

Readers
Digest

FULLY REVISED
AND UPDATED

The most amazing places to visit in Britain

The 1000 most unusual,
beautiful and captivating
spots in Britain



THE MOST AMAZING PLACES TO VISIT IN BRITAIN

The 1000 most unusual, beautiful and captivating spots in Britain: update 2012

Reader's Digest



MARKETING POINTS

■
Visitor numbers at British attractions continue to grow, with more people choosing to holiday in the UK or visit for the Olympics

■
Fully updated edition of the original bestselling book

■
New entries include the Olympic stadium

■
A phenomenal round-Britain guide and armchair reference in one

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■ DESCRIPTION ■

Explore the 1,000 most unusual, beautiful and captivating spots in Britain in this lavish three-in-one guide, gazetteer and armchair reference book. From castles, cathedrals and natural wonders to bell foundries, coal mines and even an umbrella shop, this book reflects the rich diversity of fascinating places ancient and modern, traditional and quirky, that Britain has to offer. Entries are arranged by county and region with helpful directions and maps to guide you to your destination.

Now this unique reference volume has been fully updated for 2012 and comes complete with Britain's latest sites and attractions – places such as Two Temple Place, the Astor family's London mansion, Glasgow's stunning and futuristic Riverside Transport Museum and the Turner Contemporary on the Margate sea front.

Plus, there are:

- 10 large regional maps to make trip planning easy
- directions for each entry, with opening times and other important visitor information
- More than 50 in-depth features covering remarkable aspects of Britain such as Cornish sub-tropical gardens or

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- South of England
- London
- East Anglia
- Central England
- Northwest England
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■ OTHER TITLES ■

The Most Amazing Places to Walk in Britain

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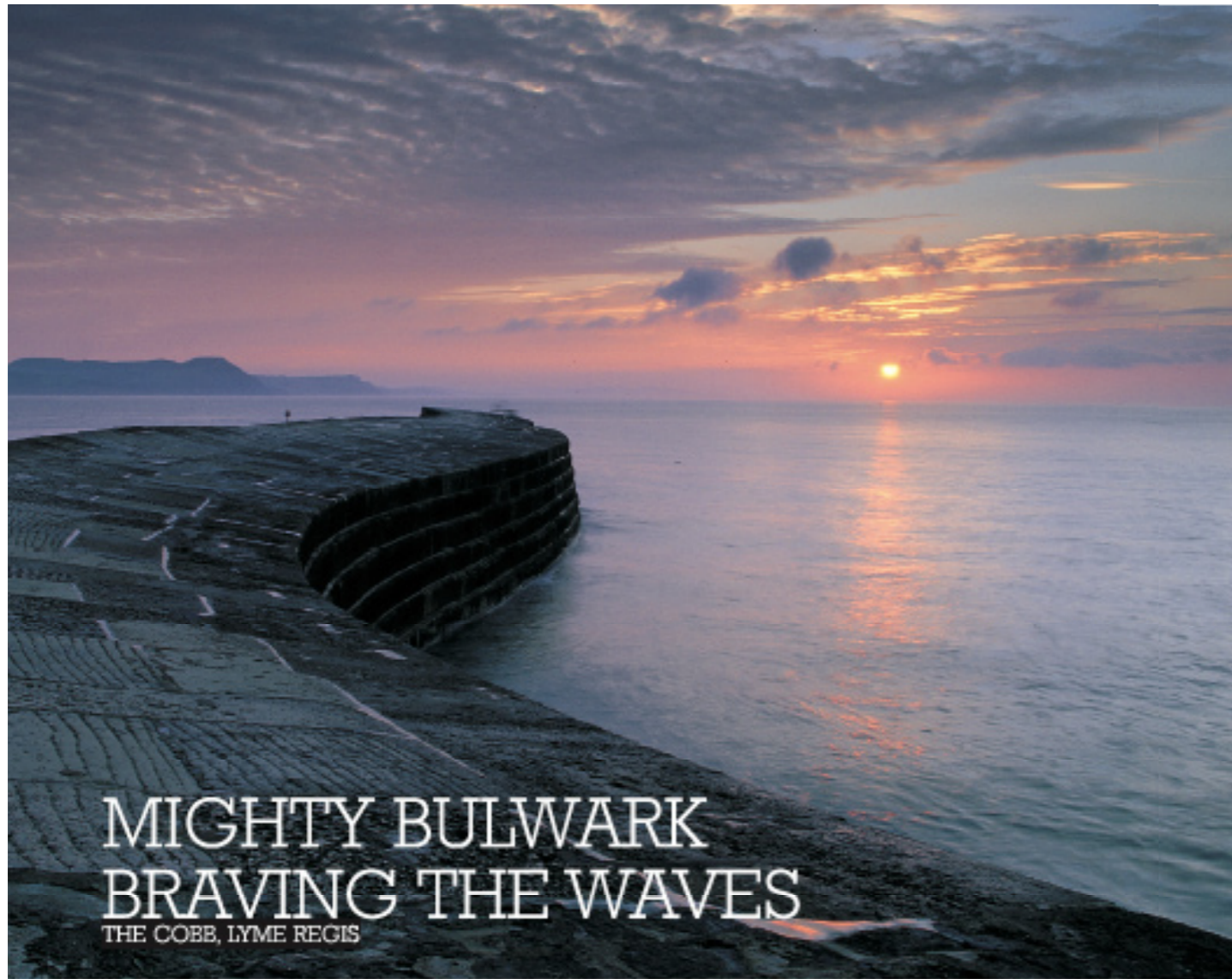
The Most Amazing Gardens to Visit in Britain

