

# Wall-to-wall ENJOYMENT

In the first of a new series of articles on Britain's most captivating cities, Don Jolly finds that historic York is choc-full of fun

## YORK FACTFILE

1. Archaeological evidence suggests that Mesolithic people settled in the region of York between 8000 and 7000 BC
2. Rowntree's was founded in the city in 1862
3. The historic core of York was designated a conservation area in 1968
4. York was voted European Tourism City of the Year in 2007
5. York City FC was founded in 1922 and is nicknamed The Minstermen



A statue to Constantine the Great stands proudly outside York Minster

The Shambles

York has been pretty much at the centre of major political events in Britain for some 2,000 years. Not surprising, perhaps, for a city that is roughly midway between the capitals of England and Scotland.

It was the Romans who put York on the map in AD71, when they laid the first stones of a fortress at the confluence of the rivers Ouse and Foss. Eventually, it expanded into the city of *Eboracum*, capital of Rome's northern European colonies.

After the Romans abandoned Britain, new invaders arrived – Angles and Saxons at first then, in 866, the Vikings captured *Eoforwic* (as York was known at the time), renaming it *Jorvik* and establishing control over much of North-East England.

Today, you can still see remnants of those early years. Head for the Museum Gardens for the best of the Roman remains, where layers of history are built into the medieval walls of the Multangular and Anglian Towers. In the gardens, the Yorkshire Museum houses one of the finest displays of Roman artefacts in Britain.

The Vikings' York comes to life at the Jorvik Viking Centre at Coppergate. You'll journey back a thousand years and experience the sights, sounds and smells of the time. But get there soon – according to Viking legend, the world is due to end on 22 February 2014!

The Viking reign in York ended in 1066, with their defeat at the Battle of Stamford Bridge by the Saxon King Harold. Weeks later, Harold was beaten at the Battle of Hastings by Viking descendants, the Normans led by William the Conqueror.

### MAGNIFICENT MINSTER

The Norman's legacy is represented by its greatest sight, the Minster, which was founded as a simple church in 1080 and over the next 300 years grew into the largest Gothic cathedral in northern Europe. It is a treasure-house, with the country's greatest concentration of medieval stained glass, including the wonderful East Window.

Although the Minster is currently undergoing restoration, you can see some of the behind-the-scenes work, plus watch stonemasons expertly carving replacements for statues and grotesques eroded by centuries of weathering and pollution.

Little remains of the Norman York Castle other than Clifford's Tower, the keep, which offers great views over the city from its motte. Horrific things happened here, including the Jewish massacre in 1190. The tower's appearance today was caused by an explosion in 1684, which left only the walls intact.

The city walls date mainly from the 12th to 14th centuries, and include five main gateways (or bars), of which Micklegate Bar is the most impressive. Within the walls as you wander the warren of medieval streets (look out for names such as Swinegate, Mad Alice Lane and Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate), you really feel as if you're stepping back in time. Pass through a door or a ginnel and you'll discover treasures such as the magnificent Merchant Adventurers' Hall, which dates back to 1357, Newgate Market and Barley Hall in Coffee Yard.

York's most famous street, The Shambles, is one of the most complete medieval shopping streets in Europe.

### CHOCOLATE DELIGHTS

As you might expect of the city that gave birth to Rowntree's (now part of Nestlé) and Terry's, York is the UK's home of chocolate. In recent years, artisan chocolatiers have appeared in the city centre, among them Monk Bar Chocolatiers at Chocolate Heaven in The Shambles, Hotel Chocolat in Coney Street and York Cocoa House in Blake Street, where you can even make your own confectionary.

In King's Square at the top of The Shambles, you'll find the city's newest attraction – York's Chocolate Story, which opened in 2012. This is a fascinating guided tour which takes you from the discovery of the cocoa bean, through its transformation in the chocolate factory, to the chocoholic paradise in the Indulgence Zone. Yum!

One of York's best attractions is the Castle Museum, where a Victorian world has been recreated in a former prison. One inmate was highwayman Dick Turpin, who was hanged in 1739 at Knavesmire, where you'll now find York Racecourse. Another rogue associated with York is Guy Fawkes, who was born there.

With its violent past, it isn't surprising York is Europe's most haunted city – there are nightly ghost walks designed to shiver the spine. You can be spooked, too, at York Dungeon in Clifford Street.

A must is the National Railway Museum, located outside the city walls by the railway station. Here, you can get close to steam age legends, from a replica of Stephenson's *Rocket* through to the *Mallard* which, in 1938, smashed the steam train world speed record at 126mph – a record that still stands. The museum has been celebrating the 75th anniversary of the achievement by temporarily reuniting *Mallard* with its five surviving sister locos.

Since Richard III's remains were discovered beneath a Leicester car park last year, the museum bearing his name at Monk Bar has also acquired topicality.



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The controversial king's death in 1485 at the Battle of Bosworth Field brought to an end the Wars of the Roses. The last English king to die in battle, Richard was also the last House of York monarch and many people feel he should be interred in York Minster, as he wished, not in Leicester.

So, there you have it: like its American counterpart, York is a city that doesn't sleep. Start exploring its historical streets and you might need to skip your bedtime rest in order to discover everything that it has to offer.

Eye-catching York Minster as seen from the city's ancient walls

## INFORMATION

### SITES

For your visit to York, stay at either York Beechwood Grange or York Rowntree Park Club sites – details can be found on p185 and p186 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2013/14*. To book, call 01342 327490 or see [caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook](http://caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook).

**York Rowntree Park** is just outside the city walls, 10 minutes' walk from the centre.

**York Beechwood Grange**, further out of the city, is close to Monks Cross Park & Ride car park, near the junction of the A64 and A1237. Frequent bus services run daily in and out of the city centre from 7am to 8pm.



York Rowntree Park



York Beechwood Grange