

REBECCA RECOMMENDS

Inspirational destinations & properties of excellence



Hogmanay in Edinburgh, Scotland's capital, is New Year's Eve unlike anywhere else.

Photo: Festivals Edinburgh

Experience The Holidays in a New Light

As much as we love our holiday traditions and rituals, there is something to be said for experiencing the familiar in an entirely different light. It freshens our perceptions, expands our minds, and can even awaken something deep within.

The streets of Edinburgh feel like a throwback to ancient times during Hogmanay (the Scottish New Year's Eve), when people light torches and parade through the streets with Vikings, bagpipes and drummers in a long, snaking "river of fire" that greets the new year.

Thanksgiving is an all-American holiday, yet many of our UK hotels celebrate the holiday with their American guests. Christmas in the UK is delightfully familiar yet different enough to make us feel we are experiencing it for the first time.

My own plans include an early celebration of my Dad's birthday, Thanksgiving and Christmas all rolled into one in a visit to Nepal with my parents in early November. It is so rewarding to travel with family and experience new places together, deepening our bonds and forming new memories.

My philosophy is to represent independently owned hotels and destination management companies that are "the best of the best." I am proud to announce that [The Tudor Room](#) at Great Fosters in Surrey just received a Michelin star, three years after opening. Congratulations!

Please feel free to contact me or any of the Rebecca Recommends team if we can assist you and your clients in any way. We love to hear from you.

Very best wishes,

Rebecca

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ENGLAND



Downward Ho! The Goring Celebrates The Cresta Run With Winter Bar

Without its early British visitors, St. Moritz would never have become the winter feast of wealth and glamour that it is today. O. R. Goring and O. G. Goring (grandfather and great-grandfather of CEO Jeremy Goring) were among the early visitors to St. Moritz, and famous for their wild toboggan rides down the famously hazardous Cresta Run.

This is the inspiration behind [The Goring's](#) Cresta Bar, an homage to the glamour of the legendary toboggan run in St. Moritz. The cozy and convivial bar will be open on the veranda from December 2016 through February 2017, overlooking the hotel's private garden. It will be decorated with a collection of archive photos and an intriguing assortment of what was needed to survive this superbly treacherous, icy run.

Jeremy Goring persuaded Benjamin Wolf, Master Sommelier of The Kulm in St. Moritz, to create some cocktails for The Cresta Bar. The result is a list of drinks that includes Thrills and Spills, Wipe Out and The Shuttlecock, named after the most hair-raising bend of the Run. Winter Magic is a stirring apple-cinnamon punch with Calvados and ginger for a restorative zing. The Kulm is also creating some bar snacks and dishes, to add to the atmosphere of The Cresta Bar at The Goring.

The Cresta Run dates to the 1880s, when five guests (four British and one Australian) formed the "Outdoor Amusements Committee" of the Kulm Hotel and set out to build a toboggan run. They plotted a splendidly dangerous three-quarter mile course from the Kulm Hotel.

Today, the run follows the original route, with a drop of 514 feet and maximum-ever speed recorded of 82.87 mph. The membership list of the St Moritz Toboggan Club (SMTTC) reads like a roll call of European aristocracy, but English is the common language in the clubhouse. Members still congregate at the Kulm Hotel's Sunny Bar for a snifter. This is Switzerland's oldest sports bar and the Cresta's unofficial "canteen".

"Let's hope The Cresta Bar tempts a few clients to hurl themselves successfully down the Cresta Run," Jeremy Goring says. "Otherwise, another cocktail will do."



Great Fosters' Tudor Room Awarded Michelin Star

Now there is one more reason to book your clients at Great Fosters, a Tudor hunting lodge just 20 minutes from Heathrow. [The Tudor Room](#) received a Michelin star, three years after opening. It was also given another prestigious award, three AA Rosettes, just one week before. Congratulations!

