



Britain

CITY BREAKS



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Contents

12



35

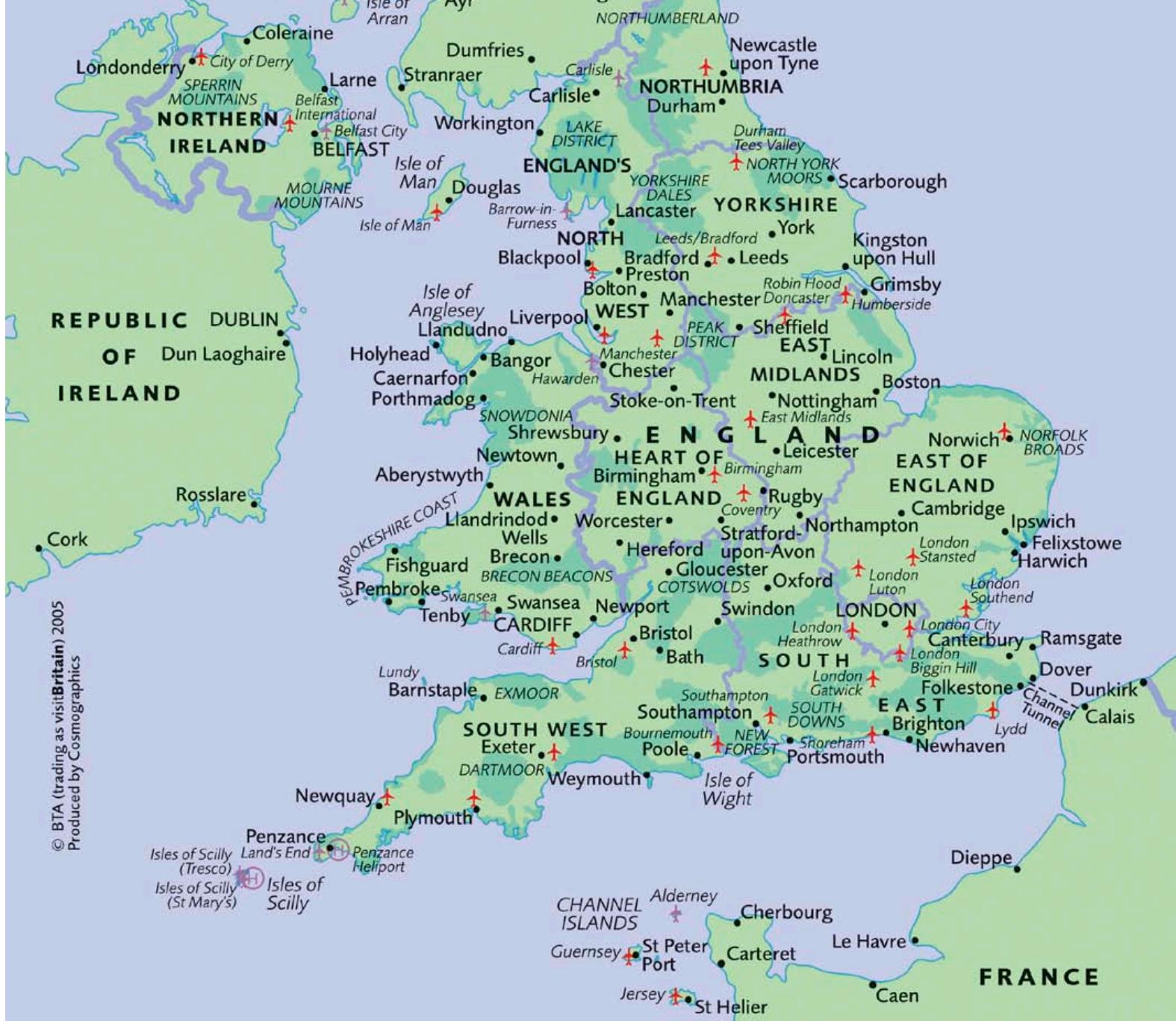


Cities	6	Glasgow	41
London	8	Liverpool	44
Day trips from London	20	Manchester	47
Modern British Cuisine	25	Belfast	50
The Performing Arts	29	Birmingham	53
Museums & Galleries	32	Brighton	56
Shopping	35	Cardiff	59
Edinburgh	38	Heritage Cities	62





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Welcome

WELCOME TO THE VisitBritain City Travel Guide 2006, produced by VisitBritain in association with Lonely Planet.

Britain is one of the most exciting places on the planet. With more than a nod to a fascinating history, the country is busy reinventing itself with style and confidence into a diverse, multicultural society.

Britain's cities are undergoing a renaissance. Reborn city centres are home to more acclaimed museums and galleries, shops and theatres than ever before. Nor are these urban pleasures confined to the day, but in the evening a whole variety of top-class cosmopolitan restaurants open their doors, and when you want to let your hair down you'll find that Britain is home to some of the world's most cutting-edge bars and stylish clubs.

London is a vibrant capital full of limitless excitements, but don't ignore the manifold attractions of Britain's other cities from the historic charm of university towns like Oxford and Cambridge to the elegant patrician character of Edinburgh and the more edgy metropolitan feel of cities like Newcastle, Manchester and Glasgow.

This guide will show you how to get to all the famous sights, and introduce you to wonderful places you never knew were there. Britain is exciting, beautiful and vital. Come and experience it for yourself.

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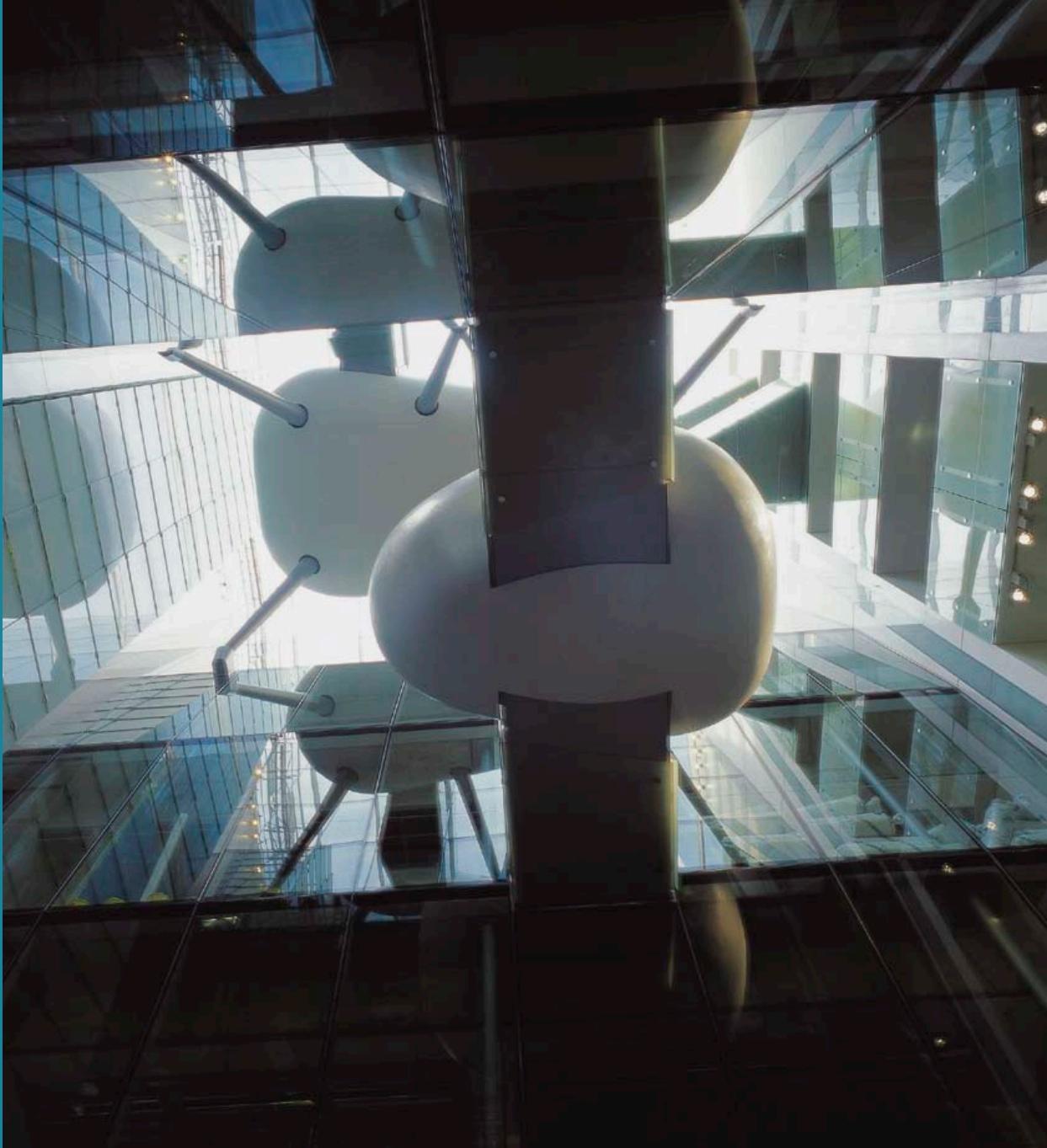
Cities

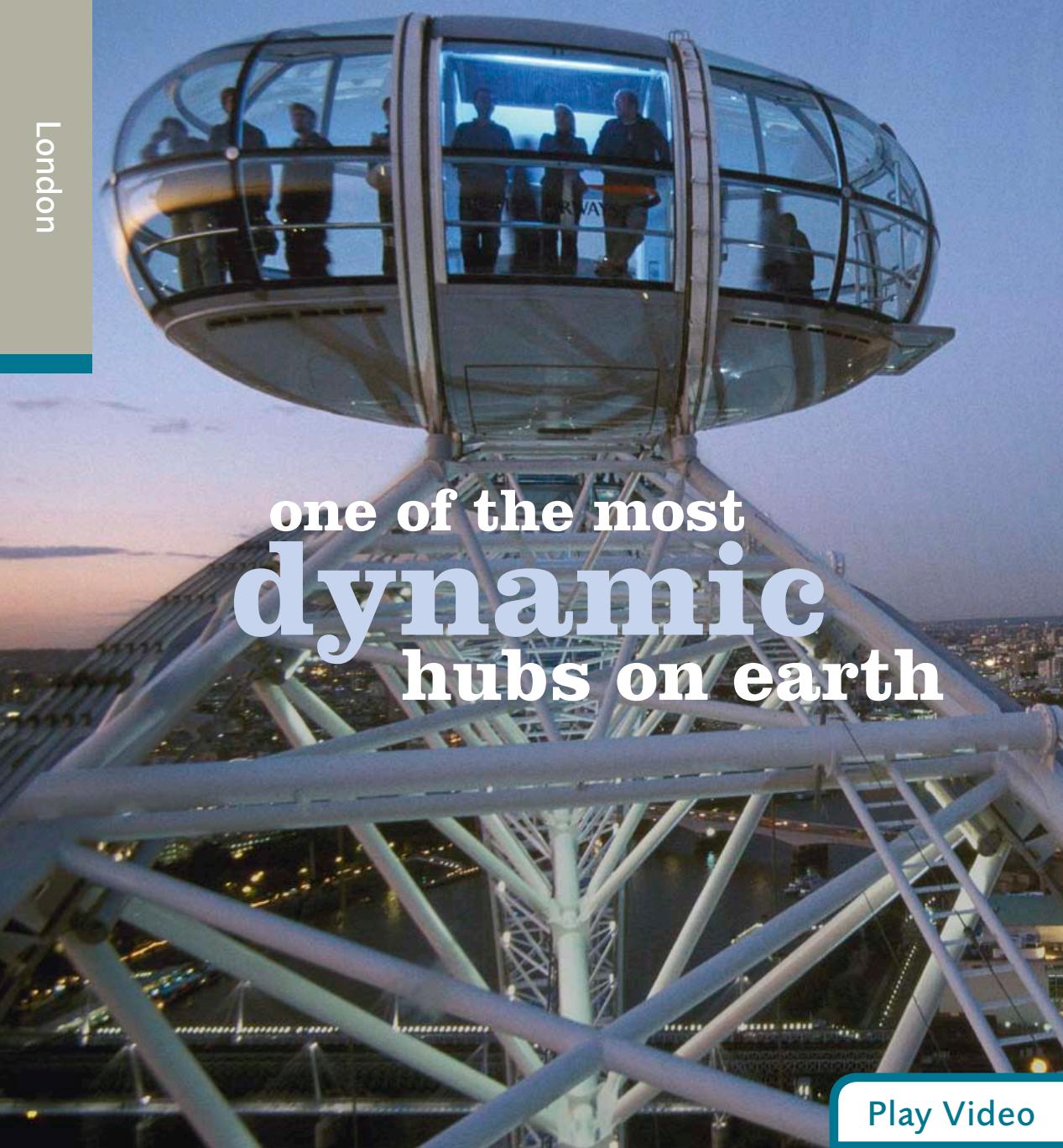
BRITAIN'S CITIES ARE ENJOYING a cultural renaissance and are full of energy and excitement. On the one hand regional cities are taking pride in nurturing individual characteristics whilst at the same time benefiting from a wealth of multi-cultural influences. Whether staying for a day to nose round an exhibition or enjoying a long weekend of shopping and chic urban living, you'll soon discover the richness and variety of city life in Britain is unparalleled.

London is a truly world-class city; and from Manchester's new museums and vibrant nightlife to Edinburgh's Castle and Palace steeped in history to Cardiff's sport and bursting regional pride, these cities are all flourishing on the cutting edge. It's the same up and down the country, yet each city is fascinatingly different – from accents to architecture.

But Britain is more than the sum of its impressive sights. Dining is second-to-none, whether you're sampling some modern twists on British classics or dining out on countless world cuisines that make their home here. Culture is on tap all over Britain, with wonderful modern performance spaces joining established classics to bring exceptional theatre, dance, ballet and opera to an ever-growing audience.

Once in danger of being overlooked, Britain's cities now tempt you to linger for longer than you'd planned. Don't say we didn't warn you...





one of the most
dynamic
hubs on earth

Play Video

THE SUN IS SHINING brighter in London these days and the English capital is aglow. It has always been a compelling city but right now it's also one of the most dynamic hubs on earth leading the vanguard in music, visual arts, fashion, film and, these days, even food. It's not the technicoloured swagger of the swinging '60s but London's back in the spotlight and it is certifiably groovy.

This mammoth metropolis is a world in one city; all at once exhilarating, irrepressible, stimulating and brimming with spectacle and possibilities. It can be different things to different people but these qualities are always in abundance, making London the place to be right now.

London is – of course – home to world-famous landmarks like Big Ben, Tower Bridge and St Paul's Cathedral, but it's also a city of wonderful secrets that reveal themselves to the traveller prepared to look a little harder. You'll find tiny riverside pubs, well-preserved houses of eccentric characters from London past, bustling weekend markets and beautiful open spaces where Londoners slow the pace of this city hooked on living life in the fast lane. However long you're planning to be here, it won't be long enough.



With some of the world's best of pretty much everything it's hard to know where to start. You could go for Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben. Or a stroll along the River Thames, taking in the galleries and culture of the South Bank. Londoners would recommend heading up Primrose Hill or striding out to the middle of Tower Bridge for a grand vista of the city before you do anything else, but what about getting stuck in straight away at the British Museum or St Paul's Cathedral? If that all sounds a bit energetic, settle down for a few hours in a gastropub with real ale and good food. Once refreshed, the shopping temples of Bond St, Oxford St and Knightsbridge beckon.

If you're in need of guidance, suggestions, maps and guidebooks stroll down to the Britain and London Visitor Centre (1 Lower Regent St, SW1). Suitably oriented, energised and inspired, you're ready to really see the city.

Seeing

Must dos

If you go home without seeing these sights, make sure you're on the first plane back.

BA London Eye (0870 500 0600; Jubilee Gardens)

Book ahead or on the day for the graceful 30-minute flight on the world's largest observation wheel. On a clear day you can see 25 miles in every direction and get wonderful views of the centre of London and beyond, including the Thames curving through town and out towards the sea.

The Tower of London (0870 756 6060; Tower Hill) The Tower is a fascinating medieval fortress surrounded by a 21st-century city. It drips history, from its beginnings during the reign of William the Conqueror (1066–1087) to the colourfully dressed Yeoman Warders (Beefeaters) who guard the Tower. Beat the queues by buying your ticket at any Underground station.

British Museum (020 7323 8299; Great Russell St; free) London's most-visited free attraction and finest museum will take more than one visit to even scratch the surface, with a world of antiquities including the Rosetta Stone, Sutton Hoo Bronzes and the controversial, beautiful Parthenon Marbles. Regular coffee breaks under the breathtaking roof of the Great Court, Europe's largest covered square, are essential for plotting your next move.



getting around

London's Underground system, known as the Tube, is the quickest way to get around and certainly the best way to get from the suburbs to the centre. Get a travelcard to save queuing for tickets each time you make a journey (£4.70 for the inner two zones for one day). However, if you have the time, travelling by an iconic red double-decker bus is more relaxed. Sit at the front of the top deck for great views. Black taxis are plentiful - simply hail one when you see the yellow light on. If you're thinking of taking the Tube in the centre, compare the Tube map with a street map – often it's just as easy, and a lot more pleasant, to walk.



