ALISON WEIR TOURS

Eleanor of Aquitaine

ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE
and Medieval England

An escorted tour led by Alison Weir

Journey back eight centuries with Alison Weir in the footsteps of legendary queen Eleanor of Aquitaine and the first Plantagenet kings - Henry II, Richard I and King John - on a fascinating tour visiting some of England’s greatest medieval cities and historical sites. See great cathedrals, magnificent castles, forgotten manors and evocative ruins, and tour Nottingham with Robin Hood! Stand on the very spots where Eleanor herself was imprisoned between 1174 and 1189, and where Archbishop Thomas Becket, famous for his quarrel with Eleanor’s husband, Henry II, was murdered in 1170. Wander through the haunting remains of the abbey where Henry II’s fabled mistress, Rosamund de Clifford, spent her last days. Hear the dramatic story of Henry’s mother, the Empress Matilda and her escape from Oxford Castle. Enjoy talks on Eleanor and her world by Alison and other expert historians, and professional guided tours at the various sites, with a few surprises along the way! Stay in luxury hotels, be wined and dined by your hosts, enjoy free time for shopping and eating out in beautiful ancient cities, and sit back and relax as your coach takes you on back in time on a memorable tour of medieval England – the England of the Plantagenets.

8 nights from 15th to 23rd June 2012:

2 nights at Canterbury
2 nights at Lincoln
2 nights at Windsor
2 nights at Winchester
Visiting:

Canterbury and Canterbury Cathedral
Dover Castle
The Manor, Hemingford Grey
Lincoln: Cathedral, Castle and Bishop’s Palace
Clipston Hunting Lodge ruins
Nottingham (for Robin Hood Town Tour)
Wallingford Castle ruins
Godstow Abbey ruins
Woodstock
Oxford (Beaumont Palace site and Oxford Castle)
Windsor Castle
Berkhamsted Castle ruins
Old Sarum ruins
Winchester (Castle and Cathedral, with option to see Wolvesey Palace)

Included in the Eleanor of Aquitaine Tour:

• All accommodation for eight nights from the night of June 2012 to the morning of June 2012, including breakfast each day. Two nights at Canterbury Cathedral Lodge, two nights the Petwood Hotel, Woodhall Spa, two nights at Oakley Court Hotel, Windsor and two nights at the Lainston House Hotel near Winchester
• Welcome buffet lunch on the first day of the tour
• Organised group dinners on 4 nights (including a welcome dinner on the first night of the tour and a farewell dinner on the last night of the tour)
• All entrance fees for events on the tour itinerary
• All coach travel
• Alison Weir as Study Director
• Nicola Tallis as Guide Lecturer
• Guest speakers and a full programme of lectures and guided commentaries, many of them specially prepared for the tour
• lectures, guided commentaries
• Personally-signed Alison Weir book on arrival.
• Tour gifts/mementos
• All gratuities for AWT organised events, hotels and included meals as specified

Price of Alison Weir’s Eleanor of Aquitaine Tour
The cost per person is £3950 (including VAT).

Alison Weir Tours offer an exclusive experience for small groups. For this reason, each tour is limited to 25 guests.

All prices are per person and based on two people sharing a double or twin room, and fares are quoted in U.K sterling.
For single person occupancy a supplement of £450 will be charged.

Payment schedule: 15% (£592.50 for each guest sharing a double or twin room, £660 for each guest in a single room) of the full price of the tour is due following booking and confirmation from AWT that AWT has a place available on the tour for you. The balance of 85% (£3357.50 for each guest sharing a double or twin room, £3740 for each guest in a single room) of the full price of the tour is payable 120 days before commencement of the tour.

What is NOT included in the cost of the tour:

- Travel from your home to the start of the Tour in London
- Travel from London to the airport after the Tour ends
- Personal items, souvenirs etc.
- Food & drinks other than those included during complimentary breakfast every morning of the tour & during the buffet lunch and 4 group dinners organised by AWT
- Any extras you incur at hotels, including but not limited to laundry, room service etcetera.
- Any other gratuities

The Eleanor of Aquitaine Tour beings and ends in London and the cost does not include travel to and from London. However AWT is pleased to partner with Connoisseur Travel at www.ctltd.com if you need assistance. Connoisseur is a full-service travel agency in Washington, D.C. that has been serving customers for bespoke overseas travel for over twenty years. Connoisseur Travel provides full leisure and corporate services for clients around the world.

