

Travel

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'The island of Chiloe has long been a retreat for Chile's one percenters and backpackers'

Caroline Phillips stays in the country's Lake District

Naturhotel Forsthofgut, Austria



25 forest escapes in Europe

From chic cabins among Alpine pines to a Black Forest boutique hotel — Rhiannon Batten picks the best stays between the trees

If the turning of the leaves hasn't had you yearning for the restorative calm of a stay in a forest this autumn, surely the first few lines of Thomas Hardy's novel *Under the Greenwood Tree* will.

"To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature. At the passing of the breeze the fir trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself; the ash hisses amid its quiverings; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall."

It may have been the Japanese who brought the stress-reducing, immune system-boosting benefits of spending time in forests to mainstream attention when they introduced the concept of

shinrin yoku as a public health programme in the 1980s but Hardy was an early influencer in the field, lowering readers' blood pressure with every surrattng word.

Whatever it is that pushes you to spend time among the trees in this season of golden light and coppery leaves — when the sights, sounds and sprucey smells of a woodland walk are a surefire way to make peace with the shortening days — you'll want somewhere delightful to stay too.

Which is why we've dusted off our walking boots and followed a Hansel and Gretel-style trail — albeit one lined with roast pork and honey cakes rather

than breadcrumbs — deep into Europe's *komorebi*-dappled corners (yes, the Japanese also have a word to describe the particular phenomenon of sunlight streaming through trees) to seek out some of Europe's best forest hotels.

From remote retreats deep in the woods to small village hotels with wide-angle views of forested slopes, and easy access to the trails that lead out into them, we've gathered Europe's best forest stays. Many are in the Alps but we've included a few favourites in Scandinavia too. Those



Buhelwirt, Italy

Great hotels next page

► who prefer their woodlands peppered with cork, beech or oak trees rather than firs will also find options around the continent's sunnier shores. Sit on any of their terraces this autumn and follow Hardy's lead, listening to the rustles and whispers of the trees around you and wishing you could sneak a little of their meditative magic into your suitcase when it's time to leave.

Repère Sauvage Loir-et-Cher, Centre-Val de Loire, France

Opened in May in Loir-et-Cher, an hour southeast from Paris by train and taxi, or about the same by car from Orleans, Tours or Le Mans, this new retreat offers 100 acres of arboreal escapism, with 16 bedrooms in the main manor house and 20 black and russet lodges in the tree-filled grounds. The heart of the project is a 19th-century manor house updated by the designer Gwenaëlle Girard in soft upholstered swirls and an earthy woodland palette. There's a locavore restaurant, a swimming pool, a kids' club that includes a mini farm and Montessori-style nature trails, and a regular programme of activities, from botanical painting to bike rides.

Details Room-only doubles from £158 (repere-sauvage.com). Take the train to Paris

Naturhotel Forsthofgut

Leogang, Salzburgerland, Austria

This family-owned hotel in the "Leogang Rockies", a pretty, uncrowded part of the Austrian Alps 80 minutes' drive southwest of Salzburg, grew from a two-room guesthouse in the 1960s into what is now a lavish, 109-bedroom #alpinecore fantasy: slick bedrooms sport names like "mountain lust", a not-so-toy farm has been built just for children and free-range massages can be arranged in a forest clearing. The hotel's forest-themed waldisPA has black timber buildings containing saunas and steam rooms beside hot and cold pools that are balm after woodland walks on the flanks of mountains or a day on the pistes in winter. You may also need a visit just to recover from navigating the hotel's pricing structure, a fiendishly complex system that plots 12 different room categories against seven different calendar seasons.

Details Half-board doubles from £540 (forsthofgut.at). Fly to Salzburg



Repère Sauvage, France

seclusion but if you do feel like uprooting yourself, there are two lakes within walking distance, for swimming or kayaking, and the Hyssna Trail long-distance footpath passes close by.