Tate Modern (020 7401 5120; Queen's Walk; free) An astonishing gallery as much for the building and setting as the art inside, the Tate Modern demands attention. Get there by Millennium Bridge from St Paul's, then enter the former Bankside Power Station's vast turbine hall. Once you've got your breath back there are thousands of world-class works of modern art arranged by theme. The views from the top floor café are wonderful too.

Portobello Road Market (Portobello Rd W10) One of London's most famous street markets, which is a great place to shop for new and vintage clothes.

South Kensington For museum heaven head to the home to the Natural History Museum, Science Museum and the fabulous Victoria & Albert Museum. You can while away weeks strolling the

corridors of these wonderful London institutions. Like many of Britain's museums, they're free and offer world-class special exhibitions showcasing the new, old and downright amazing.

Off the beaten track

While you shouldn't miss London's world-class attractions, chances are that what will linger in the memory are trips into the hidden city. Try these for starters.

Sir John Soane's Museum (020 7405 2107; 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields; free) This beautiful house is almost unchanged since Soane's death in 1837 and is an unparalleled opportunity to have a glimpse of his life and passions. Once in you stroll through nooks and crannies jammed with paintings and fragments of ancient buildings.

Borough Market (Cnr Borough High St & Stoney St; Fri & Sat only) 'London's Larder' has been here in some form since the 13th-century and now it's more popular than ever. This is the place to come for the best of British produce, from cheese that blows your taste buds away to sausages that sizzle with unusual ingredients.

Highgate Cemetery (020 8340 1834; Swain's Lane N6) Karl Marx is the best known resident, but a stroll round the wonderfully wild and atmospheric cemetery will reveal many more famous names. Continue on to & **Hampstead Heath** (020 8348 9908), one of London's greenest retreats. Highgate itself is a refined village that's a charming spot for a pub lunch.

Greenwich Village-like with a refreshing sense of space and full of historic attractions, this area of London is worth a day to itself. Visit the **Cutty Sark** (020 8858 3445), the **National Maritime Museum** and the **Royal Observatory** (both 020 8312 6565; free), explore the arts and crafts market and then chill out at one of the many cafés and bars nearby.

Top 5 views of London

- Of Buckingham Palace from the footbridge over St James's Park lake
- From the London Eye
- From Marble Arch viewing platform
- From Waterloo Bridge (preferably at sunset)
- From the gardens of Royal Hospital Chelsea across the Thames to Battersea Power Station





Eating

Eating out in London can be a wonderful experience. Modern British food is imaginative, varied and delicious. All over London are wonderful restaurants, from the high-brow likes of The Square and The Ivy to the fashionable eateries of Gordon Ramsay and Terence Conran, all offering exciting modern food with a British twist. As you'd expect in a world city, you can find the food of almost any country here. There are a huge number of cutting-edge and eclectic dining options in the West End, as well as Chinatown's huge variety of Asian restaurants.

The East End's Brick Lane and Whitechapel are

essential for the fiery curries so loved by Londoners. As you head out of the centre you'll find gastropubs – upmarket boozers serving mouthwatering big-plate specials.

Mildred's (020 7494 1634; 45 Lexington St W1) Central London's best veggie restaurant is a treat for carnivores and herbivores alike.

Wong Kei (020 7437 3071; 41-43 Wardour St W1) Cheap Cantonese food served in a communal setting. Legendary rude waiters.

The Eagle (020 7837 1353; 159 Farringdon Rd EC1) London's first gastropub serves great Mediterranean food in a relaxed atmosphere.

Bermondsey Kitchen (020 7407 5719;



194 Bermondsey St SE1) Trendy but relaxed eatery, with a varied and changing international menu.

New Tayyab (020 7247 9543; 83 Fieldgate St E1) Enticing aromas, a buzzing atmosphere and superior Indian food.

J Sheekey (020 7240 2565; 28-32 St Martin's Ct WC2) An incredibly smart place in which to savour the riches of the sea, cooked simply and exquisitely.

Club Gascon (020 7796 0600; 57 West Smithfield EC1) Right next to glorious St Bartholomew's-the-Great, it has earned a Michelin star for its delectable dishes.



Nightlife

London is often thought of as a series of interconnected villages, and each has something different going on. Why not pick the one closest to you and seek out its quiet pubs, live music venues, cinemas and theatres? You'll find something surprising and different everywhere you turn. The theatre scene, opera, ballet and classical music are all of international quality and are performed in beautiful, historic venues across the city.

Pick up a copy of the listings magazine *Time Out* for more details.

Three Kings of Clerkenwell (020 7253 0483; 7 Clerkenwell Close EC1) Eccentric décor and great food, the place for a warm summer's evening.

Princess Louise (020 7405 8816; 208 High Holborn WC1) Spectacularly decorated Victorian pub, a perfect meeting place or cosy evening hang-out.

Captain Kidd (108 Wapping High St E1) One of London's finest riverside pubs and a historic setting given that this was once the grisly execution spot for miscreant pirates like the eponymous Captain Kidd. Caters to a professional crowd during the week and is a great family spot at weekends given its fine beer garden and excellent restaurant.

Crown & Goose (100 Arlington Rd NW1) One of our favourite London pubs. The square room has a central wooden bar between British Racing Green Walls studded with gilt-framed mirrors and illuminated by big shuttered windows. More importantly, it combines a good-looking crowd, easy conviviality, top tucker and good beer.

Lamb & Flag (33 Rose St WC2) A popular historic pub and a great Covent Garden 'find'. It was built in 1623 and was formerly called the 'Bucket of Blood'.

Cow (89 Westbourne Park Rd W2) A superb

gastro-pub with outstanding food and a jovial pub-is-a-pub atmosphere. Seafood is a speciality and the staff are much friendlier than you'd expect from somewhere so perpetually hip.

Ronnie Scott's (020 7439 0747; 47 Frith St W1) Familiar to aficionados as the best jazz club in London. The food, atmosphere and acts are always spot-on.





Shopping

There are hours of endless fun to be had exploring London's consumer delights, whether you're looking for Harrods' English breakfast tea or the latest in Vivienne Westwood clothes. London's shops and markets will amaze you with the variety, choice and quality on offer – often all within the same building. There are antiques and clothes along Portobello Rd Market, a dozen libraries' worth of books along Charing Cross Rd, design stores, furniture stores and world-renowned department stores like Fortnum & Mason and Harvey Nichols. So, in short, if retail is therapy, then London is a great big sympathetic couch (designer, of course).

Selfridges (08708 377 377; 400 Oxford St W1) London's finest department store. Here you'll find high fashion, running the gamut from street to formal, an unparalleled food hall, Europe's largest cosmetics hall, furniture, books and electronics.

Fortnum & Mason (020 7734 8040; 181 Piccadilly W1) The byword for quality and

service, steeped as it is in 300 years of tradition. It is especially noted for its old-world ground-floor food hall where Britain's elite come to shop.

Harvey Nichols (020 7235 5000; 109-25 Knightsbridge SW1) London's temple of high fashion where you'll find all the names that matter in local and international high couture. The food hall's great too.

Liberty (020 7734 1234; 214-220 Regent St W1) An irresistible blend of contemporary styles in an old-fashioned atmosphere. And you can't leave London without some 'Liberty Florals' (printed fabrics).

Harrods (020 7730 1234; 87 Brompton Rd SW1)

Famous and unmissable, a walk around Harrods is like being introduced to British High Society.

Carnaby Street (W1) This street was once known as the headquarters of swinging London in the 1960s. Now you'll find Diesel, Mambo, Puma and many other well-known names here. Just try walking its length without stopping for a nose somewhere!

Greenwich Market (020 8293 3110; College Approach SE10; shops Mon-Sun, stalls Thu-Sun) Antiques, curios, arts and crafts – perfect for a weekend wander.





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Sleeping

No matter when you come to London, you'll need to book your accommodation ahead. The capital has a huge variety of places to stay. There are a good selection of budget hotels, comfy mid-range rooms all over the city and you can't leave town without



trying some of the world's best boutique hotels where design is deified.

Swiss House Hotel (020 7373 2769; www.swiss-hh.demon.co.uk; 171 Old Brompton Rd SW5) An outstanding place for the price. It's set in a Victorian terrace house that's festooned with flowers, the staff are gracious and welcoming, and the amply sized rooms are cosily chic.

Five Sumner Place (020 7584 7586; www.sumnerplace.com; 5 Sumner Pl SW7) On a quiet leafy road just off Old Brompton Rd, this place is restful, refined and elegant. It has 13 well-equipped rooms and there's an attractive conservatory and courtyard garden.

Malmaison (020 7012 3700; www.malmaison.com; Charterhouse Sq EC1) One of a modern Scottish boutique chain providing value for money in trendy Clerkenwell. Suave,

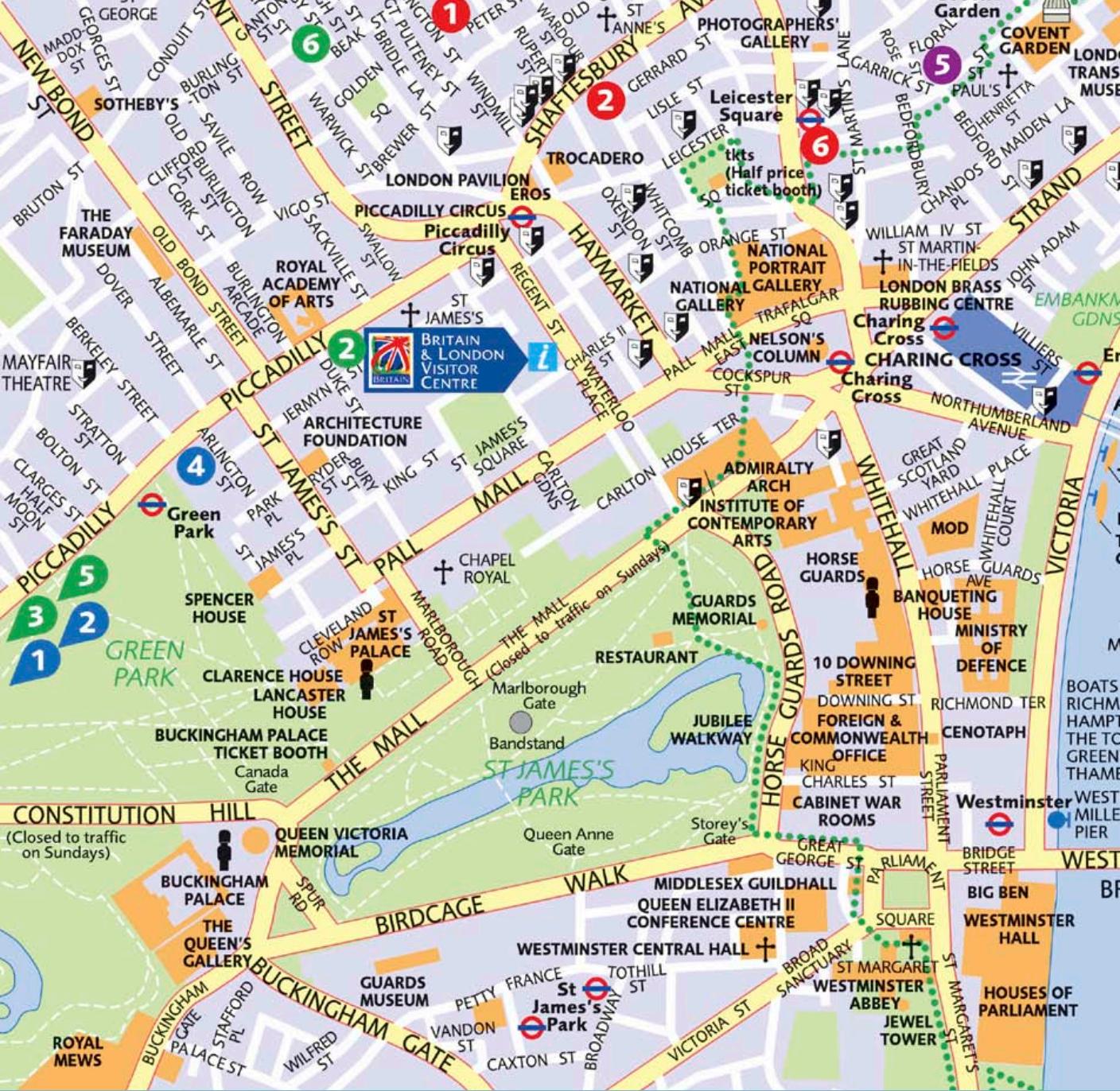
sophisticated and refreshingly understated.

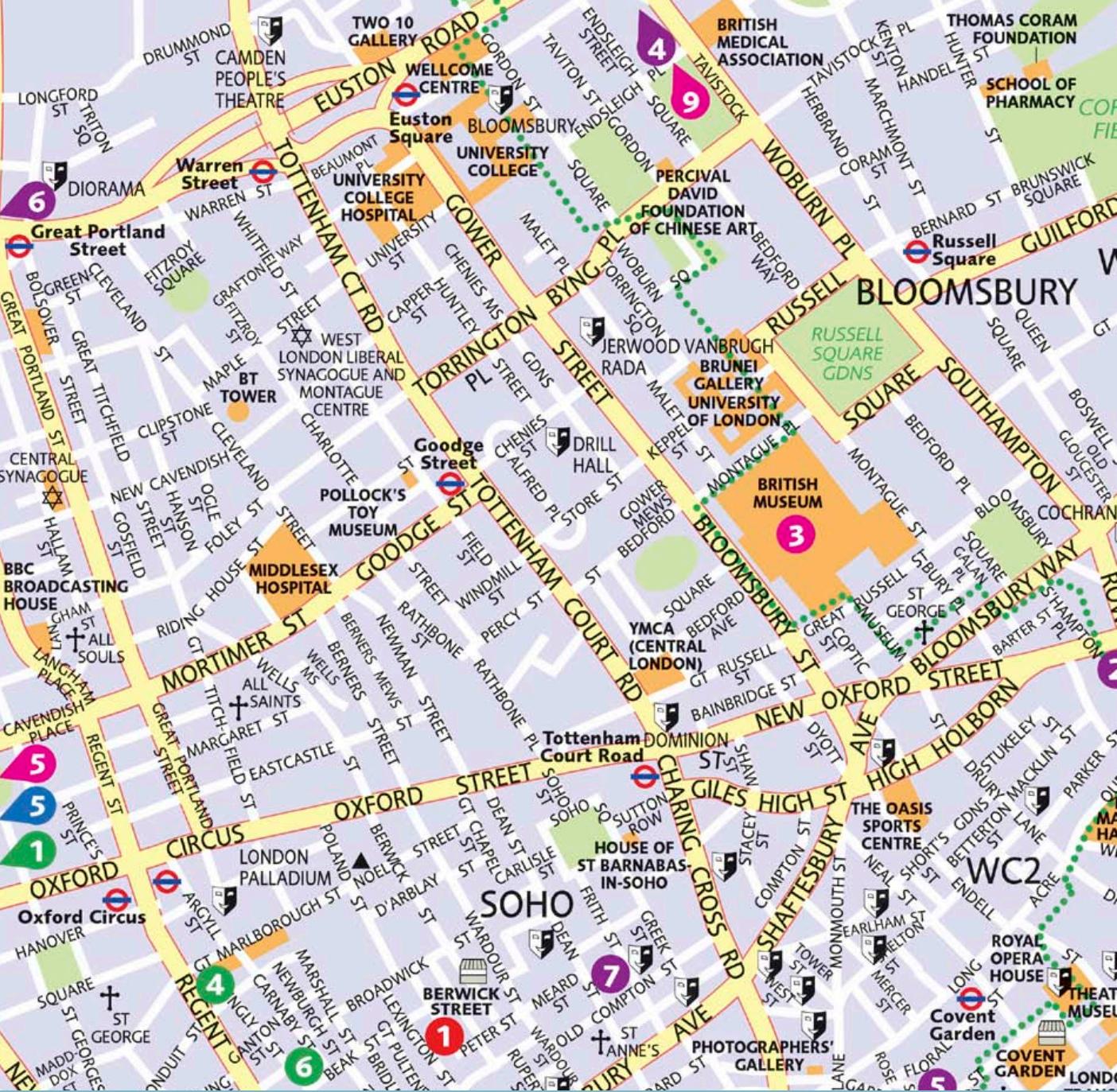
Ritz (020 7493 8181; www.theritzhotel.co.uk; 150 Piccadilly W1) London's most celebrated hotel. While it's still the royal family's home away from home, such is the Ritz's unyielding cred that even the new generation of cultural elite are taking to it. The rooms are expectedly opulent while the restaurant is decked out like a rococo boudoir.

