

England & Scotland: Lake District to Edinburgh

Bike Vacation Only

If you're looking for a cycling trip to England and Scotland that takes you far from the maddening crowd, this is the one! With VBT's insider access to remote corners of the British Isles, we'll lead you over hill and dale through some of the last wilderness in England—including rides through the rugged, scenic Lake District, the remote and pristine expanse of Kielder Forest, and the sweeping vistas of the Honister Pass. Discover the ancient history of the British Isles during a stop at Hadrian's Wall and the ancient Roman settlement of Vindolanda, as well as a memorable ride to the ancient Neolithic monument at Castlerigg Stone Circle. Pedal the charming, verdant valleys of Scotland, and enjoy the epitome of Scottish opulence during a two-night stay at a Tweed Valley hotel featuring a luxury spa, Victorian baths, sauna, steam room, and on-site distillery. Along the way, our local British trip leaders unlock the region's best kept secrets: hidden shops, delightful restaurants, and the best place to find an authentic pint of English lager.

Cultural Highlights

- View the Castlerigg Stones, a circle of Neolithic standing stones offering panoramic views.
- Cycle an iconic route through the Lake District, passing the stunning waters of Crummock Water and Buttermere.
- Cross the "spine of England" from Cumbria to Northumberland through the scenic North Pennines National Landscape.
- Stroll along Hadrian's Wall and explore the excavations at Vindolanda Roman Fort & Museum.
- Spin through the gently rolling Tweed River Valley, surrounded by Scotland's rugged, heather-lined hills.
- Savor Scotland's national dish, haggis, and sample fresh local bannock during a celebratory lunch in the town of Selkirk.
- Marvel at the trees of Dawyck Botanical Gardens as you cycle through the historic Border Country.

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain mixed with moderate hills, mainly on quiet country roads. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who need assistance with the hills. Ideal for enthusiastic beginners to experienced cyclists.

Tour Duration: 7 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 12 to 35 miles

Average Cycling Time: 2 to 5 hours

Group size: 20 max

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 61°/46°, June 64°/52°, July 68°/55°, August 68°/55°, September 63°/52°, October 55°/46°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 1.7, June 1.7, July 1.5, August 1.6, September 1.8, October 2.3

DAY 1: Your VBT Vacation Begins / Keswick / Borrowdale Valley

Meet your fellow travelers and VBT trip leaders at 1:00 p.m. in the lobby of The George Hotel in Penrith. You'll have the opportunity to change into your biking gear using the hotel's public restrooms. Be sure to eat lunch or a snack on your own beforehand, as the next scheduled meal will be dinner.

VBT strongly recommends flying to England at least one day before the tour begins to allow time to rest and recover from jet lag before you begin sightseeing and cycling.

From Penrith, take a short shuttle to the village of Keswick, the starting point of your cycling adventure. After a safety and bike-fitting session, enjoy a pleasant ride along a dedicated cycling path beside the River Greta. A gentle ascent brings you to the Castlerigg Stones, a striking circle of Neolithic standing stones offering one of the most dramatic panoramic views in the Lake District. Continue cycling through rolling countryside and tree-lined fields into the Borrowdale Valley, your home for the next two nights.

This evening, enjoy a welcome dinner at the hotel's restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Warm-Up Ride — 12 miles

What to Expect:

Begin your ride on a designated bike path that winds over the River Greta, offering smooth pavement as you pass through tunnels and over bridges along the former Keswick-to-Penrith railway line. A gentle ascent takes you away from the river and into the countryside en route to the Castlerigg Stone Circle. Here, enjoy panoramic views of the surrounding mountains before descending back toward town and

continuing along the western shore of Derwentwater to the Borrowdale Gates Hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 12 miles

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2: Northern Lakes / Buttermere Valley / Honister Pass

Cycle directly from your hotel through the heart of the Lake District today. Begin your ride beneath the spirited Catbells, one of the region's most iconic fells, and continue through the tranquil canopy of Whinlatter Forest.

