



Board Papers

Thursday 10th February 2022

Agenda

Virtual Board Meeting

Thursday 10th February 2022– 8am

Please join via Teams video conference [Click here to join the meeting](#) Or call in (audio only)
[+44 161 250 8784,,814639593#](#)

Time	Item	Lead	Reference
08:00am	1 Welcome and Apologies	TB	
08:05am	2 Declarations of Interest	TB	
08:10am	3 Minutes and matters arising from Board Meeting held on 4 th November 2021	TB	
08:20am	4 Chief Executive Report/Briefing note	JM	(Board Paper 244)
08:50am	5 Partner Engagement and Feedback	NS	
09:10am	6 Company Finances - 2021/2022 Q3 Financial Report - Approach to Budgeting 2022/23	IB	
09:40am	7 A.O.B		
10:00am	8 Close		

**Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Board
Thursday 4th November 2021 – 8am**

Present: Trevor Brocklebank – Chair (“TB”)
Joe Manning (“JM”)
**Marketing Cheshire
Directors** Mark Goldsmith (“MG”)
David Walker (“DW”)
Andy Lyon (“AL”)
Eleanor Underhill (“EU”)
Sarah Callander-Beckett (“SCB”)
Rob McKay (“RM”)
Gemma Davies (“GD”)
Steven Broomhead (“SB”)
Peter Mearns (“PM”)

In Attendance: Nicola Said (“NS”)
Ian Brooks (“IB”)
Sharon Pond (minute taker)

Apologies: Philip Cox (“PC”) (observer)
Tracey O’Keefe (“TO”)
Jamie Christon (“JC”)

- **Opening by the Chairman and Welcome**

TB thanked the board for joining the call and welcomed Board members to the meeting.

- **Declarations of Interest**

TB asked Board members to advise of any declarations of interest.

- **Minutes and Actions from the last Meeting**

The Board confirmed that the minutes from the meeting on the 2nd September 2021 were correct.

It was confirmed that the actions from the previous meeting have been dealt with.

- **Board Matters**

Reappointment of Directors

TB confirmed that the reappointment of David Walker and Eleanor Underhill to the Board of MC was approved by the LEP board for an additional 3-year term.

JM advised that in order to be compliant with the Articles of Association an additional Director is required for Marketing Chester. JM /IB to discuss with Jamie Christon to ascertain if he would be willing to take on this role.

**Action
JM/IB**

- **Board Briefing Note / CEO Report**

JM referred Board members to the report circulated within the Board pack and highlighted the following key items.

- The STEAM data has now been received and highlights the overall fall in value of the visitor economy in the past year and reduction of visitors to the area, emphasising the importance of our recovery work in this area.
- Tour of Britain was a great success, and we need to ensure we build on these events across our region.
- We have come to an agreement with Cheshire Life to continue to provide features for the magazine for an additional year. If board members have ideas for themes, please advise JM
- Work is taking place to review the travel trade industry and meetings have taken place with Liverpool Airport and the train companies to look at ways to attract additional visitors to the region from different areas including Ireland.
- Destination Cheshire meeting took place this week looking at a pitch for creating a family friendly destination.
- First stage of Destination Chester Designed by Nature events took place during half term with very positive feedback.
- The VIC had its best footfall week in October half term showing significant recovery, not quite back to 2019 levels but we are starting to see a slow increase in international visitors

Comments from Board

It was advised that the Destination Cheshire meeting was very well attended, and we have a consultant working on a brief for the family market 'our family welcomes your family.' The next steps will be to look at data and intelligence to inform the work and start work on the creative brief for the campaign.

AL enquired whether it would be possible to share the full STEAM data to allow for further interrogation. JM/NS will investigate if this is possible and report back to the board.

Action
JM/NS

It was questioned that with regard to the Tour of Britain should MC take on more of a coordination role to ensure we get the most out of the event. Also, Pete Waterman is very keen to hold his 'Making Tracks' event at the Cathedral again next year, it would be good if we could support this event.

JM to liaise with SB re contact for creating an oversight group for the Tour of Britain event.

Action
SB/JM

TB advised that new branding has been produced for the LEP and MC which simplifies the offer but allows us to communicate better with our core audiences. The new website is now live, and the AGM Video is a strong tool for promoting Cheshire and will be circulated to the Board after the meeting.

- **DMO Review**

JM referred Board members to the report circulated within the Board pack and highlighted the following key items: -

- The DMO review is an independent review commissioned by government but is not yet government policy. The spending review did not provide any further detail as to whether government will adopt or fund these recommendations. We are unlikely to have any further information until after Christmas.
- Government is aware that in terms of delivery we need to make plans and assumptions for our budgets.
- The content of review takes a very comprehensive look at tourism policy and the role of DMOs and stresses that DMOs can take a key role in government policies, such as Levelling Up.

- The Review recommends a three-tier approach that acknowledges that DMOs exist in various formats.
- There are eight actions that put the visitor economy at the heart of levelling up, regional growth, and creating sustainable and inclusive places. These recommendations build on the discussions we have had at previous Board meetings regarding our future strategic direction.
- We do need to give thought to Tier two and three with regard to further formalising our work with Destination Chester and Cheshire.

Next steps

- Marketing Cheshire positions itself as a Tier-1 'Destination Development Partnership'
- Update our political and officer leadership to take a paper to the sub leaders regional board later this month reflecting views from today's meeting.
- Continue collaboration across northwest, Invite DCMS Secretary of State to the Northwest to assist with our positioning
- Engage actively with our neighbouring counties such as Shropshire, North Wales, and into the Peak District so that we are kept informed on their positioning and priorities.
- Continue the strategic role we play in the wider economy objective set out in the review.

Comments from Board Members

The Board agreed they were supportive of the suggested next steps.

SB questioned whether we should change the name of Marketing Cheshire to the Cheshire Tourist Board. JM advised that the name of DMOs was raised in the report. A conversation will need to take place on what is our core business and on the work we are doing with the LEP. The report does stress the importance of the role of Tourism and the visitor economy in achieving government objectives such as Levelling Up.

EU flagged that Visitor Economy describes a wider offer creating a quality of place. EU also questioned data on size of our visitor economy comparatively in North-West.

SCB asked whether organisations can progress through the tier ranking. JM advised that the report refers to accreditation it is not yet known if you can move up through the tiers. The challenge will be the strategic geography.

RM stated that it is encouraging that the work we conducted on the Purpose Pyramid relates to the report and the set of agreed principles: adaptive, ambitious and collaborative.

AL agreed that with the work we are doing with the LEP puts us in the Tier one category and questioned how the tiers will be funded differently. JM advised that the report looks at a core funding model of approx. £15-20M across England a year relating to a possible £200-£250k per organisation. The hope is that we would secure a funding settlement more than one year.

DW questioned whether we have looked at the business planning and funding. JM will discuss with IB and bring a budget to the board based on what we do know, however will undertake some scenario planning should we achieve tier one looking at parts of the business we would want to grow, including analytical and data capturing. We will have to undertake an implementation stage if we achieve multi-year funding.

**Action
JM/IB**

IB stated It will be an ongoing evolution for MC and we will have to undertake a planning exercise over the next 3 months to evaluate the activities we are currently

doing against the new strategic position. We will also need to take our stakeholders opinions into consideration.

NS advised that Nick de Bois at a recent conference she attended stated that we need to focus on our destination management role and articulate our role in terms of place shaping working alongside the Local Authorities. Nick does not want the process to be a bidding exercise. DCMS are very supportive of the recommendations in the report but where it sits financially is subject to Departmental planning and allocations.

TB stated that there is a lot of focus on Cheshire and Warrington being a high skill, high salary economy. However, if we are to have a successful tourism sector there is a need to review what type of jobs we create for the area. SCB stressed that we need to communicate the value of a career in the visitor economy, and that there is a real staffing shortage in the hospitality business for these types of roles.

- **Company Finances**

TB introduced IB to give an overview of the company finances.

IB referred Board members to the September YTD report included within the board pack advising that the operating result is slightly ahead of budget and ran through the key elements of the report noting that the Audit Committee are comfortable with the cash position and reserves position. There is scope next year to look at areas of investment using part of the reserves.

