

ESCAPE TO THE COAST

THE ENGLAND COAST PATH WAS DUE TO BE COMPLETED THIS SUMMER, MAKING IT THE WORLD'S LONGEST COASTAL WALKING ROUTE. DELAYED TO 2021, THERE'S MUCH TO LOOK FORWARD TO... PLUS MANY NEW TRAILS ARE OPENING NOW

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Photographs Cornwall: MATT JESSOP.COM; Morecambe Bay: DAVE WILLIS

The coast of England stretches for thousands of miles, winding its way past wild headland where ancient castles still oversee the waves, alongside golden beaches, by seaside resorts and clifftop villages. Much of this precious coastline hasn't changed for centuries. And next year, the whole length of the coast is set to be easier to explore with the completion of the England Coast Path, linking existing coastal trails and making new sections accessible: at 2,700 miles, it will be the longest coastal walking route in the world.

The Path is the culmination of decades of hard work and

collaboration by landowners, volunteers, lobby groups and politicians to create a monumental treasure for the nation.

Special events planned for this summer and autumn to celebrate the new routes have been delayed until 2021 because of the pandemic. But there is plenty to see now – new routes have opened, existing ones are being improved, and extra access has been granted to the public to avoid frustrating detours inland.

With most people in England living within an hour of the coast, there's never been a better time to gather your WI sisters, and head to the coast. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

Walk along the glorious Coast Path by Gyllyngvase Beach in Falmouth, to Portloe, Cornwall



CREAM OF THE COAST

Even though we have to wait for the England Coast Path to be completed, many of the newest trails are still opening this summer and, wherever you live, there's plenty to see within a reasonable distance.

In Lincolnshire, 16 miles of often-wild coastline between the seaside resorts of Skegness and Mablethorpe have opened as the 11th official stretch of the England Coast Path. A boardwalk now links two promenades by the North Sea Observatory at Chapel Point, or you can gaze up to the open skies in the world's first official cloud-spotting area at Anderby Creek Cloud Bar in the Coastal Country Park.

The South West Coast Path is maybe the best-known of England's existing coastal trails, stretching for 630 miles from Minehead in Somerset to Poole in Dorset, via Cornwall and Devon where 19 new circular walks have been created. Designed to help people discover South Devon between Wembury and Berry Head, there are new information boards and signs for walkers – and seals and rare ciril buntings to spot.

▪ southwestcoastpath.org.uk

On the Isle of Wight, there are proposals to open up a 72-mile stretch of coast, including landmarks such as the Needles Rocks chalk stacks, and Tennyson Down, as well as Cowes and Yarmouth.

CUMBRIA

There's far more than just lakes and mountains in Cumbria, where the coastline stretches for 100 miles, including one of the newest stretches of the England Coast Path. The circular route around Walney Island takes in two nature reserves, home to seals and birdlife, as well as protected species, like natterjack toads. Tide permitting, you can even walk over to nearby Piel Island where the ruins of a 14th-century castle still stand at the tip of this vehicle-free zone.

Keep heading north to discover Cumbria's Hidden Coast, where a planned 40-mile trail will link Millom to Whitehaven, including the Duddon Estuary. Visit Ravenglass, the only coastal village in the Lake District National Park, or explore nearby Muncaster Castle with its gardens overlooking the Esk Valley.

Marvel at the miles of towering red sandstone cliffs dominating St Bees, laid down 240m years ago; cliff-nesting seabirds flock to the RSPB nature reserve, while your winding path leads through the harbour town of Whitehaven, home of The Beacon Museum – with tales of Vikings, Victorians and local rum history.

DON'T MISS Plans for another path are being discussed for Ulverston in the Furness Peninsula. This was the birthplace of Stan Laurel, and it now houses the Laurel and Hardy Museum. Outside the town, you can see the 100ft Sir John Barrow Monument/Hoad Monument, or head west to Roanhead beach and the Sandscale Haws Nature Reserve.

▪ cumbria.com

Morecambe Bay, Cumbria



COUNTY DURHAM

Walking amid flowers and past wild, untamed coves, the Durham Heritage coast is celebrating its beauty once more after decades of being defined by its mining history. Discover the loveliest clifftop scenery as you stroll the 11 miles from Seaham to Crimdon, and explore the coastal villages along the way.

