

GO EAST The insiders' guide to London's coolest neighbourhoods

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sites of the Peloponnese

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Cuba

Mojitos and
marlin



NETHERLANDS
THE EXCHANGE,
AMSTERDAM

UNDER
£100

One bedroom has a bed surrounded by an imitation 17th-century ruff; another is lined with a gigantic, Eighties-style knitted jumper (complete with a zipper over the window); a third is minimalist white, with a subtle dot design inspired by Braille. The Exchange hotel in Amsterdam has been fitted out by students from the Amsterdam Fashion Institute, helped by professional design studio Ina Matt to make the transition from draping bodies to decorating rooms. Fabrics were specially made in cooperation with the Audax Textielmuseum in Tilburg. The result is engagingly quirky, an effect enhanced by the fact that the hotel is spread over three narrow buildings, with warrens of corridors and Escher-like stairs. The rooms are rated one to five stars, ranked on size and location. Facilities are the same in each, so although one-star guests might be pleasantly surprised by an en-suite bathroom and safe, those in four-star rooms are likely to be miffed by the run-of-the-mill bathroom products and the lack of minibar or coffee-maker. And the hotel has no facilities apart from a good, all-day-breakfast café called Stock, and a design shop. However, The Exchange is centrally located, delightfully different, and zaniily Amsterdam. **RODNEY BOLT** Damrak 50, Amsterdam (00 31 20 523 0080; www.exchangeamsterdam.com). Doubles from €115 (one star) ➤

Matthijs van Crujisen and Ina Meijer of design studio Ina Matt at The Exchange. Opposite, Manray's Eyes by Ina Matt



Short breaks

easy reach: Netherlands ★ UK ★ Italy ★ France ★ Spain ★ Greece ★ Sweden ★ Denmark



STYLISH AND
AFFORDABLE
**EURO
GEMS**

Europe offers a treasure-trove of hotels to escape to. Here are 15 great-value options from the Cotswolds to Copenhagen



