

# Destination Lake District

There is a blessing in the air,  
Which seems a sense of joy to yield  
To the bare trees, and mountains bare,  
And grass in the green field.

*William Wordsworth, 1798*

In terms of sheer natural splendour, nowhere in England can hold a candle to the sky-topping vistas and wide-angle views of the Lake District. For centuries, poets, painters, polymaths and perambulators alike have been tramping around the region's fells and sunlit ravines in search of inspiration and escape, and it's still the nation's favourite place to revel in the mighty majesty of the English landscape.

'No part of the country is more distinguished by its sublimity,' mused the grand old bard of the lakes, William Wordsworth, and two centuries on his words still ring true. Wordsworth, Coleridge and their Romantic contemporaries famously emigrated to the Lakes in search of their collective poetic muse in the early 19th century, and a host of other literary luminaries followed in their footsteps: John Ruskin, Harriet Martineau, Beatrix Potter, Arthur Ransome and, of course, John Cunliffe, creator of the classic children's TV series, *Postman Pat*. It's not too hard to understand what drew them all here. Every bend in the road seems to reveal a fresh panorama of astonishing views: deep valleys and plunging passes hollowed out by long-extinct glaciers, plummeting fell-sides coated with orange bracken, granite boulders and twisted trees, and misty mountain lakes illuminated by sudden shafts of sunlight breaking through the cloud. It's a place where you can almost hear the creak and grind of Mother Nature's cogs at work, where stout cob-walled cottages huddle beneath overarching crags, hardy Herdwick sheep wander the fell-tops and saw-tooth summits trace a jagged course against the horizon.

Unsurprisingly, with some of the nation's loftiest peaks clustered within its borders, the Lake District is considered by many to be the spiritual home of British hiking. Ever since the accountant-turned-author Alfred Wainwright first put pen to paper in the 1950s and began the seven-book, 14-year, 214-peak odyssey of the *Pictorial Guides to the Lakeland Fells* (still the bestselling Lakeland hiking guides almost 50 years after their initial publication), walkers of every age and ability have been flocking to the Lake District to tackle the mountains, tarns and hilltop trails for themselves.

But surprisingly few stop to consider the fact that despite its wild, wind-swept aspect, the Lake District is a long way from an untouched wilderness. In fact, it's one of the most intensively cropped, cultivated and managed corners of the country, shaped and moulded by generations of Cumbrian hill farmers (not to mention several million Herdwick, Swaledale and Rough Fell sheep). Hill farming has been a vital local industry here since the arrival of the Norse settlers in the 10th century, and probably long before: many of the drystone walls stretching out across the fell-sides date back to the days when doublets and hose were still considered the height of contemporary fashion.

As in many rural corners of England, however, those employed in traditional industries such as agriculture and hill farming are finding it increasingly tough to make ends meet. The fallout from the devastating outbreak of foot-and-mouth in 2001, which closed down much of Cumbria and led to the enforced slaughter of hundreds of thousands of sheep and cattle, forced

## CUMBRIA FAST FACTS

Area: 2630 sq miles

Population: 498,900

Unemployment: 2.1%

Number of people employed in the tourism industry: 63,020

Number of sheep: 2.05 million

Ratio of grey to red squirrels: 66:1

Percentage of dwellings used as holiday or second homes: 15%

Number of peaks over 3000ft: 4

Estimated length of drystone walls: 9400 miles

many already struggling farmers to the wall, and raised fears not just for the survival of this age-old industry, but for the very future of the beloved Lakeland landscape. Without sheep to graze the high country, there are very real concerns that the Lake District's distinctive fells might look very different in years to come. Hill farming is more than just a local industry – it's a way of life that's stitched into the fabric of the Lake District landscape, and for many people its future survival is inextricably linked with the long-term welfare of the wider national park.

And while the formation of the national park in 1951 has undoubtedly helped protect the landscape for future generations, it hasn't been without its teething troubles. Spiralling visitor numbers and hundreds of thousands of extra boots tramping the fells have inevitably had consequences for the fragile Lakeland environment, leading to ongoing problems of litter, habitat damage and fell erosion, as well as a huge rise in road traffic, with all the attendant problems of noise, tailbacks and air pollution. And as in many other scenic pockets of the English countryside, many Lakeland villages have found themselves swamped by an ever-rising tide of holiday cottages, seasonal lets and second homes, which have helped push house prices to sky-high levels and prevented local families from taking their first tentative step onto the housing ladder.

While there are undoubtedly problems ahead, there are also plenty of positive signs for the future too. The designation of the Lake District as an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) in 1993 recognised for the first time the unique importance of traditional agriculture to the local environment, and helped farmers to diversify into new areas in order to supplement their income, providing funding for the restoration of drystone walls, farm buildings and hedgerows and paying local landowners to protect sensitive areas such as marshland, moorland, lakes and riverbanks.

