

A Tale of Two Mills in Nailsworth: The History and Art of Making Cloth

With a wave of a magic wand, I take you back in time



Imagine you wake up in your quaint Cotswold cottage, the year is 1773. You make your way into the main room, squeezing past the immense dobby loom. This state of the art weavers loom takes up most of the cottage's space with its 4x3x4 meter frame. You yawn, stretch and make your way over the gruel that's left for you. Your partner and the kids have already gone to work in the Fulling Mill nearby.

It's the start of the new era. The invention of the flying

shuttle now means you can man your loom alone; no help needed. This increases the work that you can do in a day. You taste the future and the world seems full possibilities.

You eat finish your gruel, get dressed and start work. You push the lever down with your foot, pull the release for the shuttle and beat down the threads.

Push, pull and beat. Push, pull and beat. Push, pull and beat. Push, pull and beat...

On and on. After an hour, you stretch your muscles, they ache, it's always the same, always in the same spots. But what can you do, the fabric has to be made. You know firsthand, having learned the hard way – that you need to keep a rhythm, so the cloth remains even. You need to keep a steady tandem going for the rest of the day. That will be for another 13 hours. You start to sing your favourite rhyme; it'll keep you going and give you a steady beat to work by. It's only 13 more hours, just like it was yesterday and just like it will be tomorrow:

Push, pull and beat. Push, pull and beat. Push, pull and beat. Push, pull and beat...



With a wave of a wand, I take you back to the present.

Are you tired yet? I felt tired when I saw the looms and heard how many hours the weavers once worked. They worked on looms so big that it left no room in the cottage for furniture. Which, considering people worked 14 hour days, there was little to no time for lounging anyway.

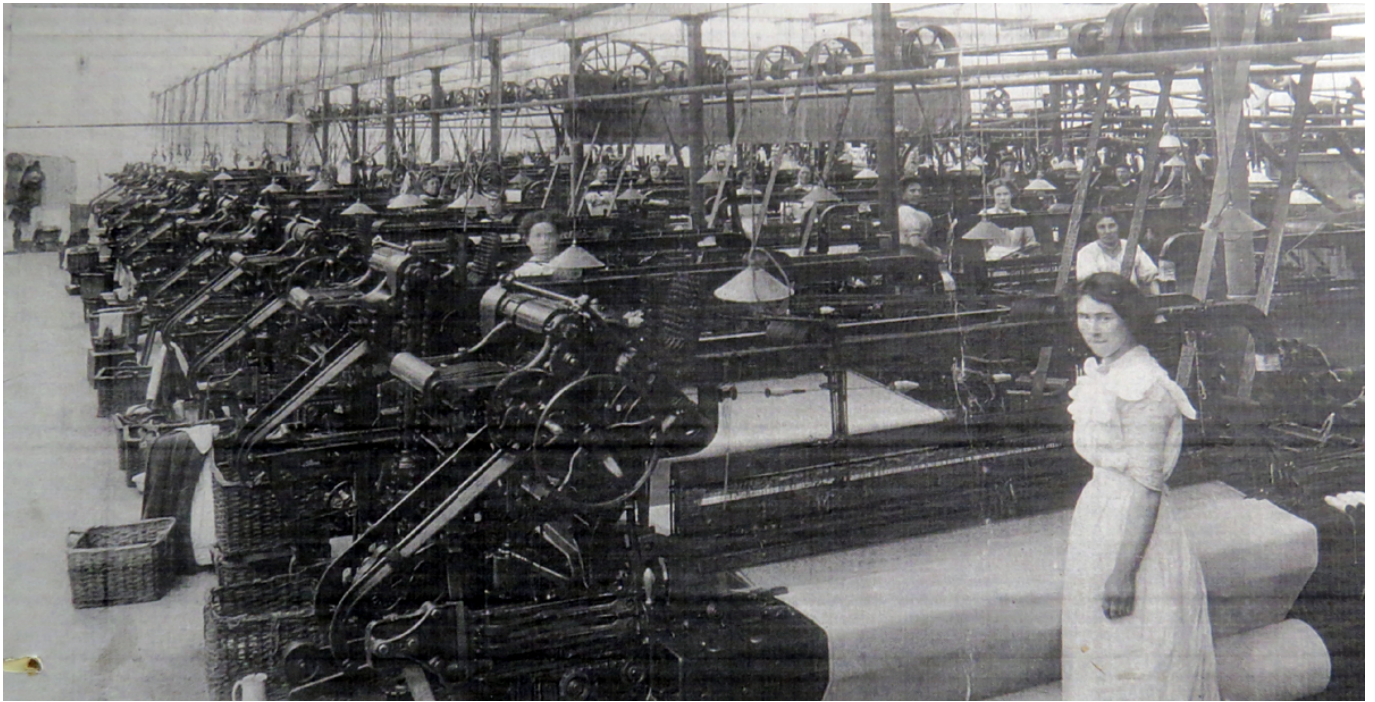
I learned all about the history and process of weaving on a recent tour of two Mills in Nailsworth. Located in the once prosperous Cotswolds valleys of the United Kingdom. The last tour, [of Ebley Mill, covered the local history](#) and the building itself. While, the tours of Gigg and Dunkirk Mill go more into the art of weaving and making cloth, as well as its evolution over time.

Learning to Weave at Gigg Mill



I am not new to weaving, as I have done workshops in the past. Yet, nothing that could have prepared me for the size of the Looms at Gigg Mill. Our tour guide taught us about the process and terminology before letting us try out hand on the smaller loom. He then demonstrated how the flying shuttle works on the larger loom. John Kay invented the shuttle back in 1973, pretty high tech for the time.

There is also a machine loom on site, which once again sped up the process of weaving, as you can see in the photos the were mills full of them. We saw it in briefly in action, what a heavy, noisy affair.



A Quick stop for Photographs at Egypt Mill

While [Egypt Mill](#) isn't part of the tour. It is a stunning refurbishment of an old Water Mill into a bar, restaurant, and hotel. While in all honesty the food and coffee were below par – it is still worth stopping at for a few photos.

I recommend walking from Gigg Mill to Dunkirk, you not only get to pass [Egypt Mill](#) on the way. But the path itself is a picturesque footpath/bike lane and part of the [famous Cotswold way](#). It weaves through the trees and alongside the river that would have once powered the Mills.



Finishing off the Cloth at Dunkirk Mill

In recent years, Durnkirk Mill has been transformed into stunning apartments. A caveat for getting planning permission was to keep on of the old water wheels functioning as it once did. And to allow the Stroudwater Textile Trust to run a small museum in the building.

It in this museum we get to learn about the last steps in the process for making cloth. We learned about Fulling; that bangs and squashes the cloth. This binds the fiber together, creating a thicker, felt like cloth. There are two machines, the guide turned one on for a few seconds. Which was a complete assault on the senses.



