

DESTINATION WESSEX

THE LEGEND OF KING ARTHUR

Car Tour



Day 1 Arrive **Dover**. The itinerary is geared to travel by motorway (M20, M26, M25) to a first night hotel or B&B somewhere near the M25 to the south west of London, for example in the Reigate, Leatherhead or Woking area.

Day 2 Leave for **Bath** (120 to 130 miles depending on where the first night stay is made) about 9.30, after the rush hour (M25, M4, A46)

Arrive Bath and check into the hotel or B&B for 2 nights. Lunch in the hotel or elsewhere in Bath.

After lunch, a tour of the world famous **Roman Baths and Temple** that were built almost 2,000 years ago and flourished throughout the centuries of Roman occupation. They were sited around a natural hot spring in the centre of the city from which the water still rises at a temperature of 46°C. The baths are remarkably complete and among the finest Roman sites in Europe.

Free time in late afternoon to stroll around the centre of this World Heritage city. If time permits, a guided walking tour can be taken.

Note There are those who connect King Arthur with Scotland and the North of England. Others who support the concept of a Welsh Arthur and an Arthur from Brittany. And these associations stretch over more than one normal lifetime. All this is part of what makes the legend so fascinating.

However, for the majority, Glastonbury, Tintagel Castle and Cadbury Castle are the three key sites associated with the legend of King Arthur. The next four days will take the tour to these three key locations.

Day 3 Leave for **Glastonbury**, 32 miles (A39).

Glastonbury has always been a place of myths and legends. Is it, as the legend says, the place to which Joseph of Arimathea brought the Holy Grail and established the first Church in England? Did Jesus and some of the Apostles also visit it as the legend says? Is it the mythical isle of Avalon where King Arthur was buried? Glastonbury does not have all the answers but it certainly has a lot more to tell the visitor about the legends.

Visit the sacred Glastonbury Tor, the Chalice Well and Glastonbury Abbey, the alleged resting place of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere. Learn more about why Glastonbury is such a special place and why the legendary King Arthur is so closely associated with it.

Lunch in Glastonbury or Wells.

Leave for Wells, A39 (6 miles).

Visit **Wells Cathedral** which has been described as a jewel in the crown of English cathedrals and is one of the finest examples of early Gothic architecture.

Its great West Front which dates from 1240, has the largest gallery of medieval sculpture in the world. A church was founded here in 705 and in 909 it was granted cathedral status. The construction of the present building was started in about 1180. Important additions were made in the 14th and 15th centuries.

A short time to stroll in the historic centre of Wells, England's smallest city.

In the event of bad weather, the visitor will be able to see the King Arthur burial site and Glastonbury Abbey has a very interesting museum. What may have to be curtailed is the walk up Glastonbury Tor and the visit to the Chalice Well. If they have to be missed, the visit to Wells Cathedral can be advanced and take place before a slightly late lunch. The trip would then continue to Bath after lunch in Wells. This would leave more of the afternoon to explore Bath.

Return to the hotel or B&B in Bath. An alternative route back (30 miles) is suggested. This would be via A371 (there is an interesting village church in Croscombe), A361, A36 with the last part looking down on the valley of the River Avon and an excellent view of Bath itself.

Day 4 Depart for **Tintagel**, 160 miles. Take A4 out of Bath towards Bristol. When reaching the junction with A4174, there is the choice of turning left and taking A4174, the Bristol Ring Road, and rejoining the A4 as it leaves the city or continuing on A4 all the way. The latter involves turning left just before reaching the bridge over the River Avon. When leaving Bristol, the road follows the River Avon and passes under the Clifton Suspension Bridge and on to Junction 18 on the M5.

Then head south on M5 until after Exeter and turn right on A30. The route will pass through the rolling green hills of Somerset and enter the northern part of Dartmoor National Park.

The journey will be broken at this point for a visit to **Castle Drogo**, a granite fortress with grand views over Dartmoor. Built between 1910 and 1930, it is one of the most remarkable works of the architect, Sir Edward Lutyens.

Lunch will be taken in the Castle Drogo restaurant and time will be allowed for a leisurely stroll through the beautiful gardens.

Continue the rest of the trip, to Tintagel, 60 miles (A30, A395, B3266). The route follows the edge of Dartmoor and enters Cornwall just past Okehampton. About 2 miles after joining A39, turn right on B3314 and make stop at Slaughter Bridge and visit the Arthurian Centre. One legend is that this is where Arthur's last battle, the Battle of Camlaan took place.

Continue on B3314 until, after crossing B3266, turn right on B3263 and follow this into Tintagel.

Check into the hotel (2 nights) and relax, perhaps explore the village.

Not being familiar with accommodation in Cornwall, I cannot recommend a place to stay but, based on rating, the following could be worth checking. Hotels. Bottreaux Hotel, Boscastle, 2 star but with a silver award and recently renovated, Bossinney House Hotel, Bossinney, also 2 star but very well located near the coast. Llantaglos Country House Hotel and the Burford Park Hotel and Club, Camelford, all 3 star. There are also a variety of four and five diamond rated B&B's. I will mail you a leaflet that lists them.

Day 5 Leave for **Tintagel Castle** (1 mile), the legendary birthplace of King Arthur and, upon entering, see the film shown near the reception area. The ruins of this Norman castle lie on wild cliffs in a particularly dramatic stretch of the Cornish coast. It is said the Arthur lived here with Queen Guinevere and the Knights of the Round Table. Merlin, his magician, lived in a cave beneath the castle that visitors can enter at low tide. While all this not proven, there is evidence that this was an important castle that could have been royal.

