

SOUTH WEST ENGLAND

Frequently Asked Questions

Product Information & Key Contacts 2016



Bath

Bath Visitor Information Centre

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Lead product

Nourished by natural hot springs, Bath is a UNESCO World Heritage city with stunning architecture, great shopping and iconic attractions. Rich in Roman and Georgian heritage, the city has been attracting visitors with its obvious charms for well over 2000 years and is now the leading Spa destination of the UK.

Some of the highlights of the city include:

The Roman Baths - constructed around 70 AD as a grand bathing and socialising complex. It is now one of the best preserved Roman remains in the world.

Thermae Bath Spa – bathe in Bath’s natural thermal waters. Highlights include the indoor Minerva Bath, steam rooms, and an open-air rooftop pool with amazing views over the city. A fantastic range of treatments including massage, facials and water treatments can be booked in advance.

Gainsborough Bath Spa Hotel – Britain’s first natural thermal spa hotel. Opened in July 2015. A five-star luxury hotel located in the centre of Bath. Facilities include 99 bedrooms (some with access to Bath’s spring water in their own bathrooms), The Spa Village Bath and Johan Lafer’s ‘Dining Without Borders’ restaurant.

Bath Abbey - Magnificent stained glass windows, columns of honey-gold stone and some of the finest fan vaulting in the world, create an extraordinary experience of light and space. Take in 360 views of the city and surrounding countryside from the top of Bath Abbey with a Tower Tour.

The Royal Crescent - this impressive landmark forms a sweeping crescent of 30 Grade I Listed terrace houses, and is without doubt one of the greatest examples of Georgian architecture anywhere in the UK.

No 1 Royal Crescent - No.1 Royal Crescent is a Georgian town house that creates a wonderfully vital picture of life in Georgian Bath.

The Holburne Museum - The Grade I listed building was originally designed and constructed as a hotel, but is now home to a collection of fine and decorative art.

Jane Austen Museum - offers a snapshot of what it would be like to live in the Regency times - the fashion, food, society - everything that would have inspired Austen’s timeless novels.

Bath Skyline Walk - Enjoy the National Trust Bath Skyline along 6 miles of waymarked paths, with amazing views over the city. (National Trust’s No.1 downloaded walk in the UK)

Transport links

Located in the South West of England, Bath is easy to reach, just 90 minutes from London Paddington station by train and a short drive from both the M4 and M5 motorways. Bath is also just 19 miles from Bristol Airport and well connected by regular bus services. Bath Spa train, coach and bus stations are both in the heart of the city centre, which is of a compact centre and best explored on foot if possible.

Bristol

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Overview

If ever there was a city with a story to tell, it's Bristol, with a thousand years of history flowing through its rivers yet retaining a young, creative and contemporary feel. A city full of festivals celebrating culture, creativity, green credentials and wonderful local food and drink.

Its historic Harbourside is now full of boat trips and watersports, lined with art galleries, museums and restaurants. Explore further the different neighbourhoods, each with its own character, from the bohemian, street art-clad Stokes Croft to the Georgian elegance and boutique shopping of Clifton.

The largest city in South West England and the first UK city to be awarded European Green Capital, Bristol has 450 parks and gardens and spectacular architecture.

Historic Harbourside – Once the second busiest port in the world, Bristol's Harbourside is now transformed into a leisure destination full of watersports, boat trips, museums and restaurants.

Clifton Village – Home to boutique shopping, fantastic architecture and a world-famous bridge, Clifton is a short walk from the city centre and is where you can also find Bristol Zoo Gardens.

Brunel's ss Great Britain - Step aboard the ship that changed the world, fully restored to its Victorian splendour and back in the dry dock where it was first built.

Clifton Suspension Bridge & Visitor Centre - The world famous bridge and the iconic symbol of Bristol, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel in 1831 and completed in 1864 after his death.

Street Art Tours & Experiences – Discover the canvas that is the walls of Banksy's home city with a guided tour with the artists themselves before trying it out with a canvas spraying session.

Festivals & Events – Bristol is a city of festivals from the world-famous International Balloon Fiesta to Slapstick Comedy Festival, there is something happening every weekend.

St Nicholas Markets – Opened in 1743 and still going strong, 'St Nicks' is a mishmash of independent traders, street food and treasure. Discover it hidden away in the Old City.

