

Dufftown: More than just the Whiskey Capital Of World

The North-East of Scotland, unlike the West Coast, doesn't boast the same marketing recognition and budget. Fortunately, it also doesn't suffer from an overwhelming influx of tourists or midges. What it offers is breathtaking countryside, mountainous landscapes, historic castles, a rich heritage, welcoming locals, a stunning coastline, and, of course, Whisky.

In a quaint village, Dufftown proudly claims the title of the Whisky Capital of the World, the presence of numerous distilleries certainly sets it apart. With a concentration of six distilleries, including renowned names like Glenfiddich, Balvenie, and Mortlach it earns it kudos in the world of spirits. Although a few distilleries have closed and reopened, the legacy of the village remains strong.

While whisky aficionados flock to Dufftown throughout the year to explore the distilleries, other noteworthy activities in the area deserve attention as well. Despite Dufftown being seldom featured in travel guides, it's good to know there is more to do here than visit a distillery. Although, doing a tour and trying a wee dram or two is still a must.

For the Love of Whisky (Uisge beatha is the Scottish Gaelic term for 'water of life')

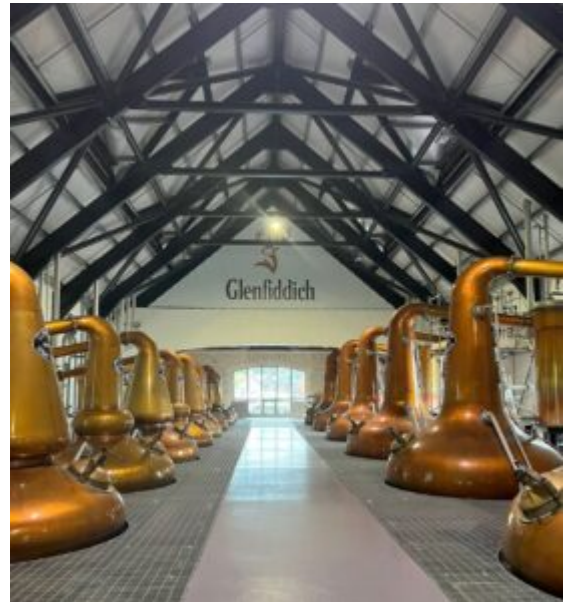
Whisky is a major draw for visitors to the area, making it a great place to begin exploring. There are plenty of tour options in Dufftown and the surrounding areas. If you have a passion for Whisky and can be flexible with your visit dates, consider attending the [Speyside Whisky Festival](#), typically held at the end of April or the beginning of May. Ensure to book your spot well ahead of time for this popular event.

The top tours in the area are both at [Glenfiddich and Balvenie](#)

[Distilleries](#). Both distilleries are owned by William Grants &

Sons. Balvenie offers a more comprehensive tour however due to its popularity it's booked well in advance. On the other hand, Glenfiddich provides great value for money, with a rich history and an in-depth tour that walks visitors through all areas, from the history, wash and tun rooms, still house through to the warehouse. The tour concludes with a tasting of four premium whiskies. While booking online is

recommended, a few walk-in spots may be available, but they fill up quickly, so be sure to get there as early in the day as possible. Additionally, Glenfiddich has a charming shop and cafe where visitors can enjoy a drink or relax with a cup of tea and a scone. [Book or reserve your tour here.](#)



[Speyside Tours](#) provides walking tours of Dufftown, where you will explore the village, discover the history and stories of the local distilleries, and have the opportunity to sample a few drams along the way. www.speysidetours.co.uk

What to see and do around Dufftown



Balvenie Castle: Hidden among the trees near Glenfiddich, you'll find the ruins of Balvenie Castle. While it's only open on select days in the summer (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday), you can still capture great photos from the outside on other days. This castle holds intriguing tales, from hosting Mary Queen of Scots to surviving an attack by Robert the Bruce. Interestingly, it was once

leased for the symbolic payment of a single red rose per year, although

maintaining it surely came with a hefty price tag. You can check when it's open and [book here on the Visit Scotland website.](#)

The Fairy Village: The location might be a bit tricky to find for those unfamiliar, as Google Maps isn't very clear about it. To reach the spot, follow the Giants Chair walk on the left side of the Dullan River (heading out of Dufftown), and you'll spot it just beyond the Giants Chair on the left. Keep your eyes open so you don't miss it. This charming spot was set up and funded by a local, with local volunteers pitching in to maintain it annually. It's a lovely spot to take the children for a stroll, and the Giants Chair walk is a great option for a leisurely walk in fair weather. [Fairy Village on Facebook.](#)



The Clock Tower stands as the focal point of Dufftown, holding a rich history within its walls. Originally constructed in 1839 as a gaol, it later served as the burgh chambers and a tourist information centre, though currently inactive. The clock within the tower was relocated from Banff and played a pivotal role in a dark tale involving the infamous local figure, James McPherson, known as a Robin Hood-like character and talented fiddler. The clock was manipulated by the sheriff, Lord Braco, to hasten McPherson's execution, despite a belated pardon. The clock was later moved to reside in Dufftown's Clock Tower, maintaining its presence as one of the town's key features.



Mortlach Church and its Pictish Stones. The optimal time to view the stones is on Sundays when the church is open. Additionally, there is a standing stone in the churchyard. This stone is surrounded by various myths and legends regarding its origin and purpose, though the true history remains uncertain. While the standing stone has weathered over time and lost some of its original markings, the stones inside the church are well-preserved, displaying Pictish symbols of a snake, bull and eagle. The original church is among the oldest Christian sites in North East Scotland, having undergone several extensions and reconstructions. The area around the church was also the site of a significant battle between Malcolm II and the Danes.

Keith & Dufftown Railway: This is a historic railway that is operated by a team of dedicated volunteers, who do a remarkable job managing the line, maintaining train operations, selling tickets, and sharing stories. The journey from Dufftown to Keith and back is both charming and scenic. Running from March to October, the railway offers special themed events like the Whisky Run. For the most current information, be sure to visit the website. Additionally, if you enjoy walking, consider disembarking at Drummuir and taking a scenic walk back to Dufftown through the forest, hills, and past the loch. [Visit the website to learn more.](#)

Dufftown Golf Course: If you're a golfer, the one here in Dufftown is said to be one of the highest in Scotland. While this isn't confirmed, as I've heard conflicting input, nonetheless, it's a great place to play a round, and the stunning views add to its charm. You can visit the website to book or learn more www.dufftowngolfclub.com

Hiking and Walking in and Around Speyside

Ben Rinnes and the Conval Hills Walks:

Ben Rinnes stands as the tallest hill in the vicinity and requires a

short drive to its base for the ascent, this is located just 5 minutes outside Dufftown. On the other hand, the Convals can be accessed from Dufftown, with the path beginning at the rear of the Golf course. For more information on the various walks in the area, [a local map is available for download](#).



Speyside Way is also a popular route in the vicinity, that goes from the Cairngorms down to the Coast, you can walk down the old railway line down to Craigellachie to join up with it. www.speysideway.org

Best Places to Eat

[Seven Stills](#) stands out as the top restaurant in the area. It is advisable to book in advance since they have limited operating hours, only during peak seasons. For accurate opening hours and more information, [it is recommended to visit their website](#).

Sidings Cafe is situated at the Dufftown to Keith Railway, housed in an old railway car. It's the perfect spot for a fast lunch or a relaxing afternoon tea.

Gathering Cafe: This is over in Aberlour, the coffee and atmosphere are worth the small drive down the road if you want to be comfortable and cosy. www.thegathern.com

Best Places to Stay while in Dufftown



Dunvegan B&B: Located in the heart of the village, this charming spot was my first choice during my visit. It offers a cosy and comfortable stay, along with a delightful breakfast selection in the mornings.

[Little Robin Bed & Breakfast:](#) Situated centrally, this B&B is renowned for its friendliness, style, and chic ambience, making it one of the top choices in town. www.littlerobinbandb.com

[The Gables Whisky B&B:](#) Slightly outside the town, run by Whisky enthusiasts they also have their bar and Whisky collection, so the ideal B&B is a must-visit for whisky lovers. www.thegablesbb.co.uk

[Hillside Havens:](#) Nestled on the village outskirts, these modern pods offer a private retreat, some even featuring jacuzzis and BBQ facilities. Enjoy stunning views, a countryside atmosphere, and easy access to the village on foot. www.hillsidehavens.com

Links to further local travel information:

[Dufftown Information](#)

[Moray Speyside Website](#)

Armchair Travellers Guide to England

Great Britain is one of the best places to visit from the comfort of your armchair. Especially in the colder months of the year. When the days are short, the fields are muddy, and the sky is more than 50 shades of grey.

To make up for these dreary months, there have always been copious amounts of tea, humour and creative storytelling to get people through.

A favourite list of books and movies are listed here, divided into the past and present. This way you'll get a gist of the country as it was, and how it is today. All while allowing you to enjoy the journey from here to there without leaving the comfort of home.



So, let's get to it, and start with:

The Past: Endless Drama and Intrigue of

Kings and Queens

England's Kings and Queens are tricky to follow, there's always a I, II, III all the way to VIII fighting someone with a similar name who is equally treacherous. Heads come off more regularly than a visit to London Tower. Making books on the subject a jolly good read. Full of excessive drama, intrigue and best of all they are based on true events.

While your average textbook is as boring as a poke in the eye, writers like [Philippa Gregory](#) bring the stories to light in a most novel way (pun intended). Making them easy to read, leaving you on edge of your seat late into the night. Now, there might be an embellishment here and there, yet, Ms Gregory knows her history. My favourites are:

[**The White Queen:**](#) Elizabeth Grey married Edward the IV, against the wishes of his family and the Kingmaker. Not only was she a mere daughter of a knight, but also a widow with two children. Highly unusual and sensational at the time. Yet for many years their marriage was successful. Like most stories about love and power, there's also plenty of drama. She has a lot of children, including the two Princes, that went missing in the tower. If you prefer to watch it rather than read it, it is also available on [DVD](#).

