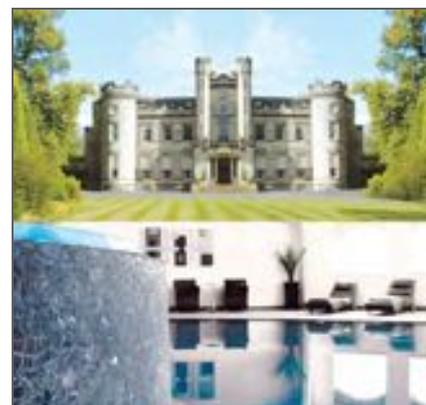


FIVE GREAT DRIVES



Autumn escapes

With the evenings drawing in and the temperature dropping, it's the perfect time to head off for a cosy weekend away. Here are five drives that take in the best of autumn's colourful displays on the way to five indulgent boutique hotels. And you can win a stay at a luxury hotel too!



Win!
A luxury stay at Airth Castle Hotel and Spa in Stirlingshire

- Four-night stay for two in a superior

1. THE NORTH

Perthshire is beautiful at any time of the year, but never more so than during autumn when the tree-lined hillsides and glens explode into wild spectrum of radiant reds and golds, reflected by the many lochs in the region.

The drive

Start your journey from Perth, continuing north along the A9 with a killer soundtrack keeping you company. Allow some time to explore **The Pass of Killiecrankie** just north of Pitlochry if you fancy a closer inspection of the autumnal hues – the walk down to Soldier's Leap alone is absolutely worth it. Formerly one of Scotland's most dangerous passes, it makes for a breathtaking riverside walk, following a steep gorge through mixed woodland teeming with wildlife.

Getting there

[Click here](#) to plan your route with RAC's new Route Planner.



room

- Two spa treatments per person
- Daily three-course dinner
- Daily Scottish breakfast

Enter the competition

For terms and conditions, click [here](#)

AIRTH CASTLE
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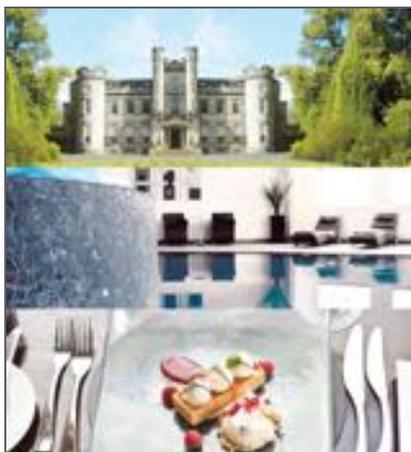
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Where to stay

Located in the Scottish Highlands, **The Cairn Lodge & Hotel** is a charming Victorian hunting lodge. Recently treated to a multi-million pound refurbishment, this boutique hotel offers a great fusion of traditional and modern design, seamlessly combining sleek lines and gloss finishes with original features. The Grill Room restaurant takes pride of place here, and is one of the few venues in the UK to feature a Josper charcoal oven – actually more of an indoor barbecue, this piece of culinary equipment counts Gordon Ramsay and Heston Blumenthal among its fans. Golfers are especially well catered for here, with some of Scotland's most famous golf courses just minutes away, while outdoor enthusiasts can get their fill at the stunning **Trossachs National Park** just 20 miles from the hotel.



➤ Win!

A luxury stay at Airth Castle Hotel and Spa in Stirlingshire

- Four-night stay for two in a superior room
- Two spa treatments per person
- Daily three-course dinner
- Daily Scottish breakfast

