

Oxfordshire, the Cotswolds & Gloucestershire



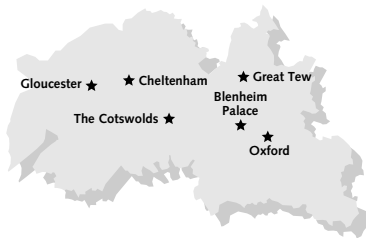
One of the most visited parts of Britain, Oxfordshire, the Cotswolds and Gloucestershire offer old-world English charm by the bucketload and a diverse range of headline attractions across the lush, rolling hills of the region. Little changed since medieval times, the Cotswolds are probably the area's biggest draw, their picture-postcard villages overflowing with implausibly picturesque thatched cottages, flower-strewn gardens, graceful stone churches and gorgeous views in every direction.

However, the region has far more than bucolic views and rural retreats to offer. To the east, the weight of academic achievement seeps from the very walls of the beautiful college buildings in Oxford, the museums are full of ancient artefacts and the hushed reverence is only broken by the laughter of unruly students who ensure there's always lively nightlife. Just north of here Churchill's extraordinary pile, Blenheim Palace, is set in glorious grounds, and to the west of the region the Regency grandeur and genteel atmosphere of Cheltenham draw the crowds. Nearby, Gloucester's magnificent cathedral is the town's crowning glory, while higgledy-piggledy Tudor character can be found in riverside Tewkesbury.

This wealth of attractions, high-quality accommodation and glorious countryside can mean serious crowds in the summer months and the shameless peddling of nostalgia in many villages. Get on your bike or take to the hills on foot, however, and it's easy to leave the crowds behind and discover a legion of rarely visited villages just bursting with charm.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Soaking up the studious calm and weight of academic achievement at **Oxford University** (p345)
- Wandering the sumptuous rooms and gardens of **Blenheim Palace** (p354)
- Hanging out at one of the many festivals in graceful **Cheltenham** (p370)
- Marvelling at the magnificent cloisters of **Gloucester Cathedral** (p366)
- Getting lost on the winding roads of the **Cotswolds** (p356)
- Going medieval with a tankard of ale at the **Falkland Arms** (p359) in Great Tew



■ POPULATION: 1.2 MILLION

■ AREA: 2222 SQ MILES

Activities

Walking or cycling through the Cotswolds is an ideal way to get away from the crowds and discover some of the lesser-known vistas and villages of the region. For more information, see the Outdoor Activities chapter (p83) or specific suggestions for walks and rides throughout this chapter.

CYCLING

Gentle gradients and scenic vistas make the Cotswolds ideal for cycling, with only the steep western escarpment offering a challenge to the legs. Plenty of quiet country lanes and gated roads crisscross the region or follow the way-marked **Thames Valley Cycle Way**, part of the National Cycle Network (see boxed text, p88).

Mountain bikers can use a variety of bridleways in the **Cotswolds** and **Chilterns**, and in the west of the region the **Forest of Dean** has many dirt-track options, and some dedicated mountain-bike trails.

WALKING

The **Cotswold Hills** offer endless opportunities for day hikes, but if you're looking for

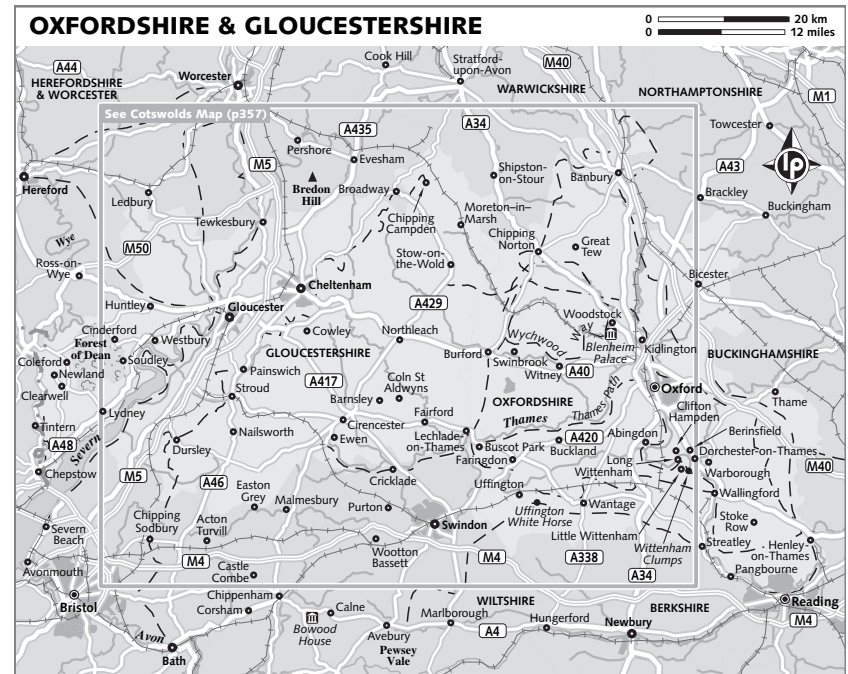
something more ambitious, the **Cotswold Way** (www.cotswold-way.co.uk) is an absolute classic. The route covers 102 miles from Bath to Chipping Campden and takes about a week to walk.

Alternatively, the **Thames Path** (www.thames-path.co.uk) follows the river downstream from its source near Cirencester to London. It takes about two weeks to complete the 173-mile route, but there's a very enjoyable five-day section from near Cirencester to Oxford.

OXFORDSHIRE

A region of old money, scholarly pursuits, thatched roofs and undulating hills, Oxfordshire is a well-bred, well-preened kind of place with plenty of rustic charm and headline attractions.

The county is dominated by its world-renowned university town, a genteel city soaked in history and full of august buildings, gowned cyclists, ivy-clad quads and dusty academics. Yet Oxfordshire is so much more than its university suggests. It is also home to the extravagant Baroque pile Blenheim Palace, birthplace of Sir



OXFORDSHIRE, THE COTSWOLDS & GLOUCESTERSHIRE

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Winston Churchill, and affluent Henley-on-Thames, an elegant riverside town that hosts the ever-so-stylish Henley Royal Regatta each year. Near here is the mysterious giant Uffington White Horse, carved from the limestone hills, and a smattering of quaint traditional villages oozing the gentle charm of middle England.

Activities

As well as the long-distance national trails, walkers may be interested in the **Oxfordshire Way**, a scenic 65-mile waymarked trail running from Bourton-on-the-Water to Henley-on-Thames, and the **Wychwood Way**, a historic 37-mile route from Woodstock, which runs through an ancient royal forest. The routes are divided up into manageable sections described in leaflets available from most local tourist offices and libraries.

The quiet roads and gentle gradients also make Oxfordshire good cycling country. The main waymarked route through the county is the **Oxfordshire Cydeway**, which takes in Woodstock, Burford and Henley. If you don't have your own wheels you can hire bikes in Oxford (see p353).

You'll find information about all walking and cycling routes in the county at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countryside.

Getting Around

You can pick up bus and train timetables for most routes at local tourist offices. The main train stations are in Oxford and Banbury and have frequent connections to London Paddington and Euston, Hereford, Birmingham, Bristol and Scotland.

The main bus operators are the **Oxford Bus Company** (☎ 01865-785400; www.oxfordbus.co.uk) and **Stagecoach** (☎ 01865-772250; www.stagecoachbus.com/oxfordshire). If you plan to do a lot of travelling by bus, Stagecoach offers one-/seven-/14-day bus passes for unlimited use of its services in southern Britain (excluding London) for £6/18/34.

Alternatively, **Cotswold Roaming** (☎ 01865-308300; www.cotswold-roaming.co.uk) runs guided bus tours from Oxford between April and October.

OXFORD

☎ 01865 / pop 143,016

Bookish, conservative, closeted and elite, Oxford is a privileged place, highly aware of its international standing as one of the world's most famous university towns and yet remark-

ably restrained for a city driven by its student population. It's the kind of place where the pursuit of excellence, the weight of academic achievement and the whiff of intellectual ideals is palpable as soon as you get off the bus.

Thirty-nine colleges make up the university, their elegant honey-coloured buildings wrapping around winding cobbled streets and attracting hordes of tourists each year. Yet despite the rushing traffic and throngs of people, inside their jealously guarded quadrangles an aura of studious calm descends. The oldest colleges date back almost 750 years and little has changed inside the hallowed walls since then.

Yet the university is only part of Oxford's story; long before Mensa was ever born the Morris motorcar was rolling off production lines in Cowley, and today the university's academic elite are still far outnumbered by the real-world majority. Butting up against all that fine architecture, the celebrated libraries, world-class museums and historic pubs is an increasingly urbane city flush with chic restaurants, trendy bars and exclusive shops.

History

Strategically placed at the confluence of the River Cherwell and the Thames (called the Isis here, from the Latin *Tamesis*), Oxford was a key Saxon town that grew dramatically in importance when Henry II banned Anglo-Norman students from attending the Sorbonne in 1167. Students soon flocked to Oxford's Augustinian abbey in droves.

The new students managed to create a lasting enmity with the local townspeople, culminating in the St Scholastica's Day Massacre in 1355 (see the boxed text, p348). Thereafter, the king ordered that the university be broken up into colleges, each of which then developed its own traditions. The first colleges were built in the 13th century, with at least three more being added in each of the following three centuries. Newer colleges, such as Keble, were added in the 19th and 20th centuries, and today there are 39 colleges catering for over 18,000 students.

Meanwhile, the arrival of the canal system in 1790 created a link with the industrial Midlands, and work and trade suddenly expanded beyond the academic core. However, the city's real industrial boom came when William Morris began producing cars here in 1913. The Bullnose Morris and the Morris Minor were both produced in the Cowley factories

to the east of the city where BMW's new Mini runs off the production line today.

Orientation

Oxford is fairly compact and can easily be covered on foot. Carfax Tower makes a good central landmark and is a short walk from the bus and train stations, which are conveniently located close to the centre of town.

The university buildings are scattered throughout the city, with the most important and architecturally significant in the centre. Jericho, in the northwest, is the trendy, artsy end of town, with slick bars and restaurants and an art-house cinema, while Cowley Rd, southeast of Carfax, is the edgy student and immigrant area packed with cheap places to eat and drink.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Blackwell (☎ 792792; www.blackwell.co.uk; 48-51 Broad St) 'The Knowledge Retailer' stocks any book you could ever need.

Little Bookshop (☎ 559176; Ave 2, Covered Market) Tiny shop bursting with first editions and rare books.

QI (Quite Interesting; ☎ 261507; www.qi.com; 16 Turl St) 'Ridiculously well-read and over-educated' staff to help you trawl through specially chosen titles.

EMERGENCY

Police (☎ 0845 8 505 505)

INTERNET ACCESS

Mices (☎ 726364; 118 High St; per 20min £1; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-11pm Sun) There's another branch on Gloucester Green.

Virgin (☎ 723906; 18-20 Cornmarket St; per 20min £1; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Daily Info (www.dailyinfo.co.uk) Daily listings for events, gigs, performances, accommodation and jobs.

Oxford City (www.oxfordcity.co.uk) Accommodation and restaurant listings as well as entertainment, activities and shopping.

Oxford Online (www.visitoxford.org) Oxford's official tourism website.

LAUNDRY

Coin Wash (127 Cowley Rd; per load £3; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat)

MEDICAL SERVICES

John Radcliffe Hospital (☎ 741166; Headley Way, Headington) Three miles east of the city centre.

MONEY

Every major bank and ATM is represented on or near Cornmarket St.

POST

Post office (☎ 223344; 102 St Aldate's; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 726871; www.visitoxford.org; 15-16 Broad St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) The tourist office stocks a *Welcome to Oxford* (£1) brochure, which has a walking tour with college opening times, as well as the *University of Oxford* leaflet and *Oxford Accessible Guide* for travellers with disabilities. Also look out for *In Oxford*, a free publication that lists events, museums, restaurants and accommodation options. The centre can book accommodation for a £4 fee plus a 10% deposit.

UNIVERSITIES

Oxford Brookes (☎ 741111; www.brookes.ac.uk; Gipsy Lane) Oxford's lesser-known university.

Oxford University (☎ 270000; www.ox.ac.uk)

Sights

UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS & COLLEGES

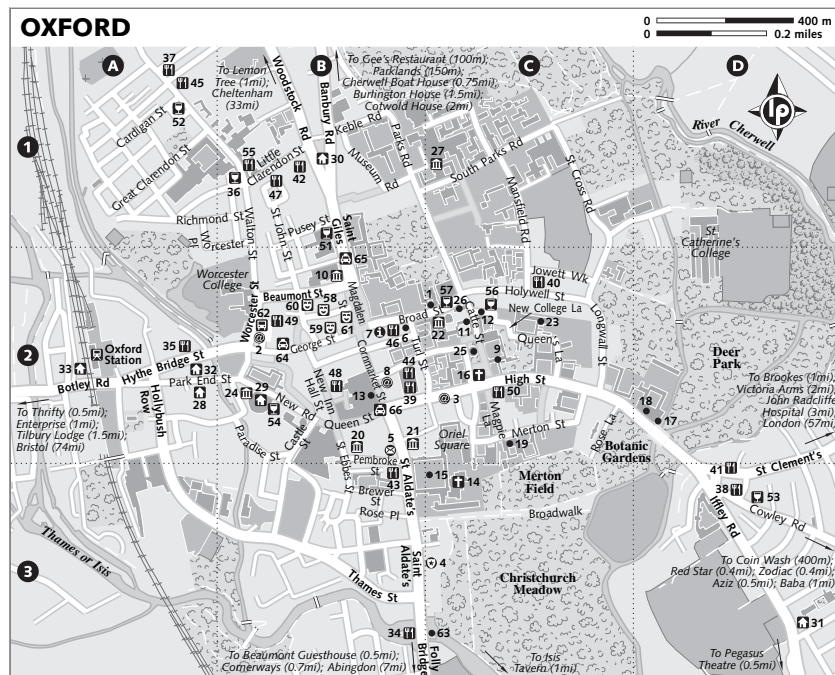
Christ Church College

The largest and grandest of all of Oxford's colleges, **Christ Church** (☎ 276492; www.visitchristchurch.net; St Aldate's; adult/under 16yr £4.70/3.70; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun) is also its most popular. The magnificent buildings, illustrious history and latter-day fame as a location for the Harry Potter films has tourists coming in droves.

The college was founded in 1525 by Cardinal Thomas Wolsey – who suppressed 22 monasteries to acquire the funds for his lavish building project – and over the years numerous luminaries have been educated here. Albert Einstein, philosopher John Locke, poet WH Auden and Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) all studied here, as did 13 British prime ministers.

The main entrance is below imposing **Tom Tower**, the upper part of which was designed by former student Sir Christopher Wren. Great Tom, the 7-ton tower bell, still chimes 101 times each evening at 9.05pm (Oxford is five minutes west of Greenwich), to sound the curfew imposed on the original 101 students.

Mere visitors, however, are not allowed to enter the college this way and must go further down St Aldate's to the side entrance. Immediately on entering is the 15th-century cloister, a relic of the ancient Priory of St Frideswide, whose shrine was a focus of



pilgrimage. From here you go up to the **Great Hall**, the college's magnificent dining room, with its hammer-beam roof and imposing portraits of past scholars.

