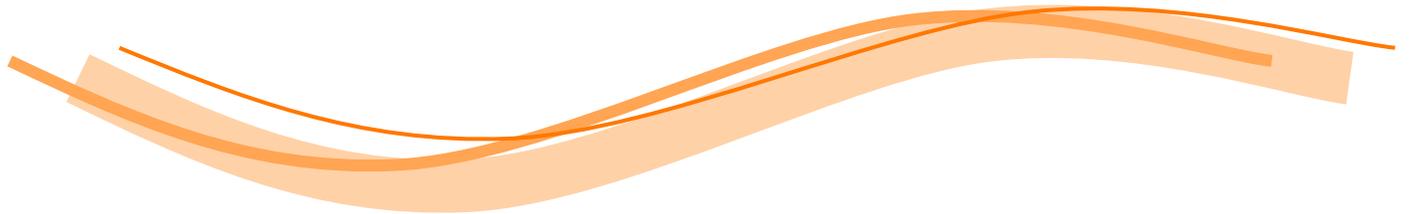




HEART OF ENGLAND





HEART OF ENGLAND	<p>The Heart of England captures the very essence of Englishness. Majestic yet unassuming, its countryside and traditions are old and quirky, yet its cities are vibrant and cosmopolitan.</p> <p>Visit the beautiful Cotswolds in the South of the region with its picture perfect, honey-coloured English villages. The north offers the Staffordshire potteries and Shakespeare's Stratford-on-Avon. Close by lies the Black Country with art, crafts and modern architecture mixed with Victorian villages.</p> <p>At the border of England and Wales, Herefordshire and Shropshire are a gourmet's delight with excellent restaurants, locally produced food and cider. While Worcestershire has churches, historic buildings, and acclaimed festivals and events.</p> <p>And the city of Birmingham offers world-class culture, superb shopping, top attractions, fantastic nightlife, major events and exhibitions. For more information, check out the brand new campaign website at www.britainitsouthere.com.</p>
Location	<p>Britain lies northwest of continental Europe, with Ireland and the Atlantic Ocean to the west and north, the North Sea to the east and the English Channel to the south.</p> <p>The Heart of England region lies to the south of England's North Country, to the east of Wales, to the north of Southern England and to the west of the East Midlands region.</p>
Geography	<p>In The Heart of England you will find fertile plains and river valleys, upland moors and hills, arable and pasture land, cities and forests...all the elements that make up the wonderful British countryside.</p>
Name	<p>England is named after the Angles, the largest of the Germanic tribes who settled in England in the 5th and 6th centuries.</p> <p>England's North Country takes its name from its geographical position within England.</p>
Population	<p>The UK – approximately 60.6 million (England 50,714,000; Wales 2,977,000; Scotland 5,108,000; Northern Ireland 1,733,000).</p>
Language	<p>English is universally spoken, but a number of other languages are also in use as second languages, reflecting Britain's cultural mix</p>
Currency	<p>UK Pounds; currently (Sept 13, 2008) one Pound = 1.89 Canadian Dollars</p>
Tipping	<p>For cab drivers, add about 10% to 15% to the fare on the meter. However, if the driver loads or unloads your luggage, add something extra.</p> <p>In hotels, porters receive 75p (\$1.45) per bag, even if you have only one small suitcase. Hall porters are tipped only for special services. Maids receive £1 (\$1.90) per day. In top-ranking hotels, the concierge will often submit a separate bill showing charges for newspapers and other items; if he or she has been particularly helpful, tip extra.</p>

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	<p>Hotels often add a service charge of 10% to 15% to most bills. In smaller bed-and-breakfasts, the tip is not likely to be included. Therefore, tip people for special services, such as the waiter who serves you breakfast. If several people have served you in a bed-and-breakfast, you may ask that 10% to 15% be added to the bill and divided among the staff.</p> <p>In both restaurants and nightclubs, a 15% service charge is added to the bill, which is distributed among all the help. To that, add another 3% to 5%, depending on the service. Waiters in deluxe restaurants and nightclubs are accustomed to the extra 5%. Sommeliers (wine stewards) get about £1 (\$1.90) per bottle of wine served. Tipping in pubs isn't common, but in wine bars, the server usually gets about 75p (\$1.45) per round of drinks.</p>
Government	The UK is made up of Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and Northern Ireland, and is one of the 25 member states of the European Union (EU). The UK is a constitutional monarchy that is a representative democracy, where Queen Elizabeth II is recognised as the head of state, and the elected Prime Minister – Gordon Brown – is the head of government.
Documentation	On arrival in the United Kingdom, you must show a valid national passport or other equivalent official document that satisfactorily establishes your identity and nationality
Time zone	Five hours ahead of EST
Health	You are advised to take out adequate insurance before travelling to Britain. Your travel agent will be able to suggest a suitable policy. If you become ill while visiting Britain, you are eligible for free emergency treatment in the Accident and Emergency departments of National Health Service hospitals. However, if you are admitted to hospital as an in-patient, even from the accident and emergency department, or referred to an out-patient clinic, you will be asked to pay.
Safety tips	By international standards, Britain is a safe country with low rates of street crime and violence.

