



THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

ACCESSIBLE BRITAIN



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Visit: [motability.co.uk/news](https://www.motability.co.uk/news)

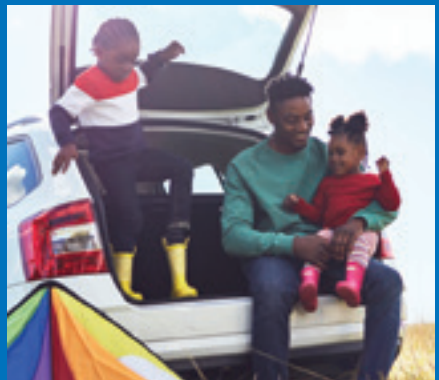
Find out more about the Motability Scheme at our One Big Day events!

These fun, family events are a chance for visitors to explore a range of cars, scooters and powered wheelchairs and to find out more about the Motability Scheme, all in one place. Free prize draws, refreshments and children's entertainment mean the One Big Day events are a great day out for the whole family.

To find out more about the One Big Day events, visit: [motability.co.uk/onebigday](https://www.motability.co.uk/onebigday)

If you can't make it to a One Big Day event, why not attend one of the many Motability dealer events? These take place all year, all around the country.

Visit: [motability.co.uk/events](https://www.motability.co.uk/events)



If you receive the **Higher Rate Mobility Component of the Disability Living Allowance**, the **Enhanced Rate of the Mobility Component of Personal Independence Payment**, the **Armed Forces Independence Payment**, or the **War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement**, you can exchange it to lease a new car, scooter or powered wheelchair through the Motability Scheme, making trips to coastal areas, castles and national parks so much easier.

Click on any region to go to that chapter



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Click on any chapter to go straight to it

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Foreword



Television presenter, programme-maker and author, Chris Packham began exploring the wildlife around him as soon as he could crawl. He is passionate about the environment and has the honour of being a proactive representative of some notable conservation charities.

Chris has had the good fortune to travel widely and he has explored many habitats from Antarctic islands, rainforests, deserts, the Everest range and the deep oceans. In his rare moments of spare time, Chris enjoys getting out into the natural surroundings near his home in the New Forest with his dog, Scratchy.

Welcome to the seventh edition of *The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain*, brought to you in collaboration with Rough Guides and Motability Operations. It's been ten years since the first guide was published and this edition is set to be the best yet, with even more useful information, for even more people.

As a life-long advocate of exploring the great outdoors I found it an easy decision to get involved with *The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain*. I'm a firm believer in the many benefits of nature, including its positive effects on mental health, and this guide helps people of all abilities find a day out that suits them. I'm passionate about the habitats around us and the guide includes lots of ideas for trips to some of the UK's most beautiful countryside, as well as venues in more urban areas.

The guide is packed with more than two hundred attractions, hints and tips for enjoying a great day out and, to celebrate its tenth birthday, there are thirty exciting new entries. For obvious reasons, a couple of my real favourites are RSPB Bempton Cliffs and the Hawk Conservancy Trust, and there are lots of other options for inclusive days out discovering the great outdoors. But I'm also inspired to try some more adventurous activities and, with the guide's useful advice, I encourage you to do the same.

Thanks go to the National Autistic Society whose active participation with this edition has helped to make it even more inclusive, ensuring the team of reviewers were equipped with the knowledge to include detail relevant to people with a range of different cognitive conditions.

For me, sensory overload is a constant distraction and that's one element of living with Asperger's that impacts me when trying to plan a day out. So having a guide like this, which takes these elements into account, is invaluable. I'll be working my way through the guide, starting with the venues I can visit with my best friend, my dog Scratchy. Wherever you start, have a great day out!

Chris Packham

About this book

Designed to be good to read and easy to use, this updated seventh edition of *The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain* is filled with **inspirational and practical advice** to help you plan your 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 details about facilities for disabled visitors, plus ideas for places to eat on site or nearby.

In each chapter, 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 look 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 it's always a good idea to call ahead 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.

Symbols used

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

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

If you have any thoughts on this guide, or would like to order an alternative version, such as Braille, please email accessibleguide@motabilityoperations.co.uk.

AUTHOR PICKS

Our team of authors have been hard at work travelling around the country reviewing attractions, to give you a detailed and accurate account of more than 180 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.



Mark Davidson

“Living in London, I have so many wonderful attractions to choose from but one of my favourites is the London Transport Museum. It takes you back in time to an era of horse-drawn trams, from the earliest Hackney carriages to mock-ups of an underground carriage. Being indoors it’s also an ideal attraction for the inclement British weather!”



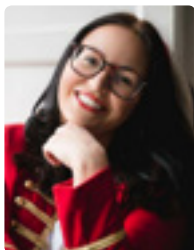
Craig Grimes

“I love heading outdoors and getting as close to nature as I can. This can be difficult for disabled people, so it’s great when nature reserves consider our needs and provide suitable facilities. The staff and team behind RSPB Bempton Cliffs in Yorkshire have worked really hard to get the right balance of access and conservation and have succeeded in creating the UK’s most amazing seabird cliff colony experience.”



Lucinda Hallett

“I really loved visiting the National Maritime Museum in Falmouth. Living in Cornwall has made me passionate about the area and really appreciate how important the ocean is down here, so when I got the chance to learn more about how the sea has an impact on Cornwall I was thrilled. Everyone was incredibly accommodating and it was a wonderful day out with so much to enjoy.”



Carly Jones

“My favourite attraction so far has to be Windsor Castle, as I’m a real patriot. Also as an autism advocate, I have many great autism colleagues from the US who love visiting our royal households when they travel to the UK, so it was a real honour to be able to review and recommend Windsor Castle. I particularly love St George’s Chapel, which has to be the most beautiful church I have ever visited.”



Andy Macleod

“One of my favourite visits was the Royal Yacht Britannia in Edinburgh. It appeals to royalists, naval enthusiasts, engineering buffs and people who just like being on the water. Accessible from bilge to bridge and bow to stern, it shows how the royals and crew lived and travelled. That a sixty-odd-year-old ship has been made accessible for all abilities is testament to the thought that has gone into it. Don't miss the *Royal Deck Tearoom* – it's superb!”



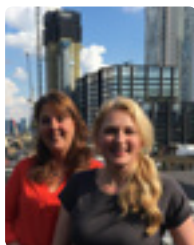
Samantha Nott

“As a family we love spending days out visiting historical sites, and my two sons particularly enjoyed their outing to the Roman Baths in the beautiful city of Bath. Everything at the site captured their imaginations, from the projections and CGI reconstructions showing how the Romans lived to tasting the spa water. A huge amount of information is available in many different formats, so that the history of the baths is really accessible to everyone.”



Jonathan Rackham

“I liked visiting Wroxham Broads Tours in Norfolk because it was something new and rural with a good sense of history attached. Broads Tours were very welcoming and really seemed to be looking for ways to improve the services they provide. I particularly liked the way that they support special occasions for disabled people.”



Gillian Scotford and Jane Carver

Co-founders of Accessible Derbyshire (www.accessiblederbyshire.org), Gillian and Jane say, “We are delighted to contribute to *The Rough Guide to Accessible Britain* and to share our experiences of a few of the places that provide a warm and inclusive welcome. The provision of information, facilities and services for visitors with autism, such as sensory stories, quiet spaces and a more understanding, flexible approach from staff, has been particularly good to see on our travels. Our favourite place is Sandcastle Waterpark in Blackpool, which is absolutely dedicated to being accessible for all. What particularly sets them apart is their friendly, understanding and helpful staff who really do go the extra mile to provide a warm welcome to everyone. As parents of children with autism we know how challenging trips out can be, so it's great to find venues that make a special effort.”

FAMILY HIGHLIGHTS



London Transport Museum

Anderton Boat Lift (Northwest, p.141)

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.198) An award-winning site combining a farm, adventure park, vintage funfair and zoo on a two-hundred-acre site near the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.

London Transport Museum (London, p.25)

A fascinating, hands-on introduction to London's transport systems, with excellent access throughout.

Monkey World (Southwest, p.74) A fantastic child-friendly monkey sanctuary where you can visit more than 250 primates in a spacious environment.

The Warner Bros. Studio Tour – The

Making of Harry Potter (Southeast, p.47)

Wander around the fabulous sets from the Harry Potter films, including Diagon Alley and Hogwarts' Great Hall.



Monkey World

HERITAGE HIGHLIGHTS

Abbotsford House (Scotland, p.184) Attractive grounds, an ultra-modern accessible visitor centre and the atmospheric former home of Sir Walter Scott make Abbotsford House a great place to visit.

IWM Duxford (E. Midlands & E. Anglia, p.99) Britain's finest museum of military aviation has masses to see, and access requirements have been carefully considered.

Navan Centre and Fort (N. Ireland, p.215) An interactive approach to history is on offer at Navan, the ancient seat of the Kings and Queens of Ulster.

Royal Shakespeare Company (W. Midlands & West Country, p.120) After extensive renovations, access to one of Britain's finest arts organisations is now better than ever.

St Paul's Cathedral (London, p.24) Another venue fresh from restoration, Sir Christopher Wren's iconic masterpiece now has lift access to the crypt and excellent facilities for those with sensory impairments.

St Paul's Cathedral



Navan Centre and Fort



FREE HIGHLIGHTS



Buckfast Abbey



Scottish National Portrait Gallery

Portstewart Strand



Brockholes Nature Reserve (Northwest, p.134) The extraordinary floating Visitor Village is just the start of a varied and accessible outdoor adventure at this nature reserve.

Buckfast Abbey (Southwest, p.77) With beautiful gardens by the River Dart, this magnificent and fascinating monastery celebrates its millennium this year.

Horniman Museum and Gardens (London, p.38) John Horniman's collection of curiosities and anthropological eccentricities is on display near the site of his former south London mansion, set in beautiful gardens.

National Galleries Scotland (Scotland, p.181) 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.204) 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.



Horniman Museum

Brockholes Nature Reserve



ACTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Celtic Quest Coasteering (Wales, p.194)

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.176)

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

iFLY Indoor Skydiving (Northwest, p.136) Staff are able to help individuals with a range of disabilities to experience the thrill of freefall, in the comfort of an indoor centre.

Lee Valley White Water Centre (Southeast, p.44)

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

Sandcastle Waterpark (Northwest, p.133)

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



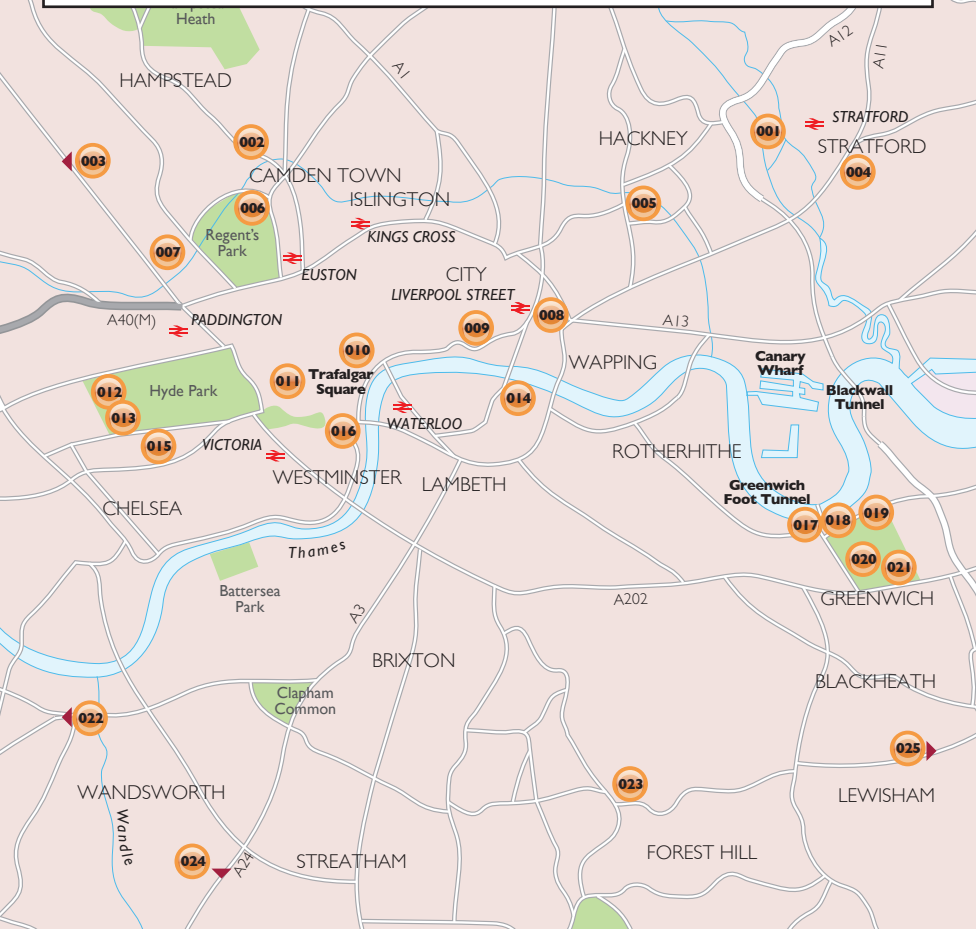
Lee Valley White Water Centre

iFLY Indoor Skydiving



London

- 001 Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park
- 002 The Roundhouse
- 003 Wembley Stadium
- 004 Discover Children's Story Centre
- 005 V&A Museum of Childhood
- 006 ZSL London Zoo and Regent's Park
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- 016 Westminster Abbey
- 017 Greenwich to Westminster River Trip
- 018 Cutty Sark
- 019 Old Royal Naval College
- 020 National Maritime Museum and Royal Observatory
- 021 Greenwich Park
- 022 WWT London Wetland Centre
- 023 Horniman Museum and Gardens
- 024 The Polka Theatre
- 025 Eltham Palace



001 Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

Address: Stratford E20 **Web:** www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk **Tel:** 0800 0722110 **Hours:** Park, no closures; venues vary by event **Entry:** park free; spectator prices vary by event



On the site of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, which re-opened to the public in April 2014, is a triumph of regeneration, fashioned out of four hundred acres of derelict, polluted wasteland. Visitors to the park can now enjoy beautiful green spaces, tranquil waterways, children's play areas and cafés, as well as top sporting venues, arts and events, and spectacular views from the 376 foot-high ArcelorMittal Orbit sculpture and observation tower, which is home to the world's tallest and longest tunnel slide.

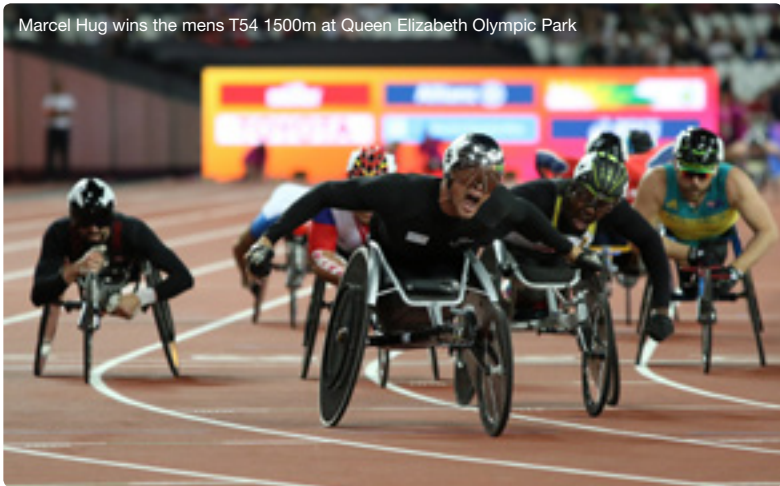
Located in Stratford, East London, the park is spread over a large site, bisected from north to south by the River Lea: the southern sector is home to the London Stadium, London Aquatics Centre and ArcelorMittal Orbit, while the northern part houses the Copper Box Arena, Lee Valley VeloPark and Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre. Many of the former Olympic sporting venues – including the main stadium, velodrome and London Aquatics Centre – are used by sports clubs, athletes and the local community. The Copper Box Arena, for example, is now London's third-largest arena and can seat up to 7500 people for events such as Premiership basketball, pop concerts and comedy, while the stadium has hosted major sports including the IAAF World Athletics Championships and World Para Athletics Championships in 2017, and the Rugby World Cup in 2015. It is also the national competition venue for UK Athletics and home to West Ham United football club. The London Aquatics Centre hosts events and galas as well as public swimming sessions, while the velodrome at Lee Valley VeloPark can seat 6000 to watch major cycling competitions. After the London 2012 Olympics, the VeloPark was remodelled to make it accessible to riders of all abilities – the BMX track boasts a starter ramp the height of a double-decker bus and a 360-metre course, and there are also five miles of mountain-bike trails, all of which are open to the public. Disabled parking is available at the VeloPark and there is disabled seating in the velodrome. The track and road circuit run disability cycling programmes: check the website (www.visitleevalley.org.uk/velopark) for details of these.

Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre has four indoor and six outdoor tennis courts, as well as two of the best hockey pitches in the country. It hosted the Paralympic wheelchair tennis in 2012 and is set to host a number of prestigious events in the future, including the Women's Hockey World Cup in 2018. All the doors within the centre, including the step-free main entrance, are extra wide and designed for wheelchair access with changing rooms, toilets and showers all specially designed for accessibility. A fully accessible lift also provides access to the upstairs clubhouse and viewing area.

Served by Stratford and Stratford International stations, the park is easy to get to from all over London, with nine overground and tube links, all of which are accessible. If you prefer to drive, there are spaces for Blue Badge holders throughout the park as well as spaces at the vast Westfield shopping centre, next to Stratford International Station.

Continuing the legacy of the London 2012 Paralympic Games, the park has been designed from scratch to be totally inclusive and with the highest standards of accessibility

Marcel Hug wins the mens T54 1500m at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park



for visitors and employees. All around the park you'll find good step-free access and hard-standing surfaces, accessible Blue Badge parking close to each individual venue and excellent accessible facilities.

A mobility service is operational on selected days of the week to help disabled and older visitors get around, along with facilities to support people with a visual impairment. This needs to be booked in advance via the park's website. The venues themselves have been specially designed for wheelchair users and non-disabled companions to get unobstructed views as well as having seating that is easy to get to for disabled and older people.

002 The Roundhouse

Address: Chalk Farm Road, London NW1 8EH **Web:** www.roundhouse.org.uk **Email:** access@roundhouse.org.uk **Tel:** 0300 6789222 **Hours:** box office and Blue Badge booking Tue–Fri 9am–9pm, Sat–Mon 9am–5pm **Dates:** check website for dates **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. 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, 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 25-year-olds in the Paul Hamlyn Roundhouse Studios: courses include street-circus skills, 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.

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 have low counters. You'll find accessible toilets opposite the lift (too small for powered scooters) on all three levels of the building. There are dedicated wheelchair spaces in both the Sackler Space 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. 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. Braille/tactile signs have been installed throughout the venue. There are also two wheelchairs available for use. Autism-friendly "relaxed" performances are held for some productions (check the website for details), with lower lighting and music and a chill-out space for those who may need to leave the performance. Staff have been trained in autism awareness and the duty manager can organize queue-jumping and other help.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The adjoining *Made in Camden* bar/restaurant (020 74248495, www.madeincamden.com) offers a stylish, accessible setting to grab a drink or light snack.

003 Wembley Stadium

Address: Wembley HA9 0WS **Web:** www.wembleystadium.com; car parking www.gotocsp.com/bookings **Email:** wembley.tours@wembleystadium.com **Tel:** 0844 9808001; disabled bookings 0845 4581966; tour parking 020 89002405 **Hours:** check website for events **Entry:** varies according to event and seat **Tours:** Pay on day [D]£20 [C]free [A]£20 [5–16s]£12 [Con]£12; Pre-booked [D]£18 [C]free [A]£18 [5–16s]£11 [Con]£11 [Fam]£50; parking £6 for up to 6 hours.



It's the colour of the pitch – such a bright green against the red and grey of the stadium – that hits you as you wheel out to one of the three-hundred-plus wheelchair spaces around the ground. Visitors never fail to be awestruck and, arguably, wheelchair users can choose from the best seats in the house.

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 press room, footballers' dressing rooms, royal boxes and the players' tunnel. You can even have your picture taken with a replica FA Cup, or sitting in the managers' seat in the press room. Throughout, you'll be made to feel enormously welcome by staff, who are justly proud of the stadium's accessibility. Lifts and disabled toilets abound, turnstiles, food and merchandise counters are at the right level and the surface is car-showroom smooth. Induction loops are everywhere and, if you're here for a match, you can listen to commentary delivered via headsets available from access points. A free app for Apple and Android devices gives useful stadium and travel information.

Blue Badge parking is available in the stadium's two car parks (book at least three days in advance). If you're arriving at Wembley Park tube station, note that not all carriages provide level access: ask for guidance on earlier station platforms. The journey to the stadium is straightforward, and on match days the police will direct you via

ramps to Wembley Way. Information on dial-a-ride and shuttle buses is available from the website. Once you've reached the stadium, you should be fine.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The on-site restaurants are only available to Club Wembley members; for everyone else, there are pricey burger and pie outlets – buy before you arrive!

004 Discover Children's Story Centre

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

Hours: Daily 10am–5pm **Entry:** [D]£4.50 [C]free [A]£6.50 [2–16s]£6.50 [Con]£5.50 [Fam]£22 [Family concession]£18



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 fun, which usually is 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, 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. On Saturday mornings Mighty Mega is a free club for children with special education needs, aged five to eleven, and their siblings to take part in arts, crafts, stories and songs.

Access around the centre is excellent: there is a step-free entrance, a lift to all floors, a ramp into the Story Garden and an accessible toilet 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.



Discover Children's Story Centre

Some areas of the Story World have been designed to be quieter and less sensory, and ear defenders are available. There's full access information online including details of the hearing loop, wheelchair access and information about the centre's multi-sensory exhibits. 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 now 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 ten-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 down a monster's tongue – it is not often that happens!

005 V&A Museum of Childhood

Address: Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9PA **Web:** www.museumofchildhood.org.uk **Tel:** 020 89835200 **Hours:** Daily 10am–5.45pm **Dates:** closed 24, 25 and 26 December **Entry:** Free



In a large hall with two mezzanine floors, the V&A Museum of Childhood is an impressive space and great for children to explore. It offers a nostalgic look at childhood through the ages, with displays that families can enjoy together. Exhibits range from the UK's largest collection of dolls, through games, models, paintings, teddy bears and clothes to children's furniture, and look at the ways childhood has changed over the generations. The museum also hosts interesting exhibitions on subjects such as children's authors, art and photography, with activities including craft workshops and story-telling held daily.

Access to the main entrance is up a gentle slope, which leads to a hallway where wheelchairs can be borrowed. The information desk has a hearing loop and can provide help for visitors with disabilities. The permanent displays on the two mezzanine levels are accessible by lift, and there's also a ramp from the ground floor to the first mezzanine level. The exhibits are well spaced so there's room to move around, though some of the text is quite small and the signage is not particularly clear: while there are some hands-on interactive areas, they are limited. The museum is open plan and can be noisy as the sounds from the café below circulate around the exhibits, which may be challenging for those on the autism spectrum. There is, however, a quiet area in the basement where visitors can eat their own lunch, and a small sensory area on the first mezzanine. The website has a helpful guide to prepare autistic children for their visit, and a backpack containing resources (ear defenders, toys, etc) can be borrowed on a first-come, first-served basis – there is only one, however, so it may not always be available. The disabled toilet in the basement is clean, and accessible by lift: ask staff for the RADAR key. The car park behind the museum is accessed via Victoria Park Square: phone in advance to book a disabled parking space, and staff will escort you into the building via the rear entrance.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The ground-floor cafe serves a good range of basic lunches. There's an extensive children's menu, including packed lunches, and prices are reasonable at around £4–5 for a children's hot meal and £7–8 for an adult hot meal.

006 ZSL London Zoo and Regent's Park

London Zoo: **Address:** Regent's Park NW1 4RY **Web:** www.zsl.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 [D]£22 [C]free [A]£24 [3–15s]£17.50 [Con]£20 [Fam]10% discount, online only; prices change seasonally, so check website.



Regent's Park: **Address:** NW1 4NR **Web:** www.royalpark.org.uk **Tel:** 0300 0612300 **Hours:** opens daily 5am, closing time varies according to season **Dates:** no closures **Entry:** free; parking free with Blue Badge for up to 4 hours, otherwise £2.40 per hour Mon–Sat, £1.40 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 seventy 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 Gorilla Kingdom, perennial favourites the giraffes and the Tiger



ZSL London Zoo

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.

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 at making itself accessible, considering how many listed buildings it has – ramps 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 (book ahead). There are several accessible toilets around the site. The zoo is less busy early in the morning and last thing at night; book online for fast-track entrance.

Regent's Park is probably best-known for its Open Air Theatre that puts on productions from May to September. Disabled patrons and their carers are eligible for discounts in the theatre (call the box office on 0844 8264242; www.openairtheatre.com), and wheelchair spaces are available. Assistance dogs are welcome and there's a hearing loop system 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 which 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. There are Blue Badge parking bays at various points around the perimeter road and accessible toilets within each toilet block.

FOOD & DRINK ►► The on-site, fully accessible *Terrace Restaurant* at ZSL London Zoo offers a range of hearty meals and sandwiches in a spacious environment; alternatively, find a nice spot for a picnic on one of the lawns outside.

007 Lord's Cricket Ground

Address: Marylebone Cricket Club, London NW8 8QN **Web:** www.lords.org **Tel:** ticket office 020 74321000; tour 020 76168595 **Hours:** tours hourly 10am–3pm; call for information **Dates:** check website for match dates; no tours on or immediately before major matches. **Entry:** tour [D]£18 [C]free [A]£24 [5–15s]£15 [Students with ID] £15 [Con]£18 [Fam]£50



Lord's Cricket Ground is the place where every batsman 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 trophy – a collection of paintings, photos and memorabilia celebrates four hundred years of cricketing 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 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 can be accessed without any problem, though the upper floor of the museum, which is home to the legendary Ashes Urn, is reached by stairs only – if you ask, someone will bring down a replica of the Ashes Urn and tell its story. For those attending a match, there are four wheelchair areas, two of which are covered, and audio commentary is provided via headsets available from stewards. There are six accessible toilets around the ground – ask a steward for a RADAR key – and a fully accessible Mobiloo toilet at international matches. The dedicated Accessibility Manager can be contacted on accessibility@mcc.org.uk. 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.

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 Spitalfields Market

Address: Brushfield Street E1 6AA **Web:** www.spitalfields.co.uk; www.oldspitalfieldsmarket.com
Tel: 020 73752963; Old Spitalfields Market 020 3771496 **Hours:** markets Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 9am–5pm; shops & restaurants open daily, times vary **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **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 – which underwent a major refurbishment in 2003 – offers an appealing blend of historical charm and contemporary chic. There's a changing rota of traders throughout the week: antiques and vintage goods on Thursdays; fashion, arts and crafts on Fridays; the Saturday Style market, 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 shops and cafés, and busy passages between stalls at peak time – Sundays in particular can get crammed, so arrive as early as you can to avoid the main throng. You'll find the disabled 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), on the corner of Hanbury Street, is handy for the market, and has level access and delicious food.

009 St Paul's Cathedral

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

Hours: Mon–Sat 8.30am–4pm; galleries Mon–Sat 9.30am–4.15pm. **Dates:** open for worship only on Sun; may close at short notice for special services, check in advance **Entry:** [D]£18 [C]free [A]£18 [6–17s]£8 [Con]£16 [Fam]£44; 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, following a massive restoration project that took fifteen years and £40 million to complete.

Wheelchair users should use the south entrance to the cathedral, which is accessed via a lift. 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. The lift marked with a wheelchair symbol only serves the Cathedral floor and crypt, so 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, there are guided touch tours (book in advance) and audio description guides can be provided. Braille and large-print Orders of Service are also available. Several members of staff are BSL-trained and there's a touch-screen multimedia BSL-signed tour, as well as an induction loop in the cathedral. There are well-equipped disabled toilets in the crypt. The cathedral has no car park, but registered taxis can drop visitors very near the entrance. Finally, it's worth noting that admission queues can be very long, so it's a good idea to buy tickets online in advance, which are cheaper and allow you to use the fast-track check-in desks after security.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ A small selection of light lunches (around £8) are available in the café in the crypt, which is fully accessible.

010 London Transport Museum

Address: Covent Garden Piazza, London WC2E 7BB **Web:** www.ltmuseum.co.uk **Tel:** General Enquiries 020 7379 6344; Bookings (10am–5.30pm) 020 75657298; Mincicom 020 75657310 **Hours:** Daily 10am–6pm; last entrance 5.15pm **Dates:** 24–26 Dec (café & shop open on Dec 24) **Entry:** [D]£15 [C] free [A]£17.50 [under 18s]free [Students & seniors]£15. All tickets allow unlimited entry for 12 months: discounted advance tickets available online.



In a prime location on Covent Garden Piazza, the 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 building of the tube to driverless trains and the Crossrail project.

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 Victorian-era 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 takes a glimpse into the future.

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. 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 toilet on the ground floor,



London Transport Museum

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 the *Upper Deck Café* and library. 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 loops, and there are induction loops at the ticket desk, cloakroom, library and information desk. BSL interpreters can be arranged. “Early Explorers” sessions are held on certain days of the year, when the museum opens early with many of the sounds switched off, so that younger SEN visitors including those on the autistic spectrum can look round at a quieter time and take part in interactive workshops and demonstrations: advance booking is essential, check www.ltmuseum.co.uk/learning/schools/special-educational-needs for details.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The *Upper Deck* and *Lower Deck* café bars serve good-quality food and drink. Upstairs you can sit on Northern Line benches and sip a tube-themed cocktail or smoothie; downstairs is a small picnic area where you can eat your own lunches.

011 Royal Academy of Arts

Address: Burlington House, Piccadilly W1J 0BD **Web:** www.royalacademy.org.uk **Tel:** 020 73008000; access information 020 73008058 (limited service); disabled parking & wheelchair hire 020 73008058

Hours: daily 10am–6pm; Fri till 10pm; last admission 30 mins before closing **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec

Entry: permanent exhibitions and Fine Rooms tour free; prices vary for visiting exhibitions



Tucked in a private courtyard off Piccadilly, the Royal Academy of Arts was founded by George III and has long been governed by artists – the present board includes David Hockney and Tracey Emin. Famous for its summer exhibition of some ten thousand works, to which any artist can submit a piece, it is one of Britain’s premier galleries.

Burlington House, home of the Royal Academy, is an elaborate piece of architecture that provides a striking setting. Free, hour-long guided tours are offered of the John Madejski Fine Rooms, a collection of opulent, eighteenth-century salons resplendent with gold columns, decorative ceilings and other Baroque and Neoclassical features. Works from the main collection are displayed in these rooms, including paintings by Sebastiano Ricci, and William Kent’s ceiling mural of Jupiter’s blessing of the marriage between Cupid and Psyche. The Reynolds Room is where Darwin presented the draft version of *On the Origin of Species*. Elsewhere, the Sackler Wing galleries display temporary exhibitions of works by renowned artists, both contemporary and historical. Building works are currently taking place, as part of a major redevelopment to commemorate the Academy’s 250th anniversary in 2018, though the main galleries will remain open throughout the works.

Call at least a week ahead to book one of the two disabled parking spaces outside. The middle entrance into the house is ramped, with handrails (the other two have revolving doors). Inside, the ticket desk and cloakroom are both low. The area housing the temporary collections is particularly easy to navigate in a wheelchair, but doesn’t have much seating (though portable stools are available). The Fine Rooms have heavy doors, but stewards are available to assist. Services include accessible toilets, a supervised lift to all floors, wheelchair hire, access for guide

and hearing dogs, hearing loops at reception and in the shop, large print guides to all exhibitions, and audio guides with audio-described descriptions of selected works. Staff trained in disability awareness organise SEN workshops for children, gallery tours for disabled adults and handling sessions for partially sighted visitors and, with two weeks' notice, can provide one-to-one audio-described tours and wheelchair assistance: check the website for contact details of the Access team.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The restaurant and café are well laid out for disabled visitors, but they're pricey – so if you have to splash out anyway, you may as well pop over the road to *Fortnum & Mason's* (020 77348040, www.fortnumandmason.com) for a splendid cream tea, served from 3pm.

012 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 **Tel:** Royal Parks 0300 0612000; Liberty Drives 07767 498096 **Hours:** Hyde Park daily 5am–midnight; Kensington Gardens daily 6am–dusk; Liberty Drives May–Oct Tue–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 will appreciate the wide, smooth paths and the half-hourly electric buggy service, run in the summer by Liberty Drives, which takes in the main attractions and is free to anyone with limited mobility. From the hubbub at Speakers' Corner (come on a Sunday to hear the 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. Or you can simply 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 pirate-themed Diana Memorial Playground. Much of the playground is accessible, including a cleverly designed raised walkway giving access to several slides, so it's a pity that the centrepiece, a huge wooden pirate ship, can only be boarded via tricky rope bridges. Heading back east via the Round Pond takes you past the gleaming Albert Memorial and the Albert Hall, and on to the Serpentine 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 education centre has facilities for those with special and educational needs and runs a programme of activities; check www.royalparks.org.uk/learn/learn-in-hyde-park-and-kensington-gardens/special-needs for details.

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 five car parks with disabled parking bays within the parks themselves.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ For a delicious afternoon tea, head to *The Orangery* in the grounds of Kensington Palace (see below). 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.

013 Kensington Palace

Address: Kensington Gardens, London W8 4PX **Web:** www.hrp.org.uk/kensingtonpalace **Tel:** 0844 4827777 **Hours:** Mar–Oct daily 10am–6pm; Nov–Feb daily 10am–5pm (arrive early to avoid the queues; last entry 1hr before closing) **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£17 [C] free [A]£17 [under 16s] free [Con]£13.50; discounted advance tickets available online.



Currently home to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, 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 into two – a private wing and a series of historic state apartments that are open to the public. There are four 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; *Victoria Revealed*, which provides an insight into Queen Victoria, who spent most of her life here, from early childhood to her Diamond Jubilee; and *Fashion Rules*, where you can admire the glamorous dresses worn by a tiny-waisted Queen Elizabeth in the 1950s, her socialite sister Margaret during the 1960s and Diana, Princess of Wales in the 1980s.

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. 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. There is plenty of seating along the routes; take a window bench in the King's Apartments and listen to the recordings of gossip from the court of George I. An Access Guide is available, as well as a tactile map of the palace, and a guide for parents of children or adults on the autism spectrum can be downloaded at www.hrp.org.uk/kensington-palace/visit/accessibility. Describer and

Ideas ▶▶ Art and sculpture

Tate St Ives (Cornwall TR26 1TG; www.tate.org.uk/stives) Focusing on contemporary art in general and the Cornish art scene of the mid-twentieth century, the Tate is delightfully located directly above the town's beach. Ramps and lifts to every floor mean access is good, and there is a daily programme of events and talks; these are usually conducted with an audio loop, and sometimes with a BSL interpreter.

Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (Middlesbrough TS1 2AZ; www.visitmima.com) This eye-catching local landmark boasts five fully accessible exhibition spaces, hosting an impressive permanent collection of arts and crafts as well as temporary exhibitions. Wheelchairs are available to borrow and Blue Badge holders park free in one of the designated parking spaces in front of the gallery.

National Gallery (London WC2N 5DN; www.nationalgallery.org.uk) Excellent access and a range of facilities for those with mobility and sensory impairments at Britain's leading art collection – but don't expect to see everything in one visit!

Yorkshire Sculpture Park (West Bretton WF4 4LG; www.ysp.co.uk) Mixing sculpture with fun and outdoor invigoration – including excellent accessible trails – makes the YSP a great, if sometimes surreal, place to visit.

BSL tours (1hr 30min–2hr) are also available: these can be arranged between 10am–3pm and must be booked two weeks in advance by phone (or via kensingtontours@hrp.org.uk). There are two accessible toilets on the ground floor. 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. However, there is also limited Blue Badge parking right next to *The Orangery* restaurant (reserve spaces on 020 31666199).

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ As well as the separate *Orangery* restaurant that serves meals and afternoon teas (see p.28), the convenient ground-floor *Palace Café* sells reasonably-priced snacks, hot drinks and a children's menu. The two steps down from the gift shop are negotiable via a discrete but useful platform lift.

014 The View from the Shard

Address: Joiner Street, London SE1 9QU **Web:** www.theviewfromtheshard.com **Tel:** ticket office 0844 4997111; enquiries 0344 4997111 **Hours:** March–Oct Mon–Fri & Sun 10am–10pm, Sat 10am–9.15pm; Oct–March Mon–Wed 10am–7pm, Thurs, Fri, Sat 10am–10pm, Sun 10am–7pm; last entry 1hr before closing. **Dates:** check website for closures **Entry:** [D] £26.95 [C] free [A] £30.95 [4–15s] £24.95; disabled £23.95 [Con] Students with ID £25.95. Discounts for advanced booking online.



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

The Shard



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. 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 booking hall and the interactive telescopes can be adjusted to wheelchair height. 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.

015 The Science Museum

Address: Exhibition Road, South Kensington, London SW7 2DD **Web:** www.sciencemuseum.org.uk
Tel: 0870 8704868; minicom 020 79424445 **Hours:** Daily 10am–6pm; school holidays 10am–7pm; last entrance is 45min before the museum closes. **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** The museum is free, but charges apply for the IMAX cinema, simulators and some exhibitions. IMAX [D] £9 [C] free [A] £11 [Con] £9 [Fam] 3 people £24; 4 people £30



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 groundfloor galleries takes you from huge steampowered machines in the Energy Hall, through the history of rockets in Exploring Space, to Stephenson's Rocket and other iconic objects in Making the Modern World. The Wellcome Wing is home to the IMAX cinema and the Who Am I? gallery, which has wheelchair accessible computer terminals with interactive games. The second floor houses galleries on Mathematics and the Information Age. While the museum is a grown-up institution, there is plenty here to keep children occupied, including The Garden (for 3- to 6-year-olds), Pattern Pod (5-to 8-year-olds) and the family-friendly interactive Wonderlab – all are appealing, with a mass of activities easily accessed by most children with limited mobility.

There are six Blue Badge parking bays on Exhibition Road. After 6pm you can use the Imperial College car park on Imperial College Road (charges apply). 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, or check the Accessibility section on the website. On the first Saturday of every month there is a BSL interpreter at various free family events. Manual wheelchairs are available to borrow, including new, lightweight models, which can be booked in advance over the phone. A selection of audio descriptions and large print gallery books for some of the most popular exhibits are available on the website. Induction loops are fitted at the ticket desk, at the entrance to IMAX 3D cinema, at the theatre and at the information desk. 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 other parents and pushchairs. The themed Science Museum Lates, on the last Wednesday of each month, allow adults to visit after hours – no kids allowed!

