

Before You Visit York

Tracy Collins with Sinead of York Travel Expert

IN THIS EPISODE

York local Sinead joins Tracy for the next in the Before You Visit series: how much time York deserves, whether you need a car, where to base yourself, what to expect from the cobbles, steps and city walls, and the one thing worth booking before you go.

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01

Welcome

TRACY Many people only give York a day, and almost all of them leave wishing they had given it longer. Today, Sinead from York Travel Expert explains how much time the city actually deserves, where to base yourself, and the one thing worth booking before you go.

Hi everybody, and welcome to episode 219 of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. This week I'd like to start by thanking our fabulous subscribers, but particularly those of you who support the podcast every month. So a huge shout out to Wes, Joy, Melissa J, Joy, Valerie, Amy, Danielle, Deborah, Vernetta, Tina, Jen, Barb B, Catherine and Elizabeth. We really appreciate you for everything that you do. We know many of you love the

podcast and look forward to it every week, and we would love it if you too would consider sponsoring us from as little as \$3 a month. It means such a lot to us and helps us to continue to bring this podcast to you every week. I will leave a link in the show notes, or use the Tip Your Guide button on the website. You too could get a shout out from us on an upcoming podcast.

Now, on to the episode. York is a beautiful historic city, so it'll come as no surprise that we are asked about it constantly. And we are lucky enough to have Sinead, a York resident, as our podcast expert, since episode 3, which is still one of our most downloaded episodes ever. So this week I've asked her back to update us and to cover the basics for anyone considering adding York to their UK itinerary. We'll cover getting there, getting around, what to expect if steps and cobbles are a worry, and the places most visitors walk straight past.

Hi Sinead, it's lovely to have you back on the podcast again. You have been a guest quite a few times on this podcast, and on our Global Travel Planning Podcast as well, most recently talking about your trip to Turkey, which has done really well. But today we're talking about York, which is your speciality. You came on for episode 3, right back at the start of the podcast, and it is one of our top downloaded episodes. It's the one I get emails about saying, it was so good, we found out so much from Sinead about visiting York. So I thought it was time to do an update. Hi Sinead, how are you doing?

SINEAD I'm good, thanks Tracy. It's nice to be back.

TRACY It's really good to chat with you. You do have a York website, and I think it's worth everybody checking it out, because Sinead is the expert on York. What's your website called?

SINEAD It's called York Travel Expert. It covers everything from the best attractions to where to stay to where the public toilets are, basically everything a first-time visitor would need to know.

TRACY Perfect. So you are absolutely the perfect guest, because we've started the Before You Visit podcast series. We've done Edinburgh so far, and this is a perfect one to do about York. The whole aim of this episode is for people planning a first-time visit to York: all the things they need to know about how to arrive in York, where to stay in York, all those basic things.

02

Where York is

TRACY So without further ado, let's ask the first question, which is the most basic and a very easy one. Where is York, and what is it near, for anybody who does not know?

- SINEAD** York is roughly halfway up the country between London and Edinburgh. It's 2 hours by train from King's Cross, a direct journey, and then it's about 2 and a half to 3 hours from Edinburgh. So it's right in the middle of the country, although it is classed as north. It makes a great base for the Yorkshire Dales, the Yorkshire Moors and the Yorkshire coast. All of those are within about an hour's reach of the city of York itself.
- It's very easy to get to as an international traveller. You could fly into London then get the train up, or you could fly into Leeds Bradford Airport, which is only a 50-minute drive away, or you could fly into Manchester Airport, where you can get a train direct from the airport to York, which takes about an hour and 40 minutes. So it's very well served by airports, motorways and train stations. It's really easy to get to.
- TRACY** It is, and I know for many people it's the perfect place to stop off on that well-worn route between London and Edinburgh. York is your natural in-the-middle place to stop and get off. I also want to mention a bit about the county of Yorkshire, where York is located, within North Yorkshire. It's the largest county in England. It's huge.
- SINEAD** It is. It's quite complicated, because the city of York isn't actually within a county. It's in the middle. We've got North Yorkshire above us, the East Riding of Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire. But the city of York is its own little bit on its own in the middle.
- TRACY** A little oasis in the middle of this massive county. A beautiful, beautiful county, I have to say.
- SINEAD** God's own county.
- TRACY** Yeah, and only people from Yorkshire can say that. God's own country. Own county, own country?
- SINEAD** It depends. You can use both, it's the same.
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03

