



Things to do
before you
go abroad



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Authors: Katie Rowe, Chris Moore and Alexandra Szydlowska

Editor: Emma Field

Picture editors: Chris Moore and Katie Rowe

Design & layout: Ann Cannings

Cartography: Katie Bennett

Production: Charlotte Cade

Project management: Ian Blenkinsop (Rough Guides)

Rebecca Holloway (Visit England)

Published 2013 by Rough Guides Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R ORL

All text © VisitEngland, 2013

Image © see p. 128

Printed in the UK by Ashford Colour Press

ISBN 978 1 40933 7614

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CONTENTS



FOOD & DRINK

14



HISTORY & HERITAGE

36



ARTS & CULTURE

58



WILDLIFE & NATURE

80



HEALTH & FITNESS

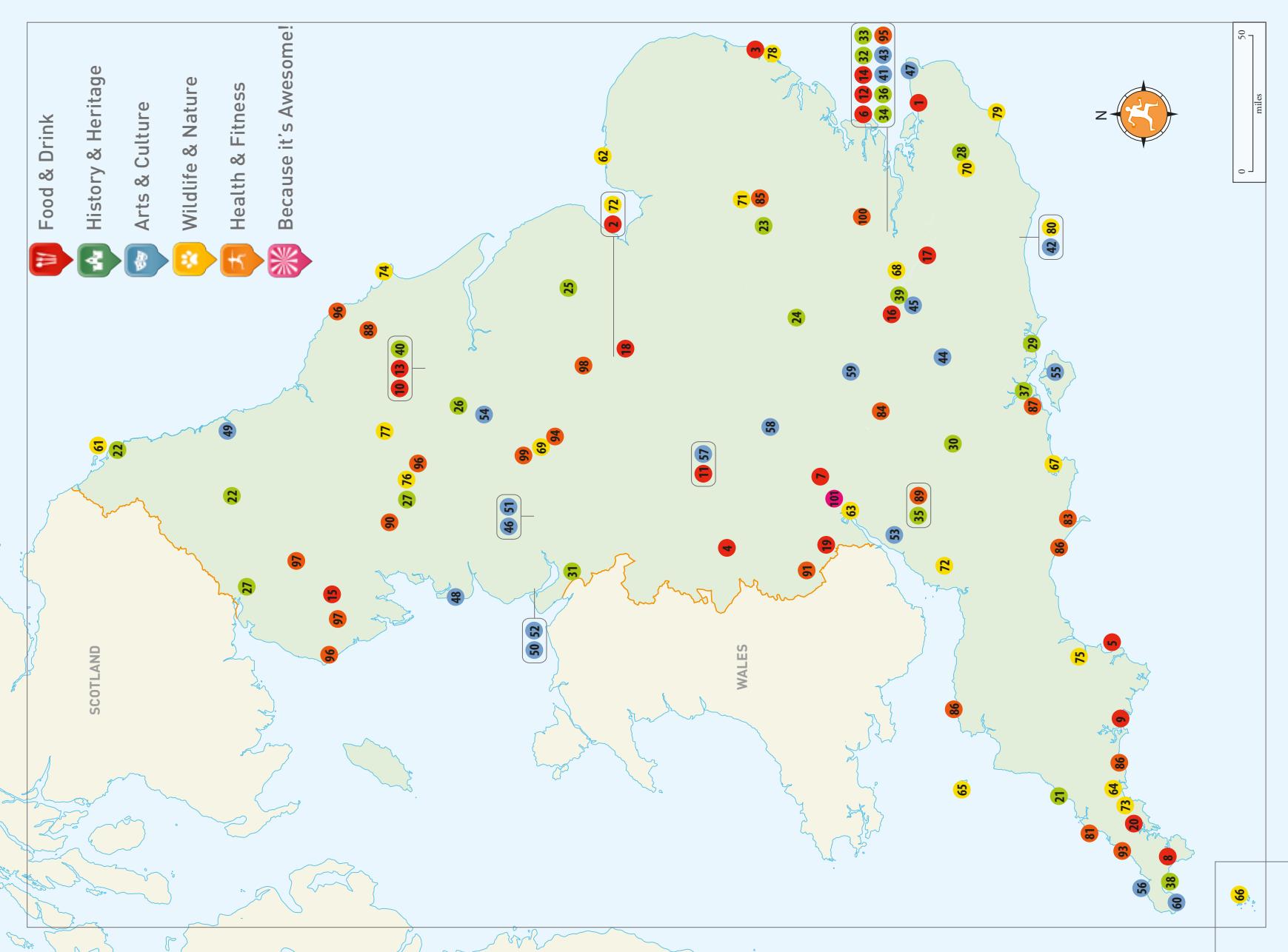
102



BECAUSE IT'S AWESOME!

124





MAP LISTINGS



FOOD & DRINK

- 1 Oysters in Whitstable
- 2 Have a pint in England's oldest pub
- 3 Fish 'n' chips in Aldeburgh
- 4 Ludlow Food Festival
- 5 Tour Brixham Fish Market
- 6 Mix martinis in Bond's spiritual home
- 7 Indulge with The Pudding Club
- 8 Eat a proper Cornish pasty
- 9 Tour a Gin Distillery
- 10 Afternoon Tea At Bettys
- 11 Go for a curry in Birmingham
- 12 Start the day with a full English
- 13 Eat chocolate in York
- 14 Brixton Village and Market Row
- 15 Taste Grasmere gingerbread
- 16 Dine in Bray
- 17 Tour an English vineyard
- 18 Taste Colston Bassett stilton
- 19 Drink real cider in an orchard
- 20 Have a truly English cuppa



HISTORY & HERITAGE

- 21 Tintagel Castle
- 22 Ancient history in Northumberland
- 23 Punt along the Backs
- 24 Visit the code-breakers
- 25 Lincoln Cathedral

- 26 Royal Armouries
- 27 Ride the Settle-Carlisle steam train
- 28 Sissinghurst Castle gardens
- 29 Maritime history in Buckler's Hard
- 30 Visit Stonehenge
- 31 Chester Rows
- 32 Sleep at Hampton Court Palace
- 33 See the Changing the Guard ceremony
- 34 Royal Observatory at Greenwich
- 35 Follow in Roman footsteps
- 36 Tower of London
- 37 Portsmouth Historic Dockyards
- 38 St Michael's Mount
- 39 Windsor Castle
- 40 York Minster



ARTS & CULTURE

- 41 Experience London's South Bank
- 42 A weekend in Brighton
- 43 Visit free museums and galleries
- 44 Follow in Jane Austen's footsteps
- 45 Dress up for Royal Ascot
- 46 Devote a weekend to football
- 47 Art in Margate
- 48 See the Blackpool Illuminations
- 49 Have a night on the toon
- 50 Escape to Another Place
- 51 John Rylands Library
- 52 Take a Magical Mystery Tour

- 53 See Banksy's graffiti
- 54 Yorkshire Sculpture Park
- 55 Dress up for Bestival
- 56 Tate St Ives
- 57 Shop 'til you drop at Birmingham's Bullring
- 58 Discover Shakespeare's Stratford
- 59 Ashmolean Museum
- 60 Watch an open-air play



WILDLIFE & NATURE

- 61 Farne Islands
- 62 Holkham Beach
- 63 Catch the Severn Bore
- 64 Eden Project
- 65 Twitch on Lundy Island
- 66 See exotic plants and animals
- 67 Glimpse rare red squirrels
- 68 Spot deer in the city
- 69 Roam the Peak District
- 70 Search for monkey orchids
- 71 Spot damsels and dragons
- 72 Join a bat patrol at Cheddar Gorge
- 73 The Lost Gardens of Heligan
- 74 Bempton Cliff's bird colonies
- 75 Dartmoor's ponies
- 76 Malham Cove
- 77 Snowdrops at Fountains Abbey
- 78 Havergate Island

- 79 Dungeness

- 80 Watch starlings circle West Pier



HEALTH & FITNESS

- 81 Coasteering in Cornwall
- 82 Scale England's highest peak
- 83 Sail like an Olympian
- 84 Walk to the White Horse at Uffington
- 85 Go ice skating on the Fens
- 86 Walk the South West Coast Path
- 87 Pony trekking in The New Forest
- 88 Mountain biking in Dalby Forest
- 89 Soak in Bath's thermal waters
- 90 Caving in the Yorkshire Dales
- 91 Canoe along the Wye Valley
- 92 Wild swimming in Grassington
- 93 Surfing in Newquay
- 94 Rock climb in the Peak District
- 95 Up at the O2
- 96 Trek from coast to coast
- 97 Learn the art of mountain biking
- 98 Go Ape in Sherwood Pines
- 99 Walk the Pennine Way
- 100 Raft down an Olympic course



BECAUSE IT'S AWESOME!

- 101 Cheese rolling at Cooper's Hill

FOREWORD

In my role, I am regularly asked what makes England such an exciting and beautiful place to visit. There is no easy answer to this question. There are so many wonderful experiences that define this country that I find it almost impossible to choose my favourites. Choosing the top 101 therefore proved to be extremely challenging.

I was thrilled to work with the panel of experts brought in to help narrow down the thousands of suggestions that were put forward by a clearly

enthusiastic public. Between us, we were able to choose this ultimate list of English "must-dos" which we hope will inspire you to explore this wonderful country and discover some hidden gems on your doorstep.

The selection process wasn't easy. We wanted the final 101 to be a mix of the most incredible, unique and quintessentially English experiences. We have such an embarrassment of riches in this country, that we couldn't include every single landmark, and we

made no attempt to arrange the 101 experiences into any order – that would have been almost impossible.

After days of passionate debating, here it is. I'm thrilled that some of my own personal favourites have made the final list but am equally delighted to see some experiences that are new even to me.

I hope you enjoy experiencing 101 Things to do as much as we have enjoyed compiling it.



Lady Cobham

Penelope, Viscountess Cobham
Chairman, VisitEngland

INTRODUCTION

Given the modesty of its scale, England deservedly sits amongst the tourism big-hitters. Packed into its borders are peerless historical and heritage sites; vibrant, blink-and-it's-changed cities; truly unique and seductive landscapes and a food and drink culture that has quietly snuck up on the global competition to gain international renown.

But all too often England is stereotyped and pigeon-holed as the land of Big Ben, Buckingham Palace and Stonehenge. Whilst those iconic sights really should be experienced at least once in a lifetime, this book is also interested in uncovering all the places in between, the places that the locals love and enjoy time and again – the places that make England special to the English.

It's been a huge privilege for Rough Guides to have collaborated with VisitEngland on this book and great fun to have witnessed first hand how passionate and generous people have been in nominating their favourite places. I hope you enjoy discovering England's unmissable 101 best as much as I have.



Clare Cusnie

Managing Director, Rough Guides



THE PANEL



Food & Drink

Meet our expert: Skye Gyngell

A critically acclaimed chef, Skye has worked in some of the best restaurants in the world. She moved to London from her native Australia, joined The Dorchester, and has since fallen head-over-heels with England's ever-evolving food scene. For her, nothing beats perfectly ripe English strawberries with lashings of Cornish clotted cream on a summer's day.



History & Heritage

Meet our expert: Yeoman Warder Barney Chandler



Beefeater Barney lives and breathes history and heritage. For a start, he calls the Tower of London home. He also works there as a Yeoman Warder, looking after the Tower's famous ravens. When he's not looking after mischievous birds, Barney shows visitors around the royal palace, filling them in on its rich and somewhat gruesome history.



Arts & Culture

Meet our expert: Clemency Burton-Hill

Clemency is crazy about culture. She's a regular on BBC2's Culture Show, has her own show on BBC Radio Three and has previously presented The Proms. Clemency can often be spotted mooching around the John Rylands Library in Manchester admiring the first edition of Shakespeare's sonnets or meandering along London's Southbank, popping into the various cultural attractions along the way.



Wildlife & Nature

Meet our expert: Bill Oddie

Wildlife spotting is a lifelong passion for Bill as well as his day job. He knows the call of a blackcap from the chirp of a chiffchaff and is an expert on the best spots in England to get up close and personal with everything from otters to rare butterflies, although twitching is still his number one reason to go on holiday.



