

Bristol

Overview

Bristol is a beautiful, vibrant and fashionable city. Its harbour, which weaves its way through the heart of the city is lined with restaurants clubs and bars, museums, arts, science and media centres. The narrow winding streets, radiating from the water's edge, reveal elegant parks and squares and stunning architecture.

Bristol's diversity shines brightly in its many distinctive quarters. Classy Clifton and Whiteladies Road are filled with antique shops, restaurants and boutiques. In the Old City, grand, dignified buildings rub shoulders with Bristol's fashionable vision of the future along the reborn harbourside. Bristol boasts an all-action annual programme of festivals and events including everything from balloons to boats, kite flying to street carnivals, and the city's thriving theatre scene continues to delight and entertain, creating stars of today's stage and screen.

Bristol Harbour

In the last decade, Bristol has renewed its links with the sea in a way that has revitalised the entire city. The harbourside, the driving force of Bristol in the days of pioneering seafarers and industrial barons, has returned to the centre stage taking the city into the 21st century and beyond in a confident and supremely stylish way.

It's a little different nowadays to the rough-and-ready dockside's of the 19th century. The harbourside is now lined with bars, restaurants, museums and art galleries from converted transit sheds and tea warehouses. Every summer the harbourside comes alive for the spectacular harbour festival, and the Lloyds TSB amphitheatre continues as the venue for open air concerts. Visitors are flocking to the waterfront to enjoy eating in excellent restaurants and socialising in fashionable wine bars. They come here for the art, film, cutting edge culture, and for the water sports - there's rowing, windsurfing, sailing, water-skiing, canoeing, narrow-boat hire and more.

The conservation project on the SS Great Britain was completed in summer 2005, restoring her to her former Victorian splendour. The new museum transports visitors back in time through the various phases of the ship's history. All the rooms inside replicate the former glory of her Victorian cruise liner days, and outside there are huge glass plate at the ship's water line, which will be covered in water to give the impression that she is floating in Bristol's docks.

The celebrated Arnolfini contemporary arts centre underwent major refurbishment creating new arts and education facilities. This new centre is home to the Arnolfini's vibrant programme of new and experimental visual arts, live art, performance, dance, film, literature and music.

The new premises are bigger and better with more space, more public facilities, provision of full access for wheel chair users, more galleries and a new education centre including a library and archive.

The jewel in the crown of the revitalised harbourside quarter is At-Bristol. Both fascinating and futuristic, it's the harbourside's major visitor attraction and a perfect example of the city's ability to create something different. Heralded as 'UK Family Attraction of the Year', this unique interactive experience hosts three separate attractions. Wildwalk-At-Bristol has a living rainforest, Explore-At-Bristol is a thrilling hands-on discovery centre and the Imax-At-Bristol cinema is the biggest screen in the West.

Compiled with the kind assistance of Destinations Bristol.

Places to Visit

Bristol Zoo Gardens

In the summer 2006 a new monkey exhibit was opened, transforming the old Monkey House creating Monkey Jungle, in more recent times web-cams have been placed in the enclosure allowing real time footage to be available on the web, featuring Meet the Lemurs, an immersive forest experience where monkeys mingle with gorillas.

SS Great Britain

Now the jewel in the crown of Bristol's Harbourside, a trip to the city is not complete without a visit to the SS Great Britain. Following an amazing £11.3 million conservation programme that took years to complete, the ship has been lovingly restored back to her former Victorian splendour. On site there is a new Dockyard Museum allowing visitors to discover more about the ship's varied life, and taking visitors back in time, so that they board the ship as a passenger setting sail on the ships first voyage to New York in 1843.

Bristol's City Museum & Art Gallery

The Bristol's City Museum & Art Gallery continues to be one of the regions finest galleries with an ever changing but always interesting array of exhibitions, with something to suit all tastes.

British Empire & Commonwealth Museum

The British Empire & Commonwealth Museum covers the dramatic history of Britain's imperial past and modern day Commonwealth. In addition to the permanent galleries that tell the story of British exploration, trade and conquest and the continued impact this has on Britain and the world today, there are also temporary exhibitions running throughout the year.

Blaise Castle

The Grade II stunning historic park and mansion at Blaise Castle Estate has a newly-opened café that has already won a prestigious Royal Institute of British Architects award. Natural materials were used in the café's construction to create an innovative modern design. It incorporates a number of public art works, including a water wall, poetry engraved on the glass walls and sculpture.

St Nicholas Market

The ever popular St Nicholas Markets now has an additional 'Slow Food Market' held on the first Sunday of every month. As well as the very best of local food produce there are cooking demonstrations, traditional preserves and jellies, local cheeses and much more. A new Fair Trade stall has been opened at St Nicholas Market, called Lovina Design & Lune that sells a range of home furnishing and clothing stall from Bali, Nepal and Thailand.