So in a world facing up to the stark realities of climate change, the Lake District has in many ways set the course for the rest of the nation to follow. Local businesses have been actively encouraged to take advantage of the growing green economy, and a host of environmentally friendly schemes, ranging from the car-free Cross-Lakes Shuttle to the solar-powered launches plying Coniston Water, have helped place Cumbria and the Lake District at the forefront of the search for greener and more sustainable ways of life.

Similarly, projects to protect the native red squirrel, restore heavily eroded footpaths and return areas of landscape to unmanaged wilderness (most obviously around the valley of Ennerdale) all bode well for the future. And perhaps most encouragingly of all, the return of Britain's first breeding pair of wild ospreys to Bassenthwaite Lake (p153) in 2001 is seen by many as a sign that after years of hanging in the balance, crucial Lakeland habitats are slowly starting to regain their natural status quo.

# Getting Started

Covering an area of 885 sq miles and measuring just 30 miles from edge to edge, the Lake District's compact dimensions are both a boon and a curse: you're never more than a bus ride away from the next trailhead or town, but unfortunately the narrow lanes, crowded trails and sardine-can car parks can make that all-important cloudlike feeling seem frustratingly elusive on the busiest days. By timing your visit and pre-planning your trip, you'll be able to dodge the crowds and appreciate the Lakeland scenery at its best.

## WHEN TO GO

There's no getting around it – overcrowding can be a serious headache in the Lake District. By far the most hectic period is from July to late August, but Bank Holiday weekends and school vacations (especially around Christmas and Easter) might also be worth avoiding; on the busiest days it can feel like half of northern England has joined you in a headlong dash to admire the Lakeland scenery. See p22 for a calendar of Lakeland events.

Regardless of when you visit, the notoriously fickle Lakeland weather is bound to play a part in your travel plans. All those green pastures and lush dales come at a price: according to the Met Office, the Lake District is officially the wettest place in England and receives twice the national rainfall average, so you're likely to experience a dose of good old English rain at some point during your stay. But the region's topography means that the weather can vary widely – while one fell summit could be cloaked in cloud and drenched by drizzle, another nearby valley might be bathed in brilliant sunshine.

All things considered, early spring and late autumn are the most settled times to visit. Arrive in March and early April and you'll be treated to a dazzling display of fresh greenery and spring blossoms, while in late October the woodlands are a blaze of autumnal reds, oranges and ochre-browns. The post-Christmas period can be another lovely season – Wordsworth thought the Lakeland colours were at their most vivid on a crisp winter's day, and glimpsing the fell tops brushed with a fresh covering of snow is one sight you won't forget in a hurry.

## COSTS & MONEY

Travelling in the Lake District certainly isn't as cheap as many other destinations, but thankfully there are options to cater for all comers, whether you're busting the budget on a full-blown luxury Lakeland experience or bunking down in a hostel or B&B. Booking ahead, dodging the peak seasons and using public transport are good ways of bringing costs down, and of course (unlike in many countries) you won't have to fork out a penny to visit the national park itself – although you might well find the costs ratchet up once you've forked out for a few days' of car-parking fees.

At the bottom end, backpackers and campers can expect to pay around £15 to £20 a night at most campsites, including two people and a car, while hostels generally charge between £12 and £18 per person for a dorm bunk and a hearty breakfast fry-up. By self-catering and using public transport, you could scrape by on £30 to £35 a day.

At the other end of the scale, romantic-weekend splurgers could find themselves shelling out a small fortune at some of the more upmarket country hotels. The cheapest rooms start at around £100 to £120 for a double, but you won't get anything special for that kind of cash; bump up to between £180 and £250 and you're entering boutique territory, while fork out £300

**'Wordsworth thought the Lakeland colours were most vivid on a crisp winter's day'**

**DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...**

- Good hiking boots with plenty of tread
- A waterproof, breathable rain jacket – Gore-Tex is best
- A comfortable rucksack or day pack to carry your gear
- An up-to-date 1:25,000 map if you're doing any hiking or biking
- Binoculars, camera and a spare memory card (or spare film for traditionalists)
- Plenty of spare socks
- A healthy appetite
- A taste for warm ale
- A calm attitude to queues

or more and you can expect an establishment of aristocratic standing. Count on £30 to £60 a head at the top-rated restaurants, excluding wine.

The vast majority of visitors end up falling into the midrange price bracket. A double room in an average B&B (including breakfast) will set you back £50 to £80; singles are often a reduced rate on a double room (generally 75%). Splash out more than £80 and you'll buy a few luxury touches (designer decor, flat-screen TVs, gourmet breakfasts and bath goodies), while under £50 you'll be looking at dowdy decor, battered tellies and a bathroom shared with your next-door neighbour. A decent bistro meal will set you back £10 to £15 for lunch, or £15 to £25 for supper; factor in admission charges and travel costs and you'll be looking at £120 to £150 per day for a really comfortable holiday. If you're travelling as a family, renting your own cottage can be a cost-effective option – see p217 for some recommended operators.

