



BEAMS, BEER & BEDS

Winter is here, so find yourself a cosy inn – preferably with an open fire – and let’s all hibernate, if only for a little while

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PHOTO: © JAKE EASTHAM

There is something quintessentially English about an inn, which traditionally provided lodging and sustenance for weary travellers. But while they were not exclusive to Britain – travellers across Europe made use of them, too – what make ours so special is that many of them retain historic features that provide clues to the lives of our medieval predecessors.

Take The Olde Bell in Berkshire. The oldest parts of the building date back to 1135, when it opened its doors as a guesthouse for visitors to the nearby Benedictine priory. The Sanctus Bell that hangs over The Olde Bell's doorway is a relic of this time – it served as an alarm to alert monks that an important visitor was on their way.

And that's not all. A secret tunnel runs from the pub to the priory, which was used by Lord Lovelace of Hurley, one of the key plotters of the Glorious Revolution that saw Catholic King James II removed from the throne and replaced with his Protestant daughter Mary and son-in-law William of Orange.

Visitors today seeking out a sense of this history will not be disappointed: outside, the leaning building and creaking pub sign that signalled to (mostly) illiterate passersby that they could rest here has changed little in centuries. Meanwhile, inside it has been sensitively and comfortably renovated to provide the kind of accommodation expected

by modern-day guests.

Accommodation is spread out across five buildings, including the 12th-century Main Inn and Malt House, and rooms include handmade mattresses, wool blankets and, in some cases, even an in-room claw-foot bathtub.

Meanwhile, in its 2 AA Rosette restaurant you can tuck into rustic fare using

The bell hanging over the doorway alerted monks in the nearby priory that an important visitor was on their way



Main image and left: The Olde Bell, Berkshire, retains quaint features inside and out. Previous page: The charming Anchor Inn, Hampshire

seasonal ingredients from the kitchen garden and local suppliers. Afterwards, sip a nightcap in a cosy armchair by the fireplace.

Dating from the 18th century, The Rose & Crown in County Durham is a mere baby in comparison, but no less special. The ivy-covered, three-storey stone building is like a protective parent looking after the pretty Pennine village of Romaldkirk, near the historic market town of Barnard Castle, where you can visit the splendid Bowes Museum. The village is set amid tranquil countryside and is home to no fewer than three village greens and a Saxon church.

Part of the Great Inns of Britain group of properties, there are 14 boutique rooms across the Main House, the Courtyard and the characterful Monk's Cottage, with plenty of period features, such as beamed ceilings and exposed stone walls.

However, for us, the Rose & Crown's biggest attraction is that it succeeds where so many other pubs fail. It offers a seriously good food menu – it also has 2 AA Rosettes – in its oak-panelled dining room, without losing the charm and intimacy of its traditional bar area.

And so to the Cotswolds, a region brimming with no end of tempting pubs and boltholes. Few, however, are quite as enticing as the wisteria-clad Ebrington Arms, in Chipping Campden, which is, quite simply, the epitome of the English country pub.

Serving the community since the 1640s, this village inn has just

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Clockwise, from top left: The Rose & Crown lounge; roaring fire at the Ebrington Arms; the rooms at the Anchor Inn have Tudor-style beams

Below: The Rose & Crown in County Durham is well placed for long country walks



five bedrooms, giving it a real home-from-home feel. Welcoming touches include a small decanter of sherry and home-baked biscuits to take the edge off any travel fatigue. You can also head downstairs to the lovely pub and sample one of the three Yubberton ales developed by the landlords. Though the beers are most definitely new, the brewery's name refers to the original name of the old village: you may even hear locals refer to the tavern as the 'Yubby'.

With its low, oak beams and beautifully polished bar, the Anchor Inn in Hampshire is the kind of place that makes you feel right at home from the off. Even the jolly, chatty locals are happy to welcome you into their fold as you share stories over a local ale or speciality gin.

Each of the five bedrooms in the 14th-century inn is individually designed and named after a First World War poet. In the Rupert Brooke bedroom, the beams reach high up into the pitched roof and the French doors open onto a small balcony. Lying on the big bed, you can gaze across at Hampshire's chalky fields, which roll away into the distance, with the occasional deer or pheasant among the crops.

Downstairs, the excellent – and very pretty – restaurant serves delicious dishes such as pork belly with frozen apple and blue cheese, or sea bass accompanied with the freshest of vegetables, using local ingredients. The dining-room walls are covered in interesting memorabilia, including photographs of the First World War veterans that gathered here on Armistice Day anniversaries for as long as they could. Elsewhere, there is a small, comfortable seating area in the bar, with old-fashioned armchairs and a

PHOTO: © JAKE EASTHAM





Left: The Star Inn is housed in a pretty thatched cottage

BOOK AHEAD

THE OLDE BELL, BERKSHIRE

Explore the acres of grounds of one of the oldest inns in the world. www.theoldebells.co.uk

THE ROSE & CROWN, DURHAM

A grand master of an inn, expect good food and a snug bar. www.rose-and-crown.co.uk

THE EBRINGTON ARMS, COTSWOLDS

Get a taste of village life with a stay in this community pub that brews its own beer. Plus, until the end of February 2018, you can enjoy three nights for the price of two (except in Christmas week), if you eat dinner in the restaurant on two of the nights. www.theebringtonarms.co.uk

THE ANCHOR INN, HAMPSHIRE

This local favourite is a great base for visiting Jane Austen's home in the nearby village of Chawton. www.anchorinnatlowerfroyle.co.uk

THE STAR INN, YORKSHIRE

This thatched-roof inn has unique rooms, plus its own Michelin star. www.thestaratharome.co.uk

PHOTO: © PURPLE MARBLES YORKSHIRE/ALAMY

squidgy sofa, making it hard to leave. The bedrooms have their own seating areas too, while a wide selection of books and magazines are available to read in the bedrooms and the pub.

When you can persuade yourself to venture outside, staff will furnish you with a map for short local walks across the fields and in the local lanes. However, it is nearby Chawton, just a 10-minute drive away, that's the biggest draw of the area. Jane Austen spent most of the final eight years of her life in this handsome village, and the Jane Austen's House Museum – housed in the cottage where she wrote *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* – is well worth a visit. Chawton House, a Grade II listed Elizabethan manor house nearby, was the home of Jane's brother, Edward.

For a different but still very English experience, head to The Star Inn near Helmsley, on the edge of the North York Moors. The inn is housed in one of the most picturesque thatched cottages we've ever

come across. Possibly dating from as early as the 14th century, the pub is a delightful treasure trove of ancient timbers, wonky walls and low beams. The quirky, traditional features have been carefully restored since its present owner took over the building in 1996.

The original inn was too small to offer 21st-century lodgings, so Cross House Lodge, the Star's nine-bedroomed hotel, was built just across the road.

But while the Star's unusual bedrooms are a delight – Room 8 has a piano, while Room 5 has a snooker table – it is the inn's modern Yorkshire cooking that really impresses. With such tempting options as Bransdale shot treacle-glazed grouse and pot-roast Rievaulx red-legged partridge, it's little wonder the inn has retained its Michelin star for the past three years. We wonder if its medieval guests were looked after quite so well. **B**