



ROMAN BATHING

Roger Wheeler gets into hot water - in Bath!

Bath, what can you say about a city that we have all heard of but may not have visited. We know it's all about **Roman baths**, Jane Austen and lots of Georgian buildings. Of course there's a lot more. Students at the two universities and college make up about 25% of the 100,000 population, making it a very young and exciting city and a World Heritage Site as well. It was autumn when we went and the place was stuffed with tourists, they get around 5 million visitors a year. Once you leave the centre though, it's much quieter and you get to see another Bath.

We wondered what it would be like to live in a place like this, where virtually every building is listed and all the roads look very much alike. Without wishing to sound like a philistine, the architecture, although world famous, is all very much the same. Lovely, beautiful, tranquil are among the many adjectives applied to Bath. And it is, but without the thousands of students it would be just a tourist magnet.

That being said the weekend we were there **Bath Rugby Club** were playing **Stade de France**. Rugby is very big in that part of the world and the place was heaving; the rugby ground is right in the middle of the city. The



ROYAL CRESCENT

river **Avon** runs right through the middle and yes it is very attractive. The **Circus** and **Royal Crescent** are the architectural wonders; the main road running down to the centre is actually called **Gay Street**. Being just 13 miles from Bristol, most night life is centred there, but there are several gay bars in Bath which are busy, although not actually on Gay Street.

The **Roman Baths** are fine, visiting is almost compulsory but at **£11** a head, I would be content to stroll around the outside. Many years ago you could actually swim in the baths but our good friends at Health & Safety put a stop to that. It would make a fantastic bath house if they recreated the way the Romans actually used it, you can use your imagination. Almost next door is **The Abbey**. It is free and if you like large churches, then it's certainly worth a look.

There are six hot springs under Bath supplying a million litres of water at around 45 degrees C every day, the Romans loved it. £30m has just been spent on a new spa, called the **Bath Thermae Spa** and it is certainly worth a look. The French rugby team had just visited, thank heavens we missed them, see the Dieux de Stade calendar – it would have been just too much. This new building has been cleverly slotted into some of the old buildings with immense style. It has a large spa pool, not actually for swimming but for floating in, on blue plastic



PULTENEY BRIDGE

floats – and what word should I use – it's very unusual. Then a whole floor of circular glass steam rooms featuring a range of fragrances and a rooftop pool, once again not really for swimming, more for drifting around in. The view over the City is great, even better in the summer when you don't freeze wearing just Speedos. They offer a huge range of spa treatments and gave us a **Watsu** for couples. Words actually fail me to describe this treatment; basically it involved two young ladies in a private pool with us. We were strapped into floatation aids and instructed to close our eyes and 'relax'. After 50 minutes of being gently swung around in the warm water listening to – what they describe as ambient whale 'music' we were done. This treatment was invented in California (where else!) in the 1980s as shiatsu in water hence Watsu, it was – interesting, but not something I would want to repeat.

The Bath Thermae Spa is a fascinating experience, customers are 65% women, you can't guarantee a rugby team every time but it's well worth a visit.



ARTEL VIEW

A weekend in Bath is great, there is lots to see and do; the river trip is a big surprise in itself and certainly worth doing. Take the bus tour, the commentary will give you the history and there's a lot of it. Most of the restaurants would seem to be excellent, there is a vast selection of hotels and guest houses to suit every pocket and, of course, loads of shops. The centre of the city is really quite small, wander around for an hour or so and you will have seen most of the sights.

www.visitbath.co.uk
www.thermaebathspa.com
www.stade.fr/dieuxdustade/
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