

The Midlands



The heart of England: that's how Midlanders like to describe their region. Wits in Scotland and Wales quip that 'the groin of Britain' is more apt. If that's so, then this nether region is more fertile than most. It has produced arguably the world's greatest playwright in William Shakespeare, and millions still make the pilgrimage to his pretty birth-town, Stratford-upon-Avon. While a youthful Shakey frolicked by the River Avon, the magnificent Warwick Castle – still beautifully preserved – was being forged a short way upstream. Meanwhile, in Kenilworth, another castle blossomed before it crumbled into disrepair and formed a hauntingly evocative ruin. And to the north the mighty Gothic Lichfield Cathedral scores highly on the spine-tingling and memorable scale too.

Midlands' cities do suffer a bad rap, however. WWII bombs, dire town planning, and a gritty industrial history have tarnished their reputation. But now an infectious cosmopolitan energy is changing all that. Nightlife and shopping hotspots are booming – and they're good value compared with London. And, once you've filled your boots with the urban good life, there's plenty of rural relief. Walkers and bikers flock to the lovely Peak District, while unspoilt towns and villages distinguish the countryside of Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire.

Heart or groin, the message is clear: you shouldn't neglect it.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Drinking in the untamed beauty of the Peak District around **Edale** (p449)
- Strolling around the quirky lost 'seaside' resort of **Matlock Bath** (p442)
- Getting down to the famous live music of Birmingham's **Jam House** (p416)
- Marvelling at the human drama of a Shakespeare play at **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p422)
- Blasting off into the orbit of Leicester's **National Space Centre** (p431)
- Stepping back in time at the glorious, medieval **Warwick Castle** (p420)



■ POPULATION: 9.5 MILLION

■ AREA: 11,551 SQ MILES

Orientation

It is perhaps easiest to orientate yourself here by motorways. The M1 winds north from London, demarking the eastern third of the region (which is bounded to the east by the A1). It runs parallel with a line of the East Midlands' major towns: Bedford, Northampton, Leicester, Derby and Nottingham, in that order. The M40 does the same for the south and west of the region, passing Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick on its way to the M42 and Birmingham in the centre of the Midlands. Routes spider out from Birmingham: the M6 runs east towards Coventry and the M1, and northwest up towards Wolverhampton, Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent; the M54 splits off at Wolverhampton to head over

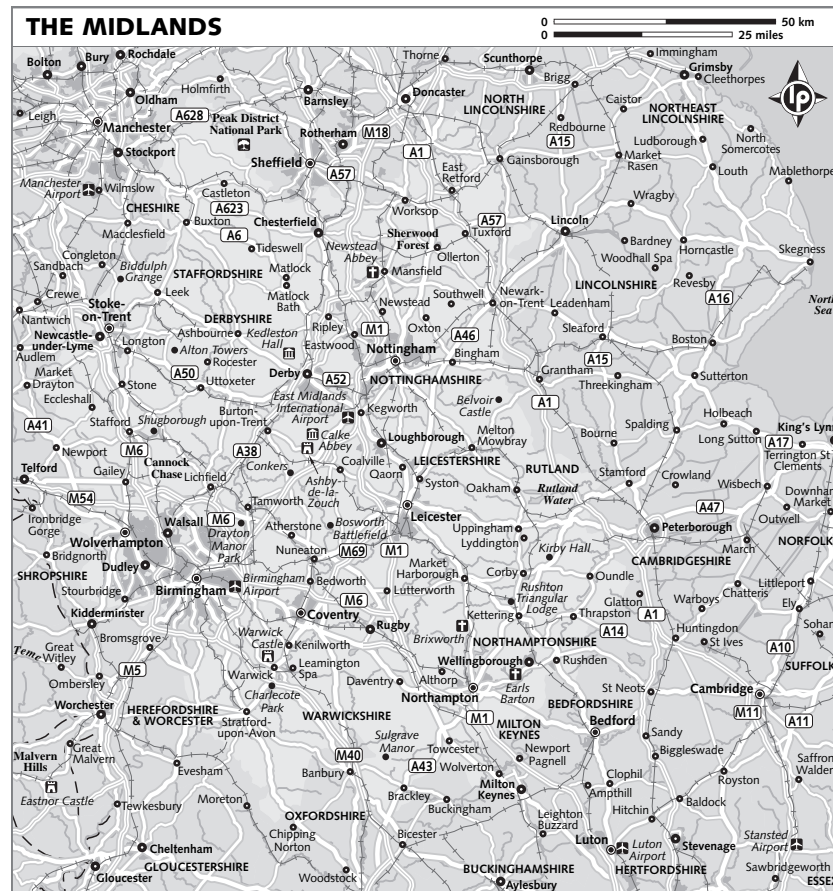
to Telford and Shrewsbury. The Peak District is midway between the M1 and the M6.

Information

The **Heart of England Tourist Board** (☎ 01905-761100; www.visitheartofengland.com) has centralised tourist information for the region and is a good place to start your planning.

Activities

The Peak District National Park is one of the finest areas in England for **walking** and **cyding**; see p446 for more details. It's also home to the start of the Pennine Way national trail, which leads keen walkers for 268 miles through Yorkshire and Northumberland into Scotland. The Pennine Bridleway starts south of the walking



route and is designed for **horse riding** and off-road cycling as well as walking. About one-third of a planned 350-mile route is now open.

But these long-distance epics are the tip of the iceberg; the Peak District is crisscrossed with a vast network of paths for walkers, country lanes for touring cyclists, and tracks and bridleways for mountain bikers – with something for every level of ability. Ideal bases include the villages and towns of Buxton, Matlock Bath, Edale and Castleton, or the national park centre at Fairholmes on the Derwent Reservoirs. Bikes can be hired at Fairholmes and various other points around the Peak District, especially in the areas where old railway lines have been converted into delightful walking and cycling tracks.

In the south of the Midlands region, other good places for walking and cycling include Cannock Chase and, for those who are after more sedate options, the National Forest, an ongoing project to plant 30 million trees across this part of central England. The main centre (called Conkers) is near Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire.

Water-lovers of all levels also flock to Rutland Water, a giant reservoir, for **sailing** and **windsurfing**. It is surrounded by cycling and walking trails if the wet stuff is not your thing.

A **canal boat** is one of the most fun ways to get active, with the metropolis of Birmingham the unlikely epicentre. Get a group of you on board with bikes, and you can enjoy the canal-side paths by wheel or by foot at your leisure, as you gently chug your way through the country's massive network of manmade waterways; see the boxed text, p92, for how to get started.

More information on all the above can be found in the Outdoor Activities chapter, p83.

Getting There & Around

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) is the main coach service in the Midlands and throughout the country. Birmingham is a major hub. For regional bus timetables, consult **SCB East Midlands Travel & Leisure** (www.scbestmidstravel.co.uk). Regional bus services are provided by **Stagecoach** (☎ 01788-535555; Explorer tickets adult/child £6.50/4.50) and **Travel West Midlands** (www.travelwm.co.uk). Take the right money for the latter as no change is given on any of its services. **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline.midlands.co.uk) is a comprehensive and impartial guide to transport in the region and beyond.

BIRMINGHAM

☎ 0121 / pop 977,087

Once a drab, grimy urban basket case, England's second-largest city – nicknamed 'Brum' – has spectacularly reinvented itself as a vibrant, cultural hot spot. Huge regeneration projects have breathed life into the industrial landscapes and canals that crisscross the city; now there are more glamorous shops, buzzing pubs and jumping nightclubs than you can shake a bargepole at.

Mind you, it's still no oil painting. The familiar destructive brew of WWII bombs and woeful town planning left a legacy of concrete and ring roads that will probably never fully be disguised. But, no matter: Birmingham is making the most of what it's got. Established cultural and architectural gems dot the city centre and planners keep coming up with ever more innovative architectural makeovers: the striking postindustrial Bullring shopping centre is just the latest. Although the manufacturing industry that defined Birmingham as the 'workhorse of the world' is declining (workers at the Longbridge Rover car factory recently felt the pinch of the moribund UK car industry), the city is well placed to adapt. More self-assured, cool and confident than it has been in many a year, it is hampered by only one thing – its inhabitants' accent, which is consistently voted England's least attractive.

HISTORY

One of the great centres of the Industrial Revolution, Birmingham has been the birthplace of several inventions; it was home to steam pioneers James Watt (1736–1819) and Matthew Boulton (1728–1809) and chemist Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), to name a few. By the mid-19th century, though, the city exemplified much that was bad about industrial development. It wasn't until the mid-1800s, under enlightened mayors such as Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914), that Birmingham first became a trendsetter in civic regeneration. But WWII air raids and postwar town planners were to undo their good work in large part.

Fortunately, the city's leadership is once again devoting itself to ground-breaking civic revitalisation, creating the award-winning Brindleyplace, the Mailbox, Millennium Point and, most recently, the Bullring in formerly grim urban wastelands.

ORIENTATION

The one aspect of Birmingham that's still indisputably a nightmare is driving in it. The endless ring roads, roundabouts and underpasses make it particularly confusing for motorists to navigate. It's wise to park somewhere and explore the city on foot until you get your bearings.

Taking the huge Council House as the centre, to the west is Centenary Sq, the International Convention Centre and Symphony Hall, and the development at Gas St Basin and Brindleyplace.

Southeast of the Council House, most of Birmingham's shops can be found along pedestrianised New St and in the modern City Plaza, Pallasades and Pavilions shopping centres. The Arcadian centre is further south, but still in the centre, and marks the beginning of Chinatown. Between New St station and Digbeth coach station is the Bullring, a sleek, architecturally striking shopping complex (see www.bullring.co.uk).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Bonds Books (☎ 427 9343; www.bondbooks.co.uk; 97a High St, Harborne) Well-known independent bookstore, about 10 minutes' bus journey from the centre.

Waterstone's High St (☎ 633 4353; 24 High St); New St (☎ 631 4333; 128 New St)

Emergency

Police station (☎ 0845 113 5000; Steelhouse Lane)

Internet Access

Central Library (☎ 303 4511; Chamberlain Sq; ☎ 9am–8pm Mon–Fri, to 5pm Sat) Internet access is free by reservation.

Orange Studio (☎ 634 2800; www.orangestudio.co.uk; 7 Cannon St; per hr £2; ☎ 8.30am–6.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6.30pm Sat) This hip 'chat café' – an offshoot of a major mobile phone network – also has an upmarket 1st-floor restaurant.

Internet Resources

BBC Birmingham home page (www.bbc.co.uk/birmingham)

Birmingham Council (www.birmingham.gov.uk)

Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery (www.bmag.org.uk) Information on most of the city's museums and galleries, including opening hours, admission costs and forthcoming exhibitions.

Birmingham UK (www.birminghamuk.com)

Gay Birmingham (www.gaybrum.com) Information for gay visitors.

icBirmingham (http://icbirmingham.icnetwork.co.uk)

The local newspaper's website.

Travel West Midlands (www.travelwm.co.uk) Travel planning from the main bus company.

Laundry

Laundry & Dry Cleaning Centre (☎ 771 3659; 236 Warwick Rd, Sparkhill)

Left Luggage

New Street station (☎ 632 6884; Station Forecourt; locker hire per day £5.50; ☎ 7am–11pm Mon–Sat, 8am–10pm Sun)

Media

Various free magazines fill hotel lobbies, bars and restaurants, providing handy updates on current exhibitions, restaurants, and the hippest bars and clubs. Pick of the bunch is the fortnightly *What's On* magazine, free at some bars and the tourist office.

Medical Services

Birmingham Children's Hospital (☎ 333 9999; Steelhouse Lane)

Heartlands Hospital (☎ 424 3263; Bordesley Green E) Catch bus 15, 17 or 97.

Money

American Express (☎ 644 5555; Bank House, Cherry Union St)

HSBC Bank & Thomas Cook Exchange (☎ 643 5057; 130 New St)

Lloyds TSB (2 Brindleyplace)

NatWest Bank (Arcadian Centre)

Post

Central post office (1 Pinfold St, Victoria Sq; ☎ 9am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, to 6pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Tourist office (www.birmingham.org.uk) Main branch (☎ 202 5099; The Rotunda, 150 New St; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon & Wed–Sat, 10am–5.30pm Tue, 10.30am–4.30pm Sun); Welcome Centre (cnr New & Corporation Sts; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm Sun) The helpful, brochure-stuffed main branch has a wide range of maps and themed leaflets.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

What were once the scariest parts of Birmingham – the area around the Bullring, for example – have been transformed by the city's dramatic refurbishments. And the city's vibrant nightlife means there's as much activity



on the main streets at 2am as there is at 2pm, although the area around Digbeth bus station has an edge to it. As in most large cities, it's wise to avoid walking alone late at night in unlit areas, particularly if you're a woman.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Town Centre

The central pedestrians-only Victoria Sq features a giant **fountain** of a bathing woman (nicknamed, amusingly, 'the floozy in the Jacuzzi'), and a drab **statue of Queen Victoria**. It adjoins Chamberlain Sq, with its **memorial to Joseph Chamberlain**, one of Birmingham's more enlightened mayors. These squares share some eye-catching architecture. The imposing **Council House** forms the northeastern face of the precinct. Its northwestern corner is formed by the modernist **Central Library**, reminiscent of

an inverted ziggurat, with the Paradise Forum shop and café complex next to it.

To the south is the **Town Hall** (1834), designed by Joseph Hansom (creator of the hansom cab, forerunner to London's black taxis) to look like the Temple of Castor and Pollux in Rome. For those who won't make it to Gateshead to see Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* statue (p26), his wingless **Iron Man** (1993), on Victoria Sq, is a step in the same direction.

West of the precinct, Centenary Sq is another pedestrian square closed off at the western end by the **International Convention Centre** and the Symphony Hall (p417), and overlooked by the Repertory Theatre. Inside the square is the **Hall of Memory War Memorial**, and there are often temporary exhibitions.

The impressive **Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 303 2834; www.bmag.org.uk; Chamberlain Sq;

BIRMINGHAM IN...

Two Days

There's no mistaking where Birmingham excels these days: shopping. Feel your cash burn a hole in your pocket as you work through the series of exceptional commercial redevelopments that have rejuvenated the city. Perhaps work from east to west. Take in the quirky original **Custard Factory** (p417) before heading up to the more mainstream **Bullring** (p417) with its space-age Selfridges building and hundreds of outlets. Dip south to the chic **Mailbox** (p412) and then take the trek up to the historical **Jewellery Quarter** (p412). Even if the credit has run dry, it is well worth a look. Being a shameless consumer is hungry work, but Brindleyplace has the answer: the **Bank** (p416) restaurant is one of the city's slickest places to eat. Then retrace your steps either to the **Jam House** (p416) in the Jewellery Quarter or the **Medicine Bar** (p416) in the Custard Factory – both rocking nights out. Gently does it on day two. Nourish the soul with the free, Pre-Raphaelite-studded **Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery** (above). We then recommend a bit of people-watching in Birmingham's historical core around Victoria, Chamberlain and Centenary Sqs before you catch a bus or taxi to the famous **Balti Triangle** (p415) to sample the curry dish that was born in Birmingham.

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, but add a **crui**se (p414) along Birmingham's extraordinary canal network. A show at the world-class **Repertory** (p417) should be next on the cards. Next morning, make a pilgrimage to the **Barber Institute** (p413) to see one of the region's most outstanding art collections. For a sweet interlude, make your way down to the chocolate paradise of **Cadbury World** (p412) for a seriously sugary experience. In the evening, take in an art-house film at the **Electric** (p417), the oldest working cinema in the country.

One Week

Follow the four-day schedule then use the extra days to visit outlying areas. In the summer, you can take a **steam train** (p418) to Shakespeare's **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p422). More conventional trains head to **Lichfield** (p426), with its marvellous three-spired cathedral. Twenty miles east of Birmingham is Coventry, with Sir Basil Spence's fantastic postwar **St Michael's Cathedral** (p419), which is symbolically joined to the bombed-out old cathedral. Or, for a longer jaunt, escape to the **Peak District** (p444) for three days of long walks and cosy pubs.

admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 10.30am-5pm Fri, 12.30-5pm Sun) has displays of local and natural history, archaeology and ethnography exhibits, and a renowned collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings. Other highlights include a fine porcelain collection and works by Degas, Renoir and Canaletto. You can sip coffee and nibble cake in the charming Edwardian tearoom.

One of England's smallest cathedrals, the striking **Cathedral Church of St Philip** (☎ 262 1840; Colmore Row; donations requested; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5.30pm Sat & Sun), was constructed in a neoclassical style between 1709 and 1715. The Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones was responsible for the magnificent stained-glass windows: the *Last Judgement*, which can be seen at the western end, and *Nativity*, *Crucifixion* and *Ascension* at the eastern end.

Gas Street, Brindleyplace & the Mailbox

Birmingham sits at the heart of England's canal network (the city actually has more canals than Venice), and visiting narrowboats can moor in the Gas St Basin right in the heart of the city. Nearby Brindleyplace, a waterfront development of trendy shops, restaurants and bars created during the 1990s, has transformed the area west of Centenary Sq into a buzzing nightlife scene. A similar development to the southeast, the Mailbox, is even more style-conscious, bristling with designer boutiques and smart restaurants.

The **Ikon Gallery** (☎ 248 0708; www.ikon-gallery.co.uk; 1 Oozells Sq, Brindleyplace; admission free; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun) is a stylishly converted Gothic schoolhouse divided into smallish rooms. It has changing exhibitions of contemporary visual art. The Spanish cuisine dished up in the adjoining café is a great option for refuelling between cultural hot spots – but it will lighten your pockets.

The **National Sealife Centre** (☎ 633 4700; www.sealifeeurope.com; 3a Brindleyplace; adult/child £12.50/8.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun), a state-of-the-art facility designed by Sir Norman Foster, is the largest inland aquarium in England; it swarms with exotic marine life. There's a sea-horse breeding facility – if you're lucky you might get a rare glimpse of a male sea horse delivering his thousand babies. The otter sanctuary is also a favourite with kids.

Jewellery Quarter

Birmingham has long been a major jewellery production centre, and the Jewellery Quarter

is packed with manufacturers and showrooms. The tourist office provides a free booklet *Jewellery Quarter: The Essential Guide*, which includes information about the industry and details of walking trails around the district.

In the **Museum of the Jewellery Quarter** (☎ 554 3598; 75-79 Vyse St; admission free; ☎ 11.30am-4pm Tue-Sun), the Smith & Pepper jewellery factory remains as it was on the day it closed in 1981 – including abandoned tea mugs and Marmite jars – after 80 years of operation. You can explore the long history of jewellery-making in Birmingham and watch demonstrations of the art.

The Jewellery Quarter is about three-quarters of a mile northwest of the centre; catch one of a host of buses (101 is the easiest), or take the Metro from Snow Hill or the train from Moor St to Jewellery Quarter station.

Within walking distance of the Jewellery Quarter is **Soho House** (☎ 554 9122; Soho Ave, Handsworth; admission free; ☎ 11.30am-4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), where the industrialist Matthew Boulton lived from 1766 to 1809. It has been painstakingly restored to reflect the styles of Boulton's era, and features displays on the great man's life and the lives of his associates, including James Watt. Buses 74 and 79 pass nearby, or take the Metro to Benson Rd station from Snow Hill.

Outlying Areas

Chocoholics from miles around flock to **Cadbury World** (☎ 0845 450 3599; www.cadburyworld.co.uk; Linden Rd; adult/child £12.50/9.50), which provides a lip-smacking exploration into the history, production and consumption of the ever popular confectionery, seen through the eyes of one of the world's largest chocolate-makers. Kids – and sweet-toothed grown-ups – will love it, but beware of the afternoon sugar-crash! Ride a beanmobile or wander down Cocoa Rd, paved with 'talking chocolate splodges'. If you're lucky, you may get to see the finishing touches being put to your favourite chocolate. Book ahead – it's very popular in July and August. Opening hours vary. It's closed for some of December and most of January, but open from 10am to 3pm or 4pm for most of the rest of the year (phone or check the website for details).

Cadbury World is part of pretty **Bournville Village**, designed for early-20th-century factory workers by the Cadbury family. Large houses, each unique, are set around a green. **Selly Manor** (☎ 472 0199; Maple Rd; adult/child £3/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri year-round, plus 2-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep), dating from 1327 or earlier, was carefully taken apart and

reconstructed by George Cadbury – who looks remarkably like Sigmund Freud – in order to save it from destruction. It has 18th-century furnishings and a Tudor garden.

The easiest way to get to Bournville is by train from Birmingham New St (five minutes). You can also get bus 45 or 47. Ask the driver to let you off at Pershore Rd.

East of the centre, the Millennium Point development is designed to help people understand science and technology. The focal point is **Thinktank** (☎ 202 2222; www.thinktank.ac; Curzon St; adult/child £6.95/4.95; ☎ 10am-5pm), an ambitious attempt to make science accessible (primarily to kids). Interactive displays cover topics such as the body and medicine, science in everyday life, nature, future technology, and industrial history, as well as an impressive new digital **Planetarium** (admission £1, advance booking required).

A visit to the **Barber Institute** (☎ 414 7333; www.barber.org.uk; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is, for art lovers, a highlight of a trip to Birmingham. The collection takes in Renaissance masterpieces, paintings by old masters such as Rubens and Van Dyck, British greats including Gainsborough, Reynolds and Turner,

an array of impressionist pieces and modern classics by the likes of Picasso and Schiele.

The Barber Institute is at the University of Birmingham, 2.5 miles south of the city centre. Take the train from New St to University station, or catch bus 61, 62 or 63 from Corporation St.

BRUM NIGHTLIFE WALKING TOUR

Birmingham by night is one of the most buzzing, vibrant metropolises in the UK – no on-looker could call this part of the world drab after a wander through the streets at midnight on a Friday. This tour, about 2 miles, will take you through some of the hippest, most happening and memorable nightspots in town. Put aside two hours if you're pressed for time, otherwise just go with the flow...

