



HERTFORDSHIRE

The county once known as Britain's Hollywood has history, nature and culture in abundance, along with film locations past and present

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What do you think of when you hear the word Hertfordshire? A boring home county? You would be very wrong. We have many, many places that reward the visitor. The county's location just above London and bordered by Essex, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Cambridgeshire, means it's within easy travelling distance of a large swathe of the country. So why visit?

For the nature. We may not have mountains but we do have the beautiful Chiltern Hills. Rising in the west of the county and stretching to Oxfordshire, the views, rare wildlife and walks are breathtaking. Lakes? Yes, some of the best in Europe for birders who flock like their namesakes to the majestic

Wildlife Trust-managed Tring Reservoirs. Forest? The National Trust Ashridge Estate covers 5,000 acres – perfect for walking, biking and even horse riding.

Culture? Did you know Herts was once known as Britain's Hollywood? With more than a century of film making at the studios in and around Elstree, the county has played a major role in the industry, going back to Hitchcock's first talkie, through Star Wars and Kubrick (a Herts man) up to the blockbusters of today and even *Strictly*. And the towns, villages and stately homes of the county are the backdrop to countless TV and film productions. The golden age of filmmaking that attracted the biggest stars in the world, is upon us again with massive investment in several new studios.

Pictured:
St Albans Abbey
in Hertfordshire



Photo: Archimage-Aerial/Alamy Stock Photo

What about history? Being the playground of royals and aristocracy for hundreds of years, who headed north out of the capital to the vast estates and hunting grounds of Herts – a county named after the stag – England’s rich history is never far away. The majestic stately homes of Hatfield – where Elizabeth I discovered she’d become queen – Knebworth and glorious Ashridge, all make for wonderful days out.

Hertfordshire is also a county of firsts – the first garden cities and the first new towns were built here as visions of a better way of living – creative, industrious self-contained communities filled with green spaces and surrounded by countryside.

For shopping, the many market towns – with their pretty streets and mishmash of ancient buildings – make the perfect setting for independent boutiques, award-winning restaurants and creatives. And with its plentiful villages so desirable, these too have boomed in recent years to thrive once more. Always one of the first places people look to when moving out of London, the county’s house prices have rocketed, and the retail offering has risen to match. ■

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5 *Local gems* IN HERTFORDSHIRE

1 *NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM*

Riding around the grounds on a giant tortoise or his zebra-led carriage, 2nd Baron Rothschild knew how to have a good time on his Tring estate. Part of the fabulously wealthy banking dynasty, he was also an avid natural historian. His incredible collection of animals can now be viewed at this purpose-built Victorian museum. nhm.ac.uk/visit/tring.html

2 *ST ALBANS*

A city built on one of Roman Britain’s most important settlements, St Albans isn’t lacking in history. The cathedral, visible from miles around, is the oldest continuous place of Christian worship in Europe and is dedicated to Britain’s first saint. The city also features arguably the oldest pub in Britain, and is also one of best places to shop in the county. enjoystalbans.com

3 *STANDON CALLING FESTIVAL*

What began as a party on an aristocratic estate in rolling countryside, has become one of the success stories of the boutique festival scene. Playful and family-friendly, yet with enough oomph to attract some of the biggest acts, this four-day summer celebration of music, comedy, wellness and more is a must-book event. standon-calling.com

4 *HENRY MOORE FOUNDATION*

The revered sculptor Henry Moore lived for much of his life in the village of Perry Green, where the Henry Moore Foundation now celebrates his monumental achievements. With a large sculpture park, his studio, a state-of-the-art gallery, shop and cafe, plus his home and gardens, it makes for a captivating day out. henry-moore.org

5 *MAKING OF HARRY POTTER WARNER BROS STUDIO TOUR*

A must for any Harry Potter fan, explore the original sets from the hugely successful films and discover behind the scenes secrets. Head along Diagon Alley, see Professor Dumbledore’s library and gawp at the Great Hall. wbstudiotour.co.uk