[**The White Princess**](#) is a follow on about the eldest daughter of the [White Queen](#) who was forced to marry Henry VII. The family hoped that the union would bring peace, which it did for some time. She was also the mother of Henry VIII, so the story sets a good background on the Tudor era of England's History. You can also buy this book in the [Cousin's War Boxset](#) for anyone interested in the whole period. The [movie is available on DVD](#).



[The Red Queen.](#) Is a part of '[The Court Tudor series](#)', this series covers the queens and stories around the Tudors, such as Henry VIII and his many wives. The Red Queen is about his grandmother Margaret Beaufort, who doesn't often get much attention. Yet, she played quite a significant role and had a strong hand in the upbringing of her son and grandson. She is often believed to be behind the disappearance and likely death of Two young Princes locked in the tower.

Philippa Gregory's stories are told from a woman's perspective, which wasn't a popular angle put forward at the time. Yes, while many women at that time were simply a pawn in a larger game. There were intelligent strategists and survivalists among them and Ms Beaufort was among them.

[The Tudors](#) is a suspenseful TV mini-series that is based on the life and a few of the marriages of Henry VIII, as well as the establishment of the Church of England.

A series called '[The Spanish Princess](#)' covers the life of Katherine of Aragon, Henry's first wife. Katherine's earlier life and first marriage aren't often written about. She was left in the lurch when her first husband King Arthur died, and her mother the Queen of Spain refused to pay her dowry. It was a tough beginning, without a happily ever after. Yet her courage, grace and character make it a great story.



[Daughter of time –](#) Is set in the current day. The story is about a bedridden detective, who decides to uncover the unsolved fate of The two Princes in the tower. His investigation takes him deeper into the life of their uncle, Richard III. You'll find it presents an interesting hypothesis of what might have happened.

Time Travelling back to England's Darker Past

There are really more books that cover the United Kingdom's history than you can read in one lifetime. Obviously, I can't cover them all, but here are a few of the best:

Books like the '[Time Travellers Guide to Medieval England](#)' is fabulously funny and take a deep dive into what the era would have been like if you were sent back in time.

The further you travel back in time, the less factual stories become. Earlier tales border on myths and legends of the British Isles. One of my favourites of that period is [The Sevenwaters series](#) by Julliet Marillier. Who does a brilliant job of bringing stories back to life and weaving in an old myth or two at the same time.

Another author that can be harder to find as they are often out of print is [Morgan Llewelyn](#). She brings stories of Ancient Albion and Ireland to life. I especially enjoy The Bard and The Druid.



If this is an era that rocks your boat, there is also a new [TV series that looks at this period called Britannia](#). While there aren't any poetic bards, it does have the Celts, druids, magic and a few gnarly Romans. The period is the time of the first Roman invasion around 43AD. You can find it on Sky TV or [Amazon Prime](#).

On-Screen Period dramas that Whisk you back through Time

[Downton Abbey](#). Resistant at first, as the show seems a bit cliché, in all honestly it is well worth watching. A great cast of actors and characters brings this whole period drama to life. It has the right amount of humour, warmth and scheming to keep you captivated all the way through to the end. Even the [latest box office movie of the same name is a keeper](#).

Others that are also set in the period are [Poldark](#), which

takes you through the challenges of rural life in Cornwall. The series is based on the famous [Poldark books by Winston Graham](#).

[Outlander](#), will take you North and up into Scotland, and is a period drama with a modern twist. Outlander is set in Jacobian times, and despite the love, and drama of this wartime era. It is the landscape and its timeless features that really steals the scene.



For any of those out there who enjoy a bit of comical black wit, on which English humour is based. Then you'll love the [Black Adder TV series](#). Written by Ben Elton and starring Rowan Atkinson and many of the cast of the equally [funny and famous Monty Python movies](#), it is the most comical view of England's history.

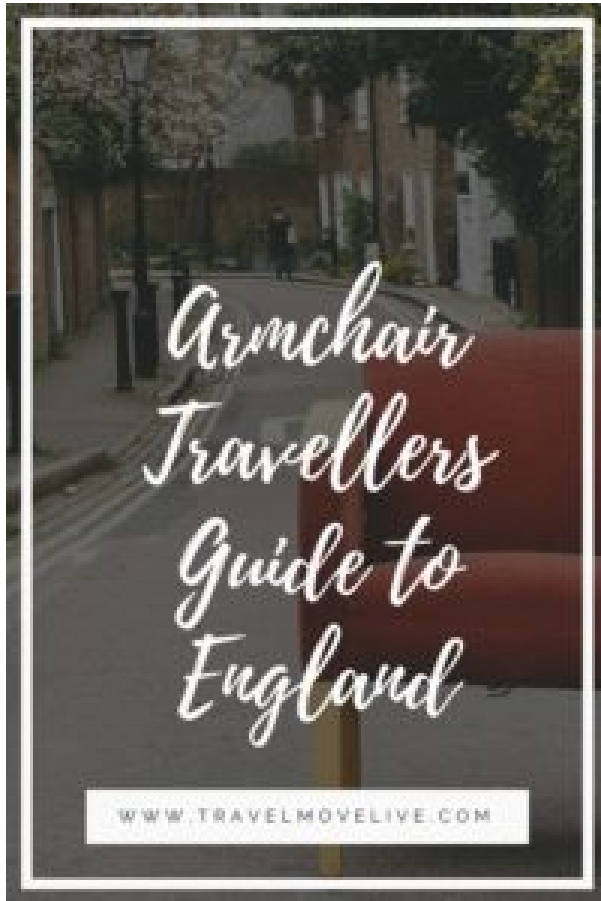
Modern Books and Movies of Great Britain

While the richness of England's history is never-ending, modern-day Britain has talent. As much as I like [Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes books](#), the [latest TV series Sherlock](#) makes London look so fabulous you'll want to visit immediately.

[Dare to be wild](#) is another perfect example. Based on true events, it contains a bit of romance, yet it is mostly about bringing a bit of wild nature back into English gardens. It's a story of a young gardener's dream to exhibit in the Chelsea flower show. It shows the English countryside and its magical landscapes in a most poetic light.



[Lad, A Yorkshire Story](#) – Such a touching story about life and death. It's often the ordinary everyday moments that become extraordinary. Most of us are touched by death, family issues and struggles. It's in these mundane moments we have the opportunity to uncover who we truly are.



This story is just that, every day that reaches out and touches us profoundly. It's a moving story, based on true events around the death of a boy's father and the effect it has on the family.

[Johnny English](#) – is what's needed after a serious movie. Good 'ole Rowan Atkinson, of Mr Bean fame, is a spy, and offers the is the best way to laugh off any and all sadness. Of course, the movie captures everything that is so quintessentially British and worth laughing at.

[Finding your feet](#) – The ideal feel-good movie. It's a view into everyday life in the UK, with a great acting cast of characters. It takes you through life turned upside down by events, the break up of a marriage, family and the magic that can come out of chaos.

It portrays hidden parts of London we don't often see on the big screen. Yes, you can swim in the ponds at Hampstead Heath and live on a canal boat. There are unknown suburbs, all worth a gander should you ever visit the city.



[Miss potter](#) – We all know the darling drawings by Beatrix potter but few of us know the author. This movie looks at how it all started out for Beatrix and how her little animals came to life.

It was quite rare at the time for women to have such freedom to create. While she did eventually marry it wasn't until she was much older. Overall its a great story of how nature can inspire us in the most charming of ways.

[Anonymous](#) – Who doesn't love a conspiracy theory? This one takes us on a deep dive into who the real Shakespeare might have been. Putting forth the most popular option of Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford.

Super actors really bring this movie to life and give us plenty of food for thought.

Personally, I am a fan of thinking it might it have been either [Mary Sidney](#) or [Amelia Bassano Lanier](#). Both of whom are better contenders than the Bard of Stratford.

If you are a Shakespeare fan, [Upstart Crow](#), is a comical series made in the same vein as [Black Adder](#) and is a very

funny view into what the real Shakespeare may have been like.



[Jam and Jerusalem](#) – This isn't a very well-known series, but it should be. It's a riot a comical take on country life written by Jennifer Saunders. Pure British humour at its best.

Timeless books about England. Warning: May increase the desire to travel

So many incredible writers come from England and weave wordy magic around this fair Isle of Albion. The top of the list are:

[The Shepherds life](#), A tale of the Lake District.

An old classic is pretty much as it sounds. A humble, honest and poignant view into the life simple life of a shepherd set in one of the most stunning parts of the country: The Lake District.



[The Living Mountain, Nan Shepherd](#)

A short but poetic book about the Cairngorm mountains in Scotland. It captures so beautifully the author's love for and relationship with them. The Living Mountain is a magical book written about and for nature.

"So simply to look on anything, such as a mountain, with the love that penetrates to its essence, is to widen the domain of being in the vastness of non-being. Man has no other reason for his existence."

– Nan Shepherd, [The Living Mountain](#)

[A Croft in the Hills](#), Katharine Stewart

Another bookshelf classic, it covers the tale of Katharine and her partner buying a croft (small countryside house) in the Scottish Highlands. It covers the simple, day-by-day challenges of life without luxury. Yet it does so in the purest form.

It is both romantic and honest in its simplicity and yet shows us that living a modest rural life can have more bite than a Rhodesian ridge-back with rabies.

Obviously, this lifestyle isn't for everyone, which is why

reading about it and experiencing it from your armchair is all the more entertaining.

[The Old Ways, Robert McFarlane](#)

Robert McFarlane's books are spellbinding, they'll carry you through highways, byways and countryside paths, stories and memories. So vividly engaging you may confuse their reading with your own future memories of adventures yet to come.