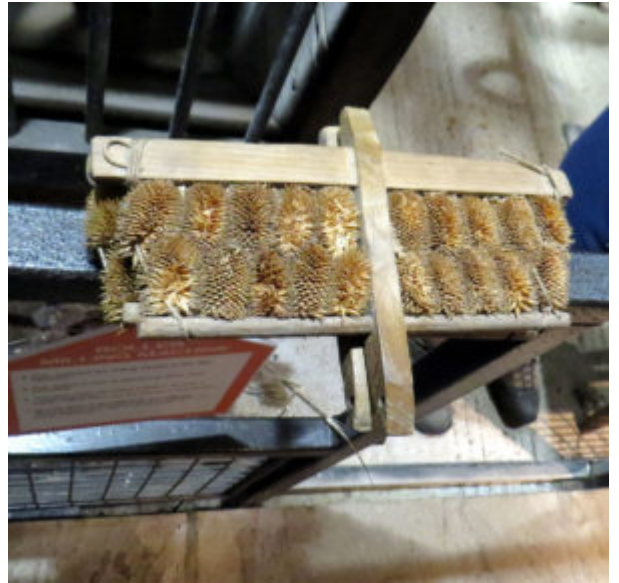
It is so loud and violent that it leaves my teeth clattering, and their vibrations echoing through my skull. I have no idea how anyone could be anywhere in the vicinity, let alone work there day and night. I am not surprised to hear that those that worked in the mill were deaf.

But, the next machine was still a finer invention than the one before, which had you stomping in a barrel. Similar to making wine. Only instead of grapes, they added ammonia and fullers earth. Which doesn't sound too bad until you hear at the time the natural ammonia would have been urine. So, not sure if I would rather be stomping in urine or deaf... Not great choices.

Thankfully, there were newer improved inventions that followed.

A Power of a Water Mill in Action

It was an incredible thrill to see the large water mill turned on (see video below). Its exceptional bulk takes up much of the space. Luckily it is well protected to stop anyone falling in. Its power vibrates through the entire room. You can't help but wonder what it would have been like with four of these wheels turning and all the machines in action.



At present the mill powers two machines; a modernised version of the fulling machine. The second raises the cloth by stroking the fabric with a teasel brush. Teasels are part of a plant that looks like a burr-weed. These were put into the brush by a special teasel setter.



The photo here is of the last teasel setter, who has since passed away. I always find it sad that complete knowledge of a craft can die with someone. An age-old specialism that will no longer be passed on down and through generations.

The fluff from the teasels was cleared off the brush by children. A sure sign that they worried somewhat less about health, safety or child labor back in the day.

The shearing the cloth

One of the last treatments in creating such a fine cloth was the shaving off any excess fibres. A tough job and a dangerous skill. Should you get it wrong you'd not only ruin the cloth but also lose a body part.



Later, they evolved this action into a rotating machine you see in the photo here. Which coincidentally lead to the invention of the lawnmower. Obviously, the cloth wasn't the only thing that needed to be kept in good order.

Last sentiments on the woven fabric of our Textile History

It was a huge thrill to see the Mills in action and to learn so much about the whole weaving and cloth making process.

There is a part of me that is sad about losing the craftsmanship and knowledge of the industry as machines take over and production moved overseas.



There are only a few working mills left here in the United Kingdom. One of them is nearby, making high-quality cloth for professional billiard tables.

While nostalgic for the loss of an era. I question the work and physical effort, and side effects of working in the mill. I don't believe I could with those machines going night and day.

I prefer weaving as a hobby, same as knitting, something I do in small quantities for the pleasure and joy of it. I am sure those who were weaving for 14 hours a day, or working in the factory would have had that luxury.

Still, the textile industry made a difference to the economy. Whether it was for ships sails, with which to go off and discover faraway shores. Blankets, uniforms to the very clothes that have kept us humans warm for centuries.

For me, it will always be a magical process. The weaving together of thread to create a piece of cloth. A cloth that can then be cut, sewn and fitted into endless possibilities.



It brings to mind the mythology of the Moirai (The 3 fates), who spun together each person's destiny at the moment of birth.

With this magic, perhaps we can weave together a future, where we keep the craftsmanship. While finding new ways to make fabric, in a more sustainable and harmonious way. Thankfully, trends like the slow fashion movement are attempting just that.

The tours put on by organisations such as the [Stroudwater Textile trust](#) help to share the knowledge, passion, and history with us. So that these stories are remembered, acknowledged and passed on.

A big warm-hearted thank you to our guide, who worked in the industry all his life, and who was incredibly knowledgeable. Thank you to the [Stroudwater Textile Trust](#) for organising these tours at such affordable prices. For opening and sharing the stories and heritage of these Mills with us.

If you'd like to do a tour yourself, check out their [website for times and availability](#).



Shearing the Cloth





Woven Cloth



Teasel Brush



Shuttles



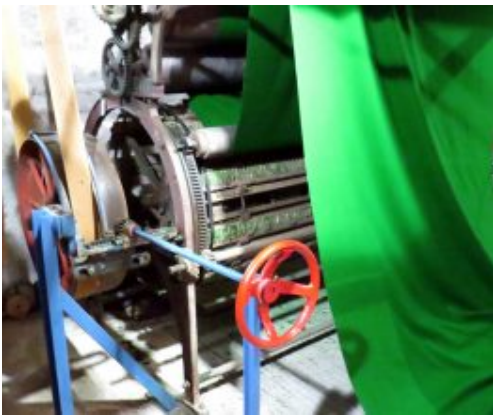
The old
Machines



Woven fabric Pillow



Our weaving



Raising the Cloth



Wool



The Flying Shuttle



Dunkirk Mill



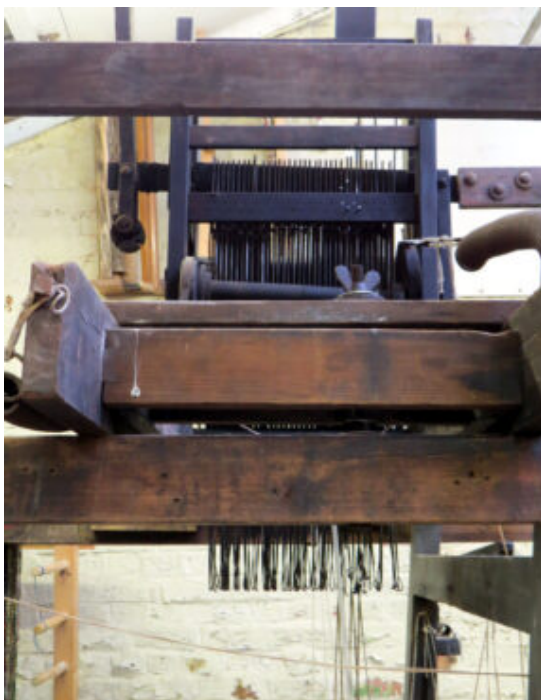
Pre and post finishing



Fulling Hammer



Cloth in Action



Dobby Loom



Teasel Setter



The Shuttle



Egypt Mill Terrace



The factory



Dunkirk Mill



Egypt Mill

For those wishing to learn more about the stories of the Mill, I've just found a book and tv series about life of the children in the Cotton Mills further north in the UK. Fascinating read, and TV series which was based on a few of the stories that came out of the archives:

A Pilgrimage to Avebury Stone Circles in Wiltshire

Pilgrims are poets who create by taking journeys. Niebuhr

There are famous pilgrimages recommended by religious groups or there is the pilgrimage that one does for oneself.

