

Britain's 50 best cottages, beach houses and rural retreats



1 The Oyster Catcher's Grade II listed 17th -century net loft is decorated in Scandinavian chic style

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Whether it's a cosy break for two large or a large family gathering, Liz Bird finds the perfect places to stay

Chic retreats

1 The Oyster Catcher Mousehole, Cornwall

Scandinavian seaside chic sums up the interior of this Grade II listed 17th-century net loft on Mousehole's harbour. The living areas are on the first floor, making the most of the lofty proportions and harbour views. Downstairs are two bedrooms with window seats and a bathroom.

Details Three nights for four from £805, one week from £1,150 (01637 881942, uniquehomestays.com).

2 Shore Croft near Durness, North West Scotland

Marvel at the views from the outdoor roll-top bath of this glass-fronted croft on Loch Eriboll. The interior is sleek and features a 7ft bespoke bed and designer furniture. Walk along the rugged coastline of Cape Wrath with its 19th-century lighthouse — there's a chance you'll spot seals, dolphins, puffins and whales.

Details A week for two from £1,200 (0844 5005101, underthethatch.co.uk).

3 Priory Barn Weybourne, Norfolk

This spacious Grade II listed brick and flint barn has beamed ceilings and a contemporary interior. Have dinner at the unusual dining table, suspended from the ceiling, or challenge the family to a game of table football — or the real thing in the spacious garden. A shingle beach is 300m away while the Norfolk coastal path runs through the village.

Details Three nights for 10 from £988.20, or £1,821 for a week (01386 701177, ruralretreats.co.uk)

4 Petite Maison Polperro, south Cornwall

The romantic French-style interior of this elegant whitewashed cottage is filled with ornate furnishings. Upstairs are two en suite bedrooms with intricately painted double beds. A stone patio overlooks the river while across a small bridge the fishing village of Polperro awaits.

Details Three nights for four from £381, a week from £480 (0844 7044987, bluechipholidays.co.uk).

5 Natural Retreats Richmond, North Yorkshire

These wooden eco-friendly lodges feature panoramic glass walls which look onto the Swale Valley. There's a chic kitchen island in the wood-floored living area. Walk along the River Swale to the Georgian market town of Richmond.

Details Three nights for six from £410, a week from £658 (0844 3843166, www.naturalretreats.com).

6 O'Sullivan House Salcombe, Devon

Hire a boat and launch it from the mooring below this architect-designed house with spectacular 180-degree estuary views. That's if you can tear yourself away from one of the two terraces overlooking the water. An open-plan living/dining area spans the length of the house and there are four bedrooms with water views. Take the ferry to East Portlemouth for the beaches.

Details A week for 10 from £1,500 (01647 434063, www.helpfulholidays.com).

7 The Cart Barn Wiltshire

Flooded with light, this simple but stylish former cart shed has floor-to-ceiling windows and French doors overlooking a pretty garden. One of the upstairs bedrooms has a roll-top bath in the en suite. The barn is a half-hour drive from Salisbury,

Stonehenge and Stourhead.

Details Three nights for four from £370, a week from £529 (01747 828170, hideaways.co.uk).

Family

8 Ivy Roost Cottage

New Forest, Hampshire

Spot New Forest ponies from the roof terrace of this luxurious, thatched cottage which dates back 400 years. Original features blend with the open-plan areas of the modern extension. Outside there is a large garden with a swing and a hot tub.

Details Three nights for nine from £500; a week is from £1,150 (07788 871609, premiercottages.co.uk).

9 Mermaid Cottage

Portscatho, Cornwall

Pull back the folding glass doors of this boutique bolthole by the sea to eat alfresco on the deck. The top-floor dorm with four single beds is perfect for little ones, while a path at the end of the garden leads to sandy Porthcurnick Beach.

Details Three nights for ten from £1,050, a week from £1,750 (01872 553491, boutique-retreats.co.uk).

10 Pudding Cottage

Windermere, Cumbria

Set in the heart of Beatrix Potter's Lake District, this comfortable 18th-century cottage ticks all the boxes for families. As well as a handy supply of nursery gear and toys, there's an indoor and outdoor kids play centre a short walk away and complimentary use of a nearby leisure club with indoor pool. Take a steamer trip across Lake Windermere, hire a rowing boat or visit the World of Beatrix Potter.

Details Three nights for six from £390, a week from £550 (0845 4890140, babyfriendlyboltholes.co.uk).