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MIGHTY BULWARK BRAVING THE WAVES

THE COBB, LYME REGIS

DORSET

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The Cobb, Lyme Regis

Mighty bulwark braving the waves

Of all man-made sights on the Dorset coast, none equals The Cobb. For more than 700 years the huge walls of this breakwater have withstood the prevailing south-westerly gales. Like an elephant's trunk, it curls protectively around Lyme harbour, which sent two ships to fight the Armada in 1588, and from end to end it is steeped in literary associations. To descend Granny's Teeth – a flight of steps protruding from The Cobb's inner wall – is to follow Louisa Musgrove in Jane Austen's novel, *Persuasion*. The end of The Cobb is where Meryl Streep stood in a memorable image from the 1980 film version of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the novel by the local author John Fowles.

► Off A3052 in Lyme Regis.

Cerne Abbas Giant

Herculean figure cut in the turf

Most chalk hill figures are simple outlines. The Cerne Abbas Giant is different. Not only does he have a face, nipples and ribs, but he is also shamelessly showing off his manhood. Who he is meant to be and how long his 54m (180ft) frame has stood watch on the downland slope above the village from which he takes his name – brandishing a great club as well as his virility at all-compasses – is a mystery. The best guess is that he represents the Roman god Hercules, whose image on coins and statues he resembles, and may date from the 2nd century AD, when the Emperor Commodus, flushed by his conquest of the Scots, added 'Hercules Romanus' to his other titles.

► ½ mile N of Cerne Abbas off A352 Sherborne road. NT.

Mighty Iron Age castles in the air

They fell to Rome in quick order, but the sheer scale of Dorset's hill-forts still has the power to astonish

- 1 **Badbury Rings** ► 4 miles SE of Blandford Forum on B3082 Wimborne Minster road.
- 2 **Hod Hill** ► 1 mile W of Iwerne Courtney on A350 Blandford Forum-Shaftesbury road.
- 3 **Eggardon Hill** ► 10 miles W of Dorchester, off A35 to Bridport on minor road to Powerstock.
- 4 **Maiden Castle** ► 2 miles SW of Dorchester, off A354 Weymouth road. EH.

On display in Dorchester's County Museum is the skeleton of a warrior who died defending the hill-fort of Maiden Castle against the Romans, the head of the fatal arrow still lodged in his backbone.

The crucial battle took place in AD 43, after the Emperor Claudius ordered the Second Augusta Legion to crush the Durotriges. One by one the tribe's strongholds fell, and at Maiden Castle the dead were buried in what could be Britain's earliest war cemetery. It was here in the 1930s that excavations uncovered their remains, including those of the unknown warrior in the museum.

The brooding hill-forts that dominate Dorset's downland skylines are the most enduring monuments of Iron Age Britain. Built between the 6th and the 1st centuries BC, they often stand on earlier Bronze Age and Stone Age defence works. By the time of the Roman invasion, they were sophisticated fortresses: the only way in was along a winding passage guarded by sturdy timber gates, between ramparts reinforced with timber baulks and crowned with wooden palisades, from which defenders could hurl down slingshot and javelins.

