

WELCOME TO NORTHUMBERLAND ENGLAND'S DEEP NORTH



Article By Phil Thomas

If the story of England can be found around its perimeter, Northumberland would be an epic opening chapter. Where else can you retrace the footsteps of Vikings, stroll the ramparts of the first castle to fall in the War of the Roses or continue a 1,500-year tradition by sipping a glass of mead as the sun descends over the Lindisfarne causeway?

Enclosed between the tourist heavyweights of the Yorkshire Dales, the Lake District and Scotland, England's border county remains largely undiscovered by international visitors. It's arguably all the better for it. Traditional coastal industries like fish smoking in Craster continue unabated, there's no fist-fight over a spot to lay your towel on Embleton beach and the boats in tiny village harbours remain a vital part of the local economy rather than merely a backdrop for tourist selfies. Northumberland is a place that makes you pause and inhale - a world away from urban chaos.

Whether you're strolling the beach beneath gravity-defying Bamburgh Castle, giggling with glee at spotting baby puffins on the Farne Islands, or sampling Berwick's unexpectedly buzzy culinary scene, Northumberland is a place where the past feels alive but the present remains vibrant.

Things to Do

Alnwick Castle and Gardens

www.alnwickcastle.com (Adults £20.50, Children £10.80, open 10.00 – 17.00, 17.30 July & August)

www.alnwickgarden.com (Adults £19.70, up to four children free with every paying adult, open 10.00 – 17.00)

Recent appearances in Harry Potter and Downton Abbey have thrust Alnwick Castle firmly into the spotlight with the summer crowds to match. Northumberland's biggest castle offers family-friendly tours of its 700-year-old history, archery lessons and 'broomstick training' within its repertoire. The nearby Gardens are a 21st century creation but no less appealing with the Poison Garden of toxic botanicals a macabre highlight. Both attractions closed during winter. While in town, pay a visit to Barter Books located in the old station – one of the best second-hand bookshops in England, complete with model trains zooming above the bookcases.



Bamburgh Castle

www.bamburghcastle.com/visit-us

Open 10.00 – 17.00, entrance £16.50 adult, £7.50 children (card only)

Better known as the semi-mythical Bebbanberg in the Last Kingdom, Bamburgh Castle occupies an imposing rocky outcrop above the village and beach. Inside, richly furnished state rooms trace its rich heritage through Viking, Norman, Scots and Plantagenet owners and a fascinating armoury collection will keep kids entertained. The coastal views from the ramparts are bettered only by silhouette of the castle from the beach: one of Northumberland's defining images.

Dunstanburgh Castle

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/dunstanburgh-castle/prices-and-opening-times/

Open 10.00 – 16.00, weekends only in winter, entrance £6.50 for adults, £3.50 children

The only one of the 'big three' Northumberland coastal castles left to ruin, Dunstanburgh is a 14th-century fortress set against a wild seascape. Fought over initially by the English and Scots and subsequently, the Houses of Lancaster and York, the castle is accessed via a 1.3-mile clifftop walk from the attractive coastal village of Craster. The approach alone is worth the entrance fee.

Farne Islands

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/north-east/farne-islands

Boat fares - £30 adults, £23 children plus (optional) Inner Farne landing £15/£12 adults, £7.50/£6 children (peak/off-peak)

The Farne Islands are a haven for puffins, seals, and seabirds, with early summer the best time to witness the spectacle of up to 50,000 pairs of breeding puffins making temporary home. Trips available on 'sail around' basis or a – more expensive - short landing on Inner Farne to walk amongst the seabirds. If you opt for the latter, wear a hat/hood – the resident arctic terns respond to curious visitors with full-throated divebombs! Boat operators from Seahouses include [Serenity](#) and [Billy Shiels](#): book online or visit their stands in Seahouses Harbour.

Lindisfarne (Holy Island)

www.visitnorthumberland.com/explore/destinations/islands/holy-island

Holy Island, linked to the mainland by a tidal causeway (see below) has been a mystical place of pilgrimage for over 1,400 years. The ruined 12th century abbey and rather more modern museum, (£8.50 adults, £4.50 children) tells the story of this cradle of early British Christianity and its violent end in the first Viking raids in 793AD. Take in the air with a stroll from the atmospheric harbour to the reconstructed castle (more of a stately home - £12 adults, £6 children)

The coastal views from the ramparts are bettered only by silhouette of the castle from the beach: one of Northumberland's defining images.

**Time and Tide:**

Holy Island is connected to the mainland by a low-lying causeway that is submerged at high tide for c. 5 hours at a time – check the [safe crossing times here](#) and factor these into your journey. Don't even think about attempting to cross outside of these times – roadside posters line the route in both directions with graphic images of half-submerged cars whose owners thought they knew better.

Where to Eat

Neptune's, 3 Seafield Road, Seahouses

(01665 721310)

Open 11.30 – 20.00, closes early in winter

A worthy contender in the competitive field of 'Best Fish and Chips in Britain' doling up enormous portions of haddock, cod and scampi for the past quarter-century. Surprisingly good vegan and gluten-free range offered, together with 'light bites' range for those intimidated by the regular plate size. Complete your experience with an ice cream from the adjoining parlour.

Dine-in or take your dinner away and enjoy a seat on the nearby terrace overlooking the harbour and Farne Islands.

