

The magazine for group travel organisers • February 2020

# Group Leisure & Travel

[groupleisureandtravel.com](http://groupleisureandtravel.com)

*Simon Calder:*

HIGHLIGHTS  
FOR TRAVEL IN  
THE 2020s

PLUS

Cheshire's heritage  
Must-see in Prague  
Prince of Egypt star  
Julie Peasgood in Portmeirion

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Front Cover: Royal Liver Building 360, Liverpool.

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Group Leisure & Travel is published 12 times per year. Subscriptions for print editions are available at £50 per annum UK, £75 Overseas, £100 Airmail. The editor welcomes editorial contributions, which can be supplied by e-mail. All content is protected by copyright laws. For terms and conditions when sending materials for editorial inclusion go to the website at [yandellmedia.com](http://yandellmedia.com) for particulars. Produced and published by Yandell Publishing Ltd. Printed by The Magazine Printing Company, Middlesex.

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The following company has provided an insert with the print edition.

So you can also find out more about them, here's a useful link:

The Tank Museum  
[tankmuseum.org/groups](http://tankmuseum.org/groups)

# Editor's Note

## History, heritage and power of the people



**H**ere in the UK we're fortunate enough to have such rich history and heritage. I was in Cheshire recently for this month's destination focus (from page 26) where that history and heritage continues to be brought to life for visitors thanks to some incredible people.

People like Ted Thompson, who along with his wife Christine, campaigned tirelessly to restore the Anderton Boat Lift to full working order in 2003. I was lucky enough to meet Ted in the café at the boat lift in Northwich and he was, as expected, a complete character and full of modesty. The passion and determination of certain individuals like Ted has such a huge effect on tourism and keeps such fascinating heritage well and truly alive for us today.

I learnt so much on my whistlestop tour of Cheshire including where the 'wich' in the village and town names comes from (the Lion Salt Works is the clue) but my main

takeaway was the power of the people and how important they are to the places we visit today.

On the subject of people, we've got some stars of our own in this edition, not least Julie Peasgood who shares her experience of a visit to the intriguing Portmeirion in Wales.

In case you haven't seen, Simon Calder is the first celebrity speaker to be announced for the Group Leisure & Travel Show due to the huge popularity of his sessions. And in this edition Simon gives an insight into what to expect from travel in the 2020s, some very interesting mentions and plenty of food for thought - enjoy!

**Keeley Rodgers**  
Editor

The magazine for group travel organisers  
**Group**  
**Leisure & Travel**  
**CELEBRATING**  
**25 YEARS**  
**1995-2020**

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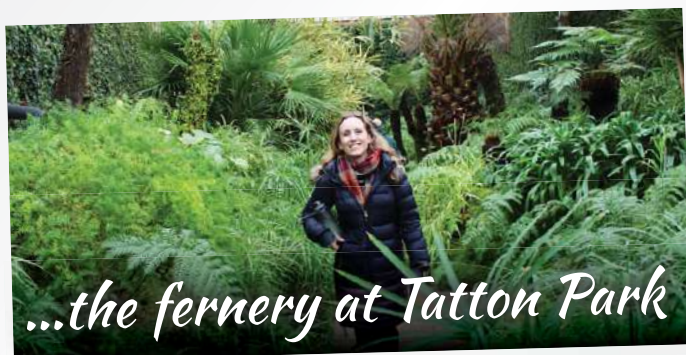
**Publisher:**

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## My happy place this month...



*...the fernery at Tatton Park*

Did you know? The fern pattern on custard creams dates back to the Victorian era - they were obsessed with ferns!

Where have you enjoyed visiting recently? Send your pictures to:  
[editorial@groupleisureandtravel.com](mailto:editorial@groupleisureandtravel.com)

# in the spotlight

Our pick of the latest news & ideas to help you plan brilliant group trips & holidays starts here...



## Attraction Review



### Discovering secret history with a Hidden London tour

It really does feel like you're stepping back in time as you cross Aldwych Station's threshold - now a nondescript doorway in a side street off the Strand. Tour members are met with old-fashioned posters and adverts on the walls before walking through the original 1906 lift into the station's booking hall.

The Hidden London programme is a smart move on the part of the London Transport Museum, one that's put disused stations like Aldwych to good use. Walking tours are available across the underground network, with more to be added, tapping into a valuable resource of history and little-known stories.

Aldwych Station - 'a twig at the end of a branch' of the Piccadilly Line - has quite the collection of tales, despite seeing very little foot traffic during its life as a working station. It's the unexpected uses that stir the imagination: as a shelter for Londoners during wartime bombings; as a secret storage space for priceless artworks; even as a filming location for the likes of *Darkest Hour*, *Atonement* and *V for Vendetta*.

An experienced guide leads the way through these underground spaces, where visitors aged 14 and over can discover fascinating design details and the purpose of each platform, from its original use to now.

For our full review visit [groupeisureandtravel.com](http://groupeisureandtravel.com) and search for 'Hidden London'



Tributes have been paid to Norman Allen, founder of Norman Allen Group Travel, who has died at the age of 97. A memorial service for the industry stalwart took place at Wellington Chapel, Hertfordshire on 17th January.

### Quote me...

"Last year I was able to meet so many people thanks to the GLT team. The GLT Show was a real benefit to me as was the Reader Club trip to Hull and Beverley."

Joyce Cook, Basingstoke & Old Basing U3A





## Simon Calder

### back by popular demand

Travel writer and broadcaster Simon Calder is the first celebrity speaker to be confirmed for the 2020 Group Leisure & Travel Show.

The senior travel editor of The Independent pulls in the crowds at the annual exhibition, sharing his advice and experience with group leaders and coach operators.

At last year's show in Milton Keynes, Simon spoke about his 25 years in travel looking back at some of the big stories and changes. He joined cruise expert Julie Peasgood and TV presenter Kate Humble in the Seminar Theatre, drawing in visitors throughout the day.

Simon said about the event: "I think the new venue – the Marshall Arena – is great, it feels really friendly and works very well. I've thoroughly enjoyed going around and talking to the lovely exhibitors including the Silverstone Experience which I'm very enthused about and the Settle-Carlisle Railway which is such an important rail link."

The other two celebrity speakers will be announced at a later date.



• Above: Simon picks up inspiration from South Georgia; busy aisles at the Group Leisure & Travel Show.

This year's show takes place on Thursday 8th October back at the Marshall Arena in Milton Keynes following overwhelming positive feedback about the venue and location. Just some of the names signed up to exhibit so far are Cruise & Maritime Voyages, the RHS, Westminster Abbey and Majestic Tours.

- You can now register to attend the show at [grouptravelshow.com/register](https://grouptravelshow.com/register).
- Anyone interested in exhibiting can contact Sharon Yandell on **01908-613323** or email [sharon.y@yandellmedia.com](mailto:sharon.y@yandellmedia.com).

## MOST READ...

...what has been popular on the website this month.



Photo credit: Rich J Jones Photography.

### What's new in Greater Manchester

One of the big openings in the region for 2020 is a major exhibition space at Manchester's Science and Industry Museum.



### Exclusive French Brothers cruises

The sightseeing cruise operator along has launched three new trips for groups to take in some of the sites along the Thames.

## Opening date confirmed for RHS Bridgewater

The Royal Horticultural Society's fifth garden, RHS Bridgewater, will open on 30th July, with group bookings now available for visits from September. The garden near Salford, Greater Manchester, is the charity's first new site for almost 20 years and is set in the 154-acre site of Worsley New Hall. Richard Green, head of RHS Garden Bridgewater, said: "We still have a tremendous amount of work to do but thanks to a brilliant team, amazing local support and generous donations, we are on track and look forward to welcoming visitors."



Photo credit: Harris Bugg Studio.

## Group deals for UK Parliament

Ticket prices for tours at the Houses of Parliament have been frozen until 2021. Each tour lasts 90 minutes and includes visits to the House of Commons, House of Lords and Westminster Hall. The offer applies to groups of ten or more booking in advance. The attraction won the Best Guided Tour category at last year's Group Leisure & Travel Awards.

## In the know...

The Hairy Bikers and James Martin will be on-hand to answer questions and take part in live demonstrations during July's Food & Music festival at Longleat.



More than 1,800 coaches visited Bury Market in Lancashire last year, marking its best ever year for coach trips. A monthly record of 296 was set in November.



Buckingham Palace's annual Summer Opening dates have been confirmed. Group visits will be available from 25th July until 4th October.



Photo credit: RWCS.

### Unusual gardens for groups to visit

We've put together some of the more obscure places for a garden-themed outing in one handy feature.



Photo credit: Roger Clegg.

### 6 ways to enjoy nature in Northumberland

From stargazing to historic sites and more, there are lots of fantastic locations linked to nature across Northumberland.



### Sherlock Holmes immersive experience in London

Based on the BBC's *Sherlock* series starring Benedict Cumberbatch, players will work together to solve a puzzling case.



Photo credit: ©Jane Austen's House Museum.

## Nature celebrations at Jane Austen's House

The museum in Chawton, Hampshire will reflect Jane's love for the outdoors this year. A pair of Regency ladies' walking boots and pattens – overshoes to elevate women's feet from the ground – will be on display in the Reading Room, alongside a first edition of *Pride and Prejudice* to celebrate Elizabeth Bennett's famous walk through muddy fields. In the Historic Bakehouse, a new chalkboard will encourage visitors to note down any wildlife spotted in the garden, where groups can also stop for a picnic. Plus, exclusive morning tours will be available from April.

[www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk/groupvisits](http://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk/groupvisits)

## What's new?

Lonely Planet has launched more than 300 sustainable group tours bringing the guidebooks to life for the first time.

Cheese-lovers can head to Cheshire's Lion Salt Works for two new tours about the county's cheese and cheese manufacturing heritage.

A magical immersive experience, Hexborn's School of Sorcery, will open at The Vaults in Waterloo in September.

Read all of these stories in full and more at [groupleisureandtravel.com](http://groupleisureandtravel.com)

## Picture of the month



## Royal Navy International Air Day



Photo credit: Paul Johnson.

The annual Air Day will be held at the Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton on 11th July.  
[www.royalnavy.mod.uk/yeovilton-airday](http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/yeovilton-airday)

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Photo: Bulbfield, Netherlands



# Being GTO of the Year® “changed my world”

**Previous winners of the Group Travel Organiser of the Year Award® on the impact it had on them.**

**S**ue Shapland, who has been organising trips for her group, the Exmoor Extroverts, for more than 20 years won in 2019 receiving £2,000 to spend on a holiday.

Speaking recently, Sue said: “It has been four months since I found out I had won the award and the reaction has been fantastic from my group and those in the travel trade. I’m looking forward to my tour of some of America’s national parks in April. I booked it with Travelsphere using my prize money from the award, I can’t wait!”

Recognising special people for more than two decades, the GTO of the Year Award® was set up to highlight great group leaders, finding out where they go, what they do and about the people they organise for.

Olivia Goodfellow, who organises trips for the Enfield Over 50s Forum, was the 2018 winner and used her prize money on a holiday to Turkey last year. She said: “The title means a lot to me as it shows that the industry values the input that people like me make to their businesses and it also gives me the motivation to continue the volunteering in the knowledge that apart from the obvious benefits to my groups (and me), there is a wider recognition that the

**Group  
Leisure & Travel  
AWARDS  
2020**



work put in is worth it and valuable to our clients and to our providers.”

Sylvia Saxon, of Saxon Group Travel, was awarded GTO of the Year® in 2005. She said: “We have most of the previous winners in our New Meridian Association and when together we often talk about how it has changed our lives. I went on a safari to Africa with my prize and that also is a holiday I will never forget. Thank you, Group Leisure & Travel, for changing my world.”

Do you know somebody who deserves to win this year? Nominations and entries will open this spring so think about who you’d like to put forward.

**Stay up to date with all the awards news at [groupleisureandtravel.com/awards](http://groupleisureandtravel.com/awards).**

• Pictured: Previous GTO of the Year® winners (left to right) Sylvia Saxon, Sue Shapland and Olivia Goodfellow.

## A special thanks to our official award partners for 2020...

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## 60 seconds with...

### Katherine Potsides, head of shows development at the RHS

#### Why are the RHS shows so great for groups?

The stunning locations and the great catering options on offer are just two of the many reasons. This year there's more of a focus on how gardening is such a great community activity; everyone has different experiences and tips that have been handed down through generations.

#### Are there particular shows that are more popular for group visitors?

I'd say Chatsworth, Hampton Court and Tatton Park, they're fantastic places to visit, mostly because they're two of our largest sites with so much space. There are great eating experiences, at Hampton Court especially and it's well worth booking a table for lunch for a group visit.

#### What's the biggest challenge for you and the team?

Trying to keep things exciting every year and ensuring the visitor experience is top notch. Gardening is a great activity and we want to inspire people to grow through the shows.

#### Do you have any top tips for how visitors can make the most of their experience?

Look out for our volunteers who will be really happy to help you. I'd recommend having a good read of the website to plan what's going on ahead of your visit. You can also pre-order show guides too. If you want to do some shopping we have plant creches so you can leave your purchases and collect at the end of the day. Please also bring your own water bottles and shopping bags.



### England's first chief spymaster to be celebrated at Burghley House

William Cecil, England's first chief spymaster and builder of Burghley House in Lincolnshire, will be honoured at his former home with a series of events to celebrate his 500th birthday. An exhibition showcasing his personal atlas will run from 14th March until 1st November this year, as well as a time-line display detailing Cecil's life and achievements. He was one of Elizabethan England's most powerful figures and was involved not only in gathering intelligence for Elizabeth I, but in diplomacy, exploration and education.



#### Which RHS show is for you?

Head to [groupeleisureandtravel.com](http://groupeleisureandtravel.com) and search 'RHS Shows' to find out about each of them.

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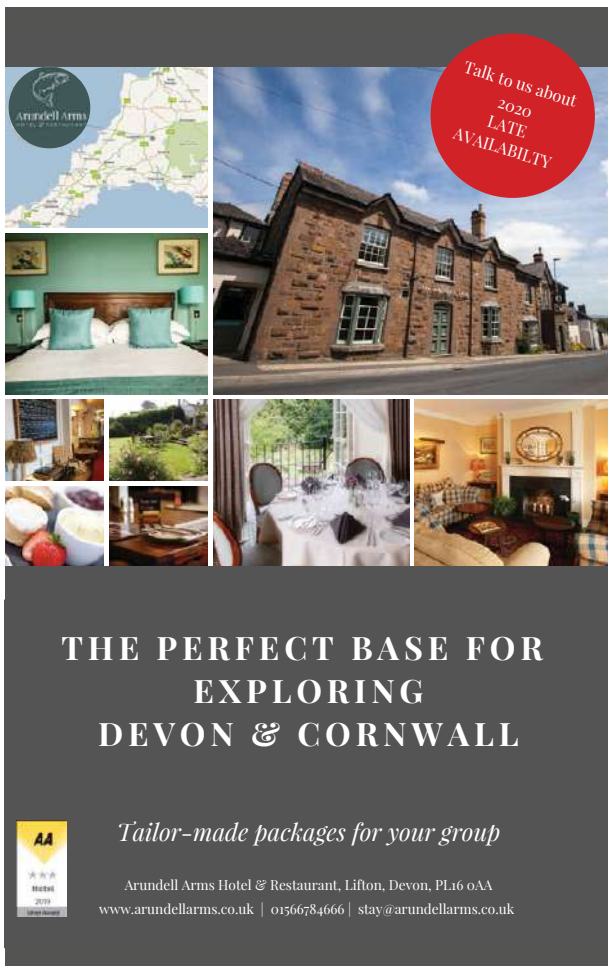


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# THEATRE

## Stage / Entertainment

The big news this month...

### Cast updates for *Sister Act* in the West End and on tour

Olivier award-winning actor Clive Rowe, whose previous stage credits include *Guys and Dolls*, will appear in the role of Eddie Souther, while *Birds of a Feather* regular Lesley Joseph has been cast as Mother Superior. Both will join the show from April.

[sisteractthemusical.co.uk](http://sisteractthemusical.co.uk)

### *Life of Pi* to make London debut this summer

A stage adaptation of Yann Martel's novel is now transferring to London's Wyndham's Theatre, which is being transformed to accommodate the show. The story follows a 16-year-old boy, Pi, who is stranded on a single lifeboat with five wild animals.

[www.lifeofpionstage.com](http://www.lifeofpionstage.com)



### *9 to 5 the Musical* stars return

Louise Redknapp, a *Strictly* finalist and member of 1990s girl band Eternal, and Brian Conley, comedian and TV presenter, are returning to the musical's cast. The pair will play Violet Newstead and Franklin Hart Jr until the end of the show's run at the Savoy Theatre on 23rd May.

