



THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

# ACCESSIBLE BRITAIN



Motability



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- **Enhanced rate mobility component of Personal Independence Payment**
- **Higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance**
- **Enhanced rate mobility component of Adult Disability Payment (Scotland)**
- **Higher rate mobility component of Child Disability Payment (Scotland)**
- **War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement**
- **Armed Forces Independence Payment**

you can exchange it to lease a new car, scooter or powered wheelchair through the Motability Scheme.

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# ACCESSIBLE BRITAIN



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The publishers and authors have done their best to ensure the accuracy and currency of all the information contained in *The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain*; however, they can accept no responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained as a result of information or advice contained in the guide.

We've gone to a lot of effort to ensure that this edition of *The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain* is accurate and up-to-date. However, things change – opening hours and entry fees change seasonally, attractions improve their facilities, restaurants raise prices and close down. If you feel like we've got it wrong, or there is something new that we ought to know about, we'd really like to hear from you. Please send your comments to [accessibleguide@mo.co.uk](mailto:accessibleguide@mo.co.uk).

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THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

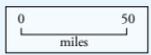
# ACCESSIBLE BRITAIN

Fully revised tenth edition



[roughguides.com](http://roughguides.com)

Click on the map to  
access the region



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Click on any chapter to find your next day out

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Mark is a former Royal Marines Commando who completed tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He was injured in Afghanistan on Christmas Eve 2007 and became the UK's first triple amputee from the conflict. Since then, he has become a successful author, motivational speaker and Britain's most successful ever Invictus Games athlete winning 11 medals, including four gold, and the Spirit of the Games award, following which he won BBC South West Sports Personality of the Year. Prince Harry dubbed him "Britain's answer to Superman."

The Amazon film *#NoLimits – The Mark Ormrod Documentary* tells his story up to 2017. In 2020, he was awarded an MBE for services to the Armed Forces and Veteran Community before winning Pride of Britain's Fundraiser of the Year in 2021 after completing an ultratriathlon that raised over £600,000. He is currently working on his second book and has just obtained an open water swimming world record. The father of three is married to Becky and does adaptive CrossFit and Brazilian jiu-jitsu in his spare time.

## Foreword

Welcome to the *Rough Guide to Accessible Britain*, brought to you in collaboration with Rough Guides and Motability Operations. Now in its 10th edition, the Guide continues to be an invaluable resource for inclusive adventures and days out across Britain. This Guide is more than just a travel book; it's a celebration of accessibility and inclusivity, offering a wealth of information for those with diverse needs.

From the busy streets of London to the idyllic landscapes of the Scottish Highlands, this latest edition covers an array of destinations and venues, ensuring that the beauty and diversity of Britain are accessible to all. It's not just about the "where" but also the "how", providing practical advice and helpful tips on navigating various locations with confidence.

As we celebrate this landmark 10th edition, the Guide reflects over a decade of progress in making Britain's attractions more inclusive. Each review is thoughtfully detailed, ensuring that experiences are not only accessible but also genuinely enjoyable and worthwhile. Whether it's historical landmarks, beautiful parks or vibrant cultural events, there's something for everyone.

This Guide is more than a directory; it offers its readers the opportunity to travel with a level of confidence, freedom and spontaneity that can be hard to find. The *Rough Guide to Accessible Britain* empowers everyone, regardless of any access needs, to experience the rich tapestry of British landscapes, venues and culture.

Having used the *Rough Guide to Accessible Britain* for many family trips, with a particular highlight being the Tarka Trail and Tunnels Beach, we can't wait to explore more in 2024. With a range of new venues added this year, we are most looking forward to visiting The East Midlands and East Anglia: High Lodge Thetford Forest.

**Mark Ormrod MBE**

# About this book

Produced in collaboration with Motability Operations, who operate the Motability Scheme, the *Rough Guide to Accessible Britain* is designed to be good to read and easy to use. The guide is filled with **inspirational** and **practical advice** to help you plan your next day out. Our team of dedicated reviewers, all with personal experience of either physical or cognitive conditions, have visited each venue in the guide to provide even more inclusive information.

The introductory **highlights** section – celebrating some of the finest accessible attractions in Britain – is a good place to start. The **ten colour-coded regional chapters** that follow are packed with reviews of a wide range of sights to suit all interests and abilities. Each review includes everything you need to know about facilities for visitors with disabilities and their families or carers, plus ideas for places to eat on site or nearby.

In each chapter (with the exception of London), we have included a beautiful **scenic drive**, complete with a colour route map and suggested stops along the way. We've also written a **town review** for each region, which looks at access both around the town and at some of its main attractions. The following symbols have been used to highlight these features:



**Scenic drive**



**Town review**

Our reviewers try to consider all the **questions and concerns** you may have, but if you can it's always a good idea to call or email the venue to check on current conditions at an attraction, especially if you have specific requirements. Many places can be enjoyed independently, but we have made it clear where some assistance will help you make the most of your visit.

At the end of the guide, you'll find **useful contacts** to help you plan holidays and days out in Britain, from travel advice to finding accommodation.

**If you have any thoughts on this guide, or would like to order an alternative version, such as large print or Braille, please email [accessibleguide@motabilityoperations.co.uk](mailto:accessibleguide@motabilityoperations.co.uk).**

## Symbols used

-  Assisted wheelchair access
-  Non-assisted wheelchair access
-  Facilities for mobility impaired people
-  Rest seats for mobility impaired people
-  Accessible toilets
-  Disabled car parking
-  Mobility scooters available
-  Induction loops
-  BSL interpreters
-  Facilities for blind and visually impaired people
-  Assistance dogs allowed
-  Café/refreshments on site
-  Restaurant on site
-  Free entry for carers

### Codes for entry fees

- [D] Disabled
- [C] Carer
- [A] Adult
- [5–15s] Child; with applicable ages
- [Con] Concessions
- [Fam] Family; two adults and two children, unless otherwise specified

## AUTHOR PICKS

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Our team of authors travelled around the country reviewing attractions, to give you a detailed and accurate account of over 200 sights and days out in the UK. We asked them to choose a place that they especially enjoyed visiting or which particularly impressed them – here are some of their own personal favourites.

### Sarah Alexander

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"I particularly love **Stanwick Lakes** because of how versatile it is; whether I go with my young nephews and they spend the day playing in the multiple play areas or I take my dogs for a walk around the lake, it's always a lovely day out and really enjoyable."

### Dean Chaffer

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"Staging a diverse musical programme from classical concerts to rock and pop, the **Glasshouse International Centre for Music** offers a fully accessible musical experience. With superb views of the River Tyne, it's an excellent place to visit and enjoy live music."

### Mark Cooper

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"**The Scottish Parliament** impressed me because it manages to be a working tourist attraction and a working legislature simultaneously. The building has accessibility very much in mind, with staff only too happy to assist you to make your visit as seamless as possible."

### Mark Davidson

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"A visit to Armagh in Northern Ireland isn't complete without seeing the **Navan Centre and Fort**. One of Ireland's most important archeological sites, it provides a valuable insight into how people lived in this area during that period, 3,000 years ago. A far cry from normal life, I sat in a reconstruction of a traditional house and heard about life all those centuries ago. Listening to tales from that time painted a fantastic picture of life as an Iron Age settler, although the smoke billowing out from the real fire made my eyes water somewhat!"

### Helen Dolphin

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"I really love a visit to **High Lodge Thetford Forest**. It's just so good for the soul. There's so many different walks to do through the forest and loads of play areas for children too. Visiting forests is not always easy as a wheelchair user but it's completely possible here."

### Sophie Etheridge

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"As an open water swimmer, a trip to London never feels complete without a trip to **Parliament Hill Lido**. It is a great venue accessibility-wise and all the staff there are so helpful. Despite it being tricky to get into (in a wheelchair), the onsite café is filled with things from local artists and writers, great produce and of course they sell wonderful hot chocolate too! The lido is in the perfect location, being on the edge of Hampstead Heath – ideal for a wander or a family picnic!"

### Lucinda Hallett

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"I really loved visiting the **National Maritime Museum** in Falmouth. It's perfect for any weather and is close to the town centre, which has lots of nice restaurants. The museum has a clear layout, making it easy to get around, with lots of interactive displays. Staff are lovely and well trained for access needs. My favourite parts of the museum are being able to watch shipwrights making boats using traditional techniques and tools and seeing the fish outside in the marina itself through the huge underwater windows!"

## Jane MacNamee

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"Few places can surpass the serenity and splendour of the **Mawddach Estuary** in Snowdonia, which makes it a firm favourite. I've been visiting it and enjoying the Mawddach trail for the past twenty years in all seasons and all weathers. It's a glorious 15km trail for all abilities, following the course of the river from Dolgellau out to sea, surrounded by mountains and crossing the impressive bridge at the mouth of the estuary over to Barmouth. It's popular and deservedly so, but there is always a sense of peace here in the company of wading birds and the magical light of the tides."

## Emma Muldoon

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"I loved visiting the **Royal Yacht Britannia** in Edinburgh. I didn't expect to enjoy it as much as I did, but it was such a fun experience exploring the Queen's former floating home. The audio tour of the Yacht was fun and interesting and the views across the water from the Royal Deck Tea Room are lovely. What is great about this attraction is that you don't have to be a fan of the Royal Family to enjoy it. Who would have thought a yacht would be accessible, but wheelchair access is amazing throughout the entire boat. Very impressive!"

## Louise Neeson

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"A particular highlight for us was **Seamus Heaney HomePlace**. We had never been before and really enjoyed being tourists at home. A beautiful building, accessible throughout and entertaining for all."

## Jim Rawlings

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"Comprising colourful heathland next to an open beach, **Dunwich Heath** is a tranquil spot right next to the RSPB reserve of Minsmere."

## Gillian Scotford and Jane Carver

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Co-founders of Accessible Derbyshire ([www.accessiblederbyshire.org](http://www.accessiblederbyshire.org)), Gillian and Jane reviewed **Carsington Water** for the Peak District Scenic Drive. They say, "Carsington Water, surrounded by stunning scenery, is a wonderful full day out. Fishing, sailing, cycling or a gentle stroll, there is something for everyone!"

## Viv Watton

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"When you have a child with special needs, going out and about is rarely easy, but one thing that makes a huge difference is staff that are understanding and helpful and Legoland has always been great at this. The real standout is the **Total Sensory Space** that they introduced in 2018, which is so well-equipped it could almost be a destination in its own right! Knowing there is a haven to retreat to if everything is getting a bit too much really takes the stress away."

## George Weller

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"I really enjoyed visiting **Wellcome Collection**. The way they mix science, art and history makes it a great place to visit with friends, as there's something to capture everyone's interest. I particularly love the library and reading room, which provide a quiet space to read or just take a break in what is otherwise a very loud part of London."

## Emma West

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"It's impossible not to come away from Brunel's **SS Great Britain** full of fascinating stories and facts, as well as inspiration and admiration for what was endured and achieved in this ship's lifetime. You get all of that together with a warm welcome at this attraction, which has made huge efforts in terms of access. It's somewhere my whole family love to go back to again and again (which you easily can as tickets last a year!)."

# FAMILY HIGHLIGHTS

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Folly Farm

**Anderton Boat Lift** (Northwest, p.162) A spectacular feat of Victorian engineering, the Boat Lift boasts fantastic access, at both the visitor centre and on the boat trips.

**Folly Farm** (Wales, p.228) An award-winning site combining a farm, play areas, a vintage funfair and zoo on a two-hundred-acre site near the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.

**Jorvik Viking Centre** (Northeast and Yorkshire, p.180) Travel back in time to tenth-century York and take in the sights, sounds and smells of a Viking city.

**London Transport Museum** (London, p.28) A fascinating, hands-on introduction to London's transport systems, with excellent access throughout.

**The Warner Bros. Studio Tour: The Making of Harry Potter** (Southeast, p.54) Wander around the fabulous sets from the Harry Potter films, including Diagon Alley and Hogwarts' Great Hall.



# HERITAGE HIGHLIGHTS

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**Abbotsford** (Scotland, p.211) Attractive grounds, an ultra-modern accessible visitor centre and the atmospheric former home of Sir Walter Scott make Abbotsford a great place to visit.

**Giant's Causeway** (N. Ireland, p.235) Take an accessible shuttle bus to see the 40,000 basalt columns that make up Northern Ireland's only UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**IWM Duxford** (E. Midlands & E. Anglia, p.115) Britain's finest museum of military aviation has masses to see, and access requirements have been carefully considered.

**Royal Shakespeare Company** (W. Midlands & West Country, p.137) After extensive renovations, access to one of Britain's finest arts organisations is now better than ever.

**St Paul's Cathedral** (London, p.27) Sir Christopher Wren's iconic masterpiece has lift access to the crypt and excellent facilities for those with sensory impairments.



Giant's Causeway



# FREE HIGHLIGHTS

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Whitworth Art Gallery



Scottish National Portrait Gallery



Portstewart Strand

**National Galleries Scotland** (Scotland, p.205) Both the art and the accessibility are world-class at the Scottish National Gallery and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

**Portstewart Strand** (N. Ireland, p.236) Two miles of glorious golden sand on the Derry coast – free to pedestrians and only a few pounds to take your car onto the beach for an accessible seaside experience.

**The Whitworth** (Northwest, p.159) Manchester University's Whitworth Gallery succeeds in making great art accessible to all, with paintings, sculptures and textiles imaginatively displayed.

**Walks on Wheels** (West Midlands and West Country, p.142) Breathe in the exquisite Cotswolds countryside on one of fourteen Walks on Wheels, a collection of beautiful accessible rambles.

**Wellcome Collection** (London, p.25) Henry Wellcome's collection of medicinal curiosities forms the basis of a series of excellent science and art exhibitions.



# ACTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

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## **Celtic Quest Coasteering** (Wales, p.225)

Experience a unique activity that uses the sea as a gym – enthusiasm and willingness to give it a try are more important than being able to swim.

## **Gliding with Walking on Air** (Scotland, p.200)

This committed, passionate charity opens up the exhilarating sport of gliding to people with disabilities.

**iFLY Indoor Skydiving** (Northwest, p.157) Staff are able to help individuals with a range of disabilities to experience the thrill of freefall, in the comfort of an indoor centre.

## **Sandcastle Waterpark** (Northwest, p.154)

Flumes, slides, a wave machine and excellent accessibility make the UK's largest indoor waterpark a thrilling place to let yourself go.

## **Lee Valley White Water Centre** (Southeast, p.52)

Everyone can have a go at rafting the Hertfordshire rapids at this site which was the venue for the 2012 Olympic white-water events.



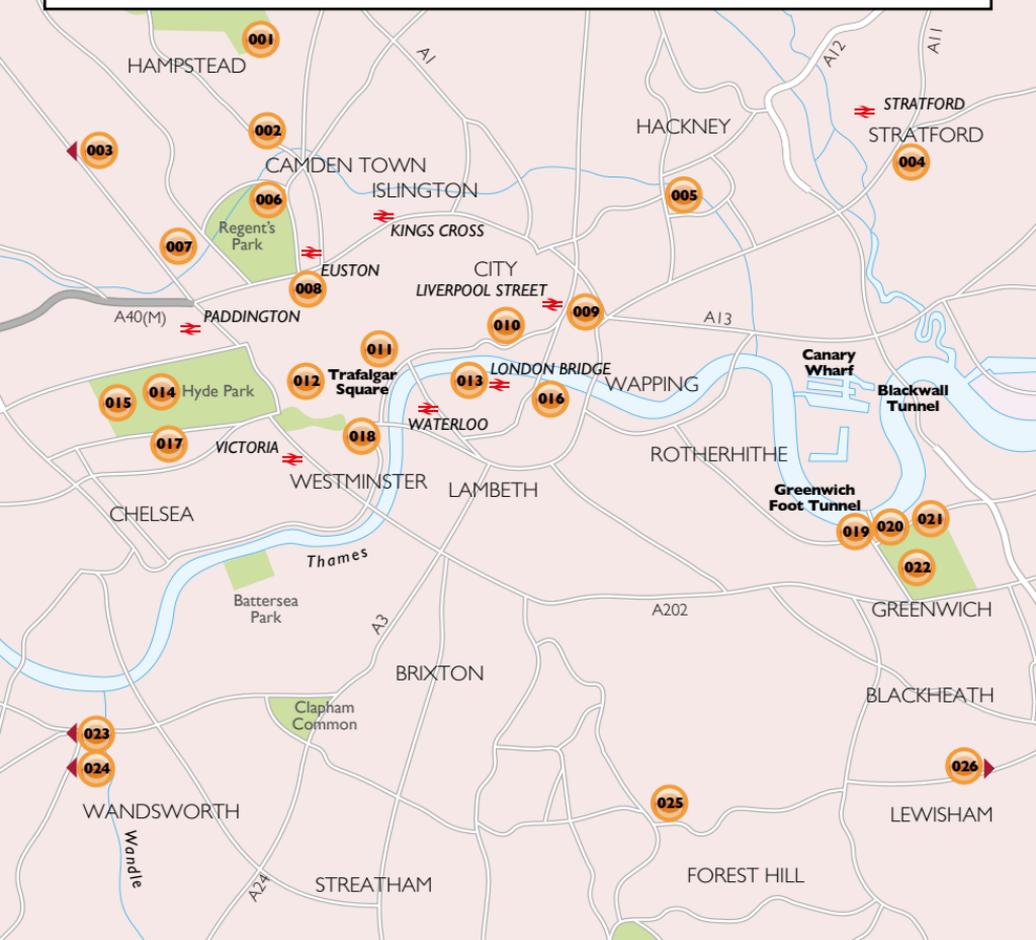
Lee Valley White Water Centre

## iFLY Indoor Skydiving



# London

- 001** Parliament Hill Lido
- 002** The Roundhouse
- 003** Wembley Stadium
- 004** Discover Children's Story Centre
- 005** Young V&A (formerly V&A Museum of Childhood)
- 006** ZSL London Zoo and Regent's Park
- 007** Lord's Cricket Ground
- 008** Wellcome Collection
- 009** Spitalfields Market
- 010** St Paul's Cathedral
- 011** London Transport Museum
- 012** Royal Academy of Arts
- 013** Tate Modern
- 014** Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens
- 015** Kensington Palace
- 016** The View from The Shard
- 017** The Science Museum
- 018** Westminster Abbey
- 019** Greenwich to Westminster River Trip
- 020** The Cutty Sark
- 021** Old Royal Naval College
- 022** National Maritime Museum and Royal Observatory
- 023** WWT London Wetland Centre
- 024** Kew Gardens
- 025** Horniman Museum and Gardens
- 026** Eltham Palace



## 001 Parliament Hill Lido

**Address:** Parliament Hill Fields Lido, Gordon House Road, London NW5 1LT **Web:** [www.parliamenthilllido.org](http://www.parliamenthilllido.org) **Tel:** 020 74853873 **Hours:** hours vary depending on the season, check the website for details  
**Dates:** open year-round **Entry:** [A]£4.50 [Con]£2.70 [Child]£1.40; 3 hour sessions [A]£7.80 [Con]£4.70 [Child]£2.40; prices vary depending on the time of year, day and how long you wish to stay



Parliament Hill Fields Lido opened in August 1938 and was the most ambitious and expensive lido to be built by the London County Council between the World Wars. In 1937, LCC Herbert Morrison had pledged to make London “a city of lidos”, providing open-air recreation for all and bringing the seaside experience to the city. The lido offered unheated, mixed-sex bathing, allowing families to swim together all year round. Since its opening, the basic layout of the lido has remained unchanged, and in 1999 it was designated a Grade II listed building.

The pool measures 60m by 27m and has a symmetrical design. Male and female changing facilities are located on opposite sides of the entry to the building. Each changing room includes four small disabled changing rooms with handrails. However, there is a small drain you have to step or wheel over to access them. There is also a larger accessible changing room and toilet that can be accessed using a RADAR key. Both changing rooms also have accessible toilets and showers, equipped with grab rails and fold-down shower seats.

There is a gentle ramp that leads down to the poolside and the area around the pool is level. There are benches for leaving towels and ample seating available. A sauna is located near the pool, but it is not wheelchair accessible. The pool water level matches the poolside, and its stainless steel lining creates impressive reflections throughout the year. The pool staff are friendly and willing to provide assistance. All lifeguards are trained to use the pool hoist to assist individuals in and out of the water. At the shallow end of the pool, there are steps for easy access, although in the rest of the pool, ordinary ladders are used. The lido has a car park with three accessible Blue Badge bays. Although a flight of steps leads to the ticket office, there is also a ramp available. Before you visit, check the website for information on various swimming events held throughout the year, such as duathlons, winter swimming galas and charity events.

**FOOD AND DRINK** ▶▶ Options are available at the *Lido Café*, which offers a mix of hot and cold beverages and food items. Their homemade falafel boxes are a popular choice. The café is small but filled with art and character, including a book swap. Please note that manoeuvring in a wheelchair may be challenging inside the café, but there is outside seating with a beautiful view of the blue waters.

## 002 The Roundhouse

**Address:** Chalk Farm Road, London NW1 8EH **Web:** [www.roundhouse.org.uk](http://www.roundhouse.org.uk)  
**Email:** [access@roundhouse.org.uk](mailto:access@roundhouse.org.uk) **Hours:** Roundhouse Bar and Café Mon–Sun 10.30am–5.30pm, box office and Blue Badge booking Tues–Fri 9am–9pm, Sat–Mon 9am–5pm **Dates:** check website for dates and performances **Entry:** ticket prices vary depending on performance and seat



A former Victorian steam-engine shed, The Roundhouse hosts a dynamic programme of live theatre, music, dance, comedy, and circus acts. It aims to reach out to teenagers and young adults, with its range of fantastic workshops, courses, and other projects.

Following a £30-million redevelopment in the mid 2000s, it makes a highly accessible place to catch both household names and emerging talent, from the likes of Elton John and the Royal Shakespeare Company to award-winning choreographer and dancer Akram Khan. There's also a year-round roster of creative projects for 11- to 30-year-olds in the Paul Hamlyn Roundhouse Studios: courses include poetry writing, music production, band development and even an introduction to working in a TV crew, all at affordable prices. In addition, 13- to 25-year-old members can rent equipment, recording studios, production suites and rehearsal rooms at low rates. The space is also available to hire for gala evenings, parties, conferences and even weddings; more details can be found on the website.

Access is excellent. There are seven Blue Badge spaces (best reserved in advance) in the on-site car park, from where a ramp leads directly into Level 1 of the building. Alternatively, the main entrance on Chalk Farm Road offers level access through power-assisted doors into Level 0, where the reception desk, box office and cloakroom all have low counters. You'll find accessible toilets opposite the lift (too small for mobility scooters) on all three levels of the building. There are dedicated wheelchair spaces in both the Studio Theatre and Main Space, with the best views being from the Circle slots – so much so that you may face competition from press photographers. The balcony handrail has been lowered to offer a better view to wheelchair users. In addition, there's an infrared-assisted hearing system in both theatre spaces (headsets loaned for free) and an induction loop at the box office too.

Braille/tactile signs have been installed throughout the venue and there are also a number of wheelchairs available to borrow. Autism-friendly “relaxed” performances are held for some productions (check the website for up-to-date details). During these performances there is lower lighting and music and a chill-out space for those who may need to leave the performance too. Visual stories on the website take visitors through all the Roundhouse's different spaces to reduce anxiety ahead of visiting, while staff have been trained in autism awareness and the duty manager can organise queue-jumping and other help. Complimentary tickets are offered to personal assistants and support workers, and wheelchair positions and accessible seats come with one free ticket as standard.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The resident *Roundhouse Bar & Café* bar/restaurant (020 74248495) offers a stylish, accessible setting to grab a drink or light snack. There are also a variety of bars throughout the main space and foyer.

## 003 Wembley Stadium

**Address:** Wembley Stadium, London HA9 0WS **Web:** [www.wembleystadium.com](http://www.wembleystadium.com); for car parking [www.wembleyofficialparking.com](http://www.wembleyofficialparking.com) **Hours:** tours start at 10am each day, Oct–March 3pm final entry, April–July 4pm final entry, Aug last entry 5pm; hours vary during events and 25–26 Dec & 1 Jan; check

website for events. **Entry:** Stadium Tour prices – [A]£24 [Con]£17 [D]£17 [C]free [4–16]£17 [0–4]free. Prices vary according to the events and tours



From cup finals to concerts, Wembley has hosted a star-studded roster of events over the years. The national stadium, Wembley is home to English football, providing the setting for various international football matches and FA Cup finals. It also stages rugby matches, music concerts and – more recently – American NFL games. Whether touring the stadium or seeing your favourite team in action, you're never far from the making of sporting or musical history.

If you can't attend a match here, taking a tour around the stadium is the next best thing – as well as exploring the pitch, you'll be shown around otherwise restricted areas such as the royal boxes and the press room. Imagine the build-up to a big game as you look around the dressing rooms, then walk out through the players' tunnel onto the famous turf. Back inside the stadium there's a museum with interesting artefacts and football shirts worn by the greats of the beautiful game. Throughout, you'll be made to feel enormously welcome by staff, who are justly proud of the stadium's accessibility. Lifts and accessible toilets, two Changing Places; turnstiles, food and merchandise counters are at the right level and the surface is car-showroom smooth. There are 310 wheelchair places spread out over all levels with an equal number of seats for personal assistants; there are also seats available for those who do not need a wheelchair space, such as those with invisible disabilities, visual or who are hearing-impaired. Induction loops are everywhere and, if you're here for a match, you can listen to commentary delivered via headsets available from access points. Wembley Stadium offers BSL interpretation for every concert, and you can find out more about how to book seats with a view of the interpreter online.

Blue Badge parking is available for booking through the Official Wembley Parking website; it can be found in the Blue Car Park for event days (pre-booked only) and the



Wembley Stadium

Red Car Park on non-event days. The Customer Engagement Team operate a ‘pushing and chaperone’ service to help customers navigate the stadium and get from their cars to their seats. This service runs from the Red, Green and Blue car parks. If you’re arriving at Wembley Park tube station, there is step-free access to the platform and a wheelchair accessible complimentary shuttle service that runs from 30 minutes pre-gates opening to 1 hour past the event finishing.

There are two new sensory and inclusion rooms that are open for use on event days with room for 12 users, which can accommodate two wheelchair users at any one time. These include a lounge area and an immersive area full of sensory equipment designed to help those with neurodiversity, cognitive impairments and other neurological conditions that can benefit from a sensory experience. Applications for tickets to the sensory rooms will be via an event specific link that will be posted on the ‘Sensory and Inclusion Rooms’ page in advance of the event; if you have issues finding this you can contact the Customer Engagement Team for more assistance. While staff have done everything possible to make Wembley accessible, this is a major sporting venue, and adrenaline runs high. For any queries, check the FAQs at <https://help.wembleystadium.com> or talk to the Customer Engagement Team on the day.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ On-site refreshments to suit every budget are readily available on match days and during concerts, but there’s no food inside the stadium on a tour day, so buy before you arrive if you aren’t attending a specific event!

## 004 Discover Children’s Story Centre

**Address:** 383–387 High Street, Stratford E15 4QZ **Web:** <https://discover.org.uk> **Tel:** 020 85365555

**Hours:** daily 10am–5pm except 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** [A]£9 [2–16s]£9 [1s]£3 [under 1s]free [D]£8 [C]free [Con and Newham residents]£8



Once you discover Discover Children’s Story Centre, you’ll be torn between telling everyone about it and keeping it all to yourself. This place is a rare find: a simple but magical spot for storytelling and lots of fun, which is usually blissfully uncrowded.

At Discover, children aged up to eleven can join Hootah – a baby space monster – on a multi-sensory journey. There is the indoor Story World and an outdoor Story Garden where they can explore secret caves, an enchanted forest, a giant spacecraft and hidey-holes, or they can just sit quietly and create. Not everything at Discover is accessible for a child in a wheelchair and complex needs, but when it is possible to cross a sparkly river, make squelches and giggles with noisy polka dots, dress up as a fairytale character, create a spoon-puppet, take off in the Lollipopter, and make music in the sensory garden, few children will feel like they are missing out on anything. Discover also puts on engaging story-building events and interactive exhibitions, which they endeavour to make as accessible as possible; as a result all performances are “relaxed” so there are no worries about your little ones getting up, moving around, and making noise. Discover also offers ‘Access Enhanced Events’; on the last Saturday of every month there is a BSL Interpreter for d/Deaf families and visitors that use British Sign Language, and on the last Sunday of every month they



run Sensory Adaptive Events; to find out more details check the website. On top of the once a month offers, there's "Mighty Mega" – a free club run on Saturday mornings for children with special education needs aged 5 to 11 and their siblings to take part in arts, crafts, storytelling, and songs. Booking is essential.

Access around the centre is excellent: there is a step-free entrance, a lift to all floors, a ramp into the Story Garden and accessible toilets on all floors, including one with a height-adjustable changing bench and hoist system. The staff are extremely welcoming, and many have experience with the SEN community and have accredited qualifications in understanding autism. Some areas of the Story World have been designed to be quieter and less sensory, and ear defenders are available on request. There's full access information online including details of the hearing loop, wheelchair access and information about the centre's multi-sensory exhibits. In addition to offering a reduced-price ticket for visitors with disabilities, carers come in free (no documentation required). There are four disabled parking bays at the back of Discover, accessed via Bridge Road, that are usually free at weekends. The Stratford Centre car park is close by, but charges the full rate for disabled drivers. The nearest station is Stratford High Street on the DLR and is only a couple of minutes from Discover. Alternatively, Stratford station – on the DLR, Jubilee, Central and London Overground lines – is a five-minute walk away and provides a good public transport option as it is completely accessible.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The open café space, on the first floor, sells sandwiches, cakes and ice creams. If you bring a picnic, you can eat outside while you watch the children play and slide from a flying castle – it is not often that happens!

## 005 Young V&A (formerly V&A Museum of Childhood)

**Address:** Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9PA **Web:** [www.vam.ac.uk/young/visit](http://www.vam.ac.uk/young/visit) **Tel:** 020 89835200

**Hours:** daily 10am–5.45pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** free (no booking required)



Young V&A (formerly the V&A Museum of Childhood) is part of the V&A group of museums, all dedicated to the power of creativity and imagination. It is an impressive space and great for children and families to explore and be inspired by. In the past decade the museums have undergone a comprehensive restoration; as part of this, the Young V&A has shifted its focus from a social history museum to create a national museum dedicated to young people, from early years to teens.

In July 2023 the new galleries opened with a focus on “doing”, creating a joyful, buzzing and optimistic place for all to enjoy. Across three galleries – Play, Imagine and Design – Young V&A encourages visitors to unlock their creativity and connect with inspiring objects, projects, and people from across the V&A’s vast collection of art, design, and performance. Highlights include a sensory environment for pre-walkers, an interactive Minecraft installation in the Play Galleries game design space, “The Arcade”, and creations by young people made for Raspberry Pi’s Coolest Projects competition. Alongside these galleries there will be exciting exhibitions held throughout the year too.

The museum is Grade II\* listed and is a large, symmetrical Victorian hall with four levels (lower ground, ground, upper ground and first floor). The galleries and circulation spaces are connected by a feature staircase at the east end of the museum as well as stairs in the South galleries and Southeast stair. A fully compliant ramp connects the ground floor marble floor with the upper ground galleries and two lifts at the front and back of the museum service all public areas. Creative spaces for hands-on making and performance play a key role in Young V&A’s new galleries, from an amphitheatre-style stage in Imagine, to a free-play construction area within Play, and a working Open Studio in Design. Alongside this, three workshop spaces dedicated to learning, and a reading room in



the lower ground floor, support a year-round public programme from parenting courses and sessions for early years, curriculum-based provision for school learners in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and after-school and holiday activities for families and young people.

Access to the main entrance is up a gentle slope, which leads to a hallway where wheelchairs can be borrowed. The welcome desk near the main shop has a portable hearing loop (hearing aids must be set to the T position) and can provide help for visitors with disabilities. The permanent galleries on two mezzanine levels are accessible by a large passenger lift at the rear of the museum, and there's also a ramp from the ground floor to the upper ground floor galleries. The exhibits are well-spaced so there's room to move around.

Assistance dogs are welcome in all areas of the museum but must be under control. Large print guides are available on request at the welcome desk. For those with sensory needs please note that the lighting in the "Imagine" Gallery is lower than in others; if you require adjustments in lighting, speak to staff. On the lower ground floor, the Reading Room is a multi-use quiet space offering a calming environment for those that need a break from sensory stimulation.

The accessible toilet on the lower ground floor is clean and accessible by lift: ask staff for RADAR key. There is also an accredited Changing Places toilet in the front extension of the museum, alongside the male and female toilets. For those travelling with a carer, free entry tickets are available for any paid exhibitions. Phone in advance to book a disabled parking space and staff will escort you into the building by the rear entrance, via Victoria Park Square.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The ground-floor café is located at the heart of the museum under the feature stair and has a mixture of communal and smaller tables, as well as bench seating along the perimeter.

## 006 ZSL London Zoo and Regent's Park

London Zoo: **Address:** Regent's Park, NW1 4RY **Web:** [www.londonzoo.org](http://www.londonzoo.org) **Tel:** 0344 2251826; to book a wheelchair call 020 74496576 **Hours:** daily 10am–4pm, 10am–6pm spring & summer; last admission one hour before closing **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** peak prices [A]£33 [3–15s]£23.10 [D adult]£29.70 [D child]£23.10 [C]free [Con]£29.70, group discounts available and prices change seasonally, check website



Regent's Park: **Address:** NW1 4NR **Web:** [www.royalpark.org.uk/visit/parks/regents-park-primrose-hill](http://www.royalpark.org.uk/visit/parks/regents-park-primrose-hill) **Tel:** 0300 0612300 **Hours:** opens daily 5am, closing time at dusk so varies according to season **Dates:** no closures, but check the website for temporary closures due to events **Entry:** free; parking free with Blue Badge for up to 4 hours, otherwise £2.80 per hour Mon–Sat, £2 per hour Sun and bank hols



London Zoo opened in 1828 but, aside from its listed buildings, there's nothing old-fashioned about this much-loved animal kingdom. Well-designed enclosures and interactive, immersive experiences allow visitors to get a better understanding of some of the world's most inspiring creatures – and have lots of fun while they're at it.

At Penguin Beach, England's biggest penguin pool, you can watch the zoo's sixty Humboldt penguins as they waddle and dive, with viewing panels giving a fascinating look at their underwater agility. There's a seating area, with designated wheelchair spaces for optimum appreciation of the ever-popular penguin feeding time. Other highlights include the Gorilla Kingdom, and perennial favourites such as the giraffes and the Tiger Territory. Several walk-through enclosures provide exciting opportunities for close-up encounters with various animals, such as Bolivian squirrel monkeys in Meet the Monkeys, tropical birds in the Blackburn Pavilion, and numerous inquisitive tamarins and red titi monkeys in Rainforest Life. The Animal Adventure Playzone opened in 2019, where young visitors can meet animals including porcupines, llamas, goats, and even meerkats; daily talks in the area explore some of nature's greatest journeys. The playground offers loads of fun for children as they climb aboard HMS *Beagle*, cross swinging bridges and enjoy rides down the slippery slides.

There are five disabled parking bays in a small car park opposite the zoo entrance, from where you'll have to negotiate a kerb and cross a busy road; there's also a disabled bay right outside the entrance. The zoo has done a great job of making itself accessible, considering how many listed buildings it has – ramps, lifts, and slopes give wheelchair access to most areas, though some slopes are rather steep. In some enclosures the hanging strips of plastic and chains designed to prevent animals escaping can be awkward to push through: assistance may be required. Manual wheelchairs are available to borrow for a fee (book ahead) and there is a space to charge mobility scooters if required. There are several accessible toilets around the site, and a permanent high dependency unit (HDU) is located in the Animal Adventure Playzone. The zoo is less busy early in the morning and last thing at night; book online for fast-track entrance. Carers are admitted for free, but must show paperwork as proof.

Early Openings are relaxed openings for a small number of people to visit part of the zoo while it is quiet and calm enough to be a comfortable experience for autistic and neurodivergent children and adults, as well as other people who can benefit from this relaxed environment. Early Openings will start at 8.30am and run until 10am when the zoo opens to the public. Visitors will be welcome to stay for the rest of the day. Early Openings are free to book, but you will need tickets to access the zoo which can be booked online. A disability concession ticket entitles the holder to a free companion or carer place with each ticket. Some of the staff have disability awareness training and some of the performances are BSL interpreted and relaxed. For specific details, check out the online accessibility guide at [www.accessibilityguides.org/content/london-zoo](http://www.accessibilityguides.org/content/london-zoo).

Regent's Park is probably best known for its award-winning Open Air Theatre, established in 1932 and one of the largest theatres in London. Productions in the entirely uncovered stage and auditorium take place annually from May to September. Disabled patrons and their carers are eligible for discounts in the theatre (call the box office on 0333 4003562; [www.openairtheatre.com](http://www.openairtheatre.com)), and wheelchair spaces are available. Assistance dogs are welcome and there is a hearing loop system in place too. The theatre also offers audio-described and captioned performances.

Other attractions include a community Wildlife Garden, several playgrounds, a boating lake, tennis courts and The Hub sports centre, as well as beautiful planting and plenty of cafés. All of these make it a very pleasant place to spend a few hours. There are no steep inclines around the park and access is generally good for wheelchair users with paved paths throughout. There are Blue Badge parking bays at various points around

the perimeter road and accessible toilets within each toilet block (requires the user to be in possession of a RADAR key).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There are several cafés around the park; including *Regents Bar and Kitchen*, serving hot and cold food between 8am–4pm (times vary seasonally). If you fancy something smaller with great views and a playground then the new *Primrose Hill Café* may be more your thing. Alternatively, find a nice spot for a picnic on one of the lawns outside.

## 007 Lord's Cricket Ground

**Address:** Marylebone Cricket Club, St John's Wood Road, London NW8 8QN **Web:** [www.lords.org](http://www.lords.org)

**Tel:** ticket office 020 74321000; tours 020 76168595 **Hours:** tours hourly; May–Oct 10.30am–3.30pm, Nov–Dec 10.30am–1.30pm **Dates:** check website for match dates; no tours on or immediately before major matches. **Entry:** tour [D]£23.95 [C]free [A]£29.95 [5–15s]£19.95 [Students with ID]£23.95 [Con]£23.95 [Fam]£79.95; costs of match tickets vary



Lord's Cricket Ground is the place where every batter dreams of scoring a hundred runs, and where every cricket fan wants to see it happen. International matches often sell out months in advance, though there are 50–60 other days of cricket annually when it's easier to get tickets, or you can access the venue on a behind-the-scenes tour (lasting 1hr 40min) where you'll get to see many of the sport's famous relics.

The tour starts in the MCC Museum where – as well as the famous Ashes Urn – a collection of paintings, photos and memorabilia celebrates four hundred years of crick-eting history. You'll also take in the Long Room, through which players make their way to and from the ground, and the dressing rooms, where the famous Honours Boards record the names of players who score a Lord's century or take five wickets in an innings. Another highlight is the futuristic J.P. Morgan Media Centre, which offers an unrivalled view of the ground. Finally, like every modern tour, this one ends in the gift shop.

Most areas visited on the Tour are accessible, though the upper floor of the Mu-seum is reached by stairs only. The Ashes Urn is now kept on the ground floor of the Museum. For those attending a match, there are eight wheelchair areas, four of which are covered. Audio commentary headsets can be collected from the Head Steward's Office for those who wish to listen to the action. There is an adult changing facility in the Ground with a fully electrical hoist. There are 20 accessible toilets in public areas and eleven accessible toilets in Members' and Hospitality areas – ask a steward for a RADAR key – and a permanent family changing/fully accessible facility, supplemented by a fully accessible Mobiloo at major matches. More information on accessibility can be found online at [www.lords.org/accessibility](http://www.lords.org/accessibility) and the dedicated Accessibility Manager can be contacted on [accessibility@mcc.org.uk](mailto:accessibility@mcc.org.uk). There is a sensory room to provide a safe and calming space for those with neurodivergent needs who may find a match atmosphere overwhelming. It is available on a first come, first served basis, with a maximum occupancy of six people. To make use of it, ask a steward who will guide you there.

There's no car park, but set-down and pick-up passes are available from Club Facilities (020 76168653) and the venue is served by wheelchair-accessible buses. Blue Badge holders

are able to park at Lord's on minor match days, including most county matches, but space is not guaranteed.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► Restaurants and bars throughout the ground cater to every palate and wallet. Food and drink are available from the *Lord's Tavern*, where people on the tour can get a discount on food.

## 008 Wellcome Collection

**Address:** 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE **Web:** [www.wellcomecollection.org](http://www.wellcomecollection.org)

**Email:** [access@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:access@wellcomecollection.org) **Tel:** 020 76112222 **Hours:** Galleries and Reading Room Tues, Wed and Fri–Sun 10am–6pm, Thurs 10–8pm; Library – Mon, Tues, Wed and Fri 10am–6pm, Thurs 10am–8pm, Sat 10am–4pm; Café and shop – Mon–Wed and Fri–Sun 10am–6pm, Thurs 10am–8pm

**Dates:** closed 21 Dec–1 Jan; library also closed on bank hols **Entry:** free



Wellcome Collection is a free museum exploring health and human experience. Its vision is to challenge how we all think and feel about health by connecting science, medicine, life and art. It offers changing curated exhibitions, museum, and library collections, and public events, in addition to a café. There are several spaces to visit, including the permanent Being Human exhibition, which explores what it means to be human in the 21st century. It reflects our hopes and fears about new forms of medical knowledge, and our changing relationships with ourselves, each other, and the world. Featuring 50 artworks and objects, the gallery is divided into four sections: Genetics, Minds & Bodies, Infection, and Environmental Breakdown. The library is probably one of the best workspaces in London for those who wish to avoid sensory distractions. Most of the library spaces are designated as quiet, with the Gallery area being the space to make phone calls, chat, and work collaboratively. There is a group study room and two assistive study rooms available, which can be booked by members of the library.



Equipment includes screen-reading software, Dictaphones and other read-aloud assistive technology. The library spaces are a mixture of low-lit in the Gallery, and slightly brighter in the other spaces. You can often find an empty desk between the bookstacks where there is little visual distraction. For an equally calm but less formal environment, the Reading Room on level 2 is a safe and comfortable space where you can find inspiration in the array of books, artworks and objects available and on display. It is a hybrid of library and museum, suitable for all ages and interests, with an array of books and objects grouped around themes, including travel, pain, food, and the body. You can also visit or join the free library if you're over the age of 18. Here you will find collections covering thousands of years of health and medicine across different cultures. You can also see much of the collection online at [www.wellcomecollection.org/collections](http://www.wellcomecollection.org/collections).

Blue Badge parking is available, but should be booked in advance by phone or email; the car park is located behind Wellcome Collection, and you'll need to use a car lift (see website for details). The entrance to Wellcome is on Euston Road, which is extremely busy and loud. Some areas within can also be busy and loud, especially the Atrium at the entrance. Other areas upstairs are often much quieter. Ask staff if you need help finding a calmer space. If you're coming by public transport, minimise exposure by arriving at Euston Square Station (south exit) rather than Euston Station. Access inside Wellcome Collection is excellent and well considered. Assistance animals are always welcome. A wide, button-activated door facilitates entry, there's step-free access to all floors and accessible toilets on every level, including a Changing Places facility on the ground floor. Wheelchairs can be borrowed, too – ask at the information point on the ground floor, or phone ahead to reserve one in advance. You can also borrow a magnifying sheet or glass, while all permanent exhibitions and some temporary exhibitions have large-print label guides. There are fixed induction loops at the information point, the café and shop, the library enquiry desk and the venue hire reception. The information desk can also lend you a portable induction loop. Some of the exhibitions contain human remains (including the Reading Room) which some visitors might find upsetting, but there are warning notices at the exhibit entrances.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The café serves a good range of snacks and sandwiches. Note that the café can be loud and busy; at these times, manoeuvrability can be difficult for those with impaired mobility, and off-putting for those with sensory conditions.

## 009 Spitalfields Market

**Address:** Brushfield Street, London E1 6AA **Web:** [www.spitalfields.co.uk](http://www.spitalfields.co.uk); <https://oldspitalfieldsmarket.com>  
**Tel:** 020 73752963; Old Spitalfields Market 020 3771496 **Hours:** Spitalfields Market Mon–Fri 8am–11pm, Sat–Sun 9am–11pm; Traders Market Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat 11am–5pm, Sun 10am–6pm **Dates:** Closed 25 Dec, 26 Dec and 1 Jan (times may vary during holiday seasons) **Entry:** free



Spitalfields Market – which has been around in one form or another since the thirteenth century – sits under a glorious vaulted Victorian roof in London's fashionable East End.

You can come simply to soak up the atmosphere, but with so much to taste, try on and check out, few can resist the temptation to join in the bustling bargain-hunting for long.

The market building offers an appealing blend of historical charm and contemporary chic. There's a changing rota of traders throughout the week: antiques, vintage goods, fashion and arts and crafts are available. At the Saturday Style market you'll find traders selling original clothing and accessories, homewares and ethical goods; and on Sundays, a lively mixture of anything and everything, from textiles to gluten-free cakes and freshly harvested oysters. Based around the perimeter of the building, and open every day of the week, are funky art and design shops, some well-known chain restaurants and other independent or family-run cafés selling delicious international foods.

Blue Badge holders can pay and display on single and double yellow lines for an unlimited time throughout the borough of Tower Hamlets. The main market area has excellent level access throughout, and the only problems you might face are step-entry to some of the surrounding shops and cafés, and busy passages between stalls at peak times – Sundays in particular can get crammed, so arrive as early as you can to avoid the main throng. You'll find the accessible toilets at the Wollstonecraft Gate; a RADAR key is required to access them, but ring the number displayed on the toilet door (020 73772883) and staff will bring it to you. An open seating area by the cafés has benches that are fixed, but at a good height for seating wheelchairs at either end.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There are plenty of food stalls and sit-down restaurants to choose from in the market, serving everything from gourmet pies to Spanish tapas. Alternatively, try one of the excellent Indian restaurants on nearby Brick Lane: *Preem Restaurant* (020 72470397, [www.preembricklane.co.uk](http://www.preembricklane.co.uk)), on the corner of Hanbury Street, is handy for the market, and has level access and delicious food.

## 010 St Paul's Cathedral

**Address:** St Paul's Churchyard, London EC4M 8AD **Web:** [www.stpauls.co.uk](http://www.stpauls.co.uk) **Tel:** reception (office hours) 020 72468350; recorded information 020 72468348; wheelchair access for services only: 020 72468320

**Hours:** sightseeing Mon–Sat 8.30am–4pm; Sun open for worship only. May close at short notice for special services, check website in advance **Entry:** [D]free [C]free [A]£20.50 [6–17s]£9 [Con]£18.40 [Fam]1 adult & 2–3 children £29.50; 2 adults & 2–3 children £50; cheaper advance rates are available online



Sir Christopher Wren's masterpiece, whose mighty dome is an iconic feature of the London skyline, is looking more impressive than ever, still benefitting from the mammoth fifteen-year, £40-million restoration project it concluded in 2011.

Wheelchair users and those requiring a step-free entrance should use the ramped access at the North Transept entrance which leads directly onto the cathedral floor. Inside, the magnificent abundance of carvings, sculptures and mosaics is almost too much to take in, even with the aid of a multimedia guide that weaves you around the nave, dome area, quire (the seating area of the clergy and choir) and an assortment of aisles and chapels. All these areas have level access, except the North Quire Aisle, but the few steps can be bypassed via a lift. There's also lift access down to the crypt, where you'll find the tombs of various notable figures including Lord Nelson and Sir Christopher Wren. Mobility scooters are permitted in the cathedral, but note that the lift has a usable area of 140cm by 130cm and may not be suitable for larger models.



St Paul's Cathedral

Moving upwards is harder: access to the three dome galleries is by stair only, with 257 steps to the famous Whispering Gallery and 528 to the topmost Golden Gallery. If you can't manage the stairs, there is a virtual tour of the galleries on the multimedia guide.

For those with visual impairments, the multimedia guide includes an audio described tour. A schedule of guided touch tours is published on the website, and these can also be arranged in advance for groups. Large print or Braille copies of orders of service and leaflets are available; request in advance if possible. Be aware that the floor and steps can be uneven and lighting in the crypt is usually low. The multimedia guide includes a BSL-signed tour with subtitles. There is also an induction loop for the spoken word under the Dome and the OBE chapel. There are well-equipped accessible toilets in the crypt; the closest Changing Places facilities are at Tate Modern. The cathedral has no car park, but registered taxis can drop visitors very near the entrance. If you are driving and have a disabled passenger, you can call 020 72468350 and ask to be put through to the security control room; they should be able to help you with a safe drop-off point. For further details of local parking check the City of London website for details. Finally, it's worth noting that admission queues can be very long, so ensure you give yourself plenty of time. Weekdays before noon tend to be quietest.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The *Paul* bakery and café on Paternoster Square has indoor and outdoor seating, and offers sandwiches, soups, salads, plus delicious cakes and pastries.

## 011 London Transport Museum

**Address:** Covent Garden Piazza, London WC2E 7BB **Web:** [www.ltmuseum.co.uk](http://www.ltmuseum.co.uk) **Tel:** 0343 2225000

**Hours:** daily 10am–6pm; last entrance 5pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec (café & shop open on 24 Dec)

**Entry:** [A]£24 [Con]£23 [C]free [under 18s]free. All tickets allow unlimited entry for 12 months, check online for the latest ticket prices



In a prime location on Covent Garden Piazza, London Transport Museum is a cleverly laid-out tribute to the creators of one of the world's most sophisticated transport

systems. It's a fascinating, hands-on look at the capital's transport, from horse-drawn buses through the world's first underground railway and early red double-decker buses.

Much like the city itself, this highly recommended museum is crowded with vehicles and has an exciting story to tell. It is laid out over three floors and the visitor's journey starts at the top with the introduction of horse-drawn carriages in the nineteenth century. The displays are crammed with historic vehicles that have adequate room around them so they can be explored up close, though only the 1938 tube carriage has an access ramp. You can climb into some of the carriages, buses and trams, all of which feature realistic mannequins and entertaining audio-visual descriptions. The first floor is dedicated to the building of the tube network – a highly dangerous undertaking, dramatically portrayed – and the age of steam, while the ground floor explores contemporary transport and offers a glimpse into what's to come with its Future Engineers gallery.

Access to the museum is best by public transport, as Blue Badge parking is extremely limited. There are no bays in the piazza itself, with the nearest being in Henrietta Street; there's also one in Tavistock Street and four in Bow Street, while the nearby Covent Garden NCP car park has two disabled bays. Dropped kerbs abound, though the piazza itself is largely cobbled and may be tricky for wheelchair users. The museum's main entrance has automatic doors, with level access throughout, and the reception counter has an angled slat to allow wheelchair users to see the cashier. There's a spacious, well-equipped accessible toilet on the ground floor, plus a nearby cloakroom with a loan wheelchair, and water for assistance animals. Further adapted facilities are available on the lower floor gallery and in the shop, by *Canteen*. Lifts and long (but not steep) ramps, which are suitable for unaccompanied wheelchair users, provide access to all areas of the museum. The audio-visual guides are all subtitled or fitted with hearing loops, and there are induction loops at the ticket desk, cloakroom, library and information desk. The museum opens outside regular hours, with many of the sounds switched off, for Family SEND Explorer Events. Advance booking is essential; check [www.ltmuseum.co.uk/whats-on/family-send-explorer-events](http://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/whats-on/family-send-explorer-events) for details.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The museum's café bar *Canteen* serves good-quality hot and cold food and drinks. Upstairs you can sit on benches found at Wembley Park and Gloucester Road stations and sip a tube-themed cocktail or smoothie; downstairs in the museum's galleries there is a small picnic area where you can eat your own lunches.



London Transport Museum

## 012 Royal Academy of Arts

**Address:** Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BD **Web:** [www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk) **Tel:** tickets 020 73008090; information and enquiries 020 73008000 **Hours:** Tues–Sun 10am–6pm, Fri 10am–9pm  
**Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** free, but charge for temporary international loan exhibitions (see website for details)



Located just off London's busy Piccadilly, the Royal Academy of Arts is a historic gallery with regularly changing exhibitions featuring a stellar line-up of national and international artists, it is one of Britain's premier galleries. Founded by George III in 1768, it has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment, and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education, and debate. The Royal Academy is an independent charity; it does not receive revenue funding from the government so is reliant upon the support of its visitors, donors, sponsors, patrons, and loyal Friends. The RA has long had its vision steered by its member artists and architects, known as Royal Academicians – the current cohort includes artists Michael Landy, Tom Emerson and Stephanie Macdonald, Veronica Ryan, Katherine Jones, Peter Barber, Amanda Levette, Sir Isaac Julien, Wolfgang Tillmans, Sir Grayson Perry, Gillian Wearing, Sir Peter Cook, Eva Jiricna and more. A key component at its inception was the foundation of the Royal Academy Schools – an independent school of contemporary art that offers up to seventeen artists each year the opportunity to participate in a free, three-year, postgraduate programme. Founded in 1769, the RA Schools remains independent to this day. Famous for its annual Summer Exhibition, the world's largest open submission contemporary art show which has taken place every year without interruption since 1769, the exhibition is a unique celebration of contemporary art and architecture. It features a display of up to 1,500 works in a range of media and any artist can submit a piece – the majority of works are for sale and funds raised support the work of the RA.

Burlington House and Burlington Gardens, home of the RA, is an elaborate piece of architecture which provides a striking setting. Elements of the gallery's permanent collection is on free display around the building including the RA Collection Gallery which features masterpieces such as Michelangelo's *Taddei Tondo*, his only marble sculpture in the UK. Primarily a teaching collection, the RA's Collection is a treasure trove: a cross-section of the history of the Academy spanning five centuries of British art and architecture, and the evolution of a distinctive British school of artists from the eighteenth century to the present day. From the late nineteenth century, the RA began to hold international loan exhibitions and has built an unrivalled history of exhibitions of global importance. The three temporary gallery spaces host exhibitions by renowned artists, both contemporary and historical. Recent highlights include Picasso and Paper, Antony Gormley, Charles I: King and Collector, and Painting the Modern Garden. In 2018, the RA completed a transformative redevelopment and launched a new campus for its 250th anniversary, joining together Burlington House with Burlington Gardens, uniting the two-acre campus and creating a new route between Piccadilly and Mayfair. It reveals more of the elements that make the RA unique – sharing with the public historic treasures from its Collection, the work of its

Royal Academicians and the Royal Academy Schools, and its role as a centre for learning and debate about art and architecture – alongside its world-class exhibitions programme. All the spacious galleries have benches and stools available throughout for those who need to pause to rest. A visit to the RA isn't all about art though; Burlington House is also home to the Geological and Astronomical Societies, both of which hold public lectures; indeed, this is where Charles Darwin first presented his masterpiece, *On the Origin of Species*.

Call at least two weeks ahead to book one of the two disabled parking spaces outside. The main accessible entrance is ramped; staff are specifically stationed outside this door, which is closed for conservation purposes, to assist with opening it and welcoming visitors. Burlington Gardens is also ramped, with an automatic door. Inside, the ticket desk and cloakroom are both low. Lift access reaches all the galleries, where exhibits are well displayed with information panels at a good height for standing or sitting (although the exhibits in display cases may be harder to view for wheelchair users). Signage is clear and visible throughout the RA, with audio guides for most exhibitions and large-print guides for all. Other facilities and services include accessible toilets, wheelchair hire, access for assistance dogs and a hearing loop in the Benjamin West Lecture Theatre. If you struggle with sensory issues, the downloadable sensory map will be helpful to you. This can be found on the Access page on the RA website, and it shows you where the bright, dark, quiet and noisy areas are located. Staff are well informed and helpful, and all receive disability awareness training.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The *RA Café* is well laid out for visitors with accessibility needs, but it's pricey. The *Poster Bar by José* and *José Pizarro* in the Senate Room have opened at the RA since the redevelopment works, serving drinks and refreshments too, but if you have to splash out anyway, you may as well pop over the road to *Fortnum & Mason's* (020 77348040, [www.fortnumandmason.com](http://www.fortnumandmason.com)) for a splendid cream tea, served from 3pm.

## 013 Tate Modern

**Address:** Bankside, London SE1 9TG **Web:** [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk) **Tel:** 020 78878888 **Hours:** Mon–Sun 10am–6pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** free; varying fees for special exhibitions, but carers go free and visitors with a disability pay a concessionary rate



Just across Millennium Bridge (better known as the wobbly bridge), on the south bank of the Thames, stands what was once the Bankside Power Station; in 2000 it was transformed by the Swiss duo Herzog & de Meuron into Tate Modern, where the Tate shows off its vast collection of international modern art. Opened in 2000 as the world's largest modern art gallery, astonishingly it has since doubled in size and today welcomes nearly six million visitors each year – making it the UK's most popular visitor attraction.

Collections range from 1900 to the present, including major works by Dali, Picasso, Matisse and Andy Warhol. The curators have eschewed the usual chronological approach and gone instead for hanging works according to themes and ideas, so you'll find the likes of Brancusi, Lichtenstein, Riley and Hepworth alongside newer names as befits the particular exhibit. Themes cover still life to landscapes, nudes to history painting. As you wander around it becomes apparent that the artworks are designed to be thought-pro-

voking, challenging established notions of what constitutes art. Many pieces are installations, which leave much to the imagination of the viewer. One of the most interesting exhibitions on display is called “Untitled 1993” by Rudolf Stingel, which allows people who are visually impaired to touch and mould the thick pile carpet on the wall. For many, though, the most impressive part of the Tate Modern is the Turbine Hall, which has a ramp into an enormous expanse of space normally used to display one huge installation.

There is no dedicated public car park at Tate Modern, but there are twelve disabled parking spaces via Park Street (book in advance by emailing [ticketing@tate.org.uk](mailto:ticketing@tate.org.uk)). The building is modern and well-designed for those with access needs, while careful consideration has gone into providing facilities and tours to ensure those with specific disabilities get the most out of a trip here. There are accessible toilets on every level of the building, which are connected by slopes, lifts and escalators. There’s an additional Changing Places toilet on Level 0; pick up RADAR keys from the cloakroom and ticket desks also on Level 0. The galleries are large and spacious, with plenty of room to manoeuvre, benches are located throughout the displays and concourses, and lightweight gallery stools can be carried around, too. Mobility scooters are available to hire, but should be booked in advance. BSL guided tour events take place monthly, in which the guide is deaf and delivers the tour in BSL; selected talks are also BSL interpreted. For neurodivergent people, a visual story of what the visit to the Tate may be like is available on the website. Ear defenders are available from the ticket desks and there is a quiet room in the Natalie Building on level 4 (this is currently closed so check the website for updates). Please note, some art installations may involve flashing and strobe lighting, loud noises and smoke effects. Assistance dogs are welcome and water bowls are available in the Turbine Hall.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ From fine dining in the *Level 9 Restaurant* to sandwiches and snacks in the café, the Tate caters for all tastes. However, there are also plenty of areas to sit down if you want to bring your own food.

## 014 Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens

**Address:** Hyde Park, The Park Office, Rangers Lodge W2 2UH; Kensington Gardens Office, The Magazine Storeyard, Magazine Gate, Kensington Gardens W2 2UH **Web:** [www.royalparcs.org.uk](http://www.royalparcs.org.uk) **Tel:** Royal Parks 0300 0612000; Liberty Drives 07767 498096 **Hours:** Hyde Park daily 5am–midnight; Kensington Gardens daily 6am–dusk; Liberty Drives May–Oct Tues–Fri 10am–5pm **Dates:** no closures **Entry:** free



Known as the “lungs of London”, Hyde Park and its neighbour, Kensington Gardens, are the best places in the city centre to escape the crowds and breathe some fresh air. Once the private gardens of kings and queens, nowadays these green oases can be enjoyed by everyone; and with such a range of visitor attractions, from modern art exhibitions to adventure playgrounds, there’s lots more to them than perfect lawns and duck ponds.

With 760 acres to cover, wheelchair users and mobility scooter users will appreciate the wide, smooth and flat paths. From the hubbub at Speakers’ Corner (come on a Sunday to hear a diversity of views and opinions), a tree-lined avenue takes you south towards the poignant, peaceful 7 July Memorial. Turn west by the Queen Elizabeth Gates and head to the park’s watery centrepiece, the Serpentine. In summer the Solar

Shuttle can ferry you silently across the water (access is via a ramp, with assistance from the crew) or you can continue along the south bank, past the Hyde Park Lido – famous for its freezing cold Christmas Day swimming race – and café. If you fancy a dip, use one of the accessible toilets and changing rooms; there is a lift to the sun terrace and paddling pool area, and three ramps with handrails leading into the water. The South side of the park was the site of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in 1851 as organised by Prince Albert. The five-month long Exhibition was held in a temporary glass structure, which became known as the Crystal Palace; you can now walk “inside” Crystal Palace again thanks to an app, or if you prefer you can go on a virtual tour from your sofa! After all that excitement you can sit, relax and dip your feet in the flowing water at the nearby, hugely popular Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain.

From here, the main footpath continues under Serpentine Bridge and into Kensington Gardens, where children will be pleased to find both Peter Pan’s statue and the Diana Memorial Playground. Much of the playground is accessible, including a cleverly designed raised walkway giving access to several slides. The centrepiece, a huge wooden pirate ship, can be accessed via stepped access and rope access. Heading back east via the Round Pond takes you past the gleaming Albert Memorial and the Albert Hall, and on to the Serpentine South Gallery, which is free, all on one level and dedicated to showing modern and contemporary art (it also has eight medium-sized accessible toilets). The LookOut Discovery Centre is a unique, eco-friendly building nestled in an acre of enclosed grounds in the heart of the park. It welcomes people of all ages, abilities, and communities to escape the hustle and bustle of the city and either learn about the natural world or take part in family and wellbeing activities. Its purpose-built gardens and indoor spaces are fully accessible, perfect for hosting special needs and educational activities and events all year round. You can find out more on The Royal Parks website. Free local parking is available for Blue Badge holders for a maximum of four hours (although the Rangers’ Lodge at Hyde Park will consider requests for longer stays) and there are two car parks with disabled parking bays within the parks themselves and parking along South Carriage Drive and West Carriage Drive.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Overlooking the Serpentine, the *Serpentine Bar and Kitchen* is accessible, although it can get very full and cramped at times. In good weather there is plenty of room to enjoy the birdlife whilst enjoying a range of coffees and sandwiches. Of course, the parks are also a perfect place to find a patch of grass and have a picnic.

## 015 Kensington Palace

**Address:** Kensington Gardens, London W8 4PX **Web:** [www.hrp.org.uk/kensingtonpalace](http://www.hrp.org.uk/kensingtonpalace) **Tel:** 0844 4827777 **Hours:** daily 10am–6pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£16 [C]free [A]£20 [Student]£16 [6–15s]£10 [under 5s]free [Con]£16



Currently home to the Prince and Princess of Wales and their children, Kensington Palace has been a royal residence ever since 1689, when William III and Mary II chose it for its country views and clean air (William suffered from asthma and central London



pollution made his condition worse). Formerly the modest Nottingham House, it was transformed into a palace by Sir Christopher Wren and has since been home to many members of the Royal Family, including Diana, Princess of Wales.

Today the palace is divided in two – a private wing and a series of historic state apartments that are open to the public. There are several routes to explore over two floors: The Queen's State Apartments; The King's State Apartments, where you can see the wonderful paintings and stunning trompe l'oeil ceiling effects by William Kent who, to secure the business, undercut the King's Painter by a substantial amount; and Victoria: A Royal Childhood, which provides an insight into Queen Victoria, who was born at the palace in 1819, and lived here with her mother until her accession. Outside, you can explore the beautiful gardens, where in the summer of 2021 a new statue of Diana, Princess of Wales was installed in the elegant Sunken Garden.

Within the palace a lift accesses all areas, and there are also plenty of scarlet-coated Explainers dotted around to help; these enthusiastic guides can steer you in the right direction. Make sure you ask for a map, which shows all the best accessible routes. For those who can access stairs, it's worth noting that in the palace they are quite shallow and many of the doors are wide – both features were designed to make it easier for ladies wearing wide mantua skirts to get around. To protect the works of art, the lighting of the various galleries is subdued; many of the display cabinets are quite high for wheelchair users and the carpeting is thick so some assistance may be required. There are wheelchairs available free of charge on a first come, first served basis for indoor use only. There is plenty of seating along the routes; folding stools can also be borrowed from the scanner desk. Why not take a window seat in the King's Apartments and listen to the recordings of gossip from the court of George I? There are currently no BSL tours. There are, however, audio guide transcripts available with the devices at the handout desk. There are two accessible toilets on the ground floor. Carers are admitted for free; this can be obtained on the day of visit upon presentation of proof of registered disability. The nearest step-free Underground stations are Earls Court (Piccadilly) and

District Lines) and Green Park (Jubilee, Piccadilly and Victoria lines), though note that they are still some distance (1 mile and 3.4 miles respectively) from the palace. There are bus stops nearer to the Palace, check [www.tfl.gov.uk](http://www.tfl.gov.uk) for more information. There are Blue Badge bays available at Kensington Palace, which must be booked online at least seven days in advance.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The convenient ground-floor *Palace Café* sells reasonably priced snacks and hot drinks, and has a children's menu. The two steps down from the gift shop are negotiable via a discrete but useful platform lift. For a delicious afternoon tea, head to *The Orangery* in the grounds of Kensington Palace. Here, you can treat yourself to dainty sandwiches and sumptuous cakes, washed down with fine teas and even champagne, if you wish. It's wheelchair accessible with a ramped entrance.

## 016 The View from The Shard

**Address:** Joiner Street, London SE1 9QU **Web:** [www.theviewfromtheshard.com](http://www.theviewfromtheshard.com) **Tel:** bookings 0844 4997111; customer service enquiries 0344 4997222 **Hours, dates and entry:** visit the website for up-to-date opening hours and pricing; there is a range of different ticket options available depending on when you wish to visit



London's highest viewing platform, The View from The Shard sits at the top of the iconic Shard building with a far-reaching panorama over London through floor-to-ceiling windows. The views are extraordinary and make the dizzying journey in the super-fast lift well worth it. There are two levels: Level 69 is indoor, with brilliant interactive telescopes that show every detail of London stretched out before you – they focus on a particular area, tell you what you are seeing and show what London would have looked like in different periods of history. Level 72 is partially open-air and not for the faint-hearted – being exposed to the elements gives an even greater sense of how high it is.

Fifteen steep steps lead up to the booking hall, though there is also a public lift. Visitors are then guided through security to the first set of lifts up to Level 33, where there's another lift to Level 69. It is all accessible for wheelchairs, although signage is limited. Note that the lifts are very fast, which may be disorientating for some, and both viewing platforms are small with minimal seating, so at busy times it could be difficult for wheelchair users and those on the autism spectrum or with sensory disorders. However, there are plenty of staff around, who can provide seating for people with limited mobility, and assist those who are visually impaired. Wheelchairs are available on request at the ticket hall. People on the autism spectrum may find the low lighting in the lifts and the queues through the booking hall, security and lifts challenging, and there's no procedure to skip the queue at busy times. There are well-kept accessible toilets in the booking hall and on Level 69, with wide doors and plenty of room. There are no BSL interpreters or hearing loops at the ticket desks. If there is no visibility, visitors are not allowed up to the viewing platform, but tickets can be used at the time they advise you to return. If visibility is poor from the platform, you can return for free.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The bars on both levels serve a range of hot and cold drinks (including champagne), a limited range of snacks and some decent cakes.

## 017 The Science Museum

**Address:** Exhibition Road, South Kensington, London SW7 2DD **Web:** [www.sciencemuseum.org.uk](http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk)  
**Tel:** 0333 2414000; minicom 020 79424000 **Hours:** daily 10am–6pm; last entrance is 45min before the museum closes **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** The museum is free, but you need to book; charges apply for the IMAX cinema, simulators and some exhibitions



A buzzing, energetic place, the Science Museum in South Kensington dispels the myth that science is boring. With hands-on exhibits, interactive displays, and lively demonstrations, exploring everything from space travel to genetics, even the most reluctant visitor will find something engaging. Most people come away enthralled and enriched.

A meander through the spacious ground floor galleries takes you from huge steam-powered machines in the Energy Hall, through the history of rockets in Exploring Space, to iconic objects in Making the Modern World. The Wellcome Wing is home to the IMAX: The Ronson Theatre and the Pattern Pod, a multisensory area for children under nine to identify patterns in the world around them. The first floor houses galleries and exhibitions around medicine, science fiction and engineering; it also houses the interactive ‘Who am I?’ gallery.

If you are interested in mathematics or the Information Age then the second floor is perfect for you, it also has a café serving a range of food. While the museum is a grown-up institution, there is plenty here to keep children occupied, including The Pattern Pod (3- to 8-year-olds) and the family-friendly interactive Wonderlab: The Equinor Gallery – all are appealing, with a mass of activities easily accessed by most children with limited mobility. Concessionary prices apply to all paid for ticketed activity.

There are six Blue Badge parking bays on Exhibition Road, which can be used for four hours between 8.30am and 6.30pm but cannot be pre-booked. Between Monday and Friday after 6pm you can use the Imperial College car park on Imperial College Road (charges apply) and from 7am on the weekend. If you can manage public transport, it's easier: there's a pedestrian subway (but no step-free access) from South Kensington tube station to the museum entrance. General museum access is excellent, with lots of manoeuvring space and low-level exhibits. The information desk has maps showing lifts, ramps and accessible toilets, including a Changing Places facility, or check the Accessibility section on the website. Ear defenders are available at the Information and Tickets desk (Level 0), IMAX Box Office (Level 0) and Wonderlab ticket desk (Level 3). A quiet room and contemplation space is available on Level 2 at the end of the Information Age gallery. The quietest times at the museum tend to be mid-afternoon during term time. On the website you can download a sensory map and a visual story. Manual wheelchairs are available to borrow, including new, lightweight models, which can be booked in advance over the phone. Large-print gallery books for some of the most popular exhibits and all temporary exhibitions are available on the website. Audio described and BSL interpretation is available in some galleries. Full details are on the accessibility pages of the website. Induction loops are fitted at all ticket and information desks, in the Wonderlab and in the Hans Rausing Lecture Theatre (Level 0). There are also AudioEyes handsets available at the information desk, which will provide audio descriptions on key objects. The IMAX cinema has four dedicated wheelchair spaces, and an infrared system – headsets are available on

request. Bear in mind that you may have a long wait to use the lifts at busy times, as you'll be vying with parents and pushchairs. The Museum runs three accessible events to keep an eye out for; Early Birds, when the Museum opens at 8am for those that need a quieter environment, Night Owls, which runs from 6.30pm to 9.30pm for over 16s, and SENsory Astronights, a relaxed, after dark exploration of the Museum for children with disabilities and special educational needs. Check the website for details of these events.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ All the cafés have movable seating. *The Diner* has waiter service and a selection of well-priced, restaurant-quality hot dishes, pizzas, salads and great meal deals for kids – including healthy options. While the *Energy Café* serves hot and cold dishes, including made-to-order pizza, salads, wraps and sandwiches. There is also a picnic area in the basement.

## 018 Westminster Abbey

**Address:** 20 Dean's Yard, London SW1P 3PA **Web:** [www.westminster-abbey.org](http://www.westminster-abbey.org) **Tel:** 020 72225152

**Hours:** Mon–Fri 9.30am–3.30pm; Sat 9am–3pm, Sunday is worship only **Dates:** open all year but dates and times may vary around Christian holidays, check the website for details **Entry:** tours: [D]free [C]free [A]£29 [under 5s]free [6–17s]£13 [Con]£26 [Fam]from £29; verger tour costs £10



Westminster Abbey, the Collegiate Church of St Peter, is one of the greatest examples of ecclesiastical architecture in the world. This shrine to the great and the good, where Britain's rulers have been crowned and buried and has been the venue of many British royal weddings including the royal wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton.

Founded by Edward the Confessor in 1065, the abbey has hosted all coronations since the time of William the Conqueror, with the Coronation Chair on display near the Great West Door. Indeed, a tour of the abbey is a great opportunity to learn about the unique pageant of British history. Scientists and statesmen are interred and honoured by monuments – you can see those of Charles Darwin and Sir Isaac Newton as well as the 1965



Westminster Abbey

memorial to Sir Winston Churchill. Geoffrey Chaucer, the first literary figure to be buried at the abbey in Poets' Corner, famously rests in the company of Tennyson, Browning and Dickens, while female rulers are represented by Elizabeth I, Mary I and Mary Queen of Scots. The final royal to be buried here was George II. After visiting the historic Royal Tombs, head up the stairs or use the lift to get to The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Galleries. Here you can enjoy the thirteenth-century triforium display of the greatest treasures and learn about our thousand-year history. Younger visitors can let off steam outdoors in the College Garden; situated just off the cloisters, it's the oldest garden in England and incredibly beautiful.

With its busy central London location, overlooking Parliament Square, it is not surprising that the abbey doesn't have parking spaces, though it's possible to request a drop-off point for Blue Badge holders in advance. Wheelchair users should enter via the North Door; the marshals are approachable and will facilitate access to tricky areas via alternative routes where possible. Ask an Abbey Marshal if you need to borrow a wheelchair. The Henry VII Chapel can only be reached by a steep flight of stairs. Free portable multimedia guides come in fourteen languages, plus BSL and family versions. Transcripts are available for deaf visitors and touch tours can be arranged, with accompanying material in large print or Braille; there is also an audio-described tour for blind and partially sighted visitors. Visitors with disabilities and their carers are granted free entry. Check out the full access guide online too, at [www.westminster-abbey.org/visit-us/access-and-facilities](http://www.westminster-abbey.org/visit-us/access-and-facilities).

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► Continuing the Benedictine tradition of providing hospitality, *The Cellarium Café and Terrace*, in the cloisters, is open for breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea.

## 019 Greenwich to Westminster River Trip

**Address:** Greenwich Pier, Greenwich Promenade, London SE10 3QT **Web:** [www.thamesriversightseeing.com](http://www.thamesriversightseeing.com), [www.uberboatbythamesclippers.com](http://www.uberboatbythamesclippers.com) **Tel:** Thames River Sightseeing 020 37780700; Uber Boat by Thames Clippers 020 70012200 **Hours:** see box, page 39 **Dates:** year-round, though timetables vary; no services over Christmas **Entry:** Fares vary according to the route and whether you buy a single or round-trip ticket, or a hop-on/hop-off day pass; check websites for details. On the Thames Clipper, those with disabilities, a Freedom Pass, a 60+ Oyster card or a UK regional senior bus pass, as well as 5- to 15-year-olds, receive 50% off on single and River Roamer tickets; carers receive a complimentary ticket. Thames River Sightseeing passengers with a valid disability badge or Freedom Pass receive 50% off standard tickets; carers receive a 50% discount (email [bookings@thamesriversightseeing.com](mailto:bookings@thamesriversightseeing.com) for a promo code).



Greenwich feels like a fitting place to start a boat trip along the Thames: it was the birth-place of King Henry VIII, whose famous royal barges carried him and his wives in such style along the river. Taking in docklands warehouses, churches, penthouses, pubs, and heading into the centre of the city, a river journey from Greenwich to Westminster offers a unique view of the Thames and its pivotal role in London life. The trip is packed with many of London's classic sights, offering spectacular views of Tower Bridge, the Tower of London, St Paul's Cathedral, HMS *Belfast*, the London Eye and the Houses of Parliament. But you can also glimpse a hidden side of London as you drift by old cranes, disused wharves, dilapidated docks and warehouses converted into luxury

apartments, which recall the years when London was the frantic, beating heart of an industrial empire. From Westminster Pier, it's a short distance to the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey (see p.37). At Greenwich, you can choose between a Thames River Sightseeing boat or the cheaper and faster Uber Boat by Thames Clippers. Both services offer easy wheel-on access, accessible toilets onboard and designated space for wheelchair users. Thames River Sightseeing caters for tourists rather than commuters, so progress upriver is more leisurely, and you have time to enjoy the constantly changing surroundings as well as an informative audio commentary.

If you plan to do a lot of river travel, the Thames Clipper Boat River Roamers ticket allows hop-on/hop-off travel between 24 piers. You can cut down the journey time by travelling back from Westminster by tube: Westminster, North Greenwich and Greenwich Pier stations have lift access between street level and the platforms. Customers on the autism spectrum should note that neither Uber Boat by Thames Clippers nor Thames River Sightseeing boats have any official quiet room or chill-out areas and can be very busy as they are regular commuter boats. For the former, check [www.thames-clippers.com/accessibility](http://www.thames-clippers.com/accessibility) for further information on what to expect.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Both boat services offer hot and cold drinks and snacks, and the bar/snack areas are wheelchair accessible. Once you arrive at Westminster Pier, head south over Westminster Bridge to Belvedere Road, just behind the London Aquarium. There is a raised walkway, accessible from the Westminster Bridge Road end, with a number of cafés and restaurants. *Troia Southbank* ([www.troia-restaurant.co.uk](http://www.troia-restaurant.co.uk)) is a good bet, serving a wide variety of food.

