



west-facing deck is perfect for watching the sun go down over the surrounding olive groves with a glass of vinho verde. Once you've recharged your batteries, ask housekeepers João and Isabel to prepare a picnic, and kayak to one of the islands for lunch.

**Details** B&B doubles are from €67 (00 351 917 214 380, [escape.com](http://escape.com)). Lisbon is the nearest airport

**4 Eremito Hotelito del Alma Umbria, Italy**

If you're travelling solo and looking for spiritual retuning with your escape — through yoga, meditation or Gregorian chanting, perhaps — this eco-retreat could be your ticket to Shangri-La. Constructed from 130,000 pieces of stone assembled over four years, it is surrounded by 7,400 acres (30 sq km) of woodland. The focus is on "old luxury" ("time, peace and contemplative spaces"), which means it's heavy on the candlelight and vegetarianism, while TV and wi-fi don't get a look-in. Still, there's a spa with a heated pool and stone steam room, and while the 14 rooms are designed to sleep only one person, underfloor heating and antique, hand-embroidered duvet covers make them very cosy.

**Details** Full board single "cells" are from €99 (00 39 0763 891010, [eremito.com](http://eremito.com)). Fly to Rome or Perugia

**5 The Rectory of San Miguel de Pineda Catalonia, Spain**

This restored 12th-century rectory is a haven for walkers, cyclists, foodies and volcanologists. It sits on the western edge of La Garrotxa's volcanic national park, where there are 28 walking routes between the 40 extinct volcanoes (the last eruption was 11,000 years ago), alongside the Ruta del Carrilet cycle path clearing the mind with some pure alpine air in summer, as past visitors such as Thakabokry, Marx, Engels and Goethe would surely have attested.

**Details** Half-board doubles are from €277 (00 41 33 895 12 12, [scheidegg-hotels.ch](http://scheidegg-hotels.ch)). Fly to Bern, Zurich or Geneva

**8 Hotel Posada del Valle Asturias, Spain**

Between the Picos de Europa and the rugged Asturian coastline, Nigel and Joanne Burch's converted farmhouse is surrounded by 18 acres (73,000 sq m) of organic farmland, orchards and

**6 Baby Bear Cottage Podlesok, Slovakia**

Animal lovers staying at Baby Bear Cottage have a unique opportunity to combine their stay with a tour that includes bear-watching expeditions with researchers on Projekt Medved (Project Bear). Nestled in an enclave of Slovak Paradise National Park that is out of bounds to the public, the timber and brick hideaway, with simple but comfortable interior, sits by a babbling stream and has a garden filled with apple and cherry trees. There are 185 miles (300km) of trails through the park, which has an abundance of waterfalls and caves, and even the ruins of a monastery. However, you won't have to stray far from the cottage, deep in the forest, to be in with a chance of spotting wild boar, red deer and roe deer.

**Details** From €46pp for a week based on two sharing. The cottage sleeps up to six people in two bedrooms (00 421 948 527246, [slovakiaocottage.com](http://slovakiaocottage.com)). Fly to Krakow in Poland

**7 Hotel Bellevue des Alpes Bernese Alps, Switzerland**

The only way to reach Hotel Bellevue des Alpes, improbably situated on a mountain pass at 2,070m (6,800ft), is by rail — unless you have your crampons, ice picks and ropes with you, and use the journey as a warm-up for an assault on the north face of the Eiger, which is close by. Dating back to 1840, the atmosphere and furnishings are distinctly old school, with chandeliers, wood panelling, patterned carpets, claw-footed baths and Toile fabric on the bedroom walls. Of course there is skiing, but this is also the perfect spot for clearing the mind with some pure alpine air in summer, as past visitors such as Thakabokry, Marx, Engels and Goethe would surely have attested.

**Details** Room-only apartments based on two sharing are from €37 a night (00 34 675 98 72 42, [laposadadelcandil.com](http://laposadadelcandil.com)). Fly to Granada

**10 Eliassen Rorbuer Lofoten Islands, Norway**

The majority of this cluster of 35 traditional fishing cottages on the tiny island of Hamnøy date back to 1890, while a handful are modern additions. Most have been renovated within the past five years to create cosy, pine-clad interiors sleeping two to six people. About two thirds of them sit on the water's edge, and spectacular jagged peaks rising up around them make for superb trekking excursions. Fishing and kayak trips also make for rewarding days.

