



# All will end well on this trip to Warwickshire

**The region that is known as Shakespeare's England focuses on that part of South Warwickshire that takes in the Bard's birthplace of Stratford-upon-Avon**

It also embraces the historic market town of Warwick, which is dominated by one of the most impressive and popular medieval castles in the UK, and Royal Leamington Spa with its celebrated Regency architecture.

Kenilworth is of interest for its connections to Queen Elizabeth 1 and for the English Heritage's Kenilworth Castle and its Elizabethan Garden.

Surrounding these are a number of attractive country towns and rural villages, set in quintessential English countryside, and a string of visitor attractions.

All of these can be enjoyed on a short break in Shakespeare's England, while on a slightly longer stay the Cotswolds are also well within reach.

[www.shakespeares-england.co.uk](http://www.shakespeares-england.co.uk)

**Ashley Gibbins**  
Commissioning Editor  
AllWays traveller







Lord Leicester Hospital

# So much on offer in Shakespeare's England

By Ashley Gibbins

**Over the years Ann and I had dipped in and out of that part of South Warwickshire that is now known, for traveller identification purposes, as Shakespeare's England.**

Revisiting the area, in the literal and literature sense, we felt it appropriate to revisit the area in a structured fashion.

## Starting at Stratford-upon-Avon

In doing so the first port of call had, quite rightly, to be Stratford-upon-Avon.

It is the town most associated with William Shakespeare and one that enjoys a truly international perception.

The town houses, again literally, those remaining properties associated with Shakespeare and his life and times and is the home of the celebrated Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC).

## Country towns

We then scheduled in a day touring the Warwickshire county town of Warwick that took in the medieval Lord Leicester Hospital and a visit to the splendid Warwick Castle.

Finally I would recommend spending a couple of hours strolling around Royal Leamington Spa.



Ann Hathaway's Cottage

## Much more on offer

Beyond that the choice for visitors is a wide one and will be determined by personal interests.

These can include the Heritage Motor Centre with the largest collection of British Cars, the unusual inventions in the MAD Museum or the thousands of butterflies at the Stratford Butterfly Farm.

As for us we opted this time for Charlecote Park, which is a grand 16th-century country house, surrounded by its own deer park, on the banks of the River Avon.



Warwick Castle



Royal Leamington Spa

It is run by the National Trust and lays claim to its own link with Shakespeare.

As a lad, young Will is alleged to have poached deer and rabbit in the park and brought before magistrates as a result.





# Taking the Bard's trail in Stratford-upon-Avon

To truly appreciate Shakespeare's life and times in Stratford-upon-Avon, one need look no further than the four houses and one site related to his life that are owned and managed by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

In each, costumed tour guides provide a fascinating insight into the life and times in Shakespearian Stratford-upon-Avon.

## Shakespeare's Birthplace

The obvious place to start is the house on Henley Street where Shakespeare was born and spent his early years.

He also spent the first five years of married life in this house with his wife, Anne Hathaway.

The house was originally owned John and Mary Shakespeare, with John's lovemaking business making wealthy enough to own, what was, the largest house on the street.

John Shakespeare and Mary (nee Arden) had eight children of whom William was the third born.

When John Shakespeare died in 1601 William, as the eldest surviving child, inherited the house, leasing part of it for a inn called the Maidenhead (and later the Swan and Maidenhead).



Shakespeare's birthplace



Anne Hathaway's cottage



Halls Croft



New Place

When Shakespeare died he left the house to his eldest daughter Susanna, and when she died it passed to her only child, Elizabeth.

Although she married twice Elizabeth had no children, so when she died the house fell to a descendant of Joan Hart, one of Shakespeare's sisters.

The house was owned by the Hart family until the late 18th century.

When it went up for sale and was purchased by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in 1847.

Under Trust management, Shakespeare's birthplace has been attracting visitors, from all corners of the globe, for over 250 years.

During this time it has proven a shrine for the likes of Charles Dickens, John Keats, Walter Scott and Thomas Hardy.



The day we took the tour we were joined, among others, by a party of French students, a family from Arkansas and a Japanese couple who, true to for, were taking photographs from start to finish.

A visit to Shakespeare's birthplace is an inevitable must as is spending time hearing the fascinating stories of life in his time, as told by the costumed guides.