It doesn't have to be on foot or by any particular mode of transport. It is nothing more than the journey of getting to the desired destination, in any way or form.

For me, that desired destination was the Stone Circles in Avebury, Wiltshire. I've travelled through the Netherlands, France and the rest of the UK, with buses, trains, and ferries to reach it.

I left Australia with the wild urge to sit in Stone Circles and visit the sacred sites of Europe. Walk the paths of my ancestors and distant kin, touching the earth of those that went before me.

So, why would anyone want to visit Avebury, a place that is often seen as the poor cousin of the ever famous Stonehedge? While in reality, it is not less, but so much more.



Why visit the Stone Circles in Avebury?

This sacred Neolithic site is the largest set of Stone Circles out of the thousands in the United Kingdom, and in the world.

It is also much older than other sites. The sites dating though is sketchy and I've heard everything from 2600BC to 4500BC. While this is still up for discussion as some researchers say that it is even older others say that it's younger.

None of us was there, so who knows...

Despite the fact that it is a major World Heritage site, it is not shut off to the public. This means that you can walk around the stones, touch, sit next to them. You can visit the site at your own pace and in your own way.

Avebury is accessible by public transport, [buses](#) stop in the middle of the village. Visiting Avebury and walking among the stones is totally free. Considering that Stonehenge costs £19.50, and you can't even go near the stones, this is a

bonus.

Visiting Avebury is a full day out. As well as the stone circles on the site, there is also the avenue of stones that you can follow. These take you down to the West Kennet Long Barrow and Silbury Hill. There is also a museum and manor on the site that is run by the National Heritage Trust.

Avebury itself is also worth visiting for the energies alone. It's situated in the centre of St. Michael's Ley Line. These are energy lines that run over and through the earth, St Michael's is one of the most well known as it is host to many sacred sites. This leads me on to a few things you may not know about the site:



What you may not know about Avebury:

As with many sacred sites, I recommend you get an alternative guide or do your own research before going. Mainstream guides or archaeologists rarely ask big questions. Nor are they up-to-date on the latest research.

Luckily, there are many who have done their own research. In one experiment, researchers planted electrodes at Avebury. In

doing so they tested the earth's telluric energy field at various times of the day. It showed that the ditch around the site harness's the earth's ground current and sends it back to the entrance of the site.

Other tests at stone circles show that energies spiral towards the centre of the site. The stones act as resonators and hold the energy during most of the night before releasing it at sunrise.

The late John Burke once tested the magnetism of the site. Tests showed that every large stone on the outer circle is magnetically facing north. And that its magnetic orientation leads on and connects it to the next stone in the circle.

As a stone's magnetic energy occurs naturally while the stone is being made, aeons ago. It's incredible that people so far back could not only be aware of this magnetic field but could measure it. Using those measurements to bring the stones together in such a precise alignment – this can't be a fluke.

Avebury and Stonehenge are both situated on St. Michael's ley lines. Both of them have avenues and both were used for ceremonies at certain times of the year. Many of England's Crop Circles also appear between the two sacred sites.



Avebury from Yesterday to Today:

Avebury has had an interesting past. As many of the sacred sites we can only guess at its real use, and who built it and why.

There are all sorts of theories of how the stones were transported and then leveraged into place.

There are those believe that sound could have lifted and moved the stones. Others believe that it would a system of pulleys, some people believe it may have been giants. In all honesty, we may never know.

During medieval and religious times fanatics removed the stones. As the church believed that the stones had been a place of heathen worship and put there by the devil.

The site later went through a period of restoration. The stones put back together, and some in different spots. They added other stone markers for stones that were missing. While it's not exactly how it was – it still as impressive today as it would have been in the past.

Has all this interference affected the power of this sacred site?



The Energies at Avebury of the Stone Circle

While there have been tests on the energy and the acoustics. How tangible is that for everyday people like you and me?

Now I can't speak for you □ For me, the energy at Avebury was both tangible and phenomenal. I could feel it the moment I arrived, it was so thick I could have sliced it with a knife.

I wandered about and touched all the stones. While I didn't feel that one stone that was stronger than another one. I did notice that when I sat in the centre or was in-between the stones, I could feel a resonance of their energy working together.

All in all, it was an incredible experience – although it floored me for the rest of the day (May also be the 3 hours on a bus there and 2 hours back). It was well worth the four-month pilgrimage across land and sea. To finally come to the

heart of hearts of European Sacred sites and Stone circles.

In all honesty, I can't wait to go back.



What to know before you go:

The main reason I'd like to go back is to not only experience the energies all over again. But to also to have more time to explore the area. It's a bigger site than I anticipated. So, I didn't have enough time to go down the avenue and to visit Silbury Hill and the West Kennet Long Barrow. Which I would have like to have done.

Remember to bring a packed lunch. Or make sure you are on-time to eat at the village pub, which stops serving food during the day. There was a pop-up café near the National Trust Entrance, but that smelt a bit funny, so bring food or be on time.

As with most sacred sites, taking your time and be mindful. For me, this means no mindless chatter. Nor yelling at others to try to prove that you are more spiritual than them. Yes, this was what one lovely lady happened to be doing.

Take some quiet time, centre yourself, and be open to the

energies that are there. Sit somewhere quiet and ponder, meditate or just be. Stew in that and see how it feels.

Each sacred site can set alight a spark in us if we allow it to – it's a site that people have done ceremonies and that special stones have been put in place to bring together the strongest of energies. What we chose to do, feel or not feel is of course up to us.

We do ourselves and others visiting the site a favour, if we can visit them in a way that is respectful, full of reverence and good intentions.

For me, the pilgrimage goes, on. I heard the other day there are over 1000 stone circles in the United Kingdom, so I am sure Avebury isn't the last on my list. To me, life itself is a pilgrimage. And sacred sites like Avebury make the journey that we are on, all the more magic.



Resources for visiting Avebury

[Manon Tromp](#): Offers tours of Avebury and Stonehenge, may also have night passes at certain times of the year if you would like to join a ceremony

[Invisible Temple](#), Freddy de Silva – Freddy does tours and has published a few great books on sacred sites and temples.

