



CITY
ELEGANCE

Ellen Kensington, LONDON

WHY GO When you need a shot of city culture, nowhere does it better than London. Swerve the busier tourist haunts and decamp to Ellen Kensington, an affordable haven in a garden square of red-brick mansions close to Earl's Court Tube. Once part of a great Georgian estate, this neighbourhood is walking distance from world-class attractions, and is surrounded by crescents of pastel-painted villas and wisteria-draped mews.

YOUR STAY Named in honour of celebrated actor Dame Ellen Terry, who lived a few doors away, Ellen Kensington is where modern luxury meets Victorian panache. The 105 rooms have period features like sash windows and ironwork balconies, and decor in tones of gold, taupe and moss with touches of chinoiserie.

Its light-filled restaurant, the Lacquer Room, serves flavoursome British-Asian dishes (think Japanese beer-battered cod with chips and yuzu pepper mayo), and has a chic Mediterranean-style outdoor terrace. For cosy cocktails, try the wood-panelled bar and cigar room. Spa treatment rooms are set to open during the summer.

OUT AND ABOUT Museum-hop around South Kensington (the V&A's art and fashion galleries are superb, and the Natural History Museum and the Science Museum are near), tour royal des-res Kensington Palace, or roam London's green lungs: Hyde Park and Holland Park. High Street Kensington and the King's Road will satisfy the most ardent shopper. You can be at the Royal Albert Hall in under 10 minutes by taxi. The local Finborough and Barons Court theatres offer plays, poetry and improv, or try legendary music venue the Troubadour, where Bob Dylan and Adele have performed.

BOOK IT Doubles from £198, including breakfast; ellenkensington.com



RURAL SPLENDOUR

Rookery Hall, CHESHIRE

WHY GO When your batteries are low and you need the cossetting of a rural hotel and spa that's surprisingly easy to reach (we're talking 15 minutes from the M6), the Rookery beckons. Wrapped in lawns that drift down to the River Weaver, this is Cheshire at its most bucolic, blanketed with water meadows and cattle pastures.

YOUR STAY The original 19th-century sandstone mansion with a Rapunzel-worthy tower has been updated with a modern wing and spa. Mahogany-panelled walls and mullioned windows wrap you in old-world charm, while the glass of fizz poured on arrival makes you feel welcome from the get-go. Rooms are thickly curtained and pin-drop quiet, and a silvered tray of premixed cocktails and nibbles is another thoughtful touch. Feeling romantic? Opt for the suite overlooking the fountained lawn where Posh and Becks got engaged.



The spacious spa centres around a glass-roofed indoor pool. For a deep decompress, try an Elemis Pro-Collagen facial and massage combo, which works a special kind of magic on your skin.

The restaurant serves British classics like Heritage dry-aged beef and Scottish halibut, alongside hyper-local produce (the menu specifies the field numbers of the vegetables). There's a plant-based menu too.

OUT AND ABOUT Hike up the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge at hillfort-topped Bickerton Hill, with exhilarating views from Kitty's Stone and a hidden hermit's cave. Nearby Nantwich is all genteel charm, with a canal, marina and half-timbered houses. Keen swimmers might fancy a dip in the town's outdoor brine pool, fed by a natural salt spring.

BOOK IT Doubles from £250, including breakfast; handpickedhotels.co.uk/rookeryhall

indulgent breaks

THREE MORE TO TRY



1 BEST FOR CHIC SHOPS AND COUNTRY WALKS

**The Feathers
Hotel, Woodstock,
Oxfordshire**

A multimillion-pound refurbishment has turned this 18th-century listed building into a 4-star boutique bolthole with 23 rooms and suites. Add a chic brasserie and a bar stocked with locally sourced spirits and cider, and you have a desirable base for exploring the Cotswolds. Blenheim Palace is on the edge of town.

✦ Doubles from £275, including breakfast; feathers.co.uk



2 BEST FOR WILD SWIMS AND FELL HIKES

**Langdale Chase,
Windermere,
Cumbria**

With a privileged setting on the shores of England's largest lake, this gabled mansion is just the cosy retreat you dream of when you've been tramping the fells. Hardy souls can consider a lake dip (the hotel has a private jetty to dive off), or hire an e-bike to effortlessly explore the high-hedged lanes. There's also a cinema, art deco bar, restaurant and Lakeland views.

✦ Doubles from £390, including breakfast; langdalechase.co.uk



3 BEST FOR DOG- FRIENDLY AND GREEN STAYS

**Palé Hall,
North Wales**
Near Eryri

National Park (Snowdonia), Palé Hall is a flamboyant manor on the banks of the River Dee. Its decadent rooms and 50-acre estate welcome four-legged companions, while its sustainable practices have earned its restaurant a Green Michelin star.

✦ Doubles from £320, including breakfast; palehall.co.uk

womanandhome.com 171

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