



**GREAT
WEST WAY®**

**The Story of the Great West Way:
An Introduction for Businesses and Destinations**



"Inbound travellers talk a lot about meeting the people, seeing the country, experiencing the culture."

- Mangrove for VisitEngland

Anna Cake Couture, Clifton

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INTRODUCING THE GREAT WEST WAY

VisitWiltshire has been leading on developing a new touring route which will join up many of England's iconic destinations and attractions along a corridor west of London through to Bristol. This is one of a number of successful projects made possible by HM Government's £40m Discover England Fund, administered by VisitEngland (www.discoverenglandfund.org).

This booklet is an introduction to the Great West Way for tourism businesses, destinations, stakeholders and the travel trade. It tells the story of the Great West Way, and is intended to be a foundation for future development and marketing activity.

The Great West Way is the first touring route of its kind for England. As such it gives the opportunity to present England in a new way in international markets.

What you read here has been informed by the expert advice of the Great West Way Steering Group, and comprehensively tested and sense-checked with consumers and the travel trade in Europe, North America and the UK.

To help develop a clear and motivating proposition, we also spoke to partners and stakeholders across the Great West Way route. We are grateful to everyone who took the time to share their advice and experience with us, whether individually or at a Great West Way Workshop.

In these pages, we describe our target visitor type, summarise the benefits the product provides and present the brand model that defines the Great West Way proposition. Helen Ochyra, one of the UK's leading travel



Bowood House, Wiltshire

journalists, brings the Great West Way to life for us in a specially commissioned feature article. We also include example visitor journeys to illustrate the many different ways the Great West Way can be experienced and enjoyed.

Thank you to all the destinations and the industry along the route who have helped us develop the Great West Way experience. We look forward to continuing to work with you to bring the Great West Way to life for our visitors.

David Andrews
Chief Executive, VisitWiltshire



WHY CHOOSE THE GREAT WEST WAY

Choosing how we spend our precious holiday time is difficult. There are so many places competing for our attention, and so many different holiday experiences open to us all.

The Great West Way vision is to create one of the world's premier touring routes between London and Bristol.

Our Value Proposition answers the question: Why should I choose the Great West Way?

"You're never more than 10 minutes away from a point of interest."



Silbury Hill

The Great West Way will promote a range of product themes reflecting the route's tourism assets, including heritage, food and drink, countryside, film tourism and gardens.

What is it?

The Great West Way links London and Bristol. It follows a 125-mile route based on one of the first Great Roads commissioned by the Kings of England.

Who is it for?

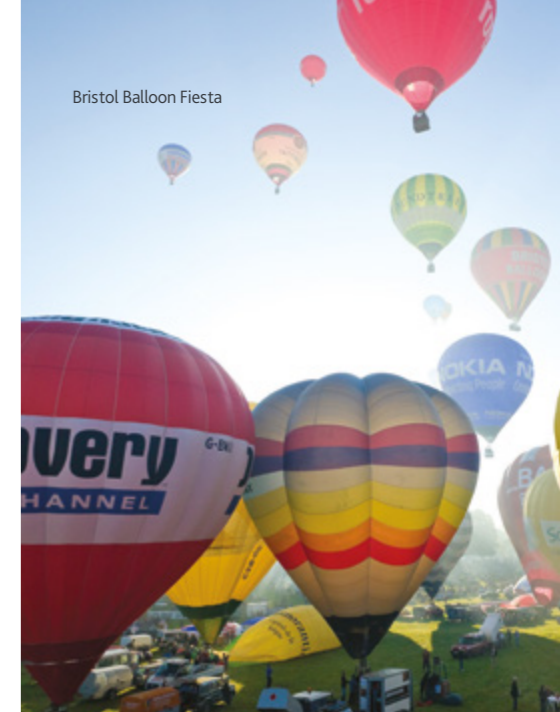
The Great West Way is for curious travellers searching for the real England. Those who want to explore further, delve deeper and uncover the essence of England.

What is it like?

Along the Way, everyday England rubs shoulders with world-famous heritage

Why should I choose the Great West Way?

The Great West Way offers an extraordinary variety of English experiences not found in any other part of the country.



Bristol Balloon Fiesta

"I just want to get off the beaten trail and see other cultures, people living."

VISITOR BENEFITS

The Great West Way makes it easy for visitors to get to know our part of England.



Rational Benefits:

Concentrated

On the Great West Way, travellers are never more than a few minutes away from an extraordinary attraction or an authentic English experience.

Choice

The Great West Way offers an extraordinary variety of English experiences. It reveals the contemporary and the historic, the cities and the countryside. It can be explored by train, by car or by coach, by boat, on foot or by bike.

Connected

The Great West Way is easy to join and easy to follow. It passes by both Heathrow and Bristol airports. It's accessible for visitors travelling from the Channel ports, or visitors already based in London.

Emotional Benefits:

Enrichment

The Great West Way is the best way to explore and get to know the English way of life.

Exploration

Every twist and turn in the Great West Way brings the satisfaction of discovering a new chapter in England's story.

Empathy

To follow the Great West Way is to understand the essence of a nation and become an England Insider.

