

Explore the historic heart of Oxford



How long do I need? One day

Where is it? Oxford

Highlights

Golden limestone colleges have shaped a lovely city centre alive with trademark student bikes, placards announcing gigs and concerts, interesting markets and shops and a seemingly endless variety of cafes, restaurants, bars, bistros and pubs. University highlights include the venerable Bodleian Library, Sir Christopher Wren's Sheldonian Theatre and five free museums each with collections of international renown. Boating and punting on the River Thames (known here as the Isis) and the leafy by-ways of the River Cherwell provides an ever-popular pastime on sunny days. Ancient Christ Church Meadow and the University Botanic Garden provide hidden havens of green tranquillity for walks and riverside picnics. Our suggested itinerary includes a good selection of Oxford's highlights, with some extra information on attractions along the way.

Start your day in Radcliffe Square

Iconic Radcliffe Square has remained largely unchanged since its centrepiece, the circular Radcliffe Camera, was completed in 1749. On the High Street side, the University Church of St Mary the Virgin looks across the cobbled Square to the Bodleian Library. Between them, the buildings of Brasenose College and All Souls largely complete the Square. Begin with a bird's eye view from the tower of the 13th-century [University Church of St Mary the Virgin](#), thought to be the oldest university building in the world. The church housed the University's reference library and its ancient Convocation House was used for degree ceremonies before the opening of the Sheldonian Theatre in 1669. There are 127 steps leading up to a platform on the church tower, giving marvellous views over the dreaming spires. The church opens from 09.00 and there is an admission charge for the tower.

Visit the Bodleian Library

The University's research library occupies a complex of historic buildings which includes the Divinity School, completed in 1488 for the teaching of theology. With its elaborate vaulted ceiling, this is one of the great masterpieces of English Gothic architecture. Leading off the Divinity School is the Convocation House and Chancellors Court, where the University's governing body would carry out its business and where parliament met during the Civil War. Above it is the Duke Humfrey Library, a treasure house of rare books and manuscripts in a wonderful medieval setting. Everything is approached through the central Old Schools Quadrangle, commenced in 1613, where doors still bear the Latin names of the schools to which they gave access. The Exhibition Room shows off Bodleian treasures in changing displays.

The Bodleian Library

Oxford OX1 3BG (entrances from Cattle Street, Radcliffe Square and Broad Street)

Opening hours: One-hour tours – Monday - Saturday 10:30, 11:30, 14:00 & 15:00, Sunday 11:30, 14:00 & 15:00.

Costs: Admission costs apply – see website or call for details

Tel: +44 (0)1865 277224

Web: www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk

Time to spare? Sir Christopher Wren's [Sheldonian Theatre](#), between the Divinity School and Broad Street, is also open to visitors offering yet more excellent views of Oxford's spires from the belfry. Admission charges apply.

A bite to eat

The [Turf Tavern](#): go under the arch of the "Bridge of Sighs" and dive down the little passageway in the left-hand wall to reach this historic 13th – century hostel, built into the old city wall. [The Vaults & Garden Café](#): has an enviable location in the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, with a small garden overlooking Radcliffe Square. [The Covered Market](#): follow Brasenose Lane from Radcliffe Square to the 18th-century Covered Market (open Monday–Saturday) where small shops sell everything from hand-made hats to Oxford sausages and shoes. Cafés, bakers and delicatessens make this a good stop for a sit down lunch or to buy a picnic to enjoy in the Botanic Garden.

Time to spare? The chapel of Exeter College, in Turl Street, was designed by George Gilbert-Scott. It has a breath-taking interior with glittering mosaics, rich stained glass and *The Adoration of the Magi*, a tapestry designed mainly by Edward Burne-Jones and produced by William Morris. The college is free to visitors and open from 14.00 – 16.00.

The High and the Botanic Garden

Follow The High, with its interesting shops, to The University Botanic Garden beside the River Cherwell at Magdalen Bridge. Founded in 1621 on the site of the former Jewish cemetery, the oldest botanic garden in Britain boasts the most compact yet diverse collection of plants in the world. Admire the large black pine known as Tolkien's Tree, where the great man would sit and meditate when writing *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Glasshouses are also a welcome highlight in the winter months.

