

England: The Cotswolds

Walking Vacation + Air Package

The English have been rambling through the Cotswolds for generations. It's little wonder. Landscapes here soothe the soul and nourish the spirit. Emerald-hued hills roll into green forests. Bubbling streams spanned by charming bridges lead to tiny villages sculpted from yellow limestone. This is the England of fairy tales, where thatched-roof houses caressed by gardens and sheep-flecked pastures parceled by drystone walls have earned the region an "Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty" designation. Walk with us along the Cotswold Way, Monarch's Way, and other scenic footpaths and join a Cotswolds tradition.

Cultural Highlights

Stroll the footpaths of Hidcote Gardens, one of England's most influential Arts and Crafts gardens

Marvel at breathtaking vistas along the famed Cotswold Way and Monarch's Way, traversing bucolic pastureland dotted with sheep and small wooded glens

Explore the fine 16th-century stone buildings of the village of Broadway, the "Jewel of the Cotswolds"

Enjoy a private tour of the grand Jacobean-style Stanway House and marvel at the 300-foot-tall fountain in the beautiful gardens.

Walk into 17th-century market towns, where wool, yarn, and farm produce were traded and sold for centuries

Pass Highgrove House, the family residence of Prince Charles and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall

Arrive by foot into the city of Bath, a rich repository of grand Georgian and Regency architecture

Visit Blenheim Palace, birthplace of Winston Churchill and home to 2,000 acres of magnificently landscaped grounds

What to Expect

This tour features a combination of paved roads and easy terrain, mixed with moderate hills, moorland and uneven footpaths. Due to England's climate, the footpaths can often be wet and muddy. Several stiles, usually a series of steps for crossing a fence or wall, constructed so as to allow humans but not livestock to pass, are encountered on the routes. Ideal for enthusiastic beginners and experienced walkers. Several of the walks require a transfer from our hotel to the start of the walk or from the end of the walk back to the hotel. Our Trip Leaders often use this time in the van for our morning route review, so we can enjoy a more leisurely morning at breakfast.

Tour Duration: 10 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 3.5 - 7

Average Cycling Time: 01:15 - 04:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 72°/49°, Jun 79°/56°, Jul 79°/59°, Aug 81°/61°, Sep 75°/55°, Oct 63°/47°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 2.8, Jun 2.5, Jul 1.5, Aug 2.6, Sep 2.2, Oct 2.7

DAY 1: Depart from home / Fly overnight to London

Depart from home for England. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

DAY 2: Arrive in London

Arrive at the London Heathrow Airport, England. Once in the arrival terminal, you will be met outside of customs by a VBT representative holding a VBT sign, who will assist you with your transfer by taxi to the hotel. Driver pick-up locations will depend on your arrival terminal:

Heathrow Terminal 2: Currency Exchange Kiosk (Travelex)

Heathrow Terminal 3: WHSmith Store, located on the right-hand side of the arrivals gate

Heathrow Terminal 4: Costa Coffee Shop

Heathrow Terminal 5: Costa Coffee Shop

If you are going to be delayed for more than 15 minutes at the Lost & Found desk due to delayed or lost luggage, please let our transfer company know by calling Airport Pickups London +44 20 8688 7744 (for a fee). You may also contact our One Call travel assistance to advise of your delay, and they will contact our transfer service (M&G). An M&G representative will be in the arrivals area one hour after the flight has landed. If you exit earlier, please remain in the arrivals area and look for the representative carrying a VBT sign.

In Royal Leamington Spa, settle in and take the rest of the day to explore this Regency town. Dinner this evening is on your own.

Please note: Your hotel room may not be available until 2:00 p.m. If you arrive early in the day, you may store your luggage with the reception desk.

Please note: VBT transfer times and departure points are finalized in advance and cannot be modified for individual guests. If you fly in before the scheduled program dates, transportation from the airport will be at your own expense.

Hotel: The Angel Hotel

DAY 3: VBT Walking Vacation begins

Meet your VBT Trip Leaders at 9:30 a.m. in the main lobby of your Royal Leamington Spa hotel. Embark your private motorcoach and transfer about 45 minutes to Hidcote Gardens. Please be dressed for your first walk. Please note your luggage will be transferred directly to the hotel from here.