Health & Fitness

Meet our expert: Sonali Shah

Sonali is a health and fitness guru. She was part of the presentation team for the London 2012 Olympics and a judge for Young Sports Personality of the Year. When she's not busy presenting sports programmes, Sonali loves nothing more than tramping through the English countryside on a long-distance walk through the charming Cotswolds countryside followed by a well-deserved pub lunch.



Because it's awesome!

Meet our experts: Wallace and Gromit

When Wallace isn't inventing labour-saving gadgets, he's roaring along the lanes of Lancashire on his motorbike. In the sidecar is his faithful four-legged friend Gromit, who would most likely rather be knitting, or reading the paper in a nice comfy chair. Together, the pair have been to the moon in search of cheese, battled a giant were-rabbit and won three Oscars. That's pretty awesome.





FOOD & DRINK

Oysters in Whitstable	1
Have a pint in England's oldest pub	2
Fish 'n' chips in Aldeburgh	3
Ludlow Food Festival	4
Tour Brixham Fish Market	5
Mix martinis in Bond's spiritual home	6
Indulge with	
The Pudding Club	7
Eat a proper Cornish pasty	8
Tour a Gin Distillery	9
Afternoon Tea At Bettys	10
Go for a curry in Birmingham	11
Start the day with a full English	12
Eat chocolate in York	13
Brixton Village and Market Row	14
Taste Grasmere gingerbread	15
Dine in Bray	16
Tour an English vineyard	17
Taste Colston Bassett stilton	18
Drink real cider in an orchard	19
Have a truly English cuppa	20

"London's restaurant scene is one of the most exciting in the world but there is a foodie revolution taking place in restaurants, markets and local high streets all over England too. From Whitstable's exquisite oysters, to melt-in-the-mouth farmhouse cheeses available from Ludlow delicatessens, English produce is phenomenal and it's getting even better with more artisan producers appearing all the time."



Skye Gyngell





1

OYSTERS IN WHITSTABLE KENT

Venues throughout Whitstable's town centre, harbour and beaches

www.whitstableoysterfestival.co.uk



Judge's pick

Eating oysters in Whitstable has to be a favourite of mine. I love oysters, they really are one of my favourite treats, and growing up I remember reading books that Whitstable featured in. So I think the combination of the two – a food I really love to eat and a town I read about thousands of miles away – makes this a special choice for me.

SKYE GYNGELL

The chic and compact town of Whitstable is one of England's coolest seaside hangouts and its oysters are to die for. Come July, dozens of stalls open for business and the pebbled beach heaves with foodie fans indulging in freshly-caught European oysters during the week-long Whitstable Oyster Festival.

2

HAVE A PINT IN ENGLAND'S OLDEST PUB

NOTTINGHAM

Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem, Nottingham NG1 6AD

www.tripjerusalem.com



Backing into the network of caves built beneath Nottingham Castle, Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem takes the prize for England's most eccentric pub. 'The Trip' (as it is affectionately known) is regarded by many to be England's oldest watering hole, established in 1189 AD and frequented by Richard the Lionheart's crusading knights. Weaving further intrigue into The Trip's past are tales of ghost sightings and

poltergeist-driven antics, which the proprietors tell with aplomb.

Once you've quaffed a pint of the house dark ale, you might be brave enough to take a tour of the pub's rear drinking rooms and cellars, which are stuffed with unusual relics. Watch out for the cobweb-ridden 'Cursed Galleon', said to bring a gruesome death on all who dare dust it!



FISH 'N' CHIPS IN ALDEBURGH

SUFFOLK

Aldeburgh Fish and Chip Shop, 226 High Street, Aldeburgh IP15 5DB
www.aldeburghfishandchips.co.uk



Crisp golden batter, flaky white fish and fresh chunky chips doused in salt and vinegar. Fish 'n' chips is England's signature dish, and where better to eat it than in one of the finest seaside resorts around. With pastel-painted homes looking out to sea and a pebble beach topped with fisherman's huts selling the daily catch, Aldeburgh encapsulates the quintessential English seaside scene.

You'll find a superb fish supper or takeaway at the family-run Aldeburgh Fish and Chip Shop, whose famous fish and chips, deliciously fried in beef dripping, have been lauded as some of the best in Britain again and again by reviewers and foodies from far and wide. The queue, which often stretches right around the block, speaks for itself.



LUDLOW FOOD FESTIVAL

SHROPSHIRE

Venues throughout Ludlow and Ludlow Castle, Castle Square SY8 1AY
www.foodfestival.co.uk



Ludlow takes food very seriously. Every September, this small Shropshire town puts on a gastronomic spectacular, with more than 160 independent producers gathering in the grounds of the medieval castle to tempt you with everything from rare breed Longhorn beef to alcoholic cupcakes. Watch chefs cooking up a storm, and get stuck into the famous Sausage Competition – a festival highlight

that lets you chomp through various competing bangers, lovingly made by independent butchers all eager to be crowned Sausage of the Year.

Ludlow is year-round foodie destination too. There are three Michelin-starred restaurants, specialist delis and a farmers market where all the produce is grown, bred, caught, pickled, brewed and baked within a 30-mile radius by the stallholders.



TOUR BRIXHAM FISH MARKET DEVON

New Fish Quay TQ5 8AW
www.englishriviera.co.uk



An early morning visit to Brixham's fish market is the most authentic way to experience coastal life in the southwest. Local fishermen haul in fish worth more than £25 million a year, the highest value catch in the country. Huge seabass, stacks of scallops and trays of plaice go under the hammer every morning and are delivered to top restaurants across Europe.

Tours of the market are led by Rick Smith, a man with decades of experience in the fish trade. Though the tours start early, the hustle and bustle of buyers haggling with fisherman while the rest of Brixham still sleeps, followed by breakfast at the Fishermen's Mission as the sun rises over the harbour is more than worth dragging yourself out of bed for.



MIX MARTINIS IN BOND'S SPIRITUAL HOME LONDON

DUKES, St. James's Place, London SW1A 1NY
www.dukeshotel.com

Tucked away behind the grand Georgian facades of Mayfair, is the small but perfectly formed DUKES hotel. It's a truly English affair with the equally small but charming DUKES Bar, world renowned for its cocktails. This is where Ian Fleming used to drink martinis, which makes it the best place to learn how to mix James Bond's drink of choice would be proud to drink.

Barman Alessandro Palazzi is a cocktail connoisseur: he'll teach you how to make the perfect martini, along with other classic tipplers, while filling you in on the story behind each beverage. After you've picked up a few tricks of the trade from Alessandro, you'll be able to mix your own martini – shaken not stirred of course.

INDULGE WITH THE PUDDING CLUB

COTSWOLDS

Three Ways House Hotel, Mickleton, Chipping Campden, Gloucs GL55 6SB
www.threewayshousehotel.com



Join a foodie revolution where pudding is king. The Pudding Club at the Three Ways House Hotel is devoted to keeping good old English puddings on the menu with regular events dedicated to post-dinner indulgence. Do your part to keep the sweetest of English traditions alive by sliding your spoon into custard-drenched spotted dick and sticky toffee pudding.

You may well need a lie down afterwards so you'll be glad to know the hotel has a quirky collection of themed rooms to check into. The Syrup Sponge Room comes with its very own Lyle's lion and the Chocolate Suite's bed is topped with chocolate-shaped cushions. You'll even find organic chocolate shampoo and bath foam in the bathroom.

EAT A PROPER CORNISH PASTY

CORNWALL

Redruth Visitor Centre, Alma Place, Redruth TR15 2AT
www.visitredruth.co.uk



There may be a plethora of pasty shops in the country but there's only one place in the world where you can get the authentic pasty experience and that's Cornwall. There's nothing quite like sinking your teeth into a locally-made Cornish pasty bursting with a humble yet tasty filling of meat, potato, swede plus a few other secret ingredients.

The Cornish pasty was invented in Redruth – the former heart of the tin mining industry – as an all-in-one meal for the miners. The town is now part of the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape Unesco World Heritage site, which you can explore on a bike trail. Even better, time your trip to coincide with the Mining and Pasty Festival in September.

TOUR A GIN DISTILLERY

DEVON

60 Southside Street, The Barbican, Plymouth PL1 2LQ
www.plymouthdistillery.com



Drink up the authentic English gin experience by taking a 40-minute tour of the Black Friars Distillery, the oldest working gin distillery in England. You'll be guided around the working home of Plymouth Gin since 1793, find out about the history of the distillery, which used to be a monastery, and get an introduction to how Plymouth Gin is made.

If you're as much of a fan of gin as Churchill was of Plymouth Gin martinis, opt for the Master Distiller's Private Tour where you'll have the chance to create and distil your very own gin recipe. And if that still hasn't quenched your thirst for the crisp juniper berry-infused beverage, there are plenty of gin cocktails to choose from at The Refectory bar.



AFTERNOON TEA AT BETTYS

YORKSHIRE

1 Parliament Street, Harrogate HG1 2QU
www.bettys.co.uk



No Yorkshire holiday is complete without an indulgent hour or two at Bettys – a local institution with a tea list as long as your arm and a tempting selection of local and continental desserts. Swiss confectioner Frederick Belmont created a delicious union between Yorkshire and Switzerland over 90 years ago, combining his homeland's famous chocolate roll with a good old Yorkshire brew.

Yorkshire now has six Bettys. To see where it all began in 1919 stop by the Harrogate branch and treat yourself to cream cakes, fresh scones and raspberry-studded macaroons washed down with a steaming brew. The light and airy surrounds still offer plenty of early 20th-century charm, with quaint views of the Montpellier Gardens through gleaming Edwardian windows.

11

GO FOR A CURRY IN BIRMINGHAM

WEST MIDLANDS

Within the Sparkhill, Balsall Heath and Moseley areas of Birmingham
www.balti-birmingham.co.uk



Curry has become one of England's national treasures, with at least 18 tonnes of chicken tikka masala wolfed down in Britain each week. But there's certainly more to the nation's curry obsession than just one dish, and one of the best places to explore the dazzling array of spicy fare on offer is in Birmingham, Britain's curry capital. In the city's Balti Triangle, over 50

Asian restaurants entice hundreds of hungry customers at a time with the robust aromas of cardamom, cumin and turmeric.

Keep your Brum foodie experience as authentic as possible and opt for a sizzling balti – a dish that many believe has its origins in Birmingham. Team it with an enormous naan bread at popular balti restaurant Al Frash.

12

START THE DAY WITH A FULL ENGLISH

LONDON

E Pellicci, 332 Bethnal Green Road E2 0AG



Kick off the day with a full English breakfast in London's East End. Eggs, bacon, sausage, beans, grilled tomatoes, mushrooms and maybe even black pudding or hash browns if you're feeling naughty, all piled on one plate. Not forgetting buttered toast and a pot of tea on the side.

You'll often see a queue of people outside E Pellicci in Bethnal

Green, all eager to tuck into their famous fry-up amid the Grade-II listed café's art deco wood panelling, stained glass and old family photos. This small and relaxed restaurant has been run by the same Italian family since it opened in 1900 and it's the atmosphere and friendly staff as much as the fry-ups that make this place an institution.

EAT CHOCOLATE IN YORK

YORKSHIRE

Venues throughout York
www.visityork.org



The city that was once host to a Roman emperor, Viking warriors and Saxons also proudly revels in its long history with the cocoa bean, which dates back to the early 18th century. In the birthplace of both Rowntree's and Terry's of York, the best place to begin your chocolate-fuelled journey is at York's newest chocolate-themed attraction, CHOCOLATE – York's Sweet Story, filled chock-a-block

with cocoa history, local chocolate-making secrets and delicious sweet treats to try along the way.

Afterwards, move on to York Cocoa House to indulge in a chocolate-themed afternoon tea. If you can fit anymore in, Monk Bar Chocolatiers on The Shambles is York's oldest artisan chocolatiers, selling chocolates moulded into everything from stilettos to swans.