## 020 The Cutty Sark

**Address:** King William Walk, Greenwich, London SE10 9HT **Web:** [www.rmg.co.uk/cuttysark](http://www.rmg.co.uk/cuttysark) **Tel:** 020 88584422 **Hours:** daily 10am–5pm, last admission at 4.15pm; extended opening hours in summer and some holidays – see website for exact dates **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** online/on the day: [D]£16 [C] free [A]£18 [5–15s]£9 [under 5s]free [Con]£12



With its magnificent architecture and glorious park, there are few places as imposing and picturesque as Greenwich ([www.visitgreenwich.org.uk](http://www.visitgreenwich.org.uk)). Add museums that allow you to navigate through time, space and the seas, a thriving food, and craft market, and cafés galore, and you'd be hard pressed to find a more rewarding day out. It's also home to the world's last remaining tea clipper, *Cutty Sark*, which underwent a £50 million

### Timetables

#### Greenwich to Westminster

Thames River Sightseeing boats leave every 30min from 11.10am (Apr–Oct) or 11.30am (Nov–Dec) to 5.10pm (Apr–May & Sept–Oct) or 6.10pm (June–Aug); the last boat back to Greenwich leaves Westminster at 4pm (Apr–Oct) or 3pm (Nov–Dec). The journey takes 50min. Uber Boat by Thames Clippers operate every 20min in each direction from approximately 6am weekdays/9am weekends to 9.30pm. The journey takes roughly 45min.



Cutty Sark

renovation (completed in 2012) after a serious fire. While Greenwich is packed with popular attractions, *Cutty Sark* is surely one of the best loved, embodying as it does the romance of the Golden Age of Sail.

Entering the lower hold, you are immediately immersed in the history of the ship, whose sleek design enhanced Britain's reputation as a trading nation. The three decks have been arranged so that visitors can explore much of the original vessel while experiencing the sights, sounds and smells of life on board through a series of interactive exhibits. The real genius of the *Cutty Sark's* display, however, is that she has been raised nine feet off the ground so that visitors can walk beneath her gleaming copper-sheathed hull. The dry dock provides space for the café, audio-visual presentations and a collection of ship's figureheads, among them the sea witch whose short shirt ("a cutty sark" in Scottish) gives the clipper her name. Enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff run family-friendly events including costumed tours, craft workshops, and even comedy nights throughout the year.

*Cutty Sark* is a shining example of how informed, clever design can render something old, and seemingly inaccessible, open to all. There's free Blue Badge parking at the Cutty Sark Gardens car park. There is lift access to all the decks: some areas such as the master's saloon have steep steps, but virtual tours are available. Only three wheelchair users at a time can enter (pre-booking is recommended) and, due to the size of the lifts, mobility scooters are not allowed. Facilities for visitors with sensory impairment include guides and signage in Braille. Large print and Braille guides are also available to download from the website, and there are tactile models and audio presentations. There are some Braille and embossed labels which can be found next to the exhibits, but there is no hearing loop inside the ship. Sensory backpacks are available from the admissions desk but note that there is no dedicated quiet space for those with sensory needs.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Cutty Sark Café* beneath the stern provides a spacious and impressive setting to enjoy homemade cakes, teas and light snacks, including children's lunchboxes.

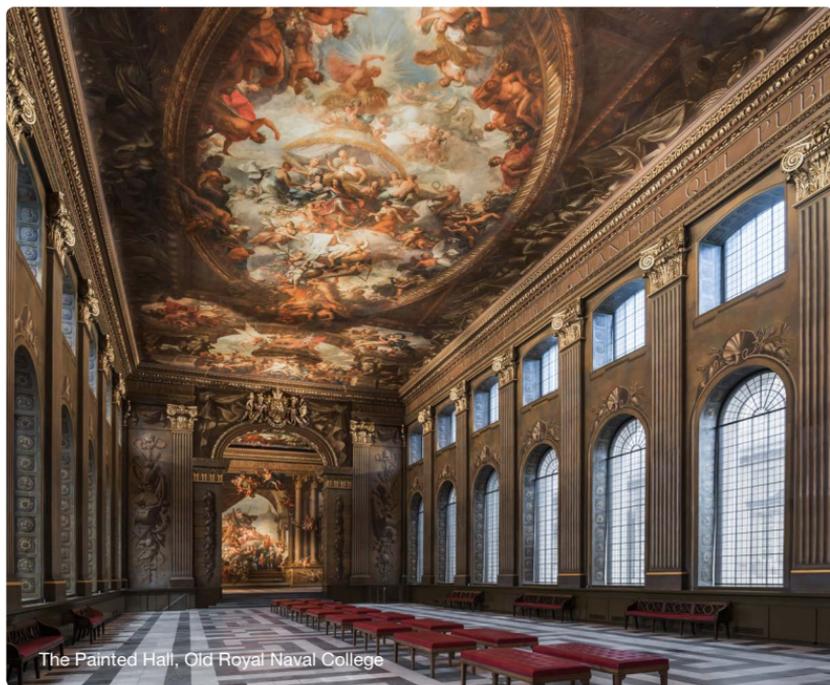
## 021 Old Royal Naval College

**Address:** Greenwich SE10 9NN **Web:** [www.ornc.org](http://www.ornc.org) **Tel:** Office 020 82694747; Accessibility info 020 82694799 **Hours:** Grounds: daily 8am–11pm; Painted Hall and chapel 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec (check website for early closures) **Entry:** General Admission [A]£15 [C]free [0–16]free [Con]£8.50 [National Art Pass]£7.50 [Universal Credit Day Ticket]£2 [Royal Navy Serving Personnel and Veterans]free; Visitor centre and grounds free; parking free for Blue Badge holders – call 020 82694799 to book a space



Dramatically sited on the bank of the Thames, the Old Royal Naval College is Greenwich's architectural centrepiece, described by UNESCO as “the most outstanding group of Baroque buildings in Britain”. The grounds and the stunning Painted Hall which underwent a conservation project and re-opened in 2019; the beautiful neoclassical chapel and visitor centre are open to all. Hands-on exhibits in the visitor centre and a multimedia guide in the Painted Hall explore the history of this evocative complex. On top of that there are regular exhibitions to see and multiple tours to go on too. There are regular BSL, BSL-interpreted and audio-described tours and a hearing loop – check the website for details.

The entrance on King William Walk offers level access to the visitor centre with a lift to access the other floors. Entry to the Painted Hall is via a lift on College Way, which brings you into the main body of the hall; once inside there are 15 steps to access the Lower Hall and six steps between the Upper and Lower Hall. For the chapel, wheelchair



The Painted Hall, Old Royal Naval College

users can use a lift, but this is not suitable for mobility scooters. There is also a Stairmate available; it is advised you arrange this in advance by calling 020 82694799. Once in the chapel, there are 14 steps to access the main body. The college is autism-friendly, with ear defenders available and a helpful online guide at <https://ornc.org/plan-a-visit/accessibility>; note that the lighting in the visitor centre and chapel are bright but due to conservation the lighting is low in the Painted Hall. Wheelchairs are available to hire from the Tourist Information Centre for a £50 deposit, which is returned when the chair is. Guide and assistance dogs are welcome in all areas. Accessible toilets are available in the visitor centre, below the chapel and in the Painted Hall. Carers/companions have free entry to the Painted Hall. Parking on-site is limited, so for disabled parking you will need to book ahead.

**FOOD AND DRINK** ▶▶ The visitor centre café sells hot drinks, pastries and snacks, while The Old Brewery serves traditional pub grub. Both are located in the Pepys Building.

## 022 National Maritime Museum and Royal Observatory

**Address:** Museum: Romney Road, London SE10 9NF; Observatory: Blackheath Avenue, London

SE10 8XJ **Websites:** [www.rmg.co.uk/national-maritime-museum](http://www.rmg.co.uk/national-maritime-museum); [www.rmg.co.uk/royal-observatory](http://www.rmg.co.uk/royal-observatory)

**Email:** [bookings@rmg.co.uk](mailto:bookings@rmg.co.uk) **Tel:** tickets 020 83126608; access 020 83126746 **Hours:** daily 10am–5pm;

last admission 30 mins before closing **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** museum free; Royal Observatory

online/on the day: [D]£18 [C]free [A]£18 [4–15]£9 [Con]£18; planetarium show prices vary, check the

website for details; there are two wheelchair spaces bookable in each planetarium show, prices are £12 for adults, £6 for children, £8 for students and under 25s; free ticket for companions



Immediately south of the Old Royal Naval College stands the National Maritime Museum, whose Maritime Galleries celebrate five hundred years of British seafaring history. Naval battles, great explorers and sea traders are all covered, with exhibits ranging from maritime art and model ships to Nelson's Trafalgar coat. Outside, an uphill stroll through Greenwich Park brings you to the Royal Observatory, the route recommended for wheelchair users is signposted in the park – the home of Greenwich Mean Time and the Meridian Line. While you're here, learn about the universe, longitude and the history of timekeeping in the Astronomy and Time Galleries, or catch one of the lively shows at the planetarium: they also put on special performances called "Morning Stars" for children on the autism spectrum, which explore the night sky. These can be booked by contacting the Bookings Office: [www.rmg.co.uk/schools-communities/special-educational-needs-aurora-days](http://www.rmg.co.uk/schools-communities/special-educational-needs-aurora-days).

All floors of the Maritime Galleries are accessible via lifts, as are the Astronomy Galleries and planetarium (with dedicated wheelchair seating) at the Royal Observatory. Due to the fact that the Royal Observatory is made up of older, Grade I listed buildings, some areas are not accessible with wheelchairs. The areas that can be accessed are the Meridian Line, the ground floor of the Meridian Building and the Astronomer's Garden. A short distance away is the Astronomy Centre, which is fully accessible using

a lift. Both sites have wheelchair accessible toilets. The museum's website has excellent access information, including audio and large-print guides. There are four disabled parking bays at the Observatory and spaces can be booked at the Maritime Galleries car park (020 83126608). The National Maritime Museum has a Changing Places toilet. Additional access details can be found here: [www.rmg.co.uk/plan-your-visit/facilities-access](http://www.rmg.co.uk/plan-your-visit/facilities-access). An audio and BSL tour is available online here: [smartify.org/tours/british-sign-language-tour-at-the-royal-observatory](http://smartify.org/tours/british-sign-language-tour-at-the-royal-observatory).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Salads, sandwiches, light meals, and home-baked cakes are on offer at the *Parkside Café and Terrace* in the National Maritime Museum. The *Great Map Café*, also in the National Maritime Museum, sits alongside a giant world atlas, and serves classic British sandwiches as well as a range of fresh cakes. Alternatively, try one of the many eating options at the nearby Greenwich Market. Although the centre of the market can be challenging for wheelchair users, with its crowds and cobbles, the edges, where many of the cafés are situated, are more easily navigated. *Monsoon Café* (020 88534495) has accessible alleyway seating and is a popular choice for coffee and cake.

## 023 WWT London Wetland Centre

**Address:** Queen Elizabeths Walk, Barnes SW13 9WT **Web:** [www.wwt.org.uk/london](http://www.wwt.org.uk/london) **Tel:** 020 84094400  
**Hours:** daily; 1 Feb–21 July 9.30am–5pm, 22 July–3 Sept 9.30am–5.30pm, 4 Sept–28 Oct 9.30am–5pm, 29 Oct–30 Nov 9.30am–4.30pm, 1 Dec–31 Dec 9.30am–4pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec, early closing 24 Dec (3pm) **Entry:** [D]£15.30\* [C]free [A]£17\* [4–17s]£11\* [under 4s]free [Con]£15.30\* [Fam]£47.50\*; \*Ticket prices include a small voluntary Gift Aid donation. You can choose not to include the donation when you purchase your tickets. Free entry for: WWT members, children aged 4 and under, carers accompanying visitors with disabilities; valid proof will be required for all concessions and memberships



Occupying a 105-acre site, the WWT London Wetland Centre is an enchanting, urban wet-land where individuals, friends, groups, and families can take time to unwind and grow closer to nature. It's a place of limitless adventure that stimulates the senses and opens the mind. A maze of accessible paths and boardwalks takes you around the marshes and over the lakes to view birdlife from Britain and migrants from around the world. Apart from the profusion of wild birds such as lapwings, gadwalls and kingfishers, you can also see a collection of exotic water birds from every corner of the globe. Six hides are scattered across the site, enabling you to watch the birds and other wildlife without being obtrusive. If mammals are more your style, don't miss the opportunity to see the site's Asian short-clawed otters, best appreciated at feeding time. Daily talks and monthly guided walks provide further insight into the centre's history and its many inhabitants. In addition, an observatory with a glass wall provides a panoramic view across the lake, while the indoor interactive Discovery Centre and outdoor Explore play area cater handsomely for younger visitors.

There are several disabled parking spots in the car park, adjacent to the main visitor centre; if you're using the pedestrian entrance, watch out for raised cracks in the tarmac, marked by yellow paint. The paths are mostly asphalt, with boardwalks and some compacted shingle, though in the World Wetlands area there are lots of wildlife gates

to be opened and closed, which will be tricky for wheelchair users. There are several accessible toilets and all but two of the hides are single-storey with level entry, as is the Sand Martin Nest Bank. The nearby Peacock Tower hide has a lift allowing everyone access to the dramatic views across the water. Carers are admitted for free. Wheelchairs and mobility scooters are available to hire, book in advance to reserve one. Private tours and group bookings can be made all through the year. Contact [Groups.London@wwt.org.uk](mailto:Groups.London@wwt.org.uk) for more information.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ As well as neatly tended picnic areas, there's the *Kingfisher Café* – eat on the terrace and observe the family of swans. The menu is clearly displayed on boards.

## 024 Kew Gardens

**Address:** Richmond TW9 3AE **Web:** [www.kew.org/kew-gardens](http://www.kew.org/kew-gardens) **Tel:** enquiries 020 83325655; mobility scooter pre-booking 020 83325121; BSL and sensory guided tours 020 83325643 **Hours:** opening hours vary throughout the year; see website for details **Dates:** closed 24–25 Dec **Entry:** prices vary throughout the year, carers accompanying an individual with a disability go free; note that day tickets do not give you access to events such as Christmas at Kew



Home to more than 50,000 living plants from around the globe, the world's largest Victorian glasshouse and even the oldest pot plant on earth, there is nowhere better to explore the beauty of nature than at the botanical gardens at Kew.

Set over 320 acres, you need to pick and choose what to see in a single visit to Kew. And while there is much to choose from, nothing sums up the Kew experience like stepping inside the heady warmth of the iconic Palm House, where Tamarind, Henna and ylang-ylang trees steam up the beautiful Victorian iron and glass structure. The Temperate House is also a must, following its magnificent £14-million restoration. For those who prefer the open air, there are gardens and trees aplenty. Highlights vary throughout the year; the Great Broad Walk Borders zing with colour in summer, while the Arboretum is most spectacular with glowing autumn leaves. The Children's Garden provides a delightful natural play area, but sadly children with limited mobility will find little to play on. For neurodivergent people there are "quiet sessions" in The Children's Garden for those aged between 2 and 12 years with SEN. The multi-sensory Hive installation also offers a more immersive experience for all visitors and the Treetop Walkway provides a fun perspective up in the tree canopy, which again is unfortunately not accessible to those with limited mobility as there are 118 steps up to the walkway.

There are eight disabled bays in the small Ferry Lane car park near Brentford Gate, three bays to the right of Elizabeth Gate and three on-street disabled bays on Lichfield Road, opposite Victoria Gate. The car parks are free to use for anyone with a Blue Badge, whether parked in a disabled bay or not. If arriving on public transport, the eastbound platform at Kew Gardens station has level access, but Kew Bridge station is not wheelchair accessible. There is a sense of space immediately on entering the gardens. There are no closed gates, and entrances are level with easy access for wheelchair users. Ticket booth desks have hearing loops, but queues can get long – avoid the worst



The Temperate House, Kew Gardens

by purchasing tickets online in advance. You can borrow a wheelchair at no cost; mobility scooters must be booked in advance. Access around Kew Gardens is mostly level or gently undulating tarmac paths, with lots of rest seats if you get tired. Alternatively, hop on the Kew Explorer land train, which can fit one manual wheelchair on the back. Access to the glasshouses is mixed, with the renovated Temperate House offering by far the easiest access with gentle ramps, wide doorways, and paths. The Palm House is trickier, with heavy, narrow doorways, and is not suitable for mobility scooters – it can also feel a little claustrophobic and humid with intermittent hissing noises. The upper walkways of both glasshouses are not accessible to wheelchair users. Access to The Hive is good, although the path to the upper level is a little steep. The Princess of Wales Conservatory is suitable for both wheelchairs and mobility scooters but the upper floors are not accessible and only wheelchairs are allowed during the Orchid Festival. The Treetop Walkway lift is out of use. Most other buildings at Kew – the Palace, Kitchens and Gardens – are accessible to manual wheelchairs. BSL walking tours, health walks, sensory tours for those with visual impairments and walks for visitors living with dementia can all be arranged. Kew is under a flight path, which could affect those with sensory issues. There are a number of accessible toilets throughout the site, marked on the visitor map, and a Changing Places facility with hoist near Brentford Gate (collect the key from the nearby entrance ticket desk).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ If you've got children in tow then the *Family Kitchen & Shop* is a push-chair and wheelchair-friendly restaurant and interactive space, encouraging young visitors to discover more about the origins of the food which they eat. This multi-sensory space also has a dedicated seating quiet zone in the shape of a giant apple, which provides the perfect space for neurodiverse visitors to enjoy the *Family Kitchen & Shop* in a calm and relaxed way.

## 025 Horniman Museum and Gardens

**Address:** 100 London Road, Forest Hill SE23 3PQ **Web:** [www.horniman.ac.uk](http://www.horniman.ac.uk) **Tel:** 020 86991872  
**Hours:** museum daily 10am–5.30pm; butterfly house daily 10.30am–4pm; gardens Mon–Sat 7.15am–sunset, Sun 8am–sunset; Café daily 9am–5pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** museum & gardens free, but charges apply for some exhibitions and events; aquarium [D]£5 [C]free [A]£5 [3–16s]£2.50 [Fam]£12; butterfly house [D]£7 [C]free [A]£7 [3–16s]£7 [Fam]£20; Horniman members free



Wealthy Victorian tea merchant Frederick John Horniman travelled the world for trade. Fascinated by natural and cultural history, he began selecting specimens and treasures to share with the public in his Forest Hill home. Over a hundred years later, his discoveries are on display in the accessible Horniman Museum and Gardens.

The museum and award-winning gardens sit on top of Forest Hill with glorious views over south London. The eclectic collections – with objects ranging from ancient Egyptian musical instruments to the enigmatic Horniman Merman – lie at the heart of the museum, but it's the interactive developments and hands-on sessions that really bring the artefacts to life. You can try African drumming, discover the size of a shark's jawbone, don a Balinese mask or watch busy bees in the beehive. The museum runs a varied programme of touch sessions, family workshops, short courses, and events, many of them available for free; it pays to keep an eye on the website for listings.

The existing museum was completed in 1901 when the collection outgrew Horniman's home, and a major centenary development has made this Victorian building easy to navigate. A good-sized lift allows access to every level, including the aquarium in the basement – home to a colony of jellyfish. Be aware, though, that heavy soundproof doors protect some of the galleries, and these can be difficult to open. In the surrounding gardens, visitors can explore the botanical display garden, the Butterfly House, bandstand, wildlife garden, meadow field, nature trail and animal walk. Limited on-site disabled parking is available; call 020 86991872 for details. Carers are entitled to free entry, and a series of videos can also be viewed online which give a visual introduction to the museum spaces, as well as a virtual journey from Forest Hill station and nearby bus stops; see [www.horniman.ac.uk/visit/disability-and-access](http://www.horniman.ac.uk/visit/disability-and-access).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The museum café is airy and boasts an outside seating area that is a beautiful spot on sunny days. There's a good range of family-friendly meal deals, hot and cold food and drinks, as well as dishes reflecting the museum's international heritage.

## 026 Eltham Palace

**Address:** Court Yard, Eltham, Greenwich, London SE9 5QE **Web:** [www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/eltham-palace-and-gardens](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/eltham-palace-and-gardens) **Tel:** 0370 3331181 **Hours:** 1 Apr–30 Oct daily 10am–5pm; 31 Oct–23 Dec Sat–Sun 10am–4pm; 26 Dec–1 Jan daily 10am–4pm; 2 Jan–10 Feb Sat–Sun 10am–4pm; 11–19 Feb daily 10am–4pm; 20 Feb–31 Mar Wed–Sun 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 24–25 Dec **Entry:** [A]£16 [5–17s]£9.50 [Con]£14 [C]free [Fam]between £25.50–41



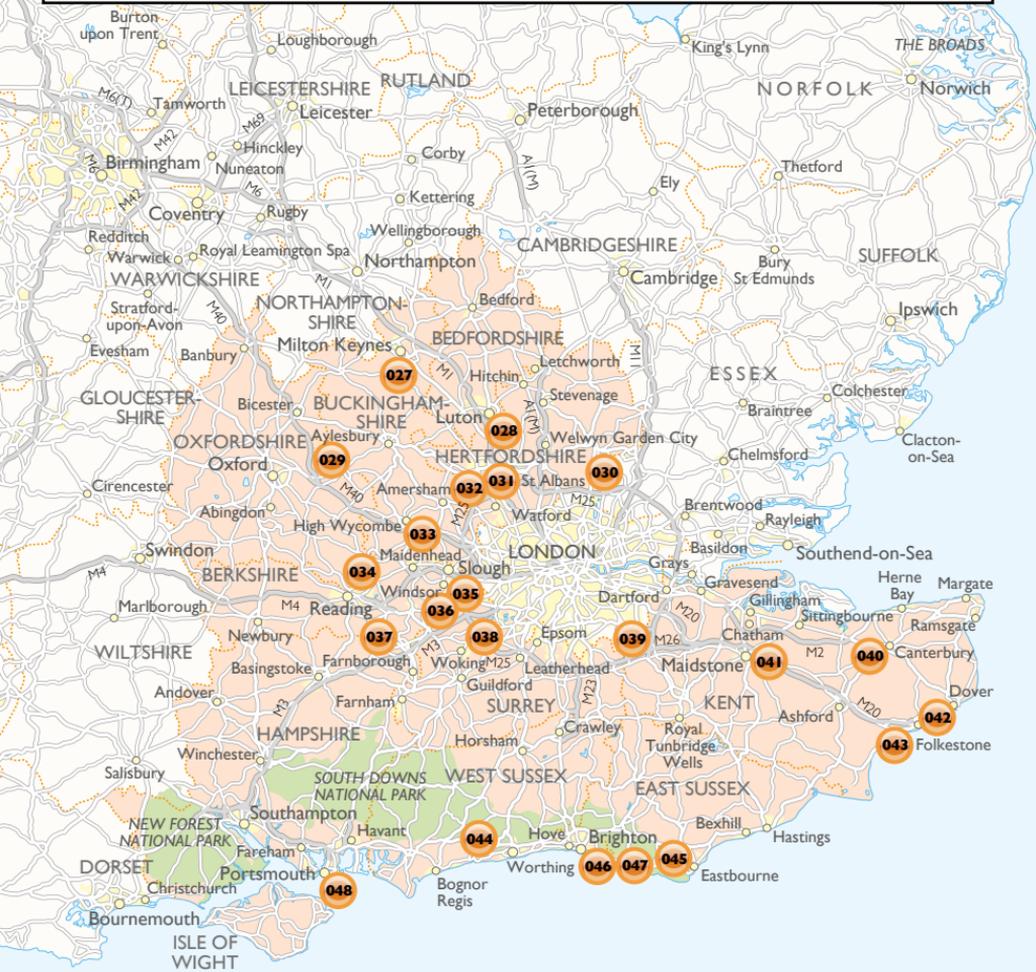
Surrounded by nineteen acres of landscaped gardens and a partial moat, Eltham Palace is most notable for its Art Deco style, although parts of the building date back to medieval times. It was owned by Stephen and Virginia Courtauld, part of a wealthy textile-owning family who were renowned for hosting lavish dinner parties here and kept a ring-tailed lemur as a pet. The palace is well worth a visit for its ornate Art Deco design and furnishings, impressive medieval hall and stunning landscaped gardens. Remains of the medieval foundations can be seen in the gardens, where you can also enjoy the waterfalls and feed the Koi carp, while the main part of the building is a fascinating throwback to the 1930s. There is generally good access for wheelchair users, and staff are on hand and ready to help.

The car park, with three disabled parking spaces, is next to the ticket office. From here, it's about 100 yards to the palace entrance over a cobbled bridge, which may cause problems for wheelchair-users. To begin the house tour, you are directed to the first floor. There is lift access and there are wheelchairs available to borrow if needed, just speak to the volunteer in the circular Entrance Hall. Multimedia guides are also on offer and there is an option for a hearing loop. Otherwise, there are interpretation boards throughout the house to help you orientate yourself. The entrance to the medieval Great Hall has a ramp and visitors can look down on the hall from the Minstrels Gallery which has one step. There are fully accessible toilets in the palace and near the ticket office and café. While there are few specific facilities for those on the autism spectrum, the general noise level is low as visitors can walk around at their own pace, listening to their headsets, and the gardens are a calming environment to relax in with a number of benches. To get to the moat, you can either walk down steps or go via a bridge and grass ramp. There is also a picnic area and children's playground near the shop and café, though wheelchair users may find the grass here slippery in wet conditions. Carers attending with a disabled visitor are given free entry; no proof of disability is required.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Orchid House Café* is wheelchair accessible and caters for most dietary requirements such as vegan and gluten-free. Homemade hot meals are served from midday and there is always a warming soup with a roll.

# The Southeast

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- 047** Sea Lanes
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## 027 Bletchley Park, Buckinghamshire

**Address:** The Mansion, Bletchley Park, Sherwood Drive, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK3 6EB

**Web:** [www.bletchleypark.org.uk](http://www.bletchleypark.org.uk) **Email:** [enquiries@bletchleypark.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bletchleypark.org.uk) **Tel:** 01908 272673 **Hours:** 1 March–31 Oct daily 9.30am–5pm, 1 Nov–28 Feb daily 9.30am–4pm, 24–26 Dec closed **Entry:** [A]£25.50 [C]free [Con]£23 [2 adults, 2 children]£60 [1 adult, 2 children]£43 [under 12s]free [over 12s]£17



By 1939 the looming threat of war had become a reality. British intelligence was searching for a safe base well away from central London and due to its solid road, rail and teleprinter links they chose Bletchley. Posing as Captain Ridley's shooting party, the British code breakers took over the estate and Bletchley Park became the nation's best-kept secret.

Bletchley was rescued from demolition in 1990 by The Bletchley Archaeological and Historical Society and Milton Keynes Council. Thanks to them, this elegant mansion and the surrounding parklands were opened to the public in 1994. The beautiful grounds on the estate are a great place for families to relax and enjoy a day out, but it is the exhibits at this wartime headquarters that are really fascinating.

Starting with the Early Years exhibition you can learn how Bletchley Park, an ordinary country estate, was chosen to be a secret wartime base and how the early pioneers set up the codebreaking headquarters. Follow that by attending the largest exhibition on site in Block A: The Intelligence Factory. Explore the rapid expansion of Bletchley Park during the second half of World War II when the workforce grew to nearly 9,000 men and women. The Block B museum tells the story of the famous Enigma machines and the Lorenx Cipher system used by Hitler and German High Command. There is also an exhibition called Life at Bletchley Park, which features the recollections of veterans, as well as an immersive experience titled "D-Day: Interception, Intelligence, Invasion", which presents Bletchley Park's vital role in the planning of D-Day.

An interactive visitor centre in Block C offers an introduction to the incredible stories of what happened on the estate during World War II, plus a café, gift shop and accessible toilets with a hearing loop system. Visitors can collect an iPod Touch multimedia guide (included in the admission price), with which they can explore Bletchley Park and experience how it would have appeared during wartime.

Huts 11 and 11A have been restored, with new audio-visual exhibitions about the invention of the Bombe Machine and the vital contribution of Polish intelligence. It is worth planning ahead to join one of the free guided tours, which will give you an added insight into the house and its work over the years. There are many objects and exhibitions to see on site, so checking the website before visiting is recommended.

Note that the replica of the Colossus – the world's first computer – is now housed in The National Museum of Computing in Block H, which has a separate entry fee and is not included in the admission charge to Bletchley Park.

The museum has step-free access, with ramps installed where necessary; all the exhibitions are at ground floor level, except for Block A and Block B, both of which have wheelchair lifts. There are 12 disabled parking spaces at the back of the Porters' Lodge and another five in the Block F car park. There is an accessible lift to the left of the six steps that lead up to the reception, and wheelchairs can be borrowed from the visitor centre for use indoors; mobility scooters are permitted outdoors. There are three accessible toilets

around the park and guide dogs and assistance dogs are welcome. BSL-interpreted guided tours take place throughout the year (check the website for details). Sound enhancement systems are available for the midday and 2pm tours and there's an audio tour of Block B (with built-in hearing loop), with information available at numbered points.

**FOOD AND DRINK** ▶▶ Seasonal hot and cold food is on offer in the *Hut 4* café, including vegan and vegetarian options. The café, located in the former codebreaking hut, is spacious with movable seating and space to manoeuvre. The coffee shop in Block C offers hot and cold drinks, light lunches and sweet treats. There is also outdoor seating for picnics.

## 028 Stockwood Discovery Centre, Bedfordshire

**Address:** Stockwood Discovery Centre, London Road, Luton LU1 4LX **Web:** [www.culturetrust.com/venues/stockwood-discovery-centre](http://www.culturetrust.com/venues/stockwood-discovery-centre) **Email:** [boxoffice@culturetrust.com](mailto:boxoffice@culturetrust.com) **Tel:** 01582 548600 **Hours:** 1 March–31 Oct daily 10am–5pm, 1 Nov–28 Feb daily 10am–4pm, 24–26 Dec closed **Entry:** Free



On the list of days out, Luton is not normally the first place that people think of; but the Stockwood Discovery Centre on the edge of town is a very good reason to visit the area. With beautiful gardens, interactive exhibitions, and the largest carriage collection in Europe, it's the perfect family day out.

The museum's wide-ranging collections – concentrating chiefly on the Luton area – take in social history, local crafts, archeology and geology. Highlights of their collections include a hoard of Roman gold coins, a rare medieval bronze jug and the largest collection of horse-drawn carriages, all engagingly and accessibly presented.

The large grounds – originally the estate of Stockwood House, a now-demolished eighteenth-century residence – houses a series of inviting themed gardens, including the Sensory and Medicinal Gardens, which have been designed to incorporate touch, sound, and smell. Also look out for the Improvement Garden, graced by six striking sculptures by the renowned artist Ian Hamilton Finlay – this is one of the few permanent displays of his work outside Scotland. The special exhibition space in the centre hosts a range of exhibitions throughout the year so it's worth checking the website to see what's currently on.

Accessibility is good throughout the site. The large car park has six disabled spaces, from where a broad asphalt path leads to the museum's step-free entrance. Inside, all the displays are on the ground floor with level access; manual wheelchairs and mobility scooters can be borrowed at reception; it is best to phone ahead to see if these are available. There is a hand-held audio-visual guide, including a BSL option, and the two videos screened in the galleries also feature subtitles and BSL interpreters. Most of the garden areas are wheelchair accessible, with alternate ways to reach anywhere that has steps. Be aware, there are a few tricky corners for wheelchairs and mobility scooters in the Period Garden. Parts of the expansive lawn could also be difficult for wheelchairs and mobility scooters in wet weather. There are spacious accessible toilets in the Discovery Hall, Discovery Galleries and opposite the café. Those who struggle in busy, crowded places and experience sensory overload may wish to visit during term time

when the venue is less busy, but you should always be able to find a quiet spot within the 8.5-acre site; staff are on hand to assist with any special needs. The site is not suitable for dogs apart from service dogs.

**FOOD AND DRINK** ▶▶ There is an accessible on-site café. Entered via automatic doors, it serves hot and cold food and drink at reasonable prices, with a beautifully displayed cake table taking centre stage.

## 029 Thomley Activity Centre, Buckinghamshire

**Address:** Thomley, Menmarch Road, Worminghall, Buckinghamshire HP18 9JZ **Web:** <https://thomley.org.uk>  
**Email:** [enquiries@thomley.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@thomley.org.uk) **Tel:** 01844 338380 **Hours:** Tues–Sat 10am–3.30pm, school hols Mon 10am–3.30pm; advanced booking necessary **Dates:** some days reserved for specific groups **Entry:** The centre fundraises to subsidise costs and asks visitors for a contribution



Parents of anyone with a disability will instantly recognise the special opportunity offered by Thomley. From the moment you arrive and receive a friendly welcome, you'll know that you will have a fun day and that you'll be able to relax.

Thomley is a lifelong learning and leisure centre for people of all ages with disabilities. The centre provides play, leisure and learning opportunities for everyone at their facility, which incorporates indoor and outdoor spaces on the border between Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

First-time visitors are shown around the numerous activity rooms, which are located inside a series of attractive red-brick buildings positioned around a courtyard. Here individuals – regardless of physical or learning disabilities – can create music, paint, read and engage in soft and messy play and make use of the two sensory rooms too. Outdoors in the safe enclosed seven-acre play space, there is a wheelchair-accessible roundabout, a wheelchair-accessible fort, a ground level trampoline and even an accessible garden and allotment. You can pedal around a 1km track, bash the outdoor chimes and gongs, fly down the basket-seated zipwire and swing to your heart's content on the flat swings, bucket swings and bed swings.

There is a dedicated facility for teenagers, which includes a mini-gym, vocation skills/hobby area and a den with an Xbox and a Wii. This is usually available for use by all children up to the age of 19, but phone in advance of your visit to check. The activity centre reserves some days for certain groups, including a family day, pre-school day, 13+, and school days. It also organises disability quiet days – so it is important to check the website to see when a visit would be most suitable, and book ahead.

In general, the centre is open to all with disabilities and their friends and family on Saturdays and during school holidays. There is plenty of parking outside the centre – designated spaces for wheelchair users are on the left as you approach. There are several accessible toilets and a changing area, including a Changing Places facility in the teenagers' area.

Almost the whole site is wheelchair accessible, and members of the disability-aware team are swift to point out any obstacles and suggest possible alternative routes.

**FOOD AND DRINK** ▶▶ Visitors can buy hot and cold food and drinks at *The Pavilion Café*, which has an accessible toilet and looks out onto the outside playing area.



Lee Valley White Water Centre

## 030 Lee Valley White Water Centre, Hertfordshire

**Address:** Lee Valley White Water Centre, Station Road, Waltham Cross EN9 1AB **Web:** [www.better.org.uk/leisure-centre/lee-valley/white-water-centre](http://www.better.org.uk/leisure-centre/lee-valley/white-water-centre) **Email:** [LVwhitewater@gll.org](mailto:LVwhitewater@gll.org) **Tel:** 03000 030616  
**Hours:** times vary, check website **Entry:** prices start at £60 for White Water Rafting, check website for more details



There's loads of fun to be had at Lee Valley White Water Centre, from white water rafting on the 2012 Olympic course to canoeing, kayaking and hydrospeeding on the lake. If none of those take your fancy, you can sit in *The Terrace Bar and Café* instead to take in the views.

Experience the thrill of tackling the waters as you paddle down the 300m Grade IV rapids with a little help from your experienced raft guide. With thirteen thousand litres of water rushing down the course each second (that's enough to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool in roughly three minutes), you'll need a certain amount of confidence in open water to take this on. Beyond this, no prior experience is necessary, and the centre welcomes people with disabilities. Do ensure you check what is involved in the centre's activity assessment before you book as all participants must successfully complete this before being able to partake in their chosen activity.

On arrival, you'll be kitted out with a wetsuit, boots, buoyancy aid and helmet; then, after the activity assessment, it's time for you to hit the rapids! Your first run will be relatively calm, and at the end a conveyer will take the crew and raft back to the top, where you start all over again. Once everyone has got their confidence, the fun and fear factor is upped with each run of the course, giving plenty of opportunities to get thoroughly drenched!

There are thirteen disabled parking bays near the main entrance, which is step-free with automatic doors. Inside there's level access to the equipment area and changing

rooms, which offer plenty of space for those with disabilities and they have accessible men's and women's toilets and showers. Although being able to swim is not a prerequisite, there is a definite risk of falling in; those with disabilities or poor swimming skills are given yellow helmets, so that they can be identified quickly and be given plenty of assistance as needed. It's a good idea to phone the centre in advance of your visit to discuss your requirements, as with notice, staff can tailor conditions to match your capabilities. The venue doesn't currently offer discounts to carers for watersports activities.

**FOOD AND DRINK** ▶▶ *The Terrace Bar and Café* serves tasty snacks and light meals, with an outdoor terrace overlooking the rapids. A lift from the ground floor provides step-free access, and it has moveable seating and an accessible toilet.

## 031 St Albans, Hertfordshire



Spread over a hilltop, around twenty miles north of London, the ancient cathedral city of St Albans ([www.enjoystalbans.com](http://www.enjoystalbans.com)) boasts a wealth of historical attractions and one of England's liveliest street markets. Every Wednesday and Saturday, St Peters Street is filled with the hustle, bustle, and vibrant colours of more than 150 stalls, packed with everything from mounds of fresh fruit and vegetables to soap powder and fancy gifts. It's all at street level, with most goods at a decent height for wheelchair users to have a browse.

If you'd rather go sightseeing, head for St Albans Cathedral (01727 890210, [www.stalbanscathedral.org](http://www.stalbanscathedral.org)), just south of the high street. Home to the shrine of St Alban (Britain's first saint), the building encompasses an exuberant blend of architectural styles, from a normal tower and medieval chapels through to Victorian restorations and a twentieth-century Chapter House. Wheelchair access is via the West Doors or Sumpter Yard; inside, disabled provision is excellent, with ramps to inaccessible areas, a lift to the Shrine Chapel, Braille guides, induction loops and an accessible toilet.

Southwest of the cathedral is a pleasant walk through Verulamium Park. About a quarter of a mile on firm, level paths, with some rest benches along the way. This takes you to the Verulamium Museum (01727 751810, [www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/visit/verulamium-museum](http://www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/visit/verulamium-museum)) which tells the story of the important Roman city that once



St Albans Cathedral

stood on the site now occupied by St Albans. Stunning Roman mosaics, bronze figurines and other archeological treasures are beautifully displayed alongside recreated Roman rooms and interactive exhibits. The museum galleries are all on one level, with disabled parking, a wheelchair available to borrow, subtitled videos and an accessible toilet reached via a lift. In addition, carers go free; see website for further accessibility information. Near the museum is a Roman hypocaust mosaic ([www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/hypocaust](http://www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/hypocaust)) and the remains of a Roman theatre ([www.gorhamburyestate.co.uk/The-Roman-Theatre](http://www.gorhamburyestate.co.uk/The-Roman-Theatre)). Elsewhere, attractions include a medieval clock tower and the Grade II-listed Georgian Town Hall, home to the St Albans Museum + Gallery (01727 864511, [www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/visit/st-albans-museum-gallery](http://www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/visit/st-albans-museum-gallery)) since 2018. Inside, state-of-the-art gallery spaces showcase more than two thousand years of priceless heritage and contemporary artworks. Entrance is free and there's lift access to all floors, accessible toilets, large-print text, audio description available in the Timeline gallery and a wheelchair to borrow.

Disabled drivers can park for free for two to three hours in on-street pay-and-display spaces, and there are several car parks with Blue Badge bays around town, including the central Drovers Way car park, off Catherine Street. This is also home to St Albans Shopmobility (01727 819339), where you can hire wheelchairs and mobility scooters. In general, getting around the compact town centre is straightforward, though some of the older streets are very narrow, and you should take care on the unusually high pavements on Fishpool Street – a relic of the days when passengers would alight from horse-drawn coaches.

## 032 Warner Bros. Studio Tour: The Making of Harry Potter, Hertfordshire

**Address:** Warner Bros. Studio Tour London, Studio Tour Drive, Leavesden WD25 7LR

**Web:** [www.wbstudiotour.co.uk](http://www.wbstudiotour.co.uk); accessibility info [www.wbstudiotour.co.uk/ADDITIONAL-NEEDS](http://www.wbstudiotour.co.uk/ADDITIONAL-NEEDS)

**Tel:** 0800 6404550 (Mon–Fri 8.30am–5.30pm, Sat & Sun 10am–5pm) **Email:** [access@wbstudiotour.co.uk](mailto:access@wbstudiotour.co.uk)

(to book BSL-interpreted and audio-described tours) **Hours:** see website for details **Dates:** closed 25–26

Dec **Entry:** [A]£53.50 [5–15s]£43 [under 4s]free [Fam]£172; tickets must be purchased in advance; complete Studio Tour packages available



There are Gryffindor robes and Hufflepuff hoodies aplenty at the Warner Bros. Studio Tour, where fans young and old flock to explore sets from the hugely successful Harry Potter films. Anyone who loves film, art, design, or storytelling can immerse themselves in the costumes, props, models and wizardry of the world of Harry Potter.

After a short film, doors open dramatically onto the set of the Great Hall, filled with familiar costumes and props from the films. Visitors then wander free to view Dumbledore's tower office, the Gryffindor dormitory, and the potions classroom, with self-stirring pots, or step onto Platform 9 3/4 and peek through the windows of the original *Hogwarts Express*. Recent expansions and makeovers have introduced yet more immersive experiences: creep through the spooky spider-filled Forbidden Forest (there's a shortcut available for anyone with an arachnid aversion) or steal treasure from the

vaults of Gringotts – just beware of the dragon! Outside, the Backlot is home to a section of the Covered Bridge, Privet Drive, and the Knight Bus, you can also sample some frothy Butterbeer here! As well as an atmospheric reconstruction of Diagon Alley, the final section celebrates the creativity employed in the making of the films with displays of prosthetics, animatronics and stunning artwork, culminating in a magnificent 3D model of Hogwarts Castle.

Show your Blue Badge on arrival to park at the front of the car park, where there are ample disabled bays with easy level access to the outside ticket offices and entrance lobby. Staff are good at facilitating priority entrance for those with access needs, and foldable stools and manual wheelchairs are free to borrow from the information desk. Visitors can also hire a Digital Audio Guide; this provides extra content for the Studio Tour rather than acting as an audio-descriptive guide but could be helpful for those with visual impairment. Personal induction loops are available, too. There are accessible toilet facilities with grab rails throughout, and a new spacious Changing Places facility with bench and hoist in the entrance lobby.

There is good access throughout the studio tour – it is spacious and mostly on one level, with just a few slopes in the latter part of the tour which are well served with handrails. The hardest parts to navigate on wheels are Diagon Alley with its upward slope and cobbles, and the main shop, which can get crowded. The Forbidden Forest has low-level and strobe lighting but can be bypassed, and the realistic dragon effects in Gringotts could be scary for some. Though some original set pieces are not fully accessible, access needs have been given careful consideration. Those with sensory difficulties can borrow ear defenders for the cinema experience, and there is a small Sensory Room adjacent to the Backlot for if things become overwhelming – ask staff to gain entry. Carers can visit for free by calling Visitor Services in advance (who can also help with access needs) and producing proof of DLA, PIP, a Freedom Pass, Blue Badge, or doctor's note at the ticket desk on arrival. There is an accessibility and autism guide for visitors to download prior to visiting to familiarise themselves on the experience; see [www.wbstudiotour.co.uk/additional-needs](http://www.wbstudiotour.co.uk/additional-needs).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The large *Food Hall* serves up hearty meals such as pie and mash or soup and sandwiches, in a delightful refectory space reminiscent of Hogwarts' Great Hall with plenty of room for wheelchairs.

## 033 Stanley Spencer Gallery, Berkshire

**Address:** The King's Hall, High Street, Cookham, Berkshire SL6 9SJ **Web:** [www.stanleyspencer.org.uk](http://www.stanleyspencer.org.uk)

**Tel:** 01628 531092 **Hours:** daily 10.30am–4.30pm, Nov–March Thurs–Sun 11am–4.30pm

**Dates:** closed 24–25 Dec **Entry:** [A]£7 [18–25s]£3.50 [C]free [Con]free [Friends of the Gallery, Arts Fund, Museum Associate, Advantage Card holders]£3.50



The Stanley Spencer Gallery celebrates the life and works of one of Britain's most iconic painters, in his hometown of Cookham in Berkshire. It's an inviting and friendly gallery where art lovers can enjoy Sir Stanley Spencer's work. Along with his beautiful paintings and drawings, a selection of his personal effects are often on display in glass cabinets accessible to visitors using a wheelchair, making the visit feel intimate and personal.



Housed in a former Wesleyan chapel which Spencer frequented as a boy, it is located at the east end of Cookham High Street at the junction with the A4094. Entry is via a wheelchair-accessible glass door on the High Street. There is a low admissions desk with a hearing loop to the left-hand side in the gallery which is about the size of two standard living rooms, with an upper-mezzanine level, accessible from the ground floor via stairs or a lift. The gallery is uniformly well lit, and the floor is wooden with no rugs. There are also solid benches to sit on to rest. The stairs have ribbed edges and a hand-rail, and the mezzanine level is quiet with a few chairs, so works well as a relaxed area.

There are disabled parking spaces in a small public car park behind the gallery, with reasonably level access to the gallery. In the afternoon, during busier times, it fills quickly, but there is also parking adjacent to the gallery along Cookham High Street. The gallery has no public bathroom, but there are accessible public toilets in the car park beside the gallery and a RADAR key is available. Large-print materials are also available for visually impaired visitors. Details of other aids can be found on the website. You can find more information on accessibility and group tours can be booked by email – [access@stanleyspencer.org](mailto:access@stanleyspencer.org).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There's nowhere to eat in the gallery itself, but there are plenty of pubs, restaurants and cafés in the village.

## 034 River and Rowing Museum, Oxfordshire

**Address:** Mill Meadows, Henley-on-Thames RG9 1BF **Web:** <https://rrm.co.uk> **Tel:** 01491 415600

**Hours:** Thurs–Mon 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 31 Dec–1 Jan **Entry:** [D]£8 [C]free [A]£10 [4–17s]£7 [65+]£8.50 [Con]£8 [Fam]£30, free parking for Blue Badge holders only



Set in a picturesque water meadow beside the Thames at Henley, the River and Rowing Museum gives visitors a glimpse into the historic relationships between the town of Henley, the River Thames, and the sport of rowing, for which it is renowned. Designed

by the award-winning British architect David Chipperfield, this bright, modern, airy museum is a very welcoming place for visitors with access needs.

The permanent displays introduce the Thames from source to estuary and review the sport of rowing through the ages. There is a look at adaptive rowing and a celebration of the GB Paralympic arms-only-rowing gold medallists too. Visitors can take a virtual tour around the town and then travel through its history, via artefacts, models, boats, video displays and interactive exhibits. The museum hosts a varied programme of special exhibitions and a busy schedule of talks and workshops for children as well as adults – check the website to find out what's on. It also houses The Wind in the Willows Gallery – a permanent exhibition of delightful dioramas with an audio guide (headphones or loop antenna), which brings Kenneth Grahame's classic story to life. Visiting this part of the museum should be a great experience for visitors with sensory disabilities – there are many sounds and smells to take in, and even an atmospheric chill in the wild wood.

The museum is a flat and easy ten-minute walk from Henley station and has a free car park at the rear. An enjoyable alternative means of getting here is on the combined river and museum trip from Reading to the museum's jetty; there's a wheelchair accessible boat which operates on this service. At the museum itself, ramps run up front and rear to the main foyer, shop and café, with access to a broad sun deck with benches and tables. There's also an accessible toilet on this lower level. There is plenty of room for wheelchairs through most of the site and staff are happy to assist. The exhibits are on two floors, with a drive-through lift which takes a chair and a couple of helpers, and most displays are at low level with easy-to-reach buttons. The gallery doors are wide but manual and one-way, though quite easy to open. Much work has been done with local disability groups, and touch tours for local groups can be organised in advance. There are currently no specific autism facilities, but the museum is looking into ways of improving its provision so keep an eye on the website for updates. Assistance dogs are welcome and a bowl of water can be provided on request at the reception desk.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The pleasant café at the River & Rowing Museum is accessible directly from the entrance to the museum on the ground floor. It has seating indoors and outside, plus the picnic benches have seating suitable for wheelchair users. You can grab cold snacks and a small selection of great quality hot meals.

## 035 Windsor Castle, Berkshire

**Address:** Windsor Castle, Windsor, Berkshire SL4 1NJ **Web:** [www.rct.uk/visit/windsor-castle](http://www.rct.uk/visit/windsor-castle) **Tel:** 0303 1237304; specialist sales 0303 1237324 **Hours:** March–Oct daily 10am–5.15pm (last admission 4pm), Nov–Feb 10am–4.15pm (last admission 3pm). **Dates:** open all year except 25–26 Dec and occasional times and days. **Entry:** [D]£16.50 [A]£30 [C]free [5–17s]£16.50 [under 5s]free [18–24s]£19.50; booking in advance is cheaper



Steeped in more than 900 years of royal history, Windsor Castle was home to Queen Elizabeth II and is a popular tourist attraction for both local and international visitors. Its attractions include the State Apartments, which include the historic route, featuring

rooms built for Charles II and Catherine of Braganza, and the ceremonial route, which takes in spaces used by the Queen and other members of the Royal Family for official visits, investitures and award ceremonies. For part of the year, you can also visit the Semi-State Rooms, which were severely damaged in the fire of 1992 but later comprehensively restored to their nineteenth-century appearance. You can marvel at fascinating displays of military arms and some of the finest paintings and furniture from the Royal Collection. Check out, too, the calm and tranquil St George's Chapel, resting place of eleven British monarchs, including Henry VIII and the late Queen Elizabeth II, and venue for the wedding between Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in 2018.

Disabled parking is available in marked bays on the high street, meaning it is a short walk up a steep hill, which has limited places to sit and rest to reach the castle. Ticket queues outside the castle are often long, but if you pre-book online you can bypass them; free carer passes can only be booked by phone or by emailing [specialistsales@rct.uk](mailto:specialistsales@rct.uk). Those who find crowds challenging should visit after lunch when the castle is less busy. All visitors must go through an airport-style security check prior to entering the grounds; those who may be distressed by the beeping metal detector should avoid wearing belts or other metal items. The flooring on arrival at the castle is stone with some carpets on stairs, and there are also carpeted areas throughout (the website has detailed images of flooring and access to each room). There are three small steps at the entrance to St George's Chapel, but if you press the buzzer staff can take you to an alternative entrance. Clear signs are given to all the rooms, though you'll have to queue to enter the Dolls' House and State Apartments. There's a Changing Places facility next to the Engine Court gift shop. Wheelchairs can be borrowed on request from the Admission Centre, and a BSL video tour is available. There is also a descriptive audio guide for those with visual impairments; this is included in the ticket price and can be collected from the Moat Room. There is a detailed autism support and accessibility information on the website, including clear colour photos of the castle interior for those wishing to familiarise themselves with the layout prior to visiting. If there is a BSL event being held, there are BSL interpreters on site at all times, and there are several members of staff with level 3 BSL. For up-to-date information on accessibility, check the website.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► Windsor Castle's café can be found in the medieval undercroft. One of the few remaining parts of Edward III's major renovations in the 1360s, the undercroft is among the oldest surviving parts of the castle and during the fourteenth century served as the principal cellar and larder. Here you can enjoy sandwiches, salads, teas and a variety of sweet treats.

## 036 Legoland Windsor, Berkshire

**Address:** Winkfield Road, Windsor SL4 4AY **Web:** [www.legoland.co.uk](http://www.legoland.co.uk); [www.legoland.co.uk/plan-your-day/before-you-visit/accessibility](http://www.legoland.co.uk/plan-your-day/before-you-visit/accessibility) **Tel:** 01753 626416 **Hours:** hours vary throughout the year; see website for details **Dates:** closed Oct–Feb except select Christmas dates **Entry:** book advance on the website for the latest prices; [www.legoland.co.uk/tickets-passes/day-tickets](http://www.legoland.co.uk/tickets-passes/day-tickets)



When the building bricks of a theme park are a much-loved toy, it's going to have instant appeal. Add fairytale characters, pirates, dragons, and LEGO favourites NINJA-GO® and it's a winning formula. What really makes LEGOLAND special, though, is the care that goes into making it a fun and engaging place for all children, whatever their ability and mobility.

The 72-acre park is divided into different "lands", each with their own theme. Small children will love the gentle rides of DUPLO® Valley, while those seeking more thrills will find them in the Land of the Vikings, Knight's Kingdom or in the crazy upside-down world of the Haunted House Monster Party. Some rides can accommodate children who can't leave their wheelchairs, including "The LEGOLAND® Express" and the "Aero Nomad big wheel" with a wheelchair-accessible gondola. There is also a lot to marvel at, including a pirate stunt show in Heartlake City, numerous character meet & greet opportunities, a 4D cinema and Miniland – the showcase LEGO recreation of famous world landmarks – as well as a chance to get hands-on in the LEGO Reef. The resort has two LEGO-themed hotels, both with accessible rooms.

The enormous car park has ample disabled parking, from where it's a short walk to the entrance with music and LEGO models building the excitement. Queues can be long, but booking online means you can pass through quickly. LEGOLAND also operates a smartphone-based All Ride Access Pass system for those who find queuing difficult due to a disability; it allows one disabled visitor and three guests to queue "virtually" rather than waiting in line. The Ride Access Pass application must be completed online at least seven days in advance of your visit. They also have a dedicated Accessibility Experience Team, contactable via the Accessibility pages on their website, who are available to help with any questions or specific requirements guests may have in advance of a visit. A portable hearing-loop system is available at all ticket windows and Guest Services.

Most of the site is fairly level, with a few steeper gradients and one fairly steep hill on entering/leaving the park; the Hill Train provides an alternative to the zig-zag path and can accommodate manual wheelchairs. LEGOLAND is a busy theme park, with crowds, lots of bright colours and activity that can be overwhelming. While the rides are mostly outdoors, some have low-level lighting and could feel claustrophobic or scary; others use flashing lights (effects are detailed online and at ride entrances). The Total Sensory Space in Heartlake City & Hotel that opened in 2018 is a large and fantastic refuge with an impressive array of sensory equipment; note that this facility is only available to hotel guests. In addition, staff are helpful and are happy to accommodate guests with additional needs wherever possible. There are wheelchair-accessible toilets with grab rails throughout the park, some accessed via RADAR key, plus a large Changing Places facility in Heartlake City. The website has a comprehensive Accessibility Guide and contact information for the Accessibility Experience Team. Carers go free but should bring documentation and must be at least fourteen years old.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *City Walk* in Heartlake City offers all-you-can-eat pizza, pasta and salad in a spacious restaurant where it is possible to find a quiet corner – or sit out front and take in a show on the lake. You can also enjoy food from *Pirate's Burger Kitchen*, *Farmer Joe's Chicken Company* and *The Hungry Troll*. There are cafés for snacks and drinks around the park too.

## 037 Aerobility, Surrey

**Address:** Aerobility, Blackbushe Airport, Camberley GU17 9LQ or Tatenhill Airfield, Newborough Road, Needwood, Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire DE13 9PD **Web:** [www.aerobility.com](http://www.aerobility.com) **Tel:** 0303 3031230

**Hours:** Blackbushe Airport: Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 9am–5.30pm for enquires and pre-booked appointments only. Tatenhill Airfield: Tues–Fri 9am–5.30pm, Sat 9am–5.30pm for enquires and pre-booked appointments only **Dates:** all flights are weather dependent **Entry:** Aerobatic Experience Flight available to anyone that doesn't need a carer £99; Aerobatic Flight Training £198 p/h



Flying an aeroplane is something you might dream about, but never expect to do in real life. One visit to Aerobility will have you questioning your preconceptions and realising just how easily the barriers can be broken down.

Aerobility enables anyone to access aviation and even fly a light aircraft. You can even study and train all the way to attaining your Private Pilot Licence. The charity operates from Blackbushe Airport in Surrey and Tatenhill Airfield in Burton-on-Trent. The flights are heavily subsidised, offered at around half the going rate, but must be booked in advance. The planes have either two or four seats and Aerobility can provide hoisted access to the cockpit if required, as well as full dual controls. Once airborne, you're encouraged to take the controls to get a feel for how the plane handles: the qualified instructors are always there as back-up, so you don't need to worry! It's a thrilling, potentially life-changing experience, and even on your first flight, with the reassurance and simple explanations from your instructor about the dials and gauges, you'll get enough of an insight to want to go up again.

Their aircraft offer a range of options for cockpit entry for those with reduced mobility. The aircraft wings are low enough to step or transfer onto easily, followed by a few steps or a shuffle into the cockpit. For those with less movement, an electric hoist can safely lift flyers into the aircraft as required. Those with sight, hearing, cognitive or learning disabilities and mental-health issues can also participate: Aerobility say they've never turned anyone away. If you have a carer, there's a good chance they'll be able to join the flight too.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Bushe Café* sells drinks and snacks – a great place for a flight debrief.



## 038 RHS Garden Wisley, Surrey

**Address:** RHS Garden Wisley, Woking GU23 6QB **Web:** [www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley](http://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley) **Tel:** 01483 224234 **Hours:** Mar–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat & Sun 9am–4.30pm; 29 Oct–Feb Mon–Fri 10am–4.30pm, Sat & Sun 9am–4.30pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£15.95 [C]free (up to 2 per each person with a disability) [A]£16.50 [5–16s]£8.25 [Fam]£42.50 [Con]£1



Situated just off the A3, RHS Garden Wisley provides an oasis of tranquillity. Over two hundred acres include superb permanent and temporary gardens and displays of native and non-native plants. With more than one hundred years of horticultural expertise to draw on, areas range from the herbaceous border to the rose garden and the spectacular exotic garden; a real highlight is the glasshouse, with banana plants and other vibrant giants of the plant world. As well as a riot of flora, the grounds include a series of pavilions and many seating areas where you can enjoy a picnic; three walks lead around the site, including a riverside walk that meanders through the woods.

Designated disabled parking is located close to the main entrance in car parks 1 and 2, with 2 nearest the entrance. The site has been redeveloped over the last few years, and is now fully accessible, with very few steps and paths that consist mostly of grass or gravel. Where steps do feature, a wheelchair-accessible alternative is provided, and benches are thoughtfully located at regular intervals. Mobility scooters (phone in advance to book) and wheelchairs are available to borrow; inside the gardens, open-sided group mobility vehicles drop people off at the main attractions around the site throughout the day. Signage is clear and large, and while some plants are off limits, others can be touched, and many provide a rich sensory experience. The site can get busy at weekends, but weekdays are quieter. Given the size of the grounds and the number of different gardens and displays, be sure to make use of the site map, which has a designated accessible route marked. There are accessible toilets around the site, with grab rails and wide entrance doors as is the availability of a Changing Places toilet. Assistance dogs are welcome in all garden areas and buildings.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The struggle at Wisley is deciding which of the restaurants and cafés to refuel at! You can eat and drink both indoors and outdoors with a variety of hot and cold food available throughout the day. There is good access at all the restaurants and cafés, and with food at reasonable prices you're spoiled for choice.

## 039 The Home of Charles Darwin (Down House), Kent

**Address:** Down House, Luxted Road, Downe BR6 7JT **Web:** [www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/home-of-charles-darwin-down-house](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/home-of-charles-darwin-down-house) **Tel:** 01689 859119 **Hours:** April–Sept daily 10am–6pm; Oct daily 10am–5pm; Nov to mid-Feb Sat–Sun 10am–4pm; mid-Feb–March Wed–Sun 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 24–25 Dec **Entry:** [A]£14.50 with gift aid £16 [under 5s]free [5–17s]£8.60, with gift aid £9.50 [Con]£12.70, with gift aid £14 [Fam]£37.60, with gift aid £41.50 (2 adults, 3 children), English Heritage members go free





Down House, the Home of Charles Darwin

In 1842, when Charles Darwin needed a bigger house to accommodate his growing family, he moved to Down House; a sturdy Georgian home in a pretty Kent village. Darwin was to live, study and work here until his death, forty years later. Preserved as a historic property by English Heritage, it offers a fascinating glimpse into the life and work of this remarkable British scientist.

Many of the ground-floor rooms have been meticulously restored to their 1870s appearance, based on photographs and family accounts; the drawing room and billiard room, in particular, retain the look and feel of a family home. Best of all is the study, crammed with books, scientific instruments, and specimens, as well as the chair and writing board on which Darwin wrote *On the Origin of Species*. Upstairs is a series of interactive exhibits, including a recreation of Darwin's cabin on HMS *Beagle*. Outside you can explore the estate grounds where Darwin conducted many of his experiments and follow the 'thinking path' that formed the basis of Darwin's perambulations around his estate. There's a car park with two disabled bays about fifty yards from the house. The main entrance to the house involves a few steps; wheelchair access is via the shop. Inside, the rooms are cosy, especially the study which is the smallest of all the ground-floor rooms. All will fit a wheelchair, but there's no room to turn a wheelchair in the study so assistance may be required. Most ground-floor rooms have level access, and there's a good-sized lift up to the first floor. Audio guides, Braille guides and large-print guides are available on request, and all video displays have subtitles. Outside, most areas of the garden are accessible, though the glasshouse is a bit narrow for wheelchairs and the Sandwalk (Darwin's "thinking path") has an uneven surface; wheelchair users may need assistance here. A wheelchair is available to borrow at Down House (ring ahead to reserve). There's an accessible toilet outside, next to the tearoom. Down House has many quiet areas and staff can advise on less busy times to visit. Assistance dogs are welcome.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The accessible ground-floor tearoom is attractive and inexpensive; offerings include soup and homemade cakes. On warm days you can eat outside on the spacious patio. Alternatively, picnics are allowed in the designated picnic area in the 1881 garden extension – ask staff to direct you if necessary.

## 040 Canterbury, Kent



Canterbury is made up of an Aladdin's cave of ancient buildings, quirky shops and a small but lively arts scene. Although much of the city's architecture dates from the Middle Ages, Canterbury is in fact nearly 2,000 years old. It's best known for its cathedral, which became a major destination for pilgrims following the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket on its altar in 1170.

The city's medieval centre, with its cobblestones and half-timbered buildings, is a stone's throw from Canterbury Cathedral (Cathedral House, The Precincts, 01227 762862, [www.canterbury-cathedral.org](http://www.canterbury-cathedral.org)). Dating from 597, it's one of England's oldest cathedrals so parts of it aren't wheelchair accessible: uneven surfaces and worn stairs can be an issue, and some interior steps don't have grab rails. Other attractions worth visiting include the nearby King's Mile ([www.the kingsmile.org.uk](http://www.the kingsmile.org.uk)) with an array of boutique and gift shops, patisseries and cafés. The Beaney House of Art and Knowledge gallery and museum (18 High St, 01227 862162, <https://canterburymuseums.co.uk/the-beaney>); and the fully accessible St Augustine's Abbey (Longport, 01227 767345, [www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/st-augustines-abbey](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/st-augustines-abbey)). For a novel way to see the city, book a boat trip with the Canterbury Punting Company ([www.canterbury-punting.co.uk](http://www.canterbury-punting.co.uk)). They offer group and individual punting trips through the waterways of Canterbury with commentary and a chauffeur; a transfer board helps wheelchair users onto the boat, and there's a loop system too. Try to call ahead – the team will do what they can to accommodate visitors of all abilities.

Driving into central Canterbury can be tricky, with on-street parking hard to come by: Orange Street is the only disabled car park, with eighteen dedicated parking bays (though it's unsigned and hard to find). See [www.canterbury.gov.uk/parking-and-roads/find-somewhere-park](http://www.canterbury.gov.uk/parking-and-roads/find-somewhere-park) for details of other disabled parking in Canterbury. However, it's better to use the Park and Ride, which is served by three accessible bus routes. By their very nature, the most interesting parts of Canterbury can be hard for disabled visitors to navigate due to the cobblestones, although some roads have drop-down kerbs and smoother paved areas. The partially pedestrianised King's Mile is level and accessible, though many of its historic shops are small and narrow, with medieval and Tudor buildings overhanging the pavements. Whitefriars shopping centre has the usual high-street chain stores, and the city's Shopmobility store (01227 459889, <https://shopmo.org.uk>), on the second floor of Whitefriars multi-storey car park; here you can hire mobility scooters and electric or manual wheelchairs (£10/day mobility scooters and electric wheelchairs, £7/day manual wheelchairs; advance booking recommended). Most of the city's public toilets require a RADAR key for access (the Beaney House no longer sell RADAR keys; purchase online or at the Shopmobility shop), though the visitor centre (01227 862162, [www.canterbury.co.uk](http://www.canterbury.co.uk)), in Beaney House, has several clean, spacious, accessible toilets. There are dedicated disabled bays in all of the car parks when you visit; see [www.canterbury.gov.uk/parking](http://www.canterbury.gov.uk/parking).



## 041 Leeds Castle, Kent

**Address:** Leeds Castle, Maidstone, Kent ME17 1PL **Web:** <https://leeds-castle.com> **Tel:** 01622 765400

**Hours:** The Castle: April–Sept daily 10.30am–5.30pm, Oct–March daily 10.30am–3.30pm (with special Christmas opening times). The Grounds: April–Sept daily 10am–6pm, Oct–Sept daily 10am–5pm (with special Christmas opening times) **Entry:** [D] from £27 [C] free [A] from £30 [3–15s] from £22.50 [D 4–15s] from £20 [under 4s] free. Tickets valid for one year after issue; best prices and discounts available when booking direct online



So much more than just a historic building, the extensive grounds in and around Leeds Castle play host to a range of family-friendly activities, from a ferry trip on the lake, through a birds of prey centre, formal gardens and a maze, to the downright bizarre dog-collar museum. There's also a fully accessible Adventure Golf course themed around the castle and its key attractions.

The castle itself is the focal attraction and with good reason. Its rich architectural history spans nearly one thousand years: from Norman beginnings, it served as a royal palace for several medieval and Tudor queens, before becoming the private residence in the 1920s of Lady Baillie, who restored much of the castle to its former glory. A visit round the castle starts at the Norman keep, continuing through a series of magnificently furnished royal apartments complete with tapestries, ornate carvings, and a spiral staircase, before finishing up in 1920s-styled apartments. Garden lovers will enjoy the formal and Mediterranean-inspired gardens, maze, and grotto, while there are play areas for children and acres of woodland and extensive grounds to explore.

## Ideas ►► Castles and stately homes

**Hampton Court Palace** (Surrey KT8 9AU, [www.hrp.org.uk/hamptoncourtpalace](http://www.hrp.org.uk/hamptoncourtpalace))

More than five hundred years old, Hampton Court is particularly well known for its wide range of family-orientated activities. There's a good accessible tour, and the only steps are to the Young Henry VIII exhibition (there's a virtual tour in the Information Centre) and the wine cellar.

**Castle Howard** (York YO60 7DA; [www.castlehoward.co.uk](http://www.castlehoward.co.uk)) One of England's finest stately homes, the Castle Howard estate is still owned by the Howard family and boasts interiors and formal gardens that, for once, truly merit the descriptor "awesome". The main house features a stairlift (with weight and size limits) and some parts of the house have restricted access. Outside, a land-train takes wheelchairs and the effort out of exploring the one thousand acres of formal grounds.

There are disabled parking bays near the entrance, though these fill up quickly. Book online to avoid long queues at the ticket kiosks in summer. There are spacious accessible toilets throughout the attraction, including at the entrance, the Fairfax Courtyard and the Knights' Stronghold Playground. There is an accessible toilet with adult changing facilities by the *Whistle Stop Café* accessed via RADAR key. From the entrance, it's a fifteen-minute walk through woodland gardens to the castle; alternatively, you can borrow a manual wheelchair from the ticket kiosks (book in advance at busy times). Alternatively, a minibus and a little train run from the kiosks to the castle entrance, though unfortunately the train cannot cater to wheelchair users.

The drawbridge at the castle entrance has several yards of cobblestones, but is relatively even ground on the other side. There's alternative access into the castle via a ramp at the main door for those who can't manage the initial steps into the wine cellar. Wheelchair users are taken on an accessible route around the ground floor of the castle, against the flow of visitors. A wheelchair lift is available between the first corridor and the Heraldry Room, with staff on hand to assist, though the upper floor is inaccessible for wheelchair users. If the individual accompanying a wheelchair user wishes to visit the upper floors, a steward can escort them to the Yellow Drawing Room where they can watch a film of the upstairs rooms while waiting. There are several rest seats throughout and audio guides are available with, on request, an induction loop. The castle corridors get very congested in summer, so those who find crowds overwhelming may want to visit in the last hour before closing when it tends to be quieter. There are plenty of tranquil places in the large grounds and gardens, where visitors of all ages can find some peace and quiet.

The maze and grotto are not suitable for wheelchair users, though the falconry display and dog-collar museum have level access, and the ferry boat has space for up to three wheelchairs. The formal gardens, although on different levels, are accessible via slopes and ramps. The Culpeper Garden and the Mediterranean-style garden, in particular, have several rest seats and tend to be the quietest areas.

**FOOD & DRINK ►►** Food and drink options include the level-access *Castle View Restaurant* (from £10 for mains), with toilets accessed via a wheelchair lift, plus food kiosks and cafés (sandwiches from £4), though the kiosks, particularly around the courtyard, have a step and limited space for wheelchairs. Don't fancy a café? You can always enjoy a picnic in the five-hundred-acre grounds.

## 042 Samphire Hoe, Kent

**Address:** signposted south off the A20, 1.2 miles west of Dover CT17 9FL (not recognised by all sat navs); contact address: White Cliffs Countryside Partnership, c/o Dover District Council, White Cliffs Business Park, Dover CT16 3PJ **Web:** [www.samphirehoe.com](http://www.samphirehoe.com) **Tel:** 01304 225649 **Hours:** daily 7am–dusk (last entry 7pm) **Dates:** no closures **Entry:** free; pay-and-display car park (free to Blue Badge holders)



The 4.9 million cubic metres of chalk marl that came out of the Channel Tunnel had to go somewhere: it was piled in the sea below the White Cliffs at Dover and the result is a unique, isolated stretch of chalk meadowland – now a nature reserve – called Samphire Hoe. It's a haven for wildlife and human visitors alike.

This new piece of Kent is a magical and ever-changing place: tucked in under the cliffs, it can be a peaceful suntrap and picnic spot on a hot day, but in rough weather the waves can come crashing in. The Hoe is landscaped with small lakes and sown with local wildflowers – look out for granny's toenails (also known as bird's-foot trefoil) – and is home to the rare early spider orchid, which you can see in April and May. Many species of insects and birds have rapidly colonised the area, and if you're quiet, and very lucky, you might see an adder. In the summer months, keep your eyes peeled for a channel swimmer as the small beach at Samphire Hoe is often where swims begin. If you like sea-fishing, then bring your tackle along and try your luck along the sea wall. And be sure to check out the sound sculptures, which evoke the history and beauty of the nature reserve. These installations have been created by local artists, who have combined pictures, sculpture, and sound recordings to tell the stories of the people who used to live here under the cliffs, and to evoke the haunting natural sounds and beauty of the Hoe. An indoor shelter (open year-round) houses six changing exhibitions of indoor and outdoor activities; call for details on which exhibitions are running.

Next to the car park – which has four designated disabled bays – there is a tea kiosk with a RADAR key-accessible toilet. The kiosk has free maps of the Hoe that show all the paths, the many benches, and the wheelchair-accessible route. The full circuit is just over a mile of asphalt and gravel path, changing to concrete back along the sea wall, with an average gradient of 1:15, but sometimes steeper. The other paths are quite challenging: the small shingle beach is accessed by steps and on rough days the sea wall may be closed, indicated by a red warning beacon and signs. For those who find noise challenging, the quietest time to visit is between 7am and 10am.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Samphire Hoe is a great place for picnics; there's also a tea kiosk (Easter–Sept daily 11am–5pm, volunteer dependent; weekends only in winter) in the car park selling reasonably priced hot and cold drinks, snacks, filled rolls and cakes..

## 043 Kent and East Sussex Scenic Drive



**Driving distance:** 62 miles **Approx driving time without stops:** 2 hours 15 minutes

You'll be treated to plenty of variety on this rewarding drive through Kent and East Sussex, on a route of many contrasts.



Starting at the ancient seaport of Hythe – which boasts a long, accessible promenade overlooking the English Channel – drive south and you’ll soon find yourself in the flat, bleak landscape of Romney Marsh, a vast expanse of drained marshland populated by grazing sheep and the occasional hamlet. It’s very atmospheric, especially if you weave through the small interior roads, via Lympne (with great views from its churchyard), Burmarsh and St Mary in the Marsh.

The coast road (A259) is faster, but less interesting – even the sea remains hidden behind the giant sea wall lining the road. If you want a sea view, stop off at Dungeness, on the southern tip of the headland. Set on a long shingle promontory, home to two nuclear power stations, a lonely railway station (terminus of the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch railway; 01797 362353, [www.rhdr.org.uk](http://www.rhdr.org.uk)) and a couple of lighthouses, it can’t be said to be pretty, but it’s oddly compelling. There is also a clutch of fishermen’s shacks dotted around the promontory; the windswept garden of Prospect Cottage, designed by former owner, film director and artist Derek Jarman, is a fittingly understated local attraction. An accessible boardwalk from the road takes you over the shingle to the water’s edge. There is an accessible café and toilet in the train station (open Easter–Sept) though you may need assistance with getting across the shingle, as the train station is surrounded by it.

Back in the car, head inland to Lydd – on the way, you’ll pass a signed turning on the left to the RSPB Dungeness nature reserve (01797 320588, [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)), where you can admire abundant birdlife from six wheelchair-accessible hides. From Lydd, it’s a twenty-minute drive to Rye, a picturesque medieval town. The old centre, perched on a hill, isn’t ideal for manual wheelchair users, with its steep inclines and cobbled streets, but the attractive harbourside area below is mostly level, with a few disabled parking spaces and a RADAR key-accessible public toilet. Turning inland from Rye on the B2082, you’ll exchange the desolate lowland of Romney Marsh for rolling Kent downlands, with orchards,



hop fields and vineyards on every side. It's a startling transformation, and very pretty. Good stopping-off points include Iden and Wittersham, a pair of quaint little villages with old churches, and the bustling market town of Tenterden, with an appealing array of shops, tearooms, and pubs. To finish off, take the A262 to Goudhurst, a beautiful, red-roofed village dramatically sited on the top of a hill, offering lovely views over the Kent Weald.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ In Rye, good seafood and steak are on offer at *Carey's* (01797 224783) at the harbourside; it has ramped access but no accessible toilet (there's a public one opposite). In Tenterden you'll find the charming *White Lion Hotel* (01580 765077). It has level entry, an accessible toilet, splendid food and a selection of award-winning ales.

## 044 Arundel Castle, West Sussex

**Address:** Arundel Castle, Arundel, West Sussex BN18 9AB **Web:** [www.arundelcastle.org](http://www.arundelcastle.org) **Tel:** 01903 882173 **Hours:** April–Nov Tues–Sun plus Mon in Aug & bank hols 10am–5pm; restaurant, café & keep close at 4.30pm (last admission to castle 4pm) **Dates:** closed Nov–Mar **Entry:** one carer free per individual with a disability (if you book online, purchase one ticket and you'll receive the carer's ticket at the gate on entry); prices vary depending on which type of ticket you buy and which parts of the castle you visit; check website for details



One of England's largest inhabited castles, Arundel Castle was founded in the eleventh century by Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Arundel, and today is the family home of the eighteenth Duke of Norfolk. The castle has commanded spectacular views over the striking landscape of the South Downs for nearly ten centuries. Its tall turrets, imposing defences, landscaped gardens, and Norman motte and keep make it seem almost en-

chanted from afar, while the finely preserved interior includes the Baron's Hall (accessible via a platform lift), the fourteenth-century Catholic Fitzalan Chapel and Victorian bedrooms (both inaccessible to wheelchairs), and a Regency library. In the library are paintings by Van Dyck, Gainsborough, and Holbein.

