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How to be a Shakespearwala



Mamta Naidu

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Shakespeare's burial place, the Holy Trinity church at Stratford-upon-Avon | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

Rambles around the Bard's birthplace, the charming Stratford-upon-Avon

The thought of Shakespeare's birthplace conjures up visions of a cosy medieval town with a scholarly air to it, packed with libraries and theatres while Shakespeare's busts adorn the streets. Stratford-upon-Avon still retains its medieval allure and flaunts an array of theatres, including the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and Swan Theatre. It is a vibrant town steeped in 800 years of history.

On a sunny day, the river Avon shines like a cluster of diamonds. Bevyies of swans dapple the river, as canoes carefully paddle their way amidst these majestic birds. People squat on the broad stairways facing the river and soak up the sun. The charming arch stone bridge at the centre provides a comfortable vantage point from where one can savour the market town. Buskers play music to add to the joy of such a beautiful day.

Four hundred years after Shakespeare's death, Stratford-upon-Avon, his birthplace, still celebrates its greatest playwright ever. For, William Shakespeare wrote like no other – 38 plays, 154 sonnets and contributed 2,000 words and expressions to the world of English.

At this very moment, his plays are being rehearsed and performed somewhere in the world, perhaps even in a language that might not have been familiar to Shakespeare. For he focussed on subjects like love, sorrow, betrayal, revenge, to name a few, that bear relevance even today. Closer home, his plays have inspired films such as *Haider (Hamlet)*, *Omkara (Othello)* and *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela (Romeo and Juliet)* among others.



As you like it (Clockwise from left) Explore Holy Trinity Church, Shakespeare's burial place, Anne Hathaway's cottage and Gower Monument, the 19th-century memorial to the Bard | Photo Credit: **Getty Images/iStockphoto RichardHayman13**

Shakespeare earned several sobriquets bestowed by his contemporaries, including the Swan of Avon, the Bard, the Bard of Avon, and the Immortal Bard. "According to Greek folklore, souls of poets pass into the bodies of swans," says Barbara Bassett, a guide from the Stratford Town Walk, pointing to the famous swan fountain with two stainless-steel sculptures of swans. "Swans have enjoyed special attention for centuries in Stratford-upon-Avon," she adds with pride. The town is a delight for Shakespeare fans, history buffs and vacationers alike. "Strat is old English for street, Avon is Celtic for river, Stratford-upon-Avon translates to the road crossing the river Avon."

The market town in Warwickshire houses 28,000 residents and welcomes a whopping five million visitors every year. A wander

along Henley Street, admiring the delicatessen, luxury chocolate, fudge, cheese and fine wine stores lodged in Tudor-styled buildings, will lead you to one of the top attractions of the town, Shakespeare's birthplace.

The pronounced Tudor architecture – brick and stone masonry set in timber frames, thatched roof and wooden flooring – which four other properties of Shakespeare also share, stands out in the bustling shopping lane. A brief tour of the two-storied house, where Shakespeare was born and lived till the early years of his marriage, with the original furniture, his bed and dining table with cutlery still intact, gives a fascinating insight into his early life, as well as the times of middle-class Tudor England. Many eminent visitors, such as Charles Dickens, John Keats, and Mark Twain, upon their visit, etched their signatures on the walls, ceiling and onto the glass panes of the windows, to mark their attendance.



Due to a lack of comprehensive records, the Bard's life, including his date of birth, has been the subject of speculation for centuries. Shakespeare may have been born on or around April 23, which was determined based on the day he was baptised, usually three days after birth, which was on April 26, 1564. His first daughter Susanna was born six months after he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior, therefore his wedding was thought of as a shotgun wedding.

Other major attractions in the town include Mary Arden's Tudor farm, Shakespeare's mother's childhood home. Anne Hathaway's cottage, a charming Tudor country house with an exquisite garden, is where Shakespeare might have fallen in love with his wife. Hall's Croft was the home of John Hall, husband of Susanna, Shakespeare's elder daughter. New Place and Nash's House, where Shakespeare wrote his later works and died on April 23, 1616, at

the age of 52 and the Church of the Holy Trinity, where Shakespeare was baptised and finally buried, are other must-visit places.

A trip to Shakespeare's birthplace feels incomplete without watching a play at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, for the theatre's world-class set-up, where the actors and the audience share the same space, looks just like the world in Shakespeare's time.

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