

## England: The Cotswolds

### Tour-Only Itinerary

There's nothing like a full English breakfast to start your day. And with the pretty village of Bibury at your doorstep, you can't wait to embrace the morning. Outside, the River Coln rushes past your hotel's ivy-covered façade, and a graceful lane weaves among golden stone cottages with mossy slate roofs, up towards the public footpath. Swing open a gate and you're immersed in the Cotswolds' pastoral countryside, where chirping birds and bleating lambs keep you company as you wander rolling meadows and along willow-lined riverbanks. Even with all this glorious greenery, civilization is never far off on this Cotswolds walking tour. A cozy pub festooned with climbing roses signals your arrival in the neighboring village of Coln St. Aldwyns. Noon has barely struck, but the day's first spontaneous detour is already luring you in.

### Highlights

Stroll a bucolic landscape of rolling meadows, sheep-dotted pastures, and tranquil forests straight out of a fairy tale.

Stay in quaint country inns and converted manors brimming with English charm and surrounded by beautiful gardens.

Follow some of England's most renowned walking trails including the hilly Cotswold Way, the gentle Heart of England Way, and the historic Monarch's Way.

Admire the graceful Regency architecture of Cheltenham, known at the "Western Gateway to the Cotswolds" and the cultural capital of Gloucestershire County.

Explore the enchanting grounds of the beautifully preserved Sudeley Castle & Gardens, resting place of Katherine Parr, the sixth wife of Henry VIII.

## Activity Level

This tour is one of our Self-Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 7 to 10 miles per day. While walks typically are not able to be shortened, it is possible to travel with your luggage to your next accommodation on any given day (included in the price of the tour). There are daily ascents and descents, with a maximum elevation gain of 850 feet. Most of the hills are gradual as opposed to short and steep. The terrain includes narrow gravel roads, springy turf, packed dirt trails, and a few stretches of loose gravel. This itinerary offers full days of walking through quintessential English countryside of quaint villages, with cream-colored cottages and beautiful gardens, as well as historic castles, a Roman road, and medieval churches. As many walks bring you through open pastures (muddy when wet!) and constantly evolving farmland, it's important to be comfortable around livestock (sheep, cows, horses) and helpful to remain attentive; some navigation skills and a sense of adventure may come in handy as well. Remember: preparation is the key to ensuring your tour readiness; the more you walk or participate in aerobic exercise prior to your trip, the more you will enjoy your experience!

## DAY 1

### Arrival in Cheltenham, England. Orientation meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Upon arrival in England, you make your way to Cheltenham in the County of Gloucestershire. This cultural capital of the fabled Cotswolds exudes an air of refinement, adorned with neatly tended green spaces and gracious Regency architecture dressed in ironwork, balconies, and verandahs. In the 18th century, aristocrats, including Jane Austen, flocked here with the same fervor with which they retreated to Bath—to “take the waters” of its many spas. You may arrive at your hotel at any time and spend the afternoon as you wish, perhaps warming up for your walking days with a stroll along the leafy promenade or browsing the fine-art collections of The Wilson Museum & Art Gallery. You meet your local Country Walkers representative this evening at 6:00 p.m. for an orientation meeting and welcome drink at the hotel. Dinner is on your own tonight at one of Cheltenham’s many fine restaurants.

**Accommodation:** Malmaison Cheltenham, Cheltenham

**Included Meals:** None

## DAY 2

### Winchcombe to Broadway

9.3 miles, moderate, 650-ft. elevation gain and loss

After breakfast, you transfer about a half-hour to the 10th-century Sudeley Castle & Gardens, gracefully set against the quiet dignity of the Cotswolds hills on the outskirts of the ancient Saxon capital of Winchcombe. One of England's most enchanting old estates, this is the final resting place of Queen Katherine Parr, the sixth wife of Henry VIII. There'll be time to visit the property and stroll among its 10 award-winning gardens (we've already paid your entrance fee). Perhaps stop by the Pheasantry to admire its collection of 16 rare bird species, all bred and conserved here. Later, set off on the day's walk to your next hotel.

