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KINGFISHER GUIDE: LEICESTERSHIRE



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I wrote the original Kingfisher Guide for Leicestershire in 2017 and have provided ongoing editorial and updates as required.

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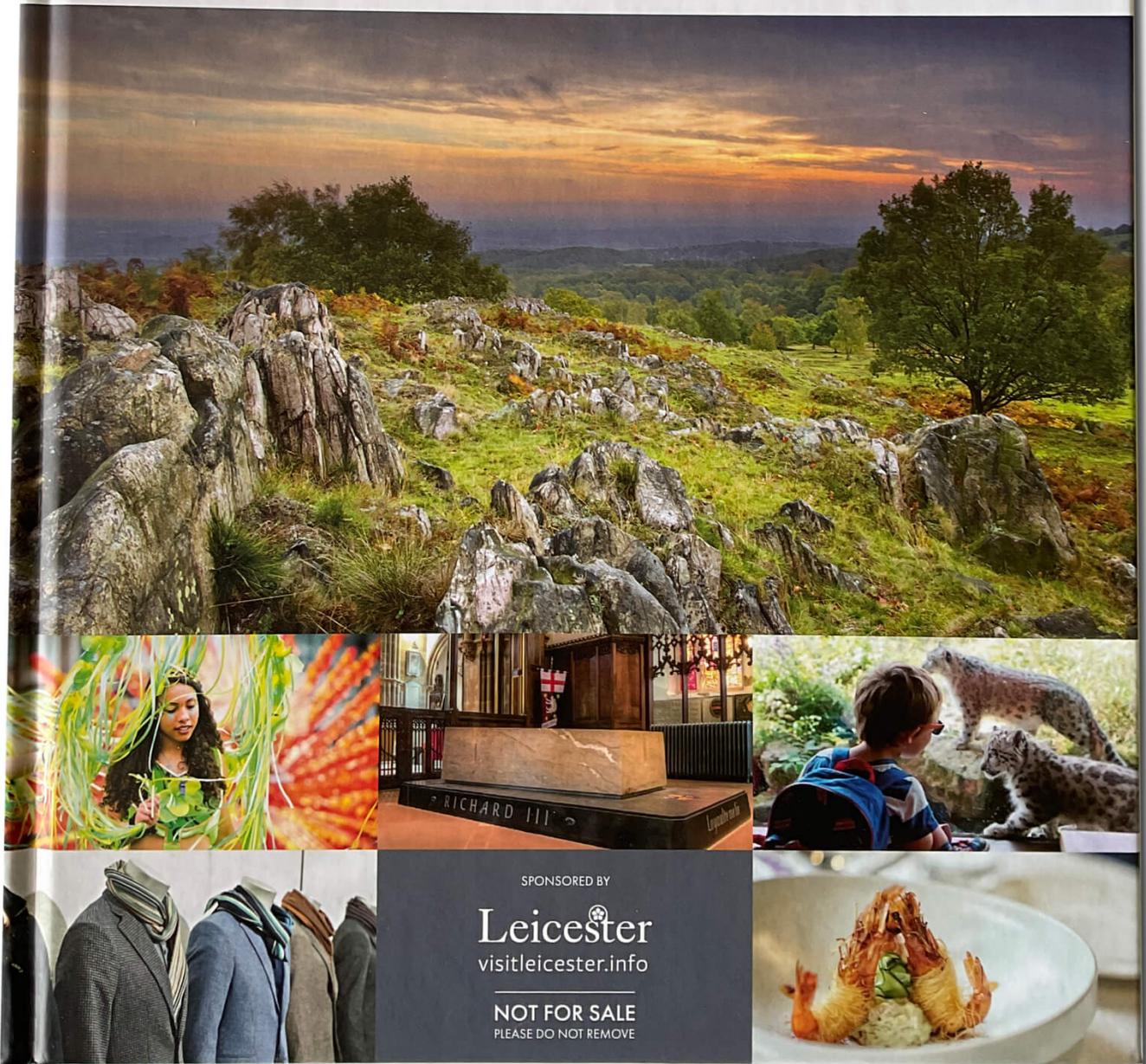
CONTENTS

Page	Title
2	Welcome to Leicestershire front cover
3	History
5	Shopping
10	Arts & culture
15	Days out
20	Eating out
25	Nightlife

Please note that the original formatting of the text has been changed slightly to allow for easier screen reading.

WELCOME TO LEICESTERSHIRE

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HISTORY

HISTORY ALL AROUND!

From an Iron Age settlement to a king buried in a car park, the story of Leicestershire is both fascinating and astonishing.

As one of the oldest cities in England, Leicester has a rich and fascinating heritage. It begins more than 2,000 years ago, during the late Iron Age, when Leicester was a high status tribal colony.

When the Romans invaded in 43CE, they recorded the colony's name as Ratae, meaning ramparts. The name describes a defensive wall and suggests that it may have been an oppidum, or fortified settlement.

It is thought that Roman Leicester began life as a fortress. Jewry Wall, was built around 150CE and is one of the largest pieces of surviving Roman masonry in Britain.

A short walk from Jewry Wall, you'll find what remains of Leicester Castle. The castle was originally built around 1150 by Robert de Bossu, 2nd Earl of Leicester.

Leicester Castle is one of 22 castles built in the county. One of the most famous is Belvoir Castle. Construction of this castle first began in 1067 but, due to persistent conflict and destruction, it has been rebuilt several times since then. The present castle dates back to the early 1800s.

While many of Leicestershire's castles have crumbled, there are still ruins to explore, most notably at Ashby de la Zouch Castle and Kirby Muxloe Castle. Both castles were built during the 15th century and both were owned by Lord Hastings.

Lord Hastings was close friend and Lord Chamberlain to King Edward IV. When the King died in 1483, Lord Hastings became one of the richest and most powerful men in England. That same year he was accused of treason and executed by Edward's brother, and ultimate successor, Richard III.

In recent times King Richard III has become Leicestershire's most famous monarch. He was killed during the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 and buried at the city's Grey Friars Church.

When the church was demolished in 1538, the site and the King's remains were lost in the passage of time, with seemingly no way to relocate them.

In 2012, after extensive map research, experts traced the site of the church to a city centre car park. An archaeological dig took place and, amazingly, both the church and the King were rediscovered.

The King has been reinterred inside Leicester Cathedral, where his grave is marked by a raised stone. There is also a fascinating exhibition, documenting the astonishing story of the King's life, death and eventual rediscovery.

King Richard is not the county's only royal connection. North Leicestershire's Bradgate House was the childhood home of the Nine-Days Queen, Lady Jane Grey.

