SIXT

EUROPE'S BEST ROAD TRIPS

PART 1: THE BRITISH ISLES

Which route, how many days, what to see: 8 road trips through Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland, with distances, stages, best seasons and driving tips.

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ROAD-TRIPPING THE BRITISH ISLES

Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland: eight road trips, from day trips to three weeks on the road

IN SHORT

The British Isles pack an extraordinary range of road trips into short distances: the single-track coast roads of the Scottish Highlands, the castles and lochs between Edinburgh and Glasgow, Ireland's Atlantic cliffs, the villages and coast of southern England, and the mountain passes of Wales. This part of the guide covers eight trips (from a day out of the city to an 18-day tour of Scotland) with distances, days to allow, the best season and the driving rules you need for each.

A car is often the easiest way to reach many of the places in this guide. Many of the highlights (sea stacks on the north coast of Scotland, moorland roads on Dartmoor, the Gospel Pass in Wales, the Dingle Peninsula in Ireland) are hard to reach by train, and the joy of these routes is stopping wherever the view makes you.

Each road trip is based on SIXT's own road-trip articles, rewritten into one clear route per chapter and checked against official and credible sources in October 2026. Distances are given in kilometres with miles in brackets, because the UK uses miles and the Republic of Ireland uses kilometres.

Which road trip is right for you?

Road trip	Where	Distance	Time to allow	Best for	Best season
North Coast 500 (ch. 1)	Far north of Scotland, loop from Inverness	830 km (516 mi)	5 to 7 days minimum; about 9 to 10 days	Wild coast, beaches, castles, single-track roads	May to June, September
Classic Scotland (ch. 2)	Edinburgh → Highlands → Skye → Glasgow	About 1,020 km (635 mi)	About 18 days	Castles, lochs, film locations, whisky country	Late spring to early autumn
Ireland in 5 or 10 days (ch. 3)	Loops from Dublin, parts of the Wild Atlantic Way	About 680 km / 1,000 km	5 or 10 days	Castles, Atlantic cliffs, traditional music	Late spring and summer (May to June sunniest)
Southern England (ch. 4)	London → Cotswolds → Bath → Jurassic Coast → Cornwall	About 750 km (465 mi)	8 days	Villages, Roman and prehistoric sites, coast	Late spring to early autumn
Norman castles & oldest pubs (ch. 5)	Two history routes through England	About 457 km / 505 km	4 to 5 days each; 9 combined	Medieval history, castles, historic pubs	April to October

Road trip	Where	Distance	Time to allow	Best for	Best season
England's national parks (ch. 6)	Yorkshire Dales, Dartmoor, South Downs, New Forest	65 to 200 km per drive	1 to 2 days per drive	Moorland, chalk cliffs, forest wildlife	Depends on the park (see chapter)
Wales (ch. 7)	Eryri (Snowdonia) and Bannau Brycheiniog	39 to 152 km per drive	Half a day to 4 days	Mountain passes, lakes, castles	Late spring and early autumn
Day trips from UK cities (ch. 8)	12 cities, 71 day trips	Usually 15 to 110 km one way	1 day each	Short breaks, families, castles, coast	All year

Choose by the time you have

- One day: pick a day trip from the nearest city (chapter 8) or one national-park drive, such as the Dartmoor loop or the New Forest (chapter 6).
- A long weekend: one Eryri drive in Wales plus a second day in the park (chapter 7), or the South Downs with a night in Brighton (chapter 6).
- One week: Ireland's 5-day loop (chapter 3), the 8-day Southern England route (chapter 4) or one of the two history routes (chapter 5).
- Ten days: the North Coast 500 at a relaxed pace (chapter 1) or Ireland's 10-day loop with the Atlantic coast (chapter 3).
- Two to three weeks: the Classic Scotland route (chapter 2), or combine two routes; see 'Plan your British Isles road trip' at the end of this part.

Driving in the British Isles: seven things to know

- Drive on the left: in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (chapters 2 and 3).
- Speed limits are in mph in the UK and in km/h in the Republic of Ireland (chapter 3).
- Single-track roads with passing places are common in the Scottish Highlands and islands and on some Welsh passes: pull into a passing place on your left, or wait opposite one on your right, and never park in one (chapters 1, 2 and 7).
- City emission zones: London's Ultra Low Emission Zone covers all London boroughs, central London has a Congestion Charge, Birmingham and Bristol have Clean Air Zones, and Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee have Low Emission Zones. Check your car before you drive in (chapters 4, 5 and 8).
- In Wales, the default speed limit on most built-up roads is 20 mph (chapter 7).

- On Dartmoor and in the New Forest, ponies, cattle and sheep roam free on unfenced roads and a 40 mph limit applies on the open moor and forest (chapter 6).
- Some roads are tolled, such as the barrier-free M50 around Dublin (chapter 3).

When to go

For most routes in this guide, late spring to early autumn is the best time for a road trip: the days are long, the weather is at its mildest and seasonal attractions are open. Each region has its own rhythm:

- Scottish Highlands: May to June and September offer a good balance of light and weather; midges are active from about May to October and worst in high summer (chapters 1 and 2).
- Ireland: May and June are usually the sunniest months (chapter 3).
- Southern England and Cornwall: spring and early summer are quieter than the July to August peak, when traffic in Cornwall is heaviest (chapter 4).
- Wales: summer is by far the busiest season in Eryri; spring and autumn are quieter (chapter 7).
- Winter: mountain roads such as the Bealach na Bà, the Snow Roads and the Gospel Pass can close in snow; check road conditions before you set off (chapters 1, 2 and 7).

How to use this guide

Every chapter follows the same structure, so you can find answers fast:

- Quick answer: the route in a few sentences, with distance, days and best season.
- Route facts: a fact box with the key numbers.
- Route at a glance: every stage with distance and time to allow.
- Stage by stage: what to see and where to stop.
- Worth a detour: extra places within easy reach.
- Driving tips: road rules and practical advice for this route.
- FAQ: the questions travellers ask most.

Small reference marks such as [W1] point to the sources listed at the end of each chapter. Distances are given in kilometres with miles in brackets. Driving times are estimates; single-track and mountain roads take longer than the distance suggests.

1. NORTH COAST 500: SCOTLAND'S CLASSIC LOOP

Inverness → John o' Groats → Durness → Ullapool → Applecross → Inverness

QUICK ANSWER

The North Coast 500 (NC500) is a 516-mile (830 km) driving loop around the far north of Scotland that starts and ends in Inverness [W1][W2]. Allow at least 5 to 7 days; nearer 10 days if you want time for walks and stops [W1][W3]. Many sections, including main A-roads in the west and north, are single-track roads with passing places [W3]. Late spring and early autumn offer a good balance of long days and fewer midges [W6][W7].

Route facts

Route type	Loop (clockwise or anticlockwise)
Start / finish	Inverness
Total distance	516 miles (830 km) [W1][W2]
Recommended time	5 to 7 days minimum; about 10 days with walks and stops [W1][W3]
Our plan	5 stages, about 9 days
Best season	Late spring (May to June) and early autumn (September); midge season runs from mid-May to September and is worst in high summer [W6][W7]
Roads	Many single-track sections with passing places, especially in the west and north [W2][W3]
Highest point	Bealach na Bà pass to Applecross, about 626 m (2,053 ft) [W8]
Good for	Coastal scenery, castles, beaches, lochs, hiking, wildlife

Route at a glance

Stage	Route	Distance	Time to allow	Highlights
1	Inverness → John o' Groats (east coast)	about 195 km (120 mi)	2 days	Dornoch, Dunrobin Castle, Whaligoe Steps, Duncansby Stacks
2	John o' Groats → Durness (north coast)	146 km (91 mi)	1 day minimum	Dunnet Head, Kyle of Tongue, Loch Eriboll, Smoo Cave

Stage	Route	Distance	Time to allow	Highlights
3	Durness → Ullapool (west coast)	107 km (66 mi)	1 day minimum	Handa Island, Kylesku Bridge, Old Man of Stoer, Ardvreck Castle
4	Ullapool → Applecross (west coast)	about 180 to 235 km (112 to 146 mi)	2 days	Gairloch, Loch Maree, Torridon, Shieldaig, Bealach na Bà
5	Applecross → Inverness via Kyle of Lochalsh	193 km (120 mi)	3 days	Eilean Donan Castle, Isle of Skye, Loch Ness

Stage 5 of this route adds Kyle of Lochalsh and the Isle of Skye before returning to Inverness, so the stage totals differ from the official 830 km loop.

Stage by stage

Stage 1: Inverness to John o' Groats (lighthouses, castles and cliffs)

about 195 km (120 mi) · 2 days · east coast

The NC500 starts in Inverness, the capital of the Highlands. Explore the city before you leave, then head north along the east coast towards John o' Groats.

This is the stage of castles and coastal landmarks. Highlights include Dunrobin Castle, the Tarbat Ness Lighthouse and the Whaligoe Steps: more than 300 steps cut into the cliff down to an old harbour [W10]. The stage ends at the sea stacks of Duncansby, near John o' Groats.

Don't miss: Tarbat Ness Lighthouse · Dornoch village · Little Ferry beach · Dunrobin Castle · Whaligoe Steps · Sinclair Girnigoe Castle · Keiss and Bucholie castles · Duncansby Stacks

Stage 2: John o' Groats to Durness (beaches, lochs and mountains)

146 km (91 mi) · 1 day minimum · north coast

The north coast is where the ocean opens up in front of you: wild beaches, hidden lochs and big Highland landscapes.

Stop at Dunnet Head, the most northerly point of mainland Britain [W9]. Further west, the Kyle of Tongue (a saltwater sea loch) frames two striking mountains, Ben Loyal and Ben Hope. Around Loch Eriboll, look for the small Ard Neackie peninsula, then finish at Durness and the Smoo Cave sea cave.

Don't miss: Dunnet Head lighthouse · Strathy Bay beach · Kyle of Tongue · Ben Loyal and Ben Hope · Talmine and Skinnet beaches · Loch Eriboll and Ard Neackie · Ceannabeinne beach · Durness beach · Smoo Cave

Stage 3: Durness to Ullapool (fjord-like lochs, birds and sea stacks)

107 km (66 mi) · 1 day minimum · west coast

Heading south down the west coast, this stretch has some of the route's most dramatic scenery. One day is enough to drive it, but plan a night here if you want to walk.

Good walks along this stretch include Handa Island and its bird reserve, the viewpoints of Assynt and the Old Man of Stoer sea stack. Cross the Kylesku Bridge, pass Ardvreck Castle on Loch Assynt and finish in the harbour village of Ullapool.

Don't miss: Scourie · Handa Island bird reserve · Oldshoremore beach · Loch Inchard · Kylesku Bridge · Wailing Widow Falls · Old Man of Stoer · Ardvreck Castle · Ullapool

Stage 4: Ullapool to Applecross (mountains, lochs and hairpin bends)

about 180 to 235 km (112 to 146 mi) · 2 days · west coast

The classic NC500 line leaves Ullapool on the A835, then follows the A832 through Gairloch and along Loch Maree to Kinlochewe, and the A896 through Torridon to Shieldaig [W2]. The longer distance in the table includes detours such as Mellon Udrigle beach and the road to Red Point beach.

Expect wild mountains, lochs and Highland cattle and sheep. Take a break with the Beinn Eighe massif in Torridon as a backdrop. The stage ends over the Bealach na Bà, one of the highest and most challenging roads in Scotland, down to Applecross [W2]. If you prefer to avoid the pass, stay on the A896 via Shieldaig [W2].

Don't miss: An Teallach · Mellon Udrigle beach · Loch Ewe · Gruinard Bay beaches · Gairloch · Loch Maree · Red Point beach · Loch Torridon and Beinn Eighe · Shieldaig · Bealach na Bà · Applecross

Stage 5: Applecross to Inverness (Skye, castles and Loch Ness)

193 km (120 mi) · 3 days · west coast, then central Scotland

The official NC500 heads back from Applecross to Inverness via Lochcarron and Achnasheen [W2]. This route goes further south first, to Kyle of Lochalsh, for its loch scenery and the bridge to the Isle of Skye.

After exploring Skye, return towards Inverness past Eilean Donan Castle, and stop at Fort Augustus and Loch Ness on the way.

Don't miss: Duncraig Castle · Loch Carron · Kyle of Lochalsh · Isle of Skye · Loch Alsh · Eilean Donan Castle · Fort Augustus and Loch Ness

Worth a detour: day trips from Inverness

Place	How to get there and why
Loch Ness (Dores)	9 miles (about 20 min) on the B862. The B852 then follows the shore. A full drive around Loch Ness takes about 2 hours without stops.
Culloden Battlefield	6 miles (about 15 min) on the B9006. Site of the last battle of the Jacobite Rising, with a visitor centre; Clava Cairns are close by.
Cairngorms National Park (Carrbridge)	25 miles (about 40 min) on the A9. Old stone bridge, woodland walks and Loch Morlich beach near Aviemore.
Glen Affric	33 miles (about 1 hour) on the A82 and A831 via Drumnadrochit. A scenic glen where you may see red squirrels and red deer.
Ben Nevis	67 miles (about 1 h 45 min) on the A82 to Fort William, then Glen Nevis.

Driving tips for this route

- Single-track roads: pull into a passing place on your left, or wait opposite one on your right, to let oncoming traffic or faster drivers pass. Give way to traffic coming uphill, and never park in a passing place [W4].
- Plan for slow progress: single-track sections mean driving times are much longer than the distance suggests [W3].
- Bealach na Bà: rises to about 626 m (2,053 feet) with gradients of up to 1 in 5 and hairpin bends. Signs advise against it for learner drivers, very large vehicles and caravans, and it is unlikely to be open in winter [W2][W8].
- A smaller, narrower vehicle is easier on narrow roads and when turning round.
- Book accommodation well in advance, especially in summer [W1].
- Wild camping in a small tent, in small numbers and for no more than two or three nights in one place, is allowed under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, but access rights do not cover motor vehicles: park campervans only where it is permitted [W5].

Frequently asked questions

How long is the North Coast 500?
The NC500 is a 516-mile (830 km) loop around the north of Scotland, starting and finishing in Inverness [W1][W2].

How many days do you need for the North Coast 500?
Allow at least 5 to 7 days [W1]. If you want time for short walks and sightseeing stops, plan nearer 10 days [W3]. The 5-stage SIXT plan takes about 9 days.

Should you drive the NC500 clockwise or anticlockwise?
Either works; Undiscovered Scotland notes that anticlockwise has become more popular in recent years [W2]. The west coast is known for its scenery, so choose whether you want to start or finish with it.

When is the best time to drive the North Coast 500?
Late spring and early autumn offer a good balance of weather, long days and fewer midges; midge season runs from mid-May to September and is worst in high summer, when the route is also busiest [W6][W7].

Can you drive the Bealach na Bà?
Yes, in a normal car, with care: it is steep, single-track and full of hairpin bends, not advised for learner drivers, large vehicles or caravans, and often impassable in winter. You can skip it by staying on the A896 via Shieldaig [W2][W8].

Where can you stay overnight on the NC500?
Campsites at the edge of villages, hotels and B&Bs. Book ahead in summer [W1]. Wild camping in a small tent is allowed if you camp in small numbers, away from buildings and roads, and leave no trace; campervans must use permitted parking [W5].

Sources for this chapter

Based on the SIXT Magazine articles “830 km of pure bliss: 5 stages for a road trip on Scotland's North Coast 500” and “Best Day Trips from Inverness”. Facts marked [W#] come from these sources:

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	516-mile loop from Inverness; allow 5 to 7 days or more; drive carefully on single-track roads; book accommodation well in advance	VisitScotland: North Coast 500 (VisitScotland)
W2	516 miles / 830 km from Inverness Castle; anticlockwise increasingly popular; route roads A835, A832, A896; Bealach na Bà signs: unlikely open in winter, inadvisable for learners; A896 via Shieldaig avoids it	Undiscovered Scotland: North Coast 500 tour
W3	VisitScotland recommends at least 5 to 7 days, nearer 10 days for walks and stops; many single-track roads, including main A-roads in the west and north	Ordnance Survey (OS Maps): 10 best NC500 walks
W4	Rules 155 to 156: single-track roads, passing places, give way uphill, do not park in passing places	GOV.UK (Department for Transport): The Highway Code, rules 103 to 158
W5	Wild camping: small numbers, no more than two or three nights in one place; access rights do not include motor vehicles	NatureScot (Outdoor Access Scotland): Camping – Scottish Outdoor Access Code
W6	Midge season generally runs from mid-May to September, worst in the height of summer; midges are most active at dawn and dusk and in still, humid conditions	Visit Inverness Loch Ness (destination organisation): The Highland midge
W7	In north-west Scotland the midge is usually very prevalent from late spring to late summer; most active just before dawn and sunset; less active in wind	Wikipedia: Highland midge
W8	Bealach na Bà rises to 626 m (2,053 ft) with hairpin bends; gradients approach 20% (1 in 5); unsuitable for learner drivers and very large vehicles; often impassable in winter; warning sign at the start says it is not suitable for learner drivers, large vehicles or caravans	Wikipedia: Bealach na Bà
W9	Dunnet Head (Easter Head) is the most northerly point of mainland Great Britain; lighthouse built 1831	Wikipedia: Dunnet Head
W10	Whaligoe Steps: counts range from 330 (RCAHMS) to 365 (local sources); about 250 ft high, down to Whaligoe harbour	Undiscovered Scotland: Whaligoe Steps

2. CLASSIC SCOTLAND: EDINBURGH, THE HIGHLANDS, LOCHS & GLASGOW

Edinburgh → Perthshire → Cairngorms (Snow Roads) → Inverness → Loch Ness → Isle of Skye → Glenfinnan → Glen Coe → Loch Lomond → Glasgow

QUICK ANSWER

This classic Scotland road trip links Edinburgh and Glasgow in a one-way route of about 1,020 km (635 miles), plus extra drives on the Isle of Skye. It crosses the Cairngorms on the 90-mile (145 km) Snow Roads, follows Loch Ness to Skye, then returns south via Glenfinnan, Glen Coe and Loch Lomond [W9]. Allow about 18 days for the 9 stages. Summer has the warmest weather and the longest days; midges are active from May to October, peaking in mid-summer [W25][W26]. Many rural roads are single-track with passing places, and Edinburgh and Glasgow have Low Emission Zones [W23][W24].

Route facts

Route type	One way (Edinburgh to Glasgow)
Start / finish	Edinburgh / Glasgow
Total distance	About 1,020 km (635 mi), not counting drives on the Isle of Skye [W35]
Recommended time	About 18 days; at least 2 days each for Edinburgh and Glasgow and 3 days for Skye
Our plan	9 stages, about 18 days
Best season	Late spring to early autumn; June to August is warmest with the longest days; midges May to October, peak in mid-summer [W25][W26]
Roads	Motorways and A-roads in the south; many single-track rural roads with passing places in the Highlands and islands [W23]
Highest point	Cairnwell Pass on the Snow Roads, 670 m (2,199 ft) [W9]
Low Emission Zones	Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee city centres [W23][W24]
Good for	Castles, lochs, mountains, film locations, whisky country, wildlife, hiking

Route at a glance

Stage	Route	Distance	Time to allow	Highlights
1	Edinburgh (city)	On foot	2 days	Edinburgh Castle, Royal Mile, Holyrood Palace, Arthur's Seat
2	Edinburgh → Scone Palace → Glamis Castle → Blairgowrie	138 km (86 mi)	1 day	Scone Palace, Moot Hill, Glamis Castle
3	Blairgowrie → Snow Roads → Grantown-on-Spey → Aviemore	184 km (114 mi)	2 days	Cairnwell Pass, Braemar, Balmoral, Ballater, Tomintoul, Nethy Bridge
4	Aviemore → Culloden → Inverness → Loch Ness → Fort Augustus	111 km (69 mi)	2 days	Culloden, Clava Cairns, Inverness, Urquhart Castle, Dores
5	Fort Augustus → Eilean Donan → Skye Bridge → Portree	150 km (93 mi), plus drives on Skye	3 days	Eilean Donan Castle, Old Man of Storr, Quiraing, Dunvegan, Loch Coruisk
6	Skye → Mallaig (ferry) → Loch Eilt → Glenfinnan → Fort William	137 km (85 mi) plus the ferry	1 day	Loch Eilt, Glenfinnan Viaduct, Loch Shiel
7	Fort William → Kinlochleven → Glen Coe	47 km (29 mi)	2 days	Loch Leven, Glen Coe, Buachaille Etive Mòr, Glencoe Lochan
8	Glen Coe → Castle Stalker → Loch Awe → Loch Lomond	147 km (91 mi)	2 days	Castle Stalker, Kilchurn Castle, Luss, Ben Lomond
9	Loch Lomond → Loch Katrine → Glasgow	108 km (67 mi)	3 days	Loch Katrine, the Trossachs, Kelvingrove, Glasgow Necropolis

Distances are approximate driving distances between the stage end points, calculated with OpenStreetMap routing; they do not include sightseeing drives on the Isle of Skye. The far-north coast (North Coast 500) is not part of this route: see chapter 1 and the extension in 'Worth a detour'. Stage distances are approximate road distances [W35].

Stage by stage

Stage 1: Edinburgh (castle, Royal Mile and Arthur's Seat)

On foot · 2 days · Scottish capital

Start in Scotland's capital and explore it on foot. The Royal Mile runs through the medieval Old Town and links Edinburgh Castle, on Castle Rock, with the Palace of Holyroodhouse.

Climb Arthur's Seat for a view over the Old Town, visit the National Museum of Scotland for the country's history, and go underground at Mary King's Close. If you are at the castle at 1 pm, you will hear the One O'Clock Gun, fired every day except Sundays, Good Friday and Christmas Day [W15].

Edinburgh city centre is a Low Emission Zone: older vehicles that do not meet the standard may be fined, so check your vehicle before you drive in [W23][W24].

Don't miss: Edinburgh Castle · Royal Mile · Palace of Holyroodhouse · Arthur's Seat · National Museum of Scotland · Mary King's Close · One O'Clock Gun

Stage 2: Edinburgh to Blairgowrie (Scone Palace and Glamis Castle)

138 km (86 mi) · 1 day · Perthshire and Angus

Head north to Perth and Scone Palace. Scone was the crowning place of the Kings of Scots, and Moot Hill in the grounds was their inauguration site [W14]. The present palace was built in the Gothic Revival style in the early 19th century [W14]. Expect richly decorated rooms, large gardens and free-roaming peacocks.

