



# The West Midlands & the Marches

The West Midlands has more than its fair share of bleak urban landscapes here – this is, after all, the area that gave birth to the Industrial Revolution. Lucky, then, that it's also home to gentle countryside, stately homes, leisurely canals and two of the country's best-known attractions: Warwick Castle, one of the finest medieval buildings in England, and Stratford-upon-Avon, a pilgrimage site for Shakespeare-lovers from around the world. What's more, the once derided city of Birmingham has reinvented itself as a dynamic, cultured city, bubbling over with influences from many different nations.

Hugging the Welsh borders to the west of Birmingham, the country pleasures of the Marches are a world away from big-city action and overrun tourist towns. The main joy here is in wandering around rippling hills and farmland and exploring sleepy, time-warp villages.

Beautiful Shropshire is home to an incredible World Heritage site at Ironbridge Gorge, an epicurean enclave at historic Ludlow, beguiling Tudor capital Shrewsbury and the sublime Shropshire hills. To the south, the canoe-friendly River Wye meanders through laid-back Herefordshire's lovely landscape, dotted with fairy-tale black-and-white villages, while Worcestershire is home to a historic capital, handsome Victorian hill resorts and the dramatic Malvern peaks.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Losing yourself amongst the second-hand bookshelves at **Hay-on-Wye** (p565)
- Wandering through fairy-tale villages on Hereford's **Black-and-white-village Trail** (p565)
- Enjoying first-rate shopping then taking in a Pakistani balti in the vibrant city of **Birmingham** (p530)
- Eating up a storm at the foodie mecca that is **Ludlow** (p582)
- Watching Shakespeare's stories come to life at **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p546)
- Wandering the haunting terracotta ruins of **Kenilworth Castle** (p545)



■ POPULATION:  
5.57 MILLION

■ AREA: 4560  
SQ MILES

■ GALLONS OF CIDER PRODUCED YEARLY IN  
HEREFORDSHIRE: 63 MILLION

## History

This region has seen its share of action over the centuries. In the Marches, territorial scuffles and all-out battles took place between feuding kingdoms along what is today the border separating England and Wales. In the 8th century the Anglo-Saxon king Offa of Mercia built an earthwork barricade along the border in an attempt to quell the ongoing tension. It became known as Offa's Dyke Path, and much of it is still traceable as a very popular walking route today.

In an effort to subdue the Welsh and secure his new kingdom, William the Conqueror set up powerful, feudal barons – called Lords Marcher after the Anglo-Saxon word *mearc*, meaning 'boundary' – along the border, from where they repeatedly raided Wales, taking as much territory as possible under their control.

Meanwhile Birmingham, Staffordshire and Shropshire were making a name for themselves as centres of industry, from the wool trade to the metal, iron and coal industries. The region gradually became the most intensely industrialised in the country, giving birth to the Industrial Revolution in Shropshire in the 18th century.

## Orientation

It is perhaps easiest to orientate yourself here by motorways. The M40 winds north from London, passing Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick on its way to the M42 and Birmingham in the west of the Midlands. Routes spider out from Birmingham: the M6 runs east towards Coventry and the M1, and northwest up towards Wolverhampton, Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent; the M5 splits off at West Bromwich and heads down towards Worcester and Hereford; the M54 splits off at Wolverhampton to head over to Telford and Shrewsbury.

## Information

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

## Activities

There are beautiful walking and cycling routes everywhere in the Marches – through pastoral idylls, wooded valleys and gentle hills. But not all the action is situated on terra firma – lots

of fun can be had in the water and in the sky too. See the county-specific Activities sections in this chapter for more information.

## CYCLING

Shropshire in particular is ideal for touring, and you can rent bicycles in Shrewsbury, Church Stretton, Ludlow, Ironbridge and Ledbury.

Areas apt for off-road biking include the woods of Hopton near Ludlow, as well as Eastridge near Shrewsbury. High-level riding on the Long Mynd above Church Stretton is also rewarding.

In Herefordshire, you'll find the **Ledbury Loop** – a 17-mile rural circuit based around the town of Ledbury.

A pack of route maps and notes called *Cycling for Pleasure in the Marches* is available from the tourist offices for £6. Tourist offices also stock many free route leaflets, and you can find them on stretches of National Cycle Route 45 through Shropshire and Worcestershire through the **National Cycle Network** (NCN; [www.sustrans.org](http://www.sustrans.org)) or you can download leaflets from [www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk).

## WALKING

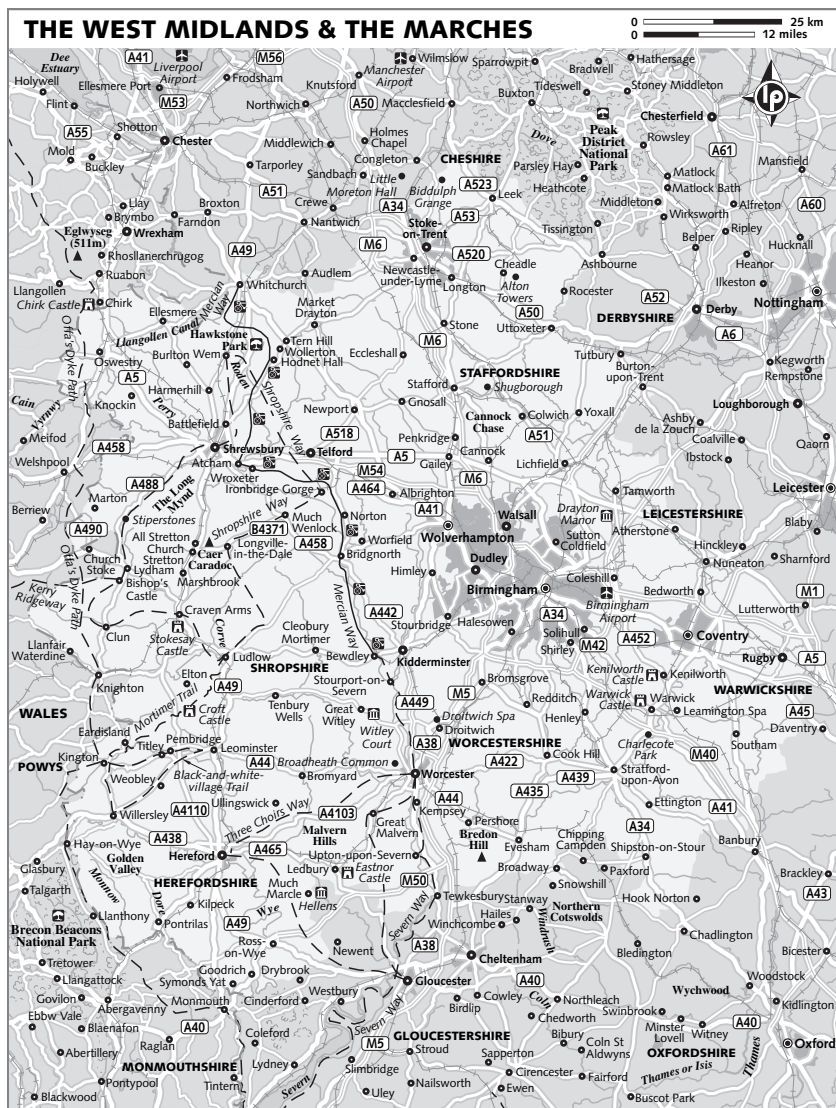
One of many great walks on which to get muddy, the glorious **Offa's Dyke Path** is a 177-mile national trail following an ancient earthen border defence. Running south–north from Chepstow to Prestatyn, it passes through some of the most spectacular scenery in Britain, but it's not for the inexperienced or unfit.

Less exhausting is the gentle 107-mile **Wye Valley Walk**, which follows the course of the River Wye from Chepstow upstream to Rhayader in Wales. Another popular route is the beautiful 100-mile **Three Choirs Way** linking the cathedral cities of Hereford, Worcester and Gloucester.

Shorter walks include the famous ridges of Wenlock Edge (p578) and the lovely Long Mynd (p580). These are in turn swallowed by the circular 136-mile **Shropshire Way**, which loops from Shrewsbury south to Ludlow.

One of the most beautiful places to walk is the **Malvern Hills** (p560), offering straightforward paths and breathtaking views on the boundary between Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

For more ideas, see the Activities sections of each county in this chapter.



## OTHER ACTIVITIES

Symonds Yat (p568) on the River Wye is a great place for both easy-grade canoeing and white-water fun, while the river gorge's rocky buttresses are also a popular rock-climbing spot. The Long Mynd is renowned for its gliding and paragliding, with facilities in Church Stretton. For something completely different,

tourist offices can point you towards hot spots for mountain boarding.

A canal boat is one of the most fun ways to get active, with the metropolis of Birmingham the unlikely epicentre. Hire a boat and take some bikes with you, and you can enjoy the canal-side paths by wheel or by foot at your leisure, as you gently chug your

way through the country's massive network of artificial waterways.

## Getting Around

Birmingham is a major rail interchange for the whole of England. **National Express** (☎ 08718 818181; www.nationalexpress.com) is the main coach service in the region and throughout the country. For general route information you can consult **Traveline** (☎ 0871 200 2233; www.travelinemidlands.co.uk).

The main bus operators:

**Arriva** (☎ 0844 800 4411; www.arrivabus.co.uk) An Arriva Go Anywhere ticket gives one day of unlimited travel.

**First Travel** (☎ 0800 587 7381; www.firstgroup.com)

A FirstDay Wyvern ticket (adult/child £5.50/3.80) offers unlimited day travel on the First network in Worcestershire, Herefordshire and adjoining counties.

**Stagecoach** (☎ 01788-535555; Dayrider Gold tickets adult/child £6.50/4.50)

**Travel West Midlands** (www.travelwm.co.uk)

Rail networks are extensive in the West Midlands, but less so in the rural Marches, where they're only useful for major towns. Useful train operators include:

**London Midland** (www.londonmidland.com) Operates a train service throughout the Midlands and excellent connections with London.

**Wrexham and Shropshire** (www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk) Operates a direct train service from Shropshire to London Marylebone.

Public transport can be a hit-and-miss affair in the largely rural Marches. Without your own wheels, getting to countryside attractions takes time, planning and patience.

# BIRMINGHAM

pop 977,087

Once the butt of many a joke, England's second-largest city – nicknamed 'Brum' – has spectacularly redefined its image from aesthetically challenged urban basket case to vibrant, cultural hot spot. Huge regeneration projects have revitalised the industrial landscapes and canals that criss-cross the city; now there are more glamorous shops, swanky bars and hectic nightclubs than you can shake a bargepole at.

Lookwise, though, it's still not a pretty picture. The unfortunate combination of WWII bombs and woeful town planning left a legacy of concrete and ring roads that may never be completely disguised. But, no

matter: Birmingham is making the most of what it's got. Established cultural and architectural gems dot the city centre and planners keep coming up with ever more innovative makeovers, such as the striking postindustrial Bullring shopping centre. Although the manufacturing industry that defined the city as the 'workhorse of the world' is declining, Birmingham will no doubt adapt. More self-assured than it has been in ages, it is hampered by only one thing – its inhabitants' accent, which is consistently voted England's least attractive.

## HISTORY

Birmingham's first mention of any note was in the Domesday Book of 1086, where it was described as a small village. Over the next few centuries Birmingham established itself in the field of industry, starting off with the wool trade in the 13th century, and becoming an important centre for the metal and iron industries from the 16th century onwards.

It was also here that, in the mid-18th century, the pioneers of the Industrial Revolution formed the Lunar Society, which brought together geologists, chemists, scientists, engineers and theorists, including Erasmus Darwin, Matthew Boulton, James Watt, Joseph Priestly and Josiah Wedgwood, all of whom contributed to the ideas and vision of the times.

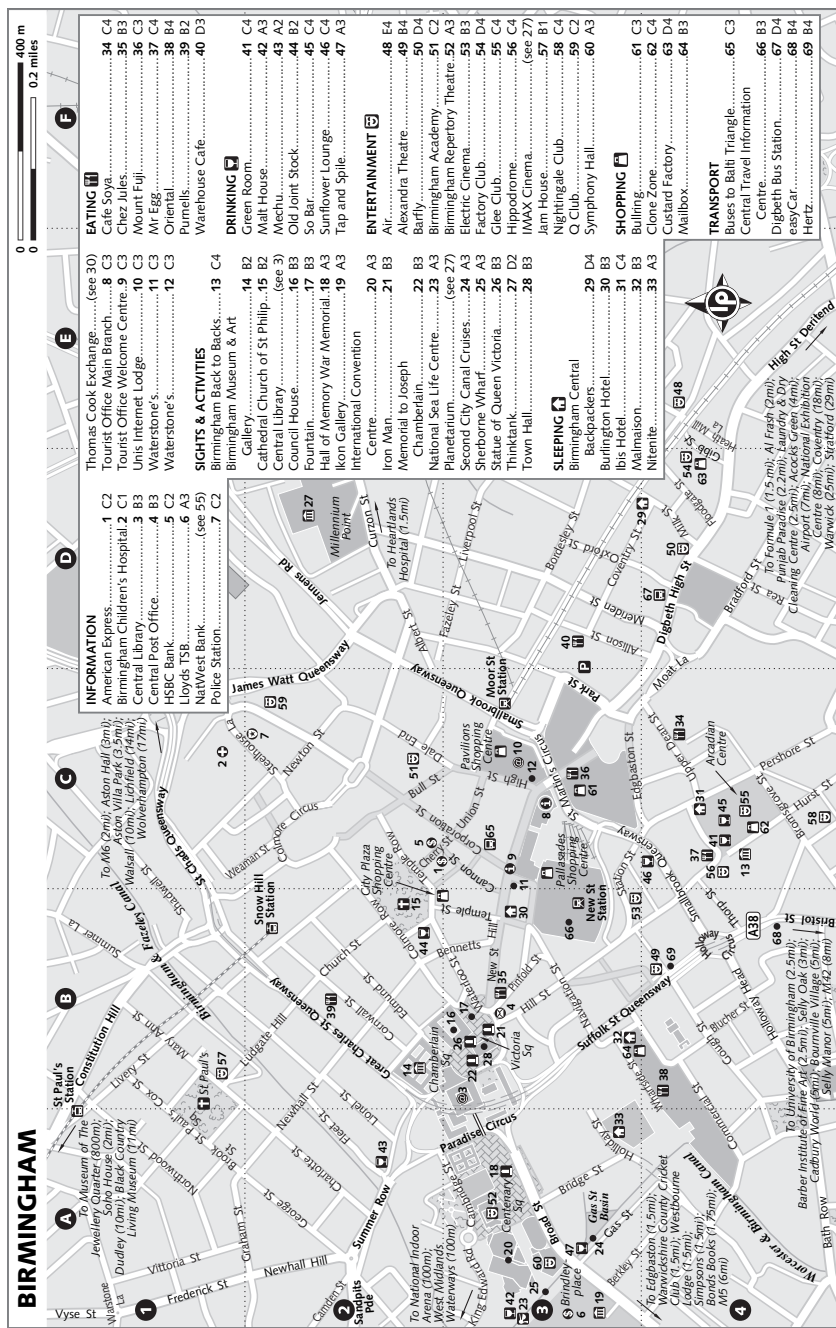
By this time, Birmingham had become the largest town in Warwickshire, and the world's first true industrial town, its population tripling by the end of the century. It had also become polluted, dirty and unsanitary.

In the mid-1800s, under enlightened mayors such as Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914), Birmingham became a trendsetter in civic regeneration, but WWII air raids and postwar town planning were later to give the city an unattractive face.

## ORIENTATION

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

Taking the huge Council House as the centre, to the west is Centenary Sq, the



<b>INFORMATION</b>	Thomas Cook Exchange.....(see 30)	<b>EATING</b>	Catie Soya.....34 C4
American Express.....1 C2	Tourist Office Main Branch.....8 C3	Chouz Jules.....35 B3	Ment Fuiji.....36 C3
Birmingham Children's Hospital.....2 C1	Unis Internet Welcome Centre.....9 C3	Mr Egg.....37 C4	Oriental.....38 B4
Central Library.....3 B3	Central Post Office.....4 B3	Waterstone's.....12 C3	Purelles.....39 B2
HSBC Bank.....5 C2	Lloyds TSB.....6 A3	<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>	Warehouse Cafe.....40 D3
NatWest Bank.....(see 55)	Police Station.....7 C2	<b>DRINKING</b>	Green Room.....41 C4
<b>DRINKING</b>	Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery.....14 B2	Malt House.....42 A3	Mechu.....43 A2
Cathedral Church of St Philip.....15 B2	Central Library.....(see 3)	Old Joint Stock.....44 B2	So Bar.....45 C4
Council House.....16 B3	Fountain.....17 B3	Hall of Memory War Memorial.....18 A3	Sunflower Lounge.....46 C4
International Convention Centre.....20 A3	Iron Man.....21 B3	Alexandra Theatre.....48 E4	Barfly.....50 D4
Memorial to Joseph Chamberlain.....22 B3	National Sea Life Centre.....23 A3	Birmingham Academy.....51 C2	Planetarium.....(see 27)
Second City Canal Cruises.....24 A3	Shedborne Wharf.....25 A3	Electric Cinema.....53 B3	Factory Club.....54 D4
Statue of Queen Victoria.....26 B3	Hippodrome.....56 C4	IMAX Cinema.....(see 27)	Jam House.....57 B1
Thinktank.....27 D2	Town Hall.....28 B3	Nightingale Club.....58 C4	Q Club.....59 C2
<b>SLEEPING</b>	Birmingham Central Backpackers.....29 D4	Burlington Hotel.....30 B3	Ibis Hotel.....32 B3
Malmison.....32 B3	Nitebite.....33 A3	<b>SHOPPING</b>	Bulling.....61 C3
Clone Zone.....62 C4	Custard Factory.....63 D4	Mailbox.....64 B3	<b>TRANSPORT</b>
Buses to Bali Triangle.....65 C3	Central Travel Information Centre.....66 B3	Digbeth Bus Station.....67 D4	easyCar.....68 B4
Hertz.....69 B4			

THE WEST MIDLANDS & THE MARCHES

International Convention Centre and Symphony Hall, and the development at Gas St Basin and Brindleyplace.

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

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**Bonds Books** (☎ 0121-427 9343; [www.bondsbooks.co.uk](http://www.bondsbooks.co.uk); 97A High St, Harborne) Well-known independent bookstore, about 10 minutes' bus journey from the centre.

**Waterstone's** High St (☎ 0121-633 4353; 24 High St); New St (☎ 0121-631 4333; 128 New St)

### Emergency

**Police station** (☎ 0121-0845 113 5000; Steelhouse Lane)

### Internet Access

**Central Library** (☎ 0121-303 4511; Chamberlain Sq; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) Internet access is free by reservation.

**Unis Internet Lounge** (☎ 0121-632 6172; loft level, Pavilions Shopping Centre; per hr £2; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, to 7pm Thu, 11am-5pm Sun) Internet lounge and coffee bar.

### Internet Resources

**BBC Birmingham home page** ([www.bbc.co.uk/birmingham](http://www.bbc.co.uk/birmingham))

**Birmingham Council** ([www.birmingham.gov.uk](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk))

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

**Birmingham UK** ([www.birminghamuk.com](http://www.birminghamuk.com))

**icBirmingham** (<http://icbirmingham.icnetwork.co.uk>) The local newspaper's website.

**Gay Birmingham** ([www.gaybrum.com](http://www.gaybrum.com)) Information for gay visitors.

**Travel West Midlands** ([www.travelwm.co.uk](http://www.travelwm.co.uk)) Travel planning from the main bus company.

### Laundry

**Laundry & Dry Cleaning Centre** (☎ 0121-771 3659; 236 Warwick Rd, Sparkhill)

## Left Luggage

**New Street Station** (☎ 0121-632 6884; station forecourt; locker hire per day £6; ☎ 7am-11pm Mon-Sat, 8am-10pm Sun)

## Media

The numerous free magazines available in hotel lobbies, bars and restaurants, will let you know what's hot on the Birmingham scene. The pick of the bunch is the fortnightly *What's On* magazine, available for free at some bars and the tourist office.

## Medical Services

**Birmingham Children's Hospital** (☎ 0121-333 9999; Steelhouse Lane)

**Heartlands Hospital** (☎ 0121-424 2000; Bordesley Green E) Catch bus 15, 17, 97 or 97A.

## Money

**American Express** (☎ 0121-644 5555; Bank House, 8 Cherry St)

**HSBC Bank** (Cherry St)

**Lloyds TSB** (2 Brindleyplace)

**NatWest Bank** (Arcadian Centre)

**Thomas Cook Exchange** (☎ 0121-643 5057; 130 New St)

## Post

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

## Tourist Information

**Tourist office** ([www.visitbirmingham.com](http://www.visitbirmingham.com)) Main branch (☎ 0121-202 5099; The Rotunda, 150 New St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-5.30pm Tue, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun); Welcome Centre (cnr New & Corporation Sts; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) The smaller, brochure-stuffed branch has a wide range of maps and themed leaflets.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

As in most large cities, it's wise to avoid walking alone late at night in unlit areas, particularly if you're a woman. The area around Digbeth bus station is not very well lit, and has an edge to it.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES Town Centre

The central pedestrianised Victoria Sq features a giant **fountain** of a bathing woman (nicknamed 'the floozy in the Jacuzzi' by locals), and a drab **statue of Queen Victoria**. It adjoins Chamberlain Sq, with its **memorial**

## BIRMINGHAM IN...

### Two Days

Shopping is one of Birmingham's major attractions these days. Work out your credit cards as you browse the series of exceptional commercial redevelopments that have rejuvenated the city. Take in the quirkily original **Custard Factory** (p540) before heading up to the more mainstream **Bullring** (p540) with its space-age Selfridges building and hundreds of outlets. Dip south to the chic designer stores of the **Mailbox** (p540) and then take the trek up to the historical **Jewellery Quarter** (p534). Even if you're all out of cash, it's well worth a look. Worshipping at the altar of consumerism can work up an appetite; head back towards the Custard Factory and soothe your conscience with some wholesome veggie nourishment at the **Warehouse Cafe** (p538). Then head to the nearby **Factory Club** (p539) for a rocking night out. Gently does it on day two. Nourish the soul with the free, pre-Raphaelite-studded **Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery** (below). Then, to get up close and personal with the city's history, check out the restored courtyard of 19th-century working people's houses at the **Birmingham Back to Backs** (below). Culture fix satisfied, catch a bus or taxi to the famous **Balti Triangle** (p538) to sample the curry dish that was born in Birmingham.

### Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, but add a **crui**se (p537) along Birmingham's extraordinary canal network. A show at the world-class **Repertory** (p540) should be next on the cards. Next morning, make a pilgrimage to the **Barber Institute of Fine Art** (p535) and **Aston Hall** (p535) to see the region's most outstanding art collections. For a sweet interlude, make your way down to the chocolate paradise of **Cadbury World** (p535) for a seriously sugary experience. In the evening, take in an art-house film at the **Electric Cinema** (p540), the oldest working cinema in the country.

to **Joseph Chamberlain**, one of Birmingham's more enlightened mayors. These squares share some eye-catching architecture. The imposing **Council House** forms the northeastern face of the precinct. Its northwestern corner is formed by the modernist **Central Library**, whose brutal design looks like an upturned ziggurat, with the Paradise Forum shop and cafe complex underneath it.

To the south stands the **Town Hall**, opened in 1834. Designed to look like the Temple of Castor and Pollux in Rome and featuring a 70ft-high organ, recent refurbishment has restored it to its former glory and reinvented it as a performing-arts venue. For those who won't make it to Gateshead to see Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* statue (p757), his wingless **Iron Man** (1993), on Victoria Sq, is a step in the same direction.

West of the precinct, Centenary Sq is another pedestrian square closed off at the western end by the **International Convention Centre** and the Symphony Hall (p539), and overlooked by the Repertory Theatre (p540). Inside Centenary Sq is the **Hall of Memory War Memorial**, and there are often temporary exhibitions in the square.

The striking **Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 0121-303 2834; www.bmag.org.uk; Chamberlain Sq; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 10.30am-5pm Fri, 12.30-5pm Sun) houses an impressive collection of Victorian art including a selection of major Pre-Raphaelite works. There are also fascinating displays on local and natural history, archaeology, world cultures, and a number of interactive exhibits for kids. Other highlights include a fine porcelain collection, and works by Degas, Braque, Renoir and Canaletto. You can indulge in a cream tea in the elegant Edwardian tearoom.

One of England's smallest cathedrals, the impressive **Cathedral Church of St Philip** (☎ 0121-262 1840; Colmore Row; donations requested; 🕒 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat & Sun) was constructed in a neoclassical style between 1709 and 1715. The Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones was responsible for the magnificent stained-glass windows: the *Last Judgement*, which can be seen at the western end, and *Nativity*, *Crucifixion* and *Ascension* at the eastern end.

The **Birmingham Back to Backs** (NT; ☎ 0121-666 7671; 55-63 Hurst St; adult/child £5.40/2.70; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, guided tour only) is a cluster of restored working people's houses: the only survivor

## THE PRE-RAPHAELITES & THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT

In a classic case of artists romanticising the 'good old days' they never experienced, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood shunned the art of their time in favour of the directness of art prior to the High Renaissance, especially the work preceding that of Raphael. Three young Brits, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais led the movement in 1848; four others soon joined them. Their work was characterised by almost photographic attention to detail, a combination of hyper-realism and brilliant colours. The themes and methods attracted criticism at the time but ensured the movement's popularity to this day.

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (p533) has one of the best collections of works by the Pre-Raphaelites. If you get the bug, there are more fine paintings in the Lady Lever Art Gallery (p689) at Port Sunlight near Liverpool.

The Arts and Crafts Movement followed Pre-Raphaelitism in yearning for a pure, idealised mode. The socialist William Morris, the movement's leading light, was a close friend of Pre-Raphaelite Edward Burne-Jones and projected the same ideals into tapestries, jewellery, stained glass and textile prints, following the principles of medieval guilds, in which the same artists designed and produced the work.

of some 20,000 courts of back-to-back houses built during the 19th century for the city's expanding working-class population. The tour takes you through four homes, where you learn the stories of the people who lived here during different periods, from the 1840s to the 1970s.

Should you wish to stay longer, the National Trust has even turned part of the court into self-catering accommodation.

## Gas St, Brindleyplace & the Mailbox

Birmingham sits on the hub of England's canal network (the city actually has more miles of canals than Venice), and visiting narrowboats can moor in the Gas St Basin right in the heart of the city. Nearby Brindleyplace, a waterfront development of shops, restaurants and bars created during the 1990s, has transformed the area west of Centenary Sq into a lively night-time destination. A similar development to the southeast, the buzzing Mailbox has a mixture of designer boutiques, smart restaurants, chain bars and upmarket fast-food joints.

The **Ikon Gallery** (☎ 0121-248 0708; www.ikon-gallery.co.uk; 1 Oozells Sq, Brindleyplace; admission free; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun) is a stylishly converted Gothic schoolhouse divided into smallish rooms. It has changing exhibitions of contemporary visual art. The adjoining cafe serves great tapas and sandwiches to refuel between cultural hot spots.

The **National Sea Life Centre** (☎ 0121-643 6777; www.sealifeeurope.com; 3A Brindleyplace; adult/child £12.50/8.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun),

a state-of-the-art facility designed by Sir Norman Foster, is the largest inland aquarium in England and is flooded with exotic marine life. There's a sea-horse breeding facility, and the otter and turtle sanctuaries are a hit with kids. Arrive early in the school holidays – the queues can be enormous.

## Jewellery Quarter

Birmingham has been a major player on the jewellery production scene for some 200 years, and the Jewellery Quarter is the place to go for a piece of the action. The tourist office provides a free booklet *Jewellery Quarter: The Essential Guide*, which includes background information about the industry and details of walking trails around the district's manufacturers and showrooms.

In the **Museum of the Jewellery Quarter** (☎ 0121-554 3598; 75-79 Vyse St; admission free; ☎ 11.30am-4pm Tue-Sun), the Smith & Pepper jewellery factory is preserved as it was on the day it closed in 1981 after 80 years of operation. You can explore the long history of the trade in Birmingham and watch jewellery-making demonstrations.

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

About 1.5 miles from the Jewellery Quarter is **Soho House** (☎ 0121-554 9122; Soho Ave, Handsworth; admission free; ☎ 11.30am-4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), where the industrialist Matthew Boulton lived from 1766 to 1809. It successfully recreates the styles of the 1700s, and includes the din-



ing room where Boulton and the members of the Lunar Society would meet to discuss their world-changing ideas (see p530). Buses 74 and 79 pass nearby, or take the metro to Benson Rd station from Snow Hill.

