

Easy Trips

for early spring

including

- ▶ Relaxing in uncrowded Jamaica
- ▶ Painting course on the Isles of Scilly
- ▶ Sunshine and wildlife in Gambia
- ▶ Meeting wolves in Norway



PHOTOGRAPH: DOUG PEARSON/AVL IMAGES

Artist Anthony Garratt – who will lead an art course on Tresco – paints one of the island's beaches



Get painting in Scilly season

No sooner has the final wild Atlantic gale of winter blown through than the first hints of summer arrive in the Isles of Scilly. The UK's most southerly outcrop is known for its sparkling light, white-sand beaches, heather-clad granite headlands and exotic foliage sprouting from all sheltered spots. The island of Tresco offers vivid and varied enough environments to inspire an expressive contemporary landscape painter like Anthony Garratt, who is among a selection of British artists

due to lead painting courses here throughout the warmer months. The courses are arranged by the Newlyn Art School and suit amateur artists of all experience levels. Make your own attempt to capture tiny 2.2-mile-long Tresco's bays, ruins and Abbey Gardens on canvas, before taking a boat trip to a neighbouring island, exploring the extensive art collection at the Flying Boat Club & Spa, and comparing your efforts to those of coastal artists for sale in Tresco's gallery.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

🎓 Newlyn Art School's Tresco Painting Holidays are aimed at groups of up to 10, start in May and fill up well in advance: bookings are now being taken into 2017. Anthony Garratt's course was a late addition for 2016, so had good availability as we went to press. It runs June 17–22, including four days of tuition, access to Tresco's Flying Boat Club & Spa, b&b at the

New Inn, and flights from Land's End to St Mary's, with onwards transfer to Tresco – flights from Newquay or Exeter are available for a supplement (£1,095; newlynartschool.co.uk).

👁️ Anthony Garratt is working on a series of landscape paintings to be installed long-term outdoors on rusty easels. They've so far appeared on Tresco and Anglesey, and will soon arrive in Snowdonia (agarratt.com).

PHOTOGRAPHS: RICHARD BROOMHALL, MIKE GARLICK, MCPHERSON STEVENS, JONATHAN WATKINS

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Ellenborough Park in
Gloucestershire; the Beaufort
Dining Room; fillet of Hereford
cross beef; the Istabraq Suite



Racy place to spend your Cheltenham winnings

If the behaviour of one of its former residents is anything to go by, a stay at Ellenborough Park will be anything but dull. Once home to Jane Digby, whose romantic liaisons and globe-trotting pursuits caused great scandal in 19th-century society, the manor is now home to a country-house hotel in the grand style. Within sight of Cheltenham racetrack, where the Gold Cup is awarded on 18 March this year, Ellenborough Park spreads over manicured grounds. Bedrooms are decorated in a traditional rural

manner, with upgrades such as super-comfy Hypnos mattresses, rain showers and underfloor heating. The spa, with treatment rooms and outdoor pool, is another more modern addition. A meal in the formal, wood-panelled restaurant is an undoubted highlight, with delicate, imaginative dishes following one after the other in the tasting menu. Post-dinner, many guests choose to sprawl by the fire in the lounge with a gin or cognac delivered straight from the in-house pub.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

🏠 The rooms of the hotel are spread over four buildings (ellenboroughpark.com; from £179). The Beaufort Dining Room, brasserie, pub and lounge are in the main building. A three-course tasting menu in the Beaufort costs £55; mains in the brasserie are from £13.50. The spa has a heated outdoor pool, saunas and steam rooms. Massages start from £50 and facials from £45.

📍 Ellenborough Park is located on the outskirts of Cheltenham, just off the A40. National Express buses service the city from Gloucester, Hereford and London (nationalexpress.com). Trains run to Cheltenham Spa from Bristol, Gloucester, Leeds, London Paddington, Nottingham and Plymouth (trainline.com).
★ For race schedules and prices at Cheltenham Racecourse, see cheltenham.thejockeyclub.co.uk.

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The Royal Shakespeare Company's main theatre in Stratford seats 1,040

Stratford's big year

On 23 April 1616, St George's Day, William Shakespeare shuffled off this mortal coil. Four centuries on, his home town is gearing up for a year of big events. On the 23rd itself, by tradition Shakespeare's birthday, parades and street entertainment take place across Stratford-upon-Avon, with a group from the New Orleans Shakespeare Festival leading a jazz procession along streets dotted with half-timbered Tudor houses. On the following day, the annual Shakespeare Marathon is joined this year by a Sonnet Rap Marathon featuring all 154 of the bard's sonnets. If you can't make the big weekend, come instead to catch *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet* or *Cymbeline* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, or wait until the summer when Shakespeare's New Place opens after a revamp.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

★ Find Shakespearean trip ideas and events at shakespeare.org.uk and shakespeares-england.co.uk. Tickets for RSC plays start at around £5 (rsc.org.uk).

