

The of Information

THE INDEPENDENT

The essential guide to going out and staying in 01.10.2011

THE 50 BEST

Weekend retreats



Comedy

Daniel Kitson's human stories

Talks

Val McDermid in Lichfield

Film

Lars von Trier's Melancholia

Pop

Death from Above 1979

Theatre

Mike Leigh's evocative Grief

10. Lime Wood

"One of Britain's newer country-house retreats, Lime Wood was originally a medieval hunting lodge," says James. "This New Forest manor pays attention to detail, with manicured grounds, contemporary interior design, a super new spa and two restaurants. It's grown-up, but not at all stuffy." **Where** Lime Wood, Beaulieu Road, Lyndhurst, Hampshire, SO43 7FZ (023 8028 7177; www.limewoodhotel.co.uk) **How much** Doubles from £190 with breakfast



The inn crowd: Felin Fach Griffin in Brecon (23)

ACTIVE BREAKS

11. Nash Hall

"This 17th-century threshing barn in the Welsh Marches has been beautifully restored and is resplendent with such touches as a vintage juke box, games room and country-chic decor," explains Sophie who suggests checking in and using it as a base to explore nearby Hay-on-Wye, Ludlow and the Offa's Dyke Path. **Where** Nash, Presteigne, Powys, LD8 2LG (01544 267359; www.nash-hall.co.uk) **How much** from £150

12. The Hotel & Extreme Academy

"The perfect escape for the extreme sports enthusiasts among us," says Sarah. "It's perched above two-mile long Watergate Bay where you can enjoy bodyboarding and surfing as well as breath-taking cliff walks." Its in-house 'extreme academy' offers surfing, kite surfing, waxeski and traction kite. **Where** The Hotel and Extreme Academy, Watergate Bay, Cornwall, TR8 4AA (01637 860543; www.watergatebay.co.uk) **How much** From £105 with breakfast

13. The Drunken Duck Inn

A great base for the active couple, suggests Sarah of this 300-year-old inn. "Surrounded by walking country, the pub specialises in hearty British fodder, a certain requirement after a day's walking in the hills." **Where** The Drunken Duck Inn, Barnegates, Ambleside, Cumbria, LA22 0NG (015394 36347; www.drunkenduckinn.co.uk) **How much** Double rooms from £95 with breakfast and afternoon tea

14. Stoke Place, Black Widow's Ball

Taking place on 28 October, the Black Widow's Ball at luxury hotel Stoke Place is lavishly reinventing the country house party, according to Sophie. "The Hammer horror-themed event promises theatrical ghoulishness by way of fancy

dress, a midnight feast, mummification room and transvestite tarot."

Where Stoke Place, Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, SL2 4HT (01753 468 854; www.thewhiteblackbird.com) **How much** From £100 plus £35 ticket

15. Alladale Wilderness Reserve

Stay in one of three lodges in a remote Highlands location. The range of activities available is impressive: go on a wildlife safari, Scots style, over the hills in a 4x4, or try pony trekking, fishing, clay-pigeon shooting or even deer stalking. The reserve offers whisky-tasting session and tours of local distilleries; or go the other direction and check in for an 'escape and rejuvenate health retreat'.

Where Alladale Lodge, Ardgay, Sutherland, Scotland, IV24 3BS (01863 755 338; www.alladale.com) **How much** From £350 for four, full board

16. Ellenborough Park

Perfect for those with a passion for the races, this is "an indulgent 15th-century manor in a knock-out location, just far enough outside Cheltenham to feel 'country living' but still less than 10 minutes from town," says James.

Where Ellenborough Park, Souham Road, Cheltenham Spa, Gloucestershire, GL52 3NH (01242 807 587; www.ellenboroughpark.com) **How much** Double rooms from £210 with breakfast

17. The Scarlet

Sarah tips this as being the most gorgeous eco-friendly hotel on the Cornish coast – and there are plenty of outdoors activities to enjoy too. "Take a refreshing swim in the reed pool overlooking the sea and get out walking on the coast path, it's all there for the taking," she adds. James agrees that "located by a gorgeous beach, the Scarlet manages that rare balance between eco and pampering, and makes the most of its setting: floor-to-ceiling glass brings the outside in and maximises sea-and-sand views."