Lady Jane succeeded Edward VI, becoming queen on July 10, 1553. Unfortunately, support for her rapidly dwindled and, just nine days later, she was replaced by the infinitely more popular Mary I.

By the 19th century, Leicestershire was flourishing as an industrial leader. Its new prosperity inspired desires for learning and travel.

Leicestershire has contributed significantly to the modern travel industry. In 1841, Thomas Cook started his international travel company by organising a one-day train excursion from Leicester to Loughborough.

A century later, Sir Frank Whittle developed some of the world's first jet engines in the nearby town of Lutterworth.

Today the county is still flying high — celebrating its colourful past and looking to a bright, exciting future.



SHOPPING

LIKE TO SHOP? YOU'LL LOVE IT HERE!

High street chains, one-off independents and quirky specialists – they're all waiting for the shopaholic.

If you love to shop, you'll love Leicestershire. With its wide range of retailers and designers, you'll have plenty of opportunities to find something fabulous, discover a new brand, bag yourself a bargain or even create your own design.

Leicester city centre is the county's principal shopping area, with more variety than any of its rivals. It is home to a host of major retailers and a vibrant selection of smaller, independent shops.

Highcross Leicester

For big names and popular brands, head to High Street where you'll find Highcross Leicester, the city's premier shopping centre. This sleek, modern complex is awash with natural light and houses around 100 stores, including its flagship store, John Lewis, and many of the city's larger high street retailers.

Highcross has an abundance of clothes shops with a mix of contemporary fashions and timeless styles, designed to suit all ages. You will also find a wealth of jewellery and accessories, art pieces, elegant homewares, quality appliances, toys, games and technology. If all that shopping has given you an appetite, the centre has more than 20 cafés and restaurants to choose from. Recharge your batteries with a freshly-made snack, indulge in a decadent dessert or enjoy cuisines from all over the world.

If you fancy a diversion, Highcross also has some fun attractions. You can climb the walls at the Social Climbing indoor bouldering centre. Or visit Treetop Adventure Golf and try your hand at putting. The mini golf experience is new for 2019 and features two 18-hole courses, both with a rainforest theme.

More major retailers can be found on Humberstone Gate and Gallowtree Gate. The 'Gates' originate from the time of the Danish occupation in AD 877. The word 'gata' was Danish for road.

High Street

High Street is home to some of Leicester's leading independent shops. Here you'll find pop culture fashions alongside designer brands, elegant jewellery and imaginative gift ideas.

Based at the entrance to the Royal Arcade, Tinfish Shoes is known for its mix of quirky and quality footwear. Vibrant colours and offbeat designs make a captivating window display. The shop also stocks vegan-friendly shoes and brands including Brikenstock, Camper, Fly and Dr Martens.

Lumbers has a long history of selling jewellery in Leicester. Established by John Lumbers in 1881, the shop is renowned for its quality and excellence. It specialises in prestigious brands, precious keepsakes and exquisite diamonds.

If you prefer something more unusual, visit nearby Amabis. This local gem champions new designers and handpicks its jewellery especially for those who like something a little bit different.

For more contemporary styles, head to Set. Its shop is packed with giftware, quality stationery, novel greetings cards and stylish jewellery. The store also stocks designer brands, including Ted Baker, Calvin Klein and Orla Kiely.

Two stores, Pilot and Wellgosh, lead the way in high-quality designer and branded apparel. Choose from an exciting range that includes smart, casual, denim, sportswear, footwear and accessories. For smaller frames, cross the road to find Jellyrolls. This charming boutique has been selling designer childrenswear in the city since 1998.

Leicester Lanes

The Leicester Lanes area, just off High Street, is the place to go for independent shops. This maze of narrow streets is a treasure trove of vintage arcades, independent emporiums and fascinating niche shops. Here you'll find an array of innovative merchandise and locally-designed items. The area takes its name from the Brighton Lanes – a similarly eclectic area of the popular East Sussex seaside town.

The Lanes has become an intriguing area to explore. You can browse the rails of stylish boutiques, peruse quirky fashion items or find yourself a pre-owned vintage classic. Discover artisan jewellery, stylish homewares, second-hand books and beautiful handicrafts made in far-flung corners of the world.

If you're feeling inspired to create something yourself, the Lanes has a selection of craft shops.

Try Button Boutique, in the Malcolm Arcade, for a range of haberdashery and craft materials. Or head to Crafty Sew & So in St Martins Square, where you can shop for colourful fabrics, sewing kits and patterns. The shop also runs a series of online workshops, where you can learn to make your own clothes, accessories or homewares.

If jewellery-making is your preference, visit Instinct UK on Loseby Lane. The shop sells a captivating range of hand-made jewellery, plus beads, equipment and supplies, so you can design your own unique creations.

For an immersive chocolate experience, head to Silver Street where you'll find Cocoa Amore, Leicester's finest independent chocolatier. Pause for a moment to admire the stunning window display, then step inside chocolate heaven. From the moment you open the door, your senses will be awakened by the delectable sights and scrumptious aromas.

As well as its divine selection of hand-made chocolate, Cocoa Amore hosts its own chocolate workshops. Here you can learn about the origins of chocolate, taste samples from across the cocoa belt and create your own chocolates to take home. Please note that workshops are limited and pre-booking is essential.

If you're feeling thirsty, there's a charming selection of tea rooms, coffee houses and juice bars to refresh you. The area is also home to a number of excellent eateries and delis.

At 17 Loseby Lane, you'll find Mrs Bridges Tea Rooms. Built in 1723, this historic building was once known as Ye Olde Tea Shoppe and still has its original cooking range in the cellar. Today it serves a menu of traditional teas, hearty sandwiches, gourmet light bites, mouthwatering main meals and home-made desserts.

For a cooling treat head to Gelato Village in St Martins Square. This award-winning gelateria sells a delicious range of authentic Italian gelato, made with natural ingredients and milk from the Belvoir Ridge Creamery in Melton Mowbray. You will also find a tempting array of sweet waffles and pastries, complemented by rich Italian coffee.

Leicester Market

A short walk from St Martins Square, you'll find Leicester Market. The market has a long history in Leicester - the first market to be held here dates back to 1298.

In former centuries the market was more extensive and bordered by the Town Walls on its north-east and south-east sides. This market featured a wide causeway known as the Corn Wall, where horse dealers would demonstrate their animals' running prowess. Today it is the largest outdoor covered market in Europe, selling a variety of goods.

Head to the main hub of the market for a cornucopia of the best seasonal produce, including sweet ripe fruits, farm fresh vegetables and beautiful blooms. On the outer edges you'll find affordable clothing, fabrics, cosmetics, fashion accessories and second-hand items. The indoor food section sells fresh fish along with local meats and cheeses.

