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Okehampton

Visitor Guide



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Image courtesy of Rob Greaves Drone Photography

WHO

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Contents

Useful information	4	Okehampton Railway	14
Welcome	5	Mayor's Chapel	15
Town history and Walk	6	What Okehampton has to offer	18
Attractions	10	Pavilion in the park	20
Okehampton Castle	12	Art around town	22
Okehampton Museum	13	10 Tors	25



Designed and published by

Useful information

www.visitokehampton.co.uk

Long stay car parks:

Mill Road
Simmons Park
Acorns car park

Short Stay car parks:

Waitrose
Co-op
Rosemary House

Public toilets:

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Fairplace Garden
Leisure Centre
Waitrose

Healthcare

Minor Injuries Unit:

Okehampton Medical Centre, East Street,
Okehampton, EX20 1AY 01837 52233
Office hours 8:15am - 6pm

Pharmacies:

Lloyds & Boots both in Fore Street



Welcome to Okehampton



Okehampton has been welcoming people for over 2000 years, and now we are pleased to welcome you and hope you enjoy exploring the town and discovering more about its heritage.

Okehampton's Roman remains were newly discovered when St James Primary School was built. A Roman fort and road were unearthed at the east end of town. Excavations have confirmed the military origin of the fort and suggested occupation in the period AD 50-80. In 1984 three ovens and a small part of the northern rampart were revealed.

Evidence can still be found of the early Bronze Age settlement on the surrounding moorland. Saxon rule came in the 7th century, the name "Ocmundtune" meaning settlement by the Okement is first recorded in AD 980. The Saxon lords were overthrown by Norman conquerors, Baldwin de Brionne the first Norman Sheriff

established Okehampton castle as the administration centre of his estates. These passed, by marriage, to the Courtenay family who rebuilt the castle as a lavishly defended country retreat.

In 1538 Henry VIII seized the estate from the family and the 9th Earl was beheaded for conspiracy. The town grew in importance during the middle ages but the castle never saw a shot fired in anger. This remained the case even during the Civil war when Okehampton was careful to remain neutral.

The industrial revolution happened on Dartmoor during the Middle Ages. Trade in tin and wool created wealth in the local area.

Town history

Get to know Okehampton by following our historic walk around the town: Start at the Town Hall in Fore Street. The Town Hall was originally built as a house in 1685 by John Northmore. It became the Town Hall in the mid 1820's when the previous Guild Hall was demolished.

Almost opposite is the Victorian arcade built in 1894 by Henry Geen. Walk through the arcade and at the end bear right, where you will find Fairplace garden which has recently been redesigned as a sensory garden.

Follow the signs for the Castle and continue past the allotments and Brocks Alms-houses. The two cottages were built in 1588 by Richard Brook whose widow Grace left them and an acre of land to the town. In 1847 John Crotch the then Mayor of Okehampton instigated the rebuilding of the cottages by the charity that oversaw the alms houses.

A bit further along the road splits, take the left-hand fork past the site of the old work house. This later became the Castle hospital before having another reinvention in to residential homes. Follow the heritage trail past Castle Ham Lodge. Keep right beside the river along a public footpath, through a gate and across the boardwalk. Turn right and cross the West Ockment River by the bridge at Old Town Park



Follow the path to the left where you will see the Castle which is well worth a visit. When you leave the Castle follow the road back towards the town and on your left is signposted a public footpath to New Road. At the top of this footpath is an ancient horse drinking trough, with its history beside it.

When you emerge on New Road turn right and follow it past the carpet shop which in the 1920's was a showroom owned by T. Day and Sons Ltd selling motor cars. On the verge opposite is the site of the former prison dating from 1623. Metal railings in the bridge wall mark the spot. On the bridge beside the verge are 4 metal flags detailing the history of the river banks.

Turn left by the London Inn into Westbridge Close, at the end of the carpark is a gate into Clapps Woods previously the gardens to Clapps Mill which stood on the site of the current Co-op and closed in the 1900's.

When you have walked through the woods you will emerge just up from Oaklands Lodge, the gate house to Oaklands House which cannot be seen from here. Continue along the drive as far as Rivers Edge Court, and cross over the bridge in to an area with seating behind Lidl's. This is the confluence of the West and East Ockment Rivers, an unusual occurrence in a town.

Follow the building around into the carpark and cross the bridge leading to North Street. Turn right beside the Ockment Centre, a building that used to be a primary school but is now a community centre.