- For further information or to arrange your flights, travel insurance and extra hotel nights at please contact Jean Glock at Connoisseur Travel on 855.469.8998 or 202.469.8998 or email jean.glock@ctltd.com.

Alison Weir Tours Ltd.
Company Registration No. 07276807.
Registered Office: 14 Vernon Street, London W14 ORJ.

ITINERARY
Day 1, Friday, 15th June

At 12.30pm, we meet for a welcome buffet lunch and drinks at Chapel and Library of The Bloomsbury Hotel in central London.

One of the finest hotels in London, the Bloomsbury is situated near Covent Garden, and not far from the West End, and occupies a magnificent neo-Georgian listed building designed by the renowned British architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens. Lavishly refurbished, and recently restored to its original glory and grandeur, it blends the high end of contemporary design with traditional elegance.

After lunch, our coach takes us down into Kent, and the ancient cathedral city of Canterbury.

Canterbury is the second most visited city in England due to its extensive history and supreme ecclesiastical importance. The history of Canterbury extends back beyond the 1st century A.D., when it was named Durovernum Cantiacorum by the Romans; when they left Britain it was given the name Cantwareburh. Eleanor of Aquitaine visited Canterbury in 1189. It is one of England's most venerable cities due to its long, and important association with Christianity. One of the most important local visitor attractions is Canterbury Cathedral, the Mother Church of the Anglican Communion and seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury (the head of the Church of England and the worldwide Anglican Communion). In the medieval heart of this wonderfully picturesque walled city you continually find yourself confronted by historic buildings spanning many centuries. The beautiful River Stour flows through the city and provides a superb setting for river trips. The city of Canterbury boasts a wealth of visitor attractions. The Cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey and St Martin's Church form the World Heritage Site, but there are also many other excellent attractions in the city too, including the Canterbury Tales visitor experience and an excellent museum of local history.

Here, we check into our hotel, Canterbury Cathedral Lodge (4*), situated within the precincts of the Cathedral itself, in the heart of the city.

Canterbury Cathedral Lodge is one of the finest hotels in Canterbury and offers superb hotel accommodation overlooking beautiful lawns and gardens with wonderful views of the Cathedral. The Lodge is owned by the Cathedral and provides the perfect getaway destination for anyone visiting historic Canterbury. Guests will enjoy relaxing in an oasis of calm in the centre of the City, but are just a couple of minutes’ walk to Canterbury's tourist attractions.

In the evening, we gather for a welcome drinks reception and dinner in the hotel.

We stay overnight at Canterbury Cathedral Lodge

Today’s lectures:

_Eleanor of Aquitaine, By the Wrath of God, Queen of England_ (Alison Weir)
In the morning, we visit Canterbury Cathedral for a guided tour.

Canterbury Cathedral was one of the most important centres of pilgrimage in Medieval England. There has been a cathedral here since 597, when St. Augustine baptised the Saxon King Ethelbert. From Saxon times, the Archbishop of Canterbury has always been the head of the Church of England, and this cathedral is his seat. In 1170, the Cathedral was the scene of the horrific murder of Henry II’s former chancellor and friend, Archbishop Thomas Becket. In 1174, Henry did penance here for his part in the murder. After Becket was canonised, his tomb in the Cathedral became a great pilgrim shrine. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* describes a pilgrimage to Canterbury. Architecturally, the Cathedral is very impressive due to its size and ornate detail. There is also a large display of stained glass windows, some of which have survived from the late 12th and 13th centuries.

After our visit, we will have some free time in Canterbury for sightseeing and an independent lunch.

After lunch, our coach takes us to Dover Castle, one of England’s most impressive historic monuments.

Known as ‘the Key to England’, Dover Castle is one of the greatest and most famous of European fortresses, its position as a frontier defence ensuring it an important place in British history. It has been crucial to England’s defences from the Iron Age to the Second World War. The oldest fortress in England, and a witness to over 2,000 years of history, Dover Castle is strategically sited, guarding the nearest landing point to mainland Europe, and making an emphatic statement of medieval royal power. Once an Iron Age fort, then a stronghold built by William the Conqueror, the Castle that survives today is the massive Great Tower built by Henry II. Highly visible across the Straits of Dover, Dover’s unbroken active service as a castle and fortress stretches over more than nine centuries. Visitors can experience the siege of 1216 by Louis VIII of France, discover the labyrinth of secret wartime tunnels built under Dover's white cliffs, and walk through the rooms where the miracle of Dunkirk was planned. Parts of the castle were also used as a hospital during World War II, and visitors can experience its sounds, smells and atmosphere. They can also see the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment Museum, one of the best-preserved Roman lighthouses in Europe and the most complete Saxon church in Kent.