[9to5themusical.co.uk](http://9to5themusical.co.uk)

Turn over the page for a round-up of what else is happening in theatre...

# ← ROUND-UP

## Theatre lovers can receive a free newsletter

Make sure you're the first to receive show news and the best group deals by signing up to the Theatre Bug e-newsletter, sent direct to your inbox every fortnight.

[groupleisureandtravel.com/our-newsletters](http://groupleisureandtravel.com/our-newsletters)

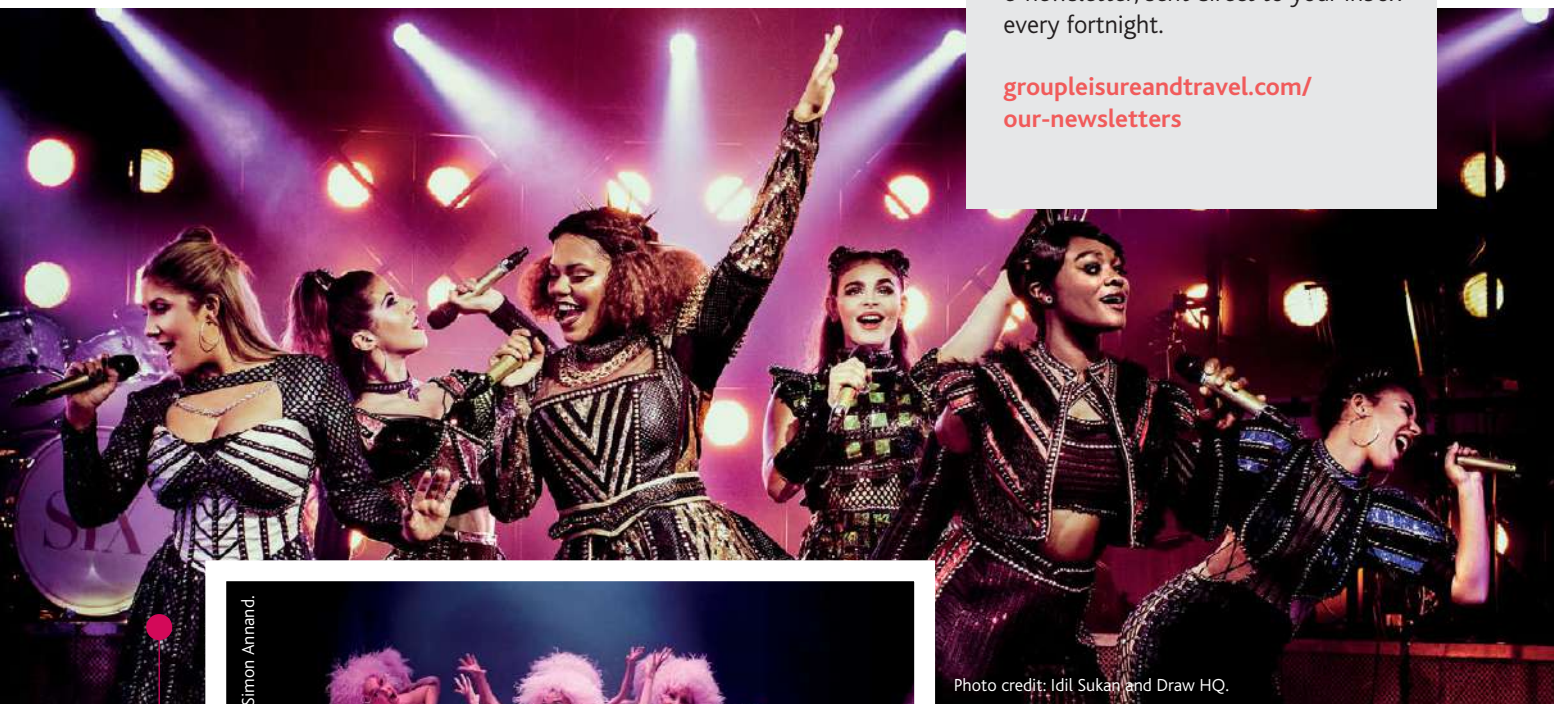


Photo credit: Simon Annand.

Photo credit: Idil Sukan and Draw HQ.



Photo credit: Tristram Kenton.

### LONDON THEATRE

#### **SIX extends into 2021**

90,000 extra tickets have been released for the musical about Henry VIII's wives, which is now running into January next year at the West End's Arts Theatre. The 75-minute show mixes historical narratives with '21st century girl power' as each queen shares their story.

[www.sixthemusical.com/london](http://www.sixthemusical.com/london)

### REGIONAL THEATRE

#### ***Nutcracker!* returns after nine years**

Sir Matthew Bourne's interpretation of the classic Tchaikovsky ballet will begin a UK tour on 16th November. Inspired by 1930s Hollywood musicals, *Nutcracker!* arrives at venues in Salford, Dublin and London with more performances to be announced.

[new-adventures.net/nutcracker](http://new-adventures.net/nutcracker)

### LONDON THEATRE

#### **Cast updates for *The Woman in Black***

The stage adaptation of Susan Hill's ghostly thriller sees Terence Wilton take on the role of Arthur Kipps for the second time, and Max Hutchinson perform the part of The Actor. The Fortune Theatre is hosting the show until 26th September, offering special rates for groups of eight or more.

[www.thewomaninblack.com](http://www.thewomaninblack.com)

Photo credit: Matt Martin



Photo credit: Robert Day

## REGIONAL THEATRE

### UK and Ireland tour for *The Addams Family*

The musical comedy, based on Charles Addams' original characters, will visit theatres across the UK and Ireland from July to November. The tour comes after a premiere run in 2017, and follows a grown-up Wednesday Addams who has fallen in love. Tickets are now available.

[www.theaddamsfamily.co.uk](http://www.theaddamsfamily.co.uk)

## REGIONAL THEATRE

### A world of dance at Sadler's Wells this year

The organisation's three London theatres are hosting a variety of performances and events, such as the Flamenco Festival in June, accompanied by Latin American music; a performance by the National Youth Dance Company; and family favourite *The Snowman*, which will return for the Christmas season.

[www.sadlerswells.com](http://www.sadlerswells.com)

## LONDON THEATRE

### *Magic Goes Wrong* running until August

The comedy is now taking bookings until 30th August at the Vaudeville Theatre in London, following a group of magicians trying to present a charity event which spins out of control. The show was created by Mischief Theatre with the help of well-known magic duo Penn & Teller.

[www.nimaxtheatres.com/shows/magic-goes-wrong](http://www.nimaxtheatres.com/shows/magic-goes-wrong)

Take a bow...

# Christine Allado

We chat to Christine Allado about her lead role in the new musical *The Prince of Egypt* and her acting highlights including meeting Harry and Meghan.

**For those who aren't familiar with *The Prince of Egypt* – can you describe the story?**

It's about two brothers, Rameses and Moses, and how they find themselves torn by circumstance and weighed down by their individual responsibilities. They have to reconcile their egos, through faith and the good of their people. But it's also a story for the 21st century – for example, if you and I were thrust into this position, how would we react?

**Why do you think the story was chosen to be adapted into a musical?**

I think because it's a story of epic proportions. It lends well to music, and there are so many sweeping melodies that Stephen Schwartz used to propel the story forward in the original film. It comes from a place of extreme emotion – either utter despair or jubilation. For me, that's the recipe of a great musical.

**Can you tell us about your character, Tziporah?**

We first meet her as a 'tribute' to Rameses which is her worst nightmare, but fate allows her to keep meeting Moses (explored in our song, *Never in a Million Years*). Tziporah grapples with her fundamental thirst for freedom; she's from a nomadic tribe who love to travel. She's always onto the next place, but suddenly there's this unexpected, divine love for this man.



Photo credit: Darren Bell.



**So far, the show's been kept very under wraps - what can groups expect from it?**

Towards the end of rehearsals there were still surprises yet to be revealed. I think it's going to be a spectacle to behold and something the West End's never seen in terms of dance and magic. We have an amazing magic team on board who previously worked on *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, and I think it's going to leave audiences' jaws on the floor.

**Tell us about the preparations for the show.**

It went really well – the team feels like a family and we all love the story. *The Prince of Egypt* film is beloved by so many that it's a great responsibility to take it on, and I think you can tell everyone is giving their heart and soul to the piece.

**Have you got a favourite moment?**

I love the first time you meet Tziporah. I have a solo that's really spicy, sassy and epitomises the idea of a strong woman and what she can accomplish. Also, *When You Believe* (a hit song from the film) is definitely a showstopper – it really tugs at the heartstrings.

**Have you drawn on any inspiration for Tziporah?**

I draw from how Michelle Pfeiffer played her in the film, she's very strong-willed. I always picture Gal Gadot from *Wonder Woman*: very strong but very feminine.

**Can audiences expect any story differences to the animated film?**

When I first attended a reading, we reached a certain point and thought "oh, wow!" – because there is a plot twist, an important one. In general, I think the show is more fleshed out than the movie, which is about 90 minutes long. Ours is a two-act performance and features beautiful new songs by an Academy Award-winning composer (Stephen Schwartz).

**You recently starred in *Hamilton* on the West End. What were your highlights?**

We filmed a YouTube mix tape where we did mashups of *Hamilton* songs and pop songs, and I got to sing *Say No to This* mashed up with Adele's *Hello* with Lin-Manuel Miranda – that's a highlight.

Also, meeting Meghan Markle and Prince Harry on stage. I asked Harry if he's done any theatre and he said, "Yes, when I was a kid I was in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*." When I asked who he played he said, "I was Sleepy." I just thought that was amazing.

**"I think it's going to be a spectacle to behold and something the West End has never seen in terms of dance and magic."**

**It's exciting that *The Prince of Egypt*'s entirely new to the stage, but are there any classic productions you'd love to perform in?**

We're working with the writer of *Mulan* and *Pocahontas*, two animated characters that I really identify with. I don't know if there's a stage adaptation, but I'd love to do that. I want to wave the flag for strong-willed women who are still in touch with their femininity. It's important to impart that to children – this show is really important for young audiences.

**If you could sum up the three main themes in *The Prince of Egypt*, what would they be?**

I think it's about family, freedom and belief. ■

***Prince of Egypt* is now playing at the Dominion Theatre in the West End, with performances currently running until 12th September 2020.**

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# Scrapbook

*What's the GLT team been up to?*

## *The magic of Harry Potter* 4th January

**Harry Rogers:** As I wandered down the main hall of Gringotts Wizarding Bank, I had to stop myself pretending to be in Harry Potter's world - we share the same first name after all. The Warner Bros. Studio Tour as a whole blew me away, from the Great Hall and iconic train to the vast amount of behind-the-scenes extras on show. I will definitely be going again, especially with the Slytherin display opening on 3rd April.

[www.wbstudiotour.co.uk](http://www.wbstudiotour.co.uk)



## *An Eagle Heights experience* 2nd February

**Katherine Payne:** When I think of huskies I think, snow – which might be why I booked a Husky Hike experience in the winter. No snowflakes were conjured, but I did have a lovely time being tugged along by Laska, one of Eagle Heights Wildlife Foundation's resident pull dogs, across the North Downs countryside. Groups of six to 12 can book at the weekends with smaller group sessions available in the week.

[www.eagleheights.co.uk](http://www.eagleheights.co.uk)

## *We've been to see... Dear Evan Hansen & Mamma Mia!*



**Sharon Yandell:** I went to see *Dear Evan Hansen* at the Noël Coward Theatre which was terrific! I wasn't sure what to expect as I hadn't read the book or heard the soundtrack, but I loved it. The cast have so much energy and emotion and the story is so relevant. This is me in the 'blue room' next to the neon sign... all will make sense when you see the show.

[www.dearevanhansen.com/London](http://www.dearevanhansen.com/London)



**Ivana Perkins:** I had the chance to see *Mamma Mia!* at the Novello Theatre in London's West End and it was fabulous. I loved everything about it... the choreography was fantastic, the costumes were stunning and the energy between the cast members was electric!

It's such a feel-good performance, you can't help but leave with a huge smile on your face.

[www.mamma-mia.com](http://www.mamma-mia.com)

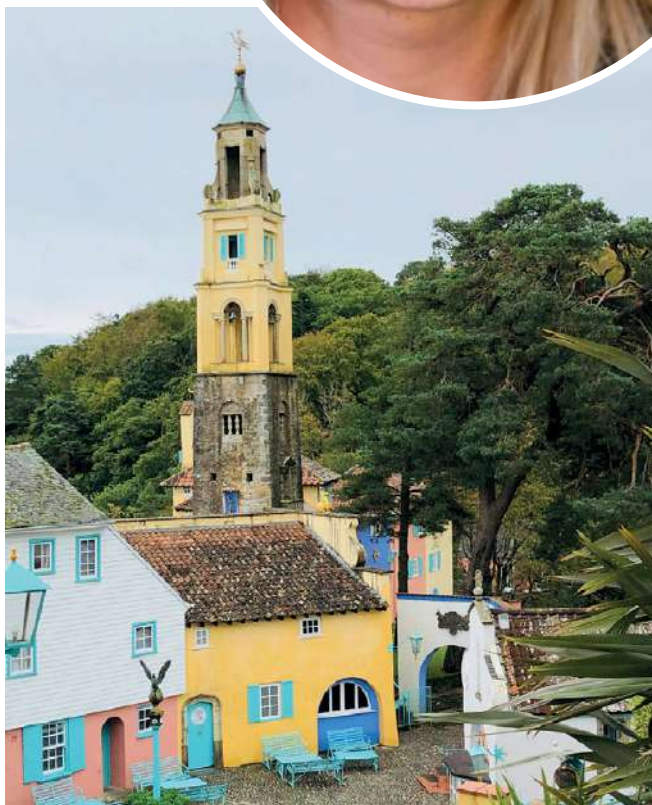
# Journey with Julie

Tips, ideas and stories from  
travel expert, Julie Peasgood.



**W**e arrive in Snowdonia with the countryside newly washed; shiny and sparkling from recent heavy rains. The road signs are now predominantly Welsh, and the afternoon rays make the burnished copper of the leaves glisten in the dappled sunshine. We are sharing our route with a lot of sheep and one of the biggest rainbows I have ever seen. Distant roads are threaded below us like silver ribbons and the hills are so green it looks as though they've been reconfigured with a 'vivid' filter. It is absolutely stunning. And when we drive into impossibly pretty, fairy tale Portmeirion, it gets even better.

Built by the visionary architect, Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, over the years 1925 to 1975, Portmeirion is a holiday village, a real-life film set and an architectural icon. Constructed in an Italianate style, it is home to two elegant hotels, 33 stylish village rooms and 13 individually designed, self-catering cottages. There is an onsite spa, a swimming pool, an array of award-winning restaurants and cafés, an authentic Italian gelateria and a sprinkling of fascinating shops, with the main village shop selling the renowned Portmeirion Pottery.



• Portmeirion in Wales boasts beautiful and colourful architecture.

## A word from location manager Meurig Jones

Sir Clough Williams-Ellis was a conservationist and called Portmeirion his 'architectural mongrel' and his 'home for fallen buildings', as he incorporated all manner of rescued treasures into his creation. He wanted to prove how a naturally beautiful location could be developed without spoiling it, and he also wanted his village to become a creative influence on others.

Writers, artists and musicians have always found it so: Brian Epstein, The Beatles manager, rented a cottage here for many years, and The Beatles were frequent visitors. George Harrison in particular

appreciated its spiritual energy, and even decided to hold his 50th birthday party here in February 1993.

It has been used on numerous occasions as a backdrop for films and TV, including *Dr Who*, *Citizen Smith*, *Brideshead Revisited*, *Cold Feet*, *Top Gear* and, most famously, the cult TV series *The Prisoner*, which was filmed here in the mid 60s.



• Julie with Meurig Jones.

I am captivated. A maverick, avid collector and environmentalist, Clough built his village as a homage to the Mediterranean, drawing inspiration from Portofino which he loved. Everywhere there are arches (always framing a picturesque view), detailed facades and anachronistic statues; Burmese dancers pose serenely alongside Greek deities. Nowhere is ordinary, nothing remotely municipal. Instead it is all pinks, yellows, blues, corals and Clough's signature colour, turquoise. His boldness is exhilarating and awe-inspiring.

All the buildings are Grade I or Grade II listed; nestling within 70 acres of sub-tropical gardens and woodland, they feature temples, sculptures, rare plants, wishing trees and 19 miles of walkways. And if you fancy some sea air, there are four miles of coastal paths and a couple of superb sandy beaches on offer too.

