



## Romanticized by poets, England's Lake District pulls you in

Cherished by English walkers, region attracts rambblers and rock climbers

BY JANE MUNDY JULY 9, 2012

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Romanticized by poets and cherished by English walkers, region attracts rambblers and rock climbers

In 1884 William Wordsworth wrote a letter to then Prime Minister Gladstone objecting to a proposed railway line that would cut through his beloved Lake District. England's Poet Laureate felt that increased tourism would threaten the Lakeland scenery the Lake Poets romanticized and the Brits cherished. It's England's best kept secret, according to the locals.

Thankfully Mr. W's complaints fell on deaf ears (unlike his poetry). The railway opened a few years later and the scenery is just as bucolic and spectacular as it was in Wordsworth's day, albeit with a few more tourists.

I know all this because a draft of his poem is on display at an exhibition called "Writing Britain" at the British Library in London. Coincidentally, I'd booked a seat to Windermere in Cumbria on Virgin Trains, knowing I'd crave wide open spaces after dodging London's crowds.

The Lake District was already established as a tourist destination when Wordsworth wrote A Guide to the District of the Lakes in the early 1800s. Apparently he wanted to correct previous guides to the area and aimed to educate readers in the "reverential and loving response to the landscaping." Then there's Coleridge, another of the Lakes Poets: "I love ... mountains with almost a visionary fondness."

The Lakes Poets waxed eloquent about these 35 square miles of mountains and lakes, where spring comes late and verdant green hills are speckled with Herdwick sheep that live on the fells. Despite the usual 'gentle' rain in these parts (optimistically called 'dampening on' by the English vacationer who comes here for rambles and rock climbs) I, too, was smitten with this land with its air of timelessness.

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I checked into the Wild Boar Inn, circa 17th century, just in time for an evening stroll to the smokehouse with chef Marc Saunders (famous for putting grey squirrel on the menu) before dinner. I noticed a metal filing cabinet among the smokers. "You put the charcoal and wet sawdust in the bottom drawer, poke a few holes in all the drawers and smoke just about anything, even cheese and olives" said Saunders. For instance, guests can smoke their catch-of-the-day, usually trout, and take it home.

Andrew Hunter, chief Gingerbread Man at The Grasmere Gingerbread shop wasn't as forthcoming.

"The recipe is locked away in the local bank vault in Ambleside," he said seriously. With one bite I understood why. And like most everything in these parts, it is steeped in history. Sarah Nelson came up with the recipe and sold it from a tree stump outside her house, a stone's throw from Wordsworth's home, Dove Cottage.

"Sarah died in 1904 and left the business to her great niece and it has been in my wife's family for three generations," said Hunter. "Secrecy is just part of the charm." And so is location.

The next day I boarded a 'Mountain Goat' bus and took the Ten Lakes Tour. What could be more relaxing than gazing at grazing sheep with a running commentary from Alan, driver and history buff, who has lived here all his life? He explained how the Vikings built about 22,000 miles of stone walls more than 1,000 years ago to enclose property, and the stones were lying about in the fields, leftover from the ice age. Now sheep and humans climb over them.

We pass woodland areas interspersed with rocky outcrops, past lakes dotted with sailboats and canoes, and stop for photo ops such as the stone circle at Castlerigg, believed to be from the Neolithic or Bronze age.

"At summer solstice this place is heaving with old hippies," said Alan, laughing.

That night I splurged and dined at Gilpin Lodge, a gorgeous family-owned Georgian hotel. After five courses — most everything sourced locally — their personal chauffeur drove me back to the Wild Boar Inn, which was only a 20-minute walk away.

I cycled the countryside and visited The World of Beatrix Potter in Bowness-on-Windermere. Interestingly, more adults were visiting than kids. The Virtual Walks display alone is worth the price of admission.

To get even further away from it all, head north to Eden Valley, where you can walk England's last bit of wilderness for miles without seeing a soul. The 'right to roam' is a recent Parliamentary Act and you can walk just about anywhere. Or drive up to Hartside Summit and onto Alston, described as England's most scenic road. It's also one of the top 10 driving roads in the world—this route is for serious cyclists, no electric bikes in sight. From the summit you can see clear across to Scotland.

The town of Alston with its cobbled streets is the highest market town in England. From here you can hop on a bus and walk Hadrian's Wall. A number of B&B's in these parts offer up-close farm life where you can feed the chickens and milk the cows. Bunnies run rampant, it's the freshest air and I probably had the best sleep ever at Scalehouse, a 400-year-old B&B about 10 miles east of Penrith. "We can pick you up from your hotel in the Lake District and you can either bring your bikes or rent them here," says proprietor Pamela Bonnick. "There are plenty of bike routes and if you stop at one of the pubs we can also rescue you after too many pints." That's got to be the next best thing to battery-run.

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## London: Posh hotels and great noshes

If the Lake District is England's best kept secret, One Aldwych in Covent Garden and Temple Apex in Fleet Street are London's best kept hotel secrets. They are both oases in the heart of London's action. One Aldwych is my fave, with its unique swimming pool. At one end is a screen projecting images of Churchill and the Coronation and underwater music compels you to swim a few more laps.

Food, glorious food. I'm a loyal Londoner, born and bred, but when it came to cuisine we closed our eyes and thought of the Queen. Gone are those days. A stone's throw from Temple Apex is Simpson's-in-the-Strand. Charles Dickens dined here and maybe started his day with a breakfast called "the 10 deadly sins," that includes Simpson's sausage, fried egg, streaky and back bacon, black pudding, lamb's kidneys, fried bread, bubble and squeak (they'll explain), baked beans, lamb's liver, and fried mush-rooms and tomatoes.

If you're still hungry, order a real pig's nose with parsley and onion sauce. The chef at Rules elevates lowly cabbage to the food of kings. Stiff-upper-lip waiters transport silver trays to private dining rooms full of very important people. Go upstairs and ogle past clients displayed on the walls - a veritable literary museum.

Spend some time in London's iconic Borough Market before dining at Roast, situated above the market. I had the best roast beef and Yorkshire pudding ever here. It is dedicated to traditional cooking and has a world-class wine selection.

I do love London after a good nosh and a posh hotel room.

### If you go

How to Get There: My British vacation started on Virgin Atlantic's Dancing Queen. Virgin flies direct from YVR to Heathrow until October 27th from about \$800.

**Where to Stay:** One Aldwych: [www.onealdwych.com](http://www.onealdwych.com)

**Wild Boar Inn:** [www.thewildboarinn.co.uk](http://www.thewildboarinn.co.uk)

**Nanny Brow:** [www.nannybrow.co.uk](http://www.nannybrow.co.uk)

**Heart of the Lakes self-catering:** [www.heartofthelakes.co.uk](http://www.heartofthelakes.co.uk)

### Eden Valley

**Scalehouse Farm:** [www.scalehousefarm.com](http://www.scalehousefarm.com)

### Getting Around the Lakes District

**Mountain Goat Bus Tours:** [www.mountain-goat.com](http://www.mountain-goat.com)

**Guided Tours on Electric Bike:** [www.discoverlakeland.co.uk](http://www.discoverlakeland.co.uk)

**Apex Temple Court Hotel:** [www.apexhotels.co.uk](http://www.apexhotels.co.uk)

**Where to Eat: Roast:** [www.roast-restaurant.com](http://www.roast-restaurant.com)

**Simpson's-in-the-Strand:** [www.simpsonsinthestrnd.co.uk](http://www.simpsonsinthestrnd.co.uk)

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