The University of Oxford Botanic Garden

Rose Lane, Oxford OX1 4AZ

Opening hours: Open daily 9:00 – 18:00, May – August (17:00 September, October, March, April; 16:30 November - February).

Costs: Admission costs apply (by donation, weekdays November – February) – see website or call for details

Tel: +44 (0)1865 286690

Web: www.botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk

Time to spare? From mid March to mid October, test your punting skills at the [Magdalen Bridge Boathouse](#) (tel: +44 (0)1865 202643) beside Magdalen College. The boathouse provides punts, chauffeured punts, rowing boats and pedalos for hire on the River Cherwell. The most popular circular route, past the Botanic Garden and Christ Church Meadow, takes 30 minutes to an hour.

The 15th century Cloister, Quadrangle, Hall and Chapel of [Magdalen College](#) (tel: +44 (0)1865 276000) are amongst the most beautiful of all Oxford college buildings. Inspiring gardens and grounds include the college's own deer park and Addison's Walk, skirting fields and meadows noted for snake's head fritillaries in the spring. Open: 13.00 – 18.00 or dusk; noon to 19.00 in the Long Vacation (late June - early October.) The Old Kitchen is open during visitor hours, Monday – Saturday, for light lunches and snacks.

Follow Dead Man's Walk through Christ Church Meadow

From the Botanic Garden, take the gate from Rose Lane into the open green spaces of Christ Church Meadow. The former coffin route which led to the Jewish cemetery skirts the walls of Merton, Corpus Christi and Christ Church, passing the Christ Church visitor entrance before emerging onto St Aldate's.

Visit magnificent Christ Church College

This splendid college was founded in 1525 by Cardinal Wolsey (the original owner of Hampton Court Palace) on the site of 12th century St Frideswide's Priory. Parts of the priory church form the college chapel, England's smallest cathedral. The magnificent Great Hall, completed in 1539, is now familiar worldwide as the model for Hogwarts Hall in the *Harry Potter* films. The college buildings and gardens also include numerous features which appear in the *Alice* stories written by Christ Church mathematics don Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) for Alice Liddell, daughter of the Dean.

Christ Church College

St Aldate's, Oxford OX1 1DP

Opening hours: daily (except 25th December) 9.00 – 17.00 Monday - Saturday, 14.00 – 17.00 on Sundays. Last admission 16.30. The Hall is usually closed from noon - 14.00; the Cathedral closes for choir practice at 16.45. Admission charges apply, except for cathedral services.

Costs: Admission costs apply – see website or call for details

Tel: +44 (0)1865 276150

Web: www.chch.ox.ac.uk

Time to spare? The [Christ Church Picture Gallery](#), entered via Canterbury Quad, has one of the most important private collections in the country including works by Leonardo, Michelangelo, Dürer, Raphael and Rubens. There is a guided tour every Monday afternoon, included in the ticket price. The gallery is open daily (excluding Christmas – New Year). Admission charges apply.

[Alice's Shop](#) (tel: +44 (0)1875 723793) on the opposite side of St Aldate's from the Christ Church exit, has the ultimate range of *Alice* themed gifts. This was the sweet shop frequented by Alice Liddell, which appears in mirror image as The Old Sheep Shop in Sir John Tenniel's illustration of *Alice through the Looking Glass*.

Visit the Ashmolean Museum

The oldest public museum in the world, the Ashmolean is dedicated to the University's superb collections of art and antiquities. The flagship museum was reopened by HM the Queen in 2009, following a £61 million development. It now has 39 new galleries, a spectacular atrium, a suite of galleries for temporary exhibitions and roof-top restaurant to complement its popular basement café. The collections have been entirely redisplayed, with an innovative approach which illustrates the fascinating ways in which the world's civilizations are connected.

The Ashmolean Museum

Beaumont Street, Oxford, OX1 2PH

Opening hours: Tuesday-Sunday and Bank Holidays, 10.00-18.00. Closed 24-26 December.