The Partnership business has been strong this year, invoiced sales are doing well, the challenge has been in collecting the income from partners, therefore, we are looking at implementing a credit card payment system or subscription model – IB to discuss with JM and NS

Action IB

- **Any Other Business.**

JM advised that we have a vacancy on the audit committee if a member of the board would like to join the audit group, please advise JM/DW.

Next meeting

Board informal sessions are scheduled to take place on the 7th and 13th December 4-7pm – further info will be circulated nearer to the dates

Future Board Meetings – 8am -10am

Thursday 10th February 2022

Thursday 19th May 2022

Thursday 1st September 2022

Thursday 10th November 2022

Thursday 15th December 2022

Signature (Trevor Brocklebank, Chair)

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Date

10th February 2022

Chief Executive update

Paper 244

1. Headline summary

This paper provides the latest economic intelligence on the visitor economy in Chester, Cheshire and Warrington. It summarises the Government's latest position on levelling up and visitor economy recovery. It sets out the progress made through the Destination Cheshire and Destination Chester networks and wider visitor economy marketing and visitor information.

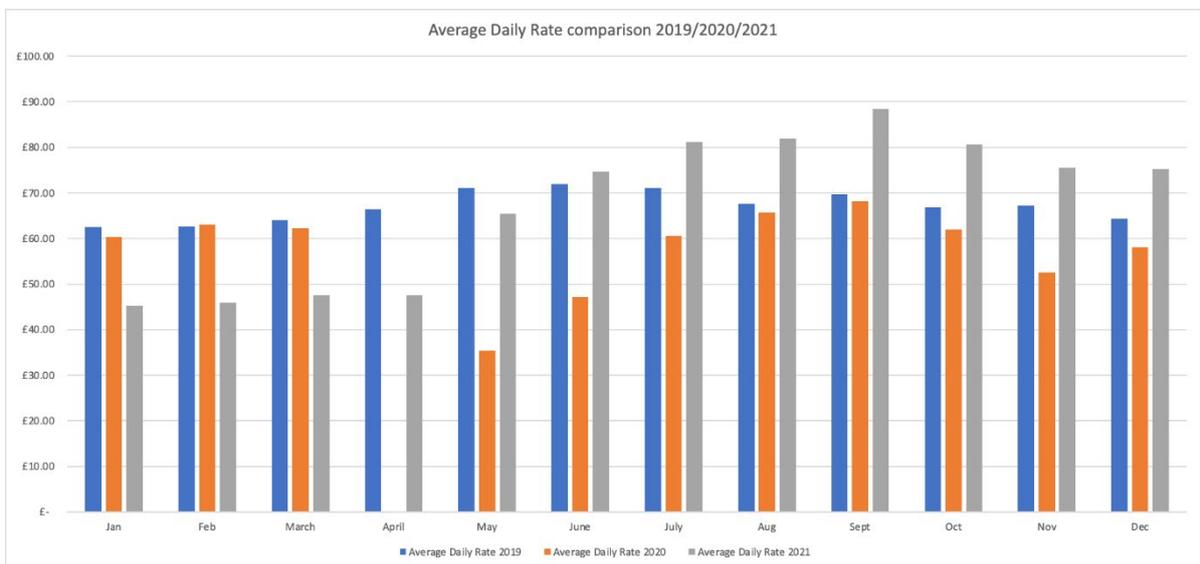
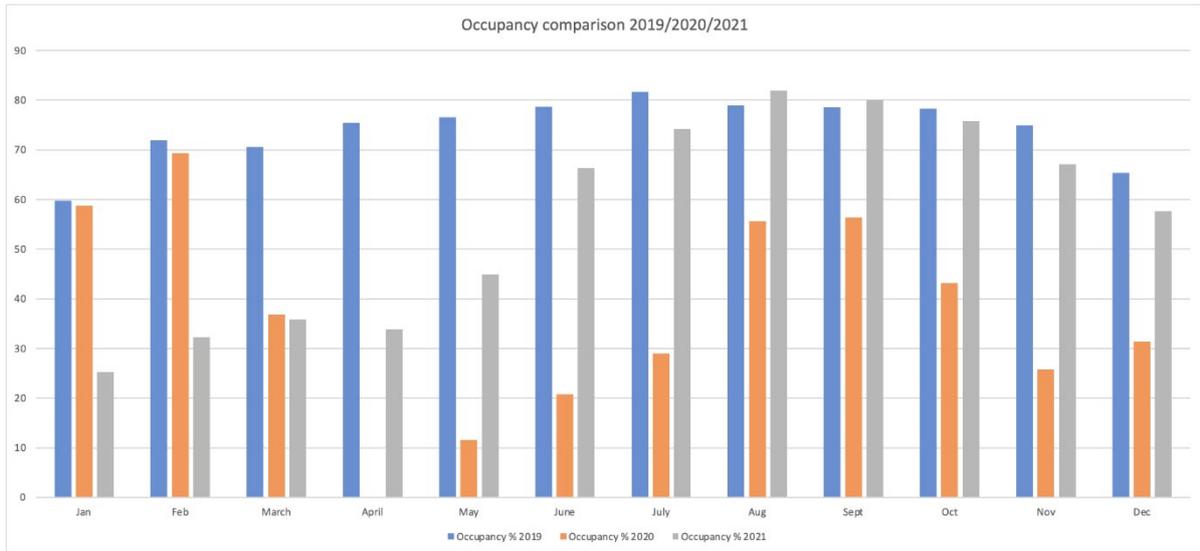
2. Christmas and New Year – Impact of Plan B restrictions on visitor economy

With the introduction of Plan B measures in December, many businesses had a challenging Christmas and New Year period. We continue to engage with our networks, councils, and Government. Managing Cashflow with rising costs, from energy bills to staffing, means that February and March will be challenging for many.

The Marketing Cheshire team spoke regularly with businesses over the Christmas and New Year period. The summary position was as follows:

- Lower occupancy in hotels. The New Year was 30% lower than 2019 levels.
- Lower daily rate in hotels. In Chester, the average daily rate was £77 for December compared to an average of £94 for the previous 6 months.
- Outdoor attractions had a good pre-Christmas and pre-sales for New Year period.
- Staff isolations still a big challenge for businesses.
- For January hotels were downgrading their forecasts to around 30% lower than usual.
- The work from home guidance has hit corporate bookings for hospitality.

Despite a strong start to the month, with positive footfall figures, December finished on 61% hotel occupancy in Chester and 57% for the whole of Cheshire and Warrington, compared to 71% and 66% in 2019. The rate was £89 on average in Chester and £75 for Cheshire and Warrington compared to £79 and £80 for Liverpool and Manchester respectively.



3. Hospitality rates for 2021/22

The last few weeks we have started to see an uptake in bookings for January and forward bookings into March though the January/February period is still concerning. We are launching marketing campaigns in February outlined below which will generate some positivity.

We have supported the three local authorities, in addition we continue to liaise with the Tourism Alliance, DCMS, BEIS to outline what the industry needs on an ongoing basis in particular;

- Business rates reduction for the next 12 months.
- VAT reduction for the next 12 months.

4. Levelling Up White Paper and visitor economy

The Government has published its Levelling Up White Paper. There is limited reference to tourism other than in the historical section on the decline of certain domestic tourism locations, such as coastal towns, in the second half of the 20th century. The importance of culture and heritage linked to the visitor economy, and Government has committed to further investment outside the Southeast. It also refers to the Shared Prosperity Fund's role in stimulating local economies and job creation and that

this could include support for the local visitor economy. There is no direct reference to the de Bois review or future role of DMOs.

5. Destination Cheshire

We have been developing a new positioning for Cheshire and Warrington around being the best place for family short breaks. This will begin in 2022 with a campaign launching in February 'Our Family welcomes Your Family'. Please see attached slide deck which outlines the campaign. This has been developed with a wide range of partners across Cheshire and Warrington.

