

UNITED KINGDOM



THE NORTH IS THE MOST MOUNTAINOUS AND HAS A MULTITUDE OF NATIONAL PARKS.



ENGLAND

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There are few places in the western world that haven't been affected to some degree or another by this vast and influential culture. You'll be overwhelmed by the sheer number of stately old buildings. But it's when you travel winding country lanes, lovely villages and chequer-work fields, that the true charm of England comes to the fore.

The north is the most mountainous and has a multitude of National Parks. The tiny hamlet of Akeld, right on the edge of craggy Northumberland National Park, is an ideal base from which to explore. Serpentine Hadrian's Wall, England's largest World Heritage Site, contains enough Roman fortresses and museums to satisfy any history buff.

There are more historic castles in Northumberland than anywhere else in the country. Must-do's are Alnwick Castle, rising above truly stunning gardens; Bamburgh Castle, guarding one of the finest beaches in the country from atop a basalt outcrop; and, when the tide's out, walk across to the unspoilt beauty of the Holy Isle of Lindisfarne, birthplace of English Christianity.



One of England's most renowned areas, the Lake District is also only a short drive away, renowned for the magic of its shining lakes, waterfalls, arboreous valleys and rugged mountains.

This sensational National Park is an outdoor enthusiast's dream. In an area of only 885 square miles, there are 16 major lakes, as well as the country's highest peak. Drive the Hardknot and Wrynose pass to the dramatic lakes around Eskdale, the Duddon Valley and Wastwater. But it's not all about nature. Explore Ravenglass, an old Roman Port; meander Grigg's beach; or visit Wordsworth's favorite haunts.

Try Beamish with its period shops, houses and Masonic Hall; and the North of England Open Air Museum that recreates life in the early 1800's and 1900's.

Thurnham is right nearby Lancaster, with its medieval castle, modern shops and theaters, enormous antique fair and excellent restaurants. If you get a chance, go to a 'Burns night' dinner, where you'll pipe in the haggis and other fun things.

The fun and seaside pleasures of lively Blackpool are also close by. Drive through some of the greenest countryside you've ever seen to Muncaster Castle, Cartmel's priory and Holker Hall.

Luxuriate in the lovely grounds and 17th century Georgian architecture of Sutton Hall in York. It's close to the high hills, moors and valleys of the Yorkshire - a walker's and cyclist's wonderland. When not out tramping through their wonder, go trout fishing; to Wensleydale for its famous cheese; York for its medieval splendor and beautiful cathedral, and spooky Richmond Castle, where King Arthur is purported to rest.

Make time to visit Lincoln. Its cobblestone streets are lined by beautiful listed buildings, a Roman castle and Newport Arch, the only Roman arch still used by traffic. There's great shopping and museums celebrating the lives of the great thinkers, artists and poets who called this part of England home.

The cathedral, which was used to film 'The Da Vinci Code', is outstanding. The city is also surrounded by fantastic Roman gates, walls and other remains. Ely and Lincoln cathedrals are incomparable; and King's College in Cambridge is 'the finest flower of Gothic in Europe'.

This is a gentle England, filled with quiet villages and fields of tulips or lavender; ancient flint churches and deserted fenland; half-timber houses, thatch-roof cottages and moated manor houses. Coastal walks are spectacular as well, with a wealth of wildlife and nature reserves.

Norfolk is also part of this East Anglian beauty. Overstrand Road, perched on a cliff top above a glorious beach is right near the famous Norfolk Broads inland waterways.



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE'S CLAIM TO
FAME IS ROBIN HOOD'S SHERWOOD
FOREST AND SOME OF BRITAIN'S MOST
ESTABLISHED INLAND WATERWAYS.



Take a seaside drive from Hunstanton to Great Yarmouth, which has the Merrivale Model Village and Hippodrome Circus to delight the kids; and the amusement arcade and Water Clock at Southwold Pier in Suffolk will mean hours of fun.

Drive to the picturesque market town of Bury St Edmunds; watch the races or play the challenging 18 hole parkland golf course in Newmarket; haunt the antique shops and bookstores.