First, make time for Seaham, a harbour town with an attractive marina – and a haven for independent shops and cafes. Here, the Eleven-O-One statue, better known as the First World War soldier, Tommy, overlooks the waves. It's a fabulous place to search for sea glass too, a legacy of the area's bottleworks and glass-making factories, including the largest in Britain which operated from the 1850s until 1921.

Then drink in the views from Nose's Point, where

the rare grassland is home to rockroses and the northern brown argus butterfly, while the sea still carves out cliffs and sea stacks. On a clear day, you can see as far as Whitby. Passing Hawthorn Dene, try to spy smugglers caves at Blackhall before you reach the dunes at Crimdon, the destination for terns that return here from Africa every year to breed.

• durhamheritagecoast.org

DON'T MISS The new Northern Saints Trails, based on ancient pilgrimage routes, aim to introduce visitors to the North East's best attractions and landscapes, all linking to the spectacular Norman Durham Cathedral. The Way of the Sea stretches north into Northumberland, while the Way of Learning leads to the coast north of Sunderland.

Photograph VISIT COUNTY DURHAM



The rugged beauty of a County Durham beach

Photograph VISIT KENT



NORFOLK

Follow in the footsteps of the UK's first tourists on the Deep History Coast in north Norfolk. It's here that archaeologists have discovered the earliest evidence of humans in Britain with their footsteps dating back almost a million years; see the UK's biggest mammoth skeleton at West Runton, and a 500,000-year-old flint handaxe at Happisburgh.

• visitnorthnorfolk.com/Deep-History-Coast

Along the coast from Weybourne to Cart Gap, the free Discovery Trail app will trigger Discovery Points at 11 stops – using tours, guides, games and virtual reality to bring the coast to life and illustrate what it would have looked like millennia ago. For a bigger adventure, the Norfolk Coast path, one of England's 15 National Trails, stretches for 83 miles from Hunstanton to Hopton-on-Sea. Look out for seals at Blakeney Point, stop off for fossil hunting, and try the local fish and chips, or the famous Cromer crab. Norwich is a short way inland, with its 12 heritage sites and the 11th-century cathedral.

DON'T MISS Venture south to walk a new section of the England Coast Path that has opened up a quieter stretch of coastline to Horsey and its grey seal colony, joining Hopton-on-Sea and Sea Palling. Following the line of a disused railway, finish at the dunes at the apparently endless beach of Caister-on-Sea, including an old lifeboat shed that has been converted into a museum.



Greatstone Beach,
New Romney, Kent



KENT

A walk along Kent's ancient coastline is a wander through England's history, visiting Iron Age hill forts, Roman sites, medieval castles, Napoleonic defences and World War history, and the iconic white cliffs and birdlife of the Sandwich peninsula.

The Saxon Shore Way stretches for 160 miles from the Thames at Gravesend, across the border to East Sussex, including Whitstable with its famous oysters, and Herne Bay for its traditional fun on the pier and colourful beach huts.

For the less-explored Kent coast, head to the wilder reaches around Dungeness, where the England Coast Path runs from Folkestone to Camber in East Sussex. The location of a nuclear power station, the area has the largest expanse of shingle in the country and its flora hold a third of all plants in the UK. Derek Jarman's renowned shingle garden surrounds his Prospect Cottage.

The Lade Pits house the Denge Sound Mirrors/ Listening Ears, concrete structures that housed an early form of radar. The Royal Military Canal at Hythe is a pretty waterway, and the town's St Leonard's Church has a macabre ossuary housing ancient human bones and skulls.

DON'T MISS England's Creative Coast arts events will now take place in spring 2021, when temporary works will be placed along 800 miles of coast: in Margate, Folkestone and Gravesend in Kent, as well as in Essex, East and West Sussex.

▪ [visitkent.co.uk](https://www.visitkent.co.uk)

▪ For information on the England Coast Path, visit: nationaltrail.co.uk or to see interactive maps, visit: walktheenglandcoastpath.co.uk



Overstrand,
North Norfolk

Photograph VISIT NORFOLK



Aberdaron Bay,
Llyn Peninsula

WALK THE WALES COAST PATH

While England waits, the 870-mile Wales Coast Path has been open for eight years. With continuous walking around its entire coast, visitors can hike from Chepstow in the south to Queensferry, Flintshire in the north. There are also shorter strolls and trails leading inland. Visit: walescoastpath.gov.uk

Photograph VISIT WALES