I started copying down phrases that resonated with me, only to realise I was copying the whole book, word for word. Eventually, I simply bought a copy for myself. I will inspire a long list of places to see and visit. It motivates us to a deeper exploration of the countryside. Leading to the article on why '[The Best way to see Britain in on Foot](#)'.



From here to there and everywhere, Get down, get cosy...

Kick back with your favourite beverage of cocoa or wine. Make popcorn, get comfortable and let yourself be transported both near and far by the greatest storytellers this country has

ever known.

This fair land of Albion is worth visiting anytime from the comfort of your armchair, or via plane, train or boat.

If you'd like to be transported to other countries through books and movies, check out my ['Armchair Travellers guide to Argentina'](#).

Thank you for the inspiring photographs from:

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The best way to see Britain is on Foot

There are many ways for us to travel in this modern day and age. Yet, a timelessness lives here in Britain, where the old ways and new ways collide.

Here in the United Kingdom modern modes of transport are a means of getting from A to B, these are not my preferred form of getting around. Driving is hectic, busy and stressful. Trains are expensive, overloaded and rarely on time. While buses are affordable, they also crawl through the countryside at a snail's pace and rarely connect through to, or stop at any worthy destination.

Biking is another option but needs to be undertaken at your

own risk, health and accident insurance is advised. Yet, amongst all the pitfalls of modern travel, there seems to be an overwhelming trend during the weekend for walking/ hiking.

*Disclaimer: I see hiking and walking as the same thing given there are not excessively large mountains, so I'm going to use the word walking to cover them both.



People in England have The right to roam

England is ideal for walkers. Endless green valleys, sloping hills, roving rivers and pockets of forests beckon anyone ready for some greenery and fresh air. Walkers also benefit from the Rights of way act, that [‘The right to roam’](#).

This means that the general public may access land without the use of paths.

Note: Although private areas do exist, you can find them on [maps via Natural England](#). Landlords of private property will in many cases put up a notice; *Private land*, or *Do not*

trespass – so be sure to respect their wishes if you do come across these signs.

On top of this, there are [plenty of right-of-way paths](#) for walkers to use, which are mapped out and easily accessible. If you are curious about what this means or have questioned the [Ramblers walking organisation has a great FAQ \(frequently asked questions\) which covers walkers and landowner rights in detail](#).

On the rights of way paths, farmers and landowners are asked not to obstruct the path or block access to it. Nor should they let aggressive bulls into the field alone. One exception is made for non-dairy breeds, which can be in a field if accompanied by cows. Apparently, the dairy bulls are more aggressive. As many of us might not be able to decipher one breed from another if you see a bull and are worried simply play it safe and find another route.

In return, it is expected that walkers also respect the landowners, and their lands by following the [countryside code of conduct](#). It is generous of farmers to allow the public access to the land that is their means of living.

If you bring your dog, have them on a leash when on farmland with livestock. If concerned there are also plenty of other farms, forests and fields without livestock that you can enjoy.



The Pilgrimage Revival

You may have also noticed a revival in ancient pilgrimages. There have been some great articles published that feature the [British Pilgrims' trust](#). An organisation that has done a stellar job in the last few years of not only promoting pilgrimages but also organising pilgrimages and bringing ancient pathways back to life for people to enjoy.

One such pathway is aptly named the [Pilgrims' way and will take you from Canterbury](#) to London's Southwark Cathedral. Travelling in true Pilgrim fashion on foot and staying in wayside houses or churches along the route.

Anyone looking for an inspirational book to read along the way, I highly recommend either the [Art of Pilgrimage](#) by Phil Cousineau or [The Old Ways](#) by Robert MacFarlane.

"Pilgrims are poets who create by taking journeys. Niebuhr"

On top of the old Religious Pilgrim routes, there are even more ancient pilgrimages to sacred sites such as Stonehenge, [Glastonbury](#) or [Standing stones of Avebury](#).

While not every walk is a pilgrimage, there are many other groups that you can join for a hike or a stroll:



Walking Associations and Groups

Whether you're a traveller from distant shores, or a local who would like to get out and about more – there are endless walking groups and options here in the UK.

[Meetup has a wide choice of walking groups](#) for all ages and has walks you can join in all areas and at weekends.

There are also established national and [local walking groups, such as the Ramblers](#). It's a great way to motivate oneself into doing longer countryside walks – while promoting a good cause.

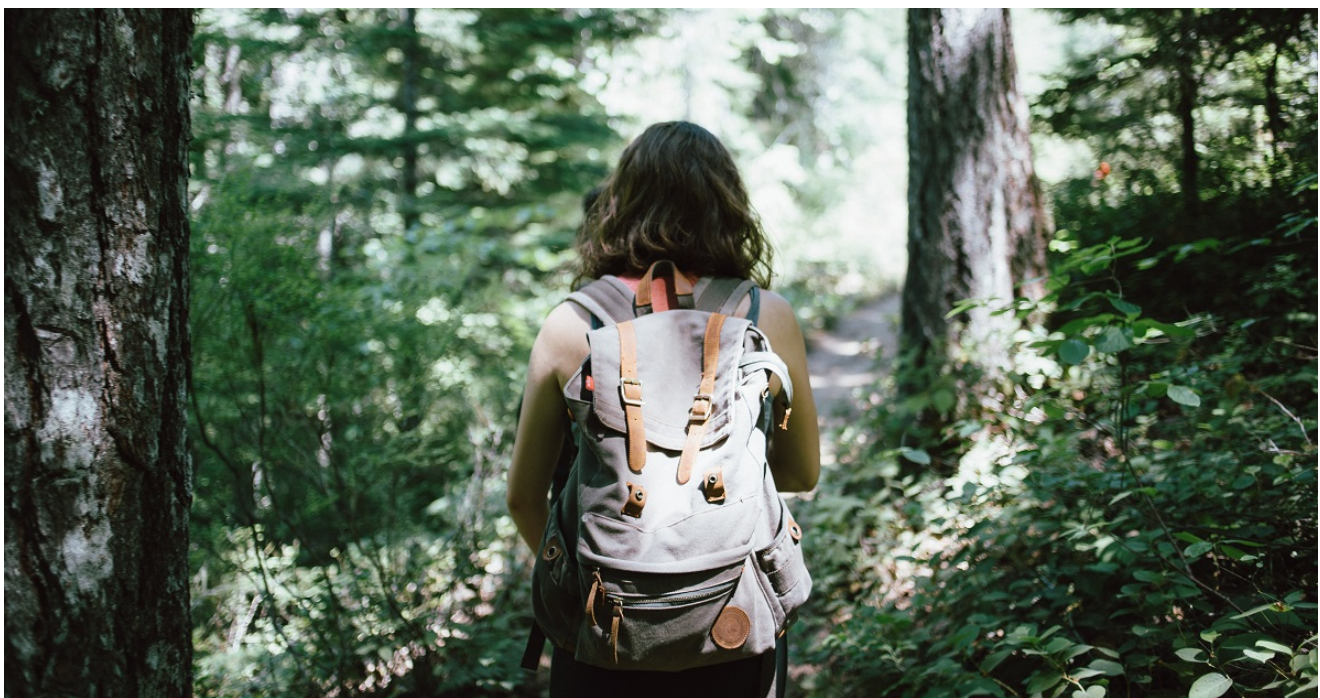
The Ramblers is a non-profit and as well as receiving a quarterly magazine, maps and free access to lead walks, they actively campaign and support walkers' interests in England.

Currently, they are in the process of lobbying with landowners and the government, to create the 'England Coast Path'. Set to open in 2020, it will cover 4.500 km of Britain's coastline, making it the longest coastal walk in the world.

On top of this, they are putting out a call to members of the public to go through old maps, to locate old pathways, so that they can be noted and reclaimed before the due date in 2026.

More than that though they offer a great range of routes throughout the country via their website or app. You can choose either independent or led walks, short or long, and easy to hard – there really is something to suit everyone.

There is nothing quite like joining a group of like-minded individuals for an afternoon of sturdy walking. You can find them online at [Ramblers.org.uk](https://www.ramblers.org.uk)



Well-known routes through the

English country

While most everyone has heard of the [Camino de Santiago de Compostela](#), and the Appalachian Trail. Britain also has its fair share of stunning trails, which may not be as famous but thankfully quieter, and equally stunning that you can enjoy if you'd like a walking holiday.

Here are just a few worth mentioning:

[Cotswolds Way:](#) This is one of the most picturesque walks. It spans the length of the Cotswolds from North the South. Covering over 100 miles, it snakes along the upper escarpment of the region and passes ancient long burrows and ruins left by prehistoric man. Being in the Cotswold it also passes through quaint villages and runs either to or from Bath, which is one of the most beautiful cities in England.

[Hadrian's Wall:](#) This is the famous wall that the Romans put up in the hope of keeping the unconquered and unruly Scots out. While I like to think of it as 'The Wall' from the Game of Thrones, the reality is that it's not half as high or fearful. Listed as a UNESCO world heritage site, it runs along the thinnest part of England. So, you can make it from the East to the West coast in under 8 days. It's a trail where you really do follow Romans' footsteps, passing by historic Roman ruins set amongst the breathtaking countryside.

[The Pilgrims Way:](#) This is an old Pilgrimage route, and you can either walk to or from London or Winchester to Canterbury, there are a few options available for the route. Canterbury was an old stopping point for pilgrims on their way to Rome. Back in the day, it was normal for most of people to try to do at least one pilgrimage in their lifetime. In doing so, and by giving alms to the church they felt more likely that they could gain, if not buy a spot in heaven.

While it did fall out of favour for a few centuries thanks to

Henry VIII, it is thankfully back in style and much of the old pathways have been given a new life for a new set of walkers and modern pilgrims.

