

Romancing the stone:
historic villages, such as
Castle Coombe in
Wiltshire, account for
much of Britain's allure.

best of british

Want a holiday with a little pomp and circumstance?
Brittania rules – and these smart hotels are proof

WORDS BELINDA JACKSON

PHOTOGRAPHY THIS PAGE GETTY IMAGES

cornish cream

HOTEL TRESANTON, ST MAWES, CORNWALL >

Go rustic on Cornwall's wild, rugged coastline where you can act out your fantasies of pirates, contraband and hidden gems – only this time, the treasure is the 29-room Hotel Tresanton. Every room looks out over the sea and the fishing village of St Mawes. The surrounding towns, such as Penzance, are an antique-lover's paradise.

Style file 'The Hamptons meets British seaside town' in rooms that are filled with antiques, local art, rustic wooden furniture and mosaic floors, all contained within a jumble of old houses that date from the 1940s. Highlights include a kids' room with its own cinema, a private terrace for candlelit dinners and sailing trips on the hotel's own 48-foot yacht. Time to get out that white poloneck!

On the map You're in cider-drinking country, about five hours south-west of London, and just two hours to Land's End, the most westerly point of the English mainland. The most romantic way to get here is by overnight sleeper from London's Paddington, otherwise you can fly to nearby Newquay from Gatwick or Stansted.

Check in... from A\$528/room, call (0011) 44 1326 270 055 or visit www.tresanton.com



west end pearl

< THE HEMPEL HOTEL, LONDON

Surround yourself with serene design at The Hempel Hotel in the well-heeled Bayswater Road, just north of Hyde Park. Celebrated Australian-born designer Anouska Hempel pulled out all the stops, with 46 rooms and apartments set in a series of vividly white Georgian houses overlooking the private Hempel Garden Square, where Hugh and Julia romped in the feelgood movie *Notting Hill*.

Style file Peace, harmony, tranquillity. Each room is individually decorated, all in a zen minimalist theme. Expect to see black ottomans against pure-white walls, suspended fireplaces, beds hovering on platforms and towering atriums. Overwhelmed? Luckily each room has a canister of oxygen to realign your inner calm!

On the map The Hempel is a short walk from the theatre district of London's West End. This is the place to set up base camp and plan your attack on Notting Hill's fascinating bookshops and boutiques.

Check in... from A\$650/night, call Design Hotels toll-free on (0011) 80 2736 8357 or visit www.designhotels.com or www.the-hempel.co.uk

london calling

∨ THE SOHO HOTEL, LONDON >

Cat-lovers will immediately feel at home at the Soho, which is guarded by a 10-foot-high bronze cat in a foyer of oak floorboards, French fireplaces and bright red walls. Situated right in the boho heart of London, the hotel has two drawing rooms, where you can idly flick through a magazine over a drink from the honesty bar or recuperate in front of the log fires after hitting the boutique shops and ancient cobbled streets of the capital.

Style file Each of the Soho's 91 rooms is individually designed. The suites, by Kit Kemp (the designer behind some of London's best boutique hotels) continue the foyer's theme, with oak and granite bathrooms and big windows that capture the sun, while the penthouses spoil their guests with tree-lined terraces and great views.

On the map Soho is the city's pulse, with some of London's hottest restaurants and clubs within a short walk. The hotel is tucked away in a quiet lane between Wardour and Dean streets but seconds from the action of the city at play.

Check in... From A\$550, call Design Hotels toll-free on (0011) 800 3746 8357 or visit www.designhotels.com.au





scotch gothic

< MAR HALL, BISHOPTON, SCOTLAND >

Even if you weren't born into royalty, you can live like it at the Earl of Mar's estate. The Gothic hall, built in 1828, was designed by the architect responsible for the British Museum. The property underwent a £10m [\$23 million] refurbishment two years ago to transform it into a 53-room hotel that includes an Aveda Concept spa.

Style file If you're a classicist at heart, then this is the place to lay your head – beneath the canopy of a four-poster bed in one of the richly furnished rooms. Marble fireplaces, tapestries, Louis XIV chairs, claw-foot baths and chocolate-coloured leather sofas combine for a sumptuous traditional style. Oh, and did we mention it's rumoured to be haunted?

On the map The 240-acre estate is set on the River Clyde, 20 minutes from Glasgow. Take a day trip to local villages, including Luss, set against Ben Lomond and Loch Lomond. Here, you can hunt, shoot and fish to your heart's content, or jump in the car and explore the hometown of 1920s designer and architect Charles Rennie Macintosh.

Check in... from A\$415/double, call (0011) 44 141 812 9999 or visit www.marhall.com





jail break

< MALMAISON, OXFORD ^

You've been bad. So bad, you need a stretch in jail. We suggest one with room service and nice sheets, like the Malmaison, in the former jail of Oxford Castle. It's been open for just a few months, and with looks this good, it's already got tongues wagging – and tails, too, because for an extra tenner, your pooch can check in, too.

Style file Big locks on the doors, iron bars on the windows and two-foot-thick [60cm] walls in the A and C wings remind you of the building's not-so-distant past (if you'd been staying as recently as 1996, your room would have been considerably smaller, with only porridge on the menu). While the exterior might be somber stone, inside it's a riot of warm, Eastern-inspired colours, with lashings of rich red and burnt orange, underpinned by dark-timber furniture. Vaulted ceilings hover above the lobby and the old underground cells are now a brasserie.

On the map Oxford is two hours' drive north of London, with plenty of express buses and trains to get you there. **Check in...** A\$260, call (0011) 44 0845 365 4247 or visit www.malmaison.com ■