BRIXTON VILLAGE AND MARKET ROW

LONDON

Coldharbour Lane, London SW9 8PR
www.brixtonmarket.net



Brixton has always danced to the beat of its own drum and the independent restaurants, bars and cafes that huddle together in Brixton Market's vaulted arcades are a perfect example of this. There's a charisma to the bustle of diners and aromas that emanate from this hidden food court that you just can't recreate anywhere else and that's what makes it such an exciting place to eat.

Here you'll find more than twenty eateries serving cuisine from every corner of the world. Franco Manca's organic pizzas are a firm favourite with locals and nine times out of ten you'll have to queue, but the warm thick sourdough crusts, which are as good as anywhere else in the world, are more than worth the wait.

15

TASTE GRASMERE GINGERBREAD

LAKE DISTRICT

Grasmere Gingerbread Shop, Church Cottage, Grasmere, Ambleside LA22 9SW
www.grasmeregingerbread.co.uk



No trip to the Lake District would be complete without a stop off at the Grasmere Gingerbread Shop to stock up on one of the Lake District's most famous exports. Loved by celebs and locals alike, the 19th-century recipe for these crumbly gingery slabs of goodness is top secret.

A-list actors such as Renee Zellweger (who visited while filming

Miss Potter) and Tom Cruise are both fans of the gingerbread, which was first created by Cumbria local Sarah Nelson in the 1850s. Visitors have been flocking to the tiny shop ever since to get their hands on the gingerbread along with Rum Butter, another Cumbrian delicacy brought into Cumbria's ports by merchant ships from the West Indies in the late 18th century.

16

DINE IN BRAY

BERKSHIRE

Bray SL6
www.visitsoutheastengland.com



It's fair to say Bray is big on gourmet food. This quiet village with rows of characterful cottages and narrow streets on the banks of the River Thames is an unexpected foodie haven. It's home to two of Britain's four restaurants with three Michelin stars: The Waterside Inn, owned by the legendary Roux family, and Heston Blumenthal's The Fat Duck, a ground-breaking

restaurant that plays mind games with its diners.

Also in Bray, Blumenthal's The Hind's Head has a Michelin star, as does The Royal Oak, just outside Bray, which brings the village's Michelin star tally to a mouth-watering eight. It's also a hotspot for gastro pubs and riverside dining with blissful views from the parish's three miles of riverside frontage.

17

TOUR AN ENGLISH VINEYARD

SURREY

Denbies Wine Estate, Dorking RH5 6AA
www.denbies.co.uk



In the heart of the Surrey Hills, overlooking Box Hill, Denbies is England's largest single estate vineyard. Its position on a south-facing slope in a sheltered valley with the fertile chalk soil of the North Downs ensure excellent vine-growing conditions, producing what many consider to be the country's finest sparkling and table wines.

Jump aboard a train for a tour

of the estate and do a guided wine tasting. You can buy many of the award-winning wines in the well-stocked gift shop, including the 2010 Denbies Chalk Ridge Rosé, winner of the International Wine Challenge Gold Award, which makes it the best rosé in the world, but we think they're best enjoyed in the Gallery Restaurant, with views across the rolling 265-acre estate.

18

TASTE COLSTON BASSET STILTON

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Colston Bassett Dairy, Harby Lane, Colston Bassett NG12 3FN
www.colstonbassettcheese.co.uk



Colston Bassett's stilton is legendary. This tiny village in the Vale of Belvoir has a proud history of cheese production, especially that of stilton, whose certification trademark limits its production to Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire.

The time-honoured tradition (and method) is preserved at Colston Bassett Dairy, a co-operative formed in 1913 from local pastures and

farms. Full fat milk is collected fresh from their cows each day before a careful process is undergone to form the smooth and creamy cheese with its distinctive blue veins of mould. Adjacent to the dairy is their shop, selling the famous stilton along with smaller amounts of white stilton and Shropshire blue. This cheese's melt-in-your-mouth perfection is worth travelling for.

DRINK REAL CIDER IN AN ORCHARD

HEREFORDSHIRE

Broome Farm, Peterstow, Ross-on-Wye HR9 6QG
www.broomefarmhouse.co.uk



Tucked away in a quiet corner of the Wye Valley, the 300-year-old working cider farm produces some of the sweetest tipplers around. In the skilled hands of the Johnson family for over 70 years, the 45 acre orchard produces sweet, medium and sparkling apple and perry cider from some 40 varieties of cider apples and 30 pears. Made using whole juice straight

from the press and a natural process of fermentation, this is definitely no tractor fuel, nor is it your artificially carbonated pub pint.

Taste the difference for yourself on a tour of the farm, including a walk in the orchard, particularly worth witnessing in full bloom, before drawing a cool and crisp draught straight from the barrel in the cider cellar.

HAVE A TRULY ENGLISH CUPPA CORNWALL

Tregothnan Tea Estate, Truro TR2 4AN
www.tregothnan.co.uk



Holidaymakers in India and Sri Lanka visit tea plantations in their hoards, but a good hot cuppa is an English institution and they do it to perfection at Tregothnan. Home to the Boscowen family since 1335, this historic estate has been supplying England's first and only tea since 2005, though it is thought to have been growing the Camellia sinensis bush ornamenteally for 200 years. Its

placid climate, thanks to the cooling breath of the Atlantic Ocean, creates optimum conditions for the plant to thrive, producing some of the world's most delicious teas.

Try it for yourself at Tregothnan's Tea Bar, selling everything from their bold and full-bodied Classic Tea to the refreshing Afternoon Tea and healthsome Manuka honey and herbal infusions range.



HISTORY & HERITAGE



Tintagel Castle	21
Ancient history in Northumberland	22
Punt along the Backs	23
Visit the code-breakers	24
Lincoln Cathedral	25
Royal Armouries	26
Ride the Settle-Carlisle steam train	27
Sissinghurst Castle gardens	28
Maritime history in Buckler's Hard	29
Visit Stonehenge	30
Chester Rows	31
Sleep at Hampton Court Palace	32
See the Changing the Guard ceremony	33
Royal Observatory at Greenwich	34
Follow in Roman footsteps	35
Tower of London	36
Portsmouth Historic Dockyards	37
St Michael's Mount	38
Windsor Castle	39
York Minster	40

"Everywhere you look there is evidence of England's illustrious past. Romans conquered and built baths and amphitheatres, Vikings invaded and left us all sorts of priceless treasures, and zealous kings and queens have left their mark with hoards of palaces and castles. There really is no better place to experience history and heritage than England. It's just one massive floating artefact!"



Yeoman Warder Barney Chandler

TINTAGEL CASTLE

CORNWALL

Bossiney Road, Tintagel PL34 0HE
www.english-heritage.org.uk



Judge's pick

I've chosen Tintagel Castle in Cornwall because these incredible ruins, perched on a cliff-top, are steeped in legend and mystery – they're said to be the home of King Arthur. I remember visiting this beautiful village as a child and still recall the spectacular setting of the castle to this very day.

YEOMAN WARDER BARNEY CHANDLER

Oozing an inimitable mythical charm, these ancient ruins are magnificently poised in a breathtaking position looking out to sea. Complete the trip with a visit to Merlin's Cave nearby. Beautiful at any time of year, a summer sunset from these crumbling walls is something extra-special to behold.

ANCIENT HISTORY IN NORTHUMBERLAND

NORTHUMBERLAND

Numerous sites of interest throughout Northumberland
www.visitnorthumberland.com



The northeast of England is teeming with history. Its dramatic golden-sand coastline is dotted with ancient castles, such as the mighty Bamburgh Castle, staring out to the North Sea from its defiant perch on a rocky outcrop. Further inland you'll find the magnificent Alnwick Castle, now immortalised as Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films.

Snaking across this landscape

and beyond is an incredible piece of Roman history: the Unesco World Heritage site of Hadrian's Wall. Designed to partition Roman-occupied England from Scotland, the wall's route stretches for 73 miles, with many areas still largely intact. The county is also strewn with pieces of mysterious rock art that are estimated to date back as far as 6,000 years.



23

PUNT ALONG THE BACKS CAMBRIDGE

Numerous punt hire companies in Cambridge
www.visitcambridge.org



The golden buildings of Cambridge's world-famous historic colleges are beguiling enough from the city's winding cobbled streets, but hop on board a punt to view The Backs in time-honoured tradition from the River Cam. You'll drift past King's College Chapel, the Wren Library at Trinity College, the wooden Mathematical Bridge and the Bridge of Sighs at St

John's. Just remember to duck for the bridges!

If you're worried about falling in – it does happen – hire a guide to do the punting while you watch the world go by. Pack a picnic to have in the punt or spread out for a snooze beneath the trees that line the river bank, with your straw boater hat dipped lazily over your eyes.

24

VISIT THE CODE-BREAKERS BLETCHLEY PARK

The Mansion, Bletchley Park, Milton Keynes MK3 6EB
www.bletchleypark.org.uk



Of all of the dramatic and decisive theatres of conflict during the Second World War, there are few more inconspicuous than the grounds of an old rural mansion on the outskirts of Milton Keynes. But it was here that Britain's brainiest did battle with the ingenious cryptographic exertions of the Third Reich. And it was here they triumphed, saving countless lives and speeding the fall of Hitler.

The undisputed highlights of Bletchley are the supposedly unbreakable Enigma machines but it's the stories of espionage, deception, ingenious endeavour and bravery that really bring this place to life. Make time to wander the grounds where mathematical genius Alan Turing used to walk his cat and see the wartime mini cinema too.

LINCOLN CATHEDRAL

LINCOLN

Minster Yard LN2 1PX
www.lincolncathedral.com



Not only is Lincoln Cathedral widely regarded as one of the finest examples of Gothic architecture in Europe, but for nearly 300 years, it was the tallest building in the world, reaching higher than the Great Pyramid of Giza. It's still as impressive today – the medieval spire is 160 metres tall – but the devil, as they say, is in the detail. It's the intricate touches that make this

such a remarkable and spellbinding place. Watch out for the Lincoln Imp, a tiny mischievous-looking figure perched atop a pillar, and the tiny cat and mouse carved into the masonry. The Medieval Library, built in 1422 and filled with books even older than the cathedral, is worth making time for too.

ROYAL ARMOURIES

LEEDS

Armouries Drive LS10 1LT
www.royalarmouries.org



England has got itself into a fair few scraps over the years and you can learn about its long military history at the Royal Armouries, part of Britain's oldest museum. Housing over 8,500 objects in six amazing galleries, this purpose-built museum houses a cornucopia of war, tournament, self-defence and hunting accoutrements from across the world. At the centre of it all

is the remarkable Hall of Steel, a glass and steel stairwell decorated with 2,500 pieces of 17th-century armour and 19th-century military equipment.

Another highlight is the Tournament gallery, part of which focuses on Henry VIII who, when in his prime, was one of the best jousters in Europe. If you can, time your visit to see a live jousting tournament.

27

RIDE THE SETTLE-CARLISLE STEAM TRAIN

NORTHERN ENGLAND

The Settle-Carlisle Partnership
www.settle-carlisle.co.uk



Hark back to a time when the world was powered by coal with a ride on the Settle-Carlisle Railway. Begun in 1869 and constructed almost entirely by hand over seven years, this 72-mile line was designed for speed to compete for the lucrative Anglo-Scottish passenger market. The result is an incredible elevated route that slices across the scenic Pennine hills, following natural

pathways and contours over rivers and ravines, and taking 20 viaducts and 14 tunnels in its stride.

A selection of charter companies operate steam tours along the line, allowing you to soak up the scenery in style from the comfort of a vintage carriage. The views alone though are worth the trip at other times when normal services are operating.

28

SISSINGHURST CASTLE GARDENS

KENT

Biddenden Road, near Cranbrook TN17 2AB
www.nationaltrust.org.uk



Nestled around the ruins of an Elizabethan manor house, Sissinghurst is known to green-fingered enthusiasts the world-over as the epitome of an English country garden, and not without reason. Conceived in the 1930s by diplomat Sir Harold Nicolson and his wife, writer Vita Sackville-West, the gardens are of huge importance in English garden design. Vita's overflowing, apparently artless planting contained within Harold's strong

architectural framework, produces a series of outdoor 'rooms', each with a different feel.