We want to showcase the diverse range of 'families' that work in Cheshire businesses, and the range of attractions available for all types of family to enjoy locally. We want this to be the start of positioning Cheshire as a wonderful place for short breaks and day trips throughout the year, with a differentiation from honeypot locations such as Cornwall or the Lake District, or 'adventure tourism' in Snowdonia and North Wales, and urban attractions of Liverpool and Manchester. The aims of the campaign are to:

- Focus on re-connecting with friends and family.
- Use a photographic approach to show the diversity of families and our family offer.
- Show visitors the wide variety of attractions to support staycations and short breaks.
- Highlighting what is unique about Cheshire and Warrington as a family friendly destination.
- Giving an insight into an easy visit, whatever age or background.
- Portraying the local community as warm and welcoming.
- Promoting Cheshire and Warrington's connectivity by both rail and road.

We will be delivering the campaign via working with influencers, sponsored social media and if we can generate enough commercial support a Video on Demand TV campaign. We are engaging with businesses to discuss opportunities to support. We will ensure key themes and events such as Jubilee, Rugby League World Cup and Women's Tour are incorporated into the activity.

As discussed in previous Board meetings, we recognise that sustainable tourism is important, and we want visitors to know we support their sustainable choices when visiting whilst also inspiring potential visitors with family friendly, sustainable options. We will also be working with Caroline Sanger-Davies on developing a sustainable tourism plan for Cheshire and Warrington.

6. Destination Chester

The Destination Chester network has been focusing on the next burst of activity 'Spring Blooms' commencing in mid-February and running until March 31st. This will be supported by a campaign to welcome people to the city and increase footfall. Working with our partners Wild Rumpus and Storyhouse Spring Blooms will see 5 nature-based installations around the city, from augmented reality at the Eastgate clock to a canopy over the cross. This burst completes the activity funded via the government Welcome Back Fund. A marketing campaign to promote the spring activity commenced in January and will include sponsored social media activity, a google 360 campaign and Channel 4 Video on demand campaign as well as PR activity.

Working on behalf of Destination Chester we have developed a 3-year proposal to 2025. This is subject to discussions with Cheshire West and Chester, our wider Chester network, and the outcome of the Destination Management Organisation review by Government. In the proposal we have set out options for improving our:

- Research and intelligence gathering on Chester.
- Marketing the destination and identify opportunities, such as Staycation City of the Year.
- Events, working alongside the Cheshire West and Chester cultural team and independent event organisers to commission events throughout the year.
- Future place-shaping, alongside Chester BID, the Chester Growth Partnership, and in support of the One City Plan.

7. Communications and Marketing

The **Christmas campaign** over the October – December period was successful for our digital channels, with our website and social media performing well. Our organic reach from our social channels grew month-on-month, totalling 720,000. Web traffic is up to the visitcheshire.com site across the board. During this period, over 400,000 people used the site and there were approximately one million page views.

Our current focus is to encourage visitors to and residents of Chester and Cheshire to try new experiences as part of our **New Year, New Adventures** campaign. Another popular aspect to this content is our focus on ‘special offers’ from partners across accommodation, spas, and restaurants. This helps the effort to support these businesses who were negatively impacted by a drop in demand over Christmas and New Year.

During the autumn, we have continued to raise Chester and Cheshire’s **media profile** by identifying the county’s best news, stories, and themes to communicate to our top-quality contacts in local, regional, and national media. Please see attached further details. The shortlisting of the Sandstone Ridge for AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) status continues to draw attention. We worked with the writer Phoebe Taplin and Marketing Cheshire partner Nelson Hotels on a press visit in December and her piece is due to publish in 2022. We also arranged two press trips to Chester for national journalists. Mary Novakovich visited to write a city break piece for The Lady and Fiona Whitty visited with her family to write a family break piece about Chester and Cheshire, including Jodrell Bank, for the Daily Mirror and other Reach plc titles. During the period October – December 2021 we generated print: 13 articles, reach 3.4m; and online: 13 articles, reach 20.8m.

As part of the wider family campaign, we will be promoting **Cheshire Day** on the 30th March. We will encourage partners and local people to engage in a range of ways both online and in person. We will use it as a hook to encourage people to share what they love about Cheshire and Warrington.

8. Christmas Market in Chester

The delivery model this year of outsourcing the Christmas market to Kendra Kennedy (who has been involved in previous years) was very successful, with footfall increased in Northgate Street and traders reporting an increase in trade in the midweek. We are in discussions with Cheshire West and Chester about plans for the Christmas market for 2022 and beyond. We want to ensure it continues to generate impact for the city and be part of plans for Destination Chester going forward. The investment into the Christmas marketing chalets is being considered as part of that.

9. Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in Chester

The VIC saw strong sales of Chester themed Christmas merchandise in the run up to the festive period. The VIC continues to support the Chester Gift Card which saw healthy sales in the run up to Christmas. A range of inhouse produced visitor guides to the city’s history have performed well, with over 2500 sold so far in 2021/22. Planning and preparation for this year’s Heritage Festival is well advanced, see below for Victorian day, and the VIC team will also be involved in supporting Spring Blooms.



10. Partnership update

We have invoiced £56,075 partnership income against an annual budgeted target of £28,000. A virtual partnership meeting was held on the 26th January where discussions took place regarding our plans for 2022 and we shared information on the new Family Campaign which is being launched this month. We have been continuing to support our partners by updating them on current grant support and sharing their offers. We will be sharing feedback from partners at the board meeting.

11. Vision and business planning

We are developing our business plans for 2022/23. Further information on the position will be provided in the finance update. We believe the year ahead gives us the opportunity to really build momentum on our vision to develop a sustainable visitor economy and promote Cheshire and Warrington as a great place to live, work, study and invest. The team are all looking forward to putting in place medium term plans and activity.

Joe Manning, Marketing Cheshire

Press Activity

PRINT

13

Pieces of coverage

ONLINE

13

Pieces of coverage

3.4_m

Reach

20.8_m

Reach

3.4_m

Impact

20.8_m

Impact

TRAVEL



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SUNDAY EXPRESS December 5, 2021 45

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Lighting-up time

SWITCH ON
Delamere
Forest



Light up dark winter nights with a dazzling festive light show this Christmas season...
By **Vicky Lissaman**

Delamere Forest Christmas trail, Cheshire

Experience twinkling lights and seasonal sounds at Forestry England's Delamere Forest. Discover sparkling tunnels of light, walk under giant baubles and stroll beneath trees which are drenched in jewel-like colour.

■ Until December 31. Adult plus parking £27.50, trail only £19.50, child £13.50. forestryengland.uk/christmas-at-delamere



Lighttopia, Crystal Palace, south London

Lighttopia is a new illuminated trail featuring multi-sensory interactive lights and installations, lasers,

lanterns and water shows. The route takes visitors through the Guardian Gate through Butterfly Field and Rainbow Road.

See the iconic palace reborn in lights and fill up on some of South East London's finest food.

■ Until January 2. Adults from £19.50, children from £13, family ticket from £58 plus booking fee. london.lighttopiafestival.com

Lap of Lights, Silverstone

At the home of British motor racing, visitors drive

around the iconic Formula 1 Grand Prix circuit under darkness experiencing a dramatic light show while following Santa's journey around the world.

Give him a wave as he makes a pitstop on the track. The Wing building, which houses the pits and paddock, is a winter-themed lodge, while the illuminated Ice Trak snakes through the Formula 1 garages and pit lane.

