



Life and times in this grand city

The city of Bath, one of the UK's most popular short-break destinations, has been luring travellers since Roman Times.

Bath was founded as a thermal spa settlement in the first century AD by the Romans and named for the resplendent baths built here.

Into the Middle Ages and Bath had become an important centre for the wool industry and with its majestic abbey under construction.

The city's hey-day was in the 18th century, however, when King George and his Queen Anne visited to 'take the rich spa waters'.

The nobility and nouveau riche followed in the Royal wake and Bath's preeminent social standing was established.

Grand theatres, public buildings and town houses were built or restored and, during the social season from October and early June, the city would stage an overflowing programme of social gatherings, theatre productions, concerts and grand balls.

With much of Georgian Bath still intact, along with extensive remains of the Roman baths, the city richly deserves its two UNESCO World Heritage Site designations.

www.visitbath.co.uk

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Bath's allure is still there for all to see

It has long been the case that those travellers coming to the UK for a vacation, will fly into London and spend time in the capital before heading off to Edinburgh, Stratford-upon-Avon and/or Bath.

By Ashley Gibbins



Being located in South-West England close to Bristol and with London under 100 miles away, by fast rail link or motorway, makes the city easily accessible for UK visitors.

Living in London and having written about Edinburgh and Stratford, I can now well see why Bath is an integral part of this esteemed group.

The city's enduring popularity has much to do with Bath's status in previous centuries.

It was in AD 40 that the Romans first discovered thermal hot springs here and, over the next decade, they built the baths, that gave the settlement its name along with a temple to the goddess Sulis Minerva.



The first spa town

A thriving spa town grew up around the baths and temple and with it the country's first health tourism boom.

While the temple is long gone, much of what were the baths complex remain to this day and provides the city with its single major tourist attraction.

Pride of place here today goes to the gilt bronze head of the Sulis Minerva, which was discovered in 1727 and is one of the best-known objects from Roman Britain.

Bath comes into its own

After centuries of relative affluence but little of note as a wool town, the Bath achieved distinction during the Georgian period.

In 1704 King George and Queen Anne began visiting Bath to 'take the rich spa waters' for their curative properties' and this prompted the echelons of social society to follow suit.

Royalty, the nobility and the nouveau riche industrialists followed in the couple's wake.

Anyone who was anyone would want to be and be seen to be in Bath during the 'social season' from October and early June.

Town planners accommodated the seasonal influx by building grand town houses and hotels, along with public buildings, theatres and other places of leisure and entertainment.

There would be an overflowing programme of social gatherings, theatre productions, concerts, and grand balls.

It is the city's Roman and Georgian influences that today make Bath one of these go to destinations.

Getting the best of Bath - at last

Although growing up in Bridgwater, no more than 40 miles away, I had only been to the city on three previous occasions.

And none enabled me to enjoy the place to the full.

During my first visit, on a primary school trip, I was far more concerned with being paired in our crocodile line with Eloise Jenkins, my first crush, and hold hands.

This ultimately unsuccessful quest prevented me from than appreciating what we saw en route.

The other two trips to Bath were during my rugby playing days, and our first XV losing heavily for two seasons running to Bath Rugby Club's fourth team.

The 'nights on the town' after these defeats were more rewarding though I saw little of Bath bar several of the city's pubs.

But now I was back to enjoy a short break in Bath, with a relationship well intact, and my rugby days long behind me.

This time around, Ann and I found Bath to be what it must always have been.

A thriving city of great grandeur with the buzz that the flow tourists brings and a youthful vibrancy that comes with a large student population.

The city in chronological order

With this stay very much time limited, we decided to work our way through the city in chronological order.

And so, it was to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre to get an overview as to why Bath is a special before heading to the Roman Baths and then Bath Abbey.

We then strolled around Georgian Bath before going, just out of the city, to the American Museum and Gardens.

In our two full days, we managed to fit in quite a bit while still finding time for a relaxing beer and a cocktail, or two in the Crystal Palace in Abbey Square.

We did though leave knowing we had merely skimmed the surface of what this city has to offer.

More information

www.visitbath.co.uk



www.visitsomerset.co.uk/bath



www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk

Taking the hop-on-hop-off

Taking a hop-on-hop-off, open top bus tour of any city is a great way to start any city-break.

It is the chance to learn more about the place and get orientated for the rest of the trip.

Bath Sightseeing has *Tootbus* and City Sightseeing, offers two guided bus tours with commentary provided in ten languages.

There are 17 stops on route to get you to almost everything you will want to see and do on the visit.

More information

www.hop-on-hop-off-bus.com/bath-bus-tours



A world heritage city of double distinction

The City of Bath is exceptional in being officially recognised by UNESCO on two counts, being designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of UNESCO's Great Spa Towns of Europe in 2021.