Bristol Cathedral - Much more than a fascinating building, being a fine example of a hall church, it is a centre of Bristol's history, civic life and culture

Transport links - Bristol is one of the most easily accessible cities in the UK, with excellent road, rail, bus and coach and air links. Bristol has a large international airport, with operators flying into Bristol from more than 112 different destinations, including all the major European hub airports. Bristol is ideally located for road access from London as well as from the north and east of England, situated at the intersection of the M4 and M5 motorways. Bristol Temple Meads railway station is the largest rail hub in the west of England, with direct services available from London, Scotland, Wales, Manchester and Birmingham.

Devon

Visit Devon
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Exeter Cathedral - Exeter Cathedral is a testament to the creativity, skill and devotion of those who built it. Dating back 900 years, it is one of England's most beautiful medieval cathedrals and one of the finest examples of decorated Gothic architecture in this country.

Kents Cavern - one of Europe's top prehistory Stone Age caves with an extensive labyrinth of spectacular and easily accessible caverns.

Mayflower Museum - set over three floors the museum explores the story of the voyage of the Pilgrim Fathers and their journey aboard the Mayflower to the New World.

Plymouth Hoe - is where Sir Francis Drake is renowned to have played his last game of bowls before his sailing voyage to engage with the Spanish Armada. Also home to the iconic Smeaton's Tower, Tinside Lido, Royal Citadel and the city's war memorials the Hoe a large open-space and jaw-dropping views.

Powderham Castle - Six hundred years of history are contained within the walls of one of England's oldest family homes. Sir Philip Courtenay began building it in 1391 and it has remained in the same family to this day, currently home to the 18th Earl & Countess of Devon.

RHS Rosemoor - Colour awaits around every corner at Rosemoor, and the calendar is packed with events, including art, craft and food fairs to get you inspired (and your mouth watering!)

Dartmoor National Park – 362 square miles of granite moorland and stunning tors. Dartmoor is dotted with deep wooded valleys with fast flowing rivers, and rugged, wide open spaces it is the place to experience freedom. Dartmoor is home to Sherlock Holmes and The Hound of the Baskervilles.

Transport links:

Devon can be easily reached by car, rail, ferry, coach or bus and even air. The main train stations are Tiverton Parkway, Exeter St David's and Plymouth. Devon is easy to reach by road – the M5 runs into Exeter and has excellent links with the A303, M4 and M6. There are a series of major A roads running through the county to enable you to reach your destination.

There are flights from many UK airports to Exeter International Airport including London City Airport, Aberdeen, Belfast, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, Manchester, Newcastle, Norwich and the Channel Islands. There are also flights from international airports - major hubs such as Amsterdam Schiphol, Paris Charles de Gaulle and Dublin, and regional airports including Geneva, Alicante, Faro, Malaga, Rennes and Palma. . Most flights are operated by Flybe.

Dorset

Visit Dorset

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Lead product

UNESCO Jurassic Coast is England's first natural World Heritage Site. Covering 95 miles of coastline from East Devon to Dorset, displaying 185 million years of the Earth's history. It includes iconic natural elements such as Durdle Door, Chesil Beach, Lulworth Cove and Old Harry Rocks.

Corfe Castle - Discover 1000 years of Corfe Castle's history as a royal palace and fortress, with tales of treachery and treason around every corner.

Highcliffe Castle - a magnificent Grade 1 Listed 1830s mansion built by Lord Stuart de Rothesay. The cliff-top grounds, with wonderful views of the Dorset coastline.

Max Gate House – Thomas Hardy designed this Victorian House and lived here up until his death in 1928.

Tank Museum - Our exhibitions tell the story of armoured warfare spanning almost 100 years of history. As you explore the museum's six large halls, you will come face to face with vehicles that have seen action in all the major wars of the 20th Century.

Cerne Abbas Giant - The 180ft tall club-wielding man has long been regarded as a sign of fertility due to his large, erect phallus. It is not agreed how old the Cerne Abbas Giant is, but he is thought to depict Hercules, the god with super- human strength and possibly created as a pagan idol during the Roman occupation of Britain in the 2nd century AD.

Bournemouth PierZip – Climb the Zip tower at the end of the Bournemouth Pier and above the sea and zip-surf over the waves to the shore. There's a dual line so riders can race to the landing pad. All this against a backdrop of seven miles of golden sand.