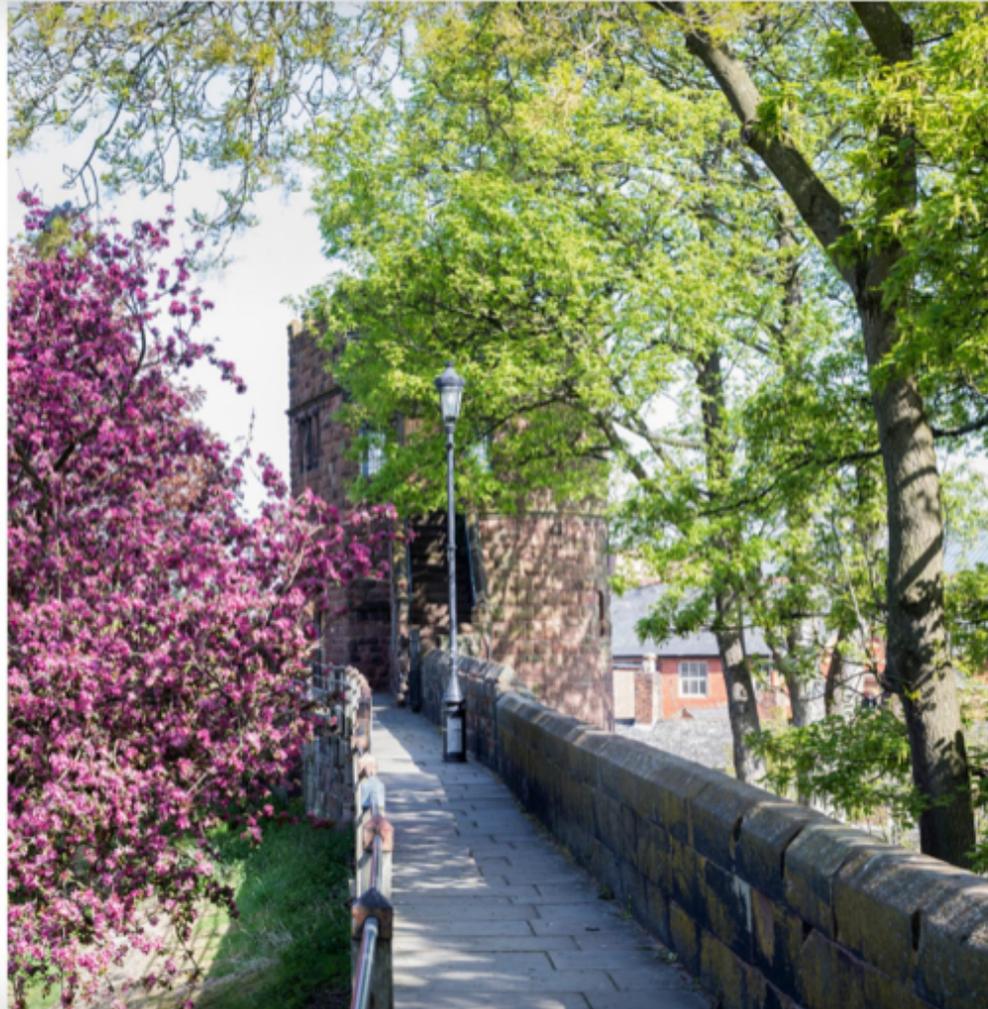
■ Until January 3. £30 per car including all occupants. Ice Trak from £8 adults, £6 child. silverstone.co.uk



LAP IT UP
Silverstone

TURN TO PAGE 46

BRITISH TRAVEL JOURNAL



WALKING TOUR OF...

CHESTER CITY WALLS

Now that we are able to wander around Britain's towns again, visiting historic sites and stopping somewhere picturesque for a relaxing lunch, the walled city of Chester is at the top of our list

Words | Adrian Mourby

DISTANCE

This two mile walk takes about 45 minutes but will of course take longer if you stop to take photographs or divert to explore all the curious and historic sights visible from the walls.

Picture: King Charles Tower found in the North East corner of Chester's City Walls walk



ONCE UPON A MEDIEVAL time every British city needed walls. Most demolished them in less turbulent times, to ease expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but a few cities were far-sighted enough – or simply not wealthy enough – and deferred demolition until it happened that walls suddenly became fashionable again. Nowadays we no longer need them to keep out marauders or exclude rebellious armies but walls do keep a town centre compact and they do make for a great tourist attraction as well.

Nowhere in Britain have city walls been so well preserved as at Chester, a small half-timbered, sandstone city on the River Dee that was a major west coast port in Roman times. The port silted up in the middle ages and is now a famous racecourse beautifully laid out below the city walls. Today almost every attraction that Chester has to offer the visitor can be viewed from the two mile circuit of these walls.



HIT THE ROAD FOR A FAMILY CAR-CATION!

HEIDI McALPIN and her family took a two-week road trip across England that was designed to keep everyone happy. Some must-haves included visits to stately homes and cathedrals... and of course a few child-friendly activities thrown in to keep the kids happy!

DESIGNING a two-week England road trip to satisfy a penchant for stately homes (that's me), someone who worships cathedrals (dad) and two kids with precious little interest in either formed the tumultuous foundations of my post-lockdown holiday plans.

Yes, the children will complain, but I'd a few age-appropriate activities up my sleeve to wrench them from the Wi-Fi. And so, with my all-consuming, colour-coded itinerary nestled in its ziplock pouch, we embarked on a 650-mile odyssey destined to kick lockdown to the kerb.

Our adventure began with an overnight sailing from Belfast to Birkenhead aboard the shiny new *Stena Edda*. This was our first time on this route and our spotless four-berth-suite cabin and access to the *Stena Plus Lounge* - with enough complimentary snacks and juice to keep us busy at bay - made the eight-hour journey a doddle.

DAY ONE & TWO: CHESTER

Back on dry land and Google Maps, our trusty friend for the fortnight, guided us 25 miles to our first stop, the charming medieval walled town of **Chester**. Its monochrome Tudor streetscape embellished with a blaze of multi-lined blooms, this picture postcard destination provided the perfect start to our jam-packed car-cation. And dad's much wanted Cathedral Bugging Tour of England was off to a flying start with the **Chester Cathedral at Height Tour**.



Freddie in Chester

Genial guide Matt regaled us with the building's centuries-old history as we ascended its 125ft tower for magnificent views across several counties and into neighbouring Wales. The tour also took us to previously inaccessible parts of the cathedral where we saw more awe-inspiring interior views showcasing the gothic nave, stunning stained-glass windows and lavish mosaic

floor. Even the children enjoyed relaxing in the sunny cloisters as we contemplated our next stop. No rest for the righteous.

DAY THREE: CHATSWORTH HOUSE

As we headed 70 miles east views turned from urban to rural as one of my holiday highlights came into view. Made famous when Mr Darcy conceived glistening from the lake to crumple Elizabeth Bennet, the magnificent **Chatsworth House** has been wooing visitors - and Pride & Prejudice fans - to its pastoral Peak District domain.

In fact, each year the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire welcome over half a million visitors to their humble abode. And as we catch our first glimpses of the mansion and meticulously landscaped grounds, the scale of their extravagant estate is nothing short of staggering.

A house tour showcased its sheer opulence as painted ceilings, sweeping staircases, priceless antiques and a quirky curatorial of classic and contemporary art vied for attention. And the equally beguiling 102-acre gardens enraptured with a mind-boggling Maze, gargantuan Rock Garden and classical Cascade where water tumbled from an ornate fountain down a flight of stone steps. Though my only sighting of Mr Darcy was at a gift shop ornament, Chatsworth... you didn't disappoint!

DAY FOUR: LINCOLN

Our cathedral and stately home spotting coming along apace, according to dad the next destination promised an ecclesiastical site just as commanding as Chatsworth. Set 55 miles east, **Lincoln** is a city synonymous with its cathedral. And it's not hard to see why as this mighty site rose up from its hilltop perch.

This cavernous gothic creation dates back to Norman times and was once the world's highest building until a storm toppled its spire in 1549. Over the centuries Lincoln Cathedral has also survived fire, an earthquake and attack by Cromwell's troops and remains the UK's fourth largest cathedral.

Eager to explore, I took a **Lincoln Cathedral Roof Tour** while dad and the children checked out the iconic Lincoln Timp statues dotted throughout the eadings as the choir sang. Pic. Jan was like glimpsing heaven itself. And emerging onto the roof for those head-spinning views is a moment that will live long in the memory.

Our next city stop was neighbouring Lincoln Castle, built by William the Conqueror and home to a Victorian Prison and an original copy of the 1215 Magna Carta. After immersing ourselves in all that history, we took the Medieval Wall Walk for panoramic views of the castle complex - and, of course, that ever-dominant cathedral. Both the Castle and Cathedral sit at the crest of the aptly named Sheep Street whose quaint cobbles lined with cute independent shops and cafes are well worth the climb. What a delightful revelation Lincoln City has been.