Membership of the National Trust is a worthwhile investment, since you'll be entitled to free entry to its Lake District properties and car parks. US-based visitors belonging to the White Oak Foundation (see p221) benefit from the same privileges.

**TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY**

Sustainable travel is a hot topic in the Lakes, and you'll find a strong selection of environmentally friendly initiatives, from yurt campsites to carbon-neutral B&Bs and solar-powered cruise boats. But the best thing you can do is to bite the bullet and leave the car at home. It might not be as convenient, and you'll have to juggle around your travel plans, but you'll be doing your bit to reduce the traffic problem as well as cutting down on your carbon footprint. Practically everywhere in the Lakes is accessible by bus or train, so there's really no excuse not to give it a go. Cycling is also worth considering, although the Lake District hills might spring a few nasty surprises if you don't plan your route carefully.

Food is another area where you can exercise your green pound: shopping locally at small suppliers and farmers markets puts your cash directly into the pockets of local suppliers rather than supermarket conglomerates. Many cafes, hotels and restaurants are starting to source their goods from closer to home, so keep your eyes peeled for locally sourced ingredients on menus.

If you're walking on the fells, avoid picking, breaking, snapping, trampling or sitting on anything – the landscape might look rugged, but it's a surprisingly fragile environment and needs to be looked after. Most importantly, stick to the trails and avoid walking across countryside or cutting trail corners if you can to prevent unnecessary erosion.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

For many visitors the Lake District is as much a literary landscape as a natural one, so here's a selection of books we think make good bedtime companions. We've concentrated mostly on recent titles – for classic authors, jump over to our Literary Lakes chapter on p41.

AS Byatt's *Unruly Times* is a fantastically readable account of the mutually inspiring but frequently stormy relationship between two of the great Lakeland figureheads, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

*Feet in the Clouds: a Story of Fell-Running and Obsession* by Richard Askwith provides an overview of one of the most brutal (and baffling) sports, told from the firsthand perspective of an ex-London journalist. If you've ever wondered what drives apparently sane men and women to run full pelt up and down a mountainside, this is for you.

*Haweswater* by Sarah Hall is a fictional work set in the 1930s during the creation of the Haweswater Reservoir and the drowning of the village of Mardale. It's a finely crafted study of a farming community facing up to progress and the loss of their traditional ways of life. Highly recommended.

Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journals* make a fascinating travel companion. Her tender descriptions paint a vivid portrait of everyday life in Grasmere at the turn of the 18th century, and it's intriguing to see how much things have (or haven't) changed over the last couple of centuries.

No visit to the Lake District would be complete without a well-thumbed copy of *Swallows and Amazons* by Arthur Ransome, not just one of the classic British children's tales, but also a kind of *roman-à-clef* to the Lakeland scenery.

Melvyn Bragg, the urbane Cumbrian-born broadcaster and presenter of the long-running *South Bank Show*, is also a prolific novelist. One of his best tales is *The Maid of Buttermere*, which centres on the celebrated beauty Mary Robinson and her encounter with the con man John Hatfield.

And finally what better companion to the Lakes could there be than the most famous fell walker of them all? *Wainwright: a Biography* by the veteran Lakeland author Hunter Davies was written with the cooperation of Alfred's beloved widow Betty, and is stuffed with anecdotes and insights about the great man. Also by the same author is the classic Lake District travelogue, *A Walk Around the Lakes*, which mixes keen observation with an obvious passion for the area.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

There's loads of information on the net to help you plan your Lakeland adventure, but your first stop should be the comprehensive site **Go Lakes** ([www.golakes.co.uk](http://www.golakes.co.uk)) run by the Cumbrian tourist authority or the more general countywide **Visit Cumbria** ([www.visitcumbria.com](http://www.visitcumbria.com)).

**Cycling Cumbria** ([www.cyclingcumbria.com](http://www.cyclingcumbria.com)) Excellent online resource for cyclists, with archived routes for on- and off-road biking graded according to strenuousness and difficulty.

**Lake District National Park Authority** ([www.lake-district.gov.uk](http://www.lake-district.gov.uk)) Official website for the National Park Authority (NPA), with background on the history, ecology and geology of the national park, as well as webcams and up-to-date weather reports.

**Lake District Outdoors** ([www.lakedistrictoutdoors.co.uk](http://www.lakedistrictoutdoors.co.uk)) Fancy trying a spot of canoeing or ghyll scrambling? This is the place to start.

**Lake District Walks** ([www.lakedistrictwalks.com](http://www.lakedistrictwalks.com)) Encyclopaedic reference site to Lakeland walks run by the internet's answer to Alfred Wainwright, John Dawson.

