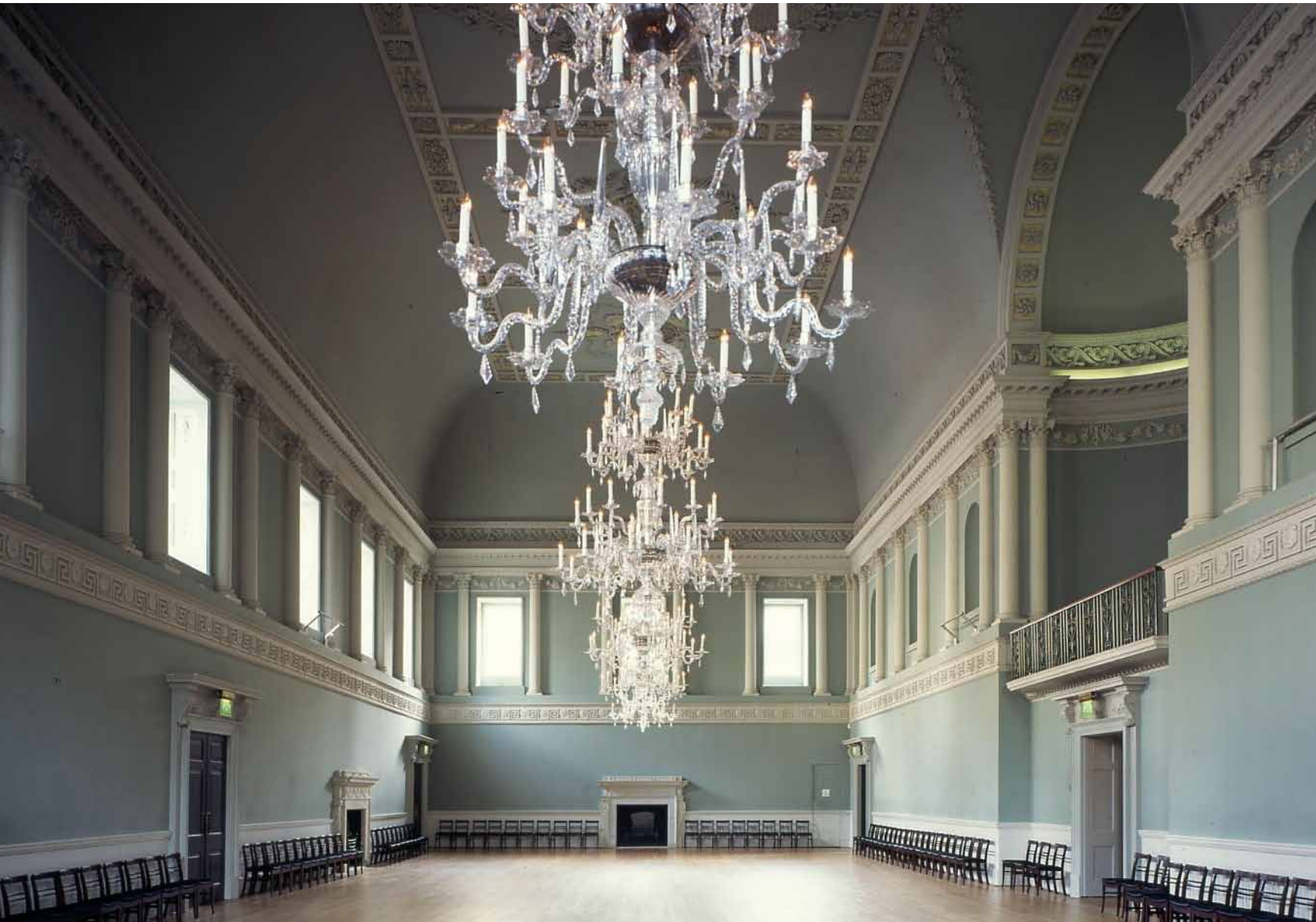


# QUINTESSENTIAL traveler



## Becoming Jane

Whether it's the romance of Regency-era England or just the passion for a good story, we can't seem to get enough of Jane Austen. Her works have inspired films of all varieties and next March, even Northlight Theatre will be doing a world premiere adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*. Come with us for our inaugural Quintessential Traveler piece as we journey to Bath, Jane's least-favorite city but perhaps the most influential on her work. **By Sherry Thomas**

