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Quick facts about Sport in Britain

Did you know?

- The largest rugby union-devoted stadium in the world, London's Twickenham Stadium, is sometimes nicknamed The Cabbage Patch, after the land's original, humble purpose. Find out more about Britain's most famous sportsgrounds on page 67.

- The ‘Cherries’ and the ‘Canaries’ are joining the Barclays Premier League when the season kicks off on 8 August – discover who these teams are, and all about the destinations on page 14.

- This year's Rugby World Cup, held in England and Wales in September and October, will be the first-ever to do so to see an official Fanzone in every host city. Find out where to celebrate in the Fanzones, the Festival of Rugby and the host destinations of Rugby World Cup 2015 on page 7.

- You can speed around Silverstone racing track, climb in the handholds of the expedition team that first conquered the world’s highest mountain in 1953 and tour Game of Thrones location sets by bike - just some of Britain’s must-do sporting experiences, on page 45.

- The Women’s Rugby and Cricket World Cups are coming to these shores in 2017 – we unveil more about where to cheer on your female sports idols as audience numbers grow on page 25.

- If you had been among the English upper classes in the 1880s chances are you would have played a game of Whiff Whaff as an after-dinner parlour game – what’s that, you ask? Ping pong to you and I! Find out about that, and other sports made in Britain on page 51.

- August is the month for indulging your eccentric side in Britain. You can gravy-wrestle, snail-race, bog-snorkel and race a train if you fancy. See page 92 for a calendar of odd sporting events.

- There are numerous accessible sporting activities in Britain, from circus-skills to flying an aeroplane. See page 73 for details.

- The British ‘Season’ – as much about how big your hat is as the results of sporting events, it’s a quintessentially British experience to attend horse races, sailing events and polo matches. Read about it on page 33.

- Underneath the home of Premier League champions Chelsea FC you’ll find Under The Bridge, a purpose-built, 550-capacity music venue, which has seen R’n’b star Jason Derulo, rock outfit Kasabian and Alicia Keys all play there. Discover other sportsgrounds with amazing features on page 58.
Introduction to Sport is GREAT

Sport is woven into the fabric of British life. Children kick a football around in the park on Saturday mornings. 60,000 fans scream support in a stadium while millions watch around the world. A genteel game of village cricket unfolds on a Sunday afternoon. The national anthem is sung in Welsh before a game of rugby in Cardiff. Glamorous ladies totter in high heels at Ascot as racehorses thunder by. A breeze stirs the flags as golfers tee off on the Old Course at St Andrews. Strawberries and cream slip down nicely amid the thwack-grunt-thwack of tennis at Wimbledon. To understand the British and Britain you need to understand its sports.

Britain invented or codified a number of sports including football, rugby, cricket and golf. Venues such as Wembley, Lord’s, Old Trafford, Brands Hatch and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park are synonymous around with the world with top-class action. It’s thrilling to watch Premier League football teams on TV if you’re in Shanghai, Sydney or Seattle but imagine actually being there! It’s all about passion, drama and courage and nothing beats seeing a great sporting event in Britain for yourself.

What do you want your sporting experience in Britain to be? Settle back and watch, or choose to play? Will you discover Britain by cantering through its National Parks on horseback, or discover your paradise in the country on a yoga retreat? Or you might choose the truly niche: pea shooting, cheese rolling and bog snorkelling, all of which go well with a pint of beer from the local pub.

The updated Sport guide features 16 brand new story angles, alongside key updates, delivering even more content media can use to inspire their own Britain adventures and stories.

Here’s a flavour of some of the new content you’ll find in the guide.

World-class events and their legacies

England and Wales will welcome rugby union fans as the Rugby World Cup kicks off across this September; people who travel from faraway to cheer their teams will want to go beyond the arenas and stadia, so we’ve put together the lowdown of how the host destinations are planning to celebrate Rugby World Cup 2015, through their fanzones and their plans for the Festival of Rugby (see page 7).

2016 is going to be a big year for Wales as it heads into its designated Year of Adventure. Find out on page 39 how visitors can already dive into adventure activities in Wales, whether it’s rambling, sailing, climbing, coasteering, mountain biking or all manner of extreme sports.

Last year Britain saw athletes from all over the Commonwealth descend on Glasgow for the Commonwealth Games; cyclists wheeled over for Le Grand Départ of the Tour de France; golfers swung over to Gleneagles in Scotland for the Ryder Cup. Not to mention rugby league players landing in England and Wales for their World Cup at the end of 2013! All this sporting action meant both sportspersons and their fans experienced a warm welcome and celebratory atmosphere in Britain during these events and we highlight how
the host locations are benefiting from improved sporting venues and activities; the true legacy of these events on page 22.

**Kick off in Britain**

The Barclays Premier League is the most popular football league in the world and nothing beats experiencing ‘the beautiful game’ in the home of football, Britain. We’ve included lots of story ideas in the updated Sport guide - from where to party like a footballer, to where to take families when you visit your favourite football city.

*See page 14 for information on the Barclays Premier League.*

**Join in!**

We've added new sections to the guide on how you can get properly involved in sport in Britain. As well as highlighting affordable spectator spots (see page 49) find out about Britain's must-do sporting experiences (see page 45), plus the most epic participations sports (see page 35) and where to find nature's natural sportsgrounds (see page 80)!

Enjoy the new Sport guide, and see [www.visitbritain.com/media](http://www.visitbritain.com/media) for more story ideas and information especially for media about Britain.
**Rugby in Britain**

Along with football, rugby is Britain’s other favourite winter sport. It’s fast, furious and often muddy and bloody so even if you don’t know the rules it’s still thrilling to watch – and you’ll get the hang of it soon enough! It’s also easy to get tickets for many games whether you’re an already-ardent fan or a complete novice.

**How it began**

It’s said the first game originated in 1823 when a pupil at Rugby school, William Webb Ellis, picked up the ball during a game of football and ran with it instead of kicking. Thanks to him the sport is now popular all over Britain.

**Spot the difference**

There are two codes: Rugby Union, where each team has 15 players, and Rugby League, where each has 13. The other main difference is that in League, play stops at the tackle, and all but two defenders retreat ten metres, and the tackled player then gets up and nudges the ball backwards with his foot. With Union you can tackle, the tackled player then releases the ball and both sides are free to contest in - this - known as ‘the ruck’ - can look like mayhem, but is actually quite organised! League is especially popular in Yorkshire and Lancashire, in the north of England. Then there’s also the newer Rugby Sevens, which, as you might guess, has seven players on each side and will be an Olympic sport in Rio in 2016. [www.worldrugby.org/olympics](http://www.worldrugby.org/olympics) [www.ukrugbysevens.com](http://www.ukrugbysevens.com)

**Venues in Britain**

England’s main stadium is at Twickenham- the world’s largest rugby-devoted stadium, often nicknamed the Home of Rugby - in the south west of London, while the Welsh national ground - the Millennium Stadium - is in the heart of Cardiff. Murrayfield in Edinburgh is the home of Scottish rugby, while in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Kingspan Stadium (formerly Ravenhill), incorporating war memorial for players killed in world wars, is the main ground.

The Twickenham Rugby Museum and Stadium Tour teaches you about the history and traditions of the game and lets you experience stepping into the (large) shoes of some of the most famous players - imagine running out onto the pitch in front of 82,000 screaming fans, and try out the players tunnel yourself (but without the 82,000 fans!). Inside the museum - which has had a makeover in preparation for the World Cup in 2015 (more information below) - you can see how the game has developed into the worldwide phenomenon it is today and watch match footage as far back as the 1930s. There’s more than 25,000 iconic objects dating back to the start of the game, plus a new ‘Play Rugby’ interactive zone, and you’ll learn fascinating facts about the game. Did you know, for example, rugby balls are oblong because they were originally made from pig bladders, which became this shape when inflated!? Tickets for the tour are available on the VisitBritain shop.

Rugby Union Facts

Did you know?

- Rugby is the fastest growing sport in America
- The Rugby World Cup is the third largest global sports event (after the Olympics and FIFA World Cup)
- Rugby Union World Cup is anticipated to attract 400,000 visitors to England and a TV audience of four billion worldwide
- Britain is the birthplace of rugby
- Rugby Sevens was born in 1888 in Melrose, Scotland, created by two butchers - the men's Rugby World Cup Sevens trophy is called the Melrose Cup
- The USA competed for the first time ever in the Rugby League World Cup 2013
- Rugby will be part of the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio (it was once an Olympic sport with the 15-a-side game featured at the Olympic Games from 1900 to 1924 - Rio 2016 will see the Olympic debut of rugby sevens)
- Famous rugby players include Sean Connery, John F Kennedy, JRR Tolkien, Bill Clinton, George W Bush, Russell Crowe, Chris Farley, Meat Loaf and Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

Key dates

The Rugby World Cup (RWC) is one of the world’s largest sporting tournaments and this year England hosts RWC 2015 with some fixtures also to be played in neighbouring Wales at the Millennium Stadium in the capital, Cardiff. The competition begins on 18 September, with the final being played at London’s Twickenham on 31 October. See page 7 for more information

Another main international competition is the RBS Six Nations that includes England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France and Italy and takes place from February to March. In the autumn many southern hemisphere teams, including South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and Argentina come to play matches too. www.rbs6nations.com

Rugby League World Cup 2013 was hosted by England and Wales across 22 venues, with some matches in Ireland and France. Australia won the final, reclaiming the cup from New Zealand, who had defeated them in the 2008 final. And, if you came for the games and are planning to revisit, turn to page 11 for more on the British cities and venues that hosted this successful World Cup.

Introduction to Rugby World Cup 2015

Contested every four years, the Rugby World Cup is one of the world’s largest sporting tournaments. First held in 1987, it currently sees 20 international rugby union teams compete over 48 matches for the prestigious Webb Ellis Cup - named after the supposed
inventor of rugby, William Webb Ellis – and rugby immortality. The current holders are New Zealand, after the Kiwis narrowly beat France while hosting the tournament in 2011.

Hoping for a similar tale of home glory, England hosts Rugby World Cup 2015, with some fixtures also to be played in neighbouring Wales at the Millennium Stadium in the Welsh capital, Cardiff. In total, matches will take place in 11 cities and 13 stadiums, from the north-eastern city of Newcastle down to the city of Exeter in Devon, south-west England. The competition begins on 18 September, with the final being played at London’s Twickenham – the world’s largest rugby devoted stadium, often nicknamed the Home of Rugby – on 31 October. A hundred days before the first match, a Festival of Rugby and a domestic Trophy Tour kicked off on 10 June to begin the countdown. www.rugbyworldcup.com

Come for the game, then stay to explore the host destinations! For more details on how the host destinations plan to celebrate Rugby World Cup 2015, through their fanzones and their plans for the Festival of Rugby, as well as the huge scope of attractions, accommodation, shopping, nightlife, family fun and key events that are taking place in all these cities, download our Rugby is GREAT guide from our Content Guides: http://media.visitbritain.com/en/pages/contentguides.html. Many stadia run behind-the-scenes tours, however visit their individual websites regarding information on stadium tours before, during and after Rugby World Cup 2015; timings may differ during the tournament.

**How Rugby World Cup began**

Rugby lore has the game originating in 1823, when a pupil at Rugby School, William Webb Ellis, picked up the ball during a football match and ran with it. This new game slowly spread around public schools and universities, with the first formal rules inked in 1845. A Rugby Football Union (RFU) followed in 1871, with an inaugural international – England versus Scotland – played that same year.

1883 then witnessed Britain’s Home Nations Championship, the first international rugby competition. By 1908, with the sport having long spread into many former British colonies, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa had all sent touring teams to compete.

Despite continued growth, rugby union didn’t turn professional until the International Rugby Board (later the IRFB, now World Rugby) removed player-payment restrictions in 1995. Continental club competitions soon followed, including Europe’s much-vaunted Heineken Cup and Super Rugby in the southern hemisphere. Today, World Rugby boasts 117 member countries.

Until 1984, rugby union lacked a global international competition – there were only regional championships, such as Europe’s Six Nations. Consistently mooted since the 1950s, momentum for a Rugby World Cup grew in the mid-1980s until, with Australian, New Zealand, French and South African union delegates all now in favour, an IRFB vote stood
deadlocked at 8-8. After English and Welsh representatives then switched sides, an inaugural competition finally became possible.

The inaugural 1987 tournament, co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand, featured 16 invited nations. By 1991, an initial qualifying tournament had been introduced. 1995’s version was hosted by the returning South Africans; in the moving finale, President Nelson Mandela handed the trophy to Springbok captain Francois Pienaar. From 1999 onwards, 20 nations competed. 2003’s historic tournament, held in Australia, remains the only Rugby World Cup won by a northern hemisphere side, Jonny Wilkinson’s drop-goal sealing it for England. Now hugely popular, the 2007 competition in France set records for total attendance (2.26million) and estimated global TV audience (four billion). Even higher numbers are anticipated in 2015.

**Fanzones and Festival of Rugby**

Everyone’s invited to the Festival of Rugby, which kicked off on 10 June (100 days before Rugby World Cup 2015’s Opening Ceremony and first match) and runs through to the tournament’s final, on 31 October.

Taking place across Britain, it will see clubs, schools, community groups and other affiliations host a wide variety of rugby-themed events to create a true festival feel.

Already on the agenda are the World Wheelchair Rugby Challenge at the Copper Box Arena in London’s Olympic Park and a massed performance of ‘The Armed Man’ by the Voices for Hospices Choir in Kempton Park racecourse, 15 miles south-west of central London. Not to mention a Beach Rugby Festival in the seaside resort of Weymouth, south-west England, and a rugby-themed beer festival in Ormskirk, 30 minutes north of Liverpool. Details are being confirmed at various times so visit [www.festivalofrugby2015.com](http://www.festivalofrugby2015.com) for all the up-to-date information of the activities taking place.

Not got tickets for a game? Make for one of the 15 official Rugby World Cup 2015 Fanzones and watch on a big screen instead; the atmosphere will be just as good, and access is completely free. Each host venue has a Fanzone, as well as the sport’s birthplace, Rugby, and Central London’s Trafalgar Square (although this Fanzone won’t screen live matches).

Fanzones will be open on match days and at various other times during the six-week tournament. The venues span iconic spaces like Leeds’ Millennium Square, sporting arenas such as Wembley Stadium, city greenery including Victoria Park in Leicester and two waterside locations: Gloucester Docks and Brighton’s beach-side Madeira Drive. With a million people expected in total, every Fanzone will include a bevy of food and drink options. This is the first-ever Rugby World Cup to see an official Fanzone in every host city. Information on the fanzones can be found on the individual destinations’ pages in VisitBritain’s Rugby World Cup guide and for further information about locations and opening times, visit [www.rugbyworldcup.com/fanzones](http://www.rugbyworldcup.com/fanzones).
**Trophy Tour**

Also kicking off on 10 June was a domestic Trophy Tour, taking over from the international version and lasting 100 days, to mark the countdown to Rugby World Cup 2015’s big kick-off. The tour sees the iconic Webb Ellis Cup travel through Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England, so if you’re travelling in Britain during the tour, you may even catch a glimpse of this coveted trophy.

It then arrives at Twickenham Stadium on 18 September ahead of the opening ceremony. Forty-three days later, it will be handed to the winning team’s captain at the same stadium.

The Trophy Tour schedule will engage with more than 100 clubs, organisations and rugby festivals from grassroots to elite level, allowing fans to get within touching distance of the Cup. More than 300 events are scheduled during the continuous, 100-day tour. Go to [www.rugbyworldcup.com/trophy-tour](http://www.rugbyworldcup.com/trophy-tour) for a map and calendar of all the action.

**Opening Ceremony**

Enticing details of the Rugby World Cup 2015’s Opening Ceremony - taking place at Twickenham Stadium before the first game, England vs Fiji, on 18 September - are only expected to arrive as the tournament nears. A spectacular ceremony is already anticipated, however, thanks to the news that Unspun Creative, the company that oversaw all four acclaimed ceremonies during London’s 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, has been put in over-all charge.

**Key milestones for your diary**

10 June - 31 October: Festival of Rugby, across Britain & Ireland

10 June - 18 September: Rugby World Cup 2015 Trophy Tour, across Britain & Ireland

18 September: Opening Ceremony, Twickenham Stadium, London


30 October: Bronze Final, Olympic Stadium, London

31 October: Final, Twickenham Stadium, London

**Where to buy tickets**

Cheer on your country on an official Supporters Tour: [http://supportertours.rugbyworldcup.com/travel_home.aspx](http://supportertours.rugbyworldcup.com/travel_home.aspx)

General ticketing: [www.rugbyworldcup.com/ticketing](http://www.rugbyworldcup.com/ticketing)
**Legacy of the Rugby League World Cup**

Visitors to the Rugby League World Cup had a fantastic opportunity to explore parts of Britain that may not figure on a traditional ‘to-do’ list. From the attractive, historical towns of the north of England to the sophisticated cities of south-west England and north Wales, these are regions rich in character and heritage.

While there is always plenty to wow the visitor to main centres such as Cardiff in Wales, Manchester in England’s north-west, the cosmopolitan port city of Bristol and the iconic city that is London, here we highlight the hidden gems, the British towns passionate about Rugby League worth getting to know better, and explore their cultural and sporting legacy following the success of the 2013 World Cup.

Their proximity to each other in north England – you can drive from Rochdale in the north-west to Hull on England’s east coast in 90 minutes, and all are easily accessible from the international airports of Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds – provides the perfect opportunity to detour off the beaten track. It’s a great opportunity to revisit the towns where your teams played.

**Rochdale** - Only half an hour’s drive north of Manchester, Rochdale, is becoming renowned for its annual festivals, including the Feel Good Festival (3 – 5 September), last year attracting more than 10,000 visitors. This year’s line-up will see Toploader performing alongside local bands, and celebrity chefs including Rachel Khoo, Kevin Woodford and Aazam Ahmad cooking up a storm ([www.facebook.com/feelgoodfestival](http://www.facebook.com/feelgoodfestival)).

The Rochdale Literature and Ideas Festival (23 – 25 October) promises another feast of events for all ages, covering drama, comedy, dance, music, theatre, films, visual arts and children’s shows ([www.rochdaleliteraturefestival.co.uk](http://www.rochdaleliteraturefestival.co.uk)). The town also has the fortune to be located close to the magnificent Pennine Hills, so take your walking shoes and be inspired by the stunning countryside. Walking trails with a link to the Pennine Bridleway can all be found by the town’s Watergrove Reservoir, while there are 118 acres of outdoor attractions to be enjoyed at the Hollingworth Lake Country Park. A historically fascinating town, Rochdale has fine heritage sights, from the Rochdale Pioneers Museum and art gallery museum Touchstones to its magnificent 19th-century Town Hall ([www.rochdalepioneersmuseum.coop](http://www.rochdalepioneersmuseum.coop)).

*Find out more: [www.visitrochdale.com](http://www.visitrochdale.com)*

**Huddersfield** - The shopper’s paradise that is the Byram Arcade in Huddersfield city centre (around 45 minutes’ drive from Manchester) has unique boutiques that stock everything, from vintage clothes and jewellery to homewares ([www.byramarcade.com](http://www.byramarcade.com)). This Victorian arcade is also just minutes from the town’s Lawrence Batley Theatre, ([www.thelbt.org](http://www.thelbt.org)) which attracts dance performances, opera, comedy and children’s shows.

A traditional market town, make sure Huddersfield Open Market is on the itinerary; bustling markets full of well-stocked stalls with everything from fabrics to fashion, hardware and household goods, it is a vital part of Huddersfield's town centre, with shoppers attracted by the superb bargains and sheer variety of goods on sale.

As well as being the birthplace of Rugby League, Huddersfield's architecture relates the town's history. There are fine examples of Victorian craftsmanship, and the whole town can be viewed from the imposing Victoria Tower on Castle Hill (900 feet above sea level
with spectacular views), built to commemorate Queen Victoria’s 60th anniversary on the throne.

Find out more: www.yorkshire.com

**Hull** - The UK City of Culture 2017, Hull has already begun the celebrations with the investment in its culture, sport and people. The inaugural Tour de Yorkshire rolled through the region in May 2015, opening up the trails spread across the beautiful Yorkshire Wolds to cyclists of all abilities (www.letour.yorkshire.com/tour-de-yorkshire/sportive); and, only two hours by train from Manchester, the city also offers visitors a packed events calendar. Choose from folk festivals, vintage fairs, food and beer festivals, or its popular Freedom Festival - year-round there’s plenty to keep visitors captivated. Hull is also home to 3,500 fish in one of the most breathtaking aquariums in the world, The Deep (www.thedeep.co.uk) and the city’s entertainment and arts space, Fruit, offers cutting-edge cultural activities from theatre, music and cinema, fashion, comedy, art and photography exhibitions.

Fancy trying some real ale? Many of Hull's pubs sell ale brewed locally. The city's Hop and Vine, for example, (www.hopandvinehull.co.uk) stocks imaginatively named ales such as Great Newsome Pig's Eat and Axholme Darley's Ghost - the pub has sold 944 different real ales since opening.

And when you need some downtime from all the entertainment, Hull’s location on the east Yorkshire coastline means it’s also the gateway to the tranquil villages and valleys of the beautiful Yorkshire Wolds, and a few hidden gems; the award-winning 17th-century Pipe and Glass Inn, located in the Wolds' tranquil and unspoiled Dalton Park, was awarded (and has retained) a Michelin Star in 2010.

Find out more: www.visithullandeastyorkshire.com

**St Helens** - While St Helens is just 15 miles from the buzzing city of Liverpool in north-west England, it’s a good base from which to explore the whole of the north west of England and beyond, and the town itself has plenty to offer. Experience the fascinating skills of the resident glassblowers, or try it yourself, at the multi-award winning World of Glass (www.worldofglass.com); or for more active pursuits, visit premier year-round horseracing at Haydock Park Racecourse - there are more than 30 race days each year - or enjoy action-packed rugby at the home of the most successful side in Super League history, Saints (www.haydock.thejockeyclub.co.uk, www.saintsrlf.com). And there’s plenty to attract families to the area: meet lions, tigers, elephants and rhinos at Knowsley Safari Park, ten minutes’ drive from St Helens (www.knowsleysafariexperience.co.uk), while big kids and adults alike will love Darkstar Laser (www.darkstarlaser.com), the UK’s largest Laser Tag venue. Check out the town’s iconic public artwork, Dream, by artist Jaume Plensa; this spectacular sculpture on the site of the town’s former colliery offers great views across the Cheshire and Lancashire plains, out to Snowdonia, the Pennines and the Peak District. Find out more: www.visit-sthelens.com
Leeds - Served by an international airport and just an hour by car from Manchester, Leeds is a lively, diverse city - it also featured on the Tour de Yorkshire cycle race in 2015 as the final destination for stage three, which ended in a massive city-wide celebration - this city knows how to party. Already host for one of the biggest music festivals in Britain, the city also has a major entertainment venue, the First Direct Arena, in the heart of the city, which has seen international boxing and sports awards, alongside major acts such as Elton John, grace its stage (www.firstdirectarena.com). Leeds is also home to world-class museums and galleries including the Royal Armouries museum, Leeds Art Gallery and Leeds City Museum (www.visitleeds.co.uk/attractions). Choose between first-class hotels, including the four-star Leeds Marriott, Radisson Blu Leeds - housed in a Grade II-listed building - and the boutique Malmaison Leeds. For a spot of shopping, a visit to Victoria Quarter is a must; a luxe, beautiful shopping centre - home to the largest stained glass window in England - it is considered the premium shopping centre in the north of England (www.v-q.co.uk).

Find out more: www.visitleeds.com

Warrington - Tasty treats and green and pleasant land can be found close to the lively town of Warrington in England’s north-west. Home to some of England’s finest gardens and the beautiful green expanse the Cheshire Plain, it's no surprise that locally grown produce is regularly used in some of the area’s best restaurants. A short drive out of town is The Church Green - head chef and proprietor Aiden Byrne was one of the youngest-ever chefs to win a Michelin star at 22 - as well as the Bear Paw's Inn, a characterful restaurant and hotel in a quaint countryside setting, with home cooked wholesome food awarded an AA Rosette for its quality (www.aidenbyrne.co.uk, www.thebearspaw.co.uk).

Find out more: www.welcometowarrington.com

Workington, Cumbria - Perched on the north-western coast of England, Workington is a mere half an hour’s drive from the Lake District National Park. A stay here means you are perfectly positioned to visit England’s famed lake country, as well as enjoy the history of this ancient market town with some parts dating back to Roman times. There are plenty of picturesque country house hotels offering accommodation: Hunday Manor (www.hunday-manor-hotel.co.uk) dates from the 18th century, while a short drive away from Workington is the historic Moresby Hall (www.moresbyhall.co.uk). Built in 1620 it is one of the area’s most historically important buildings.

Find out more: www.visitscumbria.com/workington

Wrexham, Wales - The largest town in north Wales, Wrexham also lies on the border of the affluent north-west England county of Cheshire, so visitors can dip in and out of both countries - it's only 40 miles from Liverpool and 20 minutes' drive from historic Chester. But Wrexham's position in the North Wales Borderlands means it was the perfect location for castles. It is home to the 13th-century medieval fortress Chirk Castle (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/chirk-castle), as well as championship golf courses - there are
49 golf courses in the region. Erdigg Hall (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/erddig), a couple of miles out of town, features a 485-acre garden, And, with a thriving Rugby League championship, there is every opportunity to catch a match during your visit (www.walesrugbyleague.co.uk).

Find out more: www.visitwales.com/explore/north-wales

Halifax - Georgian, Victorian and medieval landmarks adorn this charming Yorkshire market town; good examples include the Victoria Theatre, former merchant’s mansion Somerset House and, outside the town, the 15th century, Grade II-listed Shipden House. The town’s Grade I-listed Piece Hall is currently undergoing an £18.9m transformation project, which will see the Piece Hall turned into a popular visitor attraction, opening in 2016 (www.thepiecehall.co.uk). Halifax is also a family friendly destination; a fun, interactive children’s museum to head for is the National Children’s Museum, Eureka. Children can get fully involved in the interactive, hands-on exhibits (www.eureka.org.uk).

Find out more: www.yorkshire.com/places/halifax

Football – enjoying the beautiful game in Britain

Attending a Barclays Premier League match is high up on the must-do list of any visitor to Britain - you’ll witness the players’ skills, the fans’ passion, the stadiums’ electric atmosphere; altogether a truly unforgettable sports experience.

After a summer break, ‘the beautiful game’ is back, as the Barclays Premier League kicks off again in Britain on 8 August!

As well as the opportunity to watch the crème de la crème of English and Welsh football (Scotland has its own league), the new season is also the perfect chance to visit the clubs’ destinations. Reaching from the far north-east of England (Newcastle) to the south of Wales (Swansea), over to London and across to the hip cities of north-west England (Manchester and Liverpool), following Barclays Premier League football also means discovering some of Britain’s most exciting cities.

New kids on the pitch

Each season the Barclays Premier League welcomes three newly promoted clubs to its ranks. Joining the 2015/16 season are Watford, Norwich City and AFC Bournemouth.
Watford Football Club was formed in 1881 as ‘Watford Rovers’, by a group of teenage boys from local property-owning families who enjoyed a kick-around in Cassiobury Park, the largest public open space in Watford that stretches from the town centre to the woodland and countryside to the west of the town (www.cassiobury.com). Local fans are feeling the magic of moving up to the Barclays Premier League and visitors will be equally entranced with an opportunity to explore the magic of the Harry Potter™ films, with a visit to Warner Bros. Studio Tour London – The Making of Harry Potter (www.warnerbrothersstudiotour.com/harrypotter). Venture into the ‘actual’ Great Hall and get up close to Harry's Nimbus 2000 and Hagrid’s motorcycle, while also discovering closely guarded secrets about the special effects.

Watford, just north of London, is a 20-minute train ride from London Euston station and one hour from Birmingham New Street station, so day trips to the town are easy to fit in. If you decide to explore further, Watford lies in the picturesque county of Hertfordshire and offers a good range of affordable hotels, such as Hilton Watford and Premier Inn. Local museums give a snapshot into the area’s history, with Bushey Museum showing a large collection of art by Lucy Kemp-Welch and historic artefacts; Watford Museum, housed in the former Benskins Brewery Mansion, has displays of local history and industry, including Watford Football Club memorabilia (www.busheymuseum.org, www.watfordmuseum.org.uk).

Norwich City Football Club – affectionately known as ‘The Canaries’ – is another team that has powered its way into the top tier of football again this season.

