

Cycling Safaris

COTSWOLDS 2009



This is a delightful tour, where you will have the opportunity to enter a different world of quintessentially English villages, rolling green hills and, of course, traditional 'cream teas'. The cycle takes us deep into the Cotswolds with its limestone cottages along quiet back roads. We take our rest day in Stratford-upon-Avon with its Elizabethan town centre and museums dedicated to its most famous son, William Shakespeare.

TOUR ITINERARY

DAY 1 **Saturday** **City Of Oxford**

The tour starts in the splendour of the city of Oxford. Oxford is a very attractive and historic city and well worth visiting in its own right. It is especially worth seeing the Christchurch, Trinity and Balliol colleges (there are 36 in total!). A climb of the Carfax Tower offers a good panoramic view. There is a museum of Oxford Life located in the town hall, St Adates (01865 252761) open 10-5 Sats, that tells the history of Oxford with special exhibits.

The meeting point and accommodation has yet to be confirmed for 2009. A taxi ride from the railway station/coach station should cost no more than about £7.00.

If you arrive early, feel free to check in (the hotel will be expecting you), leaving you free to explore the city unencumbered by luggage. The guide will meet you in the foyer of the hotel at 6.30 pm and after a short introductory talk accompany you for dinner at the hotel which is included in the tour cost.

For those arriving early (or leaving late after the tour finishes) Oxford offers plenty of attractions. Walking tours can be taken (all starting from the Tourist Information Centre Tel 01865 726871). Sightseeing tours leave at 11.00 and 2.00, and cost £6, Inspector Morse tour 1.30pm (sats only) £6.50. Open top Bus tours can be taken, departs Gloucester green Bus Station every 15-20 mins from 10.05-17.45 cost £8 and last approx 1 hour.

DAY 2 Sunday Oxford to Burford 25 miles / 42 km

Having selected your bicycle the tour heads alongside the canal tow path and then onto a Sustrans cycle track. This brings us to Woodstock and the opportunity to visit Blenheim Palace.

Blenheim is one of the great palaces of England. It was presented to John Churchill (1st Duke of Marlborough) in 1704 after his success against the French at Blenheim. It is set in a 2000-acre park, landscaped by the famous gardener Capability Brown. The long library is one of the longest single rooms in Britain and the guided tours (every 5-10 mins) offer a great insight into the life and the history surrounding Blenheim including its most famous son, Winston Churchill. (Entry fee £10, includes access to the house, gardens, park, Winston Churchill exhibition and the train ride). Woodstock is a pretty town, the Bear Hotel being particularly noteworthy dating from the 13th Century.

The cycle then takes us deeper into the Cotswolds with its limestone cottages along quiet back roads. Our destination is Burford with a particularly attractive mainstreet of handsome Inns and charming cottages that leads downhill to a medieval bridge (1322) by the old mill over the river Windrush.

DAY 3 Monday Burford to Broadway 30 miles / 50 km

Leaving Burford we cross the heart of the Cotswolds to take in the famous village of Bourton-on-the-water, dubbed the Venice of England, with its many different attractions including Birdland, miniature village, motor museum, model railway and perfumery.

We then escape the hustle of Bourton to the quieter (and at least to us, prettier) villages of Lower and Upper Slaughter. The afternoon cycle brings us to the incredibly lovely Stanton, which has been virtually untouched since the 17th century.

Excursions include Snowhill Manor (£6 approx, open Mondays in July & Aug), Sudeley Castle which was the home of Thomas Seymour who married Henry VIII's wife Catherine Parr and was visited by Elizabeth I (very attractive castle with many exhibits, nice gardens and a coffee shop set in the banqueting hall, open 11-5 cost £6.70) and Stanway House, a Jacobean Manor still inhabited by Lord Niedpath (lovely 20 acre garden including baroque water garden with 80ft fountain - open July-Aug 2-5pm). Stanway Beer can also be sampled at many of the local pubs.

The Steam Railway from Cheltenham racecourse to Toddington (stops at Winchcombe) has limited bike carriage 01242 621405) and doesn't run every Monday, but can be a novel form of travel for those wishing a change of pace.

DAY 4 Tuesday Broadway to Stratford 27 miles / 45 km

We begin the cycle with a stretching of the legs up to the quaint village of Snowhill. We then loop around to Broadway Tower and Country Park. This folly has seen the likes of William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelite Painter Rossetti stay here. On a clear day you can see 12 counties from the top of the tower. We then meander our way through a few villages before arriving at our lunch stop, a 13th century thatched tavern. After lunch we take a disused railway line, now converted to a cycle path, which provides a traffic free entry into the heart of this famous town.

DAY 5 **Wednesday** **Rest day in Stratford-upon-Avon**

Stratford-upon Avon is the birthplace of the world's greatest poet and playwright and has a lovely preserved Elizabethan town centre. There are several sights and museums that can be undertaken whilst here.

