

Town and country

Choose a quirky hotel, a cosy guesthouse or a historic cottage for your next UK break



Relax Georgian-style at Batty Langley's or soak up the ambience of a stylish bathroom (below)



Rates at Batty Langley's Hotel start at £250 per room per night, including taxes, based on two sharing. For more information, visit battylangleys.com or call 020 7377 4390.

Batty Langley's Hotel, London

How often do you spend time exploring the city in which you live? It is something I want to do more of after staying at the fabulous Batty Langley's hotel.

The small hotel is tucked away in Spitalfields, a five-minute walk from London's busy Liverpool Street station.

Stepping inside this Georgian gem, it's as if the world outside just stops. You are away from the hustle and bustle. (And talking of bustles, I really felt I needed one in here). The attention to detail is second to none. The rooms are all individually furnished with Georgian paintings and furniture but with very modern twists – we had a television hidden behind a mirror and a toilet housed in a wooden throne. The bathroom was exquisite, with a roll-top bath, power shower and REN toiletries.

Every room is named after a famous Georgian. We were in the wonderfully monikered Obadiah Shuttleworth room, called after a musician and composer. There are 29 rooms and suites in total and the names range from Ann Flynn,

a petty thief, to Mary Wollstonecraft, the feminist writer who penned *A Vindication Of The Rights Of Woman*.

There is no restaurant in Batty Langley's but it does provide breakfast, brought to you on a tray in your room. It felt very decadent having a not-very Georgian fruit smoothie and croissant in our room.

The hotel is a brilliant base from which to explore Georgian London and the city's Huguenot past. The beautiful Christ Church is well worth a visit, as is just wandering around and admiring the architecture.

You are right on the doorstep of Spitalfields Market and not far from the curry houses of Brick Lane. We had a really lovely meal at Wringing and Mangle, where the bottomless prosecco at brunch is incredible value at just £15 per person.

Back at Batty's there are so many places to retire to – a wonderful library, an enchanting courtyard or The Tapestry Room, where there is an honesty bar. You pour your own drinks and write it down in a book. And it really is the perfect place to settle down with a gin.

Now that is very Georgian.

Margaret Hussey

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Cosy up in front of the log burner in the 15th-century Cottage at Twyford (above)

Twyford, Hampshire

There's something about seeing the world through the eyes of a two year old that changes your perspective on the enthralling.

Exploring Marwell Zoo, our toddler Freddie was intrigued by the rhinos and giraffes, rather taken with the cheeky chimps and slightly terrified of a gang of marauding meerkats. But he was just as thrilled to discover a stretch of muddy puddles by the tiger enclosure, which he proceeded to spend half an hour jumping in and paying not the slightest bit of attention to the imposing felines watching him with interest from a wooden platform above.

We were staying only a 10-minute drive from the zoo, having booked a few nights at The Cottage at Twyford, a beautiful 15th-century retreat which was all dark beams, low ceilings and covetable antique furniture – including an ancient oak highchair (on wheels, no less) that could have doubled as an Inquisition-era dipping stool. Not needed the weekend we stayed.

The first thing we need to do at the end of any long journey is let Freddie stretch his legs. So as soon as we had unloaded our luggage from the car we headed out to explore the village.

A short walk led us to Hunter Park playing field, where we let Fred work off some energy in the children's playground and sandpit before wandering into town, where we made the rookie error of visiting the

Twyford Stores on empty stomachs. We had only popped in for a pint of milk but left with bags stuffed with cold cuts and gloriously oozy cheeses from the delectable delicatessen, ice cream made a stone's throw from the shop and enough carbs to fuel a marathon runner in the form of freshly baked sourdough and large wedges of rustic-looking Bakewell tart.

After a relaxing evening sinking a bottle of red by the cottage's log burner, the next morning we snuck on to the platform at Alresford station to wave off one of the Watercress Line Pullman trains through plumes of steam and smoke, before heading for shelter from the rain at The Globe, on the banks of the expansive Alresford pond.

This gastropub will serve you two tasty meals – think wild boar stew or salmon fillet with hollandaise sauce – for £13, along with the chance to catch sight of green-winged teal among the bulrushes. They even offered to make an off-menu order for Freddie, rustling up a batch of (homemade) pesto. And as any parent will tell you, a well-fed, happy child is a holiday all in itself. 🍷

Amy Packer

Mulberry Cottages (01227 464958, mulberrycottages.com) offers three nights at The Cottage at Twyford during low season for £593.60, sleeping four.



Exmoor, Somerset

After a stroll around Bath in the rain followed by a two-hour drive through winding country lanes, we arrived at Exmoor House slightly damp and tired. But Teri and Austin, who acquired this bed and breakfast in Exmoor, West Somerset, a couple of years ago, are certainly used to providing home comforts for weary walkers.

Before we knew it, our coats and shoes were in the drying room and we were enjoying a hot chocolate with our feet up in the lounge. It's clearly been lovingly renovated in light, airy Farrow & Ball pastels and with carefully placed antique furniture here and there.

Each bedroom is named after a different poet and we were in the pale-blue Kingsley room, with framed poetry on the walls. Austin's carpentry skills have clearly come in handy for building cupboards that maximise space. The beds were comfy, the shower was

hot and we soon felt ourselves again. Every detail seems to be thought of here – fresh milk and cookies in the room daily, the tog of the bedding just right and the breakfast is locally sourced.

Dinner isn't served in the evening but, handily, The Rest And Be Thankful Inn is a few steps away and serves hearty pub grub. We wandered over and to our surprise found an Everly Brothers tribute act playing. It seems this is where the locals let their hair down and we ended up joining in the fun after dinner, finishing the night perfecting air-guitar skills to Status Quo.

We woke to the sound of lambs bleating and the odd passing tractor and wandered downstairs for our home-cooked fry-up while taking in our first proper look at the 360-degree view of the rolling hills.

Over breakfast, new friends suggested we see Dunkery Beacon. It's a challenging, windy

climb to the top through purple-heather moors. But once we reached the summit – the highest point in Exmoor, with views across the Bristol Channel, Wales and Dartmoor – we felt on top of the world.

Then, in search of a well-deserved lunch, we drove on to Dunster. It is one of the largest and oldest medieval villages in the country and is distinctive by its castle on the top of the hill – known as Dunster Tor – surrounded by sub-tropical gardens.

The village itself is a charming street of timber-framed houses set off by a yarn market. It's great for a browse around antique shops and upmarket boutiques and there's a choice of cosy fireside pubs and tea shops.

On our way back we took a detour to Minehead and walked along the vast stretch of sandy beach before heading back to another warm welcome at Exmoor House.

Paula O'Connor

King-size rooms at Exmoor House start at £90 per night for b&b, based on two people sharing. To book, call 01643 841432 For more on the area, go to visitsomerset.co.uk and visit-exmoor.co.uk.



Great escapes

Edited by Laura Mulley