CLIMATE	
General climate	Britain has a fairly temperate climate and can sometimes be overcast. However, Wales enjoys long summer evenings due to its relatively northerly latitude and periods of fine weather can happen in all seasons. The weather can vary greatly from day to day, but generally summer (June-August) is a hot 14-30 °C, and winter (December-February) is a cool 1-5 °C.
Today's weather	18 degrees Centigrade and mostly sunny with some showers (13 Sept 2008)
Best time to visit	All year round

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GETTING AROUND	
Flying time	Flying time to the UK from Toronto from is 7hrs with Air Transat, Air Canada, British Airways and others.
Cities	<p>Birmingham Birmingham, a dynamic business city, offering a world class cultural scene, a diverse and lively mix of shopping, attractions, nightlife, major international events and exhibitions.</p> <p>Coventry Coventry has easy transport links, making it the ideal destination for visitors, with great shopping facilities, and a range of bars, restaurants and historical buildings.</p> <p>Hereford Agricultural county town, its cathedral containing much Norman work, a large chained library and the world-famous Mappa Mundi exhibition.</p> <p>Ludlow Ludlow, 'the loveliest town in England'.</p> <p>Shrewsbury Shrewsbury is the county town of Shropshire and features breezy black and white 'magpie' half-timbered houses.</p> <p>Stoke-on-Trent Home to the world's greatest pottery manufacturers, the city boasts visitor centres, ceramic museums and factory shops, plus excellent leisure and entertainment.</p> <p>Stratford-upon-Avon Stratford-upon-Avon is William Shakespeare's home town with glorious river setting, five houses associated with Shakespeare, The RSC Courtyard Theatre and first class shopping and dining.</p> <p>Worcester Worcester is full of history and surrounded by beautiful countryside.</p>
Distances	<p>London to Birmingham: 180km Birmingham to Derby: 63 km Birmingham to Hereford: 95km Birmingham to Glasgow: 460 km</p>
Trains	<p>Travelling by train is undoubtedly the most scenic and relaxing way to visit Britain, sit back as rolling hills, castles and ancient monuments glide pass you.</p> <p>BritRail Travel Passes - BritRail Passes allow unlimited travel in</p>

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	<p>England, Scotland, and Wales on any British rail scheduled train over the whole of the network during the validity of the pass without restrictions. If you're traveling beyond London anywhere in the United Kingdom and plan to hop on and off the train, consider purchasing a BritRail Consecutive Pass. These passes allow you to travel for a consecutive number of days for a flat rate. In first class adults pay \$349 for 4 days, \$499 for 8 days, \$748 for 15 days, \$950 for 22 days, and \$1,124 for 1 month. In second class, fares are \$232 for 4 days, \$332 for 8 days, \$499 for 15 days, \$631 for 22 days, and \$748 for 1 month. Seniors (60 and older) qualify for discounts in first class travel and pay \$296 for 4 days, \$425 for 8 days, \$636 for 15 days, \$808 for 22 days, and \$956 for 1 month of first-class travel. Passengers younger than 26 qualify for a Youth Pass: \$185 for 4 days, \$265 for 8 days, \$400 for 15 days, \$505 for 22 days, and \$599 for 1 month. One child (younger than age 15) can travel free with each adult or senior pass when the BritRail Family Pass is requested while buying the adult pass. Additional children pay half the regular adult fare.</p>
<p>Car Rental</p>	<p>The British car-rental market is among the most competitive in Europe. Nevertheless, car rentals are often relatively expensive, unless you avail yourself of one of the promotional deals that are frequently offered by British Airways and others.</p> <p>Because cars in Britain travel on the left side of the road, steering wheels are positioned on the "wrong" side of the vehicle. Keep in mind that most rental cars are manual, so be prepared to shift with your left hand; you'll pay more for an automatic - and make sure to request one when you reserve.</p> <p>Most car-rental companies will accept your Canadian driver's license, provided you're 23 years old (21 in rare instances) and have had the license for more than a year. Many rental companies will grant discounts to clients who reserve their cars in advance (usually 48 hr.) through the toll-free reservations offices in the renter's home country. Rentals of a week or more are almost always less expensive per day than day rentals.</p> <p>When you reserve a car, make sure you know the total price, including the 17.5% value-added tax (VAT).</p> <p>Rentals are available through Avis (tel. 800/331-1084; www.avis.com), Budget (tel. 800/472-3325; www.budget.com), and Hertz (tel. 800/654-3001; www.hertz.com). And many others</p>
<p>Buses</p>	<p>In Britain, a long-distance touring bus is called a "coach," and "buses" are taken for local transportation. An efficient and frequent express motor-coach network - run by National Express and other independent operators - links most of Britain's towns and cities. Destinations off the main route can be easily reached by transferring to a local bus at a stop on the route. Tickets are relatively cheap, often half the price of rail fare,</p>