Continue to Glamis Castle, with its high turrets, conical roofs and ghost stories. End the day in Blairgowrie, the southern start of the Snow Roads.

Don't miss: Perth · Scone Palace · Moot Hill · Glamis Castle · Blairgowrie

Stage 3: The Snow Roads (Blairgowrie to Grantown-on-Spey and Aviemore)

184 km (114 mi) · 2 days · Cairngorms National Park

The Snow Roads scenic route runs about 90 miles (145 km) from Blairgowrie to Grantown-on-Spey, through Braemar, Ballater and Tomintoul [W9]. Its highest point is the Cairnwell Pass, 670 m (2,199 feet), by the Glenshee Ski Centre; VisitCairngorms describes the route as crossing the highest public road in Britain [W9]. It can be driven in either direction. The Cairngorms National Park covers 4,528 km² (1,748 square miles) and is the largest national park in the UK [W10]. Its mountains belong to the Grampians, which run from north-east to south-west across the Highlands [W12].

North of Glenshee, Braemar has a castle built in 1628 [W29]. On the way to Ballater you pass Balmoral Castle, the private property of King Charles III, built in 1853 to 1856; its grounds and gardens open to visitors seasonally: check the official Balmoral website (balmoralcastle.com) before you go [W8]. Ballater is a Victorian village, and Loch Muick lies close by. At Tomintoul, the Glenlivet estate has hiking and biking trails.

Grantown-on-Spey was founded in 1765 as a planned town on the River Spey [W28]. Take the B970 to Nethy Bridge, between the Cairngorm mountains and Abernethy forest, home of the Abernethy Highland Games and a Thomas Telford bridge. End in Aviemore: ride the Strathspey Steam Railway, visit the Cairngorm Reindeer Centre, and ski on Cairn Gorm in winter or climb it in summer.

Don't miss: Glenshee Ski Centre (summer chairlift) · Cairnwell Pass · Braemar Castle · Balmoral Castle · Ballater · Loch Muick · Tomintoul and the Glenlivet estate · The Lecht · Grantown-on-Spey · Nethy Bridge and Abernethy forest · Aviemore · Strathspey Steam Railway · Cairngorm Reindeer Centre

Stage 4: Aviemore to Fort Augustus (Culloden, Inverness and Loch Ness)

111 km (69 mi) · 2 days · Inverness and the Great Glen

On the way to Inverness, stop at Culloden Moor. The Battle of Culloden on 16 April 1746 ended the Jacobite rising of 1745 and was the last pitched battle fought on British soil [W16]. The Clava Cairns,

ancient passage tombs and standing stones, are close by. In Inverness, the capital of the Highlands, walk through the Victorian Market and along the River Ness. On the Moray Firth you have a good chance of seeing dolphins.

Then follow Loch Ness south-west. The loch is about 37 km (23 miles) long and, because of its great depth, the largest lake by volume in the British Isles [W1]. Stop at the ruins of Urquhart Castle. For a beach, drive 14 km (9 miles) from Inverness on the B862 to Dores, then follow the B852 along the shore; a full drive around the loch takes about 2 hours without stops.

Walkers can follow the Great Glen Way, 127 km (79 miles) from Fort William to Inverness, in four to seven days [W33][W36], or the Loch Ness 360 Trail around the loch. End the day at Fort Augustus, at the southern end of the loch.

Don't miss: Culloden Battlefield · Clava Cairns · Victorian Market, Inverness · River Ness · Moray Firth (dolphins) · Dores beach · Urquhart Castle · Fort Augustus

Stage 5: Fort Augustus to the Isle of Skye (Eilean Donan, Storr and Quiraing)

150 km (93 mi), plus drives on Skye · 3 days · west Highlands and Skye

Drive west to the A87 and Eilean Donan Castle. It stands on an island where three sea lochs meet, about a kilometre from Dornie, linked to the shore by a footbridge [W18]. The present buildings date from a reconstruction in 1912 to 1932, and [W37] the castle appears in Highlander and the James Bond film The World Is Not Enough [W18]. Nearby are the Five Sisters of Kintail, the two brochs at Glenelg and the harbour village of Plockton.

Cross the Skye Bridge over Loch Alsh to Kyleakin; the bridge has been toll-free since December 2004 [W17]. Base yourself in Portree. In the north, on the Trotternish peninsula, a path from the A855 north of Loch Leathan climbs to the Old Man of Storr rock pinnacle [W21]. Further north, the road over the Quiraing gives a wide view down to Staffin Bay.

In the west, Dunvegan Castle overlooks the loch of the same name; it is the seat of the chiefs of Clan MacLeod, first built in the 13th century [W13]. Explore the Waternish peninsula, the Cuillin mountains, Glenbrittle beach and the Fairy Pools. Loch Coruisk, below the Black Cuillin, is reached only by boat from Elgol or on foot; local legend says a kelpie, a shape-shifting water horse, lives in it [W20].

Don't miss: Eilean Donan Castle · Five Sisters of Kintail · Glenelg brochs · Plockton · Skye Bridge and Kyleakin · Portree · Old Man of Storr · Quiraing · Dunvegan Castle · Waternish peninsula · Cuillin mountains and Glenbrittle beach · Fairy Pools · Elgol and Loch Coruisk

Stage 6: Skye to Fort William (Loch Eilt and the Glenfinnan Viaduct)

137 km (85 mi) plus the ferry · 1 day · Road to the Isles

Leave Skye on the CalMac ferry from Armadale to Mallaig. The route runs all year, with a reduced winter timetable, and booking [W38] is advisable [W22]. If you prefer to drive, return over the Skye Bridge and take the A87 and A82 to Fort William, then drive out to Glenfinnan and back: about 231 km (144 miles).

From Mallaig, the A830 runs along the north shore of Loch Eilt. Its small island, Eilean na Moine, was used for Dumbledore's grave in the Harry Potter films [W19]. At Glenfinnan, the viaduct crosses the valley

at the top of Loch Shiel on 21 arches; it is about 380 m long and 30 m high, and the railway line opened in 1901 [W5].

The Jacobite steam train, used as the Hogwarts Express in the films, runs between Fort William and Mallaig in the summer season, roughly June to October (check the operator's dates) [W6][W39]. Follow the path to the viewpoint above the viaduct, with the loch behind it, and visit the small museum at Glenfinnan station. End the day in Fort William.

Don't miss: Armadale to Mallaig ferry · Loch Eilt and Eilean na Moine · Glenfinnan Viaduct viewpoint · Loch Shiel · Glenfinnan station museum · Fort William

Stage 7: Fort William to Glen Coe (Loch Leven and the Skyfall glen)

47 km (29 mi) · 2 days · Lochaber

Drive around Loch Leven, a saltwater arm of Loch Linnhe (not to be confused with the freshwater Loch Leven north of Edinburgh). Spend a night in Kinlochleven at the head of the loch.

Glen Coe is the valley; Glencoe is the village inside it. Plan at least a day here: walk in the Glen Coe National Nature Reserve, try the Glencoe Lochan trail around a small loch, visit the Glencoe Folk Museum or Glencoe Mountain Resort. Glen Coe is one of the filming locations of the James Bond film Skyfall, and the Buachaille Etive Mòr mountain is the classic photo backdrop.

Red deer and stags often stand beside the road. Watch for deer-crossing signs, and do not feed them: human food damages their health [W23][W27].

Don't miss: Loch Leven · Kinlochleven · Glencoe village · Glen Coe National Nature Reserve · Glencoe Lochan trail · Glencoe Folk Museum · Glencoe Mountain Resort · Buachaille Etive Mòr

Stage 8: Glen Coe to Loch Lomond (Castle Stalker, Loch Awe and the Highland edge)

147 km (91 mi) · 2 days · Argyll and Loch Lomond

Head south on the A828 to Castle Stalker, on a tidal islet in Loch Laich off Loch Linnhe, roughly halfway between Glen Coe and Oban [W7]. The castle is privately owned and open only for a few tours by prior appointment, and it appeared in Monty Python and the Holy Grail [W7]; at high tide the view from the shore is at its best.

Turn inland to Loch Awe, the longest freshwater loch in Scotland at 41 km (25 miles) [W3]. From the village of Lochawe you see Kilchurn Castle, at the northern end of the loch, with Ben Lui behind [W3]. Hikers can climb Ben Cruachan.

Continue to Loch Lomond, 36.4 km (22.6 miles) long and the largest lake in Great Britain by surface area [W2]. It spans the Highland Boundary Fault, often seen as the line between Lowlands and Highlands [W2]. Visit the village of Luss, take a loch cruise, climb Ben Lomond or walk to the Falls of Falloch. From Balmaha, Conic Hill gives a classic view over the loch.

Don't miss: Castle Stalker · Loch Awe · Kilchurn Castle · Ben Cruachan · Loch Lomond cruise · Luss · Ben Lomond · Falls of Falloch · Conic Hill (Balmaha)

Stage 9: Loch Lomond to Glasgow (Loch Katrine and the Trossachs)

108 km (67 mi) · 3 days · the Trossachs and Glasgow

Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park was established in 2002 as Scotland's first national park and covers 1,865 km² (720 square miles) [W11]. Loch Katrine, in the Trossachs, is about 13 km (8 miles) long. The steamship Sir Walter Scott has sailed it since 1900, between Trossachs Pier and Stronachlachar [W4]. Rob Roy MacGregor was born at the head of the loch in 1671 [W4]. The loch's name is often said to come from 'cateran', a word for the wild bands of armed warriors who made their living by terrorising the Highlands [W34]. Outlander fans will recognise the loch from a scene in the season 2 finale [W40].

End in Glasgow and allow two days. Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum holds Salvador Dalí's Christ of Saint John of the Cross [W30]. Visit the Hunterian Museum and the Mackintosh House, a reconstruction of the home of the Art Nouveau architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh, see the St Mungo street-art mural, walk through the Necropolis by Glasgow Cathedral, and finish in Glasgow Green, the city's oldest park, established in the 15th century [W31].

Glasgow city centre is a Low Emission Zone, enforced for most vehicles since 1 June 2023 [W24].

Don't miss: Loch Katrine and the SS Sir Walter Scott · Trossachs Pier · Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum · Hunterian Museum · The Mackintosh House · St Mungo mural · Glasgow Necropolis · Glasgow Cathedral · Glasgow Green

Worth a detour

Place	How to get there and why
North Coast 500 (from Inverness)	Extend stage 4 with the 830 km (516 mi) loop around the far north of Scotland: see chapter 1.
St Andrews (from Dundee or Perthshire)	23 km (14 mi) from Dundee on the A91, just under 30 min. Seven golf courses, including the Old Course; book a tee time in peak season.
Kingussie and Newtonmore (from Aviemore)	About 23 km (14 mi) south on the A9. Highland Folk Museum, and a track from Newtonmore up A'Chailleach, a Munro (a Scottish mountain over 3,000 ft / 914 m).
Glen Affric (from Loch Ness)	Via Drumnadrochit on the A831. A scenic glen west of Loch Ness, with Loch Affric.
Inverness to Skye, northern route	169 km (105 mi), about 2 h 30 min: the A835, then the A832 to Achnasheen, the A890 to Auchtertyre and the A87 to Skye. Stretch your legs at Loch Dùghaill (Loch Doule) by the A890 near Achnashellach [W32].
Coldingham Bay (from Edinburgh)	76 km (47 mi): the A1 along the coast to Old Cambus, then the A1107. Sandy beach and rock pools; Eyemouth is 10 min further down the coast.
Family days out near Edinburgh and Glasgow	Five Sisters Zoo is 35 km (22 mi) from Edinburgh on the A71, under 1 hour. M&D's Scotland's Theme Park is 21 km (13 mi) from Glasgow on the M74, about 25 min.

Driving tips for this route

- Drive on the left at all times [W23].
- Single-track roads: many rural roads in the Highlands and on the islands have one lane with passing places. Pull into a passing place to let oncoming traffic pass [W23]. Plan extra time: progress is slower than the distance suggests.
- Low Emission Zones: Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee have LEZs that operate 24 hours a day, checked by number-plate cameras [W23][W24]. The minimum standard is generally Euro 4 for petrol cars (registered from about 2006) and Euro 6 for diesel cars (from about September 2015) [W24].
- Winter: snow falls on 15 to 20 days a year on average across Scotland and more often on high ground, and the Snow Roads climb to 670 m (2,199 feet); check Traffic Scotland for closures before you set off [W9][W23].
- Animals on the road: expect sheep, cattle and deer on rural roads, and watch for deer-crossing signs [W23]. Do not feed deer [W27].
- Midges: most active at dawn and dusk and on calm, damp days from May to October; carry repellent [W25].
- Ferries: book the Armadale to Mallaig crossing in advance, especially in summer [W22].

Frequently asked questions

What is the best road trip route around Scotland?
A classic one-way route runs about 1,020 km (635 miles) from Edinburgh to Glasgow: Perthshire, the Cairngorms Snow Roads, Inverness and Loch Ness, the Isle of Skye, Glenfinnan, Glen Coe and Loch Lomond, in 9 stages.

How many days do you need for a road trip in Scotland?
Allow about 18 days for this route: 2 days each in Edinburgh and Glasgow, 3 days on the Isle of Skye and 1 to 2 days for each driving stage. If you have more time, add the North Coast 500 from Inverness (chapter 1).

When is the best time for a Scotland road trip?
Late spring to early autumn. June to August is the warmest period with very long days; midges are active from May to October and peak in mid-summer [W25][W26].

What are the Snow Roads in Scotland?
A scenic route of about 90 miles (145 km) through the Cairngorms National Park, from Blairgowrie to Grantown-on-Spey via Braemar, Ballater and Tomintoul. It climbs to 670 m (2,199 feet) at the Cairnwell Pass [W9].

Where can you see the Harry Potter train in Scotland?
At the Glenfinnan Viaduct, 380 m long and 30 m high, at the top of Loch Shiel [W5]. The Jacobite steam train crosses it between Fort William and Mallaig in the summer season, roughly June to October [W6][W39].

Do you need to pay to drive into Edinburgh or Glasgow?
No entry charge, but both city centres are Low Emission Zones: non-compliant vehicles get a penalty charge. Glasgow has enforced its LEZ since June 2023 and Edinburgh since June 2024 [W24].

Sources for this chapter

Based on the SIXT Magazine articles “Road trip in Scotland: how to pick up a Scottish accent in 10 steps”, “Our 10 legendary stops on a 100% Scottish lakes road trip”, “Scotland: 7 Magical Places from Harry Potter To James Bond”, “Driving in the Cairngorms: Scenic Routes and Stops” and “Best Day Trips in Scotland”. Facts marked [W#] come from these sources:

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	Loch Ness is about 37 km (23 mi) long; due to its great depth it is the largest lake by volume in the British Isles	Wikipedia: Loch Ness
W2	Loch Lomond is 36.4 km (22.6 mi) long, the largest lake in Great Britain by surface area, and spans the Highland Boundary Fault	Wikipedia: Loch Lomond
W3	Loch Awe is the longest freshwater loch in Scotland, 41 km (25 mi); Kilchurn Castle at its northern end	Wikipedia: Loch Awe
W4	Loch Katrine about 8 miles (13 km) long; SS Sir Walter Scott has sailed since 1900 between Trossachs Pier and Stronachlachar; Rob Roy born 1671 at the head of the loch	Wikipedia: Loch Katrine
W5	Glenfinnan Viaduct: 21 arches, about 380 m long, 30 m high, at the top of Loch Shiel in Lochaber, north-western Scotland; line opened 1 April 1901	Wikipedia: Glenfinnan Viaduct
W6	The Jacobite runs 41 miles (66 km) between Fort William and Mallaig, from April through October; used as the Hogwarts Express	Wikipedia: The Jacobite (steam train)
W7	Castle Stalker: tidal islet on Loch Laich off Loch Linnhe; seen from the A828 roughly halfway between Oban and Glen Coe; reachable on foot only at low tide; Monty Python and the Holy Grail	Wikipedia: Castle Stalker
W8	Balmoral is the private property of King Charles III; built 1853 to 1856; within the Cairngorms National Park; grounds and gardens open to visitors seasonally (opening days and hours change)	Wikipedia: Balmoral Castle
W9	Snow Roads: about 90 miles, Blairgowrie to Grantown-on-Spey via Braemar, Ballater and Tomintoul; highest point Cairnwell Pass 670 m (2,199 ft) by Glenshee Ski Centre; 'traverses the highest public road in Britain'; in winter check Traffic Scotland for closures	VisitCairngorms: 10 reasons to drive the Snow Roads
W10	Cairngorms National Park: 4,528 km² (1,748 sq mi), the largest national park in the United Kingdom; designated 2003	Wikipedia: Cairngorms National Park
W11	Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park: 1,865 km² (720 sq mi), established 1 July 2002, the first of Scotland's two national parks	Wikipedia: Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park

Ref	Fact	Source
W12	The Grampians extend north-east to south-west between the Highland Boundary Fault and the Great Glen; the Cairngorms are usually included	Wikipedia: Grampian Mountains
W13	Dunvegan Castle is the seat of the MacLeod of MacLeod, chief of Clan MacLeod; first construction 13th century	Wikipedia: Dunvegan Castle
W14	Scone: crowning place of the Kings of Scots; Moot Hill the inauguration site; present palace Gothic Revival by William Atkinson, 1802 to 1807	Wikipedia: Scone Palace
W15	The One O'Clock Gun is fired every day at 1 pm, except on Sundays, Good Friday and Christmas Day	Historic Environment Scotland (Edinburgh Castle): One o'Clock Gun
W16	Battle of Culloden, 16 April 1746, ended the Jacobite rising of 1745; the last pitched battle fought on British soil	Wikipedia: Battle of Culloden
W17	Skye Bridge crosses Loch Alsh; tolls ended in December 2004	Wikipedia: Skye Bridge
W18	Eilean Donan: island where three sea lochs meet, about 1 km from Dornie; footbridge; rebuilt 1919 to 1932; Highlander (1986) and The World Is Not Enough (1999)	Wikipedia: Eilean Donan
W19	Eilean na Moine in Loch Eilt was used for Dumbledore's grave; the A830 runs along the north shore	Wikipedia: Loch Eilt
W20	Loch Coruisk lies below the Black Cuillin; reached by boat from Elgol or on foot (from Sligachan, about 11 to 13 km); said to be home to a kelpie	Wikipedia: Loch Coruisk
W21	The Storr is on the Trotternish peninsula; a path leaves the A855 just north of Loch Leathan	Wikipedia: The Storr
W22	Mallaig to Armadale ferry operated by CalMac; runs year-round, limited at winter weekends; booking advisable	Undiscovered Scotland: Mallaig to Armadale ferry
W23	Drive on the left; single-lane roads with passing places; snow on 15 to 20 days on average, check Traffic Scotland; farm animals and wildlife, deer-crossing signs; LEZs in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee	VisitScotland: Driving in Scotland
W24	LEZ enforcement: Glasgow 1 June 2023 (residents 1 June 2024), Edinburgh and Aberdeen 1 June 2024, Dundee 30 May 2024; Euro 4 petrol (generally from January 2006), Euro 6 diesel (generally from September 2015)	Transport Scotland: Low Emission Zones introduced across Scotland
W25	Midge season typically May to October, peak in mid-summer; most active at dawn and dusk in still, damp conditions	VisitScotland: A guide to midges & ticks in Scotland
W26	June, July and August are normally the warmest months; summer days are very long; snowsports season November to April	VisitScotland: Weather in Scotland
W27	Signs at Beinn Eighe ask visitors not to feed deer; a stag fed by tourists had to be put down; human food damages deer health	BBC Wildlife (Discover Wildlife): Famous stag put down after tourists feed it croissants

Ref	Fact	Source
W28	Grantown-on-Spey was founded in 1765 as a planned settlement by Sir James Grant	Wikipedia: Grantown-on-Spey
W29	The main tower of Braemar Castle was built in 1628 by John Erskine, Earl of Mar	Undiscovered Scotland: Braemar Castle
W30	Kelvingrove houses Christ of Saint John of the Cross by Salvador Dalí	Wikipedia: Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum
W31	Glasgow Green, established in the 15th century, is the oldest park in the city	Wikipedia: Glasgow Green
W32	Loch Dùghaill (anglicised Loch Doule or Loch Doughaill) is on the River Carron near Achnashellach; the A890 runs along its north-west shore	Wikipedia: Loch Dùghaill
W33	Great Glen Way: 125 km (78 mi) from Fort William to Inverness; five to seven days on foot	Wikipedia: Great Glen Way
W34	Official sources say the name Katrine comes from 'Cateran', a word used for wild bands of armed warriors who made their living from terrorising the Highlands	Hidden Scotland: How Loch Katrine got its name
W35	Approximate stage road distances: stage 2 about 139 km, 3 about 170 km (incl. Nethy Bridge), 4 about 111 km, 5 about 148 km, 6 68 km + 69 km road (ferry excluded), 7 about 48 km, 8 about 136 km, 9 95 km from Balloch or 122 km from Tarbet; total about 1,020 km.	Project OSRM / Valhalla (OpenStreetMap): OSRM and Valhalla route calculations (OpenStreetMap data)
W36	Great Glen Way: 79 miles (127 km) from Fort William to Inverness, usually walked in 4 to 7 days	The Highland Council: Great Glen Way: route facts and figures
W37	Eilean Donan Castle was rebuilt between 1912 and 1932	Canmore (Historic Environment Scotland): Eilean Donan Castle
W38	Mallaig to Armadale ferry: summer and winter timetables; a smaller vessel in winter	CalMac Ferries: Mallaig to Armadale route information
W39	The Jacobite runs between Fort William and Mallaig in a summer season (2026: 1 June to 23 October); dates change every year	West Coast Railways: The Jacobite
W40	Brenachoile Point on Loch Katrine was used in the season 2 finale of Outlander	See Loch Lomond: Brenachoile Point, Loch Katrine

3. IRELAND IN 5 OR 10 DAYS (PLUS NORTHERN IRELAND)

Dublin → Kilkenny → Cork → Killarney → Dingle → Limerick → Cliffs of Moher → Galway → Dublin

QUICK ANSWER

Two loops from Dublin cover the classic sights of the Republic of Ireland. The 5-day loop (Dublin → Limerick → Cork → Dublin) is about 680 km (420 miles) of driving [W7]. The 10-day loop adds Waterford, Dingle, the Cliffs of Moher and Galway, about 1,000 km (620 miles) [W7]. On the 10-day loop, Dingle and the Clare coast to Galway are part of the Wild Atlantic Way, a 2,500 km coastal route [W1][W2]. Ireland drives on the left; speed limits are in km/h in the Republic and in mph in Northern Ireland [W3]. May and June are usually the sunniest months [W8].

