



Bath in all its autumn colours

Nicky Hancock recommends a day out in Bath for some serious pampering and retail therapy

WITH the stone glowing amber in the autumn light, this is the season to visit Bath. World Heritage status draws visitors from around the globe so we are fortunate to have such a perfectly preserved gem virtually on our doorstep. Sublime architecture and a fascinating history plus exhibitions, festivals and theatre ensure there is never a dull moment in this most picturesque of English cities.

After much controversy about the Nicholas Grimshaw design, the £45 million Thermae Bath Spa has been widely acclaimed and attracts 150,000 visitors a year. The opening of the spa in 2006 ended a period of 28 years when the UK's only hot springs were not accessible to bathe in. A series of pools at different levels culminate in the rooftop pool where you can soak in the natural thermal

waters and admire the Georgian buildings below. As the evenings draw in this makes for a dramatic experience, with the steam rising into the crisp autumn air and the lights twinkling of the city. The midweek "Twilight Package" includes three hours for the price of two plus a meal and glass of wine, so a great way to unwind after a day pounding the streets shopping for your autumn wardrobe. The spa has a full range of treatments including some unusual ones like "watsu" where you float in the warm thermal waters while being soothed and massaged by your therapist.

The water from the springs is believed to have fallen as rain around 10,000 years ago and then sank to a depth of about 2 km below the earth's surface. Over one million litres of mineral-rich water flows from the thermal springs each day, at an average

temperature of 45°C.

Bath's *raison d'être* hangs around sybaritic pleasures. The natural hot thermal waters with their unique properties gushing from deep below brought the Romans and later the Georgians who built frenetically to house the influx of fashionable visitors. The Georgians were masters of social networking long before anyone had invented Facebook. They made Bath what it is today and much of it feels like a film set. It is hardly surprising that the Bath Film Office is always busy arranging filming for blockbusters like *The Duchess* and *Vanity Fair*. Sipping a genteel cup of tea in the Pump Room while the trio play soothing Bach melodies, it's easy to imagine the Eighteenth Century aristocracy gossiping with each other over a warm glass of the healing water packed full of minerals to banish their ailments.

Despite the tourist trade, the city has avoided becoming quaint and kitsch and has maintained a thriving and fashionable retail scene. Milsom Street was a favourite with Jane Austen and is home to one of the oldest department stores in the country, Jolly's. Today it is home to some classy brands like Ted Baker, Reiss, Hobbs and Duo. Duo opened their first shop in Bath with the ingenious idea of selling boots to fit individual calf sizes. But the smart money wanders off the main drag to discover side streets and alleyways packed with small and wonderful shops just waiting to be discovered.

With a high proportion of independent

shops, Bath is no clone high street. Visitors love the personal service from fashion boutiques like Mee in Barlett Street. Pretty as a picture, Mee is a delight. Owner Emma Mandell-Lynn says "girls of every age love to come here because we get to know them and look after them and make them feel special. Shopping in Bath is a real pleasure not a hard slog because Bath is so compact."

There are some great new retail developments. Flagship L.K.Bennett and Jigsaw stores can be found in the Old Post Office. Milsom Place which was completed a year ago, incorporates 13 listed buildings. This is no dull shopping arcade but a great addition to the city with a mix of good



chenille and leather bags and a shop in Margaret's Buildings. Prey, another great independent boutique, on George Street love their soft leather bags by Irish designer Orla Keisley and Betty Jackson shoes. Longchamp, Cartier, Moschino and Bulgari handbags can be found at Mallory, Bath's oldest jewellers and "Clockmaker to the Admiralty". With the excuse of a big birthday or anniversary to celebrate, whisk your beloved to one of Bath's independent jewellers like Judy Cory and Nicholas Wyde.

Gift shopping is fun in Bath with shops like Bloomsbury, Vinegar Hill and Quadri. Bloomsbury has gifts for all with Tintin merchandise, Azumi jewellery and Paul Smith cufflinks and Quadri carries Alessi as well as jewellery, watches and picture frames. The White Company is always a treat for all the senses and closeby in the Podium find Crabtree and Evelyn and affordable silver at the Silvermine. After London, Bath is widely recognised as one of the UK's top places to buy artwork. No less than 28 galleries cover a wide range of prices and media and provide a platform for up and coming young artists as well as well established painters and sculptors.

Take a pit stop at Champney's Town and City Spa for a quick fix manicure or facial or some serious pampering in the tranquil Green Street House. New Bond Street is Bath's beauty HQ with Molton Brown, l'Occitane,

Space NK Apothecary and the Beauty Store where you can book a mini makeover and emerge as a new you.

The Bath ladies who lunch head for Milsom Place to dine at Jamie Oliver's Italian, the flagship restaurant in Jamie Oliver's new group or at the Moon and Sirenice. The West Country has been called the larder of England and Bath is groaning with great produce so it's a magnet for culinary talent. Under top chef, Michael Caines, the Bath Priory has a Michelin Star and other good hotel restaurants with set price lunch menus include the Olive Tree and The Cavendish Restaurant. With 150 British cheeses to taste, the Fine Cheese Company café does great lunches and cakes. For a coffee, cakes and light lunches, try the Circus Café, upstairs at Shoon or Bloomsbury or Jika-Jika, the newest coffee house owned by Matt Stevens and Lee Mears better known for their connections with Bath Rugby.

Download the new Bath Travel Guide from www.visitbath.co.uk for information about access and park and ride schemes. Park and ride is the best way to avoid wasting valuable shopping time while you find a car parking space.

Who needs a sprawling claustrophobic shopping mall when you can be charmed by the delights of Bath? Rediscover the city and book in some pamper time. ■



restaurants and attractive shops. Slick finishes and expanses of plate glass create a contemporary atmosphere against a backdrop of typical Bath "rubble stone" and a series of pavements and courtyards connect Milsom Street and Broad Street. Next to open will be the vast SouthGate Centre which has transformed the unloved lower end of the town. Phase 1 is due to open on November 4th with New Look, Republic and H&M followed by a flagship Debenhams store in May 2010.

Vintage is in vogue and Vintage to Vogue off Milsom Street has the genuine article.

Sassy and Boo sell very sassy hand beaded, replica flapper dresses made from authentic patterns from the thirties. Sassy & Boo is now in Milsom Place as well as Margaret's Buildings, a delightful pedestrian street, located between the two famous architectural set pieces, the Circus and the Royal Crescent, lined with top notch gift shops and galleries. Instant Vintage is a welcome addition to George Street with vintage inspired modern fashion. Traffic People, new to Milsom Place this October with their first store outside London, create their own style; "modern vintage glamour," romantic and feminine.

Cath Kidston comes with its own unique timeless style and charming retro floral prints. Serious style queens favour Square in Old Bond Street. Owner Lyn Gardner selects key pieces from each season's collections from designer like Alexander McQueen, Stella McCartney, Missoni and Matthew Williamson. For more designer labels look for Max Mara, Paddy Campbell and Sonya Riekel at Image in Milsom Place.

This is Mulberry Country and Lux carries the iconic Mulberry Bayswater as well as Juicy Couture shoes. Bath is proud of its very own handbag label, Liz Cox with her distinctive