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	<p>and it's usually cheaper to purchase a round-trip (or "return") ticket than two one-way fares separately.</p> <p>National Express (www.nationalexpress.com) offers several passes for the explorer who'd like to hop around Britain by coach. These include Hobo, costing £79 (\$150) for 7 days of bus travel. Sample itineraries are suggested but you can also plot your own - that's how flexible this pass is. There's no need to book. Footloose, at £139 (\$264), grants 2 weeks of bus travel from a choice of 1,000 destinations throughout the U.K.</p>
Canals	<p>Relax and enjoy the region's countryside, villages and historic cities from its waterways on a self-drive narrowboat. Beginners are welcome and the season extends from March to October. Try www.uk-boating.com</p>
Passes	<p>Great British Heritage Pass www.greatbritishheritagepass.com</p> <p>Your key to Britain's greatest historic properties, this great value Pass offers the individual traveller free access to 600 castles, stately homes and gardens in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Use your Great British Heritage Pass to discover over 2,000 years of Britain's history. Find world-famous attractions or magnificent hidden treasures. Properties include Kensington Palace, Shakespeare's Birthplace, Warwick Castle and Palace of Holyroodhouse. Paying only one price for the Great British Heritage Pass can help you save over 40% on admission fees. You can buy the Pass at selected locations before you leave home or after arrival in Britain. Importantly, having this Pass means that you avoid the queues for entry – you go to the front of the line every time!</p> <p>Cost: \$170 for a family pass for one week.</p>

ACCOMMODATION TYPES	<p>Dreaming of cosy nights in white sheets and waking to a heart-warming breakfast of fresh local produce? Whether you want to stay in a country cottage, chic city hotel or friendly B&B at the coast, you'll find a huge choice of quality - and often award-winning - accommodation in The Heart of England. And whatever you choose, you can expect a genuine warm welcome too. Here's a personal recommendation or two:</p> <p>The Albright Hussey Hotel, Shrewsbury</p> <p>Its unusual name derives from the feudal family (the Husseys) who occupied it between 1292 and the 1600s. Today, it's one of the best examples of an elaborate Tudor timber-frame building in Shrewsbury. The brick-and-stone wing was added around 1560. The interior has all the old-world charm and eccentricities you could hope for, including oak panels, fireplaces large enough to roast an ox, and a moated garden with several pairs of fiercely territorial black swans.</p> <p>www.albrighthussey.co.uk</p> <p>The Lygon Arms is a small family run hotel well known for its friendly</p>
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	<p>atmosphere and traditional English food offering accommodation, restaurants and public bar. Originally a 16th Century Cotswold coaching inn, the Lygon Arms is situated in the beautiful high street of Chipping Campden. Chipping Campden is well placed for touring the surrounding Cotswold villages, Stratford on Avon and Shakespeare Country. www.lygonarms.co.uk New Hall, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands www.newhalluk.com At 800 years old, New Hall has a long history of providing discerning guests and residents the finest English hospitality and today is arguably better than ever. Architecturally New Hall is a stunning building with many intricate details and is surrounded by its main attraction - a moat - originally designed to keep out intruders, today it plays home to a wide variety of wildlife including migrating ducks and geese and some of the largest carp to be found in the Midlands! Lying within 26 acres of mature, elegant grounds this hotel is widely reputed to be the oldest inhabited, moated manor house in England.</p>
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TARGET GROUPS	
Kids	<p>Cadbury World in Bournville, Birmingham: experience the magic, making and history of Cadbury chocolate. In the new Essence, discover the secret of Cadbury Dairy Milk and create your own unique product combining liquid chocolate with different taste sensations from popcorn to jelly babies. In Purple Planet chase a Cadbury Creme Egg, grow your own cocoa beans and see yourself moulded in chocolate. With the world's largest Cadbury shop, Cadabra ride, and much more, you couldn't ask for a more scrumptious day out. www.cadburyworld.co.uk Ironbridge is a great place for kids of all ages. The Ironbridge Valley plays host to seven main museums and several smaller ones, collectively called the Ironbridge Gorge Museums, Ironbridge, Telford (tel. 01952/433522 Mon-Fri, or 01952/432166 Sat-Sun; www.ironbridge.org.uk). Museums include the Coalbrookdale Museum and Darby Houses, with its Darby Furnace of Iron and sound-and-light display, as well as restored 19th-century homes of the Quaker ironmasters; the Ironbridge, with its original tollhouse; Jackfield Tile Museum, where you can see demonstrations of tile-pressing, decorating, and firing; Blists Hill Victorian Town, with its re-creation of a 19th-century village; Coalport China Museum and Tar Tunnel, which includes a tour of an underground mine; Broseley Pipeworks, a 50-year-old abandoned tobacco pipe-making factory; and Enginiuty, a children's interactive exhibit that allows them to become engineers for a day. Ironbridge is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.</p>
Teens	<p>Tales of treachery and torture await visitors to Warwick Castle... Try brass rubbing in Stratford: www.stratfordbrassrubbing.co.uk</p>

