





AVEBURY

Overview

Stonehenge is the superstar—dramatic, iconic, tightly managed, and often crowded.

Avebury is the mystical counterpart—sprawling, walkable, and soaked in atmosphere, with a more personal and magical feel.

Many visitors say:

“Stonehenge impresses you. Avebury absorbs you.”



Location

- ❖ Near Salisbury in Wiltshire. ENE of Bath, S of The Cotswolds and W of London
- ❖ Approx. 1 hr 30min from Windsor or 2hr from Central London
- ❖ Wiltshire is a landlocked county, surrounded by Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Dorset, and Somerset.
- ❖ Wiltshire is famous for Wiltshire-cured ham, a traditional English delicacy and Lardy Cake, a spiced bread like Fruit cake.
- ❖ Wiltshire is often considered the “Crop Circle Capital of the World.”
- ❖ People from Wiltshire call themselves ‘Moonrakers’
- ❖ Huge chalk white horse figures are carved into Wiltshire's hillsides — the most famous being the Westbury White Horse.
- ❖ Nearby Salisbury Cathedral is the tallest church spire in the UK (123m / 404 ft) and it Houses one of the original copies of the Magna Carta (1215).





What & Why

Avebury is the largest stone circle in the world

- ❖ The main circle is over 330 metres (1,082 feet) in diameter—much larger than Stonehenge. It contains two smaller inner circles, all dating from around 2850 BC.

The core circle is about 28 acres.

- ❖ The full ceremonial landscape is over 25 km²—a vast sacred complex that may have been used over thousands of years.

Built during the Neolithic period, over 4,500 years ago

- ❖ Constructed by prehistoric Britons before the invention of the wheel, using primitive tools, human strength, and ingenuity. Avebury's stones are local sarsen sandstone.

These enormous stones were dragged from the Marlborough Downs, several miles away .

- ❖ Some weigh over 40 tons.

The site includes a massive henge (ditch and bank)

- ❖ Surrounding the circle is a deep ditch and high bank nearly 1.5km in circumference, emphasizing its ritual significance rather than defensive use. It's part of a wider sacred landscape.

Avebury is connected to Silbury Hill, West Kennet Long Barrow, and The Sanctuary—all Neolithic sites thought to form a sacred ceremonial complex.

Silbury Hill is the largest manmade prehistoric mound in Europe

- ❖ Located nearby, it rivals the Egyptian pyramids in scale, but its exact purpose remains unknown.

No one knows why Avebury was built

- ❖ Theories range from ritual, astronomical, and ceremonial use to burial rites or tribal gathering spaces—but no written records exist.

The stones were arranged deliberately in male and female forms

- ❖ Some believe the stones' shapes—tall and thin vs. squat and rounded—represent gendered energies or fertility symbols.

The site aligns with celestial events

- ❖ Some researchers claim alignments with moon and sun cycles, suggesting astronomical knowledge among its builders.





AVEBURY

What & Why

The overall Avebury site is much larger than most people realise—it's not just a stone circle, but a vast prehistoric ceremonial landscape spread across several miles.

Avebury Henge and Stone Circle (Core Monument)

- ❖ Diameter of outer stone circle: ~330 metres (1,082 feet)
- ❖ Area enclosed by the henge (ditch and bank): ~28 acres (11 hectares)

Total stones originally in outer and inner circles:

- ❖ Estimated around 100 stones, though many have been lost or re-erected.

Wider Avebury Landscape Complex (UNESCO World Heritage Area)

- ❖ This includes a range of connected Neolithic and Bronze Age sites, forming one of the largest prehistoric ceremonial landscapes in Europe. Key elements:
 - ❖ **West Kennet Avenue**
 - ❖ A stone-lined ceremonial "avenue" of paired stones stretching 2.4km (1.5 miles) from Avebury to The Sanctuary.
 - ❖ **The Sanctuary**
 - ❖ Once a timber circle, later stone, believed to be a ritual site or temple.
 - ❖ **Silbury Hill**
 - ❖ 1 mile south of Avebury
 - ❖ 40 metres (131 feet) tall, and 500 feet across
 - ❖ Largest man-made prehistoric mound in Europe.
 - ❖ **West Kennet Long Barrow**
 - ❖ 2 miles from Avebury
 - ❖ An elongated burial chamber used over 1,000 years.
 - ❖ **Windmill Hill**
 - ❖ 1.5 miles northwest
 - ❖ A large Neolithic causewayed enclosure, possibly a communal meeting or feasting site.

Total Size of the Avebury World Heritage Landscape

- ❖ The entire Avebury section of the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site covers approximately:
 - ❖ 25 square kilometres (9.7 square miles)
 - ❖ Includes fields, downland, ridges, and a complex network of prehistoric structures





AVEBURY

Myths, Legends & Mystical Lore

The Devil is said to have thrown the stones

- ❖ In one legend, Satan tried to stop Christianity by throwing the massive stones across the land. A local priest stopped him with a prayer.

The Barber-Surgeon skeleton was found crushed under a stone

- ❖ In the 1930s, archaeologists found a medieval skeleton beneath a fallen stone—possibly killed while trying to destroy the monument.

Walking the stone circle is said to bring spiritual healing

- ❖ Many New Age visitors believe the site emits powerful earth energies, making it a hotspot for dowsers, druids, and spiritual seekers.