### Outlying Areas

Chocoholic magnet **Cadbury World** (☎ 0845 450 3599; www.cadburyworld.co.uk; Linden Rd; adult/child £13/9.95) takes you on a mouth-watering journey through the origins, manufacture and consumption of the ever popular cocoa-based confectionery, seen through the eyes of one of the world's largest chocolate-makers. Kids – and sweet-toothed grown-ups – will love it. Ride a beanmobile, take a wander down Cocoa Rd, paved with 'talking chocolate splodges', or try your hand at chocolate-making. Book ahead – it's very popular in July and August. Opening hours vary: it's closed for some of December and most of January, but open from 10am to 3pm or 10am to 4pm for most of the rest of the year (phone or check the website for details).

Cadbury World is part of pretty **Bournville Village**, designed for early-20th-century factory workers by the Cadbury family. Large houses, each unique, are set around a green. **Selly Manor** (☎ 0121-472 0199; Maple Rd; adult/child £3.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri year-round, plus 2-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep), dating from 1327 or earlier, was carefully taken apart and reconstructed by George Cadbury in order to save it from destruction. It has 18th-century furnishings and a Tudor garden.

The easiest way to get to Bournville is by train from Birmingham New St (11 minutes).

East of the centre, the Millennium Point development is designed to help people understand science and technology. The focal point is **Thinktank** (☎ 0121-202 2222; www.thinktank.ac; Curzon St; adult/child £9.25/7.25; ☎ 10am-5pm, last admission 4pm), an ambitious attempt to make science accessible (primarily to kids). Interactive displays cover topics such as the body and medicine, science in everyday life, nature, future technology, and industrial history. There's also an IMAX cinema (see p540) and a **Planetarium** (admission £2, advance booking required). A visit to the **Barber Institute of Fine Art** (☎ 0121-414 7333; www.barber.org.uk; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is, for art-lovers, a highlight of a trip to Birmingham. The collection takes in Renaissance masterpieces, paintings by old

masters such as Rubens and Van Dyck, British greats including Gainsborough, Reynolds and Turner, an array of Impressionist pieces and modern classics by the likes of Picasso and Schiele.

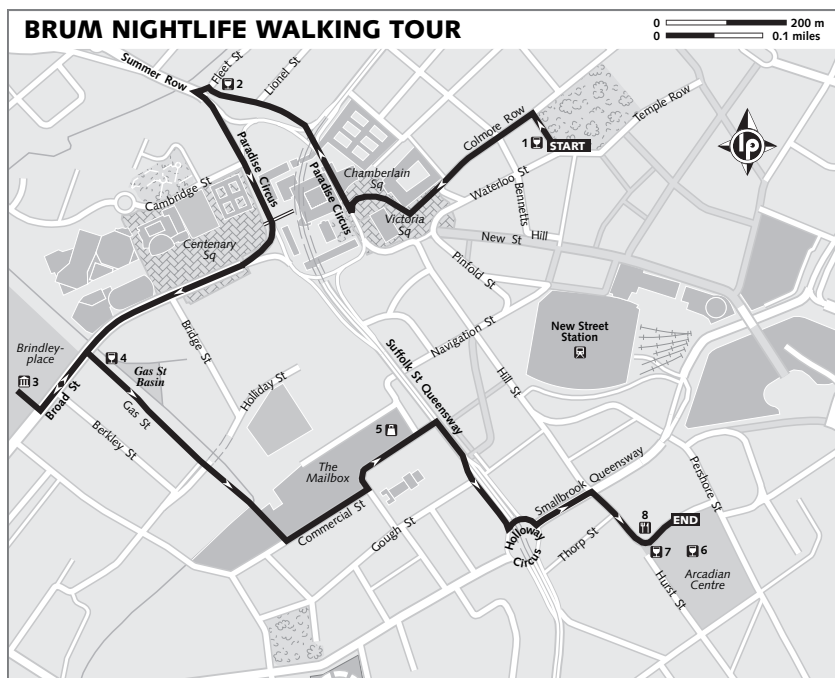
The Barber Institute is at the University of Birmingham, 2.5 miles south of the city centre. Take the train from New St to University station, or catch bus 61, 62 or 63 from Corporation St.

**Aston Hall** (☎ 0121-327 0062; Trinity Rd, Aston), a mansion built in the extravagant Jacobean style between 1618 and 1635, boasts some impressive friezes, ceilings and tapestries. To get there, take a train to Aston station from New St station. The Hall and grounds were closed for a major makeover at the time of writing and were due to reopen in summer 2009.

### BRUM NIGHTLIFE WALKING TOUR

Birmingham by night is one of the liveliest city centres in the UK. This tour, about 2 miles long, will take you through some of the town's most memorable nightspots. Put aside two to three hours if you're pressed for time, otherwise just go with the flow...

Start off at the magnificent **Old Joint Stock** (1; p539) pub where you can share the suits' relief as they spill out of the nearby offices. Skirt by the old cathedral, ease your way through Victoria and Chamberlain Squares and on to the cluster of bars at Summer Row for a swift cocktail at trendy **Mechu** (2; p539). Next, wander through Centenary Sq, mingling with the theatre fans and concertgoers. Hungry yet? Just a little bit further and Brindleyplace has several swanky options – take in some tapas and fine sherry at the airy, arty Spanish café at the **Ikon Gallery** (3; opposite). Appetite sated? Now creep out to Broad St. Dodge the screeching hen and lairy stag parties and duck into the one oasis of sanity in this part of town, the **Tap and Spile** (4; p538). Fine ales on tap in a nooks-and-crannies pub are your reward. Now take the downstairs exit by the canal and stroll south by the water to join Birmingham's bright young things in the stylish bars of the flashy **Mailbox** development (5; opposite). There are plenty of other sleek places to be seen in this well-heeled part of town, which could easily distract you from the final leg of our tour, the Arcadian Centre, chock-a-block with night-time options. Depending on your energy levels, have a few drinks at the buzzing **So Bar** (6; p539) or the laid-back



### WALK FACTS

**Start** Old Joint Stock

**Finish** Mr Egg

**Distance** 2 miles

**Duration** two hours or more

**Green Room** (7; p539), perhaps stopping for a late-night grease fest at the legendary **Mr Egg** (8; p538). You've got this far, the rest of the night is up to you...

## BIRMINGHAM FOR CHILDREN

The most obvious place to keep the kids entertained is Cadbury World (p535), where kids will learn about the history of chocolate as well as gorge themselves on it. Ease away the sugar high with a family cruise (opposite) down one of Birmingham's many narrow canals; a crucial part of the kids' education on why the city really mattered in the UK's development.

Just away from the Brindleyplace section of the canal, the National Sea Life Centre (p534) has water creatures aplenty. Playful

otters will appeal to everyone, but especially to the little ones. There's also plenty to explore at the Thinktank (p535), a gigantic attraction where the goal is to make science exciting and accessible, in particular for children. And you can keep them quiet under the vast domed ceiling of the Planetarium (p535) in the same complex.

## QUIRKY BIRMINGHAM

There's always something unusual going on at the Custard Factory (p540). The old industrial complex – built by Sir Alfred Bird, the inventor of instant custard – has been inventively converted into a hive of galleries, bars, exhibition rooms, studios, shops and performance spaces. If it's off the wall you're looking for, this is your best bet.

Brindleyplace's Ikon Gallery (p534) also plays host to unconventional modernist exhibits. Mainstream is not the word – be sure to take an open mind. For those whose fetishes go beyond the realm of handcuffs, there's the adults-only Birmingham Bizarre Bazaar, held the third Sunday of every month at the Nightingale Club (p539). Entrance is

£5. For details, check out [www.brumbazaar.co.uk](http://www.brumbazaar.co.uk) or phone ☎ 0121-602 1316.

## TOURS

**Second City Canal Cruises** (☎ 0121-236 9811; [www.secondcityboats.co.uk](http://www.secondcityboats.co.uk); adult/child £5/3) Hour-long tours leave by arrangement from the Canalside Souvenir Shop in Gas St Basin.

**Sherborne Wharf** (☎ 0121-455 6163; [www.sherbornewharf.co.uk](http://www.sherbornewharf.co.uk); Sherborne St; ☎ 11.30am, 1pm, 2.30pm & 4pm daily mid-Apr–Oct, Sat & Sun all year; adult/child £6.50/5) Canal cruises leave from the International Convention Centre quayside.

**West Midlands Waterways** (☎ 0121-200 7400; [www.waterways.com](http://www.waterways.com); Cambrian House, 2 Canalside; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat & Sun Apr–Oct) Has leaflets, advice on days out by the water and details on how and where to hire canal boats. It's off King Edward Rd.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Birmingham has a number of interesting cultural festivals. Here are some of the highlights.

**Crufts Dog Show** ([www.crufts.org.uk](http://www.crufts.org.uk)) The world's largest dog show, in March, with more than 20,000 canines on parade.

**Gay Pride** ([www.birminghamgaypride.co.uk](http://www.birminghamgaypride.co.uk)) One of the largest and most colourful celebrations of gay and lesbian culture in the country, held in May.

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

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

**Horse of the Year Show** ([www.hoys.co.uk](http://www.hoys.co.uk)) Top show-jumping equestrian event in October.

## SLEEPING

Most of Birmingham's central hotels are aimed at business travellers and are usually fairly expensive, although rates are sometimes reduced at weekends. Check online or ask about specials at the tourist office, which also makes accommodation bookings. Few B&Bs are central, but many lie within a 3-mile radius of the city centre, especially in Acocks Green (to the southeast) and the area that stretches from Edgbaston to Selly Oak (southwest).

## Budget

**our pick** **Birmingham Central Backpackers** (☎ 0121-643 0033; [www.birminghamcentralbackpackers.com](http://www.birminghamcentralbackpackers.com); 58 Coventry St; dm from £16; ☎ wi-fi) Fun, friendly laid-back backpackers spread across two buildings

a short walk from Digbeth bus station. Staff go to a lot of effort to make guests feel welcome, and there's a comfortable lounge with huge projector screen and collection of DVDs (free popcorn on movie nights), a little plant-filled garden, and a bar. There are some manically bright four- to eight-bed dorms, including a pod room – with enclosed beds based on Japanese capsule hotels.

**Formule 1** (☎ 0121-773 9583; [www.hotelformule1.com](http://www.hotelformule1.com); 3 Bordesley Park Rd, Small Heath Highway; r £25; (P)) Cheap, soulless, modern and clean: this place uses the same formula here as it does elsewhere. Rooms fit up to three people and it's about 1.5 miles from the centre.

**Nitenite** (☎ 0121-236 9000; [www.nitenite.com](http://www.nitenite.com); 18 Holliday St; r £45; (P) ☎ wi-fi) The rooms are inspired by luxury yacht cabins, and they are suitably pint-sized. They're strangely comfortable, however, with full-size double beds, leather headboards, cherry-wood furniture and giant plasma TV screens with live Birmingham webcam images instead of windows. Parking is £14 per 24 hours. Wheelchair access is available.

## Midrange

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

**Ibis Hotel** (☎ 0121-622 6010; fax 0121-622 6020; Arcadian Centre, Ladywell Walk; d £65; (P) ☎ wi-fi) You know exactly what you're getting here: a spotless identikit room with the same furnishings that you'll get in the same hotel chain in Marrakesh. Within the Arcadian Centre by Chinatown, it's in a convenient location for a night out. Parking is £12 for a night. Wheelchair access is available.

**Westbourne Lodge** (☎ 0121-429 1003; [www.westbournelodge.co.uk](http://www.westbournelodge.co.uk); Fountain Rd; s/d from £49/69; (P) ☎ wi-fi) Removed from the bustle of the city centre, this is still conveniently located just off the main road in southwest Edgbaston. Rooms are a little chintzy but spacious, and there's a lovely terrace to enjoy in the summer.

## Top End

**Burlington Hotel** (☎ 0844 879 9019; [www.burlingtonhotel.com](http://www.burlingtonhotel.com); Burlington Arcade, 126 New St; s/d Sun–Thu £175/195, Fri & Sat £83/107; (P) ☎ wi-fi) The venerable old gentleman of Birmingham hotels, the Burlington is lavishly and conservatively furnished with wood panelling, marble, classical columns and expensive glass lampshades. Rooms range from classic Victorian in style to the bland and

modern. The restaurant is a fine option for sophisticated Continental cuisine.

**Malmaison** (☎ 0121-246 5000; www.malmaison-birmingham.com; 1 Wharfedale St; d from £160; (P) (Q)) This boutique hotel in the Mailbox shopping centre is certainly style-conscious. Trendy music plays in the black-wood, minimalist lobby and the rooms, done out in crisp white and green, have floor-to-ceiling windows looking out onto the street. There's an equally smart bistro specialising in French classics as well as home-grown, local food, a great wine and champagne bar, and a spa. Wheelchair access is available.

## EATING

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

**Mount Fuji** (☎ 0121-633 9853; Bullring; ☎ 11.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, to 9pm Sun) Come to this minimalist Japanese café to fill up on cheap, delicious sushi, bento boxes and sake when you're all worn out from shopping.

**Mr Egg** (☎ 0121-622 4344; 22 Hurst St; chips £1.50) A Birmingham institution, this greasy spoon is the place to go for a 3am lard fest when you're feeling a bit worse for wear. Look out for the picture of a dapper egg with breeches and a walking stick.

**Punjab Paradise** (☎ 0121-449 4110; 377-379 Ladypool Rd, Sparkbrook; mains £4.50-10; ☎ 5pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) Don't be put off by the faux Roman decor – the food here is good and authentic and the service very friendly.

**Al Frash** (☎ 0121-753 3120; www.alfrash.com; 186 Ladypool Rd, Sparkbrook; mains £5.20-7.90; ☎ 5pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) This is the best place in Birmingham to experience the legendary balti. Don't go expecting flourishes or fancy decor – you won't find it here; just huge, tasty, great-value portions, and warm service. If you're getting the bus ask the driver to stop by Ladypool Rd.

**Oriental** (☎ 0121-633 9988; 4 The Mailbox; mains £6.20-19; ☎ noon-11pm) Supersleek pan-Asian place that is easily the Mailbox's most stylish restaurant. Eat Malaysian, Thai and Chinese food while sitting on quirky silver chairs adorned

with silk-screen faces in a moody red, brown and black space, topped off with the odd chandelier and bursts of gilt wallpaper.

**Cafe Soya** (☎ 0121-622 3888; Upper Dean St; mains £6.50-8.90; ☎ noon-11pm) Excellent café dishing up rich, flavoursome plates of Chinese and Vietnamese food – try the huge bowls of noodle soup, or fragrant spicy rice dishes. There's a great selection of vegetarian dishes and it also does a nice line in soya-based desserts and soya and bean shakes.

**Warehouse Cafe** (☎ 0121-633 0261; 54-57 Allison St; mains £10-14; ☎ 11am-10pm, to 6pm Sun) Low-key little veggie and vegan café serving a good selection of veggie snacks, curries, meze and salad, as well as tasty homemade cakes. It also has a small shop selling organic products.

**Chez Jules** (☎ 0121-633 4664; www.chezjules.co.uk; 5A Ethel St; mains £10.50-15.50, 2-course lunch £8; ☎ noon-4pm & 5-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun) French finesse defines the hearty, classic dishes served up at this excellent bistro. Burgundy walls, a spacious dining area, long benches – perfect for group dining – and reasonable house-wine prices add a certain *je ne sais quoi*.

**our pick Purnells** (☎ 0121-212 9799; www.purnellsrestaurant.com; 55 Cornwall St; 3-course lunch/dinner £19/39; ☎ noon-4.30pm & 7pm-1am Tue-Fri, 7pm-1am Sat) Run by celebrated chef Glynn Purnell. Exquisite, inventive dishes (such as monkfish with liquorice charcoal) are served in a airy Victorian red-brick building with striking modern interior.

**Simpsons** (☎ 0121-454 3434; www.simpsonsrestaurant.co.uk; 20 Highfield Rd, Edgbaston; 3-course set lunch/dinner £25/30; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Far out of the centre in a glorious Victorian house, it's worth making the journey for the top-quality modern cooking, served in an elegant dining room or conservatory overlooking the gardens. Reservations are recommended. If you fancy staying the night, there are four luxurious themed bedrooms upstairs.

## DRINKING

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

**Tap and Spile** (☎ 0121-632 5602; Gas St; ☎ 11am-11pm Sun-Thu, 11am-4am Fri & Sat) Overlooking the canal, this traditional pub is full of hidden alcoves and corners, especially once you move away from the minuscule top bar. There's a good selection of ales on tap here too.

**Malt House** (☎ 0121-633 4171; 75 King Edward Rd) The food is probably best avoided at this pub, but it has a decent selection of beers and the real draw is the expanse of outside space overlooking the canal. Apparently Bill Clinton had a drink here during the G8 Summit.

**Old Joint Stock** (☎ 0121-200 1892; 4 Temple Row West; ☹ closed Sun) This vast, high-ceilinged temple of beer, a former bank, serves good ales to a cheerful crowd. There's also an 80-seat theatre upstairs that puts on plays and regular comedy shows.

**Sunflower Lounge** (☎ 0121-472 0138; 76 Smallbrook Queensway; ☹ noon-11pm Mon-Wed, noon-1am Thu & Fri, 1pm-2am Sat, 5-10.30pm Sun) A quirky little mod bar in an unlikely setting by a dual carriageway near the New St rail station, this is a relatively undiscovered gem favoured by the indie crowd, and with a great alternative soundtrack. Live gigs occur regularly in the tiny underground basement venue.

**So Bar** (☎ 0121-693 5084; Arcadian Centre, Hurst St; ☹ 11am-2am Mon-Sat, 12.30pm-12.30am Sun) A glammed-up, shirted and booted crowd packs out this black-and-red bar to the strains of commercial dance and house.

**Green Room** (☎ 0121-605 4343; www.greenroom.cafebar.co.uk; Arcadian Centre, Hurst St; ☹ 11am-11pm Mon-Wed, to midnight Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat, to 10.30pm Sun) This place has a mellow vibe. Sink into a leather sofa and drink a coffee or a beer, or head for the outside tables to watch the street action. There's good food here too.

**Mechu** (☎ 0121-710 4222; 47-59 Summer Row; ☹ noon-1am Mon-Wed, noon-3am Fri, 5pm-3am Sat) The natty grey suede interior, streetside tables and strong cocktails attract an after-work crowd to drink, eat and dance in the late-night bar.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Tickets for most Birmingham events can be purchased through the national **TicketWeb** (☎ 08700 600100; www.ticketweb.co.uk). It is cheaper to book online than on the phone. Also check the listings (see p532) for what's going on.

## Nightclubs

Birmingham's nightlife is fast-paced and exuberant. Discover how fun the city's after-hours life can be at any of the following venues.

**Factory Club** (☎ 0121-224 7502; www.factoryclub.co.uk; Custard Factory, Gibb St; ☹ from 10pm) The crew working this joint know only too well they are mixing it in the coolest club in town with a truly eclectic range of nights,

from Asian dub to breakbeat to electro pop. A blast.

**Air** (☎ 0845 009 8888; www.airbirmingham.com; Heath Mill Lane; ☹ from 10pm) This supersleek superclub is home to the renowned Godskitchen night (www.godskitchen.com), where some of the country's top DJs whip the crowd into a frenzy with trance mixes.

**Q Club** (☎ 0121-212 1212; www.queclub.co.uk; 212 Corporation St; ☹ from 8.30 or 10pm) The legendary Q Club has been brought back to life after an absence of six years. Electro, house, jungle and old-school club classics reverberate in a huge Grade II-listed building.

**Nightingale Club** (☎ 0121-622 1718; www.nightingaleclub.co.uk; Kent St; ☹ from 9pm) Birmingham's most established gay nightclub, the Nightingale rocks on three levels, with pop on the bottom floor and techno upstairs. Even after some 30 years of action it's still the region's top gay club and is known as a starting place for top-name DJs, with regular live acts.

**Glee Club** (☎ 0871 472 0400; www.glee.co.uk; Arcadian Centre; tickets £8-15; ☹ from 7 or 8pm Thu-Sat) One of the city's best-known comedy clubs, this place regularly attracts big-name comedians as well as live-music acts.

## Live Music

**Jam House** (☎ 0121-200 3030; www.thejamhouse.com; 1 St Paul's Sq; ☹ noon-midnight Mon & Tue, noon-2am Wed-Fri, 6pm-2am Sat) This legendary live-music bar is all class. Presided over by pianist Jools Holland, it features live swing, jazz, R&B and rock and roll, mixed in with the occasional reggae and ska. Drinks are pricey, but the vibe is worth it. The global cuisine of the top-floor restaurant isn't bad either.

**Birmingham Academy** (☎ 0121-262 3000; www.birmingham-academy.co.uk; 52-54 Dale End) The best rock and pop venue in town, regularly attracting big-name acts such as Macy Gray and the Strokes. It also has regular nights showcasing local bands.

**Barfly** (☎ 0121-633 8311; www.barflyclub.com; 78 Digbeth High St) This place is a grooming stable for up-and-coming indie bands, spawned by the success of a London-based night. The entrance is on Milk St.

**Symphony Hall** (☎ 0121-780 3333; www.symphonyhall.co.uk; Broad St; tickets from £8) For classical music, including performances by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, seek out the ultramodern Symphony Hall, which is known for its superb acoustics. World-music

and jazz acts also feature. The recently renovated Town Hall (contact as Symphony Hall) also serves as a concert venue.

The giant **National Exhibition Centre Arena** (☎ 0121-767 2937), near Birmingham International Airport, hosts major rock and pop acts, as does its sister venue, the **National Indoor Arena** (☎ 0121-767 2937; King Edwards Rd) behind Brindleyplace.

## Theatre & Cinemas

**Birmingham Repertory Theatre** (☎ 0121-236 4455; www.birmingham-rep.co.uk; Centenary Sq, Broad St) In two venues, the Main House and the more experimental Door, 'the Rep' presents top-notch drama and musicals, with an emphasis on contemporary work.

**Hippodrome** (☎ 0844 338 5000; www.birminghamhippodrome.co.uk; Hurst St) This is the venue for musical extravaganzas from *Mary Poppins* to *West Side Story*.

**Alexandra Theatre** (☎ 0870 607 7533; Suffolk St Queensway) This established venue stages everything from West End musicals to opera.

**Electric Cinema** (☎ 0121-643 7879; www.theelectric.co.uk; 47-49 Station St; adult/child £6/4, £12 per sofa) Projectors have been rolling here for nigh 100 years, making it the oldest working cinema in the UK. It has an interesting art-house line-up as well as two-seater sofas from where you can text in an order and have food and drink (including champagne) brought to your seat.

**IMAX** (☎ 0121-202 2222; www.imax.ac; Curzon St; adult/child £8.25/6.25) Birmingham's first IMAX cinema, with a five-storey screen, is housed in the same building as the Thinktank (p535).

## Sport

**Villa Park** (☎ 0800 612 0970; www.avfc.co.uk; tickets adult/child from £25/15) Aston Villa football club, one of the Midlands' most enduring teams, play in this arena north of the city centre.

**Warwickshire County Cricket Club** (☎ 0121-446 5506; www.edgbaston.com; County Ground, Edgbaston; tickets from £15) Tickets for international test matches sell out early, but local matches are usually available. The Twenty20 games are pulsating, even for the uninitiated.

## SHOPPING

**Custard Factory** (☎ 0121-224 7777; www.custardfactory.com; Gibb St, Digbeth) One of the quirkiest places to shop in Birmingham, full of original, independent shops. So named because the building was constructed a century ago by

custard magnate Sir Alfred Bird, this eye-catching development is a memorable place to buy things you never knew you wanted. Funky niche shops are dotted between an arts and media centre.

**Jewellery Quarter** (www.the-quarter.com) The obvious place for unique local shopping in Birmingham. Much of the jewellery manufactured in England comes from this region and there are more than a hundred shops selling traditionally handcrafted gold and silver jewellery, watches and more. The Museum of the Jewellery Quarter (p534) has leaflets detailing notable retail outlets and artisans.

Other options for serious retail therapy: **Bullring** (☎ 0121-632 1500) This hellhole-turned-gleaming mall boasts '26 football pitches worth of shops, boutiques and restaurants'. The curved, silver Selfridges department store is worth a visit for the architecture alone.

**Clone Zone** (☎ 0121-666 6640; 84 Hurst St; ☎ 11am-9pm Mon-Sat, noon-7pm Sun) A branch of the world's largest gay retail chain, this place sells sex toys, clothes, accessories and adult novelties.

**Mailbox** (☎ 0121-632 1000; www.mailboxlife.com; Wharfside St) Label-hungry fashion victims head here for chic designer boutiques, including swish department store Harvey Nichols. They are on various levels in the unlikely setting of a converted mail-sorting factory, along with a raft of restaurants and bars.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

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

### Bus

Most intercity buses are running from a temporary bus station in Digbeth while the old coach station is being rebuilt. **National Express** (☎ 08717 818181; www.nationalexpress.com) runs coaches between Birmingham and destinations around England including London (£15.70 single, 2¾ hours, every 30 minutes), Oxford (£11.60 single, 1½ to two hours, five daily) and Manchester (£12.60 single, 2½ hours, 12 daily). Bus X20 runs to Stratford-upon-Avon hourly on weekdays and every two hours on weekends (1¼ hours) from Birmingham Moor St.

## THE BLACK COUNTRY

The industrial region west of Birmingham is known as the Black Country, a 19th-century nickname given because pollution from local industries covered the area in black soot. Now cleaned up, it's still not a tourist hot spot, but is a fascinating stop for anyone interested in how industry shapes a country. Don't mistake the locals for Brummies; as anyone round here will tell you, the 'yam yams' (so called because of a Black Country-dialect habit of saying 'you am' instead of 'you are') have a very distinct identity of their own.

The extensive, lively **Black Country Living Museum** (☎ 0121-557 9643; www.bdm.co.uk; Tipton Rd, Dudley; adult/child £12.50/6.75; 🕒 10am-5pm daily Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-Feb) features a coal mine, village and fairground, all restored to resemble the industrial heyday of the 19th century. Costumed characters recreate the living conditions of the time. It's entertaining, enlightening and kid-friendly, with a full program of mine trips, Charlie Chaplin films and opportunities to watch glass-cutters and sweet-makers in action.

## Train

Most of the longer-distance trains are operated by Virgin Trains from New St station, beneath the Pallasades shopping centre, including those to/from London Euston (£10.50 value advance single, 1½ hours, every 30 minutes) and Manchester (£9 value advance single, 1¾ hours, every 15 minutes). Trains to London Marylebone run from Birmingham Snow Hill (two hours 20 minutes, two hourly). Other services, such as those to Stratford-upon-Avon (£5.90 single, 50 minutes, hourly), run from Snow Hill and Moor St stations.

In July and August, the **Shakespeare Express steam train** (☎ 0121-708 4960; www.vintagetains.co.uk; standard return £20) operates between Birmingham Snow Hill and Stratford-upon-Avon twice each Sunday. Journeys take one hour.

## GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Trains are the easiest option for getting to the airport. They run frequently between New St and Birmingham International station (20 minutes, every 10 minutes). Buses 58 and 900 run to the airport (45 minutes, every 20 minutes) from Moor St Queensway. A **taxi** (☎ 0121-427 8888) from the airport to the centre costs about £20.

## Car

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

**Hertz** (☎ 0121-782 5158; 7 Suffolk St Queensway)

## Public Transport

**Network West Midlands** (☎ 0121-214 7214; www.networkwestmidlands.com) provides general travel advice for getting around the West

Midlands, including for those with mobility difficulties. The Daytripper ticket (adult/child £4.90/3.10) gives all-day travel on buses and trains after 9.30am; if you need to start earlier, buy the network one-day ticket (£6.10). Tickets are available from the **Central Travel Information Centre** (New St Station). **Traveline** (☎ 0871 200 22 33) has comprehensive travel information.

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

Birmingham's tram system, the **Metro** (www.travelmetro.co.uk), runs from Snow Hill to Wolverhampton via the Jewellery Quarter, West Bromwich and Dudley. Fares start at £1.10 and rise to £2.50 for the full length. A day pass covering both Metro and bus costs adult/child £4.60/3.05.

**TOA black cabs taxis** (☎ 0121-427 8888) are a good, reliable taxi firm.

# WARWICKSHIRE

Warwickshire could have been just another picturesque English county of rolling hills and market towns were it not for the birth of a rather well-known wordsmith. Stratford-upon-Avon is one of the country's most visited areas outside London, attracting Shakespeare-hungry tourists from around the world. Also popular is magnificent Warwick Castle, rich in history and theme-park atmosphere.

Other, lesser-known attractions can be just as rewarding, however: try the russet ruins of Kenilworth Castle or visit the cathedrals (yes, plural) that shaped Coventry's past.

## Orientation & Information

Coventry sits to the north of the county. Kenilworth, Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon run in a line southwest from Coventry along the A46.