When Jane Austen's father announced that she and her family would be moving to Bath in 1801, it came as such a shock that the aspiring novelist is said to have fainted, collapsing on the floor in a puddle of

despair. Jane was despondent, and the years she and her family would spend living in Bath would not be happy ones. How interesting, then, that of her six published novels, Bath is the setting for the

final two — *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. In fact, there is a scene in *Persuasion* where Anne Elliot, like Jane herself, laments news that her family would be moving to Bath. The character

speaks of “dreading the possible heats of September in all the white glare of Bath, and grieving to forgo all the influence, so sweet and so sad, of the autumnal months in the country.”

As a lifelong Jane Austen fan, I took a 90-minute train ride from London’s Paddington to Bath Spa station last summer to explore the city that not only inspired the writer but also set the scene for two of her most beloved works.

The Jane Austen story in Bath begins more than a decade before she was born. Jane’s parents, George and Cassandra, met and were married here in 1764, at a time when Bath was being transformed from a muddy, run-down Roman spa town to a prominent center of fashionable English society. The novelist who would someday immortalize the images and quintessential people of that society was born

Dec. 17, 1775. But Jane, the seventh child in a family of eight, spent her childhood and teenage years in a country parsonage of Steventon, a small village in the southern English county of Hampshire.

Bath to Jane was foreign and intimidating — an elegant, affluent city ruled by high society and high fashion. This set the stage for Jane’s Bath experience as much as it does for our tour of the novelist’s city — a city that, by virtue of its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, remains remarkably unchanged since Jane’s time.

In addition to the dramatically sweeping Royal Crescent, the Circus, the Pump Room, Queen Square and the Pulteney Bridge — architectural landmarks mentioned multiple times in both *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* — Bath is also recognized for its preservation of the ancient temple and

Aquae Sulis baths Romans began to build 2,000 years ago around Britain’s only natural thermal spring.

It truly is like walking back in time. So even if a member of your group isn’t as big of a Jane Austen fan as you are, there will be plenty to see and do.

To get your period bearings for a proper Jane Austen tour, start with a visit to the Jane Austen Centre and Regency Tea Rooms. Located at 40 Gay St. in the heart of historic Georgian Bath and Queen Square, this museum and education center (created with guidance from local members of the Jane Austen Society and other Austen authorities) is an excellent place to learn about the characters and scenes from Jane’s novels, as well as get a sampling of Regency life, society, dress and manners.

At the heart of Jane Austen’s work is a commentary on class, wealth, society and the precarious roles women often found themselves in as a result of those things. In addition to being, next to

“Oh, who can ever be tired of Bath?”

Catherine Morland, *Northanger Abbey*



These hot springs inspired the Romans to develop Bath as a city of recreation in A.D. 43. A temple, dedicated to the goddess Minerva, was built alongside the baths and this area formed the Aquae Sulis.



Jane, herself, lived very close to the Jane Austen Centre in 1805, higher up the hill at No. 25 Gay St. This and other landmarks can be seen on the Jane Austen city walking tour that meets daily at the KC Change Visitor Info Centre.

## No Flight Necessary

Even if you can’t make it to Bath this year, there are other ways to celebrate the life and work of Jane Austen.

The Jane Austen Society’s Chicago chapter regularly hosts such events as a **Regency masquerade ball** and a **Jane Austen birthday tea**. For more information call Natalie Goldberg at 773/493-1250 to go to [www.jasnachicago.org](http://www.jasnachicago.org).

