

One-off weekends

Clear calendar space for these extra-special weekend ideas that take place at limited times only

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Join a wine fight in Spain

The annual tomato fight in the Spanish town of Buñol has become world-famous. For a lesser-known alternative – and a step up in sophistication – the Batalla del Vino deserves attention. The ‘Battle of Wine’ takes place at the end of June on a hill outside the town of Haro, in the northern Spanish region of La Rioja. Wine tour specialist Smooth Red runs a four-day trip that lets you take part in the splashing frenzy. Over the course of one morning, all revellers’ clothes will be dyed a fetching pale purple. On the other days, you’ll have plenty of time to appreciate the vino in the standard, measured way. The first evening, head out from your hotel for a tapas crawl in the pilgrim’s rest town of Logroño; the following day you’ll visit three Rioja wineries, including one dating from the 14th century. While the tour as a whole is self-drive, for the winery visits at least you will have a designated chauffeur and guide (*from £994pp incl accommodation, departing 27 June 2019; smoothred.com*).

ARRIVE Car hire and return flights to Bilbao are included in the package, though it costs extra to check in hold luggage. →



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Cast a sword in Wales

The Greek poet Hesiod thought the age of bronze was a more heroic era than his own mundane age of iron. And if you take home a bronze sword from one of Dave Chapman’s workshops, you, too, might see something legendary in its blade – shorter than your typical medieval model, but with a leaf-like curve. In a foundry hidden in rural mid-Wales, a small group gather for a two-day experience that goes through every stage of making a replica British Bronze Age sword, from melting down the copper and tin to start the process, through the polishing and sharpening, to fixing on a carved oak hilt. The equipment might be modern (to use technology that existed 3,500 years ago would require longer than a weekend) but the copper-green flames from the furnace and the white heat of the metal are just what ancient swordsmiths would have seen (*£275pp; 6–7 April 2019; bronzeagefoundry.com*).

ARRIVE The residential course takes place near Rhayader in mid-Wales, under two hours’ drive from Cardiff, and two and a half hours from Birmingham. The closest train station is Llandrindod Wells.

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Take the British Pullman to Cornwall

The Belmond British Pullman is the domestic cousin of the Orient Express, a train that transports its passengers not just through rural surrounds, but back in time, too – beyond standing-room-only commuter lines, beyond the Beeching Axe, to restored 1920s and 1930s elegance. Unlike its Poirot-favoured Continental partner, it isn't



a sleeper train, but it's possible to experience it on a three-day short break to Cornwall in late spring (*programmes from £1,100pp incl hotel accommodation; belmond.com*). Aside from the wood-panelled, armchair-fitted luxury of the coaches themselves, guests can choose from options including a lunch at Jamie Oliver's Fifteen Restaurant, a stay at Falmouth's seafront Royal Duchy Hotel, and a visit to the botanical marvels of the Eden Project and the Lost Gardens of Heligan. **ARRIVE** All the programmes share the same outbound train departure from London Victoria on the morning of Friday 31 May, and return on Sunday 2 June.

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See Berlin museums at night

Museum-lovers face two main challenges when trying to see as much as possible in a city break: closing time (typically around 5pm) and aching feet. Come to Berlin on 31 August 2019, and you'll find 80 or more museums open until 2am. Stamina and comfy shoes are still essential, but special shuttle buses can help ease foot strain. Berlin was the first city to launch a Long Night of the Museums, and is an ideal location, with its World Heritage-listed Museum Island. Join the after-dark flow here for cross-cultural insights over ancient treasures such as the Nefertiti Bust, or immerse yourself in Berlin-specific displays, such as recreations of vanished East German life at the DDR Museum (*museum pass £16; lange-nacht-der-museen.de*). **ARRIVE** Fly to Berlin's Schönefeld or Tegel airports (*from £60; eurowings.com*). **STAY** Orania. Berlin is a gorgeous hotel in a sensitively restored 1913 building in Kreuzberg (*from £195; orania.berlin*).



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Build a timber raft in Sweden

Until 1991, sightseers on the banks of the Klarälven might have spotted vast mats of timber being floated downstream. Though the forestry business has moved on, this long, slow river that crosses into Sweden from Norway has kept a few reminders of its log-bearing days. You can help maintain this heritage by learning to build your own timber raft out of logs roped together, and then pilot it down the river, looking out for elk peering from the forest. Nature Travels' river trips through rural Värmland are low on frills, with nights spent in camping cabins. As well as some longer adventures, there's a two-day 'taster' trip that's ideal for a weekend. At the end of your trip, you simply untie the logs, ready for them to be reused (*from £150pp for weekend trips departing 3 July–18 August 2019; naturetravels.co.uk*). **ARRIVE** The closest major airport for rafting on the Klarälven is Oslo, in Norway (*from £55; ryanair.com*). **STAY** Rest at the start or end of the trip in nearby Torsby at the cheerful, lemon-coloured Hotell Örnen (*from £110; hotellornen.se*). →



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