



Retreats, but not as you know them

Swap spa robes for wild swims, foraging walks and off-grid adventures with three extraordinary UK retreats that wake you up in all the right ways.



1 Commune with nature at the Elmley Nature Reserve

The only nature reserve in the UK where you can spend the night and indulge in butterfly and dragon fly walks, and have the perfect bird-watching retreat.

WHY GO?

The Isle of Sheppey doesn't look promising on the approach. The bridge from the mainland passes factories and pylons, and nothing prepares you for what lies on the other side. But drive the two-mile track into Elmley – through grazing cattle, winding waterways and open marsh – and the landscape simply opens up. Huge skies, flat wetlands, a quality of silence that takes a moment to settle into. This is adventure of a quieter, wilder kind: Elmley is a working family farm while also being a 3,300-acre national

nature reserve in North Kent, and the only place in the country where you can spend the night inside one – stepping outside before dawn to a landscape already alive with sound and movement. One hour from London, and another world entirely.

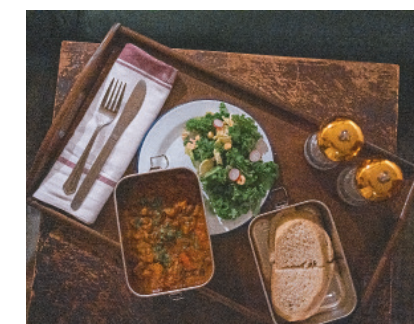
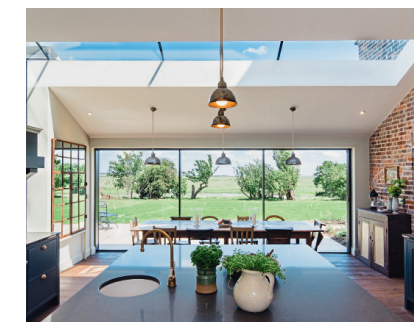
THE SETTING

The reserve sits in the Thames Estuary landscape, where the light has a particular quality – silver estuary reflections mixing with open sky that photographers come here to capture, and that guests discover for themselves

the first morning they leave the curtains open. Wetland meadows, grazing pasture and reedbeds spread across the estate, punctuated by drainage channels and vast, unhurried skies. Kingshill Farmhouse has stood at the heart of the farm for centuries – it even served as a temporary prison for James II in 1688. History runs deep at Elmley, woven into the landscape as naturally as the wildlife itself.

WHAT YOU'LL DISCOVER

Summer at Elmley is when the reserve earns its reputation. Breeding waders



arrive in force – Elmley holds the highest concentration of lapwing, redshank, avocet and oystercatcher in lowland Britain – and the skies fill with marsh harriers, hobbies and peregrines.

Head guide Simon leads wildlife tours on foot and by 4x4, each one shaped around what's active that morning. Butterfly and dragonfly walks are a summer highlight, with marbled whites, brown argus and emerald damselflies among the finds.

Go further under your own steam across miles of trails, and you'll discover four bird hides next to a freshwater wild swimming pond and a photography hide for hire. In summer, overnight guests also have access to Elmley's secret beach on the Swale – a private stretch of sand ideal for sunset swims and picnics with no one else around. You'll never know you're only 40 miles from London.

ROOMS AND STAYING OVER

Accommodation ranges from the 17th-century Kingshill Farmhouse – six individually designed bedrooms, four en-suite, sleeping 12, available for exclusive hire – to a collection of shepherd's huts and cabins across the reserve. The huts (the Damson, Ferryman's, Saltbox, Vanellus, Little Owl and others) each have wood-burning stoves and far-reaching marsh views, with many featuring outdoor baths or showers. Leave the curtains open and wake up to lapwing flocks performing against the morning sky. In summer, bell tents are pitched across the meadows and woodland for a more immersive way to sleep on the reserve.