"A real cross-section of England. A distillation of England."

GREAT WEST WAY IN A NUTSHELL

Our Brand Narrative

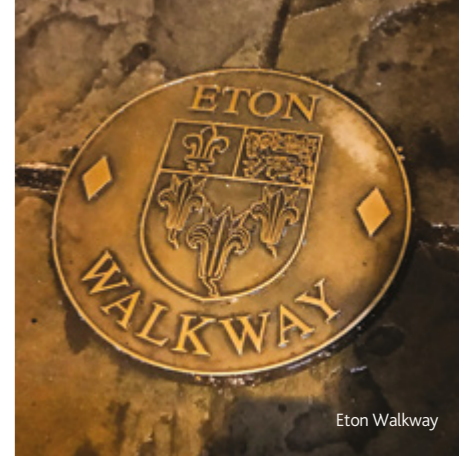
Follow the paths taken by generations of travellers and discover an essential strand of England.

Based on one of the first Great Roads commissioned by the Kings of England, the Great West Way winds its way through lush green landscapes filled with the world-famous and the yet-to-be-discovered. Touch Royal Windsor, Roman Bath and timeless Stonehenge, immerse yourself in English village life and Bristol's city energy.

On the Great West Way, extraordinary history rubs shoulders with everyday life. Traditional pubs and inns with World Heritage Sites on their doorsteps, serving craft ales and local farm food. Churches which have watched over their parishes for centuries. Independent shops and galleries filled with contemporary designs and creations.

You don't have to travel far to explore further and delve deeper into England. The Great West Way links London with Bristol through 125 miles of twists and turns and new discoveries. Explore by road, by railway or by waterway. Slow right down, base yourself along the route, walk it or cycle it.

**Welcome to the real England.
It's England undiluted.
It's England concentrated.**



OUR TARGET VISITORS

Our consumer testing showed a clear link between the Great West Way Value Proposition and the needs of three VisitEngland target market segments:

- Cultural Adventurers
- Lifestyle Travellers
- Mature Experience Seekers

Thermae Bath Spa



The three segments share a common interest - to discover the real England.

This is how we describe the Great West Way in terms of this visitor mindset.

For lovers of England.
For travellers with a desire to discover.
The "what's around the corner-ers"
and the "who will I meet today-ers".
Not the "A-to-B-ers".

For travellers who believe the journey is as remarkable as the destination.
For those who love stories - hearing others' tales, creating and sharing their own.
For those who believe the everyday can be extraordinary.

For the curious and the inquisitive.
Those who like to go deeper, to see and feel and do and try and taste for themselves.
For seekers of the real, the authentic and the very essence of England.

OUR PRIMARY MARKETS

Our market research shows that the Great West Way experience is particularly appealing to visitors from:

- Germany
- The Netherlands
- USA

These are our Primary Markets.

Repeat visitors to Britain from these three countries want to get under the skin of England. They want to see the famous icons, but they also want to seek out new places and meet the everyday England. Travelling on England's Great West Way is the best way to become an England Insider.

First-time visitors from these countries want an easy way to discover England. They want to see the famous sites they know from film and television, but they also want to see how English life is lived. Travelling on England's

Great West Way is the best way to discover the real England.

Of course, the Great West Way will attract visitors from around the world and across the UK. But by focusing our promotional effort on these three markets, we will make sure that we get the best possible return for our joint effort and investment.

"It's about links. Honeypots are seen as separate destinations. But joining them together makes it more of an adventure."





OUR MESSAGE IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

The point of getting out of the city is to savour a more relaxed pace of life, so why carry on your sightseeing at breakneck speed?

Tick those tourist icons off your bucket list. But go away having experienced more. Make your journey a memory more worth sharing than a photo taken from the inside of a bus.

“Joining things up and taking a list of disparate and sometimes disjointed attractions and transforming them into a seamless product that will become a well-trodden path.”



England's Great West Way

When we talk about the Great West Way in international markets, we always make sure that we're locating it carefully. That's why we always talk about England's Great West Way in international markets.

It sounds like a little thing, but we know that the English experience is very important for our visitors. We are unambiguous, and we make it very clear that our visitors are going to experience an inherently English journey.

Historic and Contemporary

England is rated very highly by our international visitors for both heritage and contemporary culture. We always talk about the past and the present on England's Great West Way.

Our past is important. It's what makes us what we are today and it has left a lasting and spectacular impression on our landscape.

Our present is important. With so many things happening along England's Great West Way, now is always the time to visit.

England's Great West Way connects the historic with the contemporary and lets our visitors see how icons rub shoulders with the everyday in England.



Personal and Memorable

Many of our international visitors may have planned their itineraries in some detail. But they will all welcome personal recommendations.

England's Great West Way is about the local insider tips as well as the international tourism icons. We make sure that that our visitors know that there's always something to discover around the corner – and we're all here to help them find it.

OUR BRAND MODEL

At the heart of the Great West Way is the brand idea: **England Concentrated**. An extraordinary variety of attractions and experiences in a compact area — all within easy reach for our visitors.

