



*instant
escapes*

Breezy Northumberland

Resonating a rare spirituality, this ancient coastline will blow you away

Stretching 55km from the hamlet of Alnmouth to the border town of Berwick is a blustery shoreline of dune-backed sands, tweed-coloured hills, and moors where tranquillity has replaced memories of ancient tussles. With epic castles, fishing harbours, holy islands and wild nature beacons, this is England's most atmospheric seashore. **By Norman Miller**





CUT-OUT-AND-GO GUIDE | BREEZY NORTHUMBERLAND

SEE & DO

● Start your weekend odyssey at Bamburgh Castle (bamburghcastle.com; £10.95), towering atop a volcanic outcrop amid rolling dunes. **In a setting like no other, history and landscape come together:** a fortress has watched over this golden shore since the 5th century. Craggy battlements rise from an inner sward of green, while opulent interiors include the King's Hall, where the King of Siam helped carved the wooden ceiling on a 19th-century visit.

● Make the 20-minute, 15km drive south for lunch at the Ship Inn in Low Newton (see Eat overleaf) before walking along silky sands to the ruins of Dunstanburgh Castle (english-heritage.org.uk; £5.40), **which rise from a headland like a shattered stone coronet fractured by time.** From here, you can arc around the picture-perfect Embleton Bay where, amid the dunes, secretive huts provided '30s hideaways for golfers.

● End your day with a sunset cruise from Seahouses (a seven-mile pootle north from Low Newton) out to the Farne Islands, David Attenborough's favourite British nature spot. Glorifying in names such as Wideopens and Elbow, it's a rugged archipelago, where **puffins soar and seals return your gaze quizzically. There's history, too.** Celtic holy roller St Cuthbert retreated to Inner Farne as a 7th century hermit, while Grace Darling earned heroine status in 1838, rowing from Longstone Island to aid a stricken vessel.

Striking a pose: Bamburgh Castle; below, Berwick-upon-Tweed at night; puffins on the Farne Islands

● On day two, devote a morning to browsing Barter Books (barterbooks.co.uk), in the market town of Alnwick: a sort-of bibliographic offshoot of Hogwarts fashioned from the former railway station. **Little trains rattle along miniature rails atop bookcases of second-hand tomes,** amid a forest of thought-provoking quotes and neon artwork proclamations. Then scoop up your purchases and head to Amble, for a lazy seafood lunch (see Eat, overleaf).

● Just 20 minutes by car from Amble, Howick Hall Gardens (howickhallgardens.com; £7) beckons, gloriously lush. **Take a walk, followed by afternoon tea with history** within this palatial coastal hideaway of the Earls Grey. Their eponymous famous blend was created especially for the second Earl by a Chinese mandarin to mask the limestone taste in local well water.

● Let the tide shape your next day's focus: the Holy Island of Lindisfarne. Here you can **go barefoot on Europe's most evocative pilgrims' trail,** guided by poles across the exposed sands, revealed when the waters recede. As you approach the monastery ruins and a 16th-century castle upgraded by Lutyens, ponder on the centuries of monkish contemplation ended by Viking violence (english-heritage.org.uk; £6.50).

● Time, now, for the Northumbrian beach locals (and naturists!) like to keep to themselves. Slipped between Budle Bay and Lindisfarne, Ross Back Sands unravels: 5km of **bird-filled dunes on a secluded shore, marked by navigation towers built to guide boats safely to Lindisfarne.** Access is along a path from the village car park at Ross.

● Rise early on your last day to fill a few hours before an afternoon train from Berwick. The town's Lowry Trail reveals what the British artist painted on his annual Northumbrian summer holidays, far from Northern towns filled with matchstick proles. **Potter around Georgian terraces, gnarly medieval walls and Elizabethan ramparts** guarding the mouth of the River Tweed. Here panels expand on 18 works at the spot Lowry painted each — none more ravishing than the joyful beach vistas of Spittal Sands (on trail No. 16).





