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Weekend getaways

Go green and go cheap: 'staycations' not vacations are the way forward in 2009. **Kathryn Miller** picks the 25 best hotels, B&Bs and campsites within an hour's shunt of these London stations below, with inspiring ideas for an amazing Home Counties break. Photography **Ed Marshall**



From Fenchurch St...

Rainham

24 mins

Where to stay Thurrock Travelodge
Get up close and personal with the M25 at Thurrock Travelodge, which is also convenient for the shopping Meccas of Bluewater (three miles away) and Lakeside (half a mile).
Thurrock Travelodge, Moto Service Area off

A1306, Arterial Road, West Thurrock RM16 3BG (0871 984 6216/www.travelodge.co.uk).

What to do Rainham Marshes is a former MoD firing range but was bought by the RSPB in 2000 and is now, unsurprisingly, excellent for birdwatching. Close by is Rainham Hall, an impressive red-brick house built in 1729 for a shipping merchant that's owned by the National Trust.

Getting there London Fenchurch Street to Rainham Essex station takes 24 mins. Off-peak return from £4.90 (08457 48 49 50/www.c2c.trainsfares.co.uk).

From King's Cross...

Welwyn Garden City

25 mins

Where to stay Brocket Hall

Golfing is the big draw here, though foodies are will enjoy themselves too: executive chef Phil Thompson at the hotel's Auberge du Lac restaurant was recently awarded his first Michelin star.

Brocket Hall, Welwyn, Herts AL8 7XG (01707 335241/www.brocket-hall.co.uk).

What to do Perfect your golfing technique at the on-site Faldo Golf Institute.

Getting there London King's Cross to Welwyn Garden City takes 25 mins. Off-peak return from £10 (0845 026 4700/www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk).

From Liverpool St...

Southend-on-Sea

56 mins

Where to stay The Camelia Hotel

This gracious white house on the seafront is quiet but close to the town's major attractions – Southend Pier is a 15-minute walk. Request a room with a sea view.

The Camelia Hotel, 176-178 Eastern Esplanade, Thorpe Bay, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS1 3AA (01702 587917/www.cameliahotel.com).

Offer 10 per cent off for Time Out readers!

What to do Southend might conjure images of boy racers and amusement arcades, but thanks to its proximity to the capital this town has been a holiday resort for Londoners since Georgian



Hadley Wood 29mins away

times and boasts all the traditional seaside pleasures, including safe sandy beaches (some with paddling pools) for families, rows of colourful beach huts, a pier that's more than a mile long, a funfair and plenty of unspoilt nature reserves (www.visitsouthend.co.uk).
Getting there Train from Liverpool Street to Southend Victoria takes 56 mins. Return from £18.80 (0845 600 7245/www.nationalexpress-eastanglia.com).

From London Bridge...

Tunbridge Wells

42 mins

Where to stay The Farmhouse
 If you thought B&Bs were dingy spare rooms, this place will change your mind. Located just outside Tunbridge Wells, the spacious rooms in this stylish spot have original, exposed seventeenth-century beams. Choose the four-poster suite and you'll get a king size bed, an inglenook fireplace and a cast iron bath.
The Farmhouse, Kipping's Cross, Matfield, Kent TN12 7HB (01892 824 686/www.kippingsfarmhouse.co.uk).
Offer 15 per cent midweek discount for Time Out readers!

What to do All Saints church in Tudeley has stunning stained-glass windows by French modernist painter Marc Chagall. The work was commissioned by a local in memory of his daughter, who died in an accident aged 21. Also nearby is Hever Castle, the childhood home of Henry VIII's second queen, Anne Boleyn.
Getting there London Bridge to Tunbridge Wells takes 42 mins. Off-peak return from £14 (0844 3351 640/www.southeasternrailway.co.uk).

From Moorgate...

Hadley Wood

29 mins

Where to stay Savoro
 This hotel has nine minimally decorated rooms, including a four-poster suite. Set menus in the informal restaurant, which serves Modern British fare, start at £10.50 for two courses.
Savoro Restaurant, 206 High St, Hadley Green, EN5 5SZ (020 8449 9888/www.savoro.co.uk).
What to do Meander around Monken Hadley common, which is 11 miles from central London but boasts woods, wildlife and ponds. Nearby, the 243-acre Forty Hall estate (www.tinyurl.com/fortyhall) is open to the public for picnics.
Getting there Moorgate to Hadley Wood takes 29 mins. Off-peak return from £6.50. (0845 026 4700/www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk).

From Marylebone...

Beaconsfield

27 mins

Where to stay The White Hart
 The pretty market town of Beaconsfield was once home to Benjamin Disraeli. But it's not all pomp and grandeur – this seventeenth-century inn is a great place to sample a pint of real ale with a beef and Guinness pie or Sunday roast.
The White Hart, Aylesbury End, Beaconsfield, Bucks, HP9 1LW (08702 430 500/www.innkeeperslodge.com).
What to do Bekonscot Model Village (www.bekonscot.com) is British eccentricity at its finest. The miniature village was built by an accountant (this was once his back garden) and has charmed visitors since it opened 75 years ago. A stroll around reveals a sugar-sweet 1930s English village complete with steam trains, a brass band and no unsightly electric pylons.
Getting there Train from Marylebone to Beaconsfield station takes 27 mins. Anytime return from £12.90 (08456 005 165/www.chilternrailways.co.uk).

Amersham

35 mins

Where to stay The Crown Inn
 This smart Amersham coaching inn is decorated in muted tones, with open fires and exposed brickwork. Settle down in a snug with a pint and let time ebb gently by. Bedrooms are classy and cosy and the gastro-style food is prepared using locally sourced ingredients.
The Crown Inn, 16 High St, Amersham, Bucks, HP7 0DH (01494 721 541/www.thecrownamersham.co.uk).
What to do The spooky Hell-Fire Caves (www.hellfirecaves.co.uk) were dug on the orders of Sir Francis Dashwood in the mid-eighteenth century to complement his gardens. When he later founded the Hell-Fire Club, they held their meetings down here. The series of tunnels, chambers and alcoves is not for the claustrophobic, nor for the faint of heart: a bride and a poet are both supposed to haunt them.
Getting there Marylebone to Amersham takes 35 mins. Off-peak return from £9. (08456 005 165/www.chilternrailways.co.uk). Or Metropolitan line to Amersham.

From Paddington...

Marlow

60 mins

Where to stay Macdonald Compleat Angler
 A sunny day spent lazing on the banks of the Thames beside 400-year-old riverside hotel Compleat Angler, over the bridge from Marlow, will banish economy-inspired gloom. If that doesn't trock your boat, then the mouthwatering fare at Aubergine at The Compleat Angler (whose sister restaurant is the Michelin-starred Aubergine restaurant in Chelsea) almost certainly will.