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18-night Self-Driven Tour of England

- Day 1 Arrive **London Gatwick**. You will pick up your rental car and begin your self-driven tour of England. Your destination will be **Tunbridge Wells**. If you feel up to it, enroute you can stop at **Hever Castle**, childhood home of **Anne Boleyn (opens daily 11- 6, gardens, and 12-6 for castle)**. There is a lovely garden and the home is filled with portraits, including those of Henry VIII and his wives. After you check in to your accommodation, you might feel up to making an excursion to **Seven Oaks**. Here you can get out and wander around the town and have a nice dinner in one of the many fine restaurants. You can then visit **Knole**, the largest private house in Britain which was built around 1456 by Thomas Bourchier, archbishop of Canterbury. You can also walk around in the 1,000 acre deer park! Virginia Woolf had used **Knole House** for the setting of **Orlando**. **Note: House opens at 12:00 but gardens are only open on Wednesdays. Alternately**, you can visit **Leeds Castle**, known as the "Loveliest Castle in the World". It is set on extensive grounds with a most interesting maze and lovely gardens. The castle has a more of a country manor feel than a feel of royalty.
Overnight Tunbridge Wells at The Bethany House, a 4 star b&b in the center of town.
Bed and Full English Breakfast included
- Day 2 After a leisurely breakfast, travel northeast to **Chartwell**, home of **Winston Churchill** (opens at 11:00). From **Chartwell** you can also visit **Penthurst Place**, one of Britain's most outstanding country houses, built in 1338 (opens at 12:00). You can also visit some of the sights listed above that you missed on Thursday.
Overnight Tunbridge Wells, accommodation as above
Bed and Full English Breakfast included
- Day 3 Today you can travel southeast to visit **Bodiam Castle, Rye, Hastings and Battle**. **Bodiam Castle** was built in 1385 and is an outstanding and very intact example of medieval architecture.
Rye is a superbly picturesque medieval town that was originally one of the Cinque Ports defending England's coast against foreign invaders. Places of interest include **Lamb House** (home of Henry James from 1898-1916), the **Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Ypres Tower** and the **Landgate**, built in 1329. There are also many antique shops and other shops selling speciality gifts and handicrafts. **Hastings**, where the **Castle** and **Museum** are worth visiting, and then on to **Battle**, the main interests being **Battle Abbey** (founded by William the Conqueror) and the **Battle of Hastings** site. If time permits, you can visit take a detour to the north to visit **Sissinghurst Castle Garden** (open 11 am-6:30 pm)
Overnight Tunbridge Wells, accommodation as above
Bed and Full English Breakfast included
- Day 4 This morning you will depart **Tunbridge** and make your way to **Hampshire**. You can take the scenic route through the hills of Hampshire (A3 to the B2177 traveling northeast to the A3057) where you can go travel through the lovely villages of **Hambledon, Portsdown Hill, Bishop's Waltham** and **Romsey**. Your first stop will be the **Queen Elizabeth Country Park**. Here you can see the **Buster Ancient Farm**, a reconstruction of an Iron Age Farm. The farm depicts what life was like in prehistoric times. At **Portsdown Hill** you will want to stop and enjoy the fantastic view! You can see **Portsmouth** and its harbour as well as the **Isle of Wight**. You can also see Victoria's Osborne House and Charles Dickens' home. At **Bishop's Waltham**, you will see some of the ruins of the Bishop's of Winchester's Palace which was destroyed by **Cromwell's** army. You can walk through the town for there are

quite a few shops and houses dating back to the 13th century. You can then head to **Romsey** where you can see the **12th century Abbey** and the Norman Church. (Note: the recommendation is to park at Broadlands and walk into town for there is quite a bit of traffic congestion and poor parking). From Romsey you can head for **Salisbury**.

Overnight Salisbury at Little Langford, a lovely 4 star b&b on the outskirts of town.

Bed and Full English Breakfast included

Day 5

This morning you can spend some time exploring the city of **Salisbury**. Here are some suggestions: **Salisbury Cathedral**, open from 7:15 am-6:15 pm), **Charter House**, where the **Magna Carta** is kept, and the **Old Sarum**. After lunch, you will depart Salisbury and drive north to **Stonehenge**. After visiting Stonehenge you can drive further north to **Silbury Hill** If timer permits, you can travel to **Avebury** where you can actually touch the stones!

Overnight Salisbury, accommodation as above

Bed and full English Breakfast included

Day 6

After a breakfast, you will depart **Salisbury**, your destination being **Winchcombe** in the **Cotswolds**. Enroute, take time to spend touring some fantastic English Gems in **Somerset**. First stop is **Stourhead (gardens open at 9:00, house at 11:30)**, one of the finest landscaped gardens in the world (laid out between 1741-1780).