Rutland's rolling countryside forms England's smallest county and both Exton and Barnsdale are picture-perfect villages. The largest manmade lake in Western Europe, Rutland Water is known for its balance between watersports, tranquillity and wildlife conservation.

Nottinghamshire's claim to fame is Robin Hood's Sherwood Forest and some of Britain's most established inland waterways. And what better way to explore it than from a narrowboat, where ducks, swans and kingfishers will keep you company.

Further afield at Nottingham, you'll find the old Victorian Lace Market, Nottingham Castle Museum, Clumber Park, the ancient Craswell Crags and Newstead Abbey, former home of Lord Byron. Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem is said to be the oldest pub in England and there are plenty of fantastic restaurants.

Broadmarsh has the added distinction of a network of caves carved into the limestone seven centuries ago beneath it.

When you're not enjoying the lovely surroundings at Alvecotte or Burton-on-Trent, fish for dinner; play golf at the Belfry court; enjoy the Bass museum and Brewery tour. Tutbury Castle, the Potteries, Coventry Cathedral, Lichfield and the Peak District National Park are also delightful.

Kids will love the theme parks of Alton Towers, Drayton Manor Park, complete with zoo, and Branston Water Park. Everyone will enjoy Tamworth's castle and the Snowdome (you can ski all year on real snow); the Brewhouse Art Centre, which has a gallery, cinema, bistro and live entertainment, and Birmingham's Imax and shopping centers.

At Tatton Park in Knutsford you'll find a Georgian mansion full of art treasures and original furnishings; a Home Farm from the 1930's; and an Old Hall where the Middle Ages come to life.

Warwickshire, with its sturdy Tudor houses, is Shakespeare Country and nowhere is closer to its mystique than historic Stratford-Upon-Avon, with its carefully preserved Royal Shakespeare Theatres. Cruise through quiet meadows and peaceful villages along waterways in the riverboat; drive to Warwick Castle, a huge fortress; Blenheim Palace, of Churchill fame; Mary Arden's House and Anne Hathaway's Cottage. ▶

The verdant, rolling uplands of the Cotswolds are filled with quintessentially pretty English villages of mellow stone cottages festooned with flowering creepers and surrounded by rose gardens, antique shops and restaurants.

Exploring the hills and dales of this incredibly lovely part of England will keep you busy. The village of Gloucester, whose gorgeous Gothic cathedral appeared in Harry Potter movies; the alluring old Roman spa town of Bath, England's most architecturally stylish town; or Cheltenham, which is filled with elegant Regency buildings.

The Forest of Dean near Gloucester is a must-do. Visit Bath Abbey and excavated Roman Baths. Or simply go shopping. Explore Sudeley Castle, Stanway House and Snowhill Manor, all tucked into sheltered valleys.

Bedford Marina in Bedfordshire is perfect for those who love nature. Go walking, cycling, bird watching and fishing in the Country Park; catch an air display and the Shuttleworth collection at the same time; spend the day at Woburn Safari Park or Ely in Cambridgeshire.

This is also where you'll find Milton Keynes and the classic narrowboats you can use to explore the Grand Union Canal. Follow the trails from Great Missenden 'under the hills, into the woods, through the farmyard and into secret places' for a great family day out.

Waddesdon Manor, the Rothschild treasure house, is awesome; children will love the Bucks Railways Centre, Bletchley Park and Bekonscot, the oldest model village in the world.

Explore the 13 National Trust houses, mills and monuments in the county; go to Benjamin Disraeli's Hughenden Manor and the 13th century Chenies Manor; view the Thames from the stunning Cliveden Gardens.

Follow the Thames all the way to London, the city that coined the word 'cosmopolitan'. It houses some of the finest art galleries, museums and ancient buildings in the world. Its nightlife is bright and glitzy long after you fade. The British Museum, National Gallery, British Library and Tate Modern will keep you enthralled – even if you normally prefer the great outdoors. The Tower of London, Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, Waterloo and Westminster Abbey ooze historical significance.

For those with a passion for food, go to Borough Market. Nicknamed London's Larder, it has rows and rows of mouth-watering food stalls. Walk it off with a stroll along the buzzing South Bank.

