

Cotswold Gardens

July 6th to 18th, 2022

Here's your orientation details for the July tour to London and the Cotswolds. After many stops and starts, it's finally happening.

There have been a number of changes to the original itinerary. The new draft of the itinerary is now current. In most cases, I've only had to change some timing. In some of these gardens, guided tours have not been put into practice since covid closures.

We've had a change of hotels as well. We're staying at the Francis in central Bath. The Slaughters Inn had rescheduled our stay for incorrect dates and were not able to find enough rooms. I've rebooked our group at the Lygon Arms on Broadway's main street. It's a classic historic inn, and one of the nicest hotels in the region.

Covid restrictions and concerns. Masks, vaccine passports, contact tracing, quarantine requirements, testing have all been moving targets, now trending toward more freedom of movement. It makes no sense to tell you what the current requirements are in a world where those requirements change daily. Any changes to these current policies will be communicated via group email.

To enter the UK

- There are no testing requirements
 - There are no quarantine requirements
 - They've eliminated the requirement for the UK passenger tracking form
 - There is no vaccination mandate to enter the UK
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- Masks are no longer required for overseas flights.
 - As of June 12th, you are no longer required to pass an antigen test to return to the USA. This mandate created countless headaches for many US travelers.
 - If you have a cold or cough, please wear a mask on the coach to help to prevent transmission.

- Obviously if you are ill prior to departure, stay home. Please refer to the section on travel insurance.

Travel Insurance

Though not mandated, it's worth considering. Travel insurance programs likely won't provide coverage if the world shuts down again, but it will reimburse you for your tour costs if you have to cancel at the last minute. Many policies now provide compensation if you're forced to pay out of pocket to isolate. Take a look at this company. I've found them to be more reasonable than most others...

<https://www.allianztravelinsurance.com/>

There are other insurance companies that offer like policies. If you google Forbes list of travel insurance companies, you'll find a good article on this.

Airport Check in

Please check in for your flight at least 2 hours prior to flight time. Some airlines are suggesting three hours. I always recommend an early check in for a trip like this. You'll need to have your passport and confirmation/ticket number for your flight. Masks are no longer required to travel, but it might pay off to bring a couple in your carry-on in your large bag, in case they change the rules on us again.

Baggage ID

Be certain to attach a name tag with to each of your bags.

24-hour clock

Get used to using the 24-hour clock. Most of Europe works this way. 11:30 pm is noted as 23:30. All scheduled transportation will be listed this way. Add 12 to PM times to come up with the correct number. Two PM becomes 14:00. Five AM is 05:00.

Suggested Dress

We'll be outside a lot and there's a reason England is as green as it is. Plan on cool mornings, warming in the PM. Wear layers, water-resistant footgear, and a light rain jacket. Unless you're attending the theater in London or planning on a Sunday service, there is no reason to bring anything other than casual attire.

Bring a **lightweight raincoat** and/or a collapsible umbrella with you.

Be certain to bring comfortable walking shoes. Break them in before the trip. You'll be dealing with cobbled streets and uneven surfaces just about every day.

Cotswolds Weather in July

Lows in the mid-50s and, as I write this letter in mid-June, it's currently 82 and sunny. The region, on average, gets 2.6 inches of rain during the month of July. Visit weather.com or accuweather.com to get a 10-day forecast a day or two before departure.

Dining

We've got a few lunches, teas, and dinners planned for the tour. I'll be finalizing some menus the latter part of June. If you have allergies, sensitivities, or aversions, let me know right away. I'm not crazy about lamb, so I tend not to include it on a menu. Turns out that many people like lamb, oysters, haggis, and a lot of other things I avoid. Give me a list to work with. If you're adventuresome, let me know that too.

Accommodations

Each hotel we're using will have hair dryers, wi-fi, and an English breakfast each morning. If you're accustomed to using a wash-cloth (face flannel), you may want to bring one. They're not generally provided.

Remember your passport

Make a couple of photocopies to place in your baggage and another with a friend at home. If lost or stolen, passports are much easier to replace if you have a facsimile copy. Take a picture of the signature page as a backup.

