

# Escape: UK breaks

# The bee's knees of British B&Bs!

**B**&Bs are perfect for the millions of us who enjoy this singularly British way of staying a night or two away from home.

by **MARTIN SYMMINGTON**

It all comes down to being treated as guests, not clients. True, B&Bs all over Britain have had a fight on their hands in recent times, with budget hotel chains making inroads and part-time landlords touting rooms on websites such as Airbnb. But traditional B&Bs are thriving, because the best offer experiences that cannot be replicated or manufactured. You are welcomed into a home, not simply a business. Your hosts have plenty of local

knowledge. And while the room is your private domain, guests mingle in other areas of the house. The bar is often in the lounge and breakfast is home-cooked, sometimes at a communal table.

The Top Ten B&Bs we have selected here, from around England, Scotland and Wales, are our subjective choices. Each offers something

truly special, though scores of others could easily have made the cut.

Hike the hills, sample British wine, explore a city or discover fascinating local history. Each B&B we have chosen provides a chance to immerse yourself in a little patch of Britain.

None of them have restaurants, so we also suggest somewhere near by for dinner.

## Dorset House, Lyme Regis

LYME has been abuzz lately, with Kate Winslet and Saoirse Ronan shooting the new romantic drama *Ammonite*, out next year. It is the biggest celebrity excitement the seaside town has seen since 1981 and Meryl Streep in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

Savour the views across Lyme Bay and the Jurassic Coast from the upper-storey bedrooms in this striking Regency house. Each is differently styled and furnished by owners Lyn and Jason Martin, who bubble with fossil-hunting and cinematic anecdotes while they cook breakfast on the Aga. In the snug sitting room, an honesty bar includes English sparkling wine from nearby Castlewood Vineyard.

**DINNER TIME:** Hix Oyster and Fish House, [hixrestaurants.co.uk](http://hixrestaurants.co.uk), 01297 446910 is just moments away. Locally landed fish, as fresh as you'll find.

**BOOK IT:** From £105. There is usually a two-night minimum stay. [dorsethouse Lyme.co.uk](http://dorsethouse Lyme.co.uk), 01297 442055.

## The Old Rectory, Cornwall

SALLY and Chris Searle's thoughtful little extras for guests at their Victorian former rectory include freshly cut flowers in your room from the garden and a newspaper under your door to read in bed. If you have been rambling along the North Cornish coast, they will even pop your clothes in the washing machine. The couple are fans of all things sustainable: power from solar panels; home-grown organic fruit at breakfast from the walled garden; free-range eggs from their hens.

**DINNER TIME:** The Searles offer free evening lifts to and from Bosccastle, where our pick of the restaurants is The Riverside, [riversideboscastle.co.uk](http://riversideboscastle.co.uk), 01840 250216.

**BOOK IT:** From £95. [stjuliot.com](http://stjuliot.com), 01840 250225.

## Number Thirty-Eight Clifton, Bristol

HIGH up in hilly Bristol, this double-fronted Georgian merchant's house, now a classy B&B, faces the green expanse of Clifton Downs in one direction, the honey-coloured stone of university buildings in the other. There are commanding views from the roof terrace, where you can savour a cream tea or evening cocktail. The rooms have huge beds and antique furniture.

**DINNER TIME:** Myriad options in chic Clifton village. For a high-end Indian feast, try Nutmeg, [nutmegbristol.com](http://nutmegbristol.com), 0117 360 0288.

**BOOK IT:** From £115. [number38clifton.com](http://number38clifton.com), 0117 946 6905.

## Underleigh House, Derbyshire

THE location of this 19th-century Derbyshire stone 'longhouse' with four guest rooms, in the Peak District National Park, is peerless.

It makes a perfect base for week-



PICTURES: ANDY PICKARD/PONDEN HALL; MARIA STENGARD-GREEN



## COTSWOLDS

end hikers, and is stuffed with quirks and character.

After a big breakfast round the communal table with fellow guests, head out to the sheep-cropped peaks. There are maps and walking suggestions in the sitting room, and hosts Philip and Vivienne Taylor can offer plenty of tips.

**DINNER TIME:** Home-made pies and frothing ale half a mile down the road at The Cheshire Cheese Inn, [thecheshirecheeseinn.co.uk](http://thecheshirecheeseinn.co.uk), 01433 620381.

**BOOK IT:** From £110. [underleigh-house.co.uk](http://underleigh-house.co.uk), 01433 621372.

## Llwyn Helig, South Wales

QUIRKINESS and panache are in evidence from the moment you cross the threshold of this colonnaded modern country house in the quiet Tywi valley, northwest of Swansea. The three guest bedrooms are palatial, with marble and granite bathrooms designed by the owners, Caron and Fiona Jones.

The 'Listening Room', kitted out with a gig-quality music system and enormous speakers, is truly one of a kind. Music lovers in the know pop on their own CDs and there are themed evenings ranging from Pink Floyd to Paganini. Ruby Wax and Dame Judi Dench are claimed as regular visitors.

**DINNER TIME:** Y Polyn, [ypolyn.co.uk](http://ypolyn.co.uk), 01267 290000, is three miles away.



## YORKSHIRE

**Overnight successes:** Clockwise from top, The Beeches; Ponden Hall; Woodchester Valley

The gourmet pub/restaurant cooks gutsy suppers made from local ingredients.

