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**Visit Ripon and the Skell Valley**

**Please see the bottom of this sheet for ideas on how to use this information.**

Step off the hamster wheel of life: explore Ripon, full of special treasures. Delight in awe-inspiringly beautiful and ancient buildings, quirky details and places to visit, all set in the lush green frame of Skell Valley and Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Ripon has been welcoming visitors since 672 when Saint Wilfrid laid the foundations for what became today’s impressive Cathedral. The tapestry kneelers inside Ripon Cathedral bring Ripon 1350 years of history to life. Make sure you visit the ancient crypt, look up at the magnificent medieval screen, and search for the misericords said to have inspired *Alice in Wonderland*.

Nearby Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal are stunningly beautiful and historically very significant (hence their UNESCO World Heritage Status). You can still experience the peace and tranquillity that attracted the original monks, almost 900 years ago.

These layers of history make Ripon a comforting place to visit: the city is also full of contemporary businesses run by independent people, proud of where they live.

At the heart of Yorkshire’s smallest city is the cobbled market square. It was described by Defoe as ‘*the finest and most beautiful square… of its kind in England’* and is surrounded by places to shop, eat and drink.

You’ll immediately notice the strikingly tall Obelisk, one of many legacies left by John Aislabie. His other important contributions to the local area include Studley Royal Water Gardens, and the folly-filled woods at Hackfall.

The Obelisk is the starting point for Ripon’s famous nightly tradition: setting of the watch by the Ripon Hornblower every night at 9.00 pm.

Just off the square you’ll find three fascinating museums that tell the story of less fortunate times, prisoners and poverty. Discover what it was like to be truly poor at the Workhouse Museum and Garden. Learn about crime and punishment at the Prison & Police Museum, where children can dress up or be a detective. You can even stand in the dock at the Courthouse and imagine waiting for a guilty or innocent verdict.

Ripon’s neighbouring attractions are grander, telling a very different tale. Newby Hall (Yorkshire Attraction of the Year 2022) showcases the creativity and skill of Sir Christopher Wren, Robert Adam and Chippendale. Cares melt away in the gorgeous gardens, or as you enjoy the sculptures. Children can run off their energy in the excellent playground, and enjoy a ride in a pedal boat or on the miniature railway.

Medieval Markenfield Hall describes itself as ‘the loveliest place you’ve never heard of’. Join one of the Tiny Tours with afternoon tea and you’ll agree – it’s a magical, romantic place to visit, and even has a moat!

The Himalayan Garden at Grewelthorpe is another unexpected pleasure – the 20 acre gardens will transport you to foreign climes. The beautiful woodland garden is an ever-evolving setting for their internationally-recognised collection of sculptures.

As the signs to Ripon proudly suggest, it’s well worth planning to ‘*stay awhile amid its ancient charms*’.

**Gardens and Green Spaces**

Ripon is framed by the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with pockets of green inside the city too. The Spa Gardens date back to the times when Ripon vied with Harrogate to establish itself as a spa town. You might also enjoy visiting the Workhouse Museum Gardens, now planted in a similar way to the original kitchen garden. The nearby Ripon Walled Garden has an orchard, woodland and plant nursery.

Studley Royal Water Gardens are part of the famous Fountains Abbey World Heritage Site, described by UNESCO as representing ‘over 800 years of human ambition, design and achievement,’ and a ‘feat of human creative genius’. It’s a delight to spend a whole day exploring the open spaces, historic abbey ruins and admiring the landscaping of the Water Gardens.

At nearby Newby Hall the present owner’s grandfather said, he’d inherited an ‘exceptionally beautiful home but no garden to speak of’ and was determined to rectify this. His vision set the scene for today’s impressive 25 acre gardens, with the next generations adding the National Collection of Cornus (dogwoods), an alpine area, fun adventure garden and miniature railway.

The Himalayan Gardens in Grewelthorpe are a hidden gem, transporting visitors into another world. Since 1997, the current owners have undertaken an extensive programme of woodland clearance and planting the 20-acre site to create the North’s largest collection of rhododendrons, azaleas and magnolia.

**Outdoor activities and nature around Ripon**

It’s easy to enjoy being outdoors and to appreciate nature in Ripon and the Skell Valley. Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty supports a range of different habitats including moorland, meadows, woodlands and water. They’re home to important populations of a variety of wildlife. Merlin, golden plover and redshank can be spotted in the area, as well as concentrations of breeding curlews and lapwing. The moorlands and woodlands are important habitats for adders, common lizards and slow worms.

Otters and water voles are regularly recorded alongside the area’s rivers and streams, and river lampreys are widespread. Fountains Abbey is home to many birds such as nuthatches, treecreepers, and woodpeckers.

You can follow an established route to enjoy the landscape, such as the Nidderdale Way, or Yorkshire Heritage Way. Ripon’s Sanctuary Way Walk celebrates Ripon’s origins as a sanctuary. One original marker and several replicas can be found close to their original positions, indicating a place of safety, around one mile from the cathedral. The full circuit around the city is 10 miles, with options for shorter scenic routes.

The Ripon Rowel Walk is a much-loved route taking in landmarks, historic monuments and follies over a 49 mile route including villages surrounding Ripon. Its name comes from the name of the small spiked wheels fitted to horse-riders’ spurs. Ripon was famous for their manufacture in the 16th and 17th century.

The Seven Bridges Walk is an easy flat walk, along the route of some early John Aislabie landscaping, next to Studley Royal, with five picture perfect stone bridges originally constructed as part of his plan in 1716. This can be incorporated in the full 17.5 miles of the Aislabie Walk, stretching through Studley Royal Water Gardens and on to Hackfall near Masham, established by Aislabie’s son, William.