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

## Getting Around

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

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

## COVENTRY

pop 300,848

The city was blitzed so badly in WWII that the Nazis coined a new verb 'Coventrieren', meaning 'to flatten'; postwar planning then capped off the aesthetic crimes. Today, Coventry's city centre is for the most part an unattractive mass of concrete, but is worth visiting for its striking modern cathedral, which was built alongside the haunting bombed-out ruins of the old one. The city also has an interesting industrial history as a prolific car-maker, the product of which can be seen in an absorbing transport museum.

## Orientation & Information

Central Coventry is surrounded by a stark concrete ring road; most of the city's sights lie within. The main Pool Meadow bus station is central, while the train station is just outside of the ring road to the south. The **tourist office** (☎ 024-7623 4297; [www.visitcoventry.co.uk](http://www.visitcoventry.co.uk); Millennium Pl; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) is in the Coventry Transport Museum. There's another tourist office in St Michael's Tower, Coventry Cathedral (☎ 024-7622 5616).

## Sights

The pretty **cathedral quarter** is historically the richest part of the city. The wonderfully evocative **cathedral ruins** of St Michael's Cathedral, destroyed by Nazi incendiary bombs in the blitz of 14 November 1940, still stand as a permanent memorial. You can climb the 180 steps of its **Gothic spire** for some panoramic views (£2.50). Symbolically adjoining the old cathedral's sandstone walls is the Sir Basil Spence-designed **cathedral** (☎ 024-7622 7597; [www.coventrycathedral.org.uk](http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk); Priory Row; suggested donation £3; ☎ 9am-5pm), a modern, almost Gothic, architectural masterpiece. It includes a giant Graham Sutherland tapestry of Christ, glorious stained-glass nave windows (best seen from the altar), and a towering etched glass front. Look out for the Jacob Epstein statue of St Michael's conquest over the devil outside the main entrance. The story of Coventry's original cathedral, the Benedictine priory of **St Mary's** which was dismantled following the Reformation, is told through interactive computer displays and archaeological finds at the small but excellent **Priory Visitor Centre** (☎ 024-7655 2242; Priory Row; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun). In the same area is **St Mary's Guildhall** (☎ 024-7683 3328; Bayley Lane; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm), one of the country's finest medieval guildhalls, where Mary Queen of Scots was briefly held. Look out for the centuries-old tapestry depicting Henry VI.

Further north, the extensive **Coventry Transport Museum** (☎ 024-7623 4270; [www.transport-museum.com](http://www.transport-museum.com); Hales St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm) boasts the biggest collection of British-built vehicles in the world, most of them assembled in Coventry, ranging from early bicycles to vintage fire engines. There's interactive fun in the shape of the 'Coventry Blitz Experience' and the Thrust SSC land speed record simulator.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Spire View Guest House** (☎ 024-7625 1602; 36 Park Rd; s/d £27/45; ☎) Crisp, clean rooms in a quiet residential street a few minutes' walk from the train station. The hosts are eager to help and there's a nice guest lounge with plenty of books for browsing.

**Ramada Coventry** (☎ 0870 890 3722; [www.ramada-coventry.co.uk](http://www.ramada-coventry.co.uk); The Butts; d incl breakfast from £85; ☎) Located just outside the ring road and a 10-minute walk into the town centre, the rooms are surprisingly nice for a chain hotel. They're



bright and spotless and many have great views over the city. Wheelchair access available.

**Playwrights** (☎ 024-7623 1441; 4-6 Hay Lane; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Thu, 9am-10.30pm Fri & Sat) On a cobbled street leading to the cathedral, this friendly little cafe does big breakfasts, light lunches, sandwiches and burgers as well as a more substantial dinner menu.

**Tin Angel** (☎ 024-7655 9958; Medieval Spon St; ☎ closed Mon & Tue) This minuscule bar, with a laid-back atmosphere, alternative soundtrack, and a little shop at the back selling obscure CDs and books, is the coolest place in town. There are occasional acoustic music and poetry nights and a light snack menu of soups and sandwiches. Don't expect speedy service though.

## Getting There & Away

Coventry is a convenient transport hub. Trains go south to London Euston (every 20 minutes, one hour 10 minutes) and Bournemouth (hourly, three hours), and you will rarely have to wait more than 10 minutes for a train to Birmingham. From the main bus station, there is a constant flow of National Express

buses to most parts of the country. Bus X17 goes to Kenilworth, Leamington Spa and Warwick (every 20 minutes).

## WARWICK

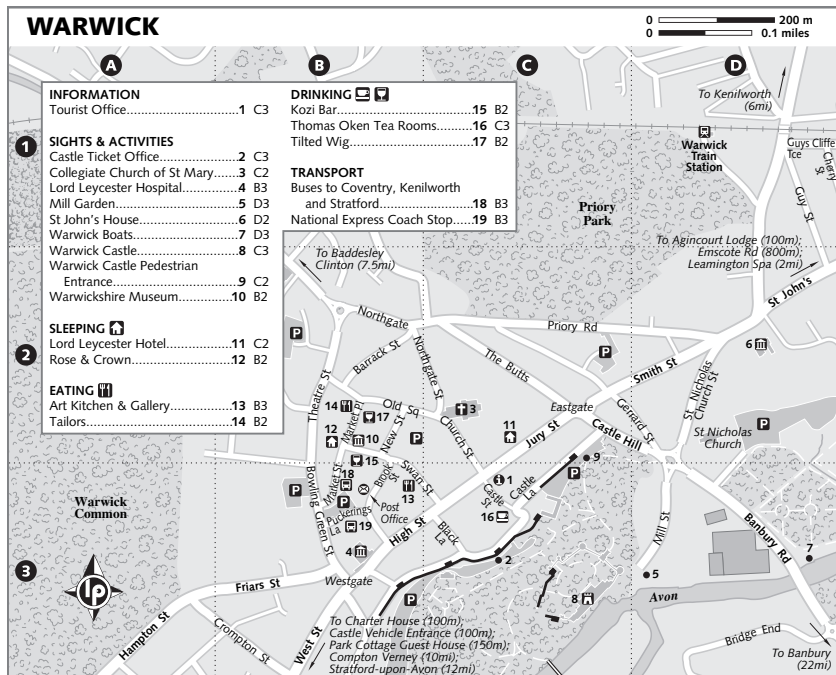
pop 25,434

Most visitors come to this quiet county town drawn by its magnificent turreted castle. It's an overwhelming sight – as are the queues in summer. Several other sights are less over-run, but also well worth stopping for. A quick stroll round the centre reveals well-preserved historic buildings – survivors of a fire in 1694 that destroyed much of the town – as well as absorbing museums and fine riverside views.

## Orientation & Information

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

The **tourist office** (☎ 01926-492212; [www.warwick-uk.co.uk](http://www.warwick-uk.co.uk); Court House, July St; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm), near the junction with Castle St, sells the informative *Warwick Town Trail* leaflet (50p).



## Sights & Activities

### WARWICK CASTLE

Incredibly well-preserved medieval **Warwick Castle** (☎ 0870 442 2000; www.warwick-castle.co.uk; adult/child £18/11; 🕒 10am–6pm Apr–Sep, to 5pm Oct–Mar; 📍) is an absolute stunner. Part of the Tussauds Group, it is prone to commercialism, crowds and cheesiness, of which the deeply naff Warwick Ghosts ‘Alive’ experience (entry £2.75) is a prime example. However, its grandeur and a palpable sense of history, including displays on influential historical figures such as ‘kingmaker’ Earl of Warwick Richard Neville, make it a must-see.

Plan on spending a full day if time permits. With eerily lifelike waxwork-populated private apartments, sumptuous interiors, ramparts, armour displays, dungeons (with torture chamber), gorgeous landscaped gardens and a 19th-century power-generating mill house, there’s more than enough to see.

### COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF ST MARY

Originally built in 1123, the magnificent **Collegiate Church of St Mary** (☎ 01926-492909; Old Sq; suggested donation £2; 🕒 10am–6pm Apr–Oct, to 4.30pm Nov–Mar) has a soaring tower, visible for miles around. Climb it for a spectacular panorama (adult/child £2/50p). It was completed in 1704 after the 1694 Great Fire of Warwick gutted the original along with much of the church. The remarkable Beauchamp Chapel (built 1442–64) survived and the bronze tomb of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, still graces its centre. Ask one of the knowledgeable guides to point out ‘the angel’, a ghostly outline barely visible on the wall that was only recently spotted. Don’t miss the 12th-century crypt with remnants of a medieval dunking stool, used to drench scolding wives.

### LORD LEYCESTER HOSPITAL

At the Westgate end of the town, the road cuts through a sandstone cliff, above which perches the improbably leaning, timber-framed **Lord Leicester Hospital** (☎ 01926-491422; High St; adult/child £4.90/3.90, garden only £2; 🕒 10am–5pm Tue–Sun Apr–Sep, 10am–4.30pm Tue–Sun Oct–Mar). Despite its name, it was never a hospital. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and favourite of Queen Elizabeth I, made it a retirement home for soldiers and their wives in 1571 – and it still is today. It has a beautiful courtyard, a fine chapel and a guildhall. There is also a small regimental museum and a cafe.

## OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

For a fragrant perspective of the castle, head for the **Mill Garden** (☎ 01926-492877; 55 Mill St; admission £1.50; 🕒 9am–6pm Apr–Oct), an explosion of flowers and plants within splashing distance of the weir that powered the castle mill. Money raised from this captivating little corner goes to charity. A fine alternative view of the castle is offered on the river itself. Head to **Warwick Boats** (☎ 01926-494743; www.warwickboats.co.uk; St Nicholas Park; rowing boat hire 30/60min £6/9; 🕒 10am–6.30pm daily Jun–Aug, 10am–6.30pm Sat & Sun Mar–May & Sep–Oct).

Other interesting sights include the **Warwickshire Museum** (☎ 01926-412501; Market Pl; admission free; 🕒 10am–5pm Tue–Sat year-round, plus 11.30am–5pm Sun Apr–Sep), in the 17th-century market building. It displays the Sheldon’s Tapestry Map, a woven map of Warwickshire stretching 5m across, which dates from 1647. **St John’s House** (☎ 01926-412132; St John’s; admission free; 🕒 10am–5pm Tue–Sat year-round, plus 2.30–5pm Sun Apr–Sep) is a striking Jacobean mansion with an antique doll and toy display, reconstructed Victorian rooms and a regimental museum.

## Sleeping



The nearest hostel is in Stratford-upon-Avon (see p549). Midrange B&Bs line Emscote Rd, the eastern end of the main road through Warwick toward Leamington Spa.

**Agincourt Lodge** (☎ 01926-499399; www.agincourt lodge.co.uk; 36 Coten End; s/d incl breakfast from £40/60 (P)). In an austere-looking Victorian house 10 minutes from the castle, some of the cosy rooms have four posters and there’s a charming garden.

**Park Cottage Guest House** (☎ 01926-410319; www.parkcottage warwick.co.uk; 113 West St; s/d £50/65 (P)) This 16th-century listed building has a pretty garden and six spacious rooms, each with a teddy bear for company. The hosts make a real effort to make guests feel welcome and are full of advice about the area.


**Charter House** (☎ 01926-496965; sheila@penon.gotadsl.co.uk; 87–91 West St; s/d incl breakfast from £56/85; (P) (Q)) This cute little timbered cottage has three rooms convincingly decorated in medieval period styles, and a long list of choices on the breakfast menu. Book early.


**Lord Leicester Hotel** (☎ 01926-491481; www.lord-leicester.co.uk; 17 Jury St; s/d £62/83; (P)) This rambling stone town house-turned-hotel, built in 1726, has very helpful staff but the rooms, while comfortable, are bland and dated.

**Rose & Crown** (☎ 01926-411117; www.roseandcrownwarwick.co.uk; 30 Market Pl; r incl breakfast from £70;   wi-fi) Most of the smart modern rooms look out onto Warwick's main square. They lie above a chic gastropub, which serves excellent food. There are only five rooms, so call in advance.


## Eating & Drinking

**Art Kitchen & Gallery** (☎ 01926-494303; 7 Swan St; mains £7-13;  lunch & dinner daily) This place serves fresh, tasty Thai food with an emphasis on local produce and is very popular. All of the art on display, from bold prints on the walls to photos of celebs in the loos, is for sale.

**Tailors** (☎ 01926-410590; 22 Market Pl; 3-course dinner £27.50  6-10pm Mon-Sat) Warwick's newest restaurant, set in a former gentleman's tailors, serves fine modern English cuisine such as roasted wood pigeon and braised pork belly, in a small, simple dining room.

**Tilted Wig** (☎ 01926-411534; 11 Market Pl;  9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) This large, lively pub on the main square spills out onto the streets in summer, provides a cosy haven in winter and serves some great beers – try the Slaughterhouse.

**Kozi Bar** (☎ 01926-493318; 62 Market Pl;  10am-11pm Mon-Thu, till 2am Fri & Sat) The dark orange walls, leather sofas and deep rattan armchairs create a warm ambience at this coffee shop, restaurant and cocktail bar. There's a sunny garden at the back for the summer and on the weekend it turns into Warwick's only late-night bar playing mainstream house and club classics.


**Thomas Oken Tea Rooms** (☎ 01926-499307; 20 Castle St;  10am-6pm) Just an arrow's flight away from the castle, this tearoom in a medieval house is pricey and usually packed – but it does have bags of atmosphere.

## Getting There & Away

National Express coaches operate from Puckerings Lane. Stagecoach X17 runs to Coventry (55 minutes). Stagecoach bus 16 goes to Stratford-upon-Avon (40 minutes, hourly) in one direction, and Leamington Spa (15 minutes) the other. The main bus stops are on Market St.


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

## AROUND WARWICK Baddesley Clinton

Boasting Elizabethan interiors that have barely changed since the 17th century, **Baddesley Clinton** (NT; ☎ 01564-783294; adult/child £8.40/4.20, grounds only £4.20/2.10;  11am-5pm Wed-Sun Oct-Feb, 1.30-5.30pm Wed-Sun May-Sep) is a beguiling 15th-century moated house. It was a haven for persecuted Catholics in the 16th century, as three cramped priest-holes show. It also has a murderous history: a priest was killed here after the owner, Nicholas Broom, found his wife in the man of God's arms.

Baddesley Clinton is 7.5 miles northwest of Warwick, just off the A4141. It is a pleasant 2-mile walk from Lapworth train station. Trains run direct from Warwick (15 minutes) and Birmingham (30 minutes).

## Compton Verney


The once-decrepit 18th-century mansion of **Compton Verney** (☎ 01926-645500; adult/child £7.70/2;  10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Mar to mid-Dec) opened to the public in 2004 after a multimillion-pound overhaul. It now houses an art gallery, which includes a permanent exhibition on British folk art, Neapolitan masterpieces, Germanic medieval art, and bronze artefacts from China. There are regular high-profile exhibitions too. Word has spread fast – the small galleries quickly get crowded. If it gets too packed, the lovely grounds, landscaped by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown are perfect for a picnic. Bus 269 runs directly here from Stratford-upon-Avon (not on Sundays).

## KENILWORTH


pop 23,219

The only thing that makes a visit to this unremarkable middle-England town truly worthwhile are the hauntingly atmospheric ruins of its castle. With crumbling walls and vivid history, it inspired Walter Scott to use it as a setting for his novel, called...*Kenilworth*.

## Information

Contact the **tourist office** (☎ 01926-852595; Library, 11 Smalley Pl;  9am-7pm Mon & Thu, 9am-5.30pm Tue & Fri, 10.30am-5.30pm Wed, 9.30am-4pm Sat) for local tourist information.

## Sights & Activities

Red-sandstone **Kenilworth Castle** (EH; ☎ 01926-852078; adult/child £6.20/3.10;  10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) isn't as popular as its commercial

neighbour in Warwick, but is arguably more rewarding, and the dramatic ruins are brought to life through an excellent audio tour. It was founded around 1120 and enlarged in the 14th and 16th centuries. A number of powerful men, including John of Gaunt, Simon de Montfort and Robert Dudley (favourite of Elizabeth I), held sway here. Following the Civil War siege, the castle's vast lake was drained in 1644, and it fell into disrepair.

You can learn about the relationship between Dudley and the 'Virgin Queen', who visited the castle to tremendous fanfare, in an exhibition in the recently restored Leicester's Gatehouse. At the time of writing work was underway to recreate the magnificent gardens Dudley had built for Elizabeth in 1575, and they were due to open in late spring 2009.

Jane Austen and King Charles I are among the famous former guests in the 850-year history of **Stoneleigh Abbey** (☎ 01926-858535; www.stoneleighabbey.org; adult/child £6.50/3; ♻️ tours 11am, 1pm & 3pm Tue-Thu & Sun Easter-Oct). Founded by Cistercian monks in 1154, it became the home of the wealthy Leigh family in the 16th century. The splendid Palladian west wing, completed in 1726, contains richly detailed plasterwork ceilings and panelled rooms. Don't miss the medieval gatehouse, dating from 1346. The landscaped grounds are fine picnic territory. Stoneleigh is 2 miles east of Kenilworth, off the B4115.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Castle Laurels Hotel** (☎ 01926-856179; www.castlelaurels.co.uk; 22 Castle Rd; s/d incl breakfast £45/75; (P) (Q)) A stately guest house opposite the castle, where the owners pride themselves on the spotless rooms and the warmth of the welcome. The home-cooked breakfasts (with free-range eggs) are lovely.

**Loweridge Guest House** (☎ 01926-859522; www.loweridgeguesthouse.co.uk; Hawkesworth Dr; s/d incl breakfast £70/95; (P) (Q)) This handsome Victorian house has a grand staircase and elegant guest lounge straight out of *Country Life*. There are four huge rooms with swish, modern bathrooms, and three have their own private sun-trap patio. It's a 10-minute walk from the town centre, off Coventry road.

**Virgins & Castle** (☎ 01926-853737; 7 High St; pub food £4-6, mains £9-11) This worn, homely old pub is a real local favourite, full of nooks and crannies to lose yourself in. It has a decent menu of Filipino specialities.

**Clarendon Arms** (☎ 01926-852017; 44 Castle Hill; mains £6-12.95) Right opposite the castle, this atmospheric pub has home-cooked food, a warm ambience and a cosy little beer garden.

## Getting There & Away

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

## STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

pop 22,187

Few towns are so dominated by one man's legacy as Stratford is by William Shakespeare, who was born here in 1564. Be prepared to fight the tourist masses for breathing space in the historic buildings associated with England's most famous wordsmith – especially during summer and on most weekends. But if you choose your time, this pretty, historic market town should definitely be on your 'to visit' list: be sure to take in a play if you're hitting the Shakespeare trail. It is also a handy base for exploring the mighty Warwick and Kenilworth Castles and the northern part of the picturesque Cotswold Hills.

## Orientation

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

## Information

**Cyber Junction** (☎ 01789-263400; www.cyberjunction.co.uk; 28 Greenhill St; per hr £4; ♻️ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-5.30pm Sat) Internet access and game play.

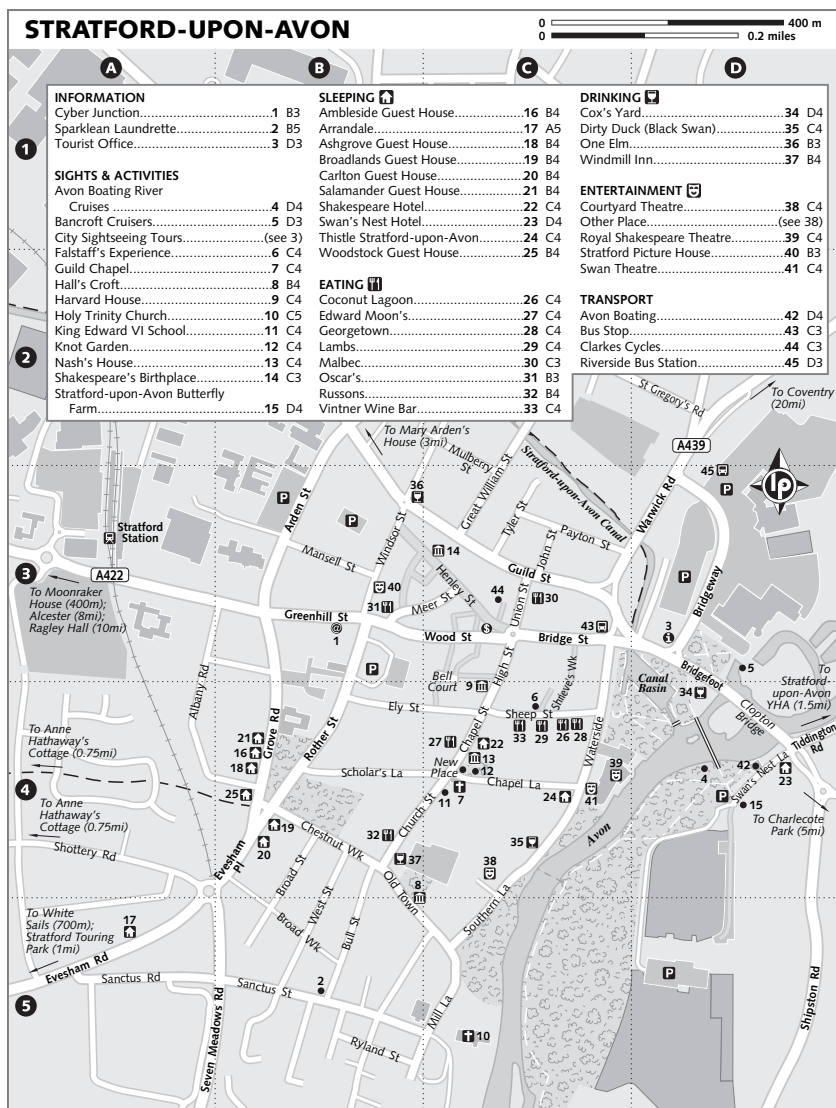
**Sparklean Laundrette** (☎ 01789-269075; 74 Bull St; ♻️ 8am-9pm)

**Tourist office** (☎ 0870 160 7930; www.shakespeare-country.co.uk; Bridgefoot; ♻️ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Nov-Mar) Helpful, but frantically busy in summer.

## Sights & Activities

### THE SHAKESPEARE HOUSES

**The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust** (☎ 01789-204016; www.shakespeare.org.uk; adult/child all 5 properties £15/7.50, 3 in-town houses £9/4.50; ♻️ generally 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Jun-Aug, hours vary rest of year) manages five buildings associated with Shakespeare. Three of the houses are central, one is an easy walk away, and the fifth a drive or bike ride



out; a combination ticket costs about half as much as the individual admission fees combined. Opening times are complicated and vary during the low season (check the website for details). In summer, enormous crowds pack the small Tudor houses; a visit out of season is much more enjoyable. Note that wheelchair access to the properties is restricted.

The number one Shakespeare attraction, **Shakespeare's Birthplace** (Henley St), has 'olde world' charm hidden behind a modern exterior. It's been a tourist hot spot for three centuries (though there's no conclusive evidence Will was born here). Famous 19th-century visitor-vandals have scratched their names on a window, and the guest book

bears the signatures of some literary luminaries. Family rooms have been recreated in the style of Shakespeare's time, and in short performances throughout the day some of Shakespeare's most famous characters come to life. There's also a 'virtual reality' display downstairs for visitors unable to access the upper areas. Tickets include admission to the adjacent **Shakespeare Exhibition**, where well-devised displays chart the life of Stratford's most famous son.

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

Shakespeare's daughter Susanna married respected doctor John Hall, and their fine Elizabethan town house, **Hall's Croft** (☎ 01789-292107), stands near Holy Trinity Church. The main exhibition offers a fascinating insight into medicine back in the 16th century.

Before marrying Shakespeare, Anne Hathaway lived in Shotton, a mile west of the centre, in a pretty thatched farmhouse now known as **Anne Hathaway's Cottage** (☎ 01789-292100). As well as contemporary furniture, there's an orchard and **Shakespeare Tree Garden**, with examples of all the trees mentioned in Shakespeare's plays. A footpath (no bikes allowed) leads to Shotton from Evesham Pl.

Mary Arden was Shakespeare's mother, and a **house** (☎ 01789-293455) at Wilmcote, 3 miles west of Stratford, was her childhood home. If you cycle there via Anne Hathaway's Cottage, follow the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal towpath to Wilmcote rather than retracing your route or riding back along the busy A3400. The easiest way to get there otherwise is on a bus tour (see right). Mary Arden's house is now home to the **Shakespeare Countryside Museum**, with exhibits tracing local country life over the past four centuries. There's a collection of rare-breed farm animals here, as well as regular falconry displays.

#### OTHER SIGHTS

**Holy Trinity Church** (☎ 01789-266316; Old Town; admission to church free, Shakespeare's grave adult/child £1.50/50p; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat & 12.30-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-4pm

Mon-Sat & 12.30-5pm Sun Nov-Mar), where Shakespeare is buried, is thought to be the most visited parish church in England. It's a lovely building in its own right, situated on the banks of the River Avon. The transepts from the mid-13th century are the oldest part. In the chancel are photocopies of Shakespeare's baptism and burial records, the graves of Will and his wife, and a bust created seven years after Shakespeare's death but before his wife's and therefore assumed to be a good likeness.

The exuberantly carved **Harvard House** (☎ 01789-204507; High St; adult/child £3.50/free, free with Shakespeare Houses ticket; ☎ noon-5pm Wed-Sun Jul & Aug, Fri-Sun May, Jun & Sep-Oct) was home to the mother of John Harvard, after whom Harvard University in the USA was named in the 17th century. It now houses a **Museum of British Pewter**.

The **Stratford-upon-Avon Butterfly Farm** (☎ 01789-299288; www.butterflyfarm.co.uk; Swan's Nest Lane; adult/child £5/3.60; ☎ 10am-6pm summer, 10am-dusk winter) is a large greenhouse with hundreds of species of exotic butterflies in tropical foliage. Other displays include the creepy 'Arachnoland', full of scorpions and spiders.

**Falstaff's Experience** (☎ 0870 350 2770; www.falstaffsexperience.co.uk; 40 Sheep St; adult/child £4.80/1.30; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm) is an old timbered building housing recreations of a witches' glade and a plague cottage; rather like a rambling, stationary ghost train with some history thrown in. Those with an even more mordant bent can explore the property's paranormal history on adult-only ghost tours (£7.50; ☎ tours 6pm, 7pm, 8pm & 9pm Thu-Fri) or even more spooky jaunts with a medium in tow (£17.50; ☎ 10pm most Friday nights).

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

#### Tours

Two-hour **guided walks** (☎ 01789-292478; adult/child £5/2; ☎ 11am Mon-Wed, 2pm Thu-Sun) depart from Waterside, opposite Sheep St. Chill-seekers can go to the same starting point for the **Stratford Town Ghost Walk** (adult/child £5/3; ☎ 7.30pm Mon, Thu & Fri).

Open-top buses of **City Sightseeing** (☎ 01789-299123; www.city-sightseeing.com; adult/child £11/5.50;

## SHAKESPEARE'S WORDS?

One of literature's greatest conspiracy theories questions whether Shakespeare actually wrote the plays attributed to him. Despite the Bard's prolific output of plays, no letters or other personal writing have survived. What little we know about him has been found in birth, death and marriage files and other official documents, and what's more, none of these official records list Will as a writer, only as an actor or a money lender. This lack of information has led to theories that Shakespeare didn't actually write the plays. Since none have survived in manuscript form, there's no handwritten evidence to conclusively prove that they're his. Some 'anti-Stratfordians' speculate that Shakespeare was simply not educated or worldly enough to have provided the background, experience and knowledge to write the plays. Favourites for the 'real' Shakespeare include Will's compatriot Christopher Marlowe, Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford or a combined business venture by a group of writers.

every 20 min Apr-Sep, fewer in winter) leave from the tourist office and go to each of the Shakespeare properties. They operate on a hop-on, hop-off basis, and are a convenient way of getting to the out-of-town houses.

**Avon Boating** (☎ 01789-267073; www.avon-boating.co.uk) runs river cruises (adult/child £4/2.50 per hour), which depart from either side of the tramway bridge. **Bancroft Cruisers** (☎ 01789-269669; www.bancroftcruisers.co.uk) runs 45-minute trips (adult/child £4.50/3, daily April to October) leaving from Clopton Bridge, opposite Cox's Yard.

## Sleeping

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

## BUDGET

**Stratford-upon-Avon YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9661; www.yha.org.uk; Hemmingford House, Alveston; dm incl breakfast members/nonmembers £20/23; (P) (Q)) This four-star youth hostel is situated in a large, 200-year-old mansion 1.5 miles east of the town centre along Tiddington Rd. Buses 18 and 18A operate to Alveston from Bridge St.