Westwards along the road of empire

Today, these great earthworks – which enclose areas from as small as 1ha (2½ acres) to the 115ha (284 acres) of Bindon Hill, near Lulworth Cove (see page 30) – are the haunt of rabbits and skylarks. Yet the rippling grassy banks of places such as Badbury Rings are hugely atmospheric. Badbury is the likely location of Mount Badon, where King Arthur, said to haunt the hill-top wood in the guise of a raven, defeated the Saxons in 518. A few miles north is Hod Hill, where the Durotriges' slingshots proved no match for the legion's ballista bolts. After its



MAIDEN CASTLE

capture, the Romans built a fort of their own on the spot, sprawling across 4ha (10 acres), with barracks and stables for 700 infantry and cavalry. The occupiers built roads too, and it is on the Roman road west from Dorchester that Eggardon Hill lies. At this spot, geology adds to the drama of the ancient fortifications; as the old military road reaches the end of the ramparts, it plunges off the airy tops of the southern chalklands towards the first combes of the West Country.

But it is Maiden Castle, where the museum's Iron Age warrior met his death, that is Dorset's, and Britain's, most impressive hill-fort. Here, the ramparts and ditches, at one point eight defensive lines deep, extend for 2 miles around the hill.

ESSEX

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Southend Pier

Roll up, roll up, ladies and gentlemen, for the longest pleasure pier in the entire world

The Pier is a breathtaking spectacle at first sight, running well over a mile out into the Thames estuary on its thousands of spindly centipede legs. It was completed in 1889 at the height of the Victorian seaside boom, and stands today as a survivor of several disastrous fires and collisions with ships.

In spite of enormous changes in holiday habits, Southend Pier remains a magnet. Little red-and-white trains rattle the holidaymakers out to the pierhead where, beyond the café, the lifeboat station can be visited. The procession of giant ships near at hand, negotiating the estuary, tells you why the lifeboat is there.

► Southend seafront. Visitor Centre
Tel 01702 215620.

Wat Tyler Country Park

A remarkable collection of buildings

A group of historically significant cottages surrounding a village green might not at first sight appear to be unusual in this part of the country, but the fact that they all started life somewhere else in the county is. The relocated buildings, including the unique 15th century Little Cooper's Cottage, lie within the Wat Tyler Country Park. Evidence of buildings with a less peaceful purpose are also preserved: the remains of a 19th century explosives factory and Second World War pill boxes and anti-tank ditches left as a legacy of the GHQ line constructed against invasion from Germany.

► 2 miles S of Basildon off A13.

Tilbury Fort

Protecting London with the ultimate in defence design

It comes as a shock to find this perfect late 17th-century fort with its arrowhead bastions marooned on the Essex shore of the River Thames between dockland cranes, a giant power station and sprawling oil refineries. Henry VIII had the first fort built here to guard the Thames approaches to London from possible attacks by the French; it was adapted during the reign of Charles II to deal with the threat of raids up the Thames by daring Dutch warships. Heavy guns were mounted on the river bank, with the low-lying ramparts designed to soak up artillery bombardment and angled to offer covering fire to all sides of the fort in a landward attack.

Standing out from the austere fortifications is the 17th-century Water Gate with its fine martial array of Ionic and Corinthian columns, and a frieze of chariots, spears, classical armour and mighty wheeled cannon. Some well-aimed cannon balls from the river would probably have brought the whole elaborate assembly tumbling. Luckily the fort never saw a shot fired in anger.
► Signed off A1089 to Tilbury (A13). III. Daily Apr-Oct; Thu-Mon Nov-Mar.

Greensted log church

The world's oldest wooden church

The squat nave of St Andrew's Church at Greensted is made of great oak logs split in half, dark with age and weathering. They probably date back to very early Norman times, making St Andrew's the oldest wooden church in the world.

It is said that the body of St Edmund (martyred in AD 870 by the Danes) rested here in an earlier church on the journey to its final burial place at Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk in 1013. On the church wall hangs a 15th-century painting of the martyrdom, with the smiling saint stuck full of arrows while scowling Danish archers prepare to finish him off.

► 1 mile W of Chipping Ongar off A414 (M11 Junction 7).

Epping Forest

A threatened forest, saved for posterity

As a 'green lung' for northeast London, Epping Forest does an incredibly efficient job. Among its 2430ha (6000 acres) of twisted and distorted old beeches and hornbeams, it absorbs and hides thousands of visitors. Complete solitude is never more than a step or two off the main paths.

In the 17th century the forest – then a royal hunting ground – was ten times its present size. Travellers hurried through, fearing the footpads who lurked among the trees; the most notorious was highwayman Dick Turpin, the Whitechapel butcher's apprentice turned mugger, who had a hideout in the 1730s in Loughton Camp, an Iron Age fort deep in the forest.