Continue towards the town passing the Library on your left which used to be a Sunday School. At the junction with Fore Street go right to the pelican crossing opposite St James' Chapel and cross.

Between St James' Chapel and Bridge House are three metal pigs, which can be used as bike racks. In medieval times pigs would roam the streets clearing up anything left behind. Follow St James' Street past the

Kings Arms and turn into Park Row. The Statue of Jim the Walker looks down from the end building. Walk along here until you are opposite the Park gates. Simmons Park was donated to the town by Sydney Simmons a local benefactor in 1907. Follow the paths through the formal gardens past the Chalet Treloar. Here there are paths up through the woods to Station Road and the railway station.



© Kate Rivers

Cross the bridge into the playing fields and head towards the bandstand built a hundred years after the first as a replacement. Follow the path towards the carpark and cross the river over the bridge by the phone box. Turn right and follow the main path to the park gates where you will be facing back towards Fairplace Gardens.

Head towards Fairplace Garden past the Post Office and Peel House (the old police station), which was used until 1995, when the police station moved to the old secondary school in Exeter Road. Follow the road past the front of The White Hart Hotel which is now a Wetherspoons. Just past is the gateway to the Museum of Dartmoor Life housed in an old mill building dating back to 1811.

Simmons Park is a very special place. It was opened in July 1907 by the Lord Mayor of London, Lord Treloar and named after Sydney Simmons, a local benefactor, who generously gifted the park to the town. In June 2002 the park was entered into the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England to safeguard its park status. In July 2007 Simmons Park was twinned with a second park donated to the community by Sydney Simmons, Friary Park in Friern Barnet, London. In 2012 Simmons Park gained a Queen Elizabeth II Fields in Trust award and in 2020 the park was voted Much Loved Status by Fields In Trust. Simmons Park has many features including a WWII pillbox, woodland walks, play areas for all ages and recreation areas.



© GC Designs



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The sensory garden was created as a reflectionary area where people can have an all round sensory experience. It's an all-inclusive area for people with dementia and disabilities to access and enjoy strong smelling plants, bright flowers and a variety of scented leaves and rough grasses to touch.

Okehampton is fortunate to have several woodland areas within easy walking distance of the town. Clapps Wood, accessible through Westbridge Close or Lodge Hill, has recently undergone a replanting scheme after being decimated by ash dieback. Old Town Park was formally the deer park of Okehampton Castle, in Spring the Bluebells carpet the area. From Simmons Park there is a circular walk to Ball Hill and Tramlines.



Attractions



Image Okehampton Rivers Improvement Group

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|----|-------------------------------|
| 1 | St.James Chapel | 8 | Railway Station |
| 2 | All Saints Church | 9 | Swiss Cottage in Simmons Park |
| 3 | Victorian Arcade | 10 | Okehampton Castle |
| 4 | Red Lion Yard | 11 | Post Office |
| 5 | The White Hart Hotel | 12 | Medical Centre |
| 6 | Town Hall | 13 | Okemant Centre |
| 7 | Museum of Dartmoor Life | | |



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Okehampton Castle

Today you can step back into the past with a visit to the substantial ruins of Okehampton Castle one of the largest castles in Devon. It stands a short distance from the town centre, in a stunning setting on a wooded spur above the rushing River Okement.

Begun soon after the Norman Conquest as a motte and bailey castle with a stone keep, it was converted into a sumptuous residence in the 14th century by Hugh Courtenay, Earl of Devon, much of whose

work survives. After the last Courtenay owner fell foul of Henry VIII in 1539, the castle declined into a ruin.

There is a riverside picnic area and beautiful woodland walks nearby. It's also a great place for bird lovers with regular visiting species. In spring and early summer you can enjoy a variety of seasonal wildflowers, which adorn the meadow, woodland and motte.

Visit: Okehampton Castle / English Heritage (english-heritage.org.uk) for more information.



Image courtesy of Rob Greaves Drone Photography



Museum

The Museum of Dartmoor Life is situated just off West Street, Okehampton, at the end of a long cobbled courtyard. It was originally a medieval burgage plot which was later developed in 1811 into a mill for grinding mainly animal feed. Also in the courtyard is a cottage where Okehampton benefactor, Sydney Simmons, lived with his family which is now a tearoom and opposite is the building that was their printing business.