Coming down the grand staircase you'll enter **Tom Quad**, Oxford's largest quadrangle, which was used as a cattle pen by Royalist forces during the Civil War. From the quad you enter **Christ Church Cathedral**, the smallest cathedral in the country. Inside, brawny Norman columns are topped by elegant vaulting, while beautiful stained-glass windows adorn the walls. Look out for a rare depiction of the murder of Thomas Becket.

You can also explore another two quads and the **Picture Gallery**, with its modest collection of Renaissance art. To the south of the college is **Christ Church Meadow**, a leafy expanse bordered by the Isis and Cherwell rivers and ideal for leisurely walking.

Magdalen College

Set amid a hundred acres of lawns, woodlands, river walks and deer park, **Magdalen** (☎ 276000; www.magd.ox.ac.uk; High St; adult/under 16yr £3/2; ☎ noon-6pm Jul-Sep, 1pm-dusk Oct-Jun), pronounced *mawd-*

len, is one of the wealthiest and most beautiful of Oxford's colleges.

An elegant Victorian gateway leads into a medieval chapel with its glorious 15th-century tower, and on to the remarkable cloisters, some of the finest in Oxford. The strange gargoyles and carved figures here are said to have inspired CS Lewis' stone statues in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Behind the cloisters the lovely Addison's Walk leads through the grounds and along the banks of the River Cherwell for just under a mile.

Magdalen has a reputation as an artistic college and some of its most famous students and fellows have included Oscar Wilde, poet laureate Sir John Betjeman and Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney.

The college also boasts a fine choir that sings *Hymnus Eucharisticus* at 6am on May Day (1 May) from the top of the 42m-bell tower. The event now marks the culmination of a solid night of drinking for most students as they gather in their glad rags on Magdalen Bridge to listen to the dawn chorus.

Opposite the college and sweeping along the banks of the River Cherwell are the

INFORMATION		Radcliffe Camera.....25 C2		Mortons.....47 B1	
Blackwell.....1 C2	Sheldonian Theatre.....26 C2	University & Pitt Rivers	Mortons.....48 B2	Noodle Bar.....49 B2	Quod.....50 C2
Mices.....2 B2	Mices.....3 C2	Museums.....27 C1			
Police Station.....4 B3	Post Office.....5 B2	SLEEPING ☎	DRINKING ☎ ☎		
QL.....6 B2	Central Backpackers.....28 A2	Central Backpackers.....28 A2	Eagle & Child.....51 B1		
Tourist Office.....7 B2	Malmaison.....29 B2	Malmaison.....29 B2	Jericho Tavern.....52 A1		
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New Castle.....23 C2	Oxford Castle.....24 B2	Mortons.....(see 39)	Mortons.....46 B2	Taxi Rank.....66 B2	

beautiful and excellently labelled **Botanic Gardens** (☎ 286690; www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk; adult/under 16yr £2.60/free; ☎ 9am-6pm May-Aug, 9am-4:30pm Oct-Apr). The gardens are the oldest in Britain and were founded in 1621 for the study of medicinal plants.

Sheldonian Theatre

The monumental **Sheldonian Theatre** (☎ 277299; www.sheldon.ox.ac.uk; 15-16 Broad St; adult/under 16yr £2/1; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Sat Mar-Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 2-3.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) was the first major work of Christopher Wren, at that time a University Professor of Astronomy. Inspired by the classical Theatre of Marcellus in Rome, it has a rectangular front end and a semicircular back, while inside, the ceiling of the main hall is blanketed by a fine 17th-century painting of the triumph of truth over ignorance. The Sheldonian is now used for college ceremonies and public concerts but you can climb to the cupola for good views of the surrounding buildings.

Bodleian Library & Radcliffe Camera

Oxford's **Bodleian Library** (☎ 277224; www.bodley.ox.ac.uk; cnr Broad St & Parks Rd) is one of the oldest public libraries in the world, and one of England's three copyright libraries. It holds more than seven million items on 118 miles of shelving and has seating space for up to 2500 readers.

The oldest part of the library surrounds the stunning Jacobean-Gothic **Old Schools Quadrangle**, which dates from the early 17th century. On the eastern side of the quad is the **Tower of Five Orders**, an ornate building depicting the five classical orders of architecture. On the west side is the **Divinity School** (admission £2; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4:30pm Sat), the university's first examination room. It is renowned as a masterpiece of 15th-century English Gothic architecture and has a superb fan-vaulted ceiling. A self-guided audio tour (£2.50) to these areas is available.

Most of the rest of the library is closed to visitors, but **library tours** (admission £6; ☎ tours 10.30am, 11.30am, 2pm & 3pm Apr-Oct, 11am, 2pm & 3pm Nov-Mar) allow access to the medieval Duke Humfrey's library and 17th-century **Convocation House and Court**. The tour takes about an hour and is not suitable for children under 11 years of age.

Just south of the library is the **Radcliffe Camera** (Radcliffe Sq; no public access), the quintessential Oxford landmark and one of the city's most photographed buildings. The spectacular circular library was built between 1737 and 1749 in grand Palladian style, and boasts Britain's third-largest dome.

For excellent views of the Radcliffe Camera and surrounding buildings, climb the 14th-century tower in the beautiful **Church of St Mary**

ST SCHOLASTICA'S DAY MASSACRE

The first real wave of students arrived in Oxford in the 12th century, and right from the start an uneasy relationship grew between the townspeople and the bookish blow-ins. Name-calling and drunken brawls escalated into full-scale riots in 1209 and 1330 when browbeaten scholars abandoned Oxford to establish new universities in Cambridge and Stamford respectively. The riots of 10 and 11 February 1355 changed everything, however, and left a bitter scar on relations for hundreds of years.

Celebrations for St Scholastica's Day grew nasty when a drunken scuffle spilled into the street and years of simmering discontent and frustrations let loose. Soon students and townspeople took to each other's throats, with hundreds more rushing to join the brawl. By the end of the day the students had claimed victory and an uneasy truce was called.

The next morning, however, the furious townspeople returned with the help of local villagers armed with pickaxes, shovels and pikes. By sundown 63 students and 30 townspeople were dead. King Edward III sent troops to quell the rioting and eventually decided to bring the town under the control of the university.

To prove its authority, the university ordered the mayor and burgesses (citizens) to attend a service and pay a penny for every student killed on the anniversary of the riot each year. Incredibly, it took 600 years for the university to extend the olive branch and award a Doctorate of Civil Law to Mayor William Richard Gowers, MA, Oriel.

the Virgin (☎ 279111; www.university-church.ox.ac.uk; cnr High & Catte Sts; tower admission £2.50/1.50; ☎ 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Sep-Jun). On Sundays the tower does not open until after the morning services (about noon).

New College

From the Bodleian stroll under the **Bridge of Sighs**, a 1914 copy of the famous bridge in Venice, to **New College** (☎ 279 555; www.new.ox.ac.uk; cnr Holywell St & New College Lane; admission Easter-Sep £2, Oct-Easter free; ☎ 11am-5pm Easter-Sep, 2-4pm Oct-Easter). This 14th-century college was the first in Oxford to accept undergraduates and is a fine example of the glorious perpendicular style. The chapel here is full of treasures including superb stained glass, much of it original, and Sir Jacob Epstein's disturbing statue of Lazarus.

Merton College

From High St follow the wonderfully named Logic Lane to **Merton College** (☎ 276310; www.merton.ox.ac.uk; Merton St; admission free; ☎ 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun), one of Oxford's original three colleges. Founded in 1264, Merton was the first to adopt collegiate planning, bringing scholars and tutors together into a formal community and providing a planned residence for them. The charming 14th-century **Mob Quad** here was the first of the college quads.

Just off the quad is a 13th-century **chapel** and the **Old Library** (admission by guided tour only; admission £2), the oldest medieval library in use. It is

said that Professor JRR Tolkien spent many hours here while writing *The Lord of the Rings*. Other literary giants associated with the college include TS Eliot and Louis MacNeice.

If you're visiting in summer, look out for posters advertising candlelit concerts in the chapel.

All Souls College

One of the wealthiest of Oxford's colleges and unique in not accepting any undergraduate students, **All Souls** (☎ 279379; www.all-souls.ox.ac.uk; High St; admission free; ☎ 2-4pm Mon-Fri) is primarily an academic research institution. It was founded in 1438 as a centre of prayer and learning, and today fellowship of the college is one of the highest academic honours in the country.

Much of the college façade dates from the 1440s and, unlike other older colleges, the front quad is largely unchanged in five centuries. It also contains a beautiful 17th-century sundial designed by Christopher Wren. Most obvious, though, are the twin mock-Gothic towers on the north quad. Designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor in 1710, they were lambasted for ruining the Oxford skyline when erected.

ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM

A vast, rambling collection of art and antiquities is on display at the mammoth **Ashmolean** (☎ 278000; www.ashmol.ox.ac.uk; Beaumont St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), Britain's oldest public museum. Established in 1683, it is

based on the extensive collection of the remarkably well-travelled John Tradescant, gardener to Charles I, and housed in one of Britain's best examples of neo-Grecian architecture.

Bursting with Egyptian, Islamic and Chinese art; rare porcelain, tapestries and silverware; priceless musical instruments; and extensive displays of European art (including works by Raphael and Michelangelo), it's impossible to take it all in at once. However, the Ashmolean is undergoing a substantial redevelopment phase, and as some galleries are closed a 'Treasures of the Ashmolean Museum' exhibition offers a cross section of highlights from the vast collection. The exhibition runs until December 2008. Otherwise, study the floor plan well and choose a manageable route through the sumptuous rooms and hallways.

UNIVERSITY & PITT RIVERS MUSEUMS

Housed in a glorious Victorian Gothic building with slender, cast-iron columns, ornate capitals and a soaring glass roof, the **University Museum** (☎ 272950; www.oum.ox.ac.uk; Parks Rd; admission free; ☎ noon-5pm) is worth a visit for its architecture alone. However, the real draw is the mammoth natural history collection of more than five million exhibits ranging from exotic insects and fossils to a towering T-Rex skeleton.

Hidden away through a door at the back of the main exhibition hall, the **Pitt Rivers Museum** (☎ 270927; www.prm.ox.ac.uk; admission free; ☎ noon-4.30pm) is a treasure-trove of weird and wonderful displays to satisfy every armchair adventurer's wildest dreams. In the half-light inside are glass cases and mysterious drawers stuffed with Victorian explorers' prized trophies. Feathered cloaks, necklaces of teeth, blowpipes, magic charms, Noh masks, totem poles, fur parkas, musical instruments and shrunken heads lurk here, making it a fascinating place for adults and children. The museum also runs an excellent series of children's workshops (usually the first Saturday of the month).

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Newly opened in 2006, **Oxford Castle Unlocked** (☎ 260666; www.oxfordcastleunlocked.co.uk; 44-46 Oxford Castle; adult/under 15yr £6.95/5.25; ☎ 10am-5pm) explores the 1000-year history of Oxford's castle and prison. You can explore the remains of the medieval motte and bailey, see an 11th-century crypt and hear tales of the inmates' grisly lives, daring escapes and cruel punishments.

Far removed from Oxford's dusty hallways of history, **Modern Art Oxford** (☎ 722733; www.modernartoxford.org.uk; 30 Pembroke St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is one of the best contemporary art museums outside London. Nearby, the **Museum of Oxford** (☎ 252761; www.museumofoxford.org.uk; St Aldate's; adult/under 16yr £2/50p; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun) is dedicated to the history of the city and its university, while the **Museum of the History of Science** (☎ 277280; www.mhs.ox.ac.uk Broad St; admission free; ☎ noon-4pm Tue-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) has a significant collection of historic scientific instruments and a blackboard used by Einstein.

For good views over the city you could climb Oxford's central landmark, **Carfax Tower** (☎ 792653; adult/under 15yr £1.90/95p; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Mar & Oct, 10am-3.30pm Nov-Feb), and for the best picnic ingredients, funky T-shirts and expensive brogues, don't miss the **covered market** (☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), a haven of traditional butchers, fishmongers, cobblers and barbers.

Punting

Apart from visiting the colleges and museums, the quintessential Oxford experience includes an afternoon punting on the river, quaffing Pimm's as you watch the dreaming spires float by.

Punts are available from mid-March to mid-October, 10am to dusk, and hold five people including the punter. They cost £10 per hour weekdays and £12 per hour on weekends.

The most central location to rent punts is at Magdalen Bridge, from **Howard C & Sons** (☎ 202643; High St; deposit £30). From here you can punt downstream around the Botanic Gardens and Christ Church Meadow or upstream around Magdalen Deer Park. Alternatively, head for the **Cherwell Boat House** (☎ 515978; www.cherwellboathouse.co.uk; Bardwell Rd; deposit £60) for a countryside amble where the destination of choice is the busy boozier the **Victoria Arms** (☎ 241382; Mill Lane). To get to the boathouse take bus 2 or 7 from Magdalen St to Bardwell Rd and follow the signposts.

Tours

Blackwell (☎ 333606; oxford@blackwell.co.uk; 48-51 Broad St; adult/child £7/6.50; ☎ May-Oct) Runs 1½-hour tours including a literary tour (2pm Tuesday, 11am Thursday), an 'Inklings' tour (11.45am Wednesday) and a historic Oxford tour (2pm Friday).

City Sightseeing (☎ 790522; www.citysightseeing.oxford.com; adult/under 16yr £9.50/4.50; ☎) every 10-15min 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct) Runs hop-on, hop-off bus tours from the bus or train stations or any of the 20 stops around town.

Oxford Information Centre (☎ 726871; www.visitoxford.org; 15-16 Broad St; ☎) 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Runs 1½-hour tours of Oxford city and colleges (adult/under 16yr £6.50/3, 11am and 2pm Sunday to Friday, 10.30am, 11am, 1pm & 2pm Saturday); Inspector Morse tours (£7/3, 1.30pm Saturday); ghost tours (£5/3, 7.45pm Friday and Saturday June to October); family walking tours (£5/3, 1.30pm school holidays); and pub tours (adults only £6.50, 7pm Wednesday).

Salter Bros (☎ 243421; www.salterssteamers.co.uk; Folly Bridge; boat trips £8.60; ☎) mid-May-mid-Sep) Offers boat trips along the Isis to Abingdon.

Sleeping

Accommodation in Oxford is often overpriced and underwhelming, and in the midrange bracket in particular, suffocating floral patterns are the norm. Between May and September beds fill up quickly in all price ranges, so book in advance or join the queue at the tourist office and pay for help.

If you're stuck, you'll find a selection of B&Bs along the Iffley, Abingdon, Banbury and Headington roads.

BUDGET

YHA Oxford (☎ 727275; oxford@yha.org.uk; 2A Botley Rd; dm/d £20.95/55; ☎) (♿) By far the best budget option in town, the YHA offers top-notch dorm accommodation, private rooms and loads of facilities including a restaurant, library, garden, laundry and a choice of lounges. All rooms have en suite and are bright and cheery, if a little functional – well worth considering over the city's cheapest B&Bs.

Central Backpackers (☎ 242288; www.centralbackpackers.co.uk; 13 Park End St; dm £14-18; ☎) (♿) Oxford's newest backpacker accommodation offers good-quality dorms right in the centre of town. The basic but bright and simple rooms sleep up to 12 people, the beds and duvets are new, there's a decent lounge with satellite TV, a rooftop terrace, and free internet and luggage storage.

