

## 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 madding 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 most coveted regions of England and Scotland—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 at the Peebles Hydro Hotel, a Tweed Valley jewel 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 with panoramic views.
- Hear the history of the early 19th-century "Lake Poets" come alive with a local guide.
- Stroll atop Hadrian's Wall and see the excavations at Vindolanda Roman Fort & Museum.
- Spin along a gently rolling route through Kielder Water and Forest Park.
- Savor Scotland's national dish, haggis—accompanied by a dram of Scottish whiskey, of course!
- Marvel at the trees in Dawyck Botanical Gardens as you cycle the 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:** 11 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: Keswick / VBT Bicycling Vacation begins / Borrowdale Valley**

Meet your fellow travelers and VBT trip leaders at 1:00 p.m. in the lobby of the Penrith hotel. You will have a chance to change into your biking gear in the hotel's public restrooms. Please note: Plan to eat lunch or a snack on your own beforehand, as the next scheduled meal is dinner.

Take a short shuttle to the village of Keswick, the start of your cycling adventure. After a safety and bike-fitting session, enjoy a pleasant pedal along the River Greta on a dedicated cycling path. A gentle ascent brings you toward the Castlerigg Stones, a circle of neolithic standing stones offering one of the most dramatic panoramic views in the Lake District. Continue cycling through the rolling countryside and past tree-lined fields into the Borrowdale Valley, your home for the next two nights.

Tonight, enjoy a welcome dinner in the hotel's restaurant.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Warm-up ride — 11 miles | —

What to Expect:

Begin your ride on a designated bike path that weaves its way over the River Greta. Enjoy smooth pavement as you pass through tunnels and over bridges on this route, which follows the old Keswick to Penrith Railway. A gentle ascent leads you away from the river and into the countryside as you make your way to Castlerigg Stone Circle. Enjoy panoramic views of prominent nearby mountains before descending back toward town and then along the eastern shore of Derwentwater to Borrowdale Gates Hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 11 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. Bike beneath the wonderful and spirited Catbells, a spectacular fell, before continuing through the canopy of the Whinlatter Forest. You then drop down into the valley and cycle along the stunning eastern shores of Loweswater and Crummock Water. Lunch is in a bucolic Lake District pub, The Kirkstile Inn, where you will be joined by a local Lakeland guide who will share some of the history of the “Lake Poets” who drew their inspiration from the bucolic region in the early 19th century. William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were all poets in residence and are considered part of the Romantic Movement. This afternoon, opt for a picturesque walk around Buttermere Lake or tackle the iconic Honister Pass back to the hotel.

Dinner is on your own tonight. Keswick has several options for a fine meal.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Borrowdale Gates to Buttermere – 25 miles

Afternoon: Buttermere to Borrowdale Gates – 10 miles

Afternoon: Buttermere Loop Walk – Up to 4 miles

### What to Expect:

Morning: The route begins from the hotel and follows the western shore of picturesque Derwentwater Lake before entering the small village of Braithwaite. Here you begin the climb through the Whinlatter Forest and over a small pass where views of the Catbells peak out in all directions. A van shuttle is available for those who would prefer a ride to the top of Whinlatter Pass. Then, enjoy a stunning descent into the valley past small hamlets before entering the picturesque lake region of Loweswater and Crummock Water before lunch.

Afternoon: Test your mettle over the iconic Honister Pass, one of the most scenic mountain passes in Northwest England. Following lunch, enjoy a gentle meander along the eastern shores of Lake Buttermere for a few miles before the road “tips up” toward Honister Pass. A short but challenging grade takes you to the top before the exciting descent through the Borrowdale Valley back to your hotel.

Afternoon walk: Follow lunch at the Kirkstile Inn, you may opt to set out on one of the most beautiful

walks in the Lake District, around Lake Buttermere. Meander along the shores of the Buttermere for as far as you would like; the circular route is 4.5 miles in length and is relatively flat. Watch out for friendly Highland cows that can often be seen in the area. A shuttle will return you to the hotel.

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 – 35 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **DAY 3: North Peninnes / Tyne Valley / Hexham**

Start off today's bicycling adventure on a high note: Alston. Set in the North Pennines, an official Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, it is the highest market town in England. Begin with an uphill climb, or take the van to Alston, and then head downhill into the Tyne Valley and the town of Hexham, named the "happiest place to live" in Great Britain in 2019 and 2021 by Rightmove.

