



AllWays Traveller

Rural River Thames, UK

www.allwaystraveller.com

Delights right on your doorstep

The thrill of travel is undoubtedly in visiting those far away places with strange sounding names.

But there are also pleasures to be found far nearer to home.

So while I'm the last person to deter your globe trotting, I do urge you to seek out the delights on your doorstep.

Making even a one night stay somewhere relatively nearby can turn a frantic day trip into a relaxing break.

This was certainly the case when I travelled less than 30 miles to spend a couple of excellent days along the rural River Thames.

Ashley Gibbins

The International Travel Writers Alliance
www.itwalliance.com

www.ruralriverthames.co.uk



The rural stretch of *Old Father Thames* starts in very modest fashion in the Cotswold Hills and gathers momentum as it flows towards London.

Passing through the heart of the UK's capital city, it then completes a 210 mile journey before reaching the North Sea. Along the way the Thames takes in three areas of outstanding natural beauty, provides home to over 25 species of fish and is the only river in Europe to have a national trail following its entire length.

It also passes through or besides some of England's most picturesque towns and villages.



A right royal route

by Ashley Gibbins



Living as I do in London, it's easy to take the Thames for granted. And to forget that just upstream the river and its surrounds offer a wealth of history and heritage, glorious English countryside and any manner of water based pursuits.

I decided to spend a couple of days along the short stretch of the river that winds from Henley-on-Thames to Windsor.

This area, which is dominated by Windsor Castle, definitely brings the best out of the Thames.

The inns of happiness

An undoubted lure of the rural Thames area is the large number of fine old country and riverside inns.

Many of these have been serving thirsty customers for centuries in premises that retain many of their historic features.

The landlords and ladies of these inns take pride in the range of local, real ales the serve.

Sitting in a beer garden supping a pint of Old Hookey (my particular favourite) or Mugwort, Jester or Maiden's Ruin real ale is a wonderful way to spend a balmy summer afternoon or evening.

If this is in one of the many riverside inns there's the chance to watch the world on the river go by.

Catching a few overs

Elsewhere you may well be able to catch a few overs of a cricket match on the village green.

Inside the inn there's the opportunity to chat at the bar with 'mine host' and the locals, always the best way to get insider knowledge of an area.

The inns invariably serve food and many offer accommodation.

Where to go

Windsor



The bustling riverside town of Windsor is dominated by its castle, which is the oldest and largest occupied castle in the world.

It is also the official residence of the British Monarch.

www.royalcollection.org.uk

For those looking to enjoy outdoor pursuits, the 4,800 acre Windsor Great Park is a venue for picnics, walking, cycling and horse riding.

The 35 acre Savill Garden, located within the park, is acknowledged as one of the finest ornamental gardens in the country.

And for kids aged two to 12, *Legoland* has 50 interactive rides and attractions spread over 150 acres of parkland.

www.legoland.co.uk



Eton

On the opposite bank of the Thames to Windsor is Eton and the famous public school that takes its name.

The College School Yard, Chapel and Museum, rewards a visit.

www.etoncollege.com

The Bird in Hand



The Bird In Hand, which is located conveniently between Windsor and Henley, makes a fine base for touring this area.

A 14th century inn with oak panelling in the bar from an ancient Scottish castle, it provides a welcome as warm as the fire that roars in the real inglenook fireplace during cooler periods.

While the Bird in Hand numbers King George III among its satisfied customers, today's guests are be equally impressed with it being the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) Berkshire pub of the year for 2007 and 2008.

It also serves more than 50 different wines, including those from a local English vineyard, to accompany the delicious range of dishes prepared by head chef Omar Ashayer and enjoyed by locals and visitors alike in the bar or the intimate full service restaurant.