Oxford Backpackers (☎ 721761; www.hostels.co.uk; 9 Hythe Bridge St; dm £14-18; ☎) (♿) Championing the laid-back, party-central attitude of student halls, this slightly scruffy place is brightly painted with cartoon-like murals and has a lounge full of picnic tables and battered sofas.

It has a licensed bar, dorms sleeping up to 18 and tiny bathrooms for the number of beds.

MIDRANGE

Beaumont (☎ 241767; www.oxfordcity.co.uk/accom/beau mont; 234 Abingdon Rd; s £50-72, d £58-72; ☎) Newly re-decorated and sparkling clean, the Beaumont offers four excellent-value rooms with simple but elegant décor. With crisp white linen, pale and trendy flock wallpaper, mosaic bathrooms and beautiful furniture, it's all a class above most B&Bs of this price.

Cornerways (☎ 240135; jeakings@btpenworld.com; 282 Abingdon Rd; s/d £45/64; ☎) (♿) A thoroughly modern interior awaits at this friendly guest-house set in lovingly tended gardens. The rooms are big and bright with pale cream and deep red furnishings, all have en suite and there's a lovely bright conservatory and patio garden for breakfast.

Tilbury Lodge (☎ 862138; www.tilburylodge.com; 5 Tilbury Lane; s £50-60, d £70-80; ☎) (♿) Although a little out of the centre, Tilbury Lodge is well worth the effort for its spacious top-of-the-line rooms with plush, contemporary décor and excellent bathrooms. Giant pillows in funky fabrics adorn the big beds, light streams through the large windows, and downstairs there's a conservatory for guest use.

Orchard House (☎ 249200; www.theorchardhouse.oxford.co.uk; 225 Iffley Rd; s £60-85, d £80-90; ☎) (♿) This lovely arts-and-crafts-style house is set in beautiful secluded gardens and makes a wonderful retreat from the city. The sleek and stylish extra-large bedrooms each have their own sofa and breakfast table, elegant but luxurious modern décor and limestone bathrooms.

Burlington House (☎ 513513; www.burlington-house.co.uk; 374 Banbury Rd; s £45-60, d £85-90; ☎) (♿) Everything in this Victorian merchant house is immaculately kept and elegantly decorated, and although a long way from the centre, it's well worth the trip. The big, bright rooms are loaded with period character but decked out in contemporary style with pale neutral colours, silky bedspreads and plenty of cushions.

TOP END

Our pick Malmaison (☎ 268400; www.malmaison-oxford.com; 3 Oxford Castle; d £140-150, ste £195-350; ☎) (♿) Oxford's newest hotel is spectacularly set in a former Victorian prison with sleek and slinky rooms created out of the vaulted cells. The wow factor is matched by the plush interiors,

sultry lighting, dark woods and giant beds. If you're planning a real bender, go for the Governor's Suite, complete with four-poster bed and mini cinema.

Old Parsonage Hotel (☎ 310210; www.oldparsonage-hotel.co.uk; 1 Banbury Rd; r £155-195; ☎) (♿) Dripping with character and skilfully blending just the right mix of period charm and modern luxury, this 17th-century boutique hotel is a wonderfully quirky place to stay. An eclectic art collection, a buzzing bar-restaurant and oddly mismatched furniture make the public areas, while the chic bedrooms have handmade beds, marble bathrooms and flat-screen TVs.

Eating

There's plenty of choice for food in Oxford, but a glut of predictable chain restaurants in the centre of town. The new castle complex has a lovely pedestrianised square for alfresco dining but few original options. Head to Jericho or Cowley for a more quirky selection.

BUDGET

Georgina's (☎ 249527; Ave 3, Covered Market; mains £5-8; ☎) 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Hidden up a scruffy staircase in the covered market and plastered with old cinema posters, this funky little café serves up a bumper crop of bulging salads, hearty soups, doorsteps of bread and such goodies as goats cheese quesadillas and scrumptious cakes.

Our pick Edamame (☎ 246916; 15 Holywell St; mains £6-8; ☎) lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Thu-Sun) Small, simple and intimate, this tiny Japanese restaurant places a firm emphasis on the food rather than the fanfare and dishes up the best noodles, rice dishes and sushi (Thursday night only) in town. Don't let the queue put you off – it's well worth the wait.

Jericho Café (☎ 310840; 112 Walton St; mains £5-7; ☎) lunch & dinner) Relaxed meals over the newspaper, long coffees with a crossword, and a choice of delectable meals with vaguely healthy ingredients make the quirky Jericho a favourite hang-out. Go for Moroccan lamb, fish pie, falafel, or wholesome salads; choose from the range of vegetarian dishes; or simply give in to those luscious cakes.

Aziz (☎ 794945; 228 Cowley Rd & Folly Bridge; mains £7-8; ☎) lunch & dinner) Feted as Oxford's best curry house, this award-winning Indian and Bangladeshi restaurant attracts vegans, vegetarians and curry lovers in hordes. There's an extensive menu, chilled surroundings and

portions generous enough to ensure you'll be rolling out the door.

For a quick bite en route between colleges, look out for the ever-popular **Mortons** (☎ 200867; baguettes £2.30-2.80) Covered Market (103 Covered Market); Broad St (22 Broad St); Little Clarendon St (36 Little Clarendon St); New Inn Hall St (22 New Inn Hall St) for its fine selection of innovatively filled baguettes.

For more hearty fare try the **Noodle Bar** (☎ 201400; 100 Gloucester Green; mains £5-5.50; ☎) lunch & dinner) for bowls of steaming noodles and generous rice dishes, or **Red Star** (☎ 251248; 187 Cowley Rd; mains £5.50-7; ☎) lunch & dinner) for pan-Asian dishes and giant bento boxes.

At all other times head for funky **G&D's** (☎ 516652; ☎) 8am-midnight) Little Clarendon St (55 Little Clarendon St); St Aldate's (94 St Aldate's), for the best ice cream, brownies and desserts in town. You'll also get copies of the *Beano and Dandy* and regular silly hat, cow-dunking and most-authentic-mooing competitions.

MIDRANGE

Café Coco (☎ 200232; 23 Cowley Rd; mains £7-14; ☎) lunch & dinner) Chilled out, clued-in and serving a superb selection of Mediterranean food, Café Coco is a Cowley Rd institution, as popular for Sunday brunch as late-night cocktails. It's a sort of hip, bohemian hang-out, with classic posters on the walls and a bald clown in an ice-bath.

Our pick Bangkok House (☎ 200705; 42A Hythe Bridge St; mains £5.50-9.25; ☎) lunch & dinner) The food's delicious, the service impeccable, the prices affordable, and unsurprisingly, this little slice of Thailand is always packed. Elaborately carved tables, massive chairs and ornate wall hangings set the scene for the wonderfully aromatic Thai curries, sizzling meat dishes and delicately prepared dumplings.

Big Bang (☎ 511441; 124 Walton St; mains £8-12; ☎) lunch & dinner) It's small, not much to look at and has a very simple menu, but deciding between the tasty sausages, choosing a speciality mash and selecting just the right gravy can be very difficult indeed. Come on a Wednesday and you'll even get live jazz thrown in.

Branca (☎ 556111; 111 Walton St; mains £9-14; ☎) lunch & dinner) Floor-to-ceiling glass, dark woods, moody lighting and exposed pipe-work set the scene at this slick Italian restaurant in Jericho. The food is rustic, though, with stone-baked pizzas, simple pastas and hearty meats pulling in the crowds every night of the week.

Fishers (☎ 243003; St Clements; mains £9-15; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Nautically themed and generally buzzing, Oxford's finest seafood restaurant serves up simple but heavenly plates of everything from traditional haddock and chips to Shetland mussels, yellow fin tuna and New England lobster.

TOP END

Quod (☎ 202505; 92 High St; mains £9-17; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Bright, buzzing and decked out with modern art and beautiful people, this designer joint dishes up Mediterranean brasserie-style food to the masses. It doesn't take reservations, is always heaving and at worst will tempt you to chill by the bar with a cocktail while you wait for a table.

Lemon Tree (☎ 311936; 268 Woodstock Rd; mains £9-19; 🍴 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun, dinner Mon & Tue) Slightly out of town but worth the trip, this smart but unpretentious restaurant is set in a north Oxford villa. The food is loosely Mediterranean and ranges from such delicacies as spiced butternut squash and chickpea tagine to pork belly with honey-glazed parsnips and curly kale.

Drinking

Oxford has plenty of choice when it comes to drinking venues, so there's no excuse for ending up in the chain pubs and bars in the centre of town.

PUBS

Turf Tavern (☎ 243235; 4 Bath Pl; 🍴 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun) Hidden away down narrow alleyways, this tiny medieval pub is one of the best loved in town. Packed with a mix of students, professionals and the lucky tourists who manage to find it, its low-ceilinged bar and outdoor courtyards host regular poker nights, pub quizzes and acoustic sets.

Eagle & Child (☎ 302925; 49 St Giles; 🍴 noon-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun) Affectionately known as the 'Bird & Baby', this atmospheric place has been a pub since 1650 and is still a hotch-potch of nooks and crannies. It was once the favourite haunt of JRR Tolkien, CS Lewis and their literary friends and still attracts a mellow crowd.

White Horse (☎ 728318; 52 Broad St; 🍴 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun) More a large cupboard than an actual pub, this tiny olde-worlde place was a favourite retreat for TV detective Inspector Morse. It gets pretty crowded in the evening, but is good for a quiet afternoon pint and intellectual conversation.

BARS

Raoul's (☎ 553732; 32 Walton St) Packed to the gills on weekends and serving some of the best cocktails in town, this trendy retro-look bar is one of Jericho's finest. Guest DJs play chilled funky jazz as effortlessly cool punters try hard not to look impressed by the pestle-wielding bar staff.

Kazbar (☎ 202920; 25-27 Cowley Rd; 🍴 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10.30pm Sun) This funky Moroccan-themed bar has giant windows, low lighting, warm colours and a cool vibe. It's buzzing most nights with hip young things sipping cocktails and filling up on the Spanish and North African tapas (£3 to £5).

Jericho Tavern (☎ 311775; 56 Walton St; 🍴 noon-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-11pm Sun) Chilled out and super cool with big leather sofas, tasselled standard lamps and boldly patterned wallpaper, this hip bar also has a live-music venue upstairs. Adorned with giant portraits of John Peel, Supergrass and Radiohead, it's supposedly where the Abingdon boys played their first gig.

Living Room (☎ 260210; Oxford Castle; 🍴 10am-midnight Sun-Wed, 10am-1am Thu, 10am-2pm Fri & Sat) The best of the new set of chain pubs that have blown in to the castle development, this one is all neutral tones, deep leather sofas, low lighting and lads on the pull. There's live blues on the baby grand from Tuesday to Saturday nights, a lengthy cocktail menu and the best outdoor seating in Oxford.

Entertainment

NIGHTCLUBS

Despite a large student population, Oxford's club scene is fairly limited, with several cattle-mart clubs in the centre of town and a lot of middle-of-the-road music. Try the suggestions here for something a little more adventurous.

Zodiac (☎ 420042; 190 Cowley Rd; club admission up to £6; 🍴 7pm-2am Mon-Thu, 7pm-3am Fri & Sat, 7-10.30pm Sun) Oxford's best live-music venue is a wonderfully grubby place that attracts an eclectic crowd with its proudly indie vibe and unpretentious attitude. Live gigs upstairs feature anything from singer-songwriters to guitar-thrashing rockers, while the club downstairs plays anything from funk, soul and disco to reggae, glam rock and punk.

Po Na Na (☎ 249171; 13-15 Magdalen St; admission up to £6; 🍴 10pm-2am Tue-Thu, 10pm-3am Fri & Sat) Still one of the best bets in town for a night out, Po Na Na is a small cave-like place with plenty of Moroccan lanterns, drapes and candles, a hip

crowd and, in between the regular club nights, some big-name DJs and live events. Expect funk, indie, Old Skool, house and reggae.

THEATRE

The city's main stage for quality drama is the **Oxford Playhouse** (☎ 305305; www.oxfordplayhouse.com; Beaumont St). Just around the corner, the **Burton Taylor Theatre** (☎ 798600; Gloucester St) hosts quirky student shows, while the **Pegasus Theatre** (☎ 722851; www.pegasustheatre.org.uk; Magdalen Rd) features alternative independent productions. Blockbuster productions and ageing pop stars strut their stuff at the **New Theatre** (☎ 0870 606 3500; www.getlive.co.uk/oxford; George St).

Creation Theatre (☎ 761393; www.creationtheatre.co.uk) produces highly original, mostly Shakespearean, shows in a variety of non-traditional venues, including city parks, the BMW plant and Oxford Castle.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

With a host of spectacular buildings with great acoustics, and two orchestras, Oxford is an excellent place to attend a classical concert. You'll find the widest range of events at www.musicatoxford.com or www.oxfordtickets.com. Alternatively, watch out for posters around town or contact one of these groups: **City of Oxford Orchestra** (☎ 744457; www.cityofoxfordorchestra.co.uk)

Oxford Contemporary Music (☎ 488369; www.ocmevents.org)

Oxford Philomusica (☎ 0870 606 0804; www.oxfordphil.com)

Getting There & Away

BUS

Competition on the Oxford-London route is fierce, with three companies offering cheap and cheaper services at all hours of the day and night.

Megabus (www.megabus.com) Coaches run every half-hour to/from Buckingham Palace Rd (one way from £1, 1½ hours).

Oxford Express (☎ 785400; www.oxfordbus.co.uk) Runs up to every 15 minutes to/from Victoria coach station (return £13, 1½ hours).

Oxford Tube (☎ 772250; www.oxfordtube.com) Runs every 10 minutes to/from Buckingham Palace Rd (return £13, 1½ hours).

The Heathrow Express (£19, 70 minutes) runs half-hourly 4am to 10pm, hourly midnight to 4am, while the Gatwick Express (£27, two

hours) runs hourly 5.15am to 8.15pm and every two hours 10pm to 4am.

National Express has five direct buses to Birmingham (£10.20, two hours), and one service to Bath (£8.90, two hours) and Bristol (£12, 2¾ hours).

Stagecoach serves most of the small towns in Oxfordshire and runs the X5 service to Cambridge (£7, 3½ hours) roughly every half-hour. If you're planning a lot of bus journeys it's worth buying a Goldrider pass (£18), which allows unlimited bus travel in Oxfordshire for seven days.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Thanks to a complicated one-way system and a shortage of parking spaces, driving and parking in Oxford are a nightmare. Drivers are strongly advised to use the five Park & Ride car parks on major routes leading into town. Three car parks are free to use, the others cost 60p. The return bus journey to town (10 to 15 minutes, every 10 minutes) costs £2.

TRAIN

There are half-hourly services to London Paddington (£18.80, one hour); and roughly hourly trains to Birmingham (£20, 1¼ hours), Worcester (£16.40, 1½ hours) and Hereford (£14.70, two hours). Hourly services also run to Bath (£17.20, 1¼ hours) and Bristol (£18.70, 1½ hours) but require a change at Didcot Parkway.

