

Amberley
Castle

STAY IN A CASTLE

From a 15th-century Scottish keep to a 900-year-old fortified manor, and even the renovated orangery of a French château, these unique winter getaways are steeped in history and style.

Amberley Castle

West Sussex

REVIEW BY POLLY BEARD

Nestled at the foot of the South Downs, on the banks of the River Arun, lies Amberley – a traditional, picturesque village complete with thatched cottages, tea rooms, two pubs and a tiny railway station. It's also home to a small, romantic castle that has been a hotel for the last 30 years, and is now part of the select luxury group owned by Andrew and Christina Brownword.

As soon as you turn into the long, sweeping drive, up through the grounds and under the portcullis, you're surrounded by majestic beauty and calm. Amberley Castle dates back 900 years and has seen many different owners, uses and transformations, including being largely rebuilt after suffering major destruction in the Civil War. There's still plenty of history on show – from mullioned windows and castellated walls to Tudor chimneys and carved stone doorways. The planted gardens are romantically framed by crumbling ivy-and-rose-covered medieval walls – ruins of past eras. Stunning views of the landscape can be spied through former arrow-slit windows and medieval archways.

The interiors have been sympathetically designed to tie in with this castle's rich history, with suits of armour,



pistols and swords on walls, and a fabulously creaky old staircase up to the first-floor barrel-vaulted dining room. You can't help but imagine the many feet that have marched up and down these steps before you. Our cosy bedroom had a four poster and huge airy bathroom with enormous windows overlooking the Sussex landscape – a lovely excuse to spend a few extra luxurious minutes in the shower admiring those spectacular Downs.

The food and wine is excellent too, with an emphasis on locally sourced produce. Having had taste-buds tantalised with our fish starters – some melt-in-the-mouth sea trout sashimi and delicate brill with truffled wild mushrooms – we feasted on deep-flavoured, well-balanced meaty mains. The star of the show was a perfect beef fillet served with unguent beef cheek, fabulous gnocchi and girolles. We also had a knockout sour cream pannacotta with fresh cherries and crunchy pistachios.

The temptation is not to stray too far away, and there's plenty to keep you entertained within the grounds. There's an all-weather tennis court, with rackets and balls to borrow at reception, and you can enjoy a round of golf at the professional-standard 18-hole putting course – one of only two in the UK. A fun hour guaranteed, for even the most unskilled golfers among us.

If you do fancy a stroll out, you're deep in the South Downs National Park for some amazing walks, and on a rainy day there's Arundel Cathedral, and the stately homes at Goodwood, Parham and Petworth just a short drive away.

Double rooms from £195 per night
B&B. amberleycastle.co.uk



Borthwick Castle Midlothian, Scotland

REVIEW BY EMMA WINTERSCHLADEN

The first thing to do when you arrive at this imposing 600-year-old fortress, through its ancient archway and around to its east side, is to look up. It's there you'll see a colossal crater – the result of a cannonball siege by none other than Oliver Cromwell. It was in 1650 that the self-styled Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England ordered the 10th Lord Borthwick to leave his castle, which he eventually did (but not before it received a hefty battering). And there it was left, empty for nearly 250 years, before being brought back into use at the beginning of the 20th century by Henry Borthwick. Luckily, the eight-metre-thick castle walls meant Cromwell's attack resulted in 'cosmetic' damage only – and a talking point for the castle's guests centuries later.

Today, the castle lives on as a luxury exclusive-use hire venue, with 12 individually styled, opulent bed chambers, which can sleep up to 20 guests in total. There's also Crookston Cottage next to the castle, which can sleep a further four guests, and the newly refurbished Gatehouse which sleeps two guests (and comes with the most beautiful Italian marble roll-top bath you've ever seen).

Offering bespoke hospitality to all who stay, you can expect a fully catered experience, headed up by Michelin-trained head chef Derek Johnstone. The food was exquisite and on the second night we enjoyed a glorious medieval banquet in the grand hall with our fellow guests. French and British oysters arrived en masse in the middle of the table, followed by a woodland tart and onion and cider soup, served in rustic bread bowls. The main was



sumptuous slow-cooked shin of Black Angus beef with bone marrow and Albert sauce. A pear, ginger and mead sorbet cleansed the palette ahead of a milk and apple tart. It was a feast fit for royalty, and royal we felt, swigging back superb red wine. The

evening finished with Eek! Escape Rooms, who provided captivating after-dinner entertaining in the form of brain-boggling puzzles.

It's easy to see why this unique, evocative castle is a world-class venue for weddings, parties and even family holidays. The air here is thick with stories – both told and untold. The walls whisper their history in the magnificent public rooms, and as you climb the castle's many stone stairwells, you wonder who else has done so. One thing's certain: to be a guest at Borthwick Castle is to sit alongside illustrious company, most notably Mary, Queen of Scots, who was hosted here before she fled persecution through one of the castle's windows.