# TOP PICKS



## CAMPSITES

Whether you're a 100% committed camper or this is your first time spent kipping under the stars, there's a campsite to suit you. Some are tap-and-toilet sites, others luxury getaways; world-class views are standard.

- **Full Circle** (p96) Yurts and wood-burning stoves in the grounds of Rydal Hall.
- **Quiet Site** (p169) Ever camped in an eco-pod? Now's your chance.
- **Syke Farm** (p163) Beautiful site in the heart of Buttermere.
- **Great Langdale** (p98) Scenery stretches in every direction.
- **Gillside Farm** (p172) Farm camping in the shadow of Helvellyn.
- **4 Winds Lakeland Tips** (p72) Camp Sioux-style near Windermere.
- **Wasdale Head** (p138) One for wild campers.
- **Low Wray** (p80) Lake camping on the shores of Windermere.
- **Bowkerstead Farm** (p122) Simple field site on the doorstep of Grizedale Forest.
- **Fisherground Farm** (p134) Family friendly site handy for the La'al Ratty railway.

## STATELY HOMES

Country estates have been an integral part of Lakeland life for centuries: lord it up in some of our favourites.

- **Holker Hall** (p183) Glorious grounds, a fantastic food hall and aristocratic architecture.
- **Muncaster Castle** (p130) The nation's most haunted castle. Nice gardens, too.
- **Brantwood** (p112) John Ruskin's country hideaway on the shores of Coniston Water.
- **Blackwell** (p71) Arts and Crafts aplenty at this 19th-century mansion.
- **Levens Hall** (p214) The most ostentatious topiary in England.

## WALKS

You really haven't seen the Lake District until you've conquered a few fells, so try these bad boys out for size.

- **Scafell Pike** (p127) England's highest mountain.
- **Helvellyn** (p165) Dizzying drops made this peak Wordsworth's favourite.
- **Black Combe** (p178) Often-overlooked fell with panoramic views in all directions.
- **Skiddaw** (p143) The northern Lakes' best hike.
- **The Langdale Pikes** (p86) Peak-bagging aplenty in the Langdale Valley.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Destination guides and travel tips from our own good selves.

**Mountain Weather Information Service** ([www.mwis.org.uk](http://www.mwis.org.uk)) Provides a weekly downloadable forecast for all of Britain's mountain parks, including the Lake District.

**Striding Edge** ([www.stridingedge.net](http://www.stridingedge.net)) Online photo diary run by Sean McMahon, with wonderful photos of practically every fell in the Lake District seen from every conceivable angle. Fantastic, inspirational stuff.

# Events Calendar

## FEBRUARY

**KESWICK FILM FESTIVAL** mid-Feb  
[www.keswickfilmfestival.org](http://www.keswickfilmfestival.org)  
Keswick's cinematic spectacular with film premieres and directors' talks.

**DALEMAIN MARMALADE FESTIVAL** mid-Feb  
[www.marmaladefestival.com](http://www.marmaladefestival.com)  
Annual jam-makers joust: separate categories for Seville orange, chunky, citrus and organic marmalades, with special prizes for chaps, kids, soldiers and (bizarrely) clergymen.

## MARCH

**WORDS BY THE WATER** early Mar  
Annual celebration of the written word in Keswick.

**DAFFODIL & SPRING FLOWER SHOW** end Mar  
[www.ambleside-show.org.uk](http://www.ambleside-show.org.uk)  
Springtime flower festival in Ambleside.

## MAY

**ULVERSTON WALKING FESTIVAL** early May  
Hikers hit Ulverston for organised walks, talks and events.

**ULLSWATER WALKING FESTIVAL** mid-May  
[www.ullswater.com/walkingfestival](http://www.ullswater.com/walkingfestival)  
Organised hikes around Helvellyn, Fairfield, Gowbarrow, and Ullswater's other summits.

**KESWICK JAZZ FESTIVAL** mid-May  
Saxophones and snare drums at Keswick's five-day jazz-fest, with top names from the Brit, European and world circuits.

**KESWICK MOUNTAIN FESTIVAL** mid-May  
[www.keswickmountainfestival.co.uk](http://www.keswickmountainfestival.co.uk)  
Celebrity hikers, bikers and climbers congregate at Keswick for this four-day celebration of the great outdoors.

**BRATHAY WINDERMERE MARATHON** mid-May  
Iron-lunged competitors cover 26.2 miles around the shores of Windermere.

**FRED WHITTON CHALLENGE** mid-May  
[www.fredwhittonchallenge.org.uk](http://www.fredwhittonchallenge.org.uk)  
Gruelling 112-mile slog over the Lake District's six highest passes. On a bike.