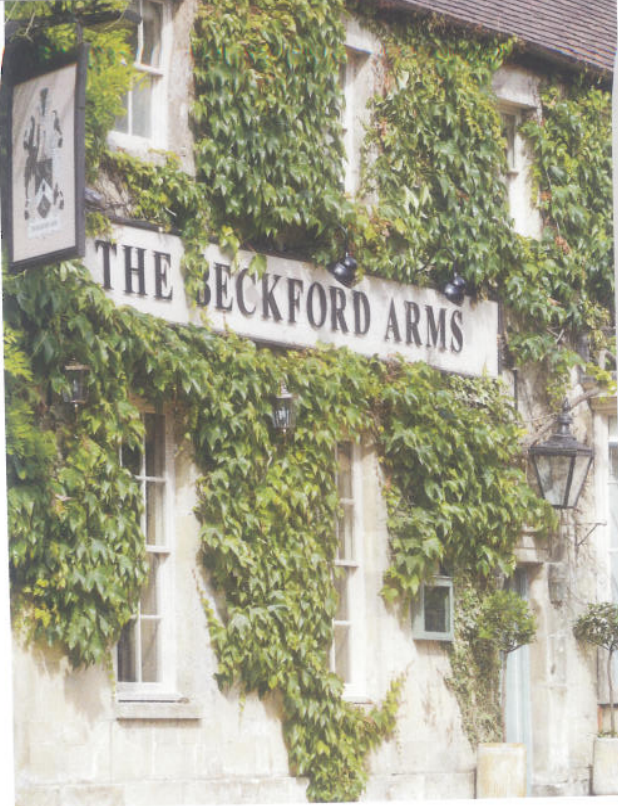
Short breaks

UK THE BECKFORD ARMS, WILTSHIRE

UNDER £100 Set on the romantic Fonthill Estate founded by William Beckford in the 18th century, The Beckford Arms is a country pub, a restaurant and a comforting place to stay. It has style as well as character. You can eat in the animated bar, elegant dining room, pretty conservatory or quiet sitting room, with its log fire and table piled high with magazines. You eat well: pork scratchings and apple sauce, pickled quails' eggs and homemade sausage rolls at the bar; imaginative but hearty lunches and dinners; peerless breakfasts, from Eggs Benedict to baked beans on toast. You sleep well: owners Dan Brod and Charlie Luxton (who learnt his trade with Nick Jones of Soho and Babington House) have thought of everything for the metropolitan guest: luxurious beds; digital radios with iPod docks; woolly hot-water bottles; Chloë Luxton's prettily packaged Bramley toiletries; quirky pictures by local artist Zebedee Helm. Touches from Babington, such as fireplaces filled with sawn logs, are in evidence – and why not? Jones is a great hotelier, and Luxton and Brod have brought similar panache to this much-loved inn. **FIONA DUNCAN**
Fonthill Gifford, Tisbury, Wiltshire (01747 870385; www.beckfordarms.com). Doubles from £95

THE GALLIVANT, EAST SUSSEX

An unprepossessing motel exterior, set back from a main road, disguises the pleasures of The Gallivant, a great addition to the beach scene at Camber Sands. For the uninitiated, Camber Sands is a golden stretch of beach abutting sand-dunes covered in marram grass, on the East Sussex coast, close to the wonders of



Dungeness in Kent. The Gallivant is London-weekender territory, with 18 simple rooms that elevate beach-shack style to an altogether more comfortable level, with luxurious beds, natural fibres, sofas, plump cushions and pale-painted driftwood. A suite and a couple of cottages to rent are the family-friendly options. In the hotel's Beach Bistro, which serves one of the best buffet breakfasts in the south, chef Trevor Hambley has created lunch and dinner menus packed with piscine delights, such as fish soup, baked mussels in cider and Kentish ale-battered fish. In the summer holidays, the hotel runs an open-air café next to the bistro, which serves burgers and fish from the chargrill, perfect for hungry families after a day on the beach – this being just a clamber away, across the road and over the dunes. **SALLY SHALAM**
New Lydd Road, Camber, East Sussex (01797 225057; http://thegallivanthotel.com). Doubles from £115

BLOC HOTEL, BIRMINGHAM

UNDER £100 There is a real buzz about Birmingham, with its triumvirate of Michelin-starred restaurants, the historic Jewellery Quarter and a number 19 ranking on the *New York Times* list of places to see in 2012. So Bloc Hotel is the ideal arrival. It is just off St Paul's Square, in the heart of the Jewellery Quarter, an area characterised by Victorian warehouses and glittering jewellery-shop windows. The dark cube of its exterior was created as a shell into which the 73 rooms, manufactured off-site as pods, were slotted in from above by crane. Compactness allows

Classic Wiltshire pub The Beckford Arms, above, serves locally sourced dishes such as deep-fried Laverstoke Park Farm mozzarella, right. Below left, the bistro at The Gallivant, Camber. Opposite: The Z Hotel, London; a bathroom at The Wheatsheaf Inn, Gloucestershire





prices to be kept below £60 a night. Some rooms are windowless (and you can't open the windows in those which aren't; the hotel is climate-controlled), but it's worth paying an extra £5 or so for a street view. A tiny basin, loo and overhead-monsoon shower are tucked behind a smoked-glass screen. Furniture consists of a king-size bed (very comfy), a single bedside unit, stool, coat rack on the wall and a HD LED TV. Hairdryers are available on request. Hot drinks and snacks may be dispensed by machine, but what you save on the room you can splurge at one of Brum's fancy restaurants. **SS** St Paul's, Caroline Street, Birmingham (01212 121223; www.blochotels.com). Doubles from £55 (£38 on Sundays)

THE WHEATSHEAF INN, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

The Cotswolds are awash with idealised, immaculate reincarnations of centuries-old inns, where you are as likely to see a leggy blonde in designer country-wear propping up the bar as a horny-handed son of toil, and in some respects The Wheatsheaf Inn is in that mould. But this stylishly decorated former coaching inn also serves as a genuine hub for the local community around handsome Northleach. It combines a cosy, informal, warmly welcoming atmosphere, courtesy of its young owners Georgie and Sam Pearman, with the attributes of a fully fledged hotel, including glamorous private dining rooms, a relaxing sitting room and a charmingly rustic treatment area. Locals crowd into the Game Bar for coffees, drinks and light meals, or dine under the beady eyes of the doughty Wills tobacco family, whose early-20th-century portraits, bought at auction, decorate one wall of the attractive dining room, gleaming with polished wood. The 14 bedrooms are



imaginatively decorated in the soothing, pastoral wallpapers and fabrics of Lewis & Wood, with luxurious Hypnos beds and Egyptian-cotton linens, Bang & Olufsen televisions and powerful showers. As for chef Anthony Ely's cooking, it doesn't miss a beat: required eating are his devilled kidneys at breakfast. They're the best you'll ever taste. **FD**

