



Blenheim Palace is home to the 12th Duke of Marlborough.

Land of Thrones

FROM SHEPHERD'S PIE TO SHAKE-SPEARE, from serfs to kings, from the Beatles to Harry Potter, there's so much to love about England. A trip to the Cotswolds in the English countryside, an area of rolling hills dotted with a mix of stately castles and peaceful villages, is a journey on cobblestones less traveled.

Driving on one-lane roadways conjoined by roundabouts is the best way to experience the nooks and crannies of old England, the places that have launched fairy tales, poets, artists, and royalty alike.

Each village has its own unique charm and history. The city of Bath, built by the Romans as early as 65 A.D. and redeveloped by the aristocracy of 18th-century London, derives its name from local

natural mineral water springs. Its Georgian architecture, atop original excavations, is a fascinating look into the past. The waters keep flowing (although no longer swimmable) throughout the spa complex which houses an interactive museum of artifacts and continued excavations. The healing waters of England's only natural hot springs can now be found at nearby Thermal Bath Spa.

WALKING THE COTSWOLDS

One of the more popular villages is Stow-on-the-Wold. Built at the highest point of the Cotswolds (800 feet), "Stow" is at the junction of seven major roads, providing a good hub from which to explore the region. This famous market town was once the center of wool trade, selling up to 20,000 sheep per day. Stow has many taverns, boutiques,



The Roman Baths from 65 A.D.



Bourton-on-the-Water is also known as the Venice of the Cotswolds.

and galleries, and is the starting point for popular “Walking the Cotswolds” tours.

Regularly voted among the prettiest villages in the Cotswolds are Bourton-on-the-Water and Bibury. Bourton, built along the gentle River Windrush, is alive with tourists enjoying river front cafés, locals picnicking, and children wading in the cool, shallow waters. Footbridges cross the banks between an array of bottle glass windowed shops, galleries, and tea rooms. Bibury, one of England’s most iconic hamlets located on the peaceful River Coln, has some of the most photographed timbered “chocolate box” cottages in the country. Arlington Row, a stretch of 14th century stone and thatched roof weaver’s cottages is instantly recognizable as a symbol of the Cotswold District.

THE BARD OF AVON

Stratford-Upon-Avon was the birthplace of English poet, playwright, and actor, William Shakespeare, one of the most quoted authors of all time. Travelers, however, may be speechless standing in the Tudor-style home and surprisingly modest gravesite on the banks of the River Avon. Home and museum tours with live re-enactments of his famous plays are offered daily. The childhood home of his wife Anne Hathaway, with its blooming gardens, is a short walk away.


Garden club and history buffs will be thrilled with the abundance of formal English garden and palace tours. Among the “must-sees” include Hidcote Manor, Kiftsgate Court, and Sezincote Palace. Sudley Castle, offering visitors the chance to

walk in the footsteps of kings and queens including Richard III, Elizabeth I, and Lady Jane Grey, is the only private castle in England to have a queen (Katherine Parr, 6th wife of Henry the VIII), buried within its grounds.

THE BIRTHPLACE OF WINSTON CHURCHILL

Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, one of Britain’s greatest palaces, is the current home of the family of the 12th Duke of Marlborough and the birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill. This massive masterpiece of 18th century Baroque architecture houses some of the finest antique collections in Europe. Tour the opulent state rooms, admire the portraits, tapestries, and exquisite furniture and hear the 300-year history of this national treasure. The expansive grounds host many “jet set” events such as international sports car exhibitions and “A list” celebrity weddings.

Lodging options abound from B&Bs to classic manor homes, luxury boutique hotels, and historic castle rentals. Destination weddings in quaint, old English country gardens or palaces fit for a king and queen can be easily arranged.

After your day of exploration, take out your book of Shakespeare and enjoy a beefy shepherd’s pie with a glass of ale in an 18th century pub in the beautiful Cotswolds. 

Dee Dee Werner is a travel advisor, former travel agency owner, and travel industry speaker. She has traveled throughout the world and has experienced many ocean and river cruises. Reach Dee Dee at Travelex International, a Virtuoso member agency in Hoffman Estates, Illinois. To learn more, call 847-882-0400 or email: deew@travelexinternational.com.



Anne Hathaway’s childhood home in Stratford-upon-Avon.



A car show at Blenheim Palace.