

Back to nature

19 Splendid isolation

Lake District

Situated near the bottom of the steepest road in England, **Bird How** in Holmrook is in a super-remote location in one of the least-visited parts of the Lake District, above the river Esk. Small and rustic, it's perfect for a back-to-basics stay and for hikers wanting a challenge without the crowds. There's a twin bedroom and another with bunk beds (bring your own sheets) but there's no bathroom - use the kitchen for washing, and the toilet's in the former cow barn in the basement of the cottage.

● Sleeps four, £642 a week in July/August, £335 low season, 0344 800 2070, nationaltruthorholidays.org.uk

20 Private meadow Suffolk

New this year, the **Hobbit Box** is a cleverly converted wooden horsebox in its own wildflower meadow on a 115-acre glamping site, Secret Meadows. With handcrafted wooden furniture, vintage velvet curtains and a Middle Earth theme (from goblets and round windows to Tolkien-themed prints on the walls), it's a total charmer. There are two double bunks, a wood-burning stove, private loo and shower and wooden deck for moonlit nights underneath the oak trees.

The site is run by The Sinfold Nature Conservation Trust and there are nature trails through old woodland and meadows, and bushcraft and Wild Way workshops too.

● Sleeps four, £894 a week in July/August, £779 low season, 01944 382992, secretmeadows.co.uk



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and a field centre, while walks include direct access to Greenfield Forest (a red squirrel reserve) and the Dales Way.

● Both cottages sleep four, £655 a week in July/August, £401 low season, 01756 761126, nethergill.co.uk

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Private island Highlands

There's something totally magical about Eilean Shona, the private island off the west coast of Scotland that inspired JM Barrie to write Peter Pan. And the recently opened **Old Schoolhouse** adds a dreamy new place to stay. Totally off-grid (with no electricity, Wi-Fi or phone signal), it's in a wild setting on a secluded bay with incredible views. The 1,300-acre island has eagles, otters and dolphins to spot. Inside, every inch has been beautifully styled, with a mix of retro and contemporary furniture (not surprising when the designer is Vanessa Branson - sister to Richard).

● Sleeps four, £1,250 a week year-round (closed November to late March) including transfers from the mainland, 01967 431249, eileanshona.com

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Luxury log cabin Moray

A clean-lined take on the log cabin, **Culbin Edge** mixes natural experiences with total comfort. Inside the cosy forest sanctuary there's a modern kitchen, walk-in shower, bedroom with kingsize bed and living room with floor-to-ceiling windows. Outside a wooden hot tub and covered deck mean you can gaze at the surrounding fields and pine forest (and try to spot roe deer, badgers, foxes, red squirrels and pine martens) in all weathers. Wild sandy beaches are a walk away, or head to the pond to watch dragonflies. Recent guests have even seen the northern lights.

● Sleeps four, £550 a week in July/August, £400 low season, 0117-204 7830, canopyandstars.co.uk

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Railway cabin Brecon Beacons

Ty Donkey is the closest you'll come to a frontier cabin this side of Colorado - albeit with a bit more comfort than your average settler's homestead. The off-grid former railway cabin outside Crickhowell, in the Brecon Beacons

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Clifftop bothy north Devon

Foreland Bothy, the National Trust's newest holiday property, may not be what you're expecting if you're used to the organisation's plush self-catering cottages. In this clifftop bothy, right on the South West Coast Path above Lynmouth, facilities stretch to a composting toilet and a cold-water sink. Think of it as a stone tent: if you want light after sunset, pack a torch; if you want to cook, you'll need a camping stove. But what it lacks in frills, the bothy makes up for with unhindered access to wildlife. Instead of TV, enjoy panoramic sea views, tune in to the sound of stonechats on gorse bushes and spot black-bellied gulls, kites, peregrines and, if you're lucky, red deer or free-roaming Exmoor ponies.

