



Time to explore **Britain**

North, south,
east and west

Explore beautiful landscapes
and historic towns by car

England, Scotland
and Wales

From National Parks to
country pubs

Tour planners

All the information you need
to make your visit special

Take the
scenic
route

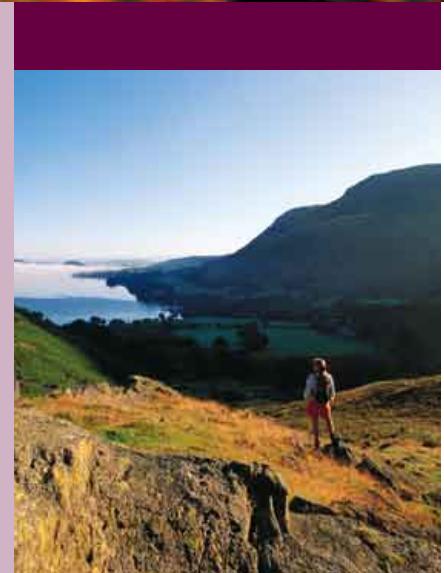




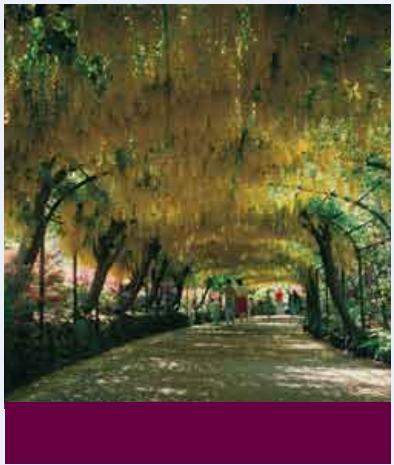
Welcome

Make your tour of Britain special with our essential guide to the most beautiful, historic and exciting places north, south, east and west

Take the scenic route and drive along winding country lanes to delightful market towns and villages where you can explore everything from friendly pubs to centuries-old churches. Walk in breathtaking countryside from green valleys and majestic mountains to miles of sandy beaches. Sail across vast lakes or cycle through lush woodland. Absorb the rich heritage of castles, royal palaces, landscaped gardens or mysterious ancient monuments. While away the hours in historic cities, enjoying everything from world-class museums, galleries and theatres to superb shops, restaurants and traditional tearooms. Treat yourself to the luxury of a grand country house hotel, or settle in to a cozy 'bed and breakfast' cottage. We've picked an abundance of unique experiences to ensure your stay is truly memorable. A day at the highland games, a trip to a local music festival or a delicious meal of fresh fare in an affordable cafe, the choice is yours. All budgets and tastes are covered, whether you want action-packed fun or sophisticated relaxation. A warm welcome to the very best of Britain.



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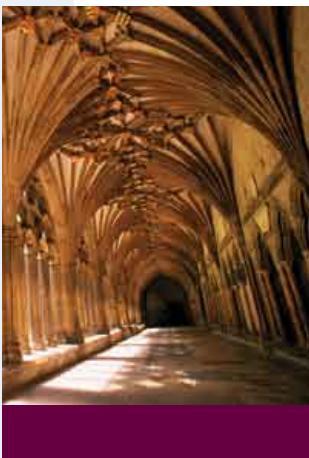
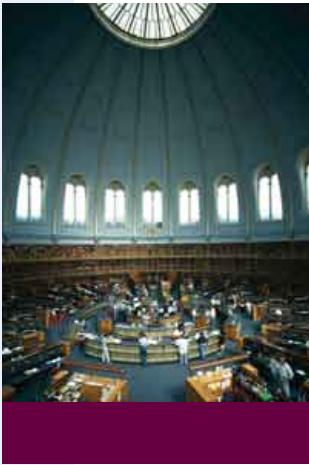
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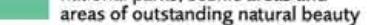
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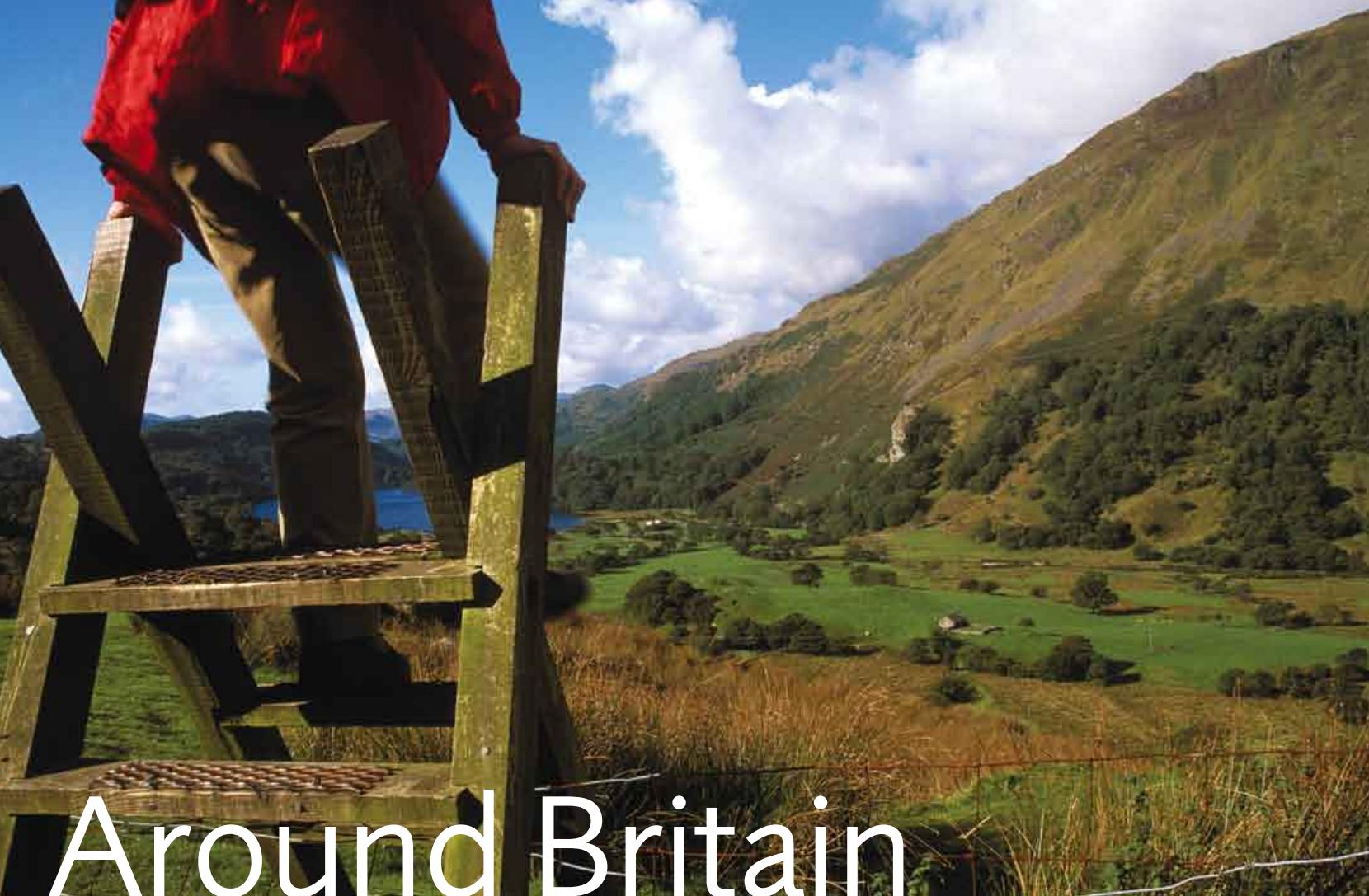
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0 50 miles
0 75 kms







Play Video

*View the scenery of
Snowdonia National
Park and the Gower
Peninsula.*

Around Britain

North, south, east and west, everywhere you go in Britain there are historic cities and monuments, beautiful countryside and a very warm welcome

FROM FABULOUS FAIRYTALE castles to mysterious ancient monuments; Roman cities to rolling green fields; majestic mountains to World Heritage Sites steeped in centuries of history – Britain has it all. Yet even if you only have a week to enjoy the country's incredible variety, you can still enjoy an exciting trip, whether travelling by train or car. Let's whisk you off on a magical tour around the splendours of Britain from ancient cities to beautiful countryside.

Breathe in the fresh country air Go walking in Snowdonia National Park in Wales and be exhilarated by the mountainous landscape



Cathedrals, castles and monuments

From Canterbury Cathedral to Stonehenge and Windsor Castle, there are historic attractions all over Britain

You might use London as your starting point, and a short distance west of the capital you will find the glories of historic Windsor Castle. There's been a royal stronghold on this Thames-side site since William the Conqueror's time, and the awe-inspiring fortress is now the Queen's principal residence. But even though the castle is a home, much of it is open to the public.

Here you can see all the important works of art, statues, ornate chapels and amazing treasures that highlight hundreds of years of British history. After an evening in Windsor – where you may have strolled the historic cobbled streets, and seen a play or an opera at the Theatre Royal – the next morning it's time to head for a place that makes even the castle's

1,000 years of history pale into insignificance.

Stonehenge in Wiltshire, the enigmatic stone circle that has exerted a powerful hold on people's imaginations for centuries, dates from about 3000 BC. There's something intensely moving about the way the sun rises over the Heel Stone on midsummer's morning, sending its shadow creeping towards the centre of the stones, just as it has done since the dawn of history.

Nearby, Salisbury Cathedral's slender, soaring spire is the tallest medieval spire in Europe. A great view of it is from the water meadows. Then step inside and wonder at the beautiful vaulted ceilings, breathtaking windows and the oldest working clock in the world.

When the Romans visited these shores a mere 2,000 years ago, they founded the city of Aqua Sulis – the modern-day Bath – at the spot where hot springs bubbled to the surface, as they do to this day.

Visitors can still find refreshment on the exact site where Romans took the waters – except these days you are more likely to enjoy a delicious afternoon tea in the elegant Pump Room overlooking the Roman baths.

Energy restored, you should be ready to explore this magnificent World Heritage city. Watch out for the architectural splendour of The Circus, a classical Georgian circle of honey-coloured houses dating from the 18th century. And don't miss the Royal Crescent, a grand arc of terraced townhouses looking out onto the Royal Victoria Park. Fans of Jane Austen will be entranced by the many locations across the city intimately connected with her life and famous novels.



‘The enigmatic Stonehenge in Wiltshire dates from about 3000 BC’

Scenes from Shakespeare
See a Shakespeare play at the great playwright's birthplace of Stratford-upon-Avon. Step back in time in pretty Cotswolds villages such as Chipping Camden



Bath is known as the gateway to the Cotswolds, and the route to your next destination takes you through some of the prettiest countryside in Britain.

Shakespeare country

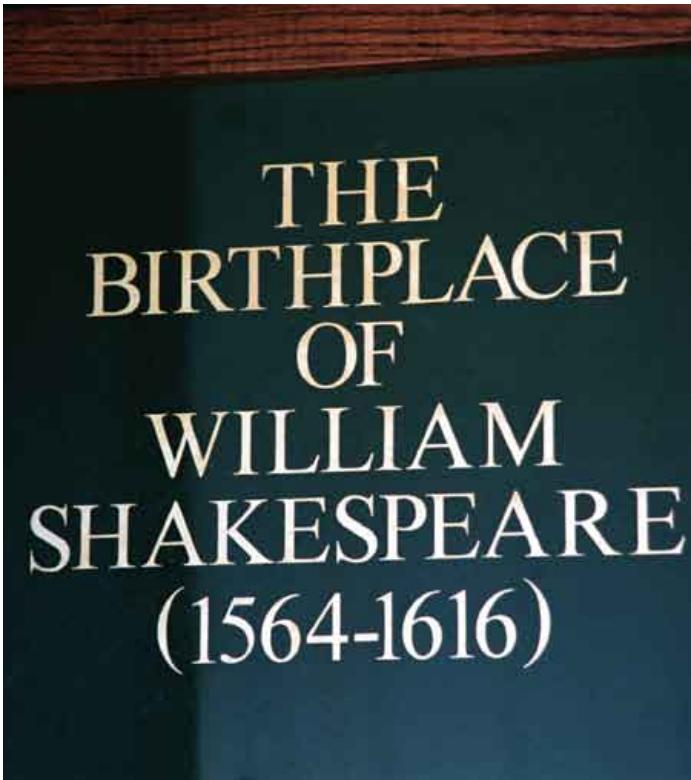
The way to Stratford-upon-Avon, the heart of Shakespeare country, is dotted with picturesque golden-stoned villages and unspoilt market towns, such as Bourton-on-the-Water or Stow-on-the-Wold, where you can stop for lunch and a browse in the charming local shops.

Stratford itself, with its timbered houses

and idyllic setting on the river Avon, is the birthplace of the world's greatest playwright. You can still see the house where he was born in 1564, and the cottage a short way out of town where his wife, Anne Hathaway, lived.

In the evening you'll be spoilt for choice of entertainment. Stratford is a world centre for Shakespeare productions, and it would be a tragedy not to see one of the local boy's great works performed by the celebrated Royal Shakespeare Company at the magnificent Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

Stoke-on-Trent is a unique city made up of six separate towns; Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley,



‘The gentle hills of the Welsh border give way to the majesty of the Snowdonian mountains’

Stoke, Fenton and Longton – collectively known as The Potteries. Home to the world's greatest pottery manufacturers, the area's ceramic museums and factory shops provide value shopping opportunities.

Welcome to Wales

On the following day, you can cross the border into Wales to take in some of Britain's

most rugged and stirring scenery. Take a leisurely route through the rolling hills of Worcestershire and the dreamy Shropshire country before encountering the perfect pastoral landscape of the Welsh borders.

Before long, the gentle green views give way to the stark majesty of Snowdonia, a mountain range blessed with an unsurpassable wild beauty. Mount Snowdon



Holiday in the Lakes The Lake District is one of Britain's most beautiful National Parks and you can visit Waterhead (left) and Grasmere (above)

'The Lake District's beauty has often been celebrated in literature'

itself is the highest point in England and Wales, and if you are feeling energetic, you won't need specialist mountaineering gear to reach the summit. A reasonably fit person can conquer the top in a brisk walk. Alternatively, you could take the enchantingly quaint Snowdon Mountain Railway all the

way to the summit.

In the evening you can stay in one of the little towns nearby, such as Machynlleth or Betws-y-Coed. The ancient Welsh language is still widely used in this region, so expect to see bilingual signs – and some unfamiliar words being used in the local pubs.

But don't worry, everyone can speak English and you'll manage just fine.

Onwards to the Lakes

Swap the grandeur of Snowdonia the day after for another National Park – the Lake District in northern England, celebrated in verse by the Romantic school of poets including Wordsworth and Coleridge.

As with all of Britain's National Parks, admission is free, and you can wander at will

over the crags and alongside the countless lovely lakes which give this stunningly beautiful area its name.

Towns such as Windermere, clinging to the shores of the lake of the same name, offer lots of interesting shops. Close by you'll find the home of children's author Beatrix Potter. Another place with a grand literary link is the tiny Dove Cottage, near Ambleside, where Wordsworth lived while he was writing so many of his best-known poems. In the

evening, the bigger towns are well-stocked with a range of restaurants – or you could stray off the beaten track and find a country inn for a bite to eat and a star-lit stroll back to your hotel or B&B.

Next morning, it's time to cross the dramatic Pennine range of hills, known as the Backbone of England, and enter Yorkshire's stunning countryside.

The city of York can claim a history dating back to the Romans. The Vikings were also visitors, and the Jorvik Centre provides a fascinating taste of what life would have been like in the York of the 10th century. For shopping, it's hard to beat the Shambles, a narrow thoroughfare boasting architecture which has barely changed since the Middle Ages. For a meal or a drink, York prides itself

on having a pub for every day of the year – 365 traditional English inns from which to choose.

