

### Day 1: Oxford, United Kingdom—City Tour / Minster Lovell

Our Cotswolds sojourn begins this afternoon in Oxford with a guided walking tour of England's most famous university town. Admire the architecture and heritage of the 15th-century Bodleian Library and several of the colleges that comprise Oxford University, founded by King Henry VIII in 1546. Leaving Oxford, we head west into the heart of the Cotswolds. This rural region, whose name comes from the Old English "cot" for sheep enclosure and "wold," meaning hill—"sheep pens among rolling hills"—spans 800 square miles and is protected as Britain's largest National Landscape. Arrive at Minster Lovell, where a welcome dinner awaits at our inn. This perfectly preserved village of stone cottages with classic thatched roofs enjoys a romantic setting on the River Windrush.

### Day 2: Windrush Valley Walk / Wytham Woods Nature Reserve

The Windrush Valley is one of the prettiest walking destinations in the Cotswolds, and we follow an easy path leading through the postcard-perfect hamlets of Widford, Swinbrook and Asthall. In contrast to the Cotswolds' more heavily touristed towns, these are unspoiled villages that evoke the England of the imagination. The settings are quintessentially Cotswolds, with medieval churches, thatched cottages, cozy pubs, and bridges spanning the river. The scenery is as bucolic as it gets, with the trail skirting pastures filled with grazing sheep enclosed by dry stone walls. Expect abundant wildflowers in spring and summer, a rich palette of warm colors in autumn, and varied bird sightings along the way.

We visit the charming village of Bampton, where many external scenes from Downton Abbey were filmed, then arrive at Aston Pottery and Gardens for lunch. The café serves up lavish homemade fare including famous quiches and fancy sponge cakes and tarts. This afternoon, continue to Wytham Woods Nature Reserve, owned and maintained by Oxford University since 1942 as a site for ecological research. We tour the "backyard natural laboratory" of the university with a private conservator who introduces us to its rich collection of flora and fauna, with more than 500 species of plants, 800 species of butterflies and moths, abundant birds and badgers, spring-fed peat fens, and a wealth of woodland habitats including ancient semi-natural woodland dating to the last Ice Age and secondary woodland intact since the 17th century. Wytham Woods is among the most-studied woodlands in the world, and we learn about the history of research and conservation efforts during our visit.

### Day 3: Bibury / Chedworth Roman Villa / Tetbury—Private Falconry Experience

We start the morning with a stroll to St. Kenelm's Church and the ruins of Minster Lovell Hall, a 15th-century Oxfordshire manor house along the River Windrush. We then make a scenic drive on country lanes to the village of Bibury on the River Coln, where we walk along Arlington Row with its picturesque weavers' cottages built in the 14th century. Continue to Chedworth Roman Villa where a specialist-

guided tour reveals some of the most elaborate Roman antiquities in Britain. The site is preserved in the style of a Victorian archeological dig, and we'll see impressive Roman mosaics, bathhouse rooms, remnants of the steam heating system, and the Nymphaeum, still fed by water that filters through ancient Cotswold limestone. The hidden valley where Chedworth is located offers glorious countryside vistas, with fields hemmed by stands of poplar, chestnut, rowan and whitebeam. The area abounds in sheep, as it has for centuries, and numerous wildlife species inhabit the hedgerows. Raptor sightings are common, and we find scores of pheasants in season. Walk on to Chedworth village, with a picnic lunch en route.

This afternoon, we arrive at our historic manor house hotel on a 220-acre estate in Tetbury, where we're met by a falconer for an interactive birds of prey experience. We'll meet several raptors—typically a hawk, owl, falcon and eagle—which we handle and watch fly as we learn about the history of British falconry.

#### Day 4: Dawn Chorus Walk / Highgrove House—Private Garden Tour / Westonbirt National Arboretum

Rise early for a "dawn chorus" bird walk with a local naturalist, who helps us identify the morning songbirds we are hearing. Later this morning, we have a private guided tour of the gardens at Highgrove House, the country residence of HRH King Charles III, who is an ardent supporter of wildlife conservation and rural landscapes in Britain. Such was his love for the landscape, history and people of the Cotswolds that Charles chose to make this 1796 manor house his personal home. The gardens, more than 35 years in the making, reflect great diversity, from the genteel setting of the Sundial Garden to the unstructured beauty of the Wildflower Meadow.

After lunch at Highgrove, continue to Westonbirt National Arboretum, where you have a choice of a guided interpretive tour or free time to wander the woodlands and gardens. A vital location for research and conservation, Westonbirt holds one of the most beautiful and important plant collections in the world. Its more than 2,500 tree species include rare and intriguing flora from the furthest corners of the globe. The magnificent botanical collection got its start in 1829 by wealthy Victorian landowner Robert Holford, whose passion for nature and plants grew in tandem with the expansion of the British Empire, when naturalist explorers were bringing back new and exotic species from far-flung lands. Holford financed plant-collecting expeditions across the planet, and the arboretum still contains many of the original specimens brought back from these trips. Return to Tetbury to spend a second night.

Please note: On occasion, unexpected changes in the King's schedule may force us to alter or cancel our visit to Highgrove House and Gardens today, since it is his personal residence. When that is the case, we will try to go on another date, or we will substitute an alternate activity.

