

# COUNTRY LIFE

EVERY WEEK

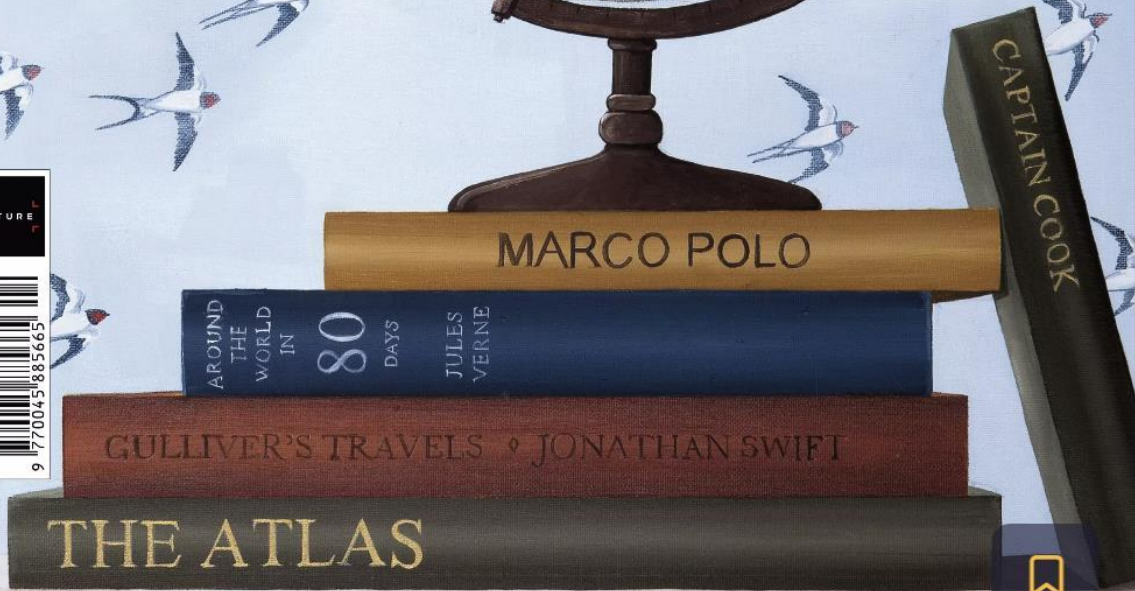
JANUARY 26, 2022

## A world worth waiting for

### Travel 2022

### Blessed are the cheesemakers

### Downton: plaster of paradise



# The top 10

From regal to retro Riviera and everything in between, **COUNTRY LIFE** rounds up the stylish hotels and villas that should be top of your wishlist in 2022

## Retro Riviera Lou Pinet, St Tropez, France

**S**TAYING at Lou Pinet is like taking up an invitation to a very exclusive house party. It's small and private: 34 bedrooms spread across a close-knit cluster of Provençal houses, protected from prying eyes by fragrant pines. St Tropez is only a few minutes drive away, but guests prefer to gather around the hotel's centrepiece, a sea-green tiled swimming pool, on one of the iron-lattice sunloungers or wood and rope hammocks. I burned through two books in as many days, sitting here, fuelled by watermelon juice, zingy guacamole and freshly baked taco chips. In the evening, everyone migrates to the terrace, home to Riccardo Giraudi's Beefbar (there are also outposts in Paris, London, Monaco and Hong Kong). Tables are as popular with non-guests as they are with those staying at the hotel, which means that the people-watching is as good as any restaurant in central St Tropez. As the name suggests, premium cuts of meat are at the heart of the menu, but, come pudding, don't miss the ludicrously large chocolate soufflé. One can easily feed three people.