By mid-Victorian times smallholders, squatters, poachers, timber merchants and commoners had all encroached on the forest, but the Epping Forest Act of 1878 allowed the City of London Corporation to take control and weed out all the exploiters. That explains the weird distortion of so many of the trees – after centuries of being pollarded into stubs by commoners who wanted open, grassy ground for grazing, the trees have been allowed to shoot their gnarled old boughs in all directions, like prisoners stretching their limbs after the manacles have been removed.

► M25 (Junction 26) or M11 (Junction 5), between Epping and Chingford.

Hunsdon Mead

The way hay meadows used to be

A fabulous carpet of wild flowers colours the grass of Hunsdon Mead in spring and summer. Traditional management of these hay meadows yields primroses, marsh marigold, yellow rattle, green-winged orchid, quaking grass and other species that have long since vanished from most meadows. Winter floods bring silt to enrich the soil, and attract crowds of wading birds. Clouds of butterflies appear in summer.

The Abbey family have farmed the meadows between the River Stort and the Stort canal since the 1920s. They continue to do as they have always done – allowing the grass to grow and wild flowers to set seed between March and July, cutting hay until mid August, and then putting stock on to graze until the end of the following February. No chemicals; everything is done nature's way.

► Path from Roydon rail station; Roydon on B181, signed from A414, 3 miles W of Harlow.



SOUTHEND PIER

LINCOLNSHIRE

6 The Wash 7 Tattershall Castle 8 Pinchbeck Pumping Engine 9 Grimsthorpe Castle
10 Stamford 11 Burghley House

The Wash

Wildlife finds a peaceful haven in an isolated land of dunes and marshes

Thousands of seals, wading birds and wildfowl inhabit the remote, marshy flatlands and shingle beaches of The Wash. Rare plants, amphibians and insects colonise the shore – marsh orchids, natterjack toads and 12 species of dragonfly among them. Their movement, calls and song may be the only signs of life in these vast expanses of land. Nature reserves at Gedney Drove End, Frampton Marsh, Freiston Shore and Gibraltar Point provide access points, trails and information about the fragile ecosystem.

The North Sea took a broad, square bite from the low-lying coastline between Skegness and the bulge of East Anglia to form The Wash. Rivers draining into this shallow basin added peat and alluvium to tidal scourings deposited by the sea and the region slowly silted up – Boston, once England's second largest seaport, now lies four miles inland. Vast areas of saline marshland have been reclaimed since the Romans built sea banks and drains along the silt ridges near Holbeach. Today, a system of banks, dykes and pumps protects the area. But visitors should not leave the sea banks as tidal flows are swift and dangerous.

► From Skegness to Hunstanton. Weekday bombing ranges at Holbeach St Matthew and Wainfleet Sand – obey signs.

Tattershall Castle

Medieval high-rise that expresses its creator's vaunting ambition

More than a million bricks were used in the construction of Tattershall's formidable six-storey Great Tower (right), built in 1434–46. Its turreted battlements loom 34m (110ft) above the flatlands around Coningsby, and are visible as far as Boston Stump and Lincoln Cathedral. The tower is a fitting monument to its creator, Ralph Cromwell (1393–1456). He fought with Henry V at Agincourt, and became Treasurer of England. Among the sparsely furnished state rooms, his defiant motto 'Nay je droit?' (have I not the right?) can be seen carved on the parlour's chimneypiece.

Cromwell also commissioned the collegiate church next to the castle, built in Perpendicular style. Look out for the Treasurer's emblem – the purse – inside.

► W of Coningsby, on A153 in Tattershall. NT. Sat–Wed mid Mar–Oct; Sat–Sun pm Nov–Dec and early Mar.

Pinchbeck Pumping Engine

A marvel of steam power that tirelessly drained the waterland

They'll start it up for you, this prodigious piece of 19th-century engineering: the hissing, pounding Pinchbeck Pumping Engine. Its gigantic 5 tonne flywheel dwarfs the interior of the modest brick housing. The precisely engineered pistons slide smoothly in their chambers – as good as when new.

The arrival of steam power and the pumping engine transformed the economy of the fens, removing the threat of flooding. From 1833 until an electrically powered replacement superseded it nearly 120 years later, this leviathan pumped up to 34,100 litres (7500 gallons) of water an hour from the surrounding marshes of South Holland into the embanked River Welland. Fenland life is explored in the small Land Drainage Museum.

► 1 mile N of Spalding off A16. Daily Mar–Oct.