## Day 5: Slimbridge Wetland Center / Picnic Canal Cruise / Private Tour of Painswick Rococo Garden / Upper Slaughter

Today's visit to a globally important nature reserve offers a rich encounter with conservation leadership in action. Encompassing 650 acres of wetlands along the Severn Estuary, Slimbridge was established in 1946 by Sir Peter Scott, son of Antarctic explorer Captain Robert Scott. Seeking to protect the birds he loved and their habitat, he set up the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) at Slimbridge as a center for science, conservation and public access to nature. Scott presented the BBC's first live television wildlife programs from Slimbridge, created the IUCN red list that measures whether species are threatened or endangered, and was founding chair of WWF, even drawing the original famous panda logo.

We are inspired by Sir Peter's vision as we explore Slimbridge, which he called the "avian Serengeti," given the vast number of wild birds that frequent this mosaic of reedbed, grazing marsh, ponds, pools and riverside flooded meadow. Migrating birds pass through in spring while hatchlings appear in early summer, including kingfishers and cranes. From summer warblers to autumn waders, the activity is lively no matter when we visit. The center also breeds rare and endangered birds that are later released to the wild in their native habitats. We learn why wetlands are crucial to the planet's survival, why they are endangered, and what we must do to preserve and restore them.

A special lunch is in store as we ply the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal aboard a wooden boat, with a hearty ploughman's picnic provided by the historic Black Shed restaurant. Afterward, enjoy a private horticultural walk through Painswick Rococo Garden, tucked into a hidden valley just off the Cotswold Way footpath that winds through the hills. Designed in the 1740s for the owner of Painswick House, it was restored in the 1980s to evoke its original sense of fanciful whimsy and joie de vivre. "Rococo" refers to a period of art fashionable in Europe in the 18th century, characterized by ornamental decoration. England's upper middle classes loved to show off their wealth by indulging in the flamboyant and frivolous, and gardens like this one were an elaborate entertainment space to delight their guests. Today, it is England's only surviving rococo garden. Highlights of our tour may include heritage roses, fiery day lilies, an orchid-filled wildflower meadow, and a focus on butterfly conservation.

Continuing to the tiny hamlet of Upper Slaughter, we reach our luxurious country house hotel where we spend three nights. Dinner this evening is at a cozy local pub.

## Day 6: Honeydale Farm / The Slaughters Walk / Bourton-on-the-Water

Awaken this morning in one of the Cotswolds' most enchanting settings. The villages of Upper and Lower Slaughter have names that derive from the Saxon word slothre or sloh, meaning "slough" or "marshy place," rather than any grisly heritage. Connected by a peaceful mile walk along the River Eye, the villages look straight out of a fairytale with their tiny cottages, steeped churches, stone walls, trailing roses and picturesque old mill.

As we weave our way through the bucolic landscape, we'll observe how the traditional rural heritage of the Cotswolds has shaped the region over the centuries. More than 80% of these rolling hills is

agricultural land. Nature here has been managed and conserved by the farming community, which continues its commitment to careful stewardship today. At Honeydale Farm, learn about sustainable agriculture in the Cotswolds. Committed to ecological farming and public education, the FarmED program on the 107-acre site seeks to reconnect people to the land in ways that will nourish them and the Earth both. Our private guided walking tour covers the heritage orchard, kitchen garden, meadows and woodland as we learn about natural flood management, regenerative agriculture, the micro dairy, and the heritage wheat the farm grows for artisan bread making.

After a walk between the Slaughters villages this afternoon, continue to Bourton-on-the-Water, one of the most famous of the Cotswold villages, for some free time—sit down for cream tea, browse the shops, or wander along the river admiring the low stone bridges that create postcard-worthy scenes. This evening, enjoy a dinner featuring local farm-to-table fare at an inviting country inn.

#### Day 7: Classic Cotswolds Walk to Broadway / Hidcote Gardens

Our morning walk begins at Broadway Tower, rising atop a beacon hill that is one of the highest points in the Cotswolds with a view into 16 counties. This landmark was the vision of 18th-century landscape designer Capability Brown, who enlisted renowned architect James Wyatt to complete it in 1798. Members of the Arts and Crafts movement used the tower as a country holiday retreat, and it was here that William Morris started his campaign for the preservation of historic monuments. A walk on the 200-acre parkland estate surrounding the tower may reveal the resident red deer herd.

From the tower base we walk along an ancient trade route down Fish Hill, where the Cotswold Escarpment drops off into the Vale of Evesham. Making our way down to the town of Broadway, we pass bucolic fields of grazing sheep, with lambs frolicking in season. A portion of our path follows the Cotswold Way, a 102-mile national long-distance walking trail connecting Chipping Campden to Bath. We'll have some free time to explore Broadway, known as the Jewel of the Cotswolds and noted for its antique shops, tea rooms and twee cafes.

Then it's on to Hidcote Gardens for a private tour of this National Trust property regarded as one of the finest displays of flora in England. Hidcote's designer, Lawrence Johnstone, sourced plants for the gardens from around the world and donated the site to the National Trust in 1948—making it the first of many significant British gardens the Trust would acquire. This evening, a festive farewell dinner awaits as we gather together one last time.

## Day 8: London / Depart

An early morning transfer is included to London's Heathrow Airport, about a two-hour drive for those who are returning home or headed to other travels. If you choose to remain in the region for further exploration on your own, you can leave any time before checkout from Upper Slaughter—consider a visit to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Blenheim Palace, Sudeley Castle, the Roman city of Bath, and Shakespeare's childhood home of Stratford-upon-Avon—all are nearby.

Please note: While all activities listed on our itinerary will be included, some may take place on days or times that are different from what is shown, depending on local schedules.