

# Leeds Castle: The Loveliest Castle in the World [C1]

Questa imponente fortezza costruita su due isole ha ospitato diversi re d'Inghilterra fin dal IX secolo. Oggi è un centro culturale che offre una vasta gamma di attività.

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On two islands on a lake formed by the River Len stands Leeds Castle, a historical marvel, and a fun destination for all the family. Although the architecture is relatively new, mostly originating in the 19th century, the site of the castle has a history that dates back over a thousand years. A castle has stood there since 857, and over the centuries it has been used as a Norman [stronghold](#), a royal residence and a royal palace.

## MAZE AND GROTTO

While Leeds is a city in the north of England, Leeds Castle is near the village of Leeds in the county of Kent in South East England. It has been open to the public since 1976 and offers a variety of activities for all ages. You can explore the site by train, boat or segway, visit a [maze](#) and underground [grotto](#), play adventure golf, climb on [high ropes](#), explore the many beautiful gardens or see a show at the [falconry](#). To find out more, Speak Up spoke to Yvonne Leach, a local guide who offers tours of all of Kent. As she explains, Leeds Castle is a particularly popular destination. We began by asking her about the origins of the castle's name. **Yvonne Leach (English accent):** We go back probably over nine hundred years and it's one of the most confusing things for people because in the north of England, we have the city of Leeds in Yorkshire. And so people say, "Is Leeds Castle in Leeds?" No, it's not. It's over two hundred miles south of there. And it's [named after](#) the first owner, who was probably Led or Ledian. Some people say it's from the Saxon word for [grassy slopes](#), but it is just beautiful. It was a little home built in a lake on an island, and it's expanded into being a Norman Castle and then the home of the medieval queens of England, including Eleanor of Castile. Later on, King Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon, was there.

## PRIVATE TRUST

Leeds Castle then passed into private hands, as Leach explains. **Yvonne Leach:** It went right the way through into private ownership, and it's become very important now for its last private owner, which [who] was Lady Olive Baillie. And the castle today shows you what life was like there in the 1930s. And perhaps if I describe it as the Downton Abbey lifestyle, you can get the idea of upstairs, downstairs, 1930s ... people were coming, [the] [late](#) Queen Mother, King Edward VII, who abdicated. All sorts of people were there... It was a place to be and be seen, and had all sorts of dancing and swimming pools and [tennis courts](#) and [supper parties](#). So that's how they show it today. But that's very much 1930s [onward](#), until it became a private [trust](#). But it's got nine hundred years of history before that as well, which you can feel it in the atmosphere.

## WOW FACTOR!

And the castle is in a [stunning](#) setting. **Yvonne Leach:** There's a beautiful little walk that goes by the side of the river, and it's full of... especially in the spring... all the baby [ducklings](#). You see the [peacocks](#), you see the black swans, which Leeds Castle is famous for. Ducks, Canada [geese](#), all sorts of wildlife and the most beautiful trees. It's [stunning](#). And you just turn a corner and there's the castle on the lake. So it's that kind of wow factor. It is beautiful. I can understand why Lord Conway wrote of it as being "the loveliest castle in the world". For me, it's the view of it as you approach it suddenly. There it is!

## THE GARDENS

The gardens comprise six beautiful individual gardens, says Leach. **Yvonne Leach:** The grounds are beautiful, as well as the [walk up](#). If you go beyond, you come into the most beautiful rose gardens and [kitchen gardens](#), and then there's a [maze](#) as well. So of course the children love going into the [maze](#). And there's something very unusual. There's a dog collar museum. So, can you imagine, back in the days when everyone had these big hunting

dogs and [wolfhounds](#) and they had those big [spiky](#) collars they used to wear? So there is a museum there that shows all these kinds of things, which I think is probably unique. There's a [golf course](#) and there's a little boat that goes round on the lake...

## ACTIVITIES

And there are many festivals and activities celebrated there. **Yvonne Leach:** It has festivals, the most beautiful flower festival. If you can go there during the flower festival, every room is decorated so beautifully. It has orchestras, concerts, [falconry](#), [jousting](#). There's always something going on...Weddings, of course, and events and all sorts of things. So it's a very busy castle with lots of different dimensions to it. [www.leeds-castle.com](http://www.leeds-castle.com)

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# Glossary

- **geese** = oche
- **stronghold** = fortezza
- **maze** = labirinto
- **falconry** = falconeria
- **supper parties** = cene di gala
- **stunning** = sbalorditivo
- **high ropes** = corde
- **walk up** = strada verso l'accesso
- **kitchen gardens** = orti
- **wolfhounds** = cani lupo
- **spiky** = a punta
- **grotto** = grotta
- **trust** = fondo fiduciario
- **ducklings** = anatroccoli
- **jousting** = giostra
- **peacocks** = pavoni
- **golf course** = campo da golf
- **named after** = chiamare come
- **grassy slopes** = pendii erbosi
- **late** = defunta
- **tennis courts** = campi da tennis
- **onward** = in avanti