

Trip

Bath

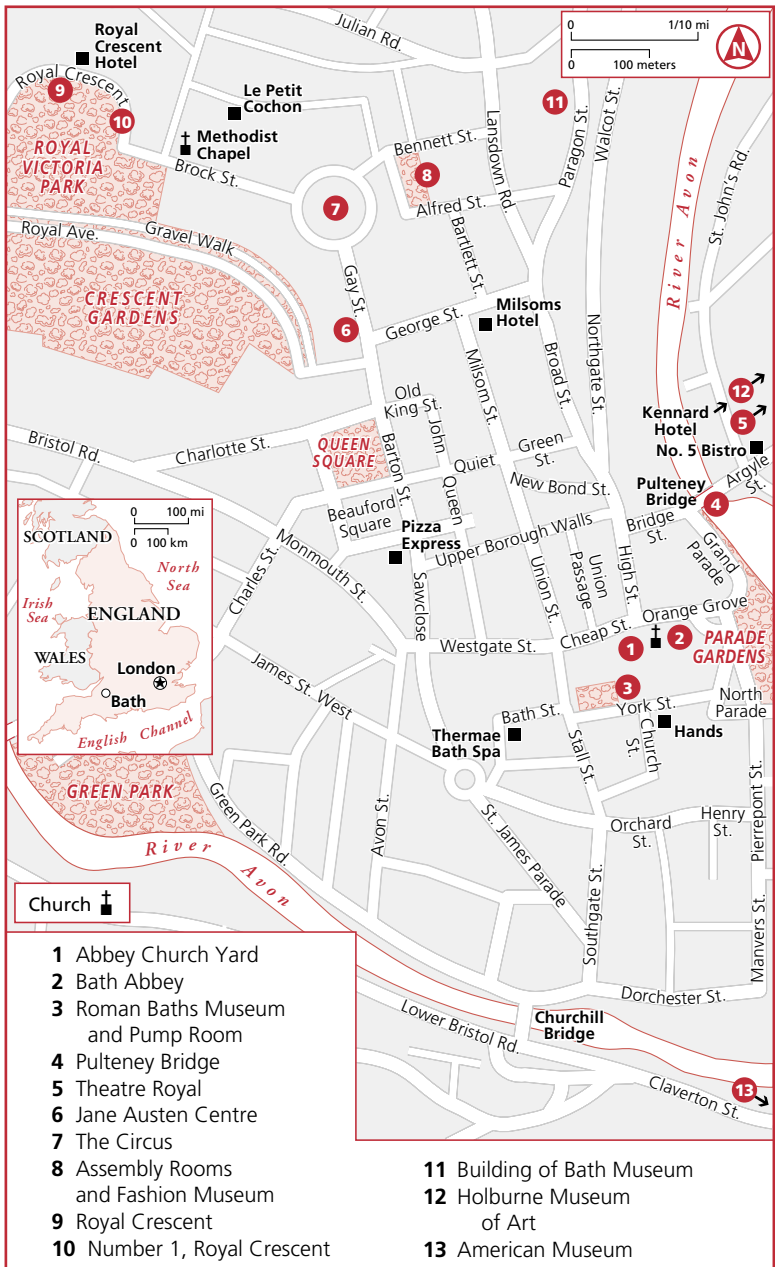
The Romans channeled Bath's hot, sulfurous waters into elaborate thermal pools some 2,000 years ago, and legend has it that the healing effects of the local springs were known to Celtic tribes a millennium before that. But it was 18th-century ladies and dandies who created one of England's most elegant and beautiful cities when they began coming to Bath to take the waters and enjoy the season in terraced houses on elegant squares and curving crescents. Among those who found themselves amid the city's swirling social milieu was Jane Austen, who lived here in the early 19th century. In the end, she didn't care for the place, but in the salons and ballrooms she found plenty of fodder for her novels of manners. These days, millions of visitors come to this city of soft, mellow stone—designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site—not to take the waters (although that can be done) but simply to enjoy Bath's unique beauty. The Roman baths where legionnaires once enjoyed their R&R and well-preserved 18th-century landmarks such as the Royal Crescent, one of the most distinctive assemblages of residential architecture in the world, and the Assembly Rooms, once the social epicenter of Bath, reflect the city's storied history. Jane Austen, Bath's most famous resident, is remembered with a museum and study center devoted to her work.