A ramped entrance and lift provide access to the castle. Inside, about one-third of the castle is inaccessible for wheelchair users (and may be tricky for visitors with physical disabilities) due to the ancient architecture – the spiral staircases and narrow corridors of the keep, for example, as well as the several flights of steps leading to the bedrooms. Lift access is provided to most of the floors, but the Victorian lift that takes visitors to the ground and first floor has a width restriction (24ins) due to its age. If your wheelchair is too wide to fit, collapsible wheelchairs are available to borrow. Wooden floors inside the castle can be noisy, though there are some quiet areas too. Well-kept accessible toilets are found on site and castle staff receive disability training. Outside, there are footpaths throughout the landscaped castle gardens and ramps wherever there are steps, though there are some slopes and gravel paths.

The car park is near the ticket office. The incline from the ticket office to the castle entrance is steep, but a motorised buggy ferries people up and down the hill (arrange at the ticket office). Carers accompanying a disabled adult receive free entry to the castle. If the carer is accompanying a child, meanwhile, the child gains free entry and the carer pays the adult ticket price.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The castle coffee shop and restaurant are both wheelchair accessible and serve reasonably priced light lunches and snacks. Alternatively, there are plenty of cafés and tea rooms in Arundel.



Arundel Castle library

## 045 Drusillas Park, East Sussex

**Address:** Alfriston BN26 5QS **Web:** [www.drusillas.co.uk](http://www.drusillas.co.uk) **Tel:** 01323 874100 **Hours:** summer daily 10am–6pm, winter daily 10am–5pm; last entry one hour before closing **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec  
**Entry:** prices vary throughout the year; tickets can be bought on the gate; pre-booked tickets are 20% cheaper; check the website for details



“No Ordinary Zoo!” claim Drusillas on their promotional material, and therein lies the appeal of this attraction: while most children love looking at animals, it’s all too easy to get a bit fur-fatigued. The joy of Drusillas is that it is a zoo and playground and theme park rolled into one, and the compact nature of the site means you can happily hop between the three. There are no lions, tigers or bears here, but instead, plenty of cute and cuddly creatures, not least in the walk-through Lemurland, home to friendly ring-tailed and black lemurs. It is possible to pop up in a glass dome in the middle of the meerkat enclosure too. The penguin feeding session is delightful. The zoo is peppered with fun “finding-out facts”; kids can stamp their animal-spotter guides; and activity points around the park – the Zoolympics Challenges – test human skills against animals. Can your children hold their breath as long as a penguin? They can also monkey around in the outdoor animal-themed and soft indoor play areas.

Little Monkey’s Makeover Parlour offers face-painting, hair-braiding and stick-on tattoos are also available on various dates. A three-ride attraction called “Go Safari!” includes the Safari Express train, The Hippopotobus and the Flying Cheetah ride, while the Rainforest Carousel allows young ones to climb aboard their favourite animal. The Rainforest Adventure is a four-ride attraction where little ones can take the wheel on a rainforest track, spin to their heart’s content in the Toucan Twister, or simply enjoy discovering the majestic animatronic wild creatures that can be found on the Amazon trails. Drusillas is now also home to the UK’s largest sensory play experience, SPARK. Extensive 360° projection software transforms an ordinary space into an extraordinary world. See little eyes marvel in wonder as they explore this unique, interactive space. SPARK is wheelchair accessible and offers a SEND session at 10.30am each day.

The whole park is wheelchair accessible, with induction loops at all four entrances. Paving is concrete or tarmac, with no steps, and there are places to rest. All enclosures have low-level viewing for wheelchair users. Wheelchairs are available to hire, with a £20 refundable deposit: book in advance on 01323 874100. How much of the play equipment is accessible depends on a child’s individual mobility, but the trampoline in the Go Bananas area is flush to the ground, and there are two round team swings and some boat-style swings that a smaller child could lie in. There are a number of accessible toilets around the park: the most spacious are next to Amazon Adventure. Key staff have disability training, and disabled visitors can apply to the visitor services centre at the park entrance for an Access Pass, which allows priority access to rides and events. Carers go free (bring evidence of PIP or DLA payments within the last two years to be eligible).

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► There are several places to grab a bite to eat and a drink. *The Explorer’s Café* serves decent, reasonably priced hot and cold meals from sandwiches to shepherd’s

pies. *The Amazon Adventure Café* offers a packed lunch, paninis, and some scrumptious cakes. If you have a sweet tooth, you should definitely check out *Candyland*. There is a picnic area with several wheelchair-accessible benches where you can enjoy your food together. There is fixed accessible seating at *The Oasis Café*.

## 046 The Royal Pavilion, Brighton

**Address:** The Royal Pavilion, 4–5 Pavilion Buildings, Brighton BN1 1EE; Museum and Art Gallery, Royal Pavilion Gardens, Brighton BN1 1EE **Web:** <https://brightonmuseums.org.uk> **Tel:** 0300 0290900  
**Hours:** pavilion: April–Sept daily 9.30am–5.45pm, Oct–March daily 10am–5.15pm, last admission 45 minutes before closing; museum: Tues–Sun 10am–5pm **Dates:** pavilion closed at 2.30pm 24 Dec, all day 25–26 Dec; museum closed Mon (except bank hols), 1 Jan & 24–26 Dec **Entry:** pavilion [D]£18 [C]free [A]£18 [5–18s]£11 [Fam]£29–47, discounts for local residents with ID (utility or council tax bill). Museum [D]£9 [C]free [A]£9 [Fam]£13–22, [5–18s]£4, local residents free



Built to impress by the Prince Regent, later George IV, the Royal Pavilion in Brighton is a unique combination of eccentric architecture and sumptuous interior design. From outside, with its Palladian symmetry and meringue-like domes, the Pavilion looks like a cross between Buckingham Palace and the Taj Mahal.

Inside, the Chinese styling is as extravagant as George IV's lifestyle was scandalous. And while it may not be to your taste, you can't fail to be impressed by the opulence of the decoration – known as Chinoiserie – the quality of the craftsmanship and the ambition of the design. Probably the most impressive example is the Banqueting Room. Here, suspended from the domed ceiling, is a red-tongued silver dragon clutching an incredible 30ft chandelier, from which extend six more fire-breathing dragons. This impressive chandelier weighs in at more than a ton!

The grandeur persists as you move through the ground-floor rooms and culminates when you arrive at the Music Room with another breathtaking domed ceiling, this time lined with 26,000 individually made hand-gilded scallop shells.

There aren't many places to sit and rest on the way round, but manual wheelchairs are available to borrow (mobility scooters must be left at the front entrance), and the staff are helpful and happy to lend a hand. Unfortunately, the first floor is only accessible by a flight of thirty shallow stairs with a handrail. If you can manage the stairs, you can visit the bedrooms used by George IV's brothers and Queen Victoria's bedroom. But if you can't, rest assured the highlights are downstairs.

Just across the beautiful Pavilion Gardens – about one hundred yards away – you'll find the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery. The museum is small enough to be a perfect addition to your visit. Inside you will find collections of world art, fashion and style, local Willett's pottery, and a fascinating collection of photos of old Brighton. The most eye-catching exhibits are in the museum's diverse twentieth-century collection, home to pieces from the early Art Deco period to contemporary works. You can view Salvador Dali's Mae West Lips sofa, ceramic art by Turner Prize winner Grayson Perry, and beautiful domestic objects that your granny might have owned. The museum has level access, some seating, an accessible toilet and a lift between floors.

Neither the pavilion nor the museum have any dedicated parking, but drop-offs and pick-ups can be arranged in advance. On-street parking in Brighton is free all day for Blue Badge holders in disabled bays and pay-and-display bays, as well as in car parks (responsible parking on single and double yellow lines is also free for up to three hours).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There is an onsite café located next to the Royal Pavilion Shop, while the Royal Pavilion Tea by Sugardough offers light lunches, pastries and cream teas.

## 047 Sea Lanes, Brighton

**Address:** 300 Madeira Drive, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 1BX **Web:** [www.sealanesbrighton.co.uk](http://www.sealanesbrighton.co.uk)

**Email:** [sealanes@southdownsleisure.co.uk](mailto:sealanes@southdownsleisure.co.uk) **Tel:** 01273 044163 **Hours:** Mon–Fri 6am–9.30pm, Sat 6.30am–7pm, Sun 6.30am–8pm **Entry:** [A]£11 [C]free [Under 18s]£7 [Con]£7



Opened in June 2023, Sea Lanes is the UK's first National Open Water Swimming Centre; run by South Downs Leisure and Sea Lanes Brighton, it has a big focus on sustainability. The pool is a six-lane, 50m-long, open-air heated swimming pool with the temperature maintained between 15 and 19°C. It provides an in-between for those wishing to get into sea swimming by providing a safe outdoor facility that is accessible to all. As you cross the small level crossing for the Volk's Electric Railway (a little tricky in a wheelchair), you are greeted with both the sight of the sea and the entrance to Sea Lanes. There is a slightly sloped (but not overly steep) entrance to the building; at the top the doors are automatic. The reception desk is at a good height and the turnstiles are wide. If you need any assistance, ask a customer advisor at the desk.

The disabled changing room is locked by a RADAR key; if you don't have one, the staff will let you in. The changing area itself is modelled on a Changing Places toilet with a hoist and changing bench. The shower does have a small lip, but it has the appropriate handrails and a folding seat. The mirror and washbasin are at the correct height and there is a pool chair that you can transfer into. There are also lockers in which you can leave your belongings. The route to get to the pool is through the small reception area, which saves you having to go through all the other changing areas; however, this door is quite heavy. There is a pool hoist available to lower you into the pool and all staff are trained in how to use this. If you do not wish to use a hoist there are a couple of vertical ladders and one set of inclined steps. If requested, staff will move your wheelchair/mobility aids inside so that they don't get wet if it rains. This venue does not have a hearing loop, but it does allow guide dogs and service dogs on poolside.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *Fika* has an onsite beach café at Sea Lanes offering great coffee, granola to fuel your swim and protein smoothies to help your recovery! The adjacent *Bison Beach Bar* (Weds–Sun) sells local craft beers alongside traditional pub food.

## 048 Spinnaker Tower, Portsmouth

**Address:** Spinnaker Tower, Gunwharf Quays, Portsmouth PO1 3TT **Web:** [www.spinnakertower.co.uk](http://www.spinnakertower.co.uk)  
**Tel:** General enquires 023 92857520; booking line 023 92857520 **Hours:** daily 10.30am–5.30pm



The Spinnaker Tower

**Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [C]free [A]£16.75 [4–15s]£12.95 [0–3s]free [Con]£15 [Fam]£56.50; discounts for local residents with ID and group bookings



Soaring proudly above Portsmouth's harbour to a height of 170m, Spinnaker Tower offers breathtaking panoramas from three viewing platforms. Completed in 2005, the resplendent white tower is an impressive sight, its graceful outline cleverly evoking the shape of a billowing sail. The views from inside, however, are what it's all about: in clear weather you can see up to 23 miles, as far as the Isle of Wight, the South Downs, and the New Forest. A high-speed lift whisks visitors up to View Deck 1 (100m above sea level), where floor-to-ceiling glass walls surround you on three sides, allowing uninterrupted views across the city, harbour and far beyond. When you've had your fill of the views, test your nerves on the glass-floor sky walk before taking the lift to View Deck 2 (105m), where you can reward yourself with coffee and cake at *The Clouds* café. The open-air Sky Garden (110m), on the top level, is unfortunately not accessible by lift, and involves a climb of thirty steps.

There are plenty of Blue Badge bays in the Gunwharf Quays underground car park, which is around two hundred yards (step-free) from the tower. Once there, the entrance lobby offers easy wheelchair access, accessible toilets, a hearing loop, and helpful staff. Only one wheelchair user is allowed up the tower at a time (to comply with emergency evacuation procedures – there is an Evac+Chair), so if this applies to you, be sure to book ahead. There's also a tactile model of the tower, to help visually impaired visitors get a sense of its structure. On View Deck 1 there is a handrail around the edge of the glass and the floor surface is level on both View Deck 1 and 2. You can read and download the full accessibility guide online at [www.accessibilityguides.org/content/spinnaker-tower](http://www.accessibilityguides.org/content/spinnaker-tower).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Spinnaker Kitchen & Bar* at the base of the tower serves a selection of hot and cold meals, sandwiches, teas, coffees and ice creams, using ingredients sourced from local suppliers. *The Clouds* café on View Deck 2 serves hot drinks and cake, or you can try their High Tea, currently only available for pre-booked High Teas (minimum of 48hrs online).

# The Southwest

- 049** Brunel's SS Great Britain and Being Brunel
- 050** M Shed
- 051** Coate Water Park, Wiltshire
- 052** Roman Baths and Pump Room
- 053** Wells Cathedral
- 054** Tarka Trail and Tunnels Beaches
- 055** Exmoor Scenic Drive
- 056** Hawk Conservancy Trust
- 057** Haynes Motor Museum
- 058** Stourhead
- 059** Exeter
- 060** Monkey World
- 061** The Camel Trail
- 062** Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy
- 063** Buckfast Abbey
- 064** South Devon Railway and Totnes Rare Breeds Farm
- 065** National Marine Aquarium
- 066** The Eden Project
- 067** National Maritime Museum Cornwall
- 068** Trebah Garden



## 049 Brunel's SS Great Britain and Being Brunel, Bristol

**Address:** Great Western Dockyard BS1 6TY **Web:** [www.ssgreatbritain.org](http://www.ssgreatbritain.org) **Tel:** 0117 9260680 **Hours:** Tues–Sun: March–Oct 10am–5pm, Nov–Feb 10am–4pm; last entry 1hr before closing **Dates:** closed Mondays (excluding bank holidays and local school holidays) **Entry:** [D]£22.50 [C]free [A]£22.50 [5–16s]£13.50 [under 4s]free [Seniors & students]£18.50 [Fam]2 adults & up to 3 children £62, 1 adult & up to 3 children £42; entry to Being Brunel included in ticket price; tickets allow free unlimited return visits for twelve months; parking free for Blue Badge holders, otherwise £2; free entry for anyone called Isambard!



When you board Brunel's SS *Great Britain*, sitting tight in the Bristol dry dock where she was built, you enter the era of Victorian ingenuity and self-confidence. The first ocean liner and biggest passenger ship of its era, this rescued vessel has undergone a loving restoration to give visitors a real sense of adventure. The first part of the visit takes in the Dry Dock, enclosed under a striking "glass sea" that acts as a giant dehumidification chamber and where you can circumnavigate the mighty hull, which has been remarkably well preserved. Stories of the ship's lifetime, voyages and passengers – including many animals – are brought to life in the engaging Dockyard Museum; among the many items recovered from the ship's flooded interior upon its return were original tickets, a snuff box belonging to the ship's surgeon, a 140-year-old ship's biscuit, and some clay pipes. On board the ship itself, the class divide is brought home by the stark contrast between the elegant First Class cabins and the cramped, noisy and smelly steerage-passenger quarters. The attached Being Brunel museum explores the life and legacy of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the acclaimed engineer behind the ship, who crammed so much into his 53 years that it's impossible not to come away inspired. Here, there's a huge, colourful timeline and displays about how Brunel's bridges, tunnels, railways and ships pushed



the boundaries of engineering, before you enter inside an 8m-tall model of his head for an immersive audio-visual experience. It's worth making use of the helpful volunteers around the site – their knowledge and enthusiasm are boundless.

There are four disabled parking bays in the nearby car park. This is a Victorian ship and dockyard, so inevitably there are sloped, uneven areas and tight corners – but great effort has gone into making the site wheelchair accessible with ramps, wide doorways and lifts to all levels. It is worth noting, however, that space in the lift is quite tight (there's room for one small mobility scooter) and there are several doors to open. Because of this, wheelchair users might find the site easier to navigate with a companion to help. The doors in the Being Brunel museum are all touch-button operated, so they shouldn't pose a problem. In wet weather, the wooden deck can be slippery, and in some of the areas below deck the planking is uneven. You'll find wheelchair-accessible toilets on the ship itself, by the shop, in the Being Brunel museum and in the *Harbourside Kitchen*. The museum can get busy at peak times, but Sunday mornings and weekday afternoons are good bets for a calmer experience. Calm Sensory Sessions are held occasionally throughout the year and are designed for children who benefit from visiting at a time when there is a calmer background sensory environment. All videos are subtitled (except for the film in the cinema) and there are large-print exhibit labels in the museum. Assistance dogs are welcome, and there's a tactile model of the SS *Great Britain* for blind and visually impaired visitors. Tailored tours can be organised, too. There's detailed access information online and carers are admitted free of charge.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Harbourside Kitchen* serves reasonably priced hot food, sandwiches, and delicious cakes and pastries, including cream teas. There are movable tables and seating inside and out, with lovely views over the water.

## 050 M Shed, Bristol

**Address:** Princes Wharf, Wapping Road BS1 4RN **Web:** [www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/m-shed](http://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/m-shed) **Tel:** 0117 3526600 **Hours:** Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; open Mon in school hols and on bank hols **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec & early closing (2pm) on 24 Dec **Entry:** free; charge for some temporary exhibitions



You don't have to be a Bristolian to enjoy M Shed, a stellar museum and art gallery bringing the fascinating history of "Brizzle" to life. Its three main galleries – Bristol People, Bristol Places and Bristol Life – are packed with compelling displays and interactive exhibits telling the personal stories of its residents, past and present. On the historic quay-side outside, you can explore M Shed's "Working Exhibits" by taking a ride on one of the museum's iconic cranes, trains or boats (specific trip dates, check website for details).

Inside, the people who have shaped the city are celebrated on a wall of fame, while displays cover a range of topics – the transatlantic slave trade, wartime Bristol, Bristol's neighbourhoods and its importance as a port, to name a few – that delve into Bristol's history. However, it's the personal narratives that really stick in the mind. Inspirational stories depict residents fighting for social change: learn about how people with disabilities demanded access for all at the local gallery and how racial discrimination against black bus employees was only challenged as recently as 1963. Recollections range from

the absurd – how students stole Alfred, a taxidermy adult gorilla, from the city museum as a RAG week stunt – to the macabre, including a book of notes on the 1821 trial of convicted murderer John Hornwood, bound in his own skin. A display covering the history of protest in Bristol includes the statue of Edward Colston, which was pulled down by Black Lives Matter protesters in 2020; after consultations with Bristolians concerning the statue's ultimate fate, it was determined that it should be put on permanent display at a museum. Look out for special events, tours and talks, including rides on the trains, boats and cranes of the Working Exhibits on the quayside and the wonderful accessible “Behind the Scenes” tours run by enthusiastic, knowledgeable volunteers, which is accessible to wheelchair users save for one mezzanine section.

Although there's no parking at M Shed itself, nearby Wapping Wharf car park has three accessible bays. Alternatively, there's space to drop off/pick up passengers in front of the museum on Museum Street. There are three entrances into the building, all accessible, with wide, automatic doors. The reception desk has a section at wheelchair-user height and a hearing loop, and two adult-sized wheelchairs and folding stools can be borrowed from here. “Little bags of calm” can also be picked up for visitors with sensory conditions; each pack contains ear defenders, a fidget toy and visual prompts. Nevertheless, the museum can get noisy – not to mention the heavy machinery of the Working Exhibits outside – so staff can provide a quiet space if it's needed. A virtual tour is also available online, so visitors can garner what to expect. There are tactile maps in Bristol Places, as well as various handling objects. Access around the whole attraction is easy and spacious, with level access to all galleries. There are two accessible toilets, one with a free-standing adult changing bench with a hoist. Although there is a charge for some temporary exhibitions, concession tickets are available and carers go free.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The light, modern *M Café* has level access and serves hot and cold dishes (mains under £10). There's a display of yummy teatime treats, pleasing harbour views and outdoor seating for warm weather.

## 051 Coate Water Park, Wiltshire

**Address:** Marlborough Road, Swindon, Wiltshire SN3 6AA **Web:** [www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20077/parks\\_and\\_open\\_spaces/487/coate\\_water\\_park](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20077/parks_and_open_spaces/487/coate_water_park) **Tel:** 01793 490150 **Hours:** no closures  
**Dates:** no closures **Entry:** free; car parking £2.10/2hr, £4.40/2–24hr



Coate Water Park is a well-kept local secret, and the residents of Swindon have embraced this seventy-acre reservoir and countryside surrounding it. On arrival, the first thing you'll notice is a striking Art Deco diving board – constructed in 1936, it stands more than thirty feet above the water of the reservoir. From here, several level and surfaced paths lead in and around the park. A route, slightly shorter than two miles, leads around the lake and provides a chance to see plenty of wildlife – from squirrels to fifteen different species of damselfly. There's no shortage of water birds too, including majestic kingfishers and herons. Indeed, for keen spotters, there are two accessible bird hides around the waterway. Many of the angling pegs are accessible to wheelchair users, and the reservoir provides great opportunities for catching big fish – 40-pound carp are not unusual (fish-

ing season is open 15 June–15 Mar). At the north end of the reservoir, there is a children's play area and miniature railway (Sundays throughout the year; £2), with a wheelchair accessible carriage, called Maisie, available upon request. The park has golf activities too: an eighteen-hole pitch and putt (Apr–Oct), mini golf and a nine-hole putting green. A Trampler (all-terrain mobility scooter) is available that can access pretty much anywhere in the park; you must book it in advance and collect it from the ranger's station near the car park. It is possible to undertake the routes in a manual wheelchair, but in cold and wet conditions, it makes sense to use the Trampler instead. The accessible bird hides are locked – you can pick up a key and a day or annual permit from the ranger's office too. At a gentle pace it will take around 45 minutes to circle the lake. Unfortunately, the mini golf has tricky access for wheelchair users. Steps are in place for level changes – these can be avoided, but only by using grassy slopes, so an assistant may need to be on hand.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *The Sun Inn* ([www.suninn-swindon.co.uk](http://www.suninn-swindon.co.uk); 01793 523292), on the A4259 Marlborough Road just before the entrance to the park, serves fantastic food. It has an accessible toilet and great access, is spacious and family friendly, with a good beer garden and play area. There is also a café on site at the park.

## 052 Roman Baths and Pump Room, Bath

**Address:** Abbey Churchyard, Bath BA1 1LZ **Web:** [www.romanbaths.co.uk](http://www.romanbaths.co.uk) **Tel:** 01224 477785

**Hours:** Daily: Nov–Feb 9.30am–6pm; Mar to mid-June, Sept & Oct 9am–6pm; mid-June to Aug 9am–10pm (last admission 1hr before closing) **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£18–20.50 [C]free [A]£18–20.50 [6–18s]£10.50–13 [under 6s]free [Seniors & students with ID]£17–19.50 [Fam]1 adult & up to 4 children £31–38 or 2 adults & up to 4 children £45–53



In the centre of the beautiful city of Bath, this is one of the best examples of a Roman bathhouse in Northern Europe. It's famous for its naturally hot spring water, packed with 43 "curative" minerals, which you can sample at the end of your visit. To gain a unique insight into life in *Aquae Sulis* some two thousand years ago, you can explore the Sacred Spring, the Roman Temple, the Roman Bath House and the museum, discovering how the Romans lived, worked and played. Highlights are the collection of original artefacts and animated projections of Roman women in the East Baths, and the terrace, flanked by Victorian statues of Roman Emperors, which overlooks the steaming green-grey water of the stunning Great Bath.

Enormous effort has gone into making this ancient site accessible, with four lifts giving access to ninety percent of the complex, although wheelchair users may need help to negotiate the uneven paving around the Great Bath. The main entrance has large double doors, with level access from the street, and lowered ticket desks: staff can arrange for visitors with additional needs to bypass the queues. It is recommended that you pre-book tickets to ensure entry at a time and date of your choosing. Three wheelchairs and one mobility scooter are available to borrow. Throughout the baths, there are clear signs, information boards with illustrations and symbols, and some Braille panels. Induction loops, BSL audio-tours and an enhanced audio description guide are available, and there's plenty of seating throughout the site. The museum is fascinating, with lots of tactile exhibits and



Roman Baths

high-tech projections, though it can get crowded and noisy; if visitors with autism find this overwhelming, they can ask a member of staff (who will have received Disability Awareness training) to find a quiet space or allow them to leave the venue then re-enter. Consider visiting early or mid-week to avoid the crowds. The two museum shops are wheelchair accessible, though they do get crowded and noisy. There's one accessible toilet by the main entrance and one by the King's Bath (a RADAR key is required for this one). The website has useful information and maps for wheelchair users, plus an autism pack to download (see [www.romanbaths.co.uk/accessibility](http://www.romanbaths.co.uk/accessibility)). Blue Badge holders can park in bays outside the Guildhall on High Street or in the four designated disabled parking bays on New Bond Street. The nearest car park is Southgate in St James Parade, with disabled parking bays.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The grand *Pump Room* restaurant, complete with the Pump Room Trio (believed to be the longest-established resident ensemble in Europe) and a resident pianist, is great for a special lunch or cream tea – and is wheelchair accessible. Alternatively, bring a picnic to eat in the picturesque abbey courtyard.

## 053 Wells Cathedral, Somerset

**Address:** Cathedral Green, Wells BA5 2UE **Web:** [www.wellscathedral.org.uk](http://www.wellscathedral.org.uk) **Tel:** 01749 674483

**Hours:** daily 7am–7pm, Oct–March till 6pm; library Mon–Fri 11am–1pm & 2–4pm, Sat 11am–1pm

**Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** free, suggested donation



A great British landmark and one of Europe's great architectural specimens, the magnificent Wells Cathedral lords it over England's smallest city. The sensational facade, teeming with some three hundred thirteenth-century figures of saints and kings, was completed about eighty years after work on the main building was begun in 1175. The interior itself is a supreme example of early English Gothic, the long nave punctuated

by dramatic and very modern looking “scissor arches”, constructed in 1338 to take the extra weight of the newly built tower. There is level access to most parts of the cathedral, including the Nave, Quire, Cloisters, Undercroft and Camery Garden although owing to the historic nature of the buildings, some areas of paving have worn unevenly over time. The exceptions are the spectacular Chapter House, which can only be accessed via a well-worn set of 31 steps, and the Chained Library and the Reading Room, which can only be accessed via a restricted-width spiral staircase of 28 steps. Hourly tours are generally accessible for all visitors, including wheelchair users and visually impaired people, with guides able to tailor the route to suit the needs of visitors at the time. The High Parts Tour, however, is not recommended for visitors with reduced mobility owing to the many steps, uneven floors, low ceilings and narrow passages.

There’s Blue Badge parking on the street running alongside the cathedral, about 100 yards from the visitor centre entrance; the cathedral itself is accessed via a ramp. Accessible toilets are provided in two toilet blocks inside the Cathedral (one by the exit, one in the Friends Building). Wheelchairs are available on arrival (subject to availability) but can also be pre-booked by calling the Visitor Services team on 01749 671663; moreover, there are reserved spaces for wheelchair users and their companions for cathedral services (not pre-bookable) and concerts. The cathedral has a loop system available for all services while a portable hearing loop is also provided for services within the Lady Chapel. For visually impaired visitors, there’s a leaflet available in Braille and in large print, while specially tailored guided tours are available to book in advance on 01749 672773. All staff and volunteers here have received training in dementia care.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The *Loft Café* adjacent to the cathedral is a light and airy space up on the first floor (accessible by lift) serving light lunches, and home-baked pastries and scones. On sunny days, Cathedral Green is a lovely spot to enjoy a picnic in the shadow of the great building.

## 054 Tarka Trail and Tunnels Beaches, Devon



**Tarka Trail:** **Address:** start point Biketrail on Fremington Quay, just outside Barnstaple, EX31 2NH

**Web:** [www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/the-tarka-trail.html](http://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/the-tarka-trail.html); Biketrail [www.biketrail.co.uk](http://www.biketrail.co.uk)

**Tel:** Biketrail 01271 372586 **Hours:** no closures **Dates:** no closures **Entry:** free



**Tunnels Beaches:** **Address:** Bath Place, Ilfracombe EX34 8AN **Web:** [www.tunnelsbeaches.co.uk](http://www.tunnelsbeaches.co.uk) **Tel:** 01271

879882 **Hours:** daily: Apr, Sept & Oct 10am–5pm, May–Aug 10am–6pm **Dates:** closed Nov–Mar

**Entry:** [D]£3.50 [A]£3.50 [3–15s]£2.75 [under 3s]free [Con]£3.25 [Fam]£12 (2 adults & 2 children); £14 (2 adults & 3 children)

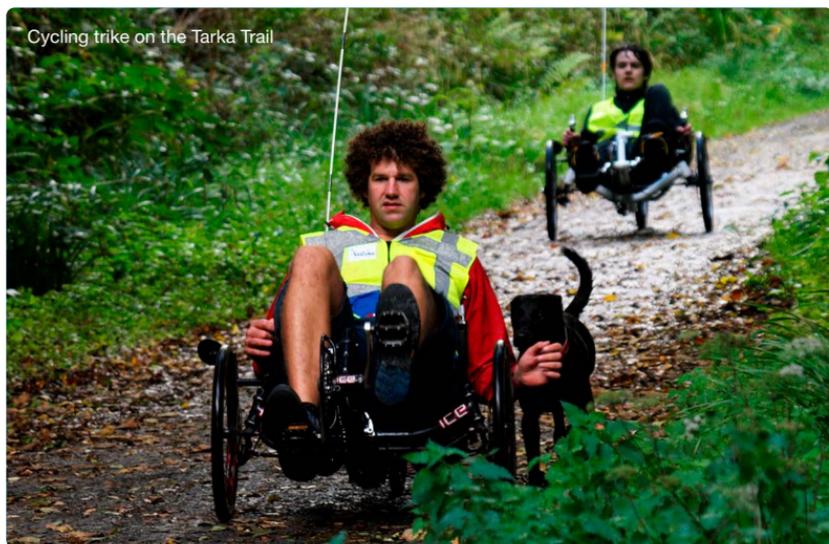


Named after *Tarka the Otter* – the celebrated children’s book by Henry Williamson – the Tarka Trail is one the UK’s most scenic and accessible trails covering around 180 miles of paths. An accessible section of the trail starts about 40 minutes’ drive from Tunnels Beaches – a unique coastal attraction in Ilfracombe.

A good way to explore the trail is by hiring a mobility scooter or other inclusive cycles such as handcycles, recumbents, wheelchair tandems, trikes or electric bikes from Biketrail on Fremington Quay (advance booking is essential). There's a drop-off point outside Biketrail, a free car park just past the shop, and an accessible toilet at the end of the *Fremington Quay Café*. Heading East from Biketrail takes you along the banks of the River Taw towards Braunton and its famous dune system. Within minutes you'll be immersed in an area rich in flora and fauna, all described on small information posts that work in conjunction with an excellent audio guide ([www.tarkatrailguide.co.uk](http://www.tarkatrailguide.co.uk)). Curlews, dunlin, herons, egrets and the occasional spoonbill – and even a kingfisher, if you're lucky – are some of the many birds that can be seen along the shoreline. Heading West towards Instow, Trammer users can also go "off road" and explore the nearby Home Farm Marsh nature reserve ([www.gaiatrust.org.uk/home-farm-marsh](http://www.gaiatrust.org.uk/home-farm-marsh)).

Some sixteen miles from the start of the trail in charming Ilfracombe, you can enter a slightly surreal series of tunnels that exit onto a wild Devon bay of craggy rocks and a grey sand and shingle beach. Formed when Welsh miners tunnelled through to Crewkhorne Cove in 1823, the beach was popular with visiting Victorians, complete with separate bathing pools for "Gentlemen" and "Ladies" (today the Gentlemen's beach is used for weddings, and is closed to the public at those times). In summer the tidal pools are a riot of youngsters in inflatables. Signs at the entrance will tell you when the tidal pools are exposed. At low tide, this is one of the UK's best places for rockpooling, with a rich array of crustaceans, sea corals, anemones and hammerhead sharks – though admittedly the last one found here was in 1865. There's a pay-and-display car park (but no dedicated disabled bays) and level access to the ticket office, as well as wheelchair accessible toilets. The tunnels are flat though the route to the beach gets progressively steeper, so wheelchair users may need assistance here and with the forty yards of sand between the bottom of the paved path and the tidal pools, as well as around the pools themselves.

**FOOD & DRINK** ► Biketrail stocks snacks, drinks and ice creams and is next door to the *Fremington Quay Café*, which serves baguettes, hot food (including Sunday roasts) and



Cycling trike on the Tarka Trail

tasty homemade cakes. At Tunnels Beaches, you can buy coffee at the beach shop. There are plenty of food options in Ilfracombe on the high street and around the harbour. For locally caught fish and lobster, the *Take Thyme Fish Restaurant* ([www.takethymefishrestaurant.co.uk](http://www.takethymefishrestaurant.co.uk)) is an excellent option.

## 055 Exmoor Scenic Drive, Devon



**Driving distance:** 21 miles **Approx driving time without stops:** 40 minutes

On wild Exmoor, windswept moors give way to gentle wooded valleys, which in turn roll into a handsome coastline. This 21-mile drive covers the best of it and will have you reaching for your camera again and again.

The drive takes a figure-of-eight route: follow signposts from Lynmouth through Watersmeet, Rockford, Brendon and Countisbury, back through Lynmouth and then past Lynton, Valley of Rocks, Woody Bay, Martinhoe, *Hunters Inn*, Killington Lane and Barbrook, before ending the drive right where you started at Lynmouth. As you pass the Valley of Rocks you'll realise why this area is nicknamed England's "Little Switzerland" – there are dramatic rock formations in every direction and even a herd of wild goats. The drive towards *Hunters Inn* is via a single-track road along the cliff, with the woods on one side and the sea on the other. The scenery is dazzling, though this section of road is not for the faint-hearted. There's an accessible toilet at *Hunters Inn*, while the nearby *Heddon Pantry* café rents out two Trampers – powered, all-terrain mobility buggies (01598 763402). They are ideal for the mile-long accessible trail from here to the beautiful rocky cove of Heddon's Mouth, or to tackle the six-mile trail to Woody Bay and back, accessible to wheelchair users along a well-made road with a gentle incline.

Back in the car, it's an easy drive back to Lynmouth, the home of the water-powered cliff railway (01598 753486, [www.cliffrailwaylynton.co.uk](http://www.cliffrailwaylynton.co.uk)) that travels back and forth to the cliff top at Lynton – a short but fun trip with exceptional views of the coastline. Wheelchairs can be taken on the cliff railway but must be folded to fit through the doors of the Victorian carriages, and there are a couple of steps to navigate. Once at the top,





you can enjoy a bite to eat and panoramic views at the *Cliff Top Café* (01598 753769), alongside the railway, although this does not have wheelchair accessible toilets. Alternatively, stay on board for the return trip back to the bottom – pretty Lynmouth, with its whitewashed cottages and attractive gift shops, is fairly accessible. There are six Blue Badge spaces in Lynmouth: two in the Esplanade car park, two in the Lower Lyndale car park and two in the Upper Lyndale car park. There are accessible toilets at the Town Hall, Memorial Hall public toilets, and one more in the Lower Lyndale car park.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► In Lynmouth, try *The Harbour Shed Fish and Chips* (01598 752755) for tasty fish and chips – it has level access, although the toilets have a big swing door that can make it tricky to enter unaccompanied. *Hunters Inn*, in the nearby Heddon Valley (01598 763230, [www.bespokehotels.com/thehuntersinn](http://www.bespokehotels.com/thehuntersinn)), has level access through the main entrance and great food; there's an accessible toilet on the ground floor.

## 056 Hawk Conservancy Trust, Hampshire

**Address:** Sarson Lane, Weyhill, Andover SP11 8DY **Web:** [www.hawk-conservancy.org](http://www.hawk-conservancy.org) **Tel:** 01264 773850  
**Hours:** Mar–Oct daily 10am–5.30pm; Nov, Dec & 13–28 Feb daily 10am–4.30pm; last admission one hour before closing **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec & 5 Jan–12 Feb **Entry:** [D]£19.95 [C]free [A]£19.95 [4–15s]£14.95 [Con]£18.85 [Fam]£52.75



As you drive along the busy A303 near Andover, there's little – save the odd brown sign – to suggest that just four hundred yards from the westbound carriageway lies a peaceful 22-acre woodland and meadowland site where you can see more than 130 birds of prey.

The Hawk Conservancy Trust is an award-winning conservation charity and visitor centre whose residents range from dinky pearl-spotted owlets to colossal Bald Eagles. Many of the birds take part in a series of spectacular daily flying displays in which



raptors large and small fly so low over the audience's heads you can feel the wind from their wings. A highlight of the summer season is the Masters of the Sky display (daily 2pm) where you'll see a mass fly-past of eagles, vultures, kites and more which soar and wheel in a nearby thermal before swooping overhead to land in the adjacent wildflower meadow. Nor should you miss the opportunity to meet their burrowing owls on an exclusive Meet the Burrowers VIP encounter, where these cheeky little birds will run and fly around you – maybe even using you as a perch!

The centre is served by a large car park on a slight slope with five Blue Badge spaces near the entrance. Access to the reception area is level (though the payment desk is high) and the outdoor paths around the site all have a tarmac surface, though they aren't all smooth. All display arenas have viewing areas for wheelchair users, and there are several accessible bird hides. Manual wheelchairs are available free of charge but should be booked ahead, and there are plenty of benches dotted around the grounds. There are three accessible toilets near the entrance, which are clean and equipped with grab rails, in addition to accessible toilets in the restaurant. For visually impaired visitors, there's a large-print information sheet available in the restaurant and gift shop.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► *Feathers Restaurant* is fully accessible and seats 120 people, offering a range of hot and cold food for breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea.

## 057 Haynes Motor Museum, Somerset

**Address:** Sparkford, Yeovil BA22 7LH **Web:** [www.haynesmuseum.org](http://www.haynesmuseum.org) **Tel:** 01963 440804; access 01963 442783 **Hours:** April–Sept daily 10am–5.30pm; Oct–March daily 10am–4.30pm **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£21.95 [C]free [A]£21.95 [4–15s]£12.50 [under 4]free [seniors, students & serving forces]£18.50 [Fam]£21.50–50; discounts available for groups of 15 or more



If there's a wannabe Lewis Hamilton or burgeoning Jeremy Clarkson in your midst, a visit to the Haynes International Motor Museum is a must.

From contemporary supercars, like the Jaguar XJ220 and the Ferrari 360, to veteran masterpieces, there are more than four hundred vehicles here. The Red Room, packed with models in the sports car colour of choice, is legendary, but there are seventeen other display areas to explore too where all the big names are present: Jaguar, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Bentley and Rolls-Royce, to name a few; two of the most outstanding vehicles present are the 1905 Daimler limousine, and a rare 1931 Duesenberg. Outside there are activities for kids, including an outdoor play area with diggers and a mini-road system, and there's also a karting track (which costs extra). Check the website for the eclectic programme of events, such as a tour of the vintage car collections and a breakfast club for motor enthusiasts.

The museum staff have a good understanding of accessibility requirements. Blue Badge parking is clearly signposted near the entrance. Carers get reduced entry, as long as they produce evidence of their status, ideally a registered carer's card. Indoors, the museum is accessible for wheelchair users with wide paths and only the odd gentle slope, and there's a lift up to the mezzanine level and the motorcycle display. Manual wheelchairs and mobility scooters can be hired but must be booked in advance. A volunteer can be booked as a guide around the exhibits – a useful facility for visitors with visual impairments – and portable induction loops are available from reception, which are best booked in advance. There are three accessible toilets in the museum: in the reception area, and at the AA and Supercars displays.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The accessible *Café 750* is on the lower ground floor, which is easily reached via a sloping walkway and has movable seating. It serves tasty hot and cold food and the kids' menu is good value. There are also picnic tables for your own food.



Haynes Motor Museum

## 058 Stourhead, Wiltshire

**Address:** Stourton, near Mere, Warminster BA12 6QD **Web:** [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stourhead](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stourhead)  
**Tel:** 01747 841152 **Hours:** house daily throughout summer, check website for closures at other times; garden daily 9am–6pm or dusk if earlier **Dates:** house open Mar–Nov; garden closed 25 Dec  
**Entry:** garden & house combined [D]£20.90 [C]free [A]£20.90 [5–17s]£10.50 [Fam]£31.40–52.30



Stourhead, a Palladian mansion owned by the National Trust, boasts a fine collection of paintings and furniture, while its world-famous landscaped garden plays host to replica Roman and Venetian buildings. When it first opened in the 1740s, it was described by the press as “a living work of art”.

Inside the house, highlights include the Regency library, the Chippendale furniture and the remarkably tall Pope’s Cabinet made for Pope Sixtus V in 1590. Access is via thirteen steps with no firm handrail, but a stair climber is available, which must be booked in advance. Once you’re inside, all the public rooms are on one floor, with level access. All-terrain wheelchairs including mountain trikes and private mobility vehicles are not allowed in the house; however, manual wheelchairs are available in the house to borrow. Accessible toilets are located next to visitor reception and in the Spread Eagle Courtyard.

For many visitors, however, the real draw is outside. Stourhead’s grounds are a feast of colour for most of the year and have a magnificent lake as their centrepiece, with classical temples, mystical grottoes and rare and exotic trees to discover on the route around it – which is on a level accessible path and just over a mile long. If you want to venture further, the two-mile path to Alfred’s Tower folly may be more challenging. An accessible map is available at visitor reception, which highlights the recommended easy access route. Surfaces vary from gravel to grass and compacted woodland soil, and some paths are undulating, or can get muddy in wet weather, but it is also reachable by car. Moreover, there are some stony and steepish descents, which may be unsuitable for anyone with restricted mobility and non “all-terrain” wheelchairs. However, between March and November, there are volunteer-led guided tours of the garden in buggies.

A shuttle bus service runs between visitor reception and the Spread Eagle courtyard and house, although this is a volunteer-run service so may not always be available; call on the day to check. The car park has designated Blue Badge spaces and is an even, four-hundred-yard walk from the house. A limited number of mountain trike wheelchairs are available to borrow for free from visitor reception, but should be booked in advance.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The fully accessible restaurant by the car park serves a wide range of food using fresh ingredients – some even grown in the walled garden. A cosy and splendid pub in the courtyard, *The Spread Eagle Inn* (01747 840587, [www.spreadeagleinn.com](http://www.spreadeagleinn.com)), serves hearty meals and cream teas – there’s a two-inch threshold step but once inside all is level.

## 059 Exeter, Devon



With its Roman origins, glorious cathedral and picturesque quayside, the city of Exeter ([www.visitexeter.com](http://www.visitexeter.com)) is a rewarding and easily accessible destination in the beauti-

## Ideas ►► Railways

**Brecon Mountain Railway** (Merthyr Tydfil CF48 2DD; [www.bmr.wales](http://www.bmr.wales)) This service runs along a scenic four-mile stretch of the old Brecon–Merthyr Tydfil line in south Wales. The website has a detailed access statement.

**Bure Valley Railway** (Norfolk NR11 6BW; [www.bvrw.co.uk](http://www.bvrw.co.uk)) This narrow-gauge railway runs for eight miles through picturesque Norfolk countryside. Access is good, though the ride is bumpy and you'll need to lower your head to enter the train.

**Steam: Museum of the Great Western Railway** (Swindon SN2 2TA; [www.steam-museum.org.uk](http://www.steam-museum.org.uk)) This museum takes you into the world of principal engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, and those who built and drove the engines and travelled on the GWR.

ful county of Devon. A good place to start your visit is the Cathedral Church of St Peter (01392 255573, [www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk](http://www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk)), one of the oldest and most magnificent cathedrals in England. It's home to the world's longest stretch of unbroken Medieval Gothic vaulting, stunning stained-glass windows and an intricately carved image screen on the West Front. Excellent access provisions include on-site parking, a RADAR key-accessible toilet, a Braille model of the cathedral, with an accompanying Braille guidebook, audio guides and wheelchairs to borrow. With sufficient notice, it may also be possible to organise tours that cater for visitors with specific needs.

Another of the city's highlights is the Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, on Queen Street (01392 665858, [www.rammuseum.org.uk](http://www.rammuseum.org.uk)). Its beautifully displayed, diverse collections take in antiquities, natural history and decorative and fine arts. Blue Badge parking spaces can be booked ahead, and the museum is accessible for wheelchair users. It has accessible toilets on both floors, two wheelchairs available to borrow, large-print information, and induction loops in the reception area. BSL tours are available on a tablet, and assistance dogs are welcome.

On Exeter's lively quayside, the handsome old warehouses contain craft workshops, antique shops and cafés. There's also a great accessible footpath along the banks of the River Exe – although on some stretches there's no barrier between the path and the water. While you're here, pop into the Custom House Visitor Centre (01392 271611, [www.exetercustomhouse.co.uk](http://www.exetercustomhouse.co.uk)), where you can watch a short film on the history of Exeter and pick up tourist information; its lift can accommodate manual and small electric wheelchairs, and there's an accessible ground floor toilet. There are five Blue Badge parking spaces at the quayside, which is also served by accessible buses from the high street (although these only run until mid-afternoon).

Exeter has excellent public transport links, and the train and coach stations are both close to the centre (wheelchair accessible taxis can be booked at [www.waveexeter.co.uk](http://www.waveexeter.co.uk)). If you're driving here, note that Blue Badge holders can park for free in most city council car parks (except the Guildhall, Mary Arches Street and John Lewis car parks, where charges apply). The city centre is compact and flat, and can be easily navigated in a wheelchair or mobility scooter; the Exeter Community Transport Association (8–10 Paris Street, 01392 494001; [www.exetercta.co.uk](http://www.exetercta.co.uk); Mon–Sat 10am–4pm), rents out both (£7/day), and runs the City Sights project, which provides a small number of trained volunteers to guide visitors around. They also offer access to various parts of the city previously difficult to reach courtesy of a tramper vehicle (£6/3hr, £10/6hr). The volunteers can also provide audio description for public events (£2/hr), though you'll need to book two to

three weeks in advance. There are handy RADAR key-accessible toilets on Musgrave Row (near the library), at St Stephen's House on Catherine Street and at the quayside.

## 060 Monkey World, Dorset

**Address:** Longthorns, Wareham BH20 6HH **Web:** [www.monkeyworld.org](http://www.monkeyworld.org) **Tel:** 01929 462537 **Hours:** daily 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£12.50 [C]free [A]£18.50 [3–15s]£12.50 [under 3s]free [Con]seniors £12.50; students with ID £14.50 [Fam]£50 or 1 adult & 2 children £36; group 10+ (10% off entrance price when booked online)



Monkey World Ape Rescue Centre is home to more than 250 primates from 25 species, who live in spacious enclosures, in an attractive, accessible 65-acre park. Many of the primates have been rescued from laboratories or illegal smugglers; others were props for beach photographers or private pets who were treated cruelly or neglected. The enclosures here are very well-designed: some are a maze of acrobatic fun, while others have a more natural feel, where the occupants are harder to spot. Keepers perform a scatter and feed and hold Q&A sessions at set times every half hour from noon. The primates rush over when the keeper appears and seem to enjoy the experience as much as the audience. Recorded video keeper talks are also available, and for an extra cost, visitors can listen to a self-guided audio tour (written versions also available). The interesting and often moving backstories of the animals are told on boards throughout the park. The children's playgrounds, set on grass or bark surfaces, are impressive: the two main playgrounds have wheelchair swings, which can be accessed with the help of a member of staff, and there are two reclining chair swings in the Great Ape Play area.

The paths around Monkey World are mainly tarmac, though a few areas have bricks or flagstones, which can be uneven in places. At times the paths are quite steep with



an adverse camber, so manual wheelchair users may need a hand, but electric wheelchairs and mobility scooters should be fine. The only inaccessible part of the park is the Woodland Walk, where there is only one marmoset enclosure. Monkey World has a fleet of mobility scooters and two manual wheelchairs to borrow (book in advance and bring ID and a £10 cash deposit). Registered assistance dogs for the blind, deaf or medical alert are permitted in the park with prior notification, and upon presentation of their ID and paperwork and vaccination records. Those on the autism spectrum may get nervous if the monkeys make sudden movements or noises, when the marmosets appear overhead in wire tubes, or when the lemurs come close in the Malagasy Enclosure. Autism-friendly days are held throughout the year, when early entry to the park (prior to busy queues) is allowed, and a sensory trail and dedicated chill-out room are made available. There are three sensory primate statues (an orangutan face, male chimpanzee and marmoset) for visually impaired visitors; ask a member of staff for access. The mostly tarmac car park has 22 Blue Badge spaces, with the nearest just 5m from the entrance and the furthest about 75m away, though there are some uneven, stony areas near the accessible spaces; there's also a large drop-off point right by the entrance. At peak times the area around the entrance gets busy, but if you ring in advance you can use the quieter wheelchair-accessible back entrance to avoid the queues and noise. There are accessible toilets near both the *Treetops* and *Malagasy* cafés. Carers go free but only when essential and accompanying an adult visitor; proof is required.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The two cafés, *Treetops* and *Malagasy*, serve reasonably priced hot and cold food and cater for vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free and lactose-intolerant dietary requirements. *Treetops* has a more extensive menu, including burgers, baked potatoes and pasta. There are two lovely picnic areas with benches on grass, by large playgrounds.

## 061 The Camel Trail, Cornwall

**Address:** Padstow Harbour PL28 8DB, Wadebridge & Bodmin **Web:** [www.cornwall.gov.uk/cameltrail](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/cameltrail)  
**Tel:** 01841 533449 (Padstow tourist information), 01208 76616 (Bodmin) **Hours:** trail open daily year-round; hire shops vary with season, up to 9pm in summer **Dates:** trail open year-round; shops closed 25–26 Dec **Entry:** trail free; Bridge Bike Hire rates [A]from £17 [Child]from £10 a day (rates include lock, helmet and puncture repair kits); booking ahead is advised



Starting from the beautiful setting of Padstow Harbour, the Camel Trail follows a disused railway line along the Camel Estuary. Along the way there's plenty of beautiful scenery and some good places to stop for a well-earned pasty or pint.

Popular with cyclists, the trail is a relatively level path with a compacted surface which you can follow to Wadebridge (five miles), or more ambitiously to Bodmin (eleven miles), or even continue all the way to the end of the trail in Wenfordbridge (eighteen miles). The Padstow–Wadebridge stretch follows the estuary, with wide-open views of sandbanks, muddy creeks and rocky shores. Birdlife is everywhere, year-round, and viewing hides are set up along the trail. Beyond Wadebridge the route is increasingly wooded, offering only glimpses of the river before emerging on the fringes of Bodmin Moor.

In high season it can be tricky finding a parking spot in Padstow, though there are some Blue Badge spaces in the Town Council and Harbour car parks. A RADAR key-accessible toilet is found in the station car park, with another opposite the red brick building on the North Quay. On reaching Wadebridge, you will find Bridge Bike Hire (01208 813050; [www.bridgebikerehire.co.uk](http://www.bridgebikerehire.co.uk)), where you can hire bikes with trailers, tandems, trikes and a wheelchair tandem that allows a wheelchair (manual or electric) user to travel in their wheelchair at the front of the “bike” with a cyclist behind (£25 to hire); they also deliver bikes upon request. There is also a RADAR key-accessible toilet opposite the bridge at *Wool Public House*, approximately 300 yards from Bridge Bike Hire.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► Arrive early to avoid the queues at *Stein’s Fish & Chips* ([www.rickstein.com](http://www.rickstein.com)) in Padstow, where there’s a relatively accessible toilet and tasty food. Alternatively, grab a Cornish pasty and watch the birds and boats pass through the harbour.

## 062 Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy, Dorset

**Address:** Osprey Quay, Portland DT5 1SA **Web:** [www.wpnsa.org.uk](http://www.wpnsa.org.uk) **Tel:** 01305 866000 **Hours:** Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat–Sun 8am–5pm **Dates:** closed over Christmas and New Year **Entry:** training prices vary according to experience, course and season



Occupying the site of a former Royal Navy air station in Dorset’s Portland Harbour, this world-class sailing venue provides year-round facilities that are open to all, including sailing and windsurfing schools. It provides direct access to the waters of Weymouth Bay and the more sheltered Portland Harbour, making it ideal for a wide range of abilities – from complete beginners to international competitors. The waters here offer some of the best small boat sailing in the world – so much so that the venue hosted the sailing events of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Besides offering ideal sailing conditions – against the stunning backdrop of the Jurassic Coast, a UNESCO World Heritage Site – the venue has a fully accessible building, with cafeteria, slipways, a boat hoist and storage space for up to six hundred boats. The Academy’s large car park has six Blue Badge spaces about fifty yards from the main entrance to the step-free building, which is accessed via an automatic door. All signage is tactile and subtitled in Braille, and an induction loop is available. There are spacious accessible toilets on both floors, and the ground-floor changing rooms have large, wheelchair-accessible shower cubicles. Outside, extra-wide pontoons provide wheelchair access to the water, and four hydraulic hoists aid transfer to and from boats. The charity Chesil Sailability ([www.chesilsailability.org.uk](http://www.chesilsailability.org.uk)) provides sailing opportunities for all, running sessions from here one evening a week. The Andrew Simpson Centre ([www.andrewsimpsoncentres.org/our-centres/portland](http://www.andrewsimpsoncentres.org/our-centres/portland)) and the OTC ([www.otc-water-sports.com](http://www.otc-water-sports.com)), who are also based at the academy, are both RYA Training Centres and can arrange accessible activities.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The first-floor café is accessible by lift and serves a good range of soups and hot snacks, with great views of the harbour.



Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy

## 063 Buckfast Abbey, Devon

**Address:** Buckfastleigh TQ11 0EE **Web:** [www.buckfast.org.uk](http://www.buckfast.org.uk) **Tel:** 01364 645500 **Hours:** Abbey Church Mon–Fri & Sun 7.45am–8.20pm (Sat till 7pm); intermittent closure for prayers and services; gardens, shop and restaurant daily 10am–4.30pm; hours vary at shops and restaurants **Dates:** shops and restaurants closed Good Friday & 25 Dec **Entry:** free; Monastic Way Exhibition £2 per person (free for under 11s)



This magnificent abbey, with its tranquil gardens by the River Dart, is a living monastery with a thousand-year history. A peaceful sanctuary, the abbey is home to a community of Benedictine monks who have always welcomed guests, and it attracts visitors from around the globe. In 2018, the abbey celebrated its millennium with a rich roster of events, including the opening of a Monastic Experience exhibition.

Buckfast Abbey was founded during the reign of King Cnut and stood for five hundred years until Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. A community of Benedictine monks returned in 1882 to rebuild it on its medieval foundations. It was completed in 1938. The monks were gifted stonemasons, as is evident throughout the abbey. Don't miss the bronzes and stained glass windows, the largest of which, at the rear of the abbey, seems to radiate light even on a dull day. The brothers lead a life of study, prayer and work. Outside, alongside the sweeping lawns, the award-winning Millennium Garden, Physic Garden (with traditional and medicinal plants), Sensory Garden and Lavender Garden (with more than 100 varieties) all boast interesting designs and unusual plants and herbs. The Green Hub Gardens and Crafts present a diverse collection of both indoor and outdoor plants, carefully curated to align with the garden themes at Buckfast Abbey. Visitors can engage with the garden team, who are available to share their extensive knowledge about the plants and the sustainable methods employed to maintain the gardens and grounds.

The abbey is less than a mile from the A38, with ample free parking. There's good wheelchair access with automatic doors to the shop, Green Hub and restaurant. Manual wheelchairs can be borrowed from the shop. Two Braille guides are available in the church, and abbey stewards can help blind/visually impaired visitors who are welcome to touch figurines and details including the choir stalls and the decorative front of the organ; hearing loops are also fitted here. There are accessible toilets beside the car park and beneath the restaurant.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► Hot and cold food, cakes and cream teas are available in *The Grange* restaurant, or on the covered terrace, with a lovely view over the abbey and gardens.

## 064 South Devon Railway and Totnes Rare Breeds Farm, Devon

**Address:** The Station, Buckfastleigh TQ11 0DZ; Totnes Rare Breeds, Littlehempston **Web:** [www.southdevonrailway.co.uk](http://www.southdevonrailway.co.uk); [www.totnesrarebreeds.co.uk](http://www.totnesrarebreeds.co.uk) **Tel:** Railway 01364 644 370; Farm 01803 840387

**Hours:** railway website has full details of timings for all routes, and the phone line has a talking timetable; farm mid-Mar–Oct daily 10am–5pm **Dates:** check railway website for timetable and seasonal specials; check farm website for winter closing dates **Entry:** Train ticket prices vary depending on the route; discounts available for registered disabled visitors and essential carers; farm [D]£9.70 [C]free [A]£9.70 [3–15s]£8.20 [under 3s]free [Seniors]£9.20 [Fam]£32.50; combined tickets are available; essential carers receive free entry



Run by enthusiasts, both the South Devon Railway and the Rare Breeds Farm draw you in because of the dedication of the staff and volunteers. Together they make for a very enjoyable day out. At Buckfastleigh station, staff will happily get out the ramp for wheelchair and small mobility scooter users to board the steam train, although there are some restrictions on size and weights of chairs (see the access page on the website for details). Once at Totnes Riverside station, it's about one hundred yards along the platform and over the track to the Rare Breeds Farm. The welcome at the farm is instant and children are encouraged to feed, pet and observe many animals including owls, guinea pigs, chickens and goats. Visitors can go into some of the enclosures too. This is not a massive site, and the paths are level and surfaced with solid stone chippings. Knowledgeable staff will happily give blind and visually impaired visitors more information about the animals. The pens have wide entry gates to accommodate wheelchairs and pushchairs; assistance dogs are allowed onto the farm but not in the animal pens or owl area, so should remain in the *Garden Café* area.

Back at Buckfastleigh station there's a miniature railway, an accessible railway museum and a shop selling gifts and kit for model train enthusiasts. The farm has no car park, but there's Blue Badge parking at the station. You can visit the Rare Breeds Farm directly, but you'll have to pay to park at Totnes train station then walk over five hundred yards along a tarmac cycle path to reach the site. There's an accessible toilet in the Buckfastleigh station restaurant and another at Totnes Riverside station. There are no toilets at the farm, so use the one at the station when you arrive or you'll have a two-hundred-yard trip there and back.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The *Garden Café* at the farm is accessible and serves local produce where possible. On the train, dining coaches do not have reserved spaces for wheelchair users as the doors are narrow – but it is worth calling ahead to discuss your specific needs to see if the team can help.

## 065 National Marine Aquarium, Devon

**Address:** Rope Walk, Coxside, Plymouth PL4 0LF **Web:** [www.national-aquarium.co.uk](http://www.national-aquarium.co.uk) **Tel:** 0844 8937938  
**Hours:** daily 10am–5pm (from 9.30am in school hols); last entry one hour before closing **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£22.50–25 [C]free [A]£22.50–25 [3–15s]£11.25–12.50 [Senior]£20.50–23 [Student]£17.50–20 [Fam]£53.50; tickets valid for 12 months



From the rather hideous-looking wolffish to the much-loved clownfish, and quirky little seahorses to menacing sharks, the tanks at the National Marine Aquarium are teeming with variety and colour. With four thousand sea creatures, this is Britain's largest aquarium. It's run by the Ocean Conservation Trust, a charity dedicated to connecting people with the ocean.

Neptune the octopus always draws a good crowd, while the cinema-screen-sized Atlantic Eddystone Reef tank beats watching *The Little Mermaid*. But it is probably the sand tiger sharks, Friday the turtle, the stingrays and replica World War II RAF bi-plane in the Atlantic Ocean tank that really steal the show. There are also hands-on exhibits, puppets and puzzles for young children, displays about aspects of ocean life, a daily dive show and a programme of talks. At 11am on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, you can witness the sand tiger sharks feeding, as they snatch at whole fish dangled to them on (thankfully) long poles.

The entrance is just over three hundred yards from the three Blue Badge parking spaces, but if this is too far to walk, it is possible to borrow a wheelchair – there are three available



on a first come, first served basis. Once inside, the layout is a bit higgledy-piggledy and there is some walking to do between tank areas, but it is generally not too far and there is seating provided. Stairs can be completely avoided by using lifts. The tanks are predominantly low, while movable steps are provided in the “Shallow Waters” area, so that smaller children can look over the sides of the tanks. Lighting is generally low level and there is a background soundtrack of underwater noises. All the Aquarium’s education facilities and meeting rooms have induction loops. Several times a year, the Aquarium holds “Quiet at the Aquarium” events whereby those with autism or sensory needs can attend in an after hours opening. There are accessible toilets at the café and the Eddystone exhibit.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The self-service café serves reasonably priced hot and cold food. Staff can help with carrying food to your table. An extra coffee bar opens on busy days in the school holidays and an outside picnic area overlooks the Plymouth Sound.

## 066 The Eden Project, Cornwall

**Address:** Bodelva, St Austell PL24 2SG **Web:** [www.edenproject.com](http://www.edenproject.com) **Tel:** 01726 811972

**Hours:** daily ranging from 9–10am; closing varies from 4–8pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec; occasional maintenance closures: see website for full details **Entry:** [D]£32 [C]free [A]£33 [under 5s]free [5–16s]£11 [Senior]£28 [Student]£28; [Fam]£75; up to 10 percent discount online



The Eden Project is a botanical and conservation attraction on a colossal scale: two vast, geodesic-dome glasshouses – the “Biomes” – nestle in south-facing cliffs of a cavernous, landscaped former china clay mine. This Living Theatre of Plants and People takes visitors on a world tour without leaving the country – a tour full of accessible routes. Winner of numerous tourism awards, Eden is, by any standards, one of the UK’s best days out.

The Mediterranean Biome features the sights and scents of warm temperate zones – the Med, South Africa, Western Australia and California – with herb and vegetable gardens, fruit trees and a vineyard. The Rainforest Biome takes you on a trek through the jungles of Southeast Asia, West Africa and South America, where huge trees tower overhead, with exhibits on fair trade and deforestation. It can get very warm and humid, but there are plenty of seats and an air-conditioned refuge in the middle. Unveiled in 2023 as part of the Outdoor Gardens, Nature’s Playground features slides and ladders, a china clay pit and a willow coppice soakaway, among other elements, with lots of sensory elements incorporated.

Eden has excellent access: on arrival, the team direct you to parking spaces. The Apple car parks, closest to the entrance and visitor centre, have Blue Badge parking (if you don’t have a Blue Badge but need an accessible space, speak to one of the readily available stewards). Both have manual wheelchairs available to borrow on a first come, first served basis (there are 25 in total) and eight powered wheelchairs, which should be booked a few weeks in advance. There is one all-terrain Trampler available for use in the Outdoor Gardens, which again must be booked well in advance, and there are also buggies to transport people who have mobility difficulties to the entrance. Ticketing staff are fully briefed on access and most are TypeTalk-trained. Hearing loops are available at three of the ticket booths and accessible toilets are plentiful throughout the gardens.

There is also a spacious Changing Places toilet near the entrance, which includes a height-adjustable changing bench, a hoist system and shower.

There are several routes down to the Biomes – the one that goes over the bridge and down in the lift is the shortest. There are slopes throughout the site, but these are mostly manageable and most of the few steps and steep gradients have alternative routes; there are also thirty park benches around the gardens. The whole of the Rainforest Canopy Walkway, except for the Canopy Rope Bridge, is wheelchair accessible. For mobility scooter users, the majority of Eden is a breeze, especially if using a powered wheelchair. Manual wheelchair users can get help from one of Eden’s trained volunteers, who can also be booked in advance to assist visitors with sensory disabilities around the site. Large-type printouts of the guidebooks and a screen readable file are available on request – for further information see the Eden Project’s comprehensive access guide ([www.edenproject.com/access-guide](http://www.edenproject.com/access-guide)). You can also get a Braille version of the guidebook at the Admissions. A hearing loop is available at the access ticketing booth (till number 13) in the visitor centre, highlighted by the T and ear symbol sign on the desk. Free, pre-bookable “relaxed sessions” are held in the summer and Christmas holidays for children on the autism spectrum, with sensory and communication needs or learning disabilities who may benefit from a more informal experience; see the website for details and timings. Staff can sort out quiet areas and provide children’s ear defenders if needed, and will fast-track people through any queue if required.

**FOOD & DRINK** >> There’s excellent food at Eden’s numerous accessible restaurants and cafés, where the bulk of the produce is local and organic and sourced with the climate in mind.

## 067 National Maritime Museum Cornwall, Cornwall

**Address:** Discovery Quay, Falmouth TR11 3QY **Web:** [www.nmmc.co.uk](http://www.nmmc.co.uk) **Tel:** 01326 313388 **Hours:** daily 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£16.90 [C]free [A]£16.90 [5–18s]£8.50 [under 5s]free; tickets allow free unlimited return visits for twelve months



With fifteen galleries spread over five floors, the museum’s exhibits include full-sized boats, radio-control yachts, areas where you can watch craftsmen building and restoring boats using traditional tools and a search-and-rescue area where you can climb aboard lifeboats and a jet ski. You can even head underwater to the tidal zone to look through thick glass windows into the misty depths of the bay, or up to the top of a lookout tower to take in views of the town and harbour. There is a playzone and trails for children to follow around the museum, along with many interactive displays.

The museum aims to be as accessible as possible: while there are stairs up to the lookout tower and down to the tidal decks, both are also accessible by lift, and the rest of the museum is accessed via ramps. There is seating throughout, though it’s a little sparse with no arms for support. Display information is available in Braille and large print and there is a BSL Tablet Tour available, too. In some places the lighting is fairly dim, but overall there’s pretty natural lighting. Although there are no designated quiet spaces, the museum is fairly quiet, with no flashing lights or loud, sudden noises; that said, sensory bags and ear defenders are available to anyone who might need them, and on

certain days of the year, the museum runs Relaxed Sessions. There are clean accessible toilets on both the first and second floor, with grab rails and enough room to manoeuvre, although it might be a little tight in an electric wheelchair. There's an accessibility guide on the website, and staff are trained in disability awareness. The hearing loop works in the shop and on the audio exhibits. There are ten Blue Badge spaces in the car park across the flat but cobbled square, which sometimes hosts lively events with stalls, cooking smells and noise. There are also wheelchairs for hire.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The wheelchair-accessible café on the second floor serves drinks and light meals such as jacket potatoes, pasties, soups and desserts. Vegetarian and gluten-free options are available. Plenty of excellent restaurants on the square outside serve more substantial meals.

## 068 Trebah Garden, Cornwall

**Address:** Mawnan Smith, Falmouth TR11 5JZ **Web:** [www.trebahgarden.co.uk](http://www.trebahgarden.co.uk) **Tel:** 01326 252200 **Hours:** daily 9.30am–5pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£8 [C]£8 [A]£16 [5–15s]£4 [under 5s]free [Con] various partner concessions, see website for details; free parking



Sweeping down the length of a Cornish valley until it reaches a private beach on the Helford River, Trebah Garden is a sea of green speckled with blooming flowers. Massive ancient trees twist up towards the sun on all sides of the valley wall, while a corridor of hydrangeas runs down the middle to reach Mallard Pond. The garden is a seasonal delight: watch the changing colours – the rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias dominate in spring, the giant gunnera in summer, the hydrangeas in autumn and the champion trees in winter – from viewpoints all around the site.

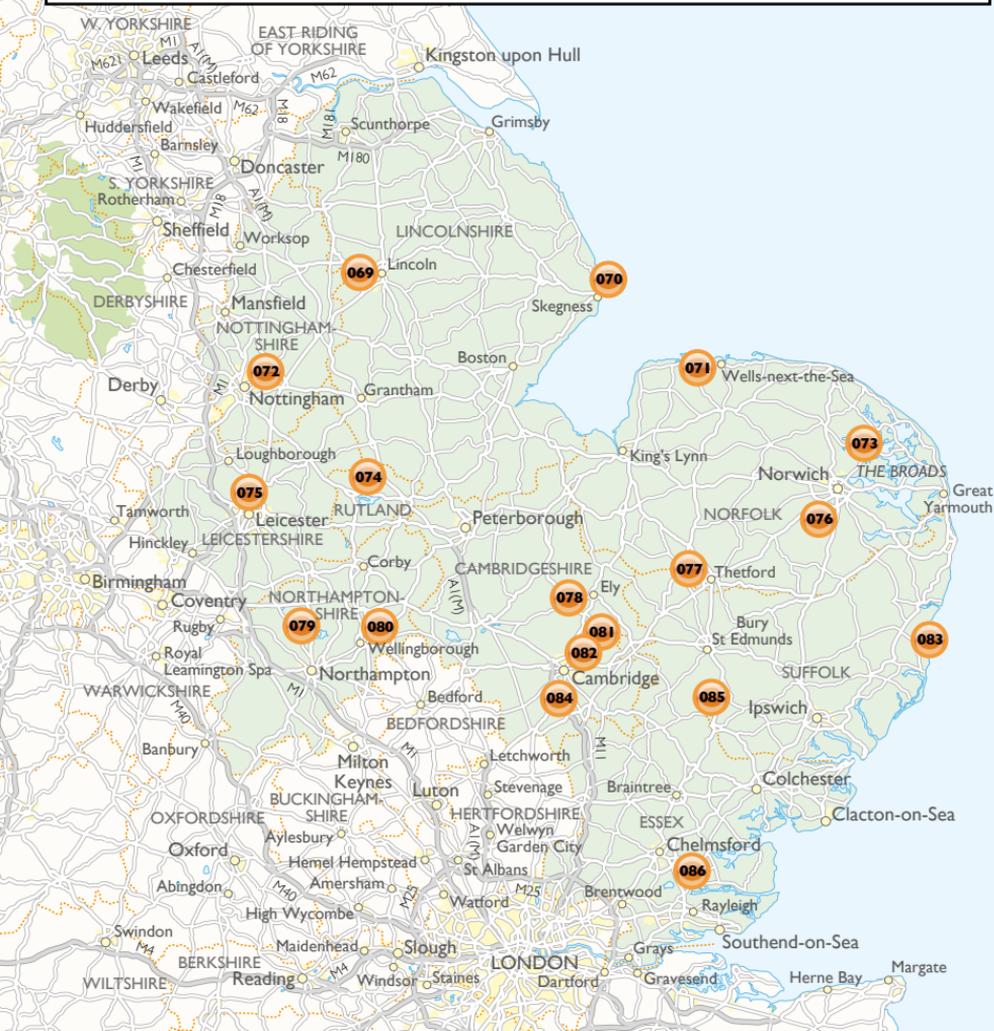
Winding through the greenery are paths that take you down along the middle of the valley or up along its sides. Seating is provided throughout the garden, so there are plenty of places to sit and take in this subtropical paradise. The champion trees are some of the largest of their species in the country, and the breeze is rich with the scent of the flowers in spring and summer. Visitors with mobility issues can access the step-free parts of the garden and beach (about eighty percent of the site) using an electric Trampler (an off-road electric vehicle, available for hire). Manual wheelchairs are not recommended because of the steep valley inclines. Trampers are available to hire from 9.30am to 10.30am for use all day and must be pre-booked.

The free car park has ten Blue Badge spaces close to the entrance and the ticket desk (which has a lower section for wheelchair users). The majority of the garden is peaceful, but visitors with sensory conditions may want to avoid the children's play area, which can be quite noisy. The addition of the new accessible Court Garden, which is free to enter, provides a quieter space. Staff are friendly and helpful, and being outdoors has proven benefits for a range of mental health issues. There is one accessible toilet, which is located at the visitor centre; note that this is the only facility for the whole garden and beach.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Coffee, cakes, breakfasts and lunches are available at the clean and bright wheelchair-friendly café, which caters for various dietary requirements. Picnic spots are located throughout the garden, while the café at the beach serves drinks and ice creams.

# The East Midlands and East Anglia

- 069** Lincoln Cathedral
- 070** Natureland Seal Sanctuary
- 071** Holkham Hall and Beach
- 072** National Ice Centre and Motorpoint Arena Nottingham
- 073** Broads Tours
- 074** Barnsdale Gardens
- 075** National Space Centre
- 076** Redwings Horse Sanctuary
- 077** High Lodge Thetford Forest
- 078** Ely
- 079** Brixworth Country Park
- 080** Stanwick Lakes
- 081** Wicken Fen Nature Reserve
- 082** Anglesey Abbey
- 083** Dunwich Heath and Beach
- 084** IWM Duxford
- 085** An Artistic Drive through East Anglia
- 086** Hyde Hall



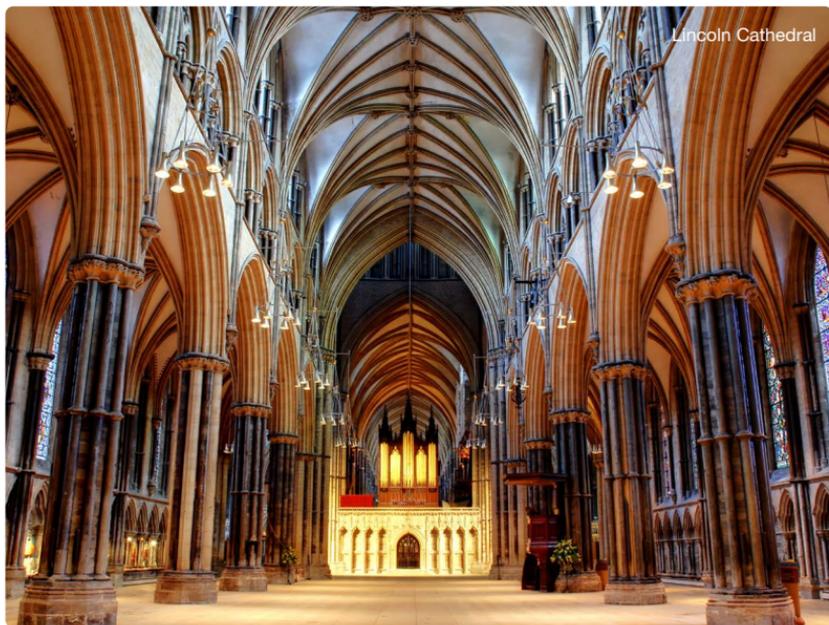
## 069 Lincoln Cathedral, Lincolnshire

**Address:** Minster Yard LN2 1PX **Web:** [www.lincolncathedral.com](http://www.lincolncathedral.com) **Tel:** 01522 561600 **Hours:** Open for the first service and closing after the last service of the day, see the service schedule on the website for service hours. Between 10am–4pm Monday to Saturday and 11.30am–3pm Sunday admission charges normally apply. **Dates:** occasional closures for special events, check ahead **Entry:** [D]£11(Sunday £7) [C] free [A]£9 [0–16s]free



Dominating Lincoln's skyline, this beautiful church is situated at the top of a steep cobbled hill overlooking the city centre. While the cathedral's architecture and interior are indeed imposing, it is also a place of peace and spirituality and a must-see if you're in the area.

The entrance is through the west door into the nave with its vast vaulted ceilings and massive piers. Beyond this, the north–south transept is illuminated by a unique pair of rose windows – the Bishop's Eye and the Dean's Eye. You then come to the heart of the cathedral, St Hugh's Choir, with its splendid oak carvings. Behind the high altar is the aptly named Angel Choir, the well-camouflaged home of the celebrated and much-searched-for Lincoln Imp. Through the northeast transept is the cloister, a tranquil setting for quiet reflection, which provides access to the nine-sided chapterhouse and a fine library designed by Sir Christopher Wren. There are interesting and informative free guided tours at intervals throughout the day. Bespoke tours for visually impaired visitors are available by prior arrangement, please contact [visitors@lincolncathedral.com](mailto:visitors@lincolncathedral.com) or 01522 561600 in advance of your visit to discuss your specific needs.



Through the cloister you will find the Cathedral's visitor centre which includes an exhibition gallery, Discovery Centre, shop and café. The space also has an additional accessible toilet and a Changing Places facility.

Parking is the only major access problem at Lincoln Cathedral. The streets in the surrounding area are narrow and cobbled, with limited access for vehicles. Although disabled parking is permitted for up to three hours in the restricted areas, it gets busy, so you'll have to arrive early to secure a spot. The nearest car park to the cathedral with accessible spaces is Westgate 1 & 3 – LN1 3BG. The ground floor of the cathedral is wheelchair accessible, with the exception of the three side chapels dedicated to the armed forces. In the northeast transept there is a touch exhibition with Braille descriptions. The toilet block has two accessible toilets. A Changing Places toilet may be used by anyone who requires it. Carers receive free entry but will need to show a carer's badge.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► *Lincoln Cathedral Café* is housed in the visitor centre. The menu features a range of tempting items from light lunches to indulgent cream teas. The bright and modern space is the perfect setting to enjoy a relaxing dining experience (Mon–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun 10am–4pm).

## 070 Natureland Seal Sanctuary, Lincolnshire

**Address:** North Parade, Skegness PE25 1DB **Web:** [www.skegnessnatureland.co.uk](http://www.skegnessnatureland.co.uk) **Tel:** 01754 764345

**Hours:** daily 10am–3.30pm last admission winter; 10am–5pm summer **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 25–26 Dec

**Entry:** (winter season prices) [D]with carer £6.75 [C]£5.85 [A]£7.50 [3–15s]£6.50 [disabled child with carer]£5.85 [Senior with carer]£6.30 [Senior without carer]£7



If you fancy a break from the beach while on holiday at Skegness, put your bucket and spade to one side and head to Natureland, a seal sanctuary and mini zoo at the northern end of the seafront.