Born in Scotland, [Head Chef Douglas Balish](#) worked at Bohemia, a Michelin-starred restaurant in Jersey before moving to Whatley Manor, with 4 AA rosettes and 2 Michelin stars. He spent time in the kitchens of Quay in Sydney before returning to the UK in 2014 to head up The Tudor Room. Balish has a passion for simple cookery with superlative ingredients and intense flavours. Great Fosters's own kitchen garden supplies aubergines, beetroot, lettuce, tomatoes, squash, onions, courgettes and fennel, to name just a few.

If your clients are passing through London and want to see what all the fuss is about, I recommend the [London Heathrow Layover Package](#) with accommodation, full English breakfast and a chauffeur-driven car to or from London Heathrow. [Fall into Autumn](#) is another great package that includes two three-course dinners in The Estate Grill.



The Great Hall is set for a Christmas Feast during Hogwarts in the Snow at Warner Bros. Studio.
Photo: TM & © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Harry Potter Publishing Rights © JKR.

OTUK Delivers A Fabulous Family Christmas in London

Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" was set in London, but things have become considerably more splendid since Victorian times, with sparkly lights, special events and Christmas markets in unexpected places like the Tate Modern. It's especially magical for families and [Original Travel UK](#) can open the keys to the kingdom with its connections, special access and ability to create the perfect customized itinerary.

OTUK can organize all aspects of your clients' trip, including arranging hard-to-get tickets along with expert guides and drives to whisk them smoothly from one venue to another. Here are some of its top 11 ideas for families visiting London during the holidays:

1. Hogwarts in the Snow at Warner Bros. Studios
2. Christmas Festival at The Royal Albert Hall
3. Ice-skating at Somerset House
4. English Traditions at The Geffrye Museum
5. Story reading with Santa at Fortnum and Mason followed by afternoon tea in the Jubille Tea Salon
6. The Nutcracker Ballet at The Royal Opera House
7. A soccer match on Boxing Day
8. The Living Nativity at ZSL London Zoo
9. A choral service at St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey
10. Borough Market and The Southbank Winter festival
11. Winter Wonderland for thrill seekers

There is truly no better time to go to London, especially with a historically low exchange rate. The OTUK team can also assist with any last-minute trips.



Holiday Fun at Middlethorpe Hall

[Middlethorpe Hall](#) is a 17th century William and Mary country house just ten minutes from the medieval city of York, where the 13th-century walls, narrow streets and gothic cathedrals make for an enchanting Christmas destination.

St. Nicholas Fair in York is "one of the most exciting and fun markets in this country," writes Director and General Manager Lionel Chatard in Middlethorpe Hall's [most recent newsletter](#). Scents of hot mulled wine and roasted chestnuts fill the air as sellers in snug wooden chalets line the twinkling streets from November 17th to December 23rd, offering unique gifts, jewelry, homewares, crafts and local wines and cheeses. York also has many holiday festivals, including The York Early Music Christmas Festival in December.

Special events coming up include a December 9th dinner with television personality and floral designer Carl Wilde, who calls Middlethorpe Hall his "favorite hotel in the whole world". Eighteen-year-old prodigy Max Prasad, who will perform at the Royal Festival Hall in April 2017, gives a piano recital on December 11th. In January, the UK director of Champagne Taittinger hosts a black-tie four-course dinner with wines.

Now a National Trust property, Middlethorpe was built for Thomas Barlow, a prosperous master cutler who bought the estate in 1698 as a bid to establish himself as a country gentleman, a familiar pattern in English life.



An Alternative Christmas Service at Barnsley House

Built in the late 17th-century of Cotswold stone, [Barnsley House](#) is the perfect venue for a holiday visit. The warm, cozy, relaxed atmosphere paired with its friendly, professional service makes the holidays memorable.

On December 15th it hosts an alternative Christmas carol service that begins with a mulled-wine reception before a short candlelit stroll to St. Mary's Church. The service mixes traditional carols, readings by professional actors and 'thespian' singing from local choral group, The Wassailers. Full of Christmas spirit, retrace your steps and return to The Potager at Barnsley House for dinner.

