

VISIT

Somerset





Be *welcomed* in Somerset

The River Parrett at Langport

A land full of character, beauty, nature and fun that boasts world-class food and drink along with the best in hospitality. This is Somerset and whatever you want from a holiday, you will find it here, from long sandy beaches, atmospheric harbours, historic cities, renowned countryside and even subterranean caves.

Our promise? You will leave here refreshed, taking memories with you to last forever. You will meet friendly people, enjoy unique activities, experience superb scenery and taste our famous agricultural produce. You will want to return to this undiscovered land.

Somerset gives you the whole flavour of the south west whilst being the

most accessible, with our border only a two hour ride from much of the south east or midlands. You can be here quicker, for longer, more time to experience our World Heritage site, internationally important wetlands, Jurassic coast, three areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Park. More precious minutes meandering through quaint

villages past our tapestry of small fields and hedgerows whilst admiring our wealth of wildlife. Extra moments of all your senses savouring Somerset.

This is your time for adventure.



Cider drinking at Wassail

Somerset

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Beautiful coastline

Great Adventure

National Park

Superb Food and Drink

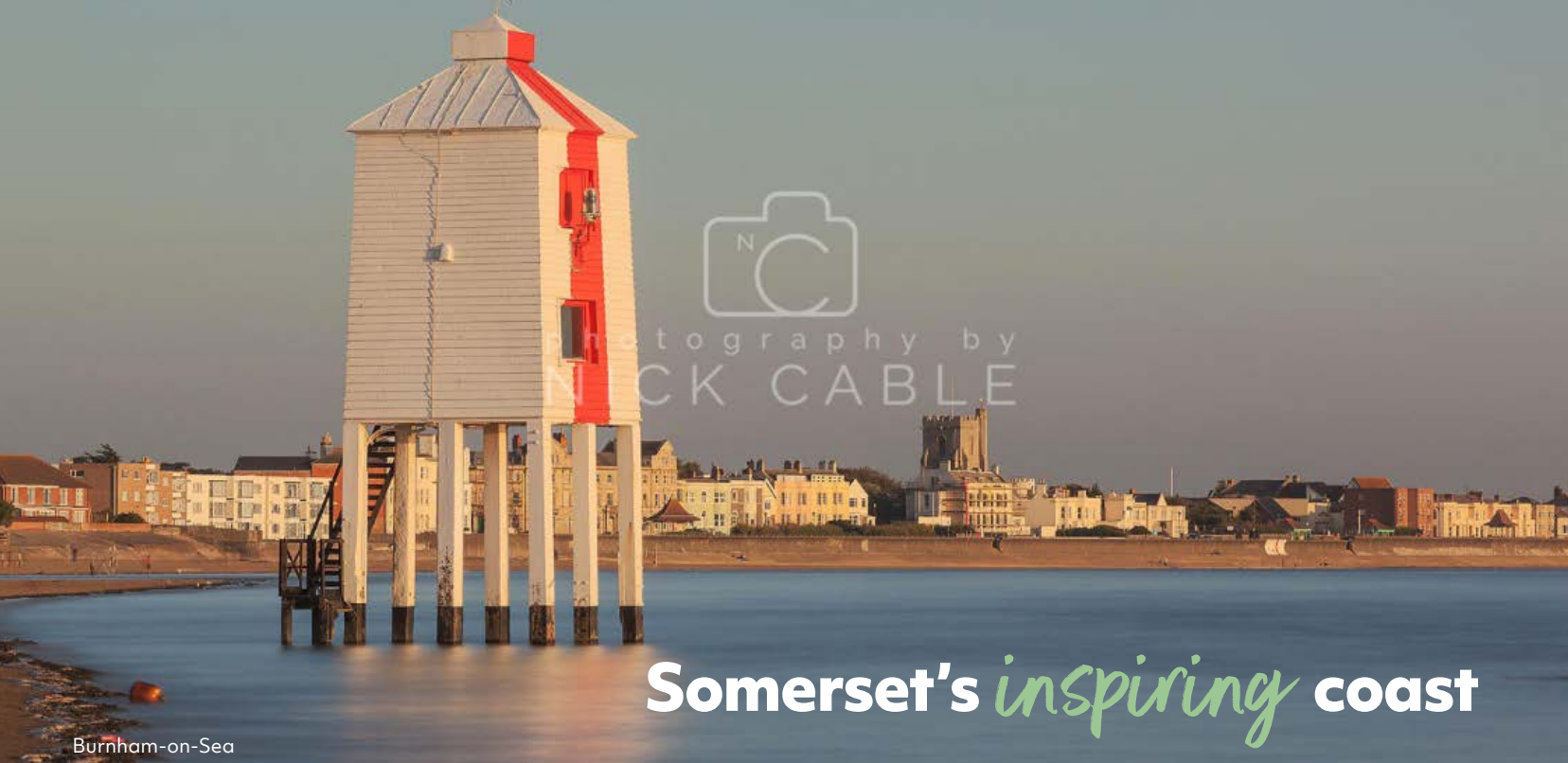
Two Historic Cities

World Heritage Site

Wetlands and Wildlife



Wells Cathedral



Somerset's *inspiring* coast

Burnham-on-Sea

Somerset's coast is full of surprises. Perhaps the biggest is that it is actually the shore of a river, Britain's longest, the Severn. That is why some in Somerset call the Bristol Channel, on which we look out when we visit our coast, 'the Severn Sea'. As a sea and an estuary, it is a mix of salty and fresh water and a vital feeding place for huge numbers of fish and wildfowl.

The variety of coastal landscape in Somerset is truly remarkable, from