Standing proud like its football team, the city of Norwich, in the heart of England – less than two hours’ train journey from London – offers visitors 1,000 years of history, outstanding heritage landmarks, and a blend of old and new architecture to ensure a visit to the city and its surrounds lingers long in the memory. Compact and accessible, the city centre is the most complete medieval city in Britain. Classic medieval landmarks make it easy to wander around the winding, haphazard lay-out. Look out for the spire of the majestic Norman Cathedral, built around 450BC and the domineering castle on its tall mound, built by the Normans as a Royal Palace 900 years ago. And it’s home to The Maids Head Hotel; dating back 800 years, it’s one of the oldest hotels in Britain and offers an inviting mix of contemporary luxury with historical character (www.visitnorfolk.co.uk/Norwich-HEART, www.visitnorfolk.co.ukSeven-Wonders-Cathedral, www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/Norwich_Castle, www.maidsheadhotel.co.uk).

Furthermore, there’s always a 21st century café, bar, pub or restaurant to top up with delicious local food or a drink or two! Norwich lies in the region of Norfolk, which is famous for its seafood, and the region now has more than 25 micro-brewers; Norwich even has its own ‘City Of Ale’ festival in May each year celebrating its huge number of quality inns and pubs (www.cityofale.org.uk).
For a small city, Norwich won’t disappoint for those seeking colour (as well as canary yellow) and hub-bub - the city has the largest undercover market in Europe. Open six days a week, Norwich Market in the heart of the city is surrounded by some of the city's great historic buildings, including the 15th century Guildhall and its rainbow-coloured roofed stalls.

More information can be found at www.visitnorwich.co.uk

A.F.C. Bournemouth, The Cherries, has entered the top deck of English football for the first time in its long history; it was formed in 1899. Its ascension is cause for much celebration in the popular coastal resort famous for its seven miles of golden sands, and now football success!

The Cherries were originally known as Boscombe Football Club, obtaining its nickname 'The Cherries' from nearby cherry orchards or because of the cherry-red striped shirts that the team played in - many a bet has been placed on which is myth and which is truth!

The cherry orchards have long gone, but the stripes live on, as does the allure of Bournemouth and the surrounding countryside and coastline, all just around two hours by train from London. Europe’s first artificial surf reef in Boscombe, for example, is attracting surfers from around the world.

A cosmopolitan city in the south-west corner of England, Bournemouth is well-known for its micro-climate and beaches that stretches from Hengistbury Head into Poole Harbour. It sits directly to the east of the Jurassic Coast, a 96-mile (155 km) World Heritage Site. Needless to say, Bournemouth is the place to get active, with world-class beaches, water-sports and coastal activities galore, plus it boasts 2,000 acres of glorious gardens and parks (www.jurassiccoast.org, www.bournemouth.co.uk/gardens).

Award-winning restaurants and the freshest of locally caught seafood will keep even the hungriest of visitors satisfied. West Beach is a Michelin-recommended, 2AA Rosette seafood restaurant situated at the water’s edge; just metres from the beach and Bournemouth pier (www.west-beach.co.uk), while the Prom Café, also by the pier, offers purse-friendly treats and drinks (www.bournemouth.co.uk/the-prom-cafe). Further afield, visitors can easily head outside the centre to The Triangle for vibrant cafés and clubs, or head up the road to Westbourne, where they’ll find hearty pubs and easy going eateries (www.thetriangle-bournemouth.co.uk, www.discoverwestbourne.co.uk).

More information can be found at www.visitbournemouth.com

**How to get tickets to the games**

Before the starting whistle blows, make sure you check for tickets to Barclays Premier League games, which are released around six weeks before matches; you can find fixtures and ticket availability on [www.premierleague.com](http://www.premierleague.com). Overseas visitors can buy tickets for selected clubs – as well as Match Break packages of tickets and accommodation – through Thomas Cook Sport; see [www.thomascooksport.com](http://www.thomascooksport.com).

Find out about the history of the Barclays Premier League teams on the VisitBritain LoveWall at [www.lovewall.visitbritain.com](http://www.lovewall.visitbritain.com), and also check out the VisitBritain Shop for tickets to unmissable stadium tours at [www.visitbritainshop.com](http://www.visitbritainshop.com) - a tour is a great way to experience the history and the heart of a Barclays Premier League club and via the
VisitBritainShop you can buy tours to Chelsea, Arsenal, Tottenham, Manchester United and Wembley.

Even if those tickets to the big games are proving elusive, there are plenty of ways to enjoy the Barclays Premier League.

**Where to… watch the match**

Many city pubs and bars will show their local games on big screen televisions and are a great place to soak up the pre- and post-match atmosphere, particularly when a city ‘derby’ is playing (when two rival teams from the same city play each other).

**Manchester** – Whether you’re a ‘Red’ (Manchester United fan) or a ‘Blue’ (Manchester City fan) there are many bars and pubs showing live matches in and around the city centre. To join Blues fans cheering at the screen, head to the Crown & Anchor: real ales, a pool table, live sport and roof terrace make it one of the most popular places to drink in the Northern Quarter, Manchester’s creative, urban area; it’s only 15 minutes from the City Of Manchester Stadium (www.crownandanchormanchester.co.uk).

Reds fans can be found at The Green, a sports fan’s dream destination, with pool tables, indoor golf, table football and XBox Kinect, and it also shows Premier League matches on large screens. In Piccadilly village, it is a short walk from Manchester Piccadilly station (www.thegreenmanchester.com/index.html).

Other popular choices include The Sawyers Arms Pizza Kitchen & Bar, a traditional English pub that shows live sport and also operates as a pizza kitchen in the central Deansgate area of the city (www.pizzakitchenbars.co.uk/sports-fixtures). Elsewhere, in the Northern Quarter you can tuck into a traditional Sunday roast and watch a game at the stylish Tib Street Tavern (www.tibstreettavern.co.uk).

**Liverpool** – There are plenty of places to watch either the ‘Reds’ (Liverpool FC) or the ‘Blues’ (Everton FC) in the city. A unique event space with a bar and eatery, Camp and Furnace boasts a Fanpark, which follows the red and blue of the city wherever they travel, it is non-partisan and equally home to both halves of Merseyside’s football royalty, showing most matches on a big screen for fans of all colours (www.campandfurnace.com). One of the most popular bars to watch the football in the city is Shooters Sports Bar at Bierkeller (http://shooterssportsbar.co.uk/liverpool); while the Brookhouse, an iconic Smithdown Road pub, is always roaring on match days. It has lots of TV screens, including a projector screen at either end of the pub (www.thebrookhouseliverpool.co.uk).

**Newcastle Gateshead** – For Premiership football in a Grade I-listed building, try The Centurion. Originally built in 1893 as a sumptuous waiting lounge for first-class railway passengers, the lounge and bar closed in the 1960s, when it was used by the British Transport Police as cells. The Grade I-listed building was lovingly restored in 2000 and is now one of Newcastle Gateshead’s most historic bars. Watch the match on big screens, but don’t forget to take in the beautiful tiling, which today is worth an astounding £3.8m (www.centurion-newcastle.com). Sunderland FC is based in the city of the same name, which is a half hour drive or train trip away from Newcastle Gateshead. Leading the renaissance in the Edwardian quarter, Vester Tilley’s Pub & Sports Bar, the last shop front pub in Sunderland, underwent a major renovation in 2014; returning it to former glory, it is named after a famous local music hall performer and is now a well-heeled venue for
watching the beautiful game (www.facebook.com/pages/Vesta-Tilleys/1495156697413836).

**London** - Wherever you go in London there’s bound to be a football match showing in a pub and it’s probably wise to remember that if you’re watching a match in a bar in Chelsea, don’t start cheering when Arsenal score a goal! But don’t worry, there are plenty of neutral bars showing all the big games. Bar Kick, based on trendy Shoreditch High Street in east London, not only shows every 3D match available but you can have a go yourself at half-time on its array of French table footballs (there is a serious table football league and tables available for casual players) (www.cafekick.co.uk/bar-kick). To watch a game at a traditional London pub head to the Nell Gwynn Tavern. Located in a small alleyway off the Strand in the West End, this pub maintains a historical vibe as its large screens sit happily between pictures of London’s theatrical history (http://citypubcompanyeast.com/our-pubs/nell-gwynne). And, for a restaurant with a sporting twist, check out Frankie’s Sports Bar and Diner. A joint venture by top British chef Marco Pierre White and jockey legend Frankie Dettori, located right by Chelsea FC’s ground Stamford Bridge, you can tuck into American-style diner dishes while watching live matches on a choice of 12 large plasma screens (http://frankiessportsdiner.com).

**New teams in the League – Watford, Norwich City and AFC Bournemouth** - Sports fans will be marking their favourite sports bars as the new season kicks off; to ensure you get the chance to share in the thrill of the three teams promoted this season, join the locals at their favourite watering holes. The Walkabout in Watford is an Australian themed pub and sports bar that has become a British institution; enjoy the Aussie-inspired food and drink while cheering along with the locals (www.walkaboutbars.co.uk/venues/watford). Elsewhere, Norwich City fans can be found at Riley’s Sports Bar, a dedicated sports bar with a heritage dating back to 1878, the bar has a three-metre HD screen and, conveniently, sits in central Norwich (www.rileys.co.uk/clubs/352-rileys-sports-bar-norwich). In the heart of Bournemouth the Litten Tree holds court to locals looking for spacious and comfortable surroundings to watch their team play on 14+ screens, including three big screens, ensuring a great atmosphere for locals and visitors alike (www.littentree-bournemouth.co.uk).

**Where to...take families**
While Dad (or Mum) is spending the afternoon at the game, the main British footballing cities are packed with attractions and activities children won’t want to miss.

**Manchester** - Take a trip to shopping and leisure complex, intu Trafford Centre – only a ten-minute drive from Manchester United’s hallowed ground Old Trafford – where you can not only shop and dine to your heart’s content, but also let the kids (under ten years) loose in the Play Area (www.intutraffordcentre.co.uk). Or visit the Legoland Discovery Centre, packed with rides and attractions to satisfy even the most ardent Lego fan (www.legolanddiscoverycentre.co.uk/chester). Families can discover more than 5,000 sea creatures at Sea Life Manchester and experience Europe's First Sea Bed Walk (www.visitsealife.com/chester).
Enjoy skiing or snowboarding? Head to Chill Factore, Britain’s longest indoor skiing and snowboarding slope and get the kids to try their skills with the Mini Moose Mountain Climb Rescue challenge, all with the convenience of being located right next to the Trafford Centre (www.chillfactore.com).

**Liverpool** - For a real ‘hands-on’ day out, head to Underwater Street, located among Liverpool's waterfront attractions. Liverpool’s Discovery Centre for Children is here, a unique venue for families with children aged two to ten years; it’s all about good old-fashioned hands-on play, stimulating the little-ones' imaginations while their parents can either join in or sit back and watch from the café (www.underwaterstreet.com). Families with older children might want to take a Shiverpool Tour to discover Liverpool’s hidden mysteries and supernatural secrets (www.shiverpool.co.uk), while the whole family can enjoy all the attractions at the Albert Dock - Tate Liverpool, Merseyside Maritime Museum and The Beatles Story (www.albertdock.com). Step aboard the colourful Magical Mystery Tour bus for a fun tour of Beatles’ Liverpool. Close by, at the Museum of Liverpool explore the remarkable story of the first electric elevated railway in the world, plus there’s a ‘little Liverpool gallery’ for the under sixes (www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol).

**NewcastleGateshead** - Young and old alike will be fascinated by Seven Stories, the only archive and gallery in Britain dedicated to the art of children’s literature. Visit the new Seven Stories experience with interactive craft activities and new exhibitions including *Rhyme Around the World* or climb up to the Artist's Attic to enjoy interactive performances throughout the day (www.sevenstories.org.uk). For a touch of local history, head to the Great North Museum, where you’ll find the ‘world under one roof’ including a large-scale, interactive model of Hadrian's Wall, a planetarium, a life-size T-Rex dinosaur replica skeleton and a Mouse House for the under-fives (www.twmuseums.org.uk/great-north-museum). More interactive displays are on offer at the Centre for Life, including the world’s most comprehensive exhibition of computer games from the past 60 years (www.life.org.uk).

**London** - The capital is, of course, packed with a huge range of family attractions, and there are plenty near the football grounds of the big London teams. After a Chelsea or Fulham match, you’re within easy distance from the Natural History Museum (www.nhm.ac.uk), the Science Museum (www.sciencemuseum.org.uk) and the Victoria & Albert Museum (www.vam.ac.uk). Furthermore, for the little ones, Gambado in Chelsea is home to one of the largest play frames in London along with special dodgems, junior climbing wall and carousel rides (www.gambado.com). Attractions such as London Zoo and Regent’s Park are easy to reach from Arsenal and Tottenham football grounds (www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo). Take a slight detour east of central London to the home of the 2012 Olympic Games, now the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Covering 560 acres, it has 6.5k of waterways, 15 acres of woods, hedgerow and wildlife habitat, and four free themed walking trails to explore: London 2012, Biodiversity, Art in the Park and Kids’ activity. It is accessible via nine tube and train links (www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/families).
Where to…party like a footballer

As the Premier League kicks off a new season on 8 August 2015, we’re showcasing some of the hotspots in the cities and towns of the Premier League teams so that when the game’s final whistle blows, you can still immerse yourself in all things football-related. Channel your inner footballer-on-a-night-out and head to some of the coolest places in town.

Manchester – Owned by Manchester United icon Rio Ferdinand, award-winning city centre Italian eatery Rosso, situated in a Grade II-listed building, it is well-known for attracting famous faces. All diners can enjoy tasty Italian fare to the accompaniment of live entertainment, and themed drinks connected to Ferdinand’s #5 shirt (www.rossorestaurants.com). You’re also likely to see famous football faces at the chic Australasia, which serves modern Australian cuisine combining Pacific Rim flavours. After 11.30pm the restaurant transforms into a Late Lounge until 3am (Thursday to Saturday), hosting guest DJs (www.australasia.uk.com). Uber-cool eatery, Artisan Kitchen, set-up by the company behind Australasia, is set in a huge semi-industrial space where you can get pizza and cocktails to enjoy in the ‘Feasting Room’ or the ‘Bitchin’ Lounge’. A new café-bar and art gallery draw the in-crowd day and night (www.artisan.uk.com).

Liverpool – a vibrant city all about glamour, one of the city’s hottest clubs, the Playground at the Hilton (located inside the Hilton Hotel), is the height of glamour (www.playgroundliverpool.com). To enjoy fine dining and glitzy cocktails with spectacular 360° views over the city, head to Panoramic, located on the 34th floor of Liverpool’s West Tower, reaching 100m above sea level (www.panoramic34.com). And San Carlo– the latest in the award-winning San Carlo restaurant group – is popular with the football crowd (www.sancarlo.co.uk/liverpool).

Newcastle Gateshead – A swanky, cool bar in Jesmond, just north of the city centre, is 97 & Social, a favourite with the football elite (www.97social.co.uk). Also popular with Newcastle football favourites is Osbornes: three bars are stretched over two venues designed in a quirky yet modern style (www.osbornesjesmond.co.uk). And if you’re partying with a similar budget to a footballer’s, check out the bohemian hotspot of Tup Tup Palace. The place for some serious ‘celeb’ spotting, its distinctive interior design includes a waterfall, a catwalk, an oval-shaped champagne snug and a sunken bar, plus the bar stocks two 1995 Dom Perignon jeroboams encased in white gold worth £10,000 (www.tuptuppalace.com).

London – The capital is packed with top restaurants, bars and clubs that cater for the well-paid footballer…and perhaps a well-heeled prince or two! The glitz and glamour of Mahiki and Boujis nightclubs certainly attract the wealthy footballer(www.mahiki.com, www.boujis.com/boujis-london), while you can expect to see a famous face or two at restaurants such as Nobu Berkeley (www.noburestaurants.com/london-berkeley-st), sipping the restaurant’s signature Caviar Martini (the Beckhams have been spotted here) and China Tang at the Dorchester (www.chinatanglondon.co.uk).
Where to...enjoy a football experience
Enjoyed the game and want to know more? Here are five top experiences tied in with 'the beautiful game'.

National Football Museum: You don't have to be an ardent football fan to enjoy the National Football Museum in Manchester in north-west England, which celebrated its third anniversary in July 2015 at its Urbis city centre location. Discover how this English school game became a global phenomenon through interactive exhibits and stories from fans, players and managers, while visitors can get up close to some of the greatest football memorabilia, such as the Jules Rimet World Cup trophy and the 1966 World Cup final ball, and explore more about the greats in the Hall of Fame, including female players, managers and community champions (www.nationalfootballmuseum.com).

Meet a football legend: Manchester United, Manchester City, Liverpool, Arsenal and more Football Clubs offer super stadium tours including 'legend tours', when an ex-player will take you round the stadium and grounds (www.manutd.com, www.mcfc.co.uk, www.arsenal.com/stadiumtours). Liverpool fans will be excited to know this type of tour is also available at Anfield...and, if visitors upgrade to the Ultimate Anfield Experience (www.theanfieldexperience.com), they can take part in a unique training session at the Liverpool Football Club Academy and enjoy breakfast and lunch in The Legend's Lounge. Many stadium tours are available to buy on the VisitBritain shop (www.visitbritainshop.com).

Many fans tour Wembley Stadium too, which has hosted everything from UEFA Champions League matches to music concerts broadcast around the world. You can climb the 107 steps and pretend you're picking up a winning team's trophy from the Prime Minister, sit in the Royal Box and get your hands on the FA Cup, or book the VIP Access All Areas tour that takes you on your own private tour. International visitors to Britain can also buy tickets to football matches at Wembley through Sportsworld, which include accommodation and travel to the match (www.sportsworld.co.uk).

City Tours: Manchester Guided Tours offers walking tours of the city centre based around football (www.manchesterguidedtours.com), while Manchester Taxi Tours has a tour focused specifically on Manchester United or Manchester City, taking passengers to key locations in the clubs’ history (www.manchestertaxitours.com).

Football Academies: Young, international football fans are in for a treat at Manchester United Football Club. It offers girls and boys aged 6-18 years six one-day or two-week residential summer camps (www.manutdsoccerschools.com), while Arsenal offers residential and non-residential boys and girls soccer programmes (www.playthearsenalway.com).

Wake up next to the pitch: No, not by accident after celebrating a good win for your team, but in a comfortable hotel room overlooking the ground. London Premier League team West Ham United has a three-star hotel right next to the stadium, the West Ham Hotel, where the double rooms overlook the pitch of its ground, Upton Park (www.westhamhotel.co.uk).

Check out Hotel Football in Manchester; located opposite Manchester United's Old Trafford stadium, the four-star 133-bedroom hotel is owned by the club's alumni Ryan Giggs and Gary Neville. The hotel offers the ultimate match-day fan experience and bespoke
hospitality packages. You can also find your own little piece of ‘Heaven’, a rooftop football pitch and one of a kind venue situated on the 12th floor of the hotel; with breath-taking views of Old Trafford and the city of Manchester, it has a retractable roof and caters for parties of up to 180 guests (www.hotelfootball.com).

In August 2015, the Shankly Hotel, dedicated to Liverpool FC manager Bill Shankly, is due to open in Liverpool, and will feature a Bill Shankly museum that will exhibit family memorabilia. A bar and sports-themed restaurant will also open and will pay tribute to different stages of Bill Shankly’s life. Each room throughout the hotel will feature stories not just from the Shankly family, but from former Liverpool players and football fans, who each have a story to tell about the late, great Bill Shankly (http://shanklyhotel.com).

**Sporting legacies**

2014 was a vintage year for sport in Britain, with organisational triumphs at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland, and the Tour de France choosing to start cycling's premier competition in the rolling countryside of Yorkshire, in north England. Those events have left more than fond memories, though, as the legacies of both the Games and the Tour mean these destinations have become even more enticing for international visitors.

The effort gone into ensuring that visitors for those events enjoyed an all-round positive experience means much more than the host locations benefiting from improved sporting venues and activities. Also noticeable is that Glasgow and Yorkshire can now offer a wider choice of accommodation, cultural activities and entertainment. Here we look at what is on offer in one of Scotland's liveliest cities and the beautiful county of Yorkshire, one year on, before catching up with developments in the legacy of the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games.

**Glasgow**

The athletes from all around the world that competed in the Commonwealth Games may have left the city, but plenty of reminders of last summer's heady celebrations remain and are continuing to emerge. The most obvious monuments are a series of world-class sports venues across the city, which continue to host key events while offering activities to the public.

Among them is the Tollcross International Swimming Centre - also home to a rink dedicated to a new twist on roller-blading, off-ice skating - and the indoor Emirates Arena in the east of the city, headquarters of the Glasgow Rocks basketball team and a host of international athletics events. The arena also boasts the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome, the home of Scottish cycling that is

Fancy your hand at indoor biking? Head to the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome in Glasgow
accessible for anyone to try indoor biking. [www.glasgowlife.org.uk/sport](http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/sport), [www.emiratesarena.co.uk/cycling](http://www.emiratesarena.co.uk/cycling)

Outdoors, cyclists can make use of Glasgow's Mass Cycle Hire Scheme, with 400 bikes available from stations across the city. Two-wheeled transport has got even easier with the opening of the West City Way that links the centre to Kelvingrove Park. This is one of Glasgow's finest green spaces and also home to a must-see attraction, the much-loved Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, a key draw in the cool West End district. [www.nextbike.co.uk/en/glasgow](http://www.nextbike.co.uk/en/glasgow), [www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=15859](http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=15859)

In the park itself, the Kelvingrove Bandstand and Amphitheatre was restored for the Games and has since become an established outdoor venue with a variety of events on offer, ranging from free family-friendly days out to gigs from the likes of Echo & The Bunnymen and King Creosote. Pedestrians, meanwhile, can enjoy a wider range of green spaces, including the Clyde Walkway than runs beside the city's wide river. [www.facebook.com/pages/Kelvingrove-Bandstand-and-Amphitheatre/226160304214185](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Kelvingrove-Bandstand-and-Amphitheatre/226160304214185)

Three new accommodation options are arriving in the city in 2015, including the cool Village Hotel in the up-and-coming Finnieston area and a new Travelodge due to open on Queen Street later this summer - handy for people aiming to make the most of Glasgow's cultural draws. With an Ibis Styles boutique hotel set to open its doors in the Merchant City quarter in October, all three will be ready to welcome attendees to the city's growing number of sporting and cultural events, whether it's the World Gymnastics Championships at the Hydro Arena or Britain's top arts competition, the Turner Prize, coming to Scotland for the first time in the autumn. [www.village-hotels.co.uk/hotels/glasgow](http://www.village-hotels.co.uk/hotels/glasgow), [www.travelodge.co.uk/hotels/593/Glasgow-Queen-Street-hotel](http://www.travelodge.co.uk/hotels/593/Glasgow-Queen-Street-hotel), [www.2015worldgymnastics.com](http://www.2015worldgymnastics.com), [www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tramway/exhibition/turner-prize-2015](http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tramway/exhibition/turner-prize-2015)

Yorkshire

In 2014 the Tour de France's Grand Départ set off from Yorkshire for the first time and the county has not been the same since. Already home to a rich cycling heritage, the residents of its historic towns and homely villages welcomed the stars of two wheels with a passion over two days of hard-fought racing. Everyone involved, both Tour organisers and local enablers, judged the courses to have been an inspired choice.

Its success has driven the county to devise its own annual race based on a series of stages: in May 2015 the inaugural Tour de Yorkshire took place. It's an exciting competition involving a varied course across the county over one long weekend, with opportunities for endurance athletes, sprinters and hill climbers to prove their mettle. Watched by one and a half million spectators en route, it has already become one of the country's largest sporting events. [http://letour.yorkshire.com](http://letour.yorkshire.com)

Highlights included the Eve of Tour Celebration, with entertainment, music and celebrities from the world of cycling, a women's race held on the Tour's York
circuit on the same day as the men's race and the Tour de Yorkshire Festival that involved the county's commendable arts and culture scenes. This was a month-long celebration that featured venues across Yorkshire, with plenty of special events on race days, kicked off with a recital by pianist Jessica Wei Zhu at Leeds College of Music. Plans for next year are already underway, with the aim of announcing a different set of start and finish towns in the autumn. These will highlight the diversity of Yorkshire's landscapes, from rolling hills and sweeping coastal views to historic towns and vibrant cities, following in the wake of this year's hosts, among them the seaside resorts of Bridlington and Scarborough, York with its fabulous historic attractions and bustling Leeds. http://tdyfestival.yorkshire.com

As well as the Tour, Yorkshire is home to many more cycling events, among them the challenging off-road course, the UK Singlespeed Championship at Duncombe Park, Helmsley, and the Selby Three Swans Sportive, its flat course handy for anyone looking to improve their distance or speed. http://cycle.yorkshire.com/cycling-events

One of the most relaxing ways to enjoy the region's lovely countryside is by following the route of the Slow Tour of Yorkshire, a handpicked itinerary suitable for most abilities that features 21 of its best cycling routes - Yorkshire boasts 1,000 miles of Britain's National Cycle Network. Take in the sea air from Scarborough to Hayburn Wyke, follow the canal from Hebden Bridge to Brighouse or try a hill climb from Settle to Clapham. www.sustrans.org.uk/ncn/map/walking-and-cycling-inspiration/best-regional-routes/slow-tour-yorkshire

Watch out too for Sky Ride's Big Bike Events, cycling festivals that include traffic-free routes passing iconic landmarks and features such as the Sensory Tunnel and Tricks & Tune area. Yorkshire has five this summer, including Hull in August and York and Bradford in September. www.goskyride.com

London

Even though it has been three years since the triumph of the 2012 London Olympics, the legacy of that time continues to blossom in the city itself, especially in the east of London, which has been revitalised and transformed.

A key benefit has been the reopening of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, a brand new green space that was originally the grounds in which the bulk of 2012 events was held, but is now a place for relaxation and a host for loads of sporting and cultural activities. Since it reopened in July 2013, the park has welcomed four million visits. It is a wonderful place to explore, with plenty of trails and tours. As well as guided walks around the 560 acres of parkland, waterways and fountains, you can join boat tours that take in all the iconic sites, with professional guides on hand to fill you in on the fascinating details about its development. http://queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk

Also worth looking out for is the rich variety of artworks around the park, including the ArcelorMittal Orbit, Britain's tallest sculpture, which you can climb to gain great views over the city and a unique perspective on the park, plus its Olympic Stadium and surrounding venues.
These continue to attract the best athletes to east London, including during July's Anniversary Games, an incredible weekend of live sport. This annual event is accompanied by the National Paralympic Day, which combines the chance to watch sporting heroes compete with taking part in free activities - try the sports yourself - as well as showcases from Britain's finest deaf and disability-orientated arts.

The centrepiece of the park, the Stadium, has reopened after two years so that it can operate as an all-year sports and entertainment venue. A new cantilevered roof has been installed that is the biggest of its kind, along with an innovative retractable seating system that ensures spectators are as close as possible to the action. Meanwhile, the stadium continues to host an ever wider range of sports, including the Rugby World Cup this autumn and the Race of Champions motorsport event. Next year, it becomes the home of Barclays Premier League football club West Ham. Among other venues, the Copper Box Arena is open to the public for a host of activities, and in October hosts the World Wheelchair Rugby Challenge. www.better.org.uk/leisure/copper-box-arena

Also open for visitors are the London Aquatic Centre and, near the park, the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre and the Lee Valley Velopark. The latter offers a range of facilities for aficionados of road racing, BMX and mountain biking. Upcoming events include Six Day London in October, an elite competition with a party atmosphere accompanied by great music and entertainment. Next year sees the arrival of the UCI Track Cycling World Championships, the sport's biggest indoor event that will see some of the world's best cyclists compete for the coveted rainbow jerseys and prepare for the 2016 Rio Olympics. www.visitleevalley.org.uk/en/content/cms/london2012/velo-park

Just as important is the development of a cultural hub, Olympicopolis, which in the coming years will see major new sites open, from London's own arts and crafts treasure house, the Victoria & Albert Museum, to the Smithsonian Institution opening its first permanent museum outside the United States.

**Women’s World Cups in Britain**

It's an exciting time for women’s sport in Britain. The Women’s Rugby and Cricket World Cups are coming to these shores in 2017, and the England football team’s success at the 2015 Women’s Football World Cup has prompted a huge growth in audience numbers. There's never been a better time to cheer on your female sports idols.

**Rugby**

Driven by the success of the 2014 Women's Rugby World Cup and the inclusion of Rugby Sevens in the 2016 Summer Olympics, women's rugby is one of the world’s fastest growing sports. It's all pointing to the 2017 Women's Rugby World Cup being the best one yet.