Getting Around

BICYCLE

The *Cycle into Oxford* map, available from the tourist office, shows all local cycle routes. You can hire bikes from **Cydo Analysts** (☎ 424444; 150 Cowley Rd; per day/week £10/27).

BUS

If sightseeing has worn you out buses 1 and 5 go to Cowley Rd from Carfax, 2 and 7 go along Banbury Rd from Magdalen St, and 16 and 35 run along Abingdon Rd from St Aldate's.

A multi-operator Plus Pass (per day/week/month £5/16/44) allows unlimited travel on Oxford's bus system.

TAXI

There are taxi ranks at the train station and bus station, as well as on St Giles and at Carfax. Be prepared to join a long queue after closing time at the pub.

WOODSTOCK

☎ 01993 / pop 2389

Conveniently close to Oxford yet a quintessential rural retreat, the charming village of Woodstock makes a wonderful day trip from the city. The big draw here is Blenheim Palace, the opulent country pile of the Churchill family, but the village itself is full of picturesque creeper-clad cottages and elegant town houses.

The **Oxfordshire Museum** (☎ 811456; Park St; admission free; ☹ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) has displays on local history, art, archaeology and wildlife. It also houses the **tourist office** (☎ 813276).

Blenheim Palace

One of England's greatest stately homes, **Blenheim Palace** (☎ 08700 602080; www.blenheimpalace.com; adult/under 16yr £14/8.50, park & garden only £9/4.50; ☹ 10.30am-5.30pm mid-Feb–Oct, Wed-Sun Nov–mid-Dec, park open year-round) is a monumental Baroque fantasy designed by Sir John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor between 1705 and 1722. The land and funds to build the house were granted to John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, by a grateful Queen Anne after his decisive victory at the Battle of Blenheim. Now a Unesco World Heritage Site, Blenheim (pronounced *blen-um*) is home to the 11th duke and duchess.

Inside, the house is stuffed with statues, tapestries, ostentatious furniture and giant oil paintings in elaborate gilt frames. You enter through the **Great Hall**, a vast space topped by 20m-high ceilings adorned with images of the first duke in battle. From here you proceed to the opulent **Saloon**, the grandest and most important public room, and on to the three **State Rooms** with their plush décor and priceless **China Cabinets**. Further on, the magnificent 55m **Long Library** was originally intended as a picture gallery but now houses a significant collection of books, a Willis organ and marble sculptures of Marlborough and Queen Anne.

From the library you can access the **Churchill Exhibition**, which is dedicated to the life, work and writings of Sir Winston, who was born at Blenheim in 1874 (see the boxed text, p55). Churchill and his wife, Lady Clementine Spencer-Churchill, are buried in nearby Bladon Church.

If the crowds in the house become too oppressive, retire to the lavish gardens and vast parklands, parts of which were landscaped by Capability Brown. To the front, an artificial

lake sports a beautiful bridge by Vanbrugh, while a mini train is needed to take visitors to a maze, adventure playground and butterfly house. For a quieter and longer stroll, glorious walks lead to an arboretum, cascade and temple.

Sleeping & Eating

Woodstock has a good choice of accommodation, but it's not cheap. Plan a day trip from Oxford if you're travelling on a budget.

Townhouse B&B (☎ 810843; info@woodstock-townhouse.com; 15 High St; s £45-65, d £70-100; ☹) This lovely 18th-century stone town house offers a selection of en suite rooms right in the centre of town. There's plenty of period character but no lack of modern style, and facilities include TVs with DVD player.

Kings Arms Hotel (☎ 813636; www.kings-hotel-woodstock.co.uk; 19 Market St; s/d £70/130; ☹) Set in a lovely Georgian town house, the rooms here are sleek and stylish yet manage to retain much of their period charm. Downstairs there's a bright bistro serving modern British fare (mains £9 to £14) and a good bar with leather sofas and cheaper snacks.

Brotherton's Brasserie (☎ 811114; 1 High St; mains £8-15; ☹ lunch & dinner, closed Tue) Set in an atmospheric 17th-century stone house and lit with the warm glow of gaslight, this popular brasserie is one of the best spots in town. The rustic interior provides an informal ambience for the competent menu, which features everything from pasta to wild boar casserole.

Getting There & Away

Stagecoach bus 20 runs every half-hour (hourly on Sunday) from Oxford bus station (20 minutes). **Cotswold Roaming** (☎ 308300; www.cotswold-roaming.co.uk) offers half-day tours (adult/under 15 years £18/11) to Blenheim from Oxford. The cost includes admission to the palace.

HENLEY-ON-THAMES

☎ 01491 / pop 10,513

Set on the banks of the river and studded with elegant stone houses, a few Tudor relics, chichi shops and affluent residents, Henley is a conservative but well-heeled kind of place that bursts into action for its world-famous regatta and festival each year. Outside the summer festivities it's a pleasant but workaday commuter town with an interesting museum, a scenic setting and a good choice of facilities.

The **tourist office** (☎ 578034; www.visithenley-on-thames.com; The Barn, King's Rd; ☹ 11am-4.45pm Mon-Sat Mar-Oct, 11am-3.45pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) is next to the handsome town hall.

River & Towing Museum

Life in Henley has always focused on the river, and the impressive **River & Rowing Museum** (☎ 415600; www.rrm.co.uk; Mill Meadows; adult/under 18yr £7/5; ☹ 10am-5.30pm May-Aug, 10am-5pm Sep-Apr; ☹) takes a look at the town's relationship with the Thames, the history of rowing, and the wildlife and commerce the river supports. Hands-on activities and interactive displays make it a good spot for children, and the *Wind in the Willows* exhibition brings Kenneth Grahame's stories of Ratty, Mole, Badger and Toad to life.

Festivals & Events

HENLEY ROYAL REGATTA

The first ever Oxford and Cambridge boat race was held in Henley in 1839 and ever since the cream of English society has descended on this small town each year for a celebration of boating, back-slapping and the beau monde. The five-day **Henley Royal Regatta** (☎ 572153; www.hrr.co.uk) has grown into a major fixture in the social calendar of the upwardly mobile, and is a massive corporate entertainment opportunity.

The regatta is held in the first week of July; tickets for the public enclosure cost £10 to £16.

HENLEY FESTIVAL

In the week following the regatta the town continues its celebrations with the **Henley Festival** (☎ 843404; www.henley-festival.co.uk), a vibrant black-tie affair that features everything from big-name international stars to quirky, alternative acts. Expect anything from opera to rock, jazz, comedy and swing. The main events take place on a floating stage on the Thames and tickets vary in price from £83 for a seat in the grandstand to £25 for a space on the promenade.

Sleeping & Eating

Henley has a good choice of accommodation, especially at the top end, but if you're planning to visit during either festival book well in advance.

Apple Ash (☎ 574198; www.appleash.com; Woodlands Rd, Harpsden Woods; s/d £50/70; ☹) Lovingly maintained and beautifully decorated, it's well worth the 2-mile trip from town to stay at

this charming Edwardian country house. The spacious rooms retain their period character but also offer modern comfort and style, with pale fabrics and restrained floral touches.

ourpick Hotel du Vin (☎ 848400; www.hotelduvin.com; New St; d £115-395; ☹) Set in the former Brakspears Brewery, this upmarket hotel chain scores highly for its blend of industrial chic and top-of-the-line designer sophistication. The spacious rooms and opulent suites are slick and stylish and are matched by a walk-in humidifier, incredible billiards rooms, huge wine cellar and a popular bistro (mains £14.50).

Green Olive (☎ 412220; 28 Market Pl; meze £3.95-6.50; ☹ lunch & dinner) Bright, airy and usually buzzing, the Green Olive serves up a menu of more than 40 traditional Greek meze. Portions are generous, so choose carefully for a light lunch or go the whole hog and opt for all your favourites for dinner. There's a lovely garden area at the back for alfresco summer dining.

Henley Bar & Grill (☎ 576126; Bell St; mains £8-11; ☹ lunch & dinner) This contemporary-styled brasserie with high-backed leather chairs, open fire, grand piano and airy conservatory features solid fare such as char-grilled tuna and Barbary duck, and a killer Guinness ice cream.

ourpick Crooked Billet (☎ 681048; www.thecrookedbillet.co.uk; Stoke Row; mains £12-20; ☹ lunch & dinner) Hidden down a back lane and surrounded by trees, the Crooked Billet is a 17th-century inn famous as the one-time hideout of highwayman Dick Turpin. Today it is little changed – beer is drawn directly from casks in the cellar and the low beams, flagstone floor and inglenook fireplace are all originals. However, it's the food that really draws the crowds, with local produce being whipped into modern, mouthwatering fare such as chicken baked with goats cheese, warm chorizo salad and puy lentils, or venison with haggis and roast figs in a port and juniper sauce.

Getting There & Around

Bus X39 links Henley and Oxford (50 minutes, every two hours). Trains to London Paddington take about one hour (£11.40, hourly).

If you fancy seeing the local area from the river, **Hobbs & Son** (☎ 572035; www.hobbs-of-henley.com) runs hour-long afternoon river trips from April to September (adult/under 16 years £5.50/4.50) and hires five-seater rowing boats (£12 per hour) and four-seater motorboats (£20 per hour).

UFFINGTON WHITE HORSE

One of England's most remarkable and mysterious ancient sites lies about 20 miles south-west of Oxford near the handsome market town of Wantage. The Uffington White Horse is a stylised chalk horse cut into the hillside almost 3000 years ago. No-one is sure why the people of the time went to so much trouble to create the image or what exactly it is supposed to represent.

Regardless, it is an extraordinary figure, measuring 114m long and 49m wide, and is thought to be the oldest chalk figure in Britain. It is best seen from a distance, or from the air, because of the stylised lines of perspective.

Just below the figure is **Dragon Hill** – so called because it is believed that St George slew the dragon here – and above it the grass-covered earthworks of **Uffington Castle**. From the youth hostel, near Wantage, a wonderful 5-mile walk leads along the Ridgeway to the White Horse.

The **Vale & Downland Museum** (☎ 01235-771447; www.wantage.com/museum; Churk St; adult/under 25yr in full-time education £2.50/1; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) in Wantage tells the history of the area and chalk figure in more detail.

THE COTSWOLDS

Undeniably beautiful, quintessentially English and beloved by tourists and locals alike, the lush rolling hills and picture-postcard villages of the Cotswolds are one of the country's most popular spots. With glorious honey-coloured villages riddled with beautiful old mansions, thatched cottages, atmospheric churches and rickety almshouses, the region just oozes old-world English charm.

A boom in the medieval wool trade brought the area its wealth and left it with such a glut of beautiful buildings that its place in history is secured for evermore. If you've ever craved exposed beams, dreamed of falling asleep under English rose wallpaper or lusted after a cream tea in midafternoon, there's no finer place to fulfil your fantasies. Just be aware that you won't be alone – the Cotswolds can be besieged by tourists and traffic during the summer months.

Orientation & Information

The limestone hills of the Cotswolds extend across a narrow band of land east of the M5,

A COTTAGE OF YOUR OWN

If you'd like to rent your own Cotswold cottage, try the websites listed here for properties throughout the region:

Campden Cottages (www.campdencottages.co.uk)

Cotswold Cottages (www.cotswolds.info/cottages.shtml)

Cotswold Cottage Company (www.cotswoldcottage.co.uk)

Discover the Cotswolds (www.discoverthecotswolds.net)

Manor Cottages & Cotswold Retreats (www.manorcottages.co.uk)

stretching almost as far as Oxford at their widest point, north to Chipping Campden and south almost as far as Bath. Most of the region lies within Gloucestershire, but parts leak out into Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. The Cotswolds are protected as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

For online information on attractions, accommodation and events:

Cotswolds (www.the-cotswolds.org)

Cotswolds Tourism (www.cotswolds.com)

Oxfordshire Cotswolds (www.oxfordshirecotswolds.org)

Activities

The gentle hills of the Cotswolds are perfect for walking, cycling and riding.

The long-distance **Cotswold Way** (102 miles) gives walkers a wonderful overview of the area. The route meanders from Chipping Campden to Bath, with no major climbs or difficult stretches, and is easily accessible from many points en route if you fancy tackling a shorter section. Ask at local tourist offices for details of day hikes or pick up a copy of one of the many walking guides to the region.

Away from the main roads, the winding lanes of the Cotswolds make fantastic cycling territory, with little traffic, glorious views and gentle gradients. Again, the local tourist offices are invaluable in helping to plot a route.

Getting Around

Public transport through the Cotswolds is fairly limited, with bus services running to and from major hubs only, and train services just skimming the northern and southern

borders. However, with a little careful planning and patience you can see all the highlights of the area. Tourist offices stock several useful *Explore the Cotswolds* brochures with bus and rail summaries for the area.

For the most flexibility and the option of getting off the beaten track, having your own car is unbeatable. Car hire can be arranged in most major centres (see p970).

MINSTER LOVELL

☎ 01993

The gorgeous village of Minster Lovell was one of William Morris' favourite spots, and the cluster of stone cottages nestled beside an ancient pub and riverside mill are little changed today. Set on a gentle slope leading down to the meandering River Windrush, Minster Lovell is a glorious place for an afternoon pit stop, quiet overnight retreat or start to a valley walk.

The main sight here is the ruins of **Minster Lovell Hall**, the 15th-century manor house home to Viscount Francis Lovell. Lovell fought with Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 but later mysteriously disappeared. When a

skeleton was discovered inside a secret vault in the house in 1708, it was assumed he had died while in hiding.

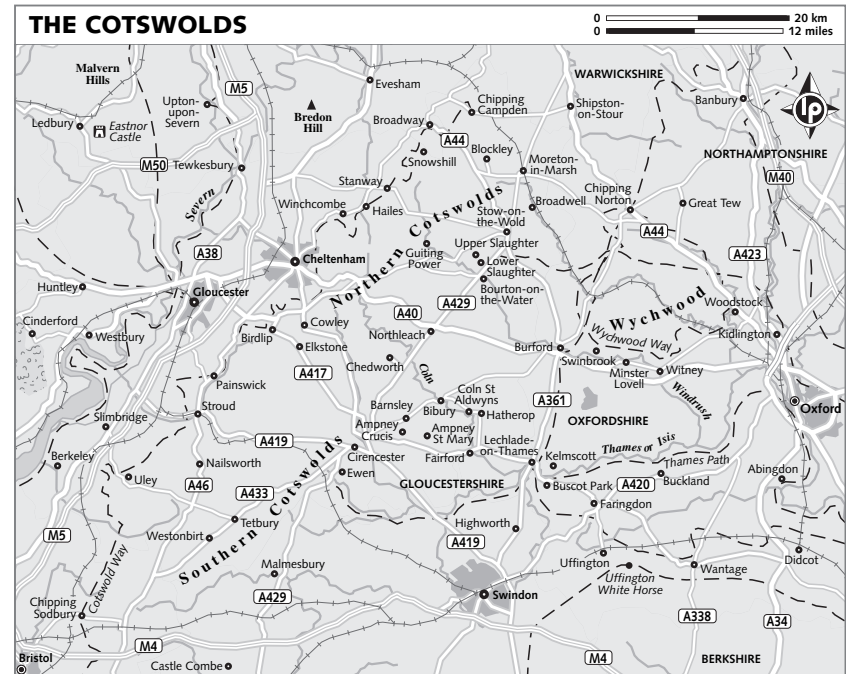
If you'd like to stay overnight, the **Mill & Old Swan** (☎ 774441; www.millandoldswan-isc.co.uk; s £50-100, d £60-140; (P) ☑) offers charming period-style rooms in the 15th-century Old Swan or more modern Scandinavian design in the converted mill. The Old Swan serves decent pub food (£8 to £10) at night.

