

## **The Art of Feeling Good.**

A series of stories describing how the great spa traditions are alive and well in Bath, while new ones are developing, featuring:

**Wellness of the spirit**

**Exercise the mind.**

**Exercise the body.**

**Therapeutic landscapes.**

**Socialise in style.**

To feel good, expose your senses to good things. Not just bathing and spa treatments. But music and art. Exercise. Beautiful views. Sociable gatherings. Stimulating events. Food. Drink. Nature.

The great spas of Europe have always made people feel good – and Bath is no exception. With natural, thermal water at its heart, it is a true spa town that continues to evolve as a destination not just for bathing, but for exercise, relaxation and rejuvenation in the broadest sense...for wellness of mind, body and soul.

The European spa journey is not one of austerity. In Bath, just as in Baden-Baden, Budapest, Montecatini and Spa itself, you can choose from music-halls, race-courses, galleries, theatres, casinos, sporting arenas, lavish hotels and restaurants. Enjoyment and even a little indulgence are all part of the tradition in the city that was re-invented by Beau Nash as ‘the first pleasure resort in the kingdom’.

### *The Art of Feeling Good. 1*

## **Wellness of the spirit.**

### **The mystery of the springs.**

If spirituality thrives where science cannot fully explain, then it should be no surprise that Bath has been at various times a door to the pagan Otherworld, a Roman sacred temple, a destination for Medieval pilgrims and a focal point for natural therapy.

Even in the modern age, despite the investigations of geologists and their seismographs, carbon dating and isotopic recorders, the precise source and sequence of geological events that bring millions of litres of steaming, healing water to the centre point of Bath every day, have continued to resist definitive explanation.

This elusiveness extends the aura that surrounds Britain's only natural hot springs. The distinguished geologist Dr Geoff Kellaway allowed in his 1991 scientific investigation that, "For all Man's great skills and knowledge, sometimes our very existence depends on matters outside human control."

### **The door to the pagan Otherworld.**

As early as 8,000 BC in Neolithic times, there is evidence of human occupation and activity. For the Celts and Ancient British tribes who first established shrines at these and other springs over 2,000 years ago, all matters were outside human control. Spirits oversaw everything. And so the healing springs of the Avon valley required no further explanation – just veneration of the goddess Sul, whose name derives from the Gaelic word for 'eye' or 'gap', and who guarded the spring, generously allowing the boiling, fluid spirit to pass from her world up to ours.

For visitors to Thermae Bath Spa, the naturally warm water on tap is not in itself a miracle. Yet, 3,000 years after Prince Bladud took the cure in the mineral-rich mud of the Avon valley, there remains a quality to the springs that is taken for granted.

### **Sacred Roman temple.**

Many visitors will also recognise Bath by the Roman name of Aquae Sulis. The Romans merged Sul with Minerva, their own goddess of wisdom and healing, and created a great bathing complex, complete with temple, altar and Sacred Spring – a medium through which a god or goddess might be contacted and reparations sought.

The act of bathing itself was a sacred act for the Romans – and remains so in many places and cultures across the world – whereby natural spring water cleanses not just the body, but the spirit. Even now, a visit to the Roman Baths, is a powerful experience, where the constantly steaming water, the Gorgon's Head and the stones inscribed with curses, create a direct connection to another time. It is easy to imagine the people of Aquae Sulis worshipping here, communing with their gods and goddesses, connecting with the spirits of their ancestors and renewing themselves.

### **A destination for Medieval pilgrims.**

There are many towns that owe their existence to natural springs, evolving into destination spas in the modern sense after starting life as pagan shrines, then holy wells and places of pilgrimage.

From the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards when the church took control of the baths and the surrounding lodgings, the increasing number of pilgrims drawn to Bath by the healing waters led to a mini-boom of building, hospitality and tourism. To this day, the springs are surrounded by ancient hospitals and hospices, many owned by St John's Trust, which was established in 1174 for the sustenance of pilgrims, poor people, nuns and monks. The Cross Bath is believed to be so named due to the crosses borne by these pilgrims, and its status as a place of miracles was cemented when the hitherto barren wife of James II, Mary of Modena, fell pregnant after bathing there on the instruction of her physician.