**HOLKER GARDEN FESTIVAL** end May  
Local food, horticultural displays and blooms in the grounds of Holker Hall.

## JUNE

**KESWICK BEER FESTIVAL** early Jun  
[www.keswickbeerfestival.co.uk](http://www.keswickbeerfestival.co.uk)  
Can't tell your Ram Tam from your Cheeky Pheasant? Then it's time you downed some brews at Keswick's annual ale-fest.

**BOOT BEER FESTIVAL** early Jun  
Much smaller beer festival held in Boot's three higger-mugger inns – but at least you won't have to queue up for a pint.

**ULLSWATER COUNTRY FAIR** end Jun  
Pedigree hunting dogs and terriers take centre stage at Ullswater's historic country fair.

## JULY

**AMBLESIDE RUSHBEARING** 1st Sat in Jul  
Rushes and wreaths are carried with pomp and ceremony around Ambleside to St Mary's Church.

**CONISTON WATER FESTIVAL** early Jul  
[www.conistonwaterfestival.co.uk](http://www.conistonwaterfestival.co.uk)  
Sailing, windsurfing, stone skimming and general larking about on Coniston Water.

**CUMBERLAND COUNTY SHOW** mid-Jul  
[www.cumberlandshow.co.uk](http://www.cumberlandshow.co.uk)  
The big 'un: Cumbrian wrestlers jostle for space with dressage displays, prize bulls and handsome Herdwicks at the county's main agricultural show.

**CARLISLE FESTIVAL** mid-Jul  
[www.carlislefestival.org.uk](http://www.carlislefestival.org.uk)  
Concerts and recitals come to town for this classically orientated celebration.

**SCARECROW FESTIVAL** mid-Jul  
Scarecrows cover the streets of Langwathby, Millom, Haverigg and several other Cumbrian villages.

**COCK ROCK** mid-Jul  
[www.cockermouthrockfestival.com](http://www.cockermouthrockfestival.com)  
Popsters and rock-chicks boogie to hot new bands at Cockermouth's provocatively titled rock festival.

**AMBLESIDE SPORTS** last Thu in Jul  
Fell runners hit the trails, hounds sniff the scents, and wrestlers in long johns battle for supremacy at this traditional sports day.

## AUGUST

**LOWTHER HORSE DRIVING TRIALS & COUNTRY FAIR** early Aug  
[www.lowther.co.uk/events/](http://www.lowther.co.uk/events/)  
Showjumping and carriage races are the main attractions at this popular country fair.

**GRASMERE RUSHBEARING** Sat nearest to 5 Aug  
More rushbearing antics, this time centring on St Oswald's in Grasmere.

**SHEEPDOG TRIALS** mid- to end Aug  
Come by! Away! Sheepdogs outwit the Swaledales and Herdwicks at competitions in Rydal, Gosforth, Threlkeld, Skelton and Patterdale.

**KENDAL MINTFEST** Aug Bank Holiday  
[www.mintfest.org](http://www.mintfest.org)  
Artists, street performers and plenty of odd costumes congregate on the Auld Grey Town.

**GRASMERE SPORTS & SHOW** Aug Bank Holiday  
[www.grasmeresportsandshow.co.uk](http://www.grasmeresportsandshow.co.uk)  
As per Ambleside Sports but on Grasmere's green.

**KESWICK AGRICULTURAL SHOW** Aug Bank Holiday  
Historic pastoral affair, held every year since 1860.

## SEPTEMBER

**HELVELLYN TRIATHLON** early Sep  
A mile swim across Ullswater, a 38-mile cycle over Kirkstone Pass, and a 9-mile run to the summit of Helvellyn. Yes, they probably are insane.

**WESTMORLAND COUNTY SHOW** 2nd Thu in Sep  
[www.westmorlandshow.co.uk](http://www.westmorlandshow.co.uk)  
Westmorland puts its comeliest sheep and cattle on show near Kendal.

**KENDAL TORCHLIGHT CARNIVAL** mid-Sep  
[www.kendaltorchlightcarnival.co.uk](http://www.kendaltorchlightcarnival.co.uk)  
Kendal's answer to the Notting Hill Carnival: daft costumes, street processions and decorated floats.

**BORROWDALE SHEPHERDS' MEET** mid-Sep  
[www.borrowdaleshow.org.uk](http://www.borrowdaleshow.org.uk)  
Hounds trail, fell runners race, shepherds shear and sheepdogs strut their stuff at Rosthwaite in Borrowdale.

**EGREMONT CRAB FAIR & SPORTS** mid-Sep  
[www.egremontcrabfair.co.uk](http://www.egremontcrabfair.co.uk)  
See the world's ugliest mugs battle it out in this historic gurning competition.

**ESKDALE SHOW** end Sep  
Farmers' show in Eskdale valley.

## OCTOBER

**TASTE DISTRICT** early Oct  
[www.tastedistrict.com](http://www.tastedistrict.com)  
Gourmet gala celebrating Cumbria's best beer brewers, chutney bottlers, sausage stuffers and bread kneaders, held at Rheged near Penrith.