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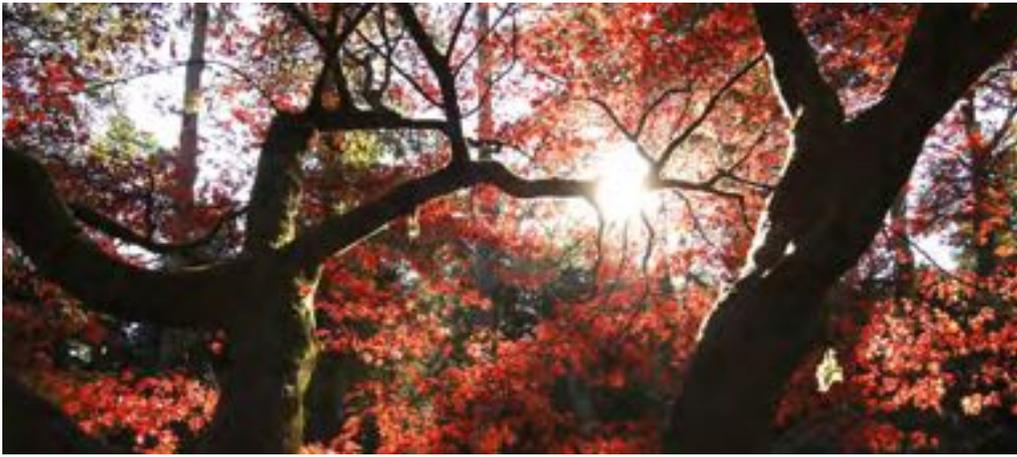
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- Cancellation & curtailment cover
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2. THE (SOUTH) WEST

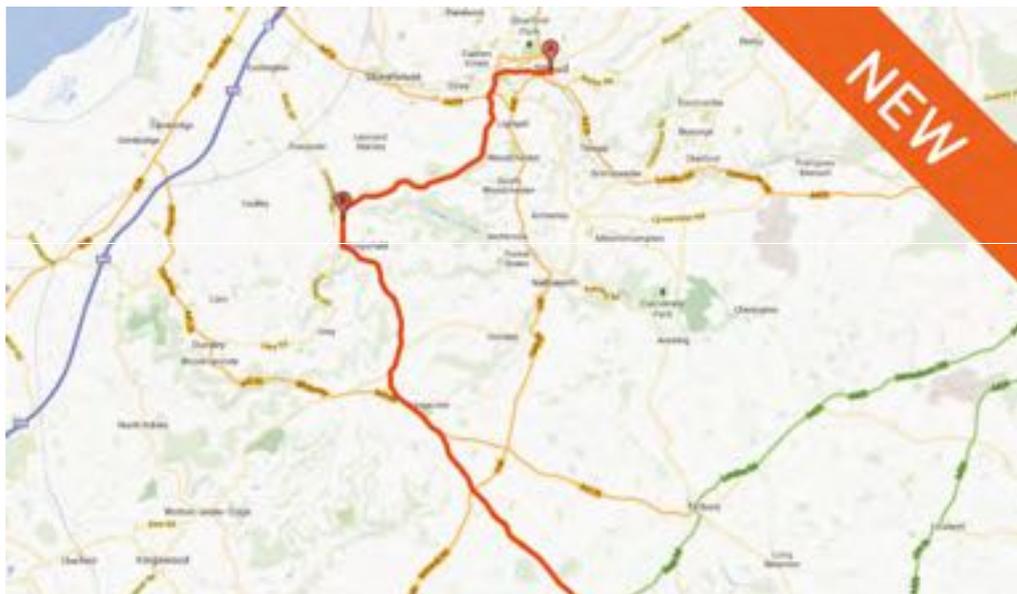
situated in the heart of the Cotswolds. Internationally renowned for its autumnal display, visitors flock to Westonbirt from all over the globe to marvel at the largest collection of maple trees in the UK. Over 18,000 Japanese maples, Korean maples, sugar maples and other rare species explode every year in what is best described as a natural firework display of vibrant oranges, yellows and reds.

The drive

Instead of opting for the more direct A46, take the more scenic B4066 from Stroud; this takes you along striking country lanes lined by turning trees, until you reach Westonbirt itself, the perfect spot for a leisurely picnic. (For great picnic inspiration, see RAC Shop offers, right.)

