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The Best of England from \$75 a Day

With this guide, you can see the best of England—even the best of pricey London—without spending a fortune. We'll show you how to save money on lodgings, food, transportation, sightseeing, after-dark diversions, and the like.

Because we steer clear of tourist traps and expensive diversions, you'll come closer to experiencing the real England and enjoy a truer slice of life. There's great joy in discovering a bargain while you meet people and learn a lot while traveling. With that in mind, we've scoured the country in search of the best places and experiences, and in this chapter we'll share our very personal and opinionated choices. We hope they'll give you some ideas and get you started.

1 The Best Destinations for Low-Cost Vacations

- **The Dorset Coast:** In summer, many vacationers flock to high-priced Devon and Cornwall; hoteliers often double their prices. The Dorset coast, stamping ground of Thomas Hardy and Jane Austen, is an equally enchanting, much less expensive, alternative. The coast is riddled with coves and inlets; rural inland areas brim with scenic villages. See chapter 7.
- **Dartmoor National Park:** In the spirit of *Hound of the Baskervilles*, be prepared for a haunting but thrilling tour of this great park southwest of London. You could explore from Exeter and Plymouth, but it's more fun to stay at an area youth hostel or campground. The best villages from which to visit these eerie moors are Princeton, Okehampton, or Postbridge. Public transportation is severely limited, so rent a bike and head off for adventure. See chapter 9.
- **East Anglia:** There's a lot more here than just Cambridge. After you've toured the colleges, explore the cathedral town of Ely or the little market towns of Thaxted and Saffron Walden. Stay at B&Bs and eat in pubs. See chapter 13.
- **Central England:** Stratford-upon-Avon is the main draw, but you should also explore lesser-known Midlands towns such as Hereford, Worcester, and Shrewsbury. Each is filled with B&Bs and affordable restaurants, and you'll get a lot closer to the true heart of England than at the more tourist-trodden joints. See chapter 12.
- **Northeast England:** Everybody seemingly heads for the south coast of Devon and Cornwall. Equally alluring is a trek through some of the highlands of Northeastern England, including Haworth, home of the Brontë sisters, as well as the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the North York Moors National Park. Throughout this area are a lot of affordable and

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comfortable B&Bs, and plenty of local pubs and small dining rooms

where the eating is good and moderate in price. See chapter 17.

2 The Best Things to See & Do for Free (or Almost)

For details on England's money-saving sightseeing passes, see chapter 2, "Planning an Affordable Trip to England."

- **Seeing the Art Treasures of England:** The British Museum and the Tate Britain in London offer some of the greatest treasures the world has known, from Old Masters to the Rosetta stone. Admission is free thanks to government subsidies. See p. 134 for the British Museum, p. 141 for the Tate Britain.
- **Touring England's Cathedrals:** Many people go to England just to tour the cathedral circuit. Nearly all are free; some request a donation. Begin, of course, at London's Westminster Abbey (p. 145). From the capital, head in virtually any direction in your cathedral search—we suggest Winchester (p. 278), Salisbury (p. 316), Canterbury (p. 228), Lincoln (p. 552), Ely (p. 503), and Liverpool (p. 576).
- **Pub-crawling:** A pub-crawl is one of the most hallowed of British social and cultural traditions. Ornate taps fill tankards and mugs in pubs found in every village, hamlet, and town. Quaint signs bearing such names as the EAGLE ARMS, the RED LION, the WHITE SWAN, the BULL, and the ROYAL OAK dot the landscape. Go not only for drink but also for conviviality and, at times, for entertainment or food. Log fires roar in winter; in summer, drinkers stand outside in the bracing air. See "The Best Pubs" category later in this chapter for our favorites.
- **Visiting Stonehenge:** One of the world's most celebrated prehistoric monuments, Stonehenge, near Salisbury in Wiltshire, is some 5,000 years old. Its construction and original purpose remain a mystery. Pay a small admission fee or see it from Amesbury Hill, 2.4km (1½ miles) up the road on the A303. See p. 321.
- **Biking Through the Cotswolds:** There's no better place to cycle than the Cotswolds, less than 160km (100 miles) west of London. Its green rolling hills and rain-nurtured pasturelands are peppered with ivy-covered inns, stone walls, and honey-colored stone cottages. Village names evoke an England of long ago—Bourton-on-the-Water, Upper Slaughter, Chipping Campden, Moreton-in-Marsh, Cirencester, or Wotton-under-Edge. See chapter 11.
- **Punting on the Cam:** Gliding along in a flat-bottom boat (or "punt"), pushing a long pole into the River Cam's shallow bed, you bypass the weeping willows along the banks, watch students stroll along the graveled walkways, and take in the picture-postcard vistas. Go on a summer's day; pack a lunch and picnic on the riverbank. You can share the reasonable cost with a few fellow passengers. See "Punting on the Cam," p. 495.
- **Walking the Yorkshire Moors:** A trekker's delight, these purple-heathered moors of *Wuthering Heights* fame cover more than 1,424 sq. km (550 sq. miles) and encompass some 2,140km (1,130 miles) of public footpaths. To the east, you'll find a cliff-studded coastline; inland, only the odd sheep, dramatic scenery, and mist will keep you company. See chapter 17.

