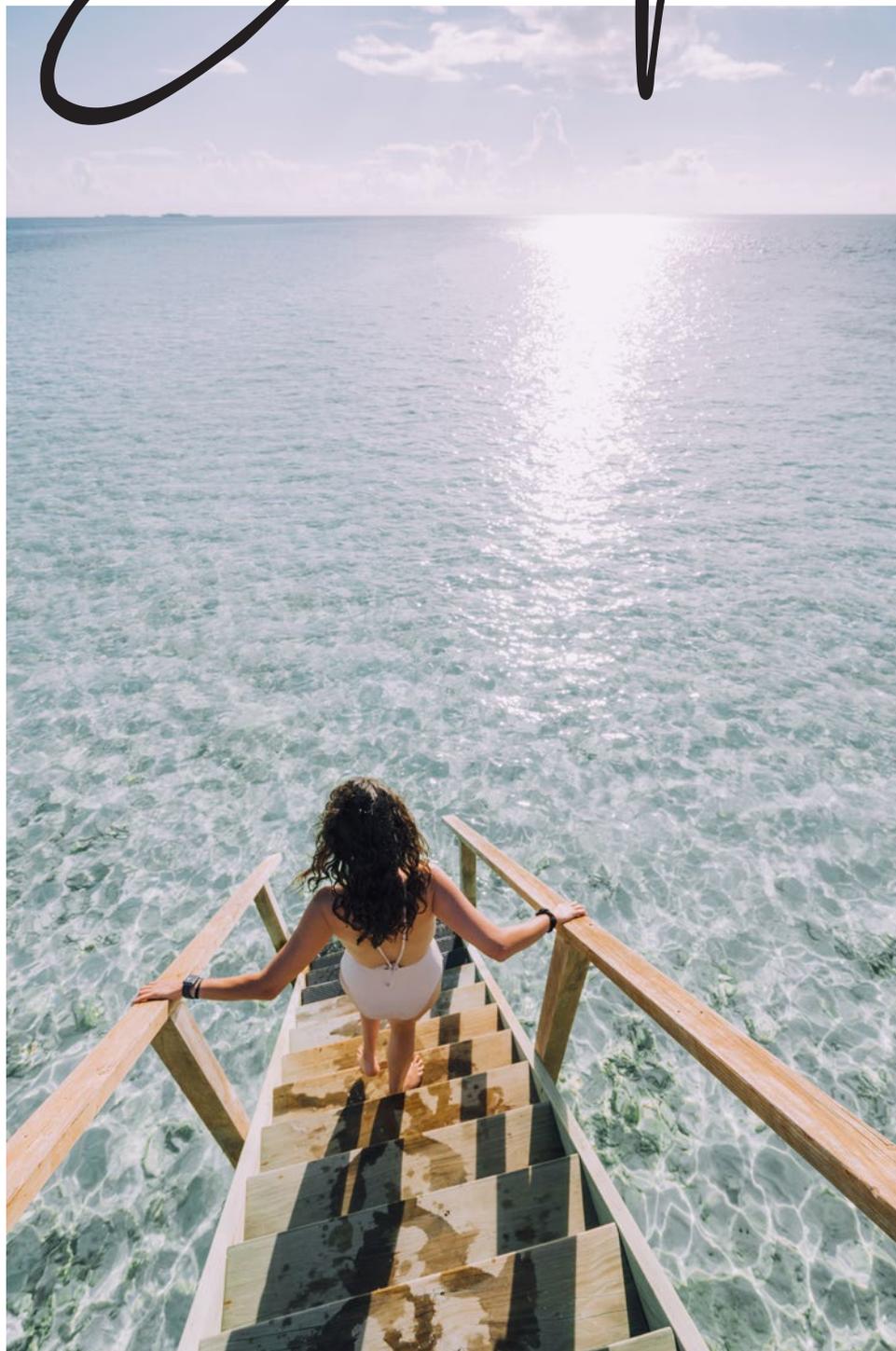


# Escapes

EDITED BY

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## ALONE TIME

Holiday villas and farmhouses make for the perfect socially distanced escape. Here, we've chosen our favourites for every occasion.