Afterward, descend into the valley and pedal along the stunning eastern shores of Loweswater and Crummock Water. Pause for a private lunch at the High Stile Kitchen in the Buttermere Court Hotel.

Later, enjoy a short walk along the shores of Buttermere—an idyllic landscape that inspired the 19th-century “Lake Poets” of the Romantic Movement. This afternoon is yours to unwind at the hotel or, if you're feeling ambitious, embark on an independent ride over the legendary Honister Pass, descending into the scenic Borrowdale Valley.

Dinner is on your own tonight. Keswick offers a variety of excellent restaurants for you to enjoy a fine meal.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Borrowdale Gates to Buttermere — 26 miles

Afternoon: Challenging Independent Option over Honister Pass — 9 miles

What to Expect:

Morning: The route begins at the hotel and follows the western shore of picturesque Derwentwater before entering the small village of Braithwaite. Here, you begin a gradual climb through Whinlatter Forest and over a small pass, where views of the Catbells emerge in every direction. Enjoy a stunning descent into the valley, passing through small hamlets before arriving in the scenic lake region of Loweswater and Crummock Water, just before lunch.

Afternoon: Test your mettle on the iconic Honister Pass, one of the most scenic mountain routes in northwest England. After lunch, enjoy a gentle ride along the eastern shore of Lake Buttermere for a few miles before the road “tips up” toward Honister. A short but challenging climb takes you to the summit, followed by an exhilarating descent through the Borrowdale Valley back to your hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 26 — 35 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3: North Pennines / Tyne Valley / Hexham

Start today’s cycling adventure on a high note—literally—in Alston. Nestled in the North Pennines, an official Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Alston is the highest market town in England. Begin with an uphill climb to reach it, or opt for a ride in the support van. From there, enjoy a rewarding descent into the Tyne Valley and the town of Hexham, named the “happiest place to live” in Great Britain in both 2019 and 2021 by Rightmove.

With a recorded history dating back to 674, Hexham boasts a rich past shaped by Viking, Roman, and Celtic influences. The town is anchored by Hexham Abbey, one of the earliest centers of Christianity in England. Originally founded as a monastery by St. Wilfrid in 674, it was destroyed by Vikings 200 years later and has since been rebuilt and expanded over the centuries. While here, don’t miss a stroll through the Abbey Grounds and Sele Park, with their formal gardens and peaceful woodland paths.

Across from the abbey stands the Queen’s Hall Arts Centre, home to art galleries and performing arts venues. In the nearby marketplace, you’ll also find Moot Hall—a medieval courthouse—and Hexham Old Gaol, built in the 1300s as England’s first purpose-built prison. Perhaps you’ll explore its dungeons and museum. You might also visit Tyne Green Country Park, set along the River Tyne, offering lovely views and an 18th-century bridge.

Tonight’s accommodations are at the charming Beaumont Hotel, featuring a lovely café and bar overlooking the Abbey grounds. This evening, gather with your fellow travelers for dinner at the hotel’s award-winning restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Alston to Hexham — 32 miles

What to Expect:

Enjoy some easy cycling today as you descend from the highest town in England toward the Tyne Valley. Begin with a 1.5-mile climb from the banks of the River Nent into the higher Pennine Hills, often referred to as the “backbone of England.” From there, a gradual descent brings you into the Tyne Valley and into the charming market town of Hexham, your home for the next two nights.

Cumulative Distance Range: 32 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4: Hadrian's Wall / Sycamore Gap / Vindolanda

In 122 AD, the Roman Emperor Hadrian began construction of a 73-mile wall across northern Britain to defend the empire from northern tribes. Today, Hadrian's Wall is the largest Roman archaeological site in Britain and part of the UNESCO World Heritage site “Frontiers of the Roman Empire.” Dotted with ditches, towers, fortlets, and gates, the wall marked the empire's northwest frontier for nearly three centuries.