The World Heritage Centre

These recognise Bath's 'outstanding universal value' and 'global significance', where 'conservation for the appreciation and education of future generations' is vital.

To put its UNESCO status into perspective, a visit to the free World Heritage Centre is a good way to start any trip to the city.

Through the interactive exhibits and displays there is the chance to understand how the hot springs occur, what remains of the Romans in Bath and the approach of the Georgian town planners and the wealth of Georgian architecture that remains.

The centre also highlights the social importance of Bath as a spa town during the Georgian period.

Before leaving the centre get the free walking trails and guides.

More information

www.bathworldheritage.org.uk
www.bathworldheritage.org.uk/visit-bath-world-heritage-centre
www.whc.unesco.org/en/list/428/

The Roman Baths still the lure



The thermal springs in area that is now Bath had been known as a place of healing, relaxation and mystical properties since before Roman times.

It was, however, the Romans who gave the place a real focus and its name.

The Baths were built between 60 and 70 AD during the first years of Roman rule in Britain.

At this time the site was dominated by a temple within which to worship the goddess Sulis Minerva alongside the baths themselves, which offered, bathing, exercise socialising on a grand scale.

Though the temple is long gone, but for a few tantalising signs, what remains is one of the best-preserved Roman remains anywhere.

Visiting the Roman Baths, as many hundreds of thousands do every year, one gets a real feeling as to what the place would have been like nearly two thousand years ago.

The museum collection contains thousands of archaeological finds from pre-Roman and Roman Britain including many Roman coins and everyday objects.

The gilt bronze head of the goddess Sulis Minerva stirs the emotions.

Some 1,170,000 litres of spring water at 46°C, still fills the baths every day.

More information

www.romanbaths.co.uk/about



Bath Abbey

The majestic Bath Abbey, next to the Roman Baths stands on the site of one that was founded in the 7th century.

The current abbey was rebuilt in the 12th and again in 16th century with major restoration work carried in the 1860s.

It is a shining example of Perpendicular Gothic architecture and features stunning stained-glass windows and some of the finest fan vaulting in the world.

The Abbey's new Discovery Centre has objects from the archives display within the ancient vaults.

There are videos, replica period costumes and interactive exhibits on the history of the building and the people connected with it over the centuries.

In a timeline of the Abbey's history one can see Anglo-Saxon crosses, Medieval carved stone fragments and historic silver.

There is the Benefactors' Book, a record of money and materials given to the Abbey for its reconstruction after the Reformation.

More information

www.bathabbey.org
www.bathabbey.org/discovery-centre/

The city's Georgian heyday

The Georgian period (1714–1837) saw Britain become a major world power and one of its first industrialised nations, with an empire that stretched across the globe.

Bath's own rise to prominence occurred in tandem when King George and his Queen Anne began visiting the city to 'take the waters' for their curative properties.

Beau Nash

Many others of wealth and influence followed, and this spurred Richard 'Beau' Nash to transform Bath into the social hub for an elite of wealthy Londoners looking to escape the capital during the 'season'.

As Bath's Master of Ceremonies between 1705 to 1761, Nash oversaw the repair of the city's roads, and renovation of its lodging houses.

He commissioned the construction of the Pump Room and the Assembly House which became the place of fashionable society to be seen.

Nash also acted as the city's social secretary, imposing a strict set of rules for the holding of dinners, balls and concerts.

Nash's Assembly House was replaced in 1771 by the Bath Assembly Rooms, 'the most noble and elegant of any in the kingdom' which remains to this day.

One concert there in 1779, attracted 800 ladies and gentlemen including 60 members of the nobility.

As the well to do continued to converge on Bath throughout the 18th century, the city grew beyond its medieval city walls and is seen as one of the earliest examples of formal town planning.

This incorporated squares, crescents, wider spacious streets with attractive views deliberately created. Bath's Georgian town planning was the benchmark for subsequent development across the UK and is one of the reasons for the city receiving its UNESCO World Heritage site status.

That Bath has been able to retain many of its Georgian buildings and urban infrastructure makes strolling around the city a real pleasure, with the Royal Crescent a standout.

Comprising a majestic row of 30 terraced houses laid out in a sweeping crescent overlooking Royal Victoria Park, it was built between 1767 and 1774.

Among the finest examples of Georgian architecture, the exterior of the crescent remains almost as it was when first built.

No 1 Royal Crescent

No. 1 Royal Crescent is a museum owned by the Bath Preservation Trust that lets visitors take a look around one of these properties and get an idea of how it would have been furnished, above and below stairs, in the late 18th Century.