## BEST FOR FRIENDS MASSERIA TRAPANÀ, PUGLIA, ITALY

I love new experiences, so there aren't many places I would happily return to every holiday for the rest of my life. But then I discovered Masseria Trapanà, a twinkling oasis set among olive and lemon trees nestled in the heel of Italy. This is one place in the world I would happily rebook time and time again.

From the moment we arrive at the property's imposing 16th-century wooden door and step into the lantern-lit courtyard we feel like we've come home. Only to a much better version of home, because here cold glasses of Champagne are handed to you on arrival, Aesop products line the bathroom's marble shelves, there's an outdoor bath big enough for two in your private garden and the beds are so impressive I have to take a running jump to get in. At Masseria Trapanà, the rooms magically tidy themselves while you laze around the grounds and pool or have a private yoga lesson in the gardens; big bottles of muscle-relaxing magnesium salts are left by your bathtub, mineral water appears by your bedside and there's a direct line to the bar from your room.

We book one of the 10 rooms (all have pared-back stone walls and lofty ceilings), but there's the option to take over the entire masseria, making this a glorious spot to holiday with up to 20 friends. Australian owner Rob puts his guests right at the heart of his property, too, but in the most relaxed way. Don't expect obsequious waiters, fussy service or formality. Here, you can pad barefoot around the chic open-plan sitting area and eat breakfast whenever you wake up (it is served until the last guest rises). It's big enough for peace and tranquillity (there are plenty of hammocks dotted about the gardens for everyone to have an afternoon snooze), but also small enough that staff remember that you like a skinny cappuccino every morning. The pressures of everyday life soon melt away. You don't even need to choose your evening meal, as there's a set menu each night served on the terrace (with all preferences catered for, of course). For our trip, we flew to Bari, which is two hours' drive from the hotel – taxis are expensive, so car hire is a must. The great news is that BA flies direct from Heathrow to Brindisi Airport, which is only about 30 minutes away, making a long weekend tantalisingly easy.

Should you wish to tear yourself away from the sanctuary of the hotel, beautiful Lecce is just a 15-minute drive away and two beach clubs, Bacino Grande and Mora Mora, around 40 minutes – Masseria Trapanà can arrange transfers. But with a spa recently added to the residence, I intend to stay behind that big wooden door, happily holed up in my home away from home. OONAGH BRENNAN



Chill out by the pool on an oversized sunbed.

## BEST FOR RECHARGING ASTERIA, SIFNOS, GREECE

Once you read that the Ancient Greeks couldn't see the colour blue, that our eyes have only evolved to notice it in more modern times. It's a shame for them, really, because the seas surrounding their islands contain so many shades of aqua and reflect such a vivid cerulean sky that they missed out on the way these deeply brilliant shades make your heart soar. And nowhere is this more true than the island of Sifnos, approximately a four-hour ferry ride from

Athens, a little outpost of sunshine, sand and stony hills that takes around 45 minutes to drive the length of. Dazzling white villas stud the coastline, looking out on to that incredible sea and the occasional fishing village, where food is served as fresh as the breeze, caught just hours before arriving on the plate.

The little coves that nestle into the curves of the island are imbued with a sleepiness, a lulling power in the quiet of the air. Renting Asteria villa via Airbnb, a design beauty with its own pool and no neighbours, I wake up to views of the sea, a laze in the hammock, a breakfast of figs, Greek bread, strong coffee and some reading. Both the house and island seduce you into a soporific sense, where a trip into town to stock up on fresh produce or a 10-minute walk to a near-deserted beach are quite enough

activity for today, thank you. The villa itself, all poured concrete, bleached wood and slubby linens, is right in my aesthetic sweet spot; the epitome of barefoot luxury, smooth underfoot and soft on the eye. I lunch at the outdoor table, drive to the town in the centre for dinner and Greek dancing, read, swim, listen to podcasts and nap. I return from the island with something more than a tan, something you don't get from every holiday. I come back feeling whole. A lot of that is down to the water, the restorative power of its saline warmth. A lot of it is down to the fact that in Sifnos, you can't help but switch off. PIP McCORMAC



Above and below: kick back and relax at Asteria villa.

### TRIP NOTES

Prices from around £390 a night on selected dates in October 2020 (airbnb.com). Flights from London to Athens from £100 return with Ryanair (ryanair.com). Ferry from Athens to Sifnos from around £70 return with Aegean Speed Lines (aegeanspeedlines.gr).