But if walking doesn't appeal, a little toytown train transports 40 visitors at a time on a complimentary loop through the woods, stopping at a 12th century ruined castle and the famed Chinese lake, where passengers can take photos of the ornamental bridge and Pagoda. (Top tip: it's worth bringing your charger if you're taking pics here on a phone - there's a risk you'll run your battery down as every single view is spectacular!)

Back in 1941, the legendary Noël Coward was so energised by the village that he wrote *Blithe Spirit* here in less than a week. "...Caught a morning train from Paddington, bound for Port Meirion in North Wales. For some time past an idea for a light comedy had been rattling at the door of my mind and I thought the time had come to let it in and show it a little courtesy... We arrived on a golden evening, sighed with pleasure at the mountains and the sea in the late sunlight, and settled ourselves into a pink guest-house."

Sir Noël's writing cabinet still graces Fountain Two, his preferred cottage, and Ingrid Bergman gifted Clough an enormous Buddha in 1958 after she finished filming *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* in the village. Other famous visitors have included Edward and Mrs Simpson, Prince Charles (who has visited three times), The Beatles, Paul Weller, Jarvis Cocker, Grace Jones... the list goes on.

## Information for groups

Portmeirion welcomes groups all year round for day visits, lunches and overnight stays. Group rates are available to parties of 12 or more – email [visit@portmeirion.wales](mailto:visit@portmeirion.wales) or call **01766 772409**. Plenty of dedicated coach parking is available and free entry (with complimentary refreshments) is provided for both the driver and tour leader.

20-minute walking tours, train rides and a film about the village are included in the entry price (the train only runs during the main season). With advance notice, bespoke guided tours can be arranged covering topics such as Portmeirion's musical heritage.

Contact location manager Meurig Jones by emailing [meurig@portmeirion-village.com](mailto:meurig@portmeirion-village.com) or by calling **01766 772306**.

The spell of Portmeirion lingers on, too. Back home I find myself 'Cloughing up' unadorned walls and empty corners - even my husband Patrick (normally a stranger to embellishment) suggests weaving into the garden the back panel of an old fireplace currently lying unused in our cellar.

Clough's motto was 'Cherish the Past, Adorn the Present, Construct for the Future'. I can't wait to construct a future trip to North Wales for another spell in this enchanting hideaway. ■

*Honoured by the Royal Television Society with the Television Personality of the Year Award, Julie Peasgood has had a multi-faceted career as an accomplished actress and TV presenter, an award-winning author, travel writer and columnist, a leading voice-over artist and a popular public speaker and events host.*



• The visionary architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis (pictured left) built Portmeirion between 1925 and 1975.

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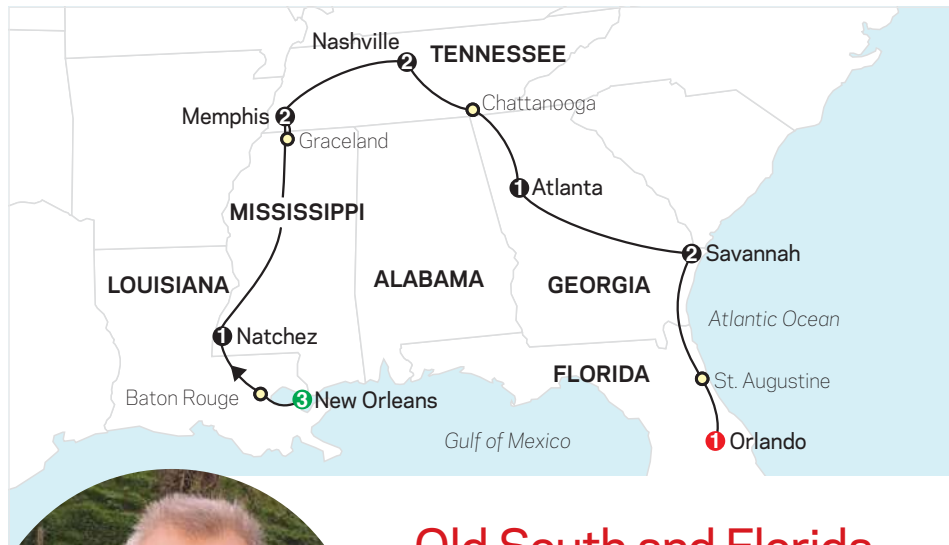
- Good Housekeeping reader 2019



Price based on departures from London airports; alternative airports available. \*Saving of £300pp is available on The Old South & Florida: Special departure, 20 May 2020 when quoting OLD SOUTH SPECIAL. This saving is available on an first come first served basis. Call to book only. Example: The Old South & Florida departing 20 May 2020 was £1,905pp, now £1,605pp tour only. Discount is included in the price shown, based on two people sharing a twin room. Cannot be applied to existing bookings or in retrospect, and excludes America's Canyonlands Escape. Subject to availability, and cannot be combined with any other offer except our loyalty discounts. Group savings are applied to the tour portion of your holiday, not including transfers, extra nights or flights. Some itineraries may require a larger group size to qualify for group savings. Call our dedicated groups team for more details. For full terms and conditions, see [cosmos.co.uk/groupterms](https://cosmos.co.uk/groupterms). Prices are based on two people sharing a twin room; single supplements may apply. For full terms & conditions, see [cosmos.co.uk/offerstcs](https://cosmos.co.uk/offerstcs). Good Housekeeping Reader Recommended survey of Cosmos escorted tours customer experience, 106 Good Housekeeping readers, 2018. Our flight-inclusive holidays are fully protected by the CAA's ATOL scheme and non-flight inclusive holidays are fully protected by ABTA's scheme of financial protection. Prices correct at time of print, subject to availability (6 Feb 2020).

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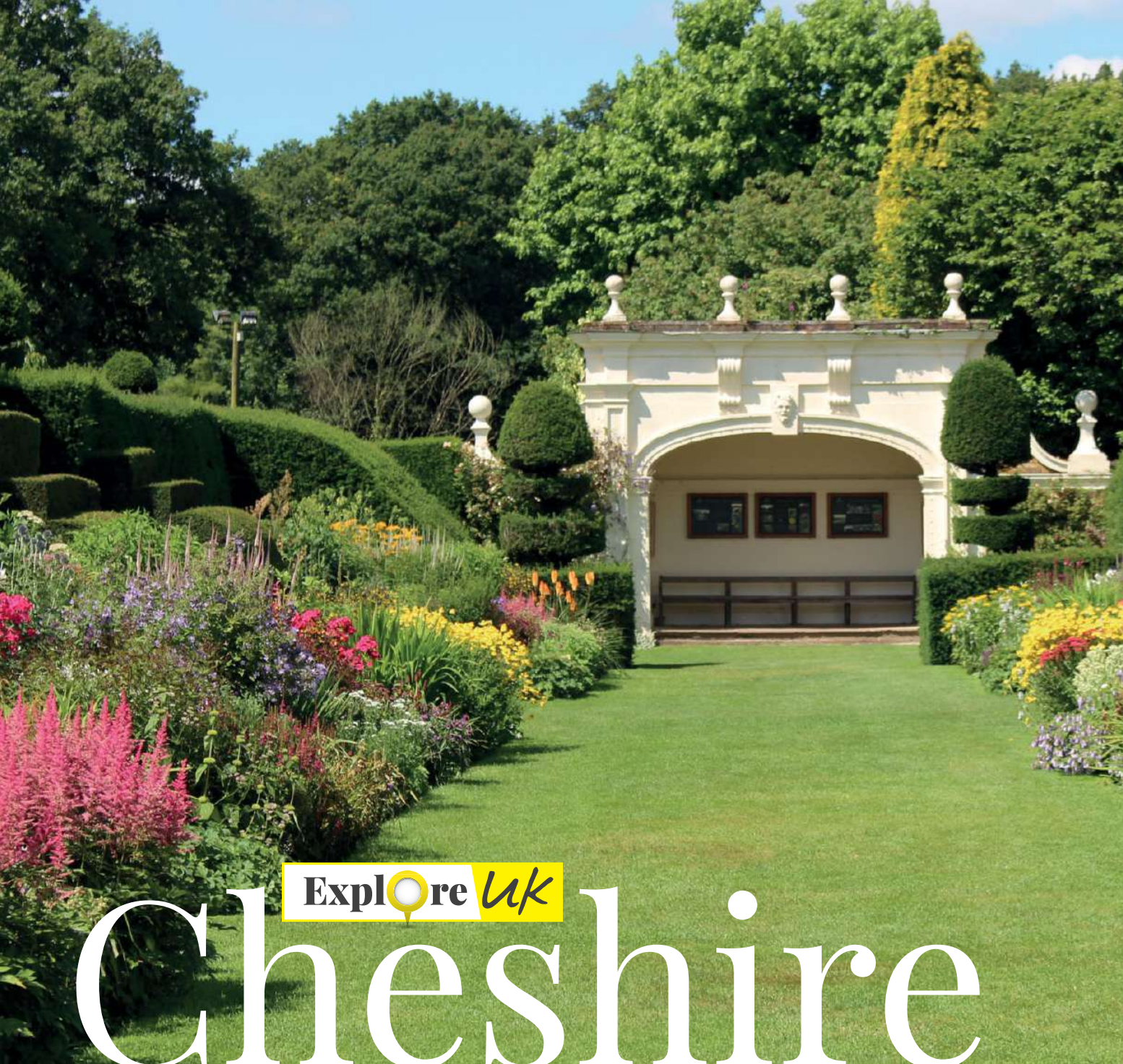
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David Wickers is the Travel Editor of Good Housekeeping and Travel Edit. For 17 years he was the Chief Travel Correspondent on The Sunday Times. Meet David as he joins the tour for the first week. This tour offers the perfect group experience and is an one off opportunity to meet David Wickers and share in his knowledge of Southern USA's musical influence and heritage.

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Explore **UK**

# Cheshire

**The history and heritage of the area has never been more alive thanks to the passion and determination of individuals – Keeley Rodgers heads to the county to find out more.**

“It gets under your skin” Graham Woods explains as he gives an insight into the workings behind the miraculous feat of Victorian engineering that is the **Anderton Boat Lift** appropriately known as the Cathedral of the Canals. The three-storey structure designed to lift boats and barges a staggering 50 feet from the river to the canal is as graceful as it is mechanical – carved into the landscape as if it has always meant to be there.

But it was almost lost forever when, in the 80s, it was declared structurally unsound and closed. Cue the power of the people, and some dedicated volunteers including Ted Thompson who we meet in the café of the visitor centre. Part of the fabric of the building and a seemingly regular sight, Ted, now in his 80s, tells me “if it wasn’t for my wife Christine, the boat lift probably wouldn’t be here today.” After millions of pounds was raised, restoration began in 2000 with the lift reopening in 2002. And walking around the site today, which consists of a two-storey visitor centre and exhibition building, you can see it was worth every single penny.

There are many options for group visits including special discounted rates, a dedicated meet and greet service as well as a glass-covered lift & river boat trip where you’ll be taken into the heart of the lift to see its incredible engineering



Photo credit: Andrew Moores



• Left: Arley Hall's colourful gardens. Above: The Anderton Boat Lift reopened in 2002 as an attraction.

up close before a historical journey along the River Weaver Navigation. I'd highly recommend the unique, behind-the-scenes tour, albeit not for the faint hearted – you get out on top of the lift and wow, what a view.

The passion of the people was the theme of my two-day visit to Cheshire; next up was the very knowledgeable Kate Harland who gave us a tour around the **Lion Salt Works Museum**, just a short drive from the boat lift. With an equally intriguing past, the site re-opened in 2015 after a £10m renovation. It now tells the centuries-old story of salt in Cheshire (including where the name 'wich' comes from in the likes of Northwich, Nantwich) and how it influenced the landscape, industry and people. ➔

### Arley Hall & Gardens' group welcome

Discounted rates are available for groups of 15+ visiting the stunning Grade II\* listed stately home. Just one of the packages on offer is an escorted Garden Tour taking in some of the highlights including the Herbaceous Border, probably the first border of its kind planted in England. There's also the option to book a meet and greet service.



“This is my absolute favourite part of the whole place”, Kate tells us as we’re taken deeper into the museum. She’s gazing up at the old crushing mill which at first glance appears as a crumbling piece of machinery. “It looks like it’s covered in some kind of moss but it’s the effect that the salt in the air has had and I just love it.”

The whole experience is both atmospheric and intriguing; as you walk through what appear to be giant clouds of steam, you get a real feel for the conditions and just how vital the salt industry was not only to Cheshire but around the world. Salt refined at the Lion Salt Works in Northwich was exported to places as far away as America, India, Nigeria and the Congo.

Group visitors are in for an extra special treat too – bespoke tours can be organised that include a talk about Cheshire Cheese from an expert, including the chance to taste and buy and there’s the option to have a special tour of the museum hearing stories about its fascinating history.



• Above: Tatton Park’s Japanese Garden is a peaceful retreat.  
Below: Group tours of the Lion Salt Works.

Diversity was the other thread of my trip to Cheshire – none more so than at **Tatton Park**, which I hear (from the cool kids) is the most popular National Trust house on Instagram.

Driving into the expansive estate, stopping to admire the many red and fallow deer, I can see why visitors find it so photogenic. Our taster tour began in the 18th century mansion where we learnt about the history and legacy of the last Lord Egerton as well as how the servants lived and worked on the estate. There are special guided tour prices for groups including an Upstairs/Downstairs and Hidden Treasures options.

There’s as much to explore outside as there is in with 50 acres of gardens and 1,000 acres of parkland. “The gardens are incredible all year round, but I think my favourite season has to be spring when everything starts to come to life”, head gardener Simon Tetlow shares.





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- Clockwise: The Lovell Telescope; one of the characters at Tatton Park's Farm; Gulliver's Warrington Resort.



He points out how the landscape was created to reflect the wealth and status of the family as well as the incredible diversity of species across the estate. You can see why the Japanese Garden is the most popular; designed after Alan de Tatton's visit to the Anglo-Japanese Exhibition at the White City in London, it's in the style of a tea garden. There's an overwhelming feeling of calm and peace as we walk around the perimeter – it's open for tours on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

**Tatton Park's Farm** deserves a special mention too with its 'Field to Fork' story bringing the authentic working farm to life. There's the original slaughterhouse, an impressive 18th century mill as well as the chance to meet farm workers from the past and present - there's even animals to see (the rare Middle White pigs were my favourite).

Another attraction for all ages is of course the **Jodrell Bank Observatory**, which was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site last year.

## Family fun at Gulliver's World

The Warrington resort is ideal for children aged 2-13 with more than 80 rides, attractions and shows to see each day. There's free parking and discounts available by booking in advance. You can also extend the fun with the various accommodation options from themed hotel suites (including Western, Princess & Pirate themes) to glamping tents and lodges.



The landmark Lovell Telescope, the third largest of its kind in the world, appears out of nowhere across the landscape on what is otherwise a gloomy January day. Inside the discovery centre though, there's plenty of light, starting with the biggest working scale model of our solar system.



Outside, the Whispering Dishes are a must – I was bowled over by how they work (it's all to do with sound waves of course) but nothing beats witnessing the spectacular telescope actually move, wondering what on earth (or not) it's picking up from space. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the observatory and there's a new talk for groups to mark the occasion. Jodrell Bank: 75 years of Science (available from April) takes visitors on a whistle stop tour from the early breakthroughs in radio astronomy through the dawn of the Space Race to today's cutting-edge technologies and latest discoveries. There's also free coach parking as well as the option for group leaders to arrange for pre-paid café vouchers for their group. ■



## I stayed at...

### ...the Cottons Hotel & Spa in Knutsford

Just a short drive away from Tatton Park, Arley Hall and Gardens and many more attractions, not only is this hotel in a great location, it's the perfect place to relax after a day sightseeing. There's a wide selection of rooms and catering options including afternoon tea and the popular Chef's Table as well as a delightful spa fit with a 'proper size pool', sauna, steam room and outdoor jacuzzi. The only thing that dragged me away from the spa was the Pillow Menu on offer in my room; while the Brexit madness ensued, I had my very own hard/soft decision to make, it was tough!

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# Direct & energetic

Simon Warwick, CEO of award-winning group travel company Groups Direct, on a fresh approach and an exciting year ahead.

**Q. 2020 is an exciting year for Groups Direct, can you tell us what's in store?**

**A.** Where do I start? We have got the biggest number of day excursions we've ever offered groups; there are more than 70 itineraries available in our latest brochure. Along with our fantastic team I've been working extremely hard over the last few months to analyse the market and get to the heart of what group organisers really want.