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	<p>In Warwickshire, teens will love the The Heritage Motor Centre, home to the world's largest collection of historic British cars. Following a £1.7million makeover the museum now boasts three new exciting and interactive exhibitions which uncover the story of the British motor industry; www.heritage-motor-centre.co.uk</p> <p>The Severn Valley Railway in Worcestershire is a steam train railway running through the beautiful Severn Valley between Kidderminster and Brdgnorth: www.svr.co.uk</p>
Romance	<p>Stay in a medieval romantic hotel in a beautiful county town...Here's a personal recommendation:</p> <p>The Albright Hussey Hotel, Shrewsbury</p> <p>Its unusual name derives from the feudal family (the Husseys) who occupied it between 1292 and the 1600s. Today, it's one of the best examples of an elaborate Tudor timber-frame building in Shrewsbury. The brick-and-stone wing was added around 1560. The interior has all the old-world charm and eccentricities you could hope for, including oak panels, fireplaces large enough to roast an ox, and a moated garden with several pairs of fiercely territorial black swans.</p> <p>www.albrighthussey.co.uk</p>
Genealogy	<p>http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk This site, provided by the FamilyRecords.gov.uk consortium, will help you find the government records and other sources you need for your family history research in England</p>
Seniors	<p>This is a region where you can make your own arrangements very easily or take an organized tour around the area – the choice is yours.</p>

UNIQUES	
Surprising	<p>Cheese-Rolling at Cooper's Hill Gloucester is held annually on Spring Bank Holiday Monday. See more about this particularly English pastime at www.cheese-rolling.co.uk</p>
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bones and flint tools found in Norfolk and Suffolk show that Homo erectus lived in what is now England about 700,000 years ago.[19] At this time, England was joined to mainland Europe by a large land bridge. - It was first invaded by the Roman dictator Julius Caesar in 55 BC, but it was conquered more fully by the Emperor Claudius in 43 AD. - The History of Anglo-Saxon England covers the history of early mediæval England from the end of Roman Britain and the establishment of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the 5th century until the Conquest by the Normans in 1066 - With the accession of Edward the Confessor, heir of the native English dynasty, in 1042, England once again became a separate kingdom. Its ties and nature, however, were forever changed following the Norman Conquest in 1066.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the 13th century Wales (the remaining Romano-Celts) was brought under the control of English monarchs through conquest - During the English Reformation in the 16th century, the external authority of the Roman Catholic Church in England was abolished and replaced with the Church of England ("Anglican Church") under the Supreme Governance of the English monarch - Although embattled for centuries, the Kingdom of England and Kingdom of Scotland had been drawing increasingly together since the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and in 1603, with the Scottish king James VI accession to the English crown, the two countries became ruled by the same Stuart dynasty - Britain created an empire upon which the sun never set and led the world through the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries - In the last century, Britain fought victoriously through the two World Wars, but emerged with diminished status and a lost empire
Books	<p>Frommer's England 2008 Bill Bryson: Notes from a Small Island</p>
1000 Places to see before you die	<p>There's too many to list them all! But here's a selection from The Heart of England: Chatsworth House, Derbyshire The Cotswolds The Newark Antiques and Collectors Show, Nottinghamshire Ludlow, Shropshire Stratford-Upon-Avon Warwick Castle</p>
Must Sees	<p>Coventry Cathedral Consecrated in 1962, Sir Basil Spence's controversial Coventry Cathedral, is the city's main attraction. The cathedral is on the same site as the 14th-century Perpendicular building, and you can visit the original tower. Many locals maintain that the structure is more likely to be appreciated by the foreign visitor because Brits are more attached to traditional cathedral design. Some visitors consider the restored site one of the most poignant and religiously evocative modern churches in the world. Outside is Sir Jacob Epstein's bronze masterpiece, St. Michael Slaying the Devil. Inside, the outstanding feature is the 21m-high (70-ft.) altar tapestry by Graham Sutherland, said to be the largest in the world. The floor-to-ceiling abstract stained-glass windows are the work of the Royal College of Art. The West Screen (an entire wall of stained glass installed during the 1950s) depicts rows of stylized saints and prophets with angels flying among them. In the undercroft of the cathedral is a visitor center, the Walkway of Holograms, whose otherwise plain walls are accented with three-dimensional images of the Stations of the Cross, created with</p>