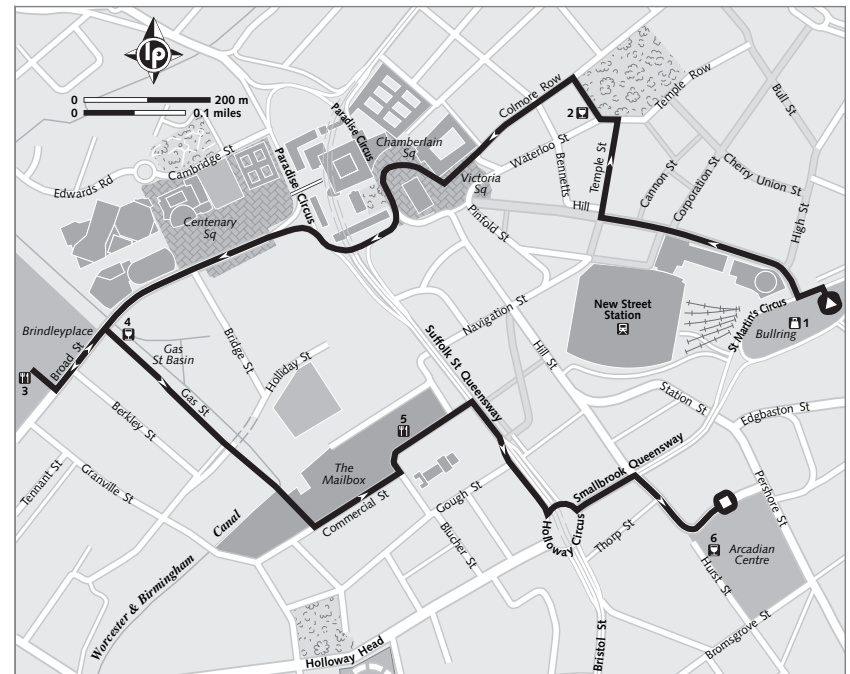
WALK FACTS

Start Bullring

Finish Prague

Distance 2 miles

Duration two hours or more



Ease yourself into the tour with a shot of caffeine at the balcony café by the space-age Selfridges in the **Bullring** (1; p417). A spot of people-watching later and it's time to hit the road. Weave between the New St late shoppers and branch off to the magnificent **Old Joint Stock** (2; p416) pub where you can share the suits' relief as they spill out of the nearby offices. Skirt by the old cathedral, ease your way through Victoria Sq then Chamberlain Sq and wander through Centenary Sq, mingling with the theatre fans and concertgoers. In winter, get your skates on at the ice rink, while temporary open-air exhibitions divert passers-by at most times of the year. Hungry yet? Just a little bit further and swanky Brindleyplace has just the answer with the peerless **Le Petit Blanc** (3; p416). Sit down and let your olfactory senses be pampered. Appetite quenched? Now creep out to Broad St. Look right, look left. Quick, dash between the screeching hen and lairy stag parties and duck into the one oasis of sanity in this part of town, the **Tap & Spile** (4; p416). Fine ales on tap in a nooks-and-cranies pub are your reward. Now take the downstairs exit by the canal and stroll south by the water where the new, flashily revamped Mailbox development looms ahead. Join the city's bright young things in **Bar Estilo** (5; opposite). There are plenty of other sleek places to be seen in this well-heeled part of town, which could easily distract you from the final leg of our tour, the Arcadian Centre, chock-a-block with night-time options, including buzzing **Prague** (6; p416). You've got this far, the rest of the night is up to you...

BIRMINGHAM FOR CHILDREN

The most obvious place to keep the kids entertained is Cadbury World (p412). Partly educational, it should also satisfy any sweet-tooth cravings until Christmas. Ease away the sugar high with a family cruise (see right) down one of Birmingham's many narrow canals; a crucial part of the kids' education on why the city really mattered in the UK's development.

Just away from the Brindleyplace section of the canal, the National Sealife Centre (p412) has water creatures aplenty. Playful otters will appeal to everyone, but especially the little ones. Meanwhile, there's plenty to explore at the Thinktank (p413), a gigantic attraction where the goal is to make science exciting and accessible, in particular for children. And you're unlikely to hear too many peeps from

them with absorbing 3D films at the IMAX (p417) cinema in the same complex.

TOURS

Second City Canal Cruises (☎ 236 9811; www.secondcityboats.co.uk; adult/child £3.50/2.50) Hour-long tours leave by arrangement from the Canalside Souvenir Shop in Gas St Basin.

Sherborne Wharf (☎ 455 6163; www.sherbornewharf.co.uk; Sherborne St; ☎ trips at 11.30am, 1pm, 2.30pm & 4pm daily mid-Apr–Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov–mid-Apr; adult/child £4.50/4) Canal cruises leave from the International Convention Centre quayside.

West Midlands Waterways (☎ 200 7400; www.waterscape.com; Cambrian House, 2 Canalside; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat & Sun Apr–Oct) Has leaflets, advice on days out by the water and details on how and where to hire canal boats. It's off King Edwards Rd.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Birmingham has a number of interesting cultural festivals. Here are some of the highlights. **Crufts Dog Show** (www.crufts.org.uk) The world's largest dog show, in March, with more than 20,000 canines on parade.

Gay Pride (www.birminghamgaypride.co.uk) One of the largest and most colourful celebrations of gay and lesbian culture in the country; held in May.

Collide (☎ 303 3984; www.collide-arts.co.uk) Birmingham City Council runs this ground-breaking arts festival, from May to June, showcasing works from up-and-coming local black and Asian artists.

Latin American Festival (www.abslatin.co.uk) This annual festival in June/July celebrates the Latin American community and culture in Birmingham.

Artsfest (www.artsfest.org.uk) The UK's largest free arts festival features visual arts, dance and musical performances in various venues across the city in September.

Heritage Open Days (☎ 0870 240 5251; www.heritageopendays.org) This unique event in September allows visitors free access to historic properties that are not usually open or normally charge an entrance fee.

Horse of the Year Show (www.hoys.co.uk) Top show-jumping equestrian event in October.

SLEEPING

Central hotels tend to court business visitors and are usually at the higher end of the price spectrum, but often reduce their rates at the weekend. Check online or ask about specials at the tourist office, which also makes bookings. Few B&Bs are central, but many lie within a 3-mile radius of the centre, especially in Acocks Green (southeast) and the area stretching from Edgbaston to Selly Oak (southwest).

Budget

Billy's Hostel (☎ 07951 745102, 07930 143439; gdbirmingham@hotmail.co.uk; 58 Coventry St; dm £17; ☎) It's the only backpackers joint in town, a very basic place a short walk from Digbeth bus station. It's not salubrious, but it seems secure. The welcome is warm enough – and the pub is literally right downstairs.

Formule 1 (☎ 773 9583; www.hotelformule1.com; 3 Bordesley Park Rd, Small Heath Highway; r £24.95; ☎) Cheap as chips, soulless, modern and clean: this place uses the same formula here as it does elsewhere. Rooms fit up to three people and it's about 20 minutes' walk from the centre.

Midrange

The better midrange options tend to be out of town – character-challenged chains dominate the centre, although they are convenient.

Awentsbury Hotel (☎ 472 1258; www.awentsbury.com; 21 Serpentine Rd, Selly Park; s/d incl breakfast from £42/56; ☎) The imposing Victorian exterior belies a welcoming B&B in the best English tradition at this house in Selly Park, close to the university. It also boasts a private vintage-car collection and a top-notch cooked breakfast.

Nitenite (☎ 236 9000; www.nitenite.com; 18 Holliday St; r £49.95; ☎) This unusual place shouldn't be comfortable but somehow is. Rooms are tiny and have giant plasma TV screens with live Birmingham webcam images instead of windows. Yet the custom-made beds and leather fittings make it seem cosy rather than cramped.

Westbourne Lodge (☎ 429 1003; www.westbourne.lodge.co.uk; Fountain Rd; s/d incl breakfast £55/75; ☎) Removed from the bustle of the city centre, this is still conveniently located just off the main road in southwest Edgbaston. Affable owners take pride in their terrace, a boon in the summer months. White-linen rooms are frilly but not overly so.

Ibis Hotel (☎ 622 6010; fax 622 6020; Arcadian Centre, Ladywell Walk; d £56.95; ☎) You know exactly what you're getting here: a spotless identikit room with the same wallpaper that you'll get in the same hotel chain in Mozambique. Within the Arcadian Centre by Chinatown, it's in a convenient location for a night out. Parking is £10 per night.

Top End

Burlington Hotel (☎ 643 9191; www.burlingtonhotel.com; Burlington Arcade, 126 New St; s/d Sun–Thu £145/155, Fri & Sat £90/130; ☎) The venerable old gentleman of Birmingham hotels, the Burlington is lavishly

furnished with marble hallways and expensive glass lampshades. Some classic rooms have stand-alone bathtubs. Despite its size (there are 112 rooms), it feels quite personal and the restaurant is a fine option for sophisticated Continental cuisine.

Hotel du Vin (☎ 200 0600; www.hotelduvin.com; Church St; d from £135; ☎) Elegant, chic...and *cher*, this is a seriously opulent boutique hotel, converted, bizarrely, from a Victorian eye hospital. Egyptian linen and duck-down duvets characterise the bedrooms. Ask for an inside room overlooking the courtyard. Manicures, massages and spas are all options for the indulgent. Bookings are advised for its bistro restaurant.

EATING

Birmingham's most famous contribution to cuisine is the balti, a Pakistani dish that has been adopted by curry houses across the country. The heartland is the Birmingham Balti Triangle in Sparkbrook, 2 miles south of the centre. Pick up a complete listings leaflet in the tourist office (or see the website www.thebaltiguide.com) and head out on bus 4, 5, 6, 12, 31 or 37 from Corporation St.

Al Frash (☎ 753 3120; www.alfrash.com; 186 Ladypool Rd, Sparkbrook; mains £8–8; ☎ 5pm–1am Sun–Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat; ☎) This is *the* place to experience the legendary Birmingham balti. Don't go for the flourishes – there aren't any. Just go for the massive excellent-veal portions, and the good-natured service. If you're getting the bus ask the driver to stop by Ladypool Rd.

Arcadian Palace (☎ 622 3283; Unit B109 Arcadian Centre, Pershore St; mains £6–9; ☎ noon–9.30pm Fri–Wed) Run by a supernice family, this simple, dinky, cafélike Chinese restaurant heaps the portions high and keeps the prices reasonably low. We liked the sizzling satay beef with crispy noodles (£6.80).

Chez Jules (☎ 633 4664; 5a Ethel St; mains £8–13, 2-course lunch £7.90; ☎ noon–4pm & 5–11pm, closed dinner Sun) French finesse defines the great-tasting dishes served up at this excellent bistro. Burgundy walls, a spacious dining area, long benches – perfect for group dining – and reasonable house wine prices add a certain *je ne sais quoi*.

Bar Estilo (☎ 643 3443; 110–114 Wharfedale St; mains £8–13, 2-course set lunch £8; ☎ noon–11pm Mon–Sat, to 10.30pm Sun) A rustic chic interior – all terracotta, dimmed lighting and plush sofas – makes this bar-restaurant the venue of choice for the Mailbox smart set. The Mediterranean-influenced menu – the same as in the

restaurant's London-based siblings – is reasonable, especially at lunchtime.

Chung Ying Garden (☎ 666 6622; 17 Thorp St; mains £8-14; ☎ noon-11pm) Get beyond the occasionally surly service and you'll be hard-pressed to fault the fine Cantonese dishes at this cavernous Chinatown favourite. With 70 varieties of dim sum, the biggest challenge is selecting from the menu!

San Carlo (☎ 633 0251; 4 Temple St; mains £10-16; ☎ noon-11pm) With Italian food far better than most mamas ever manage, this slick central restaurant is a magnet for local celebrities – although service can be on the haughty side.

Le Petit Blanc (☎ 633 7333; 9 Brindleyplace; mains £10-17; ☎ noon-2.45pm & 5.30-10.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-11pm Sat, noon-10pm Sun) Seriously stylish brasserie with contemporary French cuisine, this place exhibits all the hallmarks of its owner, Française superchef Raymond Blanc. Reservations are recommended.

Bank (☎ 633 4466; 4 Brindleyplace; 3-course meal £12.50, mains £12-20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun; ♿) Huge glass front panels make this swanky restaurant a bit of a culinary goldfish bowl, but most diners don't complain – the sophisticated modern-Brit dishes are quite special.

DRINKING

Chain pubs litter the city centre, especially on the deeply unappealing main Broad St drag. There are, however, more than a few gems if you know where to look.

Tap & Spile (☎ 632 5602; Gas St; ☎ 11am-11pm Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat) Overlooking the canal, this traditional pub is all hidden alcoves and corners, especially once you move away from the sardine tin that is the top bar. There's a good selection of ales on tap here too.

Old Joint Stock (☎ 200 1892; 4 Temple Row West; ☎ closed Sun) This vast, high-ceilinged cathedral of beer, a former bank, is marred by service without a smile. But the glittering furnishings and impressive setting, together with some half-decent ales, make it worth a stop.

Sunflower Lounge (☎ 472 0138; 76 Smallbrook Queensway; ☎ noon-11pm Mon-Wed, noon-1am Thu & Fri, 1pm-2am Sat, 5pm-10.30pm Sun) A quirky little mod bar in an unlikely setting by a dual carriage-way near the New St train station, this is a relatively undiscovered little gem favoured by the indie crowd, and with a great alternative soundtrack. Live gigs occur regularly in the tiny underground basement venue.

Prague (☎ 666 7789; 101 Hurst St; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Wed, to 2am Thu-Sat, to midnight Sun) Leather sofas; white-tile floor; glammed-up crowds; and a cool, funk-grooved dance soundtrack make this the bar of choice among discerning Arcadian Centre revellers. Portuguese-inspired dishes are also served.

Zinc (☎ 200 0620; Regency Wharf, Gas St Basin) Über-modern Conran bar-diner with an enticing menu and relaxed jazz and funk soundtrack.

ENTERTAINMENT

Tickets for most Birmingham events can be purchased through the national **TicketWeb** (☎ 08700 600 100; www.ticketweb.co.uk). It is cheaper to book online than on the phone. Also check the listings in *What's On* magazine for what's going on.

Nightclubs

Birmingham is throbbing with some of the best nights out in the country. Discover just how rocking the city's after-hours life can be at any of the following.

Medicine Bar (☎ 224 7502; www.factoryclub.co.uk; Custard Factory, Gibb St; ☎ doors open 10pm) The crew working this joint are too cool for school. But they know only too well they are mixing it in the hippest, most happening nightspot in town with a truly eclectic range of nights, from Asian dub to hip-hop to electro pop. A blast.

Nightingale Club (☎ 0871 505 5000; Kent St; ☎ 5pm-late) Birmingham's most established gay nightclub, the Nightingale rocks on three levels, with pop on the bottom floor, and techno rocking the upstairs. Remarkably, after more than three decades of action, it still tops polls as the region's premier gay club and is a known breeding ground for top-name DJs.

Live Music

Jam House (☎ 200 3030; www.thejamhouse.com; 1 St Paul's Sq; ☎ noon-midnight Mon & Tue, noon-2am Wed-Fri, 6pm-2am Sat) Legendary pianist Jools Holland directs the tunes here, an effortlessly classy live-music bar that features live swing, jazz, R&B and rock'n'roll, mixed in with the occasional reggae and ska. This is a real treat. Drinks are pricey, but the vibe is worth it. And if you're feeling like a splurge, the global cuisine of the top-floor restaurant hits all the right notes too.

Birmingham Academy (☎ 262 3000; www.birmingham-academy.co.uk; 52-54 Dale End) The best rock and pop venue in town, attracting big-name acts –

The Strokes and Primal Scream are recent guests. Its indie club nights are a big draw too.

Barfly (☎ 633 8311; www.barflyclub.com; 78 Digbeth High St) Recently opened, this place is a grooming stable for up-and-coming indie bands, spawned by the success of a London-based night. It is warming up now – the bands are getting bigger, and the crowds are getting thicker. The entrance is on Milk St.

Symphony Hall (☎ 780 3333; www.symphonycity.co.uk; Broad St; tickets from £7.50) For classical music, including performances by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, seek out the ultramodern Symphony Hall, which is known for its superb acoustics. World music and jazz acts also feature.

The giant **National Exhibition Centre Arena** (☎ 767 2937), near Birmingham International Airport, hosts major rock and pop acts, as does its sister venue, the **National Indoor Arena** (☎ 767 2937; King Edwards Rd) behind Brindleyplace.

Theatre & Cinemas

Birmingham Repertory Theatre (☎ 236 4455; www.birmingham-rep.co.uk; Centenary Sq, Broad St) In two venues, the Main House and the more experimental Door, 'the Rep' presents top-notch drama, Noel Coward comedies and plays fresh from London's best theatres.

Electric Cinema (☎ 643 7879; www.theelectric.co.uk; 47-49 Station St; adult/child £6/4) Projectors have been rolling here for nigh 100 years, making it the oldest working cinema in the UK. It has an interesting art-house line-up.

IMAX (☎ 202 2222; www.imax.ac; Curzon St; adult/child £6.50/4.50) Birmingham's first Imax cinema, with a five-storey screen, is housed in the same building as the Thinktank.

Sport

Villa Park (☎ 327 5353; www.avfc.co.uk; tickets adult/child from £25/15) Aston Villa football club, one of the Midlands' most enduring teams, plays in this arena north of the city centre.

Warwickshire County Cricket Club (☎ 446 5506; www.edgbaston.com; County Ground, Edgbaston; tickets from £12) Tickets for international test matches sell out early, but local matches are usually available. The Twenty 20 games are pulsating, even for the uninitiated.

SHOPPING

Custard Factory (☎ 604 7777; www.custardfactory.com; Gibb St, Digbeth) One of the most unique, quirky places to shop in Birmingham, full of origi-

nal, independent shops. So named because the building was constructed a century ago by custard magnate Sir Alfred Bird, this fantastic, eye-catching development is a memorable place to buy things you never knew you wanted. Funky niche shops are dotted between an arts and media centre; try the Urban Village for some retro-chic clothing and furnishings.

Jewellery Quarter (www.the-quarter.com) The obvious place for unique local shopping in Birmingham. Much of the jewellery manufactured in England comes from this region and there are more than a hundred shops selling traditionally handcrafted gold and silver jewellery, watches and more. The Museum of the Jewellery Quarter (p412) has leaflets detailing notable retail outlets and artisans.

Another option for serious retail therapy is the **Bullring** (☎ 632 1500), a hellhole-turned-gleaming mall boasting '26 football pitches worth of shops, boutiques and restaurants'. The Selfridges department store is worth a visit for the architecture alone.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Birmingham has a busy **international airport** (☎ 0870 733 5511; www.bhx.co.uk) with flights mainly to European destinations and New York. It's about 8 miles east of the centre of Birmingham.

Bus

Most intercity buses run from dismal Digbeth coach station, which thankfully is due to be knocked down and rebuilt soon. **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) runs coaches between Birmingham and destinations around England including London (£14.50, 2¼ hours, hourly), Oxford (£10.20, 1½ hours, five daily) and Manchester (£11.20, 2½ hours, 11 daily). Bus X20 runs to Stratford-upon-Avon hourly on weekdays (1¼ hours) from Birmingham Moor St.

Train

Most longer distance trains are operated by Virgin Trains from New St station, beneath the Pallasades shopping centre, including those to London (£14.50 value advance single, 1½ hours, every 30 minutes) and Manchester (£9.50 value advance single, 1¼ hours, every 15 minutes). Other services, such as those to Stratford-upon-Avon (£5.40 single, 50 minutes, hourly), run from Snow Hill and Moor St stations.

In July and August, the **Shakespeare Express steam train** (☎ 708 4960; www.vintagetrains.co.uk; standard return £20) operates between Birmingham Snow Hill and Stratford-upon-Avon twice each Sunday. Journeys take one hour.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Trains are the easiest option for getting to the airport. They run frequently between New St and Birmingham International station (20 minutes, every 10 minutes). Bus 900 runs to the airport (45 minutes, every 20 minutes) from Moor St Queensway. A **taxi** (☎ 427 8888) from the airport to the centre costs about £20.

Car

Car rental agencies:

easyCar (☎ 0906 333 3333; www.easycar.co.uk; 17 Horse Fair, Birmingham)

Hertz (☎ 782 5158; 7 Suffolk St)

Public Transport

Centro (☎ 200 2700; www.centro.org.uk), the transport authority for the Birmingham and Coventry area, provides general travel advice and a guide to getting around the West Midlands for those with mobility difficulties. The Daytripper ticket (adult/child £4.50/2.80) gives all-day travel on buses and trains after 9.30am; if you need to start earlier, buy a Centrocard (£5.60). Tickets are available from the **Central Travel Information Centre** (New St station). **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608) has comprehensive travel information.

Local trains operate from Moor St station, which is only a few minutes' walk from New St; follow the red line on the pavement.

Birmingham's tram system, the **Metro** (www.travelmetro.co.uk), runs from Snow Hill to Wolverhampton via the Jewellery Quarter, West Bromwich and Dudley. Fares start at 70p and rise to £2.20 for the full length. A day pass covering both Metro and bus costs £4.25/2.80.

TOA black cabs taxis (☎ 427 8888) are a good, reliable taxi firm.

WARWICKSHIRE

Warwickshire got lucky: it could have been just another picturesque English county but history makes it one of the most visited areas outside of London. Shakespeare's birthplace at Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick's superb

castle are the main draws. Other, lesser known attractions can be just as rewarding, however: try the hauntingly atmospheric Kenilworth Castle ruins or the visit the cathedrals (yes, plural) that shaped Coventry's history.

Orientation & Information

Warwickshire is roughly kidney shaped, with Coventry sitting between the lobes. Kenilworth, Leamington Spa and Warwick lie in the line running south from Coventry; Stratford-upon-Avon sits on the southern side of the M40 motorway bisecting the lower lobe.

The Shakespeare Country tourism website (www.shakespeare-country.co.uk) has information on the whole region.

Getting Around

The Warwickshire transport site (www.warwickshire.gov.uk/transport) has details of local bus and train services, as well as news on roads. Coventry is a major transport hub, with rail connections to London Euston and Birmingham New St.

A good ticket option is the Chiltern Rover (adult three days £39), which allows return train travel from London Marylebone or Paddington to Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick or Leamington Spa on three chosen days within a seven-day period. It also includes unlimited travel in areas between, including Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and free travel on Warwickshire's Stagecoach bus network. You can only buy the ticket from London's Marylebone Station.

COVENTRY

☎ 024 / pop 300,848

The city was blitzed so badly in WWII that the Nazis coined a new verb 'Coventrieren', meaning 'to flatten'. Postwar planning doomed Coventry to a nondescript concrete centre apart from the striking new cathedral, which was built alongside the bombed-out shell of the old. There are enough cathedrals to go round here – another even older one was recently excavated. The city also has an interesting industrial history as a prolific car-maker, the product of which can be seen in an absorbing transport museum.

Orientation & Information

Central Coventry is surrounded by a stark concrete ring road; most of the city's sights lie within. The main Pool Meadow bus station is

central, while the train station is just outside of the ring road to the south. The **tourist office** (☎ 7622 7264; www.visitcoventry.co.uk; 4 Priory Row; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat, 10.30am–2.30pm Sun) is on a cobbled street on the approach to the cathedrals.