Other spa towns such as Lourdes, where pilgrims follow the instruction of Our Lady of Lourdes to 'drink at the spring and bathe in it' retain the sense of mystique that accumulates over the centuries, when people believe they are in the presence of a sacred phenomenon.

### **The age of reason.**

For all its spiritual traditions and origins, and the implication of mysterious forces, Bath has also had a parallel strain of voices attempting to rationalise the healing powers of the waters – with their origin in the dissolution of the monasteries.

From the 12<sup>th</sup> century until 1539, the baths were controlled by the church. But Henry VIII's drive to disband Catholic institutions also included holy wells and pilgrimages. Thereafter, the buildings surrounding the baths were increasingly occupied by secular physicians who published 'authoritative' studies rationalising the medicinal properties of the hot springs.

The spa of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Bath was still much more focused on a determination to scientifically explain the benefits of the water. This somewhat austere exclusion of a sense of wonder culminated in the complete closure of the spa in 1978, with seemingly little appetite to retain a medical facility that could not be entirely rationalised.

### **Focal point for natural healing.**

By the 1990s, when the Thermae Bath Spa project was conceived, a new age of spirituality was underway and this open-mindedness and will to recognise and promote natural healing and secular spirituality has been part of a worldwide renaissance of spas and springs.

Since 1991, the Cross Bath had been maintained as a place of meditation by The Springs Foundation, whose efforts gained recognition of the Cross Spring as a sacred site by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation and by the World Wildlife Fund's Sacred Land Project.

Now, the spring rises freely up into the open air and this historic site continues as a tiny sanctuary in the centre of a bustling city – a place where you can relax and swim, steam and dream. And as you float in the Cross Bath, you may notice that the spirit of Sul, is subtly and beautifully evoked by the intersecting oval pools that create an 'eye' through which the water emerges.

**Sustaining mind, body and spirit.**

The very nature of spirituality is, of course, elusive. And the sometimes conflicting, sometimes overlapping principles of orthodox religion and paganism, conventional and alternative medicine have all, at times, harnessed the properties of the hot springs to promote their own cause.

Nowadays religion and spa co-exist peacefully. There is a restoration of the Abbey in which energy from the waste-water of the hot springs will be used to heat the building; and Bellott's Hospital, built in 1608 as 'a new hospital for lame pilgrims' has already been incorporated into The Gainsborough Bath Spa Hotel which also draws upon Bath's mineral rich water.

The springs themselves, they just keep on flowing – more constant than any politician, doctor, priest or shaman. As the inscription to the Cross Bath says, 'water is the ultimate life'. And as long as it keeps on gushing upwards in Bath it will continue to sustain minds and bodies, but most of all spirits.

## *The Art of Feeling Good. 2*

### **Exercise the mind.**

#### **Music, theatre, film...**

Nowadays, any self-respecting spa town will boast at least one annual music festival. In Bath, as well as the main International Music Festival and a lively Fringe Festival in May, there is a Mozart Festival in November, opera at Iford Arts Festival, a highly regarded symphony orchestra and regular concerts at stunning venues such as the Assembly Rooms and Bath Abbey.

There is a range of smaller, intimate venues which offer year-round live music including Chapel Arts, Moles, the effervescent Bell Inn, The Porter and Green Park Brasserie.

From the orderly refinement of the Grand Pump Room to the more organic ambience created by buskers and street artists, music permeates the centre of Bath, while Bath Spa University's School of Music & Performing Arts ensures a production line of talent for the future.

The Theatre Royal, Ustinov Studio, Rondo and Mission theatres add to this vibrant cultural scene where shows destined for the West End rub shoulders with dynamic, original productions.

While not everyone in a spa town will agree that 'laughter is the best medicine', you won't lack for opportunity to test its therapeutic qualities in Bath, home to the hilarious Natural Theatre Company. There is a Comedy Festival in spring and some of the country's best comedians at the Komedia cabaret club all year round. As the hub of the annual Bath Film Festival, The Little Theatre presents an array of mainstream and art-house films.