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	<p>reflective light. One of the most evocative objects here is a charred cross wired together by local workmen from burning timbers that crashed to the cathedral's floor during the Nazi bombing. An audiovisual exhibit on the city and church includes the fact that 450 aircraft dropped 40,000 firebombs on the city in 1 day.</p>
Secret Places	<p>Northamptonshire borders The Heart of England and appears in my "Hidden Gems" list on my Top Tens in the Hot News section on www.ChrisRobinsonTravelShow.ca : It's my home county, so forgive my partisanship! This is not on any highlights tour of the UK but its green, rolling, hedgerow veined countryside is studded with honey-stoned historic villages and is the epitome of rural England. Here, too, is Althorpe Estate, resting place of Diana, Princess of Wales. (1st July - 30th August; Every day from 11.00am to 5.00pm)</p> <p>The Malvern Hills are another beautiful part of this region. Rising spectacularly from the plain below, this ancient outcrop of hills was an inspiration to Sir Edward Elgar. On a clear day, you can see into 12 English counties!</p>

SPORTS ACTIVITIES	<p>Britain will be the host nation of the next Summer Olympic Games in 2012</p>
Golf	<p>Though the sport originated in Scotland, golf has been around in Britain since Edward VII first began stamping over the greens of such courses as Royal Lytham & St. Annes, in England's northwest, or Royal St. Georges, near London.</p> <p>If your heart is set on enjoying a round or two on the emerald-colored turf of Britain, Golf International, (tel. 800/833-1389 ; www.golfinternational.com), can open doors for you. Golf packages are arranged for anywhere from 7 to 14 days and can include as much or as little golf, on as many different courses, as a participant wants.</p> <p>One of the best ways to include golf in your vacation is to stay at a hotel that features its own golf course, such as the Welcombe Hotel and Golf Course near Stratford. www.welcombe.co.uk One of England's great Jacobean country houses, this hotel is a 10-minute ride from the heart of Stratford-upon-Avon. Its key feature is an 18-hole golf course. It's surrounded by 63 hectares of grounds and has a formal entrance on Warwick Road, a winding driveway leading to the main hall. Bedrooms are luxuriously furnished in traditional Jacobean style, with fine antiques and elegant fabrics.</p>
Fishing	<p>Fly-fishing was born here, and it's an art form. Local fishing guides are available to lead you to English waters that are well stocked with trout, perch, grayling, sea bream, Atlantic salmon, and such lesser-known species as rudd and roach.</p> <p>If you prefer to go it alone without a guide, contact the Salmon & Trout</p>

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	<p>Association, Fishmonger's Hall, London Bridge, London EC4R 9EL (tel. 020/7283-5838; www.salmon-trout.org), for information about British fishing regulations.</p> <p>An excellent guide to fishing is Where to Fly Fish in Britain & Ireland, available on Amazon.com.</p> <p>The Wye is a well known fishing river that runs through this region.</p>
Horse riding	<p>Horse riding is available throughout the region and stables can be found on the Visit Britain website.</p>
Hiking	<p>England and Wales alone have some 161,000km of trails and footpaths. The Ramblers' Association, Camelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, 2nd Floor, London SE1 7TW (tel. 020/7339-8500; www.ramblers.org.uk), has several books and maps on hiking and walking in Great Britain.</p>
Cycling	<p>The British have rediscovered the bicycle: a National Cycle Network covers about 16,000km throughout the country. The network runs from Dover in southeast England to Inverness in the Highlands. Go to www.sustrans.org.uk for route maps.</p> <p>Most routes cross old railway lines, canal towpaths, and riversides. If you're planning a bike trip on your own, you can take your two wheels on passenger trains in Britain if you pay a £5 (\$9.50) extra charge.</p>
Cricket	<p>This is one of the great sporting passions of the English. The season is during the summer months and it is possible to see cricket being played in huge stadiums...or on small village greens. Either way, you will probably want to ask a local to explain the rules to you!</p>

CULTURE	<p>On the banks of the Avon, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre (RST), Waterside, Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 6BB (tel. 01789/403444; www.rsc.org.uk), is a major showcase for the Royal Shakespeare Company and seats 1,500 patrons. The theater's season runs from November to September and typically features five Shakespearean plays. The company has some of the finest actors on the British stage.</p>
Arts	<p>The Birmingham Repertory Theatre on Broad Street at Centenary Square (tel. 0121/236-4455; www.birmingham-rep.co.uk), houses one of the top companies in England. Some of the world's greatest actors have performed with the repertory company over the years, including Lord Olivier, Albert Finney, Paul Scofield, Dame Edith Evans, and Kenneth Branagh. The widely known "Rep" comprises the Main House, which seats 800 theatergoers, and The Door, a more intimate 120-seat venue that often stages new and innovative works. The box office is open from Monday through Saturday 10am to 8pm on performance days, 10am to 6pm on nonperformance days. Tickets cost £10 to £25 (\$19-\$48).</p>
Music	<p>Connected to the Convention Centre, Symphony Hall, at Broad Street in Birmingham (tel. 0121/780-3333; www.symphonyhall.co.uk), has been</p>

