

South of England and Midlands

Four days is just the right amount of time to discover some of the best bits of the Midlands and the South of England. This itinerary will give you a balanced dose of culture, history, outdoors activities, shopping and food. Walk in the footsteps of a Jane Austen character, hunt for bargains in a Regency seaside town and learn more about England's fascinating maritime heritage.



> HMS Victory, Portsmouth

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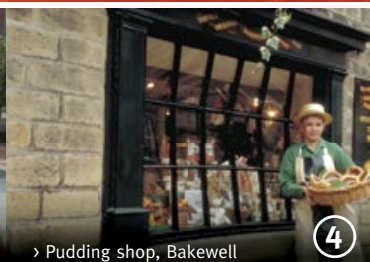
> Bicester Village, Bicester

2



> Wedgwood Visitor Centre

3



> Pudding shop, Bakewell

4

1 Brighton and Portsmouth (Day 1)

Hop on a train from London to Brighton on England's south coast. Often called 'London-by-the-sea', this Regency town is a hub for shopping. Head to The Lanes for clothes and jewellery boutiques or try North Laine for quirky cafés and vintage stores. After you've finished your morning shopping, pop by the opulent Royal Pavilion to admire the elaborate architecture and dominating chandeliers. Finish with a meal at one of the famous vegetarian restaurants or visit the pier and jump on the glittering fairground rides.

Not too far along the coast is the historic maritime city of Portsmouth. The rich nautical atmosphere is best experienced at the Historic Dockyard where you can get up close to six landmark attractions including Lord Nelson's HMS Victory, the HMS Warrior 1860 and Henry VIII's Mary Rose.

2 Bicester and Birmingham (Day 2)

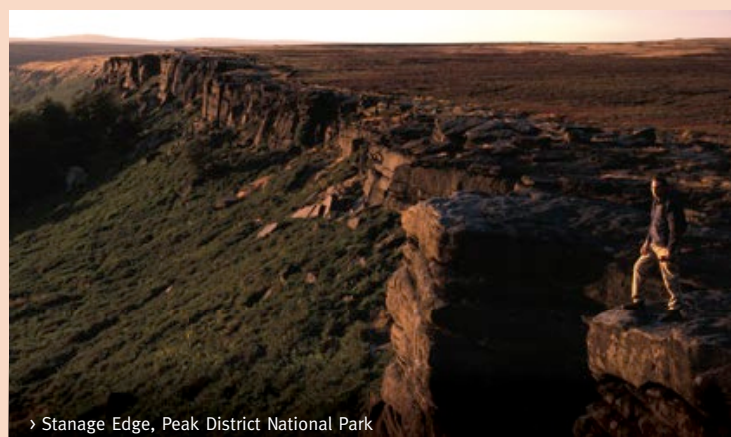
Pay a visit to Bicester – just north of Oxford – and indulge in some serious retail therapy in the Oxfordshire countryside. The Bicester Designer Outlet is packed with boutiques offering heavy discounts on designer brands normally only found in the world's most exclusive shopping streets. You can pick up everything from a Vivienne Westwood bag to a Burberry mac.

Continue your journey to England's second biggest city: Birmingham. Home to rock giants Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath, it's a thriving and artistic destination with a wealth of culture to unearth. Muse over works of art in the Birmingham Museum and Arts Gallery, or see the Birmingham Royal Ballet company perform a classic ballet at the Birmingham Hippodrome.

Finish the evening off with an authentic Balti at one of 40-plus Indian restaurants located in the city's Balti Triangle or indulge in fine cuisine at the Michelin-starred Purnell's Restaurant.



> Birmingham city skyline, Birmingham



> Stanage Edge, Peak District National Park

3 Stoke-on-Trent (Day 3)

Head further north to Stoke-on-Trent and visit the city's award-winning £10m Wedgwood Visitor Centre. A museum and factory combined, it offers craft demonstrations, factory tours and boasts a prestigious collection of priceless ceramics dating back to 1730.

For lunch, take a short trip out of Stoke-on-Trent to The Trentham Estate and wander through historic Italianate gardens that rival those of Versailles. For unbeatable views of the estate and beyond book a hot-air balloon flight in advance and float across the rich green Staffordshire, Cheshire and Shropshire countryside.

