

SHAKESPEARE COUNTRY LEISURE DRIVES



THE ARDEN TOUR

(Driving directions are shown in red text)

Tour details

Approximately 43 miles

The Arden was the name once given to the land north of the River Avon. In Shakespeare's time much of this countryside was covered in the Forest of Arden and this is where, in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare's Rosalind tutored Orlando in the ways of love. The tour passes through some of South Warwickshire's prettiest villages

This tour starts from the roundabout with the Globe sculpture in Alcester. Follow signs to Arrow and Ragley Hall.

Alcester began as a Roman camp where Ryknild Street crossed the River Alne. It is now one of the most thoroughly investigated small Roman towns in the country. Visit **Roman Alcester (1)** to experience small town life in Roman times. The fine church tower of St Nicholas dates from the 14th century. It has monuments to the Marquess of Hertford of Ragley Hall and Sir Fulke Greville, restorer of Warwick Castle.

At the next roundabout take the second exit signed Wixford. Just after Arrow village, the entrance to Ragley Hall is on the right.

Set in 400 acres of parkland, woodland and gardens, **Ragley Hall (2)** is the family home of the Marquess and Marchioness of Hertford. The Hall contains 18th century furniture, paintings and china, Baroque plasterwork and a stunning 20th century mural.

If visiting Ragley Hall, turn left on leaving the estate and, before the road bends sharply round to the left, turn right and pass over a bridge. If not visiting Ragley, before the road bends sharply to the right (clearly signposted), take the left fork and pass over a bridge. Pass the Fish Inn as you enter Wixford. Go over a humpback bridge, then follow the road round to the right (a sharp bend), and go past the Three Horseshoes Pub.

Nestling by the River Arrow, just after the Fish Inn, lies a row of pretty half-timbered almshouses built by Sir William Throckmorton of nearby Coughton Court. The village of **Wixford's** connection with the Roman Catholic Throckmortons is thought to be the reason for Shakespeare calling it "papist Wixford".

Just after leaving Wixford take the right turn, signed Broom. After a left hand bend keep straight ahead passing a turn on the right for the village centre. Pass Broom Hall Inn on the right, go over the bridge, and enter the outskirts of Bidford-on-Avon. Drive through this quiet village.

Shakespeare is said to have taken part in a drinking competition between Stratford and Bidford-on-Avon, having drunk at “Piping Pebworth, Dancing Marston, Haunted Hillboro’, Hungry Grafton, Dudging Exhall, Papist Wixford, Beggarly Broom and Drunken Bidford”.

At the T-junction with B439 (opposite a petrol station) turn left. At the next roundabout take the third exit for the village centre and shops. (There is a car park on the left after the roundabout if you wish to explore Bidford on foot). Go straight over at the traffic lights and over a bridge on the River Avon . (Just over the bridge, take a sharp right turn to the recreation ground for picnics and riverside walks).

The 15th century bridge in Bidford, with eight arches, is where the Roman Ryknild Street forded the River Avon on its way to Alcester.

At the crossroads (on the B4085) turn left to Barton and Welford-on-Avon. Drive into the village of Barton.

Look for the unusually named Cottage of Content pub in Barton, next to the appropriately named Letterbox Cottage, on the second bend in the village.

After approximately two miles, enter Welford-on-Avon.

Welford is an idyllic village with many white washed, half-timbered thatched cottages and a tall maypole on the village green - around which local children still dance on May Day.

At the T-junction in the village turn left, passing the village green. Church Street, on the left just before the Bell Inn, is one of the most picturesque roads in Warwickshire. Take care as you pass the Bell Inn on your left (the road narrows to a single lane). As you leave the village, pass the Four Alls pub just before crossing a bridge over the River Avon.

If you want to take a diversion, a little further on, in the village of **Shottery**, stands **Anne Hathaway’s Cottage (3)**. Re-trace the steps Shakespeare must have taken when courting, before they were married in 1582. Otherwise continue on the tour with the directions.

On arrival at the T-junction with the B439 turn right signed Stratford and then immediately left to Binton. At the top of the hill is Binton Church.

The Church of St Peter’s at **Binton** has a stained glass window dedicated to Scott of the Antarctic who was married to the sister of the Rector. From the churchyard there are lovely views over the Avon valley.

Continue through Binton to the crossroads by the Blue Boar Inn at Temple Grafton. The Blue Boar is a 16th century traditional freehouse and restaurant with bar snacks and local ales. Turn right to Aston Cantlow and Billesley, taking in the view across to Stratford on the right. Take extra care at the staggered crossroads with the busy A46. Cross over (right then left). You will pass Billesley Manor Hotel on your right. Follow the signs for Wilmcote, taking a right turn signed Wilmcote and Mary Arden’s House after about two miles. If you want to take a diversion, driving straight on will bring you to Aston Cantlow.