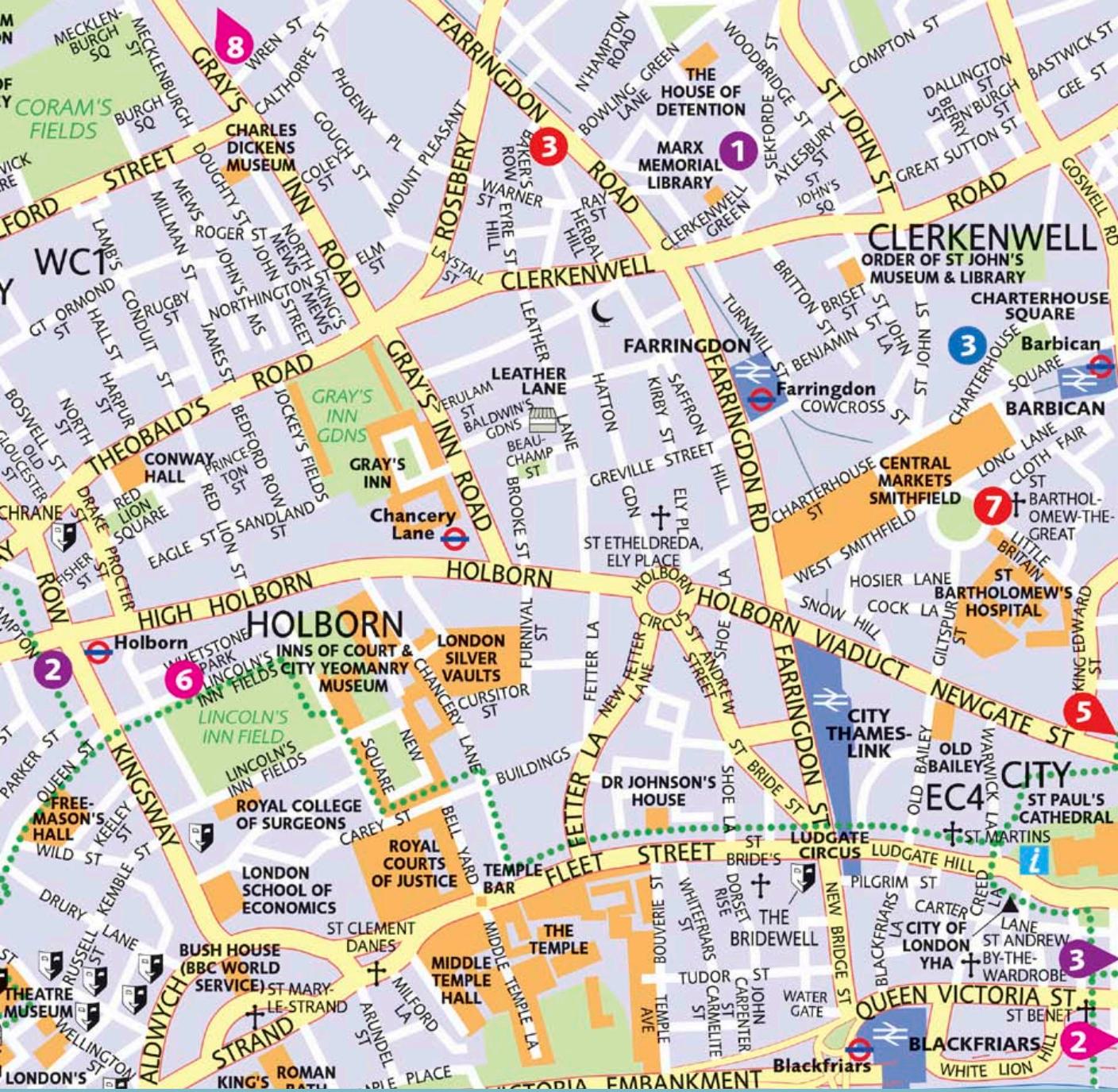
The Gate Hotel (020 7221 0707; www.hydeparkinn.com/gate; 6 Portobello Rd W11) A small, traditional hotel right in the heart of trendy Notting Hill, close to Portobello Road antiques market.

Savoy (020 7836 4343; www.fairmont.com/savoy; Strand WC2) Right on the river and the lap of luxury, there's just something special about the Savoy. A meal in the Michelin-starred Savoy Grill adds to the experience.









A photograph showing three people at a pub. On the left, a woman with curly hair is seen from the side, smiling. In the center, a man in a pink shirt is smiling. On the right, a woman with blonde hair is smiling. They are all holding glasses of beer.

the perfect gateway

LONDON IS MUCH MORE than a world-beating city with great attractions, culture and nightlife. For as wonderful a destination as it is in its own right, the capital is the perfect gateway to cities, towns and attractions that reward visitors taking the time to look a little closer.

Less than fifty miles from the sea, leaving London can give a powerful insight into Britain's island mentality. From white cliffs and a birds-eye view of France in Dover to a seaside experience unchanged since Victorian times in Broadstairs, heading to the coast will blow away any lingering cobwebs. For a more modern experience, the hip bars and boutiques in Brighton are less than an hour away from the capital. Of course, the seafood will be fantastic anywhere you can smell the brine and hear waves crashing ashore.



Britain's history will hit you in the face whatever direction you turn from London. To the west, Windsor is home to one of the Queen's castles, and a more tranquil vision of the Thames flowing gently through green fields. Keep going and you reach Oxford, a seat of learning and city of beauty with few rivals. Cambridge, 60 miles north east of the capital.

If you're yearning for your own vision of a perfect Britain, you can find it close to the capital. Rye is the classic medieval town, all winding alleys and a wonderful, ancient atmosphere. Leeds Castle, on the other hand, is one of the country's finest historic fortresses.

Though it depends where you're travelling from, we're willing to bet you'll be surprised at how accessible these excursions are from London. Trains and buses are frequent and even out-of-town attractions are easy to get to by public transport. If you're tempted into staying longer, accommodation is plentiful and you'll find locals happy to chat and welcome you to their towns. The only challenge will

be deciding what to miss out. See for yourself and let your imagination run wild.

Broadstairs

This quaint and pretty village has retained a nostalgic Victorian atmosphere that will remind many of childhood summers filled with sandy beaches, buckets and spades and rock candy. Of course, Victorian nostalgia wouldn't be complete without Charles Dickens, who holidayed here regularly, as several establishments in town are proud to remind you. Dickens wrote parts of Bleak House and David Copperfield in the cliff-top house above the pier between 1837 and 1859. As well as having a distinct literary bent including several good second-hand bookshops, Broadstairs has a long history of shipbuilding. The town is famed for its seven bays of golden sand, which stretch out along the coast, where for centuries smugglers unloaded forbidden bounty. Strolling the hilly lanes of Broadstairs on a misty night with the sound of the sea crashing to

shore – it's like travelling back in time.

How to get there

Broadstairs takes a little longer to reach than other excursions, making it an ideal place for a weekend. Trains from London Victoria, London Bridge or Charing Cross make the regular 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ -hour trip to Broadstairs. You may have to change at Ramsgate. While you're here, the more in-your-face seaside fun of Margate and historic port of Ramsgate make lingering longer a tempting prospect.

Leeds Castle

Just to the east of Maidstone, Leeds Castle is one of the most famous and most visited castles in the world. It stands on two small islands in a lake surrounded by a huge estate that contains woodlands, an aviary and a fabulous underground grotto that can only be entered once you've successfully negotiated your way through a hedge maze.

The building dates from the 9th century. Henry VIII transformed it from a fortress into a palace, and it was privately owned until 1974 when Lady Billie, the castle's last owner, died. Paintings, furniture and other décor in the castle date from the last eight centuries.

Leeds Castle is not to be confused with the Yorkshire city of the same name!

How to get there

National Express runs one direct bus daily from London Victoria coach station. Pre-book a day or so before travel.



Rye

If you've come to England to find a medieval village, look no further than Rye. Once one of the medieval Cinque Ports, this exquisitely picturesque town looks like it has been preserved in historical formaldehyde.

A stroll round Rye is a tranquil treat. Cobbled Mermaid St, one of the most famous streets in England, with timber-framed houses dating from the 15th century. Church Square is a highlight. This gorgeous square is surrounded by a variety of attractive houses, including the Friars of the Sack on the southern side at No 40. Now a private residence, it was once part of a 13th-century Augustinian friary. The Church of St Mary the Virgin is home to the oldest turret clock in England and still works with its original pendulum mechanism. There are great views from the church tower.

At the northeastern edge of the village is

Landgate which dates from 1340. It was built to fortify the rich town against French attack and it is now the only remaining gate of an original four.

How to get there

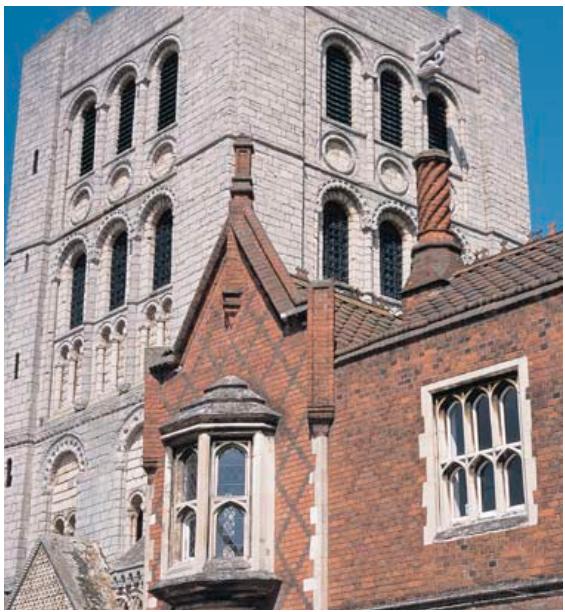
From London Charing Cross, trains run regularly to Rye, but you must change either in Hastings or Ashford.

Windsor

Windsor Castle, with its historic architecture, its vast collection of art, antiques and royal gifts, is a must-see attraction.

The town and castle have recently been in the spotlight as the venue for Prince Charles' long awaited marriage to Camilla Parker Bowles. In Eton you'll find the country's most famous public school, an elegant display of architecture in its own right.





Windsor is a great place to shop and has some very fine dining if you decide to stay late. The views of the Castle and the Thames by night make this very worthwhile.

How to get there

There are two Windsor and Eton train stations – Central station on Thames St, opposite Windsor Castle, and Riverside station near the bridge to Eton.

From London Waterloo, trains run to Riverside station. Some services from London Paddington to Central station require a change at Slough, five minutes from Windsor, but take about the same time.

Some you may not have thought of

We're only really scratching the surface here. There's so much beauty, history and excitement close to the capital that you could spend weeks

exploring. Here are a few less well-known yet still wonderful ideas.

Arundel

Arundel is one of West Sussex's prettiest towns, sitting comfortably atop a hill beneath the stunning 700-year-old castle that is the seat of the dukes of Norfolk. Here you'll find a surprising number of excellent restaurants, a wonderful castle and plenty of personable locals. Despite its medieval appearance and long history, most of the town dates from Victorian times.

Bury St Edmunds

Straddling the Rivers Lark and Linnet amid gently rolling farmland, Bury's distinct Georgian flavour, with street upon street of handsome, 18th-century façades that hark back to a period of great prosperity, make it Suffolk's loveliest town.



Farnham

Farnham is Surrey's most attractive market town. The reason to come here is to check out the exquisite Georgian homes and to shop – you'll find anything you might need short of a Paul Smith suit. There are also some winding cobblestone lanes to get lost in as well as a few arts-and-crafts shops, an award-winning museum and one of Surrey's only intact castles.

St Albans

The lovely town of St Albans is one of the best and most popular towns to visit in any of the Home Counties. Its short distance from London (25 minutes by train) makes it a perfect day trip. St Albans is home to a magnificent cathedral, outstanding Roman museum and the town's

aesthetically pleasing mix of Tudor and Georgian architecture. They also take their beer seriously here and have the real-ale pubs and the festivals to prove it – head to Ye Olde Fighting Cocks, one of the oldest in the country, for a fantastic pint of real ale.

Whitstable

Whitstable has more of a remote, unspoilt charm than other coastal towns, which may be why it's known as the 'Pearl of Kent'. A quiet fishing village with street names such as Squeeze Gut Alley and Skinner's Alley, the town is known for its superb seafood – particularly the oysters – as well as its collection of somewhat odd multicoloured beach huts lining the Tankerton Slopes east of town. Don't leave without trying some of the seaside snacks on sale at the docks.



SHOP

* CRASTER KIPPERS
* SMOKED SALMON
* SMOKED COD
* LOCALLY CAUGHT WHITE FISH
* CRAB/LOBSTER
* FRESH SALMON
* DAIRY PRODUCTS



as
good
as it
gets

BRITAIN'S FOOD HAS UNDERGONE changes that have been nothing short of revolutionary. Prompted by an avalanche of celebrity chefs with a faithful following of foodie groupies, innovative restaurants are serving fresh, vibrant food to an appreciative audience. The world is finally noticing Britain's food scene – a recent survey showed that four of the world's top ten restaurants are in the UK.

Behind the exciting evolution of Britain's dining scene are an elite of high-profile chefs who are big-name celebrities in their own right. Gordon Ramsay, Heston Blumenthal and Marco Pierre White have garnered numerous Michelin stars. Jamie Oliver is the king of the TV food scene, and his restaurant attracts visitors like Bill Clinton and Brad Pitt. Often top chefs can be found in classy city centre or lovely rural locations. Flawless styling is part of the experience here – try London's The Ivy or The Fat Duck in Bray, Oxfordshire for a taste that's as good as it gets.



In the wake of this new-found celebrity, there are plenty of traditional British eating habits enjoying a well-earned renaissance. What was once simple home cooking has now been elevated to popular haute cuisine, where even the humble Bangers & Mash are elevated to new heights when handmade thyme-flavoured sausages are paired with lightly chopped fennel and organic new potatoes or the popular dish of fish and chips is transformed into pan-fried sea bass with potatoes slow-roasted in goose fat.

Throughout England, specialities can be subtle or spectacular, and vary from region to region. In the north, expect to find bread rolls (referred to as barms) or barmcakes, and chips served with a generous helping

of gravy or curry. Classic London dishes include pie and mash and jellied eels. The Cornish pasty – a mix of cooked vegetables and meat wrapped in pastry – is now available everywhere in Britain, far beyond its original homeland of Cornwall.

Nor should you miss fish and chips. It's served in pubs and cafés but is best from specialists, where you can eat in or take away. Look for the gleaming chrome fryers as a sign of a proper fish & chipper. In seaside towns this deep-fried delight is always worth trying. Other seafood specialities include Norfolk crab or Northumberland kippers, while restaurants in Scotland, West Wales and Southwest England regularly conjure up prawns, lobsters, oysters, mussels and scallops.

If you've got special dietary needs, Britain still has great food to offer. Vegetarians should head for www.veggieheaven.com for a comprehensive list of meat-free restaurants. If you like to know your meat is from an RSPCA approved stockist head to www.farmgatedirect.com. www.aboutorganics.co.uk has details on organic restaurants in the UK.



Wherever you go in Britain you'll be surprised at the variety and quality of local produce – from freshly-caught Kentish seafood cooked in front of you to velvet-textured, quality Scotch beef that's as good as you've ever tasted. For cheese and bread in a different combination, try Welsh rarebit (originally called Welsh rabbit) – a sophisticated variation of cheese on toast, seasoned and flavoured with butter, milk and sometimes a little beer. Other traditional Welsh dishes include bara brith (spicy fruit loaf), cawl (a thick vegetable broth, often flavoured with meat) and laverbread – not a bread at all, but seaweed that is often served mixed up with oatmeal and bacon on toast, a surprisingly tasty combination.



Of course, the most famous Scottish dish is haggis. It was traditionally a poor man's sausage, made from a sheep's stomach filled with lamb off-cuts, minced meat and oatmeal all roasted in the oven. Tribute is paid to the Haggis on Burns Night (25 January, the birthday of Robert Burns, Scotland's most celebrated poet) where the poet's famous 'Address To a Haggis' is recited with great gusto and showmanship before a grand serving of haggis with neeps (turnips) and tatties (potatoes). Some pubs and restaurants in Scotland serve very good, homemade haggis, and it's also available deep-fried with chips at takeaways.

Vegetarians need not despair at this protein-rich diet as the modern British menu now includes an impressive variety of healthy vegetarian options in many cases incorporating tasty organic produce. Vegetarianism is now well-and-truly part of the culinary mainstream and most cities boast vegetarian restaurants and cafes, so do ask

around when you arrive. An extension of this trend is the explosion of 'Farmers Markets', which are springing up all over the country. Championed by TV chef Jamie Oliver they sell a dazzling array of bread, cheeses, chutneys, meat, fruit and vegetables all locally grown. A great introduction to the carnival atmosphere of a Farmers Market is Jamie Oliver's favourite haunt, the huge Borough Market in London.