This morning, you'll have the opportunity to explore this ancient wonder. Departing from the hotel, enjoy a gentle ride along the Tyne River Valley before crossing a bridge and climbing up to the wall. Park your bike and take a walk along the wall to Sycamore Gap, one of the most photographed spots in the region. Sadly, the iconic and beloved tree that once stood here was mysteriously felled by vandals in 2023.

Enjoy lunch at The Sill, the café located within the National Landscape Discovery Centre.

This afternoon, continue delving into Roman history with a visit to Vindolanda Roman Fort & Museum. Part of the UNESCO World Heritage complex, Vindolanda is considered one of the most important Roman archaeological sites in Europe. Excavations over the past 30 years have uncovered a wealth of historical treasures—and archaeologists estimate that many more remain buried, with decades of discovery still ahead. During your visit, explore the remarkably preserved remains of administrative buildings, barracks, granaries, houses, shops, a tavern, a bathhouse, and the fort's defensive walls.

The on-site museum showcases an impressive array of artifacts, including military gear, tools, jewelry, pottery, and religious and artistic objects. Among the most celebrated discoveries are the Vindolanda Writing Tablets—small wooden documents offering rare insight into daily life on the Roman frontier.

After your visit, cycle back to the hotel in Hexham. The evening is yours to explore the town and enjoy dinner on your own.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning : Hexham to Hadrian's Wall — 18 miles

Afternoon: Hadrian's Wall to Hexham — 15 miles

What to Expect:

Today's ride begins with a gentle meander through the peaceful Tyne River Valley to Haydon Bridge. After crossing the river, you'll begin a short climb up to Hadrian's Wall, where you have the option to park your bike and walk along the Wall to Sycamore Gap. Continue cycling to the National Landscape Discovery Centre for an included lunch, then step back in time with a visit to the extensive Vindolanda Roman Fort and Museum. The return ride follows the edge of the escarpment before descending back into the Tyne Valley toward Hexham.

Cumulative Distance Range: 15 — 33 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Arrive in Scotland / River Tweed

Leave Northern England behind today as you cross the border into Scotland. Along the way, stop for a short walk in England's largest forest and enjoy a stroll along the shores of Kielder Water—the largest man-made lake in Europe. This peaceful park is home to roughly half of England's native red squirrel population, along with otters, roe deer, badgers, pipistrelle bats, and water voles. Ospreys, once extinct as a breeding bird in England for nearly 200 years, are also making a comeback here. Once in Scotland, enjoy a celebratory lunch at a family-owned restaurant in the village of Selkirk. Be sure to try the local Selkirk Bannock, a rich, fruit-filled bread created in 1859 by baker Robbie Douglas.

After lunch, begin your ride from Selkirk with a gentle spin through the Tyne River Valley, gradually gaining elevation over the rugged Scottish hillsides. Pedal quiet roads lined with sheep farms, peatlands, and blooming heather moors. Eventually, you'll meet up with the glistening River Tweed and follow its course into the historic town of Peebles, your home for the next two nights. A world-famous salmon fishing

destination, Peebles was once a royal hunting town and a hub for tweed and knitwear production. As you explore this scenic, multi-faceted town, it's easy to see why John Buchan, author of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, chose to call it home.

Your accommodations for the next two nights are at the stately Peebles Hydro Hotel & Spa. For dinner on your own this evening, you may choose to dine at the hotel or take a walk—or a short shuttle ride—into the village to begin your explorations.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Selkirk to Peebles — 28 miles

What to Expect:

Leave Northern England behind today as you cross the border into Scotland. Enjoy a celebratory lunch in the historic town of Selkirk before cycling through the rugged Scottish countryside and heather-lined moors. Later, follow the River Tweed along a scenic, winding route to the charming town of Peebles.