Route facts

Route type	Two loops (5 or 10 days), both starting and ending in Dublin
Start / finish	Dublin
Total distance	5-day loop: about 680 km (420 mi); 10-day loop: about 1,000 km (620 mi) [W7]
Recommended time	5 days for the highlights; 10 days to add the Atlantic coast and Galway
Our plan	5-day loop with 3 driving days; 10-day loop with 4 driving days
Best season	Late spring and summer; May and June are usually the sunniest months [W8]
Roads	Motorways and national roads between cities; narrower roads on the Dingle Peninsula and the Clare coast. The M50 around Dublin has a barrier-free toll [W5]
Wild Atlantic Way	The 10-day loop follows parts of it: Dingle (County Kerry), the Cliffs of Moher (County Clare) and Galway [W1][W2]
Good for	Castles, monastic ruins, national parks, Atlantic cliffs, traditional music, city breaks

Route at a glance

Day	Route	Distance	Time to allow	Highlights
5-day:	Dublin	–	1 day	Guinness Storehouse

Day	Route	Distance	Time to allow	Highlights
Day 1				
5-day: Day 2	Dublin → Kildare → Limerick	200 km (124 mi)	1 day (about 2 h 30 min driving)	St Brigid's Cathedral, Irish National Stud & Gardens, Curragh Racecourse, River Shannon
5-day: Day 3	Limerick → Killarney → Blarney → Cork	205 km (126 mi)	1 day (about 3 h driving)	Killarney National Park, Muckross Abbey, Blarney Castle & Gardens
5-day: Day 4	Cork	–	1 day	Cork City Gaol, Charles Fort, English Market, University College Cork
5-day: Day 5	Cork → Cahir → Kilkenny → Dublin	about 270 km (170 mi)	1 day (about 3 h 30 min driving)	Cahir Castle, Kilkenny, Smithwick's Experience
10-day: Day 1 to 2	Dublin	–	2 days	Guinness Storehouse, Temple Bar, Trinity College
10-day: Day 3	Dublin → Kilkenny → Waterford → Cork	300 km (188 mi)	1 day (about 4 h driving)	Kilkenny Castle, Reginald's Tower, Waterford Crystal
10-day: Day 4	Cork and Cork Harbour	–	1 day	Cork's museums and landmarks, Cork Harbour
10-day: Day 5	Cork → Killarney National Park → Dingle → Limerick	305 km (190 mi)	1 long day (about 4 h 45 min driving)	Torc Waterfall, Dingle harbour, dolphins and marine life
10-day: Day 6	Limerick	–	1 day	Rugby, medieval history
10-day: Day 7	Limerick → Cliffs of Moher → Galway	about 155 km (96 mi)	1 day (about 2 h 30 min to 3 h driving)	Wild Atlantic Way, Cliffs of Moher

Day	Route	Distance	Time to allow	Highlights
10-day: Day 8 to 9	Galway	–	2 days	Eyre Square, Latin Quarter, Salthill promenade, Blackrock Diving Tower
10-day: Day 10	Galway → Clonmacnoise → Dublin	about 210 km (130 mi)	1 day (about 3 h driving)	Clonmacnoise Monastic Site

Distances are for the driving days only; days marked '–' are spent in one city. All distances were checked with a routing service [W7]. Driving times are without stops.

Stage by stage

Day 1 to 2: Dublin (the capital and starting point)

10-day loop · 2 days · no driving

Both loops start in Dublin, which has Ireland's largest airport. The 10-day plan gives you two full days in the city before you drive.

Tour the Guinness Storehouse to learn the history of the brand, how the stout is brewed and how to pour a pint. Then walk around Trinity College and spend an evening in Temple Bar.

Don't miss: Guinness Storehouse · Trinity College · Temple Bar

Day 3: Dublin to Cork (Kilkenny and Viking Waterford)

300 km (188 mi) · about 4 h driving · south-east

Head south from Dublin to Kilkenny, about 1 hour 30 minutes away. If you leave in the late morning, stop for lunch and visit Kilkenny Castle.

Continue 45 minutes to Waterford. The Vikings re-established a settlement here in 914, and Waterford is described as the oldest city in the Republic of Ireland [W11]. See the remains of the city walls and Reginald's Tower, the oldest urban civic building in the country and now a museum [W11]. The Waterford Crystal visitor centre is in the city's Viking Quarter [W11]. From Waterford it is about 1 hour 50 minutes to Cork.

Don't miss: Kilkenny Castle · Waterford city walls · Reginald's Tower · Waterford Crystal visitor centre

Day 4: Cork (city and harbour)

10-day loop · 1 day · no long drive

Cork is the second-largest city in the Republic of Ireland [W13]. Spend the day on its museums and landmarks, or go out to Cork Harbour.

For history, visit Cork City Gaol, a 19th-century prison that is now a museum, and Charles Fort near Kinsale, a 17th-century fortification with sea views. The English Market is a covered food market from the 18th century. Finish with a walk through the campus of University College Cork along the river.

Don't miss: Cork City Gaol · Charles Fort · English Market · University College Cork · Cork Harbour

Day 5: Cork to Limerick (Killarney National Park and the Dingle Peninsula)

305 km (190 mi) · about 4 h 45 min driving · south-west, Wild Atlantic Way

This is the longest driving day. From Cork it is about 1 hour 15 minutes to Killarney National Park. Take time for a walk in the park and visit the Torc Waterfall.

Then drive about 1 hour 15 minutes west to Dingle, a small port town on the Atlantic. The Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry is part of the Wild Atlantic Way, the 2,500 km coastal route that runs from the Inishowen Peninsula in Donegal to Kinsale in Cork [W1][W2]. Dingle is known for wild scenery and marine life; a boat trip may show you dolphins. From Dingle it is about 2 hours 15 minutes to Limerick.

Don't miss: Killarney National Park · Torc Waterfall · Dingle town and harbour · Dingle Peninsula

Day 6: Limerick (a rest day on the River Shannon)

10-day loop · 1 day · no long drive

After the long drive, spend a full day in Limerick. The city sits on the River Shannon and is known for its rugby.

Watch a match with locals in one of the many pubs, see a game at Thomond Park, or explore the city's medieval history.

Don't miss: River Shannon · Thomond Park · Limerick's medieval sights

Day 7: Limerick to Galway (the Cliffs of Moher and the Wild Atlantic Way)

about 155 km (96 mi) · about 2 h 30 min to 3 h driving · west coast, Wild Atlantic Way

This is the highlight of the 10-day loop. From Limerick it is about 80 km (50 miles), around 1 hour 15 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes, to the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare [W7].

The Cliffs of Moher are one of the most popular sights on the Wild Atlantic Way [W2]. From the Clare coast you follow the Atlantic north to Galway, about 1 hour 15 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes further [W7]. You can stop anywhere along the coast for views.

Don't miss: Cliffs of Moher · Clare coast · Galway Bay

Day 8 to 9: Galway (music, the Latin Quarter and Salthill)

10-day loop · 2 days · no long drive

Galway is a harbour city known for its art and traditional music scene. Galway City is also on the Wild Atlantic Way [W1].

Eyre Square is the city's hub. In the Latin Quarter you can see remains of the old city walls. Then walk the seaside promenade in Salthill to the Blackrock Diving Tower.

Don't miss: Eyre Square · Latin Quarter · Salthill promenade · Blackrock Diving Tower

Day 10: Galway to Dublin (Clonmacnoise)

about 210 km (130 mi) · about 3 h driving · across the Midlands

Start early for the drive back across the country. The only stop is Clonmacnoise in County Offaly, about 80 km (50 miles) from Galway via Ballinasloe and Shannonbridge [W7].

St Ciarán founded the monastery at Clonmacnoise on the banks of the River Shannon in the 6th century, and its ruins are extensive [W12]. From there it is about 130 km (81 miles) to Dublin [W7].

Don't miss: Clonmacnoise Monastic Site · River Shannon

The 5-day version: how it differs

about 680 km (420 mi) · 3 driving days · Dublin → Limerick → Cork → Dublin

The short loop keeps Dublin, Killarney and Cork but skips Waterford, Dingle, the Cliffs of Moher and Galway, so it does not reach the Wild Atlantic Way. Day 1 is in Dublin. On Day 2 you drive to Limerick via Kildare, where St Brigid's Cathedral stands on the site of the monastery that, by tradition, St Brigid founded around 480; the present building dates from the 13th century [W10]. Kildare also has the Irish National Stud & Gardens, and the Curragh Racecourse is nearby.

Day 3 runs from Limerick to Killarney, the gateway to Killarney National Park and Muckross Abbey, then to Blarney Castle. The Blarney Stone, a block of limestone set into the castle in 1446, is said to give the gift of the gab to those who kiss it [W14]. Day 4 is a full day in Cork. If you have extra time around Killarney, drive part or all of the Ring of Kerry, a 179 km (111 miles) loop that starts and ends in Killarney [W15].

Day 5 returns to Dublin, about 270 km (170 miles) [W7]. Stop at Cahir Castle, built in the 13th century on a rocky island in the River Suir and later the stronghold of the Butler family [W9]. Then visit Kilkenny, home of the Smithwick's Experience [W22], before the last leg to Dublin.

Don't miss: St Brigid's Cathedral, Kildare · Irish National Stud & Gardens · Killarney National Park · Muckross Abbey · Blarney Castle & Gardens · Ring of Kerry · Cahir Castle · Kilkenny

Northern Ireland: day trips from Belfast

Place	How to get there and why
Belfast from Dublin	Belfast is about 166 km (103 mi) north of Dublin [W7] and works best as the start of a separate trip. Speed limits in Northern Ireland are in mph [W3].
Giant's Causeway and the Causeway Coastal Route	97 km (60 mi), about 1 h 15 min from Belfast on the M2 and A26, then the B62 and B17. Northern Ireland's first UNESCO World Heritage Site, with more than 40,000 basalt columns [W20]. Ballymoney and its museum are on the way.
Dunluce Castle	95 km (59 mi), about 1 h 10 min on the M2, A26 and B62. A cliff-top ruin first built in the 13th century [W17].

Place	How to get there and why
North Coast beaches	Near the Causeway: Ballintoy Harbour (a Game of Thrones filming location), White Park Bay (a sheltered crescent of sand between two headlands, partly managed by the National Trust) and Whiterocks Beach (limestone cliffs with caves and arches).
Portstewart Strand and Castlerock	Portstewart Strand is a 3 km National Trust beach with dunes and views of Inishowen and Mussenden Temple. Castlerock Beach is a 1 km stretch of sand next to the Downhill cliffs; from Downhill, an 8 km strand runs west to Lough Foyle in the Binevenagh AONB [W23].
Cushendun Beach	On the Antrim coast, with views to the Mull of Kintyre about 24 km (15 mi) away in clear weather, plus the Carra Castle ruins and caves used in Game of Thrones.
The Gobbins Cliff Path and Carrickfergus Castle	27 km (17 mi), about 35 min on the M2, M5, A2 and B150. A dramatic guided cliff walk (booking needed) past caves and crevices; stop at Carrickfergus Castle, a Norman stronghold, on the way.
Derry	113 km (70 mi), about 1 h 30 min on the M2, M22 and A6, past Lough Neagh. See the medieval city walls, the Museum of Free Derry and the Peace Bridge.
Crawfordsburn and the Ulster Folk Museum	18 km (11 mi), about 22 min on the A2 towards Bangor, then the B20. A sandy beach next to Crawfordsburn Country Park. On the way, the Ulster Folk Museum at Cultra is an open-air museum of rural life in the early 20th century [W18].
Strangford Lough and Exploris Aquarium	Newtownards, at the head of the lough, is about 20 km (12 mi) from Belfast on the A20. Continue down the east shore to Exploris Aquarium and its seal sanctuary in Portaferry, 48 km (30 mi) from Belfast. WWT Castle Espie and Helen's Tower are nearby.
Castle Ward (Winterfell)	45 km (28 mi), about 1 hour via the A24, A7 and A25 through Downpatrick. A National Trust estate near Strangford; its farmyard clock tower was the backdrop for Winterfell in Game of Thrones [W19].
Murlough and Tyrella beaches (County Down)	Murlough has a 6 km (4 mi) beach below the Mourne Mountains and a 6,000-year-old dune system; it became Ireland's first nature reserve in 1967 [W21]. Nearby Tyrella Beach is a 2 km sandy beach on Dundrum Bay with a car-free zone [W24].
Groomsport Beach	A family beach in County Down with a picnic area, rock pools and the Cockle Row Cottages museum.
Marble Hill Strand (County Donegal, Republic of Ireland)	Often listed with Northern Ireland's beaches, but County Donegal is in the Republic of Ireland [W16], so it fits better into a Wild Atlantic Way trip than a trip from Belfast. A shallow, sheltered beach in Sheephaven Bay where the water warms up in the sun. It is on the Wild Atlantic Way, which starts in Donegal [W1].

Driving tips for this route

- Drive on the left in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, unless signs or road markings show otherwise [W3].
- Speed limits in the Republic of Ireland are in km/h. Default limits are 120 km/h on motorways, 100 km/h on national roads, 80 km/h on regional roads, 60 km/h on local roads and 50 km/h in built-up areas [W4]. Speed limits are being reviewed, and some roads and town centres already have lower limits, so always follow the posted signs [W4][W25]. Signs show 'km/h' below the number [W4].
- Speed limits in Northern Ireland are in mph: 70 mph on motorways and dual carriageways, 60 mph outside built-up areas and 30 mph in built-up areas unless signs show otherwise [W3]. Always follow the posted signs.
- Several Irish roads are tolled: the M50 around Dublin, the Dublin Port Tunnel and eight other national road schemes [W6]. Both loops in this chapter use at least one toll road.
- The M50 toll is barrier-free: cameras record your number plate between Junction 6 (Blanchardstown) and Junction 7 (Lucan). There is no booth, so pay by 8 pm the next day, online or at a Payzone outlet, to avoid penalties [W5].
- Allow more time on the Dingle Peninsula and along the Clare coast, where roads are slower than the motorways between cities.

Frequently asked questions

How many days do you need for a road trip in Ireland?
5 days are enough for a loop from Dublin to Limerick, Cork and back, about 680 km (420 miles). With 10 days you can add Waterford, Dingle, the Cliffs of Moher and Galway, about 1,000 km (620 miles) [W7].

What is the best route for a 10-day Ireland road trip?
A loop from Dublin: 2 days in Dublin, then Kilkenny and Waterford to Cork, Killarney and Dingle to Limerick, the Cliffs of Moher to Galway (2 days), and back via Clonmacnoise. There are 4 driving days of 155 to 305 km (96 to 190 miles) each [W7].

Is the Cliffs of Moher on the Wild Atlantic Way?
Yes. The Cliffs of Moher in County Clare and the Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry are among the best-known sights on the 2,500 km (1,553 miles) Wild Atlantic Way [W1][W2].

Do you drive on the left in Ireland?
Yes. You drive on the left in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland [W3].

Are speed limits in km/h or mph in Ireland?
In the Republic of Ireland they are in km/h, for example 120 km/h on motorways [W4]. In Northern Ireland they are in mph, for example 70 mph on motorways [W3].

How do you pay the M50 toll in Dublin?
The M50 has no toll booths. Cameras record your number plate between Junctions 6 and 7, and you pay by 8 pm the next day, online or at a Payzone outlet [W5].

Sources for this chapter

Based on the SIXT Magazine articles “Your Ireland Road Trip: Two Awesome Itineraries to Choose From”, “Ireland Road Trip Itinerary: 10 Days”, “Top 10 Stunning Beaches in Northern Ireland” and “Best Day Trips from Belfast”. Facts marked [W#] come from these sources:

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	Wild Atlantic Way: 2,500 km of coastline from the Inishowen Peninsula in Donegal to Kinsale in Cork; Dingle Peninsula (Kerry) and Galway City are on the route	Fáilte Ireland (Discover Ireland): Wild Atlantic Way
W2	2,500 km (1,553 mi) driving route through nine counties; the Cliffs of Moher and the Dingle Peninsula are among its most popular attractions	Wikipedia: Wild Atlantic Way
W3	Drive on the left in Northern Ireland and the Republic; NI speed limits in mph (30 built-up, 60 outside built-up areas, 70 motorways and dual carriageways); Republic limits in km/h	nidirect (Northern Ireland Government): Driving in Northern Ireland – road safety for visitors
W4	Republic of Ireland default limits: 120 km/h motorways, 100 km/h national roads, 80 km/h regional roads, 60 km/h local roads (rural local roads cut from 80 km/h on 7 February 2025), 50 km/h built-up areas; further cuts planned (national secondary roads to 80 km/h, town centres and housing estates to 30 km/h); metric limits since 20 January 2005, signs show 'km/h'	Wikipedia: Speed limits in Ireland
W5	M50 barrier-free toll between Junction 6 (N3 Blanchardstown) and Junction 7 (N4 Lucan), both directions; cameras record number plates; pay by 8 pm the day after, online or at Payzone outlets	eFlow (Transport Infrastructure Ireland): About the M50 toll road
W6	Ireland's toll roads: the M50 (eFlow), the Dublin Tunnel and eight PPP toll schemes on the national road network	Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII): Tolling information
W7	Driving-distance check between town centres: 5-day Day 2 about 200 km, Day 3 about 205 km, Day 5 about 270 km; 10-day Day 3 about 300 km, Day 5 about 305 km, Day 7 about 155 km (Limerick to Cliffs of Moher 78 km), Day 10 about 210 km (Galway to Clonmacnoise about 80 km via Ballinasloe and Shannonbridge, Clonmacnoise to Dublin 130 km); Dublin to Belfast about 166 to 170 km	Project OSRM / OpenStreetMap: OSRM route service (OpenStreetMap data)
W8	May and June are the sunniest months in Ireland, with 5 to 6.5 hours of sunshine a day over most of the country	Met Éireann: Sunshine
W9	Cahir Castle was built in the thirteenth century, stands on a rocky island in the River Suir and was the stronghold of the Butler family	Heritage Ireland (Office of Public Works): Cahir Castle
W10	Kildare Cathedral: restored Norman cathedral dating from 1223; tradition says St Brigid came to Kildare in 480; restored in the 19th century	Wikipedia: Kildare Cathedral
W11	Vikings re-established themselves at Waterford in 914; oldest city in the Republic of Ireland; Reginald's Tower is the oldest urban civic building in the country and a museum; Waterford Crystal visitor centre in the Viking Quarter	Wikipedia: Waterford

Ref	Fact	Source
W12	St Ciarán founded the monastery at Clonmacnoise on the banks of the River Shannon in the 6th century; County Offaly	Heritage Ireland (Office of Public Works): Clonmacnoise
W13	Cork is the second-largest city in the Republic of Ireland and the third-largest on the island	Wikipedia: Cork (city)
W14	The Blarney Stone, a block of Carboniferous limestone, was set into Blarney Castle in 1446; kissing it is said to give the gift of the gab	Wikipedia: Blarney Stone
W15	Ring of Kerry: 179 km (111 mi) loop that starts and ends in Killarney (N71, N70, N72)	Wikipedia: Ring of Kerry
W16	County Donegal is a county in the Republic of Ireland, in the province of Ulster; it mostly borders Northern Ireland	Wikipedia: County Donegal
W17	Richard Óg de Burgh, 2nd Earl of Ulster, built the first castle at Dunluce in the 13th century; later works in the 16th to 17th centuries	Wikipedia: Dunluce Castle
W18	The Ulster Folk Museum at Cultra is an open-air museum illustrating rural life in the early 20th century	Wikipedia: Ulster Folk Museum
W19	Castle Ward (National Trust), Strangford: the farmyard clock tower is the location and backdrop of HBO's Winterfell in Game of Thrones; 1 mile from Strangford on the A25	National Trust: Castle Ward
W20	Over 40,000 basalt columns; Northern Ireland's first UNESCO World Heritage Site	National Trust: Giant's Causeway
W21	Murlough: 6,000-year-old sand dune system; managed by the National Trust as Ireland's first nature reserve since 1967; four-mile-long Blue Flag beach on Dundrum Bay; County Down, near Newcastle and the Mourne Mountains	Wikipedia: Murlough Nature Reserve
W22	The Smithwick's Experience in Kilkenny is a visitor attraction on the historic home of the brewery	Smithwick's Experience: Smithwick's Experience Kilkenny
W23	Castlerock is a 1 km beach between the Downhill cliffs and the River Bann estuary; the strand from Downhill runs about 8 km to Lough Foyle	Visit Causeway Coast and Glens: Castlerock Beach
W24	Tyrella is a 2 km beach on Dundrum Bay with a car-free zone	Tourism Northern Ireland (Discover Northern Ireland): Tyrella Beach
W25	60 km/h default limit on rural local roads since 7 February 2025; regional and national roads are not included	Limerick City and County Council: New default speed limit of 60 km/h for rural local roads

4. SOUTHERN ENGLAND IN 8 DAYS: COTSWOLDS TO CORNWALL

London → Cotswolds → Bath → Stonehenge → Jurassic Coast → Exeter → Dartmoor → Tintagel → Eden Project

QUICK ANSWER

This 8-day road trip runs from London through the Cotswolds, Bath and Stonehenge to the Jurassic Coast, then west through Exeter and Dartmoor to Tintagel and the Eden Project in Cornwall. The eight daily legs add up to about 750 km (465 miles) [W30]. Daily drives range from about 25 km (15 miles) to 245 km (150 miles); on most days you spend more time on foot than in the car. Late spring to early autumn is the best time to go; July, August and weekends bring heavy traffic in Cornwall [W25][W26][W27]. Expect narrow lanes in Devon and Cornwall and a 40 mph limit on many of Dartmoor's moorland roads [W17][W25].