Grimsthorpe Castle

Vanbrugh's most impressive makeover for the new duke

It could be said that Grimsthorpe Castle is all front – but what a front. Part of a larger design by the playwright, soldier and architect John Vanbrugh, the great north front (completed about 1726) is a superb Baroque version of a medieval fortress – and symbolic of the 16th Baron Willoughby's ambition to see his new status as a duke reflected in the ancestral home. Here is a façade calculated to inspire awe. Soaring above the roof line, colossal statues on ancient classical themes crown great Tuscan pillars and frame a huge family coat of arms. The flanking towers project into the courtyard, their chimney-stacks disguised as Roman altars. Beyond the main entrance, the heroic theme continues in a spectacular arcaded hall before you enter the human huddle of the rest of the house.

► 5 miles NW of Bourne on A151. Sun, Thur and bank hols Apr–May; Sun–Thur Jun–Sept.

Stamford

Preserved but not precious, an architectural gem of a town

The A1 takes a swing around it, but you should turn off and visit this lovely town – in 1967 it was the first in England to declare itself a conservation area. Stamford has more than 500 listed buildings of architectural or historic merit. No wonder it is a favourite backdrop for period costume dramas.

Many houses have the beautifully proportioned, trademark windows of the Georgian era. But some of Stamford's buildings, such as the almshouses, Browne's Hospital (1483), in Broad Street, belong to the years when the town was a prosperous cloth port on the River Welland. In a maze of medieval streets, the roofs are a particular delight: some have graded tiles that become smaller and thinner as they climb to the ridge; others are clad in frost-fractured Collyweston limestone, subtly shading from blue to brown.

► 1 mile E of A1 on Lincs/Cambs border.

Burghley House

Home of Elizabeth's spymaster

Elizabeth I never visited the home of her trusted statesman and spymaster – perhaps wisely. Had she done so, she would have found that William Cecil had designed a residence fit for a king, with a roofscape of turrets and chimneys even more flamboyant than that at her own palace of Hampton Court.

Cecil founded a dynasty. The 5th Earl, a shopaholic, collected works of art from all over Europe and commissioned artists such as the *trompe l'œil* specialist Antonio Verrio (1639–1707). Here, in Verrio's *Hell Staircase*, the visitor ascends into the gaping mouth of a gigantic cat, where the Grim Reaper scythes down lost souls. Oil and gas lighting blackened the work over the years, but, in 1993, it was cleaned – except for the lower legs of a female figure, left to show its pre-restoration state.

► 1 mile SE of Stamford. Sat–Thur late Mar–Oct.



TATTERSHALL CASTLE

Waters and heights that lift the spirits

Deep springs and Victorian resorts in the wild

Malvern Hills – inspiration for the music of Edward Elgar

There is something exotic about the Malvern Hills, so abruptly do they rise from the flat Severn plain, an undulating ridge of rock 9 miles long and more than 500 million years old. In winter they are snow-capped; in summer, tawny and bare. At night the glittering necklace of lights strung along the northern hills could be taken for those twinkling over a Mediterranean resort, while the elegant villas and lush gardens of Great Malvern have the flavour of a late 19th-century Italian spa. A wonderfully florid railway station and fully operational gas street lights add to the Victorian holiday air.

The east flanks of the Malverns descend steeply to the plain below, while on the west they fold into curves of woodland. Roads encircle them, but the hills are made for walking. From the calm sunlight of a crisp winter's day in the village of West Malvern, try the gentle climb to the bracing summit of North Hill. Directly south lies Worcestershire Beacon, the highest point of the Malverns at 425m (1394ft). From this exhilarating vantage point the lower but wilder southern hills descend into the remote horizons of Gloucestershire. Look west to glimpse a more rugged prospect beyond the Welsh border; while to the east is patchwork England, with villages and church spires amid woods and fields.

As you move south the hills trace a sinuous line like the spine of a slumbering animal to reach Malvern Wells, where medicinal springs were discovered in the 17th century. Malvern water is now produced commercially in Colwall, on the west slopes. Tucked into the wooded, bracken-covered slopes, and joined to a 14th-century Benedictine priory, is Little Malvern Court, which incorporates the Prior's Hall with its splendid smoke-blackened timber roof. At nearby Wynds Point, where the A449 cuts across the hills, you can walk up through the woods and out onto the grassy heights and intoxicating air of the British Camp, a mighty Celtic hill fort that crowns the 340m (1115ft) Herefordshire Beacon.