#### **Art...**

Set on the outer edge of Bath's original Georgian townscape, the Holburne Museum of Art is a place where all strands of the great European spa tradition are interwoven.

The Grade I listed building was created as a hotel in 1799, to take advantage of the influx of spa visitors and to serve the existing Sydney pleasure gardens – a favourite walk of Jane Austen.

It later served as a hydropathic hospital known as the Water Cure Establishment between 1843-53 and has, since 1916, housed one of the city's most illustrious art collections.

The building and gardens remain one of Bath's great pleasures and treasures. The views from the Holburne encompass magical architecture – the traditional set-piece of Great Pulteney Street competing for attention with Eric Parry's contemporary glass and ceramic extension – not to mention, of course, the artworks within, by Gainsborough, Stubbs and Turner amongst other luminaries.

The view also includes – just the other side of Pulteney Bridge – the Victoria Art Gallery which focuses on works by artists who lived and worked in the Bath area including Gainsborough, Barker of Bath and Sickert. And there are 20-plus smaller, independent art galleries within a restorative stroll, offering an incredible range of contemporary and classic artworks.

### **...and literature.**

Literature features in spa towns, and spa towns feature in literature. None more so than Bath, which plays a central role in books by Chaucer, Jane Austen and Charles Dickens amongst others.

One of the few people to have enthusiastically drunk Bath water – with its top-notes of warm iron – is the fictional Mr Pickwick, who is described by Dickens as ‘drinking the waters with the utmost assiduity...he drank a quarter of a pint before breakfast, and then walked up a hill; and another quarter of a pint after breakfast, and then walked down a hill’.

Whether you want to drink the waters, bathe in them or you have a thirst for knowledge, then a Jane Austen Walking Tour of the crescents, pump rooms and assembly rooms that are inextricably linked with her novels *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, is bound to whet your appetite. The walk is available at weekends all-year round from the Jane Austen Centre, and is particularly popular during the annual Bath Literature Festival.

A glance at the list of contemporary authors on bookseller Topping & Company’s programme of readings and signings is enough to confirm that writers do not need too much persuasion to pay a visit to a traditional spa town. What are beautiful views, contemplative spaces and therapeutic waters, if not inspiration for the creative mind?

### **A thousand fine things.**

With music, theatre, cinema, art and literature in abundance, Bath is ready to make you feel good, just as long as you allow sufficient time to immerse yourself fully in all that this great, traditional European spa town offers.

In 1766, Christopher Anstey’s *New Bath Guide* boasted:  
*“Fine balls and fine concerts, fine buildings, and springs,  
Fine walks, and fine views, and a thousand fine things”*

A quick browse of the city’s official visitor site, [visitbath.co.uk](http://visitbath.co.uk) will confirm that there are still a thousand fine things to do in Bath, few finer than to bathe in a rooftop pool on a steamy, starlit evening – Thermae Bath Spa’s Twilight package is a wonderful way to unwind after a day spent exercising the mind.

### *The Art of Feeling Good. 3*

## **Exercise the body.**

### **Health through water.**

It's said that the origin of the word 'spa' is as an abbreviation of 'salus per aqua' – health through water. Relaxing in a warm, rooftop pool could make you feel you should, perhaps, be working a little harder towards the wellness you seek. Running a tough half-marathon, playing a hard game of rugby or cycling up a steep hill, on the other hand, are likely to make you wonder whether 'health through water' might be a less painful way of achieving your goal. In Bath, you can compare, contrast, and preferably combine, all of the above.

For a city with a population of just 85,000, there is a remarkable range of sports and leisure activities to watch, join in, and in some cases, endure. They are all part of the fabric of a town into which health and wellbeing, in their widest manifestations, are inextricably woven.

So let's set an imaginary programme of health and wellbeing, starting with the most gentle form of exercise of all – spectating, before moving through the gears with some full-blooded participation, and then down-shifting once again with a restorative visit to Bath's original source of wellness – the hot springs.