The Brand Pillars are the recurring themes that should guide the development of Great West Way experiences.

Discovery

The Great West Way lets travellers uncover England and the English for themselves.

Curated

The Great West Way points the way to a real English experience, leading visitors through England's story.

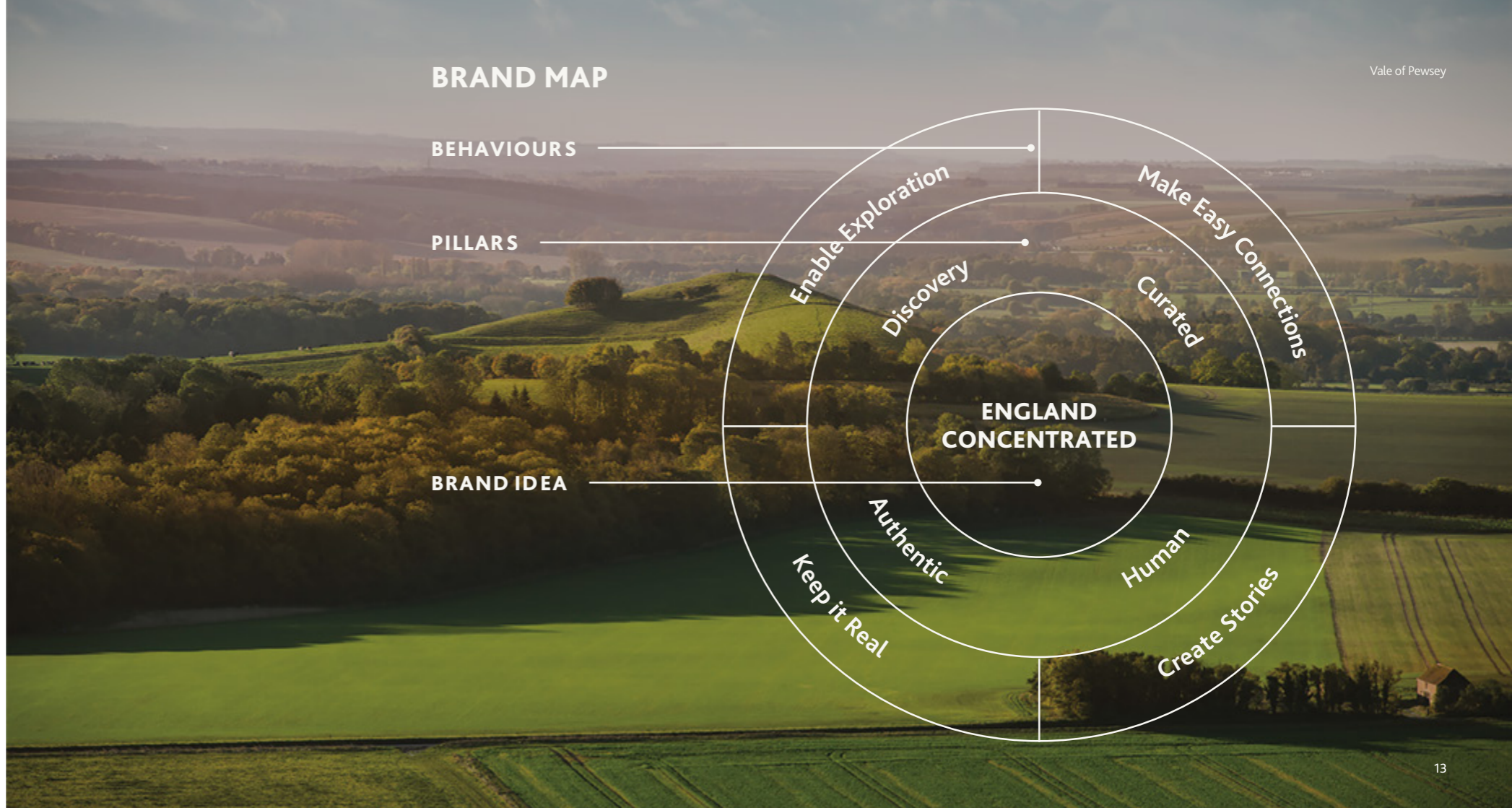
Authentic

The Great West Way is rooted in the highways and byways travelled by generations and commissioned by Kings.

Human

The Great West Way lets travellers meet England and the English. To hear our stories and create their own.

The Behaviours define the things the Great West Way needs to do to deliver its promise to visitors.



BRAND MAP

BEHAVIOURS

PILLARS

BRAND IDEA



GREAT WEST WAY CHECKLIST

Our checklist to use when developing or communicating future Great West Way experiences.

To be true to the Great West Way brand idea, visitor experiences should always help reinforce these messages.



The Royal Oak, Yattendon

Variety

A Great West Way experience should never be repetitive. The concentrated variety visitors will experience along the route is a key strength.

Narrative

The Great West Way tells an important strand of England's story. It isn't simply a collection of places to visit.

Independence

We are not prescriptive about how to experience the Great West Way. It works just as well for independent travellers as for travel trade programmes.

Contrast

The Great West Way connects England's icons. But is also reveals everyday England.

