

Late deals

NORTH EAST
White Swan in centre of Alnwick (0845 603 8892) offers dinner, B&B for £37.50 per person (saving £42.50 each) on Sun-Thurs night stays until Christmas, with Alnwick Castle/Gardens only a short walk away.

SOUTH WALES
Celtic Manor (01633 413 000) in Usk Valley offers dinner, B&B for two people per night from £118, plus 20 per cent off rounds of golf on championship course and two-for-one on select, new Elemis treatments until Dec 24.

EDINBURGH
Unique Cottages (01835 822 277) offers seven nights' self-catering in apartment sleeping four in Leith from Dec 28 for £495, saving £100, to provide splendid vantage point for Hogmanay celebrations.

SHORT BREAKS
MILAN: Flight Centre (0844 800 8628) offers three nights' B&B for keen shoppers at four-star hotel ex-London on departs Jan 14-23, from £209.

PARIS: Corona (01582 390 939) offers two nights' B&B at four-star Normandy Hotel, a 19th-century building with hi-tech facilities around corner from Rue Saint-Honore, from £198, ex-Luton Jan 17.

BOSTON: Virgin Holidays (0844 557 3870) offers three nights' room-only at 3V Midtown, ex-Heathrow with Virgin Atlantic from £479, saving up to £120, departs Jan 25-Feb 10.

NEW YORK: Virgin (0844 557 3870) offers three nights' room-only at 3V Comfort Inn Manhattan from £529, saving up to £220, departs Jan 15-31.

ROME: Cresta (0844 879 8014) offers three nights' B&B at three-star Hotel Stella from £195, saving £33, ex-Gatwick with easyJet Feb 28.

ISTANBUL: Cresta (0844 879 8014) offers four nights' B&B at three-star Martinez Hotel from £249, saving £20, ex-Heathrow with Turkish Airlines Feb 19.

VENICE: Cresta (0844 879 8014) offers three nights' B&B at three star hotel from £289, ex-Gatwick with EasyJet Feb 1.

MONTE CARLO: Cresta (0844 879 8014) offers three nights' B&B at three-star Novotel from £265 ex-Gatwick Jan 14, including helicopter transfer and one extra night's accom.

COPENHAGEN: BA Holidays (0844 493 0758) offers two nights' B&B at four-star Scandic Copenhagen from £215, based on January deps, incl return BA flights ex-Heathrow. One under 13-year-old stays free if sharing with parents.

VIENNA: BA Holidays (0844 493 0758) offers two nights' B&B at four-star K+K Hotel Maria Theresia from £265, based on Jan deps with BA return flights.

SHORT-HAUL SUN
CYPRUS: Holiday Jewels (01293 533 338) offers seven nights' B&B from Jan 8 at four-star Louis Imperial Beach Hotel, overlooking Paphos Castle, for £323, incl return flights. Local transfers, costing extra, can be arranged.

LANZAROTE: Corona (01582 390 930) offers seven nights' all-inclusive at four-star Barcelo Lanzarote Hotel in Costa Tegueste from £328, ex-Stansed Jan 18.

MOROCCO: On the Beach (0871 911 0202) offers seven nights' half-board at three-star hotel in Agadir from £189, ex-Manchester Jan 6.

FUERTEVENTURA: On the Beach (0871 911 0202) offers seven nights' self-catering at three-star hotel from £167, incl flights ex-Birmingham Jan 8.

LONG-HAUL
BALI: Pure Luxury (0844 472 0100) offers eight nights' B&B at Banyan Tree Ungasan for £1,999, incl Qatar Airways flights ex-Gatwick April 1-July 16 and transfers. Manchester departs from £2,129.

MALDIVES: Pure Luxury (0844 472 0100) offers seven nights' full-board at Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru from £2,499, saving £270, incl Sri Lankan Airlines flights ex-Heathrow, and transfers on deps May/June. Departs ex-Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow for £2,599.

Enjoying the fruits of our labour

LAURA DALE follows a cider trail around Somerset and immerses herself in traditions that have been around for 150 years

"NEVER to be forgotten, that first long secret drink of golden fire, juice of those valleys and of that time, wine of wild orchards, of russet summer, of plump red apples, and Rosie's burning cheeks."