## NOVEMBER

**KENDAL MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL** mid-Nov  
[www.mountainfilm.co.uk](http://www.mountainfilm.co.uk)  
The best new films and documentaries from the adrenaline-fuelled world of adventure sports.

**BIGGEST LIAR IN THE WORLD** mid-Nov  
[www.santonbridgeinn.com/liar](http://www.santonbridgeinn.com/liar)  
You little liar... Hear improbable tales of flatulent sheep and giant turnips at the Santon Bridge Inn's porky-telling contest.

**CARLISLE BLUES FESTIVAL** mid- to end Nov  
[www.carlislebluesfestival.com](http://www.carlislebluesfestival.com)  
Blues and rock acts hit stages around Carlisle.

**ULVERSTON DICKENSIAN FESTIVAL** end Nov  
Meet Bob Cratchits, Ebenezer Scrooges and Oliver Twists on the streets of Ulverston in this Christmassy procession.



# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### LAND OF THE LAKES

Two Weeks / Windermere to Ullswater

Kick-start the trip in historic **Windermere** (p59) with a classic cruise from the jetties at **Bowness-on-Windermere** (p62). Then it's grub galore and views aplenty at **Ambleside** (p76), before venturing into Wordsworth country at **Grasmere** (p87) and the poet's former homes at **Dove Cottage** (p87) and **Rydal Mount** (p91). Take a scenic spin around the valleys of **Great Langdale** (p98) and **Little Langdale** (p96), before heading south to picture-perfect **Hawkshead** (p118), Beatrix Potter's house at **Hill Top** (p123) and the trails of **Grizedale Forest** (p122), followed by a solar-powered cruise on **Coniston Water** (p114). Heading back west, take a detour to admire the nation's favourite view at **Wasdale Head** (p137). Then travel north to visit Wordsworth's birthplace at **Cockermouth** (p157), before cutting back inland via the gorgeous valleys of **Buttermere** (p163) and **Borrowdale** (p160) en route to **Keswick** (p145) and the tree-clad islands of **Derwent Water** (p148). Wind things up with a trip around the grand old lake of **Ullswater** (p167) and (if you're brave enough) a jaunt up **Helvellyn** (p165), England's most spectacular hike.

A whistle-stop circuit packing in the Lake District's essential sights – picturesque villages, plunging fells, snowy peaks and stately lakes (with a dose of Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter thrown in for good measure).



## PAST SPLENDOURS

### Two Weeks / Carlisle to Kendal

Begin your historic circuit in Cumbria's capital, **Carlisle** (p197). Get some textbook perspective at the **Tullie House Museum** (p198) before strolling the battlements of **Carlisle Castle** (p197) and visiting the city's **cathedral** (p198). Head down to **Penrith** (p204), once the centre of the Celtic kingdom of Rheged, before detouring via the aristocratic splendour of **Dalemain** (p167) en route to **Keswick** (p145), a thriving hiking hub. Don't miss an unforgettable sunset at **Castlerigg Stone Circle** (p147).

Spend a day exploring elegant **Mirehouse** (p153) and the Georgian streets of **Cockermouth** (p157) before heading along the **Cumbrian Coast** (p177) to the salty old seaport of **Whitehaven** (p189), once England's third-busiest harbour. Visit the spooktastic castle of **Muncaster** (p130) before travelling back in time aboard the **Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway** (p130), built to carry iron ore from the Eskdale mines.

Stop off at the Roman fort at **Hardknott Pass** (p135), spot ancient drystone walls around the **Langdale Valley** (p95) and spend time by idyllic **Elterwater** (p97). Juggle the charms of town and countryside around busy **Ambleside** (p76) and even-busier **Grasmere** (p87), visit the quirky yeoman's cottage of **Townend** (p75), before descending to **Windermere** and **Bowness** (p59) for a trip aboard the Lake District's oldest **cruise boats** (p62) across to **Lakeside** (p71) or the Victorian grounds of **Fell Foot Park** (p71).

Further south, stroll through the ruins of **Furness Abbey** (p187), pop into the medieval priory at **Cartmel** (p182), visit the antique-packed manor of **Holker Hall** (p183) and stroll the seafront promenade of **Grange-over-Sands** (p180) before finishing up in **Kendal** (p210), home of the county's favourite minty treat and a handy launch pad for **Sizergh Castle** (p214) and **Levens Hall** (p214).



**A two-week trip back in time around some of the district's historic landmarks and market towns, taking in derelict abbeys, country houses and the county's only city: red-brick Carlisle.**

## TAILORED TRIPS

### QUIRKY CUMBRIA

Weary of Wordsworth? Bored with Beatrix? Had it with hiking? Then try this specially tailored spin around some of Cumbria's more off-kilter attractions.