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	<p>hailed as an acoustical gem since its completion in 1990. Home to the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, it also hosts special classical music events.</p> <p>The National Indoor Arena, King Edward's Road (tel. 0870/730-0196; www.necgroup.co.uk), seats 13,000 and is a favorite site for jazz, pop, and rock concerts; sporting events; and conventions.</p>
Films	<p>Innumerable films have used English locations. Currently the most popular film location trail is for the Harry Potter films... Some of the adventures of Harry Potter and his friends were shot at the Norman Cathedral of Gloucester, a place of worship for more than 1300 years, including the Ghost scenes and talking portraits in 'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone' ('Sorcerer's Stone' US version). The Cathedral is also featured in 'Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets' including the scenes featuring the ghost Moaning Myrtle, and the mysterious appearance of the red writing in Hogwarts' corridors ... "The chamber of secrets has been opened. Enemies of the heir, beware".</p>
Museums	<p>There are 2,500 museums and galleries in Britain, and over 300 in London alone. And no, they're not dark rooms full of dusty old artefacts - these museums have fascinating collections and exciting exhibits. And lots of them are free!</p> <p>Wedgwood Museum – A new museum in Stoke-on-Trent housing everything from Josiah Wedgwood's first trials to the latest ranges from Wedgwood Potteries today, with about 6,000 items on display.</p> <p>The Black Country Living Museum - Much of the area immediately surrounding Birmingham is called the Black Country (after the black smoke that billowed over the area during the iron-working era). That period is best preserved at the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, a town about 16km northwest of Birmingham. The museum occupies a sprawling landscape in the South Staffordshire coalfields, an early forge of the Industrial Revolution, and re-creates what it was like to work and live in the Black Country of the 1850s. An electric tramway takes visitors to a thick underground coal seam, and trolleys move through a reconstructed industrial village with a schoolhouse, anchor forge, working replica of a 1712 steam engine, and trade shops.</p> <p>Anne Hathaway's Cottage: Before she married Shakespeare, Anne Hathaway lived in this thatched, wattle-and-daub cottage in the hamlet of Shottery, 1.6km from Stratford. It's the most interesting and the most photographed of the Trust properties. The Hathaways were yeoman farmers, and their descendants lived in the cottage until 1892. As a result, it was never renovated and provides a rare insight into the life of a family in Shakespearean times. The Bard was only 18 when he married Anne, who was much older. Many original furnishings, including the courting settle (the bench on which Shakespeare is said to have wooed Anne) and various kitchen utensils, are preserved inside the</p>

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	house. After visiting the house, take time to linger in the garden and orchard.
Festivals	<p>Shrewsbury Flower Show August</p> <p>The annual Shrewsbury Flower Show has been held in beautiful Quarry Park for over a century and has been recognised by the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's longest-running horticultural show.</p> <p>Crufts in Birmingham is officially the largest dog show in the world and welcomes 25,000 dogs from nearly 200 breeds.</p>

ATTRACTIONS	
Beaches	Britain has around 8,000 miles of coastline , and thousands of beaches. To make sure you find one of our very best beaches, look out for Blue Flag beaches.
Wildlife	The English countryside is too well farmed to support spectacular wildlife, but with patience and luck you can spot deer, fox, otter, badger and pinemarten, while the birdlife is very varied.
Parks	<p>Peak District National Park</p> <p>Britain's first national park, established in 1951, is visited by people from all over the world. They come to find peace, tranquillity and adventure, experiencing some of England's finest climbing, caving, walking and cycling.</p>
Gardens	<p>This the region for gardens in England...and among over 400 open to the public, there are none finer than the those designed by England's most talented landscape gardener of all time -</p> <p>Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, born in 1715, completed his very first landscape garden at Croome Court in Worcestershire and from this excellent start went on to shape the landscape of Britain's finest country estates and houses. To say that Brown was successful in his profession is a huge under-statement, he became immensely sought after by the aristocracy. Lancelot Brown soon acquired the peculiar nickname 'Capability' from his habit of telling clients that their gardens had "great capabilities". In his talented hands, they certainly did. As mentioned, Croome Park in Worcestershire was Capability' Brown's first complete landscape and that which made his reputation and established a new style of garden design universally adopted in England over the next fifty years, following the principle of not imposing man-made designs on nature but by enhancing what nature already provides.</p> <p>Across the region, there are a further eight gardens landscaped by Brown, all with their stories to tell: from Warwick Castle, known as England's finest medieval experience, to Compton Verney and Newnham Paddox in Warwickshire, both with award winning art exhibitions, from Weston Park in Shropshire, Shugborough Hall and Trentham in Staffordshire, Herefordshire's Berrington Hall and Moccas Court, where you can stay in a fine Georgian House</p>