Enjoy northern hospitality

For the last leg of your memorable journey around the best of Britain, hop over Hadrian's Wall into Scotland, and head for its capital, Edinburgh.

Take just a short walk through the city, and you'll feel as if you're wandering through centuries, from the Old Town on Castle Rock, to the splendid Georgian squares of the New Town.

There's so much to do in Edinburgh. Fabulous shopping on and around the Royal Mile, countless bars and restaurants, and if you come in August, you will find yourself swept up in the excitement of the Edinburgh



‘Wind down from lively Edinburgh in the peaceful Scottish Highlands’

City life, country life From Scotland's ancient city of Edinburgh to the remarkable Hadrian's Wall, there's variety wherever you go



International Festival, when entertainers from all around the world descend on the city to perform. For a taste of tradition, don't miss the Military Tattoo at the Castle Esplanade, an impressive floodlit display of music, colour and pageantry. To wind down from the hectic pace of Edinburgh, take the chance to travel north and soak up the sublime majesty of the Scottish Highlands. You won't have to journey far to find real peace amid the glens and heather, and only the occasional red deer will disturb your solitude.

Some 50 miles away, St Andrews blends past and present with ease. See the cathedral, founded in 1160, and the castle, which was built as a fortress and home of the Bishop of St Andrews. The famous Royal & Ancient Golf Club is the world's most prestigious. It's the ambition of every golfer to play on the Old

Scotland's finest Marvel at the beauty of Scotland and, while you're there, sample its national drink, whisky



'Wherever you travel around Britain, you'll find surprises, and a warm welcome'

Course so why not put your name down for the ballot? Or stroll along the magnificent two-mile stretch of beach at the West Sands.

If malt whisky is your favourite tipple, head north west to the River Spey where the famous spirit is produced. Join the whisky trail and you'll gain an insight into the traditions and skills of the famous distillers as well as

getting to taste those special brews.

Of course, this gives you just a flavour of where a week's tour of Britain could take you, and visitors with a taste for exploration can wander where the fancy leads them. But wherever you travel around Britain, you're sure to find surprises – and most importantly, a very warm welcome.

Tour tips

Further information

For more details about touring Britain, and to book accommodation along your route, visit www.visitbritain.com/ca

Great British Heritage Pass

This is valid for four, seven, 15 days or one month, allows entry to nearly 600 fascinating properties. For details: www.visitbritain.com/heritagelpass

Useful websites

Windsor Castle

www.royal.gov.uk

Stonehenge

www.english-heritage.org.uk/stonehenge

Bath

www.visitbath.co.uk

Royal Shakespeare Company

www.rsc.org.uk

The Potteries

www.visitstoke.co.uk

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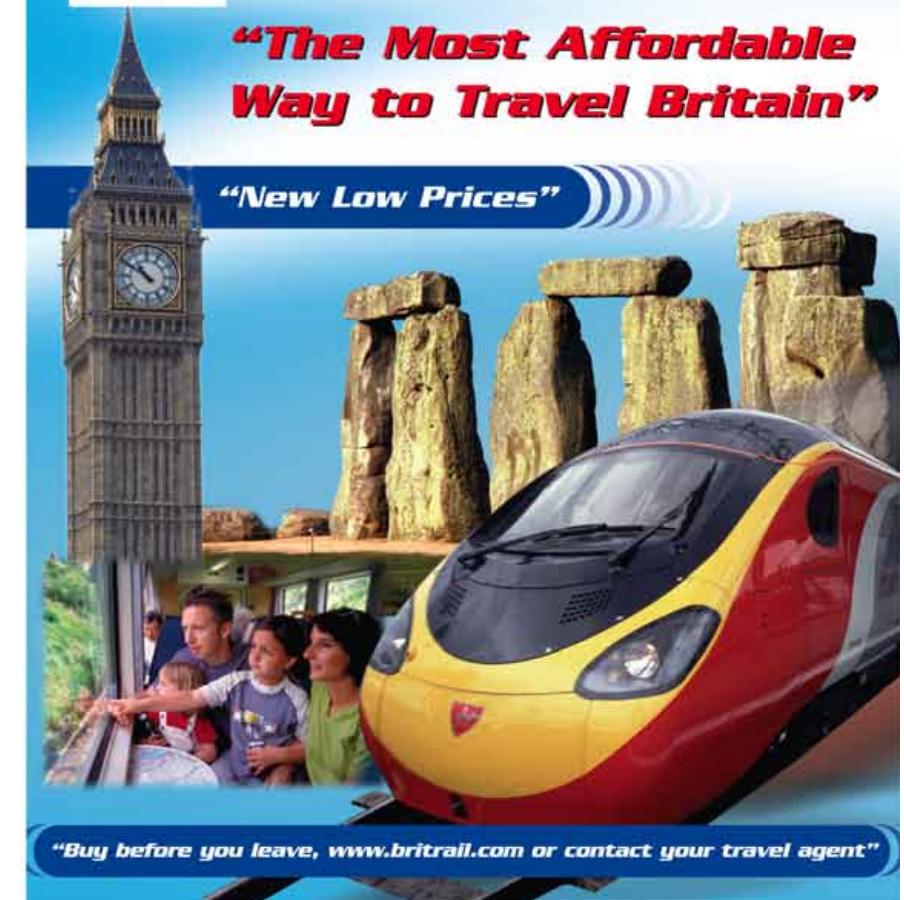
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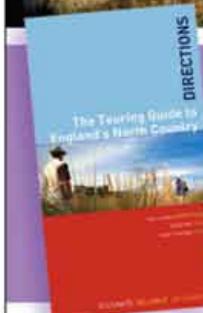
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Britain's coastline

Salty sea breezes, soft sand under foot, wildlife walks from ruined castles to working harbours.
Explore Britain's beautiful coastline and feel alive



Round the rugged rocks Stumble Head lighthouse in Wales looks out to sea

BRITAIN'S COASTLINE OFFERS all the splendour and diversity you could wish for. Towering cliffs and golden sandy beaches; fishing boats bobbing in quiet harbours and wild empty places of staggering beauty.

This year sees a very special celebration of Britain's relationship with the sea. To mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar, Britain's greatest naval victory, the SeaBritain 2005 festival is a series of spectacular events taking place up and down the coast. From the Tall Ships race to firework shows and

re-enactments, there's something to delight young and old alike.

Wild about Scotland's nature

Let's start our tour in Scotland and go round Britain's coast clockwise through the east and south of England to Wales on the west coast. Scotland is famous the world over for its dramatic mountains, shimmering lochs, rugged islands and remote coastline. Experience wildlife in the uninhabited Handa Island, a Scottish Wildlife Trust nature reserve

just a quarter of a mile from the mainland, where you can see colonies of guillemots, puffins, terns and razorbills. Climb the 400 feet to the top of the Torridonian sandstone cliffs, a dramatic vantage point and look out for whales and dolphins.

England's beautiful beaches

For many, the most beautiful coastline in England is the north east coast of Northumberland: a 40-mile stretch from Amble to Berwick-upon-Tweed that has been

recognized as a Heritage Coast and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Bamburgh beach is perfect for a stroll, with mile upon mile of golden sands overlooked by the magnificent Bamburgh Castle. Just beyond Bamburgh lies the ethereal Holy Island, known more widely by its ancient Christian name of Lindisfarne. Follow in the footsteps of those early Christian pilgrims and pay a visit to the island, which is accessible by car only at low tide along a road from the unspoilt village of Beal. Collect prehistoric fossils among the pebbles of Robin



Hood's Bay on the windswept coast of Yorkshire, then head to the ancient seaside town of Whitby. Explore its warren of cobbled streets and lanes, steeped in history and atmosphere. The explorer Captain James Cook was born down the road and Bram Stoker set most of his novel *Dracula* here. See where the Vampire Count's ship ran aground before he changed into a black dog and fled up the 199 steps to the ruined Abbey! Afterwards, eat some of the best fish 'n' chips in England.

Take the coast road

North Norfolk is famous for its long, white sandy beaches. An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, you'll find some of the best nature reserves in the country here. Drive along the coast road and you'll come across numerous, wide secluded beaches washed by safe, shallow waters. Perfect for sunbathers, swimmers and surfers – and for those who just want some space to get away from it all. When evening comes, choose between the lively seaside resorts or the

Sea views Escape to the coast near Durness, the most northerly village in Scotland. Cornish fishermen catch lobster for a fresh dinner



'Choose between lively seaside resorts or laid-back market towns'

laid-back pace of the market towns.

On the Kent coast, at the mouth of the Thames Estuary, sits the pretty coastal town of Broadstairs, home not only to seven beautiful sandy beaches but also, from 1837, Charles Dickens. The great novelist wrote most of *David Copperfield* from an imposing turreted mansion high up on

the cliffs overlooking the town.

And, of course, this was the house that inspired the title of one of his greatest works – *Bleak House*. Today, you can visit the Dickens House Museum. If you're there in June you can mix with crinolined ladies and their top-hatted escorts as they parade around the town to celebrate the annual Broadstairs Dickens

Play Video

Look out upon Padstow Harbour and the British coastline.

Bird's eye view Puffins can be found in the Outer Hebrides (left). Admire the views from the coast (right)



Festival. Even better, dress up yourself and join in the fun!

A popular spot for walking, cycling, canoeing and horse riding is the famous Seven Sisters, a stretch of chalk cliffs on the south coast that forms part of Britain's Heritage Coastline. When you've had your fill of the fantastic views across the English Channel, go to Brighton for some of the finest Regency architecture in England, and some of the best dining and nightlife outside of London.

Cornwall, right at England's south western tip, has the mildest climate in Britain and is a wonderful place to explore in all seasons. And on the most southerly tip, famous for its huge Atlantic breakers, is the deep, mysterious Kynance Cove.

Fascinated by fossils and dinosaurs? Then you'll be enthralled by the spectacular 95-mile coastal stretch along East Devon and Dorset. Dubbed the Jurassic Coast, it has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site

and the only place in the world where you can discover an unbroken record of 185 million years of evolution. New species are being discovered here all the time, maybe you'll be the next to find one.

Walking Wales's coastline

Wales has something to offer every sea lover. Breathtaking scenery, wildlife and stunning beach walks that take you past seal and sea bird colonies. Castles and churches steeped in legend and history dot the coastline, ripe for exploration.

Many of Wales's fishing villages have retained their period charm, none more so

'Breathtaking scenery, fantastic wildlife and stunning beach walks past seal and sea bird colonies'

than Tenby. With its narrow, medieval streets and pastel-coloured Regency houses, it's a photographer's dream.

Discover the exquisite coved village of Llangrannog, nestled in the lush green hills of the Heritage Coast of Ceredigion, and watch for bottlenose dolphins and porpoises near shore and whales cruise by out at sea. If you love surfing, then the beautiful Gower Peninsula is for you.

So, whether you want to enjoy an ice cream on a traditional promenade, a walk along dramatic cliffs or oysters fresh from a village harbour, Britain's coastline is worth discovering.

**SeaBritain
2005**

Tour tips

For further information
www.visitbritain.com/ca

Useful websites

www.seabritain2005.com
www.visitscotland.com
www.northumberland.gov.uk
www.yorkshirevisitor.com
www.visitnorfolk.co.uk
www.kenttourism.co.uk
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Fly over Britain's castles and witness their exquisiteness.

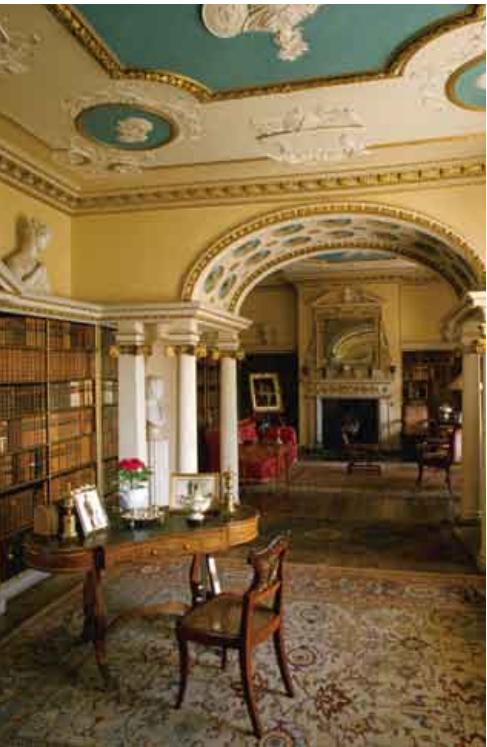
Highland heritage
The ruins of Eilean Donan Castle are set in breathtaking Scottish scenery

Castles and historic houses

From formidable fortresses to perfect palaces with glorious gardens, discover Britain's past through its castles and grand houses

A FASCINATING FORTRESS such as Warwick Castle. A grand stately home such as Blenheim Palace, set in stunning landscaped gardens. Britain's historic houses are a joy to visit.

Let's start with the castles, and Wales is a great place to begin your history lesson. King Edward I built a series of fortresses such as Conwy and Caernarfon in the 13th century to subdue the Welsh. As you walk around Conwy's massive, gritty, dark-stoned walls and peer through the arrow slits once used by the king's bowmen, you really feel as though you've stepped back in time. As a complete contrast you should put Cardiff Castle on



testament to this. Head to the Highlands and the breathtaking ruin of Eilean Donan, with snow-capped mountains as its backdrop and perfectly reflected in the rippling surface of the loch.

Royalty and wizardry

Or choose the current Royal holiday residence, Balmoral Castle, with its beautiful forests and garden walks, which you can enjoy from the beginning of April to the end of July each year. And don't miss Cawdor Castle with its Walled Garden, Flower Garden and Wild Garden, Tapestry Room, Old Kitchen and drawbridge.

If you call into medieval Alnwick Castle on England's north east coast, you might have a sense of *déjà vu*. Harry Potter fans will recognise it as Hogwarts School of Wizardry, but in real life it's the home of the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland. You're welcome to wander through its beautifully furnished rooms and walk around the walled garden, lovingly restored and renovated by the current Duchess.

A favourite Royal residence is, of course, Windsor Castle. A huge edifice, over 900 years old, it towers over the town on the banks of the Thames just west of London. Leave plenty of time to linger in its many fascinating rooms – there's just so much to see. There are the cabinets full of priceless bone china, the collection of Canalettos and the table set ready for hundreds of visiting VIPs to sit down for dinner.

In the heart of England, Warwick Castle, in Shakespeare's home county of Warwickshire,

your list. It's all high walls and tough-looking on the outside, but the interior is a colourful extravaganza of decadence.

And you'll love the gardens of Chirk Castle and medieval Powis Castle, which rises dramatically out of a world-famous garden, overhung with enormous clipped yews, sheltering rare and tender plants. Laid out under the influence of Italian and French styles, the garden retains its original lead statues, an orangery and an aviary on the terraces.

The Scots, too, were a fiery lot and Scotland's castle-dotted landscapes lay



Majesty and magic
Shugborough House in Sussex (far left) has grand interiors, and Alnwick Castle in Northumberland, location of filming for the Harry Potter films

is a magnificently-preserved stronghold. The fortress of the Earls of Warwick is now surrounded by delightful gardens rather than besieged by enemy soldiers, and from the battlements you can look out on the beautiful grounds. Watch a jousting tournament or take to the floor and join in a medieval dance class. Such attractions bring history to life and

'Harry Potter fans will recognise Alnwick Castle as Hogwarts School of Wizardry'



**‘Vast houses
and gardens
needed armies
of servants,
and you get an
insight into
their lives too’**

Touring spot *Visit Glamis
Castle in Scotland*

Touring spots
Relax in the grounds of Cardiff Castle (right); playtime at Warwick Castle (far right)



provide great photo opportunities.