Upon arrival at Hidcote Gardens, one of England's most influential Arts and Crafts gardens, there'll be time to explore its hedge-lined pathways that lead to pretty topiary and rare trees. Created by the talented American horticulturist Major Lawrence Johnston, the colorful and intricately designed outdoor "rooms" are always full of surprises.

After a picnic lunch, you'll set off on your walk along the Monarch's Way footpath toward Chipping Campden. We will only follow a fraction of this historic 615-mile footpath. On your way, you'll enter into the chocolate-box Cotswold hamlet of Hidcote Bartrim. These traditional thatched-roof stone cottages were once home to Johnston's gardeners. Admire them as you pass through and continue into the open Cotswolds countryside. Later, arrive in the small market town of Chipping Campden (chipping is a derivation of "market" in Old English). Enter into town on High Street, lined with limestone buildings the color of honey. The stone of these masterful structures—an oolitic limestone called Cotswold stone—was quarried locally. At the town center, admire the Market Hall with its splendid arches, built in 1627 by Sir Baptist Hicks to provide shelter for local farmers selling cheese, butter and poultry.

Check in to the Noel Arms Hotel, one of the Cotswolds' oldest inns. Charles II is thought to have stayed here during the English Civil War in the mid-1600s. Once settled, you may wish to continue with a circular walk to the small pretty village of Broad Campden.

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

Hotel: Noel Arms Hotel

Meals: B (included for Air Package guests only), L, D

Daily Options: 3 ½ or 6 miles

DAY 4: Walk to Broadway Tower / Broadway

After breakfast, step onto The Cotswold Way, a 102-mile UK National Trail that links Chipping Campden and the city of Bath. Your tranquil route, first envisioned by England's Ramblers, the largest walking group in Great Britain, passes quaint houses as it makes its way into the countryside and up the Cotswold Edge escarpment to Dovers Hill. Here, enjoy the extensive views west to the Malvern Hills. Around 1612, Robert Dover instituted annual games here, giving them the grand title of the "Olimpick Games," and they continue to this day.

Your walk continues through bucolic pastureland dotted with sheep, through small wooded glens, into a lateral valley, and up a gentle slope to Broadway Tower. Built in 1799, it is a typical example of an 18th-century Gothic folly, a structure built by the nobility simply for pleasure. This one was erected for Lady Coventry of Worcester, who wondered whether a torch lit here upon a tower could be seen from her home 22 miles away. (It turns out that it could, much to her delight.) Today, at 1,024 feet above sea level, Broadway Tower still offers an extensive view across the Worcestershire countryside. Take time to ponder the folly of Lady Coventry during a cream tea break in a converted barn nearby.

After, continue downhill to the village of Broadway, often referred to as the "Jewel of the Cotswolds" for its fine 16th-century buildings made from the local stone. High Street is particularly inviting with its many shops, cafés, and other amenities. There'll be time for you to enjoy lunch on your own and explore the village before shuttling back to your hotel.

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

Hotel: Noel Arms Hotel

Meals: B

Daily Options: 6 miles

DAY 5: Walk from Buckland to Snowhill

A 20-minute morning shuttle delivers you to the small rural village of Buckland, starting point for today's ramble. You traverse open country to the hamlet of Laverton, where a cluster of stone cottages evokes more of rural Old England. Later, arrive in Stanton, an idyllic village little changed in 300 years. Walk past 16th- and 17th-century houses built in typical Cotswolds style with steeply pitched gables, mullioned windows, and glowing honey-colored limestone. Stanton takes its name from the stan (or stone) from

which it is built, as does your next destination, Stanway.

Upon arrival, visit the grand Stanway House, an outstandingly beautiful example of a Jacobean manor house. Owned by Tewkesbury Abbey for 800 years, it changed hands to the Tracy family for 500 years and is still the home of their descendants, the Earls of Wemyss and March. Enjoy a private guided tour of the house, with time to explore the gardens. The centerpiece of the beautifully manicured grounds is the Stanway Fountain, a piercing 300-foot single jet, the highest in Britain and the tallest gravity fountain in the world. Savor a ploughman's lunch of local produce on the outdoor terrace before getting underway.

Your walk continues through the village of Stanway, then ascends slightly through a mixed forest. Leaving the woodland, follow the footpath through gently sloping agricultural land before arriving at Snowhill, a tiny village resting atop the escarpment. As its name implies, and as locals are fond of saying, if there is any snow about then you will find it here first. After time to explore, join the shuttle back to your hotel.