You will then move on to **Wells**, a well preserved medieval village. Spend some time touring Wells Cathedral, a wonderful example of 12 c. English architecture. You can then take a walk around the moat surrounded **Bishop's Palace** and walk down **Vicar's Street**, one of the best preserved streets in all of Europe.

From **Wells** you will head towards the village of **Cheddar**, home of cheddar cheese! It is here that you can see the **Cheddar Gorge**, within which lies the **Cheddar Caves** (underground caverns, more than 1 million years old). If you are feeling energetic, you can climb **Jacob's Ladder** and walk along the top of the cliffs to **Pavey's Lookout Tower** for views of Somerset (you can see Wales if it is a clear day!). You will then need to make your way northeast to **Winchcombe**.

Overnight Winchcombe at The George Inn, a self catering accommodation in the heart of the village with access to many restaurants, bistros and coffee shops.

Self-Catering

Day 7

After a leisurely breakfast, you can set out to explore some of the areas around **Winchcombe: Chipping Campden, Stow-on-the-Wold, Snowhill and Hicote Manor**. Enroute you can visit **Sudeley Castle, Snowhill and Hidcote Manor** before arriving to your accommodation. This morning you head to **Gloucester**, an ancient Roman city.

You will visit **Gloucester Cathedral**, where not only a scene from **Harry Potter's** Hogwarts was filmed, but where **Henry III** was crowned at the age of 9.

You can visit the chapter house, the oldest surviving part of the cathedral. The tomb of **Edward II**, murdered at **Berkeley Castle**, is in the north ambulatory. You can also visit the **Tailor of Gloucester's House**, a **Beatrix Potter Museum**, the one used as the model for the book and containing scenes from it. From Gloucester, make a slight detour south so that you can make a short visit to **Painswick**, known as the most beautiful villages in the Cotswolds. Afterwards, you can make your way to **Cheltenham** one of England's most fashionable spas where you will find many gardens (it has been referred to as a city within a garden), Regency architecture, balconies, verandas, all with beautiful flower arrangements. The main street, the **Promenade**, is one of the most beautiful streets in the **Cotswolds**. There are an enormous amount of wonderful shopping spots. To list a few: **Montpellier Quarter** (boutiques and craft and specialty shops), **Suffolk Quarter** (antique shops), the **Promenade** (clothing, shoes and books), **High Street**, (pedestrian-only).

Overnight Winchcombe accommodation as above

Day 8

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You will visit **Gloucester Cathedral**, where not only a scene from **Harry Potter's** Hogwarts was filmed, but where **Henry III** was crowned at the age of 9. You can visit the chapter house, the oldest surviving part of the cathedral. The tomb of **Edward II**, murdered at **Berkley Castle**, is in the north ambulatory. You can also visit the **Tailor of Gloucester's House**, a **Beatrix Potter Museum**, the one used as the model for the book and containing scenes from it. From Gloucester you can make your way to **Cheltenham** one of England's most fashionable spas where you will find many gardens (it has been referred to as a city within a garden), Regency architecture, balconies, verandas, all with beautiful flower arrangements. The main street, the **Promenade**, is one of the most beautiful streets in the **Cotswolds**. There are an enormous amount of wonderful shopping spots. To list a few: **Montpellier Quarter** (boutiques and craft and specialty shops), **Suffolk Quarter** (antique shops), the **Promenade** (clothing, shoes and books), **High Street**, (pedestrian-only).
Overnight Winchcombe accommodation as above
Self-Catering

Day 9 This morning you will take an excursion to **Berkeley Castle** (opens 11:00-5:00), a 12th century castle built for Henry II and where Edward II was murdered. From **Berkeley**, make your way south to **Castle Combe** (a village), which is said to be one of the most picturesque villages in the Cotswolds. From here you will travel to **Lacock Village**, an 18th c. village owned by the **National Trust of England**. The village has architecture dating back to the 13th-18th centuries. You can visit the **Abbey** and the **Fox Talbot Museum** (a medieval barn). You can spend some time wondering around the lovely village and visiting some of the shops. Dinner recommendation at **The George Inn**, a pub dating back to 1361
Reservations a must unless you dine before 6:00 pm
Overnight Winchcombe accommodation as above
Self-Catering

Day 10 This morning you can head north and visit the villages of **Blockley and Chipping Campden**. From here, head to **Hidcote Manor**, (open 10:00-6:00 pm; closed on Thurs and Fri.), one of the most delightful gardens in England and was developed in the early 20th Century horticulturist Major Lawrence Johnston. You can travel to **Bretforton** to have an early dinner (opens at 6:00 pm) at **The Fleece Inn**, a quintessential English Pub with a long history (part of the National Trust) and excellent food.
Overnight Winchcombe, accommodation as above.
Self-Catering

