

Autumn

BOLTHOLES

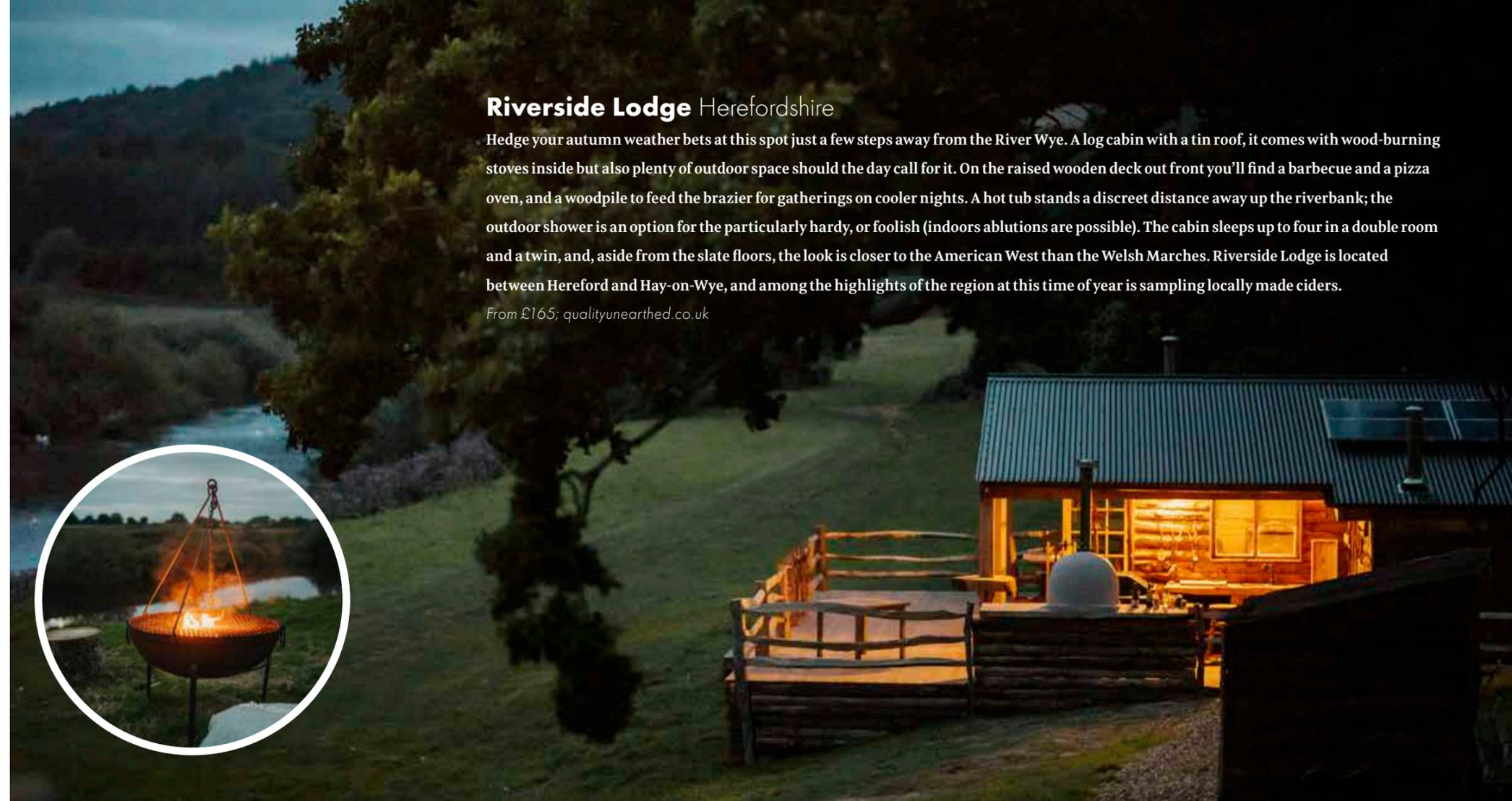
The months of October and November count as a special, often-overlooked time to take short breaks – we share nine beautiful places to hole up in this season, whether you want to pull on some wellies and go leaf-kicking or settle by the fire with a good book



