

The Cotswolds

From grand stately homes to beautiful villages, discover the best the Cotswolds has to offer with our expert tips, local secrets and reader recommendations.

Stretching across six counties in the heart of England, the gently rolling countryside of the Cotswolds offers visitors fascinating history, golden-stone villages, glorious gardens and an array of unusual attractions. It's also heaven for foodies, with exciting independent producers and chefs popping up in every village. But it's the views that people come for – the impossibly pretty, bucolic and quintessentially English scenes that have remained unchanged for centuries.

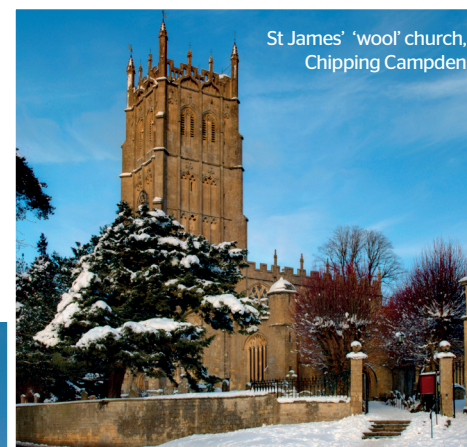
Here we share your recommendations for great places to visit, along with expert suggestions and a look at what's new. Locations are marked on the map below.

OUR RESEARCH

Recommendations are based on Which? members' suggestions via Which? Local (www.which.co.uk/local), our Helpdesk and Which? magazine's Help Wanted page. In addition, Cornwall's tourist boards updated us on what's new. We also asked the specialists at Which? Gardening and The Good Food Guide, the UK's bestselling restaurant guide, for expert tips.

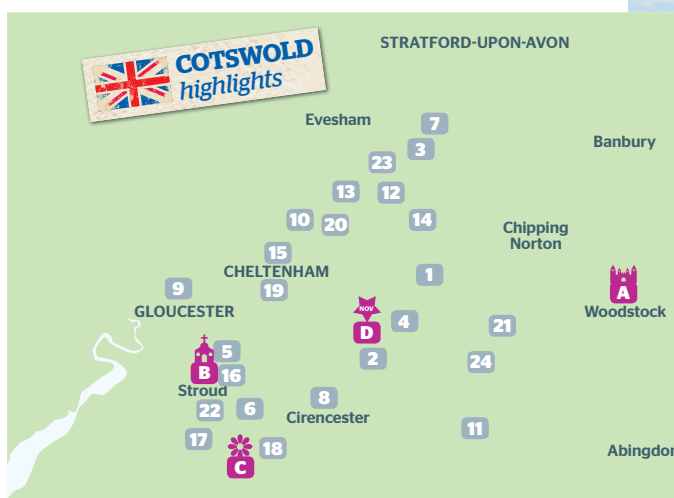


The impressive Rococo gardens, Painswick



St James' 'wool' church, Chipping Campden

The River Windrush cutting gently through Bourton-on-the-Water



Places of interest

The Cotswolds is home to some of England's most attractive towns and villages, and plenty of members recommended Bourton-on-the-Water **1**. The River Windrush ambles through the village, and is Bourton's centrepiece. Five famous stone bridges ford the river offering picturesque views of the village's honey-coloured architecture.

There are plenty of attractions in Bourton, but Birdland Park and Gardens, with over 500 types of birds from all over the world is recommended by members.

There's a clutch of other pretty villages within easy reach. Don't

miss Upper and Lower Slaughter **2** with their clusters of cottages on the banks of the River Eye. Both are idyllically tranquil.

Chipping Campden **3** is another must-see village in the Cotswolds, especially for history lovers. As the centre of the medieval wool trade, it has an impressive 'wool' church (built primarily from the proceeds of the trade), a medieval market hall and an attractive high street. The Court Barn Museum celebrates the Arts and Crafts movement in the Cotswolds.

Visit the village of Northleach for Keith Harding's World of

Mechanical Music **4** – an eccentric and ever-changing collection of self-playing mechanical instruments dating back to the 1700s. The guided tour is hosted enthusiastically by the team of craftsmen who restore the curious instruments.

Painswick **5**, dubbed the 'Queen of the Cotswolds', is perched on the edge of a hillside overlooking the Slad Valley. St Mary's church stands at the centre of the village and its svelte spire bears cannonball scars from the Civil War. But Painswick's big draw is the flamboyant Rococo Garden –

especially in February and March when the snowdrops are out.

Also recommended is the walk up to Painswick Beacon, the site of an Iron Age fort, which offers unrivalled views across the Severn Vale to the Forest of Dean and beyond. Visit the Painswick tourist office for details.

Finally Minchinhampton **6** is a village of real character and worth a visit, especially if you also take in Minchinhampton Common, a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Here you will find 600 acres of wildflower meadow, loved by walkers and wildlife watchers alike.

What's new?

Hidcote Manor Gardens **7** are a highlight at any time, memorable for amazing Arts and Crafts-inspired designs. In November and December, the new Enchanted Garden exhibition allows you to see the gardens at dark, with a guided tour and spectacular light display.



The Arts and Crafts-inspired Hidcote Manor Gardens



The expert view Anne Bartlett

Blue Badge Guide Anne Bartlett has lived and worked in the Cotswolds most of her life, and has many years' experience showing holidaymakers its highlights. She runs www.tourandexplore.com specialising in carefully planned local itineraries.