Swanbrook (www.swanbrook.co.uk) runs three buses Monday to Saturday (one on Sunday) between Cheltenham (£6.50, one hour) and Oxford (30 minutes) via Minster Lovell. Stagecoach buses 233 and X3 between Witney and Burford stop here 10 times a day, Monday to Saturday (10 minutes each way).

BURFORD

☎ 01993 / pop 1877

Little changed since its glory days at the height of the wool trade, Burford is a stunningly picturesque place slithering down a steep hill to a medieval crossing point on the River Windrush. The main street and the quiet lanes off it are lined with higgledy-piggledy stone



cottages, fine Cotswold town houses and the odd Elizabethan or Georgian gem. This incredible array of buildings attracts hordes of visitors, though, and the town can be frustratingly busy in midsummer. Add on a glut of specialist boutiques, tearooms and antique shops peddling flowery china and nostalgia and it can all feel a bit overwhelming.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 823558; Sheep St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Mar-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) has several leaflets describing walks in the local area.

Sights & Activities

Burford's main attraction lies in its remarkable buildings, including the 16th-century **Tolsey House** (Toll House; High St; admission free; ☎ 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun), where the wealthy wool merchants held their meetings. This quaint building perches on sturdy pillars and now houses a small museum on Burford's history.

Off High St you'll find the town's 14th-century **almshouses** and the gorgeous **Church of St John the Baptist**. The Norman tower here is topped by a 15th-century steeple and inside you'll find a fine fan-vaulted ceiling and medieval screens dividing the chapels.

Younger visitors will enjoy a visit to the excellent **Cotswold Wildlife Park** (☎ 823006; www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk; adult/under 16yr £9/6.50; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mar-Sep, 10am-3.30pm Oct-Feb), set around a Victorian manor house. The park is home to everything from penguins to white rhinos and giant cats.

If you have the time and fancy getting away from the crowds, it's worth the effort to walk east along the picturesque river path to the untouched and rarely visited village of **Swinbrook** (3 miles), where the beautiful church has some remarkable tombs.

Sleeping & Eating

Burford has a wonderful choice of atmospheric, upmarket hotels but far fewer options at more affordable prices.

Priory (☎ 823249; 35 High St; s £22.50-47.50, d £47.50-60) Housing the only budget beds in town, the standard rooms here are small and functional, while the en suite 'superior' rooms are newer and better but far from spacious. The restaurant serves fairly predictable but decent fare (mains £6 to £8).

Westview House (☎ 824723; www.westview-house.co.uk; 151 The Hill; s/d £45/70; ☎) This lovely old stone cottage has two bright and spacious guest rooms

with plenty of period character. The Heritage Room has exposed beams, stone walls and a cast-iron bed, while the Windrush Room has its own private balcony overlooking the garden.

our pick **Lamb Inn** (☎ 823155; www.lambinn-burford.co.uk; Sheep St; r £145-165; ☎) Step back in time with a stay at the Lamb, a 15th-century inn just dripping with character. Expect flagstone floors, low, beamed ceilings, creaking stairs and a charming, laid-back atmosphere downstairs, and luxurious period-style rooms with antique furniture and cosy comfort upstairs.

Jonathan's at the Angel (☎ 822714; www.theangelatburford.co.uk; 14 Witney St; mains £11-16; ☎) Lunch & dinner) Set in a lovely 16th-century coaching inn, this atmospheric brasserie serves up a good range of modern British and European food. Equally good but less formal dining (£7.95) is available at the bar.

Getting There & Away

From Oxford, Swanbrook runs three buses a day (one on Sunday) to Burford (45 minutes). Stagecoach buses 233 and X3 run between Witney and Burford 10 times a day, Monday to Saturday (20 minutes).

CHIPPING NORTON

☎ 01608 / pop 5688

Largely undiscovered by the tourist hordes, Chipping Norton – or 'Chippy' as it is locally known – is a sleepy but attractive place with a workaday attitude and some lovely buildings. The market square is surrounded by handsome Georgian buildings, stone cottages and old coaching inns and on Church St you'll find a row of beautiful honey-coloured **almshouses** built in the 17th century. Further on is the secluded **Church of St Mary**, a classic example of the Cotswold wool churches, with a magnificent 15th-century perpendicular nave and clerestory. Chippy's most enduring landmark, however, is the arresting **Bliss Tweed Mill** (now converted to apartments) on the outskirts of town. A monument to the industrial architecture of the 19th century, the building is more like a stately home than a factory.

For overnight accommodation, **Norten's B&B** (☎ 645060; www.nortens.co.uk; 10 New St; s £45, d £55-65; ☎) offers a range of really lovely contemporary rooms with simple, minimalist design. The downstairs café does a good range of bistro-style food (mains £4 to £7).

Another good bet is **Off the Beaten Track** (☎ 646383; www.offthebeatentrack.uk.com; 18 Horsefair;

WORTH THE TRIP

One of the hidden gems of the Cotswolds, the gorgeous village of Great Tew is little changed since medieval times, with the 16th-century **Falkland Arms** (☎ 683653; www.falklandarms.org.uk; Great Tew; r £85-110) sitting right on the village green. Roaring fires, flagstone floors and low beams are only part of its charm – the real joy comes in the local ales, ciders and wines, the traditional clay pipes and snuff still on sale, and the refreshing walk down the road when you need to use the loo. The food (mains £5 to £9) ranges from homemade soups and crusty baguettes to traditional Sunday roasts with all the trimmings, while upstairs the six guest rooms offer four-poster or cast-iron beds and period style. It doesn't get much more genuine than this.

Great Tew is about 4 miles east of Chipping Norton.

s/d £45/70), a brasserie and bar with a selection of comfortable, modern guest rooms. The restaurant (mains £8 to £15) serves a modern British menu and is probably the top spot in town for food.

Stagecoach bus 20 runs between Chippy and Oxford roughly every half-hour.

MORETON-IN-MARSH

☎ 01608 / pop 3198

Unassuming Moreton was once a lovely town but is now a major road axis and is rather spoiled by its incessant traffic. However, it's a useful transport hub and still has a clutch of beautiful buildings. On Tuesdays the town bursts into life for its weekly market.

Pulhams Coaches (☎ 01451-820369; www.pulhamscoaches.com) runs eight services daily between Moreton and Cheltenham (one hour, Monday to Saturday). Two Sunday services run from May to September only. All buses go via Stow-on-the-Wold (15 minutes) and Bourton-on-the-Water (20 minutes).

There are trains roughly every hour to Moreton from London Paddington (£27.50, 1½ hours) via Oxford (£9.30, 35 minutes) and on to Worcester (£10.10, 45 minutes) and Hereford (£14.20, 1½ hours).

CHIPPING CAMPDEN

☎ 01386 / pop 1943

The graceful curving main street of Chipping Campden is flanked by a wonderful array of wayward stone cottages, fine terraced houses, ancient inns and historic homes, making it a truly unspoiled gem in an area full of aching pretty villages. Despite its obvious allure and the presence of chichi boutiques and upmarket shops, it remains relatively unspoiled by tourist crowds and is a wonderful place to visit.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 841206; www.visitchipcampden.com; High St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) stocks

a town trail guide with some background on the town's most historic buildings. Look out for the wonderful 17th-century **Market Hall** nearby, with its multiple gables and elaborate timber roof.

At the western end of High St is the 15th-century **St James's**, one of the great wool churches of the Cotswolds. Built in the perpendicular style, it has a magnificent tower and some wonderful 17th-century monuments. Nearby on Church St is a remarkable row of **almshouses** dating from the 17th century, and the Jacobean lodges and gateways of the now-ruined Campden House. The surviving Court Barn will open as an Arts and Crafts museum in summer 2020.

Sleeping & Eating

Manor Farm (☎ 840390; www.manorfarmbnb.demon.co.uk; s/d £50/60) Set in a beautiful 17th-century farmhouse, this lovely B&B has all the period charm of a Cotswold home, but contemporary style and modern facilities. Along with the exposed oak beams and creaking stairs you'll find king-size beds, power showers and neutral colour schemes.

Eight Bells (☎ 840371; www.eightbellsinn.co.uk; Church St; s £50-65, d £80-115; ☎) The oldest inn in town has had a recent makeover, banished the chintz from its bedrooms and replaced it with sleek contemporary décor that works wonderfully with the period character of this 14th-century inn. The restaurant downstairs serves a British and Continental menu (mains £8.50 to £16) in rustic settings.

our pick **Cotswold House Hotel** (☎ 840330; www.cotswoldhouse.com; The Square; r £140-285; ☎ ☎) Relax in utter luxury at this chic Regency town house turned boutique hotel. Bespoke furniture, massive beds, Frette linens, cashmere throws, private gardens and hot tubs are the norm here. You can dine in style at Juliana's

or take a more informal approach at Hick's Brasserie (mains £8 to £17), a slick operation with an ambitious menu.

Getting There & Around

Between them buses 21 and 22 run almost hourly to Stratford-upon-Avon or Moreton-in-Marsh. Bus 21 also stops in Broadway. There are no Sunday services.

To catch a real glimpse of the countryside, try hiring a bike from **Cotswold Country Cycles** (☎ 438706; Longlands Farm Cottage; per day £12) and discovering the quiet lanes and trails around town.

BROADWAY

☎ 01386 / pop 2496

Quintessentially English, absurdly pretty and little changed since medieval times, Broadway is another stunning Cotswold village firmly on the tourist trail. The graceful golden-hued cottages set at the foot of a steep escarpment have inspired writers, artists and composers in times past, but today it's tearooms, antique shops, boutiques, art galleries and coaches that line the village green.

The **tourist office** (☎ 852937; 1 Cotswold Ct; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) is in a shopping arcade off the northern end of High St.

Beyond the charm of the village itself there are few specific attractions to visit. If you're feeling energetic the lovely, 12th-century **Church of St Eadburgha** is a signposted 30-minute walk (1 mile) from town. Near here, a more challenging path leads uphill for 2 miles to **Broadway Tower** (☎ 852390; www.broadwaytower.co.uk; adult/under 14yr £3.80/2.30; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), a crenulated, 18th-century Gothic folly on the crest of the escarpment. It has a small William Morris exhibition on one floor and stunning views from the top.

The best of the B&Bs in town is the **Olive Branch Guest House** (☎ 853440; www.theolivebranch-broadway.com; 78 High St; s £40-58, d £68-8; ☎), a lovely 16th-century home with bright, spacious rooms decked out in cosy, country-style fabrics and pine furniture. Another good bet is **Milestone House** (☎ 853432; www.milestone-broadway.co.uk; High St; s/d £45/68; ☎), a 17th-century coaching inn with exposed beams, an inglenook fireplace and subtle florals.

For food, head for the **Broadway Brasserie** (☎ 858435; 20A High St; mains £7-11), which serves a classic range of brasserie-style food, or sleek and stylish **Russells** (☎ 853555; www.russellsofbroadway

.com; 20 High St; mains £9-17; ☎ lunch & dinner) for more upmarket modern British fare. Russells also has a selection of slick, modern rooms (£105 to £245) with simple, contemporary design, flat-screen TVs and lots of little luxuries.

Getting There & Away

Bus 22 goes to Moreton-in-Marsh, Chipping Campden and Stratford (four daily Monday to Saturday, 20 minutes) and bus 606 goes to Cheltenham (four Monday to Saturday, 50 minutes).

WINCHCOMBE

☎ 01242 / pop 3682

Capital of the Saxon kingdom of Mercia and one of the most important towns in the Cotswolds until the Middle Ages, Winchcombe is now a sleepy place with the timeless charm of a typical Cotswold town. Beautiful houses line the streets, and the picturesque cottages on Vineyard St and Dents Tce offer quintessential Cotswold views. Fine gargoyles adorn the lovely St Peter's Church and just outside the town are the evocative ruins of Cistercian **Hailes Abbey** (EH; ☎ 01242-602398; adult/under 15yr £3.30/1.70; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct), once one of the country's main pilgrimage centres.

The town's main attraction, however, is **Sudeley Castle** (☎ 604357; www.sudeleycastle.co.uk; adult/under 15yr £7.20/4.20; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Sun-Thu selected weeks Easter-Oct), once a favoured retreat of Tudor and Stuart monarchs. Much of the house is off limits to visitors, but you can get a glimpse of its grand proportions while visiting the exhibitions of costumes, memorabilia and paintings, and the surrounding gardens. To see the private apartments you'll need to join the 'Connoisseur Tours' (Wednesday 11am, 1pm, and 3pm Easter to October, tour £15).

The **tourist office** (☎ 602925; www.winchcombe.co.uk; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct) is located on High St.

Sleeping & Eating

Gower House (☎ 602616; www.cotswolds.info/accommodation/gower-house.htm; 16 North St; s/d £40/53; ☎) Two 17th-century cottages have been converted into this lovely B&B close to the centre of town. The simple, uncluttered rooms have pine furniture, plain white bedspreads and plenty of light.

White Hart Inn (☎ 602359; www.the-white-hart-inn.com; r £65-135; ☎) The individually styled rooms at the White Hart range from simple and

contemporary twins to the tartan-bedecked Highland room, the Moroccan boudoir and the four-poster Swedish room. The food is equally eclectic, with light bites at the bar (£5 to £8), pizzas (£6 to £8) in the basement and modern British fare in the main restaurant (mains £14 to £16).

Our pick 5 North Street (☎ 604566; 5 North St; 2-course lunch £18.50, 2-course dinner £28-37) Winchcombe's top spot for food is this cosy, unpretentious place that also happens to hold a prestigious Michelin star. The menu is a mix of British ingredients and French flair and promises consistently good food at surprisingly keen rates.

Getting There & Away

Bus 606 runs four times daily (Monday to Saturday) from Winchcombe to Cheltenham (25 minutes), while bus 559 goes once to Broadway (Monday to Saturday, 40 minutes).

STOW-ON-THE-WOLD

☎ 01451 / pop 2074

Stow has long held a strategic place in Cotswold history, standing as it does on the Roman Fosse Way and at the junction of six roads. At its heart is a large market square surrounded by handsome buildings and steep-walled alleyways originally used to funnel the sheep into the fair. Today the sheep have been replaced with tourists and instead of farmers brokering deals the town is full of antique shops, pretentious boutiques, tearooms and delis. It's great if you're on a pit stop from a coach tour, but all a little artificial if you're looking for true Cotswold charm.

The **tourist office** (☎ 831082; Hollis House; ☎ 9.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat) on Market Sq sells discounted tickets to local attractions.

Sleeping & Eating

Stow-on-the-Wold YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6050; www.yha.org.uk; The Square; dm £14.95; ☎ Mar-Sep, Fri & Sat only Nov & Dec; ☎) Slap bang on the market square, this hostel is in a wonderful 16th-century town house and has small dorms, a children's play area and a warm welcome for families.

Number 9 (☎ 870333 www.number-nine.info; 9 Park St; s £45, d £55-70; ☎) Centrally located and wonderfully atmospheric, this beautiful B&B has three simple, contemporary-styled rooms with plenty of space, brand-new bathrooms and subtle décor.

