

The heat is on

Food and warmth are two of our most primal needs.

Rachel Walker makes her way round the UK's cosiest fireside dining spots





Getting warmer
The Potting Shed,
Malmesbury,
Wiltshire

GUARDIAN PICTURES

Ever since humans discovered fire, we have been utterly enthralled. My father can't resist dragging whole branches onto his bonfires, sometimes dousing them with petrol for good measure. One grew so out of control, it smoked out the local pub on VE day (the veterans said it was "atmospheric"). Likewise, my mother-in-law once set her chimney alight and the volunteer fire brigade had to be called out, much to everyone's delight. Most people have a similar repertoire of stories about a time when a base, pyromaniacal lust got out of hand.

The tradition of fireside dining is as ancient as fire itself. What started with tribes crouching around a fire to cook morsels they had hunted evolved into basic pots and pans in basic kitchens. Early inns were equipped with big fireplaces for practical reasons: cooking and heating. Of course, electric ovens and central heating replaced this, but as fashion moves in circles, so inglenook fireplaces have been lovingly restored, propelled back to the heart of the action.

Lots of city pubs and restaurants have followed suit, moving away from stark lighting and filament bulbs to soft, flickering firelight or candlelight. Whether it's an old pub with a stinking schnauzer curled up in front of a fireplace, or a pot-belly stove burning smokeless logs, flanked by sofas and Sunday papers, nothing can replicate the comfort of a roaring fire.

LONDON AND SOUTHEAST

MOST UNEXPECTED

Thomas's at Burberry, Regent Street, London W1

Regent Street might not be the obvious location for a classic fireside scenario, but Thomas's, the cafe at the Burberry flagship store, is a surprisingly bright and peaceful spot to unwind. From Eastleach bacon breakfasts through to Sutton Hoo chicken and Cropwell Bishop stilton tart for lunch, the emphasis is on regional ingredients. From ham to handbags — a celebration of Britishness.

uk.burberry.com/stores/regent-street-store

style, with classic decor and hearty seasonal food. The prospect of its 22-hour slow-roasted pork belly, crackling and apple sauce is certainly enough to propel me back up Holly Mount.

hollybushhampstead.co.uk

NEIGHBOURHOOD JOINT

The Abbeville, Clapham, London SW4

It's artfully understated here, with mismatched chairs, beautiful old artwork and a collection of canine "regulars". The food adds to the homely feeling: well-seasoned soups, slow-cooked meat and banoffee pie. No wonder it's often packed, especially at the weekends.

theabbeville.co.uk

HISTORIC HILLTOP

The Holly Bush, Hampstead, London NW3

Fireside seats are highly contested among visitors who arrive fresh from the heath. There's a certain irony in this pub being renowned for its fireplace. In a past life, it was Hampstead Assembly Rooms, where Michael Faraday once lectured on the pioneering gas light. Now it's rooted in old British

GOURMAND'S DELIGHT

The Earl Spencer, Southfields, London SW18

The grand proportions and open fireplace are a hint that this Edwardian pub has been around for a while, and the menu breathes tradition, too. The bread is baked on site, fish is smoked out back and locally brewed ale is served. But don't think of the kitchen as anything other than

forward-thinking. It's been fronting the charge in quality pub food for years, with Michelin approval in the form of a Bib Gourmand.

theearlspencer.com

CLASSIC CUISINE

The Palmerston, East Dulwich, London SE22

Wood-panelled rooms and two blazing fires achieve a countryside-style cosiness in the heart of East Dulwich. The Sunday roasts are a sight to behold: pink beef, swimming in gravy and topped with a whopper of a yorkshire pudding. The extensive wine list shows that this is a step up from a standard boozier, but it's not reflected in the prices or a sense of haughtiness: it's as good a destination for a pint as a three-course meal.

thepalmerston.co.uk

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Stovell's, Chobham, Surrey

Serving contemporary cuisine from a Tudor farmhouse, Stovell's is something of a riddle. Plates of coal-torched mackerel and dishes of kefir fool are served in dining rooms framed with black beams and roaring wood fires. This old-meets-new ethos is echoed in the kitchen, where chefs Fernando and Kristy Stovell use a traditional wood-fired oven, alongside robata grills and blowtorches, to create plates that pair veal with ponzu dashi, and Cornish cod with hispi cabbage and cocoa beans.