PHOTOGRAPHS: JILL TATE/THE LANDMARK TRUST

Monkton Old Hall, Pembrokeshire

An entry in the guestbook at Monkton Old Hall sums its character up well: 'Vaulted ceiling, fire at night, ping pong in the "dungeon", stone spiral stairs, peep hole windows to poke hands through and make ghost noises... just magical.' If sharing spooky tales by the light of a log fire is one of the greatest treats of autumn, this place is the ideal venue. The Old Hall has been hosting travellers since the 14th century, when it was a guest house run by Benedictine monks for pilgrims en route to St David's. The cavernous lounge (pictured) and vaulted undercroft (now home to the table tennis table) are traces of its distant origins, as is the resident ghost: some say she is a nun whose skeleton was found bricked into the wall of an equally ancient priory next door. Take a guided tour of immense Pembroke Castle – birthplace of Henry VII and viewable from the Old Hall's gardens – and enjoy beachcombing at nearby Barafundle Bay. *Four nights from £459; landmarktrust.org.uk* →



Riverside Lodge Herefordshire

Hedge your autumn weather bets at this spot just a few steps away from the River Wye. A log cabin with a tin roof, it comes with wood-burning stoves inside but also plenty of outdoor space should the day call for it. On the raised wooden deck out front you'll find a barbecue and a pizza oven, and a woodpile to feed the brazier for gatherings on cooler nights. A hot tub stands a discreet distance away up the riverbank; the outdoor shower is an option for the particularly hardy, or foolish (indoors ablutions are possible). The cabin sleeps up to four in a double room and a twin, and, aside from the slate floors, the look is closer to the American West than the Welsh Marches. Riverside Lodge is located between Hereford and Hay-on-Wye, and among the highlights of the region at this time of year is sampling locally made ciders.

From £165; qualityunearthed.co.uk



Pensão Agricola Algarve, Portugal

When so much outside attention on the Algarve is focused only on its beaches, it's easy to forget the rural side of Portugal's southernmost mainland region. Less than two miles inland from Cabanas Beach on its long barrier island, Pensão Agricola is a former farmhouse that was rescued after 40 years of neglect and turned into a serene space where every corner is a visual pleasure. The sturdy, whitewashed outside walls find their interior match in pale-toned rooms enlivened with a few well-chosen and often salvaged objects and furnishings. Three of the rooms lie within the original farmhouse, with three more added around it in buildings that echo the Cubist houses of the Greek Cyclades; all six have their own private patios, to enjoy under a blanket. Gnarled olive trees are dotted across the property, and guests are invited to help brush and feed the donkeys. The plunge pool is heated when it gets cold, and it's also possible to rent a Vespa or Alfa Romeo Spider convertible to explore the countryside beyond the front gate. From £135; pensaoagricola.com

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF PENSAO AGRICOLA, COURTESY OF RIVERSIDE LODGE/QUALITY UNEARTHED, COURTESY OF BROWNBER HALL



Brownber Hall Cumbria

While the Lake District invariably looks ravishing in this season of fiery colours, you'll meet fewer visitors in the overlooked two-thirds of Cumbria not taken up by that national park. At the top of the Lune Valley, Brownber Hall is a mid-Victorian manor house that makes a wonderful base for autumn walks – or inactivity. The eight guestrooms share an unfussy style with just a few classic touches: some of the beds have metal frames, but the décor also takes in the odd tropical-print curtain design. Windows look out onto fields cropped by sheep and trees that rustle with the activity of rare red squirrels. This eastern stretch of Cumbria was annexed to the Yorkshire Dales National Park two years ago, but the word isn't fully out yet. Hikers will find little-trodden paths in the nearby Howgill Fells, and Brownber Hall guests can also rent bikes. There's a drying room if you've just walked in from a suddenly dampened hike, and a log fire in a lounge stocked with board games if the day is a write-off, weatherwise. From £100; brownberhall.co.uk →

The Barn Devon

From the outside, this flint-walled barn under a thatched roof looks perfectly rural. Indoors, however, this pad for two is filled with high-spec features. The bathtub is a deep, silver roll-top model, the fireplace works on bioethanol fuel, the kitchen has a touchscreen oven, and the smart TV lets you schedule that film-night you can never find time for at home. The gentle Blackdown Hills of eastern Devon form the surroundings, with the Jurassic Coast just a short drive away. With a three-night minimum stay at The Barn, you might want to duck out of making dinner on at least one evening – the Masons Arms in Branscombe is creekly and cosy, with good food and a huge fireplace.