Old Butchers (☎ 831700; 7 Park St; mains £11-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) Stow's top spot for dining is

this chic brasserie serving up a great selection of modern British cuisine with more than a hint of Continental European influence thrown in. Expect grilled marinated quail, roast pork belly and succulent fish all done to perfection.

Eagle & Child (☎ 830670; Digbeth St; mains £9-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) Smart, simple but sophisticated food is served at the Eagle and Child, supposedly England's oldest inn. The décor is all exposed beams and old-world charm, but the menu is decidedly modern, blending traditional English favourites with modern European flair.

Getting There & Away

Bus 55 links Stow with Moreton, Bourton, Northleach and Cirencester eight times daily Monday to Saturday. Bus 801 runs to Cheltenham, Moreton and Bourton four times daily Monday to Friday and nine times on Saturday.

The nearest train stations are 4 miles away at Kingham and Moreton-in-Marsh.

BOURTON-ON-THE-WATER

☎ 01451 / pop 3093

Crass, commercialised and overwhelmed by coach tours, Bourton is an exceptionally beautiful place that has sold its soul to the tourist trade. Not content with its handsome houses and stunningly picturesque low bridges over the trickling River Windrush, the town has turned theme park with a series of 'attractions' including a model railway and village, bird-conservation project, perfume factory, maze and motor museum.

If you're travelling in the high season, visit in the evening, when most of the coaches have left, or wait until the depths of winter, when the village's understated charm is free to reveal itself.

The **tourist office** (☎ 820211; www.bourtoninfo.com; Victoria St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5.30pm Sat Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) can help find accommodation.

If you'd like to stay, **Larks Rise** (☎ 822613; www.larksrisehouse.co.uk; Old Gloucester Rd; r £50-80; ☎) offers beautiful, bright, simple rooms with DVD players and complimentary toiletries in a lovely Edwardian house.

For more upmarket accommodation and excellent food, the chic and stylish **Dial House** (☎ 822244; www.dialhousehotel.com; The Chestnuts; r £110-160; ☎) is the only place to go. Luxurious

rooms with hand-painted wallpaper, giant beds, silky throws and a wonderful mix of period charm and designer style are on offer. The restaurant (mains lunch £8 to £10, dinner £12 to £18) serves up excellent modern British cuisine.

Buses 801 and P1 run to Cheltenham, Moreton and Stow up to four times daily Monday to Friday and nine times on Saturday.

THE SLAUGHTERS

☎ 01451

A little over a mile from Bourton and yet half a world away, the Slaughters – Upper and Lower – are some of the Cotswolds' most scenic and unspoiled villages. The names derive from the Old English 'sloughre', meaning 'slough', and despite the camera-wielding crowds that are drawn here, they maintain their unhurried medieval charm.

To see the Slaughters at their best, arrive on foot from Bourton (about 30 minutes' walk) across the fields. Your first sight of the village will be the meandering river that weaves between the glorious buildings, past the 17th-century Lower Slaughter Manor (now a top-notch hotel) to the **old mill** (☎ 820052; www.oldmill-lowerslaughter.com; admission £2; ☎ 10am–6pm Mar–Oct), which houses a small museum and teashop. From here you can continue for another mile (about 30 minutes' walk) across the fields to Upper Slaughter, with its own fine manor house and glorious cottages.

NORTHLEACH

☎ 01451 / pop 1923

Little visited and under-appreciated, Northleach is a lovely little market town of half-timbered Tudor houses, imposing merchants'

stores and late-medieval cottages. There's a wonderful mix of architectural styles clustered around the gorgeous market square and the narrow laneways leading off it, but the highlight of a visit is the **Church of St Peter and St Paul**, a masterpiece of Cotswold perpendicular style.

Near the square is Oak House, a 17th-century wool house that contains **Keith Harding's World of Mechanical Music** (☎ 860181; www.mechanicalmusic.co.uk; admission £5; ☎ 10am–6pm; ♿), a fascinating museum of self-playing musical instruments, where you can hear Rachmaninoff played on a reproducing piano.

Just outside town on the A429 is the **Chedworth Roman Villa** (NT; ☎ 01242-890256; Yanworth; adult/under 18yr £5.50/3; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct, 11am–4pm Feb–Mar & Nov), one of the most complete Roman villas in England. Built as a stately home in about AD 120, it contains some wonderful mosaics illustrating the seasons, bathhouses, and, a short walk away, a temple by the River Coln.

For overnight stays try **Prospect Cottage** (☎ 860875; www.prospectcottage.co.uk; West End; s/d £60/75; ♿), an atmospheric 17th-century home with bright simple rooms featuring pine furniture and spacious bathrooms. Alternatively, the **Wheatsheaf** (☎ 860244; www.wsan.co.uk; West End; s £50–60, d £60–80; ♿) has eight excellent-value en suite rooms decked out in slick contemporary style. The restaurant serves a good selection of light lunches (£6 to £8) and a modern British dinner menu (mains £11 to £13).

Getting There & Away

Swanbrook runs three buses Monday to Saturday (one on Sunday) between Cheltenham (30 minutes) and Oxford (one hour) via Northleach.

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

Kick-start your weekend by checking into the seductively stylish **Cotswold House Hotel** (p359) in Chipping Campden and take a sunset stroll around the village before dining at Juliana's or Hick's Brasserie. First thing the following morning, blow away the cobwebs with a short stroll and magnificent views at **Broadway Tower** (p360) and then head south to **Winchcombe** (p360), where you can loll about the lovely village or take in some history at the Tudor pile **Sudeley Castle** (p360). Stop for lunch at the seriously unpretentious but exceptionally good **5 North Street** (p361) before taking the cross-country route to stunning **Lower Slaughter** (above). If you're feeling sprightly, follow the trail over the rolling hills to Upper Slaughter or alternatively just sit and feed the ducks, before swinging back to Bourton to check into the sumptuous **Dial House** (p361) for an evening of luxury and fine food. On Sunday head east to Woodstock to ramble the grounds or the stately rooms of **Blenheim Palace** (p354) and work up an appetite for a hearty traditional lunch at the glorious thatched **Falkland Arms** (p359) in Great Tew.

CIRENCESTER

☎ 01285 / pop 15,861

Affluent, elegant and steeped in history, the charming town of Cirencester is a refreshingly unpretentious place of narrow winding streets and graceful town houses. The lovely market square is surrounded by wonderful 18th-century and Victorian architecture, while the nearby streets showcase a harmonious medley of buildings from various eras.

Under the Romans, Cirencester was second only to London in terms of size and importance and although little of this period remains, you can still see the grassed-over ruins of one of the largest amphitheatres in the country. The medieval wool trade was also good to the town, with wealthy merchants funding the building of a superb perpendicular-style church. Today, Cirencester is the most important town in the southern Cotswolds and retains an authentic, unaffected air, with the lively Monday and Friday markets as important as the expensive boutiques and trendy delis that line its narrow streets.

Pick up a copy of *Cirencester – A Town Walk* at the **tourist office** (☎ 654180; Corn Hall; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat Apr–Dec, 9.30am–5pm Mon–Sat Jan–Mar) for information on historic buildings around town.

Sights

CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

Standing elegantly on the market square, cathedral-like **St John's** (donation £2; ☎ 10am–5pm) is one of England's largest parish churches. A superb perpendicular-style tower with wild flying buttresses dominates the exterior, but it is the majestic three-storey south porch that is the real highlight. Built as an office by late-15th-century abbots, it subsequently became the medieval town hall.

Soaring arches, magnificent fan vaulting and a Tudor nave adorn the light-filled interior, where you'll also find a 15th-century painted stone pulpit and memorial brasses recording the matrimonial histories of important wool merchants. The east window contains fine medieval stained glass, while a wall safe displays the **Boleyn Cup**, made for Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII, in 1535.

CORINIUM MUSEUM

Modern design, innovative displays and computer reconstructions bring one of Britain's largest collections of Roman artefacts to life at

the **Corinium Museum** (☎ 655611; www.cotswolds.gov.uk/museum; Park St; adult/under 16yr £3.50/2; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, 2–5pm Sun). You can dress as a Roman soldier, meet an Anglo-Saxon princess and discover what Cirencester was like during its heyday as a wealthy medieval wool town. Highlights of the Roman collection include the beautiful Hunting Dogs and Four Seasons floor mosaics and a reconstructed Roman kitchen and butcher's shop.

Sleeping & Eating

Old Brewhouse (☎ 656099; www.theoldbrewhouse.com; 7 London Rd; s £45–50, d £55–65; ☎ ☎) Set in a charming 17th-century town house, this lovely B&B has bright, pretty rooms with cast-iron beds and subtle, country-style florals or patchwork quilts. The beautiful garden room even has its own patio.

Leases (☎ 653643; www.theleases.co.uk; 101 Victoria Rd; s £45–50, d £55–60; ☎ ☎) This Victorian house offers a range of calm guest rooms with plenty of period features and modern amenities. Elegant but understated décor, soothing colour schemes and good bathrooms make it a great deal.

ourpick Jesse's Bistro (☎ 641497; Blackjack St; mains £7–15; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Wed–Sat) Hidden away in a cobbled stableyard with its own fishmonger and cheese shop, this great little place has flagstone floors, wrought-iron chairs and mosaic tables. The modern menu features a selection of great dishes, but the real treat is the fresh fish and meat cooked in the wood-burning oven.

1651 (☎ 658507; Market Pl; mains £11–16; ☎ lunch & dinner) Stripped wood floors, red walls and a modern Mediterranean menu make 1651 one of the best dining spots in town. It's a stylish place in the Fleece Hotel and serves dishes such as pan-fried monkfish with leek, braised fennel and tamarind jus.

Getting There & Away

National Express buses run roughly hourly from Cirencester to London (£17, 2½ hours) and to Cheltenham Spa (30 minutes) and Gloucester (one hour). Stagecoach bus 51 also runs to Cheltenham hourly Monday to Saturday (40 minutes). Bus 852 goes to Gloucester four times daily Monday to Saturday.

BIBURY

☎ 01285 / pop 623

Firmly on the tourist trail and thoroughly overexposed, the gorgeous village of Bibury

is best seen early in the morning or in the soft golden light of the setting sun. Its impossibly quaint collection of riverside buildings prompted William Morris to describe it as 'the most beautiful village in England', and at a quiet moment it's hard to disagree.

For many visitors Bibury's chief attraction is **Arlington Row**, a stunning sweep of riverside cottages now thought to be the most photographed street in Britain. Also worth a look is the 17th-century **Arlington Mill**, just a short stroll away. Few visitors make it past these two sights, but for a glimpse of the real Bibury you should venture into the village proper behind Arlington Row, where you'll find a cluster of stunning cottages and the Saxon **Church of St Mary**.

If you'd like to stay overnight, the riverside **Swan** (☎ 740695; www.swanhotel.co.uk; r £140-220, ☒) is a 17th-century coaching inn with a selection of classically styled rooms with billowing swag curtains, cute florals and chunky beds.

Buses 860, 863, 865, 866 and 869 pass through Bibury en route to Cirencester at least once daily from Monday to Saturday (20 minutes).

TETBURY

☎ 01666 / pop 5250

From medieval cottages to Georgian Gothic gems, Tetbury is an unspoilt town of stunning buildings and numerous antique shops. Once a prosperous wool-trading centre, Tetbury has managed to preserve most of its architectural heritage and is well worth a wander. A row of gorgeous medieval weavers' cottages lines the steep hill at **Chipping Steps** and lead up to the **Chipping**, which is surrounded by graceful 17th- and 18th-century town houses. From here it's a short stroll to Market Sq, where the 17th-century **Market House** stands as if on stilts. Close by, the Georgian Gothic **Church of St Mary the Virgin** has a towering spire and wonderful interior.

Just south of Tetbury is the **National Arboretum** (☎ 880220; www.forestry.gov.uk/westonbirt; adult £5-7.50, under 18yr £1; ☒ 10am-dusk) at Westonbirt. The park boasts a magnificent selection of temperate trees, with some wonderful walks and great colour throughout the year, especially in autumn.

The friendly **tourist office** (☎ 503552; www.tetbury.org; 33 Church St; ☒ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Mar-Oct, 9.30am-2.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb) has plenty of information on the town and its history and stocks a trail guide to the arboretum.

Sleeping & Eating

Number 65 (☎ 503346; www.number65.co.uk; 65 Long St; s £30, d £50-65; ☒) This unassuming restaurant has a couple of simple, country-style guest rooms on offer and serves up a modern British menu (three-course set menu £26) featuring such delicacies as pistachio and almond rissole with roasted pepper purée.

Ormond's Head (☎ 505690; www.theormond.co.uk; 23 Long St; s £60, d £85-95; ☒ (P)) You'll find bright, modern rooms with minimalist décor at the Ormond, a good-value place in the centre of town. The modern bar and grill downstairs serve excellent-value food (mains £8 to £15).

Blue Zucchini (☎ 505852; 7-9 Church St; dinner mains £11-15; ☒ 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) Bright, cheery and usually buzzing, this modern brasserie-bar is as good for a quick read of the paper with a coffee and fresh pastry, as for a lunchtime panini or pizza (£6 to £8) or a strapping evening meal.

Getting There & Away

Bus 29 runs between Tetbury and Stroud (30 minutes) six times daily Monday to Saturday. Bus 620 goes to Bath (1½ hours) six times daily Monday to Friday and four times on Saturday, stopping at the National Arboretum en route.

PAINSWICK

☎ 01452 / pop 1666

Largely untouched, totally unassuming and gloriously uncommercialised, Painswick is a real gem. This gorgeous Cotswold village is a maze of narrow winding streets lined with picture-perfect cottages, handsome stone town houses and medieval inns. Despite its obvious charm, Painswick sees only a trickle of visitors and you can wander the backstreets here and feel genuinely lost in time.

The village centres on **St Mary's Church**, a fine perpendicular wool church surrounded by table-top tombs and 99 clipped yew trees. Legend has it that, should the hundredth yew tree be allowed to grow, the devil would appear and shrivel it. They planted it anyway – to celebrate the millennium – but there's been no sign of the Wicked One.

Sliding downhill beside and behind the church is a series of gorgeous streetscapes. Look out for Bisleys St, the original main drag, which was superseded by the now ancient-looking New St in medieval times. Just south of the church, rare iron stocks stand in the street.

The **tourist office** (☎ 813552; Library, Stroud Rd; ☒ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) has information on short walks in the area and the **Cotswold Way**, which runs through the village.

Painswick Rococo Garden

Just a mile north of town, the ostentatious **Painswick Rococo Garden** (☎ 813204; www.rococogarden.co.uk; adult/under 16yr £5/2.50; ☒ 11am-5pm Jan-Oct) is the area's biggest attraction. These flamboyant pleasure gardens were designed by Benjamin Hyett in the 1740s and have now been restored to their former glory. Winding paths soften the otherwise strict geometrical precision, and bring visitors around the central vegetable garden to the many Gothic follies dotted in the grounds. There's also a children's nature trail and maze.

Sleeping & Eating

Hambutts Mynd (☎ 812352; www.hambuttsmyndguesthouse.co.uk; Edge Rd; s £30-36, d £60; (P) ☒) Set on the edge of the village with lovely views from the rooms, this converted, early-18th-century corn mill has simple but comfortable rooms with tasteful décor.

