

Salisbury Cathedral

Also known as the Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Salisbury Cathedral is one of the UK's most well-known and well-loved cathedrals. An awe-inspiring testament to Christianity, the scale and the grandeur of this Cathedral are truly breathtaking. Soaring up to 123 metres, Salisbury Cathedral has Britain's tallest church spire, Britain's largest cloisters and also boasts the oldest working clock in the world.

The History of Salisbury Cathedral

Originally, the Cathedral stood on the hill fort of Old Sarum, the original site of the town of Salisbury. Legend has it the Bishop of Old Sarum shot an arrow in the direction in which he would build the new cathedral but the arrow hit a deer and the location of the current cathedral is where the deer died. However, it has also been suggested that the new plot was chosen so that the cathedral, old Sarum and Stonehenge were aligned on a ley line. The site of the old cathedral provides fantastic views to the "new" one which is now some 750 years old. It was paid for by donations; mainly from canons and vicars of the southeast of England who contributed an annual fixed amount up until its completion.

The cathedral was built in one architectural style – early English gothic. To construct the building, 70,000 tonnes of stone were required, the foundation stone laid on the 28th April 1220. The building was finished less than 40 years later – in 1258.

A hidden 14th Century structure supports the hollow spire of the Cathedral which is only viewable to those who dare to take a tower tour. Those brave enough to ascend the 332 steps to the top can enjoy breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside, including the original site of the cathedral.

Salisbury Cathedral Clock

In the famous riddle it is asked what object lacks arms but has hands and lacks a head but has a face? The answer, of course, is a clock. However, Salisbury Cathedral clock is both armless and faceless – as it belongs to an era when a church clock would only ring out the time on a bell. But what this clock lacks anatomically, it makes up for in historical importance. This iron-framed clock, located in the aisle of the cathedral, dates from around 1386 and is the oldest working mechanical clock in the world.

Salisbury Cathedral's Magna Carta

In spite of its age, Salisbury Cathedral plays host to half a million visitors a year who come from all over the world to see this majestic building. Another important reason to visit lies in the chapter house. With its fan ceiling and mediaeval frieze, the chapter house is an enchanting space. But it is all the more enchanting for an entirely different reason.

The finest of only four surviving original copies of the Magna Carta resides here in the chapter house of the cathedral. Dating from 1215, the Magna Carta is a charter which limits the powers of a king and gives rights to the common man – the foundation of constitutional law. There are two other copies in the British Museum and another copy at Lincoln Cathedral.

Heralded for its age and its religious and cultural links to centuries past, it is easy to forget that this space also contains some brilliant contemporary works of art. There is an amazing “living water” font, designed by sculptor William Pye, from which four filaments of water flow to the ground. The font takes a cruciform shape and is made from bronze and clad in Purbeck stone.

The font was consecrated on 28th September 2008 by the Archbishop of Canterbury, prior to which there had been no permanent font. The surface of the water provides amazing reflections of the cathedral, including Gabriel Loire's “Prisoners of Conscience” stained glass window – another contemporary work.

The cathedral also has a fantastic gift shop offering everything from gifts and souvenirs to clothing and confectionary. Meanwhile the Refectory Restaurant, with its expansive glass roof which provides amazing views of the spire, serves delicious local food from teas and cakes to three-course lunches.

Salisbury Cathedral Close

Salisbury Cathedral sits in an 80-acre close – the largest Cathedral Close in Britain which also contains a number of beautiful and historic attractions. Arundells was the home of former British Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath and contains fascinating collections of his sailing and musical memorabilia and artwork including original political cartoons, bronzes and oriental ceramics.

Salisbury Museum is a grade 2 listed building which plays host to a broad range of important archaeological collections including displays of Saxon, Roman and even pre-historic articles. The museum also contains mediaeval items which plot the history of Old Sarum and Salisbury. Additionally, the museum has a range of artworks including five Turner watercolours.

The Rifles Museum delves into the fascinating past of the Berkshire and Wiltshire infantry regiments. The riverside garden is often used for wedding receptions and other events as it provides gorgeous views of the River Avon and the nearby water meadows.

Mompesson House is an 18th Century Queen Anne style house which was featured in the film *Sense and Sensibility*. The house is decorated with ornate plasterwork and has a beautiful carved oak staircase. Quintessentially high class, Mompesson House is the pinnacle of decadence and a truly unique space.

Salisbury

Beyond Cathedral Close is the wonderfully historic high street which gives direct access to the cathedral and the close. Here in the city centre the famous market is held. Centuries old, the marketplace is steeped in tradition and has three crosses which mark the sections of the marketplace – the poultry cross, the cheese and milk cross and the woollen and yarn cross.

These days the market sells everything including flowers, kitchenware, jewellery, clothes, shoes, delicious hot food and the best ice cream in the county. The market takes place every Tuesday and Saturday with just one exception – when the Charter Fair comes to town.

Salisbury Cathedral is just eight miles from Stonehenge – the prehistoric standing stone circle which is at once an iconic landmark, mystifying attraction, and spiritual burial ground. If you are looking for accommodation near to both of these fantastic attractions, look no further than the Holiday Inn Salisbury-Stonehenge.

Just a stone's throw from Stonehenge and with modern, air-conditioned rooms, unbeatable prices and an award-winning restaurant, this is the most comfortable and convenient hotel in Salisbury. We also offer a fantastic cathedrals package which encompasses both Salisbury Cathedral and Winchester Cathedral. Book direct for our lowest rate guarantee.