

Historic Baths Draw Visitors To English Country Town

By: Karen Dabrowska

Bath is famous for its historic Roman baths which draw millions of visitors from the UK and abroad each year. The town is delightful with plenty of charming alleyways and lanes where a variety of shops and elegant restaurants greet visitors.



The city was first established as a spa resort with the Latin name *Aquae Sulis* ("the waters of Sulis") by the Romans in AD 43. They

built baths and a temple on the surrounding hills of Bath in the valley of the River Avon around hot springs, which are the only ones naturally occurring in the United Kingdom.

Edgar was crowned King of England at Bath Abbey in 973. Much later it became popular as a spa resort during the Georgian era which led to a major expansion that left a heritage of exemplary Georgian architecture crafted from Bath Stone.

The city became a World Heritage Site in 1987. It has a variety of theatres, museums, and other cultural and sporting venues, which have helped to make it a major centre for tourism, with over one million staying visitors and 3.8 million day visitors to the city each year. The city has two universities and several schools and colleges. There is a large service sector, and growing information and communication technologies and creative industries, providing



Market Square



employment for the population of Bath and the surrounding area.

Bath became the leading centre of fashionable life in England during the 18th century. It was during this time that Bath's Theatre Royal was built, as well as architectural developments such as Lansdown Crescent, the Royal Crescent, The Circus and Pulteney Bridge. Today, Bath has five theatres – Bath Theatre Royal, Ustinov Studio, the egg, the Rondo

Theatre, and the Mission Theatre – and attracts internationally renowned companies and directors, including an annual season by Sir Peter Hall. The city also has a long-standing musical tradition; Bath Abbey is home to the Klais Organ and is the largest concert venue in the city, with about 20 concerts and 26 organ recitals each year. Another important concert venue is the Forum, a 1,700-seat art deco building which originated as a

cinema. The city holds the Bath International Music Festival and Mozartfest every year. Other festivals include the annual Bath Film Festival, Bath Literature Festival (and its counterpart for children) and the Bath Fringe Festival and the Bach Festivals which occur at two and a half year intervals.

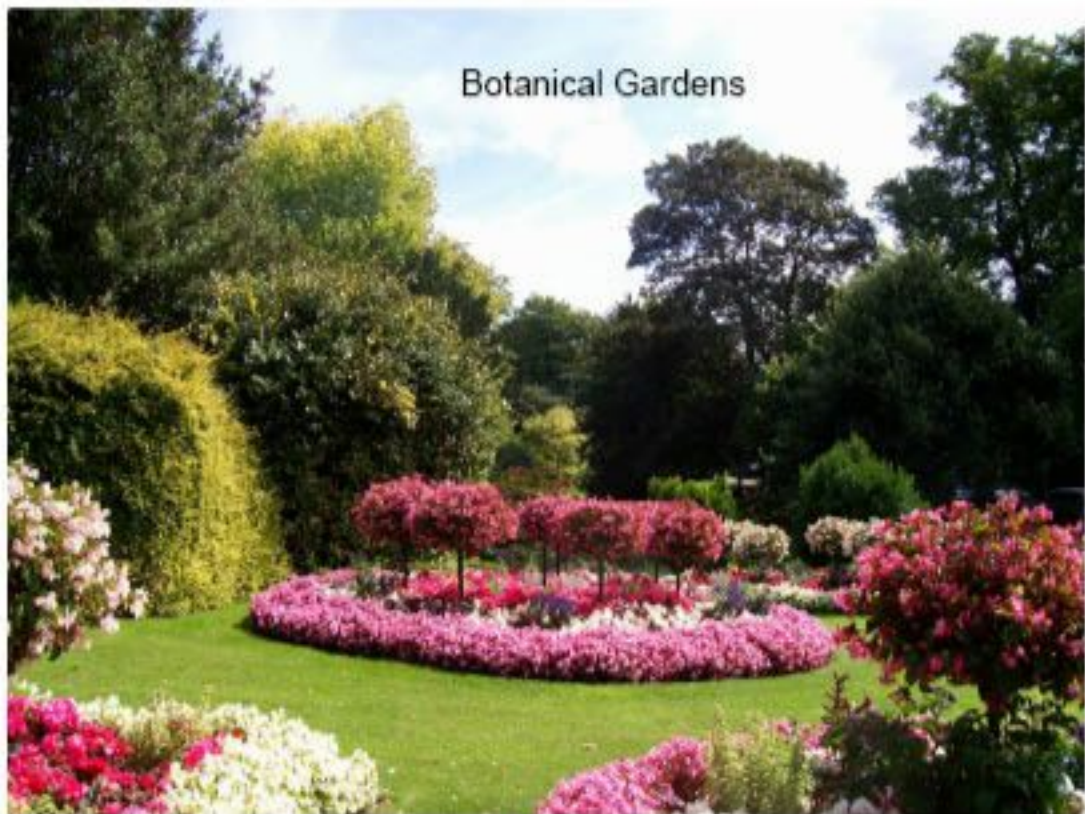
The city is home to the Victoria Art Gallery, the Museum of East Asian Art, and Holburne Museum of Art, numerous commercial art galleries