Kent is a gentle place of incredible gardens, stately homes and towering castles, and spring is a riot of glorious color. Hever, with its lovely moated castle, shows off the best of it. Explore Churchill's ancestral home, Chartwell; and step back in time to Georgian England at Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Barham is much closer to the coast, the channel ports and the iconic white cliffs of Dover. If you're not playing golf, wander through Deal Castle's artillery works, battlements and basement; go exploring and shopping in Folkestone, Faversham and Canterbury.

Canterbury's imposing Gothic cathedral is worth a long look; you'll experience the sights, sounds and smells of the Middle Ages during the Canterbury Tales; and a river cruise will give you a chance to explore further.





TRANQUIL FARMLANDS
BORDERED BY HEDGEROWS AND
NARROW COUNTRY LANES GIVE
WAY TO A BATCH OF THATCHED
COTTAGES OR A HILLTOP CHURCH.



West Sussex continues the green tranquillity of pretty countryside and Balcombe's immense grounds complete with plenty of wildlife (including snow-white peacocks) will delight. You'll see a beautiful English country garden at nearby Nymans; and children love storybook Bodiam Castle. Harbour Park, Littlehampton, offers fun for everyone; and you'll get three attractions in one at Earnley Butterflies and Gardens.

Or go to town in Rye or Brighton. The kids will love to play Punch and Judy on Brighton Pier; if you've never seen a pebble beach before, you're in for a treat; and the lavish Royal Pavilion is a gloriously exotic testimony to the decadence of King George IV.

Catch a ferry to the Isle of Wight; wonder what it used to be like to live in Hurst Castle; enjoy Beaulieu and Bucklers Hard. The charming cathedral cities of Salisbury and Winchester can be seen on the way to the ancient mysteries of Stonehenge; and the views of the south coast from the 558 foot (170 meters) high Spinnaker Tower in Portsmouth are spectacular.

Bournemouth is only 20 minutes away, in neighboring Dorset. With 8 miles (13km) of beaches, it's one of England's favorite vacation centers. Play in the sun, the sea and the golf courses to your heart's content. Go shopping, to the theater or to the casino.

Devon is a delightful mix of scenery and things to do. Walk the Tarka Trail, surf Woolacombe and Saunton Sands, explore castles, gardens and country houses.

Rural Devon offers quaint options like Eggesford Barton where you can fish for salmon and trout in the River Taw; and enjoy the beautiful woodlands. Or visit the pretty village of Chulmleigh nearby and play the par 3 golf course to your heart's delight.

Discover the spectacular North Devon beaches and wild moorland of Dartmoor and Exmoor. The untouched villages of Lynton, where Exmoor meets the sea, and Lynmouth, the traditional harbor beneath its cliffs, are amazing.

In amongst the towering cliffs, pebble beaches, sandy coves and secluded bays of Devon's south coast, you'll chance upon Kingsteignton. Try your hand at catching salmon or play golf on the rural courses; hire a pony and trek across the moors; or simply sit and watch the river changing as the tide ebbs and flows.

Visit Bicton Park and Castle Drago; feed the animals at Becky Falls; take the kids to Paignton Zoo and the House of Marbles. Drive around Teignmouth and Dawlish Warren for wonderful coastal scenery; and ride the Pigion to Dartmouth steam railway.

Built about the River Dart, Dartmouth is a picture postcard of 16th century merchant's houses. Tranquil farmlands bordered by hedgerows and narrow country lanes give way to a batch of thatched cottages or a hilltop church. It's also very convenient to places like Salcombe, Exeter, with its majestic Norman cathedral, Plymouth and, of course, Torquay, a place of golden sandy beaches.

Hope Cove nestles in a secluded valley in a National Trust Coastal Park, a place of sandy beaches, streams, trout lakes and bracken-covered hills. The pubs are good. So are the cliff top walks overlooking Bigbury Bay.