West End, Northleach, Gloucestershire (01451 860244; www.cotswoldswheat sheaf.com). Doubles from £130



THE Z HOTEL, LONDON

UNDER £100 It's been years since a hotel opened this close to a West End theatre, and hotels in this part of London carry an increasingly hefty price tag. Which makes the first property from no-frills outfit Z Hotels particularly welcome. The Z Hotel is so close to the Palace Theatre at Cambridge Circus you could nip to your room in the interval if the queue for the loo were too long. The Z approach is to maximise the tiniest spaces by using a pared-down room design with added flourishes. The neat, glass-partitioned shower rooms are a bit of a squeeze, but they're stocked with Thierry Mugler shower gel; beds are shoehorned wall to wall but the organic-wool mattresses and luxurious duvets are sourced from Devon. There's an espresso bar and café on the ground floor, serving healthy breakfasts and homemade cakes. Leicester Square, Tottenham Court Road and Piccadilly Circus stations are within easy walking distance. **SS** 17 Moor Street, London W1 (020 3551 3700; www.thezhotels.com). Doubles from £85 **➤**

HOTEL INDIGO LIVERPOOL

UNDER £100 Opened last summer, Indigo is a welcome addition to the Liverpool hotel scene, which is growing apace and becoming refreshingly varied. Whether you're on business or a weekend break, there is now a hotel for every budget. Indigo, a newly built, modern hotel which is part of an international chain, is a good, affordable option, with its democratic, one-grade room system. The Chapel Street location puts it within walking distance of Pier Head, the Liverpool One shopping complex and the commercial district. There are two small terraces and a fitness room. Each of the six floors has a different colour palette (teal and magenta floors look the classiest, whereas orange and yellow have a hint of budget airline). Furnishings are simple but supremely comfortable, both in the bedrooms (wet room, mini-fridge, Aveda toiletries, free Wi-Fi) and on the ground floor in the Cotton Lounge and the Marco Pierre White-branded steakhouse restaurant and bar. Not surprisingly, the restaurant, with its menu of reliably good steaks, salads and pies, is a bit of a city destination. **SS**

10 Chapel Street, Liverpool (01515 590111; www.hotelindigoliverpool.co.uk). Doubles from £84. Also see Room service, page 58

ITALY

B&B MALU, POLIGNANO A MARE, ITALY

UNDER £100 The rich, fertile swathe of Puglia between Bari and Brindisi is celebrated mostly for its inland attractions, but the more adventurous have begun to explore the salty, unpretentious draws of the coast – and jaunty, marine-minimalist B&B Malù is well placed to ride the wave. It occupies a three-storey seafront house in Polignano a Mare, an ancient cluster of white houses on top of a cave-pocked promontory. This is the birthplace of Italian singer Domenico Modugno, of 'Volare' fame, and the names of Malù's

six rooms are all associated with his songs. Bedrooms are white, bright and neat, with just the occasional splash of paintbox colour (boldly striped bedcovers, a lime-green sofa, enlarged photos of prickly pears and other Puglian icons). Pared-back and laid-back, the decor distracts as little as possible from the opera-box view of the Adriatic and the houses of Polignano on the other side of a deep and narrow inlet. The same view can be enjoyed from the top-floor breakfast terrace, where guests tuck into Mamma's homemade cakes or Papa's natural yogurt, created to a secret recipe. For Malù is very much a family affair: named after Mamma Mariella and Auntie Luisa, and designed by architect cousin Lucrezia Montalbò, it's run by local journalist Paolo Montalbò, whose enthusiasm and in-depth local knowledge combine with the B&B's competitive room rates to make this one of the most attractive Puglian accommodation debuts of the past couple of years.