DAY FIVE: BOSTON STUMP & HUNSTANTON

No time to dally though, and next morning it was onwards a further 70 miles south-east for a three-day visit to Norfolk. But not before dad added a quick midway stop at the **Boston Stump**, aka St Botolph's Church whose Smeretive tower stands out for miles from its flat Fenland base. Sadly, strong winds prevented us from ascending its 209 steps, but an interactive virtual view showed us what we were missing. And craning one's necks to look up at the tower, both inside and out, was just as jaw-dropping.



Freddie and Scarlett stop for ice cream at Wells-Next-The-Sea on the North Norfolk coast

A restored coaching house close to King's Lynn provided the ideal base for our **Norfolk** sojourn. And with the coast calling, we dumped our bags and headed straight for the nearby seaside town of Hunstanton. Though set in England's most easterly county, the town is west-facing and famous for its sunsets, with a familiar, caran-an-parke and big sandy beach adding to its busy holiday vibe. As a timely reminder of home, though, our trip coincided with a biblical-like deluge mirroring Sunny Funny into Runny Funny. Happily for the kids, shelter was taken at one of its many glitzy amusement arcades where piles of apps were duly transformed into two small chews. 'I was ever thus.

DAY SIX: SANDRINGHAM

From the flashy to the distinguished, and the following day took on a rather more regal air with a trip to another of my must-sees. Built in 1870 by the future King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, **Sandringham** is the country retreat of HM The Queen. A house tour showed us around several ground floor rooms including the elegant Drawing Room where the family congregates at Christmas and the Grand Ballroom where Union flags from Shackleton's successful and Scott's fateful Antarctic expeditions are proudly displayed.

A lakeside summer house built for Queen Alexandra and the burial places of three of the Queen's consorts were among the notable sites in Sandringham's 24-hectare

Continued on Page 11...



Ray, Scarlett and Freddie at Chatsworth House



Scarlett and Freddie at Merrivale Model Village, Great Yarmouth



Seek tranquillity among the Delamere Forest

Lloyds Meadow Glamping, Cheshire, England

Set in a peaceful spot in the Delamere Forest, this is an adults-only glampsite that places an emphasis on relaxation. Accommodation is within a series of bell tents with luxuriously dressed beds - think top-quality mattresses and feather and down duvets - and carpeted with Indian rugs. Fairy lights and solar lamps create a warm, welcoming atmosphere. Breakfast and BBQ hampers are available to order in advance. The site is set on a fishery, and the surrounding area is perfect for cyclists, with plenty of routes, tracks and tow-paths available. Alternatively, you can just relax and enjoy the wildlife you might spot around the site's lakes, from otters to ducks, badgers and foxes, while the cathedral city of Chester is a short drive away.

*** How to do it: A two-night minimum stay is from £160 per night, lloydsmeadowglamping.co.uk**

The best Boxing Day walks near me: 32 festive family strolls in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

The best walks for wildlife, winter lights, seaside air, mountainous majesty and more



Christmas at Delamere Forest's illuminated trail



By Sarah Baxter

Delamere Forest, Cheshire

Best for... sparkle

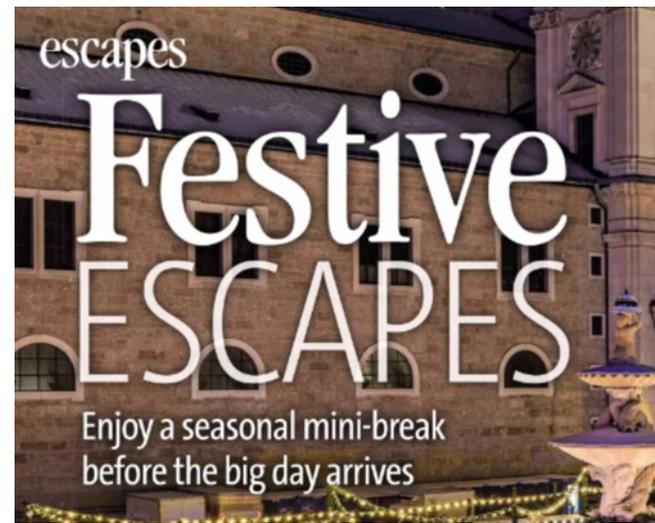


The bright lights of the Delamere Forest illuminated trail at Christmas

Handily accessible by train, Delamere Forest is a delight year-round, with well-marked walks ranging from 3km to 10.5km. There is extra magic this winter as a brand-new after-dark trail illuminates the trees (2.4km; open until 30 December). Book a ticket and stroll via giant baubles, glowing branches, fire gardens and tunnels of light.

christmasatdelamereforest.seetickets.com/raymondgubbay/christmas-at-delamere-forest

- Woods
- Accessible



FEEL FESTIVE IN CHESTER

It's Christmas market season so book a UK break – or day trip – that's packed with festive fun. Chester has a medieval heart that's pretty at any time, even more so when festooned with twinkling lights. Stroll around the Christmas market with a mulled wine, visit the cathedral for carols and a Christmas tree trail, see *Oliver Twist!* at the Storyhouse Theatre, and have a festive afternoon tea among the fairy lights at The Townhouse Secret Garden. Be sure to leave time for an after-dark visit to the city's famous zoo, lit up with giant animal-themed illuminations. chester.com

Find festive arts and crafts

Head to Chester for a mini-break and enjoy one of the UK's most popular markets. Running from 18 November to 22 December, browse 60 wooden chalets selling gifts, local food, handmade jewellery, crafts, and the perfect stocking fillers. Located in the city's Town Hall square opposite Chester Cathedral, with a sparkling Christmas tree in the centre, magic is in the air! Make the most of your weekend with a stay at boutique hotel Oddfellows Chester, which includes a festive afternoon tea.

- Odd Festive Break, from £250 for two nights, room only, in a Caldecott classic room, includes afternoon tea. Book at oddfellowschester.com or call 01244 345454. Visit [Chesterchristmasmarket.com](https://chesterchristmasmarket.com) for more information.



25 festive trips for the ultimate family day out in December

After last year's disappointing Christmas, now is the time to fully embrace the season's festivities

Meet sub-aqua Santa in Cheshire

It's not just reindeer – St Nick likes to gallivant around with reef life too. Head to Cheshire's Blue Planet Aquarium before regular opening hours for a festive breakfast by the Caribbean tank, where 'Scuba Santa' will be floating inside with the sharks, stingrays and a blizzard of tropical fish. He'll chat, via hand signals, then surface to say a proper ho-ho-ho.

Breakfast with Scuba Santa costs £28 over-12s, £24 juniors, £5 toddlers (latter excludes food); Dec 18, 19, 23, 24 (0151 357 8804; blueplanetaquarium.com).

The best Christmas markets in the UK



INSPIRATION

Tamara Hinson

Updated on 09 December 2021 | 0

Comments

SHARE THE LOVE



Chester Christmas market, Chester

When: 18 November to 22 December

Visit [Chester's magical market](#) and you'll find dozens of cute wooden chalets surrounding an enormous Christmas tree. It's another market in a brilliant location – right in the city centre, in Chester's town square and opposite its cathedral, which dates back to the 11th century.

Make sure you stop by the Dipple Tipple & Co stall, where you can pick up bottle of locally produced liquor – we recommend a bottle of Forest Gin, produced in nearby Macclesfield.

The Christmas market will also be the starting point for Chester's spectacular annual Saturnalia parade, which features a motley crew of torch-bearing ghouls, devils, skeletons and demented cooks bearing a severed head on a platter. Whether Father Christmas would approve remains to be seen.

A VEGAN'S GUIDE TO...

Chester



Above City of Chester is an old Roman town. It is one of the best preserved walled cities in Britain.