The site incorporates a “seal hospital”, where seal pups that are washed up on the beaches around Skegness are cared for before being released back into the sea. Each year Natureland rescues sixty to seventy pups from the Lincolnshire coast. You can observe the rescued pups through viewing windows, and in the outdoor rearing pools where they learn how to catch fish. Some resident seals, too tame to fend for themselves at sea, live in a separate pool. There's also a range of other animals to see, including black-footed penguins, crocodiles, pythons and spiders, plus a butterfly house and a collection of domestic animals you can feed, including goats, rabbits and guinea pigs – as well as some meerkats and alpacas. The seal feeding times are a real highlight (check ahead for times), allowing you to get up close to these beautiful animals, which you can also watch from an underwater viewing area.

Efforts have been made to make the site accessible: there are slopes either side of the main seal pool leading down to the lower level – the one on the right, by the aquarium, is longer but less steep. In the Tropical House, wheelchair users must retrace their route to avoid the bridge, and may need help opening the heavy doors. Some buildings are dimly lit, with uneven floors, requiring extra care if you're visually impaired or un-



steady on foot. There are accessible toilets next to the aquarium and in the café. There's no on-site parking, but you can park on North Parade, opposite the entrance, and there's a pay-and-display car park 100 yards north of Natureland. All dogs are welcome, but must be on a lead. Those on the autism spectrum may prefer to visit in winter, when the sanctuary is quieter.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► Between February half-term and the end of October, the on-site *Blue Lagoon* café-restaurant serves hot and cold meals, and a range of sandwiches and cakes. During November to February half-term, it's open for drinks only.

## 071 Holkham Hall and Beach, Norfolk

**Address:** Holkham Estate, Wells-next-the-Sea NR23 1AB, postcode for sat nav NR23 1RH

**Web:** [www.holkham.co.uk](http://www.holkham.co.uk) **Tel:** 01328 713111 **Hours:** head to [www.holkham.co.uk](http://www.holkham.co.uk) for full opening times for Holkham Hall, Holkham Stories Experience, Walled Garden, Woodland Play Area, Cycle and Boat Hire, Ropes Course, Courtyard Café and Gift Shop **Dates:** hall closed at short notice on rare occasions, check ahead **Entry:** combined ticket available, free entry for carers; see [www.holkham.co.uk](http://www.holkham.co.uk) for prices, parking £5 per car



A visit to Holkham is hugely rewarding. The hall, a Palladian mansion, is complemented by several other attractions – the Holkham Stories Experience, a three-thousand-acre park, a lake, plus the expansive sands of Holkham Beach and nature reserve.

## Ideas ►► Animal sanctuaries

**Bolderwood Deer Sanctuary** (nearest postcode SO43 7GQ; [www.new-forest-national-park.com](http://www.new-forest-national-park.com)) For your best chance of seeing fallow deer in the New Forest, visit the purpose-built Bolderwood viewing platform from April to September between noon and 3pm, when they are fed by rangers.

**Buckfast Butterflies and Dartmoor Otter Sanctuary** (Buckfastleigh TQ11 0DZ; [www.ottersandbutterflies.co.uk](http://www.ottersandbutterflies.co.uk)) The compact gravel paths of the humid butterfly house are better than those at the otter sanctuary, but witnessing these sleek mammals at their best is well worth the effort.

**The Donkey Sanctuary** (Sidmouth EX10 ONU; [www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk](http://www.thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk)) A peaceful home to over four hundred rescued and unwanted donkeys in a stunning location. Staff are happy to advise on the most suitable trails around the various paddocks and stables.

The Holkham Stories Experience tells the tales of the estate's 400-year heritage and current projects focusing on sustainability and conservation. Learn how Holkham has changed over the years, how the hall was built and about the Coke family's historical past, from prosecuting Gunpowder Plotters to revolutionising agriculture. The hall itself has two must-see rooms – the magnificent Marble Hall and the Library. Outdoors, there are six acres of walled garden, parkland for children to run around, plus a woodland adventure play area, high-ropes course and bicycles for hire. The lake is brimming with wildlife, while the park is home to a herd of four hundred fallow deer. Like the beach, the park has many walk and cycle routes – the website has detailed directions for every trail, as well as information on the raised boardwalks that provide breathtaking views. The beach is part of the Holkham National Nature Reserve; in summer you may see dark green fritillary butterflies, and in winter flocks of larks, finches and pipits.

There are multiple disabled parking bays next to the coach park, one hundred yards from the courtyard where the ticket office, Holkham Stories Experience, shop and café are located. Each of these venues is accessible to wheelchair users. Further disabled spaces can be found on the gravel driveway outside the hall. A metal ramp is available at the hall entrance. The main rooms are on the first floor, but the excellent and trained staff can operate the Jolly Stairclimber – an inventive piece of equipment that works much like a tank, and is compatible with most manual wheelchairs. Mobility scooter users who are able to transfer can borrow manual chairs to get up to the State Rooms, but otherwise wheelchairs aren't available to rent. Large-print and Braille transcripts are available for the hall and there's a hearing loop in the Holkham Stories Experience from room two onwards. Blue Badge holders can park at the walled garden, avoiding a ten to fifteen-minute walk from the hall, and mobility scooters are available to borrow to explore the gardens. In the gardens some of the gravel paths are uneven. An Access Statement with information on all parts of the estate – including door widths, gradients, counter heights and lighting – is available online.

**FOOD & DRINK ►►** The *Courtyard Café* serves homemade food using local produce, a variety of hot and cold dishes, snacks, sandwiches and scrumptious cakes. The Lookout visitor centre also serves a selection of food and drink, as well as offering spectacular views. *The Victoria* is a 4-star hotel located at the gates of Holkham Park whose restaurant was awarded two AA rosettes in 2023.

## 072 National Ice Centre and Motorpoint Arena Nottingham

**Address:** Bolero Square, Belward Street, Nottingham NG1 1LA **Web:** [www.national-ice-centre.com](http://www.national-ice-centre.com)

**Tel:** 0843 3733000 (select option 1, then 2, then 1 to speak with staff regarding disabled access)

**Hours:** daily; public skating times vary, check website for details **Dates:** closed 25 and 26 Dec

**Entry:** prices vary depending on day and time; adults are ages 16+; basic prices (include skate hire) [D]£11 [C]free [A]£11 [6–15s]£10 [under 5s]free [Con]seniors £4.50, NUS £6 [Fam]£29–47



Home to the Nottingham Panthers ice-hockey team and Olympic standard facilities, the National Ice Centre, in the centre of Nottingham, is much more than an average ice-skating rink.

Live events – both on and off the ice – take place in the Motorpoint Arena Nottingham: check [www.motorpointarenanottingham.com](http://www.motorpointarenanottingham.com) for an updated schedule of what's on, and to book tickets. Acts range from the classics and crooners of yesteryear to sporting events, and attract stars such as Pet Shop Boys, James Arthur and Elbow, and big-name comedians.

Structured skating lessons and one-on-one coaching are available to all, but there are plenty of public skating sessions too. Session times vary throughout the week, with times suitable for beginners, families, teenagers, parents and toddlers, or experienced skaters: check [www.national-ice-centre.com](http://www.national-ice-centre.com) for details.

All public sessions are inclusive, and disabled participants can access the ice in a number of ways. Ice-adapted frames are great for those who are on their feet but require



National Ice Centre and Motorpoint Arena

support. Manual wheelchair users can take their own chair onto the ice, or use the one available at the centre. The more adventurous, who are able to transfer, can self-propel using small hockey stick-style devices on the ice hockey sleds. The centre also runs quieter sessions on Sunday mornings with low lighting and music, perfect for those seeking a quieter atmosphere – including those with a learning disability or autism-spectrum condition.

Every effort has been made to provide a first-class experience for everyone – whether participating or spectating – and most staff have had access-awareness training. Approximately ten disabled parking bays are available on Dean Street near the entrance. Wheelchair users should use the doors on Bolero Square to access the lift. Inside there are wide walkways, lifts to all floors, accessible toilets and changing and washing facilities. Manual wheelchairs can be borrowed. Assistance dogs are welcome, but it is best to inform the venue before their arrival. Those who find noise difficult to manage should also phone the venue in advance so that they can give advice on the noise levels in the centre. Skaters should remember to wear warm clothes and bring comfortable socks and gloves. Carers are admitted free, but should also bring proof – such as an access card, DLA or PIP – although staff can exercise their discretion; the same applies to carer entry at the Motorpoint Arena.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Encore Bar & Restaurant* overlooks the public ice rink on Level 2. It offers good-quality hot and cold food and is a decent place to escape from the cold and crowds below. The *Sub Zero Café Bar* provides excellent food and drink in a warm environment on Level 1 next to the ice.

## 073 Broads Tours, Norfolk

**Address:** The Bridge, Wroxham, Norfolk NR12 8RX **Web:** [www.broadstours.co.uk](http://www.broadstours.co.uk) **Tel:** 01603 782207

**Hours:** April–Oct daily 8.30am–5pm; Nov–March Mon–Fri 8.30am–5pm **Entry:** Prices vary according to length and type of boat trip; check website or phone for details



Experience the best of the Norfolk Broads with Broads Tours. Enjoy a river trip or hire your own self-drive dayboat, complete with a wheelchair lift to enjoy the beautiful Norfolk Broads, one of the UK's most important wetlands and home to some spectacular wildlife including kingfishers and otters. With more than forty small lakes connected by six rivers, the Broads cover some 125 miles of waterways which you can explore on one of four comfortable passenger boats. All passenger boats can carry a limited number of wheelchairs. The regular boat trips last one to two hours, and have a full commentary explaining the history of the Broads and pointing out sights of interest and the abundant birdlife. There are also various special trips throughout the year including educational “Discovery River Trips”, which look at geography and conservation issues in the Broads and can be tailored to fit with school curricula.

There's level access to the venue, with disabled parking spaces a short distance from the clearly signed entrance. The reception area is accessible with friendly staff, and the flooring is easy to walk on with seating available. It also has clean, spacious toilets. Although the staff don't have specific autism or disability training, they are helpful and

can assist with most needs. Two of the passenger boats are accessible via hydraulic lifts and ramps, with reserved areas for wheelchair users, though some decks within the boats can only be accessed via steps. The Access Statement on the website has full details on the layout and accessibility of the boats, and you can check with staff in advance. All the boats can only take a certain number of wheelchair users, so book ahead to ensure there's space; that said, larger parties of wheelchair users (up to ten), such as carehome groups, can also be accommodated with advance notice. Wherever possible, groups will be given their own boat to ensure plenty of time for boarding. River cruises tailored for wheelchair users with support by trained staff are run at certain times of the day and must be booked in advance.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► All the boats have an on-board bar serving snacks and drinks, and, a short distance down the road, *The Kings Head* in Hoveton ([www.greeneking-pubs.co.uk/pubs/norfolk/kings-head-hotel](http://www.greeneking-pubs.co.uk/pubs/norfolk/kings-head-hotel)) has an accessible restaurant with amazing pub food and a collection of light ales and beers.

## 074 Barnsdale Gardens, Rutland

**Address:** The Avenue, Exton, Oakham LE15 8AH **Web:** [www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk](http://www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk) **Tel:** 01572 813200

**Hours:** daily Nov–Feb 10am–4pm, March–Oct 9am–5pm (last entry 1hr before closing) **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D][C] & [A] March–Oct £12.50, Nov–Feb £11 [5–16s] March–Oct £8.50, Nov–Feb £7.50 [under 5s] free [Fam] 2 adults & 3 children March–Oct £40, Nov–Feb £35



Barnsdale Gardens is an exquisite collection of 38 small gardens spread over an eight-acre site. With sites as varied as the Rose Garden, Fruit Orchard, Wildlife Garden and Japanese Garden – all beautifully stocked and sumptuously planted – there's something to encourage, inspire and delight everyone, from green-fingered experts to the casual visitor.

The gardens were created by Geoff Hamilton, who for many years presented BBC TV's *Gardeners' World* from here. You'll be given a map on arrival, useful if you want to target specific gardens, but it can be more enjoyable to just wander around and see where you end up – it's all pretty wonderful. There are plenty of secluded spots to sit down and just watch, listen and smell, taking in the birds, insects, scents, colours and textures that surround you. Barnsdale's Cutting Garden promises beds packed with a range of cut flowers.

There are four accessible parking spaces, next to the entrance. The accessible toilet is opposite the entrance – it's the only one on the site, which is worth bearing in mind before proceeding to the gardens. The gardens themselves are largely accessible and on level ground, though a few of the smaller ones can be a bit of a squeeze. Most paths are fine for wheelchairs, though some areas may be hard going in wet or muddy weather. The centre has two wheelchairs and a mobility scooter which visitors can borrow (free of charge); advance booking is advised.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The pleasant on-site *Helenium Tea Room* offers a wide range of hot and cold food and drink, plus free wi-fi in a spacious, accessible venue. There's also an outside seating area with wheelchair-friendly tables inside and out.

## 075 National Space Centre, Leicestershire

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**Address:** Exploration Drive, Leicester LE4 5NS **Web:** [www.spacecentre.co.uk](http://www.spacecentre.co.uk) **Tel:** 0116 2610261

**Hours:** term time Mon–Fri 10am–4pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5pm; school hols daily 10am–5pm

**Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** [D]£16.95 [C]free [A]£18.95 [5–16s]£16.95 [Con]£16.95; book online in advance; parking £4, there are 23 enhanced accessibility spaces



The UK's largest planetarium and exhibition on space exploration is a stimulating and visually arresting place – something immediately apparent as soon as you lay eyes on its Rocket Tower building, thrusting skywards above the entrance.

Whether or not you're a fan of space matters, you could easily spend the day here. Six spacious galleries tell the story of the origins of the universe, of uncrewed space probes and of space travel, all illustrated by genuine space artefacts, including food packs, rockets and even a space station toilet. Many hands-on activities provide fun for visitors of all ages. A highlight of any visit, the futuristic Sir Patrick Moore Planetarium shows stunning thirty-minute films projected onto its huge, domed ceiling. The planetarium has step-free access and six wheelchair spaces.

There are plenty of disabled parking spaces, though there's a long slope up to the entrance, which is accessed via automatic doors. Inside, lifts provide access to all the levels, though the higher levels of the Rocket Tower will only hold two wheelchairs at a time per deck, and there's a maximum of six wheelchair users in the planetarium show. Displays are easily accessible and spacious, though a few of the interactive features are out of reach to wheelchair users. Touch tours can be arranged in advance, and most audio exhibits are subtitled. Large-print and Braille guides, ear defenders, wheelchairs and magnifying glasses are available on request. Booking online allows you to avoid any long queues, and quiet rooms can be provided if you phone beforehand. There are accessible toilets off the main lobby and at the back of the ground-floor galleries.

Disability concession tickets can be purchased both on the day and from the website. When collecting pre-booked tickets, a member of staff will ask to see either a PIP letter, a DLA letter, a doctor's note or confirmation of a carer's allowance as proof in order to receive the concession. A free carer pass is issued when one-to-one support is required. A Changing Places facility has recently been installed.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► Beneath the gigantic rockets, *Boosters* serves a wide selection of food and drink, including hot dogs, chilli and nachos, sandwiches, soup and snacks. Chairs can be moved and the tables are well spread out.

## 076 Redwings Horse Sanctuary, Caldecott Visitor Centre, Norfolk

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**Address:** Caldecott Visitor Centre, Beccles Road, Fritton, Norfolk NR31 9EY **Web:** [www.redwings.org.uk](http://www.redwings.org.uk)

**Tel:** 01508 481000 **Hours:** Fri–Mon 10am–4pm **Entry:** free but donations welcome



Redwings is the UK's largest horse sanctuary, caring for over 1,500 rescued horses, ponies, donkeys and mules at eleven sites around England and Scotland, including this Visitor Centre near Great Yarmouth.

Animal lovers will delight in meeting nose-to-nose with the charity's rescued residents, which include everything from cuddly cobs and majestic shire horses, to cheeky Shetland ponies and adorable donkeys. Redwings Caldecott is the sanctuary's largest centre, with around one hundred residents. After a relaxing stroll, you can put your feet up with a warm cuppa and a slice of cake in *Oliver's Café*. There's also an on-site gift shop offering a wide range of souvenirs, with all proceeds supporting the hundreds of animals in Redwings' care.

There are around ten disabled parking spaces on a grassy surface, with a central concrete path leading to the fully accessible visitor centre. The wide grass tracks around the main paddocks and the gravel track around the stable yard can all be negotiated in a wheelchair, while benches provide resting places for those on foot. Wheelchair users get a great view of the animals through the wide-spaced paddock fences, and there are plenty of low-level hand sanitiser dispensers dotted around. A manual wheelchair is available to borrow, and there's a hose to wash down mobility equipment, pushchairs and muddy boots at the exit.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The fully accessible *Oliver's Café* offers a varied menu of light lunches and hot and cold drinks, but if you prefer to bring your own food, there's also a picnic area available, with some wheelchair-friendly tables.

## 077 High Lodge Thetford Forest

**Address:** Thetford Forest, Brandon IP27 0AF **Web:** [www.forestryengland.uk/high-lodge](http://www.forestryengland.uk/high-lodge) **Tel:** 0300 0674401

**Hours:** 9am–5pm (last entry 4pm) **Dates:** Open year-round except Christmas Day **Entry:** free; parking up to 1hr £3, up to 2hrs £6, up to 3hrs £9, up to 4hrs £12, all day £15 (card payments only)



High Lodge Thetford Forest covers an enormous 393 square miles and provides the perfect opportunity to explore the great outdoors. Depending on your access requirements and fitness levels, there are a number of different trails you can follow.

The Fir Trail provides the option of a 5km, 10km or 12km walk and enables visitors to explore the quieter areas of the forest. The Pine Trail, which is about 1.5km long, is reasonably accessible with wide, flat surfaces. The Heritage Trail, which is 4.2km long, is also reasonably accessible with benches or rest perches at 100m intervals. The Nature Trail is a short flat route so perfect for everybody, but especially families as there are different activities on the route.

However, if you have a mobility impairment, you will be able to enjoy more of the forest if you use a powered wheelchair or scooter. A mobility scooter designed for rough terrain is available to hire free of charge, but booking is advised.

As well as a variety of different trails to explore, the forest offers a number of different adventure playgrounds for children as well as a sandpit and giant seesaw. Access to

High Lodge Thetford Forest trail



some of the play areas is quite tricky as you need to navigate tree stumps and rocks, but you will have no problems if you hire the scooter.

The forest is also home to Go Ape Tree Top Challenge where visitors can climb to the top of the trees and clamber around on nets, rope ladders and swings before coming down on zip lines.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The on-site café offers a varied menu of light lunches and hot and cold drinks, but if you prefer to bring your own food, there are plenty of places you can eat; there are tables provided or you can picnic on the grass or forest floor. You can also hire a fixed, permanent barbecue.

## 078 Ely, Cambridgeshire



The tiny city of Ely ([www.visitely.org.uk](http://www.visitely.org.uk)) is known for its magnificent cathedral, whose towers rise majestically over the Fens like a fairytale castle. It's not the only reason to visit, however, as Ely's charming streets and pretty riverside make fine places to explore.

The cathedral (01353 667735; postcode CB7 4DL, [www.elycathedral.org](http://www.elycathedral.org)) was originally built during Norman times, but most of what you can see today dates from the fourteenth century, including the famous octagonal tower which, when illuminated at night, can be seen for miles around. Visitor charges apply between 10am and 4pm Monday to Saturday, and noon and 3pm Sunday. Visitor tickets are recommended to be booked in advance. There's a disabled parking space in the staff car park by the south door and a drop-off point by the main entrance. Once inside, the glorious nave, chapels, aisles and choir are all accessible to wheelchair users; pick up a leaflet at the information desk outlining access facilities, which include an accessible toilet, large-print and Braille guides, loop systems and a wheelchair to borrow. There's a concession rate available for carers, with no documentation required.

Close to the cathedral, on Market Street, is Ely Museum (01353 666655; [www.elymuseum.org.uk](http://www.elymuseum.org.uk)), in an old building that served as the town's jail from 1679 to 1836. Its



Ely Cathedral

lively exhibits focus on local history, from prehistoric times up to World War II, and some of the old prison cells have been restored to their original appearance. There's level access through automatic doors, a stair lift to the first floor and a hearing loop at reception. The museum is also the site of the Ely Shopmobility scheme (01353 666655), where you can borrow mobility scooters.

Also worth a look is Oliver Cromwell's House on St Mary's Street (01353 662062; postcode CB7 4HF, [www.olivercromwellshouse.co.uk](http://www.olivercromwellshouse.co.uk)), where the controversial parliamentarian lived for ten years before he became Lord Protector of England. Part of the house is occupied by the tourist information centre, while the rest is a museum, furnished to recreate the look and feel of a seventeenth-century home, with some fascinating exhibits on Cromwell's life and death, and the English Civil War. There's wheelchair access to the parlour and kitchen on the ground floor, though the first floor can only be accessed via stairs; visitors can view the second floor of the house via an interactive booth.

In general, Ely's compact centre is easy enough to navigate in a wheelchair, and there's a level, accessible footpath skirting the edge of the River Ouse, too, which runs through the city. There's a good supply of Blue Badge bays around town, including on the High Street, Market Street, Minster Place and Newnham Street, and there are handy long-stay car parks on Newnham Street and Barton Road, both with designated disabled spaces and a RADAR key-accessible toilet. Other centrally located accessible toilets include those at the Cloisters shopping centre, just off Market Square, and at Sacrist Gate, by the side of the cathedral. For further information, see [www.visitely.org.uk](http://www.visitely.org.uk).

## 079 Brixworth Country Park, Northamptonshire

**Address:** Northampton Road, Northampton NN6 9DG **Web:** [www.westnorthants.gov.uk](http://www.westnorthants.gov.uk) **Tel:** 0300 1267000 **Hours:** the park is open all day, every day; car park daily 9am–5pm (Sept–April), 9am–7pm (May–Aug); toilets daily 7am–7pm **Entry:** free; car park: up to 4hrs £5, all day £8 (card/contactless payment available at one machine) blue badge holders may park free



Set in the heart of beautiful rural Northamptonshire, Brixworth Country Park is a national showpiece for an accessible countryside. This small yet perfectly formed park offers great possibilities if you want to picnic, walk, push or cycle in woodland, meadow and stunning reservoir surroundings.

There are three short circular routes round the park – Kestrel, Lapwing and Skylark – all signed and colour-coded and ranging from half a mile to just over a mile. The paths are hard surfaced, with some undulations but no steep gradients, so manual wheelchair users should be able to manage independently or with a little assistance. You can stroll through the woods and meadows, where you may catch a glimpse of wildlife including foxes, squirrels, waterfowl and woodland birds. For a more challenging adventure, the walking routes also give access to a 7.5-mile circuit around the Pitsford Reservoir.



Families are exceptionally well catered for at Brixworth. There are two children's play areas, both of which are accessed by hard gravel paths and contain some supportive, accessible equipment as well as plenty of open spaces, perfect for sports and play. Kids will also love experimenting with the human sun clock in the newly refurbished, tranquil sensory garden. Following grant funding from the Mick George Community Fund, the Sensory Play Garden has been upgraded and is a vibrant space for visitors of all abilities, with accessible play equipment, tactile carved wooden sculptures, a willow dome and sand play. Details of forthcoming events can be found on the website, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) page.

Disabled parking is situated just in front of Rutland Cycling, and at the start of the walking trails (parking charges apply). There's an excellent accessible toilet facility (you'll need a RADAR key, which can be obtained from a Park Ranger) opposite, which contains a hoist and privacy screen. A Tramper (a type of mobility scooter), a wheelchair bike (with a disabled passenger seat at the front with a rider seat behind) and a mobility scooter are all available to hire; they cost £5 for the first two hours, and £2.50 for every subsequent hour, and must be booked in advance from the ranger's office. Standard bikes can be rented from Rutland Cycling, next to the ranger's office and information booth; the latter has leaflets and information about the park, its wildlife and upcoming events within the park and local communities.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *The Willow Tree* (Mon–Fri 10am–4.30pm, Sat 9am–5pm, Sun and school holidays 10am–5pm) next to the car park serves tasty breakfasts, jacket potatoes, cakes, baguettes and burgers – all in healthy portions. There is widely spaced movable seating inside or fixed picnic benches on the patio. There is a great view over the fields and lake and the young children's play area is next door.

## 080 Stanwick Lakes, Northamptonshire

**Address:** Stanwick NN9 6GY **Web:** [www.stanwicklakes.org.uk](http://www.stanwicklakes.org.uk) **Tel:** 01933 625522 **Hours:** site: Oct–March daily 7am–5pm; April–Sept 7am–7pm; visitor centre: Oct–March 10am–4pm, April–Sept 10am–5pm

**Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** free except parking charge, see website for details



Whether you want a relaxing day out, a summer BBQ or an active afternoon at an adventure playground, Stanwick Lakes is the place to be. With a range of accessible walks and thrilling play areas, each member of the family can connect with nature in their own way.

There's so much on offer at Stanwick Lakes, from cycling, fishing and birdwatching to assault courses, BBQ facilities and a visitor centre – complete with a shop, café and mezzanine displaying archeological finds. The excellent and imaginative adventure play areas, filled with apparatus, will keep children occupied for hours, while a series of events, including craft workshops, are run throughout the year. The trails around the lake are beautiful and serene, and there's plenty to look at, from wonderful wildlife sculptures to fascinating historical artefacts.

The car park has four Blue Badge spaces about ten yards from the main entrance, which is step-free with level access and wide doors. The reception desk is lowered for

wheelchair users and access throughout the visitor centre and café is tiled and level, with a lift to reach the mezzanine. There are two accessible toilets, one on the ground floor of the Visitor Centre and one behind the outdoor food kiosk. Both have wide doors, multiple grab rails and lever taps. The play areas have plenty of benches and flat ground, but some of the apparatus is inaccessible because of sand surfaces. There's more than seven miles of wheelchair-accessible footpaths at Stanwick; the route around the lake is fairly long, but there are rest benches spaced along the way. The trails should be fine for a manual or powered wheelchair, but – depending on how far you go – manual wheelchair users may want a companion on hand. Every Tuesday and Thursday morning at 10am, staff lead a Health Walk from the visitor centre to encourage people to walk for their health and wellbeing. Be aware that Stanwick Lakes can get very busy during weekends and school holidays, so visitors with sensory conditions may want to plan accordingly. Find a calm time to come and remember that spending time outdoors, in greenery and among nature, has positive effects on mental health and wellbeing.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► The *Solar Café* (daily 9.30am–4.30pm) serves hot and cold drinks, sandwiches, light meals and cakes. There is the element of grab and go (self-service) with certain foods alongside waitressing service on hot meals. If you'd rather eat in more natural surroundings, outdoor picnic and BBQ provisions are available.

## 081 Wicken Fen Nature Reserve, Cambridgeshire

**Address:** 34 Lode Lane, Wicken, Ely CB7 5XP **Web:** [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wicken-fen](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wicken-fen) **Tel:** 01353 720274 **Hours:** daily 10am–5pm, or dusk in winter **Dates:** reserve closed 25 Dec; café closed 25 Dec  
**Entry:** [D]£8.50 [C]free [A]£8.50 [5–17s]£4.25 [Fam]£21.25; parking £3; NT members free



Wicken Fen is one of Britain's oldest nature reserves and one of the most important wetlands in Europe. It's home to more than nine thousand species of wildlife, including otters and rare birds such as hen harriers. The reserve has a raised boardwalk which makes it an ideal place for disabled visitors to explore the fens.

A remnant of the once extensive Cambridgeshire fenlands, the area has been managed for centuries by sedge-cutting and peat-digging, resulting in this unique habitat. In order to sustain the many and varied species at Wicken Fen, the reserve has grown from two to two thousand acres since 1899. It is now one of England's most diverse wetland sites and a nationally important habitat; for example, more than one thousand species of beetle have been found on the reserve. It's a great birdwatching area (bitterns and marsh harriers being frequent visitors), and if you're quiet and visit the more out-of-the-way areas, you may see frogs, toads, newts and even a grass snake. Konik ponies (originally from Poland) and Highland cattle can be seen grazing in the reserve too. You can take the leisurely three-quarter mile circular Boardwalk, and add on the easy access path through the Woodland Walk for extra length at any time of year. The summer nature trail and the Adventurers' Trail are longer, and can be muddy and wet, so a more challenging expedition. The team in the Visitor Centre will be able to advise. All routes have hides. Bring or borrow a pair of binoculars to ensure you have a good chance of seeing some of the more timid wildlife, as well as the birdlife.



Wicken Fen has ten disabled parking spaces and two manual wheelchairs to borrow. The boardwalk hides are fully accessible, with movable benches, so it is possible to get up really close to the windows. Assistance dogs are welcome on all routes, but the Sedge Fen (Boardwalk, Woodland and summer nature trail) is a dog-free zone. In the summer months, boat trips along the waterways are a great way to get out into the landscape, additional charge applies.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The café serves a variety of dishes such as soup, sandwiches and pasties.

## 082 Anglesey Abbey, Cambridgeshire

**Address:** Quy Road, Lode, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire CB25 9EJ **Web:** [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/anglesey-abbey](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/anglesey-abbey) **Tel:** 01223 810080 **Hours:** Gardens open 362 days a year, House & Mill opening times vary; peak and off-peak prices; see website for full details **Entry:** Anglesey Abbey, Gardens and Lode Mill [A]£16 [C]£8 [Fam]£40 [Fam] 1 adult & up to 3 children £24



Anglesey Abbey is a Jacobean-style country house with spectacular gardens, a working watermill and great sensory experiences, plus year-round activities for adults and chil-

dren. With a plant centre and shop too, it's a good place to brush up on your historical knowledge, enjoy the wildlife and indulge in some retail therapy.

Set in the gorgeous Cambridgeshire countryside, the House at Anglesey Abbey showcases an internationally important collection and a snapshot in time to life in the 1930s. The entire ground floor is wheelchair accessible with ramps to a variety of access points facilitated by the friendly team. The gardens provide an array of beautiful floral colour and scent, sculptures and majestic avenues.

There's a huge car park with about 30 disabled parking spaces in front of the main entrance. Smooth, flat paths lead to double automatic doors into the bright and airy foyer, which is totally accessible, with level floors. The reception desk has a lower-level option for wheelchair users and it, along with the shop and restaurant, has a hearing loop, and the staff are knowledgeable about access facilities. Mobility scooter, manual wheelchair hire and shuttle transport to the main house are available at the reception, pre-booking is recommended. There are three accessible toilets on site – two near the main entrance, and one on the other side of the grounds between the mill and the house. All are bright and clean with grab rails, mirrors and alarm cords in case of emergency, though the toilets near the main entrance are more spacious, so better if help is required to transfer. A temporary adult Changing Facility is available on certain dates – see website for details. Access to the shop and restaurant are both excellent, with staff on hand to help.

A step-free trail winds its way around the gardens, although parts of the trail are steep and/or over grass or woodland bark paths which can be impacted by wet weather. The circular route via the House, Mill and Winter Garden is flat, so visitors can easily enjoy the sights and smells of the sensory areas of the gardens. Braille and large-print guides are available in the house. At the mill, portable ramps are available so that wheelchair users can negotiate the medium-sized step into the ground floor of the building. You can see the workings of the mill on its upper floors, though these are only accessible to those who can manage very steep and winding steps. A detailed access statement can be found on the Anglesey Abbey website.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The bright, airy restaurant has seating inside and out, and serves a wide range of freshly prepared seasonal dishes and limited-edition local delights.

## 083 Dunwich Heath and Beach, Suffolk

**Address:** Coastguard Cottages, Minsmere Road, Dunwich, Saxmundham IP17 3DJ **Web:** [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dunwichheath](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dunwichheath) **Tel:** 01728 648501 **Hours:** heath dawn–dusk; visitor centre & café hours vary, check website for details **Dates:** no site closures; dates vary for visitor centre and café; check website **Entry:** free; free parking for Blue Badge holders and National Trust members, non-members £6



Dunwich Heath is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with tracts of heather, gorse, woods, sandy cliffs, unspoilt beaches and bucketloads of local wildlife. Certain to appeal to natural-history enthusiasts, this lowland heath has a wonderfully remote feeling and long coastal views.

A colour-coded map is provided, illustrating three routes across the heath (the

accessible route is on a separate map) – ranging from thirty to ninety minutes. The paths are mixed surface, including sand, gravel and mud, so wheelchair users may find some areas challenging. You may prefer to use one of the off-road mobility vehicles. If you would like more information please speak to a member of staff. The accessible route map shows a 1-mile route, with a 0.75-mile shortcut labelled. The site is large, and is mostly quiet and peaceful, but remember to check the forecast before you visit as the paths can quickly become muddy in wet weather. All the routes offer sweeping views and interesting flora and fauna, with a rich selection of birdlife. Dunwich Heath is home to many rare birds, including endangered species such as the stone curlew, Dartford warbler and skylark. Family activities are held on various days throughout the year, such as pond dipping, bug hunting and bird-ringing demonstrations.

The entry road to the site is flat and even, but has five speed bumps. The gravel car park has four designated Blue Badge spaces (free of charge) fifty yards from the tearoom. There is also a Blue Badge bay overlooking the coast with a one-hour time limit. Two off-road mobility scooters are available, which come with useful front storage boxes for bags or oxygen cylinders (pre-booking is advised). The areas that are not suitable for mobility scooters are clearly signposted. A staff-driven multi-seated vehicle (carrying up to five passengers or one wheelchair and three other passengers) is also available, reliant on pre-booking and dependent on driver availability. There is one accessible toilet on site, and an induction loop is available at the visitor centre and



café. As with many nature sites, the atmosphere is relaxed and welcoming, and being in the great outdoors has positive impacts on mental health. Nevertheless, if visitors feel overwhelmed, they should approach a member of staff who will be able to provide a quiet area. Assistance dogs are welcome and route maps are available in large print, too.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The tearoom inside the old Coastguard Cottages offers lovely cakes and seasonal food; try the scones, which are particularly good. Staff will help with moving tables or carrying trays. There is seating outside to enjoy the coastal views.

## 084 IWM Duxford, Cambridgeshire

**Address:** IWM Duxford, Cambridge CB22 4QR **Web:** [iwm.org.uk](http://iwm.org.uk) **Tel:** 020 70913067; wheelchair & mobility scooter booking 01223 497239 **Hours:** daily: 10am–4pm; last entry 1hr before closing  
**Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** online tickets: [D]£26.10 [C]free [A]£29 [under 5s]free [5–15s]£14.50 [Disabled 5–15s]£14.50; prices vary for air shows and special events and include donation

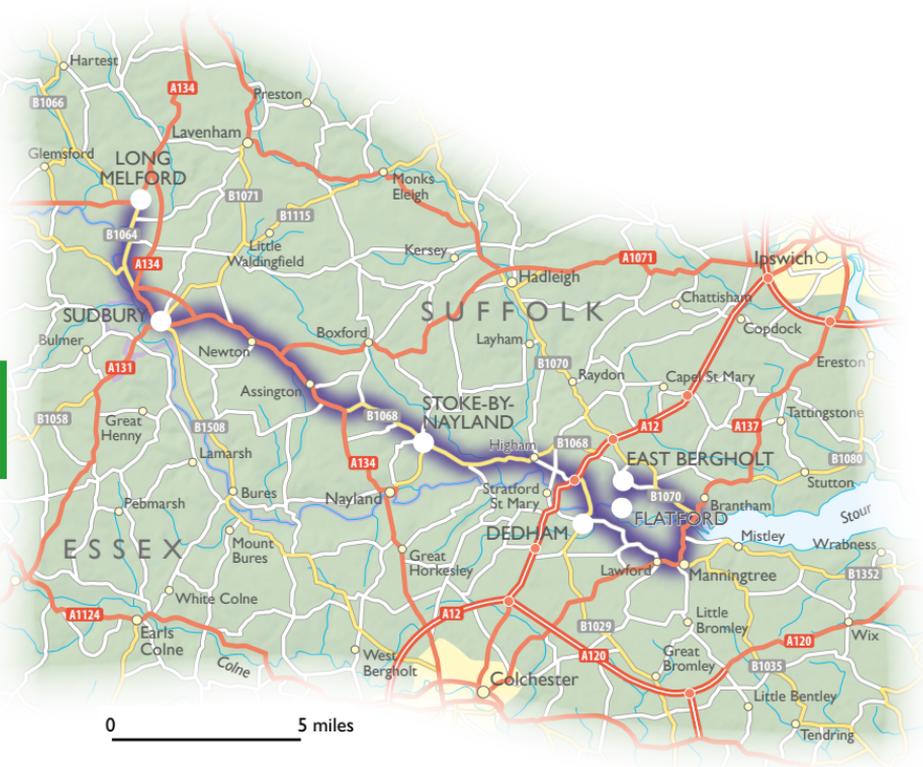


Located on the best-preserved World War II airfield in Europe, IWM Duxford takes you on a journey through the history of aviation in times of war and peace. It's a vibrant museum that marries its fascinating past with contemporary displays, interactive exhibitions and exciting events.

One thing that shouldn't be missed is the Battle of Britain exhibition, which recounts the dramatic air campaign waged by the German Air Force in the summer of 1940, intended to crush the RAF – an objective it failed to achieve. The Blitz of 1940–41 is also covered here, brought to life with evocative mementoes and personal accounts. Other highlights include AirSpace, where you can climb on board a Concorde (no lift access); The Ops Block: Battle of Britain, granting the public access to newly transformed and previously unseen historic World War II rooms; Air and Sea, which allows close encounters with submarines; and the American Air Museum, with dramatic displays of old aircraft. Boasting one of the UK's finest collections of tanks, military vehicles and artillery, the museum has plenty of exhibits showing the impact of technological development on war and conflict.

Much thought has gone into making the museum as accessible as possible: there are nineteen disabled parking spaces; wheelchairs and mobility scooters are available (call 01223 497239 to check availability) for visitors who require assistance (excluding air shows and special events); entry to all the main buildings is wheelchair accessible; and there are plenty of accessible toilets. The hangars are connected to each other by good, level paths and most have automatic doors. There's a wheelchair lift up to the 1940 Operations Room (from where RAF fighter planes were directed during the Battle of Britain), with a help point alongside to call for staff assistance. In addition, visitors with visual impairments are allowed to touch the aircraft and audio description is available at the Historic Duxford Trail Points. All audio-visual presentations have subtitles, and many have BSL interpretation, while most audio exhibits have the support of induction loops. Guide and assistance dogs are welcome.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ IWM Duxford has a restaurant and a café, both self-service. Hot meals are available as well as sandwiches, snacks, soft drinks, teas and coffees.



## 085 An Artistic Drive through East Anglia



**Driving distance:** 26 miles **Approx driving time without stops:** 1 hour

East Anglia's Stour Valley and Dedham Vale are famous as "Constable Country", for it was here that the great nineteenth-century landscape artist, John Constable, painted some of his best-known canvasses. But he wasn't the only English artist associated with this area, as the following scenic drive reveals.

Our route begins in the pretty village of Long Melford, the location of Melford Hall, a red-brick country house set in 130 acres of parkland (01787 379228, [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/melford-hall](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/melford-hall), postcode CO10 9AA). The property was formerly owned by relatives of the author-illustrator Beatrix Potter, who frequently came to stay; you can visit her bedroom and explore more about her links with the Hall. Melford Hall has disabled parking, ramped access and an accessible toilet. An accessible path now links the North and West lawns.

Moving on, drive south to the pretty market town of Sudbury, where you can visit the birthplace and home of Thomas Gainsborough, eighteenth-century England's leading portrait painter. The house (postcode CO10 2EU) is now a museum, displaying an outstanding collection of Gainsborough's works.

From here, head east through the bucolic landscape of the Stour Valley. You'll pass through the picture-perfect village of Stoke-by-Nayland, with its clutch of timber-framed cottages, before reaching the historic little town of Dedham. Here, Castle House (01206 322127, [www.munningsmuseum.co.uk](http://www.munningsmuseum.co.uk), postcode CO7 6AZ) was for forty years the home of Sir Alfred Munnings, famed for his paintings of horses. It's now the Munnings Art Museum, which has the largest single collection of Munnings' works. There's an accessible toilet and good wheelchair access to the ground-floor galleries, but not to the two first-floor galleries.

The most celebrated local artist, however, is John Constable, who grew up nearby and came to school here in Dedham. While you're here, pop into the parish church on the high street, which houses one of his paintings, *The Ascension*. Back on the road, loop east then north over the River Stour to East Bergholt, where Constable was born, continuing to the neighbouring hamlet of Flatford, where he painted some of his most famous works, including *The Hay Wain*, near Flatford Mill (postcode CO7 6UL). The mill and Willy Lott's House are now owned by the National Trust (no general access), as is Bridge Cottage (01206 298260). Bridge Cottage and the Constable Exhibition both have level access, as does the lovely riverside tea room. Please note the disabled parking is limited and there are steps down from the main car park.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► Melford Hall and Bridge Cottage both have attractive and accessible on-site cafés serving sandwiches, cakes and light snacks. In Dedham, the *Essex Rose Tea House* (01206 323101) on the high street, is another good spot; fully accessible, it serves delicious cream teas as well as hot food and snacks.

## 086 Hyde Hall, Essex

**Address:** Creepthedge Lane, Chelmsford CM3 8ET **Web:** [www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall](http://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall)

**Tel:** 01245 402019 **Hours:** daily: March–Oct 10am–6pm; Nov–Feb 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec

**Entry:** [D]£13.85 [C]free [A]£13.85 [under 5s]free [5–16s]£6.95 [Fam]£33.30



From its humble beginnings in 1955, when there were just six trees on a windswept hill, the land at Hyde Hall has been transformed into a variety of glorious gardens, with a wide range of plants, trees and flowers from around the world. The highlight is the Hilltop Garden, with its wonderful vistas over the rolling Essex countryside. Later additions to the garden include the Global Growth Vegetable Garden, showcasing edibles from around the globe and the Winter Garden celebrating the delights of the colder months. Throughout the year, there's a range of events and workshops where you can enhance your horticultural knowledge, or get creative with painting and photography classes.

All parts of the garden are accessible for wheelchairs and mobility scooters along well-kept paths – although some paths are on an incline, it shouldn't be a problem for most visitors and there are numerous benches and seated areas throughout the gardens. Getting to the top of the Hilltop Garden requires some effort in a standard wheelchair – you may prefer to use the on-site mobility vehicle (suggested donation £5); call 01245 402019 to check availability. The signage is clear with a large map clearly visible as you



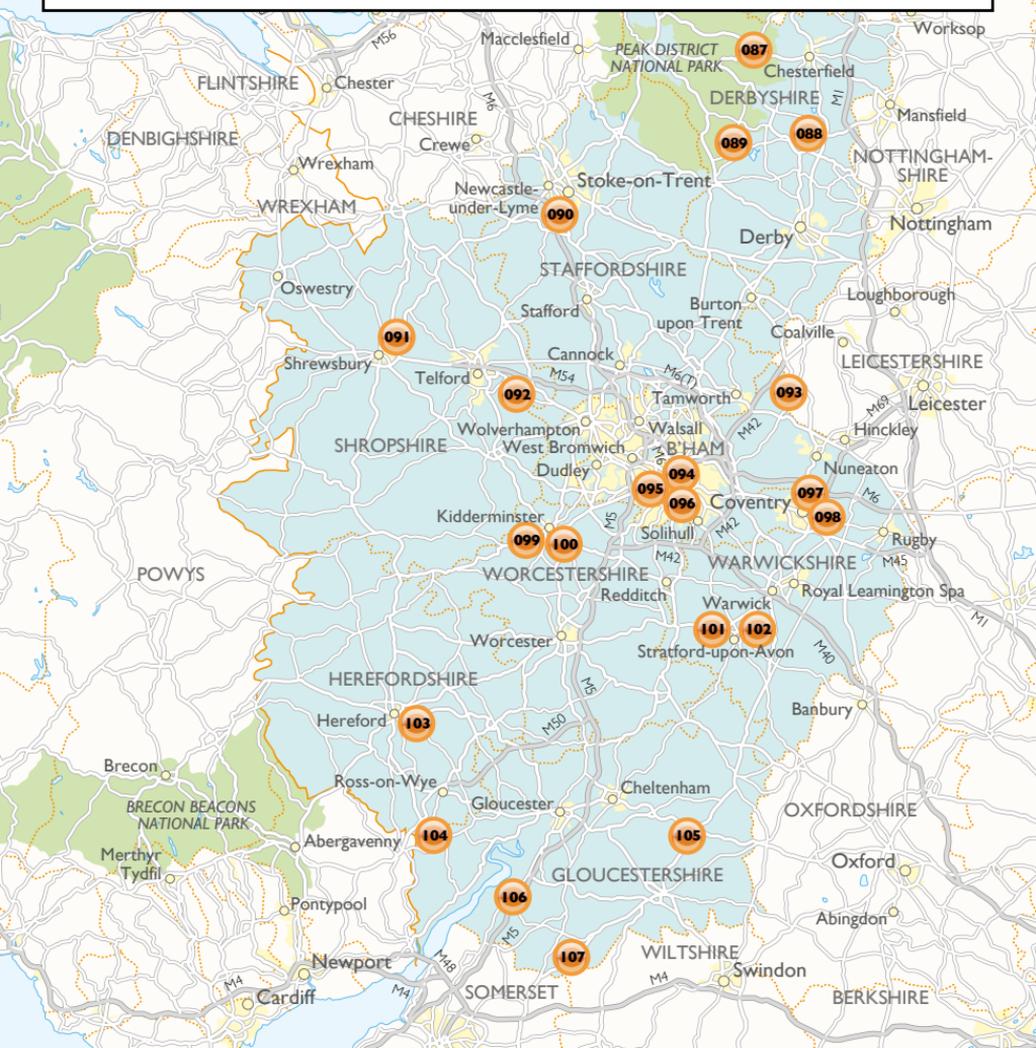
Farmhouse Garden, Hyde Hall

enter the gardens; although none of the signs are in Braille, there are Braille guidebooks available. There's level access through automatic doors into the main building, which has plenty of space for wheelchairs and mobility scooters. The shop is also quite large and fully accessible, with easy access into the *Clover Café*. There are two sets of accessible toilets, a spacious one in the main building and another in the Hilltop Garden. The car park is just a short distance from the main entrance with level access and a few Blue Badge spaces. The gardens make a relaxing setting for visitors who need to be in a calm environment. It's busier here in the summer months, but there are plenty of grassy and lawned areas within the grounds where you can escape any crowds. Detailed information can be found on the website here: [www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall/Plan-your-visit/accessibility-at-hyde-hall](http://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall/Plan-your-visit/accessibility-at-hyde-hall).

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► *The Gardeners' Rest Restaurant* in the Hilltop Garden offers a variety of hot meals and snacks, while *The Clover Café* serves a good selection of cakes and sandwiches. Alternatively, bring your own lunch to enjoy in the gardens. During the summer months the *Thatched Barn* is open for afternoon teas.

# The West Midlands and West Country

- 087** Chatsworth
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## 087 Chatsworth, Derbyshire

**Address:** Bakewell DE45 1PP **Web:** [www.chatsworth.org](http://www.chatsworth.org) **Tel:** 01246 565300; access information 01246 565430 **Hours:** Late March–early Jan daily from 10am; closing hours vary seasonally, see website; last entry 1hr before closing **Dates:** closed 1 Jan, early Jan–mid-March & 24–26 Dec **Entry:** prices vary depending on the number of attractions selected; check website for prices; [C]free; car parking £5, or free for online booking and Blue Badge holders



Chatsworth House, in the heart of the Peak District in Derbyshire, is a deservedly popular stately home with roots in the sixteenth century. Home to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, the ancestral pile has been rebuilt, updated and expanded over sixteen generations. Over 25 rooms are open to the public, including the breathtaking Painted Hall, the State Music Room with Jan van der Vaardt's masterful trompe l'oeil of a violin and bow hanging on a door, the lavish State Bedchamber grandly furnished with George II's four-poster deathbed, and the low-lit Old Master Drawing Cabinet with regularly rotated works by the likes of Raphael, Rembrandt and Rubens – a room guide (suitable for screen readers) can be downloaded from the website. A lift makes the visitor route wholly accessible to visitors with limited mobility; however, the number of visitors using mobility aids on the top floor is limited to four at all times. Encompassing a 105-acre garden, a 1,000-acre park and 385 acres of woodland, there is much to see and do on the grounds. The garden is largely accessible for wheelchairs and mobility scooters – an excellent map indicating the location of benches, accessible toilets, and varying path surfaces is available at the entrance to the house and garden or can be downloaded from the website. The garden has many standouts, from the French-style stepped cascade, Victorian rockery, sensory garden, and immense yew maze to the working farmyard, with daily animal handling sessions and the adjacent adventure playground. Wheelchair access in the park is more limited given the terrain, but a 3.5-mile accessible trail runs through Stand Wood. Pre-bookable guided buggy tours take place in the garden for an extra charge, while tractor-trailer tours (first come, first served) explore the park and woodland.

The closest lane of the house car park is reserved for Blue Badge holders. Drop-offs are permitted at the fenced area by the main entrance. Close by, you'll find an information kiosk and accessible toilets, including a Changing Places facility – there are further accessible toilets at the Stables, farmyard and playground. Free-to-use manual wheelchairs and mobility scooters can be booked in advance and collected from beneath the flagpole (but do be aware these may not be made available in bad weather). Assistance dogs are welcome throughout the whole estate, including the house. Induction loops are available at the house, garden and farmyard entrances. All the restaurants and shops have level access and plenty of space (except for the garden shop). If you have any queries about accessibility before you visit, phone or email [visit@chatsworth.org](mailto:visit@chatsworth.org).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Treat yourself to a luxurious brunch or champagne tea at the *Cavendish* or seasonal dishes and freshly baked goods at the family-friendly *Carriage House Café*.

## 088 Crich Tramway Village, Derbyshire

**Address:** Crich, Matlock DE4 5DP **Web:** [www.tramway.co.uk](http://www.tramway.co.uk) **Tel:** 01773 854321 **Hours:** mid-March–early Nov Mon–Thurs 10am–4.30pm, Sat–Sun & bank hols 10am–5.30pm; school hols Mon–Fri 10am–4.30pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5.30pm; last entry 1hr 30min before closing **Dates:** closed early Nov–mid-Mar **Entry:** [D]£15 [C]free [A]£22 [4–15s]£14 [Disabled 4–15s]£10 [Seniors]£19.50 [Disabled seniors]£15 [Fam]2 adults & 3 children or 1 adult & 4 children £49.50; full-price & disabled tickets give unlimited admission for 12 months; disabled tickets can only be purchased on arrival



With its old-fashioned streetscape, working tramline, a comprehensive collection of restored tramcars and memorabilia, and a roster of theme days from the 1940s to steampunk and other special events, this family-friendly open-air living museum in the Derbyshire countryside guarantees an immersive day out.

Collect an old penny from the admission building (within 10–25 yards of the accessible parking bays) to pay the fare on your first tram ride; this will be exchanged for an unlimited day-use ticket. Then make your way down the steep, hard surface path (visitors with limited mobility may require assistance) to the Victoria Park stop. Turn left and pass under the bridge to reach the village and a cluster of exhibition spaces: The Great Exhibition Hall, home to the museum's signature *Century of Trams* exhibition (1860–1960) and a display on engineer and inventor Michael Holroyd Smith; the Tram Depots, housing over thirty working trams and restoration projects awaiting TLC; and the two-storey Stephenson Workshop, with its interactive discovery and learning centre (some exhibits are triggered by movement, so it can get noisy when busy), and accessible workshop viewing gallery.

The village's quartet of eateries line up opposite – note *Rita's Tea Rooms* is earmarked for demolition to be replaced by a new café. The *Red Lion* pub warrants a closer look; its Victorian facade is original, rescued from Stoke-on-Trent in the 1970s. Next up is the Eagle Press, a small museum dedicated to letterpress printing, across from which you'll find more architectural salvage in the shape of the handsome eighteenth-century Derby Assembly Rooms.



Crich Tramway Village

Board the tram (do be aware that you'll have to negotiate a high step) at the Town End Terminus and trundle back through the village and into the countryside, where woodland walks, tactile sculpture trails, an outdoor playground and picnic sites await. Check the museum's X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook sites after 10am to see which trams are in service on the day. Only the Berlin 3006 is wheelchair accessible; to request this service, email [enquiry@tramway.co.uk](mailto:enquiry@tramway.co.uk) at least one week in advance. Wheelchairs (four are available for hire with a refundable deposit) can be reserved with a day's notice.

Keeping with its period theme, the street is constructed of granite setts with York stone pavements, which can be uneven; however, smooth tarmac walkways run between the buildings, and all areas in the village can be accessed via ramps or lifts. Accessible toilets can be found at the *Red Lion* pub, the Derby Assembly Rooms and Wakebridge, and the First Aid Hut can be used as a makeshift Changing Places facility (ask staff for access). There's a detailed accessibility guide on the website, and you can download a handy app from Apple or Google Play stores.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Tram spot with tea and a sandwich (or something stronger) at the *Red Lion*, take a trip down memory lane at *Barnett's Sweet Shop* or enjoy Matlock Meadows ice cream at the *Ice Cream Parlour*.

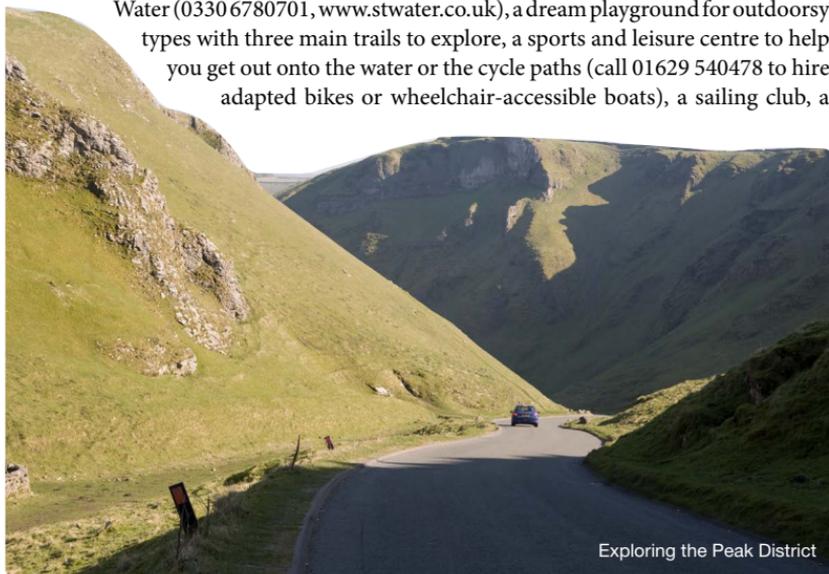
## 089 Peak District Scenic Drive



**Driving distance:** 50 miles **Approx driving time without stops:** 1hr 40 min

Sandwiched between the major urban centres of Manchester and Sheffield, the Peak District National Park ([www.peakdistrict.gov.uk](http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk)) is an oasis of unspoiled countryside. This 50-mile drive takes you through the park's varied landscape, from the gentle hills in the south to the dramatic moorland of the Dark Peak in the north.

Starting at the bustling market town of Ashbourne, drive northeast to Carsington Water (0330 6780701, [www.stwater.co.uk](http://www.stwater.co.uk)), a dream playground for outdoorsy types with three main trails to explore, a sports and leisure centre to help you get out onto the water or the cycle paths (call 01629 540478 to hire adapted bikes or wheelchair-accessible boats), a sailing club, a



Exploring the Peak District



gardens.co.uk) are laced with inviting accessible paths. There's a smart café-restaurant and accessible toilets, including a Changing Places facility. There are eight accessible parking bays on the lower level of the car park. Poole's Cavern (01298 26978, [www.poolecavern.co.uk](http://www.poolecavern.co.uk)), on the southern edge of town, offers spectacular stalactites and stalagmites; visitors with limited mobility will likely be only able to access the main chamber.

Castleton, overlooked by the hilltop ruins of twelfth-century Peveril Castle, lies northwest of Buxton. The village is best known for its show caves, including Peak Cavern (01433 620285, [www.peakcavern.co.uk](http://www.peakcavern.co.uk)), a short walk (step-free but with a hill) from the car park next to the national park visitor centre. For two centuries, its vast entrance was inhabited by rope-makers supplying the lead-mining industry; wheelchair users can watch craft demonstrations here but will likely find it difficult to go further into the caves because of the number of steps.

Detour to the Moorland visitor centre in Edale via Mam Nick – the dip in the southern ridge that borders the Edale Valley – before returning to Castleton through Winnat's Pass: the limestone crags and rugged hills around here are breathtaking. Continue east to Hope and Bamford, taking a side road north to the Ladybower Reservoir, wrapped by the broadly accessible 5.5-mile Ladybower and the Lost Villages Trail – you can rent a Trampler from Derwent Bike Hire, Repair and Service Centre (01433 651261), there is one set of steps, and the ground may be easier to cover with wider wheels. Back on the main route, proceed east toward Hathersage, which boasts a heated outdoor pool (07716 873940, [www.hathersageswimmingpool.co.uk](http://www.hathersageswimmingpool.co.uk)) with ramped access through the back gate and a lift to enter the water.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *The Castle* in Castleton ([www.vintageinn.co.uk/thecastlecastleton](http://www.vintageinn.co.uk/thecastlecastleton)) serves good, reasonably priced food (mains are approximately £14–23) – eat by the crackling fire or in the pretty gardens.

## 090 The Trentham Estate, Staffordshire

**Address:** Stone Road, Trentham, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 8JG **Web:** [www.trentham.co.uk](http://www.trentham.co.uk) **Tel:** 01782 646646

**Hours:** Jan–Dec daily usually from 9 or 10am; opening & closing hours vary seasonally, see website.

Monkey Forest mid-Feb & late Oct–early Nov daily 10am–4pm, late Feb–mid-March Sat–Sun 10am–4pm, late March–July & Sept–late Oct daily 10am–5pm; Aug daily 10am–6pm; last entry 1hr before closing

**Dates:** gardens closed 25 Dec; Monkey Forest: closed 4 Nov–9 Feb **Entry:** gardens [D]£11.50 [C] free [A]£13 [3–15s]£9.50 [under 3s]free [Con]£11.50 [Fam]2 adults & 2 children £39; winter saver tickets available early Nov–Jan; Monkey Forest [D]£12 [C]free [A]£12 [3–14s]£9.50 [under 3s]free [Con]£11



From the days of its first recorded mention as a royal manor in the Domesday Book in 1086, through its many and varied incarnations – including Augustinian priory, prestigious mansion with landscaped gardens, and 1990s golf club – the Trentham Estate has always welcomed visitors.

These days, Trentham offers an eclectic package of attractions that confidently promises “something for everyone”. The mansion is long gone (having been demolished in 1911), but the revamped gardens are as stunning as ever, especially the superb Italian Garden, which marches boldly down to a mile-long lake designed by Capabil-

ity Brown. Follow the designated accessible lakeside walking trail (a map of recommended accessible routes is available from the website or the visitor centre), take the wheelchair-accessible *Miss Elizabeth* passenger boat across it (her timetable is posted at both the north and south jetties) or admire it from the miniature train (see website for seasonal schedule). Beyond the lake lies the 60-acre Monkey Forest (01782 659845, [www.monkey-forest.com](http://www.monkey-forest.com)), home to 140 free-roaming Barbary macaques. Watching the family groups tending to and playing with their young makes for compelling viewing. Meanwhile, Trentham Treetop Adventures offers tree-based high ropes adventure. No experience is necessary, but participants must be aged six or older, a minimum of 5ft 7in tall, and under 19 stone. Finally, and slightly incongruously, the estate is also the site of a “shopping village” with over fifty shops and a large garden centre.

There’s plenty of free on-site parking, with designated accessible parking bays and level access to the garden centre, shopping village and gardens. Accessible toilets are dotted around the site, including a Changing Places facility in the Shopping Village (RADAR key required), all equipped with grab-rails. The Monkey Forest is quite a distance from the other areas, but you can drive there (it has its own car park) or ferry across the lake on *Miss Elizabeth* when she’s in service. The path through Monkey Forest is mobility scooter friendly; however, some wheelchair users may find steeper areas challenging to navigate. Assistance dogs are not permitted in the forest, but with advance notice, arrangements can be made for them to wait for you in the office while you explore.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Trentham offers numerous eating options, including the beautifully located *Lakeside Café* down towards the Monkey Forest, the delightful *Italian Garden Tearoom* and a clutch of restaurants in the shopping village and garden centre.

## 091 Shrewsbury, Shropshire



Almost completely encircled by a loop in the River Severn, Shrewsbury’s town centre ([www.originalshrewsbury.co.uk](http://www.originalshrewsbury.co.uk)) has the feel of an island, with water on all sides. It can be accessed via the Welsh Bridge in the west and the English Bridge in the east, their names neatly reflecting the town’s borderland location.

One of Britain’s most beautiful market towns, Shrewsbury has a wealth of stunning, timber-framed black-and-white buildings, many dating from medieval times. The Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery on The Square offers fascinating guided walking tours (May–Sept Mon–Sat 2pm–3.30pm, Sun 11.30am–1pm; Oct–April Sat 2–3.30pm; adults £9, 5- to 17-year-olds £3.50) around the historic centre – with notice, these can be adapted to suit visitors with disabilities. Tours depart from the sixteenth-century Old Market Hall, taking in the best of the town’s medieval architecture and a clutch of twisting, evocatively named streets and alleyways (known as “shuts”), including Grope Lane and Fish Street –these are unevenly surfaced and lack dropped kerbs, but are manageable in a wheelchair.

If the narrow streets leave you feeling claustrophobic, catch your breath at the expansive Quarry Park, a beautifully landscaped riverside park with plenty of rest benches and inviting, accessible footpaths. Its centrepiece is “the Dingle” – a sunken garden in a Medieval “wet” quarry, bursting with colourful flowers.

Shrewsbury Abbey (01743 232723, [www.shrewsburyabbey.com](http://www.shrewsburyabbey.com); daily 10am–4pm, volunteer-led tours daily 11–3pm) on Abbey Foregate, home of Edith Pargeter’s

fictional detective Brother Cadfael, is well worth visiting (the south door has level access and portable ramps are kept inside the main west door). Although much of the abbey was destroyed in the sixteenth century, it retains four massive Norman columns from the original church, an attractive stained-glass window and a fourteenth-century tower. The ancient stone tombs and Paul de Monchaux's abstract memorial (*Symmetry*, 1993) to local World War I poet Wilfred Owen are also compelling. The abbey has an accessible toilet, and you'll find convenient parking in the Abbey Foregate car park (standard parking charges apply).

Shrewsbury is spread over two hills, so you should be prepared for some steep inclines – manual wheelchair users will likely need assistance. There's a fair amount of on-street Blue Badge parking in the town centre and designated spaces in many car parks; the city's park-and-ride services are also wheelchair accessible (see [www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk)). Accessible toilets are dotted around, and you'll find a Changing Places unit at the Darwin Centre on Raven Meadows.

## 092 RAF Museum Cosford, Shropshire

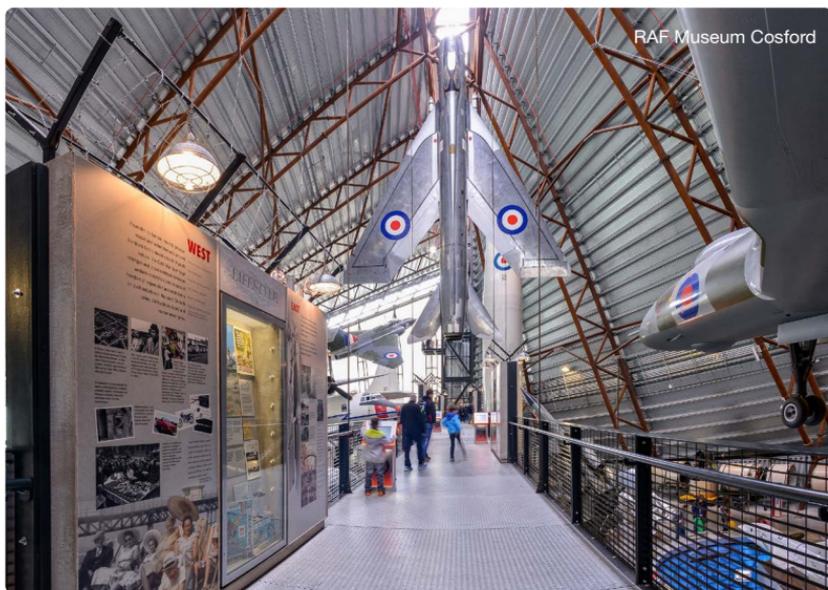
**Address:** Shifnal TF11 8UP **Web:** [www.rafmuseum.org.uk/cosford](http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/cosford) **Tel:** 01902 376200 **Hours:** Mar–Oct daily 10am–5pm; last entry 90 minutes before closing, Nov–Feb daily 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** free; parking charge for all visitors, 0–7hr £7.50 per vehicle (£6.50 if booked online)



Even non-aviation buffs will get something out of a visit to the RAF Museum at Cosford – the whole family will benefit from the fun, yet educational, exhibits and should leave with a new appreciation of what life is like in active service.

Although smaller than its big sister in north London, the RAF Museum Cosford is no slouch in the aviation department, with over eighty aircraft, reams of flight-related memorabilia and an array of interactive displays. The site encompasses three wartime hangars, a two-level purpose-built exhibition hall (home to the eerie National Cold War Exhibition; NCWE) and a glass-fronted visitor centre, so a fair amount of transferring between buildings is required.

Make the visitor centre your first port of call; it is conveniently located opposite Car Park 1, which has several accessible spaces. Pedestrian entry is through a fully accessible sliding door. Maps are on hand to help with navigation from hangar to hangar (keep an eye out for Hangar 1; it isn't as well signposted as the others). For a chronological approach, start with Hangar 2; exhibits cover World War I, the interwar period, World War II, and test flight aircraft – the VR simulations (paid add-on experiences) are a surefire hit with kids. Next up is Hangar 3, spanning 1939–45; its showpiece is a rare Vickers Wellington bomber. Then, it's off to the NCWE building for a deep dive into Cold War ideologies, social history and technological achievements. Finish up in the Falklands in Hangar 1 (also home to the museum's collection of transport and training aircraft). If you'd prefer not to go solo, you can join one of the museum's three paid tours: The Battle of Britain (Wed 11am & 2pm, Sun 12.30pm), Bomber Command (Tues 11am & 2pm, Sun 11am), and the National Cold War Exhibition (Thurs 11am & 2pm, Sun 2pm) – call 01902 376201 to discuss any requirements.



RAF Museum Cosford



The four museum buildings are level and spacious, and three have adapted pedestrian walkways for visitors with vision impairments. There are four accessible toilets throughout the site (the Changing Places facility is located near reception). The NCWE building has an induction loop, and a lift provides access to a very effective viewing gallery. Braille and large-print guides are available, too. The overall site has a slight gradient, so some visitors may find the return trip to the car park quite steep. A limited number of mobility scooters and manual wheelchairs can be borrowed on a first come, first served basis.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The on-site café *Airfield Kitchen* (10am–4pm) is light, modern and spacious, with movable furniture and a menu including soup of the day, burgers, fish and chips, and pizza.

## 093 Twycross Zoo, Warwickshire

**Address:** Burton Road, Atherstone CV9 3PX **Web:** [www.twycrosszoo.org](http://www.twycrosszoo.org) **Tel:** 01827 880250 **Hours:** early Dec–mid-Dec Mon–Fri 10am–3pm, Sat–Sun 10am–4pm; late Dec–early Jan daily 10am–4pm; mid-Jan–early Feb daily 10am–3pm; mid-Feb–late Feb daily 10am–4pm; late Feb–mid-March Mon–Fri 10am–3pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5pm; late March–early May daily 10am–5pm; early May–Aug daily 10am–6pm; see online calendar for remaining months **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£25 [C]free with supporting documentation [A]£25 [3–16s]£19 [under 3s]free; tickets must be bought in advance online; discounted tickets are available if purchased more than a day in advance; parking free



Spanning 100 acres, Twycross Zoo is home to more than five hundred animals from over 125 species, including some of the most endangered creatures on the planet. Since

its modest opening in 1963, the zoo has become renowned as a specialist in primates. Among its many denizens are a wide variety of monkeys and apes, including the UK's only group of bonobos, making it the only zoo in the country to house all four types of great apes.

As well as primates, you'll spot all sorts of other species, including zebras, snow leopards, and meerkats. Visitors can get up close and personal with butterflies and lorikeets in their walk-through enclosures and admire the graceful giraffes in their savannah setting. Look out, too, for the Humboldt penguins as they waddle around.

The zoo and its staff have a commendable grasp of visitors with disabilities' access requirements, and the facilities are impressive. Accessible parking bays are conveniently located in front of the Himalaya Visitor Centre (the zoo's main entrance). Twycross is wonderfully flat, with very few slopes and no steep ones. All path surfaces are hard gravel or tarmac. Mobility scooters can be hired for £14 and wheelchairs for £6 (book in advance). All the cafés, shops and toilets are easily accessible (and there is a RADAR key-accessible Changing Places facility, too), as are most of the animal houses. While welcome on site, assistance dogs are restricted from entering some areas and must wear an approved harness or jacket with a short lead; their presence must be arranged beforehand with the guest services team.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ You don't have to visit the zoo to enter the Himalaya Centre, with its huge glass windows overlooking the snow-leopard enclosure – it's an excellent spot for a family lunch. *The View Restaurant* has movable seating, the hot and cold menu includes healthy, vegetarian and gluten-free options, and you can book for specific dietary requirements in advance. There's a gift shop and soft play area, too. Several other places on site offer food.

## 094 Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum

**Address:** Millennium Point, Curzon Street B4 7XG, sat nav postcode B4 7AP

**Web:** [www.birminghammuseums.org.uk](http://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk) **Tel:** 0121 3488000 **Hours:** term time Wed–Sun 10am–5pm; school holidays daily 10am–5pm; last entry 1hr before closing **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan

**Entry:** [D]£12.50 [C]free [A]£15.50 [3–15s]£7.50 [under 3s]free [Con]£12.50 [Fam]3 individuals & 1 child £37.50



Bursting at the seams with hands-on exhibits and an extensive historical collection, this fun museum covers the sweep of past, present and future science and technology. With eclectic galleries spread over four (lift-accessible) floors, there is plenty to engage big kids and adults alike. A family will need at least half a day to enjoy it all – bear in mind Thinktank is now over 20 years old, and some of the long-standing interactive exhibits show signs of wear and tear. Dedicated to engineering and transport, the two ground-floor galleries showcase all manner of machinery and vehicles, ranging from James Watt's thunderous Smethwick Engine, the oldest working steam engine in the world, to the one-of-a-kind Railton Mobil Special, a three-time land speed record breaker. Take a close-up look at the Spitfire you saw hovering overhead from the Level 1 mezzanine, learn about Birmingham's key role in manufacturing these aeroplanes,



Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum

and discover how everyday products are produced in the adjacent We Made It gallery. The galleries on Level 2 have a broad scope, spotlighting how humans have affected our planet, careers in STEM, wildlife and marine animals (dinosaurs included), and the human body – visitors with photosensitive epilepsy should note that some exhibits in the Things About Me gallery have flashing or flickering lights or images between 3 and 60 hertz (flashes per second). A planetarium (show £3.50 per person), futuristic inventions, a humanoid robot which imitates your expressions, body language and voice, and the under 8s role play area, MiniBrum, await on Level 3. To access the Science Garden, an outdoor discovery space with thirty-odd hands-on exhibits, and the Kids' Park, backtrack to Level 2. The museum also hosts events and temporary exhibitions, so check “What’s on” to see what might coincide with your visit.

Much thought has gone into making Thinktank an accessible venue. The displays are low-level, with plenty of free space around the exhibits. Large print and Braille signs are used extensively, and fixed hearing loops are installed in most areas – large print floor maps and magnifying glasses, sensory maps and ear defenders, and adult and child wheelchairs (prebook for collection) are available at the ticket desk. Accessible toilets are located on each floor – the Level 1 toilet is equipped with a hydraulic changing table. The museum also runs early-access Morning Explorers sessions (prebooking required) on the second Saturday of each month for visitors on the autism spectrum with an optional activity – noise-making exhibits are muted until 11am, and a quiet room is available (ask staff for access). The Birmingham City Council–operated Millennium Point multistorey park on Howe Street – step-free access into the Millennium Point complex from levels 1 and 2 – offers free Blue Badge parking (otherwise, it’s £6.30 for up to six hours).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Signal Box Café* on Level 0 serves hot and cold food, including baguettes, jacket potatoes, pizza (whole or by the slice) and daily specials. Tables and chairs are moveable, but manoeuvring can be tricky during busy periods.

## 095 Lapworth Museum of Geology, Birmingham

**Address:** Aston Webb Building, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT

**Web:** [www.birmingham.ac.uk/facilities/lapworth-museum](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/facilities/lapworth-museum) **Tel:** 0121 4147294 **Hours:** Mon–Fri

10am–5pm, Sat–Sun noon–5pm **Dates:** closed 24 Dec–1 Jan **Entry:** free



Housed in a Grade II listed building, tucked away on the grounds of the University of Birmingham's Edgbaston campus, the Lapworth tends to fly under the radar despite being one of England's oldest specialist geological museums. It's home to a world-class collection of over 300,000 fossils, rocks, minerals and other delightful curiosities – the replica allosaur and wall-mounted Irish elk skull and antlers, in particular, are scene-stealers. Showcasing 3.5 billion years of history, the museum's diverse collection is spread between three permanent, thoughtfully designed and engaging galleries: Evolution of Life, Active Earth, and Mineral Wealth. The lion's share of exhibition space (the original exhibition hall) goes to the museum's outstanding palaeontology collections – make sure to pull open the labelled drawers; the contents range from beautifully preserved fish to pterosaurs.

The Lapworth strikes a deft balance between historic (antique glass display cases) and modern (video and audio displays, interactive exhibits and touchscreens) and achieves the rare feat of being equally adult- and kid-friendly – remember to pick up a kids' activity sheet from the rack by the front desk. The best way to explore is to work your way around in a clockwise direction. In addition to the main galleries, there is a temporary exhibition space behind the hands-on Active Earth gallery. The museum also stages public lectures, live music performances and various family activities; check "What's on" on the website for upcoming events. To help you prepare for your visit, you can download the museum's visitor leaflet (it has a handy mini-map), an easy-to-read museum guide and a general campus map.

The ground-floor galleries are step-free; a lift provides access to the small glittery Mineral Wealth gallery. There is an accessible unisex toilet with a bi-fold door (access from the temporary exhibition gallery). Seating is dotted throughout the venue. The walls and floors have a good colour contrast. The lighting in the main gallery is good, but the Active Earth and Mineral Wealth galleries have low lighting. Due to the building's largely open-plan design, sound does carry between the galleries; if you are sensitive to ambient noise, termtime Tuesdays and Thursdays are the quietest days to visit. There are a small number of accessible parking spaces next to the museum, which can be used week-round by Blue Badge holders. Inform security staff of your needs upon arrival, and you will be allowed through the security barriers. Weekday museumgoers without a disabled parking badge can park in the pay-and-display (£4 for up to four hours) North East multistorey car park (sat nav postcode B15 2SA) within ten minutes' walk of the museum. On-site campus parking is free at weekends.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The museum doesn't have an on-site dining option, but there are numerous restaurants and cafés in the vicinity; if you feel like treating yourself, the wheelchair-accessible Michelin-star restaurant, *Simpsons* ([www.simpsonsrestaurant.co.uk](http://www.simpsonsrestaurant.co.uk)) is a two-mile drive away.



## 096 Cadbury World, Birmingham

**Address:** Cadbury World, 69 Linden Road, Bournville, Birmingham B30 1JR **Web:** [www.cadburyworld.co.uk](http://www.cadburyworld.co.uk)  
**Tel:** 0121 8289300 **Hours:** vary throughout the year see website; last entry 1hr 30min before closing; tickets must be prebooked **Dates:** closed 24–26 & 31 Dec **Entry:** prices vary depending on the ticket type selected, chosen entry date and time slot; standard tickets start from [D]£21 [C]free with supporting documentation [A]£21 [3–15s]£15.50 [under 3s]free [Con]£12 [Fam]2 adults & 2 children £63, 2 adults & 3 children £76



Chronicling the history of chocolate and the Cadbury family, this engaging, interactive attraction has enough facts and nostalgia to entertain the adults and enough fun and free chocolate for kids to love it even more.