No visas are required for the UK (for US Citizens. Most of Europe requires three months passport validity from the end of your stay, but the UK simply requires that your passport is valid for the duration of your stay. To be on the safe side, you should have two months validity after your departure from the UK. **Check your passport expiration date today.**

Electrical plugs and adaptors

Information on the Type G British 3-pin Electrical Adapter Plug and Electrical Outlet

The Type G electrical plug is a British three-pin rectangular blade plug that has a protective fuse inside to protect cords from high-current circuits. Type G outlets generally include safety switches.



Your laptop, tablet, or phone, if you bring one, should have already come equipped with a transformer/convertor in the plug. Check the voltage requirements on the transformer portion of the power cord. If it comes with a transformer in the cord, you will just need a plug adapter, not a current convertor. Adaptors/convertors are available at travel stores, Target, Amazon, etc.

Telephones

Call your provider to see what they recommend for phone coverage overseas. I've typically found that plans that cover calls in Europe are very pricey and sometimes require the purchase of a new device. This has changed somewhat in the past year or so. Call your service provider in advance of the trip to see what they can set up for you.

One of the most affordable options is to buy a simple phone over there with pre-purchased minutes. There are many local phone stores in France that will sell inexpensive phones with preloaded minutes if you need to have the means to call home. An inexpensive smartphone preloaded with 300 minutes will probably cost you less than \$100.

If you're not using it already, Whatsapp is a great way to message and talk while you're overseas. <https://about.facebook.com/technologies/whatsapp/>

Currency

We're printing money like there's no tomorrow. The stock market is in a shambles, but the dollar has been steadily gaining ground on the Pound and Euro. A year ago it took \$1.41 to buy one pound. Now (June 15th) it only takes \$1.22. There has been a lot of volatility, and it seems to swing 1%-2% every day, but we definitely have more buying power in the UK than we did this time last year.

Spending overseas

Credit card and the local ATM are your best options. Not everyone takes credit cards, so plan on a daily trip to the ATM with draw that day's cash. You get the best exchange rate and won't have to worry about whether a place will take a credit card.

Credit cards give you about the best exchange rate you will find. Many bank cards charge 1-2% for purchases made in foreign currency, which offsets the beneficial rate somewhat. Chase Bank and a few others offer cards that do not charge the foreign exchange fee.

Credit cards offer a very good exchange on your purchase. Make sure you keep your receipts. I have found that Visa cards seem to have the widest acceptance, followed by Mastercard. It is sometimes difficult to get a vendor to accept American Express, perhaps because of their fee structure. There are still some vendors in France who shy away from credit cards, likely due to the roughly 4% processing fees.

I have updated this information over the years. In its last iteration, I spent much time discussing the slow acceptance of US banks to issue “chip and pin” or “chip and sign” cards. A vendor may wait for you to enter your pin to finalize a credit transaction. Simply say you have no pin.

This “chip and sign” method works well in most cases. The only places you may have serious problems are automated ticket machines and highway toll booths with ONLY take chip and pin cards.

Bringing US Currency and hoping to exchange banknotes is a mistake. Banks keep shorter hours. Some don't do foreign exchange, and many others won't like the condition of the bills you want to change.

These are all problems I have encountered that can burn an entire afternoon. You should be able to order some Euros from your bank if you want to arrive there with some (though it's not necessary). There is usually a fee and you have to allow time for your bank to secure the currency. It's easiest just to hit the ATM at the airport or the nearest one to your destination. At each ATM Stop, get enough cash to last you for a couple days. **Traveler's checks are a thing of the past.**

It's a good idea to contact your bank within a week of your departure to let them know that you will be using your credit card, debit card, or ATM over there. If you don't do this, the security department of your bank will block usage. They will want to know detailed itinerary information, specifically dates and countries visited. Don't forget to add any place you may be connecting on your way there or back.

You may do this online with some banks. Otherwise get in touch with the customer service section of your bank. (updated note for 2022-My bank, Chase, tells me I no longer need to notify them of overseas spending. I do anyway to avoid having my card suspended when I need it most.

Another Note: I have a wallet that is RFID protected. Some credit and debit cards can be read remotely using a reader. Add a level of protection by purchasing RFID sleeves for your cards. You can also find wallets online.

Packing your bags

Please try to limit your bags to one large bag and one small, carryon bag. There are laundry opportunities in most hotels.

There are a few excellent websites dedicated to the art of packing for a trip. I have reproduced some of that information here, but you may want to visit some of these sites yourself. The links are www.oratory.com/travel, and <https://www.ricksteves.com/travel-tips/packing-light/ricks-packing-list>.