Getting there

[Click here](#) to plan your route with RAC's new Route Planner.



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Where to stay

Don't allow **Cotswolds88**'s simplistic name to put you off; it belies the sophistication of this intimate boutique hotel. Located in the stunningly beautiful Cotswolds village of Painswick, Cotswolds88 feels like an exercise in contradictions – but in a good way. From the outside, it appears to be the epitome of historical significance and composed restraint. However, this is in stark contrast to the edgy, tongue-in-cheek interior, where you'll find chrome mannequins and zebra print couches competing for your attention. Clearly influenced by the latest trend of blending chill-out space with luxury, Cotswolds88 is unlike anywhere else in this generally understated part of England.



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BRITISH TRAVEL AWARDS 2010
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PRESTON, CUMBRIA

3. THE SOUTH

Where to go

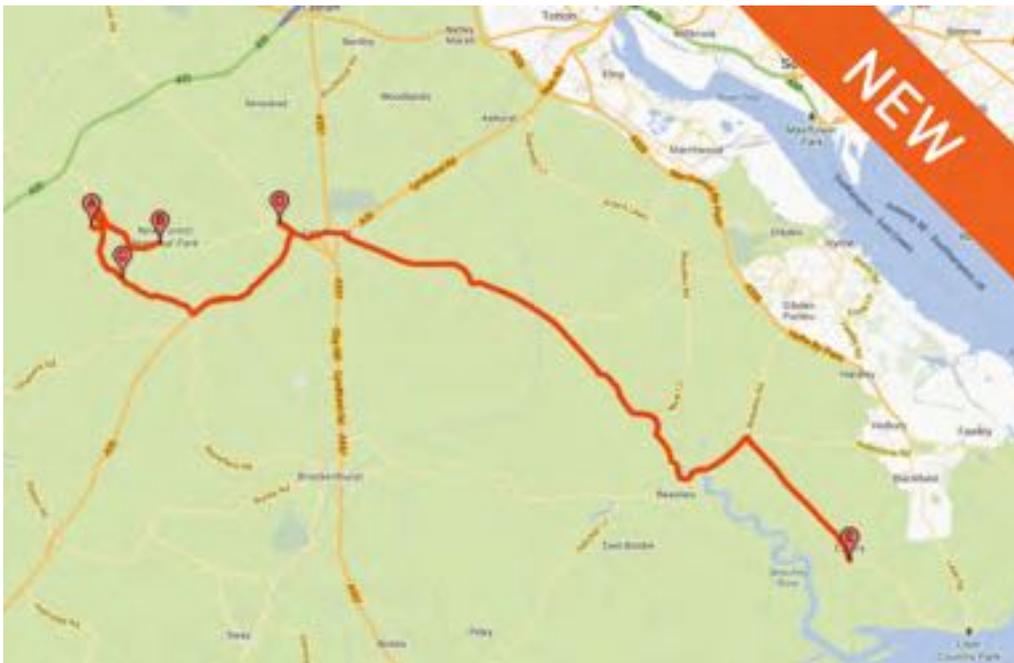
Autumn in the **New Forest** is a truly special time, when the low sun in the west draws your focus to the near-rainbow-coloured heathland. Home to the most extensive area of heather habitat in Europe, the 231-square mile forest is equally famed for its woodland, and the stretch between Bolderwood and Emery Down is among the most spectacular to marvel at turning leaves.

The drive

Just outside Bolderwood, the **Deer Sanctuary**, with its purpose-built deer-spotting platform, provides a perfect coffee stop. Coffee downed and deer hopefully spotted, continue along the spectacular Bolderwood Ornamental Drive towards Exbury Gardens. Here you can explore the gardens' special Autumn Trail, which winds past waterside maples, deciduous azaleas and numerous dogwood varieties in striking tones of russet and brass. You'd be hard pushed to find a better spot for a romantic autumn picnic. (For great picnic inspiration, see RAC Shop offers, right.)