11 Monks Bay Cottage

Bonchurch, Isle of Wight

Go rockpooling at the sheltered sandy beach a few minutes' walk from this Victorian cottage near the south coast resort of Ventnor. There are numerous light-filled rooms with sea views, and features such as stone fireplaces and vaulted ceilings.

Details Three nights for eight from £600, a week from £800 (01983 852398, oceanbluecoastalretreats.co.uk).

12 Ty Gwyn Farmhouse

Whitesands Bay, Pembrokeshire

This whitewashed farmhouse overlooks Pembrokeshire's most famous beach with a mile-long stretch of golden sand. There's a great surf school and plenty of other adrenaline-fuelled activities such as whitewater rafting and jetboat rides. See the colony of grey seals on Ramsey Island, or walk along the coastal path for lunch at the The Sloop Inn on Porthgain Harbour.

Details A week for nine from £699 (01348 837871, qualitycottages.com).

13 Pentop Cottage

Penmachno, Snowdonia

Set in the heart of Snowdonia National Park, this recently restored traditional Welsh gamekeeper's cottage, makes an ideal base for active families. Go zipwiring or join the mountain bike trail that starts on your doorstep.

Details Two nights for four from £172, £326 for a week (0844 5005101, underthethatch.co.uk).

14 Railway Cottage

Bicknoller, Somerset

This rural retreat offers stunning views of the Quantock Hills. Erected by none other than Isambard Kingdom Brunel while he was building the West Somerset Steam Railway, the three-bedroom cottage has modern decor, including a Shaker-style kitchen and there's a wonderful period bath in the main bathroom. Explore the wilderness of Exmoor, or visit Cheddar Gorge.

Details Three nights for six from £400, a week from £570 (0845 5195822, uniqueholidaycottages.co.uk).

15 Bruern Holiday Cottages

Oxfordshire

It's hard to beat the kids' facilities at Bruern cottages, set in gardens near Chipping Norton. Younger children will love the play cabins while older ones will enjoy the games room. There's also a heated indoor pool and spa. The decor features antiques and marble washbasins. Pre-order meals from the in-house chefs.

Details Three nights for four from £521, a week from £613 (01993 830415, bruern-holiday-cottages.co.uk).

Views

16 Tigh na Mara

Salen, Argyll

On the wild and beautiful Ardnamurchan Peninsula, this modern open-plan house offers breathtaking views of Loch Sunart and the surrounding hills. Explore the loch by boat from one of the two private beaches. The peninsula is renowned for its sand beaches and abundant wildlife.

Details Four nights for eight from £495, a week from £650 (01835 822277, uniquecottages.co.uk).

17 Signal Box

Newtonmore, Highlands

Trains stop at the station next to this elevated nine-year-old cottage resembling a signal box in the Cairngorms National Park. To capitalise on the panorama of the River Spey and surrounding mountains, the open-plan living area is on the first floor with wrap-around windows. Downstairs is one bedroom, a shower room and sauna. Explore the picturesque village featured in the Monarch of the Glen TV series or hike the Wildcat Trail.

Details A week for four from £440 (01244 352300, sykescottages.co.uk).

18 Hause Hall Farm

Martindale, Cumbria

This Grade II listed stone farmhouse and adjoining barn offer spectacular fell views. The local author Alfred Wainwright once described the walk from the base of nearby Hallin Fell as “the most beautiful and rewarding in Lakeland”. The main house, featuring cast-iron fireplaces, roll-top baths and an Aga, has five-bedrooms, with a further two across a courtyard. The Michelin-starred Sharrow Bay Hotel is one mile away.

Details Three nights for 14 from £988.20 or £1,638.90 for a week (01386 701177, ruralretreats.co.uk).

19 The Thyme House

Howarth, West Yorkshire

Jaw-dropping vistas of the bleak but beautiful moors abound from this Victorian cottage in the heart of Brontë country. Set over three floors with a conservatory, garden room and terrace, the semi-detached house has five en suite bedrooms. The Brontë Parsonage Museum is a few minutes’ walk away.

Details Three nights for ten from £695, a week from £795 (01244 352300, skyescottages.co.uk).

20 Parford Cottage

Chagford, Devon

It’s unusual to find a small self-catering property with its own outdoor heated pool, particularly in the heart of Dartmoor National Park. This extended granite barn also has a stunning 33ft open-plan living and kitchen area and windows offering views across the moor. Upstairs are three en suite bedrooms.

Details Three nights for six from £414, £579 for a week (01647 434063, www.helpfulholidays.com). No children under 10 (pool open May to September).

