



Reading

The town of Reading is situated in Berkshire and boasts the perks of a busy town whilst still sitting close to beautiful Berkshire countryside. Reading has something for everyone, whether you like strolls along the canal, a bit of retail therapy or historic sites like Reading Abbey.

| Housing

As with all locations, rent varies in Reading. On websites like spareroom.co.uk, you can find a reasonable room in a shared flat that's relatively close to the city centre for between £400 – 600 pcm. Price is more dependent on the size and or quality of the accommodation rather than location, but flats located close to the town centre and station will cost slightly more. The more high-end rental apartments close to the train station cost from £800- £1300 a month.

The university campus area is pleasant and leafy. Close proximity to the university means you can also make the most of their sports facilities. There are flatshares in some of the Georgian terraces just off London Road which are popular with local students and young professionals.

It is likely that estate agents will point you to Caversham first if you're looking for somewhere in Reading and for good reason; it's quiet, relaxed and has a pleasant sense of community. Situated in the North, Caversham's centre is based around Gosbrook Road, only a stone's throw away from the river and across the bridges from the centre of town.



The Oracle

The area around Oxford Road perhaps does not have as strong a reputation as Caversham, but you may still like it. Rent is likely to be cheaper here and most

places can still be a walkable distance to the town centre, otherwise there is a 3 minute train journey into the centre.

Wokingham is a green and family friendly area on the outskirts of Reading. There is a small town centre with a range of national and local shops, restaurants and pubs. Other facilities include a cinema close by, two leisure centres and a bowling alley. Wokingham is a 15 minute train journey to Reading and just over an hour to London Waterloo. Rent ranges from £500-£700 pcm depending on quality.

| Things to do



Forbury Gardens

Reading is one of the UK's top 10 retail destinations, so is great for anyone who loves a bit of retail therapy. Reading's Oracle Centre is open till 8pm most weekdays and is an ideal location for some after work shopping. Directly behind the shopping centre, the walk by the canal offers a good choice of restaurants and a great cinema.

Reading Museum is a hidden gem in the town centre and is a great amusement for a rainy day. When the sun does shine, the Thames footpath offers some pleasant walks, and the Forbury Gardens are truly beautiful. For those who enjoy watching rugby on a weekend, the London Irish home matches are played at the Madejski Stadium (home of Reading FC).

Reading festival takes place every August, bringing in music lovers from across the country, and the Concert Hall hosts a variety of concerts including many classical concerts as part of Classical Music Alive. For comedy and theatre, try the Hexagon which hosts a variety of shows all year round.



If you fancy a day trip outside of Reading, Henley, Oxford and Windsor are all only short train journeys away too.

| Food and Drink

Bills by St. Mary's Church courtyard and London Street Brasserie are local favourites. For something a bit different, try Ethiopian food at Global Café. For a lazy Sunday morning, head for a coffee at Workhouse Coffee, while the microbrewery Zero Degrees is a great spot for a drink.

If you fancy a night out, Friar Street is a good bet: there's Q Club, Sub 89 and Lola Lo (a Hawaiian beach hut themed club with great cocktails) among others. It's also worth keeping an eye on events running at the Rivermead Leisure Complex: Annie Mac, Breach, and Hot Since 82 have all made an appearance there!

| Transport

Rail: It's easy to get to most places from Reading, thanks to its central location and well serviced train station.

Trains to London operate regularly, but the 30min journey to London Paddington which costs around £45 at peak is the most expensive commuter line in the country.

An alternative is the direct line to London Waterloo which is 1hr 20mins from Reading. This line passes through areas surrounding Reading such as Wokingham, Bracknell and Ascot which are ideal places to live if you are working in London but don't want to live in the capital. The yearly season ticket for this line is over £1000 cheaper than the line to Paddington.

Bus: There is an extensive bus network in Reading. Buses go around the centre and to neighbouring towns. In particular, it is worth noting that the 17 service runs all day and night.

Car: The M4 is easily accessible from Reading. For driving locally, there is plenty of parking available in the town centre at the Oracle.

Walking/Cycling: There are 13 Reading Cycle Routes and many cycle paths around Central Reading. There are also a number of "Ready Bike" Cycle Hire spots around the centre, and many bike parking areas.

It is also easy to get around Reading on foot. A walking commute (20 minutes) is possible from several locations including lower Caversham and Newtown. Furthermore, the "Reading Explorer" pedestrian navigation system will help anyone new to the area get around central Reading.

Airport: Heathrow is only a 30 min shuttle bus service away and Gatwick is reachable in just over an hour by train.



Reading Museum and Town Hall

| Civil Service Community

There are several Civil Service offices based in Reading, including one of the main offices of the Rural Payments Agency, and offices belonging to HMRC and DWP.

