

# Travel & Outdoors

**WISH YOU WERE HERE**



## A history-making holiday

One of the UK's oldest Saxon settlements, beautiful Bradford-on-Avon in Wiltshire charms **Kate Wickers**

I have a severe case of FOMO (fear of missing out) as I stare at the 165-strong gin menu at Widbrook Grange Hotel, located in a Georgian farmhouse, just a mile outside the scenic Wiltshire town of Bradford-on-Avon. So much gin, so little time. I plump for the “gin of the week” – a Belgian apple-flavoured Buss No 509 – earmarking the Agnes Arber for later.

Earlier I'd walked a stretch of the Kennet and Avon canal, part of the 57-mile waterway that links the River Kennet at Reading with the River Avon at Bath. From the hotel it's an idyllic commute into town, past pleasure barges with names ranging from Lady Jane to Iron Maiden, moored on reed banks where kingfishers flit. Before exploring one of Britain's oldest Saxon settlements, I paused awhile at the Canal Trust Café to watch the boats pass through the lock. Life goes by here at a delightfully sedate pace.

For six centuries, Bradford-on-Avon was known for its cloth industry and the great mills of the 18th century (now converted to attractive apartments) and grand mansions, once belonging to wealthy merchants, still dominate the town, with weavers' cottages covering the steep hills behind. It takes its name from the “broad ford” that runs through its centre, namely the River Avon, and I begin my exploration at the nine-arch Town Bridge. In the middle is The Lock Up – a medieval chapel that was later used as an overnight cooling-off station for the town's troublemakers, and which inspired the local saying “under the fish and over the water”, meaning to be in jail. A little confusing until you notice the gudgeon (a freshwater

*Ask about a news story telling of a ghost sighting from the upstairs window*



**A canalside view of Bradford-on-Avon, main, and the nine-arch Town Bridge, above**

fish) spinning merrily on the Lock Up's weather vane. The bridge was doubled in width in 1767 because, rather tiresomely, people kept falling into the river.

I stroll through The Shambles – a crooked narrow street lined with 15th-century buildings – that gets its name from the Anglo-Saxon word “scamel”, a bench used by traders to display their produce. It's now lined with attractive shops, cafes and bakeries, such as Gilou's, speciality coffee house and wine bar (try the house brioche with organic butter). At the end of the street you'll see the immense Catholic Church of

St Thomas More, a mishmash of extravagant design and crowned with an onion dome, which began life as the town hall in 1854. It was designed by Thomas Fuller, who went on to design the Canadian parliament buildings in Ottawa. Continue along Church Street, then begin to climb through row upon row of honey-coloured stone weavers' cottages to what is known as Tory – the highest of Bradford's small streets. It takes its name from the word “tor”, meaning hilly peak. I take a breather at the chapel of St Mary, as pilgrims bound for Glastonbury once did.

With 10,000 steps under my belt, I feel I've earned my cream tea, enjoyed in The Bridge Tea Rooms, a former blacksmith's cottage dating from 1502. I ask about a news story I'd come across, which tells of a ghostly sighting from the upstairs window in 2018. “Oh that,” the owner says. “Turns out, it was just one of the Saturday girls. We forgot she was in that day.” All the cakes are made in the kitchens housed on the top floor. I plump for plum with frangipani and an assortment of two-bite sandwiches washed down

with peppermint tea, although for traditionalists there are scones with homemade jams and loose-leaf Earl Grey served in china cups that look like they could tell a tale or two.

When the cloth trade fell into decline in the late 19th century, Victorian entrepreneur Stephen Moulton bought up redundant mills and began production of rubber goods. The gardens of Moulton Hall feel like a secret, tucked away behind high fences in the centre of the town, and The Hall, a stunning Jacobean house built in 1600, is an even bigger surprise. The cycle track installed by Moulton's grandson, Alex Moulton, in the 1960s, was used to trial Moulton bicycles, still manufactured in the town today. Look for the bike motifs found in the stone follies dotted around the gardens. Sticking with a horticultural theme, Ilford Manor Gardens, on the outskirts of town, represents one of the UK's finest examples of terraced hillside gardening.