Authenticity

The Great West Way is rooted in history. It follows travellers' routes used for centuries, the routes that brought druids to Stonehenge, drovers to market, Georgian Society to Bath and our industrial revolution to the world.

Experience

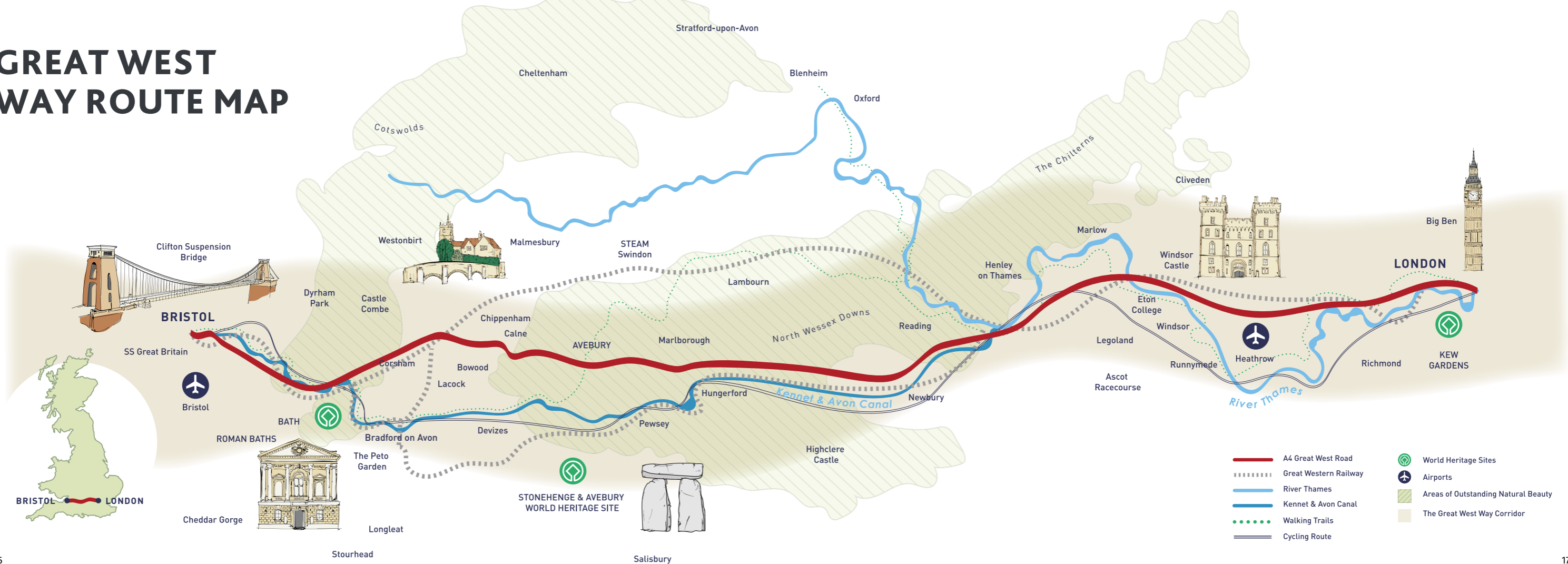
The Great West Way is about much more than the places you visit. It's about the experience of England.

Englishness

And finally, the Great West Way delivers a concentrated essence of England and Englishness.



GREAT WEST WAY ROUTE MAP



INTRODUCING THE GREAT WEST WAY EXPERIENCE

Sherston, the Cotswolds



There are many different ways to travel the Great West Way to discover the real England. It isn't a prescriptive route. It's for free-spirits and explorers. It makes extraordinary variety easily accessible for international and domestic visitors.

Visitors can follow the route on their own or with help from an expert tour operator.

Weekenders can pick a base on the Great West Way and explore further afield.

Travellers can slow down and savour the journey by car, coach or train over a week or more. Or simply discover England on a three-day trip from the capital.

Discovering the Great West Way





GREAT WEST WAY

Where the world-famous rubs shoulders with the yet-to-be-discovered.

Words by Helen Ochyra
Travel writer, editor and broadcaster



Helen has been a travel writer since 2006. She grew up on the Great West Way, and writes for (amongst others) The Guardian, Sunday Times Travel, Travel Trade Gazette, Rough Guides and the Michelin Green Guides.

I am sitting on the grass, droplets of dew gently soaking into my skirt. Towering above me is a vast and ancient stone, standing tall above the grass and the nonchalantly munching sheep of Avebury, solid and stately in its place within the largest stone circle in Europe.



I am standing in a Dickens novel, sipping a pint of ale and feeling the warm glow of the rousing fire in the fireplace on my face, as I imagine a time when this thatched house, the Waggon and Horses, was a coaching inn filled with weary travellers making their way along the Great Bath Road.

I am holding the tiller of a canal boat, watching green and yellow fields slide past on both sides and birds settle in the trees that line the banks of the Kennet & Avon Canal. I plot a course westwards, down a staircase flight of locks and past pub gardens with picnic tables and overnight moorings.



