

Explore the best of the River Thames and Chilterns



How long do I need? Four days

Where is it? Ascot, Windsor, Cliveden, Marlow, Sonning, Streatley and Moulsoford

Highlights

The beautiful countryside of the River Thames and its valley has always attracted the great and the good - from master chefs to monarchs, everyone who is anyone has wanted a presence here. This itinerary offers a selection of top-notch choices to fill four decadent days in some of the most exclusive areas of the River Thames.

Day one: a day at the Royal Ascot races

For regular racegoers, or anyone up for a first-time flutter, a day at 'The World's Most Famous Racecourse' is the ultimate in chic. Situated in beautiful wooded countryside adjoining Windsor Great Park, Ascot Racecourse is synonymous with history, heritage, tradition and world class horseracing. Royal Ascot (in June) sets the standards and the course lives up to them at both flat and jump meetings throughout the year. Old and new sit side by side, with the innovative new Grandstand and other smart facilities keeping Ascot ahead of the competition. Fine wining and dining is part of the Ascot scene (60,000 bottles of champagne were consumed during Royal Ascot 2010!) but there are plenty of budget options too. The Fixtures List includes themed days and Family Days, some of which have special entertainment. For first-time visitors, the website has a New Racegoer section with information on how to plan your day, where to watch the horses and how to place a bet.

Ascot Racecourse

Ascot, Berkshire SL5 7JX

Opening hours: Gates open at 11.00 (10.45 in winter) with the first race at around 13.30. Ascot Racecourse is located close to the M3, M4, M40 & M25 motorways and to London Heathrow for international visitors. Car parks are clearly signposted around the course. There is a frequent rail service to Ascot from both Reading and London Waterloo. Average journey times are 27 minutes from Reading, 46 minutes from Waterloo. Regular services also run from Guildford.

Costs: Tickets can be booked online. Costs are dependent on the event – see website for details

Tel: +44 (0)870 727 1234

Web: <http://www.ascot.co.uk/>

Time to spare? Explore more of The Royal Landscape at [Savill Garden](#)

The Savill Garden is one of Britain's greatest ornamental gardens, created in the 1930s under royal patronage simply as 'a garden for the garden's sake'. It is a place of constant discovery with 35 acres of interlocking gardens, containing distinctive planting areas including the Spring Wood, Summer Wood, Hidden Gardens, Summer Gardens, Glades, Autumn Wood, Azalea Walks, New Zealand Garden and the lovely new Rose Garden. The award-winning Savill Building includes a restaurant and shop and The Gallery, exhibiting original art for sale, with pieces to suit a range of budgets. Savill Garden is part of The Royal Landscape, 1000 acres of landscaped gardens, lakes and woodland which also incorporates The Valley Gardens and Virginia Water lake, all of which is open to the public.

The Savill Garden

Wick Lane, Englefield Green, Surrey TW20 0UU

Opening hours: The Savill Garden and Savill Building are open daily, from 10.00 – 18.00 (16.30 in winter) The entrance to the Garden is a mile from Englefield Green and four miles from Windsor Castle. Approach via the A30 from the south and west and by the A308 from the east and north. Please note the car park is only accessible from Wick Road, and visitors from all directions should follow the brown tourist signs saying 'The Royal Landscape', 'The Savill Garden' or depicting a flower symbol.

Costs: Various costs dependent on season – see website for details

Tel: +44 (0)1784 435544

Web: <http://www.theroyallandscape.co.uk/landscape/savillgarden/>

Stay the night at [Sir Christopher Wren's House Hotel](#) in Windsor

Sheltering beneath the ramparts of Windsor Castle, this luxury hotel enjoys a spectacular setting overlooking the River Thames at Eton Bridge. The main house, rumoured to have been the family home of Sir Christopher Wren, has been meticulously restored to offer guests the highest levels of comfort and service. The award-winning Strok's Restaurant is noted for its fine dining and superb views and the individually styled hotel bedrooms range from 17th- century rooms with original features to contemporary suites.

