



Bibury is one of England's most beautiful villages

Cotswolds Charm

Despite the Soho Farmhouse effect, there are still pockets of the Cotswolds that retain old-school character

The largest designated Area of Natural Beauty in all of England and Wales, the Cotswolds are famous for traditional villages, rolling hills, historic sites and over 5,000km of prime walking routes: a mixed and incredibly photogenic bag that has long enticed nature lovers, history buffs and unruly families alike. Lately, thanks to the 'Soho Farmhouse effect', discerning city slickers make a beeline there at weekends.

Yet the classic Cotswolds region that we know and love remains intact, and therein lies its genius: timeless, yet still timely. You can admire Bibury, the most beautiful village in England according to William Morris, explore Churchill's birthplace, stock up on organic beauty fixes – all in the space of a day.

The Cotswolds has become something of an unofficial festival capital in the UK, with year-round offerings that span everything from Cheltenham's annual Jazz and Literature festivals to haute-hippie favourites Wilderness, WOMAD and Soul Circus, dedicated to yoga.

But if crowd avoidance and precious peace and quiet are more your thing, there are endless hidden gems waiting to be discovered – it's part of the fun to find them.



Sensational Sezincote

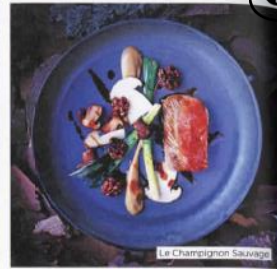


Soho Farmhouse attracts the likes of Kate Winslet

SEE We've all marvelled at Brighton Pavilion, but have you seen the building that inspired it? Spectacular Sezincote House is a little slice of India near Moreton-in-Marsh. sezincote.co.uk

Lions and tigers and bears, oh my! Cotswold Wildlife Park has them all in its 160 acres of parkland, roaming against the surreal but stately backdrop of a neo-Gothic manor house. An utterly enchanting day out for the whole family. cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk

Stately Rides organises short horse rides through beautiful, romantic countryside, with stays in elegant private homes each evening. Saddle up! statelyrides.co.uk



Le Champignon Sauvage

EAT It's well worth veering away from the chocolate box villages towards the racing town of Cheltenham for its striking Regency architecture and the wonder that is Le Champignon Sauvage. The family-owned, two-Michelin-starred restaurant does field-to-fork dining at its best, where French technique elevates hyper-local, seasonal produce to dizzying standards with undoubtedly British results. lechampignonsauvage.co.uk

Go traditional at the legendary Wheatsheaf Inn: a coaching inn that dates back to the 17th century, complete with crackling fires in winter, a beautiful garden in summer and a menu showcasing the very best of the Cotswolds countryside. Sunday lunch is the stuff of dreams. cotswoldswheatsheaf.com

Eat a table at Carole Bamford's fashionable Wild Rabbit, the epitome of new wave Cotswolds chic and winner of Michelin's 2015 Pub of the Year. thewildrabbit.co.uk

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THE SWAN

ASCOT RUNDER-WYCHWOOD, OXFORDSHIRE

This 16th-century timbered inn, complete with inglenook fireplaces, reclaimed wooden floors and a large central bar, has become the latest in Sam and Georgie Pearman's new Country Creatures collection of delightful and stylish rural boltholes (see also The Talbot in Yorkshire, page 177). You'll find seven refurbished bedrooms and a family cottage, all balancing comfort and luxury in equal measure, with antique and modern art pieces, natural linens, velvets and printed fabrics, and Georgie's 100 Acres Apothecary products in the bathrooms. In the dining room, exposed timber and Cotswold stone create an intimate setting, while the garden terrace has firepits and painted wooden planters. Expect the best of British and European produce from head chef Adam Abbott, previously of The Wild Rabbit and The Slaughters Manor House. Intrigued by the white truffle, rollright, wild mushroom and roasted garlic tarte flambée? Roll up, it's on the menu. **NOTA BENE...** 16 local women, known as the Ascot Martyrs, were imprisoned in 1873 for co-founding the National Union of Agricultural Workers; Queen Victoria later pardoned them. Doubles from £100

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THORNBURY CASTLE

THORNBURY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Thornbury Castle is the real deal: so real that Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn stayed here and Princess Mary, later Mary I, lived here. After centuries as a picturesque ruin, the Howard family transformed it in Victorian times into a splendid private residence. All the panelling and decorative features are either original hand-crafted reproductions, including much of the furniture and tapestry wall-hangings. Spiral staircases lead to 27 unique, romantic bedchambers, most with coronet or four-poster beds. Their baronial style has been cleverly updated with 21st-century luxuries: rooms are heated with opulent bathrooms and optional room spa treatments. The magnificent Tudor gardens, being restored to their full glory, comprise formal areas, a vineyard, kitchen garden, wild flower meadow and heritage hard. Thornbury's fine dining options include atmospheric Tudor Hall and a private dining room in the original dungeon. Best of all, it's an authentic, magnificent, thundering castle.

NOTA BENE... In 1535, King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn spent ten nights of their honeymoon at the castle.

Doubles from £199

+44 (0)1454 281182; thornburycastle.co.uk