Sights

The pretty **cathedral quarter** is historically the richest part of the city. The wonderfully evocative **cathedral ruins** of St Michael's Church Cathedral, destroyed by Nazi incendiary bombs in the blitz of 14 November 1940, still stand as a permanent memorial. The 180 steps of its **Gothic spire** can be climbed for some panoramic views. Symbolically adjoining the old cathedral's sandstone walls is the Sir Basil Spence–designed **cathedral** (☎ 7622 7597; www.coventrycathedral.org.uk; Priory Row; suggested donation £3; ☎ 9am–5pm), a modern, almost Gothic, architectural masterpiece. It includes a giant Graham Sutherland tapestry of Christ, glorious stained-glass nave windows (best seen from the altar), and a towering etched glass front. Look out for the Jacob Epstein statue of St Michael's conquest over the devil outside the main entrance. The story of the massive **St Mary's cathedral**, the original Coventry cathedral dismantled following the Reformation, is told in the small but well-presented **Priory Visitor Centre** (☎ 7655 2242; Priory Row; admission free; ☎ 10am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, noon–4pm Sun).

Further north, the extensive **Coventry Transport Museum** (☎ 7683 2425; www.transport-museum.com; Hales St; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm) shows off the city's turbo-charged manufacturing past. It boasts the biggest collection of British-built vehicles in the world, most of them assembled in Coventry. They range from early bicycles to the slightly zippier Thrust SSC, the fastest land vehicle ever.

Sleeping

Ashdowns Guest House (☎ 7622 9280; 12 Regent St; s/d £25/50; (P)) Quirky, chintzy place nestled in a quiet residential street, seven minutes' walk from the train station. It is run by a welcoming, retired couple, who will give you chapter and verse on their interesting assorted antique clutter if you inquire.

Hylands Hotel (☎ 7650 1600; hylands@bestwestern.co.uk; 153 Warwick Rd; s/d incl breakfast from £56/85; (P) (Q)) Some rooms here greet you with a faded, musty air; pine bed-frames and park

views freshen up others, especially rooms numbered in the 80s. It's less than five minutes from the train station.

Eating & Drinking

Browns (☎ 7622 1100; Earl St; ☎ closed dinner Sun) With a door policy that makes Groucho's look slack, Browns nevertheless is one of the most easy-going, stylish places around. Spacious (you can normally find a seat here) and split on two levels, it also dishes out excellent-value canteen-style meals.

Café Bar Inspire (☎ 7655 3355; New Union St; ☎ 11am–4pm Tue, noon–midnight Wed & Thu, 11am–2.30am Fri & Sat) Coventry's Christchurch church was destroyed during WWII, leaving only the spire, which now, slightly sacrilegiously, shelters this bar. This is forgivable as it is very good. It serves an international selection of bottled brews, as well as baguette and salad snacks (from £3.25) throughout the day.

Getting There & Away

Coventry is a convenient transport hub. Trains go south to London Euston (every 20 minutes, one hour 10 minutes) and Bournemouth, and you will rarely have to wait more than 10 minutes for a train to Birmingham. From the main bus station, there is a constant flow of National Express buses to most parts of the country. Bus X17 goes to Kenilworth, Leamington and Warwick (every 20 minutes).

WARWICK

☎ 01926 / pop 25,434

The magnificent turreted castle is the lure for most of the visitors to this quiet county town. It's an awe-inspiring sight – as are the queues in summer. Several other sights are less overrun, but also well worth stopping for. A gentle stroll round the centre reveals well-preserved historic buildings – survivors of a fire in 1694 that destroyed much of the town – as well as absorbing museums and fine riverside views.

Orientation & Information

Warwick is simple to navigate; the A429 runs right through the centre with Westgate at one end and Eastgate at the other. The town centre lies just north of this axis. The castle, which looms over the River Avon, is just south.

The **tourist office** (☎ 492212; www.warwick-uk.co.uk; Court House, Jury St; ☎ 9.30am–4.30pm), near the junction with Castle St, sells the informative *Warwick Town Trail* leaflet (50p).

Sights

WARWICK CASTLE

Incredibly well-preserved medieval **Warwick Castle** (☎ 0870 442 2000; www.warwick-castle.co.uk; adult/child £15.95/9.95, peak dates £17.95/10.95; ☞ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar; 📍) is a stunner. Part of the Tussocks Group (hence the eerily lifelike wax inhabitants), it is prone to commercialism and crowds. However, its grandeur, magnificent landscaped gardens, and a palpable sense of history, including displays on influential historical figures such as 'kingmaker' Earl of Warwick Richard Neville, make it a must-see.

Plan on spending a full day if time permits. With waxwork-populated private apartments, superb interiors, ramparts, armour displays, dungeons (with torture chamber), the 'ghost tower' (called Warwick Ghosts 'Alive', entry £2.50), and a 19th-century power-generating mill house, there's more than enough to see.

COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF ST MARY

Originally built in 1123, this magnificent church (☎ 492909; Old Sq; suggested donation £2; ☞ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar) has a soaring tower, visible for miles around. Climb it for a spectacular

panorama (adult/child £2/50p). It was completed in 1704 after the 1694 Great Fire of Warwick gutted the original along with much of the church. The remarkable Beauchamp Chapel (built 1442-64) survived and the bronze tomb of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, still graces its centre. Ask one of the knowledgeable guides to point out 'the angel', a ghostly outline barely visible on the wall that was only recently spotted. Don't miss the 12th-century crypt with remnants of a medieval dunking stool, used to drench scolding wives.

LORD LEYCESTER HOSPITAL

At the Westgate end of the town, the road cuts through a sandstone cliff, above which perches the improbably leaning, timber-framed **Lord Leicester Hospital** (☎ 491422; High St; adult/child £4.90/3.90, garden only £2; hospital ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar). Despite its name, it was never a hospital. Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester and favourite of Queen Elizabeth I, made it a retirement home for soldiers and their wives in 1571 – and it's still one today. It has a beautiful courtyard, a fine chapel and a guildhall. There is also a small regimental museum and a café.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

For a fragrant perspective of the castle, mosey down to the **Mill Garden** (☎ 492877; 55 Mill St; admission £1; ☞ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct), a wonderful effusion of plants and colours within splashing distance of the weir that powered the castle mill. Money raised from this enchanting little enclave goes to charity. A fine alternative view of the castle is offered actually on the river itself. Head to **Warwick Boats** (☎ 494743; St Nicholas Park; rowing boat hire 30/60min £6/9; ☞ 10am-6.30pm Jun-Aug, 10am-6.30pm Sat & Sun Mar-May, Sep & Oct).

Sleeping

The nearest hostel is in Stratford-upon-Avon (see p424). Midrange B&Bs line Emscote Rd, the eastern end of the main road through Warwick toward Leamington Spa.

Park House Guest House (☎ 494359; 17 Emscote Rd; s/d £27.50/45) This is a basic but affordable option in a Gothic-style town house, five to 10 minutes' walk from the centre towards Leamington Spa.

Rose & Crown (☎ 411117; www.roseandcrownwarwick.co.uk; 30 Market Pl; r incl breakfast £65; 📍 📺) These modernist, smartly decorated lodgings, all en suite, lie above a chic gastropub. There are only five rooms, so call in advance. Some have wireless internet access.

Aylesford Hotel (☎ 492799; www.aylesfordhotel.co.uk; 1 High St; s/d incl breakfast £65/80) A classic Georgian town house, the atmospheric Aylesford has well-kept rooms (including some with four-poster beds), a casual bistro and a revamped French restaurant that has reaped the plaudits from local food critics.

Eating & Drinking

Wylies Café (☎ 490448; Old Iron Yard; scones & tea £3; ☞ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Hidden down a little side alley, this traditional tearoom is a delightful discovery. It is famous for its homemade cakes and delicious ice cream.

Fanshawe's (☎ 410590; 22 Market Pl; mains £11-19; ☞ 6-10pm Mon-Sat) From the rows of fussy flowers to the decorative china plates, this looks like an elderly aunt's living room. One that you don't mind visiting, however – the English cuisine is quite delectable.

Punch Bowl (☎ 403846; 1 The Butts) Guitars dangle from beams over the flagstone floors in this interesting Warwick pub. There are, of course, cask-conditioned ales and it serves reasonable food. Charming in a slightly cluttered way.

Getting There & Away

National Express coaches operate from Puckering Lane on Old Sq. Local bus X17 runs to Coventry (55 minutes). Bus 18 goes to Stratford-upon-Avon (40 minutes, hourly) in one direction, and Leamington Spa (15 minutes) in the other. The main bus stops are on Market St.

Trains run to Birmingham (30 minutes, every half-hour), Stratford-upon-Avon (30 minutes, hourly) and London (1½ hours, every 20 minutes).

KENILWORTH

☎ 01926 / pop 23,219

One thing stands out in this pleasant, unremarkable pocket of middle England – its stunningly atmospheric ruined castle. With crumbling walls and vivid history, it inspired Walter Scott to use it as a setting for his novel, called...*Kenilworth*.

Information

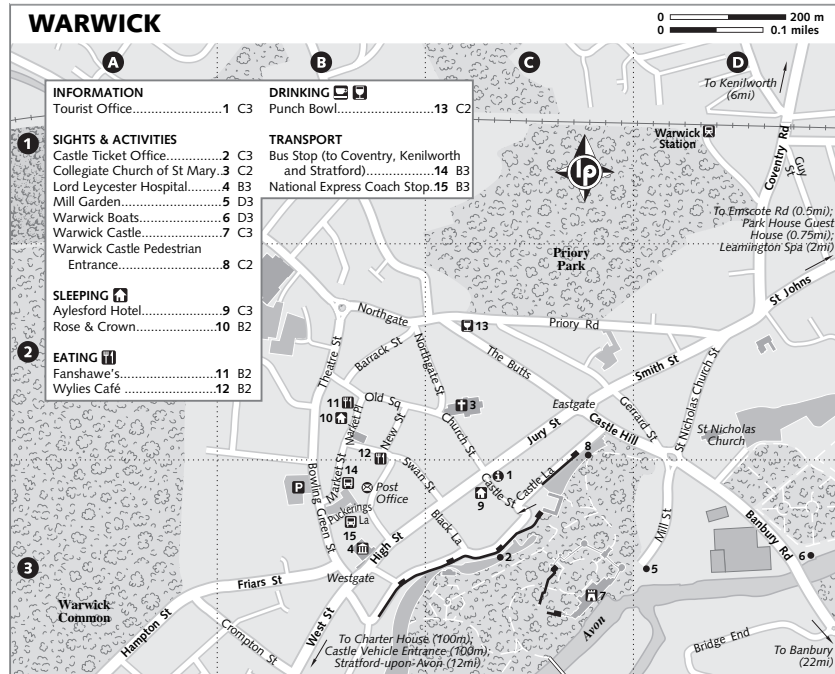
Contact the **tourist office** (☎ 852595; Library, 11 Smalley Pl; ☞ 9am-7pm Mon & Thu, 9am-5.30pm Tue & Fri, 10.30am-5.30pm Wed, 9.30am-4pm Sat) for local tourist information.

Sights & Activities

Dramatic, red-sandstone **Kenilworth Castle** (EH; ☎ 852078; adult/child £4.90/3.30; ☞ 10am-5pm Mar-May, Sep & Oct, 10am-6pm Jun-Aug, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) is less visited than its more commercial neighbour in Warwick, but arguably more rewarding. Founded around 1120 and enlarged in the 14th and 16th centuries, powerful men, including John of Gaunt, Simon de Montfort and Robert Dudley (favourite of Elizabeth I), have held sway here. There is now a new exhibition on the relationship between Dudley and the 'Virgin Queen', who visited the castle to tremendous fanfare, in the recently refurbished Leicester's Gatehouse. Following the Civil War siege, the castle's vast lake was drained in 1644, and it fell into disrepair. The audio tour is highly recommended – you almost feel like Elizabeth I is sitting at your side. Various jousting events and performances take place here throughout the year. Call for details.

Sleeping & Eating

Castle Laurels Hotel (☎ 856179; www.castlelaurels.co.uk; 22 Castle Rd; s/d incl breakfast £45/75; 📍 📺) A stately guesthouse (B&B does not seem a posh



enough name for it) opposite the castle, where the owners pride themselves on the spotless rooms and the warmth of the welcome. The home-cooked breakfasts (with free-range eggs) are lovely.

Virgins & Castle (☎ 853737; 7 High St; pub food £4-6, mains £9-11) This sprawling, comfortable old pub is a real local favourite, full of nooks and crannies and welcoming staff. It has a decent menu of Filipino specialities.

Clarendon Arms (☎ 852017; 44 Castle Hill; pub food £4-8, dinner mains £8-13) Right opposite the castle, this atmospheric pub has home-cooked food, a warm ambience and a cosy little beer garden.

Getting There & Away

Bus X17 runs to and from Warwick (20 minutes), Coventry (25 minutes) and Leamington Spa (15 minutes).

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

☎ 01789 / pop 22,187

Few towns are so dominated by one man's legacy as Stratford is by a certain William Shakespeare, who was born here more than four centuries ago. Prepare to jostle for elbow room with coachloads of tourists in the antique houses associated with Britain's most famous wordsmith – certainly during summer and on most weekends. But if you choose your time, this pretty, historic market town should definitely be on your 'to visit' list: be sure to take in a play if you're hitting the Shakespeare trail. It is also a handy base for exploring the mighty Warwick and Kenilworth Castles and the picturesque Cotswold countryside.

Orientation

Arriving by coach or train, you'll find yourself within walking distance of the town centre, which is easy to explore on foot. Transport is only really essential for visiting Mary Arden's House.

Information

Cyber Junction (☎ 263400; 28 Greenhill St; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-5.30pm Sat; per hr £4) Internet access and game play.

Sparklean Laundrette (☎ 269075; 74 Bull St; ☎ 8am-9pm)

Tourist office (☎ 0870 160 7930; www.shakespeare-country.co.uk; Bridgefoot; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Nov-Mar) Helpful, but frantically busy in summer.

Sights & Activities

SHAKESPEARE HOUSES

The **Shakespeare Birthplace Trust** (☎ 204016; www.shakespeare.org.uk; adult/child all 5 properties £14/6.50, 3 in-town houses £11/5.50; ☎ generally 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Jun-Aug, variable at other times) manages five buildings associated with Shakespeare. Three of the houses are central, the fourth is an easy walk away, and the fifth a drive or bike ride out; a combination ticket costs about half as much as the individual admission fees combined. Opening times are complicated and vary during the off season (check the website for details). In summer, enormous crowds pack the small Tudor houses; a visit out of season is much more enjoyable. Note that wheelchair access to the properties is restricted.

The number-one Shakespeare attraction, **Shakespeare's Birthplace** (Henley St), has a modern façade on one side, but behind that it's very much 'olde'. It's been a tourist hot spot for three centuries (though there's no conclusive evidence Will was born here). Famous 19th-century visitor-vandals have scratched their names on a window, and the guest book bears the signatures of some big-time literati. Family rooms have been re-created in the style of Shakespeare's time, and there's a 'virtual reality' display downstairs for visitors unable to access the upper areas. Tickets include admission to the adjacent **Shakespeare Exhibition**, where well-devised displays chart the life of Stratford's most famous son.

The wealthy, retired Shakespeare bought a fine home at New Pl on the corner of Chapel St and Chapel Lane. He died there in April 1616 and the house was demolished in 1759. An attractive Elizabethan **knot garden** now occupies part of the grounds. Displays in the adjacent **Nash's House**, where Shakespeare's granddaughter Elizabeth lived, describe the town's history and contain a collection of 17th-century oak furniture and tapestries.

Shakespeare's daughter Susanna married the eminent doctor John Hall, and their fine Elizabethan town house, **Hall's Croft** (☎ 292107), stands near Holy Trinity Church. The main exhibition is a fascinating insight into medical practice in Shakespeare's time.

Before marrying, Shakespeare's wife lived in Shottery, a mile west of the centre, in a pretty thatched farmhouse now known as **Anne Hathaway's Cottage** (☎ 292100). As well as contemporary furniture there's an orchard and **Shakespeare Tree Garden**, with examples

of all the trees mentioned in Shakespeare's plays. A footpath (no bikes allowed) leads to Shottery from Evesham Pl.

Mary Arden was Shakespeare's mother, and a **house** (☎ 293455) at Wilmcote, 3 miles west of Stratford, was her childhood home. If you cycle there via Anne Hathaway's Cottage, follow the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal tow-

path to Wilmcote rather than retracing your route or riding back along the busy A3400. The easiest way to get there otherwise is on a bus tour (see p424). The home of William's mother is now used to house the **Shakespeare Countryside Museum**, with exhibits tracing local country life over the past four centuries. Plan to spend more time here than at the other

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

0 0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

INFORMATION		Shakespeare's Birthplace..... 11 C3	One Elm..... 21 B3
1	Cyber Junction..... 1 B3	Sparklean Laundrette..... 2 B5	Windmill Inn..... 22 B4
	Tourist Office..... 3 D3	SLEEPING 🛏	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Carlton Guest House..... 12 B4	ENTERTAINMENT 🎪
	Guild Chapel..... 4 C4	Quilts & Croissants..... 13 B4	Courtyard Theatre..... 23 C4
	Hall's Croft..... 5 B5	Shakespeare Hotel..... 14 C4	Other Place..... (see 23)
	Harvard House..... 6 C4	Twelfth Night..... 15 B4	Royal Shakespeare Theatre..... 24 C4
	Holy Trinity Church..... 7 C5	White Swan..... 16 B3	Swan Theatre..... 25 C4
	King Edward VI School..... 8 C4	EATING 🍴	
	Knot Garden..... (see 10)	Edward Moon's..... 17 C4	Bancroft Cruises..... 26 D3
	Nash's House..... 9 C4	Lams..... 18 C4	Bus Stop..... 27 C3
	New Place..... 10 C4	Vintner Wine Bar..... 19 C4	City Sightseeing Bus Stop..... (see 3)
	Royal Shakespeare Company Gallery..... (see 25)	DRINKING 🍷 🍺	
		Dirty Duck (Black Swan)..... 20 C4	Clarks Cycles..... 28 C3
			Riverside Bus Station..... 29 D3
			Rose's Boathouse..... 30 D4

properties to appreciate its unique collection of rare farm animals.

OTHER SIGHTS

Holy Trinity Church (☎ 266316; Old Town; 🕒 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun Nov-Mar; admission to church free, Shakespeare's grave adult/child £1/50p) is thought to be the most visited parish church in England, as Shakespeare lies buried here. It's a lovely building in its own right, situated on the banks of the River Avon. The transepts from the mid-13th century are the oldest part. In the chancel are photocopies of Shakespeare's baptism and burial records, the graves of Will and his wife, and a bust created seven years after Shakespeare's death but before his wife's and thus assumed to be a good likeness.

The exuberantly carved **Harvard House** (☎ 204 407; High St; adult/child £2.75/free, free with Shakespeare Houses ticket; 🕒 noon-5pm Wed-Sun Jul-Sep, Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun May, Jun, Sep & Oct) was home to the mother of John Harvard, after whom Harvard University in the USA was named in the 17th century. It now houses a **Museum of British Pewter**.

The **Royal Shakespeare Company Gallery** (☎ 412 617; admission free; 🕒 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.15am-4.15pm Sun), inside the Swan Theatre, is a small but absorbing display of props, costumes, photos and theatrical paraphernalia. **Theatre tours** (☎ 0870 609 1110; adult/child incl admission to RSC Gallery £5/4; 🕒 times vary, call in advance to check) offer a fascinating glimpse behind the scenes of a working theatre.

The **Guild Chapel** (nr Chapel Lane & Church St) dates from 1269, though it was rebuilt in the 15th century. It's not open to the public except for services (10am Wednesday and noon Saturday April to September). Next door is **King Edward VI School**, which Shakespeare probably attended; it was originally the Guildhall.

Tours

Two-hour **guided walks** (☎ 292478; adult/child £5/2; 🕒 tours 11am Mon-Wed, 2pm Thu-Sun) depart from Swan fountain just by the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Chill-seekers can also go to the same group for the **Stratford Town Ghost Walk** (adult/child £5/3; 🕒 7.30pm Mon, Thu & Fri) An alternative **walk** (☎ 292478; adult/child £8/6; 🕒 10.30am Sat) is run by the Royal Shakespeare Company, and leaves outside the Swan Theatre on Waterside.

Open-top buses of **City Sightseeing** (☎ 299123; www.city-sightseeing.com; adult/child £9/4; 🕒 every 15min Apr-Sep, fewer in winter) go to each of the Shakespeare properties. They operate on a jump-on,

jump-off basis, and are a convenient way of getting to the out-of-town houses.

Sleeping

Stratford's big hotels tend to be geared towards group travel, so they're often out of the price range of many independent travellers, and they fill up fast. B&Bs are plentiful though, and offer good-quality rooms in attractive Victorian houses. Vacancies can be hard to find, especially during summer. If there's no room at any of the following, the tourist office charges £3 plus 10% deposit to find something.

BUDGET

Stratford-upon-Avon YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 160 7930; stratford@yha.org.uk; Hemmingford House, Alveston; dm incl breakfast members/nonmembers £19.95/22.95; 🕒 📺) This four-star YHA is in a large, 200-year-old mansion 1.5 miles east of the town centre along Tiddington Rd. Buses X17/18/18A run to Alveston from Bridge St.

Quilts & Croissants (☎ 267629; rooms@quilt-croissants.demon.co.uk; 33 Evesham Pl; s/d incl breakfast £26/52; 🕒 📺) A likeable family welcomes you here. Earth colours abound and the B&B is correspondingly warm and comfortable. The owners are keen theatregoers themselves, and can fill you in on the latest performances. Credit cards not accepted.

Other good budget options:

Stratford Racecourse (☎ 201063; info@stratfordracecourse.net; Ludington Rd; 2-person pitches £10; 🕒 Easter-Sep; 🕒) Camp site just off Evesham Rd a mile west of town.

Carlton Guest House (☎ 293548; 22 Evesham Pl; s/d incl breakfast £26/52; 🕒) The jolly proprietor has several reasonable en-suite rooms available.

MIDRANGE

Moonraker House (☎ 268774; www.moonrakerhouse.com; 40 Alcester Rd; s/d incl breakfast from £40/65; 🕒) Pristine to the point of fussy, the rooms behind the whitewashed façade of this memorable B&B are frilly, almost feminine affairs. Rooms have an unusual mix of themes – James Bond and Shakespeare. Impeccably attentive owners provide healthy organic and vegetarian options for breakfast.

Twelfth Night (☎ 414595; www.twelfthnight.co.uk; 13 Evesham Pl; s/d from £36/70; 🕒 📺) Now an up-market B&B, with flowery frills and gleaming brass bed frames, this once belonged to Royal Shakespeare Company governors. Breakfast is served on Wedgwood china.

TOP END

White Swan (☎ 297022; www.thewhiteswanstratford.co.uk; Rother St; s/d from £60/80; 🕒) All the quaint traits of a centuries-old hotel are here, from carved bed headboards to the atmospherically uneven floors. Rooms do vary. Plump for the oak-panelled delights of the traditional rooms (room 103 is perhaps the most charming) if possible – the standard rooms are quite ordinary.