Other good budget options:

**Stratford Touring Park** (☎ 01789-201063; www.stratfordtouringpark.com; Luddington Rd; 2-person pitches £11, showers 50p; (M) Easter-Sep; (P)) Camp site just off Evesham Rd a mile west of town.

**Salamander Guest House** (☎ 01789-205728; www.salamanderguesthouse.co.uk; 40 Grove Rd; s/d incl

breakfast from £20/40; (P) (Q) wi-fi) Comfortable rooms and friendly, informative hosts.

**Arrandale** (☎ 01789-267112; www.arrandale.netfirms.com; 208 Evesham Rd; s/d incl breakfast £23-46; (P)) Neatly kept lodgings, 10 minutes' walk from the centre.

**Carlton Guest House** (☎ 01789-293548; 22 Evesham Pl; s/d incl breakfast £20/52; (P)) The jolly proprietor has several reasonable en suite rooms available.

## MIDRANGE

**Ambleside Guest House** (☎ 01789-297239; www.amblesideguesthouse.co.uk; 41 Grove Rd; s/d from £30/50; (P) (Q)) Lovely, nonfrilly B&B, with spotless, homely rooms, amiable hosts who know everything that's going on around town, and great big organic breakfasts.

**Moonraker House** (☎ 01789-268774; www.moonrakerhouse.com; 40 Alcester Rd; s/d incl breakfast from £47/70; (P) (Q)) Pristine to the point of fussy, the rooms behind the whitewashed facade of this memorable B&B are frilly, almost feminine affairs, and have a Shakespeare theme. Impeccably attentive owners provide healthy organic and vegetarian options for breakfast.

**our pick WhiteSails** (☎ 01789-264326; www.white-sails.co.uk; 85 Evesham Rd; r from £95; (P) (Q) wi-fi) This gorgeous, intimate guest house has four plush, individually furnished rooms with flat-screen TVs, climate control and glamorous modern bathrooms. The service is fantastic – breakfast features goodies such as freshly baked bread and muffins, homemade muesli and fresh fruit, and there are plenty of other of nice touches such as complementary sherry in the cosy guests lounge and teddy bears in the bathrooms. There's a lovely large garden to soak up the rays in the summer.

Other recommended midrange options:  
**Ashgrove Guest House** (☎ 01789-297278; www.ashgroveguesthousesstratford.co.uk; 37 Grove Rd; s/d from

£35/55; (P) Tidy, airy rooms decked out in varying degrees of burgundy. Look for the funky wooden bear outside.

**Woodstock Guest House** (☎ 01789-299881; www.woodstock-house.co.uk; 30 Grove Rd; s/d from £30/56; (P) Pastel, floral-themed rooms; deep, soft carpets; and a warm welcome.

**Broadlands Guest House** (☎ 01789-299181; www.broadlandsguesthouse.co.uk; 23 Evesham Pl; s/d from £45/80; (P) Fancy, individually decorated rooms and filling breakfasts served in a pretty breakfast room.

## TOP END

**Swan's Nest Hotel** (☎ 0844 879 9140; www.macdonaldhotels.co.uk/SwansNest; Swan's Nest Lane; d with breakfast from £120; (P) (Q)) In a 17th-century red-brick house near the banks of the Avon, this hotel has airy rooms in shades of brown and cream, with many overlooking the hotel gardens. There's a nice wood-panelled bar and a terrace for summer evenings.

**Shakespeare Hotel** (☎ 0870 400 8182; www.mercure.com; Chapel St; s/d £135/150; (P) (Q)) A labyrinth of rooms enchants guests at this classic Tudor hotel. The pick of the rooms are those named after Shakespeare's plays. Some you have to stoop to get into, but with their wood-panelled headboards complemented by luxury bathrooms, they are a great base for soaking up the town's rich Elizabethan heritage. Discounts are usually available; check the website for deals.

**Thistle Stratford-upon-Avon** (☎ 01789-294949; stratford.uponavon@thistle.co.uk; Waterside; r incl breakfast from £140; (P) (Q)) Superbly located across the road from the Swan Theatre, the Thistle overlooks the River Avon and pretty bankside parkland. Brass reading lights brighten the corridors, and the fragrant, comfortable rooms are everything you would expect from a top-end chain. There's a terrace for summer dining. Large discounts are available in low season.

## Eating

Shakespeare pilgrimages clearly work up an appetite: there's certainly no shortage of good restaurants. Sheep St is clustered with refined but relaxed eating options, mostly aimed at theatregoers.

**Vintner Wine Bar** (☎ 01789-297259; 5 Sheep St; mains £7-13; ☎ 9.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, to 9.30pm Sun) This quirky space is full of beams, exposed brick, tucked-away spaces and low ceilings to bang your head on. There's a relaxed atmosphere and a tasty menu of burgers, grills and pastas, with some good vegetarian options.

**Coconut Lagoon** (☎ 01789-293546; 21 Sheep St; mains £7.50-13; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 5-11pm Tue-Sun) Fusing culinary influences as diverse as Dutch, Portuguese and South Indian, this elegantly decorated restaurant has the tastiest curry around. Highlights include pork cooked in nutmeg and vinegar and coconut milk-bathed Kerala chicken stew.

**Edward Moon's** (☎ 01789-267069; 9 Chapel St; mains £11-17; ☎ lunch & dinner) Edward Moon was an itinerant cook who worked in the colonial service and loved English food spiced with local ingredients. His philosophy inspires the food at this charming, glass-fronted brasserie.

**Lambs** (☎ 01789-292554; 12 Sheep St; mains £11-18; ☎ noon-2pm Mon-Sun, plus 5-10pm Mon-Sat, 6-9.30pm Sun) The classiest joint in town – from the imposing manor-house door to the aristocratic interior, to the delectable cuisine (pan-fried calves liver £16) and a fancy wine list.

Other recommendations:

**Oscar's** (☎ 01789-292202; 13/14 Meer St; sandwiches £3.50-4.30; ☎ 11.30am-late) This small cafe does appetising breakfasts, lunches and afternoon tea, and has live music or DJs in the evening.

**Georgetown** (☎ 01789-204445; 23 Sheep St; mains £8.50-15; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 5-11pm Mon-Sat) Fresh daisies on each table, chandeliers: there is more than a hint of Raffles at this classy vegetarian-friendly Malaysian restaurant.

**Russos** (☎ 01789-268822; 8 Church St; mains £9-17.50; ☎ noon-2pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sat) Quaint, beam-laden dining rooms have a regularly changing menu of seasonal food, from hefty meat dishes to vegetarian specials.

**Malbec** (☎ 01789-269106; 6 Union St; mains £13.50-17.50; ☎ noon-2pm Tue-Sat, plus 7-9.30pm Tue-Thu, 6-9.30pm Fri & Sat) Very swish but relaxed restaurant with a delicious, à la carte menu and personable service. The whitewashed lower level is particularly atmospheric.

## Drinking

**Dirty Duck** (☎ 01789-297312; Waterside) Officially called the 'Black Swan', this enchanting riverside alehouse should be on your list of must-visit pubs in Stratford. It's a favourite postperformance thespian watering hole, and has a roll-call of former regulars (Oliver, Attenborough etc) that reads like an actors' *Who's Who*. The adjoining restaurant (11am to 10pm) is good value.

**Windmill Inn** (☎ 01789-297687; Church St) Ale was flowing here at the same time as rhyming couplets flowed from Shakespeare's quill – it's been around a while. Despite its age it's still one of the liveliest places in town.



**One Elm** (☎ 01789-404919; 1 Guild St) This modern gastropub, smart with leather chairs, trendy wallpaper and a courtyard garden makes a change from all the 'olde worlde' charm. There's a tempting menu of free-range, sustainable goodies.

**Cox's Yard** (☎ 01789-404600; Bridgefoot) Large riverside complex with a pub, cafe and music venue. It's a lovely place to enjoy a coffee, drink or a full-blown meal while watching the swans glide past.

## Entertainment

**Royal Shakespeare Company** (RSC; ☎ 0844 800 1110; www.rsc.org.uk; tickets £8-38; ☎ 9.30am-8pm Mon-Sat) Seeing a RSC production is a must. Major stars have trod the boards here and productions are of very high standard. At the time of writing, the main Royal Shakespeare Theatre was closed for extensive renovations and was due to reopen in 2010. The adjoining Swan Theatre is also closed during this time. In the meantime, performances take place in the striking temporary Courtyard Theatre by the Other Place. The box office is in the foyer of the Courtyard Theatre until the main theatre reopens. Ticket prices depend on the performance and venue, but there are offers for under 25-year-olds, students, seniors and other groups, plus discounts for previews. Call or check the website for details – and book ahead for good seats. There are usually a few tickets sold on the day of performance.

**Stratford Picture House** (☎ 0870 7551 229; www.picturehouses.co.uk; Windsor St; adult/child £7/5) This cinema, tucked away just off the main drag, shows Hollywood blockbusters as well as art-house films.

## Getting There & Away

The train station is a few minutes' walk west of the centre. Chiltern Railways offers direct services to London Marylebone (2¼ hours). Cheap returns (£16.90) are often available after 11am.

National Express destinations from Stratford's Riverside bus station include Birmingham (£7.20, one hour, twice daily), Oxford (£9.20, one hour, daily) and London Victoria (£16.00, 3½ hours, five daily).

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

## Getting Around

### BICYCLE

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

**Clarks Cycles** (☎ 01789-205057; Guild St; per half/full day from £6/10; ☎ 9.15am-5pm Tue-Sat) rents out bikes. It's most easily reached down a little alley off Henley St.

### BOAT

Punts, canoes and rowing boats are available for hire from Avon Boating (p549) by Clopton Bridge – it's under the Thai Boathouse restaurant.

## AROUND STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

If you're tired of looking at historic landmarks and greenery from the ground, **Heart of England Balloons** (☎ 01789-488219; www.ukballoons.com; Cross Lanes Farm, Walcote; 1hr-flight per person £145) based near Alcester, offers the chance to soar above it all in a hot-air balloon. Alcester is about 8 miles west of Stratford-upon-Avon along the A46.

### Charlecote Park

A youthful Shakespeare is said to have poached deer in the grounds of **Charlecote Park** (NT; ☎ 01789-470277; charlecote.park@nationaltrust.org.uk; adult/child £8.20/4.10; ☎ noon-5pm Fri-Tue Mar-Oct, noon-4pm Sat & Sun Dec). Deer still roam the park, which was skilfully landscaped by Capability Brown. The house, built around 1551, has an interior redesigned in Elizabethan style in the early 19th century; the Victorian kitchen and Tudor gatehouse are particularly interesting. Charlecote is in Wellesbourne, around 5 miles east of Stratford-upon-Avon. Bus 18 runs from Stratford at quarter past every hour.

### Ragley Hall

The family home of the Marquess and Marchioness of Hertford, **Ragley Hall** (☎ 01789-762090; www.ragleyhall.com; adult/child £8.50/5; ☎ 10am-6pm Sun-Fri mid-Jul-Aug; hours vary rest of year) is a grand Palladian mansion built between 1679 and 1683, with a later baroque plasterwork ceiling and some good modern paintings. The intriguing South Staircase Hall with its murals and ceiling painting was restored between 1969 and 1983. Youngsters weary of behaving themselves indoors can be turned loose in Ragley Adventure Wood, a forest playground.

Taking in a play or concert in the beautiful landscaped gardens is a real summer pleasure, weather permitting. Ragley is 2 miles south-west of Alcester off the A435/A46, or about 10 miles west of Stratford-upon-Avon.

## STAFFORDSHIRE

Stoke-born novelist Arnold Bennett once wrote that Staffordshire was 'unsung by searchers after the extreme', but that doesn't mean that it's boring. Wedged between the urban sprawls of Birmingham and Manchester, the county is surprisingly beautiful, from rolling Cannock Chase, a magnet for walkers and cyclists, to the jagged backbone of the Peak District known as the Roaches. The stern might of Lichfield's cathedral, the wild rides at Alton Towers, and the neoclassical mansion of Shugborough are among the county's other charms.

### Orientation

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

### Information

**Staffordshire Tourism** (☎ 01889-880151; www.staffordshire.gov.uk/tourism) has general information on where to stay and what to do in the county.

### Getting There & Around

**London Midland** (☎ 0844 811 0133; www.londonmidland.com)

**Travel Line** (☎ 0871 200 2233; www.travelinemidlands.co.uk)

**Virgin Trains** (☎ 0845 722 2333; www.virgintrains.co.uk)

### LICHFIELD

pop 27,900

This pretty market town, full of cobbled streets and courtyard gardens, is home to one of the country's most beautiful cathedrals, a monumental three-spired Gothic masterpiece that is visible from miles away. It's also been something of a thinktank in its time: famed wit and lexicographer Samuel Johnson was born here, and Erasmus Darwin, Charles' grandfather and an important man in his own right, lived and studied here for years.

### Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 01543-412121; www.visitlichfield.com; Lichfield Garrick, Castle Dyke; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) doubles as the box office for the Lichfield Garrick theatre.

### Sights & Activities

#### LICHFIELD CATHEDRAL

The magnificent **Lichfield Cathedral** (☎ 01543-306120; free, but donation requested; ☎ 7.30am-6.15pm) boasts a fine Gothic west front adorned with exquisitely carved statues of the kings of England from Edgar to Henry I, and the major saints. Approach the blackened facade from town by Minster Pond and you won't be the first to get goosebumps as you look up to the cathedral's hallmark three spires – especially when they are floodlit by night. Most of what you see dates from the various rebuildings of the Norman cathedral between 1200 and 1350.

A superb illuminated manuscript from 730, the *Lichfield Gospels*, is displayed in the beautifully vaulted mid-13th-century chapterhouse, while the Lady Chapel to the east boasts 16th-century Flemish stained glass. Following archaeological work in 2003, a Saxon statue of the Archangel Gabriel was uncovered beneath the nave, and was on display for a month in 2006. At the time of writing it was expected to be on permanent display from around 2009, if the restoration work was successful.

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

#### OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The amateurish but absorbing **Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum** (☎ 01543-264972; www.samueljohnsonbirthplace.org; Breadmarket St; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Apr-Sep, 11am-3.30pm Oct-Mar) charts the life of one of the most remarkable figures in the history of the English language. Samuel Johnson, the pioneering lexicographer, was born here in 1709 and spent his formative years in this ramshackle, five-floored property that belonged to his bookseller father. Credited with inventing the dictionary, Samuel Johnson was immortalised in the famous biography *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, written by his close friend James Boswell. On the ground floor is a bookshop containing several of Johnson's works.

Grandfather of the more famous Charles, Erasmus Darwin was himself a remarkable

autodidact, doctor, inventor, philosopher and poet, influencing the Romantics. The **Erasmus Darwin House** (☎ 01543-306260; Beacon St; adult/child £3/2; ☎ noon-5pm Tue-Sun, last admission 4.15pm), where he lived from 1758 to 1781, commemorates his life with a video, pictures and personal items. Exhibits and displays illustrate his varied work and association with luminaries such as Wedgwood, Boulton and Watt.

The **Lichfield Heritage Centre** (☎ 01543-256611; Market Sq; adult/child £3.50/1; ☎ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, from 10am Sun) is a nicely presented series of exhibits covering 1300 years of Lichfield history in a former church. Climb the tower (adult/child £2/1) for fine views of the city.

## Sleeping

**32 Beacon St** (☎ 01543-262378; r incl breakfast from £48) An unmarked gem, this is in a lovely centuries-old town house and the friendly proprietors have furnished the rooms impeccably.

**No 8 The Close** (☎ 01543-418483; www.ldb.co.uk/accommodation.htm; 8 The Close; s/d incl breakfast from £28/48) Sitting in the shadow of the cathedral, No 8 The Close is a listed 19th-century town house that's also a family home. There are three comfortable B&B rooms here but there's no sign outside the house; you should call in advance to make arrangements.

**George Hotel** (☎ 01543-414822; www.thegeorge.lichfield.co.uk; 12-14 Bird St; s/d Fri-Sun £50/63, Mon-Thu from £80; P) A maze of rooms winds through this 18th-century coaching inn in the heart of the city. It's well located and comfortable but some of the rooms could do with a revamp.

## Eating & Drinking

**Tudor of Lichfield** (☎ 01543-263951; Bore St; sandwiches £3-5; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun) This cafe scores points over its local rivals in terms of age – the half-timbered building it is housed in was built in 1510. The signs are still there, with a suit of armour glowering over punters as they sip their morning coffee. They also sell a tempting array of hand-made chocolates.

**Chapters Cathedral Coffee Shop** (☎ 01543-306125; 19 The Close; sandwiches & salads £4-5; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) In a charming 18th-century house with a view onto a 13th-century walled garden, this cafe is ideal for afternoon tea, or even Sunday lunch.

**Eastern Eye** (☎ 01543-415047; 19 Bird St; mains £6-12; ☎ 5pm-midnight) An award-winning chef inhabits the kitchen of this smart Indian restaurant –

he earned a place in the *Guinness Book of World Records* in 2005 for producing the biggest curry ever made (at the time).

**Chandlers** (☎ 01543-416688; www.chandlersrestaurant.co.uk; Conduit St; 2-/3-course dinner £14/17.50; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-10pm) With its gleaming brass fittings, shiny wood floors, large, open dining area, and refined Mediterranean-style food, Chandlers is one of the best places to eat out in town. It is on the 1st floor of the old Corn Exchange.

**King's Head** (☎ 01543-256822; 4 Queen St) Samuel Johnson described Lichfield folk as 'the most sober, decent people in England' – but that was 250 years ago, and there are plenty of pubs to go round these days. The King's Head has a welcoming vibe, is a great place to sample real ales and it puts on regular live music.

## Getting There & Away

Buses 112 and 7 run to Birmingham, while the 825 serves Stafford (1¼ hours, hourly). The bus station is opposite the central Lichfield City train station, with trains to Birmingham New St station (30 minutes, every 15 minutes). Direct trains to London Euston (from one hour 15 minutes, around eight daily) depart from Lichfield Trent Valley station, about 1.5 miles from town.

## STOKE-ON-TRENT

pop 240,636

Stoke-on-Trent is Staffordshire's industrial heart, and is famed for its pottery production. There's not too much of interest here for the visitor, however, unless you happen to be a fan of porcelain. For a preview of Stoke, check out Arnold Bennett's memorable descriptions of the area in its industrial heyday in his novel *Anna of the Five Towns* (something of a misnomer as Stoke actually consists of six suburbs).

## Orientation

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

## Information

Ask at the helpful **tourist office** (☎ 01782-236000; www.visitstoke.co.uk; Victoria Hall, Bagnall St,

Hanley; ☎ 9.15am-5.15pm Mon-Sat), adjacent to the bus station, for a map with the locations of the various showrooms, factory shops and visitors centres.

## Sights & Activities

The recently expanded **Wedgwood Visitor Centre** (☎ 0870 606 1759; www.thewedgwoodvisitorcentre.com; Barlaston; Mon-Fri £8.25, Sat & Sun £6.25; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun), set in 81 hectares of attractive parkland, offers an absorbing look at the bone-china production process. Tours take in an extensive collection of historic pieces, and you can watch artisans calmly painting their designs onto china. Best of all, a troupe of Star Wars-esque anthropomorphic robots churn out perfect plates and mugs. Equally interesting are the film and displays on the life of founder Josiah Wedgwood (1730-95). An innovative potter, he was also a driving force behind the construction of England's canal system and the abolition of slavery. Wedgwood celebrates its 250th anniversary in 2009.

The **Potteries Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 01782-232323; Bethesda St, Hanley; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat & 2-5pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat & 1-4pm Sun Nov-Feb) covers the history of the Potteries and houses an impressively extensive ceramics display as well as a fine-art collection (Picasso, Degas).

Constructed around Stoke's last remaining bottle kiln, the **Gladstone Pottery Museum** (☎ 01782-319232; Uttoxeter Rd, Longton; adult/child £6/4.50; ☎ 10am-5pm) presents a taste of what life was like for people working in the Victorian potteries. Those of a scatological bent will enjoy the Flushed With Pride exhibition, which charts the story of the toilet from chamber pots and shared privy holes (with smell effects!) to modern hi-tech conveniences. Buses 6 and 6A go to the museum from Hanley.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Verdon Guest House** (☎ 01782-264244; www.verdonguesthouse.co.uk; 44 Charles St, Hanley; s/d from £25/40; P ☎ wi-fi) A large, lovingly kept B&B in a grand Victorian house near the main bus station. The rooms have recently had a modern makeover and the no-nonsense owners are a mine of local travel advice.

The **Ivy House Restaurant** (☎ 0870 606 1759; www.thewedgwoodvisitorcentre.com; Barlaston; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) is a large buffet-style restaurant and cafe in the Wedgwood Visitor

Centre – all dishes are, of course, served on fine Wedgwood bone china.

## Getting There & Away

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

## AROUND STOKE-ON-TRENT Biddulph Grange Gardens

The superbly landscaped Victorian **Biddulph Grange Gardens** (NT; ☎ 01782-517999; adult/child £6.40/3.20; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Sun late Mar-Oct, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Nov & Dec) present an exotic botanical-world tour, including a Chinese pagoda garden, an Egyptian courtyard, and Italian formal gardens. A highlight is the Rainbow, a huge bank of rhododendrons that flower simultaneously in spring. The gardens are 7 miles north of Stoke; take bus 6A from Hanley bus station (40 minutes, every 20 minutes). The gardens are a short walk from the bus stop.

## Little Moreton Hall

Spectacular black-and-white, timber-framed moated manor house, **Little Moreton Hall** (NT; ☎ 01260-272018; adult/child £6.40/3.20; ☎ 11.30am-5pm Wed-Sun late Mar-Oct, 11.30am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-late Dec) dates back to the 16th century; within its over-the-top exterior there are a series of important wall paintings and an indefinable sense of romance. Little Moreton is off the A34 south of Congleton.

## Alton Towers

The most popular theme park in England, **Alton Towers** (☎ 0870 444 4455; www.altontowers.com; adult/under 12yr £35/26; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Oct-mid-Mar, longer hours mid-Mar-Sep) is a great option for thrill-seekers. There are more than 100 rides, including upside-down roller coasters and log flumes, and new thrills are introduced with relative frequency. Entry prices are almost as steep as the rides and are highest during school holidays.

There's a hotel within the park, but most visitors opt to stay in nearby villages. Alton itself is an attractive village with several B&Bs. The **Dimmingsdale YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9513; www.yha.org.uk; Oakamoor; dm members/nonmembers £14/17) is 2 miles northwest of the park. There are plenty of good rambles around the hostel too.

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

### Drayton Manor

Southern Staffordshire's answer to Alton Towers, **Drayton Manor** (☎ 08708 725252; www.draytonmanor.co.uk; adult/child £23/19; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Easter-Oct, longer hours May-Sep) is another massive theme park. Rides include the Apocalypse, a 54m 'stand up' drop from a tower, and the Pandemonium, in which two rotating gondolas swing with 64 screaming passengers. The park is near junctions 9 and 10 of the M42 on the A4091. Bus 110 leaves from Birmingham Bull St just off Corporation St and goes to Bonehill, just outside Tamworth, from where it is another 15 minutes' walk.

### LEEK

pop 18,768

The attractive market town of Leek serves as a gateway to the Staffordshire moorlands, including the impressive Roaches, making it a convenient base for visiting the Potteries and the Peak District.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01538-483741; tourism.smdc@staffordshire.gov.uk; 1 Market Pl; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) will book rooms for a £3 fee.

**St Edward's Church** (☎ 01538-388134; Church St; 🕒 10am-3pm), completed in 1306, has a beautiful rose window by William Morris' decorative-arts makers.

Described by John Betjeman as 'one of the finest churches in Britain', **All Saints Church** (☎ 01538-382588; Compton; 🕒 11am-4pm Wed & Sat) features Morris & Co stained-glass windows at the eastern end (from designs by Edward Burne-Jones), and ornate Arts and Crafts Movement wall-painting.

**Brindley Mill** (www.brindleymill.net; Mill St; adult/child £2/1.50; 🕒 2-5pm Mon-Wed mid-Jul-Aug, 2-5pm Sat & Sun Easter-Sep) was built in 1752 by canal pioneer James Brindley. It's been beautifully restored and once again mills corn; inside is a small museum dedicated to Brindley and the art of millwrighting.

**Peak Weavers Hotel** (☎ 01538-383729; www.peakweavershotel.co.uk; 21 King St; s/d incl breakfast from £35/80; 📞 📺) is a lovingly restored former mill owner's property (once also a convent). Its bedrooms are light and airy and there is

a great restaurant with a delicious, regularly changing menu.

Bus 18 runs to Leek from Hanley (Stoke-on-Trent, 45 minutes).

### STAFFORD

pop 63,681

The county town of Stafford was once a major crossroads for travellers. It still has a couple of attractions that are worth a look if you happen to be passing by.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01785-619619; Market St; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) is behind the town hall and can give you the low-down on mountain biking and walking in nearby Cannock Chase.

The **Ancient High House** (☎ 01785-619131; Greengate St; admission free; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Sat) is the largest timber-framed town house in the country and has period rooms containing displays on the history of the house since its construction in 1595.

The remains of **Stafford Castle** (☎ 01785-257698; Newport Rd; admission free; 🕒 visitor centre 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar), which was built by the Normans, sit romantically on a hilltop with sweeping views over the landscape. The castle grounds play host to historical re-enactments throughout the summer. There's a small visitors centre and a 'medieval herb garden', as well as a network of forested trails for postpicnic wanderers. It's about a mile from the town centre.

Bus X1 runs between Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent (1¼ hours, every 30 minutes).

### AROUND STAFFORD

The regal, neoclassical mansion of **Shugborough** (☎ 01889-881388; adult/child £12/7, parking £3; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct) is the ancestral home of renowned photographer Lord Lichfield (there's an exhibition of his work here). Started in 1693 and considerably extended during the 18th and 19th centuries, Shugborough has marvellous state rooms and a fine collection of Louis XV and XVI furniture. Shugborough is set on a 'working historic' estate and with the aid of costumed actors you can see what life was like for those living there in the 19th century, including the servants, the farm workers, and a lady in the Mansion House.

Shugborough is 6 miles east of Stafford on the A513; bus 825 runs nearby.

# WORCESTERSHIRE

Serene Worcestershire's southern and western fringes burst with lush countryside, stunning walking trails and attractive riverside market towns, though the northern and eastern plains blend into the West Midlands, and have little to offer to visitors. Plump at the county's core is the capital Worcester, with its magnificent cathedral and world-renowned Royal Worcester Porcelain Works. Just south, the hillside Victorian resort of Great Malvern sits regally at the heart of the rolling Malvern Hills (the Malverns).

## Information

For online information check out [www.visitworcestershire.org](http://www.visitworcestershire.org), and for news try [www.worcesternews.co.uk](http://www.worcesternews.co.uk).

## Activities

The longest riverside walk in the UK, the **Severn Way** winds its way through Worcestershire via Worcester and Upton-upon-Severn, while the **Three Choirs Way** links Worcester to Hereford and Gloucester.

Cyclists can pick up the handy *Elgar Ride Variations* leaflet from tourist offices detailing routes around the Malverns.

## Getting Around

There are a few regular rail links from Worcester, and Kidderminster is the southern railhead of the popular Severn Valley Railway. Buses to rural areas can be frustratingly infrequent.

## WORCESTER

pop 94,029

An ancient cathedral city on the banks of the River Severn, Worcester's (*woos-ter*) postwar architectural clangers and soulless shopping centre tend to eclipse the architectural gems that sprinkle the city. Scratch beneath the surface, however, and you'll be rewarded with a magnificent cathedral, pockets of timber-framed Tudor and elegant Georgian architecture, riverside walks, and tales of the Civil War, which finished here.

## Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 01905-726311; [www.visitworcester.com](http://www.visitworcester.com); Guildhall, High St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) will organise 1½-hour **walking tours** (☎ 01905-222117;

[www.worcesterwalks.co.uk](http://www.worcesterwalks.co.uk); adult £4; ☎ 11am Mon-Fri). Internet access is available at **Coffee Republic** (☎ 01905-25069; 31 High St; per 20 min/1hr £1/3; ☎ 7am-6pm), opposite the Guildhall.

## Sights

### WORCESTER CATHEDRAL

Dominating the centre of the city, the majestic edifice of **Worcester Cathedral** (☎ 01905-732900; [www.worcestercathedral.org.uk](http://www.worcestercathedral.org.uk); suggested donation £3; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) encapsulates an assortment of styles and eras, and is full of the stories and symbols of England's violent past.

The atmospheric Norman crypt is the largest in England and dates back to when St Wulfstan, the only Saxon bishop to hang on to his see under the Normans, started building the cathedral in 1084. Other highlights include a striking 13th-century Lady Chapel and a lovely 12th-century circular chapterhouse.