I tread in Saxon footprints to the 14th century Tith Barn, one used by wealthy landowners to collect tythes (taxes), paid for in livestock and produce. It runs 168ft long and 33ft across, with a vast whalebone-like carcass of a timber roof supporting a stone roof that weighs over 100 tons. For a spiningling moment, run your fingers over the patterns of interlocking circles, chiselled into the stonework near the barn doors. They were put there to ward off witches. Over the 14th-century Packhorse Bridge, I make my way to the Church of St Laurence, one of the most complete Saxon buildings in existence. Built in the 11th century, the three simple stone chambers with slender archways are unadorned, save for chisel marks left by stone masons and two stylised angels flying high on the eastern wall.

Back at Widbrook Grange, I take a dip in the indoor pool and a walk around the 11 acres of grounds. The place has the feel of a wealthy friend's country pile. Nice touches include the rolled-up rugs in the lobby – handy to grab as the temperature drops – and you can't yet quite tear yourself



away from your deckchair, positioned on daisy-speckled lawns where pheasants stroll and rabbits hop. Unusual fun is found in bedroom fixtures and fittings. I'm in the Music Room, one of four suites in the main house, which has a bedside light made from a bugle, a gramophone on top of the wardrobe and biscuits, tea and coffee stored in a violin case. In the bathroom, my sink sits upon a bicycle with a basket stuffed with sheet music. A rolltop bath is in the bedroom, in which I soak happily with views of the gardens.

Dinner is served in one of two places. In the conservatory, if your dog has come on holiday with you, or in The Kitchen restaurant if not. The sign by the front door, which states that a house without a dog is not a home, will give you an idea of just how pooch-friendly the hotel is, providing beds, bowls and treats as part of their Adventures with Fido package. Without mine to keep my feet warm, I tuck into scallops with chorizo, hake on a bed of saffron risotto, and mango parfait, then I'm back to the gin bar to choose another. With 162 left to try, it's a good excuse to plan a return visit and this time I'll be bringing my westie pup Bertie to share the fun.

**Double rooms begin at £125, based on two people sharing. For info on all packages, including Adventures with Fido, go to [www.widbrookgrange.co.uk](http://www.widbrookgrange.co.uk); follow [Kate @wickers.kate](https://twitter.com/wickers.kate)**



An unusual sink set-up, above, at Widbrook Grange Hotel, top

STAYCATION



# Summer in the arty city

With a fascinating history and vibrant street life, Bristol is the ideal staycation, says Neil Geraghty

It's a warm July afternoon and groups of students are sunbathing on Bristol's elegant College Green enjoying ice creams from two of the city's favourite gelaterias.

Behind them, the imposing triple Gothic towers of Bristol Cathedral coupled with the crenelated facade of the Cathedral Choir School form a quintessentially English historic backdrop. Cast your eyes over the road though and you'll spot a striking piece of contemporary street art that draws fans from all over the world.

The painting in question is Banksy's infamous Naked Man Hanging from a Window, a hilarious work depicting a wife caught in flagrante by her husband while her lover hangs by his fingertips from a window. The painting often stops unsuspecting tourists in their tracks and this juxtaposition of history and eye catching street art is typical of Bristol's chameleon like charm.

With an extensive choice of top notch hotels and excellent restaurants, Bristol is ideal for both city breaks and longer staycations. If opting for a longer stay, Great Western Railways offer a range of good value rover tickets with which you can explore the beautiful landscapes and historic towns of the nearby Cotswolds. From Bristol's

palatial Temple Meads station, it's a pleasant 15-minute walk to the centre where I check into the Hotel Bristol, a renovated '60s office block that is full of quirky design nods to its heritage and has a superb location a stone's throw away from both the historic centre and Bristol's atmospheric new harbourside development.

After check in I wander up to the centre where reminders of Bristol's prosperous past abound. Just opposite the hotel's entrance a road leads into Queen's Square, one of the largest Georgian squares in the UK. The town centre is dominated by the imposing neo-classical Corn Exchange which is now home to a lively covered market full of local artisans and food producers.

From the city centre I walk up to the gritty working class neighbourhood of Stokes Croft where I begin a self guided web tour of Bristol's street art devised by local tour operator "Where the Wall". It was in the '90s in Stokes Croft that Banksy first began using graffiti as a political protest tool and the tour takes in some of his most famous murals including Mild Mild West which depicts a teddy bear throwing a Molotov cocktail at three riot police which is now a much loved landmark of the Stokes Croft neighbourhood.

