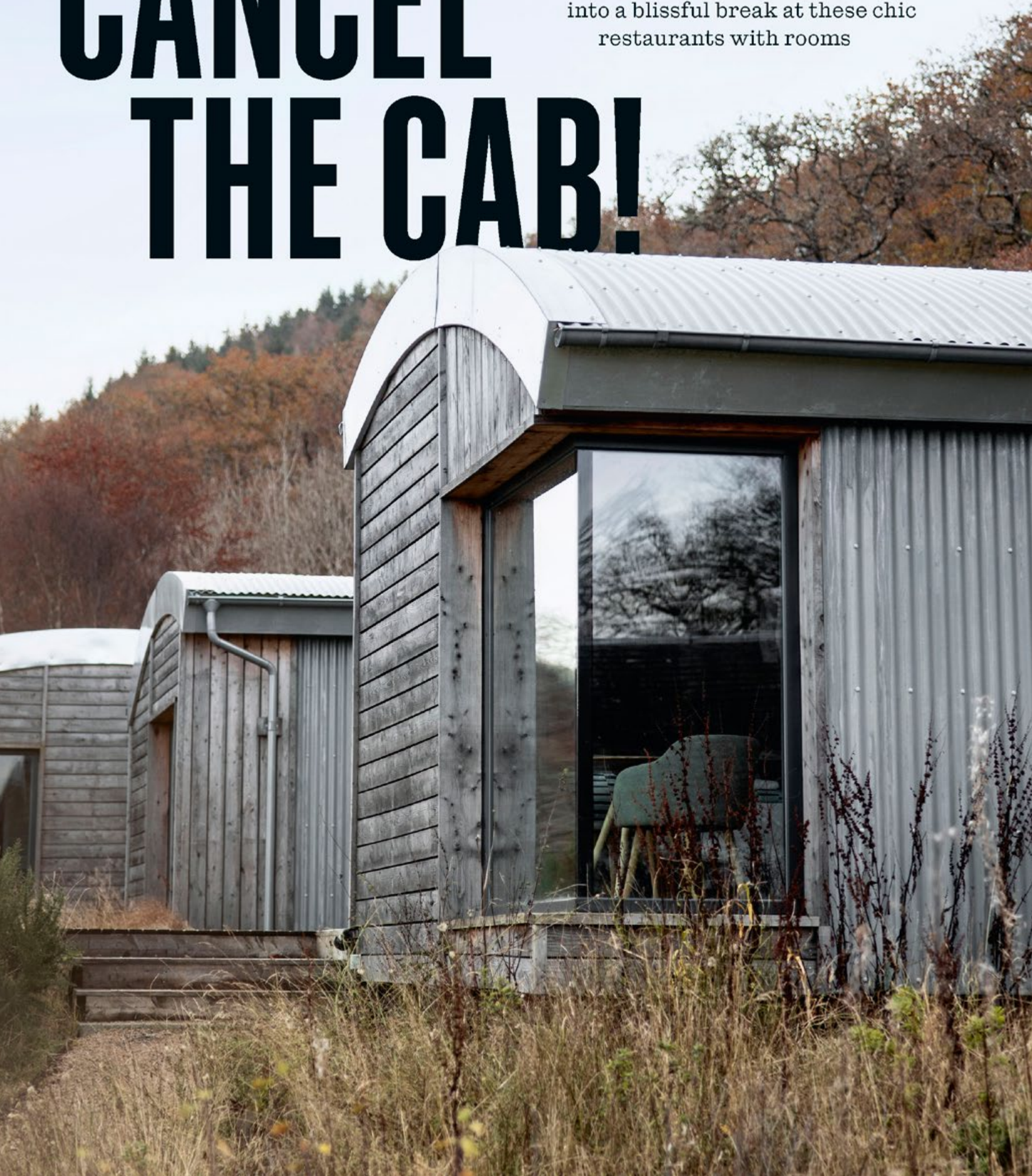


# CANCEL THE CAB!

Superb cooking, soul-restoring scenery – and sweet dreams just a few steps away... Turn eating out into a blissful break at these chic restaurants with rooms







## THE HIGHLAND HIDEAWAY

### Inver, Strathlachlan, Argyll & Bute

Reaching this destination restaurant on the shore of Loch Fyne requires you to pass along the banks of Loch Lomond, through forests that, depending on the season, might be framed by blooming rhododendrons, shimmering in autumn colours or covered in snow. The fairy-tale feel only grows on arrival with the view of the ruined 15th-century Old Castle Lachlan, which appears almost to float on water.