**BOOK IT:** From £135. [llwynheligcountry-house.co.uk](http://llwynheligcountry-house.co.uk), 01558 668778.

## Woodchester Valley, Gloucestershire

A RESTORED barn in a sea of vines, with views of wooded hills and church spires beyond. But this isn't Burgundy. Rather, we are near Stroud in the heart of the Cotswolds.

Nevertheless, the vineyard and winery are producing pinot noirs and blanc de blancs of a quality that would make the *vignerons* of Beaune turn green with envy. Sip a glass or two of vintage Gloucestershire while staying in one of the large, airy suites, which have plate-glass windows and balconies.

Breakfasts are continental, but, *mon dieu*, the crumpets are as English as those in any Cotswolds tearshop.

**DINNER TIME:** Wild Garlic ([wild-garlic.co.uk](http://wild-garlic.co.uk), 01453 835483), in Nailsworth, a mile and a half away. Simply styled décor and imaginative dishes served with artistic flourishes.

**BOOK IT:** From £130, minimum stay two nights at weekends. [woodchestervalley-vineyard.co.uk](http://woodchestervalley-vineyard.co.uk), 07808 650883.

## 94DR, Edinburgh

OWNERS John MacEwan and Paul Lightfoot have stamped their own slightly zany, emphatically north-of-the-border style on

this unique guesthouse. Witty works by modern Scottish painters and sculptors are scattered around.

Breakfast in a bright orangery takes 'full Scottish' to new heights, with a daily seasonal special such as 'tricolore' (a toasted bagel with avocado, mozzarella and tomato).

The address — 94 Dalkeith Road, on Edinburgh's south side — is a five-minute stroll from Holyrood House and the foot of Arthur's Seat; there are free bikes to borrow for a short pedal to the city centre.

The six main bedrooms are named after single malt whiskies, and there is a 'wee dram' bunk room for the warmly welcomed little 'uns.

**DINNER TIME:** With Conditia ([conditia.co.uk](http://conditia.co.uk), 0131 667 5777) just around the corner and recently awarded a Michelin star, it's surely worth pushing the boat out.

**BOOK IT:** From £80. [94dr.co.uk](http://94dr.co.uk), 0131 662 9265.

## Ponden Hall, Yorkshire

WITH grey stone walls, mullioned windows and flagstone floors, this Elizabethan farmhouse has strong connections to the Brontë sisters. Your effervescent hostess, Julie Akhurst, will tell you that Emily and Charlotte used Ponden's library — and that in size and style the house is similar to Wuthering Heights itself.

She can point out further historical and literary details in each of three bedrooms, with their raftered ceilings and log stoves.

If you need to stretch your legs, fill your lungs and work up an appetite, the Pennine Way passes near by.

**DINNER TIME:** There are pubs with grub in the villages of Haworth and Oldfield. Somebody from Ponden will ferry you there are back for no charge, bless them.

**BOOK IT:** FROM £95. [ponden-hall.co.uk](http://ponden-hall.co.uk), 01535 648608.

## The Beeches, Barcombe, East Sussex

THE Beeches warrants a stay simply for being a rambling, romantic, red-brick country house on the South Downs.

However, the real draw is the exquisite walled garden created by owner Sandy

## SOUTH DOWNS

Coppen and the horticultural courses she runs year-round. 'Design your own garden', 'Fruit tree pruning', 'Roses'... each is led by an expert lecturer.

For residents, days begin with breakfast

around Sandy's Aga. There is freshly pressed apple juice from the orchard and honey from hives in the garden.

**DINNER TIME:** The Royal Oak ([royaloakbarcombe.co.uk](http://royaloakbarcombe.co.uk), 01273 400418) is a mile away in Barcombe village. Traditional pub fare plus a few fancier offerings.

**BOOK IT:** From £120. [thebeechesbarcombe.com](http://thebeechesbarcombe.com), 01273 401339.

## Craigmhór Lodge, Pitlochry, Scotland

A VICTORIAN lodge, this glorious bolthole is tucked away in woodland on the edge of Pitlochry, on the doorstep of wildly beautiful Highland Perthshire.

The 12 spacious rooms, around three sides of a courtyard, are subtly styled to reflect the surroundings and come with thoughtful touches such as espresso machines.

Craigmhór truly comes into its own at breakfast: persuasive owners and hosts Calum and Jane MacLennan may try to tempt you with a tot of whisky on your porridge, before you tackle the free-range Perthshire eggs with Ayrshire bacon and Stornoway black pudding.

**DINNER TIME:** Victoria's ([victorias-pitlochry.co.uk](http://victorias-pitlochry.co.uk), 01796 472670). The haggis bombons rolled in Japanese panko crumbs may just be a world first.

**BOOK IT:** From £135. 01796 472123. [craigmhorlodge.co.uk](http://craigmhorlodge.co.uk). All prices are per night for a double/twin room, including breakfast.

■ **MORE ideas:** *Savday's Great Bed & Breakfast Guide*; *The Good Hotel Guide 2020*; *The AA B&B Guide*.

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