**Details** A one-bedroom cottage is from £158 for a minimum three-night stay (00 47 45 81 48 45, [rorbuer.no](http://rorbuer.no)). Fly to Svolvær or Leknes via Oslo

wildflower meadows. Whether you seek country lanes or mountain summits, this is a walker's paradise — and Nigel has compiled a guide to 42 local routes. The kitchen has a slow-food ethos, with breakfasts boasting home-made bread, apple juice from the orchard, and yoghurt and cheese produced by local artisans. The 12 rooms are simple and colourful, with exposed stonework, shutters and beams.

**Details** B&B doubles are from €62 (00 34 985 84 11 57, [posadadelvalle.com](http://posadadelvalle.com)). Fly to Asturias

**9 La Posada del Candil Andalusia, Spain**

An hour and a half from the bright lights of Granada, La Posada del Candil sits in perfect stargazing country amid the pine-clad hills and valleys of Andalusia's Sierra de los Filabres; the range's highest peak, Calar Alto, is home to an important observatory. There are five elegant but simple apartments with one or two double rooms, their own kitchens, open fireplaces, and terraces with glorious views across the olive groves and orchards of the Almanzora Valley. There's also a shared infinity pool and barbecue area, and if you can't be bothered to cook, the restaurant serves Andalusian cuisine using local and organic produce.

**Details** Room-only apartments based on two sharing are from €37 a night (00 34 675 98 72 42, [laposadadelcandil.com](http://laposadadelcandil.com)). Fly to Granada



**11 Fabriken Furillen Gotland, Sweden**

There's a futuristic, Max Mad quality to Fabriken Furillen and its setting amid 1,250 untamed acres (5 sq km) of a peninsula in the north of Gotland. The hotel has evolved from the factory of a former limestone quarry, and has clean Scandinavian lines and muted grey and white tones. The 18 rooms have wood-burning stoves, the 40 chickens supply eggs for breakfast, and there are free bicycles to explore the surrounding windswept wilderness with its warped trees, craggy rock formations and empty pebble and sand beaches.

**Details** B&B doubles are from €155 (00 46 498 22 30 40, [furiillen.com](http://furiillen.com)). Fly to Visby via Stockholm

**12 Tiseno Sweden**

You'll need to board a tiny private ferry to get to the car-free island of Tiseno on Lake Tisnaren, 125 miles (200km) southwest of Stockholm. Here you'll find a 250-year-old farmhouse that sleeps up to 12 people, making it an ideal getaway for an extended family. There are cattle, sheep, horses and a handful of people on the farm; otherwise you'll have the entire island — with its woodland walks, excellent swimming and, in August and September, the opportunity to go fishing for crayfish — all to yourselves.

**Details** The house for 12 costs from €25 per week (00 46 531 22054, [tiseno.se](http://tiseno.se)). Fly to Stockholm

**13 Hotel Glymur Hvalfjörður, Iceland**

Perched on a hillside overlooking the three-mile (5km) wide Whale fjord, this welcoming hotel with 22 split-level rooms, three suites and six cottages, feels as if it's in the middle of nowhere rather than only 45 minutes from Reykjavik. The views alone, of big skies, rugged volcanic hillsides and deep blue ocean, are guaranteed to blow the cobwebs away. Savour them while relaxing in a geothermal hot tub, stride out on the two-hour hike to Glymur waterfall (at 196m, the highest in Iceland), play golf beneath the midnight sun, or take a kayak on the fjord, where there's a good chance of spotting dolphins and porpoises. The cosy, candlelit restaurant offers freshly smoked trout and perfectly prepared reindeer.

**Details** B&B doubles are from €168 (00 354 430 3100, [hotelglymur.is](http://hotelglymur.is)). Fly to Reykjavik

**14 Agriturismo Antico Borgo di Gallano Le Marche, Italy**

Together with a small church and a Benedictine monastery, this cluster of lovingly restored medieval farm buildings forms the tiny hamlet of Gallano and is just the ticket for starchy skies, cypress trees and sheer silence. It sits in Monti Sibillini National Park in the surprisingly untamed heart of Italy, where wolves, brown bears and golden eagles roam. The six simply furnished rooms and three apartments accommodate 40 people, making it ideal

for a wedding or a party. The swimming pool has lovely views of the rolling hills; the bar and dining room, in an old cattle barn, serves home-made pasta and beef reared in the surrounding pastureland.

