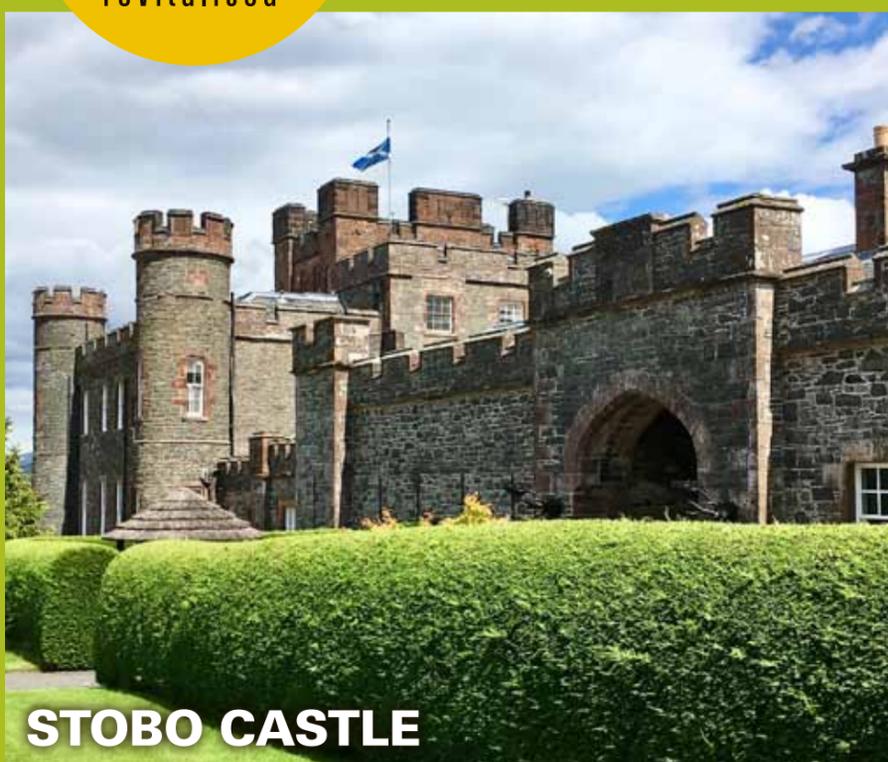


Treat yourself to a spa break to help you feel revitalised

TIME TO UNWIND



STOBO CASTLE

THE LOWDOWN: This former manor house in the Scottish Borders is all turrets and manicured lawns as you approach, and the feeling of grandeur continues inside with high ceilings, chandeliers and plush furnishings. Meals are served in two separate but equally ornate rooms, giving more of an exclusive feel than one large dining hall might.

The hotel is surrounded by lush green countryside – you can walk up into the woods or down to the tranquil Japanese Gardens, where you can relax on the grass in front of the waterfall.

THE SPA: With three giant outdoor hot tubs, this spa was an instant win for us. But there's



also a stunning 25-metre pool with floor-to-ceiling windows and an indoor thermal pool with massage jets and bubble beds.

If, like us, you sometimes find steam rooms and saunas a bit too intense, you'll love the

laconium, where you can lounge on warm stone seats in the heated, but not baking, air.

We found two treatments on the spa menu that we hadn't come across before – the Candle Massage, a full body massage using heated wax that feels like velvet on your skin, and the Relaxing Water Massage, during which you lie on a water bed while high-powered jets massage your back from below. Both were excellent, and at just £25, the latter is a great spa treat that won't break the bank.

BOOKING INFO: Overnight stays from £149pp including all meals and use of the spa facilities. See stobocastle.co.uk.



HARTWELL HOUSE

THE LOWDOWN: Staying at Hartwell House, near Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire, is like visiting a stately home, but without the velvet rope separating you from the lavish furniture, impressive antiques and magnificent oil paintings. Even the bedrooms are sumptuous, with wall tapestries and ornate plasterwork.

It was once home to Louis XVIII, the exiled king of France, and has been restored to its original grandeur. The service remains fit for a king, with welcoming staff on hand to help with your every request.

We enjoyed a pre-dinner rhubarb G&T in the ornate drawing room before moving on to the dining room for a superb three-course meal, featuring seasonal produce and local ingredients.

The National Trust-owned Jacobean and Georgian country house is set in 90 acres of countryside and the best way to discover the garden's many treasures is to follow the



woodland paths and see where they take you. On our early morning jog we discovered an obelisk, a temple, William III's column and even part of London's Kew Bridge, not to mention a herd of friendly cows.

THE SPA: Situated in a splendid orangery, the spa has a luxurious mosaic-lined swimming pool, steam room, saunas and a hot tub. There's also a well-equipped gym, with staff on hand to advise, and

outdoor tennis courts – or you can play croquet on the lawn.

A full range of treatments is offered. We opted for an Aromatherapy Intensive Muscle Release (from £89), a wonderful treatment that uses a blend of essential oils and massage to relieve tight and aching muscles. **NEED TO KNOW:** Prices start at £210 for a double room with breakfast. To book, visit hartwell-house.com.



SOLENT HOTEL & SPA

THE LOWDOWN: This cosy and inviting four-star hotel is the perfect base from which to explore the coastal delights of Fareham and Bournemouth, while also enjoying some rest and relaxation. It's recently had a makeover and now offers comfy bedrooms, nautically inspired decor and a traditional lobby with a roaring fireplace.

When hunger strikes, head to the Terrace Restaurant & Bar, which serves lunch, dinner and a selection of cocktails.



Inspired by our seaside surroundings, we feasted on rock oysters and fresh lobster. In the summer, you can also dine alfresco at the outdoor grill.

THE SPA: We began our stress-free stay with a swim in the indoor pool. There's also a sauna, steam room and Jacuzzi, plus loungers for relaxing as you admire the views of the surrounding woodland. If you fancy getting physical, there's an extensive programme of exercise classes

and a fully equipped gym. After slipping into the snuggly robes and slippers provided, we checked in for a soothing full body massage. For added indulgence, there's also a private woodland hot tub and a couples' treatment room, which need to be booked in advance.

HOW TO BOOK: Prices from £139 per person per night including dinner, breakfast, spa taster treatment and use of the facilities. See solenthotel.co.uk.