LEE MARSHALL

Lungomare Domenico Modugno, Polignano a Mare (00 39 080 424 2346; www.bebmalu.it). Doubles from €100

E.C.HO, MILAN

This new 'green' hotel is a pigeon's spit from the Central Station and only three metro stops from the glittering designer windows of the Quadrilatero d'Oro. Every aspect of E.c.ho's stylish design is mindful of the environment, from the 125 square metres of solar panels and the water-recycling system to the eco-certified paint on the walls and biodegradable laundry bags. The hub of the hotel is the open-plan lobby, a sitting-and-bar area which opens onto a wide terrace. The 143 rooms and suites, spread over six floors (the higher you go, the better the view), vary in size, but all have the same spare, stylish design: lines are clean, colours are muted, beds (made up with feather duvets) are super-comfortable, and bathrooms are sleek with gleaming chrome. At the restaurant, Orto Green Food and Mood, organic ingredients go into local specialities such as *risotto alla Milanese* as well as the more health-conscious options. Like most Milan hotels, E.c.ho (short for Eco Contemporary Hotel) is geared towards a business clientele during the week but on Friday evenings the suits leave, the vibe kicks back a notch and a cosmopolitan leisure crowd moves in.

NICKY SWALLOW

Viale Andrea Doria 4, Milan (00 39 0267 891; www.starhotels.com). Doubles from €159





FRANCE HI MATIC, PARIS

UNDER €100 Wedged between tiny bistros and boutiques on a quiet street in the ultra-hip East Bastille district, the 42-room Hi Matic is a bright, hi-tech B&B booked exclusively online. The lobby, ablaze with eye-popping colours and electro music, is a hub of information: a digitalised DIY check-in screen (there's no receptionist), an iPad nook, a vending machine stocked with art books, T-shirts and late-night snacks (sweet-potato crisps anyone?), plus posted personalised recommendations on restaurants, shops and quirky, lesser-known sights. The country-cabin-style rooms (all with showers) vary in shape and size, and are meant to bring out that kick-your-shoes-off inner kid in you. The beds – surprisingly comfy, custom-made floor mattresses with soft, white duvets – are set in multi-functional pine frames, fitted with coloured perspex, which double as extra storage and wardrobe space. Downstairs in the canteen, tasty organic breakfasts are laid out on trays: a selection of *fromage blanc* with cherries, whole-wheat rolls, fruit and an energy bar that will put you in gear for a romp around town. **LANIE GOODMAN** 71 rue de Charonne, Paris (00 33 1 43 67 56 56; www.hi-matic.net). Doubles from €109

Above, Hi Matic in Paris. Below right, Posada del León de Oro, Madrid. Left, E.c.ho in Milan. Opposite, a bright bedroom at B&B Malù, Italy

LE CITIZEN HOTEL, PARIS

Le Citizen is one of a new breed of stylish hotels colonising offbeat corners of the French capital. Set on the Canal Saint-Martin, it has watery views like no other hotel in Paris. Behind the white façade, the interior (a first by furniture designer Christophe Delcourt) has a sophisticated, hand-crafted appeal. There is more storage space than you'll find in far grander establishments. The hotel's eco-friendly credentials extend beyond water-saving taps to include iPads downloaded with hotel information and restaurant tips, significantly cutting back on paper usage. The personalised approach extends to the service: you ring the doorbell to get in, and with just 12 rooms, the welcoming reception staff soon get to know their guests. Other individual touches include carefully chosen books about Paris for bedside reading. **NATASHA EDWARDS** 96 quai de Jemmapes, Paris (00 33 1 83 62 55 50; www.lecitizenhotel.com). Doubles from €195

SPAIN POSADA DEL LEON DE ORO, MADRID

UNDER €100 This old coach house, dating back to 1893, is on Madrid's most famous tapas street, the Calle Cava Baja, in the heart of the hip La Latina quarter. After extensive renovation, it now provides a slice of city history in a stylish setting. Livestock would have been herded into the central courtyard, known as a *corral*, while their owners made straight for the tavern. Fast forward a century or so and it still fulfils its purpose, though the *corral* has been updated with plump, leather Chesterfields and floor-to-ceiling wine racks, and a lively bistro/bar has been integrated into the lobby. Solid, Castilian fare and ➤