rock pavements to sand dunes and from wooded cliffs to mudflats. There are geological and wildlife wonders for the scientifically minded, seaside resorts for those seeking entertainment, fishing and sailing for the sports fans, coasteering for the adventurous and long-distance trails for the energetic. This coast has something for everyone, even the four-legged members of the family as it has numerous dog-friendly beaches. It has all you'd expect from a sea-side: lighthouses, rock pools, fossils, ice cream parlours, piers and even a ship-wreck

and then it has more in the form of the rare plants and birds that thrive in this environment.

We will start our exploration of the Somerset coast in Exmoor where it boasts the oldest rocks and highest cliffs. These can be found on the border with Devon at Glenthorne, a Site of Special Scientific interest because of its Devonian Sandstone cliffs. The pebble beach below was part of a country estate and you can still see a ruined boathouse, a trout pool and lime kilns. It is reached by a steep wooded, fern-lined walk.



Porlock Weir



Bossington

Year round Dog Beaches

Berrow North and South

Bossington

Brean

Burnham (north of Maddock's Slade)

Blue Anchor Bay

Greenaleigh (west of Minehead)

Kilve

Porlock Weir

Sand Bay (Weston-super-Mare)

Ladye Bay (Clevedon)

Middle Hope

St Audries Bay

Uphill (Weston-super-Mare)

Watchet Harbour Beach

For more options on beaches and where dogs are welcome across Somerset see www.visitsomerset.co.uk/dogs



Brean



Porlock Weir



Blenheim Gardens Minehead



Minehead

From Porlock Weir to Minehead and Dunster



West Somerset Railway



Dunster Castle



Dunster

The spectacular drive across the moor eastwards, takes you down one of the steepest hills on a main road in England and inland to the picturesque village of Porlock with its 13th century church. A mile to the west down a road lined with pretty thatched cottages is Porlock Weir. There is a small harbour, shingle beach, salt marsh and views east to Bossington Beach and Hurlstone Point. Porlock had a reputation for the quality of its oysters in the mid 19th century and in the last five years the trade has

been re-introduced and once again fine Porlock oysters are appearing on restaurant menus.

The seaside town of Minehead is dominated by the magnificent, wooded North Hill from the summit of which you can look back towards the sea cliffs of Exmoor. It was a popular holiday resort even before the Victorians made the idea fashionable because of its superb setting and the reputed healing power of sea air.

