

Rooms at the inn

Don't want another turkey of a Christmas? Check into a luxury hotel within a sleigh ride of home.

Penelope Parkin plans her escape

It's one of the nerviest moments of the year. Like an amateur vocalist at a talent show who may or may not sing in tune, the Christmas turkey makes its entrance before an audience of expectant mouths.

All things being equal, this should be one of the highlights of the culinary year. But, like George Orwell's pigs, some turkeys are distinctly more equal than others. Some defrost properly, others don't. Some come with trimmings to die for; others are accompanied by undercooked sausage meat, bulletlike sprouts and spuds that look like something from the Great Irish Famine.

Time, perhaps, for a change. Time to give your in-house chef a year off and let someone more accomplished take the strain. Christmas – or indeed New Year – in a luxury hotel could be just the tonic to banish the midwinter blues. And, as it happens, there's a host of possibilities within an hour of every major town in Surrey.

Whether your tastes run to libraries and log fires or hot stones and hydros, a brief spell in paradise is no more than a short drive away. No slaving over a hot stove, and you won't have to stage an episode of *Changing Rooms* to get your dining room to resemble a banquet hall. Sipping champagne after an afternoon swim has a somewhat greater cachet than collapsing with a bottle of *Becks* in front of *I'm an Exhibitionist Get Me On Here*. And when slumber calls, the prospect of collapsing into an ancient four-poster bed should be enough to send thoughts of the traditional suburban Christmas scattering on the crisp night air.

Not convinced? Take a look at our top five local options and just see if you don't end up booking. It'll probably take all of Santa's reindeer to stop you...

Grayshott Spa, Grayshott, near Hindhead

Voted *Tatler's Best UK Spa 2007*, Grayshott Spa is hard to beat for a luxurious weekend break. Formerly Grayshott Farm, it was once the country seat of Victorian Poet Laureate Alfred, Lord Tennyson, who settled here briefly in 1867 whilst paying an extended visit to a Mrs Gilchrist.

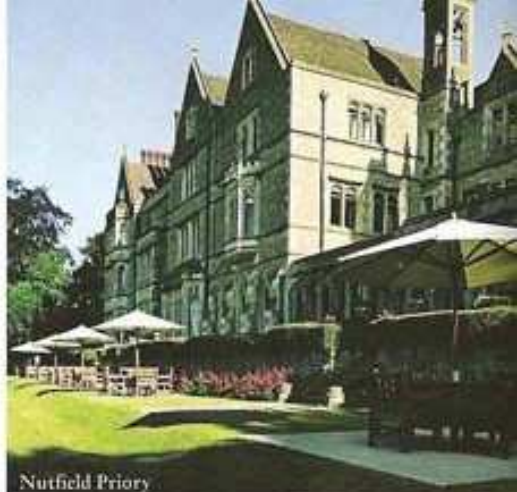
"The Tennysons have taken a house at Grayshott," wrote the lady, "that will serve their purpose for a time, enabling them to judge how the climate suits and to be on watch for any land that might be on the market."

Whether or not any land turned up, the poet and his wife soon moved on, and the following year the estate was sold to John Rowan Phillips, who changed its name to Grayshott Hall. Today – in its newest incarnation as a spa – the house offers a range of contemporary treatments, from established favourites like hot stone therapy (£75) to new innovations such as the *Safflower Fruit Salt Body Scrub* (£45).

Celebrity chef Adam Palmer is a pioneer of healthy and exquisitely presented cuisine, and if you opt for the two-night *Taste of Grayshott* spa menu package, he will invite you to join him for a six-course tasting menu on your second night. Nor is the first night, with its champagne and canapé reception, exactly a washout.

And just to ease those withdrawal symptoms, departing guests are presented with a hamper containing products sourced by Adam, designed to encourage the continued pursuit of healthy eating.

■ A Grayshott Spa day costs £110 – £130. For an overnight stay, rooms range from £190 for a single room to a Manor House Deluxe Room at £450. Tel: (01428) 602000. Visit: www.grayshottspa.com



Nutfield Priory



Canopied bedroom, Ashdown Park



Indoor pool, Grayshott Spa

Nutfield Priory, Nutfield, near Redhill
Equally worthy of a resident poet is Nutfield Priory, an imposing 19th century country house set high on Nutfield Ridge, with commanding views of the East Surrey countryside. Sit back and sample afternoon tea in one of the elegant Victorian lounges, before curling up with a book in front of the grand library's roaring log fire.