The tournament will be hosted by Ulster Rugby alongside the Irish Rugby Football Union in August 2017. It will culminate with the world’s top female rugby players coming together for the semi-finals and positional play-offs in the Kingspan Stadium Belfast, Northern Ireland's
capital, a city that loves rugby and is known for its warm welcome; this will be a memorable event! Just one month later, in September, Kingspan will also open a new education and heritage centre, exploring the history of rugby in Ulster, through a range of interactive and audio-visual content. [www.ulsterrugby.com/KingspanStadium](http://www.ulsterrugby.com/KingspanStadium)

The England team is the current Women’s Rugby World Cup champions. Watch them play at London’s legendary Twickenham Stadium, home of England Rugby. Twickenham is the largest stadium in the world devoted purely to rugby. Take a tour behind the scenes and visit the World Rugby Museum. It incorporates the history of women’s rugby from its first mention in 1899, through the First and Second World Wars, and the first international women’s rugby match in 1982. The nearest train station is Twickenham, a short walk from the stadium and 30 minutes from London Waterloo by train. [www.englandrugby.com/twickenham](http://www.englandrugby.com/twickenham), [www.scrumqueens.com](http://www.scrumqueens.com)

**Cricket**

The scene is being set for a thrilling 2017 ICC Women’s Cricket World Cup in England, with the launch of a new women’s cricket super league in summer 2016, and confirmation of London’s iconic Lord's cricket ground as the venue for the World Cup final. [www.lords.org](http://www.lords.org)

Lord’s is the home of cricket; playing its perfectly manicured wicket is the pinnacle of international cricketing ambition. Take a guided tour of Lord’s and follow the footsteps of international cricketers through the Long Room, a cricketing art gallery and gateway to the hallowed turf. Tours run seven days a week (with some exceptions) from the MCC Museum, one of the oldest sporting museums in the world. The museum holds cricket’s most precious artefact: the Ashes urn, a tiny, fragile trophy given to England captain the Hon. Ivo Bligh in 1882.

Opportunities to watch women cricketers in action in summer 2016 include a visit by Pakistan’s women’s team, the Royal London Women’s One-Day Cup, and women’s county cricket. Find match and fixture info at the England and Wales Cricket Board. [www.ecb.co.uk](http://www.ecb.co.uk)

**Football**

Women’s football is finally taking centre stage. England’s women’s team was given a heroes’ welcome when they brought home bronze from the 2015 FIFA Women’s World Cup. The Women’s FA Cup has recently signed a landmark four-year title sponsorship deal – the first ever major sponsorship of the Women’s FA Cup competition – and the FA Women’s Cup Final between Chelsea and Notts County, was held at iconic Wembley Stadium in London for the first time, in August 2015. [Wembley hosted the Women’s FA Cup Final for the first time in early August 2015. Credit VisitEngland/Diana Jarvis](http://www.englishfootball.co.uk)

[England player Lauren Winfield: England will host the Women's Cricket World Cup in 2017. Credit Don Miles](http://www.englishfootball.co.uk)
Take a guided tour of Wembley Stadium for access to the England changing rooms, the intense Players Tunnel, the Royal Box and historical treasures such as the original flag from the 1948 London Olympic Games. www.thefa.com, www.wembleystadium.com

You can catch many of the England players from the FIFA Women’s World Cup 2015 in the FA Women’s Super League (www.fawsl.com). Buy tickets at www.ticketstores.co.uk/fawsl. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also have active women’s football leagues (www.scottishfa.co.uk; www.welshpremier.co.uk; www.leaguewebsite.co.uk/niwfa).

Other arenas

Britain’s female sports professionals excel at golf, curling and netball too. Founded in 1950, the Ladies Professional Golf Association is one of the world’s longest-running women’s professional sports associations. International women golfers were recently in action at the Women’s British Open between 30 July – 2 August 2015 at the Trump Turnberry Resort on the southwest coast of Scotland, and in 2016 at Woburn Golf Club, part of the Woburn Estate. The estate also includes historic Woburn Abbey and Gardens, a safari park and hotel, approximately one hour’s drive north of London. www.lpga.com, www.woburn.co.uk

Britain is also home to the world’s leading women’s international cycling stage race; The Aviva Women’s Tour will be held in June 2016. Find out more at www.womenstour.co.uk.

Scotland is the place to watch world-class curling. Scotland took gold at the 2013 World Women’s Curling Championships and bronze in 2014, and Scot Eve Muirhead captained Britain’s women’s curling team to bronze at the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. Find out more about upcoming fixtures, venues and tickets at www.royalcaledoniancurlingclub.org. Upcoming highlights are the Scottish Women’s Championships (14 - 21 February 2016) at Dewars Centre in Perth, central Scotland, and the European Curling Championships (19 – 26 November 2016) in Braehead Arena and Curling Rink, four miles (6 km) from Glasgow International Airport.

The UK’s elite netball players compete in the Netball Superleague in eight teams from across England and Wales. Matches draw big crowds and are broadcast on Sky Sports. Netball fans should head to UNESCO World Heritage city Bath Spa in southwest England to watch Team Bath; the nation’s most successful Netball Superleague team have won five of the nine campaigns so far (www.netballsl.com). Bath Spa is around 90 minutes by train from London.

All eyes on Centre Court – tennis in Britain

Wimbledon

Say ‘Britain in summer’ and for many people around the world the first image that pops into their head is Wimbledon, the oldest tennis tournament in the world and probably the most prestigious. The two-week extravaganza in south-west London is more than just a series of games between players at the absolute pinnacle of their career. It’s strawberries and cream, champagne, a glass or two of Pimms (a refreshing gin-based drink laced with mint and fruit), passionate fans, and OK, perhaps the odd rain shower or two.
You can get tickets by entering the annual ballot through Wimbledon's website, or be very British and queue up - some people even bring a tent to stay overnight in order to try to get a coveted seat on Centre or Number One court.

If you can't get there in early July when the event takes place you could always visit the excellent Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum and Tour, tickets for which are available through the VisitBritain online shop. The guided tour lasts around an hour and a half and includes a look at Centre Court, the pressroom, a 3D hologram of John McEnroe (you cannot be serious!) and various areas that are otherwise off-limits to the general public. www.wimbledon.com, www.wimbledon-experience.com www.visitbritainshop.com

Other tennis tournaments

There's more to tennis in Britain than Wimbledon though. In early June the Queen's Club tournament takes place for male players in west London. Tickets are also offered in a ballot (which closes in February each year) and a small number of Centre Court and ground admission tickets are available on match days. The club was founded in 1886. www.queensclub.co.uk

In Eastbourne in East Sussex (on the south coast, an hour and a half by train from London) the AEGON International tournament for female players is another warm-up for Wimbledon and takes place in mid-June. Tickets are available through the Lawn Tennis Association website. www.lta.org.uk

If you're in London in winter you can enjoy the indoor ATP World Tour Finals at the O2 Arena near Greenwich in south-east London, which attracts many top players; Federer was up against Djokovic in the final last year, and Britain's own Andy Murray played too. Buy tickets through the ATP website. www.atpworldtour.com

Real tennis

For a look at the history of the game, enjoy going back in time by having a lesson of Real Tennis at the Royal Tennis Court in Hampton Court Palace - the home of Henry VIII - 30 minutes' train journey from London (the courts are closed for repair until September 2015). The first tennis courts were built there around 1526 by Cardinal Wolsey. Although the game, which is played indoors, might look like a strange mix of tennis and squash, its techniques, strategies and rules are more complex and difficult than the modern game we know today. www.royaltenniscourt.com

A tennis retreat!

And why not combine all this with a stay at Olympic gold medallist and Wimbledon champion Andy Murray's hotel, Cromlix House, in Dunblane, an hour's drive northwest of the Scottish capital, Edinburgh? The hotel is a five-star venue, and in addition to luxurious, traditional Scottish rooms with a modern twist, there's a restaurant run by chef Albert Roux of Le Gavroche in London (the first UK restaurant to win three Michelin stars). Despite the chef's star credentials, you can get a three course dinner for less than £30,
which Murray's family were insistent on when making plans for the hotel, in order to keep it affordable for locals to the area. Wander the grounds to the private loch and borrow a fishing rod to try catching brown trout, or else borrow a racquet and test your serve on the court. www.cromlix.com

**Cricket: England’s traditional game**

Don’t panic! Cricket – our national summer sport, and played since the 16th century - is not as complicated as some people would have you believe.

**The basics**

There are two teams of 11 players. Teams bat in successive turns, each turn called an innings, and try to score points, called runs. The other team fields and tries to end the batting team's innings by catching the ball of a player, or hitting the wooden stumps behind the person who's having the ball thrown - or bowled - at him. And all this can last from an afternoon to five days. Simple!

What is certain is the passion this seemingly genteel game arouses – particularly so when England plays Australia every four years for the trophy known as the Ashes (a trophy that is just 155mm tall!).

**Key events**

The Cricket World Cup is played every four years, likewise the Ashes are contested every four years between England and Australia.

**What to do in Britain’s cricket cities**

**Nottingham** is a buzzing city and well-placed for some great countryside retreats in Sherwood Forest, the home of Robin Hood (see www.experiencenottinghamshire.com).

**Birmingham** is a vibrant city, with contemporary arts and media hub the Custard Factory adding an edge of cool, some of the best curries in Britain and a lovely Jewellery Quarter (http://visitbirmingham.com). **Cardiff** is the capital of Wales and home to an atmospheric castle, the excellent Wales Millennium Centre for music, and is the gateway to the Brecon Beacons National Park for more exploration of country pursuits! (See www.visitcardiff.com). **London** may be known to most, but did you know that in south London, close to the Oval, is the buzzing Brixton market? Book an ‘Eat London’ tour with Mind the Gap tours to spend the morning tasting your way around Brixton and Borough markets (www.mindthegaptours.com/eatlondon).

**Tour Lord’s Cricket Ground**

If you want to get to the heart of the game, take a tour of the historic Lord’s Cricket Ground in north London. Visit the museum, which is the world’s oldest sporting museum, and have tea and cucumber sandwiches in the historic Long Room.

www.lords.org/history/tours-of-lords
Watching cricket

Enjoy a fast-paced ‘Twenty20’ game (quicker than traditional matches) at a ground such as Headingley in Leeds, a two-hour train ride from the capital, or the Rose Bowl near Southampton on the south coast of England; see www.cricket20.com.

St Fagans is a lovely village a ten-minute taxi ride from Cardiff in south Wales. After the match, retire to the Plymouth Arms down the road for a pint ofBrains Bitter.

Bearsted in Kent is a quintessential English village and only an hour by train from London’s Victoria station; take in a picture of traditional country life, and head to the Oak on the Green after the match for a pint or two.

Norton St Philip in Somerset is a half hour’s taxi drive from the city of Bristol in the southwest of England. The pitch is almost in the shadow of the village church, and you can get a pint at the George Inn afterwards.

Melrose Cricket Club in the Scottish Borders, just over an hour’s drive by car south of Edinburgh, is a lovely spot to watch a game of cricket, and for a cosy pub/restaurant nearby try the Buccleugh Arms Hotel.

Hambledon, a 20-minute drive from Portsmouth, which is itself less than two hours by train from London, is a small village sometimes called ‘the cradle of cricket’. Visitors shouldn’t miss the Bat and Ball pub, which is full of cricketing memorabilia.

Golf in Britain

Why just play golf when you could play at the home of golf? While people all over the world have probably been hitting a rock with a stick since the time of cavemen, Scotland is where the modern game evolved – the Royal and Ancient Golf Club in St Andrews, an hour north of Edinburgh, was founded in May 1754. Now the ‘R&A’, as it is known, is the governing body for golf throughout the world, with the exception of the USA and Mexico.

There are fantastic courses all over Britain including more than 550 in Scotland alone, where some of the world’s best golfers have honed their skills. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland too, you are never far from a course, whether it is home to a world championship tournament or a hidden local gem.

In Britain you can learn to play with world-class instructors or enjoy a golf safari, moving between links or heathland courses for example, staying at resorts where you can play 18 holes in the morning and be pampered in their spa in the afternoon before enjoying a fantastic meal in the evening. All in all, Britain is golf heaven. See below for some of our suggestions of courses.
10 great golf courses
Spectacular coastal views, beautiful five-star hotels, historic towns... a golf course in Britain has often so much more to offer the golf enthusiast than fabulous fairways and creative challenges. Britain is well stocked with courses; there are around 2,500 so you're never far away from the opportunity to tee off. Whether you're looking for a course that is part of a luxury resort, or a course where champions once achieved holes in one, we highlight ten great courses around Britain that are also within easy reach of attractions to visit once the 18 holes are completed.

St Andrews in Fife, Scotland, is the home of golf; it recently played host to the 2015 Open Championship. It's an hour by train from Edinburgh to Leuchars station then a ten-minute taxi drive. The famous par-72 Old Course is so popular that tee-off times have to be balloted! But don't worry because there are six other courses around town, the newest of which opened in 2008, as well as some other lovely ones nearby outside picturesque villages such as Anstruther, Elie and Crail. The town of St Andrews itself is a real gem and home to both the British Golf Museum and Scotland’s oldest university, where both the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge studied - look out for students in their traditional red gowns.

www.visitstandrews.com

The Celtic Manor Resort in Wales hosted the Ryder Cup in 2010. The resort is just outside Newport, which is a two-hour train ride from London Paddington station. There are three championship golf courses at the resort, all of which are 18 holes; the stunning Twenty Ten Course hosted the Ryder Cup. Furthermore, you are not far away from cosmopolitan Cardiff or the beauty of the Brecon Beacon hills and some of the finest gastropubs in Wales.

www.celtic-manor.com

Royal Lytham and St Annes on the Lancashire coast of England is just six miles south of Blackpool (around three hours by train from London) and hosted the Open Championship in 2012. It was founded in 1886 and is considered one of the premier links courses in the world. It’s also hosted the Ryder Cup twice.

www.royallytham.org

Royal Portrush Golf Club is near Coleraine in Northern Ireland, an hour and a quarter’s drive from Belfast. It’s one of the most challenging links courses in the world and the only club in Ireland to have hosted the Open Championship. It’s just ten miles along the coast to the Giant’s Causeway, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the result of an ancient volcanic eruption, and about an hour by car to Derry~Londonderry.

www.royalportrushgolfclub.com
The links course at Carnoustie, on Scotland’s east coast, is just an hour and a half by train from Edinburgh, and even pros like Colin Montgomerie have admitted to finding it a challenge. In fact there are three courses at Carnoustie – the Championship Course, the Burnside and the Buddon Links. Depending how well or how badly you play, you can celebrate or commiserate with a visit to the Glencadam whisky distillery near Brechin, a half-hour drive away - book a driver to take you!

www.carnoustiegolflinks.co.uk, www.glencadamdistillery.co.uk

Sunningdale Golf Club in Berkshire, England, is just a half hour’s drive away from London Heathrow airport, so you could easily play 18 holes if you are staying in the capital. It’s said that the course here is the closest American visitors will find to the iconic Augusta National Golf Club but, in fact, there are two championship ones here, the Old and New courses, so why not play both? www.sunningdale-golfclub.co.uk

On the coast of south Ayrshire – just over an hour by road from Glasgow, Scotland’s largest city - Trump Turnberry Resort, founded in 1902, has spectacular views towards the islands of Ailsa Craig and Arran. On a clear day, you can even see Ireland. The Trump Turnberry Resort Hotel has a luxurious spa and fitness centre to soak weary limbs after a tough day on the links.

www.turnberrygolfclub.net www.turnberryresort.co.uk

Royal St George’s in Kent is on the coast north of Dover, about two hours by car from London. Founded in the 1880s, it hosted the Ladies British Open Amateur Championship in 2014, and in 2011 hosted the Open Championship for the 14th time. Its undulating fairways and fast greens can prove a test for even the most determined golfer. Kent is known as ‘the garden of England’ and a day spent on the course could be followed by time spent discovering one of the prettiest corners of the country.

www.royalstgeorges.com

Founded in 1891, Ganton golf club in north Yorkshire, England, has hosted many amateur and professional tournaments. This course is ideally placed to discover the beautiful Yorkshire coast as well as the North York Moors and Wolds – which has inspired artists such as David Hockney - not to mention the 2,000-year-old city of York, which is a 45-minute drive away. Ganton is around an hour by train from Leeds and three hours from London.

www.gantongolfclub.com

Royal Birkdale, a 35-minute drive north of Liverpool on the north-west coast of England, will host the Open Championship in 2017. This beautiful links course is a favourite of many. Not far from Liverpool is the whole of England’s ‘Golf Coast’, which encompasses 20 golf courses, including three Royal courses; as well as Royal Birkdale there’s Royal St Lytham & St Anne’s in Lancashire, the golf course that staged the 2012 Open Championship, and Royal Liverpool at Hoylake on the Wirral Peninsula, the second oldest seaside links course
in England. It’s easy to combine a visit here with a stay in vibrant Liverpool or Manchester, or to explore the gorgeous countryside of the Lake District or the Yorkshire Dales National Park by car.

www.royalbirkdale.com

‘The Season’ – see and be seen (and see some sport too!)

Back in the days when *Downton Abbey* was for real, the British aristocracy would pour forth from their stately homes in summer for a series of social events when seeing and being seen were just the right thing to do.

New dresses would be shown off and eligible daughters paraded in the hope that a young chap of good standing – and a large bank account or the right title, hopefully both – might take a shine to her.

This was called ‘the Season’, and although it no longer exists in a formal fashion, it certainly does in a more democratic, informal sense, centred around sports where the actual action often comes in second place to the drinking, gossiping and dressing up. Nowadays it entails a fun and glamorous day out with friends, plus you never know who you’ll bump into, whether it’s royalty or familiar faces from reality TV.

**The Epsom Derby**

Popularly known as ‘the Derby’ – pronounced ‘darby’ – this prestigious horse race for three-year-old colts and fillies is run over one mile, four furlongs and ten yards (2,423m), and first took place in 1780. Its home is Epsom, just south of London, easily accessible from Victoria station.

Nowadays it is Britain’s richest horse race (with winnings of £1.25m) and the event – held on the first Saturday in June – is usually attended by the Queen, Prince Philip and other members of the Royal Family. It’s an amusing day out even if you don’t know a thoroughbred from a donkey. You can have a bet from as little as £2, and there are plenty of opportunities to buy food and drink as well as have a good view of the action. If your ticket allows you entry to the Queen’s Stand, gentlemen will be expected to wear black or grey morning dress with a top hat, or national costume, while ladies are expected to wear a fascinator or a hat. [www.epsomderby.co.uk](http://www.epsomderby.co.uk)

**Royal Ascot**

Sporting purists would argue that the five days of racing that take place just to the west of London during Royal Ascot (14 – 18 June in 2016) are some of the most dramatic and high quality during the whole year.
But then there are those – and they are many – who just want to observe the ladies' fashions in the grandstand and beside the parade ring, because the week has become known as much for being a giant fashion parade as for anything that actually takes place on the turf.

It's a chance for women to dress up and wear an amazing hat – the more amazing the better your chance of being on TV or making the front page of the newspapers the next day. This is especially true on Ladies Day.

Royal Ascot dates back to 1711, when it was founded by Queen Anne. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth attends with various members of the Royal Family, arriving each day in a horse-drawn procession from Windsor Castle.

The Royal Enclosure is the most prestigious part of the course and entry is highly prized – even to apply to enter you have to be nominated by someone who has attended the enclosure for at least the last four years. A dress code is strictly enforced: a day dress of a certain length with hat for ladies and black or grey morning dress with top hat for gentlemen.

More than 300,000 people attend over the five days, making this Europe’s best-attended race meeting. Oh, and if you are here for the horses, the Gold Cup is considered the top-ranking prize to win. [www.ascot.co.uk](http://www.ascot.co.uk)

**Glorious Goodwood**

Goodwood is another horse-race meeting that takes place each August and as you stand looking at the gorgeous, rolling hills of the South Downs near Chichester in West Sussex (around 2.5 hours' drive from London), you will agree it really is glorious indeed. More than 100,000 people flock through the gates during the five-day meeting to enjoy an atmosphere that is stylish but very unstuffy and relaxed. On Ladies Day, which usually takes place on the third day, take a picnic and enjoy some of the world’s best racing on what must be one of the most beautiful courses anywhere. Also held at Goodwood, and part of the season's calendar of events, is the very stylish Goodwood Revival - where classic cars meet classic coiffure and glamorous dresses. Rather than horses, the Revival is the world’s most popular historic motor race meeting and is the only event of its kind to be staged entirely in the nostalgic time capsule of the 1940s, '50s and ‘60s. Raid Portobello Market, hop on the train and step back in time. [www.goodwood.co.uk](http://www.goodwood.co.uk), [www.southdowns.gov.uk](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk)

**Henley Royal Regatta**

To the west of London, just over an hour by train from London Paddington station, Henley on Thames transforms over five days of the first weekend each July (29 June - 3 July in 2016) from a pleasantly sleepy town to the absolute epicentre of world rowing. The Grand...
Challenge Cup is what it’s all about – but then again so is meeting up with friends and having a drink or two.

The regatta was first held in 1839 and has taken place every year since, with the exception of the two World Wars. Nowadays, crews enter from all over the world and the races can be watched from the banks of the Thames, with the Stewards Enclosure being the spot from which to observe the goings on. www.hrr.co.uk

Cowes Week

If you like messing about on the water in sailing boats, this is the week for you. And if you just like looking at it all, enjoying fireworks and hard-fought races with plenty of socialising with hardy outdoor types, then you’re still in the right place. The festival takes place from 8 – 15 August in 2015 in Cowes on the Isle of Wight, off the south coast of England. www.cowesweek.co.uk

Polo

Dashing young chaps charging around the polo field on their well-groomed ponies, equally well-groomed young ladies doing the same: polo is exciting to watch, with plenty of off-pitch socialising to accompany the sport.

Whether the players are British, Argentinian or from some other far-flung corner of the globe, there’s nothing nicer in summer than standing watching the action with a chilled glass of champagne in hand. Nowhere more so than the Guards Polo Club near Windsor, just outside west London. Matches begin in April and take place throughout the summer, with the Cartier Queen’s Cup climaxing in June with the trophy presented to the winners by Her Majesty.

Or why not join in? The Ascot Park Polo Club in Surrey (about an hour’s drive out of London), offers two-hour ‘Discover Polo’ lessons for beginners and anyone wanting a day out with a difference from £95. Or else Coworth Park, the Dorchester Collection’s country house hotel, offers guests the chance to learn and train with some of Britain’s best players, from the Guards Polo Club.


The most epic participation events in Britain

Get involved in these epic participation events and experience Britain in a completely different way. They’re open to all abilities so you don’t need to be super fit to take part, but you will need a sense of humour and a reliable washing machine...

Dirty Weekend

The world’s biggest obstacle course race involves participants in a brutal 20 miles/32km of 200 obstacles, including reputedly the world’s longest monkey bars at 150 metres! The mud, sweat and, yes, on occasion, tears sit incongruously with the backdrop, Burghley House, one of England’s grandest Elizabethan houses. It featured in the 2005 version of
Pride & Prejudice, starring Keira Knightley, and in 2007’s Elizabeth: The Golden Age, with Cate Blanchett and Clive Owen. The stars of Dirty Weekend, though, are the obstacles: Stink Trench, Nasty Crawl, Funky Dunky, Barbed Wire Crawl, Mudstacle and, er, the Wobbly Cocks. And just when you think you’ll never move again, drag yourself to the notorious after-party.

**Getting there:** Stamford station, the nearest to Burghley, is 1 hour 30 minutes train journey north of London. From there, it’s a pleasant 30-minute walk to Burghley.

**When?** 7 May 2016

[www.ratracedirtyweekend.com](http://www.ratracedirtyweekend.com)

**Velothon Wales**

Organisers hailed the 2015 inaugural Velothon Wales road race event a huge success. Fifteen thousand participants took part in two closed-road sportives through south Wales. Both started and finished in Cardiff city centre, with the 31 mile/50km route going past majestic Caerphilly Castle and the 87-mile/140km option heading north to the tough Tumble Climb in Brecon Beacons National Park. There was also a 120-mile/194km professional race. Pre-registration for 2016 is open and organisers promise the 2016 event will be bigger and better. Expect even more spectators cheering you on and a don’t-miss cycling festival with all the biggest brands and the latest gear.

**Getting there:** Cardiff is two hours by train from London

**When?** Expected to be June 2016

[www.velothon-wales.co.uk](http://www.velothon-wales.co.uk)

**Great North Swim**

Join 10,000 participants plunging into the cool depths of Lake Windermere in the Lake District, north-west England, in Europe’s biggest open-water swimming event. Swimmers of all abilities can enter 0.5-mile/0.8km, one mile/1.6km, two miles/3km and three miles/5km races. But if splashing around in England’s largest lake doesn’t appeal, settle down in front of one the large screens around the event site and watch some of the world’s best swimmers slice through the water. The Great North Swim takes place over three days on Windermere’s north-east shore; beautiful Windermere is a destination in its own right with plenty of adventure sports to try. And, if you want more open-water swimming, there are designated swimming spots too.

**Getting there:** Windermere is three hours from London by train.

**When?** June (exact date TBC)

[www.greatswim.org](http://www.greatswim.org)

**Blenheim Triathlon**

It’s easy to see why this is billed as the world’s most stunning triathlon. Athletes compete in the grounds of Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, once described by owner Lord Randolph Churchill as “the finest view in England”. He may have been biased, but he certainly had a point: the Palace is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Participants run, swim and cycle through grounds landscaped by the legendary 18th-century landscape artist Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, with the Palace’s English Baroque-style courtyard and Vanbrugh’s Grand Bridge taking centre stage. Just try not to get distracted by the Marlborough Hedge Maze (made up of 3,000 yew hedges), Butterfly House, miniature train and smattering of carved-stone ‘summer houses’.
**The Wall**

This epic 69-mile/111km journey spans the width of northern England and 2,000 years of history. Participants run or walk the route of UNESCO World Heritage Site Hadrian's Wall, once a frontier of the Roman Empire and, for this event, transformed into a frontier of human endurance. It starts with a burst across the drawbridge of 1,000-year-old Carlisle Castle then heads east along the path of the wall. Along the way, runners are (hopefully) distracted by Roman forts, mile-castles, Roman temples and sensational views in Northumberland National Park, before crossing the finish line at the Millennium Bridge in the city of Newcastle.

**Getting there:** Carlisle is three hours 15 minutes by train from London and just over one hour from Glasgow and Edinburgh

**When?** 18 June 2016

[www.ratracethewall.com](http://www.ratracethewall.com)

**The Loony Dook**

Every New Year’s Day, hundreds of hardy souls brave the cold of New Year to dunk themselves in the chilly waters of the Firth of Forth in South Queensferry, a few miles from the Scottish capital. The celebrations start with the Dookers’ Parade and climax with a dip in the freezing water, with the iconic Forth Bridge in the background. The participants’ outfits are impressive too. Dress up in an elaborate costume or even a full Santa outfit and take the plunge to join the ranks of crazy Dookers!

**Getting there:** Event buses travel from Edinburgh city centre to South Queensferry in 45 minutes

**When?** 1 January

[www.edinburghshogmanay.com](http://www.edinburghshogmanay.com)

**Giant’s Causeway Coast Sportive**

Cyclists participating in Northern Ireland’s Giant’s Causeway Coast Sportive are rewarded with spectacular scenery. And very sore thighs! Choose from three routes: Causeway Coaster (36 miles/57km), Glens and Coast Route (80 miles/126km) and the aptly named Giant Killer (115 mile/182km). They all start and finish in Ballycastle and follow parts of the Antrim Coast Road, one of the world’s most scenic coastal routes. The Glens and Coast Route winds through the magical Glens of Antrim and kindly gives cyclists the option to miss the epic climbs and hair-raising descents of the infamous Torr Head. Those on the Giant Killer route have no such choice, although views of some of the north coast’s best scenery (arguably) make up for it!

**Getting there:** Ballycastle is one hour north of Belfast by road

**When?** 12 September 2015

[www.giantscausewaycoastsportive.com](http://www.giantscausewaycoastsportive.com)
Paddle Round the Pier
Participants take to the waves on SUP boards, surfboards, canoes, kayaks, bodyboards and even lilos in Paddle Round the Pier, the world’s biggest free beach and watersports festival. The aim is to paddle around Brighton’s iconic derelict-yet-picturesque West Pier, which dates from 1866. The two-day festival is centred on the immaculate Hove Lawns, with live music, kids’ entertainment, landpaddling, free-running stunts and fitness challenges. Watch out for the ‘Paddle something unusual’ event, when normal floatation devices are swapped for vessels as mad as aeroplanes, cranes, beds and sheds. It’s all for fun, but manages to raise serious money for charity at the same time.