Alison Weir will escort our group to the Great Tower, which has recently been the subject of a multi-million project to recreate the castle interior as Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine would have known it in the 12th century. It was here that the jacket for Alison’s novel *The Captive Queen* was photographed.
The aim of the Great Tower project was to evoke the atmospheric interiors of King Henry II's medieval royal court, creating an immersive world in which the visitor stands at the centre of the experience. Backed by meticulous research, compelling evidence and an army of skilled craftsmen who have re-created the lavish interiors, from wall hangings, stunning furnishings and over 500 intricate objects, the project is considered the most ambitious attempt to re-create a medieval palace in more than a century.

Step inside the Great Tower at Dover Castle and immerse yourself in the medieval world and royal court of King Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Experience the incredible technicolour of one of medieval England's most important castles as you're transported to a world of courtly intrigue and royal ambition. Journey through richly furnished chambers adorned with vibrant wall hangings. Costumed characters and the latest film technology will bring to life famous historical figures. Experience the sights, sounds and smells of medieval times as you wander through this richly dressed and authentically re-created medieval world, bringing to life the family and court politics of the early Plantagenets, one of the most charismatic royal families in English History.

After visiting the Great Tower, we will have free time to explore the rest of the castle and guests may like to visit the darkly atmospheric Secret Wartime Tunnels, which offer a vivid recreation of the Dunkirk evacuation, complete with dramatic projections of swooping Spitfires and real film footage.

Our tickets also include an optional 20-minute Underground Hospital Tour. An expert English Heritage guide visitors deep into the White Cliffs to explore the Underground Hospital in the Secret Wartime Tunnels. Relive those remarkable days and follow an injured pilot as doctors fight for his life. You will be able to hear and smell the fearsome action through stunning audio-visual effects!

After our visit, we return to Canterbury Cathedral Lodge.

Dinner is independent tonight; there is a wide range of dining options in Canterbury.

We stay overnight at Canterbury Cathedral Lodge

Today’s lectures:
Introduction to Dover Castle (Nicola Tallis)
The Court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine (Alison Weir)

Day 3, Sunday, 17th June

After breakfast, we leave Canterbury and make our way north towards Lincolnshire. On the way, we stop to visit The Manor, Hemingford Grey
Built in the 1130s, in the lifetime of Eleanor of Aquitaine, The Manor is one of the oldest continuously inhabited houses in Britain and much of the original house remains virtually intact in spite of various changes over nine hundred years, giving us a chance to see what manor houses were like in Eleanor’s day. The moated house is surrounded by four acres of garden renowned for its collection of old roses and irises, topiary and hidden corners. The upstairs hall of the house is a room full of atmosphere and the echoes of nearly nine centuries of family conversations. It was used during World War II to give gramophone record recitals twice a week to the RAF. The 1929 EMG gramophone is still in use in this room. Later, The Manor was home to the children’s writer, Lucy Boston, famous for the Green Knowe books.

After our private tour of the house, there will be free time for an independent lunch in Hemingford Grey, where there is a highly rated gastro-pub called The Cock.

The village of Hemingford Grey has an attractive mixture of buildings including thatched timber-framed cottages and the church with its unique truncated spire. In the High Street you will find the Cock public house and restaurant, with The Willows guest house next door. Next to the church is the old rectory, a beautiful Queen Anne house which is now a study centre.

After lunch, we continue our journey north to Lincolnshire, where we check into the Petwood Hotel at Woodhall Spa (or similar).

The Petwood Hotel is situated in Woodhall Spa, in thirty acres of Lincolnshire countryside. This former country house has a beauty studio, a restaurant, a terrace bar and free parking. The Dining Room has period features and serves fine cuisine using local produce. The hotel was used by the RAF in World War II and the Squadron Bar is named after them. The Drawing Room has an open fire and comfortable sofas for guests to relax in. Afternoon tea can be served on the hotel’s terrace. There are various beauty and massage treatments available. Guests are welcome to explore the extensive hotel gardens.