3 The Best Museums

- **The British Museum** (London; ☎ 020/7323-8299): When Sir Hans Sloane died in 1753, he bequeathed to England his vast collection of art and antiquities. This formed the nucleus of a huge collection that came to include such remarkable objects as the Rosetta stone and the Parthenon sculptures (which Greece wants back). See p. 134.
- **The National Gallery** (London; ☎ 020/7747-2885): One of the world's greatest collections of Western art—from Leonardo da Vinci to Rembrandt to Picasso—dazzles the eye at this museum. The gallery is especially rich in Renaissance works. See p. 138.
- **Tate Britain** (London; ☎ 020/7887-8000): Sir Henry Tate, a sugar producer, started it all with 70 or so paintings. The collection grew considerably when artist J. M. W. Turner bequeathed some 300 paintings and 19,000 watercolors to England upon his death. Having handed International Modernism over to the new Tate Modern, Tate Britain now concentrates on British work dating back to 1500. See p. 141.
- **The American Museum** (Claverton, 3.2km/2 miles east of Bath; ☎ 01225/460503): Housed in a neoclassical country house, this museum presents 2 centuries of American life and styles—including George Washington's mother's gingerbread recipe. See p. 326.
- **The Fitzwilliam Museum** (Cambridge; ☎ 01223/332900): Although London museums dominate this list, there are outstanding regional collections, including this gem down the road from King's College. Exhibits range from paintings by Titian and Renoir to Chinese, Egyptian, and Greek antiquities. See p. 493.
- **Walker Art Gallery** (Liverpool; ☎ 01514/784199): This gallery deserves to be better known. It owns one of the finest collections of European paintings, a nearly complete overview of British painting (from Tudor days to the present), and an outstanding collection of Pre-Raphaelites. See p. 575.

4 The Best Cathedrals

Entrance to cathedrals is usually free, although there may be charges to enter the crypts and other areas. Donations are welcomed, however.

- **Westminster Abbey** (London; ☎ 020/7222-7110): One of the world's greatest Anglo-French Gothic buildings, this minster (large church) has witnessed a parade of English history—from the crowning of William the Conqueror on Christmas Day 1066 to the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997. Most of the kings and queens of England have been crowned here; many are buried here as well. See p. 145.
- **Canterbury Cathedral** (Kent; ☎ 01227/762862): Object of countless pilgrimages of the kind described in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the original cathedral was destroyed by fire (1067). A new cathedral was also destroyed by fire (1174); thereafter the present structure was built. Thomas à Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, was murdered here; his shrine was an important site for pilgrims until the Reformation. See p. 228.
- **Winchester Cathedral** (Hampshire; ☎ 01962/857225): Construction of the Winchester Cathedral, which dominates the

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ancient capital of old Wessex, began in 1079. It is England's longest medieval cathedral, noted for its 12-bay nave. Many famous people are buried here, including novelist Jane Austen. See p. 278.

