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08 December 2018  
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# COUNTRY LIFE

## Petworth: What to do, where to stay and what to eat in one of Sussex's most charming towns

Melanie Bryant spent a weekend in Petworth, the picture-perfect market town in the South Downs that boasts superb shopping, food and one of Britain's greatest country houses.



As a bored child in the back of the car on the annual trip to Grandad's house on the south coast, I always recognized one place: the small market town of Petworth in West Sussex.

The reason for this was two-fold: a) it meant we were now only ½ hour away from our destination, and certain adoration; and b) Petworth always looked intriguing with its high, imposing wall encasing the mysterious Petworth Park and the rows of terraced ancient houses with doorways so low, surely only mystical creatures could live beyond the lintels.

Fast forward, ahem, at least forty years and I realise that bar a couple of visits to the National Trust's Petworth House on the outskirts (or so I thought) of town, I had never really stopped there. It would appear this is a common affliction, with the town being on the cross-country A272 to the likes of (depending on your direction of travel) Goodwood, Arundel, Chichester, Brighton, Winchester, to name but a few.



So, with bag in hand and man in tow, we headed off for the weekend to discover what this exceptionally pretty little town has to offer. It has charm, character and (I definitely wasn't expecting this) some of the friendliest people I've come across. It also has the bonus of being just 49 (ish) miles from the centre of London.

Suffice to say that I definitely won't be leaving it 40 years before I return. In fact, I'm planning on going back in a couple of weeks to do some independent Christmas shopping. And, if the office are really nice to me, I may nip into the deli for some more brownies... more about those later.



#### Shopping

Voted Antiques Centre of the South, Petworth is home to a remarkable 28 antiques shops and four art galleries selling everything from vintage jewellery for a few pounds to bronze sculptures for over £90,000.

**Petworth Antiques Market** on East Street is a good starting place. Hosting over 40 dealers, there is definitely something to intrigue everyone under one roof.

**The Kevis Gallery** on Lombard Street is a delightful little place, complete with greeting service provided by a gentle red Labrador. Affordable and delightful woodcuts and gorgeous gouache and gold-leaf pictures by taxidermist-turned-artist Tabitha McBain are on sale here. Commissions are also accepted by some of the artists in the gallery.

Also on the achingly pretty Lombard Street is **Artful Teasing**, an artisanal family-run toiletries and skincare company.

At the higher end, there's the excellent **Rountree Tryon Gallery** on Market Square. Recently appointed a Royal Warrant, this specialist art dealer focuses on wildlife, maritime, sporting and topographical art from the eighteenth century to the present day.

The equally-excellent **Augustus Brandt** gallery in the Georgian Newlands House on Pound Street rambles over two floors. Selling an eclectic mix of quality furniture and artworks, it is also hosting, until January 3 2019, *Behind the Mask*, a jaw-dropping collection of molds and bronzes inspired by post-Renaissance Venice by world-renowned sculptor Philip Jackson.



## The Deli

Blessed is the cheesemonger – or rather the cheesemonger’s customer, if the cheesemonger in question is the [Hungry Guest](#) delicatessen, a place that’s become such a Petworth institution that we’ve put it in its own little section here. In one corner of this exquisite shop is a dedicated, cheese room – a glass box in which ebullient manager Vicki Hitchcock encourages customers to make the most of the taste first policy, urging them to go beyond the usual Cheddar and Stilton. Tell them what you like, and they’ll recommend and offer tasters to try.

The Hungry Guest also has a bakery worth a special mention, specifically thanks to the chocolate brownies – devoured in seconds with much nodding of heads and ‘mmms’ by the staff at *Country Life* when put on our tea time snack shelf.



## Where to stay

[The Angel](#), a 16<sup>th</sup> century pub on the aforementioned A272 comes complete with a roaring wood fire in a vast inglenook fireplace and with all the charm you’d expect from an ancient watering hole. Undulating floors (that was my excuse, anyway, for wobbling around late at night), low lighting and (even Toulouse-Lautrec be warned) unexpectedly low beams.

The seven dog-friendly bed and breakfast rooms vary greatly in size, but have all been refurbished to a high standard with quality at the forefront, and all feature toiletries from the town’s Artful Teasing (see ‘Shopping’) and the now-ubiquitous Nespresso machine.

We stayed in the vast Scots Pine honeymoon suite in the new extension at the back. Painted in a calming matt slate blue, it is highlighted with a sumptuous burnt orange, multi-cushioned velvet sofa from local brand Augustus Brandt (see ‘What to do’ above) and features a super king size bed.



The Angel in Petworth – The Honeymoon Suite

The space is decadent. This particular room also comes with climate control and a bathroom big enough to swing a couple of tigers in. The bathtub itself is vast, but if you prefer, there is a walk-in rainfall shower with rinsing hose and ‘jack and jill’ sinks so you don’t need to tussle for space with the half’s shaving paraphernalia or multitude of face potions.

Rooms at The Angel Inn, Petworth, from £90 a night – [www.angelinnpetworth.co.uk](http://www.angelinnpetworth.co.uk).



#### Food and drink

**The New Street Bar and Grill** is well worth a visit. You're greeted in winter by the unmistakable smell and warmth of a log fire accompanied by subtle lighting. This bistro offers up quality British produce in an unstuffy, relaxed setting that's all the more relaxed if you start with one of the head barman's latest cocktail creations: try the Lavender Martini (think parma violets that make you warm all over) while sitting in on one of the small tub chairs, which, I'm reliably informed, were bought from London's notorious Stringfellows nightclub. Thankfully, they've been reupholstered!

Mains included a delicious Waygu burger, haunch of local venison and a whole Brixham plaice, all cooked to perfection and served with either boiled new potatoes or crispy triple cooked chips. And it would be simply criminal not to wash dinner down without a glass or two of local sparkling Nyetimber.

**The Angel Inn** where we stayed also does good food including a superb Sunday roast, with meat supplied from the local Goodwood Estate. Booking essential – we noted many disappointed people being turned away due to lack of room at the inn.



#### Other things to do

**Petworth House** is one of the National Trust's finest properties, a stately home with vast 700-acre deer park and Capability Brown landscaped parkland. There's a car park and entrance half a mile up the road, but if you're on foot it's entered directly from a door in the town centre, a hop, skip and a jump from Lombard Street.

The house itself is home to important works by the likes of Gainsborough, van Dyck, Turner and Reynolds – but my particular favourite was the servant's quarters, where you get a visceral sense of how hard people below stairs worked.

Outside, you can wander just a few yards or for miles across the parkland without ever crossing paths with fellow walkers. This is where many people come to walk their dogs, so expect the odd canine chum barreling after a tennis ball or seven.

