

The best holiday homes to rent in the UK

Our edit of the loveliest holiday homes in the UK to rent, including the sharpest new cottages, manors and barns to take over as your own in the UK

Orpheus, Suffolk

Orpheus was already a classic Georgian gem blessed with soaring sashes and cool flagstone floors when owners Steven and Evin Hancock – the latter an interior designer – got their hands on it. From the listed beauty of the house, gently sloping lawns segue into meadows ensconced in northeast Suffolk's Sotterley Estate. Over these past two and a half years, the couple's meticulous restoration has embellished the warren of rooms with decorative plasterwork, plush velvet curtains and 18th-century wall hangings. There are crystal chandeliers sourced from Sotheby's and bespoke designs from wallpaper supremo Adam Ellis, including a sweeping pastoral complete with swooping birds of prey that graces the curving walls of the main hall. The overall effect is of grand opulence, with cool Georgian meeting frothy Rococo.

All of this is combined with state-of-the-art tech so that the entire house can seemingly be run from an iPad. On the top floor, there's a deeply cosseting cinema with a Dolby Atmos sound system, as well as a gym and spa with a sauna, steam room and loungers that offer far-reaching vistas of the rolling Suffolk landscape. The seven bedrooms include a sumptuous master with double-aspect views; the exquisite four-poster one has an in-room bath. From here, it's only 15 minutes to the heritage coast at Southwold or Covehithe, with its sandy beaches, but it's tempting to hunker down and survey the estate from a palatial Catchpole & Rye roll-top bath to the distant bleating of the local flock. *Clare Coulson*



Viola, Glastonbury

Just a short drive from the characterful boutiques of Glastonbury, this palatial, six-bedroom house in the middle of bucolic Butleigh seems, once within, as though it could belong to another world entirely – offering those lucky enough to stay a halcyon holiday experience in utmost luxury. Ethereal in its very nature, balmy days here invite early morning laps of the heated outdoor pool, or a sunrise yoga session, followed by breakfast on one of the terraces (with a spread provided, in large part, by the generous welcome hamper, painstakingly sourced by estate manager and the property's friendly face, Sharon). Lethargic rotations of the private lake follow (storybook-style row boat provided) and sunset soaks in the sunken hot tub, complete with pea-light lit pool house, open fire and sun-kissing views back across the Mendip Hills. And though summer might envelope the house and its 11 acres of undulating gardens (complete with tennis court, ornamental fountains and greenhouse) in a golden glow, the space is meticulously well-prepped for colder climes too. Separate from the house, a converted barn houses a full bar, ping-pong table, fully-equipped gym and, the piste de resistance; two F1 racing simulators sit, encased by screens, ready to offer an exhilaratingly realistic driving experience. While inside, a crackling fire is ready-to-go within the sumptuous confines of the TV snug (though 'snug' perhaps undermines its larger proportions, a continual theme throughout), peppered with curiosities and a show-stopping sofa for the entire clan to curl up on.

The rest of the house too, which unfurls outward from the grand, double-height hallway, matches the same generous proportions, meaning that those staying have space to spread out not just between rooms but *within* rooms too. The kitchen for example, with views across all angles of the whimsical gardens, gives way to an intimate dining space, merging into a sitting area and then a light-filled orangery, the latter of which takes on a golden glow come twilight – and all without a wall between them.

Upstairs, toss a coin for the duck-egg blue master suite with its separate dressing room and giant, raised bath, each corner enjoying lofty views down over the swimming pool, lake and gardens. While distinctly-designed subsequent bedrooms are worthy in their own right too, playing with quirky wallpapers and their own unique features, from an in-room, freestanding tub to pops of pastel under varnished and vaulted oak beams.

A short meander up the tree-clad lane leads you to a tiny, unmanned farm shop, or more-aptly shed-shop, where freshly-baked goods, local cheeses and all manner of local chutneys, spreads and store cupboard essentials can be paid for via an honesty box in the corner. While slightly further afield, the Gothic peaks of Wells Cathedral, heady heights of Glastonbury Tor - a popular hill among walkers, topped by the roofless St Michael's Tower, a Grade I listed building - and historic market towns of Frome and Somerton, with its 17th-century architecture, can be found just a short drive away.

How a house manages to feel so elegant and graceful yet welcoming and liveable is not for us to question, ours is just to congregate round one of the (many) fire pits and wonder at how we got so lucky. *Anya Meyerowitz*



The Shipwreck, Cornwall

Set on the cliffside near the 17th-century fishing village of Portwrinkle, this cabin is more resurrection than ruin, entirely fashioned from wood recovered from Kodima, an actual shipwreck that sailed her last into nearby Whitsands Bay. It was crafted in the early 2000s and then bought and renovated in nine months by Plymouth couple Rob and Jo Kavanagh, inspired by their shared love of the sea, through his sailing and her childhood holidays. Now the home is a masterclass in maximising space.

A puzzle of pocket doors and loft cupboards; an old-fashioned trunk serving as a coffee table; a TV that swings between rooms; and a squeezed-in window seat for gazing out to sea. The kitchen is the beating heart of the place, while the sitting room has a prepped-to-go fire heater. There's a custom-made Witt and Berg steel bath in the master, bunks for the children, and the shower room has a rock-pool-shaped basin, mirroring those glistening outside.

What pulls everything together, like the buttons on a sailor's trousers, is the nautical theme. Spot illustrations of sails throughout the centuries on walls and the odd shell or message in a bottle on shelves – all without too much seaside schmaltz. Because it's the real deal; the couple has made sure their home, which they intend to retract for their family's sole use by 2025, is safe from whatever the elements may fling at it, as if it were a real boat. Besides, there's just no escaping the sea here – its repetitive chorus fills your eyes, ears, lungs, bones. Watch a neon sun melt into it from the bath or bed, the slouchy sofa or bouncy wicker egg chair on the terrace. Or, on the beach itself, while feasting on all-local scones, clotted cream, raspberry jam and even Cornish wine from the weekend hamper.

By Becky Lucas