Bath is an ideal choice for a full-day trip from London—the train journey is only about 90 minutes, there are plenty of sights to fill a day, many places to enjoy a good lunch and tea, and you can be back in London in time for the theatre. There's enough to do and see in Bath to make it a good place for an overnight stop, too, and you might want to consider combining an overnight trip to Bath with a visit to the **Cotswolds** and **Oxford** (trips 16 and 17); see the last section in this chapter for hotel recommendations.

1 Essentials

VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Bath Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 01225/477-101; www.visitbath.co.uk) is in the center of town, in Abbey Church Yard. The center is open Monday to Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm and Sunday from 10am to 4pm.



Bath Highlights

- Exploring the ancient Roman baths.
- Strolling across shop-lined Pulteney Bridge.
- Visiting the Fashion Museum—one of the world's leading collections of historical couture.
- Admiring the elegant town houses of Royal Crescent, and touring Number 1, Royal Crescent.

SCHEDULING CONSIDERATIONS

Bath is a very popular weekend destination, so if you're planning to visit on a Friday or Saturday and spend the night, it's a good idea to reserve your hotel in advance. You might want to plan your visit to Bath to coincide with one of the many events the city hosts throughout the year. These include the **Bath Music Festival** in late May and early June, the **Jane Austen Festival** in September, and the **Mozartfest** in November. For information on these and other events in Bath, contact the **Bath Festivals Office** (☎ 01225/463-362; www.bathfestivals.org.uk).

GETTING THERE BY TRAIN

Trains run about every half-hour from London's Paddington Station to Bath Spa. The trip takes 90 minutes, with the first train departing at 6:30am and the last train returning to London at 10:52pm. The "Cheap Day Return" fare is £47 (\$94). For information, call ☎ 08457/484950 or go to www.nationalrail.co.uk. The Bath train station is at the south edge of the city center, off Dorchester Street, about a 5-minute walk down Manvers Street from Bath Abbey and Grand Parade.

BY CAR

Bath is 115 miles (185km) west of London. The M4 links London with Bath, and the trip usually takes about 2 hours. Most of the city center is closed to traffic, and much of the street parking is reserved for residents. It's easiest to use the city's Park and Ride facilities, well marked from entrance routes into the city; the most convenient when entering the city from the M4 from London is Lansdown, on the north side of the city. The facilities operate Monday through Saturday 7:15am to 7:30pm; parking is free. Buses to the city center leave about every 10 to 15 minutes and cost £1.50 (\$3) return.

BY BUS

National Express buses leave London's Victoria Coach Station for Bath every hour, with some half-hourly departures. Travel times vary from 3 hours and 15 minutes for the direct trip to 4 or even close to 5 hours for trips that require a change. The day-return fare is £18 (\$36). The bus station is on Manvers Street, near the train station. For more information, call ☎ 08705/808080 or go to www.nationalexpress.com.

GETTING AROUND

City buses run from the train station to locations around town, but most places are within walking distance. There is a taxi rank outside the station, or you can call **AA Taxis** (☎ 01225/460-888). The center is compact, and many streets are open only to

pedestrian traffic, making it easy to get around Bath on foot. The easiest way to get from the south side of the city center (where Bath Abbey and the Roman Baths are located) to the north side (for the Assembly Rooms, Circus, and Royal Crescent) is to follow High Street north as it becomes Broad Street and Lansdown Road, then turn left (west) onto Bennett Street.

2 A Day in Bath

The lively center of the city is pedestrian-only. Start your tour at **1 Abbey Church Yard**, adjacent to **2 Bath Abbey** ★ (☎ 01225/422-462; www.bathabbey.org). This airy cathedral was established in the 8th century and was the site of the coronation of the first English king, Edgar, in 973. The Normans tore down the original and built their own massive cathedral here, but it was in ruins by 1499, when a new church was begun. That edifice succumbed to Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in the mid-16th century, but Elizabeth I ordered it restored and the abbey was promptly rebuilt in the Gothic Perpendicular style, with a graceful fan-vaulted ceiling and large expanses of stained glass that fill the church with light; little wonder the cathedral is nicknamed the "Lantern of the West." Bath Abbey is open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 6pm (to 4:30pm in winter); on Sunday it's open from 1 to 2:30pm and 4:30 to 5:30pm. The suggested donation is £2.50 (\$5).