Leeds Castle in Kent in the south of England has been described as one of "the most lovely castles in the world", largely due to the way it towers from an island surrounded by a lake-sized moat. Flowers and foliage abound in the formal gardens – the Culpeper and the Lady Baillie Garden – while the maze with its secret underground grotto provides a challenging half hour unless you'd rather opt for a cup of tea in the Wykeham Martin Tea Room.

Palatial splendour

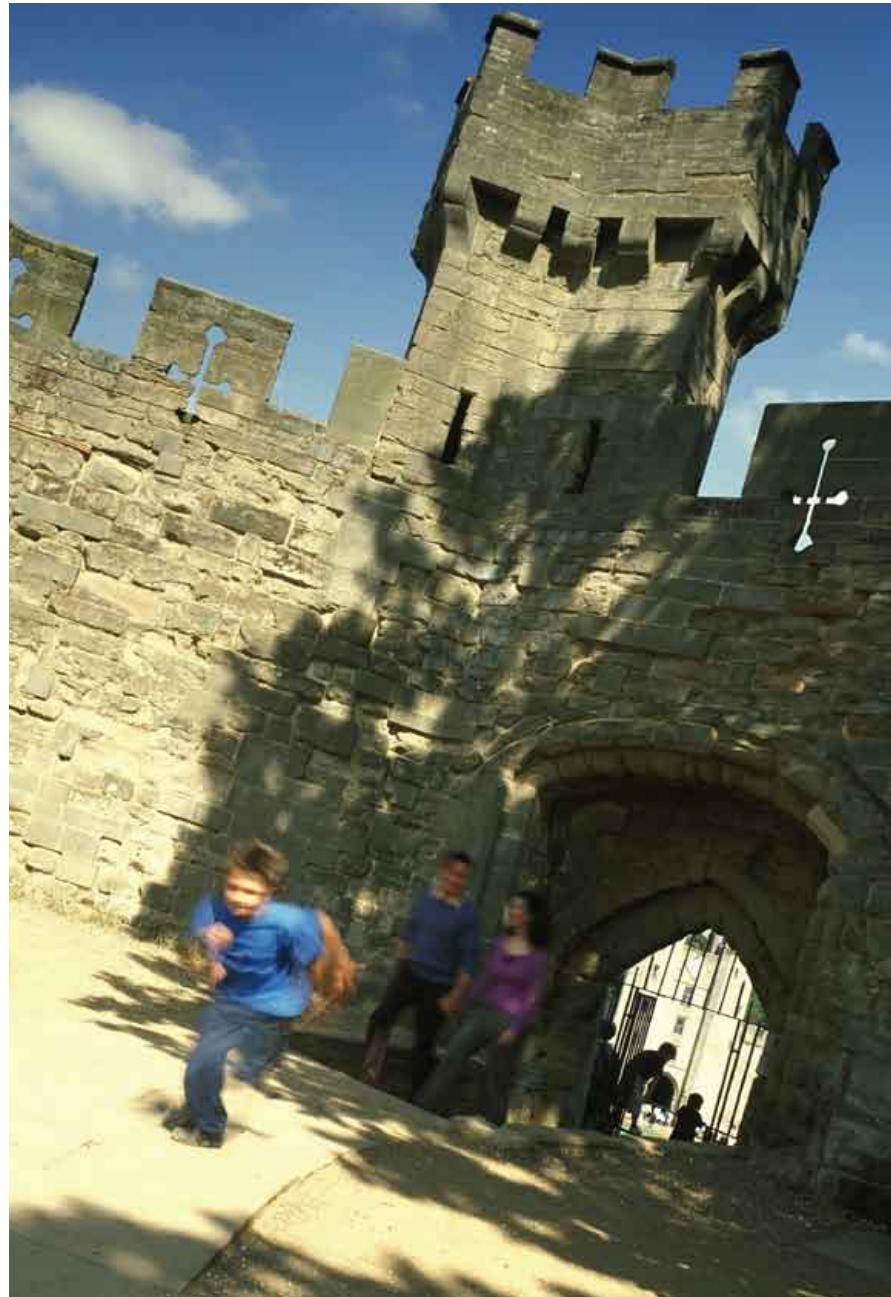
As the centuries passed and peace prevailed, there was no longer a need to build fortifications. Instead, increasingly wealthy landowners built wonderful palatial houses with magnificent landscaped gardens. Behind elegant facades the numerous drawing rooms, dining rooms, ballrooms and bedrooms

were filled with the very best furniture of the day. Adam fireplaces, Chippendale chairs, Grinling Gibbons wood carvings. Hundreds of handsome portraits and luscious landscapes lined the walls. The good news is, it's all here to enjoy today.

In the Scottish Borders you'll find Traquair, the country's oldest inhabited house. Mary, Queen of Scots once was here but now you'll find craft workshops, an antique shop and the family's very own private brewery.

Be sure to put Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire on your list, and also make time for Chatsworth House in Derbyshire. They are two of the grandest palaces in Britain. Blenheim, the birthplace of Winston Churchill, has magnificent old master paintings, exquisite architecture, lakes, gardens, fountains and also a superb gift centre.

As you sweep through the gates of





The old and the new The bridge to Conwy Castle; servants' life at Petworth House



'With great souvenir shops and cafes, stately homes offer some great days out'

Chatsworth into its acres of grounds and cross the stone bridge you'll see the imposing building ahead of you. Inside are beautifully furnished rooms and a splendid art collection. Outside there are walled gardens, a maze and an amazingly high cascade.

Such wonderful parkland is often captured

on canvas. The Capability Brown landscapes of Petworth House in Sussex, for example, are immortalised in the paintings of J M W Turner. Admire his work as you wander through the beautiful rooms and share his vistas from the windows across to the lake.

Such vast houses, gardens and parkland

couldn't have existed without armies of servants and gardeners to cook, clean, polish, cut lawns and tend plants. It's great to get an insight into life 'below stairs' while you're visiting these stately piles. At Shugborough in Staffordshire for example, take a look in the spartan maids' quarters and, in the cavernous kitchens, picture the kitchen boy as he laboriously turns the spit. At Erddig House, across the border in Wales, you can study the unique, detailed records kept by the domestic staff and learn about the unusual friendship between the family and the servants.

Britain's wealth of castles and stately homes is a joy to discover – grand architecture, stunning interiors, beautiful gardens, an insight into the lives of wealthy landowners and their servants during war-torn and more peaceful times. Add to this attractive mix some great souvenir shops and cafe restaurants and you're assured of some great days out.

Tour tips

Great British Heritage Pass

Valid for four, seven, 15 days or one month, allows entry to nearly 600 fascinating properties. Ask VisitBritain for details or click on to www.visitbritain.com/heritagelapass

Websites

Blenheim Palace

www.blenheim Palace.com

Chatsworth

www.chatsworth-house.co.uk

Leeds Castle

www.leeds-castle.com

Warwick Castle

www.warwick-castle.co.uk

Cawdor Castle

www.cawdorcastle.com

Balmoral Castle

www.balmoralcastle.com

Powis Castle

www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Chirk Castle

www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Windsor Castle

www.royal.gov.uk

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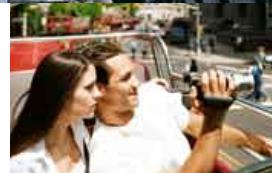
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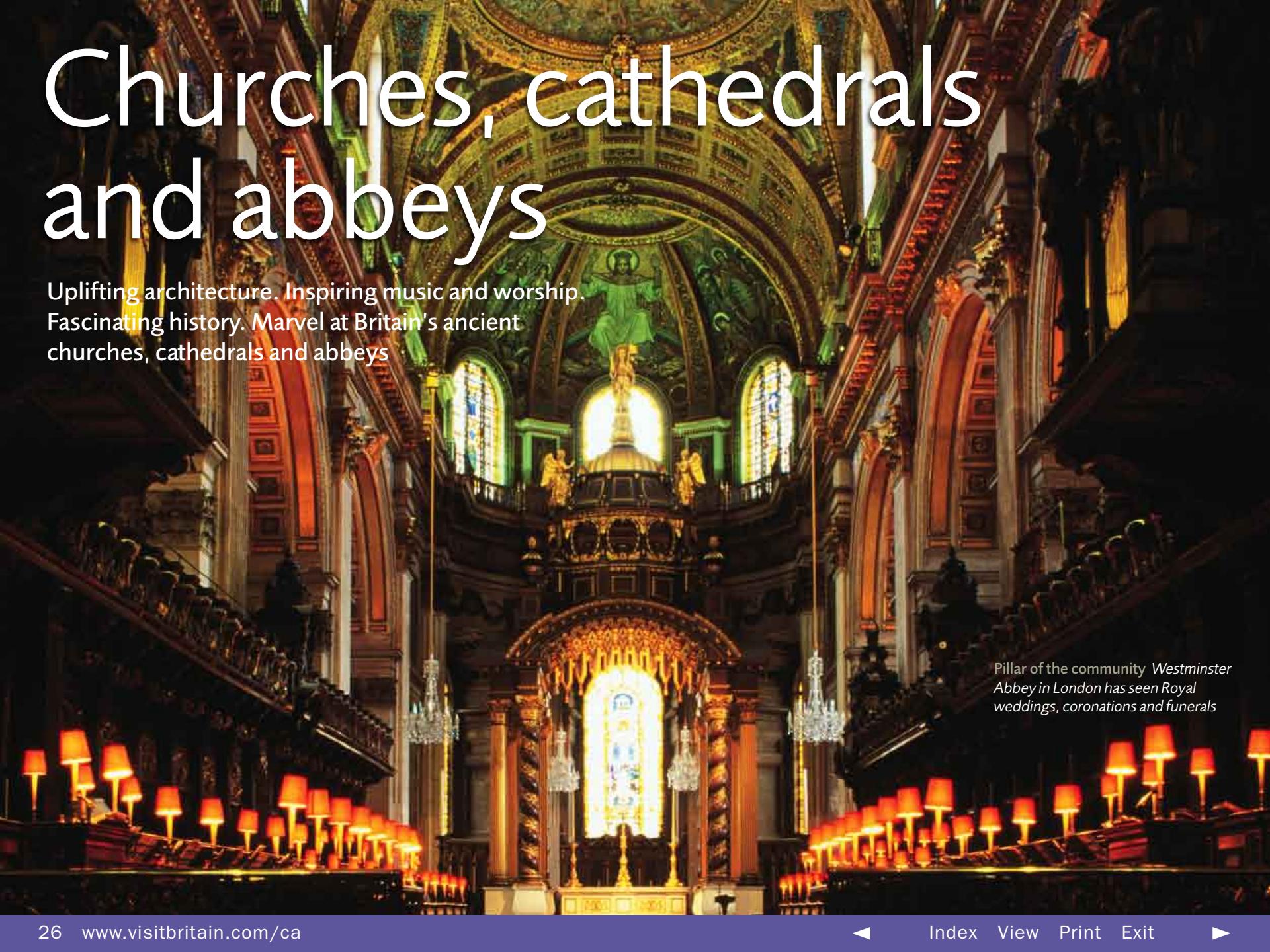


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Churches, cathedrals and abbeys



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churches, cathedrals and abbeys

Pillar of the community *Westminster Abbey* in London has seen Royal weddings, coronations and funerals

CANTERBURY, YORK, DURHAM, Winchester; stroll around Britain's ancient cities and you're likely to discover a beautiful cathedral at its heart. As you stand in a leafy cathedral close and gaze up at these towering palaces of worship, transport your mind back many centuries to imagine the religious impulse that led men to conceive such remarkable buildings. Alternatively, drive through Britain's hidden rural villages and market towns and discover smaller churches, equally historic and beautiful in their way.

Living history

Take the medieval St Govan's Chapel in the Pembrokeshire National Park in Wales as just one of many fascinating examples. Named after a hermit, it clings to the ragged rock halfway down an isolated cliff. Legend has it that King Arthur's knight, Sir Gawain, lies buried beneath the stone altar. Or head for Scotland's Rosslyn Chapel, a few miles south of Edinburgh. Admire its barrel roof and intricate carvings, especially the Apprentice Pillar, so called because the master mason was so jealous of the craftsmanship that he killed himself.

But the beauty of the churches, cathedrals and abbeys of Britain is that they remain far more than museums of architecture and statuary today. They're pieces of living history, integral parts of the community. Attend one of the services, or sit quietly in a pew and contemplate your surroundings, perhaps as the choir rehearses for a forthcoming service.

Architecture and music

If you start your tour of Britain in London, don't leave the capital without embracing the beauty and history of Westminster Abbey, where Royal weddings and coronations have been held since William the Conqueror in 1066. Enter at the towered West Front and just stop and survey the scene before you. The Nave seems as high as it's long. Lined with gilded pillars, it stretches out towards the ornate Choir screen. Look up at how the pillars sprout into elegant ceiling vaulting. And beyond the Choir, where celestial singing can be heard during daily services, there are further chapels, transepts, tombs and glorious stained-glass windows. There's the famous Poet's Corner, for example, resting place of literary greats as diverse as Geoffrey Chaucer and Charles Dickens.

Another much-loved London landmark is St Paul's Cathedral, whose vast dome dominates the skyline for miles around. The site of state funerals from Lord Nelson to Winston Churchill, St Paul's is the early 18th-century masterpiece of Sir Christopher Wren. Escape the hustle and bustle of the city for the serenity of daily services of Holy Communion or

Pillar of the community *The small but perfectly formed St David's Cathedral in Dyfed in Wales*



Evensong. Or just marvel at the many treasures. In the crypt, see effigies and stone dating back to the original 7th-century church. Share in the delight of visiting children as they test the unique acoustics in the Whispering Gallery. And check the cathedral diary for regular concerts throughout the year.

Around Britain

Canterbury Cathedral in Kent is also a must-visit for its historic beauty and choral music. Enter the close by the gothic Christ Church Gate and see the great stone structure before you with its soaring tower and iconic statues. Inside a white pavement stone marks

the spot where one of the cathedral's most famous archbishops, St Thomas Becket, was murdered in 1170 by four knights of Henry II. This martyrdom has made Canterbury a place of pilgrimage since Chaucer's day. As you wander around, daylight floods in through glorious 13th-century stained-glass windows, some depicting miracles performed at Becket's shrine. Then amble through the ornately carved cloisters that bring Canterbury's monastic past to life and are still used for prayers and processions today.

