

LUXURY WITHOUT COMPROMISE

# Robb Report

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## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Big ideas and inventive gadgets that are changing the way we live

# Wild Things

For its raw beauty and remote tranquility, Dartmoor is worth a detour the next time you fly to London.



The garden at Hotel Endsleigh was created by Humphry Repton for John Russell, the sixth duke of Bedford.

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A THICK MIST is swirling around the hilltops and it's impossible to see beyond the wild ponies grazing in front of us. We are in Dartmoor National Park in the southwest of England, which some locals say is the country's last true wilderness. Dartmoor is also infamous for its capricious weather – it's common to experience four seasons in a day, and a fog so dense it creeps up mysteriously and seems to hide all kinds of beasts imaginable.

The best way to explore Dartmoor National Park is on horseback and with a guide. There are few roads, so travelling by car offers limited views. It's also incredibly easy to get lost thanks to the lack of prominent landmarks, which is why I enlisted the services of Liberty Trails ([www.liberty-trails.com](http://www.liberty-trails.com)), a company specialising in luxury riding tours in Dartmoor. There's another reason why I have chosen to explore Dartmoor with someone who knows it well: the bogs, which can trap and kill an unsuspecting hiker or rider.

I follow Rachel Brockington, my guide, over the hill. We come to a valley vastly different from the velvety vale where we leave behind the mist and ponies, between a large canvas of startling blue and a vivid green expanse of land marked by dips and punctuated by granite boulders. The terrain here is rough and so strewn with rocks that we can only move at a brisk walk. Then the terrain evens out. We pick up pace for a canter along a babbling brook. All around us is the muted but busy chirping of ground nestlings.

Our ride the next day takes us across wide peaty areas where sheep and cattle graze, and mysterious-looking gigantic granite hilltops called tors loom.

Dartmoor is also rich in archaeology. We pass a collection of stones arranged by Druids into a fertility circle. Eerie and enigmatic, desolate and dreamy, Dartmoor is all these and more. In the midst of this wild land of sprawling valleys, marshy bogs and forbidding tors, the well-heeled will be pleased to know there are luxury experiences to be enjoyed.

Elaine Michelle Prior, founder of Liberty Trails, is adept at finding or creating them.

For one, Elaine's husband and business partner, Robert, is always on standby at the next pit stop with posh nosh and warm drinks (or port and whisky if you fancy).



Explore Dartmoor and its mystical landscape on horseback.

He also organises day trips to bucolic towns in Dartmoor, while Elaine works with Dartmoor's top hotels and country manors to provide accommodation. One of them is Bovey Castle ([www.boveycastle.com](http://www.boveycastle.com)), a stunning heritage mansion on a 111-hectare estate, with panoramas of the national park. Besides a well-appointed spa, Bovey Castle also offers activities like falconry. Besides an award-winning restaurant, it also has a well-known spa on site.

The other is Hotel Endsleigh ([www.hotelendsleigh.com](http://www.hotelendsleigh.com)). With 40 hectares of gardens to explore, guests can walk amongst the secret grottos, ancient trees and exotic plants on their own or led by the head gardener. Long corridors, antiquarian botanical paintings and plush ottomans lend a sepia-tinted charm to the place.

While I love the eclectic charm of my suite with its woodland-themed wallpaper and mustard chaise lounge, the jewel in the crown for me is the food.

Though the ingredients are local, there's an unmistakable touch of Italian influence (hardly surprising when one learns that the owner is from the Rocco Forte hotelier family).

I resist licking the sauce off my plate after polishing off a cabbage parcel filled with umami scallop and crabmeat.

As I tuck into the strawberry cheesecake cannoli paired with refreshing basil ice cream by a crackling fire, I think to myself that one cannot possibly ask for a more genteel end to exploring England's wild side. **R**