Our first curiosity stop is an underground tour into the murky depths of the **Honister Slate Mine** (p163), followed by a head-spinning clamber along the **Via Ferrata** (p163), a cliff-top system of fixed ropes and ladders modelled on those used by Italian troops during WWI. Down in the Borrowdale Valley, you can climb up to the top of the house-sized lump of rock known as the **Bowder Stone** (p160), visit the wettest place in England at **Styhead Tarn** (p162) or take to the lake in a **Viking longboat** (p160). Nearby Keswick has a wealth of weirdo sights, ranging from a geological piano and an ancient mummified cat at the **Keswick Museum** (p145) to the world's biggest pencil at the **Cumberland Pencil Museum** (p147) and a filmic fleet of cinematic cars at the **Cars of the Stars Motor Museum** (p145) – keep your peepers peeled for Mr Bean's Mini, the A-Team van and a triumvirate of original Batmobiles.



More curious filmic connections can be found out on the coast in Ulverston, where a **museum** (p185) has been established in honour of the town's most famous son, Stan Laurel. Along the coast you can see a painstaking recreation of a

1930s petrol station at Holker Hall's **Lakeland Motor Museum** (p184), or have your chi cleansed and your chakras realigned at the **Conishead Priory** (p187), home to Europe's largest Kadampa Buddhist temple. Over in Whitehaven, the weird waxworks at the **Rum Story** (p190) include a recreation of a 19th-century punch tavern and Nelson's body being pickled in rum after the Battle of Trafalgar, while budding spook hunters can indulge in their very own overnight ghost sit at nearby **Muncaster Castle** (p130), supposedly the most haunted house in England. Don't forget to stop for a spin aboard England's most elaborate train set at **Ravenglass** (p130) before paying your respects at Cumbria's tiniest **church** (p137) in Wasdale Head, boning up on the nation's nuclear industry at **Sellafeld** (p192) and wandering around the replica Victorian shopfronts of the **Millom Folk Museum** (p188).

Still not weirded out yet? Then travel back to the **Wordsworth Museum** (p89) in Grasmere, where the offbeat exhibits include Thomas de Quincey's walking stick along with spooky life masks of William Wordsworth and John Keats. Alternatively the **Ruskin Museum** (p112) in Coniston houses the original tail fin and engine from Donald Campbell's doomed jet boat *Bluebird*, dredged up from the bottom of the lake after 50 years (along with Campbell's mortal remains, which are now buried in the nearby churchyard of St Andrew's). Over in Penrith you can see the Monocled Mutineer's monocle at the **Penrith Museum** (p204) and wander around one of England's strangest stone circles, **Long Meg and Her Daughters** (p206), near Little Salkeld. Round things off with a trip up to Carlisle, whose curious attractions include the city's medieval stocks at the **Guildhall Museum** (p198), a Roman cataract needle at the **Tullie House Museum** (p198) and the celebrated licking stones of **Carlisle Castle** (p197), supposedly lapped by parched prisoners during the Jacobite siege of 1745.

## A GREEN ADVENTURE

There's a long tradition of environmental campaigning in the Lakes, so why not join the green crusade? Your first contribution is to ditch the car: you can catch **trains** (p227) between Kendal and Windermere and along the Cumbrian Coast, while nearly every Lakeland village has its own scenic **bus route** (p226). The **Cross-Lakes Shuttle** (p70) enables car-free travel between Conistone and Windermere, while the Conistone Water **cruise boats** (p114) run on nothing but sunshine. Or, of course, there's good old carbon-neutral **cycling** (p104), which is still one of the best ways to explore the Lakeland countryside.

For eco-friendly accommodation, you're spoilt for choice. Vegetarians should make a beeline for **Lancrigg** (p94) in Grasmere or **Yewfield** (p121) in Hawkshead, while carbon-conscious travellers can sleep easy at Grasmere's luxurious **Moss Grove Hotel • Organic** (p95), cottagey **Cote How Organic Guest House** (p81) just north of Ambleside, or the refurbished **Howe Keld** (p150) in Keswick.

Campers can kip in **yurts** (p96) near Grasmere, **tipis** (p72) near Newby Bridge, or **eco-pods** (p98) in the Langdale Valley, before stocking up on local goodies from **Lucy's Specialist Grocery** (p82) and the wonderful farm shops at **Low Sizergh Barn** (p214) and **Howbarrow Organic Farm** (p183). Or, if you prefer letting someone else do the cooking, how about the wholefood cafes of **Lakeland Pedlar** (p151), **Waterside Wholefoods** (p213), **Wilf's** (p74) or the **World Peace Cafe** (p186)? Go on – green is good.



