

# of the BEST

## FESTIVE UK BREAKS

Clients searching for a Christmas staycation?

**Laura French** rounds up the options

**1** he nights are drawing in, the sun is waning and the temperatures are dropping, but fear not – Christmas is round the corner, meaning mulled wine, festive frolics and copious amounts of food are soon to be on the horizon.

And while Christmas-themed European breaks continue to boom, the UK and Ireland have their own wealth of getaways. We've looked into some of the best options for clients of every kind whether they're wanting to cosy up round a log fire, tour the country by rail or wander through a Christmas market indulging in sweet, festive treats.



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### DRINK MULLED WINE IN MANCHESTER

Manchester comes alive in the festive season, with more than 300 stalls bringing wintry scents of cinnamon, mulled wine and bratwurst to streets across the city centre, and the annual Ice Village adding a grotto, Arctic bar and ice rink into the mix. Outside the city you'll find plenty more going on, not least at Tatton Park, whose historic Tudor mansion is festooned with fairy lights and festive decorations, plus seasonal music luring those wanting to get into the spirit. Shearings combines the two in a four-day break, with guided excursions and free time.

**Book it:** From £154, including three nights' half-board accommodation, two excursions and coach travel, departing December 6 and 13. [shearings.com](http://shearings.com)



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### EXPERIENCE CHRISTMAS AT OULTON HALL

For those wanting to escape the chores by getting away on Christmas Day, there are plenty of options, but for one of the best, suggest Q Hotels' Oulton Hall. Located just outside Leeds city centre, this 18th-century mansion – set within 300 acres of land and home to a 27-hole golf course – will be hosting a festive extravaganza this year with carol singing, mulled wine and Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, followed by a family treasure hunt, Christmas dinner, games, quizzes and more on Christmas Day. Those staying for Boxing Day will also get a farewell dinner, drinks reception and live music show – one way to get out of the turkey duties.

**Book it:** From £398 per person for two nights, staying December 24-26 (three-night stays are also available). [oultonhallhotel.co.uk](http://oultonhallhotel.co.uk)

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### ENJOY AN EARLY CHRISTMAS

The celebrations don't have to be limited to Christmas Day. If guests can't celebrate with family and friends over the actual festive period, suggest Warner Leisure Hotels' mid-week Turkey and Tinsel breaks, available in November and December at properties across the country. Mulled wine, mince pies, festive dinners, comedy acts, pantos, a visit from Santa and a New Year countdown are all on the agenda, designed to recreate Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Eve with live music and dancing every night; who needs December 25 when you've got this?

**Book it:** A four-night Turkey & Tinsel break at Littlecote House Hotel in Berkshire starts at £315 per person, based on two sharing Standard accommodation on a half-board basis, from November 11. [warnerleisurehotels.co.uk](http://warnerleisurehotels.co.uk)



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### GO FORAGING AND WREATH-MAKING IN SHROPSHIRE

For clients looking to get creative pre-Christmas, HF Holidays has the answer. Guests on its three-night Shropshire break will go out walking in the rolling hills to forage for materials to use in craft workshops, where they'll make wreaths and garlands. They'll also visit the nearby Tenbury Wells, an ancient market town known for its mistletoe and holly trading, and home to the annual Mistletoe Festival (taking place on December 7). Accommodation is in a historic country house with nightly entertainment and festive treats, and there's an expert guide throughout to teach guests all the skills they'll need to put their creativity to use.

**Book it:** A three-night break, departing December 6, starts at £369 including full board en-suite accommodation at Longmynd House, plus a tour leader and entertainment. [hfholidays.co.uk](http://hfholidays.co.uk)



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## DESTINATIONS

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### WITNESS THE THURSFORD CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR

For sheer glitz, nothing beats Thursford's iconic Christmas Spectacular in Norfolk. The biggest show of its kind in Europe, it brings singing, dancing, music and other performances together in an explosive, three-hour fiesta, with fairy lights and Christmas trees decorating a lavish auditorium. Just Go Holidays offers a trip to the show as part of a four-day coach package, adding in an excursion to nearby Norwich, whose Christmas market has gained country-wide fame for its colourful crafts, Christmassy food and hand-made souvenirs spilling out from traditional wooden chalets.

**Book it:** From £299 per person including three nights' half-board accommodation, coach travel and tickets to the show. Departures are available from November 11 to December 13.

[justgoholidays.com](http://justgoholidays.com)

### BEST OF THE REST

**Old Course Hotel, St Andrews, Scotland:** Mulled wine, mince pies and a Christmas Day lunch with champagne are all on the agenda at this lavish golf and spa resort over the festive period, with room rates starting at £900 for two nights.

**De Vere Cotswold Water Park:** Set just outside Cheltenham, this historic mansion makes a good base for visiting the Christmas markets, while festive Santa lunches make it a good bet for kids. Two nights starts at £250 for a family of four.

**Slieve Donard, Belfast:** Guests at this country retreat will be greeted with a range of festive activities, including a Polar Express experience around the grounds, while Belfast's markets are within easy reach.

**Lincolnshire Golden Coast:** Grand UK Holidays offers a pre-Christmas coach tour in Lincolnshire that dishes up festive fare, sightseeing, a gift from Santa and plenty more amid quintessentially British landscapes, with prices from £269.



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### TOUR YORKSHIRE BY RAIL

For clients who want a break with a difference over Christmas, suggest Arena Rail Holidays' Yorkshire Christmas Tour. The five-day trip whisks guests around the Dales on various heritage trains, including a restored vintage steam train and the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway, once used for the valley's wool mills. Guests also visit a seventh-century cathedral and the historic Ripley Castle, with a Christmas lunch thrown in for good measure and accommodation in the town of Skipton, known for its medieval castle and age-old market.

**Book it:** From £689 per person, based on two sharing half-board accommodation for four nights, including excursions and rail journeys, and departing December 23.

[arenarailholidays.co.uk](http://arenarailholidays.co.uk)