Dinner is on your own tonight.

Hotel: Noel Arms Hotel

Meals: B, L

Daily Options: 3 or 6 miles

Walk Summary: Flat/gently undulating dirt/grassy paths or along quiet paved country tracks to lunch. Afterwards a steeper climb up through woodland (can be tree roots to avoid) on a dirt track, before joining the paved country road into Snowhill.

DAY 6: Walk from Stow-on-the-Wold, Lower Slaughter, to Bourton-on-the-Water

After breakfast today, check out of the hotel and shuttle to Stow-on-the-Wold, a small market town in Gloucestershire. Founded by Normans where two busy trade routes converged, this pretty town is situated on an 800-foot hill. This was a major center of the Cotswold wool industry. Enormous annual fairs attracted farmers from all reaches with as many as 20,000 sheep to sell. Today's walk starts in the Market Square, flanked by an ancient cross on one end and the town stocks on the other. You will walk in the footsteps of the 21-year-old King Charles II who, in 1651, was defeated in the Battle of Worcester and hotly pursued by Parliamentary troops down the aptly named Monarch's Way. Rejoin this footpath that you left behind a couple of days ago.

Descend from the escarpment through timeless pastureland. This is the Cotswolds of dreams, wide green fields edged with limestone walls and dotted with sheep. Later, arrive in the idyllic small village of Lower Slaughter straddling the River Eye. The town's name is derived from the Old English word slothre, meaning "muddy place." Admire the charming stone bridges spanning the river and the 16th- and 17th-century yellow limestone cottages built in the traditional Cotswolds style. Leave this charming hamlet and continue through a small wooded area, before traversing more pastures down to the Windrush River, which leads you into Bourton-on-the-Water. This pretty village is known as the "Venice of the Cotswolds" for the bridges that span its river.

There'll be time here for lunch and to explore the village and its many craft shops before shuttling approximate 50 minutes to your home for the next three nights, the Hare & Hounds at Westonbirt, near Tetbury.

Dinner is at the hotel tonight.

Hotel: The Hare & Hounds Hotel

Meals: B, D

Daily Options: 5 1/2 miles

DAY 7: Circular walk to Tetbury

After breakfast, stroll directly from the hotel along a meandering trail through tree-dotted pastureland. Your route traverses the tree lined Highgrove House, the family residence of Prince Charles and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall. Gatcombe Park, home of Charles' sister Princess Anne, is also nearby. Shortly afterwards, walk into Tetbury, developed on the site of an ancient hill fort. Tetta's Monastery was first mentioned in a charter by King Ethelred of Mercia in 681. In medieval days, Tetbury was an important market town for the Cotswolds wool and yarn trade. The town center is still dominated by the splendid pillared Market House, built in 1655. Many of the wool merchant houses look exactly as they did 300 years ago.

During your free time in Tetbury, visit one of its inviting cafés, its lovely church, or the Highgrove shop which sells produce from the gardens of the Highgrove estate. The town is also locally famous for its antique shops. You're sure to find a pleasing spot for lunch on your own.

The walking trail circles back, to Westonbirt House. Dating back to the end of the 19th century, it's now a prestigious girls' boarding school with beautiful gardens and not often open to the public. Stop here just

before arriving back at your hotel for a private guided tour.

After time to relax back at the hotel, dinner is on your own. You may wish to eat in the hotel's restaurant or return to Tetbury by taxi.

Hotel: The Hare & Hounds Hotel

Meals: B

Daily Options: 7 miles

DAY 8: Bath

After breakfast, board our shuttle to Bath (approximately 50 minutes), which has been attracting travelers for some 2,000 years. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to some of England's grandest Georgian architecture, as well as one of the world's best-preserved Roman bathhouses.

Today's walk starts just outside Bath and follows the final leg of the Cotswolds Way, the path we followed to Broadway a few days ago. Begin by traversing Lansdown Hill, site of the bloody Battle of Lansdown during the English Civil War. From here, you will cross a plateau, passing the promontory Iron Age hill fort at Little Down and the famous Bath Horse Racecourse. Shortly afterwards, you will have your first views of Bath in the valley below. Walk through some fertile farmland before you emerge into the more suburban environs of Weston. As your walk draws to a close, you will have glimpses of finely landscaped parks and grand Regency architecture, including the famous Royal Crescent, 30 terraced houses forming a sweeping crescent, designed by John Wood the Younger in 1767. Conclude your walk at Bath Abbey, where a round carved stone set into the pavement outside the ornate west doors marks the end of the Cotswold Way.