The rooms feature historic furniture, pictures and objects and an 'immersive experience, takes you from room to room via a sight and sound storyline.

More information

www.no1royalcrescent.org.uk



Jane's legacy is kept alive in this museum and by its festival

One cannot understand on Georgian Bath without realising the impact the author Jane Austen has had on the city.



Austin (1775 -1817) who lived in the city for five years from 1801 and *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, her Bath based novels both describe life here and the Assembly Rooms.

The Jane Austen Centre, in No 1 Royal Crescent, showcases the author's life and times.

Costumed characters from Austin's books give visitors a very interesting and very entertaining snapshot of Jane and her family.

The Jane Austin Festival



For true aficionados of the author, the Jane Austen Festival in Bath every September is a 10-day celebration of her life and work.

The festival begins with the *Costumed Promenade* through the streets by over 500 people in Regency dress.

This is followed by a two-week programme of guided walks, costumed balls, theatrical performances and discussion events.

The growing popularity of the festival is a sure sign of Austin's enduring appeal in the city she loved.

The next two festivals will be held from 13 to 22 September 2024 and 12 to 21 September 2025.

More information

www.janeausten.co.uk

The American Museum and Gardens

The American Museum and Gardens was created by Dallas Pratt and John Judkyn, an Anglo-American couple to 'showcase American decorative arts and dispel stereotypes of American culture'.



Located in a Grade I listed building, the Museum features a fascinating collection of Americana, including rooms' that recreate periods of American history.

There are over 12,000 objects which showcase the finest examples of American decorative arts along with quilts and American folk art which are among the most significant in Europe.

It also houses Dallas Pratt's map collection, one of the great collections of Renaissance maps in the world.

The American Museum itself came about after Pratt and Judkyn took a whirlwind collecting spree of the USA in the late 1950s, gathering much of what is on display in the Museum in the process.

Another pleasure of a visit are the gardens set within 125 acres of green, rolling meadows with views across the valleys.

Grade II listed, the gardens represent some of the most iconic movements in American landscape design and include the New American Garden and Mount Vernon, which is a replica of George Washington's garden in Washington, DC.

More information

www.americanmuseum.org/





Hotel Indigo Bath offers whimsical elegance in abundance

A heady mix of whimsical charm and timeless elegance welcomed me to Hotel Indigo Bath.

By Ann Mealor

Plush décor, rich colours, abstract regency style portraits, rows of well-thumbed antique books, sumptuous, intensely coloured button-backed sofas and glamorous lighting all made for old town house grandeur, with a smattering of glitz.

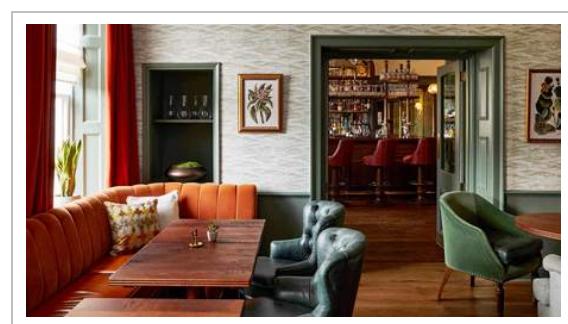
A taste of Bath in its 'Debutant Season' party heyday. And I loved it!

Grade one listed

Grade one listed and dating back to the 18th Century Hotel Indigo Bath is made up of 12 stunning, honey-coloured Georgian townhouses.

Although it has 166 bedrooms it maintains the feel of a bijou boutique hotel with its narrow, winding corridors, richly carpeted staircase, and cosy décor - contemporary with a traditional twist, reflecting the style of an 18th century Georgian home.

Situated in the heart of the city it is close to all Bath's major historical and cultural attractions including Bath Abbey, the Roman Baths and my personal favourite, *The Royal Crescent*.



The rooms



Bedroom styles reflects the culture and history of the neighbourhood, an area known for gambling, gaming, romance and mischief as well as soirees, parties and afternoon tea.

Our room was bright and spacious with all the mod cons as well as some quaint and quirky Georgian touches, including a set of round hat boxes and an 18th century scene of Bath painted onto the chest of drawers.

A decorative frieze of white plaster hung on the pale blue wall above the sumptuously comfy and extremely large *hypnos* bed.

The stylish black and white tiled bathroom had a powerful walk-in rainfall shower and a handy map of Bath etched onto the window next to the roll top bath.

This made for interesting reading while having a luxury soak.

There were full size bottles of lovely Bramley smellies and white towelling robes and slippers to relax in. Tea, coffee and biscuits were plentiful and complimentary soft drinks were cooling in the fridge.

Dining in the Elder

Dinner that evening was in the adjoining *Elder Restaurant*, run and owned by West Country restaurateur, Mike Robinson.