What to know before you arrive

- TRACY** Now, if anybody's listening and thinking they may plan a visit to York, what would you want them to know about the city before they actually arrive?
- SINEAD** I think the biggest thing people need to be aware of is how small York is. Because it's called the City of York, people are expecting a city, but it's actually a town, a friendly town. It's only got about 200,000 people in it, and most of those are in the surrounding suburbs, which tourists won't particularly go to. So it is a very, very small city. People worry about having to hire a car. You don't need it. It's so small, it's very walkable. You can get from one side of the city walls to the other in about 15 minutes,

crossing the city centre. It's very different to any other city that might be on your list to visit. You won't need to use public transport to get around. It's very easy, and you can see a lot in a very short space of time.

TRACY Absolutely. And I guess we should explain why it's called a city. It's called a city because it's got a cathedral, York Minster. That's the criteria to be a city. But as Sinead said, it is really compact and easy to get around. And it's also surrounded by something very special, isn't it?

SINEAD We have the longest city walls in England. They're about 2 miles long, and most of the attractions are found within those city walls. So you can pop on the wall, walk a bit, pop down, go and see something if you want to, get back on the wall and keep going. And inside the city walls it's just walkable. You won't be able to drive or get a bus or anything. So it's very compact. I think people are often surprised when they get here just how small and friendly it is.

TRACY Yeah. Well, it's northern, so it's obviously very friendly.

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Getting there

TRACY Now, what is the most straightforward way to get to York from London? I know you're going to have to say the train, because if Doug was on my shoulder he'd be going, train, train, train. But just chat about that, because we do that trip very regularly, and I know it's something that you do quite often as well.

SINEAD Train is by far the best way to get here. It's 2 hours, sometimes an hour and 50, and it's direct. You don't have to change. If you drive, you're looking at 4 or 5 hours plus, depending on traffic, and it's quite a boring drive as well. It's not very scenic.

The train station in York is right in the city centre. You leave the train station and you can see the city walls across the road, and from there into the heart of the city centre is only about a 10-minute walk. There's a taxi rank and bus stops outside the train station as well, and there's a hotel right next door. So if you take the train, it will bring you right into the city centre. It's the quickest, easiest and most scenic way to get to York from London.

TRACY Absolutely, and if you're doing that journey from London up to Edinburgh, it's a natural, very easy place to stop off. It's a very short walk into the centre of York from the train station, and there is left luggage, so you can leave your luggage if you want to have a few hours in the city and then pop on a train up to Edinburgh. It's a perfect place to stop.

Getting around

TRACY Now, we've mentioned a little bit about how walkable it is. Most of it's pedestrianised, so I guess that's the way to get around. What about cobbled streets? I'm thinking about accessibility for people getting around.

SINEAD The city centre is very walkable. Nearly all of the middle is pedestrianised. There are some cobbled streets, which can be quite uneven, but on both sides of the cobbles there is a pavement. So if you're finding the cobbles difficult to manage, either on foot or with a pushchair or a wheelchair, you can use the pavements at the side of the cobbles. Other roads in the city centre are flagged, so it's smooth paving stones. The cobblestones won't really hinder you getting around, because you can avoid them, and there aren't that many of them either.

We also have snickets, or snickelways, which are narrow alleyways that crisscross the city centre. If you have a good map, or you've got a good local giving you directions, you can make your journey even quicker by taking one of these alleyways. They're used by locals all the time and they're perfectly safe to use. So it is very easy to get around. From York Minster to Jorvik, which is on the other side of York, is about a 10 to 15-minute walk. It's very quick, very easy.

If you're finding the cobbles difficult to manage, you can use the pavements at the side.