Offa's Dyke way: Follows most of the border between England and Wales and is named after the Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia. It snakes through the historic Welsh countryside all the way from Chepstow in the South to the Northern shores.

Heart of England Way: This as it sounds leads you through the heart of England and through the West Midlands countryside. It's about 100 miles long and goes from Milford down to Bourton-on-the-water, one of the Cotswolds' quaintest if not most popular villages.

You can get booklets and trail passports as well as advice on the route, and places to stay along the way from the [National Trail website](#).



Transformation of Unexpected Pathways

Recently alternative routes are being uncovered. Such as old railway lines and towpaths are easy to walk along and have been revived and lovingly restored and transformed.

Towpaths, for anyone unaware, is the old route that was laid alongside the man-made waterway canals. These were built back in the industrial age before motor cars so that donkeys could pull the narrow boats containing wares through to their final destination.

Canals were eventually replaced with the railway. However, thanks to locals, volunteers and organisations such as [the canal and river trust](#) have put in a serious amount of effort to do restoring many canals to their former glory. As a result, the towpaths alongside them offer both picturesque and relatively easy walking paths.

The same is being done with older railway lines that have become overgrown through time. There is a TV show on Channel 5 in England called: Walking lost railways, and a [book Lost Railway walks](#), that highlights them. As such there are also a few [websites promoting lost railway routes](#) and sharing them so that we can all enjoy them.

It's great to see that even an old railway line can be recycled and put to new use.



Benefits of Walking

Yes, England really is the perfect country to explore on foot, but there are a lot of side benefits to doing so. Of course, exercise and an improvement in overall health are a given.

But my favourite benefit is that I am travelling at a pace that is right for me, I can stop, sit or walk fast at whichever point I like. If the view has become exceptionally stunning, you can stand or sit in awe for as long as you like.

It's flexible so that you can choose a different pathway, or do a circular route a linear route or makes one of your own – there are no time schedules or anything to abide by other than common courtesy and respect for others on the path.

In the meantime, science has proven what many of us already knew spending time in nature, with trees and fresh air has a positive effect on the heart, organs and mental health. This is why [the art of forest bathing is so popular in Japan](#) and has been taking off everywhere.

Personally, I believe that spending time outside in nature, in a disconnected world is healing for the body and soul. It leads us to appreciate the world around us, and feel connected.



Appreciating the natural world

Anyone who has spent hours walking through forests, over hills and small creeks can't help but to spend some of that time in awe of the landscape around them. The birdsong that fills the air, squirrels foraging for nuts.

[Red Squirrels are even being re-introduced](#) in areas of Snowdonia in Wales and Caledonia in Scotland. If you have a keen eye you may even spot the elusive badger or friendly otter. Or a peaceful forest floor filled with bluebells or snowdrops.

The change of the season, the fresh air or crystal-clear springs and canal towpaths. It's as healing as it is magic and touches us as humans deep in the soul of our being.

Protecting that which we love

Once we start to walk more – we can't help to connect, it brings us back to our natural state being and hence to the natural world around us.

I've not yet seen a walker with headphones, they're too busy listening to the birds, a burbling brook or the rustle of leaves through the trees. They'll stop to enjoy the views, breathing in the fresh air and reaching a deeper state of calm.

In the pure enjoyment of time spent in nature, we become more naturally inclined to want to protect it, and care for it, as it should be respected and cared for.

You can see this reflected in the number of efforts local walking organisations have to protect these areas and pathways. It's also why I appreciate upcoming organisations such as [Rewilding Europe](#), [Rewilding Britain](#) and the [woodland trust](#).

These types of organisations are going above and beyond to restore ancient woodlands and areas that are safe havens for local wildlife, birds and insects that are so critical to these natural habitats.

It's scary to think that some countries have no ancient woodland left, the ecological structure that they host so much more than just a selection of trees or a simple place for us to enjoy our daily stroll.

If you have the opportunity to look into them if you are in the UK for a while why not also support them with your time as a volunteer or purchase a membership?



Get your boots on and start walking

If nothing else, your feet are made for walking. Endless pathways that cross the United Kingdom are calling you to walk upon them.

So, let's get our walking shoes on, and they say in one of my favourite Celtic Proverbs:

"Your feet will bring you to where your heart is".

Resources

[Government Right of way, Right to Roam](#)

[British Pilgrimage Association](#)

[National Trails](#)

[Railway Paths](#)

[National Trust: A beginners guide to forest bathing](#)

Big thanks to a few of the photos by:

Photo by [Jake Melara](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Photo by [Colin Watts](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Photo by [Sint Linuza](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Photo by [Richard Bell](#) on [Unsplash](#)



To save as a desktop wallpaper, right-mouse click on the image and save.

Weekend Wanderings in Shrewsbury, Shropshire

Shrewsbury is a quaint medieval town, that made it onto my hit list of potential places to live here in the UK. This was largely due to the accolades it received from Londoners who'd made the move, housing prices and location. It didn't seem like much of a hard sell.

Yet, it is always wise before seriously considering settling into a new country or city to visit and spend some time there, even if only for a few days. You need to see the place first hand, does it live up to your expectations, as you view it through the eyes of a potential future resident.

While there is much I enjoyed about my visit to Shrewsbury. The reality is that I couldn't see myself living there long-term. This is of course a brisk assessment – I know many people who have made the move and love it.

The decision on whether a place suits you or not is personal. It depends on your style, requirements and history. This is why it's important to know yourself, and what you are looking for.

Even though I won't be spending the rest of my life there, I did really enjoy my time there. It's a great city to escape to for a weekend, with its rich history, gorgeous Tudor buildings, tasty food and ample space for riverside wanderings.

It's a perfect spot to practice the [art of slow travel](#).

Here is a snapshot of spots that warrant a visit:



Best Places to Sleep in Shrewsbury

There are hotels in Shrewsbury. But if you are keen on a local experience a lot of pubs rent out rooms upstairs. This is ideal for an authentic old-English experience that leaves a lasting memory.

Thankfully, a few old alehouses have also evolved. Back in the day a typical pub had wall-to-wall carpet, partnered with the nose-curling stench of beer, to create a multi-sensory overload of the most nauseating kind.

Now, there is a subset of bars that have modernized themselves, sharing the older Tudor-style building, but in a cleaner, stylish setting.

Boutique Pubs at their Finest

I stayed at [The Loopy Shrew](#): A fresh take, modern furniture and design in a country chic setting. Located in the centre of town, with everything within walking distance. The only downside is the photos on the website were taken with a fish-eye lens, giving the mistaken impression that the rooms are more spacious.

On the upside, the service and staff were friendly. And the room included a real English breakfast. A real cooked breakfast of Eggs Florentine (my fav), Full English Breakfast among others. Hands down, one of the best hotel breakfasts I've had in a while.

[The Lion + Pheasant](#) is also a boutique up-market pub that meets B&B, ideal for anyone with a taste for comfort and design.



Eating out in Shrewsbury

Travelling while attempting to go gluten-free has its challenges. I thought Japanese was a safe bet but was wrong – and in a smaller city exotic food can be a bit of a mistake. So, my first night's dinner was a tad mediocre.

To counter that, there are I found a few better restaurants with a gluten-free menu. [Jacques Bistro](#) has typical French fare at decent prices, it's open all day and offers great pre-theatre specials and a decent set menu.

[Loch Fyne](#) is a welcome treat. The food is local or sustainably sourced from the Scottish Highlands. So fresh it melts in your mouth and the service was second to none. It is popular with the locals and regulars and is located in the centre of town.

[Lion + Pheasant](#) is also a popular and recommendable choice. It is upmarket, with small portions – but well worth it for the quality and flavour. The atmosphere was great, and the food was phenomenal.

The city does have some stellar restaurants, but I did feel after a few nights to be running out of options. Especially

considering my desire to go gluten-free.

If I were eating gluten I would have liked to try the [Dough + Oil](#) as it looked like it had handcrafted sourdough pizza. In the end, when you've run out of places to eat, it might be time to move on.



Things to see and do in Shrewsbury

There is a good [calendar of events](#) happening in Shrewsbury. Everything from beer to folk festivals. I imagine the place turning into a mini-metropolis at those times. The city has an impressive new theatre complex. A small historic castle worth

visiting. With plenty more to see and do on the tourist route, you can [find more details here](#).

As I only had one free day and two working days to see the place, I opted for a walking tour and a scenic stroll along the river. It is along the river at Quarry park that you'll also find an incredible small garden called 'The Dingle'. Bursting at the seams with flowers, trees and benches it's the ideal spot to spend some time.

Not sure if there had recently been a flower festival in the city, as everywhere you look there are flowers. Flowers in the windowsills, flowers along the walkways, flowers hanging on shop fronts. Stunning.

Wandering back through Shrewsbury's past



Another point of interest outside top of the fact it has over 660 listed historic buildings. Is that Charles Darwin was born and grew up in Shrewsbury.

As a result, you'll find everything from rocks to restaurants named after him. You can see his statue at the library or visit his place of birth.

The old town encircled by the Severn River lends itself to

aimless wandering. The city shows a range of architectural styles from classic Tudor, Victorian, and Edwardian to modern eyesores of the industrial era.

Being on the border of Wales made the town a hub for the wool industry. You can see this early wealth reflected back in the quality of the early Tudor buildings.

It was also due to its location that it was at the forefront of regional disputes between Wales and England.

The Market Hall, a Hub of Creativity

When you get tired of strolling around town, [the Market Hall](#) is well worth a visit. It is one of my favourite places. You can sit down and grab a spot for lunch or do a spot of shopping. You will find fresh vegetables, vintage stalls, books, stalls selling wool or those that feature local artists. A vibrant creative hub of activity.

Getting out of town

If you have a car, you might even want to follow the trail of what they say [is the real king Arthur](#). Which legend has, does exist and happens to be from the local area. Ludlow and Wreham are close by and also have a rich history and colourful past and are worthy of a visit.