The village of **Aston Cantlow** is grouped around a small green and has some fine old buildings, including the black and white timbered Guild House, where, in the early 16th century, Aston Cantlow’s weekly market and fair was held. It is said that William Shakespeare’s parents, Mary Arden and John Shakespeare, were married in the Church of St John the Baptist in 1557.

To continue with our tour, after turning right for Wilmcote, you will reach the village after about a mile. Turn left just after the Masons Arms, opposite the Mary Arden Inn. Mary Arden's Farm is on your left.

Mary Arden's Farm (4) is an early Tudor house which was the childhood home of Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden. The timbered farmhouse and outbuildings feature many displays about the work and traditions of the countryside around Stratford. There is also a working blacksmith, falconry demonstrations and special events to tie in with the farming calendar.

Continue along this road, crossing over the Stratford-upon-Avon canal and railway line, to the T-junction with the A3400. Turn left at the T-junction signed Henley and Wootton Wawen. An optional detour to see the longest aqueduct in England involves going past the turning to Bearley Station and turning left, by the Golden Cross pub, down Salters Lane. Otherwise, follow the A3400 towards Wootton Wawen.

Just before the village of **Wootton Wawen** you pass the Navigation Inn. This was named after the navigators (navvies) who built the canals (the 'navigation'). A small aqueduct carries the canal over the main road. After passing under the canal bridge **Yew Tree Farm Craft Centre (5)** is on your right. This traditional old English farmyard houses a farm shop, range of country crafts and a restaurant with good home baking.

Drive on past the little church and red brick Old Mill buildings on the right. The A3400 then crosses over the River Alne with its waterfall in front of Wootton Hall on the right. Turn right immediately after the lodge house, at the entrance gates to the hall, to visit the Saxon Sanctuary in St Peter's Church.

The Saxon Sanctuary (6) at St Peter's Church is possibly Warwickshire's oldest church and a storybook in stone. A colourful 'Forest of Arden' exhibition, in the barn-roofed Lady Chapel, traces the history of the woodland village.

The A3400 bends to the right passing the Old Bull's Head pub and restaurant on the left. The pub is a Grade I Listed building and houses a lovely restaurant where you can stop to have a bite to eat. Look over to your right for views of the church. Continue into Henley-in-Arden. Once you pass over the traffic lights the road becomes the High Street. After passing the church of St. John the Baptist with its offset diamond shaped clock, there is street parking available. If you wish to, park and walk back to the church, passing Guild Hall.

Henley-in-Arden originated as a clearing in the Forest of Arden and has a medley of leaning half-timbered buildings containing small shops and a good selection of restaurants, inns and tearooms. The earthworks of the 12th century motte and bailey castle can still be seen next to the Norman Church of St Nicholas. **Heritage & Visitor Centre (7)** is a part 14th century house containing a history of the town including a model of the Norman castle.

Continue out of Henley on the A3400 for around 4 miles, passing the Henley Golf and Country Club on the left. Turn left, signed Earlswood, just after Pickles Restaurant on the right and follow a narrow road with passing places. At the crossroads go straight over. Follow the road for about 3 miles, turn left at the next junction, then follow the road to the right signed Earlswood. At the T-junction turn left onto the B4101 (Broad Lane). At the crossroads turn left into Tom Hill. Go under a low bridge and enter the village of Tanworth-in-Arden. Continue to the village centre, past the church and war memorial.

At the T-junction, next to the war memorial, turn right. Take the next left signed Ullenhall (Bates Lane). At the crossroads turn left to Ullenhall (Forde Hall Lane). After 1½ miles you will pass Mockley Manor Residential Home. Follow the road round to the right, signed Ullenhall. At the T-junction turn left signed

Henley-in-Arden/Wootton Wawen. Go over the speed bumps through the village of Ullenhall. After approximately 2½ miles turn right onto the A4189, signed Redditch. At Oldberrow Church, turn left signed Morton Bagot. At the crossroads go straight over, passing Church Farm on your left. At the T-junction turn right, signed Studley, following the road for just over a mile. At the next T-junction turn left onto the A435 to Alcester. As you enter the village of Coughton, Coughton Court is on your left.

Coughton Court (9), home of the Throckmorton family since 1409, has a fine Tudor gatehouse with half timbered courtyard. The House contains an excellent collection of family portraits and memorabilia while the grounds include a lake, riverside walks and, unusually, two churches. The walled garden is a splendid example of garden rooms set with their own particular plant themes.

At the next roundabout take the second exit for Alcester town centre. Pass the Roebuck Inn on your left. (At the traffic lights turn left down School Road and follow signs to a car park if stopping to explore the town). To return to the starting point go straight ahead at these lights, and you will return to the roundabout with the Globe sculpture.