You will have free time to explore Bath and have lunch on your own before returning to the hotel. This evening, recount your memorable journey over a festive farewell dinner.

Hotel: The Hare & Hounds Hotel

Meals: B, D

Daily Options: 7 miles

DAY 9: Transfer to Woodstock / VBT Walking Vacation ends

VBT Air Package guests: After breakfast, check out of the hotel, say goodbye to your Trip Leaders, and

transfer to The Bear Hotel in Woodstock, approximately 1½ hours away. Woodstock is a picturesque, historic market town, but not like any you have visited thus far: Today, you will have access to Blenheim Palace, birthplace of Winston Churchill and a veritable paradise for walkers.

Upon check-in you will be given an entrance ticket. Blenheim Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the principal residence of the Dukes of Marlborough, and the only non-royal, non-episcopal country house in England designated a palace. Completed in 1722, it is one of England's largest houses. Its 2,000 acres were designed by the most renowned landscape architect of his day, Capability Brown. It is pure pleasure to stroll along Blenheim's great lake, browse the beautiful formal gardens, and take off-the-beaten-track rambles. You may even stumble upon the Temple of Diana, where Churchill proposed to his future wife Clementine. All well worth exploring.

Hotel: The Bear Hotel

Meals: B

DAY 10: Depart for home

Early this morning*, transfer to London Heathrow Airport for your departing flight. Please ensure you are ready in the hotel reception area at the designated transfer time**.

*Please note: For guests with early-morning departures, breakfast at the hotel may not be available. Please check with the front desk to verify the times that breakfast is served.

**Please note: VBT recommends that you check your transfer time in your "Transfer Reminder." VBT transfer times and departure points are finalized in advance and cannot be modified for individual guests. If you extend your stay beyond the scheduled program dates, return transportation to the airport will be at your own expense.

Meals: B

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

The Angel Hotel (Day: 2)

Located in the center of Leamington, the family-run Angel Hotel occupies a former Regency coach house.

From this historic building, the towns Georgian and Victorian architecture, lovely tree-lined avenues and squares, and pretty gardens are just a short walk away. During your stay, linger over a drink at the Counting House Bar or stroll to one of Leamingtons many wine bars and cafés. The hotels wooden décor brings character, charm, and a warm touch to your stay and your room features all the amenities you need for a comfortable stay.

Bear Hotel (Day: 9)

In picturesque Woodstock, the Bear Hotel enjoys a lovely village setting and an ideal location just a mile from Blenheim Palace. Occupying a majestic 13th-century coaching inn, the charming country house is one of the finest inns in Oxfordshire, having hosted royals and film stars, including Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Each of the 54 traditional, un-air conditioned rooms is individually styled and offers period antique furniture, satellite TV, a mini bar, and fluffy bathrobes. With bare stone walls, open fires, and exposed beams, the atmospheric restaurant serves an innovative British menu using fresh, seasonal produce. The cozy bar offers fine wines, malt whiskies, and real ales, and serves light lunches and snacks.

The Hare and Hounds (Days: 6,7,8)

Nestled amid gardens and woodland, the Hare & Hounds in Westonbirt is a charming, traditional English country house hotel, with a popular restaurant and bar. The award-winning Beaufort Restaurant offers traditional British cuisine infused with continental flavors, served under a beamed ceiling and surrounded by large windows that overlook the garden. Jack Hare's is the place for more casual pub-style fare with a satisfying ale, cider, or wine. Each un-air conditioned room is inspired by the details of English country life. Many overlook the gardens or countryside.

Noel Arms Hotel (Days: 3,4,5)

One of the oldest inns in the Cotswolds, the 28-room Noel Arms Hotel is steeped in history. It is said that Charles II stayed here during the English Civil War. This gracious hotel has all the touches of warm English hospitality: a log fire in the bar, homemade cakes in the on-site coffee shop, and a refined restaurant whose diverse menu uses the freshest locally sourced produce. You'll want to sample Chef Indunil's famous curries, which have earned him the "Best Pub Curry Chef Award" on three occasions. You might also partake of a soothing massage at the sister hotel, the Cotswold House, right across the road. Simple and elegant, each un-air conditioned room features antique furnishing and ample amenities.