Three nights from £354; beachspoke.com/properties/the-barn



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF BEACHSPOKE/NICK/ISDEN, COURTESY OF THE PIG HOTEL/JAKE EASTHAM



The Pig Hampshire

If you're partial to a spot of autumnal leaf-squelching, the woods and heathland of the New Forest should be your first port of call. And the Pig should be the only place you consider staying. The ultimate in relaxed country-house hotels sits in extensive grounds, with its kitchen garden the source of much of the produce for the seasonal British dishes served in its atmospheric conservatory restaurant. It's a two-night minimum stay at the weekends, which is just as well as you're unlikely to leave the hotel for a good 24 hours after arriving. Rooms range from snug to comfy luxe, and each

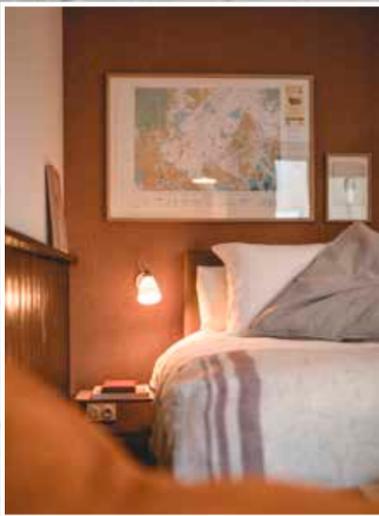
is built for excessive lolling, with deep mattresses and piles of fluffed-up pillows. There are also a number of lodges and cabins scattered away from the manor house, including two new woodland hideaways: the Forest Hut (pictured) and Bert's Box. The latter has a separate kitchen-diner, complete with log burner; the armchairs here are the perfect vantage point from which to gaze at the deer grazing on the next-door field. There are plenty of opportunities for fireside contemplation in the main house too, with two book-lined, sofa-filled sitting rooms, and a bar. From £155; thepighotel.com →



Le Barn Île-de-France, France

Forest walks are a staple of autumn, and in the orbit of the French capital are vast woods that were once the exclusive hunting grounds of kings, usually named Louis. Le Barn is ensconced in the Fôret de Rambouillet, a 45-minute drive from Paris, and the staff at the hotel have plenty of suggestions for exploring the sylvan surroundings on foot or on saddle (bike or horse). Head out early for a chance to come across forest wildlife in a misty clearing. The hotel opened earlier this year, with guestrooms in different buildings – traditional and modern – on a spread-out site. The décor starts with the French countryside as its inspiration, but adds touches including American Shaker and Mid-century Modern. In the conservatory restaurant meanwhile, gourmet-bistro cuisine is tied to the bounty of the season – mushrooms and chestnuts will be a menu staple at this time of year.

From £125; lebarnhotel.com



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF LE BARN HOTEL/INOMADES, COURTESY OF MEZI PLŮTKY/ROMANA BENNETT, COURTESY OF VENISSA/MATTIA MIONETTO

Mezi Plůtky
Czech Republic

At the eastern end of the Czech Republic, about as far from Prague and its crowds as it's possible to get within the country's borders, Mezi Plůtky is an out-of-the-way stay with an unexpected boutique look. The name means 'between fences', and though this suggests a hemmed-in feel, the smallest of the four rooms at the hotel is still more than 380 square feet, and the interior design keeps the spaces open and uncluttered. Traditional mountain farmhouses like this one kept windows small so as not to let heat escape, but in renovating the building the owners made as much use of natural light as possible. Mezi Plůtky is a 35-minute drive from Ostrava (which has direct flights to London Stansted) and stands on the threshold of the forested Beskid Mountains, under the 1,276m-high summit of Smrk. Also worth exploring is the nearby castle town of Štramberk, where gingerbread rolls known as 'Štramberk ears' are produced.

From £140; meziplutky.cz



Venissa
Venetian Lagoon, Italy

Wine-harvest time brings its annual moment of truth across the terra firma of the Veneto region, but for most of the last century, the watery expanse of the Venetian Lagoon saw no part of this. Then a family of prosecco-makers revived a nearly extinct local grape variety, Dorona, planting vineyards on the island of Mazzorbo that produced their first vintage in 2010. The Venissa estate now makes

for an all-encompassing escape 45 minutes by boat from Venice. Guests can dine in a Michelin-starred restaurant with views of the vineyards and a 14th-century belltower, before retiring to one of six smart rooms under the osteria's wooden beams. The island of Burano, known for its brightly painted fishermen's houses, is joined to Mazzorbo by a footbridge, and one of the joys of staying at Venissa is to be able to walk over before the first tour-boat arrives, or after the last one departs.

From £115; venissa.it