🚆 Direct trains serve Stratford-upon-Avon from Birmingham (from £14; londonmidland.com), and indirectly from London.

🏠 Check into The Church Street Townhouse – 10 minutes from the Royal Shakespeare Theatre – which has 12 comfy bedrooms (from £80; churchst-th.co.uk). Quote LPCST when booking for a free drink (beer, wine, spirit and mixer), valid until 31 August.

Kiss a wolf in the Arctic Circle

Above the Arctic Circle, in Norway's Polar Park, stands Wolf Lodge, so named because it's in the middle of an enclosure that is home to nine grey wolves. Spring is a prime time to book a stay in the wooden cabin, with the opportunity to come face to face with these fabled predators, with the surrounding forest still carpeted with snow and the sun rising for a little longer each day. Floor-to-ceiling windows allow visitors to peer out and, rather disconcertingly, let the wolves stare right back in. Those brave enough to leave the open fire and candle-lit comfort of the lodge can

be taken outside to meet some of the tamer animals. Guides promise that you will get close enough to receive a 'kiss' from a wolf (read: a canine slobber over the face). Part of the package is a local dinner, which might include such intriguing dishes as salted cod, reindeer steak and cloudberry dessert. Beyond close encounters with *Canis lupus*, there's also the chance to see other Nordic wildlife in the park, including Arctic foxes, bears, reindeer, lynxes and mink. And, if you're lucky, you might just see the northern lights dancing far above the skylights set in Wolf Lodge's roof.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

🏠 Wolf Lodge has six bedrooms. A one-night package includes dinner, breakfast and a wolf visit (from £400; polarpark.no/wolfledge.html). Quote 'Lonely Planet Traveller' when booking for a free ride on the park's zipline (from April, weather permitting).

✈️ Norwegian and Scandinavian Airlines fly from London, Manchester and Edinburgh to Evenes, an hour's drive from Wolf Lodge, via Oslo (from £170, flysas.com). They also fly to Tromsø, two and a half hours from Polar Park but connected by bus (from £165).

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free
zipline ride



Wolf Lodge neighbours inspect a new guest – it is thought as few as 30 wolves now live in the wild in Norway

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Mandina Lodges' Floating River Lodges sit among the mangroves of Mandina Bolong, a tributary of the Gambia River

**£50
off**
your stay



Kick back among the mangroves of West Africa

The tiny African nation of Gambia is only about the same size as Yorkshire, but there the similarities end. Hop on the six-hour flight over and you'll find the last gasps of our European winter replaced by instant, 30-degree-plus summer. The resorts along the coast are something of a West African Costa del Sol, so escape inland to Mandina Lodges, a tranquil cluster of huts set on a mangrove-lined river less than an hour from the sea. Built using local wood and thatch, the lodges look onto the jungle, or float

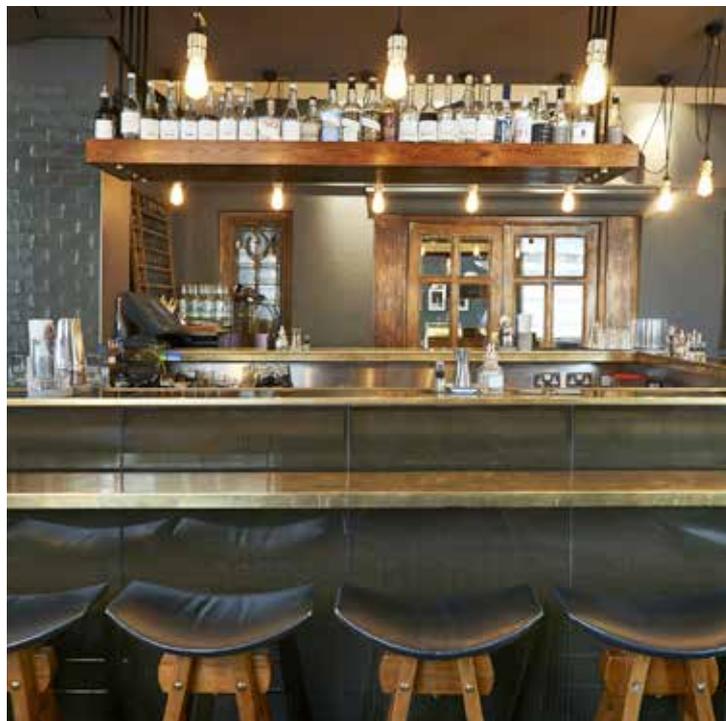
over the river on stilts. They offer ample excuses to bask in the sun, whether relaxing on the terrace or lounging by the pool to the sounds of Gambia's many birds. For a closer encounter with nature, head with expert guides into the Makasutu Forest reserve to seek out colobus monkeys, baboons and crocs. Other activities include a sunset cruise in a dugout canoe to a night of dancing and traditional lute and drum music, and visits to local villages and their resident wise men.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