If you're hankering after something sweet, you'll find tea shops selling a variety of baked goodies all over Britain. These are often traditional shops with wonderful service and your fellow customers are sure to have plenty of character. Devon and Cornwall are great places for a cream tea – scones, clotted cream and pots and pots of tea, but local institutions like Betty's Tea Room, found in select locations in Yorkshire make for a quintessential British treat. Same idea but a world away is Afternoon Tea at a deliciously decadent

upmarket hotel – try the Ritz or Claridge's in London where a rich brew of tea is accompanied by fresh cucumber or egg sandwiches. Alternatively, light meals, snacks and drinks can be found anywhere, anytime in character-filled cafes that are part of the transformation of city centres all over Britain.

Though best known for beer (and that's a great reason to head there), Britain's pubs often serve fantastic food as well and they are a great venue in which to catch your breath during a hectic day exploring. These gastropubs, as they have become known, are a fantastic, informal alternative to a full-blown restaurant and are a great place for a taste of modern British cooking at very reasonable prices. You can normally spot a gastropub by the wooden floorboards, menus written on chalkboards above the bar and an above-average selection of real ale and wine. Sunday Roasts are still glorious staples in pubs all over Britain.



From homegrown to international flavours – world food has taken the British High Street by storm, from Indian to Italian via every taste imaginable. The overall effect of overseas influences has seen the increasing sophistication of the British restaurant scene which now runs the gamut from Pan-Asian and Japanese sushi bars to Thai, Chinese, Indian, Malaysian, Mongolian and Mexican - to name but a few!

Indian (or to be more accurate, South Asian) food has become so well-loved that Indian chefs are constantly devising new dishes to appeal to British tastebuds – the most famous example of this is the chicken tikka masala which was invented in Britain. Likewise, Birmingham invented the Balti - basically a stir-fried curry quickly cooked using fresh ingredients and aromatic spices such as bay leaves,

cardamom, coriander and cloves. London's Brick Lane and the infamous 'Curry Mile' in Manchester are great places to sample these spicy delights.

So, if you need a taste of home or a quick hit of something hot, you won't be disappointed. In London, you could eat your way around the globe for years and never visit the same restaurant twice. If you've navigated your way through Chinatown... How about a gourmet burger, a

table full of tapas or another helping from a Moroccan tagine? What's more, Indian, Thai or Mediterranean food is great value.

After a gastronomic tour of Britain, you'll have tasted the traditional and the modern, the British and the international, but never have had the same dining experience twice. Britain has one of the most varied restaurant scenes in the world – and you'll want to come back for more.

Plan your meal online

- www.toptable.co.uk – a great place to see what's hot and book a table – great deals are often available
- www.squaremeal.co.uk – another excellent guide to what's hot in the UK dining scene



A HUSHED SILENCE IS BROKEN by one voice, piercing the tension and gripping the crowd. A spotlight dims, and the audience breaks into applause. The atmosphere of a trip to the theatre is second-to-none, and will be one of the highlights of your trip to Britain. Britain is a world superpower when it comes to plays, opera, ballet and classical music, which are devoured by a passionate, welcoming audience. It easily lives up to its reputation as the finest in the world, and London's West End is the international centre for performing arts. It's the same story all round the country, from the diversity and size of the Edinburgh Festival to the traditional fun of more intimate venues throughout the country.

did you know?

Britain's first theatre opened in 1576 on the northern outskirts of London and was called – rather unimaginatively – 'The Theatre'. Shakespeare's famous Globe Theatre came a little later.



Venues all over Britain are friendly and welcoming, and are the places to be right now. Everywhere you go you'll meet friendly locals who will share their enthusiasm with you. Whether in a beautiful old theatre complete with Royal Box and red velvet or in a Norman Foster creation in an exciting urban setting, not much can compare with taking your seats, drinking in the culture and the feeling that you're well and truly in the know. You'll find your main choice is what to see – a well-known musical, a popular play with a famous actor or two, an edgy fringe play or some other cultural highlight. The Arts are arguably more exciting, varied and of a higher quality than at any time for centuries.

One of Britain's best-known writers is, of course, William Shakespeare, whose plays were first performed in the 16th century at the Globe Theatre. His brilliant plots and sharp prose, and the sheer size

of his canon of work, have turned him into a national icon. The Globe, in London, has now been rebuilt, and today you can see the Bard's plays performed in Elizabethan style – in the round, with no roof, and with 'groundlings' down the front heckling and joining in the bits they know.

You may wonder why the terms 'West End' and 'theatre' are used interchangeably in London. 'West End' – as with Broadway – generally refers to the big-money productions like musicals, but also includes such heavyweights as the **Royal Court** (020 7565 5000; Sloane Sq SW1), the patron of new British writing; the **Royal National Theatre** (020 7452 3000; South Bank; Waterloo), which has three auditoriums and showcases classics and contemporary plays from some of the world's best companies; and the **Royal Shakespeare Company** (RSC; 020 7638 8891), which hosts productions

of the Bard's classics as well as stuff he might have been interested in at performances at various West End theatres.

Off West End – where you'll generally find the most original works – includes venues like the recently refurbished **Almeida** (020 7359 4404; Almeida St N1), **Battersea Arts Centre** (Lavender Hill SW1) and the Old Vic, where Kevin Spacey is Creative Director. The next rung down is known as the fringe and these shows take place anywhere there's a stage (and can be very good).

However, for many visitors to London, the theatres of the West End mean one thing: musicals. These ranged from Jesus Christ Superstar in the 1970s to Billy Elliot and Mary Poppins in 2004, through to Cats, Les Misérable, Phantom of the Opera and all the rest.

There are loads of opportunities to see some



culture as you travel round Britain's cities. Edinburgh Festival, and the famous Fringe that's grown alongside make up the world's finest celebration of the performing arts. It's almost as much fun discussing where to go next over a pint with fellow festival goers as it is heading to a show. Don't despair if you're not in Edinburgh in August: the Royal Lyceum and Traverse Theatre are great wonderful venues open year-round. There's more variety on offer in Glasgow, with the Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet in residence at the beautiful Theatre Royal while there's always something new and interesting at the Tramway Theatre and the Centre for the Contemporary Arts.

Newcastle's Sage, a huge silver riot of glass and chrome is as amazing a place to hear the Northern Sinfonia as it is stroll around taking in the

Tyneside views. More modern treats can be found in Manchester's Royal Exchange and Lowry, while slightly harder to find but equally worth seeking out are the Green Room and Library Theatre, hosting fringe and new plays to a keen audience. Local talent drives the passion for the Arts. You might see a play at Liverpool's Everyman or Empire Theatres or an Alan Bennett production at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds. History buffs will love Leeds City Varieties – the country's best preserved Music Hall—but don't miss hearing Opera North at the Grand Theatre & Opera House.

There's similar variety elsewhere in Britain. A night at the Welsh-designed, gold-roofed Wales Millennium Centre hearing the Welsh National Opera is an unforgettable experience. St David's Hall

did you know?

A London tradition is the 'long run' – plays that are performed season after season. The record holder is *The Mousetrap* by Agatha Christie; the play has been running in the West End for more than 50 years.

plays host to everything from singing competitions

to concerts, and the New Theatre is a beautiful Edwardian setting for a variety of plays. Birmingham is blessed with the Custard Factory, one of the country's finest art spaces, as well as the Hippodrome – the home of the Birmingham Royal Ballet and the Repertory Theatre where you'll find serious drama from around the UK. Bristol's Old Vic rivals anywhere in Britain for quality of performance. In smaller cities like Oxford, Bath and Brighton there's always something going on – ask at the local tourist board for recommendations.

did you know?

Here are some useful links for finding out what's on and scoring some tickets:

- www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk – one of the best online London theatre guides
- www.rsc.org.uk – Royal Shakespeare Company's site with details on all their current productions
- www.ticketmaster.co.uk – one of several reputable ticket agencies



Britain's museums and galleries are a feast for the senses, and a spectacular way to learn about the rich history and culture all around you. Often housed in cutting-edge new buildings or stunning renovations of well-loved landmarks, there's never

been a better time to explore. Everywhere you turn, there's a new museum or gallery, and British pride in its colourful history and local talent means there's always something fascinating to discover. Museums and galleries are increasingly home to top-notch

cafes and restaurants, so you can recharge tired legs in some style.

London's world-famous museums provide a wonderful introduction. Stroll the British Museum's Great Court and marvel at the curves of the modern

glass roof. A day here may not be enough, so make sure you take time to relax at the cafes and take in the millennia of history before you. It would be easy to spend a week in South Kensington at the Victoria and Albert, Natural History and Science Museums and still not see everything on offer. Be careful not to overlook the less well-known museums of London. On a visit to Sir John Soane's house you'll get a window on the life of an eighteenth century eccentric and collector of, well, everything! His house is a quirky, perfectly preserved home, packed with the relics collected over a long, colourful life. It'll be hard not to get spooked by Dennis Sever's House, a chilling look into the life of Londoners in years gone by – don't miss the candlelit tour on a stormy night.

All over Britain are exciting museums showcasing regional and national history. Today's museums are exciting, interactive places with plenty for visitors of all ages to get their teeth into – expect hands-on displays, informative guides and sound and light to bring history, culture and science to life. Manchester's Urbis and Imperial War Museum North are housed in amazing contemporary buildings - you'll be wondering what to look at next! Expect jousting, swordfighting and gruesome weapons in great supply at Leeds' Royal Armouries, in the newly fashionable canalside area of the city. Why not tackle British history head on in Bristol, at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum? The city's former railway station has been spectacularly renovated to tell the story of Britain's Empire through sound, film, costumes and props. While exploring Edinburgh's

Old Town you'll find Scotland's pride and joy - the Museum of Scotland – there's nowhere better than here to learn about the country. A trip into the heart of Wales is on offer at the Museum of Welsh Life in Cardiff, with regular festivals, special events and farmyard animals to meet.

This being Britain, there are of course museums to suit every taste, no matter how eccentric. So while Preston and Glasgow are home to National Football Museums, in Keswick there is a museum devoted to the Pencil. Southport is home to a Lawnmower Museum and in London the Old Operating Theatre, which does exactly what it says on the tin, makes for a gruesome day out.

Galleries

Additions to the capital's cultural scene like Tate Modern and the Saatchi Gallery have been so successful that it's hard to believe there was a time when wonderful modern art galleries like these weren't on Londoners' doorsteps. With Tate Britain, the National Gallery, Royal Academy already offering a huge array of superb artworks, the capital is firmly at the vanguard of the art world.

While London's new galleries set the tone for the rest of the country, other cities have much to be proud of. Newcastle's stunning Baltic centre for contemporary art is a feast of rotating exhibitions. With a scenic Tyneside location, it's the Tate Modern with a Geordie twist. Liverpool's Walker Gallery and Tate Liverpool rival any other city in Europe for collections of older and more modern art. Glasgow's Burrell Collection is as essential for the building's

exterior and stained glass as it is for the idiosyncratic range of works inside, while Edinburgh's National Gallery of Scotland and Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art showcase the traditional and the modern between them.

In the Saatchi Gallery, you can make up your own mind about BritArt, the controversial movement featuring big-names like Rachel Whiteread and Tracey Emin. In the capital, the Tate-to-Tate ferry is a work of art in itself by BritArt leading light Damien Hirst.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery goes big on Pre-Raphaelite works by artists like Sir John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt. Manchester's Lowry Gallery is dedicated to its most famous artistic son. In Yorkshire, you'll be torn between the Henry Moore Gallery in Leeds and Bradford's outstanding collection of local boy David Hockney's work at Salts Mill. If you'd rather take a work or two home with you, Cardiff's Martin Tinney Gallery is the place to head – with regularly changing commercial exhibitions it's a great place for a browse or flexing your credit card!

You'll see great art everywhere you turn in Britain, without having to step foot in a gallery. One of the most viewed works of art in the world, Anthony Gormley's Angel of the North, just outside Newcastle on the busy A1 road, has become a proud symbol of the northeast and offers an unforgettable welcome to the region. Even bigger is B of the Bang, a giant riot of spikes in Manchester's SportCity district. Belfast's Laganside is another place for a spectacular art-viewing afternoon..

Our favourites – top ten

If we had room, we'd also tell you about these great places:

The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham

For art lovers, this is the highlight of a visit to Birmingham. Renaissance masterpieces, impressionist pieces, modern classics are all here.

National Museum of Film, Theatre & Photography, Bradford

Five exhibit-packed floors tell the story of the recorded visual image from 19th-century cameras and early animation to digital technology. There's lots of hands-on stuff too; you can film yourself in a bedroom scene or play at being a TV newsreader.

National Museum and Gallery of Wales, Cardiff

The museum's animal attractions include the 9m-long skeleton of a humpback whale and the world's largest turtle (2.9m by 2.7m). The art is world-class, too.

Royal Museum, Edinburgh

A magnificent Victorian building housing outstanding international collections of decorative arts, science, industry, archaeology and the natural world.

Clydebuilt, Glasgow

Industrial heritage, ancient boats and a vivid insight into Glasgow's fascinating shipbuilding history.

Western Approaches Museum, Liverpool

The secret command centre for the Battle of the Atlantic, was abandoned at the end of the war with virtually everything left intact. Explore the underground labyrinth of rooms from a once top-secret nerve centre in 1940s wartime Britain.

Whitechapel Art Gallery, London

The capital's edgiest art space, with temporary modern art and photography exhibitions in happening Whitechapel.

Museum of Science & Technology, Manchester

Giant steam trains, puffing factory engines all housed in the oldest passenger railway buildings in the world. Discover everything you ever wanted to know about Manchester's colourful story of its history, science and industry.

Discovery Museum, Newcastle

Housed in a wonderful converted building, the history of Newcastle is told around the river, it's shipping and people.

Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight, Liverpool

Wonderful pre-Raphaelite works and Wedgwood porcelain in an unusual, picturesque setting.

links

- www.24hourmuseum.org.uk – including city guides, reviews and plenty of inspiration
- www.exhibitionsnet.com/ - another good place to get ideas, with especially good links and ticket booking

A photograph showing a person's hand holding a black strap of a red shopping bag. The bag has white text on it that is partially visible. The person is wearing a white dress with a large, vibrant floral print featuring red lilies and green leaves. The background is dark and out of focus.

a mecca for shoppers

FROM WORLD-FAMOUS DEPARTMENT stores to quirky backstreet retail revelations, Britain is a mecca for shoppers with an eye for style and a card to exercise. Fashion comes high, low and with huge choice. Well-loved department stores, exclusive boutiques, back-street retro shops and rummage-worthy markets will make sure you won't go home empty handed. In fact, it's worth bringing a spare bag for everything you pick up along the way.

If you're looking for something distinctly 'British' fill your bags with Paul Smith shirts, Vivien Westwood creations, Royal Doulton china and, perhaps, a Saville Row suit. Of course, everything will seem more prestigious if it's in a Harrods bag.



Anyone visiting a few British cities will soon notice a few familiar names, well-known nationwide as markers of quality, value or convenience. Never far from the news is Marks & Spencer, a genuine national treasure for clothes, food and homewares. Ditto Debenhams and John Lewis, found in most big cities where the range is huge and competition keeps prices down.

In London, Fortnum & Masons and Harrods are rightly famed as offering a wonderful shopping experience, with a food hall to die for. Selfridges is the department store locals love, even if the magical lightening effect it has on wallets can take a while to get used to. Of course, most cities have stores that locals have been coming to for longer than many countries have been in existence. Jenners in Edinburgh takes the prize as Europe's oldest department store, but James Howell in Cardiff is just as well-loved.

A good way to tell how famed a city is for its shopping is how many upmarket stores are found here. Manchester's Trafford Centre and Exchange Square and Birmingham's new Bull Ring Centre have the only branches of Selfridges outside London, and Leeds became the 'Knightsbridge of the North' overnight when Harvey Nichols arrived, once never seen dead outside Chelsea, but now also in Manchester, Edinburgh and Birmingham. Where 'Harvey Nicks' goes, you'll generally find chi-chi boutiques cluster round.

While most city centres have excellent shopping, it goes without saying some stand out from the crowd. Glasgow boasts a huge amount of shops and don't miss the Buchanan Galleries while you're there. Leeds' Victorian arcades, packed with cutting-edge designer gear draw crowds in from across the north. Manchester's traditionally upmarket shopping area – sometimes called the West End – is clustered



around King St. You'll find regional specialities everywhere – from whiskies and tartan in Edinburgh to fine fabrics in Manchester.