Although Reading is technically in the South East, the South West Fast Stream Network acts as a social link for all Fast Streamers in the region, and organises regular social events. The most recent contact details can be found on Facebook.

| Useful Links

For more things to do in Reading: <http://rguide.co.uk>

For info on Reading buses: <http://www.reading-buses.co.uk>

Travel in Reading: <http://www.reading-travelinfo.co.uk>



Bristol is the largest city in the South West and is known for its world famous harbour and history. Art plays a prominent role in the city's identity, particularly as world-famous artist Banksy was born here. Known as the UK's first cycling city, there is plenty to explore in the city itself and in the beautiful countryside beyond the centre.

| Housing

Bristol is a university city which makes it a fun and vibrant place to live, but can mean that the smaller apartments and flat shares go quite quickly. Generally, the more popular areas to live are around the Gloucester Road, a 1.5 mile stretch full of bars and restaurants which lead into the city centre.

Rental prices do vary but you can get a modern 1 bedroom apartment in Bristol for £725pcm or for £600 you can get a room in a flatshare in nicer areas closer to Clifton. For those looking for somewhere a bit bigger, a 3 bed house can be rented for between £850-1300pcm, depending on the location.

| Things to do



Cabot Circus

Bristol has good shopping facilities, with the most popular areas to visit being Cabot Circus and The Galleries shopping centre. Cribbs Causeway offers outlet shopping just outside of the city centre.

For those interested in sports, Bristol has a range of rugby, hockey, football, rowing and other sports clubs and will cater for first timers looking for something new right through to battle-hardened veterans. Regular public sports events such as the triathlon around the harbour and the Bristol 10k take place in the warmer months.

Bristol is a fantastic city for lovers of the arts. There are regular art exhibitions and festivals celebrating everything from Shakespeare to urban art. Bristol is also home to the famous graffiti artist Banksy, whose work is dotted around the city and can be found using helpful online guides. The Bristol Museum and Art Gallery also makes for a good cultural day out, and is situated near the city's medieval Cathedral



Bristol Harbour

The river boat ferries are an enjoyable way to help you get to know the city, there is even a Cider Boat you can board to sample the South West's famous apple juices. Bristol also hosts the famous Bristol Harbour Festival, Love Saves The Day and the Bristol International Hot Air Balloon Fiesta which is really popular.

In addition to the city itself, Bristol is surrounded by beautiful countryside, meaning it's easy to get away from it all. The spa city of Bath is a great place to visit and is only 15 minutes away by train.

| Food and Drink

Bristol has a number of mini-festivals for food and drink, including the Bristol Food Connections Festival, a city wide festival celebrating Bristol's vibrant food culture, and the Foodies Festival at the Downs.

Bristol has lots to offer if you're eating out, from Michelin starred restaurants to local pubs. Bordeaux Quay is situated by the beautiful harbour, offering the best in regionally sourced food and drink. There is also a good range of independent retailers offering specialist cuisine, which can be found around Gloucester Road and St Nicholas' Market. There are also lots of pop-up eateries and the like; this means



that it isn't easy to say where to go one week to the next. Your best bet is to search for top places in Bristol online to keep up to date on where to have your next meal out!

For nightlife, the variety is huge in Bristol. There are many clubs and bars around the city centre, including some familiar names such as Pop World. For something a little more stylish try Cosy Club which offers delicious cocktails in a majestic old vaulted bank setting. There is also the Milk Thistle cocktail bar, and for a more unusual night, try Smoke and Mirrors, the UK's only Boutique Magic Theatre with magicians performing regularly.

| Transport

Rail: By train, Bristol Temple Meads is only 1hr 45 to London Paddington, 1hr 25 to Birmingham New Street and 15 min to Bath. Bristol also has its own local train line which can help with commuting if you live in the north of the city or Clifton. Beware of flooding in the winter months as the South West can be disrupted pretty quickly.

Bus: The bus network is good and has a mixture of routes which mix speed and coverage as a priority. A Bristol Rider Day ticket costs £4.50, or £20 for a Bristol Rider week ticket, which covers the area roughly within a six mile radius of the city centre.

Car: Bristol is well connected by road via the M4 and M5. However, it is not as accessible to get around the city centre by car as public transport, by bike or on foot, though there is some parking available.



Cyclists in Bristol

Cycling/Walking: Bristol was named as the UK's first Cycling City, which means that it is one of Europe's

most bike-friendly destinations. There are cycle routes on almost all of Bristol's major roads and plenty of places to lock up your bike, over 300 cycle parking spaces and free to use bike pumps around the city. This means you can easily commute to work by bike, or if you prefer more leisurely cycle rides, take a tour round the city and its surroundings at the weekend.

Bristol is also easy to get around on foot and there is a Harbour Heritage Trail if you fancy a scenic walk round Bristol's Harbour area.

Airport: Bristol Airport is easily accessible, and has flights going across Europe to destinations including Amsterdam, Madrid and Corfu, as well as flights across the UK.

| Civil Service Community

There are several Civil Service departments in Bristol. The Ministry of Defence has two sites at Abbeywood to the north of the city and National Offender Management Service is also represented in both Bristol and nearby Gloucester. Finally, the Department for Work and Pensions has a presence in Bristol with Jobcentre Plus and a Disability Benefits Centre at Flowers Hill, meaning there are lots of opportunities to build networks with Civil Service colleagues in different departments.

