Into the Summer Light

British Staycations
Beautiful new houses to rent
Wild camping’s best spots
Cornish holidays by Ben Okri
An inside track on Sussex

European Trips
Mediterranean island-hopping
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The slow food heart of Italy

A new generation of local safari pioneers
FINDERS KEEPERS

WE PICK BRITAIN'S SMARTEST NEW MANORS AND SECRET COUNTRYSIDE NOOKS TO TAKE OVER FOR A PRIVATE BREAK RIGHT ON OUR DOORSTEP
WHERE TO STAY

FOR AN ELEGANT ESCAPE

DEER PARK, DEVON

This Georgian house near Honiton was run as a hotel for more than half a century before its owners changed tack. They had already begun a major revamp – adding a lofty orangery, restoring the walled kitchen garden, refreshing the bedrooms – with grown-up gatherings in mind, and now it works just as well for blow-out parties as it does for a low-key weekend with your favourite gang. Inside, cool twists lend personality to the traditional spaces: game-bird wallpaper in the midnight-blue living room; a mini art gallery of cricket-themed paintings. Outside, rolling lawns give way to wisteria-draped arches, the Italian garden, with its lavender beds and lion-head fountains, and orchards – ask to sample the cider, made on site from last year’s pickings, or the apple-and-fennel gin. The Chauffeur’s Hideaway – named after the motor house where the classic-car collection is stored – can be set up for late-night suppers cooked over the fire pit and eaten around the huge oak table with lights strung up in the trees. For those who prefer to sleep away from the action, or for smaller groups, The Shed comes with a retro jukebox and dart board, and there’s a circular thatched treehouse for two and a three-bedroom Playhouse with a wooden deck – most magical on an early misty morning, when deer are often spotted in the distant fields. Staff can arrange fly-fishing on a stretch of the River Otter or a spin to Sidmouth in the Packard, while chefs knock up a simple steak pie or seven-course supper. No one needs lift a finger. EMMA LOVE

BOOK IT From £7,500 per night (main house only, sleeps 28).

deerpark.co.uk
Jo and John Morfoot were already kitting out reclaimed railway carriages to rent on Settle’s peaceful patch of woodland, planted by John’s family in the 1970s, when they decided they also wanted to create a secluded hideaway for their wedding night. The Lakeside Cabin is the result: a Scandinavian-style forest escape for two. The building blocks – a mix of mid-century-modern neatness with the rustic details of a snug country hut – came from John’s nearby salvage yard and the inspiration from Jo’s design background. Dedication to sustainability is evident throughout: none of the elements were new, bar the enormous sliding doors that frame the open-plan living space which looks out across a lake full of squabbling ducks. Inside, an overstuffed leather armchair sits among a bounty of happy house plants. Earthy colours match the natural materials: there’s hardly a shred of plastic, ceramics are sourced from local potters and the welcome loaf of sourdough comes wrapped in a linen tea towel. In the wholesome little kitchen there’s enamel cookware and wooden plates that were used for the wedding. Muttering Victorian radiators, indoor and outdoor woodburners, and a freestanding bath keep colder nights cosy; for warmer days, there are wicker chairs on the lakeside veranda and a rope swing over the water. You’re unlikely to bump into any other residents, except perhaps the site’s own bees. They’re the busiest creatures here: this place is precision-tooled for slowing down and bedding in, with little phone signal, no Wi-fi or TV, and not much to do within a short driving distance. Walk, cook, read, stare into the fire – it’s private, tucked away, next-level relaxing. SONYA BARBER

BOOK IT From £250 per night (sleeps two). settlenorfolk.co.uk
FOR A HIGHLAND ADVENTURE

LARY, ABERDEENSHIRE

This is a deliciously easy way into Scottish estate living. Driving up to the Lary Farmhouse and Steading may seem like you’re heading off-road into the wilderness, but it’s actually only four miles from the cheese- and wine-stocked George Strachan general store in the Royal Deeside town of Ballater. Instagrammer The Muddy Mummy, otherwise known as Emily Salvesen, clearly has an expert eye for styling. With her husband Hal she has completely transformed the property owned by his family, originally from Norway, and, consciously or not, given it a Nordic once-over. The houses, at one time used for the occasional shoot and get-together, have been refreshed. This is Scotland, so there are plenty of relevant tartans and mounted antlers, but it’s cleverly mixed with a stripped-back aesthetic that brings unexpected light to the rooms, pale timber from Belgium lining the master bedroom’s vaulted ceiling and wonky beams running throughout. A huge taxidermied buffalo head keeps watch in the main drawing room with its Ralph Lauren hunting-lodge vibe, and the space also includes a library and masses of board games, backgammon and chess. A sheltered courtyard connects the two buildings, and the huge kitchen and dining room in the farmhouse is a great central party space for which a chef can be called in. Or just stay put and soak up the views. This is remote, raw Cairngorms countryside. From the windows all you can see are the hills and the valley below, the weather rolling in visibly. During a storm it feels as if you’re out at sea. MIRANDA MACKANESS

