

A Day Trip to Cambridge

Fun Facts

- ★ Members of Trinity College, Cambridge have won more Nobel Prizes than France.
- ★ One of them, Sir Isaac Newton, invented the cat flap
- ★ William Pitt entered Pembroke College at 14 and became Britain's youngest ever Prime Minister at 24.
- ★ You can visit the pub where Crick and Watson had a lunchtime pint to celebrate discovering DNA (and toast Franklin yourself, giving her the recognition she deserves)
- ★ Hogwarts' Professor Trelawney (Emma Thompson) and Professor Sprout (Miriam Margolyes) both went to Newnham College, now the sole women-only Cambridge college

Words of Warning

Two-thirds of visitors to Cambridge never go more than 400 yards from Market Hill - do see if you can do better

Don't ask where the university campus is. There isn't one. Cambridge consists of 31 colleges scattered throughout the city. The nearest thing there is to a campus is the post-war Sidgwick Site over on the west side of the River Cam. You might want to admire its modern architecture if you decide to visit the lovely gardens at Newnham College.

Whichever College you choose to visit KEEP OFF THE GRASS! (Except at Newnham).

Cambridge Colleges

Undergraduates apply to a specific college, not the university. Most colleges offer teaching in most subjects. Undergraduate courses are more focused than American degrees. If you opt to study Natural Sciences you won't be doing a minor in Spanish. Some degrees are unique to Cambridge - e.g. Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and Norse (Applied Lord of the Rings Studies) or Land Economy (How to Run Your Rural Property Portfolio). I'm being frivolous but you get the drift. Riffle through the 60+ possible subjects and see what takes your fancy.

Colleges vary greatly in age, size and prestige. Trinity is the biggest, grandest and wealthiest. Final degree performance is ranked annually in the Tompkins Table. Recently Christ's and Pembroke have toppled Trinity from its seven-year dominance, pushing it into third place. Sports are played on an inter-college basis and there is a longstanding sporting rivalry with "the Other Place" (Oxford).

Visiting the Colleges

Colleges take pride in their Library, Dining Hall, Chapel and Gardens, which are what visitors go to see (a few don't have a chapel). The Dining Hall is usually hung with portraits of famous alumni.

King's – architecturally the most dominant, charges a hefty £6 to visit but you can enjoy the wonderful chapel free any afternoon by attending Evensong at 5.00 p.m. This is a 45-minute service, unique to the Church of England, almost entirely sung by the world famous College choir – a Heavenly experience. St. John's (which also charges entrance) has Evensong at 6.30. as does Jesus (but only Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and at 6.00 on Sunday).

Trinity charges £2 entry fee but I think this is worth it to see the Great Court and Wren Library.

The following colleges are FREE to visit (but check college websites for opening hours and closures for college events)

Christ's – Grounds (daily); Fellows' Garden (weekdays only) (both until 4.00 p.m.): Charles Darwin went here – and flunked out.

Downing – unusual Neo-Grecian architecture, a miniature campus in its own right; probably the model for the campus of the University of Virginia – or was it vice versa?

Emmanuel – elegant architecture; two ponds with ducks; John Harvard went here; uniquely the College does your laundry – and folds but doesn't iron.

Jesus – pretty cloister court; cool modern sculptures in the grounds

Magdalene – pronounced 'mawdlin'; riverside setting; famous Pepys Library; Julian Fellowes, creator of Downton Abbey, went here

Newnham – Victorian version of Wren architecture with add-ons: Sylvia Plath went here

Pembroke – fine Gardens; the neo-Classical chapel was Sir Christopher Wren's first effort

Peterhouse – the oldest college; bijou but charming; uniquely has Formal Dining every night

Sidney Sussex – central, compact; good gardens; much favoured by students as it's bang opposite Sainsbury's supermarket (good sandwiches)

Trinity Hall – not to be confused with Trinity; pretty riverside location

Other Stuff

Picture this – you will probably want to take some photos. If you look at the postcards on sale at the souvenir shops on King's Parade you will see the most celebrated views. You can also buy a postcard with all the College coats of arms on.

