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36 HOURS

36 Hours in Cambridge, England



Jonathan Player for The New York Times

Dining at the well-regarded Alimentum on Hills Road. [More Photos >](#)

By RACHEL B. DOYLE
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CAMBRIDGE, with its narrow medieval passageways and 801-year-old university, is more than just a college town. Students today are sticking around after graduation to run alternative [art](#) galleries and cafe collectives. The famous antiquities museum is proudly displaying contemporary works of art, and lively new restaurants and watering holes are rising to the standards of those down the road in London. Even the venerable university is throwing open its doors and admitting the common folk as hotel guests.

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Multimedia



Friday

4 p.m.

1) MODERN LAWN

It's where musty meets modern. With its antiquities and rare manuscripts, the [Fitzwilliam Museum](#) (Trumpington Street; 44-1223-332900; www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk) exemplifies old Cambridge. But the two-centuries-old institution got a fresh look in 2009, when the outdoor Sculpture Promenade was unveiled with nine abstract works cast in bronze, steel, fiberglass and iron. City

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2. 36 HOURS



A Weekend in Cambridge, England



36 Hours Cambridge, England

entrepreneurs have noted how museum attendance has spiked, especially among young people, offering a blueprint for other stuffy cultural attractions wishing to modernize.

7 p.m.

2) NEW ENGLAND FARE

It used to be that Cambridge residents had to travel to London for fine dining. Not anymore. Opened in 2007, Alimentum (152-154 Hills Road; 44-1223-413000; restaurantalimentum.co.uk) brought modern English fare to the old city, and was recently voted among the top restaurants in Britain by the prestigious Good Food Guide. The Art Deco-style dining room draws a relaxed crowd of flannel-wearing professionals, who pair Rioja with seasonal English dishes like lamb sweetbread (£9.50, or \$14.90 at \$1.57 to £1) and a grilled sirloin with oxtail, bone marrow, Madeira-mushroom purée and bordelaise sauce (£21).

9:30 p.m.

3) SIP UNDERGROUND

For a sophisticated cocktail worlds away from the student bars, head to the subterranean watering hole at Hotel Du Vin (15-19 Trumpington Street; 44-1223-227330; hotelduvin.com/hotels/Cambridge). Opened in 2007, this candlelit bar has a beverage list so lengthy it needs a two-page table of contents for the absinthe rinse cocktails, fig liqueur Champagne drinks and Belgian beers. Against a brick and brown leather backdrop, fashionable patrons laugh and clink glasses.

11 p.m.

4) STAR SEARCH

Capture the energy of the incandescent young talents of Cambridge at a late-night theater performance. The 228-seat university playhouse ADC Theater (Park Street; 44-1223-300085; adctheatre.com), home of the celebrated student comedy troupe the Cambridge Footlights, got a makeover in 2008, expanding the stage where Hugh Laurie got his start. The theater is still a good place to spot emerging talent — or glimpse visiting alumni like Sir Ian McKellen. There are regular shows at 7:45 p.m., but the experimental show at 11 p.m. offers a glimpse of the young dramatists in their natural nocturnal habitat, as entertaining as it is outré.

Saturday

10 a.m.

5) ICY MORNING

Not everything's centuries old here. The sleek new Polar Museum (Lensfield Road; 44-1223-336562; spri.cam.ac.uk/museum) reopened in June on the 100th anniversary of Robert Falcon Scott's last Antarctic expedition. Captivating artifacts include the personal letters and journals of the expedition team, and a special exhibition of 1960s polar art by Sir Sidney Nolan. Afterward, check out the charmingly geeky University Zoology Museum (Downing Street, 44-1223-336650; museum.zoo.cam.ac.uk), which houses three of Charles Darwin's original Galápagos finch specimens.

Noon

6) SPICE IT UP

The slightly out-of-the-way Mill Road is one of Cambridge's most ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Absorb the local flavor with lunch at Calcutta Club (44 Mill Road; 44-1223-322267; calcutta-club.co.uk), which opened last year in a once-rough pub. This student favorite makes up for its somewhat cheesy décor with authentic takes on Indian street food and regional curries. Specialties include lamb kaliyan, cooked in yogurt and

36 Hours in Cambridge, England

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flavored with vetivier root (£8.50), spicy monkfish with mango sauce (£9.75) and addictive South Indian-style dosas (from £3.25) — all served with saffron rice and Hindi pop.

2 p.m.

7) BRITISH ECCENTRICS

Designed as an anti-museum half a century ago in a city full of history, [Kettle's Yard](#) (Castle Street; 44-1223-748100; www.kettlesyard.co.uk) is still one of the quirkiest art hangouts in Cambridge. Consisting of four cottages, the space was converted in the 1950s by Jim Ede, an early collector of modern artists like Miró and Brancusi, into a place to display his trove of early-20th-century masterpieces. Before he bequeathed the house to the [University of Cambridge](#), Ede ordered that everything be preserved as he left it. William Congdon, the American painter, was apparently upset that his work “Guatemala No. 7 (Dying Vulture)” hangs in a downstairs bathroom.