Cardynham House (☎ 814006; www.cardynham.co.uk; The Cross; s £50-59, d £69-185; ☒ (P)) The individually decorated rooms at 15th-century Cardynham House offer four-poster beds, heavy patterned fabrics and buckets of character. Choose the Shaker-style New England room, bright and airy Palm Beach or chintzy Cottage Rose.

Downstairs in Cardynham House, the **March Hare** (☎ 813452; set menu £24; ☒ 7-10pm Tue-Sat) Thai restaurant is probably the best place to eat in town.

Getting There & Around

Bus 46 connects Cheltenham (30 minutes) with Painswick hourly Monday to Saturday. Bus 256 connects Painswick to Gloucester twice daily on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

The unhurried charm of Gloucestershire is one of its greatest pleasures, and after the crowds and commercialism of the Cotswolds it's an authentic alternative, with its fair share of mellow stone villages and rustic allure. Here too is the elegant Regency town of Cheltenham with its graceful, tree-lined terraces and upmarket boutiques, and the county capi-

tal, Gloucester, with its magnificent Gothic cathedral. Tudor Tewkesbury, to the north, has a gracious Norman abbey and numerous half-timbered houses, while to the west, the historic Forest of Dean is a leafy backwater crisscrossed by numerous trails and littered with vestiges of its mining past.

Information

Much of Gloucestershire falls into the Cotswold district and information on sights, activities, accommodation and transport can be found on www.glos-cotswolds.com.

Activities

The quiet roads, gentle gradients and numerous footpaths in Gloucestershire make it perfect for walking and cycling. Tourist offices can help with route planning and stock numerous guides to the trails.

Compass Holidays (☎ 250642; www.compass-holidays.com; bikes per 2 days/week from £34/64) hires bikes and also offers a bag-drop service (£6) and guided cycling tours of the area.

Getting Around

A host of companies operate bus services in Gloucestershire. Most tourist offices stock local bus timetables or can help with finding connecting services. As always, **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline.org.uk) has details of all routes.

GLOUCESTER

☎ 01452 / pop 123,205

Despite its glorious Norman cathedral and glimmer of medieval character, workaday Gloucester (pronounced *glos-ter*) is forever destined to live in the shadow of its more glamorous neighbour. Yet unlike glitzy Cheltenham it's a refreshingly unpretentious place, and between the modern architectural blunders and steak-and-kidney-pie cafés, the city is beginning to transform its fortunes, redeveloping its historic docks into trendy apartments and heaving itself out of financial decline.

Gloucester began life as a Roman settlement for retired soldiers, built its wealth on profits from river trade and its reputation during a period of medieval piety. For a while the good times rolled but as trade shifted to Bristol the city fell into serious decline. In modern times Gloucester prospered on the back of heavy industry and is only today beginning to heal the scars left from this time.

Orientation & Information

The city centre is based on a medieval cruciform pattern, with Northgate, Southgate, Eastgate and Westgate Sts converging on The Cross. The **tourist office** (☎ 396572; 28 Southgate St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 11am-3pm Sun Jul & Aug) is in the centre of town and there's an additional **information point** (☎ 10.30am-3.30pm) at Merchant's Quay in the docks.

If you don't mind queuing, **Gloucester Library** (☎ 426973; Brunswick Rd; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 9am-5.30pm Wed & Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) has free internet access. Otherwise, head for **Surf Scorpio** (☎ 528030; 135 Eastgate St; per hr £1.50; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-9pm Sun).

Sights

GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL

The main reason to visit Gloucester is to see its magnificent Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 528095; www.gloucestercathedral.org.uk; College Green; suggested donation £3; ☎ 7.30am-6pm), a stunning example of English perpendicular style. Originally the site of a Saxon abbey, a Norman church was built here by a group of Benedictine monks in the 12th century and when Edward II was murdered in 1327 the church was chosen as his burial place.

Edward's tomb proved so popular, however, that Gloucester became a centre of pilgrimage and the income generated from the pious pilgrims financed the church's conversion into the magnificent building seen today. Inside, the cathedral skilfully combines the best of Norman and Gothic design, with thick, sturdy

columns along the nave creating a sense of gracious solidity, and wonderful Norman arcading draped with beautiful mouldings. From the elaborate 14th-century wooden choir stalls you'll get a good view of the imposing eastern window, one of the largest in England.

To see the window in more detail, head for the **Tribune Gallery**, where you can also see an **exhibition** (admission £2; ☎ 10.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-3pm Sat) on its making. As you walk around the **Whispering Gallery** you'll notice that even the quietest of murmurs reverberates across the wonderfully elaborate lierne vaulting. Beneath the window in the northern ambulatory is Edward II's magnificent tomb and, nearby, the late-15th-century **Lady Chapel**, a glorious patchwork of stained glass.

One of the cathedral's greatest treasures, however, is the exquisite **Great Cloister**. Completed in 1367, it is the first example of fan vaulting in England and is only matched in beauty by Henry VIII's Chapel at Westminster Abbey. You (or your children) might recognise the cloister from the first two Harry Potter films: it was used in the corridor scenes at Hogwart's School.

For more cathedral insights and a fantastic view of the town you can climb the 68.5m **tower** on an hour-long guided **tour** (adult/under 16yr £2.50/1; ☎ tours 2.30pm Wed-Fri, 1.30pm & 2.30pm Sat & Bank Holidays). Because of the steep steps it's not recommended for children under 10. Civic Trust volunteers also provide free **guided tours** (☎ 10.30am-3pm Mon-Sat, noon-2pm Sun) of the cathedral.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A major part of the city's regeneration is taking place at Gloucester Docks, once Britain's largest inland port. Fifteen beautiful Victorian warehouses, many now restored, surround the canal basins and house a series of museums, shops and cafés.

The largest warehouse, Llanthony, is home to the excellent **National Waterways Museum** (☎ 318200; www.nwm.org.uk; adult/under 16yr £6.60/5.25; ☎ 10am-5pm), a hands-on kind of place where you can discover the history of inland waterways. There's a collection of historic boats and plenty of interactive exhibits that are great for children.

Also worth visiting are 13th-century **Blackfriars** (Ladybellgate St; admission free), one of Britain's best-preserved Dominican friaries, and the **Gloucester City Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 396131; www.gloucester.gov.uk/citymuseum; Brunswick Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat), which houses everything from dinosaur fossils and Roman artefacts to paintings by Turner and Gainsborough.

Tours

The Civic Trust runs one-hour guided **walking tours** (☎ 396572; adult/under 16yr £2.50/free; ☎ tours 11am Mon-Sat Jun-Aug) of the city leaving from the tourist office on Southgate St, as well as **historic dock tours** (adult/under 16yr £2.50/free; ☎ tours 11am Sat & Sun Jun & Jul) leaving from the information point at Merchant's Quay. On Sunday during August it also runs **Blackfriars tours** (adult/under 16yr £5.50/free; ☎ tours 3pm).

Sleeping & Eating

Gloucester's hotels are a grim lot and you'd be wise to consider staying in Cheltenham instead.

City Lodge Guesthouse (☎ 526380; www.citylodgeguesthouse.co.uk; 72 Weston Rd; s £25-29, d £39-49; (P) ☎) This bargain B&B offers basic but clean and comfortable rooms close to the city centre. The décor is pretty nondescript and cheaper rooms share a bathroom, but you can't argue with the price.

Edward Hotel (☎ 525865; www.edwardhotel-gloucester.co.uk; 88-92 London Rd; s £45-55, d £60-70; (P) ☎) The individually styled rooms at this Victorian town house vary greatly from relatively bright and simple to seriously fussy. Ask to look at a few before deciding.

Haus (☎ 525359; 56 Westgate; mains lunch £3.50-7, dinner £9-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) Slick décor, leather sofas, dark woods and an interesting menu

THE TAILOR OF GLOUCESTER

Beatrix Potter's magical tale of good-hearted mice saving a feverish Gloucester tailor from ruin was inspired by a local legend about real-life tailor John Prichard. As in Potter's tale, he left the garment at cutting stage on a Friday night and returned on Monday to find it finished.

Commercially minded Mr Prichard was soon encouraging people to come in and see where 'waistcoats are made at night by the fairies'. In reality, his two assistants had slept off a Saturday night bender at the workshop and hoped to make amends by finishing the coat.

The original house that Potter used in her illustrations is at 9 College Ct and is due to reopen as an attraction once funding has been secured.

make this contemporary bar and restaurant one of the top spots in town. There are light and interesting lunches, meze (£3.50) and a modern European evening menu.

Bearlands (☎ 419966; Longsmith St; 2-course lunch/dinner £12/20) Another stylish joint, Bearlands is a light-filled place as popular for quiet drinks as a special meal. The menu features dishes such as supreme of pheasant with a warm apricot and cinnamon stuffing, and the drinks menu is tailored to suit.

Getting There & Away

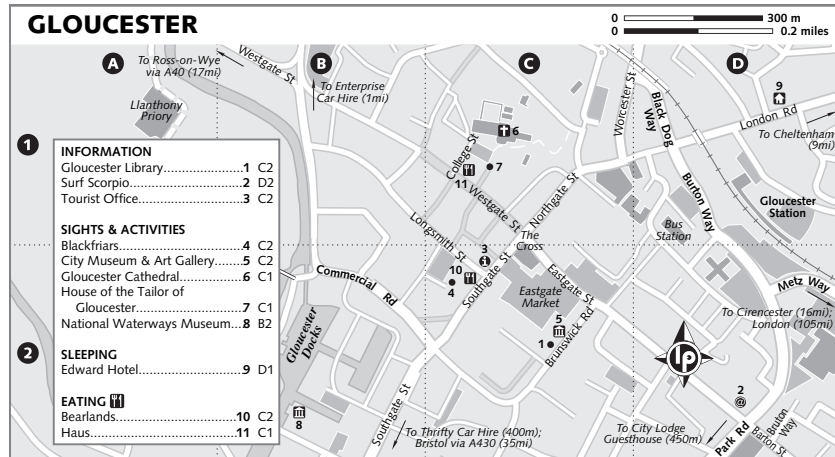
National Express has buses roughly every two hours to London (£17, 3½ hours). Bus 94 runs to Cheltenham every 10 minutes (30 minutes), with express bus X94 cutting the journey to 15 minutes during rush hour. The quickest journey between the two cities is by train (10 minutes, every 20 minutes).

AROUND GLOUCESTER

Forest of Dean

☎ 01594 / pop 79,982

The steep hills, winding tree-lined roads, lakes and unspoilt vistas of the Forest of Dean make for excellent touring by car, foot or bike. The area, England's first National Forest Park, was formerly a royal hunting ground and a centre of iron and coal mining, and its mysterious depths were supposedly the inspiration for JRR Tolkien's setting for *The Lord of the Rings*.



Coleford, the main population centre, has good transport connections to Gloucester. The **tourist office** (☎ 812388; www.visitforestofdean.co.uk; High St, Coleford; ☹ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) stocks walking and cycling guides and also offers a free accommodation booking service.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Your first stop should be the **Dean Heritage Centre** (☎ 822170; www.deanheritagemuseum.com; Camp Mill, Soudley; adult/under 16yr £4.50/2.50; ☹ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Feb, Mar & Oct), which explains the history of the forest and its free miners from medieval times to the industrial age. There's also a reconstructed forest home, adventure playground and art gallery on site.

If you're travelling with children, **Puzzle Wood** (☎ 833187; adult/under 12yr £3.25/2.25; ☹ 11am-5.30pm Tue-Sun Easter-Sep, 11am-4pm Feb & Oct) is a must. This overgrown pre-Roman, open-cast ore mine has a maze of paths, weird rock formations, tangled vines and eerie passageways and offers a real sense of discovery. Puzzle Wood is a mile south of Coleford on the B4228.

Mined for iron ore for more than 4000 years, the **Clearwell Caves** (☎ 832535; www.clearwellcaves.com; adult/under 16yr £4.50/2.80; ☹ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct) are a warren of passageways, caverns and pools that help explain the forest's history of mining. The caves are signposted off the B4228 a mile south of Coleford.

In Newland you can visit the 'Cathedral of the Forest', the 13th-century **All Saints**. The church was restored and partially rebuilt in the 19th century and houses some fine stained-glass windows as well as a unique brass depicting a miner with a *nelly* (tallow candle) in his mouth, a pick in his hand and a *billy* (backpack) on his back.

SLEEPING & EATING

Our pick **St Briavels Castle YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 6040; www.yha.org.uk; Lydney; dm £17.90; (P) ☹) Set in an imposing moated castle once used as King John's hunting lodge, this hostel offers the chance to live like a medieval lord for a night. One of the most unique hostels in the country, it's well worth considering whatever your budget. There are lively medieval banquets on Wednesday and Saturday nights in August.

Tan House Farm (☎ 832222; pchamberlain@cix.co.uk; Laundry Lane, Newland; s £25, d £60-64; (P)) Set in a wonderfully imposing former tannery complete with a 16th-century drying barn, this lovely

B&B has simple, elegant rooms and tranquil gardens just dripping with character.

Forest House Hotel (☎ 832424; www.forest-house-hotel.co.uk; Cinder Hill, Coleford; s/d £45/65; (P) ☹) This recently refurbished 18th-century house offers a selection of tastefully furnished rooms with simple décor and good bathrooms. The Bluebell restaurant downstairs is a good bet for modern British food (mains £13 to £19).

GETTING THERE & AROUND

From Gloucester, bus 31 runs to Coleford roughly every half-hour (one hour) and there are hourly trains to Lydney (20 minutes). The **Dean Forest Railway** (☎ 843423; www.deanforestrailway.co.uk) runs steam trains from Lydney to Park-end (day ticket adult/under 16 years £8/5) on selected days from March to October.

You can hire bikes (£13 per day), buy maps and get advice on cycling routes at **Pedalabikeaway** (☎ 860065; www.pedalabikeaway.com; Cannop Valley, nr Coleford).

CHELTEMHAM

☎ 01242 / pop 98,875

Riddled with historic buildings and still exuding the gracious air of an 18th-century spa resort, Cheltenham is a cosmopolitan hub at the centre of the rustic Cotswolds. The town grew dramatically after its spa waters were discovered in 1716 and in its heyday rivalled Bath as the place for the sick, hypochondriac and merely moneyed to go.

Today its period charms and elegant architecture attract a well-heeled class of resident and the leafy crescents, beautifully proportioned terraces, wrought-iron balconies and expansive parks are kept in top condition. Cheltenham also has a reputation for partying on a grand scale, with festivals of national importance held during the year, and there's a host of fine hotels, restaurants and expensive boutiques, making it a popular base for exploring the region.

History

Cheltenham languished in the relative obscurity of most Cotswold towns until the local pigeons began eating and thriving on the salt crystals from a local spring in the early 18th century. Soon several pumps had been bored, property speculators were throwing up terraced housing and the sick were arriving in droves. By the time George III visited in 1788 the town's fate had been sealed and Cheltenham became the most fashionable holiday

destination for England's upper crust. The town retained its period glamour and allure over the years and today Cheltenham is the most complete Regency town in England.

Orientation

Central Cheltenham is fairly compact and easy to get around on foot. High St runs roughly east-west; south from it is The Promenade, a more elegant shopping area, which extends into Montpellier, the most exclusive area of town. Pittville Park and the old Pump Room are about a mile north of High St.