With a recorded history dating to 674, Hexham boasts a storied history that blends Viking, Roman, and Celtic influences. Hexham Abbey, one of the earliest seats of Christianity in England, dominates the town. Built as a monastery by St. Wilfrid in 674, it was destroyed by the Vikings 200 years later, and has been rebuilt and expanded over the centuries since. While here, don't miss the Abbey Grounds and Sele Park with their formal gardens and woodland walks.

Across from the abbey, you can admire the Queen's Hall Arts Centre, home to art galleries and the performing arts. Also in the marketplace area is Moot Hall, a medieval former courthouse, and Hexham Old Gaol. Dating to the 1300s, it is the first structure built specifically as a prison in England. Perhaps you'll explore the dungeons and museum here. You might also visit the lush Tyne Green Country Park, set on the banks of the River Tyne and offering beautiful views of the river and its 18th-century bridge.

Your hotel for the night is the Beaumont Hotel, with its lovely restaurant overlooking the Abbey grounds. This evening is free for you to explore Hexham and try one of its restaurants.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: North Peninnes to Tyne Valley – 26 miles

What to Expect:

Enjoy a some easy cycling today as you descend from the highest town in England toward the Tyne Valley. You can begin your ride with a 1.5-mile climb from the banks of the River Nent to the higher Pennine Hills, commonly known as the “backbone of England.” Or take the VBT shuttle if you prefer. A gradual descent leads you to the Tyne Valley and into the beautiful market town of Hexham, your home for the next two nights.

Cumulative Distance Range: 26 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 4: Hadrian’s Wall / Sycamore Gap / Vindolanda**

In 122, the Roman emperor Hadrian began an effort to build a 73-mile wall across northern Britain as a defense against the barbarians. Today it is the largest Roman archaeological site in Britain and part of the “Frontiers of the Roman Empire” UNESCO World Heritage site. Dotted with ditches, towers, fortlets, and gates, it stood as the Roman empire’s northwest frontier for nearly three centuries.

You will have the opportunity to investigate this ancient wonder this morning. Departing from the hotel, enjoy a gentle ride along the Tyne River Valley before crossing over a bridge and climbing up to the wall. You may park your bike here and take a walk along the wall to Sycamore Gap, one of the most photogenic places in this part of the country. Sadly, the iconic and beloved tree that once stood here was mysteriously felled by vandals in 2023.

Gather with your travel mates for lunch at the Sill, the visitor café in the National Landscape Discovery Centre.

Continue to delve into Roman history in this area this afternoon as you cycle or take the shuttle to Vindolanda Roman Fort & Museum. Part of the UNESCO World Heritage complex in this region, it is one of the most important Roman archaeological sites in Europe. This ancient Roman garrison has been painstakingly unveiled over the last 30 years, and experts estimate a huge amount remains to be discovered over the next 30 to 40 years. Among the structures you can see here during your visit are administrative buildings, barracks, granaries, houses, shops, a tavern, a bathhouse, and the fort walls.

An onsite museum exhibits many beautifully preserved artifacts uncovered here. Experience daily life through the military equipment, tools, jewelry, pottery, and religious and artistic pieces on display. Most renowned are the Vindolanda Writing Tablets, which record the details of daily life on small wooden

documents.

Afterward, ride or shuttle back to the hotel in Hexham, where the evening is free for you to explore and enjoy dinner on your own.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning : Hexham to The Sill – 18 miles

Afternoon: The Sill to Hexham – 13 miles

### What to Expect:

Today's ride begins with a gentle meander through the peaceful Tyne River Valley to Haydon Bridge. Here, you will cross the river and begin a short climb up to Hadrian's Wall. You will have the option to park your bicycle and walk along the Wall to Sycamore Gap. From here, cycle to the National Landscape Discovery Centre for an included lunch. Visit Vindolanda after lunch, either by van or by bike. The return ride follows the edge of the escarpment before descending back into the Tyne Valley toward Hexham.

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 – 31 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **DAY 5: Kielder Forest / Scottish Border**

The wonders of Kielder Water and Forest Park await your discovery this morning. Here, in England's largest forest, you'll follow a gently rolling route along the southern shore of the biggest man-made lake in northern Europe. Keep your eyes peeled for wildlife as you roll along. The park is home to roughly half of England's native red squirrel population, as well as otters, roe deer, badgers, pipistrelle bats, and water voles. Extinct as a breeding bird in England for nearly 200 years, ospreys are also making a comeback here.

