinder Arora, one of the UK's most successful hoteliers, has opened his latest venture in 40 acres adjacent to Windsor Great Park. He has grand ambitions for the £200 million resort, aiming to take on rivals including Gleneagles for the title of the country's grandest country estate.

## What do we like?

Many overworked waiters have a frazzled look these days, but the Fairmont has a surfeit of smiling staff at its seven restaurants and bars, as friendly as they are efficient and a grounding foil to the hotel's glitziness. On arrival, cars sweep up a drive

The hotel's façade



A Deluxe Double room



wrapped in baize-like lawns, over a toytown bridge to a sprawling mansion, a faithful replica of the Jacobean manor house that previously occupied the spot.

In the cream-stone atrium lobby the vibe turns more Gilded Age, with a striking glass dome 50ft above. From here, choose your afternoon's tempo: the hushed, wood-panelled library,

perfect for reading the papers with a whisky; the dainty Orchid Tea Room, with staff hidden behind well-laden cake stands; or the seriously glamorous spa.

The hydrotherapy pool in the last isn't open yet, but the light-filled indoor pool — with a frothy cherry blossom tree at one end — does well to compensate. The cryotherapy chamber provides a three-minute blast at minus 110C; Queen's *Don't Stop Me Now* plays as my therapist counts down the last 60 seconds, which seem to last at least five minutes.

A very British dinner is served at the elegant 1215 restaurant, named after the year that Magna Carta was sealed in nearby Runnymede. The smoked cauliflower with Lancashire cheese and

Susan d'Arcy was a guest of Fairmont Windsor Park, which has B&B doubles from £442; mains from £15 (fairmont-windsorpark.com)



onion tea is excellently balanced, as is the Cornish halibut with dulse butter and caviar, while the Great Charter cocktail is a moreish concoction of sherry, apricot liqueur, house IPA, dry curacao and hopped bitters.

The rooms and suites — more than 200 of them — are spacious and so restrained that they would border on the bland were it not for their delicate Van Gogh Almond Blossom wallpaper.

## What's near by?

It's a one-hour stroll through the park to Windsor, where the 11th-century castle hunkers down on a ridge above the Thames. The high-octane rides of Thorpe Park Resort (thorpepark.com) and family-friendly Legoland (legolandholidays.co.uk) are near by. **Susan d'Arcy**



