

Five staycation ideas for May half-term

Where to take your brood in Britain later this month



By Caroline Phillips May 5, 2017

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It's not too late to book these British boltholes for May half-term. From a set of converted barns in Norfolk to the manor where the Gunpowder Plot was hatched, find your dream destination here...

Priory Barns, North Norfolk



This has to be the most exciting, flexible and kindly priced accommodation in the country. It's available in configurations of two to 19: there's the brick and flint Poppy Barn, with its quirky open-plan living area with soaring 25-foot ceiling, as well as antiques, cloud murals, a high-spec kitchen and a spiral staircase up to its super-king bed. Or Dairy Cottage, a former 1920s dairy turned comfy bolthole for three, with cows painted wittily across the exterior wall. For bigger gatherings, Priory House – an erstwhile Cistercian-monks' priory – is full of elegance, artefacts and fun. Next, Priory Barn has a truly chic, urban vibe. And Party Barn – with graffiti art, chandeliers and exposed brick walls – packs a punch (sleeps two but parties 200). On arrival, you'll find fresh eggs and apple juice from the orchard in your fridge. This is all the vibrant creation of leading interior designer Emma Deterding of Kelling Designs – the estate is her rural showcase and everything's for sale: the furniture, the décor, the houses. You can book the entire shebang or just one barn.

For more information, visit priorybarns.com.

Ashby Manor House, Northamptonshire



This is where you teach your kids history: Guy Fawkes hatched the Gunpowder Plot in Ashby Manor House's Tudor gatehouse. And it's here that Elizabethan construction meets Jacobean and Arts and Crafts, finally integrated by architectural whizz, Sir Edwin Lutyens. These days, it's a large family home, great for four families plus nannies and grannies. If it's a library, music-room with ebony floor, and barrel-ceilinged sitting-room that you're after (not to mention a billiard-room and former mediaeval kitchen turned play-room, complete with a pirate shack), this is it. There are three master bedrooms with ensembles (claw-foot baths and fluffy white towels) and seven other field-size bedrooms sharing bathrooms. The vibe is minimalist with whitewashed walls and Aboriginal art, Rose Uniacke sofas and Fermoie handprinted linen fabrics. And forget draughty: it's piping hot. Have (a full English) breakfast in the galleried Stone Hall with its cloud-high ceilings, Hans Wegner chairs and massive vases of tulips. And choose a chef for everything from detox to haute cuisine thereafter. The Gertrude Jekyll-designed gardens are in need of TLC, but there's a heated outdoor pool, 30 acres including a lake and swans, and an astro-turf tennis court. Who said history wasn't fun?

For more information, visit ashbymanorhouse.com.

Bohème, Somerset



There's little outside Bohème, with its working farm buildings and agricultural machinery, to indicate how cool it is inside. But open its vast barn doors and you're in a stylishly converted 16th-century former cider press and erstwhile dairy farm, nestled around a pretty courtyard. The former shippin parlour (where cows were tended) is now an open-plan kitchen, dining and living space with 20 red chairs surrounding a refectory table. The games-room – another converted barn – is teen heaven, with a snooker table, squishy sofas and films projected onto the wall. Best of all is the indoor swimming pool, with windows overlooking green and pleasant land and fluffy lambs. Sleep peacefully in one of 10 double bedrooms, which include 'the love nest' up a secret staircase. Enjoy old-fashioned fun with boules, croquet and skittles; clamber over farm gates to walk your happy hound; then visit the farmers' market for local apple juice, sourdough and goat's cheese. The property is set in 100 acres so peaceful you can hear a field mouse squeak. 'We'll be back again' is unsurprisingly the leitmotif in the visitors' book.

For more information, ring 01637 881183 or visit boheme.uniquehomestays.com.

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The Riddle, Devon



The Riddle is not the only Hollywood-perfect thatched cottage on the village green of North Bovey, Dartmoor, but its interior must be the grooviest. There are decorative tree trunks "growing" inside, and rose petals strewn romantically over the king-size beds. Plus, there is a Sherlock Holmes riddle to be solved, with clues of handcuffs, deerstalker and vintage typewriter dotted around. (The nearby Hound Tor inspired Arthur Conan Doyle.) There's a galley kitchen, with a poppy-red Aga, a den with a zebra rug and fluffy beanbags, and vanilla-coloured bathrooms with roll-top tubs and crystal chandeliers. It may be spring, but if you're still feeling the chill, curl up with a good book in this toasty bolthole with its sheepskin rugs and wood-burning stoves. There's no need to set your alarm – the cheery clanging bell of the neighbouring 14th-century church will wake you up come morning instead. Walk from the village straight into Dartmoor National Park, with its rolling hills and mists. And it's definitely worth a trip from almost anywhere just to eat at the Riverford Field Kitchen: a family-friendly, organic restaurant with communal tables and heaped plates of delicious field-to-fork food, a snip at £27.50 for three courses. The Riddle is just like walking through the pages of a fairytale. Welcome to Goldilock's des res.

For more information, ring 01637 881183 or visit theriddle.uniquehomestays.com.

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Yarrow Cottage, Cotswolds



This compact cottage in an impossibly idyllic Cotswolds village will have you taking sly photographs for interiors inspiration: exposed beams, stone walls and wooden floors feature in this 300-year-old thatched building, along with a wood burner, cosy lounge, cute garden, a copper roll-top bath tub and duck-egg-blue cupboards. There's room for four guests in total in the two bedrooms. If you don't fancy making use of the kitchen, head a few minutes up the road in Churchill to the Chequers, a lively local pub offering cheddar soufflés, Jospoer-grilled steaks and locally brewed beer. *Caroline Lewis*

For more information, visit beachspoke.com/yarrow-cottage.