Cornwall, considered to be England's very own Riviera is packed with amazing places to stay, things to do and sights to see. Its moors are bleak and high, so it's the extensive coastline that draws in the crowds. Within easy driving distance are Buckland Abbey, the National Marine Aquarium and, further away, the renowned Eden Project, the world's largest greenhouse. ►



NO-ONE WILL EVER
SEE AS MANY
HUES OF GREEN AS
THEY DID ON THE
EMERALD ISLE.



Bocastle, with its 400 year old Pixie Cottage; King Arthur's Tintagel; and Port Isaac, is breathtakingly pretty. Trevellas has miles of surf beach; a seal sanctuary in easy reach; and the old world villages of St Agnes and Perranporth to explore.

The cliff walks around the cathedral city of Truro, on the south coast of Cornwall, are memorable; Portscatho, on the Roseland Peninsula, is an Area of Outstanding Beauty; or take the Plym Valley trail into Dartmoor National Park.

You'll find Mawgan at the heart of The Lizard, Cornwall's southernmost peninsula, another Area of Outstanding Beauty. Fish the Helford River; or walk for miles along spectacular cliffs, through sun-filtered woodland, on the Goonhilly Downs.

Tywardreath may be hard to pronounce, but it's very easy to enjoy. Overlooking St Austell Bay evokes memories of Daphne du Maurier; the many coves and secluded beaches bring pirates and smugglers to mind.

This is England. Not a musty, stuffy old land. But a vibrant, often-idyllic place of gently verdant countryside, rugged moors and mountains, world-beating cities and a past that has helped shape us all.

IRELAND

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Many people think of Ireland as a luminously green island off England. But it's actually hundreds of islands and islets, most of them pounded by the relentless Atlantic Ocean.

Maybe it's the level of precipitation that accounts for the large number of pubs but this is a good thing ... because if getting wet doesn't appeal, duck into the nearest local, grab a Guinness and settle in for a riot of Irish fun and music.

One of the other passions that has shaped Ireland is religion ... right from the days druids held sway. You'll find stone circles and dolmens, early Christian churches and sacred sites, just about everywhere you go.

Another popular pastime is fishing and you won't find anywhere better than around the pretty village of Drumshambo in County Leitrim. When you've had your fill, go horse riding, cycling or hiking on the slopes of Sliabh an Iarann and the Arigna Mountains; play golf or sail at Carrick-on-Shannon and Ballinamore.

Historians can explore Drumshambo's prehistoric past; wander through the abbeys and archaeological sites in the Heritage area of Fenagh; or be impressed by the ancient fortifications at Ballymote Castle in Sligo.

The Glencar waterfall's romantic beauty inspired WB Yeats to verse. Mind you, so did much of the countryside around here, as you'll discover on the Yeats Country drive.

The remarkable Costello Chapel is the second smallest in the world; the Lake Isle of Inishfree on Lough Gill is a must-do; and tour beautifully restored Parkes Castle.

Legends have been formed from Galway's rich beauty. There's Connemara's stunning combination of rugged coastline, mountains, moorland and clear lakes; and the often windswept Aran Islands – unspoilt Inis Meain, Inis Mor, upon which you'll find an almost 3000 year old fort, and little Inis Oirr, with its lovely sandy beach.

Galway city seems to celebrate life permanently; Clifden, Westport, Kinvara and Ballyvaughan are full of good restaurants and pubs. Tramp the curved cobblestone streets of Galway past the musicians, painters, jugglers, puppeteers and magicians to arched bridges, stone cathedrals and medieval ruins; browse for handcrafted Aran sweaters, crystal, Claddagh rings, and pottery at the many markets.

Explore the old monastic city of Clonmacnoise on the River Shannon, and the 5000 year old farm found under blanket bog at Ceide Fields.

The serene beauty of Kylemore Abbey's turrets reflected in the lake will take your breath away; Leenane, Killary Harbour and the Ashleigh Falls will have your camera clicking; so will the views from the Sky Road; and the sandy beaches at Roundstone are lovely.

Dublin, on the opposite coast, is booming. Just about every street has an art-house cinema, coffeehouse, elegant shop, gallery or restaurant on it – filled to bursting during summer. The story of Guinness, Dublin's 'black blood', is told via a high-tech museum.

