

# Off the grid

Wicki Coakham



We're slaves to smartphones and tablets – so is a gadget-free break the answer? **Alessia Horwich** signs up for the latest digital detox; and, overleaf, more British boltholes where you can escape from the net

**W**hat are you

how you'll do without it," the receptionist said. "I'd be wanting to check Facebook straightaway."

The staff at Rockliffe have noticed more and more people around the hotel stuck

mid-massage," says Claire, a yoga instructor and massage therapist. "So we're trying to help people to stop, have some fun, relax and get the headspace to have a moment of mindfulness."

mindfulness to help you acknowledge what you don't see, hear or appreciate while tweeting or checking BuzzFeed. I was giddy with the anticipation of freedom from work emails, cat

half feel exposed without it. I quickly realised nobody was watching, so I started watching them instead: the couple next to me, engrossed in their phones and ignoring one another. I drank more

communicate exclusively by owl post.

"Keep it simple," Claire advised. "Resist the compulsion to check your phone, and maybe try to start the day by just feeling

## → British boltholes where you can escape the digital world

### ISLE OF ERIKA OBAN

How about a private island to get away from it all? It's not a sandy speck in the Indian Ocean, but the Isle of Erika, off the west coast of Scotland. The hotel here has 300 acres of windswept grounds, a golf course and a Michelin-starred restaurant. On its new digital-detox package, you give up your devices at the door, then get busy with a seaweed-based spa treatment, hikes around the island, reading in the library and even sailing excursions. It's only a detox in the digital sense, so have some wine – preferably by the fire after your gourmet dinner, which is included on both nights. From £410pp for two nights, half-board, with a spa treatment; [eriska-hotel.co.uk](http://eriska-hotel.co.uk)

### THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE INNER HEBRIDES

Forget wi-fi and phone signals – this retreat on another private Scottish island, Eilean Shona, doesn't even have electricity. The Old Schoolhouse, which has been refurbished by the hotelier Vanessa Branson (sister of Richard), is a character-building 45-minute walk from the private jetty. Spend your days taking bracing swims, making campfires on the white-sand beach and going on coastal walks. Then it's back to your plush digs to light the woodburning stove and gas lamps, take a soak in the double-ended Victorian rolltop bath and crack into those board games. This is definitely a place where you make your own entertainment. Sleeps 4; a week costs £1,250, self-catering, including transfers to and from the mainland; [eileanshona.com](http://eileanshona.com)

### ROWAN YURT WEST YORKSHIRE

Part of Sykes Cottages' Jomo Collection ("joy of missing out", since you ask), this yurt in Hepworth, on the edge of the West Yorkshire Pennines, is the perfect refuge when you feel the need to shut out the world. It has a private hot tub, a woodburning stove, a kingsize bed and access to a pool and sauna in the grounds. What it doesn't have is wi-fi, a phone or TV. There are scenic walking routes from the front door and, should you feel the need for some civilisation, it's a five-minute walk to the pub. Sleeps 2; three nights, self-catering, from £500; [sykescottages.co.uk](http://sykescottages.co.uk)



Cameron Rymond



**Communication breakdown** Escape the clamour of modern life in, from top, the Isle of Erika, near Oban; Cruckbarn, in Herefordshire; the Beach Hut, in Devon; and Hex Cottage, in Suffolk

pollute the stargazing at this stone cottage in Snowdonia's Dark Sky Reserve. There's no wi-fi or phone signal, anyway (or TV), so you've time to spend staring at those stars while the Aga keeps you cosy. During daylight hours, get outdoors, find a footpath and go down to Lake Gwynant for canoeing and swimming. Sleeps 4; three nights, self-catering, from £336; [menaiholidays.co.uk](http://menaiholidays.co.uk)

### CRUCKBARN HEREFORDSHIRE

Fleeces on, guitar ready: singing round the campfire at this isolated hilltop barn conversion, tucked away in woodland, is just one way to take your mind off the lack of wi-fi. There's a patchy mobile signal, too, so forget the outside world and get on with lazy lie-ins on the mezzanine kingsize bed, playing albums on the record player, taking long walks through the hills and gently poaching in the copper rolltop bath. If you think all that self-catering is going to get too much, you can arrange in advance for dinner to be delivered one night,

### THE BEACH HUT DEVON

No one will bother you at this secluded eco-hut for two on a private sheltered cove near Plymouth. There's no wi-fi or electricity, they can't call, as there's no signal, and they probably won't be bothered with the 15-minute hike from the car park down a steep cliff path to get to you. So you'll be on your own with the sound of the waves crashing on the beach, the Japanese-style hot tub, the woodburner, the solar lights, the barbecue and the cosy mezzanine double bed. From £325 a night, self-catering; [coolstays.com/the-beach-hut](http://coolstays.com/the-beach-hut)

### HEX COTTAGE SUFFOLK

This former forester's cottage is set in woodland on the Wilderness Reserve, a 5,000-acre estate dotted with smart self-catering properties. Hex has log fires, which provide all the hot water and heating (there's no electricity), original bread ovens, a herb garden and a rolltop bath that has room for two with Neal's Yard

magazines, bikes and tennis equipment, for use on the estate's court. Evenings can be spent drinking red wine by candlelight, and the kingsize Hypnos bed is just made for long mornings of loafing. Sleeps 2; three nights from £693; [wildernessreserve.com](http://wildernessreserve.com)

### WHITE HOUSE HOTEL HERM, CHANNEL ISLANDS

You take a plane, not a time machine, to get to Herm, but you might feel you've gone back 50 years. The island is car-free, for a start, and the White House Hotel doesn't have televisions. As part of its new digital-detox break, you'll hand over your devices on arrival, leaving you free to enjoy the 500-acre island without distraction. That means plenty of walking, a fitness boot camp for the energetic, or perhaps just an easy afternoon of croquet, tennis or swimming. Follow that up with a cracking high tea and (hopefully) one of the island's renowned sunsets, best viewed from the white-sand beaches. Two nights cost £295pp.