



Birmingham, the Midlands & the Marches

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Hammer & Pincers (p477)
- ➔ Old Rectifying House (p436)
- ➔ Samuel Fox (p492)
- ➔ Trooper (p434)

Best Places to Drink

- ➔ Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem (p461)
- ➔ Jekyll & Hyde (p418)
- ➔ Ludlow Brewing Company (p456)
- ➔ Old Bell Hotel (p480)

Why Go?

Few other places come so close to the dream of England as here, the country's heart. If you're searching for green valleys and chocolate-box villages of wonky timbered houses, the legend surrounding Nottingham's Robin Hood, or stately homes that look like the last lord of the manor just clip-clopped out of the stables, you'll find them here.

You'll also find the relics of centuries of industrial history, best exemplified by the World Heritage-listed mills of Ironbridge and the Derwent Valley. Then there are dynamic cities, including Britain's second-largest, Birmingham: a canal-woven industrial crucible reinvented as a cultural melting pot, with striking architecture and red-hot restaurants, bars and nightlife. And then there are tumbling hills where the air is so clean you can taste it. Walkers and cyclists flock to these areas, particularly the Peak District National Park and the Shropshire Hills, to vanish into the vastness of the landscape.

When to Go

- ➔ February and March see the wonderful chaos of Shrovetide football in Ashbourne.
- ➔ Literary buffs take note: Shakespeare takes a back seat to contemporary wordsmiths at Stratford's Literary Festival in April/May.
- ➔ If you're up for a belt-loosening, belly-stretching good time, head to Ludlow's famous Food and Drink Festival in September.
- ➔ On weekends from April to September, Shropshire Hills Shuttles provides access to wonderful walking trails on the Long Mynd and the Shropshire Hills, while June to September is the peak season for walking and cycling in the Peak District.

Birmingham, the Midlands & the Marches Highlights

- 1 Surveying the buzzing city of Birmingham from the rooftop 'secret garden' of its stunning new library (p411)
- 2 Hiking, cycling or driving through the rugged **Peak District National Park** (p484)
- 3 Contemplating the apple tree that inspired Isaac Newton's theories on gravity at **Woolthorpe Manor** (p470)
- 4 Museum-hopping in **Ironbridge Gorge** (p447), birthplace of the Industrial Revolution
- 5 Learning about King Richard III's life, death and the extraordinary discovery of his remains in **Leicester** (p475)
- 6 Taking in a Shakespearean performance in the Bard's Tudor hometown **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p431)
- 7 Touring Great Malvern's **Morgan Motor Company** (p438) and taking a car for a spin through the surrounding hills
- 8 Wandering the opulent halls and grand gardens of Stamford's **Burgley House** (p469)