Route facts

Route type	One-way, east to west
Start / finish	London / the Eden Project, near St Austell, Cornwall
Total distance	Approx. 750 km (465 mi) for the eight daily legs [W30]; about 400 km (250 mi) more to drive back to London [W30]
Recommended time	8 days (one stop per day)
Our plan	8 days, 1 main stop per day
Best season	Late spring to early autumn; spring and early summer are quieter than the July to August peak [W25][W26][W27]
Roads	Motorways and A-roads at first; narrow, high-hedged lanes in Devon and Cornwall; 40 mph limit on Dartmoor's open moor [W17][W25]
Emission zones	London ULEZ and Congestion Charge at the start; Bath Clean Air Zone does not charge private cars [W6][W7][W8]
World Heritage Sites on the route	Blenheim Palace, City of Bath, Stonehenge, Jurassic Coast [W1][W2][W4][W9]
Good for	Villages, Roman and Georgian history, prehistoric sites, coastal walks, moorland, Arthurian legend, gardens

Route at a glance

Day	Route	Distance (approx.)	Time to allow	Highlights
1	London → Blenheim Palace → Burford → Gloucester → Castle Combe (Cotswolds)	approx. 245 km (152 mi)	1 day	Blenheim Palace, Cotswold Wildlife Park, Gloucester Cathedral, Castle Combe
2	Castle Combe → Bath	approx. 23 km (14 mi)	1 day	Bridgerton locations, No. 1 Royal Crescent, thermal spa, canal
3	Bath → Stonehenge	approx. 54 km (34 mi)	1 day	Stone circle, visitor centre exhibition, late-afternoon light
4	Stonehenge → Old Harry Rocks → Corfe Castle → Lulworth Cove → Isle of Portland	approx. 140 km (87 mi)	1 day	Old Harry Rocks, Corfe Castle, Durdle Door, Portland Bill Lighthouse
5	Isle of Portland → Exeter	approx. 104 km (64 mi)	1 day	Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Castle Quarter, Underground Passages, cathedral
6	Exeter → Castle Drogo → Two Bridges (Wistman's Wood) → Lydford	approx. 77 km (48 mi)	1 day	Castle Drogo, Wistman's Wood, Dartmoor tors, Lydford Castle and Saxon town
7	Lydford → Tintagel	approx. 59 km (36 mi)	1 day	Tintagel Castle, footbridge to the island, Gallos sculpture
8	Tintagel → Eden Project	approx. 45 km (28 mi)	1 day	Rainforest Biome, Mediterranean Biome, Invisible Worlds, zip wire

All distances are route planner estimates marked "approx." [W30]. They follow the stops in the order shown. The 750 km total does not include the drive back to London.

Day by day

Day 1: London to the Cotswolds (palaces, villages and Hogwarts cloisters)

approx. 245 km (152 mi) · 1 day · source driving time London → Cotswolds about 2 h 15 min

Spend some time in London before you set off: Portobello Road market, Oxford Street, the London Eye and Big Ben are all in or near the centre. If you drive in London, check the Ultra Low Emission Zone, which covers all London boroughs 24 hours a day, and the Congestion Charge in the centre [W7][W8].

Head west to the Cotswolds, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty since 1966, now called the Cotswolds National Landscape [W10]. Start at Blenheim Palace in Woodstock, the birthplace of Winston Churchill and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987 [W9]. Continue to the Cotswold Wildlife Park and Gardens, known for its rhinos, then to Gloucester Cathedral, whose cloisters were used as Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films [W11].

End the day with a drink in a pub in Castle Combe, a much-photographed village on the southern edge of the Cotswolds.

Don't miss: Blenheim Palace · Cotswold Wildlife Park and Gardens · Gloucester Cathedral cloisters · Castle Combe

Day 2: Bath (thermal springs and Bridgerton streets)

approx. 23 km (14 mi) · 1 day · about 30 min from Castle Combe to Bath

Bath has been known for its hot springs since Roman times [W4]. The whole city has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987, and in 2021 [W32] it was also listed as one of the Great Spa Towns of Europe [W4].

Bath stood in for Regency London in the Netflix series Bridgerton. The Abbey Deli on Abbey Green played Madame Delacroix's dress shop, the Holburne Museum was Lady Danbury's house and No. 1 Royal Crescent, now a museum, was the Featherington home [W5].

In the afternoon, book a session in the city's natural thermal waters. Thermae Bath Spa admits visitors aged 16 and over (18 and over for treatments) [W31]. Finish on the water with a paddle or canoe trip on Bath's historic canal.

Don't miss: Abbey Green · Holburne Museum · No. 1 Royal Crescent · Bath's thermal waters · Canal by paddleboard or canoe

Day 3: Stonehenge (a 5,000-year-old stone circle)

approx. 54 km (34 mi) · 1 day · source driving time Bath → Stonehenge about 55 min

Stonehenge is a short drive south-east of Bath. The first monument here was an earthwork built about 5,000 years ago; the stone circle went up in the late Neolithic, around 2500 BC [W3]. The large sarsen stones weigh about 25 tonnes each on average [W2][W33].

The monument is aligned with the sunrise at the summer solstice and the sunset at the winter solstice [W2][W34]. It has been part of the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site since 1986 [W2].

Plan a guided visit of the stone circle in the morning, a picnic with a view of the stones, and the exhibition in the visitor centre in the afternoon. Check the closing time before you go: for most of the year the site closes before sunset [W35].

Don't miss: Stone circle (guided visit) · Stonehenge visitor centre exhibition · Late-afternoon light over the stones

Day 4: The Jurassic Coast (Old Harry Rocks to Portland)

approx. 140 km (87 mi) · 1 day · source driving time Stonehenge → Old Harry Rocks about 1 h 30 min

The Jurassic Coast has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2001. It runs for about 155 km (96 miles) from Exmouth in East Devon to Studland Bay in Dorset and shows 185 million years of geological history [W1]. Old Harry Rocks, chalk sea stacks near Studland, mark its eastern end [W1].

Start at Old Harry Rocks in the morning. Drive west to Corfe Castle, founded soon after the Norman conquest of 1066 and now owned by the National Trust [W14][W36]. Continue to Lulworth Cove and walk to Durdle Door, a natural limestone arch [W13].

Finish on the Isle of Portland, a tied island joined to the mainland by Chesil Beach. Its red and white lighthouse at Portland Bill dates from 1906 [W12][W37].

Don't miss: Old Harry Rocks · Corfe Castle · Lulworth Cove · Durdle Door · Portland Bill Lighthouse

Day 5: Exeter (museums, a castle quarter and medieval tunnels)

approx. 104 km (64 mi) · 1 day · drive in the morning, then explore on foot

Drive west into Devon, then leave the car and explore Exeter on foot. Begin at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery (closed on Mondays), which [W38] covers the history of Devon and beyond, then walk through the Castle Quarter around Exeter Castle.

In the afternoon, take a guided tour of Exeter's Underground Passages (Thursday to Sunday only; last tour 3pm). They were part of the city's medieval water supply, and parts of the tunnels date back to the 14th century or earlier [W15]. End the day with shopping in the streets around the cathedral and a drink in a traditional Devon pub.

Don't miss: Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery · Castle Quarter and Exeter Castle · Underground Passages · Exeter Cathedral

Day 6: Dartmoor National Park (oak woods, tors and castles)

approx. 77 km (48 mi) · 1 day · source driving time Exeter → Dartmoor about 45 min

Dartmoor has been a national park since 1951 and covers 954 km² (368 square miles) [W39] of moorland, woodland and granite tors: rocky outcrops on the hilltops [W16]. You can explore it on foot, by mountain bike or on horseback, and the tors are popular for climbing. On the open moor, roads have a 40 mph limit, and cattle, sheep and ponies roam freely [W17].

Visit Castle Drogo near Drewsteignton first. It was built between 1911 and 1930 to designs by Edwin Lutyens and is often described as the last castle built in England [W19]. Then drive to Two Bridges and walk to Wistman's Wood, a copse of stunted oaks in the West Dart valley [W16].

End the day in Lydford. Its castle stands inside an Anglo-Saxon fortified town; the stone tower dates from the 13th century, on the site of a 12th-century predecessor, and served as a prison and court [W18][W40].

Don't miss: Castle Drogo · Wistman's Wood · Dartmoor tors · Lydford Castle and Saxon town

Day 7: Tintagel (in the footsteps of King Arthur)

approx. 59 km (36 mi) · 1 day · source driving time Dartmoor → Tintagel about 1 h

Cross into Cornwall and head for Tintagel on the north coast. In the 12th century, Geoffrey of Monmouth named Tintagel as the place where King Arthur was conceived [W20]. The castle ruins you see today were built later, in the 1230s, by Richard, Earl of Cornwall [W20][W41].

Walk from the village to the headland, then cross the footbridge to the island, which opened in 2019 [W20]. Explore the ruins and look for Gallos, a life-sized sculpture inspired by the Arthurian legend [W21]. Finish with a Cornish pasty, the region's traditional filled pastry.

Don't miss: Tintagel village · Tintagel Castle ruins · Footbridge to Tintagel Island · Gallos sculpture · Cornish pasty

Day 8: The Eden Project (a rainforest in Cornwall)

approx. 45 km (28 mi) · 1 day · source driving time Tintagel → Eden Project about 1 h

The last leg takes you south to the Eden Project near St Austell. It is built in a reclaimed china clay pit and opened in full in 2001 [W22][W42].

Its Rainforest Biome is described as the world's largest indoor rainforest [W23]. Spend the morning there, then see the Invisible Worlds exhibition and the Mediterranean Biome. Finish with a ride on the zip wire above the site.

Don't miss: Rainforest Biome · Invisible Worlds exhibition · Mediterranean Biome · Zip wire

Worth a detour: stops near the route

Place	How to get there and why
Oxford (from Blenheim Palace, Day 1)	Approx. 17 km (11 mi) [W30]. There is evidence of teaching as early as 1096, which makes Oxford the oldest university in the English-speaking world [W29][W43]. See the university buildings, the Pitt Rivers Museum (entered through the Museum of Natural History) and the Botanic Garden.
Stratford-upon-Avon (from Blenheim Palace, Day 1)	Approx. 52 km (32 mi) north [W30]. Shakespeare's birthplace, with historic buildings and riverside walks along the Avon.
Glastonbury and Wells (from Bath, Day 2 to 3)	Glastonbury is approx. 45 km (28 mi) from Bath [W30]: a historic town that gives its name to the music festival held at nearby Pilton. Wells is about 10 km (6 mi) further on the A39 [W30]; its cathedral was the first in England built in the Gothic style from its foundation [W28][W44].
Bournemouth (on the way from Stonehenge, Day 4)	Approx. 62 km (39 mi) from Stonehenge [W30]. Long sandy beaches, a pier, the Lower Gardens and the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum.
Salcombe (from Dartmoor, Day 6)	Approx. 57 km (36 mi) south of Two Bridges [W30]. A bay town in south Devon with watersports, coastal paths, hidden coves and a gin distillery that offers tours.
Padstow (from Tintagel, Day 7)	Approx. 35 km (22 mi) [W30]. A harbour town with sandy beaches, the coast walk to St George's Cove and the Camel Trail for cycling; good surfing nearby.
Land's End (after the Eden Project, Day 8)	Approx. 91 km (56 mi) west [W30]. The most westerly point of mainland England, at the western end of the A30 [W24].
Brighton (from London, before Day 1)	Approx. 86 km (53 mi) south of London [W30]; too far east to fit into Day 4. A seaside city with a pebble beach, a Victorian pier and The Lanes, a network of alleys with small shops.

Driving tips for this route

- London: the Ultra Low Emission Zone covers all London boroughs, 24 hours a day, every day except 25 December; cars that do not meet the emission standards pay a daily charge, and non-UK vehicles must register with TfL [W7]. The central Congestion Charge applies 07:00 to 18:00 on weekdays and 12:00 to 18:00 at weekends and on bank holidays [W8].
- Bath: cars and motorbikes are not charged in Bath's Clean Air Zone, whatever their emissions [W6].
- Dartmoor: keep to 40 mph or less on the open moor and expect ponies, sheep and cattle on the road at any time. If you hit a pony, cow or sheep, you must stop and, if you cannot give your details to the owner, report it to the police as soon as possible and within 24 hours at the latest [W45]; the National Park also asks you to call its Livestock Protection Officer about injured animals [W17].
- Devon and Cornwall: sat-navs can send you down narrow lanes with high hedges and few places to reverse, so follow local road signs. Be ready to reverse to let others pass [W25][W26].
- A small or compact car is easier than a motorhome on the narrow roads and village lanes of Cornwall.
- Traffic in Cornwall is heaviest in peak season, during school holidays and at weekends; drive early or outside rush hours [W25].
- Accommodation: choose a hotel near the next day's stop if you travel with family, or a B&B in one of the villages on the route.

Frequently asked questions

How long is a road trip from the Cotswolds to Cornwall?
This 8-day route from London to the Eden Project covers about 750 km (465 miles) [W30]. Driving back to London adds about 400 km (250 miles) [W30].

How many days do you need for a road trip in the south of England?
Allow 8 days for London, the Cotswolds, Bath, Stonehenge, the Jurassic Coast, Exeter, Dartmoor, Tintagel and the Eden Project. Daily drives are between about 25 km (15 miles) and 245 km (150 miles) [W30].

What is the best time for a road trip in Devon and Cornwall?
Late spring to early autumn. Spring and early summer are quieter; July, August, school holidays and weekends bring heavy traffic [W25][W26][W27].

How long is the Jurassic Coast?
The Jurassic Coast is about 155 km (96 miles) long, from Exmouth in East Devon to Studland Bay in Dorset. It has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2001 [W1].

How old is Stonehenge?
The first earthwork was built about 5,000 years ago, and the stone circle was put up around 2500 BC [W3].

Do you have to pay to drive into London or Bath?
In London, cars that do not meet ULEZ standards pay a daily charge, and the Congestion Charge applies in the centre [W7][W8]. In Bath, private cars are not charged in the Clean Air Zone [W6].

Sources for this chapter

Based on the SIXT Magazine articles “The king of road trips: 8 legendary days in the south of England”, “Historic Places to Visit in Southern England”, “Best Seaside Towns in South England” and “The 5 Most Scenic Small Towns Near London”. Facts marked [W#] come from these sources:

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	UNESCO World Heritage Site (Dorset and East Devon Coast) inscribed 2001; eight sections along 155 km of coast; about 185 million years of Earth history; 95 to 96 miles from Exmouth in East Devon to Old Harry Rocks / Studland Bay in Dorset	UNESCO World Heritage Centre: Dorset and East Devon Coast
W2	Sarsens weigh about 25 tons each; aligned with summer solstice sunrise and winter solstice sunset; World Heritage Site since 1986 (Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites)	Wikipedia: Stonehenge
W3	First monument an early henge about 5,000 years ago (c. 3000 BC); stone circle c. 2500 BC	English Heritage: History of Stonehenge
W4	World Heritage Site 1987; Great Spa Towns of Europe 2021; 'by several definitions, the Bath springs can be considered the only hot springs in the UK'	Wikipedia: Bath, Somerset
W5	Bridgerton: Abbey Deli on Abbey Green as the Modiste; Holburne Museum as Lady Danbury's house; No. 1 Royal Crescent as the Featherington home	Visit Bath (official tourism site): Bridgerton in Bath
W6	Cars and motorbikes are not charged in Bath's CAZ, regardless of emissions	Bath & North East Somerset Council: Bath's Clean Air Zone
W7	ULEZ covers all London boroughs, 24/7 except Christmas Day; non-compliant cars pay daily charge; non-UK vehicles must register	Transport for London: Ultra Low Emission Zone
W8	Congestion Charge hours: Mon to Fri 07:00 to 18:00; Sat, Sun and bank holidays 12:00 to 18:00	Transport for London: Congestion Charge
W9	Birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill; World Heritage Site 1987; Woodstock, Oxfordshire	Wikipedia: Blenheim Palace
W10	Designated AONB in 1966; name Cotswolds National Landscape adopted 2020; all AONBs rebranded National Landscapes in 2023	Wikipedia: Cotswolds
W11	Cloisters transformed into Hogwarts for the Harry Potter films	Gloucester Cathedral: Guided tours
W12	Tied island joined to mainland by Chesil Beach; red and white lighthouse at Portland Bill, 1906	Wikipedia: Isle of Portland
W13	Natural limestone arch on the Jurassic Coast near Lulworth	Wikipedia: Durdle Door

Ref	Fact	Source
W14	Castle founded soon after the 1066 Norman conquest; owned by the National Trust	Wikipedia: Corfe Castle
W15	Passages built to house the pipes that brought clean drinking water into medieval Exeter; guided tours (compulsory, about 25 minutes); tunnels partly date back to the 14th century	Visit Exeter (official tourism website): Exeter's Underground Passages
W16	National park since 1951; 954 km² (368 sq mi); tors are granite outcrops; Wistman's Wood a copse of stunted oaks in the West Dart valley near Two Bridges	Wikipedia: Dartmoor
W17	Keep your speed below 40 mph on moorland roads; ponies, sheep and cattle roam freely; large areas are unfenced, so expect cows, ponies and sheep on the roads at any time, including narrow lanes; call the Livestock Protection Officer about injured livestock	Dartmoor National Park Authority: Travel information / Share the roads and bridleways
W18	Castle inside an Anglo-Saxon burh; stone tower 1195, used as prison and court; run by English Heritage	Wikipedia: Lydford Castle
W19	Built 1911 to 1930, designed by Edwin Lutyens; widely described as the last castle built in England; National Trust since 1974	Wikipedia: Castle Drogo
W20	Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1135 to 38) named Tintagel as Arthur's place of conception; castle built from 1233 by Richard, 1st Earl of Cornwall; footbridge opened 11 August 2019	Wikipedia: Tintagel Castle
W21	Gallos: life-sized sculpture on the island inspired by the Arthurian legend; footbridge access	English Heritage: Tintagel Castle
W22	Located in a reclaimed china clay pit; full site opened 17 March 2001; Rainforest and Mediterranean Biomes	Wikipedia: Eden Project
W23	Rainforest Biome: 'The world's largest indoor rainforest'	Eden Project: Rainforest Biome
W24	Most westerly point of mainland England; western end of the A30	Wikipedia: Land's End
W25	High volume of traffic in peak season, school holidays and weekends; travel outside peak hours; sat-navs may use narrow lanes with high hedges and few reversing points: follow local signs	Visit Cornwall: Getting to Cornwall: travel information
W26	Late spring or summer is the best time to tour Cornwall; be prepared for narrow roads	National Geographic: Road trip: Cornwall, England
W27	Spring and early summer offer a more relaxed experience	Visit Cornwall: Visit Cornwall this spring
W28	Wells is the first cathedral in England built, from its foundation, in Gothic style	Wikipedia: Wells Cathedral
W29	Evidence of teaching as early as 1096; oldest university in the English-speaking world; Henry II banned study at Paris (1167)	Wikipedia: University of Oxford
W30	Road distances for each leg and detour (fastest route): Day 1 245 km, Day 2 23 km, Day 3 54 km, Day 4 140 km, Day 5 104 km, Day 6 77 km, Day 7 59 km, Day 8 45	Project OSRM / OpenStreetMap: OSRM route service (OpenStreetMap data)

Ref	Fact	Source
	km (total 747 km / 464 mi); Eden Project → London 398 km; detours as stated	
W31	Minimum age of admission 16 (18 for treatments)	Thermae Bath Spa: Thermae Bath Spa
W32	City of Bath inscribed in 1987; part of The Great Spa Towns of Europe since 2021	UNESCO World Heritage Centre: The Great Spa Towns of Europe
W33	The sarsens weigh about 25 tons on average	English Heritage: Building Stonehenge
W34	The stone circle is aligned on the solstice sunrise and sunset; inscribed in 1986	UNESCO World Heritage Centre: Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites
W35	Opening hours (October 2026: 9.30am to 5pm, last entry 3pm); the site closes before sunset for most of the year	English Heritage: Stonehenge
W36	Corfe Castle was commissioned by William the Conqueror and dates from the 11th century; National Trust property	Dorset Council Historic Environment Record: Corfe Castle (MDO16751)
W37	Portland Bill Lighthouse was built by Trinity House in 1906	Trinity House: Portland Bill Lighthouse
W38	The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday and closed on Mondays	Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery (RAMM): Visit
W39	Dartmoor National Park covers 954 km² (368 square miles)	Dartmoor National Park Authority: Basic factsheets
W40	A 13th-century tower built on a 12th-century predecessor, used as a prison	English Heritage: History of Lydford Castle
W41	Richard, Earl of Cornwall, built the castle in the 1230s	English Heritage: History of Tintagel Castle
W42	Built in a 60 m deep former clay pit; opened on 17 March 2001	Eden Project: Our origins
W43	Teaching existed at Oxford in some form by 1096	University of Oxford: History
W44	Wells was the first cathedral in England built in the Gothic style	Wells Cathedral: Timeline
W45	After an accident involving an animal, the driver must stop and, if details are not given, report it to the police as soon as reasonably practicable and within 24 hours	legislation.gov.uk: Road Traffic Act 1988, section 170

5. HISTORY BY CAR: NORMAN CASTLES & ENGLAND'S OLDEST PUBS

Route 1: Arundel → Warwick → Nottingham → York · Route 2: London → Beaconsfield → Cambridge → Holywell → Norwich → Nottingham

QUICK ANSWER

Two history road trips through England. The Norman castles route links four castles founded after the Norman Conquest of 1066 (Arundel, Warwick, Nottingham and York) over about 457 km (284 miles) of driving; allow 4 to 5 days [W1][W26]. The oldest-pubs route runs from Fleet Street in London to Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem in Nottingham, via Beaconsfield, Cambridge, Holywell and Norwich: about 505 km (314 miles), 5 days [W26]. Many 'oldest pub' dates are traditions rather than documented facts [W17][W19][W24]. Go between April and October: Arundel Castle opens only from April to early November [W4].