SINEAD

SINEAD If you are staying outside the city centre, you can use buses to get around. Our local buses are £3 per person each way, or you could use one of the park and ride schemes. We have 4 park and rides at the points of the compass: one north of the city, one south, and so on. You don't have to pay for parking, you just have to pay for the bus, and that's £4 return. And if an adult is travelling, under-16s can travel with that adult for free, so it's very good value for money. Those buses will drop you right at the edge of the city walls, and then you're in the city.

It's much better than driving in and parking. There are some car parks in the city centre, but they're not inside the city walls, so you'd always have to do some walking once you park. And parking in York is very expensive, because they're trying to discourage it. You could pay around £15 to £20 a day for parking, so you're much better off getting the bus if you need to. But once you're in York, you don't need anything. You can just walk around.

TRACY Yeah, I totally agree. If you're doing a driving itinerary around the UK and you intend to stay in York, or base yourself in York for a bit, I'd first of all find out if the accommodation has got any parking. That's an absolute must. If you're going to have a car and you're thinking, I'm going to stay within the walls, you're not.

And really, I would try to put you off doing that, because going in by train is the best way, or doing the park and ride scheme. For £4 it's a total bargain getting yourself into York, so that you don't have to think about the parking issue. I agree with a lot of the cities in the UK now trying to discourage driving inside some of these historic centres. It's not really a great idea, to be honest.

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Terrain and accessibility

TRACY We're talking a little bit about accessibility as well, and getting around if you've got limited mobility. This is a question I was going to ask you a little bit further on, but I think it works really well with what we're talking about now. What about access, for example, to the walls? Can I access the walls?

SINEAD One of the things people need to know before they come to York is that it is old. You have to expect narrow streets and old buildings. It wasn't built with accessibility in mind, and some of these buildings, simply by their nature, can't be converted or adapted.

York is pancake flat, so that's no problem. However, a lot of the buildings will have steps up to them, maybe just one or two, and inside there might be more steps as well.

You access the city walls by 4 bars. The gateways are called bars, and they all have steps. Some of them, especially Monk Bar, have a very steep set of steps. It's impossible, really, to access if you have limited mobility or use a wheelchair. Even a pushchair would have to be folded, and there's not even enough room to carry it up.

There is one step-free part of the wall you can access, which is opposite the Grand Hotel near the train station, and you can walk part of the walls round to Micklegate from there. But then to get out again, you'd have to retrace your steps and come back. There are also some steps along the wall. I always say to people, don't forget to look down as well as looking at the views, because people have missed a step and then fallen, so you do have to keep an eye out.

Most museums and the Minster are step-free, and they will have ramped access. The exception to that is Clifford's Tower, which is a Norman keep on top of an artificial hill in the middle of the city centre. Unfortunately, that's not accessible to anybody who can't manage the very steep 55 steps to the entrance.

Jorvik Viking Centre, another very popular attraction, has a lift, and it also has a historical ride that you go around in, and one of the capsules on it is large enough to fit a wheelchair. Unfortunately, because the museum is quite small and it's underground, only one wheelchair user is allowed in Jorvik at a time. So they do recommend calling ahead to talk to the museum about your needs and what time you might be arriving, and potentially doing an advance booking online as well.

Some attractions, such as York Minster and York Dungeon, offer carer tickets, but again, I would always check with the individual attraction in advance, and maybe call ahead if you want the most up-to-date information.

If you arrive in York and you feel that you are struggling to get around, you can get low-cost wheelchairs for hire. In the city centre, right by Fenwick department store, there's the Coppergate Centre car park, and in there is a place called Shopmobility. You can just turn up and hire a wheelchair. Sometimes they're free, sometimes they're low cost, because it is a charity, and you can hire a wheelchair for the day to do some sightseeing.

The other thing I wanted to mention is that there are accessible toilets in York. There are some on Silver Street near the Shambles Market, and there are accessible toilets in Marks & Spencer, Browns and Fenwick department stores as well.

TRACY Perfect. That's really good information. Thank you very much for that, Sinead.

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How long to stay

TRACY Now, if you're planning to visit York, how many days would you recommend somebody stays there? I would probably just stay there for a few months, because it's lovely. But if we can't do that, what would you say is a good amount of time to get a feel for the city?