[Stone Circles website](#) – lists all many of the main stone circles in the British Isles

[Earth Ancients Interview with](#) Hugh Newman that covers the Stone Circles and more research in greater detail.

[Megalithomania](#) – annual UK event that focuses on Megalithic structures, great speakers. Hugh Newman who runs the event and site has also authored great books on the subject.

[Sacred sites website](#)

[National Trust Website](#)

[Steve Marshall](#) has a great book called exploring Avebury, here is also one of [his talks from the Megalithomania Event.](#)

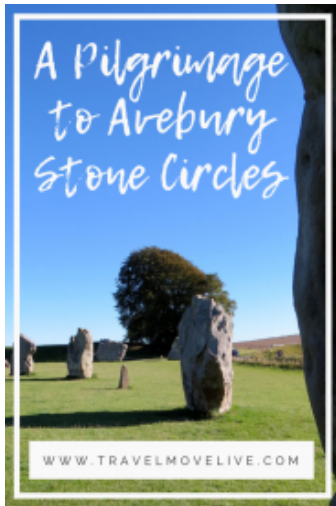
More information on [West Kennet Long Barrow](#)

p.s. Disclaimer: I don't use wikipedia, I believe their word usages, biased point of view and censorship of certain content supports a wholly mainstream agenda – which I don't agree with. Plenty of much better information out there!















Ledbury, Small Town Big Heart

Whether you are visiting England from abroad or on a weekend getaway. Ledbury in Herefordshire has a little something for everyone.

Ledbury, is more than an old market town with a colourful history, photogenic streets, and Tudor buildings. It has heart.



You can visit many of the historic buildings for free, and find them manned by volunteers who are both passionate and knowledgeable. They'll be happy to guide you around and answer questions.

It also home to Church Lane, one of the most photogenic streets in the UK, that you can visit in real life rather than on Instagram.

If you also look very carefully you may even see the little fairy doors. There is a fairy door map and trail in the shops around town. [Here is a page and map to help you out.](#)

The village is also well-known for its [Poetry festival](#) that held each year in June and July. That brings in poets from all over the country and world.

Recommended spots to see and visit in Ledbury:

Market house

This old Market house takes the center stage on the town's main street. It's unique in

that the stilts are exceptionally high. Completed in 1658 and built in Tudor style. The original use was for storing crops, after that, it was the town hall. Today it still plays the role of meeting house and hosts a small Saturday market.



Butchers house

Was built in 1581 and was originally located on the main street. Yet, they moved it to make the street wider in 1979.



It now houses a museum rather the Butchers shop. In the museum, you'll find a Shoe

bath, which I had never seen or heard of before. It was for inhabitants in Ledbury that didn't have a bath at home. Men would carry this bath from house to house, so the inhabitants could bathe.

Address: Church Lane, Free Admission Open daily, including Sundays from 1st April to 31st October from 11am to 5pm. Outside of these dates, please make an appointment via [Ledbury Civic Society](#).



Old Grammar School

Across from the Butchers house, you'll find the Old Grammar school. Interesting for kids to have an insight into schools of the past.

I liked the wattle and daub, display. An insight of the inside of a Tudor style building wall.

Church Lane, Free Admission

The Painted Room



The wall paintings go back to the 1560's, at the time they were a cheap alternative to tapestries.

The paintings were colourful and included religious inspirations (threats) of the day. The volunteers can tell you the whole story and explain the context.

Church Lane, Free Admission

The Masters House

This refurbished historic house is now home to the local library. Be sure to check the website before you go, as there are free tours available every so often. They also host talks from historians, writers, and poets. Adam Horovitz was the poet in residence Ledbury in 2015, and he wrote a few great poems about the building. [They can be found here.](#)

St Katherine's, Bye Street, Free Admission

HELLENS Manor



While this isn't in Ledbury, it is close enough to warrant a visit. Now, I am not the 'let's do a tour', type of traveler. As the Manor is still in use today, the only way to visit the manor is with a tour.

Which is well worth it. There is so much history here that you would never get the full story on a simple plaque.

The guide lives on the property and has an in-depth knowledge of the history of the house, as well as being an incredible storyteller.

My two favorite stories were that of the ghosts. The first being Hetty, who ran away with the stable boy who she'd fallen in love with. When he died she returned to the house. Due to the family's shame, they kept her room locked in her room for the next 30 years. Here she etched "It is a part of virtue to abstain from what we love if it should prove our bane", into the window with her diamond ring.

The second death took place in 'Bloody Mary's' room. Here a priest was running g to



escape from soldiers but instead, he ran straight into the second group and was brutally murdered. If you look carefully, you'll find the marks of the attack on the wall and floor.

People who have stayed in the room have claimed to see his ghost, running back and forth in a panic.

The building itself is also fascinating, in how it carries the living history of its past and present owners over the different time periods. It was one of the best tours I've been on, and the highlight of my time in Ledbury.

Address: Much Marcle, Herdforshire
Website <http://www.hellensmanor.com/>
Admission costs: £9

Recommended places to Eat:

[The Malthouse cafe and Gallery](#), Church Lane: Home cooked quality food.

Ice Bytes, 38 the Homend: Ice cream parlor

Recommended Places to Sleep:

[The Feathers Hotel](#), 25 High Street

[The Talbot Hotel](#), 14 New Street

[The Bullshed,](#) While it's not in Ledbury, it is nearby. Its boutique style and comfort is worth experiencing if you are escaping the city for a few days and looking to treat yourself.



Church Lane



Bloody Mary's
Room, Hellens
Manor



Bloody Marys room



Bloody
Marys Room



Hellens Manor



Hellens Manor



Ledbury



Ledbury Clock Tower



The Butchers House, Ledbury



Ledbury Countryside



Hetty's Room

Tour of Ebley Mill: a Historic walk through England's Industrial Wool Trade



Cathedral of Cloth, Ebley Mill Walking Tour

Do you ever have those moments, when you see an antiquated building, and have a curiosity to peek inside?

I do. I love old buildings. I love the architecture that has weathered time, and societal fluxes. As much I as I love the outside, I am always curious about what they look like inside too. So, I jumped at the chance to do a free tour of the Ebley Mill in Stroud.

Richly woven tales by our guide brought the old mill to life. In our imagination, we strode through its various incarnations. Imagined ourselves surrounded by the clamorous sounds of the mill in action. The same sounds that would have echoed through the valley, followed by the wafting scent of wet wool.

We got to hear the stories of its heyday and slow demise.

The origins of Ebley Mill:

The exact dates aren't too sure. However, there are mentions of two mills being near this site as early as the 1300's.



One mill was for milling corn, and the other for fulling the wool. Which was a process of beating the wool down so that the fibres would further entwine. Resulting in a sturdier and weatherproof fibre.