Getting there: Brighton is one hour to the south of London by train
When? July (exact date TBC)
www.paddleroundthepier.com

Ride London
At heart, Ride London is a party on wheels. For one day a year, the streets of London are cleared of motor traffic and thousands of cyclists claim the tarmac, pedalling an eight-mile/13km route past St Paul’s Cathedral, the Tower of London, Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace. Penny Farthings, music bikes, stagecoaches and numerous festival zones weave along the route too. It’s a unique and fun way to see central London’s most famous landmarks and experience one of Londoners’ favourite events. Ride London is actually just one event over a weekend dedicated to cycling with almost 100,000 riders pedalling through London and Surrey.

Getting there: Join the route at any point and do as many laps as you like
When? 1 August 2015
www.prudentialridelondon.co.uk

Tough Mudder
Tough Mudder has seen phenomenal success since launching in 2010. Yes, the obstacle course races are tough, muddy and exhausting, but the emphasis here is on teamwork and fun: it’s a winning formula. Participants aren’t timed and everybody gets a medal. But you really have to sweat to earn that medal! Be prepared to dodge electric cables, climb sheer walls, plunge into icy water and slide through endless mud. Tough Mudder course locations, on the other hand, are beautiful. Historic houses, country estates and castles are the genteel backdrops to these boisterous events.

Getting there: Directions to various locations on the Tough Mudder website
When? Eight events between May and September every year
www.toughmudder.co.uk

L’Eroica Britannia
L’Eroica Britannia is a vintage bike rally through England’s timeless Peak District, and the highlight of a three-day festival of music, camping, vintage stalls and, yes, cycling. There are three routes to choose from: 30 miles/48km, 55 miles/88km and 100 miles/161km. Here’s the catch: all bikes and accessories must be pre-1987. And participants are more likely to refuel on local ale and Bakewell pudding than energy drinks and gels. But this is still a serious event; 3,000 cyclists climbing steep hills on pre-carbon fibre bikes prove
that! It's just that a competitive nature is replaced with a more jovial atmosphere, and those crossing the finishing line are greeted with strawberries, Pimms and sandwiches. How terribly British!

**Get there:** There are numerous buses from the north-west England cities of Manchester, Chesterfield, Derby and Sheffield to Bakewell.  
**When?** June (exact date TBC)  
http://eroicabritannia.co.uk

**Loch Ness Marathon and Festival of Running**

This is a monster among running events! Distances range from the kids’ 400-metre ‘Wee Nessie’ to the marathon, all in one of the world's most storied places. The marathon follows the south-eastern shore of Scotland’s fabled Loch Ness, across the River Ness and into Inverness, the capital of the Highlands. And, as the runners lap the loch with their eyes on the water in case the Loch Ness monster makes an appearance, everyone else is enjoying the festival’s local food and drink stalls, Sports Expo, pipe band and acoustic sets.

**Get there:** Inverness is a 90-minute flight from London or just over three hours by train from Edinburgh  
**When?** 27 September 2015  
www.lochnessmarathon.com

**World Bog Snorkelling Championships**

Join hundreds of daredevil participants at the World Bog Snorkelling Championships in Llanwrtyd Wells, mid Wales. People come from all over the world to compete for this coveted title and the highly prized green frog trophy. Wearing fins, a mask and snorkel (and either a swimming costume or a suitably wacky outfit), competitors swim as fast as they can without using conventional swimming strokes up and down a 133-metre trench cut into a peat bog. You’ll need stamina, buoyancy and an eye for the fastest path through the reeds to win. And a sense of humour, of course.

**Get there:** Llanwrtyd station is just over three hours from Cardiff by train. A shuttle bus runs to the event site from the town square, or it’s a one-mile walk  
**When?** 30 August 2015  
www.green-events.co.uk

**Wales' Year of Adventure 2016**

Home to rambling, sailing, climbing, coasteering, mountain biking, all manner of extreme sports and family-friendly activities - the title of world's capital of adventure tourism could easily be awarded to Wales. To prove it, 2016 has been declared 'Wales Year of Adventure' in a campaign backed by two well-known 'Adventure Ambassadors': British TV presenter Bear Grylls, of *Man vs. Wild* fame, and Richard Parks, the extreme athlete and former Wales international rugby union player.

Feeling intrepid? Here's just a taster of the thrilling adventures you can already find in Wales.
Surf Snowdonia, Conwy, Clwyd, north Wales

Ride the longest man-made waves on the planet at the world's first inland surfing lagoon. Surf Snowdonia opened this summer in north Wales' leafy Conwy Valley, on the site of a former aluminium works. Experience its revolutionary 'Wavegarden Surf Lagoon', a freshwater lake the size of six football pitches (around 33,000 m3), where visitors can enjoy barrelling waves of 150-metres-long (492 ft) and two-metres-high (6.5ft), created by giant 350 horsepower pumps. Inside, there's also a 'Crash & Splash' water-based obstacle lagoon, a surf-side café bar and a soft play shack for kids, plus a 50-metre (164ft) glass-fronted viewing gallery that lets you get right up close to the surf action without getting wet. www.planet-surfing.com

Getting there: Surf Snowdonia lies in the village of Dolgarrog, Conwy, Wales, around 90 minutes' drive from Liverpool and Manchester in north-west England.

Zip Below Xtreme, Conway Falls, Clwyd, north Wales

Whizz along the world's longest and deepest underground zip line; equivalent to the length of 15.5 double-decker buses (130 metres / 426.5ft), and situated in a disused mine deep below north Wales' Snowdonia mountain range. Opened earlier this year, the adrenaline pumping attraction lies 396 metres (1,300ft) underground - that's more than seven times the height of London's Nelson's Column - and offers nine subterranean zip wires set in 5km (three miles) of tunnels, caverns and passageways. Whether you're inching across a gaping chasm on a wooden beam or free falling into a 21-metre (70ft) abyss, it's an experience you'll never forget. www.go-below.co.uk

Getting there: Conwy is around 90 minutes' drive from Liverpool and Manchester in north-west England.

Go Air Trampoline Park, Cardiff and Swansea, south Wales

Bounce yourself breathless as you navigate 100 interconnected trampolines inside a new all-weather indoor jumping court in Cardiff. The park's jumping arena is interspersed with supersize foam pits, trapeze swings and more, plus there's a dedicated court for extreme dodgeball games. Meanwhile, a second branch in Swansea is set to open in autumn 2015. www.goairtrampolinepark.co.uk

Getting there: Cardiff is just over two hours from London by train and has an international airport; Swansea is around one hour's train journey further west from Cardiff.

Pembrokeshire Sea Kayak Odyssey, Pembrokeshire, west Wales

Explore Wales' rugged coastline, sea caves, secluded harbours and sleepy islands teeming with wildlife, as you navigate its waters by kayak. Renowned across the globe, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park provides close encounters with a range of amazing creatures, including Atlantic grey seals, dolphins and cliff-nesting razorbills and guillemots.
The voyages of two to four days long are led by professional guides and are suitable even for beginners, with skills such as chart reading taught along the way. [www.preseliventure.co.uk](http://www.preseliventure.co.uk)

**Getting there:** Pembrokeshire Coast National Park is around two hours’ drive from Cardiff.

**Bear Grylls Survival Academy, Brecon Beacons, south Wales**

Traverse swollen rivers, forage for food, build emergency shelters, learn improvised first aid and experience how to navigate by day and night. Created by the modern-day TV adventurer and guided by a team of handpicked experts, the Bear Grylls Survival Academy's '24-Hour Adult Survival Course' takes place in the 'Waterfalls Country' of Brecon Beacons National Park. Meanwhile, a '24-Hour Family Course' means that parents and children can also learn survival skills, including sliding down zip lines, nibbling meal worms and sleeping under the stars. [http://beargryllssurvivalacademy.com](http://beargryllssurvivalacademy.com)

**Getting there:** Brecon Beacons is just over an hour’s drive from Cardiff.

**Britain’s most scenic sportsgrounds**

There are plenty of sporting hotspots that double up as beauty spots in Britain. With castles and famous landmarks as backdrops, and sweeping views of coast and countryside, head to the nation’s most scenic sportsgrounds and enjoy the on pitch action – and spectacular surroundings.

**Tennis**

**Tennis** fans should head to the beautiful **Stoke Park**, which hosts the annual Boodles Tennis Championships a week before Wimbledon. Its grass tennis courts sit within view of the impressive Mansion building, which was built in 1788, and designed by James Wyatt, architect to George III; you too can book to play there between May and September. Stoke Park is also a fantastic place for golfers, and its 27-hole championship course is considered one of the top 100 golf courses in the world. Stoke Park has an interesting ‘other life’ as a film set – two Bond films, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *Wimbledon* (look out for the grass tennis courts!) and many more movies have used the property as a film location. Stoke Park is in Buckinghamshire, roughly an hour west of London by car or train.

Prizes for one of the most scenic places to play tennis must surely go to **Crantock Bay Leisure Club** in Cornwall, south-west England. The court overlooks Crantock Beach, so close that it’s likely many a tennis ball has ended up in the water! The Leisure Club, which also has swimming facilities, is accessible to members and those staying at the Crantock Bay luxury self-catering apartments. It’s a fantastic place to holiday for a taste of England’s rugged Atlantic coast, and the apartments are located near to popular walking, surfing and kitesurfing spots. Crantock Bay is under three hours’ drive from Bristol Airport, or half an hour from Truro, itself just under five hours by train from London.
Tennis star Andy Murray opened his very own hotel, **Cromlix**, in Scotland, near his home town of Dunblane. Of course, it features a tennis court that guests can play on - decked out in Wimbledon colours, no less. Have a rally there with a view over the splendid Victorian Perthshire mansion, then drive 20 minutes away to the world-renowned Gleneagles for a spot of golf! Cromlix is under an hour’s drive from Glasgow.


**Cricket**

England is endowed with countless cricket pitches that could just as equally be the settings for a postcard or painting. The north east of England is home to many cricket clubs, and men in white are a common sight in the region’s parks and village greens. Vying for top scenic cricket spot are the **Emirates Durham International Cricket Ground**, home to Durham County Cricket Club (and frequently the location for international matches) and the **Bamburgh Castle Cricket Club**’s pitch on Castle Green. The former has views towards Lumley Castle, now a luxury hotel that serves sumptuous Pimms afternoon teas, while the latter is located right under the formidable, centuries-old Bamburgh Castle - if the match is getting a bit long, pop in for a visit.

Over in the charming and pretty Cotswolds, **Slaughters United Cricket Club** is one of the most picturesque you'll find, rivalled by nearby **Dumbleton**, a fantastic ground situated in pasture land surrounded by trees and a pond to the rear of the pavilion; Slaughters and Dumbleton are within half an hour of one another by car, both in Gloucestershire, south-west England. Essex, the county north east of London, is home to the impressive Jacobean house **Audley End**, which has a cricket pitch that brings to mind the summer garden parties in the television series **Downton Abbey** - visit for a trip back in time to when stately homes formed the backdrop to cricket matches between local teams. **Bedminster Cricket Club** in Bristol, south-west England, is overlooked by a rather more modern - though no less impressive - landmark: the Clifton Suspension Bridge.


**Golf**

**Golf** is, by its nature, a sport that involves handsome surroundings and fresh country air, and there are plenty of places to tee off and admire the view in Britain. One of the most
spectacular in England is **Hawkestone Park**, a classy hotel and golf course in Shropshire, a county characterised by rolling hills, quaint market towns and pretty villages in west England. Hawkestone’s three courses were designed in extensive parkland surrounding the ruins of a medieval castle, with the cliffs of the Follies - a historic woodland fantasy built more than 200 years ago - providing a marvellous backdrop. Hawkestone is less than two hours’ drive from Manchester.

Scotland is the home of golf, and a spectacularly beautiful country, so it’s little wonder that you’re spoilt for choice when it comes to scenic golf courses. One of the most famous is **St Andrews Old Course**, whose Swilcan Burn Bridge has to be one of the most photographed golfing spots in the world! St Andrews is around an hour and a half from Edinburgh by car.

Its winsome strapline, ‘a view from the sea from every tee’, says it all about **Nefyn Golf Course** in North Wales. Words can’t really do justice to the magnificent course, overlooked by Snowdon, particularly the eight holes played on the world famous ‘Point’ - a narrow finger of land jutting out into the sea. Nefyn is in north western Wales, under three hours by car from Manchester.

**Lough Erne**, in Northern Ireland, graced television screens all over the world in 2013, when it played host to the G8 summit, but the five-star golf resort and hotel is better known for its two championship golf courses on a private 600-acre peninsula between Lower Lough Erne and Castle Hume Lough, with striking views from every vantage point. Lough Erne is in Enniskillen, around two hours’ drive from Northern Ireland’s capital, Belfast.


**Football**

Football is known in Britain as ‘The Beautiful Game’, which usually refers to the onscreen action than the surroundings of the stadia - but in the case of many football clubs, the setting isn’t to be sniffed at. Up in Scotland, a football pitch on the island of **Eriskay** - which has a population of roughly 200 people - has been recognised by FIFA as one of the most remarkable places in the world to play football, and a match played on the field has been recorded for screening at FIFA’s new museum in Switzerland. The playing surface may be ‘bumpy’ according to Eriskay FC’s manager, but the views out to sea are remarkable. Eriskay is in the Outer Hebrides, connected by a causeway to South Uist by road, and
accessible by car and ferry from mainland Scotland.

One of the Football League's oldest clubs, the **Nottingham Forest City Ground**, around two hours north of London by train, is located on the bank of the River Trent, with Trent Bridge and Meadow Lane not far away. An hour and a half outside London, Brighton's **Amex Stadium** is particularly beautiful when the surrounding countryside is abundant with poppies, and West London club Fulham FC's premises, **Craven Cottage**, has an enviable Thames-side location.

How about having a kickabout yourself, with a view over Old Trafford? The new Hotel Football's rooftop football pitch, **Heaven**, has great views of the iconic stadium and the footy-mad city of Manchester, in north-west England. Heaven is on the hotel's 12th floor and has a retractable roof.


**Rugby**

Despite it being one of the most engaging sports to watch, it isn’t hard to be distracted from the on-pitch **rugby** action when you go to watch a game in Bath. Surrounded by the World Heritage City’s iconic sandstone buildings, **Bath Rugby**’s pitch is in prime position, nestled under Bath Abbey and Great Pulteney Street, a Georgian marvel. The atmosphere on a match day is electric, and come the evening, it’s a special experience to see the city lit up in the background of the pitch. Bath is in south-west England, and can be reached in under two hours from London by train.

Often described as Britain’s most scenic rugby pitch is that in **Keswick** in the Lake District, north-west England - it has beautiful views over the Lake District fells. But the title could just as equally be applied to **Mull**’s rugby pitch in Scotland, and that of **Aberaeron Rugby FC** in Wales. The former is set on the Scottish island of Mull, with magnificent views out to sea. Head to the island via a ferry journey from Oban (two and a half hours’ drive from Glasgow), and you’ll be rewarded with passionate rugby fans ready to welcome you to their unique club. Aberaeron is a seaside resort in Ceredigion, west Wales, and their grounds have unspoilt sea views - watch out for dolphins, or head on a boat trip after the game to see them!


**Swimming and sailing**

Sailing aficionados will find plenty of places all over Britain to feel the wind in their hair, and the waves beneath their boat. Kielder Water is the largest man-made lake in northern Europe, and offers canoeing, sailing, and water skiing in one of the prettiest parts of the country. Come night-time, head to the Kielder Observatory, where you can admire the firmament from the heart of Northumberland International Dark Sky Park. Kielder Water is around an hour and a half from Newcastle, in north-east England.
Cardiff Bay, in the Welsh capital, hosts the Extreme Sailing Series in summer, with the Wales Millennium Centre providing an impressive backdrop to the colourful boats. You too can navigate the waters by sailing, windsurfing or rowing, on a trip with the Cardiff Bay Water Activity Centre & Cardiff Sailing Centre.

When it comes to beauty spots to swim in, there are countless choices. One of the most impressive lidos (outdoor pools) in England has to be the Tinside Lido in Plymouth, in Devon, south-west England. Tinside is a lovingly restored semi-circular sea water pool, with lots of Art Deco features and views directly over the sea; diving star and Plymouth boy Tom Daley used to practise his craft at Tinside in his younger days, and starred in an Adidas photo shoot there prior to the Beijing Olympics. Up in Aberdeen, north-east Scotland, the Stonehaven Lido is an Olympic-sized pool where it’s the night-time scenery that is special – late night openings mean that the stars are there to be admired as you paddle around at midnight.


Britain’s must-do sporting experiences

With a sporting heritage as long and robust as Britain’s, it’s almost rude not to try out one of these classic sporting experiences for yourself. Whether you follow in the footsteps of revered mountaineers or skim stones like a champion, you won’t find anything quite like these anywhere else in the world.

Climb in the handholds of Sir Edmund Hillary

At 1,112m/3,650ft, Snowdon is a mere hillock compared to Everest. But it’s the spiritual home of the expedition team that first conquered the world’s highest mountain in 1953. They used Snowdon and nearby peaks as a testing ground for high-altitude boots and carrying oxygen gear. Despite the comparative lack of altitude, the sheer rock faces, treacherous screes and tricky traverses are some of the most challenging in Britain. Follow the lead of Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay and join a climbing course in Snowdonia National Park. And don’t miss Pen-y-Gwryd Hotel (affectionately known as PYG) at the foot of Snowdon; it was the 1953 expedition team’s training base camp, and they still have regular reunions here. www.pyg.co.uk

Getting there: Betws-y-Coed station, nine miles/14km from PYG, is about five hours north of Cardiff and under three hours from Liverpool by train.
Raft the rapids at Lee Valley White Water Centre

These eddies, whirlpools and drops are guaranteed to get you thoroughly soaked. In fact, you're liable to tumble into some grade four rapids; the course was built for the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics canoe slalom event. Join a group of up to nine people and tackle the foaming waters with the help of an experienced guide. And, if you still feel too dry, try hydrospeeding, with just a large float between you and the rapids!

www.visitleevalley.org.uk

Getting there: Lee Valley White Water Centre is a ten-minute walk from Waltham Cross train station, 25 minutes from London’s Liverpool Street station.

Climb England’s highest peak, Scafell Pike

The Lake District in north-west England is prime walking country and at its heart is Scafell Pike, England’s highest peak at 3208ft/978m. From the top, you can see incredible views, responsible for sparking the imaginations of countless poets, painters and climbers: a sweeping panorama that stretches to Scotland, Wales, Ireland and the Isle of Man. On calm days you can see peaks and clouds reflected in the deep blue waters of Wastwater – England’s deepest lake – while to the north unrolls the epitome of England’s finest natural landscape, with soft valleys creased with woodland, lakes and bustling villages. It’s not an easy climb, but well worth the effort!

www.golakes.co.uk

Getting there: Penrith and Oxenholme stations are both about three hours north of London by train, then take public transport or drive to your chosen starting point.

Speed around Silverstone racing track

This is about as close as most of us will ever get to being a racing car driver. Silverstone has been the home of British motor racing since 1948, and even King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II have graced it with their presence. The Formula Silverstone Racing Car single seater experience puts you in the driving seat. Go from 0 to 60mph in under five seconds, as you sit inches above the tarmac of this hallowed track. Just don’t expect to beat Fernando Alonso's lap record of 1:30.874!

www.silverstone.co.uk

Getting there: As you’d imagine, Silverstone is easy to reach by car, approximately 90 minutes north of central London and one hour south of Birmingham.

Hike to mainland Britain’s most remote pub

There’s no road leading to The Old Forge, mainland Britain’s most remote pub. Instead, you have to trek about 20 beautiful miles/32km through the Knoydart peninsula in Scotland’s West Highlands, over a mountain pass and down to the tiny, whitewashed village of Inverie on the edge of coastal Loch Nevis. (Or hop on a twice-daily ferry from Mallaig for 45 minutes.)
minutes, but that wouldn't be very sporting!) It's worth the effort. The welcome is warm and you can expect hand-dived scallops from the loch, local venison, spontaneous ceilidhs, and no phone reception! www.theoldforge.co.uk

**Skim stones like a champion**

Easdale Island, the smallest permanently inhabited island of Scotland’s Inner Hebrides, was once the centre of a thriving slate mining industry. But, unexpectedly, that slate mining heritage has spawned a brand new industry: stone skimming. How? Firstly, the glassy water in one of the disused quarries is a perfect surface for skimming stones. And secondly, the slate is perfect for skimming! In fact, Easdale hosts the World Stone Skimming Championships every year on the last Sunday in September. Any age and any level of skill can enter, so get practicing! www.stoneskimming.com

**Getting there:** Easdale is a five-minute ferry ride from Ellenabeich, which is just under 3 hours by car from Glasgow.

**Take a stand-up paddleboard through Bristol**

Bristol isn’t your average port city. The infamous pirate Captain Blackbeard and offbeat graffiti artist Banksy both hail from here, it’s known as the Birthplace of America, and it’s the European Green Capital of 2015. So it seems only right to see the sights of south-west England’s biggest city in a suitably offbeat manner: stand-up paddleboarding! Join a tour and drift in the shadow of ss Great Britain, the world’s first large transatlantic passenger ship, and paddle across Bristol’s beating heart, the floating harbour built in 1809. www.supbristol.com

**Getting there:** Bristol is less than two hours by train from London.

**Go horse-riding in the New Forest National Park**

Commoners, agisters, verderers... Don’t worry, you don’t need to understand these words to enjoy the New Forest, a peaceful and ancient mosaic of woodland, open heath, saltmarshes and river valleys in south England (those terms are to do with an ancient system put in place when William the Conqueror created the Forest in 1079, which still works today). All you need to know is the best way to see it is on a pony. There’s something so right about travelling here by horseback. New Forest ponies have lived here since before the last Ice Age and still roam freely; in fact, the animals have the right of way and the park is riddled with sun-dappled open-access bridleways. Try Ford Farm Stables in Brockenhurst for serene rides in the heart of the forest. www.nfed.co.uk/fordfarm

**Getting there:** It takes 1 hour 30 minutes by train from London to Brockenhurst.

**Have a spin at the National Cycling Centre**
Manchester’s National Cycling Centre, the home of British cycling, is one of the world’s finest and fastest board tracks and, for good reason, the busiest in the world. There’s a comprehensive range of activities suitable for everyone from complete novices to elite athletes, but start with a taster session and find out what it feels like to ride around a 42.5° banked velodrome. You could find yourself sharing the track with members of the tremendously successful Team GB track cycling and Paralympic teams; Jason Kenny OBE, Laura Trott OBE and Jody Cundy MBE are all regular users.

www.nationalcyclingcentre.com

Getting there: Easy to reach by public transport, car or the traffic-free cycle route from Manchester city centre.

Learn to surf in Newquay

This rugged spot on the north coast of Cornwall, Britain’s most southern county, has around ten surf beaches and a vibrant surf community. That means tip-top surf conditions and plenty of schools to help you perfect your carves and cutbacks. Or at the very least, learn to stand up! Try Fistral Beach Surf School’s group and private lessons, or just hire a board. They can also arrange accommodation on Tolcarne Beach – known for its consistent surf conditions – in surf shacks, beach cabins and luxury apartments, in the middle of the surfing and nightlife action. http://fistralbeach.co.uk

Getting there: Newquay is five hours by train from London.

Paddle the sights of Royal Windsor

Take to the fabled waters of the River Thames and see Royal Windsor from a completely different perspective. Self-guided and guided tours in Canadian canoes or single or double kayaks start in the heart of Windsor and drift towards Dorney Lake (which hosted London 2012’s canoeing and rowing events), past Eton College, Windsor Castle and under one of the river’s oldest bridges. It’s an ancient route, dappled with historical and sporting gems. And if you really fall in love with the experience, try canoe camping with one night on Cookham Island as you paddle from Henley to Windsor. www.canoeandkayaktours.co.uk

Getting there: Windsor is half an hour from London by train.

Tour Game of Thrones set locations by bike

Okay, Tyrion Lannister and Jon Snow didn’t roam this demesne by bike but trust us – in real life, two wheels really are the best way to see key Game of Thrones filming locations around Winterfell, aka Castle Ward in County Down. Pick up your ‘Stark Sack’ so you can protect yourself as you pedal deep into the world of Westeros: to the tree branch below where Brienne confronts the Starkmen, where Bran falls from the castle, and the waters that brought Jamie Lannister ashore in a canoe. Then try your hand at archery in a replica of the Winterfell Archery Range in the very spot that filming took place. www.gameofthrones-winterfelltours.com

Getting there: Castle Ward is one hour south of Belfast by car.

Trek the world’s first uninterrupted route along a national coast

The Wales Coast Path runs for 870 miles/1,400km. It goes through one GeoPark, two National Parks, three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 11 National Nature Reserves, 14 Heritage Coasts and 23 sites on the Register of Historic Landscapes. In other words, it’s
one very long walk. If that sounds like too much work, there are plenty of shorter sections to choose from. The Dylan Thomas Walk goes past the boathouse where Thomas wrote *Under Milk Wood*, while the seven mile/11km section from Manobier to Tenby packs in thousands of years of history. And there are always those breathtaking sea views. www.walescoastpath.gov.uk

**Affordable spectator sports**

Viewing Britain’s top sporting events can be affordable; you could watch the London Marathon for free, grab a cheap Wimbledon grounds pass, enjoy the lively atmosphere of a big screen or even attend a bargain-priced shinty final.