Cumulative Distance Range: 28 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 6: Bike the Border Country

From the 14th to the late 17th century, the region along the Scottish-English border was a remote and untamed land, where loyalty to one's clan often took precedence over the rule of law. Tensions between the English and Scots ran high, but *reiving*—plundering and cattle rustling—knew no national boundaries. Today, you'll delve into this colorful and storied landscape as you cycle through the Border Country along roads once traversed by the notorious Border Reivers.

Along the way, pause at Dawyck Botanical Gardens, home to an exceptional collection of trees, including some of Britain's oldest and tallest specimens. The garden features rare and endangered species from Europe, China, Nepal, Japan, and North America. Depending on the season, you may also spot snowdrops, bluebells, rhododendrons, azaleas, or blue poppies blooming across the park's 65-acre expanse. Enjoy lunch on your own at the garden's award-winning café.

Refueled and refreshed, continue your ride by crossing the river onto a scenic route that winds across narrow bridges and follows quiet roads through some of the most beautiful countryside Scotland has to offer.

Upon returning to your hotel, enjoy the rest of the afternoon at your leisure. You might join an optional visit to one of the area's traditional woolen mills, for which Peebles was once renowned. Or, explore the town on your own: learn about author John Buchan and his sister, Anna (who wrote under the pseudonym O. Douglas), at The John Buchan Story museum. Discover local landmarks such as the remains of Cross Kirk—believed to be the burial place of St. Nicholas—the Mercat Cross, and the old town walls. Visit the Peebles Library, Museum, and Gallery, stroll along the River Tweed, or wander the charming High Street, browsing its many independent shops. Peebles has been named the Top Independent Retailing Town in Scotland, and second in the UK.

This evening, enjoy a gin tasting at the hotel's in-house distillery before gathering with your fellow travelers for a festive farewell dinner.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Peebles to Dawyck Gardens — 21 miles

Afternoon: Dawyck Gardens to Peebles — 11 miles

What to Expect:

After breakfast, cycle directly from your hotel and cross the River Tweed into the rolling green hills of the Border Country. This afternoon's route takes you over beautiful but narrow bridges and along quiet roads through some of the most scenic landscapes Scotland has to offer. A visit to Dawyck Botanical Gardens, along with lunch in the café, provides a pleasant break during the ride.

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 — 32 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: Travel to Edinburgh / Your VBT Vacation Ends

Say goodbye to your tour leaders after breakfast before a one-hour journey by private coach takes you to

the Radisson Blu Hotel in Edinburgh's city center, arriving at approximately 10:45 a.m. (just a five-minute walk from Waverley Station). This is where your VBT tour officially ends; from here, you will make your own independent travel arrangements.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Borrowdale Gates Hotel (Days 1-2)

If you wish to relax and enjoy some of the finest fell views and walking available in the Lakes, treat yourself to a stay at this privately-owned country-house hotel. Enjoy open log fires and award-winning Lakeland cuisine at the hotel's restaurant. Comfortable bedrooms are naturally cooled without air conditioning and are decorated in a contemporary style. This hotel is a hidden gem located on the edge of the hamlet of Grange-in-Borrowdale.

Beaumont Hexham Hotel (Days 3-4)

A Victorian hotel situated in the heart of the city; the Beaumont Hexham combines cozy ambiance with upscale amenities. Featuring unique and individually designed rooms with specialty wallpaper, fabric, and furniture, this independent townhouse hotel will not disappoint. The Hexham's open restaurant offers unique seasonal menus, and its professional staff add to the appeal.

Peebles Hydro Hotel & Spa (Days 5-6)

Enjoy the epitome of Scottish opulence at the Peebles Hydro Hotel & Spa—a Tweed Valley jewel featuring a luxury spa, Victorian baths, sauna, steam room, and an on-site distillery. The hotel's inviting guest rooms complete with complimentary pool and gym access along with a plethora of outdoor activities help define this Scottish getaway.