

## TRAVEL

# Stourhead: Timeless Neo-Classical Elegance

Before my family and I visited Stourhead, the National Trust property in Wiltshire, I had no idea that visiting grand country houses was just as popular in the eighteenth century as it is today.

In fact, breathtaking Stourhead was often frequented by those traveling to Bath. They would stay the night in the nearby Spread Eagle Inn; what a humorous name for a pub. However, sometimes there was no room and one disgruntled traveler at that time wrote about how she was sent to the village of Mere, which she considered to be very much beneath her. I recall how the novelist Jane Austen would travel by carriage to Bath from her Hampshire home, and I wonder whether she ever stopped off at Stourhead. It is certainly an imposing and elegantly designed stately home, surrounded by over 2,500 acres of lush green pastures and extensive parkland.

## Neo-Classical Masterpiece

It's not the original house built on the site, and there are plans afoot using the latest technology to try to find out where the foundations of that property lie. The existing house, built by Henry Hoare, opened in 1740. Designed by Colen Campbell, it is a neo-classical masterpiece. The Hoare family is a banking dynasty, and today C. Hoare & Co. claims to be the only remaining independent bank in the United Kingdom. Accounts here are held exclusively by millionaires.

## Exploring Cultural Connections

On visiting the library, created by Sir Richard Colt Hoare during his ownership in the 1800s, we discover that there are 6,000 books. He was a learned man who enjoyed collecting relics and recording them. It is his pursuit of this passion that established archaeology as a subject. In common with much of the landed gentry at this time, he was an art lover too, and the house is full of family portraits, many by Royal Academicians.

We love our brief time in the music room where there is a pianist playing "Farewell to Stromness" by Peter Maxwell Davies on a beautiful old Steinway

## Stroll Through Gardens

It is a perfect summer's day, not too hot, and the sun is kind to us. There are plenty of trees to admire as we stroll along various paths, making our way to the massive lake. "This is such a privilege," I say to Caroline as the children take it all in. They find a large tree that has a really smooth curved trunk that they enjoy climbing and sitting on.

We head for the grotto. The garden design is inspired by art, and there are layers of trees at different heights and a low bed of lush green laurels, which guide your eye from up high to low down with the sun shimmering on the dome of the Temple of Apollo. It's quite a view and must have taken much planning. Was the land like this already or was it dug out? I wonder. The volunteers who look after the gardens do a splendid job. It's so relaxing to walk through these grounds, to see the ducks, the Canada Geese, swifts, and a plethora of dragonflies and butterflies.

## Reflect on the Day

We manage a quick look at St Peter's Church where there are war graves. I love the smell of churches and the overwhelming peace that envelops you as you enter. The gardens shut at 4:30 pm, and we rush out at 5:00 pm worried that we might be locked in. Thankfully, we're not and enjoy looking round the shop, which has lots of unique gifts.

For more information visit:  
[nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wiltshire/stourhead](https://nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wiltshire/stourhead)  
 By Tim Saunders | [travelwriter.biz](https://travelwriter.biz)