At the heart of the market stands the distinctive Corn Exchange. As its name suggests, the building was originally used by farmers and merchants trading cereal grains. The exchange started life as single storey building, in the early 1850s. Its upper floor and iconic external stone staircase were added later, in 1856. Today it is a Grade 2-listed building, housing a bar.

The Golden Mile

Along Belgrave Road and Melton Road you'll find what is known locally as Leicester's Golden Mile. This is a chance to immerse yourself in the city's Indian culture. The area sells an exciting range of produce including flavourful spices, beautiful sarees and unusual gifts. It also has the largest selection of Indian jewellery shops outside India. During your shop you can enjoy a selection of authentic Indian curries, savoury snacks and sweets.

Stoneygate

To escape the hustle and bustle of the city, head south east following London Road. In just two miles you'll reach the leafy suburb of Stoneygate. This affluent neighbourhood is home to a wonderful collection of gift shops, boutiques and salons.

Nest, located on Francis Street, has been trading in the area since 2001. Originally a boutique, it now stocks a fabulous range of quality gifts, home accessories and toys.

A literal hidden gem, also located on Francis Street, is Outerspace. The shop doesn't have much in the way of kerb appeal, but if you find the signpost and follow it down the small alley you certainly won't be disappointed.

Outerspace is packed with innovative garden items and stylish homewares. Outside there's a host of garden furniture, water features and imaginative decorations. Step inside for candles, quirky kitchen signs, beautiful mirrors and furnishings.

Wistow Rural Centre

A second Outerspace outlet can be found at the Wistow Rural Centre, south east of the city. During mid to late summer, the centre is known for hosting the Wistow Maze, a popular family attraction featuring an eight-acre living maize maze. It is also home to a charming collection of speciality shops. Browse the boutiques for elegant style collections, handbags, scarves and jewellery. Head to the Mediterranean Deli and fill a basket with delicacies including moreish olives, foreign cheeses, sweet Turkish delight and sticky baklava. And delight your senses at Utopia, where you can buy candles in a variety of fragrances and colours.

For a beautiful souvenir of your visit to Leicestershire, take a look around Wistow Gallery, where you're sure to find something special and unique. The gallery showcases the work of local artists and designers. It has all kinds of arts and crafts, including prints, ceramics, wooden items, jewellery and textiles.

Kibworth Antiques Centre

East of Wistow is the desirable village of Kibworth Harcourt, home of Kibworth Antiques Centre. Established in 2012, this is Leicestershire's largest antiques and interiors centre, showcasing the wares of more than 60 dealers. It's a fascinating shop with an eclectic selection of items to peruse.

The Old Showroom features a large collection of display rooms. Here you can find an intriguing collection of items, from traditional antiques to ceramics, glassware, china, jewellery and other collectables.

The integrated tea shop enables you to take a welcome break as you reach the halfway point. Here you can enjoy a delicious bowl of soup, a fresh panini or choose from a selection of tempting home-baked goods. Tea is served the traditional way, using china cups and saucers.

Market Harborough

More antiquities can be found south east of Kibworth, in the scenic town of Market Harborough. The town's shops present a fabulous range, from classic antiques and vintage to stylish upcycled items and shabby chic.

For something more contemporary head to Wilkinson Goldsmiths on High Street. This is the showroom of artisan jeweller, Stephen Wilkinson. Items on display include original designs, which are hand-made in his onsite workshop. Stephen also specialises in bespoke commissions, creating unique new pieces - and re-purposing tired or unloved old ones.

Market Harborough is a haven for art lovers, with several art galleries and artist's studios in the area. If you're feeling inspired to design and create something for yourself, pay a visit to the Leicestershire Craft Centre, which is also based in the town. The centre supplies a range of takeaway craft kits to give as gifts or make at home. Alternatively, you can book a taster course for an introduction to a new skill. Course areas include art and sculpture, jewellery, knitting, crochet and dressmaking. Check the website for full details and please note that pre-booking is essential.

To have some family fun and create a truly unique piece, visit Elsie's Pottery Painting Barn at the Eckland Lodge Business Park. Pottery painting is suitable for all ages and artistic abilities - all you need is creativity. There is an extensive collection of fired, unglazed ceramics. Choose one and make it your own by selecting the colours and adding a design. Draw something, write something or add a hand or paw print to make a keepsake you can treasure. The barn is open from Wednesday to Saturday. Please note that 24 hours' notice is required for all bookings.

Whatever you choose to take home, it will always be a special reminder of Leicestershire and the amazing memories you made here.



ARTS & CULTURE

A REGION AT THE HEART OF ART!

Leicestershire is a vibrant, multicultural and wonderful place to visit. And the local arts and culture scene reflects this.

Leicestershire has a long tradition of celebrated local artists, including painters, poets, writers, architects and musicians.

John Flower

In 1793, the painter, John Flower, was born in the city. During his early career, Flower drew and painted extensively in Leicester and Leicestershire, and for this he became known locally as ‘the Leicester artist’. Working in oils, watercolours, pencils and wash,

Flower was known for his depictions of local landscapes and buildings. In 1826 he published a book entitled ‘Views of Ancient Buildings in the Town and County of Leicester’. The book, which contains lithographs of his artworks, has become an important historical record of the area as it looked in the early 19th century. A number of Flower’s works are still held by the Leicester Museum and Art Gallery.

Ernest Gimson

The architect and furniture designer, Ernest Gimson, was born in Leicester in 1864. He is regarded as one of the most influential designers of the English Arts and Crafts Movement in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Several examples of Gimson’s architecture can be seen around the county. Inglewood and The White House, two of his architectural commissions, still stand in the suburb of Stoneygate.

In Ulverscroft, on the other side of the county, are three cottages, designed by Gimson as summer retreats for his siblings. In 2013, the largest, named Stoneywell, was bought from the Gimson family by the National Trust. It still contains much of the furniture Gimson made himself, including an oak bed and ladderback dining chairs. Stoneywell was opened to the public in 2015, however, there are strict limitations on the numbers of cars and visitors allowed, so all visits must be booked at least 24 hours in advance.

John Paul Cooper

It was during the late 19th century that Leicester architect, John Paul Cooper, began to experiment with metalwork - particularly silver ornaments and jewellery. Cooper was an innovator in his field with a flair for decoration. He made magnificent pieces using unconventional materials such as coconut shell, ostrich egg and shark skin. His work was an inspiration to other artists and made a significant contribution to the craft.

Dryad Handicrafts

It's perfectly possible that a Leicester company has enabled a number of other prolific artists in more recent years. In 1936 Dryad Handicrafts was the largest supplier of craft materials in the world. Its craft kits and supplies have introduced many young people to the joys of creating their own beautiful things.

