

Cheltenham

Location, Parking and Access



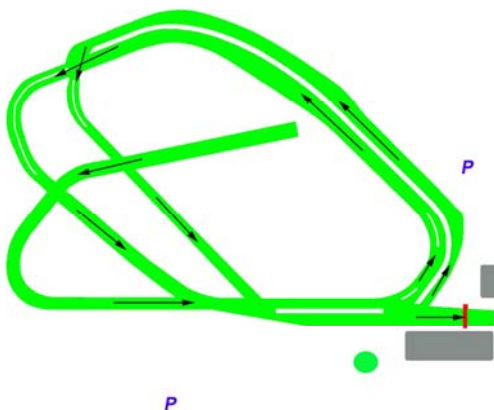
The course is situated 1 mile north of the town. There are numerous routes to the course which are signposted from both the M5 and the A40 with generally good, although at times "subtle" signposting as you approach. At the Festival it is essential that you follow the recommended routes as volumes of traffic are heavy and there are severe delays, so ensure you arrive in plenty of time.

Parking is free, except at the festival meeting where there is a charge of £8 in advance or £10 on the day.

There is extensive parking with over 14,000 parking spaces on a mixture of tarmac and grass. It has to be said, however, that leaving the car parks at the Festival can be a nightmare, as can be leaving the area itself, understandable considering the numbers attending.

Cheltenham Spa station is 2 miles from the course. For the Festival and Open meetings a direct bus link from the station to the course is provided (£2.50 single / £4 return). On the day of the festival visit traffic ground to a halt close to the course and everybody got off the bus and walked the final ½ mile. On other days there are taxis available from the station. Regular buses run from the town to the racecourse.

Course Layout



Cheltenham has a number of courses with the main ones being the Old and New Courses, in addition there is a cross country course in the centre.

The Old and New courses are left handed (anti-clockwise) whilst the cross country course meanders in all directions.

The courses are hilly and the final half mile is all up hill, which can often result in a leading runner being caught by a fast finisher.

Admission

There are three types of meetings at Cheltenham - Feature, Premier and, of course, The Festival. Each has a differing pricing structure.

Feature days operate a single enclosure policy costing £20 or £25.

For Premier days a three enclosure policy is in operation with Club costing £30, Tattersalls £25 and the Best Mate enclosure £10. (At the Open meeting reserved seating will cost you £20 extra)

For the Festival a three enclosure policy is again in operation. For the first three days the costs are £70, £45 and £25 respectively increasing to £80, £55 and £0 on Gold Cup day, Friday tickets must be booked in advance. (Seating at the Festival ranges from an additional £25 through to £90 depending on the day and location)

Annual membership: £310 including Festival (plus £100 one-off enrolment fee), £145 excluding Festival (plus £75 one-off enrolment fee), £118 for seniors, excluding Festival (plus £25 one-off enrolment fee) (2011 prices)

Discounts: Seniors Age 16-24 Group Advance

Overview

Known as the home of National Hunt racing and racing here is invariably of the highest standard, with the highlight of the year being the National Hunt Festival in March, for some of us the best race meeting of the year.

Cheltenham actually has a number of courses the main ones being the Old and New Courses, in addition there is a cross country course in the centre. The Old and New courses are left handed (anti-clockwise) whilst the cross country course meanders in all directions. The courses are hilly and there is a steep uphill run in, which can often result in a leading runner being caught by a fast finisher.

In the main enclosures viewing is generally good, although there are a large number of chunky pillars if you are in the standing area so you have to sway occasionally. A good pair of binoculars is recommended. From the seating area there is a clear view.

The Best Mate enclosure is generally flat. The enclosure is the opposite side of the winning chute and along the entrance to the back straight. It can be pretty quiet outside the festival but, like the remainder of the course, it gets very crowded at the festival meeting.

For racegoers who are used to spending afternoons at the smaller local tracks a first visit to Cheltenham can be a massive culture shock. Once inside the course the sheer size really can overwhelm you. There are a large number of separate buildings - not only the grandstand itself but loads of buildings behind the stands.



Cheltenham is in a lovely setting, set in a natural amphitheatre overlooked by Cleeve Hill. Although the Festival meeting sees the very best horses in training, it must be remembered that Cheltenham hosts another 12 days racing in addition to the mad week in March. The other meetings frequently attract top quality race horses from Britain, Ireland and France.

As I said though, the festival is the highlight and with 55,000 attending for the first three days and 65,000 on Gold Cup day the place is heaving. The Members enclosure, on the first day of the festival, was oppressively crowded with little space to move. In the end I gave up on the members enclosure and forked out £15 for a reserved seat in the head on stand. The head on stand is actually great value for money providing an excellent view of most of the course, being head on the you do miss out on the exciting finishes, however a nearby big screen gives a suitable alternate view.

