

TEN REASONS FOR A GREAT BRITISH ROAD TRIP WEEKEND IN WARWICKSHIRE THIS SUMMER

JOUSTING KNIGHTS, LONG BOATS, HAUNTED PUBS AND FINE GRUB AWAIT

June 2012: The Great British weather may have made a mockery of Flaming June but visitors of all ages to the heart of England this summer can be sure of a warm welcome at Warwick Castle and the region's other attractions and sights. Here are just ten of the many reasons to head out on a Great British Road Trip Weekend in Warwickshire in summer 2012 – there's so much to discover within easy reach of the M40 in 48 hours.

On Friday evening, head to Warwickshire and turn off the M40 just 40 minutes' drive from Birmingham or 100 minutes from London. Relax over dinner at Mallory Court Hotel (www.mallory.co.uk) on the outskirts of Royal Leamington Spa. The property's oak-panelled Dining Room restaurant has retained three AA Stars for several years under Chef Simon Haigh and offers delicacies including locally-grown Kineton asparagus; Warwickshire beef; dressed crab; and local cheeses - complemented by vegetables, soft fruits and herbs grown on-site in the kitchen garden. A la carte dinner from £59.50 per person.

Once replete, four-star Chesford Grange** in Kenilworth offers a convenient and comfortable base for the weekend, a few minutes' drive away. Delicious breakfasts are served and there's an indoor pool in which to swim them off. Set in 17 acres of wooded grounds, it's only five miles from Warwick Castle.

On Saturday morning, head to the ancient market town of Warwick that boasts the mediaeval St Mary's Church – final resting place of the Beauchamp family of Warwick Castle; the 14th-century timber-framed Lord Leycester Hospital; and the peaceful Hill Close Gardens, all best surveyed from the majestic Ramparts of Warwick Castle and spot the bustle of the thriving market from the Castle's famous 39-metre high dodecahedron Guy's Tower.

History springs to life when the doors of Warwick Castle open at 10am daily (the Portcullis goes up at 10.30am) and the cast of exotic characters at Britain's Ultimate Castle convey the site's one thousand year history with tales both true and tall. With an archer's eye view across town and country, it's easy to imagine what life was like at the fortress in centuries past; Warwick Castle (www.warwick-castle.com) remains the at heart of the region and offers an exciting and engaging day out for all ages with jousting knights every day in the summer (1 August-30 September); brand new long-boating on the River Avon with Warwick Boats (July onwards); a chilling scare-fest in recently –opened The Witches of Warwick; and sumptuous State Rooms – all set within 60 acres of riverside grounds originally laid out by Capability Brown. The best deal is to buy in advance online and save up to 40 per cent on entry for all ages.

If a photo stop in a quintessential English village with thatched cottages and a friendly pub appeals, after Warwick Castle head to Ilmington along the A429; part of the route takes drivers along the Fosse Way Roman road that linked Exeter to Lincoln.

Warwickshire is known as Shakespeare's county and no visit here would be complete without time in his birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon. The popular town is only 15 minutes from Ilmington and top attractions for a Saturday evening include the new MAD Museum (Mechanical Art & Design: see www.themadmuseum.co.uk for entry prices) that showcases weird and whacky kinetic art, contraptions and gizmos until 6.30pm in summer. Walk along Sheep Street to savour Shakespearean drama at its very best: the World Shakespeare Festival runs until November and is an unprecedented collaboration of global arts organisations produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company (www.rsc.org.uk).

Work off a hearty Sunday breakfast by flying a kite along the rugged hilltops of Burton Dassett Hills Country Park (car parking £1.50), on the way to Gaydon. The Hills afford spectacular views in every direction and with 100 acres to explore it's easy to find privacy for a quiet Sunday stroll. Boasting the haunted 18th-century Castle Inn pub and more mesmerising views, Edge Hill was the site of the first pitched battle of the English Civil War in 1642, and now offers a great little stop off on the way to Gaydon Heritage Motor Centre (www.heritage-motor-centre.co.uk) to discover the world's largest collection of British heritage cars.

Round off the weekend with some retail therapy at Bicester Village (for the pedants, this is strictly in Oxfordshire: www.bicestervillage.com), where shoppers can secure up to 60 per cent reductions in 130 boutiques including Great British brands such as Alexander McQueen, Vivienne Westwood and Jaeger. Car stacked high with bags of bargains, it's only a few minutes back to the M40 for the drive home.

** Superbreak offers accommodation with breakfast at four-star The Chesford Grange Hotel near Warwick from £90 per person for two nights. Call Superbreak on 0871 222 3035 or book online at www.superbreak.com.

For a Warwick Castle full day ticket, book online at www.warwick-castle.com up to seven days in advance to save at least 40 per cent off admission. Alternatively, visit at 3.30pm (site closes at 6pm in summer) and pay just £10.80 per adult and £7.80 for Castle entrance only.

Ends

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Notes to Editors:

Ten reasons to visit Warwickshire includes a wander in to neighbouring Oxfordshire. Just for a while.

Warwick Castle is easily accessible from junction 15 off the M40, just 40 minutes from Birmingham and 1hour 40minutes from London.

At www.warwick-castle.com a family of 4 [2 adults & 2 children (4-11)] can visit for only £40 when booked one day in advance, additional child £7.50. Alternatively, book tickets 7 days in advance and receive 40% discount, book 48 hours in advance and guests will receive 20% discount and best ticket price is guaranteed online. Entry to the castle for adults from £12.96, children from £9.36 and seniors £10.08. Visits with 10 or more guests receive at least 45% discount. Print your own tickets at home and beat the queue. Alternatively, advance bookings can be made by calling 0871 265 2000. Guests are advised to check opening times and the entertainment schedule in advance of their visit.

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