Woodhall Spa is a village full of character and timeless charm. The nearby Hotchkin Golf Course (ranked 43rd in the world) has tested many top-ranking golfers. Woodhall Spa also boasts the unique Kinema in the Woods and the village has a number of independent stores, coffee shops and boutiques. Aviation heritage is rich here with a number of attractions nearby. Cycling and walking routes run through the village and you are a short drive from the Lincolnshire Wolds, designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Dinner is independent tonight. The hotel offers two venues: the elegant restaurant, The Dining Room, or the less formal option of the Terrace Bar, overlooking the gardens. There are also several places to eat out nearby in Woodhall Spa itself.

We stay overnight at the Petwood Hotel.
Today’s lectures:
*A Marriage of Lions: Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine* (Alison Weir)
*The Cubs Shall Awake: Eleanor and her Sons* (Alison Weir)

Day 4, Monday, 18th June

In the morning, our coach takes us to the great medieval cathedral city of Lincoln.

Lincoln is a relatively small but delightful and enchanting city, and in recent years it has developed into a major U.K. tourist centre. The city of Lincoln is steeped in history, much of it dating back to Roman times. The best-known attraction and landmark is Lincoln Cathedral, closely followed by the Castle and Steep Hill, but beyond that this wonderful city boasts the very fine medieval Bailgate area with its varied and interesting range of shops, restaurants, bars, cafés, hotels and many attractions.

On arrival, we will have a guided tour of Lincoln Castle.

Discover a world of rich history in Lincoln Castle, nestling in the heart of historic Lincoln. In 1157, Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine held their Christmas court here. In 1215, Eleanor of Aquitaine’s youngest son, King John, signed the Magna Carta, and the castle is currently home to Lincoln Cathedral’s copy of Magna Carta, dating back to 1215, as well as the Charter of the Forest. Experience the magnificent views of the cathedral, the City of Lincoln and the surrounding countryside from the extensive wall walks during your visit to the castle.

After our visit, there will be free time to explore the medieval Bailgate, with its ancient buildings, shops, inns and cafes, or to walk down quaint Steep Hill to the more modern city of Lincoln below. On Steep Hill, you can see two rare survivals of Norman houses dating from Eleanor of Aquitaine’s time. There are many options for an independent lunch as Lincoln boasts wide variety of restaurants ranging from an original English pie shop to exotic Thai and Mexican cuisine.

In the afternoon, we will visit Lincoln Cathedral for a guided tour.

Lincoln Cathedral, one of the most important Medieval cathedrals in England if not Europe. Sitting on top of a high hill, it is a prominent landmark visible for miles around. It was first built in 1072, by order of William the Conqueror. In 1141, the Cathedral was damaged by fire and only partially rebuilt. In 1185, an earthquake caused structural damage to the existing building. St Hugh of Avalon, who was Bishop of Lincoln from 1186 to 1200, began reconstruction work in 1192. Henry II had approved his election as bishop in 1186. St Hugh rebuilt the Cathedral in the Gothic style, with pointed arches, ribbed vaults and flying buttresses. This gave the elegance and sense of space we see today, and made possible bigger windows for stained glass and larger roof spans. Later centuries saw further alterations and improvements. The famous Angel Choir was consecrated in 1280. The central tower
rises to 271 feet and remains the tallest cathedral tower in Europe without a spire. Visitors will be inspired by the splendour of this imposing building.

After our visit, there will be free time to explore Lincoln or enjoy an English afternoon tea in one of the tea-shops; or guests are welcome to join Alison Weir for an optional visit to the medieval Bishop’s Palace by the Cathedral.

Begun in the late 12th century, the palace's most impressive feature is the undercrofted West Hall, initiated by Bishop St Hugh and completed in the 1230s. The chapel range and entrance tower were built by Bishop William Alnwick, who modernised the palace in the 1430s. Having hosted visits from Henry VIII, Katherine Howard, and James I, the palace was sacked by Royalist troops during the Civil War. Built on hillside terraces, the palace also boasts one of the most northerly working vineyards in Europe, and the Contemporary Heritage Garden, its form was inspired by the cathedral's medieval vaulting and the curves of the vines, with trees shaped to echo spires.

In the evening, we are planning an included group dinner at a Lincoln restaurant (to be confirmed).

We stay overnight at the Petwood Hotel

Today’s lecture:
*Introduction to Lincoln* (Nicola Tallis)

**Day 5, Tuesday, 19th June**

In the morning, we leave Lincolnshire and drive south into Nottinghamshire, where we pass through the village of Clipston. Here, the ruins of the early medieval hunting lodge known as King John’s Palace can be seen as we drive through the village.