You'll find the cathedral's most notorious inhabitant, King John, buried in the choir. Famous for his treachery towards older brother Richard Lionheart, and squabbles with the barons that forced him to sign the Magna Carta, John left England in chaos. In a somewhat fitting break from tradition, the stone lion under his feet is biting back. To boost his slim chances of passing the pearly gates, the dying king asked to be buried disguised as a monk.

The strong-legged can tackle the 249 steps up the **tower** (admission adult/child £3/1; ☎ 11am-5pm Sat & school holidays Easter-Sep); once up top, spare a thought for the unhappy Charles II, who surveyed his troops from here during the Battle of Worcester.

One-hour long **cathedral tours** (adult/child £3/free; ☎ 11am & 2.30pm daily Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, Sat only rest of year) run from the gift shop. Evensong is a splendid affair; it's held at 5.30pm Monday to Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and at 4pm Sunday.

### COMMANDERY

Recently reopened after a major refurbishment, the town's history museum, the **Commandery** (☎ 01905-361821; [www.worcestercitymuseums.org.uk](http://www.worcestercitymuseums.org.uk); College St; adult/child £5.25/2.25; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-5pm Sun) is housed in a splendid Tudor building that has been used, among other things, as a monastic hospital, a family home, and King Charles II's Civil War Headquarters during the battle of Worcester in 1651. Engaging audio guides and interactive

## WORCESTER

INFORMATION	
Coffee Republic.....	1 C2
Tourist Office.....	2 C2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Commandery.....	3 D3
Greyfriars.....	4 D2
Guildhall.....	5 C2
Worcester Cathedral.....	6 C3
Worcester Porcelain Works.....	7 D3
SLEEPING	
Burgage House.....	8 C3
Digits House.....	9 C3
Ye Olde Talbot Hotel.....	10 D3
EATING	
Browns.....	11 B2
Glasshouse.....	12 D3
Mac & Jack's Deli.....	13 D2
Quay.....	14 B2
Thai Gallery.....	15 D2
DRINKING	
Cardinal's Hat.....	16 D3
Old Rectifying House.....	17 B2
ENTERTAINMENT	
Marr's Bar.....	18 C1
TRANSPORT	
Bus Station.....	19 B1

exhibits tell the story of the Commandery and of Worcester during key periods in its history. A highlight is the fascinating 'painted chamber', covered with intriguing 15th-century religious frescos.

### ROYAL WORCESTER PORCELAIN WORKS

The king of British porcelain manufacture has come a long way since founder Dr John Wall started making ornate bone china as a hobby in 1751. Granted a royal warrant in 1789, the factory still supplies Her Royal Highness (HRH) with some of her preferred crockery, and now runs an entire visitor complex to promote its wares.

Worth visiting even for those that aren't ceramic-crazy, the **Worcester Porcelain Museum** (☎ 01905-746000; www.worcesterporcelainmuseum.org.uk; Severn St; adult/concession £5/4.25; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) enlivens its exhaustive collection of works with quirky asides detailing everything from the china's use by British Royals to the factory's sidelines in porcelain dentures and 'portable fonts' designed for cholera outbreaks. Entry includes an audio tour.

The enjoyable **Visitor Experience Tour** (adult/concession £5/4.25; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) walks visitors through the porcelain's design and manufacture. Combined tickets for the museum and tour cost £9/8 per adult/child.

You can browse the bewildering array of porcelain goodies in the on-site **shops**, from the daintiest traditional dinnerware sets to bonnet-shaped candle snuffers.

### HISTORICAL PROPERTIES

For more of Worcester's bulldozer-dodging buildings of old, stroll through the idyllic cathedral-side College Green, then amble down Friar St and New St, both lined with lovely Tudor and Elizabethan buildings.

You can duck inside a 1480 timber-framed merchant's house, full of atmospheric wood-panelled rooms and backed by a pretty walled garden, at **Greyfriars** (NT; ☎ 01905-23571; Friar St; adult/child £4.20/2.10; 🕒 1-5pm Wed-Sat Mar-Dec, also Sun Jul-Aug). Also peek into the pompous 18th-century **Guildhall** (High St; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat), the creation of a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren who died in poverty after the city dragged its heels on paying him his dues.

## Sleeping

**Oldbury Farm** (☎ 01905-421357; Lower Broadheath; s/d £35/55; (P)) This blissfully quiet Georgian farmhouse is next to Elgar Birthplace Museum (see opposite), and has airy, country-style rooms. The house comes complete with fishing rights and stables, beautiful views and easy access to local walking routes.

**ourpick** **Burgage House** (☎ 01905-25396; www.burgagehouse.co.uk; 4 College Precincts; s/d £36/65) A well-camouflaged little gem, hidden on a narrow cobbled street overlooking the cathedral. The four huge rooms (three of which are accessed up a beautiful curved stone staircase) are decked out with paintings and tapestries and are elegant yet incredibly homely; those at the front have stunning views. It's run in a warm, unobtrusive manner and is family-friendly.

**Ye Olde Talbot Hotel** (☎ 01905-23573; www.old.english.co.uk; Friar St; s/d £70/90) Attached to a popular bar and bistro right in the centre of town, this pleasantly decorated inn dates back to the 13th century and is pretty good value. Rooms sport rich fabrics, deep colours, modern gadgets and an occasional smattering of antique features. Discounted parking is available nearby.

**Barrington House** (☎ 01905-422965; www.barringtonhouse.eu; 204 Henwick Rd; r £85; (P) (wi-fi)) Lovely Georgian house by the river with wonderful views, pretty walled garden, three plush bedrooms and hearty breakfasts served with eggs from the owners' hens.

**Diglis House** (☎ 01905-353518; www.diglishousehotel.co.uk; Severn St; (P)) This handsome Georgian house has an idyllic setting, right by the water, with town a short stroll along the river. At the time of writing the bedrooms and public areas were undergoing thorough refurbishment and were due to reopen in late 2008. Call or see website for price details. Wheelchair access available.

## Eating

**Quay** (☎ 01905-745792; The Quay; mains £7-14; (V) lunch & dinner) This place has an informal setting right next to the river with plenty of outside tables to soak up the atmosphere. Come for light lunches, afternoon tea or more substantial dinners served in a candlelit dining room.

**Thai Gallery** (☎ 01905-745902; 26-32 Friar St; mains £8-14; (V) lunch & dinner Mon-Sun) In a half-timbered building, carved elephants and Thai paint-

ings sit comfortably with heavy beams and low ceilings. The tasty Thai cuisine packs a punch.

**Glasshouse** (☎ 01905-611120; Danesbury House, College St; mains £13-19, 2-/3-course set lunch £10-14; (V) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun). This shiny, trendy, designer restaurant – all slate floors, grey leather banquettes, and ubermodern fireplaces – may look snooty but the service is friendly and the food delicious, well presented and unpretentious.

**Browns** (☎ 01905-26263; The Old Cornmill, South Quay; mains £14-24; (V) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Housed in a converted Victorian corn mill adjacent to the river, this top-class restaurant was renovated after flooding in 2007 and now has a mezzanine cocktail bar in addition to its stylish but low-key dining room. Classic British cooking with a few French flavours sneaked in is the order of the day here.

**Mac & Jack's Deli** (☎ 01905-731331; 44 Friar St; (V) 9.30am-5.30pm Tue-Thu, 9am-6pm Fri & Sat) Bright little deli and cafe serving perfect picnic fodder such as local meats, cheeses, freshly baked bread and cakes; as well as soups, sandwiches and tarts to eat in.

## Drinking

**Cardinal's Hat** (☎ 01905-22066; 31 Friar St) Despite its traditional old-English pub appearance, this atmospheric Worcester institution has a decidedly Austrian flavour. It sells Austrian beers in traditional steins and flutes and a choice of Austrian food at lunchtime.

**Old Rectifying House** (☎ 01905-619622; www.theoldrec.co.uk; North Pde; (V) noon-1am) This multi-gabled riverside pile has a laid-back lounge bar over a chic restaurant. There's a good selection of real ales and lagers and solid English food such as bangers and mash, fish and chips, and all-day breakfasts. DJs play chill-out music on the weekends.

## Entertainment

**Marr's Bar** (☎ 01905-613336; www.marrsbar.co.uk; 12 Pierpoint St; (V) from 8pm) The best live-music venue for miles around, Marr's still has its original sprung dance floors from its days as a dance studio and you can bounce on them to your heart's content most nights thanks to packed listings. Gigs range from acoustic sessions to comedy.

If sport is your thing you can catch spring and summer racing at **Worcester Racecourse** (☎ 0870 220 2772; www.worcester-racecourse.co.uk),



while the central **Worcestershire County Cricket Ground** (☎ 01905-337921; www.wccc.co.uk) is a lovely spot to cheer on the chaps.

### Getting There & Around

Worcester has two stations but most trains run to Worcester Foregate (the other is Worcester Shrub Hill). Trains run hourly to London Paddington (£32.30, 2¼ to three hours) and Hereford (£6.80, 43 to 50 minutes).

National Express has two direct daily services to London Victoria (£21.10, four hours). Bus 44 runs to Great Malvern (30 minutes, twice-hourly), bus 363 goes to Upton-upon-Severn (30 minutes, hourly), and bus 417 goes to Ledbury (50 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday).

Bikes can be hired from **Peddlers** (☎ 01905-24238; 46 Barbourne Rd; per day from £8).

## AROUND WORCESTER

### Elgar Birthplace Museum

England's greatest classical composer receives due pomp and circumstance at the **Elgar Birthplace Museum** (☎ 01905-333224; www.elgarmuseum.org; Lower Broadheath; adult/child £6/2; ☎ 11am-5pm), partly housed in the humble cottage in which he was born in 1857, 3 miles west of Worcester. You can browse through an engrossing collection of the walrus-mustachioed composer's possessions, which range from his gramophone and musical manuscripts to endearing doodlings in the morning paper. Admission includes an audio tour with musical interludes so you can appreciate what all the fuss is really about.

Bus 308 goes from Worcester to Broadheath Common, a short walk from the museum (15 minutes, three times daily Monday to Saturday).

### Witley Court

One of the country's most romantic ruins, **Witley Court** (EH; ☎ 01299-896636; Great Witley; adult/5-15yr/under 5yr £5.20/2.60/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Feb) was a lavish Italianate mid-19th-century home left to rot after a disastrous fire in 1937. It now acts as a stunning folly crowning the Victorian splendour of its restored landscaped grounds. The spectacular Perseus and Andromeda fountain is one of Europe's biggest.

### A COTTAGE OF YOUR OWN

To tour the countryside from your own base, try these websites for self-catering properties:

**Eco Cabin** (www.ecocabin.co.uk)

**Farm Stay Worcs** (www.farmstayworcs.co.uk)

**Lunnon Farm** (www.lunnoncottages.co.uk)

**Shropshire Cottages** (www.shropshirecottages.com)

**Sykes Cottages** (www.sykescottages.co.uk)

Don't miss the glittering gilded-plaster interior at the neighbouring **Great Witley Church** (www.greatwitleychurch.org.uk), the most magnificent baroque church in England. It's home to paintings by Bellucci and a glorious organ that composer Handel once played.

Bus 758 from Worcester to Tenbury Wells passes eight times daily (55 minutes).

### Droitwich Spa & Around

The centre of England's salt industry since the Iron Age, thanks to brine springs that are 10 times stronger than sea water, Droitwich transformed itself into a fashionable spa town in the 19th century when the industry began to decline. Today there are still public baths and several elaborate medieval buildings worth seeing.

Housed in the former brine baths, the **tourist office** doubles as the town's **Heritage Centre** (☎ 01905-774312; Victoria Sq; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat).

The area's biggest attraction is stately home **Hanbury Hall** (NT; ☎ 01527-821214; School Rd; adult/child £7.20/3.60; ☎ 1-5pm Sat-Wed Mar-Oct), 4 miles east of Droitwich Spa. Built in 1701, the house is famed for its painted ceilings, elaborate staircase and stunning grounds.

To Droitwich Spa's west, **Ombersley** is so perfect a medieval village it looks like it was created by a Hollywood film crew. Its magpie black-and-white main road is studded with excellent pubs and eateries that include the wonderful **Venture Inn** (☎ 01905-620552; Main Rd; 3-course lunch/dinner £21.50/34; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun), serving modern British cuisine in a supposedly haunted building dating from 1430.

Bus 303 runs to Worcester (25 minutes) hourly.

## Redditch

Stuck in a featureless commuter belt to big-city Birmingham, Victorian Redditch once dominated the world's needle trade, and the often-grisly tale is told in the lively **Forge Mill Needle Museum & Bordesley Abbey Visitor Centre** (☎ 01527-62509; www.forgemill.org.uk; Needle Mill Lane; adult/child £3.90/1; 🕒 11am-4.30pm Mon-Fri & 2-5pm Sat & Sun Easter-Sep, 11am-4pm Mon-Thu & 2-5pm Sun Oct-Nov & Feb-Easter), where the original water-powered machinery still runs on weekends. The museum sits on the riverside grounds of ruined 12th-century Bordesley Abbey.

Bus 350 goes direct to Worcester (55 minutes) three times daily; at other times change in Bromsgrove (15 minutes).

## GREAT MALVERN

pop 35,558

This well-to-do Victorian spa town tumbles prettily down the slopes of the gorgeous **Malvern Hills**, which soar upwards from the flat Worcestershire plains. The place positively glows with health and well-being courtesy of its lush hill views, wide tree-lined avenues, booted hikers and pure spring waters that bubble up in unexpected places. Today the medicinal waters that first attracted overindulgent Victorians are harnessed for a successful bottled-water business.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01684-892289; www.malvern.hills.gov.uk; 21 Church St; 🕒 10am-5pm) is brimming with walking and cycling information. The **Library** (☎ 01684-566553; Graham Rd; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon, Fri & Sat, 9.30am-8pm Tue-Thu) has free internet access; bring ID.

In June the town goes music-mad in the biannual **Elgar Festival** (☎ 01684-892277; www.elgar-festival.com) to celebrate the life and works of the composer who lived nearby at Malvern Link.

## Sights & Activities

### GREAT MALVERN PRIORY

The 11th-century **Great Malvern Priory** (☎ 01684-561020; www.greatmalvernpriory.org.uk; Church St; suggested donation £3; 🕒 9am-6.30pm Apr-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) is packed with remarkable features: it's lined with clumsy Norman pillars and hides a delightfully bizarre collection of 14th-century misericords under the tip-up seats of the monks' stalls. Every one a delight, they depict everything from three rats hanging a cat to the mythological basilisk, and run through domestic labours of the months from the 15th century.

### MALVERN MUSEUM OF LOCAL HISTORY

Straddling the pathway in the grand Priory Gatehouse (1470), the **Malvern Museum of Local History** (☎ 01684-567811; Abbey Rd; adult/child £2/50p; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Easter-Oct, except Wed during school term) offers a small but thorough exploration of the things for which Great Malvern is renowned, from hills geology to Victorian water cures.

### MALVERN THEATRES

One of the country's best provincial theatres, **Malvern Theatre** (☎ 01684-892277; www.malvern-theatre.co.uk; Grange Rd) packs in a lively program of classical music, dance, comedy, drama and cinema.

The quirkily little **Theatre of Small Convenience** (☎ 01684-568933; www.wctheatre.co.uk; Edith Walk) is set in a converted Victorian men's lavatory decked out in theatrical Italianate flourishes. It's one of the world's smallest theatres, seating just 12 people for acts that range from puppetry to opera.

### WALKING

The jack-in-the-box Malvern Hills, which pop up dramatically out of the innocently low Severn plains on the boundary between Worcestershire and Herefordshire, are made up of 18 named peaks; highest of the bunch being Worcester Beacon at 419m. The hills are criss-crossed by more than 100 miles of paths; trail guides (£1.75) are available at the tourist office. More than 70 springs and fountains pouring out the famous medicinal waters are dotted around the hills, and the tourist office has a map guide (£3.95) to all of them.

### Sleeping

**Como House** (☎ 01684-561486; www.comohouse.co.uk; Como Rd; s/d £40/60; 📶 📺 wi-fi) This handsome Malvern-stone converted schoolhouse has three tastefully furnished, south-facing rooms, a self-catering apartment and a large garden, complete with a bridged pond and numerous statues. The owner picks guests up from the station and drops them off at walking points.

**Bredon House Hotel** (☎ 01684-566990; www.bredonhouse.co.uk; 34 Worcester Rd; s/d from £45/70; 📶 📺) A short saunter from the centre, this genteel family- and pet-friendly Victorian hotel has superb views and courteous service. Rooms are decorated in a quirky but tasteful mix of new and old, and the books, magazines and family photographs dotted around the communal areas give it a homely feel.

**Cottage in the Wood Hotel** (☎ 01684-575859; www.cottageinthewood.co.uk; Holywell Rd, Malvern Wells; s/d from £92/135; (P) ☑) This grand old traditional hotel is a Malverns institution. Rooms are somewhat frumpy but its position – swaddled by woodland, with sweeping views over the hills – is marvellous. There's a popular fine-dining restaurant here and a 600-strong wine list.

Other possibilities:

**Copper Beech** (☎ 01684-565013; www.copperbeehouse.co.uk; 32 Avenue Rd; s/d from £43/70; (P) ☑) Wonderful guest house in a dignified late-Victorian building, about 1 mile from the town centre.

**Treherne House** (☎ 01684-572445; www.trehernehouse.co.uk; 53 Guarford Rd; r from £90; (P) ☑) This fine old gentleman's residence-turned-boutique B&B has sumptuous bedrooms with a hint of French reproduction styling and to-die-for food. It's on the outskirts of town.

## Eating

**St Ann's Well Cafe** (☎ 01684-560285; St Ann's Well; piece of cake £2; ☑ lunch daily Apr-Sep, Sat & Sun only Oct-Mar) The best of Malvern's many cafes is in a handsome early-19th-century villa, a steep 99-step ascent from town. It rewards the climb with great vegetarian and vegan food, wholesome salads and sinful cakes, which you can wash down with fresh spring water that bubbles into a carved basin by the door.

**Pepper and Oz** (☎ 01684-562676; 23 Abbey Rd; mains £7-18.50; ☑ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Right by the museum, this brasserie has a lovely alfresco terrace and photography gallery, and serves solid classics such as butch Herefordshire steaks. There's a decent wine list and it also does good-value pretheatre menus.

**Anupam** (☎ 01684-573814; 85 Church St; mains £8-13; ☑ lunch & dinner) This stylish and passionate Indian restaurant is just off the main road. Walls coated in primary colours and bubbly service put guests in a cheerful mood, and superb dishes such as duck with lemon and garam masala keep them that way.

**Leaf Coffee and Food House** (☎ 01684-574989; 1 Edith Walk; mains £9-13; ☑ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sun) Big wooden tables and fresh flowers welcome visitors to this wholesome cafe. They use locally sourced and fair-trade produce to make great salads, sandwiches, burgers and cakes.

## Getting There & Around

There are twice-hourly trains to Worcester (12 to 18 minutes) and every half-hour to Hereford (£6.50, 30 minutes). Trains also go regularly to Ledbury (13 minutes).

National Express runs one bus daily to London (£21.10, 3½ hours) via Worcester (20 minutes). Bus 44 connects Worcester (30 minutes, hourly) with Great Malvern.

Handy for walkers, the 244 – otherwise known as the 'Malvern Hills Hopper' – runs a hop-on, hop-off service (five daily weekends and Bank Holidays mid-April to October) through the hills to Upton-upon-Severn and Eastnor Castle.

## UPTON-UPON-SEVERN

pop 1789

A sweet little town with a random mix of Tudor and Georgian buildings lining its narrow meandering streets, Upton makes for a pleasant stop or a visit for the **Oliver Cromwell jazz festival** (☎ 01684-593254; www.uptonjazz.co.uk) at the end of June.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01684-594200; upton.tic@malvernhills.gov.uk; 4 High St; ☑ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) has details. Walkers and map enthusiasts should head for the **Map Shop** (☎ 01684-593146; www.themapshop.co.uk; 15 High St), which has the best selection in the county.

The town's oldest building, a stunted tower nicknamed the 'Peppertop' for its round-topped shape, now houses the **Heritage Centre** (☎ 01684-592679; Church St; admission free; ☑ 1.30-4.30pm mid-April-Sep), where displays detail the town's history. Opposite is **Tudor House** (☎ 01684-592447; 16 Church St; adult/concession £1/50p; ☑ 2-5pm Apr-Oct), with a haphazard collection of local life and history – some decidedly on the quirky side.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Tiltridge Vineyard** (☎ 01684-592906; www.tiltridge.com; Upper Hook Rd; s/d £40/65; (P) ☑) A homey farmhouse B&B connected to a thriving vineyard 1 mile west of town, Tiltridge offers little treats such as sampling its award-winning wines on the south-facing terrace, and a terrific breakfast made with freshly laid eggs, local apple juice and homemade jams. There are three simple country-style rooms, and packed lunches are available.

**White Lion** (☎ 01684-592551; www.whitelionhotel.biz; 21 High St; s/d £70/99; (P) ☑) This 16th-century coaching inn, famous for the Civil War connections and its place in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, is now known just as well for its richly furnished classic rooms and romantic oak-beamed and candlelit restaurant (mains £10.50 to £19) serving excellent modern British food. Wheelchair access is available.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 363 runs between Upton and Worcester (30 minutes) at least nine times daily from Monday to Saturday (less frequently on Sunday).

# HEREFORDSHIRE

Sleepy, rural Herefordshire is well off the mainstream tourist track. It can be difficult to negotiate, especially without a car, but your efforts will be rewarded by a tapestry of lush fields, black-and-white timbered villages, twisting lanes and more than enough leafy orchards to give you a taste for the county's famous ciders. The scenic River Wye ambles through the county, tempting canoeists and other water babies. County capital Hereford is home to a small cathedral, where you'll find the superb medieval Mappa Mundi; and perched on the border with Wales is renowned bookshop king, Hay-on-Wye.

## Information

For online county-wide information on attractions, accommodation and events:

**Visit Heart of England** ([www.visitheartofengland.com](http://www.visitheartofengland.com))

**Visit Herefordshire** ([www.visitherefordshire.co.uk](http://www.visitherefordshire.co.uk))

## Activities

Herefordshire is a haven for walkers, with several established long-distance paths meandering through it (see p528). **Offa's Dyke Path** hugs the Welsh border, while the 107-mile Wye Valley Walk begins in Chepstow (Wales) and follows the river upstream into Herefordshire and then on to Rhayader in Wales. The **Three Choirs Way** is a 100-mile route connecting the cathedrals of Hereford, Worcester and Gloucester, where the music festival of the same name has been celebrated for more than three centuries.

The **Herefordshire Trail** ([www.herefordshiretrail.com](http://www.herefordshiretrail.com)) is a 150-mile circular loop linking Leominster, Ledbury, Ross-on-Wye and Kingston.

## Getting Around

Busy railway stations with nationwide links can be found at Hereford, Leominster and Ledbury. To plan your way about, pick up a free *Public Transport Map & Guide* from tourist offices and bus stations, or

go online through **Hereford Bus** ([www.herefordbus.info](http://www.herefordbus.info)) and **National Traveline** (☎ 0870 200 2233; [www.traveline.midlands.co.uk](http://www.traveline.midlands.co.uk)).

## HEREFORD

pop 56,353

Straddling the River Wye at the heart of the county, agricultural capital Hereford is known for its cattle, cider and relationship with the composer Elgar. Even though it's the county capital it has a sluggish, provincial feel, although there are some youthful pockets in the centre and along its riverside. Hereford's most cherished possession is the extraordinary medieval map, the Mappa Mundi, housed in its dignified cathedral.

## Orientation & Information

The triangular, pedestrianised High Town is the city's heart, just north of the River Wye. The cathedral is close to the river, while the bus and train stations lie to the northeast, on Commercial Rd.

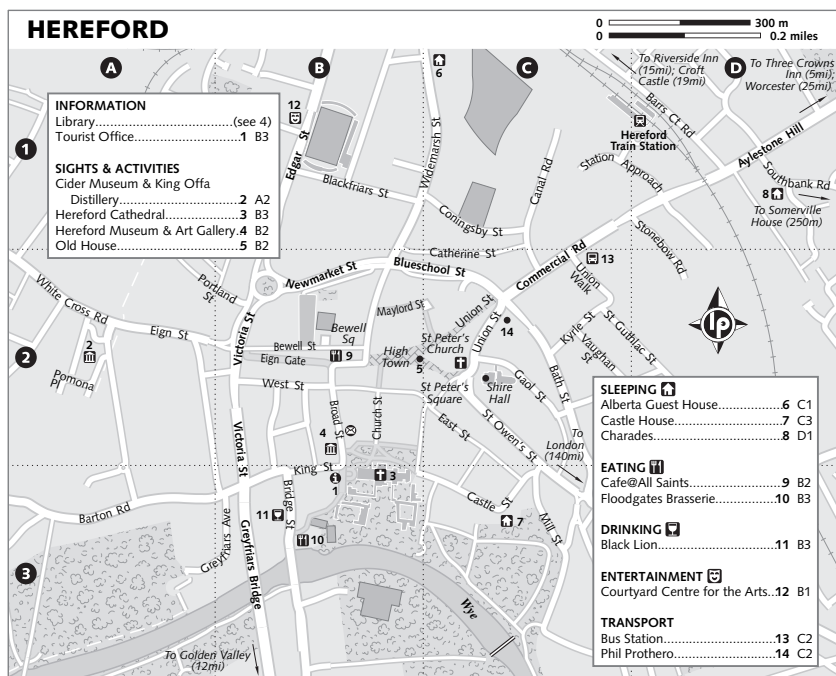
The **tourist office** (☎ 01432-268430; [www.visitherefordshire.co.uk](http://www.visitherefordshire.co.uk); 1 King St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is opposite the cathedral. **Guided walks** (£3; ☎ 11am Mon-Sat, 2.30pm Sun May-Sep) start from here. There's free internet access at the **library** (Broad St; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Tue-Wed & Fri, 9.30am-5.30pm Thu, 9.30am-4pm Sat), in the same building as the Hereford Museum & Art Gallery.

## Sights

### HEREFORD CATHEDRAL

After the Welsh torched the town's original cathedral, the new **Hereford Cathedral** (☎ 01432-374200; [www.herefordcathedral.org](http://www.herefordcathedral.org); 5 College Cloisters; suggested donation £4; ☎ 7.30am-Evensong) began life on the same site in the 11th century. The building has evolved into a well-packaged lesson on the entire history of English architecture: the sturdy south transept is Norman but holds a 16th-century triptych; the exquisite north transept with its soaring windows dates from the 13th century; the choir and the tower date from the 14th century; and the Victorian influence is visible almost everywhere.

But the cathedral is best known for two ancient treasures housed here. The magnificent 13th-century **Mappa Mundi** (adult/child £4.50/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat & 11am-3pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) is a large calfskin vellum map intricately painted with the vivid world vision of the era's scholars, and an enthralling pictorial encyclopedia of the times. It is the largest



and best-preserved example of this type of cartography anywhere, but more than that it's a bewitching journey through the world as then envisioned, roamed by basilisks and mythological monsters. Navigate your way through the barely recognisable mash of continents and you can even find Hereford itself.

The same wing contains the world's largest surviving **chained library**, hooked to its shelves by a cascade of long thin shackles. The unique collection of rare books and manuscripts includes a 1217 copy of the revised Magna Carta and the 8th-century *Hereford Gospels*, although the gospels' fragility means they aren't always on display.

The cathedral comes alive with Evensong at 5.30pm Monday to Saturday and 3.30pm on Sunday, and every three years in August it holds the famous **Three Choirs Festival** ([www.3choirs.org](http://www.3choirs.org)), shared with Gloucester and Worcester Cathedrals.

## OTHER SIGHTS

Marooned in a sea of bustling shops, the **Old House** (☎ 01432-260694; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat year-round, plus 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep) is a

wonderfully creaky black-and-white, three-storey wooden house, built in 1621, panelled and furnished in exquisitely carved wood.

The quirky collection at **Hereford Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 01432-260692; Broad St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat year-round, plus 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep) includes just about everything from 19th-century witches' curses to Roman antiquities. There's also some dressing-up gear to keep kids entertained.

Don't forget to claim your free samples in the **Cider Museum & King Offa Distillery** (☎ 01432-354207; [www.cidermuseum.co.uk](http://www.cidermuseum.co.uk); Pomona Pl; adult/child £3.50/2; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar), which explores cider-making history. Look for the fine costrels (minibarrels) and horn mugs used by agricultural workers to carry and quaff their wages, which were partially paid in cider.

## Sleeping

**Charades** (☎ 01432-269444; [www.charadeshereford.co.uk](http://www.charadeshereford.co.uk); 34 Southbank Rd; s/d £45/65; 📍) This imposing Georgian house built around 1870 has five recently revamped, comfortable rooms, some with soul-restoring views over the countryside.

