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Wealthy Americans are heading to this corner of England for Thanksgiving

Statesiders seeking a picture-perfect holiday home - and warm pints at the pub - are spending millions in this rural region

By Zoe Dare Hall

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If you're still smarting about this year's summer that never was, chances are you're not popping corks over the impending descent into winter. The dark soupy days that become night-time around mid-afternoon. Supermarket shelves hijacked weeks ago by Christmas. Bah humbug. The English winter, who'd have it?

Well, Americans, actually. They can't get enough of it – especially as, after a year's hiatus, travel to the UK is quarantine-free again. Americans are particularly keen a trip over here involves the countryside. It's *The Holiday* and *Bridget Jones* come to life: wet dogs and muddy wellies, thatched cottages and warm pints next to roaring fires.



Tormarton Court in Badminton is a seven-bed Georgian house set in 10 acres of grounds and gardens; for sale at £4.75m, Savills | CREDIT: Tormarton Court in Badminton is a seven-bed Georgian house set in 10 acres of grounds and gardens; for sale at £4.75m, Savills

London buying agent Jo Eccles, founder of Eccord, says interest from US buyers is nearly back to pre-pandemic levels. Her wealthy clients are spending several million on large family homes in West London – Eccles reckons 60%-70% of pupils at Notting Hill's private schools are from American families who have relocated here. Then they are turning their attention to buying country farmhouses and estates to use at weekends.

Other Americans, however, are thinking purely of the winter season. Harry Gladwin, partner at The Buying Solution, mentions a US client who has bought a four-bedroom house near Chipping Norton – “the heart of the North Cotswolds” – with the aim of spending November and December there each year.

“The season kicks off with the Hunt Ball in early November, where they can reintegrate themselves with friends. Then they spend much of the lead-up to New Year driven game shooting, which isn't on offer in the same way elsewhere in the world,” says Gladwin.



The Dower House near Cirencester, a classic Cotswolds Grade II listed village house, £2.7m, Knight Frank

“There’s a Christmas magic which is bought into by overseas – and particularly American – buyers in the British countryside, which goes beyond merely the desire for a bolthole. They invite friends and family over for Christmas, often catered for by local chefs, then fly back in early January.” And the rest of the year? They reap the handsome rewards of short-letting their Cotswolds homes.

Kingham and Cirencester, with their famous Christmas fairs, are particular hotspots for American buyers, adds Gemma Maclaren, the Cotswolds specialist for Middleton Advisors. “Those looking for a community Christmas are drawn to the village of Broadway, where, if it snows, the locals sledge down from the tower, the highest castle in the Cotswolds.”

If that all sounds dreamily Alpine, Charlie Wells, head of buying agency Prime Purchase, says that other than the French or Swiss mountains, perhaps, “you wouldn’t want to be anywhere but the Cotswolds at Christmas”. He’s fresh from showing some American clients around the Slaughters - one of five US families he’s currently acting for, with between £5m-£30m to spend on their Cotswolds winter idyll.



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D'Ambrosi Fine Foods in Stow-on-the-Wold

“As one of them said to me this week, it’s almost as pretty in the winter in the Cotswolds as is it in the summer. It doesn’t become bare and barren and it still has immense charm,” says Wells. “You may not get guaranteed snow, but you get a guaranteed festival feel.”

These high-spending Americans want to be between “the three city pins” of Oxford, Cheltenham and Bath, according to Wells. “They love Tetbury, Cirencester, Moreton-in-Marsh and Stow-on-the-Wold. The other day my client followed up a house viewing with a trip to Daylesford, followed by Burford garden centre.”

Property-wise, it’s all about luxury period houses. “They want a proper English country house, whether that’s a modest rectory or a manor house. And nothing newer than Georgian. They want an understated trophy home with a small ‘t’. There is no brashness here,” Wells comments.

And the ideal spot is rural, but not remote, so small market towns fit the bill. “They want quality restaurants, delis and things to do, and to find like-minded souls – including Brits they have done business with transatlantically,” says Wells.

Most, sooner or later, will gravitate to Stow-on-the-Wold where, within a honeystone building near the market square – with an unmissable façade adorned with a Star-Spangled Banner – you’ll find mouthwatering shrimp rolls and house-cured pastrami, low and slow smoked ribs and potato salad zhuzhed up with smoked paprika and jalapeno. This is [D’Ambrosi Fine Foods](#), a gourmet magnet for the Cotswolds’ American community and anyone else with a love of American-influenced cuisine.



Four-bed house in Chedworth, with equestrian facilities, set in 24 acres - £3.3m through Knight Frank | CREDIT: Knight Frank

It's run by Andrew and Jesse d'Ambrosi – he a 44-year-old Brooklynite who has been executive chef at some of New York's best restaurants, including Le Cirque and Michelin-starred Rouge Tomato; she, a 39-year-old Bostonian interior designer. They, and their young daughter Rose, moved to Stow in August 2019, opened D'Ambrosi five months later, just before lockdown – and fortuitously found a devoted following, providing restaurant-quality food to go, along with fine wines, homemade candles and floristry.

“We knew the clientele existed here – Stow is a working town and everything is here, beautiful shops, organic markets, accountants, publicists and fabulous schools,” says Jesse. For Americans, she says, Stow is the equivalent of living in affluent Westchester and commuting into New York City. “In the blink of an eye you're in Oxford. Another blink and you're in Paddington. It's rural but it feels metropolitan.”



Southern fried chicken on the menu at D'Ambrosi

It's mainly North East coasters who lap up the Cotswolds winter scene, she adds, “so they're used to the cold” - though she has recently met some recent arrivals from Tennessee, Texas and South Carolina. “Culturally, Americans really enjoy the pubs – the experience of going for a pint with their dog,” she says. And the area's American residents are typically drawn to “cute cottages or barn conversions” (she and Andrew live in a converted barn in the middle of nowhere, she adds). Some are taking long leases on manor houses. “We all want a sense of history,” says Jesse.

Now, the D'Ambrosis are busy working on their Thanksgiving menu. For Christmas, Andrew is planning a Chinese American theme, “a New York tradition on Christmas Day,” he says. But what

also fly off the shelves are the “kitsch” products that Jesse introduced as a joke – the likes of Triscuits, Swedish Fish sweets and Welch’s Grape Jelly. “I’d prefer Galichons [French crepe-thin crackers filled with Roquefort] to a bag of hot Cheetos any day. But Americans have a huge



Elegant interiors at Tormarton Court, on sale with Savills

nostalgia for these things.”

There’s a new American dream emerging in the Cotswolds, though. It’s the quintessential country house, “but with bells and whistles,” comments Charlie Warner, partner at Heaton & Partners buying agents. “They won’t usually push the button on a beamed cottage or Cotswolds stone house unless it has at least some extras – especially a whopping great extension at the back, with bifold doors, high ceilings and air conditioning.”

For those heading over for the holidays this winter, they may want to substitute the air con for a roaring great fire.

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