And please find time to enjoy the highly entertaining impromptu performances of some of his best lines by actors in the garden of the house.

### Shakespeare's New Place

New Place, which was Shakespeare's family home from 1597 until he died in the house in 1616, was demolished in 1759.

But do not let that deter you from paying a visit.

When Shakespeare bought New Place he was an established playwright and it is believed that he wrote his later plays there, including *The Tempest*.

The site is now a designated garden with an exhibition in the adjoining Nash House.

This was named after Thomas Nash, the first husband of Shakespeare's granddaughter, is a well preserved Tudor building with the ground floor furnished as it would have been in Nash's day.

Again, take time to listen to the guide talking through the history of the place.



### Hall's Croft

Hall's Croft is the Jacobean home of Shakespeare's daughter Susanna and her physician husband, John Hall.

The main part of this fine timbered property was built in 1613 and is surrounded by a delightful garden.

John Hall was a physician of some renown and his case notes, published after his death in 1657, were a popular textbook for other doctors for many years.

### Anne Hathaway's Cottage

The next stop should be Anne Hathaway's Cottage, a thatched farmhouse with grounds and gardens in Shottery, just over a mile from the town centre, it was the Hathaway family home.

And therefore where William Shakespeare courted his future bride Anne.



### Mary Arden's Farm

And finally on to Mary Arden's Farm, a 'living history' working Tudor farm and the childhood home of Shakespeare's mother.

The neighbouring Palmer's Farmhouse, which is now part of the complex, retains much of its original 16th Century structure



### More information

[www.shakespeare.org.uk](http://www.shakespeare.org.uk)





[www.rsc.org.uk](http://www.rsc.org.uk)

## No better place for that theatrical experience

**The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) really does create theatre at its best, with all its productions 'made in Stratford-upon-Avon' before being shared around the world.**

The RSC is rightly based in Stratford-upon-Avon, but regularly perform in London and tour our shows in the UK and around the world.

And there is no better place to enjoy a Shakespeare play.

Visitors to Stratford-upon-Avon can enjoy performances at its three theatres in the town.

The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, on Waterside, is an A Grade II listed building which retains many of the art deco features of the 1932 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

The major RSC productions are staged here.

The Swan Theatre, also on Waterside, is an intimate theatre, seating 426 people on three sides of a deep thrust stage.

It stages the work of Shakespeare's contemporaries as well as plays by later writers, such as Restoration playwrights, and new work by today's writers.



Henry V (image by Keith Pattison)

The Other Place which, on Southern Lane, is a creative hub with a 200-seat studio theatre, which hosts two festivals of new work every year.

Local amateur groups also use the theatre for performances.

[www.rsc.org.uk](http://www.rsc.org.uk)

### Also in Stratford-upon-Avon



**Were there no Will, Stratford-upon-Avon would still be a fine place for a visit.**

This thriving market town has main streets lined with historic buildings and the River Avon, which runs through its heart.

A riverside stroll is very pleasing and one can also take to the water on one of the many boat trips.

There are a number of very old (by that I mean characterful) traditional pubs, any number of tea shops (most seeming to refer to the Bard) and some excellent restaurants.

### The Stratford Town Walk

For those wanting to around Stratford-upon-Avon with an expert, the Stratford Town Walk has a dedicated, enthusiastic a team of professional local guides.

The guided walking tours take place 365 days a year.

[www.stratfordtownwalk.co.uk](http://www.stratfordtownwalk.co.uk)



# Historic thrills and spills at Warwick Castle

**Warwick Castle has dominated the town of Warwick for centuries.**

In days gone by the castle was an almost impregnable fortification and physical embodiment of the power bestowed upon those who commanded it.

Throughout its history, the castle served to dissuade and actively deter by use of force, those who might wish to get inside uninvited.

Today, in sharp contrast, Warwick Castle, which is now run by Merlin Entertainment, welcomes visitors with 'open arms'.

And it places great emphasis on making a visit interesting and enjoyable.

## Turrets and ramparts

When first walking through the gates into Warwick Castle, one has to be to be impressed by its overall scale and the dominant towers, turrets and ramparts.

One also comes across archers demonstrating bow skills and giving a history lesson to boot; knights fighting in the courtyard arena and a daily 'medieval' birds of prey show.