The house itself has character in spades – look for old service bells in the hall. It's handy for the bus station, but a 1km walk from the cathedral.

**Castle House** (☎ 01432-356321; www.castlehse.co.uk; Castle St; s £120, d £175-220; (P)) This refined multiaward-winning Georgian town house, once the bishop's residence, is Hereford's best boutique hotel. Rooms have rich fabrics and classic decor with full modern conveniences. There's a lovely garden and riverside seating, as well as a seriously sophisticated restaurant with an inventive menu. Wheelchair access is available.

Other possibilities:

**Alberta Guest House** (☎ 01432-270313; www.thealbertaguesthouse.co.uk; 5-13 Newtown Rd; s/d £30/55; (P)) Simple but warm welcome in the town's north.

**Somerville House** (☎ 01432-273991; www.somervillehouse.net; 12 Bodenham Rd; s/d £50/79; (P)) Victorian villa with beautiful gardens and terrace and modern boutique-style rooms, 250m away from the centre.

## Eating

**Cafe@All Saints** (☎ 01432-370414; www.cafeatallsaints.co.uk; High St; mains £3.60-8.75; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Sit underneath great stone arches as you sip fair-trade coffee or chow down on wholesome (mostly vegetarian) lunches in this natty two-level cafe in a working church. You can even enjoy a glass of wine – just remember, God's watching.

**Floodgates Brasserie** (☎ 01432-349000; Left Bank Village, Bridge St; mains £12.50-18; ☎ lunch & dinner) Part of the Left Bank Village complex, in a prime riverside spot, this sleek modern restaurant is slightly lacking in character but it has a lovely terrace overlooking the river, a sunny interior and a fine modern European menu.

**ourpick Three Crowns Inn** (☎ 01432-820279; www.threecrownsinn.com; Ullingswick; mains £15; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Burrow into the countryside, 5 miles northeast of Hereford, to find this gorgeous 16th-century half-timbered gastropub. It's worth seeking out for its delicious organic food, rare-breed meats and homemade cheese. It also has classy rooms (singles/doubles £80/95).

## Drinking & Entertainment

**Black Lion** (☎ 01432-343535; 31 Bridge St) The more real ales and local ciders you knock back in this traditional pub, the more you may believe the tales of resident ghosts from the site's history as a monastery, an orphanage, a brothel

and even a Chinese restaurant – presumably a colourful crew. Ghosts aside, it's one of the friendliest inns in the area and often stages live gigs.

**Courtyard Centre for the Arts** (☎ 0870 112 2330; www.courtyard.org.uk; Edgar St) This lively arts centre has two venues staging a busy schedule of comedy, theatre, film and poetry.

## Getting There & Around

Hire bikes at **Phil Prothero** (☎ 01432-359478; Bastion Mews) for £12 per day.

There are hourly trains to London Paddington (£37.20, 3¼ hours) via Newport, South Wales; and to Birmingham (£12.90, 1½ hours). National Express goes to London (£20.40, 4¼ hours, four daily), Heathrow (£21.10, 4¼ hours, two daily), Gloucester (£5.90, 1¼ hours, five daily) and Ross-on-Wye (30 minutes, four daily) or Ledbury (25 minutes, two daily).

From the bus station, bus 420 runs every two hours to Worcester (1¼ hours). Bus 38 runs hourly to Ross-on-Wye (40 minutes, six on Sunday), and bus 476 goes hourly to Ledbury (30 minutes, five on Sunday) – both from the bus station on Commercial Rd.

## AROUND HEREFORD

### Golden Valley

Nudging the foot of the Black Mountains, this lush valley was made famous by children's author CS Lewis (of *Narnia* acclaim) and the film that sought to portray him, *Shadowlands*. It follows the meandering River Dore (hence the name) and boasts gently undulating vistas peppered with historical ruins.

For more details or accommodation ideas, see [www.golden-valley.co.uk](http://www.golden-valley.co.uk).

## Aymestrey & Around

**ourpick Riverside Inn** (☎ 01568-708440; www.theriversideinn.org; Aymestrey; s/d £50/75; (P)) is a classic 16th-century black-and-white coaching inn resting alongside the River Lugg in the diminutive village of Aymestrey. There are terraced gardens behind the inn as well as tables right down by the river from where to enjoy bewitching views of the gurgling waters. Hop-strewn beams and red lamps mellow the bar and restaurant, and there are a handful of rustic bedrooms containing sturdy wooden furniture and rough walls. The modern British menu (mains £12 to £16) uses overwhelmingly local produce, much of it freshly plucked from the

## BLACK-AND-WHITE VILLAGES

A triangle of Tudor England survives almost untouched in northwest Herefordshire, where higgledy-piggledy black-and-white villages cluster round idyllic greens, seemingly oblivious to the modern world. A wonderful 40-mile circular drive follows the **Black-and-white-village Trail**, meandering past the most handsome timber-framed buildings, old churches and tranquil villages. You can pick up a guide from any tourist office for 75p (there are also CD versions and an accommodation pamphlet available).

The route starts at **Leominster** and climaxes at **Eardisland**, one of the prettiest of all the villages. Also memorable is chocolate-box **Pembridge**, with its gaggle of classic houses; it makes a good base for touring the area, with lots of circular walks radiating from the village and the Mortimer Trail just to the north.

For stunning food and cosy accommodation head for the award-winning **Stagg Inn** (☎ 01544-230221; www.thestagg.co.uk; Titled; s £50-60, d £70-90; ☹ closed Sun evening & Mon). The first pub to be awarded a Michelin star, this is a wonderfully welcoming place that combines culinary excellence with a laid-back approach (mains £13 to £17). Roaring fires and antiques complement the warm ambience, and there are a handful of lovely rooms, making the roll home with a full and happy belly all the easier.

The 3-mile Titled Loop Walk begins here and winds through gorgeous countryside, making it a good way to work up an appetite.

inn's own herb and vegetable garden. Walkers should note that this place is about midway along the Mortimer Trail; it makes a wonderful stopover or a thirst-quenching pause to indulge in the real local ale. Aymestrey is on the A4110, 15 miles north of Hereford.

Two miles east of Aymestrey, and well beyond reach of a bus, is castellated country house **Croft Castle** (NT; ☎ 01568-780246; off the B4362; adult/child £6.50/3.25; ☹ 1-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Sep, 1-4pm Sat & Sun Mar & Oct), worth the trip if you're turned on by flamboyant 18th-century interiors.

## Kilpeck Church

Deep in the Herefordshire countryside is the tiny hamlet of Kilpeck, home to a beguiling little Norman church that has barely changed since the 12th century. Original carvings encircle the building, from cartoon like pigs and bunnies, mythical monsters, grimacing heads, to a famous spread-legged *sheila-na-gig* (Celtic fertility figure). It's an extraordinary sight, well worth the 1-mile trip south of the main A465 road that comes from Hereford. Kilpeck is 9 miles south of Hereford, off the A465.

## HAY-ON-WYE

pop 1450

Your inner bookworm will wriggle with joy upon discovery of Hay-on-Wye: this tiny border town has totally submitted itself to

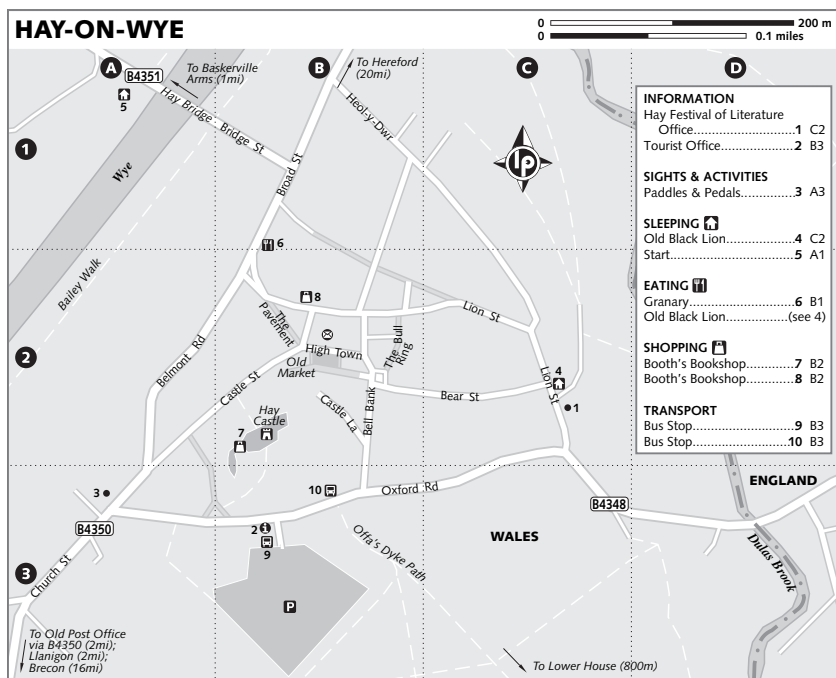
the second-hand book trade and is a point of pilgrimage for idle browsers, eagle-eyed collectors, and serious academics from around the world. That said, it's not just for book nuts but for anyone who enjoys a flick through everything from murder mysteries to classic children's stories to fascinating antique travel tomes.

The town straddles the border with Wales and on 1 April 1977 it famously declared itself independent from Britain, inviting a storm of publicity from around the world (see boxed text, p567). Every year for a week in May/June, the town becomes the centre of the literary universe for the **Hay Festival of Literature** (www.hayfestival.com), attracting big shots from the worlds of literature, art and politics, from Salman Rushdie to Jimmy Carter. For further information contact the **Hay Festival Office** (☎ 0870 727 2848; Drill Hall, 25 Lion St).

The **tourist office** (☎ 01497-820144; www.hay-on-wye.co.uk; Oxford Rd; ☹ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Easter-Oct, 11am-1pm & 2-4pm Nov-Easter) is by the main car park. It has a couple of internet terminals.

## Activities

Hay sits on the northeastern corner of Brecon Beacons National Park and makes an excellent base to explore western Herefordshire and the Welsh Black Mountains. The **Offa's Dyke Path** walking route (see p528) passes nearby. The Offa's Dyke Flyer circular minibus runs three times on summer Sundays and Bank Holidays



to help you along the way. The tourist office has schedules.

For fun on the River Wye, hire kayaks and Canadian canoes from **Paddles & Pedals** (☎ 01497-820604; [www.canoehire.co.uk](http://www.canoehire.co.uk); 15 Castle St; canoes per half-full day £25/35; ☞ Easter-Oct), which, despite the name, doesn't do bikes. Rental prices include return transport to points along the Wye, depending on which route you're taking.

## Sleeping

Don't bet on a bed *anywhere* nearby while the festival is on.

**Start** (☎ 01497-821391; [www.the-start.net](http://www.the-start.net); Hay Bridge; s/d £35/60; ☞) This 18th-century stone cottage stands alone on a grassy bank on the opposite side of the river, giving it a blissful feeling of space and solitude despite it being only a short scenic walk across the bridge. Patchwork quilts adorn the pleasant country-style rooms – some of which have a view of the river – and there are good lock-up and drying facilities for hikers and bikers. Packed lunches and afternoon teas are also available.

**Old Black Lion** (☎ 01497-820841; [www.oldblacklion.co.uk](http://www.oldblacklion.co.uk); Lion St; s/d £42.50/95; ☞) Atmospheric 17th-century inn full of blackened oak beams and moody lighting. The 10 spacious bedrooms are full of sturdy county furniture and rich fabrics, and each has its own show-stealing teddy bear.

**Old Post Office** (☎ 01497-820008; [www.oldpost-office.co.uk](http://www.oldpost-office.co.uk); Llanigon; d from £60; ☞) If you've got your own wheels, this gorgeous converted village post office, 2 miles southwest of Hay on the B4350, is a fantastic option – all polished-oak floors, exposed beams, earthy colours and rural Welsh furniture. Breakfast is vegetarian: no artery-clogging meat feasts here.

**ourpick Lower House** (☎ 01497-820773; [www.lowerhousegardenhay.co.uk](http://www.lowerhousegardenhay.co.uk); Cusop Dingle; s/d £65/85; ☞) Wonderful guest house in a luscious self-contained valley of woods, orchard, fields and a stream. The two pretty guest rooms have wooden floors, window seats, retro radios and awesome views; one has wood-panelled walls and its own private sitting room, and, this being Hay-on-Wye, both rooms come with a healthy selection of books. The rooms share a heavily beamed



## KING OF HAY-ON-WYE

King of the world's first book town, Richard Booth opened his first bookshop in Hay in 1961, but was dismayed by the falling fortunes and declining populations of rural areas. Not content to sit back and watch, he hatched a wacky plan to regenerate the town.

By 1977 he had persuaded a clutch of other booksellers to join him, and on April Fools' Day that year declared the border town independent from Britain. The town celebrated with a giant party as Booth was crowned in royal robes, orb and a sceptre made from an old ball cock and copper piping. As weird as the idea was, it had the desired effect and Hay hit the headlines all over the country.

Over 30 years on, Hay has more bookshops than even the most dedicated bibliophile can handle, and a host of thriving local businesses catering to the five million visitors a year. It has also been the inspiration for roughly 20 other international book towns, often in rural areas facing similar decline.

Aspiring lords and ladies can even apply for Hay Peerage, awarded by the king himself. See [www.richardbooth.demon.co.uk/haypeerage/](http://www.richardbooth.demon.co.uk/haypeerage/) for information.

guest drawing room complete with fireplace and grand piano. The house is about a 800 south of town along Offa's Dyke Path, which runs behind the house; or follow the B4348 east to Cusop Dingle.

## Eating

**Granary** (☎ 01497-820790; Broad St; mains £6-10; ☺ 10am-5pm) Housed in a converted grain store, this rustic cafe and restaurant serves wholesome home-cooked meals with plenty of vegetarian and vegan choices, tummy-rumbling cakes, fine cheeses and other local delicacies. If you have to disturb the peace and get online, they have free wi-fi.

**Baskerville Arms** (☎ 01497-821609; [www.baskervillearms.co.uk](http://www.baskervillearms.co.uk); Clyro; mains £7-12; ☺ lunch & dinner) This country hotel, just over a mile northwest of Hay, has a good French chef, welcoming staff and lovely views of the countryside. It lights up a log fire in winter and the dining room is candlelit at night.

**Old Black Lion** (☎ 01497-820841; Lion St; mains £12-18; ☺ lunch & dinner) This famous old inn's candlelit dining room has hops hanging from its low-beamed ceiling, stripped-pine tables, and is thick with romance and atmosphere. There are robust local ales on offer and a memorable menu including wonderful locally sourced lamb.

## Shopping

The tourist office and most shops stock the handy pamphlet guide to the town's three dozen bookshops, from 'Murder and Mayhem' to the Cinema Bookshop. The most famous is **Booth's Bookshop** (☎ 01497-

820322; [www.richardbooth.demon.co.uk](http://www.richardbooth.demon.co.uk); 44 Lion St; ☺ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-5.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-8pm Mon, Fri & Sat, 11.30am-5.30pm Sun, 9am-5.30pm Tue-Thu Nov-Mar), which supposedly has the highest turnover of second-hand books of any bookshop in the world. A smaller specialist arm is housed in a Jacobean mansion built into the walls of the battered 13th-century town castle.

## Getting There & Away

If you're driving, allow time to cruise because the countryside is spellbinding.

Bus 39 from Hereford (55 minutes) and from Brecon (45 minutes) runs roughly every two hours Monday to Saturday.

## ROSS-ON-WYE

pop 10,085

Snoozy little Ross-on-Wye, which perches prettily on a red sandstone bluff over a kink in the River Wye, is a gentle place to rest before or after exertions in the beautiful countryside that surrounds it. The town sparks to life in mid-August, when the **International Festival** brings fireworks, raft races, music and street theatre.

The salmon-pink 17th-century Market House sits atop its weathered sandstone columns in the Market Place. It contains a **Heritage Centre** (☎ 01989-260675; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) with local-history displays. The **tourist office** (☎ 01989-562768; [tic-ross@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:tic-ross@herefordshire.gov.uk); Edde Cross St; ☺ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) has information on activities and walks.

## Sleeping & Eating

**White House Guest House** (☎ 01989-763572; www.whitehouseross.com; Wye St; s/d £45/65; (P) 📶 wi-fi) This 18th-century stone house has a great location across the road from the River Wye. Vivid window boxes give it a splash of colour and the rooms, decorated in rich shades of burgundy and crisp white, are peaceful and comfortable.

**Bridge at Wilton** (☎ 01989-562655; www.bridge-house-hotel.com; Wilton; s/d from £80/98; (P) 📶) A distinguished Georgian country house, a riverside setting a short tumble down from town, and a highly praised modern British restaurant dedicated to local produce make this a wonderful spot to linger. Eight classically styled rooms overlook the gardens and river.

**Pots and Pieces** (☎ 01989-566123; 40 High St; mains £4.50-6; 🍷 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, from 10am Sat) You can browse all manner of ceramics, ironwork, jewellery and glassware before relaxing with a postbrowse cream tea or frothy hot chocolate at this cafe-cum-gallery. Savoury lunchtime goodies are also available.

The closest hostel is 6 miles south at Welsh Bicknor (see below).

## Drinking

**Hope & Anchor** (☎ 01989-563003; Wye St) This friendly riverside pub is a great place to while away the time, especially in the summer, when tables spread right down the grassy bank to the water's edge and overflow with happy customers.

## Getting There & Around

Buses 38 and 33 run hourly Monday to Saturday to and from Hereford and Gloucester respectively (40 minutes each way).

You can hire bikes from **Revolutions** (☎ 01989-562639; 48 Broad St; per day from £10).

## AROUND ROSS-ON-WYE

### Goodrich

Seemingly part of its craggy bedrock, **Goodrich Castle** (EH; ☎ 01600-890538; adult/child £5/2.50; 🕒 10am-6pm daily Jun-Aug, 10am-5pm daily Mar-May & Sep-Oct, 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-Feb) is an exceptionally complete medieval castle, topped by a superb 12th-century keep that rewards the trek up tight winding staircases with spectacular views. A small exhibition tells the story of the castle from its 11th-century origins to its demise in the 1600s.

### TOP PUBS FOR SUNDAY LUNCH

- Riverside Inn (p564; Aymestrey)
- Stagg Inn (p565; Titley)
- Three Crowns Inn (p564; Ullingswick)
- Waterdine Inn (p584; Llanfair Waterdine)

**Welsh Bicknor YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9666; www.yha.org.uk; dm £18; 🍷 Apr-Oct; (P) 📶) is well worth the high-pumping 1½-mile climb to reach it from Goodrich village. This austere-looking former Victorian rectory surveys the glorious countryside from 10 hectares of lovely riverside grounds. The Wye Valley Walk passes the hostel.

Goodrich is 5 miles south of Ross off the A40. Bus 34 stops here every two hours on its way between Ross (15 minutes) and Monmouth (20 minutes).

### Symonds Yat

A remote little nook, huddled against the River Wye, Symonds Yat is well worth a visit for water babies, bird enthusiasts and those fond of a relaxed riverside pint. An ancient hand-hauled ferry (adult/child 80/40p) joins two separate hill-backed villages on either bank, usually with a few ducks hitching a ride on the back. There's an abrupt change of mood in upper Symonds Yat West, where you'll find a big tacky fairground jingling to the sound of pocket change, slot machines and carousels.

### ACTIVITIES

This area is renowned for canoeing and rock climbing and there's also good hiking in the nearby Forest of Dean. The **Wyedean Canoe Centre** (☎ 01594-833238; www.wyedean.co.uk) hires out canoes/kayaks from £20/16 for half-day, and also organises multiday kayaking trips, white-water trips, caving and climbing. Note that the river has a strong current and is not suitable for swimming.

From Symonds Yat East, it's a steep but easy walk (at least on a dry day) up 504m to the crown of the region, **Symonds Yat Rock**, from where you'll get a fabulous view of the river and valley. You can catch a rare glimpse of the world's fastest creature doing aerial acrobatics here, as peregrine falcons nest in the cliffs opposite.

If that all sounds like too much hard work, **Kingfisher Cruises** (☎ 01600-891063) runs sedate 35-minute gorge cruises from beside the ferry crossing.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Garth Cottage** (☎ 01600-890364; www.garthcottage-symondsyat.com; Symonds Yat East; d £72; ☹ Apr-Oct; (P)) The pick of accommodation on the east side, this friendly, family-run B&B sits demurely by the riverside near the ferry crossing, and has spotlessly maintained, bright rooms with river views. Breakfast is served in the conservatory or on the terrace, both overlooking the water.

**Saracen's Head** (☎ 01600-890435; www.saracensheadinn.co.uk; Symonds Yat East; mains £10-20; (P)) This black-and-white traditional inn is Symonds Yat's focal point, next to the ferry crossing. It has some river-view rooms (doubles from £74) sporting pine furniture and polished wood floors, and two luxury suites in the boat-house. It's a popular spot to enjoy a meal while waiting for the moment when the ferryman topples into the river.

**Old Court Hotel** (☎ 01600-890367; www.oldcourt-hotel.co.uk; Symonds Yat West; r £80-200; (P)) This striking 16th-century manor house enchants history buffs without stinting on up-to-the-minute modern comforts. It's set in lovely gardens, complete with heated pool, and some rooms have characterful beams and four-posters, others crisp modern interiors. Children over 12 are welcome. Old Court is on the northern entrance to Symonds Yat West, across the river and roughly a 1-mile walk from the ferry crossing.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 34 can drop you off on the main road 1.5 miles from the village. Bikes are available for hire from the Royal Hotel (Symonds Yat East) for £13 per day.

## LEDBURY

pop 8491

An atmospheric little town abundant with history and antique shops, Ledbury is a favourite destination for day trippers. The best way to pass the time is to simply wander its dense core of crooked black-and-white streets, which zero in on a delightfully leggy market house.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 01531-636147; tic-ledbury@herefordshire.gov.uk; 3 The Homend; ☹ 10am-5pm

Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) has details about a lovely 17-mile cycle route called the Ledbury Loop (50p). To get online visit part ice-cream parlour, part internet cafe **Ice Bytes** (☎ 01531-634700; 38 The Homend; per 15min £1).

### Sights

Ledbury's centrepiece is the delicate black-and-white **Market House**, a 17th-century timber-framed structure precariously balanced atop 16 narrow wooden posts supposedly gleaned from the defeated Spanish Armada. From here, wander up the narrow cobbled **Church Lane**, crowded with tilted timber-framed buildings, including the **Painted Room** (admission free; ☹ 11am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri Easter-Sep), with jigsaw-puzzle 16th-century floral frescos.

Here too are several small museums, including **Butcher's Row House** (☎ 01531-632942; Church Lane; admission free; ☹ 11am-5pm Easter-Sep), a pocket-sized folk museum stuffed with curios from 19th-century school clothing to an 18th-century communal 'boot' bath that used to be carted from door to door for the poor to scrub in. The **Heritage Centre** (☎ 01531-260692; admission free; ☹ 10.30am-4.30pm Easter-Oct) sits in another half-timbered treasure opposite and has more displays of the town.

At the top of the lane lies the 12th-century church of **St Michael and All Angels**, with a splendid 18th-century spire and tower separate from the church.

### Sleeping & Eating

Budget travellers may struggle to find accommodation in Ledbury.

**Talbot Hotel** (☎ 01531-632963; www.visitedbury.co.uk/talbot; New St; s/d £55/80; (P)) A black-and-white, late-16th-century coaching inn with a lively little bar and dark oak-panelled restaurant, the Talbot also has a handful of simple, compact rooms in what used to be the hay loft. It can get a little noisy on weekends and breakfast costs extra.

**Feathers Hotel** (☎ 01531-635266; www.feathers-ledbury.co.uk; High St; s/d from £85/125; (P)) This charming black-and-white Tudor hotel looms over the main road. It has a mixture of rooms – ask for one in the oldest part of the building, which come with slanting floorboards and painted beams. Most of the modern rooms lack character. There's also a swimming pool.

**The Verzon** (☎ 01531-670381; www.verzonhouse.com; A438, Trumpet; s £90-105, d £155-175; (P) (Q)) The

ultimate country-chic retreat, 3 miles west of Ledbury, this lovely Georgian farmhouse has undergone a rather debonair makeover without sacrificing its rustic charm. Its eight rooms are luxuriously appointed with tactile tweeds, stand-alone baths, goose down pillows, and plush wool carpets. The brasserie's classic menu ranges from scrumptious roast rabbit in mustard sauce to Cornish lobster (mains £10 to £17).

**Cameron & Swan** (☎ 01531-636791; www.cameronandswan.co.uk; 15 The Homend; mains £6-7; ☎ lunch) New, bustling deli-cafe serving tasty deli platters, homemade tarts, cakes and bakes in a bright, airy dining room.

**The Malthouse** (☎ 01531-634443; www.malthouse-ledbury.co.uk; Church Lane; mains £13-20; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sat only) Walk through a pretty walled garden to find an elegant restaurant in an ivy-covered converted barn. Modern British food is on offer, locally sourced and with good choice of vegie options.

### Getting There & Around

There are roughly hourly trains to Hereford (15 minutes), less often to Great Malvern (11 minutes), Worcester (23 to 27 minutes) and Birmingham (£11.50, 1¼ hours).

Bus 476 runs to Hereford hourly (30 minutes, every two hours on Sunday); bus 132 runs hourly to Gloucester (one hour).

You can hire mountain bikes at **Saddle Bound Cycles** (☎ 633433; 3 The Southend; per day £12).

## AROUND LEDBURY

### Eastnor Castle

Built more for fancy than fortification, the extravagant 19th-century medieval-revival folly of **Eastnor Castle** (☎ 01531-633160; www.eastnorcastle.com; adult/child £8/5, grounds only £4/2) seems to have leapt out of the pages of a bedtime story. The opulent interior continues the romantic veneer, decorated in Gothic and Italianate features, tapestries and antiques. Even when the castle is closed – call or check the website, as the opening days are quite complicated – its maze, adventure playground and lakeside walks are worth a look. Its beautiful deer park is also stage to the **Big Chill** (☎ 020-7684 2020; www.bigchill.net; ☎ Aug), when campers, musicians, performers and artists round off the summer festival season in relaxed fashion.

The castle is just over 2 miles east of Ledbury on the A438. The Malvern Hills

Hopper bus runs here from Upton-upon-Severn and Great Malvern on summer weekends and Bank Holidays.

### Much Marcle

The tiny village of Much Marcle isn't much more than a blip on the map, but it's home to one of England's oldest and most fascinating houses – **Hellens** (☎ 01531-660504; www.hellensmanor.com; adult/child £5/2.50; ☎ tours 2pm, 3pm & 4pm Wed, Thu, Sun & Bank Holidays Apr-Sep), a time capsule of English history dating right back to the 11th century. The superb 17th-century interiors echo the gallantry of that age, and there are heirlooms of Ann Boleyn, Mary Tudor, King Charles and more. The descendants of its 13th-century masters still own the house and admit visitors on guided tours only. Outside, the restored Tudor and Jacobean gardens and charming octagonal dovecote are wonderful.

Afterwards, you can celebrate the fact that you're deep in cider country by raising a glass at **Westons Cider Mills** (☎ 01531-660233; www.westons-cider.co.uk; The Bounds; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun), just under a mile west of Hellens over the A449. Henry Weston started dabbling with cider and perry here in the 1870s; soon the local MP got Weston's cider put on tap in the parliament bar, and the rest is history. Tours (adult/child £5/3, 1¼ hours) are at 11am, 12.30pm and 2.30pm, and include the all-important tasting session.

Bus 45 from Ledbury (40 minutes) goes to Much Marcle four times per day Monday to Friday and five times on Saturday.

## SHROPSHIRE

Dreamily beautiful and sparsely populated, Shropshire ripples over the River Severn from the Welsh border to Birmingham. The surroundings are most beautiful to the south, where the land is ripe with stunning moorland, gurgling rivers and pretty villages; and its undulating, heather-ticked hills make for wonderful walking territory. The lovely Tudor town of Shrewsbury is the county capital, and nestled nearby is the remarkable World Heritage site of Ironbridge Gorge. At the county's base you'll find foodie magnet Ludlow, with its handsome castle and epicurean ways.