Route facts

Route type	Two one-way routes; both can end in Nottingham
Route 1: start / finish	Arundel (West Sussex) → York
Route 1: total distance	About 457 km (284 mi), approx. [W26]
Route 1: time to allow	4 to 5 days (our plan)
Route 2: start / finish	London (Fleet Street) → Nottingham
Route 2: total distance	About 505 km (314 mi), approx. [W26]
Route 2: time to allow	5 days (our plan)
Combined trip	Drive Route 2 to Nottingham, then the Nottingham → York leg of Route 1: about 6 to 7 days
Best season	April to October; Arundel Castle is open seasonally, from early April to early November: check before you go [W4]; Clifford's Tower opens every day [W27]; the pubs generally open all year, but check before you go
Roads	Motorways and A-roads; London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) covers all London boroughs, 24 hours a day [W25]
Good for	Medieval history, castles, historic pubs, university towns, cathedral cities

Route at a glance

Leg	Drive	Distance	Time to allow	Highlights
Castles 1	Arundel → Warwick (A3 west of London; optional stops in Windsor and Oxford)	219 km (136 mi)	1 to 2 days	Arundel Castle, Brighton, Windsor, Oxford
Castles 2	Warwick → Nottingham	96 km (60 mi)	1 day	Warwick Castle, Nottingham Castle, Mortimer's Hole
Castles 3	Nottingham → York	141 km (88 mi)	1 to 2 days	Clifford's Tower, York Castle Museum
Castles total	Arundel → York	About 457 km (284 mi), approx.	4 to 5 days	Four castles founded after 1066
Pubs 1	London (Fleet Street) → Forty Green, Beaconsfield	45 km (28 mi), approx.	1 day	Old Bell, Royal Standard of England
Pubs 2	Beaconsfield → Cambridge	110 km (69 mi), approx.	1 day	The Eagle, River Cam, Fitzwilliam Museum
Pubs 3	Cambridge → Holywell	32 km (20 mi), approx.	Half a day to 1 day	Old Ferry Boat Inn, River Great Ouse
Pubs 4	Holywell → Norwich	127 km (79 mi), approx.	1 day	Norwich Cathedral, Adam & Eve, medieval lanes
Pubs 5	Norwich → Nottingham	191 km (119 mi), approx.	1 day	The Wash, Nottingham Castle, Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem
Pubs total	London → Nottingham	About 505 km (314 mi), approx.	5 days	Pubs with claimed roots from the 6th to the 17th century

Distances are approximate; pub-route distances and both totals were calculated with the OpenStreetMap-based OSRM route planner [W26]; your exact distance depends on the roads you choose.

The two routes, stop by stop

Castles 1: Arundel Castle (where the Norman route begins)

Start · West Sussex · 1 day

The Norman Conquest began when William, Duke of Normandy, defeated King Harold at the Battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066; William was crowned King of England on 25 December 1066 [W1]. The Bayeux Tapestry shows the battle [W1]. This route follows castles he and his followers founded in the years after.

Arundel Castle was begun in around 1067 by Roger de Montgomery, a distant relative of William [W3][W28]. The motte was built in 1068 and the gatehouse in 1070 [W2]. The castle has passed by descent since 1138 (from the d'Albinis to the Fitzalans in the 13th century and to the Howards in the 16th) and has

been the seat of the Dukes of Norfolk and their ancestors for over 850 years [W2]. It was besieged twice in the Civil War, then restored; Queen Victoria stayed for three days in 1846 [W2].

Today visitors see the gardens, furnished rooms and the medieval keep. The castle is open seasonally, from early April to early November [W4]. Brighton, with its Victorian architecture and pier, is 36 km (22 miles) away.

Don't miss: Arundel Castle keep · Castle gardens · Fitzalan Chapel · Brighton

Castles 2: Arundel to Warwick (the Conqueror's Midlands fortress)

219 km (136 mi) · 1 to 2 days · A3 west of London, then north

Take the A3 north to the west of London. You can break the drive in Windsor, for Windsor Castle, or in Oxford, for the university; Oxford is 75 km (47 miles) from Warwick.

William the Conqueror founded Warwick Castle in 1068 to control the Midlands as he advanced north [W5]. It began as a motte-and-bailey castle: a motte is a mound topped by a keep, and a bailey is the fortified courtyard next to it [W6]. Henry de Beaumont became the first Earl of Warwick in 1088 [W5]. In 1153 Gundreda de Warenne, deceived into believing her husband Roger de Beaumont was dead, surrendered the castle to Henry of Anjou, later Henry II, who replaced the timber keep with a stone shell keep [W5].

Simon de Montfort's forces took the castle in a surprise attack in 1264 [W5]. The Beauchamps then held it for about 180 years [W5]. In 1469, during the Wars of the Roses (1455 to 1487), Richard Neville, 'the Kingmaker', imprisoned Edward IV here [W5][W7]. Richard III began the Bear and Clarence Towers but died in 1485 before they were finished [W5]. Elizabeth I visited in 1566 and 1572, the castle withstood a Royalist siege in 1642, and a fire in 1871 destroyed the Great Hall [W5]. Today it is operated as an attraction by Merlin Entertainments, with shows, falconry and archery [W5].

Don't miss: Windsor Castle · Oxford University · Warwick Castle · Bear and Clarence Towers

Castles 3: Warwick to Nottingham (coups, crusades and Robin Hood)

96 km (60 mi) · 1 day · Midlands

Nottingham Castle was begun on William the Conqueror's orders in 1068 as a wooden motte-and-bailey, and rebuilt in stone under Henry II [W8]. In March 1194 Richard I (Richard the Lionheart) besieged the castle, held by supporters of Prince John, and it surrendered after a few days [W8]. In legend, it is the scene of the final showdown between Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham [W8].

On 19 October 1330 the young Edward III seized power here. William Montagu and his companions entered the castle through a secret tunnel and arrested Roger Mortimer and Edward's mother, Isabella of France, who had ruled as regents [W8]. Mortimer was taken to the Tower of London and hanged at Tyburn on 29 November 1330; Isabella retired to Castle Rising in Norfolk [W8][W9]. In 1476 Edward IV ordered a new tower and royal apartments [W8].

After the Civil War the castle was razed in 1651 [W8]. The Ducal Mansion on the site was built by William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Newcastle, and completed by his son Henry [W8]. Guided tours run through

Mortimer's Hole, the passage from the castle down to Brewhouse Yard [W8]. The castle closed in 2022 and reopened in June 2023, run by the city council [W8].

Don't miss: Nottingham Castle · Ducal Mansion museum and gallery · Mortimer's Hole · Robin Hood exhibition

Castles 4: Nottingham to York (Clifford's Tower)

141 km (88 mi) · 1 to 2 days · north

York was founded by the Romans in AD 71 and was the base of the Viking Kingdom of Jorvik from 866 to 954 [W14]. In 1068 William built a timber motte-and-bailey castle here, between the rivers Ouse and Foss; a second castle followed on Baile Hill in 1069 [W10][W11]. That year a Danish Viking fleet and local rebels attacked both castles [W10]. By 1086 the castle was surrounded by a moat and an artificial lake, the King's Pool [W10].

King John used the castle as a prison [W10]. After 1244 Henry III rebuilt it in stone; the new keep on the motte became known as Clifford's Tower [W10][W11]. Between 1298 and 1338, during the Scottish wars, York Castle was for long periods the centre of royal government, including the Exchequer [W10]. The castle was held for the Royalists until York surrendered in 1644 [W10]. On 23 April 1684 a fire partly gutted the tower; reddened stones from that fire can still be seen [W11][W12].

The county bought Clifford's Tower in 1825, and York Prison closed in 1929 [W10]. The tower is now cared for by English Heritage [W11]. The former prison buildings house York Castle Museum, with Kirkgate, a recreated Victorian street [W13].

Don't miss: Clifford's Tower · York Castle Museum and Kirkgate · Baile Hill

Pubs 1: London to Beaconsfield (Fleet Street and the Royal Standard)

45 km (28 mi), approx. · 1 day · central London to Buckinghamshire

England's pubs grew out of Roman roadside inns and Anglo-Saxon ale-houses, and an inn opens Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Start in central London at the Old Bell, 95 Fleet Street, a Grade II listed 17th-century pub [W15]. It is said to have been built by Christopher Wren for the masons rebuilding St Bride's Church after the Great Fire of London in 1666 [W15]. Fleet Street is also linked to Sweeney Todd, the 'Demon Barber': a fictional character first published in The String of Pearls in 1846 to 47 [W16].

Drive west to Forty Green, near Beaconsfield, to the Royal Standard of England. It was known as The Ship from 1213 and renamed after the Restoration of Charles II [W17]. It has candle-lit rooms, pews and beams, and has been used as a film location [W17].

Driving note: all of London is inside the Ultra Low Emission Zone, which runs 24 hours a day [W25]. Central London also has a Congestion Charge; check your route on the Transport for London website before you set off [W25].

Don't miss: Old Bell, Fleet Street · St Bride's Church · Royal Standard of England, Forty Green

Pubs 2: Beaconsfield to Cambridge (The Eagle and the secret of life)

110 km (69 mi), approx. · 1 day · Cambridgeshire

The Eagle opened in 1667 as a coaching inn [W18]. On 28 February 1953 Francis Crick announced to lunchtime drinkers that he and James Watson had 'discovered the secret of life': the structure of DNA [W18]. Staff from the nearby Cavendish Laboratory were regular customers [W18].

In the rear 'RAF Bar', Allied airmen of the Second World War wrote their names and squadron numbers on the ceiling [W18]. Spend time in the city too: walk by the River Cam, visit the colleges, the Fitzwilliam Museum and the botanic garden.

Don't miss: The Eagle and the RAF Bar · River Cam · Cambridge colleges · Fitzwilliam Museum · Cambridge University Botanic Garden

Pubs 3: Cambridge to Holywell (the Old Ferry Boat Inn)

32 km (20 mi), approx. · half a day to 1 day · River Great Ouse

The Old Ferry Boat Inn stands on the banks of the River Great Ouse at Holywell [W19]. It claims to date from AD 560 and to be England's oldest pub; the listed building itself is from the 17th century, with an earlier cross-wing [W19]. It has a thatched roof and whitewashed walls, and still offers rooms, so it works as a base for a few days around Cambridge.

Inside, a stone slab is dedicated to Juliet Tewsley. In local legend she took her own life on 17 March 1050 after her love was not returned, and her ghost rises on that date [W19].

Don't miss: Old Ferry Boat Inn · Juliet Tewsley's stone · River Great Ouse

Pubs 4: Holywell to Norwich (a medieval city of pubs)

127 km (79 mi), approx. · 1 day · Norfolk

Norwich takes its name from the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Northwic; by the 10th century it had its own mint [W20]. The Roman regional capital, Venta Icenorum, lay about 8 km (5 miles) to the south [W20]. Norwich claims to be the most complete medieval city in the UK, with Dragon Hall, Strangers' Hall and the Guildhall [W20]. Norwich Cathedral was begun in 1096 [W20].

The city has a long brewing history; in 1870 it had over 780 beer-houses [W20]. The Adam & Eve is widely claimed to be the oldest pub in the city: a brewhouse is first recorded on the site in 1241 or 1249, serving workmen building the cathedral [W21]. The present brick-and-flint building is from the 17th century [W21]. It is close to the river and the cathedral.

Don't miss: Norwich Cathedral · Adam & Eve · Dragon Hall · Strangers' Hall · Guildhall

Pubs 5: Norwich to Nottingham (Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem)

191 km (119 mi), approx. · 1 day · about 3 hours' driving

Head inland to Nottingham, about 3 hours' drive. To break the journey, stop at The Wash, the large bay between Norfolk and Lincolnshire, which includes a national nature reserve [W22].

In Nottingham, visit the castle (see Castles 3) and Wollaton Hall, built in 1580 to 1588, which houses the city's natural history museum in a deer park [W23].

Finish at Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem, built against Castle Rock below the castle and attached to sandstone caves that may have been the castle brewhouse [W24]. The pub claims to date from 1189, the

year Richard the Lionheart became king, but no documents support this; the oldest parts of the building date from about 1650 to 1660 [W24]. Several other pubs also claim to be England's oldest [W24].

Don't miss: The Wash National Nature Reserve · Wollaton Hall · Nottingham Castle · Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem

Worth a detour

Place	How to get there and why
Brighton (from Arundel)	36 km (22 mi), about 40 min. Seaside city with Victorian architecture and a pier with a fairground.
Windsor and Oxford (Castles 1)	On the way north from Sussex. Windsor Castle and the Oxford University grounds; Oxford to Warwick is 75 km (47 mi), about 55 min.
Peak District National Park: Tideswell (from Nottingham)	69 km (43 mi), about 1 h 15 min. A good area for walking and the outdoors.
Haworth (from York)	About 85 km (53 mi), approx. [W26]. Hillside town of cobbled streets, home of the Brontë sisters; their house is now a museum, and the moors that inspired Wuthering Heights are close by.
Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool (from York)	Leeds 43 km (27 mi), about 45 min; Manchester 117 km (73 mi), about 1 h 30 min; Liverpool 164 km (102 mi), about 2 h.
The Wash National Nature Reserve (Pubs 5)	On the coast between Norfolk and Lincolnshire; the largest natural bay in England [W22].

Driving tips for this route

- Combine the two routes: Route 2 ends in Nottingham, which is also on Route 1, so you can continue north to York (141 km / 88 miles).
- London: the Ultra Low Emission Zone covers all London boroughs, 24 hours a day, and central London has a Congestion Charge. Check your vehicle and route on the Transport for London website [W25].
- Plan the castle route for April to early November: Arundel Castle is closed in winter [W4].
- Treat 'oldest pub' dates as traditions: several pubs claim the title, and most current buildings date from the 17th century [W15][W19][W24].
- Allow more than an afternoon at Warwick Castle, which has shows and activities across a large site.
- Do not drink and drive: stay overnight at the pub stops; several, such as the Old Ferry Boat Inn, have rooms.

Frequently asked questions

Which castles did William the Conqueror build in England?
After his victory at Hastings on 14 October 1066, William founded castles including Warwick (1068), Nottingham (1068) and York (1068, with a second in 1069) [W1][W5][W8][W10]. His follower Roger de Montgomery began Arundel Castle in around 1067 [W3].

How long is the Norman castles road trip from Arundel to York?
About 457 km (284 miles) of driving in three legs: Arundel to Warwick 219 km (136 miles), Warwick to Nottingham 96 km (60 miles) and Nottingham to York 141 km (88 miles) [W26]. Allow 4 to 5 days.

What is the oldest pub in England?
No pub has a proven title. Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem claims 1189, the Old Ferry Boat Inn claims AD 560 and the Royal Standard of England claims 1100; the oldest documented parts of the Old Ferry Boat Inn and Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem are 17th century [W17][W19][W24].

How long is the oldest-pubs road trip from London to Nottingham?
About 505 km (314 miles) via Beaconsfield, Cambridge, Holywell and Norwich [W26]. Allow 5 days; the longest leg, Norwich to Nottingham, is about 3 hours.

When is the best time for a castle road trip in England?
April to October. Arundel Castle is open seasonally, from early April to early November (check the dates before you go), while Clifford's Tower opens every day [W4][W27].

Where did Crick announce the discovery of DNA?
At The Eagle in Cambridge, on 28 February 1953, when he told lunchtime drinkers that he and James Watson had 'discovered the secret of life' [W18].

Sources for this chapter

Based on the SIXT Magazine articles “Norman Conquest: A Historic British Roadtrip”, “A Journey to the Oldest Pubs in England: London to Nottingham” and “The 5 Best Towns for Culture and History in the UK”. Facts marked [W#] come from these sources:

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	Battle of Hastings 14 October 1066; William crowned 25 December 1066; Bayeux Tapestry depicts the battle	Wikipedia: Battle of Hastings
W2	Built by Roger de Montgomery; motte 1068, gatehouse 1070; descended directly since 1138 (d'Albini → Fitzalan → Howard); seat of Dukes of Norfolk and ancestors over 850 years; besieged twice 1642 to 45; Queen Victoria three days in 1846	Arundel Castle & Gardens: Castle history
W3	Roger de Montgomery began work on Arundel Castle in around 1067	Wikipedia: Arundel Castle
W4	Open seasonally, from early April to early November (2026 season: Wednesday 1 April to Sunday 1	Arundel Castle & Gardens: Opening times & prices

Ref	Fact	Source
	November); closed on Mondays except bank holidays and in August	
W5	Founded 1068; Henry de Beaumont first Earl 1088; 1153 surrender by Gundreda de Warenne to Henry of Anjou; stone shell keep under Henry II; 1264 surprise attack by Simon de Montfort's forces; Beauchamps ~180 years; 1469 Edward IV imprisoned; Bear and Clarence Towers; Elizabeth I 1566 and 1572; 1642 siege; 1871 fire; operator Merlin Entertainments	Wikipedia: Warwick Castle
W6	Motte: mound topped by a keep; bailey: fortified enclosure next to the motte	Wikipedia: Motte-and-bailey castle
W7	Wars of the Roses fought 1455 to 1487	Wikipedia: Wars of the Roses
W8	Begun 1068; stone under Henry II; Richard I siege March 1194; 19 October 1330 coup via secret tunnel; Isabella to Castle Rising; 1476 new tower and royal apartments under Edward IV; razed 1651; Ducal Mansion by 1st Duke, completed by 2nd; Mortimer's Hole tours to Brewhouse Yard; closed Nov 2022, reopened 26 June 2023; Robin Hood legend	Wikipedia: Nottingham Castle
W9	Mortimer hanged at Tyburn on 29 November 1330	Wikipedia: Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March
W10	1068 castle between Ouse and Foss; 1069 Baile Hill and Danish attack; King's Pool by 1086; King John prison; Henry III stone rebuild after 1244; centre of royal administration 1298 to 1338; 1644 siege; county purchase 1825; prison closed 1929	Wikipedia: York Castle
W11	William built castle 1068; Henry III new stone tower (1245 writ); interior gutted by fire 23 April 1684; state guardianship 1915	English Heritage: History of Clifford's Tower
W12	Reddened stones throughout, the result of a fire in 1684	English Heritage: Description of Clifford's Tower
W13	Museum in former Debtors' and Female Prisons; Kirkgate recreated Victorian street	Wikipedia: York Castle Museum
W14	York founded AD 71; Viking Kingdom of Jorvik from 866 to 954	Wikipedia: History of York
W15	95 Fleet Street; Grade II listed; 17th century; claimed to be built by Wren for masons rebuilding St Bride's after the Great Fire	Wikipedia: Old Bell, Fleet Street
W16	Sweeney Todd is fictional; first appeared in The String of Pearls (1846 to 47)	Wikipedia: Sweeney Todd
W17	Royal Standard of England reputedly oldest freehouse, dating to 1100; The Ship from 1213 to 1663; popular filming location	Wikipedia: Forty Green, Penn
W18	Opened 1667; second-oldest pub in Cambridge after the Pickerel; Crick announcement 28 Feb 1953; RAF graffiti on ceiling of rear bar; Cavendish Laboratory staff	Wikipedia: The Eagle (pub)
W19	Holywell, on the River Great Ouse; claims AD 560; 17th-century listed building with earlier cross-wing; Juliet Tewsley legend, 17 March 1050; stone slab	Wikipedia: The Old Ferry Boat Inn

Ref	Fact	Source
W20	Northwic; mint in 10th century; Venta Icenorum about 5 miles south; claims most complete medieval city in UK; Dragon Hall, Strangers' Hall, Guildhall; over 780 beer-houses in 1870; cathedral begun 1096	Wikipedia: Norwich
W21	First reference 1241 or 1249 as brewhouse; widely claimed oldest pub in Norwich; cathedral workmen; 17th-century brick and flint building	Wikipedia: Adam and Eve, Norwich
W22	Largest natural bay in England; national nature reserve; between Lincolnshire and Norfolk	Wikipedia: The Wash
W23	Built 1580 to 1588; Nottingham natural history museum; Wollaton Park deer herd	Wikipedia: Wollaton Hall
W24	Claims 1189 with no documentary evidence; oldest parts c. 1650 to 1660; against Castle Rock with caves, possibly castle brewhouse; other pubs also claim to be oldest	Wikipedia: Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem
W25	ULEZ operates across all London boroughs, 24 hours a day, every day except Christmas Day; separate Congestion Charge	Transport for London: Ultra Low Emission Zone
W26	Approximate road distances: Arundel to Warwick 221 km, Warwick to Nottingham 97 km, Nottingham to York 141 km; London to Forty Green 45 km, Forty Green to Cambridge 110 km, Cambridge to Holywell 32 km, Holywell to Norwich 127 km, Norwich to Nottingham 191 km; York to Haworth 85 km	Project OSRM / OpenStreetMap: OSRM route service (OpenStreetMap data)
W27	Clifford's Tower open daily, 10:00 to 17:00 (last entry 16:30)	English Heritage: Clifford's Tower, York
W28	Roger de Montgomery's father probably a grandnephew of Duchess Gunnor (William's great-grandmother); first Earl of Shrewsbury; died 1094	Wikipedia: Roger de Montgomery

6. ENGLAND'S NATIONAL PARKS: YORKSHIRE DALES, DARTMOOR, SOUTH DOWNS, NEW FOREST

Four scenic drives: Harrogate to Richmond · Dartmoor loop from North Bovey · Horsham to Seaford · Southampton to Bournemouth

QUICK ANSWER

This chapter covers four scenic drives through four English national parks. The Yorkshire Dales drive runs from Harrogate to Richmond, about 200 km (125 miles), and needs 2 days. The Dartmoor drive is a loop of about 75 km (47 miles) from North Bovey, for a full day. The South Downs drive runs from Horsham to Seaford, about 70 km (45 miles), over 2 days with a night in Brighton. The New Forest drive runs from Southampton to Bournemouth, about 65 km (40 miles), for a full day. On Dartmoor and in the New Forest, ponies, cattle and other livestock roam free on unfenced roads, and a 40 mph (64 km/h) limit applies on many moorland roads and on the unfenced forest roads, and is lower in places [W9][W16][W25].