### **Gently does it.**

With sport as a kind of modern religion, the city is known almost as much for Bath Rugby Club as for its Roman remains and thermal waters. The Romans might even have approved of the gladiatorial nature of the modern game – at odds with the genteel nature of the Georgian town, but a fine spectacle that draws up to 12,000 visitors to its unique setting on the banks of the Avon and within a hefty kick of the Abbey and other city centre icons.

Uniquely, amongst English towns, the football club is dwarfed by its rugby counterpart. But Bath City FC too has had its moments of glory and offers a full programme of semi-professional football.

Older than either of these is the tradition of horse-racing – a staple of many a European spa town including Aix-les-Bains, Baden-Baden, Cheltenham – which has taken place on Lansdown since around 1840. Bath Racecourse – the highest race-track in the country – has racing and other entertainment all-year round.

Not exactly a spa town staple, but therapeutic in its tranquility and setting is the quintessential English sporting scene that you'll witness all summer long at Bath Cricket Club by North Parade.

And if you just can't make your mind up what to watch, take the ultimate over-view with Bath Balloons. On a still morning a hot-air balloon is an astoundingly peaceful and beautiful way to sight-see.

## **Step up the pace.**

If all that watching has given you an appetite for some exercise of your own, perhaps start with something fairly gentle.

While it could hardly be described as traditional in Bath, the game of 'boules' has quickly become something of an institution – particularly in Queen Square, where a summer tournament is invariably over-subscribed. The courts are available year round, however, so bring your pétanques with you. Or there is a winter alternative in the annual Christmas ice rink in Victoria Park.

Somewhat more likely to be associated with the city is bathing. Until 1976 you could even take a swim in the Roman Great Bath, even though it lay buried for some 1,700 years until it was uncovered at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bathing won't be reinstated there, but it may well be at the crescent-shaped Cleveland Pools, the UK's only surviving Georgian lido. This hidden gem, on the banks of the River Avon at Bathwick, is currently being restored. For a conventional place to swim, try the Aquaterra Leisure Centre next to the Recreation Ground and for a wild swim in the River Avon seek out Warleigh Weir or the Farleigh and District Swimming Club.

Stepping up the pace a little, there are golf courses surprisingly close to the city centre offering everything from hit and giggle in the form of the Victoria Falls Adventure Golf in Victoria Park, gentle par threes at Bath Approach Golf Course in Victoria Park to nine challenging holes at Entry Hill and the 6,100 yard 18-hole Lansdown Golf Club through to near-Championship standard at Bath Golf Club. A little further out, Tracey Park Golf and Country Hotel and Cumberwell Park, each with two 18-hole courses merit a day of any serious golfer's time.

## **Get the heart racing?**

Now, if you're going to really justify that long, hot soak that you've promised yourself, let alone enjoy the fine food and drink described in 'Socialise in style', it's time to get your heart beating a little faster.

The Sports Training Village at the University of Bath is one of the finest sports facilities in the West of England with an indoor 100-metre running track, a 140-metre bobsleigh track, 50-metre swimming pool, fencing salle as well as a state-of-the-art gymnasium and various all-weather pitches. You're likely to bump into one of the many tennis players, Olympic and Paralympic athletes who train here, so you won't lack for inspiration. There are plenty of public indoor and outdoor tennis courts at Tennis in the Park and Henrietta Gardens and clubs including Bloomfield, Lansdown, Bath and the Spa Lawn Tennis Club on the Recreation Ground.

## **On your marks, get set...**

If the thought of running 13.5 miles in hilly Bath has you breaking out in a cold sweat, here's the good news – the Bath Half is actually one of the flatter half-Marathons, where runners record some of the faster times. But if you're contemplating a podium finish, you really will have to break out into a sweat – the course record is 62 minutes and you'll be accompanied on your run by at least 11,000 other competitors.