For something different, most cities have areas where you can find unusual boutiques, often run by local jewellery and fashion designers making a name for themselves. Grainger Town in Newcastle, Birmingham's Mailbox, Covent Garden and Brighton's Lanes are all excellent places. Often these areas have excellent eating and nightlife options too.

British designers are innovative, imaginative and in-your-face. Why not coincide your visit with London Fashion Week (www.londonfashionweek.co.uk; usually February and September) and Bristol's cutting-edge Hobbs Fashion Show (usually March). You may just see a star of the future, or pick up a few ideas on how to update your own wardrobe with something unique.

A stubbornly independent streak runs through



some British shopping tastes - and all cities have areas where looking back is the new looking forward. Retro clothes stores, second-hand books and record shops selling that elusive Echo & The Bunnymen LP or Northern Soul seven-inch you're desperate to find are never far away – even if you do sometimes have to look hard to find them. Manchester's Northern Quarter is a haven for retro fans in the heart of a seriously cool city. Edinburgh Old Town's Cockburn & Victoria Streets are other slices of grungy chic. Glasgow's retro threads hide away in the West End of the city.

Some of Britain's best shopping bargains are found in markets. Pretty much every town or city has one, selling everything from cheap and cheerful food and vegetables to second-hand clothing stalls. If you've been finding the fixed prices of shops constricting, these stalls are one place that you can haggle – though in most cases

you'll be up against masters of the art. Camden Market in London is the most famous of the lot, but Green Park Market in Bristol and Barras Market in Glasgow are also brilliant for a rummage, especially at weekends.

If while strolling one weekend morning you sniff some wonderful smells, see some unusual produce and catch a crowd of excited locals comparing purchases, you've probably found a Farmers Market. Independent and hugely popular, these events allow local farmers to sell regional specialities at fair prices direct to the public. Expect to find everything from honey to hams, jams, chutneys and cheeses. For details of farmers markets near you visit www.farmersmarkets.net.

For incurable shopaholics, even the delights of Britain's city centres may not be enough. Help is at hand. Giant shopping malls with every brand name, size, colour and style of, well, everything can



be found just outside many city centres. Generally, these are easy to get to by public transport. Edinburgh's Ocean Terminal, located by the docks in Leith is a tempting alternative to Princes St; Manchester's Trafford Centre (nicknamed Old Trafford Centre for the custom it attracts from footballers and their spouses); Meadowhall just outside Sheffield and Newcastle's Metro Centre are all famed temples to consumerism.



the finest
first impression
of any city in the world

Play Video

THE VIEW AS YOU WALK out of Edinburgh's Waverly train station is probably the finest first impression of any city in the world – the castle battlements rising behind the Greek temple of the National Gallery, with the lush greenery of Princes Street Gardens in the foreground. To your left, the precipitous medieval tenements of the Old Town; to your right, the commercial bustle of Princes Street and almost all of the city's top sights are within 20 minutes walk of where you're standing.

But there's more to Edinburgh than just sightseeing – there are top shops, world-class restaurants and a bacchanalia of bars to enjoy. This is a city of pub crawls and impromptu music sessions, world-famous festivals, late nights and wandering home through cobbled streets at dawn after amazing nights out.

Maps, information and inspiration are available at **Edinburgh & Scotland Information Centre** (0845 2255 121; Princes Mall, 3 Princes St).

Seeing

Must dos

Edinburgh Castle (0131 225 9846) is an atmospheric, hugely popular attraction. It sits at the top of the Royal Mile, a beautiful road running through Edinburgh's old town to the Palace of Holyroodhouse, the Queen's official Scottish residence. Take a few hours over the walk and visit some of the many churches, museums and historic houses on the way.

A great way to see Edinburgh and explore its history is on a guided walk. Many walks are related to ghosts, witches and murders. **Black Hart Storytellers** (0131 225 9044) and **Edinburgh Literary Pub Tour** (08001 697410) are among those available.

Calton Hill is a wonderful spot at any time of day, but is especially good at sunset. Its summit is scattered with grandiose memorials and it has one of the best viewpoints in Edinburgh, with a panorama that takes in the castle, the Palace of Holyroodhouse, Arthur's Seat, the Firth of Forth, New Town and the full length of Princes St.

Off the beaten track

Just south of Edinburgh, Scotland's most beautiful and enigmatic church – **Rosslyn Chapel** (Collegiate Church of St Matthew; 0131 440 2159) is an intriguing place to visit. The ornately carved interior is a monument to the mason's art and rich in symbolic imagery. Intriguingly, there are also carvings of plants from the Americas that predate Columbus' voyage of discovery.

Eating

In the last few years there has been a huge boom in the number of restaurants and cafes in Edinburgh and there is a wide range of cuisines to choose from. In addition to restaurants, most pubs serve food.

Witchery by the Castle (0131 225 5613; 352 Castlehill) Just down from the castle, the sumptuous furnishings of this Edinburgh classic keep visitors streaming in. There are two dining areas, the lower of which, the Secret Garden, is light and airy, while the higher is more theatrically Gothic.

Khushi's (0131 667 0888; 26 Potter Row) Authentic Punjabi canteen, established in 1947 and something of an Edinburgh institution.

Fishers (0131 554 5666; 1 The Shore, Leith) This cosy bistro sits in a 17th-century signal tower on the Leith Shore. The delight of it is that it has the cheery atmosphere of a pub combined with the superb seafood of the finest restaurant.

Point Hotel (0131 221 5555; 34 Bread St) The now legendary lunch and dinner menus offer exceptional value and delicious Scottish/international cuisine.

Nightlife

Edinburgh has more than 700 pubs, bars and clubs, which are as varied as the population. The most comprehensive source of information is *The List*.

Abbotsford (0131 225 5276; 3 Rose St) Traditional pub with well-preserved 1920s interior. Settle in with a pint on a rainy afternoon.

Tonic (0131 225 6431; 34a North Castle St) Cool, classy cocktails.

insider tips

Over the years, Edinburgh has been built up to cover older buildings. Some of these subterranean vaults are now open to the public, making for a surprising and spooky experience. Start with **Real Mary King's Close** (08702 430160; 2 Warriston's Close, Writers Court, High St).





Canny Man's (0131 447 1484; 239 Morningside Rd) Although it's a fair trek on a bus from the heart of town, this unique pub is well worth a visit. Opened in the 19th century, it seems to have changed little.

Traverse Bar Café (0131 228 5383; 10 Cambridge St) Lurking low and large under the Traverse Theatre in the West End, this place is so good you might not want to leave. With art exhibitions on the walls, a host of good draught beer choices and a friendly atmosphere, it's a fine place.

Sleeping

Even though there's lots of accommodation in Edinburgh, book in advance during summer months, especially at Festival time.

Southside Guest House (0131 668 4422; www.southsideguesthouse.co.uk; 8 Newington Rd) This excellent southside option has transcended the B&B category and feels more like a stylish modern boutique hotel.

Cluaran House (0131 221 0047; www.cluaran-house-edinburgh.co.uk; 47 Leamington Tce) This sensitively restored town house is an extremely stylish pad, all colour, comfort and elegance, lightened by cheery Gallic inscription painted on the walls.

Salisbury (0131 667 1264; www.salisburyguesthouse.co.uk; 45 Salisbury Rd) It's a classy, genteel Georgian place. The rooms ooze warmth and serenity and most peer out onto the lovely back garden.

Christopher North House Hotel (0131 225 2720; www.christophernorth.co.uk; 6 Gloucester Pl) This small, elegant, boutique hotel is handy for everything in Stockbridge. Once the home of a writer and philosopher, a touch of old Vienna class is added by the Austrian-themed café-bar.

Balmoral Hotel (0131 556 2414; www.thebalmoralhotel.com; 1 Princes St) Edinburgh's most famous hotel stands stocky as a castle at the corner of Princes St and North Bridge.

Some of the rooms have wonderful views and the standard of facilities and service is first class. Famous heads to hit the pillows here include Kylie Minogue; there are regular promotional deals listed on its website.

shopping

Princes St is Edinburgh's principal shopping street and is home to Jenners, Europe's oldest department store, dating from 1838. Many smaller shops line pedestrianised Rose St. Shopping malls include Princes Mall, St James Centre and the huge Ocean Terminal in Leith. For more off-beat shopping – including fashion, music, gifts and jewellery – head for the cobbled lanes of Cockburn, Victoria and St Mary's Sts, and William St in the western parts of New Town.



spirit and character

MERCHANT SQUARE

GLASGOW HAS A SPIRIT and a character that embodies much of Scotland with its raw energy and gritty honesty. You don't have to scratch far under the surface to find a beguiling magnetism that combines affability, urban mayhem, wry humour and...oomph.

Easy to get to and around by train or bus, Glasgow makes a great base for exploring nearby towns and is deceptively close to stunning highland and island country. Get to Glasgow now before it becomes part of everyone's Scottish adventure.

Glasgow Tourist Information Centre (0141 204 4400; 11 George Sq) is the best place to start your journey into the city's rich culture.

It may not seem like it when you're standing in George Sq in the middle of Glasgow, but you're on the doorstep of some of the world's finest scenery. The famous **West Highland Way** begins in Milngavie, eight miles (12km) north of Glasgow, and runs for 95 spectacular miles (153 km) to Fort William passing lochs, rivers and towering mountains.



Seeing

Must dos

Glasgow is a city to see on foot and a great excuse to stroll around is getting on the trail of architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh. His Art Nouveau masterpieces are found all over the city and the **Glasgow School of Art** (0141 353 4526; 167 Renfrew St; guided tours only) is arguably his finest work.

An attraction that shouldn't be missed, **Glasgow Cathedral** (0141 552 6891; Cathedral Sq; free) has a rare timelessness. The dark and imposing interior conjures up medieval might and can send a shiver down the spine.

The city's history revolves around the River Clyde and today you can see the rebirth of docks, quays and the river itself. **Clydebuilt**



(0141 886 1013; Kings Inch Rd, Braehead) is a superb exhibition devoted to the shipbuilding industry of the city. Take the Pride o'The Clyde waterbus from the city centre to get here.

Off the beaten track

Football fans will just love the **Scottish Football Museum** (0141 616 6139; Hampden Park) which features exhibits on the history of the game in Scotland and the influence of Scots on the world game. You can have a nose round the national football stadium while you're there.

Eating

Glasgow is one of the best places to eat in Scotland with an excellent range of eateries, centred on the West End.

Centre for Contemporary Arts (0141 352 4900; 350 Sauchiehall St) The lovely, open café here is a trendy dining experience and a popular meeting spot.

Willow Tea Rooms (0141 332 0521; 217 Sauchiehall St) Designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh in 1903, these tearooms are located above a jewellery shop.

Wee Curry Shop (0141 357 5280; upstairs at Jinty McGintys, 23-29 Ashton Lane) The place to come for quality home-cooked Indian food.

Artà (0141 552 2101; 13 Walls St) If only every city had an Artà. Very much a favourite, this extraordinary hacienda-style place has to be seen to be believed. Eat on the mock-baroque, Spanish style ground floor among the drinking crowd, or in the elegant restaurant upstairs.

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Nightlife

Glasgow nightlife options are unpretentious and welcoming places, from stylish bars to traditional pubs. There's a huge choice, so your best option is to head to one of these places and ask around for local recommendations.

Horse Shoe (0141 229 5711; 17 Drury St) Legendary city pub and popular meeting place, dating from the late 19th century and remaining largely unchanged. It has the longest continuous bar in the UK.

Bar 10 (0141 572 1448; 10 Mitchell Lane) A little city treasure that will cause the canny Glasgow drinker to give you a knowing glance if you mention its name. As laid back as you could ask in a hip city bar.

Uisge Beatha (0141 564 1596; 232-246 Woodlands Rd) A quirky mish-mash of animal heads and portraits of depressed nobility, this is the place for an unusual evening. The name is Gaelic for whisky (literally 'water of life') of which it sells more than a hundred varieties.

Arches (0141 565 1000; 253 Argyle St) It's a one-stop culture fix. As well as an avant-garde theatre, this venue under Central Station has a downstairs bar whose intimate tables belie the cavernous space it's in. One of the city's best bars.

Sleeping

Glasgow can sometimes get quite busy so it is wise to book ahead.

The Old Schoolhouse (0141 332 7600; oschoolh@hotmail.com; 194 Renfrew St) This small and intimate hotel is in a beautiful heritage-listed building right by Mackintosh's School of Art.

Langs Hotel (0141 333 1500; www.langshotels.co.uk; 2 Port Dundas Pl) This towering place right next to the bus station has taken the style-bar concept and made a hotel of it. With an on-site spa centre, the emphasis is on relaxation, and the rooms, with CD player, Playstation, massive beds and artful colour schemes, are powerful anti-stress agents.

Cathedral House Hotel (0141 552 3519, fax 0141 552 2444; www.cathedralhousehotel.com; 28 Cathedral Sq) Right by the cathedral, it offers rooms decorated with an artistic eye, as well as a restaurant serving well-regarded Scottish cuisine.

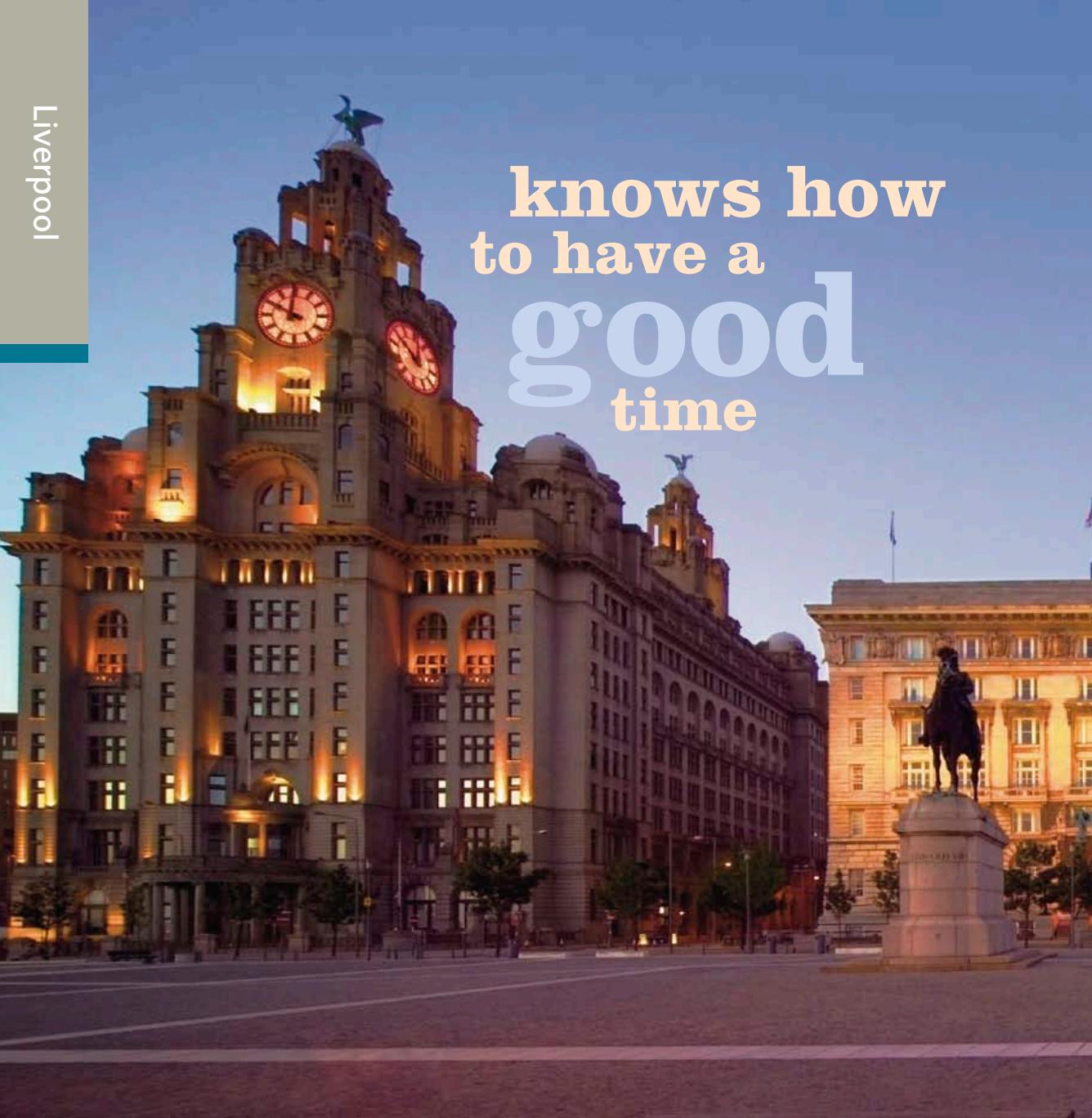
Victorian House (0141 332 0129; thevictorian@ukonline.co.uk; 212 Renfrew St) This is another fine option on a street that bristles with hotels. Run by the same management as the Old Schoolhouse, it's similarly decorated and plenty comfortable with more rooms.