For a romantic candlelit dinner, the hotel's Cloisters Restaurant is the place to head. Here you'll have ample opportunity to admire the stunning arched ceiling and elaborate stone carvings, before retiring to

your Victorian Gothic-inspired bedroom or suite.

■ A single room costs £140, whilst couples can mark a special occasion with bed and breakfast (full English), plus chocolates and champagne on arrival, for £180. Tel: 0845 072 7485. Visit: www.handpicked.co.uk

Lytche Hill, Haslemere

If you firmly believe that a guest should be a name, not a number, then lovely *Lytche Hill* is for you. All the bedrooms in this historic hotel are named – after villages, statesmen, Tudor royals and a selection of novelists and Romantic poets.

The Tudor connection is the hotel's listed farmhouse building – which, with its origins in 1475, actually pre-dates the Tudor dynasty by a decade. Still, if you're going to have your own private staircase – as you will in the *Anne of Cleves* room – who's quibbling over a few poxy years? Honeymooners love that room. Which is strange, really, when you consider that Anne's own honeymoon with Henry VIII was one of the great non-events in the history of passion. And talking of Henry, the old boy has a whole suite named after him, complete with four-poster bed dating back to 1614.

Following a £1m refurbishment, interior designer Georges Karam has also created a series of modern rooms and added some intriguing touches to the hotel's communal

areas, including an *Ingo Maurer Yayaho* hanging lighting system.

Meanwhile, the oak panelled *Auberge de France* restaurant offers a three-course festive lunch menu to satisfy even Henry VIII. The farmed raised salmon terrine, followed by roasted turkey crown stuffed with chestnut and bacon and served with gauffret potatoes and bread sauce, will leave you precious little room for the home-made Christmas plum pudding, Christmas pudding ice cream and rum sauce. But you'll manage it.

■ A two-night weekend break with full English breakfast costs £120 per room, per night. Other prices range from £160 for a double room to £295 for a garden suite. Tel: (01428) 651251. Visit: www.lytchehill.co.uk

Ashdown Park, near Crowborough, East Sussex

The first thing you notice about *Ashdown Park* is the pervasive sense of calm. Shielded from the main road, in the heart of the *Ashdown Forest*, the hotel offers a complete escape from the hustle and bustle of city life. A club sandwich for lunch in one of the elegant drawing rooms makes for a warm welcome, after which the roaring log fires will consume all thoughts of action for the rest of the afternoon.

If you must move, complimentary use of the exclusive *Ashdown Park Country Club* is available, as is access to the indoor

pool, gym, sauna spa, tennis court, indoor golf nets, putting lawn and jogging trails. A rich variety of ways to build up an appetite for the *Anderida Restaurant* and its excellent cuisine, before retiring to one of the hotel's 106 bedrooms with their views of the lush grounds.

■ Single deluxe rooms from £150. Double rooms from £180 to £400 for a master suite. Tel: (01342) 824988. Visit: www.ashdownpark.com

Tylney Hall, near Hook, Hampshire

For fans of Jane Austen, *Tylney Hall* will provide a break to remember. A Grade II listed mansion, it reputedly boasts "the longest, uninterrupted view of Jane Austen's Hampshire countryside". A grand – if rather elastic – claim. Still, it's not hard to imagine a duckweed-strewn Mr Darcy emerging from the flower-lined lake.

Jane Austen spent the last eight years of her life not far away in Chawton, where she penned three of her novels – *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* – and revised the others. And while a short stay in one of the 112 luxuriously furnished bedrooms comes with no guarantee of literary fame, you'll love the spa baths, four-poster beds and stunning views of the grounds.

■ A one-night stay in a single room costs £150, whilst £500 secures a double *Duke and Duchess Suite*. Tel: (01256) 764881. Visit: www.tylneyhall.co.uk

50% OFF CUTS & COLOURS*
25% OFF ALL PRODUCTS*

KREATIVE SALON

01483 503222
www.kreative-salon.com

TIGI

KREATIVE SALON

Make your Christmas shopping easy this year with a visit to *Papichase* & find everything you need from cards, decorations and trees to wrap, ribbon and gorgeous gifts!

Diaries
Flock & photographic £6.00 each

Laser-cut cards £2.50 each

Glitter layer starburst decorations £4.00 each

Silver bear £5.00

Floral tea-for-two boxed set £12.00

Embellished gift bags £3.00 each

Papichase
48 North Street
Guildford
GU1 4TE