Mike uses only ethical and sustainable farmers, foragers and fishermen to provide his meat, fish and vegetables.

Venison is processed in his larder from wild deer on his own land.

The restaurant with its planked oak floor, stuffed stag's head on the wall, green wood panelling, tan leather button-backed banquets and green leather studded chairs.

This gives the *Elder* the earthy feel of a hunting lodge, a place where cigars once were smoked, and adventures discussed.



As we sat mulling over the menu, a small loaf of warm, crusty bread with a pat of salted butter and two small glasses of onion broth for dipping, came to the table.

I tucked-in immediately.

The starters

I went for the artichoke velouté, smooth and woody with a hint of sweetness provided by the sherry jelly. Ashley went for the refreshing and colourful citrus cured sea trout paired with crunchy flaked almonds, basil and tomatoes.

For the main course we both chose the Cornish pink bream with a silky hollandaise sauce and crushed potatoes. The skin was crispy and the flesh succulent.

The squid salad that came with it was a tasty surprise and went well with the fish, adding texture to the dish.

Having taken our time, we pushed the boat out and had a dessert, tempted by our very helpful waiter, Nick's recommendation of the blackcurrant soufflé with warm Kir Royal sauce and smooth elderflower ice cream.

Who could resist that?

Pretty, pink and rising out of its ramekin like some rare forest flora we made short work of its demise. A fitting grand finale to a delicious meal.

Breakfast

Breakfast was in the comfortable bar area and had everything needed to fuel the body for a full day of exploring Bath.

Knowing I wouldn't be eating lunch, I started with fruit, slices of fresh, juicy pineapple and watermelon and then chose the full English breakfast of bacon, field mushroom, tomato, creamy scrambled egg, and baked beans with two pieces of toast.



Ashley's vegetarian option with half a sliced ripe avocado and pan-fried halloumi, in place of the meat, was also very satisfying.

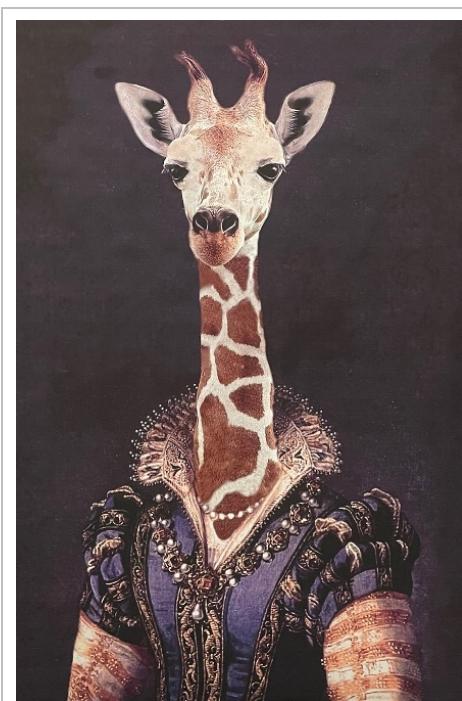
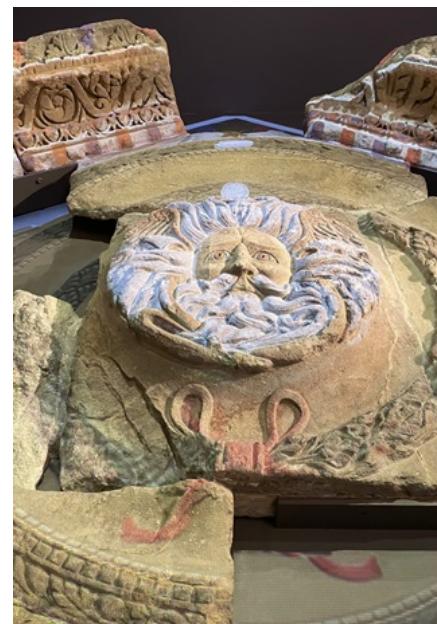
On the buffet were homemade flaky pastries, cheese, meats, yoghurt cereals and juice – all nicely presented. The help yourself toaster was a bonus, and meant my toast was always fresh and hot – great for soaking up the local butter. What a treat!

Staff at Hotel Indigo Bath were truly helpful, extremely knowledgeable always attentive. It helped to make our stay at this grand hotel a memorable experience.

More information

www.bath.hotelindigo.com
www.theelder.co.uk

A snapshot of Bath



AllWays traveller and the International Travel Writers Alliance



AllWays traveller is the consumer travel magazine from the International Travel Writers, providing independent travellers with views of the world from Alliance travel journalists.

www.allwaystraveller.com



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

www.itwalliance.com



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