Getting there

[Click here](#) to plan your route with RAC's new Route Planner.



Where to stay

Formerly a medieval hunting lodge dating back to the 13th Century, **Lime Wood Hotel** is an extensively renovated boutique country house hotel set in the heart of the New Forest National Park. Sumptuously decorated, this stately pile, with its primly manicured gardens and top-notch Herb House Spa, is the perfect base from which to explore the magic of the surrounding woodland. Dinner is an unmissable affair, with resident chefs Angela Hartnett and Luke Holder giving traditional British fare the kind of hearty treatment usually reserved for Italian kitchens.



4. THE (NORTH) EAST

Where to go

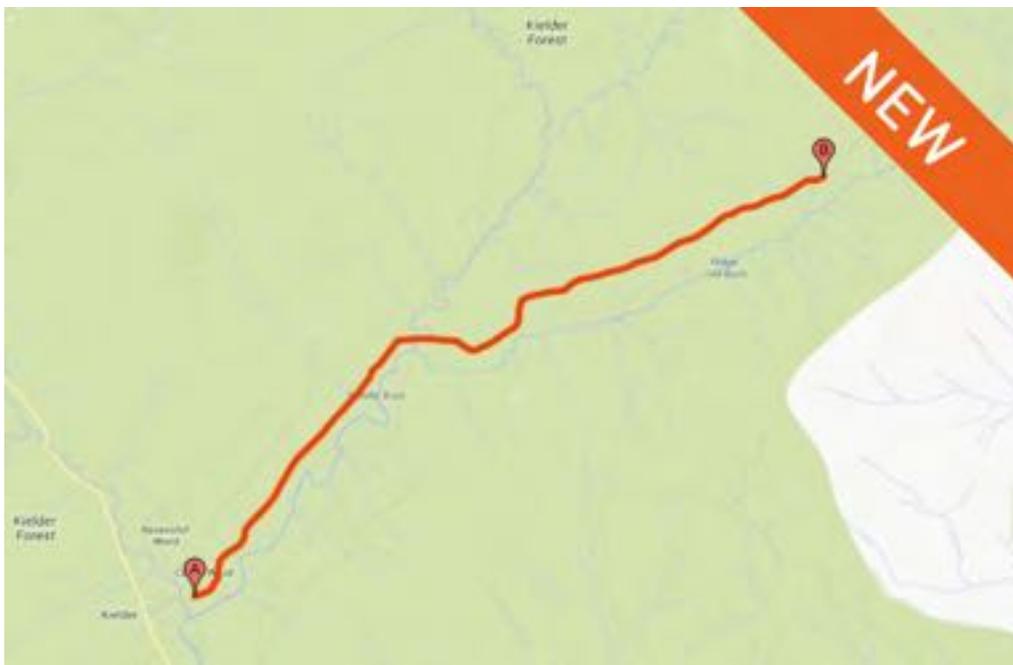
Home to the largest man-made lake in Northern Europe and measuring in at a mighty 250 square miles, **Kielder Water & Forest Park** is the largest working forest in England, and officially one of the UK's best places to visit after winning the VisitEngland's 2013 gold award for tourism excellence.

The drive

To explore the park's most dazzling autumnal displays, start from the Kielder Forest Park Visitor Centre and head down the scenic Kielder Forest Drive. This 12-mile stretch of unsealed forest track is one of England's highest roads, cresting at over 1,500ft at Blakehope Nick, where you are guaranteed unparalleled views of the colourful woodland patchwork. The road surface can be challenging at times, though a bit of preparation will save you any red-faced moments. Forest Drive continues until it meets the Pennine Way, through which you can reach other parts of the forest.

Getting there

[Click here](#) to plan your route with RAC's new Route Planner.



Where to stay

Steeped in history, with a provenance that dates back to a cousin of William the Conqueror in the 11th Century, [Otterburn Castle Country House Hotel](#) is not your average overnight option. Nestled in 32 acres of grounds stretching down to the village of Otterburn, the hotel boasts 18 comfortable en-suite bedrooms, all individually decorated.

