

Easy Trips

THIS MONTH... hole up in a manor house in **Somerset**, hit the beach in **Florida**, stay in a distillery in **Scotland** and explore a changing neighbourhood in **London**

CANARY ISLANDS, SPAIN

Starry, starry nights

Modern astronomers like to build their observatories in rarefied locations, from the high deserts of Chile to the top of a Hawaiian volcano, but some of the prime sites for staring deep into the heavens can be found in a place beloved of British holidaymakers. The Canary Islands are home to Unesco Starlight Reserves and the world's largest-aperture optical telescope – at El Roque de Los Muchachos on La Palma. It's possible to join tours around that observatory, but for a more private nighttime view, Stars by Night's guided trips on Fuerteventura head out to desert dunes and other areas away from beach towns, and protected from distracting electric light. In December and January, Orion will be very visible and the Orion Nebula on the 'sword' that hangs from the hunter's belt makes a fine aim for telescopes.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

🔗 Stars by Night runs a variety of stargazing tours on Fuerteventura, starting at £24pp if you have your own wheels or £37 if you want to be picked up (starsbynight.es).
📍 Fly to Fuerteventura with BA, easyJet, Jet2, Norwegian, Ryanair, Thomas Cook and TUI (from £37; ryanair.com).

OUR OFFERS

Look out for special Easy Trips offers. We do not arrange these offers in exchange for positive coverage

LONDON, ENGLAND

Capital ideas

Christmas shopping trip up to London? Then steer clear of the more familiar haunts of Oxford Street or the behemoth retail centres and beat a path to King's Cross. The area continues to regenerate at speed and now has a good weekend's worth of distractions. The warehouses of Granary Square, the towering iron structure of Gasholder Park and the Regent's Canal towpath are decent spots for a wander before you get stuck into some serious shopping (for local present ideas with a difference, see right). To turn the trip into a proper pre-Christmas treat for yourself, book into the Great Northern Hotel, a modern reimagining of the Victorian railway hotel. Rooms vary from the snug (the Couchette, with a nod to a sleeper cabin on a train) to the larger Cubitts, with roll-top baths and views across King's Cross. Wainscott rooms, up in the eaves, are particularly cosy and romantic. Book in for a cocktail in the GNH Bar (don't miss the salmon martini if it's on) before dinner in Plum + Spilt Milk. Dishes such as beef Wellington, roast chicken or Dorset crab are taken beneath an enormous chandelier in the elegant dining room. A meal here should certainly see you through til breakfast, but guests in search of a midnight snack can head to the pantry on each floor of the hotel and help themselves to the likes of Tunnock's Caramel Wafers and Jelly Babies.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

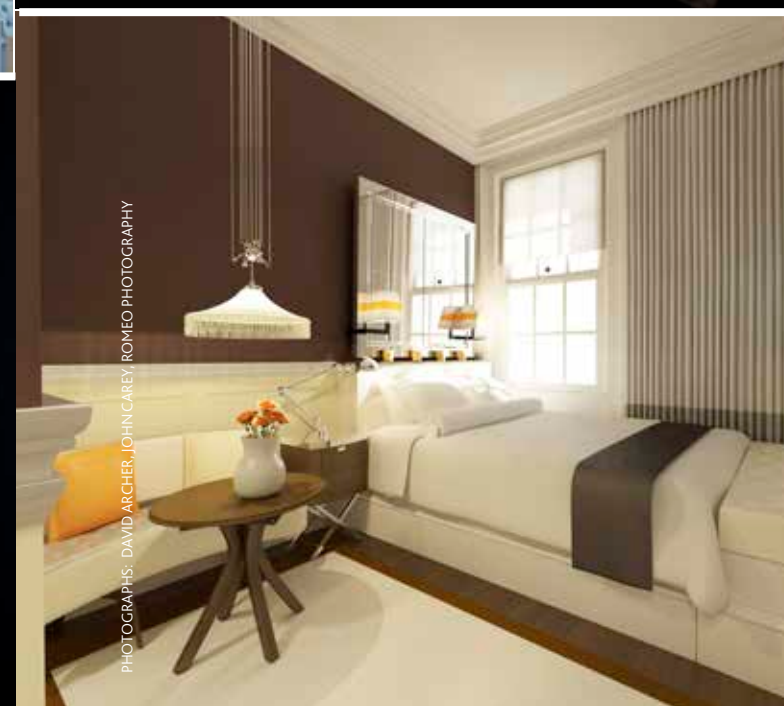
📍 For more information on the area, see kingscross.co.uk.
 🏠 Room prices at the Great Northern Hotel start at £189 (gnhlondon.com). Main dishes at Plum + Spilt Milk start at £19 (plumandspiltmilk.com) and cocktails in GNH bar at £11 (gnhbar.com).
 🏠 From 22 December to 9 April 2018, the Great Northern Hotel is offering a special ski package, for guests hopping on the Eurostar from King's Cross and going or returning to the French Alps. The rate includes room, breakfast at Plum + Spit Milk, a hot chocolate before you turn in for the night and a porter service to the train the following morning (from £369).