People flock to the festival not just for the racing, which itself is top draw, but for the partying and the Irish invasion. The queues at the bars during festival week are legendary. To give an idea of how important the partying is Cheltenham is the only racecourse with its own onsite Pharmacy ... which apparently does a roaring trade in hangover remedies.

Anybody who loves National Hunt racing must visit Cheltenham at least once, having visited it once most people want to come back, at the very least on a non-festival day. Would I recommend going to the festival ... I would say go at least once just for the experience (ideally on Wednesday or Thursday the "quieter" days). Racing at the festival is not for the faint hearted or the claustrophobic but the craic is something to behold.

Catering

From high quality restaurants to the humble burger van all tastes, and wallets, are catered for at Cheltenham.

There is a Panoramic restaurant with spectacular views of the course. A 4 course meal with afternoon tea (including admission) costs between £80 and £165 a head on non-festival days. For the festival prices are from £470 - £550 a head. (Prices exclude VAT)

The Golden Miller Seafood Restaurant in the Members enclosure on the non-combined enclosure days, offers a good range of seafood including, Lobster Lunch £23, Crab Lunch £21, Seafood Medley £25, Seafood Tapas £8 and Soup £5.70.

In other areas bangers and mash are available for £5.60, sandwiches for £2.40 to £3.60.

On the day of the non-festival inspection I must admit I was disappointed at the paucity of informal eating options. There were plenty of tables in sit-down restaurants but for food "on the hoof" as it were the choice was limited to the mobile units or the ubiquitous hog roast or pies. That was until I discovered the Centaur building and tucked away on the far side was a counter selling all in one pies for £5. I have to say the seafood pie was one of the best I have eaten at a racecourse and it wouldn't have been out of place at a top London restaurant and for a fiver it was excellent value. The only criticism was the tables in the area were all occupied by non-eating racegoers so I ended up having to sit on the floor to eat it ... but what the heck it was worth it.

Not surprisingly at the festival extra mobile catering units are bought in. One of the more popular was a curry wagon with curries at £5 or £7 or chips with an excellent curry sauce for £3. Also popular was a crepe stall selling both savoury and sweet crepes. The foot long hot dog stall had permanent queues. There are all the "usual" fast food offerings for around the £5 - £8.50 mark.

In terms of bars there are dozens and, of course, at the Festival the Guinness flows like water. Lager is priced at £4.00 a pint with bitter at £3.90 and Guinness at £4.30. Water was available at £1.60 for 500ml.

Ancillaries

Bookmakers

At the non-festival meetings you are looking at around 70 bookmakers in the main ring and around a dozen in the Best Mate enclosure.

At the festival there are more bookmakers than you can count, yet there are still massive queues. Betting at the festival is a very reasonable 1.4% per runner.

Racecard

Costing £3 the racecard is full of detailed information and editorial.

Toilets

Every corner you turn you find toilets. On a non-Festival meeting they are more than adequate.

At the festival it will come as no surprise that the number of toilets is wholly inadequate, having said that – in defence of Cheltenham – even if the entire site was converted to toilet blocks there still wouldn't be enough to cope with the festival throng. In truth I think the queues tend to be more of an issue for first timers, regular festival goers manage to work out a routine of racing, bar queuing and toilet queuing. The "secret" is to time your toilet visits to join the queue before the point of desperation arrives.

Parade Ring

Without a doubt Cheltenham has one of the two best parade rings in the country, only Ascot can rival it. Indeed the tiered viewing around the paddock is better than the tiered viewing in some racecourse main grandstands. As a result the area around the parade ring is invariably packed.



However the good viewing of the parade ring is only part of the story ... excellent tiered viewing is also

provided for the pre-parade ring as well giving an unprecedented view of the horses before they are saddled.

Non Racing Attractions

On the edge of the Cotswolds if you really want to do something other than go racing then the beauty of the Cotswolds awaits.

Bath, Bristol and Gloucester are also in striking distance.

Contact Details

	www.cheltenham.co.uk
	01242 513014
	Cheltenham Racecourse Cheltenham GL50 4SH

Ownership	Jockey Club
------------------	-------------

Fixtures 2012
January 1st & 28th
March 13th , 14th , 15th & 16th (The Festival)
April 18th & 19th
May 2nd (eve)
October 19th & 20th (Showcase)
November 16th , 17th & 18th (Open Meeting)
December 14th & 15th

Inspection Dates		
<i>Date</i>	<i>Weather</i>	<i>Type</i>
09/12/06	Dry sunny periods	7 Jump
13/03/07	Sunny but cool	6 Jump Festival
26/01/08	Sunny becoming overcast later	7 Jump weekend
11/03/08	Showery and windy	6 Jump Festival
13/03/08	Cloudy with some light showers later	10 Jump Festival
14/03/08	Cloudy with some light showers later	9 Jump Festival
19/03/10	Cloudy becoming wet later	7 Jump Festival
01/01/11	Overcast becoming misty	7 jump Bank Hol.
28/01/12	Bright with a chilly breeze	7 jump weekend

Racing