Royal West of England Academy

The Royal West of England Academy was Bristol's first art gallery and now it is Bristol's "newest" museum. The Museum has been awarded full Museum Accreditation by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. Over its more than 150-year history, the RWA Collection has accumulated pieces of fine art from various benefactors and donations who have left the Academy various artworks.

Regular Events

January - Slapstick Silent Comedy Festival

Held at various venues throughout Bristol including the Watershed, Slapstick gives you the opportunity to watch classic silent movies and humorous comedy shows.

February - Slow Food Market

The Slow Food Market gives tourists the opportunity to buy the finest seasonal produce grown. Fresh foods offer an appetizing treat catered to anyone's taste; with foods such as cheese, fish, cakes and herbs available. Traditional beverages will also be available for the public to purchase, together with hot food that can be bought throughout the day. The event takes place on the first Sunday of February.

March - NASCAR Racing

Bristol's Motor Speedway accommodates for over 160,000 fans. Races are held each season and contain an exhilarating view of races consisting of 500 laps.

April - Bristol Artists Book Event

This is a great opportunity to meet highly talented artists and gives visitors a chance to buy their works. The event is hosted at Bristol's Arnolfini.

May - Dot to Dot Festival

This is a chance to sample different genres and styles of music performed by live bands. There will be guest performances from The Mystery Jets and Blood Red Shoes at the cost of £25 per ticket.

June - Bristol Nature Festival

Held along the beautiful harbour side of Bristol, there's something for the whole family. From the latest 3D cinema screenings to the local food market, entertainment is round every corner.

July - Shakespeare Festival

The Bristol Shakespeare Festival is held annually to honour the great productions of Shakespeare's creations. There is a wide range of plays on offer, varying each year.

August - International Balloon Festival

Hosted in the Ashton Court Estate, Bristol, an extraordinary balloon festival is held annually. It is known as one of the biggest outdoor events in the whole of England due to the large number of air balloons and shows attracting visitors. Main events include funfairs, jousting and the main balloon show; where 130 spectacular air balloons take off together in synchronisation. Many different bands, both local and well-known, perform throughout the event. Admission is free.

September - Bristol Half Marathon

This energetic event takes over 15,000 runners on a circuit around the beautiful sights of the Harbourside, the Avon Gorge and the old city of Bristol, costing around £24 to take part.

October - The Compass of Desire Festival

The Compass of Desire Festival is a Halloween event not to be missed. A variety of entertainment events can be enjoyed such as magic shows and a circus at the Trinity Centre.

November - Bristol Charity Fireworks Festival

In order to celebrate Guy Fawkes Night a Fireworks Festival is held annually at The Downs, Bristol to raise money for charity. Gates open at 6pm, followed by a bright flaming bonfire and fireworks display lighting up the night sky.

December - Autumn Exhibition

On exhibition are a variety of artworks including photography, prints and sculptures presented at this event. A perfect event for all art lovers.

Getting Around

Airport Transfers

Bristol is served by Bristol Airport which is located around 8 miles south west of the city centre. As a major hub for many airlines, the airport operates flights to many major European destinations. There are a number of transport links between the airport and downtown Bristol, including taxis and buses. Taxis can be hailed from outside the Arrivals Terminal, but be sure to use only official vehicles. The journey takes around 25 minutes depending on traffic and costs £20. The Bristol Flyer bus runs frequent services between the airport, railways station and city centre. The fare is usually around £6 and the journey to downtown takes around 30 minutes. Tickets can be purchased from kiosks, via the internet or when boarding the bus.

Bus

Bristol has an extensive fleet of buses that traverse the city and surrounding suburbs. Running from the main Parkway Station, services go to the main city destinations such as Clifton, Whiteladies Road, Bristol Zoo and Temple Meads every few minutes. Operated by First Bristol, single trip tickets are a flat fare of £1.55, whilst daily, weekly and monthly travel cards are available for added convenience. Tickets can be bought from newsagents, kiosks or from the bus driver. Long distance buses also arrive and depart from Parkway, with services to many regional destinations including Birmingham, London, Exeter, Oxford and Bath. Tickets can be purchased at the terminal building or via contacting the bus companies (National Express) directly.

Train

Bristol Temple Meads station is the city's largest and an important hub for UK trains. Direct daily services run to most major destinations including London, Plymouth, Exeter, Glasgow and Birmingham. Tickets can be purchased online via rail operators or at the station.

Boat

One of the most scenic ways to travel around the city is by boat. Operated by Bristol Ferry Boat Company, services run across two routes; from the centre to Temple Meads station and Hotwells, stopping a couple of times a long the way. Boats run roughly every hour, with a reduced service during winter months. A single trip ticket is around £1.50, or alternatively visitors can buy a £6 travel card that allows unlimited travel for day.

Taxi

There are many official taxis that operate throughout Bristol, which can be hailed on the street, from a taxi stand or pre-booked by telephone. All licensed vehicles are fitted with meters and fares a standard and set by the local council, but due to heavy traffic, trip costs can be expensive.