**Q. How has your approach changed?**

**A.** We have focussed far more on our strengths rather than trying to reinvent the wheel too much. Reinvention of the wheel is fantastic, but I think you need to start by honing down on what you're good at. There were elements of the business, for example cruising, that were not necessarily our forte and are being done heavily elsewhere in the market. There's so much out there for groups and I feel they're not always sold as well as they could be. We've tried to offer something different, for example, with our trips to Hampton Court Palace by encouraging group organisers to watch some jousting, and then at Leeds Castle there's the beautiful Festival of Flowers which we've had a great response to.

**Q. Could you tell us about some of the other new experiences for groups in 2020?**

**A.** There's a whole range; we've got pork pie demonstrations, the Silverstone Experience, BODY WORLDS London and the London Transport Museum as well as the Coventry Transport Museum. We're trying to mix it up for everybody and offer more.

**Q. West End theatre is also a big feature this year, tell us more.**

**A.** Theatre is my background, having started as an actor and then getting into producing and ticketing (I set up Group Line in 1991) so it's very important to me and remains hugely popular with groups. We're a primary agent and deal directly with 75% of West End theatres but offer tickets to all West End shows.



Groups Direct is now a one-stop shop for group organisers for theatre, day trips and more.

**Q. You've been in the industry for many years, what are the key considerations for liaising with groups?**

**A.** We have to try to remember one thing – we're all human beings and we like social interaction. The fact that we're able to offer an excursion or theatre outing or holiday helps to keep people together. I think the groups demographic is changing – all of us have to be on our toes and thinking hard to keep the offer new and fresh.

**Q. How do you describe the customer service offered by Groups Direct?**

**A.** The most important thing is to understand what the customer wants and what their expectations are. Don't try to give them something they don't want. My main goal in the next year is to extend the offering even further, organisers will see more new excursions in our next brochure out later this year. The service will improve all the time and the pricing is crucial to me. My ethos when I started Groups Direct was very much about offering everybody the same service, whether they're doing one trip or 30 a year.

**Q. How would you describe Groups Direct to people who haven't booked with you before?**

**A.** We're much more energised and ready to serve group organisers. They can trust us to actively look on their behalf for the things that they'll enjoy – we are certainly not going to rest on our laurels. There's a lot of information on our website, in addition to the brochure, and I'd encourage any groups interested in booking with us to get in touch and see what we can offer. ■

**Contact details:**

**0800 049 8309**

**reservations@groupsdirect.co.uk**

**www.groupsdirect.co.uk**



- There are a range of outings available: Leeds Castle Medieval Festival (top); Old Royal Naval College (bottom left); The Silverstone Experience (bottom right).



### *Simon's top 3 for 2020*

1. Trips to mark the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain.
2. The Silverstone Experience in Northamptonshire.
3. The Hovercraft Experience to the Isle of Wight.



Photo credit: Jakob Ebrey-JEP.

• Charles Bridge is a top spot for sightseeing.



Explore Europe

# Prague

Words: Robin McKelvie

## *Czech Republic*

**Y**ou'll hear cities hailed as the 'New Prague', but there is nothing wrong with the old one. The Czech capital is a joy to visit if you want to wander for hours, wrapped in the historic arms of its old town, or seek out the dynamic sides. Whether you are strolling by the river, swooning beneath the castle or joining in the revelry in a traditional pub, you'll be glad you chose Prague.

### What's new?

The grand State Opera reopened its doors in January after a revamp that has brought out the best in this lavish neo-Renaissance building. The State Opera is part of the National Theatre, and groups can enjoy both opera and ballet performances.

### Essential sights

**Old Town Square:** Still the centre of Prague today, this public space is an expanse of cobbles dwarfed on all sides by a collage of baroque and medieval buildings, including the Old Town Square Hall and its famous astronomical clock, which draws in crowds to its hourly shows.

**Prague Castle:** Reclining on the other side of the Vltava River is Prague's impressive castle. It's a steep climb up, but worth the effort with its winding streets crammed with boutique shops, bars and cafés. The castle dates to the ninth century but has been rebuilt on numerous occasions, with austere Romanesque through to ornate Gothic influences.

**Charles Bridge:** Charles Bridge is easily the city's most dramatic bridge and one of Europe's most striking. It was first built as the Judith Bridge in 1357, but the original was washed away and its replacement given the Charles moniker.

## Where to stay

**The Hotel Savoy:** This grand old dame in the historic castle district is a real Prague institution. It has a sense of old-world five-star luxury, with such extras as complimentary mini-bars, a sauna and a hot tub.

[www.hotelsavoyprague.com](http://www.hotelsavoyprague.com)

**Hotel Hoffmeister and Spa:** The stately hotel reclines just back from the river with easy access to all the sights, offering a chance to get away from the busy city.

[www.hoffmeister.cz/en](http://www.hoffmeister.cz/en)

**Clarion Prague City:** This comfortable, no frills hotel tucked between Wenceslas Square and the emerging suburb of Žižkov, is well used to the needs of groups.

[www.clarionhotelpraguecity.com](http://www.clarionhotelpraguecity.com)

## Live like a local

To get served in a traditional Prague pub, act like a local. Go in and take a seat. Don't approach the bar. When the staff come don't attempt to order anything outrageous like a soft drink. They will then furnish you with gorgeous cold beer and mark it with a notch on a card. Beware: the process will be repeated when you're nearing the end of your glass, unless you pay up.

## Food & drink

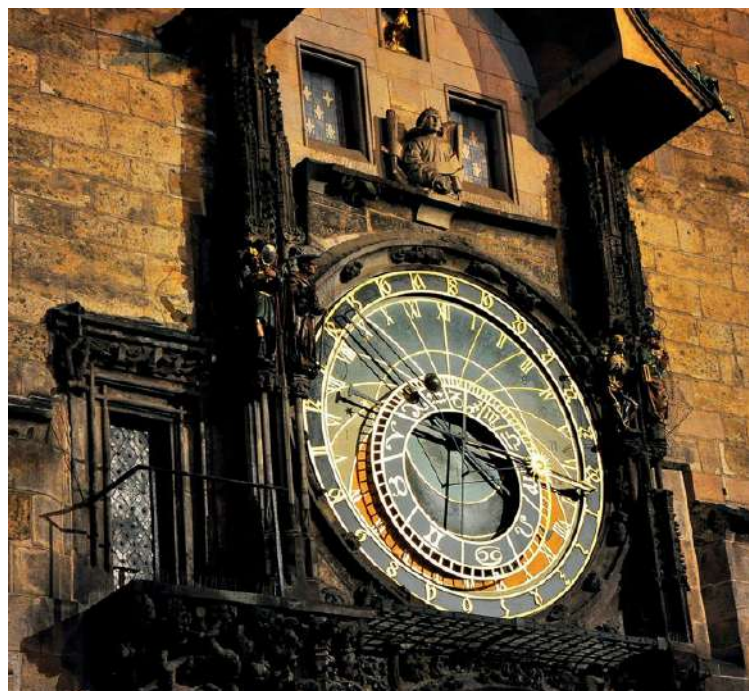
If you enjoy hearty, stodgy food you will love Prague. Creamy sauces and chunky meat cuts are staples, often bulked up by plump dumplings. In recent years a wave of healthier eateries have breezed in including vegetarian and vegan restaurants. Czech wine can be surprisingly good, but the national drink is undoubtedly beer, which is usually superb. The major lagers are found everywhere, joined by a new wave of craft beers.



## Need to know

**Best time to go:** Late spring and autumn when temperatures are milder, there is less chance of snow and summer crowds aren't an issue. The build up to Christmas is also an atmospheric time to visit.

**Tourist office:** [www.prague.eu](http://www.prague.eu)



• Above: The astronomical clock is a must-see every hour.  
Left: Robin enjoying some of the local food and drink.

## Best for groups

**Cruise the Vltava:** Getting on the river is a great way to appreciate Prague's drama. You can hop on one of the big tour boats with its guided commentary and meals, or head for the other end of the scale and hire rowing boats on a warm summer's day. The city takes on a whole new perspective from the water as its grand buildings rear above.

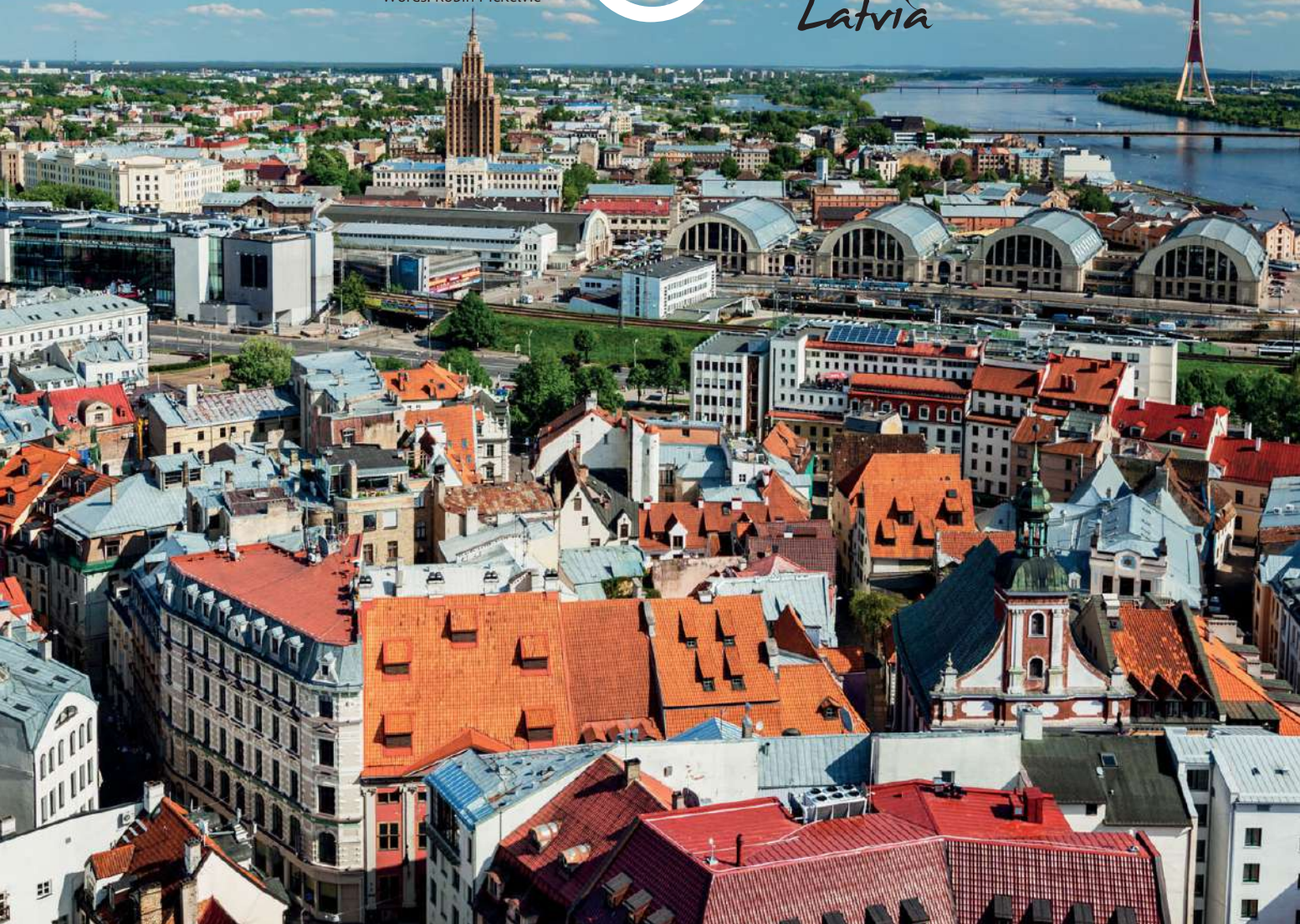
**Drink beer:** The Czechs are said to consume more beer capita than anyone and you will believe it at U Fleků, where they've been brewing beer since 1499. Today's sweet dark beer is a joy as are their hearty traditional dishes.

**Check out Žižkov:** Prague's vast old town can be a little touristy after a few days, or for groups on a return visit. The arty suburb of Žižkov is within easy reach with its authentic vibe, sprinkling of new art galleries and a wealth of exciting cafés, bars and restaurants that are geared more towards locals than tourists. ■

# Riga

Words: Robin McKelvie

*Latvia*



## Essential sights

**House of the Blackheads:** Arguably the most striking building in the whole of Riga's remarkable historic old town – and that is saying something – is this old guild base. It was the base of power for the Brotherhood of Blackheads as far back as the 14th century. Today it has been brought back to its best as a tourist attraction after being devastated during World War Two. It is open as a museum that sheds light on this mysterious brotherhood of unmarried men.

**Jugendstil (art nouveau):** When much of Germany's own Jugendstil was devastated in World War Two, Riga was left standing as a prime example of this eye catching architectural form. There are swathes of it to take in and it's no wonder that Riga's art nouveau architecture has been placed on UNESCO's coveted World Heritage list. The epicentre is around Elizabetes. A guided group tour brings out the best of the lavish buildings and helps you see details you may otherwise never notice.

## Where to stay

**Hotel Grand Palace:** Despite a recent flurry of rivals this elegant hotel remains the most glamorous address in town, enjoying a historical atmosphere and a handy central location.

[www.grandpalaceriga.com](http://www.grandpalaceriga.com)

**Radisson Blu Latvija Conference & Spa Hotel:**

This hotel enjoys a prime spot on the opposite bank of the Daugava River, with views back towards the old town.

[www.radissonhotels.com](http://www.radissonhotels.com)

**Wellton Riga Hotel & SPA:** This may lie a little outside the old town, but it offers very affordable rates, comfortable rooms and a warm welcome.

[www.wellton.com/en](http://www.wellton.com/en)

**Central Market:** This gloriously fun oasis is housed in a collage of old 1920s Zeppelin hangers. Today there is tourist tat alongside the bountiful fruit and vegetables in a retail frenzy that is an assault on all the senses - great fun for just wandering around. Make sure to sharpen your group's haggling powers before descending on this most colourful of markets.

## Food & drink

Pork is the meat of choice in Latvia and you will find it cooked and presented in many ways. Often it comes smothered in creamy sauces, whilst parts of the animal not normally savoured in other countries, such as pork knuckles and pig's head, are also popular.

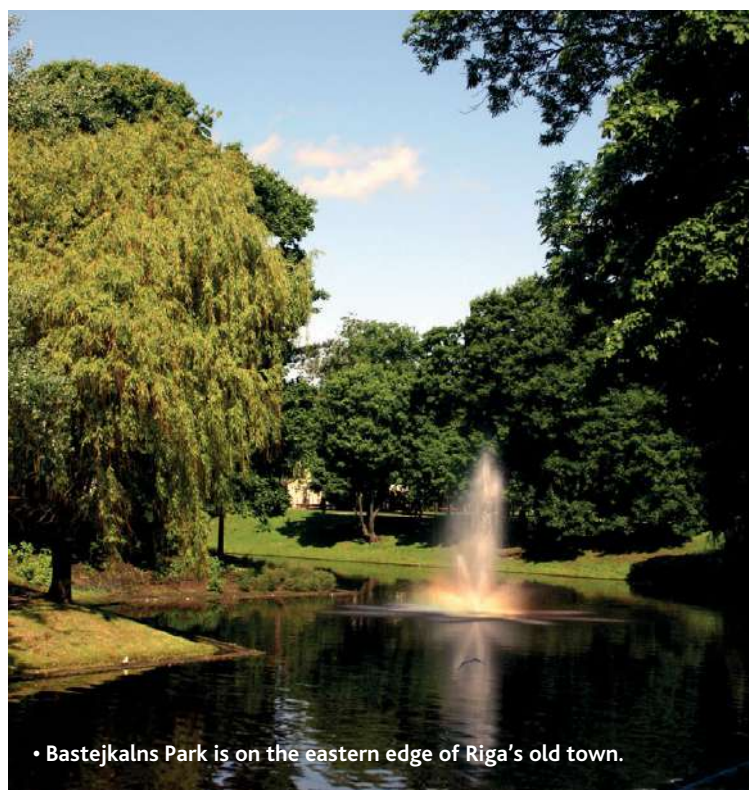
Seafood from the nearby Baltic is popular too, especially in the new wave of creative cafés and restaurants that are trying to move away from stodgy meat dishes.