Sue Townsend

Sue Townsend, born in 1946, was one of Leicester's most prominent writers. Many of her works were set in Leicester, where she lived all her life. Sue started her writing career in 1979, after joining a writing group at the city's Phoenix Theatre. She penned several plays for the Phoenix, but enjoyed most success with her novels.

During the 1980s, her Adrian Mole series sold more copies than any other work of fiction in Britain. The city's former Phoenix Theatre is now renamed the Sue Townsend Theatre in honour of her legacy to the arts and to Leicester.

James Allen

Also born in Leicester, in 1864, was philosophical writer and poet, James Allen, who is renowned as a pioneer, both of the self-help movement and of modern inspirational thought.

Famous musical acts

Some of the county's more famous musical acts include Queen bassist, John Deacon; alternative rockers, Kasabian; Felix Button, of electronic dance duo Basement Jaxx; singer, Englebert Humperdinck; 90s indie band, Cornershop; and X Factor winner, Sam Bailey.

A cosmopolitan city

Today, Leicester is well known as a cosmopolitan city that embraces and celebrates a wide range of cultures. Annual events held here include the vibrant Caribbean Carnival, Leicester Pride Parade and the Diwali Festival, with its spectacular light displays and fireworks. Leicester's ethnic groups use the arts as a way to commemorate their cultural heritage. From performing arts, such as dancing, singing and music, to writing, art, fashion and handicrafts.

The Cultural Quarter

The city promotes the work of artists from all cultures via its own creative hub. The area formerly home to the city's textile and shoe industries has been transformed into the Cultural Quarter and is now occupied by venues, bars, galleries and a collection of creative businesses. Just some of the disciplines represented here are jewellery, fashion, performing arts, photography, film-making, illustration, textiles and ceramics.

LCB Depot, which stands for Leicester Creative Business, is an initiative run by Leicester City Council. The centre is based in the Cultural Quarter and offers services to creative businesses, including workspaces, meeting rooms, studios, a cafe and an exhibition gallery. It also hosts regular social, networking and arts events. Its studio space includes the Makers' Yard, which has 10 studios for local artists and craftspeople. Its base is the oldest surviving hosiery factory building in the East Midlands. Open studio events give the public a chance to see the artists at work and buy their pieces directly.

At the heart of the Cultural Quarter is Curve: a state-of-the-art theatre, designed by acclaimed architect, Rafael Vinöly. Its imposing façade is constructed using 1,192 tonnes of steel and 46,000m of glass.

Curve has a varied calendar of entertainment, featuring both its own productions and visiting shows. It hosts a wide range of established and independent stage plays, musicals and shows for children. As Leicester's main theatre, it also attracts many high profile productions and big name performers.

The theatre is a registered charity, managed by Leicester Theatre Trust. It is committed to making the arts accessible to all and to nurturing new and emerging local talent. There are numerous theatrical workshops available to young people, in fields such as dancing, singing, and writing.

Curve also works with local artists, creating opportunities for them to meet, share their work, explore ideas and discuss their experiences.

Just around the corner from Curve is Phoenix: Leicester's centre for independent cinema, art and digital culture. This is the place to catch those smaller independent films that don't make it to the mainstream cinemas. There are also regular festivals and events to enjoy.

Like Curve, Phoenix is a charity, which is making art and cinema accessible to all. Its gallery presents an ever-changing art programme featuring work by local and international artists. Through its educational work, it is also helping people of all ages learn about film and art while offering them opportunities to create their own.

Live comedy

The Leicester Comedy Festival is an annual event, which has been held in the city since 1994. Shows take place at various venues across the city and include stand-up performances from some of the biggest names in comedy. There have also been live sketch shows, comedy dining experiences and a wealth of emerging new talent.

Live music

If you enjoy live music, Leicestershire has plenty to entertain you. There are venues and festivals all over the county, where you'll find big names, local talent and some very convincing tribute acts.

The county's biggest live music event is the annual Download Festival, held at Donington Park. Download began in 2003, as the successor to the hugely popular Monsters of Rock, which ran during the 1980s and 90s. The multi-stage event plays host to the biggest names in rock music, from Britain, the US and Europe.

For those unable to get to a large festival, the county has created some of its own. Moxters of Rock, held annually in Coalville, has some of the best rock tributes, while Glastonbudget, which takes place in Wymeswold, is described as the world's biggest and best tribute music festival.

De Montfort Hall and O2 Academy are the city's largest venues, which attract the bigger names in music. As a performance venue, De Montfort Hall has something for everyone.

It hosts a variety of plays, comedy shows, musicals, pantomime and children's entertainment. It is also one of Leicester's best places to experience classical, world and alternative music. The hall's resident orchestra, the Philharmonia, has had a residency at the hall for more than 20 years.

For local and emerging talent, look for smaller venues including The Shed, The Soundhouse and The Musician.

Countryside culture

For a taste of Leicestershire's countryside culture there are numerous events and country shows held in the county throughout the year.

On Easter Monday, the village of Hallaton performs an ancient custom known as Hare Pie Scramble and Bottle Kicking. It begins with a hare pie parade through the village and ends with a lengthy 'ballgame' in which two local teams compete to score goals with small wooden casks known as 'bottles'. The custom was the subject of the documentary short entitled 'Hare Pie and Bottle Kicking, Hallaton (2005)'.

The Market Bosworth Festival is held over a fortnight in June and takes place in and around the town of Market Bosworth. The festival is run by a group of locals who love the arts. It hosts a selection of events, which celebrate all genres of music, film, theatre, literature, visual arts and crafts.

From its historic contributions to art, to its modern multicultural metropolis, Leicestershire has a wealth of art and culture to experience – so dive in, explore and be inspired.



DAYS OUT

LET'S GO THERE!

With so many things to do and places to go, Leicestershire offers a wealth of opportunities for a memorable day out.

When it comes to planning days out, Leicestershire has something for everyone. From magnificent countryside and ancient history to animal friends and space age discovery.

Historic architecture

Let's start at the very beginning. A walking tour of Leicester's city centre reveals a fascinating insight to times gone by. Starting on Guildhall Lane, you'll find the Guildhall. Built around 1390 as a meeting place for the Guild of Corpus Christi, it is now one of the best-preserved timber-framed halls in the country. Visit the museum inside to experience a taste of medieval Leicester.

Around the corner, in the city's historic Applegate, you'll find Wygston's House – the oldest standing house in Leicester, which dates back to around 1490.

The Jewry Wall, built around AD 150, is one of the largest pieces of surviving Roman masonry in Britain. Its archways, some of which you can still see today, originally marked the entrance to the public baths.

