

FEATURES

Six of the best: Posh UK holiday homes

Hiring a house doesn't have to mean domestic drudgery. At these upmarket retreats across Britain, that's what the staff are for

Daisy Finer Published: 1 May 2011

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For the truly wild child (plus parents): Hafod Cae Maen, Gwynedd

Unruly brood? You can all make as much noise as you like at this Edwardian villa, hidden in sprawling gardens on the edge of Snowdonia National Park. But you'll probably be silenced by the view – over the Dwyryd Estuary and on to the remote Rhinog mountains beyond.

Reach the house by deserted private road and you'll discover a mansion big enough for an extended family, or a reunion of friends: two king-sized bedrooms (one with a four-poster and balcony), two twin bedrooms and two bathrooms – as well as space for travel cots. It has oodles of character, too: a wood-burning stove, a library with panelling designed by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis (the architect of nearby Portmeirion village) and even a piano for a singsong.

Come for strolls through sub-tropical woodlands, sunny days in the garden, and picnics on deserted beaches (children can swim safely at low tide). A little further afield, explore 13th-century Harlech Castle and go for rides at Greenwood Forest Park. With optional housekeeping and catering services, daily cleaning and homely catered meals – from perfect pastas to heart-warming casseroles – are just a phone call away.

Details: From £1,300 per week, or £600 for a three-night break, for up to eight people; cleaning service from £20 per day; meals from £12.50pp (07776 259768, www.historichouseretreats.com).

For stuffing your face: The Mill at Mesmeur, Cornwall

There's a weighty issue to consider at this four-bed house near Polzeath: it's impossible to visit and not put on a pound or two. The delicious meals served here are homemade from local produce. Beef and lamb are reared on the farm, and fish comes from nearby Port Isaac. Breakfasts, afternoon teas (the chef bakes a diet-be-damned cake every day), three-course dinners and wine are all included. (Nicking the 6pm childrens' supper could be a temptation, too, with homemade fish fingers and mini fruit crumbles on the menu.)

Made from Cornish slate and stone, The Mill at Mesmeur is an 18th-century barn that's kept its character, but added a dash of 21st-century style and comfort. The little ones will love The Cabin, a bunk-bedded room that sleeps three, with a bubblegum-pink Barbie Doll bus and a large model of a pirate ship to keep them entertained. Grown-ups, meanwhile, can take their pick of the other three bedrooms – all chic and calmingly neutral (although one stands out with a freestanding tub at the foot of the bed, surrounded by twinkly floor lights). Buckets and spades are on hand for trips to the countless beaches nearby, and there's a heated pool, too.

Details: One week from £3,500 for up to nine people, including breakfast, afternoon tea, three-course dinner with wine and housekeeping service on six days (01208 869731, www.mesmeur.co.uk).

For playing at gentry: Queenwood Lodge, Wiltshire

A handsome four-bedroom Georgian lodge in the middle of Capability Brown parkland, this is the quintessential Sunday-night period-drama setting. Hidden on the blissfully quiet estate of Bowood (home to the Marquises of Lansdowne for 250 years), it's a fine place to settle in with friends and play the local lord.

True, the lodge is tucked amid oak trees on the edge of Bowood's championship golf course, but the upside is immaculate, bottle-green views – and it'll make golf geeks very happy indeed. They can head out for a round while less sporty guests can potter in the dappled sunshine of a garden filled with butterflies and roses, or consume cream teas by the fire at the lodge.

The current Lady Lansdowne (who used to work at interior design company Colefax and Fowler) conjured the decor – antique furniture, Regency stripes – in the best possible taste. Colossal breakfasts set you up for the day, while supper is a candlelit three-course feast. The service is the icing on the cake. Homemade biscuits and pots of tea magically appear. Beds quietly make themselves. Games are tidied away. If you ask nicely, someone can even visit to help you with your golf swing.

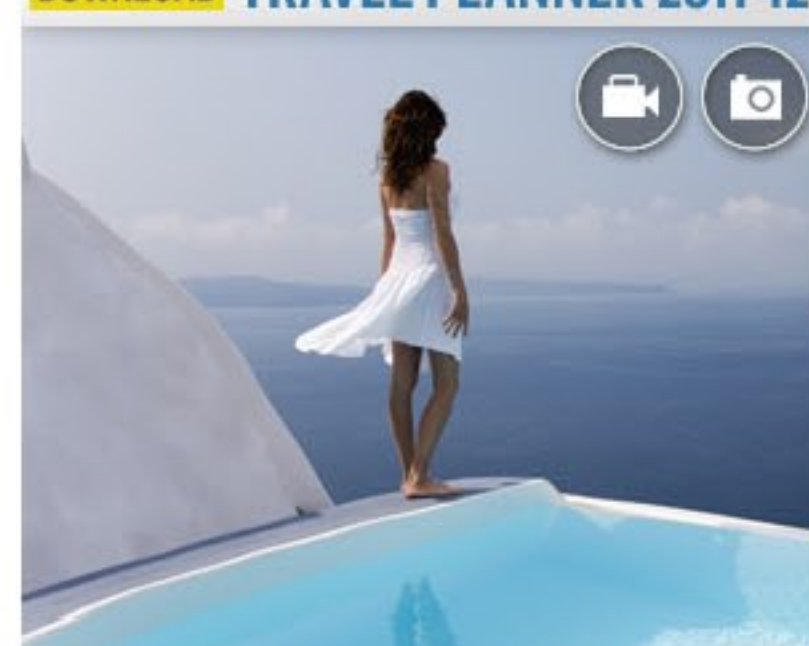
Details: From £1,540 per night for up to eight, half board, with two rounds of golf, use of the hotel spa and, from April to October, entrance to Bowood House & Gardens (01249 822228, www.bowood-hotel.co.uk)

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