Latvian beer is usually excellent, with a handful of craft beers to enjoy too. The most famous, or rather infamous, local tippie is Riga Black Balsam. It's best mixed as this 'elixir' has a potent punch. The locals swear by its health benefits.

## Best for groups

**River cruise:** Taking a boat trip along the Daugava is an ideal way to get a feel for the city and how it developed along its lifeblood river. There are numerous options, whether you are looking for a short, simple introduction to the river, or want to make it more of an event with drinks or even full meals aboard.

**Riga Motor Museum:** Extensively revamped in 2016, this is the largest of its kind in the region and a lot of fun for groups looking for an offbeat day out. There are more



• Bastejkalns Park is on the eastern edge of Riga's old town.

than 100 vehicles on site. One of the newest additions is a Belgian Limousine dating back to 1912. The most intriguing collection of vehicles are those used by officials of the communist authorities between the 1930s and 1970s. Group tours really open up the site.

**Latvian National Opera:** Get in touch with the city's rich cultural scene by night at the Latvian National Opera. This grand vaulting columned edifice – fashioned in 1863 by the St Petersburg architect Ludwig Bohnstedt – is a dramatic venue to take groups to, for a feast of opera and ballet. ■

## Did you know?

1. Riga has one of the largest Russian populations outside of Russia itself. Around 40% of the city's population are Russian. Language can be a political hot potato in this part of the world.
2. It was once hailed as the 'Paris of the North' by none other than celebrated British writer Graham Greene. It's a city of grandiose architecture, with a large river running through and looks its best in springtime when new life emerges as the snows ease.
3. It's only half an hour away from the Baltic beach resort of Jurmala. This historic escape is awash with Soviet-era health sanatoriums alongside bright new spas. The main attraction, though, is the sweeping sands, which ripple along the Baltic Sea fringes for miles on end.

# Simon Calder

## on where to holiday in the 2020s...



• Saudi Arabia is predicting a huge rise in tourists by 2023.



The start of a new decade provides an opportunity to look ahead to how our horizons will widen. These are my highlights in the Travel Twenties:

### East Sussex - 2020

Rye Harbour Discovery Centre opens this year, in the fascinating corner of England where Sussex melts into Kent. The low-impact visitor centre will boost appreciation and understanding of the rich natural habitat and provide a great addition to group trips to the wild and wonderful Romney Marsh.

### Firth of Forth - 2021

Don't tell the coach driver, but at the end of next year Scotland should be hosting a transport revolution. A fleet of Europe's first full-sized self-driving buses will shuttle between Edinburgh Park and the ancient Kingdom of Fife. The 14-mile journey crosses the Forth Road Bridge. But do tell your driver there should be good coach parking at either end of the route.



## Birmingham - 2022

The 22nd Commonwealth Games last only a dozen days (27th July to 7th August). Yet with venues stretching from Cannock Chase to Royal Leamington Spa (home for Lawn Bowls!), the festival of sport will help refresh interest in the heart of England for group tours.

## Jeddah - 2023

And now for something completely different. Group travel to Saudi Arabia has, until now, been all about religious pilgrimages. But a dramatic change for the 20s is the easy availability of e-visas as this vast country opens up. Where to start? Jeddah, on the Red Sea coast, a lively port city with an ancient heart. By 2023 it should host the world's tallest building, the Jeddah Tower, which is expected to stand at least one kilometre high.

**From top to bottom: Birmingham's Bullring shopping centre could get busier; celebrate 100 years since the world's first motorway in Italy; experience Iceland.**

## Italy - 2024

The year's travel centenary celebrates the opening of the world's first motorway. A young engineer named Piero Puricelli came up with the revolutionary idea of a road exclusively for motor vehicles, without obstructions or sharp bends. The very first was the autostrada from Milan to the lakeside town of Varese – classic group tour country.

## Iceland - 2025

UN statisticians predict that the world's population will reach 8 billion in 2025, which makes it a great year to get far from the madding crowd. Handily, Europe's least-dense country (numerically speaking) is easy for groups to reach from Britain – and Reykjavik's airport expansion is due to be completed by then, allowing visitors to experience wide open spaces from the moment they arrive. →





Photo credit: Tom Perkins.



- See the total eclipse of the decade in Gijon, Spain, in 2026. Left: Bletchley Park will be served by the new east-west railway line.

## Spain - 2026

I know where I'll be on the evening of 12th August 2026: Gijon, on Spain's lovely north coast. The most spectacular total eclipse of the decade will sweep southeast from Greenland and Iceland before arriving in Spain – and this lively port city is in the centre of the stripe of darkness. Start planning your group trip now!

## Buckinghamshire - 2027

One trend I foresee in group travel is for a welcome return to using trains. And in 2027 the two great British university cities of Cambridge and Oxford should be reconnected by train. 60 years after the old east-west railway line was ripped up, they'll be barely an hour apart. The line will also serve two very different tourist attractions: Bletchley Park, the home of World War Two codebreakers, and Bicester Shopping Village.

## Denmark - 2028

The Danes are great at connecting their complicated country, and 2028 marks the expected completion date of the Fehmarn Belt Fixed Link – a submerged road and rail tunnel that will be the longest in the world. It will make access to the tranquil and historic island of Zealand much faster and more comfortable than the existing ferry.

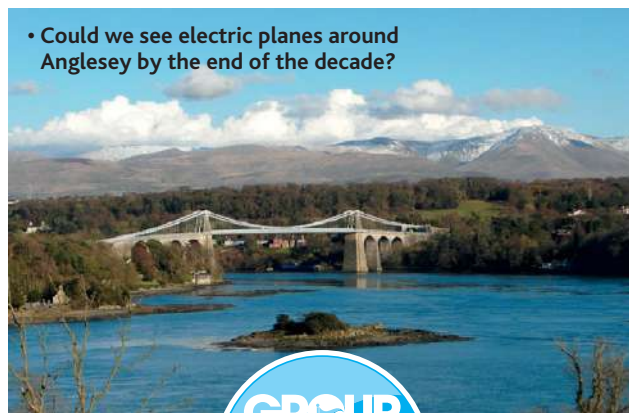
## Henley - 2029

The Thames Valley in midsummer is always a joy, and on 10th June 2029 visitors to one of the lovelier waterside towns can celebrate the centenary of the first Boat Race between Oxford and Cambridge (only later did it move downstream towards London). Expect celebratory events all year at the town's excellent River & Rowing Museum.

## Wales - 2030

The start of the Thirties is when many designers of electric aircraft expect to be fully airborne with proper passenger planes – and, with costs falling and environmental impacts easing, I predict the return of joy flights. The obvious territory is Wales, where Cardiff airport is quiet enough to allow group trips to see the spectacular scenery from the air – and perhaps even touch down at RAF Valley on the island of Anglesey. Electric dreams? A reality, I hope. ■

- Could we see electric planes around Anglesey by the end of the decade?



## Join Simon at the Group Leisure & Travel Show this October...

Simon Calder is the first speaker confirmed for the Seminar Theatre at the exhibition on **8th October, 2020 at the Marshall Arena in Milton Keynes.**

Register to attend for free at:

[groupleisureshow.com/register](http://groupleisureshow.com/register)



# Museums & Galleries: havens of history

• Above: A warrior helmet and rare headdress are among the discoveries on display at the *Mystery Warrior* exhibition.

From archaeology and shipwreck discoveries to lost paintings and fashion heritage, take a journey back in time with this year's museum & gallery highlights.

## Local and military history

Following its discovery 12 years ago in Bognor Regis, the public can now see archaeological findings of an Iron Age Warrior – arguably the most elaborately equipped fighter grave ever uncovered in England. The mysterious man's remains and burial possessions are on display in a major exhibition at **The Novium Museum** in Chichester. *Mystery Warrior: The North Bersted Man* runs from 25th January to 26th September; pre-booked groups of up to 30 members can attend for free, with the option of adding an expert talk to their visit.

**The Ruskin Museum**, described as a Cabinet of Curiosities, preserves the story of Coniston Village in the Lake District. Rocks dating back 500 million years and the Bluebird Wing – containing memorabilia and information about Donald Campbell's hydroplane – are among the displays, as well as Ruskin linen and weapons from the Stone Age.

It's an eclectic collection of local history, where groups can enjoy special rates and find plenty to see outside the building, too: the John Usher Miniature Village; relics from the old Coniston Railway; an example of a Lakeland Dry Stone Wall; and farming displays.





• The Manx Museum's latest gallery, Mann at War.  
Below: The ground floor galleries of The Devil's Porridge Museum focus on World War One.

If you're organising a trip to the Isle of Man, explore its 10,000-year history at **The Manx Museum**, presented through film, galleries and interactive displays. It's the perfect starting point on a journey around the island and its Viking and Celtic past. Be sure to visit the latest gallery, Mann at War, which explores the experiences of Manx men, women and children in conflict from 1750 to the present day and features carefully conserved uniforms, including Captain Quilliam's which was worn aboard *HMS Victory* at Trafalgar in 1805. Plus, the gift shop features an Island inspired selection of gifts made by contemporary Manx artisans.

Wartime stories can also be discovered in Easttriggs, Scotland at **The Devil's Porridge Museum**. The site commemorates the largest munitions factory in the world during World War One - HM Factory - where 12,000 young women mixed the 'devil's porridge' (a nickname for cordite, an explosive). Judith Hewitt, museum manager, told GLT magazine: "All their work came under the official secrets act but what these women achieved has been a well-kept secret for too long!"

Upstairs the story continues into World War Two with a look at the evacuation of children to Dumfries and Galloway, bombing raids, RAF bases and munitions works in the area. This year will see a new menu at the on-site café and a changing programme of exhibitions, talks and events.

## My top 3 museum trips:

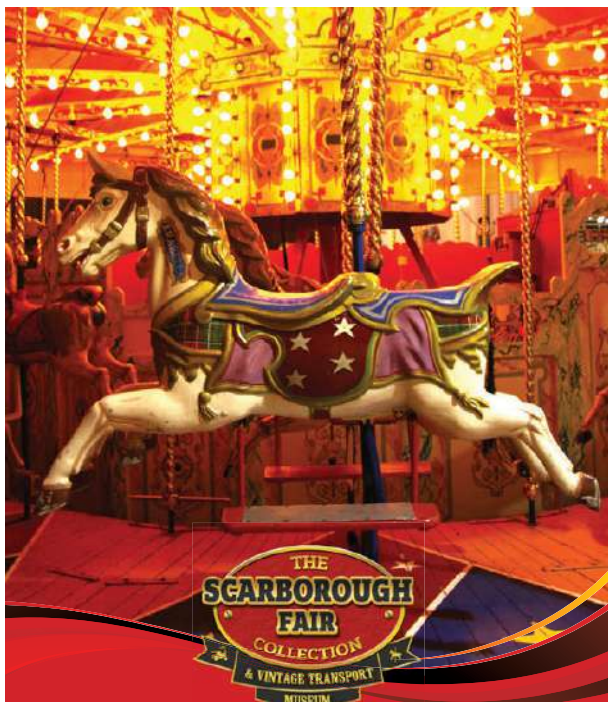
**1** Whilst on holiday in the Lake District we were really impressed with our visit to the **Lakeland Motor Museum**. Malcolm Campbell's Blue Bird is exhibited there too. Our Transport Trio Package also included a short steam train ride to Haverthwaite and a cruise to the other end of the lake.

**2** We had a good trip to the **Milestones Museum** in Basingstoke – I'd not considered it until one of our group suggested it. It was really interesting to walk around and see cobbled streets, shops, vehicles; in fact, all things vintage, including many household items from our youth.

**3** The **Tudor House** in Southampton is a small museum that offers group visits and can also include lunches. We combined our visit with a guided tour and heritage walk around the old city walls.

**John Lesser,**  
**Tyrell and Green Coffee group**





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Chandelier by Dale Chihuly, 2001. On loan from Chihuly Studio,  
Seattle, Washington, USA. Photo by James Medcraft  
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.





Photo credit: National Army Museum.

- The National Army Museum's Soldier Gallery theatre. Right: Artworks at Cyfarthfa Museum & Art Gallery.

## Try a quirky trip to...

**The Museum of Art Fakes** in Vienna, Austria. Described as a "criminal" art museum, the space is filled with fake paintings and stories from famous forgers. Visitors can also discover the bizarre distinctions between a 'copy', 'forgery' and an 'identical forgery'.



Local history can also be discovered at **Cyfarthfa Museum & Art Gallery**, based in peaceful park surroundings on the outskirts of the Brecon Beacons in Wales. Artefacts from Merthyr's history (2,000 years of it) are housed here, inside the majestic Cyfarthfa Castle's Regency rooms. Visitors can see photographs of the Crawshays, the castle's original owners, some of which date back to the mid-1850s. Special events take place throughout the year: June brings a seated talk about World War Two evacuees to the region and unique guided costume tours are offered on select dates in August. As one of the most popular free attractions in the country, groups can find plenty of interest across the site's 65 hectares.

Military stories are an integral part of local history – but for those interested in the bigger picture, a visit to the **National Army Museum** is ideal. Based in Chelsea, London, its five permanent galleries connect people with more than 400 years of British Army history and those who served. The free museum houses Napoleon Bonaparte's famous war horse and thousands of other artefacts. Its next major exhibition, *Foe to friend: the British Army in Germany since 1945*, opens in May.

Elsewhere in London, groups can tour the **Migration Museum** at its new location in Lewisham. The site is part of a project seeking to highlight the positive impact of migration on individuals and wider communities. A free exhibition and immersive experience, *Room to Breathe*, will run until September and brings to life the challenges faced by new arrivals in Britain, such as finding work and creating a home.

## Living history and the open air

Daytrippers looking for more interactive history can get involved in the theatrical experience of **Beamish: The Living Museum of the North**. Based in County Durham, the 300-acre space is designed to place you in the past. This year groups can attend a full programme of events (included in the price of yearly admission). See locomotives, fire engines and cars during the Great North Steam Fair in April; try on vintage clothes and enjoy live music at July's Festival of 50s; and attend the Agricultural Show in July, which aims to highlight the north east's heritage. With plenty planned it's a great year to visit the attraction, which is celebrating its 50th birthday.





Wales has its own rich history, including its coalmining contributions to the Industrial Revolution; this can be explored first-hand at the **Welsh Mining Experience**, located near Pontypridd (20 minutes from Cardiff) on the site of the former Lewis Merthyr Colliery. The venue hosts a unique Black Gold Experience Tour, led by ex-miner guides taking visitors through the site and underground. Your tour guide will share first-hand accounts of life as a miner in the famous Rhondda Valleys. The Welsh Mining Experience also hosts fascinating exhibitions as well as bespoke tour elements for groups, including possible performances by the Welsh Male Voice Choirs.

Another site that lives and breathes history is the **Chiltern Open Air Museum** in Buckinghamshire, offering visitors a look at traditional rural life through 37 historic buildings, a working farm and gardens. Re-enactments are part of the attraction's unique offering, with a Roman Gladiators show in May and an English Civil War experience in August.

## Try a quirky trip to...

**Teapot Island** in Maidstone, where groups can find the biggest collection of teapots in the country. More than 7,600 of them are on display with plenty of options to take home from the attraction's shop. Groups can pre-order their food at the on-site café, which serves afternoon tea and a variety of main meals. Don't forget to keep an eye out for the three-metre tall Wishing Well teapot!



Photo credit: Neal Street Productions.