1976 saw the inaugural meeting of the Okehampton and District Museum Association, organised by John Young. A fund raising committee was set up and with the help of the Town Council the derelict buildings were eventually purchased, mostly untouched since they were damaged by a WWII bomb. Further fundraising led to the renovation of the buildings over many years. Much of the initial collection came from Alan Endacott who had been collecting Dartmoor artefacts since he was a boy and he then became the first Museum Curator.

On the 4th July 1981 the museum was finally opened. Spread over three floors it houses 5000 years of Dartmoor history and

really does have something for everyone. A Bronze Age hut, Roman artifacts, a Victorian kitchen, information on the occupations of Dartmoor people, the wars and a whole floor on farming.

Now in its 41st year the Museum has gone from strength to strength due to its amazing band of volunteers who have loved it and helped it grow for the benefit of Okehampton townspeople and visitors alike.

The Museum reopens in March and closes at the end of November. It is open Monday to Friday 10am-4pm and Saturday 10am-1pm. More information can be found at www.dartmoorlife.org.uk, check out the films on the Museum of Dartmoor Life YouTube channel.

There is a 5 mile walk linking the two museums of north Dartmoor- National Trust Finch Foundry in Sticklepath and the Museum of Dartmoor Life in Okehampton. This route crosses open moorland and care should be taken before setting out.

More information can be found at
www.Sticklepath.org/information/walks-leaflets



Quarry. After a lot of work by local groups the passenger railway service was reinstated in 2021. In the intervening years the line was used for a Sunday rover service from Okehampton to Exeter as well as a Christmas Special. The opening of the refurbished station and facilities in May 2022 coincided with the start of the hourly train service.

Railway

Okehampton Railway opened in 1871 connecting Okehampton to Exeter. The railway was used for moving stone from nearby Meldon Quarry, which saved the track from being removed, as well as for transporting passengers and goods. The passenger side of the railway was closed in 1972 as part of Dr Breechings cuts but ballast was still moved from Meldon



Mayor's Chapel

St James' Chapel is a Chapel of Ease, situated in the heart of Okehampton town centre. Before the building of West Bridge, in bad weather it was difficult to cross the river in boats or punts and reach the parish church so St James was used instead. It is an ecumenical chapel and belongs to the town of Okehampton.

The primary role of the chapel is as a quiet place of reflection in the middle of a busy town. From around the time of Henry VIII it functioned as a free chapel under the control of the Mayor and Burgesses of Okehampton. This was the position until 1873 when it ceased to be under the control of the Mayor and was conveyed to the management of five charity trustees. On a Thursday at 9:50am you will hear the bell tolling calling people to the Communion service.

It was restored in 1862 by Ashworth and is built of granite. There is Tudor and 18th century woodwork with a reader's desk and pulpit, the latter dated 1662.

There are two wooden plaques beside the altar with the ten commandments written upon them.

The clock was added to the tower in around 1620 and was electrified in 1966. The clock on the tower was restored in 2021 by Smiths of Derby who annually service the mechanism behind the two clock faces.

**For more information visit:
[www.northmoorteam.org.uk/
st-james-chapel](http://www.northmoorteam.org.uk/st-james-chapel)**



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What Okehampton has to offer

Okehampton is a Fairtrade town in the foot hills of Dartmoor with a wide range of independent shops. Fore Street is the main shopping area, a wide thoroughfare where there used to be a row of cottages and shops in the middle, these were demolished in the 19th century.



Okehampton is taking part in the refill scheme where free tap water will be available in any shop displaying this sticker.

Okehampton has a newly opened virtual gaming arcade in the main street, perfect for a visit when the weather is inclement.

The town features a Victorian arcade with wrought ironwork modelled on London Burlington arcade and was finished in 1900. The Red Lion Yard links the towns three supermarkets, including a Waitrose, to the main street. Red Lion Yard is a pedestrianised shopping area with places to sit. During the summer months a market is held on Saturdays in Red Lion Yard showcasing local produce and crafts.





behind Lidl before flowing on to the sea at Bideford.

The Market Hall has been converted into a Cinema. It offers 3 screens and a wide variety of films.

The skatepark in North Road is a great place for learning the basics as well as for more experienced skaters and should definitely be visited if you are in the area with your skateboard.

If your tastes are more adventurous visit Adventure Okehampton located behind the railway station at the top of town. They offer a wide variety of activities including archery, mountain boarding and weaselling.