Cider With Rosie, Laurie Lee
As the fading Somerset sunshine slips behind the hills, a warm light casts over the orchard where rows upon rows of apple trees begin to straighten their branches having stooped all summer long under the weight of their fruitful burden. It's autumn and most of the apples have been collected up and piled high, ready for pressing, but the gentle thwack of late comers can still be heard as they hit the grass.

At Burrow Hill Cider Farm near Kingsbury Episcopi, apples have been made into cider for 150 years. The cider is pressed from 40 different varieties of apples with names sounding like characters from a Beatrix Potter book - Broxwood Foxwhelp, Ribston Pippin, Harry Masters, Tom Putt and Kingston Black. With 150 acres of orchard, Burrow Hill pumps out 3,000 gallons of cider per day.

Owner Julian Temperley throws a handful of hay to the horses and he tells us about the farm's cider-making history. "We are still using the same process. We let the apples fall naturally and press them between October and Christmas."



EXTRACTION: Above, left, apples being pressed at Roger Wilkins' farm, above right

Burrow Hill supplies top restaurants in London and Oxford Street shops, as well as up-market Devon eateries including Gidleigh Park. Julian explains: "People want a drink which is unique and there's a certain mystic and romance in orchards."

Indeed, Laurie Lee's seduction by Rosie Burdock took place underneath a hay wagon after drinking cider from a flagon. Julian has bottled the orchard's English romanticism by staying true to old-fashioned methods, but at the same time he has branched out from traditional ciders to sparkling ranges and brandy cider.

"The world has changed and our market has changed. We are selling a very special alcohol, which isn't part of the binge drinking phenomenon, although some of our customers probably get quite squirly."

Red-and-green Kingstons Blacks are piled high in the courtyard and a jet of water washes the fruit along an apple-clogged channel towards the mill where a machine scoops them up and drops them into the press.

A well-to-do farmer with dishevelled hair, Julian has run Burrow Hill for 30 years and seen it through some tough times. He explained: "You fall into cider making. It's not a logical decision. I always say cider making is the last bastion of the peasants. We're an anarchic lot, but the cider tradition needs to be protected."

And that's just what Julian is doing. In one of the out houses, the smell of warm wax wafts

into the air as staff seal bottles of 20-year-old cider brandy. The first bottle was auctioned off in London on behalf of an organisation called Common Ground which created Apple Day. "You couldn't auction off cheap ciders which are made of 35 per cent apples and 65 per cent something else. We are 100 per cent apple," says Julian.

About 20 miles away, just outside the village of Wedmore, hand-written signs lead you down a winding country lane to Roger Wilkins Farm. Wearing a blue boiler suit, a flat cap and Wellington boots, Roger welcomes us in to the breeze-block cider house and immediately offers us some cider.

Swilling out two pint glasses he asks, "sweet, medium or dry?" He pours us one dry and one medium (a mix of sweet and dry) and pours himself a pint, before draining half of it in one go. "I've been drinking cider since I was five or six years old - I drink it for breakfast."

Roger was born in the house and has lived there all his life. With his slicked-back, grey hair he looks like a faded teddy boy. Of his cider he says: "It's pure apple juice. In dry, there's nothing at all and in sweet I put six teaspoons of saccharine - one per 20 gallons. I've got to know a lot. We've got good apples and I know what cider is. I test every drop of juice I press. Good cider will keep to next year, if it's not so good you have to get rid of it before May."

Roger's grandfather started the cider business in 1917 and Roger took over when his grandfather died in 1969. He has four and a half acres, and supplements his fruit by buying up apples from local farmers. Roger has stuck to the traditional methods his grandfather used. The apples are loaded by hand on to a steep conveyor belt before they come tumbling down into a funnel which blitzes them.