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	<p>overlooking one of Brown's gardens, and reputed to be built on the site of the residence of Llacheu, son of King Arthur</p>
<p>Castles/Forts</p>	<p>There are castles, from ruins to ancestral homes, all over England...which makes choosing individual sites to visit very challenging. However, perhaps the very finest in all England is Warwick Castle. www.warwick-castle.com</p> <p>Perched on a rocky cliff above the River Avon in the town center, a stately late-17th-century mansion is surrounded by a magnificent 14th-century fortress, the finest medieval castle in England. Even 3 hours may not be enough time to see everything. Surrounded by gardens, lawns, and woodland, where peacocks roam freely, and skirted by the Avon, Warwick Castle was described by Sir Walter Scott in 1828 as "that fairest monument of ancient and chivalrous splendor which yet remains uninjured by time."</p> <p>Ethelfleda, daughter of Alfred the Great, built the first significant fortifications here in 914. William the Conqueror ordered the construction of a motte-and-bailey castle in 1068, 2 years after the Norman Conquest. The mound is all that remains today of the Norman castle, which Simon de Montfort sacked in the Barons' War of 1264. The Beauchamp family, the most illustrious medieval earls of Warwick, is responsible for the appearance of the castle today; much of the external structure remains unchanged from the mid-14th century. When the castle was granted to Sir Fulke Greville by James I in 1604, he spent £20,000 (an enormous sum in those days) converting the existing castle buildings into a luxurious mansion. The Grevilles have held the earl of Warwick title since 1759.</p> <p>The staterooms and Great Hall house fine collections of paintings, furniture, arms, and armor. The armory, dungeon, torture chamber, ghost tower, clock tower, and Guy's tower create a vivid picture of the castle's turbulent past and its important role in the history of England. The private apartments of Lord Brooke and his family, who in recent years sold the castle to Tussaud's Group, are open to visitors. They house a display of a carefully reconstructed Royal Weekend House Party of 1898. The major rooms contain wax portraits of important figures of the time, including a young Winston Churchill. In the Kenilworth bedroom, a likeness of the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, reads a letter. The duchess of Marlborough prepares for her bath in the red bedroom. Among the most lifelike of the figures is a uniformed maid bending over to test the temperature of the water running into a bathtub.</p> <p>You can also see the Victorian rose garden, a re-creation of an original design from 1868 by Robert Marnock. Near the rose garden is a Victorian alpine rockery and water garden.</p>

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OTHER ACTIVITIES	
<p>Shopping</p>	<p>Birmingham: In addition to exploring the Jewelry quarter , Birmingham is a great town for shopping. There are more than 700 retail stores, and many people in the Midlands come here just to shop, especially along Cannon Street and New Street with recently opened top-brand designer stores. The city's Mailbox complex at Wharfside Street (tel. 0121/632-1123) was once used to sort the mail. But now it's become a gargantuan shopping center, with such department stores as Harvey Nichols moving in. Emporio Armani, DKNY, Hugo Boss, Jaeger, and Crabtree & Evelyn call the Mailbox home. It also houses 12 restaurants, a spa, salons, and the upscale Malmaison hotel. In the heart of town, The Bullring (tel. 0121/632-1500), near St. Martin's Square, has been developed into Europe's largest city-center retail area, based around the historic street patterns of the city and linking New Street and High Street. It's more affordable and less classy than its cousin the Mailbox, with such U.S. mainstays as H&M, Gap, FCUK, and Footlocker. The reinvention of "Brum" (as Britain's much-maligned second city is nicknamed) is reflected by the opening of a grand department store, Selfridges, Bullring Centre (tel. 0870/837-7377). As a fashion emporium, its architecture was appropriately inspired by a dress. The curvaceous complex is adorned with 15,000 aluminum disks a la Paco Rabanne's 1960 chain-mail frocks.</p> <p>Stratford: Set within an antique house with ceiling beams, The Shakespeare Bookshop, 39 Henley St. (tel. 01789/292176), across from the Shakespeare Birthplace Centre, is the region's premier source for textbooks and academic treatises on the Bard and his works. It specializes in books for every level of expertise on Shakespearean studies, from picture books for junior high school students to weighty tomes geared to anyone pursuing a Ph.D. in literature. The largest shop of its kind in the Midlands, Arbour Antiques, Ltd., Poets Arbour, off Sheep Street (tel. 0845/603-8709; www.arbourantiques.co.uk), sells antique weapons from Britain, Europe, and India. If you've always hankered for a full suit of armor, this place can sell you one. Everything in the Pickwick Gallery, 32 Henley St. (tel. 01789/294861), is a well-crafted work of art produced by copper or steel engraving plates, or printed by means of a carved wooden block. Hundreds of botanical prints, landscapes, and renderings of artfully arranged ruins, each suitable for framing, can be purchased. Topographical maps of regions of the United Kingdom are also available if you're planning on doing any serious hiking.</p>
<p>Markets</p>	<p>If you enjoy cooking with the very best ingredients, then you can't beat the fresh local produce on offer at the Birmingham Farmers' Market.</p>