Being as it is Shrewsbury is also still today the gateway into Wales, you can catch trains up to Holyhead, or down to Cardiff and the start of the well-known Snowdonia park is but a short drive away.

Whatever your interest in Shrewsbury and the surrounding area, it is a great place to wander and spend a long weekend or dawdle away a few weeks.







Time Travellers Guide to Medieval York

Once a bustling medieval trading centre

York certainly has its charming aspects and unbeknownst to me, is on the top of most peoples list of places to visit. Which is the likely reason it is still to this day overrun by wild hordes



Once upon a time, it would have been a thriving trade centre, there are remnants of the age of Romans and Viking Britain throughout the city.

Now, if you are anything like me, you don't travel to hang out with tourists, no matter what era they're from.

So, while there are excessive amounts of visitors, and out-of-towners, there are also some quieter areas to be found, if you know where to look.

How to avoid the Pillaging Hordes

My top tip would be to visit York in the depth of winter, on a freezing Tuesday morning at the crack of dawn.



Failing that option, visiting during the week can be less painful and staying out of town is a cracking choice.

Quieter places can also be found around the outside of the city centre. Walking the city's walls, and away from the smaller shopping streets or the city's gardens.

The quietest places, I found were the bookshops, odd exhibition centres, smaller churches and back streets.

Setting the Medieval Scene

The city itself is magical, a defensive wall still surrounds the city. It was first built by the Romans and reinforced by the Vikings. Then the Normans built it into the wall that we see and can walk on today.

It gives you a bird's eye view of the city. It also gives you a feel of what it might have been like back in the day.



[The York Minister](#) is a stunning example of Gothic architecture and the largest of its kind in Northern Europe. It looms over the city with timeless grandeur.

Old wooden Tudor buildings line the streets, and The shambles are so beyond quaint it's almost postcard perfect.

In times of old this would have been the market and butchers area, and a thriving social hub.

As for the inhabitants of this bustling market town. There seemed to be groups of rowdy slightly tipsy drunken Northern blokes.

I had to chuckle as I wandered imagining myself back in the time of the Vikings. Really these lads are just following in the footsteps of their ancestors, albeit in tighter pants, which may be why there is less plundering...

And the new weapon of choice is of course the cell phone. Aimed, deadly and ready to use at the drop of a hat. It seems times haven't changed too much.

What to see and Do in York

You might think that it's unlikely that you'll be robbed by a Viking in this day and age, but beware you will be parted with your cash at every opportunity.

Visiting some of the attractions can feel like they are inflicting daylight robbery. This list includes the ever-famous [York Minister church at £11.50](#), while attractions and museums range between £4.00 – £12.00

It does all start to add up, if you plan to visit a lot of places you might be best buying a [York day pass](#) at the tourist information or online starting from £45.



You can also get the [Jorvik passport for £20](#). This gets you into five attractions and a few of those like the Dig cater more to kids...

If the prices make you baulk, there are also [free walking tours](#) that are put on by volunteers, it's a two-hour tour and covers most of the important aspects of the city.

Travelling back to the Age of Vikings

I skipped the museums, and attractions, but got the Jorvik Pastport and visited the [Jorvik Viking Centre](#), which I enjoyed. It is super ideal for kids and put together in an entertaining fashion. Despite the fact, rides or being shepherded isn't my cuppa tea.



The upside that I did enjoy is the museum area, where I was fascinated by the items found at the site, such as the shoes, jewellery, combs, coins and craft materials.

This shows that the city was an active market settlement at

the time, and its inhabitants did a lot more than raiding.



Here is a great interview with [Peter Addyman a British Archaeologist on a History of Vikings](#) which cover the dig and their finds in York in more detail.

On top of this, I went to the Henry VII and Richard III experiences.

It was a confusing time in English History, as I try to make sense of which Henry was which and who was trying to kill who...

A medieval soap opera as its finest.

The exceptional part of these exhibitions was the chats with the volunteers, if you do visit make sure you stop for a yarn, they are a wealth of information.

There was also the [Magic exhibition at Barley Hall](#), which I liked due to my fascination with all things magic. The building itself was great – although you won't find me raving or writing home about it.



The Shambles Market in the centre of town is also worth a visit, here you will find a surprising amount of Harry Potter-like magic shops. I believe this is due to some of the scenes being filmed on, or the set based on these same characterful streets.

Which explains why it's become one of England's most instagramable streets... the crowds were enough to deter me, and why I got no photo of it at all.

Another good reason it's good to get out of town. Instead, you can go and visit [Castle Howard](#), one of the most stunning castles in England, or lose yourself in [England's only Fairy Sanctuary](#).

Where to stay and eat

Finding the right place to stay can make or break a trip, do you want to leave the front door and be in the middle of it all?

Or escape the city and get away from it all, which is what I

did, and why I chose to head out to the farm, a hop, skip and short bus ride away.

[The Mohair Farm in Pocklington](#)

Staying here without a doubt was the highlight of my trip to York, and its excessively good reviews are well deserved. From the initial communication prior to my trip all the way to dropping me off at the bus stop at the end – it was perfect.



The room I had was beyond lovely, comfortable and chic – overlooking the large tree filled with birdsong, and a flower-filled garden.

What makes a great stay in the details, from a wide choice of herbal teas, and biscuits. To a selection of Natural Bath Salts, that were put to go used after walking around York for more than 6 hours.

To top it all off there was also a choice of breakfasts, either the typical English breakfast made with country fresh ingredients or an omelette of your choosing. Totally delicious!

The hosts really go above and beyond, and it was a smart move

to stay there – away from the crowds. I know where to go next time I need to escape the city and get some well-needed sleep, fresh air and R&R.



Despite being in the countryside, there are a few places to eat nearby. [Gio's Italian Diner](#) is cost-effective and promises to 'Make your tummy smile'.

On the same road is also an outstanding [Restaurant 'Thai Season'](#). I've not had a Kao Soy for a while, but it was first class – and highly recommended.

There are no restaurants or cafes I can recommend in the city itself. It was all too crowded for me, even the cafés had a queue and long waiting times.

I loathe queuing at the best of times, and spending time in line for a cuppa tea, isn't me. I would not queue if they were flown in from China and served up in a gold cup by the queen of England herself...

In Summary...

My expectations for York were likely fairly high as it's been on the top of my list of places to visit for a long time and hence sorry to say, it didn't quite meet my expectations.

When travelling, it's best to leave your expectations at home, I know – but we all fall into this trap once in a while.



If you love being on the main tourist trail, and you'd like to visit one of the most popular cities in England. Then this is the right place for you.

Just come with time, patience and a credit card.

If not, there are plenty of other equally beautiful medieval cities in England that are less busy and also worth visiting. Or simply opt for the easy route, head out to the countryside and visit Mohair Farm for a few days and enjoy time passing at a slower, more relaxing pace.

The Vikings were avid farmers. We can find as many traces of their lives in the steady work that goes on in the country, in the home-brewed craft ale and home-cooked food that is served up alongside typical countryside hospitality.

And that's where you'll find this time traveller...

Links to resources:

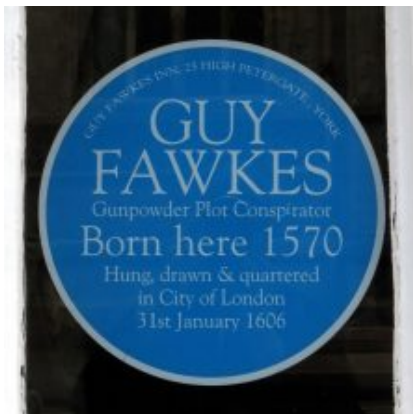
[Mohair Farm Pocklington](#)

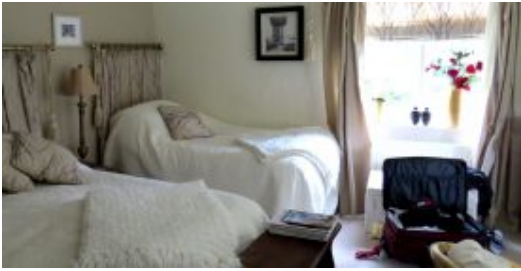
[York Minster Church](#)

[York City Pass](#)

[Jorvik Viking Centre](#)

[History of Vikings Podcast](#)













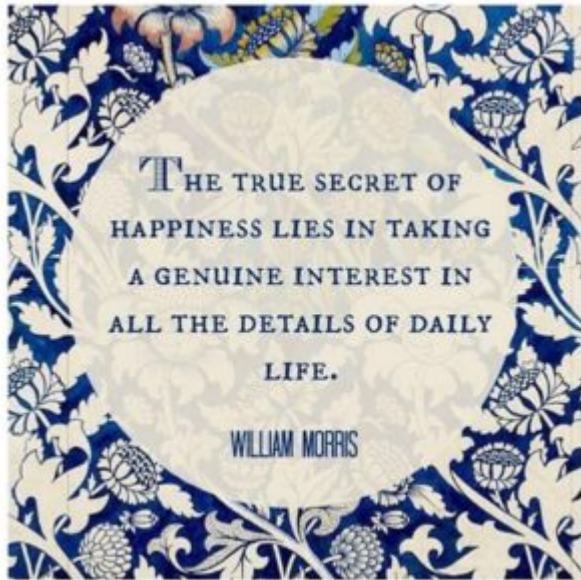
William Morris's Red House: Medieval Meet Bohemianism

Bohemian Treasure in Bexleyheath

Isn't it super when you stumble upon a historically fascinating hot spot in the most unexpected of places? You can turn up somewhere unplanned – like I am now, house sitting in Bexley – look up what there to do nearby.

And voila sometimes – not always but sometimes – you score a winner.