You need only meander through the cool beauty of the White Garden to fall in love. Surrounding it all are acres of gently undulating countryside and dense woodland, perfect for a romantic stroll of your own. Visit in the summer for some incredible floral aromas.

MARITIME HISTORY IN BUCKLER'S HARD

NEW FOREST

Beaulieu, Hampshire SO42
www.thenewforest.co.uk



This tiny shipbuilding hamlet, nestling in the New Forest National Park, is the unlikely birthplace of some of the most fearsome warships ever to have set sail. The settlement, originally named Montagu Town, was founded as a free port to trade with the West Indies, but its ambitious plans for growth never materialised.

Wander down the main street, lined with dusky redbrick cottages,

to the Beaulieu River where the likes of HMS Agamemnon, HMS Swiftsure and HMS Euryalus, veterans of Nelson's Trafalgar, were constructed from timber from the surrounding forests. You can find out more at the Maritime Museum and Buckler's Hard Story, while a riverside amble to nearby Beaulieu allows you to soak up the watery vistas of this peaceful spot.

VISIT STONEHENGE

WILTSHIRE

Off the A344, Amesbury, Wiltshire SP4 7DE
www.english-heritage.org.uk



Some 5,000 years old, and partially constructed from rare bluestones found 160 miles away, the theories surrounding this mysterious prehistoric stone circle continue to abound. Was it a temple, a solar calendar, a site for fairs, ritual feasting or sacrifices, an observatory, a burial ground or a centre for healing? Whatever is was back then, today it is an awe-

inspiring sight that draws in visitors from across the globe.

Grab a true sense of the place by booking an out-of-hours visit with English Heritage, when you can enter the circle to see the stones at close hand. Or come on the winter or summer solstice, a time held sacred by New Age believers, for an experience found nowhere else on the planet.

CHESTER ROWS

CHESHIRE

Bridge St, Watergate St, Eastgate Street, Northgate St, Chester CH1 1NG

www.visitchester.com



In a county famed for its black and white buildings, Chester is an absolute gem. It's one of the best-preserved walled cities in Britain, with a history stretching back to the Romans.

But it's the Rows that really set Chester apart. These galleried medieval shops lining four of Chester's thoroughfares are unique in the world. They consist of two tiers, one at street level, the other a floor

above, with galleries overlooking the street.

Although some of the facades are Victorian copies, there are many examples of original architecture which have stood the test of time, such as Three Old Arches in Bridge Street. Some stores even display their Roman foundations and medieval crypts, so you can soak up the history while you shop.

SLEEP AT HAMPTON COURT PALACE

GREATER LONDON

Hampton Court Palace, Surrey, KT8 9AU

www.landmarktrust.org.uk



The stately red-brick splendour of Hampton Court Palace, set beside a particularly leafy stretch of the Thames, was a favourite of Henry VIII – and it's little wonder why. On a visit to this royal abode you'll marvel at the vast Tudor Kitchens and the king's Great Hall, see a recreation of his bejewelled crown and wander the magnificently manicured gardens with their elegant water features,

sculptures and ancient hedge maze first planted around 1700.

Stay at the Landmark Trust Georgian House – an 18th-century mansion near Henry VIII's Real Tennis Court. You'll get unlimited access to the palace's public areas, and, by arrangement, have privileged access to the royal courtyards and gardens after the crowds have gone home.

33

SEE THE CHANGING THE GUARD CEREMONY

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Buckingham Palace, London SW1A 1AA
www.royal.gov.uk



Buckingham Palace's famous guards, in red tunics and bearskin hats, have stood sentry over the iconic building and its royal residents for years. The process of guards replacing each other on duty is formalised in a ceremony (daily between May and June and alternate days throughout the rest of the year) known as 'Changing the Guard'.

This much celebrated spectacle

involves military precision and marching, set to music performed by a Guards band. Each of the traditional five Regiments guarding the palace – Welsh Guards, Scots Guards, Irish Guards, Grenadier Guards and Coldstream Guards – are recognisable by their uniform variations, creating a vivid example of living history. It is one of the most iconic sights to behold in the capital.

34

ROYAL OBSERVATORY AT GREENWICH

GREENWICH

Blackheath Avenue, Greenwich SE10 8XJ
www.rmg.co.uk



One of the most important and historic scientific locations in the world, this Unesco World Heritage site is home of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and the Prime Meridian line. Wherever you are on earth, you're considered to be either east or west of here – this is the best place in the world to set your watch.

An observatory has stood on this site since King Charles

appointed the first Royal Astronomer back in 1675, and it's home to the 28-inch Greenwich refracting telescope – the largest of its kind in the UK and the seventh largest in the world. Along with fascinating insight into its extraordinary history, you can experience the wonders of the universe in the Planetarium's riveting displays and exhibitions.

35

FOLLOW IN ROMAN FOOTSTEPS

BATH

The Roman Baths, Stall Street BA1 1LZ
www.romanbaths.co.uk



Allegedly discovered by the mythical King of the Britons, King Bladud, back in 836 BC, Bath's naturally heated thermal waters have attracted vast numbers of visitors over the years, and around them has grown this resplendent honey-stoned Unesco World Heritage city.

It was the Romans who really ran with the idea of a restorative heated dip, and constructed the

opulent baths seen today. Their history here is brought to life through audio and guided tours, and costumed Roman characters, and with the jewellery, statues and inscriptions they left behind. Bath's waters are the only ones of their kind in the country and you can still bathe in the healing waters today, just like the Romans (see page 112).

36

TOWER OF LONDON

LONDON

London EC3N 4AB
www.hrp.org.uk



No first-time visit to London is complete without seeing the Tower. Begun in the 1080s by William the Conqueror, successive monarchs have added to its fortifications. It has at various times served as a royal residence, armoury, infamous prison, even a royal menagerie!

The history here is etched on the walls, quite literally. There are numerous examples of prisoners

scratching away at the walls, leaving ancient graffiti while waiting for their end. Perhaps most intriguing are the mysterious astrological engravings carved by Hugh Draper, imprisoned in the Salt Tower for sorcery in 1561. Still inhabited by the famous Yeoman Warders (not to mention being the home of some rather well-known family jewels), a one-day visit may not be enough.

37

PORSCMOUTH HISTORIC DOCKYARDS

HAMPSHIRE

Victory gate, HM Naval Base, Portsmouth PO1 3JL
www.historicdockyard.co.uk



There was a time when Britannia ruled the waves. And the home base for much of that wave-ruling was the Portsmouth Historic Dockyards. It's only when you visit that you realise just how integral this place is to our British naval heritage. Stroll along the wooden decks of HMS Victory, to the exact spot where Admiral Nelson fell, mortally wounded; share Henry VIII's heartache at the sinking

of his favourite vessel, The Mary Rose; and experience Victorian conditions aboard mighty HMS Warrior, once home to 600 men.

For a blast of the present, Action Stations gives you a taste of what life is like in the Royal Navy today, with helicopter and warship simulators, interactive displays and one of the biggest climbing towers in Europe.

38

ST MICHAEL'S MOUNT

CORNWALL

Marazion TR17 0HS
www.stmichaelsmount.co.uk



It's not often you get to follow in a giant's footsteps. But stroll across the causeway at low tide to St Michael's Mount, legendary home of the Cornish giant Cormoran, and you can do just that. This diminutive island, steeped in myth and legend, is topped by a fairy-turreted castle, passed down through generations of the St Aubyn family and still a family home today.

Adjoining the castle is a medieval priory, built after the island was bequeathed to Benedictine monks by William the Conqueror. Together with the village and its bustling harbour, they make an idyllic place to wander, whatever the season, but head down in the summer months for a dip in the glistening azure waters surrounding the island at high tide.

WINDSOR CASTLE

BERKSHIRE

Windsor SL4 1NJ
www.royalcollection.org.uk



With a history spanning over 900 years, Windsor Castle is the oldest and largest occupied castle in the world, and one of the official homes of a rather well-known person, namely The Queen.

Although you probably won't catch her watching *Coronation Street* in the living room, you are welcome to come and visit. The castle is full of treasures such as the

State Apartments, filled with priceless works of art and mesmerising items from the Royal Collection (one of the most important art collections in the world), Queen Mary's Dolls' House and St George's Chapel. Take a stately stroll around the beautifully manicured grounds, covering five resplendent hectares, and catch the Changing the Guard – a year round highlight of any visit.

YORK MINSTER

YORKSHIRE

Church House, Ogleforth, York YO1 7JN
www.yorkminster.org



Dominating the city's skyline looms York Minster – the largest Gothic cathedral in northern Europe.

Towering 53 metres, this imposing medieval structure, with its antique stained glass and ornate carvings, is breathtaking inside and out. Adding a touch of modernism is The Orb, an interpretative display containing actual sections of the restored East Window, allowing you to fully

absorb the intricate craftsmanship and tales behind the largest expanse of medieval stained glass in the world.

Come during term time and soak up the atmosphere as the Minster Choir sing Evensong. Be sure to climb the tower (275 steps!) and be rewarded for your efforts with views over the cathedral and the bewitching medieval city, with its winding cobblestoned 'snickleways'.



ARTS AND CULTURE



Experience London's	
South Bank	41
A weekend in Brighton	42
Visit free museums	
and galleries.....	43
Follow in Jane	
Austen's footsteps	44
Dress up for Royal Ascot	45
Devote a weekend	
to football.....	46
Art in Margate	47
See the Blackpool	
Illuminations	48
Have a night on the toon	49
Escape to Another Place	50
John Rylands Library	51
Take a Magical	
Mystery Tour	52
See Banksy's graffiti	53
Yorkshire Sculpture Park	54
Dress up for Bestival.....	55
Tate St Ives	56
Shop 'til you drop at	
Birmingham's Bullring	57
Discover Shakespeare's	
Stratford	58
Ashmolean Museum.....	59
Watch an open-air play.....	60

"We live in the most extraordinarily rich, vibrant and diverse country in the world. It's home to some of the finest architectural edifices in the world and has one of the greatest art scenes to be found anywhere. There's absolutely nothing that you could be interested in that England doesn't have and that's what makes it such an exciting place to be."



Clemency Burton-Hill

41

EXPERIENCE LONDON'S SOUTH BANK

LONDON

Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road SE1 8XX
www.southbankcentre.co.uk



Judge's pick

Walking across Waterloo Bridge I can't help but feel a deep sense of pride as I pass some of the finest architectural edifices ever created on route to the Southbank, which in my opinion is probably the greatest arts institution in the world. I don't think there's anything that you could be interested in that you won't find on that stretch of the Thames.

CLEMENCY BURTON-HILL

London's neon-soaked South Bank is perfect for a splash of arts and culture with its world-beating collection of art galleries and theatres congregating along the River Thames.

Shakespeare's Globe, the Tate Modern, BFI, National Theatre and, of course, the Southbank Centre will keep you busy for weeks.

42

A WEEKEND IN BRIGHTON SUSSEX

Venues throughout Brighton
www.visitbrighton.com



Colourful Brighton is a cultural cornucopia of creativity, with more than its share of festivals, museums, galleries and legendary nightlife. Start at Brighton's ode to hedonism, the Royal Pavilion. Once George IV's regal bachelor pad, this exotic palace's audio tour will have you gasping and gawping from beginning to end.

Next, buckle up for old-school

thrills on the waltzers and looping rollercoasters towering over the glittering Brighton Pier. Best save the fish and chips on the beach until afterwards, then head out to the clubs, theatres, and bars that help make Brighton one of the most cultural cities in Europe. Finish your weekend browsing the jewellers, vintage shops and boutiques of The Lanes and sipping cocktails the chic bars.



VISIT FREE MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

LONDON

Free venues throughout the city
www.visitlondon.com



London is home to one of the world's finest collections of free museums and art galleries and, conveniently, three of them live side-by-side in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Stop by the Natural History Museum to get caught up in an earthquake, take a tour led by a by cockroach at the Science Museum and drool over one of the largest collections

of precious jewellery and some of the finest design feats in the world at the V&A.

