



IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY

With rolling green fields and ancient honey-coloured villages, the Cotswolds offer a classic picture of England at its finest.

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T WOULD BE HARD to find anywhere more quintessentially English than the Cotswolds. Just an hour-and-a-half drive from London reveals a scene of bucolic bliss — the English countryside that inspired the tales of Jane Austen and Lewis Carroll.

The region lives up to its Old English name (Cotswolds translates to ‘sheep on rolling hillsides’) with undulating green fields dotted with the white fleece of lambs in spring, and in summer alight with electric-yellow rapeseed and sunflowers. Perfectly preserved villages are lined with thatched cottages, built in distinctive honey-coloured Cotswolds stone. Quarried from the local hills, it burnishes each village with a golden glow — even when the sun isn’t shining. Narrow lanes criss-cross the pastures, flanked by ancient dry stone walls.

Cotswolds is England’s largest Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and it’s vast, covering over 1000 square kilometres

FROM TOP LEFT The market town of Wotton-under-Edge; Bourton-on-the-Water is known as the ‘Venice of the Cotswolds’; a dish from The Wild Rabbit; organic vegetables from Daylesford. **OPENER, FROM LEFT** A traditional limestone house; pie from The Ebrington Arms.

across five counties: Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. For Brits it has always been an idyllic weekend getaway; its tea rooms and pubs seemingly stuck in time, just like the villages they are found in. More recently, the Cotswolds are becoming known for something else. Away from the spotlight, some of the best boutique hotels and paddock-to-plate pubs in the country are attracting a new wave of weekenders seeking a first-class experience.

To visit the area’s highlights, start north and journey south — the old market town of Chipping Campden, referred to as ‘the jewel of the Cotswolds’, is a great place to begin. Arriving in its centre is like stepping onto a Shakespearean set. The High Street buildings date back to the 14th century and are constructed in the region’s characteristic stone. At its heart stands a remarkable 17th century marketplace, and its Medieval perpendicular church is a must see. Amble through the village and soak up the history, being sure to stop off for a cream tea (scones with clotted cream and jam) at one of its coffee shops.

Down the road, The Ebrington Arms is a hidden gem that is quietly causing a stir in the culinary world. The pub’s landlords, Jim and Claire Alexander, both left successful careers in London’s music business to fulfil their dream of running a country pub.

“We chose the Cotswolds because it’s a romantic year-round destination,” Claire explains. “In summer it’s all about walking in the sunshine and visiting National Trust properties, and in

winter it’s about drinking red wine, sitting by the fire and taking pictures of the frost on the thatched cottages. It’s always beautiful, no matter what season.”

On first impressions, The Ebrington Arms is a classic inn, with wonky walls, low beams and muddy dogs sprawled in front of roaring fires. It’s been serving the tiny village of Ebrington since the 1640s and, with its current seasonal and organic menu, it was recently named the UK’s best village inn by *The Times*. “We’re surrounded by fields where the produce can be picked in the morning and can make it onto the plate in the same day,” says Claire. Another drawcard is the pub’s friendly and unassuming atmosphere.

“We have rich and famous people rocking up in their Aston Martins and then we have farmers that trundle in with their boots on after a day’s work in the fields,” she explains. “It’s an eclectic mix and everybody is treated the same.”

A short drive takes you to the handsome village of Broadway with its exquisite houses, regal inns, manicured lawns and art galleries. Hidden deep within a sprawling 160-hectare estate overlooking Broadway, you’ll find Dormy House hotel. An old farmhouse turned boutique bolthole, it recently completed a

£10 million (\$18.2 million) renovation. Flagstone floors, plush sofas and grand fireplaces offer a home-from-home level of comfort. In the spa, thermal suites, lavender infusion saunas and an outdoor fireside hot tub are some of the highlights. For spectacular views of the surrounding countryside, climb a couple of miles to reach Broadway Tower. An 18th-century folly, it’s otherwise known as the Highest Little Castle in the Cotswolds with dramatic turrets, gargoyles and balconies.

Journey south, and you’ll find some of the most photographed villages of the Cotswolds: The Slaughters (Upper and Lower), Bourton-on-the-Water and Bibury. The Slaughters take their name from Old English meaning ‘muddy place’, though now that couldn’t be farther from the truth. Lower Slaughter is a place of perfectly proportioned cottages and window boxes bursting with bright flowers. The Old Mill here was referenced in the *Domesday Book* of 1086, Britain’s oldest public record. Tourists through ➤

DETAILS

- Barnsley House**
Barnsley, Cirencester; www.barnsleyhouse.com.
- Broadway Tower**
Middle Hill, Broadway; www.broadwaytower.co.uk.
- Daylesford**
Moreton-in-Marsh; +44 1608 731700.
- Dormy House**
Willersy Hill, Broadway; www.dormyhouse.co.uk.



to the Mill's ice-cream shop and sit on the banks of the River Eye. Children paddle, painters bring out their watercolours, and croquet is played on the lawns.

Barnsley House is the ultimate romantic hideaway. Tucked into the charming village of Barnsley, you can feel its history, from the exposed beams to the original windows and fireplaces. The bathrooms here are particularly fabulous, with freestanding roll top baths. The landscaped gardens were designed by Rosemary Verey (who also created the gardens of Prince Charles and Sir Elton John). With a laburnum walk and an ornamental fruit and vegetable garden, they instantly attracted global interest and continue to do so today. The spa here is a destination in its own right. An oasis of calm in a striking modernist glass box, it features a picture-perfect hydrotherapy pool with dramatic waterfalls framed by rolling countryside.

From here, the next stop is Bourton-on-the-Water, with its five bridges crossing the river which runs through its heart; and Bibury's ancient Arlington Row — a collection of 14th-century cottages on the banks of the River Coln — is deemed so iconic that it features on the inside of British passports.

The glass-fronted lakeside villas at The Lakes by Yoo are another new addition to the area. With boating, canoeing, bird watching and wild swimming on offer, the *pièce de résistance* is the Barn House with interiors designed by supermodel and Cotswolds enthusiast, Kate Moss. "We have created a luxurious haven in the woods," says Moss. "It's a perfect place to escape with family and friends." With huge velvet sofas, a wood burning

DETAILS


The Ebrington Arms Ebrington, Chipping Campden; www.theebringtonarms.co.uk. **The Lakes by Yoo** Nr Lechlade; www.thelakesbyyoo.com. **The Wild Rabbit** Church St, Kingham; www.thewildrabbit.co.uk.

FROM ABOVE LEFT The Ebrington Arms, built almost 400 years ago, is known for its take on classic pub food; breathtaking views from Broadway Tower, the second-highest point in Cotswolds.

fire, a Crosley turntable, and a guestbook signed by her celebrity friends, it's got touches of Moss throughout.

On your way to the Lakes, stock up on delicious produce and treats at Daylesford's organic farm shop and cafe. A countryside institution, the majority of food is sourced from its own farm — there's even a dairy and creamery on site.

Don't head back to the big smoke without dining at The Wild Rabbit in Kingham. This pretty pub is so good that it won its first Michelin star in 2016. Hearty British classics with a modern twist, and a relaxed, rustic ambience are the order of the day — and in the event of overindulgence there's a selection of stylish bedrooms upstairs.

Pack your wellies, your swimmers, and prepare to loosen your belt. There's no better time to escape to England's green and pleasant land. 

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