SINEAD You can do some of the main attractions in a day, but I promise you, you would leave wishing you'd spent longer. Everybody does. People come to York and they don't leave. So I would say at least 2 to 3 days for the city, and maybe 3 or 4 days if you wanted to take a day trip to the Dales, or the Moors, or the coast. Ideally, if you wanted to do everything, the city, the Dales, the Moors and the coast, you probably need around 6 or 7 days.

You can do some of the main attractions in a day, but I promise you, you would leave wishing you'd spent longer. Everybody does.

SINEAD

TRACY Yeah, and that's the beauty of York, in that it's so well positioned to get you out to the Dales and to the Moors. It's absolutely well worth doing some day trips if you are in York. Doug and I did a fantastic one with Mountain Goat in June. We did the All Creatures Great and Small one. It was so much fun. I absolutely loved it. I'm such a fan. Are you a fan of All Creatures Great and Small, Sinead?

SINEAD I am, yes.

TRACY You have to be. And you live so close to the beautiful Yorkshire Dales as well. It was such a beautiful day when we went on the tour. York's perfect for that. It's an easy place to go and see some of these amazing places on a tour.

SINEAD It is.

TRACY And we have got a podcast all about day trips from York as well [episode 17]. I will link to that in the show notes. We talked about some of the amazing places that you can get to very easily on public transport. I know you've mentioned quite often that the buses are pretty good.

SINEAD Yep, you can get buses, you can get trains. You can take the train to the coast, and you can take the train to the Dales. You have to change in Leeds, but you can get the train to the Dales, get off, go for a beautiful hike, get back on the train and come back to York.

There's a bus called the Coastliner, which goes all the way from Leeds up to Scarborough and Whitby. It's been voted Britain's most scenic bus ride. It takes quite a long time, at least 2 or 3 hours, but it only costs £3, and it goes all the way across the moors. It's very beautiful. If you want to go to one place, you can do it by train or bus. If you want to see a lot in a day, you probably will need to take a tour.

08

Where to base yourself

TRACY Now, if you were recommending a part of York to use as a base, where would you recommend?

SINEAD I think it depends what you're after. If you want to live like a local, go to corner shops, go to an independent café and meet local people, stay outside the walls, I would say. If you have a car and you're driving, you have to stay outside the walls. Many streets around York are resident-only parking, but if you book a self-catering apartment or an Airbnb, they will often give you a parking permit. It's worth noting that hotels outside the city walls, if they're close to York, will charge you to park overnight. If you want a hotel with free parking, you'll have to go a little bit further outside of York.

Bishopthorpe Road and the surrounding streets is a good area to stay. Bishopthorpe Road has a lovely small high street packed with independent shops and cafés. It's won awards for being Britain's best high street. That's a really nice place to stay, and it's only about a 10-minute walk into the city centre from there as well. The houses are quite old and have lots of character, but you will need to check out the parking.

If you want everything on your doorstep, to hear the Minster bells when you wake up or as you fall asleep, and to minimise your walking, you need to stay inside the city walls. But you can't really stay inside the city walls with a car.

The other thing to note if you do stay inside the city walls is that the hotels will be packed with character, but they will be old buildings. They won't have lifts, they'll have steps, they'll have quite narrow passageways, and some of them allegedly might have the odd ghost as well. If you want more modern hotels with lifts and other facilities, you'll probably need to stay outside the city walls, but we do have very modern hotels very close to the city walls.

The 2 exceptions to that, I would say, are Malmaison and the Grand Hotel, which are right inside the city walls. They're literally a 5-minute walk from the train station, and they're very big and very modern. They have all the facilities you need, spa, pool, and they've got lifts and really good accessibility. But I know there you do have to pay for parking as well.

TRACY I have to say, I've never stayed inside the walls of York at all. So if the Grand Hotel or Malmaison would like to invite myself and Doug to stay, we would very much like to take you up on that offer, and we will do a review. The Grand has been on my list for a long time, because I know we have quite a few listeners who mention that it's amazing.

SINEAD It is a beautiful hotel. It's one of the top hotels in York, and it's in a fantastic historic building. In fact, once a year they run tours for locals, because they're so proud of their building they just want to show it off. It is a really beautiful building, and the food in there is amazing as well.