stovells.com

SUSSEX SCRUMPTIOUSNESS

Pilgrim's Rest, Battle, East Sussex

This eccentric little cafe has its own ghost and a secret passage under the cast-iron hearth in the fireplace that links it to neighbouring Battle Abbey. A house has existed on the site since 1340, but its current incarnation as a tearoom serves up a strong line in scones and teacakes, as well as its signature dish, the Scrumptet — two crumpets, melted cheese, bacon and coleslaw — best enjoyed with a Hepworth Sussex ale in front of the fire.

pilgrimsrestbattle.co.uk

SPECIAL AGENT

The Duck, Pett Bottom, Kent

It doesn't come more British than a fireside seat here, where Ian Fleming is said to have written *You Only Live Twice*; the Duck even gets a mention in M's obituary for Bond. Britishness also abounds in the menu — smoked mackerel, game faggots, treacle tart — as well as in the Friday wine-and-cheese nights, a very civilised and Bondishly suave way to end the week.

theduckpettbottom.com

WEST AND SOUTHWEST THE UPPER CRUST

The Wild Rabbit, Kingham, Oxfordshire

It's velouté here, not soup, tomatoes are heritage and each dessert listing comes with its own wine pairing. Lady Bamford, the founder of Daylesford, is behind the pub's recent restoration, and her former private chef, Adam Caisley, is behind the beautiful dishes. There's no better place to dip a toe into the Chipping Norton scene, so order a glass of Daylesford prosecco and cosy up by one of the fireplaces.

thewildrabbit.co.uk

BEST OF BRITISH

The Potting Shed, Malmesbury, Wiltshire

The agricultural equipment and odd bit of taxidermy create an eclectic look that's balanced by a slick menu. Potatoes are cooked in goose fat, herb-crusting pheasant comes with chestnut mayonnaise, and the sticky toffee pudding is the crowning glory. You won't be able to move anywhere quickly afterwards, though, so put another log on the fire and sit back with the papers.

thepottingshedpub.com

OLD MEETS NEW

The Muddy Duck, Monkton Farleigh, Bath, Wiltshire

Harissa-spiced lamb and smoked aubergine appear here alongside more traditional pub grub. Parts of the 17th-century inn remain unchanged, including the ancient fireplace and the views out over the hillside hamlet, but the dishes,



“The tradition of fireside dining is as ancient as fire itself”

slick presentation and beautiful decor roots the Muddy Duck firmly in the 21st century.

themuddyduckbath.co.uk

FILM-STAR GOOD LOOKS

The Lord Poulett Arms, Hinton St George, Somerset

Worn rugs, hamstone walls and dried hops hanging from beams lend a film-set rusticity, but the food is proof it's not a case of style over substance. Delicious pies and big puddings warm diners to the core. Finish with a cheeseboard of local delicacies such as Wookey Hole cheddar, and eke out the afternoon with a game of chess and a real ale in front of the fire.

lordpoulettarms.com

COASTAL CALM

The Ferryboat Inn, Helford Passage, Cornwall

On blustery afternoons, diners can watch moored-up day boats

bobbing on the estuary from a snug spot next to the fire at this 16th-century inn. The “sea-to-plate” approach means that the crab in the Cornish rarebit and the mussels steamed in white wine are procured locally, but it's not all about fish. Hearty classics such as bangers and mash or ham and egg are also served at this charming Wright Brothers-owned restaurant.

thewrightbrothers.co.uk/ferryboat-inn.html

EAST, MIDLANDS AND NORTH

FAMILY AFFAIR

The Six Bells, Preston St Mary, Suffolk

The cod batter is made with the local Adnams ale, and the cheeseboard comes with delicious walnut toast. The attention to detail is typical of the London-based gastro-pub group ETM, founded by brothers Ed and Tom Martin. This



Flaming desire The outside fireplace at Links House in Dornoch, above. The 'cooking apparatus' at the Gunton Arms, Norfolk, left. The Earl Spencer in southwest London, far left

outpost is in their parents' village and embraces its location with roaring fires, taxidermy and respectful use of local ingredients. thesixbellspreston.com

FOR MEAT-LOVERS
The Gunton Arms, Thorpe Market, Cromer, Norfolk

The hunks of beef that hang over the open fire in the Elk Room create a scene to rival the Hirst and Emin artworks dotted around the walls. Stuart Tattersall, former head chef at Hix, uses the hearth as cooking apparatus, letting the flames lick the cuts of meat and the smoke pack on the flavour. This restaurant is set in a 1,000-acre deer park, so start with a venison sausage roll — you'll know it hasn't travelled far. theguntonarms.co.uk