Kirklee Hotel (0141 334 5555; 11 Kensington Gate; www.kirkleehotel.co.uk) Set in an attractive row of sandstone terraces and with a lovingly tended garden, come for the relaxed comfort of a country hotel, but with the buzz of Glasgow's West End a few minutes stroll away.

shopping

Boasting the UK's largest retail contingency outside London, Glasgow is a shopaholic's paradise. Trendy traders line the pedestrian malls of Sauchiehall and Buchanan Sts. Try Buchanan Galleries (Royal Exchange Sq) and the exquisite Princes Square, which is set in a magnificent 1841 renovated square. Institutions include Buchanan St's splendid, jewellery-laden Argyll Arcade and the Barras (0141 552 4601; London Rd), Glasgow's burgeoning weekend flea market with over 1000 stalls.

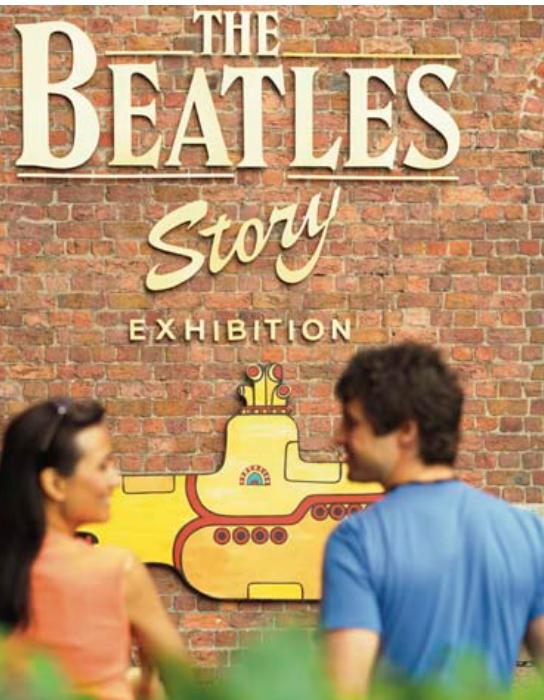




knows how to have a good time

THE CITY THAT GAVE the world the Beatles still knows how to have a good time. Liverpool's historic port was the departure point for over nine million emigrants heading for North America and Australia, and today celebrates its heritage as well as offering visitors a warm welcome. In recognition of this the city has been crowned European Capital of Culture 2008. The city centre, in the middle of a huge programme of urban development, is a great place to wander, with two very different cathedrals, an attractive dockside and streets lined with great shopping for the day and a huge variety of restaurants and bars for the night.

Like the rival city of Manchester, Liverpudlians – also known as Scousers – take huge pride in their football teams achievements. If you can't get along to a match it's worth being in a pub when a match is on – it'll introduce you to the friendly and witty locals as well as give a window on everyday life in this fast-changing city. For Liverpool Tourist Information call 0151 709 5111.



Seeing Must dos

The Beatles may be long gone but a stroll down Mathew St, home of the original Cavern Club, is the perfect introduction to their legacy. Albert Dock's Beatles Story is packed with memorabilia and trivia on the Fab Four. If you're a big fan, the **Magical Mystery Tour** (0151 709 3285) is for you.

The giant Albert Dock is most visitors' first stop in the city. It's an impressive place, with restored warehouses and giant cast-iron columns surrounding a huge expanse of water. Check out the art at the **Tate Gallery Liverpool** (0151 702 7400; free) and the various bars, restaurants and shops.

The **Western Approaches Museum** (0151 227 2008; 1 Rumford St) was the secret command centre



for the Battle of the Atlantic in WW2. It is perfectly preserved and utterly fascinating with a labyrinth of underground tunnels.

Liverpool's **Metropolitan Cathedral** (0151 709 9222; Mount Pleasant) is an extraordinary building that was originally planned to be larger than St Peter's in Rome. What actually transpired is a striking 1960s church known locally as 'Paddy's Wigwam'.

Off the beaten track

The National Trust, preserving their Beatles-inspiring interiors for future generations, owns John Lennon and Paul McCartney's childhood homes. **20 Forthlin Road** (Paul) and **Mendips** (John) can only be visited as part of a guided tour (0870 900 0256) which departs from Albert Dock.

insider tips

There are two classic views of Liverpool. From the top of the **Anglican Cathedral** (0151 709 6271; Hope St) you can see the whole city and River Mersey. The other is from the Mersey Ferry which leaves from Pier Head near Albert Dock. Look out for the Royal Liver Building topped by a Liver Bird, the city's symbol.



Eating

Liverpool has some interesting options for places to eat. If these choices don't appeal, the area around Slater, Hardman and Bold Sts has many more choices.

Everyman Bistro (0151 708 9545; 13 Hope St) Out-of-work actors and other creative types on a budget make this excellent café-restaurant beneath the Everyman Theatre their second home – with good reason. Great tucker and a terrific atmosphere.

Lower Place (0151 210 1955; Philharmonic Hall) A fashionable treat for an eat.

Far East (0151 709 3141; 27-35 Berry St) Your best bet in town for good Cantonese food. Set menus and dim sum are good value.

THE CAVERN



Blue (0151 709 7097; 17 Edward Pavilion) Enjoy comfortable couches, a view of the dock and a selection of good continental dishes.

Nightlife

Scousers really let their hair down at weekends but you'll have fun on any night. Wander around Mathew St and southeast to Bold, Seel and Slater Sts and you'll stumble upon an amazing array of pubs and bars with a friendly welcome guaranteed. Look out for the free monthly guide *In Touch*.

Philharmonic (0151 707 2837; 36 Hope St) One of Britain's most extraordinary pubs, resplendent with etched and stained glass, wrought iron, mosaics and ceramic tiling.

Modo (0151 709 8832; 1 Concert Square) One of the coolest bars in town with a great mix of people.

Ye Cracke (0151 709 4171; 13 Rice St) This atmospheric pub is a former haunt of John and Cynthia Lennon.

Cavern Club (0871 222 1957; 5 Mathew St) The Cavern Club is more than a trip down Beatles

memory lane, hosting great dance nights and live acts.

Sleeping

Liverpool is well-served by all types of accommodation. It's worth booking ahead if there's a big sporting event on, especially when nearby Aintree racecourse hosts the Grand National, one of the world's great horseraces. Late August's Beatles Week is another busy time.

Aachen Hotel (0151 709 3477; 89-91 Mount Pleasant) A perennial favourite is this funky listed house with a mix of rooms, both with en suite and sharing.

Radisson SAS Hotel (0151 966 1500; 107 Old Hall St.) A luxurious, modern business hotel, the Radisson SAS has marvellous views over the Mersey and plenty of impressive facilities, including a gym, health club and beauty spa.

Campanile Hotel (0151 709 8104; fax 709 8725; cnr Wapping & Chaloner Sts) Functional, motel-style rooms in a purpose-built hotel next to the docks. Great location.

THE CAVERN



shopping

As well as all the big names you would expect to find, there are lots of small, fashionable shops selling clothes, crafts and jewellery in places like **Cavern Designer Shopping Centre** and **Clayton Square**. A train ride north from the city centre is Southport with its distinctive Victorian shopping arcades. Liverpool is close to one of Europe's largest designer outlet villages: **Cheshire Oaks**.



A photograph of a man and a woman smiling and laughing together. The man is on the left, wearing a red shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a blue top. They appear to be in a social setting, possibly a bar or restaurant.

a terrific buzz

MANCHESTER IS AN EXCITING place to be. The world's first industrial city has thoroughly reinvented itself in the last decade and is now one of the most exciting and interesting cities in England. To many, the city is best known for its enormously successful football team, but Manchester is also where you'll find a wealth of fascinating museums, rich and varied dining and some of the best shopping outside London.

There is a terrific buzz about Manchester. From the trendy bars and boutiques of the Bohemian Northern Quarter to the chic stylings of Castlefield and the loud-and-proud attitude of the Gay Village, spend enough time here and you too will be infected with the confidence of a city that knows it is on to a good thing.

Manchester Visitor Information Centre (0161 234 3157; Lloyd St) is located in an extension of the town hall.



insider tips

For a peek inside Manchester's Victorian heritage, take a tour round the **Town Hall**. This magnificent Gothic building dominates Albert Square, has a richly decorated interior and is a suitably impressive monument to the city's status during the nineteenth century as one of the world's economic powerhouses.

Seeing

Must dos

Manchester is proud of its status as a former industrial powerhouse and Castlefield Urban Heritage Park (101 Liverpool Rd) contains an impressive cityscape of canals, bridges, viaducts and warehouses that makes for a fascinating stroll. Waterside pubs, boat trips and frequent events in the Outdoor Arena add to the appeal of the area.

Urbis (0161 605 8200; City Park, Corporation St) is an impressive, futuristic museum devoted to cities and the way humans react to them. A Metrolink tram ride across town is **Salford Quays**, home to the city's newest museums. The **Imperial War Museum North** (0161 877 9240; Trafford Wharf Rd; free) explores ordinary people's experiences of war. The remarkable architecture of Daniel Libeskind's building adds another dimension to the feelings the visitor gets while visiting. Across the water, head to **The Lowry** (0161 876 2020; Pier 8, Salford Quays) to discover more about Manchester's greatest artist.

shopping

With a large population of footballers' wives to satisfy it's not surprising Manchester has some of the best shopping in the country. There's a plethora of designer and boutique clothes shops in the West End and the upmarket arcades around St Annes Sq; some great quirky shops can be found in the Northern Quarter and Oldham St is good for music.



Manchester is a football-mad town, with United and City supported passionately in huge numbers. **Manchester United** (0870 442 1994; museum & stadium tour) play at the 'Theatre of Dreams', Old Trafford, but ticket's are almost impossible to find. City fans may have more luck at the **City of Manchester Stadium** (0870 062 1894; stadium tour).

Off the beaten track

The little-visited **Godlee Observatory** (0161 200 4977; Floor G, Main Building, UMIST, Sackville St; free) dates from 1902 and is still fully functioning. Don't miss the great views over the city from the balcony.

Eating

While there are fantastic eating options throughout the city, there are two stand-out areas to head to for food. The city centre's Chinatown is great for a fast, filling meal but for a true Mancunian night out take a



taxi to Wilmslow Rd in Rusholme (ask for the Curry Mile). It's great fun and on any given night most places are cheerfully rammed.

Mr Thomas's Chop House (0161 832 2245; 52 Cross St) Probably the best pub food in town and they pour great real ale.

Shere Khan's (0161 2562624; 53 Wilmslow Rd, Rusholme) One of the larger eateries on the Curry Mile, this place serves up top-notch Indian food in large quantities.

Simple (0161 835 2526; Tib St) Thoroughly minimalist restaurant where you can feast on solid English cuisine.

Yang Sing (0161 236 2200; Princess St) One of the most acclaimed Cantonese restaurants

Nightlife

Manchester's nightlife is legendary. Quenching the city's thirst for a good time are lively pubs and clubs

if you're keen to dance the night away. Check out City Lights for more information.

The Old Wellington Inn (4 Cathedral Gates) Start your night here, it's one of the oldest buildings in the city and is an institution for a pint of real ale.

Dukes 92 (0161 839 8646; 2 Castle St) Castlefield's best pub, in converted stables that once belonged to the Duke of Bridgewater, has comfy, deep sofas inside and plenty of seating outside, overlooking Lock 92 of the Rochdale Canal – hence the name. If it's sunny, there's no better spot to enjoy a pint of ale.

Bridgewater Hall (0161 907 9000; www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk; Lower Mosley St) The world-renowned Hallé Orchestra has its home at this enormous and impressive concert hall, which also hosts a rich and varied programme of other events.

Manchester Roadhouse (0161 228 1789; 8-10 Newton St) Local bands are put through their

paces in front of a generally enthusiastic crowd.

Sleeping

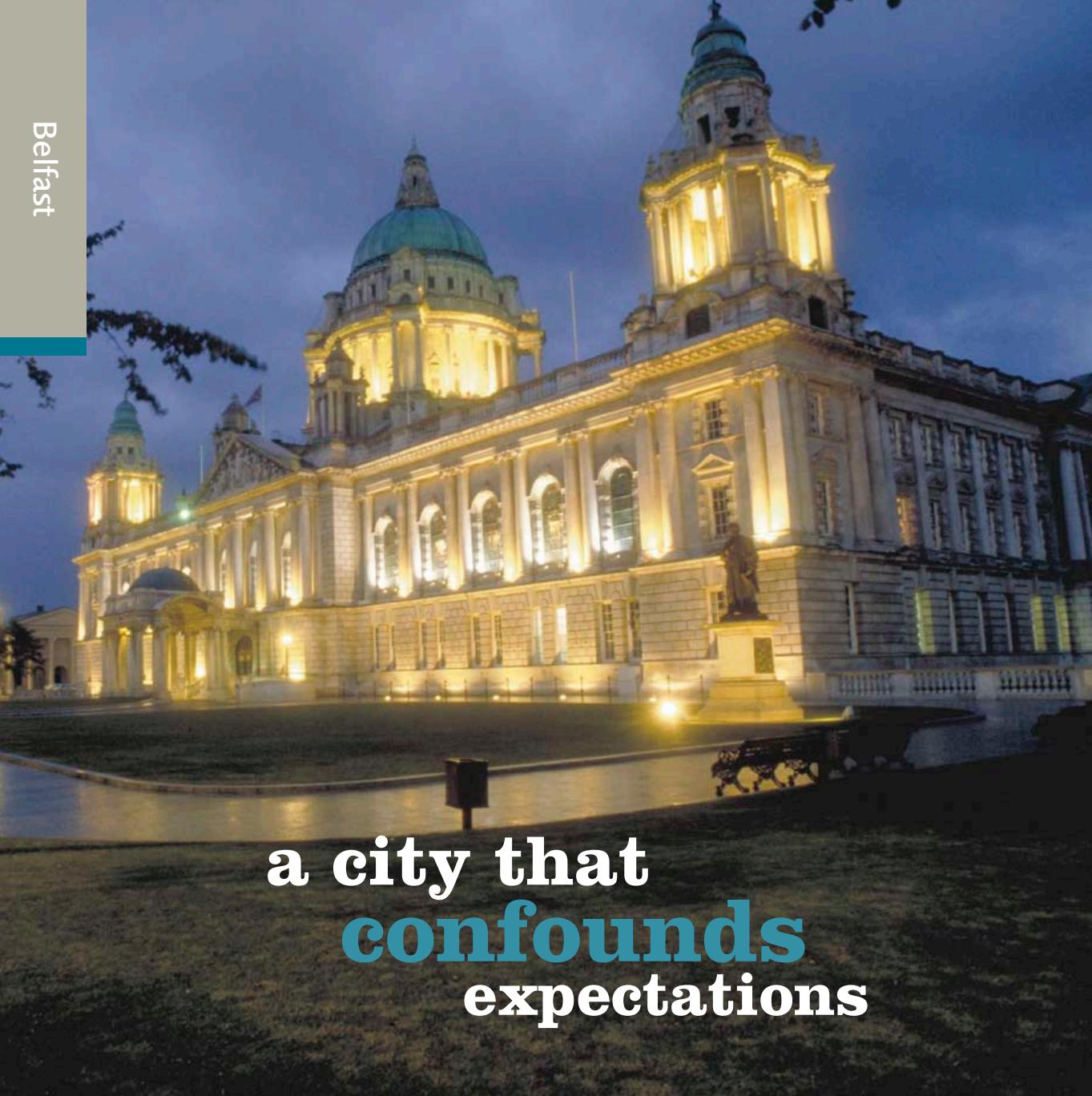
Manchester gets a lot of visitors, especially when United are at home. So make sure that you book ahead.

Ox (0161 839 7740; www.theox.co.uk; 71 Liverpool Rd) Not quite your traditional B&B (breakfast is extra), but an excellent choice nonetheless; nine oxblood-red rooms with tidy amenities above a fine gastro-pub in the heart of Castlefield. It's the best deal in town for the location.

Rossetti (0161 247 7744; www.aliahotels.com; 107 Piccadilly St) This converted textile factory is now one of the city's coolest hotels and a favourite with showbiz celebs; it's a very stylish blend of original fittings and features with hip art and contemporary design.

Castlefield Hotel (0161 832 7073; www.castlefield-hotel.co.uk; 3 Liverpool Rd) Another successful warehouse conversion that has resulted in a thoroughly modern business hotel overlooking the canal basin. It has spacious, comfortable rooms and excellent amenities, including a fitness centre and pool that are free to guests.