Halfway through the tour I get a bit lost and end up in Kingsdown, a delightful district of elegant Georgian terraces, squares and gardens. Kingsdown was the first Georgian suburb built on the hilltops overlooking Bristol where the middle classes could escape the stench of inner city living. The most famous of these suburbs is Clifton which with its honey coloured sandstone terraces is redolent of downtown Bath. Clifton is also a popular dining out neighbourhood and the eclectic choice of international cuisine reflects Bristol's multicultural make up. At the Coconut Tree which specialises in Sri Lankan street food

*The painting often stops unsuspecting tourists in their tracks*

I'm introduced to some unfamiliar dishes including Kotthu, a pan fried medley of roti, chicken and vegetables which is the perfect earthy counterfoil to their vibrantly spiced Jaffa curries and dhals.

The following day I head down to Bristol's harbourside which has been redeveloped into a pleasant neighbourhood of terrace restaurants and quayside promenades. Highlights include Bristol's pride and joy, Brunel's SS Great Britain, the world's first steam

**Clockwise from main: Bristol Cathedral on College Green; Cabot Tower; the Banksy mural Aachoo!!**

powered passenger liner and the M Shed, a fascinating museum dedicated to the culture and history of Bristol.

There's no escaping the fact the Bristol's prosperity was built upon the slave trade and the M Shed is now home to the famous Colston Statue which was toppled and thrown into Bristol Harbour during last year's Black Lives Matter protests. Daubed with red and blue graffiti it has now become an iconic example of Bristol's long history of protest art.

Back on College Green I grab a pistachio ice cream and sit down next to some students from the Cathedral Choir School who to my surprise break into a rendition of John Denver's Country Roads. Banksy himself was a student at the Choir School and I wonder what he'd make of this overt display of middle class respectability, a million miles away from the hip hop counter culture of his formative years. I suspect he'd appreciate the irony and paint a humorous new masterpiece on the walls of his old school.

**For more information on Bristol visit [www.visitbristol.co.uk](http://www.visitbristol.co.uk) – For tickets from Edinburgh via London, train times and Covid travel guidance visit [GWR.com](http://GWR.com)**

48 HOURS IN

## Campbeltown



**Friday, midday**  
Check into the Ardshiel Hotel (doubles from £150, [ardshiel.co.uk](http://ardshiel.co.uk)), a grand 19th century mansion harking back to Campbeltown's glory days.

**1pm**  
Seafood stars at swish newcomer Number Forty Two, with everything from oysters and hulking turbot hauled in boat-fresh.

**2pm**  
Once, over 30 distilleries busied away in Campbeltown. Today there are only three, but they're doing well with rumours of more to come. Glen Scotia offer superb tours and warehouse tastings. Make sure to sample their 25 year-old as it has just been named the world's best whisky.

**4pm**  
Continue on the whisky trail to Cadenhead. This famous whisky shop offers a range of bottlings, with some rare treats; tastings too.

**6:30pm**  
Savour sweeping views of Campbeltown and its famous loch at the Craighard Hotel. Tuck into local fish chowder, then local Gigha halibut spiced with pink peppercorns.

**8:30pm**  
Meet up – at the Ardshiel's brilliantly well-stocked whisky bar – with new outfit Watt Whisky, a local independent bottler who also offer tastings.

**Saturday, 10am**  
Head out on the new Kintyre 66 driving and cycling route up the west coast where the sweeping sands of Westport Beach tempt. The Hebrides start to sparkle in the distance under big skies as you head further north. Who needs Route 66?

**1pm**  
Enjoy a beach picnic tucking into the world-class local produce you picked up from Kintyre Larder with local baking, chocolates and other goodies.

**6:30pm**  
Dine at the Ardshiel. Locally landed monkfish works into the fruity curry, with hake in the lighter tacos.

**7:30pm**  
Settle in to arguably Scotland's most beautiful cinema, Campbeltown Picture House. This joy of Glasgow School Art Nouveau has been gloriously revamped, surviving for over 100 years largely through the sheer determination of the local community.

**Sunday, 9am**  
Take a walk along the palm-fringed waterfront imagining the days when you could walk across Campbeltown's wide harbour on the fishing boats.

**Robin McKelvie**

**A car is the best way of getting to Campbeltown with the bonus of driving on the Kintyre 66. Further information [wildaboutargyll.co.uk](http://wildaboutargyll.co.uk)**