Unusually for a major sports tournament, the **Wimbledon** tennis championships offer ‘on the door’ tickets. Several thousand ‘Grounds Passes’ are available each day during the tournament costing from £20, entitling use of unreserved seating on Courts 3-19 - Ana Ivanovic, Gael Monfils and Venus Williams all played on these courts in 2015 - plus the chance to climb Murray Mound (still Henman Hill to some) and watch Centre Court big-screen action while scoffing strawberries and sipping Pimms. You’ll need to join the queue by 7.00am (grounds open at 9.30am) to ensure entry, though, or come after 5.00pm for late entry from £14. www.wimbledon.com

Big screens around Britain also show Wimbledon’s key action during the tournament’s June-July fortnight. **Great British Summer** beams matches at various London rooftops and squares, with deckchairs and refreshments provided for slumbering viewers, while Leeds’ **Millennium Square**, Manchester’s ** Trafford Centre** and Birmingham’s ** The Square** also host boisterous outdoor screens each year. http://greatbritsummer.com, www.leeds.gov.uk, http://intu.co.uk, www.thesquareshoppingcentre.co.uk

Hugely popular across Ireland, traditional Gaelic football is a chaotic combination of soccer and rugby. It remains a strictly amateur sport, but draws vast, vociferous crowds. Northern Ireland’s Ulster Senior Football Championship ranks among the toughest competitions, and its final is played in July at Clones’ **St Tiernach's Park**, 90 minutes’ drive from Belfast and home to Monaghan GAA. Entry to the 36,000-capacity venue for the final itself costs just £20 per adult seat (or £14 to stand in the terraces). Advance booking is recommended. www.monaghanga.ie

April’s **London Marathon** sees swarms of spectators throng the streets. It’s terrific fun cheering on the valiant runners, many of them clad in fancy dress for charity, but picking a decent vantage point is crucial. The busiest spots are Greenwich, Tower Bridge and the Mall; east London’s Docklands tends to be much less crowded, with Mudchute Farm’s llamas, ferrets and rabbits offering subsequent distraction for kids, while Lower Thames Street in the City has several raised vantage points, particularly at the junction with Pudding Lane. www.virginmoneylondonmarathon.com
Western Scotland’s Nevis Range hosts a stage of the exhilarating 2015 UCI Mountain Bike World Cup. Visitors to the town of Fort William, around three hours’ drive from Glasgow or Edinburgh, can frequent the World Cup Village for biking demonstrations, competitions and stalls selling all equipment and jerseys. Plus there are various events, which include thrilling downhill racing – a blur of mud, tree roots, rocks, jumps and swerves. Tickets cost £26 if bought on-site. [http://fortwilliamworldcup.co.uk](http://fortwilliamworldcup.co.uk)

A very British experience is to watch live sports in a pub, ideally accompanied by a burger, chips and a pint of ale. Most pubs show live football, but some exclusively screen rugby. The Rugby Tavern, in the town of Rugby, from where the sport hails, is one, as is Cardiff’s Old Arcade. [www.shepherdneame.co.uk](http://www.shepherdneame.co.uk), [www.sabrain.com/oldarcade](http://www.sabrain.com/oldarcade)

One famous horse-racing event is April’s Grand National, a steeplechase held at Aintree Racecourse near Liverpool, northwest England, since 1839. To truly get involved, join the 154,000-strong crowd, and roar on the 40 horses and jockeys – reserving special encouragement for your nominated filly – as they hurdle famous fences like Becher's Brook. Entry costs from £23. Be aware that most attendees dress smartly. [http://aintree.thejockeyclub.co.uk](http://aintree.thejockeyclub.co.uk)

Wales’ rugged, romantic terrain plays host to Britain’s highest-profile motor rally in November. Providing the World Rally Championship’s thrilling finale, the Wales Rally GB sees cars careering around bumpy tracks near the north-western seaside resort town Llandudno, 90 minutes’ drive from Liverpool. Look out for the famous section around Chirk Castle, a beautiful fortress built by the English in 1310. Advance tickets are cheapest at £25 per adult; children aged eight and under go free, while those aged 9-15 pay just £1. [www.walesrallygb.com](http://www.walesrallygb.com)

Britain’s premier multi-stage road cycling race, the annual Tour of Britain begins in north-west Wales on pretty Anglesey island, before journeying up to Scotland and Edinburgh via the Lake District, and then criss-crossing the Midlands region of Britain while heading towards London. The precise route is announced only a month ahead in August, including the designated exciting YodelDirect Sprints and SKODA King of the Mountains climb sections. It’s free to watch, and fans can choose between scenic rural locations and city spots. [www.tourofbritain.co.uk](http://www.tourofbritain.co.uk)

Similar to Irish hurling, shinty is a traditional Scottish summer game played with hockey-like sticks. The best teams vie for the Camanachd Cup, including the team Kingussie Camanachd – who, according to the Guinness Book of Records, is the world’s most successful team in any sport. This year’s boisterous final, held in September, will be played at Mossfield Stadium in the west-coast town of Oban, about three scenic hours by train from Glasgow. Tickets are only around £10. [www.shinty.com](http://www.shinty.com)

Two illustrious rowing events take place up the River Thames each year: attracting a famously well-heeled crowd in early July is the longstanding Henley Royal Regatta, five days of head-to-head battles culminating in the Grand Challenge Cup. Tickets for the Regatta Enclosure start at £20, but there’s no charge to occupy the narrow riverbank. Then the Boat Race, contested between teams from Oxford and Cambridge universities,
has been running for almost two centuries. The modern-day, four-mile route takes the crews from the London neighbourhoods of Putney to Mortlake; it’s free to watch, including at the twin ‘Boat Race in the Park Festivals’ in Fulham’s Bishop’s Park and Hammersmith’s Furnivall Gardens. www.hrr.co.uk, theboatraces.org

One of the most quintessentially English things to do is to watch cricket – and ideally an international Test Match at grounds like Lord’s or The Oval in London, Leeds’ Headingley or Old Trafford at Manchester. Tickets go fast, but if matches go to a fifth day, they tend to be reduced – £10 tickets for adults, for instance, and free for kids – and available at turnstiles. Alternatively, watch an evening Twenty20 game in the NatWest T20 Blast competition: with the uproarious atmosphere and dynamic shotmaking, these make for a fun, affordable night out. www.ecb.co.uk/tickets, www.facebook.com/natwestt20blast

Rugby is Wales’ most popular sport, a symbol of Welsh identity that inspires partisan spectators and passionate pub conversations into the small hours. Domestically, Welsh top-flight clubs contest the Pro 12 league with teams from Ireland, Scotland and Italy, as well as Europe’s Heineken Cup. Tickets to the foremost venues, such as Cardiff Arms Park and Parc y Scarlets – in Llanelli, south-west Wales – cost as little as £10. www.cardiffrfc.com, www.scarlets.co.uk.

Planet Earth’s fastest motorsport series, the Red Bull Air Race World Championship descends in August on Ascot Racecourse, a 45-minute train-ride from London. It’s surprisingly inexpensive at just £30 to come and watch the competitors whizz high-performance airplanes through an 'Air Gate' pylon obstacle course at speeds of up to 230 mph. All tickets are issued on the day. www.redbullairrace.com

Made in Britain: a history of sport

Fancy a game of whiff-whaff, poona and gowf? Today they are better known as ping pong, badminton and golf, but whatever you call them (and who doesn’t want to call ping pong ‘whiff-whaff’ from now on?), they all have their roots firmly in British soil, along with a number of other sports.

We open up the history books and guide you through where your favourite sports first kicked off, served up and teed off.

Rugby

When English schoolboy William Webb Ellis picked the ball up and ran with it during a game of football at Rugby School in 1823, Rugby Union (and Rugby League and American Football) was born, or so the story goes. That also explains why the Rugby World Cup winner’s trophy is called the Webb Ellis Cup. Rugby’s Webb Ellis Rugby Football
Museum, where the world’s first rugby ball was made and traditional rugby balls are still handmade, is packed with international rugby memorabilia and more information on the origins of rugby (www.enjoyrugby.co.uk). England and Wales will host the Rugby World Cup in September 2015.

Rugby Sevens, on the other hand, originated in Melrose on the Scottish Borders in 1883 and will be an Olympic sport in Rio 2016.

**Olympic and Paralympic Games**

Talking of the Olympics, Britain has a claim on them too. Forget Ancient Greece; Much Wenlock, a quiet off-the-beaten track town in the Midlands, is the birthplace of the modern Olympic Games (www.muchwenlockquide.info). It was here that Dr William Penny Brookes, the founder of the Wenlock Olympian Games in the mid-19th century and the inspiration for modern Olympic movement, was born (www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk).

Almost 100 years later, another doctor, Dr Ludwig Guttmann, who worked with wounded World War II soldiers, started the Stoke Mandeville Games just outside northeast London. As he said to The Cord in 1949: “I foresaw the time when this sports event would be truly international and the Stoke Mandeville Games would achieve world fame as the disabled person’s equivalent of the Olympic Games.” The event was indeed the forerunner to today’s Paralympic Games.

And that is why, in homage to these early movements, the London 2012 mascots were called Wenlock and Mandeville.

Another thread linking Britain to the modern Olympic Games is the Cotswold Olimpicks, thought to date from 1612. The British Olympic Association even recognised the Cotswold Olimpicks as "the first stirrings of Britain's Olympic beginnings" in its bid for the 2012 Olympic Games, even though the events, such as shin-kicking and tug o’ war, have more in common with traditional rural sports than the modern Olympic events. They take place every year on a hill in the idyllic Cotswolds. www.olmpickgames.com

**Cycling**

Six-time Olympic gold medallist Sir Chris Hoy can thank one of his countrymen for creating the vehicle that has steered him to glory on many occasions. Scotsman Kirkpatrick Macmillan is credited with inventing the world’s first pedal bike in around 1839. The son of a blacksmith, on completing his first, very heavy bicycle he regularly cycled the 14 miles/22km between his home and Dumfries in south-west Scotland. A few years later, he made the much longer journey to Glasgow, completing 68 miles/109km in two days. To celebrate, on the 150th anniversary of the bicycle the KM Trail was opened, running from Dumfries through to Keir Mill, Macmillan’s birthplace.

The legacy is strong, and nowadays Scotland has some of Britain’s most fantastic biking experiences, including the scenic coast-to-coast route through the Scottish Highlands (www.visitscotland.com/see-do/activities/mountain-biking/trails), and the world-class Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome in Glasgow (www.emiratesarena.co.uk).

**Football**

While there is plenty of evidence that early ball sports were played around the world, the evolution of football as we know it began in Britain. In England, in 1863, association football
and rugby football formally branched off on their different courses and the Football Association in England was created as the sport's first governing body.

Today, if there's one thing that gets us Brits talking, it's football (and the weather, of course). Towns and cities the length and breadth of the country boast at least one, if not two, teams. And, of course, it's not just about watching football matches, although that's quite an experience. You can explore Barclays Premier League team stadiums on dedicated tours, join fellow football fans for a kick-about in the park, and visit exhibitions and museums dedicated to the beautiful game - you'll find the world's greatest football memorabilia collection in the National Football Museum in Manchester (www.nationalfootballmuseum.com).

Golf

‘Gowf’ as it was then known, has its roots in 15th century Scotland. It was banned by Parliament under King James II as a distraction from military training - which shows how popular the game was already (and how easily golfers are distracted). Thankfully, the ban was lifted in 1502 and the sport has gone from strength to strength.

It developed into something recognisable as today's game between 1750 and 1850, an era that also saw the establishment of some of the world's most famous golf clubs. On 7 March 1744, the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers (the world's oldest golf club, which now resides at Muirfield) officially came into being at Leith Links. And on 17 October 1860, eight professionals gathered at Prestwick, on mainland Scotland's west coast, to decide who would be the champion golfer. The following year, the tournament opened to the rest of the world, in the process becoming The British Open, golf's oldest championship.

St Andrews on Scotland’s east coast is globally revered as the home of golf (www.visitstandrews.com). It’s the world’s oldest links course, meaning you don’t have to be a member to tee off, just as people have been teeing off here for over 500 years. And in July 2015, in a headline-worthy reunion, golf’s oldest championship returned to the world’s oldest links course, the Old Course at St Andrews (www.theopen.com).

Scotland alone now has more than 550 courses. In fact, there are more golf courses per head of population in Scotland than anywhere else in the world (www.visitscotland.com/see-do/activities/golf).

Tennis

While 'real' tennis was popularised by King Henry VIII - you can see one of the few surviving real tennis courts at Hampton Court Palace (www.hrp.org.uk/HamptonCourtPalace) - modern-day tennis reportedly began in London in 1874 when Major Charles Wingfield patented the equipment and rules for a game he called Sphairistiké (Greek for 'playing at ball'), using an hourglass-shaped court.

When the All England Croquet Club decided to hold a tennis tournament it disbanded with Wingfield's odd-shaped court and brought in a more fashionable rectangular one. The club
was renamed the All England Croquet and Lawn Tennis Club (still its official title) and effectively took over development of the game. The Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum in London charts the sport’s evolution and displays the trophies (www.aeltc.com).

**Cricket**

It’s played on English village greens through summer or in front of huge crowds during international matches, yet the roots of cricket are said to lie in a simple 13th-century game in which country boys bowled at a tree stump or hurdle gate of a sheep pen.

The village of Hambledon, just outside Winchester, south England, has staked its claim as the birthplace of modern cricket and nearby Broadhalfpenny Down is known globally as the Cradle of Cricket. In the 1760s a cricket club was formed here that went on to establish the rules of the game as it is known throughout the world today. The Bat & Ball pub has stood opposite the cricket ground since the club was formed and has a wealth of memorabilia (www.batandballclanfield.co.uk).

**Ping Pong**

The first Table Tennis World Championships was held in London during 1926 and it is now an Olympic sport, but if you had been among the English upper classes in the 1880s, chances are you would have played whiff whaff as an after-dinner parlour game.

The game was played using books to knock golf balls across the table (‘whiff whaff’ was the sound of the balls being hit back and forth). Later incarnations used cigar box lid paddles and balls made from Champagne corks…and so began the game of ping pong.

According to the English Ping Pong Association, the name ‘ping pong’ was trademarked in 1901 by British manufacturer J. Jacques & Son, who later sold this name to the Parker Brothers in America. To avoid disputes, others referred to the game as Table Tennis, as they developed and registered slight variations of the game.

Despite the elite athletes now associated with the game, ping pong stays true to its sociable roots in Britain. Ping!, a free ping pong festival, pops up in unusual places across Britain over summer (www.pingengland.co.uk) and you can also play on the London 2012 Olympic and 2012 World Championship final tables in the very place John Jacques III invented and patented the sport in 1901, at Bounce in Holborn, London (www.bouncepingpong.com).

**Bog Snorkelling and Man vs Horse**

Welcome to the world of wacky and wonderful outdoor activities that have developed over the last 30 years in and around Llanwrydyd Wells in mid-Wales, the smallest town in Britain.
Back in the 1970s a group of local business people came together to devise methods of bringing tourism trade to the town (www.green-events.co.uk). They’re responsible for Bog Snorkelling, which is, you guessed it, snorkelling in a muddy bog, and Man versus Horse, the challenge of which is as clear as its title.

**The best of the rest**

A game named Poona was picked up by the British army in India and brought back to England in the 1870s, where it quickly became popular among British society. The name it’s now known by derives from a lawn party held by the Duke of Beaufort in 1873 at his country estate, Badminton, in west England (www.badmintonestate.co.uk). In 1877, the Bath Badminton Club was formed and developed the first official set of rules.

Apparently, the origin of curling can be traced back to approximately late medieval Scotland. The sport is still incredibly popular and the British team always does well at the Olympics. You can try curling at various venues across Scotland, Wales and England (www.trycurling.com).

**Thrillseeking in Britain – extreme sports to test your nerves**

Like to feel a tingle in your toes when it comes to sport? Then come to Britain. If adrenaline’s your bag we can show you a thing or two, from skiing to skydiving. Read on for information about extremely adventurous activities, and don't miss our watersports section for info on how to drench yourself in fun on your holiday.

**Ready, set, ACTION!**

Eager for an exhilarating adventure? Looking for that adrenaline rush? Look no further than Britain’s landscapes. From rocky outcrops to rugged coastlines, vast lakes to incredible forests and not forgetting the array of challenging mountain peaks, there’s a smorgasbord of outdoor adventure activities to get your heart pounding...with some spectacular scenery thrown in for good measure.

**Discover your inner Tarzan**

Swing through the trees, inch your way across rope bridges, and whizz down zip wires on high-ropes courses that are dotted throughout Britain. As well as the challenge of the ropes, there’s the added bonus of the picturesque locations of these courses. Go Ape Tree Top Adventures are just one company that offers this type of adventure experience, with high-ropes courses across 28 locations. http://goape.co.uk

Check out Go Ape’s location at Crathes Castle near Aberdeen, north Scotland, for example, where you’ll look out over the castle’s fairytale-like turrets, gargoyles and colourful gardens of the castle's 595-acre estate.
Elsewhere, those with a head for heights can tackle obstacles such as rope bridges, scramble nets, swinging logs and balance beams at Aerial Extreme’s treetop locations, including one in Bedale, north Yorkshire, set in the 240-acre Camp Hill Estate. After an exciting day on a challenging course, you can ‘glamp’ it up in style on the estate and continue your outdoor adventure by sleeping out under the stars in yurts.

www.aerialextreme.co.uk

Want to push yourself one step further? For the ultimate adrenaline rush, the high-ropes course at Tree Top Adventures in Snowdonia, north Wales, also includes the Powerfan Plummet, the world’s highest Powerfan Parachute Simulator. There’s also the Junior Tree Trail, specially designed for four to eight year olds so that all the family can enjoy these challenges. www.highropes-snowdonia.co.uk

Climb every mountain…

Aim for the peaks or choose something a little less demanding from the huge range of mountains, hills and rocky outcrops that you can hike up (and then perhaps abseil down?) in Britain. In Snowdonia, north Wales, the sheer variety of climbing is incredible: mountains, crags and sea cliffs all await climbing enthusiasts. In northern England’s Lake District National Park you’ll find England’s highest concentration of mountains and fell, and the sheer beauty of the Lakes creates quite an impact as you climb. www.pyb.co.uk

Over in Derbyshire, central England, the Peak District is also a popular climbing area, thanks to its concentration of crags; the northern part of the park is known as Dark Peak (due to the gritstone of its rock), while the southern part is the White Peak (limestone). Venture down to the south of England for impressive climbing on the cliffs of Swanage and Portland, which form part of Dorset’s spectacular Jurassic Coast.

www.peakdistrictonline.co.uk

Another great rock-climbing area in Britain is Glencoe, in the western Highlands of Scotland. Cliffs vary in size, so there are opportunities for a more gentle climb on the outcrops that run through the glen or, if you’re feeling adventurous, there’s plenty of scope for mountaineering climbing of up to 300 metres. www.glencoe-nts.org.uk

If you’re keen on scaling great heights, Scotland will not disappoint – there’s more mountainous terrain in Cairngorms National Park, which is home to four of the five highest mountains in Scotland: the country’s second largest mountain, Ben Macdui at 4,295 ft/1,309 m (the largest, Ben Nevis, in the west Highlands is 4,409 ft/1,344 m) sits at the heart of the park. And there are always the other 283 mountains over 3,000ft (914m) - called Munros - to choose from. Named after the man who first listed them, Sir Hugh Munro, the activity of ‘Munro bagging’, is the term used for climbing all peaks of this height. So get bagging!

Don’t forget the Three Peaks Challenge!

Not a small undertaking...just climbing the three highest mountains in Britain - Ben Nevis in Scotland, Snowdonia in
Wales and Scafell Pike in the Lake District – within 24 hours!
www.thethreepeakschallenge.co.uk

Winter wonders

Hurtle down black runs or swoosh gently down green runs – when the snow starts to fall, the adventure in the mountains continues at Scotland’s five major snow resorts. Its largest, Glenshee (two hours north of Edinburgh), offers 36 runs, while the first ski resort to have opened in Scotland – at Glencoe Mountain – has 19 runs.

Families may enjoy one of Scotland’s key outdoor resorts, such as Aviemore or Fort William, while Cairngorm Mountain has Scotland’s only funicular railway. For the most consistent snow The Lecht in the eastern Cairngorms is said to be the best.

Skiing aside, the beauty of the snow-capped mountains means winter hillwalking and winter mountaineering are also popular winter sports – the high plateau of the Cairngorms evoke an arctic nature, or check out the snowy slopes across the Highlands. In Wales, Snowdonia's snowy peaks and beautiful ice make it perfect for ice climbing. One of the more adventurous of mountain sports, ice climbing is for those with strong physical endurance levels and should be undertaken with proper supervision from instructors.

www.visitwales.com/things-to-do/activities
www.visitscotland.com/see-do/activities

A bird’s eye view

Fulfil one of man’s greatest dreams and fly like a bird…swooping over the British countryside on a paraglide or hang-glide, experiencing a heady mix of exhilaration and tranquillity, while admiring the spectacular views that are usually the preserve of our feathered friends. There are magnificent landscapes to fly over across Britain, with popular locations including the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales in the north of England, central England’s Peak District, while the Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons of south Wales also make exquisite paragliding and hang-gliding destinations. The South Downs National Park in Sussex, south-east England – only an hour from London – is also fantastic to fly over. Once airborne you'll glimpse its natural beauty spots such as Devil's Dyke, the longest, deepest and widest 'dry valley' in England; Beachy Head, home to England’s highest chalk sea cliff; as well as the magnificent white cliffs of the Seven Sisters Country Park, which forms part of the Heritage Coast.

The British Hang-gliding and Paragliding Association features a list of approved schools on its website, so you too can soar through the skies! www.bhpa.co.uk

For a serious adrenaline buzz, why not sign up for skydiving? There are ‘dropzones' across Britain and novices can enjoy the exhilaration of the freefall by jumping in tandem with an
instructor or, if you’re feeling brave, jump solo with a static line parachute. Either way, you’re going to feel electrified as you speed through the sky!

Check out the British Parachuting Association’s website for listings of fully affiliated skydiving clubs. [www.bpa.org.uk](http://www.bpa.org.uk)

**Going underground**

Britain is as fascinating down below as it is up above, with a rich tapestry of caves and potholing sites. Discover a subterranean world of stalactites, stalagmites, crystal and clay formations that have taken thousands of years to evolve. In England’s south west, Devon has some fantastic **caving** (literally, exploring wild cave systems, involving squeezing through tunnels and usually getting wet), including Buckfastleigh on the edge of Dartmoor National Park. In the north of England, the Yorkshire Dales cave systems boast more than 2,000 caves and potholes in the area and more than 400km of surveyed passage.

The southern part of the Brecon Beacons National Park in Wales is also great for caving, thanks to its vast array of caverns and passages, including the biggest cave entrance in South Wales and the largest cave passage in Britain.

And if you’re looking to cave in Scotland, the Isle of Skye has many caves up to 300m long in the southern part, while you’ll find three caves in Assynt in the Highlands that offer more than 1km of passage, with the longest over 2km. [www.trycaving.co.uk](http://www.trycaving.co.uk)

**Acrobatic adventure**

Test your nerve, your balance and your endurance with... circus skills! Bristol, west England, is home to Circomedia, where you can learn to walk the tightwire, zoom through the air on a trapeze or ‘simply’ learn to juggle. At London’s Circus Space you can learn similar skills during their Experience Days, where you are sure to unleash your inner acrobat. [www.circomedia.com](http://www.circomedia.com), [www.nationalcircus.org.uk](http://www.nationalcircus.org.uk)

Elsewhere, Belfast Community Circus School teaches skills in aerial, acrobatics, equilibristics and manipulation (moving and controlling objects), but also experiences on unicycles. Good balance is a bonus! [www.belfastcircus.org](http://www.belfastcircus.org)

**Sports grounds with amazing features**

Sports venues and grounds have yet more to offer the visitor once the game or match has ended: you can watch a cool band in a club, dine at a Michelin-starred restaurant or watch a match from the comfort of your own hotel room. Here is a pick of British sports grounds that offer that something extra.
Stamford Bridge, London

Underneath the home of Premier League champions Chelsea FC you'll find Under The Bridge, a purpose-built, 550-capacity music venue which, since it opened in 2011, has brought some classy acts to west London. RnB star Jason Derulo, rock outfit Kasabian and singer Alicia Keys have all performed in a basement joint that boasts state-of-the-art lights and sound system, while paying homage to the legendary nightspots in London's music history. Stamford Bridge also has on-site hotels, restaurants and a health club.

http://underthebridge.co.uk

Stamford Bridge is near Fulham Broadway tube station, on the London Underground's District Line.

Gleneagles, Perthshire, Scotland

Possibly Britain's most glamorous golf resort is based at the French château-style Gleneagles Hotel amid 850 acres of unspoilt Scottish countryside. As well as being home to three championship courses, Gleneagles also finds room for the only restaurant in Scotland with two Michelin stars. The Andrew Fairlie restaurant is named after its chef, who trained in France and combines that culinary influence with the best local produce, as in his signature must-try dish, smoked lobster, infused for 12 hours over whisky barrels. www.gleneagles.com

Gleneagles is an hour and a half's drive from Edinburgh. Gleneagles also has its own train station - which can be reached from London in 5.5 hours.

Goodwood Estate, West Sussex, south-east England

Glorious Goodwood at one of Britain's most glorious racecourses is a sporting and social highlight of the season. The surrounding estate also includes a racing circuit famed for its annual Festival of Speed. The track is often available for petrolheads to follow in the tracks of racing legends Sir Stirling Moss, Jim Clark and Sir Jackie Stewart, with instructors on hand to ensure you get the best from your car. Off-road routes are also available.

www.goodwood.com/Home.aspx

Goodwood is a taxi ride from Chichester station, which is just under two hours’ journey by train from London.

Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London

A key legacy of the 2012 London Olympics is the 560 acres of parkland around the venues where so many athletes competed, now left as a brand new green space for east London. There is plenty to see and do for everybody: relax on riverside lawns, discover wildlife in the wetlands or tour the park's artworks. Take a boat tour or guided walk to learn how the area was transformed into the beautiful gardens and waterways we find today. Don't forget you can ascend the ArcelorMittal Orbit tower - Britain's tallest sculpture - for stunning views of the city. http://queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk
The Park is close to Stratford station, served by several underground and overground lines.

Lingfield Park Racecourse, Surrey, south-east England

Britain's horse-racing circuit is rightly famed for the quality of its hospitality, with buzzing bars and fine restaurants that attract high society and keen punters alike. The course near the picturesque village of Lingfield adds its own spa and leisure club. The Breath Spa offers invigorating massages and revitalising facials using luxurious Elemis products, or you can hit the gym with a personal trainer, then relax in the sauna. [www.lingfieldpark.co.uk](http://www.lingfieldpark.co.uk)

Lingfield station is 45 minutes from London by train.

Celtic Manor, Newport, south Wales

This plush golf resort has not only hosted the Ryder Cup, but also meetings of world leaders, including the 2014 Nato summit, so you can be sure its facilities are top notch. The complex is set in 2,000 acres of tranquil Usk Valley parkland, so as well as teeing off, you can try a range of outdoor activities, among them laser clay-pigeon shooting, a treetop adventure course and archery. For kids, there is a specially designed pitch-and-putt course and a junior quad-bike obstacle course. [www.celtic-manor.com](http://www.celtic-manor.com)

Celtic Manor is a short drive from Newport, just under two hours by train from London.

Villa Park, Birmingham, central England

Aston Villa FC's historic stadium is now home to one of the top restaurants in England's second largest city. Restaurant VMF (Villa Midlands Food) is housed in the exclusive Directors Suite with spectacular views of the recent FA Cup finalists' pitch. Its chefs pride themselves on using locally-sourced ingredients, including some grown on an allotment that also provides honey half a mile from the ground. Open Friday and Saturday evenings and for Sunday lunch, VMF consistently features in TripAdvisor's top 10 Birmingham restaurants. [www.avhe.co.uk/vmf-restaurant-birmingham](http://www.avhe.co.uk/vmf-restaurant-birmingham)

Birmingham is 90 minutes from London by train.

National Cycling Centre, Manchester, north-west England

Very few top-class sporting venues allow newcomers to use their facilities, but that is exactly what is on offer at Britain's first Olympic velodrome, where the nation's current cycling success began. While Sir Chris Hoy and Laura Trott are regular users of the wooden track, taster sessions give riders of any ability the chance to try the distinctive banked circuit. Book one of the centre's hour-long introductory courses to learn how to race in style. [www.nationalcyclingcentre.com](http://www.nationalcyclingcentre.com)

Manchester is two hours from London by train.
The Ageas Bowl, Hampshire, south-east England

Since it opened in 2001, the home of Hampshire County Cricket Club has been setting new standards in sport hospitality, hosting international as well as domestic fixtures through the summer season. A key part of the complex is the on-site Hilton Hotel that includes suites with balconies that offer views of the pitch. Away from the cricket, you can also make use of the Spa or Beefy's steakhouse, launched by one of Britain's best-loved cricketers, Sir Ian Botham. An 18-hole golf course set amid some challenging lake features is due to open in 2016. www.ageasbowl.com

The Ageas Bowl is a short taxi ride from Hedge End station, 90 minutes from London by train.

EIS, Sheffield, central north England

The English Institute of Sport in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, is one of the country's premier athletics venues, hosting indoor competitions that attract international stars. Yet the complex is also open for the general public to use its professional-quality facilities, with plenty of coaching sessions to boot. You can try your hand at anything from boxing and basketball to diving and gymnastics, with lessons tailored for novices to improve their fitness and coordination. www.sivltd.com/eiss

Sheffield is two and a half hours from London by train.

Hampden Park, Glasgow, Scotland

Scottish football's national stadium also includes the Scottish Football Museum, one of the most impressive displays dedicated to the sport anywhere. The museum tells the story of how the country became obsessed with the game and went on to influence its development elsewhere, through thousands of exhibits spread across 14 galleries. The Scottish Football Hall of Fame pays tribute to such giants of the game as Kenny Dalglish and Denis Law, while a tour of the ground even includes a chance to hear the infamous Hampden Roar. www.scottishfootballmuseum.org.uk

Glasgow is a 75 minute flight from London.

Millennium Stadium, Cardiff, Wales

The headquarters of Wales's favourite sport of rugby union - and an impressive venue for stadium concerts - is also among the nation's most iconic buildings, so naturally a tour of the imposing structure can be as memorable as watching an international match or your favourite music act in concert. Learn about cutting-edge features such as its synthetic/grass pitch and fully retractable roof, explore the normally closed-off home changing room and, if you are lucky, take in a training session or rehearsal. Tours are generally available throughout the week, apart from match and event days. www.millenniumstadium.com

Cardiff is about two hours from London by train.
Lough Erne, Enniskillen, Northern Ireland

This modern resort is the most luxurious place in the province to enjoy a round of golf. Set on a peninsula between two lakes, Northern Ireland's 2014 hotel of the year offers gorgeous views and an authentic Thai spa. As well as providing hazards for the golf course, you can take advantage of a wide range of aquatic activities. Learn the art of fly fishing for pike or salmon with expert instructors or try all kinds of water sports from windsurfing and water-skiing to canoeing and sailing. [www.lougherneresort.com](http://www.lougherneresort.com)

Lough Erne is a two hour drive from Belfast.

Run, jump, cycle, relax! Take a sporting holiday in Britain

For sports fans that want to follow their teams or those that prefer to get active, Britain has an incredible variety of sporting holidays on offer. Hone your own golfing technique with top professionals or encourage children's participation at a football academy. You can even see the glorious countryside from a different angle.