A more recent addition to the area’s outdoor attractions is the Crackpots Trail, which combines the outdoors with the arts. First established in 1997 by ‘The Crackpots’ of Kirkby Malzeard, the group of residents made a series of 22 mosaics, each celebrating the nature, character and history of the area.

Children delight in the adventures to be found at Lightwater Valley, while adults might like to try their luck at Ripon Races, know as ‘Yorkshire’s Garden Racecourse’.  The tradition of horse-racing in Ripon dates back to 1664. It was the first racecourse to hold a race exclusively for female jockeys in 1723.

Next to the racecourse is Ripon City Wetlands, a great place to enjoy wildlife-watching. Ripon. You might also enjoy sitting back to star-gaze in some of the UK’s darkest skies, perhaps booking to use the little-known Lime Tree Observatory at Grewelthorpe.

**Stories of law makers and law breakers**

Ripon’s buildings, customs and stories are a reminder of a fascinating history of law makers and law breakers.

Ripon’s market square, and nearby Markenfield Hall were both focal points for the ‘Rising of the North’ in 1569, a plot to rise in revolt against Queen Elizabeth who had chosen to crack down on Catholicism.

Three buildings held by the Ripon Museum’s Trust tell fascinating stories of life in the 19th and early 20th century. Discover what it was like to be truly poor at the Workhouse Museum and Garden, which is said to be the most complete workhouse remaining in England. Learn about crime and punishment at the Prison & Police Museum, where children can dress up or be a detective. At the Courthouse Museum you can stand in the dock and imagine waiting for a guilty or innocent verdict.

A former Skell Valley resident had a lasting impact on divorce laws in the UK: Caroline Norton successfully campaigned to bring about divorce and child custody laws in Victorian times, giving women some rights.

The tradition of the Ripon Hornblower continues to this day. It dates back to less peaceful times when the ‘watchman’ would blow the horn at 9pm and then keep watch until daybreak. Local residents would pay for the service, and be compensated if they were burgled. Apparently the price was halved if the property was entered via a side door. Supposedly this accounts for the large number of properties in Ripon with side entrances via passages as wily residents had an eye for a discount.

**Watery Wonders**

Surrounded on three sides by rivers and a canal, Ripon has more than its fair share of watery wonders.

The River Laver on the west, flows into the River Skell, which then feeds the Ure to the east of the city. The Laver and Skell also supply Ripon’s canal which flows to the south of the city. This year is the 250th anniversary of the canal.

The waterways are thriving havens for wildlife, with two nature reserves close to the city. Ripon City Wetlands, between the Ure and the canal has lakes attracting a variety of wildowl. inhabited by a variety of wildfowl, whilst the impressively named ‘Hell Wath’ in the Skell Valley is a well-known and scenic nature reserve (Alexa – pls add more on HW)

Ripon was established as a Spa town at the beginning of the twentieth century, and piped in spa waters from nearby Aldfield. As fashions changed, Ripon’s Spa building was transformed in the 1930s to a swimming baths, and is now awaiting its next regeneration. A new swimming pool has been built, named after Jack Laugher, Ripon’s Olympic diving champion.

Outside the city, the architectural gems of the countryside are set alongside water for either practical or aesthetic purposes and sometimes both.

Fountains Abbey is next to the Skell which was channelled by John Aislabie to form lakes and ponds in the neighbouring Studley Royal Water Garden in the 18th century. He and his son both had a vision for the area and William later bought and incorporated the ruins of Fountains Abbey into the design. It is the successful combination of the two which has made the area a World Heritage Site, and the skilful use of water, channelling the Skell to create to create lakes and ponds is an important part of this. The Skell then continues to wind through the Seven Bridges Walk which was another Aislabie design.

Nearby Newby Hall utilises the River Ure for scenic boat trips, and also the lake in the adventure play area, which has plenty of water-based fun with pedalos, a self-guided boat and a ‘Tarantella’ dancing water play area that children or the young at heart can duck in and out of on a warm day.

Meanwhile Markenfield Hall has its own water feature, a spring fed moat dating back to the thirteenth century.

Within Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty there are seven reservors that supply fresh clean water to Ripon and neighbouring towns.

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**Did you know…**

You can go to the loo in an original dungeon dating back to the 13th century – at Markenfield Hall

Look out for the row of four red phone boxes, almost a century old, and a Cabmen’s Shelter from the days when hansom cab drivers were provided with newspapers and a shelter to keep them out of pubs while waiting for fares.

**Odd stories**

The Chapel of St Mary Magdalen, still known locally as the Leper Chapel, was one of a number of buildings built to care for lepers and blind priests. In the early 12th century the hospital was receiving generous donations, possibly from dodgy sources. At some stage the wooden bell on display in the chapel has replaced the original metal one, thought to be a decoy to hide the fact the bell had been sold.

Sir John Aislabie was responsible for some attractive landscaping in the area, but might never have spent time in Ripon if his previous career hadn’t ended. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, he was involved in a corruption scandal which had him confined in the Tower of London for a short period before returning to Ripon to spend more time on his garden projects such as Studley Royal Water Garden.

**HOW TO USE THIS INFORMATION**

We’d love you to use this information, or any of the other sections, in your own promotional activity – on your website, mailings or social media.

You can edit it and change it as much as you want.

You can use all of it, or just small snippets.

You’re welcome to add your own angles, and customise the info.

This is just a starting point.

We’ve created this information to encourage more collaborations between businesses.

For example, if you run a visitor attraction you might talk about other activities in the area to show there’s a critical mass of things to do and Ripon is worth the journey.

Accommodation providers might use some of this information to talk about their location and encourage longer stays.

See the other information on [www.tourismknowhow.com/Ripon](https://www.tourismknowhow.com/ripon).

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