Close by is the area where Leicester Castle once stood. The castle was built just after the Norman Conquest in 1068, by order of William the Conqueror himself. You can still see several of the original sites, including Castle Gardens; the Church of St Mary de Castro, where Henry VI was knighted as a child; the Great Hall, which was used a court of law until 1992; and Castle Yard, once the site of public executions.

City centre museums

There are two main museums in the city centre. The Newarke Houses Museum focuses on the social history of Leicester. The larger Leicester Museum and Art Gallery is popular with families and has a varied selection of exhibits, including dinosaurs and ancient Egypt.

King Richard III

One of Leicester's most famous and popular tourist attractions is the King Richard III Visitor Centre in St Martins. The exhibition tells the story of the King's life, his death in 1485 at the Battle of Bosworth Field, and the rediscovery of his remains under a city centre car park in 2012. In 2015, King Richard's remains were reinterred at Leicester Cathedral, where his tomb is marked by a raised stone monument.

For the full story of how the famous battle unfolded, visit the Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre and Country Park, in Sutton Cheney. It was here that Richard III lost his life and crown at the hands of Henry Tudor's army.

At the centre's exhibition, you can take a trip to medieval England and see real artefacts from the battle, including 'The Bosworth Boar', a silver-gilt livery badge, depicting a boar, which was King Richard's personal emblem.

The country park has a fabulous network of footpaths where you can enjoy a self-led or guided countryside walk. Paths include the 1.25-mile Battlefield Trail, which features beautiful, panoramic views of the landscape.

Round off your visit with a visit to the 1485 Tithe Barn Cafe for a variety of snacks, daily specials, cakes and drinks. And pick up a unique souvenir from the centre's shop.

Full details and forthcoming events can be found on the website. Please note that pre-booking is essential for guided walks and if you're planning to visit the exhibition.

Abbey Park and The National Space Centre

Just north of the city is Abbey Park, an 89-acre public park with the River Soar flowing through its centre. In addition to its beautiful gardens, the park has a range of sporting facilities including tennis courts, a bowling green and ping pong tables.

This area is also home to another of Leicester's premier visitor attractions. With its distinctive Rocket Tower rising 42 metres into the sky, the National Space Centre is a Leicester landmark and a must for anyone with an interest in science and discovery.

Fasten your seatbelts as you blast off into space, guided by six interactive galleries. Learn the secrets of our cosmic chemistry and explosive origins in the UK's largest planetarium. Take a tour of the planets in our solar system. Explore the wider universe and learn the science behind the search for extraterrestrial intelligence.

Next door to the Space Centre you'll find Abbey Pumping Station: Leicester City's Museum of Science and Technology. The exhibits provide a fascinating insight into Leicester's industrial, technological and scientific heritage.

The National Forest

In north west Leicestershire, you can explore part of the lush National Forest. This environmental initiative is creating public woodlands and improving the natural habitat for local wildlife. Almost nine million trees have been planted so far. The ultimate plan is to link the ancient forests of Needwood, Staffordshire and Charnwood, Leicestershire.

The best way to see the National Forest is to take one of the recommended walks. Routes include waterside strolls, pretty villages, local wildlife and spectacular scenery.

Bradgate Park

The area also includes the historic Bradgate Park, former childhood home of the Nine-Day Queen, Lady Jane Grey. Here, you can stroll among the park's roaming deer and gnarled old trees, and see the ruins of Bradgate House, one of the earliest brick-built country houses in England.

For an easy stroll, suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs, follow the park's main walkway from the main entrance in Newtown Linford. The scenic path follows the River Lin, passing Bradgate House, the park's visitor centre and the adjoining Cropston Reservoir.

For a more challenging walk, head off the main path and climb the hill to Old John Tower. This is the highest point in the park and one of Leicestershire's most famous landmarks. The views from here and from the nearby war memorial are breathtaking.

Swithland Wood

The nearby Swithland Wood is also well worth a visit. The wood is incredibly peaceful with many pathways to explore. It is especially stunning towards the end of April when the bluebells are in bloom.

Charnwood Forest Alpacas

For a trip with a difference, book an alpaca experience at Charnwood Forest Alpacas. Here, you can learn about alpacas, take one for a walk and purchase a range of fleecy items and gifts. The alpaca farm is on the Leicestershire and Derbyshire border, just outside Ashby-de-la-Zouch. Please note that booking is essential.

Steam trains and waterways

For a more leisurely tour of the countryside, step back in time and climb aboard a steam train on the Great Central Railway. This is the UK's only mainline heritage railway and a chance to experience a bygone era. Trains take a steady journey from Loughborough to Leicester, passing through the picturesque villages of Quorn, Woodhouse and Rothley. Advance booking is essential for all journeys, including the first class services which serve lunch or dinner.

The River Soar is the county's main river. It flows north through the city and Leicestershire's Soar Valley, towards the Trent. Walk along the riverside to see local wildlife and colourful narrowboats. Or book a kayaking or paddle boarding experience with Let's Get Lost Leicester. Kayak trips include the two-hour, family-friendly 'Explorer', and the full or half-day 'Paddle to the Pub', which includes two pub stops. Alternatively, try your hand at paddle boarding with a two-hour, half-day or full-day instructor-led session. These activities are available from April to October, departing from the Waterside Inn, Mountsorrel. Advance booking is essential.

Another popular waterway spot is the idyllic Foxton Locks. This stretch of the Grand Union Canal lies south of Leicester and close to the town of Market Harborough. With 10 Grade 2-listed locks, it is Britain's largest canal lock staircase, helping narrowboats negotiate a steep uphill climb. The towpath is a popular tourist spot, where you can watch the locks in action. The site also has a café and two pubs for relaxation and refreshments.

Castles

The county was once home to 22 castles, many of which have disappeared or turned to ruins over time. The largest and most famous is Belvoir Castle, which was built in 1067. Today it is one of England's most magnificent Regency houses with a vibrant, opulent

interior and stunning gardens to explore. Belvoir Castle is open to the public on selected dates throughout the year. Check the website for details.

Rockingham Castle was built by order of William the Conqueror around 1070. In 1544 Henry VIII granted the castle to Edward Watson who made it his family home. You can tour several of the castle's historic rooms, including the Long Gallery, where Charles Dickens is said to have performed. Outside, you can explore the castle's beautiful gardens and enjoy dramatic views over the Welland Valley and five counties. Check the website for availability and to pre-book your visit.

Family attractions

If you're visiting the county with children, there are plenty of exciting attractions.

For younger families there's the Twinlakes all action theme park in Melton Mowbray. The park has lots of rides and attractions, with themes of pirates, dragons, legends and farm animals.