The following are just my personal suggestions:

- King's College from The Backs
- The Mathematical Bridge at Queen's College
- The Corpus Christi Clock at the corner of Benet Street ('The Chronophage')
- The courtyard of the Eagle pub on Benet Street
- The views from the bridge on Garret Hostel Lane
- The Gateways of Trinity and St. John's

The Round Church
King's Parade and the Senate House
Punting on the Cam (Silver St. bridge is a good vantage point or Garret Hostel Lane bridge)
Gate of Honour at Caius (pronounced 'keys') College
The windows of Ryder and Amies (sellers of College scarves, sweats, quality souvenirs etc.)

It costs £5 to climb the tower of the University Church of Great St. Mary's but it would enable you to take panoramic views of many of the most iconic city centre features.

The University museums are all FREE. The Fitzwilliam is world class and big - art, armour, coins and medals, paintings, sculpture; strong Asian collections as well as European. Other museums include Archaeology and Anthropology; Classical Archaeology; The Polar Museum; Earth Sciences; History of Science; Zoology and Kettle's Yard (modern art). (www.museums.cam.ac.uk).

G. David's Bookshop Tucked away on St. Edward's Passage, just off Market Hill. Book-browser Heaven.

Talk Cambridge

Learn Cambridge student slang on www.thestudentroom.co.uk and www.varsity.co.uk - just so you know a bedder from a Blue and a mathmo from an aznak and never confuse Emma with Pemma.

Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial

This is the resting-place of 3,811 World War Two US servicemen with an additional 5,127 names recorded on the Walls of the Missing. Chapel with two massive military maps. Unusual but highly effective quadrant layout of grave markers, echoing a navigator's compass. Visitors' Centre with photographs and interactive displays. Site donated by the University of Cambridge. Three miles west of the city centre. (No. 4 bus takes you to the gates). Do at least visit the website (www.abmc.gov) to see why this is so special.

Eating

There are 600+ places to eat. A few possibilities:

The Eagle, Benet Street - every American visitor's idea of the quintessential English pub; Don't miss the Crick and Watson plaque outside, the pretty galleried courtyard or the back bar where you can still see the ceiling with the World War Two flyers' zip-lighter graffiti. This extremely popular pub gets very busy so go early - 12 noon.

An early start is also recommended for the very popular noodle stall at the heart of Market Hill. If The Eagle is too crowded try the Bath House next door.

The Mitre on Bridge Street does good fish and chips - also other pub grub. Not touristy.

Fitzbillies tea shop, next to Pembroke College, is famous for its ultra-calorific, sugar-drenched Chelsea Bun.

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My undergraduate daughter recommends Honest Burgers on Corn Exchange Street; Nanna Mexico (3 branches); and Aromi (Sicilian snacks 3 locations, 2 with gelateria). Also says that Fudge Kitchen - opposite King's - gives free samples.

Getting There

Train (about an hour) from either King's Cross or Liverpool Street. Considerably cheaper if you book at least three days in advance. BUT Cambridge station is a mile and a half from the City Centre. Bus - Citi 1, 3 or 7. Or pretend you are a Cambridge Student and walk - about 25 minutes going briskly. Not much of interest until you reach Downing College, which you can visit before going on to Emmanuel, Christ's, Sydney Sussex, Jesus and Magdalene (in that order) then loop back, passing St. John's, Trinity and Caius, to finish with visits to Trinity Hall, Pembroke and Peterhouse.

Coach - this takes 2 hours but is MUCH cheaper. Coaches have sockets and wifi. Get a good look at the East End of London and a bit of suburbia before you hit the M11 motorway and the countryside whizzes by. You can shave time off the journey and a bit off the price by using the Central Line to join the National Express coach at Stratford. And, unlike the train, the coach will take you right to the city centre, so when you add on the time and/or cost of getting from the station to the city centre it's not much slower. Your budget, your choice.