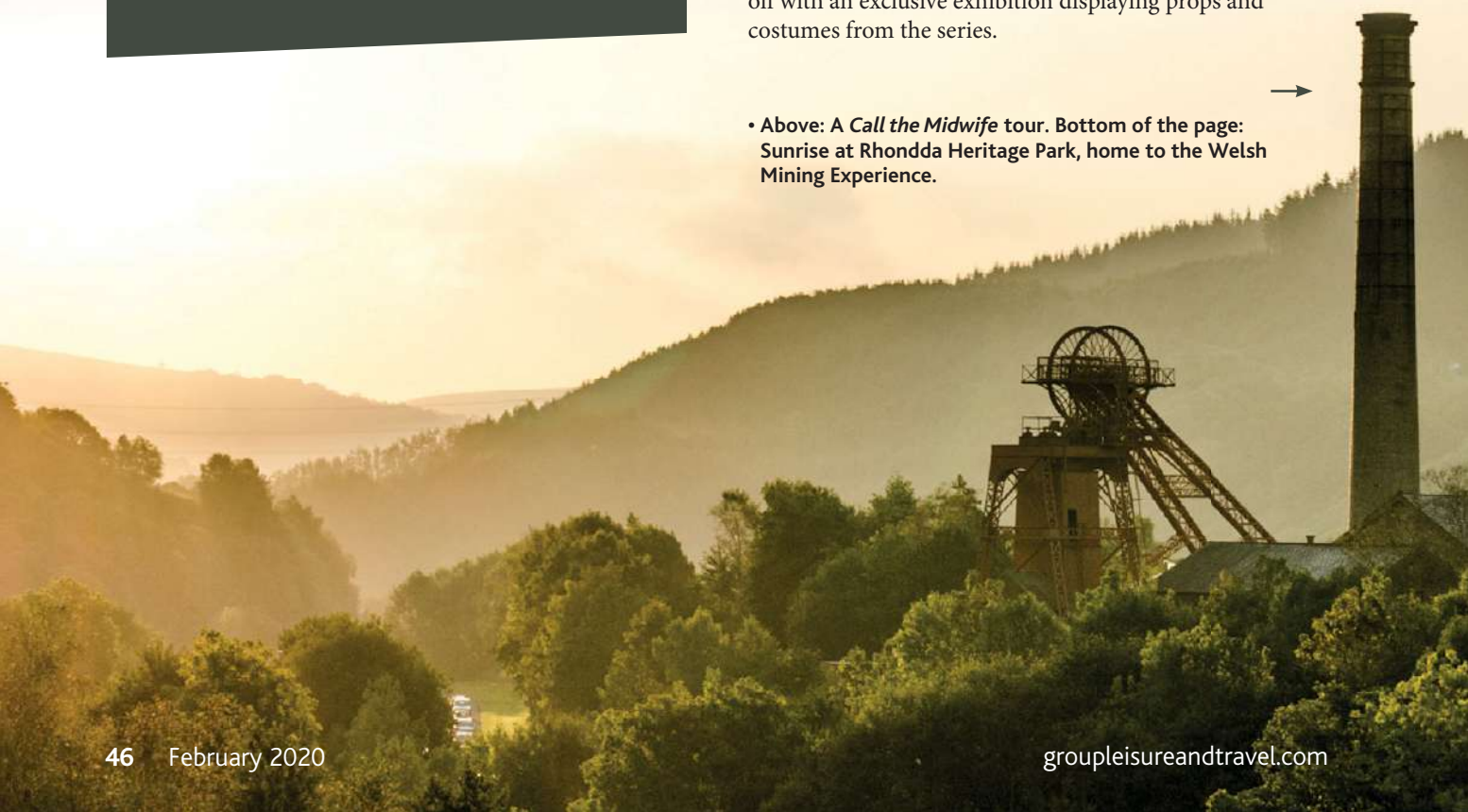
## Ships and seafaring

A trip down to Kent provides many exciting options to learn something new, whether it's about local town history, ancient Roman life or military heritage. Warships and the age of sail can be discovered at **The Historic Dockyard Chatham**. Some of the highlights are three historic ships, the Grade I listed rope factory and a Steam, Steel and Submarines gallery.

Official *Call the Midwife* tours can be booked from 4th March to 31st October, led by a costumed guide who will take groups of up to 25 people around the streets and buildings shown on screen. The experience is rounded off with an exclusive exhibition displaying props and costumes from the series.



• Above: A *Call the Midwife* tour. Bottom of the page: Sunrise at Rhondda Heritage Park, home to the Welsh Mining Experience.



# WINDERMERE JETTY

Museum of  
Boats, Steam and Stories

Blackwell  
The Arts  
& Crafts  
House

GROUPS:  
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**Just five minutes drive apart, these stunning attractions overlook Windermere in England's Lake District - a UNESCO World Heritage site.**

Windermere Jetty Museum of Boats, Steam and Stories is a spectacular new museum which tells the story of boats and boatbuilding on the lake.

This all-weather attraction reflects industry and engineering. See boat conservation in action, or take a heritage boat trip on Osprey - a beautiful 1902 steam launch.

Windermere Jetty's lakeshore café offers a varied menu of fresh local produce and enjoys stunning views of the lake and mountains.

[windermerejetty.org](http://windermerejetty.org)

Arts & Crafts gem Blackwell is the most beautiful historic house in the Lake District.

Discover original decorative features by leading Arts & Crafts designers. Sit and soak up the atmosphere in Blackwell's inglenooks and inviting window seats with views over Windermere and Conistown fells.

Explore this unique house, gardens and tea room which offers locally sourced Cumbrian produce.

[blackwell.org.uk](http://blackwell.org.uk)

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| Attraction                                          | 2020 Group admission price |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Blackwell The Arts & Crafts House                   | £7.50                      |
| Windermere Jetty Museum of Boats, Steam and Stories | £7.50                      |
| Both venues in one day                              | £12.50                     |



Groups can visit either Windermere Jetty or Blackwell, at a special group rate. Or make it a full Lake District heritage day and take advantage of the joint ticket price.

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# Cyfarthfa Park

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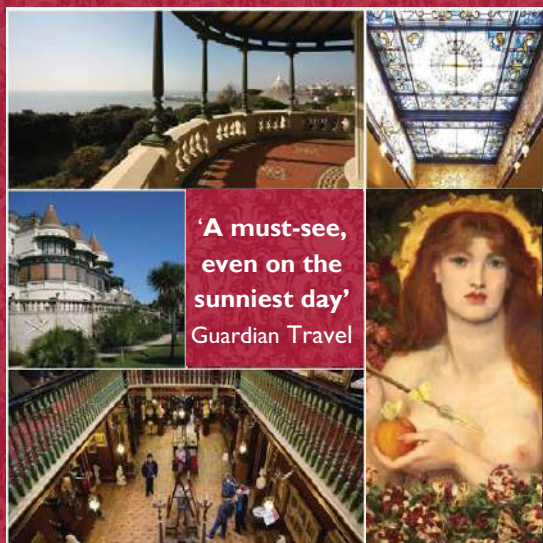


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Photo credit: Jonty Wilde

- Above: Touring the sculptures at Henry Moore Studios & Gardens. Below: Rare displays at the Shipwreck Treasure Museum.



If your group's heading to Cornwall, consider the harbour town of Charlestown on your destination list. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Charlestown has been a filming location for BBC's *Poldark* and the 2010 *Alice in Wonderland* film. Visitors might be less familiar with its **Shipwreck Treasure Museum**, one of Europe's largest collections of re-discovered finds, including the world's only intact coin barrel ever recovered from a shipwreck. Displays include artefacts from *The Mary Rose*, props from the iconic film *Titanic* and guided tours are provided with the museum's resident historian. Pre-booked groups of ten or more receive entry discounts and will find plenty of eateries across the coastal town.

Find Cumbria's newest museum with local stories and a collection of national significance: **Windermere Jetty**, where working steamers, a live conservation workshop and exhibitions reveal Windermere's boating heritage. In March, the museum will celebrate its first birthday with a restored 1930 motor launch, *Penelope*, which takes visitors around the lake; and relive Arthur Ransome's Lake District-inspired books with a summer of *Swallows and Amazons* events.



## Try a quirky trip to...

**The Tank Museum.** Through nine powerful exhibitions and over 300 vehicles, the Dorset museum holds one of the most historically significant collections of tanks in the world. Groups can explore on their own or take a guided tour with an expert. Fully wheelchair accessible, the museum caters for any group size. Opening in April is part one of *WW2 War Stories*, a complete retelling of World War Two from the perspective of the British tank crew.

## Movers and makers

Why not couple a trip to Windermere Jetty with **Blackwell, The Arts & Crafts House**? Based five minutes away from the lakeside museum, Blackwell is a beautifully designed Grade I listed building with artistic influences – craft tiles, mosaics, stained glass and plenty more creative details. Adding to this are exhibitions like *The Arts & Crafts of Politics*, which highlights socialist ideas at the heart of the 19th century arts and crafts movement.

In September, the new **Museum of Making** at Derby Silk Mill will open to the public. Standing on the site of the world's first factory, the museum aims to inspire the makers of tomorrow. Elsewhere in Derby, see world-renowned Enlightenment paintings by Joseph Wright at the **Museum and Art Gallery**, where visitors can also study items from around the globe in the *World Collections gallery: Objects of Love, Hope and Fear*.

Fans of sculpture will find plenty to admire at the **Henry Moore Institute** in Leeds, the city where British artist Henry Moore began his training. At this hub, visitors can take a tour of exhibitions on historical, modern and contemporary art from around the world, suitable for first-time gallery visitors as well as art enthusiasts.





## Try a quirky trip to...

**The Museum of the Home**, reopening this summer in London. Here you'll find a unique collection designed to bring to life the idea of home - from the 1600s to modern times. There'll be new displays and stories to create conversations on the theme.

The famous artist's legacy can also be found at Hertfordshire's **Henry Moore Studios & Gardens** in the spring and summer. Groups can see his family home or learn about his work through a tour of the gardens, boasting the impressive evidence of his craft. Itineraries are available which include a combination of attractions at the site, as is a new exhibition running until October, exploring the significance of the 'hand' in Moore's art.

Soak up some culture as well as some sun on a seaside trip to Bournemouth, home to the **Russell-Cotes galleries**. The four purpose-built spaces can be found in the house of East Cliff Hall, one of the last of its kind to be built in England. Groups can take a guided tour of the house and its international collection of paintings and



• Impressive interiors at the Russell-Cotes galleries.

sculptures or arrange a more bespoke tour that focuses on a group's special interest areas. Among this year's artistic exhibitions is *Beyond the Brotherhood* (21st February to 21st June), featuring 19th century masterpieces that have arguably inspired the likes of *Lord of the Rings*.

## Lost paintings and international art

Fans of the BBC programme *Britain's Lost Masterpieces* can see one of its discoveries themselves at the **Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery**. After cleaning and restoration, a damaged painting was identified as a key work by Jan Breughel the Elder, described as one of the most important artists in northern Europe in the 16th century - and the work is now on display. The venue offers two tours for pre-booked groups of 15 to 50 people, which can fit in around visits to other Birmingham attractions such as the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter and Sarehole Mill.

The jewel of Barnard Castle in County Durham is **The Bowes Museum**, where fine and decorative art can be admired. The diverse collections are located inside a Grade I listed French-style château, which visitors can either explore at their leisure or on a guided tour. Fashion, ceramics, paintings and decorative arts are just some of the site's galleries, not forgetting the daily Silver Swan automaton performance; and groups shouldn't miss the *Pre-Raphaelite Knights* exhibition, open until 3rd May, which brings to life medieval fantasy and myth. There's also acres of parkland and gardens to roam through, ideal for a sunny day visit.



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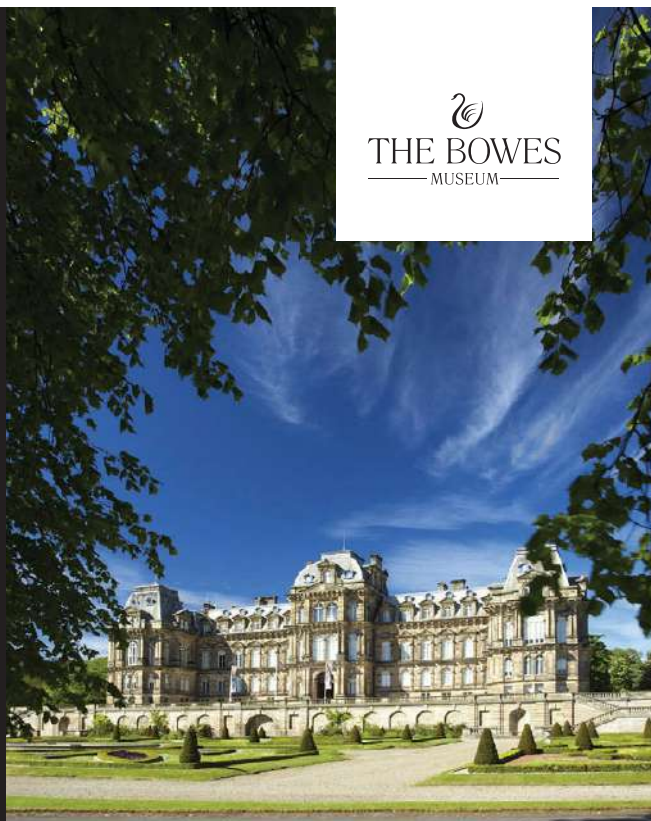
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Art of all forms can be admired at the **V&A** in London. This year's landmark exhibition is *Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser* (27th June to 10th January 2021), taking visitors on an immersive and theatrical journey down the rabbit hole through *Alice in Wonderland's* evolution over 158 years. For those intrigued by fashion and Japanese culture, why not see *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk* (29th February to 21st June), revealing the significance of kimonos from the 1660s to now (with beautiful examples on display). Better still, group discounts are available for all the museum's exhibitions.

Alternatively, take a different kind of journey to Japan at Liverpool's **World Museum** which will host *AI: More than Human* (10th July to 1st November). This unusual and interactive exhibition of special commissions and international projects will showcase the relationship between humans and technology: from ancient Japanese religion to modern leaps in computing.

Another unusual collection can be found at the **American Museum & Gardens** near Bath – it's the only museum of Americana outside of the United States. Open from 14th March, the space takes visitors through America's story. The Folk Art Gallery contains the artistic output of its people, created before the industrial boom, and the Period Rooms imagine settings from American homes of the past 300 years. The New American Garden, too, offers memorable sights – there's even a replica of George Washington's garden at Mount Vernon, which has recently been updated.



- Above: Mount Vernon is inspired by George Washington's 18th century garden design.
- Right: An exhibition exploring kimonos runs at the V&A until 21st June.

## Campus culture

There are group experiences aplenty at the **University of Birmingham**, home to multiple cultural attractions. The **Barber Institute of Fine Arts** houses major artworks from Monet and Van Gogh to Botticelli and Degas, and hosts performances in its Grade II listed concert hall. Five minutes away is the university's **Lapworth Museum of Geology**, where visitors can explore 3.5 billion years of history for free. Plus, visitors can stop for refreshments at the sites or enjoy a meal at one of the nearby campus outlets.



Photo credit: Alina Times.



## Figures through time

This year sees worldwide celebrations for the ‘Lady with the Lamp’s’ bicentenary and the London **Florence Nightingale Museum** will be the focus of activity. Nightingale was the founder of modern nursing and one of our greatest Victorians, still an inspiration to leaders today. See the actual lamp she carried which earned her the iconic nickname; discover how she fought against her parents’ wishes to become a nurse and find out how she campaigned for better healthcare. Plus, opening on 8th March is a new exhibition, *Nightingale in 200 Objects, People and Places*, explaining what influenced her to become an icon.

Poetry lovers may know about William Wordsworth’s 250th birthday this year, an excellent excuse to visit the popular Lake District, where he lived and worked. Fans can stop at **Hawkshead Grammar School** between April and October, which houses its own museum containing 16th century artefacts relating to the ancient school that he attended.



Photo credit: Thomas Gilder.

• Hawkshead village is also home to St Michael & All Angels’ Church. Above: A tour at the Florence Nightingale Museum.

If Wordsworth isn’t your literary cup of tea, you can find plenty else at **The Story Museum** in Oxford, where exhibitions, workshops and performances share books from across the world. Unusual items include a rabbit doorstep once belonging to Richard Adams, author of *Watership Down*. Interestingly, the museum is undergoing a transformation and scheduled to reopen on 4th April, following a combination of national funding and fundraising efforts.

In the south, visitors can celebrate the lives of 100 female pioneers with Anita Corbin’s *100 First Women Portraits* at **Brighton Museum & Art Gallery**. The portrait photographer has spent more than four decades capturing images for this project, in the hope that “women who dream big will look at these pictures and see that they are not alone.” Suzi Quatro, Nicola Adams and Brigadier Sharon Nesmith are featured among many others; learn their stories at the free exhibition, open from 15th February to 7th June.

Key figures of a different kind can be discovered at the **National Justice Museum**, housed in Nottingham’s former County Gaol. This year, the museum is marking its 25th anniversary with a new ‘escapee’ tour and a sculptural installation, ‘Witness’, which will be a major new attraction from April 2020.

