

Reading 2021

900 year anniversary of Reading Abbey Ruins



Press release

22 March 2020

Reading Abbey 900th centrepiece of Reading 2021

An unexpected destination on the Great West Way

The 900th anniversary of one of England's medieval gems, Reading Abbey Ruins, will be the cornerstone of Reading's visitor offer in 2021.

Reading is an unexpected and surprising stop along the route of England's Great West Way, a new national multi-modal tourism trail from London to Bristol. Those taking the time to explore will be rewarded with an experience which includes medieval heritage as the burial place of King Henry I of England; the home of the only full-scale replica of the Bayeux Tapestry; the fascinating and contrasting histories of the time Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde spent in the town; the final destination on the Kennet & Avon Canal (as featured on the new Great West Way Guide to the Kennet & Avon Canal); a waterways leisure destination on the River Thames/Kennet; and home to a new Banksy artwork on the walls of the former Reading Gaol.

Reading Abbey was founded in 1121 by King Henry I, youngest son of William the Conqueror. He intended it to be his own burial place and memorial, and although he died in France, he was buried in Reading before the Abbey's High Altar in 1136. In its heyday, the Abbey was one of the largest monastic sites in Europe. It was closed in 1539 as part of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and it suffered greatly in the following years. The Ruins that survive were re-opened to the public in 2018 following major conservation work.

Reading Abbey Ruins will be celebrating its 900th anniversary throughout the second half of 2021. The main celebrations will revolve around the anniversary on 19 June 2021. Other events are planned from open-air theatre to music festivals and the unveiling of a new carved head stop on the Abbey Gateway (all events dependent on COVID guidelines at the time). The programme will be announced in Spring 2021. The Abbey has remained open through lockdown (s) and remains open throughout 2021 for visits every day, from dawn to dusk.

One of the original Abbey gateways survived the dissolution and has also been conserved. In 1785, as part of its subsequent life as a girls' boarding school, it was home to 10-year old Jane Austen. Nowadays, it is a part of the experience offered by Reading Museum, serving as a Victorian Schoolroom experience. The neighbouring former Victorian prison is best known for its most famous inmate - Oscar Wilde. During his imprisonment in the late 19th century, he wrote one of his seminal works, *De Profundis*, and he later published *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, 'inspired' by the years he spent inside the prison. Wilde fans can walk the perimeter of the former Gaol site, and



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alongside the River Kennet, where the Wilde Gates mark his connections with Reading. The new Banksy artwork on the walls of Reading Prison may also be a homage to Reading's connections with Wilde.

The Thames and the Kennet & Avon Canal

Reading is also a great stopover for people on boating holidays on the Kennet and Avon Canal, which flows through the heart of the town, passed the entrance to Reading Abbey and bisecting the waterside restaurants at the Oracle Centre. Reading features on the new Great West Way Guide to the Kennet & Avon Canal.

Reading also sits on a majestic stretch of the River Thames. Thames River Cruise offer circular sightseeing tours and themed events aboard their range of craft. Water sports fans can hire kayaks and SUPs on the Thames at Wokingham Canoe Centre and the new Caversham Lakes open water swim centre opens in April. The restored Edwardian Ladies bathing pool, Thames Lido, offers spa treatments and swim and dine packages at this new glamorous riverside destination

Attractions

Reading hosts a number of excellent museums. A visit to Reading Abbey Quarter should start at Reading Museum, which tells the story of the foundation of the Abbey. It also boasts the only full-size replica of the Bayeux Tapestry. Seventy metres long, Britain's Bayeux Tapestry was stitched by Victorian embroiderers from Leek in the late nineteenth century. The MERL - the Museum of English Rural Life, is the national museum dedicated to food, farming and countryside. The Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology and the Cole Museum of Zoology (re-opening in a new home in 2021) are both on the University of Reading campus in Reading. Reading is also the UK capital of Escape Rooms with indoor and outdoor games available across a number of venues.

Hotels

Reading has the greatest hotel capacity on the eastern end of the Great West Way outside London, with a wide range of town centre and out-of-town options. Stay in the Abbey Quarter in five-star luxury at the Roseate Reading; take a dip in the pool in the centrally located Novotel Reading; enjoy Thames views at the riverside Crowne Plaza; or step back in time to Reading's original Victorian railway hotel, now a Malmaison. Hilton, Ibis, Travelodge, Holiday Inn and Voco are among the international brands also represented in Reading and there is a wide range of self-catering/serviced accommodation available in central Reading.

Reading is a short-break destination along the Great West Way, the UK's new tourist trail from London to Bristol. Just 22 minutes by train from London Paddington, easily accessible on the M4



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motorway, by boat on the Kennet & Avon Canal and Rivers Kennet or Thames and on foot along the Thames Path national trail, Reading is one of the best-connected destinations in the UK.

More information

Reading's many hotels and attractions have signed up to the Good to Go scheme so visitors to Reading can feel confident they can visit securely. For more information on Reading 2021 visit www.livingreading.co.uk and <https://www.readingabbeyquarter.org.uk/>

Further press information

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