BOOK IT From £1,000 per night (sleeps 20).
airbnb.co.uk/rooms/25372333
COTSWOLD FARM HIDEAWAY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

The antiques honeypot of Tetbury is a 20-minute drive away, but the Swiss owners of these three quirky cottages have gone for a more eclectic look. The restrained edit of contemporary and vintage furniture would look more at home in a tall Islington townhouse along with its sustainable lime plaster walls and tourmaline-green tiles. The main farmhouse and its accompanying outbuildings, previously owned by an artist, are huddled together down a private lane in the cusp of the valley where llamas roam. It’s cut-off and quiet. North Country sheep speckle the hills. The biggest cottage, Whitehall, has a pitched roof and original details. This is a farm, so a large boot room makes a no-stress entrance for muddy wellies. Piles of logs and kindling already laid in the inglenook fireplace keep things toasty. Just-laid duck eggs, freshly baked bread and a bowl of lemons are left as a welcome. Take Whitehall together with Willow, the smallest, which, with its mezzanine bedroom and baby football table, is good for the overflow; together, they sleep eight. And high-ceilinged Winterspring, previously the artist’s studio, sleeps four. A well-written little booklet about where to go and what to do is also included. The footpaths of the Cotswold Way run past the cottages, but it’s rare to pass even a dog walker. Ever so slightly off the beaten track, this feels like a thrillingly forgotten corner of the Cotswolds. EMMA HILEY

BOOK IT From £580 per night for all three cottages (minimum stay two nights), excluding cleaning fee (sleeps up to 12). cotswoldfarmhideaway.com
WHERE TO STAY

ANTHOLGY FARM, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Forced to leave their fourth-generation farm in the Midlands by the construction of HS2, the Barnes family started afresh near Cheltenham two years ago, renovating two 18th-century barns at break-neck speed. ‘We had built up a shop and wedding-venue business in Staffordshire, so we had to diversify quickly here in order to survive,’ says Henry Barnes. The brief for London-based design agency Run for the Hills was to make it not so far removed that it might alienate a more traditional crowd, but cooler and more current than Cotswolds-cottage dove-greys and duck-egg blues. So off-white sofas and pampas grass set off the exposed Grade II-listed brickwork, while contemporary art, black highlights and tribal patterns work together to create a sharp, fresh look.

Cheer is injected with a distressed travel trunk here, a whimsical vintage fan there. The beaded leather pendant lights above the enormous raw oak dining table sold out in the UK, so they took a while to source – a friend-of-a-friend of the Barnes in the USA tracked a pair down and shipped them over. Gangs from both houses can pile in through the glass doors for supper on wishbone chairs, and despite the pristine feel, children are welcome. There’s a cot, but older kids will love den-making in the twin rattan beds under the eaves. Add to that a heated indoor swimming pool, cinema room and tennis court – and the patchwork quilt of yellow and green cubes of fields and clutches of woodland all around – and it makes for a great spot for all ages to decamp to. Designed and run by a big family for other big families. HARRIET JONES

BOOK IT From £4,450 for three nights (sleeps 18).

uniquehomestays.com
FROM CONVERTED BARNS TO RETUNED CASTLES, WHERE TO HOLE UP NOW IN THE UK AND IRELAND

LINGHOLM BOATHOUSE, CUMBRIA
The Lingholm Estate on Derwentwater is known for its gardens (a blue poppy is named after it) and Beatrix Potter, who spent her summers here. In 2013 new owners embarked on a project to restore the main house and revamp the cottages in the grounds. The one-bedroom larch Boathouse, above, is the latest addition. The living space has a whole wall of glass that showcases the north-to-south sweep of Skiddaw, Blencathra and Bleaberry Fell. From £325 per night (sleeps two); coolstays.com

CLIFF BEACH HOUSE, CO WATERFORD, IRELAND
The setting of this statement house in the pretty fishing village of Ardmore is knockout, with wild Atlantic views not just from the deck but from each of the six bedrooms from which you can spot sea otters and the occasional dolphin. A collaboration with the Cliff House Hotel, it comes with impeccable service and Irish charm on tap, but the real draw is the location: soft sand beaches, rugged cliff walks, amazing birdlife and that invigorating sea air. From about £2,240 per night (sleeps 12); cliffbeachhouse.ie

