



# Rail Trails: Unique rail experiences and suggested itineraries to get off the beaten track

Britain boasts some of the world's most scenic railway journeys, setting off from historic cities, travelling past snow-covered peaks, through moorlands, and cruising along the coast. Travelling by train is a great way to explore Britain more sustainably while relaxing and enjoying the scenery. Visitors can book their trains individually or choose a BritRail pass for the duration of their stay which will give them flexibility to travel on the National Rail network.

- Adventure and sport
- Food and drink
- History and heritage
- Outdoors and nature
- Sustainability
- Arts and culture
- Great Britain on screen
- England
- Highland Scotland
- London
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northwest England
- Southeast England

July 2024

Check out a sampling of themed rail experiences and longer rail itineraries to take you outside the cities and explore further across Britain's nations and regions throughout the year.

## Scotland, Skye, Lochs and Lake District

*Edinburgh - Glasgow - Fort William - Mallaig - Isle of Skye - Inverness – Glasgow – Windermere*

The trip takes in vibrant cities, castles, lochs and lakes, highlands and coastlines. Take the [Caledonian Sleeper](#) to Edinburgh and wake up in the Scottish capital in the morning. [Glasgow](#) is just an hour away and is a hotbed of art and culture with street art trails across the city. Head north to Fort William, a waterside town at the foot of the Nevis Range, home to Britain's highest peak, Ben Nevis. [The West Highland Line](#) to Mallaig, which is considered to be one of the most scenic rail journeys in the world, travels across the iconic Glenfinnan Viaduct made famous by the *Harry Potter* films. From the final stop at Mallaig, the [Isle of Skye ferry](#) accesses the magical landscape of the island. Back on the mainland take a train to [Inverness](#), the gateway to [Loch Ness](#). Returning to Glasgow, take the train into the heart of the Lake District to [Windermere](#) to explore the lakes and peaks, take a boat trip and enjoy the great local food and drink.

## Wales Culture and Castles

*Cardiff - Aberystwyth - Harlech - Llandudno - Chester*

Take a trip across Wales to take in castles, culture and coastline. Starting in the city of [Cardiff](#), take a train to [Aberystwyth](#) to enjoy the seaside, then connect to the Cambrian Coast Line north through [Snowdonia National Park](#) to Harlech. [Harlech Castle](#) is perched at the top of the hill and only a short distance away from [Portmeirion](#), a Italianate style coastal village. Nearby [Porthmadog](#) is a major hub for steam trains including the [Ffestiniog Railway](#), for those who want to explore the area in style. [Llandudno](#), another seaside favourite, is well worth a visit before ending the trip in the vibrant city of [Chester](#) for some great shopping, iconic architecture and roman heritage.

## Cornwall Coasts, Eden Centre and Maritime City

*St Ives - Falmouth - St Austell - Newquay - Looe - Plymouth*

Take a trip out to the Wild West of England on the [Night Riviera](#) sleeper train from London to [St Ives](#), via St Erth and past golden [Carbis Bay](#), to arrive in the early morning. The itinerary takes in some of the most stunning coastline in Britain. [Falmouth](#), via the quintessential market town of [Truro](#) and rolling fields of Cornish countryside, is a busy port town with great watersports and boat trip options. [The Eden Project](#) is accessible by bus from St Austell station, a popular attraction located in a valley populated by enormous glass domes which house plants from different continents. Next stop, [Newquay](#), on the north Atlantic coast, is a surfer's mecca and tourism hot spot. The fishing village of [Looe](#) has a nearby [vineyard](#) and wildlife reserve. [Plymouth](#) marks the journey's end with its iconic lighthouse and plenty of options for award-winning food and drink.

## City Cultural Tour

*London - Brighton - Bristol - Manchester – Liverpool - Leeds*

Take in some of the highlights of Britain's major cities, travelling to the south coast and on to the cultural hotspots of the west and north of England. [Brighton](#) is just an hour away from central [London](#) with all its seaside attractions and experiences. Travel to [Bristol](#) to take in the sites and follow in the footsteps of Banksy. Next stop [Manchester](#), a northern powerhouse packed with cultural hotspots, and famous for its football and music scenes. [Liverpool](#), just under an hour from Manchester, is home to a waterfront of museums and attractions. Take in [Leeds](#), just an hour and half away, a hidden gem of a city with an art trail, world-class museums and galleries, and known to be the foodie capital of the North.

## Great West Way and Literary Hotspots

*London - Salisbury - Bath Spa - Oxford - Stratford-upon-Avon – York*

Explore some of Britain's literary gems, starting west and up through central England to York in the East. Including cathedrals, castles, culture and cuisine, this itinerary can be used for foodies and culture vultures alike. [Salisbury's](#) cathedral is home to one of the last surviving copies of the Magna Carta. Head out west to [Bath](#) and roam around the Georgian streets which were used as the backdrop for many scenes in *Bridgerton* and *Queen Charlotte*. Once home to English novelist Jane Austen, the city boasts a Jane Austen Centre and hosts themed walking tours along with an annual festival in her honour. Up to [Oxford](#) to survey the sites that inspired many well-known authors, take a tour of the colleges, explore the museums and see some of the locations featured in *Harry Potter*. [Stratford-upon-Avon](#) is Shakespeare's hometown. Visitors can watch a play at one of the theatres and visit the famous writer's birthplace, home and school. Finally, travel up to York to ramble through The Shambles, said to have inspired Diagon Alley in the *Harry Potter* books.