- **Salisbury Cathedral** (Wiltshire; ☎ 01722/555120): The most stylistically unified of English cathedrals, this edifice was built between 1220 and 1265. Its landmark spire was constructed from 1285 to 1320. Salisbury Cathedral epitomizes the early English style of architecture. See p. 316.
- **Lincoln Cathedral** (Lincoln; ☎ 01522/544544): This is one of

the Great Gothic edifices of England, rich in the architectural styles of the early English and decorated periods, with a nave dating back to the 12th century. Its central tower is the second tallest in England. See p. 552.

- **York Minster** (York; ☎ 01904/557216): The largest Gothic cathedral north of the Alps is among the grandest, with the largest single surviving collection of medieval stained glass in England. Its unusual octagonal Chapter House has a late-15th-century choir screen and a wooden vaulted ceiling. See p. 620.

5 The Best Castles, Palaces & Historic Homes

Most of these places charge an entrance fee (sometimes steep), but if that's what's needed to see these elegantly appointed mansions, country houses, and palaces, we think it's worth the money! Passes are available from English Heritage and the National Trust to help you save on the admission fees (see tips 17 and 24 under "50 Money-Saving Tips" in chapter 2 for details).

- **Woburn Abbey** (Woburn; ☎ 01525/290666): A Cistercian abbey for 4 centuries, Woburn Abbey, the seat of the dukes of Bedford, features Queen Victoria's Bedroom and the Canaletto Room, with 21 perspectives of Venice. The popular grounds house a Wild Animal Kingdom, the best collection in England after the London Zoo. See p. 223.
- **Hatfield House** (Hertfordshire; ☎ 01707/262823): Hatfield was the childhood home of Elizabeth I; she was under an oak tree there when she learned she had become queen of England. Hatfield remains one of England's largest and finest country houses, complete with antiques, tapestries,

paintings, and even Elizabeth's red silk stockings. See p. 222.

- **Windsor Castle** (Windsor; ☎ 020/7321-2233): The world's largest inhabited stronghold and England's largest castle, Windsor Castle has been a royal abode since William the Conqueror constructed a "motte and bailey" here in 1070. Severely damaged by fire in 1992, the castle now welcomes visitors to help defray restoration costs. Its major attraction is the great Perpendicular Chapel of St. George's, begun by Edward IV. The chancel's three-tiered stalls abound with misericords and ornate carvings. See p. 189.
- **Blenheim Palace** (Woodstock; ☎ 01993/811091): England's answer to Versailles, this extravagant baroque palace designed by Sir John Vanbrugh was the home of the 11th duke of Marlborough and the birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill. Sarah, the duchess of Marlborough, battled the architects and builders from the beginning, wanting "a clean sweet house and garden be it ever so small." The structure measures

850 feet from end to end. Capability Brown designed the gardens. See p. 215.