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# Travel doctor

## Solving your holiday dilemmas



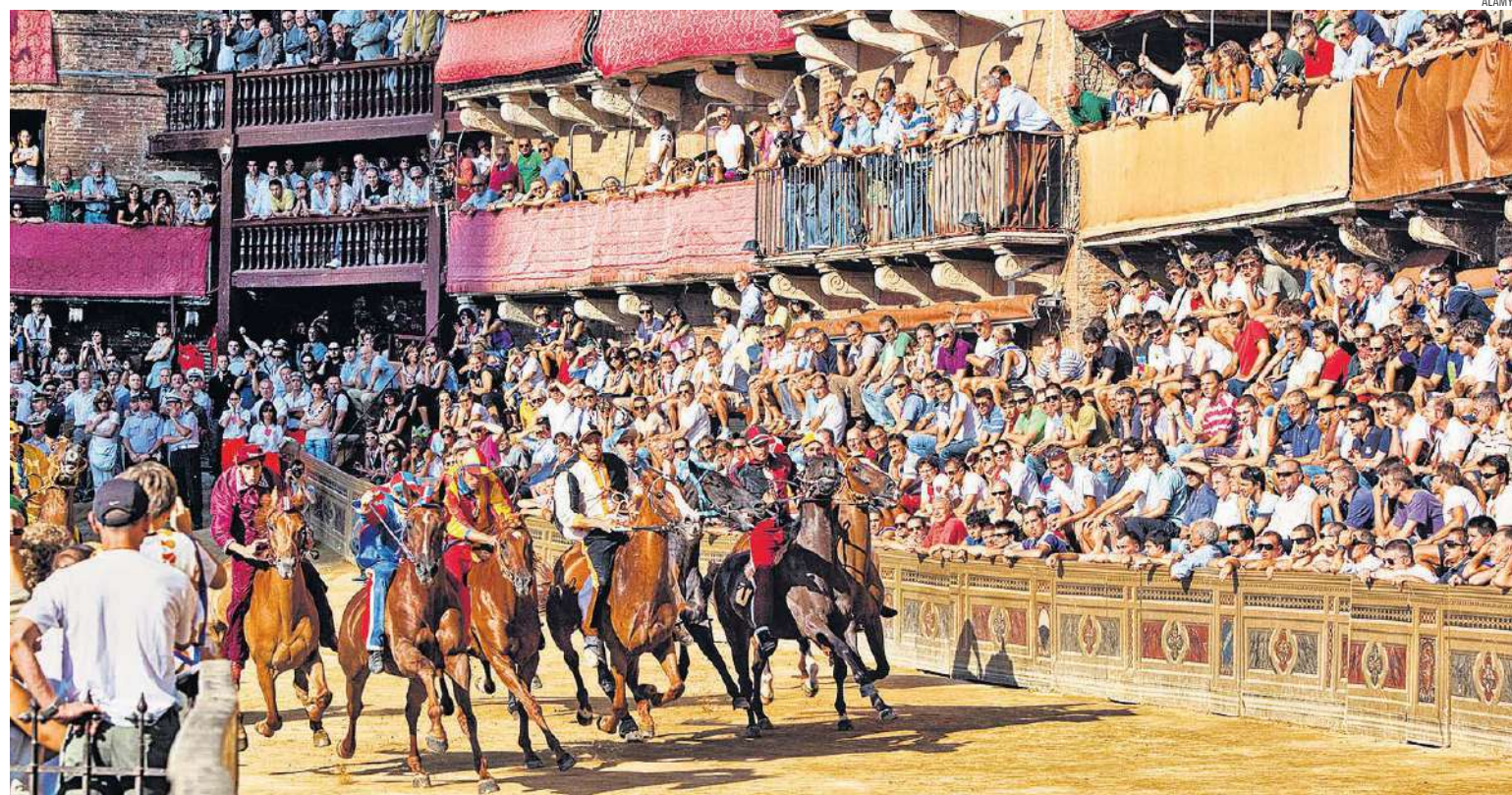
**Julia Brookes**  
Consumer expert

**Q** We booked tickets to see the Palio in Siena in July 2020. We rebooked for 2021, but still no joy. We were hopeful for 2022 until we read that your last Covid jab needs to be less than 180 days old; our last vaccinations were in November. It's not looking like we will be offered a fourth injection and we aren't aware that we can pay for private jabs. Any advice? We are desperate to go.  
*Susan Owen, via email*

**A** You're one of many readers anxious about their upcoming trips to Italy. The new rule came into effect on Tuesday and meant that any UK traveller who had their final vaccination more than 180 days ago would have to self-isolate on arrival for five days, inform the local authorities of their arrival and take a test to exit quarantine. But just a day later the Italian government announced that its Green Pass will have unlimited validity for the triple-vaccinated. So travellers who are boosted can enter Italy and your July trip can go ahead as planned.

A three-night Palio package including tickets to the race, in which horses from 10 of Siena's 17 districts gallop around the Campo, plus flights and B&B in a 17th-century hotel with a pool on the outskirts of the city, starts at £995pp (citalia.com).

**Q** I am triple-vaccinated and returned from a foreign holiday on January 5. My day two PCR test was positive, and the result was reported via the NHS app. I have completed my isolation and plan to travel to Barbados on February 20. However, Barbados protocol states that I need a negative PCR test result to enter, and the UK government says that you shouldn't have a PCR within 90 days of a positive test. The Barbados embassy told me that I need a recovery certificate, but I can't get it because my Covid records on the



The Palio horse race in Siena and, below, the harbourfront in Cassis

**NHS app don't show my positive result — according to NHS 119 this is because the test was done by a private company, even though that was in line with UK government rules. If I test positive before travel, could I get a refund? I'm flying with Tui to go on a Marella cruise.**  
*Michael Owen, via email*

**A** Where to start? So many of the government's regulations on travel testing don't seem to have been thought through. For you, the good news is that while Tui advises you should still take a PCR test because that's part of the entry requirements for Barbados, if the test returns a positive result you can change your holiday free of charge up to the day of your scheduled departure. If the new holiday you pick is more expensive, you'll have to pay the difference; if it's cheaper, you'll get the difference back. You can't, however, have a refund.