## Information

For online county information:

**North Shropshire** ([www.northshropshire.co.uk](http://www.northshropshire.co.uk))

**Secret Shropshire** ([www.secretshropshire.org.uk](http://www.secretshropshire.org.uk))

**Shropshire Tourism** ([www.shropshiretourism.info](http://www.shropshiretourism.info))

**Virtual Shropshire** ([www.virtual-shropshire.co.uk](http://www.virtual-shropshire.co.uk))

**Visit South Shropshire** ([www.visitsouthshropshire.co.uk](http://www.visitsouthshropshire.co.uk))

## Getting Around

Handy rail services from Shrewsbury go to Church Stretton, Craven Arms and Ludlow. The invaluable *Shropshire Bus & Train Map*, available free from tourist offices, shows public transport routes. **Shropshire Hills Shuttle Buses** ([www.shropshirehillsshuttles.co.uk](http://www.shropshirehillsshuttles.co.uk)) also drops off walkers along popular hiking routes on weekends and Bank Holidays. Call **Traveline** (☎ 0870 200 2233; [www.traveline.org.uk](http://www.traveline.org.uk)) with any queries.

## SHREWSBURY

pop 67,126

The higgledy-piggledy mass of medieval streets in the heart of Shropshire's most picturesque town don't take long to work their magic. Ancient passageways wind their way between crooked Tudor buildings; dusky-red sandstone warms an ancient abbey and castle, and elegant parks tumble down to the River Severn.

Nudging a horseshoe loop in the river, Shrewsbury's defensive potential was crucial in keeping the Welsh in line for many centuries. Then in medieval times the town grew fat on the wool trade. It is also the birthplace of Charles Darwin (1809–82), who rocked the world with his theory of evolution.

## Orientation

Shrewsbury's near-island status helps preserve the Tudor and Jacobean streetscapes of its centre and protects it from unattractive urban sprawl. The train station is a five-minute walk northeast of the centre and is as far as you'll need to venture.

## Information

**Library** (☎ 01743-255300; Castle Gates; ☎ 9.30am–5pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat, 9.30am–8pm Tue & Thu, 1–4pm Sun) Free internet access.

**Royal Shrewsbury Hospital** (☎ 01743-261000; Myton Oak Rd)

**Tourist office** (☎ 01743-281200; [www.visitshrewsbury.com](http://www.visitshrewsbury.com); Music Hall, The Square; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–

Sat, 10am–4pm Sun May–Sep; 10am–5pm Mon–Sat Oct–Apr) Guided walking tours (adult/child £3.50/1.50 1½hr) leave the tourist office at 2.30pm Monday to Saturday, and 11am Sunday from May to September and at 2.30pm Saturday only from November to April.

## Sights

### SHREWSBURY ABBEY

Most famous as a setting for monastic who-dunits the *Chronicles of Brother Cadfael* by Ellis Peters, the lovely red-sandstone **Shrewsbury Abbey** (☎ 01743-232723; [www.shrewsburyabbey.com](http://www.shrewsburyabbey.com); Abbey Foregate; donation adult/child £2/1; ☎ 10am–4.30pm Mon–Sat, 11.30am–2.30pm Sun) is what remains of a large Benedictine monastery founded in 1083, its outbuildings mostly lost and its flanks unceremoniously chopped. It's graced by a mix of Norman, Early English and Victorian features and there's an exceptional 14th-century west window of heraldic glass. The abbey is renowned for its fine acoustics and a noticeboard provides information on upcoming recitals.

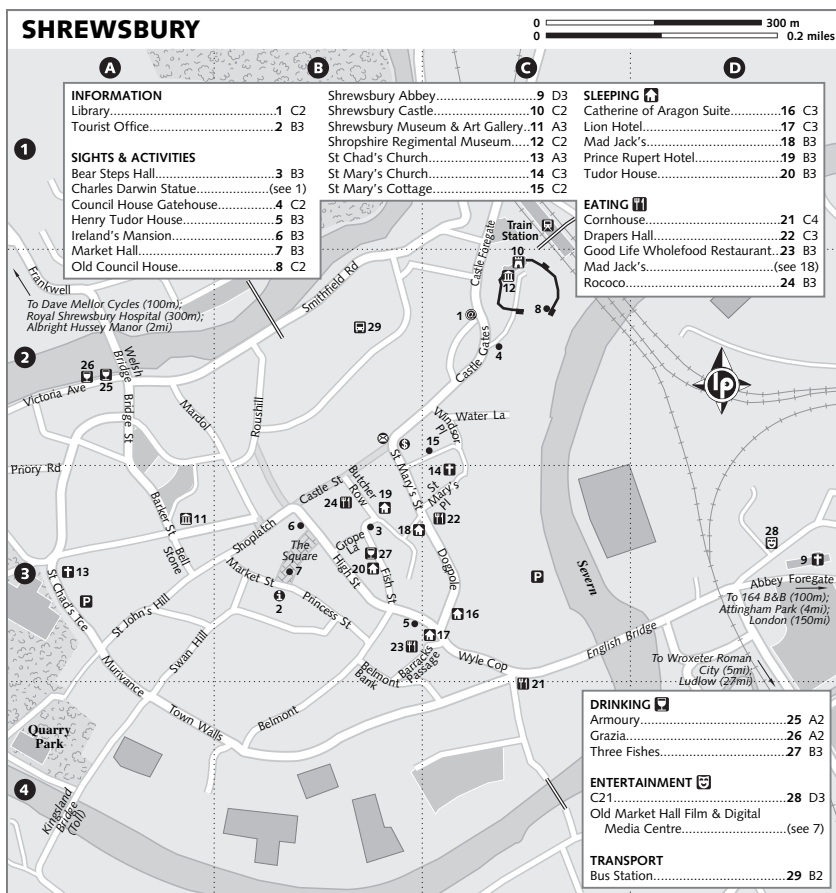
### SHREWSBURY MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Rowley's House, the stunning timber-framed Tudor merchant's mansion and warehouse in which **Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 01743-361196; [www.shrewsburymuseums.com](http://www.shrewsburymuseums.com); Barker St; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, to 4pm Sun Jun–Sep, 10am–4pm Oct–May) is housed, is as much of an attraction as its exhibits, which range from Roman finds to Darwin's times. At the time of writing, the museum was due to move to the Music Hall in 2011, forming a part of a new museum and tourist office. It will be closed for several months a year until then.

## Walking Tour

Begin your tour at the town's tourist office. The mellow-stone building balancing on chunky legs opposite you is Shrewsbury's 16th-century **Market Hall**, hub of the historic wool trade. Look out for the holes in the pillars, which were used to count how many fleeces were sold.

The most impressive of Shrewsbury's black-and-white beauties, the stern timber-framed **Ireland's Mansion** grabs attention to your left as you step up to High St. Turn right and cross over into charmingly named, narrow little **Grope Lane** with its overhanging buildings, and you'll emerge into atmospheric **Fish Street** and see some steps leading to the 14th-century **Bear Steps Hall** (☎ 10am–4pm), now home to a



small exhibition space. On the hall's other side is **Butcher Row**, home to more atmospheric black-and-white lovelies.

Head another street north to check out the magnificent spire of medieval **St Mary's Church** (St Mary's St; ☎ 11am-4pm Fri-Sun May-Sep), one of the highest in England. Duck inside for a peek at the astonishingly vivid Jesse window made from rare mid-14th-century glass.

Turn left into Windsor Place, before taking the second right into Castle St. You can't miss the entrance to russet **Shrewsbury Castle**, home to the the stiff-upper-lip **Shropshire Regimental Museum** (☎ 01743-358516; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 4pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Feb-Apr). It also has wonderful views.

Back near the entrance is the Jacobean-style **Council House Gatehouse**, dating from 1620, and the **Old Council House**, where the Council of the Welsh Marches used to meet.

Opposite the castle is an unusually grand **library**, with a severe-looking **statue** of Shrewsbury's most famous son, Charles Darwin. Returning to St Mary's St, follow it into Dogpole and turn right into Wyle Cop, Welsh for 'hilltop'. Henry VII stayed in the seriously overhanging **Henry Tudor House** before the Battle of Bosworth. At the bottom of Wyle Cop is the graceful 18th-century **English Bridge**, which takes you across to **Shrewsbury Abbey**.

If your feet aren't yet aching, double back over the bridge and stroll left along the riverside to enjoy an ice cream in sweeping

gardens of **Quarry Park**, and listen to the cacophonous bells of odd 18th-century round church **St Chad's**, which surveys the park and the river.

## Sleeping

**164** (☎ 01743-367750; www.164bedandbreakfast.co.uk; 164 Abbey Foregate; s/d £35/54, with bathroom £45/58; P 📺 wi-fi) Despite the age of the building you won't find any chintz or faux Tudor interiors here. This B&B celebrates its lovely 16th-century timber frame with bright colours, contemporary fabrics and a quirky mix of artwork. As an extra treat, breakfast is served in bed.

**Mad Jack's** (☎ 01743-358870; www.madjack.suk.com; 15 St Mary's St; s/d from £65/75) The foot-sinking cream carpets, leather furniture and soft fur throws of this guest house's four smart rooms blend in perfectly with the quirks of the old building. There's a good restaurant downstairs.

**Tudor House** (☎ 01743-351735; www.tudorhouse.shrewsbury.com; 2 Fish St; s/d from £69/79; 📺 wi-fi) If you're feeling nostalgic, this creaky medieval house has old-world charm by the bucketload. The building is festooned with floral window boxes and its handful of traditional oak-beamed rooms are turned out in high-shine fabrics, some with spindly metal-framed headboards entwined with flowers. Not all rooms have an en suite.

**Lion Hotel** (☎ 01753 353107; www.thelionhotel.shrewsbury.co.uk; Wyle Cop; s/d from £76/92; P) A cowardly lion presides over the doorway of this grand old coaching inn. The most famous hotel in town, it has hosted many a luminary through its 400-year history. At the time of writing the hotel was undergoing a major refurbishment.

**Prince Rupert Hotel** (☎ 01743-499955; www.prince-rupert-hotel.co.uk; Butcher Row; s/d from £85/105; P 📺 wi-fi) King James' grandson Prince Rupert once lived at this oak-panelled hotel. Though most rooms are modern, tapestries, armour and heraldry haphazardly push the theme, and a few 15th- and 12th-century suites have all the quirky angles, beams and wood panelling you could ask for.

There are plenty more B&Bs huddled around Abbey Foregate.

Other options for bedding down:

**Albright Hussey Manor** (☎ 01743-290571; www.albrighthussey.co.uk; Ellesmere Rd; s/d from £79/95; P 📺 wi-fi) Romantic manor with excellent restaurant, surrounded by a moat, 2 miles north of town.

**Catherine of Aragon Suite** (☎ 01743-271092; www.aragonsuite.co.uk; the Old House, Dogpole; s/d £85/125 P 📺) Hugely atmospheric wood-panelled bedroom with its own sitting room in an old Tudor mansion.

## Eating

**Good Life Wholefood Restaurant** (☎ 01743-350455; Barracks Passage; mains £3.50-7; 🍴 lunch Mon-Sat) Healthy, freshly prepared vegetarian food is the name of the game in this cute little refuge off Wyle Cop. Favourites include quiches, nut loaf and slightly less health-conscious cakes and desserts.

**Cornhouse** (☎ 01743-231991; www.cornhouse.co.uk; 59A Wyle Cop; mains £8-14; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This cosy corner holds a relaxed wine bar and restaurant, successfully mixing contemporary style with period features from its working cornhouse days. Its consistently good British food is served up in the shadow of a superb cast-iron spiral staircase.

**Rococo** (☎ 01743-363633; 18 Butcher Row; sandwiches £6-9, mains £9-17; 🍴 10am-midnight) Modern, bustling bar and brasserie with streetside seating serving everything from sandwiches and deli plates to full-on grills, fish and pasta dishes. It doubles up as a cocktail and wine bar.

**Mad Jack's** (☎ 01743-358870; www.madjacksuk.com; 15 St Mary's St; mains £11-16; 🍴 10am-10pm) Posh cafe, restaurant and bar that's passionate about local produce. Breakfasts, light lunches, afternoon tea and dinners are served in a bright, elegant dining room or a lovely plant-filled courtyard. Highlights include pistachio-crusted local lamb and chocolate torte with fennel ice cream.

**Drapers Hall** (☎ 01743-344679; St Mary's Pl; mains £12-17.50; 🍴 lunch & dinner) The sense of history is palpable in this well-fossilised 16th-century hall, fronted by an elegant Elizabethan facade. Award-winning, Anglo-French haute cuisine is divided between dark oak-panelled rooms decked out in sumptuous fabrics and antique screens. The connoisseur's wine list is also well worthy of a special occasion.

## Drinking

**Armoury** (☎ 01743-340525; www.armoury-shrewsbury.co.uk; Victoria Ave) There's a great warmth and conviviality to this converted riverside warehouse. Towering bookshelves, old pictures and curios help straddle the divide between posh restaurant (mains £9-17) and informal pub; large, curved windows invite in sheds of light, while a plethora of blackboard menus

invite you to sample wines, guest ales and hearty British dishes.

**Three Fishes** (☎ 01743-344793; 4 Fish St) The quintessential creaky Tudor alehouse, with a jolly owner, mellow regulars and hops hanging from the 15th-century beamed ceiling. No music here, just plenty of good-value real ales on tap and solid bar food.

**Grazia** (☎ 01743-233222; www.gograzia.com; Victoria Ave) This cavernous, two-storey place has huge windows overlooking the river, a cocktail lounge decked out with low leather seating and plush cushions, and a glam restaurant done up in stark black and white. It puts on regular live music and wine-tasting evenings.

## Entertainment

**C21** (☎ 01743-271821; 21 Abbey Foregate; admission after 10pm £3-7; ☎ 8.30pm-3am) A polished city-chic club for over-25-year-olds to indulge in late-night cocktails and dance-floor acrobatics. On Mondays it's home to Shrewsbury's main gay and lesbian night.

For mainstream and art-house movies in an Elizabethan setting, try the **Old Market Hall Film & Digital Media Centre** (☎ 01743-281281; www.oldmarkethall.co.uk).

At the time of research, a massive new riverside theatre and music venue, Theatre Severn, was due to open in early 2009 on Frankwell Quay.

## Getting There & Around

### BIKE

You can hire bikes at **Dave Mellor Cycles** (☎ 01743-366662; www.theycleshop.co.uk; 9 New St).

### BUS

National Express has two direct buses to London (£17.80, 4½ hours) and two to Birmingham (£5.70, 1½ hours). Bus 96 serves Ironbridge (30 minutes) every two hours Monday to Saturday. Bus 435 travels to Ludlow (1¼ hours) via Church Stretton (45 minutes) eight times daily, and bus 553 heads to Bishop's Castle (one hour) 10 times daily.

### TRAIN

There are five direct daily services between Shrewsbury and London Marylebone (£33, 3½ hours) on the Wrexham and Shropshire line. Otherwise you must change at Wolverhampton (£42.40, 2½ to three hours). Trains run twice-hourly to Ludlow (£8.40, 30 minutes) during the week and hourly at weekends.

Shrewsbury is a popular starting point for two scenic routes into Wales: one loop takes in Shrewsbury, northern Wales and Chester; the other, **Heart of Wales Line** (☎ 0870 9000 772; www.heart-of-wales.co.uk), runs southwest to Swansea (£19, 3¾ hours, four daily).

## AROUND SHREWSBURY

### Attingham Park

The most impressive of Shropshire's stately homes is late 18th-century mansion **Attingham Park** (NT; ☎ 01743-708123; house & grounds adult/child £7.40/3.70, grounds only £4.20/2.20; ☎ house 1-5pm Thu-Tue mid-Mar-Oct, grounds 10am-dusk Thu-Tue mid-Mar-Oct). Built in imposing neoclassical style, it's reminiscent of many a bodice-ripping drama. Behind the high-and-mighty facade, you'll find a picture gallery by John Nash, two wings respectively decorated into staunch masculine and delicate feminine Regency interiors. A herd of deer roam the landscaped grounds and there are pleasant walks along the River Tern.

Attingham Park is 4 miles southeast of Shrewsbury at Atcham. Buses 81 and 96 (18 minutes) run six times per day Monday to Friday, less frequently on weekends.

### Wroxeter Roman City

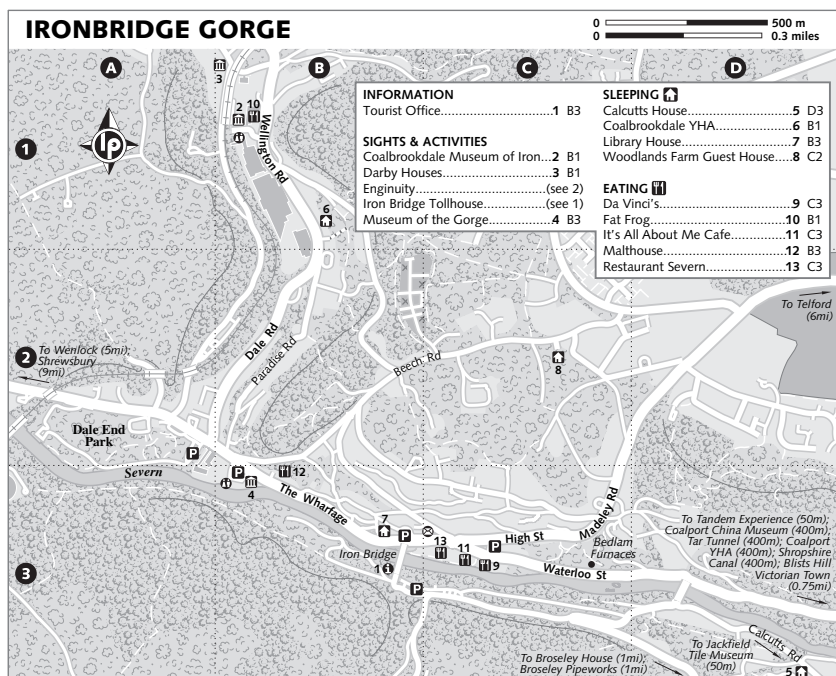
The crumbled foundations of one of Roman Britain's largest cities, Viroconium, can be seen at **Wroxeter** (EH; ☎ 01743-761330; adult/child £4.20/2.10; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-Feb). Geophysical work has revealed a Roman city as large as Pompeii lying underneath the lush farmland, but the costs of excavating the whole lot are, for now, too great. You'll have to make do with exploring the remains of the public baths and marketplace.

Wroxeter is 6 miles southeast of Shrewsbury, off the B4380. Bus 96 stops nearby, and runs six times per day Monday to Friday, less frequently on weekends.

## IRONBRIDGE GORGE

Winding your way through the woods, hills and villages of this peaceful river gorge, it can be hard to imagine the trailblazing events that took place here some 300 years ago. But it was this sleepy enclave that gave birth to the Industrial Revolution, when three generations of the pioneering Darby family set about transforming their indus-





trial processes and in so doing irreversibly changed the world.

The story began quietly in 1709, when Abraham Darby determinedly set about restoring an old furnace to prove it was possible to smelt iron ore with coke, eventually paving the way for local factories to mass-produce the first iron wheels, rails and steam locomotives. Abraham Darby II's innovative forging process then enabled the production of single beams of iron, allowing Abraham Darby III to astound the world with the first ever iron bridge, constructed here in 1779. The bridge remains the valley's showpiece and dominates the main village, a jumble of cottages slithering down the gorge's steep bank.

Now written into history books as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, Ironbridge is a World Heritage Site and the Marches' top attraction. Ten very different museums now tell the story in the very buildings where it took place.

### Orientation & Information

Driving or cycling can make life easier, as the museums are peppered throughout the long gorge. See p578 for public transport options.

The **tourist office** ( 01952-884391; [www.ironbridge.co.uk](http://www.ironbridge.co.uk); Tollhouse; 10am-5pm) is by the bridge.

### Sights & Activities

The great-value **passport ticket** (adult/child £15/10) that allows year-round entry to all of the sites can be bought at any of the museums or the tourist office. The museums open from 10am to 5pm unless stated otherwise.

#### MUSEUM OF THE GORGE

A good way to begin your visit is the **Museum of the Gorge** (The Wharfage; adult/child £3/£2.50), which offers an overview of the site. Housed in a Gothic warehouse by the river, it's filled with touch screens, fun exhibits and details of the horrific consequences of pollution and environmental hazards at the cutting edge of industry (Abraham I and III both died at 39). An absorbing video sets the museum in its historical context.

#### MUSEUM OF IRON & DARBY HOUSES

What was once the Coalbrookdale iron foundry, where pioneering Abraham Darby

first smelted iron ore with coke, now houses the **Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron** (adult/child £5.95/4.25). An army of men and boys once churned out heavy-duty iron equipment here, and later, ever more fancy ironwork castings. The excellent interactive exhibits chart the company's history and showcase some extraordinary creations.

The early industrial settlement that surrounds the site has also happily survived, with workers' cottages, chapels, church and graveyard undisturbed. Just up the hill are the beautifully restored 18th-century **Darby Houses** (☎ 01952-433522; adult/child £4/2.50; ☹ Apr-Oct), which housed generations of the industrial bigwigs in gracious but modest Quaker comfort. Rosehill House is furnished with much original furniture, and next-door Dale House includes the wood-panelled office in which Abraham Darby III pored over his bridge designs.

### IRON BRIDGE & TOLLHOUSE

The flamboyant arching **Iron Bridge** that gives the area its name was a symbol of the iron industry's success; a triumph of engineering that left contemporaries flabbergasted by its apparent flimsiness. As well as providing a crossing over the river, it ensured that Abraham Darby III and his village would be given a prominent place in the history books. The **tollhouse** (admission free; ☹ 10am-5pm) houses a small exhibition on the bridge's history.

### BLISTS HILL VICTORIAN TOWN

To travel back to 19th-century Britain, hear the pounding of steam hammers and the clip-clop of horse hooves, or tip your hat to a cycling bobby, head to the vast open-air Victorian theme park, **Blists Hill** (☎ 01952-433522; Legges Way, Madeley; adult/child £10.50/7.50; ☹ 10am-5pm). This ambitious project does a remarkably good job of reconstructing an entire village, encompassing everything from a working foundry to a chemist to a bank, where you can exchange your cash for shillings to use on site. Costumed staff explain displays, craftspeople demonstrate skills, and you can even join in an old-fashioned knees-up round the piano at the Victorian pub.

### COALPORT CHINA MUSEUM & TAR TUNNEL

When ironmaking moved elsewhere, Coalport china slowed the region's decline and the restored works now house an absorbing

**Coalport China Museum** (adult/child £6/4.25) tracing the region's glory days as a manufacturer of elaborate pottery and crockery. Craftspeople demonstrate china-making techniques and two enormous bottle kilns are guaranteed to awe even if the gaudily glazed chinaware leaves you cold.

A short stroll along the canal brings you to the 200-year-old **Tar Tunnel** (adult/child £2/1.50; ☹ Apr-Sep), dug as a water-supply channel but halted abruptly when natural bitumen unexpectedly started trickling treacle-like from its walls. You can still don a hard hat and stoop in deep enough to see the black stuff ooze.

### JACKFIELD TILE MUSEUM

A kaleidoscopic collection of Victorian tiles, faience and ceramics can be found at the **Jackfield Tile Museum** (adult/child £6/4.25), displayed through a series of gas-lit period-style galleries reconstructing lustrous tiled interiors of everything from pubs to churches, tube stations and remarkably fancy toilets. Kids especially love the fairy-tale friezes for children's hospital wards.

### BROSELEY PIPEWORKS

Sucking on tobacco was the height of gentlemanly fashion in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, and the **Broseley Pipeworks** (adult/child £4/2.50; ☹ 1-5pm mid-May-Sep), once Britain's most prolific pipe manufacturer, charts the history of the industry. A vast range of clay pipes from short-stemmed 'pipsqueaks' to arm-length 'church wardens' were produced here, until the factory finally closed in 1957; now visitors can explore its time-capsule contents, which are largely unchanged since the last worker turned out the lights. It's a mile-long walk to get here, signposted from the bridge.

### ENGINEUTY

Championing Ironbridge's spirit of brains before brawn, the fabulous interactive design and technology centre **Enginuity** (adult/child £6.25/5.25) invites you to move a steam engine with the flick of a wrist, X-ray everyday objects, power up a vacuum cleaner with self-generated electricity and basically dive head first into a vast range of hands-on, brains-on challenges, games and gadgets that explore design and engineering in modern life. If you have kids with you, allow at least two hours.

## Sleeping

**Coalbrookdale YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9325; www.yha.org.uk; 1 Paradise Rd, Coalbrookdale; dm £17; (P)) The austere former Literary and Scientific Institute, a grand blue-grey building from 1859 sitting high on the hillside behind sturdy iron gates, now houses a newly refurbished hostel within easy walking distance of the Museum of Iron. It has a few en suite family rooms.

**Coalport YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9325; www.yha.org.uk; High St, Coalport; dm £17; (P)) This historic former china factory, a big bluff industrial-looking building mere paces from the China Museum and the canal, and close to pleasant countryside walks, now houses an 83-bed hostel. The plain, modern rooms betray little of their long history, however. It has family-friendly rooms.

**Calcutts House** (☎ 01952-882631; www.calcuttshouse.co.uk; Calcutts Rd; s/d/f from £45/66/95; (P)) This former ironmaster's pad built in the 18th century is tucked away a few strides from the Jackfield Tile Museum. Its traditionally decorated rooms have bags of character, some have four-posters, and each is named after a celebrated former owner of or visitor to the house.

**our pick Library House** (☎ 01952-432299; www.libraryhouse.com; 11 Severn Bank; s/d from £65/75; (P) (wi-fi)) This lovingly restored Georgian library building is hugged by vines, backed by a beautiful garden and elegantly decorated with light colours, deep cream sofas, rows of vintage books, and the odd African artefact. There are three charming, individually decorated rooms, with seriously comfortable beds, each named after a famous writer, and the welcome from hosts and family dog is exceedingly friendly.

Other options include the **Woodlands Farm Guest House** (☎ 01952-432741; www.woodlandsfarm

guesthouse.co.uk; Beech Rd; d from £60; (P) (wi-fi)), which has five elegant rooms (including three suites), most with lovely views of the gardens and fields beyond.

## Eating

**Malthouse** (☎ 01952-433712; www.themalthouseironbridge.com; The Wharfage; mains £8-17; (M) lunch & dinner) This former malting house would be worth visiting for the enormous plates of good English cooking alone, but the vibrant atmosphere, regular live jazz and riverfront terrace are an added bonus. Stylish contemporary rooms (£63) are also available.

**Fat Frog** (☎ 01952-432240; www.fat-frog.co.uk; Coalbrookdale; mains £10-16; (M) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) This quirky French bar-bistro is cluttered with toy frogs and showbiz memorabilia, has a rustic candlelit basement and plays nostalgic music from the ebullient Gallic proprietor's prime. The food is excellent, and as you'd expect, there's a great wine list with plenty of half-bottles.

**Restaurant Severn** (☎ 01952-432233; 33 High St; 2-/3-course dinner £25/27; (M) dinner Wed-Sat, lunch Sun) The highly-praised food is a hybrid of English and French at this exciting fine-dining waterfront restaurant. The simple decor and laid-back service attests to the fact that the real star here is the food – a delectable, locally sourced menu that changes weekly.

Other spots to consider:

**Da Vinci's** (☎ 01952-432250; www.davincironbridge.co.uk; 26 High St; mains £12-18; (M) dinner Tue-Sat) Gourmet Italian food served in a classy wood-panelled dining room.

**It's All About Me Cafe** (☎ 01952-432716; 29 High St; main from £10; (M) Tue-Sun 10am-11pm) The Mediterranean-inspired food isn't great, but the views of the gorge from the sun terrace are. There are also good cocktails and regular live music.

## SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

Kick off your weekend with a night of loved-up escapism and fine food at the barmy **Hundred House Hotel** (p580) at Norton. Next morning, nip over to **Ironbridge Gorge** (p574) for a stroll across the world's first iron bridge, then roll down to the beautiful **Long Mynd** (p580) to build up an appetite on its stunning walking trails. Hold onto your hunger pangs just long enough to put them to good use in the region's gourmet capital, **Ludlow** (p582), where **La Bécasse** (p583) and **Mr Underhill's** (p583) are just two of the superb restaurants to choose between. Sleep off your excesses in the stunning timber-framed **Feathers Hotel** (p582), then on Sunday morning head south for a quick tour through the picture-postcard **black-and-white villages** (see boxed text, p565). For a final fling, linger over an indulgent Sunday lunch at the **Stagg Inn** (see boxed text, p565) and book yourself a trip to the gym on Monday.

## Getting There & Away

The nearest train station is 6 miles away at Telford. Bus 96 runs every two hours (Monday to Saturday) between Shrewsbury (40 minutes) and Telford (15 to 20 minutes) via Ironbridge, stopping near the Museum of the Gorge. Bus 9 runs from Bridgnorth (30 minutes, four daily).

## Getting Around

The Gorge Connect bus connects nine of the museums every half-hour on weekends and Bank Holidays only. It costs 50p per journey, or there's a Day Rover pass (£2.50/1.50 per adult/child). The service is free to museum-passport holders.