I am exploring the Great West Way, a corridor that runs through the very soul of England, from the vibrant capital of London to the edgy city of Bristol. This is a touring route that is more a lattice – of paths, trails and tracks, snaking across the countryside from ancient market town to quaint village.

Some of these paths are best on two feet, strolling around Bath's cobbled streets perhaps, or rambling across the green rolling hills of the Cotswolds, England's largest Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Others could have been made for cycling, the towpaths of the Kennet & Avon Canal for example, or the mountain biking trails that wind through the ancient trees of the Savernake Forest.

Then there are the waterways. There is the River Thames, home to some of the best stretches of water for rowing in the country, not to mention the Henley Royal Regatta, an annual festival of rowing races that brings London society to the river's banks, champagne glass in hand. There is also the Kennet & Avon Canal, home to the Caen Hill lock flight, one of the greatest challenges in English narrowboating – 29 locks up (or down!) one very steep hill. Spend the day tackling that, or get in training for the annual Devizes to Westminster International Canoe Race, when canoeists of all abilities paddle their way from the Wiltshire market town to London.



Rather ride the rails? The Great Western Railway runs from London Paddington to Bristol, a modern railway still following the route of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's pioneering line. Brunel designed it to be the longest, most level and broadest railway in Britain, but travellers simply called it the 'holiday line', climbing aboard in their thousands to chug out to the coast and countryside for their holidays.

Climb aboard in London and in under an hour you can be in Windsor, poking your head into the rooms and galleries of the oldest and largest occupied castle in the world – said to be the Queen's favourite residence. Spend 90 minutes on board and you could be in Bath, taking the waters at the thermal baths first discovered by the Romans and strolling along Georgian streets, where every building is fashioned from Bath stone and glows the same shade of honey. It pays to take your time travelling along the Great West Way, walking, cycling or narrowboating through the countryside, but it is also possible to drive. Take a car and you'll find yourself on one of the first major

highways to be built in England, once called the Great Bath Road, and route of the world's first mail coach service, which ran from London to Bristol from 1784. Along the way you'll find old coaching inns serving hearty English meals such as fish and chips and Sunday roast, washed down with local real ale – from Wadworth brewery in Devizes perhaps, or the West Berkshire Brewery near Frilsham.

This route, now the A4, remains a major highway, bringing you to Bristol from the heart of London in just a few hours. And what an underrated city Bristol is. Innovative, forward thinking and vibrant, this western powerhouse has long been at the cutting edge; a major port that is home to both Brunel's lofty Clifton Suspension Bridge and his SS Great Britain, and helped to drive England's industrial revolution. Today it is a major hub that helps to drive English culture, from the street art of Banksy (who hails from here) to the contemporary art of the city's independent galleries. Cycling is popular in Bristol, with cycle paths on most major roads as well as

along rivers and into the countryside, so why not let two wheels take you into the city's secret corners, where you might find an early Banksy (there's an app for that) or a yet-to-be-discovered fashion designer, musician or artist displaying their creations?

However you choose to travel, the web of trails and tracks that make up the Great West Way mean you can meander off the major routes and find your own favourite slice of

England. You might find it in Marlborough, home to one of the country's widest and grandest high streets, lined with boutiques and cafés.

Or at the prehistoric and deeply mysterious Silbury Hill, the largest manmade mound in Europe, which covers some five acres, reaches about 130 feet high and has no discernible purpose.

Wherever you choose to stay you'll find friendly family-run hotels and boutique B&Bs. You could stay in five-star grandeur at Cliveden in Berkshire, where afternoon tea is served in the Great Hall, or check in to Lucknam Park in Wiltshire for a Michelin-starred meal and a spa day that combines a thermal soak with horse riding through the estate.



Street Art, Bristol



Bath Racecourse

Like gardens? Call in to Kew, where the Royal Botanic Gardens is home to the world's most extensive and diverse plant collection. Here in London's largest UNESCO World Heritage Site you can stroll through an arboretum that is like a living library of more than 14,000 trees and step into a rainforest in the Victorian-era Palm House, a stunning glass structure that shelters endangered and otherwise-extinct tropical tree species.

“However you choose to travel, the web of trails and tracks that make up the Great West Way mean you can meander off the major routes and find your own favourite slice of England.”

Further west in Berkshire you could call in to Downton Abbey, aka Highclere Castle. It's not just Downton Abbey fans who will need a full day here – there's a dazzling array of things to see, from state rooms with walls made from Spanish leather panels and French green

silk, to a walled secret garden with winding paths that beckon you to lose yourself for a while. The 1,000 acres of parkland here were designed by English landscape architect 'Capability' Brown and there are arresting views at every turn – stop in the right place and you could recreate the shot from Downton's opening credits, sauntering across the grass towards the Jacobethan mansion that is one of English architect Sir Charles Barry's masterpieces.

From the 19th century wind your way along the Great West Way further and you'll wind the clock back too. In Wiltshire you'll find Lacock Abbey, a Tudor family home that started life as an abbey and nunnery in the 13th century. You'll almost certainly recognise the medieval cloisters here – from Wolf Hall or Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone – but the Abbey's finest hour came in 1835, when William Fox Talbot captured the world's first photographic negative from a tiny window in his rural home.