A multi-sensory, self-guided experience, visitors progress through several zones, including ancient Mesoamerica and Victorian Bull Street, where the Cadbury story started. History, interactive cinema and tasting experiences are all cleverly linked – and the sweet smell of chocolate is never far away, especially where the chocolatiers demonstrate traditional chocolate-making techniques; you can even try tempering chocolate yourself. For visitors of a certain age, Advertising Avenue will reintroduce some familiar characters, such as the drum-playing gorilla (2007). At the time of writing, this zone was partially closed for mysterious developments.

The free on-site car park has plenty of accessible parking spaces less than 50 yards away from the main entrance, which can be accessed via a permanent ramp – there is also a drop-off point at the main entrance with a dropped kerb. Automatic doors open onto the good-sized reception area, with desks with a low-level section and priority queues for visitors with disabilities. The accessible toilets are excellent – modern, bright and well-kept – and the Changing Places facility (RADAR key required) has a hoist and height-adjustable bench. All floors are accessible by lift.

Cadbury World is well thought-out, and those with different needs can access and interact with most of the attraction. The staff are helpful; some have disability awareness, Next Generation Text, and BSL training. Some parts of the building are dark, with little contrast between walls and floor, or have brick-effect flooring, which may be tricky for those with impaired sight or mobility. SEN sessions, with reduced music and increased lighting, are offered on select days – these need to be booked before noon on the day before the session; proof of disability is required. A downloadable Social Story is available, too. A manual wheelchair-accessible car is available on request on the Cadabra ride. There are two wheelchair spaces on the 4D Chocolate Adventure, plus a limited amount of static seating. Non-static seats are not suitable for visitors with spinal or heart conditions. Wheelchair users who can transfer into a cinema seat will have a more interactive experience as the seats shake and move.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Cadbury World Café* in the main reception area has movable chairs and tables and serves hot food; staff can provide table service if required. A second café is located outside near the African Adventure play area.

## 097 Coventry Transport Museum

**Address:** Millennium Place, Hales Street, Coventry CV1 1JD **Web:** [www.transport-museum.com](http://www.transport-museum.com) **Tel:** 024

76234270 **Hours:** daily 10am–5pm, last entry 2hr before closing **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan

**Entry:** [D]£15.50 [C]free [A]£15.50 [5–16]£8 [under 5s]free [Con]£11.50 [Fam]1 adult & 3 children £31.50, 2 adults & 2 children £39; fee covers entry for one year; city residents go free with a valid Go CV card



The Coventry Transport Museum houses the largest publicly owned collection of British vehicles on the planet. With a cornucopia of historic transport on display, interactive modern exhibits and highly immersive exhibitions, the museum explores how one city changed the world through transport. With so much hands-on fun, the whole family will find it hard to leave.

Telling a very British story of vehicle manufacture in the Midlands, the galleries are laid out chronologically and thematically, with exhibits leading from the first bicycles – think boneshakers and penny-farthings – to early motor transport, iconic cars and commercial vehicles and innovative designs like the impressive ThrustSSC, holder of the land speed record since 1997. Further displays take a peek into the technologies that could define our future. The evolving history of manufacturing, technological development, the effect of war, and all the past and current big players are explained well. The museum also stages temporary exhibitions, events and activities; see the online “What’s on” page.

Parking spaces for Blue Badge holders are made available on weekends (booking required). For weekday Blue Badge parking, there are a limited number of designated parking bays in the Bishop Street car park – phone to arrange for a museum escort. This is just behind the museum; access from here is flat, although some pavements need repair. Enter via the automatic revolving door. A ramp leads to the reception area; the lighting here is subdued, which may cause problems for those with visual impairments. Inside the galleries, access is good, with lift access to all floors, wide walkways and regular seating throughout – assistance may be required for wheelchair access to Model World.

Exhibits incorporate a mix of written, pictorial, audio and video material. The Blitz experience has flashing lights, intense smoke and noise, but this section can be easily bypassed. Wheelchairs and magnifying sheets can be borrowed from the museum, and a full-colour museum guide (priced at £5) can be purchased from the on-site shop. Museum staff are trained in basic Makaton signing. Accessible toilets are located on both the ground and first floors, while the closest Changing Places facility is at Coventry Central Library on Smithford Way.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The museum's café-cum-coffee house is pleasant and open, with movable chairs and tables and space to manoeuvre. Expect homemade cakes, smoothies, coffee, basic jacket potatoes and paninis with crisps and salad.

## 098 Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry

**Address:** Jordan Well, Coventry CV1 5QP **Web:** [www.theherbert.org](http://www.theherbert.org) **Tel:** 024 76237521 **Hours:** Mon–Sat 10am–4pm, Sun noon–4pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** free; charge for some events/workshops



If you've never heard of the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, it's time to learn more. A former winner of *The Guardian's* Family Friendly Museum award, this eclectic museum is devoted to art and local and natural history.

The museum's outstanding achievement is combining serious, grown-up content – from Saxon glazed wall tiles to thousands of fossils – with an imaginative approach that engages children with the collections. Abstract paintings and sculptures, Old Masters, minerals, fossils, stuffed birds, silk weavings and Victorian clocks sit cheek by jowl with hands-on exhibits, touchscreen displays, dressing-up costumes, things to smell, story baskets, family trails and more. The Herbert has a number of permanent galleries, ranging from the visual arts to social and industrial history, archeology and natural history – you can access a free audio smartphone tour spotlighting fifteen exhibits from the perma-

Herbert Art Gallery and Museum



ment collection – plus a series of regularly changing temporary exhibitions (some charge an entrance fee), including touring exhibitions from the likes of the Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Museum; check the website to see what's coming up. A wide range of detailed talks and events take place throughout the year, and lively, child-centred workshops add to the family appeal. Everything in the museum is beautifully displayed in a modern, light and accessible space. The Herbert is also home to Coventry Archives, the city's destination for historical documents, photographs, maps and archival materials.

There's no on-site car park, and the gallery is in the middle of a busy city centre. Gallery visitors and city-centre shoppers use the two Blue Badge bays on Bayley Lane, and they get snapped up quickly. Around the old cathedral, some double yellow lines can be parked on with a Blue Badge or, failing that, try one of the city's pay-and-display car parks nearby. Once inside, accessibility is outstanding: induction loops in the reception area, lifts and level access to all floors, accessible toilets, easy-to-read text panels, and well-equipped sensory backpacks. The well-trained staff is uniformly helpful.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The light, airy *Alfred's* café is on the ground floor with level access. However, there's little space to manoeuvre at busy periods, so it's worth considering one of the many other cafés and restaurants nearby.

## 099 Severn Valley Railway, Worcestershire

**Address:** Kidderminster Station, 1 Comberton Place, Kidderminster DY12 1QR **Web:** [www.svr.co.uk](http://www.svr.co.uk)  
**Tel:** 01562 757900 **Hours:** services vary throughout the year; check online for running days; check website for details & special events **Dates:** closed Jan (except New Year special), 25 Dec & selected dates for maintenance **Entry:** "Freedom of the Line" ticket [D]£32 [C]free [A]£32 [4–15]£21 [Fam]2 adults, up to 4 children £85, 1 adult & 2 children £55; prices vary for special events & point-to-point fares; cheapest rates are for pre-booked tickets (£2 booking fee applies)



There's a magic about travelling by steam train that appeals across the ages – from children captivated by the huffs, puffs and toots to older folk nostalgic for the romance of a bygone era. With its shiny steam engines, heritage carriages and picturesque stations, the Severn Valley Railway doesn't disappoint.

The original Severn Valley Railway was closed in 1963 as part of national rail rationalisation. It was subsequently bought and gradually restored by rail enthusiasts keen to preserve it for future generations. Running 16 miles from Kidderminster in Worcestershire to Bridgnorth in Shropshire, the line meanders through the Severn Valley, often close to the River Severn itself (at one point crossing it on the impressive Victoria Bridge, high above the water). Those keen to explore the valley should get a "Freedom of the Line" ticket, which allows passengers to hop on and off. One stop worth making is the Engine House visitor centre at Highley, where you can view the reserve locomotives, find out what it's like to ride on the footplate (and pull the whistle!) or watch trains go by from the viewing platform.

The railway goes out of its way to make itself welcoming and accessible to those with limited mobility. All trains have a wheelchair-accessible carriage with an accessible toilet and a ramp. Assistance dogs are welcome on all services. Access at the main stations

(Kidderminster, Bewdley and Bridgnorth) is good. All three stations offer designated parking spaces – to avail yourself of free parking, present your Blue Badge at the booking office and request a parking code – and staff can point you to the most appropriate entrance/exit or way to cross the tracks when necessary. Accessible toilets are at Kidderminster, the Engine House in Highley, and Bridgnorth. It's recommended that visitors with mobility impairments avoid disembarking at Northwood Halt, as the only access from the platform is along a narrow footpath.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The café at the Engine House visitor centre serves well-priced light meals in an airy, bright space with a great view of passing trains and out over the Severn Valley. There are refreshment rooms and pubs at Kidderminster and Bridgnorth, and a trolley buffet service is available on the trains. Dining carriages cannot accommodate wheelchairs, and passengers must be able to navigate a step to enter/exit.

## 100 West Midland Safari and Leisure Park, Worcestershire

**Address:** Spring Grove, Bewdley DY12 1LF **Web:** [www.wmsp.co.uk](http://www.wmsp.co.uk) **Tel:** 01299 402114 **Hours:** summer daily 10am–5pm; winter Fri–Sun 10am–4pm; daily for Santa Safari event **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec; the Theme Park is closed for the duration of the winter season **Entry:** prices vary depending on the ticket selected, availability and chosen date [C]free [under 3s]free; visitors who purchase tickets through the WMSP website are entitled to a free return visit within six months of visit date (prebooking required)



With elephants, rhinos, giraffes, zebras, tigers, hunting dogs, cheetahs and antelopes, West Midland Safari and Leisure Park gives you a taste of Africa from the comfort of your own car. You can easily spend a couple of hours driving around the park's safari drive-through, which is 4 miles long and can take around an hour and a half to two hours (it can be congested at peak times), observing the wildlife and stopping to take photos along the way. Some less dangerous species (deer, antelope and giraffes) can be fed from car windows, and you can buy a box of feed at the entrance. Feeding is fun and a great way to see the animals up close, though you may be left with slobber on your hands! The white lions in the African Reserve, often relaxing on their rock, are a highlight. You are welcome to drive around the park as often as you wish. Guided minibus tours (£7.50) are available, but you need to be able to board the vehicle on foot.

After the safari experience, there is more to enjoy in the rest of the park. Penguin Cove is home to a colony of Humboldt penguins, complete with a semi-submerged beach and underwater viewing area, while the African Village houses Meerkat Mayhem, Lemur Woods, and Lion Ridge. As well as various animal encounters throughout the day, there's Creepy Crawlies, Aquarium, Twilight Cave, Reptile World, Lorikeet Landing, the wheelchair-accessible Land of the Living Dinosaurs, which is home to forty life-size animatronic, prehistoric beasts, plus the wheelchair-accessible sensory playground Boj Giggle Park and the equally accessible Ice Age which complements the Land of the Living Dinosaurs. The animal exhibits are at ground level or wheelchair accessible via ramps.

As the park is a pedestrian area, you'll need to leave your car in the accessible parking area near the entrance – a valid Blue Badge must be displayed if you use an accessible

parking bay. There are considerable distances to cover and a few slopes to negotiate, but rest stops are provided along the way. Manual wheelchairs can be borrowed too, but do call ahead to book and note that your car keys or driving licence must be left as a deposit. The park has a Changing Places facility (requires a RADAR key to access) in the main car park toilet block, complete with an adult changing bed and hoist. Access to most animal houses, including the ramped high walkway over the hippo enclosure, is reasonable, although visitors should be prepared for some steep and uneven surfaces. The park boasts twenty rides; unsurprisingly, not all are accessible. If you can transfer from your wheelchair, the intense Venom Tower Drop and the delightful Jumbo Parade family ride, among others, are manageable. You can find a brief, helpful overview of each ride on the website and other information.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Dino Diner* is midway through the park and has plenty of healthy options, a children's menu, an accessible toilet and movable outdoor seating. Alternatively, *Burger Co.* serves a variety of sandwiches, burgers, children's meals and salads.

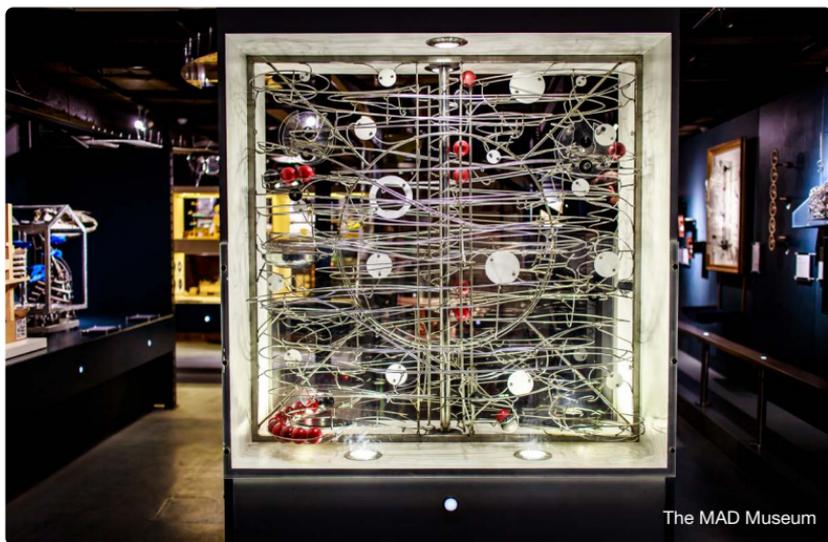
## 101 The MAD (Mechanical Art and Design) Museum, Warwickshire

**Address:** 4–5 Henley Street, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 6PT **Web:** www.themadmuseum.co.uk **Tel:** 01789 269356 **Hours:** Apr–Sept Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5.30pm; Oct–Mar Mon–Fri 10.30am–4.30pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5.30pm; weekend opening hours also apply to Warwickshire school hols & bank hols; hours may vary over Christmas; last entry 45min before closing **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & once a month for maintenance (see website calendar) **Entry:** [D]£7 [C]free [A]£8.80 [6–15s]£6 [under 6s]free [Con]£7 [Fam]£25



The UK's only permanent venue for mechanical art, Stratford-upon-Avon's award-winning Mechanical Art and Design Museum, is packed with interactive exhibits to educate and entertain visitors of all ages. Fans of *Wallace and Gromit's* crazy contraptions or the wild creations of Caractacus Potts in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* will love this quirky and fascinating museum. Small and friendly, it's interactive-heaven with buttons, knobs, levers and pedals to make the displays come to life around every corner – you'd be "MAD" to miss it.

An open-tread, metal staircase takes visitors up to the first-floor museum reception and shop, and there's also a spacious lift with audio announcements and Braille text on the buttons. Once on the first floor, the museum is on one level with wide walkways, no steps or ramps, and several seats. Clear directional signage is used everywhere, and descriptive text for people with vision impairments is available on request. Exhibits are sensor-based; wave your hand in front of the button to activate (you're good to go when the colour changes from blue to green). The museum has numerous mechanical installations, some with lights and sounds, which may make some visitors jump. Some visitors on the autism spectrum may be overwhelmed by the many visually stimulating exhibits and the sounds they produce, such as the model train running around the ceiling, which toots periodically, the machine that claps loudly in response to visitors, and the oversized



The MAD Museum

marble-run that follows the staircase with occasional “clanking” sounds as the marble drops between levels. Others will be fascinated by the interesting mechanics of the displays, which can be operated repeatedly. Some exhibits have flashing and moving lights, which people with photosensitive epilepsy may be sensitive to (these have warnings).

There is a large accessible toilet in the museum with a wide doorway, grab rails and a lowered sink. The nearest car park is on Windsor Street, a four-minute walk from the museum, with eight accessible and fifteen accessible/parent-and-child parking spaces; Blue Badge holders park for free. The museum website has further accessibility information, and you can call in advance if you have specific queries or to get advice on when the quietest periods to visit are (those without school group bookings in place, for example).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There isn’t an on-site café; however, as the museum is in the centre of Stratford-upon-Avon, there are a range of places to eat and drink nearby, including a riverside picnic area.

## 102 Royal Shakespeare Company, Warwickshire

**Address:** The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Waterside, Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 6BB

**Web:** [www.rsc.org.uk](http://www.rsc.org.uk) **Email:** [access@rsc.org.uk](mailto:access@rsc.org.uk) **Tel:** 01789 331111; access booking line 01789 331275

**Hours & Dates:** check website for performance dates and times **Entry:** varies depending on performance and seat; theatre tours £13.50 per person, £6.75 for under 18s with full price adult ticket purchase, touch tours are free but must be booked at the same time as your ticket for the audio-described show



One of the world’s best-known theatre ensembles, the Royal Shakespeare Company is based throughout the year in Stratford-upon-Avon, where it performs plays by the bard himself, William Shakespeare, alongside the work of his contemporaries, as well as put-

## Ideas » Theatre

**Dundee Rep Theatre** (Dundee DD1 1PB; [www.dundeereptheatre.co.uk](http://www.dundeereptheatre.co.uk); [www.scottishdancetheatre.com](http://www.scottishdancetheatre.com)) Scotland's last remaining repertory theatre is widely believed to produce some of the finest work in Scotland. Access is generally good, but arrive early to guarantee a parking spot.

**National Theatre** (London SE1 9PX; [www.nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk)) Ranked as one of the most accessible venues in London, this theatre has extensive information on the website to help you plan a visit and find the best seat to suit your requirements.

**Royal Exchange Theatre** (Manchester M2 7DH; [www.royalexchange.co.uk](http://www.royalexchange.co.uk)) Despite being one of the most unusual theatre spaces in the country, the futuristic, steel-and-glass structure of the Royal Exchange Theatre has wheelchair spaces offering excellent, unimpeded views of the action, plus a lift providing level access to all floors.

**Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds** (Suffolk IP33 1QR; [www.theatreroyal.org](http://www.theatreroyal.org)) Although wheelchair access to some parts of the theatre is not possible, staff are helpful and knowledgeable about access needs, and several performances per season are captioned, signed or BSL-interpreted.

ting on pieces by new playwrights.

The venue includes the 1,018-seat Royal Shakespeare Theatre, as well as the smaller, more intimate 469-seat Swan Theatre, while The Other Place, a short walk away from the main building, houses the experimental 200-seat studio theatre. The theatres in the main building both have thrust stage auditoria, projecting out into the audience and making for a more intimate relationship between the actors and audience, while the studio theatre is frequently reconfigured to suit the work on display there. There are plenty of other activities, too: you can follow a guided theatre tour (routes are fully accessible, and the tower can be accessed by lift), visit the free seasonal exhibition in the PACCAR Room, or see *The Play's The Thing*, an award-winning experience which explores a hundred years of theatre with beautiful costumes and hands-on, interactive fun. You can pick up a free self-guided trail map (available from leaflet racks around the theatres) or lift to the top of the 105ft high viewing tower for panoramic views over Shakespeare's hometown.

Access facilities at the venue are excellent. There are ten accessible parking bays on Waterside, in front of the main theatre, and seven on Chapel Lane, opposite the Swan Theatre, with additional Blue Badge holder spaces on nearby Southern Lane. The Other Place theatre also has additional parking. Visitors with sensory conditions are well catered for: signage is clear; there are audio-described performances with touch tours and captioned performances on every RSC production; several shows have a BSL-integrated version; and large-print and Braille cast lists are available. Assistance dogs are welcome in the auditorium or can be left with friendly theatre staff. There are also loop systems in the auditoria and other public areas. There are eight wheelchair spaces in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, with excellent visibility and accessible toilets on every level. Tickets for visitors with disabilities (and their carers) are charged at a reduced tariff of £16 – best booked ahead. Front-row seats are available at every performance for those with visual or hearing impairments – email [access@rsc.org.uk](mailto:access@rsc.org.uk) for audio-described introductory notes; these can be provided for each production. The theatre also puts on relaxed performances for those on the autism spectrum, with chill-out areas available. Quiet performances are also staged for parents with babies,

people living with dementia and others who might benefit from a less restrictive theatre environment. For more information, visit [www.rsc.org.uk/access](http://www.rsc.org.uk/access).

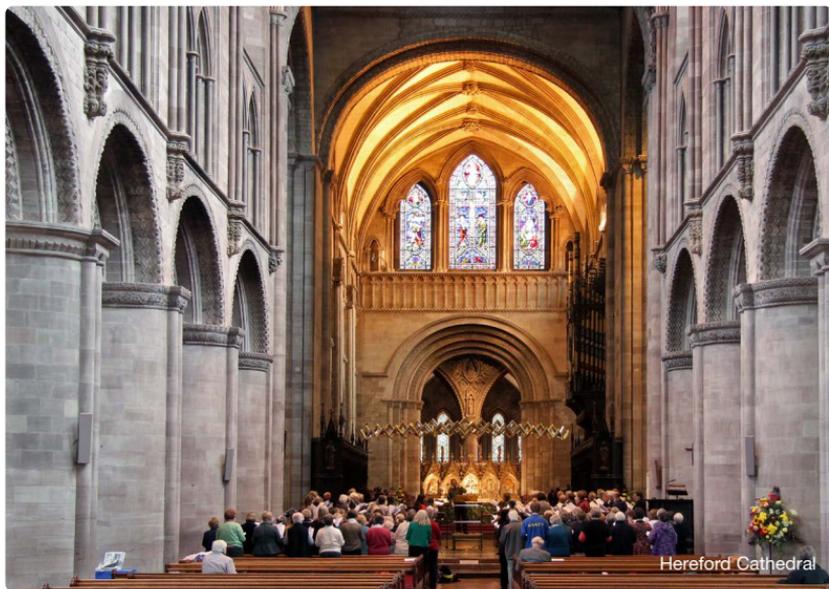
**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *The Rooftop Restaurant & Bar* serves delicious food in a spacious and sophisticated dining room with beautiful views – the fixed-price pre-theatre menus are good value, with two courses for £29 and three courses for £35 on show days. *Susie's Café Bar* in *The Other Place*, a short walk from the main theatre, is a good spot for snacks, cakes and coffee. Otherwise, the casual *Riverside Café* serves snacks and light meals overlooking the River Avon.

## 103 Hereford Cathedral and Mappa Mundi, Herefordshire

**Address:** 5 College Cloisters, Cathedral Close, Hereford HR1 2NG **Web:** [www.herefordcathedral.org](http://www.herefordcathedral.org)  
**Tel:** 01432 374200; accessibility officer 01432 374240 **Hours:** cathedral Mon–Sat 7.30am–5pm, Sun 12.30pm–3pm; Mappa Mundi & Chained Library Exhibition, café & shop Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; last entry/orders 4.30pm; library and archives Tues–Thurs 10am–4pm, first Sat of the month 10am–1pm (by appointment) **Dates:** Mappa Mundi & Chained Library Exhibition, café & shop closed Good Friday, 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** Mappa Mundi and Chained Library: [D]£6 [C]free with supporting documentation [A]£6 [Con]£5 [Fam]1 adult & 1 child £8, 1 adult & 2–3 children £10, 2 adults & up to 3 children £14; tours £5; accessible parking is available under exceptional circumstances, contact the cathedral before your visit



Beautifully situated on the banks of the River Wye, this ancient Norman cathedral is well worth a visit. Housing the sensational Mappa Mundi ([www.themappamundi](http://www.themappamundi)).



Hereford Cathedral

co.uk/mappa-mundi) – the largest surviving medieval map of the world, dating to around 1300 – as well as a plethora of amazing artefacts and archeological information, there's much to admire here. By embracing modern technology, the cathedral has created an exciting and accessible experience for everyone.

Entering through the enormous main doors, the immense presence of the building reveals itself, from the beautiful stained glass windows to the expansive floor covered with colourful tessellated tiles. Whispers reverberate around the space, where high ceilings, ornamented walls and superb statues add to the atmosphere. Elsewhere, the Mappa Mundi and the extraordinary Chained Library stand out. Drawn on a single calfskin, the Mappa Mundi shows Jerusalem at the centre of the world and is decorated with numerous fascinating images of historical and Biblical events, plants, animals and mythological creatures. The Chained Library, displayed in its original 1611 to 1841 arrangement, contains about 1,500 books dating from around the eighth century to the early nineteenth century, including over 220 medieval manuscripts. You can soak up the atmosphere, attend the entertaining and illuminating tours or join in with the prayers. A cathedral choir has sung here since the thirteenth century and can be heard during services – this is still very much a working cathedral, so check ahead if you want to catch or avoid a service.

Access to the building is excellent, and staff – who undergo accessibility training – are on hand to assist. The New Library Building housing the library and Mappa Mundi has level entry through a push-button door and plenty of space. Visitors with visual impairments are well catered to with a tactile map, a Braille interpretation of the Mappa Mundi and accompanying audio descriptions, a Braille map of the cathedral, and a Braille guide. The rest of the cathedral is largely accessible to wheelchair users, except for the tower, crypt, Lady Chapel and Audley Chapel; a ramp can be provided for the quire (ask at the vestry). The atmosphere is generally quiet and calm, but the interior of the building is huge, which may be overwhelming for some. In addition, the organ music and the prayers (delivered over a microphone) can be loud, but ear defenders are available. Sensory and family trails, quizzes and brass rubbings will occupy children of all ages. Makaton has been introduced and can be used by staff and volunteers. You'll find a spacious unisex accessible toilet in the Chapter House Garden (this requires a RADAR key; ask at the shop or the vestry).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The reasonably priced and accessible on-site café serves hot and cold meals, soups, sandwiches and cakes – the adjacent Chapter House Garden provides a lovely additional outdoor eating area.

## 104 Symonds Yat Rock and aMazing Hedge Puzzle, Herefordshire

Symonds Yat Rock: **Address:** GL16 7NZ **Web:** [www.forestryengland.uk](http://www.forestryengland.uk); [www.forestryengland.uk/symonds-yat-rock](http://www.forestryengland.uk/symonds-yat-rock) **Tel:** Forestry Commission: 0300 0674800; tourist board 01432 268430 **Hours:** daily: Nov–Feb 8am–5pm; March & Oct 8am–6.30pm, April 8am–8pm; May–Aug 8am–9pm; Sept 8am–7.30pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** free, £2–7 car parking charge; Forest of Dean members can park for free



aMazing Hedge Puzzle: **Address:** Ross-on-Wye HR9 6DA **Web:** www.mazes.co.uk **Tel:** 01600 890360  
**Hours:** Easter–Sept 11am–5pm; Oct–end of Herefordshire Autumn half-term hols 11am–4pm; opening hours can vary, so check website **Dates:** Visitor centre closed 24–28 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** [D]£5.75 [C]free [A]£5.75 [5–15s]£4.25 [Con]£4.75; discounted combination tickets are available for the aMazing Hedge Puzzle and Wye Valley Butterfly Zoo



Presiding over the quaint village of Symonds Yat, on the banks of the River Wye, Symonds Yat Rock is a dramatic limestone outcrop that rises some 500ft from the river. It offers breathtaking views over the Herefordshire countryside and the wooded gorge far below.

Although there is accessible parking in the upper car park, visitors should start their journey from the main lower car park – accessible parking spaces are located near the toilet block, which is equipped with an accessible toilet – and follow the path that leads through the Iron Age hill fort to a clearing with picnic tables and the Symonds Yat Rock Café. From there, a solid wooden footbridge starts the path up the hill to Symonds Yat Viewpoint. The total distance from the car park to the summit is around 450 yards. The inclines along the way are not too extreme, but if you're using a manual wheelchair, assistance may be required in some places – Trampers can be booked through Forest Holidays by calling 01594 837165. At the viewpoint, low walls allow wheelchair users to enjoy the glorious views and the first-rate birdwatching possibilities. If you visit between April and August, look out for the pair of peregrine falcons that nest in the area. Symonds Yat Rock is usually quieter on weekdays, especially early morning and late afternoon, though all bets are off during school holidays.



Symonds Yat Rock

When you've had your fill of the views, head to the aMazing Hedge Puzzle, a few miles over the river in Symonds Yat West (there's also a butterfly zoo, mini golf and laser tag here). This perfectly formed maze, one of the largest in the UK, features 6ft high by 3ft wide hedges; it's a challenge but great fun and a big hit with kids. You can only leave the maze by finding the centre or going backwards (assuming you remember the way you came), so don't bank on being able to make a quick exit. The hard, wide paths are suitable for wheelchairs, though the viewing platform in the middle can only be accessed via a metal staircase. Those on foot will appreciate the well-deserved rest seats. The attraction has designated accessible parking bays (remember to pay; these are not free to use) and a Changing Places toilet (ask for the key at reception). Mornings are the quietest times to visit.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The on-site café at Symonds Yat Rock ([www.symondsyatrockcafe.co.uk](http://www.symondsyatrockcafe.co.uk)) serves hot drinks, cooked breakfasts, sandwiches and homemade cakes. For something more substantial, try *The Saracens Head* (01600 890435) at Symonds Yat East, a two-mile drive away. *IzzysCafe* ([www.izzyscafe.com](http://www.izzyscafe.com)) at the Wye Valley Visitor Centre serves cakes, teas and light lunches.

## 105 Walks on Wheels, the Cotswolds

**Web:** [www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk) **Tel:** Cotswold National Landscape 01451 862000 (ask to discuss Walks on Wheels)



Covering much of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, as well as parts of Wiltshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire, the picture-postcard Cotswolds, with its old churches, handsome stone mansions and blissful views, is prime walking country. Walks on Wheels' well-researched collection of accessible walks gives step-free access to some of the region's most picturesque and historic places, from relaxing river walks to ancient stone circles.

Rangers and volunteers have pooled their extensive knowledge of hundreds of Cotswold rambles to select twelve engaging and wholly accessible walks. No steps, steep gradients, impassable terrain, stiles or narrow bridges mean everyone can enjoy the countryside. Some walks are surprisingly urban, while others pass through unspoilt greenery, trace riverbanks or take in ancient archeological sites – scenic views are pretty much a given whichever walk you choose. Many similar walking collections attempt the same feat but fail to realise that a narrow bridge can be just as insurmountable a barrier as a steep gradient.

Whether you are in the mood for a half-hour outing or a two-hour ramble (Winchcombe's 'Ultimate' Walk on Wheels circular is an outlier at four hours), there will be a walk to suit. Each route is different, but to qualify, walks must have level access, accessible terrain and no barriers. There's no designated website for the collection, so you'll have to navigate to Walks on Wheels via the Cotswolds website: click on Walking & Exploring, scroll down to Self-Guided Walks, filter by Wheelchair friendly and look for Walks on Wheels after the name – it's not indicated, but the Leckhampton Hill mobility scooter route is part of the collection. There's an excellent two-page download for each

walk showing the nearest disabled parking, accessible toilet and café or food outlet, and an excellent route map with a clear description of the terrain.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There are no specific refreshment stops as the walks generally take in open countryside, but the two-page download includes details on the nearest opportunities.

## 106 WWT Slimbridge, Gloucestershire

**Address:** Slimbridge GL2 7BT **Web:** [www.wwt.org.uk/slimbridge](http://www.wwt.org.uk/slimbridge) **Tel:** 01453 891900 **Hours:** daily: Nov, Dec–Jan 9.30am–4.30pm (last entry 3.30pm); Feb–Mar 9.30am–5pm (last entry 4pm); Apr–Oct 9.30am–5.30pm (last entry 4.30pm); 24 Dec 9.30am–3pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£15.90 [C]free [A]£15.90 [4–16s]£10.45 [Con]£14.31; free entry for WWT members



You may imagine that wetland centres are frequented solely by fanatical binocular-brandishing ornithologists, but the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) take pains to ensure its habitats are fun, informative and accessible – part conservation centre, part visitor attraction.

Situated beside the Severn Estuary, the Slimbridge Wetland Centre is the jewel in the crown of the ten WWT locations in Britain and Northern Ireland. There is plenty to see



and do year-round, whether it's hopping aboard a canoe for a duck's-eye-view of the reed beds (mid-April–Oct 11am–4pm) or embarking on a Wild Safari (May–Sept Sat–Sun, school hols daily), dropping in on one of the daily talks on amphibians, otters and cranes (the latter are a Slimbridge success story) or catching a live demonstration or subtitled film at the open-air Living Wetland Theatre. The Welly Boot Land wet play area will likely prove irresistible to younger children. Note that the water system is switched off from October to February. You can buy grain at the information desk if you or your little ones want to feed the birds. Most of the centre's greater flamingos have been rehomed. However, some oldies are still on site, so you can still see all six species. The Chilean flock has moved into Flamingo Lagoon, and the Caribbean flamingos have found new digs opposite.

The centre's thirteen hides overlook the reserve; most have ramp access and low-level viewing windows. The Estuary Tower hide has a lift, while South Lake Discovery Hide and Peng Observatory can accommodate mobility scooters. Look for cranes, avocets and oystercatchers in spring; kingfishers and green sandpipers in summer; Berwick's swans, wigeons, golden plovers and pintails in autumn; and lesser white-fronted geese, lapwings, water rails and curlews in winter – check the website for up-to-date sightings.

There are two rows of accessible parking spaces next to the visitor centre and entrance. A long ramp leads up to the reception area, where you can get a map and advice on what to see. You'll find accessible toilets and a Changing Places facility on site. All the paths are tarmac, hard gravel or boardwalks. However, given the steepness of some ramps, uneven boardwalks and awkward gate locks, visitors with mobility impairments may wish to bring a companion. Hand sanitiser is provided throughout the site, but wheelchair users may want to bring gloves, as freely wandering birds can leave a lot of mess on the paths. If you require mobility equipment, call ahead to reserve. Manual wheelchairs are free to use, but there is a rental charge for mobility scooters; you'll also need to leave a deposit. Assistance dogs are welcome, but proof of registration is required because of the wildlife on site.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *The Kingfisher Kitchen*, the centre's spacious restaurant, has moveable tables and chairs and serves good-quality hot and cold food, including homemade bread and soup. During busier periods (if the weather is playing ball), you can buy light bites and drinks from the Riverlife and Welly Boot Land kiosks.

## 107 Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, Gloucestershire

**Address:** Near Tetbury GL8 8QS **Web:** [www.forestry.gov.uk/westonbirt](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/westonbirt) **Tel:** 0300 0674890 **Hours:** daily 9am–4.30pm; last entry 4pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** Mar–Sept & mid–Nov–late Nov [D]£12 [C]free [A]£12 [5–18s]£4 [Con]£8; Oct–early Nov [D]£16 [C]free [A]£16 [5–18s]£4 [Con]£11; Dec–Feb [D]£9 [C]free [A]£9 [5–18s]£3 [Con]£6; free entry for Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum members, annual membership costs £42; prices vary for special events; some staff have disability awareness training



Laid out by horticulturist Robert Holford and his son George in the nineteenth century, Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, is one of the world's most botanically diverse tree

gardens. Managed by Forestry England, it's home to some 15,000 specimen trees, 113 threatened species, and five national plant collections: Bladdernut, Japanese Maple cultivars, Lime, Maple and Walnut. A riot of fiery reds, glowing oranges and radiant yellows in autumn, it's exceptionally breathtaking from mid-October to mid-November. Still, it's lovely in all seasons: budding and flowering in spring, in full leaf by summer and sculpturally atmospheric in winter.

Criss-crossed by hard paths, woodchip trails and grass rides (the linear open spaces between the trees), the 625-acre site comprises the Old Arboretum, the grassland Downs, and ancient Silk Wood. The latter is the largest and most visited part of the arboretum; it is also the only area where dogs can go off-lead (the Old Arboretum is a dog-free zone except for assistance dogs). The best way to reach it is via the snaky 984ft-long STIHL Treetop Walkway (suitable for mobility scooters and wheelchairs), but if you have no head for heights, follow the path under the bridge. Wheelchair users may find some of the bark trails off the beaten track hard to navigate, particularly after rainfall, and may prefer the Old Arboretum (the original nineteenth-century picturesque-style planting), which is relatively flat with more gentle slopes. Download the short walk map from the website for a whirlwind tour of the Old Arboretum; it covers four easy, hard surface walks. The friendly staff and volunteers can also advise on seasonal trails, guided and sensory walks, and events such as the popular Christmas illuminations (Enchanted Christmas late Nov–mid-Dec, selected evenings 4–9.30pm). From April to October (daily 10am–4pm), a volunteer-run bus circuits the Downs, picking up and dropping off at any shuttle bus benches.

The Arboretum can get busy, particularly in autumn, so if you visit on a weekend or a sunny day and want the most convenient parking, arrive as early as possible. There are 22 accessible spaces within 50 yards of the Welcome Building. You'll find an accessible toilet nearby and a Changing Places toilet by the Great Oak Hall. Mobility scooters (over-16s only) and manual wheelchairs, including a trike wheelchair, are available free of charge (the last booking slot is 2.20pm).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *The Kitchen* offers tasty hot and cold food in pleasant, relaxed surroundings; *The Pantry* kiosk serves hot and cold drinks, sandwiches and snacks; and *The Smokehouse* is the go-to spot for wood-fired pizzas and burgers.



# 108 Lake District Scenic Drive



**Driving distance:** 47 miles **Approx driving time without stops:** 1 hour 35 minutes

This stunning drive takes you through some of the finest scenery in Britain, with several tempting opportunities to get out and explore the fells along the way.

Starting at Cockermouth, a handsome market town on the northwestern edge of the Lake District, head south down the B5292. Three and a half miles down the road, a side road (the B5289) branches west to Loweswater, where a mile-long, fully accessible path leads from Maggie's Bridge car park down to the lakeshore – the views from here across to the undulating slopes of Fellbarrow are lovely, and visitors with good mobility can continue through the lakeside woods. Back on the main route, continue south to the pretty village of Buttermere, where another smooth, accessible footpath awaits you, this one leading from the village car park to tranquil Lake Buttermere in just under a mile.

As you head south from Buttermere, the scenery gets wilder and more dramatic at every turn, particularly as you drive over the 1167-foot-high Honister Pass, hemmed in by steep, craggy hillsides. Once over the pass the road loops north through the Borrowdale Valley, treating you to classic Lakeland vistas in all directions. Beyond, you'll skirt pretty Derwentwater before arriving at Keswick, a busy town with many facilities and great views of Skiddaw. The next stage of the drive takes you south of Keswick down the A591, passing the flanks of Helvellyn, the Lake District's third-highest peak



at 3117 feet. Soon you'll come to Grasmere, a picturesque village that from 1799 to 1808 was home to William Wordsworth. His house, Dove Cottage, is open to visitors but is not wheelchair accessible, though the adjacent Wordsworth Museum (015394 35544, [www.wordsworth.org.uk](http://www.wordsworth.org.uk)) – stacked with books, manuscripts and paintings – is served by ramps and lifts.

South of Grasmere you'll pass the turning to another of Wordsworth's homes, Rydal Mount (partially accessible; 015394 33002, [www.rydalmount.co.uk](http://www.rydalmount.co.uk)), before reaching Ambleside, a busy little town that makes a good lunch stop, with plenty of Blue Badge parking options. Alternatively, stay in your car for some dazzling views over Lake Windermere, just out of town. A couple of miles south of Ambleside, the Brockhole on Windermere visitor centre ([www.brockhole.co.uk](http://www.brockhole.co.uk)), with its wonderful gardens, accessible footpaths and superb location on the shore of Lake Windermere, makes a good place to end your drive – see next page for more details.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ In Ambleside, you'll find delicious pizzas at *Zeffirellis*, on Compton Road (015394 33845, [www.zeffirellis.com](http://www.zeffirellis.com)), and a great vegetarian menu at nearby *Fellini's* (015394 32487, [www.fellinisambleside.com](http://www.fellinisambleside.com)), on Church Street; both venues are fully accessible. The *Brockhole Café* at the Brockhole Visitor Centre is another choice spot for lunch.

## 109 Theatre by the Lake, Cumbria

**Address:** Lakeside, Keswick CA12 5DJ **Web:** [www.theatrebythelake.com](http://www.theatrebythelake.com) **Tel:** 01768 774411 **Hours:** Box office; check website for details **Dates:** Open almost year-round; check website for details **Entry:** ticket prices vary depending on seat and production [C]free



It may not be what you'd expect to find on the banks of Derwentwater, but Theatre by the Lake has succeeded brilliantly in bringing the dramatic arts to a part of the country more commonly associated with bracing walks and cloud-shrouded landscapes.

You would be hard-pressed to find a more beautiful setting, or such a relaxed atmosphere, at a theatre anywhere else in the country. The audience is made up of locals, people on holiday or a weekend break, plus a sprinkling of walkers still wearing their deerstalkers and brandishing sticks – not your usual metropolitan theatre crowd. Opened in 1999, and expanded since, the complex houses two stages: the large Main House which seats four hundred visitors, and the one-hundred-seater Studio. The theatre has a reputation for creating top notch home-made theatre productions throughout the year, as well as serving their community as a year-round busy arts centre hosting all sorts of different art forms and festivals. Wheelchair seats can be booked online if people fill in an access record and can record all their preferences and needs there. The following accessible shows are normally on offer: BSL, Captioned, Audio-Described and Relaxed Performances for some appropriate shows.

Reaching the venue is easy: there's a huge council car park next to the theatre with fourteen disabled parking bays just outside the entrance, and a wheelchair is available to help with transfer inside. If organised in advance, auditorium seating can be removed to create wheelchair spaces. The access facilities are generally excellent, with

lifts and accessible toilets on each floor. Pre-performance touch tours and familiarisation tours for those on the autism spectrum can be booked, infra-red handsets for the hearing-impaired can be borrowed from reception, and captioned and audio-described performances are scheduled for certain shows; see website for details. Assistance dogs are welcome in all areas of the building, and audio and large-print versions of the programme can be requested. Relaxed performances are held with chill-out spaces, and many of the front-of-house staff and volunteers are Dementia Friends. There is also a Tramper service available for anyone who wishes to explore the lakeside.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ You can have breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea or a full pre-theatre meal in the accessible lakeside café which offers stunning views across the lake to Catbells.

## 110 Brockhole on Windermere, Cumbria

**Address:** Windermere LA23 1LJ **Web:** [www.brockhole.co.uk](http://www.brockhole.co.uk) **Tel:** 015394 46601 **Hours:** Visitor centre, shop, café: daily 10am–4pm; gardens, grounds, adventure playground: daily 10am–4pm; Gaddum Restaurant daily noon–4pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** free; car parking £2 first hour; 40p per 20 mins thereafter; maximum £8



With a stunning location on the shore of Windermere, Brockhole, the Lake District Visitor Centre, offers up historic buildings, mature gardens, woodland walks and breathtaking waterside views.



The handsome Victorian residence hosts the Gaddum Gallery, The Story of the Lake District Exhibition, a soft-play area, the *Gaddum Restaurant*, a café and a gift shop. Outside, thirty acres of beautiful gardens spread out along the shore of Lake Windermere, offering stunning views towards the distant Langdale Pikes. Paths snake between lovingly tended flowerbeds, shrubs, borders, magnolias and rhododendrons, taking in a wildflower meadow and a tract of woodland (look out for deer, foxes and badgers). Among the many activities, there is archery, laser clay shooting, an adventure playground (which has a swing suitable for children with limited mobility) with a new toddler area, Tree Top Trek, Crazy Karts (a children's off-road driving experience) and mini golf. There's also a boating centre down by the lakeshore where you can kayak.

Blue Badge holders can use the small car park right next to the visitor centre. In addition, there are several disabled parking bays down in the main car park from where it's a fairly steep hundred-yard walk on a smooth tarmac surface up to the entrance. Alternatively, you can pre-book the "Brockmobile" electric bus that ferries less mobile visitors between the car park, visitor centre, grounds and lakeshore jetty. The house is perfectly accessible, and there are well-appointed accessible toilets next to the visitor centre and in the main car park. The paths around the gardens and down to the lake have a hard-packed surface, manageable in a wheelchair, though there are some steep gradients where you may need help; a few paths have steps, which you can easily avoid. A mobility scooter is available for hire for use in the gardens, with a small donation requested. There's a comprehensive map of the grounds and visitor centre on the website to help you plan your trip.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The very reasonably priced café and restaurant are fully accessible, and there is a delightful outdoor terrace with terrific views.

## 111 Walls Drive Trail and Ravenglass and Eskdale Steam Railway, Cumbria

Walls Drive Trail: **Address:** Ravenglass CA18 1SW **Web:** [www.lakedistrict.gov.uk](http://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk) **Tel:** 015394 46601 (Lake District Visitor Centre) **Hours:** no closures **Dates:** no closures **Entry:** free



Steam Railway: **Address:** Ravenglass CA18 1SW **Web:** [www.ravenglass-railway.co.uk](http://www.ravenglass-railway.co.uk) **Tel:** 01229 717171 **Hours:** check website for timetable **Dates:** check website for seasonal variations **Entry:** fares vary, so check website for full details



Ravenglass is the only coastal village in the Lake District – a wonderfully quiet spot, where mountain scenery gives way to coastline, a world away from the tourist hotspots of Bowness and Ambleside. Following the undemanding Walls Drive Trail takes you through magnificent Cumbrian countryside, culminating at some significant Roman remains.

Ravenglass car park is large and has accessible toilets – it's an excellent base to set off from and is clearly signposted on the only road that leads into the village. The beginning of the walk skirts the station of the Ravenglass and Eskdale Steam Railway; when you leave the car park, head towards the railway bridge, and then follow signs to the

## Ideas ▶ Active

**Diggerland Yorkshire** (Castleford WF10 5NW; [www.diggerland.com](http://www.diggerland.com)) Packed with giant diggers, earth movers and dumper trucks, this novel adventure park (one of five nationwide) makes for a great family day out. Although none of the machines are adapted for disabled use, most have power-assisted hand controls that don't require great strength to operate; you just need sufficient mobility to get on them.

**SNO!zone @ Xscape Milton Keynes** (Buckinghamshire MK9 3XS; [www.snozzoneuk.com](http://www.snozzoneuk.com); [www.disabilitysnowsport.org.uk](http://www.disabilitysnowsport.org.uk)) Disability Snowsport runs lessons at the SNO!zone centre (and at other locations around the country), where sit-skis, hand-held outriggers, tethers and other specialist equipment give people with a wide range of disabilities the opportunity to get out on the snow.

Roman Bath House. The path slopes slightly from the car park but quickly becomes level and is compactly surfaced along the entire scenic trail. After around thirty minutes of smooth progress, you reach the ruins of Glannoventa – a huge Roman fort, perhaps once one in a string of defences built along the northwest coast. Much has been destroyed and, apart from earthworks, all that now remains is the Bath House, one of the largest existing Roman structures in England. It's possible to get inside and look around – the level grass surface is firm if a little muddy following heavy rain, and there is an information panel and a bench to rest on nearby. A map for this “Miles without Stiles” route is available at [www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/visiting/things-to-do/walking/mileswithoutstiles/mws20](http://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/visiting/things-to-do/walking/mileswithoutstiles/mws20).

From Ravenglass to the Bath House and back is little more than a mile. The village is small and accessible, with smooth, level roads and pavements throughout – its huge natural harbour is well worth a look when you return. If you'd like to see more of the area, the steam railway winds seven scenic miles inland past craggy Muncaster Fell, with views of the Scafell range and through the Eskdale Valley. The locomotives in service have carriages with wheelchair spaces (which must be prebooked in advance of travel) and ramped access on and off the train. Many of the charming stations en route have level access, but not all are staffed. The line ends at Dalegarth Station near Boot and has shops, cafés and toilet facilities. The journey takes forty minutes each way. Ravenglass Station is home to a museum documenting the 140-year history of the railway. It has disabled parking, close to the platforms, shops, cafés and toilets, accessible toilets, a wheelchair for hire, hearing loops, and a brand new Changing Places facility; for comprehensive access details and station maps, check [ravenglass-railway.co.uk/plan-visit/accessibility](http://ravenglass-railway.co.uk/plan-visit/accessibility).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Turntable* café at Ravenglass Station is fully accessible, as is the *Fellbites* café at Dalegarth.

## 112 Grizedale Forest, Cumbria

**Address:** Hawkshead, Ambleside, Cumbria LA22 0QJ **Web:** [www.forestryengland.uk/grizedale](http://www.forestryengland.uk/grizedale) **Tel:** 0300 0674495 **Hours:** daily dawn–dusk **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec **Entry:** free; car park fees apply



Get back to nature and immerse yourself in the beauty and grandeur of the Lakes with a day exploring this fantastic woodland environment, set in the heart of the Lake District World Heritage Site. Whether you fancy a strenuous mountain bike adventure or a leisurely stroll through the trees on a smooth level path, it's all possible at Grizedale. The visitor centre offers an excellent introduction to this area of the Lake District. The forest is criss-crossed by a network of eight waymarked paths and five cycle trails, varying in accessibility; collect advice, information, maps and guides from the helpful rangers in the centre before you set off to explore. Each path is unique, but many boast incredible views: Carron Crag – the highest point in the forest – overlooks The Old Man of Coniston and the Grizedale Valley (although this viewpoint is only accessible via a steep, rocky path). The trails are dotted with eclectic sculptures – there are more than fifty to discover in the forest, and their locations are marked on a map available from the centre. The all-ability Ridding Wood trail – a tarmac, almost level, mile-long loop – leads through oak woodland. The Millwood trail passes some of the oldest trees in the forest, covering about a mile on natural surfaces; wheelchair users should comfortably be able to manage the first half a mile or so, but then there's a gentle incline before it loops around back to the level track. It's certainly suitable for cross-country terrain mobility scooters, as is the five-mile trail which tackles some of the western side of the forest around Moss Tarn. E-bikes are available to hire from the on-site bicycle shop. The extensive play area is superb, with cleverly constructed ramped entry at the top and bottom, and to many of the bits of recreation equipment. Weather conditions can change rapidly in this area of the country – remember to wear plenty of layers and suitable footwear. There is a hoist in the accessible toilet. Trampers can be hired through Outdoor Mobility ([www.outdoormobility.org](http://www.outdoormobility.org)).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The excellent *Grizedale Café*, located by the visitor centre, is fully accessible. It uses local produce that is beautifully prepared, and the treetop views through the huge picture windows are brilliant.

## 113 Lakeland Motor Museum, Cumbria

**Address:** Old Blue Mill, Backbarrow LA12 8TA, on A590 **Web:** [www.lakelandmotormuseum.co.uk](http://www.lakelandmotormuseum.co.uk)  
**Tel:** 015395 30400 **Hours:** daily 9.30am–5.30pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£11 [C]free [A]£11  
 [5–15]£6.60 [under 5s]free



With no less than 30,000 exhibits on display, the splendid Lakeland Motor Museum is a dream for petrol-heads and nostalgia buffs alike: there are vintage vehicles and memorabilia galore here, from boneshaker bikes and Bentleys to DeLoreans and Dinky toys. There are digressions into the local industries that used to dominate this part of the Lakes – the museum itself occupies the converted packing shed of Backbarrow's former “Dolly Blue” works, where ultramarine pigment (used in laundry powder, paint and crayons, among other things) was once boxed up for export around the world. There are also some re-created vintage shop windows and an authentically greasy 1930s motor garage, while a separate hangar houses an exhibition space devoted to the speed-racer Campbells, Sir Malcolm and son Donald, where you can view life-sized replicas of their record-breaking Bluebird machines.



The large car park, where there are tarmacked parking bays reserved for Blue Badge holders, is located immediately opposite the museum, about 40 yards away. Parking immediately outside the museum reception can be arranged. Access throughout the museum is excellent, while the lift can accommodate a visitor in a wheelchair or powered scooter and a single accompanying person; there is also a wheelchair for hire. There is a hearing loop system for the deaf and hard of hearing; a magnifying glass, pencil and pad of paper are also available, while large print interpretation panels and audio-visual stations are strategically sited around the museum. Accessible toilets are located on the ground floor and café.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Adjacent to the museum, and with a picturesque location overlooking the River Leven, *Café Ambio* serves hearty Cumbrian dishes as well as home-baked cakes and nicely brewed coffee; there's indoor and outdoor seating, with plenty of wheelchair accessible spaces.

## 114 The Blackpool Tower, Lancashire

**Address:** The Promenade, Blackpool FY1 4BJ **Web:** [www.theblackpooltower.com](http://www.theblackpooltower.com) **Tel:** 01253 622242

**Hours:** open daily 10/11am; closing varies seasonally and for events; check website for details **Dates:** closed 25 Dec; varies for venues & events **Entry:** prices vary seasonally and by attraction; online discounts available, including multi-attraction pass with Madame Tussauds, Sea Life Centre, and the Gruffalo & Friends Clubhouse



The Blackpool Tower and its ancillary attractions are the epitome of the British day at the seaside. Erected in 1894, the 518ft-high tower has stood the test of time to retain its own iconic appeal.

Whatever the weather, there's plenty to see. The tower boasts much more than a trip to the top, the lift taking you to the 380ft-high, glass Skywalk, from where you can walk up higher to more than 400ft; this will take your breath away, with views as far afield as Wales and the Lake District. Kids in particular will love the 4D cinema with its sensory effects, including wind and rain. You can also enjoy the excitement of the traditional circus and the truly magnificent Victorian splendour of the The Blackpool Tower Ballroom, where you can eat high tea while the dancing takes place. Alternatively, you can take the kids on a laugh-out-loud tour of the superb Dungeon (over 8s only), with its excellent live shows and drop ride, or putt a few balls at Dino Mini-Golf.

The tower has no dedicated parking of its own. There are plenty of spaces only two minutes away, in outdoor and multi-storey car parks; both have Blue Badge parking, but expect them to be very busy. If you would rather use public transport, note that the railway station is a ten-minute walk away, although bus and coach stations are closer. All of the trams (except the Heritage Trams) now have level boarding and step-free interiors, plus visual and audible announcements of stops. Disabled access into the tower is via Bank Hey Street (opposite Primark). The tower has lifts to every level with many accessible toilets, and all the attractions are accessible, except the ballroom balcony. Book ahead for both the circus and Dungeon – accessible seating is limited in the circus, and parts of the Dungeon only have space for one wheelchair at a time. Wheelchair users are advised to visit with a helper. Quiet sessions are held at the Sea Life Centre and the Gruffalo and Friends Clubhouse.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ As well as a café inside the tower serving snacks, there is also *Harry Ramsden's* for fish and chips, although this is accessed via a separate entrance.

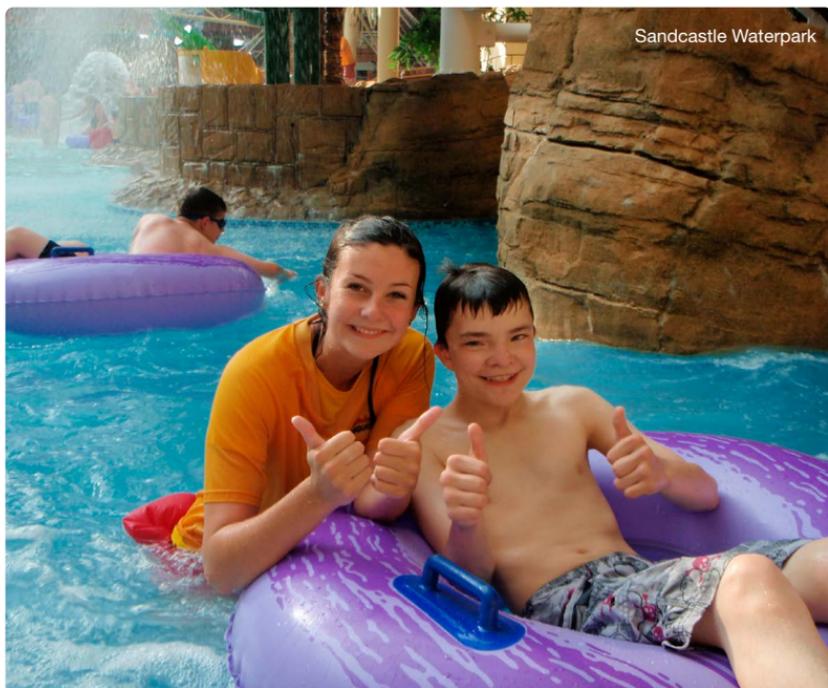
## 115 Sandcastle Waterpark, Blackpool

**Address:** South Beach, Blackpool FY4 1BB **Web:** [www.sandcastle-waterpark.co.uk](http://www.sandcastle-waterpark.co.uk) **Tel:** 01253 343602; Access Hotline 01253 340721 **Hours:** opening hours and days vary through the year; check website for full details **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** [D]£15 [C]£15 [over 12s]£24 [8–11s]£20 [3–7s]£15 [60+]£15 [under 3s]free



On Blackpool's seafront, Sandcastle Waterpark is the UK's largest indoor waterpark, with eighteen waterslides, pools and a wave-machine in an 84-degree tropical climate. This award-winning, accessible attraction appeals to fun-loving thrill-seekers with its exciting waterchutes in the fantastic Hyperzone, while the Sea Breeze Spa (adults only) is a relaxing oasis where you can feel refreshed and re-energised, or simply unwind.

The waterpark is committed to accessibility for all visitors, and its website has detailed information on its facilities for those with mobility, hearing or visual impairment, plus an excellent guide telling those on the autism spectrum what to expect. Lifts provide access to all floors, with level or ramped access to all other areas of the waterpark (except the foot spas), though the walkway to the seating area and drink-



ing water machine is quite narrow. There are accessible changing rooms and toilets, as well as four adjustable accessible woggles (a type of long float), a movable changing bench and three accessible wheelchairs. Water ambassadors with accessibility and autism-awareness training can help guests into the pools and around the facilities. Those with access needs can request support before arrival on the Access Hotline or via the AssistMi app. The waterpark operates Quiet Starts for the first hour of each day and Relaxed Evenings, when background music, tannoy announcements and general noise levels are reduced (check website for details of these). Familiarisation visits for guests on the autism spectrum can be arranged in advance on the Access Hotline. Water-safe ear defenders can be used on all the slides except Montazooma and Duelling Dragons, and staff in the first-aid room can provide access to an autism-friendly quiet room if needed. Guests who find queuing difficult can ask a member of staff and bypass the bottom queue on Aztec Falls, Master Blaster, Montazooma and Sidewinder slides. There are Braille signs throughout the waterpark and large-print menus in all the catering outlets. Guide dogs are welcome and will be looked after by staff during your visit. There are hearing loops at the reception desk and at all catering outlets. The car park has disabled parking spaces less than fifty yards from the main entrance, with level access via a gently sloping path, and a drop-off zone directly outside the entrance. During busy periods there can be long queues in the reception area, where there are also lots of signs, colours, textures, sounds and smells; staff will try to fast-track people on the autism spectrum through the arrival queue.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Watersedge Kitchen* and *Waterfalls Café* serve hot and cold food including gluten-free, lactose-free, vegetarian and halal options.



## 116 Brockholes Nature Reserve, Lancashire

**Address:** Preston New Road, Samlesbury, Preston PR5 0UJ **Web:** [www.brockholes.org](http://www.brockholes.org) **Tel:** 01772 872000

**Hours:** Nature reserve and car park: daily 6am–7pm; visitor village: daily 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 24–25 Dec **Entry:** free; parking £5 a day; coaches free



Brockholes' slogan announces "Nature just got closer" – and, at just a stone's throw from junction 31 of the M6, this nature reserve certainly offers easy access. The reserve is composed of an appealing mix of grassland, reedbeds, ancient woodland and several lakes, the largest of which sports Brockholes' extraordinary centrepiece: the floating Visitor Village, where you'll find a visitor centre, shop, restaurant and other facilities.

The wide range of habitats at the site provide a home for numerous birds, bats, mammals and insects, which you can investigate from three trails. Two of them are wheelchair accessible: the Gravel Pit Trail, which you can do in half an hour, and the longer Reserve Trail, which covers a much larger area in about two hours, via a couple of accessible bird hides. Guided walks are also offered, which are a great way to make the most of a visit. The ingeniously designed floating village really makes you feel like you're on the lake, rather than near it, and is a fabulous spot to sit down and take it all in.

The car park has plenty of Blue Badge spaces on firm, level tarmac, from where it's about 120 yards on a tarmac path down to the Visitor Village. All areas of the "village" are totally accessible, with low counters and exhibits, interpretation boards, tactile features, large-print displays, hearing loops and an accessible toilet; note that there are no toilets anywhere else on the reserve. The trails through the reserve vary in surface type; the two accessible trails should be straightforward in a wheelchair, though they can get very muddy during wet weather. An access guide – available in the visitor centre and on the website – gives detailed information on path gradients, kissing gates (which can be bypassed, if necessary) and the location of hides and steps.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The bright, spacious *Kestrel Kitchen* in the Visitor Village offers fresh, locally sourced (and reasonably priced) food, low-level serving counters and lovely views across the lake. *Peckish*, meanwhile, serves delicious, Lancashire-orientated street food.

## 117 iFLY Indoor Skydiving, Manchester

**Address:** 9 Trafford Way, Trafford Park, Manchester M41 7JA **Web:** [www.iflyworld.co.uk](http://www.iflyworld.co.uk) **Tel:** 0330 1913982 **Hours:** reception: Mon–Thur 9.30am–10.30pm, Fri 9am–10.30pm, Sat–Sun 9am–10.30pm, school holidays daily 8am–10.30pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** from £49.99 off-peak and when booked online; no concessions; multiple-flight packages and family flights available



Experience the thrill of "human flight" in a vertical wind tunnel at this extraordinary indoor skydiving venue, suitable for people of all ages and abilities, including those with limited mobility.

The activity takes place in a flight chamber, where a column of air (with wind speeds of over 120mph) suspends you, allowing you to experience the sensation of freefall in a totally safe environment. You'll begin your flight session with twenty minutes in the classroom, where you'll meet your instructor, watch an instructional DVD (with subtitles for those with hearing impairments), get briefed and kitted out in your flying suit in the changing rooms (a variety of flight-suit sizes allow for maximum comfort). From here, you'll enter the wind tunnel area. When your turn comes, you simply lean into the wind towards your instructor and take flight. The instructor is with you every step of the way, providing support and encouragement, to help you experience the full thrill and master all the basic moves. For thrill seekers, there is the option for a high fly where you get flown further up the tunnel for the ultimate adrenaline experience. After the flight, photos and videos captured by the in-tunnel camera are available (for a fee), and you also get a certificate.

iFLY welcomes visitors with limited mobility, and staff are experienced at dealing with people of all abilities; it is recommended, however, that visitors with specific requirements contact the centre in advance. It is also a good idea if you can book your session on a weekday, so that extra time and attention can be allocated. All iFLY venues offer Blue Badge parking. The building is fully accessible – the floorplan was specifically designed to be free of obstruction. Accessible facilities are on the ground floor, with lift access directly to the wind tunnel. Wheelchairs can be fully manoeuvred right up to the flight chamber entrance. Note that a carer is permitted to enter the flying zone with you



(free of charge), though not the flight chamber itself – but the instructor will be with you in the chamber at all times.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► Next door, the accessible Chill Factor indoor skiing venue houses several restaurant chains.

## 118 Science and Industry Museum, Manchester

**Address:** Liverpool Road, Castlefield M3 4FP **Web:** [www.scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk](http://www.scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk)

**Tel:** 033 0058 0058 **Hours:** Daily 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** free; donations welcome; charges apply for some exhibitions and activities



Located on the site of the world's oldest surviving passenger railway station, the Science and Industry Museum brings Manchester's industrial and scientific heritage to life with a vast collection of eclectic and compelling exhibits.

The early days of the industrial era in the north of England are vividly evoked by machinery demonstrations, where you can watch cotton being processed and find out about the working conditions of the thousands of adults and children who worked in the region's mills. Iconic objects are on display in its permanent galleries, including the

Manchester 'Baby' computer and one of the first Rolls Royce motorcars. The museum also hosts a variety of changing exhibitions and displays, which in the past have featured objects like Tim Peake's spacecraft and Stephenson's rocket. The museum also produces the biennial Manchester Science Festival, with lots of science events on site and across the city; check the website for details of future exhibitions and events.

The museum has step-free access to all floors of multi-level buildings, and multiple accessible toilets, including a Changing Places toilet. Wheelchairs can be borrowed and the staff are very willing to help. An accessibility guide can be viewed at [www.scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk/visit/facilities-and-accessibility](http://www.scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk/visit/facilities-and-accessibility) where information about relaxed sessions, sensory packs and the museum's visual story can also be found.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The museum's stylish ground-floor coffee shop serves hot and cold meals and snacks, as well as several children's options. Indoor and outdoor picnic tables – including wheelchair accessible tables – are available, while there are plenty of excellent restaurants nearby, including many in the picturesque canal basin.

## 119 The Whitworth, Manchester

**Address:** University of Manchester, Oxford Road M15 6ER **Web:** [www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk)

**Tel:** 0161 2757450 **Hours:** Tues–Sun 10am–5pm (Thurs till 9pm) **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan

**Entry:** free; charges may apply for some events



Part of the University of Manchester, the Whitworth succeeds in making great art accessible to all, regardless of age or ability. The building reopened in 2015 after a £15-million renovation project to double and extend its public space into the surrounding Whitworth Park, which in turn has increased its accessibility.

This is a gallery created for the twenty-first century. Yes, there are exhibitions of eminent art, magnificent sculptures and sumptuous textiles (the widest range outside London's V&A), but they are displayed with great imagination – as you walk around the exhibits you are fed snippets of fascinating detail. The glass walls and walkways of the award-winning gallery space blend seamlessly with the park, and sculptures by the likes of Emily Young, Nathan Coley and Anya Gallaccio have augmented the already spectacular collection that includes work by Epstein, Hepworth and Moore. Free tours are delivered by the Visitor Team daily at 2pm. However, do call ahead if you are coming specifically for the tour, to make sure it is running on the day.

There's no parking on site, but there are five disabled bays and nine spaces for car/bus drop offs which can be used by Blue Badge holders. The surrounding terrain is level and, set in open parkland, the gallery feels calm and relaxed. The main entrance is approached via shallow steps or slopes, and doors are wide and electronically operated. Inside, the galleries are spacious and well connected (including railed ramps where necessary), with lift access to every floor. There's plenty of natural light, but some spaces are darker for conservation reasons. Signage is excellent throughout. Staff are trained in a range of accessibility considerations and are extremely helpful. Audio description accompanies some exhibits and there are ear defenders available to borrow; there's also a quiet space, and the gallery runs quiet hours. Several accessible toilets are dotted

around, all fitted to a high standard with wide doors and all the necessary equipment you'd expect.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The café's menu changes regularly, prices are reasonable and everything is served in a bright, airy, spacious environment. The gallery also provides a picnic area if you would like to bring your own food; note, though, that food and drink is not allowed outside these spaces due to conservation reasons.

## 120 Cavern Club, Liverpool

**Address:** 10 Mathew Street, Liverpool L2 6RE **Web:** [www.cavernclub.com](http://www.cavernclub.com) **Tel:** on-site manager 0151 2361965; admin office 0151 2369091 **Hours:** Sun–Wed 11am–midnight, Thur until 1am, Fri–Sat until 2am **Dates:** Closed Dec 25 **Entry:** entrance fees £5 every day, all day & night pass £7.50 (children allowed on premises until 8pm)



The most famous club in the world, which oversaw the birth of Mersey Beat in the early 1960s, remains a vibrant centre for live music more than sixty years after it first opened. You can see the original stage where the Beatles, Cilla and other household names first played, and listen to new groups trying to emulate their success.

Crowds arrive from around the world to pay homage at this shrine to popular music – on a typical day you'll rub shoulders with locals, Japanese coach parties and assorted Americans, all keen to soak up the atmosphere, have a drink and take in the vibe. Despite first hitting the headlines more than half a century ago, this iconic club attracts a clientele aged from 15–75 as it showcases the next wave of young talent. New live bands play daily in the *Cavern Club*, with more established groups playing weekly in the adjoining *Cavern Live Lounge*. The whole area is full of memorabilia, much of it for sale. The club also operates the Magical Mystery Tour around Liverpool, which leaves from Gower Street at the Albert Dock and finishes on Lord Street for customers to enter the Cavern, which is free with their MMT ticket. Those who can manage three steps will be able to board the bus, with the wheelchairs stowed in the luggage hold. Guide and assistance dogs are permitted aboard the bus.

As the club is on a pedestrianised street, there is no drop-off at the door, but nearby are multi-storey car parks and lots of on-street designated Blue Badge bays. The club entrance is downstairs, so either ring ahead to be met or send a companion down to the reception: helpful staff will escort you around the block to a neighbouring building, where there is lift access to the Club and Lounge – it's a bit of a trek but all step-free. There are two accessible toilets in the club, one en route from the access lift and the other at the back of the Live Lounge. Once inside, there is a solid level floor throughout with no steps, though a steep ramp leads up to the bar in the Lounge. There are many accessible tables, where you can sit and enjoy a drink, and lighting is subdued but even throughout. Noise levels are generally high, with music at all times, and as the venue is small it always appears crowded. The Pub is the third part of the Cavern Experience; while the adjoining Club and Lounge are fully accessible, the Pub (which also has lots of memorabilia) is downstairs across the road, and has no lift so no wheelchair or mobility scooter access.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There is a fully equipped bar in the Club and the *Cavern Pub* sells food. The *Cavern* also owns the *Cavern Restaurant* ([www.thecavernrestaurant.com](http://www.thecavernrestaurant.com)), and there are myriad eating options in the Albert Dock area (see page 162).

## 121 Albert Dock and the Museum of Liverpool

Albert Dock: **Address:** Liverpool L3 4AF **Web:** [www.albertdock.com](http://www.albertdock.com) **Tel:** information centre 0151 7078384 **Hours:** opening hours vary depending on venue, check individually **Dates:** the dock never closes; check venues individually **Entry:** docks free; other venues vary, check individually



Museum of Liverpool: **Address:** Pier Head, Liverpool L3 1DG **Web:** [www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk) **Tel:** 0151 4784545 **Hours:** Tues–Sun 10am–6pm **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 24–26 Dec **Entry:** free



Originally redeveloped in the 1980s, the Albert Dock has become a major tourist attraction. The complex sits on the banks of the River Mersey, with views, walks, grassy areas to play and picnic on, and a clutch of outstanding museums.

The Merseyside Maritime Museum and International Slavery Museum (both [www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk)) are magnificent, with several floors of superb exhibits and installations in a converted dockside warehouse – they place Liverpool at the centre of the world’s trading history and bring alive the great historical status of the port. Finally,



a few hundred yards north of the dock (and connected by a riverside walkway), the fully accessible Museum of Liverpool (also [www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk)) tells the city's story with three floors of compelling, hands-on exhibits, housed in a spectacular building. And of course you can't visit Liverpool without paying homage to the Beatles. The Beatles Story ([www.beatlesstory.com](http://www.beatlesstory.com)) has plenty to offer visitors young and old – educational exhibits on the Fab Four's life, times and legacy and a 4D multi-sensory cinema to experience their music.

Parking is not a problem, with designated outdoor spaces. The venues have staff who try very hard to accommodate the needs of all visitors. The three museums are very accessible with plenty of lifts, wheelchairs for hire, accessible toilets (including Changing Places toilets in the Maritime Museum and Museum of Liverpool) and audio descriptions, while great care has been taken with signage and information; the International Slavery Museum also works with Autism Together. The Beatles Story is wheelchair accessible, though there are restrictions on how many can be accommodated at any one time (call the dedicated wheelchair booking line on 0151 7056622 to book a slot); it also has lift access (though height restrictions apply) and portable ramps. The basement venue looks a little awkward at first, but it's a surprisingly comfortable and accessible place to visit. Outside, there are a few challenges, including the occasional slight gradient, flagstones and cobbled surfaces, but the whole area is criss-crossed with hard paths, making all areas accessible.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The choice of places to eat reflects the international history of the port, from *The Smuggler's Cove* (0151 7036555, [www.thesmugglerscove.uk.com](http://www.thesmugglerscove.uk.com)) to delicious Mexican food at *Madre* ([www.thisismadre.co.uk](http://www.thisismadre.co.uk)) and a traditional pub at *The Pump House* (0151 7092367). Other places in the area that have wheelchair access (including accessible toilets) are the Middle Eastern-inspired *Maray* ([www.maray.co.uk](http://www.maray.co.uk)); the authentic *Rosa's Thai Café* ([www.rosasthaicafe.com](http://www.rosasthaicafe.com)); and the family-run *Peaberry Coffee House & Kitchen* ([www.peaberrycoffeehouse.co.uk](http://www.peaberrycoffeehouse.co.uk)).

## 122 Anderton Boat Lift, Cheshire

**Address:** Lift Lane, Anderton, Northwich CW9 6FW **Web:** [www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/Anderton-boat-lift](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/Anderton-boat-lift) **Tel:** 01606 786777 **Hours:** Visitor centre Sat–Sun 10am–4pm **Entry:** free for all categories; parking charges up to £3 all day



Built in 1875 to haul cargo boats from the River Weaver up to the much higher Trent and Mersey Canal, the 72-foot-high Anderton Boat Lift is a remarkable feat of Victorian engineering. Following a multi-million-pound restoration project, visitors can marvel at the machinery, take a ride through the lift and continue on a river trip through the beautiful Cheshire countryside, or simply take in the view from the coffee shop.

The main entrance is in the modern, fully accessible visitor centre, where an interactive exhibition on the lift's workings and history has plenty to captivate both adults and children. Once you've learned all about it, head over to the real thing for a fifty-foot vertical ride through the lift itself inside a glass-roofed boat, the *Edwin Clark*. If you want more than the thirty-minute-long lift trip, the lift and river trip offers visitors 45



minutes more of leisurely cruising down the River Weaver to Northwich and back. You can also explore the site's other attractions, including a children's adventure play area designed to look like the lift itself, with some activities suitable for wheelchair users. There is a nature park too, home to a dragonfly pond and stunning wildflower displays in late spring and early summer. From here, paths strike out through the picturesque Northwich Woodlands ([www.northwichwoodlands.org.uk](http://www.northwichwoodlands.org.uk)) along the riverside, the canal and north to Marbury Country Park, whose magnificent arboretum and avenues of limes recall its days as a grand country estate.

Blue Badge holders will find five free, dedicated spaces in the site's large, level car park, some 100 yards away from the two-level visitor centre, which is accessed via a slope and has a lift inside. The audio-visual presentation has an induction loop, and the interpretation boards are designed with different sizes of lettering; wheelchairs can be hired here. The Edwin Clark takes two wheelchairs, with a hydraulic lift to transport them into the boat. There is one step into the boat, with handrails either side. The paths into the nature park and Northwich Woodlands are mostly level and hard-surfaced, allowing for easy progress, while clear maps make route-planning straightforward. A Braille map of the site is available from the reception desk. The website has a dedicated access page that is worth checking for further details of access throughout the attraction.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The family-friendly café in the visitor centre makes a convenient lunch stop, and there are some lovely picnic spots (with accessible tables) around the site and in the neighbouring woodlands. Nearby alternatives include the *Moorings Restaurant* (01606 79789, [www.themooringsrestaurant.co.uk](http://www.themooringsrestaurant.co.uk)), which you pass en route to the car park, and the excellent *Stanley Arms* pub (01606 77661, [www.stanleyarmsanderton.co.uk](http://www.stanleyarmsanderton.co.uk)), overlooking the boat lift.

## 123 Chester, Cheshire



The ancient city of Chester ([www.visitcheshire.com/chester](http://www.visitcheshire.com/chester)) was founded by the Romans in 79 AD, on the banks of the River Dee. Today, you'll find a spread of beautiful old buildings and historic sights, combined with a thriving city centre packed with bustling shops.