Trentham Estate is also home to 140 Barbary macaques roaming free in the 60 acre Monkey Forest. After you've got a few snaps of the pretty primates, move on to heart of the Peak District National Park, staying overnight in the historic market town of Bakewell.

4 Peak District (Day 4)

Get out and about in the Peak District National Park. Take a walk following one of the many trails, including Tissington and Manifold, or join a guided walk to find out more about this national park's history and literary connections. We recommend the Pride and Prejudice Tour where you can pretend to be Elizabeth Bennet (as played by Keira Knightly) atop Stanage Edge, the largest of the gritstone cliffs overlooking the park.

With its vertical cliffs and vast open moorlands this area was made for adventure sports. Test your climbing skills on Stanage Edge, explore the highest natural cavern in the UK or for a gentler outdoor pursuit try cycling the High Peak Trail. For a break during the day, find a cosy pub and tuck into lunch bursting with local Derbyshire produce. And speaking of local food, don't leave without trying the famous Bakewell Pudding, made from a top-secret recipe at the age-old Original Bakewell Pudding Shop.

South of England and Midlands



> Buckler's Hard, New Forest

1



> Fountain, Buckinghamshire

2



> The Ironbridge Gorge, Shropshire

3



> Robin Hood, Nottinghamshire

4



Other things to see and do

1 The New Forest

Little has changed in this wonderful landscape since William the Conqueror made these woodlands a hunting forest over 900 years ago. Nowadays The New Forest's expanse of pony-filled heathland and charming villages is the perfect place to explore by foot, bike or horseback.

www.thenewforest.co.uk

2 Cliveden - Buckinghamshire

This glamorous National Trust country estate is perched on the River Thames and surrounded by grand gardens. Not far from Heathrow Airport, it was once the home of English high society and some very notable scandals! Visit the estate's hotel for a memorable afternoon tea toasted with a glass of champagne.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cliveden

3 Ironbridge - West Midlands

Visit the 18th-century birthplace of industry, which is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It's home to the world's first iron bridge, which straddles the River Severn at Coalbrookdale, and a collection of 10 museums spread along the River Severn valley. Learn about the importance of this iconic site and the role that it played in the Industrial Revolution. Step back in time and see how Victorians lived and marvel at the collections of world-famous Coalport and Caughley china.

www.ironbridge.org.uk

4 Robin Hood Country - Nottinghamshire

A visit to Robin Hood's old haunt is a chance to step back to a time of great turbulence and great deeds. Visit Nottingham Castle, the ancient Sherwood Forest – where England's infamous outlaw and his band of merry men hid away – and Medieval inns like Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem where stories of Robin Hood's deeds became legend.

www.experiencenottinghamshire.com

food & drink

Terre a Terre

71 East Street, Brighton, BN1 1H
www.terreaterre.co.uk

Brasserie Blanc

1 Gunwharf Quays,
Portsmouth, PO1 3TZ
www.brasserieblanc.com

The Nut Tree Inn

Main Street, Murcott, OX5 2RE
(near Bicester)
www.nuttreetinn.co.uk

Al Frash

186 Ladypool Road, Sparkhill,
Birmingham, B12 8JS
www.alfrash.com

The Six Arches

The Trentham Estate,
Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 8AX
www.trentham.co.uk

The Old Original Bakewell Pudding Shop

The Square, Bakewell, DE45 1BT
www.bakewellpuddingshop.co.uk

where to stay

Hotel du Vin & Bistro

Ship Street, Brighton, BN1 1AD
www.hotelduvin.com

Holiday Inn Express Portsmouth

Gunwharf Quays,
Portsmouth, PO1 3FD
www.holidayinn-expressportsmouth.co.uk

Cotswold Lodge Hotel

66A Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 6JP
www.cotswoldlodgehotel.co.uk

Radisson Blu Hotel Birmingham

12 Holloway Circus, Queensway,
Birmingham, B1 1BT
www.radissonblu.co.uk

Premier Inn – The Trentham Estate

The Trentham Estate,
Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 8AX
www.trentham.co.uk

The Rutland Arms Hotel

The Square, Bakewell, DE45 1BT
www.rutlandarmsbakewell.co.uk



> Robin Hood's Stride near Ashbourne, Derbyshire