This is exactly what happened when I realized that William Morris's Red house was around the corner from where I am currently staying. Now I have to confess I wasn't completely sure who Will Morris is/ was... until...



Until I saw the designs and wallpaper and recognized them immediately.

His designs are legendary and recognized by all, sold by Liberty and Sanderson's.

Either which way the Red House was one that he bought in Bexleyheath in the 1800s and worked with the builders on the design to create a family home with the medieval style and theme that he was so fond of.

Since then the house has changed hands, some parts have been painted over, however much of his inbuilt furniture and a few paint and design features remain.

Medieval Village Mayhem

Like the man, Mr. Morris's creative bohemian style would have raised an eyebrow or two in the late 1800's – my tour guide filled us in on the late nights, loud parties and apple fights.

All of which caused a bit of a raucous back in the day, which ultimately led to the family moving back up to London.



It's a little more tranquil in the house and gardens today. The National Trust now owns the house, which gives us all the opportunity to visit the house and gardens.

A Tour led by volunteers worth taking –

As with many National trust buildings, there is often a tour available that is part of the entrance fee. While I am not a tour type of person – I do love to hear the stories, especially that you would otherwise not find out about by wandering about by yourself.

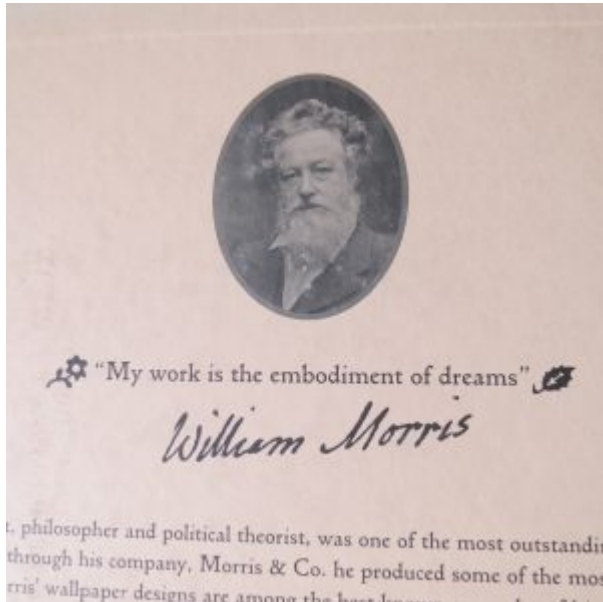
Some of the furniture was made especially for the house, and hence certainly makes a statement. It's a quirky place with lots of creative details that add to the character and charm. All the while, William Morris's own personality and beliefs are embodied in the walls and even in the ceiling.



His idea of painting by holes, that were made into patterns to prove that you don't need to be an artist to paint and create a design worthy space. Something that we can still see reflected in the simplicity yet almost Nordic designs in the house today. Perhaps IKEA took a page from his book.

The walls of the manor also proudly display his love of stories, myths and forgone days of chivalry, romance and friends.

The Man was and remains a Creative Legend



While I might not have known who he was when I started the day, I certainly knew him by the end of it. His house, his heart and inspiring creative spirit lives on here in the UK as does his style.

Surely, you also recognize his furnishings, wallpaper and timeless designs. The man himself is a National Treasure.

To uncover similar gems in the National trust house throughout the UK, you can find them on the [National Trusts website](#).

Visit the [website for the William Morris's Red House](#), for opening hours and admission fees.

P.s. I also visited [Halls House and Gardens in Bexley](#), the gardens are free and highly recommended, the house perhaps is worth a visit with kids. For me on this occasion, I didn't think it was worth the price.









Is there be such a thing as London Tube Etiquette?

Do we need Etiquette on the Tube?

* Disclaimer: Political **incorrectness** ahead – abort here if you are prone to snowflake tendencies...

There is email, driving, texting and swimming pool etiquette –

but I've yet to see tube etiquette in action. 2 million people a day are squeezing into a spacious tin can. Surely we can agree the situation calls for a smidgen of manners.

Once upon a time in a more civilized society (a society that drinks tea and queues for buses) there once existed unsung rules. But these rules for the underground were not handed down through the generations to those that ride the tube today.

Instead, these invisible rules lurk in the depths of the underground, keeping the remnants of the plague company.

New Era calls for new Rules and Tube Etiquette

Must we make some new rules? We'll base them our collective misery and daily commuting annoyances thus far. Rules such as:

#1 No Eating or Drinking in the Carriage



Everyone eyes the person clinging to their freshly brewed coffee precariously. The other day I spotted a woman accidentally spill her takeaway coffee all over herself. Thankfully there was now less coffee in the world to land on me. While I've not had coffee spilt on me (YET), I have had yogurt flicked all over me.

Not impressed; I was so appalled I didn't know how to react. What is the etiquette in this situation, I wondered? Should I

call them out?

Comfort them by saying sorry? as though its OK to flick yogurt all over my suit jacket anytime. Do you smile and pretend it never happened.

Or do what comes naturally? My reaction was honest. The horror in my face spoke so loudly, words could never have done the look justice.

Mentally I slapped them upside the head. I wondered why anyone would eat something so messy and impossible to open on an overcrowded underground carriage....

Sure, reasons may exist– but if you are going to spill shit, then please like the mysterious coffee woman, be kind enough to spill it all over yourself.



#2 Throwing up

The only thing worse than seeing someone eat on the tube is the regurgitation of the aforementioned food.

Are there times this might be OK. Perhaps in a moment of motion sickness? No, not really, there is nothing that makes

it acceptable.

I can say in all honesty that nothing grosses me out more. If you see a superhero tearing out of the carriage at the speed of light – that'll be me.

If you are feeling ill, faint or not well – please get off the train. Ask for help... I am sure it's going to happen sometimes, but it sure does happen more than it should.

#3 The Mobile Phone Stagger

Remember the old cowboy movies? A man would get down off his horse with a bottle of Whiskey in one hand and a gun in the other – staggering across the dusty road.

Nowadays rushing from the tube in the vain attempt to get to work in time, is that a drunken cowboy you see before you?

No, it's some schmuck who hasn't finished watching TV on their mobile or texting a friend. Checking an email, that will doubtlessly explode into a fiery hell if not read slowly at this exact moment in time.

This staggering numchuck will take up all the space. There is no way past them to the left, or right, over or under. They exist in a parallel universe where only their mobile exists.



#4 Pushing, Shoving and Being Nasty

Every day there are injustices taking place in the world when I see someone get the absolute hump on the tube, I almost laugh out loud.

First world problem – don't take life so personally. The fact that you've taken out all your anger on another person in such a small space is just going to piss you off and everyone else in the vicinity too.

Sure we all feel like yelling, screaming and smacking someone in the head – luckily most of us control these urges. Do us all a favour and control it too.

5 Man spreading... taking up space

While there is even a '[scientific explanation](#)', according to mainstream media, there is still no excuse for it.

If like me, you are a foreigner and are new to the term [man spread](#), I want to let you know, it's not something you smear on your toast. It is as it sounds, men taking up space.

You know, like animals do when in an aggressive stance. Animals do this to make themselves bigger, scarier, it helps them feel more confident. While it may work for animals, in the real world it comes across as arrogant and greedy.

We all know the seats are small, anyone who has sat between two 300 pounders can attest to that. So let's just stick to the space we have, and not spread ourselves around more than we need to.



6 Respect the elderly (anyone older than you)

London Transport has taken a step to help those that are pregnant with a 'Baby onboard' badge. You can also get a "Please give me a seat" badge if disabled or have a mental health condition. Not sure if you can apply when the tube is driving you mad...



Yet, there is no 'Get the f&%k up, I'm old' badge, which is a good idea as people are not very forthcoming with their seats.

No one looks up from their phone or book long enough to gauge someone's age. Let alone kindly give up their seat.

I remember a time when we were taught to respect anyone older than ourselves and to give up your seat. Those days are well past, it's never too late to give up your seat, and show a bit of respect.



#7 Don't throw yourself under the train

Listen, life's a bitch – and it's a bitch for us all. You were not singled out for some special shit pie. You throwing yourself under the train is not only something the driver needs to live with forever. It also holds up all other trains,

transit and passengers. Late to work, or worse held up on the way home, stressed and annoyed, even more than we need to be.

TIP: If, my little pep talk hasn't talked you off the platform. At least, Find a driver that has at least run over two other people. I heard, that if a driver has had three strikes he's out. He can retire early and never have to work again. Very sad, but true.

Please don't throw yourself under the train...

One rule that does exist that we can break:

"The vow to never ever make eye contact ever".

Do people avoid eye contact so they don't see that 110-year-old lady that needs a seat? By keeping all eyes on their phone – even if sitting in the priority seat – they can avoid getting up.



Looking someone in the eye reminds you that they are another human being. This is the last thing the people want as they push, shove and crush anyone in their path to a seat.

Once they have their seat they won't give it up lightly – whatever the social norms.

Today, integrity ebbs away and people know the best course of

action yet decline to act upon it.

Research has shown that if one person stands up to a thief, bully or injustice others follow. Yet, it also works the other way around.

Read [the spoof that caused a stir on the tube when signs threatened penalty if anyone made eye contact on tube.](#)



Becoming a Zen Commuter – Yoda of the Underground

Early in my commute, I spotted someone who remained standing and giving up the seat to others purposefully. In the midst of all the raucous and chaos, they stood out like a Zen master in a storm – a Yoda of the underground.

Totally suffered a fangirl crush – I was in awe.

I finally experienced the [side effect of kindness](#). Scientific research has shown that when you are kind to others you not only get a shot of feel-good endorphins but so does everyone else around you.

Now, while you may still see me diving head first into a seat, if and when these rare beasts are available. Now and again I also strive for a bit of inner zen and stand up to give others

the opportunity to sit.