TRACY All right, well, hopefully I'll get a chance to try that out, maybe next year. I'll get in touch with both those hotels and see where we get to.

York Minster and the city walls

TRACY Now let's talk a little bit about York Minster and the walls. Tell me about York Minster, because I know as a York local you don't have to pay to go in. Is that correct?

SINEAD Yeah, we are very lucky. The Minster is hard to describe, quite honestly. Locals look on it really fondly. It's a very special place. You hear the bells. It's so beautiful, and it changes with different lights at different seasons. I will never, ever get bored of walking into town and looking up at the Minster.

If you're lucky enough to be in York on New Year's Eve, I highly recommend going to the Minster. The bell ringers play carols, and then you hear the bells at midnight, and everyone cheers and claps and sings Auld Lang Syne. It's a fantastic atmosphere.

If you want to go to York Minster as a visitor, you can go in for free if you attend a service or evensong, but you can't do any sightseeing. You can go in, sit, enjoy the service and look around you, but you can't walk around. So I would personally recommend paying. It's not cheap. It currently costs £20, and that's just for York Minster, but you will easily spend 2 or 3 hours in there. All ticket sales go to the upkeep of the Minster. They don't receive any government funding. An adult ticket also includes children under 17, so if you've got kids with you, they get in for free. So it can be quite a good value for money attraction.

With your entry ticket, you can go to the Undercroft Museum, the Crypt and the Chapter House as well. And once you get inside, you can join a tour. The tours are about 45 to 50 minutes. They're free with your entrance ticket, and they are really well worth taking. The guide knows everything about York Minster, and they'll be able to point out hidden things in the stained glass windows, or hidden carvings that you wouldn't see without your guide.

If you want to, for an extra £6, you can climb the central tower of York Minster. If you have the ability to get up the stairs, I would highly recommend it. It's fantastic. It's only for children over 6, and it's not really for anyone with mobility problems, a fear of heights, which I have, I have to say, or if you're claustrophobic. The staircase to get up there is very narrow, and it's winding. For me, the most challenging part was when you have to cross from one tower to the other. You have to walk along the edge of the roof, and that was a bit knee-wobbling for me. But once you get up to the top, you've got this fantastic 360-degree view of York.

You do need to know, though, that when you get to the top, you can't come down when you want to. What they do is let everybody up, and then they close it at the bottom so the people at the top can come down. So if you're up there and you don't like it, you won't be able to come down as soon as you want to. But I would highly recommend it if you can do it.

If you want to walk the walls, it takes about 2 hours to do the whole circuit. There are some parts where you have to go down to road level and then carry on. If you only have limited time, I would recommend the stretch from Micklegate to Monkgate. You get some really good views of the Minster, and you'll also get to see some of the bars.

If you're really time-pressed, I would do the stretch from Bootham Bar to Monk Bar, because that's the bit that goes round the back of the Minster. You get some really fantastic views of the Minster, the Minster gardens, Dean's Park, and an eye into other people's back gardens as well. It's really the best stretch of the walls.

TRACY York Minster is 100% worth going to. I know it sounds pretty expensive when you say £20, but it does go to the upkeep of this absolutely beautiful building. I haven't actually climbed to the top, so good on you, Sinead, for doing that with a fear of heights. I get claustrophobic, so I'd be no good going up there. I've sent Doug up there before with our friend Mark. They went up to get the photos, but I chickened out.

SINEAD It is amazing, but I was a bit nervous, I have to say.

TRACY I'll stick to walking the walls. I enjoy walking the walls. You get beautiful views up there, and it's a lovely stroll around to get a feel for York. I mean, the Romans built these things, which is just incredible, isn't it?

SINEAD It is amazing.

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One day in York

TRACY Now, if someone has only one full day in York, how would you design an itinerary? What would that look like?

SINEAD I would always say go to York Minster first. I think it's the best and most amazing attraction in York, and if you leave it till last, I'd be worried you wouldn't have enough time to fit everything in.

