

Directory

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This chapter provides general practical information for the whole of Cumbria and the Lake District. If you're looking for something more specific, consult the relevant area chapter or the Getting Started chapter (p18).

ACCOMMODATION

Whether it's historic country houses, boutique hotels, bargain-basement B&Bs or grandstand campsites, the Lake District has somewhere to stay to suit all tastes (and budgets). But while there's no shortage of accommodation, there's also no getting around the fact that this is far from the cheapest corner of England – especially if you pitch up in the high season in July and August, when space and prices are at a premium. Booking ahead, shifting your visit to the shoulder months, and opting for B&Bs and guest houses rather than pricey hotels can all help strip back the costs.

Where appropriate we've split our reviews into three categories – budget (under £50), midrange (£50 to £120) and top end (more than £120). We've generally quoted full prices for a double room in high season, so you might find some places will cut a deal in the quieter months. Broadly speaking the

standards of accommodation are high, although obviously you'll buy more creature comforts and designer flourishes the higher you move up the price ladder. There are a couple of accommodation-rating schemes that provide a rough (if generic) guide to standards – Visit Britain uses a one to five rosette rating, while the AA uses a one to five star rating. Both schemes tend to concentrate harder on facilities than on subjective impressions.

The **regional tourist board** (☎ 0845 450 1199; www.golakes.co.uk) is a useful place to start your search, and will arrange bookings for a £3 fee.

B&Bs and Guest Houses

The good old British B&B has taken its share of brickbats over the years – some deserved, some not so – and while the tired old clichés about chintzy wallpaper, Stalinesque landladies and saggy mattresses might still hold true for a few establishments, the average B&B has come on in leaps and bounds in recent years. With a little pre-trip research (and the help of this guidebook) you'll discover some seriously impressive places around the Lakes, including some that give the top-end hotels a run for their money.

The average B&B bed starts at around £30 to £40 for a single, or £60 to £80 for a double. Most B&Bs offer en suite or private bathrooms these days, but plumping for shared facilities can knock a few quid off the price tag. Even the most basic places offer clean (but not necessarily up-to-date) bedrooms and bathrooms, and a full fried breakfast (included in the room price), not to mention those essential items: twin-pack bickies, foil-wrapped teabags, UHT milk pots and, of course, a pocket-sized kettle. You'll nearly always have your own key to your room as well as the front door – thankfully the days of rigidly enforced B&B curfews (memorably recounted in Bill Bryson's *Notes from a Small Island*) are mostly a thing of the past.

It's worth remembering that many B&Bs don't accept credit or debit cards, and even if they do you might find a transaction charge added to your bill to cover the bank fees.

Camping

Whether you're a hiker keen to get a head start on the trail or a city type looking to rediscover the sights, sounds and smells of the countryside, for many people camping out is an essential part of the Lake District experience. There are some fantastic locations to choose from, ranging from spit-and-sawdust farm sites to facility-packed places loaded with the luxuries of a five-star resort. Some sites are geared towards caravans and motor homes, while others are tents only. At the simplest end of the spectrum, you'll be lucky to find much more than a field, a cold-water tap and a toilet block, but the fancier sites boast their own farm shops and even ecofriendly sleeping pods made from sustainably sourced timber. You can even stay in an authentic Mongolian yurt near Rydal Hall (p96) or a Sioux-style tipi near Newby Bridge (p72). For our top 10 favourites, see p21.

There are comprehensive listings at www.lakedistrictcamping.co.uk, and you can find out about the National Trust's three basic but spectacularly-sited campgrounds at www.nationaltrust.org.uk/campsites/lakedistrict. All the prices given in this book are for a tent and two adults unless otherwise stated. Generally you'll need to arrive before 10pm and leave by 11am the following morning, although policies vary at each campsite; not all places accept credit card payments, so check before you arrive.

Camping Barns

For campers who prefer something a little sturdier over their heads than a nylon fly-sheet, camping barns provide a bit more cover. The general rule is to imagine you're camping, but under a 'stone tent'; facilities generally include sleeping platforms, cold running water and a flush toilet, although some also offer cooking equipment, hot water, showers and a log fire, but you'll need your own sleeping bag and other camping gear. There are listings of over 15 barns at www.lakelandcampingbarns.co.uk.

Hostels

In many ways the history of hostelling began right here in the Lake District – Thorney How, near Grasmere, was the first property purchased by the YHA (Youth Hostel Association; ☎ 0870 770 8868; www.yha.org.uk) back in 1931. The original ethos of the organisation was to provide

friendly, affordable accommodation to enable more people to experience the pleasures of the English landscape, but things have moved on a long way since its foundation in the 1930s. Don't expect the drab, pre-fab buildings you may be used to elsewhere – the YHA has some truly stunning Lake District buildings, ranging from converted farmhouses and miners' cottages right through to a couple of converted mansions.

As always, facilities, rooms and standards of accommodation at each hostel are very different. Dorms are the norm, although a limited number of doubles and family rooms are available at many hostels; most have shared bathrooms and showers, as well as a TV lounge and usually a kitchen for guest use. Some also offer breakfast, usually included in the room price. Duvs, sheets and towels are provided at nearly all hostels. Prices range from around £9 to £15 per adult, or £6 to £10 per child depending on the hostel and season. Membership of the YHA offers a discount of up to £3 on the standard nightly fee and annual costs are £15.95 for adults, £9.95 for under-26s or £22.95 for two adults and their dependents. Unsurprisingly the Lake District YHAs are some of the busiest in the country and often get booked out during weekends and holidays, so plan ahead.

As well as the YHA hostels, there are independent hostels in Grasmere (p92), Windermere (p65) and Ulverston (p186). The YMCA (☎ 015395-31743; www.ymca.org.uk) also has its main outdoors centre at Lakeside on Windermere, although it tends to be booked out by activity holidays and school groups.

Hotels

There are lots of landmark country hotels scattered around the Lake District, ranging from historic hikers' hangouts such as the Old Dungeon Ghyll (p100) in Langdale to old-fashioned country pamper-pads such as Sharrow Bay (p170) and the Holbeck Ghyll (p68) in Windermere. The boundary between top-end B&Bs and hotels can sometimes be blurry, but in general you'll find hotels offer a higher standard of accommodation and service, as well as more comprehensive facilities such as gyms, in-house restaurants and swimming pools. Prices vary, but the cheapest hotels are likely to set you back between £100 and £120 per night, rocketing up to £250 or more at some of the fancier establishments.