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EAT

● Super chippy

LEWIS'S (Mains about £6)

Because: It's the perfect fish 'n' chip experience — succulent fish or lobster scoffed while watching boats bobbing in the harbour. **Travel's tip:** Perch on a bench and consume while reading the info boards about the area's herring heritage. 22 Main St, Seahouses; lewissfishrestaurant.co.uk.

● Street food with panache

ADVENTURES IN AUDE (Mains about £8)

Because: It's a food truck fashioned from a vintage Citroen van (open Wed–Fri, May–August). Michelin kitchen veteran Andy Haines pairs grilled goodies with salads stuffed with home-pickled veg. **Travel's tip:** mackerel and squid. Old School Gallery, Foxton Drive, Alnmouth; adventuresinaude.co.uk.

● Seafood mecca

SWALLOW SMOKEHOUSE

(Mains about £9)

Because: Britain's oldest working smokehouse has been transforming herring into delicious kippers since 1843. Today there's crab, lobster and Lindisfarne oysters, too. **Travel's tip:** Come mid-morning to peek inside the smoking room where rows of hanging fish glisten like baubles. 2 South St, Seahouses; swallowfish.co.uk.

● Distinctive gastro stop

FISH SHACK AT SEA QUEST

(Mains about £11)

Because: It's an offbeat dining space, fashioned from an old sea coble (open fishing boat). Fresh fish is the order of the day, served on tin plates. **Travel's tip:** Want dinner? Last orders are at 8pm. 29 Harbour Rd, Amble; 01665 661301; boathousefoodgroup.co.uk.

● Culinary high

THE SHIP INN (Mains about £14)

Because: Fresh seafood and local ale make for a perfect union in a bare-brick interior of almost monastic purity. Northumbrian produce stars. It also brews its own ales — try the dark Sea Coal wheat beer. **Travel's tip:** Between June and October, call ahead and ask when the lobsterman is due in. The Ship Inn, Low Newton-by-the-Sea; 01665 576262; shipinnnewton.co.uk.

DRINK & EAT

● Ale with heritage

OLDESHIP INN

Because: It's a 19th-century inn with ship-decking floor, stained-glass windows and a cosy fire in winter, all festooned with nautical paraphernalia.

Travel's tip: Order a 'nip and a hauf' — local ale and a whisky chaser. 7–9 Main St, Seahouses; seahouses.co.uk/theoldship.

● Pilgrimage pick-me-up

ST AIDAN'S WINERY, LINDISFARNE

Because: Lindisfarne's take on mead includes lip-smacking Spiced and Pink versions alongside the classic original.

Travel's tip: The bitter orange notes of the Pink will impress gin geeks as a cool swap for Cinzano in a Negroni. Holy Island; lindisfarne-mead.co.uk.

● Chilled thrills

SPURRELI'S BOUTIQUE ICE-CREAM

Because: Choose from homemade scoops with distinctive flavours such as sea buckthorn and Alnmouth rum, or elderflower & ginger. **Travel's tip:** If you're self-catering, stock up — it does takeaway containers. The Old Chandlery, 12 Coquet St, Amble.

ASK THE LOCAL



Ellie Davison-Archer is a local artist based in Amble. She also works at Alnmouth's Old School Gallery

“I spend a lot of time outdoors — **Alnmouth Beach and Hauxley Beach are great for collecting things.** I also like going to Hulne Park in Alnmouth — it's lovely, with **woodland walks, the Brizlee Tower Gothic folly** designed by Robert Adam in 1781, plus fantastic gates designed by local blacksmith Stephen Lunn. **Amble has fantastic fish restaurants** — I like Sea & Soil (104 Queen St) for its seafood specials. The wonderful **Spurrelli's ice-cream parlour** (see above) **is expanding to do cocktails as well!** In Craster, the Jolly Fisherman (thejollyfishermancraster.co.uk) has gone upmarket, but **still has a great vibe.**”



STAY

● Heritage luxe

NEVILLE TOWER, BAMBURGH CASTLE

(Two-bed apartment from £88, min three-night stay, S/C, or £715pw)

Because: Spread over three floors within Bamburgh Castle, this historic apartment comes with stupendous views and lashings of heritage cool. As well as kingsize beds, there's a fully-equipped kitchen. **Travel's tip:** Ease into your first night with a homemade meal delivery, including wine, from upscale vintners Corney & Barrow. Bamburgh Castle; www.crabtreeandcrabtree.com.