Shakespeare Hotel (☎ 0870 400 8182; www.theshakespeare-hotel.co.uk; Chapel St; s/d £128/138; 🕒 📺) A labyrinth of rooms enchants guests at this classic hotel, the classiest in Stratford by a sonnet. The pick of the rooms are those named after Shakespeare's plays. Some you have to stoop to get into, but with their wooden-panelled headboards complemented by luxury bathrooms, they are the perfect base for soaking up the town's rich Elizabethan heritage.

Eating

Shakespearean tourism clearly makes you hungry: there's no shortage of good restaurants. Sheep St is clustered with refined but relaxed eating options, mostly aimed at theatregoers.

Vintner Wine Bar (☎ 297259; 5 Sheep St; mains £9-13; 🕒 10am-10pm Mon-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat, to 9.30pm Sun) The most down-to-earth of all the restaurant options on the gourmet Sheep St strip, this place is unpretentious and fun. The menu includes several inventive vegetarian options.

Edward Moon's (☎ 267069; 9 Chapel St; mains £10-14; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Inspired by an itinerant cook who loved English food spiced with local ingredients, Moon's is relaxed; it's distinguished by the entirely glass-panelled front.

Lambs (☎ 292554; 12 Sheep St; mains £11-18; 🕒 noon-2pm Mon-Sun, plus 5-10pm Mon-Sat, 6-9.30pm Sun) From the imposing manor-house door to the aristocratic interior, this courses with effortless sophistication. Dishes, such as roasted saddle of lamb (£15.95), are not cheap, but it's the company you are keeping that counts, my dear.

Drinking

Dirty Duck (☎ 297312; Waterside) If you only have one drink in Stratford, come here. It's almost as essential as a trip to the theatre. Officially called the Black Swan, this enchanting alehouse is a favourite postperformance thespian watering hole, and has a roll call of former regulars (Olivier, Attenborough etc) that reads like an actors' *Who's Who*. It's in a very pretty location across from the river. The adjoining restaurant (11am to 10pm) is good value.

Windmill Inn (☎ 297687; Church St) Ale was flowing here at the same time as rhyming couplets flowed from Shakespeare's quill – it's been around a while. Despite its age it's still one of the liveliest places in town.

One Elm (☎ 404919; 1 Guild St) A swanky place with leather seats and sun-tanned clientele, this popular gastropub has a pleasant courtyard and owners who are real foodies – the restaurant dishes are a treat.

Entertainment

Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC; ☎ 0870 609 1110; www.rsc.org.uk; box office inside Royal Shakespeare Theatre; tickets £5-42; 🕒 9.30am-8pm Mon-Sat) Seeing a RSC production is a must. Major stars have trod the boards here and productions are of a very high standard. Performances include the Bard's classics as well as contemporary offerings and take place in the main Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the adjacent Swan Theatre or the nearby Other Place. The main theatre will close for refurbishment in summer 2007. Performances will take place in the striking temporary Courtyard Theatre by the Other Place. Ticket prices depend on the performance and venue, but there are offers for under 25s, students, seniors and other groups, plus discounts for previews. Call or check the website for details – and book ahead for good seats. There are usually a few tickets sold on the day of performance.

Getting There & Away

The train station is a few minutes' walk west of the centre. Chiltern Railways offers direct services to London Marylebone (2¼ hours). Cheap returns (£15) are often available after 11am.

National Express destinations from Stratford's Riverside Bus Station include Birmingham (£6.50, one hour, twice daily), Oxford (£8.30, one hour, daily) and London Victoria (£15.00, 3½ hours, three daily).

In July and August, the **Shakespeare Express steam train** (☎ 0121-708 4960; www.vintagetains.co.uk) operates between Birmingham Snow Hill and Stratford stations (adult/child single £10/5, return £20/10, one hour, twice each Sunday).

Getting Around BICYCLE

Stratford is small enough to explore on foot, but a bicycle is good for getting out to the surrounding countryside or the rural Shakespeare properties. The canal towpath offers a fine route to Wilmcote.

Clarks Cycles (☎ 205057; Guild St; per half-/full day from £6/10; ☎ 9.15am-5pm Tue-Sat) rents bikes. It's down a little alley off Henley St (look out for the old sign saying Pashley Cycles).

BOAT

Punts, canoes and rowing boats are available from **Rose's Boathouse** (☎ 267073; row boats/punts per 30min £3/2) by Clopton Bridge. **Bancroft Cruises** (☎ 269669; www.bancroftcruises.co.uk) runs 45-minute trips (adult/child £4.50/2, daily April to October) leaving from the Holiday Inn hotel pier.

STAFFORDSHIRE

Staffordshire, in the words of Stoke-born novelist Arnold Bennett, has long been 'ungung by searchers after the extreme' – but if you took that to mean 'boring' you'd be mistaken. Though it's tucked between the urban sprawls of Birmingham and Manchester, the county has a surprising abundance of natural beauty, from rolling Cannock Chase, a magnet for walkers and cyclists, to the prickly spine of the Peak District known as the Roaches. The haunting Gothic might of Lichfield's wonderful cathedral, the wild rides at Alton Towers, and the neoclassical mansion of Shugborough are among the county's other charms.

Orientation

Staffordshire's attractions are spread fairly evenly around the county: Stoke to the north-west; the Peak District and Leek northeast; with Alton Towers just south; Lichfield southeast; and Stafford just southwest of the centre.

Information

Staffordshire Tourism (☎ 0870 500 4444; www.staffordshire.gov.uk/tourism) has general information on where to stay and what to do in the county.

Getting There & Around

Central Trains (☎ 0121-654 2040; www.centraltrains.co.uk)

Travel Line (☎ 0870 608 2 608)

Virgin Trains (☎ 0845 722 2333; www.virgin.com/trains)

LICHFIELD

☎ 01543 / pop 27,900

This pretty market town is home to one of England's most beautiful cathedrals, a monumental three-spired Gothic masterpiece that is worth the trip alone. It's also been something

of a think-tank in its time: famed wit and lexicographer Samuel Johnson was born here, and Erasmus Darwin, Charles' grandfather and a man of note in his own right, lived and studied here for years.

Information

The thinly stretched **tourist office** (☎ 412121; www.visitlichfield.com; Lichfield Garrick, Castle Dyke; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) doubles as the box office for the new Lichfield Garrick theatre.

Sights & Activities

LICHFIELD CATHEDRAL

The magnificent **cathedral** (☎ 306120; requested donation £4; ☎ 7am-6pm) boasts a fine Gothic west front adorned with exquisitely carved statues of the kings of England from Edgar to Henry I, and the major saints. Approach the blackened façade from town by Minster Pond and you won't be the first to get goose bumps as you look up to the cathedral's hallmark three spires – especially when they are floodlit by night. Most of what you see dates from the various rebuildings of the Norman cathedral between 1200 and 1350.

Inside, there is a superb illuminated manuscript from AD 730, the *Lichfield Gospels*, which is displayed in the beautifully vaulted mid-13th-century chapterhouse, while the Lady Chapel to the east boasts 16th-century Flemish stained glass. Following archaeological work in 2003, a Saxon statue of the Archangel Gabriel was uncovered beneath the nave, attracting a lot of press interest. If restoration work succeeds, it should soon be on display.

There are tours of the cathedral at 2pm Monday to Saturday and 1.30pm Sunday.

A stroll round the tranquil **Cathedral Close**, which is ringed with imposing 17th- and 18th-century houses, is also rewarding.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The amateurish but absorbing **Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum** (☎ 264972; www.lichfield.gov.uk/sj-museum; Breadmarket St; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Apr-Sep, noon-4.30pm Oct-Mar) charts the life of one of the most remarkable figures in the history of the English language. Samuel Johnson, the pioneering lexicographer (dictionary-maker), was born here in 1709 and spent his formative years in this ramshackle, five-floored property that belonged to his bookseller father. Credited with inventing the dictionary, Samuel Johnson was immortalised in the famous bi-

ography *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, written by his close friend James Boswell. You can inspect the ground-breaking dictionary using the computer in the bookshop in the lobby.

Grandfather of the more famous Charles, Erasmus Darwin was himself a remarkable autodidact, doctor, inventor, philosopher and poet, influencing the Romantics. The **Erasmus Darwin Centre** (☎ 306260; Beacon St; adult/child £2.50/2; ☎ noon-5pm Tue-Sun, last admission 4.15pm), in the house where he lived from 1758 to 1781, commemorates his life with a video, pictures and personal items. Exhibits and displays illustrate his varied work and association with luminaries such as Wedgwood, Boulton and Watt.

Sleeping

No 8 (☎ 418483; www.ldb.co.uk/accommodation.htm; 8 The Close; s/d incl breakfast from £30/50) The cathedral looms large over No 8 The Close, a comfortable family home that doubles as a B&B. There's no sign outside this listed town house; you should call in advance to make arrangements.

George Hotel (☎ 414822; www.thegeorgelichfield.co.uk; 12-14 Bird St; s/d Mon-Thu from £82/99, Fri-Sun £48/58; ☎) A rabbit warren of rooms winds through this 18th-century coaching inn in the heart of the city. Some of the double beds err on the small side, and parts are a bit worn, but the George (now part of the Best Western group) is generally comfortable and convenient.

Eating & Drinking

Chapters Cathedral Coffee Shop (☎ 306125; 19 The Close; sandwiches & salads £4-5; ☎ 9.30am-4.45pm Mon-Sat, noon-4.45pm Sun) In a charming 18th-century house with a view onto some fine gardens, this café is ideal for a caffeine or snack pit stop, or even a full Sunday lunch (three-courses meal £14.50).

King's Head (☎ 256822; 21 Bird St) Samuel Johnson described Lichfield folk as 'the most sober, decent people in England' – but that was 250 years ago, and there are pubs aplenty these days. This place should be your first port of call. A traditional olde-worlde pub, it has been shaken up by new owners who put on live music on Thursday and Saturday. It is Lichfield's most welcoming alehouse.

Getting There & Away

Bus 112 runs to Birmingham, while the 825 serves Stafford (both £2.60 single, 1¼ hours, hourly). The bus station is opposite the central Lichfield City train station, with trains

to Birmingham New St station (30 minutes, every 15 minutes). Direct trains to London Euston (from one hour 15 minutes, around eight daily) depart from Lichfield Trent Valley station, about 20 minutes' walk from town.

STOKE-ON-TRENT

☎ 01782 / pop 240,636

Staffordshire's industrial heart, though historically important in pottery production, holds limited appeal to the visitor, except in one department: the porcelain for which the city is famed. For a preview of Stoke, check out Arnold Bennett's memorable descriptions of the area in its industrial heyday in his novel *Anna of the Five Towns* (something of a misnomer as Stoke actually consists of six towns).

Orientation

Stoke-on-Trent is made up of Tunstall (Robbie Williams' hometown), Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton and Longton, together often called the Potteries. Hanley is the official 'city centre'. Stoke-on-Trent train station is south of Hanley, but buses from outside the main entrance run there in minutes. The bus station is in the centre of Hanley.

Information

Ask at the helpful **tourist office** (☎ 236000; www.visitstoke.co.uk; Victoria Hall, Bagnall St, Hanley; ☎ 9.15am-5.15pm Mon-Sat), adjacent to the bus station, for a map with the locations of the various showrooms, factory shops and visitor centres.

Sights & Activities

The **Wedgwood Visitor Centre** (☎ 0870 606 1759; www.thewedgwoodvisitorcentre.com; Barlaston; Mon-Fri £8, Sat & Sun £6; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun), set in 80 hectares of attractive parkland, offers a fascinating insight into bone-china production. Tours take in an extensive collection of historic pieces, artisans who deftly paint designs onto china while you watch, and best of all, a troupe of Star Wars-esque anthropomorphic robots churning out perfect plates and mugs. Equally interesting are the film and displays on the life of founder Josiah Wedgwood (1730-95). An innovative potter, he was also a driving force behind the construction of England's canal system and the abolition of slavery.

The **Potteries Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 232323; Bethesda St, Hanley; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun Nov-Feb) covers the history of the Potteries and houses

an impressively extensive ceramics display as well as a fine-art collection (Picasso, Degas).

Constructed around Stoke's last remaining bottle kiln, the wonderfully evocative **Gladstone Pottery Museum** (☎ 319232; Uttoweter Rd, Longton; adult/child £4.95/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm) has an authentic working Victorian pottery factory where skilled potters tell visitors about their work. Those of a scatological bent will enjoy the Flushed With Pride exhibition, which charts the story of the toilet from chamber pots and shared privy holes (with small effects!) to modern hi-tech conveniences. Buses 6 and 6a go to the museum from Hanley.

Getting There & Away

National Express coaches run to/from London (four hours, five daily) and Manchester (1½ hours, eight daily). Trains run to Stafford (20 minutes, every 30 minutes), and hourly to London (1¾ hours).

AROUND STOKE-ON-TRENT Little Moreton Hall

England's most spectacular black-and-white timber-framed house (NT; ☎ 01260-272018; adult/child £5.50/2.80; ☎ 11.30am-5pm Wed-Sun late Mar-Oct, 11.30am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-late Dec) dates back to the 16th century; within its over-the-top exterior there are a series of important wall paintings and an indefinable sense of romance. Little Moreton is off the A34 south of Congleton.

Alton Towers

Deservedly Britain's most popular theme park, **Alton Towers** (☎ 0870 444 4455; www.alton-towers.com; adult/under 12yr £29.50/19; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Oct-mid-Mar, longer hours mid-Mar-Sep) is an absolute must for white-knuckle fiends. There are more than 100 rides, including the terrifying vertical drop of the Oblivion, upside-down roller coasters, log flumes and more. Entry prices are almost as steep as the rides and are highest during school holidays.

There's a hotel within the park, but most visitors opt to stay in nearby villages. The park's website features a list of accommodation options. Alton itself is an attractive village with several B&Bs. **Old School House** (☎ 01538-702151; old_school_house@talk21.com; Castle Hill Rd, Alton; d incl breakfast £60) is an exceptional guesthouse in an 1845 listed school building (just over 1 mile from the park) with accommodating hosts. Much more basic is the **Dimmingsdale YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5794; dimmingsdale@yha.org

.uk; Oakamoor; dm members/nonmembers £11.95/14.95), 2 miles northwest of the park. There are plenty of good rambles around the hostel too.

Alton Towers is east of Cheadle off the B5032. Public transport is sketchy, but various train companies offer all-in-one packages from London and other cities; check the website for current details.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Beyond its obvious appeal as a batch of pretty villages and winding country lanes, Northamptonshire has special relevance for fans of Princess Diana, footwear and religious eccentrics. Its far-flung attractions also include some historic Saxon churches, honey-coloured historic towns with pretty thatched cottages and stately homes. It's a great region for driving and, as there's no single tourism blockbuster, you don't have to fight the masses to take in its charms.

Orientation & Information

Northamptonshire is roughly 50 miles long and 20 miles wide, running southwest to northeast. The M1 cuts diagonally across the county just below Northampton, which lies in the middle. Attractions are scattered.

For general (but sketchy) information about the county, check the website www.visitnorthamptonshire.co.uk. Otherwise, visit Northampton's tourist office.

Getting Around

Driving is the way to see the most of the county. Turning a corner on a winding country lane and coming across a sleepy village is one of the joys of the region. All the major car-hire companies have branches in Northampton.

Buses do run to most places of interest from Northampton and other nearby towns, but services can be sporadic; some run only a few times daily, so it's best to check times with the operator.

Stagecoach (www.stagecoachbus.com/northants/)

Traveline (☎ 0870 608 2 608)

NORTHAMPTON

☎ 01604 / pop 194,458

Unassuming Northampton is surprisingly steeped in historical significance. In Saxon days it was perhaps the most important city in England, and Mary Queen of Scots was executed

in nearby Fotheringhay. Nowadays, soulless stretches of shopping precincts blight the centre but the town has some buildings of architectural note, and it's a good base for trips around a remarkably pretty county. It's particularly notable for two other things: shoes (factories here used to protect the feet of half the country) and its hideous 1970s bus station, recently voted one of the ugliest buildings in Britain.

Orientation

The town is centred on Market Sq, with the main pedestrianised shopping route, Abington St, running east from it, where it becomes Kettering Rd, with its hotels and bars. To the south of Market Sq is the Guildhall and tourist office. The infamous bus station is to the north.

Information

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 838800; www.northampton.gov.uk/tourism; Guildhall, St Giles Sq; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is within the city's town hall.

Sights & Activities

You don't have to be a shoe fetishist to get a kick out of the impressive displays at **Northampton Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 838111; Guildhall Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun). From Turkish stilted clogs to rawhide sandals, the footwear collection is fantastic, varied and vast. There are also some fine paintings and changing special exhibitions.

The **Church of the Holy Sepulchre** (☎ 754782; ☎ noon-4pm Wed, 2-4pm Sat) is Northampton's oldest building at nine centuries and counting. It is also one of the few surviving round churches in the country. Founded after the first earl of Northampton returned from the Crusades in 1100, it is modelled on its Jerusalem namesake.

Sleeping & Eating

Coach House Hotel (☎ 250981; www.thecoachhouse.northampton.com; 10 East Park Pde; s/d incl breakfast from £55/65; P) In an attractive Victorian terrace façade, this family-run hotel (effectively on the Kettering Rd) has reasonable rooms in a fine location opposite parkland.

Lime Trees Hotel (☎ 632188; www.limetreeshotel.co.uk; 8 Langham Pl; s/d from £85/105; P) This welcoming Best Western affiliate is in an attractive Georgian property about half a mile north of the centre. It has a pretty courtyard at the back. Rooms err on the small side, but the restaurant beats most of the town's eating options.

Church Restaurant (☎ 603800; 67-83 Bridge St; mains £12-19; ☎ noon-2.30pm Tue-Fri, 6pm-11pm Tue-Sat) This upmarket restaurant is merely the latest incarnation of a historic site; previous uses include hospice, church and even train station. Its French cuisine is a rare example of fine dining in Northampton city centre.

Entertainment

Picturedrome (☎ 230777; www.thepicturedrome.com; 222 Kettering Rd) A little way out of town, this is a breath of fresh air after the humdrum chain pubs of the centre. Gilt-edged mirrors are part of the slick décor, which, along with decent food and an easy-going vibe, attracts the more discerning of Northampton's 20-somethings. There are regular comedy nights, live music and other events.

Royal Theatre (☎ 624811; www.northamptontheatres.com; Guildhall Rd) is managed cooperatively along with Derngate. Following a major refurbishment, they were reopened in 2006. Derngate is Northampton's arts centre and hosts anything from Bill Wyman to *Madame Butterfly*. The Royal is an impressive Victorian structure staging local theatre and quality West End productions.

Getting There & Away

Northampton has good rail links with Birmingham (one hour, hourly) and London Euston (one hour, at least every 30 minutes). The train station is about half a mile west of town along Gold St.

National Express coaches run to London (£10.60 single, 2¼ hours, five daily), Nottingham (£10.20, 2½ hours, daily) and Birmingham (£5.70, one hour 40 minutes, two daily). The truly awful Greyfriars bus station is on Lady's Lane, north of the shopping centre.

AROUND NORTHAMPTON Althorp

Famous as the final resting place of Diana, Princess of Wales, after her life was tragically cut short in a Paris car crash, **Althorp House** (☎ bookings 0870 167 9000; www.althorp.com; adult/child £12/6, plus access to upstairs of house £2.50; ☎ 11am-5pm Jul & Aug, last entry 4pm) had an acclaimed collection of art and books before the world's eyes turned upon it. Diana is commemorated in a memorial and museum in the grounds of her ancestral home. Meanwhile, the slightly forbidding-looking 16th-century mansion contains works by Rubens, Gainsborough and

Van Dyck. Profits from ticket sales go to the Princess Diana Memorial Fund. The limited number of tickets must be booked by phone or on the website. Incidentally, Althorp should be pronounced 'altrup'.

Althorp is off the A428 5.5 miles northwest of Northampton. There are five buses daily (except Sunday) linking Northampton with Althorp, leaving from Greyfriars bus station.

Rushton Triangular Lodge

This mysterious **lodge** (EH; ☎ 01536-710761; adult/child £2.40/1.20; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct) with esoteric inscriptions shows the power of Sir Thomas Tresham's Catholic faith. He designed a number of buildings in the area (and was imprisoned more than once for expressing his beliefs). With three of everything, from sides to floors to gables, the lodge is in a magical setting among rapeseed fields and is Tresham's enduring symbol of the trinity. It was built at the end of the 16th century.

The lodge is 4 miles northwest of Kettering. Bus 19 from Kettering stops in Desborough, 2 miles away (20 minutes, every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday, every two hours on Sunday). Kettering is 15 miles northeast of Northampton along the A43.

Kirby Hall

Once one of the finest Elizabethan mansions, the 'Jewel of the English Renaissance', **Kirby Hall** (EH; ☎ 01536-203230; adult/child £4.50/2.30; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-6pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Mar) was begun in 1570, and additions were made up to the 19th century. Abandoned and fallen into disrepair, it's still a remarkable, atmospheric site – it was used as the location for the 1999 film of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* – with fine filigree stonework, ravens cawing in the empty halls and peacocks roaming its restored formal parterre gardens.

Kirby Hall is 4 miles northeast of Corby; Corby is 9 miles north of Kettering along the A43.

LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND

In typical Midlands fashion, Leicestershire self-deprecatingly plays down its own attractions, yet it boasts several picturesque villages, a rich industrial heritage and a few key

historic sites – not to mention magnificent Belvoir Castle. Leicester, meanwhile, is a vibrant multicultural city.

Tiny Rutland was merged with Leicestershire in 1974, but in April 1997 regained its 'independence' as a county. With magnificent Rutland Water and charming settlements, it's a hit with lovers of water sports and quaint villages.

Orientation & Information

Leicestershire and Rutland together look like an upside-down map of Australia. Leicester is virtually bang in the centre of its county, with the M1 motorway running north-south just to the west, dividing the largely industrial towns and National Forest of the west from the more rural east, including Belvoir Castle. To the east of Leicester, Rutland, wedged between four counties, revolves around central Rutland Water.

For general countywide information, contact **Leicestershire Tourism** (☎ 0906 294 1113).

Getting There & Around

Arriva Midlands (www.arrivabus.co.uk) Operates Leicestershire bus services.

Traveline (☎ 0870 608 2 608) Latest timetables, bus routes and numbers.

LEICESTER

☎ 0116 / pop 279,923

Like many Midlands cities, Leicester is no oil painting, but it's still got a lot going for it if you're ready to give it a chance. Pummelled by the Luftwaffe, then knocked sideways by industrial decline, the city has now re-invented itself as vibrant, socially progressive melting pot. Its large student population also ensures a buzzing nightlife. It has a large and vibrant Asian community with many interesting events staged around religious festivals such as Holi, Diwali and Eid-ul-Fitr. The National Space Centre is worth a visit in its own right.

Orientation

For drivers, Leicester is plagued by a maze of one-way streets and forbidden turns. Although there isn't a ring road as such, the A594 does almost a whole circuit and most attractions flank it or are contained within it.

