

# Monkey Island Estate, Bray, Berkshire

**BACKGROUND** Managed by luxury hospitality specialist YTL Hotels, which boasts a unique portfolio of historic and bespoke properties around the world, Monkey Island Estate is rural retreat on a private island in the UK foodie haven known as Bray-on-Thames – possibly the only village in the world with four Michelin-starred restaurants and gastro pubs. This centuries-old property, once the getaway destination of VIPs and royalty, is one of YTL's five UK hotels.

**WHAT'S IT LIKE?** It's a luxury haven that immerses you in its colourful history, reflected in its two main buildings that date back to the 12th and 18th centuries. The fish-tail shaped island was originally inhabited by monks but taken over by the Duke of Marlborough in the 18th century as his fishing lodge, and in the 20th century it became the party destination for the rich and famous, including the Queen's sister, Princess Margaret. The property has since been tastefully renovated, but retains its historical charm and the estate has been landscaped to create what is best described as a secluded riverside hideaway.

**WHERE IS IT?** Nestled on a private island in the River Thames, surrounded by stunning gardens and accessible only by a footbridge or boat. It's at the heart of Bray, a quintessentially English village that's five miles from Windsor, home of the Queen's historical castle, and just over 10 miles from London Heathrow.



**ROOMS** Rooms and suites are custom-furnished and reveal stunning views of the grounds or the famous river. They are small due to the age of the listed Grade One heritage building, but very cosy and feature contemporary design in the style of a luxurious English country house, providing the perfect place to retreat to after a day on the river. You can bring your furry friends too, with dog-friendly rooms available on request! I stayed in a ground floor corner room (Temple Room) with French doors opening out to the river and terrace, revealing sweeping vistas of the seven-acre estate.

**FOOD AND DRINK** Monkey Island Brasserie has been decorated in keeping with the original properties; vaulted ceilings and classic French doors lead out to the terrace with views over the Thames and the venue is spacious but intimate. The menu is inspired by modern British cuisine and afternoon tea is a guest favourite. The Monkey Bar serves light bites all day and its selection of cocktails draws on the location's English heritage, with a range of English wines to match. In the winter, beverages are served in front of the welcoming fireplace.

## BEST FOR

Special occasions and team building events

## DON'T MISS

Star gazing at the shepherd's hut, huddled in a blanket with a mug of the estate's signature hot chocolate

## PRICE

Rates start from £275 (US\$361), per room, per night in a Temple Room

## CONTACT

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**MEETINGS** For private meetings, the Boardroom has a capacity for 20 while The River Room can host larger groups and conferences with a theatre capacity of between 60 and 80 delegates.

**LEISURE** For business or leisure gatherings with a difference, guests can rent the estate's traditional wooden river boat with catering services provided. This splendid vessel can accommodate up to 12 people and will transport you in style to Windsor if you so wish. Monkey Island's floating spa – the only wellness facility of its kind in London – is another experience

highly recommended. Step on board this opulent houseboat and indulge in tailored treatments such as The Floating Massage.

**VERDICT** A truly 'English' retreat in a property steeped in history, located on enchanting and private riverside grounds. Ideal for weekend or wellbeing breaks, business meetings and discreet corporate gatherings where excellent food and service and unique Thames-inspired experiences define your stay. It's close to Heathrow and easily accessible by road, but transports you to world of sophisticated calm. *Melanie Swan*