Check out the photography museum then step outside – and into a film set. The ridiculously picturesque village of Lacock is the darling of TV producers and your Downton Abbey trail continues here, on



Church Street, seen on screen as a 1920s livestock market. Look up and you'll see why the British TV networks love Lacock – or, rather, you won't, as it's the lack of TV aerials and phone cables that have made this National Trust village the perfect backdrop for everything from Pride and Prejudice to Cranford.

Travel further back in time and further west again, into Roman Britain and the well-preserved baths of Bath. See the original Roman bathing pool surrounded by gorgeous 18th and 19th century buildings and don't miss taking a dip yourself, at the modern Thermae Bath Spa. Here the rooftop pool sends curls of steam up above the skyline of this elegant Georgian city and where you can rest your arms on the side of the pool, look up through the heat haze and stare straight at the Victorian Gothic Bath Abbey, the work of another great English architect, Sir George Gilbert Scott.

It may only be 125 miles from London to Bristol but the Great West Way can take you all the way back to the prehistoric. At Avebury you can touch the stones of Britain's largest stone circle, its ancient standing stones part of a sacred landscape that dates back to around 2850BC. There are some

100 stones here, each one weathered and wizened into a different shape and within walking distance is Silbury Hill, that ancient, mysterious mound, and West Kennet Long Barrow, one of Britain's largest Neolithic chambered tombs.

And then of course, there is Stonehenge. This masterpiece of ancient engineering is one of the icons of England, and part of the same UNESCO World Heritage Site as Avebury.



This may be one of the planet's most important ancient sites but it's just one small part of England's story, and of your journey on the Great West Way. It's time to head out there and make your own memories.

WANDERING THROUGH ENGLISH WONDERS

Some friends of ours told us the best way to see England outside of London would be on the Great West Way, the historic route that connects London with Bristol. We figured we could handle it!

Windsor



Having collected our rental car at Heathrow, our first stop on the Great West Way was in Royal Windsor. We'd wanted to visit Windsor Castle during our first trip to England a few years ago, but couldn't find the time in our schedule. But when we finally got here, it didn't disappoint. We even managed to make it on a day when the Queen was in residence, which made the fact we could walk around so much of this 'working' castle even more special. And the Changing the Guard ceremony was mesmerising – and so uniquely British!

Leaving Windsor, we made our way to the Georgian town of Marlow, perfectly sandwiched between the Thames Valley and the Chiltern Hills. We took to the river for the afternoon, passing through a number of pretty villages and past the manor houses of Bisham Abbey and Medmenham Abbey (a friendly crewman told us the latter was recently on the market at a cool £10 million!). Our route also took us along the Henley Royal Regatta course before arriving at Henley-on-Thames.

Having enjoyed tea and cake in the café of the River and Rowing Museum, it was then time for our return trip to Marlow. We

collected our car (which we were quickly getting used to driving!) and continued to Newbury, to the 18th-century former hunting lodge we were spending our first night in.

Our second day on the Great West Way began with a short journey to the handsome market town of Marlborough, set in the beautiful North Wessex Downs. We then paid a visit to Bowood House, the home of the Marquis and Marchioness of Lansdowne. As impressive a stately home as it is, in our opinion, it's the 'Capability' Brown-designed gardens that really make the place.

The timing of our trip meant we were able to visit the Woodland Garden, which between late April and early June is a riot of colour from rhododendrons, azaleas and magnolias. One of the gardeners we got chatting to boasted proudly that it's one of the best displays in the whole of Britain. We certainly weren't going to disagree with him.

Our journey on to Stonehenge took us through a number of curiously-named, but unmistakably English villages – Clench Common, Manningford Bruce, Netheravon and Larkhill. And then we arrived at one of the most instantly-

recognisable monuments in the world - Stonehenge. As we wandered our way from the visitor centre to the stone circle (there's a shuttle bus if you want to save your legs), we did ponder its purpose. A signal for aliens? Cemetery? Ancient healing ground? A temple for sun worship? We were still no clearer when we came away several hours later. But the mystery is probably Stonehenge's biggest appeal, we figured.



River Thames at Marlow

On our way to our overnight stay in Bradford on Avon, we saw some signs for the White Horse at Westbury, so decided we'd take the slight detour from our route to see it. It turns out it's the oldest of 8 white horses carved into various hillsides around Wiltshire. Leaving our car at the bottom, it was quite a trek to the top of the hill. It was totally worth the effort, however, with views of the sun setting beyond the Mendip Hills in the west, stretching round to Bath, Chippenham and Devizes. All-in-all, our journey along the Great West Way was giving us an enormous sense of well-being.

Having had a quick wander around Bradford on Avon after breakfast, we continued on

"Discovering this beautiful part of England under our own steam has made us feel like we've become England 'insiders'."

the Great West Way to the beautiful honey-stoned city of Bath. We'd read that the best way to see this compact city was on foot, so we parked the car and joined a free 2-hour walking tour of the city offered by the Mayor of Bath's Corps of Honorary Guards. This group is made up of around 85 volunteer guides who turn out in all weathers to take visitors around the city – and they won't even accept tips! Our tour took in all the key sights: The Roman Baths, Bath Abbey and the Royal Crescent, and was a perfect introduction to the city.