The centre of the Asian community, Belgrave Rd (the 'Golden Mile') is about a mile northeast of the centre. Castle Park, with many of the historic attractions, lies immediately west of the centre.

Information

Ice Mango (☎ 262 6255; www.icemango.co.uk; 4 Market Pl; per hr £2.20; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat, noon-5.30pm Sun) Relaxed juice bar with computers for internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 0906 294 1113, calls per min 25p; www.goleicestershire.com; 7-9 Every St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 10am-5.30pm Thu, 10am-5pm Sat)

Sights

JEWRY WALL & MUSEUMS

All Leicester's **museums** (www.leicestermuseums.ac.uk) are free.

Despite its name, **Jewry Wall** is one of England's largest Roman civil structures and has nothing to do with Judaism. You can wander among excavated remains of the Roman public baths, which date back almost two millennia. Notwithstanding its grim external appearance, the **Jewry Wall Museum** (☎ 225 4971; St Nicholas Circle; ☎ 11am-4.30pm Sat, 1-4.30pm Sun Feb-Nov, & some school holidays) contains wonderful Roman mosaics and frescoes, as well as an interactive exhibition 'The Making of Leicester', which tells the history of the city with archaeological reconstructions and paintings.

New Walk Museum & Art Gallery (☎ 225 4900; New Walk; ☎ 11am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sun) is a child-friendly series of displays on space, materials and art. Adults should get something from the surprisingly varied exhibits too, which range from a Siberian mammoth-ivory paperknife to a life-size portrait of local rugby legend Martin Johnson.

Newarke Houses Museum (☎ 225 4980; The Newarke; ☎ 11am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sun) is housed in two 16th-century buildings. Revolving around the theme 'ordinary people, extraordinary lives', it charts the life of everyday Leicester residents, and includes reconstructed period shops, and exhibitions on well-known local citizens including Thomas Cook, the package-holiday pioneer.

NATIONAL SPACE CENTRE

This **centre** (☎ 0870 607 7223; www.spacecentre.co.uk; adult/child £11/9; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, plus Mon during Leicester school holidays, last entry 3.30pm) is a spectacular and successful attempt to bring space science to us ordinary mortals. Interactive displays cover cosmic myths, the history of astronomy and the development of space travel; in the Space Now! area you can check on the status of all current space missions. Films in the domed Space Theatre (included in the

admission price) launch you to the far reaches of the galaxy, and you can come back to earth with a coffee in Boosters Café. Don't miss the displays on zero-gravity toilets and the amazing germ-devouring underpants.

The centre is off the A6 about 1.5 miles north of the city centre. Take bus 54 from Charles St in the centre.

TEMPLES

Materials were shipped in from India to convert a disused church into a **Jain Centre** (☎ 254 3091; www.jaincentre.com; 32 Oxford St; ☎ 2-5pm Mon-Fri, or by prior arrangement). The building is faced with marble, and the temple – the first Jain temple outside the subcontinent and the only one in Europe – boasts a forest of beautifully carved pillars inside. Jainism evolved in India at around the same time as Buddhism.

Close to the Jewry Wall is the Sikh **Guru Nanak Gurdwara** (☎ 251 7460; 9 Holy Bones; ☎ 1-4pm Thu, 7-8.30pm Sat, 11.30am-1.30pm Sun). There is a small museum, which contains an impressive model of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India, and a Sikh/Punjabi heritage exhibition.

Sleeping

Leicestershire Backpackers Hostel (☎ 267 3107; 157 Wanlip Lane, Birstall; dm incl breakfast per night/week £11/45; ☎) This odd little place 3 miles north of the centre takes under-28 travellers/students only. Cooking is communal, and the breakfast is basic. Don't expect luxury or personal space here. Take bus 70 from Haymarket station or 125 from St Margaret's station to get there.

Spindle Lodge (☎ 233 8801; www.spindlelodge.com; 2 West Walk; s/d from £49/67; ☎) This charming Victorian town house, now a small family-run hotel, is elegantly furnished, the varnished floors gleam with good care, and the welcome is warm.

Belmont House Hotel (☎ 254 4773; www.belmonthotel.co.uk; De Montfort St; s/d Sun-Thu £110/120, Fri & Sat £70/90; ☎) In an elongated Georgian building, this hotel has spotless rooms, although the décor is due a face-lift. It is favoured by executives during the week, with some week-end deals available.

Eating

The Golden Mile on Belgrave Rd is located a mile to the north of the centre (take bus 22 from Haymarket bus station) and teems with good Indian and vegetarian restaurants.



INFORMATION		Newarke Houses		DRINKING ☑ ☑	
Ice Mango.....	1 B2	Museum.....	7 A3	Bossa.....	12 C3
Tourist Office.....	2 B2			Globe.....	13 B2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		SLEEPING ☑		ENTERTAINMENT ☑	
Guru Nanak.....	3 A2	Belmont House		Charlotte.....	14 B3
Gurdwara.....	3 A2	Hotel.....	8 D4	Original Four.....	15 B3
Jain Centre.....	4 B3	Spindle Lodge.....	9 D4		
Jewry Wall Museum.....	5 A2	EATING ☑		TRANSPORT	
New Walk Museum & Art		Case.....	10 B2	Haymarket Bus Station.....	16 C1
Gallery.....	6 C3	Opera House.....	11 B2	St Margaret's Bus Station.....	17 B1

Liquid (☎ 261 9086; 5 Guildhall Lane; toasted baguettes £2.30; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, plus Sun Dec) Fresh and friendly with enough juices to satisfy anyone's daily vitamin requirements.

Sardaar Restaurant (☎ 299 3300; 30 Narborough Rd; mains £3-8; ☎ 10am-10pm) Very cheap vegetarian Indian platters are served in this stripped-

back diner-style café. Dishes won't do the cholesterol count much good, but the mango lassī-style drink is to die for. It's west of the centre.

Friends (☎ 266 8809; 41-43 Belgrave Rd; mains £6-12; ☎ noon-2pm Mon-Sat, dinner daily) Chefs from New Delhi proudly prepare authentic North

Indian recipes at this mainstay of the Golden Mile, still going strong after more than two decades.

Case (☎ 251 7675; 4-6 Hotel St; mains £8-18 ☎ 7-10.30pm Mon-Sat) One of Leicester's finest places to eat out, this is in the unlikely setting of a former suitcase factory. A refined hubbub fills the airy 1st-floor space where exotic influences infuse traditional English recipes. The Champagne Bar downstairs is easier on the wallet.

Opera House (☎ 223 6666; 10 Guildhall Lane; mains £15-19) Located in a very historical building with a colourful history (it used to be a brothel), this classy Leicester restaurant has an excellent chef. Head downstairs for the intimate, atmospheric underground dining area.

Drinking

Amid the rash of chain pubs in the centre, there are a few places for more discerning drinkers. Some great options are away from downtown. Head to Braunstone Gate, Narborough Rd and Hinckley Rd to experience Leicester's vibrant bar and pub scene at its best.

Globe (☎ 262 9819; 43 Silver St; ☎ 11am-11pm Sun-Thu, 11am-1am Fri & Sat) At last, that rare beast, a traditional old pub (built in 1720) in a city centre where there's no edge to the night-time drinking – just fine draught ales, a warm atmosphere and little alcoves to lose yourself in.

Looking Glass (☎ 255 9002; 68-70 Braunstone Gate; ☎ 3.30pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) If you hadn't sussed it from the name, this is the place to see and be seen on Braunstone Gate. Funky mirror-decked walls, beautiful young things and a basement with decent live acoustic music make this well worth a visit.

O-Bar (☎ 255 8223; 59-61 Braunstone Gate; ☎ 4.30pm-1am Mon-Sat, 3pm-12.30am Sun) A relaxed, unpretentious crowd heads to the colourful, retro-cool of this bar, which gets absolutely packed to the rafters on weekend nights.

Bossa (☎ 255 9551; 110 Granby St; ☎ 11am-10.30pm Mon-Thu, 11am-1am Fri-Sat) Latin rhythms, cheap, tasty snacks (toasties £1.25) and a relaxed, bohemian crowd populate this pint-sized, gay-friendly bar-café.

Entertainment

Charlotte (☎ 255 3956; www.thecharlotte.co.uk; 8 Oxford St; ☎ doors open 8pm) Leicester's legendary venue has staged Oasis and the Stone Roses, among others, before they became megastars. With a late licence and club nights, it's grungy, it's

lively, it caters for all sorts of musical tastes – and it keeps packing 'em in.

Original Four (☎ 254 1638; 2 King St; admission Sat night £7) Behind a mock-Tudor façade, this place cooks up four floors of diverse beats, from electric tracks to live-music sets. It has seen more popular days but is still one of the best clubbing options in town.

Getting There & Away

National Express operates from St Margaret's bus station on Gravel St, north of the centre. The express bus JL367 runs to Nottingham (one hour, eight daily Monday to Saturday), while the 310 runs to Coventry (45 minutes, four daily). Other options for Coventry include the X67 (one hour, hourly).

Trains run to London St Pancras (1½ hours, every 30 minutes) and Birmingham (one hour, every 30 minutes).

A tourist jaunt rather than a serious transport option, the classic **Great Central Railway** (☎ 01509-230726; www.gcrailway.co.uk; return tickets £12/8) operates steam locomotives between Leicester North station on Redhill Circle and Loughborough Central. This dual-track railway runs the 8-mile route along which Thomas Cook ran his original package tour in 1841. The trains run daily from May to August and every weekend the rest of the year. Take bus 70 from Haymarket bus station.

Getting Around

Central Leicester is easy to get around on foot. As an alternative to local buses, the open-top bus run by **Discover Leicester** (☎ 299 8888; adult/under 15yr £6/4; ☎ on the hour 10am-4pm Jul-Sep) runs a jump-on, jump-off bus around the city and up to Belgrave Rd, the Great Central Railway and the National Space Centre with commentary from a local expert. It starts by the Thomas Cook statue outside the main train station.

AROUND LEICESTER

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

☎ 01530 / pop 12,758

The real draw of Ashby-de-la-Zouch is its castle (☎ 413343; adult/child £3.40/1.70; ☎ 10am-6pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Mar). Built in Norman times and owned by the Zouch family until 1399, it was extended in the 14th and 15th centuries and then reduced to its present picturesquely ruined state in 1648 after the Civil War. A lively audio guide introduces the characters and

details the history. Bring a torch (flashlight) to explore the underground passageway connecting the tower with the kitchen.

For accommodation, contact the **tourist office** (☎ 411767; North St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat). Ashby is on the A511 about 15 miles northwest of Leicester. Buses 117 and 118 (218 Sunday) run hourly from St Margaret's bus station in Leicester.

Belvoir Castle

In the wilds of the county is **Belvoir Castle** (☎ 01476-870262; www.belvoircastle.com; adult/child £10/5; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun May-Sep, Sun Apr & Oct), a magnificent baroque and Gothic fantasy rebuilt in the 19th century after suffering serious damage during the Civil War. It is also home to the duke and duchess of Rutland. Much of the sumptuous interior is open to the public, and collections of weaponry, medals and art (including pieces by Reynolds, Gainsborough and Holbein) are highlights. There are marvellous views across the countryside, and peacocks roam the delightful gardens.

Belvoir (*bee-ver*) is 6 miles west of Grantham, off the A1; Grantham is about 25 miles east of Nottingham along the A52.

RUTLAND

Rutland's motto 'Multum in Parvo' (so much in so little) refers to its status as England's smallest county. Rutland Water, one of the largest reservoirs in Europe, makes it a haven for water-sport lovers, as well as climbers and bird-watchers.

Information

Oakham tourist office (☎ 01572-758441; Catmose St, Oakham; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun) Housed in the Rutland County Museum.

Rutland Water tourist office (☎ 01572-653026; Sykes Lane, Empingham; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Oct-Mar, shorter hours in winter)

Sights & Activities

In Rutland Water, the **Rutland Belle** (☎ 01572-787630; www.rutlandwatercruises.com; the Harbour, Whitwell Park; adult/child £6/4) offers pleasure cruises every afternoon, May to September.

The **Watersports Centre** (☎ 01780-460154; Whitwell) organises windsurfing, canoeing and sailing and offers tuition. **Rutland Sailing School** (☎ 01780-721999; www.rutlandsailingschool.co.uk; Edith Weston) offers tuition to sailors of all abilities, from catamarans to dinghies.

For bike hire contact **Rutland Water Cycling** (☎ 01780-460705; www.rutlandcycling.co.uk; Whitwell Car Park).

The sleepy county town of **Oakham** has a famous school and **Oakham Castle** (admission free; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun, shorter hours Nov-Feb), where an impressive Great Hall from a 12th-century Norman structure still stands.

South of Oakham is the village of Lyddington, home to the **Bede House** (EH; ☎ 01572-822438; adult/child £3.30/1.70; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Sep). Originally a wing of the medieval rural palace of the bishops of Lincoln, it was converted into almshouses in 1600. Look out for the beautifully carved cornice in the Great Chamber.

Getting There & Away

Bus 19 runs from Nottingham's Broadmarsh bus station to Oakham (1¼ hours, hourly). Trains run hourly from Leicester, Peterborough and Birmingham.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Nottinghamshire seems to breed good stories: this is the land of the legendary Robin Hood and his merry men, and the home of provocative writer DH Lawrence and decadent bad-boy poet Lord Byron. Even its castles and pubs are draped in myth and mystery. The city of Nottingham is a vibrant hub of business, shopping and clubbing, while the surrounding countryside is dotted with the occasional gem of a stately home.

Orientation & Information

Nottinghamshire is tall and thin, spreading a surprising distance north of Nottingham to finish level with Sheffield. Most of the county's attractions are in the southern half, including Nottingham, with Newstead and Eastwood just north, Sherwood Forest in the centre and Newark-on-Trent and Southwell to the east.

Find countywide information at www.visitnottingham.co.uk.

Getting Around

A journey planner and comprehensive bus, rail, tram and plane information can be found at www.itsnottingham.info. **Sherwood Forester buses** (☎ 0115-977 4268; Ranger ticket adult/child £6/3;

☎ Sun & Bank Holidays Jun-Aug) go to tourist attractions all over Nottinghamshire; some offer admission discounts if you show the ticket.

NOTTINGHAM

☎ 0115 / pop 266,988

Linked forever to Robin Hood and his merry band of men in Lincoln green, Nottingham today is a dynamic mix of medieval and modern. Amid multistorey car parks and who-cares-what-you-think architectural eyesores, you'll stumble upon a centuries-old landmark that crusaders probably knew – it's that kind of place. Transformed by the riches of the 19th-century lace industry, the city developed into a powerful manufacturing engine-room, churning out Raleigh bikes, the Boots pharmacy empire and cigarettes. Industry has since declined, but the nightlife, culture and shopping most definitely have not. The city boasts fashion designer Paul Smith as one of its own, while the clubs and bars are some of the liveliest in the country. Trent Bridge is a major draw for cricket fans, and the reds of Nottingham Forest football club have an impressive heritage that belies their current form.

Orientation

Like other Midlands cities, Nottingham is enclosed by an inner ring road within which lie most of the attractions, bars and restaurants. The train station is on the southern edge of the centre. There are two bus stations: Victoria bus station is hidden away behind the Victoria shopping centre, just north of the centre, while Broadmarsh bus station is beneath Broadmarsh shopping centre to the south.

Information

Combat Strike (☎ 988 1880; 2nd fl, the Cornerhouse, Forman St; per hr £3; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Thu, to late Fri-Sun) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 915 5330; www.visitnottingham.com; 1-4 Smithy Row; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Very helpful. Ask about discount combination tickets for major attractions.

Sights & Activities

NOTTINGHAM CASTLE MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

More of a mansion than a castle, the stately building here now has been standing since the 1670s. The last Nottingham Castle was demolished after the Civil War, while the

original was put up by William the Conqueror. The castle **museum** (☎ 915 3700; adult/child £3/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat-Thu Nov-Feb) opened in 1878. It vividly sets out Nottingham's history and displays some of the medieval alabaster carvings for which Nottingham was noted. Textiles and costumes peculiar to the city are also on show. Upstairs there's an art gallery with changing exhibitions and some fine permanent pieces (including works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti). There's a stylish café and an excellent shop.

An underground passageway, **Mortimer's Hole** (45min tours £2; ☎ tours 11am, 2pm & 3pm Mon-Thu, 2pm & 3pm Fri & Sat), leads from the castle to Brevhouse Yard. Roger Mortimer, who arranged Edward II's murder, is said to have been captured by supporters of Edward III who entered via this passage. Ask to see the Sheriff Room (there is still a Sheriff of Nottingham today, a purely symbolic role).

CAVES OF NOTTINGHAM

Nottingham stands on Sherwood sandstone riddled with manmade caves that date back to medieval times. Bizarrely, the entrance to the most fascinating, readily accessible **caves** (☎ 924 1424; www.cityofcaves.com; admission £3.75; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) is inside Broadmarsh shopping centre, on the upper level. These contain an air-raid shelter, a medieval underground tannery, several pub cellars and a mock-up of a Victorian slum dwelling.

WOLLATON HALL

Built in 1588 by Sir Francis Willoughby, land and coal-mine owner, **Wollaton Hall** (☎ 915 3900; Wollaton Park, Derby Rd; admission free Mon-Fri, adult/child Sat & Sun £1.50/1; ☎ 11am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) is a magnificent example of Elizabethan architecture at its most extravagant. Architect Robert Smythson was also responsible for the equally avant-garde Longleat in Wessex. It was undergoing restoration works at the time of research; call ahead to check opening hours. The hall also houses a mediocre natural-history museum.

The **Industrial Museum** (admission free Mon-Fri, adult/child Sat & Sun £1.50/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct), in the 18th-century stable block, displays lace-making equipment, Raleigh bicycles, a gigantic 1858 beam engine and oddities such as a locally invented, 1963 video recorder that never got off the ground.



INFORMATION		EATING		NG1	
Combat Strike.....	1 B3	Alley Café.....	10 B4	Rock City.....	21 B3
Tourist Office.....	2 C4	Fresh.....	11 D4	Social.....	22 C4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Punchinello.....	12 B3	Stealth.....	23 B3
Brewhouse Yard Museum.....	3 B5	Skinny Sumo.....	13 D4	SHOPPING	
Caves of Nottingham.....	4 C5	DRINKING		Original Paul	
Galleries of Justice.....	5 D5	Bell Inn.....	14 B4	Smith Shop.....	24 C4
Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery.....	6 B5	Cock & Hoop.....	15 D5	Paul Smith.....	25 C5
SLEEPING		Ye Olde Salutation Inn.....	16 B5	TRANSPORT	
Igloo Backpackers Hostel.....	7 B1	Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem.....	17 B5	Broadmarsh Bus Station.....	26 C5
Lace Market Hotel.....	8 D5	ENTERTAINMENT		Bunneys Bikes.....	27 C6
Rutland Square Hotel.....	9 B5	Malt Cross.....	19 B4	Victoria Bus Station.....	28 C2

Wollaton Hall is on the western edge of the city, 2.5 miles from the centre; get there on bus 30, which stops right in front (£1.30, 15 minutes). Wollaton Park, surrounding the hall, is a popular picnic spot.

BREWHOUSE YARD MUSEUM

Housed in five 17th-century cottages carved into the cliff below the castle, this engaging museum (☎ 915 3600; Castle Blvd; admission Mon-Fri free, Sat & Sun £1.50; ☎ 10am-4.30pm) re-creates everyday life in Nottingham over the past 300 years with particularly fine reconstructions of traditional shops.

GALLERIES OF JUSTICE

In the impressive Shire Hall building, the well-presented **Galleries of Justice** (☎ 952 0555; www.galleriesofjustice.org.uk; High Pavement; adult/child £7.95/5.95; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-3pm Tue-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) takes you through an interactive history of the judicial system. From medieval ordeals by water or hot iron to modern crime detection, 'gaolers' and 'prisoners' guide you through. Careful, you may find yourself sentenced to death in a Victorian courtroom!

Tours

Nottingham Tours (☎ 925 9388; www.nottinghamtours.com) Offers a well-respected walking tour of the city, as well as tours of Sherwood Forest and boat trips. **Original Nottingham Ghost Walk** (☎ 01773-769300; www.ghost-walks.co.uk; adult/child £4/3; ☎ tours 7pm Sat Jan-Nov) Departs from Ye Olde Salutation Inn (p438) to delve into the city's supernatural past – descend into the medieval caves if you dare...

Festivals & Events

A **Shakespeare Festival** has been held each July for almost a decade at the **Nottingham Playhouse** (☎ 941 9419; www.nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk;

Wellington Circus). Meanwhile, the Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery (p435) plays host to a **Robin Hood Pageant**, in October each year, reliving the times of the local outlaw legend.

The city's famed **Goose Fair** dates back to the Middle Ages. These days it's an outsized funfair that takes place around the beginning of October in the Forest Recreation Ground, a mile north of the city centre.

Sleeping

Igloo Backpackers Hostel (☎ 947 5250; www.igloohotel.co.uk; 110 Mansfield Rd; dm £13.50) Easy-come, easy-go budget travellers' favourite, this basic 36-bed independent hostel is a short walk north of Victoria bus station. The entrance is on Fulforth St. It's always full at weekends so book ahead. Breakfast is extra.

Lindum House (☎ 847 1089; 1 Burns St; s/d incl breakfast £40/50) On the outskirts of the centre in a striking Gothic residence, this is a quirky option and a good one for self-caterers: two of the rooms have adjoining kitchens. Beware of steep cancellation policy of 72 hours in advance. It's about 10 minutes' walk northwest from the centre.

Rutland Square Hotel (☎ 941 1114; rutlandsquare@zoffanyhotels.co.uk; St James St; s/d from £85/120) The rooms at this central business hotel are clean and serviceable, but the overall feel is clinical with little personal touch or charm. But there are good weekend discounts.

Lace Market Hotel (☎ 852 3232; www.lacemarkehotel.co.uk; 29-31 High Pavement; s/d £90/115; ☎) Nottingham's best place to stay by a country mile, this is a lovely boutique hotel in a beautifully historic, well-heel pocket of the city centre. It's in an old town house with a slick contemporary interior and young, attentive staff. Check the website for weekend discounts.

Eating

Alley Café (☎ 955 1013; 19 Cannon Court; mains £6-9; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon & Tue, to 11pm Wed-Sat) This pint-sized café-bar has created quite a buzz with its excellent, globally inspired vegetarian and vegan dishes, not to mention its funky DJs and tunes. It is hidden down an ancient back alley. Seek it out.

Skinny Sumo (☎ 952 0188; 11-13 Carlton St; sushi platters from £8, lunch menu £6.90; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-11pm Tue-Fri, noon-11pm Sat, noon-3pm & 6-10pm Sun) Frills are sparse, but taste is plenty in this basic, highly regarded white-tiled Japanese café-restaurant with a sushi-bar conveyor belt.