Sir Christopher Wren's House Hotel & Spa

Thames Street, Windsor, Berkshire SL4 1PX

Opening hours: All year round

Costs: Various costs – see website for details

Tel: +44 (0)1753 861354

Web: <http://www.sirchristopherwren.co.uk/>

Day two: fly high above the River Thames

Pleasure flights afford stunning views of the River Thames – but the true flying experience is to take the controls yourself. A trial session is the height of luxury, combining an overview of the river and its setting with the thrill of hands-on aviation. The West London Aero Club, (ten miles from the hotel) offers flying experiences in five different types of aircraft from helicopters to vintage open-cockpit Tiger Moths. You'll do more than just enjoy the view - briefing begins with the principles of flight and the aircraft controls! During the flight, the instructor will demonstrate some basic manoeuvres and give you the chance to carry them out. The West London Aero Club House is of great interest too, with photographs and

memorabilia recalling the days when this was the wartime HQ of the Air Transport Auxilliary. A flying experience at White Waltham starts at around £85 for an hour, which includes 30 minutes flying.

West London Aero Club

White Waltham Airfield, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 3NJ

Opening hours: From 8.00 and closes at dusk or 20.00 in the summer.

Costs: Various – see website for details.

Tel: +44 (0)1628 823272

Web: <http://www.wlac.co.uk/>

A bite to eat

The small 16th century village of Bray (five-and-a-half miles from White Waltham) is a big name in the world of food - Michelin stars abound in revered restaurants run by famous chefs whose reputations need little introduction.

A leading light in the world of gastronomy, The Waterside Inn is a French restaurant that has been in the Roux family since 1972. Its tranquil location on the banks of the River Thames is the perfect setting for a world-class culinary experience.

The Waterside Inn

Ferry Road, Bray, Berkshire SL6 2AT

Opening hours: Lunch and dinner are served from Wednesdays to Sundays, dinner is also served on Tuesdays from June to August

Costs: Various – see website for menus

Tel: +44 (0)1628 620691

Web: www.waterside-inn.co.uk

Heston Blumenthal of The Fat Duck has been described as a culinary alchemist for his innovative style of cuisine. Dishes on the menu here push the boundaries of culinary expectation, with a sense of theatre and multi-sensory appeal.

The Fat Duck

High Street, Bray, Berkshire SL6 2AQ

Opening hours: Lunch and dinner are served from Tuesdays to Sundays. Reservations are taken for up to two months in advance

Costs: Various – see website for menus

Tel: + 44 (0)1628 580333.

Web: www.thefatduck.co.uk

Heston Blumenthal's Hinds Head Hotel, also in Bray, was voted Michelin Pub of the Year 2011. This Tudor building retains the wonderful old English feel, with a menu that features classical and traditional dishes.

The Hinds Head Hotel

High Street, Bray, Berkshire SL6 2AB

Opening hours:

Costs: Various – see website for menus

Tel: +44 (0)1628 626151

Web: www.hindsheadbray.com

Tea and walks at Cliveden

This spectacular country estate on cliffs overlooking the River Thames was once the glittering hub of society as the home of Waldorf and Nancy Astor. For 300 years, the house was dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure, politics and power. In the 1960s it was still in the headlines for its association with the notorious Profumo Affair. Cliveden's 376 acres of magnificent formal gardens and parklands command panoramic views over the beautiful Cliveden reach, where the River Thames meanders through the richly wooded cliffs. Walk off an excellent lunch on Cliveden's marked woodland paths or among its formal gardens, adorned with an outstanding collection of sculptures and statues from the ancient and modern worlds. The house is now let as a magnificent hotel, but parts are still open to visitors at limited times. You can enjoy traditional afternoon tea in the hotel, which has won Tea Guild Awards for Excellence. Non-residents are also welcome in the restaurant for lunch and dinner. Bray to Cliveden is six-and-a-half miles.