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ All the cafés have moveable seating. *Deep Blue Café* has waiter service and a selection of well-priced, restaurant-quality hot dishes, pizzas, salads and great meal deals for kids – including healthy options. There are also picnic areas.

016 Westminster Abbey

Address: 20 Dean's Yard, London SW1P 3PA **Web:** www.westminster-abbey.org **Tel:** 020 72225152

Hours: Mon–Fri 9.30am–3.30pm; Wed also 4.30–6pm; Sat 9.30am–1.30pm (May–Aug closes at 3.30pm) **Dates:** open for worship only on Sun **Entry:** tours: [D]free [C]free for carer of wheelchair user [A]£22 [6–16s]£9 [Con]£17 [Fam]£40–45; verger tours £5 extra per person. Fast-track entry for all advance tickets bought online.



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, was in the international spotlight in 2011 as the venue for the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate 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 Issac Newton as well as the 1965 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 of Scots. Younger visitors can let off steam outdoors in the College Garden; situated just off the cloisters, it's the oldest garden in England.

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. The Henry VII Chapel can only be reached by a steep flight of stairs. Free portable audio guides come in a range of languages. Transcripts are available for deaf visitors and a touch tour can be arranged for visually impaired visitors, with accompanying material in large print or Braille. Check out the full access guide online too, at 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.

017 Greenwich to Westminster River Trip

Address: Greenwich Pier SE10 9LW **Web:** www.citycruises.com, www.mbnathamesclippers.co.uk **Tel:** City Cruises 020 77400400; MBNA Thames Clippers 020 70012200 **Hours:** see box, p.33 **Dates:** year round, though timetables vary; City Cruises run a special service 25 Dec – check website for details; MBNA Thames Clippers closed 25–26 Dec **Entry:** Fares for City Cruises and MBNA Thames Clippers vary according to the route and whether you buy a single ticket or a hop-on/hop-off day pass: check online for the full range of fares. MBNA Thames Clippers accepts Oyster cards and contactless, and gives Freedom Pass holders and their carers 50 percent discount if they book online or ask at the ticket office.



Greenwich feels like a fitting place to start a boat trip along the Thames: it was the birthplace 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 and 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. Arriving at Westminster, you can take a short walk to the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey (see p.31).



At Greenwich, you can choose between a City Cruises boat or the cheaper and faster MBNA Thames Clippers boat to Westminster Pier. Both services offer easy wheel-on access to the boats, disabled toilets onboard and designated space for wheelchair users. The City Cruises option 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 taking in an informative audio commentary. If you plan to do a lot of river travel, you can buy a Red Rover Ticket, which allows you to hop-on/hop-off at any stop along the City Cruises route and is valid for the whole day. The MBNA Thames Clippers' River Roamer ticket allows hop-on/hop-off travel between seventeen 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 MBNA Thames Clippers don't have any official quiet room or chill out areas, and can be very busy as they are regular commuter boats: check www.thamesclippers.com/about-mbna-thames-clippers/accessibility-information 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. A nice option is to bring a picnic to eat on board, or 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 cafes and restaurants. *Troia Bagel Deli Café* (www.troia-restaurant.co.uk) is a good bet, serving a wide variety of filled bagels.

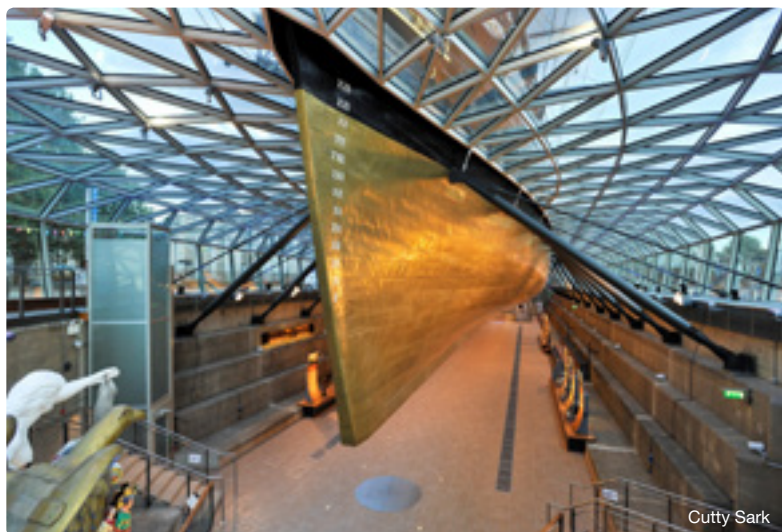
Timetables

Greenwich to Westminster

City Cruises leave every 30min from 10.25am (Apr–Sep) or 11am (Oct–Mar) to 5.25pm; the last boat back to Greenwich leaves Westminster at 4.50pm Apr–Sep, 3.50pm Oct–Mar. The journey takes 1hr.

Greenwich to Embankment

MBNA Thames Clippers operate every 20min in each direction from approximately 6am to 8.30pm, with hourly services until 10.30pm. The journey takes roughly 45min.



Cutty Sark

018 Cutty Sark

Address: King William Walk, Greenwich, London SE10 9HT **Web:** 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, reduced hours on 31 Dec and 1 Jan. **Entry:** [D]£13.50 [C]free [A]£13.50 [5–15s]£7 [under 5s]free [Con]£11.50



With its magnificent architecture and glorious park, there are few places as imposing and picturesque as Greenwich (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 has undergone a £50 million renovation after a serious fire. Whilst 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 and craft workshops.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ Salads, sandwiches, light meals and home-baked cakes are on offer at the *Museum Café* in the National Maritime Museum, in a lovely setting with wonderful views over Greenwich Park. The *Brasserie* in the museum is a pricey but delicious alternative. Alternatively, try one of the many eating options at Greenwich Market, nearby. 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.

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. The Sammy Ofer wing is full of technical wizardry, including an impressive audio-visual "wave" that tells the story of Britons and the sea. Outside, an uphill stroll through Greenwich Park brings you to the Royal Observatory, the home of Greenwich Mean Time and the Meridian Line. While you're here, learn about the universe, longitude and the history of time-keeping 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 autistic spectrum, which explore the night sky.

All floors of the Maritime Galleries are accessible, as are the Astronomy Galleries and planetarium (with dedicated wheelchair seating) at the Royal Observatory. Wheelchair users can also access the Meridian Line and Time Galleries via an external lift in the Astronomer's Garden. There are adapted toilets at both sites. The museum's website has excellent access information, including audio and large-print guides. All Visitor Experience staff are trained in working with SEN audiences and they run Sensory Seas sessions for special schools: see www.rmg.co.uk/plan-your-visit/schools/sessions/sensory-seas-send for details. There are three disabled parking bays at the Observatory and spaces can be booked at the Maritime Galleries car park (020 83126608).

021 Greenwich Park

Address: Greenwich Park Office, Blackheath Gate, Charlton Way SE10 8QY **Web:** www.royalpark.org.uk/parks/greenwich-park **Tel:** 0300 0612380 **Hours:** winter 6am–6pm, summer 6am–9.30pm (check for exact closing times) **Entry:** free; pay-and-display parking, or free for up to 4 hours with Blue Badge.



Greenwich Park, the site of the Royal Observatory, is London's oldest royal park, and quite possibly its most beautiful. The views from the hilltop where the observatory stands are spectacular, taking in the Thames and much of London. Other highlights include the Wilderness Deer Park and Flower Garden. In the summer of 2012, Greenwich Park provided a suitably grand backdrop to the Olympic Equestrian and Modern Pentathlon events and the Paralympic Dressage competition.

The greatest challenge for those with limited mobility is the steep hill in the centre of the park. Your best bet is to drive to the upper park: take the Blackheath Gate entrance

on Charlton Way for the nine bays where Blue Badge holders can park free for up to four hours. There are a number of wheelchair accessible toilets around the park.

022 WWT London Wetland Centre

Address: Queen Elizabeth's Walk, Barnes SW13 9WT **Web:** www.wwt.org.uk/london **Tel:** 020 84094400
Hours: daily Mar–Oct 9.30am–5.30pm, Nov–Feb 9.30am–4.30pm; last admission one hour before closing
Dates: closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£9.17 [C]free [A]£12.26 [4–16s]£7 [under 4s]free [Con]£9.17 [Fam]£34.36



Occupying a 105-acre reserve by a meander of the Thames in southwest London, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust's London Wetland Centre is a paragon of ornithological conservation, a mecca for birdwatchers and an international Site of Special Scientific Interest. 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 around the world. Six hides are scattered across the site, enabling you to watch the birds and other wildlife without being obtrusive. In addition, a large glass observatory 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 visitor centre has some heavy doors but staff can assist. 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. There are several accessible toilets, with Braille signage, 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.

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.

London Wetland Centre



023 Horniman Museum and Gardens

Address: 100 London Road, Forest Hill SE23 3PQ **Web:** www.horniman.ac.uk **Tel:** 020 86991872 **Hours:** museum daily 10am–5.30pm; gardens Mon–Sat 7.15am–sunset, Sun 8am–sunset **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** museum & gardens free, but charges apply for some exhibitions and events; Aquarium [D]£4 [C]free [A]£4 [3–16s]£2 [Fam]£9; Butterfly House [D]£5.40 [C]free [A]£5.40 [3–16s]£5.40 [Fam]£13.50; 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 a Haitian voodoo altar – 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, pavillion, wildlife garden, meadow field, nature trail and animal walk. Limited on-site parking is available for disabled visitors: call 020 86991872 for details.

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, as well as dishes reflecting the museum's international heritage.

024 The Polka Theatre

Address: 240 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19 1SB **Web:** www.polkatheatre.com **Tel:** 020 85434888 **Hours:** Tue–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm, Sat 10am–4.30pm; later for some shows and workshops **Dates:** subject to performance schedule; closed 25 Dec **Entry:** free entrance to building, play areas and café; ticket prices vary but are typically £12–£18 for adults and children.



The UK's first venue dedicated to children's theatre, the Polka Theatre in Wimbledon has been bringing big smiles to the faces of children from all backgrounds since 1979, with its original and engaging shows. Before the show children can enjoy ride-on toys,

dressing-up clothes, teddy bear displays and a book corner. And outside, there is a small playground with a climb-on cat and a charming Wendy House, which is free to use, even if you don't have tickets for a show. Polka performances provide a magical, enjoyable introduction to the world of drama and make-believe for children under thirteen – and some simple stories are created for children as young as nine months. Every year, the theatre welcomes more than 90,000 children, parents and teachers to an exciting range of performances, with past productions including the vibrant and sensory musical, *Hatch* (a co-production with The Royal Opera for ages 2–5), and the world premiere of *Child of the Divide* in 2006, which was re-staged in autumn 2017 to mark the 70th anniversary of partition. Check the website for details of performances and workshops up to eight months ahead.

There is step-free access into the building, and once inside movement is, by and large, easy. You'll find a roomy accessible toilet at the back of the venue, beyond the coat hooks. There are two show spaces: the Main Theatre on the first floor is accessible via a lift and can accommodate six wheelchairs in the front row; the Adventure Theatre, an intimate space ideal for small children, has level access and spots for two wheelchairs. To guarantee a wheelchair space, call in advance or book online. The Main Theatre has an induction loop system and there is always one BSL-interpreted performance of each show, and captioned performances are being introduced: check the website for details. There are occasional relaxed autism-friendly performances (for children with sensory sensitivities), where the sound is lowered and the lights dimmed. Visually impaired groups can pre-book touch tours of the stage, the set and even the actors. There is always one audio-described performance of the Main House's productions. Large-print information is available and there's an audio-described Access Guide on the website.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The Polka Theatre has its own café, serving a good range of child-friendly sandwiches, jacket potatoes and light meals. However, unlike the rest of the venue, it is quite a narrow space, so accessing the tables can be tricky at busy times.

025 Eltham Palace

Address: Court Yard, Eltham, Greenwich, London SE9 5QE **Web:** www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/eltham-palace-and-gardens **Tel:** 020 82942548 **Hours:** Nov to mid-Feb Sun 10am–4pm, except 27 Dec–1 Jan daily 10am–4pm; mid-Feb to Oct daily 10am–4pm. **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£15 [C]free [A]£15 [5–15s]£9 [Con] over 65s and students £13.50 [Fam] 2 adults & 3 children £39.



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 to help.

The car park, with two Blue Badge spaces, is next to the ticket office. From here, it's about 100 metres to the palace entrance over a cobbled bridge, which may cause problems for wheelchair-users. At the entrance, you are given headsets (with subtitles for those with hearing difficulties) for an interactive tour, before entering the impressive circular reception hall. The tour starts up a flight of stairs, but there's also lift access, and a wheelchair is available on the first floor if needed. The entrance to the Medieval hall has a ramp, and visitors can also look down on the hall from a balcony (also accessible). There are fully accessible toilets in the palace and near the ticket office and café. Whilst 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.

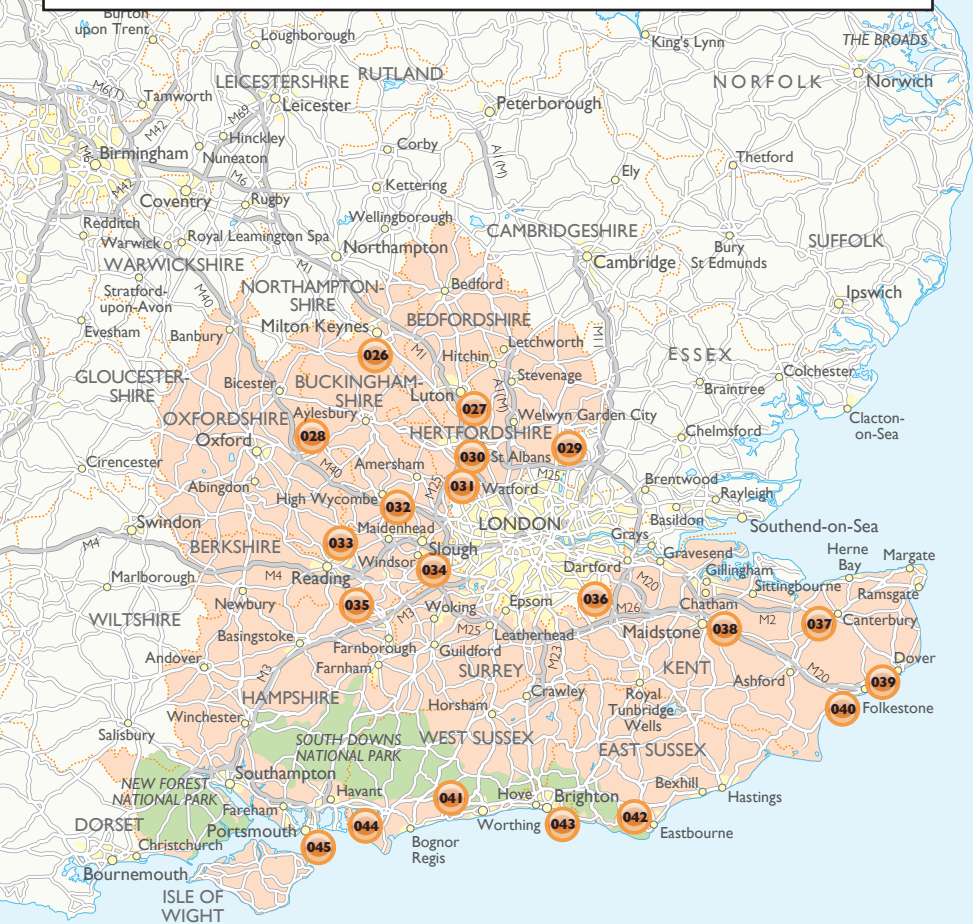
FOOD & DRINK ►► The accessible and relatively inexpensive palace café caters for most tastes, with dishes ranging from homemade cottage pie and three bean stew to a nice bowl of soup or afternoon tea.



Eltham Palace

The Southeast

- 026** Bletchley Park
- 027** Stockwood Discovery Centre
- 028** Thomley Activity Centre
- 029** Lee Valley White Water Centre
- 030** St Albans
- 031** Warner Bros. Studio Tour – The Making of Harry Potter
- 032** Stanley Spencer Gallery
- 033** River and Rowing Museum
- 034** Windsor Castle
- 035** Aerobility
- 036** The Home of Charles Darwin (Down House)
- 037** Canterbury
- 038** Leeds Castle
- 039** Samphire Hoe
- 040** Kent and East Sussex Scenic Drive
- 041** Arundel Castle
- 042** Drusilla's Zoo Park
- 043** Brighton Royal Pavilion and Museum
- 044** Around Chichester Harbour: Solar Heritage Boat Trips and West Wittering Beach, West Sussex
- 045** Emirates Spinnaker Tower



026 Bletchley Park, Buckinghamshire

Address: The Mansion, Bletchley Park, Sherwood Drive, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK3 6EB **Web:** www.bletchleypark.org.uk **Tel:** 01908 640404 **Hours:** Mar–Oct daily 9.30am–5pm; Nov–Mar daily 9.30am–4pm **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 24–26 Dec and for special events (phone ahead) **Entry:** [D]£17.75 [C] free [A]£17.75 [12–16s]£10.50 [under 12s] free [Con]£15.75 [Fam]£46.25



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

This government intervention rescued Bletchley from demolition, so the elegant mansion and parklands survived, and have been open to the public since 1994. The grounds are a great place for families to relax, but it's the exhibits at these wartime headquarters that really fascinate. The Block-B centre and the famous Enigma machine help to illuminate the complexities of code breaking, and the vital role of this decryption work during the war, while an exhibition about the Lorenz cipher system that was used by Hitler, features an original machine. There are also exhibitions on Life at Bletchley Park, featuring the recollections of veterans, as well as a recreated World War II classroom. An interactive visitor centre in Block C has an overview exhibition, a display on cyber security, a café, shop and toilets: it's wheelchair accessible 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. Hut 11, the Bombe Hut, has recently been restored, with life-sized video projections of the women who operated the Bombe machines. It's worth planning ahead to join one of the revealing guided tours that give you an added insight into the house and its work. There are many collections to see and some have varying opening times, so a quick check on 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 Block B, which has a wheelchair lift. There are twelve 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; powered scooters are permitted outdoors. There are three accessible toilets dotted around the park and guide dogs are welcome. BSL-interpreted guided tours take place throughout the year (check 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 & DRINK ►► In a converted code-breaking hut, *Hut 4 Café* serves ample portions of “good, hearty British food” (think cottage pie or bangers and mash) for around £7.50, plus sandwiches and cakes. The café is spacious with moveable seating and space to manoeuvre.

027 Stockwood Discovery Centre, Bedfordshire

Address: Stockwood Park, London Road, Luton LU1 4LX **Web:** www.lutonculture.com **Tel:** 01582 548600
Hours: Daily Mar–Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–Feb 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec, 1 Jan **Entry:** free; occasional paid-for events



Luton may not be the first place that springs to mind for a day out, but the Stockwood Discovery Centre – on the edge of town, just off the M1 – is a very good reason to visit.

The museum's wide-ranging collection – concentrating chiefly on the Luton area – takes in social history, local crafts, archaeology and geology. Highlights include a hoard of Roman gold coins, a rare medieval bronze jug and the UK's largest collection of horse-drawn carriages, all engagingly and accessibly presented. Outside, the large grounds – originally the estate of Stockwood House, a now-demolished eighteenth-century residence – house a series of inviting themed gardens, including the Sensory Garden, which has a tactile trail incorporating textured paving and plants to touch, a sound trail with wind chimes, and a fragrant zone, with plants such as lavender, roses and witch hazel. Look out, too, 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.

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 powered scooters can be borrowed at reception (best to phone ahead). The hand-held audiovisual guides include a BSL option, and the two videos screened in the galleries also feature BSL interpreters and subtitles. Most of the garden areas are wheelchair accessible, with alternative ways to reach anywhere that has steps, although there are a few tricky corners for wheelchairs and scooters in the Period Garden. Parts of the expansive lawn could be difficult for wheelchairs in wet weather. There are spacious accessible toilets in the Learning Centre, discovery galleries and opposite the café. Those on the autism spectrum may want to visit during term time when it's less busy, but 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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The accessible on-site café, entered via automatic doors, serves hot and cold food and drink at reasonable prices, with a beautifully displayed cake table taking centre stage.

028 Thomley Activity Centre, Buckinghamshire

Address: Menmarsh Road, Worminghall HP18 9JZ **Web:** www.thomley.org.uk **Tel:** 01844 338380 **Hours:** Tues–Sat & school hols Mon 10am–3.30pm; advance booking necessary **Dates:** closed Sun & Mon; some days reserved for specific groups, call or visit website to check **Entry:** The centre fundraises to subsidise costs and asks visitors for a contribution towards their visit.



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

This centre has been designed with the needs of all children in mind. 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, children – regardless of any physical or learning disabilities – can create music, paint, read and engage in soft and messy play. Outdoors, in the safe, enclosed, seven-acre play space, children can spin on a wheelchair accessible roundabout, pedal around the one-kilometre track, bash the outdoor chimes and gongs, fly down the basket-seated zipwire and swing to their heart's content on the flat swings, bucket swings and bed swings. There's a dedicated facility for teenagers (usually available for use by all children, 0–19, but call to check), which includes a mini-gym, vocational skills/hobby area and a den, with an Xbox and Wii.

The activity centre specially reserves some days for different groups including toddlers, teenagers and schools and also organises quiet days – so it is important to check the website to see when a visit would be most suitable, and book ahead. In general, on Saturdays and during school holidays, the centre is open to all disabled children and their friends and family. There is plenty of parking outside the centre – designated spaces for wheelchair users are on the left as you approach. There are a number of adapted 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 alternative routes.

FOOD & 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.

029 Lee Valley White Water Centre, Hertfordshire

Address: Station Road, Waltham Cross EN9 1AB **Web:** www.gowhitewater.co.uk **Tel:** 0300 0030616

Hours: times vary, call or check website **Dates:** check website **Entry:** prices start at £50 per person for a half-day rafting session (minimum age 14)



Lee Valley White Water Centre is a state-of-the-art canoe and kayak slalom centre created for the 2012 Olympic Games. Today, however, this world-class venue is open to the public for rafting and other white-water activities including canoeing, kayaking and hydrospeeding.

Experience the thrill of tackling the waters as you paddle down the three-hundred-metre 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 approximately 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, but ensure you check what is involved in the centre's activity assessment before booking. All participants have to 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. After the activity assessment, it's time to hit the rapids! Your first run will be relatively calm –



Lee Valley White Water Centre

at the end, a conveyor will take the crew and raft back to the top, where you start all over again. Once everyone's 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 disabled visitors and have adapted men's and women's toilets and showers. Although being able to swim is not a prerequisite, there's a definite risk of falling in; those with disabilities or poor swimming skills are given yellow helmets, so they can be identified quickly and given plenty of assistance. It's a good idea to phone the centre in advance and discuss your requirements – with notice, staff can tailor conditions to match your capabilities.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The *Terrace Bar & 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 movable seating and an accessible toilet.

030 St Albans, Hertfordshire



Spread over a hilltop, around twenty miles north of London, the ancient cathedral city of St Albans (www.enjoystalbans.com) boasts a wealth of historical attractions and one of England's liveliest street markets. Every Wednesday and Saturday, St Peter's Street is filled with the hustle, bustle and vibrant colours of over 160 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 browse.

If you'd rather go sightseeing, head for St Albans Cathedral (01727 890210, www.stalbanscathedral.org), just south of the high street. Home to the shrine of St Alban



St Albans Cathedral

(Britain's first saint), the building encompasses an exuberant blend of architectural styles, from a Norman 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 adapted toilet.

Southwest of the cathedral, a pleasant walk through Verulamium Park – about a quarter of a mile on firm, level paths, with some rest benches along the way – takes you to the Verulamium Museum (01727 751810, www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk), which tells the story of the important Roman city that once stood on the site now occupied by St Albans. Stunning Roman mosaics, bronze figurines and other archaeological treasures are beautifully displayed alongside recreated Roman rooms and interactive exhibits. The museum galleries are all on one level, with seven Blue Badge bays in the adjacent car park and an accessible toilet in the basement via a lift: see website for further accessibility information. Near the museum is a Roman hypocaust mosaic (www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/hypocaust) and the remains of a Roman theatre (www.gorhamburyestate.co.uk/The-Roman-Theatre). Elsewhere, attractions include a medieval clock tower, and the Georgian town hall, on Market Place, home to a tourist centre, shop and café and, from summer 2018, the new St Albans Museum and Gallery.

Disabled drivers can park for free for two to three hours in on-street pay-and-display spaces, and there are a number of 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 powered 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.

031 Warner Bros. Studio Tour – The Making of Harry Potter, Hertfordshire

Address: Studio Tour Drive, Leavesden, Hertfordshire WD25 7LR **Web:** www.wbstudiotour.co.uk **Tel:** Visitor Services 0845 0840900 **Hours:** daily year-round tours start between 9am & 10am, last tour starts between 4 & 6.30pm; studio closes 3hrs after last tour starts; check exact times when booking **Dates:** closed 25 & 26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£39 [C]free [A]£39 [5–15s]£31 [under 4s]free [Fam]£126; saver tickets and studio tour packages available online



If you find yourself following a small boy in round glasses and a Gryffindor cloak, it won't be actor Daniel Radcliffe, but one of the young fans who flock to the Warner Bros. Studios to look around the sets of the hugely successful Harry Potter films. Anyone who loves film, art, design or storytelling can immerse themselves in the costumes, props, models and sheer amazing wizardry of the world of Harry Potter.

After a short film, the tour starts with the set of the Great Hall, filled with familiar costumes and props. Visitors then wander free to view Dumbledore's tower office, the circular Gryffindor dormitory, the Weasley's Burrow complete with self-knitting needles, and the Potions Classroom with self-stirring pots. You can fly a broomstick, via a green-screen experience, and step onto Platform 9¾ which features the original Hogwarts Express. Outside, The Backlot is home to a section of the Covered Bridge, Privet Drive and the Knight Bus, and you can also sample some frothy Butterbeer here. The final section, aside from an atmospheric reconstruction of Diagon Alley, celebrates the creativity employed in the making of the films. Prosthetics and animatronics rule in Creature Effects, while the stunning artwork and models in the Art Studio culminate in a magnificent intricate 3D model of Hogwarts Castle.

Show your Blue Badge on arrival and you can park at the front of the car park where there are ample disabled bays with easy level access to the ticket offices and 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 with a wheelchair are Diagon Alley with its upward slope and cobbles, and the Studio Shop which can get crowded. Outside in The Backlot, climbing on the bus footplate, car or motorbike requires visitors to be able to transfer and bear weight, while for the broom-flying experience you'll also need to transfer independently. The tour is not ideal for visitors with visual impairment due to the low-lighting used for much of the visit, while sets and props tend to be behind barriers or in cases with little opportunity to touch. The barriers are also at a height that may obstruct the sight line of some wheelchair users, though everything is viewable. There are good disabled toilet facilities with grab rails throughout, and a new Changing Places facility.

All tickets must be bought in advance, and visitors with disabilities should call Visitor Services to discuss access requirements and book free carer tickets (valid ID required), which can be collected from the ticket office to the right of the main entrance. Whilst there are no specific facilities for those on the autism spectrum, staff on arrival can offer assistance, and there are arrival information videos on the website. Foldable stools, ear defenders, and manual wheelchairs are available for free from the Information Desk.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The sizeable *Studio Café* is located off the lobby and sells handmade sandwiches and salads, children's lunchboxes plus a changing menu of hot snacks such as soups, hot dogs or meatballs.

032 Stanley Spencer Gallery, Berkshire

Address: The King's Hall, High Street, Cookham, Berkshire, SL6 9SJ **Web:** www.stanleyspencer.org.uk **Tel:** 01628 471885 **Hours:** April–Oct Tues–Sun 10.30am–5.30pm; Nov–March Thurs–Sun 11am–4.30pm
Dates: 24 & 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£6 [C]free [A]£6 [children] free if accompanied [Con] students & seniors £4



The Sir Stanley Spencer Gallery celebrates the life and works of one of Britain's most iconic painters, in his home town of Cookham in Berkshire. It's an inviting and friendly gallery where art lovers can enjoy Sir Stanley Spencer's work and hear audio accounts by his fellow artists and friends giving their personal and professional perspectives of him. Along with his beautiful paintings and drawings, personal effects such as the artist's knighthood and glasses are on display making the visit feel intimate and personal. Housed in a former Wesleyan chapel which Spencer frequented as a boy, the gallery is small, but uncluttered, with natural light entering through large church windows. On the upper mezzanine, visitors can watch a twenty-minute film about the artist's life.

On Cookham High Street, the gallery is easy to find with a large sign displayed on the building. Entry is via a wheelchair-accessible glass door with a low admissions desk



Stanley Spencer Gallery

to the left-hand side. The gallery is about the size of two standard living rooms, with an upper mezzanine level which is accessible from the ground floor via stairs or a lift. The lighting is good for autistic visitors and the flooring is wooden without being excessively noisy. The mezzanine level is quiet with a few chairs, so works well as a relaxed area for autistic visitors. There are disabled parking spaces in a small public car park behind the gallery, with reasonably level access to the gallery: at busier times, it fills quickly, but there is also ample parking adjacent to the gallery along Cookham High Street. The gallery has no bathroom, but there are accessible public toilets in the car park grounds to the side. Large-print materials are available for the visually-impaired, and exclusive sessions can be booked online for those on the autism spectrum. The website has further information for visitors with cognitive and physical conditions.

FOOD & DRINK ►►

There's nowhere to eat in the gallery itself, but there are plenty of pubs, restaurants and cafés a stone's throw away on Cookham High Street, including the upmarket *Indian Spice Merchant* restaurant (www.spicemerchantgroup.com).

033 River and Rowing Museum, Oxfordshire

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

Hours: daily 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 31 Dec–1 Jan **Entry:** [D]£11.50 [C]free [A]£12.50 [4–16s]£9.95 [Con]£11.50 (all standard tickets valid for 12 months)



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 disabled visitors.

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 medalists. 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. It also houses *The Wind in the Willows* Gallery – a permanent exhibition of delightful dioramas with an audioguide (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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The pleasant *Café at the River & Rowing Museum* 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.

034 Windsor Castle, Berkshire

Address: Windsor Castle, Windsor, Berkshire, SL4 1NJ **Web:** www.royalcollection.org.uk/visit/windsorcastle **Tel:** 020 77667304; disabled sales 0303 1237324 **Hours:** March–Oct daily 9.30am–5.30pm (last admission 4pm); Nov–Feb 9.45am–4.15pm (last admission 3pm) **Dates:** closed 25 & 26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£12.30 [C]free [A]£21.20 [5–16s]£12.30 [under 5s]free [Con]Seniors & students with ID £19.30 [Fam]£54.70



Steeped in more than 900 years of royal history, Windsor Castle is home to Queen Elizabeth II and is a popular tourist attraction for both local and international visitors. Its attractions include the grand State Apartments, which have been painstakingly restored after being badly damaged by a fire in 1992, and the impressive St George's Hall, where state banquets are held. You can marvel at the expansive state dining sets, fascinating displays of military arms and the intricate details of Queen Mary's Dolls' House, as well as view priceless paintings, vases and furniture. Check out, too, the calm and tranquil St George's Chapel, resting place of ten British monarchs, including Henry VIII and Charles I, and venue for the wedding of the year between Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in May 2018.

Accessible parking is available in the public car park on the high street, a short uphill walk from the castle. Ticket queues outside the castle are long, but if you pre-book online you can bypass them: free carer passes can only be booked by phone and the usual phone supplement of £2 is waived for disabled guests. Those who find crowds challenging should visit after lunch when the castle is less busy. All visitors have to 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 entering the castle is stone with some rugs 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 well-kept accessible toilet next to the Engine Court gift shop: ask at the shop for the Radar Key, which you can keep for the duration of your visit. Wheelchairs can be borrowed on request

from the ticket office, and BSL interpreters are available on selected days of the year (call 0303 1237323 or email learning@royalcollection.org.uk for details). There's 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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶ Windsor Castle has no café, but the adjacent high street has the usual chain restaurants, cake shops and pubs. Castle tickets allow re-entry after lunch, but check with staff first.

035 Aerobility, Surrey

Address: Blackbushe Airport, Camberley, GU17 9LQ **Web:** www.aerobility.com **Email:** info@aerobility.com
Tel: 0303 3031230 **Hours:** daily 9am–6pm **Dates:** no scheduled closures but weather-dependent
Entry: Trial flight experience in plane or glider £60 (approx 30min)



Flying a plane is something you might dream about but never expect to do. One visit to Aerobility, formerly the British Disabled Flying Association, will have you questioning your preconceptions and realising just how easily the barriers can be broken down.

The Aerobility charity enables people with disabilities to experience flying light aircraft and gliders. If you want, you can go on to gain the necessary flying hours and get your pilot's licence. The charity has the use of six light planes at Blackbushe, its main base, with other centres at Tatenhill, Staffordshire, Prestwick in Scotland and elsewhere. Gliding takes place at nearby Lasham or at other UK centres. The flights are heavily subsidised, offered at around half the going rate, but have to be booked in advance. The planes have either two or four seats with easy access to the cockpit and full dual controls in the front seats. Once airborne, you're encouraged to take the controls to get a feel for how the plane handles: the qualified instructors, some of them disabled themselves, are always in full control. 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.

When you call or email to book your flight, your instructor will tell you where to find them on the airfield. Disabled parking is adjacent to the new clubhouse, which has a large accessible toilet. A wheelchair accessible golf buggy can take you to the aircraft. Two types of plane offer 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 aid transfer at Blackbushe and Tatenhill. Those with sight, hearing, cognitive or learning disabilities can also participate: Aerobility says they've never turned anyone away.

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

036 The Home of Charles Darwin (Down House), Kent

Address: Down House, Luxted Road, Downe BR6 7JT **Web:** www.english-heritage.org.uk

Tel: 01689 859119 **Hours:** Apr–Sept daily 10am–6pm; Oct daily 10am–5pm; Nov to mid-Feb Sat & Sun 10am–4pm; mid-Feb to March Wed–Sun 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 24 & 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£10.60 [C]free [A]£11.80 [under 5s] free [5–16s]£7.10 [Con]£10.60 [Fam]£30.70 (2 adults, 3 children)



In 1842, when the young Charles Darwin needed a bigger house to accommodate his growing family, this is where 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 museum 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.

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 spacious and the doorways are wide; most ground-floor rooms have level access, and there's a good-sized lift up to the first floor. Audioguides and large-print guides are available and all video displays have subtitles. Outside, most areas of the garden are accessible, though the greenhouses are a bit narrow for wheelchairs and the Sandwalk (Darwin's "thinking path") has an uneven surface; wheelchair users may



Down House, the Home of Charles Darwin

need assistance here. 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: all staff have disability awareness training and there are three staff members on the autism spectrum.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ Picnics are not allowed, but the accessible ground-floor tearoom is attractive and inexpensive: offerings include soup and home-made cakes. On warm days you can eat outside on the spacious patio.

037 Canterbury, Kent



An Aladdin's cave of ancient buildings, quirky shops and a small but lively arts scene, Canterbury is nearly 2000 years old, although much of the city's architecture dates from the Middle Ages. 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 pilgrim heritage was the inspiration behind Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and is explored at The Canterbury Tales, St Margaret's Street (01227 696002, www.canterburytales.org.uk), which takes visitors back in time on a pilgrimage with audio tours (hearing loops available) and actors playing some of Chaucer's most colourful characters – the flickering lights, atmospheric smells and sudden noises may be overwhelming for those with sensory disabilities, however. There's room for one wheelchair, though there are a few steps in the first room with no grab rails. Rest benches are provided throughout, and those with visual impairments can experience the displays through touch and feel. The city's medieval centre, with its cobblestones and half-timbered buildings is a stone's throw from Canterbury Cathedral, 11 The Precincts (01227 762862, 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 (01227 785699, www.thekingsmile.org.uk) with its array of boutique and gift shops, patisseries and cafés; the Beaney House of Art and Knowledge art gallery and museum, 18 High St (01227 862162, www.canterbury-museums.co.uk); and the fully-accessible St Augustine's Abbey, Longport (01227 767345, www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/st-augustines-abbey).

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-travel-roads/where-to-park/canterbury-parking for details of other accessible 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, www.cshopmobility.org.uk), on the second floor of Whitefriars multi-storey car park: here, you can hire scooters and electric or manual wheelchairs (£4/hour; advance booking recommended). Most of the city's public toilets require a RADAR key, though the visitor centre (01227 862162, www.canterbury.co.uk), in Beaney House, has several clean, spacious accessible toilets.

038 Leeds Castle, Kent

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

Hours: Daily: Apr–Sep 10am–4.30pm; gates close 6pm; Shop 10am–6pm; grounds & gardens 10am–5pm; playgrounds, maze, grotto and birds of prey centre 10am–5pm; train 10am–5.15pm; Oct–Mar 10am–3pm; gates close 5pm; shop 10am–4pm; grounds & gardens 10am–5pm; playgrounds, maze, grotto and birds of prey centre 10am–4pm; train 10am–4.30pm **Dates:** Castle closed on Nov fireworks weekend & 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£21.90 [C]free [A]£24.90 [4–15s]£16.90 [Disabled 4–15s]£14.40 [Under 4s] free [Seniors & students] £21.90. Tickets valid for one year after issue: £1 discount 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.

The castle itself is the focal attraction 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 woodlands and extensive grounds to explore.

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 Knight's Realm Playground. 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 the train can't take wheelchairs.

The drawbridge at the castle entrance has several yards of cobblestones, but 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. 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 where 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 Mediterrean-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 *Fairfax Restaurant* (£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. Or, you can enjoy a picnic in the five-hundred-acre grounds.

039 Samphire Hoe, Kent

Address: signposted south off the A20, 2km west of Dover CT17 9FL (not recognised by all satnavs); contact address: White Cliffs Countryside Partnership, c/o Dover District Council, White Cliffs Business Park, Dover, CT16 3PJ **Web:** www.samphirehoe.com **Tel:** 01304 225649 **Hours:** daily 7am–dusk **Dates:** no closures **Entry:** free; pay-and-display car park (free to Blue Badge holders)



The 6.4 million cubic yards 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 brand-new piece of Kent is a magical and ever-changing place: tucked in under the cliffs, it can be a peaceful sun trap 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 wild flowers – 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. 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.

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 kiosk in the car park selling reasonably priced hot and cold drinks, snacks, filled rolls and cakes.

