

# Culture in the Countryside – Hexham



How can we describe Hexham? How about “as handsome a market town as you will find anywhere” as Bill Bryson said? Or “cute as a puppy’s nose, handsome as Clark Gable... the nicest market town in the known universe” as the Guardian newspaper proclaimed? Hexham is all those things and more. It boasts a fascinating (and, at times, bloody) history, incredible architecture, icons including Hexham Abbey and the Old Gaol, interesting shops, an array of eateries and pubs, great events, a spectacular location, fantastic people and a warm welcome for visitors - not to mention Hexham’s proximity to Hadrian’s Wall UNESCO World Heritage Site and Northumberland National Park, home to England’s cleanest rivers, clearest air and darkest skies.

Or you could enjoy scenic walks and cycle routes on the doorstep, two golf courses, rowing, canoeing and kayaking on a beautiful stretch of the River Tyne, theatre, cinema and a leisure centre with pool. We also boast Northumberland’s only racecourse, the most picturesque in Britain!

Isn’t it time you visited Hexham?

## Ideas for A day Out in Hexham with children

**Shop:** Mr Wolf on Market Street is a treasure trove for kids with toys and games aplenty. Cogito Books on St Mary’s Chare has a brilliant children’s book section and a comfy corner with toys where you can while away the time with a good book. They also do free reading sessions which are great fun.

**Eat:** Rising Café on Beaumont Street is a fun option for lunch with lots of kid-friendly foods at reasonable prices. Follow up with a visit to Molly Moos with Jennie on St Mary’s Chare, Hexham’s only ice-cream parlour and the place to go if you fancy a milkshake or ice-cream sundae too. If more sugar is simply necessary then you must visit Lister’s Biscuit Box, a fantastic, independent old-fashioned sweet shop also on St Mary’s Chare.

**Play:** ‘The Big Story’ at the Abbey is a fantastic way to have some fun. You can touch, listen and even smell history through its interactive displays. Dress up as a monk or Queen Etheldreda, try your hand at calligraphy or build a tower without any tools, just as the original Abbey builders did. You can head through to The Refectory Café for afternoon tea if you have worked up an appetite. Another option is the My Little Place role-play centre on St Mary’s Wynd where children up to the age of eight can use their imagination in a variety of different play scenarios. If you’re feeling active, a trip to the Wentworth Leisure Centre is a must. Here you can go wild in the soft play centre Jungle Jacks, take on the family at ten pin bowling or go for a swim. Tyne Green Country Park is a great way to get some fresh air. Feed the ducks, check out the playground with zip wire and generally burn off some of that sugar in a beautiful spot by the river.

**Dinner Time:** Vercelli on Priestpople and Buongiorno on St Mary’s Chare are firm favourites with kids. Fill up on pizza and finish with ice cream!

## **An itinerary for a day out on a winter Saturday or Sunday**

Arrive at Hexham Railway Station. Opened in 1835, Hexham Railway station is one of the oldest railway stations in the world, built to link the lead mines of the North Pennines to the Tyne Docks at Blaydon. The buildings and platform are very attractive and the station was included in the 2017 book, Britain's 100 Best Railway Stations, by Simon Jenkins. Platform two's waiting room has a fireplace made of black marble, which includes many fossilised orthoceras cephalopods, dated to approximately 400 million years old.

Head into town and start the day at Hexham's acclaimed farmers market. (Hexham Farmers' Market takes place every second and fourth Saturday of the month in the Market Place and runs between 9am and 1.30pm). Choose from organic vegetables, seasonal fruit, honey, preserves and baked goods. The quality and choice of meats is exceptional. We also have an exceptional range of local cheeses, artisan breads made with local flour, Northumberland chicken, duck and guinea fowl, gluten-free foods, amazing charcuterie and a series of locally produced crafts.

If you fancy a fossick, you can't go past The Vintage Emporium on Market Street. The Vintage Emporium is home to several Vintage and Retro dealers. Housed in a Georgian building packed with character, there are lots of rooms, nooks and crannies to explore. In the heart of the shop is a pop-up vintage tearoom, so you might want to set aside some time to have a cup of tea... in 1940.

Having had your shopping interest piqued, head along Market Street to Mr Wolf (for incredible toys), cross the road to Robinson Gay (art work by professional Artists from the region and beyond) then head down Hallstile Bank to Sorella (gorgeous handpicked gifts) and Matthias Winter (eco gifts and homewares). You will pass several other independent shops on your way, all of which are well worth a look.

You've probably worked up an appetite by now, so head to The Queen's Hall Café, home of the cheese and bacon scone. The Refectory Café at Hexham Abbey is another delicious option as is The Small World Café, a local's favourite serving fresh homemade food, much of it locally sourced. (They also cater for vegetarian, vegan, dairy free and gluten free requirements, with gluten free bread available for sandwiches and a wide selection of gluten free and dairy free cakes).

Time to walk off that lunch with a stroll by the river at Tyne Green Country Park. There are easy walking and cycling routes and you'll spot a variety of woodland and riverside birds and other wildlife. It's just a 15-minute walk from the town centre across the very handsome 18th century sandstone bridge, and an even shorter drive. (Come back in mid-Autumn and see salmon leaping up the Tyne).

Head back to town and check out the Cogito Books on St Mary's Chare, a lovely independent bookshop set on a cobbled street and stroll around town as you admire the amazing architecture across 1,300 years of history. The Shambles in the Market Place, Moot Hall and Old Gaol all offer excellent photo opportunities.

You'll be spoilt for choice at dinner time. Choose from our award-winning French bistro Bouchon, the newly refurbished and elegant Beaumont Hotel or if an Indian meal appeals (dine-in or takeaway) then Zyka is ideal.

If you're in the mood for a night out, head over to The Forum, our independent, Community-owned Art Deco cinema or visit Haslams of Hallgate, a wonderful art gallery by day but by night, go underground to the historic stone vaults beneath the shop where live music and a drink or three awaits