



Jane Austen's BATH

Chris Morley walks in the gentle author's footsteps



The River Avon and (inset) character guides from the Jane Austen Centre

This year is the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth (16 December), sparking countrywide celebrations. In Bath, where Jane lived for five years, the line-up of events includes an Austen Festival and Regency Parade (12-21 September), and three themed balls. What better time, then, to hotfoot it to this grand metropolis, its neoclassical

architecture so complete, it's Britain's only city to be crowned a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Stepping out

To get a sense of Jane's world, I traced her steps accompanied by Theresa, a costumed guide who's every inch the romantic heroine in a red velvet cloak and ribboned bonnet (strictlyjane.austen.com). Passing through colonnaded avenues, we stop

at the Theatre Royal, a former casino where 'gamesters' lost fortunes. 'Bath was the Las Vegas of the 18th century,' explains Theresa. High society flocked here to make merry – all great material for Jane, whose novels *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* were set here.

Pleasure Gardens

Jane first lived at 4 Sydney Place on the city's edge. From

the drawing room she could watch carriages draw up at the Sydney Hotel opposite. A shiny cog in Bath's social wheel, the hotel laid on public breakfasts and gala nights, and was the gateway to the popular Pleasure Gardens.

Today the author's home is an Airbnb, while the hotel is a wonderful museum (holburne.org) that showcases art and artefacts from the collection of Sir William Holburne alongside contemporary exhibitions. Sydney Gardens offers views across Bath's terraced slopes, and walks by the Kennet and Avon canal. There's also a Jane Austen trail – download it at friendsofsydneygardens.org.

Thermal springs

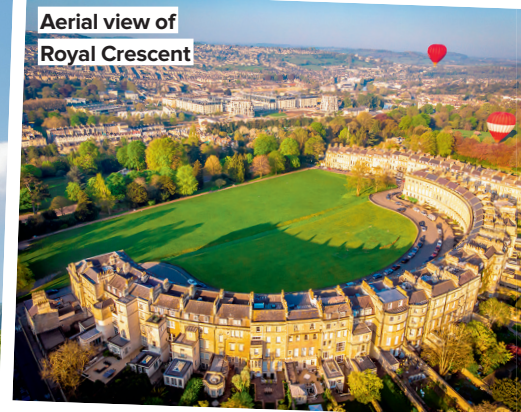
As well as fun and frivolity, Bath was a centre for healing. The Romans discovered the curative properties of its mineral waters, and Georgians with ailments thronged here too, including Jane's mother, who 'took the waters' at the Cross Baths.

At the Pump Room (thepumproombath.co.uk), visitors sipped tumblers of sulphurous waters, in between gossiping and checking out prospective suitors.

You can still taste the spring waters at the Pump Room, but the main lure is to dine in its chandeliered surroundings. Next door, visit the original Roman bath complex and temple ruins, plus a museum with relics like the 'curse tablets', etched with prayers and complaints.

In need of a restorative dip?

Aerial view of Royal Crescent



WORDS: CHRIS MORLEY. PHOTOS: THE JANE AUSTEN CENTRE, GETTY, KALEIDOSCOPE, VISIT BATH, SHUTTERSTOCK. DETAILS CORRECT AT TIME OF WRITING



The Roman baths and (inset) a room at Dukes Hotel

Head to the city's modern temple to wellness, Thermae Spa (www.thermaebathspa.com), crowned by a rooftop pool.

Royal Crescent

Jane Austen would certainly have walked along Royal Crescent, a showstopping curve of Grade-I listed houses. No 1 (no1royalcrescent.org.uk), has been beautifully restored as the home of a wealthy Georgian family. See the reality behind the glamour, such as an ivory wig scratcher that offered relief from critters in fake hair, while in the Withdrawing Room, where ladies gathered to take tea, an offer of 'one lump or two?' might be declined by 'anti-saccharites' boycotting sugar made by slaves on West Indian plantations.

Teatime

On a Jane Austen tour, afternoon tea at the Gainsborough Hotel comes with a talk on Georgian history and etiquette, with the option to don a Regency outfit.

At the Jane Austen Centre,

airy scones and finger sandwiches are served by staff in period costume (janeausten.co.uk), while Sally Lunn's 17th century tea house offers a treat favoured by Jane – a Bath bun topped by sugared caraway seeds (sallylunns.co.uk).

Stay and dine

Dukes Hotel is on Great Pulteney Street, Bath's widest and longest Georgian street (name-checked in *Northanger Abbey*). Its elegant bedrooms have period-style furnishings and huge sash windows. Doubles from £120 including breakfast; dukesbath.co.uk.

Around the corner, Dukes' funkier sister hotel, The Bird, offers seasonal dishes with global flavours, such as harissa lamb belly, and desserts like treacle pudding and vanilla ice cream.



Celebrations at the Jane Austen Festival

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