

Blenheim Palace weekend break

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YOURS VERDICT
Product: www.bespokehotels.com/lambertarms
Price: £79.50
Rating: ★★★★★

If you fancy combining a spot of culture with rural relaxation, why not try a Blenheim Palace Package, courtesy of the Lambert Arms Hotel, Wallingford.

As part of this weekend package you get dinner, bed & breakfast in a lovely hotel on the outskirts of Oxford and two passes to Blenheim Palace House and Gardens, which is only 30 minutes' drive away.

The Lambert Arms Hotel is situated in a quiet spot in the Chiltern Hills, just off junction 6 of the M40 and is really easy to find. Just 20 minutes' drive from Oxford, it's the perfect base for exploring the area.

It's a pretty hotel that was originally a coaching inn, but has been refurbished to include a new courtyard block with really spacious, comfortable rooms. It caters for various functions and conferences while managing to retain a relaxed feel (there was a wedding reception on while we were staying but we never noticed!).

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We found the hotel staff friendly, professional and very well-organised. When we arrived at 10am (check-in to your room is usually early afternoon), our passes were ready and waiting for us, so we left our bags safely at reception and headed off to Blenheim Palace for the day.



Home to the 12th Duke and Duchess of Marlborough and birthplace of Winston Churchill, there's history aplenty here as well as more than 2,000 acres of landscaped parkland and formal gardens.

Blenheim offers a range of tours if you don't want to wander round yourself – private apartment tours, formal gardens walking tours, buggy tours, Palace specialist tours featuring things such as photography, paintings and portraits, ceramics and furniture and even the Ladies Of Blenheim Palace, a fascinating look at the ladies of the Marlborough/Spencer-Churchill family.

2015 is the also the 50th anniversary of Sir Winston Churchill's death. He was born at Blenheim Palace and is buried nearby. You can even walk in Churchill's footsteps using the specially-designed trail.

A handy map offers a series of waymarked trails around the gardens and extensive grounds, ranging from 1.5 miles to 4.6 miles so you can either stroll at your leisure, or strike out and walk round the entire perimeter of the grounds in this circular route. Dogs are welcome on leads, too, but obviously not in the Palace itself.

Our visit was blessed with gorgeous sunshine and a light breeze, perfect for admiring the tulips in bloom in the formal garden and the blossom. We walked around the lake, saw the rose gardens and stood on the little walkway/viewing area to get a good view of the Grand Crosswalk and Bunsen Avenue. So lovely, we were delighted to see the...

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If you've got little ones in tow, the Pleasure Gardens are a family friendly area that includes the Marlborough Hedge, butterfly house and extensive playground. If you're not up to walking them, or if your feet are aching, there's a little train every half an hour that will take you there for just 50p (under-fives go free).

We especially loved the exhibition entitled Churchill's Destiny that parallels the two great military leaders, Sir Winston Churchill and his ancestor, John Churchill, the 1st Duke of Marlborough. So much so we had to buy a book on John Churchill in the large, varied gift shop that offers souvenirs to suit all tastes, including children, as well as locally made products and the Blenheim Palace oven range, from wall hangings resembling tapestries to pencils bearing the Blenheim logo.

There are plenty of places to eat here (it does get very busy) in the form of a variety of cafes and restaurants serving locally sourced, fresh food, from light bites to formal dining. Brown socks eat next outside on a terrace overlooking the formal gardens, but hang on to your food and drink if it's windy!

Useful info:
Blenheim Palace & Gardens,
Woodstock,
Oxfordshire OX20 1PP
Call 0800 849 6500
Visit www.blenheimspice.com

Opening times: Palace, Park and Formal gardens open daily from Saturday Feb 14 to Sun, Dec 20
Park: 9am-6pm
Formal gardens: 10am-5.30pm (autumn 10am-4.45 or dusk if earlier)
During the Palace closed season, the Park remains open except for Christmas Day, from 9am-4.45 of dusk if earlier
Where possible, the site has been adapted for accessibility purposes. Wheelchairs and mobility scooters can be hired on site.

...when we got back to the Lambert Arms, our standard courtyard twin room was ready and our bags had been taken there for us. We had a pot of much needed complimentary tea and enjoyed the opportunity to relax before dinner in the main restaurant.

Our room was large, comfortable, spacious and immaculate. We had a ground-floor room, with added extras such as a hairdryer, TV, tea and coffee-making facilities, toiletries and free Wi-Fi. The bathroom had a rain shower over the bath – very invigorating after a hard day's sight-seeing!

The hotel itself had a nice relaxed atmosphere and there were plenty of leaflets/maps in the reception area offering info on local attractions.

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We were really looking forward to our evening meal after a lively day at Blenheim, so I chose slow-cooked shoulder of lamb, rosemary roasted potatoes, kale, onions, lamb jus and parsnip. It was so tasty (the lamb just fell apart) but for me (about a big eater) the portion was slightly too small!

My daughter opted for been-battered cod and chunky chips, garden pea puree and tartar sauce – and was plenty full! Pudding was a to-die-for milk chocolate truffle with raspberry sorbet.

We then retired to the bar, with its comfy chairs and relaxed ambience, to enjoy a drink before bed.
Breakfast was a buffet with either full English cooked, or continental and was plentiful and tasty. Just right to set us up for the journey home.

Useful info:
The Lambert Arms
Aston Rowant
Near Thame
Wallington
Oxfordshire
OX49 5SQ
Call 01844 3351496
Visit www.bespokehotels.com/lambertarms

◆ 1 Night Blenheim Palace Break – What's included:
1 night's accommodation in a standard room
A delicious full English breakfast
An evening meal in the hotel restaurant (£25 allocation per person)
2 tickets to Blenheim Palace
Based on 2 people sharing a standard twin/double room
£79.50 per person
Package subject to availability until end October 2015

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