Details B&B doubles from £378 (hyssnaforestresort.com). Fly to Gothenburg

Grand Forest Metsovo, Epirus, Greece

In the Northern Pindos National Park, Grand Forest Metsovo has such a screensaver-worthy backdrop of lakes, canyons and black pines that it's tempting to do away with four walls altogether and simply head out into the trees with a hammock — though that may mean braving brown bears, wolves and wild cats. And passing up on the comforts of the indoor and outdoor swimming pools, as well as a restaurant that serves slow-cooked local lamb and baklava-like kataifi with pine honey (mains from £20). The spa is inspired by "the resilience of the aspen tree", with treatments including a scrub made from mountain herbs (30 minutes £57).

Details B&B doubles from £186 (grand-forest.gr). Fly to Ioannina or Thessaloniki

Hotel Björnson

Low Tatras, Slovakia

Across the border in Austria you would pay a lot more for the charms of this family-friendly mountain hotel.

In the craggy-peaked, densely wooded

Demanovska valley,

Hotel Björnson expanded in 2020, adding 15 timber cabin suites and a wellness area that includes a pool, hot tubs and three types of sauna. The

region was once best known for its stalactite-filled caves but is now jumper-to-jumper with ski-suited

snow bunnies in winter, as it's less than five minutes' drive from the ski

lifts of Jasna Nizke Tatry, the country's largest and best-known ski resort. For autumn there are biking trails leading into the forest, hiking trails up to the top of Chopok mountain (cable cars too at weekends) and afterwards you can fill up on duck breast with saffron risotto, or Slovak potato sausages with apple and onion chutney in the restaurant.

Details Half-board doubles from £87 (bjornson.sk). Fly to Poprad or Krakow



The funicular above Lake Brienz, Switzerland



The Vagar Country House, Portugal

Albergo Miramonti

South Tyrol, Italy

Style isn't hard to find in the Alps, unless you're on a budget. Happily, this family-owned albergo in Corteno Golgi, 45 minutes' drive from St Moritz, caters to guests seeking both. Within a 1960s building commissioned by the owners' grandfather are duck egg and midnight blue paintwork, architectural lamps and framed prints giving a cosy feel to the recently renovated guest rooms. As well as forest bathing in 30 acres of woodland, there's a small spa and yoga studio, trails into the dramatic glacier-carved valleys and forested nature reserves that surround the village and "proper" pizzas topped with locally cured meats in the restaurant. Less active guests can drive to Tirano, 30 minutes away, to ride the Bernina Express (tickets.rhb.ch), or head down into Merano.

Details B&B doubles from £83 (miramonticorteno.com). Fly to Bolzano

Blyb.

Bavaria, Germany

Across the road from Bavaria's forest-backed Tegernsee lake, in the small town of Gmund, Blyb is a hotel that is well placed for boat trips and beer gardens. The property's dark history (the main villa was once owned by Heinrich Himmler) is addressed through projects such as the Listening Room, a dedicated space for exchange. For tree-lovers a network of trails leads out behind the hotel's extensive grounds into some of the region's wildest — and most deeply forested — mountains, including the summit of Baumgartenschnied. Alternatively stay put and enjoy the hotel's pared-back rebuke to the lederhosen-and-pretzels model of Bavarian hospitality. It's more likely to be full of weekend Münchens in tailored jeans enjoying the woodland sauna and buzzy bar, restaurant and pizzeria.

Details Room-only doubles from £125 (blyb.co). Fly to Munich

The Vagar Country House

Serra da Esperança, Portugal

Sun-baked hill towns, medieval castles and hiking trails winding beneath a canopy of pine, oak and ash — Portugal's Serra da Esperança, two hours east of Coimbra, makes a wild-edged backdrop to this contemporary country hotel. Choose between light, airy guest rooms in the main house or a trio of forest shelters — A-framed suites perched a mile from the hotel, on what feels like the edge of the earth but is actually the saddle of a ridge. Swim in the infinity pool, soak in the bath house or tiptoe to a natural spring along a



barefoot trail, feeling the sensations of pine needles, leaves and stones underfoot.

