



REDUCE YOUR HOLIDAY MILES

THE ALLURE OF LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

The pandemic has made most of us review the way we live in many ways - the way we shop, the way we socialise, the way we entertain, the way we holiday. Although most travel restrictions have been lifted for overseas destinations, there is still a certain reticence among holiday makers to book those trips to faraway places, apprehensive of sudden changes in the rules, costly tests and confusing form-filling. Step forward not just the staycation but hyper-local tourism.

Many of us love to show off our local area to visiting friends and family, extolling the virtues of its many and varied attractions only to quietly admit you've not actually visited all or any of them yourself.

With this in mind, editor Sally-ann Bloomer spent a few days in the oft-overlooked city of Hereford, seeing it through the eyes of a tourist.

Who needs to travel hundreds of miles to enjoy a little mini-break? Don't they say a change is as good as a rest? With this in mind, we loaded up the car for a couple of days to see just what the centre of Herefordshire has to offer.

At the heart of Hereford is a really bustling city centre, small but perfectly formed with history jumping out at you at every street turn and fabulous shops, bars and restaurants crying out to be enjoyed. The outskirts though are a real rural idyll, perfect for those looking for some R&R so for this trip we decided to try a little of each.



For our first night, we booked into the Hayloft, one of three accommodation options at Wall End Farm in Monkland. The farm has been in the family for generations but has recently diversified to offer B&B in the main house for up to two guests and two self-catering options, the Hayloft, where we stayed, which again sleeps two, and the more recently refurbished Hop Kiln which accommodates four people. Beautifully and stylishly decorated, guests' every need were catered for and on arrival we found our fridge loaded with local eggs, jam and apple juice and an artisan loaf of bread perfect for a self-catering breakfast. Equidistant from Ludlow and Hereford, it's a great base for sight-seeing but for those looking to stay closer to home the farm is surrounded by gorgeous countryside cross-crossed with public footpaths and a short walk away is the Monkland Cheese Dairy which offers cheese tours as well as a shop and café.

After recharging our batteries in the peace of the Hayloft, the next morning we headed to Hereford city, where we had booked a city walking tour. It's easy to visit or even live in a place without fully appreciating all it has to offer but our tour guide Linda really knew her stuff when it came to the history of Hereford, pointing out interesting architecture (Hereford really does have some beautiful buildings) and telling us fascinating facts about events which formed the city's historical, social and political landscape. Organised by Hereford Guild of Guides, these tours are a great way to really understand the city. In the summer there are daily tours but outside of those months they are available on a pre-booked basis only and at just £5 per person for around 90 minutes it's excellent value.

Of course the Cathedral is the real jewel of the city, dominating its skyline and no visit to Hereford would be complete without venturing inside. A place of continuous worship for more than 1300 years, the Cathedral boasts a colourful history through the ages with beheadings, miracles and pilgrimages all part of its narrative. History aside, it is a truly beautiful place to visit, not as large or grand as other cathedrals perhaps, but with stunning

stained glass windows, fascinating shrines and curious tombs. And of course it has some very special additional treasures always worth a visit – the world famous Mappa Mundi, the Chained Library and a 1217 version of the Magna Carta now all housed in a new purpose-built library building.

After a lunch in a charmingly quirky café in Church Street, known as the independent quarter, where the autumnal weather allowed us to sit outside, we checked into our hotel for the night, the Green Dragon. Perfectly, centrally positioned for a city break, the hotel is one of the oldest in Hereford and has been trading under its current name since the early 1700s. Under new ownership since 2018, the hotel has recently undergone major refurbishment and in addition to its 80-plus comfortable bedrooms, it offers stylish and contemporary dining in its Hereford brasserie with a focus on local produce as well as drinks and cocktails in its choice of bar or lounge areas.

Castle House Hotel is another stylish choice for overnight accommodation or even just drinks and dinner. Family owned, this boutique hotel aims to provide much of its beef, fruit, salad and veg from their own farm which now has an extensive kitchen garden. The hotel has just 24 rooms and has recently added a new bar area, welcoming guests who just fancy a drink or more casual dining overlooking the old castle moat alongside the hotel. The fine dining menu celebrates the best of local and seasonal produce and on Saturday evenings there is a five course tasting menu which really promises to tantalise the taste buds.

For more casual dining, another great choice is the renowned Saxtys, which offers dining, drinking and dancing. Again, recently refurbished in a contemporary style, with lots of outdoor seating at the rear for warmer days, the speciality here is 'hot rocks' cooking.

The menu offers small plates for starters or sharing, tapas style,



and for mains a choice of burgers, head chef Martin's specials and the hot rocks steak which can either be cooked in the kitchen or by the diner at the table. We opted for kitchen cooked (why go out and cook yourself? I fancied a night off) and it was delicious, tasty fare. Our visit was mid-week but we did take a sneak peek at The Library which becomes a nightclub at the weekends with live DJs from 10pm until late.

Whilst there is definitely plenty to draw in the history and food lovers in Hereford, there is so much more too. The River Wye, winding its way through the city, offers various sporting pursuits. Test those core muscles with a little paddle boarding or take out a kayak or canoe.

We had scheduled a horse ride for our second afternoon but forecast thunder storms made that seem a less than attractive proposition so maybe we can see more of the Herefordshire countryside from the saddle at another time.

Instead we decided to drive over to Much Marcle to visit the makers of another of the county's great exports – cider. As well as cider mill tours, Weston's offers plenty to enjoy for all the family, including a play park, Shire horses to see and delicious food and drink in The Scrumpy House. There are many other drinks producers in the area open to visitors, particularly gin makers, and many offer talks and workshops where you can even make your own blend.

Two days gave us a perfect taste of what Hereford has to offer but it really was just an aperitif, there is so much to see and do.

For ideas on places to stay, dine and activities, visit www.eatsleepliveherefordshire.co.uk.