Roger then operates a metal shutter which drops the apple pulp from a shoot onto a tray covered in muslin cloth, called a lissom. More than ten lissoms are put on top of each other before the stack, called a cheese, is wheeled over to an antique-looking 100-tonne press. Golden coloured liquid begins to pour out of the muslin cloth as the press squeezes the cheese. Apple juice drips to the trough below and Roger scoops up a palmful and tastes it before offering us a glass. We watch him methodically press the apples for a good hour - with the help of an apple loader and his daughter in law - before he stops for an obligatory cider break.

Roger tells us he used to supply gallons of cider to pubs across the UK, but trade has died out with the recession and cheap supermarket booze. He still supplies cider to Scotland, London and Manchester, but people come and pick it up. To cope with the down-turn in trade, Roger has expanded into a one-stop farm shop selling cheese, chutneys, eggs, occasionally beef and, of course, anything apple related. By now, several locals have gathered at Roger's unofficial bar in the dank cider house. Helping themselves to the on-tap cider, they are reading newspapers and ordering rind on cheddar and creamy stilton. The adjacent wall is covered with faded newspaper cuttings and photographs including Jamie Oliver - who made sauces with Wilkins' cider - and an interview with the late Clash singer Joe Strummer. Other high profile visitors include Ozzie Clark, Johnny Rotten, Chris Bradstock and Mick Jagger's brother "who lives down the road".

A lady wearing a National Trust fleece walks in and orders stilton and apple juice. Eying my notepad she comes over to chat. "I've only just discovered this place.



CORE STRUCTURE: A Burrow Hill orchard



JUICY JOURNEY: On the way to the press

I thought it was my little secret but I think I'm one of the last people to catch on. The apple juice is lovely - not like anything you buy in the supermarket - and the cheese is delicious," she says. In the background Roger fills a cardboard box with apples for another, near toothless, shopper with a rotund belly. "Give me 96 for that," he says before taking another swig of cider.

It's barely 12 o'clock and I'm feeling soft round the edges as we drive back down the winding, country lane towards Cheddar. We head to our eco-lodge at Nyland for a lunch of bread, chutney, cheese and Wilkins' cider. Tor Farm is nestled at the foot of the Mendip Hills and used to be a working dairy farm. Owners Caroline and Brian Ladd started the business three years ago when the farm became untenable. With heavy hearts they turned the former farm yard into a hamlet of luxury eco-lodges complete with hot tubs and each sporting a different roof of grass, rubber tiles and shingle. Caroline says:

"The nearest train stations to Cheddar are Worle and Yatton which are eight miles away. Highbridge and Burnham is nine miles away. There are regular trains from Torquay and Exeter St David's. There aren't many bus services and if



ON THE CIDER TRAIL: Above, Tor Farm; below, Jamie Oliver uses Wilkins' cider to make sauces

"Brian misses it. He would have liked to have still had the dairy. It broke his heart when we finished with the farm, but we have to move on with the times." The couple have made a great success of the holiday business and families, couples and friends looking for an escape to the countryside are lining up for a Tor Farm holiday.

As we gulp down Wilkins' cider and throw the sheep bits of apple, I realise the cider makers of Somerset are not just marketing a traditional cider. They have bottled up the landscape and the summer sunshine providing a taste of what life is really like down on the farm.

THE FACTS
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THIS WEEK: Torbay Hospital League of Friends annual fundraising dinner, at the Royal Torbay Yacht Club



ABOVE: From left, Mayor Nick Bye, Christine Weston, Michael and Lynne Hookings, Com Andy Hancock, Debbie Selley and Commodore David Selley

RIGHT: From left, Mary and Philip White, Jenny Simnett and Julian Chandler



IMPORANT EVENING: From left, Georges Adroid, Jesamine Adroid, Stephen Latham, Chris Bunker and Gary Bundy



ABOVE: From left, Kiri Bigwood, Lynne Hookings and Tony Hobson



LEFT: From left, Councillor Robert Horn, Wendy Horn, Barry and Caroline Edwards



SHOWING SUPPORT: From left, Lt (SCC) Skingle RNR, Cadet Craig Veasey, Cadet Shaun Sheehy, Able Cadet Natalie Parkins, OC Ben Reeves, CPO (SCC) Scarrott

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