Please do what you can to reduce the size of your bag. Motor coaches in the UK and Europe simply don't have the storage capacity that we see over here.

Security/Safety

There is not a significant amount of violent crime toward tourists in the UK. There is, however, a great deal of pickpocketing and scams in which tourists are a prime target. I could write a few pages about what to look out for. Here's a thumbnail.

For starters, take a photo of your passport with your phone. It's also a good idea to photocopy the data page and zip it into a suitcase pocket. Leave a copy with a friend or relative that is able to fax or email that copy should you need it. It's much easier to replace a lost or stolen passport if you have a facsimile to present.

Rick Steves and people that have used them, swear by a money belt. I've always found them to be somewhat uncomfortable, but you may want to give it a try. Please! No wallets in back pockets! Purses and backpacks should always be zipped closed and held in front of you in crowded situations. (I just had a wallet stolen on the Paris Metro by a client with their wallet in a back pocket! Don't be that guy. See the section on RFID protection under Banking.

Buddy up! If you're going out, don't go alone. There's safety in numbers.

Most common scam is where someone gives you a plant sprig, necklace, bracelet, etc. It's not a gift. They will then ask for a donation, becoming increasingly belligerent until you give them something. Don't take anything if approached.

You'll be asked to sign petitions and approached by people pretending to be deaf. Don't believe a word of it. They want money and can become quite unpleasant if you refuse. Say no and walk away.

Be cautious. The closer you are to main tourist sites, the more you need to be aware of what's going on around you. En Garde!

Suggested Gratuities

We've got guides lined up for some of the garden visits and for our tour of Oxford, Stratford, Wells, and Bath. They're compensated with an hourly fee, but would appreciate a gratuity if you believe they provided a great service.

Here is a key to gratuities for services in the UK.

- Hotel porters-generally 1 £ per bag.
- It's typically customary to tip any local guide £2- £4 for their services.
- A reasonable gratuity for a coach driver is £1- £2 per person, per day.

Who's coming?

Marty Wingate

Mary Maybee

Karen Larkin

Karen Benveniste

Christine Anderson

Cindy Harden

Leighton Wingate

Francie Huhndorf

Robert Larkin

Susan Connolly

Penny Douglas

Laura Harris

Brad Cilley

Karen Ellis

Neel Parikh

William Connolly

Lynn Grigsby

2022 revised itinerary for Cotswolds Tour

It's anticipated that we'll begin our tour day between 9:00-9:30 each morning. If there's a change to that timing, you'll be notified the day before. Please be on time for our departure each morning. I do not want to be late for these appointments.

Our travel time each day is generally 60-90 minutes. There is one day that we've got a longer distance to travel with a total travel time of about 3 hours. The coach is not restroom equipped, but we make stops as needed.

Wednesday, July 06

Depart USA for London's Heathrow Airport. British Airways and Virgin Atlantic offer non-stops from Seattle, arriving Heathrow on July 7th.

Thursday, July 07

We'll meet at 6:00 PM at The Swan, a local pub near Hyde Park for a welcome pint, glass or dram. We'll dine as a group near the hotel this evening. Overnight London (D)

Friday, July 9th

We've got an all-day ticket arranged for the Royal Hampton Court Flower and Garden Festival. I haven't decided which mode of transport we'll take to the show, but we'll depart shortly after breakfast at 9:15. The train involves 2 changes on the way, but a coach is likely to be slowed by surface traffic. Either way, the travel time is a little over an hour to reach Hampton Court.

Hampton Court Palace is located on the River Thames to the Southwest. The Hampton Court Festival, like the better-known Chelsea Flower Show, offers display gardens, live music, seminars and workshops, shopping, food and drink. Based on arrival time, we'll determine how long we'll stay at the garden. Return to Paddington in the afternoon for free time in London. (B)

Saturday, July 9

Your morning is free to spend sightseeing or shopping in London. The Victoria and Albert Museum, Hyde Park, Harrods, or Buckingham Palace aren't far away. You're also very near the Paddington Tube stop, which gives access to the Circle, District, and Bakerloo Lines.

I've changed the transportation mode for our journey to Bath today. Instead of a train from Paddington, we'll take a coach from the London hotel to the Bath hotel. The travel time is a bit longer, but there is less manual labor in hauling bags on and off trains. A noon departure will have us at the Bath hotel about 3:00 PM. We'll have time to check in to the hotel before our tour.

