



The Royal Mint: 'history, innovation and craftsmanship'

We spoke to Dan Johnson, visitor attraction manager at The Royal Mint in Wales, to find out more about the treasure trove of fun waiting for groups.

What can groups expect from a visit to The Royal Mint?



A visit to The Royal Mint is an immersive journey through history, innovation and craftsmanship - perfect for groups seeking a truly memorable experience. You'll step into the heart of 1,100 years of coin-making and discover a world of fascinating stories mixed with our groundbreaking developments.

Groups can look forward to exclusive behind-the-scenes access, hands-on exploration, along with the opportunity to 'Strike Your Own Coin' to name a few highlights.

Is there anything new for groups this year?

The Royal Mint is evolving like never before, and there's never been a better time for groups to visit. Our enhanced Royal Mint Experience Tours will immerse you in the exciting new directions our business is taking. With a brand-new tour launching this month, this is your chance to be part of history and witness our transformation first-hand. Bring your group and discover the extraordinary future of The Royal Mint.

What are some of the more unusual things for guests to look out for?

There are plenty of unusual and fascinating things that will surprise and captivate you. Visitors can create a one-of-a-kind coin of their own, struck on the same presses used to produce commemorative coins. It's not only memorable but a rare opportunity to become part of coin-making history.

Elsewhere, groups can discover a collection of stunning, limited-edition coins created to commemorate significant events, from royal milestones to pop culture icons. Some of these coins feature intricate designs and rare materials, such as 24-carat gold or even meteorite fragments.

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THE ROYAL MINT

EXPERIENCE

There's also some lesser-known stories to discover, like the Mint's involvement in creating some of the world's most famous coins, including the famous "sovereign" or the design secrets behind coins used in various countries.

Don't forget to look out for the oldest coins in our collection, dating back more than 1,000 years. These ancient pieces tell captivating stories about the past and give a tangible sense of the Mint's deep historical roots.

What are you most excited about this year?

In December 2024, we closed the chapter on making overseas circulating coins - a tradition spanning an incredible 700 years. The global shift away from cash has sparked a bold era of transformation and innovation at The Royal Mint. While we continue crafting UK coins, we've channelled our expertise into exciting new ventures, including precious metals investment and luxury jewellery.

We've invested over £17 million into ground breaking initiatives, like our cutting-edge gold recovery plant here in Llantrisant.

GLT talks to... The Royal Mint

Using revolutionary technology, we're recovering gold and other precious metals from printed circuit boards in old electronics like mobile phones and laptops. Our upgraded tour is designed to showcase these thrilling developments.

When is the best time for groups to visit?

That really depends on what you're looking for! If you want to be among the first to experience the new tour, spring is the perfect time to witness the exciting transformation and enjoy milder weather for a pleasant visit. From June to August, summer offers the best weather for a relaxed visit, with longer days allowing ample time to explore everything on offer. For a quieter experience, autumn is ideal. The crowds are smaller, and you can explore the exhibits and interact with the displays in a more peaceful environment. Plus, the autumn colours outside create a picturesque backdrop. If you're after a cosy, festive experience, winter could be magical, especially around Christmas when The Royal Mint Christmas is in full swing.



• See interesting exhibits like a coin-coated Mini, or a Shaun the Sheep sculpture (below).

Are there any special incentives for groups to enjoy?

Our incentives change throughout the year, but we always offer free entry for coach drivers and group leaders. We have ample free parking available for coach visitors and are always happy to create a bespoke package especially for your group's needs.

Finally, what's the best fact you've learned in your time working at The Royal Mint?

My favourite fact has to be around the coinage of Edward VIII. It has been a long-standing tradition that every time there is a change of monarch, the new monarch's effigy will face the opposite way to their predecessor. Edward VIII broke this tradition, insisting that his portrait showed his favoured left-side, meaning his effigy would face the same way as that of his predecessor, George V. There are lots more interesting facts surrounding the coinage of Edward VIII, but I don't want to spoil anything - you'll have to come and explore our exhibition gallery to find out more! ■



For more information and to book, call 0800 032 2154, email groups@royalmint.com or go to www.royalmint.com.



Prepare to be dazzled

Catherine Hodgson, head of marketing and communications at The Auckland Project, talks about group visits to Bishop Auckland this Christmas.