The Mills brought prosperity to the owners and being a clothier at the time was good business. While the business boomed and ebbed the company grew. When the original owners sold it off, it was perfect timing for the following owner.

As the French civil war broke out, the army's need for uniforms made from quality English wool was in demand.

How the war lead to a boom in the Wool trade

Half the wealth of England rides on the back of the sheep

An Old English saying, that serves to remind us of the prestigious history of wool. Romans also wrote home about the high quality of the wool when they arrived at the British Isles.



The wool was as much for survival in a cold and rainy climate, as it was for fashion. There is nothing as sustainable, warm & weatherproof.

Which is why the fabric is popular for military uniforms, leading to a boon in orders. The profits of which financed the first building of the Mill that we see here today.

While a later war paid for the extension of a second building, which was originally 7 stories high. An epic explosion in the boiler room blew 5 of those floors. It was rebuilt and then damaged by fire damaged before it was rebuilt once more.

Peace and the changes in the Textile industry

As peace reigned, without uniforms to make, orders declined. The Mill had an equal measure of tough times in it's past.



By the 1960's it was struggling, and the introduction of

synthetic fibres didn't help. The mill innovated with the times, creating new products by blending fibres with the wool. Yet, in the end, it couldn't compete with other manufacturing costs and processes.

Sadly, by the late 1980s, it went bust and Ebley Mill's grandiose buildings left to ruin.

A New life for the Mill and Local council



In the 1990s the building's were bought and refurbished. It now houses the Stroud local council and its local departments.

Restored, it stands to watch over this Cotswold valley as majestically as it's always done. A nod to its heyday, Ebley Mill was a state of the art building, the first Mill in the area of that style and size. Although, many other mills soon followed suit.

A walking tour of the Mill through time:



The tour put on by the Stroudwater Textile Trust, gives us the opportunity to see the behind the scenes. We got a wander through the building and see the touches of the mills past. A past etched into the beams and walls.

It's as though the Mill reaches out and tells us its story, of all the architects and owners past and present.

While the mill no longer processes wool. The richness of the stories, history and its beautiful buildings remain.

A reminder of the past that lives on and is spun into the days and lives of the council and local residents today.

A Thank you for the walk down memory lane:

I'd like to finish with a heartfelt thank you to our guide, and her memorable stories. To the [Stroudwater Textile Trust](#) for organizing and promoting the tours. To Stroud City Council for preserving the old mill, and allowing us to wander about and learn it's rich history.

The exhibition 'Cathedral of Cloth, that was also on site, there is also a book available on the subject.

There are likely to be other tours in the future. If you are visiting or living in Stroud, keep an eye on the website of the [Stroudwater Textile Trust](#) for dates. It's well worth a visit.



Resources:

[Stroudwater Textile Trust](#)

[Stroud city Council](#)

[British History](#)

A Seekers Guide to Glastonbury

Welcome to A Seekers Guide to Glastonbury and it's sacred sites, for those that are seeking the magic, with both feet on the ground. Here is my advice on the best way to visit a

sacred site to make the most of the magic you'll encounter.

A few tips to keep in mind when visiting a sacred site:

1. Everything is frequency. Sacred sites also hold a specific frequency stronger than most. And we all hold our own frequency. Simply said some will resonate with you and some will not. Don't take it personally.
2. Do to give yourself the time and space to sit and see if you connect to the place.

In the wise words of [Manon Tromp](#):

"Let go of expectations, go with the flow and take your time to let Avalon do what it needs to do".

I also agree with [Freddy de Silva's](#) views on why we visit sacred sites (paraphrased): Every sacred site we visit awakens a spark in us, and takes us forward on our journey of self-evolution. As each of us is on our own unique life pilgrimage, we will each experience it in our own way.

Which is why I put together my own Seekers Guide to Glastonbury;

A Pilgrimage to Glastonbury Tor



Glastonbury Tor is a magical spot. To connect and feel the energy of the land, I choose to walk up to the top of the Tor barefoot. Being so steep, every step was a reminder of how unfit I was feeling – I ended up feeling more out of breath than enlightened.

To keep myself going I imagined all the pilgrims that had walked the path before me. All the ceremonies and processions that the hill must have seen over the ages.

I hoped that by the time I got to the top that the veils would lift and Avalon would appear before me. Needless to say, that didn't happen.

Instead I went and found a quiet spot to sit on the hill. A quiet place to sit and feel all that I couldn't see. To connect to the energy of the site.

It was pretty magic.

If you find yourself at a sacred site do find a quiet place away from everyone else. A place to connect, to go within and meditate on what you feel and what emerges within you. Churches are often built on Sacred Sites, which were often built on the earth's energy or Ley Lines.

Sacred sites have also had people making pilgrimages to them for thousands of years. Using them for their intentions, prayers and ceremonies. Put all this together and you end up with a magical energy for us all to tap into. Sit in the glow of those energies and let them share some of that subtle to strong magic with you. It is free to visit the Tor, you can find information on the National Trust's [Website here](#).

Getting your toes wet at Chalice Well

Chalice well sits at the bottom of the Tor, across the road from the White Springs. It is a small park that costs £4.50 to enter. It's a peaceful garden, well tended and with many areas to sit and reflect and meditate.



The ice cold red spring water at Chalice Well is the stuff of legends. One story is that the water gets its red colour from Joseph of Arimathea who added a few drops of Jesus's blood to it. Another is that it is the spring of eternal youth and has healing properties.

The fact is the iron oxide gives the water the reddish colour. The well has been in use for thousands of years and is a constant 11 degrees all year around. There is a small pool

you can walk through, and it's pretty cold!

You can drink the water from the spot where you'll find the lions head. Legends say it gives eternal life, I did have a drink so let's see if that is true. Only time will tell.

It's a lovely garden, and well worth the entry fee and a visit.

[Chalice wellsprings is run by the trust, website here.](#)

Address: 85-89 Chilkwell Street.

Dive into the Sacred White Springs

The White Springs sit at the foot of the Tor, managed by volunteers and open in the afternoons. It is free to enter.

You can immerse yourself in these waters. The spring and its pools are lit by candlelight. While I stood in the darkness and I wasn't sure if I wanted to risk slipping across the cold stones into a pool of water.

So I drank some instead and wet my feet with it outside and hoped that would suffice.

[The White Springs website can be found here.](#) Address: Well House Lane.

Time Travel to Glastonbury Abbey



At a cost of £7.50, I had to consider whether it would be worth it to see an old ruin. The curiosity of seeing King Arthur's tomb and the original church of Joesph de Armithea drew me in.

I am so very glad it did. The museum itself wasn't that interesting. And I have my doubts that King Arthur ever existed let alone lay there. Rumour has it this was most likely the churches medieval money-making marketing ploy.