Boasting an 'important provincial royal palace' used by all the Plantagenet Kings for 200 years, Kings Clipstone was 'the royal heart of ancient Sherwood Forest'. The ruins we see here are of a palace or fortified manor house, which was a royal residence before 1164, rebuilt in stone c.1180, when it became the principal hunting lodge in Sherwood Forest. In 1194, Eleanor stayed there with her favourite son, Richard the Lionheart, after his return from crusade and captivity. It was later a favourite retreat of King John. Excavations in 1956 showed that the palace consisted of a number of buildings, some timber-framed and some stone-framed, including a great hall, knights' hall, queen's hall and kitchen, king's kitchen, great chamber, great chapel and long stable, surrounded by a ditch. The three walls now remaining belong to an undercroft, possibly one of two chambers with chapels built in 1279-90 for Edward II. The site has been very much disturbed by ploughing and stone robbing. There are only traces of the earlier building.

We then continue to the city of Nottingham, famous for its legends of Robin Hood.
The city of Nottingham is full to the brim with myth and legend, architectural gems and a wide range of exciting places to visit. The city stands on a mound of Sherwood sandstone that is riddled with unique man-made caves, and one of Nottingham’s most intriguing attractions is the City of Caves exhibition, where you can explore part of the 700-year-old cave system, with highlights including an air-raid shelter and a Victorian slum dwelling. At the Galleries of Justice in the imposing Shire Hall, where you can travel through time and learn about 300 years of crime, punishment and law. Nottingham’s wonderful architecture is exemplified by St Mary’s Church on High Pavement in the trendy Lace Market district, which is reputedly one of the finest medieval buildings in the city. Also in the city centre is Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem at the base of Nottingham Castle, which is one of the oldest pubs in England. Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine stayed in the medieval castle in 1157, and Eleanor was present when Richard I presided over a meeting of the Great Council there in 1194. Legend links both Eleanor and Richard to the tales of Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest.

Our coach will drop us off at the Cross Keys pub for an early independent lunch. Steeped in hundreds of years of history and renovated to the highest standards, the Cross Keys, one of Nottingham’s finest gems, is now restored to its former glory.

After lunch, our guide, “Robin Hood” himself, will lead us on a tour of the historic sites of Nottingham.

Robin Hood and Nottingham are inextricably linked. Both names are world famous, yet this enigmatic character and the town associated with him are not always clearly understood and appreciated. Robin Hood’s Town Tour of Nottingham seeks to redress this injustice. See the sights, hear the stories and explore this cultural capital with Robin Hood as your guide. Visit ancient pubs, haunted caves, the Council House and the Market Square, the Lace Market, the Castle and the Park, and journey through the mists of myth and history. Learn how simple ballads over 700 years old grew into one of the greatest stories ever told.

Our tour ends at Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem in Nottingham, dating from c.1189 and one of England’s oldest pubs, where we can enjoy a drink.

Travellers to the city of Nottingham invariably find their way to this quaint old Inn which is carved into the rock and connected with the labyrinth of sandstone caves at the foot of Nottingham Castle. As its sign says, it truly is “well known throughout the world”, but the very first question every visitor asks inevitably relates to how it came to have such an unusual name. The answer to this lies in the date painted on the exterior walls of the Inn, that of 1189AD. This was the year Richard the Lionheart succeeded to the English throne, and one of his first acts as king was to go on crusade against the Saracens who at that time occupied the Holy Land. Legend has it that the brave knights and men-at-arms who rallied to his call to fight in this Third Crusade, gathered at the castle to rest before journeying to Jerusalem. On stepping inside, visitors to this ancient inn will immediately sense that they truly are taking a step back in time.
Our coach will then take us south to Berkshire, where we will check into Oakley Court Hotel (4*) (or similar), not far from the historic royal town of Windsor.

This historic country house hotel is set in large gardens, looking out over the River Thames. It has air-conditioned rooms, an award-winning restaurant and indoor pool. Oakley Court was built in 1859 and mixes original character with modern luxury. The large rooms have luxury beds, minibars and satellite TV. There are beauty treatment rooms, tennis courts, croquet and a 9-hole golf course. The hotel also has a bar, sauna, steam room and modern gym. A private boathouse offers boats for hire during the spring and summer. The Oakleaf Restaurant has won an AA Rosette award for its modern European cuisine.