Elsewhere in the capital, stare ancient history in the face at British Museum, be transfixed by modern masterpieces at the Tate Modern and let both William Shakespeare's and David Beckham's eyes follow you around the rooms of the National Gallery.



FOLLOW IN JANE AUSTEN'S FOOTSTEPS

HAMPSHIRE

Various locations in Hampshire
www.visit-hampshire.co.uk



From its handsome estates and genteel society life to its straw-thatched cottages and time-capsule villages, Jane Austen was inspired by rural Hampshire, setting many of her novels here. Lovers of her subtle, ironic humour and understated prose will relish the chance to follow in her footsteps. Start your journey at the Jane Austen House Museum in Chawton, where you can browse

through her family portraits, stroll through the pretty gardens and admire the desk where she penned such classics as *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*.

Austen loved the countryside and the circular walk from Chawton to Farringdon is a great opportunity to see why. Round the day off with a visit to Winchester Cathedral, where she is buried in the north aisle.



DRESS UP FOR ROYAL ASCOT

BERKSHIRE

Ascot Racecourse, Ascot SL5 7JX
www.ascot.co.uk



Few sporting events match the drama and pageantry of Royal Ascot, where half the spectators turn up to see the horses and the other half turn up to see the spectators. For almost 250 years, Royal Ascot has seen celebrities, royals and fashion's darlings mingle on Ascot Racecourse's manicured grounds every June.

Tops and tails for the gents, extravagant hats and heels for the

ladies and a glass of champagne are the de rigueur dress code, while 'Ladies' Day' sees sartorial creations achieve new heights of showmanship. Each day's Royal Procession gives punters and curious visitors a chance to inspect the world's best racehorses up close, whether or not you decide to bid for a slice of the £4.5 million in prize money.



DEVOTE A WEEKEND TO FOOTBALL

MANCHESTER

Various football-themed attractions throughout the city
www.visitmanchester.com



Football in Manchester is pursued with a passion that borders on the devout, with clubs Manchester United and Manchester City two of the most famous in the world. No wonder then that this footie-mad city is home to the National Football Museum, whose vast collection of memorabilia, trophies and archival footage takes you from the game's early development through to its more

recent dramatic moments. After you've had your fill of football trivia, head over to Football Plus, an interactive experience that allows you to test your speed, reactions and accuracy, have a pop at a penalty shot or give Gary Lineker a run for his money in the commentator's seat. Also recommended are stadium tours of Manchester City's Etihad and Manchester United's Old Trafford.



ART IN MARGATE

KENT

Turner Contemporary, Rendezvous, Margate CT9 1HG
www.turnercontemporary.org



You'll find creativity in abundance along the Kent coast, from the bohemian haven of Whitstable to Folkestone's Creative Quarter. One gallery that's kicking up an artistic storm the Romantics would be truly proud of is the Turner Contemporary, slap-bang on Margate's seafront.

In its first year, this boundary-pushing art hub has seen a major free exhibition by local artist Tracey

Emin and put a new perspective on Rodin's sculpture *The Kiss*. A revolving collection of JMW Turner's work sits alongside contemporary exhibitions.

The surrounding area has also benefitted from an arty make-over, with young designers, vintage enthusiasts, art lovers and cupcake-makers all setting up shop in the Old Town over the past few years. In short, Margate is buzzing.



SEE THE BLACKPOOL ILLUMINATIONS

LANCASHIRE

Promenade, Blackpool FY1 5BB
www.visitblackpool.com



Every autumn, Blackpool lights up the Lancashire skies with a sparkling spectacle that will leave you feeling dizzy. You really have to see to believe it. The flamboyant light show has been dazzling crowds since 1912, when 10,000 bulbs were lit to celebrate Blackpool's first British royal family visit. The Illuminations have lit up Blackpool ever since.

Nowadays, more than a million bulbs, lasers and animatronics flash, sparkle and twinkle along six miles of Blackpool's iconic Promenade from the end of August until November, and they get more extravagant each year. The very best way to experience this electrical extravaganza is to hop on a heritage tram, but be sure to book in advance as tours sell out quickly.

49

HAVE A NIGHT ON THE TOON

NEWCASTLEGATESHEAD

Venues throughout NewcastleGateshead
www.newcastlegateshead.com



Geordies are some of the friendliest folk you'll ever meet. Combine that with a cool yet unpretentious arts scene and you've got yourself a night out in the northeast to remember.

Start the evening with dinner at one of the swishiest restaurants in town. Crowning the BALTIC contemporary art gallery, Six's floor-to-ceiling windows frame the glittering skyline, with the Tyne and

Gateshead Millennium bridges heroically stretching across the River Tyne below. Next, hit Toyko Bar to sip on weird and wonderful cocktails before bar hopping along the Diamond Strip, which packs a plethora of clubs and bars into a compact area. For live music, hop back across the river to The Sage, an innovative music venue with an ever-changing programme.

50

ESCAPE TO ANOTHER PLACE

LIVERPOOL

Mariners Road, Crosby Beach, Merseyside L23 6SX
www.visitliverpool.com



Forget crumbly sand sculptures; Antony Gormley's *Another Place* is seaside art on a whole new level. The sculptor who brought a giant steel angel to NewcastleGateshead has also left his artistic signature on a town just north of Liverpool, and in doing so transformed a sleepy shoreline into a worldfamous work of art.

Here on Crosby Beach, a hundred cast iron life-sized figures

dot the bay's wide sands, each gazing out to sea from a different point, becoming increasingly submerged as the tide comes in. The figures are all casts of Gormley's own body, standing upright, hands by his side. You can touch them, photograph them, stand next to them, or simply join them in their peaceful contemplation of the watery horizon.

51

JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY

MANCHESTER

150 Deansgate M3 3EH
www.library.manchester.ac.uk/deansgate



A literary hangout for bookworms and architecture lovers, the John Rylands Library is a gargoyle-laden Gothic Revival masterpiece with one of the most impressive collections of in the world. Sat within Manchester University, it looks more like a cathedral with its stained glass windows and grand sandstone pillars, but inside its Victorian bookcases are stacked with notable literature.

The library has a continual programme of temporary exhibitions that span culture in many forms – from Clockwork Orange to calligraphy – but the exhibits that tend to provoke the most excited whispers are the 15th-century accounts of witchcraft, the oldest known piece of the New Testament written in any language and a treasured first edition of Shakespeare's sonnets.

52

TAKE A MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

LIVERPOOL

Cavern City Tours, Century Buildings, 31 North John Street L2 6RG
www.cavernclub.org



Tread in the famous footsteps of a certain four lads from Liverpool on a magical mystery tour of their home town. You can take a peek inside the National Trust-owned childhood homes of John Lennon and Paul McCartney – two humble Liverpool abodes that now act as shrines to the iconic musicians – and be transported back to the 1950s as you discover fascinating

anecdotes and artefacts from the pair's lives.

The Beatles Story is another must for Beatles lovers keen to top up on their Fab Four facts, and a fittingly musical end to your Beatlesmania break is to demonstrate your best Sixties moves at a gig at The Cavern Club, before heading back to your Beatles-inspired room at the Hard Days Night Hotel.

53

SEE BANKSY'S GRAFFITI

BRISTOL

Graffiti sites throughout Bristol

www.visitbristol.co.uk



The world's most notorious graffiti artist might have made his satirical graffiti mark all over the world but Bristol is where it all began. Banksy's native city has been transformed into one big bold urban gallery.

To really get under the skin of Banksy and the city's street art scene you'll need to head out of the centre. Stoke's Croft, the heart

of Bristol's cultural quarter and home to Banksy's *Mild Mild West* mural, is a good place to start, but it's Easton that's a real mecca for street art fans. Here you'll find some of his earliest works. Watch out for the *Cat and Dog* on Foster Street and the famous *Masked Gorilla* on Fishponds Road. Cameras at the ready!

54

YORKSHIRE SCULPTURE PARK

YORKSHIRE

West Bretton, Wakefield WF4 4LG

www.ysp.co.uk



Lose yourself in an arty wonderland filled with world-class works by contemporary sculptors. This vast expanse of luscious 18th-century parkland is decorated with mesmerising creations by the likes of Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Turner Prize-winner Martin Creed and many more.

The sculptures are set against the sweeping backdrop of the Bretton

Estate's parkland; as you wander around the swathes of greenery, meet masterpiece after masterpiece, each with its own personality. If there's rain in the air never fear. As well as the outdoor park there are four indoor galleries to explore, plus talks, tours and family events – and even courses in metal sculpture and stone carving if you fancy having a go at creating a your own personal masterpiece.

55

DRESS UP FOR BESTIVAL

ISLE OF WIGHT

Robin Hill Country Park, Downend, Newport PO30 2NU
www.bestival.net



Where else in world can you party at a festival featuring pole-dancing robots, a Wishing Tree Stage, a farmers market, a Bollywood Cocktail Bar, cabaret in the Knees up Tent, a retro-tastic roller disco, an inflatable church and a cinema hidden in the forest? And that wacky list hasn't even mentioned the chart-topping live music, or the annual fancy dress theme!

Every September, Bestival sends off the English summer with a gloriously eccentric bang. This three-day party on the Isle of Wight sees some of the world's biggest stars in music and performance head to the south coast island to perform to a welly-wearing crowd of thousands, who've travelled from far and wide to experience the festival's magical and unique atmosphere.

56

TATE ST IVES

CORNWALL

Porthmeor Beach, St Ives TR26 1TG
www.tate.org.uk



With its clean air and shimmering sea and sands, St Ives is a true English beauty. It is in this striking location that you'll find one of the country's most mesmerising galleries. Perched on Porthmeor Beach, Tate St Ives is the original seaside art gallery and draws in around 200,000 visitors a year eager to pencil a bit of culture into their beach break.

There aren't any permanent exhibitions. Instead the gallery holds three special exhibitions a year, meaning you'll see something different each time you visit. You can save a few pounds by buying joint admission tickets for Tate St Ives and the Barbara Hepworth Museum, just a short walk away and well worth seeing for its extraordinary sculpture garden.



SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP AT BIRMINGHAM'S BULLRING

BIRMINGHAM

Upper Dean St, East Birmingham B5 4BP
www.visitbirmingham.com



When you're perusing the likes of Vivienne Westwood, Stella McCartney and Alexander McQueen inside Selfridges at the Bullring, take a minute to admire the building that houses this legendary department store. Fittingly, the bubbly-surfaced, silver edifice was inspired by a sequined dress by designer Paco Rabanne. In the evenings it transforms into a neon-glowing futurist blob

reminiscent of something straight out of a sci-fi film.
 If designer goods are a little costly, the hundreds of high street brands that surround Selfridges will keep you busy for days; if you're fan of independent shops and boutiques then head for Digbeth, where a family of old waterside factories has been transformed into a hub for art and culture known as the Custard Factory.



DISCOVER SHAKESPEARE'S STRATFORD

WARWICKSHIRE

Sites throughout Stratford-upon-Avon
www.discover-stratford.com



Shakespeare is the most quoted writer in the history of the English-speaking world and, for many, the most influential playwright of all time. Politicians draw from his speeches, lovers swoon to his sonnets and schoolchildren grow up on a staple diet of his plays. Prior to carving out his illustrious career in London, Shakespeare lived in leafy Stratford-upon-Avon, drawing inspiration from

every-day life in the busy market town. Each year, thousands of visitors flock to his Birthplace on Henley Street, see the sight of his final home New Place, and visit the quaint Anne Hathaway's Cottage – the childhood home of Shakespeare's wife. See his plays brought to life by the world-class Royal Shakespeare Company before grabbing a pint at the Garrick Inn, allegedly Stratford's oldest pub.

ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM

OXFORDSHIRE

Beaumont St, Oxford OX1 2PH

www.ashmolean.org



Oxford University's Ashmolean Museum is a haven for students, academics and art lovers looking to immerse themselves in cultural riches. Behind the doors of this elegant Neo-classical building, the whole story of human civilisation is told through its artefacts – from pre-Dynastic Egyptian mummies to Anglo Saxon treasures and the largest collection of Raphael's drawings outside of Rome.