The Great Northern Hotel in King's Cross, built in 1854, was one of the first hotels designed solely with the train traveller in mind. It fell into disrepair and closed for 12 years, but re-opened in 2013 after a £40 million refurbishment



These days, the Great Northern Hotel houses three bars and a restaurant, where dishes include Goosnargh chicken sharing platters; its Couchette room is an homage to the railway sleeper carriage



PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID ARCHER, JOHN CAREY, ROMEO PHOTOGRAPHY

SHOP THE NEIGHBOURHOOD:

There are plenty of independent shops in King's Cross and regular markets are held in Granary Square (check kingscross.co.uk for updated listings). Here's our choice of local gifts to pick up.

Former travel writer Jake Bullough works with a family business in Bolivia to sell their handmade leather bags in his shop Beara Beara (handbags from £85; bearabeara.co.uk).



Drink, Shop & Do sells all manner of things you never thought you needed, from melon necklaces to glitter beard kits. They also hold regular workshops and events (drinkshopdo.co.uk).



The British Library is a short walk from the Great Northern Hotel and has an excellent gift shop. Its book collection is extensive, as you might expect, but it also does unusual homeware and gifts (bl.uk).



FLORIDA, USA

Palm Beach style

Coconut palms are a reliable sign of mild winters: in the US, the trees don't grow in California (still too much risk of a chill), but since a Spanish ship carrying 20,000 coconuts beached itself on a Florida sandbar in 1878, the trees have thrived in the resort city that now bears their name. Temperatures of high teens or low 20s prevail in Palm Beach in winter; it gets warmer but wetter in the summer. Going back to the days of its first coconuts, the resort was a favourite winter escape for Gilded Age tycoons. Just one block back from the beach, the powder-pink Colony Hotel is a later vintage (1947), and after a tropical-hued restyling, it's sure to banish any sense of seasonal drabness.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

🏠 Rooms at the Colony Hotel start at around £150 (thecolonypalmbeach.com). The hotel also offers seven two-bedroom villas, which form part of an adjacent Mediterranean-style mansion dating from the 1920s.

📖 Read more at thepalmbeaches.com.

✈️ Fly to Palm Beach via major US hubs with airlines including American, Delta and United (from £435; delta.com). The nearest airport with direct flights from the UK is Fort Lauderdale, 45 miles to the south, with Air Canada from Heathrow and Norwegian flights from Gatwick (from £295; norwegian.com).

GATESHEAD, ENGLAND

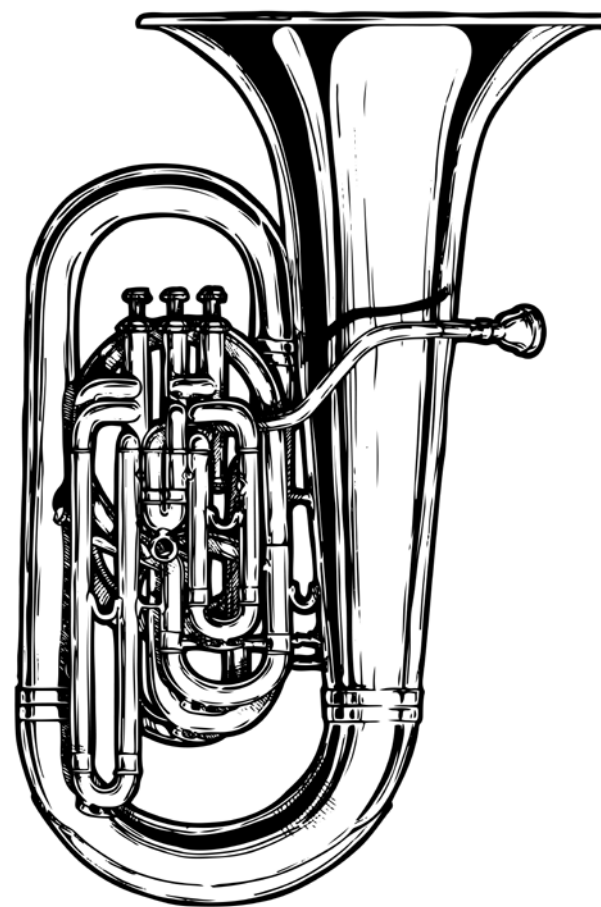
BOLD AS BRASS

In a centenary year that has recalled battles and revolutions, the members of Grimethorpe Colliery Band get to mark a more harmonious anniversary with a concert at the striking, curved-glass Sage Gateshead venue. Begun in 1917 by South Yorkshire miners, the band gained fame even as its namesake pit closed, thanks to the 1996 film *Brassed Off*. Today, Grimethorpe's cornets, trombones, euphoniums and solo flugel horn sound out as proudly as ever.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

📅 Grimethorpe Colliery Band: A Centenary Celebration takes place at Sage Gateshead on 17 December (£18; sagegateshead.com).