It has [packages for both Christmas and New Year's](#), with the usual pleasures of afternoon tea and spa treatments with exceptional events like a Christmas Eve midnight mass at the stunning Bibury church (and a tipples on your return).



Hartwell House's Pre-Christmas Getaway

[Hartwell House](#) is one of Buckinghamshire's most celebrated country houses. Just 40 miles west of London, the National Trust property combines seclusion and exclusivity with easy access to the

The Christmas Fair at Waddesdon Manor runs from November 11th to December 16th. Guests of Hartwell House receive a VIP shopping voucher at Bicester Village, an emporium of discounted designer stores, with 10% saving on the already discounted prices.

Built in the early seventeenth century for the Hampden family, the house has both Jacobean and Georgian features with outstanding decorative plasterwork and panelling. The 46 bedrooms, including those in Hartwell Court (formerly a coach house), are individually furnished with prints, pictures and antiques. Hartwell Spa offers an indoor swimming pool and an extensive range of exercise possibilities and beauty treatments.



Westonbirt's Enchanted Christmas includes a mile-long walking trail through beautifully lit landscapes.
Photo: Paul Box.

Enjoy An Enchanted Christmas at Family-Friendly Calcot

Named the UK's Family Hotel of the Year, [Calcot](#) has a partnership with the Westonbirt National Arboretum, just three miles down the road, where it runs the restaurant. Attracting over 400,000 visitors per year, the Arboretum is internationally famous for its spectacular Autumn colors, when its succession of plants and 15,000 trees burst into a riot of bright, golden or burnished tones.

See the trees in a whole new light -- literally -- during Westonbirt's Enchanted Christmas event from late November to mid-December. The whole family can enjoy the mile-long trail through the arboretum, where all the trees are specially lit, then celebrate Christmas cheer with festive food, fun and Father Christmas.

Calcot also encourages a visit to the Royal Gardens at Highgrove, just a stone's throw from the hotel. This is the private residence of TRH Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, but it is open for [special Christmas shopping and dining events](#), including a black-tie Christmas dinner.



The Lost Gardens of Heligan in Cornwall are open every day of the year except Christmas.
Photo: The Lost Gardens of Heligan.

The Nare's Famous “No Snow Policy”

After more than 20 years at [The Nare](#), owner Toby Ashworth feels sure of one thing -- there will be no snow during winter on the Roseland Peninsula. Its remarkably mild micro-climate supports palm trees in the hotel garden, produces daffodils in time for the tables at Christmas and creates a profusion of early spring flowering shrubs in Cornwall's world-renowned gardens.

So sure is Toby of the mild micro-climate on the Roseland Peninsula, that he offers one night without charge, for those staying on a four-night break, if there is snow lying on the cocktail bar terrace for more than 24 hours. The only exception to the policy is over the Christmas and New Year period when snow is considered desirable for decorative purposes and even Ebenezer Scrooge might appreciate its attraction.

Be warned: The Nare's “No Snow Policy” has been in place for many years and there has not yet been a pay-out. The milder maritime climate in the Southwest generally means that Cornwall is spared snow, however with the current changes in the weather is this year going to be a first?



Oddfellows On The Park Joins Design Hotels

[Oddfellows On The Park](#) is the only UK hotel outside London that has been invited to join Design Hotels, the global hotel community. Based in Berlin, Design Hotels represents over 290 individually owned and operated hotels in more than 50 countries and has strict guidelines on which properties may join. The hotel must be rooted and enhanced by thoughtful design, but also must have a cultural authenticity and offer genuine hospitality.

Oddfellows On The Park is a 22-bedroom boutique hotel set to open soon in the historic Bruntwood Hall in Cheadle, just outside Manchester. It is inspired by the story of Major James Platt, the Bruntwood Hall resident who created an equestrian stud farm on the estate and added the enormously expensive ballroom where an ambitious new restaurant called [The Galloping Major](#) will be headed by Daniel Beech. Cheekily, the hotel also has a "Bridle Suite" and a bar called The Stud Room.