Short breaks

➤ excellent Spanish wines are an essential part of the vibe but so, too, is design. The bedrooms combine a monochromatic theme with striking, hand-painted graphics and a scattering of furniture-design classics, such as a Le Corbusier chaise longue and Mackintosh-inspired desk chairs. All feel spacious and airy, with crisp bed linen, powerful showers and free Wi-Fi. They are split into categories: doubles looking over the *corral* (less private) and onto the street (noisier), and family rooms; then there's a junior suite and a romantic *buhardilla* (attic) with pitched, wood-beamed ceilings, a Jacuzzi bath and gabled windows. **TARA STEVENS** *Calle Cava Baja 12, Madrid (00 34 91 119 1494; <http://posadadelleondeoro.com>). Doubles from €89*

GREECE

NEW HOTEL, ATHENS

At first glance, there's nothing new about this 79-room hotel, a refit of the Olympic Palace Hotel, where socialites schmoozed in the 1960s. Just a Molotov cocktail's throw from the Hellenic Parliament, it's the fifth property in art collector *Dakis Joannou's* selection of design-conscious hotels. Joannou likes to surprise, and his latest project, designed by Brazilian brothers Humberto and Fernando Campana, does just that. Alongside their own signature pieces, the Campanas have up-cycled the original fittings. The 'favela' lobby is lined with a collage of deconstructed chairs and desks. Pared-down bedrooms reference the surrounding souvenir shops, with wall features inspired by evil-eye amulets, vintage postcards and shadow puppets. Materials are tactile: jagged-bronze basins, corridors clad in bark cloth, bamboo and marble floors, a small gym and a spa decked out in shimmering PVC. The ground-floor restaurant serves the best breakfasts in Athens



(organic espressos, fresh pastries, Eggs Benedict); after dark, locals gossip over Black Angus mini-burgers and cucumber-chilli Martinis. Only a few rooms on the upper floors overlook the National Gardens, but you can admire the ragged Athenian skyline from the penthouse suite and the recently opened rooftop lounge.

RACHEL HOWARD
16 Filellinon Street, Athens (00 30 210 327 3200; www.yeshotels.gr). Doubles from €175

SWEDEN

HOTEL J, STOCKHOLM

Inspired by a class of US racing yacht and the town of Newport, Rhode Island, the Hotel J (pronounced 'yee') looks like it was airlifted to Scandinavia from New England with Ralph Lauren at the controls. Everything inside the 1912 building is blue, white and wooden; outside there are deckchairs on the balconies and on the lawn overlooking the water. Blazing fires warm the lounge in cooler months, and in the summer people dine alfresco on the quayside at Restaurant J. The city is just a 15-minute ferry trip away, but this is the perfect place for anyone who wants to explore Stockholm and then retreat to peace and quiet. Come with a pile of paperbacks, visit the nearby spa or spend a day exploring the glorious archipelago. In 2011, the hotel added a new wing; this has helped to attract business groups but also means bargains can be found when occupancy dips. Great deals can be had at the weekend, such as a Sunday package that includes breakfast and a three-course dinner for SKr725 (about £70) per person.

STEPHEN WHITLOCK
Ellensviksvägen 1, Nacka Strand (00 46 8601 3000; www.hotelj.com). Doubles from SKr1,395 (about £130)

Above, a sitting room at Hotel J in Stockholm. Below, Ibsens in Copenhagen. Below left, jagged-bronze basins at New Hotel in Athens

DENMARK

IBSENS, COPENHAGEN

UNDER €100 Ibsens is deeply rooted in its neighbourhood, with many of the elements of its vibrant interiors sourced from within a few hundred metres of the 118-room hotel in the Nansensgade district. Cushions and rugs are by textile artist *Kristine Kjærholm*, based just around the corner; on the same street is *We Shop*, which supplied the coffee tables. The nearby vintage store, *No 40*, provided the lamps in the lobby lounge, a cosy space with communal tables and seating adjacent to the reception desk, which doubles as a breakfast counter. Later, the same space becomes a bar. The bedrooms are a quirky mix of different layouts. Plaid carpets and contemporary furniture make for a comfortable experience but one that veers towards the functional rather than the glamorous. Bathrooms are simple but absolutely do the job, as does the free Wi-Fi. **GUY DITTRICH**
23 Vendersgade, Copenhagen (00 45 3395 7744; www.ibsenshotel.dk). Doubles from DKr650 (about £75)