During mid to late summer, visit the hamlet of Wistow and the Wistow Maze. The eight-acre maze is constructed from living maize, with a new design grown every year. The adjoining Wistow Rural Centre has a restaurant and a variety of shops.

Working farms

Leicestershire has a long tradition of livestock farming, which still continues today. The county is home to three working farms, which open their gates to the public.

Gorse Hill City Farm is closest to the city of Leicester. The farm is a registered charity, approved by the Rare Breed Survival Trust. There are lots of animals to meet, including cows, sheep, donkeys, pigs, goats, ducks and rabbits.

Stonehurst Farm is a working family farm in the north Leicestershire village of Mountsorrel. Children will love meeting the animals and taking tractor and pony rides around the beautiful grounds. The farm also has a motor museum and a delightful tea shop. Online booking is essential.

Largest of the three farms is the Paradise Found Educational Farm Park, which can be found in Sapcote, to the south west of the city. This park offers a fun and educational family day out, with a whole host of animals.

Tropical Birdland and Twycross Zoo

For a more exotic excursion, venture west of the city to Desford's Tropical Birdland. This 6.5-acre bird sanctuary houses more than 250 feathered friends, including vibrantly-coloured parrots and other tropical birds. The site also features a children's play area, a cafe and a woodland walk featuring local birds such as woodpeckers, kingfishers and jays. Pre-booking is required.

Leicestershire also has its own zoo. Twycross Zoo started life as a pet shop in Sutton Coldfield in 1963. Today it occupies over 80 acres at its site in Twycross, West Leicestershire. Here you can see more than 500 animals from around 100 different species, including mammals, primates, birds and reptiles. The zoo is a registered charity, caring for a number of endangered species. It is also a specialist primate centre with a

variety of monkeys and all four species of great ape: gorillas, orangutans, chimpanzees and bonobos.

The zoo is open 364 days a year and online booking is essential.



EATING OUT

A TASTE OF LEICESTERSHIRE — AND THE WORLD!

It's famous for its cheeses and pork pies, but there's so much more to discover when you're eating out in Leicestershire.

It's said that variety is the spice of life and that is certainly true of Leicestershire's diverse restaurant scene. With a host of excellent restaurants, showcasing the finest of local and international cuisines, you're sure to find something to whet your appetite.

Stilton and Red Leicester

Two of the county's best known exports are its Stilton and Red Leicester cheeses. There are two varieties of Stilton: blue and white. Blue Stilton has a strong, tangy flavour; a soft, crumbly texture and distinctive blue veins. White Stilton is creamy and crumbly with a light, fresh flavour and is often used as a dessert cheese. Red Leicester is a firmer cheese with a nutty flavour and a rich orange colour.

Melton Mowbray pork pie

Leicestershire is also home to the distinctive Melton Mowbray pork pie. Melton pork pies use chopped, uncured meat, which is characteristically grey. The meat is encased in a lardy pastry, then baked free-standing. Only pies baked in this way, and in the Melton Mowbray region, can bear the Melton Mowbray name.

Curry

In more recent years, Leicester has become famous for serving up some of the country's best curries. It's fair to say that parts of the UK have embraced Indian food as part of British culture. There is something wonderfully comforting about an expertly spiced curry and a freshly-baked naan that you don't often find in other cuisines.

Leicester city centre, in particular, boasts a fine range of restaurants that are defining a new contemporary standard for Indian cooking. Their food is exciting, colourful and beautifully presented, using fresh ingredients and authentic recipes with bold, vibrant flavours.

The award-winning Chutney Ivy is based in the city centre's Cultural Quarter and is perfect for a pre-theatre meal. The restaurant combines contemporary fine dining with classic Indian hospitality and prides itself on food cooked freshly to order.

Kayal, located on Granby Street, serves dishes originating from India's Kerala region on the tropical Malabar Coast. The restaurant has a varied menu and specialises in fresh seafood, as would be caught and prepared by the Keralan fishermen and their families.

Sited opposite Leicester Railway Station, Shimla Pinks is a fine dining restaurant with a penchant for authenticity. With chefs brought in from Delhi and the best fresh herbs and spices, the dishes are expertly prepared and a treat for the senses.

For a more contemporary style of Indian cuisine, book a table at Lilu on Highcross Street. The restaurant has both a main menu and a vegan menu. Popular dishes include crispy soft shell crab, tandoor-roasted lamb cutlets, and stuffed baby peppers.

Vegetarian and vegan

Many of the county's popular restaurants now serve vegan options alongside their regular offerings, but there are two city centre restaurants that are dedicated to vegetarian and vegan dishes.

The Good Earth restaurant has been serving delicious vegetarian food in Leicester for decades and now offers vegan and gluten-free options too. The restaurant is open Tuesday to Saturday, from lunch until mid afternoon. You will find it tucked away on Free Lane, just off Halford Street.

Herb, on Granby Street, has a menu inspired by the traditional herbal cooking in Kerala. The restaurant's chefs were all born and bred in the region. Their food is described as authentic, aromatic, colourful and full of flavour. And you don't have to be vegetarian to enjoy it.

International dining

In addition to its Indian cuisine, this multicultural city has a multitude of other opportunities for international dining.

For some fine French-inspired fare, head to Bistrot Pierre on Millstone Lane. The menu is full of flavourful dishes, from France and further afield. Popular dishes include the signature boeuf bourguignon, confit duck leg with puy lentils, and the seasonal vegetable risotto.

San Carlo, on Granby Street, offers a true taste of Italy in a stylish and contemporary setting. Dishes include meat, seafood and vegetarian options, plus authentic Italian pizzas from Leicester's only wood-burning oven. Look out for the Leicester Tigers pizza, with Red Leicester cheese and tiger prawns, which has been dedicated to Leicester's rugby team.

Continuing the Italian journey is Oggi, on London Road. Its name is Italian for today and is a nod to its fresh ingredients, which are prepared simply and in true Italian style. Its range of dishes include popular favourites, like pasta and risotto, alongside rack of lamb, fillet steaks and seafood.

Heading south, just out of the city centre, you'll find the leafy suburb of Stoneygate. Here, on Queens Road, is Barceloneta, which offers a taste of traditional Spain. The

menu comprises a range of tasty tapas dishes, designed for sharing, with Spanish wines, liqueurs and aperitifs.

You will also find a selection of internationally-inspired chain restaurants to the rear of the Highcross Shopping Centre. They include Turtle Bay, Pizza Express, Zizzi, Nando's, Wagamama, Yo Sushi, Frankie & Benny's and Fridays.

