

## *A Day Trip to Bath*

### *Fun Facts*

- ★ The entire city of Bath is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, up there with Stonehenge.
- ★ Bath is the only place in Britain where hot naturally water bubbles up out of the ground.
- ★ Bath is one of Britain's most visited cities, receiving more than four million visitors a year.
- ★ The city centre is the largest conservation area in Britain, with more than six thousand listed buildings.
- ★ Bath is also a student city with two universities and a college, so it's lively as well as historic.
- ★ Bath has figured as a location in Les Mis, Sherlock, Persuasion, Vanity Fair etc.
- ★ The coronation of the first king of all England, Edgar, took place in Bath Abbey in 973.
- ★ Bath's street performers are regulated by a Guild of Buskers.
- ★ Britain's only American Museum is at Claverton, a (free) bus-ride outside Bath.
- ★ Bath has annual festivals themed around Music, Literature, Shakespeare, Puppets, Balloons, Walks, Banjos, Beer, Guitars, Film, Mozart and Jane Austen.

### *A Very Little History*

If you want to know about the mythical origins of Bath you need to find out about the legend of Bladud and the acorns. Then discover the link between this, The Circus (look up) and the bonkers historical ideas of eighteenth-century local architect John Wood.

The Romans made Bath (Aquae Sulis) their favourite centre for R & R. and built the famous Baths. Medieval Bath was dominated by its famous Abbey. You can still visit it and see bits of the medieval city walls.

During the eighteenth-century Bath was massively rebuilt to become the most fashionable resort in Britain. The main attraction was the healing waters which were both drunk and bathed in. As visitors stayed for weeks at a time the city became noted for its leisure attractions, notably dancing, gambling, shopping, sketching, strolling, flirting and having your portrait painted. A strict code of manners was enforced by the Master of Ceremonies, Richard 'Beau' Nash, whose name is still much in evidence. He banned gentlemen from wearing swords and hunting clothes at dances and made sure people didn't get cheated at cards. He also warned naive young girls against fortune-hunters. You can still visit (free) the Assembly Rooms, where the smart people gathered in Jane Austen novels.

The coming of railways in the 1840s brought in the day-trippers who now account for the bulk of the daily influx of visitors.

### ***The Baths***

Bath's top attraction is the Roman Baths. A student ticket costs £13.05 if booked online. This includes the use of an audio guide. Photography is permitted throughout the Museum. If you listen to it all a visit would last around 90 minutes. You can drink a sample of the spa water. It's not safe to bathe in the Roman Baths but the same water is purified so that you can bathe in it at the ultra-modern Thermae Bath Spa a couple of minutes' walk away. The price includes use of a towel, robe and slippers but is eye-wateringly expensive.

### ***The Abbey***

Because Bath Abbey was rebuilt between 1502 and 1535 it is more architecturally coherent than many comparable churches, which often combine features from several different periods. It has more monuments and memorials – over 640 – than any church except Westminster Abbey.

### ***The Buildings***

Bath was almost completely rebuilt in the eighteenth century and is renowned for its Georgian architecture, most using the local honey-coloured Bath stone. Try to take time to walk round The Circus (look for the plaque to Major Andre, hanged by George Washington as a spy). Then walk along Brock Street and stop about a hundred yards from the end and look ahead. All you will see is a terrace of houses about half a mile ahead. Then carry on and enjoy a stunning architectural 'reveal' – the Royal Crescent. It's quite invisible from your stopping-point, then, hey presto! – there it is. No.1 is furnished as it would have been in the eighteenth century and is open to visitors. Student entry is £9.80 but if you are really interested you will find the guides very knowledgeable.

### ***Museums***

Specialised museums include a Postal Museum (£2.50), a Museum of East Asian Art (£2.50), a Museum of Bath Architecture (£6.20), the Victoria Art Gallery (£4.05 online) and a Museum of Bath at Work (£7.00).

The Fashion Museum (£7.65 online) is truly outstanding, the best costume collection outside London. There is a Fashion Research Centre attached.

The Herschel Museum of Astronomy (£6.20) is housed in the former home of the astronomer who discovered the planet Uranus.

The Holburne Museum (£7.00) (free on Wednesdays (3.00–5.00 p.m.)) is located in a former Georgian hotel with a dramatic new extension tacked on the back. The contents are like a compressed version of the Victoria and Albert Museum's collections – top class. It is set in an eighteenth-century pleasure garden, just opposite the house Jane Austen once lived in.

### ***Other Attractions***

The Jane Austen Centre (£8.50) has staff in period costume and a Regency Tea Room.

The Old Theatre Royal (£5.00) includes a former chapel and a magnificent Masonic Hall

Bath is great for shopping. The Corridor is a Regency period mall. Milsom Place is the modern version. Colonnaded Stall Street still has a real historic feel and figures as a location in many films and TV series. The covered Guildhall Market is easily overlooked but can be entered from Orange Grove, the High Street or Newmarket Row and includes a retro diner and a café. There is another, bigger, covered market at the former Green Park railway station.

Sally Lunn's Historic Eating House and Museum claims to be housed in the oldest (ca. 1483) house in Bath. The famous Sally Lunn bunn (note spelling) is not a bun and can be eaten with either a sweet or a savoury topping. Or you could try an early dinner on a trencher - a 'plate' made of bread, which you eat.

The Pump Room by the Roman Baths has a very elegant restaurant. Afternoon Tea will cost you £20 - or there is a two-course lunch for £22. Not cheap - but it really is very stylish. You're paying for the setting as well as the refreshment.

### ***Picture This***

Bath is a very photogenic place. Here are some suggestions for photographs:-

The Royal Crescent No. 1 Royal Crescent. The Circus. Stall Street.

The Western front of Bath Abbey. Milsom Street. North side of Queen Square.

Pulteney Bridge. Holburne Museum The Assembly Rooms. Sally Lunn's House.

The Jane Austen Centre. The Roman Baths. The Pump Room.

Find an aerial photograph showing The Circus, Brock Street and the Royal Crescent (there is a good one at [studyabroadbath.org](http://studyabroadbath.org)) and you will see that they make the shape of a gigantic key - more of John Wood's notions, Freemasonry etc.

### ***Getting There***

The trains from Paddington take from 1 hour 11 minutes to 2 hours 39 minutes. Booking at least three days in advance will be considerably cheaper. The average time is 2 hours 8 minutes. The station is ten minutes walk from the city centre.

The coach journey time ranges from 2 hours 35 minutes to 2 hours 50 minutes but will be much cheaper than the train.