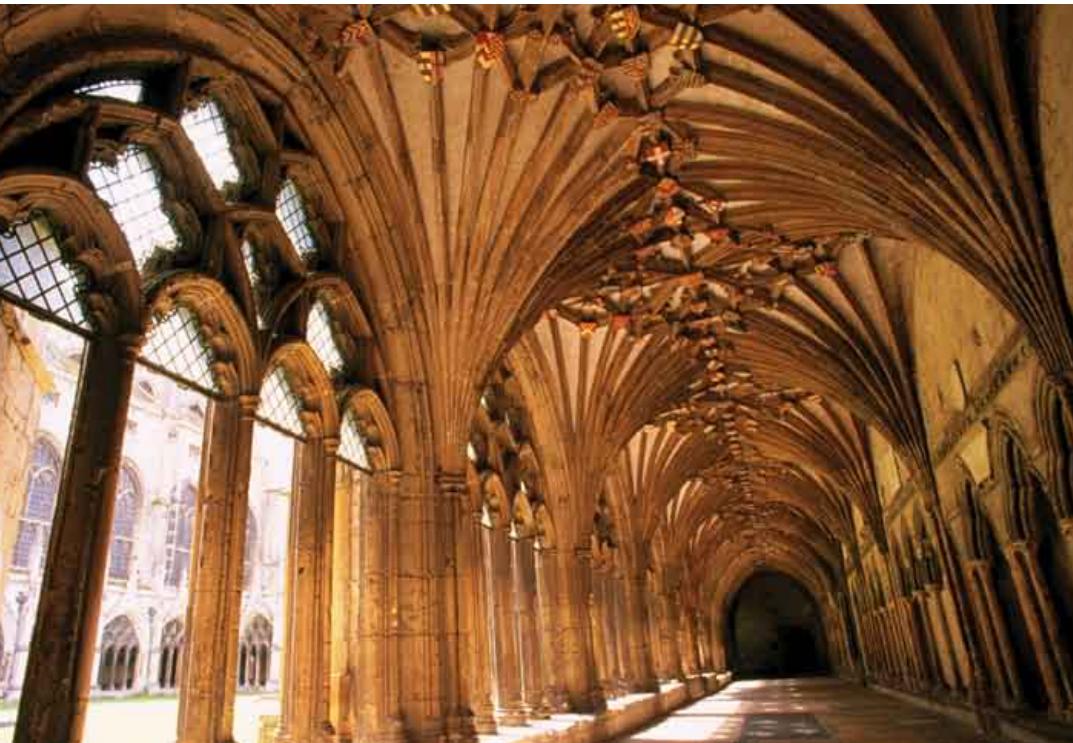
While Canterbury is dominated by a vast tower, Salisbury Cathedral in Wiltshire is characterized by a slender, soaring spire, the

tallest medieval spire in Europe. Viewed from the nearby water meadows in the picturesque city, it's a wonderful sight. And as well as being uplifted by amazing vaulted ceilings and breathtaking windows inside, you'll discover gems such as the original copy of the Magna Carta in the Chapter House, and the oldest working clock in the world. And within easy distance is the equally splendid Winchester

Cathedral, home to the tomb of the novelist, Jane Austen.

In the north of England, York Minster stretches out above the city rooftops, a great horizontal structure almost 500 feet long. When you first walk through the stone archway that serves as its front door, you're immediately taken aback by the sheer amount of space that the walls enclose, and the beauty

‘Cathedrals are living history, they’re integral parts of the community’



Towers of strength Great cathedrals include York Minster (above) and Canterbury Cathedral with its monastic cloisters (left)



of the stained-glass windows. The nave is the widest in England and the polished stone floor seems to extend endlessly in all directions. It's worth contrasting it with nearby Durham Cathedral. While York Minster radiates with brightly painted walls and shiny gold-lined vaulting, Durham has a more austere beauty. You get a great view as you approach the carved stone North Door with its striking bronze, lion-like Sanctuary Knocker: throughout the Middle Ages, Durham Cathedral was a sanctuary for fugitives from the law. If they used the knocker they were admitted to the monastery and given the choice between trial or exile. If they chose exile, they were escorted to the port at Hartlepool and given passage to freedom.

Ancient abbey ruins

Majestic architecture, ethereal music and worship at the heart of communities around Britain. Now be awed by some of the country's ancient abbey ruins. Arguably the finest of Scotland's great border abbeys, Melrose is a magnificent ruin on a grand scale with lavishly decorated masonry. Search for the stone pig playing bagpipes that's mentioned in all the guidebooks! The abbey is also thought to be the burial ground of Robert the Bruce, the warrior king.

Meanwhile, Wales has impressive living cathedrals such as St David's and Bangor, but Tintern Abbey is certainly one of its greatest monastic ruins. Situated in the wooded valley of the Wye in the south east of the country, it inspired the Romantic poet William Wordsworth to eulogize about its beauty. You

Loved London landmark *The dome of St Paul's Cathedral can be seen from many vantage points in London (left). Tintern Abbey (below) in Wales is a ruin that delights visitors*



'Escape the hustle and bustle of the city for the serenity of daily services'



Romantic ruins Take a pilgrimage to the Holy Island in Northumberland and marvel at Lindisfarne Abbey

can still imagine it intact simply by looking at its great stone pillars and elegant archways and windows.

Finally, Lindisfarne Abbey is one of the first outposts of Christianity in Britain and remains one of the most inspirational places of pilgrimage and retreat. Situated on Holy Island, off the coast of Northumberland, it can only be reached at low tide across a causeway. Founded by St Aidan in the 7th century, the original monks created the exquisite Lindisfarne Gospels, illuminated parchments. Marvel at the tranquil, windswept ruins and imagine the lives of the monks who've lived here over the centuries.

‘Be amazed by some of the country’s ancient abbey ruins’

Tour tips

Great British Heritage Pass

Valid for four, seven, 15 days or one month, allows entry to nearly 600 fascinating properties, including those cathedrals and abbey ruins that require an access fee. For details go to www.visitbritain.com/heritagepass

Church music

For information about services and concerts, cathedrals offer calendars of events on their websites. Or receive the directory, *Singing in Cathedrals 2005*, when you join Friends of Cathedral Music. Email info@fmc.org.uk for details.

Useful websites

- www.westminster-abbey.org
- www.stpauls.co.uk
- www.canterbury-cathedral.org
- www.salisburycathedral.org.uk
- www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk
- www.yorkminster.org
- www.durhamcathedral.co.uk
- www.aboutscotland.com/mel.html
- www.castlewales.com/tintern.html
- www.lindisfarne.org.uk

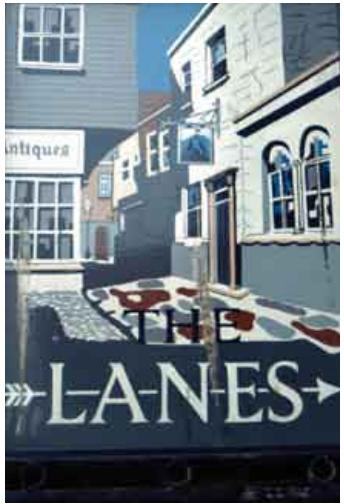
Historic cities

From castles and museums to ancient shopping streets, Britain's cities are a treasure-trove of historical gems. Whether you're touring England, Scotland or Wales, Britain's countryside is punctuated with many lively historic cities as well as tranquil villages and market towns

'Climb to the top of Carfax Tower to view Oxford's dreaming spires'



History all around Explore The Lanes, a maze of shopping alleyways in Brighton, or take a stroll along the beach (middle, right); visit the dreaming spires of Oxford (above)



Oxford

IN THE SOUTH of England, Oxford's city centre is dominated by the medieval colleges of the world-famous University of Oxford. Join students ambling down cobbled alleyways and entering the ancient quads, chapels, halls and cloisters. Take a guided walk or open-top bus to see architectural marvels like one of Europe's oldest libraries, the Bodleian, which has more than seven million books, alongside Sir Christopher Wren's Sheldonian Theatre and the circular domed Radcliffe Camera reading room. The Ashmolean Museum is Britain's oldest and Oxford's central crossroads are still marked by the 13th-century Carfax Tower. Climb to the top for magnificent views of the famous 'dreaming spires'.

Brighton

Follow in the footsteps of Britain's Prince Regent, the future George IV, and head to Brighton, his 'city by the sea' on the south coast of England. George arrived in the late 18th century determined to have fun. Step inside his beloved seaside home – the Royal Pavilion is Britain's most eccentric Royal palace with Eastern-style onion-shaped domes, Chinese dragons on the ceilings and tree-shaped chandeliers. Wander along gleaming white terraces and squares of elegant Regency architecture and sense how George's liberal atmosphere lives on around the seafront. Enjoy an ice cream on the historic pier and stroll through the quirky Lanes – a maze of narrow 16th-century alleyways lined with cafes, boutiques and antique shops.



Rich in architecture
The Bodleian Library in Oxford

Chester

You can walk right round the stone wall circling the city; it dates back to Chester's days as a fortified town. Inspect the 2,000-year-old ramparts and gatehouses built by Rome's 20th legion while gazing at medieval black-and-white half-timbered buildings at the heart of the city. See the Roman amphitheatre that once seated 5,000 people and then the Roman tombs in Grosvenor Museum. And 'Oyez, oyez'... don't miss a traditional town crier's regular appearances at High Cross where four main 15th-century streets converge! There are also tours galore in Chester from historic to ghost tours.



Rich in architecture (from left to right)
Chester, Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon,
and Edinburgh Castle



Stratford-upon-Avon

Take a peek inside the Tudor half-timbered house where William Shakespeare was born and the room where he probably received his schooling. The pretty riverside town and its old-world pubs, hotels and restaurants are dominated by the world's greatest playwright. Watch the Royal Shakespeare Company perform in one of their three theatres, take a backstage tour or a guided walk round the town, following in the Bard's footsteps. See where Shakespeare is buried alongside his family in Holy Trinity Church. And on the town's outskirts, visit the original Tudor farmhouses where his mother and wife lived.

Edinburgh

When you visit the Scottish capital, you're struck by the architectural contrasts of the medieval lanes of the Old Town and the Georgian squares and crescents of the New Town.

Edinburgh Castle perches on a rocky pinnacle in the heart of the city. Step from the gatehouse onto the Royal Mile, an ancient cobbled street leading through the Old Town to the Palace of Holyroodhouse. The Mile is lined with whisky-sellers and tartan weavers.

Next, immerse yourself in art at The National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art. Edinburgh is a

wonderful place for art lovers with many fine works here. The shopping opportunities are great too, and there are also hundreds of bars and restaurants. Take your pick from characterful old pubs where you may catch a live Scottish folk session to chic, sophisticated restaurants.

The world-renowned Edinburgh International Festival happens in August and early September. Or plan ahead for the magnificent Military Tattoo at the Castle every August.

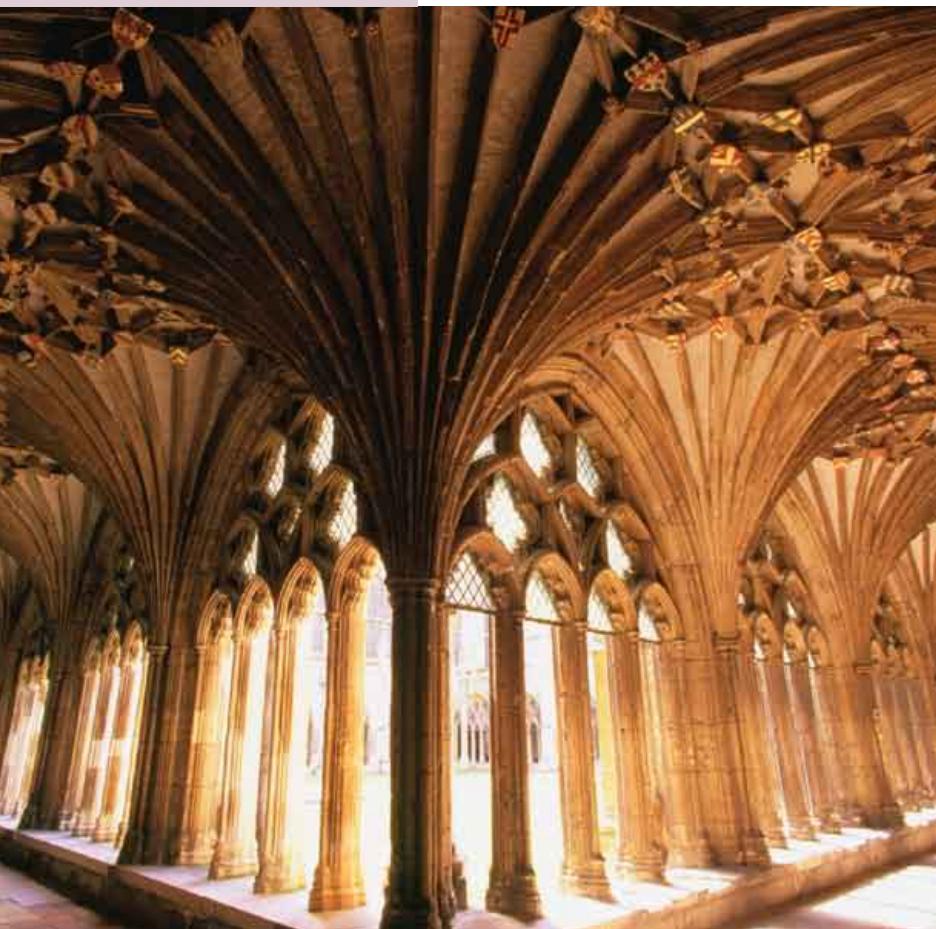
And one of the best parties anywhere in the world is Edinburgh's New Year's Eve, otherwise fondly known by the Scots as Hogmanay. A memorable night!



'The Royal Mile in Edinburgh is lined with whisky-sellers, bagpipe-makers and tartan weavers'

‘Visit Cardiff Bay’s grand tree-lined boulevards, waterside hotels, theatres and art centres’

Tales of the city (below) Walk through Canterbury Cathedral cloisters, and have fun in the revitalized cosmopolitan Cardiff Bay (right)



Canterbury

Visit this ancient city in the county of Kent near London and follow in the steps of Middle Age pilgrims to the famous cathedral where St Thomas Becket was murdered in 1170. Also, don't miss the ruins of St Augustine's Abbey and England's oldest parish church, St Martin's Church nearby, all of which are World Heritage Sites.

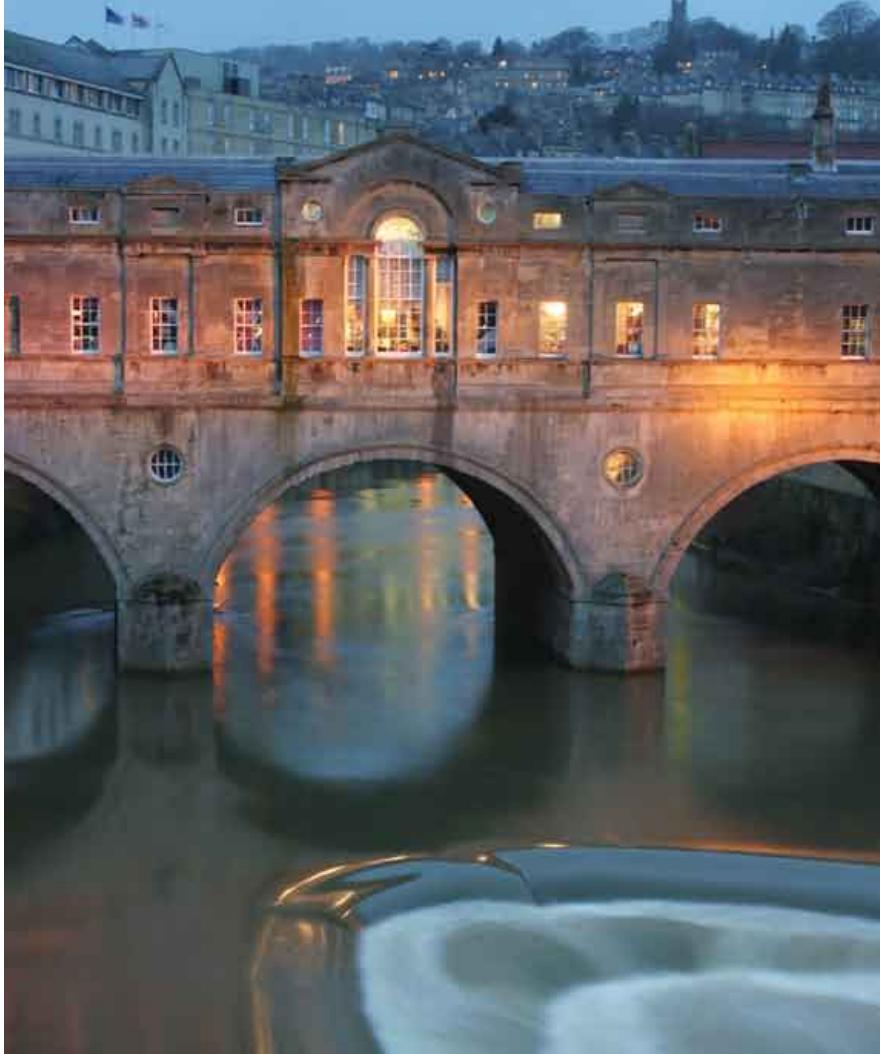
Enjoy the audiovisual fun of Chaucer's characters at the Canterbury Tales Visitor Attraction and step back through 2,000 years of history at the Museum of Canterbury in the medieval Poor Priests' Hospital. In the underground Roman Museum tour the remains of a Roman townhouse before resurfacing with a walk round the medieval town walls to the fortified gatehouse.

