

National treasures

Show clients the best of Britain via one of its institutions – the National Trust, writes Joanna Booth

FAST FACT
Just Go! Holidays has added six National Trust tours, including properties in Kent, Yorkshire and the Isle of Wight

What's on your bucket list? The chances are it features far-flung and exotic destinations, but are you missing out on something extraordinary right under your nose?

Nearly 40 million inbound tourists come to the UK every year, and leisure travellers cite exploring our culture, history and landmarks as their primary reason for visiting. Surely it's time to follow their example?

There's no easier place to find inspiration than the charity set up to protect our historic spaces – the National Trust. It cares for more than 500 heritage properties, from the castles and grand houses most associated with it, to former factories, mills, monuments and mines. It's also one of the largest landowners in the UK, with areas of natural beauty that add up to the size of Luxembourg under its supervision.

The National Trust's remit is to preserve these sites "for ever, for everyone", so assuming it's only relevant to retirees would be a mistake. With such diversity on offer, there's a site to suit any client. Here are a few ideas; find more at nationaltrust.org.uk

► BEST FOR FAMILIES

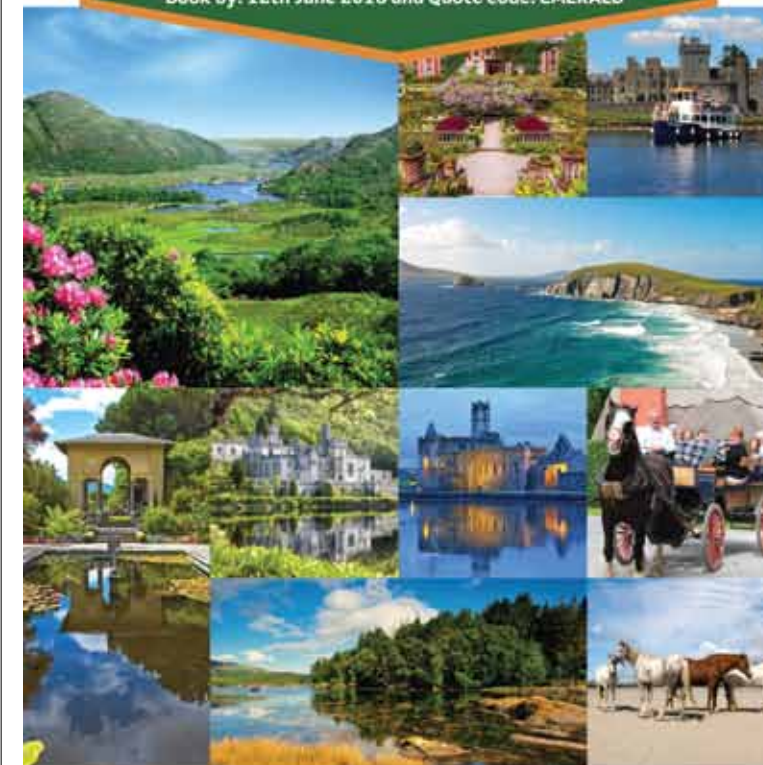
Give a child a pencil, and they'll draw something that looks very like Wray Castle. This Victorian neo-Gothic fortress has such an array of battlements, turrets and arrow-slits that you'd guess it had been designed for a siege, rather than as a home for a retired doctor.

It came to the National Trust empty of any historic furnishings, and what would render it unappealing to more erudite visitors makes it perfect for kids. The charity has transformed it into a playground, where kids can build their own castle with oversized soft blocks, dress up as knights and princesses, and immerse themselves in the world of Peter Rabbit. The author Beatrix Potter spent a summer at the Lake District castle, and now the universe of

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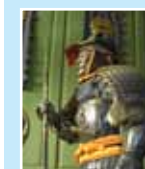
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5 OF THE BEST UNUSUAL NATIONAL TRUST SITES



Dolaucothi Gold Mines

Take an underground tour of this Welsh gold mine, dating back to Roman times, and have a go at gold-panning.



Snowhill Manor

This Cotswold home is a treasure trove of 22,000 curiosities collected by an eccentric Edwardian, from Samurai armour to penny farthing bicycles.



Whipsnade Tree Cathedral

This atmospheric and unusual Bedfordshire landmark was planted by a soldier in 1932 in remembrance of his comrades who fell in the First World War.



