



The East Midlands

The East Midlands doesn't have the best of reputations: much of the region is ignored by visitors, under the impression that it's dull, grey and industrial. But while the region does have its fair share of grim settlements, it's for the most part very rural – home to fertile agricultural land, quintessential English villages, waterways, forests and the iconic calling card of the Peak District.

The gentle landscape of Northamptonshire and Rutland is flecked with handsome old towns, infused with warmth by the local honey-coloured limestone with which they're built. Charming villages and stately homes pocket nearby Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, testament to the area's rich past. And for city slickers there's vibrant Leicester, a multicultural success story, and Nottingham, now as well known for its shopping and clubbing as for its association with a certain man in tights. Further east, the hilltop city of Lincoln has one of the most striking medieval cathedrals in the land. Around it, a carpet of rich farmland, fens and rivers unfolds gently towards a long sandy stretch of coastline, ringed with marshes and nature reserves dense with birdsong.

The region's big name draw, the Peak District, may be a tourist honey pot but it still feels isolated and wild, and its hills and moorland are graced with pretty little stone cottages and handsome settlements including the graceful spa town of Buxton.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Walking or cycling the many footpaths and trails in the **Peak District National Park** (p513)
- Strolling past grand Georgian architecture and through leafy parks in the former spa town of **Buxton** (p516)
- Visiting exquisite **Hardwick Hall**, one of the country's finest Elizabethan mansions (p512)
- Marvelling at the vast facade of Lincoln's **cathedral** in this historic hilltop town (p492)
- Sampling an authentic curry on multicultural Leicester's **Golden Mile** (p486)
- Picturing yourself in a Jane Austen novel as you stroll the historic streets of **Stamford** (p496)
- Exploring **Chatsworth House** (p525), the resplendent country home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire



■ POPULATION:
4.2 MILLION

■ AREA: 6,400
SQ MILES

■ NUMBER OF BAKEWELL PUDDINGS SOLD IN
BAKEWELL DURING HIGH SEASON: 12,000 A WEEK

Information

East Midlands Tourism (www.enjoyenglandseastmidlands.com) is the official website for the East Midlands. Other helpful websites:

Go Leicestershire (www.goleicestershire.com)

Peak District & Derbyshire (www.visitpeakdistrict.com)

Visit Nottinghamshire (www.visitnottingham.com)

Visit Lincolnshire (www.visitlincolnshire.com)

Activities

Regional tourist websites are packed with walking, cycling and sailing information, and tourist offices are stacked high with leaflets, maps and guides covering activities offered in the area.

CYCLING

Derbyshire and the Peak District are full of country lanes for touring cyclists, and tracks and bridleways for mountain bikers – with something for every level of ability. Bikes can be hired at various points around the Peak District, especially in the areas where old railway lines have been converted into delightful walking and cycling tracks. The Pennine Bridleway starts south of the Pennine Way national trail and is designed for off-road cycling and horse riding as well as walking. Just over one third of a planned 350-mile route is now open.

There are quiet country roads and purpose-built cycle ways in the National Forest in Leicestershire and you can hire bikes at Rutland Water in Oakham.

WALKING

The Peak District National Park is one of the finest areas in England for walking; more details are given in the introduction to the Peak District section (p512). It's also home to the start of the Pennine Way national trail, which leads keen walkers for 268 miles through Yorkshire and Northumberland into Scotland. Mammoth walking trails aside, the Peak District is criss-crossed with a vast network of paths for walkers. Ideal bases include the villages and towns of Buxton, Matlock Bath, Edale and Castleton, or the national park centre at Fairholmes on the Derwent Reservoirs.

To follow in the footsteps of history, the 140-mile **Viking Way** (p490) trails from the Humber Bridge through the Lincolnshire Wolds to Oakham in Leicestershire.

There are also pleasant walking trails in the National Forest and at Rutland Water.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Sailors, windsurfers and water-lovers of all levels also flock to Rutland Water, a giant reservoir. You could also try steering a boat through the waterways of the Lincolnshire fens.

Getting There & Around

There is good public transport throughout most of the region although in Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire you're better off with a car. For public transport information, consult **Traveline East Midlands** (☎ 0871 200 2233; www.travelineeastmidlands.org.uk).

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

While it lacks a major 'must-see' attraction, Northamptonshire is a great place to explore. Winding country lanes punctuate the gentle countryside, which is studded with fetching, honey-coloured limestone towns, storybook thatched cottages, historic Saxon Churches and grand country estates including Althorp House, the final resting place of Princess Diana. What's more, Northamptonshire is refreshingly free from the tourist hordes, so you won't have to fight to take in its charms.

Orientation & Information

Northamptonshire is roughly 50 miles long and 20 miles wide, running southwest to northeast. The M1 cuts diagonally across the county just below Northampton, which lies in the middle. Attractions are scattered.

For general information about the county, check the website www.explorenorthamptonshire.co.uk. Otherwise, visit Northampton's tourist office (p474).

Getting Around

A car can be a convenient way of getting around Northamptonshire. Turning a corner on a winding country lane to discover a sleepy village is one of the joys of a visit here. All the major car-hire companies have branches in Northampton.

Buses services run to most places of interest from Northampton and other nearby towns, but can be sporadic; some run only a few times daily, so check times with the operator.

Stagecoach (www.stagecoachbus.com/northants)

Traveline (☎ 0871 200 2233; www.travelineeastmidlands.org.uk)