**Towns and villages **

Within and close by the North Wessex Downs there are many picturesque market towns and villages with much to offer the day or weekend visitor. If you’re interested in antiques there are lots of interesting shops and dealers in the Marlborough, Hungerford and Pewsey ‘Triangle’. The close proximity of these towns and villages means you can you can browse lots of different antique dealers in a day. For those with an interest in history there are fascinating museums and visitor centres in Devizes, Pewsey, Wantage and Whitchurch. They give an insight into the way of life and landscape of the area from prehistoric times to the present day and are well worth a day out. The Kennet and Avon Canal passes through Devizes, Hungerford, Pewsey and Kintbury, giving them a shared industrial heritage which is now a focal point for walking, cycling and boating.

The market towns all have their distinctive character with independent shops, superb pubs, restaurants and plenty of B&Bs and hotels. During the summer many of the towns and some of the larger villages have music and arts festivals, carnivals plus special events around Christmas.

The Villages of the North Wessex Downs have their own distinct architectural character and include a high proportion of listed properties. In these villages you will find atmospheric Medieval churches dating back to the 12th century plus there is a wonderful Roman villa site with mosaic at Littlecote near Ramsbury. A mix of building styles can be found, mostly influenced by the geology on which the North Wessex Downs sits. From the use of Sarsen stone in the Marlborough Downs and Pewsey

Vale and chalk block cottages of the Berkshire Downs, to the eye catching ‘Flint Knapping’ of the Bourne Valley. More information can be found in a leaflet called ‘Diversity in Stone’, available to download here.

**Marlborough**

Marlborough is a very attractive and bustling market town on the River Kennet. It is packed with antique shops, galleries and independent fashion retailers. If you’re looking for collectable art, old books or just like to browse for antiques then Marlborough is the place to come. Once you get here you will find lots of places to eat and drink and things to do. And if you are a jazz fan you will not want to miss the International Music Festival in July featuring up to 120 bands. As the Daily Telegraph puts it: “Each year the exquisite market town of Marlborough becomes a mini New Orleans”

**Pewsey**

For a village, Pewsey is packed with things to see and do. The Kennet and Avon Canal passes through the conurbation and at the pretty wharf you can stop for tea and watch the narrow boats go by. In the town you will find a statue of King Alfred the Great, who owned lands in the area and there’s a wonderful Heritage Centre based in a Victorian Foundry which showcases Pewsey life through the ages. There are many antique shops in the vicinity, a music festival in August and carnival/feast in September, which culminates in an illuminated procession.

**Wantage**

Located just to the North of the Ridgeway lies the historic market town of Wantage, famous as the birthplace of King Alfred the Great, and you will find a marble statue in the main square in his honour. The Vale and Downland Museum is a great place to discover more about the Downs and there are over 3000 objects on display, many hands-on experiences and a large model railway. Wantage has its own Arts festival in Summer plus the town is packed with many pubs, restaurants and shops. And if you’re interested in literature you may be fascinated to learn that Thomas Hardy’s ‘Jude the Obscure’ was set in nearby Letcombe Bassett where ‘Arabella’s Cottage’ can still be seen.

**Hungerford**

Situated on the Kennet and Avon Canal, this historic town has much to offer the visitor. The town is famous for its antique shops and independent retailers. For lunch or dinner you will find a wide range of vibrant pubs and restaurants. There are popular events throughout the year including a 3 week arts festival in summer and a Victorian Extravaganza evening in December. Just 5 minutes from the centre you can take a stroll or have a picnic on Freeman’s Marsh or the ancient Hungerford Common. Hungerford is now the only place in the country that celebrates the annual Hocktide festival, an English Medieval tradition celebrated on the second Tuesday after Easter Sunday. The festival dates from the 14th Century when John of Gaunt gave the rights of free grazing and fishing to local ‘commoners’. It has celebrated the granting of commoners’ rights for over 600 years.

**Great Shefford**

Located by the river Lambourn, this pretty village has many lovely centuries old and thatched houses to view. The 13th Century parish church of St Mary is architecturally interesting as one of only two round-tower churches in Berkshire.

**Kintbury**

The picturesque village of Kintbury is regarded as one of the most beautiful villages in England and one of the most sought after to live in. Located beside the Kennet and Avon Canal, one of the few remaining horse-drawn barges can be seen at weekends during the summer, pulled by Cross-Shire horses Freddie and Monty. The village was likely first inhabited in the Middle Stone Age, with evidence of Saxon and Roman settlement. If you like to sample local produce why not try the local Ciderniks cider which can be purchased in the local shops and pubs.

**Aldbourne and Ramsbury**

Aldbourne and Ramsbury are two pretty villages located 10 kilometres North East of Marlborough in a valley south of the Lambourn Downs. Aldbourne medieval church of St Michael is a Grade I listed building and well worth a visit. Plus the Village has more recent fame as the real base during WWII for Easy Company of the 101st Airborne Division who featured in the award winning television series ‘Band of Brothers’. Ramsbury boasts its own Brewery and an award-winning tea company and within its parish you can visit the impressive Littlecote Roman Villa with its outstanding Orpheus mosaic. There is also a beautiful 13th Century church complete with its own ghost.

**Devizes**

Devizes is a charming town to visit with over 500 listed buildings, some of which date back to the 16th Century. The Kennet and Avon canal passes through the town and at Caen Hill you will find a spectacular flight of 29 locks. The town boasts 2 museums and a free visitor centre at Wadworth Brewery. The Wiltshire Heritage Museum has the finest Bronze Age archaeology collection in England while the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust Museum tells the story of the construction and restoration of the canal. The Brewery visitor centre provides a fascinating insight into the brewing process and an insight into the lives of the Shire horses that still make deliveries in the town.

**Lambourn**

Lambourn takes its name from centuries-old sheep breeding in the area. More recently Lambourn has become synonymous with the horse racing industry with over 50 yards and 2,000 horses based around the town. The springy downland and large open spaces are ideal terrain for gallops. At Easter every year Lambourn Open Day gives access to many of the yards, and there are events and activities for all the family in the afternoon.

**Goring and Streatley**

Located close to the picturesque ‘Goring Gap’ on the Thames are two villages either side of the river – Goring in Oxfordshire and Streatley in Berkshire. The villages are situated at the only meeting place of three ancient routes: The Ridgeway, Icknield Way and River Thames. From the bridge across the Thames you get some wonderful scenic photographic opportunities or you can just stand and admire the view. In the villages you will find shops, pubs, a 12th Century church, places to stay and some very nice riverside walks.

**Whitchurch**

The town is believed to have taken its name from early church built of white chalk. Situated at the head of the river Test, Whitchurch has many listed buildings and the UK’s only working Silk Mill. Built in 1800, the mill is open for visitors and features the original mill wheel and Victorian machinery plus beautiful fabrics on the looms. The shop sells silk products made at the mill and there is a tea room for refreshments.