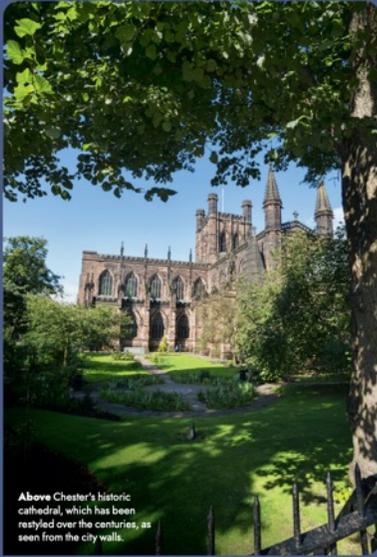


Left The beautiful, ancient architecture of The Rows arcade in Chester city centre.



Above Chester riverside, River Dee, as seen from the Roman city walls.

Right A view of Chester's Eastgate street and the Eastgate Clock. This clock was built in 1899 and it is said to be the most photographed clock in UK after the Big Ben at the Houses of Parliament in London.



Above Chester's historic cathedral, which has been restyled over the centuries, as seen from the city walls.

"Founded as a Benedictine abbey in 1092, it has been restyled over the centuries with today's building dating back over 280 years."

The medieval city of Chester is historically significant. Its strategic position close to the Welsh border saw the Romans consider it for their capital. A slice of history is discovered around every corner. Even the city's racecourse, reputedly the oldest in England, was the site of a large Roman harbour. Chester is also famous for The Rows, continuous half-timbered galleries reached by steps, which form a second row of shops above those at street level. Chester is easy to explore on foot and much is packed within its famous walls, including shops, attractions for everyone, plenty of places to stay and numerous cafés and restaurants. Richard Webber discovers that when it comes to food and drink, vegans are well catered for in Chester...



RICHARD WEBBER

Richard Webber writes for various national papers and magazines, including *The Daily Mail* and *Sunday Telegraph*. A keen traveller, he's also editor of the family-focused review site Travellowdown.com and he can be found tweeting on @Travellowdown.

CHESTER

WHERE TO EAT



▲ Shrub
Shrub's owner wanted to create an unpretentious, relaxed vegan eatery that welcomes everyone and he's certainly achieved that. The menu has something to satisfy everyone. I enjoyed the Shrub Burger (£12.50) comprising a Beyond Burger, lettuce, tomato, pickles, smoked Gouda with fries and slaw. The lemon and blueberry cheesecake was the perfect way to finish a delicious meal. **Open: Mon-Thurs & Sun 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight; 1-3 Eastgate St; shrubchester.co.uk**



▲ Artezian
Focusing on Mediterranean-inspired food, this new restaurant has an airy, contemporary interior. It offers fine food with a dedicated vegan menu. I started with no-meat balls in a tomato sauce (£5.95) followed by tomato and basil risotto, cherry tomatoes with rocket and basil (£12.95). My daughter's choice – tagliatelle arrabbiata in a chili/garlic tomato sauce (£9.95) – was just as good. **Open: Mon-Sun 9am-midnight; 33 Pepper St; artezian.com**

Jaunty Goat ▶

There are three branches in the city, with the Northgate outlet 100% plant-based. With soya, almond, coconut and oat milk available, a coffee is a must before or after sampling dishes from the menu. This branch opened in 2019, the first plant-based hospitality venue in Chester. The smashed avocado dish followed by lemon and raspberry cake were delicious. The company's website states that they aim to provide specialty coffee and honest food, served with genuine hospitality. Well, we can vouch for that. **Open: Mon-Sat 8am-6pm, Sun 9am-6pm; 128 Northgate St; jauntygoat.co.uk**



▲ Hanky Panky
Don't leave without a visit to Hanky Panky. This brightly-coloured eatery not only offers tasty pancakes, but specialises in, among others, curries. Since we last visited, the menu has expanded and you certainly won't leave disappointed. I didn't, after enjoying Kumily cashew curry (£8) followed by Strawberry Fields Pancake (£7.50). **Open: Mon-Wed 9am-5pm, Thurs-Sat 9am-11pm, Sun 9am-4pm; 20 Commonhall St; hankypankypancakes.com**



▲ Dough Dough
A love of traditional Neapolitan pizza inspired the creation of Dough Dough. Now with branches in Liverpool, Warrington and one in Derby opening soon, it's clear the public love this Italian restaurant. The atmosphere is relaxed, the pizzas fab and the service friendly. A large margherita with homemade vegan cheese and red onion topping costs £6.95, so prices are decent, too. **Open: Mon-Sat noon-10.30pm, Sun 12-9pm; 66-68 Northgate St; eatdoughdough.com**

CHESTER

WHERE TO EAT CONTINUED



▲ The Flower Cup
The owner of this coffee shop adores plants – they're everywhere! Specialising in all-day brunches, I had a vegan breakfast of mushrooms, sausage, avocado, tomatoes, beans and toast (£9). I couldn't resist finishing with a banana and coconut milk pancake (£7.75). **Open: Mon-Fri 9am-4pm, Sat & Sun 9am-5pm; 61 Watergate St; flowercup.co.uk**



▲ Katie's Tearooms
This traditional tearoom in Chester's centre is spread over three floors of a 14th century building. Ask for the vegan menu, which has plenty of options. Try spaghetti veganise, using soya mince (£6.25), followed by blackcurrant crumble with vegan custard (£4.50). **Open: Mon-Fri & Sun 10am-5pm, Sat 9am-5pm; 38 Watergate St; katiestearooms.com**



▲ Crêpeaffaire
Crêpeaffaire has several branches across the UK and Chester's is in the heart of the city. Selling savoury and sweet crêpes, the Supervegan contains tomato, spinach, and mushrooms (£6.25), while the Banana Split has banana, vegan whipped cream and chocolate (£7.45). **Open: Mon-Sat 9am-9pm, Sun 10am-6pm; 34 Bridge St; crepeaffaire.com**



▲ The Secret Garden
A hidden away bar and eating area behind The Townhouse Hotel, with amazing murals of mountains and oceans. As well as cocktails and premium drinks, meals and afternoon teas are served. Enjoy a vegan afternoon tea (£18.95). **Open: Mon-Sun 8am-11pm; The Townhouse, 49-51 Lower Bridge St; chesterstounhouse.com**



▲ There are others places to eat, too!
Other eateries include Hypha (pictured), high up on the historic City Walls and recently awarded a Michelin Green Star. Popcorn is a bar/restaurant offering, among other suitable dishes, vegan fish and chips. Urbano 52 is a well-respected pizzeria while Falafel Xpress has several vegan options.

TOP FIVE Things to do

1 The City Walls

Walk the well-preserved City Walls, the most complete in Britain, dating from the Roman occupation 2,000 years ago, before heading to the impressive amphitheatre. It's so atmospheric, you can imagine this outdoor arena packed with 7,000 spectators.

2 Head For The Cathedral

The cathedral has reached high into the air for 1,000 years. Founded as a Benedictine abbey in 1092, it has been restyled over the centuries with today's building dating back over 280 years. Head to the top of the tower by booking a Cathedral At Height tour. **Further information: chestercathedral.com/tours; 01244 324756.**

3 Weird & Wonderful World of Medicine

Located in a Grade-II listed church, Sick to Death charts the gory story of medicine through time. This fascinating museum promotes itself as a 'playground of plague with a

smatter of splatter, and a chance to poke into our medical past'. **Further information: sicktodeath.org; 01244 408963; St Michael's Church, Bridge St.**

4 Take To The Water

Hop aboard one of ChesterBoat's vessels and relax while drifting down the 70-mile long River Dee, which twists its way through the city. Various trips are offered. Why not book a private cruise while enjoying a vegan picnic onboard like we did? **Further information: chesterboat.co.uk; 01244 325394.**

5 Be Entertained

Storyhouse is among the UK's foremost cultural charities and its home in Chester incorporates a library, theatres and cinema. During the summer, watch a favourite movie at Moonlight Flicks, an open-air cinema while open-air theatre productions take place in Grosvenor Park. **Further information: storyhouse.com; 01244 409113.**

WHERE TO STAY

The Townhouse Chester

Among the best independent hotels in the city, this 17th century family-run hotel is moments away from the river and a short stroll from the main attractions. Located within the historic Roman walls circling the medieval centre, it boasts its own Georgian features. A range of bedrooms are available, including family rooms, while the self-contained, two-bedroom Amphitheatre Apartment sleeps up to eight. **Further information: 49-51 Lower Bridge Street; 01244 567300; chesterstounhouse.com; double rooms from £80 per night while the apartment is from £250 per night.**



FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO VISITCHESHIRE.COM

The Luxe Review

STYLE TRAVEL CULTURE TECHNOLOGY DINING WHEELS

TRAVEL

5 exciting new openings that will make you want to book a Cheshire staycation in 2022

BY THE LUXE REVIEW EDITORS

JANUARY 7, 2022

Discover medieval history from amazing open galleries with this new tour

Chester's medieval Rows will be the subject of a new online and audio walking tour, Discover The Rows, launching this month. Sightseers and shoppers from near and far will be able to learn on the spot about these amazing first-floor open galleries, with revelations including England's first shopfront and a coded message about a possible visit to the city by Catherine of Aragon. To surprise and delight young visitors, guides from Roman Tours dressed as medieval soldiers will even be on hand in the city centre to explain a little more about these historic structures.

