

STROLLS AND FIRESIDES

WITH good weather predicted through autumn, a cottage or lodge stay in Britain is a must to make the most of the mellow season. As this bright time of year flutters in, think ferny woodland colours, falling leaves, food festivals and coastal strolls – all bathed in golden light. What's more, now the peak period is behind us, there are far more cottages to choose from. And even the swiftest of proposees becomes a bargain, as prices plummet from their summer highs.

RAB your knife and fork and tuck into some of the finest fayre around at wonderful seasonal food festivals.

Drop off the bags at a cosy cottage. Then make tracks for sampling opportunities, wine tastings and cooking demos performed by celebrity chefs.

The enticing Aldeburgh Food and Drink Festival, for example, will showcase local seafood dishes, beers and artisan products at lovely Snape Maltings from September 27 to 28, with 80 East Anglian producers and a celebrity chefs, including TV's Valentine Warner and 2013 Masterchef winner Natalie Coleman.

Suffolk Secrets has plenty of delectable cottage options in Snape, Aldeburgh and the surrounding villages, all close to the Suffolk Heritage Coast.

Other events where you can literally bring home the harvest include the Dartmouth Food Festival (October 24-26). Coast & Country Cottages can put you up in style by the beautiful River Dart.

And don't forget Tannertfest in the Channel Islands (October 1 to November 11), where special set menus in many of the great restaurants make Michelin-starred lunches suddenly very affordable.

BRIGHT DAYS

● CRISP autumn mornings are perfect for strolling on the South West Coast Path, which Lonely Planet rates as one of the world's top walks.

Admire the views along the craggy cliffs, dip down onto deserted



Golden season: Walk by the coast, then toast your toes by a cosy cottage fireside

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beaches and tuck into cosy fireside lunches at a welcoming thatched pub, serving scrummy fresh local produce.

Attractions are less busy and prices are often reduced now, making it a good time to explore the likes of the Eden Project, the Lost Gardens of Heligan, Dartmoor Zoo, Becky Falls

or Pennywell Farm. Toad Hall Cottages, Blue Chip Holidays or Holiday Cottages will find you an autumnal cottage bursting with West Country character and charm.

On your way south, stop off at the Three Counties Caravan Show (October 3-5) at Malvern. There's live music and the very latest in caravanning to enjoy.

THE endless sandy beaches of North Norfolk are sublime walking territory in the long, low, golden light of autumn. And the season's rich colours and morning mists make the Norfolk Broads a paradise for keen photographers, too.

Discover Nelson's Norfolk with a new app, starting at his birthplace in Burnham Thorpe. And venture into impressive Norfolk 'wool' churches where exquisite 15th-century wood screen paintings of the saints survive. A self-catering stay here during the festive season is a good bet, too. Cromer Pier Christmas Show



SUBLIME WALKS

and Thurston's famous Christmas Spectacular, the largest in the country featuring 130 performers, both start high kicking in November.

And the Queen's Sandringham Estate and Blickling Hall will be spreading even more seasonal cheer when they hold their Christmas fairs. Plan your festive fun by booking a cosy Norfolk cottage through Keys Holidays or Rural Retreats.

Or stay in a centrally heated, five-star lodge at Dream Lodges Norfolk Park in North Walsham, where a festive menu will be served in the very stylish restaurant on site.

● **LOOKING** for a family pad for Christmas week itself? Then make busy like a festive elf and get booking. Beth Bailey, of Premier Cottages, says: 'Large properties tend to book up early and will be hard to find if you put off planning your festive break until November.'

'Extended families and those wanting properties with facilities such as indoor play areas, games rooms and swimming pools should decide on their Christmas cottage now.'

● **IMMERSE** yourself in russet tones by going 'leaf peeping' at a National Trust property, or one of the ten stately homes known as the Treasure Houses of England. These great estates – including Castle Howard, Chatsworth, Beaulieu and Holkham Hall – will soon be resplendent with autumn colour as their woodlands shed their foliage.

You'll find flower festivals set amid the Elizabethan grandeur and great art of Burghley, in Lincolnshire, and at exquisite Leeds Castle in Kent.

At some of these historic houses, you can rent a self-catering cottage set in their manicured grounds. Failing that, agencies such as Sykes Cottages, Holiday Cottages, Blue Chip Holidays and Bramley & Teal are sure to be able to put you up close by in suitably stately style.