BAVARIAN BEER HALL
Albert's Schloss, Manchester

From its bavette-steak brunches to the crispy pork knuckle, Albert's Schloss is confirmation that the trend for Bavarian cuisine is here to stay. As night falls, the pilsner flows freely and the long benches fill with revellers clinking tankards. Seek respite the following morning

by bagging a spot next to the fire, as well as a strong coffee and one of the "haus-made" pretzels. albertsschloss.co.uk

MICHELIN-STARRED
The Yorke Arms, Pateley Bridge, Harrogate, North Yorkshire

Located in the Yorkshire Dales, this 18th-century inn has become a destination, thanks to Frances Atkins's Michelin star, as well as her new-found television fame on Great British Menu. It still does a relaxed bar lunch — wensleydale soufflé or devilled kidneys — but the show stopper is the eight-course evening tasting menu, which winds down with coffee and petits fours by the log fire in the sitting room. yorke-arms.co.uk

FINDING TRUE NORTH
The Rose & Crown, Romalldkirk Teesdale

With your walking boots drying by the fire, a sausage sandwich and pint of Black Sheep in hand, you'll find the only downside to the 18th-century Rose & Crown is having to leave. Enjoy a fireside meal at the bar, or spend a more formal evening in the restaurant.

From braised Herdwick mutton and Teesdale blue cheese, it's a great northern spread from start to finish. rose-and-crown.co.uk

DUCKS IN A ROW
Lord Crewe Arms, Blanchland, County Durham

Australian chef Simon Hicks has adapted his barbecue style to the on-site apparatus, and the result is spectacular, with Goosnargh ducks threaded onto metre-long skewers and cooked in a cavernous ancient fireplace. The elegant restaurant has its own beautiful fireplace, but the most atmospheric seats are in the larders, where guests can keep a greedy eye on the roasting fowl. lordcrewearmsblanchland.co.uk

AFTERNOON TEA
Jesmond Dene House, Newcastle

Afternoon tea is a seasonal affair here: while the garden room makes a lovely setting in the summer, ask for a table in the wood-panelled billiard room when it gets chillier and hunker down next to the fire. The menu changes seasonally, too: finger sandwiches and scones are followed by delights such as the cranberry and white chocolate macaroon, or the mulled pear and cinnamon cheesecake sundae. jesmonddenehouse.co.uk

WALES, SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

PHOENIX FROM THE FLAMES
Llangoed Hall, Powys, Wales

It's hard to believe this Edwardian estate had fallen into disrepair before Sir Bernard Ashley, the husband of Laura Ashley, breathed life back into it. Visitors to the Wye Valley should drop in, if only for an afternoon tea served fireside in the main lounge or morning room. The Welsh tea includes thick slices of bara brith, while the Laura Ashley afternoon tea comes with pastries and elderflower champagne. llangoedhall.co.uk/dining

TRADITIONAL SCOTS
The Scran & Scallie, Edinburgh
Smoky-rich cullen skink is followed by braised roe deer and a platter of

local cheeses at the Scran & Scallie, which celebrates some of Scotland's favourite dishes in a menu conceived by Michelin-starred chefs Tom Kitchin and Dominic Jack. With its tartan and tweed upholstery, cast-iron stove and decent number of whiskies behind the bar, it's a great place to unwind. scranandscallie.com

LOCHSIDE
Inver, Argyll & Bute, Scotland

Since overhauling this crofter's cottage last year, Pam Brunton and Rob Latimer have attracted food lovers from near and far. The stripped-back interior draws the eye to the awe-inspiring views over Loch Fyne, which are rivalled by the Inver's stunning dishes. Brunton's artisanal ethos means she churns and cultures the butter herself, does on-site butchery and even makes her own tonic water. inverrestaurant.co.uk

BEST FOR A DRAM
Links House, Dornoch, Scotland

The outside fireplace at Links House makes an al fresco dram a real joy. Inside, exciting things are happening in Jon-Paul Saint's kitchen, with the young chef making the most of the natural larder of his surrounds: his menu showcases delicious shellfish and wild venison in modern Scottish dishes. linkshousedornoch.com

BRITISH TAPAS
The Gas Bar at the Bushmills Inn, Co Antrim, Northern Ireland

The restaurant at this boutique Causeway hotel is renowned for its food, but there's also a lot to be said for a few plates from the bar-food menu next to the fire at the Gas Bar next door, where the sound of a fiddle fills the air on Saturday nights. The pheasant beaters' nose bag — Irish cheese, Ballymoney roast ham and wheaten bread — is "British" tapas at its finest. bushmillsinn.com/gas-bar.aspx

For 10 more of our top picks, go to thesundaytimes.co.uk/food, or *The Dish* on tablet