You follow the Cotswold Way and an ancient pilgrims' route to the eerie ruined arches of Hailes Abbey, once a sprawling complex that lured pilgrims by falsely claiming it held a vial of Holy Blood. From here, it's a gentle climb up to the Iron Age Fortress at Beckbury Camp for superb valley views. After passing Stanway House's magnificent gatehouse and tithe barn, perhaps enjoy a pub lunch in Stanton, and then amble through open meadows to charming Broadway, referred to as the "Jewel in the Cotswold Crown," with its picturesque tree-lined High Street. You can seek out St. Eadburgha's Church, hidden away on Snowhill Road. The village's honey-colored limestone buildings and garden-lined streets were an inspiration to many artists and writers, such as J.M. Barrie and John Singer Sargent. After time to explore, you transfer about 10 minutes to your hotel for the next two nights, nestled among the hills on a country lane.

This evening, savor a relaxed dinner at the inviting on-site country pub, The Potting Shed—expect wholesome, hearty dishes like meltingly tender, slow-cooked pork belly, freshly caught fish, and locally sourced steaks with a heap of dripping chips. Throughout your Country Walkers Self-Guided Adventure, you can forget everything you've heard about English cuisine being bland. Far from the traditions of old, you will enjoy an exciting blend of fresh garden flavors and meats from local farms, infused with international flair, bright color, and the creativity of modern chefs.

**Accommodation:** Dormy House Hotel & Spa, Broadway

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 3

### Hidcote Gardens to Dormy House via Chipping Campden and Broadway Tower

9.7 miles, moderate, 700-ft. elevation gain and 450-ft. elevation loss

Enjoy a hearty breakfast this morning of eggs, kippers, poached haddock, juices, and continental favorites. On your way out, retrieve your included packed lunch with a sandwich of your choice, chips, seasonal fruit, fruit juice, and cake of the day to keep you fueled. You begin the day's invigorating walk at Hidcote Gardens, which you may visit at your own expense if you wish (approximately £13.50 per person). Its maze of paved pathways leads to outdoor "rooms," splendid panoramas, and endless surprises, all designed by American horticulturist Major Lawrence Johnston.

From the gardens, set off on foot below the Worcestershire Hills to Chipping Campden, a charming old market town once famous for its wool trade, making the Cotswolds an important stop for merchants from London to Florence as they sought material for their clothing, tapestries, and more. The Grevel House, home to a renowned wool merchant, is on High Street. Today, Chipping Campden remains a thriving market town, home to fine buildings of every style from the 14th to the 17th centuries, a covered market, the "wool church" of St. James, and a silversmith. Take time to drink in this handsome little village with its long, gently curving main street.

Continue along the Cotswold Way on a gentle ascent toward the hotel. A short detour leads to Broadway's Tower, the 18th-century folly inspired by Capability Brown, where you're rewarded with stunning, unspoiled views (entry at your own expense; approximately £6 per person). Located 1,024 feet atop Fish Hill, the tower is the second-highest point in the Cotswolds; it is said that in good weather, 13 counties can be seen from here. The tower was built to satisfy a countess's whim, and was later the home of William Morris, a 19th-century poet, painter, and social reformer. Return to your hotel for another unforgettable evening in luxury, sampling more restaurant fare on your own. You might use the spa facilities, included in your stay, perhaps indulging in one of its soothing treatments at your own expense. (Be sure to reserve in advance.)

**Accommodation:** Dormy House Hotel & Spa, Broadway

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 4

### Chipping Campden to Moreton-in-Marsh

7 miles, easy to moderate, 800-ft. elevation gain and 850-ft. elevation loss

Transfer to Chipping Campden after another glorious breakfast. Then follow the farm fields and dirt tracks of the Heart of England Way, the celebrated trail that traverses the midlands of the country. Your first destination is Broad Campden, a quiet, picturesque village of thatched cottages nestled in the rolling countryside. You're sure to pass grazing sheep and babbling streams as you approach the charming hamlet. Its cottages along High Street and its parish church are built from the lovely and distinctive golden Cotswold stone. The Quaker Meeting House is the oldest in the country, constructed in 1663.