SCOTLAND



Hogmanay in Edinburgh is a fiery festival complete with Vikings, bagpipes and drums. Photo: Festivals Edinburgh.

Hogmanay And G&V Create A Unique New Year's Experience

from November 18th through January 7th. Edinburgh's Christmas includes the famous Street of Light, Scottish markets, shows, ice skating, and rides like the 197-foot Star Flyer, with breathtaking views over the city.

As [the only five-star hotel on the historic Royal Mile](#) in the Scottish capital, G&V is [the](#) place to stay. Its award-winning Italian restaurant, Cucina, just had a major update, and a brand new £1 million bar and lobby redevelopment is opening this month.

As wonderful as Christmas is, no one does Hogmanay (aka New Year's Eve) like the Scots. Things get started Dec. 30th, when thousands of torch-bearers join Vikings, pipes and drums and march from the historic Royal Mile to the son et lumière and fireworks finale on Calton Hill. And there's another party the next night!

G&V has a [three-night Hogmanay Package](#) that includes an exclusive six-course Hogmanay dinner in Cucina and tickets to the Edinburgh Hogmanay Street Party.



Aldourie Castle Provides The Perfect Holiday Retreat

The luxurious yet relaxed [Aldourie Castle in Scotland](#) on the shores of Loch Ness can provide exclusive group accommodation during Christmas and New Year. It is a unique experience, combining an extremely welcoming and personable property with 500-acres of diverse grounds where guests feel at home within minutes.

"We'll light the fires and let guests settle in," says Amy Jagger, Marketing Coordinator. "Later, they can put presents under the tree and let the children hang decorations before sitting down to a festive feast or enjoying an old fashioned house party."

Guest can relax in four-poster bedrooms, dine on the finest Scottish cuisine and enjoy activities that cater to both adults and children. Aldourie Castle's hospitality team can organize anything inside the castle or both on and off the estate. "Everything can happen at your client's pace, and any requirement is just an ask away," says Jagger. Aldourie Castle is also excellent for [luxury Corporate Retreats](#) and private celebrations any time of year.



Drive The North Coast 500 and Stay at The Torricon

[The Torricon](#) is already full for Christmas and Hogmanay. However, the fall and early winter is a lovely time to sit by roaring log fires, dine in luxurious surroundings and sample from more than 350 different malt whiskies.

The Torricon is the perfect place to stay while enjoying the new North Coast 500 (NC500), following a lazy loop around the gorgeous countryside of the Scottish Highlands, where the roads are gentle and the traffic minimal.

After exploring this spectacular route, guests can return to The Torricon's luxury cocoon, settling into a slow afternoon tea celebration in front of a cozy, glowing fireplace. The bedrooms are luxurious, the fine dining makes brilliant use of local ingredients, and when you tire of sitting, The Torricon has its own friendly and professional activities team to lead you forth across the sort of scenery which lifts the soul.

WALES



A Traditional Welsh Christmas at Bodysgallen Hall & Spa

Standing in over 200 acres of its own parkland, [Bodysgallen Hall & Spa](#) is the best place to enjoy Christmas with a traditional Welsh flavour. Clients arrive on Christmas Eve for a champagne reception prior to dinner. Transport can be arranged to attend Midnight Mass and they will be welcomed with port and mince pies upon their return. On Christmas Day, traditional lunch will be served and in the evening there will be a light Buffet Supper.

Known as the jewel of North Wales, this 17th-century country house hotel and a National Trust property is the perfect base for exploring the many wonders of North Wales, including World Heritage castles, National Trust properties, Snowdonia National Park and heritage steam engines.

IRELAND



Castle Leslie Available For Christmas

Castle Leslie Estate has been in the Leslie family for over 300 years, and they always keep the castle to themselves during Christmas. This year, in a break from tradition, the Leslie family is offering the castle for exclusive use the nights of December 24th, 25th and 26th. The castle has 20 bedrooms (for up to 40 people) and will enjoy full Irish breakfast, lunch and dinner for a daily rate of €15,000 (two nights minimum).