4:30 p.m.

8) LITERARY RIVER

Punting down the River Cam in a flat-bottom boat is the classic way to see Cambridge, but mastering the long wooden pole takes practice. Book a 90-minute lesson with Scudamore's Punting Company (Granta Place, Mill Lane; 44-1223-359750, scudamores.com), which will assign a well-muscled tutor to punt you down the gorgeous stretch of river that runs behind the colleges. Halfway through, the pole is handed to you, for a lesson in propelling the unwieldy craft. If you didn't come to Cambridge for tutoring, rent a [kayak](#) from Scudamore's and paddle to the Orchard Tea Garden (45-47 Mill Way, Grantchester; 44-1223-551125; orchard-grantchester.com), where [E. M. Forster](#), [Virginia Woolf](#), and Bertrand Russell hung out a century ago.

7 p.m.

9) JAMIE'S KITCHEN

It's a good thing that the building is beautiful and the bar lively, because the no-reservation policy at [Jamie's Italian](#) (The Old Library; Wheeler Street; 44-1223-654094; jamieoliver.com), the new hot spot opened by the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, means you might have to wait a while. Known for its freshly made pastas and modest prices, the Italian restaurant opened in February inside a gorgeous former courthouse. A young, attractive crowd feasts on specials like porchetta with lentils (£14.50) in front of an open kitchen, where chefs in striped aprons sprinkle rosemary salt on polenta chips (£3.25) beneath stained-glass windows.

9 p.m.

10) CAM CITY ROCKERS

Forget sticky floors and crackling amplifiers: Cambridge's newest [music](#) venue, the [Haymakers](#) (54 High Street, Chesterton; 44-1223 312899; www.thehaymakerspub.com) has clean lines, superb sound and indie bands on the cusp. The stage is intimate, allowing the women in cropped leather jackets and men with black-rimmed glasses to get up close to acts like Carl Barat and the Twilight Sad. The cab is about £6.

Sunday

11 a.m.

11) BOOKISH BRUNCH

Have brunch at [Fitzbillies](#) (52 Trumpington Street; 44-1223-352500; fitzbillies.co.uk), a charming bistro frequented by university professors grading essays and young couples tucking into eggs Benedict (£7.50). The bakery next door is known for its syrupy Chelsea buns — the recipe is still secret after some eight decades — but the violet cakes have quite a following, too. Afterward, peruse silver jewelry and homemade soaps at the Sunday craft market at Market Square, where Martin Luther's works were once burned.

2 p.m.

12) ART PUNKS

Get a taste for the region's emerging contemporary art scene at Wysing Arts Center (Fox Road, near Bourn; 44-1954-718881; www.wysingartscentre.org), an enormous visual arts complex nine miles west of Cambridge. Performance art is big here, so don't be surprised if you stumble into a post-punk concert led by a Turner Prize winner. Transformed to the tune of \$2.75 million in 2008, the 10-building campus has 24 resident artists splattering paint or shooting reels. Like the new students who arrive each year, the visiting artists provide steady infusions of creativity, helping to power the reinvention of a classic town for the next generation.

IF YOU GO

Cambridge is 50 miles from London, and is easily accessible by train. First Capital Connect (44-8450-264700, firstcapitalconnect.co.uk) and National Express East Anglia (44-8456-007245; nationalexpresseastanglia.com) have frequent service, with fares from £19.10 pounds (\$30) one way.

Opened in August, the 48-room Varsity Hotel & Spa (24 Thompson's Lane; 44-1223-306030, thevarsityhotel.co.uk) has modern furnishings and great views of St. John's College and the River Cam. Doubles start at £155.

Hotel Du Vin (15-19 Trumpington Street; 44-1223-227330, hotelduvin.com) occupies a renovated town house near the Fitzwilliam Museum, with 41 classic rooms and Victorian bathtubs. Rooms from £160.

For a taste of university life, stay in a Cambridge University dorm room (cambridgerooms.co.uk) when classes are not in session. Rates start at £34. Breakfast in the impressive dining halls is a rare treat.

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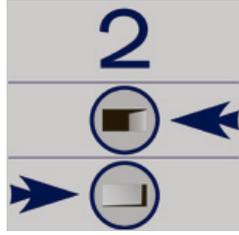
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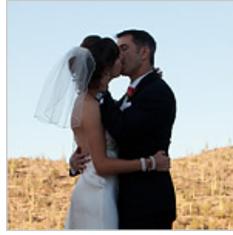
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