21 Stonebarrow Lodge

Charmouth, Dorset

Sit in your hot tub and admire the spectacular Jurassic Coast from the two-acre grounds of this cedar bungalow above the bay. On inclement days, admire the panorama from the spacious sitting room or terrace. The gardens are lovely with a stream, and summerhouse. Hunt for fossils on Charmouth beach.

Details A week for six from £798 (01326 555555, classic.co.uk).

22 Battery

Portmeirion, Gwynedd

This Italianate village dreamed up by the architect William Clough-Ellis couldn’t be more idyllic with sweeping views of the River Dwyryd estuary. The weatherboard, three-bedroom Battery is has a balcony overlooking the water. At low tide stroll along the beach.

Details A week for five from £810 (01766 770000, portmeirion-village.com).

Unusual

23 Sonia, The Boat by the Sea

Cardigan, West Wales

Kids will love sleeping in this 1950’s pleasure cruiser in near the Cardigan Coast. The

snug wood-panelled interior is a delight with padded seating (which converts to two single beds for children). A double bed in the front of the boat has a glass dome for stargazing. Cook, eat and wash in a neighbouring building.

Details Three night weekend for four from £229, £344 for a week (0844 5005101, underthethatch.co.uk).

24 The Balancing Barn

Walberswick, Suffolk

This silver tile-clad house a few miles inland from Walberswick cantilevers over the landscape, offering panoramic views over woods, ponds and meadows. The interior is just as quirky with artwork by contemporary Dutch designer Jurgen Bey.

Details Four nights for eight from £810 (living-architecture.co.uk).

25 Majestic Bus

Hay-on-Wye, Herefordshire

A Sixties bus near Hay-on-Wye has been lovingly converted into a stylish eco-friendly bolthole for two. There's a double bed, kitchen, woodburner and plenty of natural light. Lovingly restored by its owners Rob and Layla, the bus was recently featured on Channel 4's *George Clarke's Amazing Spaces*. The Offa's Dyke Path is two fields away.

Details Three nights for two from £309 (01275 395447, canopyandstars.co.uk).

26 The Gatehouse

Upton Cressett, Shropshire

This 16th-century turreted house once hosted the young Edward V during his fateful journey from nearby Ludlow Castle to the Tower of London. Built as an entrance to the moated manor of Upton Cressett Hall, it has a medieval courtyard and the interior has an original Tudor fireplace. Upstairs the master bedroom has a half-tester bed and turreted bathroom.

Details Three nights for four from £459.90, a week from £836 (01386 701177, ruralretreats.co.uk)

27 Clavell Tower

Kimmeridge, Dorset

You have to book at least 12 months in advance to secure a stay at this 19th-century cliff-top tower, which was painstakingly moved, brick by brick, a few years ago, to save it from falling into the sea. It's worth planning ahead though as you'll be rewarded with incredible views of the Jurassic Coast from every window.

Details Three nights for two from £639, a week from £1,052 (01628 825925, landmarktrust.co.uk).

28 Bensfield Treehouse

Wadhurst, East Sussex

Cross a rope bridge to this luxurious treehouse for grown-ups, built around a mature oak tree. The open-plan layout features a king-size bed, wood floors, sleek kitchen and an en suite bathroom. Sit on the decked terrace to enjoy the view and listen to birdsong. Ashdown Forest is on your doorstep.

Details Three nights for two from £309, a week from £830. (01348 830922, qualityunearthed.co.uk).

29 The Shingle House

Dungeness, Kent

It seems fitting that this quirky architect-designed house set on a shingle beach against the beautiful, brooding landscape of Dungeness is close to a fisherman's hut once owned by the eccentric film-maker Derek Jarman. The simple black building has been finished with tarred shingles while inside it's all concrete, and whitewashed timber.

Details Four nights for eight from £1,545 (no weeks left for 2013). (living-architecture.co.uk).

Beach

30 The Cornish Beach House

Booby's Bay, Cornwall

Jill Stein, the former wife of the TV chef Rick, designed the interiors of this new, ultra-chic retreat on a sandy beach near Padstow. Four of the five bedrooms make the most of the views through glass balconies that overlook the sea and neighbouring golf course. There are acres of limestone, glass and steel throughout.

Details Three nights for 10 from £4,300 or £6,615 for a week (01242 220006, thewowhousecompany.co.uk).

31 Beach Bay Cottage

Uig Bay, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides

Camouflaged by a turf roof, this stone cottage merges into the hillside on the edge of the stunning white sands of Uig Bay. Marvel at the views through the 180-degree bay window in the open-plan living area, which has doors out on to a patio. After a bracing walk, warm up in the two-person sauna or hot tub. Kite surfing, cycling and fishing are also on offer.

