# City of Bath

The City of Bath is in Somerset 97 miles west of London and 11 miles southeast of Bristol and became a World Heritage site in 1987. The River Avon flows through the city.



## A brief history

Evidence has been found of early settlement in the area dating back to the Bronze Age. There is a legend thar Prince Bladad had skin disease that was cured by bathing in the mud and hot waters of the area founded a settlement and dedicated it to the god Sulis who was the goddess of healing.

The Romans are credited with establishing the first permanent settlement early in the first century AD. A temple was constructed 50AD and the settlement was called Aqua Sulis (waters of the gods). Over the next 300 years the settlement was extended, and the famous Roman baths constructed which can still be seen today. Around 300 AD, the settlement was surrounded by a ditch and wooden palisade. The wooden palisade was later replaced by a stone wall.

The Romans left Britain in 407 AD and the settlement fell into decline becoming a market centre for the area. The baths fell into disrepair and silted up. The next important inhabitants were the Saxons who gradually conquered Britain and made Bath a stronghold in 577. During the Saxon occupation, the settlement was known as Acemannesceastre which translates as “aching men’s city” from its reputation for healing.

In the 9th century, King Arthur remodelled the city and made it one of the many fortified burghs he created. The city flourished and boasted a mint. In 973, Edgar, the first king of all England, was crowned at Bath. In 1088 during the rebellion following the death of William the Conqueror, the town was extensively destroyed but recovered quickly. Shortly after this construction of the cathedral began and new baths were built over the hot springs. In 1189, the city was granted a royal charter and became famous for the manufacture of woollen cloth and its healing spas.

The 18th century was a period of very rapid expansion with many fine buildings being constructed using local limestone which has become known as Bath stone. Queens Square was built in 1739, The Circus 1760, Octagon in 1767, Royal Crescent in 1774, and the Assembly Rooms in 1771.

Today Bath is a famous tourist centre as well as having a strong service-oriented businesses... It has two universities, the University of Bath, and Bath Spa University.

## The Royal Crescent

The Royal Crescent was designed by the architect John Wood the Younger and is a magnificent example of Georgian architecture. It consists of 30 townhouses built in a sweeping crescent and was completed in 1774. The crescent is 500 feet (150m) long with 114 ionic columns on the first floor.

In its 249-year history there has been considerable change. Ten of the original full sized town houses remain, and 18 have been made into flats. The central house, number 16, is the Royal Crescent Hotel and Spa. Number 1 is a historic house museum which shows how the houses were used and furnished by their owners in the late 18th century...

## The Circus

The circus is a ring of townhouses built in three segments of equal length. It was designed by John Wood the Elder who based his design on his study of Stonehenge making the circle’s diameter 319 feet (97m). John Wood died shortly after construction began so the project was taken over and completed by his son, John Wood the Younger in 1769 having taken 15 years to build.

The Circle is laid out with three entrances. Each block of townhouses faces an entrance so if you stand in an entrance you are faced with a block of townhouses straight ahead.

In the Second World War in April 1942, Bath was blitzed, and a bomb fell on the circus and several houses were destroyed. They have now been rebuilt in the original style.

## Pulteney Bridge

Pulteney Bridge spans the River Avon connecting the City of Bath with the estates owned by the Pulteney family. It was designed by Robert Adam using the Palladium style and constructed in 1774. It is one of only four to has a row of shops on each side. The bridge is 148 feet (45m) and 58 feet (18m) wide and is used by buses and taxis.

It was damaged by floods in 18th century and was rebuilt using the original style. Further extensions were made in the 19th century and extensive preservation work was done 1n the 20th century returning it to its original design.

Originally there were 16 shops on the bridge, but in 1792 these were converted in six larger shops.

Downstream from the bridge is the Pulteney weir which was constructed as a flood control measure between 1968 and 1972.

## Bath Abbey

The full name of Bath Abbey is the Abbey Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Dating from 675 AD when a convent was established several different buildings existed before the current building was constructed in 1090 and raised to abbey status. This building was too small so a much larger building was started in the early 12th century. In 1137 a fire destroyed the partially constructed building, but it did not stop construction which was completed around 1156. The building was 330 feet (101m) long.

Over the next 100 years, the abbey fell into disrepair due to infighting between various religious factions. Restoration was completed just before the dissolution of the monasteries between 1536 and 1539. During this period much of value was removed from the building and once again, it was allowed to decay until the 1860s when extensive restoration took place under the oversight of George Gilbert Scott. Included in the work was the installation of exquisitely carved wooden pews which are considered to be one of the best examples of Victorian church seating.

## The Roman baths

The water in the Roman baths comes from the nearby Mendip Hills having percolated through limestone from a depth of between 9000 and 14000 feet and varies in temperature from 69º C and 96º C. Pressure forces the water up to the surface through fissures in the rocks Some of the minerals dissolved in it are sodium, calcium, and chloride and sulphate ions in high concentrations which help to relieve muscle and joint pain.

The first bath buildings were constructed by the Romans between 60 and 70 AD and were used for public bathing. Various buildings have housed the baths with the current building being constructed in 1897 and has been added to a various times since.

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