Lizard Point

As well as seal-spotting and seaside walks, at mainland Britain's most southerly point, visit the Wireless Station, where Marconi developed radio technology.



5. Sticklebarn

This Lake District pub is owned and run by the National Trust; have a pint of Cumbrian ale after walking in the Langdale Pikes.

wrote his most famous speeches.

After touring the house, and Churchill's studio, where a large collection of his paintings are on display, it's worth taking a wander in the extensive gardens, particularly beloved by his wife.

Book it: Visit Chartwell on Back Roads Touring's five-day Garden of England tour, which also includes a visit to the National Trust's Bodiam Castle, a 14th-century moated fortress in Sussex. Prices start from £1,299. backroadstouring.com

Or try: Travel back in time to one of Scotland's most turbulent moments at the battlefield of Culloden. This windswept moor was where the Jacobite rebels made their last, doomed stand against government troops in 1746, and the visitor centre brings the period to life with artefacts, interactive displays and an immersive cinema experience of the battle itself. Book an Inverness hotel with Super Break and add a three-day National Trust for Scotland Discover Ticket for £27 per person. superbreak.com/agents

BEST FOR TV FANS

Smash hit series Game of Thrones might seem a racy fit for the genteel National Trust, but the historic farmyard at Castle Ward in County Down stood in for Winterfell, the home of the Stark family, and the site is home



ABOVE: Bodnant Garden, Conwy



RIGHT: Ickworth House, Suffolk



Kids can dress up as knights and princesses, and immerse themselves in the world of Peter Rabbit

cinema room, swimming pool and the huge estate to explore by bike. Parents will love the gourmet food - and the baby listening service that allows them to enjoy it - plus the two hours of free childcare per day in the Ofsted-registered crèche and kids' club, suitable for kids between three months and eight

years. Super Break offers stays from £135 per person per night. superbreak.com/agents

BEST FOR HISTORY

The handsome red-brick walls of Chartwell were privy to some of the pivotal moments of the 20th century. Home to Sir Winston Churchill for more than 40

years, this Kent mansion gives visitors a window into the life of our most famous politician. Crammed with memorabilia and decorated with original furniture and books, visitors will feel as if the notoriously short-tempered statesman might return at any moment and berate them for intruding in his study, where he

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→ to other key locations including the Whispering Wood, and Baelor Battle. Visitors can take a cycle tour of the filming locations or make like Jon Snow and fire arrows in full costume on the original archery range film set.

Book it: Belfast is an hour's drive from Castle Ward – book a three-night break at the city-centre Europa Hotel with Osprey Holidays from £339, including flights from Gatwick.

ospreyholidays.com

Or try: The sight of Colin Firth striding towards a grand mansion in a wet shirt made a generation fall in love with Jane Austen. In the BBC's 1995 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, Pemberley was in reality the National Trust's Lyme Park in Cheshire. After walking around the famous lake – we wouldn't recommend jumping in – visitors can head to the house, try on Regency costumes and even have a game

of billiards, imagining they're Darcy and Elizabeth. Book a stay at the nearby Hallmark Hotel Manchester in Wilmslow. Great Little Breaks offers two nights with breakfast and one dinner from £111 per person.

greatlittlebreaks.com

▶ BEST FOR GARDENS

Green fingers will start twitching if you mention Bodnant Garden to plant-loving clients. The 80-acre garden in Conwy, North Wales, was developed by five generations of one family.

Victorian plant hunters brought back many exotic species, and the garden's collections of rhododendron, magnolia, cedars and redwoods are renowned. The design is also famous, from its curving laburnum arch to The Far End, a wild, lakeside garden only recently restored and reopened.

Book it: Just Go! Holidays offers a range of tours in association



ABOVE: Lyme Park, Cheshire

with the National Trust and Bodnant Gardens is one of the highlights of the five-day Castles and Gardens of Medieval Wales, which starts from £600 and also includes visits to the Trust's Erddig, Chirk Castle, Plas Newydd and Powis Castle.

justgoholidays.com

Or try: At Sissinghurst Castle in

Kent, the poet Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson created the quintessential English garden, with tumbles of roses and honeysuckle, fragrant herbs and an apple orchard. Visit on Kirker Holidays' four-night Houses, Galleries and Gardens of Sussex and Kent, from £1,143.

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