In doing so, I may have even caught a few peoples eye, an odd smile and nod of the head. Kindness is eternal, and no matter where you are, or who you are – let it travel with you – it goes a long way.

Resources:

See the percentage of other people that [share your commute:](#)

[Fun facts about the London Tube](#)

[Transport of London](#)– sign up for travel updates and alerts

[Tube Status](#) – updates and delays in real time

[Commuter Club](#) (discounted rail and tube tickets)

Most lovely photos gratefully provided by:

[Brunel Johnson](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[John T](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[Adrien Ledoux](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[Viktor Forgacs](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[Ohmky](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[Suhyeon Choi](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[Vidar Nordli-Mathisen](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[Robert Baker](#) on [Unsplash](#)

10 Ways to Avoid these Deadly Travel Nightmares

We are all too young to die...

Sure, it sounds like an alarmist title, but if there one thing you can be sure about is the fact that you, me, absolutely everyone is going to die at some point

However, none of us wants it to be on the plane, on the first leg of an overseas adventure. Surely none of us wants that (maybe you do – that's ok but you are in the minority – and stop here the following tips are not for you).

That is almost what happened to me, on my first international trip the bullet-ridden plane from Jarkata, with toilets that didn't work, a seat rest that fell apart when I sat down. The plane skittered down the runway, took a few failed attempts at taking off before it was airborne, and then flew straight into a lightning storm.

In my terrified state I negotiated a deal with life, let me live, write and travel. In return, I promise to live life to the fullest. And then if you still want me, I'll welcome death at when it finally arrives.

Many flights later, I live to tell the tale, and I am still an avid traveller and have been on many more rickety flights, with only the occasional fear of crashing.

So here are a few tricks I've learnt on the way, that have kept me alive and have made me little wiser. Sharing these stories in the event that you find yourself in a similar situation you can save yourself or better yet avoid the situation altogether.

Getting out alive 101, lessons on not dying and what to do should you find yourself:

1. Stuck out in the ocean

First off, don't panic. If at all possible, avoid ending up alone in the middle of the ocean. Take heed not to swim too far offshore and into a current. Don't dive off a cruise ship, and don't decide to snorkel and leave the boat like a plonker (that'd be me).

Next, don't do what I did, which is try to swim. Do float to reserve your energy and hope that whoever lost you is smart enough to come and find you. Failing that, swim calmly in the last known direction of the shore.

Should you have a flare in your pocket – set it off – once you've removed it from your pocket, obviously!

Pray if you need to pray, pee if you need to pee, and if you see a shark, try to avoid it.



2. Avoiding being eaten by a shark,

When you find yourself at sea with a shark, a wise man or drunken surf lifesaver once told me to just stand up. The logic is that sharks can't turn on their side, which makes perfect sense, (disclaimer: I've not tested this theory – so don't try it at home).

This advice is, of course, is useless if you are in the middle ocean and the sea floor is miles down.

Tip: Stay at a depth where you can touch the bottom and stand up.

If you are out at sea and do spot a shark, stay calm (easier said than done, but try) and don't splash around. Sharks might mistake you for a dying fish, and you'll end up on the menu.

Do remind yourself that sharks by and large don't prefer human meat, they prefer seals... obvious tip: Don't mimic a seal.

3. Big ocean Rip and waves

Now you might end up in that big ocean with the shark if you get suck in a rip. If you've ever been stuck in a strong current, you know that it sucks – literally!

You scramble to remember that wisdom passed down from your surf life-saving instructor when you were knee-high to a grasshopper. Hoping for a miracle, that those fatal words will come to you.

Trust me, you won't remember. So here are so new ones: 'relax and go with the flow'.

The worse thing you can do is panic and swim against the rip to vainly attempt to get back to shore. The strongest part is in the middle of the rip. Try to stay afloat and let it pull

you out, in the end, it will fling you out and free.

As soon as the pull loosens, swim parallel to shore, well past it and then swim back in. This is one of those instances that it pays to know how to float well. Reserve your energy to get past it and back to shore.

See a surf life-saver give them a wave, they should come out and rescue you. Check out this handy [guide and videos](#), if you want to brush up on what to do.

4. Food Poisoning

Getting food poisoning can happen anywhere and at any time. Some countries are more likely to get it than others. There is a reason that the biggest conversation in India revolves around the Delhi Belly... of which I won't go into the details – for anyone who has been there – I don't need to.

The best way to avoid getting poisoned is to avoid using local water; this includes ice in your drinks, water for brushing your teeth and salad that has been washed in water. Raw fish or meat can also be suspect – it's a good time to become vegetarian.

For me, when I was beastly ill in Costa Rica the culprit was the unpasteurised cheese – an unlikely suspect. I realised it was the cheese because when I finally recovered, I ate what was left over in the fridge, which floored me for another two weeks.

Tip: Drink Coca Cola – if you've seen what it does to coins, you know it will kill most anything in your gut. It's the only time it's worth drinking.



5. Getting Attacked

All girls should learn self-defence, not in the hope that she has to use it, but so she can at least face any dangerous situation with confidence. With all danger, prevention is better than dealing with the situation.

Know the lay land, stay alert, sober and keep your eyes open. If you think you are being followed, slow down and check. Stay where there are other people and get a taxi if you feel unsafe.

In all my travels, I've only had to deal with the situation once. In England of all places. Thankfully a gentle self-defence move, staying calm, telling the person very strongly 'NO', before walking back to the main road to get a taxi up the street was all that was needed.

Luckily I was able to walk away. I wish beyond all else that we lived in a world where this wasn't at all necessary – yet in the meantime, a little preparation means you can travel confidently and kick arse if you need to (which I hope you never do).

Tip: If you've not had any training – brush up, it's never too

late to learn some moves, [see here](#)

6. You find yourself in the wrong part of town:

Don't you just hate it when this happens, you take a wrong turn; you get off the bus at the wrong stop and the next minute everyone is looking at you with the **WTF raised eyebrows**.

Play it cool, and whatever you do don't pull out a map, or your newest iPhone. Do act like you know where you are heading. Head confidently along the shortest route back to a better area.

I've accidentally wandered in the Tenderloin area of San Francisco and into the back streets of La Boca in Argentina. Thankfully while in San Fran an angel came and rescued me and guided me back onto the right path. I can write it off an interesting experience.

Now I ask the hotel or Airbnb where I am staying if there are any areas to avoid – so I know ahead of time to avoid them when possible.



7. Dangerous Crocodiles, Snakes and Wildlife

While this looks like a no-brainer however you only need to look at the statistics of the tourists that die without heeding the warning signs. In Australia's Northern Territory, the signs read 'beware of crocodiles'. Which is why you won't see the locals bathing there.

Tourists do – and hence the crocodiles are kept well fed.

Should you go hiking in nature, know what might be lurking and the right way to respond. Ask the locals or the hotel where you are staying about the local wildlife and get any tips and pointers. Snakes in Australia will run if you stomp or make noise, while the ones in Costa Rica are curious and will come closer for a look.

Tip: If all else fails and you do get bitten, try to take note of what did bite you, the colours, shape and size – it's the only way to know what antidote is right and what action is needed.



8. Arriving late at night

When you are backpacking and jump on a train it's always pretty smart to know what time you are arriving somewhere and to make sure you have some local money or credit card.

If you are arriving late at night and don't know the local language, book a place to stay ahead of time or even a taxi, and have a map with you.

I made the mistakes when I got the ferry to Sicily where I arrived at midnight. I had no credit card, I had no local money. I had no Italian language skills and I had no idea where I was staying. No one at the ferry terminal spoke English, and no one could recommend a place to stay.

Luckily one taxi driver took me to an upmarket hotel that was open, they let me booked me in with the understanding that I'd have to go to the bank the next day to pay them, and the taxi driver. The kindness of strangers is as incredible as my stupidity.

Which reared it's head again the next day when I went to the bank without taking note of the address or name of the hotel... It took me 8 hours to trace all my steps back to it. It was the first and last time I made that mistake.

Tip: Always grab a card from the hotel with its name and address. This is also very handy when in Asia where the taxi drivers can't understand the name, address or a map.

We all live and learn. Thankfully even if at times it's the hard way.

9. Hitchhiking

Best way to avoid being left out in the middle of a field in the rain at 3 in the morning or stuck in a car with a load of

rednecks, is to simply not hitchhike.

If it's a small town in a safe country and you must, do so with caution. I have friends who hitchhike everywhere – they are also blokes. So I prefer to play it safe, and avoid it – buses are cheap, easy and safe.

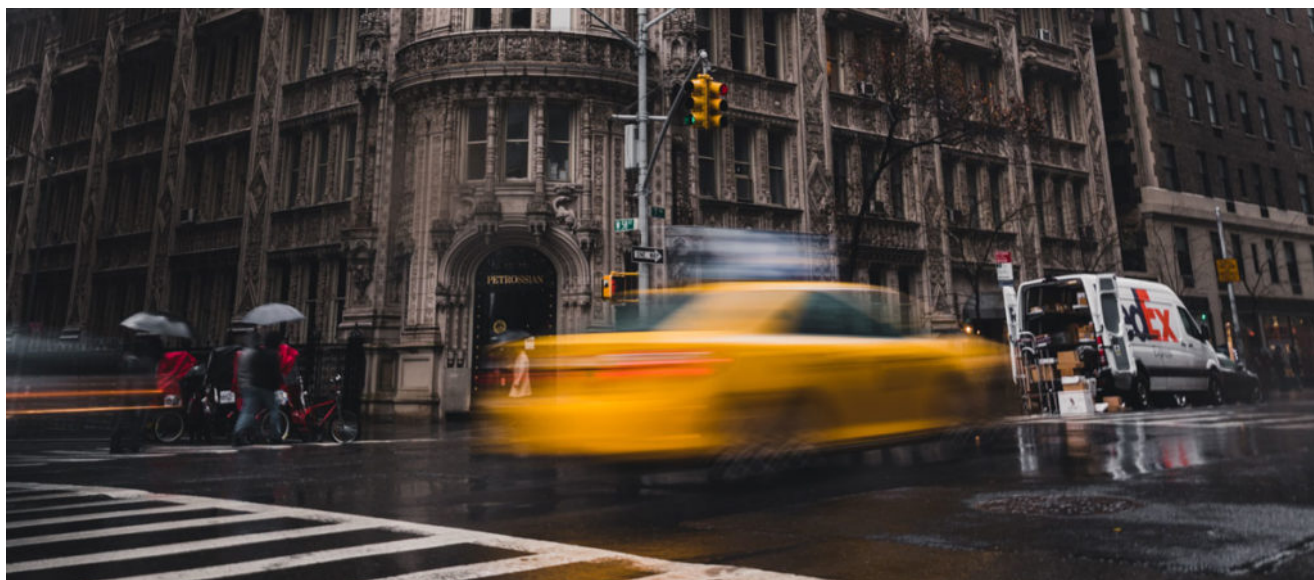
10. Taxi Rip-Offs and getting run over

I know your thinking that taxies are surely not that dangerous. Maybe you've never argued with one so much that he then tried to run you over twice. Or had one in Argentina who threaten to throw you out onto the freeway (without your bags which were in the back).

