

A scenic view of a village with thatched-roof cottages and a stone cross in the foreground. The main house is a two-story white building with a thick thatched roof and two chimneys. It has several windows and two doorways with thatched awnings. A wooden bench sits on the lawn in front of it. To the right, a smaller white cottage with a thatched roof is visible. In the foreground, a large stone cross stands on a circular stone base. The scene is set in a lush green field under a clear blue sky.

VILLAGE IDYLL

From coastal communities to countryside settlements, Britain's villages are as different as they are delightful. Katie Gregory explores five of the country's prettiest...



Left to right: Arlington Row in Bibury was built in 1380 and appears inside the British passport; Tudor beauty endures in Lavenham
Previous page: Thatched cottages cluster around the village green in Lustleigh, Devon

The dictionary definition of a village is simple: a collection of houses and buildings that is smaller than a town, larger than a hamlet, and in a rural setting. The real picture, however, is far more difficult to define. Britain's villages are more akin to a patchwork quilt of fabrics in every size, shape and pattern imaginable. Each one has a charm and a character all of its own, and for visitors that's precisely where the appeal lies.

This difference is strikingly clear when one moves between neighbouring regions. Just as dialects vary from one postcode to another, so too do the village scenes. From humble cob houses with neatly thatched roofs to rows of half-timbered houses criss-crossed with extravagant patterns, Britain's villages are a living, breathing embodiment of the country's rich history.

Indeed, no cluster of buildings, tangle of streets or intersection of roads is the same from one village to the next; what Britain's bigger towns and cities boast in

uniformity and precision, its villages counter in variation and charm. Here is our pick of five villages whose beauty lies in their uniqueness – just be sure to take a camera.

Bibury, Gloucestershire

Endorsements don't come much better than from a certain William Morris, who once declared Bibury "the most beautiful village in England". Indeed, the designer isn't the only one to have fallen in love with this typical Cotswold village just a short drive from Cirencester.

Perhaps the most photographed of its chocolate-box scenes is Arlington Row, a string of cottages built in 1380 as a monastic wool store and later converted into weavers' cottages. Emperor Hirohito is said to have stayed here and fallen in love with them, Henry Ford liked the cottages so much he tried to ship them over to the US, and you might just recognise them if you've ever left the country: a blue-hued version of the row has graced the inside cover of British passports since 2010.

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Elsewhere in the village, life centres on the square of St Mary's Church – an ancient building with a charming combination of Saxon, Norman and medieval influences – on the banks of the River Coln, which runs through the village, and the vast expanse of Bibury Trout Farm. The latter takes in 15 acres of the Coln Valley, one of the most beautiful in the Cotswolds.

Lavenham, Suffolk

Lovely medieval Lavenham is home to more than 300 listed buildings, which makes it one of the best preserved villages in England, if not Europe. It is perhaps most famous as one of the Suffolk wool towns, and certainly one of the most handsome.

In the 15th century, Lavenham and several of its surrounding towns and villages became hugely wealthy at the peak of the wool trade, and this wealth gave rise to the half-timbered houses that still stand proud today. Pitched at crooked angles, these quirky buildings seem ➤



to defy gravity, so it comes as little surprise to learn they feature in both instalments of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Perhaps the most famous example is the Guildhall of Corpus Christi, which is now home to a museum where you can learn more about the village's rich heritage. Or there's Lavenham Priory, a remarkable Grade I-listed, half-timbered house where you can stay.

If you're planning to visit Lavenham in 2017, do consider the weekend of 19 May. The village will host a weekend of special events to mark the 75th anniversary of US Forces arriving in support of the Second World War, when Lavenham Airfield was used as a base by the 487th Bombardment Group.

Lustleigh, Devon

Tucked in the Wray Valley in the Dartmoor National Park, this unassuming village paints a quintessentially British picture. With a postcard-worthy combination of thatched cottages, traditional pub and church whose origins date back to the 13th century, it ticks all the boxes when it comes to village life.

Where it truly stands out, though, is its incredible setting. Lustleigh Cleave attracts walkers from miles around, keen to take in the sweeping views of Dartmoor from its lofty ridge, or follow the path of the River Bovey deep in the valley beneath. Indeed, there are plenty of walks in the area that give widescreen views over Dartmoor's cinematic landscape. On a clear day, one can see across the tors and hills all the way to the coastline of the English Riviera in the distance.

For visitors keen to experience the village in full colour, two events are highly recommended. May Day is something of a speciality in Lustleigh, with traditional maypole dancing, a carnival procession throughout the village and the crowning of the May Queen. August Bank Holiday Monday, meanwhile, is the date of



This image:
Half-timbered
houses in Lavenham
Below: Lustleigh's
13th-century church



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Appletreewick is tucked
away in a pretty valley
in the Yorkshire Dales

Village idyll

Top to bottom:
Carrbridge in
Scotland is 300 in
2017; the village's
famous bridge



Lustleigh's traditional village show, which takes over the fields at Kelly Farm and is a highlight of the calendar.

Appletreewick, Yorkshire

What the village of Appletreewick lacks in size, it more than makes up for in charm. Hidden away in Wharfedale, one of the Yorkshire Dales' longest and most picturesque valleys, it's essentially a single street, with enchanting views of the Dales towards Simon's Seat at one end and Thorpe Fell at the other. The stone cottages that line the road date from the 17th and 18th centuries – some even as far back as the 12th century – and there are very few modern properties.

In summer, visitors flock to the River Wharfe, whose banks make prime picnicking and sunbathing territory and whose rocky waters are ripe for swimming. The area is popular with walkers, too, thanks to the relatively even terrain and a variety of walks taking in the area's hills and fells, as well as challenges such as the craggy peak of Simon's Seat.

Appletreewick's proximity to Bolton Abbey is another draw. The ruins of this 12th-century Augustinian monastery are flanked by some 30,000 acres of spectacular countryside, and walkable from Appletreewick. Just be sure to pay a visit to the Craven Arms on the way back into the village. This traditional 16th-century pub is named after William Craven, the village's most famous son, whose story shares interesting parallels with that of Dick Whittington, the pauper who became Lord Mayor of London.

Carrbridge, Scotland

Celebrating its 300th anniversary in 2017, the village of Carrbridge – part of the Cairngorms National Park – boasts several claims to fame. For one, it became the first of Scotland's skiing villages when a professional ski school was set up here in the 1950s. It's still a popular winter skiing destination today, and the snow-dappled forest scenery might be the most enduring image of this village if it weren't for one particular landmark: Carrbridge's packhorse bridge.

An ethereal arch of stone that breaches the icy water beneath, the bridge was originally built to enable villagers to carry coffins across the water when the River Dulnain was in spate. It's now the oldest stone bridge in the Highlands, not to mention the most photographed. In summer, locals and more adventurous tourists use it to dive into the chilly water which snakes below. And for those in search of more organised outdoor pursuits, the Landmark Forest Adventure Park in the south of the village is another popular attraction.

Last but by no means least, Carrbridge has one final string to its bow. Every October the village hall plays host to the Golden Spurtle World Porridge Making Championship. The 2017 event will be the 24th year of the competition, which traditionally takes place on – or close to – World Porridge Day. ■

For more photographs of Britain's loveliest villages, see www.discoverbritainmag.com/britains-prettiest-villages