So, what to pack? A headscarf would be a good start, because Lou Pinet oozes 1960s style. The bold colour palette—coral reds, ochre yellows, navy and flashes of bright blue—is the brainchild of interior designer Charles Zana. Many of the beds sport retro-print headboards; tactile, rough-woven rugs carpet the terracotta-tiled bedroom floors; crescent-shaped sofas pop up in both the private and communal areas. The bathrooms err on the right side of bohemian and it's hard not to fawn over the airy indoor



**Time to relax:** guests are often found lazing around Lou Pinet's sea-green tiled pool

dining room where breakfast is served. Cane chairs sit beneath a matching ceiling, oversized Crittall windows flood the space with light and a primary-coloured mural—think Picasso meets Matisse—covers the top half of one wall.

Behind the pool there's a subterranean spa with treatments by farm-to-face beauty brand Tata Harper. Book in for a facial to soothe your sun-kissed skin. *RP*  
From €430 (about £360) per night on a bed and breakfast basis ([www.loupinet.com](http://www.loupinet.com))

## Bohemian The Fife Arms, Braemar, Scotland

WHEN it comes to finding the middle of nowhere, Braemar in the Cairngorms is about as middle as it gets. There's a reason that Victoria and Albert chose next-door Balmoral as the location for their summer getaways. When it comes to getting away from 'it' all, 'it' would have a hard time finding you here.

Should your invitation to join Her Majesty have got lost in the mail, The Fife Arms would make an equally luxurious and elegant alternative. The hotel, a former hunting lodge refurbished and revamped by Hauser & Wirth, provides a slice of luxury with a focus on the past, the present and the future.

Here is a place imbibed with both the expected and the unexpected. We expect to see the guests in their stalking gear and their waders. We expect to see staff dressed sharply in Araminta Campbell's bespoke Fife Arms tartan. What we do not expect, however, is a chandelier of glass antlers and neon. We do not expect murals on the walls and ceilings or for the piano to play itself. The proximity of Picasso and Freud to stags, grouse and foxes suggests an eclectic passion for collecting that spans centuries—The Fife Arms is as much about the history of the Highlands as it is about its art-collecting owners.

Past, present and future. For the past, enjoy the storied history of the hotel itself and admire the local area. The front desk can organise a trip with Braemar Highland Experience, which can teach you everything from the



The Fife Arms drawing room, with the eponymous tartan and ceiling artwork by Zhang Enli

best places to walk or how to properly taste whisky. Stalking and fishing are on the cards, too. I teamed up with local gillie Ian Murray, who, as well as being one of the more pleasant fishing companions I've met, is also an enthusiastic expert on local history.

In the present, enjoy the food and drink The Fife Arms has to offer. Casual dining is available at the Flying Stag pub, which enjoys seasonal classic fare (the venison was likely dragged off a mountain that week), or head for the fine dining of the Clunie Dining Room, where the menu changes each day depending on what's available. Don't forget to have a cocktail at Elsa's bar beforehand (named after Elsa Schiaparelli and with photographs by Man Ray) or, post-dinner, a dram of some of the world's finest whiskies at Bertie's

(where the walls are stacked with bottles and the menu is some 72 pages long).

As much as the future presents itself in the varied forms of contemporary art that inhabit the interiors of The Fife Arms, so, too, does the location of the hotel in the context of our ever-changing attitudes to what constitutes a 'holiday'. Whether it's a 10-hour drive, overnight train or one-hour flight from London, the Highlands are an entirely different world and offer meaningful escape. Here is a rural hotel that is both rustic and modern, where city and country folk can be equally at peace. Perhaps that is the future, after all. *JF*  
From £250 per night in a Croft Room and £434 in a Nature & Poetry room, both including breakfast (01339 720202; [www.thefifearms.com](http://www.thefifearms.com))

## Beach La Valise Tulum, Mexico

ALMOST razed to the ground in a fire in 2020, this 11-room boutique in the former fishing village of Tulum has risen from the ashes looking better than ever. Lapped by azure Caribbean water on Mexico's Riviera Maya, it's perfect for modern castaways reluctant to part with their creature

comforts, but content to roam barefoot to breakfast. The heartbeat is an open-sided sitting room, dressed with biscuit-hued sofas, potted plants and distressed copper coffee tables laden with leatherbound tomes.

