

# 9 best weekend courses

Improve yourself in 2011 – whether it's by learning to dance, playing polo or tucking into chocolate



Visit Brussels and discover the art of the chocolatier

## 1 SAY CHEESE

'Blessed are the cheesemakers', as a wise man once said. At Somerset's Hagley Bridge dairy farm, they are only too happy to invite newcomers into the inner sanctum. The farm offers one- and two-day courses in the art of making everything dairy, from cheese and yoghurt to butter and cream. Numbers are limited to six, so there is maximum opportunity to get your hands cheesy – and if you're inspired to start your own brand speciality, they also offer one-to-one tuition in product development (from £58.75; hagleybridgefarm.co.uk). Accommodation is available in the farmhouse or at local b&bs.

### MAKE IT HAPPEN

- ARRIVE: Hagley Bridge is near Waterrow, 12 miles from Taunton on the B3190. The nearest train stations are Taunton and Tiverton Parkway, from where you can arrange for Hagley Bridge staff to pick you up.
- STAY: The farmhouse b&b is four star, with breakfasts made from local produce (from £70).

## 2 POLO PRACTICE

The Ascot Park Polo Club has a secret – sometimes it lets the plebs play too! Normally the preserve of ex-Etonites, now those who've never even sat on a horse can learn the best way to swing a mallet and play a chukka (a period of play). Things start off safely on the ground, with a quick lesson on the rules, before you clamber up on crates to perfect the four basic polo strokes. Only then are you let loose on a horse to practise hitting a ball without falling off. The session ends with a full match, before you're whisked off to Buck House for a jolly good booze-up with Wills and gang... well, maybe a pint in the nearby Castle Grove pub instead (from £95; polo.co.uk).

### MAKE IT HAPPEN

- ARRIVE: Ascot Park is in Chobham, Surrey, off the M3 at junction 3 or the M25 at junctions 11 or 13.
- STAY: Swallow Barn is a great family-run b&b in Chobham, with a swimming pool and squash court (from £85; swallow-barn.co.uk).

## 3 KERRY ON CAMERA

It's a frustrating experience when you can't seem to capture on film what your eyes can see in stunning detail. For expert advice, turn to Fruï and its range of global photography holidays. The easiest one to fit into a weekend is in County Kerry, where Ireland is blessed with more shutter-friendly landscapes than it knows what to do with. These include the views from Conor Pass (the country's highest mountain pass) and a cliffside castle crumbling into the Atlantic. The course is punctuated by visits to local pubs, and teaches landscape photography fundamentals as well as ways to edit your photos on a computer (from £299; frui.co.uk).

### MAKE IT HAPPEN

- ARRIVE: Ryanair flies from Luton and Stansted to Kerry (from £64; ryanair.com) and Aer Arann has flights from Manchester (from £100; aerarann.com).
- STAY: Two nights at the Gleann Fia Country House near Killarney are included in the price (glennfia.com).

## 4 LIFE IS SWEET

If chocolate were a weapon, Belgium would be the world's most feared superpower. You too can learn the secrets of the dark arts (or milk or white if you prefer) at Zaaäär in Brussels. A chocolatier first guides you through the tempering process (molten chocolate has to be cooled slowly to keep its texture), before you are let loose to customise your creations with dustings and spices ready to take home. You can join the workshop every Saturday or arrange a private group course for a minimum of 10 people (from £18; zaabar.be).

### MAKE IT HAPPEN

- ARRIVE: Brussels is two hours from London by Eurostar (from £69; eurostar.com). British Airways, bmi and easyJet fly from a variety of UK airports (from £90; flybmi.com).
- STAY: Behind the bright red-brick façade of a 17th-century merchant's house, Hooy Kaye Lodge is a fabulous b&b, with a keen eye for design and every possible comfort (from £82; hooykayelodge.com). ▶





Study perfume making in the lavender fields of Languedoc

### 5 BORN SURVIVOR

If you'd like to make like Ray Mears for the weekend, head to the Welsh coast. On the Llyn peninsula, the Coast Hunter course will bring out any latent hunter-gatherer genes, teaching forgotten survival skills such as identifying edible plants, and spear-fishing. The style of the instructors ensures that the purpose of the course is squarely on having fun and picking up knowledge, rather than on hard-core endurance, but you will be camping out (having learnt how to set up camp yourself, of course). A good night's sleep is guaranteed, however, after a dinner of seaweed risotto cooked to perfection with oysters and whelks over the fire (£125; coastalsurvival.com).