The Lowry (0161 827 4000; www.rfhotels.com; 50 Dearman's Pl, Chapel Wharf) Simply dripping with designer luxury and five-star comfort, Manchester's top hotel has fabulous rooms with enormous beds, ergonomically designed furniture, walk-in wardrobes and bathrooms finished in Italian porcelain tiles and glass mosaic. You can also soothe yourself with a skin-brightening treatment or an aromatherapy head massage at the health spa.



a city that confounds expectations

IMPOSING VICTORIAN ARCHITECTURE, modern art on the waterfront, footstomping music in packed-out pubs and the UK's second-biggest arts festival – Belfast is a city that confounds expectations. Massive investment in recent years has transformed Belfast into something of a boom town. Forget your preconceptions, Belfast is rebuilding itself.

The city is compact and easy to get around, with most points of interest within easy walking distance of each other. There is a vibrant nightlife, and plenty of good places to eat – a colourful new wave of stylish bars and restaurants has emerged to complement the splendid Victorian pubs that have been a mainstay of the capital's social life for decades.

Belfast is easy to get to. There are numerous direct flights from many European cities, and links are very good from the UK and Ireland. It's straightforward to add Belfast to any UK travel itinerary or visit it as a stand-alone destination.

Belfast Welcome Centre (028 9024 6609; 47 Donegall PI) provides information about the whole of Northern Ireland.

insider tips

Did you know Belfast was the city that built the Titanic? The famous Harland & Wolff shipyards built 1742 ships between 1861 and 2003, including the ill-fated ocean liner in 1911. The shipyard is not open to the public, but you can view it from the water by taking a boat trip (book through Belfast Welcome Centre). The giant yellow cranes known as Samson and Goliath dominate Belfast's eastern skyline.

Seeing

Must dos

Start with a look around **City Hall** (028 9027 0456; Donegall Sq; free). Take a guided tour around this symbol of the city's Victorian prosperity to see the amazing marble and stained glass hallway.

There are not too many historical monuments that you can enjoy while savouring a pint of beer but the National Trust's **Crown Liquor Saloon** (028 9027 9901; 46 Great Victoria St) is one. Belfast's most famous bar displays Victorian decorative flamboyance at its best.

Off the beaten track

West Belfast was the focal point for the troubles that scarred Northern Ireland for three decades and a visit here is compelling. The main attractions are the powerful murals that chart the history of the conflict. The easiest way to see West Belfast is on a black taxi tour. You'll see the main murals and other significant



sights and get a colourful commentary from the driver. The two most recommended companies are **Black Taxi Tours** (0800 052 3914) and **Belfast City Black Taxi Tours** (028 9030 1832).

Eating

Belfast has a burgeoning restaurant scene that includes a couple of the best eating places in all Ireland. The Golden Mile, to the south of the city centre, has a huge variety of dining options.

Café Paul Rankin (028 9031 5090;

shopping

For general shopping you'll find all the usual high street chains and department stores in the compact central shopping area north of City Hall. Items particular to Northern Ireland that you may like to look out for include fine Belleek china, linen (antique and new) and Tyrone crystal.



27-29 Fountain St) Coffee, cakes, focaccia, soups, pastas and salads, with comfy sofas for lounging on.

John Hewitt Bar & Restaurant (028 9023 3768;
51 Donegall St) Modern pub with a traditional atmosphere and a well-earned reputation for excellent food and drink.

Cutters Wharf (028 9080 5100; Lockview Road, Stranmillis) Enjoy excellent bar meals on the terrace overlooking the river.

McHugh's Bar & Restaurant (029 9050 9999;
Queen's Sq) One of the highlights of the Laganside redevelopment, this is one of the city's best restaurants.

Nightlife

The pub scene is lively and friendly, with the older traditional pubs complemented by a rising tide of stylish designer bars. The city's cultural scene is excellent, with ballet, theatre and live music options aplenty.

Morning Star (028 9023 5986; 17 Pottinger's

Entry) One of several traditional pubs hidden away off High Street with a big sweeping horseshoe bar and cosy snugs for privacy.

Northern Whig (028 9050 9888; 2 Bridge St) Stylish new bar set in an elegant Georgian printing works; here you get Communist statues with your sofas.

Grand Opera House (028 9024 1919; 2-4 Great Victoria St) This grand old venue plays host to a mixture of opera, popular musicals and comedy shows

Sleeping

There's a great mix of accommodation, from city centre style and business hotels to a wide choice of places slightly out of the thick of things along the Golden Mile.

Beneficts (028 9059 1999;
www.benedictshotel.co.uk; 7-21 Bradbury Pl) Set



bang in the middle of the Golden Mile, Beneficts is a modern, style-conscious hotel at the heart of Belfast's nightlife. The rooms are above a huge Gothic bar and restaurant (where you also have breakfast).

Malone Lodge Hotel (029 9038 8000;
60 Eglantine Avenue) Luxurious and homely rooms in the centre of a Victorian terrace

Crescent Town House (028 9032 3349;
www.crescenttownhouse.com; 13 Lower Cres) The Crescent is a stylish hotel, in an attractive Victorian town house with a slightly country-house feel.

Madison's (028 9050 9800;
www.madisonshotel.com; 59-63 Botanic Ave) Madison's successfully rolls a hotel, bar-restaurant and nightclub into one sharply styled package, pulling in a mixed crowd of tourists, business people and clubbers who just don't want to go home. There are two suites for guests with disabilities.

A photograph of two young men walking together, smiling, carrying shopping bags. The man on the left wears a light blue t-shirt and jeans, while the man on the right wears a yellow polo shirt and jeans.

journey to the heart

LET'S START BY SAYING that Birmingham (or Brum, as the locals call it) is not your regular tourist destination. And that's what's great about it. Tourists in a hurry to get to Stratford-upon-Avon sometimes overlook England's second city. Don't make that mistake. Spend a while in Birmingham and you'll realise why Brummies are so proud of the place. As well as being a great base for exploring the surrounding towns and countryside, the city has rejuvenated waterways (Birmingham has more canals than Venice), an excellent cultural scene and some of the best shopping and nightlife around. For more on Birmingham contact the **Tourism Centre** (0121 202 5099; The Rotunda, 150 New St).

insider tips

Try your luck in obtaining football tickets to see matches by either claret-and-blue clad Aston Villa (0121 327 5353; Villa Park) or 'Bluenose' Birmingham City (09068 833 2988; St Andrews). These Premiership clubs generally have tickets for sale.

Excursions around Birmingham

Once you've explored the centre, make time to see some of Birmingham's nearby attractions. Lichfield, with its marvellous three-spired cathedral, is only 14 miles to the northeast along the A38. The Black Country Living Museum in Dudley is also within easy reach for a day or half-day trip. Twenty miles east of Birmingham is Coventry, worth a stop for Sir Basil Spence's fantastic post-war St Michael's Cathedral, which towers alongside the still-standing walls of the bombed-out old cathedral. Alternatively, for a longer jaunt, dash up to the Peak District for three days of long walks and cosy pubs.



Seeing Must dos

Birmingham boomed in the 19th century and a stroll round the car-free Victoria and Chamberlain Squares showcases the grand buildings and statues from this era.

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

(0121 303 2834; Chamberlain Sq) is an impressive building housing great art and a lovely old fashioned tea room that's perfect for a cake pit-stop.

Take in Shakespeare's birthplace of Stratford-upon-Avon in a more manageable day-trip. Trains leave hourly from Moor Street station.

Off the beaten track

Birmingham sits on the hub of England's canal network and colourful visiting narrowboats moor in the Gas St Basin right in the heart of the city. Brindleyplace and The Mailbox are great places to start and finish a tranquil waterside walk; both are

home to fantastic restaurants, bars and boutique stores. Ikon Gallery (0121 248 0708; 1 Oozells Sq, Brindleyplace; free) features impressive exhibitions of modern art.

Eating

Birmingham's contribution to cuisine is the Balti, a Pakistani dish that has been adopted by curry houses across the country. The heartland is the Balti Triangle in Sparkbrook, two miles (3km) south of



the centre. Pick up a complete listings leaflet in the Tourism Centre, and head out on bus No 4, 5 or 6 from Corporation St.

Al Frash (0121 753 3120; 186 Ladypool Rd) Award-winning baltis, fantastic service and excellent value for money.

Warehouse Café (0121 633 0261; 54-57 Allison St) Back in the centre, Warehouse Café is a great choice for a vegan or vegetarian lunch.

wineREPublic (0121 644 6464; Centenary Sq) Nearby is this bright, sharp and airy restaurant, and the food comes in for plenty of praise too.

Chez Jules (0121 633 4664; 5a Ethel St) A great place for French regional cuisine in relaxed surroundings.

Nightlife

Birmingham has a massive and diverse nightlife scene, from one of the best regional theatre scenes in the country to a fantastic live music scene.

Custard Factory (Gibb St) This remarkable and expanding arts and media centre is taking the city by storm; it houses theatre and dance spaces, restaurants and bars, a gallery and recording studios. The name? The building was constructed a century ago by custard magnate Sir Alfred Bird.

Symphony Hall (0121 780 3333; Broad St) For classical music, including performances by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

The Jam House (0121 200 3030; 1 St Paul's Sq) A classy music bar featuring live swing, jazz, R'n'B and rock and roll; admission charges apply some nights.

Sleeping

Birmingham offers a wide variety of good value hotels and B&Bs, many of whom offer weekend deals.

Ibis Hotel (0121 622 6010; fax 622 6020; Arcadian Centre, Ladywell Walk) Sparklingly modern and in a great location: inside the Arcadian Centre next to bars, cafés and Chinatown eateries aplenty.

Awentsbury Hotel (0121 472 1258; www.awentsbury.com); 21 Serpentine Rd, Selly Park) In a cool Victorian house in Selly Park, close to the university, this friendly, cosy B&B boasts a private vintage car collection, which, if you're nice, the owners might show you.

Travelodge (0121 191 4564; 230 Broad St) This Travelodge is ideally positioned for exploring Brindleyplace's nightlife. It fills up fast, so be sure to book ahead.

Burlington Hotel (0121 643 9191; www.burlingtonhotel.com); Burlington Arcade, 126 New St) The Burlington is grand and classy, one of the best of the central options; its 112 rooms have

shopping

Shopping in Birmingham has taken a turn for the better in recent years. The Jewellery Quarter, 3/4 mile northeast of the city centre, is packed with showrooms and manufacturers reflecting local expertise. The real jewel in Birmingham's crown though is the brand new Bull Ring Centre, a huge temple to shopping with a Selfridges and pretty much anything else you care to mention. As well as the Brindleyplace and Mailbox boutiques, the pedestrianised centre is home to yet more options making for a potentially exhausting afternoon trying to get round everywhere!



all the mod cons but are painstakingly designed to create the feel of a much smaller boutique hotel. There's also a noted restaurant.



a little bit
naughty
a little bit
nice

Play Video

A LITTLE BIT NAUGHTY and a little bit nice, Brighton rocks. The destination of choice for weekending Londoners for centuries, it's a pulsating, jumping city pretending to be a seaside resort. First a famed playground for royalty, Brighton has always had a wild streak. Today, Brighton is a creative, exciting, colourful place to visit. Beside the Royal Pavilion, a showpiece museum that ranks among the best in the country, you will find terrific restaurants and cafes, curiosity shops among cobbled streets, wonderful pubs and bars, and a nightlife that is a match for anywhere in the country. The Tourist Information Centre (09067 112255) is at 10 Bartholomew Square.



Seeing

Must dos

The Royal Pavilion (01273 290900) is an absolute must and a highlight of any trip to southern England. This extraordinarily lavish fantasy, playground of party-loving King George IV is one of the most sumptuously hedonistic buildings you'll see anywhere in England and is a fitting symbol of Brighton's 'un-English' decadence.

Along with the Royal Pavilion, Palace Pier is Brighton's most distinctive landmark. It's got the usual selection of fairground rides, amusement arcades and food stalls, where you can buy a stick of the famous Brighton Rock.

The Brighton Museum & Art Gallery (01273 290 900; Church St) has a good collection of 20th-century art and design (including a Salvador Dali sofa in the shape of Mae West's lips) and there's a fascinating exhibit on world art.

Off the beaten track

The Booth Museum of Natural History (01273 292777; 194 Dyke Rd) displays more than half a million specimens of wildlife, from hundreds of British birds displayed in natural settings to butterflies, skeletons, a whale and dinosaur bones.

Eating

Wander around The Lanes and North Laine or walk along Preston St, which runs back from the seafront near West Pier, and you'll uncover a wide selection of cafés, diners and restaurants of every hue and taste.

Coach House (01273 719000; 59a Middle St) The eclectic menu at this bright and stylish former

insider tips

Some of England's loveliest countryside is easily accessible from Brighton. The South Downs are perfect for walking, cycling, horse-riding and even paragliding. A great excursion from Brighton is to Ditchling Beacon from where the views on a sunny day are utterly breathtaking.

shopping

The Lanes is Brighton's most popular shopping district, a confusing maze of small streets and tiny alleyways that are choc-a-bloc with shops and boutiques selling everything from 17th-century rifles to the latest foot fashions. There's less of a touristy, upmarket feel in North Laine – a series of streets northwest of The Lanes – which abound with second-hand clothes shops, record and CD stalls, and local craft outlets. Check out the flea market (Upper Gardner St) on Saturday mornings.



coach house includes Italian and Moroccan as well as the Sunday roast.

Terre a Terre (01273 729051; 71 East St) Voted the best vegetarian restaurant in Britain by the Vegetarian Society, and we can't disagree. Even



diehard meat fiends will find the imaginative and delicious cuisine hard to resist here.

Oki Nami (01273 773777; www.okinami.com;
208 New Church Rd, Hove) For a Zen moment amid the bustle of Brighton meditate on the quality Japanese cuisine at this intimate spot with minimalist design.

The De Vere Grand (01273 224300; King's Rd) If you haven't experienced afternoon tea yet, then treat yourself to this most English of activities...now!

Nightlife

Brighton has the best nightlife on the south coast, from modern bars to fringe theatre, often housed in imaginative settings.

The Bar With No Name (01273 601419;
58 Southover St) Traditional pub popular with local artists, clubbers and those simply looking for a good pint.

Komedia Theatre (01273 467100;

www.komedia.co.uk; Gardner St) A former supermarket, now a stylish fringe theatre and cabaret space in the centre of Brighton.

Brighton Dome (01273 709709;
www.brighton-dome.org.uk; 29 New Rd) Once the stables and exercise yard of King George IV, this Art Deco complex houses three theatre venues within the Royal Pavilion estate.

Ocean Rooms (01273 699069; 1 Morley St) Sumptuously decorated in red – red sofas, red drapes and red cushioned walls. Come here at weekends for the excellent soul, funk and disco.

Sleeping

There's plenty of choice for accommodation in Brighton to suit all styles. You should book ahead for weekends in summer and during the Brighton Festival in May.

Oriental Hotel (01273 205050;
www.orientalhotel.co.uk; 9 Oriental Pl) Stylishly decorated in mint and rouge with a cool, modern



atmosphere, its groovy interior is Brighton to a tee.

Brighton House Hotel (01273 323282;
www.brightonhousehotel.co.uk; 52 Regency Sq) The proprietor is lovely and helpful at this luxurious Regency hotel. The rooms are immaculate and breakfast is refreshingly healthy.

Genevieve Hotel (01273 681653;
www.genevievehotel.co.uk; 18 Madeira Pl) There is a minimum two-night stay at weekends in this refurbished but standard lodging. Luxury rooms are more attractive and come with four-poster beds.

Old Ship Hotel (01273 329001;
www.paramount-hotels.co.uk; King's Road) The oldest place in town has undergone recent refurbishment and is a brightly-coloured classic choice for a wonderful seaside weekend.

De Vere Grand Hotel (01273 224300;
www.grandbrighton.co.uk; King's Rd;) Life here is all leisure and comfort, with luxurious facilities right on the seafront.



**lively and
tranquil
ancient and
modern**

MANAGING TO BE LIVELY and tranquil, ancient and modern, Cardiff is a confident city – small enough to remain friendly but big enough to buzz. Only the Welsh capital since 1955, it's been surging into its status as if on fast-forward. Sport is at its heart, with the huge Millennium Stadium looming over the city centre – the population ebbs and flows with the coming and going of the fixtures and each match floods the streets with a sense of hope. The gleaming razzmatazz of Cardiff Bay – waterside restaurants, cafés, the National (or Welsh) Assembly and the Wales Millennium Centre – has emerged phoenix-like from the docklands.

Right in the centre of the city with over 2,000 years of history stands the enchanting Cardiff Castle. Bute Park fills the centre with vast parklands – Cardiff has more green space per resident than any other city in Europe. **Cardiff Visitor Centre** (029 2022 7281; 16 Wood St) can offer further guidance.



Seeing Must dos

If you possibly can, see a rugby or football match at the **Millennium Stadium** (08705 582582). This 72,500-seat, three-tiered enormity with a sliding roof was completed to host the 1999 Rugby World Cup. Tours are very worthwhile if you can't get in another way.