So while I didn't see a tomb fit for marketing, or bones. I did have the pleasure of visiting one of the oldest medieval kitchens in Europe. And a chance encounter with Alice from the 1500s.

Alice was busy working and complaining about how a woman's work is never done. Before beginning her story of the kitchens and abbey's history. We sat down and had a nice long chat about ages past.



I heard that my fellow countryman from the Low Lands (Netherlands) visited the abbey in the 1500s. Brought over for their skills in silk weaving with the intention to teach those skills to locals. It was believed they spent time living in the kitchen of the Abbey. They never did have the opportunity to pass on the skills. They fled when Catholic King Henry came into power. As did most Protestants to avoid prosecution.

I did the day tour with Alice later in the day, and also learnt that the Abbey was at once the richest in the country. Pilgrims and visitors coming from far and wide to visit the holy site, seeking to clear their sins.



Luckily the wealthy people had the most sins. Which they could absolve for the right amount of money. Which is why the wealthy landlords left all their holding to the abbey in the hope of eternal redemption.

Now in a cruel twist of fate, it is the same wealth that destroyed them. The greedy king, who had spent all his money

on war decided to put the abbot on trial. The abbot was found guilty, hung and quartered at the top of the Tor. The Abbey ransacked and it's wealth sold and left to ruin.

You can enjoy the interesting stories and rich history by taking one of the guided walking tours that is included in the entrance fee. There is a tour every hour until 4 PM.

[The Glastonbury Abbey website is here.](#) Address: Magdalene Street.

St. Margaret's Chapel and Almshouses



This is a quiet secluded garden off the street. At the entrance, You'll find a finger labyrinth, which is a meditation in itself and fun. You can pray or meditate in the small old chapel or garden. The little courtyard almshouses were once hospital rooms built in the 11th century.

One of them is open and set up with furniture from the era. You can see how small yet gracious it was. Those that had to stay would have been well looked after.

While the walls of the courtyard in ruin from the onslaught of time. There are lovely details to the garden and can see that the place is up kept with love. Address: 46 Magdalene street.

Wearyall Hill and the Holy Thorn



The Holy Thorn, is where the original staff of Joseph of Armithea took root and grew, the tree is still there. It pains me to write that vandals killed and chopped branches from the tree. So it isn't half of what it once was.

The tree, or the remaining stump is still there and still holds an incredible energy. I recommend putting your hands on it and feeling it's warmth.

It costs nothing to visit, and has great views over to the Tor and the rest of Glastonbury.

More Magical spots to visit

Glastonbury is full of unusual shops, people and places that

you won't find on your average High Street. From the magic shop like the [Cat & Cauldron](#), where you can buy a real wand, staff or a host of other magic book and paraphernalia.

Lovers of the Esoteric and metaphysical books can [visit Avalon Library](#). In the same arcade 2-4 High street, is [Star Child](#), an incredible essential oil and herb shop. And upstairs you'll also find the [Goddess Temple](#). Which hosts speakers and events most nights of the week.

Anyone for cuppa tea & a scone?

[The Abbey Tea Rooms](#) has stunning views of the ruins and some of the best Tea + Scones with clotted cream and jam and other English goodies which will give you the energy to climb the Tor or walk the Abbey gardens. Address: 15 Magdalene St.

For those that might be looking for a stronger sacred drink, the [George's hotel and Pilgrims Inn](#) is a lovely old fashioned English Pub in a well preserved medieval building.

You can even [book a night and stay over the inn](#), if you dare, its known to be haunted and you can read about a [few spectral accounts and ghost stories of the Inn](#).

Where to Stay in Glastonbury

I was lucky enough to spend 3 weeks doing a work exchange through [Workaway](#) at [Earth Spirit Centre](#). Incredibly lucky to met some truly magical people. The centre also runs incredibly workshops throughout the year, so be sure to check their calendar to see what's on.

[AirBnb](#) is also highly recommended, particularly [Earth Mama's House](#) that is run by [Manon Trump](#). Manon also runs tours

to [sacred sites including Stonehedge and Avesbury](#).

The Magic never ends

Glastonbury can be many things, quirky, magical, spiritual and at times over the top. Is it a reflection of our inner selves, is it whatever we want it to be (yes, be prepared for fairies and men with arrows and crossbows walking along the high street).

It can have moments of feeling like it is spirituality gone mainstream. Yet, it is still enchanting. The people I met there is that they are all doing whatever they want, being whoever they want and living life as they want – blissfully content.

In this crazy world – maybe this is the sanity of it all. There isn't any seeking, but an authentic way of being. And that, in itself is kinda Magical.

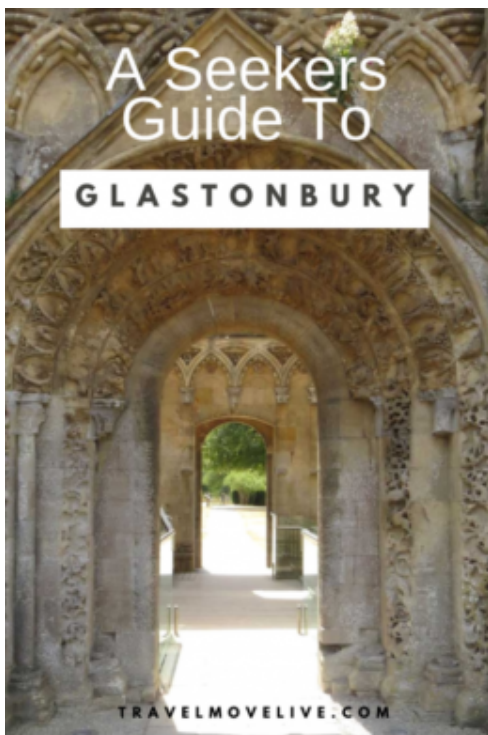
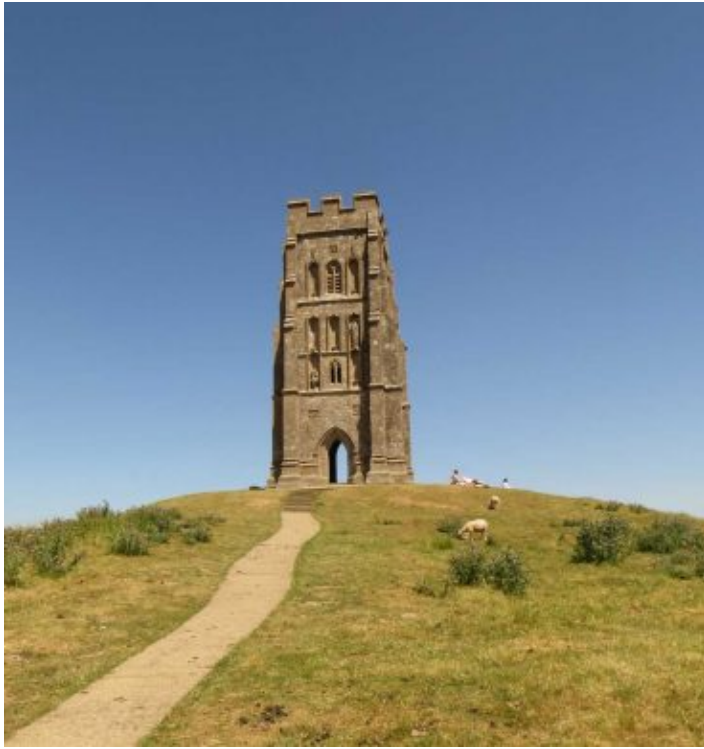
For Further reading:

Freddy de Silva's [Website](#). Freddy de Silva's book: [The Divine Blueprint](#).