## The dungeon

When touring the castle itself, a first trip should be the dungeon, which dates back to 1345.

Passing through its 10 underground rooms one comes across poor (waxwork) souls braving the torturer, and hear a judge pronouncing sentences to accused of all manner of crime

## Dragon Slayer

Dragon Slayer, Warwick Castle's new evening show an is 'the epic journey of Guy of Warwick as he battles beasts to win the heart of Princess Felice, the Earl of Warwick's daughter'.

It combines fire jousts, equestrian acrobatics and stunts and an interactive procession through the Castle grounds to the Central Courtyard where 'Guy of Warwick faces his final and most challenging battle'.

This final battle takes in a projection and light show onto the Castle's walls featuring real flames and pyrotechnics.



## The Warwick trebuchet

The trebuchet at Warwick Castle is the world's largest catapult, and takes a team of eight just over 30 minutes to load and 'shoot' stones or fireballs up to 240 metres at a speed of 160 miles per hour.

Throughout the year there is also a programme of special themed events.

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## Into the house

In the house at Warwick Castle, one can see a collection of armoury that is second only to that on display in the Tower of London.

And, again, stunningly lifelike wax models are used to create a lavish, turn of the century, weekend party hosted by Daisy, Countess of Warwick.

Frances Evelyn 'Daisy' Greville, Countess of Warwick, was a British socialite and long-time mistress to Albert, Prince of Wales, who later became King Edward VII.

She was also the inspiration for the popular music hall song Daisy, Daisy.

This mix of history and theme park entertainment makes a day out at Warwick Castle really very enjoyable.

## More information

[www.warwick-castle.com](http://www.warwick-castle.com)







Charlecote Park

## Out and about in Shakespeare's England

In addition to the Bard's Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick Castle, there is much else to take in on a trip to what is known as Shakespeare's England

### Lord Leycester Hospital

Lord Leycester Hospital is a truly unique group of timber-framed buildings of buildings that have been occupied, continuously, for more than 600 years.

Dating from the late 14th century they clustered round the Norman gateway into Warwick.

For 150 years it was the home of Warwick's Mediaeval Guilds and, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth became a retirement home for ex-servicemen and their wives.

The Master's Garden, which is a tiny garden hidden behind the Master's House, features a 12th Century Norman arch.

[www.lordleycester.com](http://www.lordleycester.com)

### Royal Leamington Spa

Royal Leamington Spa offers the visitor wide boulevards, Georgian and Edwardian architecture and formal parks and gardens.

It likes to consider itself as having 'the best bits of London, all in a ten-minute walk', and its town centre focuses on independent, specialist boutiques.

The small village of Leamington had known about its mineral springs since the middle ages, but it was in 1784 that the village started building baths around some of them.



Lord Leycester Hospital



Ragley Hall

Spa seeking visitors brought wealth to the area and the village grew to become Royal Leamington Spa.

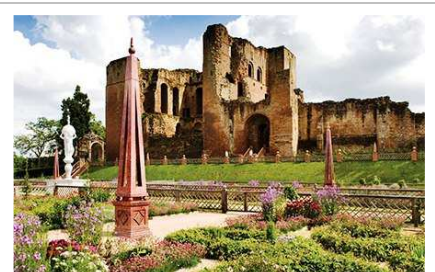
Visitors should look to take in the splendid Jephson Gardens and the Art Gallery & Museum, which is located opposite in the Royal Pump Rooms.

### Charlecote Park

Charlecote Park is a grand 16th-century country house, surrounded by its own deer park, on the banks of the River Avon which, with a previous house, has been home to the Lucy family since the 12th-century.



Stonleigh Abbey



Kenilworth Castle

It was built in 1558 by Sir Thomas Lucy, and Queen Elizabeth I stayed in the room that is now the drawing room.

Now a National Trust property, the house is furnished as it would have been in Victorian times, contains family portraits and artefacts collected from around the world.

The gardens include a formal parterre, colourful herbaceous planting and a woodland walk.

The wider parkland (inspired by 'Capability Brown'), has miles of walks and views across the River Avon and herd of fallow deer has been reared in the park since Tudor times.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/charlecote-park](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/charlecote-park)

## The Stratford Butterfly Farm

The Stratford Butterfly Farm houses the largest collection of tropical butterflies and live insect display in the Europe.