See Chester bloom with fabulous new art installations

There'll be a treat for the eyes in Chester in February with a glorious burst of art installations across the city titled Spring Blooms. Part of a new campaign, Cheshire Designed By Nature, from Destination Chester, the display of artworks – which visitors will be able to find out more about using a new app – will bring the Cheshire countryside into the heart of this green city. Expect nocturnal projections of wildlife, a sculptural swoop of birds, and a stage set in the Cathedral gardens for free theatre performances.

News

New hotel and other attractions unveiled for Chester and Cheshire

By Jonathon Barnett



An artist's impression of the First Light Pavilion.

A NUMBER of new attractions for Chester and Cheshire for 2022 have been unveiled.

Due to open its doors in the summer, Wildes Chester is a new boutique hotel on Chester's medieval Rows, overlooking the High Cross.

Chester's medieval Rows will be the subject of a new online and audio walking tour, Discover The Rows, launching in January.

Sightseers and shoppers from near and far will be able to learn on the spot about these amazing first-floor open galleries, with revelations including England's first shopfront and a coded message about a possible visit to the city by Catherine of Aragon.

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Expect nocturnal projections of wildlife, a sculptural swoop of birds, and a stage set in the Cathedral gardens for free theatre performances.

Innovative Big Heritage has reinvented one of Chester's favourite museums as Deva Roman Discovery Centre, offering an entertaining 21st-century take on ancient history. The familiar Roman soldier guides and astonishing archaeological site will be complemented by new activities, hands-on exhibits, and sound-and-light shows.

It will feature 18 luxurious rooms, a spa, and restaurant X by Harry Guy. Jodrell Bank is also set to launch its multi-million pound First Light Project, with the opening of the First Light Pavilion (pictured) this spring.

The national heritage attraction is set in a stunning new building in the shadow of the mighty Lovell telescope, which was named a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2019 because of its global role in achieving a transformational understanding of the universe.

Designed by internationally acclaimed architects HASSELL Studio, the pavilion will include a gallery dedicated to telling the story of Jodrell Bank, an immersive projection space and auditorium, and an education hub and cafe.

Ice-cream fans can take a tasty tour of Cheshire's artisan parlours by following the new self-guided trail 'The Delicious Dozen'.

The landlocked county may not be known for its seaside attractions but this is dairy country, with ice-cream makers popping up from the Welsh borders to the foothills of the Cheshire Peak District.

Highlights of the trail include one of the UK's top visitor attractions, The Ice-Cream Farm, in Tattenhall.

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- 7 Take a peek at the beautifully refurbished cottage in an amazing central location
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- 20 Missing teen is believed to be in Cheshire

Read more >



The Telegraph

The UK's 10 hottest hotel openings of 2022

Wildes, Chester

One to put in the diary for later this year, Wildes is set to put Chester firmly on the short-breaks map. It's an elegantly restored Victorian building in the heart of the city's iconic Rows. The 18 rooms will combine period touches - wooden beams, original fireplaces - with plenty of contemporary luxuries, while the restaurant will be helmed by Harry Guy, who cut his teeth with Gordon Ramsay and Simon Rogan. The cherry on the cake is the roof-top pool, with glorious views across the city rooftops; in the colder months, the hotel's spa will be the place to relax.

Doubles from £250; wildeschester.com

The best vegan and vegetarian restaurants to try for veganuary 2022 across the UK

Whether you're vegetarian, vegan or just looking to reduce your meat intake, here are some of the top restaurants to try

By Tomé Morrissy-Swan
27 January 2022 - 9:19am

Hypha, Chester

Chester has become something of a foodie hub in recent years, and that's certainly the case for vegetarian and vegan food, too. The city has a plethora of cheap and fast-food options, but Hypha brings a level of sophistication, with its ever-evolving, "micro-seasonal" tasting menu. Awarded a green Michelin star in 2021 for its efforts in sustainability.

5 City Walls, Chester, CH1 2JG; hypha.uk

MailOnline

Staycationers rejoice! The eye-catching British hotels new for 2022, from Blackpool seafront's first 5-star property to swanky cabins in Norfolk and a Premier Inn on Jersey

- February will see the opening of a Shoreditch hotel with amazing views and a new Premier Inn in St Helier
- Sands Venue Resort in Blackpool will be 'inspired by 1930s glamour with Art Deco and modern influences'
- A highlight at Wildes Chester, which is set to open this summer, will be the new restaurant 'X by Harry Guy'

GO WILDE



Wildes Chester is set to open on Chester's historic Rows this summer. Pictured is a rendering of the hotel's spa area



A rendering of one of the 18 rooms at the hotel. Room prices will start from £250 per night



One of the highlights at Wildes Chester, shown here in a rendering, will be X by Harry Guy - a chef who has worked in multiple Michelin-starred restaurants

Chester's historic Rows will be home to an 18-room boutique hotel from this summer.

One of the highlights at Wildes Chester will be X by Harry Guy — a chef who has worked in multiple Michelin-starred restaurants. Rooms from £250 at wildeschester.com.



Chester makes for a brilliant city break for foodies (Image: Getty Images)

- COVID-19
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Exploring Chester's food scene including the best restaurants, food halls and tours

Chester has a great food scene with heaps of brilliant restaurants, food halls and fascinating walking tours for foodies – and it's easy to get a taste on a short city break

By **Fiona Whitty**
05:01, 23 Jan 2022



"You're never a tourist in your hometown so many locals have no idea how good this road is," mused Chester guide Gareth Boyd.

Gareth was kicking off a family foodie walking tour on Brook Street – once a humdrum cut-through, now a blossoming hub for indie entrepreneurs like Wojciech and Katy who run Pierogi, named after the dumplings they create.

A cross between ravioli and gyoza, the handmade Polish staples consist of small rounds of dough filled with a variety of sweet or savoury fillings.

Our favourite contained spinach, garlic and curd cheese. We were soon to discover that Cheshire's historic county town, nuzzled in the shadow of Liverpool and the Welsh border, is teeming with plenty more inventive restaurants.

At new 'all-natural' eatery native we tried roasted squash and almond labneh – a soft cheese made from yogurt – deliciously light hash browns and sourdough toast with clarified beetroot butter, a hit with my teens Rosie, 16, and Freddie, 13.

TRAVEL



Edited by
NIGEL THOMPSON

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facebook: @NigelThompson
or visit: dailystar.co.uk/travel/

TIME TRAVEL

BY WICKY LISBAMAN



Laax, Switzerland

Started on a sunny plateau, high above the pine gorges, the Swiss mountain resort of Laax is at the forefront of the new skiing scene.

But it wouldn't be the pioneering spirit's motto: it is better without the vision of one man, Hans Gurnner, who set about transforming it after a brief fall.

When his father, owner of the Coop Sogn Gaur mountain cableway in Laax, died in 1983, 27-year-old Felix abandoned his studies to become a lawyer and took over the family business. Then, in 1996, he merged it with the firm's colleagues to form the Venise Area Group.