Equally vigorous is a ride up the hill that six-time Olympic cycling champion Sir Chris Hoy included in his UK top ten. Even he preferred the descent of Ralph Allen Drive to the ascent, but if you like a challenge you'll be in your element in Bath – Widcombe, Bathwick and Lansdown Hills all offer lung-busting rides and views to make the effort more than worthwhile. For an organised cycle ride the annual Bike Bath offers two days of sportives from the centre of Bath with routes of 20, 30, 60 and 100 miles, while NextBike is a city-wide, pick up and drop cycle-hire scheme that is perfect for a day of gentle city centre sight-seeing.

### **About that bath...**

Whether you decide on a fitness routine no more demanding than a stroll down to the Recreation Ground for a couple of pleasant hours encouraging other people in their endeavours, or throw yourself into a full programme of physical exertion, there's only one way to warm down – 'per aqua'. Thermae Bath Spa's 'Reviver Massage and Body Scrub' followed by a plunge into the Hot Bath will restore aching muscles. Or perhaps just head straight for one of the rooftop pool, bubble-jet benches, from which you can contemplate which of Bath's hills you will conquer next.

*The Art of Feeling Good. 4*

## **Therapeutic landscapes.**

### **The experience of a lifetime.**

When Prince Bladud was cast – ailing – into the wilderness of ancient Britain some 900 years BC, he wandered the land until by chance he discovered the therapeutic powers of the natural hot springs in the place destined to become Bath.

What closer connection could there be between landscape, wellness and spa?

The evolution of a spa town lies, to some degree, in the success with which this link is maintained, whilst accommodating the enterprises and the visitors that they attract. Hotels, casinos, theatres, assembly rooms are, of course, very much part of the traditional European spa experience. So too are open spaces, promenades, parks, gardens, green vistas and woods. A walk in The Black Forest is just as much a part of a visit to Baden-Baden as a visit to the Caracalla Spa.

The distinguished architect, Sir Nicholas Grimshaw, who designed the Thermae Bath Spa building, described how “to sit in this hot water with steam all around you looking out over the wonderful hills around Bath would be one of the experiences of a lifetime”. The rooftop pool was created precisely to maintain a connection with the surrounding landscape, and to relate to the wider therapeutic benefits that it brings.

In its Georgian heyday a walk along Grand Parade overlooking the Parade Gardens, the River Avon and out towards Bathwick Hill was all part of the cure – the ‘warm-down’ after a hot bath. Nowadays, inevitably, the therapeutic landscapes are a little further from the centre of the town – but it’s still one of Bath’s greatest charms that you can be little more than a mile from the Guildhall and feel yourself to be in open countryside.

So if you’re planning to take a modern ‘cure’, whether in Bath, Baden-Baden or Spa, make sure you allow time to benefit from the therapeutic value of the landscape itself – the sights, the sounds, the smells and the views.

### **The green lungs of Bath.**

In Hot Bath Street in the city centre you can put your hands on a man-hole cover that is permanently warmed by the hot spring water that rises to that point under artesian pressure – a natural form of underfloor heating.

It’s a good place to feel a first connection with the therapeutic properties of this particular environment. A 500-metre walk east brings you to North Parade. Stop on the bridge over the River Avon or on Grand Parade and you can see Parade Gardens and the Recreation Ground – two of the many green spaces within the city itself.

Take a different route – over Pulteney Bridge – and you can peel off into Henrietta Gardens or walk on to Sydney Gardens – a magical little park with criss-crossing paths, hidden corners and glimpses of the glass-encased café of the Holburne Museum.

One perfect way of appreciating and understanding the DNA of Bath – where landscape and built environment are in such harmony that UNESCO decreed the city of ‘outstanding universal value’ – is to follow a walk that takes in the immaculate symmetry of The Circus and Royal Crescent on the way to Royal Victoria Park. The secluded beauty of the Botanical Gardens contrasts with the buzz of visitors, families, photographers and students larking on the Crescent’s vast lawn that marks the border of Bath’s biggest park.