In the evening, there will be an included drinks reception and dinner at the hotel.

We stay overnight at Oakley Court Hotel.

Today’s lectures:
Eleanor of Aquitaine in the Robin Hood Legends (Alison Weir)
Introduction to Clipston (Alison Weir)
Introduction to Nottingham (Nicola Tallis)
Eleanor of Aquitaine (speaker tbc)

Day 6, Wednesday, 20th June

After breakfast, we depart for Wallingford Castle ruins

Wallingford was one of the greatest medieval castles in England. Today, amidst its rural landscape, it’s hard to imagine that. William the Conqueror and his army crossed the Thames at Wallingford in 1066 and ordered the building of the castle. In 1153, the Treaty of Wallingford settled the crown on the future Henry II. It was here, in 1155, that Henry and Eleanor presented their two oldest sons to the barons of England, and here, the following year, that the elder son, William, died. The remains of the castle’s massive earthworks are still capable of evoking an extraordinary sense of history.

We then visit Godstow Abbey ruins.

Godstow Abbey lies near the River Thames, and is famous for its connection with Henry II’s fabled mistress, Rosamund de Clifford, who is linked to Eleanor of Aquitaine in many legends. Godstow once boasted a magnificent church, courts, cloisters and a chapter house. Only the outer walls and ruins of a private chapel remain. The church was consecrated in 1139. The abbey was again enlarged between 1176 and 1188 when Henry II endowed it as the burial place of Rosamund de Clifford. The abbey was suppressed in 1539. It was then converted into Godstow House, but this was badly damaged in the Civil War. After that, it fell into disrepair and was used by the locals as a source of stone for their buildings. In Victorian times,
Charles Dodgson (aka Lewis Carroll) brought Alice Liddell (the real Alice in Wonderland) for river trips and picnics at Godstow.

Nearby is The Trout, a well-known inn, once the abbey’s hospice, built in 1138. There will be time to enjoy a drink here.

From Godstow, we drive to lovely old town of Woodstock, where there will be time for independent lunch.

Woodstock, eight miles North of Oxford, is often visited for two reasons: eighteenth-century Blenheim Palace and Sir Winston Churchill's grave in nearby Bladon churchyard. But Woodstock has much more to offer. Before the Norman Conquest, when the Wychwood Forest stretched from the Cotswolds to London, there were royal hunting lodges in Woodstock. Near the village lay Woodstock Palace, a residence that was popular with English kings and queens throughout the medieval period. The building was destroyed in the English Civil War. Sixty years later the palace remains were cleared for the construction of Blenheim Palace. Woodstock was long associated with Henry II's courtship of Rosamund de Clifford. Eleanor of Aquitaine stayed here several times. The market of the town was established when Henry gave Woodstock a Royal charter in 1179. The Bear Hotel in the town centre opposite The Oxfordshire Museum dates to the 13th century. The Town Hall is 18th century and there are numerous attractive period buildings including the 17th century Fletcher's house, now home to the County Museum. Chaucer's House in Park Street was once home to Geoffrey Chaucer, the poet.

In the afternoon, we visit the university city of Oxford.

Oxford, the City of Dreaming Spires, is famous the world over for its University and its place in history. For over 800 years, it has been a home to royalty and scholars; nowadays, it is a bustling cosmopolitan town, a good mix of ancient and modern, with plenty to see and do. Oxford has it all. It will surprise and enchant you with its magnificent architecture, impressive yet intimate colleges, romantic rivers, hidden nooks and crannies, and vibrant atmosphere.

Here we will see the site of Beaumont Palace, where Eleanor gave birth to her sons, Richard I and King John, and afterwards we will enjoy a guided tour of Oxford Castle.

Oxford Castle is Oxford’s oldest new quarter! This is the site of the eleventh-century Norman Oxford Castle, whence Henry II’s mother, the Empress Matilda, escaped in a snowstorm in 1141. The crypt is 900 years old. Later, the castle was used as the infamous Oxford Prison. Parts of these historic buildings remain, including the Saxon St George’s Tower. The secrets of the castle are revealed in the exciting visitor attraction, Oxford Castle – Unlocked, which brings the site’s history to life, opening a whole new perspective on Oxford. Visitors can climb the Norman Castle Mound and enjoy panoramic views from the top of St. George’s Tower (101 steps), while centuries of prison life are revealed within the 18th century buildings, taking the story across a thousand years, right up to living memory. The rest of the site is now
home to an exciting hub of bars and restaurants. Oxford Castle also boasts O3 Gallery, with its dynamic programme of exhibitions and events all year round.