Cardiff

The capital of Wales is a wonderfully grand city built around an ancient castle – but it's also vibrant and cosmopolitan. Cardiff Bay is one of the world's biggest urban regeneration projects – grand tree-lined boulevards and an eight-mile panorama of waterside hotels, museums, theatres and arts centres including the Welsh National Opera.

That mix of new and old continues in the heart of the city too. Cardiff Castle dates back to the Romans. Enjoy both its interiors and gardens where peacocks strut, and relax a while in the Tea Rooms. Then there's the striking architecture of the new Millennium Stadium – Britain's premier sporting venue. Take a walk from here through riverside gardens to Llandaff, a pretty suburb that's more like a quaint old Welsh village. It even has its own historic cathedral.





Bath

Stroll through honey-coloured Georgian crescents, terraces and squares just like the gentlefolk of Jane Austen's day. See the steam rise off the healing waters bubbling from natural hot springs under the Roman Baths... or take a dip yourself at the new glass-sided Thermae Bath Spa.* Listen to brass bands in

riverside gardens and gaze upon the elegant Pulteney Bridge, lined with 250-year-old shops. The City of Bath is a designated World Heritage Site – relax with traditional afternoon tea in the 18th-century Pump Room next to Bath Abbey, where Edgar, England's first king, was crowned in 973AD.

Salisbury

You'll spot the cathedral spire long before you reach the historic heart of the city – at 123 metres (404 feet) it's Britain's tallest. The Close around the cathedral is the biggest too. Take tea with home-made cakes in 18th-century Mompesson House and watch a fascinating film on the city's heritage in the nearby Medieval Hall. Stroll along ancient streets or take a horse-drawn tour. Browse antique shops

and investigate historic inns. On Tuesday and Saturday visit the traditional market in the square.

On the edge of town visit the heights of Old Sarum Iron Age hill fort for splendid views. And 16 kilometres (10 miles) north prepare yourself for one of the world's greatest ancient sites – Stonehenge. It's 5,000 years since the striking stone structure was erected, but we still don't really know why....



Vistas and vantage points Bath's beautiful Pulteney Bridge (far left); the inspiring spire of Salisbury Cathedral can be seen for miles around

Play Video

Marvel at Salisbury Cathedral and the Roman Baths.

‘You’ll spot Salisbury Cathedral’s spire long before you reach the historic heart of the city’



Historic streets

Soak up the atmosphere in the cobbled streets of York

‘The Shambles in York is full of antique shops and interesting pubs’

York

Wander narrow cobbled streets and twisting alleyways within 800-year-old city walls, heading towards magnificent York Minster – northern Europe's largest gothic cathedral. Inside you'll see half the medieval stained glass in Britain – including the world's largest pre-Renaissance window.

Stroll along traffic-free streets like the Shambles, an old butchers' quarter now full of antique shops and interesting pubs. Step back nearly 600 years at the historic Treasurer's House, or even 1,000 years at the Jorvik Viking Centre, before taking an evening ghost walk through the world's most haunted city.

Tour tips

Useful websites

www.visitbritain.com/ca

www.heritagecities.co.uk

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National parks

From the dramatic Welsh mountains to the wilds of Scotland and the natural beauty of England, escape to Britain's many National Parks

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Each national park has its own distinctive array of wildlife, birdlife and plantlife – and they all have an abundance of B&Bs

and small hotels to choose from. So let the tour begin...

Cruise control

If you enjoy being afloat, there's no better way to enjoy the English landscape than by cruising on the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads. These miles of waterways are the perfect place to enjoy a leisurely voyage. The comfortable craft which criss-cross the Broads are undemanding vessels to master – all you have to do is chug along at your own pace, the only decision to make being which quaint pub to stop at for lunch.

Peace in the Peak District
A view from Froggatt Edge



Water and mountains The waters of the Norfolk Broads (left) and the mountains of Snowdonia form part of the rich variety of Britain's National Parks



The wild side

Dartmoor in Devon has an altogether wilder beauty. Look out for the area's most famous inhabitants, the wild Dartmoor ponies, the ancestors of domestic horses let loose on the moors in the Middle Ages. You'll fall in love with the region's dramatic wooded valleys, atmospheric open moorland, and the lofty hills, called tors. And don't miss the area's many neolithic monuments, at their most enigmatic as they loom out of a swirling mist. Little wonder Conan Doyle set his most chilling Sherlock Holmes story, *The Hound of the*

'The wild Dartmoor ponies roam the open atmospheric moorland'

Baskervilles, on these moors.

Sticking with a literary theme, RD Blackmore's charming novel, *Lorna Doone*, captured the essence of Exmoor, a gorgeous tract of land straddling the north Devon and Somerset border. It's an area dominated by expanses of bracken and heather, gentle rolling hills and a rocky coastline overlooking

the Bristol Channel. Like Dartmoor, Exmoor is home to wild ponies roaming the countryside.

Mountain ranging

The spectacular sandstone mass of the Brecon Beacons provides a compelling reason to visit South Wales. The mountains are honeycombed by thousands of underground



‘The Yorkshire Dales have been enshrined forever in the books of James Herriot, the local vet’

Haven for wildlife Dartmoor (left) and the Norfolk Broads are the habitats of an abundance of wild animals and birds

passageways and caverns, and attract caving fanatics from all over the world. If subterranean sport isn't your idea of fun, there's plenty on the surface to enjoy: walking, cycling, canal cruising, salmon fishing, or simply enjoying the attractions of the area's many quaint market towns, and sampling the delicious local fare at a country inn.

In North Wales, Snowdonia is a magnificent mountain region which boasts the highest peak in England and Wales. But reaching the summit of Mount Snowdon, the awesome centrepiece of the park, can be easy, even for toddlers and grandmothers. You can

leave the ropes and crampons to the serious mountaineers – and catch the captivating Snowdon Mountain Railway all the way to the top!

Coast to coast

The dramatic outline of Wales's Pembrokeshire Coast offers you some of the finest walking country in Britain. Waves crash against the rocks where jagged cliffs tumble into the sea, but safe on the coastal path you'll enjoy superb seaward panoramas. Water sports fans can enjoy scuba diving in the more tranquil depths of St Brides Bay, and nature lovers might make an excursion to the fascinating bird sanctuary islands of Skomer and Skokholm.

The great outdoors

Head for the Peak District, which covers wide stretches of South Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire, to take in picturesque moorland, steep-sided dales and a huge array of outdoor activities from a gentle ramble along some of the hundreds of miles of footpaths to rock-climbing, cycling, hang-gliding or fishing.

The North York Moors has so much to offer for those fond of nature, history and literature. Don't miss the grandeur of the abbeys of Rievaulx and Rosedale. Or the pretty seaside town of Whitby, famous for its association with Bram Stoker's great gothic novel, *Dracula*.



The Yorkshire Dales have been immortalised in the books of James Herriot, who introduced these sheep-cropped, dry-stone walled acres to the world in his stories about the adventures of a Yorkshire vet. The best way to enjoy them is on foot, exploring the spectacular limestone formations around Malham Cove, a unique landscape combining elements of an English pastoral scene with the surface of the moon.

The Lake District offers you a heady mix of savage crags, mellow green hills and countless clear-watered lakes. Seek out the stony slopes of Scafell Pike for an energetic walk, or stick to the lowland lakes for a gentler amble or undemanding bike ride.

Northumberland is one of the best-kept secrets in Britain. It attracts fewer visitors than some of the other National Parks, but after experiencing its many pleasures, you'll wonder why. Explore the Roman Hadrian's Wall and Kielder Water, a vast reservoir and nature reserve that's ideal for canoeing, yachting and wind-surfing. There are also stunning beaches to walk along and see the sights.

Take the high road

In Scotland, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs present a wealth of contrasts. In just a few square miles, you can sample lush lowland



scenery, lofty peaks swathed in purple heather, dense pine forests and Loch Lomond itself, an inviting blue expanse of water with the outlines of craggy mountains perfectly mirrored in its still surface.

‘In Scotland, you can sample lush lowland scenery and and lofty peaks swathed in heather’



England, Scotland and Wales From hiking in the Lake District (top right) and Loch Lomond (top left) to boating in Talyllyn (above), experience the great outdoors all over Britain



Canals and cattle A canal tour in the Brecon Beacons makes for a wonderful break. Highland cattle are handsome additions to the British landscape

‘Catch the Snowdon Mountain Railway all the way to the top’

It's the perfect place to unwind.

Further north is the mountainous Cairngorms region where there's the chance to spy rare birds of prey such as the beautiful golden eagle, osprey and snow bunting. Scan the skies over the tumultuous peaks which dominate this wild land for a rare glimpse of these noble creatures.

Down south

This gives you a flavour of the sublime sights on offer at Britain's 13 glorious National



Parks – and a 14th, the ancient New Forest in southern England is about to join their number. Peaceful woodland and pastureland grazed by wild ponies, it's dotted with thatched cottages and rural pubs.

From this gentle landscape to the wilds of the Cairngorms, National Parks in the north, south, east and west reveal the diverse beauty and glorious variety of Britain. You'll find lots of places to stay and dine out and you can expect a warm welcome from the locals.

Tour tips

Great British Heritage Pass

This is valid for four, seven, 15 days or one month, allows entry to nearly 600 fascinating properties. For details:

www.visitbritain.com/heritangepass

Further information

To plan your tour, book accommodation and discover more places to visit:

www.visitbritain.com/ca

www.anpa.gov.uk

Discover more

A visit to Britain would not be complete without experiencing our unique rural countryside at its breath-taking best.

Our fifteen National Parks offer a spectacular range of stunning scenery from sweeping coastlines to open moors and rugged mountains; dramatic landscapes lived on and loved by people for thousands of years.

However far you wander, you're never far from the natural wonder of a British National Park.



Brecon Beacons

Broads

Cairngorms

Dartmoor

Exmoor

Lake District

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs

New Forest

Northumberland

North York Moors

Peak District

Pembrokeshire Coast

Snowdonia

Yorkshire Dales

National Parks,
Britain's Breathing Spaces

For further information please call The Association of National Parks on
+44 (0) 29 2049 9966 or visit our website www.anpa.gov.uk

Gardens

Tiny white snowdrops. Carpets of bluebells. Roses of every hue. Britain's gardens are ablaze with colour throughout the seasons

GRAND LANDSCAPED PARKS surround handsome historic houses; rose gardens entice you with their heady scents; intimate cottage gardens invite you through their rustic gates and wonderful arboreta beckon you into their cool interiors. Over centuries, plantsmen and designers have created wonderful gardens of every kind, open for all to enjoy. Here's a taster of some of the best.

Palm trees in the Scottish Highlands? Despite its mountain setting on the north west coast, Inverewe is full of plants from China to Chile, South Africa to Australia, which flourish in the warm Gulf Stream climate. Further south, put Drummond Castle on your list as the parterre, with the castle as a backdrop, is stunning. Visiting in spring? You'll be bowled over by the incredible banks of daffodils – more than 250 varieties – in Threave Garden.

'Classical temples and elegant bridges all perfectly reflected in the glass-like lake'

Landscapes of beauty

It looks as though a sculptor of Rodin's talents has been at work at Levens Hall in Cumbria, such is the beauty of the topiary. Stroll among the leaf-perfect shapes and ask yourself how it's done. At Ripley Castle in Yorkshire you'll discover the work of 'Capability' Brown, commissioned by wealthy landowners in the 18th century to landscape their vast parklands with lakes, trees and temples. Today we can enjoy his hard work.

The 12-acre garden at Alnwick Castle, in Northumberland, has been recreated by the present Duchess who has transformed it into a contemporary and exciting retreat. The vast Grand Cascade, the largest water feature of its kind in Britain, tumbles into a pool forming the centrepiece for the entire garden. Above the Cascade is the Ornamental Garden, a formal



Flowers in bloom Explore gardens bursting with colour at Threave



walled garden with innovative European planting and water pools, as well as a Rose Garden with 3,000 rose bushes and clematis.

Year-round colour is guaranteed in Shropshire's Hodnet Hall gardens: in spring are blooms of rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias; in summer, enjoy the incredible fuchsia varieties and in autumn marvel at the vibrant colours of the acer displays.

Stourhead in Wiltshire is next, and its stunning vistas are hard to put into words. See for yourself the classical temples, elegant bridges and picturesque grottoes all perfectly reflected in the glass-like surface of the lake.

Almost 50 years ago, Beth Chatto, one of the great women gardeners of our time, took several acres of swampland in Colchester and transformed it into a stunning garden with woodland, scree, gravel and water beds. See the lush leafy plantings of gunnera, eupatorium, phormium and miscanthus around a series of natural ponds. It's a prime example of ecological planting.

Head west to Wales where, six miles from Cardiff, you can wander around Dyffryn's individual gardens, each with a distinctive character. Visit in autumn when the arboretum is bursting with colour. Nearby, at the Museum of Welsh Life, St Fagan's beautifully restored Italianate garden is worth a visit. At Abergglasney, 12 miles east of Carmarthen, an inspired restoration has breathed new life

Flowers in bloom Explore gardens bursting with colour at Alnwick

'The huge biodomes of the Eden Project house plants from around the world'

into this 15th-century garden, once 'lost in time' but now open for you to enjoy its colourful pleasures.

Wild and lost gardens

Bodnant, also in the north, looks across the valley towards Snowdon. Wander through the Terrace Gardens and The Dell, then explore the wild garden. There are fine collections of rhododendrons, magnolias and camellias,

and the spectacular laburnum arch, a 55-yard tunnel of golden blooms, is at its peak from mid-May to early June.

On the south coast of Cornwall, you'll discover the Lost Gardens of Heligan. Once neglected and overgrown, these Victorian gardens have been lovingly restored. Take the tour and find out how the Victorians grew pineapples without heated greenhouses – just manure!



The huge biodomes of the Eden Project, 30 miles west of Plymouth, are certainly heated and you'll mop your brow exploring the world's tropical plants.

In the south east of England go to Hatfield House in Hertfordshire. Used as a location for *Shakespeare in Love*, the film starring Gwyneth Paltrow, the 42-acre Jacobean-style gardens include formal, knot, scented and wilderness areas and are managed organically.

And don't miss Sissinghurst in Kent, as it's of huge importance in English garden design. The head gardener calls it 'an inspiring and intimate garden, full of good plants' – somewhat modestly understating its beauty and attraction. Seeing is believing.

Tour tips

Great British Heritage Pass

Valid for four, seven, 15 days or one month, allows entry into some of Britain's loveliest gardens and nearly 600 fascinating properties. For details click on to www.visitbritain.com/heritangepass

Guide to Britain's Gardens

VisitBritain's *Britain's Gardens*, is a 48-page colourful guide which will help you get the most out of your holiday.