A place of very English muses

The composer Edward Elgar loved these hills. He was born at Lower Broadheath, north of Great Malvern near Worcester, in a small brick cottage that is now a shrine to his memory. The Malverns also inspired the 14th-century poet William Langland, who slept on the hills and dreamed *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman*. Seven hundred years later, Evelyn Waugh used Madresfield Court, a delectable jumble of Elizabethan and Victorian styles for which the Malverns provide a theatrical backdrop, as the real 'Brideshead' of his novel *Brideshead Revisited*.

- 1 Great Malvern ▶ 6 miles S of Worcester on A449.
- 2 Worcestershire Beacon ▶ Footpaths from Great Malvern.
- 3 Little Malvern Court ▶ Little Malvern, off A4104. Wed and Thur pm, mid Apr-mid July. Priory daily.
- 4 Elgar Birthplace Museum ▶ Lower Broadheath, W of Worcester on B4204. Daily; closed Christmas-end Jan.
- 5 Madresfield Court ▶ Madresfield, 6 miles SW of Worcester off A449. Guided tours only, Apr-July. Tel 01684 579947 to book.

WORCESTERSHIRE BEACON

FIFE & SOUTHEAST SCOTLAND

6 Forth Rail Bridge 7 Grangemouth 8 Falkirk Wheel 9 Calton Hill 10 Charlotte Square

Forth Rail Bridge

Victorian engineering genius at its most masterful

Best seen from the waterfront at South Queensferry, the mile-long bridge over the Firth of Forth (right), completed in 1890, is a triumphant celebration of the 19th-century's faith in industry and science.

The rail bridge's massive, double-cantilevered spans make no attempt to blend with the environment, treating nature as a challenge to be conquered by man's new world of iron and steam. The sturdy web of giant tubes and girders rejoices in its muscular development and strength, proclaiming that the railway is striding over water as it takes the march of progress to the North.

Contrast this bravado approach with the delicate appearance of the 1964 suspension bridge, tip-toeing across the Firth half a mile upstream. Each bridge is a work of art, expressive of its age.

► *A90 at South Queensferry.*

Grangemouth

Technology as performance art

Against a backdrop of romantic hills, flares belch flames into the sky, steam swirls out of cooling towers and sunlight glitters off science-fiction-like pipework. The refinery and petrochemical works at Grangemouth has a strange and fearful beauty. The plant functions as a huge machine, processing 4,550,000 litres (1,001,000 gallons) of fuel a day. Take the public road running through the site for the best views.

► *20 miles W of Edinburgh on A904.*

Falkirk Wheel

Lifting canals into the 21st century

Spectacular in scale, thrilling in design and hypnotic in its steady motion, the world's first rotating boat-lift, built in 2001, raises eight boats at a time from an 18th-century canal to a 21st-century aqueduct 33m (110ft) above. Plans to reopen the inland waterways that linked Edinburgh to Glasgow until the 1930s faced a major challenge: the difference in levels between the Forth & Clyde and the Union canals. The giant, futuristic wheel of steel and concrete, weighing 1800 tonnes when filled with water, provided the solution.

► *2 miles W of Falkirk.*

Calton Hill

An acropolis of follies

In pursuit of the accolade 'The Athens of the North', Georgian Edinburgh acquired its own acropolis of monuments and ruins on Calton Hill, high above the New Town. A massive portico of Doric columns dominates the scene – all that was constructed of a Napoleonic war memorial intended to be a full-scale copy of the Parthenon.

Scarcely less bizarre is the telescope-shaped tower commemorating Lord Nelson. The 'time-ball' at its top was designed to drop at 1 o'clock every day as a signal to shipping on the Forth. From the hill's grassy slopes there are fine views of Edinburgh Castle, Princes Street and the red cliffs of Salisbury Crags.

► *Central Edinburgh, off Leith Street.*

Charlotte Square

Style and wealth in Edinburgh's Georgian New Town

In the late 18th century the heart of Scotland's capital city shifted north from the medieval lanes around the Royal Mile to a modern New Town. The architectural climax of the development was Charlotte Square, designed by Robert Adam in 1791. This is one of Britain's finest Georgian squares, with a perfect composition of classical façades with richly decorated columns. The square soon became Edinburgh's most fashionable address, and the lifestyle of its first inhabitants can be seen at No. 7, the Georgian House, where rooms have been returned to their original appearance.

► *Georgian House, 7 Charlotte Square. NTS. Daily Mail-News.*

VICTORIAN
ENGINEERING
GENIUS AT ITS
MOST
MASTERFUL
FORTH RAIL BRIDGE