and antique shops, as well as numerous museums, among them Bath Postal Museum, the Fashion Museum, the Jane Austen Centre, the Herschel Museum of Astronomy and the Roman Baths. There are many Roman archaeological sites throughout the central area of the city. The baths themselves are about 6 metres (20 ft) below the present city street level. Around the hot springs, Roman foundations, pillar bases, and baths can still be seen,

Shopping Centre



Botanical Gardens



however all the stonework above the level of the baths is from more recent periods.

Bath Abbey was a Norman church built on earlier foundations, although the present building dates from the early 16th century and shows a late perpendicular style with flying buttresses and crocketed pinnacles decorating a crenellated and pierced parapet. The choir and transepts have a fan vault by Robert and William

Vertue. The nave was given a matching vault in the 19th century. The building is lit by 52 windows.

Most buildings in Bath are made from the local, golden-coloured Bath Stone, and many date from the 18th and 19th century. The dominant style of architecture in Central Bath is Georgian; this evolved from the Palladian revival style which became popular in the early 18th century.

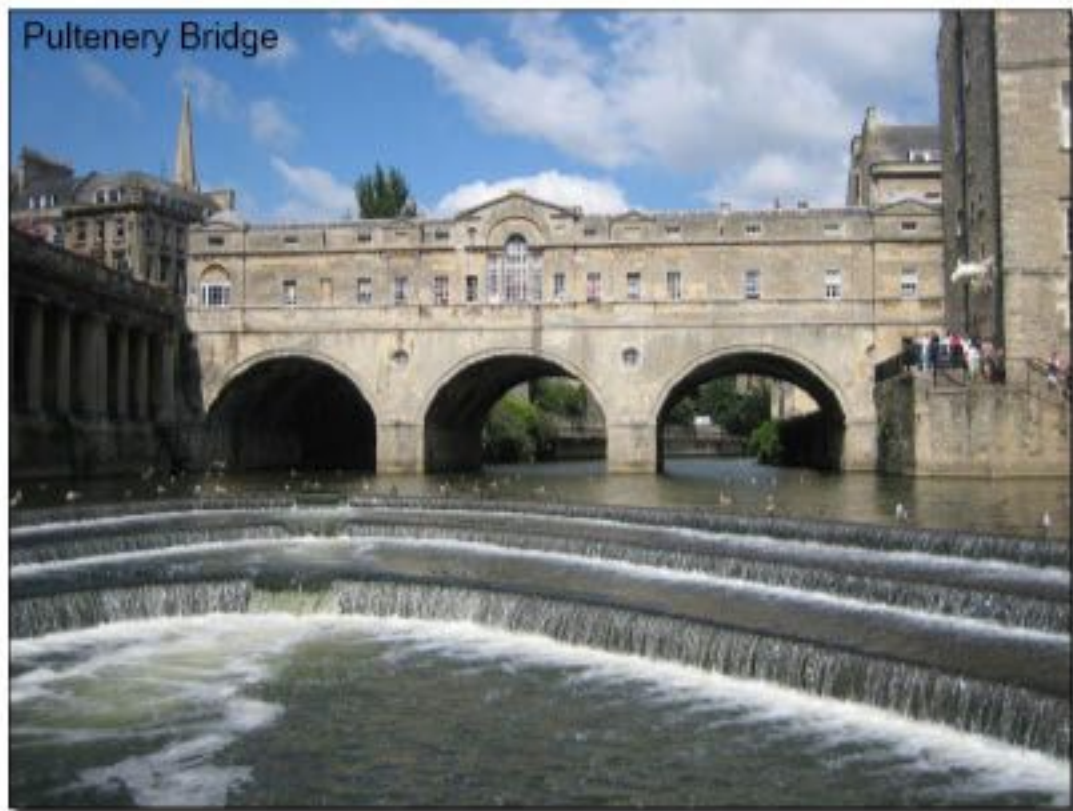
Many of the prominent architects of the day were employed in the

