



CHRISTMAS COTTAGES

Sorry — but if you fancy a cosy festive break in a snug little hideaway, it's time to start booking. **Stephen Bleach** finds the best



Yes, I know it's September. Yes, I know the ho-ho hype starts earlier every year, and this is a deeply bad thing, robbing the festive season of its uniqueness and magic. So yes, I know saying this won't make me popular. But it's time to think about Christmas. Specifically, where you're going to have it. Because if you want to make it extra-special by going away, you're going to have to move fast.

Times being what they are, not so many of us can afford a hotel this year — which means the best countryside cottages are being snapped up fast. Never fear, though: there are still some great ones left, places where you can really make the most of the festive season, with antique charm, roaring fires, Agas for the dinner and country walks in the crisp air to work it off. Here's our pick.

Trendy London couples can't get enough of Suffolk, and there's nowhere trendier for them to stay than the Workshop, near Badingham (9). Converted from a farm outbuilding by the architects Pitman Tozer, it's chock-full of design classics by Eero Saarinen and Arne Jacobsen, with curved white walls and white stone surfaces. Room for a festive fire, of course — in a Dominique Imbert spherical suspended fireplace. Five nights from December 23 cost £720, with Best of Suffolk (01728 638962, bestofsuffolk.co.uk).

In the same neck of the woods, sleeping eight, Rokeby Old Hall (10) is a magnificent 15th-century house in classic Suffolk style, all meandering beams, low ceilings and mellow aged brick. It has a big original fireplace and an Aga plus an electric oven in the kitchen, so there's masses of space to cook dinner — order the turkey early from the excellent Creasey's butchers in nearby Peasenhall. It costs £1,505 for the week from December 21, again with Best of Suffolk.