Horticultural shows

The biggest events in the gardening calendar are the RHS shows at Chelsea, Hampton Court and Tatton Park. For more information, visit www.rhs.org.uk

Useful websites

www.visitbritain.com/gardens
www.nts.org.uk
www.rileycastle.co.uk
www.alnwickcastle.com
www.bethchatto.co.uk
www.nationaltrust.org.uk
www.edenproject.com

Green fingers Skilled gardeners upkeep the grounds of Bodnant Garden (left) and Hatfield House (right)

Market towns and villages

Market towns and villages hidden away in Britain's splendid countryside are a joy to discover – and great places to shop for fresh local produce

AS YOU DRIVE through Britain's gentle countryside, it's possible to simply stumble across some of the most idyllic villages and market towns you'll ever see.

The Cotswold village of Bibury in Gloucestershire is so picture postcard beautiful that it looks like the film set of a costume drama. It seems almost too perfect,

'Wherever you travel in Britain there are market towns and villages of unique charm'

too untainted by modern life, to be real: blue sky, fresh air, birdsong, sun shining on honey-coloured stone buildings clustered around a village green next to the Saxon church of St Mary's.

For a panoramic view of the village, stand on the humpback bridge that straddles the River Coln. You'll see red Virginia creeper hugging the walls of the rambling Swan Inn Hotel and Arlington Row, a group of ancient cottages with steep pitched roofs, overlooking the water meadows. And all around are rolling fields and lush woodland.

As you leave Bibury, you drive along hedge-lined lanes, slowing down to pass horse riders, their handsome steeds clip-clopping along the roadside. After a few miles, the bustling market town of Burford comes into view. The main high street slopes down a hillside to the River Windrush and it's lined with old cottages bedecked in climbing roses, along with



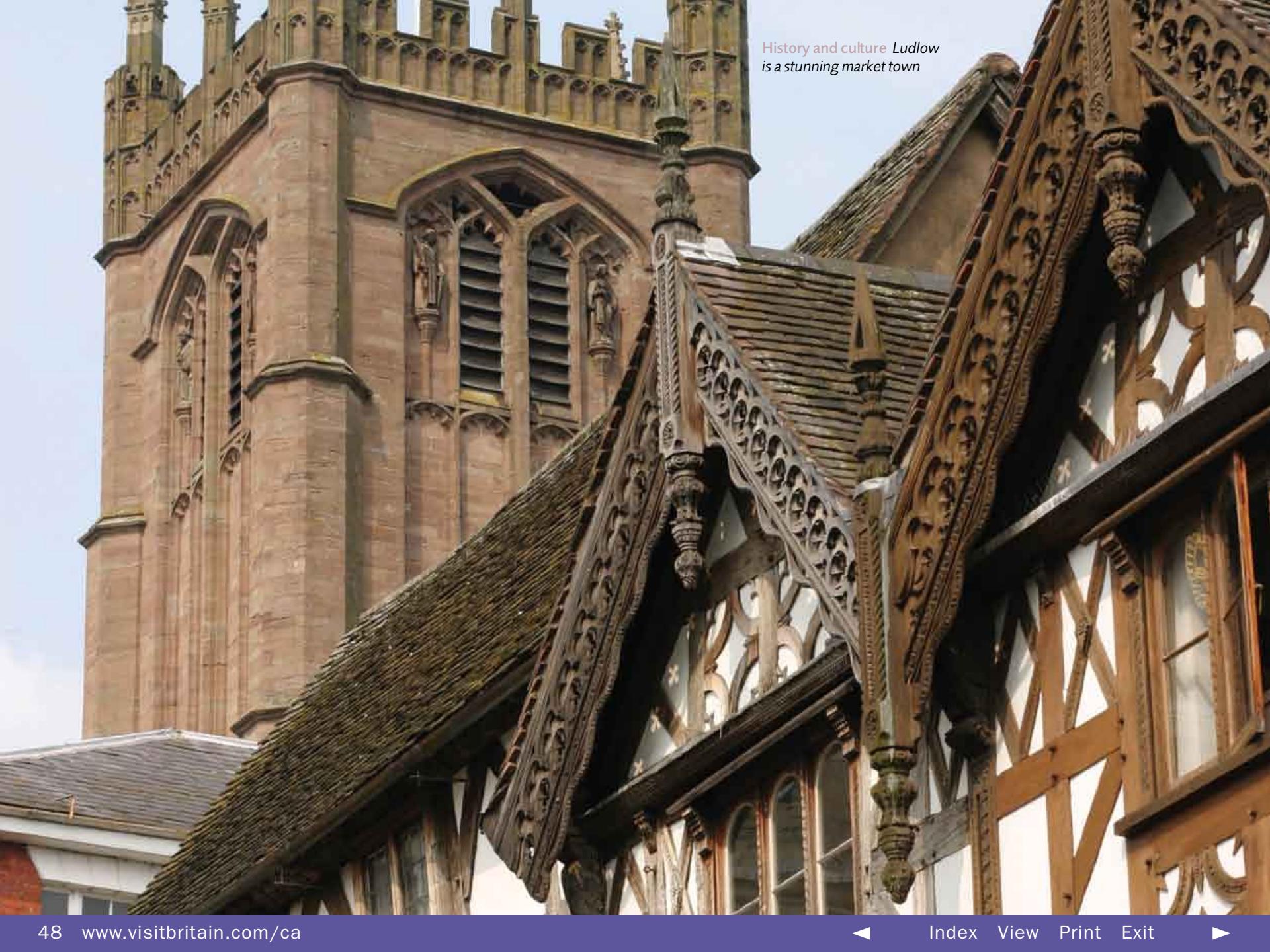
Hidden Britain Discover idyllic market towns and villages where you can stop for a pub lunch or visit the shops and market stalls

antique shops, country clothing stores, pubs and cafes. And after browsing the shops and relaxing over a cup of tea and a piece of cake, there's Burford Parish Church to explore, one of England's finest Saxon churches. But your journey has just begun; other Cotswold towns – Tetbury, Bourton-on-the-Water, Lechlade – just wait to be explored.

Hidden gems nationwide

You can share this experience when visiting places throughout Britain. Wherever you travel there are market towns and villages of unique charm where you can either stay the night in a welcoming local hotel, or just stop off for a leisurely lunch in a cozy pub and



A photograph capturing the architectural beauty of Ludlow, a market town in Shropshire, England. In the foreground, the intricate timber-framing of a building is visible, featuring dark wooden beams and decorative carvings. Behind it stands the Ludlow Castle, a massive stone structure with a tall, spire-topped tower. The sky is clear and blue.

History and culture *Ludlow*
is a stunning market town

‘Great places to shop for everything from old books to local fresh farm produce’

soak up the atmosphere and sights before moving on to your next destination. The distinctive slate stone buildings of Grasmere and Kendal in the majestic environs of the Lake District. The pretty villages of Kirbymoorside and Kettlewell set in the stunning Yorkshire landscape. The medieval towns of Conwy, Beaumaris and Caernarfon in Wales, with their castles and ancient narrow streets. Romantic Melrose, set on the River Tweed in the Scottish Borders, where you can buy the local and distinctive tweed cloth. The Victorian town of Pitlochry set in the beautiful scenery of the Perthshire Highlands. Famous for its salmon, whisky and woollens shops, it's also the ideal base from which to go walking by day. And nightlife is lively too, with the Pitlochry Festival Theatre season running from May to October. And this is just a tiny sample. You're truly spoilt for choice.

From books to antiques

Your choice of destination can be tailored to many specialist interests. Book-lovers, for example, should head for Hay-on-Wye on the borders of England and Wales, as there

are over 40 bookshops dominating this quaint town, not to mention the famous Hay-on-Wye literary festival, held in May/June.

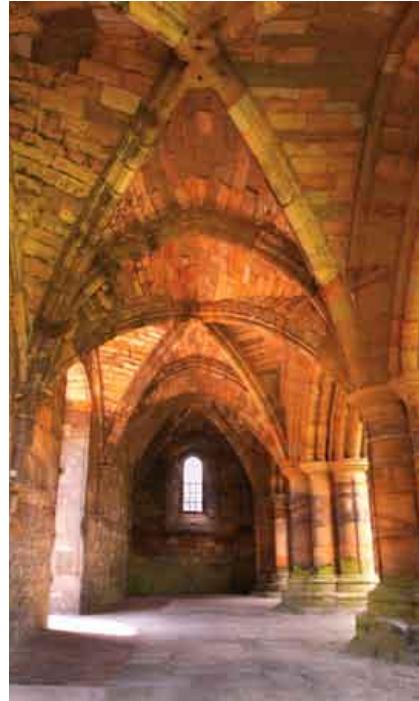
Stamford in Lincolnshire is a magnet for antiques lovers, its shops attracting buyers from all over the world to its 18th-century cobbled streets and Georgian coaching inns.

Shop at ancient markets

Market towns are also wonderful places to shop for amazing value local fresh farm produce and other goods. Wander around colourful market stalls run by equally colourful characters, taking in the sights, sounds and smells and a few bargains along the way.

Wells in Somerset has a terrific market to recommend it, as well as one of the world's most architecturally perfect cathedrals. Held on Wednesdays and Saturdays, you can buy anything from jewellery to plants, organic fruit and vegetables, books, pottery and more.

Ludlow in Shropshire is not only one of England's loveliest market towns but its market – open every second Thursday of the month – is a great place to browse. It's been around for over 900 years and you'll find a



History and culture Much Wenlock (top) is rich in architectural history, and Hay-on-Wye (right) on the Welsh border is a book-lovers' paradise





Fresh fare and fresh air
Browse the stalls of market towns for fresh local food produce, and relax in peaceful villages such as Bibury in the Cotswolds (left)

‘The Cotswold village of Bibury is so picture postcard beautiful that it looks like the film set of a costume drama’

wide variety of country stalls with everything from quality fresh foods to crafts, antiques and even a blacksmith. What's more, Ludlow is home to more Michelin-starred restaurants than anywhere in Britain outside London. People drive for miles and book weeks in advance to eat at restaurants such as the

Merchant House and Hibiscus.

The nearby farmers' market in the historic fortress town of Shrewsbury will delight the most discerning foodie. Find meats, cheeses, salads, gourmet baked goods and lots more.

While visiting Ludlow and Shrewsbury, discover a nearby hidden gem. Much Wenlock is a small market town, but it's a hive of activity: bell-ringing practice on Tuesday, the Women's Institute stall on Thursdays, and regular farmers' markets and an antiques market on Saturdays.

The stocks where Much Wenlock wrong-

doers were incarcerated are now only for show, but the handsome and timbered 16th-century Guildhall is still used for council meetings. The town's museum (free entrance) contains everything from a 1930s film projector to Roman remains and, rather surprisingly, Much Wenlock's Olympic history. In 1850, William Penny Brookes, a local doctor, aiming to improve the health of the local people, organised a series of athletic competitions. Word spread and, in time, Penny Brookes helped a group who wanted to make the movement international – the founders of the modern Olympics.

Old traditions live on

It's a well known fact that smaller towns and villages are friendly and welcoming, due to the more relaxed pace of life. But Britain's rural communities also often seem a little eccentric, too. Take the Cornish town of Helston. In early May, you'll find it decorated with flowers, the children dressed in white, and the adults dancing in formation through its cobbled streets. They're celebrating something called

Flurry Day. Meanwhile, Thaxted in Essex is one of the best places to see another old British folk ritual, morris dancing. Towns like these cling to traditions so old, nobody really knows how they started: pagan fertility rites and agrarian celebrations at sowing and harvest time. You may not get a straight answer as to what it all means, but suffice to say they've been doing it for centuries and will be doing it for centuries to come.

Tour tips

Great British Heritage Pass

This is valid for four, seven, 15 days or one month, allows entry to nearly 600 fascinating properties. For details:

www.visitbritain.com/heritagepass

Further information

To plan your tour, book accommodation and discover more places to visit:

www.visitbritain.com/ca

Village life and ancient traditions. From the quaint cottages and leafy lanes of the Cotswolds to traditional celebrations such as Flurry Day in Helston in Cornwall (above), hidden Britain is waiting to be discovered



Play Video

Take a moment and relax in the tranquil atmosphere of the New Forest.



B&Bs and inns

Offering so much more than bed and breakfast, B&Bs and inns are the place to stay for homely comfort and a very warm welcome

Home from home Sleep soundly in one of Britain's many stylish bed and breakfast houses or country inn hotels



THERE WAS A time when bed and breakfast (B&B) and inn accommodation was characterized by a jovial house owner or pub landlord charging a modest fee to guests in return for a basic room for the night and a hearty British breakfast. It was a friendly affordable alternative to a hotel – but with few of the trappings. How times have changed.

Today's B&B houses remain good value for

money but can offer individual style and luxury while continuing to provide the intimacy of being welcomed into a real home. There are distinctive B&Bs all over Britain. Historic timber-framed Elizabethan manor houses. Georgian mansions. Victorian country rectories. Lovingly-restored cottages. Offering a genuine taste of British hospitality, hosts go out of their way to treat you as friends – they'll

serve you with afternoon tea on arrival, show you to your picturesque and inviting room, cook you a delicious dinner as well as breakfast if you so desire, and give you all the insider tips about local places of interest that you could wish for to make your visit eventful.

It's the same story with Britain's inns, where pub landlords offer hotel-style accommodation in characterful upstairs rooms of buildings



Taste the real Britain Stay in a typically British Cotswolds house that provides bed and breakfast accommodation (top) and tuck into a traditional breakfast of bacon, sausage and eggs with mushroom and tomato

that are invariably in the heart of rural communities. Old coaching houses and ancient hosteries overlooking the village green. Low beamed ceilings and a sense of history in every nook and cranny. Retire to the privacy of your room after enjoying a superb meal in the dining room and mingling with locals in the bar over a pint of foaming ale. A relaxing, informal, home-from-home with the authentic experience of British life.

There are many guidebooks available to help you decide where to stay. Wolsey Lodges is a consortium of luxury B&Bs offering a wide choice. How about an 18th-century cottage such as Cotham Lodge in Newport, Wales, which has delightful grounds overlooking the sea? Pleasant rooms with en suite bathrooms

and dinner, often including local cheeses and lamb and eaten with the host, Lady Hallinan. Or how about Kinkell, an old Scottish farmhouse near St Andrews, the 'home of golf', with informal gardens stretching down to the sea? Traditional sitting rooms and bedrooms, excellent cooking, croquet on the lawn, strolls along the coastline, tennis in summer or relaxing in front of a log fire in winter.

Something a little different

Distinctly Different is another company, this time offering a choice of charmingly eccentric places to stay that are picked for being weird and wonderful buildings! Why not try a soaring church or a scary lighthouse? Another example is Bradford Old Windmill near the beautiful Cotswold spa town of Bath. This three-bedroom, four-storey tower is furnished with stripped pine and decorated with interesting finds from around the world. Choose a vegetarian breakfast if you like, or

'Today's bed and breakfast houses and inns remain good value but can offer style and luxury'

tuck into sausages, bacon and eggs.

'The Great Inns of Britain' is an alliance of the very best traditional inns. For example, The Angel lies in the heart of rural Wiltshire in the enchanting and historic village of Hindon. Built in the 18th century as a stabling and coaching inn serving travellers between London and Exeter, it's been beautifully refurbished in keeping with the original Georgian character. Choose a room with a four-poster bed but you can also enjoy



modern facilities such as a pool and a gym.

The Pheasant, a charming old coaching inn close to Bassenthwaite Lake in the Lake District is a traditional Cumbrian hostelry. Here you'll find individually decorated bedrooms with beautiful fabrics, antiques and modern bathrooms. Tea trays are provided or you can order a morning tea service to ensure you're up bright and early to explore the sights.

B&Bs and inns offer a fun and relaxing stay in Britain, the ideal base for your sightseeing tour.