The Michael and Mary ley lines run through Avebury

- ❖ These mythical energy lines are believed to connect sacred sites across Britain, and Avebury is one of their key crossing points.

People still gather at Avebury for solstices and equinoxes

- ❖ Like Stonehenge, Avebury remains a place of modern pilgrimage, particularly for summer solstice, Beltane and pagan festivals.

AVEBURY



Avebury Village

The village is built inside the stone circle.

- ❖ Unlike other ancient monuments, Avebury village sits directly within the henge, with cottages nestled between ancient stones.

Many stones were destroyed or buried by locals

- ❖ From the Middle Ages onward, some villagers feared pagan associations or needed building material—so they toppled, buried or broke the stones.

Christianity left its mark on the pagan site

- ❖ In medieval times, a church was built inside the circle, and crosses were added to stone carvings to “Christianize” the site.

Avebury Manor

- ❖ Grade I listed early 16th-century manor house, featured on BBC’s “The Manor Reborn” This historic home was restored by the National Trust and decorated to reflect 500 years of styles, with rooms you can touch and explore

The Red Lion pub claims to be haunted

- ❖ Built in the 17th century, it's said to be haunted by a woman named Florrie, who was murdered and thrown down the pub's old well.

The Alexander Keiller Museum

- ❖ Houses one of the most important prehistoric archaeological collections in Britain, housed in the Stables Gallery, and including many artefacts from the World Heritage Site





AVEBURY Vs. STONEHENGE

Q: Which came first: Avebury or Stonehenge?

A: Avebury was started first, but both evolved over time.

Avebury Timeline

- ❖ Earliest activity: ~3700 BC – evidence of early farming and settlement
- ❖ Avebury Henge and Outer Circle constructed: ~2850–2600 BC
- ❖ Inner circles added: ~2600–2400 BC
- ❖ West Kennet Long Barrow (nearby): ~3650 BC
- ❖ Silbury Hill built: ~2400 BC
- ❖ Avebury's major construction started around 2850 BC, and the whole site developed over several centuries.

Stonehenge Timeline

- ❖ First earthworks (circular ditch & bank): ~3000 BC
- ❖ Stone settings (bluestones & sarsens): ~2600–2200 BC
- ❖ Major trilithon arrangement completed: ~2500 BC
- ❖ Stonehenge began with an earthwork enclosure slightly earlier, but its iconic stone phase came after Avebury's main circle was already built.

In Summary

- ❖ Stonehenge's earliest ditch may be slightly older (by a couple of centuries)
- ❖ But Avebury's stone circle was built before Stonehenge's famous sarsen trilithons
- ❖ Both sites evolved in phases over many hundreds of years
- ❖ They are part of the same ceremonial culture, with possible shared rituals, routes, and meanings

Note:

- ❖ Some archaeologists believe there was interaction between the two sites—perhaps even a ritual journey linking Stonehenge (land of the dead) with Avebury (land of the living).



AVEBURY Vs. STONEHENGE

Feature	Avebury	Stonehenge
Size	Largest stone circle in the world – over 330m across	Smaller in area, but more visually dramatic due to its iconic design
Date Built	Around 2850–2200 BC (Neolithic)	Around 3000–2000 BC (Neolithic to Bronze Age)
Material	Local sarsen stones , some over 40 tons	Sarsen and bluestone (bluestone transported from Wales , 150+ miles away!)
Layout	Consists of a large outer circle , two inner circles , and a huge earth henge	Circular layout with massive upright trilithons (paired stones with lintels)
Purpose (theories)	Possibly ritual gatherings , fertility rites , astronomical or spiritual ceremonies	Likely for solar alignments , especially summer/winter solstices , and burial rituals
Alignment	Believed to align with moon cycles and natural landscape features	Precise alignment with the sunrise on the summer solstice and sunset on winter solstice
Access	Open access —you can walk among the stones freely , including at night	Restricted access —ropes prevent close contact except on special occasions
Atmosphere	Quiet, mystical, immersed in countryside and village life	Iconic, but more touristy and structured experience
Surroundings	Set within a living village , includes Avebury Manor, church, pub	Isolated on Salisbury Plain, surrounded by barrows and burial mounds
Part of a Larger Complex?	Yes – connected to Silbury Hill , West Kennet Long Barrow , and The Sanctuary	Yes – associated with Durrington Walls , Woodhenge , and ancient processional avenues
Myth & Legend	Haunted pub, ley lines, buried skeletons, “Devil’s work”	Giants, Merlin’s magic, sacrificial altar myths
Excavation History	Restored in the 1930s by archaeologist Alexander Keiller	Studied extensively since the 17th century , still under research
UNESCO World Heritage?	Yes – part of the same World Heritage Site as Stonehenge	Yes – jointly listed with Avebury
Best For	Visitors who love to explore at their own pace , nature, spiritual energy, and atmosphere	Visitors who want to see one of the most iconic landmarks in the world
Entry Fee	Free to walk around (National Trust museum fee optional)	Paid entry required (managed by English Heritage)
Popular Events	Solstices, equinox gatherings, Pagan & Druid festivals, casual spiritual visits	Major Summer Solstice celebrations , guided tours, concerts (occasionally)