VINTAGE HOUSE, SUFFOLK
Art director Sandy Suffield first spotted the Vintage House, built to supply electricity to a manor near Bury St Edmunds, on renovation blog Wreck of the Week. It took 18 months to make it liveable; now it’s a three-bedroom bolthole with double-height kitchen-diner looking out to a walled garden. Beautifully retro, this is a study in how to assemble a collection of second-hand treasures – car-boot-sale art prints, Fifties lamps from eBay – and nail it. From £250 per night (sleeps six); kiphideaways.com

TAY HOUSE, PERTHSHIRE
This imposing Victorian structure by the banks of the River Tay, right, is curiously modern inside – the handiwork of developer John Burke and his wife Susie Whyte, an architect and interior designer, who paired original mosaic floors with their eclectic look won’t be disappointed: in the house, cheery fabrics and chandelier sit alongside industrial lighting. Plus, the outstanding homemade food is still on offer in the form of doorstep-delivered suppers, such as longhorn-beef bourguignon. Tay House, from £2,800 for four nights (sleeps 16); browberhall.co.uk

CABU BY THE SEA, KENT
Originally a try-before-you-buy set-up for building company Cabu’s customers, this cluster of cabins on scrubby grassland behind St Mary’s Bay is now a salty weekend escape. Each riffs on a vernacular style: cedar-clad studios with log burners; blackened-timber two-beds reminiscent of Derek Jarman’s Prospect Cottage; a family beach house with a hot tub. Deckchairs surround the heated pool and there’s an outside kitchen. Cycle along the sea wall or explore the coastal towns of Folkestone, Hythe and Dungeness. A second site in Cavan, Ireland, opened in July. Studio from £250 for two nights (sleeps two); holidays.cabu.co.uk

TREMATON CASTLE LODGE, CORNWALL
In the grounds of the castle that is home to House of Hackney founders Frieda Gormley and Javvy M Royle, the lodge has all the maximalist touches you’d hope for (blooms-and-birds wallpaper, leopard-print sofa bed). But that’s only part of the story. Wider plans include a series of retreats, hosted by therapists such as Terrence the Teacher from the Harrods Wellness Clinic, where guests can practise yoga in the orchard and have holistic massages in the Indian pool house. From £120 per night (sleeps four); houseofhackney.com. For details of retreats, contact castlerefridagomley@houseofhackney.com

BROWNBER HALL AND HOUSE, CUMBRIA
Hotel owners Peter and Amanda Jaques-Walker had plans to launch a four-bedroom Victorian farmhouse next door before lockdown. Now the timing seems serendipitous – they’ve transformed Brownber Hall into an exclusive-use rental, too. Anyone familiar with their eclectic look won’t be disappointed: in the house, cheery fabrics sit alongside industrial lighting. Plus, the outstanding homemade food is still on offer in the form of doorstep-delivered suppers, such as longhorn-beef bourguignon. Brownber Hall, from £2,800 for four nights (sleeps 15); Brownber House, from £1,600 for four nights (sleeps eight); brownberhall.co.uk

THIRLESTONE CASTLE, BERWICKSHIRE, SCOTLAND
A bagpiper’s welcome can be arranged at this rose-coloured stone pile half an hour from Edinburgh. The five apartments in the south wing (available individually or together) have been given a refurb – gilt mirrors and chandeliers set the tone in sitting rooms, while bedrooms have a crisp botanical feel. For the full live-like-a-laird vibe, sit down for supper with beamed vaulted ceilings and a plank-hewn kitchen table. Kick back on the Moroccan-inspired terrace and by the summer cabin, or walk south along the river on Saints’ Way to the harbour town of Fowey where there’s a quietly emerging food scene. From £1,519 per week (sleeps eight); cornishgems.com

THE WILLOWS, CORNWALL
The look of this gorgeous barn conversion 10 minutes’ drive from sandy Polkerris Beach is country-cottage-meets-Scandi cool, with beamed vaulted ceilings and a plank-hewn kitchen table. Kick back on the Moroccan-inspired terrace and by the summer cabin, or walk south along the river on Saints’ Way to the harbour town of Fowey where there’s a quietly emerging food scene. From £1,519 per week (sleeps eight); cornishgems.com

CLOISTER HOUSE, MELROSE, SCOTTISH BORDERS
Right next door to the ruins of Melrose Abbey in Sir Walter Scott Country, this sensitively revived 19th-century listed house is a beauty – unstuffy, with original fireplaces, reading nooks and a games room in the eaves. There’s a light-filled drawing room for afternoon slices of Selkirk bannock, and the more formal Folly Green dining room for late-night feasts. A walk up Eildon Hill, with its triple peaks and sensational views steeped in folklore, is a must. From £697 for three nights (sleeps eight); crabtreeandcrabtree.com