Russell Cotes House. Gallery. Museum – In 1901 Merton gave his wife Annie a dream house on a Bournemouth cliff-top overlooking the sea. They filled this exotic seaside villa with beautiful objects from their travels across the world and lined the walls with a remarkable collection of British Arts, creating a unique atmosphere in a most dramatic setting. A home, art gallery and a museum. They sealed it in time and gave it to the future.

Travel links: Dorset is easily accessible by road, linking with the M3 from London and the M5 from Birmingham. By road, Dorset is only a couple of hours from London and passing through beautiful countryside along the way. Driving is a pleasure on our traffic-light country lanes, just make sure you don't get distracted by the incredible views!

Cornwall

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Lead product

Located in the far west of Great Britain on a peninsula tumbling into the vast Atlantic Ocean, almost completely surrounded by the sea, a magnificent coastline wraps around Cornwall for almost 300 miles. Cornwall is also the location of mainland Great Britain's most southerly promontory, The Lizard, and one of the UK's most westerly points, Land's End, while a few miles off shore and even further west is an archipelago of tiny islands that make up the Isles of Scilly.

There are lots of things Cornwall is loved for; the dramatic coastline with its captivating fishing harbours; the spectacular beaches and the pounding surf that provide a natural playground for a variety of watersports; and of course the Cornish pasty and cream teas.

St Michaels Mount - Explore the amazing island world of St Michael's Mount and discover legend, myth and over a thousand years of incredible history. Delve into the history of a fortress.

Lost Gardens of Heligan - Heligan is so much more than a garden restored; its own special atmosphere encourages contemplation and inspiration, satisfying the broadest range of horticultural and wildlife interests with over 200 acres to explore!

Minack Theatre - Cornwall's world famous open-air theatre, carved into the granite cliff and set in glorious gardens overlooking the spectacular panorama of Porthcurno Bay.

Land's End - One of Britain's best loved landmarks, famous for its unique location and beautiful scenery. Cliff top trails, breathtaking views, pay-as-you-go family attractions, shopping village, restaurant and cafés.

Tintagel Castle - For a magical day out take the family to Tintagel Castle, steeped in legend and mystery; said to be the birthplace of King Arthur, you can still visit nearby Merlin's Cave.

Eden Project - Dubbed the Eighth Wonder of the World by some, Eden is a dramatic global garden housed in tropical biomes that nestle in a crater the size of 30 football pitches.

Transport information

Cornwall is easily accessible by rail or road and has its own airport in Newquay. The nearest international airports are Bristol, Birmingham and London Heathrow. Frequent high speed trains run from London Paddington to Penzance, including the Night Riviera Sleeper Service. The A30 is the main trunk road through the centre of the county.

Isles of Scilly

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There are many wonderful aspects to island life that make the Scilly unique in a very special way. Nearly everyone who comes here falls in love and yearns to come back - again and again and again. No doubt you'll have your own reasons to love Scilly once you've visited, but here are a few of our personal favourites.

The journey Getting to Scilly is an adventure. Where else in England will you arrive on holiday on a scheduled flight from a tiny airport in a small 8- or 17-seater aircraft? With a pilot who doubles as your tour guide? Arriving by sea from Penzance is equally pleasurable... set sail aboard the passenger ferry and leave all your worries behind.

Life on the water Scilly pulsates to the rhythm of the sea. In summer, the coves and quays come alive with boats of every shape and size. Fun seekers enjoy messing about on dinghies, paddleboards and kayaks. You can snorkel with seals, too, and dive the wrecks.

Dazzling birds and wildlife The Isles of Scilly are home to a rich diversity of wildlife. Puffins arrive at the end of April and leave around mid-July. Enjoy a guided wildlife excursion by boat or on foot from resident experts.

Not one destination, but five! There's no better way to experience Scilly than island hopping by boat. Tripper boats run daily between all five inhabited islands as well as the larger uninhabited isles like Samson and the Eastern Isles.

Deserted beaches to call your own Marvel at the long stretches of largely deserted fine white sand beaches reminiscent of the Caribbean and the sparkling crystal clear blue waters that surround the archipelago.

An amazing heritage Scilly's history is utterly compelling – and to this day influences and blends with daily life on the islands. From maritime shipwrecks to Bronze Age burial chambers dating back 3,000 years; from deserted Christian chapels on St. Helen's to heavily fortified castles and headlands from the English Civil War.

