

## Travel: York Castle and more in England

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For someone who yearns to take a trans -Atlantic flight to a faraway land but is afraid of confronting a language barrier, England may seem like the ideal destination. An island full of fellow English-speakers allows you to step outside of your normal boundaries without straying too far from your comfort zone. Of course, when most people imagine traveling across the pond, the grand city of London often comes to mind, filling your head with images of Big Ben, double-decker buses, and all the hustle and bustle of a giant urban center. However, if you are thinking of making the trip, I would urge you look farther north upon one of the oldest cities in England: York.

One of the best reasons to look at York over London is one that most college students need to keep in mind: money. Lodging in York is much cheaper than in London, letting you put more money towards actually seeing the sights and eating. In addition, flying in to a smaller airport like Manchester's airport instead of one of London's is not only cheaper, but also a lot less stressful since Manchester's airport is much less crowded. Just fly in and hop on a train, and you're in York!

The first thing to plan on any trip is where you're going to stay. While York has its fair share of chain hotels, I would definitely recommend staying in a traditional bed and breakfast if you can. Not only do you get to wake up every morning to one of the best breakfasts you will ever have in your life, but also the owners will treat you like family. While out sightseeing one day, I twisted my ankle horribly. When I got back to our lodgings (the Hedley House Hotel), they offered me a towel with ice and the owners personally asked me if my ankle was doing better every day.

One of the best things about York is that it is relatively small, but offers all the amenities you could want in a big city. You can walk literally from one end of the city to the other in a single day, and along the way encounter nearly any kind of shop or store you could want. One of the best shopping spots in York is the large open-air market located in the middle of the city, where you can find street vendors selling all sorts of fresh fruits, vegetables, cheeses and meats, perfect for a light-mid day lunch or as ingredients in a home-made dinner later on in the night. In fact, street-vendors or hole -in-the-wall restaurants that serve food to go sell the best food you can find in York. I visited tons of pubs, and the best fish and chips I had in all of York came from a tiny walk-in only stall that served their humongous helpings of haddock and chips wrapped up in the day's newspaper.

But, please, walk in to every pub you can find. Though the word pub in America usually means a bar, pubs in England can mean anything from a family restaurant to a raucous football bar full of hooligans. Even if you're normally not a big drinker, it's worth it to try the wide variety of both beer and cider that each place has on tap. One quick tip: most pubs in England don't serve you at your table. You place your whole order at the bar, and then someone will either bring it to you or you'll pick it up at the bar as well. Some of my favorite pubs included Crosskeys and The Old White Swan (try the mushy peas!).

Last tip for food: you absolutely must visit Betty's while in York. Though the waits can be extremely long and the menu is a bit pricey, it is absolutely worth it. The food is delicious and the tea is out of this world. I was never a big tea drinker until I went to England, and once I tried English tea I could start a day without my cuppa'. Betty's also has a large selection of their teas that you can take home with you, and you'll probably drop several pounds into your favorite blend.

York is also full of historical sights, some of which are fairly well hidden. York's most obvious attraction is the York Minster, which dominates the skyline and is clearly visible from almost any point within the city. The Minster is one of the largest Gothic cathedrals in the world and also contains the largest example of medieval stained glass in the world. Once inside the Minster, you can climb 275 stairs to reach the top of the cathedral's central tower, or journey underground to explore the Undercroft, where you can walk on an actual Roman road dating back thousands of years. Another big attraction is the Merchant Adventurer's Hall, an intact medieval guildhall the largest timber-framed building still standing in the UK. York Castle, also called Clifford's Tower, is another ancient must-see and the site of one of the most horrible events in the town's long history. You should also set aside a day just to walk along the wall that surrounds York. Several miles long, York's original city walls (part of which date back to 71 A.D.) are broken up by several gatehouses called "bars" that usually contain museums or other shops.

Of course, not everything worth seeing is as obvious as a castle or a cathedral. In the basement of a pub named The Roman Bath, you can literally walk through the ruins of an ancient Roman bathhouse. Accessible only through one of York's winding side streets known as "snickets," Barley Hall is a restored medieval townhouse, complete with tour guides in period garb.

However, one of the best things about York (and England in general) is the ease of traveling to other cities. While York is a fine town, you may just have the urge to trek out to London, Manchester, or maybe even Scotland. No need to worry about renting a car or catching a bus, just take the train! All of England's cities are linked by an island-spanning rail system that is incredibly cheap and easy to use. If you plan on traveling a lot via rail, it might be a good idea to buy a rail pass, but otherwise you can show up half an hour before your train and buy your ticket from an automated machine.

While I and many other students experienced York via a study -abroad program offered here at UMM, you should definitely consider York as a prime destination for a personal vacation as well. It is an amazingly charming city that surprises you with something new every day.

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