🚶 Across the Tyne in the centre of Newcastle, a 15-minute walk from the concert venue, the Vermont Hotel is a show of early 20th-century elegance inside a magnificent stone building that once served as the County Hall (from £90; vermont-hotel.com).



PHOTOGRAPHS: BABICH ALEXANDER/SHUTTERSTOCK, 101CATS/GETTY, KIM SARGENT, NICKOLAS SARGENT, THOMAS STEN SORESEN

COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

The taste of the town

Little more than a decade has passed since New Nordic cuisine became a phenomenon and Copenhageners are still getting used to the idea of their city being a gastronomic capital. Long before Noma was hogging the world's top restaurant spot, however, fishing boats were bringing in their catch by the cheerily painted quayside houses at Nyhavn, and the farmers from the Danish countryside were transporting their beef and pork to the warehouses of Kødbyen, just to the west of the city centre. Translated – with a nod in the direction of New York – as the Meatpacking District, this area is the focus of a guided walking tour that explores Copenhagen's past and future food culture. Modern smørrebrød (open sandwiches) balance simplicity with artistry – tour participants get to try a pair, along with pork croquettes and charcuterie, beer and akvavit, and a meal's worth of other specialities, in a once-gritty part of town that is casting off its ugly-duckling feathers.

ABOVE The harbour of Nyhavn; a takeaway sausage platter; chocolate snowballs, a Danish Christmas favourite; popular Torvehallerne market

MAKE IT HAPPEN

📅 The West End Gourmet Tour takes place on Fridays and Saturdays at 11am and lasts three hours (£100; copenhagen.foodtours.eu).

✈️ Airlines including BA, easyJet, Norwegian, Ryanair and SAS fly to Copenhagen from Aberdeen, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Gatwick, Heathrow, Luton, Manchester and Stansted (from £80; ryanair.com).

🏠 Bertrams is the smallest of the Guldsmiden group of boutique hotels in town and has rooms featuring raw stone, bare wood, spectacular bathtubs and Bali-style décor (from £95; guldsmidenhotels.com/bertrams).

REVIEW OF THE MONTH

SOMERSET, ENGLAND

Backwell House



The Georgian façade of Backwell House. RIGHT The modern bar



DISCOUNT
Quote 'Lonely Planet' to receive 10% off the room rate and a glass of prosecco on arrival; book by 29 March 2018

Why now?

Head to Backwell House in Somerset this winter for an archetypal British weekend away – all countryside walks, local feasting and evenings in front of the fire.

What should I expect?

Opened earlier this year, under the guiding eye of co-owner and creative director Guy Williams (see his local recommendations, right), Backwell House is a Georgian country pile eight miles outside of Bristol. The hotel retains its 18th-century grandeur, but is now as warm and comfortable as a pair of old slippers. Individual design elements include sinks hidden inside vintage leather suitcases to old ice skates and radios dotting the breakfast room. You'll likely spend a fair bit of time sunk into a battered leather sofa in front of the fire in the lounge, clutching a gin or whisky from the next-door upcycled bar.

What's my room like?

There are nine bedrooms of varying styles and size, all named after a previous guest or owner at the house. Each is a theatrical affair, with tall ceilings and good views, and is furnished with antiques, such as cinema lights and old dressers. Our favourite is Robinson, with its huge bed, wooden window shutters and slipper bath. Sparrow, a small double, is particularly cosy, and Grace (named after the cricketing family) is the one to go for

if you're keen to impress, with a carved oak wooden bed.

What am I eating?

Dinner is served in the two rooms of the downstairs restaurant, and is locally sourced and seasonal. Expect inventive dishes such as ox cheek and alliums or Cornish brill with Indian spices, and expert wine pairing. The duck-liver parfait starter is exceptional. Breakfast is also taken here and has plenty of healthy options (berries, muesli, yoghurt and so on) alongside the traditional full English. A lot of the produce used in the dishes is taken from the hotel gardens at the back of the property, which you're free to explore.

What's in the neighbourhood?

Bristol is a 15-minute drive away if you're after more urban pursuits. The hills around the hotel are good for a stroll; the one directly behind gives great views on a clear day. For more committed ambling, the Mendip Hills are a half-hour drive away.

What's the damage?