We'll meet our local Blue-Badge guide at the Abbey Churchyard at 4:00 PM for a 2-hour walking tour of the historical center of Bath. Dinner will be in the early evening near the hotel. Overnight Bath. (BD)

Sunday, July 10

Morning is free in Bath or you may want to visit Bath Priory Gardens. They aren't currently offering tours there, but a self-guided tour would be worth the time. We'll

travel to Iford Manor in the afternoon. Originally scheduled for a nearby pub lunch, we've decided to host a lunch at Iford Manor before beginning our afternoon tour of their gardens. You'll have time to visit the Roman baths (last admission 5:00 PM) or the Jane Austen Centre (open until 5). Dinner is on your own this evening. Overnight Bath. (BL)

Monday, July 11

We'll depart for Wells right after breakfast for a guided walking tour of the town, followed by a visit to the Bishop's Palace Gardens. You'll have free time in Wells for lunch, shopping, and sightseeing.

On our return to Bath, we'll enjoy a late afternoon Pimms Cup and cake at Stoberry House and Gardens with its tremendous view overlooking Wells and the Somerset countryside. Dinner is on your own this evening. Overnight Bath (BT)

Tuesday, July 12

Lacock Abbey Gardens is an ideal first visit on our way north. Following our walk through the abbey gardens, allow yourself time to get a coffee or snack at the café located on site. We've got a drive of about 30 minutes to Highgrove Royal Gardens for our tour time at 1:00 PM.

My original plan was to have lunch at the Orchard Restaurant located on the grounds, but they will not grant access to the restaurant to groups prior to their allotted tour time. I'm still hammering out details with the Prince's minions, but my plan is to schedule a cream tea in the Orchard Restaurant immediately following our 90-minute tour of the gardens. Dinner is at the hotel this evening. Overnight Broadway (BTD)

Wednesday, July 13

Our first visit of the day is to Hidcote Manor for a tour of the gardens. We'll journey to Stratford upon Avon for lunch on our own before meeting our Shakespearean guide for a tour of the town. I expect to return to the hotel by 5:00 PM. Overnight Broadway (B)

Thursday, July 14

Highclere Castle visit in the morning with tour of house and gardens. We've booked a lunch at Aston Pottery, a short drive away. After lunch we'll enjoy a tour of the gardens.

Return to Broadway for free time in town. Dinner on your own. Overnight Broadway (BLD)

Friday, July 15

We're on our way to Oxford today with a stop in Stow on the Wold for photos, shopping at lunch on your own. After our departure from Stow, we'll enjoy a guided tour of Blenheim Palace, ancestral home of the Spencers and Sir Winston Churchill. Dinner will be arranged at the hotel this evening. Overnight Oxford (BD)

Saturday, July 16

We'll start the day with an Author's Walking Tour of the University and surrounds. Experience Oxford through the eyes of JRR Tolkien, CS Lewis, and Colin Dexter (Inspector Morse). We'll break for lunch on your own near the university.

We've got two private NGS Gardens and a tea this afternoon in the small town of Abingdon. 116 Oxford Road and Failford are two properties that open their gardens with proceeds going to a local charity. Return to Oxford for the evening with dinner on your own. Overnight Oxford. (BT)

Sunday, July 17

A morning visit to Awkward Hill Garden with an afternoon at Oxleaze Farm. Return to Oxford for the evening with our farewell dinner planned at a restaurant close to the hotel. Overnight Oxford. (BD)

Monday, July 18

Depart the hotel just after breakfast for Heathrow Airport. Drive time is about an hour. Virgin Air and British Airways (the BA flight has since been cancelled) have scheduled non-stops to Seattle departing after noon. These are the best flights to book. (B)

Hotels:

[The Chilworth London Paddington](#)

55 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 3UY

[The Francis Hotel](#)

Queen Square, Bath BA1 2HH

[The Lygon Arms](#)

High St, Broadway WR12 7DU

[Voco Oxford Thames Hotel](#)

Henley Rd, Sandford-on-Thames, OX4 4GX

Arrival in London

We're all arriving in London at different times. I specifically chose the location for the London hotel for its convenient location to Paddington Train Station and Tube access. We can discuss the Paddington Express at our meeting and determine the best way to get you onto the train at Heathrow and to the hotel.

Brad Cilley

Northwest Travel Service

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