



The Lake District & Cumbria

Includes ➔

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Best Traditional Inns

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- ➔ Wasdale Head Inn (p601)
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- ➔ Mortal Man (p590)
- ➔ Kirkstile Inn (p607)

Best Beauty Spots

- ➔ Wasdale (p600)
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Why Go?

'No part of the country is more distinguished by its sublimity', mused the grand old bard of the lakes, William Wordsworth, and a couple of centuries on his words still ring true. In terms of natural splendour, nowhere in England can compare to the Lake District. For centuries, poets, painters and perambulators alike have been flocking here in search of inspiration and escape, and it's still the nation's favourite place to revel in the majesty of the English landscape.

The main draw here is undoubtedly the Lake District National Park – England's largest, at 885 sq miles. Every bend in the road reveals more eye-popping views: deep valleys, plunging passes, glittering lakes, whitewashed inns, barren hills. But it's worth exploring beyond the national park's boundaries too: the old towns of Carlisle, Kendal and Penrith are full of historical interest, and Cumbria's coast has a windswept charm all of its own.

When to Go

- ➔ The Lake District is the UK's most popular national park; visit in early spring and late autumn for the fewest crowds. Its weather is also notoriously fickle – showers can strike at any time of year, so bring wet-weather gear just in case.
- ➔ Cumbria's largest mountain festival is held in Keswick in mid-May, while the Beer Festival in June welcomes ale aficionados from across the globe.
- ➔ Ambleside's traditional sports day on the last Saturday in July features events such as hound trailing and Cumbrian wrestling; Grasmere's annual sports day takes place on the August Bank Holiday.
- ➔ In November, the world's greatest liars congregate on Santon Bridge for their annual fibbing contest.

History

Neolithic settlers arrived in the Lake District around 5000 BC. The region was subsequently occupied by Celts, Angles, Vikings and Romans, and during the Dark Ages marked the centre of the ancient kingdom of Rheged.

During the Middle Ages, Cumbria marked the start of the 'Debatable Lands', the wild frontier between England and Scotland. Bands of raiders known as Border Reivers regularly plundered the area, prompting the construction of defensive *pele* towers and castles at Carlisle, Penrith and Kendal.

The area became a centre for the Romantic movement during the 19th century, largely thanks to the Cumbrian-born poet William Wordsworth, who also championed the need to protect the Lake District's landscape from overdevelopment – a dream that was achieved in 1951, when the Lake District National Park was formed.

The present-day county of Cumbria was formed from the neighbouring districts of Cumberland and Westmorland in 1974.



Activities

Cycling

Cycling is a great way to explore the Lake District and Cumbria, as long as you don't mind the hills. For short mountain-bike rides, the trails of Grizedale Forest (p596) and Whinlatter Forest Park (p602) are very popular.

Long-distance touring routes include the 70-mile **Cumbria Way** between Ulverston, Keswick and Carlisle; the 140-mile **Sea To Sea Cycle Route** (C2C; NCN 7; www.c2c-guide.co.uk), which begins in Whitehaven and cuts east across the northern Pennines to Newcastle; and the 173-mile **Reivers Route** (NCN 10; www.reivers-route.co.uk) from the River Tyne to Whitehaven.

Several local buses (including bus 599 from Bowness to Grasmere, bus X33 from Ambleside to Ravenglass and the Cross Lakes Experience) have space for bikes. There's also the new summer-only bus 800 along Windermere's eastern shore, which can carry 12 bikes. It runs several times a day in July and August, plus on weekends in May and June. You pay the standard bus fare plus £1.50 for each bike. For more information see www.golakes.co.uk/travel/New-Bike-Bus.aspx.

Walking

For many people, hiking is the main reason for a visit to the Lake District. All tourist offices

and bookshops sell maps and guidebooks, such as Collins' *Lakeland Fellranger* and Ordnance Survey's *Pathfinder Guides*. Purists prefer Alfred Wainwright's seven-volume *Pictorial Guides to the Lakeland Fells* (1955–66) – part walking guides, part illustrated artworks, part philosophical memoirs, with painstakingly hand-penned maps and text.

Maps are essential: the Ordnance Survey's 1:25,000 *Landranger* maps are used by most official bodies, while some hikers prefer the Harvey *Superwalker* 1:25,000 maps.

Long-distance trails which pass through Cumbria include the 54-mile **Allerdale Ramble** from Seathwaite to the Solway Firth, the 70-mile **Cumbria Way** from Ulverston to Carlisle and the 191-mile **Coast to Coast** from St Bees to Robin Hood's Bay in Yorkshire. Door-to-door baggage services such as **Coast to Coast Packhorse** (☎017683-71777; www.c2cpackhorse.co.uk) or **Sherpa Van** (☎0871 520-0124; www.sherpavan.com) transport luggage from one destination to the next.

Other Activities

Cumbria is a haven for outdoor activities, including rock climbing, orienteering, horse riding, archery, fell (mountain) running and *ghyll* (waterfall) scrambling. Contact the **Holmescales Activity Centre** (☎01539-722147; www.holmescales.com; Old Hutton, Kendal), **Rookin House** (☎017684-83561; www.rookinhouse.co.uk; Troutbeck) or **Keswick Adventure Centre** (☎017687-75687; www.keswickadventurecentre.co.uk; Newlands).

Getting There & Away

Carlisle is on the main West Coast train line from London Euston to Manchester and Glasgow. To get to the Lake District, you need to change at Oxenholme for Kendal and Windermere. The lines around the Cumbrian coast and between Settle and Carlisle are particularly scenic.

National Express coaches run direct from London Victoria and Glasgow to Windermere, Carlisle and Kendal.

Getting Around

Traveline (☎0871 200 22 33; www.traveline-northeast.info) provides comprehensive travel information. Bus timetables are available from tourist offices.

There are round-the-lake ferry services on Windermere, Coniston Water, Ullswater and Derwentwater. Windermere also has a ferry service (p589).

Traffic can be heavy during peak season and holiday weekends. Many Cumbrian towns use