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CUPID, WITHOUT THE LITTLE ONES

Kiddie alert: Valentine's Day falls at half-term this year — but Robert Ryan knows the hotels where you won't be disturbed

You've only just recovered from the last event when you had to indulge and pamper and spoil your loved one, and now the next lesson is in view. It's a miserable Valentine's Day. Should you treat it with disdain, deciding it as an artificial construct set up by a shady conglomerate of red-rose wholesalers, the champagne marketing board and greeting-card companies? Or embrace it as an opportunity to celebrate your relationship with a special trip away? A word of advice: no matter how cynical his or her partner, nobody ever went far wrong with the latter.

Valentine's Day falls on a Sunday this year, right at the beginning of the half-term school holiday. Which is an awkward moment for it: if you are not careful, you may find your bed like a crumpled sheet of paper, with a messy trail of dirty socks, a bowl of soggy cereal and a few other items strewn about. (That's the trend in my house, anyway.) Don't those of us who have 'em and love 'em know they sometimes don't fit that well with romance. Bearing that in mind, here's our pick of hotels in the UK and Ireland where kids are either banned or gently discouraged.

THE POOL HOUSE HOTEL Highland

Hidden away between the Kyle of Luchnah and Ullapool, this Scottish bolt hole has just six lavish suites and



two rooms. It will be business as usual over the weekend, with a two-night minimum stay, but with the addition of a romantic afternoon tea in front of the log fire and the option of an à la carte 'loweak', with special coddle and income to the bath (or, in most cases, an ornate, double-ended 'antique bathing machine'). There is also an Ever So Slightly Soggy Weekend Kit, the contents of which include an ostrich feather and other items we'll leave to your overactive imagination. Details: rooms and suites start at £199 per night, B&B, or £280 with dinner. The weekend kit, with a bottle of champagne, costs £90. Call 06445 78122 or visit pool-house.co.uk.

TRIGONY HOUSE Dumfriesshire

A range of options here: stay curled up in front of roaring log fires, walk the gardens or — truly to escape fellow guests — hire a vintage car (there's a very lovely white E-type Jag), then explore the lovely local countryside and empty lanes that surround the hotel in all directions. The Romance Package includes two nights in a superior room with a garden view, dinner, breakfast, home-made chocolates, a bottle of chilled Crémant d'Alsace sparkling wine and flowers on arrival. Although children are allowed at the hotel, they are expected to be "see and far between" during Valentine's.



Details: the package starts at £405 per couple. Vintage car hire starts at £150 per day; the E-Type costs £295. Call 01848 331215 or visit trigonyhotel.co.uk.

SWINSIDE LODGE HOTEL Cumbria

Unaffected by recent flooding, this charming seven-bedroom hotel has a narrowboat sitting in the Newlands Valley, at the foot of Cat Belle Fell, surrounded by gorgeous scenery. Every room gets a lovely view, so lovely that you might have trouble tearing your loved one from the window, but the food and service can offer distractions as

worth the effort. Champagne, chocolates and flowers in the room cost an additional £50.

Details: doubles start at £264 per night, including dinner and breakfast. There is a minimum two-night stay over the weekend. Call 017687 72648 or visit swinsidelodge-hotel.co.uk.

MATTHEW HALL HOTEL Near Newcastle

Set in 300 acres, this very grand pile — the ancestral home of Sir Hugh and Lady Blackett, who still pop in from time to time — is having it both ways this year. On February 12 and 13, it has

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Dinner a drey? Far left: Triggory House. Above right and far right: the Pool House Hotel



TEN SQUARE HOTEL Belfast

A chic and cosy hotel with all the in-room entertainment bells and whistles you might want (so it's great if you just want to stay in bed), and a buzzy bar scene downstairs. The Valentine's package includes rose-petal turndown, chocolate-dipped strawberries, champagne and a "special Valentine's gift", all topped off with a carriage ride for two around the city centre. It's February, remember: best hiring a maff. Details: doubles on February 13 and 14 start at £210 per night, B&B (or £225 for a suite). Call 02890 241000 or visit tensquare.co.uk.