Cliveden National Trust Estate

Taplow, Maidenhead, Buckinghamshire SL6 0JA

Opening hours: The estate, garden and shop are open daily, February - December (Woodlands also open in January.)

Costs: Free to National Trust members, other admission costs apply – see website for details

Tel: +44 (0)1494 755562

Web: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-cliveden>

Stay the night at the [Macdonald Compleat Angler](#) in Marlow

The Compleat Angler, which takes its name from the famous fishing book, enjoys an enviable position on the banks of the River Thames overlooking Marlow Weir. Many of the bedrooms have superb views and all have been recently upgraded to individual designs. The fine-dining Aubergine restaurant, the sister of the acclaimed Chelsea original, offers award-winning European cuisine. A more casual menu is available in the hotel's Bowaters restaurant. Cliveden to Marlow is six miles.

The Compleat Angler

Bisham Road, Marlow, Buckinghamshire SL7 1RG

Opening hours: All year round

Costs: Costs vary – see website for details

Tel: +44 (0)844 8799128

Web: <http://www.macdonaldhotels.co.uk/compleatangler/>

Day three: a day by the river

Time to go fishing

Hire one of the Compleat Angler's stylish motor launches to enjoy some time on the river, or pre-book for The Thames Experience under the expert guidance of angler and River Warden Roger Wyndham-Barnes, who moors his boat at the hotel. Roger serves as your guide and instructor on a journey from the weir to the reedy backwaters of the river, fishing waters not available to bank fisherman for carp and trench, Thames trout, summer bream, autumn roach, winter pike and spring trout all according to the season.

The Thames Experience

The Compleat Angler, Bisham Road, Marlow, Buckinghamshire SL7 1RG

Opening hours: Subject to availability

Tel: Roger Wyndham-Barnes on +44 (0)1189 342 981 or The Compleat Angler on +44 (0)1628 484 444.

Lunch by the River Thames at The French Horn in Sonning

Set in beautiful surroundings beside the River Thames, (12 miles from Marlow) The French Horn is famed for its exceptional cuisine. A set lunch menu is available in addition to A La Carte options.

The French Horn Hotel

Sonning-on-Thames, Berkshire RG4 6TN

Opening hours: All year round

Costs: Costs vary – see website for details

Tel: +44 (0)118 969 2204

Web: www.thefrenchhorn.co.uk

An afternoon visit to Basildon Park

Impressive Basildon Park is the very model of a dignified Georgian mansion. The house played a starring role in the 2005 big screen adaptation of Pride and Prejudice as the location for Netherfield, the mansion where Darcy and Elizabeth first met. The dining room was also the setting for the film's sumptuous ballroom scenes. In the mid 1950s, the elegant interior was restored by owners Lord and Lady Iliffe who salvaged 18th century fixtures and fittings and filled the house with the fine paintings, fabrics and furniture which are enjoyed there today. The house is surrounded by glorious parkland and gardens. Basildon Park is situated between Pangbourne and Streatley, 11 miles from Sonning and seven miles north west of Reading, on the west side of A329. Open: Wednesday - Sunday. On Location Exhibition, tea-room and grounds February - December; main show rooms March – December. Free to National Trust members. Other admission charges apply.

Basildon Park

Lower Basildon, Reading, Berkshire RG8 9NR

Opening hours: February-December

Costs: Free to National Trust members, adult £8.80, child £4.40, family £20.35.

Tel: +44 (0)118 984 3040

Web: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-basildonpark>

Stay the night at the Swan at Streatley

This intimate hotel is situated right on the banks of the River Thames in the picturesque village of Streatley, three miles from Basildon Park. The hotel has individually styled bedrooms and suites and a luxurious spa. Dinner is served in the award winning Cygnets restaurant which has lovely views of the river, and drinks and light meals are also available on the terrace and in the relaxed riverside bar.