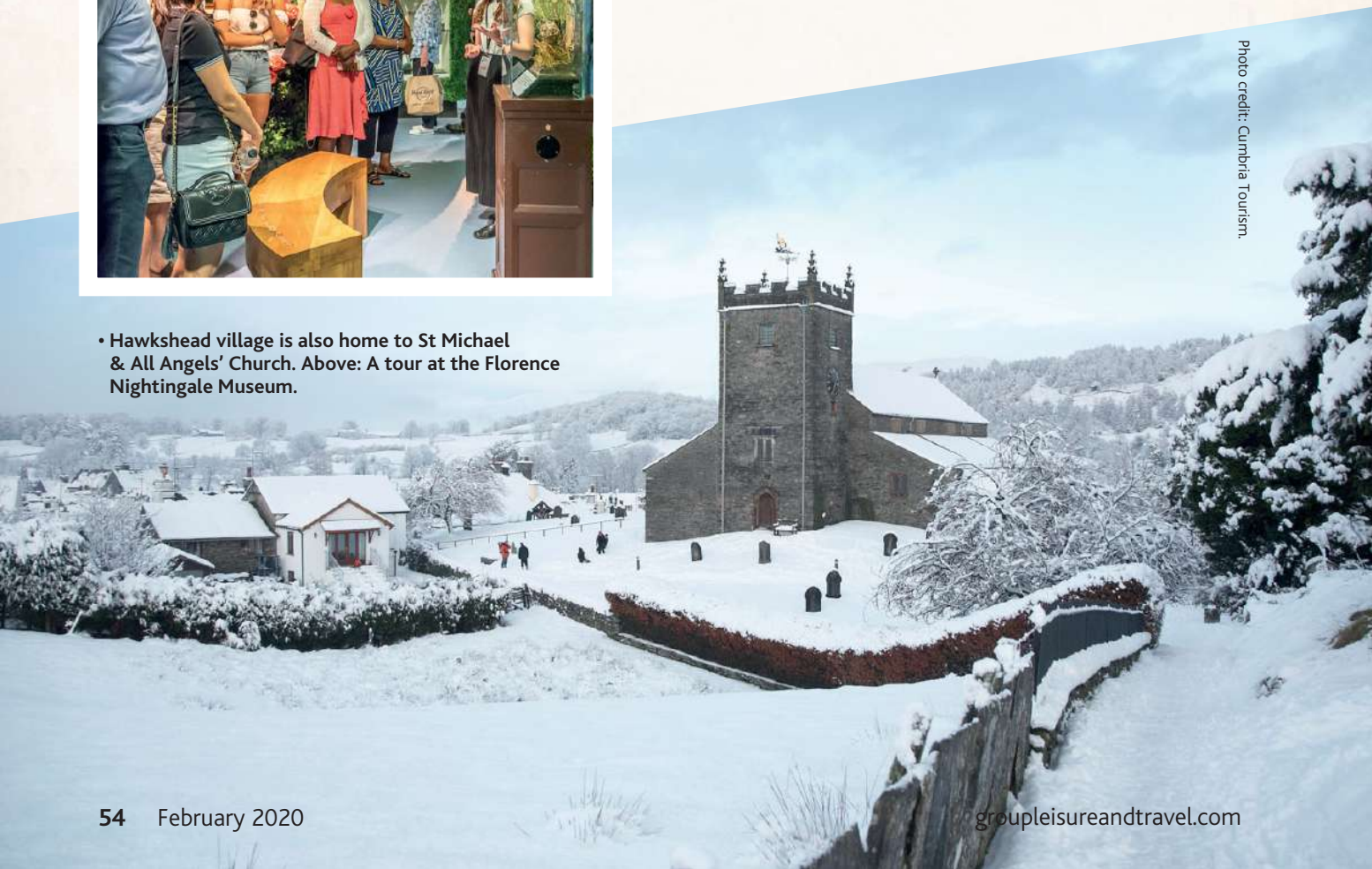


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- Coventry Transport Museum's vehicle collection contains iconic historical cars.



## We recently visited...

...the **Saatchi Gallery** in London for the Tutankhamun exhibition. It's a great location in the Kings Road and near Peter Jones which we visited for lunch although the gallery also has a café. The museum itself stands in grounds surrounded by gardens which are perfect for enjoying a rest or picnic in spring or summer. For those who are unable to travel to Egypt to see these items, it's worth going to see them while you can as the exhibition finishes in May.

**Marian Durbidge,**  
**Go Together Travel Club**

## Try a quirky trip to...

**The Museum of Timekeeping**, where visitors are transported through time to discover the history of Horology (that's watch and clock making to me and you). Originally the collection of the British Horological Institute, there are over 500 working examples on display set in the building and grounds at Upton Hall, Nottinghamshire. New for 2020 comes the redesigned watch exhibition and hands-on exhibits.



## In the air and on the road

The word artefact takes on a whole new meaning at the **Scarborough Fair Collection and Vintage Transport Museum**, housing one of the most impressive collections of vintage cars, motorbikes and steam engines – as well as a few more surprises, such as weekly tea dances on Wednesdays and Thursdays and electronic organ concerts throughout the year.

For specifically British vehicles, consider a look around the **Coventry Transport Museum's** 14 fully accessible galleries, home to some of the fastest vehicles in the world and many of the most innovative creations of the last 200 years. There's also a significant collection of pioneering bicycles. For adventure seekers, there are three 3D simulator rides and the museum hosts touring exhibitions and a wide range of events from Breakfast Clubs to Family Saturdays. Handily, coach parties are offered free parking at the back of the museum as well as free guided tours.

Imagine taking to the skies at the **de Havilland Aircraft Museum** in Hertfordshire, the first aviation museum in Britain. It's currently undergoing a project that will add an entirely new hangar to the museum, where visitors will be able to examine historic aircraft designed by the de Havilland Company upon the museum's reopening on 16th February (entry on Tuesday to Sunday, and Bank Holidays). Over 30 airframes can be viewed up close, including the only original Mosquito prototype from World War Two. A two-hour tour is offered to groups, led by the curator who provides expert insight into the collection. →



A new café has recently opened at the **London Transport Museum**, featuring an all-day menu of British classics. The big news at the museum however, is the expansion of its Hidden London programme, taking groups through disused Tube stations to learn more about their secrets, and how some spaces were used as war-time shelters and top-secret hideaways. Back at the museum, visitors can see many of these stories recreated in a special associated exhibition, which includes recreated underground locations and rare photos from the network's past.

## Science and space

You might ask the question of whether a science centre is the same as a science museum; yet the **National Space Centre's** six gallery spaces display important objects from upright rockets and a Soyuz spacecraft to a real moon rock. The family-friendly attraction in Leicester accepts group bookings of 15 or more people with a coach park and café on site. For something a little less science and a little more fiction, why not book tickets for a film screening in the UK's largest Planetarium? *Total Recall* is planned for June in honour of its 30th anniversary.

• Below: The National Space Centre's Planetarium.  
Inset: The Science Museum's new medicine galleries.



Photo credit: © Science Museum Group.

## Something new to celebrate the old

Here's a selection of key events worth seeing at some of the UK's major collections.

**Natural History Museum:** Magical and natural worlds combine at the *Fantastic Beasts™: The Wonder of Nature* exhibition, opening in May.

**National Museum of Scotland:** From May to October, visitors can study the richest collection of Viking objects ever uncovered in the UK at *The Galloway Hoard: Viking-age Treasure* exhibition.

**National Gallery:** Observe 500 years since the death of Raphael with a dedicated exhibition opening in October, exploring the artist's complete career.

One for the late 2020 list is the **Thackray Medical Museum** in Leeds, which is undergoing refurbishment ahead of its summer reopening. New and updated exhibitions, plus improved facilities are among the site's plans. Or, find something new at the notable **Science Museum** in London, where *Medicine: The Wellcome Galleries* is now open. This new space holds one of the most significant medical collections in the world; look out for the first MRI scanner, Alexander Fleming's penicillin mould and the cabinet of curiosities – which contains 1,000 medical objects. Groups can take an hour-long tour of the galleries coupled with lunch or an afternoon cream tea. ■

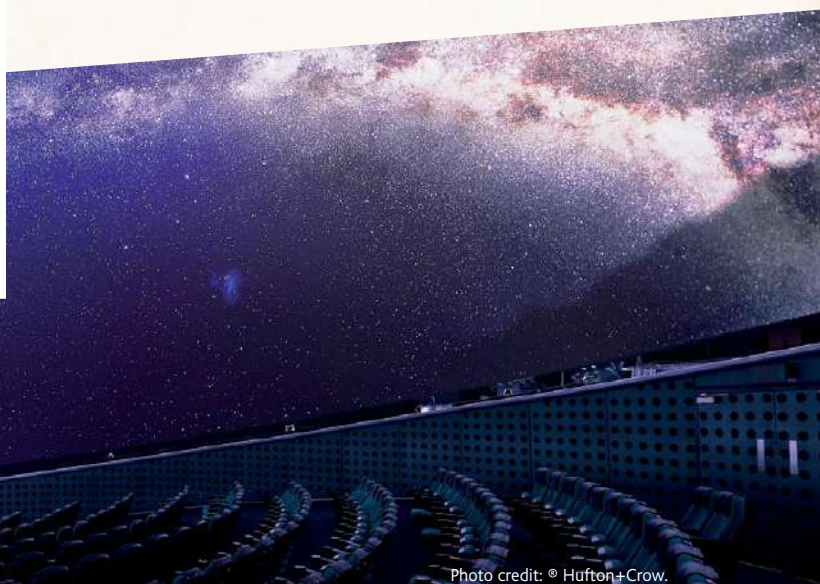
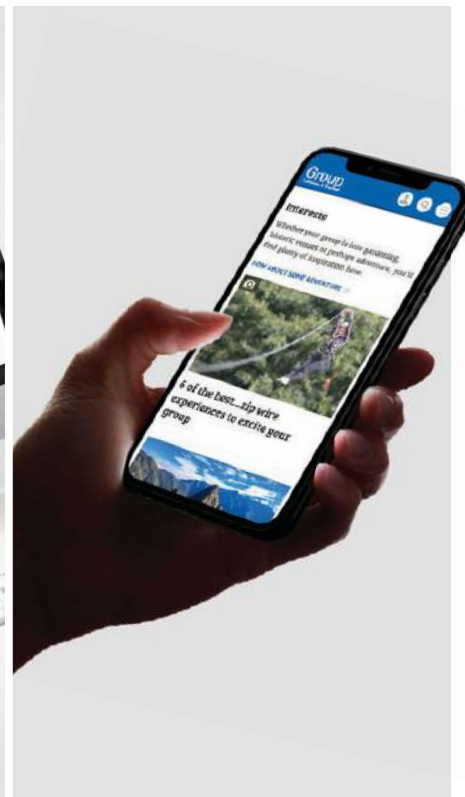


Photo credit: © Hutton+Crow.

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# As far as the *eye can see*

Giving you inspiration  
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spectacular views and scenery.



Photo credit: Visit Isle of Wight.

## Some of the best views... on the coast

### The Needles, Isle of Wight

What better way to see the iconic Needles and its lighthouse on the west coast of the island than on a chairlift ride. The gentle trip takes visitors down the chalky cliffside to the beach while overlooking the infamous red and white striped lighthouse. Fitter members of the group may want to jump off and take a slow walk back to the top to see the area's natural beauty while other members take the ride back.

### PierZip, Bournemouth

PierZip is the world's first pier-to-shore zip line with 250 metres of wire to whiz down. You'll begin your journey at the back of Bournemouth Pier, 25 metres above sea level. From there, it's a quick burst across the pier before soaring over the ocean on your way down to the beach, giving riders an adrenaline fuelled look at Bournemouth's beautiful sand from a different perspective. The dual zip allows you and one other member of your group to race to the shore.

### British Airways i360, Brighton

For superb views of the Sussex coastline, not many compare to the British Airways i360, a viewing pod which takes visitors up to 450 feet. The experience is made extra special with an on-board bar, meaning groups of up to 175 people can experience a glorious sunset with a glass of sparkling wine. Bad weather doesn't always indicate poor visibility either and typical flights take around 30 minutes to complete. As well as this, different food and drinks packages are available and special discounts apply to six people or more.

• The i360's Sonia recommends a flight on a winter's evening when the sun is setting.

### Our recommendation...

"My favourite time to fly is sunset on a winter's day. A mixture of purple, pink and blue skies sit above an angry sea that's bashing against the thought-provoking West Pier. I often think the view is worthy of a postcard photograph."

**Sonia Bouloux**, guest experience host at British Airways i360.





## Emirates Spinnaker Tower, Portsmouth

The Emirates Spinnaker Tower offers floor-to-ceiling panoramic windows with views of up to 23 miles. Whether you're 100 metres high on View Deck 1 and brave enough to walk across its glass floor, 105 metres high in The Clouds café enjoying a high tea, or admiring the flowers and the view at 110 metres in its open air Sky Garden, there's lots to see. Groups can make use of special discounts and a range of joint attraction tickets so you can visit the sites you see from above.

## Blackpool Tower

The home of ballroom offers unforgettable views across the Lancashire town's coastline, taking visitors 300 feet in the air and onto its Skywalk, to enjoy a slow stroll along its glass floor for an even more exciting experience. When you've had a chance to glance over the sights, groups of ten or more can take afternoon tea in its Ballroom, featuring a variety of cakes and sandwiches.

- The Emirates Spinnaker Tower has three viewing decks.



Photo credit: Stefan & Sara Venter

## Some of the best views... across London



Photo credit: High Level Photography Ltd.

## The View from The Shard

The View from The Shard, the highest viewing gallery in London, has launched a new initiative to entertain and educate guests visiting the attraction this year. To further enhance the experience, knowledgeable tour guides can be arranged to give talks to enlighten groups about a variety of topics relating to the iconic building and of course, the capital city. Using the greatest views of London The View from The Shard tour guides will bring the stories behind the city to life and are a great way for your group to get the most from their visit.



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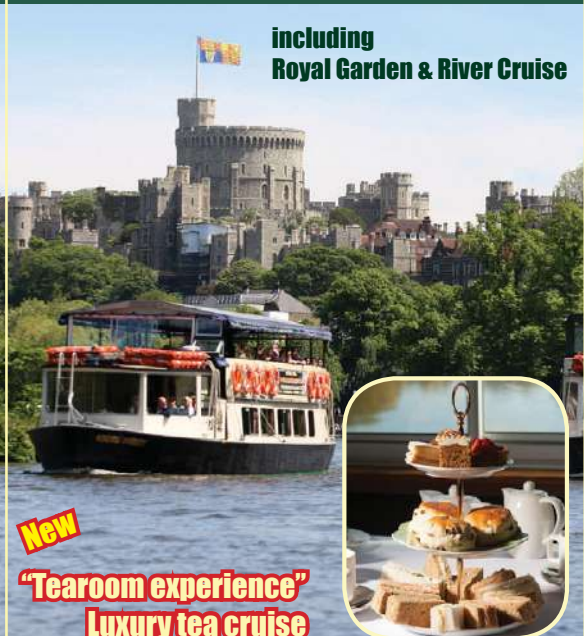
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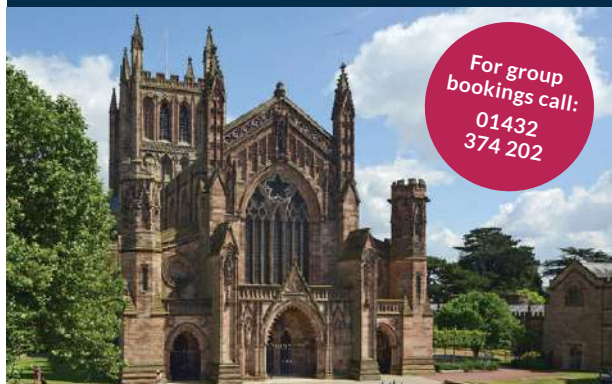
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## Up at The O2

For groups who are looking to see London's skyline, but with an extra shot of adrenaline and adventure, The O2 Millennium Dome can help with its 'skywalk' attraction – a 90-minute climb on 380 metres of fabric walkway from one side of the venue to the other. The attraction has a variety of climb options ranging from daytime slots to sunset climbs and more, with each one providing a unique look across the capital.



## The lastminute.com London Eye

The iconic viewing wheel has become a staple of the city skyline ever since its opening 20 years ago. It was only supposed to be temporary but has remained on the banks of the River Thames ever since, welcoming thousands of visitors year-round with multiple options to make the visit extra special for groups. Whether it's a private pod for a more exclusive ride, matched with its 4D cinema experience, the 2019 GLT Award winner for Best UK Attraction is still a must-do for groups.



## Tower Bridge

Standing as the gateway to London for more than 120 years, Tower Bridge is arguably one of the most recognisable bridges in the world. On a visit, not only can you venture to the top for views of the River Thames and over the walls into the Tower of London, but there is also a glass floor walkway to get a wonderful perspective of just how high up the bridge is. Another highlight for groups on a visit are the Victorian Engine rooms which showcase how historic engineering made it possible to lift the roadway to allow larger ships into the city.