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	<p>As well as an array of fresh seasonal fruit and vegetables, you will also find a whole host of other delights such as fresh meat, eggs, pickles, chutneys, cheese, sausages and even ostrich burgers. The market also offers freshly baked breads, biscuits, cakes, pies and pastries and an array of wines and ciders.</p> <p>Antique markets can be found all over the region, but there is one antique fair that is so monumental as to be a destination in itself. It is the Newark Antique Fair, held 6 times a year. This mind boggling antiques market has in excess of 4,000 stalls at any given show! Yes, over 4000 dealers in antiques and collectibles offering a huge variety of furniture, architectural pieces, porcelain, pottery, silver, jewelry, paintings, books, maps, prints, toys, and you name it. If you collect it, chances are someone at Newark will have it for sale.</p>
<p>Nightlife</p>	<p>Birmingham is the centre of nightlife in the North of England. Boho Rooms 52 Gas St., along the City Centre canal (tel. 0121/643-2573), is a converted warehouse with a bar and two nightclubs. Liberty's, 184 Hagley Rd. (tel. 0121/454-4444; www.libertysnightclub.co.uk), is a large, fashionable club, complete with champagne bar, vodka bar, and other smaller bars; it's open Friday and Saturday nights.</p> <p>Goose O.V.T., 561 Bristol Rd. (tel. 0121/472-3186), one of the largest pubs in England, is popular with university students.</p> <p>Otherwise, Broad Street has become the center of night life in Birmingham. Just walk up and down the street and pick your favorites. Revolution, Broad Street (tel. 0121/665-6508), a vodka bar draws a hip collection of the younger-than-40 crowd. Ipanema operates a restaurant and bar at 9 Brindley Place (also known as 60 Broad St.; tel. 0121/643-5577), offering an extensive cocktail menu and playing salsa on Thursday nights. You can also drop in at the best Irish bar in town, O'Neill's, Broad Street (tel. 0121/616-7821).</p>

<p>CUISINE</p>	
<p>Food</p>	<p>English food has improved hugely over the last few years and now even humble village pubs serve up excellent meals, whilst in the cities the range of cuisines is as wide as your imagination!</p> <p>The Heart of England is home to some British staples such as Worcestershire Sauce, Marmite, Herefordshire beef and regional cheeses.</p>
<p>Beer</p>	<p>England has many regional breweries producing the distinctive and flavoursome British 'pint' –these are often open for tours and tastings.</p>
<p>Restaurants</p>	<p>The Black Swan in Stratford: Affectionately known as The Dirty Duck, this has been a popular hangout for Stratford players since the 18th century. The wall is lined with autographed photos of its many famous patrons. Typical English grills, among other dishes, are featured in the</p>

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	<p>Dirty Duck Grill Room, though no one has ever accused it of serving the best food in Stratford. You'll have a choice of a dozen appetizers, most of which would make a meal themselves. In fair weather, you can have drinks in the front garden and watch the swans glide by on the Avon.</p> <p>Mr. Underhill's at Dinham Weir in Ludlow: Chris Bradley, the chef and owner, turned this threadbare inn, which looked like Fawley Towers, into a charming inn beneath the ruins of an 11th-century castle overlooking an English garden above a dam on the River Teme. In summer, tables are placed outside in the garden. Since the menu changes every night, you don't know what you'll be served. For one of your most memorable meals in England, you might start with a chestnut custard studded with crispy smoked duck and follow with a monkfish studded pasta enlivened with cèpe mushrooms. Venison flavored with elderberry thyme appears in a red wine sauce, and roasted rack and shoulder of lamb is married to sorrel, mint, and baby spinach. Other mains include a pavé of halibut on shredded vegetables with the startling addition of coconut. For dessert, why not try the iced plum sponge cake with star anise ice cream?</p>
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MORE INFO	
Brochures	1 888 VISIT UK (847 4885) for brochures
Website	www.britainitsoutthere.com (Britain it's out there) Also: www.visitheartofengland.com

CURRENT DEALS	Transat have deals to the UK right now from \$997 for 7 nights departing October 8, including hotel – go to www.airtransat.com for further details. Flights only are available from \$229 + taxes
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PERSONAL EXPERIENCES	Birmingham, Coventry, Warwickshire, Shakespeare Country, Worcestershire, Hereford and the Wye Valley, Cheltenham Spa, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Ironbridge, Shrewsbury
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