### TRIP NOTES

Prices start at around £200 a night for one room, based on two people sharing. Hire the entire masseria from around £14,500 a week (trapana.com). Flights from London to Brindisi from £115 return with British Airways (ba.com).



## BEST FOR FAMILY WILDERNESS RESERVE, SUFFOLK



**T**he farmhouses, cottages and barns dotted throughout the Wilderness Reserve – 5,000 acres of private parkland in rural Suffolk – seem to only reveal themselves the deeper you delve. It’s hard to miss Sibton Park – an opulent honey-hued Grade II-listed manor house, which stands proudly in the centre of the grounds, but then there’s a

17th-century long barn tucked behind a crowd of trees, a converted clockhouse hidden beyond a curl in the road, a row of Victorian bothies (gardeners’ cottages) obscured by a walled garden and the gate lodges – two follies that cleverly conceal a two-bedroom cottage below. They are all available to rent – with bedrooms ranging from one or four, although Sibton Park has 14 (oh, and a butler service). And then there’s the Farmhouse, a raspberry-pink-plastered, six-bedroom property, the oldest on the reserve, which is to be our home for the weekend.

Like all the other dwellings on the estate, the Farmhouse is a mix of the beautifully preserved and thoroughly modern. Thick wooden beams, stone floors, exposed copper pipes, roll-top baths and an extremely rickety, charming wooden downstairs loo meet giant Hypnos beds, underfloor heating, cinema-sized TV screens and a state-of-the-art wine fridge, which is chock-full on our arrival. And that brings me to the most joyful home-from-home elements of our visit. While the reserve is just miles from some of the most coveted parts of the region (Richard Curtis and Emma Freud have a home in the nearby chichi seaside town of Walberswick), we have very little reason to leave the bucolic bliss of our weekend residence. You see, on arrival, we (two families with

four kids under five) are met with the most extravagant welcome hamper you could imagine, which gives us no plausible excuse to venture further afield. And if we did feel the need to expand our culinary horizons, we could have just booked one of the estate’s private chefs for the night.

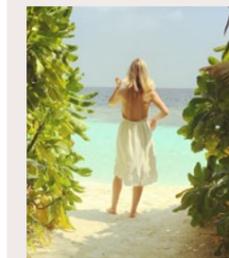
As for our physical horizons, the tennis courts and Pashley bikes are faintly alluring, as is the sunken oval swimming pool (open May to October). We could have also paddleboarded in a variety of lakes, or taken part in dawn yoga. In the end, as it is lambing season and the estate is gloriously car-free, we let our young clan march through its wild grasses and skip alongside the newest members of the reserve (I can’t decide who is the more nonplussed). They also enjoy playing hide-and-seek (the kids, not the lambs) under the massive oak staircase at the Farmhouse, and dive bombing across the two-metre-long cushion-dense sofas that flank the sitting room. The Wilderness Reserve is special. Whether you’re a twosome looking for an off-grid thatched cottage for a weekend or a colossal family in need of somewhere spectacular to while away a week of the holidays, there’s nowhere else quite like it in Britain. SARAH TOMCZAK



**Above and left: pretty in pink: discover the Farmhouse, with its ornate wall coverings, thick wooden beams and stone floors**

### TRIP NOTES

From £196 a night for one-bedroom Hex Cottage through to £3,175 a night for 14-bedroom Sibton Park, minimum stay of three nights over a weekend period (wildernessreserve.com).



## BEST FOR LUXURY KANDOLHU, THE MALDIVES

**D**on’t think I really ever knew the true meaning of the phrase ‘holiday of a lifetime’ until one bleak day in January, still mourning the end of Christmas, I took a plane, seaplane and a speedboat and arrived in paradise. It’s easy to forget the journey that came before when we find ourselves standing, suitcases in hand, on a floating landing platform in the middle of the Indian Ocean, watching our private speedboat whizzing towards us for a transfer to Kandolhu, the idyllic island resort that is to be our home for the week. I’ve never had a holiday that has started quite so glamorously. Kandolhu is a tiny resort that sits in the North Ari Atoll surrounded by a perfect circle of white sand and a lagoon so clear you can practically see the colourful fish, reef sharks and turtles from your lounger.