- **Knole** (Kent; ☎ 01732/462100): Begun in 1456 by the archbishop of Canterbury, Knole is celebrated for its 365 rooms, 52 staircases, and 7 courts. One of England's largest private houses, Knole is a splendid Tudor edifice set in a 404-hectare (1,000-acre) deer park. See p. 251.
- **Penshurst Place** (Kent; ☎ 01892/870307): This outstanding country mansion (built 1346) has been expanded by Tudor, Jacobean, and neo-Gothic wings. It was home to poet Sir Philip Sidney (1554–86); in its day, the house attracted literati, including Ben Jonson. See p. 254.
- **Hever Castle & Gardens** (Kent; ☎ 01732/865224): This was the childhood home of the ill-fated Anne Boleyn. In 1903, William Waldorf Astor bought the castle, restored it, and landscaped the grounds. From the outside, it still looks like it did in Tudor times; a moat and drawbridge protect the castle. See p. 254.
- **Beaulieu Abbey & Palace House** (Beaulieu, in New Forest; ☎ 01590/612345): The home of the first Lord Montagu, Palace House blends monastic Gothic architecture with Victorian trappings. Many visitors consider the National Motor Museum, which is on the premises and displays more than 250 antique automobiles, more interesting than the house. See p. 292.
- **Harewood House & Bird Garden** (West Yorkshire; ☎ 01132/886331): Edwin Lascelles began constructing this "essay in Palladian architecture" in 1759. Its grand design was planned by Robert Adam, Thomas Chippendale, and Capability Brown, who developed the grounds. A 1.8-hectare (4½-acre) bird garden features exotic species from the world over. See p. 638.
- **Castle Howard** (North Yorkshire; ☎ 01653/648333): This was the first building designed by Sir John Vanbrugh, and, as it turned out, his masterpiece. It was the principal setting for the popular TV series *Brideshead Revisited*. A gilt-and-painted dome tops the striking entrance, and the surrounding park is one of the most grandiose in Europe. See p. 637.

6 The Best Gardens

- **Royal Botanic (Kew) Gardens** (outside London; ☎ 020/8940-1171): Everything from delicate exotics to everyday flowers and shrubs blooms in profusion here in this 120-hectare (300-acre) garden; it also houses the largest herbarium on earth. The gardens are part of a vast lab that identifies plants from throughout the globe. Fabled landscape architect Capability Brown laid out some of the grounds. A delight in any season. See p. 166.
- **Sissinghurst Castle Garden** (Kent; ☎ 01580/15330): These gardens were created by Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicholson. They were landscaped between the surviving parts of an Elizabethan mansion. Although overrun in summer, this garden is the most intriguing on the doorstep of London, some 33km (21 miles) northeast of Cranbrook. We prefer the garden in autumn because of its stunning colors then. See p. 254.
- **Stourhead** (near Shaftesbury; ☎ 01747/841152): You'll find the most famous garden in England here, where English landscape gardening was born. Stourhead

is the best-executed example of the “natural landscaping” that swept England in the 1700s. The grounds have been described as a painting by Constable in three dimensions, with its wealth of flowering shrubs, trees, and numerous beds of multi-hued blooms. Grottoes, bridges, and temples add to the allure. See p. 346.

- **Hidcote Manor Garden** (near Chipping Campden; ☎ 01386/438333): Near one of the most

charming Cotswold towns, this stunning garden is laid out around a stone-built manor house. It’s the largest garden in the Cotswolds and one of the most intriguing in all of Britain. Major Lawrence Johnstone, an American horticulturist, traveled the world and brought back specimens to plant in the garden he created in 1907. See p. 436.