Manon Tromp's Website, you can also find her on the Mystical Tours website.

Anyone interested in visiting Avesbury Stones can [read more here](#).











How to Bla Bla your away around the French Rail Strike

Without a doubt we are all for a bit 'La Revolution', and in most cases happy to support workers rights and protests on the whole.

Yet, do you hardly recall a real strike being held that interrupted your every day life? Australia, Netherlands or the UK rarely strike – and the most we hear is rumours, threats, union meetings before it's all neatly sorted out. And we are informed of the results.

The Revolution in France never really ended

Here, in France, where I am currently travelling they have an ongoing train strike – From April to June. WHAT... Yes, a 3 whole months, it's spring and many tourists and locals are affected.

Read the details, or see the dates here in more detail here: [Trainline EU](#)

And they mean it. I went and asked at the tourist information if there really was a strike – seriously? there really isn't any trains?? Are you sure? The woman looked at me and my most absurd questions – of course there is a strike, which means limited to no trains.

Luckily while not everyday, booking anything can be tricky, I would advise where possible you travel on the days there is no strike.

Yet, there is another new transport distrupter that has stepped in and saved the day, a modern day knight / driver in shining chariot to whisk you off to where you'd like to go, meet [Bla Bla Car](#).

There is No Bla Bla about it...

So I have to declare I am a bit of a car sharing newbie – and was super nervous about getting into some strangers car, most likely this person won't speak english – and my French is dismal at best. How would this work?

Yet, thanks to my stubborn streak, I wasn't going to let the Rail strike stand in the way of where I wanted to go, so I decided to risk it. And try to Bla Bla my way across France to get to where I was going, when I said I was going to get there.

I found [Bla Bla car](#) to offer the best carpooling service, and there has also been a huge influx of French subscribers to the site, and a really community that is helping people everywhere to get them to where they are going – the easy way.



My First Bla Bla Experience

My first ride was a challenge to say the least. I caught a taxi to the middle of nowhere and had to hope for the best. The taxi driver spoke to the driver, and the many messages the driver texted never arrived – as the website didn't show my country code... so, the driver rang – trying to speak french on the phone had me in tears, and I had no idea what was being said.

The taxi had left me in the wrong freeway exit, and the driver had to drive all the way around and hence was annoyed. Communication melt-down at it's best. However, the driver found me, we resolved the issue. He was super kind and I got across the country in less than 3 hours, while if I had taken the bus it would have taken me 13 hours!

The second driver had a full car, and was young yet a sensible, polite and charming. So all in all with only a small wait between lifts, I got from Carcassonne in the South West of France up to La Creuse in the Middle of France cheaper and quicker than I would have ever gotten the train or bus for.

Lessons in using Bla Bla Car in a Foreign Country

So, while use of car pooling in another language isn't without it's challenges and limitations. There were a few lessons learnt in the experience:

My advice:

- Try different routes, and have a play around with the locations – without dates, so you can gauge what the more travelled routes are
 - Also go for rides that can pick you up from a central location (ie. Train station, this means there are also taxis or buses should anything go wrong)
- Be sure to check the if they have room for luggage or not
- Don't be worry if the car has other passengers (I found this ideal as that meant I didn't need to talk to the driver)
- Read the reviews, Leave a review
- Make sure you are on time
- Always be polite and respectful

Bla Bla Car in Summary



Not only is the rail strike a spanner in the works, it is also difficult with the rail network or buses to get to get to the smaller cities or across from one region to another. I am loving the option of using [Bla Bla car](#) to get me to where I want to go. While I personally like travelling by train, for me to get from here to my next destination Brittany I would need to change trains 6 times, which makes the journey a long and arduous one. While if driving it's just 4 hours away.

Bla Bla Car is available in a variety of countries in Europe, and while you do pay for the ride, depending on what the driver is asking – it is still much cheaper than public transport. Payment it is via the website using paypal.

You can also set your preferences, music, smoking/ non smoking, and a little of a lot of bla bla (talking).

Keep on Roaming

I will continue to carpool across France, strike or no strike. Admiring and yet avoiding the impact of the mini-revolution that is currently underway.

I'll have my own revolution in defiance and not let it dampen my travels or stop me in getting to where I want to, when I want to get there.

Yes, the language barrier can be a challenge and also a great opportunity to learn some French and if you do speak the language the perfect chance to have a chat to a local. So don't let a transport strike or your nerves get in the way.

Book a ride, get your Bla Bla on, and keep on Roaming.
What is life, if not a constant adventure.

Website: <https://www.blablacar.com/>

Book Train/ Bus: [Oui SCNF](#)

An insiders guide to Amsterdam

Ah Amsterdam, You've seen the movies. You've heard the stories. Whatever your reason is for going to the enchanting city – you definitely want to make the most out of your time there.

Amsterdam is more affordable than London, friendlier than Paris and more fun than Rome – and it's no secret, everyone knows it.

This is why the city has approximately 18+ Million visitors a year. Which is 350K a week, in a central area that has only 830K residents. As you can envision, it gets a little crazy-busy on the weekends.

So you have the choice 1) wrestle with the masses, waste your time in queues and see what everyone else does. Or 2) hang out and see Amsterdam like a local, avoiding the crowds in the process and having an unforgettable experience.

Even in a populated small city, you can become an expert at avoiding crowds. For instance, you'll find all cyclists on one street and no one on the parallel street – so take a ride on the wild side, and make your own path through town.

TIP: Avoid getting run over by Cyclists

Ok, I admit. I've run over the occasional tourist. I rang my bell, ting and they jumped – the wrong way right in front of me... And in my defence, the old bike's brakes are shot and don't work. I tried to stop really I did... splat...

So a free tip – watch out for cyclists, where a bike is painted on the path that means it's a bike path, and when you hear 'ting ting' behind you – jump to your left, not to the right. Walk and be aware, we are not trying to run you over... but may not be able to help it.