However, there's still enough of the old Dublin to keep everyone happy. Elegant Georgian mansions stand the test of time in Merrion, Fitzwilliam, Montjoy and Parnell Squares or explore museums and wander through its lovely parks.

Bodyke is the ideal position from which to explore Ireland's west and south. The gray lunar-like rocks of Burren, where lovely wildflowers hide in the cracks and you'll find dolmen and megalithic tombs; the stunning Tralee peninsula; the wonderful scenery around the Glen of Atherlow in Tipperary; Banratty Castle; and the smelly ghost at Leap Castle.

The old fishing village of Mountshannon perches on the edge of Lough Derg, one of Ireland's biggest lakes. If you're not spending your day playing on the lake, take a boat to the ancient monastic settlement on Holy Isle, complete with holy well.

You'll find ring forts, famine graves and dolmen in the surrounding countryside; brightly painted terraces in Athlone; Kilaloe is quaint, especially at dusk; and Birr Castle everything you'd expect. Adare is one of Ireland's prettiest villages; restored Bunratty Castle is simply magnificent; and the pocket-size museum in Limerick has a fantastic collection of Celtic and medieval treasures.



KISS THE BLARNEY STONE AT BLARNEY CASTLE; CORK CITY HAS THE COUNTRY'S BEST FOOD MARKET; OR GO TO ONE OF THE EXCELLENT PUBS AND RESTAURANTS ON THE DRIVE FROM KINSALE'S HARBOR TO SKIBBEREEN. THE VIEWS OF THE TEMPESTUOUS OCEAN WILL HAVE YOU STOPPING OFTEN.



The Cliffs of Moher rise vertically from the ocean and the views from their precipitous edges are incredible. Hike the spectacular way-marked walking trail from Doolin to the coast near Lisdoonvarna. At night, catch great Irish music and great food at a multitude of pubs and restaurants.

Kiss the Blarney Stone at Blarney Castle; Cork City has the country's best food market; or go to one of the excellent pubs and restaurants on the drive from Kinsale's harbor to Skibbereen. The views of the tempestuous ocean will have you stopping often.

Then to Crookhaven, on Mizen Head, and Bantry Bay; up to the two big peninsulas that dominate Kerry's wild, rugged coast; and, finally, Killarney's purple mountains. This is the country where the 'thatched, whitewashed cottages, stone walls and donkey in the main street' images from postcards come to life.

Stay at Skariff, on the shores of Lough Derg, or Waterville, overlooking Banlinskelligs Bay – both on the awesomely scenic Ring of Kerry route. The delightfully small Kenmare, poised between the two big peninsulas, is positioned to explore the equally scenic Ring of Breara; the famous tunnel road to Glengarriff; and Killarney's national park, especially the Gap of Dunloe and Mt Brandon.

It's a given that most will come home with memory sticks full of photos. Some will also come home with CDs of the rollicking Irish music. No-one will ever see as many hues of green as they did on the Emerald Isle ... no matter how hard they look.

SCOTLAND

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When you see the wild moors, raw mountains and deep mirrors they call lochs, you may begin to understand why the Scots are so feisty. Its untamed, sometimes brutal, beauty has forged a people who have learnt the value of humor in the face of adversity and a wee dram of whisky when all else fails!

Nothing brings Scotland to mind as much as the highlands do. In this deliciously tempestuous part of the world, the adventurous don warm gear and get going! Watch Ospreys raise their young at Loch Garten in spring; laze on the sandy beaches of Nairn and Findhorn in summer; or ski Cairngorm in winter.

Visit the ruins of Elgin, beautiful Loch Morlich, the welcoming Moray Coast and the dramatic castles in Inverness. Eat salmon freshly caught from the Rivers Dee, Don and Spey and whisky distilled with their clear waters.

Stay at the village of Carrbridge, with its Landmark Forest Heritage Park, South Laggan, on the shores of Loch Oich, or Aviemore, only minutes away from the ski slopes. Fish for trout, play golf, go mountain biking, clay pigeon shooting, rock climbing, abseiling, or whatever watersport takes your fancy.

