



# The Lake District & Cumbria

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## Why Go?

If it's grandstand views you're looking for, nowhere in England can match Cumbria. It's a place where the superlatives simply run dry – home to the nation's longest and deepest lakes, as well as its smallest church, steepest road, highest town and loftiest peak. The glaciers that carved out this landscape during the last ice age have long since melted, leaving behind a string of crags, fells and sparkling tarns that form the core of one of England's oldest national parks – the stunning Lake District, founded in 1951 and still considered by many to be the spiritual heartland of English hiking.

But there's much more to this region than just fine views. With a wealth of literary and artistic connections, a history stretching back over 5000 years and some of the halest and heartiest cooking anywhere in England, it's packed with more natural appeal than almost anywhere else in Britain.

## Best Places to Eat

- » Punch Bowl Inn (p582)
- » Jumble Room (p586)
- » Drunken Duck (p587)
- » Yanwath Gate Inn (p604)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Moss Grove Organic (p585)
- » Waterhead Hotel (p582)
- » Yewfield (p587)
- » Howe Keld (p594)
- » Summer Hill Country House (p590)

## When to Go?

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 houndtrailing 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

The earliest settlers arrived in the Lake District 5000 years ago, building stone circles like Castlerigg and quarrying flint and stone around Stonethwaite and Seatoller. 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 in Scotland, 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 above its potential for industrial resources (a cause later taken up by other literary luminaries, including John Ruskin and Beatrix Potter). 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, but you'll need nerves (and legs) of steel on the more challenging routes. Cycle-hire shops are widespread, and tourist offices stock a cycling map showing traffic-free routes. Bike hire starts at around £15 per day.

Long-distance bikers can follow the 72-mile **Cumbria Way** ([www.cumbriawaycycleroute.co.uk](http://www.cumbriawaycycleroute.co.uk)) between Ulverston, Keswick and Carlisle, and the Cumbrian section of the 140-mile **Sea to Sea Cycle Route** (C2C; [www.c2c-guide.co.uk](http://www.c2c-guide.co.uk)) from Whitehaven via the northern Lake District en route to the North Pennines and Newcastle.

### WALKING

For many people, hiking on the fells is the main reason for a Lake District visit. Trails range from low-level rambles to full-blown mountain ascents; most tourist offices sell

maps and guidebooks, including Collins' *Lakeland Fellranger*, Ordnance Survey's *Pathfinder Guides*, and Alfred Wainwright's classic hand-drawn, seven-volume set, *A Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells* (recently updated by experienced hiker and Wainwright devotee Chris Jesty).

If you're planning on anything more than a low-level stroll in the Lakes, a decent-quality map is essential. Walkers have a choice of two map publishers: traditionalists generally opt for the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 *Landranger* series maps, although many hikers prefer Harvey *Superwalker* 1:25,000 maps, which are specifically made for walkers and clearly mark major trail routes (as well as all 214 fells detailed by Alfred Wainwright in his classic walking guides).

There are endless fell trails to choose from, but if you're up for something more challenging, how about Alfred Wainwright's **Coast to Coast Walk** (<http://www.thecoasttocoastwalk.info/>), which cuts west to east from St Bees to Robin Hood's Bay in North Yorkshire, a distance of 191 miles. The Cumbrian section passes through Honister Pass, Grasmere, Patterdale, Kirkby Stephen and Shap en route to the Yorkshire Dales, a five- to seven-day hike of 82 miles.

Door-to-door baggage services can be useful; contact **Coast to Coast Packhorse** (☎017683-71777; [www.c2cpackhorse.co.uk](http://www.c2cpackhorse.co.uk)) or **Sherpa Van** (☎0871 520 0124; [www.sherpavan.com](http://www.sherpavan.com)).

### OTHER ACTIVITIES

Cumbria is a haven for adrenalin-fuelled activities, ranging from rock climbing and orienteering to quad biking, fell running and *ghyll* scrambling (a cross between coasteering and river canyoning along a steep ravine). Sailing, kayaking and windsurfing are popular too, especially around Windermere, Derwent Water and Coniston.

Check out [www.lakedistrictoutdoors.co.uk](http://www.lakedistrictoutdoors.co.uk) for the low-down.

### **i** Getting There & Away

**BUS** National Express coaches run direct from London and Glasgow to Windermere, Carlisle and Kendal. Count on seven hours between London Victoria and Windermere.

**TRAIN** Carlisle is on the main Virgin West Coast line from London Euston to Manchester to Glasgow, with trains running roughly hourly from both north and south. To get to the Lake District, you need to change at Oxenholme, where regular trains travel west into Kendal and Windermere. There are at least three direct trains from