Details B&B doubles from £148 a night, minimum two-night stay (thevagar.pt). Fly to Viseu or Porto

Agriturismo Canales, Sardinia, Italy

Not all forests are pine-cloaked, snow-dusted and neck-crinklingly high altitude, as this rural hotel, surrounded by acres of shady olive trees and holm oaks, shows. In the east of Sardinia, an hour south of Olbia, its ten smart but homely bedrooms and two apartments make gentle base camps for days spent hiking around local archaeological sites or kayaking around Lago del Cedrino. Grandma-style cooking from the fourth-generation owners means breakfasts of homemade jams, freshly baked cakes and local cheeses, and dinners of roast suckling pig, or lamb with wild fennel. When you fancy a change of scene the beach is less than 30 minutes' drive away.

Details B&B doubles from £96, two-night minimum stay (canales.it). Fly to Olbia

The Baro Barosund, Finland

There are more remote corners of Finland, and much wider swathes of forest, but the Baro's attraction lies in its relative accessibility, an hour west of Helsinki. If you're not a fan of dark interiors, look away now: guest rooms in the hotel's black-timber cabins are decorated in shades of pewter, steel and charcoal, reflecting the rocky Barosund archipelago that surrounds them. The moody backdrop also spotlights the views, a restful natural collage of wood and water. Head out to explore it on



“There are books on Romanian wildlife and an observatory for spotting bears

foot, bike or kayak and you'll find a private beach, hiking trails, a sauna and a restaurant raising foraged berries and mushrooms to ambrosial heights.

Details B&B doubles from £215 (thebaro.fi). Fly to Helsinki

Grandhotel Giessbach, Bernese Oberland, Switzerland

A swag-curtained parquet-floored, chandelier-lit carnival of belle époque style, the Grandhotel Giessbach, overlooking Lake Brienz, was built in the 1870s to cater to wealthy tourists visiting the Giessbach Falls. Set beside the 14-tier falls an hour southwest of Lucerne, the hotel has survived its share of choppy waters and is now a listed historical monument. Still surrounded by forest and accessible via boat and funicular as well as road and rail, luxury here comes with a hale and hearty edge: swims in a natural pool, hikes through the woods or

plates of agnolotti with pumpkin, walnuts and chilli in the Michelin green star bistro, Elisa (mains from £27). **Details** B&B doubles from £244 (giessbach.ch). Fly to Zurich

Buhelwirt, South Tyrol, Italy

Breathing fresh Alpine air into a traditional Aurina Valley guesthouse opened by her great-grandmother, Buhelwirt's owner, Michaela Haller, and her husband, Matthias, added a bold new extension in 2017. This small hotel in the village of San Giacomo, two hours north of Bolzano, is now a model of Scandi-Alpine refinement, its clean-lined furnishings and Jenga-like windows framing close-up views of the surrounding meadows and forests. Short of heading out for a hike, one of the best places from which to enjoy the trees is the sauna, a cosy timber oasis that looks out over swathes of evergreens.

Details B&B doubles from £157 (buhelwirt.com). Fly to Bolzano

Hotel Storfjord, Sunnmore, Norway

Turf-roofed and timber-walled, Storfjord Hotel is snugly camouflaged among the forested shores of the "great" fjord about 40 minutes' drive east of Alesund. With slick concrete fireplaces, glassy views of the water, bedrooms in a huddle of slick log cabins and guided trips in inky-coloured kayaks, staying here is a bit like stepping into a modern-day Norse saga. A fine-dining restaurant elevates ingredients as rugged as the fjords (think barley risotto, or local cod with seaweed; mains from £34) while in summer guests can book in for forest-to-table dining in the hotel's lavvo tent.