A mere 80 minutes from Dublin airport, Castle Leslie Estate offers an intimate atmosphere, old-world elegance and the ability to make one lose all sense of time and space. A break on the 1000-acre estate can be as action-packed or relaxed as you want it to be. Activities include pike fishing, a private cinema, exceptional walking trails, kayaking, clay pigeon shooting, hot air balloon rides, falconry, a fabulous spa and the famous world-class equestrian center.

FRANCE



Decouvertes Serves Up An Authentic French Christmas

Christmas in France is unlike anywhere else in the world. It glitters in the shop windows, with imaginative displays that are a delight for the eye. It sprinkles its magic aura throughout shows, concerts and restaurants. Master confectioners and chocolatiers' use all their powers to create a stunning feast of sweets.

Decouvertes, France's leading luxury destination management company, can make sure your clients have a genuine French Christmas experience. It is a time for love, friendship, sharing and a common feeling of peace with the rest of the world.

Christmas is in the pubs and bars where everyone gathers to discuss and listen to music. It is an occasion to share unforgettable moments with loved ones while enjoying the marvelous cuisine of France. Christmas is the time of the biggest exhibitions in Paris, indeed the whole of France. Decouvertes know the most authentic venues for Christmas shopping along with the concerts, bars and restaurants that are favored by locals. Your clients will experience a real French Christmas, as only the experts at Decouvertes can deliver.

USA



Discover New York Customizes Christmas Packages

Broadway Shows, and the famous Ball Drop in Times Square.

[Discover New York](#) can help you create your own customized packages with its Insider's Access program. The weekends are hosted by knowledgeable guides who deliver insider access and destinations only insiders know about.

Just put together a group of at least two guests and find a hotel that offers the price and experience your clients prefer. A country club group might want individual suites at the Mandarin-Oriental, while a group of friends might ask for quad-rooms at The Sheraton New York Times Square.

The programs start Thursday night with a welcome dinner and go through Sunday brunch. The programs are offered net. For pricing and more information on itineraries, contact Discover New York and Beyond.

NEW ZEALAND & AUSTRALIA



Southern Crossings Creates the Perfect Summer Christmas

Instead of dusting off the sleds and scraping off the ice, pack up your swimmers and pop on some sunscreen to celebrate Down Under. Christmas comes in the middle of the summer in Sydney, with sun-drenched days and balmy nights. It is a very popular travel season, but [Southern Crossings](#), Australia's leading bespoke destination management company, can still secure top-notch lodging during December and the Christmas period in 2016.

Sydney sparkles with the festive spirit from early December, but the real magic of an Aussie Christmas is celebrated with the sand between your toes on one of the city's dozens of golden beaches. Catch a concert at the Sydney Opera House or take a seaplane to lunch at one of Sydney's waterside tables. Learn to sail on Sydney Harbour or how to surf in Bondi. See the colourful start of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race on Boxing Day or enjoy a cocktail overlooking the Harbour.

If clients are dreaming of being in Sydney's for its famous New Year's Eve celebration, they must wait until next year. Sydney accommodation is all but booked up for New Year's Eve 2016.

Peak holiday season in New Zealand is even more booked up. "Now is a good time to be considering our part of the world a year in advance if you wish to stay at the preferred lodges," advises Sarah Farag. Now is a good time to book clients' Easter trip to New Zealand or their "festive holiday" for December 2017, she reports.



Artist's rendering of the new four-bedroom villa at Blanket Bay, scheduled for completion in December 2017.

Blanket Bay Builds New Four-Bedroom Villa

Recognizing that family and friend groups aren't well catered for in the luxury lodge sector, the management of [Blanket Bay](#) is creating a new four-bedroom villa perched on a cliff top with magnificent views of both Lake Wakatipu and the snow-capped Southern Alps.

"Guest requests for a complete home, separated from the main lodge building, heralded the creation of this sanctum," says Tom Butler, general manager at Blanket Bay. "The remarkable location that we've found for our villa offers unique views that can't be experienced from anywhere else on the property. By virtue of this exceptional location, absolute privacy is assured."