FOOD AND FEASTING

The huts and cabins are self-catering, but there is no need to arrive loaded with supplies. Breakfast hampers,

picnic lunches and evening supper hampers packed with local and seasonal delights can all be ordered and delivered straight to your door. Kingshill Farmhouse, booked as a serviced stay, includes breakfast, with lunch and dinner available at extra charge. The Linhay barn runs an honesty bar for drinks and snacks during the day, and wood-fired pizzas are available from the Kingshill Courtyard from May to September – the ideal end to a day on the reserve.

Elmley also runs a programme of retreats throughout the year, from yoga weekends in the reserve's dedicated studio to self-guided wellness and birdwatching retreats. Check the website for upcoming dates.

HOW TO BOOK

elmleynaturereserve.co.uk
01795 664896

WORDS: ALEX FISHER. IMAGES: SUPPLIED.



2 Adventuring at The Lovat with a foodie twist

A Highland hotel on the banks of Loch Ness where you can discover fishing, canoeing and hiking, and where the food as much as the landscape is worth the journey north.

WHY GO?

Fort Augustus sits at the southern tip of Loch Ness, and the Lovat sits right at its edge – a family-run, four-star hotel built in 1869 on the site of an 18th-century Highland barracks, and one of the Highlands' most distinctive bases for adventure. Michelin-listed and AA three-rossette awarded, it has earned a reputation that reaches well beyond the region.

A hotel where the food is as extraordinary as the setting that surrounds it – perfect fuel for all the adventuring you will do during

the day. Swim in the loch, cycle through glens, try Segway tours, archery or laser clay shooting, or head out onto the water with canoeing on Loch Ness. For something slower, fish the region's crystal-clear rivers with expert tuition, or simply explore the trails at your own pace. Back at base, unwind with shiatsu, reflexology or an Indian head massage, available Thursday to Saturday.

Whether you're after adrenaline or deep rest, this is a place to reset, recharge and reconnect with nature.

THE SETTING

Loch Ness is 23 miles long, over 700 feet deep, and flanked by steep wooded hillsides that press in close on both sides. The sheer scale of it – standing at the edge on even a calm day – is enough to understand why it has captivated and unsettled people for centuries. Fort Augustus is quiet and small, a village that sits comfortably in the shadow of the hills: the Caledonian Canal passing through five locks right at its heart, forests and glens rolling away in every direction, with trails to match. The Lovat sits at the village



edge, close enough to the loch to feel its presence from every room, and perfectly placed for everything the Great Glen has to offer – whether that means lacing up boots after breakfast or simply watching the light change across the water from a warm lounge.

WHAT YOU'LL DISCOVER

The Great Glen Way runs straight through the village and walking a well-chosen section on a long summer day is one of the finest things you can do up here. Kayaking and canoeing on the loch, guided landscape tours with the Highland Tour Company, and Highland “coo” tours above Drumadrochit are among the organised options – or simply hire a hotel bike and follow the trails through the glens at your own pace. Boat cruises depart five minutes from the front door, Urquhart Castle perched

above the loch is worth half a day, and the Falls of Foyers are a 20-minute drive. For the genuinely committed, there is always the Loch Ness Dook – a full plunge into the loch – to round off a day well spent.

ROOMS AND STAYING OVER

Bedrooms range from garden rooms, loft rooms, master rooms and the self-contained apartment at the top of the house. In summer, master and loft rooms with direct Loch Ness views are the ones to go for – the light at this latitude in June and July, falling across the water through long evenings, makes those rooms worth the upgrade. Rooms are thoughtfully furnished with deep beds, proper bathrooms and good linen. There's a log fire in the lounge that earns its place even in August, and the kind of personal hospitality that makes guests come back.

FOOD & FEASTING

The Station Road restaurant at the Lovat is the reason many people make the journey. Chef Sean Kelly forages the surrounding landscape for wild herbs, mushrooms, berries and seaweeds, combining them with locally landed seafood – scallops from Orkney, Gigha halibut – and Highland produce to create menus that taste of this place. The tasting menu, the Mòr, is the full experience; the shorter Mion menu suits those wanting something less extended. Hearty Highland breakfasts set you up for whatever the day holds, and the Waypoint Bar treats Scottish whisky with the respect it deserves.