Many of the elements that made up a classic British seaside holiday are still here: the beach for sandcastles and rock pooling; the gardens and bandstand for relaxation and

West Somerset near the coast

Coleridge Cottage

Dunster Castle

Dunkery Beacon

Selworthy

Westermill Farm

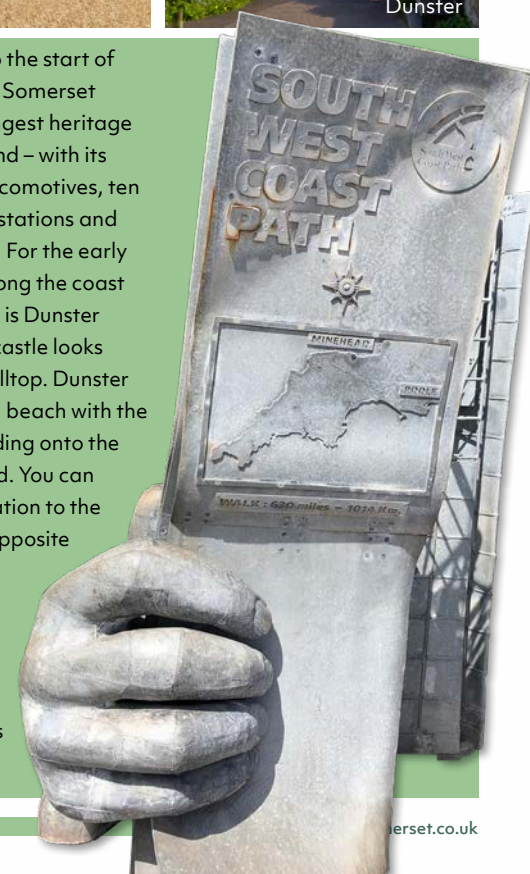
West Somerset Railway



the entertainment. They have been joined by new cafes and eating places as well as activity centres for more energetic ways of enjoying the coast such as kayaking and paddle boarding

A walk along the sea front towards North Hill takes you to the harbour and past a sculpted pair of hands holding a map as a graphic indication that this is the starting point for the UK's longest, long distance country walk, the South West Coast Path which stretches all the way round the tip of England to Poole in Dorset. Or you can carry on along the Somerset Coast as far as Brean Down on the England Coast Path.

Minehead is also the start of the superb West Somerset Railway – the longest heritage railway in England – with its historic steam locomotives, ten beautifully kept stations and 20 miles of track. For the early miles, it chugs along the coast and the first stop is Dunster whose fairytale castle looks down from the hilltop. Dunster has a fascinating beach with the River Avill cascading onto the pebbles and sand. You can walk from the station to the beach or in the opposite direction along the river to the village, one of the largest and most intact medieval villages in England.





Blue Anchor

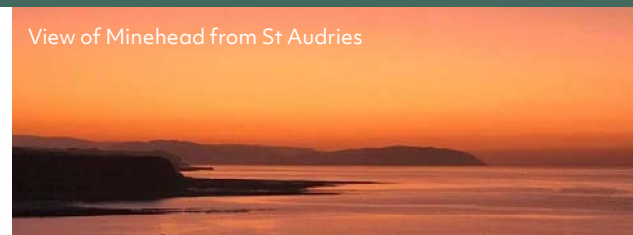


Watchet Harbour



Blue anchor bay

View of Minehead from St Audries



JMW Turner painted Blue Anchor Bay which is noted for the alabaster and fossils found in its cliffs. Its sweeping sandy bay is framed by Minehead's North Hill at one end and dramatic blue lias cliffs the other. It is popular with anglers, dog walkers and photographers for its sunsets.

At low tide you can walk to neighbouring Watchet, also painted by Turner. An ancient Port, that once had its own mint, the town

is crammed with quaint houses and shops; two museums, a Holy Well and a sculpture of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner.

The cliffs between Blue Anchor and Hinkley Point are from the Triassic and Jurassic periods and the striking features of this stretch are the 'pavements' spreading out from the base of the cliffs across the beach. The best places to see them are St Audries where there is a magical waterfall plunging towards them, Lilstock and Kilve which is well-known for its splendid ammonite fossils.

One of the country's largest new wetland reserves lies to the east of Hinkley Point, created by the Environment Agency to defend

villages inland as sea levels rise. Managed by The Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT), Steart Marshes have the added benefit of providing rare saltmarsh habitat and attracting wildlife. Since its completion, avocets have bred on the reserve and it has been visited by glossy ibis, spoonbill and ringed plover. Water voles and otters are resident as are the cattle and sheep that graze there. A network of paths lead you round the reserve, to the River Parrett and Combeville village.

