

## Spa Towns of the UK

There are several Spa towns in the UK that at some time in their past history, have proved to be a popular destination with many people, for the curative effects of their water. Some of these spa towns produce and bottle the water that is sold world wide. Others are now being revived, with new investment from local councils, communities and businesses, to develop and update the original facilities to create a modern spa destination, using the natural mineral waters as a base for the popular spa treatments on offer today.

**Bath** is a city in western England famous for its historic Roman baths produced by underground springs. In the early 1800's it was known as a resort city for the wealthy, and the water was considered to be a cure for many afflictions. As a result of its popularity during this period, the city contains many noted examples of Georgian architecture, particularly the Royal Crescent. The Baths were built between the 1st and 4th centuries AD and were centred around the natural hot springs that rise up from the ground here at a constant temperature of 46.5 ° Celsius. Today you can see the Roman Baths in the form of the Roman Baths



Museum, located in the Abbey Courtyard. The centre piece of the complex is the superb Great Bath, with its adjacent Circular Bath where the bathers would cool off. These formed the basis of the Roman Baths, and you can still see the original Roman paving around the baths. You can also see the remains of the temple of Minerva, and the more recent King's Bath which dates from the 12th century.

**Boston Spa** is a town in West Yorkshire two miles south of Wetherby, on the banks of the River Wharfe. In 1744, John Shires established Boston as a spa town when he discovered magnesian limestone and sulphur springs. It declined however, when Harrogate became very popular as a spa town.

**Buxton** in Derbyshire is situated in the Peak District National Park. It is an 18th century market town, but originally, the Romans, who called the town Aquae Arnemetiae, which means "The Spa of the Goddess of the Grove", discovered the spa. In the town centre is St Ann's Well, a fountain where natural Spring water can still be obtained today. The water is also bottled and sold nation wide. Buxton was developed in the style of Bath and the Crescent was modelled on the Royal Bath Crescent.

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**Cheltenham Spa** situated in Gloucestershire the gateway to the Cotswolds and famous for Jane Austen and Lord Byron. Cheltenham, Britain's only regency spa town became popular in the eighteenth century, soon after King George III declared the town a Spa town in 1716. The medicinal water was discovered after pigeons were seen pecking at deposits from around a spring. The water can still be tasted today, at the Town Hall and Pump Room.

*Mr P Coombes PicturesOfEngland.com*



**Droitwich Spa**, in Worcestershire, is unique in Britain - it is the only Brine Spa. This is because beneath the town, there are large deposits of rock salt in the ground, and again, the spa was discovered in Roman Times. In the centre of Droitwich, there is now the 'Brine Baths Complex' where visitors can bathe in the naturally warm salt water. The water from the Droitwich spa is not drinkable - it contains two and a half pounds of salt per gallon of water. This is ten times stronger than sea water. The amount of brine in the water meant that it could be easily collected to produce high quality table salt. John Corbett the man responsible for developing the salt industry, also built a Spa Complex so that people could take advantage of the healing properties of the brine.

**Harrogate** has Turkish Baths dating from 1897, which are still open daily. Harrogate developed as a spa town after the discovery of the first medicinal springs in 1571 but blossomed as a spa town around the turn of the 19th Century when the town became one of the most prestigious holiday destinations in the UK. The Royal Baths Assembly rooms - designed by Frank Bagally and Fred Bristowe was officially opened in July 1897 and quickly established an international reputation, boasting some of the finest spa facilities available. The Baths' had an Islamic influence with great arches and screens, and walls of vibrant glazed brickwork. The Turkish Baths, however, formed a small part of The Royal Baths, where a vast number of facilities were available during the Baths' 'hey days', including medicinal waters' dispensary, hydrotherapy departments, mud baths and steam rooms, as well as a full complement of consulting doctors. The treatment centre closed in 1969, but the Turkish bath is still maintained as a functional shrine to this bygone era. The spa baths are currently being restored and modernised.

**The plunge pool in Harrogate's Turkish Baths, which also has three inter-connecting hot room chambers - Tepidarium(warm), Calidarium(hot) and Laconium(hottest) and a Frigidarium or relaxation room. [www.harrogate.gov.uk](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk)**



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**Leamington Spa** is an elegant regency town. The Spas at Royal Leamington Spa were developed in 1784, after a large increase in visitors to the towns Bath Houses. It was decided to build a large Bathing Establishment, but a saline spring could not be found close to the new town, and for that reason, the spa building was built close to the old town.

**Malvern** has many wells and springs, which can still be found on the hillsides around. Holy Well, above Malvern Wells was the most popular hill spring during the 18th century before people began to flock to St Ann's Well, which was closer to the bath houses and Water Cure establishments of Great Malvern. The pure water from the Malvern Hills was first bottled, about 1622, but appreciated well before that. Most Spa towns owe their existence to water that is full of natural chemicals, with a most "distinctive" taste and smell. Malvern is different, as it is famous for what its water does not contain. In 1756 Dr John Wall published a book based on tests and experiments carried out on the water and he says " The Malvern water is famous for containing just nothing at all" ...!

Malvern became known as a curative centre in 1757, after Dr Wall published his findings. During the 1840's two other doctors, Wilson and Gully, each created their own establishment, treating well-to-do sufferers from self-indulgence by dieting, wrapping in wet sheets, water-drinking and walks on the hills. The Malvern cold water cure, part of Victorian medicine, would appear to have helped many people, including Charles Darwin and Florence Nightingale.

**Matlock Bath** was fashionable spa, patronised by those seeking tranquillity and appreciating natural settings during the 17th century. Visitors to the Matlock area sought cures from the springs and Princess Victoria's visit in 1831 confirmed Matlock as a society venue of the time. Present day visitors, can still "take the waters," from an ornate Victorian pump and bathe in the natural spring water Spa pools of the New Bath Hotel.

**Royal Tunbridge Wells** has been a fashionable Spa town since the 17th century when it became popular among royalty and the aristocracy. It is set within an area of outstanding natural beauty.

**Strathpeffer Spa** is situated in the Highlands of Scotland and has a recently restored Spa Pump Room - an original Victorian Spa experience. The Pump Room recreates the peaceful days of the Strathpeffer Spa, offering visitors a refreshing insight into an era when High Society flocked to this picturesque Highland village for "the season" Strathpeffer rapidly became one of Europe's most popular health resorts between 1870 and 1939.



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You can sample the famous curative waters and see how the wealthy patients of days gone by were also advised to try many different kinds of invigorating baths, including the infamous peat bath.

**Strathpeffer Spa** is a conservation village and the Pump Room is right in the heart, providing a striking portrait of Victorian society and its relationship with the Scottish Highlands.

**Woodhall Spa** came to light in 1811 after an entrepreneur, John Parkinson, decided to sink a coal shaft and discovered the water, which entered the coal shaft and as a result of this work, ceased. The shaft was covered over causing water eventually to overflow into a ditch in the nearby Coal-Pit Wood. The Lord of Woodhall Manor, Thomas Hotchkin found that the water helped with his condition of gout. When analysed, the water was found to contain quantities of sodium, calcium and magnesium chlorides and more bromine and iodine than any other spa. This analysis induced Hotchkin to build a pump room and bathhouse, giving rise to the foundation of Lincolnshire's only Spa where plans are now being developed to create a modern spa complex on the site of the historical spa.