040 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 the 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 Lymyne (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 light railway; 01797 362353, 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 takes you over the shingle to the water's edge, and there's an accessible café and disabled toilet in the station (open Easter–Sep).

Back in the car, head inland to Lydd – on the way, you'll pass a signed turning on the left to an RSPB nature reserve (01797 320588, 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 wheelchair users, with its steep inclines and cobbled streets, but the attractive harbourside area below is pretty level and has a few disabled parking spaces and a RADAR key-accessible public toilet.

Turning inland from Rye on the B2082, you exchange the desolate lowland of the Romney Marsh for rolling Kent downland, with orchards, hop fields and vineyards on



Prospect Cottage, Dungeness Beach



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 the *White Lion Hotel* (01580 765077) has level entry, an accessible toilet, splendid food and a selection of award-winning ales.

041 Arundel Castle, West Sussex

Address: Arundel Castle, Arundel, West Sussex, BN18 9AB **Web:** www.arundelcastle.org **Tel:** 01903 882173 **Hours:** April–Oct Tues–Sun plus Mons in Aug & bank hols 10am–5pm; restaurant, café & keep close at 4.30pm (last admission to castle 4pm) **Dates:** closed Nov–March **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. Its tall turrets, imposing defences, spectacular views, landscaped gardens and Norman motte and keep make it seem almost enchanted from afar, while the finely preserved interior includes the Baron's Hall, the fourteenth-century Catholic Fitzalan Chapel, a Regency library and Victorian bedrooms. You enter the castle via the grand Duke Henry entrance before heading up to the first floor to visit the Baron's Hall, dining areas, drawing room, long hallways hung with paintings and a

Ideas ►► Castles and stately homes

Hampton Court Palace (Surrey KT8 9AU, 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) 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.

couple of bedrooms. The second floor is brilliant for exploring, with its narrow winding staircases and access to the battlements (though only the rooms are accessible via a very narrow lift, not the battlements), while the top floor is home to several themed bedrooms. Outside, the landscaped castle gardens are all wheelchair accessible, with tarmacked areas – and perfect for picnics.

All areas into the main castle are step-free or ramped, and wheelchairs are available to borrow, which fit into the narrow lift to the first and second floors. There's a wheelchair stairlift up to the Baron's Hall, though neither the top floor nor the castle keep are wheelchair accessible. The driveway from the ticket office to the castle entrance is steep, but a motorised buggy ferries people up and down the hill. There are no priority queues but the helpful staff can accelerate access if necessary. Inside the castle, the wooden floors can be noisy, though there are some quiet areas too. Touching the objects on display is prohibited, so there's little tactile interaction for blind or autistic children, however staff can use their discretion to allow blind children to feel certain items. There are well-kept accessible toilets in the castle and the gardens, with wide doors, grab rails and low-level hand-dryers. There are eight Blue Badge bays at Mill Road car park, with tarmacked access to the castle, and a drop-off point at the castle main entrance. Call customer services if you have mobility issues or any particular requirements and they can tell you if there are any noisy events on (such as jousting days).

FOOD & DRINK ►► The castle café 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, including the sixteenth-century *Belinda's* in Tarrant Street, which serves homemade cakes.

042 Drusillas Zoo Park, East Sussex

Address: Alfriston BN26 5QS **Web:** www.drusillas.co.uk **Tel:** 01323 874100 **Hours:** summer (BST) daily 10am–6pm, winter daily 10am–5pm; last entry one hour before closing **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** peak prices shown; savings available off peak [D]£16 [C]free (DLA letter required) [A]£16 [2–16s]£16 [Con]£15 [Fam]£31–77.50 depending on family size



“No Ordinary Zoo!” claims 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 play park rolled into one, and the compact nature of the site means you can happily hop between the two.

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 Zolympics 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. Younger children will enjoy the Hello Kitty Secret Garden, with themed rides and a house and parlour where children can meet Hello Kitty on a number of dates throughout the year: face-painting, hair-braiding and stick-on tattoos are also available on various dates. A new three-ride attraction called “Go Safari!” includes the Safari Express train, The Hippopotobus and the Flying Cheetah ride.

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, 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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ *The Explorer’s Café* serves decent meals reasonably-priced such as pasta and sausages. There’s also a picnic area with several wheelchair-accessible benches.

043 Brighton Royal Pavilion and Museum

Address: The Royal Pavilion, 4–5 Pavilion Buildings, Brighton BN1 1EE; Museum and Art Gallery, Royal Pavilion Gardens, Brighton BN1 1EE **Web:** www.brightonmuseums.org.uk **Tel:** 0300 0290900 **Hours:** pavilion: Apr–Sep daily 9.30am–5.45pm, Oct–Mar daily 10am–5.15pm, last admission 45 minutes before closing; museum: Tue–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]£9.50 [C]free [A]£11.50 [5–15s]£6.20 [Con]£9.50 [Fam]£17.70–£29.20, discounts for local residents with ID (utility or council tax bill). Museum [D]£4 [C]free [A]£5 [Con]£4 [Fam]£7.80–£10.60, 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 topping of onion-shaped 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, a red-tongued silver dragon clutches a thirty-foot chandelier, weighing more than a tonne, from which extend six more fire-breathing dragons. The grandeur persists as you move through the ground floor rooms and culminates when you arrive at the Music Room with its breathtaking domed ceiling, 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, 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 free and 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. There is a pair of giant lips that is actually a 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 ►► *Royal Pavilion Tearoom* is on the first floor of the building, so out of reach for some visitors, but there's an accessible tea shop, *Pavilion Tea Company*, on the ground floor next to the shop. At the museum, excellent home-made cakes, drinks and light lunches are served in the accessible tearoom overlooking the main exhibition area. The tea hut in the Pavilion Gardens sells drinks and snacks and is a great place to sit on a sunny day.

044 Around Chichester Harbour: Solar Heritage Boat Trips and West Wittering Beach, West Sussex

Boat trips: **Address:** The Harbour Office, The Street, Itchenor PO20 7AW **Web:** www.conservancy.co.uk
Tel: 01243 513275 **Hours:** departures from Emsworth most days in the summer hols; scheduled departures from Itchenor throughout the rest of year; check in advance for timetable **Entry:** [D]£8.50–£17 [C]free [A]£8.50–£17 [0–16s]£3.50–£7. Refreshments available on board for Itchenor trips.



Beach: **Address:** The Estate Office, West Wittering PO20 8AJ **Web:** www.westwitteringbeach.co.uk
Tel: 01243 514143 **Hours:** summer 6.30am–8.30pm, winter 7am–6pm **Dates:** year round **Entry:** free



An abundance of wildlife, sandy beaches and views towards the Isle of Wight and South Downs make Chichester Harbour an attractive place to live. Indeed, people have been settling here since prehistoric times, so visitors get to soak up not only all of the above, but the fascinating history of the area too.

The Solar Heritage is a solar-powered boat that glides almost silently through this area of outstanding natural beauty. The knowledgeable crew are excellent at drawing attention to points of historical interest and wildlife – you'll pass Roman settlements, an abandoned village and evidence of Victorian-era attempts to reclaim land from the sea. Binoculars are provided free of charge and come in particularly handy for children keeping their eyes peeled for seals. After the boat trip, visit beautiful West Wittering beach for an afternoon of sandcastle building and games, or take a stroll around the sand dunes at East Head – this area can be approached from the far west end of the car park, and is also the starting point for the eleven-mile Salterns Way cycle and wheelchair accessible path to Chichester.

The Solar Heritage sails from Itchenor and Emsworth: check the website for the full seasonal schedule. At Itchenor, it is possible to be dropped off on the slipway, or park in the street – a Blue Badge space is available around two hundred yards from the harbour office, where there is a wheelchair accessible toilet. The road is quite uneven and slopes down towards the slipway. There is a short ramp with a lip to reach the pontoon, which has a handrail and is around one hundred yards from the boat. Although the staff have not had specialist training, they will assist with access to the boat. For wheelchair users, this is via a



Chichester Harbour

lift that has a maximum weight limit of 364 kilograms (about 57 stone). At Emsworth, you can park for free either in the village 250 yards from the pontoon, or on the quay 150 yards away. The accessible toilet is in the village car park. The toilet on the boat is not wheelchair accessible. On cold days, blankets can be requested during the journey.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The popular *Ship Inn* in Itchenor (www.theshipinnitchenor.co.uk) is half a mile from the harbour office, serving real ales and good snacks and meals. It is accessible by a ramp, but there's no accessible toilet. At West Wittering, the *Beach Café* (01243 514143) offers limited food, though visiting vans augment the fare.

045 Emirates Spinnaker Tower, Portsmouth

Address: Gunwharf Quays P01 3TT **Web:** www.spinnakertower.co.uk **Tel:** 023 92857520; booking line 023 92857521 **Hours:** daily 10am–5.30pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£10.50 [C]free [A]£10.50 [4–15s]£8.50 [Con]£9.50 [Fam]£34; discounts for local residents with ID and group bookings



Rising dramatically above Portsmouth's harbour to a height of 557 feet, Emirates Spinnaker Tower offers breathtaking panoramas from three viewing platforms. Completed in 2005, the gleaming white, gold and blue 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 Deck 1 (328ft 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 up to Deck 2 (344ft), where you can reward yourself with coffee and cake at *The Clouds* café. The open-air Sky Garden (360ft), on the top level, is unfortunately not served by lift, and involves a climb of thirty steps.

There are plenty of Blue Badge bays in the enormous 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), so if this applies to you, be sure to book ahead. Large-print and audio guides are available at reception, to describe the view at specified, numbered vantage spots. There's also a tactile model of the tower, to help visually impaired visitors get a sense of its structure. Up on Deck 1 there's a handrail around the glass wall and the floor surface is level.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The *Waterside Café* at the bottom 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 Deck 2 serves hot drinks and cake, or you can try their High Tea afternoon tea, which must be booked in advance.

The Southwest

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- 047** Coate Water Country Park
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- 061** National Marine Aquarium
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046 Brunel's SS Great Britain, Bristol

Address: Great Western Dockyard BS1 6TY **Web:** www.ssgreatbritain.org **Tel:** 0117 9260680 **Hours:** 10am–5.30pm, autumn/winter 10am–4.30pm; last entry one hour before closing **Dates:** closed 24–25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£16.50 [C]free [A]£16.50 [5–17s]£9.50 [Seniors & students]£14.50 [Fam]2 adults & 3 children £45; tickets allow free unlimited return visits for twelve months



When you board Brunel's *SS Great Britain*, you enter the era of Victorian ingenuity and self-confidence. The visit is a slickly presented, behind-the-scenes immersion in the story of the first ocean liner and the biggest passenger ship of its era.

The *SS Great Britain*, for decades a rusting hulk in the Falklands, has been lovingly restored to her former glory in the Bristol dry dock where she was built. Visitors first descend under the beautiful glass “sea” to view the magnificent hull, which is protected by a state-of-the-art system to control humidity levels that would otherwise corrode the iron. Then you visit the interactive dockside museum before boarding the ship, where you can find out what life was like for passengers and crew, from the elegance of the First Class cabins to the cramped, noisy and smelly steerage accommodation.

There are disabled parking spaces about 160 yards from the entrance. 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. Two narrow, manual wheelchairs are available and can be booked in advance. In wet weather, the wooden deck can be slippery, and in some of the areas below deck the planking is uneven. You'll find disabled toilets on the ship itself, by the ticket office and in the museum and café. Assistance dogs are welcome, and there's a tactile model of the *SS Great Britain* for blind and visually impaired visitors.



Brunel's SS Great Britain

FOOD & DRINK ►► The light and airy *Dockyard Café Bar* serves delicious cakes and pastries, all prepared on the ship – enjoy your lunch with views of the floating harbour.

047 Coate Water Country Park, Wiltshire

Address: Marlborough Road, Swindon, Wiltshire SN3 6AA **Web:** 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



Coate Water Country 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 reservoir's water. 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 a number of 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 (fishing season is open 15 June–15 Mar). At the north end of the reservoir, there is a children's play area and miniature railway. The park has golf activities too: an eighteen-hole pitch and putt (Apr–Oct), mini golf and a nine-hole putting green. A Tramper 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 Tramper instead. At certain times of year, the accessible bird hides may be locked – you can pick up a key 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; 01793 523292), on the A4259 Marlborough Road just before the entrance to the park, serves fantastic food. It has a disabled 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.

048 Roman Baths and Pump Room, Bath

Address: Abbey Churchyard, Bath, BA1 1LZ **Web:** www.romanbaths.co.uk **Tel:** 01224 477785 **Hours:** Daily: Nov–Feb 9.30am–5pm; Mar to mid-June, Sept & Oct 9am–5pm; mid-June to Aug 9am–9pm (last admission 1hr before closing) **Dates:** closed 25 & 26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£15.50 [C]free [A]£15.50 [6–16s]£9.80 [under 6s]free [Seniors & students with ID]£13.75 [Fam]£46





Roman Baths

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 200 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 autistic visitors to bypass the queues, and 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 inside and on the terrace. The museum is fascinating, with lots of tactile exhibits and high-tech projections, though it can get crowded and noisy: if visitors with autism find this overwhelming, they can ask a member of staff (all are trained in disability and autism awareness) 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). Blue Badge holders can park on the single yellow lines on nearby Cheap Street and York Street or in the four designated disabled parking bays on New Bond Street. The nearest car parks are Northgate Street and the Southgate car park in St James Parade, both with easy-access parking bays.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The grand *Pump Rooms* restaurant is good for a special lunch or cream tea, while the *Roman Baths Kitchen* is more informal: both are wheelchair accessible. Alternatively, bring a picnic to eat in the picturesque abbey courtyard.

049 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; Biketrail 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 **Tel:** 01271 879882 **Hours:** Daily: Easter to April 10am–5pm; May, June & Sept 10am–6pm; July & Aug 10am–7pm; Oct 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed Nov–March **Entry:** [D]£2.50 [A]£2.50 [3–15s]£1.95 [Under 3]free [Con]£2.25 [Fam]£8.50 (2 adults & 2 children); £9.50 (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 tandem with an excellent audio guide (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, Tramper users can also go “off road” and explore the nearby Home Farm Marsh nature reserve (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”. Now, in summer the tidal pools are a riot of youngsters in inflatables. Signs at the entrance say when they 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. 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. There is a beach shop just above the sands, and deckchairs are available to rent.

FOOD & DRINK ► Biketrail stocks snacks, drinks and ice creams and is next door to the *Fremington Quay Café*, which serves baguettes, hot food and 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, the *Take Thyme Fish Restaurant* is an excellent option.

050 Exmoor Scenic Drive, Devon



Driving distance: 21 miles **Approx 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. Pop a £2 toll in the honesty box en route – 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 National Trust shop rents out two Trampers, powered, all-terrain mobility buggies (01598 763556). They are ideal for the mile-long accessible trail from here to the



beautiful rocky cove of Heddon's Mouth, or to tackle the seven-mile trail to Woody Bay, 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) 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. Once at the top, you can enjoy a bite to eat and panoramic views at the *Cliff Top Café* (01598 753769), alongside the railway. 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 three Blue Badge spaces in the Lynmouth car park, and the public toilets are by the Memorial Hall.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ In Lynmouth, try *Fish on the Harbour* (01598 753600) for tasty fish and chips – it has level access and an accessible toilet. *Hunters Inn*, in the nearby Heddon Valley (01598 763230, www.thehuntersinnexmoor.co.uk), has level access through the main entrance and great food: there's a disabled toilet on the ground floor.

051 Hawk Conservancy Trust, Hampshire

Address: Sarson Lane, Weyhill, Andover SP11 8DY **Web:** www.hawk-conservancy.org **Tel:** 01264 773850
Hours: Feb–Oct daily 10am–5.30pm; Nov & Dec daily 10am–4.30pm; last admission one hour before closing **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec & 5 Jan–2 Feb **Entry:** [D]£14.65 [C]free [A]£14.65 [4–15s]£10.30 [Con]£12.85 [Fam]£45.50



As you drive along the busy A303 near Andover, there's little to suggest – save the odd brown sign – 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/autumn season is the Valley of the Eagles display (daily 2pm) where you'll see a mass fly-past of eagles, vultures and kites 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 a bird: adults can have a Harris hawk fly to their fist, while children can meet a British species of owl.

The centre is served by a large car park on a slight slope with five disabled bays 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. Four manual wheelchairs and three powered scooters are available (phone to reserve; £1 donation to Shopmobility for scooters), and there are plenty of benches dotted around the grounds. There are three disabled toilets near the entrance, which are clean and equipped with grab rails. For visually impaired visitors, there's a large-print information sheet available in the 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: it also has free wi-fi.

052 Haynes International Motor Museum, Somerset

Address: Sparkford, Yeovil BA22 7LH **Web:** www.himm.co.uk **Tel:** 01963 440804; access 01963 442783
Hours: Mar–Oct daily 9.30am–5.30pm; Nov–Feb daily 9.30am–4.30pm **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 24–26
Dec Entry: [D]£13.50 [C]£13.50 [A]£14.50 [4–15s]£9 [D 4–15s]£7 [Senior]£13.50 [Fam]£21–£48.50



Haynes International Motor Museum

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 super cars, like the Jaguar XJ220 and the Ferrari 360, to veteran masterpieces, there are over four hundred vehicles here. The Red Room, packed with models in the sports car colour of choice, is legendary, but there are sixteen other display areas to explore too where all the big names are present: Jaguar, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Bentley and Rolls-Royce to name a few. Children and teenagers who may be drawn to the old-fashioned penny arcade games, Sega Rally machines and Cycraft, a challenging racing car simulator, should bring along pocket money: costs for these vary from 20p to £2. Younger children will enjoy pushing interactive buttons, doing brass rubbings and playing in the small area equipped with puzzles, colouring-in sheets and Lego. Outside there are also activities for kids, such as diggers and go-carts. 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 carers card. Indoors, the museum is accessible for wheelchair users with wide paths and only the odd gentle slope. A wheelchair can be hired and booked in advance. If you have any special requirements, the helpful staff provide advice over the phone. A volunteer can be booked as a guide around the exhibits – a useful facility for visitors with visual impairments. There are two disabled toilets in the museum and two in the foyer area near the café.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The accessible self-service *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.

053 Stourhead, Wiltshire

Address: Stourton, near Mere, Warminster BA12 6QD **Web:** 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 10 Mar–11 Nov; garden closed 25 Dec **Entry:** garden & house combined [D]£18.30 [C]free [A]£18.30 [5–17s]£9.20 [Fam]£45.80



Stourhead, a Palladian mansion owned by the National Trust, boasts a fine collection of paintings and furniture and a superb landscaped garden, complete with replica Roman and Venetian buildings and an extraordinary folly.

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. For many visitors however, the real draw is outside. Stourhead's grounds are a feast of colour for most of the year and offer breathtaking views around the lakeside setting. A level accessible path leads around the lake for just over a mile. Other trails, such as the two-mile path to Alfred's Tower folly (also reachable by car), are less straightforward. Surfaces vary from gravel to grass and compacted woodland soil, and some paths are undulating, or can get muddy in wet weather. Staff can provide a map showing accessible routes (a Braille map is also available).

Otherwise, visitors with limited mobility can take a tour of the grounds in a golf buggy, subject to availability of drivers. In high season (mid-Mar to Oct), there's a shuttle bus service between the car park, the house and the lower gardens. The house itself is accessed 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. There's an accessible toilet by the main entrance and in the courtyard adjacent to the house. The car park has designated disabled spaces and is an even, four-hundred-yard walk from the house.

FOOD & DRINK ►► The fully accessible restaurant by the entrance serves locally sourced produce – some even grown in the kitchen garden at the house. A cosy and splendid pub in the courtyard, *The Spread Eagle* (01747 840587, www.spreadeagleinn.com), serves hearty meals and cream teas – there's a two-inch threshold step but once inside all is level.

054 Exeter, Devon



With its Roman origins, glorious cathedral and picturesque quayside, the city of Exeter (www.visitexeter.com) is a rewarding and easily accessible destination in the beautiful county of Devon. A good place to start your visit is the Cathedral Church of St Peter (01392 285983, 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 disabled provision includes on-site parking (book ahead), a RADAR key-accessible toilet, Braille guidebooks, audio guides, wheelchairs to borrow and – with around two weeks' notice – one-to-one tours for visually impaired visitors.

Another of the city's highlights is the Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, on Queen Street (01392 665858, 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, large-print information, induction loops and volunteers trained in disability awareness. On request, BSL tours can be organised, 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), 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. There are five disabled parking bays at the quayside, which is also served by accessible buses from the high street.

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.com). 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 powered scooter: Shopmobility, 8–10 Paris Street (01392 494001), rents out both, and runs the City Sights project, which provides trained volunteers to guide visitors around. 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) and at the quayside.

055 Haldon Forest Park, Devon

Address: Haldon Forest Park, Kennford EX6 7XR **Web:** www.forestry.gov.uk/haldonforestpark **Tel:** 0300 0675826 (ranger's office; info and Trammer bookings) **Hours:** daily: Apr–Oct 8.30am–9pm; Nov–Mar 8.30am–5pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** free; parking: £4–7 (car), £15 (coaches)



The Forestry Commission's Haldon Forest Park has miles of graded walking, cycling and horseriding trails set in 3500 acres of glorious Devon woodland. Its accessibility means everyone can get a taste of the great outdoors and potentially spot birds of prey, butterflies and the rare black fallow deer that live in the forest.

The park has two circular, 1.5-mile-long all-ability trails suitable for wheelchairs and people with restricted mobility. The Discovery Trail is a level walking and cycling route that takes in a great viewpoint over Exeter and the Belvedere Tower, while the Mamhead Trail is a flat walking route with stunning vistas of the Exe estuary. As well as these, there are several more demanding trails, which include sloping or rougher surfaces; visitors can hire special all-terrain powered scooters known as Trampers, which can handle the trails with ease (the Trampers must be pre-booked through the Countryside Mobility Scheme (www.countryside-mobility.org)). In addition, you can hire specialist bicycles including wheelchair and recumbent bikes from Forest Cycle Hire (01392 833768) or even take a guided "glide" around the forest with Go-Segway! on their two-wheeled, self-balancing electric vehicles (07545 917416).

The main car park, from where most trails are accessed, has three disabled spaces and a fully accessible toilet. Nearby you'll find the ranger office and Trammer hire outlets (these



Haldon Forest Park

can be brought to your car if requested). The rangers can help you devise a route through the forest that suits your level of fitness and mobility. There's a second car park at Mamhead (see website for directions), which is where the Mamhead Trail begins; note that there are no toilets or other facilities at this site, though parking is free. Those on the autism spectrum may prefer to visit the park Monday to Friday in term time, when it's at its quietest.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The *Ridge Café*, near the park's main entrance, serves hot and cold food and drinks with level access and moveable benches inside. There's plenty of seating outside, overlooking a large sandpit play area, and a wood burner indoors for colder days.

056 Monkey World, Dorset

Address: Longthorns, Wareham, Dorset, BH20 6HH **Web:** www.monkeyworld.org **Tel:** Information 0800 456600; scooter reservation 01929 462537 or 01929 401004 **Hours:** Daily: Jan–June & Sept–Dec 10am–5pm; July & Aug 10am–6pm (last admission 1hr before closing) **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£9 [C]£9 [A]£12 [3–15s]£9 [under 3s]free [Con]Seniors £9; students with ID £10.50 [Fam]£38



Monkey World Ape Rescue Centre is home to more than 250 primates from over twenty species, who live in spacious enclosures, in an attractive, accessible 65-acre park. Many of the monkeys 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. The



Monkey World

Ideas ►► Railways

Brecon Mountain Railway (Merthyr Tydfil CF48 2DD; www.bmr.wales) This service runs along a scenic four mile stretch of the old Brecon–Merthyr Tydfil line in south Wales. Access to the guard's van is via a steep, secure ramp, with the help of the friendly staff.

Bure Valley Railway (Norfolk NR11 6BW; 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) 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.

animals are at their most entertaining during the Keeper Talks, which take place every half-hour from 12.30pm (written versions also available). The monkeys rush over when the keeper appears and seem to enjoy the experience as much as the audience. The interesting and often moving backstories of each animal 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 scooters should be fine. The only inaccessible part of the park is the Woodland Walk, though there are no primate enclosures there. Monkey World has twenty mobility scooters and two manual wheelchairs to borrow (book in advance and bring ID and a £10 deposit). Guide dogs are allowed everywhere except the Malagasy Enclosure where lemurs roam free. Those on the autism spectrum may get nervous if the monkeys make sudden movements or noises, or when the marmosets appear overhead in wire tubes, or when the lemurs come close in the Malagasy Enclosure. 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 disabled 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.

FOOD & DRINK ►► The two cafés, *Treetops* and *Malagasy*, serve reasonably priced hot and cold food: *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.

057 The Camel Trail, Cornwall

Address: Padstow Harbour PL28 8DB, Wadebridge & Bodmin **Web:** 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] £12–16 [Child] £7–9 a day; book ahead on peak dates (summer & school hols)



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. If you're lucky, you may also spot seals at play in the water. 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 behind the Harbour car park, with another opposite the tourist information centre on the North Quay. In Wadebridge, there's also a RADAR key-accessible toilet next to the trail. Nearby is Bridge Bike Hire (01208 813050; www.bridgebikerehire.co.uk), where you can pre-book bikes with trailers, tandems, trikes and a Draisin Low Loader that allows a wheelchair (manual or electric) user to travel in their wheelchair at the front of the "bike" with a cyclist behind (£20 to hire).

FOOD & DRINK ►► Arrive early to avoid the queues at *Stein's Fish & Chips* (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.

058 Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy, Dorset

Address: Osprey Quay, Portland DT5 1SA **Web:** www.wpnpsa.org.uk **Tel:** 01305 866000 **Hours:** Daily 9am–5pm; **additional access** varies by course and season **Dates:** no instruction Dec–Jan; contact individual schools for closures **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 school and windsurfing schools. It provides direct access to the waters of



Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy

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 includes a modern, fully accessible clubhouse (with its own café), slipways, a boat hoist and storage space for up to six hundred boats. The Academy offers excellent access. Its large car park has five disabled bays 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 disabled 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 sailing school has boats suitable for disabled visitors. Weekdays are quieter than weekends for those on the autism spectrum.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The first-floor café serves a good range of soups and hot snacks, with great views of the harbour.

059 Buckfast Abbey, Devon

Address: Buckfastleigh TQ11 0EE **Web:** www.buckfast.org.uk **Tel:** 01364 645500 **Hours:** Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun noon–6pm; intermittent closures for prayers and services; hours vary at shops and restaurants **Dates:** shops and restaurants closed Good Friday & 25–26 Dec **Entry:** free



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 celebrates its millennium, with a full programme of events throughout the year, including a new 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 stone masons, 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, the Physic Garden, Sensory Garden and Lavender Garden all boast interesting designs and unusual plants and herbs – and are as much for the benefit of the monks' work and leisure as for the pleasure of visitors. In the Monastic Produce Shop you can buy the famous Buckfast tonic wine, as well as a variety of goods and consumables from monasteries and convents around the world. Other retail opportunities at the abbey include the gift shop, which sells a variety of lovely items, and the religious bookshop – one of the largest in southwest England.

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, bookshop 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 new organ. 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.

060 South Devon Railway and Totnes Rare Breeds Farm, Devon

Address: The Station, Buckfastleigh, Devon TQ11 0DZ; Totnes Rare Breeds, Littlehempston **Web:** www.southdevonrailway.co.uk; www.totnesrarebreeds.co.uk **Tel:** Railway 0843 3571420; Farm 01803 840387

Hours: The train has nine daily departures (10am–4.30pm) in peak season; check website for full details; Farm mid-March to Oct daily 10am–5pm. **Dates:** Railway closed Nov–Mar, with some exceptions for school holidays; check farm website for winter closing dates. **Entry:** Railway [D]£7.50 [C]£7.50 [A]£15 [3–15s]£9 [under 3s]free [Con]£14 [Fam]£43; Farm [D]£6.50 [C]free [A]£6.50 [3–15s]£5 [under 3s]free [Con]£6 [Fam]£20; combined tickets are available, but with no discount for disabled visitors and carers.



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 powered scooter users to board the steam train. There's some commentary on the thirty-minute journey which takes you along the beautiful valley of the river Dart, passing fields of cows and even a bank of pixies! Assistance dogs can ride on the trains (£1 per dog). 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, rescued hedgehogs, seaweed-eating sheep, 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 can't enter the pens but can 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 disabled 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, certain coaches have wheelchair access to the buffet car, and at Buckfastleigh station *The Refreshment Rooms* are spacious and accessible.

061 National Marine Aquarium, Devon

Address: Rope Walk, Coxside, Plymouth PL4 0LF **Web:** www.national-aquarium.co.uk **Tel:** 0844 8937938

Hours: daily 10am–5pm; last entry one hour before closing **Dates:** closed 25 & 26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£15.95 [C]free [A]£15.95 [3–15s]£11.95 [Senior]£13.95 [Fam]£49.50



National Marine Aquarium

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.

Miss Squishy the octopus always draws a good crowd – she can open jars to find her favourite food. And 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 disabled 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 moveable 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.

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.

062 The Eden Project, Cornwall

Address: Bodelva, St Austell PL24 2SG **Web:** www.edenproject.com **Tel:** 01726 811911 **Hours:** open daily from 9.30am (10am in winter); closing varies from 4pm to 9pm (later in summer and at weekends) **Dates:** closed 25 Dec; occasional maintenance closures: see website for full details **Entry:** [D]£27.50 [C] free [A]£27.50 [under 5s]free [5–16s]£14 [60+ /student]£22.50; [Fam]£71; 10 percent discount online



The Eden Project is a botanical and conservation attraction on a colossal scale: two vast, geodesic-dome glasshouses – the “Biomes” – stand at the bottom of a cavernous, landscaped former clay mine, showcasing the world's huge diversity of plantlife. Winner of the 2017 Inclusive Tourism Award, 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, the Cape in South Africa, Western Australia and northern California – with herb and vegetable gardens, fruit trees and a vineyard. The Rainforest Biome takes you on a trek through the jungles of Malaysia, 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.

Eden has excellent access: on arrival, marshals direct you to parking spaces. Apple One car park, closest to the entrance and visitor centre, and Apple Two car park both 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 also have manual wheelchairs available to borrow on a first-come, first-served basis (there are forty in total) and there are also buggies to transport people who have mobility difficulties to the entrance. Ticket 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 park. 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 two routes down to the Biomes – the one that goes over the bridge and down in the lift is the shortest, but to avoid any walking at all you can take the land train there and back instead. 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 throughout the gardens. For powered scooter users, the majority of Eden is a breeze. Eden's on-site powered wheelchairs should be booked two weeks in advance during peak holiday times. 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. Easy English, large print and Widgit (symbols for those with learning and communication difficulties) guidebooks are available – for further information see the Eden Project's comprehensive access guide (www.edenproject.com/access-guide). You can also get a Braille version of the guidebook sent to you (call 01726 818895 or email sarahhill@edenproject.com), and there is a Braille exhibit in the Core where visitors can explore the carbon footprint of everyday items. Free, pre-bookable “relaxed sessions” are held in the summer and Christmas holidays for children on the autism spectrum, 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.

063 Trengwainton Garden, Cornwall

Address: Trengwainton Garden, Madron, Penzance, Cornwall, TR20 8RZ **Web:** www.nationaltrust.org.uk/trengwainton-garden **Tel:** 01736 363148 **Hours:** Mid-Feb to Oct Mon–Thu & Sun 10:30am–5pm; last entry at 4:30pm **Dates:** Closed Fri & Sat, plus Nov to mid-Feb **Entry:** [D]£8 [C]Up to 2 carers free [A]£8 [under 5s]free [5–15s]£4 [Fam]£20. Free carers can be pre-booked on 0344 8001895



With spectacular views from the lawns in front of a stately home, Trengwainton Garden is a hidden gem near Penzance. This stunning garden is stocked with plants from around the world, some which have flowered here for the first time in the British Isles.

The long gentle hill into the garden leads past a stunning display of mature trees and shrubs. To the right are the walled gardens where a wide selection of year-round fruit and vegetables are on display – much of the produce grown is used in the garden's tea room. Further sights in the walled gardens include a second-hand bookshop, an orchard, chickens and bee hives. Continuing up the main route the hill stretches on,



which might be a struggle for some, but eventually visitors emerge onto a lawn in front of a private stately home. Here, you can stop and admire fantastic vistas over Mount's Bay – sometimes even as far as the Lizard peninsula on a clear day – or move further on to the terrace, where you can sit down and enjoy the view.

There are two car parks; the left one at the bottom has six disabled parking spaces. From here, the garden entrance is about a hundred yards along an inclining winding path, but if that's too far, it's possible to be dropped outside the entrance. The shop/reception has a level floor and enough space for a wheelchair to manoeuvre easily. Most doors – barring the one into the second-hand bookshop – are ramped or have a ramp nearby. There is a spotlessly clean disabled toilet in both the men's and the ladies' (no key required), with wide doors, grab rails and enough space inside to manoeuvre.

Two manual wheelchairs are available to hire (phone in advance to book). An electric Trampler can also be booked through the Countryside Mobility Scheme (www.countrysidemobility.org). Powered wheelchairs are useful for the slightly steep and long main route through the garden, though might not fit through some of the gaps when seeing the house, view or walled gardens. Manual wheelchairs give flexibility for seeing more of the garden, although assistance will be needed with the slopes, gravelled paths and in navigating around the odd sharp corner or tight gateway. There are rest benches throughout the garden. Guides are available in large print and Braille, and there is also a guide with a wheelchair-friendly route laid out, complete with the gradient of the slopes throughout the gardens. Sight- or hearing-impaired visitors can try the sensory trail, which focuses on the sounds, feel and smell of the garden. Note that the main path through the gardens is a driveway, and wheelchair users should look out for the gullies on either side if moving aside to make way for a car.

FOOD & DRINK ►► The *Trengwainton Garden Tea Room* serves sandwiches, salads and similar meals, many made from ingredients grown in the gardens. It stops serving meals at 3pm, but cakes and drinks are available until 4.45pm.

064 National Maritime Museum, Cornwall

Address: Discovery Quay, Falmouth, Cornwall, TR11 3QY **Web:** www.nmmc.co.uk **Tel:** 01326 313388

Hours: Daily 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 25 & 26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£12.95 [C]free [A]£12.95 [5–17s]£5 [under 5s]free



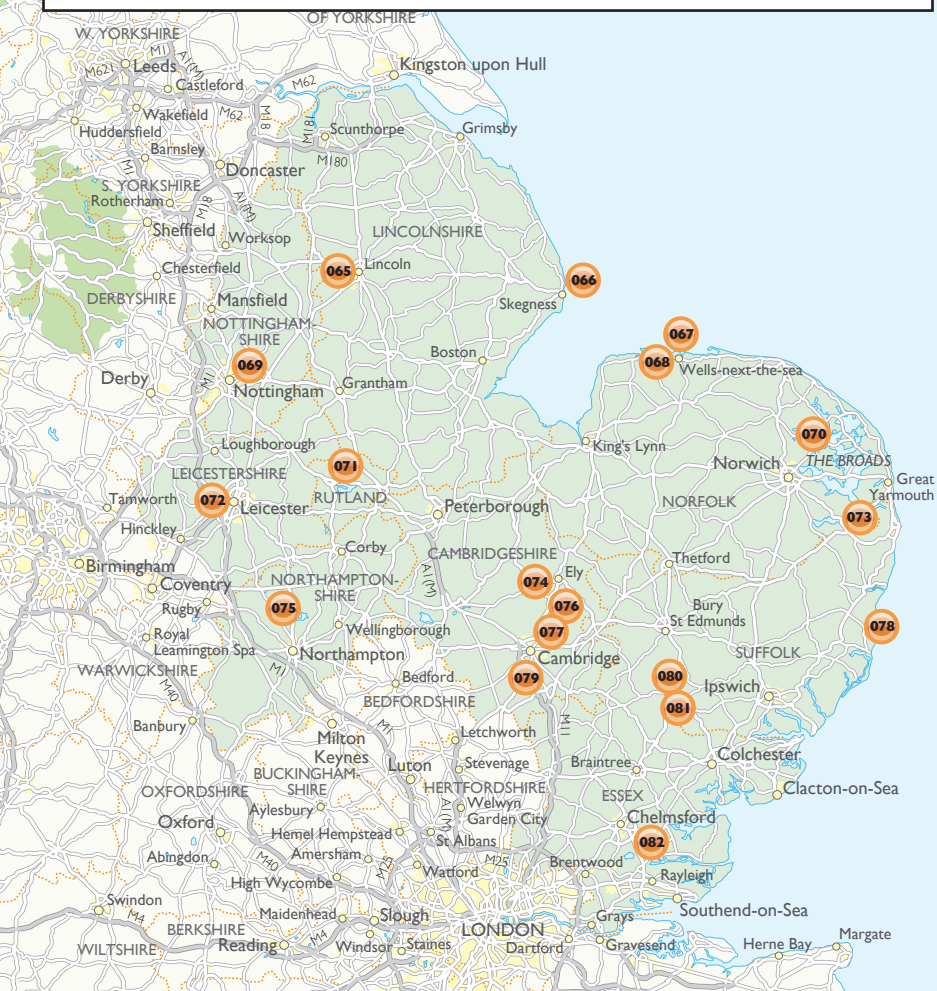
With fifteen galleries spread over five floors, the museum's exhibits include full-sized boats, toy yachts, areas where you can watch craftsmen building and restoring boats using traditional tools, or discover what it was like to live and work in a lighthouse. You can even head underwater to the tidal zone to look through thick glass windows into the misty depths of the bay, or up to the top of a look-out 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 and games that teach about currents, charting the seas and more.

The museum aims to be as accessible as possible: whilst there are stairs up to the look-out 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. 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. 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 several of the staff are currently undergoing training in disability awareness. The hearing loop only works in the shop and during events, but plans are in place to have a BSL interpreter and make the seating more accessible. There are four disabled spaces in the car park across the flat but cobbled square, which sometimes hosts lively events with stalls, cooking smells, and noise.

FOOD & DRINK ►► The wheelchair-accessible café on the second floor serves drinks and light meals such as jacket potatoes, soups and deserts, all under £7. Vegetarian and gluten-free options are available. Plenty of excellent restaurants on the square outside serve more substantial meals.