Tour tips

Accommodation classification

VisitBritain has a Guest Accommodation classification code which uses a diamond rating system that works along much the same lines as the familiar star rating system for hotels. Five diamonds means excellent.

Where to stay

To find out more about B&Bs across Britain go to VisitBritain's web site at www.visitbritain.com/ca

Useful websites

Wolsey Lodges

www.wolsey-lodges.co.uk

Distinctly Different

www.distinctlydifferent.co.uk

The Great Inns of Britain

www.greatinns.co.uk



Back to your roots Trace any long lost relatives in Britain through research at establishments such as the British Library in London (immediate left)

Genealogy

What's in a name? Well, quite a lot if you're interested in tracing your British ancestors

EVEN FOR THOSE who only have the smallest snippet of information about their family heritage, Britain has a first-class network of official genealogy offices and societies which can help you piece together the past and research your roots.

Spend happy hours discovering your family history, helped by access to birth, marriage and death certificates, parish records and military service records at England's Public Record Office near London. Its efficient enquiry service will ensure you're on the right track. Or, if time is of the essence, it will give you the names of reputable professional

researchers to do the work for you.

English or Welsh descent?

To start you on your search, visit the Public Record Office website (www.pro.gov.uk). This will prepare you to get the most out of a trip to the offices. Also in London is the British Library (www.bl.uk) and the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies (www.ihgs.ac.uk) is in Canterbury.

Many of the records offices in London cover Welsh ancestry too, but if you're visiting Wales and want to carry out your search there, the National Library of Wales

in Aberystwyth (www.llgc.org.uk) has resources and experts on hand.

The Association of Family History Societies of Wales (www.fhswales.info) is a governing body that links scores of genealogy groups and helps hundreds of visitors every year.

Roots in Scotland?

If you're a McDonald, McDougal or McAllister, it's Scotland, not England or Wales, that you should head for, and its capital, Edinburgh, has a wealth of established genealogy centres to help in your search.

The National Archives of Scotland

(www.nas.gov.uk) has records spanning back to the 12th century with a vast library of documents. The nearby General Register Office (www.gro-scotland.gov.uk) is responsible for keeping records of every birth, death or marriage, plus divorces and adoptions.

Hail from Northern Ireland?

Your first reference point in Northern Ireland is The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (www.proni.gov.uk) in Belfast. Good luck with your search!

Tour tips

Useful websites
www.ukgenealogy.co.uk

Society of Genealogists
www.sog.org.uk

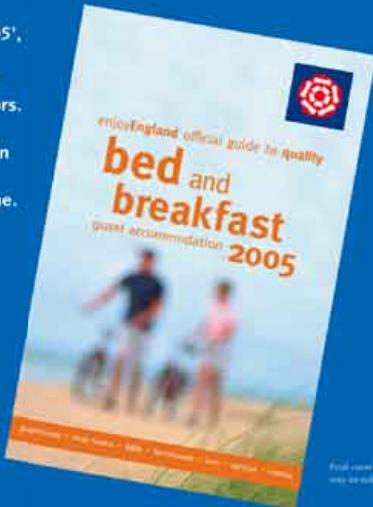
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Museums and galleries

Britain's museums and galleries are dynamic, fascinating and loads of fun

Bridge to the arts Tate Modern (above) is a vast London gallery filled with world-class contemporary art. The Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh is filled with treasures

'The V&A has more than seven miles of galleries'

NOT ONLY ARE Britain's museums and galleries among the best anywhere – most are completely free to visit. So step inside, they're a wonderful chance to absorb Britain's heritage, culture and sense of fun. Here are recommendations for some of the finest.

The British Museum, London

A treasure-trove of everything. See Egyptian mummies, Mesopotamian treasures and Anglo-Saxon swords in Britain's largest museum, boasting an unparalleled array of ancient artefacts.

Imperial War Museum, London, and Imperial War Museum North, Manchester

The wars of the 20th century have affected us all in some way, and the Imperial War Museum is here to tell all our stories, covering many aspects of life in wartime.

Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh

Experience the variety and richness of Scotland's long and vibrant history through the national collections, brought to life by the fascinating stories each object and gallery has to tell.





In the picture London's Royal Academy has an eclectic mix of art

'Gaze at more than 10,000 faces from Henry VII, to modern stars'

The Natural History Museum, London

From creepy-crawlies to blue whales and dinosaurs, be inspired by hundreds of exhibits about the natural world.

The National Gallery, London

See thousands of the world's best-loved paintings, by artists like Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Turner, Monet and Van Gogh.

The National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh

Enjoy works by great artists including Botticelli, Raphael, Monet and Cézanne in one of Europe's finest collections of paintings and sculpture.

The Burrell Collection, Glasgow

Set in beautiful woodland just outside Glasgow, The Burrell Collection includes medieval art, tapestries, ceramics, stained glass and European paintings.

National Portrait Gallery, London

Gaze at more than 10,000 faces dating from an unsigned oil painting of King Henry VII, conceived in the 16th century, to portraits of modern-day celebrities.

Welsh National Museum & Gallery, Cardiff

Discover priceless bronze age jewellery, early Christian monuments and Celtic treasures among impressive displays in a grand setting.

The Tate, London, Liverpool and St Ives

London's Tate Britain shows Britain's national collection from 1500 onwards while, on the South Bank, Tate Modern has world-class modern art. Tate Liverpool is home of the National Collection of Modern Art in the north of England and Tate St Ives displays contemporary works in a stunning location by the sea in Cornwall.

Admission: free, except Tate St Ives (£5.50 for adults, £2.50 concessions).

BALTIC, Newcastle Gateshead

Explore a major new international art space in a converted grain warehouse on Gateshead's rejuvenated quayside. Check newspaper listings for the latest major touring exhibitions.

‘Cringe at 19th-century surgical instruments’



Multitude of museums From teddy bear museums to the National Portrait Gallery (below, right and middle), and modern art at BALTIC in Newcastle Gateshead (right, below left), your choices are extensive

Ulster Museum, Belfast

Find a hoard of polished Neolithic stone axes and the recovered gold of a sunken galleon from the Spanish Armada. They're among 8,000 square meters of galleries. Visit the museum's off-shoots: Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in County Down and Ulster-American Folk Park in County Tyrone.

These world-class attractions are complemented by hundreds of lesser-known ones. From teddy bear museums to the world's finest tank museum, from a definitive storehouse of historic shoes to a museum all about tea, you can discover quirky collections all over Britain. What a great way to appreciate Britain as a nation of eccentrics!

For example, learn about the British obsession with garden lawns at the Lawnmower Museum, Southport, near Liverpool and see mowers owned by Princess Diana and Prince Charles, and the world's first solar-powered mower. Or buy smoked fish and take a boat trip from Brighton Fishing Museum.

Or go to the Fan Museum in London to see over 3,500 fans, some designed by Fabergé and Gauguin, or check out the Markfield Beam Engine Museum in London which houses a gigantic 1886 steam-powered sewage pump in all its Victorian glory.

Cringe at 19th-century surgical instruments or step inside a giant human intestine at the award-winning Thackray Medical Museum in Leeds or visit the Oxford Story Museum to learn about the history of the university – your lesson will take place while you are seated at a mobile school desk which trundles up and down a three-storey building in one of Europe's longest, darkest rides!

Tour tips

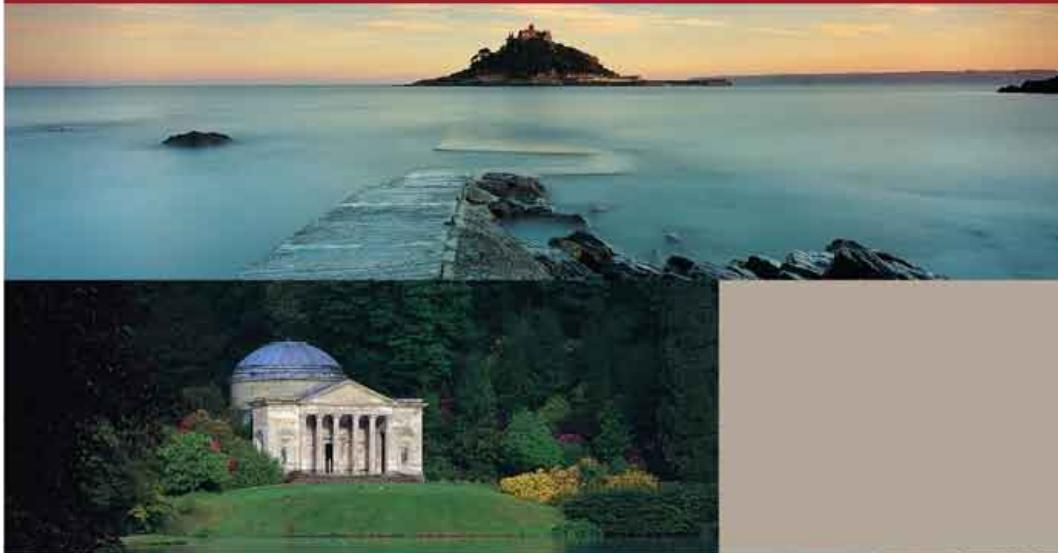
Useful websites

- www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk
- www.nationalgallery.org.uk
- www.natgalscot.ac.uk
- www.vam.ac.uk





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or call **+44 (0)870 240 4197** to order your pass.

NFT David Nash, Nick Adams,
Andrew Butler, Guyatt/Fresh

Unique events

Music, theatre, sport, partying and lots more, there's something for everyone at the summer events that make up Britain's 'season'

A wealth of events The sights and sounds of the spectacular Edinburgh Tattoo. Take in a unique event during your stay





A wealth of events
Tennis action at
Wimbledon. Take in a
unique event during
your stay

KNOWN SIMPLY AS 'the season', Britain's social calendar is second to none, with a diary of events that brings out the uniqueness of the country and its people. Whether you want to mix with high society at a horse racing meeting or listen to opera while picnicking on the lawns of a historic country house, the season is a time to enjoy partying outdoors at the same time as seeing some of the most famous events in the world. A little forward planning will ensure you're not disappointed – so book well in advance and make your stay a memorable one.

Bath Literature Festival (February 26 - March 6)

Nine days of literary pleasure in the beautiful city of Bath. Most events take place in the splendid surrounding of the Guildhall in the city centre, within easy walking distance of specialist shops, restaurants and cafes, and historic Georgian buildings. Past writers appearing at the Festival include Tracy Chevalier, Melvyn Bragg, Rageh Omaar, P D James, The Children's Laureate Michael Morpurgo, Garrison Keillor, Terry Pratchett, and Brian Keenan. www.bathlitfest.org.uk

Braemar Gathering (September 3)

The Braemar Gathering and Highland Games, which are held every year on the first Saturday in September, have a long history dating back 900 years to the days of King Malcolm Canmore. The Gathering features a hill-run up Morrone mountain, tossing the caber, putting the stone and throwing the hammer.

For more information, visit
www.braemargathering.org

Brighton Festival (May 7 - 29)

Attracting top-class performers from all over the world, the annual festival in this historic southern English seaside resort features dance, theatre, music, poetry and street acts. For further information visit
www.brighton-festival.org.uk

Chelsea Flower Show (May 24 - 28)

This renowned London extravaganza of all things floral is the Royal Horticultural Society's annual event. Luxuriate in the sights and smells of the unlimited array of flowers, plants and gardens. For information about tickets and dates, visit

www.rhs.org.uk

Edinburgh Festival Fringe (August 14 - September 3)

One of the most vibrant arts festivals in the world, this three-week event presents more than 1,000 shows daily! Every possible venue in the Scottish city is utilized to support the vast number of performances, which include theatre, dance and comedy. For information visit www.edfringe.com

Edinburgh Military Tattoo (August 5 - 27)

Scottish tradition has created this musical military spectacle at Edinburgh Castle, which includes The Royal Air Force's Massed Military Bands, Massed Pipes and Drums, Highland Dancers and the sweet tones of the Lone Piper. Visit www.edintattoo.co.uk



Festival fever The Chelsea Flower Show attracts garden lovers, the Glyndebourne Festival is on every opera lover's wish list and the Eisteddfod celebrates Welsh culture

Glyndebourne Opera Festival (May - August)

The famous opera festival in Sussex in the south of England has just celebrated its 70th year. In between performances, visitors – who dress up for the occasion – enjoy lavish picnics in the beautiful grounds of Glyndebourne House. For information about tickets and dates, visit

www.glyndebourne.com

Grand National (April 3)

The Grand National is a much-loved British horse racing event that captivates the nation every year. Held at Aintree near Liverpool, have lunch in one of the hospitality suites while watching the races. It's just one of many horse racing fixtures in Britain. For dates and tickets information visit

www.aintree.co.uk

The Great Dorset Steam Fair (August 31 - September 4)

If you want to get an idea of the English way of life at the turn of last century, head for the Steam Fair at Tarrant Hinton near Blandford Forum in Dorset. You'll see an incredible collection of steam and vintage equipment, including working steam engines and fairground organs.

Visit www.steamfair.co.uk

Henley Royal Regatta (June 29 - July 3)

Set on the river at Henley-on-Thames, the Royal Regatta presents 19 rowing races, watched by visitors who dress up for the occasion and enjoy picnics on the river banks.

For details visit www.hrr.co.uk

Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod (July 5-10)

Since 1947, thousands of competitors have taken part in this international music festival. This year the event features chamber choirs, stage show songs and folk dance groups, as well as a new section of Celtic music. For more information, visit

www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk

Royal Academy Summer Exhibition (June - August)

Held at this prestigious gallery on Piccadilly in London, the Summer Exhibition is an institution as visitors flock to see which contemporary art has been chosen for display each year.

For details visit www.royalacademy.org.uk

The Royal Show at Stoneleigh (July 3 - 6)

Showcasing the best of British food, farming and rural living, the Royal Show at Stoneleigh in Warwickshire displays the country's finest livestock, shopping and agricultural businesses, and attracts around 150,000 people each year.

Visit www.royalshow.org.uk

Wimbledon Tennis (June 20 - July 3)

Tickets for this world-famous lawn tennis tournament in south London each June are highly sought after. Visitors apply through a ballot system months in advance or queue for hours to get hold of last-minute vacancies. For information visit

www.wimbledon-experience.com

Royal homes and palaces

Palaces in London and castles in Scotland. Visit the splendid homes of Britain's monarchy and experience living history

FROM BUCKINGHAM PALACE in London to Balmoral Castle in Scotland, Britain's kings and queens have, for centuries, had a collection of palaces and castles serving as family homes, places of work and venues for grand State occasions. Today, the Queen continues to use many of the Royal establishments for these purposes and they're now open to the public too. Gilt-edged, chandeliered ballrooms and stunning landscaped gardens for you to enjoy. Beautiful treasures from fine furniture to old master paintings and priceless jewels.

Start with London

Throughout the summer months of August and most of September, look around the lavish State Apartments of Buckingham Palace, then head to the Queen's Gallery (open all year) and marvel at masterpieces by Rembrandt, Rubens, Vermeer and Canaletto. Next, go



to the Royal Mews to see the impressive collection of horse-drawn coaches (open March to October).

A few minutes walk from Buckingham Palace are St James's Palace and Clarence House, the former home of the late Queen Mother and now the London residence of Princes Charles, William and Harry. Of the two, Clarence House is open to the public from August to October. Less opulent than Buckingham Palace, it's a fine example of a grand London mansion that's still in domestic use. Then there's Kensington Palace, birthplace of Queen Victoria and the former home of Princess Diana. Surrounded by a

'The former London home of the Queen Mother is now the residence of Princes Charles, William and Harry'

Private and public homes Osborne House on the Isle of Wight (left) was Queen Victoria's holiday home. Windsor Castle (right) combines pomp and pageantry with the present Royal family's private rooms

‘Of all the Queen’s homes, Windsor Castle is the oldest, largest and most majestic’

lovely park, here you can see exhibits such as the Queen’s dresses from her early years in the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection.