Bishop Auckland, County Durham, is becoming a must-visit year-round destination for groups thanks to The Auckland Project, a unique collection of heritage attractions, galleries and gardens centred around Auckland Palace.



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Q. What can you tell us about The Auckland Project?

A. There's nowhere quite like The Auckland Project. Over the last few years, we have developed an astonishing collection of attractions in the historic town of Bishop Auckland inspired by the magnificent Auckland Palace, one of the best-preserved bishop's palaces in Europe.

Once home to the powerful Prince Bishops of Durham, Auckland Palace has a rich history dating back almost 1,000 years. Today groups can walk in the footsteps of the bishops at Auckland Palace and explore ten-acres of landscaped gardens, two art galleries and England's only Faith Museum. We even operate our own heritage railway!

Together our attractions offer groups the ideal blend of art, history and nature with plenty of unique and memorable events to enjoy in Bishop Auckland throughout the year, from Kynren in the summer months to our spectacular new Christmas events.

Q. Why should groups visit Bishop Auckland this Christmas?

A. Bishop Auckland is already famous as the home of Kynren, the amazing live outdoor action show which takes place here every summer, but there are so many other things to see and do in this historic town throughout the year.

Groups visiting Bishop Auckland this Christmas can expect a festive experience like no other thanks to two incredible events organised by The Auckland Project. Our dazzling 1.5-mile light trail AGLOW is back, taking visitors on a magical journey through the gardens and grounds of Auckland Palace, and this year the interior of Auckland Palace will be transformed too, with stunning Christmas decorations in every room.

Q. What are you most looking forward to about Christmas at The Auckland Project this year?

A. I'm very much looking forward to Christmas at the Palace, our new Christmas extravaganza inside Auckland Palace itself. Each room will be adorned and festooned with elaborate and opulent Christmas decorations to delight and surprise our visitors. Combined with the return of our popular light trail AGLOW, this year really will be a Christmas to remember at The Auckland Project.

Q. What makes AGLOW stand out from other light trails?

A. AGLOW is one of the UK's newest light trails, following its launch in November 2023. It features the longest light-tunnel in the country, the tallest Christmas Tree in the North of England, and 20 mesmerising light installations, including a Son et Lumiere on the façade of Auckland Palace.

The Christmas Guide

It has already been named as one of the best light trails in the country, and this year it will be even bigger and better than before!

Q. What unique experiences can groups expect at The Auckland Project this Christmas?

A. The most unique element of Christmas at the Palace has to be our monumental 18th-century Neapolitan Nativity, which really does have to be seen to be believed. Measuring a remarkable 11ft tall and 15ft wide, it is one of the most impressive and important examples outside Italy and brings together classical and Christian mythology with the traditional folk culture of everyday Naples. It will take our curatorial team over one week to position the 421 individual items which make up the full nativity scene.

Q. What benefits can groups enjoy when visiting The Auckland Project?

A. We offer specially tailored group packages to make every visit to The Auckland Project truly memorable, including Christmas packages. Optional extras including refreshments and guided tours can be added to any itinerary, and all groups of ten people or more can benefit from savings of up to 15%. Complimentary driver tickets and driver refreshments are provided per coach or minibus, and our dedicated Group Visits team offer a seamless planning service and warm 'Meet and Greet' service upon arrival. Bishop Auckland was also awarded a Coach-Friendly accreditation this summer, so you can be assured of a smooth visit from start to finish.

Q. Do you welcome group organisers for familiarisation visits?

A. Absolutely! We offer complimentary familiarisation visits to our attractions for group tour organisers and Blue Badge Guides, and this year we are including AGLOW and Christmas at the Palace as part of this offer too. For those travelling from further afield, Park Head Hotel, also part of The Auckland Project, is offering a special two-night dinner, bed and breakfast rate of £199 per night for familiarisation visits. Park Head Hotel is group-friendly and the ideal base for groups who want to experience everything Bishop Auckland and County Durham have to offer.

To book your Christmas familiarisation visit, simply email groups@aucklandproject.org and we can arrange your tickets and accommodation for you.

Q. Are you accepting bookings for next Christmas?

A. We are already taking bookings for group visits next year. AGLOW, Christmas at the Palace and our monumental Nativity scene will all be returning for Christmas, creating a truly unique and memorable Christmas experience like no other. We hope to see you there! ■

Find out more:

groups@aucklandproject.org
www.aucklandproject.org