

Head for the hills

Don't let the name fool you – The Cottage in the Wood, Malvern is a four-star hotel with exceptional food, sweeping views and a tranquility most of us have forgotten.

THE COTTAGE IN THE WOOD Malvern

● The setting

As we drove towards the Malverns, the hills rising up ahead of us, cow parsley lining the verges, we fell silent. We wound our way up past a row of oil-style streetlamps, the woodland closing around us, then there we were – on top of the world at The Cottage in the Wood. The house, all handsome and Georgian with tall windows, looked over the valley and the distant Cotswolds.

● Step inside

Checking in felt immediately special – the reception sits inside a book-lined room with floor-to-ceiling shelves, an open fire and velvet armchairs. Beyond it, The Lounge Bar leads out to The Terrace, where those extraordinary views stretch out before you. We eventually made our way to the Coach House, a short walk from the main building, where our “Best” room was waiting. Muted, calming tones, a super-king bed and double patio doors opening on to a private terrace looking out towards the

main house through the trees – it really did live up to its “best” name. The bathroom was equally generous: a roll-top bath, walk-in shower and Bramley toiletries. Oh, and a vintage record player with a stack of vinyl. We put on a classical Elgar and settled in.

● Elgar country

The Malvern Hills have inspired some of the greatest creative minds. But it is Edward Elgar, born in Broadheath near Worcester, who is most entwined with this place – he walked these hills constantly,

The hillside location offers breathtaking views



The AA-Rosette winning 1919 Restaurant

performed a private violin recital at what is now the Coach House in the 1920s, and composed much of his greatest work with this landscape as his backdrop. The 35-mile Elgar Route takes in the places he lived, worked and is buried, and with his music playing, the connection feels entirely natural.

● Foodie rating

Our first evening was in The Brasserie, the hotel's relaxed dining room, where head chef Mark Potts serves seasonal, beautifully crafted food in a welcoming setting. I went for wild mushrooms on brioche toast with asparagus and tarragon, which were exceptional, followed by baked cod with courgette, basil and prawns, and triple-cooked fries. I was completely in food heaven.

Breakfast was just as good – porridge with local honey, smoked salmon with scrambled eggs on sourdough, and the best coffee I've ever had. Every member of staff throughout our stay was warm, attentive and professional without being intrusive. We felt genuinely special from start to finish.

● The main event: 1919 Restaurant

On our second evening, the space had been transformed – white tablecloths, intimate lighting and a sense that the evening was about to become something memorable. This was 1919 Restaurant, listed in the 2026 Michelin Guide and Malvern's only establishment with three AA Rosettes, open Thursday to Saturday for a seven-course tasting menu at £95.

We started with amuse-bouche and sourdough with Ampersand Dairy butter, then a heritage tomato salad with consommé and local curds, a Cornish scallop with curry coconut cream, and a Knightwick fillet steak with feta and mint. A geranium pannacotta pre-dessert and chocolate delicé with mascarpone ice cream followed, with petit fours to finish. Hands down the finest dining experience I've had in years – worth the trip on its own. My daughter, meanwhile, declared her beef burger on brioche bun the best she'd ever had – the team are wonderful with families too.

● Out and about

Worcester is roughly eight miles away – we wandered along the river with views of the magnificent cathedral, had lunch, and visited the National Trust's Greyfriars House and Garden, a late 15th-century timber-framed merchant's house in the city centre. On the way back we stopped at The Wonky Barn near Ledbury, a 24/7 automated shop stocked with local cheeses, breads and artisan produce – perfect for taking a little of the region home.

● Good to know

The Cottage in the Wood, Malvern sits above Great Malvern, Worcestershire, with miles of walking on the doorstep. Great Malvern Priory – home to the oldest medieval stained glass in England outside York Minster – is worth a visit, and the town's natural springs are still flowing; the Victorian water cure drew the likes of Florence Nightingale and Charles Darwin, and you can still sample the water today.

It is said C.S. Lewis stepped out of a Malvern pub one night, saw one of the town's 109 gas lamps glowing through the falling snow and said, “that would make a very nice opening line to a book.” And so *Narnia* began. Tolkien, a close friend, walked the same hills and mapped them on to Middle Earth. Malvern Theatres, in the original 1885 Winter Gardens, stages world-class productions year-round.

● Treat yourself

The Forest Spa opened in August – the first spa located in the Malvern Hills – and offers guests in Best or Great rooms a complimentary 90-minute spa session. Other guests can book spa access for £25pp and day visitors can access the spa for £59pp. This includes the use of the hot tub, indoor relaxation room, relaxation garden, sauna and plunge pool. A three-course lunch is also included for day visitors.

Some places you visit and enjoy. Others stay with you. The Cottage in the Wood is firmly in the second camp – so beautiful, so peaceful and utterly unlike anywhere else in England that by the time you leave, you're already planning your return. The rooms are exceptional, the food extraordinary, and we left wishing we could stay another night. It won't be our last visit.

● Book now

The Cottage in the Wood, Malvern offers B&B from £104 per night for a Cosy Room (two adults sharing, low season), rising to £177 for Best rooms; dinner, bed and breakfast packages are also available. Visitingcottageinthewood.co.uk

WEEKENDS OF WONDER



Afternoon tea on the terrace

‘Some places stay with you after you’ve left’



Cosy comfort in the bedrooms



Seasonal menus with global flavours