It has 30 luxury villas – a few over the water, the others nestled discreetly around the edge of the island – looking out on to a view that will be imprinted on my mind for ever. Imagine a warm breeze, waves gently lapping at the shore, sand so soft you can’t bear to wear shoes (and you don’t, not even for dinner, so don’t pack any) and nothing on the horizon except sparkling sea as far as the eye can see and a huge expanse of sky that fills with layer upon layer of stars at night. We stay in a Duplex Pool Villa, a two-storey space with a private section of beach, a sitting room, plunge pool and outdoor bathroom so we can shower under the night sky. As if that isn’t luxurious enough, extra details such as an iPad, underwater GoPro camera and a state-of-the-art Nespresso machine make us feel utterly spoilt.

The resort is all-inclusive, but any fears of buffet queues and limited menus are quelled by the five outstanding à la carte restaurants all offering something delicious, from the cosy, romantic Sea Grill (our favourite) to the Japanese restaurant Banzai that seats just six guests and where I eat the most delicious

Wagyu steak I’ve ever tasted. You can also book a candlelit beach dinner for two and feel the waves lapping at your feet as you sip Champagne.

Despite being small, Kandolhu never feels crowded. We are often the only people in the spa on our daily visits for a steam and sauna – in fact, we rarely see any guests until dinnertime. The resort manages to strike the perfect balance between relaxed luxury and five-star service without being overly formal. It’s very Robinson Crusoe, but if Robinson Crusoe had won the lottery. We’d go back in a heartbeat. OONAGH BRENNAN



*Above and top right: a Duplex Pool Villa is the ultimate island getaway.*



### TRIP NOTES

Kuoni (kuoni.co.uk) offers seven nights at the five-star Kandolhu Maldives (kandolhu.com) in a Beach Villa, including breakfast and return flights on SriLankan Airlines from London Heathrow. Prices from £3,099 per person based on two adults sharing for selected dates in May and June 2021. Includes one bonus night. Book by 30 November 2020.



## BEST FOR COUPLES FALLEN ANGEL, MOUSEHOLE, CORNWALL

**N**estled discreetly just three-and-a-half miles along the coast from the larger holiday town Penzance, Mousehole is a hidden gem of charm and pretty views. With a scattering of galleries and some delightful coffee shops and restaurants, this fishing village is the perfect spot for a weekend of doing

very little. Though the sandy beach is small, it is part of the very attractive harbour at the heart of the village that has a fabulous outlook across the glittering turquoise sea. The children we see seem perfectly entertained among the rock pools and sand – both activities rewarded with delicious readily available Cornish ice creams. We stay in the idyllic Fallen Angel. Accessible only by foot and through a mystery tour of the roads around Mousehole, this purpose-built haven for two is possibly the most romantic place I have ever stayed. Spread over two floors, it's been designed to make the most of the views – it has a balcony where we sip chilled white wine while watching the sunset before enjoying an indulgent soak in the roll-top bath. Greeted by an array of goodies on arrival – fresh bread, local cheese and Cornish sparkling wine – the accommodation ensures that, if you don't want to, you don't even have to venture out during your stay.

We completely embrace the couples' hideaway and treat ourselves to an additional breakfast hamper (also delivered before you arrive), containing everything you would expect, as well as some other treats (the home-made muesli is to die for), and a personal chef who comes to our little home and whips up a meal including scallops, Cornish beef and scrumptious chocolate brownies with salty caramel sauce. We spend our time wandering around Mousehole's narrow streets, enjoying a fabulous meal at The Old Coastguard, a leisurely one-hour walk to Penzance (there is a Mousehole bus that runs every 30 minutes if you don't fancy the walk back), and a two-hour paddleboarding session around St Michael's Mount. Fallen Angel is a very grown-up way to relax. Add it to your travel bucket list. SOPHIE WILKINSON



*Above and top:  
Fallen Angel  
is a heavenly  
hideaway in  
Mousehole.*

### TRIP NOTES

Stay at Fallen Angel from £200 a night (three-night minimum stay). Book at [i-escape.com/fallen-angel](http://i-escape.com/fallen-angel).