🇬🇲 A seven-night stay at Mandina Lodges with the Gambia Experience is from £1,000 inclusive (gambia.co.uk), or from £350 for a three-night add-on stay. Options include floating river lodges, jungle lodges with roof terraces over the river, and spacious stilted and mangrove lodges. All feature hardwood floors, four-poster beds and characterful furnishings. There are also two pools, one with a viewing tower,

and an al fresco bar and dining area where guests can enjoy meals by candlelight. Stays also include a free guided forest walk and river trip in a traditional pirogue. Quote *Lonely Planet Traveller* when booking for £50 off your stay.

📍 Mandina Lodges is a 30-minute drive from Banjul Airport. Flights in Mandina Lodges' packages are with charter airline Titan Airways, which flies to Banjul from London Gatwick (from £349; titan-airways.com).



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
The Town Hall Hotel frontage;
The Corner Room; a Signature
Suite; The Peg + Patriot bar

A good old East End knees-up

Bethnal Green has come a long way since the Kray twins and various other East London criminal gangs made it their stomping ground in the 1960s, with new restaurants and bars popping up seemingly by the week. The conversion of the old Edwardian town hall into a hotel was something of a spearhead for change, though it's apt that its interiors have since featured in gangster flicks *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and *Snatch*. The landmark building's original marble staircases, walnut panelling

and Art Deco styling remain, complemented by floor-to-ceiling windows and mid-century furniture. The work of local producers, such as books from Hoxton Mini Press, are now also on sale alongside local artwork. The Peg + Patriot hotel bar is never less than lively, and be sure to book in for a meal at the Corner Room. Here, thoughtful, creative dishes, from pork tenderloin to curried cod, are presented at prices that any penny-pinching councillor would be well pleased with.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

🏠 The Town Hall Hotel has a number of different room options, from doubles to signature suites and apartments (from £170; townhallhotel.com). Food is served in the first-floor Corner Room and the ground-floor Typing Room, with a focus on inventive, modern European cuisine (two-course lunch £19; mains from £10). The Peg + Patriot hotel bar, which also welcomes

non-residents, is open until 1am at the weekend. There's also a pool on-site, open till midnight daily. 📍 The nearest tube is a short walk away at Bethnal Green, on the Central line (tfl.gov.uk). 🗨️ There are many distractions on the doorstep, from the bars of Paradise Row (motherkellys.co.uk) to the Sunday flower market at Columbia Road (columbiaroad.info) and the nearby Museum of Childhood (vam.ac.uk/moc).

Hiking the island of eternal spring

Spring is a fine time to discover Madeira beyond its connection with a rather stodgy cake. The subtropical Portuguese isle marooned in the Atlantic, some 360 miles west of Morocco, is known as the 'island of eternal spring', and the season is most fitting to those who prefer strapping on walking boots to pulling on swimsuits. While the winter rain has dwindled to the odd sprinkle, temperatures haven't yet crept up into the twenties – perfect weather for exploring the island's extensive network of hiking trails, which link the verdant coastline with the mountainous interior.

Highlights include the Paúl da Serra, an easy-to-ramble plateau which has commanding views of the ocean pounding both the north and south coasts, and the Pico do Arieiro – at 1,818m tall, Madeira's third highest peak, and with views above the clouds and out over the entire island. Alternatively, follow one of the many paths that abut the levadas, historic aqueducts that criss-cross Madeira, leading past fields terraced like staircases, banana plantations, and trellised vineyards where the island's eponymous dessert wine is produced – best sampled at walk's end.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

🏠 Hotel da Vila has 15 bright rooms, all with sea views, set on the beachfront of Ponta do Sol. This historic village is located on Madeira's south coast and, as the name suggests, is the sunniest place on the island (from £65; pontadosol.com/hoteldavila).

👉 To join various walking tours of the island with local experts, take a look at madeira-levada-walks.com (from £21).

✈️ BA, easyJet and Monarch fly to Madeira from various UK airports (from £89; monarch.co.uk).

📖 Find out more at lonelyplanet.com and visitmadeira.pt.



