

NEW FOREST HOTELS

The New Forest: A Land of Legends and Mysteries

The New Forest is a place where nature's beauty meets the supernatural, a land steeped in history and folklore that continues to captivate those who venture into its depths. From ancient dragons to ghostly apparitions and eerie encounters, the stories told in the forest are as wild and unpredictable as the landscape itself. Here, tales of mythical creatures, curses, and spirits mingle with the peaceful tranquility of the forest, creating an air of mystery that surrounds every corner.

Burley, a small village in the heart of the New Forest, has long been associated with witchcraft and strange happenings. In the 1950s, Burley was home to the infamous Sybil Leek, a white witch who was often seen walking through the village in her long black cloak, a jackdaw perched on her shoulder. Her presence added an eerie charm to the village, and her legacy as a practitioner of the occult still lingers in the area. Locals often speak of her influence on the village, with some claiming that her spirit still watches over Burley.

But it's not just witches who have left their mark on the New Forest. The tale of the Burley Dragon adds a touch of mythical terror to the region's folklore. Burley Beacon, a peaceful hilltop now beloved by walkers, was once the site of a dragon that terrorized the area. The creature, said to demand a pail of milk daily, caused havoc among the people and livestock until it was vanquished by Sir Maurice Berkeley of Bisterne. Some believe its remains formed the hill known as Bolton's Bench, but no one really knows if the dragon was indeed a fire-breathing beast or simply a particularly vicious wild boar.

The supernatural tales of the New Forest don't end with dragons and witches, however. Over at Wilverley Oak, a majestic tree that once stood as a symbol of law and order, a dark past lingers. This oak was used for executions, where highwaymen and smugglers were hanged. One of these criminals, whose body was left to swing from the tree for an extended period, is said to haunt the area to this day. Those who visit the site often feel a strange, unsettling presence, as though the ghost of the unfortunate soul still lingers beneath its twisted branches.

A visit to the New Forest would not be complete without stopping by Minstead Church, the final resting place of none other than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of the legendary Sherlock Holmes. Conan Doyle's burial, however, was far from ordinary. Known for his vocal belief in the supernatural, his request to be reburied in

the churchyard caused a stir. In 1950, his reburial took place, but to honour his controversial views, he was laid to rest at the southern end of the cemetery, as far from the holy building as possible. His grave has since become a point of interest for fans and those intrigued by his fascination with the otherworldly.

For those drawn to the idea of restless spirits, the Hurst Castle near Milford-on-Sea offers a chilling experience. The ghost of King Charles I, who was imprisoned there before his execution in 1649, is said to wander the castle's grounds. The royal spirit, forever trapped in the place where he awaited his tragic fate, adds to the castle's eerie reputation. Visitors report strange sensations and feelings of being watched as they explore the castle's cold, stone walls.

In the heart of the New Forest lies Breamore House, where a centuries-old portrait is said to carry a curse. The portrait, which hangs in the house to this day, was of an elder sister who, on her deathbed, threatened to curse anyone who dared to move it. In the 1950s, a man cleaning the house moved the painting, only to suffer a nasty fall and break his leg that very same day. Since then, no one has dared to touch it, as the curse still lingers in the house.

One of the most intriguing tales in the New Forest is that of The Red Pond at Ocknell. Every year, this pond near Stoney Cross turns a mysterious shade of red. Legend has it that after killing King William Rufus, Sir Walter Tyrrell washed his hands in the pond, staining the water with the king's blood. Every year since, the red water is said to signal the appearance of a black hound, Tyrrell's Dog, which is believed to be an omen of death. The sighting of this spectral hound continues to strike fear into the hearts of those who witness it.

And then there's The Angel & Blue Pig Inn in Lymington, a pub with a notorious reputation for being haunted. Among its many ghostly inhabitants are a coachman, a naval officer, and a young blonde girl, all of whom have been spotted by visitors and staff alike. In addition to these apparitions, strange sounds—such as the eerie notes of a piano—have been heard drifting through the empty corridors. The inn, once known simply as "The Angel," has become a must-visit for ghost hunters and those intrigued by its haunted history.