Accommodation is in 15 refurbished bedrooms that adjoin the inn.

www.birdinhand.co.uk

Lock watching - a grand spectator sport



Another enjoyable pastime during a relaxing break in the rural Thames is lock watching - or rather watching those looking to navigate the locks. During 'rush hour' (bearing in mind the river has a speed limit of 5 knots an hour) boats and boat owners of every shape and size will meander up to the lock, moor and wait their turn to get through.

While the lock keeper is invariably proficiency personified, the ability of the boat owners to complete the task varies considerably.

And this is where splendid spectator sport is to be had.

One first has to admire and quietly applaud the experienced owners of river launches and live-on-board canal barges as they (proverbially) sail through with absolute minimum of fuss.

Then there are the many lighter moments, even moments of farce, as families or groups of friends in rented boats tackle the task.

Bray

Bray is a picturesque village with umpteen Britain in Bloom awards and three miles of Thames frontage.

It is also home to the three Michelin-starred Waterside Inn and the renowned Fat Duck restaurant.

Cookham

The village of Cookham is one of the places to visit with its mix of workers cottages and grand Georgian and Victorian houses.

Marlow

The Thames at the bustling market town of Marlow is dominated by the bridge, built in 1832.

The areas of public open space along both banks provide fine viewing of the rowers, skullers and other boat users passing by.

Hurley



Hurley is a hugely picturesque village with its lock and weir situated in a clump of wooded islands nearby.

The river has always been an important part of the village's history with records of a ford as early as the 6th century.

The Olde Bell Inn was built as a monastic guest house in 1135.

All hands to the pump

This tends to be 'all hands to the pump' amid conflicting instructions from too many captains.

And finally there are the comic turns, those making a maiden voyage in rowing boats and inflatables.

And yet all seem to pass through in good spirits and with no more than a harmless jostling of vessels or bumping against the lock walls.

For a grandstand view there is a choice of old Windsor, Romney, Bovney, Boulton, Cookham, Marlow and Temple locks.

Boat hire



Those looking to participate can hire boats of all shapes and sizes for the hour, half or whole day. Alternatively take one of the many guided boat trips on the river.

One company plying the river is the family run French Brothers Boats operating river cruises between Windsor, Runnymede and Maidenhead.

www.boat-trips.co.uk

The sport of kings



With horse racing known as the sport of kings, the Royal Windsor Racecourse is a highly apt place to enjoy a race meeting.

And what an attractive course it is to boot, set in 165 landscaped acres on the banks of the Thames overlooking the Castle.

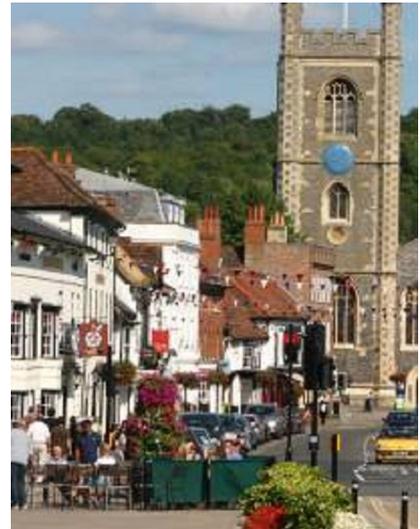
The racecourse stages 26 flat race days a year with regular Monday evening meets during the summer.

www.windsor-racecourse.co.uk

Ascot racecourse, which is also near at hand, hosts its Royal Ascot flat race meeting in June and jump meetings from November to April.

www.ascot.co.uk

Henley-on-Thames



Henley-on-Thames lies on the borders of the counties of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire.

The first record of medieval settlement dates to 1179 with a church first mentioned at Henley in 1204 and bridge in 1234.

Today Henley is an attractive small town with riverside walks on both banks and known worldwide for a Royal Regatta every Summer, which is as much a social as a sporting occasion.

Marsh lock lies about a mile upstream.

More information



www.windsor.gov.uk

The International Travel Writers Alliance



AllWays is the consumer travel service from the International Travel Writers Alliance.

The International Travel Writers Alliance represents travel writers, editors, broadcasters and photographers worldwide

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