#### MAKE IT HAPPEN

● ARRIVE: The courses in Wales take place on the Llyn Peninsula in the northwest. Locations vary, but Coastal Survival will provide you with full access details on booking.

### 6 WHOLLY SMOKE

Chipotle chillies, Applewood cheddar, kielbasa sausages, kippers – smoking food may no longer be essential for food storage since the advent of modern preservation techniques – but it's still going strong now we've got the taste for it. Smoky Jo's, in the Cumbrian village of Shap, offers one- or two-day courses to teach you how to smoke your own food at home, using hot and cold smoke methods. You can also learn to construct your own smoker – apparently a filing cabinet makes an excellent one (from £99; smokyjos.co.uk).

#### MAKE IT HAPPEN

● ARRIVE: Penrith is the closest station to Shap (nationalrail.co.uk), then it's 30 minutes on the route 106/107 bus. By car, Shap is five minutes from junction 39 on the M6.  
● STAY: Smoky Jo's has rooms for guests on the smoking courses (£80). In Penrith, Brooklands is a top-notch Victorian guesthouse (from £75; brooklandsguesthouse.com).

### 7 CAFFÈ PERFETTO

If you've ever wondered what a macchiato is (it's an espresso with a dash of milk), or fancied creating elegant coffees at home, then try this London-based barista course. Run by coffee experts and commercial trainers BARista BARBAR, this one-day course teaches everything from speciality Italian gourmet coffee styles to the correct way to properly maintain your coffee machine. For £20 more, you can get even more creative on the latte art course and learn how to pour patterns such as hearts and tulips onto your cuppa (£65; baristabarbar.co.uk).

#### MAKE IT HAPPEN

● ARRIVE: London has extensive rail and air connections with the rest of the UK. The course is based in east London, close to Whitechapel underground station.  
● STAY: The Judd Hotel has 38 rooms on an elegant Georgian crescent in Bloomsbury, just a few tube stops away from Whitechapel (from £77; juddhotelbloomsbury.com).

### 8 HEAVEN SCENT

A perfume's 'notes' must combine in the right sequence and in harmony with one another, just like musical notes. Get it right, and you have a classic scent on your hands: Chanel No 5 turns 90 this year. The French region of Languedoc in the sweet-smelling south of the country is a fitting place to learn the first steps towards perfume making. Start by finding out the properties of essential oils before turning natural ingredients into your own signature perfume or aftershave (from £415 for four days; golearnto.com).

#### MAKE IT HAPPEN

● ARRIVE: The two closest airports (both 1¼ hour's drive) are Montpellier (easyJet from Gatwick and Luton, Ryanair from Leeds) and Beziers (Ryanair from Luton and Bristol, Flybe from Southampton).  
● STAY: The course price includes three nights in a restored house near the village of Lunas.

### 9 STRICTLY WALTZ

It's hard to believe now, but the waltz was considered quite scandalous when it first became popular more than 200 years ago. Today, of course, it is the epitome of courtly manners. The Elmayer Dance School in Vienna has been teaching this much-loved classic since 1919, and offers private tuition for singles or couples in any of the standard or Latin American ballroom dances. But if you're hoping to attend a Viennese ball – the Opera Ball is the big one – it's the waltz you'll want to practise (£50 per lesson; elmayer.at).

#### MAKE IT HAPPEN

● ARRIVE: Fly from London to Vienna with Austrian Airlines, British Airways, bmi or easyJet (from £60; easyjet.com).  
● STAY: To base yourself in the city centre close to the dance school, try Pension Nossek – a typically Viennese place with baroque-style furnishings (from £100; pension-nossek.at). For Habsburg-style extravagance, choose the Hotel Imperial (from £280; hotelimperialvienna.com).

WORDS: WATT BOLTON, AMANDA CANNING, RORY GOULDING. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY, PHOTOLIBRARY, SHUTTERSTOCK



Learn to waltz in Vienna, then strut your stuff at the city's famous Opera Ball, which began in 1936

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best weekends  
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