HOW TO BOOK

thelovat.com
01456 459250



3 Creative styling retreat in Ennys, Cornwall

A Georgian manor farm hidden in a quiet corner of West Cornwall, with 20 acres of gardens and pasture to explore, and some of the finest coastline in Britain within easy reach.

WHY GO?

The drive into Ennys tells you something is different before you've even arrived. Down a long private track between woodland banks rich with bluebells, foxgloves and ferns, under a canopy of trees, then there it is: a Georgian manor farm in 20 acres of wild pasture and gardens, tucked into its own corner of West Cornwall and completely hidden from the road. Adult-only and personal in a way that shows – fresh flowers from the garden in the cottage, crisp linen and homemade scones on arrival. Some of the most dramatic coastline

in Britain is just 15 minutes away, with wild swimming, clifftop walking and open Atlantic views all right on your doorstep. This summer, Ennys is hosting a creative styling retreat in collaboration with Faded Vintage and Planted House, Penzance-based shops specialising in vintage interiors and restored antique furniture, plus plants and beautifully curated finds. Across the weekend, you'll learn the essentials of container planting and explore interior styling using foraged materials gathered from the estate, shaping everything from bonsai art to natural table settings.

THE SETTING

The estate sits in the pastoral landscape of the Penwith peninsula, wild pasture running down to the River Hayle and hedgerows thick with summer growth. The grounds are worth a morning in themselves: a glasshouse, orangerie and formal gardens at their best in summer, mown paths running out through the wider pasture. But the real draw lies beyond the gates. West Cornwall has a quality of light and a scale of coastline unlike anywhere else in England, and Ennys places you right at the heart of it.



WHAT YOU'LL DISCOVER

At the retreat, days unfold between the gardens and the orangerie, ending with a candlelit supper surrounded by your own creations, before leaving recharged, inspired and seeing your home through a more creative lens. If you use Ennys as a base, you can cycle to Prussia Cove for open-water swimming in one of Cornwall's most beautiful and least crowded spots – rocky coves, clear Atlantic water, no queues. Or simply join the Southwest Coast Path nearby and walk the clifftops towards Mousehole or north towards Hayle and the lighthouse at Godrevy. The Minack Theatre, cut into the cliff above the sea near Land's End, is worth an evening regardless of what's on: the setting alone is extraordinary. For more inspiration, St Ives deserves a full day – the Tate, Barbara Hepworth Museum & Sculpture Garden, The Leach Pottery, and any

number of good places to eat. Back at the estate, 20 acres of mown paths, riverbank and kitchen garden invite the kind of afternoon that needs no particular plan.

ROOMS AND STAYING OVER

Four properties have been converted from the original farm buildings. The Granary is a one-bedroom cottage for couples, with a wood burner and private terrace; Well Cottage, also for two, has a wood burner, a covered terrace and a small private garden. Garden Cottage sleeps four with an upstairs sitting room overlooking the gardens. The Godolphin Studio Suite, accessed via the original granite hayloft steps, has a large bedroom with bath and separate shower, and a comfortable sitting room. All four share the outdoor heated pool and the wider estate, with a welcome hamper of Cornish produce waiting on arrival.

FOOD & FEASTING

The property is self-catering, which in West Cornwall is a genuinely good position to be in. Newlyn fish market is 15 minutes away – buy that morning's catch and cook it that evening. Penzance has farm shops, bakeries and a good restaurant scene: 45 Queen Street is worth booking. The Gurnard's Head near Zennor, and Kota in Porthleven are both worth the drive.

Ennys hosts Karen and Nick know this corner of Cornwall inside out and are generous with their recommendations – from the best beach for a quiet swim to the hidden restaurant 20 minutes away. Ennys also runs a curated programme of creative retreats throughout the year; check the website for upcoming dates.

HOW TO BOOK

ennys.co.uk
hello@ennys.co.uk