Get some coaching

If you prefer improving your own skills to watching prime exponents in action, you can take your pick of the residential coaching holidays on offer. Since its founding in 1999, the James Andrews School of Golf has received global recognition, including being voted Golf Today magazine's top residential school. The organisation runs two sites, at Woodbury Park, Devon, south-west England, and Sedlescombe, East Sussex, south-east England, with courses aimed at beginner, intermediate and expert levels in a fun and relaxed atmosphere. [www.golfschool.co.uk](http://www.golfschool.co.uk)

Some of Britain's most sublime tennis courts are found at south-east England's Devonshire Park, East Sussex, home to the Eastbourne International, a fixture on the ATP and WTA circuits. You can also receive top-class coaching there, with residential packages provided by Active Away, a tennis holiday provider that caters for singles and couples. Eastbourne is a traditional seaside resort that boasts some of the Britain's sunniest weather. [www.activeaway.com](http://www.activeaway.com)

It is called the sport of kings, but anyone can learn how to play at Ascot Park Polo Club in Chobham, Surrey, south-east England. Its Discover Polo Package is the ideal starting point for those wanting to learn the basics of the game and covers riding ponies, use of the stick and rules of the game. Even non-riders can take part in their first game, or 'chukka', within one session. [www.polo.co.uk/learn-to-play.html](http://www.polo.co.uk/learn-to-play.html)

If you want to learn how to sail, why not stay on a boat to get the most out of the experience? This is exactly what's on offer with Classic Sailing, a company that teaches timeless skills on historic craft or exact replicas of traditional designs, from compact trawlers to elegant schooners. One of their courses is a great way to meet new people,
learn how to sail and view the breathtaking coastline of places like Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. A fleet of craft is based in Cornwall, operating out of the sailor's paradise of St Mawes, south-west England. [www.classic-sailing.co.uk](http://www.classic-sailing.co.uk)

### Cycling, swimming and more

Keen cyclists, meanwhile, can join a tour with the [Carter Company](http://www.the-carter-company.com), which shows groups Britain's hidden gems, including a secret traffic-free route in the rolling countryside of west England's Cotswolds and remote tracks in the Scottish Outer Hebrides islands. With guided tours and self-guided itineraries to suit all levels of fitness, along the way you will enjoy fine landscapes, but also learn about history, culture and cuisine. Its Scotland Grand Tour includes visits to a whisky distillery, while the Highlands & Hebrides route links to the life and dramatic times of Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Wild swimming – taking a dip in seas, lakes or rivers, rather than artificial pools – is having a moment. [SwimTrek](http://www.swimtrek.com) takes care of any safety fears and organisational hassles by offering carefully designed tours with experienced guides, escort boats and quality accommodation. The company has found perfect spots for intrepid water-lovers all over the British Isles, including a thrilling experience at the site of the world's third largest whirlpool, the imposing Gulf of Corryvreckan between the islands of Jura and Scarba off Scotland's west coast. More gentle trips include a dip in the River Thames or a visit to southern England's lovely Jurassic Coast, including a swim under iconic Durdle Door.

[www.swimtrek.com](http://www.swimtrek.com)

Or you can take the reins and let a horse take the strain. This is a perfect means to explore the rugged landscape of Dartmoor, south-west England, one of the country's last remaining wildernesses – a region with plenty of secrets and stories to tell. [Liberty Trails](http://liberty-trails.com) ensures you do this in style, with luxury accommodation, small groups led by local guides, and extra activities such as falconry and vintage car tours. A two-day War Horse ride, meanwhile, takes you to the stunning locations used for the film of that name.

[http://liberty-trails.com](http://liberty-trails.com)

### Doing it for the kids

Draw children's attention away from their tablets and phone screens; Britain's idyllic countryside can inspire them to put them down. For watersports and more, head to unspoilt Fermanagh Lakelands, a network of waterways in the south-west of Northern Ireland. [Share Discovery Village](http://www.sharevillage.org) offers a range of accommodation options, including full-board and self-catering, and a wealth of aquatic activities from kayaking to power boating. Inland, the likes of archery and climbing are among the pursuits available.

[www.sharevillage.org](http://www.sharevillage.org)

An especially daring treat involves taking on the high-octane descents of Wales' white waters in a spectacular natural environment. [Whitewater Active](http://whitewateractive.com) provides rafting facilities in the steep gorge of the River Dee at Llangollen, north Wales. Experience the Serpents Tail and Campsite Weir with dedicated instructors on hand for excursions in rafts, canoes
or kayaks. Gorge walks, abseiling and rock climbing are also on offer to add variety, and
can be just as thrilling. [http://whitewateractive.co.uk](http://whitewateractive.co.uk)

A sporting break is a great way to encourage fitness and confidence. What better location
to do that than following in the footsteps of David Beckham? He is just one young player to
have benefited from expert coaching at Britain's first football school, the **Bobby Charlton
Soccer and Sports Academy** in Manchester, north-west England, which has built up 36
years of experience. Boys and girls who want to bend it like Beckham (as the film and
musical aspires to) are welcome from ages 8-18, with residential facilities and
extracurricular activities available at its Parrswood Campus in the suburb of Didsbury.
[www.bcssa.co.uk](http://www.bcssa.co.uk)

### Horse-back adventures

Mount a trusty steed and experience Britain's beautiful and diverse scenery from the saddle. You can explore
the beaches, moors, lakes and forests of Britain, whether it’s on a beginner’s gentle pony trek or a
thrilling adventure holiday galloping cross-country.

#### Beaches

Miles and miles of isolated sandy beaches around Britain's coastline make for spectacular horse-riding.

Gallop along Holkham Beach, that lies within the Norfolk Coast countryside in eastern England (used as a location in *Shakespeare in Love*), or, when the tide's out, along a mile of sand at Druidston Haven in Pembrokeshire, west Wales.

[www.holkham.co.uk/html/localguide_horseriding.html](http://www.holkham.co.uk/html/localguide_horseriding.html), [www.noltonstables.com](http://www.noltonstables.com)

Embark on an intrepid adventure on clifftop rides above Dorset’s Studland Beach, team a
ride with birdwatching along the ‘singing sands’ of Lunan Bay on the dramatic coastline of
east Scotland (home to red-backed shrikes, rough-legged buzzards and hoopoes), or race
along the white beaches on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne in Northumberland, north-east
England. And after vigorous rides, there's no better way to cool down than in dip in the

#### Moors

From the sweeping southern English moors of Dartmoor and Exmoor in Devon to the wild
rugged beauty of the north Yorkshire moors in northern England (all of which are National
Parks), these wide open spaces are an open invitation to trek, canter or gallop. The gentle
slopes and valleys of the moors lend themselves perfectly to the beginner rider, while
experienced riders will enjoy thundering across their remote wilderness.

[www.spiritofexmoor.com](http://www.spiritofexmoor.com), [www.exmoor-riding.co.uk](http://www.exmoor-riding.co.uk)

And what better way to refresh yourself during a ride than with a stop-off in a country pub;
Dartmoor-based Babeny Stables, for example, offers a 90-minute ride that stops halfway
for an hour’s pub lunch, before you head back on another 90-minute ride. During the
summer months these rides are also available in the evenings. In fact, many pubs on Dartmoor welcome horse riders, providing tie rails or paddocks, water for your horses, and convenient picnic tables from which you can watch them. www.babenystables.co.uk, www.dartmoorhorseriding.co.uk

The North York Moors offer more than 800km of bridleways, with new ones added over the last few years, including the former Scarborough to Whitby railway line. And with plenty of pretty small towns and villages in the National Park offering accommodation in charming bed and breakfasts, or within picturesque country house hotels along the way, it’s easy to explore the moors on horseback for several days – a horse-rider’s paradise. www.yorkshireholidays.com/horse-riding-and-pony-trekking-in-north-york-moors

Mountains

For breathtaking views from up high, Britain’s mountains make for some extraordinary riding experiences. Cairngorms National Park in Scotland has many riding centres dotted around; and where better to go trekking than in the place where pony trekking is said to have started, in the Scottish Highlands (sturdy Highland ponies worked alongside stalkers, carrying deer off the hill). Many of Scotland’s trekking paths were created centuries ago and were originally cattle droving roads; today these rough tracks still cross the open moors and high passes so that riders can experience some of Scotland's stunning scenery. http://visitcairngorms.com/horseriding.html, www.visitscotland.com/see-do/activities/horse-riding

The more mountainous regions are not solely for the highly skilled rider. You'll find riding schools and stables that cater for the novice rider as well as the more experienced. Cantref Pony Trekking Centre in the Brecon Beacons, south Wales, for example, offers 20-minute rides for children in its riding school, takes groups out across its farm with views of the Brecon Beacons and the Black Mountains, while experienced riders can venture up into the Brecon Beacons themselves. http://ridingcentre.cantref.com, www.visitwales.com/things-to-do/activities/horse-riding

Forests

It’s easy to be inspired to jump on horseback when you see New Forest Ponies roaming the New Forest in Hampshire, south-east England - there are more than 3,000 of them. While these ponies are wild (in the sense that they graze freely), there are plenty of opportunities to experience the New Forest’s flora and fauna on horseback, witness indigenous wildlife on the way, and check out the country pubs, www.newforestponies.org.uk, www.newforest.gov.uk/visitors/activities/horse-riding
via the numerous riding schools in the area. [www.thenewforest.co.uk/activities/stables.aspx](http://www.thenewforest.co.uk/activities/stables.aspx)

You can also encounter impressive forest scenery on horseback for an entire holiday: Mount Pleasant Riding and Trekking Centre in County Down, Northern Ireland (around 40 minutes outside of Belfast), organises horse-riding excursions through the picturesque trees and shrubs of Castlewellan Forest Park, home to the National Aboretum and Castlewellan Lake. [www.mountpleasantcentre.com](http://www.mountpleasantcentre.com)

**City Parks**

Can you imagine yourself cantering along, surrounded by beautiful greenery, and yet still find that you're in the heart of one of the world’s biggest cities? Hyde Park in central London turns this image into reality. Rotten Row in London's Hyde Park - one of the Royal Parks - has been an equestrian venue for 300 years, and played host to equestrian events during the Olympic Games in 2012. Hyde Park Stables offers both horse and pony riding, and visitors can choose a fun ride, an arena ride, or horse-riding lessons. Trot alongside the tranquil Serpentine Lake, while marvelling that you're still in the centre of a capital city. [www.hydeparkstables.com](http://www.hydeparkstables.com), [www.ridinginlondon.com](http://www.ridinginlondon.com)

The largest of the Royal Parks, Richmond Park – only 30 minutes outside of central London – is said to have been popular with Queen Victoria as a riding location, and it remains so today, with riders enjoying the scenic bridlepaths that afford views of deer grazing as they canter along. Wimbledon Common, which also lies about 30 minutes south-west of central London, is also an ideal spot for horse-riding, with more than 17 miles of horse-riding trails through woodland and heath. There are many stables in both Richmond Park and Wimbledon Common, including Kingston Riding Centre and Wimbledon Village Stables, and you’ll find courses and packages catering for every skill level. [www.kingstonridingcentre.com](http://www.kingstonridingcentre.com), [www.wvstables.com](http://www.wvstables.com)

**Dedicated horse-riding holidays**

Plan a weekend break or entire holiday on horseback with specially created horse-riding packages. Equestrian Escapes caters for all ages and abilities and offers packages in some of the most beautiful areas of Britain, including Cheshire in the north-west, Devon, Somerset and Cornwall in the south-west, Shropshire in central England, Yorkshire in the north of England, and London and Wales. Choose from farmhouse breaks, spa hotel breaks, dressage breaks and even a ‘horses and chocolate’ break! [www.equestrian-escapes.com](http://www.equestrian-escapes.com)

Fans of the hit film *War Horse* can experience the magnificent locations used during the filming on Dartmoor in Devon, south-west England. Organised by Liberty Trails, the War Horse Ride is for accomplished riders. Views of open grasslands, granite tors, rocky outcrops, stone circles and standing stones are ubiquitous during the three-night trip, where you will also ride past the isolated Grade II-listed building used during filming as the Narracott family's farmhouse. [www.libertytrails.co.uk](http://www.libertytrails.co.uk)

Trans Wales Trails takes riders (although not complete beginners) on trail-riding holidays that almost cross the length and breadth of Wales, from the Black Mountains to the Irish Sea. Including seven nights’ accommodation en route, you’ll be
able to explore some of the most stunning countryside in Britain.  
www.transwales.demon.co.uk

Admire the beauty of north-west England’s Lake District riding a heavy horse breed – Clydesdale, Shire and Ardennes horses. Cumbrian Heavy Horses organises horse-riding experiences for different abilities, with steadier mounts available for beginners. The location you’ll be riding in – in the foothills of Black and White Combe, a few miles from the Irish Sea coast and in the boundaries of the Lake District National Park, means you’ll feel like you’re mountaineering on horseback! www.cumbrianheavyhorses.com

**Britain’s most famous & historic sportsgrounds**

Be it the home of golf, cricket, tennis or bog-snorkelling, Britain is replete with legendary sports venues. So why not visit some of them? Take a guided tour, or tee off yourself.

Home to the FA Cup final and England football team since 2007, **Wembley Stadium**’s £800million rebuild heralded the incorporation of its iconic, Norman Foster-designed arch. Available all week, tours of this 90,000-seater London behemoth take in the changing rooms and players’ tunnel, plus allow visitors to climb 107 steps up to the Royal Box, and lift a replica FA Cup. Alternatively, book an exclusive ‘VIP Access All Areas’ experience to enjoy a privately-guided tour, or purchase one of Wembley Way’s stones and own a permanent piece of Britain’s largest stadium.  
www.wembleystadium.com

Sometimes nicknamed The Cabbage Patch – after the land’s original, humble purpose – and over a century old, London’s **Twickenham Stadium** is the planet’s largest rugby-union-devoted stadium, and will host the Rugby World Cup final in autumn 2015. Including admission to the World Rugby Museum (£8 entry otherwise), in which fans can relive iconic moments on interactive screens, tours (available Tuesday-Sundays) also explain how **Swing Low, Sweet Chariot** became the English team’s anthem during a 1988 match. Allow time to browse the Rugby Store for shirts and souvenirs.

www.englandrugby.com/twickenham

With its strict dress code, strawberries, Pimms and lush green lawns, **Wimbledon** is a world-famous symbol of the British summer. Located in a leafy south-west London suburb, the club’s annual July Championships have witnessed some of tennis’s greatest matches, and remains most players’ holy grail. Centre Court – labelled “the cradle of our sport” by world number-one Novak Djokovic earlier this year – is the hub, but make sure to wander the buzzing grounds and watch big-screen matches from boisterous Henman Hill. Outside of the tournament, tours of the Lawn Tennis Museum and Centre Court tours are available daily. www.wimbledon.com
The ‘home of cricket’, **Lord’s** also possesses the world’s oldest sporting museum. Dating back to 1814, the central London test-match ground has a series of celebrated features such as the Long Room, the honours board, the unique slope and Old Father Time, a spindly weather vane. Behind-the-scenes tours include all those, as well as The Ashes. This small terracotta urn dates back to 1882: after Australia defeated England, the Sporting Times printed a mock obituary to English cricket, concluding that “the body will be cremated and the ashes taken to Australia”. Thus the legendary Test series, which takes place in Britain during summer, was born. [www.lords.org](http://www.lords.org)

One of the Formula 1 season’s most established circuits, **Silverstone** has hosted the British Grand Prix since 1948, as well as superbike, touring car, MotoGP and even truck-racing events. It’s located close to Northampton in central England, a 45-minute train-ride from London, and offers extensive visitor experiences - including skid control tutorials, the chance to drive an F1-like single-seater car and once-a-month Track Days (mostly Saturdays and Mondays), when you can do laps in your own humble car. [www.silverstone.co.uk](http://www.silverstone.co.uk)

It might hold fewer than a thousand spectators, but that hasn’t stopped northern England’s **Crucible Theatre** becoming the mecca of international snooker. Found in Sheffield, a lively, culture-filled Yorkshire town two hours from London by train, the intimate, protected space has hosted the World Championships every April since 1977. That fortnight aside, it reverts to more traditional theatre, putting on regular local and touring productions. [www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk](http://www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk)

While the neighbouring Millennium Stadium has taken over Wales’s international matches since 1997, the venerable **Cardiff Arms Park** remains a classic rugby union venue, synonymous with the sport and a pilgrimage sight for purists. Not only did it stage the Dragons’ home matches for 113 years, but it was where the practice of anthem-singing before international sporting clashes began: in response to New Zealand’s fearsome Haka dance, Welsh players started reciting *Hen Wlad fy Nhadau*, the crowd joined in and a tradition was born. The Arms Park now puts on Cardiff RFC games and concerts, and will spend autumn as Cardiff’s Rugby World Cup fanzone. [www.cardiffrfc.com](http://www.cardiffrfc.com)

None of Scotland’s 550-links challenges have more repute than the Old Course at **St Andrews**, the club labelled the ‘Home of Golf’. Grand-slam competition The Open is sporadically held here every few years - including July 2015 - and six other tournaments take place annually. In between, mortals can play on the hallowed Old Course year-round; although, with the required handicap of 24 for men and 36 for women, a Golf Academy session might first be required. The British Golf Museum offers additional distraction, while
the Himalayas is a professional-level 18-hole putting course. Edinburgh is 50 minutes away by train. www.standrews.com

It might be a few years back now, but when BBC Radio 5 Live conducted a 2002 poll to find Britain's favourite sports venue, the result was decisive: Celtic Park received some 60% of the vote. Scotland's largest football stadium and the 60,000-seat home ground of Glasgow's Celtic side, 'Paradise', as locals call it, is still particularly famed for its feverish intensity: none other than Lionel Messi declared it had "the best atmosphere in Europe" after Barcelona visited for a Champion's League match. Tours are available at set times daily (including matchdays), with bespoke private and family options. www.celticfc.net

A tiny wool-mill town in mid-Wales, Llanwrtyd Wells makes an unlikely sporting venue. Yet this is where August's annual and hugely-popular World Bog Snorkelling Championship has been contested since 1985. Cheered on by rowdy spectators, entrants complete two lengths of a 55-metre watery peat trench without using hand strokes. The town also stages the Man Vs Horse Marathon every June, a madcap affair in which runners race horseback-riders over 22 miles. Both spectacles were dreamt up by landlord Gordon Green and a few regulars at the town's still-open Neuadd Arms hotel, pub and brewery. Cardiff is three hours away by train. www.visitmidwales.co.uk

Britain specialises in legendary horse-racing courses. There's Aintree in Liverpool, north-west England, where the annual Grand National steeplechase is held in April. There's Newmarket, in Suffolk, east England, boasting the National Horseracing Museum and July's champagne-filled Moet & Chandon Festival. And there's Ascot, the venue for the fabled Royal Ascot festival in June, a British social-calendar standout renowned as much for its extravagant Ladies Day hats as the multi-million Gold Cup flat race. Ascot is a 45-minute train-ride from London Waterloo. Check each course's website for meeting dates, or to book private tours of Newmarket. aintree.thejockeyclub.co.uk, newmarket.thejockeyclub.co.uk, www.ascot.co.uk

With the major recent success of Darren Clarke, Graeme McDowell and, particularly, Rory Mcllroy, Northern Irish golf has become world-famous. Hugging the northern Causeway Coast - an hour’s drive from Belfast, overlooked by a ruined castle and affording scenic views of Scotland’s Isle of Islay - Royal Portrush is the only Northern Ireland club to have been chosen for The Open, and will do so again soon courtesy of its feted Dunluce Links course. Visitors can play that, the easier Valley Links or both all year, seven days a week, with no handicap requirements. www.royalportrushgolfclub.com

Stay and play – hotels with sporting activities
Keeping fit and active while on holiday has never been easier. Plenty of Britain’s hotels and resorts include sports and leisure facilities as an integral part of their offering. We've
highlighted a selection, where you can enjoy sports activities to your heart’s content, before enjoying the rest of a hotel’s facilities.

**Good for...all-weather sports**

**Isle of Eriska Hotel, Spa & Island, Oban, west Scotland**

Views of the picturesque Lismore Island and Scotland’s scenic west coast are bound to encourage guests to exercise outdoors at the five-star Isle of Eriska hotel – after all, there’s a golf course, mountain biking (hire bikes from the hotel), clay pigeon shooting, croquet, countless watersports options including sailing, kayaking and fishing to make the most of. Exercise fans can keep up the good work whatever the weather though, with the hotel’s dedicated Indoor Sports Hall.

Open year round, guests can hire whatever sports equipment is required from the hotel for tennis, table tennis, badminton, five-a-side football and bowls. Whether you choose to exercise indoors or outdoors in the hotel’s 300 acres of ground, there’s always a roaring fire in the hall to relax in front of every day of the year.

[www.eriska-hotel.co.uk](http://www.eriska-hotel.co.uk)

**Good for...action and adventure**

**De Vere Slaley Hall, Northumberland, north-east England**

Whether you fancy rolling down hills in a giant plastic orb, zipping around stunning moorland on speedy quadbikes, or ‘eliminating’ opponents on a paintball adventure, De Vere Slaley Hall offers a diverse range of sports activities. Its location in 1,000 acres of moorland also makes the hotel ideally situated for bracing country walks, getting behind the wheel of 4x4 offroad driving, taking a fun ‘stroll’ on a Segway Safari, or hitting the target with a spot of archery. And, if you want even more action, there’s always the challenge of two championship-standard golf courses on site.

The hotel itself lies within an elegant Edwardian mansion that offers eateries Hadrian’s Brasserie and the Duke’s Grill in which to wind down after a day’s sporting adventure...after a trip to relax in its spa and indoor pool of course.

[www.qhotels.co.uk/our-locations/slaley-hall](http://www.qhotels.co.uk/our-locations/slaley-hall)

**Good for...on-site watersports centre**

**The Lensbury, Middlesex, south-east England**

Kayaks, canoes, sailing dinghies, motor boats, sculling boats - four-star resort The Lensbury has got the lot. Thanks to its location on the banks of
the River Thames, its dedicated Watersports Centre is able to offer guests a rich variety of water-bound courses and clubs. In addition to its Watersports Centre, it has two heated indoor swimming pools, 19 tennis courts and two squash courts. There’s an extensive gym with a wide range of classes on offer, including yoga, pilates, tai chi and latin and ballroom dancing, or simply stroll around the hotel’s 25 acres of landscaped grounds and admire the property’s 1930s architecture.

www.lensbury.com

If you like a bit of zumba - or even some Bokwa or Kangoo Jumps - the Vale Resort offers it all

Good for...quirky fitness classes

Vale Resort, near Cardiff, south Wales

Although just 15 minutes’ drive from the centre of Wales’ capital, Cardiff, the four-star Vale Resort is tucked away in 650 acres of Welsh countryside, a perfect environment for sport and fitness fans. The resort offers an extensive menu of exercise classes, with more than 80 on offer each week. These incorporate the more unusual offerings of Bokwa (a dance-based class mapping out shapes of letters and numbers in a dance routine), Kangoo Jumps (where you bounce your way to fitness wearing Kangoo Jumps boots - there’s even a class for kids) and combat fit. If that’s not enough to raise the heart rate, check out its squash and tennis courts, indoor pool, large gymnasium, two championship golf courses and action adventure activities such as wind surfing, abseiling and off-road driving. And you might be lucky enough to see a Premiership football star arrive - several teams have used the resort’s FIFA-standard football pitches for training sessions.

www.vale-hotel.com

Good for...year-round tennis

Stoke Park Country Club, Spa & Hotel, Buckinghamshire, south England

As host of The Boodles Challenge – the international tennis exhibition that takes place in June before the Wimbledon tennis championships, and which has attracted Novak Djokovic, David Ferrer and Tomas Berdych to play – Stoke Park serves up a treat for tennis fans (the dates for next year’s Boodles Challenge are 21-25 June 2016). Located around half an hour’s drive outside London and only seven miles from Heathrow, the five-star resort is home to 13 tennis courts, including indoor, all-weather and grass courts, all available year-round, apart from when tournaments take place.

And if guests prefer hitting balls with clubs rather than racquets, they might like to try out the hotel’s 27-hole Championship golf course or make use of its all-weather golf practice facilities at its Swing Studio; view your swings immediately on plasma screens during an interactive golf lesson.

www.stokepark.com
Good for... catching a wave

The Marine in Thurso, in the very north of Scotland.

Run by a friendly couple, luxury B&B The Marine in Thurso is stylish, comfortable and well kitted out, with some incredible views over the sea. Don't just look at it though - Thurso is famous for its huge breaks, and big waves, favoured by serious surfers. The Marine is also well located for visiting John O' Groats, Orkney, the Castle of Mey and for touring the dramatic north coast. Eat at nearby pub The Holborn.

www.themarinethurso.co.uk

Good for... full-scale activity breaks

Crieff Hydro, Perthshire, east Scotland

An hour's drive from Glasgow lies a resort that has enough leisure facilities within it to please even the most ardent of sports enthusiasts!

Although the hotel was built in the Victorian era, its choice of sports is thoroughly modern. Its Turret Trail tree-top ropes course adventure takes you across rope bridges and high wires, and flying along zip lines; this activity is also available for children.

Continue that adrenaline rush with a game of five-a-side football at the indoor football pitches located in the resort's Melville Hall, which are open daytime and evening. Alternatively shoot some hoops on the indoor basketball courts, serve up aces on the indoor tennis courts, or jump on horseback and ride across the 900-acre estate.

Travelling in a large group? The resort can organise a mini Highland Games where you can take your chance at the caber toss, haggis hurl, welly throw, dog and duck herding and Highland dancing. Kilt is optional!

www.crieffhydro.com

Good for... luxury nautical encounters

Spitbank Fort, The Solent, Hampshire – south-east England

The sporting action begins before you even arrive at this private island that comes with its own rooms, restaurants, boat charters and full crews, all for exclusive use – experience thrills and spills on board a high-speed boat from Portsmouth's Royal Clarence Marina, as it takes you to your accommodation.

Originally built during the Victorian period as a further line of defence against possible naval attack, the fort is now about luxurious accommodation right in the heart of the sea – eight of the previous gun emplacements have been redesigned as bedroom suites, all of which, naturally, come with sea views. A few steps from the rooms, guests can board either
a speedy RIB ride to the Isle of Wight to enjoy its attractions, or simply enjoy an exciting
spin around the Solent. There are whole-day sailing itineraries aboard racing yachts, but if
guests prefer to stay land bound they can enjoy a spot of fishing from the fort itself.

www.spitbankfort.com

Good for...golf treats

Lough Erne Resort, Enniskillen, Northern Ireland

Famed for its Nick Faldo-designed championship golf course and championship Castle Hume golf course, the Lough Erne resort - under two hours’ drive from Belfast - is designed with the dedicated golfer in mind. Even to the point that its Thai Spa has created a variety of treatments designed for golfers, including the ‘Golfers’ Tonic’.

The views from the golf courses alone should do plenty to relax golfers and other guests alike. The resort is situated on a private 600-acre peninsula between Lower Lough Erne and Castle Hume Lough (a ‘lough’ is a ‘lake’ in Ireland), and its waterfront location means hotel residents can also enjoy fishing. As it’s also in the heart of the Fermanagh Lakelands, a whole host of watersports, as well as cycling, caving, deer-stalking and horse riding activities are close by.

www.lougherneresort.com

Accessible Sport

The success of the London Paralympics in 2012 saw a steady increase in the range of disabled accessible activities available around the country. Whether you want to ski, sail or zip-wire through the air, there is an association, club or organisation that can help.