Rooms start at a very reasonable £95 for a cosy double. The most expensive rooms, Hobbs, Toogood and Robinson, are spacious 'superior' doubles. A two-course menu in the restaurant will set you back £29, and three courses £35 (backwellhouse.co.uk).



The Hobbs room. ABOVE A basin disguised in a suitcase; the restaurant's signature strawberry cannelloni

ASK A LOCAL

GUY WILLIAMS
Creative Director, Backwell House



The best place for...



... DESIGN INSPIRATION

'I get some antiques from Focus on the Past in Bristol. I particularly remember getting a beautiful old oak chest of drawers there, which now sits in the Hobbs room in the hotel. Biggie Best is a homeware shop in Clifton where I get a lot of bed throws and quilts.'
focusonthepast.org;
biggiebest.co.uk

... HANGING OUT

'The Lido is a taste of history in Clifton, Bristol. It was originally built as a swimming baths in the mid-1800s and has pretty much stood still in time ever since. The pool is still there, but there's now a restaurant too, which does good tapas. It oozes nostalgia, but with a modern twist.'
lidobristol.com



... A MEAL

'Outside of Backwell House, I like the Ethicurean. It's a restaurant in a glasshouse that sits within a walled garden. I really like the ethos of how they cook. It's real field-to-fork eating.'
theethicurean.com



... LIVE MUSIC

'There's a nice relaxed vibe at Canteen on Stokes Croft, which is a sort of artists' area in Bristol. The Canteen has live music on every night, from jazz to folk to new world, and it's a great place to just sit, have a few real ales and chill out with your mates.'
canteenbristol.co.uk

... A COCKTAIL

'After hours, I like a basement bar called Hyde & Co. It's a "secret knock" kind of place. My favourite drink is the Café Noir, made with Diplomatico rum.'
hydeand.co

PHOTOGRAPHS: A PATTENDEN, ANDRÉ REGINI, I. ILLUSTRATIONS: TASHA NATASHA/SHUTTERSTOCK

AROUND THE UK

CHRISTMAS SHOWS



BRIGHTON & HOVE

If you can't choose which classic panto to attend, why not see all of them at once? In the Old Market's three-performer production *Cinderella and the Beanstalk*, showing from 14 December to 6 January, the aspiring princess is blackmailed by Rumpelstiltskin to scale a giant beanstalk and bring him a clutch of golden eggs.
Full price £15; theoldmarket.com

LONDON

The faded Victorian grandeur of Wilton's Music Hall in Whitechapel is the atmospheric backdrop for *The Box of Delights*, an adaptation of poet laureate John Masefield's 1935 children's novel. In this tale of light and dark, a schoolboy must protect a magic device from an unscrupulous sorcerer. Performances run all through December to 6 January.
Full price from £20; wiltons.org.uk

SHEFFIELD

The Crucible Theatre, best known as the annual venue for the World Snooker Championships, is putting on a different clash of colours this Christmas, with *The Wizard of Oz*. All the musical numbers from *Over the Rainbow* onwards accompany Dorothy's growing band along the Yellow Brick Road towards the Emerald City. See it from 8 December to 20 January.
Full price from £15; sheffieldtheatres.co.uk

EDINBURGH

Running at the Traverse Theatre, right by the foot of Edinburgh Castle from 7 December to Christmas Eve, Shona Reppe's reimagining of *Cinderella* makes use of hidden drawers, secret hatches and other visual surprises, while the definitive rags-to-riches fairy tale unfolds thanks to the master puppetry of Rick Conte.
Full price from £12; traverse.co.uk



RAASAY, SCOTLAND

Spirit guide

The crinkled coast of the Scottish Highlands was for long a favourite place to hide illicit whisky-making from the taxman. Only now is the Isle of Raasay going legit, with the first official distillery opening on this 14-mile long sliver between Skye and the Scottish mainland. The first bottles of Raasay-made whisky won’t be ready before 2020, but visitors can sample the engagingly named While We Wait single-malt Scotch to get a taster of what’s in the pipeline.

Raasay’s population of less than 200 will no doubt be sharing their fabulous views of the Cuillins with more visitors now that the island has its own distillery

MAKE IT HAPPEN

i A one-hour tour of Isle of Raasay Distillery costs £10, and includes a tasting of the While We Wait single malt (raasaydistillery.com). **🏠** You can stay at the distillery itself if you sign up to a membership (£250 for one year; raasaydistillery.com). Otherwise, the distillery website lists accommodation options on this small island, including B&Bs (from £80) and the Raasay House hotel. Skye has a wider choice of accommodation. **i** Raasay is a 20-minute ferry ride from Sconser on the Isle of Skye (£3.70pp return and £12.20 for a car; calmac.co.uk). Sconser is a 2½-hour drive (via the Skye Bridge) from Inverness or 35 minutes from the nearest train station at Kyle of Lochalsh.