Punchinello (☎ 941 1965; 35 Forman St; mains £8-13; ☎ noon-3pm Mon-Sat, plus 7.30-10pm Mon-Thu, 7.30-10.30pm Fri & Sat) Low-slung beamed ceilings distinguish this established central restaurant, the oldest in town, but it has moved with the times with a hint of the Mediterranean infusing most of its dishes.

Fresh (☎ 924 3336; 15 Goose Gate; dinner mains £9-12; ☎ 8am-late Mon-Fri, 9am-late Sat) The downstairs eatery specialises in wholesome snacks, salads and sandwiches, while the thriving upstairs restaurant fuses culinary influences from such diverse sources as Thailand and the Mediterranean. Beautiful lilies deck the tables and brighten the surroundings.

Drinking

Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem (☎ 947 3171; Brewhouse Yard, Castle Rd) Tucked into the cliff below the castle, this fantastically atmospheric alehouse claims to be England's oldest pub; it supposedly slaked the thirst of departing crusaders. The phrase 'nooks and crannies' could have been invented for here. Just when you think there are no more, you'll find another – and there are usually more than enough to accommodate the many tourists who come to sample the brews.

Cock & Hoop (☎ 852 3217; 25 High Pavement) Sophisticated yet easy-going, this cosy, traditional refurbished alehouse in a well-heeled pocket of Nottingham is a most pleasant place for a knees-up.

Bell Inn (☎ 947 5241; 18 Angel Row) Another must for the history buffs, this atmospheric old coaching inn lies at the heart of the shopping district and has warmed the cockles of Nottingham drinkers for hundreds of years.

Ye Olde Salutation Inn (☎ 988 1948; Maid Marian Way) A dual carriageway disguises the centuries-old atmosphere (c 1240) of 'the Sal', as regulars

know it. Ask at the bar if you can have a peek at the labyrinth of underground caves spiralling down behind an innocuous-looking door.

Entertainment

Nightclub fads come and go at breakneck speed in Nottingham. The converted warehouse/nightclubs on Lace Market's Broadway are still a hub, but the beats could soon move on – and there are plenty of great nights elsewhere. Check the local guides for more.

Stealth (☎ 958 0672; www.stealthattack.co.uk; Masonic Pl, Goldsmith St; admission £2-10) The bold new thing on the Nottingham nightclub scene, Stealth has an eclectic music mix, from indie to highly charged dance all-nighters that lures an up-for-it crowd from miles around.

NG1 (☎ 958 8440; www.ng1club.co.uk; 76-80 Lower Parliament St; admission £2-7) Nottingham's very own gay superclub, NG1 is pure, unpretentious hedonistic fun, with two dance floors belting out classic funky house, pop, cheese or indie depending on the night.

Social (☎ 950 5078; 23 Pelham St) Techno-/dance-heads make for this sister club of the famous London venue. DJs rock the upstairs dance floor.

Bluu (☎ 950 5359; 5 Broadway; ☎ 11am-midnight Sun-Tue, to 1am Wed & Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) This part restaurant, part bar, part nightclub offers a swish menu by day (slow braised lamb hotpot £15.50), and a jumping downstairs bar by night, attracting a chic, shirted and high-heeled crowd mostly in their mid-20s.

Malt Cross (☎ 941 1048; 16 St James St) What a great place! In an old music hall with a colourful history (it was a brothel in a previous incarnation), this has got the best vibe in town. Good live music and decent food are all dished up under the glass arched roof, an architectural treasure in itself.

Rock City (☎ 941 2544; www.rock-city.co.uk; 8 Talbot St) The dance floor jumps here on the popular 'Tuned' student night on Thursday, and on '80s night every Friday. Big-name pop acts usually head here.

Shopping

Paul Smith is the local boy made good in the heady environment of the London fashion scene. He's done so well, he has not one, but two upmarket exclusive shops in the city centre. One is on Byard Lane, the other is Willoughby House.

Getting There & Away

Nottingham is well situated for both trains and buses. The train station just to the south of the town centre has frequent – but no fast – services that go Birmingham (1½ hours), and Manchester (two hours) and London (two hours). Coaches are the cheaper option, mostly operating from the dingy confines of Broadmarsh bus station. There are five direct services to Birmingham and around 10 to London. Bus services to outlying villages are regular and reliable too. Services to Southwell, Eastwood and Newark also mostly depart from Broadmarsh bus station. If you're going further, the nearby airport might be your best bet.

Central Trains (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.centraltrains.co.uk) Links up to Liverpool to the northwest, and as far south as Stansted Airport.

East Midlands Airport (☎ 0871 919 9000; www.nottinghamema.com)

Midland Mainline (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.midlandmainline.com) Serves East Midlands, London, and goes up north too.

Trent Barton (☎ 01773-712265; www.trentbuses.co.uk) Buses depart from Broadmarsh and Victoria bus stations.

Getting Around

For information on buses within Nottingham, call **Nottingham City Transport** (☎ 950 6070; www.nct.co.uk). The Kangaroo ticket gives you unlimited travel on buses and trams within the city for £2.70.

The city **tram system** (www.thetram.net; single/day all day from £1.20/2.20) runs to the centre from Hucknall, 7 miles to the north of central Nottingham, through to the town centre and the train station.

Full details on Nottingham transport can be found at the **Nottingham Travelwise Service** (www.itspottingham.info). You can also pick up a free transport planner and map from the tourist office.

Bunneys Bikes (☎ 947 2713; 97 Carrington St; bike hire per day £8.99; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) is near the train station.

AROUND NOTTINGHAM Newstead Abbey

With its attractive gardens, evocative lakeside ruins and notable connections with Romantic poet Lord Byron (1788–1824), whose country pile it was, **Newstead Abbey** (☎ 01623-455900; www.newsteadabbey.org.uk; adult/child £6/3, gardens only £3/1.50; ☎ house noon-5pm Apr-Sep, garden 9am-dusk

year-round) is a popular weekend destination for tourists and local families alike. Founded as an Augustinian priory around 1170, it was converted into a home after the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. Beside the still-imposing façade of the priory church are the remains of the manor. It now houses some interesting Byron memorabilia, from pistols to manuscripts, and you can have a peek at the poet's old living quarters. Many of the rooms are re-created in convincing period styles.

The house is 12 miles north of Nottingham, off the A60. The Stagecoach bus 233 runs at 23 minutes past the hour from Victoria bus station, weekends only. The Sherwood Forester bus runs right there on Sunday in summer. Bus 737 runs from Nottingham (25 minutes, every 30 minutes, hourly Sunday) to the abbey gates, where you will have to walk a mile to the house and gardens.

DH Lawrence Sites

The **DH Lawrence Birthplace Museum** (☎ 01773-717353; 8a Victoria St, Eastwood; admission Mon-Fri free, Sat & Sun £2; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar), former home of Nottingham's controversial author (1885–1930), has been reconstructed as it would have been in Lawrence's childhood, with period furnishings. Down the road, the **Durban House Heritage Centre** (☎ 01773-717353; Mansfield Rd; admission £2, joint ticket £3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) sheds light on the background to Lawrence's books by re-creating the life of the mining community at the turn of the 20th century.

Eastwood is about 10 miles northwest of the city. Take Trent Barton service 1.

Sherwood Forest Country Park

Don't expect to lose yourself like an outlaw: there are almost more tourists than trees in today's Sherwood Forest, although there are still peaceful spots to be found. The **Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre** (☎ 01623-823202; www.sherwoodforest.org.uk; admission free, parking £3; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar) houses 'Robyn Hode's Sherwode', a cute but corny exhibition describing the lifestyles of bandits, kings, peasants and friars. One of the major attractions is the Major Oak, which is supposed to have been a hiding place for Mr Hood; these days it's more likely he'd have to hold it up, not hide in it. The **Robin Hood Festival** is a massive medieval re-enactment that takes place here every August.

Sherwood Forest YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6026; sherwood@yha.org.uk; Forest Corner, Edwinstowe; dm members/nonmembers £15.50/18.50) is a modern hostel with comfortable dorms just a bugle-horn cry away from the visitor centre.

Sherwood Forester buses run the 20 miles to the park from Nottingham on Sunday. Catch bus 33 from Nottingham Monday to Saturday.

SOUTHWELL

☎ 01636 / pop 6285

Like it fell out of a Jane Austen novel, Southwell is a sleepy market town with tearooms and antique shops. **Southwell Minster** (☎ 812649; suggested donation £2; ☎ 8am-7pm May-Sep, to dusk Oct-Apr) is a Gothic cathedral unlike any other in England, its two heavy, square front towers belying the treats within. The nave dates from the 12th century, although there is evidence of an earlier Saxon church floor, itself made with mosaics from a Roman villa. A highlight of the building is the chapterhouse, filled with 13th-century carvings of leaves, pigs, dogs and rabbits. The library is also fascinating, with illuminated manuscripts and heavy tomes from the 16th century and earlier.

A visit to **Southwell Workhouse** (NT; ☎ 817250; Upton Rd; adult/child £4.90/2.40; ☎ noon-5pm Thu-Mon Mar-Jul, Sep & Oct, 11am-5pm Thu-Mon Aug) is a sobering but fascinating experience. An audio guide, narrated by 'inmates' and 'officials', describes the life of paupers in the mid-19th century to good (if grim) effect, despite the fact that most of the rooms are empty.

Bus 100 runs from Nottingham (40 minutes, every 20 minutes, hourly on Sunday) and on to Newark-on-Trent (25 minutes, hourly, every two hours on Sunday).

DERBYSHIRE

Without doubt one of the prettiest parts of England, Derbyshire is a winning combination of rolling green hills dotted with lambs and lined with stone fences, beautiful wild moors, remote windswept farms and grey-stone villages. And, er, Derby.

Part of the county is within the Peak District National Park, and for many visitors the two areas are synonymous – although the park overlaps several other counties, and there are parts of Derbyshire beyond the national park boundary that contain many other attrac-

tions. There's the misplaced seaside resort of Matlock Bath, the twisted spire of Chesterfield cathedral, and some wonderful stately homes including dishevelled Calke Abbey and unforgettable Chatsworth.

Derbyshire is one of the most visited counties in England, and justifiably so.

Orientation

Derbyshire's main city, Derby, lies towards the south of this very pretty county, which stretches much taller than it does wide. The north contains some of the prettiest stretches of the Peak District, but south is also blessed with some fine scenery, perhaps most instantly accessible from the pretty market town of Ashbourne. Matlock Bath is almost plumb in the county's centre.

Activities

Outdoor activities in Derbyshire include walking, cycling, rock climbing, caving and paragliding, to name but a few. Many take place inside the Peak District National Park, and are covered under the Activities heading in that section (p446).

Getting There & Around

Derbyshire Wayfarer (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.derbybus.net; day pass adult/family £7.90/12.50) Covers buses and trains throughout the county and beyond (eg to Manchester and Sheffield).

Trent Barton Buses (☎ 01773-712265; www.trentbuses.co.uk; day ticket £4) Operates the TransPeak bus service.

DERBY

☎ 01332 / pop 229,407

The Industrial Revolution made a major manufacturing centre out of Derby, which made its name churning out such varied goods as silk, china, railways and Rolls-Royce aircraft engines. Not the prettiest town, it is a useful stepping stone to some lovely Derbyshire countryside. And while you're here you can delve into the history of English engineering, the bone-china industry and sample a pint in a city that residents claim to be the real-ale capital of Britain. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 255802; www.visitderby.co.uk; Market Pl; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10.30am-2.30pm Sun) is in the main square.

Sights

Derby's grand 18th-century **cathedral** (Queen St; adult/child £5/2.50; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) boasts a 64m-high tower and impressive wrought-iron

screens. Large windows enhance the magnificent light interior. Tours run at 10.30am on the second Monday of the month. Don't miss the huge tomb of Bess of Hardwick, one of Derbyshire's most formidable residents in days gone by. For more about her, see Hardwick Hall (p444). Bird-lovers should watch out for peregrines, regularly spotted around the tower.

Next to the River Derwent in a former silk mill (Britain's first 'modern' factory), the **Derby Museum of Industry & History** (☎ 255308; Silk Mill Lane; admission free; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1-4pm Sun & Bank Holidays) tells the city's manufacturing history; trainspotters will have a field day, while plane buffs should get a buzz out of displays on the development of the Rolls-Royce aero-engine.

The factory of **Royal Crown Derby** (☎ 712841; www.royalcrownderby.co.uk; Osmaston Rd; tours £4.95, demonstration studio only £2.95/2.75; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun, 4 tours daily Mon-Fri) turns out some of the finest bone china in Britain. In the demonstration studio, you'll see workers skilfully making delicate china flowers, using little more than a hat-pin, spoon handle and even a head-lice comb. There's also a shop (watch your elbows).

Sleeping

Crompton Coach House (☎ 365735; www.coachhouse.derby.co.uk; 45 Crompton St; s/d incl breakfast £28.50/55) Bright sunny rooms along with cheery hosts in this colourful B&B make this the best option in a city short on choices for the cash-conscious traveller. It lies just south of the central shopping area.

Midland Hotel (☎ 345894; www.midland-derby.co.uk; Midland Rd; s/d £99/117; ☎ ☑) The grand old dame of Derby hotels lies right opposite the train station. Business delegates hobnob in its welcoming and convivial environs during the week. Prices tumble at the weekends. Ask for an interior room away from traffic noise. The hotel restaurant is good and particularly popular for Sunday lunch.

Eating & Drinking

Derby's best pubs are near the train station.

Café B (☎ 368822; Sadler Gate; bagels £2.50; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm Sat, 11.30am-4.30pm Sun) On the narrow pedestrian street branching out from central Market Pl, this place is busy, bright and bustling (to use 'b' words). It's also 'boxlike' and you'll need to scarp for space to munch very tasty bagels.

Haus (☎ 832926; Jacobean House; mains £9-15; ☎ 6-10pm Tue-Sat) The restaurant of the moment, Haus has excellent European cuisine and a fresh, contemporary look. Book ahead at weekends.

Brunswick Inn (☎ 290677; 1 Railway Tce) This award-winning inn has a warm ambience, all maroon leather upholstery and wood panels, but the real reason to come here is the beers (some made on-site), which are a wet dream for real-ale-lovers.

Getting There & Away

Derby's main bus station is currently closed, with temporary stands in place nearby. TransPeak buses run every two hours between Nottingham and Manchester via Derby, Matlock, Bakewell and Buxton (Derby to Nottingham 30 minutes, Derby to Bakewell one hour). Outgoing services currently leave from stand Y1 on Derwent St just north of the tourist office. From London, there are trains to Derby (two hours, hourly), continuing to Chesterfield, Sheffield and Leeds. There is also a direct service from Birmingham (45 minutes).

AROUND DERBY

Kedleston Hall

Sitting proudly in vast landscaped parkland, the superb neoclassical mansion of **Kedleston Hall** (NT; ☎ 01332-842191; adult/child £6.90/3.30; ☎ noon-4pm Sat-Wed Easter-Oct) is a must for fans of stately homes. The Curzon family has lived here since the 12th century; Sir Nathaniel Curzon tore down an earlier house in 1758 so this stunning masterpiece could be built. Meanwhile, the poor old peasants in Kedleston village had their humble dwellings moved a mile down the road, as they interfered with the view! Ah, the good old days...

Entering the house through a grand portico you reach the breathtaking Marble Hall with its massive alabaster columns and statues of Greek deities. Curved corridors on either side offer splendid views of the park – don't miss the arc of floorboards, specially cut from bending oak boughs. Other highlights include richly decorated bedrooms and a circular saloon with a domed roof, modelled on the Pantheon in Rome. Another great building, Government House in Calcutta (now Raj Bhavan), was modelled on Kedleston Hall, as a later Lord Curzon was viceroy of India around 1900. His collection of oriental artefacts is on

show, as is his wife's 'peacock' dress – made of gold and silver thread and weighing 5kg.

If the sun is out, take a walk around the lovingly restored 18th-century-style pleasure gardens.

Kedleston Hall is 5 miles northwest of Derby. By bus, service 109 between Derby and Ashbourne goes within about 1.5 miles of Kedleston Hall (20 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday). It leaves from Albert St in Derby, stand B1. On Sunday and Bank Holidays the bus loops right up to the house.

Calke Abbey

Like an enormous, long-neglected cabinet of wonders, **Calke Abbey** (NT; ☎ 01332-863822; adult/child £6.80/3.40; ☎ 12.30-4.30pm Sat-Wed Apr-Oct) is not your usual glitzy, wealth-encrusted stately home. Built around 1703, it's been passed down a dynasty of eccentric and reclusive baronets. Very little has changed since about 1880 – it's a mesmerising example of a country house in decline. The result is a ramshackle maze of secret corridors, underground tunnels and rooms crammed with old furniture, mounted animal heads, dusty books, stuffed birds and endless piles of bric-a-brac from the last three centuries. Some rooms are in fabulous condition, while others are deliberately untouched, complete with crumbling plaster and mouldy wallpaper. (You exit the house via a long, dark tunnel – a bit more thrilling than one might like, given the state of the buildings.) A stroll round the gardens is a similar time-warp experience – in the potting sheds nothing has changed since about 1930, but it looks like the gardener left only yesterday.

Admission to Calke Abbey house is by timed ticket at busy times. On summer weekends it's wise to phone ahead and check there'll be space. You can enter the gardens and grounds at any time. Calke is 10 miles south of Derby. Visitors coming by car must enter via the village of Ticknall. The Arriva bus 68 from Derby to Swadlincote stops at Ticknall (40 minutes, hourly, change to the 69 in Melbourne) and from there it's a 2-mile walk through the park.

Ashbourne

☎ 01335 / pop 7600

The picturesque little market town of Ashbourne is nestled in a bowl formed by the

Derbyshire Dales. It lies at the very southern tip of the Peak District National Park, about 15 miles northwest of Derby. Fine stone terraces line Market Pl and the precariously sloping main street, where visitors flock at weekends, either to recharge after a hike or to simply hang out in the flurry of cafés, pubs and antique shops.

The **tourist office** (☎ 343666; Market Pl; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) can provide leaflets or advice on B&Bs in the area.

Of particular interest to walkers and cyclists, Ashbourne is the southern terminus of the **Tissington Trail**, a former railway line and now a wonderful easy-gradient path cutting through fine west Derbyshire countryside. The Tissington Trail takes you north towards Buxton and connects with the High Peak Trail running south towards Matlock Bath; for more details on circular route possibilities see p446). About a mile outside town along Mapleton Lane, **Ashbourne Cycle Hire** (☎ 343156; cycle hire per day £13) is on the Tissington Trail, with a huge stock of bikes and trailers for all ages, and free leaflets showing the route with pubs and teashops along the way.

Ivy-covered **Bramhall's** (☎ 346158; www.bramhalls.co.uk; 6 Buxton Rd; s/d £27.50/55) lies just up the road from the main market square. Its fine restaurant is known well beyond Ashbourne and it also has a great little B&B.

The half-timbered **Ashbourne Gingerbread Shop** (☎ 346753; St John's St) takes the biscuit as the best bakery and tearoom in town. It serves some of the gingerbread Ashbourne is famous for. Down-to-earth **Smith's Tavern** (☎ 342264; 36 St John's St) is a cosy, cluttered and popular pub with decent brews and good grub.

Without your own transport, bus is the only way to get to Ashbourne. Numerous services leave from the forecourt of Derby train station and the trip takes from 40 minutes to just under an hour. Direct buses include the 109 (five services daily Monday to Saturday) and 108 (four per day on Sunday and Bank Holidays). The One, operated by Trent Barton, leaves from Derby's Albert St, stand B1 (four daily Monday to Saturday).

MATLOCK BATH

☎ 01629 / pop 2202

Charming, tacky and quirky in a uniquely British way, Matlock Bath is like a seaside resort that got lost in landlocked rural Derbyshire. Day-trippers wander down the brash

promenade, popping into amusement arcades, an aquarium, Victorian cafés, pubs and the souvenir shops – some with stock that seems left over from Victorian times. The tiny tourist beauty spot lies on the southeastern edge of the Peak District National Park. Bisected by the smooth, twisty A6, the town's buzz becomes a roar (of engines) at the weekend, as hundreds of motorcyclists flock here. If you're lucky, you may catch the memorable sight of a leather-clad burly biker sipping tea from a bone-china mug.

It sits next to the pleasant town of Matlock, which has little in the way of sights but is a handy gateway to the scenic dales.

Orientation & Information

Matlock Bath is 2 miles south of Matlock. Everything revolves around North Pde and South Pde, a line of seaside-style shops, attractions, pubs and places to eat along one side of the main road through town (the A6), with the murmuring River Derwent and a plush gorge on the other side.

Matlock Bath's **tourist office** (☎ 55082; www.derbyshire.gov.uk; the Pavilion; ☎ 9.30am-5pm daily Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun Nov-Feb) is run by helpful staff armed with reams of leaflets and guidebooks.

Sights & Activities

One of the delights of Matlock Bath is simply strolling along the promenade, munching on chips or candyfloss. For a scenic detour, you can meander across the river to the park on the other side and take one of the steep paths to great clifftop viewpoints.

At the enthusiast-run **Mining Museum** (☎ 583 834; the Pavilion; adult/child £3/2; ☎ 10am-5pm May-Sep, 11am-3pm Nov-Apr) you can clamber through the shafts and tunnels where Derbyshire lead miners once eked out a risky living. Bizarrely, part of the museum was once a dancehall. For £2 extra (child £1), you can go down **Temple Mine** and pan for 'gold'.

For a different view, go to the **Heights of Abraham** (☎ 582365; adult/child £9.50/6.50; ☎ 10am-5pm daily Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun Feb-Mar), which claims to be the Peak District's 'oldest attraction'. It is an excellent, wholesome family day out, with underground caverns, an adventure playground and woodland nature trails. The price includes a spectacular cable-car ride up from the valley floor.

From the cable-car base, walking trails lead up to viewpoints on top of **High Tor**. You can

see down to Matlock Bath and over to **Riber Castle**, a Victorian folly.

A mile south of Matlock Bath is **Masson Mills Working Textile Museum** (☎ 581001; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun), built in 1783 for pioneering industrialist Sir Richard Arkwright. It's still working today, with renovated looms and weaving machines, and the world's largest collection of bobbins bringing more than 200 years of textile history to life. It's now cunningly combined with a 'shopping village', including three floors of high-street textile and clothing names.

From the beginning of September to October don't miss the **Matlock Illuminations** (Derwent Gardens; admission £3; ☎ evenings from dusk Fri-Sun), with streams of pretty lights, outrageously decorated Venetian boats on the river and fireworks.

Sleeping

Matlock Bath has several B&Bs in the heart of things on North Pde and South Pde, and a few places just out of the centre. There are also more choices in nearby Matlock.

Matlock YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5960; matlock@yha.org.uk; 40 Bank Rd; dm members/nonmembers £13.95/16.95) A basic, big housing block 2 miles from Matlock Bath, with likeable, friendly staff. It is due to close in October 2007.