Route facts

Chapter type	Four separate drives, one per national park
Parks	Yorkshire Dales (North Yorkshire and Cumbria), Dartmoor (Devon), South Downs (Hampshire, West and East Sussex), New Forest (Hampshire and Wiltshire)
Distances	Yorkshire Dales about 200 km (125 mi); Dartmoor about 75 km (47 mi); South Downs about 70 km (45 mi); New Forest about 65 km (40 mi) [W24]
Time to allow	Yorkshire Dales 2 days; Dartmoor full day; South Downs 2 days; New Forest full day (or 2 days with a night in Brockenhurst)
Best season	Yorkshire Dales June (hay meadows) to September (heather) [W6]; Dartmoor August to September (heather) [W12]; South Downs spring and summer (chalk grassland flowers) [W22]; New Forest spring (foals) and autumn (pannage pigs) [W18][W19]
Speed limits	Dartmoor: 40 mph (64 km/h) on many moorland roads [W9]. New Forest: 40 mph (64 km/h) maximum on unfenced forest roads, lower in some areas such as villages [W16][W26]
Roads	Narrow lanes, single-lane sections, steep hills and free-roaming livestock, especially on Dartmoor and in the New Forest [W7][W9][W17]
Good for	Limestone scenery, moorland, prehistoric sites, market towns, chalk cliffs, forest wildlife

Route at a glance

#	Drive	Distance	Time to allow	Highlights
1	Yorkshire Dales: Harrogate → Richmond	about 200 km (125 mi)	2 days	Grassington, Kilnsey Crag, Malham Cove, Gordale Scar, Hawes, Hardraw Force, Tan Hill Inn, Richmond
2	Dartmoor: loop from North Bovey (optional detour to Tavistock)	about 75 km (47 mi)	Full day	Grimspound, Warren House Inn, Postbridge clapper bridge, Princetown, Dartmeet, Widecombe in the Moor, Hound Tor
3	South Downs: Horsham → Seaford	about 70 km (45 mi)	2 days (night in Brighton)	Leonardslee, Ditchling Beacon, Devil's Dyke, Brighton, Seven Sisters
4	New Forest: Southampton → Bournemouth	about 65 km (40 mi)	Full day (2 days with a night in Brockenhurst)	Southampton museums, New Forest Wildlife Park, North Solent National Nature Reserve, Brockenhurst, Bournemouth beach

Distances are rounded estimates for the roads named; the South Downs and New Forest drives take about 1 hour 40 minutes and 1 hour 45 minutes of driving. Check your exact route on a map before you go.

The four drives

Drive 1: Yorkshire Dales (Harrogate to Richmond)

about 200 km (125 mi) · 2 days · best June to September

Start in the spa town of Harrogate, known for its Turkish Baths and the Royal Pump Room Museum. Drive north-west to Pateley Bridge, then west on the B6265 over Greenhow Hill. At 398 m (1,306 feet), it is the high point between Nidderdale and Wharfedale, and the road down to Pateley Bridge has gradients of 16 to 19% [W5]. Grassington, inside the national park, is about 45 km (28 miles) from Harrogate. From there, drive up Wharfedale past the overhanging limestone of Kilnsey Crag, and turn off to Arncliffe in Littondale, about 13 km (8 miles) from Grassington.

From Arncliffe, a narrow single-lane road climbs out of the Cowside Beck valley; follow the signs to Malham, about 14 km (9 miles) away. Malham Cove is a 70 m (230 feet) limestone cliff. A massive waterfall once flowed over it, when Ice Age meltwater could not sink into the frozen ground [W1]. A pair of peregrine falcons nests here and can be seen in summer [W1]. The Malham Landscape Trail links Janet's Foss, a woodland waterfall, with Malham Cove, and a short side trip takes in the gorge of Gordale Scar [W8].

Day 2 heads south to the market town of Skipton (about 18 km / 11 miles), with its castle and canal. Then drive about 40 km (25 miles) to Ingleton, known for its caves and waterfalls, and about 27 km (17 miles) on to Hawes, home of the Dales Countryside Museum and the Wensleydale Creamery. Hardraw

Force, 1.5 km north of Hawes, falls about 30 m (100 feet) and is claimed to be England's highest unbroken waterfall above ground [W2]. Cross the moors via Tan Hill, where the Tan Hill Inn, at 528 m (1,732 feet), is Britain's highest pub [W3]. Then drive through Arkengarthdale and Reeth to Richmond (about 40 km / 25 miles). Richmond has castle ruins and the Georgian Theatre Royal, built in 1788, which describes itself as Britain's oldest working theatre in its original form [W4].

Don't miss: Harrogate Turkish Baths · Royal Pump Room Museum · Grassington · Kilnsey Crag · Arncliffe · Malham Cove · Janet's Foss · Gordale Scar · Skipton Castle · Ingleton · Hawes and the Dales Countryside Museum · Hardraw Force · Tan Hill Inn · Reeth · Richmond Castle · Georgian Theatre Royal

Drive 2: Dartmoor (a loop from North Bovey)

about 75 km (47 mi) · full day · best August to September

Start in North Bovey, a village with a granite parish church on the eastern side of Dartmoor National Park. Drive west on the B3212 across the open moor and turn off for Grimspound. This late Bronze Age settlement dates from about 1450 to 700 BC and has the remains of 24 stone roundhouses inside a boundary wall. Entry is free and the site is open at any reasonable time in daylight [W10]. Nearby Headland Warren, between Moretonhampstead and Postbridge, is one of the best places to see the moor turn purple and yellow with heather and gorse in August and September [W12].

Back on the B3212, the Warren House Inn, at 434 m (1,425 feet), is said to be the highest pub in southern England; legend says its fire has never gone out [W11]. Postbridge, about 3 km (2 miles) south-west, has a granite clapper bridge just downstream of the B3212 road bridge [W11][W12]. Continue to Wistman's Wood, an ancient wood of dwarf oaks, and to Princetown and the Dartmoor Prison Museum. From Princetown you can detour west to Tavistock, known for its 19th-century architecture and Victorian Pannier Market.

Head east to Dartmeet, where the East and West Dart rivers meet, then to Buckland in the Moor. On Buckland Beacon above the hamlet, the Ten Commandments Stones were carved in 1927 to 1928 [W15]. Ashburton is about 6 km (4 miles) further, a market town and a good place for a break. Then drive north to Widecombe in the Moor, whose church of St Pancras has a 120 feet (37 m) tower and is known as the Cathedral of the Moor [W13]. Finish at Hound Tor, a weathered granite outcrop near the remains of a deserted medieval village; it may have inspired The Hound of the Baskervilles [W14]. Park in the car park and walk about 800 m (half a mile). Stop at Becky Falls before returning to North Bovey.

Don't miss: North Bovey · Grimspound · Headland Warren · Warren House Inn · Postbridge clapper bridge · Wistman's Wood · Princetown and the Dartmoor Prison Museum · Tavistock Pannier Market · Dartmeet · Buckland in the Moor · Ten Commandments Stones · Ashburton · Widecombe in the Moor · Hound Tor · Becky Falls

Drive 3: South Downs (Horsham to Seaford)

about 70 km (45 mi) · 2 days · best spring to summer

Start in the market town of Horsham, just north of the national park. Visit Huxley's Birds of Prey Centre, with owls and peregrine falcons, then Leonardslee Lakes and Gardens, a restored woodland garden where wallabies and deer roam free.

Drive about 30 minutes on the A23 to the village of Ditchling. The Ditchling Beacon Loop is a walk of about 8 km (5 miles). Ditchling Beacon, at 248 m (814 feet), is the highest point in East Sussex, with views to the sea, across the Weald and along the South Downs [W22]. About 20 minutes away is Devil's Dyke, a National Trust site. At nearly 1.6 km (1 mile) long, it is described by the National Trust as the longest, deepest and widest dry valley in the UK. In spring and summer its slopes are covered with chalk grassland flowers, including orchids and wild thyme [W22].

Drive about 20 minutes on the A27 to Brighton and spend the night. See Brighton Palace Pier and the Royal Pavilion, a former royal residence near the city centre. On day 2, drive about 30 minutes along the coast to Seaford and walk up to the Seven Sisters chalk cliffs. The coastal walk continues to Eastbourne, about 22 km (13.6 miles) in total. Stay well back from the edge: the cliffs are very crumbly and can give way at any time [W23].

Don't miss: Huxley's Birds of Prey Centre · Leonardslee Lakes and Gardens · Ditchling · Ditchling Beacon · Devil's Dyke · Brighton Palace Pier · Royal Pavilion · Seaford · Seven Sisters

Drive 4: New Forest (Southampton to Bournemouth)

about 65 km (40 mi) · full day · best spring and autumn

Start in the port city of Southampton. The Solent Sky Museum covers the city's aviation history, including the Spitfire. The SeaCity Museum tells Southampton's part in the Titanic story, and the Tudor House and Garden shows Tudor life. Then drive west on the A35 for about 20 minutes and turn left onto Deerleap Lane to the New Forest Wildlife Park near Ashurst, home to European bison, lynx and four species of otter [W21].

Drive south for about 30 minutes towards the Solent coast to the North Solent National Nature Reserve. It covers 820 hectares of coast, grassland, woodland, heathland and reedbeds. The reserve is split into separate areas, and access at Needs Ore is by permit only, so check where you can walk before you go [W20]. Then drive back and follow the signs for the B3055 to Brockenhurst, a good place to stay the night. A family-run vineyard nearby offers tours that must be booked in advance.

Leave Brockenhurst on Burley Road, join the A35 and then the A338 to Bournemouth, about 35 minutes away. Walk on the beach, visit the Oceanarium on a rainy day and finish at the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum.

Don't miss: Solent Sky Museum · SeaCity Museum · Tudor House and Garden · New Forest Wildlife Park · North Solent National Nature Reserve · Brockenhurst · Bournemouth beach · Oceanarium · Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum

Worth knowing: road advice park by park

Place	How to get there and why
Yorkshire Dales	Reduce your speed on Dales roads: there could be a herd of cattle around the next corner. Use designated car parks [W7]. The B6265 over Greenhow Hill has gradients of 16 to 19% [W5].

Place	How to get there and why
Dartmoor	Keep below 40 mph (64 km/h) on moorland roads. Expect cows, ponies and sheep on the road at any time, and do not park on the verges: it damages the moor and attracts ponies to the road [W9].
New Forest	40 mph (64 km/h) maximum on unfenced forest roads, lower in some areas such as villages. Ponies, cattle, donkeys, sheep and pigs roam free, day and night [W16][W17]. You must report any accident with a pony, cow, donkey, pig or sheep to the police within 24 hours [W16].
South Downs	Seven Sisters gets extremely busy on warm days and at weekends in spring and summer. Do not park on grass verges; use the car parks, or the Friston Forest car park when it is busy [W23].

Driving tips for this route

- New Forest: forest animals have no road sense. Drive slowly, especially at night, and pass animals wide and slow [W17].
- New Forest by season: in spring, foals have no road sense; in autumn, accidents with livestock peak as the nights draw in; in winter, livestock gather on gritted roads to lick the salt [W19]. During pannage (in 2026, 14 September to 29 November), pigs roam the open forest [W18].
- Do not feed or touch the ponies or other animals in the New Forest: you may be fined [W18]. Fires and barbecues are banned on the open forest [W19].
- Dartmoor: there are few fuel stations on the moor, so fill up in towns such as Ashburton. Many roads are narrow; be ready to stop, and reverse to let oncoming traffic pass.
- Dartmoor and the Yorkshire Dales: share the road with walkers, cyclists and horse riders, and watch for animals around blind bends [W7][W9].
- All four drives use surfaced public roads, though some lanes are narrow, steep and single-track.

Frequently asked questions

What is the speed limit in the New Forest?
The speed limit on the New Forest's unfenced roads is never more than 40 mph (64 km/h), and lower in some areas such as villages [W26]. Animals are on the roads day and night [W16].

What is the speed limit on Dartmoor?
Keep below 40 mph (64 km/h) on Dartmoor's moorland roads. Cows, ponies and sheep roam free and can be on the road at any time [W9].

How long is a Yorkshire Dales road trip?
The drive from Harrogate to Richmond via Grassington, Malham, Skipton, Ingleton, Hawes and Tan Hill is about 200 km (125 miles). Allow 2 days.

How long does it take to drive around Dartmoor?

The loop from North Bovey via Postbridge, Princetown, Dartmeet, Ashburton, Widecombe in the Moor and Hound Tor is about 75 km (47 miles). Allow a full day.

What is the best time to visit the Yorkshire Dales?
June, when the hay meadows are in full flower, and September, when the heather is in full bloom on the high moors [W6].

When is pannage in the New Forest?
Pannage lasts at least 60 days. In 2026 it runs from 14 September to 29 November, when pigs roam the open forest to eat acorns [W18]. Drive slowly and pass animals wide.

Sources for this chapter

Based on the SIXT Magazine articles “Driving in the Yorkshire Dales: Scenic Routes and Stops”, “Driving in Dartmoor: Scenic Routes and Stops”, “Driving in the South Downs: Scenic Routes and Stops” and “Driving in the New Forest: Scenic Routes and Stops”. Facts marked [W#] come from these sources:

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	Malham Cove is a 70 m (230 ft) limestone cliff; a massive waterfall once flowed over it (meltwater on frozen ground); nesting peregrine falcons can be viewed in summer	Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority: Malham Cove
W2	Hardraw Force falls 100 ft (30 m); claimed to be England's highest unbroken waterfall (discounting underground falls); 1.5 km north of Hawes	Wikipedia: Hardraw Force
W3	Tan Hill Inn: highest inn in the British Isles at 1,732 ft (528 m)	Wikipedia: Tan Hill Inn
W4	Theatre built in 1788 by Samuel Butler; Britain's oldest working theatre in its original form; Woodland Scene probably painted 1818 to 1836	Georgian Theatre Royal, Richmond: History – The Georgian Theatre Royal
W5	B6265 between Pateley Bridge and Grassington crosses Greenhow Hill, 1,306 ft (398 m), the high point between Nidderdale and Wharfedale; descent to Pateley Bridge 16 to 19%	Wikipedia: Greenhow
W6	Hay meadows in full flower in June; heather in full bloom on the high moorlands in September	Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority: What to do month by month
W7	Reduce your speed and drive carefully on Dales roads: there could be a herd of cattle around the corner; park in designated car parks	Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority: Countryside Code
W8	Malham Landscape Trail takes in Janet's Foss (a woodland waterfall) and Malham Cove; short side trip to Gordale Scar	Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority: Malham – walks and things to do
W9	Keep your speed below 40 mph on moorland roads; expect cows, ponies and sheep on the roads at any time; expect walkers, cyclists and horse riders; do not park on verges (damages them and attracts ponies to the road)	Dartmoor National Park Authority: Travel information

Ref	Fact	Source
W10	Grimspound: late Bronze Age, about 1450 to 700 BC; remains of 24 stone roundhouses; free entry; open at any reasonable time in daylight	English Heritage: Grimspound
W11	Warren House Inn at 1,425 ft (434 m), highest pub in southern England; about 2 miles (3 km) north-east of Postbridge; hearth fire said never to have gone out	Wikipedia: Warren House Inn
W12	In August and September Dartmoor is purple and yellow with heather and western gorse; best spots include Haytor and Headland Warren (between Moretonhampstead and Postbridge); Postbridge clapper bridge is just downstream of the B3212 road bridge	Ordnance Survey (OS Maps): Explore Dartmoor National Park
W13	St Pancras, Widecombe-in-the-Moor: called the 'Cathedral of the Moor' for its 120-foot tower and large capacity	Wikipedia: Church of St Pancras, Widecombe-in-the-Moor
W14	Hound Tor: heavily weathered granite outcrop; deserted medieval village (Hundatorra) with 13th-century longhouses; may have inspired Conan Doyle's The Hound of the Baskervilles	Wikipedia: Hound Tor
W15	Ten Commandments stones on Buckland Beacon engraved from mid-December 1927 to mid-June 1928	Wikipedia: Buckland-in-the-Moor
W16	Blanket 40 mph speed limit with 30 mph in the villages; commoners' animals are out all year, day and night; legal duty to report accidents with a pony, cow, donkey, pig or sheep to the police within 24 hours	New Forest National Park Authority: Plea to drivers following the death of three donkeys in the New Forest
W17	Ponies, cattle, donkeys, sheep and pigs roam free; animals have no road sense and have right of way; drive slowly, especially at night; pass wide and slow	New Forest National Park Authority: Who is doing what? (animal accidents)
W18	Pannage 2026: 14 September to 29 November; lasts at least 60 days; pigs roam the open forest; keep your distance, don't feed or pet the animals; you may be fined	New Forest National Park Authority: Pannage
W19	Spring: foals have no road sense; summer: fires and BBQs banned on the open forest; autumn: livestock road accidents peak as nights draw in; winter: gritted roads attract livestock	New Forest National Park Authority: Seasonal guidance
W20	North Solent NNR: 820 hectares; coastal, grassland, woodland, heathland, reedbeds; fragmented; permitted access only at Needs Ore	GOV.UK (Natural England): Hampshire's national nature reserves
W21	New Forest Wildlife Park: Deerleap Lane, Longdown, near Ashurst; wisent (European bison), Eurasian lynx, four otter species	Wikipedia: New Forest Wildlife Park
W22	Ditchling Beacon 248 m, highest point in East Sussex, views to the sea, the Weald and the Downs; Devil's Dyke nearly one mile long, the longest, deepest and widest dry valley in the UK; in spring or summer a living carpet of flowers incl. orchids and wild thyme	South Downs National Park Authority: South Downs Walks: Ditchling Beacon and Devil's Dyke (leaflet, 2024)
W23	Seven Sisters cliffs are extremely crumbly and can give way at any time: stay well back; extremely busy on warm sunny days and weekends; don't park on verges, use the car parks or Friston Forest car park	South Downs National Park Authority: Be safe and plan ahead for your visit to Seven Sisters

Ref	Fact	Source
W24	Approximate drive distances: Yorkshire Dales 200 km; Dartmoor loop 65 to 77 km; South Downs 73 to 74 km; New Forest 64 km.	Project OSRM / Valhalla (OpenStreetMap): OSRM and Valhalla route calculations (OpenStreetMap data)
W25	40 mph is the maximum speed limit on many of Dartmoor's roads	Dartmoor National Park Authority: Ponies
W26	The limit on the unfenced New Forest roads is never more than 40 mph and lower in some areas	New Forest National Park Authority: Advice for New Forest drivers (leaflet)

7. WALES: ERYRI (SNOWDONIA) & BANNAU BRYCHEINIOG (BRECON BEACONS)

Four scenic drives in Eryri and one through Bannau Brycheiniog, from Hereford to Abergavenny

QUICK ANSWER

Wales has two classic national-park road trips. In the north, Eryri (Snowdonia) has four scenic drives of about 39 to 141 km (24 to 88 miles) each, including a 57 km (35 miles) loop around Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon), at 1,085 m (3,560 feet) the highest mountain in England and Wales [W3][W10]. In the south, a 152 km (94 miles) route runs from Hereford through Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) to Abergavenny; allow 2 to 4 days [W10]. Spring and autumn are quieter than summer, which is by far the busiest season in Eryri [W5]. In built-up areas of Wales the default speed limit is 20 mph [W4].

Route facts

Route type	Five separate drives: four in Eryri (north Wales), one through Bannau Brycheiniog (south Wales)
Official names	Eryri (Snowdonia), Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon) and Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) are now the names used by the two national park authorities [W1][W2]
Distances	Eryri drives: 39 to 141 km (24 to 88 mi) each; Hereford → Abergavenny: 152 km (94 mi) with all stops [W10]
Recommended time	Half a day to a full day per Eryri drive; 2 to 4 days for the Bannau Brycheiniog route
Best season	Late spring and early autumn; summer is the busiest season, especially around Yr Wyddfa, Llanberis, Ogwen and Betws-y-Coed [W5]
Highest points	Yr Wyddfa 1,085 m (3,560 ft) [W3]; Pen y Fan 886 m (2,907 ft) [W11]
Highest roads	Llanberis Pass 359 m (1,178 ft) [W7]; Gospel Pass 549 m (1,801 ft), the highest road pass in Wales [W13]
Speed limit	Default 20 mph on restricted roads (usually street-lit, built-up roads) since September 2023 [W4]
Good for	Mountain passes, lakes, castles, coastal towns, hiking, book towns, steam railways

Route at a glance

#	Drive	Distance	Time to allow	Best season
1	Circle of Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon): Caernarfon → Beddgelert → Llanberis Pass → Caernarfon	57 km (35 mi)	Half a day (about 1 h 10 min driving)	Spring and autumn; very busy in summer
2	Llangollen → Llyn Ogwen on the A5 (eastern approach)	69 km (43 mi)	Half a day (about 1 h 10 min driving)	Late spring to early autumn; Ogwen busy in summer
3	Forest to coast: Betws-y-Coed → Porthmadog	39 km (24 mi)	Half a day (about 45 min driving)	Spring and autumn; Betws-y-Coed busy in summer
4	Heartland drive: Aberystwyth → Llandudno	141 km (88 mi)	2 h 30 min non-stop; a full day with stops	Late spring to early autumn
5	Bannau Brycheiniog: Hereford → Hay-on-Wye → Pen y Fan → Abergavenny	152 km (94 mi)	2 to 4 days (about 3 h driving in total)	Late spring to early autumn; September for the Abergavenny Food Festival

Distances and driving times are approximate road distances calculated with OpenStreetMap routing [W10]. Seasons are based on the Eryri National Park Authority's visitor guidance [W5] and the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority [W26]. The five drives are independent: drives 1 to 4 can be combined from a base in Eryri, while drive 5 is a separate trip in south Wales.

The drives

Drive 1: Circle of Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon) via Caernarfon, Beddgelert and the Llanberis Pass

57 km (35 mi) · half a day · best in spring and autumn

Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon) rises to 1,085 m (3,560 feet) and is the highest mountain in England and Wales [W3]. If you do not want to climb it, a circular drive around it is a good alternative. Either direction works; this route runs anticlockwise from Caernarfon.

Take the A4085 into the hills. After Rhyd-Ddu you get a good view of the mountain's western face. At Beddgelert, turn onto the A498, where the summit appears again from a new angle, with jagged peaks and cliffs. At Pen-y-Gwryd, join the A4086 over the Llanberis Pass, which runs between Yr Wyddfa and the Glyderau and reaches 359 m (1,178 feet) at Pen-y-Pass [W7]. The main hiking paths start here.

From Pen-y-Pass the road drops down through Nant Peris to Llanberis and back to Caernarfon [W7]. Between March and November, plan ahead if you want to park at Pen-y-Pass: the Eryri National Park

Authority has used a pre-booking system, and the Sherpa'r Wyddfa bus links the pass with Llanberis, Nant Peris, Caernarfon and Bangor [W6].

Don't miss: Caernarfon Castle · Rhyd-Ddu viewpoint · Beddgelert · Pen-y-Gwryd · Llanberis Pass · Pen-y-Pass · Nant Peris · Llanberis

Drive 2: Llangollen to Llyn Ogwen (the eastern approach on the A5)

69 km (43 mi) · half a day · best from late spring to early autumn

The A5 from Llangollen is an alternative way into Eryri from the English border, instead of the more common northern approach. Llangollen itself, on the River Dee, lies outside the national park.

