

Ideas for late autumn short breaks

A selection of ideas for holiday short breaks this autumn.

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Lakeside Barn

LOOKING for inspiration for a late autumn short break? Then look no further....

Celebrate the autumn wine harvest at an award-winning English vineyard on a hotel break in Dorset. Visitors enjoy a guided tour of the vineyard and winery followed by a wine-tasting at the Furleigh Estate Vineyard on an exclusive overnight break at BridgeHouse in nearby Beaminster (01308-862200; www.fihotels.com).

The family-run hotel, which dates back to the 13th-century, is offering the Harvest Gold Experience on October 19/20 and 22/23. Guests receive a complimentary glass of Furleigh Estate's sparkling wine on arrival at the hotel and enjoy a three-course candlelit dinner from BridgeHouse's Taste of the West Gold Award-winning menu. After breakfast the following morning they visit the vineyard where they also enjoy coffee and lunch. Cost is £140 per person sharing a coach-house room for one night.

Longing to experience the Downton Abbey lifestyle? Then get together with some

equally aspirational friends for the weekend and move into 14th-century Bruisyard Hall in Suffolk for an authentic taste of aristocratic living (though without the downstairs staff).

Set in a 700-acre private estate and owned by the same noble English family for more than 400 years, the beautiful old house near the traditional coastal town of Aldeburgh sleeps up to 20 people and is available for rental from Suffolk Secrets (01502-722717; www.suffolk-secrets.co.uk). Luxuriously renovated and refurbished, it holds the ultimate gold five-star grading from VisitEngland and is full of period detail and character, with antique furniture and fine old paintings. Most bedroom suites have a fireplace and private bathroom, while two have four-poster beds.

There is a clubby bar with a card table on the second floor, (though would-be Lord Granthams will have to serve themselves, rather than ring for the butler). Up to four well-behaved dogs are also welcome and catering can be arranged, as can fishing for trout in the estate's lake, horse-riding, clay pigeon-shooting, boat trips and archery. Three-night rental this autumn/winter starts at £4,000.

Brush up your cooking skills for the autumn/winter dinner party season on a stay at a luxurious new lakeside venue in Cheshire.

Lakeside Barn (01829-760902 (www.fihotels.com)) is a beautifully converted building which offers a bright and airy, state-of-the-art cookery school downstairs, plus two smart, contemporary-style bedrooms above. Overlooking a five-acre lake, the cookery school is run by ex-London Savoy chef Philip Martin who provides hands-on tuition in a choice of specialities such as baking, fish and shellfish, vegetarian cookery, Spanish and Italian food and cooking with chocolate.

Day-long courses for small groups take place in a fun and light-hearted atmosphere with everyone sitting down afterwards to enjoy the dishes they've prepared with a glass of wine and leaving with their own recipe folder including techniques and tips covered in the class. On selected dates until the end of the year an overnight Cook and Stay package normally costing £495 for two is available for the special introductory price of £345. It includes accommodation in one of the new bedrooms and breakfast, as well as use of a spacious lounge with sophisticated audio and TV system, a garden room, sauna, gym equipment, snooker table and outside seating areas beside the lake. The location, just outside the attractive village of Tarporley, ten miles from Chester, is surrounded by peaceful countryside, with attractive walks from the door.

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