The contrast with the two millennia of history on offer at **Cardiff Castle** (029 2087 8100) couldn't be bigger. You can only get in on a tour but it's well worth the effort. The castle is surrounded by Bute Park, part of a two-mile corridor of verdant parkland that stretches out of Cardiff to the north.

Once an enormous coal dock, Cardiff Bay is now the most striking mix of the old and new. It is home to the National Assembly for Wales as well as several museums, bars and restaurants. Inland from the bay

is the spectacular **Wales Millennium Centre** (029 2040 2000; www.wmc.org.uk), an international multimedia centre that opened in 2004. It has two theatres and is home to seven companies, headed by the Welsh National Opera. The gleaming gold-roofed structure has mauve slate panelling and was designed by Welsh architect Jonathan Adam.

Off the beaten track

Take a train or bus a few miles down the road to **Newport**. As well as offering an insight into small-town life in Wales, it also has one of two working **Transporter Bridges** left in the UK. It's free for foot passengers and dates from 1906.

Eating

The Cardiff restaurant scene is booming. Whatever you are after, the city centre offers an eclectic range

shopping

Within the triangle formed by High St, Mary St and pedestrianised Queen St are many arcades, a Victorian and Edwardian treasure trove of small shops and cafés. **High St Arcade** abounds with funky little shops, selling new and vintage clothing, jewellery and crafts.

Cardiff's also the place to pick up unique Welsh items like lovespoons, stuffed dragons and even suits of armour. For furniture, clothes, books and knick-knacks, try **Jacob's Market**, just south of the railway line at the western end of Bute Square; it opens most days but it's biggest Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

of eating options. It's a good idea to book at the weekend.

Celtic Cauldron (029 2038 7185; 47-49 Castle Arcade) Cosy with reasonable health-food versions of traditional Welsh dishes such as laver bread and cawl (a hearty dish of bacon and lamb).

Café Bar Europa (029 2066 7776; 25 Castle St) Super small and cosy with exposed brickwork and scattered books. Metamorphoses into a bar at night, when there are poetry readings, DJs, comedy and live music.

Norwegian Church (029 2045 4899; Pier Head, Cardiff Bay) The white-wood arts centre has a lovely little café that does excellent cakes, waffles, sandwiches and light lunches.

Café Naz (029 2049 6555; Mermaid Quay) Stylish Indian with a carpeted wall and Bollywood projections.



Tides (029 2031 3018; St David's Hotel & Spa)

This calm, unadorned place with a classic bay view and terrace seating for balmy days is a great place for a splurge.

Nightlife

Buzz is a useful, free monthly magazine with up-to-date event listings in the city.

Cayo Arms (36 Cathedral Rd) Proper pub with proper real ale, lots of wood inside and tables out

the front.

Bsb (029 2023 8228; Windsor Pl) Laid-back, smartish, smallish bar playing a fusion of sounds during the week and live music on Sundays.

Wales Millennium Centre (029 2040 2000; www.wmc.org.uk) Performances in its inaugural year (2005) include dance and circus performances and the Welsh National Opera's The Magic Flute.

Clwb Ifor Bach (029 2023 2199; www.clwb.net); 11 Womanby St) Founded in the early 1980s, this is

a Cardiff institution and the place to hear live music by unsigned talent as well as the big names.

Sleeping

Big Sleep (029 2063 6363;

www.thebigsleephotel.com; Bute Tce) Highly styled, and central, this 'design B&B' occupies a tall ex-office block. The big rooms are saturated in bright colours there's a big Continental breakfast.

Town House (029 2023 9399;

www.thetownhousecardiff.co.uk; 70 Cathedral Rd)

The brass-knocked Town House is a Cathedral Rd favourite, and good value for two people.

Annedd Lon (029 2022 3349; 157 Cathedral Rd)

It's a comfortable town house. Breakfast is served on Portmeirion crockery, right down to the salt and pepper pots.

Beaufort Guest House (029 2023 7003;

65 Cathedral Rd) Smart refurbished rooms decorated with bright colours and traditional furniture.

Angel (029 2064 9200;

www.paramount-hotels.co.uk/angel; Castle St) A large Victorian hotel built at the same time as the nearby castle, the 100-room Angel has a grand entrance hall but remains informal. Rooms have the fireplaces of old but come with Internet connections.

St David's Hotel & Spa (029 2045 4045;

www.thestdavidshotel.com; Havannah St) This exceptionally pleasant five-star place on the waterfront has a 38m-high atrium, big-sky views from all rooms and a spa with a dedicated lift to whisk slippers guests to the comfort of the masseuse's couch.



Bath

Bath is a gorgeous town full of beautiful Georgian architecture dating from the time it was the place to see and be seen. Today it's one of the destinations on almost every visitor's list – and with good reason. When sunlight brightens the honey-coloured stone and buskers and strollers fill the streets and line the river, only the most churlish would deny its charm. If you're feeling burnt out after a little too much nightlife and want somewhere to relax for a while, Bath has the perfect combination of sights and relaxing options to allow you to recharge.

Don't leave until you've

Explored the city's steaming soul: the bath-and-temple complex built from the 1st century AD by the Romans, over one of Bath's three natural hot springs. The buildings were left to decay after the Romans departed and it wasn't until the end of the 17th century that the numbers of those coming to 'take the cure' in Bath began to rise again. In 1702 the visit of Queen Anne set the seal on the trend, and a few years later Ralph Allen started his town expansion programme.

Seen the best of Bath's Georgian architecture - graceful, elegant and wonderful, and nowhere more so than at the Royal Crescent, The Circus and Pulteney Bridge, though much of the town centre is comprised of delightful buildings.



Cambridge

Cambridge is undeniably a university town, but its appeal is by no means limited to what you'll find on campus. The city's pristine core is at once immaculately preserved – its elegantly curving alleyways, moss-strewn courtyards and ornate gateways seem to have been sculpted all of a piece – and bustling with activity. The cobblestone streets are pleasantly thronged with locals and visitors alike, shopping, cycling, wandering around, punting on the peaceful River Cam or just relaxing at a quayside pub.

Don't leave until you've

Had a look round King's College Chapel -



one of the finest examples of Gothic architecture in England. The chapel is supreme in its grandeur and comparable with Chartres cathedral in France.

Strolled the two notable bridges - the Bridge of Sighs (built in 1831, a replica of the original in Venice) and the bridge at Clare College.

Canterbury

Most people have heard of Canterbury's great cathedral and rightly so. It's one of Europe's (and some say the world's) finest examples of Gothic religious architecture. It's also a surprising place – come for the beautiful buildings and you'll stay for the great dining and drinking scene and laid-back

atmosphere that make Canterbury one of England's most green and pleasant small cities. Plus, this is a great place to base yourself while visiting the nearby coastal towns. Any time you come to Canterbury, it's essential to book ahead for hotels and some of the nicer restaurants.

Don't leave until you've

Given the cathedral as much time as you can devote to it – and if you can take a tour to explain the secrets of the famous old church, so much the better.

Taken a wonderful wander on top of the city walls – just cross the footbridge at Canterbury East station to start exploring.



Chester

A slice of Elizabethan England in aspic, Chester is one of the country's most beautiful cities, a compact collection of Tudor and Victorian buildings wrapped in an almost intact red sandstone wall that was originally built by the Romans to protect the fortress of Castra Devana.

Most places of interest are inside the walls, where the Roman street pattern is relatively intact. From the Cross (the stone pillar that marks the town centre), four roads fan out to the four principal gates.

[Don't leave until you've](#)

Made a circumnavigation of the most complete city walls in Britain, built by the Romans and basically unaltered since 1200.

Shopped at Chester's other great draw - the Rows, a series of two-level galleried arcades along the four streets that fan out from the central Cross.

Had a taste of a British pub which refuses to modernise – or compromise – head to **The Albion** (4 Albion Street).

Durham

Durham is small, posh and exquisite. Its joys are apparent as soon as you arrive, for crammed onto a hilltop peninsula in a bend of the River Wear is Britain's most beautiful Romanesque cathedral, a masterpiece of Norman architecture that simply doesn't fail to impress. Just in front of it is the enormous castle that for centuries was home to the prince bishops. Surrounding both is a cobweb of cobbled streets that are usually full of upper-crust students as Durham is also a posh university town. The university may not have the wizened prestige of Oxbridge – but the city still has the air of learning, history and grandeur that will stay with you long after you've dragged yourself away.

[Don't leave until you've...](#)

Been wowed by the enormous, breathtaking Norman cathedral – don't miss the Galilee Chapel, cloisters and tomb of the Venerable Bede.

Take a nose round Durham Castle, still a University hall of residence and a beautifully preserved medieval building.



Oxford

World renowned as a bastion of the academic elite, the lure of Oxford comes in its incredible architecture, air of refinement and international reputation. The weight of academic achievement seeps from the walls of the beautiful buildings that house Britain's oldest and most famous university.

Be inspired by the stunning vistas, world-class museums and gorgeous architecture. Once you've seen the highlights you'll have fun trying to control a teetering punt or wandering the winding passages that lead to tiny drinking holes unchanged since the time of Tolkien, Auden and Elliott.

Don't leave until you've

Admired the dreaming spires and medieval buildings



from the top of Carfax Tower, all that remains of St Martin's Church.

Visited at least one college – Christ Church is the largest and most popular, Merton is small and lovely, while Magdalen is arguably the most beautiful.

Been blown away by the amazing treasure troves of the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers Museums

Portsmouth

Anyone interested in maritime history should flag this page. Not only is Portsmouth home to Lord Nelson's 18th-century warship, the HMS Victory, which led the charge at Trafalgar in 1805, but it is also the principal port of Britain's Royal Navy, whose ships once exported the empire to the far-flung

corners of the world. The areas around The Point and The Hard still manage to evoke an atmosphere of salty dogs and scurvy scallywags.

Don't leave until you've

Had a day at the Naval Heritage Area. It's the city's main draw, and it's a humdinger. Three classic ships and a handful of excellent museums form the core of England's tribute to the historical might of the Royal Navy, on the edge of the country's most important naval port. Even the most devoted landlubber should find this a good day out. As well as Nelson's HMS Victory, the remains of Henry VIII's flagship the Mary Rose can be found here, along with the Victorian HMS Warrior.



Salisbury

With its glorious towering cathedral, the gracious market town of Salisbury is a fantastic base for touring the area. It has a host of excellent museums, some wonderful historic buildings and a good selection of accommodation. There's more to Salisbury than the cathedral – a bustling market square providing a keen contrast to the tranquillity of the cathedral close.

While arguably best known as a gateway to the nearby Stone Age mystery of Stonehenge, there's lots to see in Salisbury itself, which makes lingering longer in the city well worth it.

Don't leave until you've

Taken in the stunning cathedral, and wandered down Cathedral Close, a beautiful collection of houses still locked behind gates from the rest of the



city at night.

The museums here offer a great insight into the history of the city.

Seen the magnificent cathedral in all its glory. Among its prize possessions are the tallest spire in Britain, and one of only four surviving copies of the Magna Carta.

Made an excursion out to Stonehenge - Europe's most famous ancient site.



St Andrews

Renowned for golf and famous residents, St Andrews is a wonderful place for a Scottish seaside retreat. It's perfect for a day-trip from Edinburgh or a long weekend enjoying good food, sea views and perhaps a round or two at a historic golf course. The city oozes history, with stately buildings and ancient castle, with its complex of siege tunnels running underneath.

The Old Course, the world's most famous, has a striking seaside location at the western end of town. Although it's difficult to get a game, it's still a thrilling experience to stroll the hallowed turf. Even if you're not into golf, it's worth making tracks to St Andrews, as it boasts an impressive concoction of medieval ruins and idyllic coastal scenery.

Don't leave until you've

Taken a guided tour or evening stroll of the Old Course – that's if you can't get a tee-off time to play a round on the venerable public course.

Enjoyed the sweeping coastal views from St Andrews Castle, and explored the mossy, damp siege tunnels

Got an idea for just how impressive the cathedral, Scotland's finest medieval achievement, would have been in its heyday.

Stirling

It's no coincidence that strategically vital Stirling, which dominates Scotland's narrow waist, was the location for two of Scotland's most crucial independence battles, involving William Wallace, of Braveheart fame, and Robert the Bruce. Nestled in the streets below the castle are many buildings that bear witness to the town's centuries at the forefront of Scottish power, and wandering the cobbled streets is a real pleasure, especially as the city boasts a couple of old pubs of huge character and charm to quench your thirst at along the way.

Don't leave until you've

Seen Scotland's best-located fortress. More than anything else, the castle is what draws visitors; perched on a crag at the top of the town, it's one of the country's finest medieval fortresses. Staring at it across a couple of miles of open country is the brooding Wallace monument, a Victorian-era creation to honour the giant freedom fighter.

Stopped off for a pint in the pubs of the Old Town – try the Settle Inn or Portcullis.

Followed the best surviving town wall in Scotland; built around 1547, on the Back Walk.



Stratford-upon-Avon

For many visitors to Britain, the country is synonymous with Shakespeare. This is what makes a pilgrimage to his picturesque birthplace so essential. Best of all, Stratford is just what you'd imagined it would be. It's an undeniably pretty town, full of historic buildings, half-timbered houses and thatched roofs. The culture, pleasant atmosphere and convenience of stopping off here on a tour of Britain only add to the

appeal. It's also a handy base for exploring the surrounding areas, particularly if you avoid the high tourism season when accommodation can be hard to come by.

Don't leave until you've

Explored Shakespeare's Stratford. There are five historic properties related to The Bard that can be seen in a day, including the house he was born in, Nash's House, home to his granddaughter and the thatched farmhouse

where his wife, Anne Hathaway, called home before their marriage.

Seen a play at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, home to the Company of the same name. Book ahead for the best seats, but you'll always find a few tickets on sale on the day of the performance.

Stopped off at magnificent Warwick Castle, the huge and fascinating fortress that dates back to William the Conqueror's time.



Wells & Glastonbury

Well off the usual tourist trail, Wells will delight visitors. Almost perfectly preserved and brimful of character, the medieval cathedral city makes an excellent base for touring the nearby Mendip Hills and Cheddar Gorge. It's a dignified place and one of England's finest and smallest cities. The magnificent cathedral is hidden until the last moment when it is dramatically revealed in all its glory. Nearby is the imposing Bishop's Palace (still surrounded by the

spring water that gives the city its name) and a cluster of handsome medieval buildings.

Nearby Glastonbury claims to be everything from the resting place of the Holy Grail to the birthplace of English Christianity. It's a laid-back, historic town with New Age leanings and is a fascinating counterpoint to Wells' more conservative charms.

Don't leave until you've

Seen the Cathedral's best features: the beautiful

West Front, is the first you'll see. Inside, the most striking feature is the pair of scissor arches separating the nave from the choir. High up in the north transept is a wonderful mechanical clock dating from 1392 – the second-oldest surviving in England after the one in Salisbury Cathedral. The clock shows the position of the planets and the phases of the moon.

Climbed Glastonbury Tor, rightly famous for great views and a thoroughly rewarding stroll.

Whitby

Whitby is the most charming of Northern England's seaside resorts, a handsome maze of narrow, medieval streets leading from a busy fishing harbour packed with colourful boats. Perched above one of the cliffs that hem it all in are the spectacular remains of an ancient abbey.-

Whitby is popular with fun-loving girls and boys, retirees, hikers, bikers and even Goths – who flock here for two festivals honouring the king of the vampires: Bram Stoker set part of Dracula here. The town was also the birthplace of the famous explorer James Cook

Don't leave until you've

Discover the wonderful ruins of Whitby Abbey, which dominates the town or get thoroughly spooked following the Dracula Trail round the sights of the town featured in the book. Try this at night for a more atmospheric experience.

Fuelled up on fish & chips – Whitby is reputed to have Britain's finest. Magpie Café has the best reputation and Trenchers is a great alternative.



York

York exudes history and heritage and to many visitors it is the epitome of Ye Olde Englishe Towne. It is a city of extraordinary cultural and historical wealth: its medieval lattice of narrow streets is enclosed by a magnificent circuit of 13th-century walls and, at its heart is the immense, awe-inspiring Minster, one of the most beautiful Gothic cathedrals in the world. Medieval charm meets modern savvy, with a myriad of museums, restaurants, cafés and traditional pubs. York is one of the most popular destinations in the whole country.

Compact and eminently walkable, York is home to five major landmarks of note: the wall enclosing the small city centre; the Minster at the northern corner; Clifford's Tower at the southern end; the River Ouse that cuts the centre in two; and the train station to the west. Just to avoid the inevitable confusion, remember that around these parts gate means street and bar means gate.

Don't leave until you've

Had your fill of England's largest medieval cathedral, York Minster. Without doubt one of England's finest Gothic buildings.

Got under the skin of the city's Roman, Viking and medieval history through York's excellent museums. If you can come in mid-February, the city's Jorvik Viking Festival brings this era to colourful and noisy life with battle re-enactments and themed walks.



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