The Ashmolean began in the 1620s with a cabinet of curiosities donated to the university by Elias Ashmole. In 1683, it was formally founded as Britain's first public museum. A major redevelopment in 2009 updated it with a sleek, modern interior, 39 new galleries and a rooftop restaurant. Be sure to pick up an events programme, featuring talks with some of Britain's most esteemed academics.

WATCH AN OPEN-AIR PLAY

CORNWALL

Minack Theatre, Porthcurno, Penzance TR19 6JU

www.minack.com



Carved into a granite cliff face on the southern tip of Cornwall, the Minack Theatre is a wonderfully unique theatrical experience, where audiences soak up opera, classic dramas and musicals in the sunshine or under the stars with the sparkling Atlantic Ocean as an appropriately dramatic backdrop.

The theatre was the brainchild of Rowena Cade, who conceived,

helped build and even financed the theatre from 1931 up until her death in 1983. Opening with Shakespeare's *The Tempest* back in 1932, the theatre today draws audiences from far and wide with a packed programme filling spring and summer months. Being open air, the English weather always plays a big role, but in true English spirit performances are only cancelled in extreme conditions.



WILDLIFE & NATURE

Farne Islands	61
Holkham Beach	62
Catch the Severn Bore.....	63
Eden Project	64
Twitch on Lundy Island.....	65
See exotic plants and animals.....	66
Glimpse rare red squirrels	67
Spot deer in the city.....	68
Roam the Peak District	69
Search for monkey orchids	70
Spot damselfs and dragons.....	71
Join a bat patrol at Cheddar Gorge	72
The Lost Gardens of Heligan ..	73
Bempton Cliff's bird colonies...	74
Dartmoor's ponies.....	75
Malham Cove	76
Snowdrops at Fountains Abbey	77
Havergate Island.....	78
Dungeness	79
Watch starlings circle West Pier	80

"I've travelled the world and I can honestly say that England is unique. For me, it's all about the sea birds. Nowhere else in the world will you find such teeming, easy-to-reach bird colonies. My other obsession is small islands – they change every day – and England has them in abundance, from the Isles of Scilly to the Farne Islands. I'm addicted!"



Bill Oddie

FARNE ISLANDS

NORTHUMBERLAND

Tourist Information Centre, Seafield Car Park, Seafield Road NE68 7SW
www.nationaltrust.org.uk



Judge's pick

There are just a few places that I would recommend to anyone and feel absolutely confident that they'd have an unforgettable experience. I have visited sea bird colonies all round the world but the Farne Islands are the best place to literally walk among terns, shags, kittiwakes and the endlessly entertaining puffins. I'd recommend visiting between April and early September, with June and July for maximum bird activity.

BILL ODDIE

Hop on a boat from Seahouses Harbour to discover one of the finest nature reserves in Europe. During the summer you can get up close to all sorts of seabirds, including around 37,000 pairs of loved-up puffins, and come autumn the cute factor shoots right off the scale with the birth of over a thousand seal pups.

HOLKHAM BEACH

NORFOLK

Holkham Hall, Wells-next-the-Sea NR23 1AB
www.holkham.co.uk



Holkham Beach forms part of a national nature reserve and has made a windswept cameo in *Shakespeare in Love*. With unspoilt white-golden sand that stretches for miles, its panoramic vista is a director's dream come true.

But the setting isn't the only star as it plays host to rich and varied wildlife. Sand dunes, salttings, pine forests, marshes and a maze of

creeks make Holkham a haven for VIP flora and fauna. The number of breeding birds here is remarkable. Holkham Nature Reserve attracts thousands of pink-footed geese as well as lapwings, larks, finches and pipits. As the weather warms up croaking natterjack toads and orchids start to make an appearance. And summer sees a purple haze of sea lavender.



CATCH THE SEVERN BORE

GLoucestershire

The Severn Bore Inn, Main Street, Minsterworth GL2 8JX
www.severnboreinn.co.uk



The River Severn has the second highest tidal range in the world and several times each year the waters rush in at speeds of up to 13 miles per hour (21km/h), forming waves up to 2 metres high. It's quite the spectacle. The largest surge waves, or bores, occur around the high tides nearest the spring and autumn equinoxes. Surfers, kayakers, paddle boarders and some rather

astonished ducks line the waves surging inland.

But you don't have to ride the water yourself – although plenty do – as you can watch one of Britain's most incredible natural wonders from the banks. You can get a clear view, and hear the roar of the bore, at night too. The Severn Bore Inn floodlights the river for nocturnal sightings.



EDEN PROJECT

CORNWALL

Bodelva, St Austell PL24 2SG
www.edenproject.com



Rising phoenix-like from a former clay pit, the Eden Project is a working example of sustainability practicing what it preaches. Three distinctive biomes, resembling giant soap bubbles, recreate tropical, temperate and desert environments in their role as the world's largest greenhouses.

Travel from the steamy jungles of the rainforest to the fragrant lemon groves of the Californian grasslands,

learning about the plants that bring us chewing gum, cupcakes and car tyres. The Core education centre has marvellous interactive exhibits on ecosystems, evolution and climate change, while the enormous gift shop allows you to take a piece of the Eden Project home. Look out also for the resident leaping lizards, tree frogs and ladybirds, used as a natural alternative to pesticide!



TWITCH ON LUNDY ISLAND

DEVON

Lundy Shore Office, The Quay, Bideford EX39 2LY
www.nationaltrust.org.uk



Jump on MS Oldenburg to Lundy Island, a granite car-free wilderness rising 400ft above the spot where the Bristol Channel meets the Atlantic. It may be just three and a half miles long by half a mile wide, but there is plenty of diverse sea life crammed into England's first Marine Conservation Zone.

Grey seal, lobsters and eight species of coral, including pink

sea fans, red sea fingers and dead man's fingers can be found on Lundy Island. In spring and autumn migrant birds make these rocky reefs their home. And it's a top spot for manx shearwaters, puffins and cliff nesters. In May and June, look out for Lundy Cabbage – this type of brassica doesn't grow anywhere else in the world.



SEE EXOTIC PLANTS AND ANIMALS

SCILLY ISLES

Cornwall
www.simplyscilly.co.uk



With their clear, warm waters and towering palm trees, the Isles of Scilly are England's answer to a tropical paradise. This amazing archipelago of over 100 islands, located 30 miles from Cornwall, provides a wealth of wildlife-watching experiences.

Jump on a sea safari from St Mary's, the largest of the five inhabited islands, to see grey seals

and flocks of seabirds, including puffins from April to July. If you're lucky you might even spot basking sharks and dolphins.

Back on dry land, hedgerows and fields blaze with pink proteas in May and scented white and gold narcissi in October. But Scilly's flower power is most obvious at Abbey Gardens on Tresco, blooming with exotic cacti, plants and floral delights.



GLIMPSE RARE RED SQUIRRELS

DORSET

Poole Harbour, Poole BH13 7EE
www.nationaltrust.org.uk



A former Second World War decoy for German bombs, Brownsea Island is now a haven for nature. Around two hundred indigenous red squirrels live here but these rare, bushy-tailed creatures are famously shy. If you want to catch a glimpse of them, autumn is the best time to try, although you'll still need plenty of patience and a keen eye.

If the thought of waiting around is enough to drive you nuts, the island's resident peacocks and sika deer are much easier to see. So too are the numerous wading birds that fill the island's lagoon. Watch out for breeding sandwich terns during summer and avocets and black-tailed godwits in winter.



SPOT DEER IN THE CITY

SURREY

Richmond Park, Richmond, Surrey TW10 5HS
www.royalparks.org.uk



It might come as a surprise to discover a deer-filled oasis just a tube ride away from the hustle and bustle of central London. But it's easy to see why Richmond Park – home to over 600 red and fallow deer – was once described as the "lungs of London". This gorgeous green space covers 2,500 acres and is the largest of the capital's Royal Parks.

Charles I moved his court to Richmond Palace, creating enclosed hunting grounds in 1637. Today the only deer-stalking you'll find in this National Nature Reserve are attempts to catch deer grazing on camera. And the Isabella Plantation, an ornamental woodland garden bursting with violet azaleas and emerald green ferns, is the most photogenic sight of them all.



ROAM THE PEAK DISTRICT

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK

Peak District NPA, Aldern House, Baslow Road, Bakewell DE45 1AE

www.visitpeakdistrict.com



Did you know that the Peak District was the UK's first national park? This vast natural playground forms the southern end of the Pennines. The highest point, the gritstone plateau of Kinder Scout, was the site of a famous clash between ramblers and landowners in 1932. It resulted in the public being granted the 'right to roam' on uncultivated land.

Pull on your hiking boots and

explore the jagged crags that rise from the moorlands. In winter the spectacular mist-shrouded Kinder Downfall, the Peaks' tallest waterfall, spews out ice formations. Head towards Hathersage, 20 minutes from Sheffield, and you'll experience panoramic vistas at Surprise View that seemly appear out of nowhere. In late August it's swathed in the heady scent of heather.



SEARCH FOR MONKEY ORCHIDS

KENT

Park Gate Down, between Stelling Minnis and Elham, Canterbury CT4 6NE

www.wildlifetrusts.org



Orchids are a common sight in flower shops and supermarkets but nothing beats seeing the wild variety in bloom, en masse, in the great outdoors. Park Gate Down (renamed the Hector Wilks Reserve in memory of a local botanist) consists of acres of ancient chalk grassland that attracts feeding and breeding birds, adders and common lizards. It is also home to

monkey orchids, one of the rarest types of orchid in Britain. The clue really is in the name, but these unusual orchids look remarkably like a monkey's face dangling down from the stalks.

You can also find bee orchids here that, yes, you've guessed it, resemble bees. And there are plenty of violets, primroses and marjorams to sniff out too.



SPOT DAMSELS AND DRAGONS

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Wicken Fen National Nature Reserve, Lode Lane, Ely CB7 5XP
www.nationaltrust.org.uk



Wicken Fen National Nature Reserve is one of the most important wetlands in Europe with over 8,400 types of plants, birds, otters, water voles and dragonflies. It's also one of Bill Oddie's favourite places to spot two of the oldest insect groups in the world. On a sunny day you might find thousands of these brightly coloured insects winging their way between ponds, ditches and lakes

across the fen. Britain's largest dragonfly, the emperor, is common, as well as rarer species.

It's crazy to think that damselflies and dragonflies have been darting about the planet for 325 million years. Catch virtuoso displays of these mini flying dinosaurs in the summer months. Their glittering bodies will quite simply take your breath away.



JOIN A BAT PATROL AT CHEDDAR GORGE

SOMERSET

Cheddar BS27 3QF
www.cheddargorge.co.uk



As the sun sets, the silvery moon lights up Cheddar Gorge making it the perfect time to join a bat walk. Cheddar Gorge is made up of lots of small caves but the two largest, Gough's Cave and Cox's Cave, are open to the public for this unique wildlife experience.

Once you're kitted out with an ultra-sonic bat detector the bat patrol explores Gough's Cave, a mystical

limestone stalactite cavern where endangered greater horseshoe bats scan the night air for moths and insects to feed on. The caves are home to the UK's largest colony. Don't worry if you're as blind as a bat and have trouble spotting them as the conservation officer leading the walk will be happy to help point them out.



THE LOST GARDENS OF HELIGAN

CORNWALL

Pentewan, St.Austell PL26 6EN

www.heligan.com



On paper The Lost Gardens of Heligan may sound like a work of fiction, like a scene out of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Secret Garden*, but we can assure you that they are very much real. Once an aristocratic estate, the grounds were abandoned after the Second World War and fell into a state of decay. But after one of the largest garden restoration programmes in Europe,

there are now more than 200 acres of luscious land to explore. Marvel at the mini jungle, with its banana plantations, towering bamboo and giant rhubarbs. And meander across the ancient woodland and lost valley, remembering the way you came. Visit in spring and you'll find most of the gardens carpeted with bluebells.