Hodgkinson's Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 582170; www.hodgkinsons-hotel.co.uk; 150 South Pde; s/d from £38/70; ☎) You seem to stumble into the 19th century when you enter this brilliantly quirky hotel. From the wooden-handled umbrellas by the door to the bizarrely shaped rooms and antique chairs, it is soaked in Victorian atmosphere and charm. Rooms come with beams and brass bed-knobs.

Temple Hotel (☎ 583911; www.templehotel.co.uk; Temple Walk; s/d £55/92; ☎ ☒) The views from this hillside hotel are fantastic – so lovely that poet Lord Byron once felt inspired to etch a poem on the restaurant window. It's been a hotel for 400 years (and a good chunk of its recent history with the same décor). The rooms are straight from the 1970s but that's part of the charm. Bar meals are available.

Eating & Drinking

North Pde and South Pde are lined end-to-end with cafés, teashops and takeaways, serving chocolate cake, fish and chips, fried chicken, pies and burgers – hear those arteries scream!

Temple Hotel (☎ 583911; Temple Walk) On the hillside, the bar at this hotel has reasonable pub food and a fine restaurant.

Fishpond (☎ 581000; 204 South Pde) This pub gets a lively, spirited crowd and is surprisingly jumping for a pub in rural Derbyshire. It has some great (and not-so-great) live music.

Victorian Tea Shop (☎ 583255; 118 North Pde; ☞ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) For the pick of the tea-houses, stroll elegantly into this place, all lace curtains, cream cakes and delicate crockery. You may find yourself mingling with bikers with slightly less finesse!

Getting There & Away

The Peak District is extremely well served by public transport, and Matlock is a hub. Buses 213 and 214 go to and from Sheffield (one hour 10 minutes) several times a day. There are hourly buses to and from Derby (1¼ hours) and Chesterfield (35 minutes). There is also a train station. Several trains a day serve Derby (30 minutes). For detailed travel planning information, go to www.derbybus.net.

CHESTERFIELD

☎ 01246 / pop 100,879

This is an unremarkable town with the exception of one famous landmark: the eye-catching crooked spire of **St Mary & All Saints Church** (☎ 206506; admission free, tours adult/child £3.50/1.50; ☞ 9am-5pm). Dating from 1360, the giant corkscrew spire is 68m high and leans almost 3m southwest. There are various theories why: it probably was due to green timber warping, although some still prefer to believe that the spire was so amazed to hear of a virgin being married in the church that it twisted to see the sight for itself. Tour times vary; call to arrange.

The **tourist office** (☎ 345777; Rykneld Sq; ☞ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) is right opposite the crooked spire in a sleek black building. It's very useful for planning a trip to the Peak District.

The easiest way to get here is by train. Chesterfield is between Nottingham/Derby (20 minutes) and Sheffield (10 minutes), with services about hourly. The station is just east of the centre.

AROUND CHESTERFIELD

Hardwick

If you're weighing up which stately homes to see, **Hardwick Hall** (NT; ☎ 01246-850430; adult/child £7.80/3.90; ☞ noon-4.30pm Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun Apr-Oct)

should be high on your list. It was home to the 16th century's second most powerful woman, Elizabeth, countess of Shrewsbury – known to all as Bess of Hardwick. Unashamedly modelling herself on the era's *most* famous woman – Queen Elizabeth I – Bess gained power and wealth by marrying four times, upwards each time.

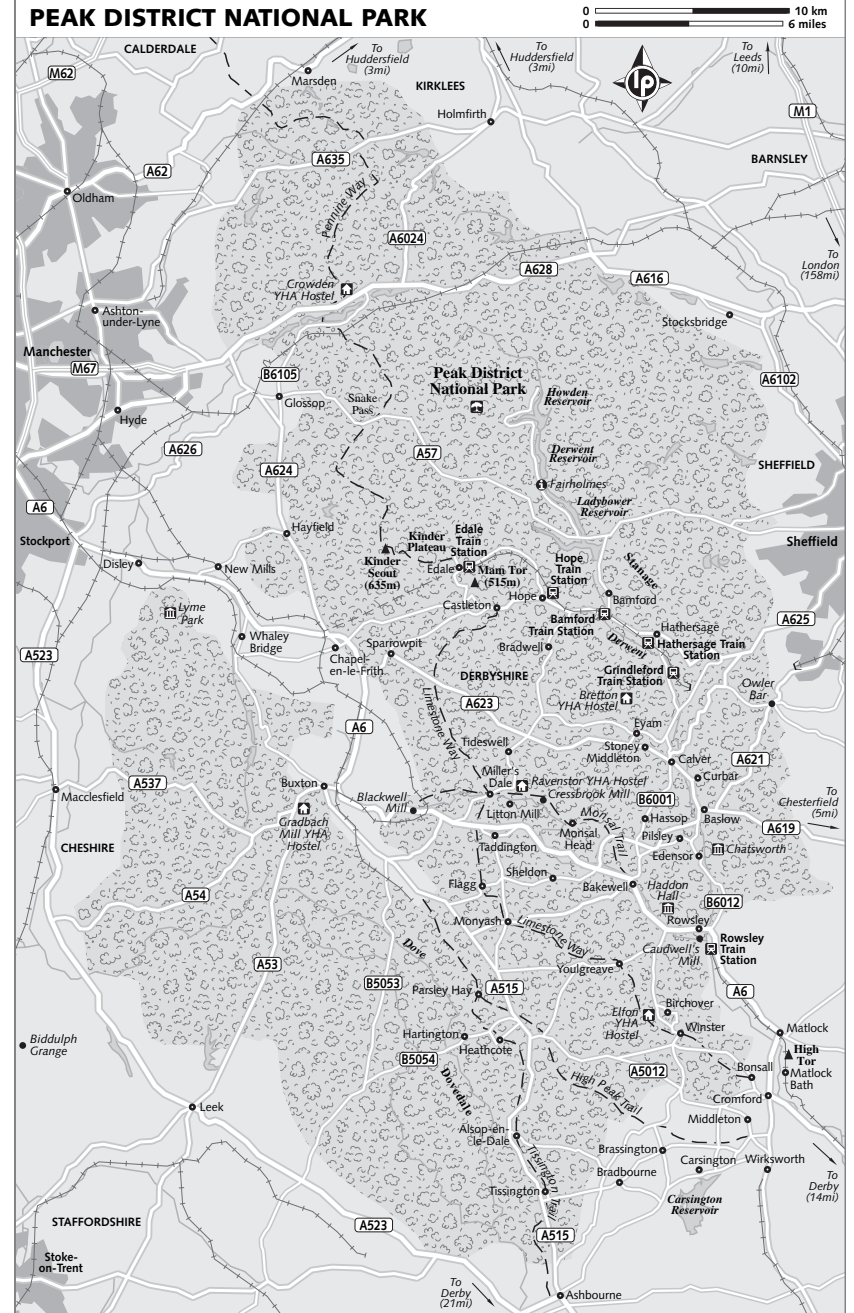
When her fourth husband died in 1590, Bess had a huge fortune to play with, and had Hardwick Hall built using the designs of eminent architect Robert Smythson. Glass was a status symbol, so she went all-out on the windows, and a contemporary ditty quipped 'Hardwick Hall – more glass than wall.' Also astounding are the magnificent High Great Chamber and Long Gallery. These and many other rooms and broad stairways are decorated with fabulous large tapestries.

Next door is **Hardwick Old Hall** (EH; adult/child £3.50/1.80, joint ticket £10.60/5.30; ☞ 11am-6pm Mon, Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 11am-5pm Mon, Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun Oct), Bess's first house, now a romantic ruin.

Hardwick Hall is 10 miles southeast of Chesterfield, just off the M1. A special coach, Service 101, runs from Chesterfield train station (tickets £6, with 20% discount at Hardwick, Sunday June to August, Thursday July and August), out in the morning, back in the afternoon, giving about three hours at Hardwick. The bus also passes **Stainsby Mill** – a quaint working flour mill dating from 1245 – and ends at **Bolsover Castle**, yet another stately home. For details, contact the Chesterfield tourist office or call **Chesterfield Community Transport** (☎ 01246-209668).

PEAK DISTRICT

The Peak District National Park features some of England's wildest, most beautiful scenery: pretty villages, historic sites, grand houses, fascinating limestone caves and the southernmost hills of the Pennines. Called the Peak not because of the hills, which are quite rounded, but because early British tribe the Picts once lived here, this is one of the country's best-loved national parks (it's the busiest in Europe, and the second busiest in the world after Mt Fuji). But don't be put off by its popularity: escaping the crowds is no problem if you avoid summer weekends, and even then, with a bit of imagination, it's easy to enjoy this wonderful area in relative peace and solitude.



Orientation & Information

The Peak District is principally in Derbyshire but spills into five adjoining counties (including Yorkshire, Staffordshire and Cheshire) and is one of the largest national parks in England. This 555-sq-mile protected area is divided into two distinct zones: the harsher, higher, wilder Dark Peak to the north, characterised by peaty moors and dramatic gritstone cliffs called 'edges'; and the lower, prettier, more pastoral White Peak to the south, with green fields marked by dry-stone walls, and divided by deep dales.

There are tourist offices (those run by the national park are called visitor centres) in Buxton, Bakewell, Castleton, Edale and other locations, all overflowing with maps, guidebooks and leaflets detailing walks, cycle rides and other activities. For general information, the free *Peak District* newspaper and the official park website at www.peakdistrict.org cover transport, activities, local events, guided walks and so on.

Activities

CAVING

The Peak District limestone is riddled with caves and caverns, including ' showcaves ' open to the public in Castleton, Buxton and Matlock Bath (described in each of those sections). For serious caving (or potholing) trips, tourist offices can provide a list of accredited outdoor centres, and if you know what you're doing, Castleton makes a great base.

For guidebooks, gear (to buy or hire) and a mine of local information, contact **Hitch n Hike** (☎ 01433-651013; www.hitchnhike.co.uk; Mytham Bridge, Bamford, Hope Valley, Derbyshire), a specialist caving and outdoor-activity shop in Bamford, near Castleton. The website also has more info about caving in the area.

CYCLING

The Peak District is a very popular cycling area, especially the White Peak and the parts of Derbyshire south of here around Matlock and Ashbourne, which have a network of quiet lanes, and tracks for mountain bikers. In the Dark Peak there are fewer roads, and they are quite busy with traffic, although there are some good off-road routes. A good place to start any ride is a tourist office; all stock maps, books and leaflets for cyclists and mountain bikers.

In the Dark Peak, Edale is a popular starting point for mountain bikers, and near the Derwent Reservoirs is also good. In the White

Peak, all the villages mentioned in this section make good bases for cycle tours.

For easy traffic-free riding, head for the 17.5-mile **High Peak Trail**, a route for cyclists and walkers on the mostly flat track of an old railway. You can join the trail at Cromford, near Matlock Bath, but it starts with a very steep incline, so if you seek easy gradients a better start is Middleton Top, a mile or so north. The trail winds through beautiful hills and farmland to a village called Parsley Hay, and continues on for a few more miles towards Buxton. At Parsley Hay another former-railway-turned-walking-and-cycling-route, the **Tissington Trail**, heads south for 13 miles to Ashbourne. You can go out and back as far as you like, or make it a triangular circuit, following the busy B5053 or (a better choice) the quiet lanes through Bradbourne and Brassington.

The **Pennine Bridleway** is another, more recent addition, and is suitable for horse riders, cyclists and walkers.

There are several cycle-hire centres in the Peak District, including **Derwent Cycle Hire** (☎ 01433-651261), and **Parsley Hay** (☎ 01298-84493) and **Middleton Top** (☎ 01629-823204) for the Tissington and High Peak Trails. Tourist offices have a leaflet with all other hire centres, opening times etc. Charges hover around £10 to £15 per day for adults' bikes (deposit and ID required), and kids' bikes and trailers are also available.

WALKING

The Peak District is one of the most popular walking areas in England, crossed by a vast network of footpaths and tracks – especially in the White Peak – and you can easily find a walk of a few miles or longer, depending on your energy and interests. If you want to explore the higher realms of the Dark Peak, which often involves the local art of 'bog trotting', make sure your boots are waterproof and be prepared for wind and rain – even if the sun is shining when you set off.

The Peak's most famous walking trail is the **Pennine Way**, with its southern end at Edale and its northern end more than 250 miles away in Scotland. If you don't have a spare three weeks, from Edale you can follow the trail north across wild hills and moors for just a day or two, or even less. An excellent three-day option is to Hebden Bridge, a delightful little town in Yorkshire.

The 46-mile **Limestone Way** winds through the Derbyshire countryside from Castleton

to Rocester in Staffordshire on a mix of footpaths, tracks and quiet lanes. The northern section of this route, through the White Peak between Castleton and Matlock, is 26 miles, and hardy folk can do it over a long summer day, but two days is better. The route goes via Miller's Dale, Monyash, Youlgreave and Bonsall, with YHA hostels and B&Bs along the way, and ample pubs and cafés. Tourist offices have a detailed leaflet.

Various shorter walks are described throughout this section.

Sleeping

Tourist offices have lists of accommodation for every budget. Perhaps the best budget options are the various camping barns (beds from £5 per person) dotted around the Peak. Usually owned by farmers, they can be booked centrally through the **YHA** (☎ 0870 870 8808).

Getting There & Around

The Peak District authorities are trying hard to wean visitors off their cars, and tourist offices stock the excellent *Derbyshire Bus Timetable* (80p) covering local buses and trains. For more details, see p440.

BUXTON

☎ 01298 / pop 24,112

With its grand Georgian architecture, central crescent, leafy parks, tourists and thermal waters, Buxton invites comparisons to Bath. It's smaller in scale, however, and lodged a little less far up its own backside. While the Romans discovered the natural warm-water springs, the town's heyday was not until the 18th century when 'taking the waters' was highly fashionable. After years of relative obscurity, ambitious restoration projects have put the sparkle back into the town, especially the resurrection of the Opera House, which had fallen into disuse in the 1970s.

Every Tuesday and Saturday, colourful stalls light up Market Pl. The town itself is made for hours of browsing idly and café-crawling.

Situated just outside the border of the Peak District National Park, Buxton is an excellent, picturesque base to get to the northern and western areas.

Orientation & Information

Buxton effectively has two centres: the historical area, with the Crescent, Opera House and

Pavilion; and Market Pl, surrounded by pubs and restaurants. There are several banks with ATMs on the Quadrant.

Cyber@Emporium (☎ 214455; 28 High St; ☎ noon-9pm Mon-Fri, 11am-9pm Sat, 11am-7pm Sun; per hr £3) Internet access.

Post office (Spring Gardens; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 25106; www.peakdistrict-tourism.gov.uk; the Crescent; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep) Has useful leaflets on walks in the area.

Sights & Activities

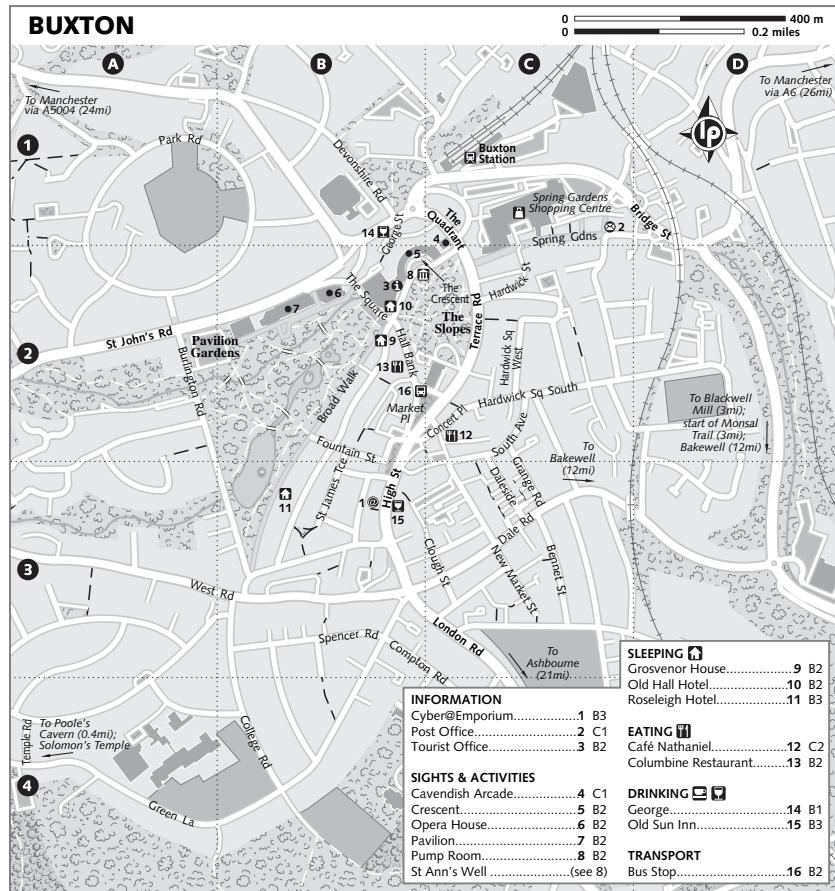
Buxton's gorgeously restored **Opera House** (☎ 0845 127 2190; www.buxton-opera.co.uk; Water St) enjoys a full programme of drama, dance, concerts and comedy as well as staging some renowned festivals and events (see p448). Tours (£2) of the auditorium and backstage areas are available at 11am most Saturday mornings.

Next to the Opera House is the **Pavilion**, an impressive palace of glass and cast iron built in 1871, which overlooks the impeccably manicured **Pavilion Gardens**. Skirting the gardens, the grand, pedestrian **Broad Walk** promenade is the perfect place for a gentle evening stroll.

Another impressive Buxton construction, the graceful curved terrace of the **Crescent** – reminiscent of the Royal Crescent in Bath – is waiting its turn for regeneration. A luxury hotel complex is imminent. Just east of here is **Cavendish Arcade**, formerly a thermal bathhouse (you can still see the chair used for lowering the infirm into the restorative waters), with several craft and book shops, and a striking coloured-glass ceiling.

Across from the tourist office, the **Pump Room**, which dispensed Buxton's spring water for nearly a century, now hosts temporary art exhibitions. Just outside is **St Ann's Well**, a fountain from which Buxton's famous thermal waters still flow – and where a regular procession of tourists queue to fill plastic bottles and slake their thirst with the liquid's 'curative' power.

Poole's Cavern (☎ 26978; www.poolecavern.co.uk; adult/child £6.20/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct) is a magnificent natural limestone cavern, about a mile from central Buxton. Guides take you deep underground to see an impressive formation of stalactites (the ones that hang down) – including one of England's longest – and distinctive 'poached egg' – formation stalagmites.



Festivals & Events

All the big events in Buxton revolve around its beautifully restored Opera House located in the historical area.

Four Four Time An annual live-music festival staged in February each year, including a medley of jazz, blues, folk and world-music acts.

Buxton Festival (www.buxtonfestival.co.uk) This renowned festival takes place in July and is one of the largest of its kind in the country. As well as opera, literary notables such as Louis de Bernières hold sway.

Buxton Fringe (www.buxtonfringe.com) In the same month, the more contemporary Buxton Fringe is gathering popularity.

International Gilbert & Sullivan Festival (www.gs-festival.co.uk) This very popular festival is held at the end of July/beginning of August.

Sleeping

Buxton is awash with good-value, elegant guesthouses – many dating from Victorian times – that are steeped in atmosphere. You'll find the pick of the bunch on Broad Walk.

Roseleigh Hotel (☎ 24904; www.roseleighhotel.co.uk; 19 Broad Walk; s/d incl breakfast from £30/64; (P) (X) (Q)) This tasteful family-run B&B in a spacious old terraced house gives a delightful panorama from the breakfast room onto the ducks paddling in the picturesque Pavilion Gardens lake. The owners are a welcoming couple, both seasoned travellers, who have given each room a warm, Victorian style.

Grosvenor House (☎ 72439; grosvenor.buxton@btpenworld.com; 1 Broad Walk; s/d incl breakfast from £40/60; (P) (Q)) Affable owners run this tranquil,

period-decorated hotel with period furniture and fine views from the front bedrooms. It's well situated on the corner of Pavilion Gardens.

Old Hall Hotel (☎ 22841; www.oldhallhotelbuxton.co.uk; the Square; s/d incl breakfast £65/110) There is a tale to go with every creak of the floorboards at this genial, history-soaked establishment, supposedly the oldest hotel in England. Mary Queen of Scots was held here from 1576 to 1578, and the wood-panelled corridors and rooms are as well appointed and elegant as they must have been in her day.

Eating & Drinking

The Market Sq/High St strip spills over with lairy, alco-fuelled revellers on weekend evenings, but there are a few great pubs all the same. Head down to the area around the Opera House for a more laid-back evening.

Café Nathaniel (☎ 23969; Market St; mains £7.50-10; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun) It's worth pitching up early to snare a seat at this relaxed but small café with scrubbed wooden tables and fresh seafood. It has an adjoining linen, lace and antique shop next door.

Columbine Restaurant (☎ 78752; Hall Bank; mains £10-12.50; ☎ lunch Thu-Sat, dinner 7-11pm Mon & Wed-Sat) Perched on the slope leading down to the Crescent, this excellent understated restaurant is top choice among Buxtonites in the know. Choose from local produce (Derbyshire lamb £12.50) and an extensive vegetarian menu.

Old Sun Inn (☎ 23452; 33 High St) The pick of the town's watering holes, but one which retains an Edwardian-era ambience. Low ceilings, antique light fittings, flagstone floors and a different crowd in every cranny of this warrenlike ale-house make it *the* place to head for a pint – not to mention the surprisingly sophisticated pub grub.

A convivial, bohemian crowd gather within earshot of the Buxton Opera House at the **George** (☎ 24711; the Square), where they sit on a hotchpotch of chairs and lean across big wooden tables to put the world to rights.

Getting There & Away

Buxton is well served by public transport. The best place to get the bus is Market Sq, where services go to Derby (1½ hours, twice hourly), Chesterfield (1¼ hours, several daily) and Sheffield (65 minutes, every 30 minutes). Trains run hourly to and from Manchester (50 minutes).

EDALE

☎ 01433

Time seems to have stood still at this enchanting picture-postcard village. Surrounded by sweeping Peak District countryside at its most majestic, the tiny cluster of imposing stone houses and the parish church are eye-catching in their own right. Ramblers and mountain bikers love it here: Edale lies between the White and Dark Peak areas, and is the southern terminus of the Pennine Way. Its train station makes this seemingly remote enclave very accessible – and highly popular.

Information

All the leaflets, maps and guides you'll need can be found at the recently revamped **tourist office** (☎ 670207; www.edale-valley.co.uk; Grindsbrook; ☎ 10am-5pm), which also includes some updated displays telling the story of the landscape.