The East Midlands and East Anglia

- 065** Lincoln Cathedral
- 066** Natureland Seal Sanctuary
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- 078** Dunwich Heath Coastal Centre
- 079** IWM Duxford
- 080** An Artistic Drive through East Anglia
- 081** Gainsborough House Museum
- 082** Hyde Hall



065 Lincoln Cathedral, Lincolnshire

Address: Minster Yard LN2 1PX **Web:** www.lincolncathedral.com **Tel:** 01522 561600 **Hours:** July–Aug Mon–Fri 7.15am–8pm, Sat & Sun 7.15am–6pm; Sept–June Mon–Sat 7.15am–6pm, Sun 7.15am–5pm; Evensong is at 5.30pm (Mon–Sat) and 3.45pm (Sun) **Dates:** occasional closures for special events, check ahead **Entry:** [D]£6.40 [C]free [A]£8 [5–16s]£4.80 [under 5s] free [Con]£6.40 [Fam] £20.80



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. Down the left side, a series of beautiful and tactile wooden sculptures depict the Stations of the Cross. Beyond them, 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.

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 ground floor of the cathedral is wheelchair accessible, with the exception of the three side chapels dedicated to the armed forces. Just inside the entrance there is a touch model of the building, including a site layout, with a foot-operated audio guide, while in the northeast transept there is a touch exhibition with Braille descriptions. The toilet block has two disabled toilets, and ear defenders can be provided for those who need them.

FOOD & DRINK ►► The cosy *Cloister Refectory*, at the north end of the cathedral, serves cakes, sandwiches and a small range of hot meals, some using local ingredients, such as Lincolnshire sausages in the excellent sausage pie. It's small, but at busy times of the year tables spill out into the cloisters (Mon–Sat 10am–4.30pm, Sun noon–4pm).

066 Natureland Seal Sanctuary, Lincolnshire

Address: North Parade, Skegness PE25 1DB **Web:** www.skegnessnatureland.co.uk **Tel:** 01754 764345
Hours: daily 10am–4pm winter; 10am–5pm summer **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 25–26 Dec **Entry:** [D] with carer £7.20 [A]£9 [4–16s]£6.50 [Disabled child with carer]£5.20 [Senior with carer]£6 [Fam]£28; winter discounts available



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 – to date, over seven hundred seals have been successfully returned to the wild. 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 spread of other animals to see, including black-footed penguins, Chilean flamingos, crocodiles, pythons and spiders, plus a butterfly house and a collection of domestic animals you can handle and feed, including goats, rabbits and guinea pigs – as well as some meerkats and alpacas. Natureland was built in 1965 and is showing its age a bit, though it has been refurbished in some areas. 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 unsteady on foot. There's are disabled 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 a couple of hundred yards further up the road. 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 April and October, the on-site *Blue Lagoon* café-restaurant serves hot and cold meals, and a range of sandwiches and cakes. During other months, it's open for drinks only.

067 Norfolk Coast Path: Wells-next-the-Sea

Address: Wells-next-the-Sea NR23 1AT **Web:** www.norfolktrails.co.uk, www.norfolkcoastaonb.org.uk

Hours: daily **Dates:** no closures **Entry:** free; pay-and-display parking varies



Part of the National Trail (www.nationaltrail.co.uk), the 45-mile-long Norfolk Coast Path, runs from Hunstanton to Cromer, but you don't have to walk it all – the one-mile stretch linking the busy harbour of Wells-next-the-Sea to its beach and coastline makes an easy, accessible and enjoyable stroll, with plenty to look at along the way.

Start at the harbourmaster's office on Beach Road, from where the level asphalt footpath heads north towards the lifeboat house and beach car park, running parallel to the road and narrow-gauge railway line. As you follow the path, you'll be treated to great views of the lively harbour, full of working boats and pleasure craft, and of the saltmarsh and sandbar running alongside it, rich in birdlife. There are plenty of rest benches along the way, including a few with spaces for wheelchairs next to them. After about a mile, the path reaches a steep concrete slipway that – with care – can be used to access the sandy beach. After you've had your fill of the sea views, and perhaps stopped for a bite at the *Beach Café*, go back the way you came.

The best place to park is at the council-run Stearmans Yard car park on Freeman Street, about a hundred yards from the harbourside, which has ten disabled spaces – avoid the quayside car park, which has obstructive mooring posts and an unprotected quayside edge. Access to the path itself is ramped, with handrails where appropriate. There's a spacious RADAR key-accessible toilet at the start of the path, next to the harbourmaster's office, with an additional accessible toilet (no key required) at the other

Ideas ►► Animal sanctuaries

Bolderwood Deer Sanctuary (nearest postcode SO43 7GQ; 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) 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) 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.

end, in the beach car park. See www.norfolkcoastanbn.org.uk for links to an interactive map, easy-access walks and information about transport, food and local attractions.

FOOD & DRINK ►► The accessible *Beach Café* (www.holkham.co.uk/stay-eat/beach-cafe) at the north end of the path, just off the beach, serves locally produced light meals and snacks at reasonable prices in a lovely spot, with an outdoor terrace and friendly staff.

068 Holkham Hall and Beach, Norfolk

Address: Holkham Estate, Wells-next-the-Sea NR23 1AB **Web:** www.holkham.co.uk **Tel:** 01328 710227

Hours: hall: 25 Mar–Oct Mon, Thur & Sun, plus Good Friday, Easter Sat, 26 & 27 Oct noon–4pm; Field to Fork exhibition & walled garden: 25 Mar–Oct daily 10am–5pm; beach: daily dawn–dusk **Dates:** hall closed at short notice on rare occasions, check ahead **Entry:** combined ticket for hall, Field to Fork & walled garden: [D]£16 [A]£16 [5–16s]£8 [Fam]£44; car park £3



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

The Field to Fork exhibition traces the history of farming at Holkham, exploring its origins, food production, gamekeeping and conservation, using audio visual and interactive displays, films and authentic artefacts. 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. 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 pitits.



Holkham Hall

There are ten disabled parking bays next to the coach park, one hundred yards from the courtyard where the ticket office, Field to Fork exhibition, 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. Powered scooter users who can transfer are able to 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 Field to Fork exhibition from room two onwards. Blue Badge holders can park at the walled garden, avoiding a ten- to fifteen-minute walk from the hall, though transport is available to all between the two sites. 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.

069 National Ice Centre, Nottingham

Address: Bolero Square, The Lace Market NG1 1LA **Web:** 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 Dec **Entry:** prices vary depending on day and time; basic prices (excluding £2 skate hire) [D]£4.50–£6 [C]free [A]£4.50–£6 [over 5s]£4.50–£6 [under 5s]£2.50 (inc. skate hire) [Con] seniors £3.50, NUS £5 (both inc. skate hire) [Fam]£25–£31



Home to the GMB Nottingham Panthers ice hockey team, Olympic standard facilities and an impressive schedule of live events and concerts, the National Ice Centre, in the centre of Nottingham, is so much more than an average ice skating rink.

Live events – both on and off the ice – take place in the Motorpoint Arena, based in the centre: check www.motorpointarenanottingham.com for an updated schedule



National Ice Centre

of what's on, and to book tickets. Acts range from the classics and crooners of yesteryear to pro-wrestling, Disney On Ice, stars such as Ed Sheeran 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 (Club Night on Fridays and Wednesdays), parents and toddlers, or experienced skaters: check website for details.

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

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 or the lift from Lower Parliament Square. Inside there are wide walkways, lifts to all floors and accessible toilets – including the excellent Changing Places accessible changing and washing facility. 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. All leaflets can be ordered in large print on 0843 3733000 – this is also the number to call if you have questions about accessibility. Skaters should remember to wear warm clothes and bring comfortable socks and gloves.

FOOD & DRINK ►► The *Encore Bar & Grill* 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 new *Café Bar Sub Zero* provides excellent food and drink in a warm environment on Level 1 next to the ice.

070 Broad Tours, Norfolk

Address: The Bridge, Wroxham, Norfolk NR12 8RX **Web:** www.broadtours.co.uk **Tel:** 01603 782207

Hours: Mar–Oct daily 8am–5.30pm; Nov–Feb Mon–Fri 8am–5.30pm, Sat 9am–2pm, Sun 10am–3pm

Entry: Prices vary according to length and type of boat trip: check website or phone for details.



Broad Tours runs a variety of river cruises on 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. 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 evening music cruises, a Santa cruise and 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 free 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 accessible by RADAR key. Although the staff don't have specific autism or disability training, they are helpful and can assist with most needs. All four of the boats are accessible via hydraulic lifts and ramps, 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. 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) has an accessible restaurant with amazing pub food and a collection of light ales and beers.

071 Barnsdale Gardens, Rutland

Address: The Avenue, Exton, Oakham LE15 8AH **Web:** www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk **Tel:** 01572 813200

Hours: daily Nov–Feb 10am–4pm, Mar–May & Sep–Oct 9am–5pm, June–Aug 9am–7pm (last entry 1hr before closing) **Dates:** closed 24–25 Dec **Entry:** [D], [C] & [A] Mar–Oct £9, Nov–Feb £7.50 [5–16s]

Mar–Oct £5, Nov–Feb £4 [under 5s] free [Con] Mar–Oct £8, Nov–Feb £6.50 [Fam] 2 adults & 3 children Mar–Oct £27, Nov–Feb £20



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’s 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 new Cutting Garden is currently under construction, and promises beds packed with a range of cut flowers.

There are four disabled parking spaces, next to the entrance. The disabled 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 powered scooter which visitors can borrow; advance booking is advised.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The pleasant on-site *Tea Room* offers tasty soups, sandwiches, cakes and snacks, plus free wi-fi in a spacious, accessible venue. There’s also an outside seating area with wheelchair-friendly tables.

072 National Space Centre, Leicestershire

Address: Exploration Drive, Leicester LE4 5NS **Web:** 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]£11 [C]free [A]£14 [5–16s]£11 [Con]£11; parking £3.



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 – and if you’re an enthusiast, you’ll be enthralled by Tranquility Base, where you can test your suitability for a career as an astronaut. Elsewhere, six spacious galleries tell the story of the origins of the universe, of unmanned 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 – don’t miss the Weather Pod, where you can record your own TV studio weather forecast then broadcast it on the big screen. 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, such as the SIM, which is a flight to the ice moon Europa. It is possible, however, to view the Europa show in 2D from Mission Control. 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 disabled toilets off the main lobby and at the back of the ground-floor galleries.

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

073 Redwings Horse Sanctuary, Caldecott Visitor Centre, Norfolk

Address: Caldecott Visitor Centre, Beccles Road, Fritton, Norfolk NR31 9EY **Web:** www.redwings.org.uk
Tel: 01508 481000 **Hours:** Fri–Mon 10am–4pm **Entry:** Free



Redwings is the UK's largest horse sanctuary, caring for over 1500 rescued horses, ponies, donkeys and mules at several sites across 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, majestic shire horses, cheeky Shetland ponies and adorable donkeys. Redwings Caldecott is the sanctuary's largest centre, with more than 120 residents. Regular guided tours and horse care demonstrations allow visitors to find out all about these wonderful animals, their background stories and how the charity cares for them. For youngsters who still have enough energy after exploring the paddock walks, there's a children's play area, while parents can relax in the café and gift shop.

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-cleaner 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 *Nosebag 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.

074 Ely, Cambridgeshire



The tiny city of Ely (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; Ely's charming streets and pretty riverside make fine places to explore.

The cathedral (01353 667735; 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. There's a disabled parking space in the staff car park by the south door (sometimes possible to reserve ahead) 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 adapted toilet, large-print, audio and Braille guides, loop systems and a wheelchair to borrow.

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

Also worth a look is Oliver Cromwell's House on St Mary's Street (01353 662062; 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



Ely Cathedral

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, 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 town. There's a decent 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.

075 Brixworth Country Park, Northamptonshire

Address: Northampton Road, Brixworth NN6 9DG **Web:** www.northamptonshireparks.co.uk **Tel:** 0300 1265932 **Hours:** car park daily 9am–5pm; toilets daily 7am–7pm; shop daily 10am–4pm **Entry:** free; car park £3



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 550 yards to just over a mile. The paths are hard surfaced, with some undulations but no steep gradients, so regular 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 tranquil sensory garden. On the third Wednesday of every month, there is a nature-themed parents and toddlers group (10–11.30am, £3 per child; advance booking required).

Disabled parking is situated just in front of Rutland Cycling, and at the start of the walking trails. There's an excellent disabled toilet facility (you'll need a RADAR key) opposite, which contains a hoist and privacy screen. A Trampler – a type of powered off-road scooter – is available to hire for £5 for the first hour and £2.50 for each additional hour. There's also a wheelchair bike, that has a disabled passenger seat at the front with an operator seat behind, and two powered scooters available to hire: they cost £5 for 2 hours, 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 and its wildlife.

FOOD & DRINK ►► *The Willow Tree* next to the car park serves tasty breakfasts, jacket potatoes, cakes, baguettes and burgers – all in healthy portions. There is widely spaced moveable seating inside or at fixed picnic benches on the patio. There is a great view over the fields and lake and the new young children's play area is next door.

076 Wicken Fen Nature Reserve, Cambridgeshire

Address: Lode Lane, Wicken, Ely CB7 5XP **Web:** 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 & Mon–Tues in winter (check ahead) **Entry:** [D]£7.35 [C]free [A]£7.35 [5–17s]£3.60 [Fam]£18.30



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 eight thousand species of wildlife including otters and rare butterflies. 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. It is now one of England's most diverse wetland sites and a nationally important habitat for molluscs, with 88 species of slugs, snails and bivalve shellfish recorded here. 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 half-mile walk along the boardwalk or a more challenging two-mile route along either the nature trail or the adventurers' trail. The boardwalk is completely flat and very easy to walk on, but it can get a little slippery in wet weather. The other paths have a lot of tree roots and boggy patches, so wheelchair users are likely to need assistance. It's also recommended to call ahead to check the state of the roads. All three routes have hides along the way. Hire a pair of binoculars on arrival to ensure you have a good chance of seeing some of the more timid wildlife, as well as the birdlife.

Wicken Fen has two disabled parking spaces and two manual wheelchairs to borrow. The boardwalk hides are fully accessible, with moveable benches, so it is possible to get up really close to the windows. It's a great site to take dogs, but they must be kept on a lead at all times. Braille and large-print information is available.

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

077 Anglesey Abbey, Cambridgeshire

Address: Quy Road, Lode, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire, CB25 9EJ **Web:** www.nationaltrust.org.uk/anglesey-abbey **Tel:** 01223 8100801 **Hours:** Garden, plant centre, restaurant & shop daily: Apr–Oct 10am–5.30pm; Nov–Mar 10.30am–4.30pm. House Wed–Sun: Mar 11am–3pm; Apr–Oct 11am–4pm. Guided tours of house Mar–Oct Tues 11am–3pm. Mill Wed–Sun: Nov–Mar 11am–3.30pm; Apr–Oct 11am–4pm **Dates:** House closed Nov–Feb: Garden, plant centre & shop closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D] House, gardens and mill £11.60; gardens and mill £7.10 [C]free [A] House, gardens and mill £11.60; gardens and mill £7.10 [Child] House, gardens and mill £6; gardens and mill £3.75 [Fam] House, gardens and mill £29.50; Gardens and mill £18.50 (1 adult & 3 children). Since those with mobility issues can only access a limited part of the house and mill, they can have entry to the whole property at the lower price on request.



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 children. 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, Anglesey Abbey showcases the 1930s luxury and entertainment that Lord Fairhaven, the owner of the house, offered his visitors – in particular its spectacular ground-floor dining room, which is accessible to those with mobility issues. However, wheelchair users will probably find the gardens more of an attraction, with the walk to the main house a highlight in itself. You'll experience beautiful floral smells, sculptures, quaint archways and subtle streams, while the winter garden of Himalayan silver birches is so stunning it's almost haunting.

There's a huge car park with about fifty accessible 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 two tills, one

with a hearing loop, and the staff are knowledgeable about access facilities. Scooter hire and shuttle transport to the main house is available at the reception, although pre-booking is recommended. There are two accessible toilets on site, one to the left of the main entrance, and one on the other side of the grounds between the mill and the house. Both are bright and clean with grab rails, mirrors and alarm cords in case of emergency, though the toilet at the main entrance is more spacious, so better if help is required to transfer. 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. Most of the trail is flat and paved, so disabled visitors can enjoy the sights and smells of the sensory areas of the gardens. Braille information leaflets are available. Both the mill and the house have limited access if you can't use stairs. The ground floor of the house can be accessed via a call button at a door around the side of house where staff will provide assistance. 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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The bright, airy restaurant has seating inside and out, and serves delicious local produce – the chicken pie is particularly good. Expect to pay around £10 for a satisfying two-course meal.

078 Dunwich Heath Coastal Centre, Suffolk

Address: Dunwich, Saxmundham IP17 3DJ **Web:** www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dunwichheath **Tel:** 01728 648501 **Hours:** heath dawn–dusk; visitor centre hours vary, call or check website **Dates:** no site closures; dates vary for information kiosk and café **Entry:** free; car park £4.80, free to National Trust members



Dunwich Heath is an area of outstanding natural beauty with tracts of heather and gorse, woods, sandy cliffs, unspoilt beaches and lots of local wildlife. While certainly appealing to natural history enthusiasts, this lowland heath has a wonderfully remote feeling, enabling you to blow away the cobwebs, and many visitors find they want to come back time and again.

There are three designated paths to take you over the heath – the 2.5-mile Gorse Walk, the 1.2-mile Heather Walk and the 1.1-mile Birch Walk. All three provide magnificent displays of gorse and heather in spring and summer, but each takes you over a different part of the heath. It is best to decide which walk you want to explore depending on what you most fancy seeing. If you walk down the path to Minsmere Beach, you may glimpse a sand martin returning to its nest in the cliffs. There is also a sea-watch hut with lookout points where you may spot seals and harbour porpoises, as well as many sea birds. On the heath, the wildlife-viewing is more certain, with the area home to many different species, from glow-worms to red deer.

The car park has two Blue Badge bays within twenty yards of the visitor centre. There's a single powered scooter and one three-seater buggy with a driver for disabled or elderly visitors, subject to volunteer availability (booking is recommended). There are also two mobility vehicles that run along three defined routes – two take one hour,

the other takes two hours. The heath's paths have the sort of gravel you can push a wheelchair over, although the path down to the sea has seven shallow steps, while the beach itself is shingle. On-site staff can advise about the suitability of the path for wheelchairs as it varies throughout the year. Assistance dogs are welcome in the café and on the heath, but limited to certain parts of the beach.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The tearoom inside the old Coastguard Cottages serves lovely home-made cakes and seasonal food, and there's seating in the lookout area where you can enjoy far-reaching views.

079 IWM Duxford, Cambridgeshire

Address: Duxford Airfield, Duxford, Cambridge CB22 4QR **Web:** iwm.org.uk **Tel:** 01223 835000; wheelchair & scooter booking 01223 497240 **Hours:** March–Oct 10am–6pm; Oct–Mar 10am–4pm; last entry 1 hour before closing **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£14.40 [C]free [A]£18 [under 5s]free [5–15s]£9 [Disabled 5–15s]£9 [Fam] £45.90; prices vary for air shows and special events



Located on the best-preserved World War II airfield in Europe, IWM Duxford (which was previously called the Imperial War Museum 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 Concorde (no lift access); the Exhibitions Gallery, packed with child-friendly interactive exhibits; 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; a free on-site mobility vehicle is available 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 disabled 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 free audio guides for AirSpace and the Historic Duxford exhibition are available: the audio guide should be reserved in advance on 01223 497240 or email contact@iwm.org.uk. 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.

080 An Artistic Drive through East Anglia



Driving distance: 26 miles **Approx 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.

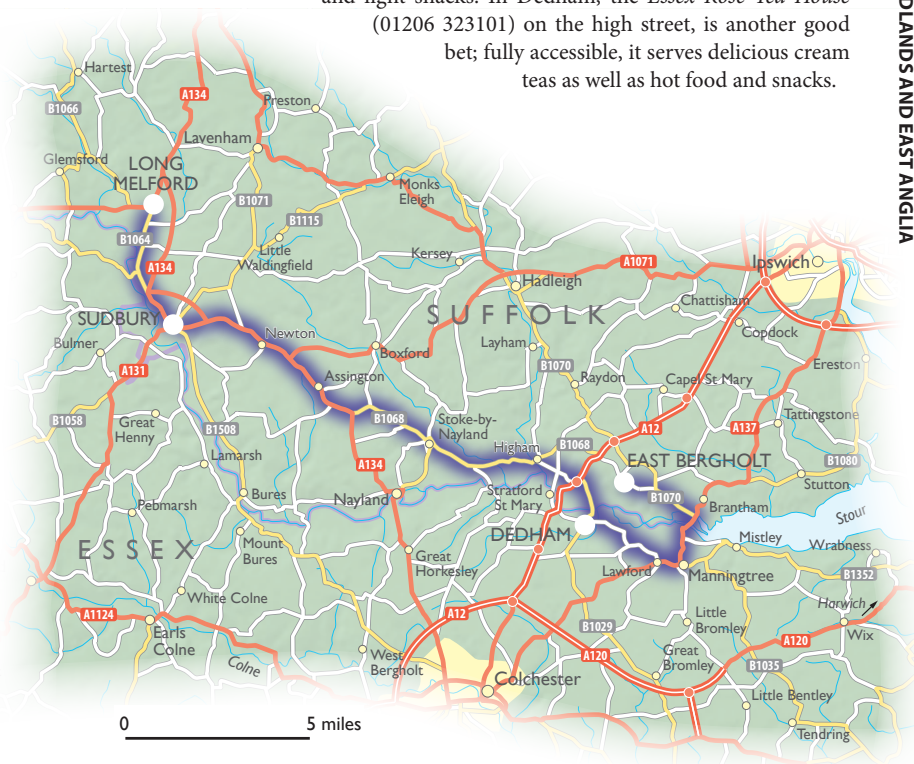
Our route begins in the pretty village of Long Melford, the location of Melford Hall, a red-brick Elizabethan pile set in 130 acres of parkland (01787 379228, www.national-trust.org.uk/melford-hall). The property was formerly owned by relatives of the author-illustrator Beatrix Potter, who frequently came to stay: you can visit her bedroom and admire a collection of her charming watercolours and sketches in the Beatrix Potter Room. Melford Hall has disabled parking, ramped access and two accessible toilets. A stair lift takes wheelchair users to the first floor, though only one wheelchair at a time is permitted upstairs.

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 is now a museum, displaying an outstanding collection of Gainsborough's works; for a full account, see p.102.

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) 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 Willy Lott's Cottage, near Flatford Mill. The mill and cottage in question are now owned by the National Trust (no general access), as is Bridge Cottage (01206 298260, www.nationaltrust.org.uk/flatford), which houses an exhibition on Constable's life and works (with level access), and has a lovely riverside tearoom.

FOOD & DRINK ► Melford Hall, Gainsborough's House and Bridge Cottage all 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 bet; fully accessible, it serves delicious cream teas as well as hot food and snacks.





Gainsborough House Museum

081 Gainsborough House Museum, Suffolk

Address: 46 Gainsborough Street, Sudbury CO10 2EU **Web:** www.gainsborough.org **Tel:** 01787 372958

Hours: Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–5pm **Dates:** closed Good Friday & 23 Dec–2 Jan **Entry:** [D]£7 [C]free [A]£7 [child and student]£2 [Fam]£16



Thomas Gainsborough was (along with Joshua Reynolds, his chief rival) eighteenth-century England's leading portrait painter, and there's no more fitting place to admire his work than here in the artist's birthplace – a handsome sixteenth-century house that's home to a superb collection of Gainsborough's paintings, drawings and prints.

The permanent collection contains numerous portraits and landscapes, many featuring the delicate, feathery brushwork and rich colours that typified Gainsborough's later works. Highlights to look out for include the recently acquired *Wooded Landscape with Old Peasant and Donkeys outside a Barn*, and the charming portrait of the *Pitminster Boy*. Also represented here are works by other artists associated with Gainsborough, such as his nephew and studio assistant Gainsborough Dupont, some of whose paintings have been mistakenly sold as Gainsboroughs. The house – whose oldest parts date from around 1500 – provides a beautiful setting for the artworks and the various items of eighteenth-century furniture and Gainsborough memorabilia on display. Outside you'll find an enchanting walled garden whose centrepiece is a 400-year-old mulberry tree.

There are three disabled bays on Gainsborough Street, right outside the museum; if these are full, the car park behind North Street is about a five-minute walk away. Entry to the museum is through step-free double doors which wheelchair users will need help to open. Inside, the house is surprisingly accessible for such an old building, and is mostly manageable in a wheelchair (with some assistance). One area on the ground floor has a large step up to it, but staff are on hand to put down a ramp, and there's a lift

up to the first floor, which must be operated by a staff member. An exhibition room on the second floor involves a small flight of six curving stairs, and no lift, so it's not accessible to wheelchairs. There's a spacious disabled toilet fitted with grab-rails. Outside, the garden paths are a little overgrown, but with help wheelchair users can still enjoy the delightful grounds. There are no specific facilities for visitors on the autism spectrum, but it's a fairly quiet museum with low lights and no music: you can call in advance to check whether any large groups or schoolchildren are visiting, which may be disturbing for some visitors.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ There is no on-site coffee shop, but there are numerous cafés nearby. Refreshments can be arranged in advance for group bookings.

082 Hyde Hall, Essex

Address: Creepthedge Lane, Chelmsford CM3 8ET **Web:** www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall **Tel:** 01245 400256 **Hours:** Daily: Mar–Oct 10am–6pm; Nov–Feb 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed Dec 25 **Entry:** [D]£11.50 [C]free [A]£11.50 [under 5s]free [5–16s]£5.75 [Fam] £29



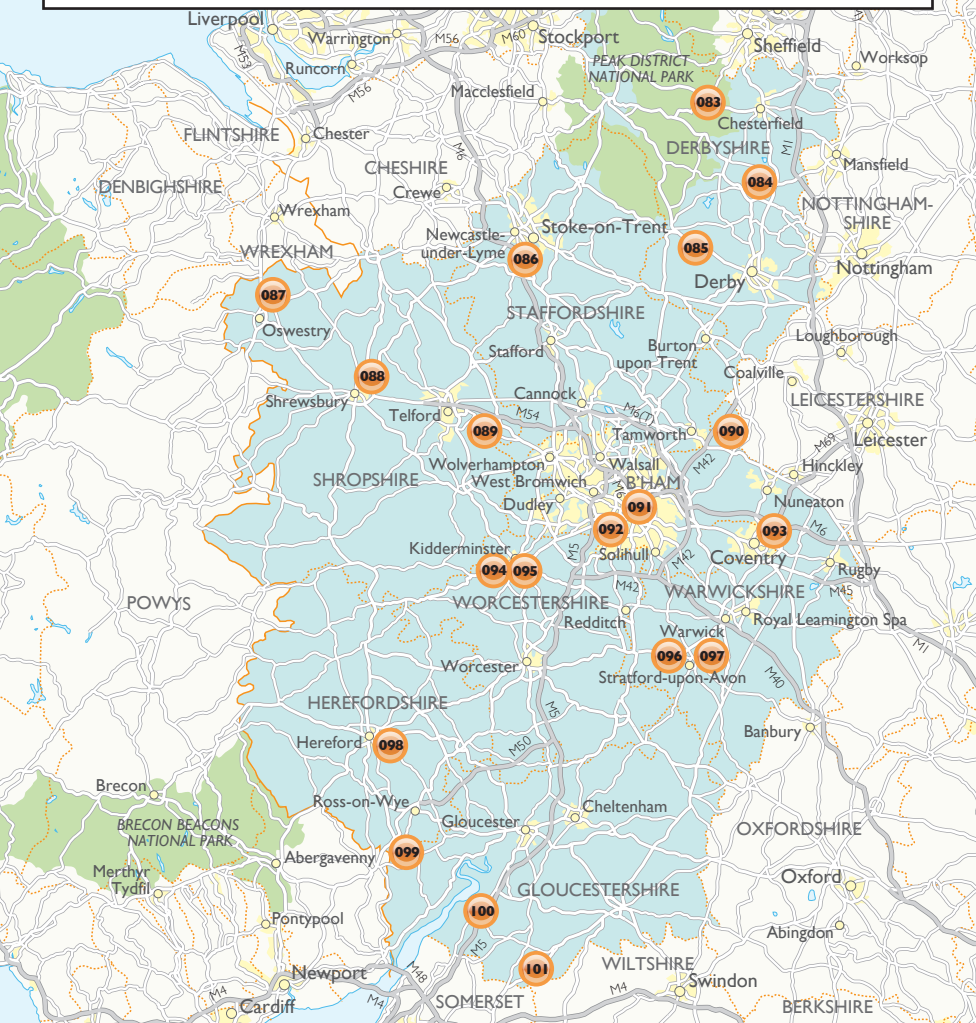
From its humble beginnings in 1955, when there were just six trees on a windswept hill, the land at Hyde Hall has been transformed into a variety of glorious gardens, with a wide range of plants, trees and flowers from around the world. The highlight is the Hilltop Garden, with its wonderful vistas over the grounds below. Along with exploring the magnificent gardens, visitors can learn about the history of the place in the library, or try one of the many workshops and activities on offer, such as woodcarving or paper-making, using original techniques, creating an indoor terrarium, learning how to grow vegetables and willow-weaving.

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 borrow one of the two mobility scooters available (suggested donation £2). The signage is clear with a large map clearly visible as you enter the gardens: although none of the signs are in Braille, there are Braille guide books available. There's level access through automatic doors into the main building, which has plenty of space for wheelchairs and powered 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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ *The Barn 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.

The West Midlands and West Country

- 083** Chatsworth House
- 084** Crich Tramway Village
- 085** Peak District Scenic Drive
- 086** The Trentham Estate
- 087** Park Hall Farm Countryside Experience
- 088** Shrewsbury
- 089** RAF Museum Cosford
- 090** Twycross Zoo
- 091** Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum
- 092** Cadbury World
- 093** Herbert Art Gallery and Museum
- 094** Severn Valley Railway
- 095** West Midland Safari and Leisure Park
- 096** The Mad (Mechanical Art and Design) Museum
- 097** Royal Shakespeare Company
- 098** Hereford Cathedral and Mappa Mundi
- 099** Symonds Yat Rock and aMazing Hedge Puzzle
- 100** WWT Slimbridge
- 101** Westonbirt, The National Arboretum



083 Chatsworth House, Derbyshire

Address: Bakewell DE45 1PP **Web:** www.chatsworth.org **Tel:** 01246 565300; access information 01246 565430 **Hours:** daily; house 11am–5pm; garden 11am–5.30pm; farmyard & adventure playground 10.30am–5.30pm; last entrance 1hr before closing; opening hours slightly longer at weekends, high summer and at Christmas, check website for details **Dates:** closed 1 Jan, 8 Jan–16 Mar & 24–26 Dec **Entry:** prices vary seasonally and for individual attractions, check website for details; car parking £4



Chatsworth House, in the heart of the Peak District in Derbyshire, is a deservedly popular, extraordinary stately home, dating back to the seventeenth century. Owned by the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, the house has been updated and expanded over sixteen generations, but the current incarnation remains a harmonious whole. The four-poster bed where George II died and the Great Dining Room – set as it was for the visit of George V and Queen Mary in 1933 – are showpiece exhibits. Another enduring highlight is the magnificent collection of paintings. Chatsworth displays works by Tintoretto, Van Dyck and Rembrandt, whose Portrait of an Old Man hangs in the chapel. There is a lot to see in the grounds as well: a grotto and artificial waterfall; a nursery and assorted greenhouses; a tour of the sensory garden to stimulate sound, touch and smell; a farmyard, with daily animal handling sessions; and a woodland adventure playground that has water, sand pits, a climbing forest and spiral slides.

An excellent map indicating the location of benches, accessible toilets and varying path surfaces is downloadable from the accessibility page of the website, and also given out on arrival. Parking for Blue Badge holders is clearly marked and free of charge, and drop-offs are permitted at the main entrance. Close by you'll find an information kiosk, a powered scooter and manual wheelchair collection point (these are free to hire but be sure to book in advance and be aware they may not be made available in bad weather), and an accessible toilet. There are further accessible toilets in the restaurant and at the farmyard. A wheelchair accessible trailer – pre-bookable on 01246 565300 – offers rides to the woods and lakes behind the house, while an adapted golf buggy takes visitors on tours of the garden (both incur a small additional charge). All areas, including the entrance to the main children's attractions – the farmyard and adventure playground – are at the top of the main car park. There is lift and ramp access to the animals, picnic room, café, shop and playground, but the woodland playground has a bark surface. There is a gently sloping footpath leading to the paddocks and picnic area.

A lift in the house means wheelchair users have unrestricted access to the full house. Touch tours of selected exhibits in the north wing and a BSL interpreter can be booked on 01246 565430; these are charged as guided tours, so booking as a group might be a good idea. Assistance dogs are welcome throughout the whole estate, including the house. Those who are visually impaired have access to free audio tours. Induction loops are available at the house, garden and farmyard entrances. All the restaurants and shops have level access and, except the garden shop, plenty of space. If you have any queries about accessibility before you visit, phone or email visit@chatsworth.org.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ Treat yourself to a luxurious brunch or champagne tea, at the award-winning *Cavendish Restaurant*. Alternatively, the fully-accessible *Carriage House* restaurant is good for families, serving fresh dishes prepared from local and seasonal food.



Crich Tramway Village

084 Crich Tramway Village, Derbyshire

Address: Crich, Matlock DE4 5DP **Web:** www.tramway.co.uk **Tel:** 01773 854321 **Hours:** Mid-Mar to early Nov daily 10am–5.30pm (last admission 4.30pm); trams sometime run later during school hols **Dates:** closed early Nov to mid-Mar **Entry:** [D]£10.50 [C]free [A]£16.50 [4–15s]£9.95 [Disabled 4–15s]£6.50 [Seniors]£12.50 [Disabled seniors] £9.50 [Fam]2 adults & 3 children or 1 adult & 4 children £39.50; full-price ticket gives unlimited admission for 12 months; discount for advance online bookings.



Set in the Derbyshire countryside, Crich Tramway Village is home to the National Tramway Museum, with its extensive collection of restored vehicles and memorabilia including more than sixty trams built between 1900 and 1930. Full of old-fashioned charm, the large, recreated period village has plenty to explore including a pub, old-style sweet shop, tram depots, an indoor exhibition centre, play areas and a woodland sculpture trail. On entering the museum, visitors collect an old penny to pay the conductor then take a tram ride around the period village. Exhibition areas take visitors on a fascinating journey through a hundred years of tram history, with interactive audio-visual panels, archive films, a dressing-up area and craft room. You can also watch the museum's workshop staff restoring the trams to tip-top condition from an accessible viewing gallery. Throughout the year, themed events give visitors the chance to dress up in Edwardian and 1940s' clothes.

All areas in the village can be accessed via ramps or lifts, and a wheelchair- and scooter-accessible tram runs at 11.30am, 2.30pm and on request. Due to the nature of the site there are cobbles, slopes and some uneven surfaces, but a "smoothway" path for wheelchairs and pushchairs runs from the main reception area around the village. Significant slopes lead to the Woodland Trail, play area and tea room. To avoid the steep uphill segment, take a tram to the top of the village and walk back down

through the woodland trail. Although the smoothway path runs around the play area, the equipment, including a nest swing, is set on bark so may be difficult to access for some. There are plenty of helpful staff and seats throughout the village, plus audio descriptions on interpretation panels, tactile exhibits and several carved, wooden sculptures on the woodland trail. A number of well-appointed, accessible toilets are dotted throughout the site, and all the eating options and shops have ramped or level access. The main admissions area has level access through a wide double door, with illuminated magnifying glasses and a hearing loop available. Whilst there's no formal fast-track admission, call in advance if queuing is difficult and staff will meet you and speed up the process. The themed events are very busy, so visitors who find this challenging may prefer to visit at a quieter time. Check the website for details of events and accessibility.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ You can have a meal in the period *Red Lion* pub (which also serves gluten-free beer and cider) and the traditional *Rita's Tea Rooms*, grab a sweet treat from *Bluebell's Ice Cream Parlour* or *Barnett's Sweet Shop*, or enjoy a scenic picnic.

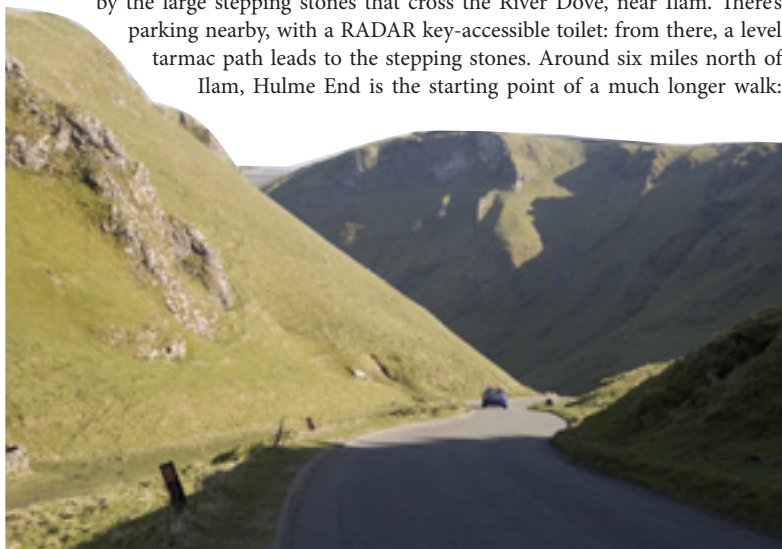
085 Peak District Scenic Drive

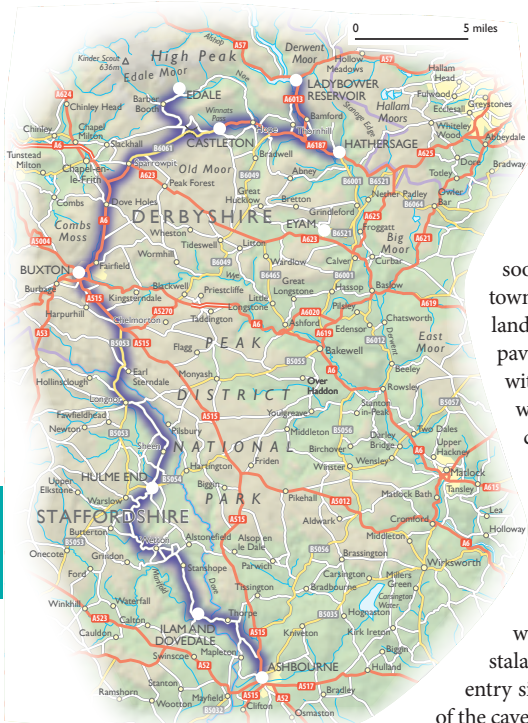


Driving distance: 50 miles **Approx time without stops:** 1 hour 40 minutes

Sandwiched between the major urban centres of Manchester and Sheffield, the Peak District National Park (www.peakdistrict.gov.uk) is an oasis of beautiful, unspoiled countryside. This fifty-mile drive takes you through the varied landscape of the park, from the gentle hills and dales of the White Peak in the south, to the dramatic, rugged moorland of the Dark Peak in the north.