Transport information

Fly to the islands via small plane (8 seater Islander or 17 seater Twin Otter) year round from Newquay (30 mins) and Land's End Airports (15 mins) and between March and October from Exeter Airport (60 mins). The Scillonian III passenger ferry leaves from Penzance Quay at 9.15am (generally, although tides may occasionally dictate travel times) six days a week from March to November (seven days per week in high season) and takes just under 3 hours. For more information please see www.islesofscilly-travel.co.uk. Direct trains, including the GWR Sleeper Service overnight from London Paddington, travel to Penzance from the wider region. Cruise ships also call at the islands. Day trips to the islands are possible from Penzance, Land's End and Newquay. .

Somerset

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Lead product

Somerset really is a county that has it all. Ranked seventh in the UK for size, it is far from being the most highly populated meaning there are vast expanses of open, unspoilt spaces waiting to be explored.

Glastonbury Festival - The world's biggest and best known long-running music festival; showcases some fabulous acts on its multiple stages.

Glastonbury Tor - Glastonbury Tor is known as being one of the most spiritual sites in the country. Its pagan beliefs are still very much celebrated and it's a beautiful place to walk.

Cheddar Gorge - Explore Britain's biggest gorge from the dramatic cliffs rising 450ft to the stunning stalactite caverns. This world-famous site is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, reveals many fascinating stories of our prehistoric ancestors, and is an international centre for caving and rock climbing.

Cheddar Cheese - The land around the village of Cheddar has been at the centre of England's dairy industry since at least the 15th Century with the earliest references to Cheddar Cheese dating from 1170.

Somerset Levels - Relax and unwind, see rare species of plant, bird and animals under a wide expanse of sky surrounded by tranquil waterscapes.

Exmoor is home to some of the finest walking with a unique landscape of moorland, woodland, valleys and farmland, shaped by people and nature over thousands of years. Its scenic coastal paths offer a different World-class view around every footpath corner.

Dunster Castle and the medieval village of Dunster are rich in history and heritage. There are several hotels in the village offering accommodation for groups and individuals alike.

The South West Coast Path starts in Minehead (only 4 kms from Dunster) and takes you through the delightful villages of Porlock and Porlock Weir and on to Lynton and Lynmouth. Further advice is always available from your accommodation provider.

Transport information

Taunton's only 165 miles from central London, 132 from Birmingham. By road, you enter our county along the M5 from London or the Midlands, by the M4 or the A4 to Bath, the A38 through Bristol, the A361 which bisects the county, with a few breaks, from Frome to Tiverton, or the A37 which bisects it from Bristol to Yeovil, the mighty A303 from London, its gentler sister the A30 through Yeovil, the A39 if you're coming along the seaboard of Exmoor.

By rail, you have a choice of lines, either through Bath, Bristol and Weston-super-Mare through to Taunton, or the southern route from London through Frome, Bruton and Castle Cary. Bristol's our local airport on the A38, and Exeter airport's not far away. Even Heathrow is this side of London, and Birmingham International is easily reachable by road and rail. Somerset travel just couldn't be easier!

Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean

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Forest of Dean

Lead product – For adventure-seekers we have mountain biking, cycle tracks, zip-wires and kayaking; for explorers there's a great range of attractions, from the magical Puzzlewood to caves and steam trains, and for something more relaxing, enjoy the Sculpture trail, our many walks, the spectacular views and our many castles, museums and cathedrals.

Dean Forest Railway – An 8.5-mile round trip winds through the Forest on heritage steam and diesel hauled trains, giving you a glimpse of the area's rich industrial heritage.

Pedalbikeaway – Cycle trails for all abilities from the fabulous 10-mile Family Trail, to the more challenging Verderers' and Freeminers cross-country trails. Bike hire also available.

Perrygrove Railway – Ride on our steam engines, explore the tree top adventure, build dens in our woods, find hidden treasure or play undercover – there is plenty for everyone!

Puzzlewood – A unique and magical forest with meandering pathways and over 200 steps set in 14 acres of ancient woodland. Follow the paths through a wonderland of deep ravines of moss covered rocks, over wooden bridges and through fantastic tree and rock formations.

Activity providers – Activities available include canoeing, kayaking, rock climbing, archery, abseiling, a high level ropes course, Nordic walking, bushcraft, raft building and orienteering.

Sculpture Trail – A unique opportunity to walk through the woodlands and discover sculptures interpreting the unique Forest environment. Perfect for all ages and abilities.