● Sleeps four, £50 a night all year, 0144 800 2070, nationaltruthorholidays.org.uk

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Gothic temple Buckinghamshire

For a very special holiday steeped in history, try the **Gothic Temple** at Stowe (though it comes at a price). Built in 1741 and surrounded by Capability Brown-designed gardens, the rooms are all circular with pilasters, and the sitting room is decorated with heraldry and mosaic and topped with a gilded dome. The bedrooms, kitchen and bathroom are squeezed into turrets. There is a first-floor belvedere at the top of a spiral staircase, with stone seats and a view over the grounds, and a roof terrace.

● Sleeps four, £2,491 a week in July/August, £1,107 low season, 01628 825295, landmarktrust.org.uk

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Tudor pile Herefordshire

Live out your Tudor fantasies at **The Throne**, a grade II-listed gentleman's residence that dates back to 1478 (Charles I spent a night here during the English civil war). The house has secret doors, oak boards and paneling, stone flags, leaded windows, and wattle and daub walls - but marries old and new with the modern, bright, spacious kitchen and living area. There are seven bedrooms, and a lovely garden with trampoline and badminton net. Weobley is one of best-preserved "black and white villages" in England, full of timber-framed Tudor houses.

● Sleeps 12, £1,913 a week year-round, 01873 890 573, cottage-holiday-wales.co.uk

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Art deco Northumberland

A three-storey 1930s-built house by the coast in Beadnell, **1-2 The Haven** has curves in all the right places. The bedrooms are downstairs and the living area is upstairs to make the most of the sea views. There's oodles of space, with a terrace on the first floor and a sun deck on the second; two large lounges and a games room, make it perfect for large groups and families. Sandy Beadnell Bay stretches for two miles; the harbour town of Seahouses is two miles away and Bamburgh Castle four miles away. Summer availability is very limited, however, so move quickly.

● Sleeps eight, £1,675 a week in July/August, £1,369 low season, 07585 229002, bridgeendashford.com

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Regency splendour Lake District

Hidden away in private woodland south of Newby Bridge - and 10 minutes from the shores of Windermere - **Eller How House** is a grand, self-contained wing of a Regency villa, and has beautiful views. Its striking exterior is matched by unusual features inside, from ornate plasterwork in the living room to a collection of "heads" holding up the ceiling in the master bedroom, and furniture to match. With three en-suite bedrooms there's plenty of space for families, and the lovely grounds, complete with summerhouse, are fun for children to explore. And, of course, the delights of the Lakes await, from walking on the southern fells to water sports on Windermere and Coniston.

● Sleeps six, £3,700 a week in July/August, £1,850 low season, vista-point.co.uk or themodernhouse.com

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Monastic retreat Scottish Borders

Designed by modern British architect Patrick Gwynne in the late 1960s, **Vista Point**, close to the pebbly beach in East Preston, has real wow factor - it feels like you've stepped back in time, with furniture and wallpaper from the era completing the look. The grade II-listed house (Gwynne completed it in 1970) has a striking spiral staircase, five bedrooms, and an outdoor swimming pool (heated May to September) in the large garden, along with table football and trampoline. It's one for splashing out on for a special occasion.

● Sleeps nine, £3,700 a week in July/August, £1,850 low season, vista-point.co.uk or themodernhouse.com

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It will come as little surprise that **Kirknowe**, now a peaceful, dog-friendly holiday cottage, was once a retreat for monks from Jedburgh monastery. Its double-height living area has an ecclesiastical feel, with a soaring arched window, huge tapestry and galleried bedroom (there are two more traditional bedrooms in a side wing). Colourful, boho decor and the wood-burning stove make this a convivial space to return to after a day walking or cycling around nearby Newcastle Forest, which is also home to one of Scotland's renowned 7-Stanes mountain biking centres. (The cottage has a separate bike store.)

● Sleeps six, £595 a week in July/August, £305 low season, northumbria-cottages.co.uk

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