

# GOING PLACES

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## ONCE UPON A WEEK IN THE COTSWOLDS



NEXT TIME YOU'RE IN LONDON, ONCE you've seen the sights, ogled at Big Ben, toddled across Trafalgar Square, and stared through the gates at Buckingham Palace, you've gotta get out in the country. Why? Because there's more to Ye Olde England than just London, with its beloved pomp-and-ceremony.

**I** MEAN, NOT FAR ALONG the M4 are some of the sweetest, loveliest corners you can find in “England’s green and pleasant land”. And when you wander off the beaten track, through leafy woodland lanes and rolling chequerboard hills, you’re soon oohing-and-aahing at quaint fairytale villages, thatch-roofed cottages, flower-smothered gardens, pubs with weird names, cathedrals with pointy roofs, medieval castles, and knights in shining armour.

If you’re not in a hurry (and you *mustn’t* be!), make sure you sample some home-grown goodies, local wines, farmhouse cheeses, and clotted-cream scones. Listen to all the tall tales and legends along the way. And choose beds in places that are old and atmospheric, anything-but-ordinary.

How do I know all this? Well, we

recently spent a week wandering backroads in the **Cotswolds**. And a good time was had by all ...

**O**ur first stop (one warm Tuesday) was historic Oxfordshire and the superbly landscaped **Blenheim Palace**. Built in 1772 on land given to the Duke of Marlborough by Queen Anne as a thank-you for beating the French in battle, this grand stately home was later the birthplace of Winston Churchill.

We roamed the famous university town of **Oxford** with its impressive colleges – then fell in love with the nearby village of **Woodstock**, its narrow cobbled roads lined with honey-coloured mansions. King Henry II engaged in some hanky-pank here with his mistress, the Fair Rosamund. And Queen Elizabeth I was imprisoned here by her sister, Mary Tudor.



Blenheim Palace



Woodstock & the Bear Hotel

We bunked down in the ivy-clad **Bear Hotel** – previously a 13th century coaching inn, today a hidden gem with exposed oak beams, four-poster beds, antique furniture, secret passageways ... and resident ghosts!

**T**he Cotswolds are one of England's most postcard-pretty regions, undulating elegantly across six counties and tempting visitors to ramble in golden-hued villages, worship in heavenly gardens, and cosy-up in gourmet eateries.

Over the following day or three, we felt the vibes of *'Downton Abbey'* in the quaint village of **Bampton** (which has featured in every episode) ... went walkabout in **Hidcote Manor Garden** (overflowing with exotic rarities gathered from around the world) ... stretched our legs in the **Kiftsgate Court Garden** (a haven for fragrant old-fashioned roses, created by three generations of green-fingered women)

... and stumbled upon another magical village: **Broadway** (the 'Jewel of the Cotswolds', its streets lined with horse-chestnut trees and picturesque stone cottages).

The 650-year-old **Lygon Arms** (our next accommodation) was draped with mauve wisteria and steeped in glamorous history – from Oliver Cromwell (who stayed here on the eve of the bloody Battle of Worcester) and King Charles 1 (who used this same hotel to rally his royalist supporters) to Richard



Broadway thatched cottages



Burton and Elizabeth Taylor (who were spotted here during their scandalous love affair in 1963).

**T**alk about a gift that kept on giving! The Cotswolds were luring us with more bloomin' gardens than you could shake a gumboot at ... and more idyllic villages with puzzling names like **Moreton-in-Marsh**, **Stow-on-the-Wold**, **Bourton-on-the-Water** and **Lower Slaughter**. Lower Slaughter sounded a bit grisly, so we chose Bourton-on-the-Water: crammed with shops, cafes, tea rooms, and five arched bridges that span the sparkling waters of the River Windrush.

Down the southernmost end of the Cotswolds is the genteel, flower-filled city of **Bath** – famous for its Roman-built hot-springs spa, stunningly

preserved from the first century AD.

Queen Anne and King George came here in 1704, to ease their aches and 'take the waters'. Then we came in 2024, but we just took photos.

By the way, when you're checking out Bath's charming town, keep a lookout for its oldest teahouse (dated 1482) down an alleyway near the Abbey – where the famous fluffy buns known as 'Sally Lunns' were first baked!

*Remember them? With that slab of pink icing? Mmmm ...* 🍷

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Lygon Arms Hotel