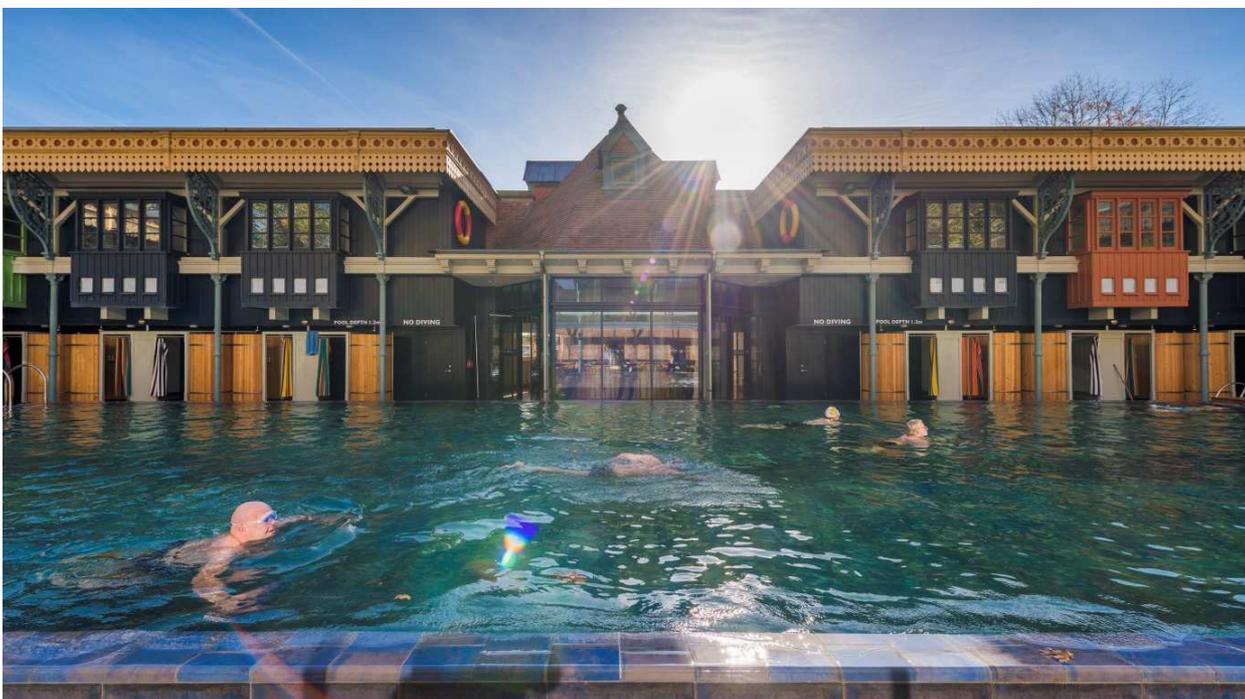


## ***Heritage and H<sup>2</sup>O***

### **King Henry I, Thames cruising and a new spa swim & dine experience is shaping perceptions of Reading (on Thames)**

In June 2018, following a £3.1 million conservation project, the burial place of King Henry I of England, **Reading Abbey**, re-opened to visitors.

This momentous occasion in the UK's royal heritage offers an opportunity to re-visit a much-changed Reading, its modern and historic offering, new leisure experiences and the glorious river Thames and Kennet frontages, which juxtapose with the vibrant economy of a city that is ranked among the top 25 in Europe (FDI Awards 2018). From 2019, Reading will also be the western terminal of the Elizabeth Line and increasingly accessible to visitors as part of London's Oyster card system.



Reading has long been synonymous as one of the best connected places in the UK and as home to the Reading Festival, but it is less well-known for the majestic stretch of river on which it is sited, its heritage and its modern day leisure offer.

Reading should be on the itinerary for any heritage, industrial history, spa days and River Thames tours west of London.

## **Heritage**

Reading is proud of its heritage. King Henry I built **Reading Abbey** as his mausoleum – it was one of Europe’s most important buildings in the medieval period. It reopens to the public on 16 June 2018 following a major Heritage Lottery Funded conservation project.

In the Abbey, Reading boasts a site of national significance. One of 12th century England’s wealthiest and most important monasteries, the burial place of Henry I, an ambitious conservation project has brought to life the story of Reading Abbey and has enabled this medieval jewel to re-open to the public.

Reading was also the ‘enforced home’ of **Oscar Wilde** during his imprisonment in Reading Prison which inspired his Ballad of Reading Gaol. The Gilbert Scott designed Prison (now closed) sits alongside the Abbey Ruins in Reading’s Abbey Quarter.

The recently restored Abbey Gateway provided the school room for **Jane Austen** – it has been restored and reopened as part of the Reading Abbey Revealed project.

Reading’s **Huntley & Palmers** supplied the world’s biscuits for a hundred years – Reading Museum has the best collection of their biscuit tins, photos and historic film.

With the renewed interest in the **Bayeux Tapestry** in the UK, Reading Museum’s 70 metre long full size copy of the Tapestry is gaining increasing interest. It was made by 35 skilled Victorian women embroiderers in 1885 and depicts the events leading up and includes to the Battle of Hastings.

## **All things water**

Alongside medieval restoration work, Reading has also now restored its wonderful Edwardian swimming pool - the resulting **Thames Lido** opened in November 2017 and is now a glamorous spa and dining complex alongside the River Thames with Head Chef Freddy Bird producing fabulous food overlooking the pool. (See Guardian and Telegraph reviews).

A majestic stretch of **the Thames** flows through the town. The longest Thames frontage of any local authority in England, the Thames flows through the heart of Reading with meadows, islands and locks creating a beautiful river-scape – it even has its own new festival – the Reading on Thames Festival (7-16 September 2018), while riverside dining is the major attraction on Reading’s other river, **the River Kennet**, as it passes on its way.



The Thames at Reading

Modern Reading is also the premier shopping and dining destination outside London in the south east, anchored by The Oracle shopping centre with its **riverside dining destination**, alongside a strong independent retail sector.

## **Sample weekend itinerary**

### **Friday evening**

Arrive hotel- Roseate Reading (Abbey Quarter) or Crowne Plaza Reading (on the Thames)

### **Saturday**

Reading Abbey Quarter tour, including Reading Abbey restoration, Abbey Gateway, Forbury Gardens, Reading Museum

Lunch at Thames Lido followed by a swim in the heated open air Lido and enjoying the hot pool and saunas

Evening – Reading nightlife and riverside supper at The Oracle Riverside – choose from over 20 restaurants with outdoor dining.

### **Sunday**

River Thames boat trip from Caversham Pier – up stream to Mapledurham or a circular cruise.

Lunch at a riverside pub in Reading



Riverside dining at the Oracle Riverside