

GREAT ESCAPES

Take a few days out with your best friends to celebrate your last days as a single girl – here are our suggestions for wonderful weekends all over the country

GLAMPING

Sometimes all you want is to get back to nature... but that doesn't have to mean letting go of luxury



Gorcombe Farm Activity Centre has teamed up with Honeybells to provide luxury tents nearby, so you and your hens can enjoy action-packed sports by day before retiring for a comfortable night under the stars. Activities on offer include dirt-buggy driving, clay pigeon shooting, archery and zorbing, and various tent packages are available including a luxury option with sheepskin rugs, double mattresses, duvets, pillows and towels.

www.honeybells.co.uk



This is most definitely a luxurious camping experience; you and your friends will stay in a huge vintage-style lodge tent, complete with four-poster beds, log burners, soft rugs and roll-top baths. It's a 200-acre site that you can explore on bike or foot, and at night you can sit around the fire pit toasting marshmallows after visiting one of the local pubs and restaurants (Michelin-starred favourite The Star Inn isn't far). In the morning, a hamper of fresh locally sourced breakfast ingredients will be delivered to your tent.

You can get active with a polo lesson (no riding experience necessary!), take a trip in a hot air balloon, try your hand at archery or visit York for some shopping. Being out in the wild doesn't mean you can't indulge yourselves; you can arrange for on-site treatments from a mobile beauty spa. Prices start from £75 per tent, sleeping four, on a Sunday night.

www.jollydaysglamping.co.uk

ALSO CHECK OUT...

Henlow Bridge Lakes, Bedfordshire

Go 'podding' at this campsite in a wooden pod complete with carpeted floors, TV and heaters. You'll also have your own private brick-built barbecue area.

www.henlowbridgelakes.co.uk

Secret Meadows, Suffolk

One to convert even the most reluctant of campers, Secret Meadows has luxury lodge and bell tents, a gypsy caravan and the very cute converted wooden horsebox truck with a 'Middle Earth' theme, the Hobbit Box. On-site workshops and complimentary therapies are available, plus delicious food packages – and even your own hen coop to provide you with fresh eggs.

www.secretmeadows.co.uk

Glamping Holiday, Surrey

Perfect for those who want to enjoy the great outdoors with their girlfriends, there's lots to do around this site. You can go fishing or clay pigeon shooting, and there are plenty of walking and cycling routes, with bikes available for hire locally. Horse riding can be arranged, and watersports are available at nearby Southwater Park.

www.glampingholiday.co.uk

Oaker Wood Leisure, Herefordshire

Get all your friends together here to stay in the new wooden glamping pods where you'll have exclusive use of the camp area. You can gather at night around the campfire under the twinkling fairy lights and there's a covered communal dining area and barbecue hut. A host of activities can be arranged, including quad biking, high ropes, paintballing and raft building.

www.oakerwoodleisure.co.uk

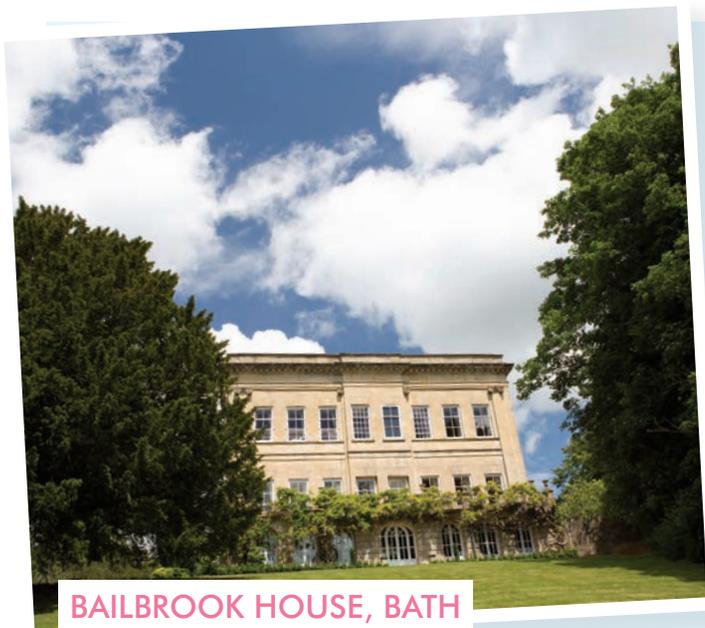
CITY BREAK

You can have it all on a weekend break in the city – but where to go? Let us help you...



THE MET HOTEL, LEEDS

If you're having a big night out with your friends, spending the night in a hotel means you don't have to worry about catching the last train home and someone else will even cook you breakfast. It doesn't have to just be about collapsing into bed at the end of the evening though; at the Met Hotel, staff are happy to assist in arranging fun activities. From a girlie movie night, complete with DVDs, popcorn and pizza; or in-room beauty treatments; to Wii games in a room set up just for you – ask and they'll help you sort it out. All you have to do is bring your coordinating onesies. www.hotelmetleeds.co.uk



BAILBROOK HOUSE, BATH

For a chic hen weekend with some in-built pampering, Bath is the answer. Consider a trip to Bailbrook House, where you can enjoy afternoon tea in the Royal Lounges. There's the option to pre-book canapés and cocktails to be served before you head out for an evening in the city, or you could upgrade to a champagne breakfast in a private dining room for the perfect end to your stay. Tickets for a for a two-hour spa session at the Thermae Bath Spa are included, which can be used any day during your stay. www.bailbrookhouse.co.uk

HOUSETRIP, LONDON

Think you can't afford a hen weekend in London? Jo Fletcher-Cross finds a way...