Starting at the bustling market town of Ashbourne, drive north through wooded dales to pretty Dovedale; a good spot to get out and admire the scenery is down by the large stepping stones that cross the River Dove, near Ilam. There's parking nearby, with a RADAR key-accessible toilet: from there, a level tarmac path leads to the stepping stones. Around six miles north of Ilam, Hulme End is the starting point of a much longer walk:





the level, nine-mile Manifold Trail, running along a disused railway line – the information point near the trailhead has an accessible toilet and Blue Badge parking, though it's opening hours are very limited.

Continuing north, you'll soon reach the Victorian spa town of Buxton, whose elegantly landscaped Pavilion Gardens (www.paviliongardens.co.uk) are laced with inviting accessible paths, with accessible toilets, a smart café-restaurant and disabled bays in the adjacent car park. Buxton is also home to Poole's Cavern (01298 26978, www.poolecavern.co.uk), on the southern edge of town – a network of underground caves with spectacular stalactites and stalagmites: wheelchair users get free entry since they can only access a third of the caves, after which there are 28 steps.

Northeast of Buxton, the ancient village of Castleton is overlooked by the romantic hilltop ruins of twelfth-century Peveril Castle. There are several Blue John mines and show caves here including Peak Cavern (01433 620285, www.peakcavern.co.uk), a short walk (step-free) from the car park next to the accessible national park visitor centre in the village. Its vast entrance cave – the largest natural cave entrance in Britain – was for two centuries inhabited by rope-makers supplying the lead-mining industry; wheelchair users can watch demonstrations of the craft here, but can't go any further into the caves.

Take a scenic detour to the Moorland visitor centre in pretty Edale, via Mam Nick – the dip in the southern ridge that borders the Edale valley – before returning to Castleton through the stunning 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 impressive Ladybower Reservoir, which has a visitor and cycle hire centre and an accessible six-mile circuit around its shore. Back on the main route, proceed east toward the village of Hathersage, which boasts a heated outdoor pool (01433 650843, www.hathersageswimmingpool.co.uk; there's ramped access through the back gate and lift for entry into the water) surrounded by stunning scenery.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ *The Castle* in Castleton (www.vintageinn.co.uk/thecastlecastleton) serves good, reasonably priced food – eat by the crackling fire, or in the pretty gardens.

086 The Trentham Estate, Staffordshire

Address: Stone Road, Trentham, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 8JG **Web:** www.trentham.co.uk **Tel:** 01782 646646

Hours: gardens 10am–6pm (exit by dusk); autumn & winter hours vary (check website), but generally north entrance open until 4pm, south entrance until 1pm, 3pm at weekends; Monkey Forest Apr–Oct daily 10am–5pm, last entry 1hr before closing **Dates:** gardens: closed 25 Dec; Monkey Forest: closed Nov–Mar **Entry:** gardens: [D]£5.75 [C]£5.75 [A]£11.25 [5–15]£9.60 [under 5s] free [Con]£9.60 [Fam]£28.50–£39, discounts available online; Monkey Forest: [D]£5.50 [C]£5.50 [A]£8.50 [3–14s]£6.50 [Con]£8



From the days of its first recorded mention as a royal manor in the Domesday Book in 1085, 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, in the midst of a £100-million redevelopment project, 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 newly revamped gardens are as stunning as ever, especially the superb Italian Garden which marches boldly down to a mile-long lake, designed by Capability Brown. You can walk around the lake, take a boat across it or admire it from a miniature train. Beyond the lake lies the Trentham Monkey Forest, home to 140 Barbary macaques which roam freely around sixty acres of woodland. Watching the family groups tending to and playing with their young makes for compelling viewing. There’s also Aerial Extreme, a tree-based high ropes adventure course. No experience is necessary, but there is a minimum height requirement of 1.4m. 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 disabled spaces and level access to the garden centre, shopping village and gardens. The Monkey Forest is quite a distance from the other areas, but you can drive there (it has its own car park) or reach it on the wheelchair accessible (seasonal) boat across the lake. The paths around the gardens are mostly level, with a compacted gravel surface; scented paths and tactile features add to their accessibility. The path around the lake is only partially suitable for wheelchairs, but there is a designated accessible route through the Monkey Forest. There are several disabled toilets dotted around the site, all equipped with grab-rails. Assistance dogs are not permitted anywhere in the Monkey Forest site.

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.

087 Park Hall Farm Countryside Experience, Shropshire

Address: Burma Road, Oswestry SY11 4AS **Web:** www.parkhallfarm.co.uk **Tel:** 01691 671123 **Hours:** Apr to mid-Oct daily 10am–5pm; Feb & Oct half-terms daily 10am–4pm; Nov, Dec & mid-Feb to Mar Sat & Sun 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec–9 Feb **Entry:** [D]£7.95 [C]free [A]£8.95 [2–16s]£8.95 [Con]£7.95 [Fam]£33.95



This is a boisterous day out: if you're a family that enjoys getting muddy and can't get enough of farm animals, then you'll love it here.

Adults will be pleasantly surprised by the uniforms and memorabilia in the Welsh Guards display, while older children will enjoy the fitness and assault courses, a 131 foot zip-wire, the off-road 4x4 children's driving course and a go-kart circuit. Animals are the main draw, especially the pig races held daily at 12.30pm and 2.30pm. Younger children can hold guinea pigs and rabbits in the pet handling area. Staff help children aged over five milk the cows and even toddlers can join in with brushing the tiny Shetland ponies. From the end of February until early summer, lambs and goats can be bottle-fed by visitors – check the website for times. Less confident children can watch the Clydesdale heavy horses gracefully cross the stableyard, or feed the ducks in the pond. Elsewhere, there are sand pits, two bouncy castles, a drop slide and a massive play barn with slides, nets and ropes, while the Trench Experience allows visitors to experience warfare through an elaborate network of trenches from World Wars I and II and modern times.

Disabled parking is close to the entrance. The Park Hall team has made provisions for visitors with disabilities – wheelchair users in particular – to access the farm. However, there are areas of the attraction that are still reminiscent of a working farm. Be aware that some of the flagstones and paths are slightly uneven and that some of the ramps for access between barns and to indoor and outdoor areas can be tricky for wheelchair users to negotiate independently. There is no step-free access to the upper level of the granary or to the tractor-towed cart-ride around the farm, however the friendly staff are on hand to assist if required.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The café/restaurant at the back of the largest building serves basic hot and cold food, including burgers, soup and sandwiches – at peak times it can be a little crowded but there are picnic areas if you want to bring your own sandwiches.

088 Shrewsbury, Shropshire



Almost completely encircled by a loop in the River Severn, Shrewsbury's town centre (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 the most beautiful market towns in Britain, Shrewsbury boasts a wealth of stunning, timber-framed black-and-white buildings, many of them dating from

Medieval times. The Visitor Information Centre, in the Music Hall on The Square, offers fascinating guided walking tours around the historic centre – with notice, these can be adapted to suit visitors with disabilities. The tours take in the best of the town's medieval architecture, including gems such as the sixteenth-century Market Hall and a clutch of twisting, evocatively named streets and alleyways (known as “shuts”), including Grope Lane and Fish Street – they're manageable in a wheelchair, but some have uneven surfaces and lack drop kerbs.

If the narrow streets leave you feeling a little claustrophobic, head over to the expansive Quarry Park, a beautifully landscaped riverside park, with plenty of rest benches and some inviting, accessible footpaths. Its centrepiece is “the Dingle” – a sunken garden sited in a former quarry, bursting with colourful flowers.

Try to pay a visit to Shrewsbury Abbey (01743 232723, www.shrewsburyabbey.com), home of fictional detective Brother Cadfael, just across the English Bridge. Although much of the abbey was destroyed in the sixteenth century, it retains four massive Norman columns from the original church, plus an attractive stained-glass window and fourteenth-century tower. The ancient stone tombs are also compelling, and there is a memorial to local World War I poet Wilfred Owen. The abbey has level access, an accessible toilet and on-site parking with designated disabled spaces.

Shrewsbury offers a good spread of on-street Blue Badge parking in the town centre, with designated spaces in many car parks including the Abbey Foregate – or use the accessible park-and-ride service (see www.shropshire.gov.uk). As the town is spread over two hills you should be prepared for some steep inclines, which means that manual wheelchair users are likely to need assistance. There are a number of accessible toilets dotted around, including at the Market Hall. The Visitor Information Centre stocks copies of the Wheelchair User's Guide to Shropshire, which has some information on Shrewsbury.

089 RAF Museum Cosford, Shropshire

Address: Shifnal TF11 8UP **Web:** www.rafmuseum.org.uk/cosford **Tel:** 01902 376200 **Hours:** Mar–Oct daily 10am–4pm, Nov–Feb daily 10am–5pm; last entrance 1hr before close **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** free; parking charge for all visitors



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.

The sister site to Hendon's RAF Museum, in north London, this museum houses over seventy aircraft in four hangars, including experimental aircraft, engines, missiles and World War II planes. Captured enemy aircraft provide an interesting comparison with the British models on show, while the Cold War exhibition covers the subject extensively. The displays are interactive throughout, but the Fun 'n' Flight Learning Zone in the test-flight hangar is particularly brilliant, and well engineered for kids.

Access to the visitor centre from the conveniently located disabled parking spaces is along a downhill tarmac path. Pedestrian entry is through a rotating door but there's a separate wheelchair accessible entrance. RAF Museum Cosford is pretty well set up for



RAF Museum Cosford

wheelchair users, although a fair amount of transferring between buildings is required. Maps are on hand to help with navigation from hangar to hangar (keep an eye out for Hangar One, as it isn't as well signposted as the others). The four museum buildings are level and spacious, and three of them have well-indicated pedestrian walkways for visitors with visual disabilities. There are four designated toilets throughout the site as well as a Changing Places toilet located near visitor reception. The one split-level building housing the Cold War exhibition has an induction loop and a lift giving access to a very effective viewing gallery, plus Braille and large-print guides are available. The overall site has a slight gradient and some visitors may find the return trip to the car park quite steep. A limited number of motor scooters and manual wheelchairs can be borrowed on a first-come first-served basis.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The glass-fronted café *Refuel* is light, modern and spacious, with moveable furniture, and a menu including hot-dogs, fish and chips, omelettes and paninis.

090 Twycross Zoo, Warwickshire

Address: Burton Road, Atherstone CV9 3PX **Web:** www.twycrosszoo.org **Tel:** 0844 4741777 **Hours:** Nov–Mar daily 10am–4.30pm; Apr–Oct daily 10am–5.30pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£16.45 [C] free [A]£19.45 [3–16s]£14.45 [D 3–16s]£21.45 [under 3s]free [Con]£17; parking free



Set in more than 80 acres, Twycross Zoo is home to around 500 animals from almost 150 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 and is home to 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 ape.

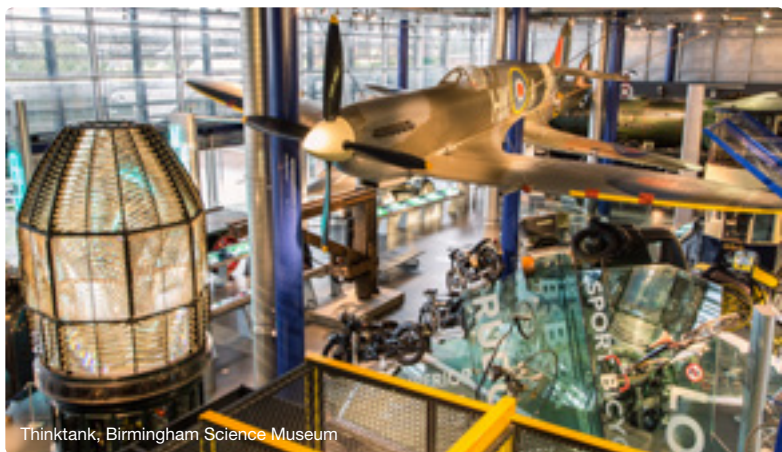
As well as primates, the zoo is home to all sorts of other species, including snow leopards, Humboldt penguins and meerkats. Visitors can get up close and personal with butterflies and lorikeets in their walk-through enclosures, and admire the graceful giraffes in their savannah setting. Look out, too, for the penguins as they waddle around on their daily parade. Just outside the zoo is a nature reserve, dedicated purely to British wildlife, with more than 400 species including the endangered grey partridge.

The zoo and its staff have a commendable grasp of the needs of visitors with disabilities and facilities are impressive. There are well-signposted Blue Badge parking spaces in front of the Himalaya visitor centre (the zoo's main entrance). Twycross is wonderfully flat with very few slopes, and certainly no steep ones. All path surfaces are hard gravel or tarmac. Powered scooters can be rented for £12, and manual wheelchairs for £5, though numbers are limited so book in advance. All the cafés, shops and toilets are easily accessible, as are most of the animal houses. While welcome on site, assistance dogs are restricted from entering some areas; check which ones with the guest services team. Induction loops can be picked up at guest services.

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 a great spot for a family lunch. The restaurant has moveable seating, while the hot and cold menu includes healthy, vegetarian and gluten-free options. There's a gift shop and soft-play area, too. Several other places on site offer food, including the *Twycross Fish Bar* and the *Wet and Wild Lodge*, and there are indoor picnic facilities at the *Cockatoo Café*.

091 Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum

Address: Millennium Point, Curzon Street B4 7AP **Web:** www.birminghammuseums.org.uk **Tel:** 0121 3488000 **Hours:** daily 10am–5pm; last admission one hour before closing **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec
Entry: [D]£9.75 [C]free [A]£13.50 [3–15s]£9.75 [under 3s]free [Con]£8.40 [Fam]£33–50



Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum

Bursting at the seams with hands-on exhibits, Thinktank is a fun museum, covering the sweep of past, present and future science and technology. Although often awash with young children, there is plenty to engage big kids and adults too, and a family will need at least half a day to enjoy it all. This diverse learning experience is spread over four galleries on four floors. Down on Level 0, the journey starts in The Past, where there's a full-size Spitfire, plus a new gallery that explores Birmingham's key role in the manufacture of these aeroplanes, and a look at the steam machinery of the Industrial Revolution that was instrumental in Birmingham's expansion. From there, as you work your way up the building, through the three further areas, The Balcony, The Present and The Future, all the exhibits are colourful, tactile and utterly compelling. You can play along with a drum-playing robot, solve a crime, record a news broadcast and programme the Robo Thespian, a robot that imitates your expressions, body language and voice. The under-7s roleplay area is vast, amazingly well thought-out and a brilliant place for younger children to unleash their imaginations and learn at the same time. The diverse programme of events, activities and lectures for adults changes regularly – check the website for dates and for BSL-interpreted events. In addition, there is a Planetarium (shows £1.50) in the wider Millennium Point complex where Thinktank is based, plus the exciting Science Garden outdoor discovery space with family-oriented activities.

Thinktank was created in partnership with the visual impairment specialists at Queen Alexandra College, with every element of the space crafted to ensure accessibility. The displays are low-level, with plenty of free space around the exhibits and captions on the walls are generally large. There's an accessibility box, containing large-print and Braille guides, magnifying glasses, adult and child wheelchairs, ear defenders and an induction loop. People on the autism spectrum can download information (from www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/thinktank/visit) to prepare for a visit. Morning Explorer sessions are held before the museum opens to the public for those on the autism spectrum to look around the exhibitions at a quiet time and do craft or other activities: entrance for these sessions is half-price (with a free adult carer), and places must be pre-booked by phone (see www.birminghammuseums.org.uk for details). There's a multistorey car park behind Thinktank, accessed from Jennens Road. Blue Badge parking is free.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The café, located on Level 0 of the museum, serves hot and cold food including baguettes, jacket potatoes, pizza (whole or by the slice) and daily specials. There is always a Halal option available. Tables and chairs are moveable but manoeuvring can be difficult during busy periods.

092 Cadbury World, Birmingham

Address: Cadbury World, Linden Road, Bournville, Birmingham, B30 1JR **Web:** www.cadburyworld.co.uk **Tel:** 0844 8807667 **Hours:** Opening hours vary from 9am–4.30pm at peak times to 10am–2pm in low season: check website for details. All visits must be pre-booked **Dates:** Closed 1–23 Jan & 10, 14, 17, 24–26 & 31 Dec **Entry:** [D]£8.35 [C]£8.35 [A]£16.75 [4–15s]£12.30 [Disabled 4–14s]£6.15 [under 4s]free [Seniors & students with NUS card]£12.65 [Fam]£49.95; prices vary slightly depending on the day of visit, so check online first: ID required for discounted disabled tickets.





Covering the story of chocolate from bean to bar and the history of Cadbury from tiny shop to international brand, Cadbury World has enough facts and nostalgia to entertain the adults and enough fun and free chocolate for kids to love it even more.

This engaging, interactive attraction tells the story of chocolate from its discovery by the ancient Mayans and Aztecs through its journey to the bars and brand that we know today. This is a multi-sensory experience where visitors progress on a fun journey through several zones, with rides, history, interactive cinema and tasting experiences all cleverly linked – and the sweet smell of chocolate is never far away, especially where the chocolatiers demonstrate traditional chocolate-making techniques. The advertising avenue introduces a spot of nostalgia, too, bringing back memories of Cadbury advert campaigns from the past.

The flat car park has plenty of disabled parking spaces, less than a hundred yards away from the main entrance along a slight slope. Automatic doors open onto the good-sized reception area, with low-level payment desks and priority queues for those with disabilities. The accessible toilets are excellent – very modern, bright and well-kept – and there's a Changing Places facility with a hoist and height-adjustable bench.

Overall, Cadbury World is well thought-out, and those with different needs can access and interact with most parts of the attraction. The staff are helpful and are used to disabled visitors and their needs. 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. A manual wheelchair-accessible car is available on request on the Cadabra ride, and there are two wheelchair spaces on the 4D Chocolate Adventure. Wheelchair users who can transfer into a cinema seat will have a more interactive experience, as the seats shake and move as part of the experience.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The on-site café is light, with a variety of seating areas, movable chairs and tables: it serves a limited selection of food including paninis, sandwiches, cakes, jacket potatoes, burger and chips and soup.

093 Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Warwickshire

Address: Jordan Well, Coventry CV1 5QP **Web:** www.theherbert.org **Tel:** 024 76237521 **Hours:** Mon–Sat 10am–4pm, Sun noon–4pm **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** free



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

The museum's great achievement is to combine serious, grown-up content – from Saxon glazed wall tiles to thousands of fossils – with an imaginative approach that really engages children with the collections. Abstract paintings and sculpture, old masters, minerals, fossils, stuffed birds, silk weavings and Victorian clocks sit cheek by jowl with hands-on exhibits, touch-screen displays, dressing-up costumes, things to smell, story baskets, family trails and more. The Herbert has a number of permanent galleries plus a series of exhibitions that change every few months (some charge an entrance fee): check the website to see what's coming up. Recent exhibitions have included Recording Britain from the Victoria and Albert Museum, Roman Empire: Power and People from the British Museum, and *The Story of Children's Television: from 1946 to Today*, a record-breaking exhibition. Lively, child-centred workshops add to the family appeal, and everything in the museum is beautifully displayed in a modern, light and accessible space.

There's no on-site car park and the gallery is in the middle of a busy city centre. Two Blue Badge bays on Bayley Lane are used by gallery visitors and city centre shoppers alike, so are in high demand. 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. There are features not uncommon in other modern museums: induction loops in the reception area; lifts and level access to all floors; accessible toilets, for instance. But there's also the sense that the Herbert wants to go beyond this and make itself as accessible as possible to as many people as possible,



Herbert Art Gallery and Museum

particularly with its multi-sensory elements. Birdsong recordings, for instance, can not only be listened to: visitors can “feel” the sound on a vibrating metal plate, and “see” a visual interpretation of it on a large screen. Pre-arranged touch and audio descriptive tours are available, and the well-trained staff are uniformly helpful.

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

094 Severn Valley Railway, Worcestershire

Address: Kidderminster Station, 1 Comberton Place, Kidderminster DY12 1QR **Web:** www.svr.co.uk **Tel:** 01562 757900 **Hours:** daily mid-May–Sept; irregular service Oct–Apr, check website for details & special events **Dates:** closed Jan (except New Year special), 25 Dec & selected dates Feb–May & Oct–Dec (check ahead) **Entry:** “Freedom of the Line” ticket: [D]£19.80 [C] free [A]£19.80 [3–15]£13 [Con]£18.80 (seniors) [Fam]£55.50 (2 adults, up to 4 children); prices vary for special events & point-to-point fares; discounts for pre-booked tickets, though £1.75 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, but it was subsequently bought and gradually restored by enthusiasts keen to preserve it for future generations. Running sixteen 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 definitely worth making is the recently opened 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 simply 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. Access at the main stations (Kidderminster, Bewdley, Highley and Bridgnorth) is good – all offer designated disabled parking spaces, and staff can point you to the most appropriate entrance/exit or way to cross the tracks when necessary. Ramps are available for boarding trains at most stops (excluding Country Park Halt and Northwood), and many of the trains have specially adapted carriages for wheelchair users, which come with fully accessible toilets (also available at Kidderminster and Bridgnorth stations, and in the Engine House). Assistance dogs are allowed to travel on the trains for free and large-print leaflets are available from the Bewdley ticket office.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ *Flag and Whistle Food Stop* 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's also a trolley buffet service on the trains.

095 West Midland Safari and Leisure Park, Worcestershire

Address: Spring Grove, Bewdley DY12 1LF **Web:** www.wmsp.co.uk **Tel:** 01299 402114 **Hours:** mid-Feb to early Nov daily 10am–4 or 5pm; check website for winter days and hours **Dates:** generally open Sat & Sun in Jan, early Feb, Nov & late Dec, though dates and hours vary (check website) **Entry:** prices vary seasonally [D]£21 [C]free [A]£23 [3–15s]£18 [Con]£21; extra charges apply for Theme Park

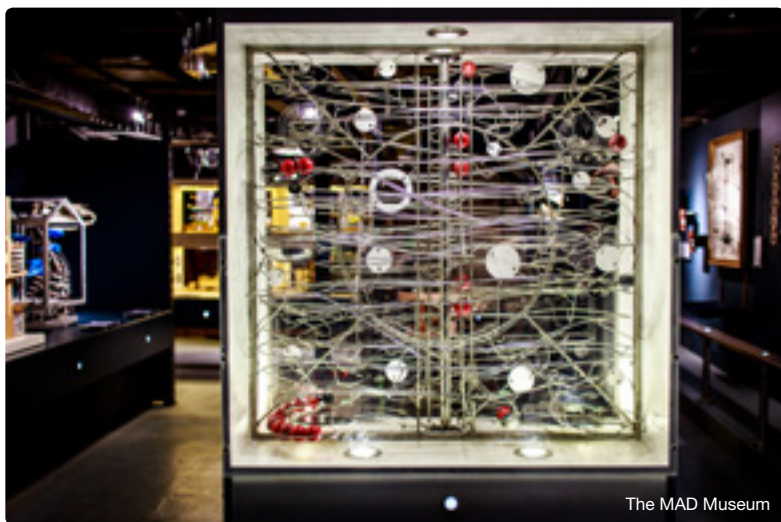


With elephants, rhinos, giraffes, zebras, tigers, hunting dogs, cheetahs and antelopes, West Midland Safari and Leisure Park gives you a taste of Africa from the comfort of your own car. You can easily spend a couple of hours driving around the park's one hundred acres (it can be congested at peak times), observing the wildlife and stopping to take photos along the way. Some of the less dangerous species can be fed from car windows, and you can buy a bag of the special 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 latest exhibit in the animal reserves is Realm of the Lions, which is home to a pride of twelve African Lions, who can often be seen relaxing on their own rock. You are welcome to drive around the park as many times as you wish. Guided minibus tours (£6) are available, but you need to be able to board the vehicle on foot.

After the safari experience, there is even 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 and Lemur Woods. As well as various animal encounters throughout the day, there's Creepy Crawlies, Seaquarium, Twilight Cave, Mark O'Shea's Reptile World, Lorikeet Landing, the wheelchair-accessible Land of the Living Dinosaurs, which is home to forty life-size animatronic, pre-historic beasts, plus the new wheelchair-accessible sensory playground Boj Giggly Park.

As the park is a pedestrian area you'll need to leave your car in the disabled parking area near the entrance. There are some 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 will need to be left as a deposit. Access to most of the animal houses, including the ramped high walkway over the hippo enclosure, is reasonable, although disabled visitors should be prepared for some steep and uneven surfaces. The park boasts thirty rides and unsurprisingly not all of them 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, useful overview of each ride on the website, along with other information.

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



The MAD Museum

096 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 10.30am–5pm; Oct–March Mon–Fri 10.30am–4pm, Sat & Sun 10.30am–5pm; weekend opening hours also apply to Warwickshire school hols & bank hols; hours may vary over Christmas (last admission 30min before closing). **Dates:** Closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£6.30 [C]£6.30 [A]£7.80 [6–15s]£5.20 [under 6s]free [Cons]£6.30 [Fam]£22



The UK's only museum dedicated to mechanical art and design, 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, the wild creations of Caractacus Pott in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* or the unbelievable machines in *Scrap Heap Challenge* 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 large lift with audio announcements and Braille text on the buttons. Once on the first floor, the museum is all on one level with wide walkways, no steps or ramps, and a number of seats throughout the venue. The majority of the exhibits are operated by well-lit, low-level push buttons. Clear directional signage is used throughout, and descriptive text for people with impaired vision is available on request. The museum has numerous mechanical installations, some with lights and sounds, while two exhibits – the Treasure Chest and the Hooded Figure – 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 which claps loudly in response to visitors, and the over-sized marble-run that follows the staircase with occasional “clanking” sounds as the marble drops between levels. Others will be absolutely fascinated by the interesting mechanics of the displays, which can be operated repeatedly. A couple of exhibits have flashing and moving lights, which people with epilepsy may be sensitive to. There is a large accessible toilet in the museum with a wide doorway, grab-rails and lowered sink. The nearest car park is on Windsor Street, a two-minute walk from the museum, with eight Blue Badge parking spaces. The museum website has further accessibility information, and you can call in advance if you have specific queries or to arrange out-of-hours sessions for visitors with autism.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ There is no on-site café, but the museum is in the heart of Stratford-upon-Avon with plenty of places to eat and drink nearby, plus a nice picnic area a five-minute walk away by the river.

097 Royal Shakespeare Company, Warwickshire

Address: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Waterside, Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 6BB **Web:** www.rsc.org.uk **Email:** access@rsc.org.uk **Tel:** 01789 403493; access booking line 01789 403436 **Hours & Dates:** check website for performance dates and times **Entry:** varies depending on performance and seat; tours [D]£4 [C]£4 [A]£6.50 [under 18s]£4 [Con]£4; tower lift £2 per person. Group rates available.



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 putting on pieces by new playwrights.

Following a major transformation project, the venue now includes the 1000-seat Royal Shakespeare Theatre, as well as the smaller, more intimate 400-seat Swan Theatre. The theatres both have thrust stage auditoria which provide the best possible setting in which to experience live theatre, as the stages project out into the audience making for a more intimate relationship between the actors and audience. There are plenty of other activities, too: you can follow a guided theatre tour; visit free exhibitions, such as *The Play's The Thing*, which explores 100 years of theatre with beautiful costumes and hands-on, interactive fun; pick up a self-guided Family Trail; or take a lift up to the top of the 105-foot-high viewing tower, for panoramic views over Shakespeare's home town.

As you'd expect, access facilities at the new venue are excellent. There are disabled parking bays on Waterside, in front of the main theatre, and ten on Chapel Lane, opposite the Swan Theatre, with additional spaces on nearby Southern Lane. Visitors with sensory disabilities are well catered for: signage is clear; there are audio-described performances with touch tours and captioned performances on every RSC production; 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 twelve wheelchair spaces, with excellent visibility, and accessible toilets on every level. Tickets for visitors with disabilities (and

Ideas ▶ Theatre

Dundee Rep Theatre (Dundee DD1 1PB; www.dundeereptheatre.co.uk; 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) With a full-time access manager and free underground parking for Blue Badge holders, the National must rank as one of the most accessible venues in London.

Royal Exchange Theatre (Manchester M2 7DH; 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) Although wheelchair access to some parts of the theatre is not possible, staff are helpful and knowledgeable about access needs and three or four performances per season are captioned, signed or BSL-interpreted.

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 for introductory notes on CD for each production. The theatre also puts on relaxed performances for those on the autism spectrum, with chill-out areas available. For more information, visit www.rsc.org.uk/access.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ *The Rooftop Restaurant & Bar* serves delicious food in a spacious and sophisticated dining room with wonderful views – the fixed-price pre-theatre menus are good value, with two courses for £21, or three courses for £26. Otherwise, the more casual *Riverside Café* serves snacks and light meals overlooking the River Avon.

098 Hereford Cathedral and Mappa Mundi, Herefordshire

Address: 5 College Cloister, Cathedral Close, Hereford HR1 2NG **Web:** www.herefordcathedral.org **Tel:** 01432 374202 **Hours:** Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Nov–Mar closes at 4pm; open for services outside these hours **Dates:** no closures **Entry:** [D]£5 [C]free [A]£6 [5–16s]£5 [Con]£5 [Fam]£8–14



Beautifully sited on the banks of the River Wye, this ancient Norman cathedral is well worth a visit. Note that it is still very much a “working” cathedral, with three daily acts of worship – check ahead if you want to catch or avoid a service.

Inside, there is much to admire, from the superb stained-glass windows (with a new tribute to the SAS) to the vibrantly painted shrine of St Ethelbert, to whom the cathedral is dedicated. Standing out from everything else however, are two unique features: the sensational Mappa Mundi and the extraordinary Chained Library. The Mappa Mundi is the largest surviving medieval map of the world, dating from around 1300. Drawn



Hereford Cathedral

on a single calfskin, it shows Jerusalem at the centre of the world, and is decorated with numerous fascinating images of historical and Biblical events, as well as plants, animals and mythological creatures. The Chained Library consists of several early seventeenth-century bookcases bearing over two hundred medieval manuscripts, all attached to the bookcases by chains, rods and locks.

The exhibition area housing the library and Mappa Mundi has level entry through a push-button door and plenty of space. Visitors with visual impairments are very well catered for with a tactile reproduction of parts of the Mappa Mundi and accompanying audio descriptions, a Braille map of the cathedral, and a Braille guide available from the reception desk. The rest of the cathedral is largely accessible to wheelchair users, except the lower crypt and the tower; portable ramps can be used to access the altar and other raised areas. There's one spacious disabled toilet (which requires a RADAR key, available in the café) outside, off the Chapter House Garden. There are two Blue Badge parking bays in the cathedral grounds (phone ahead), with additional bays on Broad Street, a couple of hundred yards away.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The on-site *Café Mundi* serves hot and cold meals, sandwiches and cakes. Newly refurbished, it's easily accessible for wheelchair users and is accredited by the Coeliac Society.

099 Symonds Yat Rock and aMazing Hedge Puzzle, Herefordshire

Symonds Yat Rock: **Address:** GL16 7NZ **Web:** www.forestry.gov.uk **Tel:** forestry commission: 0300 0674800; tourist board 01432 268430 **Hours:** Daily 8am–5pm; barrier locked at 5pm **Entry:** free, but car parking up to £5 a day, with lower rates on weekdays and for shorter stays.



aMazing Hedge Puzzle: **Address:** Ross-on-Wye HR9 6DA **Web:** www.mazes.co.uk **Tel:** 01600 890360
Hours: Apr–Jul & Sep 11am–5pm; school summer hols 11am–6pm; Mar & Oct 11am–4pm; Nov–Feb
 11am–3pm; opening hours can vary, so check website **Dates:** Maze: closed 1 Jan & 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£3.75
 [C]free [A]£3.75 [5–15s]£2.50 [Con]£3



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 five hundred feet from the river. It offers breathtaking views over the Herefordshire countryside and down to the wooded gorge far below.

Thanks to a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of almost £3 million, the viewpoint has been fitted with a fully accessible, all-ability trail to the top. Visitors should start their journey from the main car park where there is disabled parking and toilet facilities. Follow the path that leads through the hill fort to a clearing with picnic tables, and the *Log Cabin Café* – from there a solid wooden footbridge starts the path up the hill. 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. 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.

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, is composed of six-foot-high, three-foot-wide hedges; it's a challenge, but great fun and a big hit with kids. Note that you can only leave the maze by finding the centre or going backwards, so it's not suitable if you might need to exit quickly. The hard, wide paths are fine for wheelchairs, though the viewing platform in the middle can only be accessed via a metal staircase. Those on foot, however, will appreciate the well-deserved rest seats. The attraction has designated disabled parking (though it's not free for Blue Badge holders) and a RADAR key-accessible toilet. Mornings are the quietest times to visit.

FOOD & DRINK ►► Symonds Yat Rock has the *Log Cabin Café* on site (Mar–Oct daily; Feb & Nov Sat & Sun only; closed Dec & Jan). Alternatively, *The Saracens Head* (01600 890435, www.saracensheadinn.co.uk), at Symonds Yat East, a two-mile drive away, has outdoor seating overlooking the river, a ramped side entrance and a disabled toilet. The aMazing Hedge Puzzle has its own tearoom, serving cakes, teas and light lunches.

100 WWT Slimbridge, Gloucestershire

Address: Slimbridge GL2 7BT **Web:** www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/slimbridge **Tel:** 01453 891900
Hours: daily Nov–Mar 9.30am–5.00pm; Apr–Oct 9.30am–5.30pm; last entry one hour before closing
Dates: closed 25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£11 [C]free [A]£14 [4–16s]£8 [Con]£11 [Fam]£38.25



You may imagine that wetland centres are frequented solely by fanatical ornithologists brandishing binoculars and talking about obscure species. But the Wildfowl & Wetlands

Trust (WWT) works hard to ensure its habitats are fun places for everyone to visit.

Situated beside the Severn Estuary, Slimbridge Wetland Centre is the jewel in the crown of the nine WWT locations in Britain. Visitors are free to roam in the same wetland area as many of the birds, and can get very close – feeding of some species is allowed, using bird food available on site. Other species, including flamingoes, are in outdoor open enclosures. The visitor centre holds excellent daily talks on frogs, toads, otters and cranes, and back outside, beavers, otters, voles, shrews and harvest mice can be seen. Small children won't be able to resist splashing around in the Welly Boot Land wet play area (there's no water from Nov–Feb due to ice). The pond zone is also great for kids wanting to discover mini aquatic beasties. Canoes are available for hire (Apr–Oct) for a duck's-eye-view of the reed beds.

There is a large car park, with plenty of disabled 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. All the paths are tarmac, hard gravel or boardwalks, while routes around the different areas of the grounds vary from a quarter of a mile to a full mile. To take the whole centre in, you'll need to travel around three miles in total. There are many accessible hides but, due to some fairly steep ramps and some uneven boardwalks, unstable walkers or wheelchair users may want to bring a companion to assist at some points. The South Lake Discovery Hide is particularly tranquil and quiet, so good for those on the autism spectrum. Wheelchair users may also want to bring gloves as lots of birds wandering freely around can cause a lot of mess on the paths – plenty of hand sanitiser is provided throughout the site. You can book manual wheelchairs and powered scooters in advance. There are disabled toilets in the visitor centre and on the grounds. Assistance dogs are welcome, but proof of registration is required because of the wildlife on site.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The visitor centre has a spacious restaurant serving good-quality hot and cold food, including homemade bread and soup. It has moveable tables and chairs and great views over the wetlands through huge windows.



WWT Slimbridge

101 Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, Gloucestershire

Address: Near Tetbury GL8 8QS **Web:** www.forestry.gov.uk/westonbirt **Tel:** 0300 0674890 **Hours:** daily 9am–5pm; last admission 4.30pm **Dates:** open daily except 25 Dec **Entry:** Mar–Nov [D]£10 [C]free [A]£10 [5–18s]£4 [Con]£7; Dec–Feb [D]£7 [C]free [A]£7 [5–18s]£3 [Con]£7; prices vary for special events



Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, is one of the most magical and inspiring tree gardens in the world. Cared for by the Forestry Commission, it's a unique collection of nearly 15,000 specimen trees from around the globe. Today, Westonbirt is known as a hotspot for the very best in autumn colour, though the flowering trees are magnificent in spring, as are the sculptural and bright stemmed specimens in winter.

Westonbirt's collection of trees, plants and shrubs is vast, and worth visiting in any season. Two different areas comprise the site's six hundred acres: the Old Arboretum is fairly level and has a family play trail, while the larger Silk Wood has some steeper slopes (especially near the entrance) but also benches to rest on. There are seventeen miles of paths throughout the arboretum and dozens of leafy glades with levels of accessibility to suit visitors on foot, in mobility scooters or with pushchairs. Wheelchair users, however, may find some of the bark trails off the beaten track hard to navigate, particularly after rainfall. A new 300-yard-long Treetop Walkway, accessible for walkers, wheelchairs and powered scooters, rises above the leaf canopy to a height of forty feet along a gentle incline, allowing visitors to look down over the trees.