Also mark your calendars for the world premiere of Jon Jory’s adaptation of *Sense & Sensibility* March 10-April 17 at Northlight Theatre in Skokie. For more information call 847/673-6300 or go to [www.northlight.org](http://www.northlight.org).



The Georgian garden at The Kennard on Henrietta Street was inspired by Jane Austen’s letters and novels. It is open for the enjoyment of all guests staying at the 1794 hotel.

London, one of the most fashionable society cities in England, Bath was notorious as a “marriage market,” a place where both men and women sought potential spouses “of great fortune.”

As an unmarried woman with little to offer as a dowry, it was during Jane’s time in Bath that her disadvantage in finding a suitable “match” became most pronounced. She was, according to letters and diaries, romanced briefly during her years here by Tom Lefoy, who was (much like several male characters in the author’s novels) removed by family before any “understanding” about marriage could be reached between the two. According to a letter she wrote to her sister, Cassandra, in 1796, “I am to flirt my last with Tom Lefoy, and

when you receive this it will be over. My tears flow at the melancholy idea.”

While this romance was portrayed dramatically (with some embellishment, according to Jane Austen scholars) in the 2007 Anne Hathaway film, *Becoming Jane*, there is perhaps no better way to get an authentic taste of that era than a visit to the Fashion Museum and Assembly Rooms, located in the same building at the Pump Room and Roman Bath museum.

Built in 1771, the assembling Ball Room, Octagon, Tea Room and Card Room, used throughout the late 18th century for dancing, music and card playing, tea drinking and conversation, were collectively designated as “the most noble and

elegant in the kingdom.” There have been few changes to the Pump Room and the Assembly Rooms (shown on page 83) since Jane’s time here, so it truly is like walking in the author’s footsteps.

In her younger days, such places might have been a source of enjoyment. But as Jane grew older and her chances of marriage diminished, the thought of a dance became oppressive.

It’s no accident that most of the beautiful architectural landmarks mentioned in her novels are symbols of a life that she would never truly be a part of — a constant reminder of what others had, and would she could not.


The Circus, which consists of three terraces of tall narrow houses that curve around a central



circular space whose diameter matches that of nearby Stonehenge, was a regular fixture on Jane's travels around the city. Her friends, Marianne and Jane Mapleton, lived at No. 11, where she was said to visit them frequently.

In 1805, soon after the death of the Rev. George Austen, Jane and her family left Bath. She would never return, but the experience she had there left an indelible print on her life and her work for years to come.

What were Jane's true opinions of the city, still considered by some to be one of the most beautiful in England? One may never know. While some of her characters express profound joy over Bath's shops and sights, others, such as *Northanger Abbey's* Isabella Thorpe, are not so kind.

"Do you know I get so immoderately sick of Bath, your brother and I were agreeing this morning that, though it is vastly well to be here for a few weeks, we would not live here for millions." 



## Quintessential BATH: When You Go

**GETTING THERE:** Located in southwest England, Bath is easy to get to from London or the Bristol Airport. It's a 90-minute train ride from Paddington or a short 120-mile drive from London on the M4/M5 motorways. The Bath Spa train station is in the heart of the city center. Once you arrive, you will not need a car. Everything is in easy walking distance and getting around is a snap. For train schedules and rates, go to [www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk](http://www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk).

**HOTEL:** For a truly authentic Jane Austen experience, I stayed at The Kennard, a 1794 Georgian townhouse at 11 Henrietta Street with a garden inspired by the novelist herself. "She had a keen interest in gardens and has left us detailed descriptions of plants and flowers that were fashionable at the time and which we have included in our garden," says Mary, who operates the hotel with her husband, Giovanni. Rooms are small but beautifully appointed, with a traditional English breakfast to wake up to every day in the home's fully restored original kitchen. Located near Henrietta Park in close walking distance to all attractions, the Kennard blends history with modern luxury, with all rooms featuring wireless internet, flat-screen TVs and en suite facilities. The owners are also incredibly knowledgeable and helpful. A pair of earrings left in the room during the stay were returned promptly via post. Now that's service. For more information, go to [www.kennard.co.uk](http://www.kennard.co.uk).