A short journey to the edges of London are Hampton Court and Windsor Castle. At the Tudor palace of Hampton Court, wander around the gardens by the River Thames complete with its hedged maze. This was the pleasure palace of Henry VIII. Learn what it was like to work in the kitchen preparing his banquets over which he wooed his six wives.

Of all the Queen’s homes, 12th-century

Windsor Castle is the oldest, largest and most majestic. Walk around the exquisite State Apartments furnished with treasures from the Royal Collection from such painters as Holbein and Van Dyck. Visit St George’s Chapel, one of the finest examples of Gothic architecture in the world. Admire the intricate detail of Queen Mary’s dolls house.

England, Scotland, Wales

The Queen’s main holiday homes are Sandringham House in Norfolk and Balmoral

Castle in Scotland. Bought by Queen Victoria for her son, Edward VII, Sandringham is usually occupied by members of the current Royal family from Christmas to February, but it’s open to the public between April and October (the grounds are open all year). The drawing room is a treasure house of Russian silver and Chinese jade, while the grounds are renowned for their beauty.

You can also visit Balmoral from the beginning of April to the end of July each year. Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, fell in love with this remote Scottish house, and after Albert’s death, Victoria found solace in its forests, burns and walks.

Also in Scotland, see more paintings from the Royal Collections at the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh, and visit the Queen Mother’s favourite home, the Castle of Mey, in the very north of Scotland (open between October and May). It shows the human face of royalty with paintings by her grandson, Prince Charles, on the wall, a magazine left by her bed and videotapes of her favourite television programmes, including the comedy show, *Fawlty Towers*.

Prince Charles made his home at Highgrove in Gloucestershire in the early 1980s, and it is here that Duchy Originals, one of Britain’s leading brands of organic food and drink, is based. While visits to Highgrove must be booked between three and four years in advance, Duchy Originals products are widely available in supermarkets around the country and can make an ideal souvenir gift.

Meanwhile in Wales, medieval Caernarfon Castle is nearly as old as Windsor. Near the



Royal treats and retreats
The Queen and her family holiday at Balmoral Castle in Scotland. Open to the public



Tour tips

Great British Heritage Pass

Valid for four, seven, 15 days or one month, allows entry to nearly 600 fascinating properties. For details go to www.visitbritain.com/heritangepass

Useful websites

For opening times and further information, visit the following websites.

www.royalresidences.com
www.castleofmey.org.uk
www.english-heritage.org.uk
www.royal.gov.uk
www.hrp.org.uk

stunning mountains of Snowdonia, this was the site of the investiture of the first Prince of Wales in 1301 and, 688 years later, Prince Charles followed in his footsteps.

Some Royal homes are no longer in use but live on purely as historic attractions. Visit Queen Victoria's delightful holiday retreat, Osborne House on the Isle of Wight – a family home, smaller and cosier than most

Royal homes.

At so many of these beautiful homes you come away not only with a taste of the pomp and pageantry of monarchy but also of Royal family life and that of their servants and courtiers.

‘Get a taste of the pomp and pageantry of monarchy but also of royal family life’

Door into history There are fascinating secrets at every turn in Britain's Royal palaces. Hampton Court near London was the pleasure palace of Henry VIII





Feast of the arts *The Birmingham Symphony Orchestra offers classical music*

Festivals and the arts

In Britain, it's showtime all the time. Art lovers have their pick of events and performances, and there are year-round festivals where new talent can rub shoulders with A-list celebrities



Feast of the arts The Glyndebourne Festival (top) offers classical music, while the annual Notting Hill Carnival (right) is a celebration of world music and costume



KITSCH OR CLASSIC? *Mamma Mia* or *Hamlet*? The ornate grandeur of the Royal Opera House or the natural beauty of Shakespeare in the park? Whatever your preference, there's a performance from Edinburgh to Cornwall that's sure to leave you cheering in the aisles.

Symphonies and arias

Lovers of classical music are spoilt for choice. You can enjoy concerts showcasing the very best of the world's musicians all year round at the Barbican, Royal Festival Hall, Royal Albert Hall and other venues around London. You may have heard of the BBC Proms. Join the 'promenaders' and stand in the central arena of the magnificent Royal Albert Hall listening to classical recitals which take place over eight weeks from July to September. Buy your tickets on the day at very reasonable prices or book seats in advance on the web. The 'Last Night of the Proms' is world-famous, packed with smiling faces, flags, banners and balloons. It's a fantastic occasion, but difficult to get tickets for, so the alternative is 'Proms in the Park' where it's relayed on huge screens in Hyde Park – the atmosphere is almost as good!

‘For a true feast of opera, take a champagne picnic to the Glyndebourne Festival’

An opera or ballet fan? Enjoy first-class performances, both classical and contemporary, at London's two great venues, the Royal Opera House and the Coliseum. Queue up on Monday evenings at the Royal Opera House for tickets for that evening's performance at a very reasonable price. Or book in advance on the Internet. For a true feast of opera, head out of London, take a



**'The biggest of them all
is the Edinburgh
International Festival'**



Ballooning and opera in Wales From the Balloon Festival in Blackwood, Gwent (left), to the Opera House at the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff, Wales is full of entertaining and cultural events

champagne picnic and join other fans for a performance at the superb three-month Glyndebourne Festival, which runs from mid-May to the end of August, and is set in the glorious Sussex countryside.

Music and drama aren't restricted to London of course. Catch a play or musical in elegant historic theatres or contemporary venues in towns and cities all over Britain at any time of year. Visit the 'land of song' and share the excitement of Welsh audiences as arias resound in Cardiff's brand new Opera House within the Wales Millennium Centre. Listen, spellbound, to the sounds of the Halle Orchestra performing in Manchester's Bridgewater Hall or thrill to the superb skills of the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Enjoy Scottish Opera north of the border and let the music of Scotland's leading orchestras waft over you at the Usher Hall in Edinburgh

and Glasgow's Royal Concert Hall.

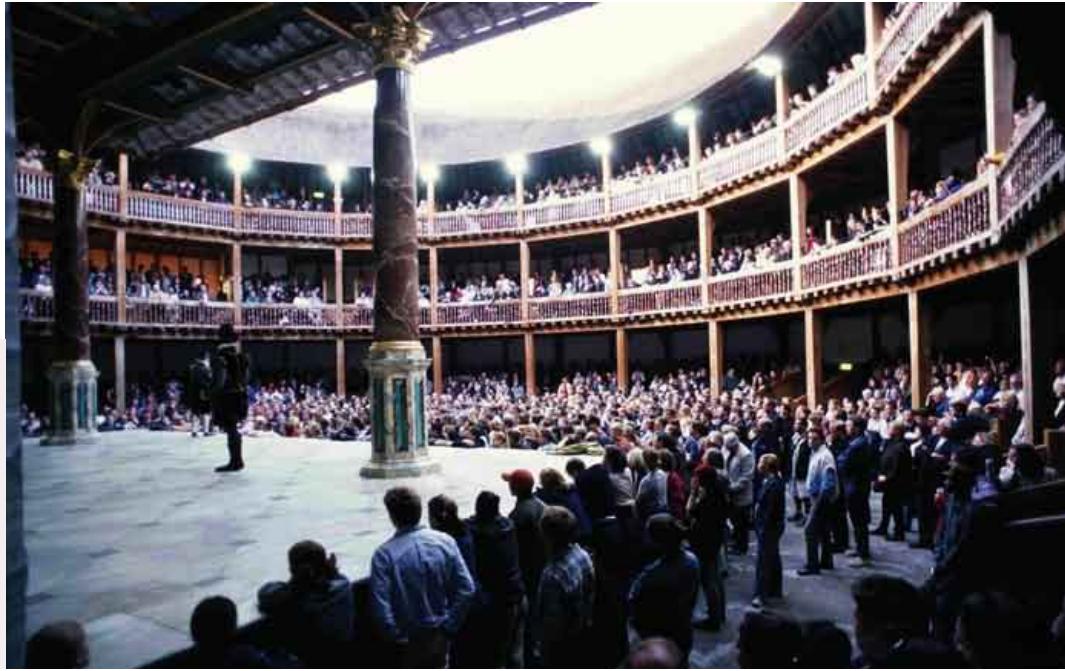
Feel your spine tingle as the sound of massed voices resonates around the wonderful architecture of splendid cathedrals such as Canterbury, Winchester, Lincoln or Durham.

Shakespeare with a twist

Picture the scene. A warm summer's evening as the sun goes down, relaxing on a grassy bank with a bottle of chilled wine, breeze ruffling your hair. As a nation, the British love performing in the open air. Join performances of Shakespeare with stunning backdrops of grand stately homes, castles or ruined abbeys. Go to concerts in parks and opera in open spaces. They're happening all over the country in the summer.

If you like, you can watch a Shakespeare play at the Globe Theatre on London's Bankside

Music and madness
More music can be heard at the Capercaillie Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow, and find street entertainers in London such as the Strange Fruit pole performers



and experience pretty well what it must have been like in the great playwright's day. The audience doesn't sit on straw bales and throw eggs at the actors if they don't like the show nowadays, but it's a great atmosphere!

For Shakespeare in more traditional surroundings take a trip to the bard's birthplace Stratford-upon-Avon. Here the Royal Shakespeare Company performs its great classical repertoire at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and the Swan Theatre.

A feast of festivals

Dancing in the streets, music on the hillsides, poetry on the promenade, drama in the dungeons. Feel the excitement? Music festivals, arts festivals, literature festivals,

'Samba in the streets and soak up the fun at London's noisy Notting Hill Carnival'

drama festivals, maritime festivals, balloon festivals, kite festivals... the list is endless. But we'll concentrate here on music and the arts.

The biggest of them all is, of course, the Edinburgh International Festival and Festival Fringe, staged over three weeks in August every year. Watch plays on the pavements and sketches in the squares; laugh at clowns in the street and jugglers in the parks.

Or book seats to see or hear some of the world's finest theatrical and musical talent in

venues of every conceivable shape and size throughout the city. Performers from around the world also come to the International Eisteddfod in the lovely Welsh town of Llangollen in July each year to entertain the crowds with song and dance from their native lands. Dressed in their national costumes, the competitors make a colourful scene.

Up and down the country you can join local communities in their cultural festivals where many events are completely free. Put a note



Ticket bookings

www.ticketmaster.com

www.keithprowse.com

Venue websites

Barbican

www.barbican.org.uk

Royal Festival Hall

www.rfh.org.uk

Royal Albert Hall

www.royalalberthall.com

Royal Opera House

www.royalopera.org

Coliseum

www.eno.org

Glyndebourne Festival

www.glyndebourne.com

Wales Millennium Centre

www.wmc.org.uk

Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

www.cbsco.co.uk

Scottish Opera

www.scottishopera.org.uk

Globe Theatre

www.shakespeares-globe.org

Royal Shakespeare Company

www.rsc.org.uk

Edinburgh International Festival

www.edinburgh-festivals.com

International Eisteddfod

www.eisteddfod.org.uk



Famous attractions *The Last Night of the Proms* (right) has a party atmosphere and *The Phantom of the Opera* exemplifies a long-running musical in London



‘Shakespeare performances with stunning backdrops of grand stately homes and castles’

in your diary for a weekend in mid-September to come to the Birmingham ArtsFest, the country's largest free arts festival. Want to samba in the street? Well that's just fine at London's colourful, noisy Notting Hill Carnival.

Or dance to a drumbeat at Africa Oye, Liverpool's spectacular African Music Festival. For a street party of a different kind, join an Asian Mela. Bradford stages Europe's largest – a wonderful multi-cultural mix of live music, dance, fashion, exotic foods and Asian crafts.

Art or literature

Music, art and literature come together at many of our festivals. At Brighton for instance you'll find an eclectic feast of drama, dance, opera and comedy, but in addition you can meet and chat to local artists in their own homes. And at Bath's Literature Festival listen to book and poetry readings in the elegant Georgian surroundings of this beautiful city. Or head for the Hay-on-Wye festival. This connoisseurs' event attracts the cream of international literary talent from around the world, but it's also for the ordinary book-lover.

How to book

But how do you get tickets for all these fantastic occasions? Major events such as Glyndebourne, Shakespeare at Stratford and the Edinburgh Festival need planning well in advance and you can book tickets online. Buy advance tickets for London shows, and major events around the country on the Internet through agencies such as Ticketmaster or Keith Prowse. When in London, queue at box offices for returns, or purchase reduced-price tickets for that day's performances at Tkts in Leicester Square. When you're touring around Britain,

Tourist Information Centres will tell you what's on locally and how best to get tickets. Check out www.artsfestivals.co.uk for information on over 100 festivals nationwide.

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London is up against New York, Paris, Madrid and Moscow for the right to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
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Take your pick of attractions Brown signposts guide you to places of interest in England and Wales, blue signposts in Scotland

By road

Britain has an excellent road network with motorways and dual carriageway roads linking many of the main cities and towns, but don't be afraid to get off the beaten track as country roads are all well surfaced and clearly signposted. Brown signposts guide you to attractions and places of interest in England and Wales, blue signposts in Scotland.

Car rental

Many companies offer competitive rates and can be booked before you leave home via the Internet or your local travel agent. Or hire one when you arrive if you're not sure of your plans in advance.

You'll find car rental outlets at all airports and in every major town and city. Conditions of hire vary and most require the driver to be between 23 and 75 years old, with a current driving licence, issued in your own country of residence and having been held for at least one year.

You'll find fuel stations in every town, at many supermarkets (where fuel can often be purchased at cheaper prices) and along all major roads.

Touring directory

It's easy to travel around Britain whether by road, rail or air. Here are just a few tips and guidelines

By car

For route information and advice and assistance on driving in Britain, visit www.theaa.com

Car hire websites

www.avis.co.uk
www.easyCar.com
www.europcar.co.uk
www.hertz.co.uk

By train

For timetable and fare enquiries contact National Rail on www.nationalrail.co.uk

For online reservations visit

www.thetrainline.com

If you plan to do a lot of rail travel, then it's probably worth getting a BritRail Pass (www.brirail.com) which you'll need to buy before you leave home. Ask your VisitBritain contact centre for details or visit www.visitbritain.com/ca



By coach

There's an extensive coach network reaching most parts of the country offering reasonably-priced, comfortable travel.

National Express is the major coach operator with express services to all major cities, towns and places of interest. They have special discount cards for 16-25 year olds and for mature students. Valid for 12 months, they'll save you up to 30% off many normal adult fares. Anyone over 60 automatically receives a discounted fare.

In Scotland services are operated by Scottish Citylink and offer an Explorer Pass which allows travel on any Citylink coach service within Scotland at any time within the validity of the Pass. Further information visit

www.citylink.co.uk.

By rail

Britain's huge rail network means it's incredibly easy to travel to even the remotest parts of the country. Fast express services operate between major towns and cities and

suburban and country routes are served by smaller trains which have more frequent stops.

If you know of your travel plans in advance you can save quite a lot of money by booking ahead, but if you make a spur of the moment decision, then just buy your ticket at the station booking office; travel off peak (ie, out of rush hour) and you can buy a 'cheap

day-return', also at a reduced rate. On longer journeys there's usually a buffet car for snacks and drinks.

By air

If you need to get from one part of Britain to another in a hurry, check out the air services. With the increase in cut-price air fares there are bargains to be found if you plan ahead.

By coach

For journey planning and to book visit www.nationalexpress.com

Airline websites

www.ba.com
www.flybmi.com
www.easyjet.com
www.ryanair.com
www.virgin-atlantic.com



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