

Secrets of the Houses

Culture-lovers looking for a luxury weekend getaway will find the best of both worlds in these historic houses



BOVEY CASTLE, DEVON

» boveycastle.com

MADE OF DARTMOOR granite, Bovey Castle is a neo-Jacobean, Grade II listed country house. From the moment you enter the courtyard, you are immersed in the surrounds and lifestyle of the landed gentry of the past.

A castle in name only, the luxury of Bovey Castle contrasts with the wuthering winds of the Dartmoor national park. In the late 1800s, the inheritor of the W.H.Smith Empire, Sir William Henry Smith, was looking for a way to diversify his family's wealth. The collapse of agricultural commodities meant land was at an all-time low in 1890 and Sir William seized his opportunity, buying huge stretches of land from the Earl of Devon. The move was a shrewd one; by the mid-1890s the financial markets were in deep depression as they

were exposed to the over-expansion of the railways. The W.H.Smith franchise had been built on the growth of these railways during Britain's second industrial revolution, so it is a testament to the financial foresight of Sir William

"Today, the hotel has been awarded five stars by the AA"

that the family continued to grow their wealth during these harsh times.

A generation later, the financial savviness that had served the family so well deserted

them, when William's son failed to plan for the significant death duties levied in Britain at the time.

It was perhaps fitting the new owners were the builders of the very railway line on which Bovey sat; the Great Western Railway Company transformed the home into a hotel, dazzling their guests with an 18-hole golf course, built as a southern rival to the famous Scottish retreat of Gleneagles.

Today, the hotel has been awarded five stars by the AA and treats its visitors as it always has, with exemplary five-star service throughout. The Great Western Restaurant offers an exclusive dining experience with a focus on beautifully crafted, locally sourced, seasonal produce overseen by their award-winning head chef. ▶

Did you know?

A considerable gravity anomaly is associated with Dartmoor as it sits on an area of low-density granite



Brooding Dartmoor contrasts with Bovey's luxury.



Lewis Stallard

Lewis is founder of British History Breaks, specialists in historic luxury travel in the UK

britishhistorybreaks.com

Historic hotels are worlds apart from chain hotels, in that they each have a unique story and every room you visit is unlike the last.

Historic hotels give visitors the opportunity to walk in the footsteps of some of the most important people in history, to experience the same space and, if they are lucky, to even share some of the opulence that made up their lives.

Here we have chosen three of the most memorable hotels that will hopefully capture your heart and imagination: one is steeped in myths and legends, one exemplifies the importance of business diversification and the other has an illustrious musical heritage.

No matter which one you prefer, you can be guaranteed a superlative stay in the most beautiful of surroundings.



NANTEOS MANSION, CEREDIGION

» nanteos.com

STRIKING GEORGIAN HOUSES are perhaps not the first thing you think of when imagining the western fringes of Wales, yet Nanteos Mansion could barely be more suitably located. The countryside in this part of Ceredigion, just inland of Cardigan Bay, ranks amongst the most unspoilt and romantic places in the UK, renowned for inspiring famous works of literature and music. Wagner was alleged to have been inspired to write his opera, *Parsifal*, while vacationing at Nanteos.

Meaning the ‘nightingale’s stream’ in Welsh, Nanteos has been the recipient of a meticulous renovation that has returned this 18th century mansion to the luxurious glory of its Georgian past.

The mansion was built by the Powell

family, a wealthy dynasty that made their fortunes from the mineral wealth buried beneath their vast Welsh estates. Thomas Powell began the construction of Nanteos

“It would be 23 years before the mansion would near completion”

in 1734, yet it would be a long 23 years before the mansion would near the final stages of its construction.

At its peak the Nanteos estate comprised some 31,000 acres, covering

most of what is today Aberystwyth.

The turbulent history of Nanteos mansion would see it witness disputes with the Crown, open rebellion and military intervention before its completion. The Powell family would clearly not let much get in the way of sentimentality for the old country and by 1757 Nanteos was complete, largely resembling the country house hotel that now, more than 250 years later, welcomes guests from around the world. ➔



The Powell family occupied Nanteos house for 200 years.

THE GRAND HOTEL, EASTBOURNE

» grandeastbourne.com

AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN TO locals as The White Palace, The Grand Hotel in Eastbourne is the epitome of Victorian seaside luxury, purpose built in 1875 as a dazzling establishment suitable for Royalty and the aristocracy.

The Grand is famous for its long-standing association with music, which is down to its general manager from 1910-1939, Sam Eeley. Sam's protégé was Albert Sandler, a 19-year-old from a Russian refugee family who grew up in the impoverished East End of London. Mr Sandler's talent was discovered by Mr Eeley, who encountered him making money by playing violin at a tea shop – a living he had been making since the age of twelve, juggling evening gigs at an orchestra with his schooling.

With Mr Eeley as his musical director, Sam built a glittering worldwide reputation for the hotel; enticing the BBC to broadcast live from the hotel's Great Hall every Sunday night between 1924 to 1939, attracting the most accomplished international musicians of the day.

Over the years Sir Winston Churchill, Charlie Chaplin, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and King Constantine of Greece were all received as guests.

The fantastic tradition of music at The Grand continues in this, the only five-star seafront hotel in the country, where guests can feel a sense of luxury as soon as they walk through the door. 



The Grand Hotel is famed for its seafront service.

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Q What date was the 'First Day on the Somme'?

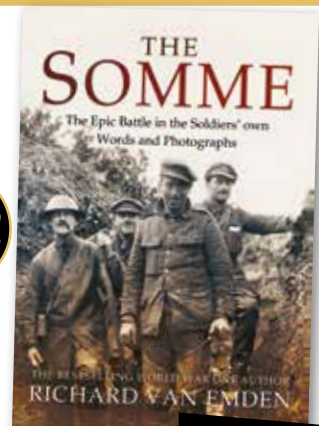
A: 1st July, 1915

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C: 1st June, 1916

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