Continue to the pretty village of Blockley, called a "best kept secret" of the Cotswolds. This stunning little town prospered not on wool—like so many other villages in the region—but on silk. The eight mills that once produced the material are now private homes. During your visit, stroll among a rich canvas of Norman, Early English, medieval, and 17th- and 18th-century architecture. Later, descend to the town of Batsford home of the Batsford Arboretum, a beautiful garden where spectacular coral bark maple and russet-berried mountain ash trees thrive. You may wander its inviting pathways on your own if you wish (approximately £8.95 per person). Then enjoy an easy stroll to the edge of the splendid Evenlode Valley and its bustling market town of Moreton-in-Marsh, which has welcomed travelers for at least 1,700 years. A late afternoon transfer then delivers you to tonight's accommodation in the antique-filled village of Stow-on-the-Wold. Norman lords founded this pretty town at the crossroads of several trade routes. Its market square is brimming with history: Fairs have been held here since 1330. At the height of the Cotswold wool industry, as many as 20,000 sheep were sold at one time. Dinner tonight is on your own, and you can choose from one of the fine restaurants in town, or dine at your hotel.

**Accommodation:** Sheep on Sheep Street, Stow-on-the-Wold

**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 5

### Stow-on-the-Wold to Lower and Upper Slaughter. Optional detour: Lower Slaughter to Bourton-on-the-Water and return

1.1–3.7 miles (depending on hotel location), easy to moderate, 100-ft. elevation gain and 350-ft. elevation loss. Afternoon option: 2.5 miles, easy, no elevation gain or loss

After breakfast, take time to explore the charming village of Stow-on-the-Wold. You might pop into the town's historic library to pick up a copy of the Stow Town Trail guide and discover the story behind many of the oldest buildings in the town. Take time to explore the narrow stone alleyways or 'tunes,' traditionally used for herding and counting sheep on their way to market.

Afterward, enjoy another day of glorious walking over gently undulating landscapes. Setting out from Stow, you follow grass and dirt paths through farm fields and copses of hawksbeard and buttercups on the way to your next lodging in the tiny hamlet of Upper or Lower Slaughter. A delightful stroll from town leads to the neighboring hamlet of Bourton-on-the-Water, regularly voted the prettiest village in England. Its tidy streets are lined with small shops, Tudor houses, and gourmet restaurants.

**Accommodation:** Lords of the Manor, Upper Slaughter

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 6

### Bibury to Coln St. Aldwyns loop

6.8 miles, easy to moderate, 400-ft. elevation gain and loss

After breakfast, a short transfer brings you to the town of Bibury, lauded by William Morris as "the most beautiful village in England." Today, you'll be starting and ending in this pretty village, home to Arlington Row, a string of stone weavers' cottages and one of England's most photographed sites. Originally built in 1380 as a wool store, it was converted into picturesque cottages in the 17th century. In 2010, the scenic cottages of Arlington Row were featured on the inside cover of the UK passport.

Your walk begins near these cottages as you cross the Coln River. Make your way past farmhouses and old mill buildings and into a landscape of rolling meadows and scattered forest. Reaching the town of Coln St. Aldwyns, stop for lunch at a local restaurant or perhaps savor a pint at a pub, taking some time to relax before the return walk to Bibury.

As you leave Coln St. Aldwyns, you'll pass almshouses and other historical buildings as your trail turns

from road to walled lane to farm track. Continue through pastures and past farm cottages until your trail turns to a grassy track. Reaching Bibury, you'll have time to explore before you settle in at tonight's elegant, ivy-clad accommodation.

Dinner tonight is at your hotel where you might try local smoked guinea fowl to start, followed by baked Bibury trout for a main course.

**Accommodation:** The Swan Hotel, Bibury

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 7

### Departure from Moreton-in-Marsh

After a sumptuous breakfast, you transfer about 40 minutes to Moreton-in-Marsh, where your tour concludes.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast

### What's Included

#### Tour Only

Boutique accommodations

10 meals: 6 breakfasts, 1 lunch, and 3 dinners

Detailed water- and tear-resistant Route Notes and maps

Orientation meeting with a Country Walkers representative

Local representative available 24/7

Entrance fees and special events as noted in the

## What's Included

### Tour Only

itinerary: Entrance to Sudeley Castle & Gardens

Scheduled taxi and luggage transfers (Please note: If unable to walk, it is possible to transfer with your luggage from one accommodation to the next at no additional charge.)

Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz Global Assistance

Access to Self-Guided Flight Concierge—Ask our knowledgeable team to find flights that sync perfectly with your planned trip.