Owners Pam Brunton and Rob Latimer took over Inver in 2015. Since then, they have transformed the site, adding four wooden bothies (pictured on previous page) and two shepherd's huts. A slew of awards, including best restaurant in Scotland and a Michelin Green Star, are proof that they're on an upwards trajectory.

The à la carte lunch and six-course evening tasting menus change regularly to reflect the wilderness outside, with produce typically having travelled a shorter distance than the guests. Expect delicacies such as locally foraged mushrooms and oysters from

specialist farmers in the nearby sea lochs. In the woods either side of the restaurant are the shepherd's huts and bothies, all with birch-ply interiors, hand-woven cushions and comfy beds to sink into, plus wonderful loch views. Included in each reservation is a table at the restaurant, making this a luxury package without rival in the region.

**DON'T MISS** Inver's new guest-chef series, featuring top cooks from Oslo and beyond. *Shepherd's huts from £195 b&b; bothies from £285; tasting menu £95 per person, with optional wine pairing at £65, plus service; [inverrestaurant.co.uk](http://inverrestaurant.co.uk)*



## THE HIDDEN SOMERSET GEM

Holm, South Petherton, Somerset

The town of Bruton, long a magnet for discerning food lovers, has competition: the hamstone village of South Petherton, near Glastonbury. At its heart is Holm, a laid-back, light-filled space run by chef Nicholas Balfe, who co-founded much-lauded London restaurant Levan. Produce from local growers, farmers and fishers takes centre stage in dishes such as homemade tagliarini with Cornish mussels, and Devon lamb shoulder with carrot and chard (kale, fennel and other produce grow in the garden at the back). Built around the vault of a former bank,

the dining room has a varied series of spaces. For a romantic date, grab seats at the open kitchen counter or nab a roomy table for Sunday roast with the family – there's even space for the dog.

Following a two-year renovation of the 1830s building, Holm has seven bedrooms, each with bespoke décor, which has made good use of local craftspeople. Elm is the only suite with a four-poster bed and it also features a double-headed shower made for two. For cosy, loft-style vibes, ask for Hornbeam, with its exposed wooden beams and

freestanding bath. Rooms are well stocked with tea, coffee and welcome treats, and seasonal breakfast includes house-cured bacon collar with locally foraged mushrooms. Nicholas's wife, Natalie, curates an eclectic series of classes, including yoga and Pilates, in a multipurpose lounge area.

**DON'T MISS** The restaurant's superlative snack menu: highlights include the Westcombe Cheddar fries with pickled walnuts.

*Rooms from £145 b&b; mains from £18.50; [holmsomerset.co.uk](http://holmsomerset.co.uk) »*

WORDS: LAURA PRICE  
PHOTOGRAPHS: ED SCHOFIELD, DAVE WATTS





## THE FOODIE FARMHOUSE

Updown Farmhouse, Deal, Kent

Drift a few miles inland from Deal on the Kent coast and you come across the wooded glade sheltering Updown Farmhouse, a bijou restaurant serving sumptuous Italian-ish feasts, with four handsome rooms plus two cottage suites in the leafy grounds. Owners Ruth Leigh and Oli Brown both have serious restaurant mettle, with front-of-house Ruth growing up in the business – her father is Rowley Leigh, the chef and restaurateur famed for Parmesan custard, Kensington Place and Le Café Anglais. The latter is where Updown chef Oli cut his chops.

The Grade II-listed property looks out over the lawn, where children play on sunny afternoons, leaving the grown-ups free to enjoy the dining room next to the grass. Expect local seafood and sharing cuts of meat (saucer-sized scallops, rib of beef with morels and kilo portions of lobster) served with handmade pasta, seasonal Kentish produce and proper puddings: rice pudding, rum baba, rhubarb trifle.

The décor is somehow both homely and sophisticated, with mattresses as



deep as the trifle, linens in ice-cream shades and artwork from Margate-based Studio Lenca. The largest suite is the just-opened Gate House (above), with two bedrooms and views of the kitchen garden. If you can tear yourself away, take a stroll down Deal's Brutalist pier or gaze across at France from the ramparts of Walmer Castle, once home to the Duke of Wellington.

**DON'T MISS** The guest-chef residencies, which have included Rachel Roddy and the late Russell Norman. *Double rooms from £250 b&b; The Gate House from £500 b&b; mains from £26; [updownfarmhouse.com](http://updownfarmhouse.com)*

## THE COTSWOLDS COACHING INN

The Bell at Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire

If implausibly picturesque scenery and market gardens full of fresh produce are your thing, you're spoilt in the Cotswolds. One of the families that has ensured the area is famous for epicurean escapes is the Bamfords, whose Daylesford empire includes various places to stay and a cool 2,350 acres of organic farmland.