You can now expect a much more civilised affair, especially if you hire the castle over the Christmas and New Year period, where there's a festive bespoke package on offer. This may include a Christmas Eve banquet in the Great Hall or a Hogmanay feast, whiskey and gin-tasting sessions or storytelling for children. There are also trips and experiences on offer, but you may find, especially in the depth of winter, that you don't want to leave your cosy chamber, never mind the castle itself.

From £10,000 per day throughout most of December, with a minimum three-night stay, 24-26 Dec, and 30 Dec to 1 Jan at £33,000, borthwickcastle.com

Le Jardin du Château Duras, South West France

REVIEW BY EMMA WINTERSCHLADEN

There's a word in French, *retrouvailles*, which translates literally to 'reunion'. But, in the way that the French language can so often capture what the English can't, it means so much more than that. It's the feeling I got when I arrived in Bergerac airport to greet a friend I hadn't seen for over a year – a deep sense of joy and sentimentality that comes from rediscovering a friendship, and then being able to enjoy that friendship in the glamorous comfort of Le Jardin du Château, the 13th-century property which was to be our home for the week.

Situated 45 minutes from Bergerac, this listed ancient monument resides in the small market town of Duras in southwestern France. Seemingly untouched by tourism, it's the sort of quiet, provincial commune with no travel guides written about it, which is exactly what we were after. Le Jardin du Château is in the grounds of Château de Duras – the grand fortress that overlooks the property's top garden (talk about lunch with a view!). Once said to be the castle's orangery, today it has been renovated back to life as a chic holiday home by east Londoners Olly and Tom.

Evidence of their impeccable taste abounds the minute you walk through the door. Walls are adorned with original art and retro posters, the kitchen with



reclaimed marble worktops. Ensuite bedrooms are light-drenched and luxurious, finished with crisp linen, vibrant velvet and eclectic furniture. Many of the bathrooms boast rainforest showers, complete with a selection of gorgeous, high-end shampoos and soaps. These stylish boutique touches complement the property's historical quirks – old stone walls, bow holes and 'the tower' – once part of the château's fortified wall, which is now a secluded double room.

As it was just the two of us, we settled into the top half of the house, which acts like a self-contained,



open-plan apartment. The property as a whole sleeps up to 12, with its well-equipped 'entertainment' kitchen on the ground floor and ample wine storage, making it the perfect spot for a wine-and-cheese-fuelled friends' getaway. In fact, Le Jardin du Château seems designed for leisure and pleasure. Top-quality coffee machines are at the ready for a morning brew, bookshelves are bursting with must-reads, there's a charming secret 'gin terrace' that overlooks the pool, and the living spaces, both upstairs and down, are south-facing and spend much of the day bathed in light, even in the colder months.

I soon perfected my morning ritual: waking to the singing birds, opening the shutters and looking out over the rolling landscape of the Dropt Valley, before settling down on a chaise lounge with a book and steaming cup of black coffee. *La bonne vie* indeed! All this before my friend and I trotted, arm in arm, baskets over shoulders, to the boulangerie (Aux Pains Des Ducs) on the opposite side of town. We'd return, laden with freshly-baked baguettes and eat breakfast 'the French way' - that is: slowly, with lots of cheese. Duras has a



'Le Jardin du Château felt like the perfect meeting of past and present – an old building given a new life'

weekly market on a Monday, so we made sure to stock up on bundles of red onions, strings of pink garlic, plump, juicy tomatoes and abundant heads of green lettuce (while also enjoying an on-the-go lunch of the most delicious spit-roasted chicken).

Evenings were spent cooking up our market spoils and drinking glass after glass of Côtes de Duras – specifically from Château les Maubats, a local winery where we did a tour one morning (and returned with many bottles to take home). As we sat outside, wrapped in a clear, cool night and warmed by red wine, we both took great joy controlling the coloured lights illuminating Château de Duras (you can download an app on your phone). It got me thinking: in the same way the deep pink lights shone bright and modern on the old castle walls, our week at Le Jardin du Château felt like the perfect meeting of past and present – an old building given a new life, an old friendship rediscovered in a new place. 🍷

From £2,150 for a week, for 12 people (2 November 2019 to 4 Jan 2020), oliverstravels.com, [@orangerieduras](https://www.instagram.com/orangerieduras)



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Make menopause matter with Diane Danzebrink

Leading menopause counsellor Diane shares her own experience of debilitating, life-threatening depression during the menopause, and the campaigning work she has led since.

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Do you know your regulated body identical HRT from your your unregulated compounded HRT? Consultant gynaecologist and Secretary General of the International Menopause Society, Nick Panay, gives a detailed dive into this all-important treatment.

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Liz with Kirsty Lang

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Words: Ellie Smith

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