Burgers

On Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, St Martins Coffee turns into Crafty Burger and serves up some of the best burgers in the city. The burgers are crafted on site, using locally sourced ingredients, and are served with loaded home-made fries. Look out for the Farmyard Jam, topped with maple bacon, onion jam and American cheese. And the vegan Bhaji Burger, which features an onion and sweetcorn bhaji with Indian condiments in a vegan brioche bun.

Fine dining

For a fine dining experience, head to The White Peacock at the bottom of New Walk. This stylish restaurant has a menu of modern British and international dishes, including vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free options, and a selection of fine wines and cocktails.

Just outside St Martins Square is The Case Restaurant, which focuses on fresh, seasonal produce and no-nonsense British food. Evening meals are served from Wednesday to Saturday and lunches from Tuesday to Saturday.

The Knight & Garter, on Hotel Street, is a perfect spot for a weekend brunch, Sunday lunch or evening dinner. Enter via the Knight's Bar, then, step through a hidden door into the spacious restaurant. The house speciality is steak, supported by a menu of seasonal dishes, inspired by global cuisines, but with a distinctly British twist.

For a uniquely Leicester experience, you can enjoy drinks and a meal in the city's oldest standing house. Wygston's House on Applegate is a Grade 2-listed building dating back to medieval times. Choose from a selection of real ales and draught beers and enjoy a selection of classic dishes in this charming and historic setting.

Excellent local restaurants

North West Leicestershire is home to three of Leicester's most distinguished local parks: Bradgate Park, Swithland Wood and Beacon Hill. After a revitalising scenic walk, you can enjoy a delicious meal in one of the excellent local restaurants.

The Grey Lady is situated just outside the picture postcard village of Newtown Linford. It is a short car journey from Bradgate Park's main entrance and from Swithland Wood. This long-established restaurant occupies more than three acres of land and has an outdoor dining area overlooking the National Forest. It offers a contemporary dining experience with colourful dishes and an emphasis on fine wines and fresh local produce.

Beacon Hill is located near the quaint village of Woodhouse Eaves. Here you'll find The Old Bull's Head: a modern take on the traditional British pub, where relaxed drinking and dining are the order of the day. The extensive bar serves a selection of beers, ciders, fine wines and cocktails, while the restaurant has a menu of high quality seasonal dishes.

Venture north of the city and you'll find the charming riverside village of Mountsorrel. This former market village is home to John's House, Leicestershire's only Michelin-starred restaurant. John Duffin worked in some of the country's top restaurants before returning to his family's Stonehurst Farm to open his own. The restaurant prides itself on its exquisite homegrown ingredients, many of which are supplied by the farm. As you might expect, John's House has a waiting list, so pre-booking in advance is a must.

Following the River Soar south from Mountsorrel, you'll find the village of Barrow upon Soar and local restaurant, The Blacksmiths Arms. This stylish eatery has a seasonal menu, created as a showcase for its fresh, locally-sourced produce. Everything that can be made from scratch is created in the restaurant's own kitchen - from the bread and butter at the start of the meal to the ice cream and home-made desserts at the end.

Further south, towards the city centre, is the village of Anstey and Italian restaurant, Saponi, which offers fine dining with a family atmosphere. Saponi is Italian for flavours and its menu certainly delivers them. Everything is made in-house, using fresh seasonal ingredients for an authentic taste of Italy.

South of the city is the quaint village of Bruntingthorpe. The area is perhaps best known for its race track, which was used in Top Gear, and its airfield and aircraft museum, with its collection of Cold War jets. Bruntingthorpe is also home to The Joiners Arms, a delightful village gastropub, known for its delicious food and friendly service. The pub has a regular menu of favourites, complemented by regular specials, so there's always something new to try. Dishes include the finest British ingredients available, from Scottish beef to Cornish seafood, served with fresh vegetables from nearby allotments and markets.

Slightly east of Bruntingthorpe is the idyllic village of Gilmorton and its gastropub, The Grey Goose. The charming white building has a bright, modern and spacious interior, including a generous bar area where you can enjoy an aperitif or freshly-made cocktail before your meal. The menu comprises a selection of classic flavours and new, inspired dishes created by the expert chefs. The food is elegant, contemporary and stylishly presented.

Leicestershire is home to an award-winning seafood restaurant. The Lighthouse, in Kibworth Beauchamp, has an extensive and ever-changing menu of dishes, designed to deliver seafood that is fresh, sustainable and in season. The menu also has a selection of meat and vegetarian options.

South east of Kibworth, in the nearby town of Market Harborough, is Ascough's, where you can enjoy a stylish and relaxed dining experience with some excellent gourmet food. The restaurant prides itself on producing everything on the premises - from bread and biscuits to ice creams and sorbets. Its mouthwatering menu offers something different, with new and tempting flavour combinations. The food is fresh, delicious and beautifully presented.

Market Harborough is also home to the fabulous Farndon Fields Farm. The farm shop has a bountiful selection of homegrown fruits and vegetables, which are picked from the farm daily. Fresh and local produce also features heavily in the extensive Farmer's Kitchen restaurant menu, which changes with every season. Choose a hearty farmer's

breakfast; a ploughman's lunch, with locally-brewed beer; or a sumptuous afternoon tea, with freshly-made sandwiches, scones and cakes.

If you're based in the west of the county, the charming town of Market Bosworth has two outstanding restaurants. Softleys is located on the market square. The Grade 2-listed building has a classic interior and a high quality menu. All dishes are cooked to order, from fresh, raw ingredients, which are sourced locally wherever possible.

The Black Horse is situated on the other side of the square. It offers a more internationally-inspired menu, with European and Asian flavours alongside more traditional British dishes.

From its cosmopolitan city centre to its countryside gastropubs, wherever you're based in county, you're sure to enjoy a taste of what Leicestershire has to offer.



NIGHTLIFE

WELCOME TO THE NIGHT!

From its lively city centre to its quiet country pubs, there's an enjoyable night out for everyone in Leicestershire.

Leicester city centre comes alive during the evenings, with a lively mix of restaurants, cinemas, theatres, bars, clubs and other attractions to enjoy. So whether you want to be entertained or entertain yourselves, you'll find plenty of things to do.

Cinema

For lovers of the big screen, Leicester has a choice of three cinemas. Most central is the 12-screen Showcase Cinema de Lux, which is located to the rear of the Highcross Shopping Centre. This state-of-the-art cinema plays all the latest blockbusters and immerses you right in the heart of the action. Experience XPlus with its giant wall-to-wall screen, ultra high definition projection and 360 Dolby Atmos sound. Or try RealD 3D, for 3D that's so real you'll feel like you can reach out and touch it. The movie selection is complemented by the Odeon Cinema at Freemans Park.