Drive north past Inverness to aptly-named Cape Wrath for sheer cliffs, sandy bays and fierce Atlantic storms. On the way, stop off at Channory Point, in the Moray Firth, to watch bottlenose dolphins.

Set off south to the lovely Glen Coe, via Loch Ness and the Great Glen. Ben Nevis begs to be climbed (or simply gazed at). Head west to Eilean Donan Castle, on the way to the Isle of Skye, and down past Mallaig to



PERTSHIRE IS WHERE THE LOWLANDS BEGIN, RICH WITH SOME OF THE MOST REMARKABLE WOODLANDS IN EUROPE. THIS IS WHERE YOU'LL FIND THE WORLD'S HIGHEST HEDGE, AND EUROPE'S OLDEST TREE, SOME 5000 YEARS OLD.





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the remote Ardnamurchan peninsula; or east to the Cairngorms National Park, in the center of which is the National Trust Mar Lodge Estate.

Perthshire is where the lowlands begin, rich with some of the most remarkable woodlands in Europe. This is where you'll find the world's highest hedge, and Europe's oldest tree, some 5000 years old. The fact that it straddles the Highland Boundary Fault has also made it Scotland's undisputed 'adventure capital'.

Cliff jump or canyon in Pitlochry's deep river gorge, Killiecrankie; walk its ancient woodlands and relive the historic battle fought there; watch the fascinating salmon leaps at the Pitlochry dam.

Aberfeldy has both the mightiest of British rivers, the Tay, and Loch Tay right on its doorstep. Walk Robert Burns' Birks of Aberfeldy and the Falls of Moness, discover underwater archaeology at the Crannog Centre; play golf on one of the many fairways.

Gleneagles has a world-renowned golf course, or take your clubs with you on the drive to Largo. Apart from great coastal scenery, there are some of the best links golf courses in the world.

If golf isn't your game, you'll enjoy the lovely little fishing villages filled with antique and craft shops, castles and historic monuments, beaches and coves. And, when you get there, you'll want to stay in Leven, with its whitewashed houses with pan-tiled roofs or crow-stepped gables, fishing boats and lobster pots, fine restaurants and friendly pubs.

Loch Leven is famous for Lochleven Castle, where Mary Queen of Scots was imprisoned, as well as its brown trout and huge bird population.

Renaissance-built Falkland Palace has a tennis court built in 1539; the old buildings and cobbled streets of the Royal Burgh of Culross take you back in time; Inchcolm Abbey's monastic buildings are marvellously preserved.

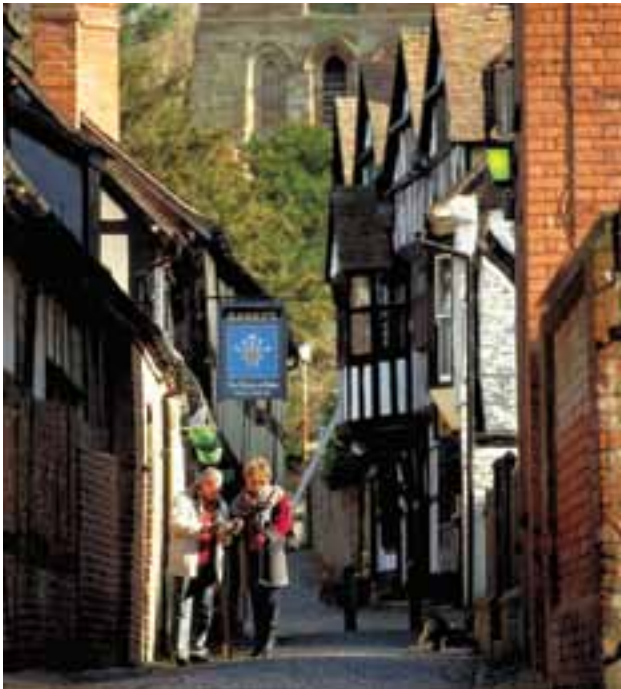
Just across the Firth of Forth is medieval Edinburgh, a wonderful mixture of superb old architecture and ultra-modern pleasures. The Castle looks over it all from its precipitous perch, as it has for centuries. The hilly, cobblestoned city center's crowning glory is the old Royal Mile, a warren of tunnels, tenements, vaults and closes.