Details B&B doubles from £254 (storfjordhotel.com). Fly to Alesund

Les Cabanes de Rensiwez, Ardennes, Belgium

Bridging the territory between cabin stay and hotel, this forest of 50-odd cabin suites an hour's drive south of Liège, in the Ardennes, has all the earthy escapism you want from a back-to-nature stay but enough hotel-style trappings that you don't have to go to the full Thoreau. Squirrel yourself away in a cabin for a couple of nights, emerging only to blink at the autumn sun as you hike the forested trails of the Two Ourthes Natural Park, or make the most of the services on site, ordering add-on breakfast and apero baskets, or wild boar stew and wild berry baobois (£37pp for three courses) brought to the door.



Details Room-only doubles from £173 (escabanesderenswez.be). Take the train to Liège via Brussels

En Hotel Podhale, Poland

You know you're in mountain territory when a hotel's bedrooms have names like "Granite" and "Spruce" and this quietly decadent 15-bedroom retreat, ten minutes' drive from the ski resort town of Zakopane, leans deeply into its setting. Exposed stone walls reflect the surrounding Tatra Mountains, the spa uses natural oils scented with pine and the restaurant raises forest-to-table ingredients such as local trout or wild berries to delicious new heights. In winter it's busy with skiers (the Kasprowy Wierch cable car is just 100m away) but autumn is a season of mists and mellow hillwalkers, when the surrounding forests can be explored on quiet trails straight from the door.

Details B&B doubles from £137 (enhotel.pl). Fly to Poprad-Tatry

Stubn in der Frasdorfer Hütte, Bavaria, Germany

Ah, the cosy joys of a simple mountain refuge at the end of a footlong day. But imagine if instead of the usual ugly metal beds there were some made from carefully carpentry timber, and if dinner was, say, local fish with rösti and apple sauce rather than a casserole. No need to imagine at this recently transformed hikers' hut in Bavaria's Chiemgau Alps, an hour's drive southeast of Munich or west of Salzburg. Surrounded by a paisley of rolling meadows and forests, Stubn is now a simple hotel, with 11 stylish rooms and a restaurant focusing on natural wines and Alpine flavours. Shared bathrooms are one of the few remaining throwbacks to its former incarnation, but you still reach it on foot. Go in the autumn and you'll find more reasonable rates, a kitchen under less crowd pressure and miles of quiet hiking and biking trails.

Details B&B doubles from £131 (stubn.co). Fly to Munich or Salzburg

La Maison de la Pia, Alpes-Maritime, France

In France's Mercantour National Park, close to the border with Italy, the Vallée des Merveilles, or Valley of Wonders, is home to one of the largest collections of open-air Bronze Age rock carvings in Europe. To reach it, many visitors take the scenic Train des Merveilles, from Nice to nearby Tende, with its dedicated museum (free; museedesmerveilles.departement06.fr). Now there's even more reason to hop on board. Just outside town, Pia's House opened in May. Its kitchen, run by Thomas Guernon, a former chef at Paris's starry L'Arpège, serves dishes such as ile flottante made with local eggs, honey and rosemary (four courses £44). Diners can book to stay over in chic dome suites settled into the hillside, overlooking rolling pine forest.

Details B&B doubles from £96 (lamaisondelapia.com). Fly to Nice

Novanta, Tuscany, Italy

When Novanta's Dutch owners came across the remains of an old settlement deep in the wilds of Tuscany, an hour's

More hotels overleaf

► drive north of Arezzo, they thought the site would make a good location for a pop-up place to stay. That glamping site has grown into a year-round hotel, with rustic-chic bedrooms, two cottages and a treehouse. Sit on the dining terrace drinking in views of the surrounding Casentino forests, swim in the saltwater pool, sign up for a swim-hike with picnic lunch thrown in, go truffle hunting or trek up to neighbour Fabrizio's farm for a field-to-table feast. Remote and steep, this is true barefoot luxury; there's even a Skyloge suite where you can sleep on a four-poster beneath the trees.