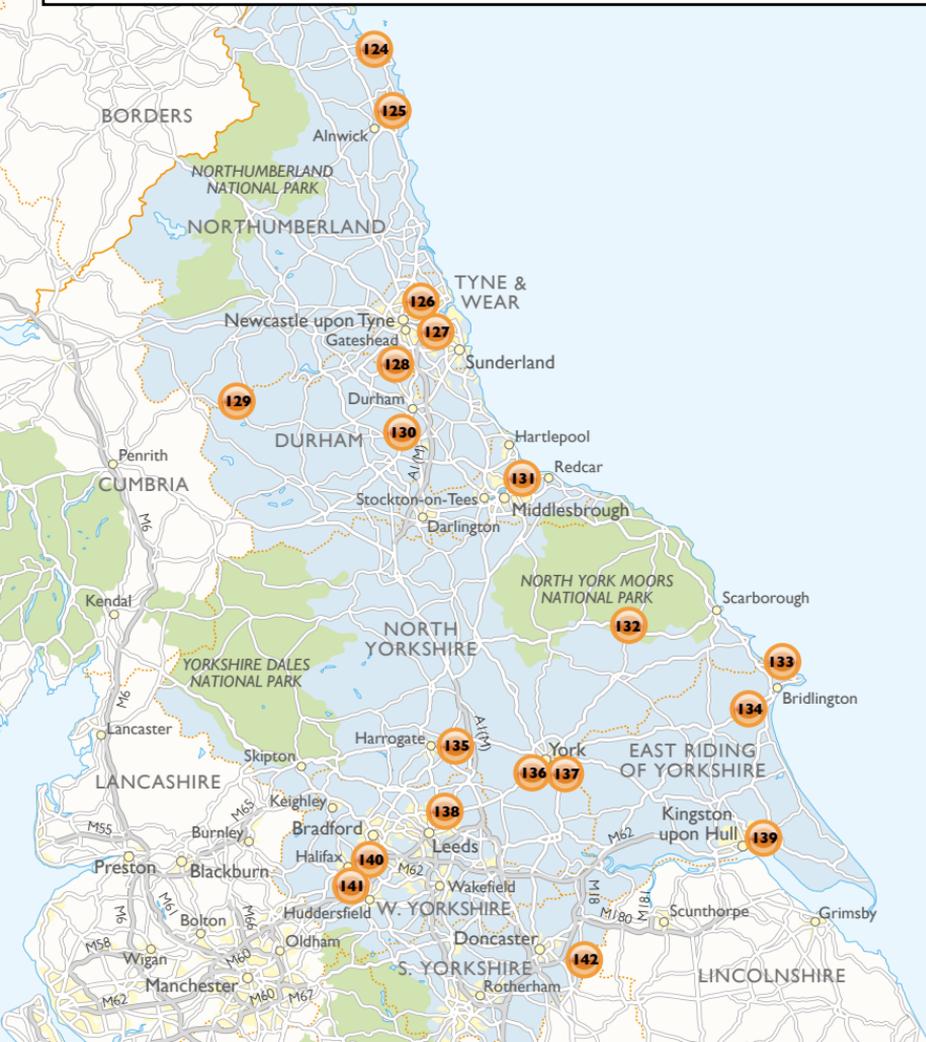
Chester is the only city in England to retain the full circuit of its defensive walls, which offer panoramic views from the footpath along the top. Two sections of the walls have ramped, step-free access – one next to the cathedral, and the other in Lower Bridge Street. The cathedral itself (01244 324756, [www.chestercathedral.com](http://www.chestercathedral.com)) is a must-see; wheelchair accessibility is good to almost all parts of the building. Inside, treasures include some outstanding medieval woodcarvings in the quire, an image of the Virgin and Child painted on the web of a caterpillar and the UK's only surviving ecclesiastic court of law.

Also unique to Chester are the town's four "Rows" – streets lined with two-storey half-timbered buildings, with raised, covered walkways running alongside the upper storey of each Row. They were originally constructed in medieval times, but most of the Tudor-style buildings you see today were rebuilt in the nineteenth century. All the Rows are wheelchair accessible (via ramps on Pierpoint Lane and Goss Street, or level access from Grosvenor Shopping Centre or Godstall Lane). Other diversions include the Chester Racecourse (01244 304600, [www.chester-races.com](http://www.chester-races.com)), at the southern end of the city centre, and Chester Zoo (01244 380280, [www.chesterzoo.org](http://www.chesterzoo.org)), about four miles north of the centre, which boasts some weird and wonderful species, from an eastern bongo to a sun bear, and first-class accessible facilities including wheelchair and electric scooter hire, wheelchair lifts, and numerous multi-sensory experiences.

Before you come here, it's well worth getting hold of the excellent Chester City Centre Access Guide, produced by the city council; you can order a copy by phone (0300 1238123) or download it at [www.visitcheshire.com/dbimsgs/Accessible%20Chester.pdf](http://www.visitcheshire.com/dbimsgs/Accessible%20Chester.pdf). If you don't manage to obtain it in advance, pick up a copy at the tourist information centre in the Town Hall on Northgate Street. The guide gives comprehensive details on Blue Badge parking, wheelchair-accessible toilets, step-free access points to the Rows and Shopmobility services. There's also an accessible park-and-ride scheme (see council website, [www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk) for details) between the outskirts and the centre, and the train station is served by regular accessible buses to Frodsham Street, near the cathedral, as well as a taxi rank outside. More information about accessibility is available at [www.visitcheshire.com/visitor-information/accessible-chester](http://www.visitcheshire.com/visitor-information/accessible-chester).

# The Northeast and Yorkshire

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## 124 Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland

**Address:** Half a mile from Bamburgh, NE69 7DF **Web:** www.bamburghcastle.com **Tel:** 01668 214515  
**Hours:** Mid-Feb to Oct daily 10am–5pm; Nov to mid-Feb Sat & Sun 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 25 & 26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£12.50 [C]free [A]£17 [5–16s]£8.50 [under 2s]free [Fam]£47.50



Solid and chunky, Bamburgh Castle is a spectacular sight, its elongated battlements crowning a formidable basalt crag high above the long sandy beach. The village, too, is also worth visiting for its attractive cluster of stone cottages, and warming cafés and pubs.

The castle's origins lie in Anglo-Saxon times, but it suffered a centuries-long decline – rotted by sea spray and buffeted by winter storms, the castle was bought by Lord Armstrong in 1894, who demolished most of the structure to replace it with a hybrid castle-mansion. Inside there's plenty to explore, including the sturdy keep that houses an unnerving armoury packed with vicious-looking pikes, halberds, helmets and muskets; the King's Hall, with its marvellous teak ceiling that was imported from Siam (Thailand) and carved in Victorian times; and a medieval kitchen complete with original jugs, pots and pans. Wheelchair users can access the first five rooms on the State Room tour, including the magnificent King's Hall, which offers an audio-visual presentation of those remaining rooms not reachable via wheelchair.

Considering its forbidding location, access to and within the castle is excellent. From the car park at the bottom of the hill, a shuttle buggy is available to transport those with limited mobility up to the heart of the castle. At the ticket office, there are wheelchairs for use. Although the main entrance to the State Rooms is not accessible by wheelchair owing to the width of the medieval doorway, a separate entrance just before the main entrance does provide access to the building. There are two accessible toilets in the grounds: one located between the Crewe Museum and the First Small Room in the main castle building, and a second one adjacent to the main toilet facilities in the stable block. The castle handbook is available in large print format.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Although the *Clock Tower Café* (which is in the old castle library) is inaccessible to wheelchair users, the *Tack Room* in the stable yard is for the exclusive use of those unable to access the café; large print menus are available too.

## 125 The Alnwick Garden, Northumberland

**Address:** Denwick Lane, Alnwick, Northumberland NE66 1YU **Web:** www.alnwickgarden.com  
**Tel:** 01665 511350 **Hours:** daily 10am–4pm, until 5pm during school holidays **Dates:** check website for closures **Entry:** [D]£6.50 [C]free [A]£8.50 [0–16s]free [60+]£6.50



In 1996, the Duchess of Northumberland set up a trust to transform an area of derelict wasteland into a spectacular contemporary garden. The result is The Alnwick Garden.

With its colourful Cherry Orchard, the fragrant Rose Garden and watery Serpent Garden, it feels like a fantasy land.

Water and light are used for theatrical effect at The Alnwick Garden: the huge central Grand Cascade is unlike any run-of-the-mill water features you may have seen elsewhere – its fountains and jets erupt on a spectacularly complex cycle, while visitors try to dodge them. Children are allowed to paddle in the Toricelli feature in the Serpent garden – be sure to bring them a change of clothing. The plants grown in the infamous Poison Garden require a special licence from the Home Office and can only be viewed on guided tours. But perhaps the most enchanting feature at The Alnwick Garden is the Treehouse, a huge cedar, pine and redwood building where trees grow through the floor and wooden walkways lead outdoors into the surrounding treetops, while a roaring log fire keeps everyone cosy; the Treehouse's rope bridges and walkways are fully accessible. Also located within the grounds is Lilidorei, a magnificent all-ability playground and one of the world's largest play structures, though there is an additional fee to visit.

It seems that considerations for visitors with access needs were at the forefront of the design plans. Disabled parking is close to all the main buildings and garden features, so you don't have to trek for miles to get to the best bits and back again. The garden has smooth, solid surfaces, although it is large, with some slight gradients. There are accessible toilets in the restaurant, café and gift shop; there are wheelchairs and mobility scooters available for hire (and charging points); and display information is available in large print, as are the restaurant menus.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Treehouse* restaurant is a magical, if fairly pricey, place to eat; its upper level (with rooftop viewing point) is not wheelchair accessible. If you'd prefer something lighter, try *The Bakery*, just outside the garden gates or the *Pavilion Café*, which overlooks the Grand Cascade.





## 126 Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books, Newcastle upon Tyne

**Address:** 30 Lime Street, Ouseburn Valley, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 2PQ **Web:** [www.sevenstories.org.uk](http://www.sevenstories.org.uk)  
**Tel:** 0300 3301095, ext 300 **Hours:** Mon 10am–5pm (school holidays only), Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun & bank hols 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 25 & 26 Dec **Entry:** free for all categories



This very special and unique museum brings books alive for children. Seven Stories uses every technique possible to provoke children's imaginations and involve them in the wonder of books, reading and play. The lowest floor of this converted warehouse is home to the World Lab, where families can draw, paint, write and build together in various themed craft sessions. There is a light and airy coffee shop on level three, where a gradual slope takes you to the well-designed reception area on level three, with a low counter, hearing loop and spaces to sit, plus a wonderful, colourful bookshop, with displays and activities in abundance. But the fun really starts on the next few floors, with innovative and multi-sensory exhibitions featuring original manuscripts and artwork straight from the Seven Stories archive; talks are regularly given by authors and illustrators, and the magical attic area is a space for storytelling, performances and events..

There are Blue Badge parking bays on Lime Street and Stepney Bank, and there's a car park behind the museum on Foundry Lane. Alternatively, the yellow Quaylink bus stops within a ten-minute walk of the centre, and Manors metro station is also a ten-minute walk away. Inside, the building is very accessible – it's designed for children and with Disability Discrimination Act-compliance in mind. There are low levels, wide passageways for pushchairs, bright colours and lots of contrast. There's a large lift to all levels,

and a fully accessible Changing Places toilet on level one. Early-bird opening (9–10am) is offered on the first Saturday of every month for visitors on the autism spectrum, and ear defenders and sensory backpacks full of tactile props and activities are available. Films in the galleries are always subtitled, there are quiet spaces around the building for respite and the friendly front-of-house staff are trained in Makaton. The venue also offers events and activities throughout the year designed for families with additional needs, including Relaxed Storytimes and various programmes modified to cater to neurodiverse families and visitors. A Social Story can be downloaded from the website in advance.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The fully accessible café serves child-friendly and healthy dishes named after famous children's books. Head into Newcastle for something more sophisticated.

## 127 The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, Tyne and Wear

**Address:** St Mary's Square, Gateshead Quays NE8 2JR **Web:** [www.theglasshouseicm.org](http://www.theglasshouseicm.org) **Tel:** 0191

4434661 **Hours:** check website for details of daily opening times and occasional building closures

**Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec & for occasional special events **Entry:** building entry free; ticket prices vary depending on performance & seat



Designed by Sir Norman Foster, the remarkable Glasshouse International Centre for Music (formerly Sage Gateshead) sits high above the River Tyne, like a great soap bubble of steel and glass. It's a place where you can hear rock legends or pop icons on the same night as folk trios or string quartets; where new musicians are nurtured and showcased on the same stages as platinum-selling performers; and where youth choirs and tambourine-shaking toddlers practise in the same spaces as its acclaimed orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia.

The now iconic outer shell houses three major spaces. Sage One is a 1,700-seater, state-of-the-art concert hall with extraordinarily good acoustics, capable of showcasing the Royal Northern Sinfonia and a solo artist equally well. Sage Two is smaller and more experimental – a ten-sided space with many movable seats, where the stage can be reconfigured and even transformed into a dancefloor. The third venue, the Northern Rock Foundation Hall, is an intimate performance space and is also used as a rehearsal and participation space. The Glasshouse is a wonderful place to attend a performance – its lively programme appeals to all age groups, and the atmosphere is always great.

There are a number of priority spaces for Blue Badge holders near the various entrances to the building, as well as in the venue car park. Disabled parking is free at all times, but you'll need to visit the box office with your ticket and car-registration details. All the bays lead to simple, level access to the building. The whole structure is open and uncluttered, with the option of using steps or multiple lifts to the upper spaces. Whether it's with toilet changing areas (plenty of accessible toilets on every level), loops, venue audibility, ease of movement from one point to another or low surfaces in retail areas, the building's designers have clearly given access issues careful consideration. It's a very welcoming space, too, with positive, well-informed staff. The venue has an Access Scheme for people

with specific additional needs – the information you provide will help the team find the best seats for you; full information is available at <https://theglasshouseicm.org/your-visit/access-information/access-scheme>. A thoroughly comprehensive access guide is also available online or from the venue. The Glasshouse’s ongoing commitment to inclusion and access has resulted in some impressive accolades in recent years: the venue was awarded Gold by Attitude is Everything on their Charter for Best Practice, and Gold for Inclusive Tourism at the North East England Tourism Awards in 2018 and silver in 2022. The only minor criticism is that the coordinated design results in some dark areas and occasionally poor colour contrast that won’t be helpful for visually impaired visitors.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Outside the auditoria, there’s a very large public concourse that houses the *Sir Michael Straker Café*, a separate brasserie, several bars, chill-out areas and shops: sit down with a coffee or a beer and enjoy the brilliant view.

## 128 Beamish Museum, County Durham

**Address:** Beamish, County Durham DH9 0RG **Web:** [www.beamish.org.uk](http://www.beamish.org.uk) **Tel:** 0191 3704000; bookings 0191 3704026 **Hours:** times vary throughout the year, so check website **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** [D]£24.95 [C]free [A]£24.95 [5–16s]£15.45 [Con]£18.95 [Fam]£42.50–69.95



Beamish is a huge and utterly compelling open-air living history museum, transporting visitors back in time to experience what life was like in northeast England in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Painstaking recreations include an authentic nineteenth-century hall, 1940s farm, 1900s town and pit village (with more besides and a 1950s town in production), all spread over a 350-acre site.



Beamish isn't a museum where you look at items locked behind glass in a display cabinet; instead, visitors are encouraged to actively engage with their surroundings to find out more. In the 1900s town you can enjoy a pint of ale in The Sun Inn, go to the bank or peruse the shelves of the vintage sweetshop; in the pit village you can visit the schoolhouse to practise your sums on an abacus and write your name on a slate. Discover what life was like on the home front at the 1940s farm, take a ride behind a steam locomotive, or hop on and off the museum's fleet of beautifully restored working trams. In the 1950s Town, which is nearing completion, visitors can experience the community spirit of the decade, see the differences in domestic life between a sergeant and a constable in the police houses, and discover what life was like for the region's retired miners; you can even get a 50s hairdo. Friendly, talented staff (in costume) provide valuable insights into how life was lived in past decades. A cinema, toyshop and electrical shop are due to open in 2024.

Beamish takes accessibility very seriously, and all staff undergo disability-awareness training. There's a designated car park for Blue Badge holders, close to the entrance, which has excellent access. The museum is spread over a wide area, but a fully accessible bus, with a wheelchair lift and space for four wheelchairs, is available to transport visitors around the site. Wheelchair hire is also available, which can be reserved in advance, while motorised scooters can be hired for £12. Visitors with greater mobility can take advantage of the tramway and bus that serves the museum's main points of interest, and there are also many spacious, accessible toilets dotted around. There is also a RADAR-key Changing Places toilet situated in the 1950s welfare hall. Historical authenticity means that parts of each attraction are more accessible than others, and there are some uneven surfaces such as cobbles and steps. Bring a companion to help, ask the friendly staff for assistance where necessary and consult the accessibility guide. Carers are admitted for free but should bring a copy of PIP or DLA documentation.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There's a good choice of food outlets, including *Davy's Fried Fish & Chip Shop* in the 1900s pit village. Alternatively, bring your own picnic.

## 129 Killhope: The North of England Lead Mining Museum, County Durham

**Address:** Killhope, Near Cowsill, Upper Weardale, Co. Durham DL13 1AR **Web:** [www.killhope.org.uk](http://www.killhope.org.uk)

**Tel:** 01388 537505 **Hours:** daily Apr–Oct 10am–4.30pm; last entry, 3.30pm, last mine trip at 3pm

**Dates:** closed Nov–Mar **Entry:** [D]£6 [C]free [A]£9 [4–16s]£4.70 [Con]£6 [Fam]£25; annual tickets available



The first winner of *The Guardian's* Family Friendly Museum award in 2004, this museum works very hard to give a true impression of the hardships endured by miners in a nineteenth-century lead mine. Thanks to the meticulous restoration of buildings and machinery used at the time – including the huge water wheels working above and below ground – it's an authentic, educational and captivating experience, where children will be fascinated to discover how the miners and their families lived and worked. They can explore the mine shop, dress up as a washer boy, search for minerals like

quartz among the silt, and even go down into the mine kitted-out with a hard hat and head lamp (only for children over four); Wellington boots must also be worn but these are not supplied. All of this is backed up with exhibitions and workshops, with helpful guides on hand with information and explanations. After the rigours and darkness of the mine, the woodland walk is a good place to spot red squirrels in the trees and frogs in the ponds. There are three accessible yurts on site if you want to stay the night – bring your own bedding and equipment.

Despite its location on a slope fifteen hundred feet up in the rugged splendour of the North Pennines, this is a surprisingly accessible site, without impacting on the integrity of the historical realism. There are Blue Badge parking spaces plus a drop-off point in front of the entrance, with level access from the car park to the main entrance, which has automated doors. Gravel paths connect the different sections of the attraction, which may be tricky for wheelchair users; the lower part of the site around the buildings is generally flat, though some areas of the site require stair-climbing. The trip into the mine may be awkward for some visitors: although access is level, the tunnel is narrow and the ground is rough and wet. Helpful staff will do all they can to make a journey underground possible, so contact them in advance to talk through practicalities. Those on the autism spectrum may prefer to visit at quieter times, which are early in the morning and early in the week. There is wheelchair access into the visitor centre, with wide, automatic doors, and accessible toilets both there and on site itself. Trampers can be hired ([www.outdoormobility.org/killhope-museum](http://www.outdoormobility.org/killhope-museum)) to explore the outdoor areas. The weather in the area can get quite wild – bring layers, waterproof clothing, sturdy footwear and a spare pair of socks – hence the museum occasionally closes at short notice.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Killhope 1853* café serves a welcome array of hot snacks, drinks and cakes. For a full meal with all the trimmings, try *Nent Hall Country Hotel* at nearby Alston.

Killhope: The North of England Lead Mining Museum



## 130 Low Barns Nature Reserve, County Durham

**Address:** Witton-le-Wear, Bishop Auckland DL14 0AG **Web:** www.durhamwt.com **Tel:** 01388 488728  
**Hours:** daily 9.30am–4.30pm; Christmas opening hours published online each December **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** free; car park £2.50



Low Barns Nature Reserve is tucked away in a secluded location in West Durham. Based around old gravel workings in a meander of the River Wear, it affords easy access to many different types of habitat and wildlife – for such a small area there is incredible diversity here.

Visitors to the reserve will see many different birds, and (depending on the time of year) butterflies, dragonflies and wildflowers, too. Otters can sometimes be spotted by those enjoying the circular route around the reserve's lakes. Starting from the visitor centre, this walk is less than two miles long, but you can also add on an optional detour to one of the observation hides. There are four hides in all, giving you great views of Marston Lake, with its islands and marshes, and West Lake, with its reed beds and wet pasture grazed by Exmoor ponies. There is a rare alder wood, which is part of the reason that Low Barns is listed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. There is also an observation tower, and a wonderful boardwalk that leads through the reed beds. In addition, bird-feeding stations attract a huge variety of birds – you should look out for brilliant kingfishers and, in summer, migrants such as pied flycatchers. Bitterns sometimes visit in winter.

This is an accessible site, with a surfaced car park and an accessible toilet. A mobility scooter can be booked free of charge (phone in advance). All the paths are level and firm, with few gradients, though there can be puddles in wet weather and there are some patches of loose chippings – mobility scooters will have no trouble, but manual wheelchair users may need assistance. The paths that lead to the hides are inclined, but well surfaced, while the boardwalk is flat and wide. All the hides are spacious, with low windows. The only inaccessible feature is the observation tower.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The visitor centre has a very welcoming coffee shop, with large indoor and outdoor seating areas and a good range of hot and cold food available. Otherwise you'll have no problem finding a lovely local pub in the nearby Witton, Crook and Bishop Auckland areas.

## 131 Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA), North Yorkshire

**Address:** Centre Square, Middlesbrough TS1 2AZ **Web:** www.mima.art **Email:** mima@tees.ac.uk **Tel:** 01642 931232 **Hours:** Gallery: Tues–Sat 10am–4.30pm, Sun noon–4pm; kitchen: Mon–Fri 9am–3pm, Sat 10am–3pm, Sun noon–3pm **Dates:** closed Mon & bank hols **Entry:** free, but charge for some events



Opened in 2007 and spanning three floors, the stunning Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA) is a purpose-built art gallery and community space. Bringing together the city's municipal art collections, MIMA doesn't just display traditional art. The walls of each gallery are adorned with interesting text pieces, and you'll find forms represented from crafts to ceramics, sculpture to jewellery. Audio-visual installations, which you can listen to on headphones or in breakout rooms, offer a more immersive experience. Local and international artists are both well represented, and the collection features work by David Hockney, L.S. Lowry and Tracey Emin, among others. The second floor holds a community workspace and the third has a roof terrace with superb views over Middlesbrough town centre. The excellent gift shop has books and items relating to the exhibitions, as well as items made by community groups.

There are eight Blue Badge bays in the MIMA car park, with level access to the building. At the entrance, low counters cater to wheelchair users, and the gallery is fully accessible throughout, with lifts to all floors and accessible toilets equipped with grab rails. All gallery doors (bar one) open using a touch button, and wheelchairs can be borrowed on request. The atmosphere inside the gallery is generally quiet and peaceful but can get busy during the Thursday community lunch. Ear defenders can be provided if it gets crowded, or if any individual exhibition is too loud. Signage is very clear, and large-print information can be requested, too. Assistance dogs are welcome.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *MIMA Kitchen* offers a range of light lunches and breakfast options, including sandwiches and quiches, that are prepared on-site daily.

## 132 North York Moors Scenic Drive



**Driving distance:** 115 miles **Approx driving time without stops:** 3 hours 40 minutes

This beguiling tour of North Yorkshire takes in some spectacular moorland and coastal scenery, as well as a clutch of architectural and historical jewels.

The itinerary begins at Castle Howard ([www.castlehoward.co.uk](http://www.castlehoward.co.uk)), one of Britain's most magnificent stately homes, famously used as the filming location for *Brideshead Revisited* – both the classic 1981 TV adaptation and the 2007 feature film. Be sure to arrive early, as you'll want to spend a good couple of hours here before moving on. Access to and within the castle is good: wheelchair users can use the house stair lift, which takes visitors to the main floor and most of the rooms, while scooter users will need to transfer to a manual wheelchair (which can be borrowed if required); there's also a car land train which can transport visitors from the courtyard ticket office to the house and other parts of the grounds.

When you've had your fill of Castle Howard, set off for the seaside town of Whitby, about an hour and a half north – the minor road, via Rosedale Abbey, takes you through the heart of the North York Moors National Park, with its sweeping vistas of rolling, heather-clad moorland and wide-open skies. Try to get to Whitby in time for lunch, so you can feast on the award-winning fish and chips on offer at the *Quayside Restaurant*. While you're here, be sure to pay a visit to the dramatic ruins of the seventh-century abbey perched on the cliff overlooking the town – said to be the inspiration for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. If you would like to avoid the 199 steps from the lower town, drive up to the abbey and adjacent visitor centre (01947 603568, [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)); most of the site is wheelchair accessible (with wheelchairs to loan) and it offers a range

of facilities, including Blue Badge parking and an accessible toilet.

Moving on from Whitby, follow the coast road to Staithes, ten miles north, for some superb views of the cliffs and sea, before turning inland to enter the moors again. From Staithes, it's about half an hour to Guisborough, with its atmospheric ruined priory ([www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)), served by a small on-site car park.

Pushing on, it's around ten miles south to Great Broughton, where you can continue south through the national park to the splendid Rievaulx Abbey (01439 798228, [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)), one of the largest and most complete sets of abbey ruins in the UK. There's an on-site car park with three Blue Badge spaces, wheelchair access, an accessible toilet and audio tours tailored to visually impaired visitors. There's also a lovely on-site café, serving delicious cakes and hot food – the perfect spot to end a full day's sightseeing.



**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Whitby's *Quayside Restaurant* (with street-level entry and an accessible toilet) is down by the harbour at 7 Pier Road ([www.quaysidewhitby.co.uk](http://www.quaysidewhitby.co.uk)). There are also on-site cafés at Castle Howard and Rievaulx Abbey.

## 133 RSPB Bempton Cliffs, East Yorkshire

**Address:** Bempton, Bridlington YO15 1JF **Web:** [www.rspb.org.uk/bemptoncliffs](http://www.rspb.org.uk/bemptoncliffs) **Tel:** 01262 422212 **Hours:** Visitor Centre daily: Apr–Oct 9.30am–5pm; Nov–Mar 9.30am–4pm; the reserve is always open **Dates:** Visitor Centre closed 25–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£7 [A]£7 [5–17s]£3.50, but free entry for first child [under 5s] free



At the heart of the UK's largest seabird colony, RSPB Bempton Cliffs nature reserve nestles on Yorkshire's east coast, with the North Sea lapping at the base of its cliffs. From April onwards, mayhem breaks out as half a million seabirds descend on the reserve to begin courting, breeding and rearing their young. In mid-April, the stars of the show, the puffins, arrive on the bustling cliffs and remain until the end of July; they can often be seen in the sea in early August. You can also watch razorbills launching themselves from the cliff face before frantically flapping their wings to take flight, and noisy gannets, with their enormous fluffy white chicks, gliding gracefully in the coastal breeze. As the weather turns, you can enjoy the fantastic birds of prey, including short-eared owls, barn owls and peregrine falcons swooping along the dramatic wild Yorkshire Coast. Experience a picturesque coastal walk and take in the big sky, sea and cliffs. Finish your day with a nice warming meal and hot drink in the café.

Seven Blue Badge spaces are available in the car park, within 30ft of the entrance, via a smooth hard-surface path. There's level access through push-button doors into the Visitor Centre, where there may be short queues at busy periods, but staff are usually available to help both outside the entrance and in the reception area. The accessible toilet is spacious and clean with grab rails, and there are two electric mobility scooters and

RSPB Bempton Cliffs



two manual wheelchairs available to hire: to book in advance, visit the website. Beyond the reception area, the small RSPB shop has narrow aisle gaps, and doors leading out to a patio with three picnic benches. A ramp leads to the main reserve path, which generally has a good surface. Of the six cliff-edge viewing platforms, three are fully accessible, and all six have at least one wheelchair bay. Benches are spaced out periodically along the paths for a place to sit and enjoy the view. With around half a million seabirds here, the colony can be very noisy and smelly during breeding season, and the viewing platforms get busy as people jostle for the best views. While many visitors on the autism spectrum have thrived on the cliff tops, others may find the site challenging at busier times of the year. There are quieter areas around the Dell and in the bird feeding area for those that would like a quiet spot to reflect. The path back to the Visitor Centre is up a long but gentle incline so manual wheelchair users may need assistance. The website has full access details, including a video for wheelchair users.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The café in the Visitor Centre serves hot and cold drinks, sandwiches, soups, and pasties. On a fine day, you can sit outside for lunch with a view.

## 134 Burton Agnes Hall and Grounds, East Yorkshire

**Address:** Driffield YO25 4NE **Web:** [www.burtonagnes.com](http://www.burtonagnes.com) **Tel:** 01262 490324 **Hours:** daily: 1 Apr–31 Oct 11am–5pm; 16 Nov–23 Dec 11am–5pm; also open 3–25 Feb (“Snowdrop Spectacular”) 11am–4pm  
**Dates:** hall closed 1–15 Nov & 24 Dec–31 Mar **Entry:** [D]£13 [C]free [A]£13 [5–15s]£8 [under 4s]free



Burton Agnes Hall is a magnificent Elizabethan stately home, set in glorious grounds. Completed in 1610, the house has remained in the same family for four hundred years,



Burton Agnes Hall

and is still lived in by descendants of its first owner – though these days its doors are open to the public, too.

Wheelchair access is limited to the ground floor, but the building is on such a grand scale this still leaves you with plenty to see. Highlights on this level include the Great Hall, with its massive fireplace and exquisite Elizabethan panelling and plasterwork; the Red Drawing Room and its collection of French and English porcelain; the Chinese Room, featuring some stunning Chinese lacquer screens; and the Garden Gallery, which houses paintings by a number of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artists, including Walter Sickert and Albert André. If you aren't able to climb the great oak staircase up to the bedrooms and Long Gallery, head out to the beautiful grounds, which boast an enchanting Elizabethan walled garden and a mile-long woodland sculpture walk.

There is designated Blue Badge parking in the car park. The ground floor is wheelchair accessible, and there are rest seats in every room, with plenty of staff on hand to assist. The upper floors can only be accessed via the large staircase; if you can't manage this and want to know what's up there, ask for a printed guide with photos at reception. Outside, there's an accessible toilet in the courtyard, next to the café. Most areas of the grounds are wheelchair accessible, including the woodland sculpture walk, which has a level hard-surfaced path, and the walled garden, where a ramped entrance allows you to bypass the stone steps.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Courtyard Café* serves hot drinks and cakes, and delicious light meals and hot dinners, with much of the fresh produce grown on-site in the kitchen gardens.

## 135 Harrogate, North Yorkshire



Harrogate ([www.visitharrogate.co.uk](http://www.visitharrogate.co.uk)) is a prosperous, historic and classy town, packed with beautiful old manor houses, stately architecture, avenues of trees and some wonderful public gardens. The town falls into two distinct areas: upper and lower Harrogate; most of the sights are concentrated in the compact lower town, which is pretty level, and has plenty of on-street parking (free for Blue Badge holders).

A good place to start a visit is the Royal Pump Room Museum on Crown Place, which details Harrogate's rise to riches in the eighteenth century as a fashionable spa town – while you're here, you can sample the famed sulphurous water that brought visitors flocking, convinced of its medicinal properties. The museum is wheelchair accessible (although you can't get down to the wells) and has an accessible toilet; there's also a hearing induction loop at the information desk.

If this puts you in the mood for some spa action, head to the nearby Turkish Baths on Parliament Street (01423 556746, [www.turkishbathsharrogate.co.uk](http://www.turkishbathsharrogate.co.uk)), whose grand, beautifully tiled steam room and heated chambers are fully accessible (the only exception being the plunge pool). There's a ramped entrance, a lift to all floors and an accessible changing room.

From here, you could pay a visit to the Mercer Art Gallery, on Swan Road, with rotating displays of nineteenth- and twentieth-century fine art from its extensive collection, which includes works by the likes of Alan Davie and William Powell Frith. The wheelchair-accessible entrance is at the back of the building (ring the bell if it's not open), and once inside everything's on one level.



Bettys tea rooms, Harrogate

Further up the road, the elegant *Old Swan Hotel* ([www.classiclodges.co.uk](http://www.classiclodges.co.uk)) is where Agatha Christie went into hiding for eleven days in 1926, prompting a massive manhunt. To find out more, pick up a leaflet at reception, which you can peruse in the sumptuous dining room, or while having a cocktail at the bar. There's ramped access to the hotel, an accessible toilet inside and four Blue Badge spaces available for parking.

If you'd rather stay outdoors, take a stroll through the beautifully landscaped park, Valley Gardens, or better still, the fabulous RHS Garden Harlow Carr (01423 565418, [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)) next door, with its entrance on Crag Lane. Its gardens, woodland and alpine areas are laced with accessible paths (with a map available to display those routes) – though some are quite steep in places – and there's designated parking near the entrance plus wheelchairs and mobility scooters to borrow (suggested donation of £5). Accessible toilets include a Changing Places facility in one of the car parks. There's even an on-site branch of the famous *Bettys* tea rooms (whose main branch is on Parliament Street).

For more information on Harrogate's disabled facilities, including parking, RADAR key-accessible toilets and provision at visitor attractions, see the council's excellent website, [www.harrogate.gov.uk](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk).

## 136 National Railway Museum, York

**Address:** Leeman Road, York YO26 4XJ **Web:** [www.railwaymuseum.org.uk](http://www.railwaymuseum.org.uk) **Tel:** 0333 00580058  
**Hours:** daily 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** free; booking in advance recommended



The UK's largest railway museum has giant halls full of steam and diesel engines including *Mallard*, the world's fastest steam locomotive and a replica of Stephenson's *Rocket*.

Covering two hundred years of history, the museum explores the pivotal role railways played in our industrial development and the extent to which they permeated society, from transporting royalty in sumptuous elegance to providing work for the masses. You'll be impressed by the sheer quantity of fascinating railway objects on display and the knowledge, enthusiasm and helpfulness of the staff and volunteers.

There are twelve designated Blue Badge bays in the museum's car park. Check the website beforehand to locate the free disabled parking – it's easy to overshoot (poor signage) – which has awkward gradients. There are steps to access the Great Hall but a lift is available to take people on the short journey into the museum. Wheelchairs and mobility scooters are available for hire.

The museum consists of two main sites: Great Hall and Station Hall, although the latter is currently closed for renovation. The hall is large, so you never feel crowded, and access to all areas is excellent, completely level and under cover. There is plenty of space around the exhibits. The Great Hall has several ramps up to the most interesting trains and an Observation Gallery in the Great Hall with lots of natural light. The North Shed houses hundreds of smaller items from railway history as well, and the exhibition Flying Scotsman: 100 Years, 100 Voices; the hall is on one level and the exhibition is accessible via a ramp. The road train around historic York (caught outside the main entrance) has an accessible coach, and there are accessible toilets on site, all clean, spacious and with appropriate grab rails and drop downs. The shop is slightly crowded for some tastes, but well lit with high and low shelving and surfaces.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The museum has a café in the Great Hall, which is accessible, and where you can sample scrumptious Northern Bloc ice creams and milkshakes with dairy and vegan options.

## 137 Jorvik Viking Centre, York

**Address:** 19 Coppergate, York YO1 9WT **Web:** [www.jorvikvikingcentre.co.uk](http://www.jorvikvikingcentre.co.uk) **Tel:** 01904 615505

**Hours:** Apr–Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–Mar 10am–4pm; 31 Dec 10am–2pm; 1 Jan 11am–4pm; open until 6pm during school holidays **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£15 [C]free [A]£15 [5–16s]£10.50 [Con]£12.50 [Fam]£43 (two adults, two children); £49.50 (two adults, three children); ticket valid for one year



The marvellous Jorvik Viking Centre allows visitors to dig deep into York's fascinating Viking legacy. As you journey back to tenth-century York, the sights, sounds and even the smells of the Viking-age city are brought vividly back to life with an updated ride experience, state-of-the-art galleries, and a rare collection of thousand-year-old artefacts – a fun experience enhanced by friendly Viking hosts.

There's more than one way to interact with history at Jorvik Viking Centre. On top of the stand-out ride, there are Viking hosts kitted out in full costume, an artefact gallery with hundreds of fascinating items and a descriptive video showing how archeologists were able to excavate and preserve so much of this Viking heritage. A glass floor allows visitors to see the reconstructed Coppergate Dig right beneath their feet, giving a real sense of how people lived.

There's no car park at the attraction itself, but the Piccadilly and Coppergate car parks are both nearby, with designated disabled bays. There's level access to the entrance, where visitors with additional access needs can skip the queue (make yourself known to a member of staff). A RADAR key-accessible toilet is on the lower-ground floor, with grab rails and plenty of space to manoeuvre. Although a lift services the lower-ground floor, it's worth checking the maximum wheelchair width with the disabled-access staff – some powered wheelchairs might be too big, but you can borrow a manual wheelchair on site. Because of fire regulations, only one wheelchair user is allowed on the lower-ground level at a time; on the ride, there's one time capsule that can accommodate a wheelchair.

Jorvik is underground and some areas are dark, and the ride's sounds, smells and animatronics are potentially distressing for those on the autism spectrum or with other sensory conditions – the centre can provide sensory packs to help alleviate anxiety and a visual story can be downloaded online. Jorvik also operates a sticker system for people with autism, with colour-coded badges indicating whether visitors are happy to be approached, do not wish to be approached, or would like staff to answer questions when asked. Those with complex access needs should phone in advance; the team, who all receive disability training, strive to accommodate everyone, and can arrange BSL interpreters too. Large-print and Braille guides are available at the admissions desk and assistance dogs are welcome.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There is nowhere to buy refreshments on site, but there are numerous cafés and restaurants located inside the Coppergate Centre and the surrounding streets that are accessible and fairly priced.

## 138 Leeds Playhouse, West Yorkshire

**Address:** Playhouse Square, Leeds LS2 7UP **Web** [www.leedsplayhouse.org.uk](http://www.leedsplayhouse.org.uk) **Tel:** 0113 2137700

**Hours:** office daily 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed bank hols, 24 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** dependent on show but carer goes free



One of Britain's leading homes for new artistic talent, Leeds Playhouse was reopened in 2019 after a huge refurbishment that upgraded the building to facilitate access and inclusion. The playhouse was founded as part of the Leeds Playgoers' Society and the Leeds Arts Club in 1907, and moved to its current location in Quarry Hill in 1990. Today, Leeds Playhouse is a hub of creativity and activity.

Families, groups and individuals can all come and spend time exploring their artistic personality – varied performances range from classical drama to children's shows, with a focus on new writing. But it is the award-winning Creative Engagement programme that really makes this place special. Projects for young people, older people, local communities and schools all unfold here. All this is backed up by a dedicated programme for refugees and asylum seekers, including a weekly singing group with a supervised creative play session for children – in recognition of this work, the Playhouse has been designated the first ever Theatre of Sanctuary.

With an ethos that champions making theatre accessible to everyone, this redevelopment has pulled out all the access stops. There's disabled parking at the front of the

building, new entrances to the Playhouse with level access and automatic doors, Braille signs and lifts between floors. There are accessible toilets on every level (as well as a family bathroom with full changing facilities) and staff members are on hand to help. Captioned, audio-described, BSL-interpreted, relaxed and dementia-friendly performances are delivered by an experienced freelance team. As part of their ongoing commitment to inclusion, Leeds Playhouse is part of the Access Leeds Theatre partnership (a Leeds-wide initiative to improve theatre access) and the Ramps on the Moon consortium (putting deaf and disabled actors on the stage).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Front Room Café* offers a selection of hot and cold drinks and snacks; the second-floor restaurant has hot meals, including vegetarian and vegan options. Both are accessible.

## 139 The Deep, East Yorkshire

**Address:** Tower Street, Hull HU1 4DP **Web:** [www.thedeep.co.uk](http://www.thedeep.co.uk) **Tel:** 01482 381000 **Hours:** daily 10am–6pm; last entrance 5pm **Dates:** closed 24–25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£19.75 [C]free [A]£19.75 [3–15s]£15.50 [under 3s]free [Con]£18.75



Designed by Sir Terry Farrell, the gleaming glass and aluminium building that houses The Deep is distinctly shark-like in appearance – aptly so, because this huge aquarium is home to more than 5,000 animals including sharks, rays, Loggerhead sea turtles, a colony of Gentoo penguins and the UK's only green sawfish.

As well as being a visitor attraction, The Deep is an educational and conservation charity, equipped with interactive displays. Prepare to be taken on a journey, where you'll explore the world's oceans, from the early beginnings of life to the present day – through coral reef, slime and flooded forests, and from the warm waters of the tropics to the icy Antarctic. Children are entertained the whole time, with attractions such as artefact handling and talks. Gentoo penguins have a purpose-built exhibit, the Kingdom of Ice. The highlight, however, is a walk through a deep viewing tunnel followed by a breathtaking ride in an underwater lift, which takes you through the main exhibit, home of the sharks.

The Deep is only a five-minute walk from Hull Marina, and access around the whole site is excellent; the venue undertakes regular reviews of their services and facilities to ensure they offer access to all. The Deep's car park has ten accessible spaces, right next to a designated accessible entrance. Parking is free for Blue Badge holders. Wheelchairs and a variety of walking aids (including rollators) can be booked in advance for free and there are also mobility scooters available, though these can't be booked in advance. There are seating areas on each level – but be warned that the route throughout The Deep is gently sloping all the way along, and can be crowded at busy times. Accessible toilets, fitted with emergency call alarms, are on every level of the building. There is also a Changing Places facility, providing much more space, plus a hoist, an adjustable basin/mirror, a central toilet and a privacy screen. The room is decorated with coral-reef murals, and access is by using a RADAR key that can be borrowed from reception staff. The lift is wheelchair accessible. There are Braille guides, ear defenders, sensory support



The Deep

packs, personal induction loops and audio guides available. All assistance and emotional support dogs are welcome, and induction loops can be found at reception, at the tills at the gift shops and in the conference suite of the Learning Centre. Finally, on several dates throughout the year, “quiet days” are organised, when the audio system is turned down, the lighting turned up and BSL-signed presentations are available throughout the day. During term times, on “Tranquil Tuesdays” the same sensory changes are made to the environment (minus the BSL presentation) from 3pm, specifically designed for visitors who prefer a quieter and more peaceful environment – everyone is welcome and there’s no need to book. Carers are granted free entry; please bring proof, as random checks can be made on documentation.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ On the third floor, the café (with a children’s menu and options for a range of dietary requirements) is open until 5.45pm, is accessible and offers impressive views over the Humber. A snack bar serving light bites is open halfway round the attraction during weekends and school holidays.

## 140 Eureka! The National Children’s Museum, West Yorkshire

**Address:** Discovery Road, Halifax HX1 2NE **Web:** [www.play.eureka.org.uk](http://www.play.eureka.org.uk) **Tel:** 01422 330069 **Hours:** Sat & Sun 10am–5pm; Mon–Fri during local school hols 10am–5pm; Tues–Fri during local school term 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** [D]£15.95 [C]free [adult & child over 3]£15.95 [1–2s]£6.95 [under 1s]free; parking up to 4hr £3.60; up to 12hr £6.90; free annual pass with every standard admission (additional charge may apply on some events and activities); free annual pass with every standard admission (additional charge may apply on some events and activities)





Eureka! The National Children's Museum

The award-winning Eureka! The National Children's Museum aims to inspire children to find out about themselves and the world through hundreds of imaginative, cleverly designed and interactive exhibits within six indoor galleries and a large outdoor space.

Among the numerous multi-sensory activities on offer, Zoom the Robot is very popular as he's fully interactive – talk to him and he talks back. In the All About Me section, children can climb inside a cavernous mouth, and they can discover the properties of sound and music in Sound Space. Meanwhile, under 5s can explore the sights, sounds and textures of a giant garden in the SoundGarden. While Eureka! is targeted at the under 12s (with Desert Discovery, SoundGarden and Creativity Space designed for the under 5s), there's plenty here to enthrall older children – and their adult companions – too.

There are three dedicated disabled parking bays around fifty yards from the main entrance (bypass the main car park and park beside the Eureka building), plus extra bays near the path in the overflow car park, both with level access into the museum. Inside, there's a low counter at the ticket desk where children and other visitors with access needs can jump the queue at busy times – just ask on arrival. There are no awkward surfaces or gradients for wheelchair users to contend with and a few wheelchairs are available to borrow (book in advance). All staff receive disability training (including autism training) and many of the front-of-house staff can do basic signing or finger spelling. The museum has an induction loop, Changing Places bathroom, ear defenders for those with sensitive hearing, large-print multi-sensory displays, and the All About Me gallery has BSL interpretation for some exhibits. A private chill-out space is available for visitors with access needs, too. Outside, the Wonder Walk incorporates a sensory trail (for all) and a wheelchair accessible trail. An online sensory guide is available at <https://sensoryguide.eureka.org.uk>.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The accessible café serves tasty hot and cold meals and snacks, and has a children's menu, with sandwiches made on-site. There's a microwave for heating baby food and a picnic area outside, plus additional seating areas for extra lunch space.

## 141 The Victoria Theatre, Halifax, West Yorkshire

**Address:** 2 Fountain St, Halifax HX1 1BP **Web:** [www.victoriatheatre.co.uk](http://www.victoriatheatre.co.uk) **Tel:** 01422 351158

**Hours:** Box office on non-performance days Jan, Feb & June–Aug daily 10am–4pm; Mar–May & Sept–Dec daily 10am–6pm; on performance days it stays open until 30 mins after curtain up **Entry:** Ticket prices depend on the performance but [C]free; see website for details



In the heart of Halifax, the Victoria Theatre is a traditional Victorian theatre staging a varied programme of plays, concerts and events, including rock 'n' roll performances, side-splitting comedy, ballet, opera and traditional panto. The theatre's sumptuous interior contains many original features including an ornate, sweeping, double staircase in the foyer with its beautiful, stained-glass dome and striking statue of Queen Victoria. While the auditorium retains the feel of a bygone era, the theatre itself has modern facilities such as a wheelchair stair-lift and infra-red audio system.

There are free parking spaces for Blue Badge holders on Commercial Street, directly outside the theatre, with dropped kerbs and level walkways. The main entrance has steps, so wheelchair users should enter via the side entrance on Commercial Street, which offers level access through wide doors. If pre-advised, staff can meet visitors with access needs here and offer additional support. From here, there is level access to the stalls,



## Ideas ▶▶ Safari Parks

**Knowsley** (Prescot L34 4AN; [www.knowsleysafariexperience.co.uk](http://www.knowsleysafariexperience.co.uk)) A conservation-led, drive-through wildlife sanctuary with active breeding programmes, where you can come face to face with all manner of exotic animals from emus to giraffes.

**Woburn Safari Park** (Bedfordshire MK17 9QN; [www.woburnsafari.co.uk](http://www.woburnsafari.co.uk)) With a wide range of animals from around the world, as well as rides and indoor activities to keep kids occupied in poor weather, Woburn offers an excellent day out. Thorough access information is available on their website too.

the stalls bar, the accessible toilet and designated wheelchair spaces in the auditorium. There are hearing loops in the booking office and the auditorium, and an infra-red audio system allows customers in the stalls and circle to adjust the volume of the performance. The annual pantomime has both BSL-interpreted and BSL-integrated performances and a relaxed performance for those on the autism spectrum. A touch tour is also available during pantomime season, enabling visitors with visual impairment to meet the cast and feel costumes and props. Seasonal brochures are available in large print, and guide dogs are welcome. There are two large, accessible toilets. The significant detail and contrasting colours in the Victorian interior may be a little overwhelming for those with sensory sensitivity, along with the noise levels on entry, exit and during intervals. Visitors with access needs should tell staff when booking, and wheelchair users can sign up to the theatre's email service to book performances in advance.

**FOOD & DRINK ▶▶** The theatre has two main bars and a smaller bar for pre-show and interval drinks, plus a snack kiosk in the lobby and a number of smaller ice-cream kiosks. There are plenty of places for a full meal nearby in Halifax's town centre.

## 142 Yorkshire Wildlife Park, South Yorkshire

**Address:** Warning Tongue Lane, Doncaster DN4 6TB **Web:** [www.yorkshirewildlifepark.com](http://www.yorkshirewildlifepark.com) **Tel:** 01302 535057 **Hours:** times vary throughout year, check website for details; park may close during adverse weather **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** prices vary depending on the season; see website for details



Yorkshire Wildlife Park describes itself as “an award-winning walk-through wildlife experience”, which neatly sums up this enjoyable family attraction just outside Doncaster.

Footpaths lead around a variety of walk-through areas, where many of the animals are free to wander around, often venturing up close to visitors before shying away. In South America ¡Viva! you can walk among troops of capybaras, the largest rodents in the world, while over in Lemur Woods you can hang out with two species of lemur. Some areas, such as the Wallaby Walkabout, allow you to pet the animals. Some of the more predatory creatures, including the Amur tigers and Amur leopards, can be viewed from raised accessible walkways or through ground-level glass panels. The park is also home to anteaters, lions and eight polar bears (intriguingly the largest polar bear centre outside Canada), including Flocke and her adorable triplets, Indiana, Yuma, and Tala.

Ring-tailed Lemur, Yorkshire Wildlife Park



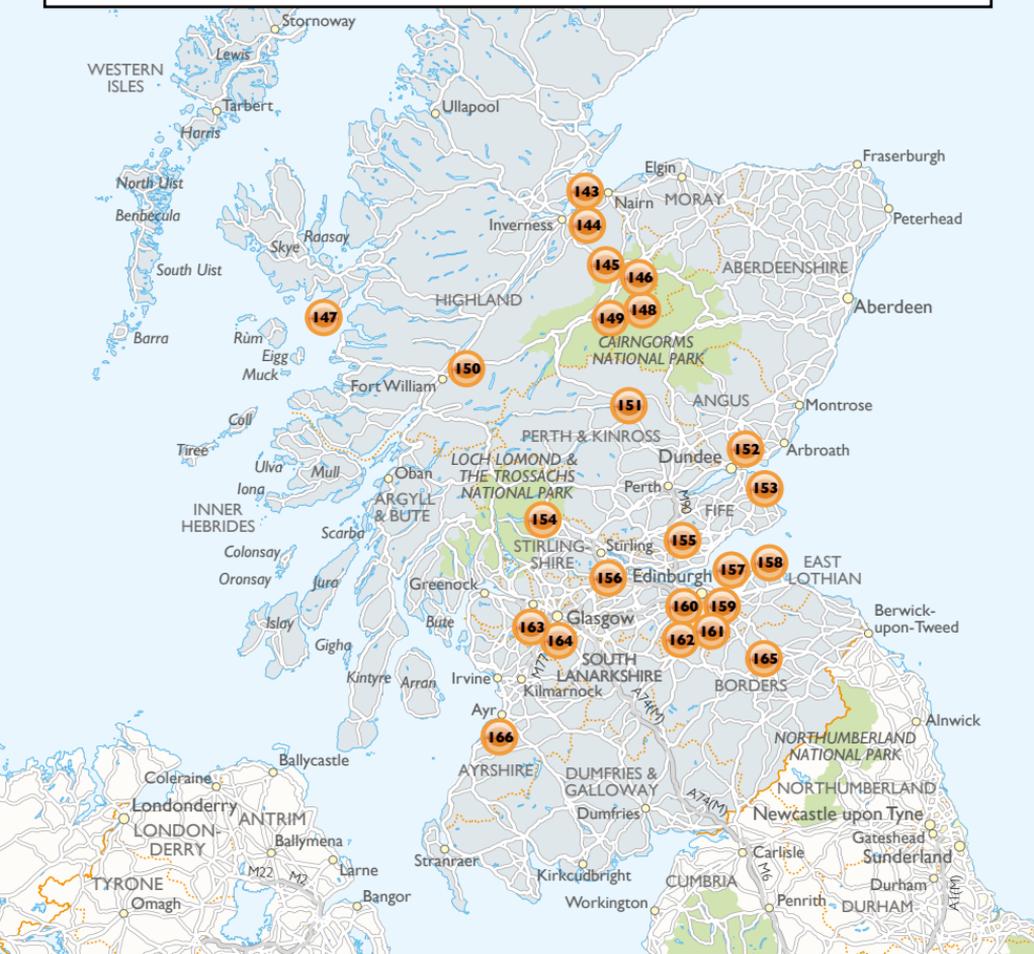
Children will enjoy the three outdoor play areas – Jungle Jamboree, Tiny Tots Safari Trail and Bobcat Run – plus the huge, indoor Monkey Playhouse, with its viewing area into the baboon reserve, though these have no special disabled provision.

Access to the Yorkshire Wildlife Park is good, with plenty of disabled parking spaces and a ramp down to the courtyard, where trails lead to the wildlife areas. All the trails and walkways are wheelchair accessible; most paths are fairly level, with a hard surface of compacted gravel, though there are a few gravelly or uneven parts where wheelchair users may need some assistance. Manual wheelchairs are available to borrow (but must be booked ahead), as well as mobility scooters, though there is a £20 charge for these. There are three fully accessible toilets, as well as a Changing Places facility in the Yorkshire Hive courtyard. Assistance dogs are welcome at the park, but can't be taken into the animal walkthrough areas. Visitors on the autism spectrum can pre-book for fast-track entry, while those who struggle to queue can head to the quieter Information Station for assistance; queues are usually less busy from 2pm onwards.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There are no less than five eateries within the park (all accessible) – varying from a bistro to a bakehouse – in addition to outdoor picnic areas.

# Scotland

- 143** Fort George
- 144** Culloден Battlefield Visitor Centre
- 145** Landmark Forest Adventure Park
- 146** RSPB Loch Garten Nature Centre
- 147** Islands Coast Scenic Drive
- 148** Glenmore Forest Park
- 149** Highland Wildlife Park
- 150** Nevis Range Mountain Experience (Aonach Mor Gondola)
- 151** Pitlochry Festival Theatre and Explorers Garden
- 152** V&A Dundee
- 153** St Andrews
- 154** Steamship Sir Walter Scott
- 155** Gliding with Walking on Air
- 156** Falkirk Wheel
- 157** The Royal Yacht Britannia
- 158** Scottish Seabird Centre
- 159** Dynamic Earth
- 160** Scottish National Gallery and Scottish National Portrait Gallery
- 161** Scottish Parliament Buildings
- 162** Edinburgh International Festival and Edinburgh Festival Fringe
- 163** Riverside Museum
- 164** House for an Art Lover
- 165** Abbotsford
- 166** Robert Burns Birthplace Museum



## 143 Fort George, Inverness-shire

**Address:** Ardersier, Inverness-shire IV2 7TD **Web:** [www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/fort-george](http://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/fort-george) **Tel:** 01667 460232 **Hours:** daily: Apr–Sept 9.30am–5.30pm, Oct–Mar 10am–4pm; last entry 1hr before closing **Dates:** closed 1–2 Jan & 25–26 Dec; site may close at short notice in adverse weather **Entry:** [D]£10 [C]free [A]£10 [7–15s]£6 [Seniors, 60+]£8



Built on the orders of King George II in the wake of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, Fort George is still in use as an army barracks today. It is one of the largest and best-preserved forts in Europe, a spectacular complex of fortifications and garrison buildings set on a spit of land jutting into the Moray Firth. After parking, you approach the fort along a path that takes you through sandstone tunnels and over white wooden bridges that span the ditches. Once there, you're rewarded with magnificent coastal views from the ramparts – sometimes you can even spot dolphins in the sea from here.

A short (12min) film recounting the Fort George story is a good starting point for a tour, and a ninety-minute multilingual audio tour is available to guide you around the extensive site. The Historic Barrack Rooms vividly recreate the living conditions of the eighteenth-century soldiers who lived here. Other highlights include: the Grand Magazine, which once held thousands of gunpowder barrels and now stores a vast collection of eighteenth-century arms; the Garrison Chapel; a dog cemetery (which is not accessible); and the Camp Cinema with its short film about the history of the Black Watch regiment. There's a special quiz sheet for children and summertime family events –



though the shiny weapons, imposing buildings and vast space to run around in will provide ample enjoyment for younger visitors.

Though built to be impregnable, the fort is very accessible today. From the car park, where there are four accessible bays, it's around two hundred yards to the visitor centre and main entrance, mostly across level ground, but with two short stretches of cobbles to cross. You can borrow mobility scooters at the visitor centre, as well as some manual wheelchairs; these are available on a first come, first served basis. The site is largely wheelchair accessible, though assistance may be needed up one of the six grassy ramps (twenty degrees) onto the ramparts or up the slight step into the Barrack Rooms. The Regimental Museum has chairlift access to the first floor only; the second floor can only be reached via a staircase. There are two sets of accessible toilets: one in the main garrison area, the other in the café. An induction loop is available in the audio-visual theatre and in the shop and main reception area, and ear defenders are also available.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Fort George Café* sells homemade, organic food such as soup and sandwich lunches, and has level access and accessible toilets.

## 144 Culloden Battlefield Visitor Centre, Inverness-shire

**Address:** Culloden Moor, Inverness IV2 5EU **Web:** [www.nts.org.uk/culloden](http://www.nts.org.uk/culloden) **Tel:** 01463 796090

**Hours:** daily: Jan–Feb & Nov–Dec 10am–4pm; Mar–May & Sept–Oct 9am–6pm; June–Aug 9am–7pm

**Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 31 Dec–2 Jan **Entry:** [D]£11 [C]free [A]£11 [under 18s]£9.50 [under 5]free [Con]£9.50 [Fam]£25



The sixteenth of April 1746 was a decisive day in British history – the date of the last battle fought on British soil, when seven thousand Government troops swiftly and bloodily defeated Bonnie Prince Charlie's Jacobites. The Culloden Battlefield centre is a must-do – it's one of the most fascinating attractions in the Highlands and accessible to all.

The centre's natural building materials and sympathetic architecture ensure it blends in with its environment. The well-crafted displays are presented through vocal and tactile description, as well as by traditional glass-case presentation. The staff are very helpful, doling out advice and directions, and some give historical talks in period costume. Hand-held electronic guides (included in ticket price) enhance the experience, particularly while touring the battlefield outside. Don't miss the Cumberland Stone – the giant boulder that's supposed to mark the spot where the Duke of Cumberland took up his position to direct the battle (although if he did stand here he would have needed binoculars!).

There are thirteen Blue Badge spaces, and it's just a short stroll or push to the entrance of the centre, which has level access throughout. Both the rooftop walkway – which has the best view of the grounds and is accessed via a ramp, which is not too steep (1:21) – and battlefield paths are wheelchair accessible, though during wet weather the latter can

become muddy and tricky to use, so assistance may be required. Accessible toilets are just inside the visitor centre entrance, and wheelchairs and mobility scooters are available to borrow; you're advised to book these in advance. There are hearing induction loops throughout the visitor centre, while the text in the exhibition centre is available in large print.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The on-site café-restaurant, which has level access throughout, serves good food in a light and spacious dining room with a patio and fine countryside views.

## 145 Landmark Forest Adventure Park, Inverness-shire

**Address:** Carrbridge, Inverness-shire, Scotland PH23 3AJ **Web:** [www.landmarkpark.co.uk](http://www.landmarkpark.co.uk) **Tel:** 01479 841613 **Hours:** hours and times vary, call or check website for details **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 25 Dec; some attractions close late Oct to late Mar; occasional closures in bad weather, so call to check **Entry:** prices change regularly, so check the website; weekly and annual tickets available. Note: disabled visitors and carers need official documentation to qualify for reduced rate or free entry



Set in a beautiful pine forest in the Cairngorms National Park, Landmark Forest Adventure Park is a paradise for active kids, who'll have loads of fun exploring, running, climbing and hurtling around the park's numerous activities and rides, many of which are surprisingly accessible. Highlights include: Ant City, a two-storey climbing-running-sliding structure; Pinnacle, a 30ft-high climbing wall; and the Fire Tower, a 70ft-high timber structure whose 105 steps can be scaled to reveal breathtaking 360-degree views above the treetops.

Adrenaline junkies will make a beeline for Ropeworx, the challenging high-wire adventure course, or the 50ft Skydive jump, which uses stuntmen-style descenders – continuing, no doubt, to the thrilling Wild Water Coaster rides. Gentler pleasures are on hand on the fully accessible Ancient Forest Adventure Treetop Trail through the forest canopy, where you've got a good chance of spotting rare red squirrels and beautiful forest birds, or in the Butterfly House, home to hundreds of brightly coloured butterflies. Finally, mention must be made of the indoor Bamboozeleum, whose morphing machines, special effects, holograms and "capture-your-shadow" wall are certain to intrigue and delight. Dinosaur Kingdom, features 22 moving, roaring and life-size dinosaurs, including a 6m T-Rex. The park's latest attraction is NetworkX, Scotland's first ever aerial net challenge, where visitors can ascend the trees as they make their way around a series of bouncy nets.

Blue Badge holders can park in the disabled bays a few yards from the park entrance. All the trails through the park are wheelchair accessible – though take care not to get your wheels jammed between the boardwalks on the Ancient Forest Adventure Treetop Trail. There are a few wheelchairs available to borrow at the main reception. All the toilets in the park include a spacious, fully accessible toilet with grab bars.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The on-site *Foresters' Café* offers a decent choice of locally sourced food, such as fish and chips, homemade soup and kids' meals. Alternatively, the *Pinewood Grill* snack bar serves burgers, hot dogs, salads and the like.

## 146 RSPB Loch Garten Nature Centre, Highlands

**Address:** Loch Garten Nature Centre, Nethy Bridge PH25 3HA; off the B970, 10 miles from Aviemore (follow Loch Garten Nature Centre tourist signs) **Web:** [www.rspb.org.uk/lochgarten](http://www.rspb.org.uk/lochgarten) **Tel:** 01479 831476  
**Hours:** daily Apr–Oct 10am–6pm (last entry 5pm); check website for event details **Dates:** closed Nov–Mar  
**Entry:** [D]£3 [C]free [A]£5 [under 16s]£2 [Con]£3.50 [Fam]£10



The RSPB's Nature Centre – nestling in mature pine forest, near the spot where ospreys returned to breed after a period of extinction in the 1950s – is a mecca for nature lovers the world over. Small and well-appointed, and newly refurbished in 2021, it teems with windows into the forest, viewing slots and equipment, with some binoculars and telescopes set low for children and wheelchair users. You get great views of the osprey nest through these, as well as opportunities to spot myriad small birds coming to feeders nearby, including siskins, greater spotted woodpeckers and, if you're lucky, crested tits. Red squirrels are also frequent visitors, as are bank voles and wood mice. While the centre doesn't have dedicated facilities for those with sensory disabilities, enthusiastic staff are happy to describe the action, and there are audio and video feeds from the osprey nest. Further afield, in the surrounding Abernethy Forest, you may see crossbills, deer, lizards and wood ants.

The centre is extremely well signposted from the A9. There are three disabled parking spaces near the reception and toilet block, and those with limited mobility are permitted to drive the last 330 yards to the door, and park right outside the centre – otherwise visitors can follow a gently undulating and well-compacted path. A gentle decking ramp takes you inside, where all is on one level and fully wheelchair accessible. There is a Changing Places facility at the car park and a fully accessible toilet at the Nature Centre itself. There is one standard wheelchair, as well as an off-road assisted wheelchair for the trails, available to borrow, which you can reserve in advance. Any other queries can be answered by the staff, all of whom have received disability awareness training. The centre was awarded the Visit Scotland Gold Award for Green Tourism in 2013, and it deserves it – the sights, sounds and smells of the wilderness will stay with you long after your visit.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ You can get hot drinks, sandwiches and snacks at the centre shop, but for something more substantial pop to Nethy Bridge or Boat of Garten, where you'll find village shops and cafés.

## 147 Islands Coast Scenic Drive



**Driving distance:** 86 miles **Approx driving time without stops:** 3 hours 15 minutes

Scotland's northwest Highlands is an untamed land of mountains, glens, lochs, wind-swept islands and unforgettable beauty – nowhere more so than the mesmerising Isle of Skye and neighbouring mainland.

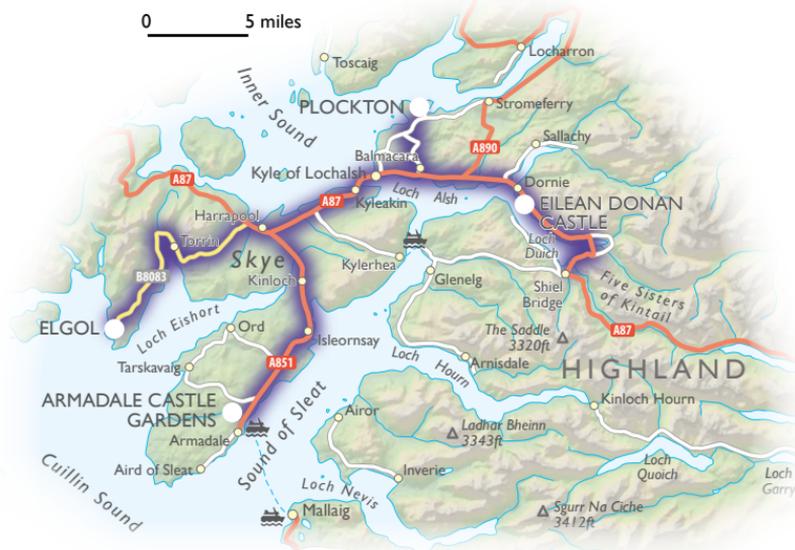
The little ferry port of Armadale, in the south, makes a good introduction to Skye; it's reached by a half-hour boat trip (0800 0665000, [www.calmac.co.uk](http://www.calmac.co.uk)) from Mallaig. A short distance from the ferry terminal stand the imposing ruins of Armadale Castle (01471 844305, [www.armadalecastle.com](http://www.armadalecastle.com)), a nineteenth-century manor house whose

beautiful grounds are the site of the Museum of the Isles, which explores the history of the region from the perspective of the powerful Clan Donald. Fully accessible and with a range of facilities (including three dedicated parking bays, accessible toilets in both the museum and the café, and two mobility scooters to borrow, which are best booked in advance). The main routes through the gardens are wheelchair accessible.

From here, head north towards Harrapool then loop south to Elgol fishing village, where you'll be rewarded with sensational views across Loch Scavaig to the Cullin Ridge. Those who want to get closer can take a boat trip with Misty Isle Boat Trips, whose staff are keen to help anyone on board, but it's worth noting that the lower the tide, the longer the route to the boat down the slipway (phone in advance on 01471 866288).

From Elgol, retrace your route to Harrapool and take the A87 over the toll-free Skye Bridge to the mainland for stunning views of the Kyle of Lochalsh. Take either of two left-hand turns for a pretty detour to the charming village of Plockton, where you can take a stroll along the shore of Loch Carron and watch picturesque sailing boats bob in the sea. There's disabled parking and toilets by the harbour, and a good supply of shore-front pubs and restaurants. Otherwise, follow the road east to Eilean Donan Castle (www.eileandonan castle.com). Perched on a small island at the junction of three lochs, this is a truly magical place. Sadly, the castle itself has no disabled access, but the adjacent visitor centre – which is 20 yards from the disabled car parking spaces – has full access and offers two on-screen virtual tours (as well as a coffee shop, gift shop and accessible toilets). Continue on to Shiel Bridge to end your trip with fabulous views of Loch Duich and the Five Sisters of Kintail.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ On the Isle of Skye, try the restaurant at the friendly, accessible *Coruisk House* (01471 866330, www.coruiskhouse.com) in Elgol. Plockton has great seafood restaurants; the *Plockton Inn* (01599 544222, https://plocktoninn.co.uk) is a good bet, although, being in a heritage building, it doesn't have an accessible toilet. Take a look at www.visitplockton.com for more ideas.



## 148 Glenmore Forest Park, Inverness-shire

**Address:** Glenmore Forest, near Aviemore PH22 1QU **Web:** [www.forestryandland.gov.scot](http://www.forestryandland.gov.scot) **Tel:** 0300 067 6100 **Hours:** visitor centre/café daily 9.30am–4pm (10am–3.30pm in winter) **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 25–26 Dec **Entry:** free; pay-and-display car park; free parking for Blue Badge holders



Sitting in the heart of the Cairngorm Mountains, around six miles east of Aviemore, Glenmore Forest Park boasts one of Scotland's few remaining tracts of ancient Caledonian pine forest. It is also the site of the gorgeous Loch Morlich, whose long, golden beach is the highest in Britain.

A good place to start is the visitor centre, where you can pick up trail maps and find out more about the park's landscape, wildlife and history on information panels; although the visitor centre is not always manned, rangers are often on hand to help out on the nearby trails. The park has two accessible trails, both starting from the visitor centre. The longer one is the 3.5-mile long Loch Morlich Trail (with red waymarks) which takes you along the shores of the Loch, although both can get very muddy after heavy rain. The shorter 1.5-mile long Beach Trail (with yellow waymarks) takes you along the edge of the Loch and up the riverside past the visitor centre. This latter one is easily managed with a mobility scooter or electric wheelchair. Manual wheelchair users, however, will probably need assistance on a couple of the steeper sections.

There are two wide-bay disabled spaces in the car park, close to the visitor centre, which has a step-free entrance. Once inside accessibility is good, with everything on one level – including access to the café – and plenty of space to manoeuvre. The information boards have large print. There's a spacious, accessible toilet at the visitor centre, fitted with grab rails.

**FOOD & DRINK** ►► Fabulous views and tasty hot and cold food (including a kids' menu) are on offer at the pleasant visitor centre café, which has indoor and outdoor seating.

## 149 Highland Wildlife Park, Inverness-shire

**Address:** Kincaig, Kingussie, Inverness-shire PH21 1NL **Web:** [www.highlandwildlifepark.org](http://www.highlandwildlifepark.org) **Tel:** 01540 651270 **Hours:** daily: Apr–Oct 10am–5pm; July–Aug 10am–6pm; Nov–Mar 10am–4pm; last entry 1hr before closing **Dates:** closed 25 Dec and in bad weather; phone in advance to check **Entry:** [D]£15 [C]free [A]£18.50 [3–15s]£13.50 [under 3s]free [Con]£15; discounted tickets available online



Set in the stunning Cairngorms National Park, the two-hundred-acre park offers breathtaking mountain and loch views with the chance to see a range of native animals like the Scottish wildcat, as well as species from around the world including snow leopards and Scotland's youngest polar bear.

Entering the park, you will drive through the entrance reserve where a herd of Bactrian camels and yak roam free. White-lipped deer and Mishmi takin can also be seen in this reserve. It takes about half an hour to drive (slowly) around the drive-through

reserve, where you'll see many hoofed animals, including elk, deer, vicuna, bison and Przewalski's horses. Don't worry if you miss something: you can go round as many times as you like. From the car park, trails lead to more exotic animals such as Amur tigers, snow monkeys, wolves, arctic foxes and the polar bears. Native Scottish wildlife is also represented, with red deer, Scottish wildcats and red squirrels, among others, while children will enjoy the excellent Go Wild adventure playground.

Blue Badge parking is available within a few yards of the accessible visitor centre, which houses a café and a shop. Trails through the park are mostly wheelchair-friendly, particularly the wooden walkways to the tigers. Some are surfaced with compressed earth or hard-packed gravel; a few are steep in places, but manageable, though you may need assistance. Rest seats are provided at various points. The shop staff are helpful and can provide a map and advice about trails and surfaces. There are a limited number of manual wheelchairs available for free hire from the shop and accessible toilets located in blocks by the car park and in the visitor centre.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The park has a range of cafés and food trucks serving an excellent range of hot and cold snacks and drinks. In the visitor centre, *Antlers* café offers spectacular views of the Spey Valley and the Japanese snow monkey tribe. There are also several food trucks and kiosks dotted around the site.

## 150 Nevis Range Mountain Experience (Aonach Mor Gondola), Inverness-shire

**Address:** Nevis Range, Torlundy, Inverness-shire PH33 6SQ **Web:** [www.nevisrange.co.uk](http://www.nevisrange.co.uk) **Tel:** 01397 705825 **Hours:** gondola summer daily 9.30am–5pm (9.30am–late in July and Aug); winter daily 9.30am–4pm; see website for details of other activities **Dates:** closed mid-Nov to mid-Dec **Entry:** [D]£14 [C]free [A]£24.95 [5–17s]£13 [under 4s]free [Con]£20.95 [Fam]£59.95–67.95



Aonach Mor – just two summits away from the peak of Ben Nevis, towering above the Great Glen – is the location of Britain's only mountain gondola. The wheelchair-accessible gondola is open year-round, and transports visitors up 2,150ft to Scotland's highest snow-sports area and, of course, dramatic, unbeatable views over the mountains and lochs of Scotland's west coast. In winter, the slopes are abuzz with skiers and boarders, and offer options for both beginners and experts.

The site is the base for Disability Snowsport UK, so it's a great place to have a go. An adaptive ski instructor can be booked in advance, and a junior sit-ski suitable for children aged up to fourteen (depending on height) is available. Downhill mountain bike trails are open in summer, but while bike rental is possible, there are no adapted bikes available. At the bottom of the mountain – around the base station – are miles of forest trails, open year-round. Some are passable by the adventurous disabled visitor, including those in wheelchairs, if they're not too muddy. Blue Badge parking is provided next to the gondola entrance. The café at the base station and the *Snowgoose* restaurant at the top both have easy access and accessible toilets. The gondolas are able to accommodate wheelchairs up to 60cm wide, but if yours doesn't fit, transfer onto the gondola seat is quite easy. They also have a narrow chair, which can be wheeled up the ramp, into

the gondola by the helpful staff (your own chair can go up with you). The restaurant is accessible by a steep ramp from the outside of the building, just fifty yards from the gondola arrival point, though in winter this may mean a short journey through snow. Its balcony-cum-viewing deck is accessible, too. The upper chairlifts above the gondola don't operate in summer, to protect the sensitive vegetation.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Snowgoose* restaurant is right at the top, with panoramic views. Alternatively, the *Pinemarten* café and bar at the bottom serves locally sourced hot and cold meals and snacks in a light and airy building. It has step-free access, movable seating and an accessible toilet.

## 151 Pitlochry Festival Theatre and Explorers Garden, Perthshire

**Address:** Port-na-Craig, Pitlochry PH16 5DR **Web:** [www.pitlochryfestivaltheatre.com](http://www.pitlochryfestivaltheatre.com) **Tel:** 01796 484600; box office 01796 484626 **Hours:** performance dates & times vary; theatre & box office daily year-round 10am–5pm (in summer box office closes at 8pm & theatre after the evening performance); garden daily 1 Apr–31 Oct 10am–5pm (last entry at 4.15pm) **Entry:** tickets vary depending on performance & seat; gallery free; garden [A]£5 [Fam]£9; season tickets and concessions are available, see website



The Pitlochry Festival Theatre presents productions of all kinds, year-round, including musicals, plays, concerts, workshops, talks, festivals and tours. But even if you don't see a performance, you can spend a few hours here looking around the beautiful Explorers Gardens, taking a backstage tour, browsing in the gift shop or simply admiring the beautiful setting from the panoramic lounge.

Adjacent to the theatre, the famous Explorers Garden will delight horticulturalists. On the banks of the River Tummel, the extensive garden and woodlands tell the story of the Scottish plant hunters who travelled the globe in search of new plants and trees. The gardens have a network of tarmac paths, steeply graded in places, but mostly step-free – you can arrange to be dropped at the garden's entrance pavilion, and meander downhill back to the car park. If you want to learn more about the trees and plants, book ahead to join one of the garden tours (90min); with notice, staff will try to accommodate individual access needs.

The modern theatre is a short walk – just less than a mile – across a suspension footbridge from the attractive centre of Pitlochry town. This is a step-free route, albeit steep in places. If you'd prefer to avoid the hills, it's better to drive to the theatre, where disabled parking is available by the entrance – with striking views across the valley. The venue welcomes disabled visitors: there's good access into the building and four wheelchair spaces in the auditorium, and six spaces in the Studio, as well as automatic doors to enter the building. Tours of the backstage area, including the Green Room, are available upon request (though this is not suitable for wheelchair users due to the stairs), and can be conducted as a touch tour that even covers the set. Assistance dogs are welcome with prior notice; the theatre is also fitted with a hearing loop and IR system. Captioned, relaxed, dementia-friendly, audio-described and BSL-interpreted performances are also staged here.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The theatre's café bar serves light meals and snacks and a wide selection of drinks, all accompanied by glorious views.

## 152 V&A Dundee

**Address:** 1 Riverside Esplanade, Dundee DD1 4EZ **Web:** [www.vam.ac.uk/dundee](http://www.vam.ac.uk/dundee) **Tel:** 01382 411611

**Hours:** summer daily; winter Wed–Mon 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec, 1 Jan **Entry:** free; charge for select exhibitions



Dundee is undergoing a dazzling transformation. In the middle of a thirty-year £1-billion redevelopment programme to transform five miles of land along its waterfront, a surge of new bars, restaurants and attractions are breathing new life into the city. V&A Dundee opened in 2018 in a prime location on the banks of the River Tay and is the jewel in Dundee's crown.