### **Views and vistas.**

Another factor in the city’s World Heritage site status is ‘the green setting in a hollow of hills’. 18<sup>th</sup> century entrepreneur Ralph Allen built Sham Castle – a folly on one of these hills – to improve the view from his townhouse in the centre of town. But the views back are pretty spectacular too – none better than that from Alexandra Park on Beechen Cliff when the setting sun brings out the full honey-glow of the limestone crescents and parades, banked steeply on Lansdown and Camden on the northern slopes opposite.

From Sham Castle you are on the Bath Skyline – an invigorating six-mile National Trust walk that not only encompasses the full range of natural landscapes and uplifting vistas, but is said to burn off the recommended calories for an entire week’s physical activity.

On your walk, you’ll encounter wildlife-rich meadows, old orchards, shady woods and kissing gates. The sweeping valley of Prior Park Landscape Garden, book-ended by one of Bath’s most beautiful mansions at the top and the rare Palladian Bridge at the bottom, is further therapy for the eyes and the soul.

From Jane Austen, whose characters ‘determined on walking round Beechen Cliff, that noble hill whose beautiful verdure and hanging coppice render it so striking an object’, through to Peter Gabriel ‘climbing up on Solsbury Hill’ at the north-east corner of Bath, the therapeutic landscape has been a defining element almost as much as the hot springs themselves.

### **Further afield.**

Flat walks and rides are at something of a premium in hilly Bath, but the Kennet and Avon tow-path, ambling out east is a wonderful way to access the villages, valleys and landscapes beyond. Hire a bike (or even a boat) and make for Dundas Aqueduct, where canal, cycle-path, river and railway converge in the greenest of transport interchanges. If you’re feeling vigorous, head for the Bath Boating Station and take to the River Avon in a skiff, canoe, kayak or punt. If you’re a little more laid-back, take a river cruise from beside Pulteney Weir.

The ingenious Two Tunnels Greenway takes you south, underneath the outskirts of Bath via the track-bed of the old Somerset and Dorset Railway. At the end of the walking and cycling tunnel you’ll find yourself in the glorious Midford valley, part of the Area of Outstanding Beauty.

Similarly, the Bristol to Bath Railway Path is a 13-mile off-road walking and cycling route that meanders west through and alongside fields, valleys and the River Avon.

A third off-road route is the Cotswold Way, a 100-mile walk to the north. This was the route by which the Romans arrived in Aquae Sulis, ready for a long, hot, salutary soak, no doubt.

**The inspiring springs.**

The phenomenon of one million litres of mineral-rich, hot water emerging from deep below the ground is, of course, the most tangible element of Bath's therapeutic landscape. But the wellness tradition is broader than just the waters. The natural springs have also inspired a beautiful built-environment around them, including listed gems such as the Hot Bath and Cross Bath, and the four hospital buildings within the spa quarter. Two of these, Bellott's and the original Royal United Hospital building, have recently been restored as part of the Gainsborough Bath Spa Hotel and its Spa Village, fed by the thermal waters and further enhancing the quality of the built environment. The beauty of this, combined with the surrounding landscape can only enhance the therapeutic effect of your time in Bath.

The Art of Feeling Good. 5

## Socialise in style.

### Assemblies every other night...

*“The morning is passed in drinking the waters, in social converse on the parade, at the coffee-house, in the public rooms, billiards, cotillon dances, private concerts, cards, or sometimes in extraordinary curiosity with a painter, a musician, a juggler, a fire-eater, or a philosopher. After dinner, all go dressed to the parade parties. The ball nights are Tuesdays and Fridays, assemblies every other night except Sundays. While the company are walking on the parade, a band of music plays to them from the orchestra.”*

A typical ‘season’ at an 18<sup>th</sup> century spa – though not so very different from a visit to modern day Bath. The fire-eaters, jugglers and musicians nowadays ply their trade in Abbey Courtyard. You can take the waters in the Pump Room Restaurant. And there are more places to ‘assemble’ than ever before.

