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With outdoor adventures back on the agenda, serial Rambler Julia Bradbury shares her shortlist of the best active luxury breaks to take in the UK



GOING WILD IN THE ISLES

Stargazing, hiking, coasteering, wildlife spotting... Julia Bradbury tells **Joseph Furey** about the best adventures to be had in the great British outdoors

If anyone walks the walk as well as they talk the talk, it's TV presenter Julia Bradbury. And as someone who spends most of her working life outside, pitting herself against all manner of testing terrain – tramping up fells and down dales, traversing arêtes – she understands more than most the enormous power of the open to help us to work the winter confinement out of our bones and lift our spirits.

We wanted to get the inside scoop on what the great British outdoors has to offer the curious, the enterprising and the bold these days. And we figured there was no one better to ask than Land Rover ambassador Julia – who, like Range Rover, is no stranger to adventure – to give us a shot of “Outspiration”.

Discussing new trends in travel across Britain, we quizzed Julia about her pick of the places in the UK to watch the night skies, to become one with nature in Scotland and to wear a wetsuit in north Wales. For each of Julia's recommendations, we have chosen accommodation nearby that readers who wish to follow in her footsteps will surely love.

STARS IN YOUR EYES

A sky full of stars is one of the greatest shows on Earth – and it's free – but light pollution means that few of us get to see it, unless we travel to somewhere sufficiently remote, like the North Pennines, to do it. The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB) Partnership has worked with Edinburgh Observatory to designate 16 official Dark Sky Discovery Sites, more than any other protected landscape in the UK.

“The North Pennines, which spans four counties, holds very fond memories



for me,” says Julia. “I explored this area a lot with my dad, starting a little farther south at the beginning of the Pennine Way in Edale, in Derbyshire, and spending time around Alston, in Cumbria, where there's an unusually shaped Roman fort. It was a formative time for me, and the area's just brilliant.”

“The heavens just open up over the North Pennines. You'll see shooting stars, meteors, Mars, Venus and Jupiter, as well as the Milky Way in all its glory. You might be able to make out the fuzzy glow of the Andromeda Galaxy, too. If you need to get your eye in, there's a fantastic observatory at Allenheads Contemporary Arts in Northumberland.” *Lowbyer Manor Country House couldn't be better located, sitting as it does at the*

“
We tend to forget that we have our own wilderness to explore

heart of the North Pennines AONB. A walking/cycling path runs 14 miles north along a disused railway track to Haltwhistle and Hadrian's Wall.

“Exmoor National Park was the first site in Europe to be granted International Dark Sky Reserve status in 2011,” says Julia. “It is wild, untamed and beautiful, and the stargazing is first-rate, especially if, as part of a couple, family or small group, you book your own private guide to the cosmos.”

Working with Dark Sky Telescope Hire, an astronomer will set up their giant telescope wherever you're staying on Exmoor for astonishing views of the sky at night. You can also hire your own Dobsonian telescopes from the national park centres at Lynmouth, Dulverton and Dunster. As if that weren't enough, the Dark Skies Festival is slated to take place from October 22 to November 7. Subject to Covid restrictions, there will be dark sky themed workshops, retreats and assorted nocturnals.

“And you can go for one of my favourite walks on the Exmoor coast. It starts at the harbour town of Lynmouth and follows the East Lyn River till it meets the Hoar Oak River at a National Trust café, the perfect spot for a cream tea. It's absolute bliss,” Julia says. *Locanda on the Weir is either an excellent restaurant with rooms or a chic boutique hotel with fine dining. It's a picturesque getaway, regardless, owing to its location in Porlock Weir, an artsy seaside hamlet on the very edge of rugged Exmoor.*