The character of the coast changes completely around the mouth of the Parrett with the rocky cliffs and shingle giving way to sand flats that run all the way to the promontory that is Brean Down. Sand naturally attracts holiday makers especially those keen to wield a bucket and spade which is one of the reasons for the popularity of the resorts and parks here. The three Bs - Burnham, Berrow and Brean - are famed for their miles of sand, ideal for walking, running, riding, angling, kite-flying and picnicking.



Kilve

Be *wowed* by Weston



The Victorian love affair with the seaside turned what had been a small fishing village, Weston, into a thriving resort especially after the arrival of the railway. During the construction of the railway, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who was supervising it, lived in Weston. He has left his mark on a number of bridges and buildings in the County. Today, Weston-super-Mare is known for its visit from Banksy, Sand Sculptures, Air Festival and SeaQuarium. Weston has

not one but two piers. Birnbeck sadly is closed now but the magnificent Grand Pier is deservedly one of the UK's leading visitor attractions.

North of Weston is another natural vantage point, Sand Point, owned by the National Trust and overlooking the locals' secret, Sand Bay. As at Brean Down, it is possible here to tick off quite a few species on the Nature i-spy list from sea birds to skylarks and butterflies to wild flowers.

If Burnham has the shortest pier and Weston the grandest, then,

according to the poet John Betjeman, Clevedon has the most beautiful in Britain. More recent fans were the members of the band, One Direction, who made a video there. Formed from discarded wrought iron lines from Brunel's railway, the 48 foot high pier has been lovingly restored as centrepiece to Clevedon's elegant Victorian sea front.

Our journey along the Somerset Coast ends at Portishead, which gave its name to a rock band from nearby Bristol. A happy blend of old and new, this former fishing port has a Victorian High Street and

a modern marina complemented by glorious planting. From the cliffs of Exmoor to the outskirts of Bristol, we've encountered holiday resorts and secluded coves, rocky shores and sand dunes. All are accessible now along the England Coast Path which will one day track round the whole of the UK.



Things to do near the coast

Brean Down National Trust

Brean Leisure Park

Channel Adventure Minehead

Cleeve Abbey Washford

Clevedon Court National Trust

Clevedon Hall

Court Farm Country Park

Weston-super-Mare Museum

Somerset Piers

Burnham-on-Sea

Clevedon

Grand Pier Weston-super-Mare

More information at www.visitsomerset.co.uk

Be *inspired* in Somerset

The Mendips

With rich grasslands, ancient wooded combes, historic monuments, quaint villages and a complex of nature reserves, the Mendip Hills are full of mystery and adventure. You can explore the depths of these magnificent limestone hills by visiting the caves or you can seek out a vantage point at the top of the ridge for an incredible view of the iconic Somerset Levels and across the Bristol Channel to Wales.

The Mendip Hills have been providing food and shelter for people since the earliest days of settlement in this country and are still, slowly, giving up their secrets. Scientists recently reconstructed the head of a man who lived here some 10,000 years ago and whose remains were found in a cave at Cheddar.

You can let your imagination run free in these hills with their stories graphically written in stone. There is the stone witch of Wookey Hole, the hymn-inspiring 'Rock of Ages' at Burrington Combe, the tower atop Glastonbury Tor and the wonderful dry stone walls that decorate the wind swept hills.

From Britain's highest inland limestone cliffs that form the world famous Cheddar Gorge, you can look down on the Vale of Avalon with its tales of Arthur and to the coast visited, so legend has it, by Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph was a metal merchant and the hills were mined



Cheddar Gorge

for lead until the last century. They are still a quarried for stone and have more than 200 scheduled ancient monuments including prehistoric barrows and remnants of WW2.

As well as being an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the countryside of the Mendip Hills and Valleys has a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest playing host to rare plants, butterflies and birds. There are wildflower meadows, orchid filled fields and woods once tended by mediaeval monks. Where people have exploited the hills for mining or the valleys for reservoirs, the wildlife has also benefitted. Somerset Wildlife Trust has a dozen reserves and can point to species that are only found here while Chew Valley Lake is considered the third most important site in Britain for wintering wildfowl.