Just across Abbey Church Yard is the **3 Roman Baths Museum and Pump Room** ★★ (☎ 01225/477-785; www.romanbaths.co.uk), a bath complex built by the Romans that remains, in part, just as they left it. The springs in Bath were known and used by the Celts as long ago as 875 B.C. In A.D. 75 the Romans channeled the waters into a luxurious bathing complex that rivals any of the baths in Rome or elsewhere in Italy. A terrace overlooks the large pool where legionnaires once soaked in waters that continue to bubble forth at 116°F (47°C) at the rate of about 240,000 gallons a day. In a maze of subterranean chambers, which you navigate with the aid of excellent self-guided audio commentary, are the remains of steaming pools and saunas, surrounded by elaborate paving. Allow yourself at least an hour to see everything. The baths are open daily, but hours vary seasonally (Jan–Feb and Nov–Dec 9:30am–5:30pm; Mar–June and Sept–Oct 9am–6pm; July–Aug 9am–9pm; last admission is always 1 hr. before closing). Admission is £11.25 (\$23) for adults, £8.70 (\$17) for seniors and students, £6.50 (\$13) for children 6 to 16, and £29 (\$58) for families of up to two adults and two children. A combined ticket to the Roman Baths and the Fashion Museum (see below) costs £13.50 (\$27) for adults, £11.50 (\$23) for seniors and students, £8 (\$16) for children 6 to 16, and £38 (\$76) for families of up to two adults and four children. You can sample the famous waters in the adjacent 18th-century Pump Room (free with your admission ticket), though you may opt to sip coffee or tea to the musical accompaniment of a string trio instead.

The Grand Parade leads a few blocks north to **4 Pulteney Bridge** ★★, an 18th-century span over the Avon River modeled on the Ponte Vecchio in Florence—and like its Italian counterpart, lined with shops. Return to the west bank of the bridge and follow Upper Borough Walls Street through the city center to the **5 Theatre Royal** ★★ (☎ 01225/448-844; www.theatreroyal.org.uk), one of Britain's oldest working stages. If you're unable to attend a performance, you might be around to join one of the tours on the first Wednesday of every month at 11am and every Saturday at noon; the fee is £3 (\$6) for adults and £2 (\$4) for children. The house next to the theatre was once the home of Beau Nash, an 18th-century arbiter of taste and a high-living gambler who is

credited with putting Bath on the map as a fashionable watering hole (see “The Beau of Bath,” below).

Gay Street leads north past Queen Square to the **6 Jane Austen Centre** ★ (☎ 01225/443-000; www.janeausten.co.uk), a rather dull but informative collection of text-heavy displays that honor the ever-popular novelist of late-18th- and early-19th-century manners. Jane visited Bath twice in the late 18th century and lived here from 1801 to 1806, drawing from her experiences for her novels; Bath figures prominently in *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*. The most satisfying part of a visit is the gossipy introductory lecture; among the juicy information that you’ll hear is how Jane came to loathe Bath, where she and her mother and sister fell upon hard times. The center is open daily 9:45am to 5:30pm in the summer (until 8:30pm Thurs–Sat July–Aug; Sun–Fri 11am–4:30pm and Sat 9:45am–5:30pm in the winter). Admission is £6.50 (\$13) for adults, £4.95 (\$10) for seniors and students, £3.50 (\$7) for children 6 to 15, and £18 (\$36) for families of up to two adults and four children. You’ll need about 30 minutes to tour the entire museum.