The South West Fast Stream Network acts as a social link for all Fast Streamers in the South West region, and organises regular social events. The most recent contact details can be found on Facebook.

| Useful Links

Things to do in Bristol: www.visitbristol.co.uk

Travel West: Information on buses and routes
<http://travelwest.info/bus>

Banksy Tour around Bristol:
<http://www.tourinaday.com/bristol/banksy-bristol-free-tour.html>

Better by Bike - Cycling website for Bristol, Bath, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire:
<http://www.betterbybike.info>



Andover is a picturesque market town in North-West Hampshire situated near Basingstoke, Winchester and Salisbury (in nearby Wiltshire). A site of military activity during WW2, Andover hosted the RAF's Maintenance Command, and today is the location of Army Headquarters.

| Housing

Housing in Andover tends to be more affordable than in the neighbouring villages, towns and cities, though you could choose to commute in from a nearby town or village. Rent for a 1 bedroom apartment in Andover currently ranges from £575-900pcm depending on size and location, though flat shares can be much cheaper. For those considering a larger home, you can rent a 2 bedroom house for £700-1000pcm, or a 3 bedroom house will set you back between £850-£1200pcm.

In terms of location, it's advisable to live near the town centre and transport links such as the train station, as this provides easy access to the centre and nearby attractions. Young professionals tend to live in these areas, rather than the new build housing estates.

For a town so small, Andover has quite a lively housing market, with properties often being taken shortly after they are posted online, so if you find your dream property, go for it right away!

| Things to do



The Lights Theatre

Andover has an active town centre with a cinema, several gyms, a pool and "The Lights", a theatre known for its range of comedy, theatre and arts events. You should also find many high street brands in Andover, but otherwise Festival Place in

Basingstoke is close and easy to get to by car or train and should cover anything and everything else that you need!

There is plenty to explore in Andover. Near to the town are a number of unique attractions, such as Highclere Castle (which doubles as the set of



Highclere Castle

Downton Abbey), the Iron Age Danebury hill fort and the award-winning Hawk Conservancy Trust where you can see over 150 birds of prey.

For those who want to explore Andover's history, the town hosts several museums including The Museum of the Iron Age, and in-keeping with its military links, the Museum of Army Flying. There are also many historic sites nearby.

That said, one of the highlights of Andover really is the beautiful local scenery. There are walking, riding and cycling routes across the Test Valley, as well as lots of picturesque lakes.

| Food and Drink

There are a wide range of good pubs and bars in Andover, but of particular note are The Station; recommended as a nice, affordable pub, and the Town Mills which is particularly quaint and historic. A recent addition to the town is the community-run skittle alley and bar, Breakers, which is popular with the locals.

Andover also boasts a selection of excellent restaurants and cafes. Burbidge's Bakery makes excellent cakes and pastries and The Copper Kettle provides delicious home-made food whether you fancy breakfast, lunch or just a snack. If you fancy a huge slice of cake and a nice pot of tea after a long



Civil Service HR Fast Stream

walk then TeaCosy in nearby Hurstbourne Tarrant is definitely worth a visit – who doesn't love a clock made out of teacups? There are a good range of local restaurants from good pub food at The Old Bell & Crown, to top rated Indian restaurant The Curry Leaf. You can also find many of your familiar chain restaurants in nearby Basingstoke, including Zizzi, La Tasca and Wagamama.

| Transport

Walking/Cycling: Andover is quite a small town, so most places in the town proper can be reached by foot in under an hour, and cycling is also a viable option for travel as there are several cycle ways and more in development by the Borough Council.

Car: For car users, there are several fairly cheap pay and display car parks, with 14 that are free to park in after 4pm.

Bus: There are active bus networks if you'd prefer to use public transport, with several regular bus services through the centre of Andover and other buses that can take you to Winchester, Salisbury and Basingstoke.



The Town Mills

Rail: If you fancy exploring further afield, Andover has good train links to Basingstoke and Salisbury, which are just 20 minutes away. Given the easy commute from Basingstoke and Salisbury you could choose to live in those cities and commute in to Andover for work.

Andover

You can also get to London Waterloo in just over an hour. Andover is less well connected to Winchester, but there are bus routes and train connections between the two, and Andover train station is conveniently situated in the town centre.

| Civil Service Community

The Ministry of Defence is the largest employer in Andover, and Andover is home to Army Headquarters as well as the Headquarters for the Field Army, so you'll be in good company in terms of other Civil Servants and Crown Servants.

The local Fast Stream group for this area is the South East Fast Streamer group. The most recent contact details can be found on One HR, to find out more about the sorts of social events they organise.

| Useful Links

For information on what to do and see in Andover:

<http://www.visit-hampshire.co.uk/places-to-visit/test-valley/andover>

For more information on events and performances at The Lights, a local theatre:

<http://www.thelights.org.uk/>

A list of things to do in Andover:

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/localpages/andover-attract.htm>

Useful when looking for property to rent in Andover:

<http://www.rightmove.co.uk/property-to-rent/Andover.html>