

YTF10: A Brief and Biased Guide to Durham

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ABSTRACT: In this work I give a short review of the touristic, culinary, and beverage-based opportunities available to those staying in Durham for an academic conference. Despite its size, the charming city of Durham provides a suprising number of options for each of the above categories. A somewhat biased selection of said options is given below, with brief descriptions and indications of cost. The items on the list are somewhat limited by the fact that I've only been in Durham for a year or so, I'm quite stingy, and I tend to just go to the same places everytime. Nonetheless, this guide will at least give you somewhere to start.

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1 Introduction

Theoretical physics conferences are known across the globe for their non-stop unhinged action. Naturally, YTF10 will be much the same. However, should you find yourself with some spare time, here are some suggestions for what you might do with it.

The possibilities are split into four categories: Pubs, Food (both eat-in and takeaway), Tourism and Nightlyfe. I have starred one item in every category, as a personal recommendation. The next section presents the Master Map of Durham, which is marked with colour-coded numbered boxes at locations mentioned in the text. Sections 3 and 4 attempt to tackle the complex topics of food and drink. Section 5 lists some/all of Durham’s tourist attractions, such as its impressive cathedral, which was a popular filming location for the Harry Potter film franchise. Finally, some fairly superfluous conclusions are presented in Section 7 in the interest of maintaining the “written like a paper” gimmick.

2 The Master Map

The Master Map (Fig. 1) uses a combination of numbering and colour-coding to indicate the locations of all establishments referenced in the text below. In places of high item density, the Master Map can be a little unclear. Recent advances in online map services have made Google Maps an appealing alternative.

3 Pubs/Bars

Pubs/bars are marked on the map in **purple**. Again, let me stress that this is not an exhaustive list. If you've come from London ignore the cost rating, they're all cheap.

1. **The Water House (Wetherspoons)** £: I think most people know the deal with Wetherspoons, but if not, they do cheap drink and food which is surprisingly fine. Most meals come with a free drink, which is great. I'm a big fan, some others are not.
2. **The Swan & Three Cygnets** £: affectionately just known as "the Swan", very central, nice atmosphere but can get rowdy at popular times.
3. **The New Inn** £: the nearest pub to the department. Also offers some burgers etc.
4. **★ Head of Steam** ££: a bit more expensive but has a good selection of ciders and ales for those looking to try something a little more exotic than a Carling.
5. **Court House Inn** ££: a small pub with a nice atmosphere. They also do a nice/cheap roast.
6. **Library** ££: a bar, open later than most, very central.
7. **Whiskey River** ££: cocktail place by the river. Take the steps on the bridge.

4 Food

Restaurants etc are marked on the map in **red** and **cyan** for eat-in and takeaway respectively. I've only listed places I've been to so that my description holds some meaning. Some establishments appear in both subsections, where both options are present.

4.1 Eat in

1. **The Water House (Wetherspoons)** £: again, I think everyone knows about Wetherspoons. Meals tend to come with drinks and are extremely good value. I recommend the Tennessee burger.
2. **La Spaghetтата/Fabio's "Spags/Fabs"** £: an interesting one. Spags is a cheap and cheerful Italian restaurant that at night transitions into Fabs, a bar/club. Italians in the department have described it as "more authentic than the other Italian places in Durham". If you don't like moving unnecessarily, this place has your entire night sorted.
3. **★ Fat Hippo** ££: a standard gourmet burger place, much like the hundreds of others that have popped up in the UK in recent years. The food is tasty and likely served on something less practical than a plate, like a rustic wooden board or a trendy US diner-style tray. Matthew warns that the onion rings are somewhat questionable, I have had no such quarrels.

4. **Nadon Thai** ££: a nice Thai place which my Thai friends last year said was fairly legit. I recommend their drunken noodles. Takeaway also possible.
5. **Lebaneat** ££: nice Lebanese restaurant in the centre of town. A cheaper takeaway alternative is also available, as indicated below.

4.2 Takeaway

1. ★ **Lebaneat Wraphouse** £: same people but different building to the eat-in restaurant above. Meals are more schwarma based and cheaper than the eat-in options. I recommend the chicken schwarma wrap, which I sample a little too often.
2. **Urban Oven** £: classic takeaway place, the pizza is appropriately greasy and satisfying. Particularly good after sampling the nightlyfe.
3. **Rajpooth Tandoori** ££: I don't know if it's the best curry place in Durham, but it's pretty good in my opinion. On Thursday and Sunday evenings they have a ridiculous five course deal.
4. **Nadon Thai** ££: see Section 4.1.

5 Tourism

Durham is pretty small so there's not a great deal to see but the city as a whole is very charming and a nice place for a stroll. The main attractions are given below, and marked on the map in [green](#).

1. ★ **The Cathedral**: entry is free. A beautiful and impressive UNESCO World Heritage Site (along with the castle) with plenty of history. A more shallow but worth-it reason to go is that the cloisters at the back feature in a fair few Harry Potter movies.
2. **The Castle**: a lot can be seen from outside but to get the full experience attend a tour. Durham Castle is a Norman castle, originally built in the 11th century to maintain power over the North. Strangely, when the University formed, the castle became one of the colleges. The college's members can attend the castle for dinners and events or just to work whenever they please. Some undergraduates even live in the keep!
3. **Walk along the river**: there are various walks along the river, the beginning of my favourite is marked on the map. One accesses the river using the steps on the marked bridge, near Grainger Games.