Where The Scarlet, Tredragon Road, Mawgan Porth, Cornwall, TR8 4DQ (01637 861800; www.scarlethotel.co.uk) **How much** From £165 with breakfast



Room and board: the Hotel & Extreme Academy in Cornwall is ideal for water sports (12)

18. The Swan Hotel & Spa

According to James, this is "the perfect place to pitch up at after a ramble round the Lakes, the 17th-century Swan providing a warm and hearty welcome with local ales on tap, fires in the hearth and fine food on plates. Great for cosy rendezvous or family getaways, it's like a pub with benefits – including attractive rooms, a swimming pool and a spa."

Where The Swan Hotel & Spa, Newby Bridge, Cumbria, LA12 8NB (015395 31681; www.swanhotel.com) **How much** Double rooms from £119 with breakfast

19. Natural Perspectives

Fancy putting yourself through boot camp, but with a side order of comfort and style? Sophie explains that at this retreat in the Yorkshire Dales, "you spend the weekend working towards specific goals, whether it's fitness, toning or weight loss before retiring to the sleek glass and wood self-catering Natural Retreats residences overlooking the Swale Valley."

Where Natural Perspectives, Swale Valley, Richmond, North Yorkshire, DL11 (0161-8323271; www.natural-perspectives.co.uk) **How much** Three-day all-inclusive retreat from £439

20. Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel

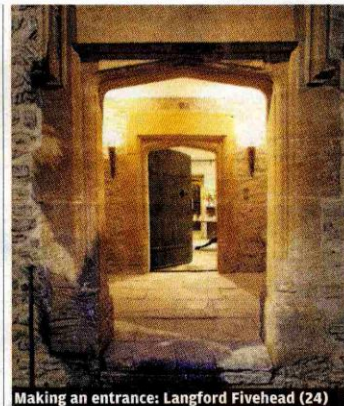
"A historic old coaching inn, full of nooks and crannies, with bedrooms upstairs, little has changed since Victorian days – but in a good way" insists David. "A long-time favourite for walkers and climbers, the bar downstairs is full of mountaineering memorabilia. The British team that first conquered Everest trained nearby – you can still see their signatures on the ceiling."

Where Pen-y-gwryd Hotel, Nant Gwynant, Gwynedd, North Wales, LL55 4NT (01286 870211; www.pyg.co.uk) **How much** From £40 with breakfast

FOODIE FAVOURITES

21. South Lodge Hotel

With the addition of the Pass restaurant, the South Lodge Hotel rather surpasses its traditional grand country house stylings – lovely and luxurious though they are. Developing the "chef's table" concept, diners are seated in the kitchen to watch



Making an entrance: Langford Fivehead (24)

their creations being made by Matt Gillan and his team. Expect inventive, delicate, contemporary dishes from their choice of tasting menus. Vegetarians are imaginatively catered for too.

Where South Lodge Hotel, Brighton Road, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 6PS (01403 891 711; www.southlodgehotel.co.uk) **How much** Double rooms from £335 with six-course tasting menu and breakfast

22. Coworth Park

"Just outside Ascot, the 17th-century mansion and polo estate has been treated to an intelligent and eco-friendly modern makeover by the Dorchester group, creating three restaurants, a spectacular spa, and an air of quietly confident grandeur," suggests James. Sarah is similarly enthused: "Michelin-starred chef John Campbell heads up Coworth Park's restaurants where you can get everything from an extravagant tasting menu to a good steak and chips."

Where Coworth Park, Blacknest Road, Ascot, Berkshire, SL5 7SE (01344 876 600; www.coworthpark.com) **How much** Double rooms from £215

23. Felin Fach Griffin

Holiday-makers drawn to the Brecon Beacons would be well advised to book in at this charming country inn, especially if they're looking for good food too. A dining pub with seven simply decorated rooms attached, the Felin Fach Griffin serves high-quality, delicious grub in its cosy library, bar and tack rooms.

Where Felin Fach Griffin, Felin Fach, Brecon, LD3 0UB (01874 620 111; www.eatdrinksleep.ltd.uk) **How much** Double rooms from £170 with dinner and breakfast

24. Langford Fivehead

"Recently opened by Peter Steggall and Orlando Murrin (also behind the Le Manoir des Raynaudes), this personality-packed medieval manor has been playfully renovated," James explains, adding that "it's a sociable, foodie place, perfect for country-house weekends spent sharing great food and good times." Sarah deems it "a real retreat for foodies."

Where Langford Fivehead, Lower Swell, Somerset, TA3 6PH (01460 281159; www.langfordfivehead.co) **How much** Double rooms from £220 with breakfast