The Mendip Way is a 50 mile trek that takes you all the way from the fascinating hamlet of Uphill on the coast with its views across the Bristol Channel to the town of Frome dubbed by The Times as 'one of the best places to live in Britain.' Tracking along the ridge, which overlooks the Somerset Levels to the south and the Chew Valley to the north, the route dips down at times to include such gems as Cheddar and Axbridge, Wells and Wookey.



Exmoor



Craig S
PHOTOGRAPHY



One of Britain's smallest National Parks, Exmoor packs a remarkable array of contrasting landscapes into its designated area. We go from remote moorland and stunning sea cliffs to steep wooded valleys and racing streams in a matter of miles. Antiquities such as stone circles and barrows abound as do rare plants and animals like whitebeam trees, red deer and Exmoor ponies. The towns and villages too are steeped in history.

The moorland that makes up a quarter of the National Park and so much of its character is the result of centuries of grazing. Its colour, which at times is spectacular, comes from the Heather, Gorse and grasses. It is a habitat fast disappearing and so it is all the more important that it is protected. The other part of

the Park's name comes from the largest of its eight rivers, the Exe. If agriculture is one of the architects of this unique landscape with its patchwork of fields, farmsteads and distinctive beech hedge banks then the Exe is another.

With rivers such important features of Exmoor, it is not surprising that bridges are significant landmarks. Most famous is a clapper bridge across the Barle, Tarr Steps. Clapper means a pile of stones and legend has it they were placed there by the Devil so he could sunbathe. In nearby Dulverton the medieval Barle Bridge has five stone arches. The colourfully named Robbers Bridge harks back to a time when there were bandits and is in a valley that inspired the writer of Lorna Doone, R.D. Blackmore, just one of the many people who has shaped the history of this extraordinary place.

Rocky shores, wide open spaces and natural beauty



make Exmoor a magnet for the adventurous. You can try wild swimming, coasteering, riding, foraging, falconry, trail-walking or even a food safari. You can admire Britain's highest sea cliffs, its most extensive broadleaved coastal woods and its tallest tree. You can see plants that are found nowhere else. At the end of a busy day, you can gaze up at the stars as you are in Europe's first Dark Skies Reserve or you can visit one of the many pubs and restaurants to sample the local produce including oysters and trout.



South Somerset



South Somerset is the real deal English countryside, with rich pastures, traditional orchards, walled gardens and acres of beautiful farmland that result in celebrated local menus. Rich ochre-coloured hamstone, quarried from Ham Hill gives villages and towns a unique appearance.

Explore winding lanes with wildflower verges, picturesque villages of thatch cottages and village greens. Discover bluebell woodlands in the spring, misty mornings over open moorland and the wetlands of the famous Somerset Levels, ramble through country parks, or float down the meandering rivers, Parrett and Yeo. Find secluded wild swimming spots for summer dips, places to see the wild life or just sit and watch the sunset.

Ham Hill is a nature playground, as is nearby Yeovil Country Park with 150 acres that includes bike and skate parks. Yeovil is the regional centre with long history of aircraft and defence industries as well as glove manufacture. The town's Octagon Theatre is the centre of a buzzing local arts and culture scene which also has popular venues in Ilminster and South Petherton. South Somerset has over a dozen small market towns, each with unique and unspoilt character and regular traditional markets.

South Somerset boasts seven National Trust properties at Barrington, Lytes Cary, Montacute, Tintinhull, Stoke-sub-Hamdon Priory, Treasurer's House in Martock and Priest's House in Muchelney. The latter also is the site of Muchelney Abbey and renowned Muchelney Pottery. Other potteries at Barrington Court, High Ham and Littleton give

accord to South Somerset's craft scene along with woodcraft in Martock and glass blowing in Langport.

Events and activities are year-round from Wassails in January, park-runs at Montacute, through to canoeing the River Parrett, experiencing the Green Scythe Fair or the South Petherton Folk Festival.

South Somerset's gardens connect to offer an excellent two day trail, from the famous Margery Fish garden at East Lambrook, to Forde Abbey, Barrington, Tintinhull and Piet Ouldorf Field at Hauser & Wirth at Bruton.





The Quantocks



The first place in Britain to be designated An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was the land on and around the Quantock Hills which inspired the great poets of the Romantic Movement, Coleridge and Wordsworth to pen some of their finest verses. The pair, accompanied by Wordsworth's sister Dorothy, would wander the woods, rolling hills and coastal paths for hours and in many ways much of what they wondered at has not changed.