Afterwards, there will be free time to visit the world-famous Ashmolean Museum or the sights of Oxford, including its many ancient colleges.

We then return to Oakley Court Hotel.

Dinner is independent tonight. Guests may opt to eat in The Dining Room at Oakley Court. Alternatively, Windsor, with a great choice of restaurants, is just 3.5 miles away, so is easily accessible by taxi.

We stay overnight at Oakley Court Hotel.

Today’s lectures:
*The Amazon Queen: Eleanor on Crusade* (Alison Weir)
*Wallingford Castle* (Nicola Tallis)
*Fair Rosamund* (Alison Weir)
*Woodstock Palace* (Alison Weir)
*The Empress Matilda* (Alison Weir)
*Introduction to Windsor Castle* (NT)

Day 7, Thursday, 21st June

In the morning, we tour Windsor Castle.

Windsor Castle, the largest and oldest occupied castle in the world, is one of the official residences of Her Majesty The Queen. The Castle's dramatic site encapsulates 900 years of British history. The castle built by William the Conqueror was rebuilt in stone by Henry II after 1166; Henry also erected the original Round Tower and a range of royal apartments on the site of the present state apartments. The present castle covers an area of 26 acres. The magnificent State Apartments are furnished with some of the finest works of art from the Royal Collection, including paintings by Rembrandt, Rubens, Canaletto and Gainsborough. St George's Chapel is one of the finest examples of Gothic architecture in England. It is the spiritual home of the Order of the Garter, the senior order of British Chivalry established in 1348 by Edward III. Within the chapel are the tombs of ten sovereigns, including Henry VIII and his third wife Jane Seymour. Among the highlights of a visit to Windsor is Queen Mary's Dolls' House, the most famous dolls' house in the world. It took three years to complete and involved 1,500 craftsmen, artists and authors. The house has electric lighting, hot and cold running water, and even flushing lavatories.

Our guide will take us around the extensive precincts and the State Apartments. Afterwards, there will be free time to explore further at leisure and perhaps see Queen Mary’s Dolls’ House, the Drawings Gallery and St Georges Chapel.

There are many options nearby for an independent lunch.
In the afternoon, on our way to Berkhamsted, we drive through Runnymede, where the Magna Carta was signed by Eleanor’s son, King John.

Magna Carta (Latin for 'great charter') was sealed by King John at Runnymede in June 1215. Known as the Great Charter of English Liberties, it formed a peace treaty with barons who were in revolt against the King due to his disastrous foreign policy and arbitrary government. The effect of Magna Carta over the centuries was to guarantee the liberties of the King’s free subjects and to restrict his absolute power. The text of the charter was copied on to the first English Statute Roll in the reign of Edward I and passed into English Law. It has since formed the basis of the constitutions and statues of many other countries in the English-speaking world, including the United States of America. It underlines the Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which goes well beyond its original purpose as a definition of the limitations of royal power.

Today, Runnymede itself is a very attractive meadow now owned by the National Trust. There are three monuments to be seen. The first commemorates the Magna Carta. The second was erected in the 1960s to honour the memory of the assassinated President John F. Kennedy, and stands in its own acre of land, given by the people of Britain to the USA; it is a little piece of America by the Thames. The third monument, at the top of the hill, is the Air Forces Memorial.

We continue to Berkhamsted, where we visit the ruins of Berkhamsted Castle.

In 1066, William the Conqueror received the submission of the English at Berkhamsted Castle after the Battle of Hastings. Around 1070, his half-brother, Robert of Mortain, built a timber castle. It was in the classic Norman motte-and-bailey form, with a defensive conical mound and oval bailey. The castle stayed in royal hands, and in 1155 the honour of Berkhamsted was granted to Thomas Becket by Henry II. As chancellor, Becket enjoyed great royal favour. He rebuilt the castle to befit his new status and house his large staff; his buildings probably included the huge stone curtain wall. In 1163, Henry and Eleanor kept Christmas here, and Eleanor lodged there at Easter 1184. In 1164, during his quarrel with the king, Becket was accused of embezzlement. He was disgraced and the honour of Berkhamsted was removed. Only ruins remain today.

Afterwards, we drive into Hampshire, where we check into the Lainston House Hotel (4*) near Winchester.