Building on his long-term fascination with the Californian ski scene, he initiated one of the most successful winter sports concepts in the Alps - Freemove.

Laax is now considered to be the Venice Beach of the mountains. Just as Gurnner once imagined it, accepting snowboarders just as much as skiers and celebrating freedom in the snow.

The mountain railways, ski lifts and other services such as hotels, bars, rentals and winter sports schools, catering to the Venise Area Group. The resort is also home to the world's largest heliport - the Big Bear - which is 4,550 long, 120 wide and 22ft high, as well as the first actual 'heliport' built in Europe.

Its 'Greenstyle' concept - which brings Laax closer to its goal of becoming the first self-sustaining ski resort - and the launch of the mobile Laax app exemplify Felix's pioneering spirit.

In 2016, he was awarded the Milestone Award, the most important Swiss tourism prize, for his life's work and dedication to commitment, as well as for his constant quest for innovation.

The latest venture to be launched in Laax is its brand new regeneration reality (UK) guided walk across the Semis di Orsino, at Piani di Orsino, the longest treetop walkway in the world.

Four nights of skiing in Laax, staying at signature hotels, including ski passes for the Firmo Laax Valera region, arrival boat with access to the extensive area and spa rooms from £1,100 for adults until January 31 and from March 20 to April 1, signature.com/en



SPACE TO EXPLORE: Fiona Whitty at cultural centre

A taste of chic Chester

Fiona Whitty gets an appetite for a city full of foodie delights and fun pastimes



JUST-SEE: Chester's stunning Cathedral

You've never a tourist in your hometown so many locals have no idea how good this road is," issued Chester guidebook author.

Next stop was kicking off a family foodie walking tour on Broad Street - once a fashionable eat-through, now a blossoming hub for indie entrepreneurs like Wajack's and Katy who run Panang, named after the dumplings they create.

A cruise between drinks and games, the handmade Pulak staples consist of small rounds of dough filled with a variety of sweet or savory fillings.

Our favorite costumed spinach, garlic and card cheese. We were soon to discover that Chester's historic county lanes, nestled in the shadow of Liverpool and the Wirral, houses is brimming with plenty more inventive restaurants.

At new all-outdoor active venue we indulged in squash and shared bubbly - a soft cheese made from yogurt - deliciously light lamb burgers and mouthful bread with

clarified butter, a hit with my teens, Rose, 16, and Freddie, 13. Low intervention wine, a avocado-based soft drink and another which mixed espresso granules (reminiscent of matcha) by other.

Next stop was popular local store The Cheese Shop to try cloth-bound Cheshire Cheddar and the creamy Rustic Blue, served on the Orléans Express no less, or compared by honey-pickled bread.

Trip to Betty's Fudge and the Market Hall followed, the latter providing a mix of local, London-made and seasonal items from the Sandbar Seafood Shack and French-style cakes from Patisserie Patisserie.

By the time we reached publisher's Street Elements we were browsing our belts to acquire a Cheshire River-trained Fyn's prettily presented creations, including a moose-filled chocolate, richly moist carrot cake and chocolate. Carrots - they too give us a

cheerful and fun insight into

Cheshire's foodie scene flourishes from 18th-century (chocolate) to modern (chocolate) to modern (chocolate).

We returned at our self-contained two-bedroom apartment at the Tenements Chester, an independent hotel placed within Chester's city walls - the oldest, largest and most complete in Britain.

With a small terrace, two bedrooms, comfy lounge, ancient Roman-inspired artwork and its own private entrance, it was a perfect family city stay with the added benefit of having hotel amenities - like the Tenements' new Secret Garden covered terrace - nearby.

Just down the road was the brand new Rick To Death, a quirky but entertaining attraction looking at medicine through the ages.

Created inside an old church for the extra reaches, it was packed with fun hands-on activities like a pop-poll - Freddie's favorite bit - where you can sit on a hot, listening to the habits of our ancestors (18 adult, £3.50 child, includes both).

Cheshire's certainly postcard-perfect for children - and just as much for those who love a special photography workshop for teens, part of the new Chester Design Co. by Nature or a campaign aimed at encouraging the community to embrace the natural world.

Local photographer Jane Foley took them on a walk to show them how best to use light, reflections and camera angles. Their showcase of intricate leaves, shadow lines and golden light were impressive (for events see www.visitcheester.com).

To experience Chester at a different pace we joined paddle-sports expert Jamie Greenough for a kayak along the River Dee, past the city walls and riverbank restaurants. Jamie provided snacks and drinks - a lovely inflator on the spot - and we ate late-afternoon two-hour kayak under ancient sandstone transported on a wooden away from the busy city (from £120, drinks not included, see www.visitcheester.com).



BARBONNE: Fiona and Freddie kayak on the Dee

abandoned shipwreck of Paradise Island Adventure Golf (01244 225 444), £100 child, paradisegolf.co.uk.

We were also lucky for Jack and Louise, home of the 12th-century Lovell Telescope who is now one of the world's largest and still plays a key role in space understanding (£2.50 adult, £1.50 child, johndevill.com).

And a fantastic afternoon was had at Garden Park, a luxury country estate hotel packed with things to do.

The location recently hosted an award-winning course called Vertigo, Rose and Freddie barely battled two

years of trying when being a VR high, including bridges, tunnels and more, with a 100ft tall spiral tower (£40 adult, £20 child, www.visitcheester.com).

While there we all tried laser clay shooting, where you fire at plastic discs with a laser gun. It's a safe form of the game shooting and alternative the best job you'll ever get, so it's

perfect for children - and just as much for those who love a special photography workshop for teens, part of the new Chester Design Co. by Nature or a campaign aimed at encouraging the community to embrace the natural world.

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Nearby is the huge Cheshire Oaks designer outlet village where we navigated exotic markets and

BEHAVIOUR

THE MED Fiona does a round of cultural centre



READ ALL ABOUT IT

The library at cultural centre



HEAR FROM

Fiona Whitty on the city of Chester



WHEEL THOMPSON

Soil's worldwide



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BOOK IT

A two-bedroom apartment



MORE INFO

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NEIGHBOURHOOD

Fiona Whitty on the city of Chester



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BOOK IT

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MORE INFO

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WHEEL THOMPSON

Soil's worldwide



BUY OF THE WEEK

www.visitcheester.com

HOTEL CHECKOUT

MAILING LIST

Asor's boutique hotel brand



Asor's boutique hotel brand Moma Sherin is making its mark in the Middle East, bringing its cutting-edge style to the historic city of Dubai. Situated in an area towards the end of the year, Moma Dubai's 107 rooms and 152 apartments will be housed in a unique tower in the high business district, close to the world's tallest tower, the Burj Khalifa. Features will include a range of dining outlets, a terrace with four swimming pools, and an outdoor Cinema. Room rates to be announced. Check at moma.com.

In another tall story, April will see the arrival of



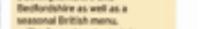
Hotel La Tour in the heart of Milton Keynes, and the highlight has to be Fourtours, the country's highest bar and restaurant.

Soaring 144ft above ground level, the elegant eatery will offer stunning 360-degree panoramic views over Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire as well as a seasonal British menu.

The four-star plus hotel features 200 contemporary designed rooms and suites (including a honeymoon suite), each with floor-to-ceiling windows boasting views over the city centre or Cotswold Park.

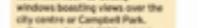
Rooms start at £220 a night with breakfast, hotel labour.co.uk

Soil's worldwide



WHEEL THOMPSON

Soil's worldwide



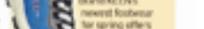
BUY OF THE WEEK

Soil's worldwide



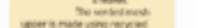
BOOK IT

A two-bedroom apartment



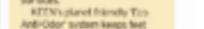
MORE INFO

www.visitcheester.com



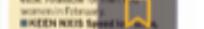
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BUY OF THE WEEK

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ANCIENT CHESHIRE: The city's old buildings in the centre



BOOK IT: A two-bedroom apartment at Tenements Chester costs from £175 a night (includes £200 airport transfers, www.visitcheester.com)



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