development of the city. The original purpose of much of Bath's architecture is concealed by the honey-coloured classical façades; in an era before the advent of the luxury hotel, these apparently elegant residences were frequently purpose-built lodging houses, where visitors could hire a room, a floor, or (according to their means) an entire house for the duration of their visit, and be waited on by the house's communal servants.

The best known of Bath's terraces

is the Royal Crescent, built between 1767 and 1774 and designed by the younger John Wood. But all is not what it seems; while Wood designed the great curved façade of what appears to be about 30 houses with Ionic columns on a rusticated ground floor, that was the extent of his input. Each purchaser bought a certain length of the façade, and then employed their own architect to build a house to their own specifications behind it; hence

Pulteney Bridge



Lansdown Crescent



what appears to be two houses is sometimes one. This system of town planning is betrayed at the rear of the crescent: while the front is completely uniform and symmetrical, the rear is a mixture of differing roof heights. This «Queen Anne fronts and Mary-Anne backs» architecture occurs repeatedly in Bath.

Around 1770 the neoclassical architect Robert Adam designed Pulteney Bridge, using as the

prototype for the three-arched bridge spanning the Avon an original, but unused, design by Palladio for the Rialto Bridge in Venice. Thus, Pulteney Bridge became not just a means of crossing the river, but also a shopping arcade. Along with the Rialto Bridge, it is one of the very few surviving bridges in Europe to serve this dual purpose. It has been substantially altered since it was built. The bridge was named after Frances and William Pulteney,

the owners of the Bathwick estate for which the bridge provided a link to the rest of Bath.

In the 1960s and early 1970s some parts of Bath were unsympathetically redeveloped, resulting in the loss of some 18th- and 19th-century buildings. This process was largely halted by a popular campaign which drew strength from the publication of Adam Fergusson's *The Sack of Bath*. Controversy has continued

in recent years with the demolition of the 1930s Churchill House, a neo-Georgian municipal building originally housing the Electricity Board, to make way for the new Bath Bus Station. This was part of the Southgate redevelopment begun in 2007 in which the central 1960s shopping precinct, bus station and multi-story carpark were demolished and a new area of mock-Georgian shopping streets is being constructed.

Royal Theatre





As a result of the changes the city's status as a World Heritage Site was reviewed by Unesco in 2009. The decision was made to let Bath keep its status, but Unesco has asked to be consulted on future phases of the Riverside development, saying that the volume of buildings in the second and third phases of the development need to be reconsidered. It also says that Bath must do more to attract world-class architecture to any new developments.

There is a great view of Bath from Alexandra park, up the Wells Rd.

That whole area, which includes Shakespeare's Avenue, is known as poets corner.

As far as restaurants are concerned Bath has them all: A Californian steakhouse, Chinese, English, French, Mexican, Portuguese and vegetarian.

The town is situated 97 miles (156 km) west of London and 13 miles (21 km) south-east of Bristol. It is easily reached by train from London's Paddington Station and is an ideal location for a day out or a weekend stay.