Surf the Waves

On the beautiful Welsh coast in the pretty town of Mumbles (around one hour's drive west of Cardiff), Surfability offers individual or group lessons to people with all levels of disability. A tandem surfboard allows first-timers to experience wave-riding alongside an experienced surfer, while beach and sea-friendly wheelchairs enable physically handicapped visitors to get into the water with ease.

www.surfabilityukcic.org

Set sail in Scotland

Adventures Unlimited is based in the dramatically beautiful Highlands of Scotland, close to the city of Inverness (eight hours by train from London Euston, or three hours' drive north
of Edinburgh) and offers a wide range of activities, including canoeing and kayaking on Loch Ness, sailing on the Caledonian canal and double kayaks, which can be shared by disabled and able-bodied participants. They can also offer archery and climbing/abseiling in partnership with local organisations. Activities can be booked for groups or individuals, and they offer short-breaks and kayaking/canoeing touring weekends, as well as half or one-day taster sessions. www.adventuresunlimited

Cycling in the Forest

Thetford Forest in Norfolk, eastern England, is a great place to discover the British countryside on two wheels, and Bike Art Thetford has a range of bicycles to hire that offer disabled visitors the chance to enjoy gliding up and down the cycle-paths that criss-cross between the trees. Equipment includes tricycles with a back platform for a wheelchair, with an additional seat for passive passengers, tandem and semi-recumbent trikes. Equipment should be reserved before arriving at the Park. Thetford Forest is around two and half hours’ drive from London. www.bikeartthetford.co.uk

White-Knuckle Ride

The thrill of hurtling over white-water rapids is one that can be enjoyed by everybody. The National White Water Centre, on the eastern edge of the Snowdonia National Park in north Wales (around five hours’ drive from London) has a specially-designed seat that can be put into any of its rafts, with quick-release straps in case of emergency. Any disabled visitors have a specially-assigned member of crew in the raft, to ensure their safety. Back on dry land, there is a ramped entrance, disabled changing room and an accessible viewing balcony to watch the other rafts whizz by. www.ukrafting.co.uk

Multi-Activity Days

Whether you want to tackle a high-ropes course, have a go at rock-climbing, or become Robin Hood for an hour, firing arrows from your bow, the Calvert Trust centre at Kielder Water in Northumberland, north east England, will have an activity to suit. The Calvert Trust is an organisation dedicated to ‘challenging disability through outdoor adventure’ and offers drop-in days (no need to pre-book) and short-breaks, where you can try anything from zip-wiring to abseiling or orienteering. Kielder Water is around five hours’ drive from London. www.calvert-trust.org.uk

Wheelchair tennis will be played for the first time at Wimbledon in 2016, and the Tennis Foundation offers Disability Tennis Camps at locations throughout Britain, through the year. Different courses, which last for one day, cater for different types of disability, including wheelchair tennis, visually-impaired and deaf tennis camps. Coaches take participants through a range of activities to help them learn the basics of the game, before organising informal competitions. Disability Tennis Camps can be booked through the Lawn Tennis Association's website, which also has a searchable database of tennis courts. www.lta.org.uk/Tennis-Foundation/Home

Game, Set and Match
Saddle Up

London might not seem the most obvious place to try horse riding, but the Lee Valley Riding Centre in east London, which boasts two floodlit outdoor riding arenas and an indoor area, offers half-hour sessions for disabled riders, taught by specially trained instructors and volunteers who lead the horses and ponies. Lee Valley Riding Centre is a short taxi ride from Clapton overground train station. More experienced riders can find information on where to ride on the Riding for the Disabled Association's website, which has almost 500 groups dotted around Britain, based at stables and equestrian centres. www.visitleevalley.org.uk, www.rda.org.uk

Take to the Skies

Britain's biggest provider of disabled hangliding, Airways Airsports offers the chance to glide over the gorgeous countryside of the southern Peak District and Derbyshire, (around an hour's drive from Manchester). Tandem tuition using aerotow – where the glider is towed by another aircraft – means getting off the ground is problem free, and the flight will be steered and managed by one of Airways' experienced gliders. Visitors can choose from one-off experience days or a short-course, which teaches the basics of hangliding. The site also has a disable accessible Aviator Cafe, where you can sit and watch the action over coffee and cakes or a hearty lunch. www.airways-airsports.com

Piste Possibilities

Disability Snowsport offers the chance for anyone with a disability, whether physical, learning or sensory, to experience the thrill of skiing or snowboarding, either as a one-off experience or as a series of lessons. Classes take place at six indoor ski slopes around the country, in locations ranging from Braehead in Scotland to Milton Keynes, a one hour drive or train journey north of London). Sit-skiing lessons are available, and lessons can be taken either individually, with a carer or helper, or as part of a group. To ski in real snow on a real mountain, head to the Cairngorms National Park in Scotland (around two and half hours from Edinburgh by car or train) where Disability Snowsport offer lessons for disabled skiers on the Cairngorm Mountain. www.disabilitysnowsport.org.uk

Whizz through the Water

Deep in the heart of the 1,000-year-old New Forest in southern England, Ellingham Water Ski & Wakeboard Club offers the opportunity for disabled visitors to try water-skiing or wakeboarding. The Club, which is based in Ringwood, Hampshire (around 90 minutes from London by train) is part of the British Disabled Waterski and Wakeboard Association, which runs regular 'novice days' between May and October. Both seated and standing skiing are on offer, and there is a range of specially adapted equipment that enables people with a wide range of disabilities to experience the thrill of speeding through the water. www.ellinghamwaterski.co.uk, www.bdwsa.org
**Sports museums in Britain**

You've played it, you've watched it, now delve into its history - if you want to brush up on your knowledge of your favourite sport or simply enjoy browsing through memorabilia, uncover Britain's many sporting achievements through the numerous sports museums across the destination.

**Love Football?**

**National Football Museum, Manchester, north-west England**

The National Football Museum in Manchester has just celebrated its third birthday in the Urbis building in the city centre and, as well as displaying the sport's culture and history for existing fans, it aims to introduce non-fans to the world of football. Exhibits explain how football became 'the people's game' and is a key part of England's heritage and way of life. The museum is home to the country's most extensive football collection, housing more than 140,000 items, including the FIFA Collection. [www.nationalfootballmuseum.com](http://www.nationalfootballmuseum.com)

*How much?: Free*

**Manchester United Museum and Tour, Manchester, north-west England**

As one of the best-known football teams in the world, Manchester United's museum promises historical exhibits and state-of-the-art interactive experiences, and regularly runs successful displays celebrating Manchester United's greatest players (including Denis Law, Sir Bobby Charlton, David Beckham and the famous Class of '92). [www.manutd.com/museum](http://www.manutd.com/museum)

*How much?: £18 for the museum and tour from [www.visitbritainshop.com](http://www.visitbritainshop.com)*

**Arsenal Museum and Stadium Tour, London**

Arsenal players provide the commentary to your stadium tour, whether it's a Legends tour guided by a former player, or a self-guided audio tour. Enjoy exclusive exhibits such as Michael Thomas' boots from Anfield '89, Charlie George's 1971 FA Cup final shirt and Alan Smith's shirt from 1994's European Cup Winners Cup Final.

*How much?: £20 for the museum and tour from [www.visitbritainshop.com](http://www.visitbritainshop.com)*

**Chelsea FC Museum and Stadium Tour, London**

Chelsea's new high-tech museum is now the largest football museum in London, with all manner of interactive gadgetry, games and videos. Visitors will be able to see how Chelsea has evolved on and off the pitch to become one of the biggest football clubs in the Premier League.

*How much?: £17 for the museum and tour from [www.visitbritainshop.com](http://www.visitbritainshop.com)*

**Love rugby?**

**Webb Ellis Rugby Football Museum, Rugby, central England**

As the reported birthplace of the game of rugby, Rugby is naturally home to the Rugby Museum. The museum houses a large collection of rugby memorabilia and artefacts gathered over 160 years. Since 1842, the building the museum is housed in has been at the
centre of rugby ball manufacturing – originally the workshop of William and then James Gilbert, who began a tradition of rugby football manufacture on this site that is carried on by Webb Ellis Ltd. to this day.

http://rugbytowncentre.co.uk/directory/out-about/item/the-james-gilbert-rugby-football-museum

How much?: Free

Millennium Stadium Tours, Cardiff, Wales

In addition to the extensive tours around Wales’ national sporting venue, the iconic Millennium Stadium, there are plans for it to become the permanent home to several distinctive sporting artefacts that are currently housed at the Museum of Welsh Life at St Fagans in Cardiff, showcasing sporting achievements in the home of Welsh rugby.

www.millenniumstadium.com/tours

How much?: The tours cost £10.50 for adult tickets, £7 for children 5-16, under fives free

World Rugby Museum, Twickenham, London

The World Rugby Museum, located in the East Stand of Twickenham Stadium houses 25,000 objects in its permanent galleries that relate to rugby. Kids can take up the challenge of the museum’s new interactive area by testing their skills including speed, strength and kicking prowess, to find out “What Kind of Rugby Player Are You?” You can also go on a tour of the stadium, operated in partnership with the museum - see the royal box, hospitality suites, medical room, players’ tunnel, a breath-taking view of the arena from the top of the stand and take a pitch-side walk.

Until 1 September the World Rugby Museum is also running its exhibition: ‘Lest We Forget - Rugby and the First World War’. Timed to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the death of Ronald Poulton Palmer, England’s Grand-Slam winning captain from the 1914 season, this exhibition is dedicated to the memory of all rugby players who fought and died in the First World War.

www.englandrugby.com/twickenham/world-rugby-museum

How much?: £20 for the museum and stadium tour from www.visitbritainshop.com

Love tennis?

Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum, London

Since Murray took the men’s Wimbledon title in 2013, tennis fever has taken over the country. Learn about the evolution of the game from a garden party pastime to a multimillion-dollar professional sport at the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum. Displays feature treasures from the first Championship in 1877, as well as outfits and racquets from the champions of recent years, while further highlights include a ‘ghost’ of John McEnroe seemingly speaking live from the locker room.
Love golf?

British Golf Museum, St Andrews, Fife, east coast of Scotland

Just steps away from the famous Old Course at St Andrews in Fife you can explore more than 500 years of golfing history at The British Golf Museum, which has reopened this year following a year-long transformation. Learn about the game’s historic origins and golfing pioneers like ‘Old’ Tom Morris and James Braid, through creative exhibitions and multimedia displays.

www.britishgolfmuseum.co.uk

How much?: Adults £7, children under 15 £3, children under five free

Love racing?

National Horseracing Museum, Newmarket, Suffolk, east England

It’s here that you’ll discover all about the early days of racing, its royal origins and the Classic races, through to the thoroughbreds and their owners and trainers and, of course, the jockeys. View the silks worn by Frankie Dettori at Ascot when he achieved his Magnificent Seven, the racing saddle of 19th-century jockey Fred Archer, and the Beacon Course Starting Post, which represents all the posts that have been dotted about Newmarket Heath since the 17th Century, marking the starts and finishes of courses.

www.nhrm.co.uk

How much?: Adult tickets £6.50 children £3.50

The Donington Grand Prix Collection, Derby, central England

Donington is home to the largest showcase of Grand Prix racing cars in the world. Offering four halls and more than 130 exhibits, the Collection illustrates the history of motor sport from the turn of 20th century. Get close to cars driven by the likes of Mansell, Prost and Stewart, plus the largest collection of McLaren and Williams racing cars in the world (outside of their factories) and the only complete collection of Vanwalls.

www.donington-park.co.uk/about-donington/the-donington-grand-prix-collection

How much?: Adult tickets £10; children over six £4; children under six free.

The National Motorcycle Museum, Birmingham, central England

This museum is the largest and most comprehensive motorcycle museum in the world. The museum has a comprehensive collection of bikes through the ages and a selection of machines showing the development of the motorcycle from its early days to the golden years of the 1930s – 1960s, when British motorcycles ‘ruled the world’.

www.nationalmotorcyclemuseum.co.uk

How much?: Adult tickets £8.95. children 5-16 £6.95, under fives free
Brooklands Museum, Weybridge, Surrey, south-east England

Built in 1907, Brooklands became the world's first purpose-built motor-racing circuit and is the birthplace of British motorsport and aviation, home of Concorde and the site of many 20th century engineering and technological achievements. The Museum displays a wide range of Brooklands-related motoring and aviation exhibits, ranging from giant racing cars, motorcycles and bicycles to a fine collection of Hawker and Vickers/ BAC-built aircraft, plus the only Concorde with public access in south-east England.

www.brooklandsmuseum.com

How much?: Adult tickets £11, children £6

Love watersports?

River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, south-east England

Located on the banks of the River Thames, the River & Rowing Museum has three galleries dedicated to the international sport of rowing, rivers and the history of Henley, and contains the largest and most comprehensive collection of oar-powered racing boats in the world, stretching from the Napoleonic Wars to the Olympics of 2004.

http://rrm.co.uk

How much?: Adult tickets £9.50; children £7.50

Museum of British Surfing, Braunton, Devon, south-west England

The museum believes it has the largest and most comprehensive public collection of surfing memorabilia in Europe, and follows a policy of collecting at least one example of each British shaper among its vintage surfboards. Surfing in Britain was recorded as far back as 1890 - find out more about its history at this museum.

www.museumofbritishsurfing.co.uk

How much?: Adult tickets £3, children under 16 free when accompanied by an adult

Love cricket?

Marylebone Cricket Club Museum, Lord’s, London

Though the museum opened its doors to the public in 1953, the museum's collection began in 1864 and spans the full history of cricket, from its emergence as a major sport in the early 18th century to the contemporary Twenty20. A wide range of cricketing memorabilia is on display, including its most famous artefact, the original Ashes urn. The MCC Museum is open year-round, and is a part of the famous Lord’s Tour, a 100-minute guided tour of Lord’s Cricket Ground with behind-the-scenes access.
How much?: Adult tickets cost £7.50, children between 5 - 15 £5

Best natural sports grounds

Sport in Britain isn't just restricted to man-made stadiums, aquatic centres or basketball courts, you know. From far-flung football pitches to epic rock climbs, Mother Nature has provided plenty of beautiful natural sports venues too.

April Fool's Squeeze. Frozen Deep. Bottomless Pit. The Letterbox. Rather than band names or ambitious yoga positions, these are, in fact, the titles of caves in Cheddar Gorge, in south-west England, near to where the eponymous cheese hails from. Guided tours of the gorge, located 15 miles south of Bristol, see headlamp-wearing cavers abseil, traverse, clamber and crawl through the most impressive chambers.

Who needs the Alps? Growing each year, the Scottish ski scene revolves around five centres in the northern Highlands. Among them, Glenshee in the Cairngorms National Park - a two-hour drive north from Edinburgh - is the most sizeable, with 25 miles of runs served by 22 lifts while, 50 miles west and more easily reached via Glasgow, the Nevis Range is the highest in reaching 1,190m. While weekends can see long queues at all, weekdays are uncrowded. The snow is reliable throughout January and February.

A more traditional snowy British pursuit is sledding, be it aboard purpose-made toboggans or something more makeshift, like a tea tray. Beacon Hill ticks the adrenalin box with a steep, twisting 250 metre descent. If you dare look up, there are fine views over nearby Loughborough, which is in central England near to the East Midlands Airport (www.leicscountryparks.org.uk). Sledding is possible inside cities, too - Camp Hill in Liverpool, north-west England, is long, shallow and only a single bus-ride from central Liverpool, for instance. http://liverpool.gov.uk

Pioneered in Wales and best experienced there, coasteering is a thrilling fusion of rock-hopping, shore-scrambling, swell-riding, swimming, caving and cliff-jumping, with heavy doses of wildlife, white water and scenery. There are seven separate places to try it, from the north-western island of Anglesey, where hidden beaches and a huge sea cave are promised, to Wales' own Blue Lagoon, where even ten metre cliff jumps don't upset Britain's friendliest seal population. Both are around a two hour drive from Cardiff.

The destination of Box Hill's prominence in the London 2012 Olympics road race course - the men cycled it nine times, and the women twice - secured its status as Britain's most iconic pedalling challenge, yet the 129-metre gain and average 5% gradient actually render the climb surmountable for cyclists of all levels. Though the zigzagging hairpins lend an alpine feel, the route's actually just outside London (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/box-hill).
Reach it by taking a one-hour train journey from London Waterloo to Dorking, and then cycling an idyllic Surrey countryside loop.

The **Causeway Coast** of Northern Ireland, a 75-minute drive north-west from Belfast, has a well-established **surfing** scene. An abundance of surf schools and shops dominate the lively town of Portrush, either side of which are seven beaches befitting everyone from beginners to world champions. Modern wetsuits have made Northern Irish surfing a year-round industry, with many surfers now preferring the more dramatic swells experienced in winter. [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com).

For an altogether quirkier **surfing** challenge, consider the **Severn Bore**: a natural tidal surge that sweeps up the Severn Estuary in western England. The phenomenon occurs daily, although it only reaches its maximum potential every few years ([www.severn-bore.co.uk](http://www.severn-bore.co.uk)). The world record for a longest continuous surf ride was broken here in 2006, when Steve King rode the Bore for more than nine miles. Nearby Gloucester is one hour by train from Birmingham, and its international airport.

Out in western Scotland's Outer Hebrides islands, remote **Eriskay** received FIFA recognition in 2015 when its sole soccer ground was hailed as one of 'eight remarkable places to play football in the world'. Adorned only with goal frames and white lines, the completely uneven pitch fringes the Atlantic - balls must occasionally fly seawards - and boasts a wonderful wild beauty. One of Eriskay's other claims to fame is being where the **SS Politician** and its 250,000 bottles of whisky shipwrecked in 1941. Fly to Barra from Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen, and then catch a ferry on to Eriskay. [www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk](http://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk)

Although Britain has hundreds of popular rock-climbing locations, few rival central England's Peak District for sheer variety. Options are numerous, but the real A-Lister is **Stanage Edge**, a four-mile cliff stretch culminating in the dramatic Cowper Stone. The Edge is home to Britain's longest rock route, the 5,000m Girdle Traverse. It's also hugely convenient for day-trippers, as the city of Sheffield, two hours by train from London, is just five miles away ([www.visitpeakdistrict.com](http://www.visitpeakdistrict.com)).

The **Skomer Island Marine Conservation Zone** in Pembrokeshire, in west Wales, is one of Britain's diving hotspots. And not just for humans, either: noisy flocks of dive-bombing guillemots and terns also choose to holiday here. Seals come, too, especially to loll on Rye Rocks, while locals around the North Wall cliff include rare gorgonian sea fans, lobsters and fish species galore. One permanent visitor is the Lucy, a perfectly-intact 53-metre wreck. Based in Broad Haven, two hours' drive from Cardiff, the West Wales Diving Company boasts five-star PADI centre accreditation. [www.westwalesdivers.co.uk](http://www.westwalesdivers.co.uk)

While the pursuit's most commonly undertaken in rivers, no route trumps **wild swimming from Durdle Door to Lulworth Cove** in south-west England, and linking two natural wonders. Front-crawl first through the famous rock arch into wide open sea, and follow
the UNESCO-protected Jurassic Coast east past near-vertical cliffs to the perfectly crescent-shaped Cove. The savviest swimmers stow some clothes on the shingle in advance, as it's a long, steep and potentially shivery walk back up the car park (www.lulworth.com). Ten miles east, the town of Weymouth is a three-hour direct train-ride from London Waterloo.

If that sounds a bit arduous, how about a natural swimming tub? Nestling under the cliffs along the north Cornwall coast in south-west England, Bude Sea Pool was created in the 1930s to provide a safe haven for swimmers. At 91 metres long and 45 metres wide, it's large enough to facilitate decent workouts, but slumber's also a viable option: aside from twice-daily top-ups courtesy of the Atlantic Ocean, the basin stays peacefully still. Entrance is free. Bude is a 75-minute drive west from Exeter's airport. www.budeseapool.org

Once a western Scottish slate-mining hub, Easdale Island is now the centre of an entirely different industry: one of its quarries hosts the annual World Stone Skimming Championships every September. Open to everyone, the various disciplines include a team event and the cheekily-named ‘Old Tosser’ competition for veterans. On Saturday night, the Pre-Skim Party promises beer, live music, bouncy castle and a barbecue. Glasgow is a two-to-three-hour drive away. www.stoneskimming.com

At 250 square miles, and hosting walking trails, cycling tracks, around half of England’s native red squirrel population and a vast reservoir popular with waterskiers and anglers, the north west of England’s Kielder Water & Forest Park is a dream outdoor-adventure destination already (www.visitkielder.com). But, what with its Lakeside Way trail being exactly 26 miles long, the ‘working forest’ is able to stage the scenic Kielder Marathon every October, too (www.kieldermarathon.com). Newcastle is just 40 miles south-east.

England’s country rivers are ripe for canoe trips, and none more so than the babbling River Cam. A popular day route involves paddling 13 miles from Chesterton, just north of quaint university city Cambridge, to Ely and its magnificent cathedral, passing locks, pubs and curious ducks as you go (www.canoedaysout.com/trip/145). Hire canoes in Cambridge – an hour by train from London’s Kings Cross – and make sure to avoid race meetings like May’s Bumps (www.scudamores.com). You'll need to obtain an advance licence from the Canal & River Trust. https://canalrivertrust.org.uk

Run around Britain: marathons and more

In April, 40,000 runners descend on the British capital for the annual London Marathon. There are plenty more running events throughout the year all over Britain: explore the nation’s network of running trails and take in some spectacular scenery along the way.

1. Glenariff Forest Park Scenic Trail, County Antrim, Northern Ireland

Level: Easy

This easy, ten-kilometre circular runs through the pristine Glenariff Forest. It passes waterfalls, river gorges and bluebell woods, and takes in far-reaching views over the sea to the Scottish island of Mull. Glenariff is a one-hour drive north of Belfast.

www.discovernorthernireland.com/Glenariff-Forest-Park-Scenic-Trail-P15651
2. The Thames Path, London, England

Level: Easy

Cutting straight through the heart of London, the Thames Path is a 180-mile National Trail that follows the banks of the River Thames. Run the 12-kilometre section between Greenwich and the London Eye to see a selection of the capital's most famous sites, including the Cutty Sark, Tower Bridge and St Paul's Cathedral.

www.nationaltrail.co.uk/thamespath

3. Glentrool Trail, Galloway, Scotland

Level: Easy

Loch Trool lies at the heart of the Galloway Forest Park in the south west of Scotland. This eight-and-a-half-kilometre run circles the loch in an undulating loop that takes in some of southern Scotland's most beautiful scenery. The loch is a three-hour drive from Edinburgh.

www.gallowayforestpark.com

4. Pembrokeshire Coast Path, west Wales

Level: Intermediate

This cliff-top trail through the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park in Wales – a two-hour drive from Cardiff - is 300 kilometres of pure sensory overload. The short section between Fishguard and Pwll Deri offers a thrilling challenge to runners.

www.visitpembrokeshire.com/coastpath

5. Rutland Water, Rutland, central England

Level: Intermediate

A haven for wildlife and runners alike, Rutland Water is a spectacular reservoir surrounded by 4,200 acres of open countryside. It’s set in England’s smallest county, Rutland, a two-hour drive from central London. Runners can follow the 22-kilometre path around the perimeter of the reservoir, and spot tufted ducks and Eurasian widgeons among other avian curiosities.

www.rutlandwater.org.uk

6. Cuckoo Trail, East Sussex, south-east England

Level: Intermediate

This 22-kilometre path follows the line of an old railway through a rural corner of south-east England. It begins in Eastbourne, a quiet coastal town just an hour and a half from London by train, and runs past woodland and quiet villages to the small market town of Heathfield.
7. **Templer Way, Devon, south-west England**

Level: Intermediate

A rolling 28-kilometre route that runs through Dartmoor National Park, in the south-west England county of Devon. It takes in moorland, river valleys and quiet canals before ending in the pretty coastal town of Teignmouth.

[www.dartmoor.co.uk](http://www.dartmoor.co.uk)

8. **Giant’s Causeway, County Antrim, Northern Ireland**

Level: Intermediate-hard

Passing through the ethereal volcanic scenery of Northern Ireland's north coast, this route begins at the windswept seaside village of Portballintrae – a 90-minute drive from Belfast – and winds north to the Giant’s Causeway. Visitors can opt to complete the full route of the Causeway Coast Marathon, or to enjoy a more manageable ten-kilometre circular jog.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway), [www.26extreme.com](http://www.26extreme.com)

9. **Scafell Pike, Cumbria, north-west England**

Level: Hard

England’s highest mountain is surrounded by the awe-inspiring scenery of the Lake District National Park in north-west England. The seven-kilometre route to the top is one of Britain’s most popular fell-running challenges – go it alone, or join in on the Scafell Pike Fell Race in September.

[www.scafellpike.org.uk](http://www.scafellpike.org.uk)

10. **Snowdon Horseshoe, Snowdonia, Wales**

Level: Very hard

Fell runners up for a truly adventurous challenge should tackle the Snowdon Horseshoe, an 11-kilometre circuit that takes in the highest mountain in Wales. It starts at Pen-y-Pass, a four-hour drive north from Cardiff, and traverses a knife-edge ridge to reach Snowdon’s 1,085-metre summit.

[www.eryri-npa.gov.uk](http://www.eryri-npa.gov.uk)

**Take part in a famous British run**

**The London Marathon**

This great British classic is one of the most famous marathons in the world. The 2016 event takes place on 24 April although the entry ballot is now closed. If you live outside of Britain and want to take part in the 2017 event then you can enter through one of the approved tour operators listed on the website.
The Great North Run

The biggest annual sporting event in Britain, this 20-kilometre run circles the city of Newcastle in north-east England. It kicks off on 13 September in 2015; and it’s easy for international entrants to sign up online for next year’s.

www.greatrun.org/great-north-run

Great Scottish Run

Scotland’s biggest half marathon event runs through the heart of Glasgow, a one-hour drive from Edinburgh. This year, more than 20,000 runners are expected to line up at the start line on 3 October. www.greatscottishrun.com

Snowdonia Marathon

Voted the ‘best marathon in the UK’ by Runner’s World magazine, this challenging marathon encircles Snowdon, the highest peak in Wales and a four-hour drive from Cardiff. Registration is now closed for the 2015 event on 24 October.

www.snowdoniamarathon.co.uk

Belfast City Marathon

This internationally acclaimed run takes over the centre of Northern Ireland’s capital city on in May each year. It generally attracts around 3,500 runners, and the day also includes a range of easier events for families.

www.belfastcitymarathon.com

Alfresco fitness in Britain

Join a team of alfresco fitness fans working out in Britain’s parks, castles and rooftops. From yoga in the clouds to 5km runs along the beach, we’ve selected the best outdoor exercise classes to help you keep fit, meet the locals, and see a side of Britain that those travelling without their training kit may not see!

Sweat

Every British Military Fitness instructor has a military PT background, so expect no mercy. A typical session burns 640 calories through a combination of team games, circuits, strength work and running, all delivered with plenty of chat. There are more than 140 venues across Britain, with Holyrood Park in the centre of Edinburgh being one of the top picks. Appropriately, the Scottish capital is home to the annual Edinburgh Military Tattoo, billed as ‘the most spectacular show in the world’, and any training that involves Holyrood’s 251m volcano,

No pain, no gain; prepare to work hard at a British Military Fitness class!
Arthur’s Seat, is sure to make you feel the burn! Sign up for a free trial or buy class passes. [www.britmilfit.com](http://www.britmilfit.com)

Anti-authoritarian types should check out parkrun’s free, timed 5km runs. They take place in 350 outdoor venues around Britain but Northern Ireland’s Portrush parkrun is the first one completely on sand. The soft golden beaches of Portrush are sandwiched between sparkling sea and grass-covered dunes, 1 hour 20 minutes north of Belfast by road. Join the Portrush runners every Saturday at 9.30am, and get insider tips on must-see local attractions at the post-parkrun coffee at 55 Degrees North restaurant. Register and print out your barcode to join. [www.parkrun.org.uk](http://www.parkrun.org.uk)

**Stretch**

One thing you won’t need to stretch in these yoga classes is your neck. The venues have prime views of London’s skyline. Yogasphere’s classes in The View from The Shard put you through your sun salutations with 360-degree views of London. Unsurprisingly, the experience is pricier than your average yoga class, but the cost includes a private viewing session, goodie bags worth more than £100 and mats, And in a classroom 244m above central London with the River Thames snaking below, you really will be levitating to heights other yogis can only dream of! Classes are every Saturday at 8.30am and cost £40. Advance booking only. [www.yogasphere.eu](http://www.yogasphere.eu)

For a less dizzying but equally heady yoga class, head to the world-famous Selfridge’s department store on Oxford Street. Triyoga hold rooftop classes here every Tuesday at 10am. The considerate Triyoga folk have thought of everything, from a cold-pressed juice to scheduling the class to finish in time for brunch! Vintage Salt restaurant transplants a Cornish fishing village to Selfridge’s rooftop, dishing up light salads and grains if you’re feeling virtuous after class, or an unabashedly British G&Tea cocktail if you’re not. Pre-book or take your chance at the door, but book ahead for brunch. [www.triyoga.co.uk](http://www.triyoga.co.uk), [www.selfridges.com](http://www.selfridges.com)

**Sightsee**

Nordic walking is the world’s fastest-growing fitness activity. Scarlett Johansson, Ben Stiller and Adam Sandler are all fans and Britain has fallen for this hot new trend too. It’s kind to joints and muscles, tones the upper and lower body and all you need are poles, but what we love most about Nordic walking is that it combines fitness with sightseeing. Join one of Nordic Walking UK’s holidays or book one of their 3,000+ instructors across Britain at a time and place to suit you. Renowned storyteller and guide Andrew Dugmore will teach you Nordic walking technique along the beaches, cliffs and coves of west Wales’ Pembrokeshire Coastal Path, telling you stories of Celtic saints and ancient stones as you stride. [https://exercise-anywhere.com](https://exercise-anywhere.com), [http://nordicwalking.co.uk](http://nordicwalking.co.uk)

**Rebalance**

Every Tuesday at 8.30am throughout summer, the terrace above Bath Spa’s 2,000-year-old Great Bath fills with people practising the Chinese martial art of tai chi. Life-size
statues of Roman emperors and governors of Britain stand still as class members move fluidly through the tai chi motions, guided by a professional tai chi instructor. It’s a charming twist on the Roman Bath’s original purpose; visitors have sought out Bath Spa’s healthful waters for millennia. Book ahead. Bath Spa, a beautiful UNESCO World Heritage city in south-west England, is around 90 minutes from London by train.

www.visitbath.co.uk

In north-west England, Manchester’s Whitworth gallery – the Art Fund’s Museum of the Year 2015 – holds tai chi classes in the Art Garden every Wednesday at 8.30am. What could be more restorative than doing tai chi surrounded by fine art and sculptures? All that creative energy from great artists including Cezanne, Manet, Rossetti and JMW Turner is sure to flow into you! Yoga classes are also available. Manchester is two hours from London by train. www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk

And for something completely different...