The A5 runs west between mountain ranges and into the national park. Continue through Betws-y-Coed and Capel Curig, then north-west towards Tryfan, whose rocky peaks attract climbers and boulderers.

The road then runs beside Llyn Ogwen, a lake below a ring of mountains and a good place for a picnic stop. Ogwen is one of the busiest areas of the park in summer, so arrive early [W5].

Don't miss: Llangollen and the Dee Valley · Rhydlanfair · Betws-y-Coed · Capel Curig · Tryfan · Llyn Ogwen

Drive 3: Forest to coast (Betws-y-Coed to Porthmadog)

39 km (24 mi) · half a day · best in spring and autumn

Betws-y-Coed is one of the eastern gateways to Eryri. It is a popular, historic town surrounded by the woodland of Gwydir Forest Park, and one of the park's busiest places in summer [W5].

Take the A5 west through the forest to Capel Curig, then turn left onto the A4086 to Pen-y-Gwryd. There, take the A498 south through the Nantgwynant valley, past the lake Llyn Gwynant, to Beddgelert and on through the Aberglaslyn Pass and Tremadog to Porthmadog [W8].

The route crosses valleys and rolling hills. Near Porthmadog, the estuary opens out towards the Irish Sea.

Don't miss: Betws-y-Coed · Gwydir Forest Park · Capel Curig · Llyn Gwynant · Beddgelert · Aberglaslyn Pass · Porthmadog estuary

Drive 4: Heartland drive (Aberystwyth to Llandudno)

141 km (88 mi) · 2 h 30 min non-stop or a full day · best from late spring to early autumn

Aberystwyth lies roughly halfway between north and south Wales. From this coastal town you can drive through the whole of Eryri to Llandudno on the north coast.

Follow the A487 north towards Machynlleth and Dolgellau, then the A470 north through Trawsfynydd, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Betws-y-Coed and Llanrwst to its end on the seafront at Llandudno [W9][W10]. The route winds through forests, valleys, mountains and lakes, and has many places to pull in, eat or walk.

Non-stop, the drive takes about 2 hours 30 minutes; with stops it makes a relaxed full day [W10]. Llandudno is a large seaside resort with wide beaches and a long promenade.

Don't miss: Aberystwyth · Machynlleth · Dolgellau · Trawsfynydd · Blaenau Ffestiniog · Betws-y-Coed · Llanrwst · Llandudno promenade

Drive 5: Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons), Hereford to Abergavenny

152 km (94 mi) · 2 to 4 days · best from late spring to early autumn

Start in the cathedral city of Hereford and head west on the A438 and B4352 to Hay-on-Wye, crossing the River Wye on the way [W10]. You can detour to Arthur's Stone, a Neolithic chambered tomb dated to around 3700 BC [W18]. Hay, known as 'the Town of Books', has been full of second-hand bookshops since Richard Booth opened the first in the early 1960s; the Hay Festival runs for about ten days in late May (21 to 31 May in 2026) [W14][W27].

From Hay, take the A479 via Talgarth to Crickhowell, near Tretower Court and Castle, a medieval fortified manor house [W19]. The single-track Gospel Pass road, the highest road pass in Wales at 549 m (1,801 feet), is the alternative into the Black Mountains and down to Llanthony Priory [W13]. The Black Mountains lie roughly between Abergavenny, Hay-on-Wye and Llangors, and reach 811 m (2,661 feet) at Waun Fach [W12]. The area is popular for hiking.

Continue on the A40 past Llangorse Lake, the largest natural lake in Mid and South Wales, towards Brecon, then the A470 to Pen y Fan, at 886 m (2,907 feet) the highest peak in South Wales [W15][W11]. The easiest paths start from the Pont ar Daf car park and the Storey Arms on the A470 [W11]. Next, drive about 20 minutes south to the Brecon Mountain Railway at Pant, which runs about 7 km (4.5 miles) by steam beside the Pontsticill Reservoir to Torpantau [W16]. Finish in Abergavenny, a market town with a food festival on the third weekend of September, below the Sugar Loaf [W17].

Don't miss: Hereford Cathedral · Arthur's Stone · Hay-on-Wye · Tretower Court and Castle · Crickhowell · Gospel Pass · Llanthony Priory · Llangattock cliffs · Llangorse Lake · Brecon · Pen y Fan and Corn Du · Brecon Mountain Railway · Pontsticill Reservoir · Sugar Loaf · Abergavenny

Worth a detour: castles and industrial heritage near the drives

Place	How to get there and why
Caernarfon Castle (start of drive 1)	Begun by Edward I in 1283 with the town walls. Part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site 'Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd' (1986), cared for by Cadw [W20].
Beaumaris Castle, Anglesey	About 20 km (12 mi) from Caernarfon [W10]. Begun in 1295 and never fully built, it had a moat and a tidal dock so it could be supplied straight from the sea. Part of the same World Heritage Site, with Harlech, Caernarfon and Conwy [W21][W20].
Conwy Castle and town walls	About 6.5 km (4 mi) from Llandudno, at the end of drive 4 [W10]. Begun in 1283; part of the Gwynedd World Heritage Site [W20].
Flint Castle	About 41 km (25 mi) north of Llangollen, the start of drive 2 [W10]. Begun in 1277, the first of Edward I's castles in his campaign in Wales. Its isolated great tower follows Savoyard models, and its layout is unique in the British Isles. Ruined after the Civil War siege of 1647; free entry, cared for by Cadw [W22].

Place	How to get there and why
Blaenavon Ironworks	About 11 km (7 mi) from Abergavenny, the end of drive 5 [W10]. Built from 1788 to 89 by three West Midlands industrialists. In 1877 to 78 Sidney Gilchrist Thomas and Percy Gilchrist ran experiments here that made phosphoric iron ore usable. Part of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site (2000), cared for by Cadw [W23][W24].

Driving tips for this route

- Speed limits: since September 2023 the default limit on restricted roads in Wales (usually built-up roads with street lights no more than 200 yards apart) is 20 mph, not 30 mph. There are no repeater signs. Since 2024, councils have been returning some roads to 30 mph, so watch the signs [W4].
- Mountain roads: routes in both parks are narrow in places, twist and climb to relatively high points. Expect tractors, local traffic, and sheep and deer on the road, especially on higher ground.
- Single-track roads such as the Gospel Pass: pull into a passing place on your left, or wait opposite one on your right, to let oncoming traffic pass, and never park in a passing place [W25][W13].
- Winter: the Gospel Pass is sometimes blocked by snow, and the highest peaks of Eryri can be snow-covered from autumn [W13][W5].
- Parking: car parks fill up in summer, and Pen-y-Pass has used a pre-booking system between March and November; check the Eryri National Park Authority website before you travel [W5][W6].
- A smaller, narrower vehicle is easier on narrow roads and when turning round.

Frequently asked questions

What are the best scenic drives in Eryri (Snowdonia)?
Four classic drives: the 57 km (35 miles) circle of Yr Wyddfa from Caernarfon, the 69 km (43 miles) A5 from Llangollen to Llyn Ogwen, the 39 km (24 miles) drive from Betws-y-Coed to Porthmadog and the 141 km (88 miles) drive from Aberystwyth to Llandudno [W10].

How long is the drive around Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon)?
About 57 km (35 miles), or 1 hour 10 minutes of driving, on the A4085, A498 and A4086 via Beddgelert and the Llanberis Pass [W10][W7]. Allow half a day with stops.

When is the best time to drive in Eryri?
Late spring and early autumn. Summer is by far the busiest season, with visitor numbers that can double compared with spring at Yr Wyddfa, Llanberis, Ogwen and Betws-y-Coed [W5].

What is the speed limit in Welsh towns and villages?
20 mph is the default on restricted roads, usually built-up roads with street lights, since September 2023. Some roads stay at 30 mph, and councils have returned more roads to 30 mph since 2024, so follow the signs [W4].

How long does the Brecon Beacons drive from Hereford to Abergavenny take?
The full route via Hay-on-Wye, Crickhowell, Pen y Fan and the Brecon Mountain Railway is about 152 km (94 miles), or 3 hours of driving [W10]. Allow 2 to 4 days to walk and stay in the Black Mountains. The direct road from Hereford to Abergavenny is about 38 km (24 miles) [W10].

Why is Snowdonia now called Eryri?
The national park authority voted in November 2022 to use the Welsh names Eryri and Yr Wyddfa in English as well as Welsh [W1]. The Brecon Beacons National Park took the name Bannau Brycheiniog in April 2023 [W2].

Sources for this chapter

Based on the SIXT Magazine articles “Driving in Snowdonia: Scenic Routes and Stops”, “Driving in the Brecon Beacons: Scenic Routes and Stops” and “Historical Places in Wales: From Castles to Iron”. Facts marked [W#] come from these sources:

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	Members voted to use the Welsh names Eryri (Snowdonia) and Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon) in both Welsh and English contexts; Place Names Principles adopted	Eryri National Park Authority: Paper on Place Names Principles approved in order to safeguard and celebrate Welsh place names within the National Park
W2	The park will refer to itself as Bannau Brycheiniog National Park (informally 'the Bannau'); takes effect on the 66th anniversary of designation; means 'the peaks of Brychan's kingdom'	Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority: Brecon Beacons National Park Reclaims Its Welsh Name
W3	Yr Wyddfa 1085 m (3560 ft), highest mountain in England and Wales; park covers over 823 square miles	Ordnance Survey (OS Maps): Eryri National Park (Snowdonia)
W4	Default 20 mph limit on restricted roads across Wales from September 2023; restricted roads usually have street lights no more than 200 yards apart; no repeater signs	Welsh Government (gov.wales): Introducing default 20mph speed limits
W5	Summer by far the busiest season (numbers can double at Yr Wyddfa, Llanberis, Ogwen, Betws y Coed); spring second busiest; autumn significantly quieter, high peaks may be snow-covered; car parks fill in summer	Eryri National Park Authority: When is the Best Time to Visit Eryri?
W6	Pen y Pass pre-booking via JustPark (until 1 November 2026); planning essential March to November; Sherpa'r Wyddfa bus from Nant Peris, Llanberis, Caernarfon, Bangor	Eryri National Park Authority: How to get to Pen y Pass
W7	Llanberis Pass carries the A4086 between the Glyderau and Snowdon massif; summit 359 m (1,178 ft) at Pen-y-Pass; descends via Nant Peris to Llanberis	Wikipedia: Llanberis Pass
W8	A498 runs from Pen-y-Gwryd south-west via Nantgwynant, Beddgelert, the Aberglaslyn Pass and Tremadog towards Porthmadog	Wikipedia: A498 road
W9	A470 ends on the seafront at Llandudno; passes Trawsfynydd, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Betws-y-Coed and Llanrwst; meets the A487	Wikipedia: A470 road

Ref	Fact	Source
W10	Road distances and driving times for all five drives and detours (for example circle 56.6 km/69 min; Llangollen to Llyn Ogwen 68.8 km; Betws to Porthmadog 38.7 km; Aberystwyth to Llandudno 141.4 km/144 min; Hereford to Abergavenny full route 152 km/177 min, direct 38.3 km; Crickhowell to Storey Arms 36.5 km/33 min; Caernarfon to Beaumaris 20.2 km)	Project OSRM / OpenStreetMap: OSRM route service (OpenStreetMap data)
W11	Pen y Fan 886 m (2,907 ft), highest peak in South Wales and highest British peak south of Cadair Idris; paths from Storey Arms and Pont ar Daf on the A470; Bronze Age cairns on Pen y Fan and Corn Du; owned by the National Trust	Wikipedia: Pen y Fan
W12	Black Mountains lie roughly in a triangle between Abergavenny, Hay-on-Wye and Llangors; highest point Waun Fach 811 m (2,661 ft)	Wikipedia: Black Mountains, Wales
W13	Gospel Pass 549 m (1,801 ft), highest road pass in Wales; from Hay-on-Wye to Llanthony and Abergavenny; single-track with passing places; sometimes blocked by snow in winter	Wikipedia: Gospel Pass
W14	Richard Booth opened his first second-hand bookshop in 1962; 'The Town of Books'; Hay Festival runs ten days at the end of May or start of June	Wikipedia: Hay-on-Wye
W15	Llangorse Lake is the largest natural lake in Mid and South Wales, near Brecon	Wikipedia: Llangorse Lake
W16	Brecon Mountain Railway runs about 4.5 miles (7 km) from Pant to Torpantau along Pontsticill Reservoir; extension to Dol-y-Gaer 1995	Wikipedia: Brecon Mountain Railway
W17	Abergavenny Food Festival is held annually on the third weekend of September (two days)	Visit Monmouthshire (Monmouthshire County Council): Abergavenny Food Festival
W18	Arthur's Stone, Herefordshire, is a Neolithic chambered tomb dating to around 3700 BC	University of Manchester: Discovery at Arthur's Stone led by University of Manchester team
W19	A479 runs from Glanusk Park near Crickhowell (near Tretower Castle and Court) via Talgarth and Bronllys to Llyswen	Wikipedia: A479 road
W20	World Heritage Site inscribed 1986: Beaumaris, Harlech, Caernarfon (with town walls), Conwy (with town walls); Caernarfon, Conwy and Harlech ordered in 1283; managed by Cadw	Wikipedia: Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd
W21	Beaumaris work began in 1295; moat; tidal dock to supply by sea; never fully built (work stopped about 1330); part of the 1986 World Heritage Site	Wikipedia: Beaumaris Castle
W22	Flint begun 1277, first of a series of castles in Edward I's campaign; isolated corner tower follows Savoyard models; 'layout at Flint remains unique within the British Isles'; captured 1647 and slighted; Cadw, free access	Wikipedia: Flint Castle
W23	Lease to Thomas Hill, Thomas Hopkins and Benjamin Pratt (1788), construction began immediately; Sidney Gilchrist Thomas and Percy Gilchrist experiments at Blaenavon 1877 to 78 made phosphoric ore usable; World Heritage Site 2000; managed by Cadw	Wikipedia: Blaenavon Ironworks

Ref	Fact	Source
W24	Blaenavon Industrial Landscape inscribed in 2000; includes the ironworks and Big Pit	Wikipedia: Blaenavon Industrial Landscape
W25	Rules 155 to 156: single-track roads, passing places, do not park in passing places	GOV.UK (Department for Transport): The Highway Code, rules 103 to 158
W26	Early spring: car parks quieter and trails less crowded before the May bank holiday	Bannau Brycheiniog National Park (visitor site of the Park Authority): Top 10 Spring Experiences in Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) Before the May Bank Holiday
W27	The 2026 Hay Festival ran from 21 to 31 May	Hay Festival: Hay Festival previews flagship edition

8. BEST DAY TRIPS BY CAR FROM UK CITIES

London → Bristol → Aberdeen → Birmingham → Cambridge → Leeds → Liverpool → Newcastle → Southampton → Manchester → Edinburgh → Glasgow

QUICK ANSWER

The best day trips by car from the UK's main cities are usually 15 to 110 km (10 to 70 miles) away, or under 1 hour 30 minutes each way. From London, the classics are Windsor (40 km / 25 miles, about 45 minutes), Canterbury, Cambridge and Blenheim Palace (all about 100 km / 62 miles, around 1 hour 30 minutes). From Edinburgh, North Berwick, Stirling and Glasgow are all about an hour or less away; from Leeds, York, Harrogate and Fountains Abbey are under 50 minutes; from Bristol, Bath is 30 minutes away. London, Birmingham, Bristol and the four big Scottish cities have low-emission or clean air zones, so check your car before driving in [W7][W8][W10].

Route facts

Chapter type	Day trips by car from 12 UK cities
Cities	London, Bristol, Aberdeen, Birmingham, Cambridge, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle, Southampton, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow
Destinations	71 day trips, 5 to 6 per city
Typical distance	15 to 110 km (10 to 70 mi) one way; full range 9 to 177 km (5.5 to 110 mi)
Typical drive	15 min to 1 h 30 min one way; the longest trips take just over 2 hours
Recommended time	1 day per destination; leave early for drives over 1 h 30 min
Best time	All year for cities and museums; some houses open only in spring, summer and autumn (for example Burghley House)
Driving rules to check	London ULEZ and Congestion Charge; Clean Air Zones in Birmingham and Bristol; Low Emission Zones in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee [W7][W8][W9][W10]
Tidal road	Holy Island (Lindisfarne) causeway: cross only at the published safe times [W6]
Good for	Castles, cathedral cities, coast, national parks, museums, family days out

Route at a glance

City	Best day trips	Distance range	Typical drive	Great for
London	Windsor, Canterbury, Cambridge, Blenheim Palace, Highclere Castle, Stratford-upon-Avon	40 to 163 km (25 to 101 mi)	45 min to 2 h 5 min	Castles, palaces, cathedral cities, Shakespeare
Bristol	Bath, Cheddar Gorge, Berkeley Castle, Longleat, Stonehenge, Bannau Brycheiniog	21 to 115 km (13 to 72 mi)	30 min to 1 h 30 min	Roman and Georgian Bath, gorges, safari park, hiking
Aberdeen	Newburgh, Stonehaven, Muir of Dinnet, Balmoral Castle, Dundee, St Andrews	23 to 127 km (14 to 79 mi)	25 min to 1 h 40 min	Seals, fishing towns, Royal Deeside, golf
Birmingham	Cadbury World, Black Country Living Museum, Warwick Castle, Stratford-upon-Avon, Ironbridge Gorge, Cheddar Gorge	9 to 177 km (5.5 to 110 mi)	20 min to 2 h 15 min	Families, industrial heritage, castles
Cambridge	IWM Duxford, Ely, Audley End, Bury St Edmunds, Burghley Park, Norwich	21 to 102 km (13 to 63 mi)	25 min to 1 h 30 min	Aviation, cathedrals, country houses
Leeds	Harewood House, Harrogate, Haworth, Bolton Abbey, Fountains Abbey, York	14 to 44 km (9 to 27.5 mi)	20 to 50 min	Stately homes, abbeys, the Brontës, York
Liverpool	Port Sunlight, Chester, Southport, Llandudno, Blackpool	10 to 89 km (6 to 55.5 mi)	15 min to 1 h 25 min	Seaside towns, Roman Chester, North Wales
Newcastle	Hadrian's Wall, Tynemouth, Beamish, Durham, Alnwick Castle, Lindisfarne	13 to 97 km (8 to 60 mi)	15 min to 1 h 20 min	Roman history, castles, coast, islands
Southampton	Marwell Zoo, New Forest, Winchester, Salisbury, Bournemouth, Stonehenge	16 to 53 km (10 to 33 mi)	25 to 55 min	National park, cathedrals, beaches, Stonehenge
Manchester	Stockport, Dunham Massey, Little Moreton Hall, Delamere Forest, Liverpool, Lake District	11 to 134 km (7 to 83 mi)	20 min to 1 h 45 min	Historic houses, forests, lakes
Edinburgh	Rosslyn Chapel, North Berwick, Tantallon Castle, Stirling, Glasgow, St Andrews	12 to 87 km (7.5 to 54 mi)	20 min to 1 h 25 min	Castles, coast, golf, cities

City	Best day trips	Distance range	Typical drive	Great for
Glasgow	Paisley, Dumbarton Castle, Stirling, Loch Lomond, Ayrshire Coast, Oban	16 to 156 km (10 to 97 mi)	20 min to 2 h 15 min	Lochs, castles, Robert Burns, West Highlands

Distances and drive times are one way, from the city centre, checked with an OpenStreetMap route planner [W1]. Real drive times depend on traffic, especially at rush hour.

City by city

Day trips from London

6 day trips · 40 to 163 km (25 to 101 mi) · 45 min to 2 h 5 min

London is the starting point for day trips in every direction. Windsor is the closest, about 45 minutes away, and is home to Windsor Castle [W1]. Canterbury, a cathedral city and medieval pilgrimage site, lies to the south-east in Kent. To the north and west you can reach the university city of Cambridge, Blenheim Palace, where Winston Churchill was born, Highclere Castle, known from the TV series Downton Abbey, and Shakespeare's hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon. Central London has a Congestion Charge and the ULEZ covers all London boroughs, so check both before you set off [W8][W9].

Don't miss: Windsor: 40 km (25 mi), about 45 min, via the A4 and M4 · Canterbury: 100 km (62 mi), about 1 h 35 min, via the A2 and M2 · Cambridge: 103 km (64 mi), about 1 h 30 min, via the M11 · Blenheim Palace: 101 km (63 mi), about 1 h 25 min, via the M40 and A40 · Highclere Castle: 106 km (66 mi), about 1 h 30 min, via the M4 · Stratford-upon-Avon: 163 km (101 mi), about 2 h 5 min, via the M40

Day trips from Bristol

6 day trips · 21 to 115 km (13 to 72 mi) · 30 min to 1 h 30 min

Bristol sits between the West Country and Wales. Bath, a UNESCO World Heritage city with Roman baths and Georgian buildings, is only 30 minutes away. Cheddar Gorge offers walks, caves and a feral goat herd, and Berkeley Castle dates from the 12th century. Further away are the drive-through safari park at Longleat, the stone circle at Stonehenge and, across the River Severn, the hiking country of Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park, with the Pen y Fan route [W5]. Bristol has a Clean Air Zone that includes cars that do not meet the emission standards [W7].

Don't miss: Bath: 21 km (13 mi), about 30 min, via the A4 · Cheddar Gorge: 31 km (19 mi), about 45 min, via the A38 · Berkeley Castle: 32 km (20 mi), under 30 min, via the M5 · Longleat Safari & Adventure Park: 47 km (29 mi), about 1 h, via the A36 · Stonehenge: 71 km (44 mi), about 1 h 10 min, via the A36 · Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons): 115 km (72 mi), about 1 h 30 min, via the M4 and A470 [W1]

Day trips from Aberdeen

6 day trips · 23 to 127 km (14 to 79 mi) · 25 min to 1 h 40 min

From Aberdeen you can reach the coast, Royal Deeside and other Scottish cities. Newburgh is known for its seals, which are present all year, and Stonehaven is a fishing town with a beach and a heritage museum. Inland, Muir of Dinnet National Nature Reserve is an easy entry point to the Cairngorms

National Park, and Balmoral Castle, completed in 1856 [W11], lies further along the A93. Dundee and the golf town of St Andrews are both reached via the A90. Aberdeen city centre has a Low Emission Zone [W10].