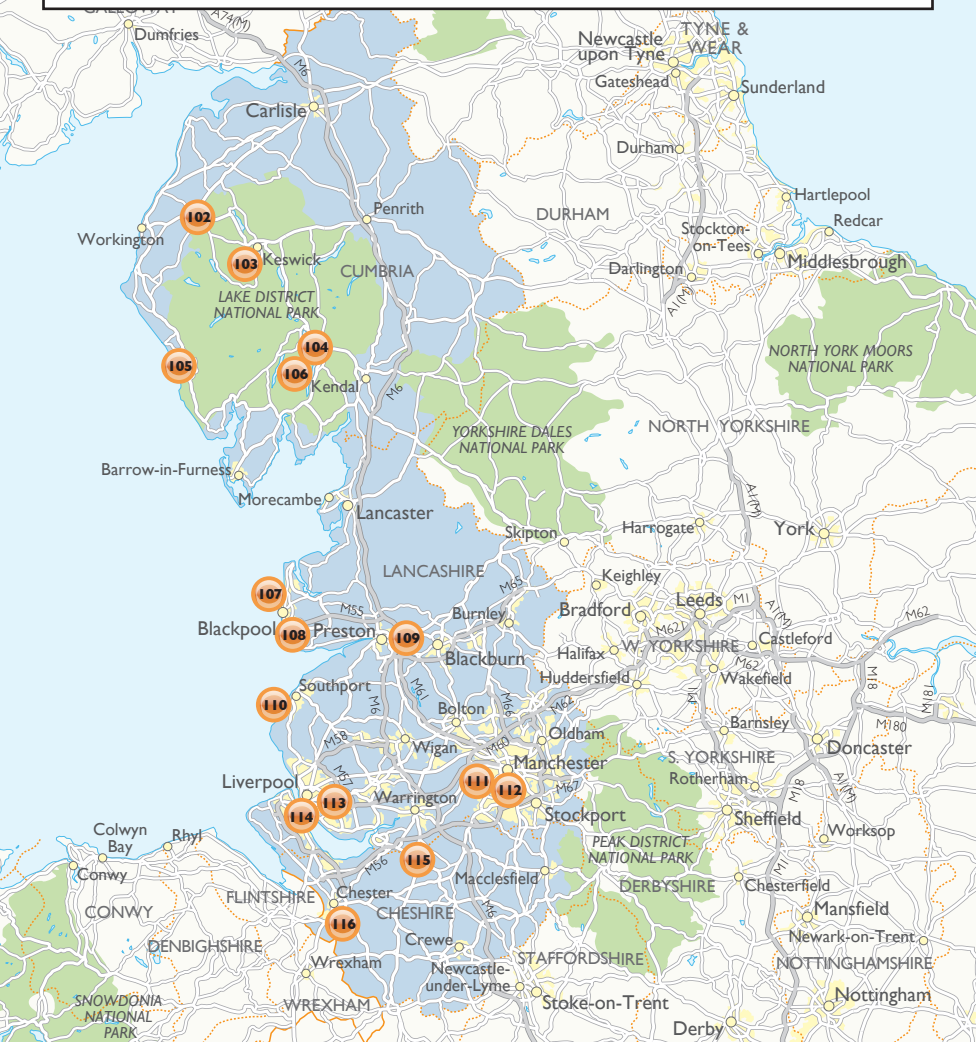
Powered scooters allow disabled visitors to freely explore the whole of Westonbirt, and using one is recommended – the visitor centre has several available to borrow (no charge), but you are advised to call ahead to book one, especially in October and November. You can get advice on the best trail to choose from the friendly team of staff and volunteers, who will help you get the most out of your visit. There is also a handy map available on arrival. Check the website for events that take place throughout the year, including the popular Christmas illuminations.

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. Westonbirt has a Welcome Building with a car park offering 21 parking bays for disabled visitors.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ *Westonbirt Restaurant* offers tasty hot and cold food in pleasant, relaxed surroundings (daily 9am–4.30pm). The *Westonbirt Café* serves takeaway tea, coffee and hot and cold snacks (seasonal opening 9am–4pm). Outdoor seating is available.

The Northwest

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102 Lake District Scenic Drive



Driving distance: 47 miles **Approx 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 do a bit of fell walking 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) – 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; contact 015394 33002), 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), with its wonderful gardens, accessible footpaths and superb location on the shore of Lake Windermere, makes a good place to end your drive – see p.129 for more details.

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

103 Theatre by the Lake, Cumbria

Address: Lakeside, Keswick CA12 5DJ **Web:** www.theatrebythelake.com **Tel:** 01768 774411 **Hours:** Box office 9.30am–8pm; on non-performance days, it closes at 6pm (some parts of building close at 5pm)

Dates: closed 25 Dec & 1 Jan **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 – a registered charity funded by Arts Council England – 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. Each summer season the company produces a series of works, with an interlocking programme that enables visitors to see several different plays over the course of a long weekend. In addition, the theatre hosts a string of events, including literature, jazz and film.

Reaching the venue is easy: there's a huge council car park next to the theatre with a dozen or so 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 facilities for disabled people 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 certain front-of-house staff have some autism and dementia training.

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.

104 Brockhole on Windermere, Cumbria

Address: Windermere LA23 1LJ **Web:** www.brockhole.co.uk **Tel:** 01539 446601 **Hours:** information centre & shop 10am–6pm, or 4pm in winter; café 10am–5.45pm, or 3.45pm in winter **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** free; car parking £2 first hour; 40p per 20 mins thereafter; maximum £8



Developed by the National Park Authority as the chief Lake District visitor centre, Brockhole perfectly represents the area in miniature, with its elegant buildings, mature gardens, woodland walks and breathtaking lakeshore views. Come here to collect information on a wide range of Lakeland attractions, or simply to enjoy the place in its own right.

The visitor centre is housed in a handsome Victorian residence, along with the café and 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). Amusements for kids include an indoor play area, an adventure playground, Tree Top Trek, pony rides, bikes and crazy golf. Down by the lakeshore, you can hire kayaks and rowing boats, or catch the ferry across the lake, depending on the season.

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, café



and shop are 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. There's a comprehensive map of the grounds and visitor centre on the website to help you plan your trip. The adventure playground has a swing suitable for disabled children.

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

105 Walls Drive Trail and Ravenglass and Eskdale Steam Railway, Cumbria

Walls Drive Trail: **Address:** Ravenglass CA18 1SW **Web:** 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 **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 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.

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 four locomotives in service have carriages with wheelchair spaces (which must be booked) and ramped access on and off the train. Many of the charming stations en route have level access,

Ideas ▶▶ Active

Diggerland Yorkshire (Castleford WF10 5NW; 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; www.disabilitysnowsport.org.uk) Disability Snowsport run 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.

but not all are staffed. The line ends at Dalegarth Station near Boot, which has a visitor centre and museum documenting the 140-year history of the railway. The full return journey takes one hour and forty minutes. Ravenglass Station has accessible parking, close to the platforms: for full access details, check www.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. The award-winning *Pennington Hotel* (www.penningtonhotels.com) in Ravenglass is near the village car park, with views of the village and out to sea: it has a lift to the upper floor and level access from the train platform.

106 Grizedale Forest Park, Cumbria

Address: Hawkshead, Ambleside, Cumbria LA22 0QJ **Web:** www.forestry.gov.uk/grizedale **Tel:** 0300 0674495 **Hours:** daily summer 10am–5pm; winter 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 24 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, whether you fancy a strenuous mountain bike adventure or a leisurely stroll through the trees on a smooth level path. The newly designed 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 Conistone and the Grizedale Valley. The trails are dotted with eclectic sculptures – there are forty in the park, 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, covers about a mile on natural surfaces, impassable for wheelchair users, but suitable for cross-country terrain powered scooters. 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.

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.

107 The Blackpool Tower, Lancashire

Address: The Promenade, Blackpool FY1 4BJ **Web:** www.theblackpooltower.com **Tel:** 01253 622242

Hours: open daily 10am; 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 and Sea Life Centre



The Blackpool Tower and its ancillary attractions are the epitome of the British day at the seaside. Somehow, the tower seems to have survived its kitsch reputation and stood the test of time to retain its own iconic appeal.

Whatever the weather, there's plenty to see. The tower – completely refurbished in 2011 – boasts much more than a trip to the top, although the new, 380-foot-high, glass Skywalk can still take your breath away. The comfortable lift takes you over four hundred feet up, where you can see straight down to the ground and as far afield as Wales and the Lake District. Kids in particular will love the new 4D cinema with its sun, wind and rain effects. 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 tire them out in Jungle Jim's Indoor Play Area.

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 disabled 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. Sadly the trams are not accessible. 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 – disabled 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. A BSL interpreter can be arranged in advance for events.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ You don't need to leave the tower to eat, as there's an on-site *Harry Ramsden's* for fish and chips.

108 Sandcastle Waterpark, Blackpool

Address: South Beach, Blackpool FY4 1BB **Web:** 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]£10 [C]£10 [A]£16 [over 12s]£16 [3–11s]£12.75 [under 3s] free [Fam]£51.40



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, whilst the Sea Breeze Spa (adults only) is a relaxing oasis where you can feel refreshed and re-energized, 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 drinking 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 smartphone 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



Sandcastle Waterpark, Blackpool

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 accessible parking spaces less than 50 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 *Bongo-Bongo Burger Shack*, *Snack Shack* and *Waterfalls Café* serve hot and cold food including gluten-free, lactose-free, vegetarian and Halal options.

109 Brockholes Nature Reserve, Lancashire

Address: Preston New Road, Samlesbury, Preston PR5 0UJ **Web:** www.brockholes.org **Tel:** 01772 872000

Hours: Apr–Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–Mar 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 24 and 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

Brockholes Nature Reserve



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 disabled spaces on firm, level tarmac. From here, there is a newly-installed 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. Elsewhere, 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 restaurant in the Visitor Village offers fresh, locally sourced (and reasonably priced) food, low-level serving counters and lovely views across the lake.

110 Southport Pier, Merseyside

Address: Southport, Merseyside PR8 1QX **Web:** www.visitsouthport.com **Tel:** Tourist Information Centre 01704 533333 **Hours:** daily 11am–5pm; bank hols & school summer hols 10am–6pm **Dates:** closed 25 Dec & during Southport Air Show **Entry:** pier free; road train £2 return (£1.50 child)



A classic seaside resort, Southport is the proud possessor of the country's second-oldest, second-longest pier, as well as a 22-mile stretch of beautiful coastline and a beachside town centre featuring some handsome Victorian architecture.

The main event here is the great iron pier, built in 1860 and extending two thirds of a mile out to sea – or at least towards the sea, which in low tide it falls well short of. Indeed, a peculiarity of the pier is that it crosses an ornamental lake, a miniature railway and a road before it even gets to the beach. Those who journey its length – whether walking, wheeling or on the road train that once took steamer passengers out to meet their boats – can enjoy traditional seaside treats such as fish and chips, ice cream and candy floss, and play on the antique penny arcade machines (using authentic old pennies) in the new pavilion at the pier head. The pavilion also houses a new interactive display and exhibition on the local wildlife and coastline. Back on land, why not take a trip on the boating lake or miniature railway, or explore the nearby sand dunes? Time your visit right and you can also take in the Southport Flower Show (late August), though the pier is closed during the celebrated Southport Air Show (September). The pier is also closed on Christmas Day, but a Boxing Day stroll along its length is something of a tradition for

Southport Pier



many local families. At the entrance to the pier is Silcock's Funland, a family amusement centre, with video games and amusements and, just around the corner, New Pleasureland has traditional fairground rides including dodgems, waltzers and rollercoasters.

There's plenty of generously spaced parking on Marine Parade, much of it very close to the pier. If you feel daunted at the prospect of tackling the full length of the pier under your own steam, take advantage of the road train that travels its length every half-hour, with space for wheelchairs and powered scooters. Alternatively, there's ramped access halfway along the pier from the car park below. Once you're up there, you'll find plenty of rest seats and a smooth, level surface that's perfect for wheelchairs – though bear in mind that you're very exposed to the elements, so wrap up warm against the wind.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ There's a decent café and bar in the pavilion at the end of the pier, which both offer superb views over the sea. Besides this, there's a traditional fish and chip restaurant at the pier's entrance, and any number of seaside snack bars and restaurants along Southport's promenade.

111 iFLY Indoor Skydiving, Manchester

Address: 9 Trafford Way, Trafford Park, Manchester M41 7JA **Web:** www.iflyworld.co.uk **Tel:** 0845 3316549 **Hours:** reception: daily 9am–9pm; flying: Mon–Fri 10am–10pm, from 9am during school hols; Sat, Sun & bank hols 7am–11pm; check website for peak times **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** from £29.99 off-peak and when booked online; no concessions; multiple-flight packages and family flights available



Experience the thrill of “flying” in a vertical wind tunnel at this extraordinary indoor skydiving venue, that's suitable for people of all abilities, including those with physical disabilities.

The activity takes place in a flight chamber, where a column of air (with wind speeds



of over 100mph) 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. 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. Your instructor will help you master the basic moves: going up, down, forwards, backwards and sideways.

iFLY welcomes visitors with physical disabilities, and staff are experienced at dealing with disabled people; it is recommended, however, that disabled visitors 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. There are three Blue Badge spaces in the car park, near the entrance. The building is fully accessible, with good-sized lifts between the different levels, and there are three accessible toilets at the venue. 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 ▶▶ The café-bar is open all week serving drinks, snacks and fresh Italian food. Next door, the accessible Chill Factor indoor skiing venue houses several restaurant chains.

112 Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester

Address: Liverpool Road, Castlefield M3 4FP **Web:** www.msimanchester.org.uk **Tel:** 0161 8322244

Hours: daily 10am–5pm **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 24–26 Dec **Entry:** free. 4D theatre show [A] £4 [Con] £3



Filling five enormous listed buildings – including the world’s oldest surviving passenger railway station – the Museum of Science and Industry 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 the ear-splitting cotton 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, and check out the huge collection of steam engines. Special events here have included Doctor Who, Dinosaurs and the famous BodyWorlds, while the Manchester Science Festival takes place every October with lots of science events here and across the rest of Greater Manchester: check the website for details of future exhibitions and events.

The museum is accessed by a smooth path, and the main entrance can then be accessed by lift. Despite being spread over five nineteenth-century buildings, almost the whole site is wheelchair accessible, with smooth-surfaced paths connecting the different buildings, allowing you to avoid the Victorian cobbles. Wheelchairs can be borrowed (£20 deposit required) and the staff are very willing to help. All multi-level buildings are served by lifts, and most buildings have disabled toilets. Visually impaired visitors can access a handling collection without supervision: it’s available in the Collections Centre (Tues–Thurs 10am–12.30pm and 1.30–4.30pm; 0161 8330027). Those on the autism spectrum can view the guide at www.msimanchester.org.uk/visit-us/facilities-and-accessibility to familiarise themselves with the museum before their visit.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The museum’s stylish ground-floor coffee shop serves drinks, snacks and cakes in a spacious, contemporary dining room, while the licensed first-floor restaurant offers a full menu featuring hot and cold meals and snacks, as well as several children’s options. In addition, there are plenty of excellent restaurants nearby, including many in the picturesque canal basin.

113 Cavern Club, Liverpool

Address: 10 Mathew Street, Liverpool L2 6RE **Web:** www.cavernclub.org **Tel:** On-site manager 0151 2361965; Admin office 0151 2369091 **Hours:** Mon–Wed 10am–midnight, Thur 10am–1.30am, Fri & Sat 10am–2am, Sun 10am–midnight **Dates:** Closed Dec 25 **Entry:** Entrance fees for everyone are Mon–Wed free; Thu free until 8pm, then £4; Fri & Sat free before noon, then £2.50 til 8pm, then £5; Sun noon–8am £2.50, then £4. There’s a £1 discount if you book online. Bands playing at the weekend in the Cavern Lounge may cost more: check website for details



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 nearly 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 Lounge. The whole area is full of memorabilia, much of it for sale. Tourist coach trips leave daily from the club on a Magical Mystery Tour around Liverpool.

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. The only accessible toilet in the club is en route from the access lift. 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 scooter access.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ There is a fully equipped bar in the Club, but unfortunately only the inaccessible *Cavern Pub* sells food. Head instead to one of the many food outlets at the nearby Albert Docks (also home to the Beatles Experience, museums, galleries and shops), or the Liverpool One complex, both only half a mile away.

114 Albert Dock and the Museum of Liverpool

Albert Dock: **Address:** Liverpool L3 4AF **Web:** www.albertdock.com **Tel:** information centre 0151 7070729 **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 **Tel:** 0151 4784545 **Hours:** daily 10am–5pm **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) 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. Tate Liverpool (www.tate.org.uk/liverpool) is a nationally important gallery of modern and contemporary art, which draws visitors from around the world. And of course you can't visit Liverpool without paying homage to the Beatles: The Beatles Story

Museum of Liverpool



(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. Finally, a few hundred yards north of the dock (and connected by a riverside walkway), the fully accessible Museum of Liverpool tells the city’s story with three floors of compelling, hands-on exhibits, housed in a spectacular building.

Parking is not a problem, with designated outdoor spaces, plus a huge new multi-storey car park with lots of accessible bays. The venues have staff that try very hard to accommodate the needs of all visitors. The three museums are very accessible with plenty of lifts, accessible toilets and hearing loops, while great care has been taken with signage and information. Tate Liverpool has similar facilities, plus wheelchairs, BSL-interpreted tours and touch tours. The Beatles Story has lift access 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) to modern regional food at the *Maritime Dining Room* in Merseyside Maritime Museum (0151 4784056), and a traditional pub at *The Pumpouse* (0151 7092367). Nearby, Liverpool One has many restaurants, including *Jamie’s Italian* (www.jamieoliver.com).

115 Anderton Boat Lift, Cheshire

Address: Lift Lane, Anderton, Northwich CW9 6FW **Web:** www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/Anderton-boat-lift

Tel: 01606 786777 **Hours:** Check website for full details of opening hours and dates **Entry:** [D]£8.25 lift only/£5 river trip only/£12.75 combined [C]free [A]£8.25/£5/£12.75 [5–16s]£6.25/£6.25/£9.75 [under 5s] free [Con]£7.25/£4.50/£11.75; [Fam] £22.75/£14/£35.50. Visitor centre and grounds free



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. This can be followed by a leisurely half-hour river cruise – or you can explore the site's other attractions, including a maze and new children's adventure play area, 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.merseyforest.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. Check the website for special events such as Santa Cruises in December and children's activities throughout the year.



Blue Badge holders will find plenty of free, dedicated spaces in the site's large, level car park, close to the two-level visitor centre, which is accessed via a slope and has a lift inside. The boats used for the Anderton Lift trips and river trips have mechanical transport on and off – you can stay in your wheelchair (two wheelchair spaces are available and should be booked in advance) or transfer independently. 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.

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), which you pass en route to the car park, and the excellent *Stanley Arms* pub (01606 75059), overlooking the boat lift.

116 Chester, Cheshire



The ancient city of Chester (www.visitchester.com) 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 historical sights, combined with a thriving city-centre packed with bustling shops.

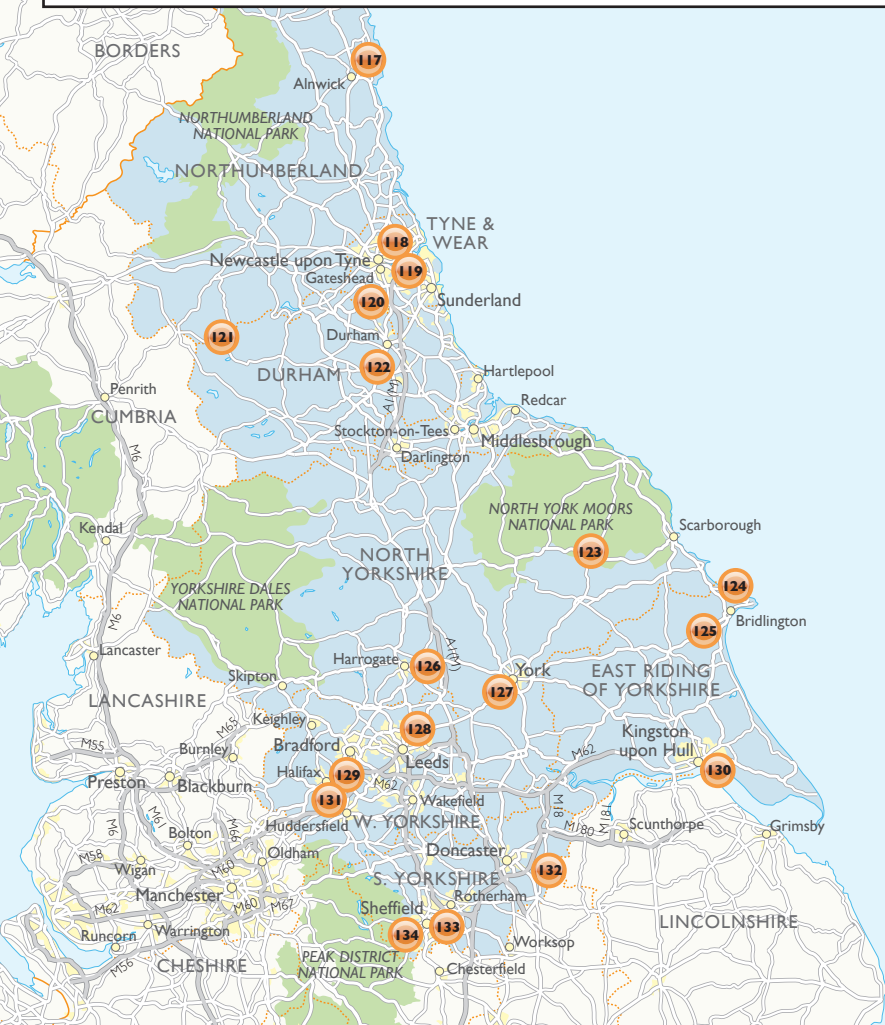
Chester is the only town in England to retain the full circuit of its defensive walls, which offer panoramic views from the footpath along the top. Two sections of the walls have ramped, step-free access – one next to the cathedral, and the other in Lower Bridge Street. The cathedral itself (01244 324756, www.chestercathedral.com) is a must-see; accessibility is good and admission includes a guide-point audio tour with a hearing loop facility. 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 Mall or Godstall Lane). Other diversions include the Chester Racecourse (01244 304600, www.chester-races.co.uk), at the southern end of the city centre, and Chester Zoo (01244 380280, www.chesterzoo.org), about four miles north of the centre, which boasts seven thousand animals and good disabled facilities, including a fully accessible monorail around the site.

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 download it online or order a copy by phone (0300 1238123, www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk). 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, or the visitor centre on Little John Street. The guide gives comprehensive details on Blue Badge parking, wheelchair accessible toilets, step-free access points to the Rows, Shopmobility services and the PlusBus door-to-door minibus service for people unable to use public transport. There's also an accessible park-and-ride scheme (see council website above 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.

The Northeast and Yorkshire

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117 The Alnwick Garden, Northumberland

Address: Denwick Lane, Alnwick, Northumberland NE66 1YU **Web:** www.alnwickgarden.com **Tel:** 01665 511350 **Hours:** 27 Mar–Oct daily 10am–6pm, Nov–26 Mar daily 11am–5pm **Dates:** check website for closures **Entry:** 27 Mar–Oct [D]£10.45 [C]free [A]£12.10 [under 5s]free [5–16s] £4.40 [Con]£10.45 [Fam] £29.70; Nov–26 Mar [D]£5.83 [C]free [A]£7.70 [under 5s]free [5–16s] £4 [Con]£5.83 [Fam] £21.50



Twelve years ago, 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 meandering Bamboo Labyrinth and watery Serpent Garden, it feels like a fantasy land.

Water and light are used to theatrical effect at Alnwick: 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 Alnwick is the Treehouse, which is accessible, remarkably – in this huge cedar, pine and redwood building, trees grow through the floor and wooden walkways lead outdoors into the surrounding tree-tops, while a roaring log fire keeps everyone cosy.

It seems that considerations for disabled visitors 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

The Alnwick Garden



smooth, solid surfaces, although it is large, with some slight gradients. Sixteen powered scooters and wheelchairs are available for three-hour slots, free of charge (advance booking advised) – check out the scooter-use map available free at reception. At the time of writing, the charitable trust was raising funds to construct an all-ability adventure playground.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The *Treehouse* restaurant is a fairly pricey but magical place to eat. If you'd prefer something lighter, try *The Potting Shed* located on the Treehouse decking or the *Pavilion Café*, which overlooks the Grand Cascade. All these venues are accessible.

118 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
Tel: 0300 3301095 **Hours:** Tues–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun & bank holidays 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed Easter Sunday, 24–26 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** [D]£6.60 [C]free [A]£7.70 [4–16s] £6.60 [Con]£6.60 [Fam]£23.10; concession family ticket £18.70.



This very special and unique museum – a registered charity whose trustees include Quentin Blake and Philip Pullman – brings books alive for children. Not a conventional bookshop, nor a library, Seven Stories uses every technique possible to provoke children's imaginations and involve them in the wonder of books and reading. The lowest floor of this converted warehouse is home to the studio, where families can draw, paint, write and build together. There is a light and airy café on level one, 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: there are exhibitions on some of literature's most famous bears including Winnie the Pooh and Rupert, while the comic exhibition features comic art dating back to 1939. Original manuscripts and artwork are on display too; talks are regularly given by authors and illustrators; and the magical attic area is a space for storytelling and dressing-up.

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, though it's in constant use with buggies, 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 condition, and ear defenders and sensory backpacks full of tactile props and activities are available. Films in the galleries are always subtitled, and there are quiet spaces around the building for respite. 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.



119 Sage Gateshead, Tyne and Wear

Address: St Mary's Square, Gateshead Quays NE8 2JR **Web:** www.sagegateshead.com **Tel:** 0191 4434661

Hours: check website for details **Dates:** closed 25–26 Dec & for occasional special events **Entry:** building free; prices vary depending on performance & seat



Designed by Sir Norman Foster, the remarkable Sage Gateshead sits high above the River Tyne, like a great soap bubble of steel and glass. Built to be the northeast's premier concert venue, it hosts music events from classical to rock, from brass to jazz and folk to soukous.

The now iconic outer shell houses three major spaces. Sage One is a 1700-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 moveable seats where the stage can be reconfigured and even transformed into a dancefloor. The third venue, the Northern Rock Foundation Hall, is a rehearsal and participation space. Sage Gateshead is a wonderful place to attend a performance – its lively programme appeals to all age groups, and the atmosphere is always great.

There's Blue Badge parking right outside the front door and lots of designated disabled spaces around the outside. All of them 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. A thoroughly comprehensive access guide is available online or from the venue. 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.

120 Beamish Museum, County Durham

Address: Beamish, County Durham DH9 0RG **Web:** www.beamish.org.uk **Tel:** 0191 3704000; bookings 0191 3704026 **Hours:** Apr–Oct daily 10am–5pm; Nov–Mar daily 10am–4pm; Jan to early Feb closed Fri & Mon **Dates:** closed 25, 26 Dec, 1 Jan **Entry:** [D]£19 [C]free [A]£19 [5–16s]£11 [Con]£14 [Fam]£35.50–£49.50



Beamish is a huge and utterly compelling open-air living history museum. Aspects of England in bygone times are brought vividly to life through the museum's authentic eighteenth-century hall, 1940s farm, Edwardian town and early-twentieth-century pit village and colliery (with more besides), all spread over a three-hundred-acre site.

Friendly, talented staff in period costume shed further light on how life was lived in those times, and visitors are encouraged to interact with their surroundings to find out more. Enjoy a pint of ale in *The Sun Inn* or a packet of sweets at the Jubilee



Sweetshop, both in Edwardian Town; explore a drift mine on an underground tour of the colliery; try out some freshly baked bread in Pit Village, and while you're there, practise your handwriting skills on a slate in the village school. You can also discover what life was like on the Home Front at the 1940s Farm, as well as taking a ride behind a steam locomotive, or hopping on and off the museum's fleet of beautifully restored working trams.

Beamish takes accessibility very seriously, and all staff undergo annual disability-awareness training. The car park has a good supply of disabled bays, 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. 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. Historical authenticity means that you may well have to negotiate some areas where there are uneven surfaces such as cobbles and steps, but the staff here are always happy to help out with any problems. There are several induction loops around the site.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ There's a good choice of food outlets, including the accessible *Tea Rooms* in Edwardian Town. Particularly recommended is *Davy's Coal Fired Fish & Chip Shop* in Pit Village, serving fish and chips fried in beef dripping on a coal-fired range – delicious!

121 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 **Tel:** 01388 537505 **Hours:** daily Apr–Oct 10.30am–5pm; last mine trip at 3.30pm **Dates:** closed Nov–Mar **Entry:** [D]£7.60 [C] free [A] £8.60 [4–16s] £4.70 [Con] £7.60; tickets are valid for unlimited visits for 12 months after entry.



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, head lamp and Wellington boots (only for children over four). All 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 – and the backpack available to borrow (£10 returnable deposit) contains all you'll need to discover more. Unfortunately, due to storm damage much of the woodland with accessible paths has been felled and the remaining woodland is accessible only by stairs. There are three accessible yurts on site if you want to stay the night – bring your own sleeping bags 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 site. 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. The helpful staff will do all they can to make a journey underground possible, so contact them in advance to talk through practicalities. All the publicity and welcome leaflets are available in large and contrast print. Those on the autism spectrum may prefer to visit at quieter times, which are early in the morning and early in the week. The weather in the area is changeable – so bring layers, waterproof clothing, sturdy footwear and a spare pair of socks.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The café serves a welcome array of soups, scones, sandwiches and other tasty snacks, made from organic and locally sourced ingredients where possible. For a full meal with all the trimmings try *Nent Hall Country House Hotel* at nearby Alston.

122 Low Barns Nature Reserve, County Durham

Address: Witton-le-Wear, Bishop Auckland DL14 0AG **Web:** www.durhamwt.co.uk **Tel:** 01388 488728

Hours: daily 9.30am–5pm; Nov–March 9.30am–4pm **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 three old gravel lakes 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 regularly see roe deer, stoats and sometimes even otters have been spied on the circular walk around the 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; West Lake, with its reed beds and wet pasture grazed by Exmoor ponies; and the ancient Alder Wood. There is also a butterfly garden, coot pond, observation tower, and a wonderful boardwalk that leads through the reed beds. In addition, several winter-feeding stations attract a huge variety of birds – you should look out for brilliant kingfishers and, in summer, even migrant pied flycatchers.

This is a fully accessible site, with a tarmac car park and an accessible toilet. A powered mobility scooter can be booked free of charge (phone in advance). All the paths are level and firm, with few gradients, though they can get muddy in wet weather and there are some patches of loose chippings filling puddle areas – powered 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, but a video link is provided for anyone who can't manage the climb.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The visitor centre has a very welcome coffee shop, which is run by volunteers. Otherwise you'll have no problem finding a lovely local pub in the nearby Witton, Crook and Bishop Auckland areas.

123 North York Moors Scenic Drive



Driving distance: 115 miles **Approx 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, 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.

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 Yorkshire 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); most of the site is wheelchair accessible and it offers a range of facilities, including Blue Badge parking, an accessible toilet, an audio tour designed for visually impaired visitors and tactile displays in the visitor centre.

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



Staithe, it's about half an hour to Guisborough, with its atmospheric ruined priory (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), one of the largest and most complete sets of abbey ruins in the UK. There's an on-site car park, wheelchair access, an adapted toilet and audio tours tailored to visually impaired visitors. There's also a lovely (accessible) 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* is down by the harbour at 7 Pier Road (01947 825346). There are also on-site cafés at Castle Howard and Rievaulx Abbey.

124 RSPB Bempton Cliffs, Yorkshire

Address: Bempton, Bridlington YO15 1JF **Web:** www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/bempton-cliffs **Tel:** 01262 422212 **Hours:** Yorkshire Seabird Centre Daily Apr–Oct 9.30am–5pm; Nov–Mar 9.30am–4pm; the reserve is always open **Dates:** Seabird Centre closed 24–31 Dec **Entry:** D]£5 [C]free [Adult] £5 [1–2s]£4.25 [5–17s]£2.50 [under 5s] free



Europe's largest accessible 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 mid-July. 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. By autumn most of the seabirds have gone, but you can still enjoy some of the UK's most spectacular coastal views along Yorkshire's finest cliffs.

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 Yorkshire Seabird Centre, where the reception desk has a lowered section for wheelchair users: 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's an electric scooter, Trampler and two manual wheelchairs available to borrow: book in advance on 01262 422212. 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 accessible via a hard surfaced path, while a fourth is along a grassy undulating path that can get muddy: all four viewing platforms have at least one wheelchair-viewing bay. 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, which could be overwhelming for those on the autism spectrum. The path back to the Yorkshire Seabird Centre is up a long 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 Yorkshire Seabird Centre serves snacks, drinks and a variety of sandwiches (from £3). On a fine day, you can sit outside for lunch with a view.

125 Burton Agnes Hall and Grounds, Yorkshire

Address: Driffield YO25 4NE **Web:** www.burtonagnes.com **Tel:** 01262 490324 **Hours:** 1 Apr–31 Oct daily 11am–5pm; 14 Nov–23 Dec daily 11am–5pm; gardens, café & shop also open Feb/Mar for "Snowdrop Spectacular" (hall closed) **Dates:** hall closed 1–13 Nov & 24 Dec–31 Mar **Entry:** combined ticket (hall & gardens): [D]£10.50 (£5 if unable to access upper floors) [C]free [A]£10.50 [5–15s]£5 [Con]£10



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, 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.



Burton Agnes Hall

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 a disabled 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 appetising tea and cakes, light meals and hot dinners, with much of the fresh produce grown on-site in the kitchen gardens.

126 Harrogate, Yorkshire



Harrogate (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 and has a disabled toilet.

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), whose grand, beautifully tiled steam room and heated chambers are fully accessible (the only



Betty's Tea Rooms, Harrogate

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.

Further up the road, the elegant *Old Swan Hotel* (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, a disabled 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) next door, with its entrance on Crag Lane. Its gardens, woodland and alpine areas are laced with accessible paths, and there's designated parking near the entrance plus wheelchairs and powered scooters to borrow. There's even an on-site branch of the famous *Betty's 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.

127 National Railway Museum, York

Address: Leeman Road, York YO26 4XJ **Web:** www.nrm.org.uk **Tel:** 0844 8153139 **Hours:** Daily 10am–6pm **Dates:** Closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** Free entry for all



The UK's largest railway museum has giant halls full of steam and diesel engines including *Mallard*, the world's fastest steam locomotive, a replica of Stephenson's *Rocket* and the world's finest collection of royal carriages. 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 about ten designated Blue Badge bays at the museum entrance, with a large drop-off area alongside. Check the website beforehand to locate the free accessible parking – it's easy to overshoot (poor signage) and end up at the main car park, which has awkward gradients and no accessible spaces. Electric doors lead into the museum's comfortable reception area with plenty of space and seating; there are several counters at the reception desk, some with low sections.

The museum consists of two main sites either side of a road linked by an underpass: both sites are 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 with decent lifts to negotiate the underpass. Much of the floor on the Station Hall side is raised (due to its engineering maintenance past) which greatly enhances views of the exhibits. The Great Hall has several ramps up to the most interesting trains and an Observation Gallery – even the inaccessible motion simulator has a static version alongside so you can experience the sights and sounds. Lighting is subdued on the Station Hall side, and brighter in the Great Hall with lots of natural light. The road train around historical York (caught outside the main entrance) has an accessible coach, and there are accessible toilets on both sites, 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 four eating outlets, all accessible – the *Countess of York*, the *Mallard Café*, the *Dining Car Restaurant* and the *Container Café*.



128 Roundhay Park and Tropical World, West Yorkshire

Address: Princes Avenue, Roundhay, Leeds LS8 2ER **Web:** www.leeds.gov.uk/roundhaypark, www.leeds.gov.uk/tropicalworld **Tel:** 0113 2145715 **Hours:** Park open access: Tropical World summer (BST) daily 10am–6pm; winter (GMT) daily 10am–4pm; last entry 30min before closing **Dates:** Closed 1 Jan & 25–26 Dec **Entry:** park free; Tropical World [D]£6 [C]free [A]£6 [15–15s]£3 [under 5s] free, Leeds card holders £3.60, Extra cardholders £2.40, Breeze card holders £2.40



Spread over 700 acres on the outskirts of Leeds, Roundhay Park is one of the world's largest urban parks. Wide, level pathways provide good access around its parkland, woodland, gardens and lakes, and link its key sites. Among them is Tropical World, a family attraction with an impressive collection of plants and animals, including meerkats, a crocodile, frogs and butterflies.

A good place to start a visit to Roundhay is pretty Waterloo Lake, the site of a lakeside café and with an accessible pathway skirting the water's edge. About half a mile north of here sits The Mansion, an imposing manor house built in the early 1800s when the park was a privately owned hunting ground; inside, its lovely café-restaurant is the only part of the main house open to the public. About five hundred yards west of The Mansion, with accessible entrance from the gardens, is Tropical World, where butterflies and birds fly freely around the re-created rainforest, and a ramped trail leads you past meerkats and desert cacti. Look out for the crocodiles too! Elsewhere in the park, are several beautiful themed gardens, such as the Monet Garden, which was inspired by the famous gardens of the French artist, the Alhambra Garden, modelled on the gardens of the palace in southern Spain, as well as the gold award-winning Chelsea gardens.

There are eight Blue Badge spaces outside Tropical World and at the Lakeside car park. Note that Roundhay's main car park, on Princes Avenue, has no disabled bays

and is a few hundred yards downhill from Tropical World. Nearby is a playground with some equipment for children with mobility problems. There are accessible toilets in The Mansion's old conservatory, at Tropical World and in the *Lakeside Café*. Tropical World is visited on a one-way level route with good wheelchair access, though you might need assistance with the heavy plastic dividers separating the different areas.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The park offers a choice of three places to eat: the cheap and cheerful *Explorer's Café* at Tropical World; the attractive *Lakeside Café* at Waterloo Lake; and the smart (and pricey) *Garden Room Café* at The Mansion.

129 The Deep, East Yorkshire

Address: Tower Street, Hull HU1 4DP **Web:** www.thedeep.co.uk **Tel:** 01482 381000 **Hours:** daily 10am–6pm; last entrance 5pm **Dates:** closed 24–25 Dec **Entry:** [D]£12.50 [C]free [A]£12.50 [3–15s]£10.50 [under 3s]free [Con]£11.50 [Fam]£41; discounted rates for advance booking online



Designed by 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 almost 3500 fish including sharks, rays, turtles, a colony of Gentoo penguins and the UK'S only pair of green sawfish.

As well as being a visitor attraction, The Deep is an educational and conservation charity, equipped with interactive displays. You are taken on a journey to underground levels, where you'll explore the world's oceans, from the early beginnings of sea life to the present day – through coral, slime and flooded forests, and from the warm waters of the tropics to the icy Antarctic. Children are kept busy the whole time, with attractions such as touch-pool sessions, a fossil-brushing station and the interactive Magic Floor. The Deep also has several Gentoo penguins, whose purpose-built enclosure, the Kingdom of Ice, boasts its own balcony overlooking the Humber. The highlight, however, is a walk through Europe's deepest viewing tunnel followed by a breathtaking ride back up to the ground floor in the world's only underwater lift, which takes you through the main tank, home of the sharks. Daily dive shows take place, when the sharks are fed by hand.