A great excursion is Warwick Castle – home to the all-powerful Earls of Warwick, the site was first fortified in 1068 and has survived 1000 years of turbulent history intact.

The castle offers many displays from Staterooms, to dungeons, torture chambers, private apartments as well as climbs to the top of the ramparts for great views. There is various entertainment depending on the season, such as jousting, falconry, etc (www.warwick-castle.co.uk).

The castle itself cost £12.50, however tour buses depart the Tourism centre in Stratford (Rother Street) at 10.15 and 12.30 costing £17.50 including castle entrance (return buses 13.40 & 17.40)

Open-top bus tours stop at all the major tourist sights on a hop-on, hop-off basis (cost £7.50 run every 15 mins 9-17.40), includes all the Shakespeare homes.

The Shakespeare Properties are (prices are approximate);

Ann Hathaway's Cottage – Girlhood home of his wife containing family furniture, 1 mile outside town in Shottery. (£5)

Mary Ardens Cottage & Shakespeare countryside museum – 3 miles outside Stratford, Wilmcote, includes displays of local and Tudor rural life. (£5.50)

Shakespeare's Birthplace – Furnished as his boyhood in 1570's. features 1st folio editions of plays (£6.50)

Nash's House – Home of his granddaughter contains collection of 17th century oak furniture and tapestries (£3.50)

Halls Croft – A fine half-timbered gabled house, home to his daughter with displays including Elizabethan medicine (£3.50)

All 5 houses can be visited for £12 or the 3 in town for £8.50 (more info at www.shakespeare.org.uk).

Holy Trinity is a lovely church that also contains Shakespeare's grave, if you wish to complete his life cycle!

Backstage tours can be taken of the famous Swan theatre (booking has to be made in advance) for £4. Plus there is always the opportunity to see one of the master's plays. At the time of writing schedules were not available for the summer, but more details can be found at www.rsc.org.uk.

DAY 6 **Thursday** **Stratford to Stow on the Wold** **34 miles / 57 km**

Leaving behind Stratford we are soon into the countryside and back onto pleasant country roads. Today brings the opportunity to visit some of the lovelier gardens of the Cotswolds such as the noteworthy Hidcote Manor or Batsford Arboretum with its Falconry centre.

Lunch is taken in Chipping Camden one of the loveliest and best preserved of the Villages before ambling our way through Broad Campden and Blockley. Moreton in the Marsh offers further shopping and Tea Room opportunities before arriving into the lovely Square of Stow On the Wold. The Royalist pub claims to be one of the countries oldest, with scientific tests dating the beams back to 947AD.

There is also a toy museum in the town with many Victorian toys and Teddy bears as well as other exhibits of porcelain etc.

DAY 7 Friday Stow on the Wold to Oxford 34 miles / 57 km

Today's cycle sees us follow the Oxfordshire cycleway for much of the morning, with most of the journey being pleasantly downhill.

Our lunch stop for today is the market town of Witney, originally famous for its blanket making and now known for its unusual 17th century butter cross. Just outside of the town, a mere quarter mile off the route is the Cogges Manor Farm Museum that contains working kitchen and dairy as well as other exhibits from the Edwardian period. The last part of the cycle sees us retrace our steps for the last three miles back to our starting point in Oxford for our last night together.

The recommended route is relatively flat and some 30 miles (50 km) each day should you follow the shorter route. The mileage has been kept low so as to leave plenty of time to stop to visit places of interest along the way. The traffic on the route should be quite light, however you should cycle carefully at all times, especially when going downhill or during any rain showers. Total Route distance is about 150 miles (250 km).

TOUR DATES

June 20
May 30
Sept 19

TOUR PRICE

Stg £599 per person sharing
Stg £740 for single occupancy

WHAT THE TOUR PRICE INCLUDES

- 7 nights bed and breakfast accommodation
- Two dinners
- 21 speed touring bike with a pannier bag
- Guide in a support van
- Route details/Maps

Clients buy their own lunches and dinner throughout the trip. You should budget for between £5 and £7 for lunch each day. The guide organises an evening meal each night costing somewhere between £12 and £18. Although most people enjoy coming together each evening to discuss their adventures during the day over dinner, you are always free to organise your own dinner arrangements if you so wish. Please inform the guide if you decide to do this. Nearly all restaurants in England now cater for vegetarians but please inform the guide if you are vegetarian so that he can organise something for you in more remote places.

ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation is allocated on a twin-sharing basis with a combination of B&Bs and hotels. We ensure private facilities almost all of the time. We would be happy to help you organise extra accommodation for the start or the end of the week, you can contact the office directly for this and we will help with phone numbers and with bookings if possible.

WHAT TO BRING

We would recommend that you bring padded cycling shorts or even a gel saddle cover which can make your days cycling more comfortable. Cycling gloves are also a good investment.

We provide small front handlebar bags in which you can keep your day-to-day items. Otherwise you may prefer to use a daypack and there are back carriers on each bike for this purpose.

We do not provide rain gear so be sure to bring your own light weight waterproofs.