Day 11 This morning you can take a walk to **Sudeley Castle (opens at 10:30)**, was once home to Queen Katherine Parr, the last and only surviving wife of Henry VIII. Henry, Anne Boleyn, Lady Jane Grey and Queen Elizabeth I have all lived at or visited Sudeley. King Charles 1 stayed here and his nephew, Prince Rupert, established his headquarters at the Castle during the civil war. Afterwards, take the opportunity to visit some of the villages you have not had a chance to visit: Stow-on-the-Wold, Upper and Lower Slaughter, Minster Lovell. If time permits, you can drive to **Burford** for dinner at **The Highway**, a newly established Inn and Restaurant in the main street of Burford with excellent cuisine housed in a very old inn.
Overnight Winchcombe, accommodation as above.
Self-Catering

Day 12 This morning you can take an excursion to **Warwick Castle**, one of the finest examples of a medieval castle in England. Afterwards, we can see **Beuchamp Chapel**. You can then travel south to **Woodstock**, passing through **Chipping Norton**. In Woodstock you can visit **Blenheim Palace**, one of the finest in England, birth place of Winston Churchill! If time permits on your return trip "home", you can stop in **Minster Lovell**. Here there is a very narrow road which is said to be one of the most picturesque scenes in the Cotswolds. You will follow the signs **Minster Lovell Hall** in order to discover the old part of the village. Here you will park at the

end of the lane and then walk through the Churchyard to see the **Lovell Home** (it is now in ruins). The prettiest building in the village is **The Swan**.

Overnight Winchcombe, accommodation as above

Self catering

Day 13

This morning you will depart **Winchcombe**. You will make your way to the **London Heathrow Airport** where you will return your rental car. Enroute, stop at **Windsor Castle (9:45-5:15 pm)**. **Windsor** is the largest inhabited castle in the world. When the Queen is in residence the royal standard flies. At the **Castle Hill** you can see **Queen Mary's Doll House** (worth the visit) and **St. George's Chapel** along with the **Jubilee Garden**. There are many shops and restaurants in Windsor (there is a great ice cream store directly across from the castle!). Once you drop off your car rental, you can take the **London Heathrow Express** to **Paddington Station** and taxi to **St. Ermins**.

Overnight London at The St. Ermins Hotel, a 3.5 star hotel in Westminster (deluxe room)

Bed and continental Breakfast included

Day 14

After a leisurely breakfast, you will set out to fully explore London! The best way to around London while receiving a panoramic view of the city is on the **Classic London Tour**. **The tour departs at 9:30 and returns around 1:30**. This is a unique 1920' replica mini coach which has a maximum of 11 passengers. You will be able to see some of the main points of interests, such as, **Buckingham Palace Westminster Abbey Harrods Fleet Street Hyde Park The Monument Piccadilly Circus Tower of London Big Ben Downing Street The Houses of Parliament Tower Bridge St. Paul's Cathedral Trafalgar Square**, but will also be able to go down some of the less traveled roads that big buses are unable to access.

Overnight London, accommodation as above

Bed and continental Breakfast included.

Day 15

Today you can visit **Buckingham Palace** (State rooms are open 9:30-5:30).

The State Rooms are lavishly furnished with some of the greatest treasures from the Royal Collection - paintings by Rembrandt, Rubens, Vermeer, Poussin, Canaletto and Claude; sculpture by Canova and Chantrey; exquisite examples of Sèvres porcelain; and some of the finest English and French furniture in the world. **Changing of the Guard** is at 11:30 on even days during September. Afterwards, you might enjoy doing some shopping at **Liberty** and **Harrods!** You can spend the afternoon visiting the **National Portrait Gallery (open 10:00-9:00 pm)**.

Overnight London, accommodation as above

Bed and continental Breakfast included.

Day 16

Today you can spend the day visiting the **British Museum (10:00 am-5:30 pm)**.

Afterwards, you can head to **St. Paul's** (galleries and Cathedral open until 4:00 pm) and attend **Evensong**.

Overnight London, accommodation as above

Bed and continental Breakfast included.

Day 17

This morning you can visit **Kensington Palace and Gardens** (opens at 10:00 am).

You can visit the 18th century staterooms. Afterwards, you can visit **Notting Hill** and **Portobello**. Portobello has its street markets on Saturdays. It is fun to walk up and down the streets, visiting some of the shops, stalls and sidewalk cafes.

Overnight London, accommodation as above

Bed and continental Breakfast included.

Day 18

Today you can visit the Tower Hill /Tower of London. Please allow at least 2 hours.

If you wish, you can take a cab to **Greenwich** to see the **Greenwich Royal Observatory** (open 10-4:30) and the **Old Royal Naval College** (closes at 5:00 pm).

Overnight London, accommodation as above

Bed and continental Breakfast included.

Day 19

This morning you can take a taxi or the **Gatwick Express from Paddington** station back to **the London Gatwick airport** for your return journey home