It's the chance to see hundreds of the world's most spectacular and beautiful butterflies flying in an exotic environment of tropical blossom with splashing waterfalls and fish-filled pools.

Its Arachnoland is home to the world's largest spider, rainforest scorpion colonies and the deadly Black widow spider.

[www.butterflyfarm.co.uk](http://www.butterflyfarm.co.uk)

## The Mad Museum

The MAD Museum (Mechanical Art & Design) displays Kinetic Art and Automata, in Stratford-upon-Avon, is the only permanent exhibition of its kind in the UK for international artists to showcase their work.

The museum holds over 100 pieces; both large and small, full of far-fetched designs and quirky contraptions.

[www.themadmuseum.co.uk](http://www.themadmuseum.co.uk)

## The British Motor Museum

The British Motor Museum, is the world's largest collection of historic British cars.

There are over 300 Classic cars on display from the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust and the Jaguar Heritage Trust.

[www.britishmotormuseum.co.uk](http://www.britishmotormuseum.co.uk)

## Ragley Hall

Ragley Hall, at the heart of the Ragley Estate, dates back to 1680 and is open to the public on select dates throughout the year for guided tours of the state rooms.

The 10 hectares of 'Capability' Brown gardens surrounding Ragley Hall display a spectacular array of snowdrops in the winter, tulips and daffodils in the spring and a Rose Garden and Prairie Garden throughout the summer months.

[www.ragley.co.uk](http://www.ragley.co.uk)

## Stoneleigh Abbey

Stoneleigh Abbey, the ancestral home of the Leigh family, is a country house first founded in 1154 as a Cistercian monastic house on a land grant from King Henry II.

[www.stoneleighabbey.org](http://www.stoneleighabbey.org)



The Mad Museum



The British Motor Museum

## Hidecote Manor Garden

Hidecote Manor Garden is one of England's great gardens, known for its rare trees and shrubs, herbaceous borders and unusual plants from all over the world.

The 300 acre estate, comprising farmland, the Manor and the hamlet of Hidecote Bartrim, was purchased in 1907 by Gertrude Winthrop, an American widow and her son Major Lawrence Johnston.

Johnston began to create the garden from a ten acre field containing just a few trees.

He divided the garden into a series of outdoor 'rooms' using hedges and walls, with each room designed to have its own special and unique character.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hidecote](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hidecote)

## Upton House

Upton House is a wonderful National Trust property with a relaxed atmosphere

Visitors are invited to 'join the guests of Lord and Lady Bearsted and experience a weekend house party of a 1930s millionaire', surrounded by art and porcelain collections.

The stunning gardens - being returned to their 1930s heyday- have a sweeping lawn, which gives way to a series of terraces and herbaceous borders leading to a kitchen garden, tranquil water garden and spring bulb displays.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/upton-house](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/upton-house)



Stratford Butterfly Farm



Hidecote Manor Garden

## Kenilworth Castle

The historic, small town of Kenilworth has the ruins of England's most important lake fortress and the remains of a medieval monastery.

The town's green heart is the 70 acre Abbey Fields, which includes picnic areas, a lake and outdoor swimming pool.

The vast medieval fortress of Kenilworth Castle is one of the largest historic visitor attractions in the West Midlands and one of the most impressive castle ruins in England.

Kenilworth is best known as the home of Robert Dudley, the great love of Queen Elizabeth I.

Once boasting the finest architecture in Elizabethan England, visitors can get an appreciation of this in the ruins today.

[www.english-heritage.org.uk/kenilworth](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/kenilworth)

## More information

Shakespeare's England is the official destination organisation for Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick, Kenilworth, Royal Leamington Spa and the surrounding towns and villages.

It's website contains a whole host of information and traveller tips and ideas.

[www.shakespeares-england.co.uk](http://www.shakespeares-england.co.uk)



## A snapshot of Shakespeare's England



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[www.allwaystraveller.com](http://www.allwaystraveller.com)



**The International Travel Writers Alliance** is the world's largest association of professional travel journalists.

[www.itwalliance.com](http://www.itwalliance.com)



**Ann Meador** is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Editor of *AllWays traveller*



**Ashley Gibbins** is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Director of the International Travel Writers Alliance.