

# WEEKEND... AWAY

Recharge your batteries? Have fun? Well, take a break... just a short step away

## 6 OF THE BEST VALENTINE'S DAY BREAKS

**Italy** Travel to Verona, the setting for the ultimate romantic tale, Romeo And Juliet, and stay at the Palazzo Victoria. From 13-16 February you can enjoy cocktails, a carriage ride and tickets to the historic Lomberti Tower from £226pp per night. [www.palazzovictoria.com](http://www.palazzovictoria.com).

**Isles of Scilly** What could be more romantic than staying in a star-shaped castle above a pristine white sand beach? Book a stay at Star Castle between 11-18 February and you'll also be wooed with chocolates, champagne and a boat trip to Tresco island. From £399pp for three nights. [www.star-castle.co.uk](http://www.star-castle.co.uk).

**France** With its picturesque turrets, manicured grounds and beautifully renovated period interiors, Château Les Carrasses in rolling Languedoc countryside is the perfect setting to inspire romance. A two-night stay costs from £130pp. [www.lescarrasses.com](http://www.lescarrasses.com).

**Scotland** Be inspired by the ultimate romantic hero, James Bond, and book into Skyfall cottage on the banks of Loch Ewe in the Western Highlands. This cosy hideaway boasts a wood-burning stove and a hot tub for two with views over the tranquil loch. A three-night Valentine's weekend break costs £595 for two. [www.skyfall.uniquehomestays.com](http://www.skyfall.uniquehomestays.com).

**London** Treat yourself to a Valentine's Package at Café Royal in Piccadilly, overlooking the statue of the god of love, Eros. Your one-night stay includes champagne and a five-course Valentine's dinner. From £450pp, only on 14 February. [www.hotelcaferoyal.com](http://www.hotelcaferoyal.com).

**Lapland** Entrance your beloved with a magical show of the Northern Lights on a Wilderness Romance experience in Finnish Lapland that includes a night-time sleigh ride. Three nights including flights from £899pp. [www.transun.co.uk](http://www.transun.co.uk).

*Ursula Hirschhorn*



## FAMILY DAY OUT The Dickens House Museum

The wintry streets of London are synonymous with Charles Dickens – which means it's an excellent time to visit the Dickens House Museum in Camden.

The great writer called 48 Doughty Street home between 1837-1839. It was where his beloved sister-in-law Mary died, inspiring many of his angelic female heroines and tearful death scenes.

The museum has just reopened after a £3 million revamp, and you can now see the room where Mary died aged 17. The rooms also hold rare photographs of the 1865 train crash which Dickens survived along with his mistress Ellen Ternan. But perhaps the most inspirational spot is the study, where you can see the desk at which he dreamed up Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby.

The museum also has temporary exhibitions – at the moment it's costumes from the film Great Expectations, starring Helena Bonham Carter.

There are plans for regular events throughout the year, so check the website to see what's on. The Dickens House Museum, 48 Doughty Street, London, WC1N 2LX is open daily from 10am to 5pm, admission £8 for adults, £4 for children over six. Tel: 020 7405 2127 or visit [www.dickensmuseum.com](http://www.dickensmuseum.com).



## LOCATION, LOCATION

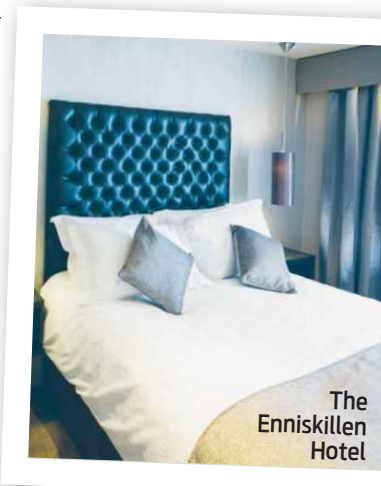
Visit the sets starring on your TV screen. This week: Crom Castle, N Ireland

**LOCATION** Crom Castle in Fermanagh is the setting for BBC1's hit comedy drama Blandings, starring Timothy Spall and Jennifer Saunders. It's the home of Viscount Crichton, who makes a cameo appearance as an under-butler.

**WHAT TO SEE** Although the castle is a private home, the public can visit the grounds, open from 16 March, and the west wing can be rented out by groups of up to 12, tel: 028 6773 8004. You can see the ruins of Crom Old Castle beside Lough Erne, and there's a visitor centre. [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/crom](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/crom).

**HOW TO GET THERE** The estate is a two-hour drive from Belfast and Dublin airports. It's signposted from the A34 at Newtownbutler and Lisnaskea.

**WHERE TO STAY** As well as the castle itself, you can rent one of Crom's cottages – Jennifer Saunders stayed in one while filming, [www.nationaltrustcottages.co.uk](http://www.nationaltrustcottages.co.uk). The Enniskillen Hotel nearby has doubles from £95, [www.enniskillenhotel.com](http://www.enniskillenhotel.com).



The Enniskillen Hotel



Earthy: Northumberlandia



## Janet Street-Porter's WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

This week: The wonderful views from atop the Lady of the North

The derelict land around Shotton coal mine has been transformed into a sculpture – a saucy version of the female form.

Northumberlandia is the largest earthwork in the world based on the human body, made with 1.5 million tonnes of rock, clay and soil, 100ft high and a quarter of a mile long. She lies on her back, dreaming up at the sky, with arms outstretched, next to a series of pools.

The earthwork is set in a 47-acre community park, with four miles of

footpaths that snake over her torso, up and down her legs and around her hair.

Designed by landscape architect Charles Jencks, who taught me in the 60s, the artwork has been funded privately at a cost of £3 million. It's a huge hit with locals, who come for family outings – the views from her head and breasts are stunning!

For more information, visit [www.northumberlandia.com](http://www.northumberlandia.com). A visit can easily be combined with a trip to Hadrian's Wall, 38 miles away.

**WALK NAME** A gentle stroll over Northumberlandia, the Lady of the North.

**DISTANCE** Allow at least an hour. The paths are graded, and suitable for small children.

**HOW TO GET THERE** It's 2.5 miles east of Cramlington, Northumberland, a short drive from the A1 north of Newcastle, off Blagdon Lane. Sat Nav ref NE23 8AU. Train to Cramlington, or X13 bus from Newcastle. Open from dawn to dusk.

**EATING AND DRINKING** I took a packed lunch. A cart near the car park sells hot drinks and snacks. Cramlington's Snowy Owl pub has hearty meals.



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