Although it is not obligatory to wear a helmet we highly recommend that you wear one. If you own a bicycle helmet please bring it, otherwise there will be helmets available in the van.

Don't forget sun cream, sunglasses and sun hat.

If you wish to bring your own saddle that is not a problem.

Finally if you wish to use toe clips we advise you to bring your own pedals with toe clips, as the pedals on our bikes do not accommodate them.

Please make an effort to pack lightly. This will make your travels easier and will be much appreciated by the guide when he/she is carrying your bags up a long flight of stairs to your room! Alternatively if you are travelling for a long time and do have a lot of luggage, maybe you could consider dividing your luggage into two bags, we could leave one in your first night's hotel to collect at the end of the week and the other bag to take with you on the tour.

FITNESS

The advantage of a cycling safari is that you can take the tour at your own pace. Longer routes are always available but the guide can always give you a lift if you need one. However we would recommend that you do try to do some cycling before the tour in order to make your week more enjoyable.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Oxford is well connected and located within the UK offering easy access especially from London and the main hub airports of Heathrow, Gatwick and Birmingham International. It is also well served by bus links from the smaller budget airline hubs of Luton and Stansted (see below).

Through these airports (especially Heathrow) almost anywhere in the world is a flight away. A selection of the airlines serving the mentioned airports includes American Airlines, Air Canada, Aer Lingus, Air France, Air India, Air Italia, British Airways, British Midland, Continental, Delta, Easyjet, Iberia, KLM, Swiss Air, Virgin Atlantic, Quantas.

Getting from Heathrow/Gatwick Airport

There is a regular bus service between Heathrow/Gatwick Airport and Oxford City. Contact the Oxford bus company on 01865 785400 www.oxfordbus.co.uk or Stagecoach on 01865 772250 www.stagecoach-oxford.co.uk. Approximate journey time from Heathrow 70 minutes from Gatwick 2 hours.

From London

There are 24 hour express coaches from London Victoria operated by Stagecoach and the Oxford bus company - see above details. During the day these services run every 20 minutes - approximate journey time 90 minutes.

Trains

Thames trains run from London Paddington to Oxford twice an hour, with the journey taking under an hour. There are also good rail connections from Birmingham and the North, South West and South Coast. National Rail Enquiries 08457 484950 www.rail.co.uk

Regional airports/Regional Towns Cities

National Express operate daily services from most major towns/cities 0990 808080 www.gobycoach.com For services from Stansted/Luton Airports contact Jetlink on 08705 747777.

GROUP, GUIDE AND BACK-UP SERVICE

The group size varies from 6 to 14 people. Each group is led by a guide driving a support van. He/She will sweep the road during the day to check on cyclists. In the afternoon they will be gone for about 2 hours to leave the luggage off at your accommodation so they may not be on hand to give you a lift, but there is no rush and you have all day to complete the ride. As soon as the guide has delivered the luggage to your accommodation they will sweep back to do a final check on cyclists.

Contact telephone numbers are provided in the route description so that you can contact or leave a message with the guide during the day if necessary. The aim is allow you the freedom to cycle each day at your own pace, in the security that the guide is there for you in the event that you might need them. Most importantly, the guide hopes to set the right tone, to make you feel welcome to the country and to help you in whatever way possible so that each day you are free to leave your worries behind.

GENERAL INFORMATION

What is the weather like?

England and the Cotswolds have a very mild climate making it ideal for cycling. Although there are occasionally wet days, the rain never usually lasts very long and you are soon free to enjoy a clear view of the magnificent scenery once again.

Are there facilities to change money?

There are banks in Oxford, Burford, Broadway, Stratford, Stow On the Wold, Moreton in Marsh, Chipping Camden, Bourton on the Water and Witney (all open Monday - Friday, 9.30am - 5.00pm). Credit cards are also widely accepted. Travellers cheques are accepted in banks.

What happens if I am delayed on the first night?

If you know in advance that you will be late please contact our office. If you are unexpectedly delayed you should call the meeting point on Saturday evening and leave a message as to what time you expect to arrive.

When does the tour finish up?

The tour arrives back in Oxford on Friday night for a last evening meal together. Accommodation is included for that night and you are free to head your separate ways on Saturday morning.

RECOMMENDED READING, VIEWING AND LISTENING

William Shakespeare is an obvious choice.

Oxford has many literary links, especially in children's stories through Lewis Carroll, CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien. Lewis and Tolkien met regularly at the Eagle and Child pub to read extracts to each other of their works.

Evelyn Waugh based his novel Brideshead Revisited on his time at Hertford College.

Oxford also provided the backdrop to the award winning detective series Inspector Morse.

Geoffrey Chaucer (Canterbury Tales) resided in Woodstock for some years.

J. M. Barrie was a frequent visitor to Stanway and is thought to have had the idea of Tinkerbell (from Peter Pan) when a moonbeam hit his bedroom wall.

Gustav Holst's first professional engagement was at Wyck Rissington