Costs: Free admission

Tel: +44 (0)1865 553823

Web: www.ashmolean.org

Enjoy a sunset picnic on the Isis

Evening on the Isis is a magical time, with bird life at its most active and cows making their way across the meadows for a last cooling drink. The Edwardian style launch owned and operated by Oxford River Cruises provides the perfect viewpoint from which to enjoy the scene. Their Saturday Sunset Picnic Trip offers superb hospitality, with a long and leisurely gourmet picnic made up of the freshest produce and well-chosen wines. The cruise leaves Folly Bridge, St Aldate's at 18.00 (17.00 during September), returning after 2.5-3 hours as the light begins to fade. Cruises operate daily, from May to the end of September.

Oxford River Cruises

57 Oxford Road, Oxford, OX2 6HJ

Opening hours: Sunset cruise leaves Folly Bridge, St Aldate's at 18.00 (17.00 during September), returning after 2.5-3 hours as the light begins to fade. Cruises operate daily, from May to the end of September.

Costs: Admission costs apply

Tel: +44 (0)845 2269396

Web: www.oxfordrivercruises.com

More ways of exploring Oxford

Official *University and City Guided Walking Tours* leave the Oxford Tourist Information Centre in Broad Street daily throughout the year. Choices include themed tours on wide range of popular subjects. Call in for tickets or pre-book online.

[City Sightseeing Oxford](#) operates a 1-hour open-top bus tour all the year round. Tickets are valid all day, to hop on and off at any one of 19 stops. No need to book: just pay the driver.

[Salters Steamers](#) (tel: +44(0)1865 243421) run 4-hour return trips along the Isis, from Folly Bridge to Iffley Lock. Trips operate hourly from 11.00 – 17.00 from the end of May to mid September.

Getting to Oxford

By Air: the Oxford Bus Company's Airline Service (tel: +44 (0)1865 785400) operates a direct frequent service to London Heathrow and Gatwick Airports, 24 hours a day. Approx journey times: from Heathrow Bus Station 100 minutes (80 minutes from Terminal 5); from Gatwick North and South Terminals, approx 2 ½ hours. London Stansted and Luton airports are linked by the [National Express 737](#) bus service.

By Car: the M40 and M4 + A34 provide easy access by car from London, leaving the M40 at Junction 8. The M40 links Birmingham to Oxford from the north, leaving at Junction 9. Parking in Oxford is very limited, so take advantage of Oxford's [Park and Ride](#) service. All five Park and Ride sites are clearly signposted from the Oxford Ring Road. They operate seven days per week (excluding Sundays at Water Eaton). The Pear Tree, [Seacourt](#) and Thornhill sites serve evening visitors, with buses running until 23:30 (Monday - Saturday). All Park and Ride buses are equipped to take wheelchairs and pushchairs.

By Coach: fast and frequent bus services provide a direct link between central Oxford and central London 24 hours a day. The journey takes approx 100 minutes - longer during the rush hour. [The Oxford Express](#) (tel: +44 (0)1865 785410) runs all day and most of the night. [The Oxford Tube](#) (tel: +44 (0)1865 772250) operates all 24 hours.

By Train: a direct service operates between Oxford and London Paddington (approximately every 30 minutes), and between Oxford and Birmingham New Street via Banbury and Coventry. Other services operate from the north via Birmingham New Street, from the South via Reading and from the west via Didcot or Reading. Contact [National Rail Enquiries](#) (tel: +44 (0)8457 484950) for details.

By Taxi: taxi ranks are located at Oxford Railway Station, Gloucester Green Coach Station and St Giles' in the city centre. ABC Taxis: tel: +44 (0)1865 770077; City Taxis: tel: +44 (0)1865 201201; Euro Taxis: tel: +44 (0)1865 430430; Radio Taxis: tel: +44 (0)1865 249743 / 242424.

More visitor information

Go to the [Visit Oxfordshire website](#), or call in at The Oxford Information Centre, 15-16 Broad Street, Oxford, OX1 3AS. Tel: +44(0)1865 252200. Open: daily Monday – Saturday 09.30 – 17.30 (17.00 in winter); 10.00 – 16.00 on Sundays. Closed 25, 26 December, 1 January and Good Friday – Easter Monday.