Alternatively, you could go to the Shambles first. The Shambles is a very short, atmospheric medieval street. It's cobbled, it's very narrow, and it's got overhanging buildings. It's really beautiful. And it can get really busy once people start arriving and the shops are open. So if you want that quiet, and you want to get some really good photos, you need to go there early. But if you want to go in and out of the shops and have a bit of atmosphere, it is okay to go later in the day. You just have to be prepared for the crowds.

So I would say a day in York should always include the Minster, the Shambles, and just walking around the streets, looking up, soaking up the architecture, reading the blue plaques, seeing the hidden gems everywhere. High and Low Petergate, Stonegate, the

Shambles Market, Goodramgate, Fossgate. Go down to the river for lunch, or have dinner on the riverside, or just have a pint in a riverside pub.

If you've got time, you'd have to choose between our fantastic museums. If you want Roman history and local geology, go to the Yorkshire Museum, plus you'll get to see Museum Gardens, which has a 3rd-century multi-angled tower, a 19th-century observatory, 11th-century ruins from an abbey and a 15th-century hospitium. So that's a good museum to choose, because you get other things on the same site.

Alternatively, if you want to see how people lived in York in the past, you could go to the medieval Barley Hall or the Georgian Fairfax House. If you wanted to know a bit more about the history of York, you could go to the Castle Museum, which follows York through the Victorian era, through the World Wars and through the '60s, and opposite that you could also fit in Clifford's Tower, the Norman keep.

So I think if you only have one day, you have to do the Minster, the Shambles and walking around town, and then you'd have to make a choice between those areas with those museums in.

TRACY Absolutely. I think we've done all of those. I really like the Jorvik Viking Centre. I think it's very well done. And then the Castle Museum. Do you know that Doug got locked in the Castle Museum once? Do you know that story? I have to tell you this story now.

We go to York every time we're in the UK. We went to the Castle Museum, and I came out maybe 20 minutes or half an hour before Doug. He was taking a bit longer to look around. I was sitting there, and the next thing, it's all locked up and everybody's gone. I was thinking, okay, maybe Doug will come out soon. I sat there for about another 10 minutes and thought, okay, this is a bit odd. I think I must have called him, or he sent me a message saying he was locked inside. And it wasn't just him, there was another lady as well. I think they were in a courtyard. Anyway, we managed to alert them and they went and let them out. Otherwise they were going to be stuck there for the night.

SINEAD Oh dear. I think it'd be a spooky place to be closed in as well.

TRACY Yeah, I wouldn't fancy it.

SINEAD One thing I would add: Jorvik Viking Centre is obviously one of the most famous museums in York. It is quite short. You can do it in about an hour, so if you are pressed for time, it's a good one to do. But you would need to book in advance, because there are always queues outside. So if you are on a one-day trip and you want to do that, I would book it in advance.

TRACY Absolutely. And I have to say, if you like chocolate, York's Chocolate Story is pretty good as well.

SINEAD It is very good, yeah.

What gets overlooked

TRACY See, this is where it becomes more than one day, because you've given some great itinerary ideas for one day, but we're easily spilling into day 2, aren't we? What do you think people tend to miss in York?

SINEAD They do miss some of the lesser-known museums. I think the Castle Museum is brilliant, Clifford's Tower is very good, and Fairfax House is amazing. It's all laid out as the Georgians would have lived. The Mansion House, where our current Lord Mayor lives, you can go and have a look around that. I also really like Treasurer's House, just behind York Minster. It's really quirky, really atmospheric. And just outside York, about a 20 to 30-minute walk away, is Goddards, which is an Arts and Crafts house with amazing gardens. You can play croquet on the lawn. Those sorts of museums and houses often get lost amongst some of the bigger, more famous museums.

I would also say some of the smaller churches in York are amazing. Obviously York Minster is the big draw, but some of the smaller ones are fantastic. All Saints on North Street, which is about a 5 to 10-minute walk from the city centre, just across the river, is a Grade I listed medieval church, and it has some of the best 14th and 15th-century stained glass windows in the country. It's beautiful, and it's really quiet. Sometimes you'll be the only person in there.