Each suite is complete with stone fireplace, luxurious sofas and decadent bathroom. A grand central atrium sets the scene for socializing and shared relaxing. There are multiple other areas for sitting, as well as several locations for dining.

The villa incorporates discreet security and butler accommodation, and Blanket Bay's award winning culinary team can staff the kitchen to provide sublime cuisine experiences at any time of the day. "The new villa will provide an unparalleled level of comfort, convenience and seclusion for families and friends traveling together. It can be fully supported by the lodge's exceptional food, wine and activities, or groups can choose to look after themselves," says Butler.

Local craftsmen are completing some of the elements off-site, to minimize disruption to Blanket Bay's guests during construction.

SRI LANKA



Cape Weligama overlooks the Indian Ocean, and the weather is perfect in December.

Cape Weligama Celebrates Its 2nd Year With A New Spa

Resplendent Ceylon, which owns the only two Relais & Chateaux properties on Sri Lanka: Cape Weligama on the coast near Galle, and Tea Trails in hill country, has lots of news this month. Clients can experience all the changes with a [Tea and Sea package](#) that includes four nights at Cape Weligama and three nights at Tea Trails.

First, [Cape Weligama](#) is celebrating its second anniversary with the opening of Sanctuary Spa, with four treatment rooms and tea-based treatments from the THÉMAÉ Paris. Guests can now go to the spa if they prefer that to getting treatments in their luxurious oversized bathrooms. The treatments use a custom 4 Teas Elixir which blends antioxidant green tea, regenerating white tea, soothing red tea and stimulating black tea with pure spring water.

Meanwhile, [Tea Trails](#) has two interesting wildlife initiatives. The first is a leopard conservation station at Dunkeld, in partnership with The Wilderness and Wildlife Conservation Trust. The initiative is part of a longer term project aimed at better human wildlife co-existence within the tea garden villages.

The second is a night-time safari where guests can join the resort's leading naturalist, Anuradha Ediriweera, on the bungalow-to-bungalow trails. Sighting might include three different types of cats -- fishing cat, rusty spotted cat and jungle cat -- as well as wild boar, amphibians, sleeping lizards and snakes. If they wish, guests can get involved with conservation activities, including monitoring remote cameras and observing data collected.

[The Wild Coast Tented Lodge Yala](#) will open May 2017 near the greatest concentration of leopards anywhere in the world. Its 28 tented suites on a pristine beach will offer the comfort of a luxury hotel with the excitement of a safari-style wilderness experience.

INDIA



On a recent trip to Kerala, I loved exploring the backwaters by boat.

Ventours Offers Luxury Trips To Lush Kerala

Set along the southwestern tip of India, Kerala is an unusual warm weather destination for the holidays and is developing its high-end offerings. The state is divided into three parallel strips: the coastal area of islands and peninsulas, the middle strip of rubber, tea and spice plantation; and a hilly region with tropical forests.

[Ventours recommends](#) that you start in the vibrant town of Kochi. It harbors legacies of the Portuguese, Dutch and the British, including stained glass windows of the Santa Cruz Basilica and the beautiful Mattancherry Palace. During the harvest festival, Onam, breathtaking snake boat races between the villages are an extraordinary sight, with huge canoes hold more than a hundred people. In the evenings, Kathakali dancers reenacting the legends and folk stories of Kerala.

In the famed backwaters of Kumarakom, guests can cruise the palm-fringed canals and lakes of this tropical paradise on a house boat, passing tiny settlements of thatched houses. Munnar, land of the tea estates and plantations, boasts scenery that is nothing short of breathtaking.

In Thekkady, there's a chance to see wild tuskers, the reticent Indian bison, sambar, deer and a profusion of birds and butterflies in the beautiful and wild sanctuary of Periyar. In the captivating city of Hyderabad, spend some down-time at the exquisite Falaknuma Palace. Passed on for generations like a precious jewel, this "Mirror of the Sky" was a royal guest house and is made entirely of marble.

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