London is an incredible place to spend a few days, but there's no doubt that the cost of hotels can be scary, especially for a large group. There's another way, though, and it's perfect for a hen weekend. In London recently for a concert – I could pretend that it was for something hip and sophisticated, but no, it was Dolly Parton – I stayed at an apartment in Greenwich, right on the Thames and just a few minutes' walk from the O2. The chic flat, complete with balcony overlooking the river, free Wi-Fi, fully equipped kitchen and funky furnishings, was provided through HouseTrip. You might not have thought of using a holiday rental company for a hen weekend but for costly, sought-after destinations like London, it's a great idea. The company only lets entire homes, with every one screened by a team of experts, so you can get a whole house for the price of a single hotel room – and the owner of the home is only paid once you've checked in and you're happy, so you won't get ripped off or stuck in a dodgy pad.

There are lots of places to rent in London, the UK and around the world on HouseTrip's website – 320,000 homes in 20,000 destinations so far – but Greenwich is a great choice for a hen weekend. You could, like me, take in some music at the O2 while you're there. I also recommend bowling and cocktails at Brooklyn Bowl (london.brooklynbowl.com), enjoying a tour round the beautiful and historic buildings in the area with a guide (www.visitgreenwich.org.uk), or doing some shopping at bustling Greenwich Market. There's also a plethora of exciting local bars and restaurants: for fabulous steak and more cocktails, try Rivington Grill Greenwich (www.rivingtongreenwich.co.uk). It's only a short tube or boat ride into central London if you want to party in the middle of town, too.

My apartment could sleep up to five people and cost from £118 per night. Find out more at www.housetrip.com

ALSO CHECK OUT...

Blue Rainbow Aparthotels, Manchester

For a home-from-home experience right by Manchester's Northern Quarter – perfect for exploring nearby cocktail bars – consider Blue Rainbow. As well as all the shopping, dancing and drinking opportunities on your doorstep, you can enjoy time in the spacious five-star luxury apartment and order wine, beer and champagne from an exclusive menu. www.bluerainbowapartments.com

COUNTRY HOUSE

Get away from it all by heading to a rural retreat with your mates



BEDFORD LODGE, NEWMARKET

Bedford Lodge is the only four-star hotel in Newmarket, and its country house vibe is perfect for a relaxing break with your best girls. The rooms are chic and comfortable and it's close to Cambridge and Bury St Edmunds for a bit of shopping or culture – but once you've seen the spa you might never make it out the door. Whether you're sampling the five different water experiences in the spacious hydrotherapy pool, bobbing around in the outdoor rooftop hot tub or exploring the thermal area, you're bound to have a relaxing time. Indulge in an ESPA facial or Rasul mud treatment, or get big-night ready with a manicure or pedicure. www.bedfordlodgehotel.co.uk

NORTON PARK, WINCHESTER

Norton Park isn't just a beautiful country manor house; it's the perfect place to celebrate with your hens. It offers a fabulous Ultimate Slumber Party package, which even includes your own butler to cater to your every whim. With sole use of 13 bedrooms and six entertainment rooms, you'll enjoy dinner and drinks before an evening of fun and party games. Everyone will receive a pampering spa treatment as well as full use of the hotel's health club facilities. www.qhotels.co.uk



ANFIELD HOUSE, LIVERPOOL

For the ultimate house party, you and up to 33 of your best friends could hire Anfield House, just a stone's throw from Liverpool. There's an on-site nightclub – seriously – complete with bar, fridges, disco lights, seating, TV and docking station. There's even a pole, should the urge to pole dance strike. A day at the races can be organised, barbecues arranged on the decked garden terrace, croquet on the lawns, or you could head for the large games room for a bit of pool hustling. You can arrange for almost any kind of catering to be provided, so you don't even have to worry about cooking – or clearing up. Once you've exhausted – or attempted to exhaust – the possibilities of the house, it's an easy trip into Liverpool for a big night out, if that's what you fancy. www.kateandtoms.com



ALSO CHECK OUT...

Fanhams Hall Hotel, Hertfordshire

You fancy a luxury retreat complete with its own karaoke bar? Not a problem. Fanhams Hall has just that, and also included in the Karaoke Klub package are popcorn, slushies and a private bar. Your dedicated events planner will take care of all your party requirements; all you have to do is choose your song. www.ehvenues.com

New Hall Hotel, Sutton Coldfield

This 800-year-old building is reputed to be the oldest inhabited moated manor house in England. It offers packages that are perfect for the stressed-out bride-to-be and her hens, which include pre-dinner champagne and canapés, a three-course meal in a

private dining room, overnight accommodation, full breakfast and a 55-minute spa combo treatment; the bride also receives a complimentary room upgrade. www.handpickedhotels.co.uk

Stapleford Park Country House Hotel, nr Melton Mowbray

Surrounded by 500 acres of Capability Brown-designed grounds that are just perfect for strolling around, pretending that this is your new crib, Stapleford Park is a beautiful location for a few days away with your besties. Complete with luxury spa, two-AA Rosette restaurant and 18-hole championship golf course, it also offers a wide variety of country pursuits including shooting, riding and falconry. If you suspect that you're to the manor born, check it out. www.staplefordpark.com