The other one I'd really recommend is Holy Trinity on Goodramgate. Goodramgate is a pedestrian road with shops, restaurants and cafés, so you have to look for the entrance. It's quite nondescript. You go through the gate into a really lovely courtyard garden. It's really quiet. You wouldn't think you're in the centre of York. The church is a 15th-century church, and it's the only one in York that still has its traditional box pews that people used to sit in with their families. So if you do have more than 1 or 2 days in York, I would definitely recommend seeking out some of the churches and going into some of the houses.

I would also make time to walk along the riverbank. You can do a lovely walk from York city centre down the riverbank. It's all paved, it's all pedestrianised. You cross over the Millennium Bridge, which is a pedestrian bridge, and then you walk back along the riverbank on the other side. It's really lovely, very quiet.

Museum Gardens is beautiful to spend some time in. We've got an edible garden just behind York Art Gallery, which has lots of edible plants, but some you cannot eat because they're poisonous, so read the signs. And then the beautiful Dean's Park, behind York Minster, is where lots of York people go to have their lunch, and you get fantastic views of York Minster from in there as well.

TRACY Lovely. And you can also take a boat down the river if you like. If you walk along it and think, actually, I want to sail along it, you can do that too.

SINEAD You can. You can't get off the boat. You just sit on it and it cruises down the river, and then it turns around and comes back. But it's a really lovely, leisurely way to see York from a different angle.

You can also hire your own boat in York city centre. We have the little blue boats. I think you can fit 5 people in a boat. I did it a couple of weeks ago, actually, and I think it's about £60 for an hour between 5 people, which isn't bad. It's just got a little handle to push, there are no brakes or anything, so it's so easy. You go up the river, turn around and come back. So that's fun to do.

TRACY Yeah, definitely. We stayed in a lovely hotel on the river when we were there in June, and we really enjoyed that. I saw the boats going up and down, and we were near the train station, so we saw the trains coming in. It was one of our favourite places to stay.

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York as a base for Yorkshire

TRACY Now, we talked a little bit about using York as a base to see more of the county of Yorkshire. What would be the top places that you would recommend people go? You're going to mention Castle Howard, and you know what, I've still not been to Castle Howard. That's another one on my list for next year, because I know it's easy to get to.

SINEAD It is. I don't know if I could choose the best place, to be honest, because they're all so amazing. If you like stately homes, or you want to see where bits of Bridgerton or Brideshead Revisited were filmed, Castle Howard's the place to go. You can get there by bus in the tourist season, though it does take a while, or you can drive or even get a taxi. It takes about 25 to 30 minutes from the city centre. It is beautiful, and the grounds are amazing. You can spend the whole day there easily, and at Christmas it is magical.

By bus you can get to Whitby and Scarborough, which are along the coast, you can get to the Moors, and you could go to the Dales. By train you could again go to the coast, and you can get to some parts of the Dales. You can get to Harrogate in 30 minutes by train. You can get to Knaresborough, which is beautiful, in 20 minutes by train. There are so many things to do. It depends whether you want to do history, or shopping, or hiking, or just have a day on the beach.

TRACY Absolutely, and of course there's the North Yorkshire Moors Railway as well, which is very popular.

SINEAD It is. You have to get to Pickering, so you'd either get the bus to Pickering or join a tour. From Pickering you can pick up the steam train, and it goes all the way across the moors to the coast. With that ticket, you can get on and off during the day, and there are some lovely places to get on and off. You can get off at Goathland, which is where

they filmed the Heartbeat television series, and the train station there doubled as Hogsmeade in the Harry Potter movies. There are lots of lovely things you can do along the way, or you can just ride it to the coast.

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Making it go smoothly

TRACY Perfect. Now, I'm sure there are plenty of people listening to this episode, as they did with episode 3, who are thinking, you know what, we're going to include York in our itinerary. It's easy to get to. If you're doing that very common London to Edinburgh route, there's no reason why you wouldn't at least stop off and explore York for a few hours, though we would try to encourage you to stay longer than that. If anybody's planning it, what tips would you share to make a first visit to York go more smoothly?