Access around the whole site is excellent. The car park has twelve disabled spaces, right next to a designated disabled entrance. Wheelchairs and walking frames can be booked in advance for free and there's also a powered scooter available, though this can't be booked in advance. There are seating areas on each level – but be warned that descending each level involves making your way down two ramps, which can be crowded at busy times. The lift is wheelchair accessible. There's a Braille printer for any information you might like to read while visiting, and ear defenders and audio guides are available. Finally, on several dates throughout the year, "quiet days" are organised, when the audio system is turned down, the lighting turned up and a BSL-trained member of staff delivers a signed presentation.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ *The Observatory Café* has moveable furniture and impressive views over the Humber Bridge and estuary. On Friday and Saturday evenings, visitors can dine alongside the sharks in the award-winning *Two Rivers* restaurant.



Eureka! The National Children's Museum

130 Eureka! The National Children's Museum, Yorkshire

Address: Discovery Road, Halifax HX1 2NE **Web:** www.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, plus Mon during term time **Entry:** [D]£11 [C]free [adult & child over 3] £11.95 [1–2s]£4.25 [under 1s]free; parking up to 4hr £3; up to 12hr £6; free annual pass with every standard admission (additional charge may apply on some events and activities)



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; they can become mechanics and give a car an MOT in Living and Working Together; shrink to the size of an insect and explore the sights, sounds and textures of a giant garden in the Sound Garden; and discover the properties of sound and music in Sound Space. While Eureka! is targeted at the under 12s (with Desert Discovery 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 with disabilities 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; many of the front-of-house staff can do basic signing or finger spelling and most have autism training. Visitors can book a dedicated, trained “Helping Hand” enabler for two hours during their visit (book in advance). The museum has an induction loop, ear defenders for those with sensitive hearing, large-print multi-sensory displays, and the All About Me gallery has BSL interpretation for some exhibits. Free weekend and holiday clubs are supported by trained staff and adapted activities. Outside, the Wonder Walk incorporates a sensory trail (for all) and a wheelchair accessible trail.

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 a refurbished train carriage for extra lunch space.

131 Victoria Theatre, Halifax

Address: 2 Fountain St, Halifax HX1 1BP **Web:** 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: 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. Whilst 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, the stalls bar, the accessible toilet and designated wheelchair spaces in the auditorium. A wheelchair-accessible stair climber and a steep ramp give access to the Green Room bar and the box office on the foyer level. 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 Braille and 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 town centre.

132 Yorkshire Wildlife Park, South Yorkshire

Address: Warning Tongue Lane, Doncaster DN4 6TB **Web:** www.yorkshirewildlifepark.com **Tel:** 01302 535057 **Hours:** daily mid-Mar to Oct 10am–6pm (last admission at 5pm); Nov to mid-Mar 10am–4pm (last admission 3.30pm); 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 playful squirrel monkeys and 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 four polar bears, Victor, Pixel, Nissan and Nobby. Children will enjoy the three outdoor play areas, Oasis Play Area, Jungle Lookout and the Big Bug Play Area, 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. Ten manual wheelchairs are available to borrow (but must be booked ahead) and three fully accessible toilets; the one in the café also has a hoist. Assistance dogs are welcome at the park, but can't be taken into the animal contact areas. Visitors on the autism spectrum should 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 outdoor picnic areas plus accessible cafés and kiosks dotted throughout the park.

133 Magna Science Adventure Centre, Yorkshire

Address: Sheffield Road, Templeborough, Rotherham S60 1DX **Web:** www.visitmagna.co.uk **Tel:** 01709 720002 **Hours:** Opening hours vary; check website for details **Entry:** [D]£10.95 [C]free [A]£10.95 [4–15s]£8.95 [2–3s]£4.95 [under2s]free; discounts available online



Magna has four huge interactive pavilion structures built inside the shell of what was once one of the biggest steelworks in the world. The thread that runs through the vast centre (550 yards long and 12 storeys high) is the demonstration and celebration of science, and particularly the ear-splitting heavy industry of the north, which is now largely historical. Everything at Magna is on a monumental scale.

The four pavilions represent the four elements: earth, air, fire and water, each one housing themed collections of experiments and demonstrations. You can operate a JCB, blast a rock face, fire a super-soaking hose, shine searchlights and engage in masses of hands-on gadget adoration. And to remind you what it's all built upon, at regular intervals they fire up the steel mill's original arc furnace for The Big Melt, in a ground-shaking multimedia spectacular. Outside, there are two extensive play areas, Sci-Tek and Aqua-Tek (bring spare clothes), which have level access and a wide range of play equipment. Check the website, too, for special event days, when activities such as bungee-jumping and zip-wire rides are offered.

There are designated disabled parking spaces beside the main entrance, though they're not particularly wide. Inside, the site is superb for visitors with mobility problems. The incredible scale means it never gets crowded, even when more than a thousand people are here at once – so you'll have no problem navigating the attractions in a wheelchair. Portable seating is available at reception to help if you're visiting on foot. A huge, slightly sloped reception area (with an excellent low section) leads to lifts, and the pavilions are connected by long, wide walkways with a perfect metal surface. Make



sure your powered scooter has fully charged batteries, as there are long stretches of walkway between displays, and note that the building is cold, even in summer, so be sure to dress warmly.

Braille signs indicate the toilets and stairs, but visually impaired visitors may struggle with the low light in much of the building. While some of the interactive exhibits have subtitles, visitors with hearing impairments may find the empty, echoing spaces distracting. Some areas, including the Melt Show, have strobe lighting effects.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The restaurant in the Red Hall, on the ground floor, serves meals and snacks and is reasonably priced. It is wheelchair accessible and has a disabled toilet.

134 Museums Sheffield: Weston Park, Yorkshire

Address: Weston Park, Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TP **Web:** www.museums-sheffield.org.uk **Tel:** 0114 2782600 **Hours:** Mon–Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–4pm; closes at 4pm in winter **Dates:** closed 1 Jan & 25–26 Dec: check website for further Christmas closures **Entry:** free



Weston Park's impressive archaeology, natural history, decorative art and social history collections have been diverting and educating the citizens of Sheffield since 1875. A £19-million renovation project in 2006 breathed new life into these collections, with further development and improvements in 2016, leaving the museum with a bright, modern interior filled with imaginative displays.

Families are particularly well served here, with four excellent family trails available to help younger visitors explore the different galleries and engage with their contents, (check the website for regular family events). Along the way, kids can build an igloo or visit the Arctic Story Corner, crawl through a tunnel beneath a replica of an old

Ideas ►► Safari Parks

Knowsley (Prescot L34 4AN; 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) 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 info on their website too.

oak tree, see a full-size woolly rhinoceros, watch bees at work in their hive, look out for the recreated butcher's shop, and much more besides. There's plenty to command adults' attention, too, from Anglo-Saxon burial offerings to World War II relics from Sheffield: some of the exhibits are hands-on too, where visitors can touch replicas of the museum's objects. Perhaps the most evocative exhibits are the personal stories and mementos in the Sheffield Life and Times gallery.

For tips on getting to Weston Park, check the helpful website in advance. There are six Blue Badge spaces and regular street parking on Mushroom Lane, to the side of the museum, around twenty or thirty yards from the entrance, though be prepared for a fairly steep gradient and a poor surface. The beautiful listed building that houses the museum is now fully accessible. The galleries and the café are all on the ground floor (along with three accessible toilets), and there's lift access up to the first-floor activity rooms and picnic area (where there's another accessible toilet). In addition, many of the interactive exhibits are at a low level, within easy reach of children and wheelchair users, and there are wheelchairs available to borrow. A number of the exhibits have audio displays, and some one-off talks and events are BSL-interpreted. Some of the signage is in Braille (phone in advance to request information in Braille) and there are large-print information folders in each gallery. Outside, the pretty grounds are served by smooth-surfaced paths and plenty of benches.

FOOD & DRINK ►► The on-site café is spacious, light and airy, with moveable seating, and provides a wide range of light meals, including plenty of children's options. There's also an indoor picnic area on the first floor (available at weekends and during school holidays), or you can picnic in the grounds.

135 Callanish Standing Stones, Western Isles

Address: Callanish, Isle of Lewis, HS2 9DY **Web:** www.callanishvisitorcentre.co.uk **Tel:** 01851 621422
Hours: June–Aug Mon–Sat 9.30am–8pm; Apr, May, Sept & Oct Mon–Sat 10am–6pm; Nov–Mar Tues–Sat 10am–4pm **Dates:** Closed for two weeks over the Christmas period: call ahead to check exact days as it varies from year to year **Entry:** Entry to the standing stones and visitor centre is free, but the following charges apply to the “Story of the Stones” exhibition [D] £2.20 [C] £2.20 [A] £2.80 [Under 16s] £1.50 [Seniors & students] £2.20 [Fam] Families & groups get a discount of £2 per adult and £1.20 per child.



A Neolithic marvel in a wild island landscape, the Callanish Standing Stones on the remote Isle of Lewis are as old as the Pyramids, and rival Stonehenge for historic and archaeological importance. Set in a wild lochside location, Callanish offers stunning views across Loch Roag and the surrounding countryside, making a visit worthwhile for the vistas alone.

Unlike at many ancient monuments, you are encouraged to touch the stones and roam around this atmospheric and mysterious place. The general shape of the stones is that of a Celtic cross which only adds to the mystery of this ancient landmark, as it is thousands of years older than Christianity. In use from the late Neolithic to the Bronze Age, its original purpose is subject to debate, but one theory is that it was an astronomical observatory. If you are lucky enough to visit during one of the solstices, an unusual weather event like the Northern Lights, or planetary events like a blood moon or eclipse, then the site assumes a very special atmosphere and can get busy.

There are no dedicated parking spaces, but disabled visitors can park in one of the bus bays near the visitor centre: otherwise the tarmac car park is on an incline, slightly downhill a few metres from the visitor centre. There is ample space to drop-off too.



Callanish Standing Stones

From the visitor centre car park, a fairly long uphill hardcore path leads to the stones, which might challenge less-fit wheelchair users or those with limited walking ability – though there are rest-seats en route. To avoid this path, follow road signs to the post office, which will take you to a second car park with level access into the site. Bear in mind, however, that Callanish is an ancient monument in a wild landscape consisting mainly of peat, which can become soft in wet weather and may cause problems for some wheelchair and scooter users – visiting on a dry day would make life simpler. Entrance into the visitor centre is step-free, with a small lip at the front door. The reception, shop and pay counter of the café are all at a good height for wheelchair and scooter users, and there's a spacious unisex disabled toilet (no key required) in the visitor centre, which is clean with grab rails and a wide door. The café and shop are easily negotiated by wheelchair, though the informative “Story of the Stones” (with audio description for the sight-impaired) is more compact and may prove a squeeze for users of larger scooters.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The lovely, bright on-site café doubles as an art gallery and has glorious views. It serves reasonably priced hot and cold food, with level access throughout.

136 Fort George, Inverness-shire

Address: Ardesier, Inverness-shire IV2 7TD **Web:** www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/fort-george **Tel:** 01667 460232 **Hours:** daily: Apr–Sep 9.30am–5.30pm, Oct–Mar 10am–4pm; last entry 45 mins before closing **Dates:** closed 1 & 2 Jan & 25 & 26 Dec; site may close at short notice in adverse weather **Entry:** [D]£8.50 [C]free [A]£8.50 [5–15s]£5.10 [Con]£6.80



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 – you can even sometimes 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 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 powered scooters at the visitor centre, as well as some manual wheelchairs. The site is largely



Fort George

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 second floor only. 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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The *Fort George Café* sells homemade, organic food such as soup and sandwich lunches and has level access and disabled toilets.

137 Culloden Battlefield Visitor Centre, Inverness-shire

Address: Culloden Moor, Inverness IV2 5EU **Web:** www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/culloden **Tel:** 01463 796090

Hours: daily Apr–May, Sept & Oct 9am–5.30pm; June–Aug 9am–7pm; Nov–Mar 10am–4pm **Dates:** closed 24 Dec–4 Jan **Entry:** [D]£8.50 [C]free [A]£11 [under 16s]£8.50 [under 5]free [Con]£8.50 [Fam]£26



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 Crown 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. A rooftop viewing area can be accessed by an external ramp, which is not too steep (1:21) but rather long, so some wheelchair users may need assistance. It's worth the effort of getting up there though – this has the best view of the grounds. On the battlefield itself, hard-surfaced paths are pushable but undulating in places; again, wheelchair users may need help. Accessible toilets are just inside the visitor centre entrance and wheelchairs and powered scooters are available to borrow: you're advised to book these in advance.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The on-site café-restaurant serves good food in a light and spacious dining room with a patio and fine countryside views.

138 Landmark Forest Adventure Park, Inverness-shire

Address: Carrbridge, Inverness-shire, Scotland PH23 3AJ **Web:** www.landmarkpark.co.uk **Tel:** 01479 841613; infoline 0800 7313446 **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:** 29 Mar–Oct [D]£10.35 [C]free [A]£20.70 [4–14s]£18.60 [Disabled 4–14s]£9.30 [under 4s]free [Seniors]£18.60; Nov–28 Mar [D]£3.50 [C]free [A]£6.95 [4–14s]£5.90 [Disabled 4–14s]£2.95 [under 4s]free [Seniors]£5.90; 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; the Lost Labyrinth, featuring a maze of confusing paths; Pinnacle, a thirty-foot-high climbing wall; and the Fire Tower, a seventy-foot-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 fifty-foot Skydive jump, which uses stuntmen-style descenders – continuing, no doubt, to the thrilling Wild Water Coaster rides or the Runaway Timber Train rollercoaster. Gentler pleasures are on hand on the fully accessible Treetop Trail through the forest canopy, at the Wildlife Feeding Area, where you've a good chance of spotting rare red squirrels and beautiful forest birds, or in the new Butterfly House, home to hundreds of brightly-coloured butterflies. Finally, mention must be made of the indoor Bamboozleum, whose morphing machines, special effects, holograms and "capture-your-shadow" wall are certain to intrigue and delight.

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 Treetop Trail. The Runaway Timber Train is wheelchair accessible and safe (if you have the upper body strength to hold on through the rollercoaster), and the Lost Labyrinth can be negotiated in a wheelchair. 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' Restaurant* offers a decent choice of locally sourced food, such as cooked breakfasts, fish and chips, homemade soup and kids' meals. Alternatively, the *Pinewood Grill* snack bar serves burgers, hot dogs, salads and the like.

139 RSPB Loch Garten Osprey Centre, Highlands

Address: Abernethy National Nature Reserve, Forest Lodge, Nethy Bridge, PH25 3EF; off the B970, 10 miles from Aviemore (follow RSPB Ospreys road signs) **Web:** www.rspb.org.uk/lochgarten **Tel:** 01479 831476 **Hours:** daily Apr–Aug 10am–6pm (last entry 5pm); check website for event details **Dates:** closed Sep–Mar **Entry:** [D]£3 [C]free [A]£5 [under 16s]£2 [Con]£3 [Fam]£10



The RSPB's Osprey Centre – nestling in mature pine forest, near the spot where these stunning fish-eating birds of prey returned to breed after a period of extinction in the 1950s – is a mecca for nature lovers the world over. Small and well-appointed, it teems with 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 numerous 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 two 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 ramp takes you inside, where all is on one level and fully wheelchair accessible. The unisex adapted toilet – an eco-friendly composting facility – is between the car park and the centre. There is one wheelchair available to borrow, which you can reserve in advance. Any other queries can be answered by the staff. 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.

140 Islands Coast Scenic Drive



Driving distance: 86 miles **Approx time without stops:** 3 hours 15 minutes

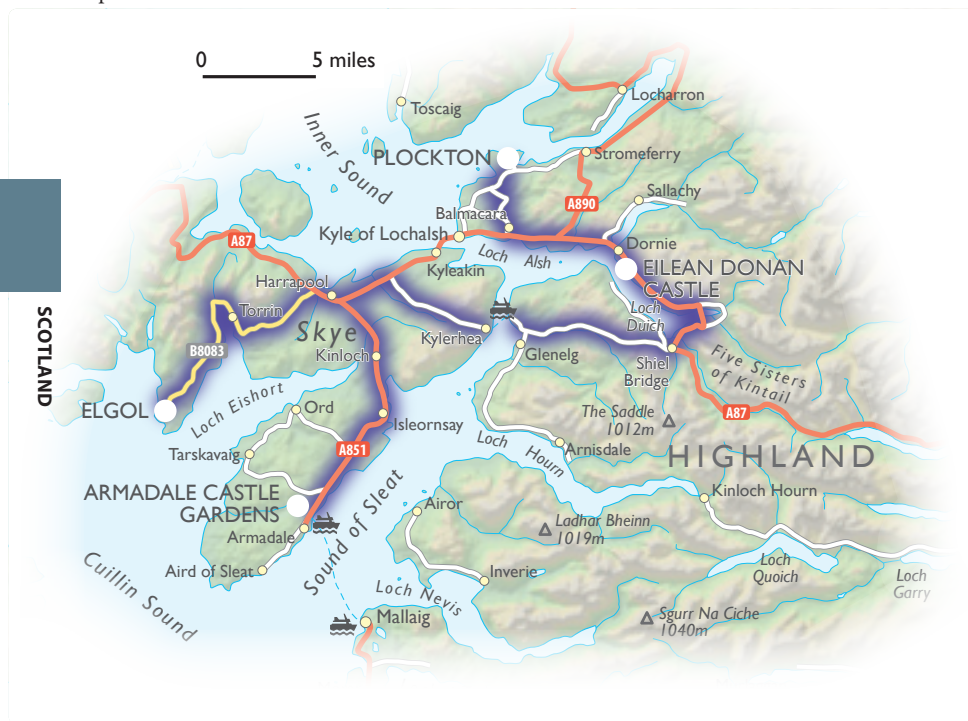
Scotland's northwest Highlands is an untamed land of mountains, glens, lochs, wind-swept islands and unforgettable beauty – nowhere more so than the mesmerising Isle of Skye and neighbouring mainland.

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) from Mallaig. A short distance from the ferry terminal stand the imposing ruins of Armadale Castle (01471 844304, www.clandonald.com), a nineteenth-century manor house whose beautiful grounds are the site of the Museum of the Isles. Fully accessible and with a range of disabled facilities (including wheelchairs and powered scooters to borrow), the museum explores the history of the region from the perspective of the powerful Clan Donald.

From here, head north towards Harrapool then loop south to Elgol fishing village, where you'll be rewarded with sensational views across Loch Scaivaig to the Cullin Ridge. Those who want to get closer can take a boat trip with Misty Isle Boat Trips, whose staff are willing to help anyone on board unless it's low tide (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. From here, follow the road east to Shiel Bridge – there are fabulous views of Loch Duich and the Five Sisters of Kintail – and then north to Eilean Donan Castle. 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 offers an on-screen virtual tour (as well as a coffee shop and accessible toilets).

Moving on, the charming village of Plockton is a fine place to end your day – take a stroll along the shore of Loch Carron, where picturesque sailing boats bob in the sea. There's disabled parking and toilets by the harbour, and a good supply of shorefront pubs and restaurants.



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, www.plocktoninn.co.uk) is a good bet.

141 Glenmore Forest Park, Inverness-shire

Address: Glenmore Forest, near Aviemore PH22 1QU **Web:** www.forestry.gov.uk **Tel:** 01479 861220

Hours: visitor centre daily 9am–4.30pm **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 and by watching a ten-minute film. The park has two accessible trails, both starting from the visitor centre. The shorter one is the mile-long circular Loch Trail, which takes you along the shores of Loch Morlich. The other accessible path is the lower section of the Ryvoan Trail, which leads through a beautiful, steep-sided glen to the stunning Loch Uaine. It's around two miles in each direction, and is easily managed with a powered 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, the reception desk is high for wheelchair users, but otherwise accessibility is good, with everything on one level – including access to the café – and plenty of space to manoeuvre. The film shown here does not have subtitles or an induction loop, but the information boards have large print. Powered scooters are available to borrow for free (book in advance on 01479 810004). 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.

142 Highland Wildlife Park, Inverness-shire

Address: Kincaig, Kingussie, Inverness-shire PH21 1NL **Web:** 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]£13.50 [C] free [A]£15.90 [3–15s]£12 [under 3s]free [Con]£13.50 [Fam] £51.50.



Run by the Zoological Society of Scotland, the Highland Wildlife Park is a two-hundred-acre safari park and zoo, with drive-through and walk-through sections. Splendidly set in the Cairngorms National Park, it offers stunning mountain and loch views and the chance to see a range of mountain and tundra wildlife – including polar bears.

It takes about half an hour to drive (slowly) around the Main Reserve, where you'll see many hoofed animals, including elk, deer, reindeer, bison, yak and Mongolian wild 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, 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, housing cafés and a shop. Trails through the site are pretty 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 navigable, 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 three wheelchairs available to borrow, and three disabled toilets located in blocks by the car park and in the visitor centre. If you don't have your own vehicle, you can join one of the Land Rover tours that leave the visitor centre at various times throughout the day (book in advance).

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The on-site *Antlers* café serves hot and cold meals and snacks, and comes with great views of the snow monkeys and beyond to the Spey Valley. There's also a picnic area next to the playground. Alternatively, the *Old Bridge Inn* on Dalfaber Road, on the outskirts of Aviemore (01479 811137, www.oldbridgeinn.co.uk), serves excellent food by the banks of the River Spey: from the wildlife park, take the Coylumbridge/Glenmore Road and then the first turning on the left.

143 Nevis Range Mountain Experience (Aonach Mor Gondola), Inverness-shire

Address: Nevis Range, Torlundy, Inverness-shire PH33 6SQ **Web:** www.nevisrange.co.uk **Tel:** 01397 705825; extension 227 for adaptive ski instruction **Hours:** Gondola summer daily 10am–5pm (9.30am–late in July and Aug); winter Mon–Fri 9.30am–dusk, Sat & Sun 9am–dusk; see website for details of other activities **Dates:** closed mid-Nov to mid-Dec **Entry:** [D]£14 [C]free [A]£14 [5–17s]£8 [under 4s] free [Con] £12.50 [Fam] £38–43



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 2150 feet 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 set-up here for disabled skiing isn't as impressive as at Aviemore (the base for Disability Snowsport UK), but it's well worth having 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. The Broomstick Blue trail is about four miles long and reasonably level, though wheelchair users may need to turn back halfway, when the route becomes trickier to navigate. The Tree Adventure, featuring a “swoop drop”, zip slide and rope bridges is an exciting addition, but unfortunately, very challenging for disabled children and adults. Blue Badge parking is provided on a tarmac area 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 23.6 inches 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 has one small step down to it. Beneath the restaurant, the Mountain Discovery Centre has information about the Nevis range's flora and fauna, but access is via a flight of stairs. 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 (01397 705 825) serves locally-sourced hot and cold meals and snacks in a light and airy building. It has step-free access, movable seating and a disabled toilet.

144 Pitlochry Festival Theatre and Explorer's Garden, Perthshire

Address: Port-na-Craig, Pitlochry PH16 5DR **Web:** www.pitlochryfestivaltheatre.com; www.explorersgarden.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 2 Apr–2 Nov 10am–5pm (last entry at 4.15pm) **Entry:** tickets vary depending on performance & seat; gallery free; garden [A]£4 [child]£2 [Con]£3.50 [Fam]£9; tour £1 extra per person



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 Explorer's Gardens, visiting the gallery, 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 Explorer's 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 plenty of accessible parking is available by the entrance – with striking views across the valley. The venue welcomes disabled visitors: there's good access into the building, four wheelchair spaces in the auditorium and free tickets available for carers. Tours of the backstage area, including the Green Room, are available (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. Volunteer audio-describers can be brought in, if booked in advance, and guide dogs are welcome with prior notice; the theatre is also fitted with a hearing loop and IR system. The art gallery is mostly accessible, though about a quarter of it is upstairs without lift access.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The theatre's *Festival Restaurant and Café Bar* serves a lunch and evening menu, plus less formal coffee and snacks, all accompanied by glorious views. From May to October, the dinner menu is themed to match the theatre's plays.

145 St Andrews, Fife



The beautiful little town of St Andrews (www.visitstandrews.com), 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 Salvator'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: 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 – 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 British Golf Museum, on Bruce Embankment (01334 460046, www.britishgolfmuseum.co.uk), 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, a ramped entrance, level access inside and an accessible toilet. Braille guides are available, and with advance notice a BSL interpreter can be arranged.



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 disabled toilets along here, and a RADAR key-accessible toilet at Bruce Embankment, near the edge of town. 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.

146 Steamship Sir Walter Scott, Perthshire

Address: Trossachs Pier, Loch Katrine, by Callander FK17 8HZ **Web:** www.lochkatrine.com **Tel:** 01877

332000 or 376315 **Hours:** Mar–Dec daily cruises of 1 or 2 hours, departing Trossachs Pier 10.30am, 1pm & 2pm, Jun–Aug also at 4pm: check website for exact timetable and details of Santa and New Year cruises

Dates: no cruises Jan & Feb **Entry:** 2-hour return trip from Trossachs Pier to Stronachlachar [D]£16 [C]50% discount [A]£16 [5–16s]£8.25 [Con]£14.50; 1-hour cruise from Trossachs Pier [D]£12.50 [C]50 percent discount [A]£12 [5–16s]£8.25 [Con]£11.25; [under 5s and dogs]£1 all sailings



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 amidst 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 bio-diesel, 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 *Brenachoile Restaurant*, which has an accessible toilet, too. Once you’re booked, you’ll find level access all the way to the gangplank, which has a small step on and off. Once on board, the forward lounge and bar are accessible, as is the disabled toilet on the main deck. If you disembark at Stronachlachar, there’s an accessible café and conservatory at the pier with toilet facilities.

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, *Brenachoile Restaurant* (www.brenachoile.co.uk) has a good range of hot food, plus an outside terrace with great views: it’s accessed by lift and has an accessible toilet.

147 Gliding with Walking on Air, Kinross-shire

Address: Scottish Gliding Centre, Portmoak Airfield, Scotlandwell near Kinross KY13 9JJ **Web:** www.walkingonair.org.uk; www.scottishglidingcentre.co.uk **Tel:** bookings 01592 840543 **Hours:** flying day is Fri, other dates possible by prior arrangement **Dates:** all year, but most frequently in spring and summer **Entry:** £50 for a 15- to 30-minute trial flight



Walking on Air is a charity set up to allow people with disabilities and a sense of adventure to soar 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 works with BLESMA (a charity supporting ex-service personnel injured in combat) and 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 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 has converted one of its gliders, as well, in case WA1 is out of action.

The Scottish Gliding Union supports Walking on Air, with accessible parking adjacent to the clubhouse and ramped access into the clubhouse. Inside, there’s a café, overnight accommodation (accessible though not specifically adapted) and a disabled toilet and shower.



FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The home-made food at the clubhouse café is great value: the full breakfast should set you up for a flight, and you can calm your nerves at the bar afterwards.

148 Royal Yacht Britannia, Edinburgh

Address: Ocean Terminal, Ocean Drive, Edinburgh, EH6 6JJ **Web:** www.royalyachtbritannia.co.uk **Tel:** 0131 5555566 **Hours:** Nov–Mar 10am–3.30pm; Apr–Oct 9.30am–4.30pm (last admission 2.30pm on 24 Dec & 3pm on 31 Dec) **Dates:** Closed 25 Dec & 1 Jan **Entry:** D]£15.50 [C]free [A]£15.50 [5–17s]free [Under 5s]free [Cons] Seniors & students with ID £13.75; Armed forces with ID £8.50 [Fam]2 adults & 3 children £44.50



Berthed at the Ocean Terminal quayside shopping mall, 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 world leaders – it's a fascinating snapshot of an interesting period of history. Design students will marvel at how much can be shoe-horned 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 disabled 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 organized 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. Assistance may be required when boarding or leaving the yacht and on some of the ramped areas, but staff are on hand to help. There's a spacious, well-maintained accessible toilet with grab rails immediately prior to boarding, plus similar toilets on four levels on board. Some eighty Blue Badge spaces are available on levels E and C and the ground floor of the Ocean Terminal multi-storey 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. 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 is a quieter time 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 drinks, cakes and scones baked on board, and light meals, using local produce where possible (wheat- and 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.

149 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]£8.95 [C]free [A]£8.95 [3-15]£4.95[Con]£6.95



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 over 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 Centre allows visitors to get to know the local seabirds and marine wildlife. 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 Flyaway 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. At the end of the tunnel is the 3D Ocean Wonderland experience. The new Turtle and Ray Zone features stunning photos of each species, and fascinating facts about their connections to Scotland's seas. Did you know, for example, that the largest of all turtles,



the leatherback, has been spotted in the Firth of Forth, and fifteen different species of rays and skates can be found in Scottish waters?

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. At peak times, the five Blue Badge parking bays at the front of the entrance fill up quickly. 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 Centre displays are low-set to suit small people and wheelchair users alike. A 55-seat catamaran offers boat trips from the Centre, but cannot accommodate wheelchair users. There is an induction loop in the theatre, shop and café. A volunteer BSL interpreter can be arranged, but call in advance to check availability.

Ideas ►► Birds

Abbotsbury Swannery (Dorset DT3 4JG; 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) 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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The glass-fronted café serves fish and chips, pasta and baked spuds at reasonable prices – check the specials board too, as it might feature freshly caught lobster. The children's menu features all the usual suspects, nuggets, sausages, chips, etc.

150 The Titan Crane Clydebank, West Dunbartonshire

Address: Garth Drive, Queens Quays, Clydebank G81 1BF **Web:** www.titanclaydebank.com **Tel:** 0141 5262889 **Hours:** By appointment only; see website or call 0141 9513420 for details **Entry:** [D]£4 [C]free [A]£5 [5–16s]£3.50 [Con]£3.50 [Fam]£14



The Titan Crane helped build world-famous ships, including the *Lusitania*, *HMS Hood*, the *QE2* and the *Queen Mary*, survived the Blitz and industrial decline, and is now a visitor attraction.

The Titan, looking like a colossal toy crane, has a box-girder construction and stands 150 feet tall. Its viewing platform provides a stunning panorama up and down the River Clyde as well as views of the comings and goings at Glasgow airport. You can see the remains of the slipway, down which many well-known ships were once launched, including the *Royal Yacht Britannia*, though it is now little more than a few rotting planks sticking out of the river. Video presentations play inside and outside the crane's winding house, and sepia-tinted photos and films of a bygone age tell the story of the yard in good times and bad.

A bus that can be accessed by platform lift takes you on a short tour to the base of the crane, where you disembark and are transported in a couple of minutes by glass lift to the viewing platform. Up at the top, there are sets of fixed binoculars, two of them at a lower position, ideal for wheelchair users. Back on the ground, an accessible timber-and-glass visitor centre houses a small but fascinating display of drawings, models and loaned artefacts, as well as a gift shop and coffee bar.

There's a single, free, disabled parking space at the booking office, with gently ramped access to the ticket office and shop, and there's an accessible toilet in the waiting area. The site is open to the elements, so it's best to wear warm clothes, even on a fine day.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ Hot drinks and light snacks are available at the visitor centre, and at the *Beangrinder Café* in the new Clydebank Leisure Centre, adjacent to the Titan.

151 Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh

Address: Holyrood Road EH8 8AS **Web:** www.dynaminearth.co.uk **Tel:** 0131 5507800 **Hours:** April–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]£15 [C]free [A]£15 [4–17s]£9.50 [under 3s] free [Con]£13



The shadow of the long extinct volcano 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 descent in the "time machine" (in reality, a highly accessible lift) transports visitors backwards from the present day, through the history of time, to the formation of the universe. At the end of the short journey, the doors of the time machine open onto the bridge of a spaceship where huge screens display Hubble Telescope images of the Big Bang. And from that point – going forward through time – the story of the creation of our Earth and continents is told via a series of spectacular 3D, 4D and tactile exhibits. In Restless Earth, the floor shudders with the colossal force of an earthquake and the icebergs in Polar Extremes are authentically chilly to touch. On the incredible 4DVENTURE expedition, you'll be guided by a CGI pilot on a flight from the Arctic to the tropical rainforest – it is such a realistic experience that you'll even feel G-force and sense your tummy roll during turbulence.

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 and pre-booked tickets get priority entry: 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.

152 Scottish National Gallery and Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh

Address: 1 The Mound EH2 2EL **Website:** www.nationalgalleries.org **Tel:** 0131 6246200 **Hours:** Mon–Wed & Fri–Sun 10am–5pm, Thu 10am–7pm **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 complex, whose three interconnected buildings house the Royal Scottish Academy, the Weston Link (a shopping and eating centre) and, most notably, the Scottish National Gallery. The gallery is home to the national collection of fine art, which, 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*. And above all, there's a comprehensive display



The Scottish National Portrait Gallery

of Scottish painting, 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*.

Parking can be tricky in the city centre, but there's a handful of Blue Badge bays in a pedestrianised area right outside the gallery (just off The Mound). The Scottish National Gallery complex is fully accessible over all levels, and even has voice-activated lifts. There are BSL-trained staff on site, and tours catering for a range of disabilities can be arranged by contacting the education department in advance.

Just a few streets away, on Queen Street, is the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, fresh from a two-year, multi-million-pound restoration. 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 Portrait Gallery has two rooms that can be used as chill-out spaces for those on the autism spectrum – ask staff for details. The closest Blue Badge parking is currently on the south side of St Andrew's Square and George Street.

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. Over in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, there's a fully accessible café on the ground floor.

153 Riverside Museum, Glasgow

Address: 100 Pointhouse Place, Glasgow G3 8RS **Web:** www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums **Tel:** 0141 2872720 **Hours:** daily 10am–5pm, except Fri & Sun 11am–5pm **Dates:** closed 1–2 Jan, 25–26 Dec & at 12.30pm on 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 cars, train 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 twelve Blue Badge spaces right outside the museum, and another six in the main car park; 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. Lifts provide easy access between the ground and upper floors, and virtually the whole attraction is barrier-free. Many exhibits have accompanying audio or video displays; some are loop-compatible and some video displays 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 one on the first floor.

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.



154 House for an Art Lover, Glasgow

Address: Bellahouston Park, 10 Dumbreck Road G41 5BW **Web:** www.houseforanartlover.co.uk **Tel:** 0141 3534770 **Hours:** check website or call, as the house is regularly closed for functions **Entry:** [D]£3 [C]£3 [A]£4.50 [under 10s]free [Fam]£13



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 disabled 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. 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, serves coffee, cakes and three-course lunches – the food is truly sublime.

155 Abbotsford House, Roxburghshire

Address: Abbotsford, Melrose, Roxburghshire, TD6 9BQ **Web:** www.scottsassbotsford.com **Tel:** 01896 752043 **Hours:** House & gardens daily: Mar & Nov 10am–4pm; Apr–Oct 10am–5pm. Visitor centre & restaurant daily: Apr–Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–Mar 10am–4pm (Jan & Feb only open Wed–Sun) **Dates:** House and gardens closed Dec–Feb; Visitor centre & restaurant closed 25 & 26 Dec & 1 & 2 Jan **Entry:** check website for prices.



The home of world-renowned author Sir Walter Scott, Abbotsford House 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 Roxburghshire 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 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 metres 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, 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 metres 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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ Upstairs at the visitor centre, the spacious, bright and airy *Ochiltrees* restaurant 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.

156 Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, Ayrshire

Address: Murdoch's Lone, Alloway, Ayr KA7 4PQ **Web:** www.burnsmuseum.org.uk **Tel:** 01292 443700

Hours: daily Apr–Sept 10am–5.30pm; Oct–Mar 10am–5pm; last entry 1hr before closing **Dates:** closed 1–2 Jan & 25–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£9 [C]free [6–17s]£7 [A]£9 [Con]£7 [Fam]£17–£22. 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 (open 11am–4.30pm), 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.

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 disabled 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. On the first Tuesday of each month (3–5pm), the museum and cottage hold accessible sessions, when the sounds are dimmed, lights turned up and interactive displays switched off for those with visual, hearing and autism spectrum issues: 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

157 RSPB Conwy Nature Reserve

158 Llangollen

159 Llangollen Wharf and
Pontcysyllte Aqueduct

160 Snowdonia Scenic Drive

161 Gigrin Farm

162 Newport Parrog Coastal Trail

163 Celtic Quest Coasteering

164 Brecon Canal Walk

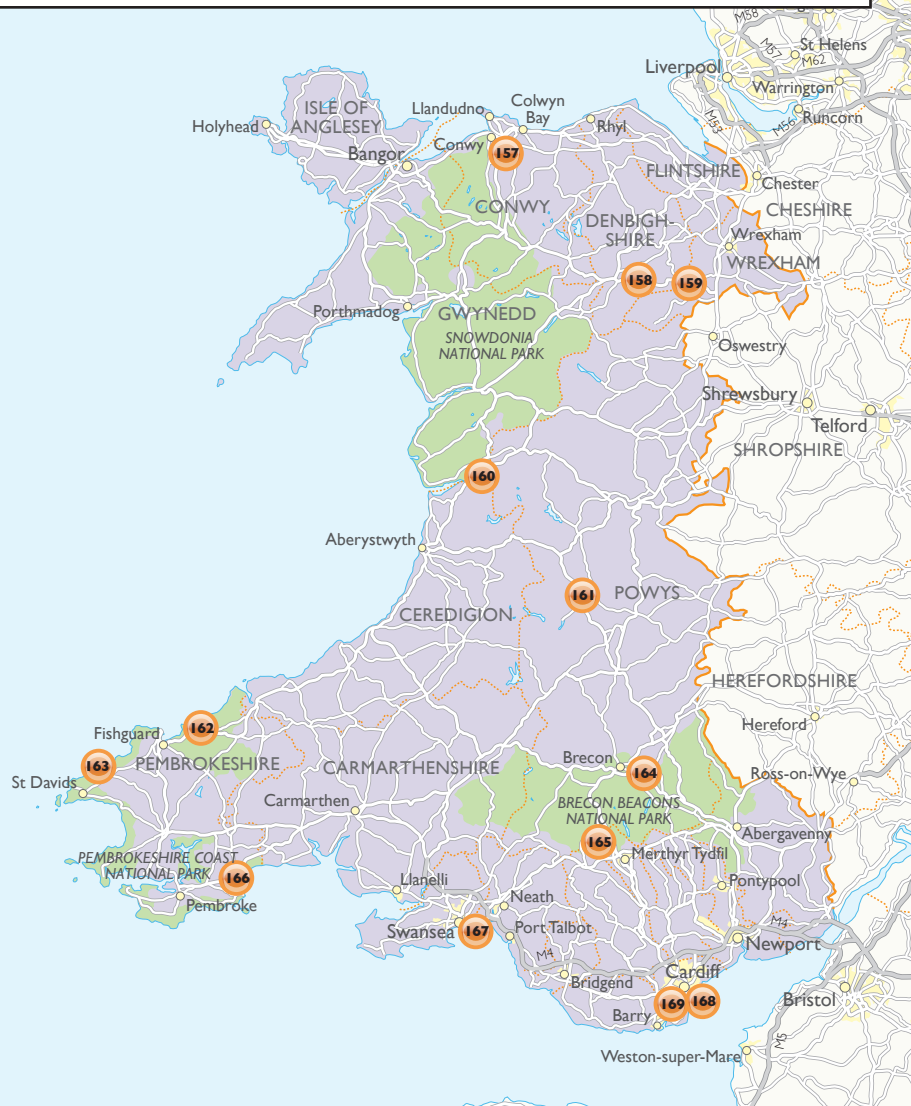
165 Garwnant Forest Visitor Centre

166 Folly Farm

167 National Waterfront Museum

168 Wales Millennium Centre

169 Principality Stadium Tours



157 RSPB Conwy Nature Reserve, Conwy

Address: Llandudno Junction LL31 9XZ **Web:** www.rspb.org.uk/conwy **Tel:** 01492 584091 **Hours:** daily 9.30am–5pm; coffee shop 10am–4.30pm, or 4pm in winter **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** members free, non-members [D]£5 [C]free [A]£5 [5–15s]£2.50 [Fam]£12.50



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 rarely muddy the 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 powered 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. In 2013, RSPB Conwy was transformed with a fresh look and exciting new facilities. A village square has been created, called Y Maes, which 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. The visitor centre has a welcoming reception area (with low counter and knee recess) and a well laid-out shop with spacious aisles and low displays. There are seven designated disabled parking spaces.