Meldon reservoir and viaduct can be visited by travelling along the Granite Way. This cycle path is suitable for walking or cycling, - all sizes of bikes including e-bikes can be hired from Adventure Okehampton. The Granite Way follows the path of the old railway line between Okehampton and Tavistock and has many access points to Dartmoor. Meldon Dam offers stunning views down the West Okement valley, one of the two rivers that flows through Okehampton. The East and West Okement join to form the Okement at Rivers Meet



Okehampton Golf Course stands in the Old Deer Park and this land was given to the Golf Club by Sydney Simmons, who was a very keen golf player. The nine-hole course was opened on 16th July 1913 and was designed by 5-time open champion JH Taylor, In 1923 it was enlarged to eighteen holes.



Pavilion in the Park

The Pavilion in the Park is nestled in the corner of Simmons Park, surrounded by sports fields, an all-weather pitch, Tennis courts and access to Dartmoor, it is the gateway to activity in Okehampton. Run by the charity Okehampton Community and Recreation Association (OCRA) the Pavilion Café on the lower floor fuels activity with a selection of cakes, light bites, meals and ice creams and keeps visitors hydrated with a selection of hot and cold drinks. Indoor and outdoor seating is available and dogs are welcome. Each Sunday their popular roast dinner draws diners back again and again. The Pavilion

Lounge on the upper floor is a hub of activity during the day with Yoga, Pilates, Tai chi and Baby Sensory sessions complementing the Sporting Memories dementia, loneliness and depression workshop each week. The space is available for meetings for the community and is the focus for socialising post-match, after training or watching sport on one of the 4 screens. OCRA facilitates sport in Okehampton with Tennis, Hockey, Football, Badminton, Basketball and Netball all options to watch or play, with social and walking opportunities available.

**For more information visit
ocrasport.org.uk**





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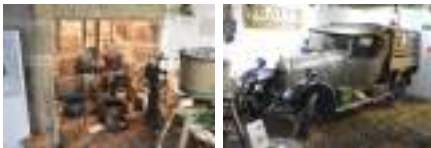
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Museum of Dartmoor Life

The gateway to exploring Dartmoor, its history and people



Admission

Adults £5, children/students £3, family (2+2) £13, family (1+2) £9, under 4s free

Your ticket entitles you to unlimited entry to the museum for 12 months and a discounted entry to Okehampton Castle

Opening Times

Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm
Saturday 10am to 1pm, closed Sunday

Museum of Dartmoor Life Museum Courtyard
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Art around the town



A community art project created a stunning mural here in the beautiful gateway to Dartmoor. This mural was painted on a gable end at the junction of East Street and Crediton Road.



On the corner of Park Row is a large mural of a Dartmoor walker celebrating Okehampton's position as a wonderful centre for walking and northern gateway of the moor.



The pig cycle stands beside St James Chapel are a reminder of when pigs were used to clean the street and were housed next to the chapel.



The deer commissioned by ORIG (Ockment Rivers Improvement Group) used to be situated at the confluence of the Okement Rivers but is now grazing peacefully in Simmons Park on the slope about the water garden.



The little fishing boy sits on the bank of the West Ockment river eternally watching the river flow by.



The lady with her child created by Alan Biggs a local artist was thought to represent happy parenthood to coincide with the overall ethos of the new hospital building – tranquillity and healing. She is incorporated within the Japanese influenced garden in the courtyard of the hospital and was unveiled by Prince Charles.

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10 Tors

Ten Tors is an annual event that takes place on Dartmoor at the beginning of May. It is the largest Defence-run youth event in the United Kingdom, with around 2,800 young people participating, and with over 1,000 troops, agency staff and volunteers providing safety capability. The event also brings in around 6,000 spectators and supporters from across the South West, so is a significant occasion in the National Park's calendar.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 the event was sadly cancelled, and in 2021 the first ever Virtual Ten Tors event was held, which saw 78 establishments organise and plan activities for their young

people to take part in. The Virtual event was hugely successful and played a key role in keeping the Ten Tors flame alive.

Ten Tors participants will be involved in one of two challenges: the Ten Tors Challenge and the Jubilee Challenge. The Ten Tors Challenge sees teams of six young people complete expeditions of either 35, 45 or 55 miles. The Jubilee Challenge is for young people with physical and neurodiversity challenges, and they can take part in expeditions that range from 7 to 15 miles in distance, across a variety of terrains, and with varying levels of support as required.

For more information, please visit www.tentors.org.uk.



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Face to face triage services and pre-booked appointments are available at our Okehampton office, for service times, please visit the Ockment Centre.

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