In the afternoon, we returned to explore the Roman Baths further. Nowadays visitors and locals alike can enjoy the waters in an open-air rooftop pool with amazing views over the city. We'll definitely do that on a return trip. We might have even acquired a taste for the waters by that time. Let's just say, the taste is a little out of the ordinary!

We then spent the remainder of the afternoon indulging in some retail therapy. We were impressed with the wealth of shopping options for such a small city: well-known retailers, designer brands and a great selection of independent shops. Our day ended with us checking-in to a luxury spa hotel, for some much-welcome R&R after all that walking!

Leaving Bath on the last leg of our Great West Way experience, we travelled north to Malmesbury, home to a 12th-century abbey that's very much a cultural treasure off the beaten tourist track. The artist Henry Moore ranked the reliefs on the abbey's porch among the finest works of Romanesque art in England. A nice review for a market town of less than 6,000 people.

Our final stop was in the city of Bristol, which has much more of a contemporary feel than ancient Bath. We headed to the Harbourside, which has been transformed in recent decades from a busy dock to a modern development of attractions, shops, bars, restaurants and hotels.

We walked down to Brunel's SS Great Britain, the world's first great ocean liner and a masterpiece of engineering. If you have a head for heights, there's even an opportunity to climb the rigging and see the city from the yardarm! We preferred to take the short ferry ride and walk through Brandon Hill Park to Cabot Tower to enjoy the views from there instead.

As we headed back towards London, the conversation was all about the new people and places we'd experienced on this trip. Discovering this beautiful part of England under our own steam has made us feel like we've become England 'insiders'. How long we can keep the Great West Way a secret from our friends, though, is another thing!



THE ENGLAND OF YOUR IMAGINATION

The point of getting out of the city is to savour a more relaxed pace of life, so why carry on your sightseeing at breakneck speed?

Tick those tourist icons off your bucket list. But go away having experienced more. Make your journey a memory more worth sharing than a photo taken from the inside of a bus.



24 hours

Windsor Castle is the oldest and largest occupied castle in the world and is the place the Queen considers 'home'. As well as visiting the State Apartments and Chapel, don't miss seeing British pageantry in full effect at the Changing the Guard ceremony.

Why not lunch at The Windsor Castle (one of 24 pubs with that name in England - but the only one you can actually see the castle from!), then leave Windsor and head for a stately home you can nose around.

Highclere Castle is the ancestral seat of the Carnarvon family, but has become better known as Downton Abbey, the country pile of the Crawley family, in the hit TV drama. Alternatively, Cliveden, a National Trust property, has been noted for society intrigue and scandal, from a 17th-century duel between a duke and his mistress' husband, to the Profumo scandal of the early 1960s.

Continue on to Marlborough for an overnight stay in one of its ancient coaching inns.

48 hours

Stonehenge is possibly the world's most famous prehistoric monument and it's a masterpiece of engineering. To put it in perspective, scientists estimate that it may have taken around 30 million man-hours to construct Stonehenge using the simple tools available at the time.

After a pub lunch on the banks of the Kennet & Avon Canal, take a couple of hours to discover the restored waterway on a 60ft barge. Or, if Stonehenge has left you feeling curious about the sacred landscapes here, you might want to head over to the sister site at Avebury to ponder its mysterious pre-historic ceremonial purpose.

Journey on to Bath and treat yourself to an overnight stay in one of its luxury spa hotels.

72 hours

Bath is the only UK city designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which is hardly surprising considering this compact city packs in one of the world's best preserved Roman bathhouses, naturally

hot springs, some of the nation's grandest Georgian architecture and no less than 17 museums.

Before heading back to London, be sure to spend time in one of England's historic market towns or perfect villages. In Corsham, you're just as likely to share the pavement with a peacock as you are a fellow human (They often escape from their residence at Corsham Court!). Castle Combe is often named as the prettiest village in England and Lacock will prove familiar to Harry Potter fans, having featured in several of the films.



Highclere Castle

GREAT WEST WAY BY RAIL

Brunel to Banksy – and all stops in-between

The Great West Way can be experienced just as easily by rail as by road – thanks to the Great Western Railway. The Main Line, which runs between London Paddington and Bristol Temple Meads, was engineered in 1833 by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, one of the greatest figures of the Industrial Revolution.



Discovering the Great West Way by rail

Friday

London Paddington to Swindon

🕒 Journey time: **59 minutes**

STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway

Housed in a beautifully restored Grade II-listed building in the former Swindon railway works, the museum tells the story of the men and women who built the Great Western Railway. Even if you're not a rail 'aficionado', it's two hours well spent.

Swindon to Bath Spa

🕒 Journey time: **29 minutes**

Roman Baths

Bath is the only UK city designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which is hardly surprising considering the city boasts one of the world's best preserved Roman bathhouses, supplied by naturally hot springs deep underground.