Favourite historic house **A**

I love the grandeur and history of Blenheim Palace in Woodstock. It was a gift to the 1st Duke of Marlborough from Queen Anne and a grateful nation for winning a decisive battle in Bavaria in 1704. There is an exhibition about Winston Churchill, who was born here, and magnificent state rooms with furnishings collected by the Duke of Marlborough during his campaigns. Outside there are award-winning gardens. It gets very busy, so get there as soon as it opens in the morning. As you leave, get your ticket stamped to enable you to revisit free for the rest of the season.

Favourite historic church **B**

I enjoy visiting All Saints Church, Selsley, because of the craftsmanship in the furniture and fittings, and especially the stained-glass windows. It was commissioned during the mid-19th century by Samuel Marling, a wealthy cloth mill owner, philanthropist and MP. Selsley was the last Cotswold 'wool' church to be built, standing proudly on the hillside overlooking the Stroud Valley where so much cloth was produced. Inside, the stained-glass windows are by William Morris and his associates.

Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Philip Webb and Ford Madox Brown.

Favourite garden **C**

There are so many lovely gardens to visit in the Cotswolds, however a visit to Highgrove to admire the private gardens created by HRH the Prince of Wales is a very special treat. It's one of the most creatively inspired gardens of today and the fascinating guided tour lasts nearly two hours. Although the house isn't open to the public, the tour includes some of the history of the 18th-century building. The garden visit must be prebooked well in advance.

Best November attraction **D**

The ruins of Chedworth Roman Villa are especially interesting, as it was one of the grandest Romano-British villas in the country during the 4th century AD. It was lost for centuries, but then an accidental discovery of tiles in a field during Victorian times led to the site being excavated. The extensive ruins, with their impressive mosaics, underfloor heating and bath houses were preserved, and artefacts were collected and are displayed in the on-site museum.



The formal grandeur of Blenheim Palace, the birthplace of Winston Churchill

Sudeley Castle - once home to Catherine Parr



All Saints Church set in the hills, Selsley



The intricate cloisters of Gloucester Cathedral

History and culture

While parts of the Cotswolds may appear untouched, the region has been inhabited for centuries. A good place to start exploring the area's rich history is Cirencester's Corinium Museum **8** covering the town's Celtic, Roman and Saxon heritage. It's particularly popular with children, who can dress as Roman soldiers and play Roman games.

Another historic site recommended by members is Gloucester Cathedral **9**, with its Norman masonry in the nave, the tomb of Edward II and the beautiful cloisters (used to represent the corridors of Hogwarts in Harry Potter films). The Cotswolds is packed full of delightful stately and historic homes. Sudeley Castle **10** near Winchcombe, for example, was

once home to Catherine Parr, Henry VIII's last wife, and the building oozes romance and intrigue. The gardens are currently being redesigned. Kelmscott Manor **11** is a 17th-century Cotswold stone farmhouse and was once the country home of William Morris – poet, craftsman, socialist and founder of the Arts and Crafts movement.

It features a fascinating collection of handmade furniture, furnishings and artwork by Morris and his friends. The house and gardens are open to the public two days a week, and tickets are limited. Plenty of other historic houses are worth a visit. Snowhill Manor **12** is packed to the rafters with the eccentric collection of Charles Paget

Wade – from Samurai armour to Penny Farthings; and Stanway House **13** has the tallest gravity-fed fountain in the world. If you visit in June or July, the Longborough Festival Opera **14** comes highly recommended for its intimate feel and green surroundings. The 500-seater opera house is itself a converted barn.

What's new?

Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum **15** reopened on 5 October after a £6m redevelopment. There are four new floors housing displays on local history and archaeology, its fine art collection and a world-renowned Arts and Crafts collection. Free admission.

Food and drink

The Cotswolds is renowned for its fantastic local produce, from its famous Gloucester cheese, to Bibury trout and organic Old Spot pork. You'll find all of the region's delicious food and drink at farmers' markets across the region. One of the biggest, not just in the Cotswolds but in the whole of the UK, is the award-winning Stroud Farmers' Market **16**, every Saturday from 9am-2pm. Farm shops and delis are another great place to pick up supplies for self-catering or a picnic. If you're visiting Nailsworth, don't miss William's Fish Market and Food Hall **17**.

More than a hundred types of cheeses are produced in the Cotswolds, many of them by tiny artisan producers. A good place to sample local cheese is the award-winning House of Cheese **18** in Tetbury – a local institution. Its single and double-Gloucester cheeses are made less than 10 miles from the shop. The region's fresh bounty has also made its way onto the menus of restaurants across the Cotswolds. For a real treat, visit Le Champignon Sauvage **19** in Cheltenham. This Cotswolds favourite has been going for 25 years, serving up modern

French cooking, but celebrating regional ingredients, such as Winchcombe venison. There's also no shortage of pubs with exceptional menus in the Cotswolds. Try the newly revamped Lion Inn **20** in Winchcombe, popular with locals tourists and Cotswolds Way walkers who all flock here for reliable modern British food. Other great foodie finds include the wisteria-clad Swan Inn in Swinbrook **21**, a 16th-century pub on the banks of the river Windrush. And The Bear of Rodborough **22**, praised for its wine tastings as well as its restaurant. Cotswold towns and villages are teeming with tea rooms, but one of the most highly recommended is Tisanes Tea Room in Broadway **23**, offering a traditional teatime experience in an attractive 17th-century Cotswolds stone building.

What's new?

The Five Ails **24** country pub and restaurant in the village of Filkins (near Burford), which opened its doors in late 2012, has been causing quite a stir with its confident, classy cooking. Expect British classics pepped up with Mediterranean flourishes.



A butcher at Stroud Farmer's Market



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