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.

158 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) 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), which operates from a handsome old station across the river. Shining locomotives pull beautifully restored coaches through the Dee Valley, as far as Carrog, some seven miles west, with a specially adapted coach



Llangollen Eisteddfod

for wheelchair users (it's recommended to pre-book this carriage). The station has accessible toilets and wheelchair access to all platforms, plus limited disabled parking; indeed, all the stations along the route have disabled access, except Berwyn. 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.190 for details).

Mention should also be made of the Llangollen Eisteddfod (www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk), a week-long international music and folk dance festival held here every July. The festival has been going strong for over 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) and a hearing loop in the auditorium.

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 two RADAR key-accessible toilets. 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 mentioned 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 p.190), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visit the Tourist Information Centre on Castle Street (01978 860828) for more information.



Pontcysyllte Aqueduct

159 Llangollen Wharf and Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, Denbighshire

Horse-drawn boats: **Address:** Wharf Hill, Llangollen LL20 8TA **Web:** www.horsedrawnboats.co.uk **Tel:** 01978 860702 **Hours:** daily 11am–4pm; trips every 30 minutes during school holidays, hourly at other times **Dates:** closed Nov–Easter **Entry:** prices start from [D]£7 [C]£7 [A]£7 [3–16s]£3.50 [Fam]£18



Vale of Llangollen Canal Boat Trust: **Address:** The Old Wharf, Trevor Basin LL20 7TY **Web:** www.vlcbt.org.uk **Tel:** 01978 861450 **Hours:** private bookings only; from 9.30am, trips can last from 3hrs to full day **Entry:** minimum donation of £85 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.

Over a thousand feet long and a dizzying 126 feet 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: the Vale of Llangollen Canal Boat Trust runs trips for up to twelve disabled passengers (up to four wheelchairs) in a specially adapted narrowboat with a hydraulic wheelchair lift, a disabled 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 £85 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 disabled 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 home made scones, cakes, soups and light meals.

160 Snowdonia Scenic Drive



Driving distance: 53 miles **Approx time without stops:** 1 hour 40 minutes

The 53-mile drive between Machynlleth and Beddgelert is one of the most scenic in Wales. Taking in woodlands, valleys, mountains, beaches and an ancient castle, it offers all the quintessential hallmarks of southern Snowdonia.

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 fascinating Centre for Alternative Technology (www.cat.org.uk) and the signed turn-off for the Corris Craft Centre (www.corriscraftcentre.co.uk), worth a stop to browse through the jewellery, ceramics, glassware and other items sold here (there's also an on-site accessible café and a disabled toilet). Continuing north from here, look left for some impressive close-up views of Cadair Idris, southern Snowdonia's most famous peak.

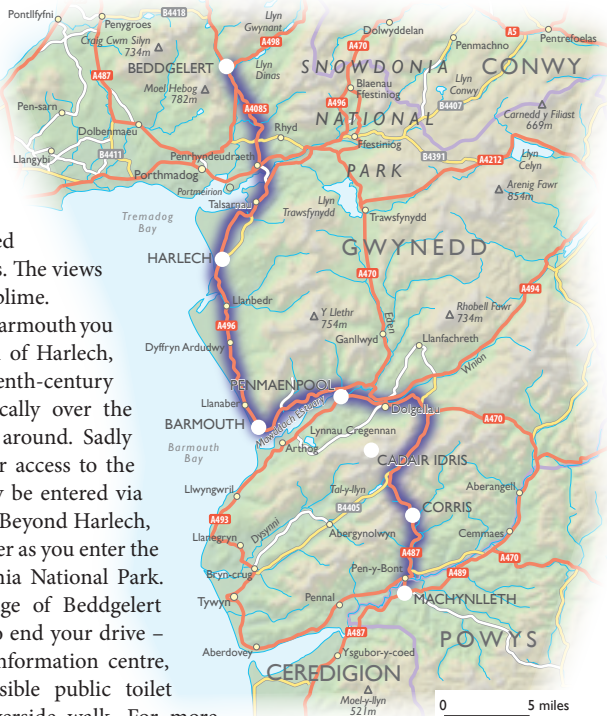
Heading north from Corris, the Snowdonia National Park car park near the junction with the B4405/A487 at Minffordd is known as Dol Idris and has a picnic area, a disabled toilet and a nice wheelchair-friendly circular walk of about 800m around two small lakes. There is also a café in summer.

Onwards from Dolgellau, head for the A493 (to Fairbourne) then turn off at Penmaenpool for the toll bridge over the Mawddach Estuary (70p) – the car park off the trail, just short of the bridge, is a good place to admire spectacular estuary views, and the trail itself is wheelchair accessible (see www.mawddachestuary.co.uk). Once over the bridge, follow the A496 to Barmouth, where the road follows the coast north, in places offering terrific views down to the sandy beaches of Cardigan Bay. One of them – Traeth

Benar, turn off the A496 just before the village of Dyffryn Ardudwy – has an accessible boardwalk along the sand dunes and beach, served by a car park with a disabled toilet and picnic tables. The views from the beach are sublime.

Ten miles north of Barmouth you reach the pretty town of Harlech, whose stunning thirteenth-century castle looms dramatically over the sea, visible for miles around. Sadly there is no wheelchair access to the castle, which can only be entered via a steep flight of steps. Beyond Harlech, the hills become steeper as you enter the heartland of Snowdonia National Park. The picturesque village of Beddgelert makes a good place to end your drive – it has an accessible information centre, a RADAR key-accessible public toilet and an accessible riverside walk. For more details on disabled facilities in Snowdonia, visit www.snowdonia.gov.wales/visiting/snowdonia-for-all.

The *Ael-y-Bryn Hotel*, on the main road through Dyffryn Ardudwy (01341 242701, www.hotelaelybryn.co.uk), has an entrance with ramped access, superb views over Cardigan Bay and good food (daily 5–9pm, plus lunch in high season), including excellent Sunday lunches (noon–2pm).



161 Gigrin Farm, Powys

Address: South Street, Rhayader, Powys LD6 5BL **Web:** www.gigrin.co.uk **Tel:** 01597 810243 **Hours:** Jan–Nov Sat–Wed 1–5pm; school hols & 27–31 Dec daily 1–5pm; Apr–Oct feeding at 3pm; Nov–Mar feeding at 2pm **Dates:** closed 1–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£6 [C]free [A]£7 [5–15s]£4 [Under 5s] free [Con]£5



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.

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. The well-stocked shop is worth visiting, but the information and display area is in a separate two-storey building: the ground floor is split level, but has two separate entrances that allow access to the whole of the lower floor. Although steps to the upper floor leave some displays out of bounds to wheelchair users, they present no deterrent to the main event – seeing the kites being fed.

Gigrin Farm is accessed by a single-track tarmac road. There are no disabled bays – in fact, there's no formal parking area at all – and the space available is on a gentle gradient. The main area between the buildings has been tarred and there are no access problems across it or into any of the buildings, all of which have level access. If you need to, you can ask the staff for permission to park in one of the four spaces adjacent to the ramped entrance to the viewing hides. The accessible hides have designated low viewing points for wheelchair users and a new wheelchair-accessible hide, designed for keen photographers with large cameras, can be reserved online (www.gigrin.co.uk/hide).

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ When it's your feeding time, try the wheelchair-accessible *Carole's Cake Shop and Tearoom* (01597 811 060) on West Street in Rhayader. Alternatively, on summer afternoons an on-site café sells sandwiches, cakes and hot and cold drinks.

162 Newport Parrog Coastal Trail, Pembrokeshire

Address: The Parrog, Newport SA42 0RW **Web:** 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 disabled visitors a taste of the spectacular scenery offered by one of Britain's most popular long-distance walking trails: www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk/website/AppAccess4All/newport_parrog.pdf shows 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 Café Bar & Restaurant* (01239 820565) offers delicious local baked crab, Pembrokeshire lamb and much more in a fully accessible dining room with a disabled toilet.

163 Celtic Quest Coasteering, Pembrokeshire

Address: Abereddy Bay, Berea, St Davids, Pembrokeshire, SA62 6DT **Web:** 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 £44 (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 Abereddy 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 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 twenty foot 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. Due to the physical and sometimes risky nature of coasteering, the deaf or hard of hearing 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* in Solva, a fifteen-minute drive away, serves a mean burger – perfect after a water workout.

164 Brecon Canal Walk, Powys

Address: Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, Canal Wharf, Brecon LD3 7EW **Web:** www.breconbeacons.org/monmouthshire-brecon-canal **Tel:** 01874 622485 **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 Brynich 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. A brightly coloured canal boat called the Dragonfly is in operation sporadically – for those lucky enough to be present at the same time, it offers an alternative, fun and wheelchair accessible way to reach the lock.



Brecon Canal Walk

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 *Waterfront Bistro* café (www.brycheiniog.co.uk/en/waterfront-bistro) is run by the Theatr Brycheiniog and open seven days a week. Alternatively, the nearby *Rich Way Café* serves good food.

165 Garwnant Forest Visitor Centre, Merthyr Tydfil

Address: Garwnant Visitor Centre, Cwmtaf CF48 2HU **Web:** www.naturalresources.wales, then search Garwnant **Tel:** 01685 722481 **Hours:** site open daily 10am–4pm, extended to 5pm in summer; check the website for latest opening hours **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 disabled visitors 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 low rope course, and a couple of longer trails, suitable for visitors with good mobility.

There are three Blue Badge bays in front of the on-site restaurant, with a couple of additional bays across the road from here. 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 scooter will have no problem.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The spacious restaurant offers snacks and meals, with a family-oriented menu. There's also a wheelchair accessible picnic table in the main car park.



166 Folly Farm, Pembrokeshire

Address: Begelly, Kilgetty SA68 0XA **Web:** www.folly-farm.co.uk **Tel:** 01834 812731 **Hours:** Mid-Feb to June, Sept & Oct daily 10am–5pm; July & Aug daily 10am–5.30pm; Nov to mid-Feb Sat & Sun 10am–4pm
Dates: closed over Christmas and New Year **Entry:** [D]£11 [C]free [A]£13.95 [3–15s]£11.95 [D3–15s]£9.95 [aged 2]£4.95 [Disabled aged 2]£3.95 [under 2s]free [Con]£11.95 [D Con]£9.95



Folly Farm, the proud holder of the “Best Family Day Out in Wales” National Tourism Award, combines a farm, play area, vintage funfair and zoo on a two-hundred-acre site near the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.

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 – and can even try milking a goat. 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 a 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, with a go-kart track and ferris wheel, not to mention the Land Train tractor ride, which takes visitors around the paddocks to see unusual breeds and red deer – there’s ramped access to the first carriage and the driver will help you up.

Access at Folly Farm is generally good. On arrival, head for the disabled car park, which is located close to the entrance. Inside, there are spacious, disabled toilets, plus a disabled changing room with a bed and hoist. They also have several standard wheelchairs which are free to borrow (£10 refundable deposit required). 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, some of the concrete



Folly Farm

surfaces inside the barn are prone to being slippery, and in wet conditions wheelchair users should take care on the ramps to and from the underpass beneath the road. The ferris 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. An induction loop is fitted in the interactive centre and 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 new burger restaurant, cafés, ice cream kiosks and the *Funfair Restaurant*, which serves a range of hot dishes including pasta, jacket potatoes, fish and chips, pies and homemade soup. Some outlets only open seasonally.

167 National Waterfront Museum, Swansea

Address: Oystermouth Road SA1 3RD **Web:** <https://museum.wales/swansea> **Telephone:** 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 bays on Burrows Place, plus more disabled spaces in the car park by the adjacent leisure centre (sat nav SA1 3ST) – parking here is free on Sundays; otherwise, take your parking ticket into the museum to receive a partial refund. Mobility scooters are welcome at the museum, however only a limited number are permitted at any one time: call 029 20573600 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 new 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 training.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ You can picnic in the lunch room, 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.

Ideas ►► Outdoors

Castle Semple Visitor Centre (Lochwinnoch PA12 4EA; 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.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/counyparks) 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.

RHS Garden Wisley (Surrey GU23 6QB; www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley) Spread over almost 250 acres, the Royal Horticultural Society's flagship garden is something special. A mobility vehicle and an extensive wheelchair route cover all the best attractions, and you can get hands-on in the spectacular climate-controlled Glasshouse.

168 Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff

Address: Bute Place, Cardiff Bay CF10 5AL **Website:** www.wmc.org.uk **Tel:** 029 20636464 **Hours:** box office open daily 10am–6pm, later on performance days **Dates:** closed 25 Dec **Entry:** building free; performance prices vary; discounts available for Hynt members (see website for details)



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. The magnificent 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 the BBC Orchestra of Wales. There are also workshop and studio sessions, behind-the-scenes group tours and pre-show touch tours, which provide the opportunity for the visually impaired to explore the stage, sets and costumes before the performance. Also resident is Touch Trust, which provides creative touch-based music, art and dance activities for people with profound and multiple disabilities (phone ahead to book a session; 029 20635660, www.touchtrust.co.uk). The Trust's purpose-built suite has a large disabled toilet and changing rooms with a hoist and large changing table.

Theatres can be tricky places for disabled people, but here every effort has been made to make the venue as welcoming and accessible as possible. The centre has seventeen 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 entrances, lifts and level access to all areas. Accessible toilets are dotted throughout the centre, with a Changing Places toilet on the ground floor, while the auditorium has accessible seating and wheelchair access on every level. There are induction loops in all the key public areas; audio-described, BSL-interpreted and captioned performances are available; and signage and directions around the building are given in large clear type and raised text – in both Welsh and English Braille. Assistance



Wales Millennium Centre

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. Quiet rooms are available for those on the autism spectrum – ask the duty manager – and one member of staff is currently undergoing specific autism training.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ This is a truly public building, where people can come to meet each other, have something to eat and enjoy themselves. The lounge bar and restaurant *ffresh* serves full pre-show meals, or you can just relax with a coffee and a snack at *Caffi* or *Crema*.

169 Principality Stadium Tours, Cardiff

Address: Westgate Street CF10 1NS **Web:** 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]£12.50 [C]free [A]£12.50 [5–15s]£9 [under 5s] free [Con]£10 [Fam]£38; for group discounts, contact customer@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 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 disabled 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.

Northern Ireland

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170 Portstewart Strand, County Derry

Address: National Trust Portstewart Strand Visitor Centre, 118 Strand Road, Portstewart BT55 7PG **Web:** www.nationaltrust.org.uk/portstewart-strand **Tel:** 028 70836396 **Hours:** Daily: Apr 10am–5pm; May & Sep 10am–6pm; Jun–Aug 10am–7pm. 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 Sep–10 Apr **Entry:** free for pedestrians, car £6, minibus £15, coach £22; 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 – and in 2015 was voted one of the UK's top ten wild swimming spots.

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



Portstewart Strand

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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ By far the best option is to bring a picnic & dine at the award-winning *Harry's Shack* (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.

171 Derry, County Derry



Chosen in 2013 to be the inaugural UK City of Culture, Derry, or Londonderry (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 Craigavon Bridge, further south.

Tucked into the northernmost corner of the walls, near Magazine Gate, the excellent Tower Museum (028 71366018, www.derrystrabane.com/museums) is fully accessible and has 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.

You can explore this theme in more detail at the Museum of Free Derry (028 71360880, 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. Nearby, several large murals vividly depict some of the events of the conflict, while a few yards away the Bloody Sunday Memorial commemorates the victims of the infamous shootings that took place here in 1972. On Society Street in the old city, the Siege Museum (www.thesiegemuseum.org) tells the story of the Siege of Londonderry in 1688/89 and the history of the Apprentice Boys of Derry.

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 Foyle Side Shopping Centre has 35 disabled bays in its car park; the centre is also the location of Derry's Shopmobility scheme (028 71368623, mary@shopmobilityfoyle.com), 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 disabled toilets dotted around, including those at the Tourist Information Centre on Foyle Street; at the Foyle Side Shopping Centre; at the Richmond Shopping Centre, within the walls; at the Tower Museum; 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.

172 Carnfunnock Country Park, County Antrim

Address: Coast Road, Larne BT40 2QG **Web:** www.carnfunnock.co.uk **Tel:** 028 28262471 **Hours:** Country park: Mar–Jun, Sept & Oct Mon–Thu 10am–6pm, Fri 10am–9pm, Sat, Sun & bank hols 10am–7pm; Jul & Aug daily 9.30am–7pm (Fri open until 9pm); 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, pay for some activities; parking charges apply, but free for Blue Badge holders



Spread over a hillside overlooking the Irish Sea on the beautiful North Antrim coast, Carnfunnock Country Park occupies a former country estate that's been turned into a public 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, which clearly marks steep slopes and steps. 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 equipment for children with special needs), 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 at a small charge. There's also a golf driving range where you can perfect your swing. 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. You can do archery at the County Antrim Archery Centre

Carnfunnock Family Fun Zone



(June–Aug Sat & Sun & bank hols), and various events are held (Mar–Oct), such as Sunday band concerts in the Walled Garden (June–Aug): check website for full listings, and phone ahead as some activities are weather dependent.

Parking is straightforward in one of the five dedicated Blue Badge spaces about twenty yards from the visitor centre, with two extra spaces in the separate activity centre car park. Alternatively, the main lower and upper car parks, situated 130 yards and 230 yards respectively from the visitor centre, are both linked to the centre by hard-surfaced, wheelchair-accessible paths. All the walkways linking the park's main, lower areas are fully accessible, and wheelchair users will have no problem accessing the walled garden and maze. The higher way-marked walking trails are not suitable for wheelchairs, though many can be accessed on powered scooters. In wet weather, however, even these may not be suitable. 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 dedicated disabled toilets at the visitor centre and activity centre, with Braille signs at the toilet entrances.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ *Parklands Café* in the visitor centre offers sweeping views from its terrace and a good range of breakfasts, inexpensive snacks (such as paninis, baked potatoes and burgers), a kids' menu and delicious cakes. There's a Snack Stop by the adventure playground plus picnic sites around the park, many fitted with grills where you can use disposable barbecues. Mobile barbecues and covered barbecue areas can be rented by prior arrangement.

173 Sperrin Mountain Drive, County Tyrone/Derry



Driving distance: 38 miles **Approx 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 (028 66343032, www.nidirect.gov.uk/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 (pay and display) car park with four disabled bays, a spacious adapted toilet and some accessible picnic tables nearby. Several trails lead through the forest from here, though none are wheelchair accessible. You can, however, enjoy the scenery from your car by following the park's five-mile Forest Drive, which passes several panoramic viewpoints where you can soak up the mountain vistas. As you drive along, look out for the wild Sika deer that inhabit the park and for buzzards circling overhead.

Back on the B48, continue north through the mountains. You'll soon pass the pretty village of Gortin, nestled in the Owenkillee 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 Mount Sawel, the highest peak in the Sperrin range at 2225 feet. 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, Ireland – and Britain's – biggest lake. 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.

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.

174 Titanic Belfast

Address: 1 Olympic Way, Queen's Road, Titanic Quarter, Belfast, Northern Ireland BT3 9EP **Web:** www.titanicbelfast.com **Tel:** 028 90766386; Accessibility line 028 90766399 **Hours:** April–May & Sept 9am–6pm; June–Aug 9am–7pm; Oct–March 10am–5pm; last admission 1hr 40min before closing. Late Saver tickets are available 1hr before closing but exclude the cable car ride. **Dates:** Closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£18 [C]free [A]£18 [5–16s]£8 [Under 5s] free [Seniors 60+]Mon–Fri £14.50 [Students & unemployed]£14.50 [Fam]£44. Late Saver ticket [A]£9 [5–15s]£5



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, the museum's iconic design sits as the centrepiece of Belfast's Titanic Quarter.

Inside the massive complex (around 150,700 square feet), you can learn about the story behind the infamous maritime disaster, through reading authentic historical accounts about the luxurious ocean liner that sank during its maiden voyage in 1912, claiming the lives of more than 1500 passengers and crew. There are also exhibits such as a dark ride, an underwater exploration theatre and recreations of the ship's cabins. Everything is

presented in an interesting style using a mixture of holograms, virtual reality and historic artefacts. There is also a cable car ride, which takes visitors around in carriages to view the various different processes in the ship's construction. Electric wheelchairs cannot be taken on the ride, but there's a car which can accommodate one manual wheelchair. Help is also available for those who choose to leave their chairs behind.

The building itself is inviting and accessible to those with disabilities. 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 gallery and ticket area. All the entrances and exits to the museum 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. Manual wheelchairs and mobility scooters are available free on request. Several staff members have disability, autism, sign language 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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ *Bistro 401* serves a wide selection of food, with the waiting staff dressed in the style of the crew onboard *Titanic*, while *The Galley Café* offers drinks, sandwiches and pastries. Afternoon tea is available on Sundays in the *Titanic Suite*.

175 W5, Belfast

Address: 2 Queen's Quay BT3 9QQ **Web:** www.w5online.co.uk **Tel:** 028 90467700 **Hours:** Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat 10am–6pm, Sun noon–6pm; check website for seasonal variations **Dates:** closed 24–26 Dec **Entry:** [D]£9.80 [C]free [A]£9.80 [3–16s]£7.50 [Con]£8.10 [Fam]£27.50–£48.60



You don't have to wait very long to get a rainy day in Belfast, and when you do, it's a perfect time to visit the city's "Millennium Project", the Odyssey Complex – where the highlight for families is W5, a science and discovery centre with over 250 interactive exhibits.

The attraction invites you to explore five very important questions: Who, What, Where, When and Why? If your kids want to know where electricity comes from, or how to beat a lie detector, then they'll love this place, and it will entertain them for hours. Adults will be happy too – making soaring rings of steam and trying to unlock the secrets of the ever-turning marble ball. The majority of exhibits are hands-on so you can push buttons, pull levers, turn cogs and swing on ropes as you explore the five floors – there's even an exhibit teaching children how to read Braille. In designated demonstration zones, Team W5 present experiments at allocated times throughout the day and there's an area designed specifically for younger children. Additional seasonal events and exhibitions take place, including at Easter, Halloween and Christmas and during the summer holidays.

The sixty car parking spaces closest to the Odyssey Complex are reserved for Blue Badge holders, available on a first-come, first-served basis. All the designated bays are within fifty yards of the entrance, with just one crossing and no steps to negotiate. Inside the Odyssey Complex, there is lift access to the two upper levels, and level access throughout the ground-floor area where W5 is located. W5 is an accessible and friendly attraction, where most of the exhibits are multi-sensory and interactive. Accessible



toilets are available on all floors in the complex, and there's a hearing loop system at the ticket desk and in the lecture theatre.

FOOD & DRINK ▶ Visitors are encouraged to bring their own food and drink, and there are designated picnic areas. There's a small coffee shop serving *Costa Coffee* as well as several bars, cafés and restaurants in the Odyssey Pavilion, including a branch of *Pizza Hut* on the ground floor, which offers quick and tasty pizzas in an accessible venue.

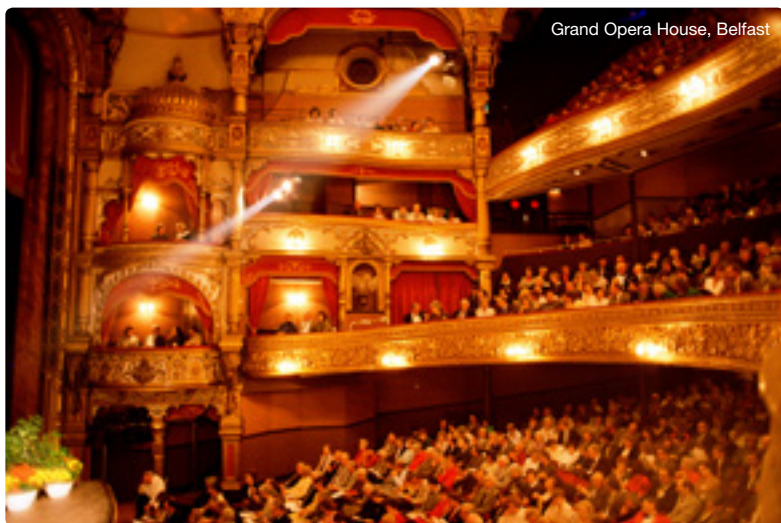
176 Grand Opera House, Belfast

Address: 2 Great Victoria Street BT2 7HR **Web:** www.goh.co.uk (with browsealoud) **Tel:** box office 028 90241919 (textphone 028 90278578); 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, family shows and is the home of pantomime in Northern Ireland.

The Main Auditorium is a magnificent example of Victorian architecture: the original decor has been well maintained, and the atmosphere is intimate and relaxed. In 2013, the theatre was awarded the Disability Equality Charter Award in recognition of its ongoing commitment to ensuring accessibility for everyone. All levels of the theatre, except The Gods, are wheelchair accessible, and there are bars over two 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 – although during popular productions, spaces are at a premium, so public



Grand Opera House, Belfast

transport is recommended. 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 powered scooter. Colour contrast is excellent throughout and visitors with assistance dogs can be reassured the acoustics are not too intrusive. 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. Brochures are available in different formats on request.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ The ground-floor bar, *Luciano's* serves pastries and drinks before, during and after performances. Opposite, *The Crown Liquor Saloon* (www.nicholsonspubs.co.uk), Belfast's most famous pub, serves various meals and drinks.

177 Oxford Island National Nature Reserve, County Armagh

Address: Oxford Island, Lurgan, Craigavon, County Armagh BT66 6NJ **Web:** 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 Britain and Ireland – 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 forty 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 three bird hides dotted along the shore – 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 main building in the reserve, with a reception desk, café, shop and tourist information desk. From time to time, exhibitions are run in the centre too. The centre has accessible parking, and is a good place to start an exploration of the island. There are several car parks 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 powered scooters and a wheelchair 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. The only wheelchair accessible hide is called Kinnego Hide (despite not being near the marina) – the closest car park to this is at Artscape (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 disabled 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.

178 Belleek Pottery Visitor Centre, County Fermanagh

Address: 33 Main Street, Belleek BT93 3FY **Web:** www.belleek.ie **Tel:** 028 68659300 or 028 68658501

Hours: Jan & Feb Mon–Fri 9am–5.30pm; Mar–Jun Mon–Fri 9am–5.30pm, Sat 10am–5.30pm, Sun 2–5.30pm; Jul–Sep Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat 10am–6pm, Sun noon–5.30pm; Oct–Dec Mon–Fri 9am–5.30pm, Sat 10am–5.30pm, Sun 2–5pm (visitors are advised to call ahead to check opening hours)

Dates: closed over Christmas & New Year **Entry:** [D]£3 [C]£3 [A]£5 [over 12s]£3 [Con]£3



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 over 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 7500 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 seven Blue Badge spaces directly in front of the visitor centre, and the disabled 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.

179 Ulster Museum, Belfast

Address: Botanic Gardens, Stranmillis Road BT9 5AB **Web:** www.nmni.com **Tel:** 028 90440000 **Hours:** Tue–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; Takabuti, an Egyptian mummy brought to the museum in 1835 (along with a skilful reproduction of the head); 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.

Disabled visitors can move round the museum with ease (though, as parts of the building are listed, a few areas remain difficult to access without help, such as the "Deep in Time" gallery). There are five Blue Badge parking spaces, and ramps lead through the



automatic doors into the stunning entrance hall, where you'll find a low-level desk and cloakroom with lockers, and the two main lifts. Elsewhere there are three additional lifts, which provide alternatives to the staircases in the old part of 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 too. A few wheelchairs are available to borrow, and there are plenty of disabled toilets on site. Visitors with sensory disabilities can call ahead to organise free personal guided tours. 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 the weather keeps you from venturing outside.

180 Armagh Planetarium, County Armagh

Address: College Hill, Armagh BT61 9DB **Web:** www.armaghplanet.com **Tel:** 028 37523689 **Hours:** Mon–Sat 10am–5pm: check website for seasonal variations **Dates:** check website for dates **Entry:** Pre-booking is essential for shows [D]£5 [C]£6 [A]£6 [child]£5 [Con]£5 [Fam]£20 (2 adults, 3 children); exhibition area £2 year-round



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 engrossing 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 nine 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. Signage in the main 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! Both the reception and the theatre have an induction loop. Lastly, paved walkways weave around the Astropark and there are plenty of places to sit down en route. Separate screenings can be organised for those on the autism spectrum, or the complex can open early to allow quiet access: email reception@armaghplanet.com in advance and they can advise you of quieter times to visit and help with any special needs.

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) are recommended, as is the *Charlemont Arms* (www.charlemontarmshotel.com) on English Street.

181 Navan Centre and Fort, County Armagh

Address: 81 Killylea Road BT60 4LD **Web:** www.navan.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 archaeologists – it has featured on the Channel 4 programme *Time Team* – 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

Ideas ►► Heritage

Fountains Abbey (North Yorkshire HG4 3DY; 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) 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) A fully accessible restaurant and shop plus the availability of a lift to make most of the house accessible, give 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.

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's accessible parking by the visitor centre, with one manual wheelchair available to borrow: 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 relaxed environment and its layout allows visitors to wander around at their own pace. Staff have basic autism awareness training and can help visitors with special needs, while the website has detailed information about what visitors will experience during their trip.

FOOD & DRINK ►► There is a coffee shop on site serving a range of meals, sandwiches and scones. For eating al fresco, there is a picnic area with tables and chairs outside the centre and also plenty of grassy areas dotted around to relax on.

182 Silent Valley Nature Trail, County Down

Address: Silent Valley Reservoir, 74 Head Road, Kilkeel BT34 4PU **Web:** www.niwater.com/silent-valley

Tel: 028 41762525 or 0345 7440088 **Hours:** daily May–Sep 10am–6.30pm; Oct–Apr 10am–4pm **Dates:** no closures **Entry:** [A]£1.60 [child]60p; annual pass £20; car £4.50, motorcycle £2, minibus £11, coach £27



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 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 also a children's play park, picnic area and other walking trails, with podcasts for walkers to download as they head 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 disabled 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.

FOOD & DRINK ▶▶ There's a beautifully sited picnic area by the river, on the trail, with wheelchair-accessible tables. A seasonal café next to the visitor centre serves cakes, sandwiches and drinks, though wheelchair users might find it a bit cramped inside.



Useful contacts

This chapter features Rough Guides' pick of the specialist organisations and independent companies that provide advice, assistance and services to help disabled people 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. Some councils offer additional benefits, such as peak-time travel. Further information is available at 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 is valid on buses at any time of day, plus a companion pass for those who need help to travel. A similar scheme is run by Transport Scotland www.transports.gov.scot and requires a National Entitlement card. In Northern Ireland, over 60s and disabled travellers are eligible for free or half-price travel: check www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/free-and-concessionary-bus-and-rail-travel for details.

Changing Places www.changing-places.org; *England, Wales and Northern Ireland: 020 76966019; changingplaces@muscular dystrophyuk.org Scotland: 01382 385154 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; 020 72508181; enquiries@disabilityrightsuk.org Campaigning network of organisations and disabled people that runs the National RADAR Key Scheme for accessible toilets. They also publish a guide to the scheme listing details of the 9000 UK toilets.

Disabled Motoring UK www.disabledmotoring.org; 01508 489449; 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 transportation issues. Check the website for updates on disability schemes and legislation. Annual membership costs £24.

Disabled Persons Railcard www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk; 0345 6050525; **textphone** 0345 6010132; disability@raildeliverygroup.com

Concessionary railcard that costs £20 annually, 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). The website also has useful a link for booking assistance with individual rail operators.

Fuel Service www.fuelservice.org This mobile app helps disabled drivers 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; 0300 4564566; **minicom** 0845 6750009 The Motability Scheme provides disabled people with a new car, 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 of the Mobility Component of PIP, the Armed Forces Independence Payment, or War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement.

National Express www.nationalexpress.com; **Disabled Persons Travel Helpline** 03717 818181; DPTH@nationalexpress.com **minicom** 0121 622 2717 National Express aims to run an accessible coach network: adapted coaches have a wide entrance, lift access, level flooring and a large toilet. Full details of their Disabled Code of Practice are at www.nationalexpress.com/help-and-advice/about-us/disabled-travellers.aspx#15.

National Federation of Shopmobility UK www.nfsuk.org; 01933 229644; shopmobility@bhta.com

Most towns and shopping centres have a Shopmobility scheme that lends manual wheelchairs, powered wheelchairs and scooters. Schemes operate differently from place to place with some charging and others free. The website has a searchable database of affiliated schemes.

Stations Made Easy www.nationalrail.co.uk Search for any station via the "stations and on train" page on the National Rail website, click on the "stations made easy" icon, and you'll see a handy station floor plan with images of facilities including platforms to help with route planning.

Transport for London (TFL) 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 and step-free tube maps and information on assisted transport services.

Travel advice and listings

Accessible Countryside www.accessible-countryside.org.uk A basic and dated website, with an extensive database of things to do (not all outdoors) and facilities to help you do it. Unexciting but very useful if you have the time to trawl through, with an impressive list of accessible sports organisations.

Accessible Derbyshire 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.

The Bimblers www.thebimblers.com A travel and lifestyle blog for wheelchair users, with candid and personal reviews of places to stay and things to do.

Contact A Family www.cafamily.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 A disability lifestyle website with
an audio version of every article. The great
travel section covers practicalities, news,
issues and reviews of places to visit – not all,
but plenty of the content is UK focused.

Disabled Go www.disabledgo.com;
01438 842710; enquiries@disabledgo.com
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
adapted toilet. An incredibly useful website –
the only downside is that they don't yet cover
the whole country.

Disabled Ramblers 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 £20.

Enable Magazine 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; **0131
5105106** Reviews of thousands of places
to visit in the UK, 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.

Good Access Guide www.goodaccess-guide.co.uk; **01502 806706** Essentially an
online directory of holiday accommodation
that advertise themselves as accessible and
disabled-friendly. Far from a comprehensive
list but a good starting point.

GOV.UK www.gov.uk Government web-
site for public services with an area for peo-
ple with disabilities. Contains background
on the Blue Badge parking scheme and
advice on other types of transport.

Guide Dogs www.guidedogs.co.uk;
0800 7811444; cypservices@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 This
website dedicated to walking, fronted by
Julia Bradbury, provides inspiration, informa-
tion 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 is also a short list of
recommended sensory walks and ideas for
accessible accommodation near walks.

Mumsnet 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 Features some advice on planning
holidays and days out when you have a
child with autism, plus lists of holiday provid-
ers and accommodation suitable for adults
with autism. The extensive Autism Services
Directory can be filtered by region.

Open Britain www.openbritain.net
Extensive accommodation, restaurant and
attraction reviews and listings, plus useful
information about the practicalities of travel.

Phototrails www.phototrails.org This web-
site provides photo tours of walking routes
in the UK. It also has plenty of 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.

RNIB www.rnib.org.uk 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, while their young people and family co-ordinators run days out, weekends away, activity breaks, clubs and groups.

Walks with Wheelchairs www.walkswithwheelchairs.com A fantastic database of accessible walks throughout the UK. You can search by county, distance, gradient, terrain and facilities, and even upload your own routes to share with others.

Accommodation booking

Accomable www.accomable.com Founded by two friends with spinal muscular atrophy who have travelled the world, this claims to be the world's leading platform for booking accessible accommodation. Many UK properties are listed, most with good detail, though this is generally provided by the owners, so is not consistent across the board.

Disabled Access Holidays www.disabledaccessholidays.com; 0800 6226000 An online travel agent, with a decent amount of accessible accommodation in the UK.

Disabled Holidays 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.

Disability Holidays Guide www.disabilityholidaysguide.com A good directory for booking accessible holiday accommodation and supported breaks, with lots of UK places.

The arts

Hynt www.hynt.co.uk; 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 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; 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; 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 vocaleyes.co.uk; 020 73751043 A directory of audio-described events at theatres and museums around the UK.

British tourism

Discover Northern Ireland 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; 0370 3331181; customers@english-heritage.org.uk Owners of more than 400 historic properties, English Heritage operates an Access for All policy. Access details for properties are available on the website under "plan your visit", and

you can filter for wheelchair accessibility.

Experience Community CIC www.experiencecommunity.co.uk Not-for-profit organisation that provides video guides, photos and information about tourism, attractions, facilities and walks in Yorkshire for disabled and older people. They also organise day trips and training sessions using specialist equipment.

National Parks www.nationalparks.gov.uk 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; 0344 8001895; enquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk Essential companions of disabled visitors get free entry to National Trust properties, with an annual Admit One card. The members’ handbook provides access advice and the website has a decent level of detail about each property, with some larger attractions providing a downloadable access statement. 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; 0131 4580200 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 Under

“plan your trip” drop-down on the main menu of the website, there’s an option for “Accessible Britain” in the “Getting around Britain” sub-section, where you’ll find an overview of useful links. One takes you to a more detailed online *Guide to Britain for Disabled Travellers*.

Visit England www.visitengland.com The English tourist board runs an Access for All scheme on their website 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; info@visitscotland.com The Scottish Tourism Board runs a quality assurance scheme for disabled access. The accommodation section of the website has an “accessible” page, where you can filter searches with an impressive list of access options.

Visit Wales www.visitwales.com; 0333 0063001; info@visitwales.com The website of the Welsh tourist board links through to a wide variety of accommodation and activities. Both the attraction and accommodation search facilities have a “provision for disabled visitors” filter option.

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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@motabilityoperations.co.uk.

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