Don't miss: Newburgh Seal Beach: 23 km (14 mi), about 25 min, via the A90 and A975 · Stonehaven: 26 km (16 mi), about 30 min, via the A92 · Muir of Dinnet (Cairngorms National Park): 58 km (36 mi), about 1 h 10 min, via the A944 and B9119 · Balmoral Castle: 76 km (47 mi), about 1 h 30 min, via the B9119, A980 and A93 · Dundee: 108 km (67 mi), about 1 h 25 min, via the A90 · St Andrews: 127 km (79 mi), about 1 h 40 min, via the A90, A92 and A91

Day trips from Birmingham

6 day trips · 9 to 177 km (5.5 to 110 mi) · 20 min to 2 h 15 min

Birmingham is the base for trips across the English Midlands. Cadbury World in Bournville is about 20 minutes south on the A38 [W2]. The Black Country Living Museum in Dudley and Ironbridge Gorge, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, tell the story of the Industrial Revolution. Warwick Castle and Stratford-upon-Avon are reached via the M42 and M40 [W1]. Cheddar Gorge is a long day out, about 2 hours 15 minutes each way [W1]. Birmingham's Clean Air Zone includes cars that do not meet the emission standards [W7].

Don't miss: Cadbury World (Bournville): 9 km (5.5 mi), about 20 min, via the A38 [W2] · Black Country Living Museum (Dudley): 15 km (9.5 mi), about 25 min, via the A457 · Warwick Castle: 42 km (26 mi), about 50 min, via the M42 and M40 [W1] · Stratford-upon-Avon: 64 km (40 mi), about 55 min, via the M42, M40 and A46 [W1] · Ironbridge Gorge: 60 km (37 mi), about 45 min, via the M6 and M54 · Cheddar Gorge: 177 km (110 mi), about 2 h 15 min, via the M5 [W1]

Day trips from Cambridge

6 day trips · 21 to 102 km (13 to 63 mi) · 25 min to 1 h 30 min

Cambridge is surrounded by the cathedral cities, market towns and country houses of the East of England. IWM Duxford, with aircraft from the First World War to the present day, is just south of the city at junction 10 of the M11 [W3]. Ely has a vast Norman cathedral, and Bury St Edmunds is a market town with St Edmundsbury Cathedral and the ruins of the abbey. Audley End is a Jacobean house with gardens by Capability Brown, who also designed Burghley Park near Stamford. Norwich, the county town of Norfolk, is about 1 hour 30 minutes away.

Don't miss: IWM Duxford: 21 km (13 mi), about 25 min, via the M11 (junction 10) and A505 [W1][W3] · Ely: 27 km (17 mi), about 40 min, via the A10 · Audley End House and Gardens: 27 km (17 mi), about 35 min, via the M11 and A1301 · Bury St Edmunds: 45 km (28 mi), about 45 min, via the A14 · Burghley Park (Stamford): 76 km (47 mi), about 1 h, via the A14 and A1(M) · Norwich: 102 km (63 mi), about 1 h 30 min, via the A14 and A11

Day trips from Leeds

6 day trips · 14 to 44 km (9 to 27.5 mi) · 20 to 50 min

Leeds has some of the shortest day trips in this chapter: all six are under an hour away. Harewood House, a stately home with staterooms and an art collection, is 20 minutes north, and the spa town of Harrogate is 10 minutes further on the same road. Haworth is the home of the Brontë sisters. Bolton Abbey and Fountains Abbey, with the Studley Royal Water Gardens, are both set in large historic

estates; Fountains Abbey is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. York, with York Minster and the Shambles, is about 40 minutes east.

Don't miss: Harewood House: 14 km (9 mi), about 20 min, via the A61 · Harrogate: 25 km (15.5 mi), about 30 min, via the A61 · Haworth: 37 km (23 mi), about 45 min, via the A647 and B6144 · Bolton Abbey: 37 km (23 mi), about 45 min, via the A660 and A65 · Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal: 42 km (26 mi), about 50 min, via the A61 · York: 44 km (27.5 mi), about 40 min, via the M1 and A64

Day trips from Liverpool

5 day trips · 10 to 89 km (6 to 55.5 mi) · 15 min to 1 h 25 min

From Liverpool you can cross the Mersey to the Wirral, drive up the Lancashire coast or head into North Wales. Port Sunlight is a preserved 19th-century workers' village, 15 minutes away through the Queensway Tunnel. Chester is known for its Roman walls and the two-tier shops of the Rows. Southport and Blackpool are classic seaside towns, and Formby Beach, with its dunes and pine woods, is on the way to Southport. In Wales, Llandudno has a Victorian promenade between the Great Orme and Little Orme headlands.

Don't miss: Port Sunlight Village: 10 km (6 mi), about 15 min, via the Queensway (Birkenhead) Tunnel and A41 · Chester: 32 km (20 mi), about 40 min, via the A41 and M53 · Southport: 32 km (20 mi), about 45 min, via the A565 · Llandudno: 89 km (55.5 mi), about 1 h 25 min, via the A41 and A55 · Blackpool: 89 km (55 mi), about 1 h 15 min, via the M58, M6 and M55

Day trips from Newcastle

6 day trips · 13 to 97 km (8 to 60 mi) · 15 min to 1 h 20 min

Newcastle is the gateway to the Roman frontier, the North Sea coast and the castles of Northumberland. Hadrian's Wall can be walked from Heddon-on-the-Wall, just 15 minutes west. Tynemouth has the Long Sands beach and a medieval priory and castle. Beamish is an open-air museum of life in the North East, and Durham has a cathedral and a castle that are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. North on the A1 are Alnwick Castle and Lindisfarne (Holy Island), which you can only reach across a tidal causeway [W6].

Don't miss: Heddon-on-the-Wall (Hadrian's Wall): 13 km (8 mi), about 15 min, via the A69 · Tynemouth: 16 km (10 mi), about 20 min, via the Coast Road · Beamish, The Living Museum of the North: 18 km (11 mi), about 25 min, via the A1 and A693 · Durham: 29 km (18 mi), about 35 min, via the A1 and A167 · Alnwick Castle: 61 km (38 mi), about 50 min, via the A1 · Lindisfarne (Holy Island): 97 km (60 mi), about 1 h 20 min, via the A1 and the Holy Island Causeway

Day trips from Southampton

6 day trips · 16 to 53 km (10 to 33 mi) · 25 to 55 min

Southampton lies close to the New Forest and the south coast. The New Forest, with its free-roaming ponies and the village of Lyndhurst, is about 25 minutes west. Winchester has its cathedral and King Arthur's Round Table in the Great Hall, and Marwell Zoo is nearby. Salisbury Cathedral holds an original copy of Magna Carta, and Stonehenge is less than an hour away. For the beach, Bournemouth has a long sandy coastline and a pier.

Don't miss: Marwell Zoo: 19 km (12 mi), about 30 min, via the M3 and B3335 · New Forest National Park (Lyndhurst): 16 km (10 mi), about 25 min, via the A33 and A35 · Winchester: 21 km (13 mi), about 25 min, via the A33 and M3 · Salisbury: 39 km (24 mi), about 40 min, via the M271 and A36 ·

Bournemouth Beach: 53 km (33 mi), about 50 min, via the M27, A31 and A338 · Stonehenge: 53 km (33 mi), about 55 min, via the A36 and A360

Day trips from Manchester

6 day trips · 11 to 134 km (7 to 83 mi) · 20 min to 1 h 45 min

Manchester has short trips to Cheshire towns and longer drives to the coast and the lakes. Stockport is known for its 1840 railway viaduct, and Dunham Massey near Altrincham is an estate with a Georgian house and a deer park. Little Moreton Hall is a half-timbered house begun in about 1504 to 1508 [W12], and Delamere Forest has walking and cycling trails. Liverpool is less than an hour west on the M62. The Lake District is the longest trip, about 1 hour 45 minutes to Windermere [W1].

Don't miss: Stockport: 11 km (7 mi), about 20 min, via the A6 · Altrincham and Dunham Massey: 14 km (9 mi), about 25 min, via the A56 · Little Moreton Hall: 48 km (30 mi), about 1 h, via the A34 · Delamere Forest: 51 km (32 mi), about 55 min, via the M56 · Liverpool: 56 km (35 mi), about 1 h, via the M62 · Lake District (Windermere): 134 km (83 mi), about 1 h 45 min, via the M61 and M6 [W1]

Day trips from Edinburgh

6 day trips · 12 to 87 km (7.5 to 54 mi) · 20 min to 1 h 25 min

Edinburgh has castles, coast and cities within easy reach. Rosslyn Chapel, dating from the 15th century, is 20 minutes south. East along the A1 are the seaside town of North Berwick and Tantallon Castle, a 14th-century ruin with views of the Bass Rock. Stirling, with its castle and the Wallace Monument, is reached via the M9. Glasgow lies to the west, about an hour away on the M8 [W4], and St Andrews, known as the home of golf, is about 1 hour 25 minutes north. Edinburgh city centre has a Low Emission Zone [W10].

Don't miss: Rosslyn Chapel (Roslin): 12 km (7.5 mi), about 20 min, via the A701 · North Berwick: 40 km (25 mi), about 40 min, via the A1 · Tantallon Castle: 48 km (30 mi), about 45 min, via the A1 · Stirling: 66 km (41 mi), about 1 h, via the M9 · Glasgow: 76 km (47 mi), about 1 h, via the M8 [W4] · St Andrews: 87 km (54 mi), about 1 h 25 min, via the A92

Day trips from Glasgow

6 day trips · 16 to 156 km (10 to 97 mi) · 20 min to 2 h 15 min

Glasgow is the gateway to the West Highlands and the Ayrshire coast. Paisley gave its name to the famous textile pattern, and Dumbarton Castle stands on a basalt rock above the River Clyde. Stirling is 40 minutes away on the M80. Loch Lomond, the largest freshwater loch in Scotland by surface area, is part of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park [W13]. South on the M77 is Robert Burns country, with the Burns Birthplace Museum and Culzean Castle, and Oban, a port for ferries to Mull and the Hebrides, is about 2 hours 15 minutes away. Glasgow city centre has a Low Emission Zone [W10].

Don't miss: Paisley: 16 km (10 mi), about 20 min, via the M8 · Dumbarton Castle: 33 km (20.5 mi), about 30 min, via the M8 · Stirling: 43 km (26.5 mi), about 40 min, via the M80 · Loch Lomond (Balloch): 39 km (24 mi), about 40 min, via the M8 and A82 · Ayrshire Coast (Burns country): 69 km (43 mi), about 55 min, via the M77 and A77 · Oban: 156 km (97 mi), about 2 h 15 min, via the A82 and A85

Worth a detour: longer trips and island days

Place	How to get there and why
Isle of Wight (from Southampton)	Car ferry from Southampton to East Cowes; allow about 1 h 20 min including the crossing. Highlights include Osborne and Compton Beach.
Isle of Arran (from Glasgow)	54 km (33 mi), about 50 min, on the A737 to the ferry at Ardrossan, plus the crossing [W1]. Known as "Scotland in Miniature"; put Brodick Castle and Goat Fell first.
Loch Ness (from Edinburgh)	275 km (171 mi), about 3 h 30 min, via the A9. A long day: boat trips run from Fort Augustus and Inverness.
The Cotswolds (from London or Bristol)	From London 163 km (101 mi), about 2 h 10 min, via the M4; from Bristol about 1 hour. Villages include Bourton-on-the-Water, Castle Combe and Lacock.
Yorkshire Sculpture Park (from Leeds)	32 km (20 mi), about 25 min, via the M1. More than 90 artworks across 500 acres of parkland.

Driving tips for this route

- Check emission rules before you drive into a city centre. London's ULEZ covers all London boroughs 24 hours a day, but not the M25 [W8]; the Congestion Charge applies in central London from 07:00 to 18:00 on weekdays and 12:00 to 18:00 at weekends and on bank holidays [W9].
- Birmingham and Bristol have Class D Clean Air Zones, which include cars. Cars must meet at least Euro 4 (petrol) or Euro 6 (diesel) to avoid a charge [W7]. The Tyneside zone in Newcastle and Gateshead does not charge private cars [W7].
- Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee have Low Emission Zones. Non-compliant vehicles are not charged to enter; instead the registered keeper receives a penalty charge [W10].
- Lindisfarne (Holy Island): drive the causeway only during the safe crossing times published by Northumberland County Council, and allow 30 minutes extra, because weather such as high wind can change them [W6].
- Leave early for the longer trips (Stratford-upon-Avon from London, Cheddar Gorge from Birmingham, Oban from Glasgow) so that you have time at the destination and avoid driving back late.
- Book popular sights in advance where needed, for example a tour of Highclere Castle.

Frequently asked questions

What are the best day trips by car from London?
Windsor (40 km / 25 miles, about 45 minutes), Canterbury (100 km / 62 miles, about 1 hour 35 minutes), Cambridge (103 km / 64 miles, about 1 hour 30 minutes), Blenheim Palace (101 km / 63

miles, about 1 hour 25 minutes), Highclere Castle (106 km / 66 miles, about 1 hour 30 minutes) and Stratford-upon-Avon (163 km / 101 miles, about 2 hours 5 minutes).

Where can I go within 1 hour of London by car?
Windsor is the closest option, about 45 minutes and 40 km (25 miles) away via the A4 and M4 [W1].

What are the best day trips from Edinburgh by car?
Rosslyn Chapel (12 km / 7.5 miles, 20 minutes), North Berwick (40 km / 25 miles, 40 minutes), Tantallon Castle (48 km / 30 miles, 45 minutes), Stirling (66 km / 41 miles, about 1 hour), Glasgow (76 km / 47 miles, about 1 hour, to the west on the M8 [W4]) and St Andrews (87 km / 54 miles, about 1 hour 25 minutes).

How far is Cheddar Gorge from Birmingham?
About 177 km (110 miles), or around 2 hours 15 minutes each way via the M5 [W1]. From Bristol it is only 31 km (19 miles), about 45 minutes, on the A38.

What are the best day trips from Manchester by car?
Stockport (11 km / 7 miles), Altrincham (14 km / 9 miles) and Dunham Massey just beyond it (19 km / 12 miles), Little Moreton Hall (48 km / 30 miles), Delamere Forest (51 km / 32 miles), Liverpool (56 km / 35 miles) and the Lake District, about 134 km (83 miles) and 1 hour 45 minutes to Windermere [W1].

Do I need to pay to drive into UK city centres?
In some cities, yes. London has the ULEZ and the Congestion Charge, Birmingham and Bristol charge cars that do not meet the Clean Air Zone standards, and Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee issue penalty charges to non-compliant vehicles in their Low Emission Zones [W7][W8][W9][W10].

Sources for this chapter

Based on the SIXT Magazine articles “Best Day Trips from London: 15+ Places to Go by Car”, “Best Day Trips from Bristol”, “Best Day Trips from Aberdeen”, “Best Day Trips from Birmingham”, “Best Day Trips from Cambridge”, “Best Day Trips from Leeds”, “Best Day Trips from Liverpool”, “Best Day Trips from Newcastle”, “Best Day Trips from Southampton”, “Best Day Trips from Manchester”, “Best Day Trips from Edinburgh” and “Best Day Trips from Glasgow”. Facts marked [W#] come from these sources:

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	Road distances and drive times: Birmingham to Cheddar 177 km / 110 mi (M5, A38/A371); Birmingham to Stratford 64 km / 40 mi and Birmingham to Warwick Castle 56 km / 35 mi (M42, M40); Cambridge to IWM Duxford 21 km / 13 mi (M11, A505); Manchester to Windermere (Bowness) 134 km / 83 mi (M61, M6, A590); Bristol to Pen y Fan area 115 km / 72 mi (M4, A470); Glasgow to Ardrossan 54 km / 33 mi (M8, A737); London to Windsor 37 km, 47 min; Manchester to Altrincham 14 km, Manchester to Dunham Massey 19 km.	Project OSRM / OpenStreetMap: OSRM route planner (OpenStreetMap data)
W2	Cadbury World is signposted from the A38 in Bournville; follow brown signs to Cadbury World and Bournville	Cadbury World: Travelling by car – Cadbury World

Ref	Fact	Source
W3	IWM Duxford is just south of Cambridge at junction 10 of the M11	Imperial War Museums: Getting to IWM Duxford
W4	The M8 connects Glasgow and Edinburgh; from the Edinburgh City Bypass the road runs west towards Glasgow	Wikipedia: M8 motorway (Scotland)
W5	The national park uses the name Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, with 'Brecon Beacons' as the English name	Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority: Bannau Brycheiniog National Park
W6	Safe crossing times for the Lindisfarne causeway road; weather such as high wind can change them; always allow 30 minutes extra	Northumberland County Council: Holy Island crossing times
W7	Clean Air Zones: Birmingham and Bristol are Class D (includes cars); Tyneside (Newcastle and Gateshead) is Class C (cars not included); cars must meet Euro 4 petrol or Euro 6 diesel	GOV.UK: Driving in a clean air zone
W8	The ULEZ operates across all London boroughs, does not include the M25, and runs 24 hours a day, every day except Christmas Day	Transport for London: Ultra Low Emission Zone
W9	Congestion Charge hours: 07:00 to 18:00 Monday to Friday, 12:00 to 18:00 on weekends and bank holidays	Transport for London: Congestion Charge
W10	Low Emission Zones in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen; a penalty charge is payable by the registered keeper when a non-compliant vehicle enters	Transport Scotland: Low Emission Zones introduced across Scotland
W11	Foundation stone laid in 1853; castle completed in 1856	Wikipedia: Balmoral Castle
W12	Earliest parts built about 1504 to 1508, with additions until about 1610	Wikipedia: Little Moreton Hall
W13	Largest loch in Great Britain by surface area; part of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park	Wikipedia: Loch Lomond

PLAN YOUR BRITISH ISLES ROAD TRIP

How to combine the routes, sample itineraries and a checklist before you go

The eight road trips in this guide work on their own, but several of them share a start or end point, so they are easy to combine into a longer journey.

Combine the routes

Combination	How it links	Total time
North Coast 500 + Classic Scotland	Both pass through Inverness. Drive Classic Scotland from Edinburgh to Inverness, add the NC500 loop, then continue to Skye, Glen Coe, Loch Lomond and Glasgow.	About 3 to 4 weeks
Norman castles + oldest pubs	The oldest-pubs route ends in Nottingham, which is also on the castles route; continue north from Nottingham to York.	About 9 days
Southern England + England's national parks	The Southern England route crosses Dartmoor; add the New Forest and South Downs drives on the way west from London.	About 10 to 11 days
Ireland + Northern Ireland	After the 10-day Ireland loop, plan Belfast and the Northern Ireland coast as a separate trip, using the day trips and beaches in chapter 3.	About 12 to 14 days
A city base + day trips	Stay in one city and use chapter 8 for a different day trip each day: ideal for families or a first visit.	3 to 7 days

Sample itineraries

Trip length	Suggested road trip	Chapters
1 week	Ireland's 5-day loop from Dublin plus two days in Dublin, or the first five days of Southern England, from London via the Jurassic Coast to Exeter.	3 or 4
10 days	The North Coast 500 at a relaxed pace, with time for walks such as Handa Island and the Old Man of Stoer.	1
2 weeks	Southern England in 8 days, then cross into Wales for Bannau Brycheiniog and one or two Eryri drives.	4 and 7
3 weeks	Classic Scotland from Edinburgh to Glasgow, with the Isle of Skye and the Cairngorms.	2
4 weeks	Classic Scotland combined with the North Coast 500.	1 and 2

Before you go: checklist

- Check the emission zones on your route (London, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee) and whether your car meets the standards (chapters 4, 5 and 8).
- Book accommodation early for summer, especially along the North Coast 500 and in Cornwall (chapters 1 and 4).
- Book ferries in advance in summer, for example the Armadale to Mallaig crossing to and from Skye (chapter 2).
- Check seasonal opening times for castles and houses before you set off: several close in winter (chapters 2 and 5).
- Check road conditions in winter for mountain roads and passes (chapters 1, 2 and 7).
- Pack midge repellent for the Scottish Highlands from late spring to early autumn (chapters 1 and 2).
- Plan fuel stops on remote routes: for example, fill up in towns such as Ashburton before crossing Dartmoor (chapter 6).

British Isles road trips: frequently asked questions

What is the best road trip in the UK?
For wild coastal scenery, the North Coast 500 in Scotland: a 516-mile (830 km) loop from Inverness. For history and villages, the 8-day Southern England route from London to Cornwall. For mountains, the Eryri drives in north Wales.

How many days do you need for a road trip in Scotland?
At least 5 to 7 days for the North Coast 500, and about 18 days for a classic tour from Edinburgh through the Highlands and Skye to Glasgow. Allow extra time: single-track roads are slower than the distance suggests.

Which side of the road do you drive on in Ireland?
On the left, in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Speed limits are in km/h in the Republic and in mph in Northern Ireland.

When is the best time for a road trip in the British Isles?
Late spring to early autumn. In Scotland, May to June and September avoid the worst of the midges; in Ireland, May and June are usually the sunniest months; in Cornwall, avoid the July to August peak if you can.

Do you have to pay to drive into London?
Possibly: London's Ultra Low Emission Zone covers all London boroughs, 24 hours a day, and applies to cars that do not meet its standards, and central London also has a Congestion Charge. Check your vehicle on the Transport for London website before you go.

Are there toll roads in the British Isles?

A few. In Ireland, the M50 around Dublin has a barrier-free toll, and several other national roads are tolled. Both Ireland loops in chapter 3 use at least one toll road; most of the other routes in this guide use toll-free roads.

ENJOY THE ROAD

Take your time, stop often and let the road set the pace. Whether you drive the single-track roads of the far north, the hedge-lined lanes of Cornwall or the mountain passes of Eryri, the best moments of a British Isles road trip are usually the unplanned ones.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

How this guide was made

The routes in this part of the guide are based on SIXT Magazine's road-trip articles. Every chapter was rewritten into clear routes and fact-checked in October 2026 against official sources (governments, national park authorities, tourism boards and road authorities) and credible references. The sources for each chapter are listed at the end of the chapter.

Distances marked 'approx.' or 'about' are estimates from route planners or official route figures; actual distances depend on your exact start and end points. Opening times, prices and road rules can change, so check them again shortly before you travel.

AI transparency: this guide was drafted with the help of AI tools. Every chapter was reviewed, fact-checked and approved by the SIXT editorial team before publication.