As in the poets' day, there is still wilderness, heathland

and a rocky shoreline where you can lose yourself in thought. The mix of heath on the top is a characteristic of the Quantocks and includes heather, whortleberry, gorse, bracken and wavy-haired grass. There is woodland too, once prized as a source of timber for ship building and now by walkers for its tranquillity. The oaks here are Sessile with acorns that grow directly on the branch and twisted trunks.

From the National Trust owned Coleridge Cottage in the charming village of Nether Stowey you can walk in the footsteps of the poet along the Coleridge Way as far as Lynmouth on Exmoor with a

small diversion to visit the hilly mound which is all that remains of the Norman Stowey Castle.

One is the highest spots in Somerset is Wills Neck from where you can see Exmoor, the Mendips, Blackdowns and across the Bristol Channel to Wales. Look out for wild ponies. Below the summit lie steep wooded valleys with streams at the bottom, full of birdsong and villages with manor houses and fine churches.



The Somerset Levels



At the heart of Somerset and giving the County its name, are the internationally important Levels and Moors. Among the lowest, flattest areas in the UK, they were once covered by sea apart from the curious mumps and mounds that rose above them as islands. Somerset is therefore 'the land of the summer

people' as the rich grazing pastures of the Levels were only accessible in the drier months.

To reach the grasslands from the 'islands', prehistoric people built raised wooden tracks, of which there is still evidence today. The most famous is the Sweet Track at Shapwick. The Romans tried managing the Levels but did not have as much success as the monks of Glastonbury. Dutch engineers eventually drained them in the 17th century but thankfully not until after King Alfred had used the marshes to escape the Vikings or English history might have taken a different turn. Still farmed and used for growing willow, the wetlands attract huge numbers of wading birds including the reintroduced Common Crane.





Be *nourished* in Somerset



Say 'Somerset' and most people think of Cheddar cheese so it is fitting that the world's oldest surviving makers of it should be based here. To go with it, we make the perfect accompaniment, cider. These are not the only treats to sample on a foodie tour of the County which could take in oysters from Exmoor, strawberries from

Cheddar, Trout from the Quantocks and of course a Somerset Cream Tea.

Somerset's rich soil and gentle climate are ideal for cider-making. We drink more cider in the UK than anywhere else in the world and it is good to see the orchards returning to Somerset after many disappeared during a dip in the drink's popularity a few decades ago.

The first recorded mention of cider presses as a source of income here is in 1230 in a Royal Charter granted to the Bishop of Bath even though we know the Romans grew apples in Britain. Today we have a refreshing mix of farms that have been

making cider for generations and new young businesses; large concerns selling internationally and tiny orchards using community presses.

There is something special about sampling a product where it is made. Myrtle Farm, at the foot of the Mendips, is where the Thatcher family has been making cider for more than 100 years and is a perfect day out. Torre Cider at Washford has a tea room and orchard walks.

Going together like strawberries and cream are cider and Cheddar. Where

better to sample it than in its birthplace? The Cheddar Gorge Cheese Company is the only producer of Cheddar left in the village. Its cheese, maturing in Gough's Cave, is a memorable sight. Having

mentioned strawberries, we should say that at one time Cheddar Valley strawberries were famous and even had their own train on The Strawberry Line. It is still possible to find them locally and well worth the effort. Recently added to Somerset menus are Porlock Bay oysters,

Exmoor Caviar, Newton House Gin from Yeovil and farmed trout.





Events



March

21st and 22nd West of England Game Fair, Bath and West Showground, Shepton Mallet
29th Yeovil Half Marathon

April

5th Taunton Marathon
 Mells Daffodil Festival

May

Kingsbury Episcopi Festival
3rd The North Somerset Show
8th-16th Wedmore Arts Festival
11th Somerset Day
15th-24th The Bath Festival
22nd-25th Dunster Festival
28th-30th – The Royal Bath and West Show, Shepton Mallet

June

Green Scythe Fair, Muchelney
12th-14th To of the Gorge Festival, Cheddar Gorge
 Somerfest
24th-28th Glastonbury Festival
27th-28th Weston Air Festival, Weston-super-Mare