7 The Best B&Bs

- **Vicarage Private Hotel** (London; ☎ 020/7229-4030): Eileen and Martin Diviney share their London home and its traditionally furnished rooms. It’s well located near Kensington High Street. Sewing kits, hair dryers, and other amenities are provided, all for £76 (\$122) in a double without bathroom, a bargain in high-priced London. See p. 92.
- **Tilbury Lodge** (Oxford; ☎ 01865/862138): On a quiet country lane in the village of Botley, this is a warm and inviting guesthouse. Well-furnished, comfortable bedrooms are rented, often to families. Opt for the romantic four-poster if available. Rates are £60 (\$96) in a double. See p. 211.
- **Alexandra House** (Canterbury; ☎ 01227/767011): This house is a 10-minute walk from Canterbury Cathedral. Nothing fancy, but the clean and comfortable rooms come at the right price: from £52 (\$83) in a double without bathroom. See p. 233.
- **Jeake’s House** (Rye; ☎ 01797/222828): This is the premier B&B in high-and-dry Rye, the former seaport. Built in 1689, the guesthouse welcomes guests into its Laura Ashley-style bedrooms, which rent for £78 (\$125) in a double without bathroom. See p. 242.
- **Dudley House** (Brighton; ☎ 01273/676794): Located in England’s premier seaside resort, this cream-colored Victorian town house features well-decorated bedrooms. A double without bathroom begins at £40 to £45 (\$64–\$72). See p. 268.
- **Ennys** (St. Hilary, near Penzance; ☎ 01736/740262): A former flower farm, Ennys has good and comfortable rooms; another reason to stay here is the home-style cookery, sometimes of surprising sophistication. Add a heated swimming pool and prices beginning at £50 to £55 (\$80–\$88) a night. See p. 389.
- **The Marlyn Hotel** (Stratford-upon-Avon; ☎ 01789/293752): This place (built in 1890) welcomes guests who come to pay their respects to the Bard. Each modernized bedroom comes with a complete collection of Shakespeare’s works. The cost is £52 (\$83) for a double without bathroom. See p. 449.
- **Hambutts Mynd** (Painswick; ☎ 01452/812352): Two blocks from the center of this pretty Cotswolds village, you’ll find this

17th-century windmill converted into a home of warmth and charm, with views of the nearby fields and hills—all for a price of

£55 to £60 (\$88–\$96) for a double, including an English breakfast. See p. 417.

8 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels

- The **Rushmore Hotel** (London; ☎ 020/7370-3839): Interior-design buffs in particular will love this gracious town-house hotel. The interior is an extravaganza of muralled ceilings and stage-set bedrooms. The price for all this glamour: £79 (\$126) double. Not bad for pricey London. See p. 91.
- **Red Lion** (Clovelly; ☎ 01237/431237): This inn lies at the bottom of the country's steepest cobblestone main street. Once you reach it, at just £87.50 (\$140) for the night, you'll be amply rewarded. Bask near the stone seawall of a little harbor; have a drink in the pub and a meal in the seawall dining room before retiring to your cozy lair. See p. 376.
- **The Cott Inn** (Dartington; ☎ 01803/863777): This inn, possibly the second oldest in England, was built in 1320. Although much has changed over the years, it remains a low, rambling two-story building of stone, cob, and plaster, with a thatch roof and thick walls. Your low-ceilinged double room will be quaint but a good deal at £70 (\$112). The Cott's pub is a gathering place for the locals and a good place for a drink on a windy night, as log fires keep the lounge and bar snug. See p. 368.
- **Brompton House** (Bath; ☎ 01225/420972): In this city on the Avon, you can follow the trails of many leading literary and political figures and enjoy England's most celebrated spa. Prices tend to run high here, but this elegant Georgian rectory with excellent doubles for £65 to £95 (\$104–\$152) offers good value. It's set on tranquil grounds within an easy commute of the city. See p. 330.
- **The Beadles** (Middleton, near Salisbury; ☎ 01980/862922): Located in an enchanting setting, this Georgian house lies in .4-hectare (1-acre) gardens with a view of the much-painted Salisbury Cathedral. A warm welcome and good beds await at a cost of £60 (\$96) for two people. From here, visit Stonehenge and the New Forest. See p. 320.
- **Rothay Garth Hotel** (Ambleside; ☎ 01539/32217): In one of the most beautiful areas of the Lake District, stay in an elegant century-old country house set in beautiful gardens—all at a fair price, £88 (\$141) for a double. In warm weather, enjoy a sunny garden room; when autumn winds blow, retreat to the lounge with its log fires. See p. 606.

