

THE SUNDAY TIMES
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PART ONE

BEST PLACES TO LIVE IN BRITAIN



CITY LIMITS, CHIC SUBURBS

From Exeter to Aberdeen,
Cambridge to Cardiff
— plus London's
favourite postcodes



MARKET TOWNS, VIBRANT VILLAGES

Organic produce, rolling
countryside and room for your
family to grow — with great
schools on the doorstep

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Travelpix/Getty; Tom Hills/John Morrison/Alamy; Adrian Sherratt

THE WINNERS

Our four top spots

STAMFORD, Lincolnshire ①

The ducks are quacking and the river sparkles in the spring sunshine. Across the green of Stamford's famous water meadows, young families and couples enjoy the day, sipping takeaway coffees from the cosy independent cafes, such as the Fine Food Store, that line the gloriously Georgian high street. It feels familiar — the town has starred in period dramas from *Middlemarch* to *Pride and Prejudice*, just one lucky by-product of Stamford being named Britain's first conservation area. The architecture and honey-stone streets really are magnificent, but that's not all Stamford has to recommend it; this friendly town offers good organic produce as well as designer boutiques. There's even an indispensable hardware store, Harrison & Dunn, which has been a stalwart of the area for years.

Fast trains from nearby Peterborough zoom to London King's Cross in 55 minutes, making for a quick commute. (Stamford is particularly popular with City types). It's more rural than Hertfordshire, classier than Essex and more original (and cheaper) than Surrey. Stamford is the Cotswolds without the cars — the same limestone spur ends here, giving those lovely stone houses and rolling hills — and it beats its more celebrated counterpart for fantastic schools (Oundle, Oakham and Uppingham, as well as fee-free Deepings and Bourne Academy).

Beyond the charms of the town itself — we mustn't forget to mention the George, the country's oldest coaching inn, which has put up numerous kings — the rolling Rutland countryside is unspoilt and picturesque, while there's boating and canoeing at Rutland Water. Residents can also take advantage of the extensive grounds of Burghley House, just outside the town.

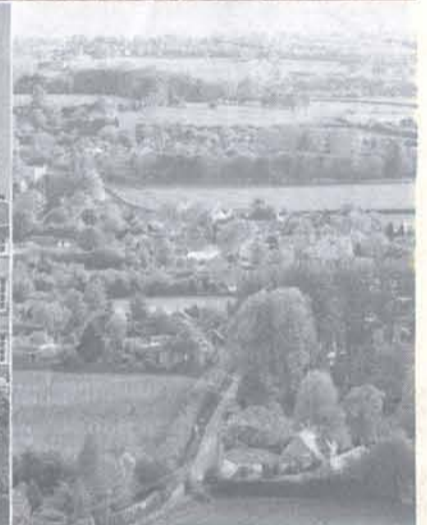
So who lives here? Local agents say most out-of-area buyers are young families who have fled the London suburbs in search of fresh air and space. The nearest big city is Leicester, 32 miles west; Cambridge is 45 miles southeast; and in between you'll find lush farmland and villages with proper pubs. The Fens and the Norfolk coast are near enough for a day out. Every year, the town hosts the Stamford Fair (mentioned in Shakespeare) on the water meadows in the middle of town. It has a food festival, an arts centre and initiatives to promote recycling and greener transport. Still not convinced? Listed stone houses cost between £375,000 and £575,000.

What the locals say The most beautiful town in England.

Why we love it All the charm of the Cotswolds — without the snobs and tourists.



Right, Kendal's riverfront. Far right, the North Downs near Wye. Top right, one of Stamford's honey-coloured streets. Above, Thornbury Sailing Club's regatta on the Severn



KENDAL, Cumbria ②

This picturesque Lake District town has superlative shopping, bags of community spirit and an enviable location in the heart of one of Britain's most beautiful landscapes. It is also spectacularly well connected: trains from nearby Oxenholme, on the West Coast main line, reach Glasgow and Manchester in less than two hours, and London Euston in 2hr 40min. It's a 15-minute drive to the M6; many residents commute from Kendal to Manchester or Preston.

The scenic surrounds, low crime rate, vibrant community activities and wide-ranging programme at the Brewery Arts Centre all add to Kendal's appeal. House prices are typically £211,000, compared with an average of £144,000 across the county — relatively pricey, but there is no shortage of beautiful barn conversions, small farmhouses and period country homes in the surrounding villages, ranging from £500,000 to about £1m.

What the locals say A magical place full of festivals, friendly people and stonking local produce.

Why we love it Friendly, fecund and slap bang in the middle of some of the world's most beautiful countryside.

WYE, Kent ③

Nestling in the spectacular scenery of the North Downs, with easy access to endless walking and cycling routes, Wye is a 20-minute drive from the cathedral city of Canterbury and has its own station (just six minutes from Ashford International, from which you



can get to London King's Cross in 55 minutes). In the village itself — where the medieval street layout is part of a conservation area — you'll find pubs, restaurants, a bank and a farmers' market, as well as independent stores such as The Wooden Spoon Preserving Company's jam shop and a magical children's shoe shop, The Elves and the Shoemaker.

Wye has a good prep school. Spring Grove, and there's a free school on the horizon, which is already prompting movement into the area. Prices aren't bad, either. Modern three-bedroom houses on the outskirts start at about £175,000, Grade II-listed family cottages in the conservation area at £550,000 and larger homes at £575,000.

What the locals say Fancy a poppadom? We've got the best Indian for miles. **Why we love it** A great all-rounder, popular with families and retirees.

THORNBURY, Gloucestershire ④

Thornbury has the ultimate lifestyle mix. It's an attractive small town with a historic centre — there's been a village here since before the Domesday Book — a castle, a 12th-century church and attractive 18th-century houses at reasonable prices. To top it off, parking in the centre is free, so it's easy to visit the traditional greengrocer and ironmonger, as well as the regular farmers' market, get stuck into the thriving musical and dramatic scenes or enjoy the pubs, coffee bars and restaurants (including Ronnies, a Which? restaurant of the year winner).

If that's not enough, the M4 and M5 meet nearby, and there is a fast train from Bristol, a 15-minute drive away, to London Paddington. Thornbury is also set in beautiful countryside, with the Severn estuary, beaches and the Wye Valley a short drive (or, if you're fit enough, cycle) away. Cash-strapped parents have a good choice of excellent schools, including the Castle School, and there's an even broader choice in Bristol. Much of the property outside the old town was built in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s; three-bedders cost £180,000-£250,000. Larger period family houses with a few acres go for between £700,000 and £1m. **What the locals say** Open all hours. We love Riddifords — venison, anyone? **Why we love it** Community spirit, with big-city conveniences — and great countryside — on the doorstep.

BEST PLACES TO LIVE IN BRITAIN THIS WEEK

Read The Times every day this week or visit thetimes.co.uk/bestplacestolive to find out more on the smartest, coolest places to live. Then, next weekend, The Sunday Times will select the top locations for schools, families and more.

MONDAY The 30 best villages in Britain
TUESDAY The 30 coolest places in Britain
WEDNESDAY The 30 best towns in Britain
THURSDAY The 30 best places to buy a second home
FRIDAY The 30 best places to move when you retire
SATURDAY The 30 best places by the sea
SUNDAY The best for schools, culture, the great outdoors, families and more
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