Details Full-board doubles from £218; minimum two-night stay (novantao90.com). Fly to Arezzo or Florence

Solo Palacio

Asturias, Spain

Living up to Asturias's nickname 'green Spain', the mountainsides around Solo Palacio run the full gamut from sage and fern to moss and pine, with the cloud-hatted old-growth forests of Las Ubiñas-La Mesa Natural Park among them. You'll want to pack your hiking boots. About 45 minutes' drive south of Oviedo, the hotel has 11 elegant wood and stone suites, an infinity pool and a sauna with a view. Food is also a big attraction; partnering with a nearby Michelin-starred restaurant, Solo x Monte's kitchen weaves wondrous things from local produce, including suckling pig with a pepper, apple and cream sauce, and a signature cheesecake made with local La Peral cheese (mains from £18). More reason to book? The whole thing is a not-for-profit initiative.

Details Room-only doubles from £244 (solopalacio.com). Fly to Oviedo

Sonnenhalde Tonbach

Baden-Württemberg, Germany

It was the Romans who gave the Black Forest its name, calling it Silva Negra after the dense shade lurking beneath its fir and pine trees. It's still possible to get

a sense of that thickety gloom today on the hiking trails that skitter up the deliciously named Rinkenkopf mountain direct from the Sonnenhalde's door. If that sounds too energetic, head to the hotel's spa; you'll find a wellness suite, a dedicated forest-based life coaching service (talking is done while walking) and a forest pavilion where muscles can be pummelled among the trees. In the small town of Baiersbronn, an hour's drive east of Strasbourg, you're also amid a veritable milky way of Michelin-starred restaurants.

Details B&B doubles from £190 (sonnenhalde.de). Fly or take the train to Strasbourg

Hotel Consolacion

Aragon, Spain

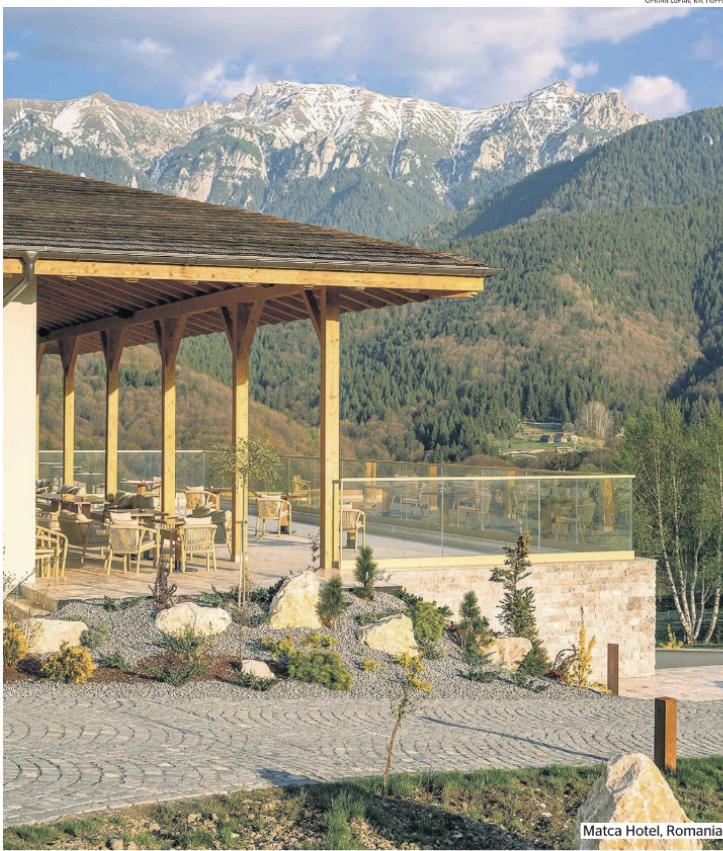
Stone and wood may form the foundations of this one-time hermitage but unlike so many bleached wood-and-sheepskin forest stays, this one is devotedly sparse, its quiet, contemplative architecture interspersed with organically shaped fireplaces, sculptural furniture and pops of jewel colour.