9 The Best Dining Bargains

- **North Sea Fish Restaurant**, 7–8 Leigh St., WC1 (☎ 020/7387-5892): Cabbies know everything, and they're always right, as you'll find out if you travel by taxi. Their vote goes to the restaurant, for the national dish, fish-and-chips. Fish platters run £8.30 to £16.95 (\$13–\$27). See p. 112.
- **Brown's Restaurant and Bar** (Brighton; ☎ 01273/323501): The very popular Brown's serves

bistro-style continental food and British traditional fare. Prices begin at £7.50 (\$12). See p. 269.

- **Mulberry House** (Torquay; ☎ 01803/213639): The Mulberry's Lesley Cooper is an inspired cook. Prices for a lunch of solid English fare start at £10.50 (\$17). See p. 365.
- **Harper's Restaurant** (Salisbury; ☎ 01722/333118): The chef-owner takes pride in making everything homemade, uncomplicated, and wholesome. A fixed-price lunch of £7.20 (\$12) is one of the best values in town. See p. 320.
- **Evans Fish Restaurant** (Bath; ☎ 01225/463981): Since 1908,

this family-run enterprise has served only the freshest of fish. It offers meals costing from £4.50 (\$7.20). See p. 332.

- **Arundel House Restaurant** (Cambridge; ☎ 01223/367701): Overlooking the River Cam, this acclaimed restaurant's hearty fixed-price dinner, costing £19 (\$30), is one of the best values in town. See p. 498.
- **Don Pepe Restaurant and Tapas Bar** (Liverpool; ☎ 0151/231-1909): This drinking and dining emporium's Spanish cuisine, including delectable tapas, breaks "ye olde English" dining monopoly. Meals cost from £6.95 (\$11). See p. 582.

10 The Best Pubs

Pubs come in all styles, but atmosphere is the key. Some are extravagant Victorian gin palaces; others occupy long-gone monasteries or abandoned factories. Some are sleek and modern; others are in the country and open onto riverbanks with weeping willows and white swans floating gracefully by. Cornwall may have the largest concentration of good pubs in England, say 30 for every 100,000 in population. Not far behind, with about 25 per every 100,000, are Devon, Cumbria (embracing the Lake District), Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Somerset, and North Yorkshire.

- **The Lamb & Flag** (London; ☎ 020/7497-9504): There are plenty of outstanding pubs in London, but it's hard to beat this one for history. It hasn't changed much from when Dickens prowled this neighborhood and described the clientele. See p. 186.
- **Ye Olde Starre Inne** (York; ☎ 01904/623063): Dating from 1644, this is said to be the oldest licensed pub in this ancient cathedral city. Settle down on a Victorian

settle before the open fireplace and enjoy a pint. See p. 628.

- **The Ship Inn** (Exeter; ☎ 01392/272040): Once frequented by Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Sir John Hawkins, this pub is the most celebrated in Devon. It still provides tankards of real ale and food in large portions, as in Elizabethan times. See p. 358.
- **Mermaid Inn** (Rye; ☎ 01797/223065): This ancient Sussex seaport boasts the most charming pub in southeast England. Elizabeth I came to the Mermaid in 1573, when it was already 150 years old. It welcomes visitors for a pint or some freshly caught local fish. See p. 244.
- **The Turk's Head** (Penzance; ☎ 01736/363093): The oldest pub in Penzance (1233) is filled with artifacts and timeworn beams. Take your lager into the summer garden or retreat to the snug inner chambers when the wind blows cold. See p. 392.
- **Lamb Inn** (Burford; ☎ 01993/823155): This is our favorite

place for a lager in all the Cotswolds. In a mellow old house from 1430, it's a good place to spend the night, have a traditional English meal, or just a beer. Snacks are served. See p. 425.

- **The Black Swan** (Stratford-upon-Avon; ☎ 01789/297312): This

has been a popular hangout for Stratford players since the 18th century. Locals affectionately call it "The Dirty Duck." In cool weather an open fireplace blazes; stick around and order the chef's specialty: honey-roasted duck. See p. 452.