Lainston House Hotel is a charming 17th Century country house standing elegantly in 63 acres of beautiful Hampshire parkland. Delicate archways and loggias frame the picture-perfect entrance and a short walk takes you to a beautiful 12th-century chapel ruin and pretty dovecote. The hotel features a 3 AA Rosette restaurant, spacious, charming rooms, a well-equipped gym, a croquet lawn and two tennis courts. The Cedar Bar has an impressive cocktail list. The en suite rooms at Lainston
House have a pillow menu, spa toiletries and tea/coffee facilities. Full of character, some rooms feature an elegant four-poster bed or roll-top bath.

Dinner is independent tonight. At Lainston House, guests may choose to eat in the smart Avenue Restaurant, or dine alfresco at the Terrace. Alternatively, Winchester, with a great choice of restaurants, is just 2.7 miles away, and is easily accessible by taxi.

We stay overnight at the Lainston House Hotel.

Today’s lectures:
*The Admiration of her Age: Eleanor Triumphant* (Alison Weir)
*Berkhamsted Castle* (Nicola Tallis)
*Magna Carta* (Alison Weir)

**Day 8, Friday, 22nd June**

Today, we retrace the footsteps of the ‘Captive Queen’.

In the morning, we visit the ruins of Old Sarum Castle and Cathedral on their windswept mound outside Salisbury. Here, we will enjoy a guided tour.

Old Sarum is a huge earthwork raised in about 500 B.C. by Iron Age settlers, and later occupied by Romans, Saxons and Normans. The Normans built a castle and a royal palace, and by the mid-12th century Sarum was a busy town with a fine new cathedral. Eleanor of Aquitaine was imprisoned in the castle between 1174 and 1189. Lack of water and squabbles between church and military led in the thirteenth century to the building of a new settlement by the river, now known as Salisbury. Old Sarum was then abandoned and fell into ruin.

We then return to Winchester in time for an independent lunch.

Winchester is a delightful, historic city of broad streets and narrow alleys with history written at every corner, lying in a hollow in the downs in the ancient heart of the southern English countryside. This unique heritage city dates back to Saxon times, and has a magnificent cathedral, many historic buildings, award-winning pubs and restaurants and a tempting array of independent shops, all surrounded by fabulous rolling countryside and pretty Hampshire villages.

In the afternoon, we visit Winchester Cathedral for a guided tour.

Winchester Cathedral is one of the world’s greatest churches, and arguably England's most magnificent cathedral. Its grandeur is enhanced by its setting in Winchester, and the cathedral itself is a treasure house of art, both ancient and modern, housed in a magnificent, light-filled, powerful edifice that is built in the uniquely English perpendicular style.
Afterwards, we will have some free time to see the sights of Winchester. Guests have the option of accompanying Alison Weir to the ruins of historic Wolvesey Palace, a ten-minute walk from the Cathedral (admission free).

Later in the afternoon, we visit Winchester Castle for a guided tour.

Winchester Castle holds a prominent position in English history. It was built in 1067, within a year of the Norman Conquest. At the time, it was one of the greatest strongholds in England, and for over a century it served as the seat of government, before that position was taken by London. Eleanor of Aquitaine was held prisoner here between 1174 and 1189. The castle was extended and rebuilt under Henry III, who added the Great Hall. Little remains from that early period. When the fortress finally fell to Parliamentary troops in 1646, Oliver Cromwell ordered its destruction. The medieval Great Hall survives, and upon one end wall is hung a huge Round Table, reputed to be that of King Arthur, though recent investigation assigned a 13th century date to the workmanship of the table. The table was repainted during the reign of Henry VIII. Behind the hall is situated Queen Eleanor’s Garden, a delightful recreation of a small medieval garden made for Eleanor of Provence, Henry III’s queen.

After this we return to Lainston House Hotel.

In the evening, we gather for included farewell drinks and dinner in the hotel.

We stay overnight at Lainston House Hotel.

Today’s lectures:
*Poor Prisoner: Eleanor in Captivity* (Alison Weir)
*Introduction to Winchester* (Nicola Tallis)

*The Candle Goeth Out: Eleanor and Fontevrault* (Alison Weir)

**Day 9, Saturday, 23rd June**

After breakfast, our coach leaves Lainston House Hotel for London. Guests will be dropped off at the Bloomsbury Hotel, where the tour ends.

(Please note that this itinerary may be subject to minor changes.)