The Firth is often filled with boats of all descriptions; Arthur's Seat has the best views of Edinburgh; the Writer's Museum is worth going to just to see the building; and Pentland Hills offers Europe's longest dry ski slope.

Although there are plenty of shops in Edinburgh, Glasgow actually offers much more sophisticated shopping in its high street stores, designer labels and specialty outlets. While out and about, drive to Melrose Abbey, where Robert the Bruce's heart is buried.

Further west lie the scenic foothills of the Trossachs. Kinlochard overlooks the tranquil Loch Art and is a place of dramatic mountain and glen scenery. Mystic Aberfoyle, home to the Trossachs Discovery Centre and Queen Elizabeth, is a fitting starting point for many wonderful walking and cycling routes.

The placid waters of nearby Loch Lomond are edged by green lawns and glades of ancient oaks. Ben Lomond rises majestically from the far shore and completes the breathtaking picture. Rob Roy's grave can be found in Balquhider; Glenturret, at Crieff, is Scotland's oldest whisky distillery; romantic Culzean Castle and Country Park, high on a cliff near Maybole is a must; and the volcanic mound on which Stirling Castle sits can be seen for miles. ▶



WANDER THE PARK SPOTTING WILDLIFE, INCLUDING SOME OF BRITAIN'S RAREST BIRDS, AND VISITING HISTORIC SITES.



Seaside Oban, from which you can reach the Isle of Lismore, and Kilmeford by Oban Argyll are less than two hours away. Here, the countryside is tranquil and 19th-century stone cottages grace the shores of beautiful Loch Melfort. Enjoy watersports, fish, kayak on the ocean, cycle or walk in the hills and oak woods, drive through breathtaking scenery; go on one of the numerous ecotours and wildlife cruises.

A little south and you get to the Isle of Arran in the Firth of Clyde. It may be an island, but there are no fewer than seven golf courses! The most temperate of the Highland islands, you'll find stags roaming the glens, seals popping their head out of the ocean and golden eagle and ptarmigan, among others, in the hills. Take the kids to South Bank Farm Park and the adventure playground at Brodick Castle.

The quiet river community of Dailly is close to Ayrshire's picturesque coastline. Go to Culzean for cliffside views, caves, smugglers and canons; experience the healing powers of the mystical Blue Stones of Old Dailly.

Whether you go to spot Nessie in Loch Ness, experience the wild nightlife in Glasgow, tramp the heather-clad highlands or trace your historical roots, Scotland is a country that will grab you and leave you breathless.

WALES

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You're probably used to hearing about great beaches in the tropics. But this tiny country, off on the western edge of Britain, has many long, sweeping swathes of white sand, clean blue water and a host of marine life.

Then there are all the rivers and lakes that dot the countryside. Wales is also mountainous, with three great National Parks and four Areas of Outstanding Beauty. Combine that with the kind of climate that's great to walk in, and you have a great place to vacation!

One of those particularly beautiful areas is the Gower Peninsula, with more miles of Heritage coastline than anywhere else. And there's no better base than Mid Glamorgan, ideally situated between Cardiff, Swansea and the Heritage Coast. Think of it! 160 miles (257km) of unspoilt beaches waiting to be played on.

Follow the footsteps of the Marcher Lords through the Wye Valley; discover what a miner's life was like at Rhondda Heritage Park at Trehafod or Big Pit at Blaenafon; play golf, fish or try watersports.

Bridgend is crammed with specialist shops and a designer outlet center; shop Swansea's permanent market for craft and visit the excellent National Waterfront Museum; Cardiff's museum and Techniquest are also top class; Porthcawl and Barry Island both have big adventure theme parks.

Caerphilly, Coity and Newcastle Castles are marvellous; the Vale of Glamorgan's Valeways Trail is worth the walk; Porthcawl's 19th century harbor is very pretty; Newton has a Norman church and St John's Well; and Kenfig National Nature Reserve is the place for birds and wildlife.

When you arrive at the little village of Llanfynydd you'll understand why a popular BBC TV series was set here. And, if you love the countryside and incredible gardens, you'll be in heaven.