For something a little different, head to Phoenix, in the city's Cultural Quarter. This two-screen cinema presents a selection of classic films, world movies and Hollywood blockbusters, alongside independent, local and micro-budget productions, you won't find in the mainstream cinemas.

Live shows

If you prefer a live show, Leicester has a selection of performance venues, which host both visiting shows and exclusive homegrown productions.

The city's two largest theatrical venues are its neo-classic De Montfort Hall and its contemporary Curve theatre. Here you'll find all the most high profile acts and shows. There are also two smaller theatres in the Granby Street area. The Y, on East Street, which hosts an eclectic mix of music, comedy, theatre, dance and family shows. And The Little Theatre, on Dover Street, which is the place to go for homegrown drama, musicals and family entertainment.

For a theatre experience with a difference, head south to North Kilworth. In the beautiful grounds of the Kilworth House Hotel is a delightful open air theatre, which lends its stage to music, comedy and musical extravaganzas. The theatre opened in 2007 and enjoys a scenic position in a wooded glade, close to the lake. If you want to eat before the performance, you can choose a delicious pre-theatre meal in the hotel or pack your own picnic and find yourself an outdoor spot in the picturesque estate. As you

can imagine, the theatre is hugely popular. Pre-booking is essential and it is advisable to book evening meals and accommodation at the time you buy your ticket.

The Shed, on Yeoman Street, Leicester, has been a popular spot for fans of live music for decades. It is still one of the best places to see local bands and emerging talent from all over the country. The Musician, on Clyde Street, and The Soundhouse, on Southampton Street, offer similar line-ups. Check their calendars before you go, for the latest information and availability.

The Cookie, on High Street, is another well-loved independent venue, hosting a calendar of fantastic live music and comedy. In addition to some amazing local and little-known talents, famous names including Royal Blood, George Ezra, Jon Richardson and Sean Walsh have all appeared here.

If you love standup comedy, Leicester's Just the Tonic Comedy Club should tickle your fancy. The clubs are known for their mix of high profile comedians and virtual unknowns. Check the website for forthcoming line-ups and booking information.

Cocktails

If you fancy a pre-show cocktail or two, Leicester city centre has some excellent bars, serving a mix of classic cocktails and new concoctions. Manhattan 34 is based in the Cultural Quarter, close to Curve and Phoenix. It has a vintage Art Deco-style and has been inspired by the cocktail bars that sprung up across America when Prohibition ended in 1934. The bar serves up a delicious menu of cocktails accompanied by a busy programme of live music and comedy.

With its flamboyant Art Nouveau facade, 1901 - The Turkey Café, on Granby Street, is one of Leicester's most iconic buildings. Constructed in 1901, it has survived two world wars and several renovations. It was restored to its former glory in 2014 and is now a cafe by day and a cocktail bar by night.

At 45 West Bottle Shop and Bar, on Hotel Street, you'll find a fine selection of premium spirits, fine wines, craft beers and cocktails. The excellent gin selection includes Leicestershire's very own Burleigh's. This locally-distilled gin uses a unique blend of botanicals sourced from Burleigh Wood, in Charnwood.

Leicester's Cank Well was once the city's water source and a focal point for locals to share gossip and divulge secrets. Today, it's known as 33 Cank Street. This bar occupies a prime location in St Martins, where it serves up a selection of classic, artisan and virgin cocktails, tasty tapas and occasional live music.

Around the corner is TØNNE, a bar known for its friendly service, stylish décor and relaxed atmosphere. Inside, you can enjoy an array of craft beers, wines, cocktails and sharing boards.

Also in St Martins, you'll find The Bottle Garden. In this botanical-styled bar you can enjoy a menu of premium cocktails and mocktails, surrounded by twinkly white lights and green foliage.

Just around the corner, on Guildhall Lane, is The Gadabout. Its name means ‘habitual pleasure seeker’ and its logo is a pineapple, which is an international symbol for warmth, friendship and hospitality. The bar serves an extensive menu of signature and classic cocktails, complemented by beers, wines and champagne. Look out for Hostel, a fruity concoction with a base of Maker’s Mark bourbon whiskey.

Thriving pub scene

Leicestershire has a thriving pub culture, with many still choosing their local as a place to socialise. Many pubs offer regular entertainment, with live music or standup comedy, especially at the weekends. Pub quizzes are also popular and offer an opportunity to flex your mental muscles.

The county is known for its breweries, the largest of which is Everards. The first pint of Everards ale was brewed in 1849. Today, there are more than 175 Everards pubs across the East Midlands, all serving a selection of the company’s award-winning ales. Local favourite, Tiger Copper Ale, is the official beer of the Leicester Tigers rugby team.

If you’re south of the county, look for ales from the Langton Brewery in Market Harborough. The brewery is known for its craft ales, including Inclined Plane amber ale, Union Wharf copper ale and Leicester Line auburn ale. The range also includes Thomas Lift bitter, Bullseye stout and Chinwag premium craft lager.

North of the county you’ll find beers from the Charnwood Brewery in Loughborough. Look out for Salvation: a golden beer with flavours of citrus and tropical fruits and Vixen: a copper coloured best bitter with subtle hints of honey, spice and hedgerow fruits. These are the brewery’s perennial offerings, available all year round. They are complemented by a range of seasonal beers, with different varieties released each month.

The Belvoir Brewery is based in Old Dalby, just west of Melton Mowbray. It produces a range of cask and bottled beers, which it supplies to pubs, shops and supermarkets within a 50-mile radius. Notable is its Blue Brew bottled beer, which is infused with Blue Stilton whey.

For a more European beer experience head to Café Bruxelles on High Street, Leicester. The bar is known for its elaborate European decor, including its magnificent domed ceiling, which is painted with delightful scenes and embellished with gold. Inside you’ll find a menu of European food and an excellent selection of Belgian beers. Outside, the bar has its own Hendricks gin garden for al fresco drinking.

Club life

Leicester has an ever-changing club scene, but two clubs in particular have stood the test of time.

With its spectacular digital video wall and world-renowned Funktion One sound system, Club Republic, on Gravel Street, is a must for the more discerning clubber. In addition to its mix of techno, trance and electronic music, the club hosts some of the biggest DJs and live acts.

Popular with both the younger and older crowd, The Fan Club, on Abbey Street, offers a taste of nostalgia. On Fridays the club hosts its popular Atomic 80s night. And on Saturdays the club extends to three rooms. Choose room one for 90s hits, room two for hip hop and RnB, or room three for non-stop indie hits.

Leicestershire's nightlife offers a varied range of experiences, from popular culture to country pubs, cocktails and clubbing. Whatever you choose, you'll be in for a memorable and enjoyable night out.