



# KING of the CASTLE

From dungeons and haunted turrets, to four-poster beds and glorious spas, a stay in a British castle is a magical and mysterious experience

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**M**y grandfather, who was one of King George V's butlers, used to tell me about all the British castles he'd stayed in as he followed the king in his duties. He told me of huge canopied beds at Thornbury and the terrifying dungeons at Warwick. At one of the Cinque Port castles (I can't remember which) he said he regularly heard the clank of chains in attics and doors closing on empty rooms.

The tales stayed with me and inspired a lifelong love of castles, those magical fortifications built to defend the highest people in the land, decked out with sumptuous furniture and draped in the mysterious cloak of history.

In my grandfather's time only those related to, or working with royalty were likely to spend the night in a castle, but these days as the original owners pass away or find it increasingly expensive to maintain their ancestral homes, more and more of Britain's beautiful castles are opening their doors to guests.

One of the country's oldest castles, Amberley, just an hour's drive from London, has been providing a monarchical haven to visitors for several decades.

Situated in a picturesque South Downs village in Sussex, this privately owned, nine-centuries-old walled castle has panoramic views of the surrounding marshes and a large moat. Inside this medieval sanctuary you'll find four-poster beds, roaring log fires and walls decked with coats of arms. There are also several acres of flower-studded gardens to roam, a putting green and tennis courts. While here, make sure you take a tour with local historian Keith McKenna, who will tell you all about the history of this magnificent castle, which was once inhabited by the Bishops of Chichester, and is said to be haunted by the ghost of 13-year-old Emily, who committed suicide after falling pregnant by one of them.

*This page, dockwise from top left: Amberley Castle, Sussex; dining room at Amberley; bedroom at Thornbury Castle. Facing page: the library at Skibo Castle, Dornoch Firth, Scotland*

Cross the country to near Bristol and you'll be plunged into another medieval fantasy land at Thornbury Castle, a sumptuous Tudor fortress hemmed in by crenellated walls where illustrious guests have included King Henry VIII and his ill-fated second wife Anne Boleyn.

Behind massive oak doors you'll find clanking suits of armour and a selection of the castle's original wall tapestries, while bedrooms have four-poster beds, period furnishings and log fires, along with plenty of more modern comforts.

This lovely castle also has England's oldest Tudor garden, as well as a gourmet restaurant serving traditional treats, including delicious Sunday roasts.

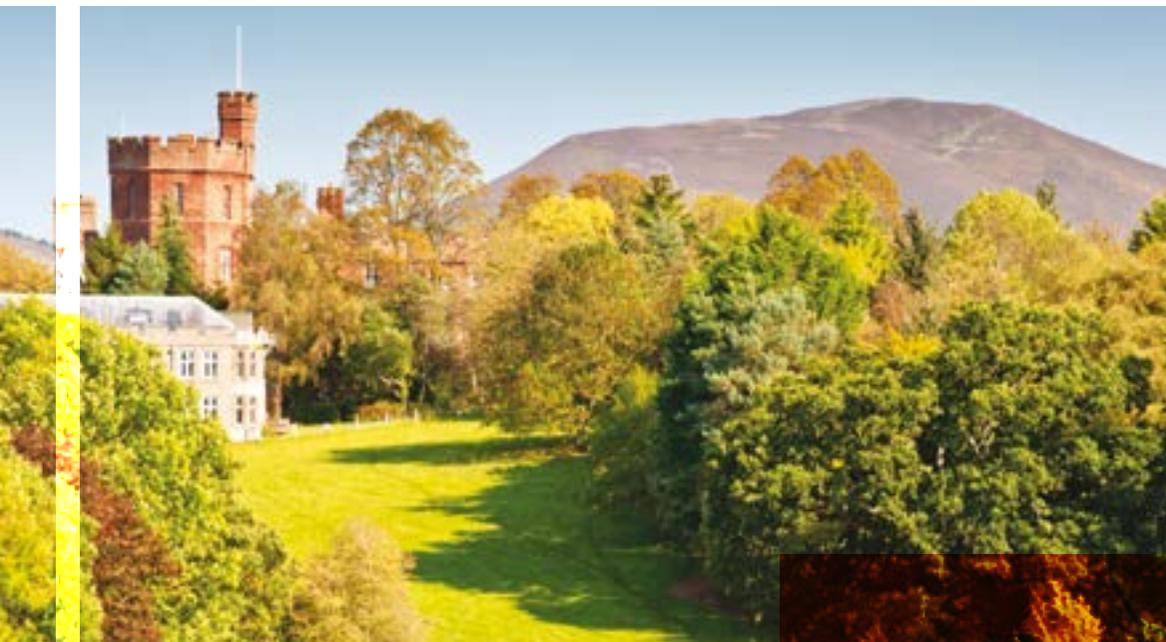
Slip over the border into Wales and you'll find Ruthin Castle, a retreat surrounded by a vast estate, which was built in the late 13th century for King Edward I of England by Dafydd ap Gruffydd (Edward later gave it back to him). Dafydd went on to become the Prince of Wales, before being hung, drawn and quartered for treason.

Briefly owned by the Nine Days' Queen Lady Jane Grey, the final monarch to own this castle was King Charles I who sold it to pay his debts. In the 19th century, the castle, owned by Colonel Cornwallis-West, was wreathed in ►

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Inside Tulloch Castle you'll find wood-panelled rooms, crimson wallpaper and stained glass windows – some of them inscribed with the previous owner's coat of arms



scandal when Cornwallis-West's 16-year-old wife had a drawn-out love affair with the future King Edward VII.

