

On the trail of an outlaw



IN THE HOOD: Russell Crowe stars in an upcoming film as the legendary bandit, who has been immortalised in statue form in Nottingham, below left

How to get there

Emirates flies to nearby Birmingham and Manchester airports, visit www.emirates.com for details. For accommodation, try www.thefinesecollection.com/lacemarket/. Watch the trailer of the new film www.robinhoodthemovie.com

With the blockbuster film due out next month, give Robin Hood country a try

By Georgina Wilson-Powell

Robin Hood, Robin Hood riding through the glen, Robin Hood, Robin Hood with his band of men... The tales of the British forest dwelling outlaw who robbed from the rich and gave to the poor have been handed down through generations. From bards telling stories round campfires, to plays, books, TV series and more recently movies, each embellishing the man in Lincoln green. This May, Russell Crowe steps into the famous bandit's tights in the newest portrayal of Robin Hood, directed by Ridley (Gladiator) Scott. But who was Robin Hood and where did he come from? We all know his evil nemesis was the Sheriff of Nottingham, played by Matthew Macfadyen in the 2010 version, and many will know that he hid out in Nottingham's Sherwood Forest to plan raids on the corrupt priests and

nobles of the important town. Part of Nottingham Castle still stands and is now home to a large Robin Hood exhibition, which boasts costumes and props from the film. It's a great starting point for any Robin Hood city tour. There are still plenty of sandstone caves below the castle that can be viewed, which is where many outlaws like Robin Hood would have gained secret access to the castle, built in 1068 by William the Conqueror. May has been declared Robin Hood month, with medieval-inspired events, such as jousting, taking place at the castle. Of course - so the museum tells me - Robin Hood is all just a story. There was no Robin of Loxley, no displaced Earl who returned from the crusades to find his home burnt out only to rouse the villagers to overthrow the nobles. But there were many Robin Hoods... outlaws who lived in the King's forest, beyond the laws of the

state and church whose raids and encounters with the soldiers and the courts became the stuff of legend and became condensed into one person - an immortal hero who stands for the normal man, fairness, equality and what is morally right. So Robin Hood's legend lives on and although he might not have been real, plenty of places mentioned in the tales are, and are still visible. A city tour (www.visitbritain.ie/robinhood) is a great way to get to see the history and architecture of this interesting city, and one of the most important points to stop off along the way is the Ye Olde Trip Jerusalem, one of the oldest, if not the oldest pub, in England, built in 1189. Carved into the sandstone rock that the castle is built on, it's here travellers would have swapped their stories about the outlaw. The Galleries of Justice, which stand on what was a County Jail in Robin Hood's time, now have an interactive exhibition where visitors can experience what it would have been like to be



BRANCHING OUT: The Major Oak is 800 years old

thrown into prison, and right opposite the beautiful building is one of the city's finest boutique hotels, the Lace Market Hotel.

The Lace Market Hotel has corner studio suites that overlook the wonderfully Gothic St Mary's Cathedral, which also features heavily in Robin Hood myth, and is a stone's throw from Hockley, an area full of independent bars, restaurants and art galleries and home to a much-loved regional favourite, the Broadway Cinema and Bar. The hotel itself has a pub, cocktail bar and award-winning restaurant attached, all of which focus on locally sourced products, and the staff are friendly and knowledgeable about the area. Leaving Nottingham behind, Sherwood Forest is one of the last protected English forests that remains pretty much in the same state as it has done for the last thousand years. Home to more than 900 giant oaks, including the Major Oak -

ROBIN HOOD'S MOVIE MOMENTS

■ The last time Robin Hood was committed (seriously) to celluloid was in 1991 with Kevin Costner in the role and Kevin Reynolds directing. The pair went on to work together in the flop 'Waterworld'. ■ The title song for 'Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves' was Bryan Adams' 'Everything I Do I Do It For You', which is still the track that has spent the longest amount of time at No.1 in