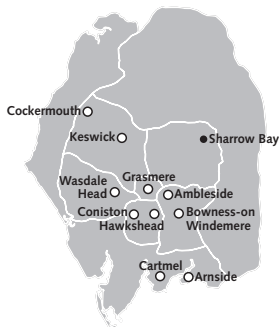
## ROMANTIC RETREATS

Whether you're a chintz lover or a boutique devotee, the Lake District is brimming with romantic boltholes tailor-made for spoiling your nearest and dearest.

First you need the perfect hideaway. Prefer things posh? Then you'll want a country house hotel – perhaps the ivy-clad **Holbeck Ghyll** (p68), the splendid sophistication of **Gilpin Lodge** (p68) or the swag-draped showiness of **Sharrow Bay** (p170). Too stuffy? Don't fret. Try the **Waterhead Hotel** (p81) for cool contemporariness, **Linthwaite House** (p68) for country pampering or the **Samling** (p68) for all-out celeb splendour. Too pricey? No probs. **Summer Hill Country House** (p116), **No 43** (p180) and the **Drunken Duck** (p121) all have lashings of style without the sky-high price tag, while the **Wasdale Head Inn** (p139) is the ideal place for that dreamy end-of-the-world feel.

Next you need the perfect table. You could dine under mill machinery at the **Glass House** (p82), among cosy clutter at the **Jumble Room** (p95), amid clean lines at **Rogan and Company** (p183) or shiny pine at **Lucy's on a Plate** (p82). Veggies should plump for the **Quince & Medlar** (p159), but for culinary fireworks there's only one choice – **L'Enclume** (p183) in Cartmel.

Last you need that all-important magic moment – and what could be more romantic than a **twilight cruise** (p148) across the island-studded lake of Derwent Water?



## THE WILD SIDE

Looking to give the civilised world the slip? Top spot in the wildness stakes has to go to **Wasdale Head** (p137), whose untamed peaks have long provided a proving ground for ambitious hikers and mountain climbers. Many Lakes visitors overlook the nearby **Cumbrian Coast** (p177), but if you choose your spot it can make a wonderfully remote refuge from the hustle and bustle of the busier corners of the national park. There are rich wildlife reserves around **Hodbarrow** (p188), **St Bees** (p191) and the **Solway Coast** (p192), as well as around the dramatic vales of **Eskdale** (p133) and the **Duddon Valley** (p135), where sheep and cattle still outnumber the human inhabitants by a rather considerable margin. Meanwhile the return of ospreys to **Bassenthwaite** (p153), red squirrels to **Whinlatter** (p156) and golden eagles to **Haweswater** (p176), together with the ‘rewilding’ of **Ennerdale** (p139), has brought a sliver of lost wilderness back to the Lakeland landscape.



As for unruly views, you’re spoilt for choice: try the windswept summits of **Black Combe** (p178), **Scafell Pike** (p127) and the **Langdale Pikes** (p86), or the high mountain passes of **Kirkstone** (p174) and **Honister** (p163). And if you fancy a night out in the wilds, you won’t find anywhere better than the mountain hostels of **Black Sail** (p140), **Coppermines** (p115) and **Helvellyn** (p172), or the splendidly isolated and marvellously ivy-clad **Haweswater Hotel** (p176), built in the 1930s and still the only accommodation option in the Haweswater valley.

## GOURMET GETAWAY

Passionate pubbers, organic advocates and fine-dining diehards will all find culinary Cumbria a highlight. For traditional grub and ale, the **Britannia Inn** (p97) and the **Pheasant Inn** (p155) are hard to beat, but if you prefer your pints in more contemporary surroundings, try the beautifully beamed **Yanwath Gate Inn** (p207) or the organic-orientated **George and Dragon** (p175). Meanwhile the homely **Black Bull** (p117) in Coniston and the **Bitter End** (p159) in Cockermouth have established themselves as two of northern England’s top microbreweries.

As for afternoon tea, **Bryson’s** (p151) in Keswick turns out the crumbliest of scones and tastiest of cakes, while the **Hazelmere Cafe** (p181) in Grange-over-Sands is the top choice if you’re a sucker for bone-china teapots and frilly doilies. For a funkier spin, try **Good Taste** (p151) in Keswick, or for slate-floored cosiness make a beeline for the **Yew Tree Farm** (p117) near Coniston or the **Jumping Jenny** (p114) at Brantwood.



Not full yet? Don’t worry – you’ve still got to pick up handmade gingerbread from **Sarah Nelson’s** (p89) in Grasmere, tender venison from **Holker Hall** (p183), mintcake from **Kendal** (p213), fresh bread from **Munx** (p74) in Slaveley, spicy chutneys from the **Hawkshead Relish Company** (p121) and royally approved bacon from **Woodall’s of Waberthwaite** (p189), not forgetting of course the stickiest of sticky toffee puddings from the **Cartmel Village Shop** (p182).

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