

Travel

10 great places to rent a cottage, or a lookout

For those looking to skip chain hotels and get off the beaten path, cottage rentals may be the answer. From simple getaways with stunning views to pampering retreats, each promises something rare in mass-market travel: a unique experience. Eleanor Griffin, editor in chief of *Cottage Living* magazine, shares her favorites with Ayesha Court for USA TODAY.

29 Palms Inn

Southern California

A mix of historic wood-frame cabins and adobe bungalows, the Palms opened in 1928 in a natural oasis outside the starkly beautiful Joshua Tree National Park in the Mojave Desert. "So much of America is cookie-cutter," Griffin says, while this inn "has privacy and personality." Kids and pets are welcome. 760-367-3505, 29palmsinn.com

St. Orres

Gualala, Calif.

It takes something spectacular to make drivers along Highway 1 in Northern California look inland. But this Russian-style coastal lodge and cabins — think onion domes — capture the imagination. "It's like *Dr. Zhivago* where Julie Christie is going to shake off the snow," Griffin says. Shrouded by woods, cottages boast saunas, wood-burning stoves and private decks with whirlpool tubs. 707-884-3303, saintorres.com

Sundance Resort

Sundance, Utah

"Mountain-cozy and slightly rustic but with all the style of Robert Redford," Griffin says. Though coveted Redford sightings are rare, the views are "incredible," the skiing is some of the "country's best," and activities in summer, when rates drop, include hikes guided by naturalists. 800-892-1600, sundanceresort.com



Looking for more travel ideas? Review "10 Great" lists on the internet at 10greats.usatoday.com



Park Butte Lookout, Washington state: Vacationers can get a bird's-eye view of the forest by renting one of many fire lookout towers available.

Fire lookout towers

Various states

Imagine camping in the sky in the midst of the West's most beautiful mountain ranges, and you'll have an idea of sleeping in a fire lookout tower. "You're in nature and listening to that, not the ice machine or video player next door," Griffin says. Many are free (reservations required) and offer a rustic cabin with stove, cookware and bed. In exchange, guests "sign a journal and leave the place as clean as they found it." firelookout.com/links.html#A

Steinhatchee Landing Resort

Steinhatchee, Fla.

Far from the spring-break crowds, this remote Gulf Coast resort is about unwinding and unplugging, Griffin says. Relax on your front-porch cottage under a canopy of live oaks. Or take advantage of the resort's children's activities, hiking, fishing, biking and canoeing. 352-498-3513, steinhatcheelanding.com

Canoe Bay

Chetek, Wis.

"Pack a bottle of wine and leave the kids home," Griffin advises. These luxury prairie-style cottages on Canoe Bay's wooded 280-acre property are probably "the best in the Midwest" for a romantic retreat. Hike, boat, swim and fish on the three lakes or cuddle in front of a gas fireplace in a lakeside cabin. The Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired lodge also offers a fitness center, an extensive library and massages. 715-924-4594, canoebay.com

Shack Up Inn

Clarksdale, Miss.

A must-stop on any Delta Blues trip is this inn with "undeniable character," Griffin says. You stay in updated sharecropper shacks or rooms carved from bins attached to an old cotton gin on historic Hopson Plantation. Shack Up is near Madidi, the restaurant co-owned by actor and Clarksdale native Morgan Freeman, Ground Zero Blues Club and Delta Blues Museum. 662-624-8329, shackupinn.com



Canoe Bay: Nightly rates for cottages at this luxury getaway in Wisconsin start at \$375.

The Hope and Glory Inn

Irvington, Va.

Offering a B&B and four cottages, this "outstanding" converted 1890 schoolhouse near the Chesapeake Bay is the perfect place "to start or continue a tradition with your family," Griffin says. With English-style landscaped gardens and antique furnishings, it's well suited for weddings, anniversaries and family reunions. 800-497-8228, hopeandglory.com

Castle Hill Inn and Resort

Newport, R.I.

"If Jay Gatsby needed a cottage rental," Griffin says, "Castle Hill would be it." It was recently remodeled with French doors opening onto the beach and white wicker furniture upholstered in the colors of the sea. Here, linen shorts trump gym shorts. The "style quotient matches the Newport ZIP code." 888-466-1355, castlehillinn.com

Deer Creek Cottages

Saugatuck, Mich.

Cottages are fewer than 150 miles from Chicago but a "world away from high stress," Griffin says, and they're where "the glimmer of fireflies is more important than a GameBoy glow." Guests in the three cottages and main guesthouse can rent electric boats to explore Lake Michigan and Kalamazoo Lake, hike or bike and visit Saugatuck with its art galleries, boats, shops and restaurants. 269-8575445, deercreekcottages.com