Details A week for four from £1,060 (0845 2681086, cottages4you.co.uk).

32 The Artist's Beach House

Whitstable, Kent

This stylish clapboard house wouldn't look out of place in New England. Inside, there are bright nautically-themed bedrooms, an Arts and Crafts-style living room with an open fire and patio doors leading on to a wraparound veranda. A private road separates the house from the shingle beach. Whitstable is a few minutes' stroll.

Details Three nights for eight from £1,250, a week from £2,250 (01637 881942, uniquehomestays.com).

33 Sea Garden Cottages

Tresco, Isles of Scilly

You'd be forgiven for thinking you're in the Caribbean on a hot summer's day in the Scillies. Seapink, one of the new clutch of Sea Garden Cottages at Tresco's Island Hotel, has three light-filled bedrooms, oak flooring, original artwork, a log burner and French doors leading to a patio with great views.

Details Four nights for six from £660, a week from £1615, including Skybus flights from the mainland. (01720 422849, tresco.co.uk).

34 Bamburgh Beach House

Bamburgh, Northumberland

Beaches don't get much more dramatic than Bamburgh with miles of golden sand and a magnificent 11th-century castle. Step inside this modest-looking clapperboard house and it takes on tardis-like proportions with four bedrooms, stylish décor, including Ralph Lauren wallpaper and a wood burner. The open-plan kitchen/dining area leads on to a large landscaped garden with timber play equipment and a barbecue. Drive over to the tidal island of Lindisfarne.

Details Three nights for eight from £750, a week from £915 (0191 2851272, coastalretreats.co.uk).

35 No 2 Shore Cottages **Berriedale, near Wick, Caithness**

Dolphins are often sighted off the beach in front of this quaint row of fisherman's cottages. Inside, No 2 retains its original 19th-century features with tongue and groove panelling, flagstone floors and fireplaces. There's no TV but you won't need one. Kayak to the nearby caves frequented by seals and otters.

Details Three nights for six for £306, £465 for a week (01628 825925, landmarktrust.org.uk).

36 New England Beach House **Angmering-on-Sea, West Sussex**

Go to sleep listening to the sound of the sea at this stunning house with French doors opening on to balconies and decks overlooking the water. One of the five bedrooms has a double-ended bath with sea views and there's a hot tub in the garden. The decor is effortlessly chic with lots of cream and white furnishings, wood floors, and a battered leather Chesterfield imprinted with the American flag.

Details Three nights for 10 from £1,650, a week from £2,900 (07989 404 535, luxurycountryrentals.com).

Large

37 The Colloquy **Lyonshall, Herefordshire**

In Victorian times, The Colloquy was home to this sprawling country estate's carriages and horses. Now the pitched roofs, iron pillars and cobble floors have been joined by the kind of slick interior that wouldn't look out of place in a city loft apartment: underfloor heating, modern art, mini cinema, hot tub, squash court and outdoor heated pool.

Details Two nights for 16 from £1,925, a week from £3,150 (01544 340241, thecolloquy.com).

38 Toft Hall **Staffordshire**

This quirky, Grade II listed 17th-century house on the edge of the Peak District makes a brilliant party venue with a music room for dancing — the walls are 77cm thick, so you can crank up the volume — and a games room. Just remember to duck when you walk through the 4ft 6in doorways in the four top-floor bedrooms. The kitchen has all the latest gadgets and there's an atmospheric dining room with a stone fireplace.

Details Three nights for 20 from £2,205, £2,772 for a week (01260 226609, partyhouses.co.uk).

39 Western House

Newton Abbott, Devon

Surrounded by a magnificent two-acre garden, this sprawling 1820s country house has plenty to keep you occupied. Children will love the indoor pool and games room. There are also plenty of elegant rooms for celebrating special occasions with a grand piano and open fire in the width-of-house living room and a well-equipped kitchen. French doors lead out on to the garden with a wood and pond.

Details Three nights for 25 from £2,393, a week from £3,350 (01647 434063, www.helpfulholidays.com).

40 Norbury Manor

Ashbourne, Derbyshire

After a walk through the lush landscape of nearby Dovedale, retire to this elegant Grade I listed Queen Anne-style house with its wood-panelling, beamed ceilings and stained glass windows. Outside are spacious grounds including a medieval knot garden and a river. Guests get free entry to the 17th-century Sudbury Hall.

Details Three nights for 12 from £878, a week from £1,350 (nationaltrustcottages.co.uk).

