

Cruise from the Cotswolds to Oxford



How long do I need? Three days

Where is it? From Lechlade to Oxford

Highlights

Hire a cruiser to escape the rush of modern life, exploring the remote upper reaches of the River Thames. This is an experience to delight all ages - watching the wildlife, keeping pace along the towpath, chatting to lock keepers, enjoying the hospitality of riverside pubs and mooring at night in cosy comfort, with the water lapping against the sides.

Your three day voyage follows the peaceful passage of the infant river from its highest navigation point near Lechlade, on the edge of the Cotswolds, to Oxford's dreaming spires. These upper reaches of the Thames are very different in character from the more regal river which opens out beyond Oxford. For much of the 30 mile journey, you'll wend your way amongst open fields and meadows, with plenty of welcoming waterside pubs and little to disturb the tranquil scene.

Two nights are sufficient to make the 60 mile return trip. Take advantage of flexible hire arrangements to give yourself an extra night in Oxford or time to explore the rural landmarks and attractions around Lechlade. Our two itineraries [Explore the historic heart of Oxford](#) and [Enjoy the River Thames at Lechlade](#) have all the details.

Start your day at Lechlade

Your starting point is near Lechlade at St John's Lock, the first lock at the top of the River Thames. Hire a cruiser from Cotswold Boat Hire to make the journey in comfort and style. Boats can accommodate up to six people, with all mod cons provided. Tuition is given on how to handle the boat, together with information on moorings and other facilities and tips for cruising along the length of your route. Most of the locks you'll encounter are manned during working hours to provide any help that's needed along the way.

Cotswold Boat Hire

The Trout Inn, St John's Lock, Lechlade, Gloucestershire GL7 3HA

Opening hours: Boats operate from 1 April to 31 October

Costs: Various costs apply – see website for details

Tel: +44 (0)1793 727083

Web: www.cotswoldboat.co.uk

Your rural route to Oxford

Directions are not really needed, you won't get lost! However, to whet your appetite for this idyllic journey, here are some notes on the superb pubs and other highlights that define this restful route. As these pubs are popular, book ahead for meals when you can.

St John's Lock to Radcot Bridge

The reclining statue of Old Father Thames oversees your departure from the Trout Inn beside St John's Weir, just below the lock. Winding loops meander through open meadows, passing Buscot's church enroute to Buscot Weir and Lock. You can moor here for the ten-minute walk into the National Trust village of Buscot, where the tea room serves both lunch and tea. More meanders bring you under rustic Eaton footbridge and the path to Kelmscott Manor – the idyllic summer home William Morris shared with the Pre-Raphaelite painter, Rossetti. The Tudor house is open by timed tickets on Wednesdays and Saturdays, from April – October. The village, The Plough pub and the churchyard where Morris is buried are all well worth a visit at any time. From here, a house or two and glimpse of a church brings you to Grafton Lock, then on to 12th-century Radcot Bridge, the oldest bridge on the River Thames. The existence of a second channel has preserved the ancient arched bridge, still with a niche which held a statue of the Virgin Mary.

The Swan Hotel

Radcot-on-Thames, Bampton, Oxfordshire OX18 2SX

This attractive inn on the banks of the river has visitor moorings and is open daily for food and refreshment in its cosy bar, riverside garden and patio.

Tel: +44 (0)1367 810 220

Web: www.swanhotelradcot.co.uk

Radcot Bridge to Tadpole Bridge

After Radcot Lock, the river passes under Old Man's Footbridge and through peaceful fields to Rushey Lock. Rushey is home to a rare surviving paddle-and-rymer weir, where wooden 'paddles' are lowered between heavy posts (the rymers) to hold the water back. You are wending your way now to remote Tadpole Bridge, with its solitary Trout Inn.

The Trout Inn

Buckland Marsh, Farringdon, Oxfordshire SN7 8RF

The Trout Inn has good food, log fires and its cask ales have won this historic inn and free house the title of AA Pub of the Year for England 2009 / 10. Accommodation includes six private moorings, which may be hired or are free to use if you are dining at The Trout.

Tel: +44 (0)1367 870382

Web: www.trout-inn.co.uk

Tadpole Bridge to Newbridge

From here the River Thames continues past the flower-rich meadows of the Chimney Meadows National Nature Reserve on its left-hand bank, and under the Tenfoot Bridge and the approach to Shifford Lock. Then it's on again through an open landscape of tranquil fields and a wooded stretch, to Newbridge. This is another idyllic spot, with the lovely 13th century stone bridge fringed by reeds and trees and yet more welcoming pubs.

The Rose Revived

Newbridge, Witney, Oxfordshire OX29 7QD

Set right beside the water this popular inn and pub has a garden and patio and a cosy bar with its own menu and log fires on chilly days. The large restaurant has lots of character and lovely river views.

Tel: +44 (0)1865 300 221

Web: www.rose-revived-inn-newbridge.co.uk

The Maybush Inn

Newbridge, Witney, Oxfordshire

Sitting on the opposite side of the bridge with views of the river this inn is popular for its home cooked food, served in the bar and restaurant.

Tel: +44 (0)1367 300 624

Web: www.maybushinn.co.uk

Newbridge to Wolvercote

From Newbridge you will travel round more 'amiable meanders' of the Thames and under the Lonely Hart's Weir Footbridge, to Northmoor Lock and another paddle-and-rymer weir. If you'd like a change of scene, a footpath on the left hand bank will take you to Northmoor village, and the path on the right hand bank leads to the village of Appleton. Then it's on to Bablock Hythe, where the Romans forded the river and a ferry served the crossing for some thousand years. Monks used to provide refreshment for travellers crossing here – a tradition now kept up by The Ferryman Inn.

The Ferryman Inn

Babcock Hythe, Northmoor, Witney, Oxfordshire OX29 5AT

This riverside pub serves food in both the Fisherman's Bar and the restaurant, with an extensive terrace and lawn area for summer days.

Tel: +44 (0)1865 880028

Web: www.theferrymaninn.co.uk

With a caravan park on the left bank, your river route winds and wanders round the curves that mark Farmoor Reservoir to reach Pinkhill Lock, the Oxford Cruisers base and Swinford Toll bridge, where motorists still pay a 5p toll per car. Nearby Eynsham Lock marks the presence of the first village you will have encountered since Lechlade, 24 miles away. Now Wytham Great Wood rises steeply from the water's edge, and King's Lock and the Oxford Bypass bridge mark your imminent arrival at Little Wolvercote and pretty Godstow Bridge, Lock and Weir.

The Trout

Godstow Road, Wolvercote, Oxford OX2 8PN

The Trout marks your journey's end, some two miles from Oxford city centre. Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) loved to row to Godstow with Alice Liddell, for whom he wrote his famous stories, and the pub with its waterside terrace is now familiar around the world as a favourite haunt of Inspector Morse.

Tel: +44 (0)1865 510 930.

Web: www.thetroutoxford.co.uk