Kielder Water and Forest Park is also renowned for its award-winning contemporary art and architecture, which have been lovingly curated over the past 27 years here. Perhaps you'll glimpse some of these unique pieces as you ride.

Continuing on, you will cross the border into Scotland as you pedal past farms and tree-lined hedges. Celebrate with your travel mates at a special lunch, and savor an authentic taste of Scotland's national dish, haggis—accompanied by a dram of Scottish whiskey, of course!

Remount your bike for a ride through magnificent scenery this afternoon. Along the way, stop to visit Hermitage Castle, described by George Macdonald Fraser as “the guardhouse of the bloodiest valley in Britain.” Tales of torture, treason, and illicit romance abound within its ancient walls—including a legend about Mary Queen of Scots, whose ghost is reputed to still haunt this atmospheric ruin.

A short, scenic ride later, you'll hop into the van for the final stretch into the Tweed River Valley and the historic town of Peebles. Set on the banks of River Tweed, a world-famous salmon-fishing site, Peebles was once a royal hunting town and an important center for the production of tweed and knitwear. As you become acquainted with this scenic and multi-faceted town, you'll see why John Buchan, author of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, chose to make his home here.

Your home for the next two nights is the stately Peebles Hydro Hotel & Spa. For dinner on your own tonight, you might dine at the hotel, or walk or shuttle into the village of Peebles to begin your explorations.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Kielder Forest into Scotland — 31 miles

#### What to Expect:

Today's ride begins along the southern shores of Kielder Water along a gently rolling route through the wild Kielder Forest. More verdant views await as you cross the border into Scotland, past farms and tree-lined hedges. Visit ancient Hermitage Castle and tackle one final hill before hopping in the van for a short shuttle to Peebles.

Cumulative Distance Range: 31 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **DAY 6: Bike the Border Country**

From the from the 14th to the late 17th century, the area surrounding the Scottish-English border was a remote and wild land, where depending on one's clan rather than the rule of law was a way of life. Tensions between English and Scots were high, but reiving (plundering and cattle rustling) knew no national boundaries. You'll be delving into this colorful land today as you cycle the Border Country along roads made famous by the Border Reivers.

Along the way, you'll pause at Dawyck Botanical Gardens, home to an exceptional collection of trees. Among these are Britain's oldest and tallest trees, rare and endangered trees and plants, and trees and plants from Europe, China, Nepal, Japan, and North America. Depending on the season, you might also spot snowdrops, bluebells, rhododendrons, azaleas, or blue poppies along the park's 65-acre expanse. Enjoy lunch here with your travel mates at its award-winning café.

Properly refueled, take to your bike again and cross the river to a route that traverses beautiful but narrow bridges and continues along quiet roads through some of the best scenery Scotland has to offer.

On return to your hotel, you are free to pursue your own interests for the rest of the afternoon. You might join an optional tour to one of the woolen mills for which Peebles was once famous. Or explore Peebles on your own. Learn more about John Buchan and his sister Anna, who wrote under the pseudonym O. Douglas, at the John Buchan Story, a museum dedicated to their legacy. View the remains of Cross Kirk, said to have been the grave of St. Nicholas; the Mercat Cross, which once marked a trading center; and the town walls. View the exhibits at the Peebles Library, Museum, and Gallery. Stroll along the River Tweed. Or soak in the medieval ambiance of High Street, as you browse the wide variety of shops in this neighborhood. You'll see why Peebles has been deemed the Top Independent Retailing Town in Scotland and second in the UK.

Tonight, enjoy a gin tasting at the hotel's in-house distillery before a festive farewell dinner.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Border Country Loop – 33 miles

### What to Expect:

After breakfast, cycle directly from your hotel and across the River Tweed to the rolling green hills of the Border Country. Traverse beautiful but narrow bridges and continue along quiet roads through some of the best scenery Scotland has to offer this afternoon. A visit to Dawyck Botanical Gardens and an included lunch break up the ride.



Cumulative Distance Range: 33 miles

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 7: VBT Bicycling Vacation ends / Departure**

Travel 30 minutes by van to Tweedbank Train Station after breakfast. Say goodbye to your tour leaders before a one-hour journey on ScotRail will deliver you to Edinburgh's Waverly Station.

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.