**JANE AUSTEN TOURISM:** The 10th annual Jane Austen Festival, which runs Sept. 17-Sept. 25, includes a selection of events to celebrate all things Jane — including everything from theater, walking tours, an 18th-century costumed parade through the old Georgian city, tea parties and, of course, dancing. Bath also hosts a Jane Austen's Regency Christmas celebration during the month of December. For more details on these festival and other Jane Austen tourism opportunities while visiting Bath and surrounding areas — including guided Austen-centric tours through the city — go to [www.janeausten.co.uk](http://www.janeausten.co.uk).

**ACTIVITIES:** While Jane Austen may be Bath's most famous former resident, there are many fun, interesting things to do here that have nothing to do with the novelist or her work. Be sure to visit the Bath Abbey, built in 1499 and one of the last great medieval churches in England, which now offers 212-step "tower tours" for a bird's eye view of Bath like no other ([www.bathabbey.org](http://www.bathabbey.org)). Another "must-stop" are the Roman Baths, where you can learn all about the history of the town, see Roman artifacts and walk on ancient pavements surrounding the original baths (several feet below current street level). While you're there, stop up to the Pump Room, where hot "spa water" is drawn for the drinking (and last summer, was used to make spa lemonade) For details, go to [www.romanbaths.co.uk](http://www.romanbaths.co.uk).

**TEA ROOMS:** No visit to Bath would be complete without reservations and a good spot of lunch or afternoon tea at the stunningly gorgeous, neoclassical Pump Room, where every day feels like you've been immersed in a Jane Austen novel ([www.romanbaths.co.uk/pump\\_room](http://www.romanbaths.co.uk/pump_room)). Another excellent place for an authentic Georgian tea is Sally Lunn's, the oldest house in bath (circa 1482) and purveyor of the most famous local delicacy — the Original Sally Lunn Bun (named after Sally Lunn, a French refugee who arrived in Bath in 1680). To find out more, go to [www.sallylunns.co.uk](http://www.sallylunns.co.uk).

**RESTAURANTS:** The culinary scene in Bath is more eclectic than you might think. While traditional "pub grub" is always an option, several chefs are making their mark on the city with cuisine that would make any sophisticated foodie salivate. A favorite meal of the trip was at the trendy Olive Tree Restaurant at the Queensberry Hotel. Regarded as serving some of the finest modern British cuisine with dishes that fuse English flavors with Mediterranean influences, every bite was worth savoring. For more information, go to the Queensberry Hotel web site at [www.thequeensberry.co.uk](http://www.thequeensberry.co.uk).

**SPAS:** Fed by Britain's only natural hot springs, Bath would not be the city it is today without its famous waters, enjoyed by ancient Celts and Romans nearly 2,000 years ago. After a long day of Jane Austen touring, reserve some time to "take the waters" at the Thermae Bath Spa, Britain's only natural thermal spa. For a rate of just 22 pounds (the equivalent of about \$40, depending on the exchange rate) you can spend two hours here enjoying the open-air rooftop pool bubbling with warm water (and amazing views) as well as an indoor pool, spa café and four scented steam rooms. Our favorite was the eucalyptus room. Treatments (for an additional charge) include Tropical Oasis Body Wraps and Chocolate Indulgence Dream Flotation. Just say "ah ..." For more information, go to [www.thermaebathspa.com](http://www.thermaebathspa.com).

**BATH TOURISM:** Special thanks to Lucy Weaver and the staff of Bath Tourism for hosting us and guiding us through this special media trip. For more information on Bath, including maps and guides, go to the Bath Tourism web site at [www.visitbath.co.uk](http://www.visitbath.co.uk).