**Q** We are arriving in Marseilles mid-September and would like to stay near a sandy beach within walking distance of a town. We like public transport, so buses or trains near by would be ideal. Our budget is up to £1,500 for a week.  
*Jo Bedford, via email*

**A** The Provençal seaport of Cassis is less than 20 minutes by train from Marseille-St Charles station and ticks all your boxes. It's small and conducive to walking, with several lovely beaches, including the sandy Plage de la Grande Mer, in the town centre. Stay a ten-minute walk away at Jardin d'Emile opposite beautiful, although rocky, Bestouan beach. A week in a seaview room with a balcony costs £1,408 in September. There's a bar and pizzeria in front of the hotel, and you can stroll to the harbour and hop on a boat to see the three calanques (coves) near by (lavitedescalanques.com), or take the 45-minute tour on the tourist train to the Port Miou peninsula (ot-cassis.com).

**Q** My two sons grew up in Zimbabwe and flew there in December with Emirates. They were scheduled to come back to the UK early last month, but Emirates cancelled their return leg three times then put them on a flight several days later. They are 18 and 20, and needed to get back for work and university — plus they had to pay for extra accommodation and living expenses. When Emirates cancelled the flight yet again, we decided we couldn't leave them there any longer (particularly as there was no guarantee that Emirates wouldn't carry on doing

this for months), so we had to buy flights to the UK with Qatar, at considerable cost. Emirates offered a mere £100 per ticket as a refund. Surely it had a duty of care to get them back with another airline, or at least to refund the full cost of their tickets?  
*Jan Hounsell, via email*

**A** Emirates told me that when your sons were booked to travel, the UAE authorities had suspended entry to inbound and transit passengers from many countries, including Zimbabwe. In addition, passengers who had been in Zimbabwe in the previous 14 days weren't allowed to enter or transit through Dubai. So Emirates couldn't operate in Zimbabwe until the suspension was lifted, on January 29. Emirates wasn't obliged under UK law to offer your sons flights back home on an alternative airline because it's neither a UK nor an EU airline, and its policy for partially used tickets is to allow passengers to apply for refunds for the unused portions of their journey. It apologised for any inconvenience.

### Contact us

If you have a gripe, suggestion or question relating to your holidays, please email [traveldoctor@thetimes.co.uk](mailto:traveldoctor@thetimes.co.uk)

### Don't put up with this

Expedia refused to pay up for error

In September we bought our student daughter a return Chicago-Newcastle ticket with Expedia for £450 so that she could come home for Christmas. The American Airlines flights were changed three times, and each time we received an email from Expedia

telling us of the proposed change, with the new itineraries emailed to us, so it was a shock when she arrived at check-in and was told that she didn't have a ticket. It turned out that Expedia hadn't passed on the changes to the airline and could do nothing to help before the flight closed. We had to buy our daughter a ticket for the next flight to Heathrow, costing more than £600, then get her to Newcastle by train because there were no connecting flights available. We also had to buy her a separate ticket to return to the US. Expedia has refunded us the £450 for the original

flight but refuses to do anything about the added expenses. Can you help?  
*David Flavell, via email*

This was obviously Expedia's mistake, so it's ridiculous that it refused to reimburse you. It has now had a change of heart and apologised. "Our team will be contacting the customer directly to confirm a refund for the [Chicago-to-Heathrow] flight ticket value and to gather costs for any other out-of-pocket expenses incurred, including the train ticket and flight back to Chicago," it said.\*

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\*From price applies to departures on 17/10/22. A ESTA visa must be obtained before travel. Please note availability is limited for our lead-in from price. All offers are subject to availability & can be withdrawn without notice. Price shown includes return flights, accommodation, all internal travel, entry fees & English-speaking guides throughout. Price based on flights out of London; regional airports available & at a supplement. Terms & conditions apply, for further details and detailed itineraries please visit [mercuryholidays.co.uk](http://mercuryholidays.co.uk).