41 The Old Mill

Oakridge Lynch, Gloucestershire

There's a higgledy piggledy feel to this pretty stone cottage with reception rooms on different levels. The decor is eclectic with antiques, high-backed sofas and modern art. Most guests congregate in the extension which has a large table and floor-to-ceiling windows. Extra guests can stay at the neighbouring Blandfords (sleeping nine), cottage with an inglenook fireplace and mullioned windows.

Details Three nights for 17 from £2,250, a week from £3,515 (01242 248177, cotswoldcottagesonline.com).

42 Dove House

Hampton, Dorset

The crowning glory of these converted farm buildings in a secluded valley at the end of a tree-lined drive is the heated indoor pool. Each of the seven bedrooms has an en suite shower or bathroom. There's a contemporary kitchen/dining area and elegant sitting room. Dorchester, Bridport and Lyme Regis are within reach.

Details Three nights for 13 from £1,850, a week from £2,300 (01305 889338, dovehousedorset.co.uk).

43 Earls Hall

Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

This sprawling mansion dating back to the 17th century is a bargain. Recently spruced up with modern bathrooms and fresh paint, it still has a relaxed, lived-in feel that makes it perfect for families. The dining room has a long table, open fire and Welsh dresser and there's an elegant living room with a woodburner and piano.

Details Three nights for 15 from £800, a week from £1,500 (07977 217780, earls-hall.co.uk).

Romantic retreats

44 The Secret Holt

Haytor, Devon

There's a fairytale feel to this wooden cabin tucked away along a country lane on the edge of Dartmoor. J. R. R. Tolkien once lived in the main house and you can imagine where he drew inspiration for *The Hobbit*. The eclectic decor includes an ornate wood fireplace, heart-shaped mirrors and antique doors. Retire to your bedroom with its en suite roll-top bath.

Details Three nights for two from £550, a week from £695 (01637 881942, uniquehomestays.com).

45 Pip's Barn

Crickhowell, Powys

On a remote hillside overlooking a valley in the Black Mountains, this stone and slate barn is the perfect place to unwind. Lime-washed walls and exposed beams are complemented by artwork, textiles and a woodburning stove. Floor-to-ceiling windows lead on to a terrace. Superb walks include one to the village of Llanbedr.

Details Three nights for two from £297, a week from £363 (01874 676446, breconcottages.com).

46 Lavender Cottage

North Yorkshire

This period property within the North Yorks Moors National Park is only 10 minutes from Whitby. There's an antique French bed, a bath big enough for two and a contemporary kitchen. Sit in the garden with its pink roses, lavender and a chiminea to warm you on chilly evenings. There's even romantic comedy DVDs to watch in the lounge with its plush sofas.

Details Three nights for two from £270, a week from £450 (0191 3789573, romanticretreats.co.uk).

47 The Hop Picker's House, Brook Farm

Berrington, Worcestershire

This pretty bolthole, tucked away in the Teme Valley near Ludlow, is perfect for garden lovers. There are nine acres to get lost in with babbling brooks and a hammock. You'll find a welcome pack of local goodies, in the farmhouse-style kitchen. Upstairs there's a four-poster bed. Stockton Bury Gardens and Burford House and Gardens, with its National Clematis Collection, are a short drive away.

Details Two nights for two from £280, a week from £550 (01584 819868, brookfarmberrington.com).

48 Blue Moon

St Ives, Cornwall

Curl up on the sofa or cook up a storm in the sleek kitchen of this bijou cottage less than a minute's walk from Porthmeor Beach. The lofty bedroom under the eaves makes clever use of mirrors to bounce light around the room. Head off along the coast path towards Zennor for lunch.

Details Three nights from £318, a week from £530 (01872 553491, boutique-retreats.co.uk).

49 The Boathouse at Knotts End

Ullswater, Cumbria

You'll never tire of the lake and fell views from this 19th-century stone boathouse on the shores of Ullswater. There are no neighbours or passing cars. The slate-floored, open-plan living area is small but features a leather sofa, modern oak furniture, and Moroccan lamps and Indonesian chests. Take the rowing boat out across the lake or hike up Helvellyn.

Details Two nights for two from £370, £1,295 for a week (i-escape.com).

50 Herston Hall

South Ronaldsay, Orkney

This secluded 19th-century former chapel overlooks the sea at Widewall Bay, a birdwatcher's paradise. The living area, with its high-vaulted roof and lancet windows, is cosy. There's no TV but a DVD projector means you can watch films. Walk around the high cliffs or discover great beaches such as Sandwick Bay.

Details Three nights for two from £225, a week from £295 (01835 822277, unique-cottages.co.uk).

0 comments



James Meyer

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