## ArcelorMittal Orbit

The world's tallest sculpture became a memorable and now lasting symbol of the London 2012 Olympic Games. Groups can travel to the top to take in the sights of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and enjoy panoramic views into the stadium. What's more, it also has the longest tunnel slide in the world so visitors can slide their way to ground level for an even more exciting visit.



## Our recommendation

"From Buckingham Palace to the Houses of Parliament and St. Paul's Cathedral, you can see it all. We regularly hear from our guests that the view has to be seen at day and night, it's a truly magical moment when you see London start to light up."

**Sunny Jouhal**, general manager at The lastminute.com London Eye.





## Some of the best views... **at unique places**



• Waddesdon Manor is a beautiful sight in itself.

### **Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire**

The first glimpse of the house as you round the fountain is breathtaking – a glorious honey-coloured 300-foot Renaissance château. Possibly one of the best, but perhaps overlooked views, is from the White Drawing Room which looks out over the Parterre and the countryside beyond. Guided group tours of Waddesdon offer various opportunities to understand the collection and the Rothschild family that built it.

Photo credit: Chris Lacey.

### **Hereford Cathedral**

Hereford Cathedral welcomes thousands of tourists each year, offering beautiful examples of architecture, stained glass and art from all periods. These features can be further explored as part of a tour, led by an experienced guide will point out key things to look out for. With prior booking, more adventurous groups can climb 218 steps to the top of the cathedral's tower where visitors can enjoy some of the finest views in Herefordshire, and beyond.

### **Yorkshire Sculpture Park**

Celebrating 40 years of art without walls, the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in Wakefield showcases modern and contemporary pieces by some of the world's most exceptional artists, including Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth across 500 acres of 18th century parkland. Groups can enjoy tranquil walks around the Lower and Upper Lakes and surrounding woodland while discovering bridges, follies and a variety of historical features. The Restaurant at The Weston is a fantastic place to eat to enjoy panoramic views over the parkland too.

### **Lost Gardens of Heligan, Cornwall**

Full of winding pathways, beautifully laid around collections of camellias, rhododendrons and more, The Lost Gardens of Heligan are a sight to behold. Visitors can take a leisurely stroll across 200 acres of well-kept gardens, with hidden gems tucked away in its woodlands area. Three sculptures lay in its undergrowth – The Giant's Head, Mud Maid and Grey Lady. Guided garden tours can also be organised.



Photo credit: © Toby Strong.

• The Mud Maid is hidden in the garden's undergrowth.



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**Rupert Viney**, commercial executive at LEGOLAND® Windsor Resort.



## *Some of the best views...* **linked to history**

### Tintagel Castle, Cornwall

For the first time in more than 500 years, the divided halves of Tintagel Castle have been reunited thanks to a spectacular footbridge which opened last year. Visitors can enjoy the panoramic views as they tread the path of the historic route from the mainland onto the island, which was severed when the natural land bridge collapsed into the sea. On the rocky headland, visitors can wander through the remains of houses built between the fifth and seventh centuries and down onto the beach to admire the waterfall falling from the cliffs above.

### Kynren – An Epic Tale of England, County Durham

The UK's biggest outdoor live theatre event is returning with a host of amazing new experiences as part of a new daytime attraction. Complementing the Kynren evening performances, visitors can expect an action-packed afternoon including an electrifying Horse Stunt Show, live music on the lake, immersive attractions and all-new dining experiences to extend their visit. Visitors will literally step into history at the attraction, and not to mention its finale scene where hundreds of cast members gather with fireworks, lighting displays and more to bring an end to the historical spectacular. →



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## Cheddar Gorge & Caves, Somerset

Cheddar Gorge and Caves is a natural and ancient spectacle, set in both an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Visitors can climb 322 steps to the top of a 14-metre Lookout Tower and take in the wonderful scenery including Gough's Cave, nestled in the Gorge's valley. Guests can also enjoy a drive through the ravine taking in the beautiful sights or even experience a cliff-top walk with 360-degree views of the Mendip Hills.

## Buckfast Abbey, Devon

The historic Buckfast Abbey can be found in a beautiful wooded valley beside the river Dart in Devon, offering groups a look into the lives of Benedictine monks who live at the site. The working monastery boasts fine architecture and its colourful gardens come alive in the summer, providing sensational views across the grounds along its paved walkways. Groups can make use of special discounts, plus The Grange Restaurant is the best place to grab some tea and take in the views of the surrounding countryside.



## The Royal Liver Building 360, Liverpool

The most iconic building in the city welcomes groups on a tour all the way to the 15th floor to enjoy 360-degree views of Liverpool's skyline. As well as this, a digital projection show inside the clock tower will uncover why the building is so culturally significant to the city – using lights, sounds and digital effects to explore its past. En route to the summit, the tour guide will share anecdotes and historical stories before taking in the magnificent views across the home of The Beatles.

### *Our recommendation*

"The view from the 15th floor can tell a thousand stories, each guest taking their own special memory. Be sure to look out for both the city's football stadiums, and on a clear day, even Snowdon."

**Tom Brown**, presenter at the Royal Liver Building 360.



## Mountainous views

The Railway Touring Company travels across the world to some of the best attractions with amazing views. The provider's Swiss tours are particularly popular with shimmering lakes and soaring peaks, including Jungfrau and Eiger.



Photo credit: Switzerland Tourism.



## Some of the best views... **on the move**

- See the Thames like never before with French Brothers.



### French Brothers

With multiple options and routes to choose from, French Brothers offers a wonderful day on the River Thames, picking out some of the key sights in the region along a voyage. Highlights to look out for on some of its cruises include Chertsey Bridge, which can be seen on the walled gardens at Sunbury, Pharaoh's Island, a picturesque spot at Shepperton or Sunbury Lock with its hydraulically operated gates, built in 1925, giving passengers the chance to see boating history.

### Dudley Canal & Tunnel Trust

For a unique view into the West Midlands' waterways, the Dudley Canal & Tunnel Trust takes its guests into abandoned limestone mines and tunnels. The caverns have been left untouched since the industrial revolution, made of limestone around 428 million years old. It may not be the first place to spring to mind when you think of beautiful views, but the underground journey unearths a whole new world that's certainly worth seeing.

### Crich Tramway Village, Derbyshire

For a day of retro travel matched with untouched natural scenery, Crich Tramway Village can offer a route back in time. Vintage trams run along a period street, climbing a mile and a half track which provides breath-taking views of the surrounding countryside. Groups can experience the fascinating Woodland Walk & Sculpture Trail, which winds its way back to the village, or remain on the tram and be dropped off outside The Red Lion Pub and Tearooms, before visiting the fascinating exhibitions and workshop viewing gallery.

- Take in Crich Tramway Village's scenery.



### Seaton Tramway, Devon

Celebrating its 50th year in 2020, Seaton Tramway offers a fantastic day for all ages. Passengers can journey three miles, through two nature reserves along the beautiful Axe Valley and head inland to its Victorian station in Colyton. The Garden Room at Colyton Station is a great place to enjoy the Tramstop Café with a special groups' menu and cream teas to choose from. ■

### Our recommendation

"Estuarine birds can be watched probing for worms in the mud at close quarters on one side of the track, while animals such as deer and foxes sporadically appear in the neighbouring fields. There's always a chance of a rare or unusual bird species appearing at any moment."

**Steve Waite**, commercial director at Seaton Tramway.





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Sean Henry, *Seated Figure*, 2016. Courtesy the artist and The David Ross Foundation. Photo © Jentry Wilde

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## My Group and I



# Making Memories

Chris Behrendt, joint group leader of Milton Keynes U3A Outings Group along with Czesia Eales-Johnson, expands on the trips that everyone's still talking about and her advice for other organisers.

### Firstly what trips have proved especially popular this year?

The Tutankhamun exhibition in London sold really quickly – we booked it as soon as it came out last year. We're going to the Mini factory in Oxford next month too. We went a few years ago because I saw it advertised but a few of the group asked if we could go again. Some of the other trips we're looking at are: Frogmore Paper Mill, Arundel Castle and a Stratford river cruise combined with visiting the gin distillery. We tend to start looking in September/October where we're going to go the following year. We've also got a holiday to Somerset in June including free time in Bath, a trip on the West Somerset Railway as well as the Royal Mint Experience and St Fagan's National Museum of History.



### What's the trickiest part of organising the outings?

The first part is finding the places to go; we tend to pick up ideas in your magazine and other literature. The second is deciding as a committee what we can put in to please all our members. I know you can't please everybody all of the time, but we certainly aim to give as much choice as possible.

It's very important that we give people enough time in each place to see different things and explore. Getting the hotel right for the holidays is a big one too.

### What's the demographic of your group?

It's a real mixture of ages. The point of the U3A is that it's lifelong learning, it doesn't matter where you go. For example, we went to the Museum of Brands in London last year and wandering around there, people started talking about 'I used to have one of those' etc; it brings back memories. We also went to the American Museum & Gardens in Bath in December which was really interesting – everybody got something out of it.

### Is there anywhere else you've been that has surprised the group?

The JCB Factory in Staffordshire. It was absolutely fascinating and people still talk about it. The other one that was really interesting was the Triumph Motorcycle experience in Leicestershire; you don't realise what goes into making a motorbike. They're the type of trips that people will remember.



**“There's always lots of laughter and quite a lot of reminiscing for people on the trips which starts all kinds of conversations.”**

### What advice would you give to others who want to get into organising?

I'd say have a small committee with which you can sit down and talk about where you want to go, then plan each step of what you need to do. We always make sure that we've got mobile numbers for everyone going on the trip as well as an emergency contact number. It's about making sure the ducks are all in a row. I'd also say check the access statements for venues to see what type of footwear is required and whether large bags/rucksacks are allowed – this could help people decide if the outing is suitable for them.



### How did you become involved as an organiser?

I joined the U3A in 2011 but didn't start helping out until 2012. I went along to one of the travel exhibitions and we began getting more information about where we could go. I made some big A3 flipcharts with lists of places we could go and asked people to choose where they wanted to visit. The list has grown from there. We've been to a lot of places but there's an awful lot of places still on the list!

### What do you like about organising group trips?

Seeing the pleasure that people get out of it. A lot of people don't like driving a long way so they get on the coach, they're driven there and then they can do what they want at the place they're going to. They come home and they've got something to talk about with other people. More and more people are on their own so it's the social element of it. Also, I get to see an awful lot of places too which is great. ■



### Chris' group at a glance...

**Group name:** Milton Keynes U3A – Outings Group  
**No. of members:** More than 400  
**Time organising:** 8 years



# Discovering new group outings

The annual Excursions exhibition, organised by Tourism South East, took place at London's Alexandra Palace on Saturday 25th January.

Exhibitors including hotels, cruise lines and historic venues, came together for the annual Excursions event to inspire people who organise group trips and holidays. Visitors were greeted to a performance from the *Spitfire Sisters*, a trio of singers, adding a retro twist to modern hits as well as classics from the past.

There were presentations throughout the day including a talk about the new Great West Way touring route between London and Bristol as well as a presentation about Bowood House & Gardens in Wiltshire and another about why groups should visit Longleat and Cheddar Gorge.

Attractions, tour operators and cruise lines were showcasing what's new for groups in 2020 and beyond with some very special anniversaries being marked this year including Salisbury Cathedral which is celebrating its 800th anniversary. The cathedral's stonemasons performed live demonstrations throughout the day, carving intricate patterns into stone for visitors to admire.



• The team from Halstead showed off their flowery hats to promote the award-winning town.

The award-winning floral town of Halstead on the border of Essex and Sussex lived up to its name with staff wearing colourful hats to promote the area's beauty. They were sharing ideas with visitors including a trip to St Andrew's Church which hosts an annual flower festival. Experience Oxfordshire promoted its official Oxford Walking Tours and were joined by attractions including Blenheim Palace,

the Oxford Artisan Distillery and MacDonald's The Randolph and Bear Hotels. Annie MacDonald at Experience Oxfordshire said: "It was a great chance to promote our walking tours and also a lovely opportunity to meet up with our partner businesses."

Louis the owl welcomed groups to Leeds Castle's stand, offering visitors the chance to get a photo before finding out about the Kent fort's group offerings for 2020. This year group organisers can choose from a variety of events such as The Golden Joust in May – a huge historic jousting tournament and its Christmas season, where visitors can enjoy a traditional three-course lunch before a complimentary talk from one of the castle's expert guides.

The team from Shuttleworth in Bedfordshire were available to discuss group visits to see its collection of historic planes, the Swiss Garden and Shuttleworth House all under one ticket. Speaking about the Shuttleworth offer group organiser Olivia Goodfellow from the Enfield Over 50s Forum, said: "I have taken a group to Shuttleworth's three attractions before but finding out you can now combine them into one trip is brilliant. It's nice to learn something new about an old destination."

Group organisers visited the Group Leisure & Travel stand to catch up with the team about what's coming up in the magazine this year as well as information about the 2020 Group Leisure & Travel Awards initiative and the Group Leisure & Travel Show held in October.



The team from Chawton House in Hampshire revealed details of their 2020 exhibition: *Man up!* a celebration of 18th and 19th century women who dared to step outside of traditional female roles. Chelmer Cruises, which explores Essex's fabulous waterways, promoted its different boat rides on offer, including the chance to hire out an entire vessel with a qualified skipper and crew for a more exclusive ride. Manager David Hewitt said: "It's nice to meet people with similar ideas to us."

Mandy Keating from Travelsphere commented: "We have had the opportunity to talk about our brands Travelsphere and Just You and how we're hoping to change people's lives through travel."

Group organiser Maureen Cawte, from The Girls' Brigade Solent District, added: "I've picked up one or two good ideas by visiting the exhibition. I've come on my own today, but everyone has been very friendly which is what group travel is all about."

Fran Downton, CEO of Tourism South East, which organised the show, said: "We were really pleased to have once again welcomed such a high quality of exhibitors, GTOs and coach and tour operators to the show. We know the bookings, research and conversations that took place will facilitate future business in the group travel market." ■

[www.excursionsshow.com](http://www.excursionsshow.com)

- Above: Posing with Louis the owl from Leeds Castle. Right: The Salisbury Cathedral stonemasons shared a live demonstration. Below: The GLT team at their stand.



# Grumpy group organiser



A cracking column this month, with stories that will make your hair curl.

## Plane show not for the faint hearted

A new immersive theatre performance lets the audience experience a plane crash. I know, I'm rushing to find out if they do group rates too. Unfortunately, the current run finishes at the end of March with tickets being snapped up for locations in Nottingham and London. It's all from DARKFIELD, which describes itself as a multi-sensory sonic theme park. So if you fancy crashing in a Boeing 707 and only have half an hour to spare, this is for you. Or perhaps you would prefer 'Séance' or 'Coma' instead? Keep an eye on the [darkfield.org](http://darkfield.org) website for future dates. I am sure there is a reason why someone would want to go to something like this. I cannot think of any off the top of my head right now, but look out for next month's column by which time I'm sure to have the answer.



## Pontins says no entry for kids

Always wanted to organise a group holiday to Pontins but been put off by noisy kids? Haven't we all? Fear not, because the Pakefield site at Lowerstoft in Suffolk is now off-limit for those with little ones. It's been welcoming families since 1958 but now even the children's playground is being altered to cater for older guests. The mind boggles. I admit I would feel a little conscious doing the Hokey Cokey without my grandchildren beside me, but you only live once. Luckily, Pontins does have other seaside locations that still serve up the type of traditional fun it is famed for. Now, where's my blue coat?



## Butt-naked Britain

Naturist holidays are going to be big in 2020 according to a survey suggesting that one in four Brits would go on a naturist holiday. Yes, that's right: butt-naked Britain here we come. The enthusiasm is even bigger in Germany, Spain and France with tanning evenly the main reason people were willing to bare all. No-one likes white bits, after all. Maybe the findings reveal more about the customers of FarawayFurniture.com which is a garden furniture website responsible for the study. I can only assume their chairs are comfortable should you be hanging loose. Who's for a game of rounders on the beach?



The views expressed in this column are not necessarily the views of the publisher.

# WINDSOR CASTLE



## ROYAL WEDDINGS AT WINDSOR

March – October 2020

Windsor Castle is the home of royal weddings. From Henry I in 1121 to Prince Harry in 2018, the Castle has been part of a 900-year tradition of celebrating royal marriages.

Groups can enjoy a special talk about how the ceremonies and magnificent celebrations have evolved over the centuries. Groups will then go on a self-guided tour of the Castle with a chance to see St George's Chapel, where Prince Harry married Ms Meghan Markle, and Princess Eugenie married Mr Jack Brooksbank in 2018.

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