About two hours' drive from Tarragona, Zaragoza or Valencia, the ancient buildings at its core contain a baroque chapel, a restaurant, a library and two bedrooms. Ten others are set within glass-walled wooden cubes perched among pines on the hillside. Deep in Spain's Matarranya region, a quiet corner of Aragon, this modern-day pilgrim's retreat sits on at least two ancient trails. **Details** B&B doubles from £131 (consolacion.com.es). Fly to Tarragona

Triangel Boutique Hotel

Julian Alps, Slovenia

Slovenia isn't lacking in winsome hotels with windows opening onto pine-fringed wonderlands. Whittling down a choice, however, can feel like picking a pine needle from a well-plumped haystack. Which is where Triangel comes in. Close to Kranjska Gora in the Julian Alps, this small, crowd-pleasing hotel has windows that look out on the mighty peaks of the Martuljek mountains in Triglav National



Park. Enjoy the views over refined plates of barley soup with Carniolan sausage, or local trout fillet with herbs and celery cream, at the hotel's Bib Gourmand restaurant (mains from £17), from a horizontal angle in the spa's glass-walled relaxation area or on a guided hike.

Details B&B doubles from £160 (hotel-triangel.com). Fly to Ljubljana

Union Oye

More og Romsdal, Norway

Pale timber woodwork, stripped-back wall space and floor-to-ceiling glass not cutting it for you? Union Oye can help. A vision of sugarpink and berry-coloured frames, dainty balconies and dragon-head roof timbers, it was built beside Hjørundfjord, in Norway's Sunnmøre Alps, in 1891 for mountaineers and tourists. The latter included the writers Karen Blixen and Henrik Ibsen; the porridge that Blixen started her days with is still served as a breakfast option. Between the fjord and its fairytale peaks, a ribbon of birch and spruce forest winds behind the hotel; the gentle 4.5-mile Storerunden trail loops out through here to the village of Slyngstad and back. Or take on the more challenging hike to Slogen, trekking through spruce then birch before the trail pierces the treeline altogether.

Details B&B doubles from £197 (unionoye.no). Fly to Alesund

70 Hectares et l'Océan

Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France

A holiday wish list or a name? However you look at it this chic hotel outside hip Hossegor, a surf town on the Atlantic coast, missed a trick mentioning

“Slovenia isn't lacking in winsome hotels with windows opening onto pine-fringed wonderland

hectares rather than the maritime pine forest the land is mostly made up of (there is a golf course too). That's what gives it the edge, adding shadowy, sun-dappled drama to its gingerbread architecture. This salty stretch of coast, an hour north of Biarritz, offers the chance to catch waves, cycle and go swimming. The sporty attitude is reflected in the hotel's 32 bedrooms, whose simple white walls and pared-back furnishings in soft, seaweedy tones have a fresh, anyone-for-tennis vibe.

Details B&B doubles from £224 (lesdomainesdefontenille.com). Fly to Biarritz

Matca Hotel

Transylvania, Romania

Part luxury hotel, part cultural celebration, Matca opened last year in Transylvania, its low-pitched shingle roofs and inner courtyards inspired by the collections of the Astra Museum in Sibiu. The heritage theme continues in the 16 guest rooms and seven villas. Among such modern frills as walk-in showers and wi-fi are ceramics commissioned from local potters and coffee table books on Romanian wildlife (the hotel also has a private observatory where it's possible to spot bears). There's a spa, a pool and a restaurant serving pork tenderloin with mustard sauce and delicate honey cake with blueberry jam (mains from £15). If the views of the Transylvanian Forest, and the Bucegi and Piatra Craiului mountains aren't hauntingly beautiful enough for you, there's 20 minutes' drive from the infamous Bran Castle (entry £15, bran-castle.com).

Details B&B doubles from £395 (matcahotel.com). Fly to Brasov