July

3rd-12th Frome Festival
11th Yeovilton Air Day, RNAS Yeovilton
17th-18th The Godney Gathering, Glastonbury
18th-19th Yeovil Show
18th-19th Somerset Steam and Country Show, High Ham
26th-28th Farm Fest, Bruton

August

The Steam and Vintage Rally, Norton Fitzwarren

Taunton Flower Show

3rd Porlock Country Fair
6th-9th Bristol Balloon Fiesta
 Dunster Show
16th Mid Somerset Show, Shepton Mallet
8th-9th Wessex Truck Show, Yeovil Showground

September

5th Grail Quest. Long Sutton near Langport
11th-20th Jane Austen Festival, Bath
 Heritage Open Days
 Frome Cheese Show
 Frome Carnival
 Somerset Art Weeks
 Somerset County Show
 Wellington Carnival

October

Ilminster Carnival

Chard Carnival

Weston-super-Mare Beach Race
 Taunton Carnival

November

Bridgwater Carnival
 Burnham-on-Sea Carnival
 Weston-super-Mare Carnival
 North Petherton Carnival
 Shepton Mallet Carnival
 Wells Carnival
 Glastonbury Carnival
 Midsomer Norton Carnival

December

Dunster by Candlelight



From *museums* to *castles*



Just as the landscape of the County is full of variety, the list of things you can do here in your leisure time is seemingly endless and so diverse. If art is your thing then we have galleries in even the smallest towns while if it is adventure you are after we have natural thrills and hi-tech attractions. There are country pursuits and country houses; city museums and city spas.

Somerset has some of the largest curated collections in the UK. These range from cars exhibited at Haynes International Motor Museum at Sparkford to Naval

Aircraft at the Fleet Air Arm Museum in Yeovilton. At the other end of the scale, we have a museum dedicated to the bricks and tiles for which Bridgwater was once famous and the tiny King John's Hunting Lodge which is a Tudor house in Axbridge crammed with local artefacts. Appropriately, there is a Boat Museum in the old port of Watchet; a Willows and Wetlands Centre on the Levels; a Fashion Museum in Bath; a Rural Life Museum in Glastonbury and The Somerset Museum in the County town, Taunton. What might be more surprising is that that there is a museum about coal mining in Radstock, one about flight in Chard and

one about America in Bath – you will have to visit them to find out why!

Collections can be out of door as well as under a roof and Somerset has numerous fine gardens open to the public, some of which have collections of rare plants such as The Walled Garden of Cannington.

Somerset and Exmoor have their fair share of castles, country houses, hill forts and ancient monuments. Outside London and Norfolk, Somerset has more Grade 1 Listed Buildings than any other county. Many of our most special buildings and landmarks are looked after for us by the National Trust,



and galleries there are becomes obvious during Somerset Arts Weeks each September.

The performing arts are often a feature in rural areas where communities have made their own entertainment traditionally. These range from touring shows to festivals and carnival. Bridgwater was the first town in the country to have an Arts Centre funded by the Arts Council and also has an accessible community media centre run by Somerset Film known as The Engine Room. Black Swan Arts is a popular arts venue for the creative people of Frome and beyond while in Glastonbury, the Red Brick Building in a former sheepskin factory is set on becoming a pioneering centre for community arts, design and education.

A day after Jimi Hendrix died in 1970, the Glastonbury Festival was born and is now a five day celebration of music, dance, comedy, theatre, circus and more that is known the world over. Music of all kinds can be found in the County from the only residential centre in the world concentrating on the varied folk heritage of England that is Halsway Manor in the Quantocks to the village of Wedmore, where every couple of years, hundreds of local people work alongside professional singers, players and designers to create a new production of an opera.

Glorious architecture and fabulous grounds create atmosphere so a number of our notable grand houses have featured in films and TV Dramas which makes them doubly interesting to visit. Scenes from Poldark were shot in Wells and for Wolf Hall the stunning Elizabethan Montacute House became Greenwich Palace, to mention two. These historic treasures provide for great days out as they usually have cafes, shops and special exhibitions.

There are exceptional gardens too – East Lambrook was created by plants woman Margery Fish; Tintinhull's Pool Garden, in memory of a war-time fighter pilot and Hestercombe has the signature of Gertrude Jekyll.