The Swan at Streatley

Streatley-on-Thames, Berkshire RG8 9HR

Opening hours: All year round

Costs: Costs vary – see website for details

Tel: +44 (0)1491 878 800

Web: www.swanatstreatley.co.uk

Day four: a day walking in the country

The Thames countryside is at its most dramatic at Streatley, where the river forces its way through a narrow chalk gorge at the Goring Gap – the perfect place to wander and explore. The [Thames Path National Trail](#) takes walkers through the gap, arriving at Goring on the far bank of the river where it crosses over the lock and weir to Streatley. For the best views, cross the bridge to the Goring bank, go down the steps on the right and turn left onto the towpath. Walk on ahead to where wooded hills tower high above you across the water – and you are in the Goring Gap. Walk on to reach Brunel's railway bridge then retrace your steps, this time admiring the contrast of the meadows and more distant slopes of the [Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty](#) now on your right. Alternatively, join the Thames Path in the lane behind the hotel and follow it right to the garden of the Beetle & Wedge. The walk will take approximately one hour.

Lunch at [The Beetle & Wedge Boathouse](#), Moulsoford-on-Thames

The secluded garden and terrace of the Beetle & Wedge Boathouse Restaurant (two miles from Streatley) is a magical place to hire a boat with a picnic or have lunch by river and watch the boats gliding by. The beamed restaurant has an open charcoal grill and a conservatory for those 'indoor' days.

The Beetle and Wedge Boathouse

Ferry Lane, Moulsoford-on-Thames, Oxfordshire OX10 9JF

Opening hours: Seven days a week, lunch and dinner

Costs: Costs vary – see website for details

Tel: +44 (0)1491 651381

Web: www.beetleandwedge.co.uk

Visit Moulsoford – a classic Oxfordshire village

Stretch your legs after lunch in the ancient and secluded village of Ewelme, on the eastern slope of the Thames Valley. The heart of this charming village is a hilltop cluster of 15th-century buildings which include the church, almshouses and a small junior school - said to be oldest in the country. These were the charitable works of Alice, Duchess of Suffolk, the granddaughter of Geoffrey Chaucer, writer of The Canterbury Tales. The churchyard has a further claim to fame as the burial place of Jerome K Jerome, author of Three Men in a Boat. Ewelme was once celebrated for the watercress grown in the pretty cress-bed streams which still flow through the village. The little Watercress Centre, run by the Chiltern Society, opens to visitors in the afternoons on the first Sunday of the month. Ewelme is eight miles from Moulsoford, reached via Wallingford off the A4074 to Oxford.

Time for tea at [Dorchester Abbey](#)

Dorchester Abbey is the church of the medieval abbey which was saved for this little Oxfordshire village, along with its Guest House, when the rest of the buildings were 'dissolved' by Henry VIII. The display in the Cloister Gallery, described as "the best of its kind" in the country, tells the story of the Abbey building through a collection of carved and moulded medieval stonework supported by a vivid, written commentary. The 16th-century Old School Room in the Abbey Guest House houses the Old School Room

Museum, furnished with school items from the 17th-century to WWII. The Abbey is open daily, 8.00 – 18.00 or dusk, free of charge. The museum is open daily, April - September, from 14.00 – 17.00. Admission is free. The Abbey Tea Room has fans around the world, with many visitors coming back with their children and even grandchildren to enjoy their excellent range of home-made cakes, baked and served by an army of over 70 volunteers. You can sit in the Tea Room itself at communal tables, or at picnic tables in the Abbey Guest House Garden or on the lawns in the Cloister Garden. Profits go to worldwide good causes and maintenance of the Guest House and abbey.

Dorchester Abbey, Museum and Tea Room

Dorchester, Oxfordshire OX10 7HH

Opening hours: Abbey - 365 days a year, 8.00 - 18.00 (summer) / 8.00 - dusk (winter)
The Tea Room is open May - September, on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays, 15.00 – 17.00

Costs: Free entry to the abbey

Tel: +44 (0)1865 340054

Web: www.dorchester-abbey.org.uk