The waterfront V&A Dundee is Scotland's first design museum. Japanese architect Kengo Kuma drew inspiration from the cliffs along Scotland's east coast for the building; its curving walls clad in rough stone rise from the Tay to create the impression of a plunging cliff-face. Inside the state-of-the-art building you'll discover the Scottish Design Galleries (free), showcasing the history of Scottish design from fashion to furniture, architecture to healthcare; highlights include an Alexander Campbell eighteenth-century pistol and a winged tiara encrusted with 2,500 diamonds. Other galleries feature the work of emerging designers and artists and compelling temporary exhibitions, while the V&A's range of workshops, tours, talks and events make for an engaging calendar. The museum also has a learning centre, auditorium, restaurant, café bar, gift shop and an outdoor terrace offering beautiful views of the River Tay.

While there is no dedicated car park at the V&A Dundee, six accessible bays can be found just across from the museum in the public car park. Smooth paths run along the waterfront to the step-free entrance via automatic doors. A lowered wheelchair-accessible information desk (with an induction loop) welcomes you to the museum. You can pick up leaflets, borrow a wheelchair or buy tickets here. There's lift access to all galleries, where exhibits are spread out with interactive displays and plenty of hands-on learning. These areas can often get crowded, but there's a quiet room available for some time out. Seating areas are located around the museum, and there's space outside on the terrace to admire the lovely views. Spacious accessible toilets feature on each level, as well as a Changing Places facility on level 1, with an adult-sized changing bench, ceiling track hoist and plenty of space to manoeuvre; ask staff for an access code. For more information about V&A Dundee's access provision and programme, please contact: [access@vandadundee.org](mailto:access@vandadundee.org). Concession tickets are available for disabled visitors and carers receive free admission to paid exhibitions.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Tatha Bar and Kitchen* serves sit-down meals, snacks and take-aways, cakes and drinks. For those who'd rather bring their own, you can eat at the tables downstairs by the large window. An affiliated pop-up food van, *Heather Street Food*, is located outside, by the South Crichton Street car park, which serves coffee and fresh doughnuts and bagels.

## 153 St Andrews, Fife



The beautiful little town of St Andrews, set on the east coast of Fife, is widely known as the home of golf – though these days it's just as likely to conjure up thoughts of Prince William and Kate Middleton, who famously met while studying at the town's university.

Having already celebrated its six-hundredth anniversary, the university is the oldest in Scotland and a major presence in the old town centre. Take a wander into St Mary's College, on South Street, to admire the stunning sixteenth-century architecture and expansive quad within – there's level access through the main gate, though the cobbles may be a little bumpy. Another university building worth visiting is St Salvador's Chapel, on North Street, home to the exquisitely carved medieval tomb of Bishop Kennedy and some striking stained-glass windows. There are steps up to the entrance, but if you call ahead (01334 462866) staff will put a ramp in place.

To many visitors, however, St Andrews is all about golf ([www.standrews.com](http://www.standrews.com)): as well as being the base of the R&A (the sport's governing body, and organiser of the Open Championship), the town is home to some world-famous golf courses, including the revered Old Course, on the northwest edge of town. On Sundays, the Old Course is open to the public (unless a big competition is taking place) – it's quite a sight to see people pushing prams and walking dogs on some of golf's most hallowed turf. A good place to satisfy your golf interest is the R&A World Golf Museum, on Bruce Embankment (01334 460046, [www.worldgolfmuseum.com](http://www.worldgolfmuseum.com)), which charts the history of the game with a series of engaging exhibits and multimedia displays. The museum is fully accessible, with four disabled spaces in its car park (there's also a drop off point right outside the museum), a ramped entrance, level access inside, a lift between the two floors, and an accessible toilet.

A short distance from the museum, glorious West Sands Beach stretches north up the coastline. There's plenty of free parking along the coast road, and while the beach itself isn't easily accessed in a wheelchair, the grassy area running alongside it is a great spot for a picnic, sandwiched between the sea dunes and the Old Course. There are a couple of public accessible toilets along here, and a RADAR key-accessible toilet at Bruce Embankment, near the edge of town, which also has a Changing Places facility. There's also another handy, RADAR key-accessible toilet in the town centre at Church Square. In terms of getting around, St Andrews is fairly flat and straightforward to navigate in a wheelchair – and there's not too much ground to cover. There's also a good provision of on-street Blue Badge parking around town.

## 154 Steamship Sir Walter Scott, Perthshire

**Address:** Trossachs Pier, Loch Katrine, by Callander FK17 8HZ **Web:** [www.lochkatrine.com](http://www.lochkatrine.com) **Tel:** 01877 332000 or 376315 **Hours:** Mar–Nov daily cruises of 1 or 2 hours, departing Trossachs Pier 10.30am, 1pm & 2.30pm, June–Sept also at 4pm; check website for exact timetable and details of Santa and New Year cruises in Dec & Jan **Dates:** no cruises Feb **Entry:** 2-hour return trip from Trossachs Pier to Stronachlachar [D]£30 [C]free (for two carers) [A]£30 [5–16s]£15 [Con]£27; 1-hour cruise from Trossachs Pier [D]£20 [C]free (for two carers) [A]£20 [5–16s]£11.50 [Con]£19; [under 5s]£1 [dogs]£2 [bikes]£2.50





Turn the clock back to the days when Victoria was on the throne by boarding this delightful little ship and marvelling at the stunning scenery of Loch Katrine and the surrounding peaks. It's an opportunity for a short cruise aboard a piece of maritime history – and you can enjoy a glass of something, or a cappuccino, as you drink in some of Scotland's finest scenery.

Set amid the stunning lochs and mountains of the Trossachs, and only an hour from Glasgow, the SS *Sir Walter Scott* now carries tourists the five-mile length of Loch Katrine – which has been the source of Glasgow's drinking water since 1900 – from its home port of Trossachs Pier in the east to Stronachlachar in the west. Built at Dumbarton, and named after the writer Sir Walter Scott (whose poem *The Lady of the Lake* was set around the loch), the ship was then dismantled and transported overland to the loch – a serious feat of logistics in 1900. Another character intrinsically linked to both Scott and Loch Katrine is Rob Roy MacGregor, born on the shores of the loch and elevated to legendary status by Scott's writings. If you're a fan of machinery, check out the engine room, visible from windows on deck level. No longer coal-fired, the ship now runs on biodiesel, plying the same route today that it has chugged over for more than a century.

There are nine disabled parking spaces by the toilet block, near the booking kiosk and ship and, on the other side, the lift-accessed Steamship Café, which has an accessible toilet, too. The *Sir Walter Scott* is accessible to both wheelchairs and mobility scooters, though booking should be made in advance as space is at a premium; access to the ship is via a ramp. Once on board, the forward lounge and bar are accessible, as is the accessible toilet on the main deck. There are live commentaries on all sailings and audio stories on the pier walkway, and a large print version of the commentary text is available on request. If you disembark at Stronachlachar, there's an accessible café and conservatory at the pier with toilet facilities. If you'd like to extend your trip overnight,

Loch Katrine Eco Camp has one wheelchair-accessible lodge called Loch Arklet (full details on the loch website).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Sandwiches, soft drinks and ice cream are available from *Katrine Café* at the booking kiosk. On board, drinks and light snacks are available. On shore, *The Steamship Café* has a good range of hot food, plus an outside terrace with great views; it's accessed by lift and has an accessible toilet.

## 155 Gliding with Walking on Air, Kinross-shire

**Address:** Scottish Gliding Centre, Portmoak Airfield, Scotlandwell near Kinross KY13 9JJ

**Web:** <https://walkingonair.org.uk>; [www.scottishglidingcentre.co.uk](http://www.scottishglidingcentre.co.uk) **Tel:** bookings 0780 8152785

**Hours:** flying day is Fri, other dates possible by prior arrangement **Dates:** April–Nov **Entry:** £60 for a 15- to 30-minute trial flight, plus 3-months' trial membership allowing flights in that period for £11 launch and 25p per minute in the air



Walking on Air is a charity set up to allow people with access needs a sense of adventure by soaring the thermals using a modified glider. The club uses the Gliding Centre facilities (operated by the Scottish Gliding Union) at Portmoak Airfield, and the clubhouse has panoramic views of the airfield.

The Chairman of Walking on Air, Dave Tuttle (a wheelchair user himself), is passionate about flying and the opportunities it offers for integration – the club has a growing membership from all walks of life. Go along for a trial flight and experience the adrenaline rush of the launch and landing, the almost spiritual experience of being up



Walking on Air

high as you soar quietly above the mountains, and the mesmerising views of the peaks and lochs far below. Gliding seems to make everyone a bit poetic. Even if you're not sure about flying yourself, you're welcome to come and meet the enthusiastic members, watch others fly and enjoy a relaxing day out. For flying, they have a two-seater K21 training glider, known as "WA1", with hand controls fitted front and back. The Scottish Gliding Union supports Walking on Air, with disabled parking adjacent to the clubhouse and ramped access into the clubhouse. Inside, there's ample seating space, overnight accommodation (accessible though not specifically adapted) and an accessible toilet and shower.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Self-service drinks and snacks are available at the clubhouse café: the full breakfast should set you up for a flight.

## 156 Falkirk Wheel, Falkirk

**Address:** Lime Rd, Tamfourhill FK1 4RS **Web:** [www.scottishcanals.co.uk/visit/canals/visit-the-forth-clyde-canal/attractions/the-falkirk-wheel](http://www.scottishcanals.co.uk/visit/canals/visit-the-forth-clyde-canal/attractions/the-falkirk-wheel) **Tel:** 0300 373 0868 **Hours:** Varies throughout the year but peak season daily 9.45am–6pm; boat trips every 40mins **Entry:** [D]£14.50 [C]free [A]£17.40 [5–15s]£9.60 [seniors, 60+]£15.40



One of the most remarkable pieces of modern engineering in Britain, this fascinating contraption lifts boats 100ft between the Union and Forth and Clyde canals.

Looking more like a giant metal claw than a wheel, it was designed to solve the problem of the 115ft gap between the two canals. To solve the problem, engineers designed the giant lift, which scoops a boat in one claw and an equal weight of water in the other. It's the only structure of its kind anywhere in the world. Boat tours – aboard either *Archimedes* or *Antonine* – take you from the visitor centre on a one-hour journey from the lower basin into the wheel, along the Union Canal for a short distance through a reinforced concrete tunnel, then back down to the basin again via the wheel. On a clear day the views from the upper canal are stupendous. The boat trip isn't essential if you just want to see the wheel in action, which can be done by walking around the basin and adjoining towpaths. There's much more besides, especially if you've got kids, including splash and activity zones, bumper and paddle boats, and a water-themed mini-golf.

There are a limited number of car park spaces dedicated for Blue Badge holders, which are available on a first come, first served basis, and which are located about 20 yards from the entrance to the visitor centre. The ground is paved and has little or no incline. Facilities on-site can be used with ease, and a wheelchair or mobility scooter can also be taken onboard the boat trip, but this should be mentioned when booking as capacity has to be reduced slightly in order to accommodate a chair. There is one disabled toilet facility inside the visitor centre, located next to the gift shop desk. Otherwise, the staff here – some of whom have BSL and disability awareness training – are unfailingly helpful.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The lovely, bright café in the visitor centre serves reasonably priced hot and cold food, with level access throughout. There are plenty of picnic tables with wheelchair accessible spaces.

## 157 The Royal Yacht Britannia, Edinburgh

**Address:** Ocean Terminal Shopping Centre, Ocean Drive, Edinburgh EH6 6JJ **Web:** www.royalyachtbritannia.co.uk **Tel:** 0131 5555566 **Hours:** Nov–Mar 10am–5pm; Apr–Aug 9.30am–6pm; Sept & Oct 10am–6pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** [D]£19.50 [C]free [A]£19.50 [5–17s]£9.25 [under 5s]free [Cons]seniors & students with ID £13.50; armed forces with ID £9.25 [Fam]2 adults & 3 children £50



Berthed at the Ocean Terminal Shopping Centre, The Royal Yacht *Britannia* provides an intimate glimpse into how the royal family lived on their floating home. With little off-limits from bow to stern and keel to bridge, it also gives a rare insight into how a naval ship was run and staffed. It's unlikely that there will be another royal yacht, so *Britannia* is a unique attraction which naval buffs, ardent monarchists and fans of engineering can all enjoy. Plush but not ostentatious, the interior is filled with one-of-a-kind artefacts and photographs of the Royal Family – it's a fascinating snapshot of an interesting period of history. Design students will marvel at how much can be shoehorned into a small space, while would-be sailors can imagine being in command on the bridge, taking port in the Officer's Wardroom or being an engineer down below.

All entrances to the yacht are accessible, with visitors accessing each level of the yacht by onshore lift – this means exiting and re-entering *Britannia* several times, which sounds tiresome but is well organised and quite seamless. The floor surfaces between the lift and on board vary from vinyl floors to wooden decking, metal ramps, on-board ramps with hard-wearing surfaces and occasional rubberised mats. The tour route is well-signed, and generally accessible independently, although they specify a maximum width of 670mm, so larger electric wheelchairs will struggle in some of the narrower areas; however, wheelchairs can be hired from the visitor centre. There's a spacious, well-maintained accessible toilet with grab rails immediately prior to boarding, plus similar toilets on four levels on board. Some 80 Blue Badge spaces are available on levels E and C of the Ocean Terminal Shopping Centre car park; all are adjacent to lifts, with level E (18 spaces) giving level access to the *Britannia* visitor centre. There's a hearing loop in the spacious shop, and a large-print guide and tablets that give a BSL video tour of the yacht are available. Sensory packs are also available. Staff are looking at improving facilities for visitors on the autism spectrum; in the meantime, as it's a busy and popular attraction, call to discuss any special needs and check when a quieter time is to visit.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Royal Deck Tearoom* on the top deck has high glass walls with fantastic views across the Firth of Forth; it serves soups, sandwiches, cakes and scones, all made on board (gluten-free options are available). If you can't manage the stairs, access is via the original internal lift, and staff can help open the heavy doors.

## 158 Scottish Seabird Centre, East Lothian

**Address:** The Harbour, North Berwick EH39 4SS **Web:** www.seabird.org **Tel:** 01620 890202 **Hours:** daily from 10am, closing varies between 4pm and 6pm, see website for details; last admission 45 mins before closing **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£11.95 [C]free [A]£11.95 [3–15s]£7.95 [Con]£9.95 [Fam]£34



On the shoreline of ancient North Berwick, the Scottish Seabird Centre offers unrivalled views out to the Firth of Forth and North Sea. The vista is dominated by the Bass Rock – a steep-sided extinct volcanic plug, two and a half miles out to sea, and home (at peak times) to more than 150,000 gannets.

The bright and airy visitor centre commands centre stage on the end of the town's old harbour wall. The ground floor houses a gift shop and café, but downstairs is where the treasure lies: simultaneously fun and educational, the Discovery Experience allows visitors to learn more about Scotland's incredible marine environment, brought to life through interactive exhibits and games, 3D films, wildlife trails and Virtual Reality experiences. There are numerous live interactive cameras that are easy to operate, even for children and visitors with all but the most limited hand function. In summer, close-ups of Bass Rock gannetry and puffin colonies on nearby islands are stunning, and in autumn and winter there is the chance to see seal mothers suckling their pups on the shore. The Flyway Tunnel simulator lets you experience the feeling of bird take-off and migration, using sound effects and strong fans to imitate the buffeting of the wind. However, the incline, which helps to give the impression of lift, may be too steep for some wheelchair users.

This is an excellent and fully accessible place to visit. Indeed, its very popularity can create the only barriers to a visit, as it can get crowded with visitors, especially during school holidays. There's accessible parking for Blue Badge holders adjacent to the centre and in the Seabird Centre car park, though these do fill up quickly at peak times. The helpful staff have experience with those on the autism spectrum and, if you call ahead, they can advise on quieter times to visit. The visitor centre has a push-button automatic door and in the Discovery Experience displays are low-set to suit wheelchair users;



## Ideas ▶▶ Birds

**Abbotsbury Swannery** (Dorset DT3 4JG; [www.abbotsbury-tourism.co.uk](http://www.abbotsbury-tourism.co.uk)) A great visit all year round, but the fluffy cygnets you're likely to see in May and June are a real treat. There are two accessible, packed-gravel paths around the site.

**RSPB Ribble Discovery Centre** (Lancashire FY8 1BD; [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)) Less than seven miles from Blackpool, this is an oasis of calm on the Fylde Peninsula, and the most important estuary site in England. A hard-surfaced path around the lake and an accessible boat trip make visiting a treat.

there are also wheelchairs for hire. A lift operates between the two floors and there are accessible toilets on the ground floor. A 55-seat catamaran offers boat trips from the centre, but cannot accommodate wheelchair users.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The glass-fronted café serves fish and chips, pasta and baked potatoes at reasonable prices – check the specials board too. The children's menu features all the usual suspects: nuggets, sausages, chips, etc.

## 159 Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh

**Address:** Holyrood Road EH8 8AS **Web:** [www.dynaminearth.co.uk](http://www.dynaminearth.co.uk) **Tel:** 0131 5507800 **Hours:** Apr–June, Sept–Oct daily 10am–5.30pm; Nov–Mar Wed–Sun 10am–5.30pm; July–Aug daily 10am–6pm (last entry 90 mins before closing) **Dates:** check website for seasonal closures and variations to opening times **Entry:** [D]£19.50 [C]free [A]£19.50 [4–17s]£12 [under 3s]free [Con]£13



The shadow of the long extinct volcano of Arthur's Seat is an apt setting for a venue offering a potted history of the planet. At Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh, complex and varied scientific subjects are explained with ease and enthusiasm.

With clever use of video and sound, the Edinburgh Science Centre & Planetarium provides a compelling, immersive experience about how the universe came to be, the evolution of Earth, and the wonders of our world. The fully accessible centre allows you to travel back to the Big Bang, experience a shaking floor to simulate an earthquake, be bathed in the rich redness of a volcanic eruption before cooling down with a real iceberg that you can touch. You also get to experience the bottom of the ocean in a marine-themed gallery and be immersed in the tropical wonders of a simulated rainforest. The centre also has a state-of-the-art, accessible planetarium that features a wide range of shows and films about Space, Climate, and Oceans.

Dynamic Earth's glass-fronted, marquee-style, Millennium Dome-inspired construction stands out from the Old Town buildings nearby and contrasts with the futuristic Scottish Parliament building – it's well signposted and easy to find. The underground car park has numerous disabled bays and lift access to the entrance. Wheelchair users and their friends and family can stay together throughout – seeing and touching the exhibits from the same angles. Ear defenders are available. There's a sensory map and access details on the website. This is an inclusive, multi-sensory, seamless experience – a triumph of accessibility.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The bright, clean and spacious *Food Chain Café* serves a decent selection of meals at different times of the day, from excellent coffees and muffins to meatballs and chips; daily specials and meal deals are available in the café section.

## 160 Scottish National Gallery and Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh

**Address:** SNG, 1 The Mound EH2 2EL; SNPG, 1 Queen Street EH2 1JD **Web:** [www.nationalgalleries.org](http://www.nationalgalleries.org)  
**Tel:** 0131 6246200 **Hours:** both daily 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec **Entry:** free, except for some major exhibitions (see website)



Right in the heart of Edinburgh, just off Princes Street, lies the Scottish National Gallery, home to the national collection of fine art, one that, for its size, equals any other gallery in the world.

Masterpieces from Raphael, Titian, El Greco, Velázquez, Rembrandt and Rubens vie for attention with Impressionist works by the likes of Monet, Cézanne and Degas, and Post-Impressionists including van Gogh and Gauguin – all superbly displayed in an impressive Neoclassical building. The gallery also houses Antonio Canova's stunning sculpture *The Three Graces*, although this work splits its time between here and the V&A. And above all, there's a comprehensive display of Scottish art, with works by all the major names, including Allan Ramsay, David Wilkie and William McTaggart. Perhaps the best-known painting is Sir Henry Raeburn's *The Reverend Robert Walker Skating on Duddingston Loch*, popularly known as *The Skating Minister*.



Scottish National Portrait Gallery

There is no car park at the gallery, but there is a drop-off point on the mound precinct, which is the large, paved area just off the mound in front of the National Gallery building. There is parking close by, including for those with a Blue Badge. The National is fully accessible over all levels. There is a partial Changing Places toilet on level 3, and a key is not required; this facility has all the required facilities and floorspace, but as it's in a listed building, it is a few inches too narrow to be a full Changing Places toilet. The room width is 1.9m at the narrowest point. Pre-recorded Sensory-friendly, Audio-described and British Sign Language introductions to the gallery are available to help plan a visit. There is an audio-described tour and a BSL tour available, as well as a sensory map.

Just around the corner, on Queen Street, is the excellent Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Fully accessible throughout, the gallery houses an outstanding chronology of portraiture from the Reformation through to the present day, taking in subjects as diverse as Robert Burns, Robbie Coltrane and Sir Alex Ferguson. The gallery's cathedral-like vaulted ceilings and Gothic windows provide a stunning backdrop to the collection, particularly in the Main Hall, the site of an extraordinary frieze depicting famous figures of Scottish history. The closest Blue Badge parking is currently on the south side of St Andrew's Square and George Street. A pre-recorded sensory-friendly introduction to the gallery is available to help plan a visit. There is a sensory map available as well as an audio-described tour.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The Scottish National Gallery's *Scottish Café & Restaurant* serves delicious snacks, full meals and afternoon teas sourced from Scottish suppliers, with indoor and outdoor seating overlooking Princes Street Gardens. There is also a café, *Espresso*, at the entrance to the Scottish National Gallery. Over in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, there's a fully accessible café on the ground floor.

## 161 Scottish Parliament Buildings, Edinburgh

**Address:** The Royal Mile, Edinburgh EH99 1SP **Web:** [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot) **Tel:** public information 0131 3485000 or freephone 0800 0927500 **Hours:** Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, last entry 4.30pm **Dates:** check the website for closure details **Entry:** free



Opening in 2004, the new Scottish Parliament building, at the bottom of the Royal Mile, has become a fixture on the Edinburgh tourist list partly due to its award-winning design by architect Enric Miralles, who died before its completion, and the political and financial drama that surrounded its creation. These controversies – selecting a Spanish architect, swollen project costs (it went ten times over budget) and polarising design – did nothing to dampen the spirit of the Scottish Parliament, which creates legislation in devolved matters from this building.

There are a range of exhibitions and events on offer here, including a free tour on the architecture, history of the building and institution, and how the Parliament works. Committee hearings and debates can also be attended as part of a visit. Friendly and knowledgeable staff are on hand throughout the building, which was constructed with inclusion in mind. One of the themes of the original design was transparency: there is

a lot of natural light and stunning views from the many windows. When parliament is sitting it can get very busy; people with sensory or hidden disabilities who find crowds and noise a challenge may want to avoid these periods.

There is no dedicated disabled parking for the Scottish Parliament, but there are Blue Badge spaces in Horse Wynd; Blue Badge holders can also park on the single yellows on the surrounding streets. There's an accessible entrance, and once inside the building, everyone must go through the airport-style security check (an online video shows what this involves). During busy periods there may be queues to get in, but staff, who receive ASC training, are there to help; contact visitor services before your trip to get the most directed support. If you choose to go on a tour (which can be pre-arranged with a BSL interpreter), there's quite a lot of distance to cover, but there's ample seating throughout, and wheelchairs can be reserved in advance. It pays to remember that this is a working building; bells and Tannoy announcements occur throughout the day, although there's a quiet area for people with sensory or hidden disabilities in need of some time out. Because this is a secure building, visitors are given a pass and escorted by a member of staff for the tour, taking the pressure off carers, who won't need to worry about choosing routes, locating lifts and so on. Each committee room has space for wheelchairs in the public gallery, as does the parliamentary chamber public gallery. Hearing loops are found in key visitor areas and videos in the exhibition have subtitles and BSL interpretation, while all main signs have Braille. Assistance dogs are welcome, too. Accessible toilets are found throughout the building, and there's a Changing Places toilet on the ground floor with a hoist, changing bed and plenty of space to move around.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The accessible on-site café serves a selection of sandwiches and hot dishes, but you'll find more atmospheric options by venturing into Edinburgh.



Debating chamber in the Scottish Parliament

# 162 Edinburgh International Festival and Edinburgh Festival Fringe

Edinburgh International Festival: **Address:** Café, tickets & Hub: The Hub, Castlehill EH1 2NE

**Web:** www.eif.co.uk **Tel:** ticket office 0131 4732000; access line 0131 4732056 **Email:** access@eif.co.uk

**Hours:** Aug; performance dates vary **Entry:** prices vary by performance



Edinburgh Festival Fringe: **Address:** Box office & shop: 180 High Street EH1 1QS **Web:** www.edfringe.com

**Tel:** main office 0131 2260026; ticket office (June–Aug) 0131 2260000; access tickets 0131 2260002

**Email:** accessbookings@edfringe.com **Hours:** Aug; performance dates vary **Entry:** prices vary by performance



For all its appeal as an attractive capital, Edinburgh is perhaps best known for its incredible annual festival, which takes place each August and transforms the city into an overwhelming mass of cultural activity. “Edinburgh Festival” is an umbrella term that encompasses several different festivals, but the principal events are the Edinburgh International Festival and the much larger Edinburgh Festival Fringe. With thousands of performances – including dance, opera, music and theatre – the majority of the International Festival takes place in permanent traditional theatre-style settings, while the Fringe transforms the city streets into a stage for live acts. From chess to ballet, pole-dancing acrobatics to children’s comedy, both festivals offer unbelievable shows from around the world.

The sheer volume of the Festival’s output can be bewildering, and choosing what to see can feel like the biggest challenge. If you enjoy the dynamism of a festival (and are comfortable with crowds), you can catch some of the Fringe street performances, busking and live statues. Dates, venues, names, star acts, happening bars and burning issues change from one year to the next – this unpredictability is one of the Festival’s greatest charms. Another is that many of the performances take place against the backdrop of Edinburgh’s medieval streets, reformation-era and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings. Visitors who want something quieter, away from the hustle and bustle of the Fringe, can opt for the calmer events of Edinburgh Art Festival and Edinburgh International Book Festival, also gracing the city in August.

Both Edinburgh International Festival and Edinburgh Festival Fringe have made significant strides towards becoming more inclusive in recent years. Inevitably, the city swells in August and the streets around the Festival venues become crowded. While it is high energy and atmospheric, the Fringe itself is chaotic, unpredictable and risks causing a sensory information overload. To make the experience easier, the Fringe has prepared a downloadable Social Story, with a video about street events, and sensory backpacks can be borrowed from various points around the city (holding a fidget toy, stress reliever, water bottle and ear defenders). Signed, audio-described and captioned performances are available, too; see the Fringe Festival website for accessible performance listings. A Disabled Access Day is run ahead of the Fringe in July for people wanting to familiarise themselves with the surroundings.

Edinburgh is a historic city, and the crowds, hills and cobbles can be hard to navigate for those with reduced mobility – your best bet is a powered wheelchair. Accessibility varies from venue to venue, so careful planning is essential. The International Festival provides a useful Access Guide (available in Braille, large print and downloadable audio file/CD format), detailing the main access points for each venue, and puts on additional access events as part of their programme. With a range of permanent and established venues, the International Festival can feel more predictable than the Fringe, and all theatres have accessible toilets. A new Access Pass offers a dedicated booking experience for disabled audience members, with online booking for wheelchair spaces, free essential companion seats, access discounts, the best views for BSL interpreted performances and Touch Tours. The International Festival also runs its own Deaf Theatre Club, a deaf-led initiative aimed at offering deaf audiences a more inclusive experience. Staff working across both festivals receive basic disability-awareness and attitude training, and are clear and considerate communicators.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There are dozens of places to enjoy some refreshments on or just off the Royal Mile; for starters, try *The Wall Coffee* and *Design House*, with coffee served from copper espresso machines and a fine menu chalked up on a board.

## 163 Riverside Museum, Glasgow

**Address:** 100 Pointhouse Place G3 8RS **Web:** [www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums](http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums) **Tel:** 0141 2872729

**Hours:** daily 10am–5pm, except Fri & Sun 11am–5pm **Dates:** closed 1–2 Jan & 24–26, & 31 Dec

**Entry:** free; parking free for Blue Badge holders



Housed in a contemporary, landmark building on the banks of the River Clyde, the Riverside Museum – subtitled “Scotland’s Museum of Transport and Travel” – is a vibrant celebration of Glasgow’s importance as a transport innovator.

Inside, you’ll find a vast and glorious collection of vintage and modern vehicles, including trams, buses, locomotives, subway carriages, taxis, cars and motorbikes, as well as numerous models of Clyde-built ships such as the *Queen Mary* and *QE2*. There’s an emphasis on social history, too, with atmospheric re-creations such as a Victorian subway station, complete with rolling stock and a 1900s street where you can visit various shops, including an Edwardian photography studio and a 1930s café.

Much thought has been given to access. There are a total of eighteen designated disabled car-parking spaces, and there’s also a disabled drop-off point at the entrance. With a front door you could drive a bus through, there’s no problem getting inside. The reception desk has a lowered section and – like all customer service points – is fitted with a hearing loop. There are two accessible lifts in the exhibits, one in the Caledonian 123 and one in the South African locomotive, and virtually the whole attraction is barrier-free. Many exhibits have accompanying audio or video displays, with subtitles on all video displays, while the ones with green information screens have BSL interpretation. Many of the exhibits are there to be touched, to help enhance the experience. There are three fully accessible toilets on the ground floor and two on the first floor. There are a couple of autism-friendly kits, containing ear defenders and gadgets to help



engage children on the autism spectrum, and there are autism-friendly early opening sessions (contact the venue for details). With these families in mind, the museum does not have any background music playing. The museum also has a Changing Places facility on the ground floor, with a hoist, shower and adjustable bench and washbasin among its amenities.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ An upstairs coffee bar gives great views of the river and serves very fine coffee. Downstairs, hot food is served in the spacious café, which has table service.

## 164 House for an Art Lover, Glasgow

**Address:** Bellahouston Park, 10 Dumbreck Road G41 5BW **Web:** [www.houseforanartlover.co.uk](http://www.houseforanartlover.co.uk) **Tel:** 0141 4831600 **Hours:** check website or call, as the house is often closed for functions **Entry:** [D]£9 [C]free [A]£9 [children 10+]£7.50 [under 10s]free [Con]£7.50 [Fam]£24



Legendary Scottish architect and artist Charles Rennie Mackintosh drew up plans for the House for an Art Lover in 1901, but it wasn't built until the 1990s; consequently, this elegant house boasts all the hallmarks of a Mackintosh creation with the accessibility of a modern building.

The architects charged with its construction worked closely from the original designs. Mackintosh pioneered the Art Nouveau movement in the UK, and the building is emblematic of his desire to make the functional beautiful. Inside, all his signature

designs are present – the high-backed chairs with their robust right angles, the softly tinted stained glass and, of course, the iconic Mackintosh rose. The grand Main Hall was designed for entertaining, and all the other main rooms radiate from it. The rose motif is evident throughout the intimate Dining Room, but it's the bright Music Room that really dazzles – bathed in natural light from the huge windows that lead onto the terrace, and featuring an ornate baby grand piano, the room is breathtaking. The souvenir shop is a great place to pick up gifts – you can buy Mackintosh-styled jewellery, as well as prints of his original work.

Only two levels of the four-storey building are open to the public – outside there's a ramp up to the house and one down to the café, as well as a lift between floors inside. To save the effort of going uphill, enter via the café and leave from the upper floor. There are four disabled parking spaces available in the staff car-parking area, and accessible toilets on the ground floor. The house has been designed with access in mind – some rooms are less spacious than others, but all surfaces are smooth. Staff are available if you need assistance. The excellent multilingual audio sets are induction-loop compatible. Carers go free but paperwork must be provided. Only yards away from the house are the tranquil Victorian Walled Gardens – particularly worth a look in high summer when the sweet peas are in bloom.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The ground-floor *Art Lover's Café* has a lovely, accessible terrace, and serves breakfasts, lunches, coffee and cakes, as well as a sumptuous afternoon tea – the food is truly sublime.

## 165 Abbotsford, Roxburghshire

**Address:** Abbotsford, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9BQ **Web:** [www.scottsassbotsford.com](http://www.scottsassbotsford.com) **Tel:** 01896 752043 **Hours:** daily: house, chapel & gardens Mar, Nov–Dec 10am–4pm, Apr–Oct 10am–5pm; visitor centre & café Apr–Oct 10am–5pm, Nov–Mar 10am–4pm (Jan–Feb only open Wed–Sun) **Dates:** house, chapel & gardens closed Jan–Feb; visitor centre & café closed 25–26 Dec & 1–2 Jan **Entry:** check website for prices; [C]free



The home of world-renowned author Sir Walter Scott, Abbotsford is where much of his best-known work was written. Situated by the banks of the Tweed in the Scottish Borders, this Baronial pile is essentially unchanged since Scott lived here, some two hundred years ago. You can visit the rooms where the author, poet and judge created world-famous literature, view artefacts and works belonging to him, and take in the views of the river and the Eildon hills beyond. This atmospheric building is as impressive inside as its imposing facade, from the dark entrance hall, lined with arms and militaria, to the study housing Scott's writing desk, the library, the well-preserved Chinese drawing room and the dining room, where, crippled by debt and poor health, Scott breathed his last.

There's step-free level access into the ultra-modern, accessible visitor centre, with a spacious foyer, shop and exhibition area. Here, audio-visual displays recount the house's history. There's also a 3D tactile model of the house and gardens, and an outline map of the site with a raised key that shows the phases of Abbotsford's development.

A hearing loop in the visitor centre and large-print guides are available, but there's no BSL provision. There are spacious, spotless accessible toilets on the ground and upper floors of the visitor centre. If the lift in the visitor centre can't be used, there's alternative level access outside to the upper floor. The house itself is some 300 yards from the visitor centre, along a wide tarmac path that slopes gently downhill. There's step-free level access through a heavy glass door (assistance may be needed) into the dark entrance hall, which has low lighting to protect the unique artefacts within. Guides offer tours (pre-booking required), or audio tours with a small handset that you point at sensors in each room to get the commentary. Most rooms have level access, except one step in the private chapel, and there's respite seating around the house. After the house tour, you can explore the walled garden and extensive grounds, along smooth paths, though some woodland paths have a loose, hardcore surface that may require assistance. Six Blue Badge spaces are available in the car park, roughly 100 yards from the visitor centre via a tarmac path sloping gently upwards. If getting between the centre and the house is problematic, direct vehicle access to the house car park can be arranged (it's best to book this in advance). Staff don't have specific autism training but are helpful and can advise about the quietest times to visit. There are wheelchairs available for use in both the visitor centre and at the house.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Upstairs at the visitor centre, the spacious, bright and airy *Ochiltree's* café serves drinks, great home-baking, snacks and meals, using local produce where possible; mains £8–12, sandwiches £7.50–9, cakes and pastries around £3. A takeaway service is offered year-round from here.

## 166 Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, Ayrshire

**Address:** Murdoch's Lone, Alloway, Ayr KA7 4PQ **Web:** [www.burnsmuseum.org.uk](http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk) **Tel:** 01292 443700

**Hours:** daily 10am–5pm; last entry 1hr before closing **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec & 1–2 Jan

**Entry:** [D]£11.50 [C]free [6–17s]£11.50 [A]£10.50 [Con]£8.50 [Fam]£22–27; NTS members free



Occupying a striking stone, glass and timber structure surrounded by stunning gardens, the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum exuberantly celebrates the life and prodigious talent of Scotland's most cherished poet.

The main museum – a modern, spacious and barrier-free building – houses the world's largest collection of Burns' manuscripts, along with many of the poet's personal possessions, from his desk, chair and writing set through to his pistols and waistcoat buttons. Listening posts play evocative recordings of his most popular works, and there's even a jukebox where you can select Burns' songs, categorised by styles such as "punk", "tear-jerkers" and "power ballads". Displays also give a flavour of Burns' colourful private life – a glance at his family tree reveals he'd fathered thirteen children by five different women by the time he died, aged 37. Outside, wheelchair users can easily navigate Poet's Path through the lovely grounds to reach the modest Burns Cottage (Apr–Oct daily 11am–4pm; Nov–Mar 11am–3.30pm), where Burns was born in 1759. However, some of the neighbouring sites – which feature in the poet's work – are less accessible, such as the Auld Kirk (which has a few steps) and Brig o' Doon, which is cobbled.



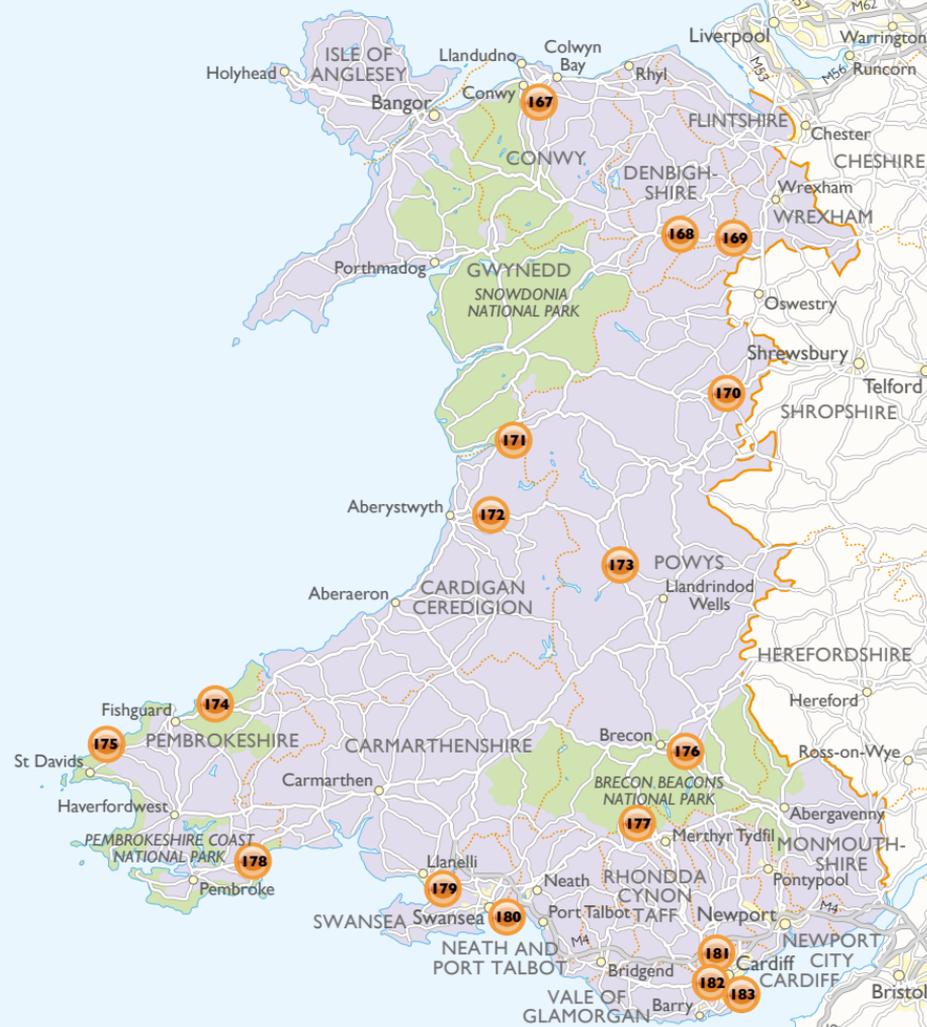
Robert Burns Birthplace Museum

Access to the main museum, however, is good, starting with the six disabled parking spaces near the front door, which is opened by a touch-pad control. Inside, the large reception desk is a good height for wheelchair users and is fitted with an induction loop. There's a large and spotless accessible toilet in the foyer, with another one at Burns Cottage. There are two wheelchairs available to borrow, and the museum is on one level throughout. The main exhibition area is quite dimly lit – necessary to preserve the manuscripts – which may be an issue for some sight-impaired visitors, although large print versions of the labels are available. On the first Tuesday of each month (3–5pm), the museum and cottage hold accessible sessions, when the sounds are reduced, lights turned up and interactive displays switched off for those with visual, hearing and sensory conditions; see website for details.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The on-site café/restaurant has a great choice of cakes, pastries and sandwiches made to order, as well as a good selection of hot food, all locally sourced where possible – a delightful space to enjoy lunch.

# Wales

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## 167 RSPB Conwy Nature Reserve, Conwy

**Address:** Llandudno Junction LL31 9XZ **Web:** [www.rspb.org.uk/conwy](http://www.rspb.org.uk/conwy) **Tel:** 01492 584091

**Hours:** daily 9.30am–5pm; coffee shop 9.30am–4.30pm (10am–4pm in winter) **Dates:** closed 25–26

**Dec Entry:** RSPB members free, non-members [D]£6 [C]free [A]£6 [5–15s]£3 [Fam]£15



RSPB Conwy Nature Reserve is the perfect place to get back to nature. The estuary is home to many varieties of birds; the star species to tick off here are black-tailed godwits, shelducks and, with a bit more difficulty, water rails poking about furtively in the reeds. It is a fascinating place to visit, even for ornithological novices.

At Conwy you'll find an impressive mix of untamed nature – including serious winds across the estuary – and decent access for all, which is a difficult trick to pull off. The boardwalk is superb, taking you straight into the reeds on a level wooden track. The main tracks are firm and hard, with only slight gradients, and because they are well drained, puddles are rarely an issue. The looser-surfaced, more distant trails can be difficult in poor weather though, and the boardwalk can get slippery when wet. The Grey Heron Trail, which leads around the perimeter of the reserve, returns to the visitor centre via the entrance driveway and main car park. In rain, it's sensible to visit using a mobility scooter, although updates are posted on the notice board when conditions get particularly challenging. The hides and screens are solidly constructed with hard floors, all adapted for the comfort of wheelchair users, with wide doorways, plenty of turning space and viewing points at various heights. A recreated village square, called Y Maes,



RSPB Conwy Nature Reserve

includes an accessible landscaped area providing elevated views of the reserve and the Conwy valley, a play area, graffiti tunnel and picnic area.

The staff here are enthusiastically trying to improve accessibility at all times and are helpful without being fussy. There are eight designated disabled parking spaces, with a drop off point outside the shop entrance. There are accessible toilets by the coffee shop. The visitor centre is accessed via three small steps, but there is also a ramp here, and once inside, it's all level access; the shop is well laid out with spacious aisles and low displays.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The reserve's wheelchair-accessible *Waterside Coffee Shop* is a wonderful place to enjoy a hot drink and bite to eat. With huge picture windows looking over the lagoon and to the Carneddau mountains, it's a picturesque place for a cuppa. The picnic area between the visitor centre and the coffee shop has ten wheelchair accessible tables.

## 168 Llangollen, Denbighshire



Sitting on the banks of the fast-flowing River Dee, at the foot of the brooding Berwyn Mountains, the busy little town of Llangollen ([www.llangollen.org.uk](http://www.llangollen.org.uk)) enjoys one of the most picturesque settings in Wales.

A good place to take in the scenery is the accessible riverside promenade, which incorporates a park with a children's play area and plenty of seating. From here, you can often see the atmospheric trails of steam coming from the Llangollen Railway (01978 860979, [www.llangollen-railway.co.uk](http://www.llangollen-railway.co.uk)), which operates from a handsome old station across the river. Shining locomotives pull beautifully restored coaches through the Dee Valley, with access using a ramp up to either the guard's compartment or an adapted carriage for wheelchair users (it's recommended to pre-book this carriage). The station has accessible toilets and wheelchair access to all platforms, plus two disabled parking spaces (not bookable) and possibilities for passenger drop-off if these are full; indeed, all the stations along the route have disabled access. The new station at Corwen has a stairlift to facilitate wheelchair access to and from the platform, though cannot accommodate motorised wheelchairs or mobility scooters. More nostalgic transport is on offer at Llangollen Wharf, up a steep hillside overlooking the town, where a horse-drawn narrowboat runs along a pretty canal (see p.217 for details).

Mention should also be made of the Llangollen Eisteddfod ([www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk](http://www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk)), a weeklong international music and folk dance festival held here every July. The festival has been going strong for more than seventy years, and regularly attracts the biggest names in the music world – previous participants have included Luciano Pavarotti, José Carreras and Nigel Kennedy, among others. It's held in the town's Royal International Pavilion, which has limited Blue Badge parking and wheelchair spaces (both best booked in advance with the box office, who can offer advice for visitors with specific requirements) and a hearing loop in the auditorium. Essential carers get a free ticket, although documentation must be supplied.

There's no easy way to get to Llangollen on public transport – unless you're coming by bus from a nearby town, such as Wrexham – so most visitors end up driving here. There are several Blue Badge spaces in the central car park on Market Street (you need to pay to park here), which also has an accessible toilet. The compact town centre is fairly flat, and getting around is pretty straightforward; though some of the pavements are rather narrow, most now have regular drop kerbs. As well as the attractions men-

tioned above, there's lots of fun to be had just pottering around, exploring the shops and enjoying the views. There are also some terrific places to visit a short drive away, including the breathtaking Horseshoe Pass, high in the mountains, and the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct (see below), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visit the Tourist Information Centre on Castle Street (01978 860828) for more information.

## 169 Llangollen Wharf and Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, Denbighshire

Horse-drawn boats: **Address:** Wharf Hill, Llangollen LL20 8TA **Web:** [www.horsedrawnboats.co.uk](http://www.horsedrawnboats.co.uk)  
**Tel:** 01978 860702 **Hours:** daily 9.30am–4.30pm; trips generally every 30mins during school holidays, hourly at other times **Dates:** closed Nov–Feb half-term **Entry:** prices start from [D]£10 [C]£8 [A]£10 [3–16s]£5 [under 4s]free [Fam]£27.50; visitors with disabilities and their carers may be able to gain reduced entry depending on individual circumstance



Vale of Llangollen Canal Boat Trust: **Address:** The Old Wharf, Trevor Basin LL20 7TY **Web:** [canalboattrust.org.uk](http://canalboattrust.org.uk) **Tel:** 07435 655609 **Hours:** private bookings only; from 9.30am, trips can last from 3hrs to full day **Entry:** minimum donation of £150 per trip (up to twelve people)



The Llangollen Canal offers an alluring combination of tranquillity and superb Welsh scenery. In 2009, an eleven-mile stretch of it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, together with the two-hundred-year-old Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, which carries the canal high over the River Dee.

More than one thousand feet long and a dizzying 126ft high, this is the tallest navigable aqueduct in the world. Those with a strong head for heights can walk across it – the footpath, protected on one side by a metal railing, is just about wide enough for a wheelchair, but note that there's no barrier between the path and the narrow canal trough running alongside it. A less daunting prospect is to take a boat across the aqueduct: between March and October the Vale of Llangollen Canal Boat Trust runs trips for up to twelve disabled passengers (up to four wheelchairs) in a specially adapted narrowboat (*Lady Winifred*) with a hydraulic wheelchair lift, an accessible toilet and low windows providing exhilarating views.

Half-day trips follow the canal to Llangollen Wharf, five miles west, while full-day trips go all the way into the English county of Shropshire. All trips depart from Trevor Basin, adjacent to the aqueduct; there's a drop-off point near the mooring, and a small car park about twenty yards away (with a RADAR key-accessible toilet). You book the whole boat for your party, and should arrange it well in advance; a donation of £150 is requested per trip.

Over at Llangollen Wharf, the Horse Drawn Boat Centre offers delightful 45-minute narrowboat trips, pulled by a horse plodding gently along the towpath. It's a supremely leisurely affair, without even the sound of an engine to disturb the peace. The boats have ramped access for wheelchair users, who can sit in the open air or under cover – book ahead to be sure of a space. There's no parking at the wharf, but visitors with restricted mobility can be set down at a drop-off point while a companion parks elsewhere; staff will advise you of the nearest parking spots. There's a small accessible toilet at the wharf.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ At Trevor Basin, the wheelchair accessible *Telford Inn* (01978 820469) serves decent food on the opposite side of the canal from the boat moorings – the Canal Boat Trust can drop you off on that side after your trip. Over in Llangollen Wharf, there's a tearoom near the horse-drawn boat ticket office, with ramped access and a tempting array of homemade scones, cakes, soups and light meals.

## 170 St Fagans National Museum of History, Cardiff

**Address:** St Fagans, 4 miles west of Cardiff city centre, CF5 6XB **Web:** [www.museum.wales/stfagans](http://www.museum.wales/stfagans)  
**Tel:** 0300 1112333 **Hours:** daily 10am–5pm; last entry 1hr before closing **Dates:** closed 25 Dec–Jan  
**Entry:** free; parking £6/day (free for Blue Badge holders)



Constructed on grounds near St Fagans Castle, the unmissable St Fagans National Museum of History an outstanding collection of period buildings – houses, shops, dwellings, churches – garnered from all corners of Wales and faithfully rebuilt here.

Many of the domestic structures are farmhouses of different ages and styles – from the grand seventeenth-century red-painted Kennixton Farmhouse from Gower to the homely Edwardian comforts of Llwyn-yr-Eos Farm. The best demonstration of

how life changed over the years for a section of the Welsh population comes in the superlative Rhyd-y-car ironworkers' cottages from Merthyr Tydfil, while the evocative Victorian St Mary's Board School from Lampeter, which closed in 1916, is redolent of a simpler way of school life. The museum is quite the sensory experience too, such as the waft of freshly baked bread from the early twentieth-century bakehouse and wood fires burning in some of the homesteads, to the aroma of polished mahogany in the Victorian Gwhalia Stores (you can buy sweets here too!) and the sounds and smells of the many farm animals that roam the grounds. A number of buildings have costumed staff doing crafts and demonstrations, all of whom are happy to explain the techniques and skills involved.

Within the huge car park, there is disabled parking adjacent to the main entrance. There are three accessible toilets available: at the main entrance, adjacent to the Rhyd-y-car cottages, and in the Castle Yard, in addition to two Changing Places facilities, including one with an electronic bed and hoist. There are level pathways through the site and wheelchair access is pretty good, although due to the historic nature of some of the buildings, some access may be difficult; wheelchairs are available to borrow free of charge on a first come, first served basis. The terrain on the castle side of the museum is steep in places and may be difficult for wheelchair users; a map displaying a flat, accessible path is available. If you prefer to visit during quieter hours, try to go after 3pm when there are fewer people around. Some parts of the site may present orientation difficulties to visually impaired people, such as the stream and ponds, but advice can be sought at the information desk in the entrance hall before going out on site. There are also large-scale site plans at key points around the museum.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The food outlets, *Y Gegin* and *Y Gweithdy* are accessible to wheelchair users, and there are dozens of places to stop and have a picnic.

## 171 Powis Castle, Powys

**Address:** Welshpool SY21 8RF **Web:** [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/powis-castle-and-garden](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/powis-castle-and-garden) **Tel:** 01938 551944; access information 01938 551929 **Hours:** Apr–Sept daily: castle, shop & Clive Museum 11am–5pm; garden 10am–6pm; garden coffee shop 11am–4pm; restaurant 10am–5pm; garden shop noon–4pm; Oct–Mar daily: castle, shop & Clive Museum 11am–4pm; garden 10am–4pm; garden coffee shop & garden shop closed; restaurant 10am–4pm; last entry 1hr before closing **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]free [C]free [A]£15 [5–17]£7.50 [under 5s]free [Fam]£22.50 (1 adult, 3 children); group savings available; Links Pass Card and Essential Companion Card both valid



In a land of ruined castles, the scale and beauty of Powis Castle is quite staggering. Majestically located high in the Welsh hills, the medieval fortress houses an impressive collection of artefacts amassed over 400 years by the Herbert family, while the formal garden, dating back 300 years, is a riot of colour with Edwardian, Dutch, French and Italian influences.

Powis Castle is alive with history. On the site of an earlier Norman fort, the Castle was started in the reign of Edward I by the Gwenwynwyn family; in 1587, Sir Edward Herbert bought it and began to transform it into the Elizabethan palace that survives

today. Wander through the beautiful rooms, filled with treasures from all over the world accumulated by successive owners. The Clive Room houses a remarkable collection of items from India and the Far East, the largest of its type in the UK, with diaries, notes, letters, paintings, tapestries, weapons and jewels. The gardens, designed by Welsh architect William Winde, are spectacular. Dropping down from the castle in four huge, stepped terraces, the design has barely changed since the seventeenth century, with a charming orangery and trim topiary. Pause to breathe in the glorious views across the surrounding countryside. Seasonal themed events include the Powis Pumpkin Trail at Halloween and Illuminated Gardens in the run-up to Christmas.

There's an accessible car park about one hundred yards from the castle entrance, but the National Trust also provides vehicles (which can take wheelchairs) that service four pick-up and drop-off points around the site: the main car park, the accessible car park, the Coach House and the garden coffee shop. Due to the historic nature of the building, some areas are more accessible than others, and there are thirteen steps to the castle entrance. Where access around the site is difficult, much thought and creativity has been given into putting alternatives in place. Although there is disabled access to the ground floor of the castle only, staff can provide a tablet showing a virtual tour of the upper rooms. Rest seats are provided in every room, and a Braille guide and information in large print is available. The castle also runs touch tours of the house and sensory tours of the garden, both of which must be pre-booked. The gardens are mostly accessible, and the sense of peace is palpable. The scent of flowers, birdsong and delightful vistas are guaranteed mood enhancers. Wheelchairs can be loaned from the Old Stables (booking advisable), and there are two accessible toilets, one inside the main toilet block just outside the castle courtyard and another in the formal garden. Carers and visitors with disabilities are admitted free of charge.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The spacious, airy café serves light snacks; for something more substantial, head to the restaurant. Both are accessible, with helpful and friendly staff.

## 172 Snowdonia Scenic Drive



**Driving distance:** 107 miles **Approx driving time without stops:** 3 hours 20 minutes

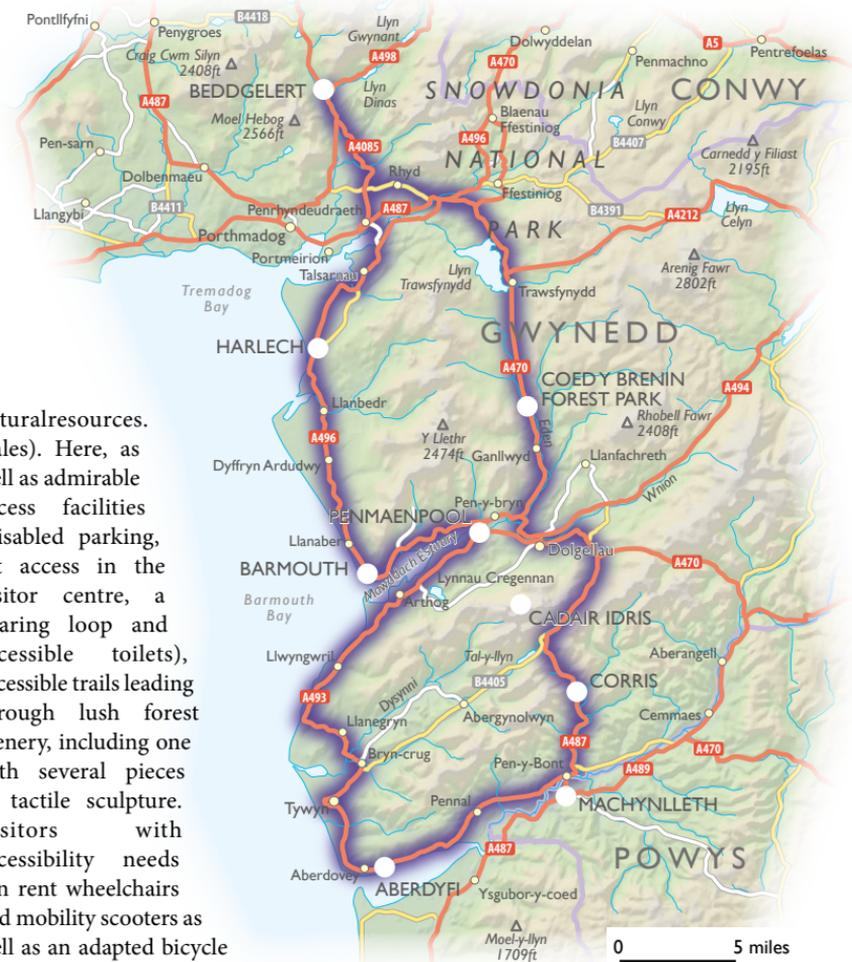
This meandering loop starting in Machynlleth and heading north to Beddgelert is one of the most scenic in Wales. Taking in valleys, mountains, majestic coastal scenery and Coed y Benin Forest Park, there are plenty of beautiful places to stop, stretch and enjoy the fresh air.

From Machynlleth – a handsome little town in the Dyfi Valley – take the A487 towards Dolgellau. Five miles up the road, past the beautiful beechwoods of the Tan y Coed forest reserve, you'll pass the signed turn-off for the Corris Craft Centre ([www.corriscraftcentre.co.uk](http://www.corriscraftcentre.co.uk)), worth a stop to browse its studios making and selling jewellery, glass and pottery among other things (there's also an on-site accessible café, RADAR key-accessible Changing Places facility and an accessible toilet). Continuing north, look left for some impressive close-up views of Cadair Idris, southern Snowdonia's most famous peak; you'll also pass through the Mach Loop, an RAF training zone, so watch your head for low-flying fighter jets.

Keep driving north as the road merges into the A470. Pass Dolgellau and continue on the tree-lined A470 to reach the excellent Coed y Brenin Forest Park ([www](http://www).

natural resources (wales). Here, as well as admirable access facilities (disabled parking, lift access in the visitor centre, a hearing loop and accessible toilets), accessible trails leading through lush forest scenery, including one with several pieces of tactile sculpture. Visitors with accessibility needs can rent wheelchairs and mobility scooters as well as an adapted bicycle for a spot of mountain biking. There are picnic benches dotted around; alternatively, drop into the café for a locally sourced venison burger.

Take the A487, then the B4410, A4085 and A498 into Beddgelert. This pretty little village has an accessible information centre, a RADAR key-accessible public toilet and an accessible riverside walk, while nearby is a monument to the legend of Gelert. From here, retrace your route to the A4085, then follow the road through Penrhyndeudraeth, over the River Dwyrhyd and onto the A496 towards Harlech. Harlech's stunning thirteenth-century castle looms dramatically over the sea, visible for miles around, and while there is wheelchair access into the castle across the bridge, once inside you are very restricted as to how much you can see. Continue down the coast to Barmouth, where accessible boardwalks lead along the beach. Stay on the A496 and follow a sign in the village of Pen-y-Bryn to the A493, which leads across the Penmaenpool toll bridge over the Mawddach Estuary. Trails for all abilities loop around the estuary (see [www.mawddachestuary.co.uk](http://www.mawddachestuary.co.uk)), and there are spectacular views. Continue along the



coast road – looking out for the knitted ogre at Llwyngwrl – past Aberdyfi (with an accessible toilet) and back to Machynlleth. You can shorten the route by finishing your drive in Beddgelert (43.5 miles). For more details on disabled facilities in Snowdonia, visit [www.snowdonia.gov.wales](http://www.snowdonia.gov.wales).

## 173 Bwlch Nant yr Arian, Ceredigion

**Address:** Ponterwyd, Aberystwyth SY23 3AB **Tel:** 0300 0655470 **Hours:** visitor centre: daily 10am–5pm; kite feeding: daily 3pm summer, 2pm winter; shop: daily 11am–4.30pm; café: daily 10am–5pm, hot food 10am–3pm **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** free; car parking £3/3hr, £5/day



At the head of a remote valley, nine miles inland from the busy coastal town of Aberystwyth, Bwlch Nant yr Arian is one of the main red kite feeding centres in Wales. The site offers visitors the rare opportunity to observe more than one hundred red kites at close quarters during the daily feedings, and also fosters a variety of graded forest walking, running and cycling routes to inspire all abilities and ages, including a popular accessible lakeside trail. The latter offers the best vantage points from which to watch these majestic birds of prey in the freedom of their open, upland environment.

Each afternoon, red kites fill the skies above the centre, gliding gracefully overhead before swooping down to feed. Their impressive numbers are testament to the collective conservation efforts which saved them from near extinction. They can be viewed at a distance from the visitor centre, or in closest proximity from the spacious, covered bird hide on the accessible Barcud Trail, with room for wheelchairs and mobility scooters. This delightful route (0.7 miles) follows a level, circular path around the lake – with

Bwlch Nant yr Arian



wooden seats and covered resting places along the way. It is shared by an optional audio trail of Welsh myths and folklore and a wooden animal-puzzle trail for younger visitors. With plenty of outdoor seating space, children's play areas and adapted picnic tables, the visitor centre is the starting point for all the waymarked forest paths on site. While it can be busy during the holidays, the site is exceptionally well designed to accommodate a broad range of visitors, enabling everyone to enjoy the rugged isolation and beauty of the Cambrian mountains in all seasons, at their own pace.

There are three disabled bays on the ground level of the car park, some 20 yards from the visitor centre along a tarmac path. Inside, access is good, though some areas can get busy (including the café and the car park). There's a hearing loop in the café and high visibility strips on doors, doorframes and steps. Access to the walking and bike trails, play area and bird hide is all out in the open in a relaxed, natural environment. While some visitors might feel anxious about the sheer numbers, speed and unpredictable flight of the wild birds, many find observing them so closely in their natural habitat an uplifting and inspiring experience. A large accessible toilet with plenty of space, grab rails, a lowered handbasin and a disabled shower facility is located in the main visitor centre. There's a second accessible toilet outdoors.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The on-site café has tall glass viewing windows and a Makaton-style menu with signs and symbols developed with the help of a Local Health Board speech and language therapist. It offers a range of locally sourced hot and cold food and drink with good vegetarian options. Plenty of extra outdoor picnic tables line a decked area with views across the lake.

## 174 Gigrin Farm, Powys

**Address:** South Street, Rhayader, Powys LD6 5BL **Web:** [www.gigrin.co.uk](http://www.gigrin.co.uk) **Tel:** 01597 810243

**Hours:** Jan–July & Sept–Nov Sat–Wed 12.30–5pm; Aug and school hols daily 12.30–5pm; Dec Sat–Sun 1–5pm; Apr–Oct feeding at 3pm; Nov–Mar feeding at 2pm **Entry:** [D]£10 [C]free [A]£10 [4–15s]£6 [under 4s]free [Con]£8.50



Gigrin Farm in Powys became the Red Kite Feeding Station in 1993, following a request from the RSPB. The daily feeding of the birds – often hundreds of pairs – is an extraordinary sight and an increasingly popular attraction. Numbers of kites feeding at the site varies from two to three hundred in the summer months to around five hundred in the winter months.

The site is a working farm, so unsurprisingly access isn't perfect, but significant measures have been taken, and it is worth the effort to see this natural spectacle. Visitors can head to several kite-viewing hides just before feeding time, and watch as a quarter of a tonne of beef is distributed to the waiting birds that have flown in from the surrounding countryside. What follows is a riot of colour and noise as the kites – resplendent-looking raptors in chestnut, white and black plumage – vie with other birds for the food that has been scattered, and perform natural aerobatics that have become an entertaining feature of the visit. If you're lucky, you may also see buzzards, which often land to feed on the ground, and the very rare White Red Kite, a leucistic Red Kite. There is a



gift shop on site (this is on two floors with steps, so only the ground floor is accessible), coffee shop (on the ground floor of the gift shop), and both indoor and outdoor seating areas (wheelchair accessible) and a picnic site.

Gigrin Farm is accessed by a single-track tarmac road. The main area between the buildings has been tarred and there is car parking available. There are no access problems across the farmyard or into any of the buildings, all of which have level access. There is a disabled toilet facility in the farmyard. There is a short track (130 yards) from the car parking area to the hides, which has a slight gradient; however, it is possible for anyone with mobility issues to drive down to the hides and park alongside – just ask a member of staff upon arrival. The hides have designated low viewing points for wheelchair users, while hides 2, 3 & 5 have ramp access.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The on-site coffee shop sells sandwiches, sausage rolls, cakes, ice creams and hot and cold drinks.

## 175 Newport Parrog Coastal Trail, Pembrokeshire

**Address:** The Parrog, Newport SA42 0RW **Web:** [www.pembrokeshirecoast.wales](http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.wales) **Tel:** 01646 624800 (Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority) **Hours:** year-round, daylight hours only **Dates:** may close during adverse weather **Entry:** free; parking free for Blue Badge holders



This short but very pretty half-mile stretch of the Pembrokeshire Coast Path is wheelchair accessible, giving visitors with disabilities a taste of the spectacular scenery offered by one of Britain's most popular long-distance walking trails: [www](http://www).

pembrokeshirecoast.wales/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/newportparrog\_ironbridge/pdf gives details including a map of the walk.

Starting from the Parrog (old harbour) car park in Newport, the purpose-built trail heads east, skirting the estuary of the River Nevern and offering splendid, ever-changing views out to sea and upriver to the mountains. The gently undulating route takes you past reed beds, through trees, over streams and finally to the Iron Bridge – a particularly good place to spot wildlife – just over half a mile from the starting point. Bring your binoculars, and keep a look out for wigeon, teal, oystercatchers and kingfishers. The bridge marks the end of the accessible section of the path, and wheelchair users will have to turn and retrace their route. Allow half an hour or so each way – stopping here and there to appreciate the sense of tranquillity and open space.

Back at the car park, by the boathouse, a ramp leads onto the sand and a sheltered viewing area offers views of both the estuary and the sea. The car park has four Blue Badge spaces and a toilet block with a RADAR key-accessible toilet (note that the lights inside are movement-sensitive – if it goes dark, move!). From here, it's about fifty yards to the start of the path, which has a well-maintained, dry compressed stone surface (though occasional potholes can become puddles in wet weather), and benches set back from the path at regular intervals.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Near the car park, the *Morawelon Restaurant* (01239 820565) offers delicious local meats and fish in a fully accessible dining room with an accessible toilet.

## 176 Celtic Quest Coasteering, Pembrokeshire

**Address:** Abereiddy Bay, Berea, St Davids SA62 6DT **Web:** [www.celticquestcoasteering.com](http://www.celticquestcoasteering.com)

**Tel:** 01348 837337 **Hours:** Mar–Oct daily 9am–9pm; call for details of hours Nov–Feb **Dates:** closed 1–18 Dec **Entry:** the fee for everyone is £50 (minimum age is 8 years); discounts available for larger groups



An adventurous alternative to swimming for adrenaline junkies, coasteering turns the sea into a playground. Jump off cliffs, slip into the water, slither along slides and currents that nature has created, explore caves, go rock hopping and get lost in the infamous “washing machine” – if you dare!

Coasteering is a unique activity that takes swimming to the next level and uses the sea as a gym – it's not often that you find rock slides that will plunge you into the water below, or can jump from a diving board made of natural rock. The “washing machine” and the “surfing platform” will both make you feel the true strength of the sea's current. What's more, Cleopatra Browne and her charming team at Celtic Quest ensure that you can be both daring and safe. The essence of this activity is adventure. Being able to swim is not essential, but a willingness to “have a go” is, as it's a physically tough activity.

On arrival at Abereiddy Beach, there is plenty of space to park, but no specific accessible spaces. Parking is just a few steps from the beach, so you can get your wetsuit on and plunge straight in. The surface of the car park is hard and, although pebbly in places, much better for wheelchair users than sand. Those with impaired mobility will need assistance to get into the water, but Cleo and her team of strong helpers will be



Celtic Quest Coasteering

on hand and have you in giggles in an instant. The terrain around the water is often uneven, with a few ledges to rest on if needed. There are no steps, no queues and no leaflets to carry around – just the water straight in front of you.

When swimming out to sea, you can hold onto a float connected to one of the trip leaders, so you save your energy for the exciting bits and get a guided tour. Being able to walk is not essential as the group leaders will lift and support you, should diving off a 20ft cliff be your thing. Not everyone will be able to do this, but Cleo and her team push themselves to the limits in order to make it possible for as many people as they can. The sea is a huge sensory playground, with sights, smells and sounds that can't be found elsewhere. The team are very keen to facilitate adventures for everyone, and excel at working with people with hidden disabilities. Due to the physical and sometimes risky nature of coasteering, deaf or hearing-impaired visitors are recommended to bring along a hearing companion. If you're visually impaired, be prepared to take a hands-on approach to coasteering and those taking you through it. There are no accessible toilets on site – the nearest one is a short drive away at *The Shed* bistro at Porthgain.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There's a refreshment van on site, while the homely and reasonably priced *Cambrian Inn* ([www.thecambrianinn.co.uk](http://www.thecambrianinn.co.uk)) in Solva, a fifteen-minute drive away, serves a mean burger – perfect after a water workout.

## 177 Brecon Canal Walk, Powys

**Address:** Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, Canal Wharf, Brecon LD3 7EW **Web:** [www.canalrivertrust.org/canal-and-rivers/monmouthshire-and-brecon-canal](http://www.canalrivertrust.org/canal-and-rivers/monmouthshire-and-brecon-canal) **Hours:** daily dawn–dusk **Entry:** free



Built between 1796 and 1812, the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal linked landlocked Brecon with Newport and the Severn Estuary. No longer a route for transporting stone and processed lime, it is now affectionately known as the Mon & Brec, and is one of the most picturesque canals in the UK.

The complete towpath covers just over thirty miles between Brecon and Cwmbran and all along the way there are stunning views of mountains, river valleys, farmland and woodland, making this the perfect place for a peaceful stroll. A two-mile accessible section of the trail starts from Brecon Wharf and follows the canal as far as Brynch Lock and back. As well as stunning scenery, the trail passes interpretation boards, community art projects and two picnic areas with wheelchair-accessible tables – here, on a short track, is a reconstruction of one of the horse-drawn Hay Railway trams that once worked the length of the canal. A little further along there is a resting point with views over the River Usk – for a short while the river flows alongside the canal. Between March and October Dragonfly Cruises ([www.dragonfly-cruises.co.uk](http://www.dragonfly-cruises.co.uk)) offers an alternative and fun way to reach the lock; they've got a lift for up to two wheelchairs per boat.

A small car park is located at Brecon, where there is a ramp onto the towpath. The start of the trail is narrow and uneven in places, but soon broadens out to become a wide and hard-surfaced cycle path, only restricted at bridges where headroom is also reduced. On wet days, deep puddles can form, so wheelchair users, mobility-impaired walkers and visitors with toddlers and pushchairs are advised to visit on sunny days – when the scenery and views are at their best anyway. Deaf and hearing-impaired visitors should be aware that this is a busy cycle route and while signs request that priority is given to pedestrians, many cyclists speed along, ringing their bells as the only sign of their presence. On return to the Brecon car park, avoid a push back up the ramp by using the road on the left of the bridge, just before the wharf. There are other barrier-free access points to the towpath at Talybont-on-Usk, Llangynidr to Llangattock, Gilwern and Govilon, but some of these have steep inclines.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The excellent café inside the Theatr Brycheiniog ([www.brycheiniog.co.uk/en/food-drink](http://www.brycheiniog.co.uk/en/food-drink)) offers a selection of hot and cold snacks to eat both inside and on tables overlooking the canal basin.

## 178 Garwnant Forest Visitor Centre, Merthyr Tydfil

**Address:** Garwnant Visitor Centre, Cwmtaf CF48 2HU **Web:** [www.garwnantvisitorcentre.co.uk](http://www.garwnantvisitorcentre.co.uk) **Tel:** 01283 228841 **Hours:** daily 9am–5pm **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 25–26 Dec **Entry:** free; car park £2, minibus £5



Garwnant Visitor Centre makes an excellent launchpad for enjoying the forest, streams, waterfalls and fabulous views of this corner of the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Of particular interest to visitors with access needs is the waymarked all-ability trail, which is accessed from just outside the visitor centre (or from the car park), taking you on a short but very pretty woodland walk. Along the way, you'll pass a pond with an accessible dipping platform, where you can investigate the underwater pondlife – always a big hit with children. Look out, too, for several striking animal sculptures, including

a life-size stag. The path follows a fast-flowing river, which it crosses in several places, and takes in many beautiful trees, including a lovely willow tunnel. The trail is about half a mile long and takes about forty minutes to complete. Also on offer here is a kids' mountain bike park and adventure playground, and a couple of longer trails, suitable for visitors with good mobility.

There are several Blue Badge bays in the main car park. The visitor centre, restaurant and toilet block are arranged around a courtyard, and all offer level, easy access. There are separate male and female accessible toilets, and there's also a RADAR key-accessible Changing Places toilet, with a ceiling hoist, full-sized changing bed and space for several carers. The all-ability trail is mostly hard-surfaced and has seating at regular intervals; note, however, that it includes some steep inclines – manual wheelchair users will require assistance from a fit companion, and people with limited walking ability may find it challenging. Those with an all-terrain powered chair or mobility scooter will have no problem.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The spacious *Forest Café* offers snacks and meals, with a family-oriented menu. There's also a wheelchair-accessible picnic table in the main car park.

## 179 Folly Farm, Pembrokeshire

**Address:** Begelly, Kilgetty SA68 0XA **Web:** [www.folly-farm.co.uk](http://www.folly-farm.co.uk) **Tel:** 01834 812731 **Hours:** times vary throughout the year, see website for details **Dates:** closed over Christmas and New Year **Entry:** [D]£23.95 [C]free [A]£23.95 [3–15s]£21.95 [aged 2]£14.95 [under 2s]free [Con]£21.95



Folly Farm is an award-winning attraction combining a farm, several adventure play areas, a vintage funfair and a zoo on a two-hundred-acre site near the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.



Folly Farm

With so much on offer, it can be hard to know where to begin. One of the first areas you come to is the popular Jolly Barn, where you get to meet a host of farmyard animals. Moving on, you'll come to the fair, full of classically restored rides, including a beautiful "Golden Gallopers" carousel. Beyond the fair lies the zoo area, home to more than one hundred species of animal, from giraffes, lions and penguins to rhinos, sloths, meerkats and squirrel monkeys. Dotted throughout the site are a number of indoor and outdoor adventure play areas, including a go-kart track, Black Bart's Pirate Cove and a Big Wheel, not to mention the Land Train tractor ride, which takes visitors around the paddocks to see unusual breeds and red deer.

Access at Folly Farm is generally good. On arrival, head for the disabled car park, which is located close to the entrance. There are several accessible toilet facilities throughout the park, as well as a Changing Places facility with a bed and hoist in the vintage fairground. They also have several standard wheelchairs that are free to borrow, in addition to a few mobility scooters (£20/day). All the paths around the site are level: some have a tarmac surface, while others are of compressed gravel. Most should present no problems for wheelchair users, though the ones around the zoo area can get muddy during wet weather. In addition, when it's been wet, wheelchair users should take extra care on the ramps to and from the underpass beneath the road, and also on some of the ramps at the enclosures. The Big Wheel and Land Train both have accessible carriages and step-free access; you are advised to wait for the driver's assistance before boarding the Land Train. Rides in the vintage funfair all have at least one or two steps but staff are always on hand to offer assistance. The majority of Animal Experiences are available to wheelchair users – the one obvious exception being the sloths as they are too high! An induction loop is fitted in the theatre, and assistance dogs are welcome throughout the whole site, including the zoo and farm.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There are plenty of places to eat, including a table-service restaurant, *The Hungry Farmer*, with a menu that lists plenty of gluten-free, vegetarian and vegan options. There's also the *Carousel Woods Burger Bar* restaurant, the *Cwtch Coffee Café* serving cakes and cream teas, the *Carousel Café* for rolls and subs, and the *Dairy Shed* for homemade ice cream. Some outlets only open seasonally. Picnics are allowed if you prefer to take your own.

## 180 WWT Llanelli Wetland Centre, Carmarthenshire

**Address:** Llwynhendy, Llanelli SA14 9SH **Web:** [www.wwt.org.uk/llanelli](http://www.wwt.org.uk/llanelli) **Tel:** 01554 741087

**Hours:** site daily 9.30am–5pm; café daily 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 24–25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£8.59 [C]free [A]£9.54 [4–17]£6.13 [under 4s]free [Con]£8.59 [Fam]£26.59



Covering more than 500 acres and taking in various habitats, WWT Llanelli Wetlands is home to abundant plant and animal life including resident species such as kingfisher and otter, and tens of thousands of migratory birds in the colder months, with spoonbill and shoveler among the highlights. Visitors are encouraged to explore the immersive wetlands, delight in the environment and participate in the centre's exciting roster of organised activities – from pond dipping and owl pellet dissection, to canoe safaris.

## Ideas ►► Outdoors

### Castle Semple Visitor Centre (Lochwinnoch PA12 4EA; [www.clydemuirshiel.co.uk](http://www.clydemuirshiel.co.uk))

Set on the shores of Castle Semple Loch, this visitor centre – where inclusiveness is the order of the day – is a great place to birdwatch, paddle and sail (book ahead), and to start exploring the enormous Clyde Muirshiel Country Park.

**Sherwood Forest** (Nottinghamshire NG21 9HN; [www.visitsherwood.co.uk](http://www.visitsherwood.co.uk)) 450 acres of national nature reserve are all that remain of the once vast Sherwood Forest, but they contain some of the oldest trees in Europe (including the legendary hideout of Robin Hood), and it's still a fantastic day out.