A cold winter morning on Princes Dock in Liverpool, 1972

Liverpool's water ways

When *Down the Dock Road*, Alan Bleasdale's play about the dockers of his home town Liverpool, premiered in 1976, it was a smash hit. Forty years on, it returns to the city's 1930s Royal Court theatre for an anniversary run, offering the same funny and poignant glimpse of a way of life – and city – that's now long gone. Liverpoolian Les Dennis stars as Grandad, a veteran whose plans for a peaceful last day on the docks are thwarted by a cast of colourful co-workers, from tough-as-nails Mad McKenna to Dobbo the Croxteth Casanova, with no shortage of scams experienced along the way. Afterwards, explore the waterfront as it is today at Albert Dock – a World Heritage site whose grand warehouses form the largest collection of Grade I-listed buildings in the country, and also house top museums and art galleries.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

★ *Down the Dock Road* runs from 11 March to 9 April (from £13; royalcourtLiverpool.co.uk). Admission to the Albert Dock is free (albertdock.com).

🚆 Liverpool Lime St station has train services from numerous UK cities, including Chester, London and Manchester (virgintrains.co.uk).

🏠 Set on Liverpool's most elegant avenue, Hope Street Hotel has individual rooms with oak floors, exposed brick walls and Egyptian-cotton-draped beds (from £80; hopestreethotel.co.uk).



7 Madeira's rocky northeast coast, seen from near the town of Santana



Victor Frankenstein and his 'creature' from a late 19th-century book cover

Lake eerie

Lake Geneva, seen on a sunny day, is not the likeliest of settings for a work of horror. But in 1816, ash clouds from the eruption of Indonesia's Mount Tambora resulted in a 'year without a summer', a prolonged period of dismal weather, and also one of our best-loved works of Gothic literature. At a gathering in the Swiss Alps, Lord Byron and his guests, including Percy Bysshe Shelley and his soon-to-be wife Mary, took turns in telling spine-chilling tales while cooped up in Villa Diodati. And so Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* was born. Two hundred years on, the villa remains private property, but literary pilgrims can ogle the mansion from the small park on the winding Chemin Byron, before taking a boat trip on Lake Geneva. Over the border in France, Mont Salève offers even wider panoramas: Frankenstein's monster scaled its cliff face by hand, but now a cable car provides an easier ascent.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

📍 Villa Diodati is at 9 Chemin de Ruth in the posh Geneva suburb of Cologny. Take bus A from Rive stop in the centre of Geneva and get off at Cologny-Mairie (around 20 mins; tpg.ch). For more local details, see geneve.com.

✈️ BA, easyJet, Swiss and other airlines fly to Geneva from many UK cities; the widest choice of flights comes during ski season (from £70; easyjet.com).

🏠 Hôtel Edelweiss goes for an all-out Alpine look in the Pâquis district. Its restaurant is a popular place to go for fondue (from £120; hoteledelweissgeneva.com).

Miles of Jamaican relaxation

Give the long British winter a final heave-ho in favour of a long stretch of Caribbean sand, and with any luck by the time you're back it'll finally be over. Visit Jamaica's Seven Mile Beach in late March and April, and you'll miss the crowds of American college kids who descend on the island for spring break. During the shoulder season, there are far fewer tourists stretched out under its swaying palms and frolicking in the gentle surf, so you'll have a greater chance of finding a spot of sand to call your own. Although many enjoyable hours can be lost imagining yourself the star of any number of vintage Bounty chocolate

advert on Seven Mile, you can also get a real taste of paradise – from jerk chicken to curried conch – at the various hippy-run restaurants and snack shacks that back onto the beach. Off-shore, you'll find extensive shallow reefs perfect for novice divers and snorkellers – keep your eyes peeled for hawksbill sea turtles, quite common here. Heading inland, there are plenty of attractions to tempt you away from the beach, from the Bob Marley Museum, featuring the island's favourite son, to rum distilleries, coffee plantations and the chance to plunge under waterfalls deep in the rainforest.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

✈️ Fly direct either to Kingston from Gatwick (from £670; ba.com) or Montego Bay from Birmingham, Gatwick and Manchester (from £700; virgin-atlantic.com).

🚗 Book a rental car to collect at the airport (from £30 per day; avis.co.uk).

🏠 The well-run Rockhouse hotel has a dramatic location, clinging to a cliffside overlooking a small cove. Guests stay in pretty pine and stone thatched huts (from £125; rockhouse.com). Quote *Lonely Planet Traveller* when booking by 31 August for a free room upgrade.

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free
room upgrade



Long Bay Beach at the quieter north end of Negril Beach (Seven Mile Beach – it's actually just under four miles long)