The bus station is behind The Promenade in the town centre, but the train station is out on a limb to the west; bus D runs to the town centre every 10 minutes.

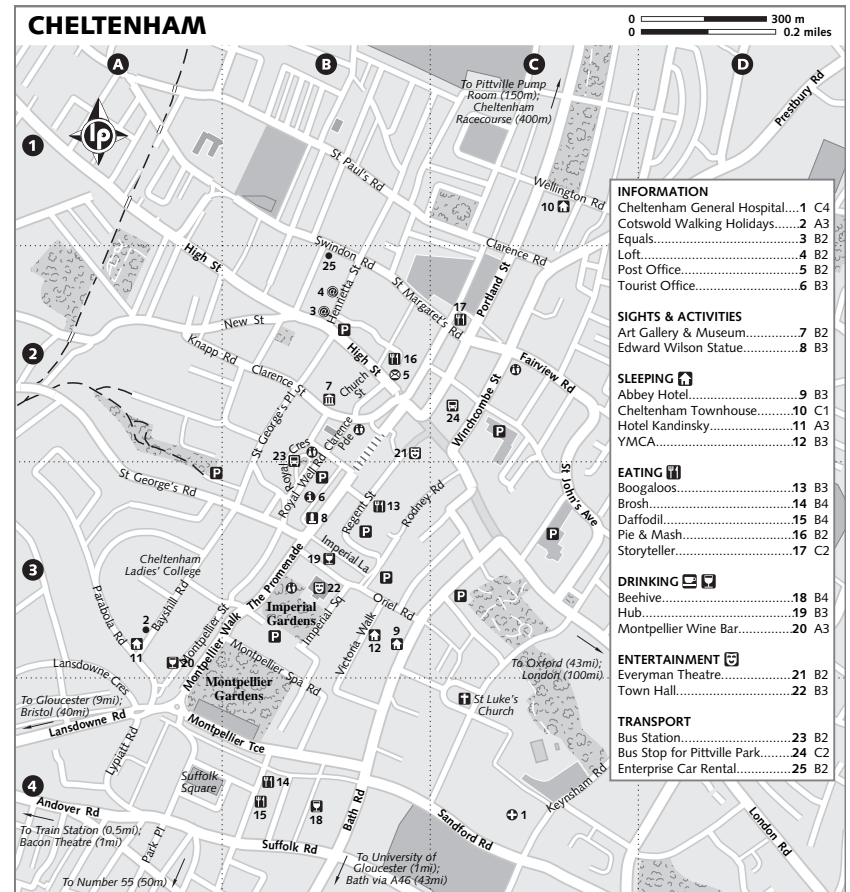
Information

You'll find all the major banks and the main post office on High St. The **tourist office** (☎ 522878; www.visitcheltenham.info; 77 The Promenade; ☹ 9.30am-5.15pm Mon-Sat) runs a free accommodation booking service, sells event tickets and stocks copies of walking, cycling and driving guides to the Cotswolds. For internet access try **Equals** (☎ 237292; 287 High St; per 30min £2) or **The Loft** (☎ 539573; 8-9 Henrietta St; per hr £3).

Sights

THE PROMENADE & MONTPELLIER

Famed as one of England's most beautiful streetscapes, The Promenade is a wide, tree-lined boulevard flanked by imposing period buildings. The Municipal Offices, built as



private residences in 1825, are among the most striking on this street and face a **statue of Edward Wilson** (1872–1912), a local man who joined Captain Scott's ill-fated second expedition to the South Pole.

Continuing on from here you'll pass the grandiose **Imperial Gardens**, built to service the Imperial Spa (now the Queens Hotel), en route to **Montpellier**, Cheltenham's most fashionable district. Along with the handsome architecture of the area, there's a buzzing collection of bars, restaurants and boutiques. Along Montpellier Walk **caryatids** (draped female figures based on those on the Acropolis in Athens) act as structural supports between the shops, each balancing an elaborately carved cornice on its head.

PITTVILLE PUMP ROOM

Built in 1830 as a centrepiece to a vast estate, the **Pittville Pump Room** (☎ 523852; Pittville Park; admission free; ☎ 10am–4pm Wed–Mon) is Cheltenham's finest Regency building. Originally used as a spa and social centre, it is now used for occasional art exhibitions and summer concerts. You can still take the spa waters here or just explore the remarkable building and vast parklands and lake it overlooks.

ART GALLERY & MUSEUM

Cheltenham's excellent **Art Gallery & Museum** (☎ 237431; www.cheltenhammuseum.org.uk; Clarence St; admission free; ☎ 10am–5.20pm Mon–Sat) is well worth a visit for its depiction of Cheltenham life through the ages. It also has wonderful displays on William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, as well as Dutch and British art, rare Chinese and English ceramics and a section on Edward Wilson's expedition to Antarctica.

CHELTENHAM RACECOURSE

Cheltenham is more famous in some circles for its horse racing than its architecture, and the town's racecourse can attract up to 40,000 punters a day during an event simply known as 'The Festival'. Held in mid-March each year, this is England's premier steeplechase event and is attended by droves of breeders, trainers, riders and race enthusiasts. To experience what all the fuss is about you'll need to buy your **tickets** (☎ 226226; www.cheltenham.co.uk) well in advance.

Otherwise, you can visit the **Hall of Fame museum** (☎ 513014; admission free; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri), which charts the history of steeplechasing since 1819.

Tours

Guided 1½-hour **walking tours** (£3; ☎ 11am Mon–Fri, 11.30am Sat late Jun–mid-Sep) of Regency Cheltenham depart from the tourist office. A rolling programme of day-long **coach tours** (adult/under 16yr £28/20) to various locations in the Cotswolds can also be booked through the tourist office.

Festivals & Events

Cheltenham is renowned as a city of festivals and throughout the year you'll find major events going on in the city. For more information or to book tickets visit www.cheltenhamfestivals.com.

Folk Festival (February) A showcase of traditional and new-age folk talent.

The National Hunt Festival (March) The hottest week in the racing calendar on both sides of the Irish Sea.

Jazz Festival (April) An imaginative programme hailed as the UK's finest jazz fest.

Science Festival (June) Exploring the delights and intrigues of the world of science.

Music Festival (July) A celebration of traditional and contemporary sounds with a geographical theme.

Literature Festival (October) A 10-day celebration of writers and the written word.

Sleeping

Cheltenham has an excellent choice of hotels and B&Bs, but you'll need to book as far in advance as possible during the festivals – especially for race week.

YMCA (☎ 524024; www.cheltenhamymca.com; 6 Victoria Walk; dm/s £16.50/25) This elegant building right in the city centre now houses the cheapest beds in town. The four-bed dorms are fairly basic and well worn, but the price includes breakfast and access to the attached fitness centre.

Number 55 (☎ 584915; www.number55.co.uk; 55 Painswick Rd; s £30–40, d £55–70; ☎ ☎ ☎) Simple, contemporary rooms with white linens and original fireplaces are available at this new B&B just minutes' walk from Montpellier. It's an ideal location and excellent value.

Cheltenham Guesthouse (☎ 521726; www.cheltenhamguesthouse.biz; 145 Hewlett Rd; s £32.50–37.50, d £55–65; ☎ ☎ ☎) This guesthouse has individually themed rooms in a Victorian house with an exotic vibe.

Abbey Hotel (☎ 516053; www.abbeyhotel-cheltenham.com; 14–16 Bath Pde; s/d £40/70; ☎ ☎) Conveniently situated in the centre of town, the Abbey offers good, comfortable rooms in a perfect location.

The décor is tasteful, if not memorable, but a good deal at these rates.

Hotel Kandinsky (☎ 527788; www.hotelkandinsky.com; Bayshill Rd; s £75, d £105–130; ☎ ☎) Gloriously quirky, keenly priced and extravagantly decked out, this is a 'funkier than average' hotel, with lots of eclectic modern art, exotic furniture, designer style and an extremely efficient but laid-back attitude. The slick restaurant (mains £9 to £16) serves an ambitious modern British menu and residents get access to the über cool members-only U-bahn bar and club.

Eating

Cheltenham has a host of good restaurants to eat in. Stroll through Montpellier for a choice of the city's finest.

Boogaloos (☎ 702259; 16 Regent St; mains £5–10; ☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Sat) Chilled out Boogaloos serves up tasty sandwiches, salads and hot lunches in a cosy Georgian town house with warm colours, big sofas and mellow music. Make up your own sandwich or go for pasta, fish cakes or hot dishes such as chicken with mozzarella and basil.

Pie & Mash (☎ 702785; 10 Bennington St; mains £5–10; ☎ dinner Thu, lunch & dinner Fri & Sat) Wholesome to the core, this certified organic restaurant serves up hearty pies, sausages, puddings and flavoured mash designed with meat-eaters, vegans, veggies, coeliacs and diabetics in mind. There's even organic beers, wines and champagnes, and live music on Saturday evening.

Storyteller (☎ 250343; 11 North Pl; mains £6–15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Enduringly popular for its generous proportions, buzzing atmosphere and extensive menu, this place serves up comfort food with an innovative twist. It's got the kind of menu where you'll be spoiled for choice, with inspiration from Mexico to the Mediterranean.

Brosh (☎ 227277; 8 Suffolk Pde; mains £12–18; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed–Sat) Small, quirky and brave enough to take on the Montpellier big boys, this lovely little place has white walls, dark wood tables and a menu of interesting Middle Eastern and Mediterranean dishes.

Daffodil (☎ 700055; 18–20 Suffolk Pde; mains £14–19; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) A Cheltenham institution, this converted Art Deco cinema harks back to the roaring '20s and serves up a top-notch selection of modern English brasserie food with a dollop of French and Mediterranean influences thrown in. Come on a Monday night for live jazz and blues.

Drinking

Beehive (☎ 579443; 1–3 Montpellier Villas; ☎ noon–11pm Mon–Sat, noon–10.30pm Sun) A traditional boozier with a modern take on quirky cool, this perennially popular pub is a jumble of mismatched furniture, chilled-out clientele and bar-room games. There's a courtyard garden and a surprisingly good restaurant (mains £8 to £12) upstairs.

Hub (☎ 238001; 1A Imperial Lane; admission £2–5; ☎ 9pm–2am Thu–Sat & Mon) This late-night club and music venue has two bars, live bands, top-name guest DJs and a groovy attitude. The music ranges from hip-hop and drum 'n' bass to funk, and pulls in the crowds all weekend.

Montpellier Wine Bar (☎ 527774; Bayshill Lodge, Montpellier St; ☎ 10am–11pm) Slick, sophisticated and self-consciously cool, this is where Cheltenham's beautiful people come to hang out, sip wine and dine on modern British food (mains £7 to £14). There's an extensive wine list, cask ales and plenty of people-watching.

Entertainment

The **Everyman Theatre** (☎ 572573; www.everymantheatre.org.uk; Regent St) is Cheltenham's main stage and hosts everything from Elvis impersonators to comedy and panto, while the modern **Bacon Theatre** (☎ 258002; www.bacontheatre.co.uk; Hatherly Rd) showcases touring shows, jazz and ballet. Classical music lovers should look out for concerts at the **Pittville Pump Room** (☎ 523852; Pittville Park), while the **town hall** (☎ 227979; Imperial Sq) offers more mainstream talent as well as hosting many festival events.

Getting There & Away

For information on public transport to and from Cheltenham, pick up a free copy of the handy *Getting There by Public Transport* guide from the tourist office.

BUS

National Express runs buses to London roughly hourly (£17.00, 3½ hours) and Swanbrook bus 853 goes to Oxford three times daily Monday to Saturday (one on Sunday, £6.50, 1½ hours).

Bus 94 runs to Gloucester every 10 minutes (30 minutes), Monday to Saturday, every 20 minutes on Sunday. Bus 51 goes to Cirencester hourly (40 minutes).

Pulhams bus 801 runs to Moreton (one hour) via Bourton (35 minutes) and Stow (50

minutes) seven times daily Monday to Saturday. Castleways Coaches 606 runs four times daily to Broadway (50 minutes) via Winchcombe (20 minutes), Monday to Saturday.

TRAIN

Cheltenham has trains to London (£50, 2¼ hours), Bristol (£8.10, 50 minutes) and Gloucester (£2.80, 10 minutes) roughly every half-hour, and hourly services to Bath (£12.50, 1¼ hours).

Getting Around

Compass Holidays (☎ 250642; www.compass-holidays.com; bikes per 2 days/week from £34/64) has bicycles for hire at the train station.

TEWKESBURY

☎ 01684 / pop 9978

Crooked half-timbered houses, buckled roof-lines and narrow alleyways lined with medieval buildings give Tudor-heavy Tewkesbury a higgledy-piggledy charm. There's also a lovely riverside area with ancient passageways leading up to Church St, where you'll find the town's most glorious building, the magnificent medieval abbey church.

The **tourist office** (☎ 295027; www.tewkesburybc.gov.uk; 64 Barton St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10-4pm Sun) is housed in a 15th-century timber-framed house, which is also home to a small **museum** displaying finds from Roman and medieval times.

Tewkesbury Abbey

Magnificent **Tewkesbury Abbey** (☎ 850959; www.tewkesburyabbey.org.uk; suggested donation £2; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) is one of Britain's largest churches, far bigger than many of the country's cathedrals. The Norman abbey, built for the Benedictine monks, was consecrated in 1121 and was one of the last monasteries to be dissolved by Henry VIII. Although many of the monastery buildings were destroyed, the abbey church survived after being bought by the townspeople for the princely sum of £453.

The church has a massive 40m-high tower and some spectacular Norman piers and arches in the nave. The Decorated-style chancel dates from the 14th century, however, and still retains much of its original stained glass. The church also features an organ dating from 1631, which was originally made for Magdalen College, Oxford, and an extensive collection of medieval tombs. The most interesting is that of John Wakeman, the last abbot, who is shown as a vermin-ridden skeleton.

A **visitor centre** (☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat), by the gate, houses an exhibition on the abbey's history.

Sleeping & Eating

Ivydene House (☎ 592453; www.ivydenehouse.net; Uckingham; s/d £35/60; ☎) Slightly out of town but well worth the effort, Ivydene is a real gem, offering gorgeous rooms at excellent rates. On top of the charming but contemporary rooms there are large gardens, a tennis court and log fires to enjoy.

Royal Hop Pole (☎ 293236; www.royalhoppole.co.uk; Church St; s £55-75, d £65-90; ☎ ☎) Right in the centre of town and one of the oldest inns around, this imposing half-timbered place offers period-style rooms with exposed beams and frumpy décor. There's a garden leading down to the river, and a restaurant serving a competent modern British menu (mains £10 to £13).

Aubergine (☎ 292703; 73 Church St; mains £7-13; ☎ lunch & dinner) Set in a 15th-century building but decidedly modern inside, this place is a welcome change from Tewkesbury's tearooms. The menu ranges from standard fare to more adventurous dishes such as venison casserole with honey and roast cardamom vegetables.

Getting There & Away

Bus 41 runs to Cheltenham every 15 minutes (hourly on Sunday, 25 minutes) and 71 goes to Gloucester hourly (30 minutes). The nearest train station is at Ashchurch, 1.5 miles away.

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