Saturday (a day trip off the Great West Way)

Bath Spa to Salisbury

🕒 Journey time: **56 minutes**

Salisbury to Stonehenge

🕒 Journey time: **33 minutes**
(via The Stonehenge Tour bus)

Stonehenge

One of the world's most iconic prehistoric sites, archaeologists have managed to work out how the stones got there and even, roughly, when. But attempts to pin down why they were brought here have largely fallen flat (pardon the pun).

Stonehenge to Salisbury

🕒 Journey time: **33 minutes**
(via the Stonehenge Tour bus)

Salisbury to Bath Spa

🕒 Journey time: **54 minutes**

Sunday

Bath Spa to Bristol Temple Meads

🕒 Journey time: **15 minutes**

(Left luggage facilities available at Bristol Tourist Information Centre)

The Bristol Street Art Tour

Bristol is well-known for its offbeat, alternative character, and characters don't get any more offbeat than the elusive and downright mischievous Banksy. The Bristol Street Art Tour provides an insight into his life and work, as well as the city's street culture.

SS Great Britain

Brunel designed the steam ship as a transatlantic luxury passenger liner and it marked the birth of international passenger travel. Restored and conserved, it's now an award-winning heritage site and museum. If you're feeling brave, you can climb the huge mainmast just as the Victorian sailors had to.

Bristol Temple Meads to London Paddington

🕒 Journey time: **1 hour 52 minutes**

A WEEKEND ON THE GREAT WEST WAY

Bath pretty much ticks all the boxes for a great weekend break. Its setting and architecture makes it a strong contender for England's most beautiful small city. Bath also makes an ideal base from which to explore the Great West Way. And nearby Bristol provides the contemporary yin to Bath's ancient yang.



Holburne Museum, Bath

Here are some must-dos for any break:

- Get to know Bath on foot. The Mayor of Bath's Honorary Guides have been offering visitors free walking tours since 1934.
- Get lost in all things Austen – visit the locations that inspired the novels Northanger Abbey and Persuasion.
- Explore the surrounding countryside and villages. Movie and TV fans will love places like Lacock (Harry Potter and Downton Abbey), Corsham (Poldark) and Castle Combe (War Horse and Dr Dolittle).
- If you're travelling by train, the contemporary cool of Bristol is just a 20-minute journey from Bath, offering urban innovation, green living, street art and a legendary music scene.



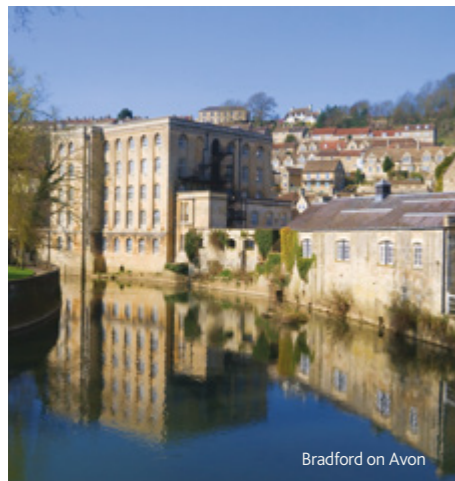
We The Curious, Bristol



Roman Baths, Bath

EXPLORE BEYOND THE GREAT WEST WAY

Arriving in the UK by ferry, we used the Great West Way as a base from which to explore England's highlights.



Our first port of call was for some lunch in a 16th-century pub right opposite Windsor Castle. We got talking to the barman about the history of the place. Before we knew it, we were staring at a bricked-up archway in the far end of the pub's cellar, which he said was once the entrance to a tunnel linking to the castle! It's one of a number of secret passageways built so the royal household could escape if the castle was under siege. Amazing!

The village of Ramsbury, just outside Marlborough would be our base for the next two nights. We stayed in a charming 300-year-old coaching inn in the heart of the village. It turned out to be the perfect base from which to explore the Great West Way and to travel further afield.

Our second morning saw us head away from the Great West Way for a few hours to wander around Oxford. A short drive north and we were at Blenheim Palace, a picture-perfect (and pretty awe-inspiring) British stately home.

Returning to the Great West Way, it was time to get out our bikes and explore part of the Kennet & Avon Cycle Route. We covered a 13-mile section that took us from Devizes, past Caen Hill – the longest continuous flight of locks in the country – to Bradford on Avon. Charming and very English!

The following morning, we said a reluctant goodbye to Ramsbury and took a route south through the countryside to Stonehenge and its instantly-recognisable prehistoric stone circle.

We travelled on to the Georgian city of Bath, another World Heritage Site. Like Oxford, Bath is best explored on foot. We visited Bath Abbey and the Roman Baths before heading north up Gay Street to The Circus and then on to the Royal Crescent.

Our final morning saw us travel through the Cotswolds, exploring the beautiful golden-stoned villages and the region's unofficial capital – stylish Cheltenham.

Our afternoon was spent discovering Shakespeare's England, taking a cruise on the River Avon, exploring the Tudor house in which the bard was born, and visiting Anne Hathaway's Cottage, the 500-year-old thatched cottage where Shakespeare courted his bride-to-be.