SCOTTISH SERENGETI

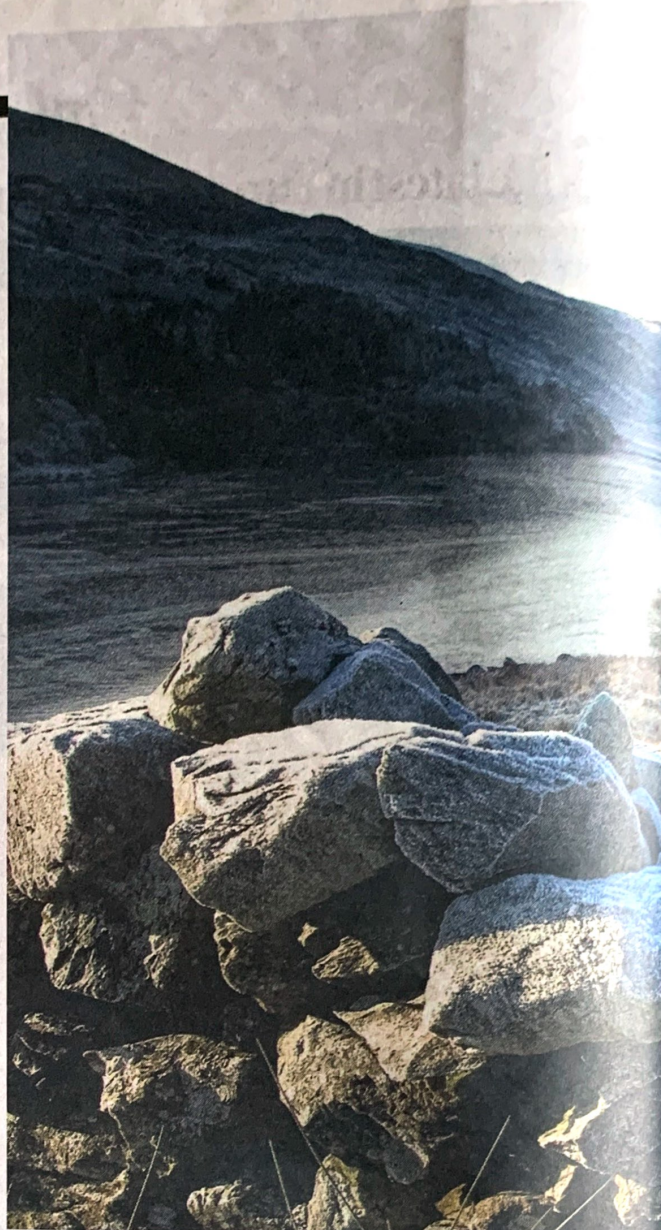
We've got used to seeing footage of

Land Rovers on safari, driving in a perfect convoy across the Serengeti. So used to it, in fact, that we tend to forget that we have our own wilderness to explore. And just as visitors to Africa have their “big five” animal checklist, so visitors to Scotland have theirs: the red deer, golden eagle, harbour seal, otter and red squirrel.

“Loch Lomond is the place to start,” says Julia. “You'll score four out of five animals, as well as the fallow deer and pine marten; and in neighbouring Loch Goil you'll find common and grey seals.” But the last thing you'll be doing is keeping count, such is the beauty of the place. On the eastern shore of Loch Lomond, the largest loch in Scotland by surface area, you can catch a boat to Inchcailloch, the wooded island that an Irish missionary, later Saint Kentigerna, made her bolthole in the 8th century. “I've seen deer swimming across the loch to get to the island. It's heavenly,” Julia says.

The lochside five-star Cameron House hotel resort has 18th century baronial looks, unparalleled views, championship golf and a spa with hydro and thermal treatments and a rooftop infinity pool.

“The Isle of Arran is home to all five of the country's sought-after beasts,” says Julia. “But it's also a refuge for rare bird species such as hen harriers, red-throated divers and nightjars. It's Scotland's seventh-largest island, so to get the most out of your time there, take a guided tour with an Arran Wild Walks expert. Or you can bag yourself a bird's eye view of the island with Flying Fever Paragliding. They do five-day elementary pilot courses, as well as



Best foot forward: top, TV presenter Julia Bradbury; main picture, Loch Lomond; and left, stargazing in the Pennines



“
Simply getting out there has the power to lift our spirits

Bay on the other, is sometimes called Snowdon's Arm, and it has a wonderful character that's all its own," says Julia. "On the southern side of the peninsula, there's Pwllheli, Llŷn's 'capital', which has a fine Blue Flag beach and one of the best modern marinas in the UK.