CASTLE LESLIE Co Monaghan

It's the feudal baronial pile where McCartney and Mills pilgriaged their troth, but don't hold that against it: the baronial Castle Leslie is still a fantastically romantic place to celebrate the 14th. Children are welcome in certain parts of the 1,000-acre estate, but are actively discouraged from staying in the castle itself, so it'll be couples only. This year, there are some bonding add-ons available, such as boating and a gourmet picnic on the lake (250), or horse and carriage rides (325pp). Details: a two-night package, staying between February 13 and 14, starts at £699pp in the castle, including a bottle of champagne, one dinner



and breakfast both days, with a late (2pm) check-out. Call 00 353 47 86000 or visit www.castleleslie.com.

PENMAENUCHAF HALL HOTEL Snowdonia

A two-night break at this 14-bedroom hotel (its name is truncated to Pen Hall for the tongue-tied) promises to tick all the romantic boxes, with log fires, fresh flowers and a candlelit dinner with a Valentine's menu on both evenings. With 20 acres of gardens and fantastic views over the Mawddach estuary, it suits lovers of nature, too. Details: the package starts at £400 per couple, including dinner and breakfast. Call 01340 421128 or visit penhall.co.uk.

WASHBOURNE COURT Gloucestershire

Washbourne Court is a 17th-century, heavily beamed former iron crammer in a classic Cotswold village, so you could be forgiven for thinking that it would come up with a very traditional Valentine's Day package. Not so. For £205, the hotel is offering lovers Washbourne Intimacy Kits by Coco de Mer, comprising a silky-smooth wooden spanner, a black leather and various devices (not yet described in a family newspaper). Less adventurous couples can huddle round the huge log fire in the bar. Details: doubles start at £225 per night, B&B, with a minimum two-night stay. Set dinner costs £65pp over the Valentine's weekend. Call 01452 821143 or visit washbournecourt.co.uk.

BURGH ISLAND Devon

The rocky outcrop of Burgh Island may not be very far off shore, but it has always had a special feeling of isolation, as famously explicated by Agatha Christie. The lovely art-deco hotel is adults only over Valentine's weekend: on February 13, there is a ball with a burlesque act (£200 per couple), and on the 14th a champagne lunch, with a billed tasting where the House of Bannant takes on the night of Bollinger. Details: doubles start at £360 per night, including dinner and breakfast. Call 00448 810514 or visit burghisland.com.



Baby Broom 2 (above)

LUTON HOOD HOTEL Luton

Set in more than 1,000 acres of Capability Brown parkland, this mansion house certainly has the wow factor — it starred in *Eyes Wide Shut*, a couple of *Bosch*, *Little Dorrit* and many more. Its Valentine's package includes a bottle of Louis Roederer champagne and chocolate-dipped strawberries in the room, breakfast in bed and a three-course dinner in the brasserie — although, as it's a special occasion, it is worth paying the £20 supplement to upgrade to the far grander Werther Restaurant, as used in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Details: the package starts at £300 per night per couple. Call 01582 734407 or visit www.lutonhood.co.uk.

THE OLDE BELL Berkshire

The inn has had on the Crawford makeover, and the sumptuous food is by Rosie Sykes. Its Valentine's package for the 14th includes a glass of sparkling wine on arrival, chocolates in the bedroom, a three-course dinner and champagne breakfast in bed. You can embed the day with upgrades, flowers, picnics or in-room massages. Details: doubles start at £285, including dinner, breakfast and complimentary transport to and from Maidenhead station for those who'll sooner arrive by rail; the embellishments are extra. Call 01628 828881 or visit theoldbell.co.uk.

family breaks, with children's dinners from 5pm-7pm and baby-sitting available, while the 14th is adults only, with dinner, dancing and the crooner Alexander Lomas channeling Sinatra and Sinatra.

Details: doubles cost £255 per night, or £425 for two nights, on the Friday and Saturday, including dinner, breakfast, champagne and chocolates. Children up to 12 sharing their parents' room stay for £24, B&B.

For the Sunday-night dinner and dance, the price is £80pp, including accommodation, a reception drink, a three-course dinner and breakfast. Call 01664 866690 or visit primahotel.co.uk.

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