From the Jane Austen Centre, Gay Street continues north to **7 The Circus** ★, where three semicircular terraces of Regency town houses surround a circular park. The Circus was designed by noted architect John Wood the Elder (responsible for much of Bath’s 18th-c. development) in the prevalent neoclassical style; note the symmetry and classical columns reminiscent of Imperial Rome. The **8 Assembly Rooms and Fashion Museum** ★ (☎ 01225/477-789; www.fashionmuseum.co.uk), just east of the Circus on Bennett Street, evoke a lifestyle in which balls, card-playing, and gossip ranked high among life’s priorities. If the Assembly Rooms are not being used for a private function, you can stroll through the four elegant rooms that were the center of 18th-century Bath’s social life. There’s not much to see or do in the Assembly Rooms, but it’s easy to imagine the twitter of gossip and laughter as the regulars of the Bath season kept tabs on one another. Downstairs, and open daily, is the Fashion Museum, where you can view the finery in which a lady or dandy of the time would have danced away an evening. This is one of the world’s leading collections of fashion (about 2,000 pieces are on display at any one time) and takes about an hour to see. Just as intriguing as the historic fashions are creations by Versace, Armani, and other contemporary designers. Hours are daily from 10am to 5pm (until 4pm Nov–Feb). Admission to the Assembly Rooms is free (but please note you cannot see them if an event is taking place); the museum costs £6.75 (\$14) for adults, £5.75 (\$11) for seniors and students, £4.75 (\$9.50) children 6 to 18, and £18 (\$36) for families of up to two adults and four children. A combined ticket to the Museum of Costume and the Roman Baths Museum (see above) costs £13.50 (\$27) for adults, £11.50 (\$23) for seniors and students, £8 (\$16) for children 6 to 16, and £38 (\$76) for families of up to two adults and four children.

Brock Street leads west from The Circus to Royal Victoria Park and the amazing **9 Royal Crescent** ★★, an exclusive residential semicircle of elegant town houses built by John Wood the Younger from 1767 to 1774, and one of the most distinctive examples of Georgian architecture in the world. The focus of the design is on the classical face of the crescent; there’s characteristic symmetry and proportion of the facades facing the arc, though the rear facades are far more individualistic. At **10 Number 1, Royal Crescent** ★★★ (☎ 01225/428-126; www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk/museums/no1) you can step into one of the town houses, a spacious “corner” house whose tenants included, in 1776, the duke of York, second son of George III. The Bath Preservation Trust has restored the house using only paint, wallpapers, fabrics,

The Beau of Bath

Bath was a sleepy, inelegant little place when Beau Nash (1674–1761) arrived in 1705 to try his hand at some games of chance. Nash, then 31, had more or less given up law and made his living by gambling. He was well known in London social circles for his looks, charm, aplomb, and stylish attire. He was lucky in Bath, decided to stay on as assistant to the town's master of ceremonies, and soon made his mark by enforcing dress codes and rules of behavior at dances, installing streetlights, and improving lodgings. He put Bath on the map as one of Europe's fashionable spas, with a sparkling new Pump Room for taking the waters, Assembly Rooms for dances, terraces on handsome houses, and other improvements we still enjoy today. Bath staged a grand funeral ceremony when Nash died penniless in 1761 at age 87 (ironically, he was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave)—and the elegant town continues to pay tribute to Beau Nash with its perfectly preserved beauty.

and other materials available in the 18th century, and furnished the three floors with a superlative collection of period antiques. The attractive card table in the study would have been a handy piece of equipment, given the popularity of gambling in Georgian Bath. The house is open mid-February through November, Tuesday to Sunday from 10:30am to 5pm (until 4pm in Nov); last admission is half an hour before close. Admission is £5 (\$10) for adults; £4 (\$8) for seniors and students, £2.50 (\$5) for children 6 to 18; and £12 (\$24) for families of up to two adults and two children.

ORGANIZED TOURS

Among the many walking tours of Bath (the Tourist Information Centre has a complete list), you get the best overview on the free, 2-hour **Mayor of Bath's Honorary Civic Walking Tour**, with stops at the Pump Room, Pulteney Bridge, Royal Crescent, and other architectural gems. The tour departs from outside the Abbey Church Yard entrance to the Pump Room at 10:30am daily, with additional walks at 2pm every day except Saturday. From May through September, there are evening walks at 7pm on Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday.

City Sightseeing (☎ 01871/666-0000) offers a 1-hour open-top bus tour with audio commentary at a cost of £10 (\$20) for adults, £8 (\$16) for seniors and students, and £4.50 (\$9) for children. Tours depart from the bus station every 15 minutes in summer, otherwise hourly. Tickets are valid all day, and you can get off and on to explore places along the route.

The 90-minute tours of **Bizarre Bath** (☎ 01225/335-124; www.bizarrebath.co.uk) use street theatre to amuse visitors with cleverly scripted dialogues and reenactments for a humorous look at the city. Tours leave from in front of the Huntsman Inn in North Parade Passage every evening at 8pm from March through September, and cost £7 (\$14) for adults, £5 (\$10) for students; purchase tickets, in cash, at the time of the walk.