Return to the hotel for lunch.

After lunch visit **Padstow** which lies 25 miles south of Tintagel (A39, A389). It is an area of outstanding natural beauty with wonderful bays and fine beaches. The town itself has a colourful and ancient history. Old crooked streets slope down to the harbour where many fine medieval buildings can still be seen. Today Padstow remains a working fishing port whose produce has been made famous by Rick Stein's television series and acclaimed seafood restaurants.

Stay in Padstow for dinner and return to the Tintagel hotel or B&B afterwards, or have dinner back at the hotel.

If preferred, stay one night in Tintagel and the second night in Padstow where there is ample accommodation.

Day 6 Leave for **Cadbury Castle**, 127 miles. A39, A395, M5, a short distance and then A30, A303 through the Blackdown Hills and on as far as the Sparkford roundabout. Turn right into Sparkford village and then follow the signs to South Cadbury. Probably 2.5 hours.

If Camelot exists, it is the general view of acknowledged experts that its location is Cadbury Castle. Excavations here in the 1960's discovered the largest stone and timber fortification of its kind in Britain. It was undoubtedly the fortress of a major leader. Was it Arthur's stronghold from which he went out to defeat the Danes at the battle of Mount Badon? Some experts think so. Some have also speculated that the site of

the battle of Camlaan where Arthur was killed took place alongside the River Cam which flows not far the Castle.

Lunch will be taken in the charming inn, The Camelot, which lies near the foot of the path which leads up to the Castle.

The path up to the Castle starts just a short distance from the Inn. Before you start up it check the information board in the car park a few yards further on since it provides a brief but informative background to the Castle. It is a fairly steep but not difficult walk up to the top. Once there, a walk around the perimeter earthen walls provides splendid views of the surrounding countryside in all directions. (Reasonably sturdy shoes are recommended).

After coming down, why not break for tea in The Camelot.

Depart for **Salisbury**, 35 miles. Return to A303 and turn right after Mere on B3089 which leads through attractive countryside and villages to A30. Turn left in to Wilton and on into Salisbury. Ideally leave by about 3.30pm or 3.45pm.

Should the weather be really bad, the walk up to and around Cadbury Castle might have to be cancelled. In that event, proceed to Salisbury after the talk. There will then be more time to enjoy the attractions of historic Salisbury. Alternatively stop at Wilton House on the way. This is a very impressive historic house with a fine art collection.

Check into the Salisbury hotel or B&B of your choice.

If on schedule, there should be time to check in, have a wash and then arrive at Salisbury Cathedral in time to join its outstanding choir at Choral evensong which takes place six days a week at 5.30pm.

Day 7 Depart for **Stonehenge**, 10 miles (A345. A303).

The great and ancient circle of Stonehenge is one of the world's wonders. This circle and the landscape surrounding it remain a powerful witness to the once great civilisations of the Stone and Bronze Ages. It has attracted visitors for 5,000 years and was one of the very first places recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

King Arthur also has a Stonehenge connection through Merlin, his magician. Legend has it that Merlin, along with King Uther, led an expedition to Ireland to procure the stones of the Chorea Gigantum, the Giant's Ring. Merlin, by the use of his extraordinary powers, brought the stones back to a site, just west of Amesbury that we now call Stonehenge and re-erected them.

After the visit to Stonehenge, return to Salisbury for lunch.

After lunch, leave for **Winchester** which was the first capital of England, 27 miles (A36, A27, A3090).

Visit the Great Hall, the only remaining part of Winchester Castle. This houses what is claimed to be the famous Round Table around which King Arthur and his knights met.

Move on to Winchester Cathedral, the great Norman/Romanesque cathedral, the construction of which began in 1079. It has the longest nave in Europe and King Alfred the Great is buried here along with other well known figures including Jane Austen.

A 90 minute walking tour of the historic centre of Winchester is also regularly operated.

Return to the Salisbury hotel by the same route.

Day 8 Free time to explore the historic centre of Salisbury and take a relatively early lunch.

Depart for **Dover**, 145 miles (A338, A303, M3, M25, M26, M20, A20). This is a fast motorway route which should not take more than about 3 hours, provided the rush hour is avoided. This means being clear of the M25, ideally by 3.30pm. The coach should therefore leave Salisbury by 1.30pm at the latest.

Arrive Dover and board the ferry. This schedule can of course be changed to a morning departure from Salisbury if the timing of the ferry demands this.

Notes

- Motorways. It is a bit longer in distance to head west via the motorway system but, if rush hours are avoided (I have scheduled the trip to miss them,) it is considerably faster in time to travel through the "Home Counties" on them than to fight the congestion on the regular roads.
- Accommodation. The itinerary has been geared to 2 night stays. If you could use more small hotel or B&B recommendations for the stays in Bath and Salisbury, let me know. Tintagel is out of our area and I personally do not know the accommodation. I cannot therefore make recommendations but I will mail you a leaflet on accommodation in this area
- * Bad weather. I have included alternate arrangements if weather limits some of the sections that are outdoors.
- Route. I have also included the details of the road numbers that I recommend and the approximate distances to the next destination in each case. I hope this is useful.

I recommend this itinerary to you and hope that you will give it consideration in respect to your 2007 programme. To stimulate your interest, I have also attached a brief extract on the legend.