Transport information – The Wye Valley & Forest of Dean is within easy access of the M4, M48, M5 and M50 motorways. We are 90 minutes from Birmingham International Airport. The closest railway stations are Abergavenny, Chepstow, Gloucester and Lydney.

The Cotswolds

Lead product – Famous for stunning scenery, picturesque cottages and world class food and drink, as well as typically English villages, bustling market towns, beautiful gardens, fabulous hotels and year round entertainment. Cheltenham is famed for its many festivals and jump racing, while Gloucester has a Cathedral and Britain's most inland port.

Gloucester Cathedral – See the stunning gothic architecture of this amazing building which dates back as far as 679!

Berkeley Castle & Estate – Historical castle in the Vale of Berkeley, believed to be the scene of the murder of Edward II.

Painswick Rococo Garden – The UK's only complete surviving Rococo Garden in a secret valley in Painswick.

Sudeley Castle & Gardens – With royal connections stretching back over 1000 years the Castle has played an important role in the turbulent and changing times of England's past.

Westonbirt Arboretum – The country's national arboretum, south of Tetbury. Beautiful all year round but especially arboreal in autumn.

Woodchester Mansion – Mysterious abandoned 19th century mansion which you can experience in its unfinished state.

Transport information – Gloucestershire is situated at the very north of South West England with good rail and road connections from London, the Midlands and South Wales. It's just an hour from Birmingham International Airport and 90 minutes to London Heathrow.

Wiltshire

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Time has more meaning in Wiltshire. It's a magical place with a strong connection with the past making it the perfect place to enjoy the present. The Wiltshire countryside alters with the changing seasons, so press pause and let time stand still long enough to enjoy the beautiful surroundings within an ancient landscape. Wiltshire is timeless wonders, timeless pleasure, timeless nature and timeless places. Welcome to Wiltshire.

Top 5 Reasons to Visit Wiltshire

World Heritage Site - Stonehenge and Avebury. This stone circle at Stonehenge is one of the most famous sites in the world. Archaeologists believe it evolved between 3,000 BC and 1,600 BC. Originally erected 4,500 years ago, Avebury is the largest stone circle in the world. Make time to explore the 15thC manor house and take a short drive to **Wiltshire Museum** where you can see gold from the time of Stonehenge and the Wessex Gallery of Archaeology at **The Salisbury Museum**.

Stately Homes & Gardens – There are many quintessentially English stately homes and country gardens to visit in Wiltshire. **Longleat** and **Bowood** are celebrating the 300th anniversary of Capability Brown in 2016 with special tours and packages for groups. Other properties worth a visit include the National Trust's **Great Chalfield Manor**, **Lacock Abbey** and **Stourhead**.

Charming Rural Market Towns – such as **Malmesbury**, **Bradford on Avon** and **Corsham** amongst others. Wiltshire is a favourite with filmmakers and television crews, taking centre stage in a whole range of productions from period dramas to Hollywood classics. Poldark, Harry Potter, Wolf Hall and Rosamunde Pilcher's Four Seasons have all been filmed locally.

Salisbury – Known as the 'city in the countryside' and one of the top 10 cities in the world to visit according to Lonely Planet in 2015! The Cathedral Close is a hub of activity for visitors with many attractions only a stone's throw from each other including **Salisbury Cathedral & Magna Carta**, **Arundells** and **Mompesson House**. Don't miss the weekly markets and the annual **Salisbury Christmas Market**. A few miles away is **Old Sarum** the mighty Iron Age hill fort which was where the first cathedral once stood.

Great Days Out, Events & Entertainment, Shopping and Group Friendly

Accommodation – Swindon offers some reasonable priced group accommodation and is also home to the **McArthurGlen Designer Outlet Swindon** for great value shopping. There are award-winning restaurants, pubs and cafés plus major attractions, events, arts, culture and entertainment, all at the heart of a Wiltshire experience.

Transport Information

Wiltshire is easily accessible as it is only 90 minutes from London and within two hours of the south coast, the Midlands and Wales. The north of Wiltshire is conveniently accessible from London or Heathrow Airport by using the M4. The M3 connects London to the A30 and A303 roads, which serve the south of Wiltshire. Avebury and Stonehenge, can be reached from London by rail services to Swindon and Salisbury respectively where connecting bus services are available.