The site takes in a collection of lakes, scrapes, pools, streams and lagoons, flanked by the salt marshes and shore of the pretty Burry inlet. Meandering wetland paths lead through a jungle of reeds; look out for water voles, herons, dragonflies and the centre's flock of Caribbean flamingoes. Meet hundreds of waterbirds up close, including swans, geese, cranes, storks and ducks from around the world in the centre's conservation collection. To cover more ground, canoes can be hired during the summer holidays (extra charge).

Parking is free at Llanelli, and there are designated disabled bays close to the centre's entrance. Inside access is wheelchair friendly, and all disabilities have been considered and catered for. The centre is light and open, with stunning views across the wetlands. There are two easily accessible toilet blocks with all the necessary aids to ensure wheelchair users have a comfortable, stress-free experience. Outside, the attraction is organised around flat, paved pathways. Wheelchair users and most people with impaired mobility will be able to move around independently, getting fresh air and exercise in a quiet and reflective environment – a positive experience for those with mental-health challenges, too, as well as those living with dementia. The only inaccessible area is the viewing tower which has narrow, steep steps; gates, required for animal safekeeping, must also be negotiated. Seating areas and accessible bird-watching hides are peppered throughout the site, and information is clearly signposted. A map is available in large print on request. Carers are admitted for free.

**FOOD & DRINK ►►** The spacious, accessible and modern café overlooks the wetlands on one side and the ponds on the other; it offers a good selection of hot and cold snacks, cakes and ice cream, and drinks.

## 181 National Waterfront Museum, Swansea

**Address:** Oystermouth Road SA1 3RD **Web:** [www.museum.wales/swansea](http://www.museum.wales/swansea) **Tel:** 029 20573600

**Hours:** daily 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 24–26 Dec **Entry:** free



The National Waterfront Museum tells the proud story of industry and innovation in Wales, through the changing lives of the people involved. Stressing the international importance of Wales as “the world's first industrial nation”, the museum links the past to the present using fabulous interactive technology.

The museum building is impressive – a massive brick former warehouse on the dockside, enhanced by a modern slate and glass wing. The exhibits are arranged into fifteen categories, including energy, people, communities, land, coal and metals, and each area has its own soundscape, evoking the theme. The connection between culture and history is brought home by examining how lives and work have been linked to Wales' changing industrial heritage. If you plan to visit, be sure to check the website for the packed events schedule, which includes activities such as hands-on workshops, historical talks, science activities and many seasonal events.

The museum makes a big effort to be inclusive. There are five disabled parking bays on Burrows Place, plus more than twenty disabled spaces in the car park in the new Copr Bay development on Oystermouth Road (sat nav SA1 3BX). Wheelchairs are available to hire on a first come, first served basis, while mobility scooters are welcome at the museum; however, only a limited number are permitted at any one time – call in advance to check. Most entrances and interconnecting doors are operated by large push buttons, and there are plenty of places to sit, accessible toilets – including a Changing Places room – baby-changing facilities and a children's play area in the café. All areas and some of the displays have interactive touch-screens, complete with audio description, and real-time BSL interpretation. There's a chill-out area with relaxed lighting and comfortable seating available for those who may need some quiet time, and some of the staff have additional autism-spectrum and dementia training. The museum has sensory backpacks available for visitors to borrow; these include a sensory map of the museum, ear defenders, a torch and more. The museum also has a quiet hour once a month for those with additional needs who prefer it less crowded and noisy – more information is available on the website.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ You can picnic in the GRAFT community garden and on the balcony overlooking the marina, or eat in the museum café, but if you explore along the waterfront and in the city centre, you'll find plenty more eating and drinking options.

## 182 Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff

**Address:** Bute Place, Cardiff Bay CF10 5AL **Web:** [www.wmc.org.uk](http://www.wmc.org.uk) **Tel:** 029 20636464 **Hours:** building open daily from 9am Mon–Sat, 10am Sun **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** building free; performance prices vary, but [C]free



The award-winning Wales Millennium Centre has a commitment to engaging with the disabled community that is as impressive as the building's iconic design.

Since opening in 2004, the centre has become a world-renowned venue for the arts, but it is also an inclusive meeting place for the local community, a rehearsal space for theatre groups, a venue for talks and workshops, and home to its own youth-led radio station. The magnificent large-scale auditorium – the 1,900-capacity Donald Gordon Theatre – hosts arts events ranging from hip-hop to ballet, opera to musicals, and contemporary dance to stand-up comedy. You can also see performances by the Welsh National Opera and enjoy the annual Llais Festival of Music ([www.wmc.org.uk/llais](http://www.wmc.org.uk/llais)). Audio-described, captioned and BSL-interpreted dates are available for nearly all the



shows in the Donald Gordon Theatre, while fully relaxed performances and touch tours are also sometimes on offer. The 150-seat Cabaret space offers an eclectic mix of drag, burlesque, comedy and gig theatre, while the 250-seat Weston Studio presents critically acclaimed theatre productions and live music.

Theatres can be tricky places for people with disabilities, but here every effort has been made to make the venue as welcoming, navigable and accessible as possible. The centre has fourteen Blue Badge disabled parking bays, all under cover, and bookable in advance (a booking fee applies in some cases). There are automatic doors at all the main entrances, two lifts and level access to all areas. Accessible toilets are dotted throughout the centre, with a Changing Places toilet on the ground floor. The theatres have accessible seating and wheelchair access on every level; wheelchairs can also be hired. There are induction loops in all venues and ticket counters. Signage and directions around the building are given in large clear type and raised text – in both Welsh and English Braille. Assistance dogs are welcome in all areas of the Wales Millennium Centre. If you would like your dog to remain with you during the performance, ask ticket staff for suggested seating. Alternatively you can leave your dog with a member of the front of house staff during the performance. A recently installed Quiet Room is available for those on the autism spectrum, and the centre is the first in Wales to join the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower scheme. Carers go free as part of the Hynt scheme ([www.hynt.co.uk](http://www.hynt.co.uk)).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ This is a truly public building, where people can come to meet each other, have something to eat and enjoy themselves. The newly installed, and very cool, *Ffwrnais* lounge-café bar in the foyer offers breakfasts (between 9 and 10am), as well as hot drinks and pastries, and lunches. For full meals, there is a plethora of restaurants a short walk away at Mermaid Quay.

## 183 Principality Stadium Tours, Cardiff

**Address:** Westgate Street CF10 1NS **Web:** [www.principalitystadium.wales/tours](http://www.principalitystadium.wales/tours) **Tel:** 029 20822432

**Hours:** Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun & bank hols 10.15am–4pm; tour times are subject to change, so book ahead **Dates:** tours do not run on 1 Jan, 25–26 Dec & on event days **Entry:** [D]£16.50 [C]free [A]£16.50 [5–15s]£12 [under 5s]free [Con]£13.50 [Fam]£50; for group discounts, contact [customercare@wru.wales](mailto:customercare@wru.wales)



Cardiff's state-of-the-art Principality Stadium (previously known as the Millennium Stadium) features a fully retractable roof and is the home of the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU). Described by the WRU as "the best rugby venue in the world", it can be visited on a behind-the-scenes tour that leaves you with a keen sense of the huge scale and national standing of this most impressive site.

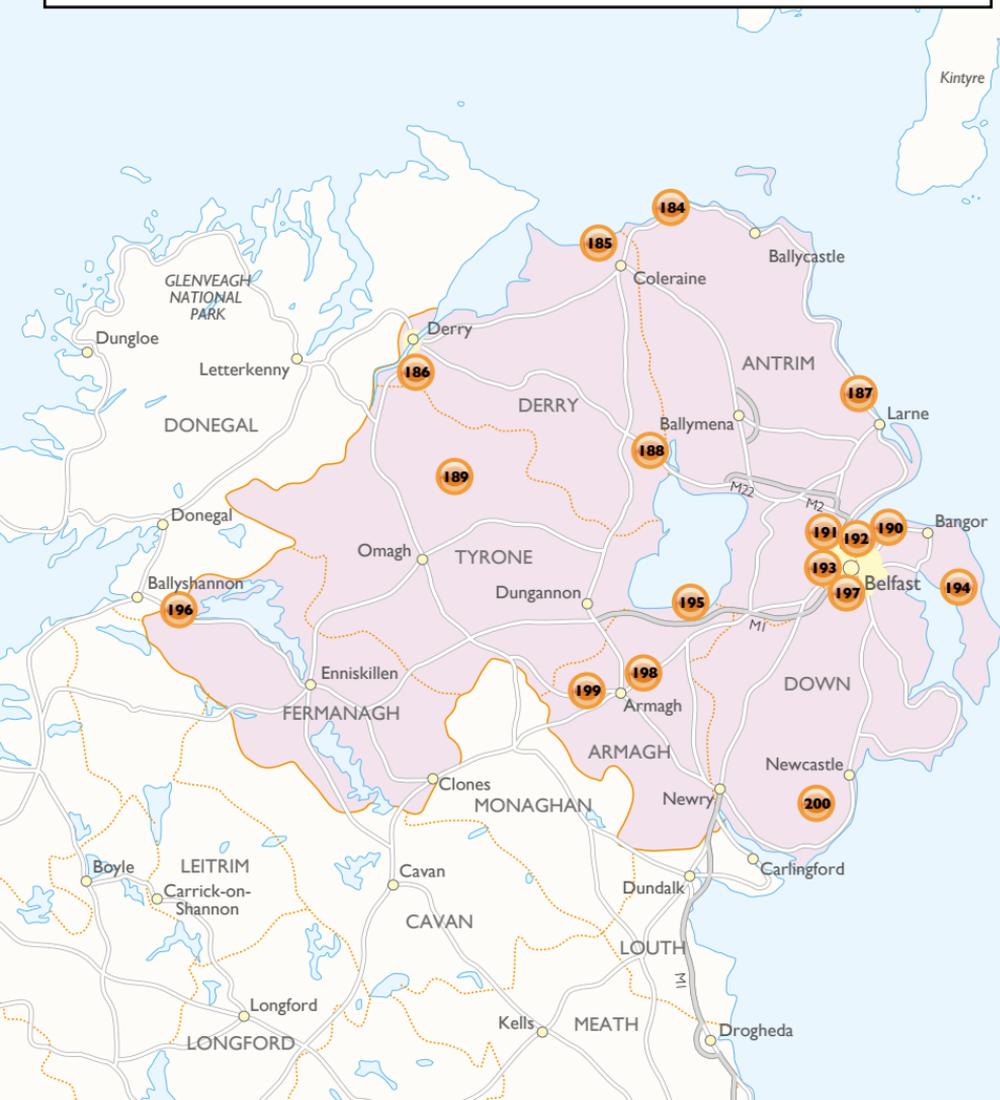
Tours explore all levels of the stadium, from the Ray Gravell press room, deep in the bowels of the terraces, to the heights of the President's Box overlooking the verdant turf below. There are plenty of great photo opportunities along the way, such as standing by your favourite team member's shirt or raising a trophy in a victorious pose. For many, the highlight is visiting the atmospheric "Dragon's Lair" home-side changing rooms. The tour guides are knowledgeable and entertaining, and even those visitors not passionate about sport will be caught up in the spirit of Welsh patriotism that the stadium evokes.

On-site disabled parking spaces can be booked in advance. Access from the parking area to the tour's starting point in the WRU shop is via a long ramp. Step-free access to the stadium section of the tour is back along this ramp (which manual wheelchair users may need assistance to ascend) and via lifts. Although most areas visited have level access, a few small sections are not wheelchair accessible, though this doesn't detract from the enjoyment of the visit. It's worth noting that tours proceed at a fairly speedy pace, with much walking or wheeling and little opportunity to rest. An accessible lift takes you to the WRU shop floor. There are many accessible toilets available, all operated by RADAR key, and assistance dogs are welcome by prior arrangement.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ As the Principality Stadium is situated in the heart of Cardiff city centre, there's no shortage of restaurants to suit all pockets within a hundred yards. By far the best is *Bar 44* (<https://grupo44.co.uk/bar44/cardiff>), a fabulous tapas-style diner with an all-Spanish wine menu.

# Northern Ireland

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# 184 Giant's Causeway, County Antrim

**Address:** 44 Causeway Road, BT57 8SU **Web:** [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway) **Tel:** 028 20731855 **Hours:** visitor centre daily: Mar–Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–Feb 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£13 [C]£13 [A]£13 [5–18]£6.50 [under 5s]free [Fam]£32.50



The Giant's Causeway is Northern Ireland's only UNESCO World Heritage Site, and for sheer otherworldliness, it can't be beaten. Made up of a collection of 40,000 interlinked basalt columns running for 3 miles along the northeastern Irish coast between Benbane and Causeway heads, the site is the result of a subterranean explosion some sixty million years ago. A huge mass of molten basalt was spewed out onto the surface and, when it cooled, it solidified into what are essentially crystals. Folklore, meanwhile, dictates that the Causeway was built by giant Ulster warrior Fionn Mac Cumhail.

Many of the formations have names (“the Giant's Boot”, “the Camel” and “the Granny”), and the local myths relating to how they came about are explored at the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre – the Boot is reputed to be a staggering shoe size 93.5. Sunken into the ground and made from locally quarried basalt, the visitor centre blends into the landscape with indigenous grasses on the roof providing a habitat for wildlife. Inside, exhibition panels and 3D and hands-on displays provide detail on the geological and scientific nature of the area, while you get to meet the various characters that have shaped the landscape hereabouts. There's an excellent topographic model of the Causeway, with different textures to give the sight-impaired an idea of the ruggedness of what's outside.

The car park is located a couple of hundred yards from the visitor centre. Inside, wide aisles and throughways make access a breeze; steps are hazard-marked and handrailed, and ramps to the upper levels are easy to navigate and not too steep. Flooring is smooth, and there is an accessible toilet with a fully equipped changing area. You can request a portable induction loop, or a general audio guide for those with visual impairments.

You can walk to the stones for free, but the on-site car park is reserved for those buying tickets for the Visitor Experience, which includes a guided tour, use of the audio guides and access to the shop, café and exhibition. The Causeway Coast Way Car Park is available at 60 Causeway Road with a PayByPhone system for walkers to park and access the coastal walkways. Please be aware, spaces are limited and allocated on a first come, first served basis. The causeway stones are located 1.2km from the visitor centre so a reasonable level of fitness is required. The Blue Trail is the most direct route to the causeway stones. The trail does have some steep inclines and the natural gradient of the terrain may not be suitable for visitors with reduced mobility, manual wheelchair users or older visitors. It also may not be suitable for some battery-operated wheelchairs or mobility scooters. The Blue Trail is a tarmac surface with some paving stones and dropped kerbs, and it can be gravelly in places. There are various seating areas along the route to the causeway stones if you're on wheels. Check [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway) for details. Mobility-impaired visitors will not be able to walk on the Causeway itself, which is rough, cold and rugged, but the view of the stones is still spectacular. Be mindful that it can get very busy in the summer months, so it's worth

pre-booking online and visiting as early (or as late) in the day as possible. The Visitor Centre has a dog friendly policy.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The café area is flat and accessible, and staff are friendly and helpful. Try the cake, which is top-notch.

## 185 Portstewart Strand, County Derry

**Address:** National Trust Portstewart Strand Visitor Centre, 118 Strand Road, Portstewart BT55 7PG

**Web:** [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/portstewart-strand](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/portstewart-strand) **Tel:** 028 70836396 **Hours:** daily: Apr 10am–5pm; May–June 10am–6pm; Jul–Aug 9am–8pm; Sept 10am–4pm; toilets at the beach open 10am–5pm, but may stay open later in summer; the barrier to the beach closes two hours after the rest of facilities

**Dates:** beach open all year, visitor centre closed 28 Sept–10 Apr **Entry:** free for pedestrians, car £8, minibus £16, coach £20; no motorcycles allowed on the beach



Stretching from the seaside town of Portstewart to the mouth of the River Bann, Portstewart Strand is a glorious two-mile ribbon of golden sands and towering, pristine dunes. Owned by the National Trust, it's a Blue Flag beach and an Area of Special Scientific Interest.

Beaches don't get more accessible than this: visitors are allowed to drive their cars right onto the sand – an old tradition that the Trust inherited, and allowed to continue, when it bought this stretch of coast in 1980. Bring a picnic and take in the spectacular scenery as you listen to the surf crashing in from the Atlantic. Depending on the time of year, you may spot butterflies, wild orchids, pansies and thyme flourishing among the



dunes, plus seals in the sea. The western end of the Strand, by the river estuary, is home to abundant birdlife, which you can view from a wheelchair-accessible hide.

From Portstewart, brown signs point the way to the Strand, where there are two designated disabled parking spaces available close to the entrance. Beach access is usually simple for wheelchairs, as the sand is hard and compacted. That said, anyone who plans to go far up the Strand should feel confident about navigating the beach in all weathers, as conditions can change very quickly. The paths through the dunes are not suitable for wheelchair users or those with restricted mobility. If you want to visit the bird hide, you'll need to drive ten miles west to the other side of the river: it's at the end of Barmouth Road, off the A2, towards Castlerock. From the car park, the path to the bird hide is level. There is a Changing Places facility where beach wheelchairs can be booked at [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/portstewart-strand](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/portstewart-strand).

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ By far the best option is to bring a picnic or dine at the award-winning *Harry's Shack* (028 70831783; opening hours vary depending on the day and time of year; booking recommended). There are also numerous cafés and wine bars in nearby Portstewart town.

## 186 Derry, County Derry



Set against the backdrop of the hills of Donegal, Derry, or Londonderry ([www.visitderry.com](http://www.visitderry.com)), is a walled city with a thriving arts scene and a lively atmosphere. It also boasts some outstanding historical attractions, including its old city walls – the last to be built in Europe and among the finest in the continent.

Completed in 1618, Derry's walls have never been breached and remain perfectly intact. There's ramped wheelchair access to the top from the Grand Parade, Magazine Street and Bank Place. Once up, you'll be rewarded with some great views over the city's landmarks, including St Columb's Cathedral, with its tall, pointed spire, and the Millennium Forum, Derry's main theatre and concert venue. Beyond, you can also see the dramatic lines and curves of the stunning new Peace Bridge across the River Foyle, as well as the old double-decker Craigaonon Bridge, further south.

Tucked into the northernmost corner of the walls, near Magazine Gate, the excellent Tower Museum (028 71372411, [www.towermuseumcollections.com](http://www.towermuseumcollections.com)) is fully accessible, with an accessible toilet, induction loops and many touch exhibits. The highlight here is the museum's "Story of Derry" exhibition, which gives an absorbing overview of the city's history, from its origins as a monastic settlement in the sixth century right up to the present day – taking in the Troubles of the 1960s and 1970s – with a second permanent exhibition entitled "La Trinidad Valencera", which focuses upon the fate of a downed ship off the coast of Donegal.

You can explore this theme in more detail at the Museum of Free Derry (028 71360880, [www.museumoffreederry.org](http://www.museumoffreederry.org)), a short distance west of the city walls in the Bogside area, a majority-Catholic neighbourhood that played a key role in the conflict. Here you can see the Bloody Sunday Memorial and The Free Derry Corner, as well as several large murals which vividly depict some of the events of the Troubles. On Society Street in the old city, the Siege Museum ([www.thesiegemuseum.org](http://www.thesiegemuseum.org)) tells the story of the Siege of Londonderry in 1688/89 and the history of the Apprentice Boys of Derry. One of the city's most iconic buildings is the Guildhall ([www.guildhallderry.com](http://www.guildhallderry.com)),

which is fitted with accessible toilets, internal lifts, and indoor and outdoor ramps.

Inside the city walls, your best bet for parking is the Bishop Street car park, near the cathedral, which has five disabled spaces. Just outside the walls, the Foyleside Shopping Centre has 35 accessible bays in its car park; the centre is also the location of Derry's Shopmobility scheme (028 71368623, [www.foyleside.co.uk/accessibility/shopmobility](http://www.foyleside.co.uk/accessibility/shopmobility)), which can provide copies of the Derry Free Access map showing accessible toilets and parking spaces, and recommended routes for wheelchair users. There are a number of accessible toilets dotted elsewhere around the city, including at the Tourist Information Centre at 1–3 Waterloo Place; at the Foyleside Shopping Centre; at the Richmond Shopping Centre, within the walls; and a Changing Places facility in Ebrington Square. Note that the city centre has a few steep gradients, so manual wheelchair users may need assistance.

## 187 Carnfunnock Country Park, County Antrim

**Address:** Coast Road, Larne BT40 2QG **Web:** [www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/things-to-do/parks/carnfunnock-country-park](http://www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/things-to-do/parks/carnfunnock-country-park) **Tel:** 028 28262471 **Hours:** country park: Mar–Oct daily 9am–dusk (July & Aug till 9pm), Nov–Feb 9am–4.30pm; check website for opening hours of individual attractions and activities

**Dates:** closed 25 Dec; most activities, caravan park, campsite & maze closed Nov–Mar **Entry:** free entry to the park, charges for some activities; parking charges apply, but free for Blue Badge holders



Spread over a hillside looking out to the Irish Sea on the beautiful North Antrim coast, Carnfunnock Country Park occupies a former country estate that's been transformed into a country park, complete with walking trails, formal gardens, a maze and numerous family-friendly activities.

On arrival at the wheelchair-accessible visitor centre, pick up a map of the park, or speak to staff for information. A good place to start exploring is the exquisite walled garden, featuring a butterfly garden, sun dials, a scented walkway and plenty of exotic plants. Close by, the maze – designed in the shape of Northern Ireland – will delight children, as will the excellent adventure playground (which includes accessible play equipment), face-painting and various activities within the activity centre. If that's not enough, head to the privately run Family Fun Zone, with a miniature railway, mini golf, bungee run, trampolines and remote-controlled model boats and trucks, all available at a small charge. The walking trails threading through the park are not all suitable for wheelchairs, but the Biodiversity Trail (just over half a mile) is fully accessible, and offers fine views of Carnfunnock Bay. Signs along the way tell you exactly what flora and fauna to look out for.

Parking is available including dedicated Blue Badge spaces throughout the site. All the walkways linking the park's main and lower areas are fully accessible, and wheelchair users will have no problem accessing the walled garden and maze. A Shopmobility scooter can be booked in advance by holders of a Shopmobility Membership Card for Northern Ireland or a Scooter Driving Licence issued by the Disabled Ramblers Northern Ireland. There are accessible toilets at the visitor centre and activity centre, with Braille signs at the toilet entrances. A fully accessible Changing Places unit is available (RADAR key required – available at the visitor centre).



farmer's son to Nobel prize-winner. Both poetry and history are tastefully and interestingly presented throughout, with some interactive features along the way. The Creative Zone is an impressive and conscientious attempt to engage the younger generation and challenge perceptions of the traditional exhibition experience, allowing children (and adults) to hone and explore their artistic impulses. All this can be followed by a contemplative stroll around the Sensory Garden outside.

There are two Blue Badge parking spaces in the top car park on Main Street and four more in the car park on Gulladuff Road; tarmac paths lead from both to the centre. Seamus Heaney HomePlace is a modern, very accessible building, with a lift from the ground floor to the first floor and ramps throughout. At the entrance, two automatic doors lead into the reception area, which has a lowered counter section, and there's seating here and throughout the exhibition. It's an open and spacious setting with a relaxed atmosphere, and staff are friendly, approachable and accommodating; employees are trained on the "JAM Card" initiative which aids communication for people with a learning difficulty, Asperger's, or on the autism spectrum. Exhibition numbers are limited to twenty people and quiet rooms can be made available. Meanwhile, the Back Yard at HomePlace houses a Sensory Garden, a peaceful spot with Braille signage. The exhibition's individual listening devices allow visitors to hear Seamus Heaney reading select pieces aloud, and most videos have subtitles. Written information provided at reception can also be printed off in large format, and a hearing-loop system is in place in the Helicon Space. Family Movie Days are arranged regularly in this auditorium by a local organisation, Empower, which provides support for children under twelve with dyslexia, dyspraxia and on the autism spectrum; events have reduced lighting and sound, a dedicated quiet space and sensory equipment, and children have the freedom to leave their seats during the show. There are accessible toilets on both floors of the HomePlace, with grab rails and wide doors. A manual wheelchair is available to borrow and entry for carers is free.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *The HomePlace Café* provides a selection of hot and cold food, signature salads, baked goods and beverages. It's spacious and chairs are free standing.

## 189 Sperrins Scenic Touring Routes, County Tyrone/Derry



**Driving distance:** 38 miles **Approx driving time without stops:** 1 hour 20 minutes

Heading right through the heart of the Sperrin Mountains, this 38-mile drive rewards you with fabulous views and the chance to enjoy some nature along the way.

Six miles north of Omagh, on the B48, the Gortin Glen Forest Park ([www.fermanagh.com/gortin-glen-forest-park](http://www.fermanagh.com/gortin-glen-forest-park)) is the western gateway to the Sperrin Mountains and marks the start of our scenic drive. Enter the park and you'll come to a car park with accessible bays, a spacious accessible toilet, level access to the café, accessible playground and some accessible picnic tables nearby. Several trails lead through the forest from the Walking Trail Head, with Park Trail (1km) the most accessible with only gentle slopes. You can also enjoy the scenery from your car by following the park's five-mile scenic Drive, which passes several panoramic viewpoints where you can pull in and soak up the mountain vistas. As you drive along, look out for the wild Sika deer that inhabit the park and for various bird life circling overhead.



Back on the B48, continue north through the mountains. You'll soon pass the pretty village of Gortin, nestled in the Owenkillew river valley, and, four miles beyond, Plumbridge, by the Glenelly River, whose banks make a good picnic spot. From here, branch east along the B47 through the idyllic, steep-sided Glenelly Valley, carved through the mountains by ancient glacial flows. It's a stunning road, offering awesome views of Sawel Mountain, the highest peak in the Sperrin range at 2,225ft. Also located in the Glenelly Valley are Bradkeel Social Farm ([www.bradkeelfarm.co.uk](http://www.bradkeelfarm.co.uk)) and Butterlope Farm ([www.butterlopefarm.co.uk](http://www.butterlopefarm.co.uk)). These are social farms which are open to the public by appointment and which offer experiences which aim to bring visitors closer to nature through learning about farming and the countryside while also improving their own health and well-being. Twenty miles east of Plumbridge, having left the high mountains behind, you'll find plenty of places to stop for lunch in the lively village of Draperstown, famous locally as the site of a weekly sheep market on Fridays.

From Draperstown, it's another twelve miles to the small village of Ballyronan, on the shore of Lough Neagh, the biggest lake in the British Isles. Head to the marina, where you can admire the fine views from an accessible boardwalk. There are picnic areas and paths through the woodland nearby.

There are four visitor information centres which provide further information ([www.visitmidulster.com](http://www.visitmidulster.com)): Magherafelt Visitor Information Centre, The Bridewell, 6 Church Street, Magherafelt, BT45 6AN, 028 79631510, [tourism@midulstercouncil.org](mailto:tourism@midulstercouncil.org); Strabane Tourist Information Centre, The Alley Arts and Conference Centre, 1a Railway Street, Strabane, BT82 0LY, 028 71384444; Omagh Visitor Information Centre, Visitor Services/Box Office, Strule Arts Centre, Townhall Square, Omagh, BT78 1BL, 0300 3031777; Cookstown Visitor Information Centre, The Burnavon Arts & Cultural Centre, Burn Road, Cookstown, BT80 8DN, 028 86769949.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *Corner House Bar* (028 79629855), on St Patrick's Street in Draperstown, is a good old-fashioned pub serving tasty, down-to-earth food at reasonable prices. It also has a fully accessible toilet.

# 190 Ulster Folk Museum and Ulster Transport Museum, Cultra

**Address:** 153 Bangor Road, Cultra, Holywood, BT18 0EU **Web:** [www.ulsterfolkmuseum.org](http://www.ulsterfolkmuseum.org) and [www.ulstertransportmuseum.org](http://www.ulstertransportmuseum.org) **Tel:** 028 90428428 **Hours:** Tues–Sun 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** prices for admission to both museums: [D]free [C]free [A]£11.50 [5–17s]£7 [under 5s] free [senior & student]£9 [Fam]£32 (1 adult and up to 3 children), £34.50 (2 adults and up to 3 children); group discounts available; free parking



Ulster Folk Museum and Ulster Transport Museum are stalwarts of Northern Irish tourism. Comprising two separate and distinct museums located in very close proximity, this stellar double act gives a comprehensive overview of Northern Ireland's cultural and industrial history.

The Ulster Transport Museum is a largely indoor attraction, boasting one of Europe's most extensive transport collections, with trains, horse-drawn carriages, trams, emergency vehicles, vintage motorbikes and cars. The excellent TITANIC exhibition is both informative and interactive, taking a considered look at the world's most famous ship and her beginnings in Belfast. The Ulster Folk Museum – mostly outside – depicts both urban and rural life more than a century ago, containing reconstructed houses, churches, farms, schools and more. Live demonstrations by costumed staff take place throughout the day, ranging from baking and linen weaving to blacksmithing and basket making, giving a unique insight into how our ancestors lived and worked in days gone by.



There's disabled parking at both museums, and mobility scooters as well as manual and powered wheelchairs can be borrowed from either entrance. There are a number of spacious accessible toilets provided throughout both sites, which have grab rails and low-level sinks. Inside the Transport Museum, the Rail and Road Galleries are spread over three floors with ramped access and plenty of seating throughout. There's a hearing loop at reception and videos are subtitled. Look out for the gaps between platforms and trains ("Mind the Gap" signs are in place); in addition, boarding the train carriages will not be possible for wheelchair users. The Land, Sea & Sky Galleries, in a separate building, are accessed via a moderately steep outdoor walkway. The Folk Museum, meanwhile, is a largely outdoor venue. It lends itself to leisurely strolls through trees and flowerbeds, which make it peaceful, relaxing and enjoyable. That said, given the museum depicts Ireland more than one hundred years ago and demands historic authenticity, there are some limitations to access, particularly for visitors with physical disabilities. Walking distances between buildings are lengthy, there's some hilly terrain, a few gravel paths, a cobbled street and steps into some buildings. However, there are deployable ramps, which are available at some of the key exhibits where the door width permits wheelchair access, and staff will help wherever possible. A number of employees at both museums have autism-awareness, JAM and dementia-friendly training, as well as being able to tailor tours for blind and visually impaired people, while carers go free.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The Ulster Folk Museum offers a range of teas, coffees and baked goods, in addition to hot and cold dishes suitable for both adults and children. It has freestanding chairs and tables. Although the Ulster Transport Museum does not have a café it has vending machines in place which offers both hot and cold drinks, confectionery and savoury snacks.

## 191 Belfast Zoo

**Address:** Antrim Road, Belfast BT36 7NP **Web:** [www.belfastcity.gov.uk/zoo](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/zoo) **Tel:** 028 90776277

**Hours:** daily: Apr–Sept 10am–6pm (last entry 4.30pm, animal houses close 5pm, Zoovenir shop and cafés close 6pm); Oct–Mar 10am–4pm (last entry 2.30pm, animal houses close 3pm, Zoovenir shop and cafés close 4pm) **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£15 [C]free [A]£15 [4–16s]£7.40 [under 4s]free [Con]£7.50 [Fam]£42.50 (2 adults, 3 children); group discounts available online



Belfast Zoo is home to some 110 species of animal – the exotic, the rare and the endangered. Hear the lions roar and see the flamingoes dance as you make your way around this beautifully located zoo, with stunning hilltop views over Belfast.

Opened back in 1934, the zoo has long been known for its conservation work, and is currently involved in more than sixty global and collaborative breeding programmes as well as native-species projects which help to protect local wildlife. Animals are housed in spacious enclosures across the Cavehill site. Particular highlights include feeding time for the penguins, Californian sea lions and the Asian elephants. Children can sign up to be a "Zookeeper for a Day", allowing them to get up close to some of their favourite animals, including lemurs, giraffes and penguins, while other animal experiences are also available.



Being outside and interacting with animals both have proven positive impacts on mental health; Belfast Zoo is a relaxed, outdoor environment, so everyone will benefit from the fresh air and panoramic views over Belfast. There are fifteen disabled parking bays located just a few yards from the main entrance, which has level access, automatic doors and a lowered section on the reception desk. All staff are trained in disability awareness and the JAM card posters at reception signal the zoo is part of the JAM scheme, an initiative helping people with learning disabilities, Asperger's, and on the autism spectrum. Free audio tours are available, and a SignVideo is also offered at reception, allowing BSL users to communicate with zoo staff using an interpreter in real time. A fast-track queue system is available for disabled visitors, too.

While it is clear that accessibility is high on the agenda here, the hilltop site dictates that there are some steep, hilly areas and significant distances between enclosures. Seats are dotted around the zoo, signs inform visitors of gradients and a wheelchair-accessible Zoo-mobile (available to book in advance) can provide a drop-off service to the top of the hill or whisk mobility-impaired visitors on an inclusive tour. There are a number of accessible toilets located around the zoo, and a Changing Places facility in the Visitor Centre. Manual wheelchairs can be borrowed for free. Special events such as sensory days and quiet hours cater to those on the autism spectrum and animal lovers with other sensory requirements.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Zoo Café* is open daily during summer and key holiday dates and serves a selection of hot food and snacks as well as a selection of baked goods. It's roomy, with freestanding tables and chairs. The *Treetop Tearooms* is open all year (selected dates during winter) and has outdoor seating available.

# 192 Titanic Belfast

**Address:** 1 Olympic Way, Queen's Road, Titanic Quarter, Belfast BT3 9EP **Web:** [www.titanicbelfast.com](http://www.titanicbelfast.com)  
**Tel:** 028 90766386 **Hours:** seasonal, please check website; last admission 1hr 40mins before closing  
**Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£24.95 [C]free [A]£24.95 [Fam]2 adults, 2 children £62 [5–15s]£11 [under 5s]free [Seniors 60+]Mon-Fri £19 [Students 16+ & Un]Mon–Fri £19



Step back to eighteenth-century Belfast and learn about its proud tradition of ship-building at the world-famous Harland and Wolff shipyard – the birthplace of *RMS Titanic*. With nine galleries of interactive exhibition space housed inside a building clad with three thousand sheets of silver-anodised aluminium, the iconic Titanic Belfast sits as the centrepiece of Belfast's Titanic Quarter.

The self-guided Titanic Experience tells the story of *RMS Titanic*, from her conception in Belfast in the early 1900s, through her construction and launch, to her famous maiden voyage and tragic end. Following a £4.5 refresh in 2023, the attraction has introduced a new theme, namely *The Pursuit of Dreams*, boasting a stunning new artefact collection including bandmaster Wallace Hartley's violin, an original Titanic lifejacket and deckchair plus much more, alongside an illuminated 7.6m long scale model of the ship, which is fully suspended from the ceiling and fully rotates in sync with state-of-the-art projections for a truly immersive experience. There is also a cable car ride, which takes visitors on a journey through the shipyard to view what life was like for workers during the construction of the Titanic. Mobility scooters cannot be taken on the ride, but there's a car that can accommodate one manual wheelchair.

The building itself is inviting and suitable for those with access needs. Disabled parking is available on two levels of the underground car park and is conveniently located next to the lift that takes you to the main atrium and ticket area. All the entrances and exits to the attraction have automatic doors and there's a hearing-loop system plus a BSL audio-visual guide. There's also an audio-described guide for blind and visually impaired visitors. Man-

## Ideas ►► Heritage

**Fountains Abbey** (North Yorkshire HG4 3DY; [www.fountainsabbey.org.uk](http://www.fountainsabbey.org.uk)) The centrepiece of Studley Royal Estate and Park, the abbey is Britain's most complete Cistercian foundation. Smooth, hard paths and a recommended wheelchair route make exploring easy.

**Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms** (London SW1A 2AQ; [www.iwm.org.uk/visits/churchill-war-rooms](http://www.iwm.org.uk/visits/churchill-war-rooms)) This underground complex beneath Whitehall housed Cabinet meetings, intelligence, communications and map rooms as well as Churchill's domestic quarters. Parking is tricky but access is excellent – a lift down from street level is a great boon – though some passageways are rather narrow.

**Blickling Estate** (Norwich NR11 6NF; [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/blickling-estate](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/blickling-estate)) A fully accessible restaurant and shop, plus the availability of a lift to make most of the house accessible, gives any visitor the opportunity to enjoy this beautiful and imposing estate to its fullest. A circular wheelchair route around the park and an optional sensory experience make this a very accessible day out.

ual wheelchairs and mobility scooters are available free on request. Several staff members have disability, autism and dementia training, and “VIP” wristbands can be worn so that staff can identify those who may need extra assistance, such as fast-tracking through queues. Essential carers go free; where possible, bring supporting documentation.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ *The Galley Café* offers drinks, sandwiches and pastries. *The Pantry* restaurant provides a range of options for breakfast, lunch or an early dinner. *Hickson’s Point*, open seasonally, is an authentic 1900s public house setting serving up traditional food and drink and live music.

## 193 Grand Opera House, Belfast

**Address:** 2 Great Victoria Street BT2 7HR **Web:** [www.goh.co.uk](http://www.goh.co.uk) **Tel:** box office 028 90241919; stage door 028 90240411 **Hours:** box office Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, open til 8pm on performance nights **Dates:** box office times vary on bank hols and non-performance days **Entry:** prices vary depending on performances and seats; a companion seat is available for those who require essential assistance



First opened in 1895, the Grand Opera House is one of Belfast’s oldest and best-loved venues. It presents a year-round programme of West End and locally produced musicals and drama as well as ballet, opera, comedy and family shows; this is also the home of pantomime in Northern Ireland.

The Main Auditorium is a magnificent example of Victorian architecture, and the atmosphere is intimate and relaxed. It underwent a full restoration in 2021, as did the foyer and bars, during which time the number of wheelchair places was increased and state-of-the-art loop systems were installed. The accessible seats in the Upper Circle are one of the best viewing locations in the Auditorium. The theatre was awarded the Disability Equality Charter Award in recognition of its ongoing commitment to ensuring accessibility for



Grand Opera House, Belfast

everyone. All levels of the theatre, except The Gods, are wheelchair accessible, and there are bars over three levels of the theatre which are wheelchair accessible with sections of lowered counters. Disabled parking is available on-street and in the Great Northern multi-storey car park in Hope Street. The Europa bus centre and Great Victoria Street train station are adjacent to the theatre, making it easily accessible via public transport. The main entrance is level with a lift that takes you to all other floors. Accessible toilets with grab rails and low-level mirrors are on every level, except in The Gods. Make sure you state when booking if you're planning to visit in a mobility scooter. Colour contrast is excellent throughout and visitors with assistance dogs are welcome. Audio-described, signed and captioned performances are available for most productions, and there's a relaxed performance of the pantomime each year with extra staff on hand to help and a chill-out space for those on the autism spectrum or with other sensory conditions. Audio and large print brochures are available on the theatre website. Customers wishing to gain a free companion ticket should register with the theatre's Access for All scheme.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Opposite, *The Crown Liquor Saloon* ([www.nicholsonspubs.co.uk](http://www.nicholsonspubs.co.uk)), Belfast's most famous pub, serves various meals and drinks.

## 194 Mount Stewart House & Gardens, County Down

**Address:** Portaferry Road, Newtonwards BT22 2AD **Web:** [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/northern-ireland/mount-stewart](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/northern-ireland/mount-stewart) **Hours:** March–Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–Feb 10am–4pm; house April–Oct daily 11am–5pm; Nov–March Sat & Sun 11am–3pm **Dates:** closed 23 Dec–18 Jan **Entry:** [D]£13 [C]free [A]£13 [3–16s]£6.50 [Con]from £8 [Fam]from £19.50



The ancestral home of the Londonderry family, Mount Stewart House and Gardens offers a superb double-header: a magnificently ostentatious country house, in addition to 98 acres of gardens, laid out by Edith, Lady Londonderry, wife of the seventh marquess, in the 1920s.

Guided tours of the house – which has level access on the ground floor and a lift to the upper floor – take place every fifteen minutes in the morning, before a free-flow system takes over from 1pm. Among the splendid (and occasionally eccentric) furniture is a set of 22 Empire chairs used by the delegates to the Congress of Vienna in 1815, who included the Duke of Wellington, while the Continental connection is flaunted further in bedrooms named after various historically important cities, among them Rome, St Petersburg, Madrid and Moscow. The house also contains a number of prestigious paintings, the most notable and largest of which is *Rubbing Down* (1799) by George Stubbs, which shows the celebrated thoroughbred, Hambletonian, being rubbed down after a victory at Newmarket. Continuing the horsey theme, look out for a pair of hooves (which have been fashioned into inkwells) that belonged to Fighting Charlie, winner of the 1965 Ascot Gold Cup and ridden by the great Lester Piggott. There is plentiful seating in each room should you need to rest up.

As impressive as the house is, for many the highlight of a visit to Mount Stewart is the formal gardens, comprising Spanish and Italian gardens, a Sunken Garden, and the Shamrock Garden (with a topiary harp, naturally) – although slightly uneven in places, all of

these areas are wheelchair accessible. The trees and shrubs here are no more than seventy to eighty years old, but they've grown at such a remarkable rate that they look twice that, thanks mainly to unusually warm and humid microclimate hereabouts. Look out, too, for the Dodo Terrace, which flaunts various bits of giant statuary, including the eponymous bird alongside lizards, griffins and the like. There are numerous marked trails around the site, mostly compact earth, concrete and gravel, and which range from just under 1km to 3km. The majority of these are wheelchair accessible, with the Lake Walk being both the easiest and most attractive. There are also plenty of bench seats dotted around.

There are designated Blue Badge parking spaces located in Car Park 1, as well as additional accessible spaces to the rear of the courtyard; visitors can also be dropped off at the rear of the courtyard. There are accessible toilet facilities located in Car Park 1, the courtyard, visitor reception, and adjacent to Temple of the Winds. There is also a Changing Places facility to the rear of the toilet block in Car Park 1. There are mobility scooters and wheelchairs available to borrow for use throughout the site (which should be pre-booked), with indoor wheelchairs available for use inside the house. Braille and large print versions of the property leaflet are available, and there are induction loops inside the visitor reception and tea room.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ Refreshments in the form of hot and cold drinks, cakes, snacks and light lunches are available in the tea room, which also has an outdoor area accommodating wheelchair users.

## 195 Oxford Island National Nature Reserve, County Armagh

**Address:** Oxford Island, Lurgan, Craigavon, County Armagh BT66 6NJ **Web:** [www.oxfordisland.com](http://www.oxfordisland.com)

**Tel:** 028 38322205 **Hours:** Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat 10am–5pm; Easter–Sept also Sun 10am–5pm

**Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec **Entry:** free



Oxford Island is one of Northern Ireland's prime conservation areas. On a peninsula jutting into Lough Neagh – the largest lake in the British Isles – this national nature reserve is a tranquil retreat, far away from the hustle and bustle of daily family life.

It is busy with wildlife though – especially as a sanctuary for wintering wildfowl. Guided trails lead around the reserve, passing along the shore and through woodland that was planted around fifty years ago. On the route you'll pass by meadows that are home to Irish breeds of cattle. You'll also come across picnic areas, play parks and ponds with plenty of ducks and swans splashing around and hoping to be fed. There are two bird-watching hides (Croaghan and Kinnego) and an open-topped viewing area overlooking Lough Neagh and Kinnego Bay – spend time in these to see how many of the wildfowl and songbirds you can identify. Kinnego Marina is in the reserve and is also the largest marina on Lough Neagh – from here, for a charge, visitors, including wheelchair users, can enjoy a pre-booked relaxing trip on the lake in the *Master McGra* vessel.

The Discovery Centre is the main building in the reserve, with a reception desk and café. From time to time, exhibitions are run in the centre too. The centre has disabled parking, and is a good place to start an exploration of the island. There are several car



Oxford Island

parcs in the reserve, so if you have trouble covering long distances then it makes sense to drive from car park to car park and explore the surrounding area of each one. The marina has two car parks, with plenty of designated disabled spaces. Two Shopmobility mobility scooters are available from the Discovery Centre. Most of the paths in the reserve are either tarmac or compact gravel and easily accessible for wheelchair users. Unfortunately, there are few routes that have rest seats, although there are numerous picnic areas to stop at. Many of the play areas are fenced and the Discovery Centre and Kinnego Marina have safety flooring. Croaghgan and Kinnego hides are both wheelchair accessible. Croaghgan Hide is easily reached from the car parks at the Discovery Centre. The closest car park to Kinnego Hide is at Artspace (a facility on the island for community arts), where there is one disabled parking space – the car park is a four-minute walk or push away from the hide. The accessible toilet at the marina requires a RADAR key.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Loughside Café* in the modern Discovery Centre serves breakfast, lunch and afternoon snacks. The soups, sandwiches, cakes and hot dish of the day are all reasonably priced. There is a second smaller café on site at Kinnego Marina called the *Galley Café*. It is advisable to phone ahead to check opening times.

## 196 Belleek Pottery Visitor Centre, County Fermanagh

**Address:** 3 Main Street, Belleek BT93 3FY **Web:** [www.belleekpottery.ie](http://www.belleekpottery.ie) **Tel:** 028 68659300 or 028 68658501 **Hours:** Jan–Mar Mon–Fri 10am–3pm; Apr–Sept Mon–Fri 9am–4pm, Sat & Sun 10am–4pm; Oct–Dec Mon–Sat 10am–3pm; check opening and tour times before arrival; tour times Mon–Fri 10.30am and every 30 mins until 12.15pm and from 1.30pm and every 30 mins until 2.30pm **Dates:** closed over Christmas & New Year **Entry:** [D]£7 [C]free [A]£7 [over 12s]£4 [under 12s]free [Con]£5 [Fam]£15



Originally set up by a landowner to provide employment for locals suffering the after-effects of the potato famine, the Belleek factory has been producing pottery for more than 160 years – longer than anywhere else in Ireland. Its products are exceptionally popular, particularly in the US, which imports around two-thirds of Belleek's output.

The Belleek International Collector's Society has 7,500 loyal members worldwide and many own hundreds of pieces of the trademark porcelain. You don't have to be an avid fan to enjoy the visitor centre, however – anyone can appreciate the craftsmanship on show. If you're keen to get collecting, you can make a start in the spacious showroom, which has some exclusive pieces on sale, but visit the museum first to brush up on the history of the products and admire the beautifully crafted pieces on display. In addition, fascinating half-hour tours take visitors around the production area: you'll witness working moulds being made and liquid slip being poured; watch the designers painstakingly shape the intricate floral designs; feel the heat in the kiln firing area; and finally admire the work of the artists as they delicately paint the porcelain. You can chat to some of the craftspeople, and you might even have the chance to get your hands dirty. There are numerous other Belleek Experiences available, check the website.

There are seven Blue Badge spaces directly in front of the visitor centre, and the accessible toilets are roomy. The tour route is completely level, with plenty of space for wheelchairs. The guides are keen for everyone to get the best possible view, and chairs are provided for visitors on foot to rest at many of the stop points. Wheelchairs are available, but they can be rather hard-seated – take a cushion along for comfort. Visitors with visual impairments are able to touch and feel some of the products made in the factory, ideally by prior arrangement.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Belleek Tearoom* serves good-quality lunches and afternoon tea on fine Belleek crockery. It's split-level, but you can specify that ground-floor seating is required. If you prefer to bring your own food, use one of the tables on the grassy area outside.

## 197 Ulster Museum, Belfast

**Address:** Botanic Gardens, Stranmillis Road BT9 5AB **Web:** <https://www.ulstermuseum.org> **Tel:** 028 90440000 **Hours:** Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; closed Mon except bank hols **Dates:** contact the museum for closing dates and times over Christmas **Entry:** free



Northern Ireland's treasure house of the past and present, the Ulster Museum is home to rich collections of art, history and the natural sciences, spanning everything from ancient relics to modern masterpieces.

Modern glass and steel walkways lead visitors into the art, history and science galleries, which tell the story of the evolution of Ireland, from Jurassic times through to recent political history. But it isn't just Irish history that's covered – must-see exhibits include the gleaming collection of gold coins and jewellery rescued from the Spanish Armada fleet shipwrecked on the Giant's Causeway; The Troubles and Beyond gallery which relates to contemporary history and represents the museum's wider social, cultural and economic history; seven galleries packed with spectacular art; and the ever-popular Peter the Polar Bear, whose home is the impressive Window on our World

gallery. The interactive Discovery Zones – nature, art and history – are particularly popular with children, and include a number of touch exhibits, such as a fossilised dinosaur egg, snake skin and shark teeth.

The majority of the building is suitable for wheelchair users, although there are a few areas that are inaccessible due to the listed status of the building. The visitor services staff will be available to advise on the most accessible routes. There are five Blue Badge parking spaces, and ramps lead through the automatic doors into the stunning atrium, where you'll find a low-level desk and cloakroom with lockers, and two passenger lifts. There are two further passenger lifts and three platform lifts located throughout the building. Ramps inside the building have handrails and level rest points. Most exhibits have low display panels and there are rest seats dotted around, with portable chairs available on request. A few wheelchairs are available to borrow, and there are plenty of accessible toilets on site. Quiet rooms and child-sized ear defenders are available – just ask a member of staff.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The spacious museum restaurant overlooks the lovely Botanic Gardens next door, or you can eat your own packed lunch in the picnic room on the ground floor if it's available or the weather keeps you from venturing outside.

## 198 Armagh Observatory and Planetarium, County Armagh

**Address:** College Hill, Armagh BT61 9DB **Web:** [www.armagh.space](http://www.armagh.space) **Tel:** 028 37523689 **Hours:** Tues–Sun 10am–5pm (last entry 4.30pm) **Dates:** check website for dates **Entry:** pre-booking is essential for shows; under 3's: free; [D]£8 [C]£8 [A]£9 [child]£6 [Con]£8 [Fam]£28 (2 adults, 3 children); exhibition only adults £4.50, exhibition only child £3.50

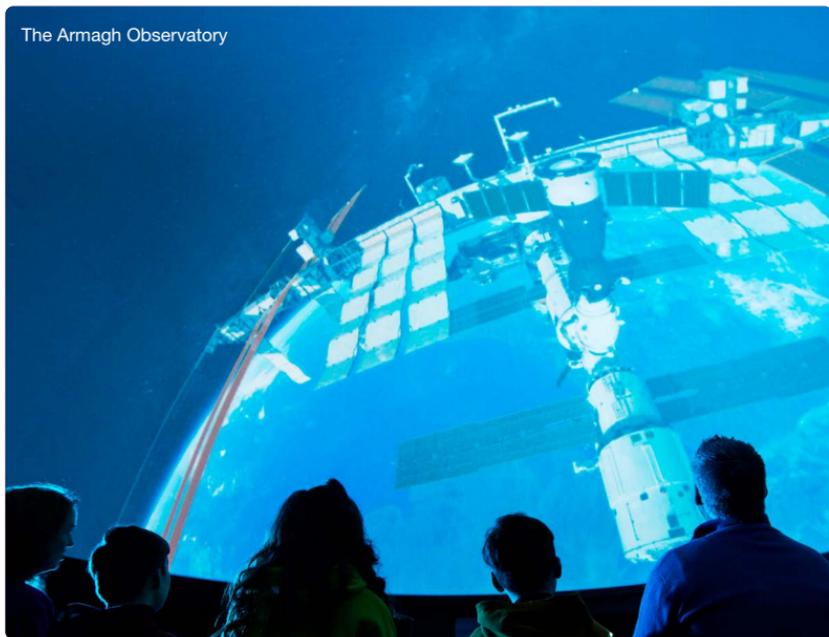


Lean back and take a visual journey across the night sky, then step outside and repeat your voyage through space on foot – at Ireland's leading astronomical education centre, you can do both and learn a great deal about our solar system in the process.

The domed ceiling of the planetarium is illuminated by a state-of-the-art digital-projection system and plays host to a changing programme of family-friendly shows (pre-booking advised), from close-up tours of the Red Planet to learning how to identify those constellations visible with the naked eye. Aside from the planetarium itself, there's an engaging exhibition area featuring, among other displays, a 4.5-billion-year-old meteorite. Both the planetarium and the nearby Armagh Observatory are located in the fourteen-acre Astropark, whose rolling green landscape reveals all sorts of educational models that complement the starry scenes you'll have seen inside. Wandering round the impressive scale model of the universe, for example, gives you an immediate grasp of the relative sizes of the eight planets, the distances between them and the supremacy of the sun.

The planetarium complex is straightforward to navigate, with ramped walkways approaching the main entrance and all areas of the ground floor, and two Blue Badge spaces nearby. A lift provides access to the first floor and there are designated viewing areas for up to eleven wheelchair users in the theatre itself. There's an accessible toilet on each floor and a Changing Places facility on the upper floor. Signage in the main

The Armagh Observatory



areas and the lift are given in Braille, and assistance dogs are welcome – bear in mind, though, that the special effects used in the theatre could be unsettling for dogs, and the revolving images overhead can take a little getting used to for human visitors too! Some screenings in the theatre are marked as Relaxed or Chilled, meaning smaller audiences and volume and light adjusted to the needs of the viewers. Both the reception and the theatre have an induction loop. A dedicated sensory room on the ground floor is packed with interactive gizmos, including an immersive suite where the walls and floor respond to movement; there are even space suits to dress up in. Lastly, paved walkways weave around the Astropark and there are plenty of places to sit down en route.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The on-site café serves a good range of hot and cold drinks and snacks (open Sat & Sun and school hols). In Armagh city, the snack bar and restaurant in the Market Place Theatre ([www.marketplacearmagh.com](http://www.marketplacearmagh.com)) are recommended, as is the *Charlemont Arms* ([www.charlemontarmshotel.com](http://www.charlemontarmshotel.com)) on English Street.

## 199 Navan Centre and Fort, County Armagh

**Address:** 81 Killylea Road BT60 4LD **Web:** [www.navancentre.com](http://www.navancentre.com) **Tel:** 028 37529644; textphone 18001 3752 9644 **Hours:** check website for opening times **Entry:** check website for admission charges



Known in Old Irish as Emain Macha, the Navan Fort is celebrated as the ancient royal seat of the Kings and Queens of Ulster. It is a significant site that's fascinating for archeologists but provides a stimulating step back in time for any visitor.

Here, children can learn about their ancestry and the history of Ireland, with Celtic costumes for them to dress up in. Outside the centre is a replica dwelling, showing how our Iron Age and early Christian-period ancestors lived (open April–Sept). Celtic characters bring all this to life – explaining and demonstrating the different aspects of day-to-day life, from farming to weaving. There are models of the weapons the inhabitants would have used, and it is even possible to taste the food they would have eaten. Indeed, this is a multi-sensory experience, with not only authentic sights and sounds, but smells too. The fort itself – a circular hill, thought to have been used for pagan rituals and ceremonies at one time – is a ten-minute walk away. Visitors are permitted to climb the hill – at the top, the views across the beautiful, green countryside are spectacular. There are daily, guided tours of the fort; times vary by season. Signs located around the perimeter of the fort give a brief history of the site.

There are five disabled parking bays in the car park, from where there's an easy access path to the visitor centre; there is one manual wheelchair available to borrow here, but you should book in advance in the busy summer months. To access the fort, there is a narrow gate to negotiate. The indoor exhibition areas are completely flat and accessible, with space for up to fifteen wheelchairs. While the surfaces are less smooth in the reconstructed dwelling, it is accessed via a gentle slope from the centre, and has an entrance and exit suitable for wheelchair users. To mount the fort, a steep climb and steps can't be avoided, so access isn't possible for everyone. There is, however, parking and a great vantage point at the bottom of the hill, limited to three cars at any time. The centre is a relaxed environment and its layout allows visitors to wander around at their own pace; Braille and large print documents are available. Staff have detailed autism-awareness training, and offer a full range of adaptive services for visitors with autism-spectrum disorders, including a pop-up tent and sensory bags. Staff also have training in accepting JAM cards, which allow people with a learning difficulty, autism or a communication barrier to tell others they need "Just A Minute" discreetly and easily.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ There is a coffee shop on site serving a range of meals, sandwiches and scones. For eating alfresco, there is a picnic area with tables and chairs outside the centre, and also plenty of grassy areas dotted around to relax on.

## 200 Silent Valley Nature Trail, County Down

**Address:** Silent Valley Reservoir, 74 Head Road, Kilkeel BT34 4PU **Web:** [www.niwater.com/silent-valley](http://www.niwater.com/silent-valley)  
**Tel:** 028 41762817 **Hours:** daily: April–Oct 10am–6.30pm; Nov–March 10am–4pm **Dates:** no closures  
**Entry:** [A]£1.60 [child]60p; annual pass £20; car £5, motorcycle £2.50, minibus £13, coach £35



The Silent Valley Nature Trail is a gorgeous, very accessible, loop of about a mile through the Kilkeel River Valley, amid the Mourne Mountains' spectacular scenery.

It begins at the car park a short distance south of the Silent Valley Reservoir, which was built in the 1920s to provide Belfast with a new water supply; part of the trail follows the old railway line that brought supplies and materials to the construction site. Gently undulating, with no steps, the route passes through heathland and woodland, and over the Kilkeel River on an accessible wooden bridge. Look out for the numerous

Silent Valley Nature Trail



dragonflies and damselflies by the riverside – you might be able to spot trout or salmon in the water too. In spring and summer there are lots of butterflies, as well as a good covering of wildflowers, including bluebells, dog violets and foxgloves. You can extend your journey to take in the reservoir itself, an impressive sight against a stunning backdrop of rippling hills. There's a children's play park, picnic area and other walking trails, with podcasts for walkers to download as they go into the wild.

The nature trail is part of Silent Valley Mountain Park, which has a fully accessible visitor centre operated by Northern Ireland Water. There is a car park with four accessible spaces close to the start of the trail, and there are two additional Blue Badge spaces near the café and the visitor centre. There's one fully accessible toilet in the car park and another at the visitor centre. The visitor centre at the beginning of the trail has social stories, photos and descriptions of what visitors can expect to see and do when they arrive here. The trail itself is level and constructed of light gravel and cinder; in theory it's an all-weather surface, but it can sometimes get muddy in wet weather. There are plenty of rest benches along the route. Spending time outside in green space among nature has proven benefits to mental health.

**FOOD & DRINK** ▶▶ The *Silent Valley Café* next to the visitor centre serves sandwiches and hot lunches, as well as cakes, teas and coffees, and there's also a sited picnic area by the river, on the trail, with wheelchair-accessible tables.

# Useful contacts

This chapter features Rough Guides' pick of the specialist organisations and independent companies that provide advice, assistance and services to help travellers with disabilities with holidays and day trips in Britain. **Getting around** has the lowdown on practical services for your day-to-day travel needs. **Travel advice and listings** flags up disability charities and organisations that provide travel and leisure advice and aid, plus specialist providers of accessible travel and holiday information. **Accommodation booking** includes companies that can book accessible accommodation, while **The arts** highlights useful arts-related organisations. Finally, **British tourism** details the national tourist boards and keepers of national heritage whose access information and advice stands out.

## Getting around

**Bus pass scheme, England** Everyone who is of state pension age plus disabled people are eligible for free off-peak travel on English local buses. Passes are available from the local council. Carers may be able to travel for free or pay a reduced fare if travelling with someone who holds a Disabled Person's Bus Pass. Further information is available at [www.gov.uk/apply-for-disabled-bus-pass](http://www.gov.uk/apply-for-disabled-bus-pass).

**Bus pass schemes, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland** Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland run independent bus pass schemes. In Wales, contact your local council for a pass, which allows travellers with disabilities to get around for free. A similar scheme is run by Transport Scotland at [www.transport.gov.scot](http://www.transport.gov.scot) and requires a National Entitlement card. In Northern Ireland, over 60s and travellers with disabilities are eligible for free or half-price travel: check [www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/free-and-concessionary-bus-and-rail-travel](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/free-and-concessionary-bus-and-rail-travel) for details.

**Carers UK** [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org) Carers UK provides expert information and advice as well as running carers' groups. The organisation champions the rights of carers and works with local authorities to improve carer services throughout the UK.

**Changing Places** [www.changing-places.org](http://www.changing-places.org); *England, Wales and Northern Ireland: 020 78032876; [changingplaces@muscular dystrophyuk.org](mailto:changingplaces@muscular dystrophyuk.org). Scotland: 01382 385154; [pamischangingplaces@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:pamischangingplaces@dundee.ac.uk)* This consortium campaigns for public toilets with non-standard access features, including hoists and height-adjustable changing benches. The website has a map of Changing Places toilet locations with opening hours.

**Disability Rights UK** [www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org); 0330 9950400; [enquiries@disabilityrightsuk.org](mailto:enquiries@disabilityrightsuk.org) Campaigning network of organisations and people with disabilities that runs the National RADAR Key Scheme for accessible toilets. They also publish a guide to the scheme listing details of the 9,000 UK toilets.

**Disabled Motoring UK** [www.disabledmotoring.org](http://www.disabledmotoring.org); 01508 489449; [info@disabledmotoring.org](mailto:info@disabledmotoring.org) A charity campaigning for improvements in access for disabled motorists, passengers and Blue Badge holders. Members receive a monthly magazine and can access information officers who advise on individual transport issues. Check the website for updates on disability schemes and legislation. Full membership costs £30, but online membership is free and includes the monthly newsletter.

**Disabled Persons Railcard** [www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk](http://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk); 0345 6050525; [textphone 0345 6010132](tel:0345 6010132); [disability@raildeliverygroup.com](mailto:disability@raildeliverygroup.com)

Concessionary railcard that costs £20 annually (or £54 for three years), but allows 1/3 off most standard and first-class rail fares for those with a disability (plus an adult companion, if train travel presents difficulties). Railcards can be linked to a London Oyster card for 1/3 off Oyster pay-as-you-go single fares and daily caps. The website also has a useful link for booking assistance with individual rail operators.

**Fuel Service** [www.fuelservice.org](http://www.fuelservice.org) This mobile app helps drivers with disabilities who can't leave their cars when refuelling, by notifying the station so someone can help. Not all stations are signed up, but the number is growing. Available for iPhone, Android and Windows Phone.

**Motability** [www.motability.co.uk](http://www.motability.co.uk); 0300 4564566; [minicom 0300 0370100](tel:0300 0370100) The Motability Scheme provides people with a disability with a new car, mobility scooter or powered wheelchair as part of an all-inclusive lease package. The scheme is open to anyone receiving the Higher Rate Mobility Component of the DLA, the Enhanced Rate Mobility Component of PIP, the Armed Forces Independence Payment, or War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement.

**National Express** [www.nationalexpress.com](http://www.nationalexpress.com); **Assisted Travel Team** 03717 818181; [addl@nationalexpress.com](mailto:addl@nationalexpress.com) National Express aims to run an accessible coach

network: adapted coaches have a wide entrance, lift access and level flooring. Full details of their Disabled Code of Practice are at [www.nationalexpress.com/en/help/accessibility](http://www.nationalexpress.com/en/help/accessibility).

**National Federation of Shopmobility UK** [www.shopmobilityuk.org/we-have-moved](http://www.shopmobilityuk.org/we-have-moved); 0798 4740271 Most towns and shopping centres have a Shopmobility scheme that lends manual wheelchairs, powered wheelchairs and mobility scooters. Schemes operate differently from place to place, with some charging and others free. The website has a searchable database of affiliated schemes.

**National Rail** [www.nationalrail.co.uk/on-the-train/accessible-train-travel-and-facilities](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/on-the-train/accessible-train-travel-and-facilities) Use the interactive Accessibility Map to quickly find information on accessibility for UK train stations and download useful apps.

**Transport for London (TFL)** [www.tfl.gov.uk](http://www.tfl.gov.uk) The TFL website provides transport accessibility information and a journey planner that allows you to find a route that suits your mobility requirements. TFL also produce a range of accessibility guides and maps, including audio and large-print versions, step-free tube maps and information on assisted transport services.

## Travel advice and listings

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**The 3H Foundation** [www.the3hfoundation.org.uk](http://www.the3hfoundation.org.uk) This charity makes it possible for people with disabilities (children and adults) to have a memorable and fulfilling holiday, enabling carers to take a break. They can provide grants to families on a low income with a disabled dependent for a modest holiday in the UK.

**AccessAble** [www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk); 01438 842710; [hello@AccessAble.co.uk](mailto:hello@AccessAble.co.uk) Exhaustive access information for restaurants, hotels, cinemas, tourist attractions, pubs and train stations etc. All attractions are researched

in person with invaluable detail on points such as the best transfer side in an accessible toilet. An incredibly useful website – the only downside is that they don't yet cover the whole country.

**Accessible Countryside** [www.accessiblecountryside.org.uk](http://www.accessiblecountryside.org.uk) A basic website with an extensive database of things to do, region by region, around the UK. As well as accessible walks, there is information on wheelchair and mobility-scooter hire and disabled holidays, plus advice and useful resources for new carers.

**Accessible Derbyshire** [www.accessiblederbyshire.org](http://www.accessiblederbyshire.org) Provides inspiration for places to go in Derbyshire, from scenic viewpoints to shopping centres, via farm shops, museums and gardens. It also details local accessible sporting activities, Changing Places toilet locations, and an overview of ways to travel around the county.

**Carers Trust** [www.carers.org](http://www.carers.org) Online support and advice for carers, including holiday tips for recharging the batteries.

**Contact** <https://contact.org.uk>; 0808 8083555 Publishes a guide to "Holidays, Play and Leisure" with advice on planning holidays and possible sources of funding. The guide can be downloaded for free from the website – search under "Advice & support", then "Resource library".

**Disability Horizons** [www.disabilityhorizons.com](http://www.disabilityhorizons.com) A disability lifestyle website. The great travel section covers practicalities, news, issues and reviews of places to visit.

**Disabled Ramblers** [www.disabledramblers.co.uk](http://www.disabledramblers.co.uk) Organises supported rambles throughout England and Wales, principally for those with mobility disabilities, as well as campaigning for better access to the countryside. Annual membership £25.

**Enable Magazine** [www.enablemagazine.co.uk](http://www.enablemagazine.co.uk) The leisure category of this online magazine covers UK travel news and also champions great places to visit.

**Euan's Guide** [www.euansguide.com](http://www.euansguide.com); 0131 5105106 Reviews of thousands of places

to visit in the UK and around the world, with searches that can be filtered by an impressive number of access facilities and requirements, as well as type of venue. The list is not comprehensive and the quality of detail per attraction varies, but you can submit your own review if you have something to add for a place you know well.

**GOV.UK** [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) Government website for public services with an area for people with disabilities. Contains background on the Blue Badge parking scheme and advice on other types of transport. The carers section includes information on funding for carers, disability day-care centres and help if you have a child with a disability.

**Guide Dogs** [www.guidedogs.org.uk](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk); 0118 9835555; [guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk) As well as providing trained guide dogs, this organisation helps people who are blind or partially sighted to enjoy the same freedom of movement as everyone else. Its young people's department provides services and organises days out for children with visual impairments at many attractions in the UK.

**Mobility and Access – The Outdoor Guide** [www.theoutdoorguide.co.uk](http://www.theoutdoorguide.co.uk) This website dedicated to walking, fronted by Julia Bradbury, provides inspiration, information and maps for routes across the UK. A selection of walks good for wheels have been tested and reviewed by chair-user Debbie North. There are also ideas for accessible accommodation near walks.

**Mumsnet** [www.mumsnet.com](http://www.mumsnet.com) With a range of very active forums on topics as diverse as special needs and style and beauty, as well as regular articles, advice, blogs, reviews and campaigns, Mumsnet is one of the web's biggest portals for parents.

**National Autistic Society** [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk) Features some advice on planning holidays and days out for those with autism or who have a child with autism. The extensive Autism Services Directory can be filtered by region.

**Phototrails** [www.phototrails.org](http://www.phototrails.org) This website provides photo tours of walking routes in England and Scotland. It also has detail on trail lengths, gradients and facilities en route, and all trails have been awarded an accessibility rating. Each map route has been annotated with the locations of potential obstructions and facilities, and these map views can be filtered to suit the needs of the viewer.

**Revitalise** [www.revitalise.org.uk](http://www.revitalise.org.uk); 0303 3030145 National charity providing essential breaks with nurse-led support in a holiday style for people with disabilities and carers.

**RNIB** [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk); 0303 1239999 Advice on leisure activities and holidays for those with visual impairments, including guidance on museums, galleries, shopping, cinemas, theatre trips and spectator sports. They also provide advice on finding accommodation.

**Simply Emma** [www.simplyemma.co.uk](http://www.simplyemma.co.uk) Travel and disability blog written from a wheelchair user's perspective. Features accommodation and event reviews, days out and more.

## Accommodation booking

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**Disabled Access Holidays** [www.disabledaccessholidays.com](http://www.disabledaccessholidays.com); 0800 6226000 An online travel agent, with a decent amount of accessible accommodation in the UK.

**Disabled Holidays** [www.disabledholidays.com](http://www.disabledholidays.com); 0161 8049898 This holiday specialist has a user-friendly website that allows accommodation searches to be filtered by access need and region – there are plenty of UK options to choose from. They can help with bookings for children and have a tips page on travelling with a child with autism.

**Sykes Holiday Cottages** [www.sykescottages.co.uk/accessible-holiday-cottages.html](http://www.sykescottages.co.uk/accessible-holiday-cottages.html) A good directory for booking accessible holiday accommodation and supported breaks, with lots of UK places.

## The arts

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**Hynt** [www.hynt.co.uk](http://www.hynt.co.uk); [info@hynt.co.uk](mailto:info@hynt.co.uk) An Arts Council of Wales initiative providing specific access information to plan a theatre trip in Wales. Cardholders are entitled to a free ticket for their carer at all the participating venues – the list is not comprehensive, but growing. Upcoming performances can be filtered by access need, including relaxed, captioned and dementia-friendly shows.

**SeatPlan** [www.seatplan.com](http://www.seatplan.com) This website provides a decent level of access information for many of the UK's major theatres. Each venue has a seating plan (with some photos of views from seats) and an Access section.

**Signed Culture** [www.signedculture.org.uk](http://www.signedculture.org.uk); 01925 710561 An organisation promoting the use of BSL in the arts. The "What's On" page has an eclectic, but somewhat limited, list of events.

**Stagetext** [www.stagetext.org](http://www.stagetext.org); 020 73770540 A charity providing captioning and live subtitling services to theatres and arts venues. The "What's On" page can be searched by region or date.

**Vocal Eyes** [www.vocaleyeyes.co.uk](http://www.vocaleyeyes.co.uk); 020 73751043 A directory of audio-described events at theatres and museums around the UK.

## British tourism

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**Discover Northern Ireland** [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com) The Discover Northern Ireland website has suggestions for days out and itineraries, plus lists of events and festivals in the various different regions – plus, of course, links to accommodation and activities.

**English Heritage** [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk); 0370 3331181 Owners of more than four hundred historic properties, English Heritage operates an Access for All policy. Access details for many of the

properties are available on the website: click on “visit”, then “places” and search for properties. You can filter for wheelchair accessibility, too.

### **Experience Community CIC**

[www.experiencecommunity.co.uk](http://www.experiencecommunity.co.uk) Not-for-profit organisation that provides video guides, photos and information about walks and leisure activities in Yorkshire for people with disabilities and the wider community. They also organise rambles and training sessions using specialist equipment.

**National Parks** [www.nationalparks.uk/visit-us](http://www.nationalparks.uk/visit-us) The Access for All area on this website covers trails, Trammer hire, parking and other facilities in fifteen national parks.

**National Trust** [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk); 0344 8001895; [enquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk)

Carers of visitors with disabilities get free entry to National Trust properties, with an annual Essential Companion card. There is an Access Guide with detailed information for visitors with disabilities, and the website has an increasing level of detail about each property, with more and more attractions providing downloadable access statements. Predictably with heritage sites, certain properties have some inaccessible areas, but the dedicated Access for All team is working to make improvements. For particular needs provision, call the site ahead of your visit.

### **The National Trust for Scotland**

[www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk); 0131 385 7490 The largest conservation charity in Scotland looks after myriad places to visit, from castles to

coastlines. All their attractions have a basic level of access information on the website.

### **Visit Britain** [www.visitbritain.com](http://www.visitbritain.com)

Under the “Plan your trip” drop-down on the main menu of the website, there’s an option for “Accessible Travel in Britain” where you’ll find links to guides for accessible travel in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

### **Visit England** [www.visitengland.com](http://www.visitengland.com)

The English tourist board runs an Access for All scheme on their website (go to “Info & Advice”) which includes mini-guides to short breaks across the country and practical information. Their National Accessible Scheme rates the accessibility of accommodation in England. It also helps tourism businesses make improvements in access and the level of information available to visitors.

### **Visit Scotland** [www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com); [info@visitscotland.com](mailto:info@visitscotland.com)

The Scottish Tourism Board runs a quality-assurance scheme for disabled access. The accommodation section of the website has an “Accessible accommodation” page, where you can filter searches with an impressive list of access options.

### **Visit Wales** [www.visitwales.com](http://www.visitwales.com); 0333 0063001; [enquiries.wales@gov.wales](mailto:enquiries.wales@gov.wales)

The website of the Welsh tourist board links through to a wide variety of accommodation and activities. Although you can’t filter the listings by provision for visitors with disabilities, there are accessibility guides for each region within the “Destination” section. These list places to visit, things to do, places to stay and helpful links.

# Picture credits

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# YOUR TAILOR-MADE TRIP STARTS HERE

## Tailor-made trips and unique adventures crafted by local experts

Rough Guides has been inspiring travellers with lively and thought-provoking guidebooks for more than 35 years. Now we're linking you up with selected local experts to craft your dream trip. They will put together your perfect itinerary and book it at local rates.

Don't follow the crowd – find your own path.

## HOW ROUGHGUIDES.COM/TRIPS WORKS



### STEP 1

Pick your dream destination, tell us what you want and submit an enquiry.



### STEP 2

Fill in a short form to tell your local expert about your dream trip and preferences.



### STEP 3

Our local expert will craft your tailor-made itinerary. You'll be able to tweak and refine it until you're completely satisfied.



### STEP 4

Book online with ease, pack your bags and enjoy the trip! Our local expert will be on hand 24/7 while you're on the road.

# BENEFITS OF PLANNING AND BOOKING AT ROUGHGUIDES.COM/TRIPS



## PLAN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH LOCAL EXPERTS

Rough Guides' English-speaking local experts are hand-picked, based on their experience in the travel industry and their impeccable standards of customer service.



## SAVE TIME AND GET ACCESS TO LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

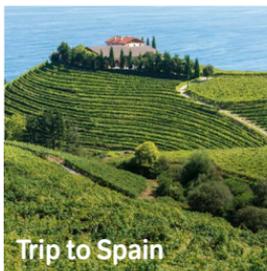
When a local expert plans your trip, you save time and money when you book, even during high season. You won't be charged for using a credit card either.



## MAKE TRAVEL A BREEZE: BOOK WITH PEACE OF MIND

Enjoy stress-free travel when you use Rough Guides' secure online booking platform. All bookings come with a money-back guarantee.

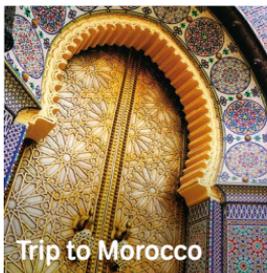
## WHAT DO OTHER TRAVELLERS THINK ABOUT ROUGH GUIDES TRIPS?



Trip to Spain

This Spain tour company did a fantastic job to make our dream trip perfect. We gave them our travel budget, told them where we would like to go, and they did all of the planning. Our drivers and tour guides were always on time and very knowledgeable. The hotel accommodations were better than we would have found on our own. Only one time did we end up in a location that we had not intended to be in. We called the 24 hour phone number, and they immediately fixed the situation.

Don A, USA



Trip to Morocco

Our trip was fantastic! Transportation, accommodations, guides – all were well chosen! The hotels were well situated, well appointed and had helpful, friendly staff. All of the guides we had were very knowledgeable, patient, and flexible with our varied interests in the different sites. We particularly enjoyed the side trip to Tangier! Well done! The itinerary you arranged for us allowed maximum coverage of the country with time in each city for seeing the important places.

Sharon, USA



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ROUGHGUIDES.COM/TRIPS





**THIS TENTH EDITION** of the *Rough Guide to Accessible Britain* contains over 200 recommendations for fun days out for travellers with disabilities and their families. Detailed reviews, written by people with disabilities, include practical advice and recommendations for where to eat and drink. Covers a wide range of indoor and outdoor attractions, from Wells Cathedral to High Lodge Thetford Forest and the Lakeland Motor Museum to Parliament Hill Lido. Download the eBook or read it online: [motability.co.uk/accessibleguide](http://motability.co.uk/accessibleguide)



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