Activities

Heading south, a great walk from Edale takes you up to **Hollins Cross**, a point on the ridge that runs south of the valley. From here, you can aim west to the top of spectacular **Mam Tor** and watch the hang-gliders swoop around above. Or go east along the ridge, with great views on both sides, past the cliffs of **Back Tor** to reach Lose Hill (which, naturally, faces Win Hill). Or you can continue south, down to the village of Castleton.

From Edale you can also walk north onto the **Kinder Plateau**, dark and brooding in the mist, gloriously high and open when the sun's out. Weather permitting, a fine circular walk starts by following the Pennine Way through fields to **Upper Booth**, then up a path called Jacobs Ladder and along the southern edge of Kinder, before dropping down to Edale via the steep rocky valley of Grindsbrook Clough, or the ridge of Ringing Roger.

Sleeping

Edale YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5808; edale@yha.org.uk; dm members/nonmembers incl breakfast £16.45/19.45; (P) (Q)) This spartan hostel in an old country house 1.5 miles east of the village centre has spectacular views across to Back Tor. It's also an activity centre and is very popular with youth groups.

Mam Tor House (☎ 670253; www.mamtorhouse.co.uk; Grindsbrook; B&B per person around £22.50; (P)) Lovely stained-glass windows distinguish this characterful lodging in an Edwardian house right next to the church.

For campers, the National Park Authority-owned **Fieldhead Campsite** (☎ 670386; www.fieldhead-campsite.co.uk; sites per person £4.50; **P**), by the tourist office (visitor centre), is the most convenient option. With good facilities, it is also popular with youth groups, and has separate fields dedicated to families and backpackers. **Cotefield Farm Camping Barn** (☎ 0870 870 8808; per person £5; **P**) is bookable through the YHA.

Eating

Edale has two walker-friendly pubs, the refurbished **Old Nag's Head** (☎ 670291; Grindsbrook) and the **Rambler Inn** (☎ 670268; Grindsbrook), which also does B&B. Both serve passable pub grub (£4.95 to £6.95). But the best food in the area is served beneath the beamed ceilings of the **Cheshire Cheese** (☎ 620381; Edale Road; mains £7-10), located around 4 miles from Edale near the neighbouring village of Hope. It has a mud-scraper on hand for dirty boots and is perfect for a posthike pint.

Getting There & Away

Edale is on the train line between Sheffield and Manchester (about eight per day Monday to Friday, five at weekends). Trains also stop at several other Peak villages. At the weekends and on Bank Holidays, bus 260 connects Edale to Castleton (25 minutes, seven daily), with the final bus going on to Buxton.

CASTLETON

☎ 01433 / pop 1200

Nestled in the shadow of 517m-high Mam Tor and crowned by the ruins of Peveril Castle, the neat little settlement of Castleton has a couple of narrow lanes with sturdy gritstone houses and colourful gardens, and a good collection of cosy country pubs. Oh yes – and about a million tourists on summer weekends. But don't let that put you off. Come here at a quieter time to enjoy good walks, and marvel at the famous 'showcaves', where a semiprecious stone called Blue John has been mined for centuries.

Orientation & Information

Castleton stands at the western end of the Hope Valley. The main road from the village goes up the narrow, spectacular gorge of Winnats Pass toward Edale (the A625 route used to cut across Mam Tor, but the Peak's brittle shale led to a landslide in 1977 that destroyed the road). Cross St is the main street; most of the pubs, shops,

cafés, B&Bs, the YHA hostel, and the modern **tourist office** (☎ 620679; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb) are here or just nearby.

Sights

Crowning the hill to the south of Castleton is ruined **Peveril Castle** (EH; ☎ 620613; adult/child £3/1.50; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Jul, 10am-7pm Aug, 10am-5pm Apr, Sep & Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Mar), well worth the steep walk up from the village. William Peveril, son of William the Conqueror, built it originally, and Henry II added the central keep in 1176. The ruins are wickedly atmospheric, and the setting isn't bad either, with a stunning view over the Hope Valley, straight down to Castleton's medieval street grid and north to Mam Tor and beyond.

The area around Castleton is riddled with underground limestone caves, and four are open to the public. Although mostly natural, they have expanded from extensive lead, silver and Blue John mining over the centuries. The most convenient, **Peak Cavern** (☎ 620285; www.devilsarse.com; adult/child £6.25/4.25; ☎ 10am-4pm daily Apr-Oct, Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), is easily reached by a pretty streamside walk from the village centre. It has the largest natural cave entrance in England, known (not so prettily) as the Devil's Arse. Visits are by hourly guided tour only.

Speedwell Cavern (☎ 620512; adult/child £6.75/4.75; ☎ 10am-5pm May-Sep, to 3.30pm Oct-Apr) includes a unique boat trip through a flooded mineshaft, where visitors glide in eerie silence to reach a huge subterranean lake called the Bottomless Pit. Claustrophobics should make their excuses.

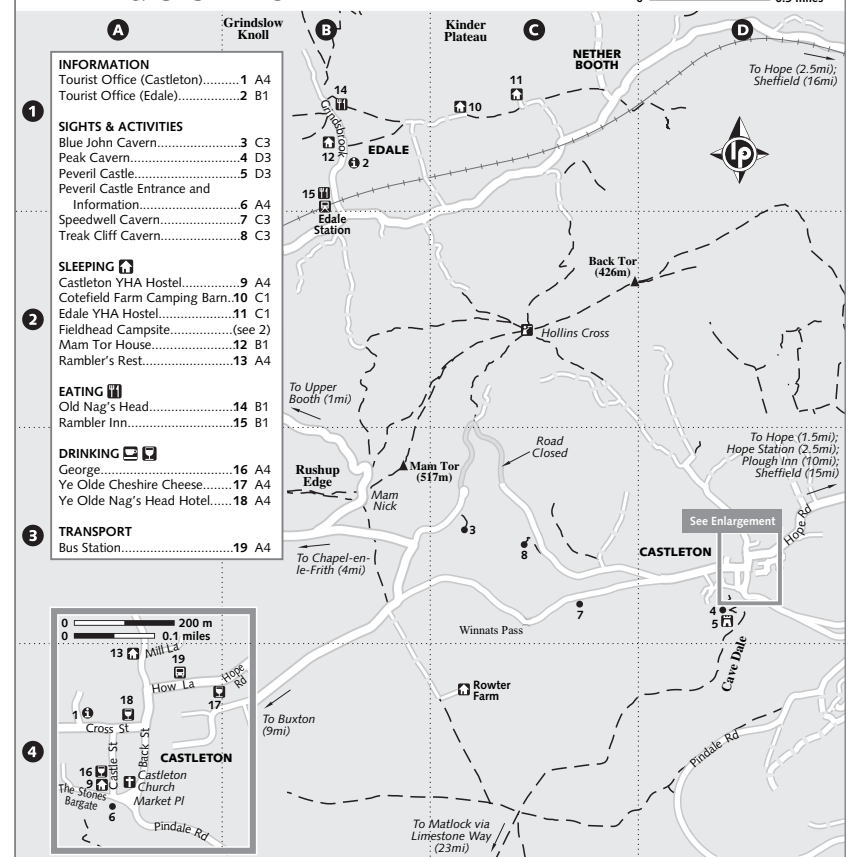
Treak Cliff Cavern (☎ 620571; adult/child £6.50/3.50; ☎ 10am-4.20pm Mar-Oct, to 3.20pm Nov-Feb) is a short walk from Castleton, with colourful exposed seams of Blue John and great limestone stalactites, including the much-photographed 'stork'.

Blue John Cavern (☎ 620638; adult/child £7/3.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm summer, to dusk winter) is an impressive set of natural caverns, where the rich veins of the Blue John mineral can prove dazzling. Watch out for the old mining equipment, also on display. You can get here on foot up the closed section of the Mam Tor road.

Activities

Castleton is the northern terminus of the Limestone Way (p446), which includes narrow, rocky Cave Dale, far below the east wall of the castle.

EDALE & CASTLETON



If you feel like a shorter walk, you can follow the Limestone Way up Cave Dale for a few miles, then loop round on paths and tracks to the west of Rowter Farm to meet the Buxton Rd. Go straight (north) on a path crossing fields and another road to eventually reach Mam Nick, where the road to Edale passes through a gap in the ridge. Go up steps here to reach the summit of Mam Tor, for spectacular views along the Hope Valley. (You can also see the fractured remains of the old main road.) The path then aims northwest along the ridge to another gap called Hollins Cross, from where paths and tracks lead back down to Castleton. This 6-mile circuit takes three to four hours.

A shorter option from Castleton is to take the path direct to Hollins Cross, then go to

Mam Tor, and return by the same route (about 4 miles, two to three hours). From Hollins Cross, you can extend any walk by dropping down to Edale, or you can walk direct from Castleton to Edale via Hollins Cross. Maps are available at the tourist office, and its *Walks Around Castleton* leaflet (30p) has plenty of alternative routes.

Sleeping

Prices listed are peak weekend rates, but almost all Castleton options have good weekday deals.

Castleton YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5758; castleton@yha.org.uk; Castle St; dm members/nonmembers £13.95/16.95; **P**) A rambling, old building with an abundance of rooms, this hostel is a great pit stop

with knowledgeable staff who also conduct guided walks. There's a licensed bar too.

Rambler's Rest (☎ 620125; www.ramblersrest-castleton.co.uk; Mill Bridge; s/d from £25/40; (P)) Rooms are well appointed and comfortable in this attractively restored 17th-century stone cottage. It has a large en-suite room with three or four beds (£22 per person), ideal for small groups or people with kids. Some rooms have shared bathrooms.

Eating & Drinking

George (☎ 620238; Castle St; mains around £7) Flagstone floors, and the tankards dangling from the ceiling, give this ageing local a measure of olde-worlde charm. But it's very much on the beaten tourist track – and don't expect any earth-shattering cuisine.

Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese (☎ 620330; How Lane; mains £7-9) One-armed bandits are most definitely off limits at this well-known alehouse, where tradition is everything. The home cooking needs a little attention but go for the peaceful, snug atmosphere.

Ye Olde Nag's Head Hotel (☎ 620248; Cross St; bar meals £7-10) This cosy, traditional local is a 17th-century coaching house, where the conversation gets livelier as the night goes on. The all-you-can-eat carvery lures hungry diners from miles around. Comfy B&B rooms (per person £36), including one with Jacuzzi, are upstairs; get the ones on the top floor with a view and away from the noise.

Getting There & Away

You can get to Castleton from Bakewell on bus 173 (45 minutes, five per day Monday to Friday, three per day at weekends) via Hope and Tideswell. The 68 goes to Buxton at 9am from Monday to Saturday, while the 174 gets all the way to Matlock on Sunday and Bank Holidays (4.35pm start).

The nearest train station is Hope, about 1 mile east of Hope village (a total of 3 miles east of Castleton) on the line between Sheffield and Manchester. At summer weekends a bus runs between Hope station and Castleton tying in with the trains, although it's not a bad walk in good weather.

EYAM

☎ 01433 / pop 900

The former lead-mining village of Eyam (ee-em) is a quaint little spot with a morbidly touching history. In 1665 a consignment of cloth

from London delivered to a local tailor carried the dreaded Black Death plague. What could have been a widespread disaster remained a localised tragedy thanks to the bravery of the village inhabitants: as the plague spread, the rector, William Mompesson, and his predecessor Thomas Stanley, convinced villagers to quarantine themselves rather than transmit the disease further. Selflessly, they did so; by the time the plague ended in late 1666, it had wiped out whole families, killing around 250 of the village's 800 inhabitants. People in surrounding villages remained relatively unscathed. Even independently of this poignant story, Eyam is well worth a visit; its sloping streets of old cottages backed by rolling green hills form a classic postcard view of the Peak District.

Sights

The **Church of St Lawrence** (☎ 630930; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) dates from Saxon times and carries a moving display on the plague and its devastating effect on the village. Look out for the plague register, recording those who died, name by name, day by day. Perhaps most likely to bring a lump to your throat (although there are several contenders) is the extract from a letter the rector wrote to his children about his wife, Catherine Mompesson, who succumbed to the disease. Her headstone lies in the churchyard. In the same grounds is an 8th-century **Celtic cross**, one of the finest in England. Before leaving, you could also check your watch against the **sundial** on the church wall.

Around the village, many buildings have information plaques attached; these include the **plague cottages**, where the tailor lived, next to the church.

Eyam Museum (☎ 631371; www.eyam.org.uk; Hawkhill Rd; adult/child £1.75/1.25; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Easter-Oct) has some vivid displays on Eyam's plague experience, as well as putting it into the wider context of the effect of the bubonic plague elsewhere. There are also neat exhibits on geology, Saxon history and the village's time as a lead-mining and silk-weaving centre.

Look out too for the **stocks** on the village green – somewhere handy to leave the kids, perhaps, while you look at the church.

Activities

Eyam makes a great base for walking and cycling in the surrounding White Peak area. A short walk for starters leads up Water Lane

from the village square, then up through fields and a patch of woodland to meet another lane running between Eyam and Grindleford; turn right here and keep going uphill, past another junction to **Mompesson's Well**, where food and other supplies were left during the plague time for Eyam folk by friends from other villages. The Eyam people paid for the goods using coins sterilised in vinegar. You can retrace your steps back down the lane, then take a path which leads directly to the church. This 2-mile circuit takes about 1½ hours at a gentle pace.

Sleeping

Bretton YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5720; brettton@yha.org.uk; Bretton, Hope Valley; dm members/nonmembers £10.95/13.95) If the Eyam YHA's full, this basic place is only 1.5 miles away.

Eyam YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5830; eyam@yha.org.uk; Hawkhill Rd; dm members/nonmembers £13.95/16.95) In a fine old Victorian house with a folly, perched up a hill overlooking the village.

Crown Cottage (☎ 630858; www.crown-cottage.co.uk; Main Rd; d£50) Bright, walker- and cyclist-friendly – and full to the rafters most weekends. Book ahead to be sure of a spot.

Getting There & Away

Eyam is 7 miles north of Bakewell and 12 miles east of Buxton. Bus 175 from Bakewell goes to Eyam (three daily Monday to Saturday, no Sunday service). From Buxton, buses 65 and 66 run about six times per day to and from Chesterfield, stopping at Eyam (40 minutes).

BAKEWELL

☎ 01629 / pop 3,979

After Buxton, this is the largest town in the Peak District (though it's hardly a metropolis). It's not as interesting or picturesque as its posh spa-town neighbour, but it's a useful base for cyclists and walkers. It has a famous pudding (the Bakewell Pudding – it's not a tart you know), a couple of fine country houses within ambling distance and a reputation for traffic trail-backs on summer weekends.

Orientation & Information

The centre of town is Rutland Sq, from where roads radiate to Matlock, Buxton and Sheffield. The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 813227; Bridge St; ☎ 10am-5pm), in the old Market Hall, has racks of leaflets and books about Bakewell and the national park.

Sights & Activities

Bakewell's weekly market is on Monday, when the square behind the tourist office is very lively. Up on the hill above Rutland Sq, **All Saints Church** has some ancient Norman features, and even older Saxon stonework remains, including a tall cross in the churchyard, which sadly has suffered at the hands of time.

Near the church, **Old House Museum** (☎ 813642; Cunningham Pl; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☎ 11am-4pm Apr-Oct) displays a Tudor loo and, also on a scatological theme, shows how early Peakland houses used to be made with materials including cow dung.

A stroll from Rutland Sq down Bridge St brings you – not surprisingly – to the pretty **medieval bridge** over the River Wye, from where riverside walks lead in both directions. Go upstream through the water meadows, and then along Holme Lane to reach **Holme Bridge**, an ancient stone structure used by Peak District packhorses for centuries.

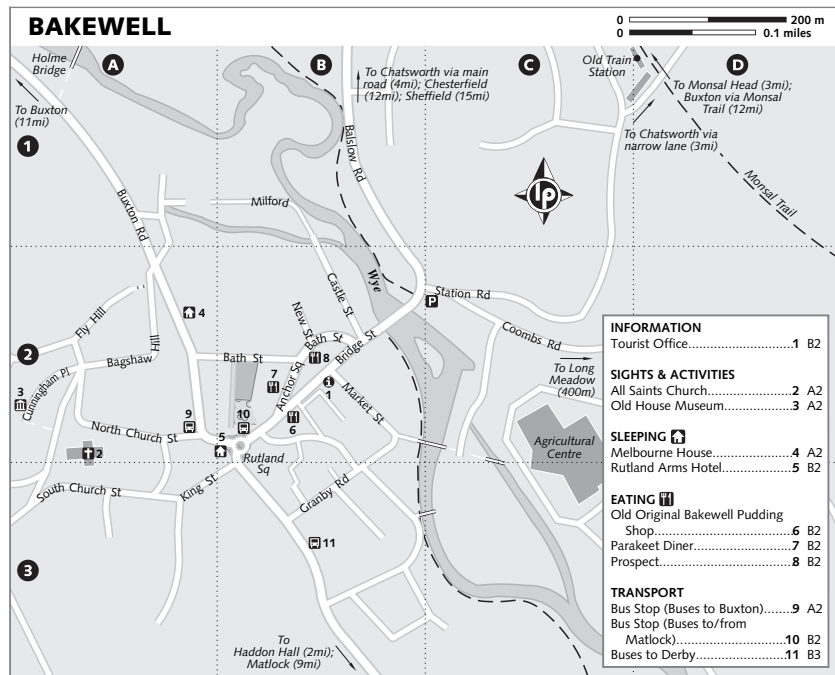
On the northern edge of Bakewell, a former railway line has been converted to a walking and cycling track called the **Monsal Trail**. From Bakewell you can cycle about 3 miles north and 1 mile south on the old railway itself, and there are numerous other tracks and country lanes nearby. The nearest place to hire a bike is the **Parsley Cycle Hire** (☎ 01298-84493) at the junction of the High Peak and Tissington Trails, about 5 miles southeast of Buxton. Walkers on the Monsal Trail follow alternate sections of the old railway and pretty footpaths through fields and beside rivers. From Bakewell, an excellent out-and-back walk (3 miles each way) goes to the dramatic viewpoint at Monsal Head, where a good pub, Stables Bar at the Monsal Head Hotel, provides welcome refreshment. Allow three hours for the round-trip.

Other walking routes go to the stately homes of Haddon Hall (p454) and Chatsworth House (p455). You could take a bus or taxi there and walk back, so you don't muddy the duke's carpet.

Sleeping

Melbourne House (☎ 815357; Buxton Rd; s/d £35/50; (P) ☎) In a pretty, listed building dating back more than three centuries, this is an inviting B&B in the best Peak District tradition. It is on the main road leading to Buxton.

Rutland Arms Hotel (☎ 812812; www.rutlandarmsbakewell.com; the Square; s/d £65/120; (P)) Aristocratic but slightly careworn, this hotel is the



most refined of the Bakewell accommodation options. Get a higher room if traffic noise keeps you up. Room 20 has a four-poster bed that costs the same as a normal double.

Eating & Drinking

Bakewell's streets are lined with cute teashops and bakeries, most with 'pudding' in the name, selling the town's eponymous cake. It would be bad manners not to try the local speciality when in town.

Old Original Bakewell Pudding Shop (☎ 812193; the Square) Probably has the best claim for having the original Bakewell Pudding recipe. They come in seriously jumbo sizes here, should you require.

Parakeet Diner (☎ 812349; the Square; haddock & chips £4.70; ☎ 9am-5pm) Has not a frill to be seen, right down to the plastic-backed chairs, but service comes with a smile, it's easy on your wallet and its generous portions help fuel the day's activities.

Prospect (☎ 810077; Bath St; mains £13-15; ☎ noon-2pm & 7-8.30pm Tue-Sun) The flavour of the local restaurant scene. It's a smart bistro, with slick presentation, from the dark varnished bar to

the serving of specials such as belly pork with local black pudding mash (£14.50).

Getting There & Away

Buses serve Bakewell from Derby via Matlock (most 90 minutes but there are some faster buses, twice hourly) and Chesterfield (45 minutes, hourly). The TransPeak service goes on to Nottingham (one hour 50 minutes, hourly).

AROUND BAKEWELL Haddon Hall

You won't be the first to fall under the spell of **Haddon Hall** (☎ 01629-812855; www.haddonhall.co.uk; adult/child £7.75/4; ☎ noon-4.30pm Sat-Mon Apr & Oct, daily May-Sep), one of the finest medieval houses you'll find anywhere. Film producers have long been aware of its charms. The hall dates back to the 12th century; what you see today dates mainly from the 14th to 16th centuries. It was abandoned in the 18th and 19th centuries, so escaped the 'modernisation' experienced by many other country houses. Highlights include the **Chapel**; the **Long Gallery**, bathed by natural light; and the vast **Banqueting Hall**, virtually unchanged since the days of Henry VIII.

The house is 2 miles south of Bakewell on the A6. You can get there on any bus heading for Matlock (every 30 minutes) or walk along the footpath through the fields mostly on the east side of the river.

Chatsworth

The great stately home, manicured gardens and perfectly landscaped park of Chatsworth together form a major highlight for many visitors to Britain. The main draw is sumptuous **Chatsworth House** (☎ 01246-582204; www.chatsworth.org; adult/child £9.75/3.50; ☎ 11am-5.30pm Mar-Dec). Known as the 'Palace of the Peak', this vast edifice has been occupied by the dukes of Devonshire for centuries. The original house was started in 1551 by the inimitable Bess of Hardwick; a little later came Chatsworth's most famous guest, Mary Queen of Scots. She was imprisoned here on and off between 1570 and 1581 at the behest of Elizabeth I, under the guard of Bess' fourth husband, the earl of Shrewsbury. The **Scots bedrooms** (adult/child incl admission to the house £12.40/4.95), nine Regency rooms named after the imprisoned queen, are sometimes open to the public.

The house was extensively altered between 1686 and 1707, and again enlarged and im-

proved in the 1820s; much of what you see dates from these periods. Among the prime attractions are the painted and decorated ceilings, although the 30 or so rooms are all treasure-troves of splendid furniture and magnificent artworks.

The house is surrounded by 25 sq miles of **gardens** (adult/child £6/2.75), complete with a fountain so high it can be seen when you're miles away in the hills of the Dark Peak. For the kids an **adventure playground** (admission £4.50) provides hours of fun. Beyond that is another 400 hectares of parkland, originally landscaped by Capability Brown, open to the public for walking and picnicking.

Chatsworth is 3 miles northeast of Bakewell. If you're driving, it's £1.50 to park. The only direct bus service from Bakewell runs on a Sunday (215, seven times daily). Virgin Trains runs a bus between Macclesfield, Buxton and Bakewell (two per day) that extends to Chatsworth June through September.

Another option is to walk or cycle from Bakewell. Start out on the quiet lane that leads uphill from the old train station; walkers can take footpaths through Chatsworth park via the mock-Venetian village of Edensor (ensor), and cyclists can pedal via Pilsley.

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