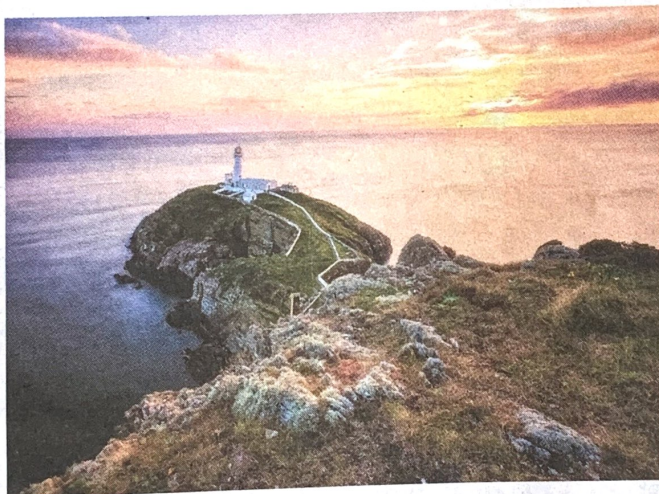
"There's also Abersoch, which holds a regatta each August and is hoping to stage the Glass Butter Beach music, wakeboarding and surfing festival on August 20 to 21; and there's Hell's Mouth, one of the most consistent surf spots on Llŷn. Should terra firma look more appealing, an 84-mile section of the Wales Coast Path runs right around the peninsula." *Castell Deudraeth, like the Hotel Portmeirion, was part of the architect Clough Williams-Ellis's design to transform a north Wales village into an Italianate folly. Guests have free access in the evening to Portmeirion village, which is best known as the backdrop to the 1960s television series The Prisoner.*

Now go forth, suitably outspired, and follow in the footsteps of the adventure queen...

tandem flights with an instructor. "Arran is amazing besides. It has some of the most impressive standing stones in northern Europe - as well as megalithic tombs and evidence of farming going back almost 6,000 years. And if you like a wee tippie, the acclaimed Arran distillery - one of the very few independent distilleries left in Scotland - will be opening for tastings again from next month." *The consummately family-friendly Bwthynie Resort, in Brodick, has three restaurants, two indoor swimming pools, a luxury spa, sauna and steamroom, the Playbarn for children and a games room for teens.*

MAKING WAVES IN NORTH WALES

Coasteering is the latest thing. How best to describe it? Extreme rock-pooling, maybe. Kayaking without a boat, perhaps. It involves exploring caves, jumping off cliffs, scrambling over boulders. It treats the coastline as a natural adventure playground. "I've done it myself, in Pembrokeshire, even in Russia," Julia says. "It's very exciting, like whitewater rafting. The island of Anglesey, with its largely unspoilt coastline, craggy cliffs and hidden coves, is simply made for it. "All you need is the spirit of derring-do, a wetsuit, a pair of old trainers to protect your feet and grip the rocks, a helmet, buoyancy aid and an accredited coasteering provider [such as Anglesey Adventures]. It's unbeatable fun.



Getaway joys: above, Holyhead in north Wales; and right, boats in the harbour at Abersoch on the Llŷn Peninsula

"It's worth mentioning that Anglesey has a place in motoring history, too - it was on the sands at Red Wharf Bay, on the east coast of the island, that automotive engineer Maurice Wilks first drew the shape for the original Land Rover." *A painstakingly restored 19th century stone mansion approached by a long private drive, Tre-Ysgawen Hall, in Llangefni, is grand yet unstuffy. No museum piece, its mod cons include a state-of-the-art spa with a salt inhalation therapy room that releases particles of prized Halen Môn (Anglesey sea salt).*

"The Llŷn Peninsula, stuck out between the Irish Sea on one side and Cardigan



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