BEMPTON CLIFF'S BIRD COLONIES

YORKSHIRE

Bridlington YO15 1JF

www.rspb.org.uk



From April to August over 200,000 seabirds call Bempton Cliffs home and it's a rather grand place to live. This RSPB reserve is one of the finest places in England to catch bird migration in action. Gannets and puffins reside next door to guillemots and kittiwakes as they nest together on the towering chalk cliffs that rise above the swirling North Sea.

Various vantage points provide uninterrupted views of life at one of Britain's major bird colonies. And when it comes to the sounds of the breeding season, you could say it's a bit of a noisy affair. If you can't tell a short-eared owl from a sparrow you won't miss out as there are specially trained staff on hand to help.

DARTMOOR'S PONIES

DEVON

Dartmoor National Park, Bovey Tracey, Newton Abbot TQ13 9JQ
www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk



Nothing says spring more than seeing new-born foals finding their feet, or rather hooves, on bluebell-clad moors. The pony is as deeply associated with Dartmoor's landscape as the tors, swirling mists, bogs and mires of its high ground – Stephen Spielberg's epic *Warhorse* was filmed here.

These hardy animals, with their full-flowing manes, have roamed Dartmoor since prehistoric times. Hoofprints

of domesticated ponies dating back around 3,500 years were found on Dartmoor during an archaeological excavation in the 1970s. Though indigenous ponies are now quite rare – there are fewer than 900 breeding Dartmoor ponies remaining – non-local breeds can also be found in this wild area of open country. But as these ponies are all untamed, horsing around isn't advisable.

MALHAM COVE

NORTH YORKSHIRE

Near Malham BD23 4DJ
www.yorkshiredales.org.uk



Malham is one of the Yorkshire Dale's hidden gems, the rich scenery providing a source of inspiration to the likes of William Wordsworth and the artist Turner. Malham Cove is a towering cliff formation in the shape of an amphitheatre. Its weirdly shaped limestone pavements, formed after the last ice age, will stop you in your tracks.

The Clints (blocks of limestone)

and Grykes (the gaps) create a unique micro-climate for rare wild flowers and fern. Popular with rock climbers and nesting peregrine falcons alike, Malham Cove is one of the few places in the national park where this bird of prey attempts to breed. Keep your ears open for the yaffle of green woodpeckers and watch out for the distinctive grey wagtail's colourful yellow plumage.



SNOWDROPS AT FOUNTAINS ABBEY

YORKSHIRE

Fountains, Ripon HG4 3DY
www.nationaltrust.org.uk



The first snowdrops are always a welcome sight, signalling an end to chilly winter days. Walk on a white carpet of them as you explore the 12th century ruins at Fountains Abbey. Best viewed early in the morning, a thin layer of mist slowly fades to reveal swathes of delicate little white flowers in front of this World Heritage Site.

Set in 800 acres of countryside

near Ripon in Yorkshire, Fountains Abbey is the most complete Cistercian abbey remains in England and houses the only surviving Cistercian corn mill. Drink in the beauty of the adjoining landscaped Georgian water garden of Studley Royal where over 500 red, fallow and Sika deer roam among the ancient trees of its medieval deer park.



HAVERGATE ISLAND SUFFOLK

Near Aldeburgh
www.rspb.org.uk



Suffolk's only island is a gem. Nestled within the Alde and Ore Estuary, this secluded nature reserve is only accessible by the RSPB boat. No more than 12 visitors are allowed to set foot here each day, so peace and quiet is guaranteed... at least, until the terns arrive.

Spring and summer sees these black-headed birds return to the island to breed and raise their

young, throwing up a riot of sound. The hares are also friskier during this time – their boxing antics are a real treat to watch. During autumn and winter the island is a haven for ducks and wading birds, while few sights are as moving or memorable as that of the enigmatic barn owl silently scouring the grassland for prey.



DUNGENESS

KENT

Near Lydd TN29 9PN
www.dungeness-nnr.co.uk



At first glance, windswept Dungeness National Nature Reserve appears too remote and strange to constitute as a wildlife attraction. A mile and a half of desolate shingle stretches out before the eye, punctuated only by ramshackle huts, a couple of lighthouses and a nuclear power station. In fact, Dungeness is home to a large RSPB site, as well as being a Special Protection Area.

Hundreds and hundreds of species of plant life grow here and those into moths, bees, beetles, spiders and other creepy crawlies will find them in abundance. A circular 2 mile nature trail with six hides winds through the reserve. What's more, the shoreline grows in volume each year as more shingle gets washed up. Bleak or beautiful? Decide for yourself.



WATCH STARLINGS CIRCLE WEST PIER

BRIGHTON

King's Road, Brighton
www.westpier.co.uk



Despite being ravaged by fire in 2003, Brighton's West Pier still attracts thousands of visitors. Every December, a black cloud drifts across the horizon from as far away as Scandinavia towards the pier's charred skeleton. Swelling up to 40,000 in number, the starlings come to perform their annual pre-roosting aerial show, known as 'murmuration'. Their arrival is particularly significant

since plummeting numbers have earmarked the starlings as a Species of Conservation Concern.

The best time to catch their hypnotic display is at sunset, while sat on the pebbled beach with some fish and chips in your lap. The sight of these speckled birds looping and swirling across the rose-tinted sky is simply spellbinding. Just don't let your dinner get cold.



HEALTH AND FITNESS

Coasteering in Cornwall.....	81
Scale England's highest peak..	82
Sail like an Olympian.....	83
Walk to the White Horse at Uffington.....	84
Go ice skating on the Fens.....	85
Walk the South West Coast Path.....	86
Pony trekking in The New Forest.....	87
Mountain biking in Dalby Forest.....	88
Soak in Bath's thermal waters..	89
Caving in the Yorkshire Dales..	90
Canoe along the Wye Valley	91
Wild swimming in Grassington	92
Surfing in Newquay.....	93
Rock climb in the Peak District	94
Up at the O2	95
Trek from coast to coast	96
Learn the art of mountain biking	97
Go Ape in Sherwood Pines....	98
Walk the Pennine Way	99
Raft down an Olympic course	100

"There's no excuse for not getting out and about in England. We have great walks with amazing views right on our doorstep and the best sporting facilities in the world thanks to the 2012 Olympics.

But people forget that health and fitness also means relaxing! And for me an afternoon of total relaxation in a spa, or walking to a pub for lunch is bliss."



Sonali Shah



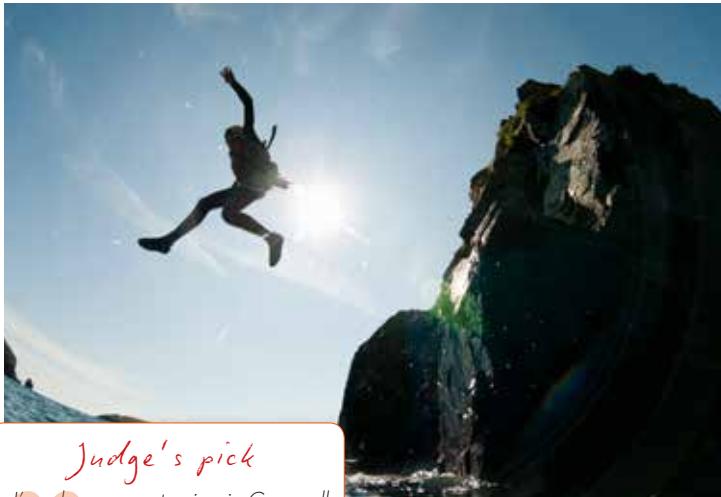


COASTEERING IN CORNWALL

CORNWALL

Numerous activity centres throughout Cornwall

www.visitcornwall.com



Judge's pick

I've chosen coasteering in Cornwall as my ultimate pick because it sounds like a super-charged version of something many of us will have tried as kids on a seaside holiday.

The variety of activity – the sport involves swimming, jumping, diving, climbing and scrambling – would make it a totally adrenaline-packed experience. It's a unique way of exploring one of England's most stunning coastlines!

SONALI SHAH

Experienced guides are dotted along the coastline ready to take you on an adventure where the land greets the sea. Scaling cliffs and plunging into crystalline waters is an exhilarating and fun way to get to know the Cornish coast.



SCALE ENGLAND'S HIGHEST PEAK

LAKE DISTRICT

Lake District National Park

www.lakedistrict.gov.uk



Scafell Pike is the highest point in England and successfully scaling it guarantees sublime rewards. The fell rises some 978m above sea level and from the peak on a clear day you can see all the way across the sea to the Isle of Man.

The Lake District has inspired writers and artists for centuries and when you're standing at its highest point, towering above a beautiful

scene of sparkling waters, twisted crags and pristine highlands, you'll understand why. It's enough to turn even the most taciturn hiker into a poet. The feeling will stay with you long after you've made the descent, and are kicking-back in a country pub in one of the area's countless picturesque villages and hamlets.



SAIL LIKE AN OLYMPIAN

DORSET

WPNSA, Osprey Quay, Portland DT5 1SA
www.wpnsa.org.uk



The world-class sailing waters of Weymouth were made for cruising or racing. Brit Ben Ainslie stormed into gold medal position in the Men's Finn Olympic event here in 2012. You can replicate his success (in your own head at least) at the Weymouth & Portland National Sailing Academy (WPNSA), which offers Olympic-standard facilities.

Whether you're an absolute

beginner or pushing to race competitively, you'll find expert tuition and ideal practice conditions. If you already confident on the water, just hire one of the academy's world-class dinghies to skim across the water in and take in that view – Weymouth is at the heart of the Jurassic Coast, with Lulworth Cove and Chesil Beach nearby – or join a coastal cruise from Weymouth Harbour.



WALK TO THE WHITE HORSE AT UFFINGTON

OXFORDSHIRE

On The Ridgeway National Trail between Swindon and Wantage
www.nationaltrust.org.uk



Hike across rolling chalk downs and back in time to an age of myth and legend. The area all around Uffington is dotted with an Iron Age hillfort, ancient burial mounds, Roman roads and apparently the very flattened hilltop where St George slew the dragon. The most famous landmark, though, is the Uffington White Horse, which leaps across the head of a valley.

Until recently it was thought to be from Anglo-Saxon times yet further scientific investigation has revealed the enormous horse, carved into the chalky downland, to be much older – almost 3,000 years in fact, dating it to the Bronze Age. Time your trip right and you can work up a sweat as you help scour the horse clean.



GO ICE SKATING ON THE FENS

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Wisbech and the Fens

www.visitcambridge.org



The Fens are the birthplace of British speed skating. In a tradition stretching back centuries, when the ground froze over and the land was too hard to work, local landowners would organise races for their unemployed labourers. The prize, often half a bullock or pig, was enough to keep the labourer's family in food for the cold winter months so races were fiercely contested.

Today, when the conditions are right, the tradition of racing and skating is alive and well. The fenland between Cambridge and Kings Lynn is already a bewitchingly atmospheric place, but covered in a layer of ice and frost, it takes on a truly magical quality. Strap on your skates, wrap up warm and experience these natural ice rinks in the bracing air for yourself.



WALK THE SOUTH WEST COAST PATH

SOUTH WEST ENGLAND

Between Minehead in Somerset and Poole in Dorset

www.southwestcoastpath.com



You probably won't get round all 630 miles of staggeringly beautiful coastline in one go, but you will be back. Stretching from Somerset, through Devon, around the tip of Cornwall and back to Dorset, we reckon this national trail is one of the greatest of its kind. From the wilds of Exmoor National Park through picture-perfect villages, gorse-covered heath, medieval ports,

secret smugglers coves, ancient forts and charming quayside villages, to incredible geological formations including Durdle Door and dramatic cliff-tops, there's almost too much to take in. What's more, the route is bordered by shimmering turquoise waters. It's a totally mesmeric experience. Pick your first section with the reassurance that there will be plenty left to explore.



PONY TREKKING IN THE NEW FOREST

THE NEW FOREST

Numerous riding stables and schools throughout The New Forest
www.thenewforest.co.uk



At around 900 years old, the name is a little misleading. Originally created as a private hunting ground for William the Conqueror in 1079, the ancient landscape of The New Forest has changed little over the intervening centuries. A network of pathways and trails takes you through almost 355 square miles of enchanting woodland and quaint forest villages.