On Saturday and Sunday at 11am throughout the year, the **Jane Austen Centre** (☎ 01225/443-000; www.janeausten.co.uk) sponsors **Jane Austen's Bath**, a walking

tour that focuses on the novelist's residences and settings for her novels. Walks begin in Abbey Church Yard and cost £3.50 (\$7).

MORE THINGS TO SEE & DO

11 Building of Bath Museum ★ Exhibits in this museum, which examines the city's Georgian and Regency architecture and interiors, detail the crafts used in the course of construction and introduce the architects who contributed to Bath's remarkable development.

The Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel, The Vineyard (off Paragon St.). ☎ 01225/333-895. Admission £4 (\$8) adults, £3.50 (\$7) seniors and students, £2 (\$4) children 5–15. Mid-Feb to Nov Tues–Sun 10:30am–5pm. To reach the museum from the Assembly Rooms, head east on Alfred St. and north on Paragon St.; the museum will be on your left.

12 Holburne Museum of Art ★ When this mansion was Bath's finest hotel, Jane Austen kept an eye on the fashionable clientele from her house nearby. Now the elegant rooms house silver, glass, and other decorative objects, as well as paintings by Joseph Turner, Thomas Gainsborough, and other masters, collected by 19th-century Bath resident Sir William Holburne.

Great Pulteney St. ☎ 01225/466-669. www.bath.ac.uk/Holburne. Admission £4.50 (\$9) adults, £3.50 (\$7) seniors, free for children. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 11am–5pm.

13 American Museum ★★ On display at 19th-century Claverton Manor are quilts, folk art, Shaker pieces, and the other holdings of Britain's only museum devoted to Americana. Nearly 125 acres (51 hectares) of gardens, including a replica of the one at Mount Vernon, spill down the hillside. The museum is closed most of the winter, except from mid-November to mid-December, when the rooms are decorated for Christmas.

Off The Avenue, Bathwick Hill. ☎ 01225/460-503. www.americanmuseum.org. Admission £7.50 (\$15) adults, £6.50 (\$13) seniors and students, £4 (\$8) children. Mid-Mar to mid-Nov Tues–Sun 2–5pm; mid-Nov to mid-Dec Tues–Sun noon–4:30pm. Bus: 18 to the museum from the train station and other stops in the city center.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Skiffs, punts, and canoes are available for rental from the **Victorian Bath Boating Station**, on the River Avon beneath the Pulteney Bridge; a gambol in the waters provides nice views of this attractive city from a different perspective. (May–Sept daily 10am–6pm; ☎ 01225/466-407). The nearby **Kennet and Avon Canal towpath** is one of many local places ideal for hiking, cycling, and boating. The **Bath and Dundas Canal Company** (☎ 01225/722-292) at the canal information office rents bikes

Tips A New Royal Bath for Bath

Visitors to Bath can once again soak in the city's famous warm, mineral-laden waters. The newly opened **Thermae Bath Spa**, Hot Bath St. (☎ 01225/33-5678; www.thermaebathspa.com), offers spa sessions in the New Royal Bath, a striking mixture of historic architecture and contemporary design just a few steps from the ancient Roman Baths. You can soak and swim in the Minerva Bath, a large open-air pool on the roof with marvelous views over the city, or in the Cross Bath, a smaller open-air pool where a 1½-hour soak costs £12 (\$24) and no reservation is required. All manner of other spa treatments are available, from Vichy showers to facials. Check the website for more information.

as well as canoes and other boats for a leisurely outing in the green pastoral countryside; if you've been feeling city-bound in London, this is a good way to get out into the fresh air. It's 5 miles (8km) south of Bath on the A36 at Monkton Combe. (Take bus no. 4, 5, or 6 from the train station.)

3 Shopping

One of Bath's liveliest shopping venues is the **Green Park Arts and Craft Market**, in the historic Green Park train station, north of the center off Charles Street; the market is open from 9am to 5pm Tuesday through Sunday and hosts vendors selling everything from antiques to crafts to farm produce. Vendors at the **Bartlett Street Antique Centre**, near the Assembly Rooms on Bartlett Street, open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm, sell jewelry, silver, prints, and other easily portable items. Vendors in the **Bath Saturday Antiques Market**, in the Old Cattle Market on Bath Walcot Street, sell collectibles of an unusually high quality on Saturday from 6:30am to 2:30pm. Quill pens, needlepoint kits, and other items associated with Jane Austen are for sale in the gift shop of the **Jane Austen Centre** (☎ 01225/443-000).

