

Cumbria & the Lake District



Ever since William Wordsworth and his Romantic chums ventured into the hills in search of poetic inspiration in the late 18th century, this part of England has been a byword for natural grandeur, although in many ways the Cumbrian landscape, with its glacier-etched valleys, ridges and peaks, is closer to the rugged panoramas of the Scottish Highlands than the green and pleasant vistas of England. The region's distinctive jade-green hills (locally known as 'fells') have been a favoured haunt for generations of peak-baggers, trail trekkers and view junkies.

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of Cumbria's 14 million annual visitors make a beeline for the landmark sights of the Lake District. Cruise boats putter across the silvery waterways of Windermere, Derwent Water and Coniston Water, while whitewashed inns and hugger-mugger pubs huddle beneath the lofty summits of England's three highest mountains, Scafell, Scafell Pike and Helvellyn. Literary connections are another major Lakeland draw: Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Arthur Ransome and Beatrix Potter are all inextricably linked with this corner of England, and the Victorian critic John Ruskin created one of northern England's loveliest country estates at Brantwood, overlooking Coniston Water. But if you want to escape the inevitable crowds, it's worth taking the time to discover some of the region's lesser-known sights. Relatively few visitors investigate Cumbria's historic capitals, Penrith and Carlisle, while even fewer make the trek to explore Cumbria's bleakly beautiful coastline, where you'll find the spiritual home of sticky toffee pudding, the rosy-red ruins of Furness Abbey and the historic steam railway known as La'al Ratty.

HIGHLIGHTS

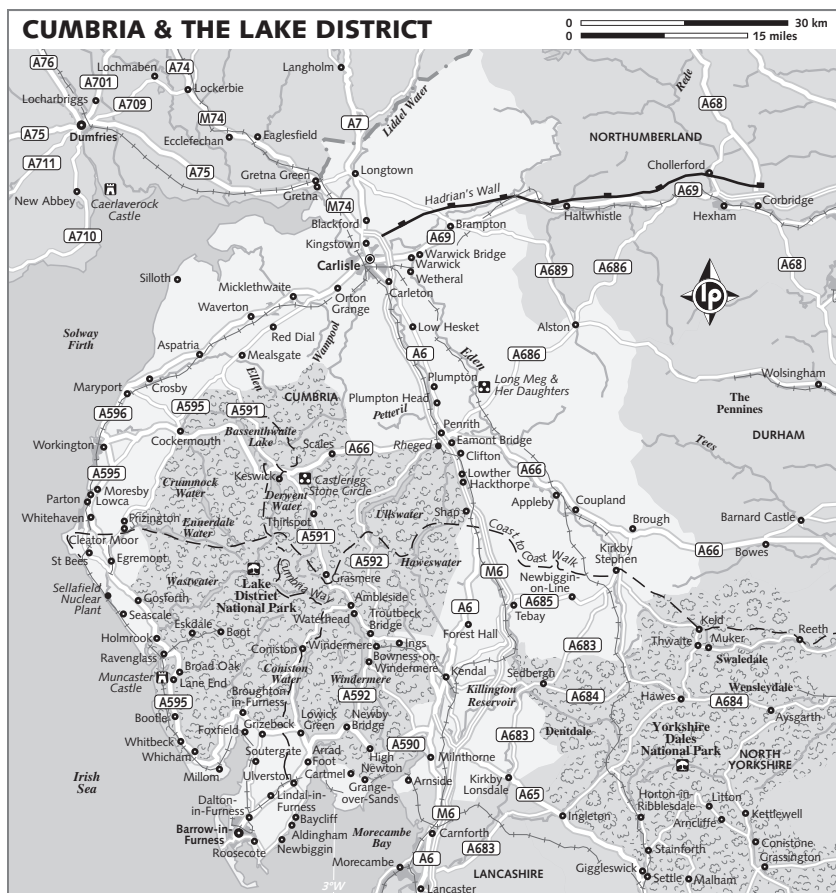
- Delving into the Lake District's literary heritage at **Dove Cottage** (p620) in Grasmere, **Rydal Mount** (p620) and **Hill Top** (p623)
- Playing lord of the manor at John Ruskin's country estate, **Brantwood** (p623), near Coniston
- Cruising in style around the idyllic islands of **Derwent Water** (p627)
- Admiring the outlandish artwork around **Grizedale Forest** (p622)
- Clambering aboard the pocket-sized choo-choos of the **Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway** (La'al Ratty; p632)
- Sampling contemporary Lakeland tucker at **Lucy's on a Plate** (p619) in Ambleside or the **Drunken Duck** (p622) in Hawkshead



■ POPULATION: 496,200

■ AREA: 2629 SQ MILES

■ NUMBER OF LAKE DISTRICT
PEAKS OVER 900M: 5



History

The earliest settlers arrived in the Lake District around 5000 years ago. The region was subsequently occupied by Celts, Angles, Vikings and Romans, and during the Dark Ages marked the centre of the kingdom of Rheged, which extended across much of modern Cumbria, Dumfries and Galloway, and was annexed by neighbouring Northumbria sometime in the 8th century.

During the Middle Ages Cumbria marked the start of 'The Debatable Lands', the wild frontier between England and Scotland. Bands of Scottish raiders known as Border Reivers regularly plundered the area, prompting the construction of distinctive *pele* towers, built to protect the inhabitants from border raiders,

and the stout fortresses at Carlisle, Penrith and Kendal.

The area was a centre for the Romantic movement during the 19th century, and writers including Coleridge, de Quincey and William Wordsworth were among the first to champion the area's natural beauty. The Lake District became one of the nation's first national parks in 1951, and the modern county of Cumbria was formed from the old districts of Cumberland and Westmorland in 1974.

Activities

CYCLING

Cycling is popular in Cumbria, especially mountain biking on the fells. Cycle-hire shops are widespread, and tourist offices stock a