Their latest property, newly renovated, is The Bell at Charlbury. It's gloriously rambling, with a convivial bar at its heart, a walled garden and exposed stone walls, plus fireplaces and snugs at every turn. The 12 bedrooms (eight above the pub, four in the neighbouring barn) blend rural charm with contemporary flourishes. The one to request is Beech, located in the oldest part of the pub, with a birch-wood four-poster, butter-hued furnishings and a huge bathtub overlooking ivy-clad lanes and woodland.

Much of the menu concentrates on what's in season from local suppliers and Daylesford's own organic market garden. Dishes might include roasted heritage beetroot with toasted pumpkin seeds and salsa verde, or a plate of whole roasted plaice, basil beurre blanc and courgettes. Stagger upstairs, sink into bed and return the next morning for Bircher muesli with yogurt and berries, cooked breakfasts and toasted sourdough with lusciously thick preserves.

**DON'T MISS** A stroll down Church Street to watch the sun set over the river. *Rooms from £195 b&b; mains from £14; [thebellatcharlbury.com](http://thebellatcharlbury.com)* »

WORDS BY HAYE HARDY



**'THE DÉCOR IS HOMELY, WITH MATTRESSES AS DEEP AS THE TRIFLE'**



## THE STARRY CHEF-LED PUB

### The Abbey Inn, Byland, North Yorkshire

Tommy Banks's fame reaches far beyond his Yorkshire home: his fine-dining restaurants, The Black Swan at Oldstead and Roots in York, each hold a Michelin star. This latest opening, The Abbey Inn (a stone's throw from the ruins of Byland Abbey, once one of England's greatest monasteries), is more casual – it's dog-friendly and the sort of place where muddy wellies wouldn't be an issue – but the food is still something to rave about.

Centred around ingredients grown on the Banks family farm a mile away in Oldstead, the à la carte menu offers seasonal starters such as smoked beetroot with ewe's curd and preserved Yorkshire rhubarb, followed by mains that might include smoked haddock pottage, a risotto-like soup of pearl barley and spelt that was once the staple food of the monastery. Portions are generous, especially the signature Byland burger, which features Dexter beef from cows reared in Oldstead and is served with pork-fat fries. Walk off a substantial lunch in the abbey grounds, or, if a nap or an early night is called for, there are three cosy bedrooms just a few steps away (two overlook the abbey itself). Abbot's Retreat comes with a four-poster bed and a breakfast table for feasting on the hamper of morning treats provided: homemade coppa, smoked salmon, boiled eggs and granola.

**DON'T MISS** Limited-edition Pinot Noir from the Banks brothers' wine label. *Rooms from £350 b&b, which includes a £100 allowance towards dinner; mains from £22; abbeyinnbyland.co.uk*

## THE COASTAL BOLTHOLE

### The Suffolk, Aldeburgh, Suffolk

Every town should have a place like The Suffolk: stylish yet laid back (pooches welcome); on trend but without a hint of snootiness; and so well run that the place practically purrs like a pampered lap cat.

The Suffolk owes its existence to Covid. Back in 2020, George Pell, then the MD of the revered L'Escargot in London's Soho and now The Suffolk's owner, launched L'Escargot Sur Mer as a pop-up, taking advantage of the coastal town's bracing sea air and outdoor space. The 17th-century building, now lovingly restored, reopened in 2022 as a smart small hotel housing Sur Mer restaurant, slap-bang in the middle of Aldeburgh's High Street, close to the shingle beach.

Head chef is Tom Payne, who grew up in nearby Woodbridge. Locally sourced seafood is the big draw – Butley Creek oysters, seared scallops with lardo, and pan-fried skate with caper sauce are all ace. Local produce figures large: cheese from Fen Farm Dairy, chicken from Sutton Hoo and Pump Street chocolate.

The six bedrooms, each with Roberts radios and some with sea views, are done up in relaxing shades of blue and green, with sleek bathrooms. What they may lack in space, they make up for in cosiness. There's also a shared first-floor pantry stocked with nibbles and pre-mixed cocktails, a roof terrace with sweeping views out to the North Sea and a lively bar area where you can sip and spin your own classic vinyl.

**DON'T MISS** A stroll along the beach to see Maggi Hambling's Scallop sculpture. *Rooms from £192 b&b; mains from £20; the-suffolk.co.uk*

WORDS SUSAN LOW PHOTOGRAPHS REBECCA DICKSON



'IT'S SO WELL RUN, THE PLACE PRACTICALLY PURRS LIKE A PAMPERED LAP CAT'