4 Where to Dine

Hands ★ LIGHT FARE/TEA These bright, airy rooms next to Bath Abbey are especially popular for morning coffee and afternoon tea. Breakfast and lunchtime sandwiches and salads are available, too. Lunch offerings include hearty portions of well-prepared traditional Cornish pasties, steak pie, and a ploughman's lunch.

Abbey St. ☎ 01225/463-928. Lunch £4.50-£7 (\$9-\$14); cream teas £3.75-£7.75 (\$7.50-\$15). MC, V. Tues-Sat 9:30am-5:30pm; Sun 11am-4:30pm.

Le Petit Cochon ★ MODERN FRENCH Le Petit Cochon (The Little Pig) is Bath's only French brasserie and offers about a dozen dishes each day based on traditional French cafe cooking (steak and frites, coq au vin, and boeuf bourguignon). You can stop in for a morning espresso and croissant or drop by for a leisurely lunch or dinner with a glass of wine. The atmosphere is casual, the food great, and the fixed-price lunch a good value.

11 Margarets Buildings (off Brock St.). ☎ 01225/421-251. Main courses £8-£13 (\$16-\$26); fixed-price lunch £10-£11 (\$20-\$22). MC, V. Mon-Sat 10:30am-10:30pm.

No. 5 Bistro ★★ FRENCH A welcoming, casual air pervades this handsome restaurant at the east end of Pulteney Bridge. Typical offerings from the small but appealing menu of simple, excellent French bistro-style preparations include pan-fried pepper steak, Provençal fish soup, chargrilled loin of lamb, and vegetarian dishes such as roast stuffed peppers and vegetable gratin.

5 Argyle St. ☎ 01225/444-499. Main courses £14-£17 (\$28-\$34); fixed-price lunch £7.95 (\$16); fixed-price dinner £9.95 (\$20). AE, MC, V. Daily noon-2:30pm and 6:30-10pm.

Pizza Express ★ Kids PIZZA/PASTA If you're looking for a kid-friendly restaurant in Bath, or just want a good, reasonably priced meal, try Pizza Express. The service is relaxed and friendly, kids are given crayons and paper, and the pizzas are great. There's nothing spectacular or showy on the menu, but the food is consistently good.

1-3 Barton St. ☎ 01225/420-119. Main courses £7-£13 (\$14-\$26). AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am-midnight.

5 Extending Your Trip

Bath is so engaging that you may want to spend the evening taking in a play at the Royal Theatre or enjoying a leisurely dinner, and continue your sightseeing the next day. Bath is also a handy stopover if you want to continue on to the nearby Cotswolds and Oxford.

Kennard Hotel ★★ Just across the Pulteney Bridge from the city center, this handsome town house was built as lodgings in 1794 and still treats guests to tidy and comfortable accommodations, an attractive breakfast room, and a gracious welcome.

11 Henrietta St. ☎ 01225/310-472. www.kennard.co.uk. £98–£118 (\$196–\$236) double. MC, V.

Milsoms Hotel ★★ Milsoms offers a great location, good value, and a kind of unique charm. There are only nine rooms but each has been individually decorated in a fresh, contemporary look. Be aware that the reception area is up a fairly steep flight of stairs, and there is no elevator. The Loch Fyne restaurant, located below the hotel, is a nice choice for dinner, serving some of the city's freshest and most adeptly prepared fish.

24 Milsom St., Bath, Somerset BA1 1DG. ☎ 01225/750-128. www.milsomshotel.co.uk. £85–£115 (\$170–\$230) double. AE, DC, MC, V.

Royal Crescent Hotel ★★★ These elegant, interconnected town houses not only boast the best address in town (right in the center of the Royal Crescent) but provide elegant and lavishly appointed accommodations as well as a delightful garden and beautiful pool and spa. Check the website for special offers.

16 Royal Crescent, Bath, Somerset BA1 2LS. ☎ 01225/823-333. www.royalcrescent.co.uk. From £290 (\$580) double. AE, MC, V.