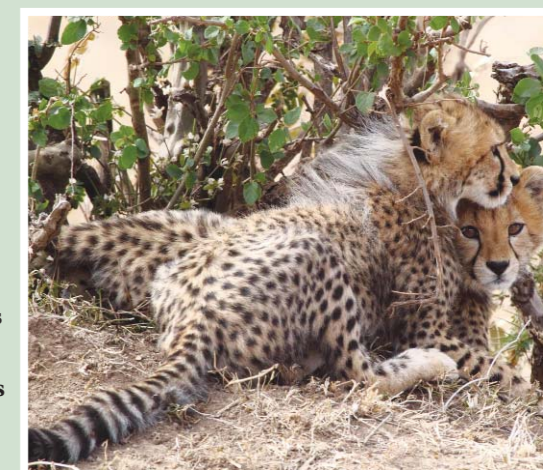
the UK - 16 weeks. The song was also nominated for an Oscar. ■ In the 1980s British television series 'Robin of Sherwood', British hard man Ray Winstone played Will Scarlet. ■ Sean Connery played the role in 1976's 'Robin and Marian', to woo Audrey Hepburn, who - in this version - has become an Abbess 20 years after most of the stories are set. The Scot still manages to turn on the charm though and wins the fair maiden's hand.

often photographed as a tree which might have been home to outlaws such as Robin, as it's around 800 years old - Sherwood Forest has plenty of mapped out walks where visitors can explore the great outdoors. The temperate climate means that long walks are made possible (perhaps pack an umbrella) pretty much all year round. The city has plenty of nightlife options that definitely weren't around in Robin's time, with a huge variety of restaurants at a reasonable price.

Tonic (in the Chapel Quarter) offers modern British fare in a retro 60s setting. Post dinner the Chapel Quarter has plenty of bar options for a cocktail or nightcap. Alternatively, Tarn Thai (in Hockley) serves mouth watering Thai food with a menu so long it has to be folded several times. Robin Hood country boasts wild British landscapes, historical architecture, charming independent pubs and restaurants - plenty apart from myth and legend keep you enchanted.

My favourite holiday Masai Mara, Kenya

PRECISION timing, a steady hand and a little specialist knowledge are all essential to wildlife photography. With the last of these, your pictures are transformed into the sort of images to grace a nature magazine. Without it you are doomed to an endless succession of empty branches. Paul Goldstein has that specialist knowledge. An award-winning wildlife photographer who has coaxed, cajoled and demanded the best from amateur snappers for years. I joined one of his safaris in Kenya's Masai Mara, hopeful of returning with pictures worthy of a frame. Within minutes of arriving at our luxurious camp, we were bouncing along in one of Paul's specially converted vehicles in pursuit of a cheetah and her two cubs. We found the family bathed in honeyed afternoon light, with the mother looking wistfully into the distance. But rather than settle for these serene pictures we were on the move as the experts knew a hunt was on the agenda. We swung away from the languid scene, our eyes scanning the countryside for potential prey. There, in the distance, a Thomson's gazelle grazed near a thicket. Small and spry - an ideal feast for a peckish big cat - the gazelle munched on rough, scrappy grass. It was over in a second, and only afterwards did I realise I had caught the action on camera: The cheetah lunging from a swirl of dust, front paws stretched out to whip the gazelle's back legs from under it. I was helped by the fact my camera was primed with the shooting action, aperture and shutter speed set to Paul's specifications. This was a relief as perfectionist Paul clearly takes no prisoners. The Mara has



life in abundance and often we found sightings of the smaller characters as enjoyable as the big predators. We were not forced into a rigid itinerary, we left the delightful surroundings of our tents around 5am every day, and often were still out at sunset. Returning to a hot shower and a drink around the campfire, we buzzed with excitement and waited sheepishly for Paul to appraise our shots. Thanks to the eagle eyes of our guides, and Paul's expert knowledge, we had plenty of material ready for his appraisal. Kelly McNamara



Tell us about your favourite holiday and send pictures to: letters@7days.ie