6 Nightlyfe

Simply put, Durham’s night life is pretty terrible. However if you go with a good group of people you can absolutely still have a good time. All cheap, most have free entry. Nightclubs are marked on the map in [blue](#).

1. ★ **Jimmy Allen’s**: free entry. Just a bar and club combo, probably my choice. The outdoor smoking area is by the riverside and is a nice break from the sweaty interior whether you smoke or not. May warns of the slippery floors: wear appropriate footwear!
2. **Spags/Fabs**: as mentioned in Section 4, this Italian restaurant bizarrely turns into a bar/club at night. It’s alright.
3. **Klute**: entry is not free, I think it’s about £3. Infamously labelled the ”worst club in Europe”¹ a few years ago. Certainly an interesting experience.

7 Discussion and Conclusions

You probably won’t have an enormous amount of time to try this stuff anyway but if you do hopefully this good will save you time. In conclusion, the food and drink is fairly standard, the nightlyfe isn’t great, but the castle/cathedral are seriously worth a visit.

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¹by default, after the real worst burned down

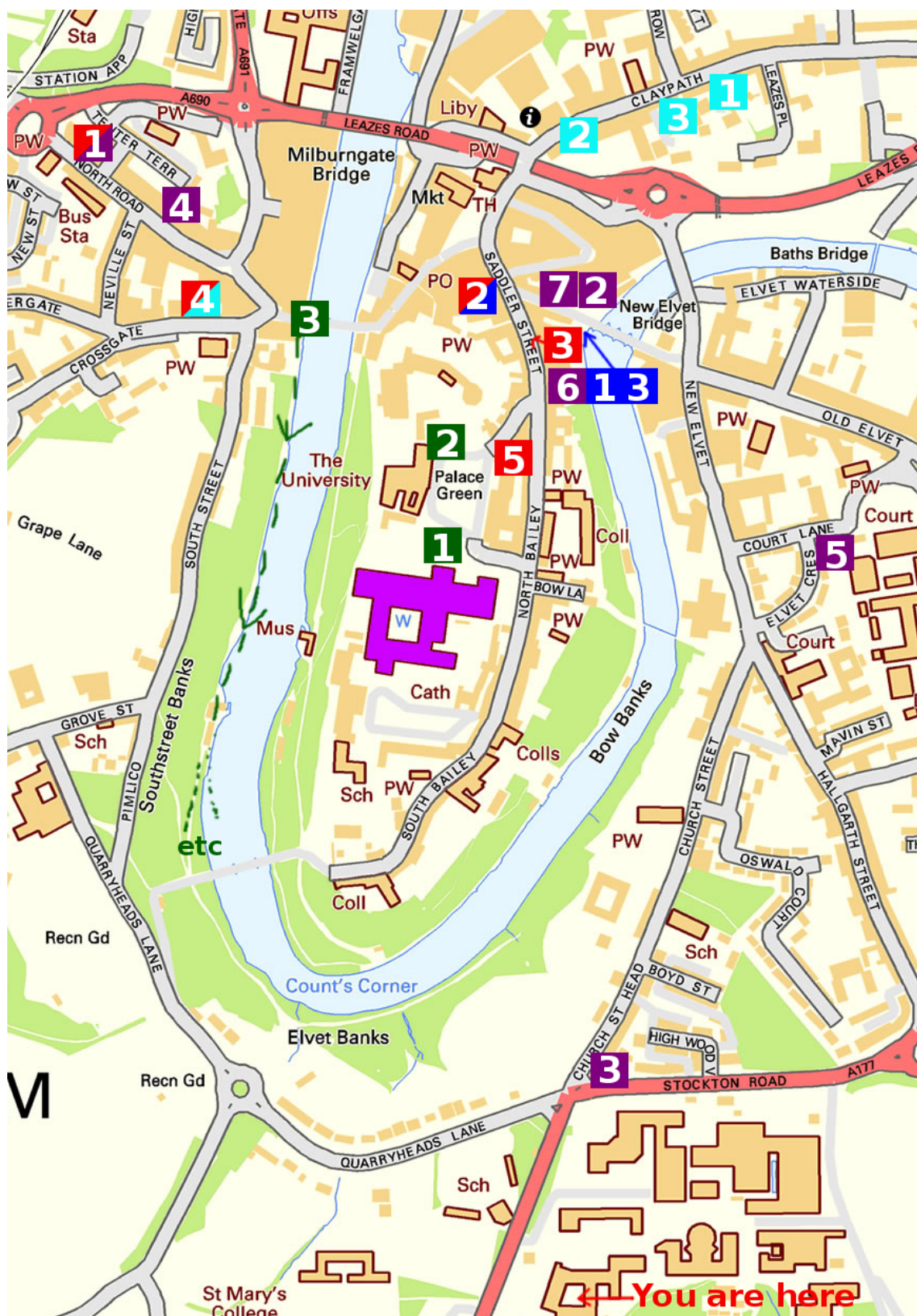


Figure 1: The Master Map. Colours and numbers are used to indicate locations referenced in the text. Pubs and bars are in purple; eat-in and takeaway food are in red and cyan respectively; tourism is green and nightclubs are blue. Items in more than one category have mixed-colour boxes.