## Regional Heritage Lines, New, Themed and Steam Train Experiences

### North

- [The Northern Belle](#) has a programme of new themed trips from northern stations. Trips include: Champagne Lunch, a spectacular steam hauled journey over the Settle to Carlisle, a trip to Blenheim Palace, new Fireworks Dinner trip, Edinburgh day trip and Christmas lunches. Classic and innovative dishes are created from the finest seasonal ingredients from the British Isles and served on a backdrop of stunning scenery along the way.
- [The Keighley & Worth Valley Line](#) was used as a filming location for the *Railway Children* (both original and new films), *Brideshead Revisited* and most recently *Peaky Blinders*.
- [The North Yorkshire Moors Railway](#) has a dining carriage and serves up seasonal menus of locally sourced food and drinks, as spectacular countryside rolls by the windows of the heritage Pullman carriage. This route travels out from the scenic seaside town of Whitby through the North York Moors.
- [The Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway](#) in Cumbria offers new themed trips, amid the spectacular scenery of the Lake District, including Winter Warmer and dining experiences. In addition, there is a carriage at the station that has been converted into a unique place to stay.

- [The Settle-Carlisle line](#) is one of the most scenic rail routes in England, cruising through the [Yorkshire Dales National Park](#), over the rolling hills, past waterfalls and lush green valleys of Yorkshire and Cumbria. The Ribbleshead viaduct is the track's most dramatic feature with 24 soaring arches over the valley. Connections are available from Leeds and Lancaster and there is also the option to travel by historic steam train.
- [The Hope Valley Line](#) in the Peak District heads out from Sheffield through the stunning valleys onto Edale and the Cowburn Tunnel. The Kinder Scout Plateau Circuit can be accessed along the Pennine Way from Edale station and crosses open moorland for walkers who want to ascend the peak of Kinder Scout.
- [Magical Mystery Beatles Tour](#) to Liverpool from London is a great day trip to take in the city sights.

### South-east and east

- From Alton in Hampshire take [the Watercress Line](#) which crosses Jane Austen country on a heritage steam train and has new themed trips including illuminations, fine dining, real ale and wizarding experiences.
- The North Norfolk Railway has a [Murder Mystery performance & meal](#) on the trail that connects to Bittern Line at Sherringham.
- [The Bluebell Railway](#) in East Sussex has newly imagined themed trips including festive feasts, a curry trip and a teddy bears picnic, and connects to National Rail at East Grinstead.
- Take a trip out to Sussex for a [wine tour and a trip on a heritage steam train](#)

### South-west

- A [heritage steam train](#) runs from Corfe Castle to the cute seaside town of Swanage with a connection through Wareham in Dorset.
- The South Devon Railway has a fun '[Drive a train](#)' experience that connects to National Rail at Totnes.
- [The Riviera Line](#) in Devon traverses one of the most beautiful stretches of coast in England from Exeter city to Paignton, via the Exe Estuary and the coast. Calling at the picturesque villages of Dawlish, Teignmouth, Torre and the resort town of Torquay along the way, there is the option to stop at one of the beaches or take the opportunity to hike or bike along the trails of Devon.

### Wales

- Wales has more than its fair share of stunning scenic rail routes including a whole range of options on the [Great little trains of Wales](#).
- Combine the [Welsh Highland Way and Ffestiniog lines](#) to experience over 40 miles of adventure.
- Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon), the highest mountain in Wales and England, is accessed by a [heritage locomotive](#) to the summit to take in the stunning views of mountains and lakes

1,085 metres above sea level – and an opportunity to stop for a brew with a view.

## Scotland

- Take a day trip from London to [Edinburgh](#) with breakfast on the way up and dinner on the way down, and a chance to take in the city's highlights.
- [The West Highland Line](#) runs from Glasgow up north to Crianlarich, past Loch Awe to Oban or continues north through Rannoch Moor to Fort William and Mallaig. The route passes over the iconic Glenfinnan Viaduct and offers breath-taking views of locations such as Loch Shiel, Loch Eilt and Ben Nevis, many of which can also be seen in *Harry Potter* films. Journeys can be done on the Jacobite steam train or on national rail services.
- [The Kyle Line](#) travels coast to coast across the Highlands from Inverness to the shores of Loch Alsh, taking in spectacular Highland scenery – and finishing with magnificent views of Skye and the Torridon Peaks.
- [The Far North Line](#), voted by Lonely Planet one of the best regions in the world to visit, runs north from Inverness to Thurso, the furthest north train station and a short bus hop from John O'Groats, the most northern tip of mainland Britain. Along the way, take in the spectacular scenery of moorlands, sea stacks, unspoiled beaches and towering Munros.