Enjoying the wealth of wildlife for which Somerset and Exmoor are well-known is easier than ever for even the most novice nature lovers because of the reserves dotted all over the coast and countryside. Run by a variety of organisations, they full of information and laid out with hides and viewpoints to give visitors the best chance

of seeing the species for which each one is best known. There are wetlands, woodlands, reed beds and breeding grounds. The Avalon Marshes on the Somerset Levels is an internationally important area for wildlife where you can watch starling murmurations and listen to booming bitterns.

Naturalist and broadcaster, Stephen Moss, has described the reserve complex of Avalon Marshes on the Somerset Levels as one of the best places in the country to see wildlife. Thanks to events organised there, you don't have to wander out alone unsure what you're likely to see

(although of course you can!). These days there tractor rides, bird box making, pond dipping and guided walks. Elsewhere on the Moors there are Wildlife Safaris and Exmoor Safaris take you off the beaten track in search of Red Deer and other rarities.

Somerset is the only area still producing willow commercially and one way to understand the versatility of this amazing tree is to book onto a course at one of the farms where the young shoots are grown. They are used to make all manner of goods from chairs and baskets to fences and coffins. You can also take tours and learn about the part willow has played in the county and the country's history.

When it comes to making things, the county has a proud tradition of crafts, particularly rural ones and just how many little art studios





Bath in Somerset

XXXXX

XXXXX

XXXXXXX



XXXXXXXX

XXXXXX

XXXXX



Somerset Suprises

One of the larger English counties and yet far from the most densely populated, Somerset has so many surprises waiting to be unwrapped by the inquisitive visitor. Even those who live here can be taken

aback to discover some of its gems; wildflower meadows, beach waterfalls, ancient wells, unique carvings and underground reservoirs. Then there are the well-known landmarks which, despite seeming all too familiar, have secrets of their own.

There are plenty of secret gardens hidden in the heart of Somerset and Exmoor. One, Kilver Court near Shepton Mallet was created more than 100 years ago by Ernest Jardine, a progressive

industrialist, who wanted to give his workforce inspirational working conditions. You can wander through the rockeries, millpond and herbaceous borders for a truly peaceful day out. Another surprising garden is much more recent. Designed by internationally renowned landscape architect Piet Oudolf, this oasis sits behind the Hauser and Wirth Gallery in Bruton.

As well as gardens there are stunning parks many of them quite tucked away. Some form an oasis in a busy city while others are local nature reserves. Look out for the

Green Flag awarded by Keep Britain Tidy flying above the best kept green spaces such as Apex in Burnham, Keynesham Memorial and Ham Hill near Yeovil that is centred on an iron age fort.

A Green Flag was awarded to the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal which Go Canoeing has described the as one of England's best kept secrets. The Canal was opened in 1827 and links the River Parrett to the River Tone, passing through some of the best Somerset Levels and Moors landscape.

Somerset is widely regarded as having some of the most beautiful churches in the land, particularly the medieval towers that rise majestically above even the most modest villages. Many of these towers are decorated with strange carvings which have their own Somerset dialect name, hunky punks. Similar to gargoyles,

they have no function other than to attract attention. Step inside and there are more secrets from rare painted walls to unusual pews. Exmoor has some real gems, Oare Church in Lorna Doone country and Culbone, said to be the smallest parish church in England. Some churches are abandoned like Burrowbridge and Uphill.

Because of their significance, in a County that is notably flat in its middle, hills have a rich variety of names here – mump, tor, peak, down. It might seem odd to describe some of these as hidden treasures since they are so obvious but the views from them can be a revelation. Unless you know how to reach the summits, they can remain hidden. Six of these have been named the 'Somerset 360s' which you can find on the Visit Somerset website along with details of the Walkers Are Welcome scheme which has more.

Some of Somerset and Exmoor's treasures can remain buried or absent for large parts of the year. That is why it pays to visit at different times as each season has something different and special to offer. In the winter, the reserves on the Levels and Coast are visited by huge flocks of ducks and waders, sometimes being hunted by birds of prey giving rise to spectacular aerial displays. Certain woods become carpets of snowdrops such as the famous Snowdrop Valley on Exmoor. In Spring there are bluebells at Fyne