Sumptuous as these are, you may prefer to lounge around the Garden Room with its Florentine fireplace, high ceilings and French windows overlooking the lawn and lake. Or there's always the bar housed in the old stables, which provide buckets of ambience for pre-dinner drinks.





5. FRANCE

Where to go

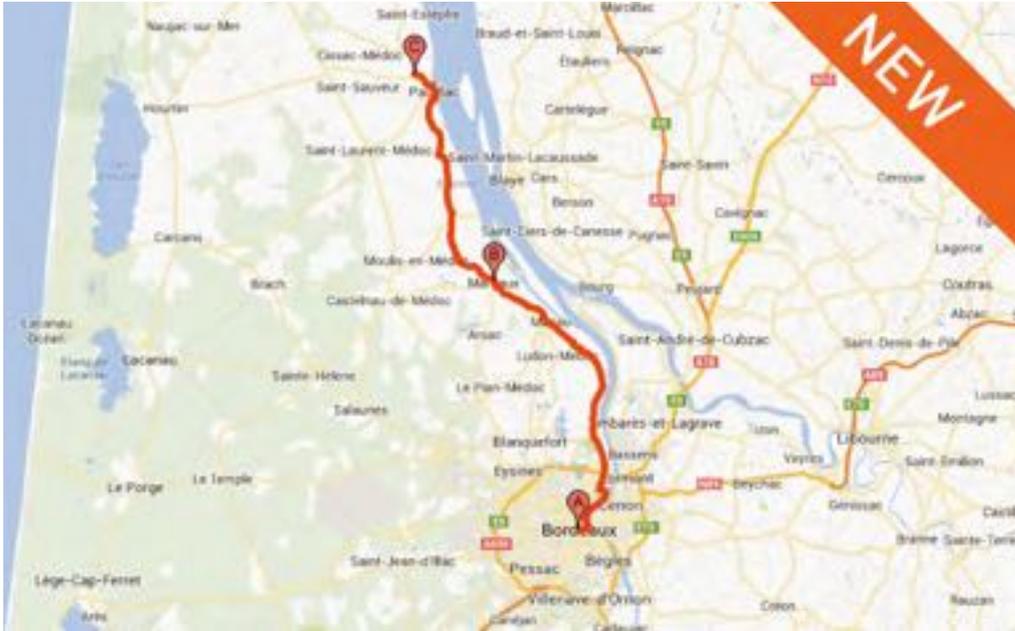
Located just north of Bordeaux on the Médoc peninsula, the already enchanting route des châteaux, also known as the Route du Médoc, is treated to an additional layer of magic during the autumn months, when row upon row of vineyards are painted in hues of ochre and ruby, and the entire region buzzes with the energy of harvest season.

The drive

Leave Bordeaux and continue along the D209 in the direction of Pauillac as it turns into the D2. A narrow road hemmed in on both sides by an endless sea of autumnal vineyards, this unassuming route is home to some of the Bordeaux region's most celebrated wine producers, including [Château Margaux](#) and, just north of Pauillac, [Château Mouton Rothschild](#). If your passengers are wine-tasting en route remember to book your visit ahead.

Getting there

[Click here](#) to plan your route with RAC's new Route Planner.



Where to stay

A sculptural iceberg of a building, the bright white façade of the [Hotel Seeko'o](#) virtually glows amid the surrounding traditional, tawny buildings. Located in the heart of Bordeaux with views over the Garonne River and the Jacques Chaban-Delmas Bridge, this funky boutique hotel is just as cutting-edge on the inside, though it never feels frigid or sterile – and children are welcome here. With the historic centre of Bordeaux a short walk away, it is easy enough to explore the city's cultural heritage – making sure you visit the [UNESCO World Heritage quays](#) – without straying far from the D2 wine route.



European breakdown cover