While Bladud – the legendary 9<sup>th</sup> century founder of Bath – bathed alone, since at least Roman times spas have been the most sociable of places. The classic spa towns, with baths closely surrounded by pump rooms, assembly rooms, casino, theatre and concert hall are evidence that the ‘cure’ eventually became almost incidental to the ‘craic’.

In 18<sup>th</sup> century Bath, Beau Nash appointed himself the ‘Governor General of the Diversions’, drew up a code of conduct for visitors and played the lead role in transforming the ‘hospital of the nation’ into the town that English writer Daniel Defoe described as ‘the resort of the sound, rather than the sick’ and another commentator called ‘the premier resort of frivolity and fashion’. No wonder that European spa towns are considered the prototype for the modern concept of the holiday and the leisure resort.

Nowadays Bath is a fully-fledged destination, catering for more than one million visitors a year and the social scene remains as vibrant as it ever was. The Roman Baths and Thermae Bath Spa continue to be the focal point of the destination and can be enjoyed as a Spas Ancient and Modern package.

### A healthy number of places to eat and drink.

With some 200 eateries packed into an area not much more than four miles square, ‘cater’ is the operative word. The spa tradition of fine food extends beyond the restaurants, cafés and gastro pubs with a number of cookery schools including Demuths Vegetarian Cookery School, the UK’s original farmers market at Green Park Station and some lively festivals celebrating local and international cuisine including The Great Bath Feast.

While it may appear that coffee shops are a recent invention, the first one in Bath opened in 1694 and thrived along with the spa. In those days coffee-houses charged a subscription for which users were entitled to newspapers and writing materials, engendering an air of creative industry not dissimilar to today’s Society Café on Kingsmead Square, for example, or Colonna & Small’s on Queen Square, where students and business-people savour impossibly exotic speciality coffees, while smartphone and internet subscriptions replace paper and pen. Another constant is the Bath bun – invented in about 1680 by Sally Lunn – whose ‘historic eating house’ remains one of the city’s most famous institutions. Newer, but no less popular, contributions to the spa town’s eating and drinking scene are two breweries – Abbey Ales and Bath Ales.

Both opened for business in the mid-1990s and have thrived, partly through their close identification with the city and partly due to the sheer volume of pubs and bars in such a concentrated area, no fewer than 21 of which are featured in the Good Pub Guide, including the unspoiled Old Green Tree, the single-room, stained-glass fronted Coeur de Lion, the cooperatively owned Bell Inn and the legendary Star Inn.

Are you feeling at risk of undoing your health and fitness aims with all this talk of food and drink? Well socialising, of course, doesn't have to involve pubs and restaurants. The Makery is a hub where people learn and practice creative skills in a relaxed, welcoming place. Learn how to blow glass at Bath Aqua and jewellery at Bijoux Beads.

### **Pump it up.**

The Grand Pump Room, The Assembly Room and The Guildhall Banqueting Room are so beautifully preserved that it's a small leap of the imagination to picture them full of characters from a Jane Austen novel. All three rooms can be hired for functions and regularly feature concerts, recitals, and other events. You can dine by torchlight on the balcony overlooking the Roman Baths, and if you listen carefully you may overhear a local resident reminiscing about the Bath Festival revelries which were held there in the 1960s and 70s when you could still swim in the 2,000 year old Great Bath.

### **It's a pleasure.**

'Pleasure' gardens are very much part of the spa tradition, and when the sun is shining and the band is playing, there are few greater pleasures than Parade Gardens, overlooking the River Avon and with views of Bath Abbey and Pulteney Bridge. It's as good a spot for a picnic as any, and there's also a café with outdoor seating, deckchairs and regular children's entertainment in the summer.

When the sun goes down on Parade Gardens, skip up the steps and on to 'Bog Island', the meeting place for a Bizarre Bath walk starting 8pm, every evening from April to November – more 'street theatre' than 'guided tour'.

Once you've returned from this you should be ready to sample the nightlife. Bath's cocktail bars and nightclubs include Circo, Sub 13, Turtle Bay, Opium and Moles. While your Georgian predecessors might not necessarily recognise the dance moves, they would certainly admire your commitment to round-the-clock socialising.