Midweek your only options are to walk or hire a bike from **Broseley House** (☎ 01952-882043; www.broseleyhouse.co.uk; 1 The Square, Broseley; per day £15), a mile and a half south of the bridge; booking is advised. You may also like to look into **Tandem Experience** (☎ 0845 60 66 456; www.tandeming.co.uk; tandem per day £50), located next to the Tile Museum; the price includes tuition for tandem riding.

## MUCH WENLOCK

pop 1959

A tangle of narrow winding streets and historical buildings from the Tudor, Jacobean and Georgian eras, an arresting timbered guildhall and the enchanting remains of a 12th-century priory make this little town a real gem. It also claims to have jump-started the modern Olympics (see boxed text, opposite).

The **tourist office** (☎ 01952-727679; muchwenlock.tourism@shropshire-cc.gov.uk; The Square; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, plus Sun Jun-Aug) shares a 19th-century building and opening hours with the local **museum** (admission free).

## Sights & Activities

The tourist office provides a map to the town's sights of historical interest, as well as copies of *The Olympian Trail*, a pleasant 1½-mile walking tour of the town exploring the link between the village and the modern Olympics.

Otherwise, you can skip straight to the town's main highlight, the atmospheric 12th-century ruins of **Wenlock Priory** (EH; ☎ 01952-727466; adult/child £3.50/1.80; ☎ 10am-5pm daily; May-Aug, 10am-5pm Wed-Sun Apr & Sep-Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Sun Nov-Feb) which rise up from vivid green lawns, sprinkled with quirky topiaries of bears, cats and rabbits. The remains include part of a

finely decorated chapterhouse and an unusual carved lavabo, and there's a particularly entertaining audio tour.

## Sleeping & Eating

The closest hostel is Wilderhope Manor YHA (opposite).

**Talbot Inn** (☎ 01952-727077; www.the-talbot-inn.com; High St; s/d £40/80; ☎) A wonderfully atmospheric old place with colossal beams, cavernous fireplaces and good home-style fare (mains £10 to £15). There are some simple rooms in a converted 18th-century malthouse, with whitewashed walls, exposed beams and pine furniture.

**Raven Hotel** (☎ 01952-727251; www.ravenhotel.com; Barrow St; s/d £85/120; ☎) Much Wenlock's finest, this 17th-century coaching inn and converted stables has thick oak beams, open fires and rich country-chic styling throughout. The excellent restaurant (two-/three-course meal £25/30) overlooks a flowery courtyard and serves up classic British and Mediterranean fare.

**Fox** (☎ 01952-727292; www.the-fox-inn.co.uk; 46 High St; lunch £3-5; dinner mains £14-17) Warm yourself by the massive fireplace, then settle down in the simple black-and-cream dining room to enjoy solid local produce such as venison, pheasant and Shropshire beef. When you're done you can sample some real ales at the bar.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 436 runs from Shrewsbury (35 minutes) to Bridgnorth (20 minutes) hourly (five on Sunday).

## AROUND MUCH WENLOCK

The spectacular limestone escarpment of **Wenlock Edge** swells up like an immense petrified wave, its ancient oceanic rock rich in fossils and its flanks frothy with woodland. It stretches for 15 miles from Much Wenlock to Craven Arms and makes for wonderful walking and dramatic views. The National Trust (NT) owns much of the ridge, and there are many waymarked trails starting from car parks dotted along the B4371. There are no convenient buses along this route.

For a bite, a beer or a bed, the 17th-century **Wenlock Edge Inn** (☎ 01746-785678; B4371, Hilltop; s/d £50/70; ☎) is a good choice for hikers en route. It's a down-to-earth place with a recently revamped lively restaurant and bar with a fine choice of ales and Belgian beers. The food is a notch up from standard pub grub and provides

### GRANDDADDY OF THE MODERN OLYMPICS

All eyes will be on London when the Olympic Games arrive in 2012, but they will not be the only Olympics taking place in England at that time. The altogether more modest annual games at tiny Much Wenlock were instrumental in the rebirth of their big fat Greek brother.

Local doctor and sports enthusiast William Penny Brookes fused his knowledge of the ancient Olympics and rural British pastimes to launch the Much Wenlock Olympic Games in 1850. Begun as a distraction for the beer-swilling local youth, the games soon pricked the interest of Baron Pierre Coubertin, who visited Much Wenlock in 1890 to see them for himself.

He and Brookes became firm friends, with the shared dream of reviving the ancient Olympics. Coubertin went on to launch the modern Olympics in Athens in 1896; the games featured many of the events he had seen in Much Wenlock (although wheelbarrow racing and chasing a greased pig around town never really caught on). Brookes was invited to the event but he died, aged 86, before the games opened.

The good doctor never really got his share of the Olympic limelight until almost a century later, when International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch visited his grave to 'pay tribute and homage to Dr Brookes, who really was the founder of the Modern Olympic Games'.

The Much Wenlock Olympics are still held every July, with events that range from the triathlon to bowls. You can find details at [www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk](http://www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk).

heartly sustenance for the road ahead (mains £9 to £15). There are also some country-style rooms available. The pub is about 4.5 miles southwest of Much Wenlock on the B4371.

For top-value budget accommodation, ramble out to the remote **Wilderhope Manor YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9149; [www.yha.org.uk](http://www.yha.org.uk); Longville-in-the-Dale; dm £17; ☞ Fri, Sat & school holidays; ♿), a gloriously atmospheric gabled Elizabethan manor, with oak spiral staircases, heavy beams, wood-panelled walls, an impressive stone-floored dining hall and surprisingly spacious rooms. The hostel is set deep in lush countryside and adjoins a picturesque if stinky farmyard.

You can catch buses from Ludlow and Bridgnorth to Shipton, a half-mile walk from Wilderhope.

### BRIDGNORTH & AROUND

pop 11,891

Cleaved into two by a dramatic sandstone bluff that tumbles down to the River Severn, Bridgnorth's upper head and lower body are joined by means of the steepest inland railway in Britain, **Bridgnorth Cliff Railway** (☎ 01746-762052; [www.bridgnorthcliff railway.co.uk](http://www.bridgnorthcliff railway.co.uk); return 90p; ☞ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat & noon-8pm Sun May-Sep, to dusk Oct-Apr), which has been trundling its way up the cliff since 1892. The town also boasts a cute colonnaded mid-17th-century town hall, and two interesting churches.

Bridgnorth is also the northern terminus of the **Severn Valley Railway** (☎ 01299-403816; [.co.uk; adult/child £13/6.50; ☞ daily May-Sep, Sat & Sun Oct-Apr\), whose trains chug down the picturesque valley to Kidderminster.](http://www.svr</a></p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=)

There's something for cyclists here too: a beautiful 20-mile section of National Cycle Route 45, the **Mercian Way**, runs alongside the Severn Valley Railway from here to the Wyre Forest.

Organic, free-range, fair-trade and vegetarian is the name of the game in wholefood cafe **Cinnamon** (☎ 01746-762944; Waterloo House, Cartway; mains £5-8; ☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun), where you can munch on savoury bakes, quiches and homemade cakes on squashy sofas inside or while enjoying the views from the terrace. There's a wide selection of books and papers to browse and the owners put on frequent evenings of music, poetry and storytelling.

### Getting There & Away

Buses 436 and 437 run from Shrewsbury to Bridgnorth 10 times daily (one hour, five times on Sunday), via Much Wenlock (25 minutes). You can catch the steam train from any of the stations in the Severn Valley.

### CHURCH STRETTON & AROUND

pop 3841

Set deep in a valley formed by the Long Mynd and the Caradoc Hills, this scenic if restrained little town is the ideal base from which to venture into the glorious surroundings. It

## SHROPSHIRE'S MOST ECCENTRIC HOTEL

**Hundred House Hotel** (☎ 01746-730353; www.hundredhouse.co.uk; A442, Norton; s/d £90/105; (P) (Q)) offers a taste of escapism at its barmiest and best. Unashamedly romantic bedrooms are crammed with flamboyant decor, heart-shaped cushions and mirrors, antique beds, and seven out of 10 rooms sport suggestive velvet-covered swings entwined with ribbons. Shampoo comes in carafes and pillows are sprinkled with lavender water. The quirky herb gardens are another adventure, full of hidden corners and pathways, including a trail to a teddy bears' picnic sculpture. The owners devote just as much passion to their food; the excellent menu (mains £15 to £19) uses local produce to perfection. Hundred House is 6 miles north of Bridgnorth.

also shelters some interesting old buildings, including a 12th-century Norman church most famous for its weather-beaten but still undauntedly exhibitionist *sheila-na-gig* (Celtic fertility figure) over its north door.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01694-723133; www.churchstretton.co.uk; Church St; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat), adjoining the library, has abundant walking information as well as free internet access.

## Activities

### WALKING

The splendid hogback hill of **Long Mynd**, Shropshire's most famous mountain, heaves its bulk up above Church Stretton and is one of the best walking areas in the Marches. The area was dubbed 'Little Switzerland' by the Victorians, who came in droves for its healthy climes and spring waters. The entire area is riddled with walking trails with memorable views.

You could begin with the **Carding Mill Valley Trail**, which starts just outside Church Stretton and leads up to the 517m summit of the Long Mynd. This trail can get very busy at weekends and in summer, so you might prefer to pick your own peak or cross the A49 and climb towards the 459m summit of Caer Caradoc.

You can drive part of the way up the Carding Mill Valley, although the NT would rather you took the **Long Mynd shuttle**

**bus** (🚏 weekends & Bank Holidays only Apr-Oct) from Beaumont Rd or the station.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

The tourist office has maps of local mountain-biking circuits and details of riding stables. Daredevils can also look up **Beyond Extreme** (☎ 01694-682640; www.beyondextreme.co.uk; 2 Burway Rd) to organise hill-launch paragliding lessons and tandem flights.

## Sleeping

**Bridges Long Mynd YHA** (☎ 01588-650656; www.yha.org.uk; Ratlinghope; dm £16; (P)) Once the village school, this old stone pile is one of the country's longest-running YHA hostels, with a handful of basic but comfortable dorms. Hidden away in the Shropshire hills, it's a perfect base for exploring the county's walking trails – it's right on the doorstep of the Shropshire Way and walks to Long Mynd and Stiperstones. Boulton's bus 551 comes here from Shrewsbury on Tuesday only. On weekends and Bank Holidays from April to October the Long Mynd shuttle runs hourly to Church Stretton.

**Mynd House** (☎ 01694-722212; www.myndhouse.com; Ludlow Rd, Little Stretton; s/d/f from £37/70/120; (P) (Q) wi-fi). Set right at the foot of the Long Mynd, this welcoming, family-friendly guest house has splendid views out over the hills and makes an excellent base for cycling, hiking or strolling. Rooms are clean and airy, and there's a small bar and cosy lounge stocked with local books. There are maps for guests to borrow, and lots of advice on where to go hiking in the surrounding area.

**Jinlye Guest House** (☎ 01694-723243; www.jinlye.co.uk; Castle Hill, All Stretton; s/d £50/80; (P)) The Long Mynd is literally your back garden, so you'll have sheep as your neighbours at this beautifully restored crofter's cottage perched on the hilltop, and graced by old beams, log fires and leaded windows. Bedrooms are bright and elegantly furnished with antiques and the off floral frill. Expect a good old-fashioned welcome. Wheelchair access is available.

Other options include:

**Willowfield** (☎ 01694-751471; www.willowfieldguesthouse.co.uk; Lower Wood; s/d £50/70; (P)) A 17th-century farmhouse in an idyllic isolated location.

**Longmynd Hotel** (☎ 01694-722244; www.longmynd.co.uk; Cunnersy Rd; s/d £70/125; (P) (Q) wi-fi) Hilltop pile with airy rooms, a swimming pool, stunning vistas, sculpture trail and excellent food.

## Eating

**Berry's Coffee House** (☎ 01694-724452; www.berryscoffeehouse.co.uk; 17 High St; meals £6-8; ☎ 10am-5pm daily) A sociable cafe in an 18th-century building with little conservatory just off the main street. Berry's is proud of its organic, free-range, fair-trade, wholesome offerings, but makes up for all that goodness with wicked desserts.

**Studio** (☎ 01694-722672; 59 High St; set menus £22.50-27.50; ☎ dinner only Wed-Sat) A former artist's studio, still littered with interesting works, sets the scene for the town's best and most intimate restaurant. The award-winning menu jumps confidently between modern English and traditional French food, and uses plenty of local game and fish.

**Van Doesburg's** (☎ 01694-722867; 3 High St) You'll find everything you need for a classy picnic at this excellent patisserie-delicatessen. Highlights are posh sandwiches, flapjacks and quiches.

## Getting There & Around

There are hourly trains to Shrewsbury (20 minutes), and bus 435, which runs between Shrewsbury (45 minutes) and Ludlow (40 minutes) six times daily, stops here.

You can hire 24-speed mountain bikes with front or full suspension and cheaper, simpler bikes from **Shropshire Hills Bike Hire** (☎ 723302; 6 Castle Hill, All Stretton; per day from £10).

## BISHOP'S CASTLE

pop 1630

Home to a bewitching mixture of breweries, half-timbered buildings, second-hand bookshops and eclectic boutiques, this languid little border town makes stress seem like an alien concept. At the top of High St sits the adorable Georgian **town hall** and delightfully crooked 16th-century **House on Crutches** (☎ 630007; admission free; ☎ 1-5pm Sat & Sun), which also houses the town **museum**.

The pleasingly potty **Old Time** (☎ 01588-638467; www.bishopscastle.co.uk; 29 High St; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) offers limited tourist information.

## Activities

Walk along the **Shropshire Way**, which runs through the town and joins up with **Offa's Dyke Path** to the south; the **Kerry Ridgeway** to the south; or head north and risk the forbidding

ridges of the **Stiperstones**, where Satan is said to hold court.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Poppy House** (☎ 01588-638443; www.poppyhouse.co.uk; 20 Market Sq; s/d £40/70) Sweet little beamed rooms with dark burgundy bedspreads and lots of little extras, such as books and magazines and a complimentary breakfast-in-bed service win this B&B much praise. The downstairs restaurant has an interesting menu, featuring the likes of eel wrapped in prosciutto and sea bass on caramelised pineapple (mains £9 to £18; open 10am to 5pm and 6.30pm to 11pm).

**Castle Hotel** (☎ 01588-638403; www.thecastlehotelbishopscastle.co.uk; The Square; s/d £45/90; (P)) Occupying a regal position in an elevated square, this handsome 18th-century coaching inn has lovely terraced gardens and seven relaxing beamed rooms, many with soul-restoring views over the town and the valley. The oak-panelled restaurant dishes up classic English food and the bar serves a good choice of local brews.

Other possibilities:

**Porch House** (☎ 01588-638854; www.theporchhouse.com; High St; s/d £40/70; (P) ☎ wi-fi) This stunning porch house dating back to 1564 has chic, contemporary rooms and plenty of extra touches to make you feel special.

**Yarborough House** (☎ 01588-638318; The Square) Excellent coffee and cakes in a classical music shop and second-hand bookshop.

## Drinking

**Three Tuns** (☎ 01588-638797; Salop St) One of Shropshire's most famous alehouses is a surprisingly ordinary place but for the fact that it is next door to a Victorian brewery, close enough to smell the roasting malt. Though they're no longer run by the same folk, you can still sample the brewery's best at the Three Tuns bar.

**Six Bells Inn** (☎ 01588-630144; Church St; mains £7.50-13; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) This historic 17th-century coaching inn is alive with loyal locals and ramblers who come to sample ales from its adjoining brewery. The pub also has a reputation for traditional English comfort food such as homemade pies and Big Nev's bangers made with local ale.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 435 runs to and from Shrewsbury (one hour) seven times daily.

## LUDLOW

pop 9548

Fanning out from the rambling ruins of a fine Norman castle, beautiful Ludlow's muddle of narrow streets, flanked by half-timbered Jacobean and elegant Georgian buildings, are a magnet for foodies from miles around. This picturesque town is a temple to gastronomy, hosting independent butchers, bakers, grocers, cheesemongers and a handful of exceptional restaurants. Our advice: book ahead and punch a few extra holes in your belt – you can always work it all off in the nearby Shropshire hills afterwards.

Ludlow's helpful **tourist office** (☎ 01584-875053; www.ludlow.org.uk; Castle Sq; ☹ 10am-5pm) is in the 19th-century assembly rooms. There's also a small back-to-front **museum** (☎ 01584-813666; admission free; ☹ 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Easter-Oct) on the town and surrounding area here.

Internet can be tracked down at the **library** (☎ 01584-813600; 7-9 Parkway; ☹ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Wed & Sat, 9.30am-7.30pm Fri) and clothes can be washed, dried and pressed at **Ludlow Laundry** (Tower St; per bag £5; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat).

### Sights & Activities

With seductive delicatessens and distracting antique dealers around every corner, the best way to explore Ludlow is to simply surrender to getting pleasurably lost on foot.

The town's finest attraction is its **castle** (☎ 01584-873355; www.ludlowcastle.com; Castle Sq; adult/child/senior & student £4.50/2.50/4; ☹ 10am-7pm Aug, to 5pm Apr-Jul & Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar, weekends only Dec & Jan), which sits in an ideal defensive location atop a cliff above a crook in the river. One of a line of fortifications built along the Marches to ward off the marauding Welsh, it is full of secret passageways, ruined rooms, tucked-away nooks and mysterious stairwells. The sturdy Norman keep was built around 1090 and has wonderful views over the surrounding hills and the river below.

The castle was transformed into a 14th-century palace by the notorious Roger Mortimer, who was instrumental in the grisly death of Edward II, but its chequered history is reflected in different architectural styles. The round chapel in the inner bailey was built in 1120 and is one of few surviving in England.

The waymarked 30-mile **Mortimer Trail** to Kington starts just outside the castle entrance. The tourist office can provide

a free leaflet on en route services, or a more thorough booklet for £1.50. Also see www.mortimercountry.co.uk.

Some delightfully cheeky medieval misericords lurk in the choir of **Church of St Laurence** (☎ 01584-872073; www.stlaurences.org.uk; King St; requested donation £2; ☹ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 11am-4pm Oct-Mar), one of the largest parish churches in Britain. These painstakingly carved 'mercy seats' show scenes of domestic 15th-century life both pious and profane, including a beer-swilling chap raiding his barrel.

**Guided walks** (£2) run from April to October, leaving the Cannon in Castle Sq at 2.30pm on Saturday and Sunday. You can also take the **ghost walk** (www.shropshireghostwalks.co.uk; adult/child £4/3; ☹ 8pm Fri) from outside the Church Inn on the Buttercross.

### Festivals & Events

Markets are held in Castle Sq every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. The town's busy calendar peaks with the **Ludlow Festival** (☎ 872150; www.ludlowfestival.co.uk), a fortnight of theatre and music in June and July that uses the castle as its dramatic backdrop. No surprise that most of the other events are foodie affairs. The renowned **Ludlow Marches Food & Drink Festival** (☎ 01584-873957; www.foodfestival.co.uk) is one of Britain's best, and takes place over a long weekend in September.

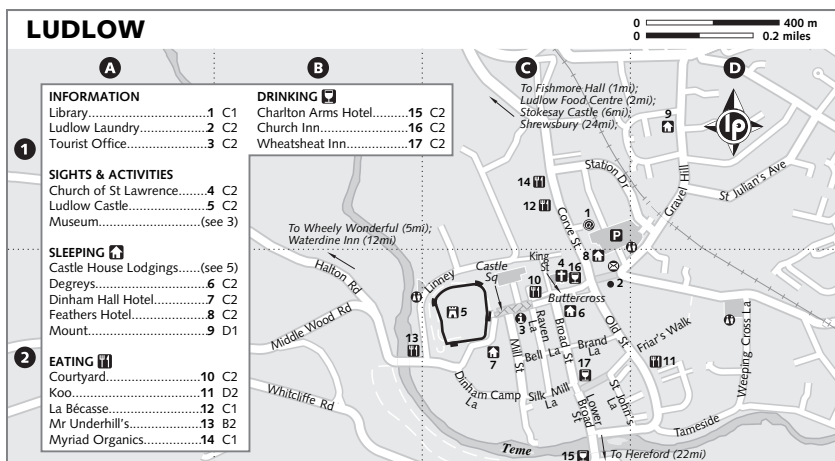
### Sleeping

**Mount** (☎ 01584-874084; www.themountludlow.co.uk; 61 Gravel Hill; s/d from £30/55; (P)) The glorious sunset views from this good-looking Victorian house are worth the modest price tag alone. Walkers and cyclists are well catered to, despite unforgivingly crisp white bed linen and cream carpets, and the welcoming hostess offers lifts from the railway station.

**Feathers Hotel** (☎ 01584-875261; www.feathersatludlow.co.uk; Bull Ring; s/d from £75/95; (P)) Three storeys of stunning black-and-white timber-framed facade serve to introduce this famous Jacobean inn. Not all rooms are in the wonderfully atmospheric original building, so make sure you're getting the real deal when booking. Newer rooms follow the usual bland template with antique-styled trimmings. The deeply atmospheric restaurant (set lunch/dinner £15/25) is recommended.

**Degreys** (☎ 01584-872764; www.degreys.co.uk; 73 Lower Broad St; r £75-140) Set in an Elizabethan townhouse at Ludlow's heart, this classy B&B





has nine luxurious rooms with low ceilings, beams, leaded windows and solid oak beds. The balance of period features and modern luxury is spot on and there's a fantastic traditional English tearoom downstairs.

Other options include:

**Dinham Hall Hotel** (☎ 01584-876464; [www.dinhamhall.co.uk](http://www.dinhamhall.co.uk); s £95, d £140-240; (P)) Resplendent 18th-century country manor with superb traditional restaurant, opposite the castle.

**Castle House Lodgings** (☎ 01584-874465; [www.castle-accommodation.com](http://www.castle-accommodation.com); Ludlow Castle; an apt sleeping 4 for 3 nights £545-825; (P)) Glorious self-catering apartments in Castle House, within Ludlow Castle grounds.

## Eating

If you can afford to splurge on food, this is unquestionably the place to do it. While we've picked our favourites, you needn't go far for more epicurean delights.

**Ludlow Food Centre** (☎ 01584-856000; Bromfield; mains £5-8; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun) Wonderful food shop selling fresh baked bread and cakes, cheese, local meats, ciders, fresh pies and quiches ripe for a picnic. There's also a bright cafe selling similarly scrumptious produce in a converted barn next door. Two miles north west of Ludlow, just off the A49.

**Courtyard** (☎ 01584-878080; [www.thecourtyard-ludlow.co.uk](http://www.thecourtyard-ludlow.co.uk); 2 Quality Sq; mains £5.50-10; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Thu-Sat) Light relief from too much gastronomic extravagance, this simple cafe, tucked away in a tranquil courtyard, has a faithful local following for its lightning service and tasty seasonal food.

**La Bécasse** (☎ 01584-872325; [www.labecasse.co.uk](http://www.labecasse.co.uk); 17 Corve St; 2-course lunch/6-course gourmand menu £20/55; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Wed-Sun) Artfully presented modern French cuisine bursting with inventive flavour fusions – the spectacular tasting menu is enough to make you weak at the knees. The serious business of eating is conducted within the oak-panelled and exposed brick walls of a 17th-century coach house.

**Koo** (☎ 01584-878462; 127 Old St; 3-course set menu £22-26; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) Three- and four-course Japanese menus are served up in this bright green cubby hole, overseen by its friendly Japanese owner who's always eager to chat with diners about Japanese culture and etiquette. During the festival, takeaway bento boxes are available for impromptu picnics.

**Mr Underhill's** (☎ 01584-874431; [www.mr-underhills.co.uk](http://www.mr-underhills.co.uk); Dinham Weir; 6-course set menu £45-55; ☎ dinner Wed-Sun) Ludlow's only Michelin-starred restaurant is set in a converted corn mill that dips its toes in the river. Expect exquisite modern British food, though there's little choice before dessert, so make any dietary requests beforehand. It also offers stylish rooms (singles £120, doubles £140 to £190, suites £235 to £290). Reserve well in advance.

Some other options:

**Myriad Organics** (☎ 01584-872665; 22 Corve St; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Excellent all-organic deli opposite arch rival supermarket Tesco.

**Fishmore Hall** (☎ 01584-875148; Fishmore Rd; 2-course dinner £38.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) Imposing whitewashed Georgian hotel in a beautiful rural location with first-class food about a mile north of town.

## Drinking

For an atmospheric pint, traditional hop-strewn pub the **Church Inn** (☎ 01584-872174) is tucked away on narrow Buttercross, and the quiet little **Wheatsheaf Inn** (☎ 01584-872980; Lower Broad St) has a good choice of local ales. For a more contemporary atmosphere head for the **Charlton Arms Hotel** (☎ 01584-872813), a rambling place on the other side of the river with a couple of terraces and sublime views.

## Getting There & Around

Trains go twice-hourly to Shrewsbury (£8.40, 30 minutes) and Hereford (£6.40, 25 minutes), and hourly to Church Stretton (16 minutes). Slower buses go to Shrewsbury (bus 435, 1½ hours, five daily) and to nearby towns.

You can hire bikes from **Wheely Wonderful** (☎ 01568-770755; www.wheelywonderfulcycling.co.uk; Petchfield Farm, Elton; bike/tandem per day £18/36), 5 miles west of Ludlow.

## AROUND LUDLOW

The wonky timber-framed tops and stunning Jacobean gatehouse of **Stokesay Castle** (EH; ☎ 01588-672544; adult/5-15yr/under 5yr £5/2.50/free; ☞ 10am-5pm daily Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Wed-Sun Oct & Mar, 10am-4pm Thu-Sun Nov-Feb) give this fortified 13th-century manor house a fairy-tale glow that is hard to shake off. Built by Britain's most successful wool merchant, Lawrence of Ludlow, it has changed little since it was completed in 1291 and boasts a cavernous Great Hall, original timber staircase and gabled windows, and an enchanting garden that's hardly been touched since the original owners first pitched their medieval forks.

Stokesay Castle is 6 miles northwest of Ludlow, just off the A49. Bus 435 runs five times daily between Shrewsbury and Ludlow. Alternatively, catch the train from Ludlow Station to Craven Arms, just over a mile away.

**our pick** **Waterdine Inn** (☎ 01547-528214; www.waterdine.com; Llanfair Waterdine; s/d incl dinner & breakfast £80/160; P), a timbered and ivy-clad 16th-century longhouse, is well and truly in the middle of nowhere, with the River Teme border with Wales the only reminder of an outside world. Expect a warm welcome and simple cottage-style rooms with low ceilings,

wooden furniture and springy beds. The restaurant also has a homely, dinner-party feel, while the fantastic modern Anglo-French menu (mains £12 to £18) focuses on organic meats and wild game. Llanfair Waterdine is about 12 miles west of Ludlow.

## NORTH SHROPSHIRE

A tapestry of pretty market towns and fertile countryside make northern Shropshire well worth a look. With a market dating back 750 years, **Market Drayton** is also famed for its gingerbread and for being home to terrible teen Clive of India, founder of Britain's Indian Empire. The town has a scattering of medieval buildings. The **tourist office** (☎ 01584-653114; 49 Cheshire St; ☞ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat) can point you towards sights.

Five miles southwest, **Wollerton Old Hall** (☎ 01630-685760; www.wollertonoldhallgarden.com; Wollerton; adult/child £5/1; ☞ Fri, Sun & Bank Holidays noon-5pm) is a treat for gardeners, with its beautifully manicured lawns and flowers surrounding a 16th-century house.

Another 4 miles west is the ideal energy-burning spot for kids, **Hawkstone Park** (☎ 01939-200611; www.hawkstone.co.uk; Weston-under-Redcastle; adult/child £6/4; ☞ 10am-4pm Mar-Sep, 10am-3pm Oct, 10am-2pm weekends only Jan & Feb), an 18th-century magical land of cliffs, spooky rock-hewn caves, deep woods and underground grottos.

Another leap westwards will bring you to the beautiful mere-drizzled countryside around **Ellesmere**. The six glacial lakes surrounding the town are ideal for gentle walking, with well-signposted circular routes to guide you.

The wonderfully remote **Pen-y-Dyffryn Hotel** (☎ 01691-653700; www.peny.co.uk; Rhydygroesau, Oswestry; s/d from £57/114; P) is a real treat, where the bird-song is the prevalent noise and sheep roam the steep valley sides. Serving award-winning organic food (three-course set menu £35) and offering 12 traditional rooms, the hotel is in a remote Georgian rectory with gorgeous views of the Welsh mountains. The lovely 16th-century **Top Farm House** (☎ 01691-682582; www.topfarmknockin.co.uk; Knockin; s/d/f £35/60/65; P) is criss-crossed with an elaborately painted black-and-white timber facade, has just three old-maidish floral rooms and serves the best breakfast around.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'