**Details** B&B doubles are from €73 (00 39 349 7560202, [anticoborgodigallano.com](http://anticoborgodigallano.com)). Fly to Perugia

**15 The Goat House Alentejo, Portugal**

With solar and wind-powered energy, a wood-fired stove and drinking water provided by a small stream, this former goat-milking parlour in Marvão is an authentically off-grid hideaway. Views stretch out towards Spain and there are no other inhabited houses within sight, with the nearest shop three miles away. It sleeps two — four if you don't mind a squeeze — and guests receive 500ml of oil produced from the surrounding olive trees, with the option to order vegetable and meat boxes on arrival, too. A nearby stretch of river is a wonderful spot to cool off on blazing summer days.

**Details** From €31 per night based on a minimum three-night stay (01285 750713, [oneofplaces.co.uk](http://oneofplaces.co.uk)). Fly to Lisbon

**16 Fisherman's Cabin Dordogne, France**

Sitting on the edge of a private lake, this idyllic wooden cabin surrounded by mature woodland is like something out of a fairytale, with only birds, butterflies, deer, frogs and fish for company. There are two cosy bedrooms with views over the lake, a log fire and a deck that

overhangs the water. Alternative energy sources supply mod cons, but there is no TV or music system — try floating across the lake on the raft instead. Bike hire is also available.

**Details** From €80 per night based on a minimum three-night stay (0117 204 7830, [canopyandstars.co.uk](http://canopyandstars.co.uk)). Fly to Limoges

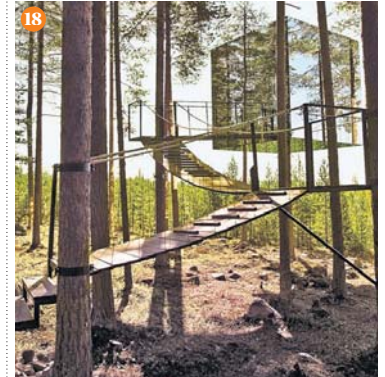
**17 Melanya Mountain Retreat Kardzhali, Bulgaria**

Walks through pine forest and broadleaf woodland lead directly from Melanya Mountain Retreat, deep in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains. The house is high on the crest of a mountain, with dazzling views, ideally surveyed when reclining on the terrace with a glass of the local wine. The accommodation comprises the whole of the top floor of the house, with two double bedrooms, a private entrance and a kitchenette (although the owners will also happily cook for you). Plus there's complimentary use of mountain bikes, kayaks and fishing equipment.

**Details** From €56 a night for two people including breakfast (00 359 88 46 217 80, [melanya.com](http://melanya.com)). Fly to Plovdiv or Sofia

**18 Treehotel Harads, Sweden**

When the Scandinavians' love of nature and passion for design collide, the results can be extraordinary. The Treehotel's six living spaces and sauna, suspended 4-6m



**19 Tajgolka Tatra Mountains, Poland**

While you drink in the alpine air and coo over the meadow, stream and mountain-filled vistas of Tatra National Park, your little ones can be trampolining, playing on the swings and in the sandpit, or making use of the "playground corner" in each of the five rustic log cabins at Tajgolka. There's a spa and dining hall in the main building, where typical Polish dishes are served. The cosy cottages have colourful furnishings and lots of exposed wood.

**Details** Three-bedroom cottages are from €85 (0203 286 4643, [secretplaces.com](http://secretplaces.com)). Fly to Krakow

**20 Crna Punta Lighthouse, Istria, Croatia**

Seafarers can look at their charts and find the newly restored 1873 lighthouse at Crna Punta at 44.95702 N, 14.14561 E. Landlubbers should borrow a jeep belonging to Slaven and Tijana Maretić to tackle the steep dirt track that leads to the most remote of their three lighthouses on the Istrian peninsula. There is a private beach just 10m (30ft) from the front door, and the lighthouse's pristine location ensures that you will have miles of rocky shoreline, and the great swathe of forest that enfolds it, to yourself. Expect exposed beams, stone walls and painted floorboards in the four bedrooms.

**Details** From €204 per night for eight (00385 98 1820719, [lighthouse-croatia.com](http://lighthouse-croatia.com)). Fly to Pula

**T** Holidays in Greece — should you stay or go? [thetimes.co.uk/travel](http://thetimes.co.uk/travel)