7Repas, 7 West Street, Berwick-Upon-Tweed (no phone)

Open 10.00 – 16.00 plus 17.00 – midnight Fri-Sat, closed Sundays

A delightful little bistro, offering a respite from the swathes of pub grub you'll have consumed along the coast. Menu highlights include stone baked pizzas and a tapas menu with local colour - the haggis bonbons with whiskey sauce will have you purring. Live blues and jazz musicians take to the small stage, every weekend at 8pm.

The White Swan Inn, Warendorf Village (01668 213453)

Open 12.00 – 23.00, food until 21.00

William Morris décor and exposed brickwork give this village pub a contemporary flair with a menu to match. Local game and fish feature strongly with the scallops and pork belly a particular highlight. The adjacent bar offers an extensive gin menu, local beers and a warm welcome for walkers and dogs alike. Also offers 3 en-suite rooms.



Where to Stay

Well House Hayloft, Belford

www.wellhousehayloft.co.uk

Apartment from £100 p.n

Characterful one-bed apartment in Belford village, halfway between Alnwick and Berwick, just off the A1. Sleeps three comfortably with space for two more in the living room. Tastefully decorated with local artwork, a fully-equipped kitchen and extra comfortable armchairs. Watch your head on the period low ceilings!

Situated directly above the Well House Coffee Shop (open 10.00 – 16.00) which serves exceptional breakfasts, home-bakes and afternoon teas. Belford, an old coaching stop between London and Edinburgh is well equipped with three pubs, a Co-Op supermarket and is only five miles from the coast.

The Victoria Hotel, Bamburgh

thevictoriahotelbamburgh.co.uk

Rooms from £180 p.n

Nestled in the heart of Bamburgh, the Victoria offers rooms with warm lighting and contemporary décor. Some rooms offer picture-perfect views of Bamburgh Castle, which will justify the higher price in the eyes of true romantics. The hotel's Bar & Brasserie earns rave reviews for its Northumbrian lamb, regional cheeses and seasonal vegetarian options. Breakfast features homemade pastries.

A partnership with the Ocean Club in Seahouses – a five-minute drive away – gives access to a swimming pool and gym for residents.

TO MISQUOTE BILL BRYSON 'IF YOU'VE NEVER BEEN TO NORTHUMBERLAND, GO AT ONCE. TAKE MY CAR. IT'S WONDERFUL.' BILL'S RIGHT ON ALL FRONTS, INCLUDING THE NEED FOR YOUR (OR HIS) CAR TO GET THE BEST FROM NORTHUMBERLAND.

Lindisfarne Hotel, Holy Island

visitlindisfarne.com/listings/short-stays/lindisfarne-hotel/

Rooms from £150 p.n.

Seven B&B en-suite rooms on offer in the centre of Holy Island village, including one wheelchair accessible and one dog-friendly room (contact in advance). Simple, clean and comfortable rooms with tea and coffee facilities, hairdryers and fast and free Wi-Fi. Breakfast cooked to order at The Manor, a two-minute walk away, with a focus on locally sourced ingredients and stirring views of the harbour and castle. Not to be confused with the Lindisfarne Inn, 5 miles away on the mainland.

Touring Suggestions

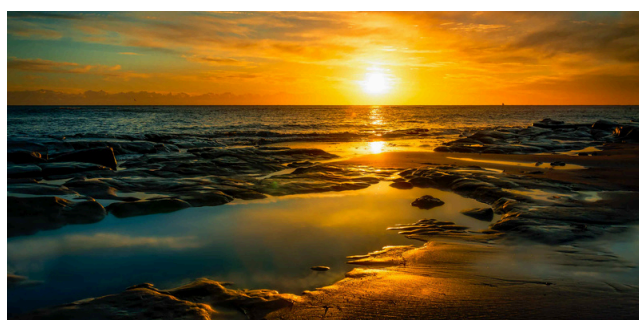
To misquote Bill Bryson 'If you've never been to Northumberland, go at once. Take my car. It's wonderful.' Bill's right on all fronts, including the need for your (or his) car to get the best from Northumberland. The Northumberland Coastal Scenic Drive is clearly signposted from the A1 and runs between Bamburgh and Alnmouth (5 miles from Alnwick). From north to south – the 25-mile route takes in the villages of Seahouses, Beadnell, Embleton and Craster, all of which merit stops for walks, pubs, boat trips and beaches.

Without a car, bus X18 operates along the coast every 2hrs (less frequently on Sunday) between Alnwick and Berwick, including stops in all the coastal villages mentioned above. Timetable [here](#) to help plan your route.

By train, Alnmouth and Berwick are both regular stops on the London to Edinburgh East Coast mainline (www.lner.co.uk or www.lumo.com for tickets). Journey time London-Alnwick is just over 3hrs, Edinburgh-Berwick is 1hr.

Nearest airports are Edinburgh and Newcastle, both of which are the nearest spots to hire a car.

Finally, those with time to kill and with a thirst for a more spiritual mode of transport may consider St Oswald's Way, walking in the literal steps of the Northumbrian king who brought Christianity to the region in the 7th century. The 97-mile/156km path from Heavenfield on Hadrian's Wall near Newcastle to Holy Island takes in much of the coast over a 10-12-day adventure.



STAY CONNECTED

www.someoneelsescountry.com
[@@exploresomeoneelsescountry](https://twitter.com/exploresomeoneelsescountry)