● Distinctively eco

ALNMOUTH SHORESIDE HUTS

(Doubles from £90, S/C)

Because: This trio of new shepherd huts spell stylish (solar-powered) kipping between a wild beach and a photo-**Travel's tip:** Skip the owners' overpriced breakfast hamper (£18pp) and start your day at nearby Scotts Deli on Northumberland St (open from 10am;

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALAMY, GETTY MAP: MAIDENHEAD CARTOGRAPHIC



● **Eerily atmospheric**
CHILLINGHAM CASTLE

(Apartments from £100, S/C)

Because: Distinctively different spaces blending antiques with shabby chic beckon inside an ancient tower overlooking formal gardens. After the day-trippers have gone, roam through the beautiful Capability Brown-landscaped parkland. Feeling brave? Book one of the after-dark tours of what is often considered Britain's most haunted castle (£20). **Travel's tip:** Stay clear of the wild white Chillingham cattle in the grounds — they're so fierce they were long used to guard the castle. *Chillingham Castle, Chillingham; chillingham-castle.com.*

● **Blessed intimacy**
ST CUTHBERT'S HOUSE

(Doubles from £130, B&B)

Because: Carved from a 200-year-old former chapel, St Cuthbert's House was Visit England's Best B&B last year. Classical music floats through rooms named after local saints, while breakfasts are equally heavenly.

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clockwise from top left, PICTO CHANGE simusaperit, ut et; mussels being served at the offbeat Fish Shack at Sea Quest; modern style in historic Bamburgh Castle; the spooky Chillingham Castle; proper fish 'n' chips and mushy peas at Lewis's in Seahouses

Travel's tip: Find the fine beer brewed exclusively for St Cuthbert's in the honesty cabinet downstairs — from aromatic IPA to the dark heft of Black Bishop. *192 Main St, Seahouses; stcuthbertshouse.com.*

● **Louche charm**
JOINERS ARMS, NEWTON-BY-THE-SEA

(Doubles from £145, B&B)

Because: Each of the five bedrooms is individually designed. Features include four-poster beds, rolltop baths and antler chandeliers. **Travel's tip:** Dogs are welcome in two rooms (Sandwood Bay or Sebastia) for £10 extra per canine a night. *On B1340, Newton-by-the-Sea; joiners-arms.com.*

● **Smuggling heritage**
SEAVIEW STUDIO, FISHING BOAT INN

(Studio for two, from £205, B&B, minimum two-night stay)

Because: This feels like old-school Northumberland, attached to a beachside inn where smugglers once congregated. The pub deck, perched

above the sand, is a perfect spot to down a pint before going indoors for a sea-view meal in the glass-box dining room. **Travel's tip:** Take your hiking boots — the coastal trail goes right past the door. *Boulmer; seaviewstudioatthefishingboatinn.co.uk.*

➔ **GET ME THERE**
GO INDEPENDENT

Virgin Trains East Coast (lner.co.uk) runs services to Berwick-upon-Tweed. Pick up a car at the station from **East Coast Rentals** (eastcoastrental.co.uk) from £43 a day. **Arriva** (arrivabus.co.uk) also runs the X18 bus between Newcastle and Berwick along the coast.

GO PACKAGED

McKinlay Kidd (mckinlaykidd.com) offers a Dark Skies and Nature trip, including the Holy Island and the Farne Islands; six nights from £675pp, B&B (two sharing). See **northumbrian-cottages.info** for self-catering options.

FURTHER INFORMATION

See **visitnorthumberland.com**. ■