Right nearby, you'll find the National Botanic Gardens in nearby Tywi Valley; the hauntingly beautiful Aberglasney; the National Trust's Dinefwr Park, where you have a breathtaking 360° view of it all from the top of its castle; and the Hywel Dda Centre, created for one of the great Welsh kings.

Coastal Laugharne, at the mouth of the River Taf, was a favorite of playwright, Dylan Thomas. So are St Martin's Church, the Norman Castle overlooking the estuary and Laugharne Park, which offers a magnificent view ... night and day.

Tenby, on the western edge of Carmarthen Bay, has a charming harbor overlooked by pastel Georgian townhouses. Its steep streets offer curious nooks and crannies, a section of old town wall and attractive architecture. Just offshore is Caldey Island, with lovely walks, an interesting old monastery and a handsomely restored Tudor Merchant's House.

Then there's the Pembrokeshire National Park. On a peninsula, it's spectacularly beautiful and, offshore, the waters are filled with basking sharks, grey seals, leatherback turtles, dolphins and a whole lot more. Don't miss Haverfordwest, between jutting cliffs in a corner of St Brides Bay, and tiny Saint David's, Britain's smallest city.

When you're not deep-sea fishing, sailing, diving, surfing or boardsailing, cliff climbing or abseiling, you can play golf in Haverfordwest and Mildford Haven. Otherwise wander the park spotting wildlife, including some of Britain's rarest birds, and visiting historic sites, like the hill forts and burial chambers of Preseli Hills.

Walk the glorious Pembrokeshire Coastal Path – try Barafundle to St Govan's, where you'll have to look for St Govan's Chapel, impossibly wedged into a slot in the cliffs just above the sea and overlooking bizarre rock formations, dashed by wild surf.

Wales' holiest place is the superb hidden cathedral at St David's. If you like ruins, also go to the Bishop's Palace. Carew Castle, on the other hand, looms romantically over the river. Complete with a restored Elizabethan tidal mill, there's also a good walk that takes in an 11th century Celtic cross.

They say mid-Wales is a fantastic place to get lost and Builth Wells is a great place to come home to. This is a place of green hills, occasional farmhouses and plenty of sheep.

Elan Valley's huge dams and woodlands are wonderful. While in the area, the Gilfach Nature Reserve has three themed rooms; and you can watch wild Red Kites being fed from just 54 yards (50 meters) away at Gigrin Farm.

Hay-on-Wye, right on the English border, has 'millions' of book shops; and the Brecon Beacons National Park is great for walking, caving, kayaking, mountain biking or just enjoying the scenery from the top of Pen-y-Fan.

New Quay, in the middle of Cardigan Bay, is the only summer residence of bottle-nosed dolphins and is easily accessible from Pannal, which overlooks the River Dovey on the edge of Snowdonia National Park. A visit to the slate-filled, old rebel capital, Machynlleth, is always interesting; the Ceredigion coast is full of award-winning beaches, smuggler's coves and spectacular scenery.

The Bondant Gardens and the Fairy Glen are feasts for the eyes; delve into the earth at the Llechwedd Slate Caverns and Sygyn Copper Mines; there are castles, secluded lakes and beautiful bridges all around.

It's said that all the wonders are in north Wales and it's certainly a walker's paradise. And, from Caernarfon, it's easy to enjoy it all. Climb Snowdon, the highest mountain; enjoy the highest waterfall, Pistyll Rhaeadr; explore the idyllic Menai Straits and Island of Anglesey. Caernarfon Castle's polygonal towers and color-banded masonry set it apart. And Conway Valley is worth the short drive.

Rhyll has Ruddlan Castle, the Gresford Bells, St Winefride's Well, the Wrexham Steeple and the Overton yew trees. While the Llangollen bridge and Dinas Brân, of King Arthur fame, are a short drive away.

Mind you, nothing's that far away in Wales. In fact, it would only take an afternoon to travel from one end of Wales to the other. The haunting voices of the choirs and the spectacular vistas along the way will, however, take much, much longer to fade from your memory.