Despite the hotel's raw beauty (you can walk straight off the beach into the dining

room), nothing has been left to chance. The interior design and accessories have been lovingly curated by designer Roberto Ayala—the visionary behind La Valise's three sister properties. There's a sense of place, especially in my 1,000sq ft master suite, constructed out of indigenous materials and topped by a soaring, 23ft-high palapa roof. The outdoor shower is stuccoed with resin tapped from the native chukum tree; floors swathed in locally made woven rugs. A wicker bench is bookended by two wicker jaguar heads—the animal was worshipped by the Aztecs and Mayans for its hunting prowess and temples were built in its honour.

Spend your days lounging under the Mexican sun on squishy daybeds and tasselled hammocks, listening to the tinkling sounds of the numerous water features and surrounding bird life. *Sarah Freeman*  
From £503 per night, including breakfast (00 13 05 999 1540; [www.lavalisetulum.com](http://www.lavalisetulum.com))



At La Valise, the Caribbean waters of the Riviera Maya are just moments away





Pretty and practical: Valency Wood is 'exactly what you want' for a Cornwall staycation

### Country chic Valency Wood, near Boscastle, Cornwall, England

VALENCY WOOD is at its best in spring-time, when the orchid meadows that surround it begin to bloom and bluebells carpet the forest floor. Beyond the 140-acre confines, the self-catering cottage—which can happily accommodate six people and three dogs—is flanked by farmland. The valley, two miles east of Boscastle and five south of Crackington Haven, slopes all the way down to the ocean at Boscastle Harbour. Here, you'll find proper Cornish tearooms and plenty of inns. The interiors have a pared-back country aesthetic: white walls and a polished, dark wooden floor; a white, wrought-iron spiral staircase, tongue-and-groove panelling and an Instagram-worthy rose-pink kitchen. It's pretty and put-your-feet-up-practical at the same time—exactly what you want on a Cornish staycation.

*Valency Wood is available to rent through Unique Homestays, from £1,250 for a long weekend or midweek stay and £1,695 per week ([www.uniquehomestays.com/self-catering/uk/cornwall/boscastle/valency-wood/](http://www.uniquehomestays.com/self-catering/uk/cornwall/boscastle/valency-wood/))*

### Minimalist Juvet Landscape Hotel, Valldal, Norway

JUVET might feel remote—think valleys, big rivers, vivid green and glassy fjords—but it's surprisingly accessible, an easy two-hour drive from Alesund Airport. The faint roar of a waterfall greets you on arrival.

The hotel is both a working farm and the latest in experimental accommodation, a century-old barn that has been ingeniously renovated. A hay loft has morphed into a snug, outdoor seating area, the pigsty into a kitchen and the cow byre into a dining and breakfast room with communal tables. I managed to procure a seat next to a charming Norwegian-Swedish couple who did their best to educate me on all things Scandi.

Acclaimed Oslo-based architects Jensen & Skodvin designed the gorgeous, sleek, chalet-style bedrooms—seek out room two, which hovers over an ice-blue river. The cosy spa, built into the grassy hillside, offers close-up river views, too. Nature is the best decoration—instead of art, huge, floor-to-ceiling windows look out onto an ever-changing landscape and there's little in the way of trinkets to distract you.

The best time to visit is late spring, when the rivers swell, the mountain tops are still

capped in snow and some flowers are starting to emerge (lupins, dandelions, wild garlic). Early autumn is also attractive and there's an abundant harvest (pears, plums, pumpkins). The hotel is closed from December to March, but there's a good mix of activities throughout the rest of the year, including hiking and river rafting. And you must visit Alesund

Town—destroyed by fire in 1904 and rebuilt in a remarkably consistent Art Nouveau style. *Daniel Pembrey*  
From £160 a night ([www.juvet.com](http://www.juvet.com)).  
Visit [www.visitalesund.com](http://www.visitalesund.com) for more information on the wider area. KLM and SAS fly to Alesund from London via other cities; other airlines fly direct to Oslo, a seven-hour drive from the hotel.



Jensen & Skodvin designed the contemporary bedrooms at the Juvet Landscape Hotel