SINEAD I would do a little bit of research, and unless you want to go to the races, I would avoid race days, personally, because York is absolutely packed on race days. Race days run in the spring and the summer. They have them every 2 or 3 weeks, and they're on for 2 or 3 days at a time. The restaurants and bars will be very busy, and accommodation prices will hike. So unless you want to go to the races, I would avoid a race day.

I would also perhaps avoid the last weekend in January. That's called Residents Weekend, which is when everything in York is free to local residents. So everybody visits the city, and that's also very busy.

We have lots and lots of festivals in York. We have the Food Festival, Drink Festival, Oktoberfest, Flower Festival, Chocolate Festival, Roman Festival, Ice Festival. They are worth going to, but you just need to be aware that York will be very busy then as well. Midweek is much quieter. Weekends are very, very busy.

I know you say this a lot with your London advice: I'd plan attractions along a route so you don't have to crisscross the city. So don't do York Minster followed by Jorvik and then try to go back to Museum Gardens. Look at a map, and try to plan a route through the city, or maybe even a circular route around the city, to avoid doing too much walking.

I would highly recommend leaving some time just to wander around, enjoy the buskers and admire the architecture. Look for independent places to eat and drink. Anywhere that's been recommended on TripAdvisor or Insta is going to be very, very busy, so you might have to queue. If you want the Shambles to yourself, go early or late.

If you visit around Christmas, from mid-November up until the day before Christmas Eve, we'll have our Christmas market on, and you need to be prepared for large crowds on Christmas market days. You can still enjoy York at those times, it's just that the market area will be very busy. So go to the market as early as you can, or as late as you can, and then leave that area and go and see the rest of York.

The other thing I would say to make a York visit go more smoothly is just wear comfy shoes, because you will be walking, and dress for the weather. Yorkshire weather is unpredictable, so don't get caught out in a rainstorm, because it'll make the rest of your day miserable.

TRACY Absolutely. Those are really very good tips. Thanks for those, Sinead.

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Quick-fire round

TRACY Now, I'm going to end on a quick-fire round. The one place people picture when they think of York?

SINEAD York Minster.

TRACY One place to stay?

SINEAD If you want to splurge and stay somewhere super special, I'd say the Grand. For history, Judge's Lodging or Judges Court, and for elegant style, the Milner.

TRACY One thing to eat or drink?

SINEAD Parkin, which is a type of cake, and a fat rascal, which is like a gooey scone. It's delicious. And the drink is always going to be a cup of Yorkshire Tea.

TRACY Oh, I agree with you on that one. One view worth the effort?

SINEAD The top of York Minster. And the walls behind Grays Court Hotel, which have the most amazing view of the hotel, the gardens and York Minster.

TRACY Perfect. One thing to bring home?

SINEAD Yorkshire Tea.

TRACY And one thing to book before you go?

SINEAD An afternoon tea. York does some amazing afternoon teas, but I would pre-book one if you want one.

TRACY Have you got one in particular that you'd recommend?

SINEAD Oh, I like them all. I've done nearly all of them now, I think. I really like the afternoon tea at Dean Court Hotel. It was great food, and you got to sit right by the windows overlooking York Minster. That was amazing.

TRACY Perfect. So that's afternoon tea with a view. Thanks so much, Sinead, for coming on the podcast. It's always fantastic to talk to you about York. Hopefully Doug and I get to meet up with you again when we're over next year. Thanks for sharing your expertise, and we'll link to your website, because Sinead is the person that knows York inside out. So if you've got a question, pop it over on SpeakPipe, and I'll always pass it over to Sinead and get the answer back to you. Thanks so much, Sinead, for coming on this week's episode of the podcast.

SINEAD Thank you very much for having me.

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Until next week

TRACY And that brings us to the end of another episode. Sinead has given us an awful lot of fantastic information there, from the step-free stretch of the walls to which afternoon tea to book before you go. All the links are waiting for you in the show notes at uktravelplanning.com/episode219.

If you're planning your own trip to York and you still have a question, do leave me a voice message through SpeakPipe and I will put it to Sinead. And if you know someone also considering adding York to their UK itinerary, and why wouldn't you, do send this episode their way too. But that leaves me to say, as always, until next week, happy UK travel planning.

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