What to do, what to see, where to go:

While the magic of the city is endless, there are a few things that are always highly recommended that I never get sick of. Such as:

1. Canal Cruise

The best way to see Amsterdam. It's a water city and the view you get from the canal is unique night or day. The companies are all the same so get on a boat anywhere anytime!

2. Rent a bike

Getting around on a bike is the second best way to get around Amsterdam and an incredibly local experience. You can rent a bike from almost anywhere. Get a map and get off the same street as everyone else, you'll find all the tourists on one road while the next one over goes in the same direction with no one on it, so always take the opportunity to take the road less travelled! Tip: Remember where you park it – with more bikes in the city than people – it can be an adventure to find your bike again at the best of times.

3. City Library

Not for the books. What many people don't know is that it has a café/ restaurant on the top floor where you can find an affordable lunch and enjoy the panoramic view of the city. It's one of the only spots in the city where you can get an aerial view, a great photo opportunity as it's a bit dull – there are rarely any tourists.

4. Quieter Shopping streets: (read: Skip Kalverstraat)

1. Amstelstraat: Not as touristy as the main shopping street but has some of the most unique design shops where you'll find some real treasures.
2. 9 Streets in the Jordan: Great tiny streets well lit up at night full of boutique stores – however these are publicized and will be full of tourists – yet due to the charm, still worth visiting.
3. StaalStraat: home of Droog Design and Puccini and a few other cute unique shops too – around the corner from the Waterlooplein markets – which are great on a Saturday. Rembrandt's house is also there, if there is no queue be sure to check it out – the oldest bar in town is across from his house – it's the one that may fall over at any minute.

5. Museums

1. [Droog Design Museum](#)

While it's not officially a museum they do have

some of the best young, talented designers/artists that work for them so the items on show are inspiring.

2. [van Gogh Museum](#)

This museum got a huge makeover quite a few years back, and to everyone's horror, it was closed. Yet, all was made good when they reopened, as not only is the museum itself stunning, but it also shows off van Gogh's artwork like non-other. There will be a queue, however, this is one of the few instances it's worth the wait (do get there as early as possible).

3. [FOAM Photography museum](#)

One of the most undervalued museums in my view, and yet perhaps it's something I am grateful for – as it's much less crowded. They always have local and international exhibits on, and the space



itself is a curiosity.

6. **ARTIS:** Not the zoo but the hood, it's one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Amsterdam and is so much quieter and more spacious than everywhere else. It's' as if someone has waved their magic wand and made all the tourists disappear. You can visit the butterfly room in the [De Hortus Botanicus](#) (Botanic Garden), and find a seat at a café on the canal at [Bloem](#). Take a look around the stunning architecture of the [Hermitage](#) or have a coffee

in the garden (the inside is a bit overly stuffy, so don't waste your time unless that's your jive and you like Faberge eggs and paintings of men with tutus around their neck...).

7. Day out to the Historic village of Volendam.

If you are spending more than a weekend there are also a few things to do outside of town. Volendam is a small bus ride away (public bus in 20 mins and a few euros) and captures some of the old-world Dutch charms. You'll catch the odd person still wearing the traditional dress, it has typical houses, including one that is a museum. And you can try the raw herring, or at least use one for a photo prop as everyone else does.

8. Tulips fields forever

now if you are lucky to be there around spring, and the weather is favourable – you'll get the opportunity to visit one of my very favourite places: [Keukenhof](#). An endless array of tulips – as well as many other flowers, remind the world that the Dutch are one of the largest flower exporters in the world, and certainly know how and where to grow them. If you can get out of town, at least visit the Flower market in town.



Foodies Delight: Best places to Eat in Amsterdam:

Chocolate: [Puccini](#). [StaalStraat](#). This without a doubt is the best handmade chocolate spot in the world, not only do they have an amazing array of flavours, from pepper, chilli, and cinnamon through to cognac – they make it out the back so the smell is as intoxicating as the taste. There is such a wide selection it's not rare to see some tourists in there for hours as they try to make a choice before buying most of the shops.



Rakang. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: This really is the best Thai restaurant in the world (Yes, even better than in Thailand). It's an all-time favourite thanks to the incredible food, service, kitsch twist and ambience. What's really great is that you can have any dish on the menu made with tofu instead of meat. Approx. €50p.p Elandsgracht 31. Tel: 020 620 9551 <http://www.rakang.nl/>



Breakfast / Cake: [Gartine](#). There are few spots that do a real breakfast. As the Dutch staple is bread and cheese.

Not so at Gartine, the food is beyond delicious, the chef has her own cookbook, and they grow a lot of their own produce on their plot outside of town. Their cakes are so good, I admit it's the only place I'll also pre-order my dessert without questioning the calories.

The only downside is getting a table, they're always booked out in advance and it's a small place, yet if you'd like to experience the best breakfast spot and cakes in town it's well worth the phone call, or the wait. Tel: 020 320, Taksteeg 7, Amsterdam.

Modern Dutch: [Greetjes](#), I've heard so many discourses on whether Real Dutch cuisine actually exists (beyond french fries). I know for a fact it does. I am Dutch and while it might not be the cuisine of the century, and you might not see a Dutch Restaurant in every (or any) city, there is a rather modest yet delicious one right in the centre of Amsterdam. And trust me, this is the age-old grub my family relished ok, albeit a more modern somewhat funky version.

Fries: [Vlaamsefriethuis](#), voetboogstraat 33 – Best place ever, once again tucked away in a side street, and looks like and is a hole in the wall, however, you can follow your nose or the queue, as there are always people waiting in this spot. be

sure to try the 'Oorlog' which means war, with onions, mayo and sate sauce!

Olliebollen Van: this is a big van parked at the odd place around town – depending on the time of the year, that has what looks like big fat juicy doughnuts. And they are only 100 times more delicious and authentic!

Insiders' guide to Amsterdam

I have skipped the museums that I find depressing. Reminders of wars, and relics, are full of old masters that go on forever and can get a little overwhelming.

As a local, I've included a short list of where I take visiting friends. Places that I never tire of. I've been on 100's canal rides and still love it. I never tire of seeing the Magere Brug (Skinny bridge) at night, and will always stop for a second when I cycle past it, to savour a moment of its magic. To me, this is more breathtaking than any expensive museum.



I recommend if you are going for a few days be sure to grab yourself the [iamsterdam card](#), which gets you into most museums and public transport free for a few days. It gives you the opportunity to pop in and out of museums that you might not visit otherwise.

I hope you take yourself off the well-worn path, avoid the masses, and see the “Real Amsterdam”. The joy of travel comes from unique experiences and insights into a local culture, a real taste of a mysterious foreign land, that you rarely find standing in a queue with many other moaning tourists.

So head out into this enchanting world and go and create some unique and memorable experiences of your own. Uncover the lesser seen – yet even more enjoyable – Amsterdam for yourself.