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#### MARCH 2023

Mon 27 **Fly FREE<sup>>></sup> from London to Miami, Florida, USA<sup>^</sup>.**  
Upon arrival, transfer to a hotel for your overnight stay. Book a Concierge Suite (D) or above and enjoy a **FREE** upgraded hotel stay<sup>^</sup>

Tue 28 **Miami, Florida, USA**  
Transfer to the port and embark the 6★ *Seven Seas Navigator*<sup>®</sup> for your 24 night all-inclusive voyage to the Caribbean & Amazon

Fri 31 **Basseterre, St. Kitts** (arrive late am)

#### APRIL 2023

Sat 1 **Castries, St. Lucia**

Sun 2 **Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago**

Wed 5 **★Cruising the Amazon River★**  
Everyone knows the name, but only an intrepid handful of travellers get to experience the remarkable sights and sounds of the Amazon. Sail along the vast Amazon River as it flows through the heart of the world's largest tropical rainforest on a holiday with a difference. Immerse yourself in exoticism; search for vivacious wildlife as you float amongst trees

Thu 6 **Santarém, Brazil** (arrive late am) ★*Amazon River*★  
★Recommended FREE Excursion\*: **River Tour and Eco Maica Lake**  
Cruise by local riverboat along two different rivers that meet near Santarém, but don't mix immediately.

Watch the waters of the Tapajós and the Amazon flow in parallel – one stream clear, the other muddy. Anchor at the entrance to Maica Lake, an ecological utopia alive with primal rainforest, birds, monkeys, sloths and other wildlife

Fri 7 **Boca da Valeria, Brazil** (depart early pm) ★*Amazon River*★

Sat 8 - Sun 9 **Manaus, Brazil** (overnight) ★*Amazon River*★  
★Recommended FREE Excursion\*: **Meeting of the Waters Cruise**  
Cruise a lake where giant water lilies grow and visit the famous spot where two rivers of different colours flow side-by-side for several miles

Mon 10 **Parintins, Brazil** (arrive late am) ★*Amazon River*★

Tue 11 **Alter do Chão, Brazil** ★*Amazon River*★

Wed 12 **★Cruising the Amazon River★**

Sat 15 **Bridgetown, Barbados** (arrive late am)

Sun 16 **Roseau, Dominica**  
★Recommended FREE Excursion\*: **Whale & Dolphin Safari**  
Cruise into the crystalline waters off Dominica to observe whales and dolphins. Marvel at the massive size of the whales that breach the water's surface

Mon 17 **Gustavia, St. Barts**

Tue 18 **San Juan, Puerto Rico** (depart early pm)

Thu 20 **Great Stirrup Cay, Bahamas** (arrive late am)

Fri 21 **Miami, Florida, USA**  
Disembark and transfer to the airport for your **FREE<sup>>></sup>** overnight flight to London<sup>^</sup>

Sat 22 **Arrive in London**

Dates not mentioned are spent relaxing at sea

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Deluxe Veranda Suite	F <sup>*</sup>	£12,459	£9,199
<b>FREE DOUBLE UPGRADE to a Concierge Suite (D)<sup>^</sup></b>			
Penthouse Suite	C	£13,519	£10,299
<b>FREE DOUBLE UPGRADE to a Penthouse Suite (A)<sup>^</sup></b>			

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STATEROOM/SUITE	FULL FARE (PP)	READER OFFERS LTD FARE FROM (PP)
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Balcony	£1,679	<b>£1,199</b>
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STATEROOM/SUITE	FULL FARE (PP)	READER OFFERS LTD FARE FROM (PP)
Inside	£1,759	<b>£1,399</b>
Ocean View	£2,159	<b>£1,799</b>
<b>FREE upgrade to a Balcony Stateroom<sup>*</sup></b>		
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AquaClass®	£2,810	<b>£2,329</b>
Suite	£4,399	<b>£3,199</b>

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Itinerary, fares & availability are based on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2022 departure

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### YOUR ALL-INCLUSIVE READER OFFERS LTD SALE FARES FROM

STATEROOM/SUITE	FULL FARE (PP)	READER OFFERS LTD FARE FROM (PP)
Inside	£2,139	<b>£1,799</b>
Oceanview	£2,320	<b>£1,959</b>
Balcony	£2,779	<b>£2,299</b>
Concierge Class	£2,979	<b>£2,499</b>
Sky Suite	£5,059	<b>£3,859</b>

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