Along the way you're likely to see some of the 3,000 New Forest ponies. They've lived in the area for around 2,000 years and although not wild, they are as close to it as you can get and roam the area freely. Saddle up one of their tamer cousins and take to the bridleways on a pony trek for an entirely appropriate way to explore this incredible setting.



MOUNTAIN BIKING IN DALBY FOREST

NORTH YORK MOORS NATIONAL PARK
Dalby Forest Visitor Centre, Low Dalby, Pickering YO18 7LT
www.forestry.gov.uk



Dalby Forest is internationally recognised as one of the best places in the world to go mountain biking. It hosted the Mountain Bike World Cup in 2010 and 2011 and Dalby Bike Barn is the Centre of Excellence for the Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC). These are some serious accolades in a sport that's rocketing in popularity.

You'll find miles of routes criss-crossing the forest, featuring drops, berms and rock gardens. If you don't have a clue what those are, start at the Barn and choose a CTC course. After a day spent careering downhill, get your breath back and have a bite to eat while taking in the views from the Tree Tops Restaurant in the Dalby Forest Visitor Centre.



SOAK IN BATH'S THERMAL WATERS

BATH

Thermae Bath Spa, The Hetling Pump Room, Hot Bath Street BA1 1SJ
www.thermaebathspa.com



If you took a trip back in time 2,000 years you'd probably still want to visit Bath. The Celts and Romans came here to take a dip in Britain's only naturally heated thermal spa. Now a Unesco World Heritage site, this elegant town houses state-of-the-art spa facilities in Thermae Bath Spa. As well as soaking in the mineral-rich thermal springs, you can luxuriate in the spa's rooftop pool

looking out over the spires, rooftops and chimney stacks of this honey-hued, Roman-meets-Regency city and indulge in the health and beauty treatments.

As health and fitness go, feeling refreshed and invigorated is just as important as feeling the burn so just lie back and relax. It's all good for you.



CAVING IN THE YORKSHIRE DALES

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK

Numerous caving and activity centres throughout the Yorkshire Dales
www.yorkshiredales.org.uk



Spread over 683 square miles the Yorkshire Dales are a beautiful landscape of gently tumbling countryside and wide valleys. And the limestone cliffs and gorges that characterise the picturesque scenery extend below it... way, way below. The cave system of the Dales is believed to be one of Britain's longest and most complex, with the Ease Gill system alone making up

an elaborate network of over 43 miles of known passageways and Gaping Gill cavern large enough to swallow St Paul's cathedral.

Under expert guidance, people can experience the heart-pounding excitement of caving at every level. Vertical caving, horizontal caving and potholing are all on offer as you suit-up and head down into a bewitching subterranean world.



CANOE ALONG THE WYE VALLEY

HEREFORDSHIRE

Numerous canoe and kayak hire centres in the Wye Valley AONB
www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk



The River Wye leisurely sweeps and twirls its way through the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Emerald green fields, deep limestone gorges and opaque hillside forests line its banks taking you through chic Regency market towns and past ancient castle ruins and riverbank pubs. Some stretches are best left to experienced canoeists, but chose your route carefully and you'll

encounter only tranquil waters.

An open-top Canadian canoe is the perfect way to experience the river in the hot summer months. Moor at Symonds Yat for some food and drink at The Saracen's Head Inn before walking to Symonds Yat Rock for a spectacular view of the valley and a glimpse of some peregrine falcons nesting in the surrounding cliffs.



WILD SWIMMING IN GRASSINGTON

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK

Grassington, Skipton
www.yorkshire.com



Grassington is an idyllic little Dales market town with a cobbled square, quirky shops and cosy pubs. It's also the ideal base for a spot of wild swimming. The surrounding area is bejewelled with plunge pools, cascading waterfalls and the pristine waters of the River Wharfe. You can ride a rubber ring down the chutes, just cool off with a paddle or brave the plunge pool at Loup Scar.

We recommend going in the comfortable warmth of summer but maybe we're just soft. Should your inner thermostat fail you, there are plenty of great countryside walks year round – head to Linton Falls, the largest falls on the Wharfe – and there's a grassy common near Grassington Wier that's just perfect for picnics.



SURFING IN NEWQUAY

CORNWALL

Fistral Beach, Headland Road, Newquay TR7 1HY
www.visitnewquay.org



The UK's surf capital, Newquay, on Cornwall's Atlantic coast, boasts some of the best surfing in Europe. Good-sized swells producing strong, hollow waves break on Fistral Beach. If you've no idea what a hollow wave looks like, you should probably take a lesson. The area is awash with surf shops, board manufacturers and surf schools catering for every level

of surfer, from veteran to beginner. The rush of adrenaline and thrill of catching your first wave is unforgettable, and you'll soon pick up on the surfer lingo. When you're confident on the board, or at least have got your head around the slang, head out for some post-surfing fun as the sun sets on this lively centre of surf culture.



ROCK CLIMB IN THE PEAK DISTRICT

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK

Numerous rock climbing centres throughout the Peak District



With 10,000 recorded climbs the Peak District is widely recognised as having some of the best climbing in the country. The beautiful formations at Dovedale, stark carapaces of The Roaches, dramatic gritstone crags of Windgather Rocks and the sinuous moor-top crest of Stanage Edge are places of pilgrimage for climbers from across the world. Spectacular views across

this inimitable landscape of stark limestone cliff faces, tors and crags erupting from sheep-cropped fields and moors are all yours, if you can make it to the top.

If you don't know your carabiners from your crimps, get in touch with one of the area's outdoor pursuits experts who will have your fingertips aching and your adrenaline soaring in no time.



UP AT THE O2

GREENWICH

The O2, Peninsula Square, London SE10 0DX

www.theo2.co.uk



Have a Bond-esque experience on the huge dome that dominates the Greenwich peninsula. The O2 is 52 metres high with a diameter of 365 metres. Inside, it's a vast entertainment venue with an enormous indoor arena, several restaurants and bars, a cinema and nightclub. But we're not interested in that part. Instead, don the safety gear and literally walk across the top.

You may remember 007 heading up here (and tumbling down it) in *The World Is Not Enough*. You won't be doing any tumbling yourself, but when you get your breath back at the apex you will experience 360-degree views of London, from the Thames Barrier to the Shard and beyond. Then there's the descent to contend with...



TREK FROM COAST TO COAST

NORTHERN ENGLAND

Between St Bees in Cumbria and Robin Hood's Bay in Yorkshire

www.wainwright.org.uk



Few things are more satisfying than crossing a country on foot. But when that cross-country trail passes through three national parks, the experience is intensified three-fold. Devised by legendary guidebook writer, Alfred Wainwright, the long-distance Coast-to-Coast trek unfurls across the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors.

Beginning on the shores of the

Irish Sea on the Cumbrian coast, the trail twists and turns for 182 miles through pristine countryside and quaint rural villages, coming to a very satisfactory end overlooking the waves of the North Sea at Robin Hood's Bay. There are plenty of places to stop, pitch up or spend the night in a B&B before getting cracking the next day, although few do this walk in one go.



LEARN THE ART OF MOUNTAIN BIKING

LAKE DISTRICT

CycleActive, Brougham Hall, Brougham, Penrith CA10 2DE
www.cycleactive.co.uk



Cumbria's rolling hills, wooded trails and vertiginous peaks make this rugged region a dream for keen (and wannabe) mountain bikers. The really good news is that you don't need to be a mountain biking maven to get involved.

At CycleActive in Penrith, Chris Ford and his team of expert guides are more than happy to hook you

up with a cycling holiday fit for your needs. Each of their holidays is graded according to skill level so you're sure to find the right one for you. Adrenalin junkies can choose to take on the daring all-mountain Three Summits, while newbies can learn to handle a bike like a pro on a one- or multi-day course at the Staveley trail centre.



GO APE IN SHERWOOD PINES

NOTTINGHAM

Go Ape Sherwood Pines, Edwinstowe NG21 9JH
www.goape.co.uk



Deep in the heart of Robin Hood country, Nottingham's Go Ape centre offers an adrenalin-pumping way to explore the vast 3,300-acre Sherwood Pines Forest Park. Watch the woodland floor spin almost 10 metres below you as you fly down zip wires, leap off Tarzan swings, crash into cargo nets and tackle some of the tricky obstacles along this heady tree top adventure. A

highlight is the 140 metre-long tree-to-tree zipline, where screaming as loud as you can on the way down isn't essential... but definitely fun!

As you're safely strapped into a harness at all time, Go Ape is perfect for days out with family and friends, though those with less of a head for heights can opt to take the hour-long Segway Tour through the forest instead.

99

WALK THE PENNINE WAY

NORTHERN ENGLAND

Starts at The Nags Head pub, Edale, Derbyshire
www.nationaltrail.co.uk



Experience the ultimate walking challenge with a 268-mile trek along the rugged backbone of England. The Pennine Way National Trail takes hardy walkers on an upwards journey through the Pennine Mountains, starting in the Peak District, then moving through the Yorkshire Dales and over Hadrian's Wall to the Cheviots. The best time to set out is between mid-May and

September, but hardy folks can attempt it year round.

The record for completion is held by Mike Hartley, who ran the route without any sleep in 2 days, 17 hours, 20 minutes and 15 seconds. It'll take most people 16-19 days to complete and, because of high altitudes and rough conditions, is not for the faint-hearted. Trek this and you'll be a legend.

100

RAFT DOWN AN OLYMPIC COURSE

ESSEX

Lee Valley White Water Centre, Station Road, Waltham Cross EN9 1AB
www.visitleevalley.org.uk



The London 2012 Canoe Slalom events host venue sets the bar high for adrenalin-pumping action. Relive the glory of Team GB's gold and silver medallists along the Olympic course, whose rapids, drops, boils and eddies are perfect for those craving their own white-water experience.

Each group gets to ride the rapids at least four times, and each

time it gets hairier and hairier. This all takes places under the watchful eye of an expert guide. That's not to say you won't be tipped into the water – in fact, some guides delight in guaranteeing it – but you will certainly get very wet indeed, and not just because part of the safety drill includes jumping in and floating feet first downriver.



BECAUSE IT'S AWESOME!

Cheese rolling at Cooper's Hill.....126

As a nation, the English have a reputation for being a little... eccentric. In a land as riddled with ancient traditions, myths and legends as this one, there's understandably no shortage of weird and wonderful spectacles, experiences and sights. Whether that's people hurling themselves down a dangerously steep hill after some cheese, a giant, ahem, 'appendage' carved into a hillside, or annual events in celebration of the most unlikely heroes (we're thinking garden gnomes), you're guaranteed an awesome experience to remember in England.



Category Judges:
Wallace & Gromit



101 Things to do

101

CHEESE ROLLING AT COOPER'S HILL

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Cooper's Hill, Brockworth, Gloucestershire GL3

www.cheese-rolling.co.uk



Judge's pick

 Gromit and I are delighted to announce the winner of the Because It's Awesome category: none other than Cheese Rolling, of course. (Reminds me of the old joke, lad: "How do you make a cheese roll? Push it down a hill!") This is one of the nation's fastest growing sports and bound to be granted Olympic status soon, along with its spin-off games: Cheddar-Chucking and Wensleydale-Wanging. Awesome indeed, eh Gromit?

WALLACE AND GROMIT

Every year on the last Monday of May, a group of what can only be described as crazy people hurl themselves down a very steep hill in pursuit of a large 7.8lb Double Gloucester cheese. The tradition is centuries old and is apparently rooted in a pagan ritual celebrating the return of spring. There are three men's races, and one ladies', with the first cheese rolled at midday.

Each race lasts about 30 seconds, if that, during which hundreds of competitors roll, bounce and slide down the 200-metre, 1:2 gradient slope. We're not suggesting you take part – it really is a mad thing to do, as proven by the broken bones – but join the huge and enthusiastic crowds to watch this awesome, unique and utterly English event.

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