



## Eight Keys to the Kingdom

Sophy Roberts goes in search of the perfect house to rent. What she finds is everything from stately Scottish castle to cozy cottage in the Cotswolds.

SOMETIMES IT'S NOT JUST A ROOM WITH A VIEW WE WANT but an entire house of our own. Especially in places like Dorset, North Norfolk, or Caithness, Scotland—remote, out-of-the-way spots where a good hotel is hard to find, and where we're looking for a completely different experience. Luckily, there are quite a few private houses to rent throughout the U.K.—and very good ones at that, whether rustic and simple or grand and baronial.



## Rental Agencies

Reputable brokers can be as difficult to locate as road signs to the best private addresses. Those listed here, in our opinion, are absolutely first-rate:

The best agent is Warren de Long of **BLANDINGS** (44-20-7947-3290; [www.blandings.co.uk](http://www.blandings.co.uk)). Properties range from actress Jane Seymour's Tudor pile outside Bath to family-size manors such as Place in Cornwall. De Long also offers high-end houses that sleep just four. If you need a cook, a driver, or a helicopter, just ask—with enough advance warning, nothing is impossible.

Ian Holmes of **PRIVATE WORLD** (44-20-7723-5599) has an impeccable—if limited—range of houses.

Susie Worthy of **NOTEWORTHY EVENTS** (44-20-7824-8995; fax 44-20-7824-8545; [www.noteworthyevents.com](http://www.noteworthyevents.com)) offers the most stately homes in England, including Castle Ashby and Somerley House in Hampshire, a Georgian mansion set on 7,000 private acres.

Robert Rattray at **CKD FINLAYSON HUGHES** (44-1738-451-600; [www.sport.ckdfh.co.uk](http://www.sport.ckdfh.co.uk)) rents wonderful Scottish sporting estates, including Mohammed Al Fayed's Balnagown property (where Di and Dodi reportedly hid from the press) and Affric Lodge.

The **LANDMARK TRUST** (44-1628-825-925; fax: 44-1628-825-417; [www.landmarktrust.co.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.co.uk)) rescues, restores, and rents historic estates. Of the 165 properties in the United Kingdom on its books, 24 are Grade I Listed. The Gothic Temple in Stowe, Buckinghamshire, sits on a hill in a Capability-Brown designed garden that's a kind of theme park of architectural follies. It is fantastic aesthetically, with a domed ceiling and circular rooms, but like many of the Landmark Trust properties, it wasn't really designed to be lived in. (For starters, there's only one bathroom.) The emphasis is on unique architecture rather than guest comfort levels, but the trade-off is a glimpse of 18th-century eccentricity.