The first taxi was in Amsterdam, where I was living and I have to say despite being a reasonably organised country, it has the worst, obnoxious and terrible taxi drivers that I have ever come across. The train into town is the safest, cheapest and best bet.

Tip: Don't use unmarked cars that you find at the airports. Use a reputable company or book before if possible. If you have a hotel, see if they'll arrange it or at least advise you on the rough cost.

Sure being ripped off when you travel is part and parcel of the adventure, yet trying to avoid the hassle, threats and abuse is also wise.



Surviving long enough to travel another day

So now that you know all my secrets on staying alive, you'll live long enough to travel for another day. Really travelling is not that dangerous, confidence and common sense go a long way – be sure to carry them with you at all times.

And remember:

Life is short; death is long – so avoid it while you can. A famous Native American once said 'It is also a good day to die'... but it's less of a good day to do so while travelling!

p.s. One of the biggest threat to travellers today is their own stupidity. Hanging off a rock on the edge of a cliff while taking a selfie is perhaps the universe's way of population control... It's not on my list as it's not something I've would consider doing or planning any time in the future. Simple common sense says perhaps you should avoid it too.

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**You know you are back in
Holland when**

There are many idiosyncrasies that sum up Holland (the Netherlands) that many people miss when visiting. However, are never lost on a Dutch person coming home.



After a recent and brief visit, here are a few of my favourites:

You know you are back in Holland when:

- The plane land so far from the airport and you spend 15 minutes being ferried all the way to your gate
- You get off the plane and are met by Tulips, a Heineken café and flashes of bright orange – not necessarily in that order

- You through and outside of the airport with little hassle in all of 15 minutes
- Passport control says 'welcome home'
- The first beeline you make is to the Friettent – Fries Café, and the first thing you order is Frietje Oorlog, War Fries, Fries with Sate sauce, mayonnaise and raw onion, with a Chocomel (chocolate milk)
- Even the bus stops at the airport are pretty
- The second pit stop is [G-star outlet](#), as serious there are no better jeans, and no better selection here or price
- It's drizzling in a way that you can't call it rain, but it seems immune to umbrellas and you'll be wet and miserable either way
- The taxi drivers are all ruthless thieves which is why you take the train or bus which only cost a few euros
- The buses are all electric and modern
- You have to remember to swipe on and off all public transport
- You outside and get run over by a bike
- You stop outside and into dog poop, or in my case, my friends were warned via the apartment app there was poop on the doorstep – beware those without the app
- You are no longer the tallest person in the room – the Dutch are excessively tall
- Breakfast is sliced bread with an option of cheese or peanut butter – which is why you either take two slices or cut one in half, it's a tough choice
- When every coffee comes with a koekje (cookie)
- You hope that one food truck the 'Olliebollen Kraan', is still around (often only before Christmas), so you can still get a deep friend bit of delicious dough an 'Olliebolle'
- People are a wee bit bossy and speak their mind without needing to try and be nice about it
- The only stonners you see are foreigners
- You are sad to leave, but also know that a short visit

sometimes can be long enough

- You know you'll be back to visit all the places you missed soon



The last visit was a short one, for an avid traveller as much as I like to visit my country and reminisce and see my favourite haunts. I'll be honest and prefer to visit new countries and experience new cultures.

But the beauty of living a literal hop, skip and jump of a short plane ride away, is that I can visit, even if just for a day.

I flew [Flybe.com](https://www.flybe.com) from London City to Amsterdam – which is a cheap and easy flight, both airports are easy to get in and out making a shorter trip hassle-free.

If you are planning a trip to Amsterdam be sure to check out my blog post [insider's guide which you can find here.](#)

Sustainable Travel, How to leave only the smallest footprint

Tourism and Tourists Running Rampant

Have you've noticed how much more populated tourist spots have become? Those famous sites like the Eiffel Tower in Paris, The Acropolis in Athens, or the Seven steps in Rome, all seem to be even busier than ever.

Perhaps you've seen hoards of tourists trampling through an epic natural event such as the baby turtles hatching in the beaches in Costa Rica on social media. All to take the perfect selfie. But at what cost?

No doubt whenever you are next on that idyllic little island getaway that surpasses all natural perfection. The last thing you want to do is to share it with these very same tourists.

How and where do we find the balance of sharing, yet keep it pristine?

These are questions I often ask myself as I write about my travels. On the one hand, I truly believe that travel enriches our lives beyond measure.

Having grown up in a clean, safe, pristine country like Australia I recall my initial shock at being on my first international trip in Asia. The currency, haggling, pushy

sellers, the rubbish, the dirt and difference to life as I'd known it.

And yet, the more we travelled, the more we learn to appreciate what we have. We grow up and extend our empathy and love for the world around us.

Have you ever noticed how the children in all countries laugh and play? That for the most part people everywhere are generous and kind, no matter what their social status.

We wouldn't be who we are today without travel. The opportunity to explore the world and recognise that we are simply just like everyone else, a human being from earth. On a miraculous blue ball in space that we all share with a few million other people.

And as such, surely travel is a good thing, when its done right.

Yet, when we look at the impact that excessive travel is having, we are reminded that it would be better if we made the effort to travel conscientiously and sustainably.

So that we can keep this magical planet in its natural pristine state.



How do we travel sustainably, respectfully and leave only a small footprint?

Here are some handy tips that can be practised whether you visiting somewhere close to home or abroad:

1. Respect Nature

- Don't Litter, sounds obvious yet there is always rubbish, let's not add to it.
- Keep the use of plastic and throw away items to a minimum, wherever you may be.
- Tread mindfully, there is no need to stomp or shout when walking through an otherwise peaceful forest. We want to see the wildlife, not scare them away.

- Turn your cell phone off.
- Once in a while put the camera down, experience being part of nature. Look at life through your own eyes, no lens required.
- Breathe, practice being mindful and present.

2. Respect Animals, and Native wildlife

Game shooting is beyond appalling, as are zoos, circuses and anywhere that animals are misused for human entertainment or leisure.

You can get up close to local wildlife ethically, research before you go and know the difference.

There are real reserves that treat hurt animals and were set up to protect them, like the [White Lion Protection Trust](#). Or there are those, such as canning zoos in Africa where lion cubs are grown up and get used to being with tourists, so they can more easily be hunted and shot.

Understand the reality of this, don't ignore it. Investigate before you go, read reviews and educate yourself. When you make an educated decision you can then support the right organisations, and remove your support from those that treat animals so appallingly. Where you choose to spend your money can make all the difference.

We can choose to be custodians of this planet and its



3. Respect other people, and respect their lives and customs

Common sense rules the day. However, let us count the times we've seen people do the opposite:

- **Research** [Before going to a new country](#) what is the correct way to behave and what is not. This way you know that touching a person in India with your left hand is an insult. In the process, you'll save yourself from any obvious embarrassments.
- **Be polite** at all times.
- **Dress modestly** if you attending a religious building, ceremony or are in a country where the women dress modestly, or that is religious.
- **Be Quiet** and respectful during a ceremony so that other people can listen and enjoy.
- **Don't judge**: People live the life they are living. Countries habits vary, and you're lucky to have the opportunity to be there and see something new, enjoy it move on.

4. Photo Taking: Little respect goes a long way, and results in a better photo

- Ask if it's ok **before** taking a photo
- **Be respectful** when there is a ceremony, procession by not getting in the way and holding it up.
- Notice if people are flustered or uncomfortable with you taking a photo
- Once and awhile **put the camera down** and be present
- Don't disrupt or touch wildlife in their habitat for a selfie, watch from a safe distance where they won't be stressed, or invaded by your presence

5. Research where you are staying, who you are paying (where possible)

- Stay, tour or visit spots that hire locals and **support the local community**
 - [Ock Pok Tok in Laos is](#) my favourite example; it is run by a small community collective. They have fair trade practices and stands for the empowerment of women. You can sleep, eat or learn natural dying and weaving of Silk that is such a rich part of the Laotian Culture. I enjoyed seeing and meeting the inter-generational women that worked there from young to old, laughing, weaving and creating.

Small acts of respect and common sense go a long way in the world

When we travel we have the opportunity to vote and support sustainable practices with our dollars. We have the opportunity to learn from local cultures, and to be role models along the way.

Local communities flourish when we use our dollars to support them by staying in their accommodation and eating in their restaurants. By choosing to spend our money locally rather than with bigger international enterprises.

By travelling with a smaller footprint, by travelling mindfully and conscientiously, we move through the world, leaving it in the same state for those that follow.