A holiday is a great time to break free of your usual workout and try something new. So how about hula hooping? Your favourite childhood activity is actually incredibly sculpting and, with the likes of Liv Tyler, Emma Stone and Beyoncé doing it, who are we to argue? This is Britain though, so it’s not enough to simply work those abs; you need a view too. The Berkeley hotel has launched London’s first rooftop hula hooping classes, every Wednesday at midday until the end of October. The price is £65 per person (including pool side lunch, complimentary use of the pool and a one of a kind Berkeley hula-hoop, which can be taken home to continue the fun). Book ahead. Classes include lunch, a one-of-a-kind Berkeley hoop and use of the beautiful rooftop pool, all with a panoramic view of Hyde Park and bustling Knightsbridge. Could this be the perfect workout? www.the-berkeley.co.uk

Watersports

Britain's dramatic coastlines and many waterways make it an exciting watersports destination. Surfing, wild swimming and kayaking have never been more popular - and opportunities to get wet and wild are even penetrating the cities. Wake Up Docklands, located in the redeveloped docklands area of east London, offers an unusual opportunity to wakeboard and paddleboard surrounded by glass tower blocks and 19th-century warehouses. www.wakeupdocklands.com/watersports

Surfing

Surfing is well-established in Britain, thanks to the surprisingly varied number of places available to hang ten and catch some breaks. Cornwall, in south-west England, is the best known surf hangout, centred on the town of Newquay, but you can enjoy the sport all over, from Saltburn in
Cleveland, in the north-east of England, to Freshwater West in Pembrokeshire in Wales (www.saltburnbysea.com) (www.visitpembrokeshire.com). And it might surprise some people to know that one of the top surf spots in Britain is at Thurso on the far north coast of Scotland, considered to have some of the best waves in all of Europe (www.thursotown.co.uk).

Also check out Bridlington, a coastal town in Yorkshire (around two hours by train from Leeds) that claims to be where surfing first started in Britain. Its stunning sandy beaches were where two Hawaiian princes, studying in Britain in 1890, first took to the waves with homemade surfboards (www.bridlington.net). Mullaghmore in Northern Ireland is one of the best big wave surfing locations in the world; it was listed by Lonely Planet as one of the Best Spots to Catch a Wave but retains its local feel, accessible only by bus (www.magicseaweed.com/Mullaghmore-Head-Surf-Report/1505). Wales has just opened Surf Snowdonia, a revolutionary world-first inland surf lagoon set in the lush, green Conwy Valley in the lee of the Snowdonia mountains, north Wales (www.surfsnowdonia.co.uk). For surfers who choose to stay dry, there’s the London Surf Film Festival, which takes place in October each year, and the Museum of British Surfing in the southern county of Devon (www.londonsurffilmfestival.com) (www.museumofbritishsurfing.org.uk).

**Wild swimming**

Why restrict yourself to the repetitive lanes of a swimming pool, when you have glorious rivers and lakes to dive into? No wonder this sport is becoming more and more popular in Britain. With the right guide and knowledge, you can swim in lots of different venues including the River Thames, the lakes of the Lake District, the Isles of Scilly, and idyllic islands located just off the far south-west tip of England and off the west coast of Scotland, warmed by the benign effects of the Gulf Stream (www.wildswimming.co.uk). The Waterfall Woods, in the Brecon Beacons National Park in Wales, offer some of the most idyllic waterfall plunge pools in Britain – more than 20 of them, in fact, making them the ideal breaking points from a long forest walk (www.breconbeacons.org).

SwimQuest offers a very different holiday experience – luxury swimming holidays in a range of different destinations around the world, including the UK. Accommodation ranges from hotels to yachts, and trips take place over long weekends or up to a week, with swimming distances from 2.5km to 4km a day. [http://swimquest.uk.com](http://swimquest.uk.com)

Londoners, always reluctant to miss a trick, get their outdoor swimming kicks in the city's popular lidos - most notably, the Serpentine in Hyde Park, which has the oldest swimming club in Britain (www.royalparks.org.uk).

**Sea kayaking**

The west coast of Scotland, along with her islands, makes sea kayaking in this part of the country a breathtaking experience - from sheltered sea lochs to
deserted white sand beaches and the opportunity to stop off at a couple of whisky distilleries along the way. Explore the Knoydart peninsula for example (accessed by a five hour train ride from Glasgow to Mallaig, then a half-hour's ferry boat crossing), or the island of North Uist (fly one hour from Glasgow to Benbecula on neighbouring South Uist then cross the causeway in a taxi for 40 minutes to Lochmaddy) (www.knoydart-foundation.com) (www.isle-of-north-uist.co.uk).

The Shetland islands, to the north east of Scotland, share the same degree of latitude as southern Greenland but have a surprisingly mild climate. Heavy ocean swells have created a coastline rich in sea caves, hundreds of metres long and dappled with sunlight, which make for a dramatic kayaking experience (www.visitshetland.org). From May onwards, the days in Scotland are especially long with the sun high in the sky. Various organisations can provide guiding, whether you're a novice or a pro, and organise accommodation too.

**Kite surfing**

You can kite surf in many places around the coast of Britain and with wind coming in off the Atlantic and the North Sea, it's a great place to learn. Why not take a two-day introductory course on the Isle of Wight, off the south coast of England, and then explore the island's extensive hiking paths and beaches? Not to mention its superb selection of hotels, cafes and restaurants. It's easy to get there on one of the 230-plus daily ferries. www.wightlink.co.uk, www.windstalkerislandkitesports.com

The island of Anglesey, off the north-west coast of Wales, is a reliable surfing destination – its consistently good winds make it the site of the British National Wave Championships. An island it may be, but thanks to two spectacular suspension bridges, it takes only three-and-a-half hours to reach by train from London and is less than an hour from Cardiff airport (www.visitanglesey.co.uk).

The Isle of Tiree is remote by comparison, but surfers agree that it's well worth the effort. The most westerly of the Inner Hebrides – a chain of islands off the west coast of Scotland – it is only 12 miles long, three miles wide and famously fertile. Exposure to the warm gulf stream has earned it the nickname 'the land below the waves' and it's reported to be the sunniest place in Britain. With frequent flights operating from Glasgow, and regular ferries from the town of Oban, its uninterrupted waves and wind makes it one of Scottish surfing's holy sites (www.isleoftiree.com).

**Coasteering**

How to explain coasteering? Essentially it's going for a hike around coastal paths, with the sea crashing on rocks below you, except that when the track runs out you jump into the ocean (dressed in a wetsuit, helmet and
shoes) and swim or clamber round rocks to the land to start your hike again. Although you can do it in several spots in Britain, including the coast of Devon in south-west England and in Northern Ireland too, it’s really taken off in west Wales where it was pioneered - the dramatic Pembrokeshire coastline really lends itself to the sport. www.visitwales.co.uk

**Highland Games**

Each summer, from May to September, the north Scottish countryside provides a stunning backdrop to adrenaline-fuelled athleticism and Celtic culture: the Highland Games.

The Games are thought to hark back more than 900 years to the 11th century when, in order to find the fastest soldiers and couriers, Scottish King Malcolm III of the Canmore clan staged a foot race to the summit of Craig Choinnich - a pine-clad hill close to the Highland village of Braemar, Aberdeenshire in Scotland's north-eastern reaches.

Almost 1,000 years later, the Games season provides the most celebratory of the Scottish calendar. Wearing traditional kilts, competitors engage in foot races and heavyweight athletics (including tug-o-war, shot putting and caber tossing), display native dances such as the famous 'Highland Fling', play bagpipes, sell local cuisine and stage fun social events. Clan gatherings were outlawed for decades, so it wasn't until the Games' revival in the 1800s that this familiar formula was distilled, and last year marked the bicentenary of its modern-day incarnation.

Today, the **Braemar Gathering** in the Cairngorms National Park, about six hours drive northeast of Glasgow, is a major highlight. With its pipe music, sword dances and sports events, ranging from hammer throwing to that historic hill race, the Gathering takes place on the first Saturday of September and has been attended by members of the Royal Family since the days of Queen Victoria.

www.braemargathering.org

The world’s biggest Highland Games is the **Cowal Highland Gathering** situated in Dunoon, Argyll, on a picturesque peninsula, an hour west of Glasgow by car and ferry. The Scottish and World Highland Dancing Championships held there find teams from Scotland, Canada, Australia, South Africa and US competing on the last weekend in August, with 2016’s event promising additional family-friendly fun.

www.cowalgathering.com

The **St Andrews Highland Games**, held at the world-famous 'Home of Golf' on the coast of Fife in July, is around one hour from Edinburgh by train and bus. It's one of the Games staging a nail-biting, knockout bicycle race known as 'Diel Tak the Hindmost', where, at every lap, the rider in last position is disqualified.

www.standrewshighlandgames.co.uk

The highlight of the local communities' calendar, some Games feature unusual special events, such as August's **Aberfeldy Show and Games** in Perthshire, which boasts vintage tractors, a fancy dress contest on horseback and terrier dog racing. Made famous by Scottish poet Robert Burns in *The Birks of Aberfeldy*, the market town lies on the River Tay about three hours' drive north east of Glasgow. www.aberfeldyshowandgames.co.uk
Visitors may even encounter celebrity or two: last year Judy Murray, mother of Wimbledon tennis champion Andy, was the guest of honour or 'Chieftain' at August's Bridge of Allen Games in Stirling (30 minutes from Glasgow by rail. (http://bofagames.com), singer Susan Boyle was Chieftain at May's West Lothian Highland Games, Bathgate in 2014 (25 minutes from Edinburgh by train (www.westlothianhighlandgames.com); and Ewan McGregor was Chieftain in his hometown of Crieff, Perthshire in August 2001 (three hours from Edinburgh by train (www.crieffhighlandgathering.com).

With scores of happenings across the Highlands and beyond, the Games provide a wonderful way to experience the nation's rich culture and heritage. A full calendar of 2016 events will be available from the website of the Scottish Highland Games Association (SHGA) in October. www.shga.co.uk

Sports cafés and restaurants

Fanatical about football, crazy for cricket, mad for motor racing? Indulge your passions as you dine, with our guide to the best sports cafés and restaurants in the country.

Café Football, London and Manchester

When former Manchester United teammates Gary Neville and Ryan Giggs discovered that not only did they share a mutual love of football, but also of good food, they opened a restaurant together. Launched in 2013, Café Football has branches in east London's Westfield Stratford City shopping mall, and Manchester United Football Club's famous Old Trafford ground. Entertainment takes the form of live TV football and sports quizzes, and the theme also extends to its menu with football pitch-shaped desserts and dishes reputed to be the favourite foods of football legends. Giggsy's sausage and mash, a nod to owner, coach and former player Giggs, is one popular order. www.cafe-football.com

Café Kick/Bar Kick, east London

Table football, gluten-free food and live sports screenings have proved a winning combination at Café Kick in Shoreditch and its larger sister, Bar Kick in Clerkenwell. Both located in trendy east London, they boast 14 vintage French 'Bonzini' football tables (£1 a game; reservations recommended). Watch the action as you enjoy continental-style dishes including chorizo sandwiches, smoked frankfurters, salads, soups and tapas. Fancy your chances? Then join a tournament to find out how you rank. www.cafekick.co.uk

Frankie's Sports Bar & Diner, west London

The brainchild of champion horse jockey, Frankie Dettori, and Michelin-starred chef, Marco Pierre White, Frankie's is a sports lover's dream. Situated at Stamford Bridge, the west London home of Chelsea Football Club, it's ideally situated for a pre- or post-match meal, or for anyone catching their breath following a stadium and club museum tour. Enjoy 12 screens of live sports as you dine on hearty American menu fare, from burgers and ribs to Cobb salad and pizza. www.frankiessportsdiner.com

Laverys, Belfast, Northern Ireland

Show off your breaking skills at one of Laverys' 18 pool tables. Belfast's oldest family-owned bar and restaurant has been owned by the Lavery family since 1918. Its menu ranges from local dishes, such as fresh Irish mussels, to universal favourites such as
Buffalo wings, burgers and lasagne; there's also a dedicated gluten-free menu. Meanwhile, sister venue, The Pavilion – just across the River Lagan – offers a similar formula and the same warm welcome. www.laverysbelfast.com

Rileys Sports Bars, across England, Scotland and Wales

Eat, drink, compete or cheer on your favourite teams at Rileys, a nationwide chain with 60 outlets in locations including Aberdeen in north-east Scotland, Swansea in south Wales, Liverpool and Chester in north-west England, Sheffield in north-east England and, of course, London. Stop by to quench your thirst, enjoy some pub-style food, watch the giant HD screens and enjoy a friendly game of snooker, darts and pool. www.rileyssportsbars.co.uk

Bar Sport – Sports Bar & Grill, across England

Inspired by the US sports bars and steakhouses, this young chain is the place to enjoy steaks, ribs, wings, burritos and deli sandwiches, all washed down with a generous serving of sports fixtures, screened on HD and 3D TVs. Gaming consoles, sports memorabilia, Man vs. Food challenges and events add to the fun at five venues across central England, including Derby in central England (famous for its football, cricket and rugby teams), Cannock in Staffordshire (field hockey), around an hour’s drive from Birmingham, and Newbury, which is world-famous for horse racing. More outlets are on their way, including one in Scotland’s capital, Edinburgh. www.barsportgroup.co.uk

Weird, wacky and wonderful – Britain’s quirkiest sports!

Fancy your chances at bog snorkelling? How about shin kicking or egg throwing? Famous for their eccentricity, British people regularly find time to turn the most bizarre pastime into a competition, whether it is racing snails, wrestling in gravy or playing marbles.

Sometimes these are children's games carried on by adults, though often what appear peculiar sports are customs that date back centuries. So whether you fancy the joy of cheese-rolling or the camaraderie of river football, plan your trip around the quirkiest events taking place in Britain this year and next.

International Worthing Birdman, West Sussex, south England

15 – 16 August
This competition for human-powered flying machines is held each summer in the classic seaside resort of Worthing on England’s south coast. Many flyers take part to raise money for charities; others design complex machines to aim for the distance prizes. A substantial prize of £30,000 is offered for the furthest flight in excess of the challenge distance of 100 metres, attracting contestants from all over the world. The Birdman competition started in 1971 along the coast in Selsey, and then spent 29 years in Bognor Regis, before relocating to
Race the Train, Tywyn, Mid Wales
15 August
A popular contest between man and machine, this race takes place alongside, as far as practicable, the route taken by the Talyllyn Railway on its picturesque journey to Abergynolwyn and back. The course includes a mix of public roads, lanes, unmetalled roads, tracks, agricultural land and rough grazing pastures, so the terrain varies, sometimes getting very wet and muddy in places, along with some steep hills. Often the train, or for many runners, the track, is just over a fence - from where family or friends can shout encouragement.

World Bog Snorkelling Triathlon Championships, Powys, Mid Wales
29 August
Waen Rhydd peat bog on the outskirts of the smallest town in Britain, Llanwrtyd Wells, is home to this now world-famous event. The aim is to run eight miles, followed by navigating two lengths of the 60-yard murky trench, dug out of the bog, and then a 12-mile mountain bike ride. Competitors come from Australia, the US and Europe, as well as from Britain, to take part. The snorkeller with the fastest time wins a small cash prize. Organised by Green Events, this novel competition was originally devised by local pub landlord Gordon Green in 1986 in a bid to boost tourism to the area.

River Football, Gloucestershire, west England
31 August
Once a year, the peaceful waters of the Windrush River get very choppy. Two competitive teams from the pretty Cotswolds village of Bourton-on-the-Water play in the shallow waters rather than on grass, attracting crowds that can number hundreds, if not thousands, of spectators. The game that has been played for 100 years now gets global coverage, and celebrities have taken part.

World Gravy Wrestling Championships, Lancashire, north-west England
31 August
Contestants competing for this title must slip and slide about in lukewarm gravy, winning
points for pinning down the opposition and encouraging applause. The event at the Rose n Bowl pub in Stacksteads began in 2007 and regularly brings out the crowds in force to laugh at proceedings, while TV cameras and the press often record the event for audiences all over the world, from Australia to the US, Europe to Asia. The winners receive a glittering trophy and can wallow in fame and gravy, if not fortune.

Ramsbottom World Black Pudding Throwing Championship, north-west England
13 September

An ancient grudge stretching back to the War of the Roses in the 15th century, when the Houses of Yorkshire and Lancashire fought for the English throne, is now played out with general hilarity and food rather than fire, by hurling locally made black puddings at a pile of Yorkshire puddings on a six-metre high plinth. Competitors have three turns to knock down as many as possible (a dozen are arranged in a pile) and must throw underarm from a purpose-built stand called the oche. All ages are welcome, with yummy left-overs for everyone!

http://calendarcustoms.com/articles/world-black-pudding-throwing-championships

Gurning World Championships, Cumbria, north-west England
18 – 19 September
Contestants put their heads through a horse collar and have a set time in which to gurn – contort their faces in the scariest, most grotesque, silliest expression possible! False teeth may be left in, taken out or turned upside down if desired and the person who gets the most applause for their ugly face wins! It is a highlight of the Egremont Crab Fair, which dates back to 1267 to celebrate the time when the local Lord of the Manor wheeled a cart of crab apples through the village as a goodwill gesture to the poor. Crab apples have a sharp taste and it is said the gurning competition originates from the faces locals made when they bit into them.

www.egremontcrabfair.com

World Stone Skimming Championships, Argyll, Scotland
27 September
Each competitor is allowed three skims using specially selected Easdale slate stones from the tiny island where the annual event takes place. For a skim to qualify the stone must bounce at least three times – it is then judged on the distance achieved before it sinks. The World Stone Skimming Championships were launched in 1983 as a fundraising event and now contestants hail from all around the world. The championships now attract more than 200 participants and plenty of spectators.

www.stoneskimming.com

World Conker Championships, Northamptonshire, central England
11 October
A popular pastime of British schoolchildren for decades, the rules of conkers are simple: each player chooses a conker (the seed of a horse chestnut tree) attached to a piece of string and takes turns in trying to break their opponent’s nut using a swinging motion. The World Conker Championships – this year taking place at Southwick, near Oundle in Northamptonshire – attracts 300 competitors attempting to become the King or Queen of
World's Biggest Liar, Cumbria, north-west England  
20 November  
This annual contest is held at The Bridge Inn in Santon Bridge, a Lake District hamlet, in honour of the pub's 19th-century landlord Will Ritson, who was famous for his incredible stories. Competitors are given five minutes to impress judges with an outrageous but convincing lie; previous holders of the title World's Biggest Liar have included nuclear plant worker Glen Boyland, who won after telling an unlikely story about racing snails with Prince Charles. Politicians and lawyers are reputedly barred from entering, as they are considered to 'have an unfair advantage'.

www.santonbridgeinn.com/#!/the-worlds-biggest-liar/cbic

5 December  
Celebrating its 35th year, this is one of the wackiest races you'll ever see: teams from schools or companies – aged from 14 to 70 – race around a 150-metre course, balancing a Christmas pudding on a flimsy paper plate. They have to navigate two slippery inflatables, balloons filled with flour, jets of foam and limbo poles. To complicate things even further, they do it all in fancy dress.

www.xmaspuddingrace.org.uk

2016:

Olney Pancake Race, Buckinghamshire, south England  
9 February  
This unique race literally stops traffic as energetic local ladies in traditional attire (including skirt, apron and scarf) run through the streets of Olney. The tradition supposedly began in the 15th century when a local housewife heard the ringing of the bell summoning the congregation to church while she was making her Shrove Tuesday pancakes. In a rush, she raced to the service carrying her frying pan. The course is 415 yards (380 metres) long and pancakes must be tossed at the start and finish. The winner receives a kiss from the verger at the end of the race, and a shriving service follows in the church.

www.olneypancakerace.org

Wife Carrying Race, Surrey, south England  
6 March  
This tradition only dates back to 2008, but the annual wife-carrying race already attracts contestants from Germany, Lithuania and Belgium to the Surrey town of Dorking. In true modern fashion, competitors don't need to be married, but, as the website says, “it certainly helps if you are at least friends”. And beware, the course features obstacles and water hazards.

www.trionium.com/wife

Bottle-kicking, Leicestershire, East Midlands, central England  
28 March
In true quirky fashion this involves no bottles! It takes place in the village of Hallaton, two hours’ drive north of London, on Easter Monday (on 28 March in 2016). The event starts with a parade through the village and neighbouring Medbourne. The two villages try and get the ‘bottle’ - actually a painted 5kg beer barrel - across two streams one mile apart. It can go on all day, though eventually the teams retire to a pub, one victorious, the other licking its wounds.
http://calendarcustoms.com/articles/hallaton-hare-pie-scramble-bottle-kicking

**World Coal Carrying Championships, West Yorkshire, north England**

28 March

The coalman competition of its day (established in 1963) is a test of sheer stamina and muscle that involves men carrying 50kg of coal over an uphill course close to a mile long, while the ladies race involves women carrying 20kg of coal. The event originated in Gawthorpe, when a local coal merchant and the president of the Maypole Committee were enjoying a pint of beer together. A friend is said to have burst into the pub and bet that he could race the two with a bag of coal on their backs. Not wanting to let a good idea go to waste, the secretary of the Maypole Committee, who was listening to the challenge, decided to set the race for Easter Monday. Don’t let this opportunity to prove yourself the strongest man or woman pass you by!

[www.gawthorpe-maypole.org.uk](http://www.gawthorpe-maypole.org.uk)

**Maldon Mud Race, Essex, east England**

26 April

Join 250 competitors in this mad scramble through the ink-black mud of the Blackwater Estuary in Essex. Entrants are advised to tape their shoes to their feet. Not for the faint-hearted, but lots of fun for anyone watching.

[www.visitmaldon.co.uk/events/mudrace.php](http://www.visitmaldon.co.uk/events/mudrace.php)

**Cheese rolling at Cooper's Hill, Gloucestershire, west England**

30 May

A passion for cheese and a head for heights are a must for this annual event, which involves daredevils hurling themselves down the steep, grassy slopes of Coopers Hill, near Gloucester, in pursuit of round 'wheels' of Double Gloucester cheeses. There are races throughout the afternoon, including ones for men and for women. The race starts with the master of ceremonies rolling a four kilogram cheese down the hill, followed by dozens of competitors running, rolling and somersaulting after.

[www.cheese-rolling.co.uk](http://www.cheese-rolling.co.uk)

**Cotswolds Olimpicks, Gloucestershire, west England**

May/June Date TBC

Started by local barrister Captain Robert Dover in 1612, the annual Cotswolds Olimpicks attracts thousands of spectators and features well-known countryside games, including...
shin-kicking. In this event, two contestants fill their trouser legs with straw – to help reduce the pain – before holding one another’s arms and kicking each other wearing steel toe-capped boots. The loser is the competitor who gives in to the pain and bruising first. The Olimpicks has been celebrated for more than 400 years and attracts participants and spectators from all over the world.

www.olimpickgames.co.uk

Toe-wrestling World Championship

Late June TBC

Toe-wrestling was originally devised by a Staffordshire landlord in the seventies as a new sport for British people to dominate. Now it has migrated to the Bentley Brook Inn in the neighbouring county's tiny village of Fenny Bentley. Anyone can take part, though you must pass a rigorous examination before you sit down at the 'toedium'.

http://bentleybrookinn.co.uk/toe-wrestling

World Worm Charming Championship, Cheshire, north-west England

Late June TBC

Worm charming is the skill of encouraging worms to the soil's surface by mimicking the effects of rainfall on the ground above, usually by tapping a garden fork. Since 1980, an annual competition for protagonists has taken place at Willaston, near Nantwich. What began as a school fundraising mission has now become a global fixture with rules available in 30 languages.

www.wormcharming.com/index.html

World Egg Throwing Championships, Lincolnshire, central England

Late June TBC

For 10 years now, the village of Swaton has been the centre of egg-throwing, whether that involves pairs of contestants chucking (and just as importantly catching) the fragile missiles or teams constructing gravity-powered devices to launch eggs towards one of their members. Another popular activity is Russian Egg Roulette where participants select from five hard-boiled and one raw egg – before smashing them against their own foreheads.


World Pea Shooting Championships, Cambridgeshire, east England

July TBC

Tension rises as the focal point of Witcham's village fair grows closer. In its 44th year, the competition was started to raise funds for the community, but has progressed to earn international recognition, with contenders arriving from as far afield as the US. Skill and a keen eye will shoot one expert marksman or woman into the slot of world champion, while the runner-up can commiserate at the fête.

www.witcham.org.uk/_sgg/m1m6_1.htm
World Snail Racing Championship, Norfolk, east England
July TBC
Ready, steady, slow! For 26 years, the World Snail Racing Championships have been held at Congham, near King's Lynn, in Norfolk, where 300 specimens slug it out for the title of fastest snail in the world. Anyone can enter, with a number of heats held before the grand finale. The winner receives a silver tankard stuffed with lettuce. The world record is held by Archie, who in 1995 completed the 13-inch course (set on top of a table) in two minutes. www.snailracing.net

World Hen Racing Championships, Derbyshire, north England
August TBC
The World Hen Racing Championships have brought an entire new meaning to ‘Chicken Run’ - not to mention some egg-stra egg-citement to the Peak District. Visitors to the Barley Mow pub in the village of Bonsall each August are able to cheer on chickens racing along a ten-metre track, under strict world championship regulations. www.world-championship-hen-racing.com

Sporting Events Across Britain 2015 - 2017

2015

• 8 August - Barclays Premier League begins
• 11-14 August: Cricket - Women's Ashes Test match, Canterbury, Kent, south-east England
• 29 August: Rugby League - Challenge Cup final, Wembley, London
• 13 September: Athletics - Great North Run
• 18 September-31 October: Rugby World Cup, England and Wales
• 16-22 November: Tennis - ATP World Tour Finals, London

2016

• 6 January - Great Winter Run/Edinburgh X-country (international) - Holyrood Park, Edinburgh, Scotland
• March - 2016 UCI Track Cycling World Championships, London
• 17 April - The Gran Fondo Conwy; an epic cycle sportive set in the heart of North Wales
• 24 April - Virgin Money London Marathon
• 9-22 May - LEN European Aquatics Championships at the London Aquatics Centre, London
• 21-22 May - Snowdonia Slateman Triathlon in the heart of Snowdonia National Park
• 24-29 May - BMW PGA Championship (Golf) - Wentworth Club, Surrey, England
• May-Sept - Highland Games held across Scotland
• 14-18 June - Royal Ascot
• 13-19 June - Queen's Club Tennis Championship, London
• Late June (TBC) - Giro d'Italia Northern Ireland, Belfast
• 27 June-12 July - Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championship
• 26 June (TBC) - British Grand Prix (Silverstone)
• June - Women's Hockey Champions Trophy at Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre, London
• 10 July – The Legend Triathlon – Powys, Wales
• July (TBC) – Royal Troon 2016 Open Championship, St Andrews, Scotland
• 12-29 August – World Alternative Games, Powys, Wales
• 26-29 August – North Sea Tall Ships Regatta, Blyth, Northumberland, north-east England
• Sept (TBC) – Great North Run
• Sept (TBC) – The Giants Causeway Coast Sportive
• Late September (TBC) – Mourne Mountain Marathon
• 19th and 26th November – European Curling Championships, Braehead, Scotland

2017

• April – IPC Athletics Marathon World Cup, London
• June – 2017 ICC World Test Championship, England and Wales
• July – 2017 IPC Athletics World Championships, London
• August – 2017 Women’s Rugby World Cup in Belfast and Dublin
• TBC – ICC Women’s Cricket World Cup 2017 to be hosted across England