In 2004, Ruthin Castle was purchased by Anthony and Amanda Saint Claire and has been transformed into a luxurious hotel where you can enjoy lively medieval banquets and a range of relaxing spa treatments.

Further north you'll find Scotland's legendary castles. One of the most renowned, 12th-century Tulloch Castle in the hamlet of Dingwall and overlooking the Highlands, is just a short drive from Inverness.

Home to Scottish nobles the Bains, and the Highland Scottish Clan Davidson, the castle, which was used as a hospital after the evacuation of Dunkirk, passed out of Davidson ownership in 1917 when the last direct descendant of this family, Duncan, died and left the castle to his daughter and her son, Colonel Angus Vickers, of the Vickers aircraft company.

Inside you'll find centuries-old, wood-panelled rooms, deep crimson wallpaper, and stained glass

**Clockwise, from top:** Ruthin Castle, Denbighshire, north Wales; ornate staircase at Skibo Castle; Tulloch Castle Hotel in the Scottish Highlands



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windows – some of them inscribed with the previous owner's coat of arms, while suites are spacious and light. During your stay keep a look out for ghosts: both visitors and hotel staff have reported witnessing apparitions in the form of a young girl and the middle-aged 'Green Lady', believed to be the ghost of Elizabeth Davidson who died after falling down the stairs at Tulloch.

If ghost spotting is not your thing, then why not look out for dolphins on the Moray Firth instead – just a 10 minutes' drive from Tulloch Castle.

Finally you might prefer to follow in the footsteps of pop royalty at the gorgeous Skibo Castle. While the first record of a castle at Skibo is on a charter from 1211, its current 19th-century design is the work of wealthy industrialist Andrew Carnegie. Members of high society, from Rudyard Kipling to King Edward VII, have all paid visits to the castle. However, its most recent claim to fame came

## BOOK YOUR STAY

There are several excellent companies that can organise castle stays, including Exclusive Castle Rentals ([www.exclusivecastlerentals.com](http://www.exclusivecastlerentals.com)), which organises stays for families, individuals and groups, and Oliver's Travels ([www.oliverstravels.com](http://www.oliverstravels.com)), a UK-based company that has some of Britain's best fortresses on its books.



For more on Britain's best castles go to [www.britain-magazine.com/castles](http://www.britain-magazine.com/castles)

From top: the swimming pool at Skibo Castle; Skibo Castle illuminated at night; Bovey Castle, Dartmoor



when pop star Madonna chose to stage her wedding to film director Guy Ritchie here in 2000.

Skibo means 'fairylane of peace' in the Norse language, and the castle is a delightful Edwardian hideaway along a beech-lined drive overlooking Dornoch Firth. The area's highlights include one of Scotland's finest championship golf links courses, a well-equipped beauty spa and a charming pool built inside a Victorian conservatory.

With such a rich variety of castles for you to visit, the only thing you have to do is choose which one is right for you. But whether you decide on a Tudor citadel, a medieval fortress, or a celebrity chateau, one thing is certain: a castle stay is guaranteed to give you a right royal treat. **B**

Go to [www.britain-magazine.com/castles](http://www.britain-magazine.com/castles) to read more about Britain's castles and some of their incredible stories

## THE EDITOR'S PICK



### BOVEY CASTLE, DEVON

An Edwardian mansion built in the early 1900s, Bovey Castle is a delightful, family-friendly retreat in the heart of Dartmoor National Park. Built for the 2nd Viscount Hambleden, this charming property has large stone fireplaces, ornate wood panelling and glorious views from the windows of 66 comfortable rooms and several large lodges dotted around the grounds. The

hotel's estate also includes an 18-hole championship golf course that was designed by John Frederick Abercromby in 1926, a daily falconry display, and a large collection of vintage cars.

[www.boveycastle.com](http://www.boveycastle.com)

### AUGILL CASTLE, CUMBRIA

Sumptuously historic and yet gloriously laid-back, this delightful country castle near the Lake District has open fireplaces, antique fixtures and fittings and an eclectic range of bedrooms and suites. Activities include an open-air cinema and a large children's play area.

[www.stayinacastle.com](http://www.stayinacastle.com)

### PENTILLIE CASTLE, CORNWALL

Sir James Tillie, who was knighted under King James II, built Pentillie Castle in the late 17th century. Just a short drive from Plymouth and situated on the banks of the River Tamar, this charming castle, renovated in 2009 now has nine luxurious rooms with stunning views over the river, a solar-heated swimming pool and

award-winning gardens, vibrant with flowers ranging from rhododendrons to camellias.

[www.pentillie.co.uk](http://www.pentillie.co.uk)

### BEAUCHAMP CASTLE, WORCESTERSHIRE

With a picturesque 14th-century tower and a 15th-century ancestral manor house built by the Beauchamp family, Beauchamp Castle overlooks the River Severn. Step inside and you'll find suits of armour, stuffed bears, period furnishings, a well-stocked library and eight lavishly appointed rooms, while the vast grounds have beautifully manicured lawns and several tennis courts. [www.oliverstravels.com](http://www.oliverstravels.com)

### LEEDS CASTLE, KENT

Visitors to the 'loveliest castle in the world' (see feature, page 26) can stay in the luxury refurbished Stable Courtyard bedrooms. Guests can enjoy a full English breakfast, made with local produce, served in the 17th-century oak-beamed Fairfax Hall. [www.leeds-castle.com](http://www.leeds-castle.com)

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