



# Cheltenham Spa

Step back into the Regency era with a look at fine architecture and a taste of the local mineral water

## WHY GO?

**After the discovery of mineral springs nearby in the early 1700s, plain old Cheltenham, sitting in the nub of the Cotswolds, reinvented itself to become gentrified Cheltenham Spa. And it still boasts an aura of gracious living to this day, maintained by the glut of Regency architecture flanking many of its roads leading to the town centre. Characterised by intricate ironwork balconies and stucco façades, the Montpellier district is a particularly good quarter to get a flavour of Regency Cheltenham too, with its tiny Dickensian 'trifle' (luxury goods) shops supported by beautifully sculpted caryatids.**

## THINGS TO SEE AND DO

### ■ Pittville Pump Room

Pittville Park

☎ 01242 523852

🌐 [www.pittvillepumproom.org.uk](http://www.pittvillepumproom.org.uk)

In a park, about a mile from the town centre, the Pittville Pump Room was built between 1825-1830, its design based on the Ionic order, with lovely Greek columns looking out over a lush lawn. Though it was planned as the centrepiece of a wealthy politician and entrepreneur's estate, today the Pump Room lives on as a venue for private and corporate events held beneath its dome. You can still take the famous alkaline waters from little tumblers here at the original marble and scagliola pump, though the waters are now pumped electronically rather than by hand. The water has the texture of saltwater, without a strong salty taste.

**Open** daily 9am-4pm – closed to the public during functions. The Pump Room does advise checking ahead before visiting to avoid disappointment

**Admission** free

### ■ Walk around Regency Cheltenham Spa

Tourist Information Centre

☎ 01242 522 878

🌐 [www.visitcheltenham.com](http://www.visitcheltenham.com)

The first *Cheltenham Guide* in 1781 described a visit to the town as 'a journey of health and pleasure'. Whether that description still stands today or not, a good stroll through Cheltenham's sweeping classical terraces or broad tree-lined walks is certainly an exercise in the latter.

The town is characterised by the intricate patterning of ironwork balconies, stucco façades of Regency townhouses and leafy promenades – furthermore, VisitCheltenham go as far as to assert that this is the most complete Regency town in England. You can buy an informative miniguide booklet describing walking tours (50p) from the tourist information centre. One of the walks takes in Cheltenham Ladies College.

Alternatively, 'techies' might prefer an MP3-guided tour of town – tours of the Montpellier district or to Pittville are available to download at 🌐 [www.tourist-tracks.com](http://www.tourist-tracks.com) for £5.

## GOOD PLACES TO STAY

### ■ Hannafords

☎ 01242 515181

🌐 [www.hannafordshotel.com](http://www.hannafordshotel.com)

Conveniently placed part way between the town centre and the Pittville Pump Room, this little townhouse forms part of an attractive Regency terrace with ironwork balconies. With a little bar (overlooking the patio) in the residents lounge, this is technically a hotel, but the size of a guesthouse. Some of the 10 charming bedrooms have Regency-era features, such as floral mouldings – and creaky floorboards! Light sleepers may want to avoid front facing rooms which overlook a main road. As we went to press, we heard that Hannafords was due to have new owners.

**Rooms from £70 B&B**

## GETTING THERE

### By rail

■ First Great Western 🌐 [www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk](http://www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk). Direct trains from Bath (one hour and 10 minutes) and Great Malvern (45 minutes), and other towns such as Gloucester, Worcester, Bristol, and London (Paddington).

■ Cross Country trains 🌐 [www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk](http://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk). Cheltenham Spa is on the main route from Penzance to Aberdeen via cities such as Birmingham, Sheffield, Newcastle and Edinburgh.

■ Arriva 🌐 [www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk](http://www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk). Trains from Cardiff, Newport and Bridgend.

■ London Midland 🌐 [www.londonmidland.com](http://www.londonmidland.com). Direct trains from Worcester and Gloucester.

### ■ Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum

☎ 01242 237 431

🌐 [www.cheltenhammuseum.org.uk](http://www.cheltenhammuseum.org.uk)

The Art Gallery and Museum offers a comprehensive stride back in to Cheltenham's local history, particularly excelling in its Regency past. But there's plenty more on offer too, from exhibitions on Edward Wilson, (Cheltenham's very own Arctic explorer who perished with Robert Scott) to the Arts and Crafts Movement, which is rooted in the Cotswolds.

**Open** daily 10am-5pm (10am-4pm November-March). The Museum stays open till 8pm on the third Thursday of each month

**Admission** free

### Hotel du Vin

☎ 01242 588450

🌐 [www.hotelduvin.com/cheltenham](http://www.hotelduvin.com/cheltenham)

On a quiet street, five minutes on foot to the town centre, this hotel occupies a Regency building, yet is contemporary (and smart) inside. Wine and horses are the main themes. An impressive chandelier of wine glasses hangs above the spiral staircase that leads down to the bistro. Here, staff hold wine tasting sessions – the hotel boasts two cellars. The walls of the clubby ‘Sinners Enclosure’ bar are adorned with photos of race-goers, and a huge, cheeky mural that’s worth a look. The 49 rooms are named after wine houses and come with robes, monsoon showers and Egyptian linen. Three rooms are adapted for wheelchairs. You can pamper yourself with spa treatments, but there’s no pool or Jacuzzi. Free car park. **Rooms from £145 (room only)**

### Butler’s Guest Accommodation

☎ 012142 570771

🌐 [www.butlers-hotel.co.uk](http://www.butlers-hotel.co.uk)

Butler-themed décor in this cosy and unpretentious 1837 guesthouse. Breakfast is a hearty affair. Well placed between the station and the town centre.

**Double room B&B from £85**

## GOOD PLACE TO EAT AND DRINK

### The Royal Well Tavern

☎ 01242 221 212

🌐 [www.theroyalwelltavern.com](http://www.theroyalwelltavern.com)

There’s a French twist to British fare at this small, low-key brasserie in the town centre, close to The Promenade. The classy décor includes wood banquettes surrounded by wood-panelled walls that are decorated with ornate, gilt-framed, Regency-style portraits. The daily changing menu might offer oysters and a roast pork belly with prunes and pommes purée. Our prawn-topped bream was perfectly grilled – simply presented, but tasty. Starters around £6, mains £15, and desserts £5.

## USEFUL INFORMATION

Download a free map and town guide from [www.visitcheltenham.com](http://www.visitcheltenham.com). A visitor guide is also available at the town’s tourist information centre and costs £1.

### Events

Cheltenham National Hunt Festival races – March 16th-19th 2010 [www.cheltenham.co.uk](http://www.cheltenham.co.uk).  
Cheltenham Music Festival from July 2nd-17th [www.cheltenhamfestivals.com](http://www.cheltenhamfestivals.com).



Panorama of hills and valley in Cheltenham



Beautiful pink blossom trees and tall Scots Pine in a country churchyard

**For the report on English spa towns, see p36 of the January 2010 issue of Which? Holiday**