

Walking the South Downs Way

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary – Amberley to Eastbourne

Itinerary

Day 1	Arrive Eastbourne
Day 2	Walk Amberley to Steyning -13 miles
Day 3	Walk Steyning to Kingston – 15 miles
Day 4	Walk Kingston to Alfriston – 13 miles
Day 5	Walk Alfriston to Eastbourne – 11 miles
Day 6	End of the walk – depart Eastbourne

Departs

June / July

Focus

Butterflies, Wildflowers and Birds

Grading

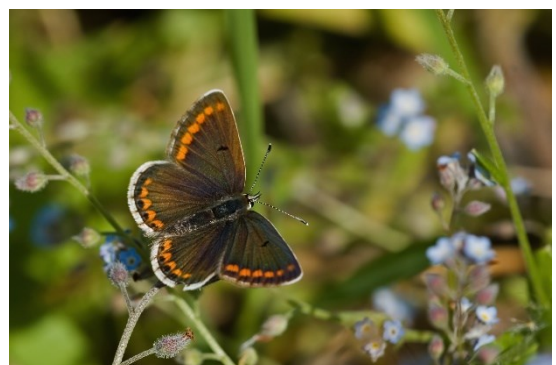
Grade B+. This is a walking holiday of 52 miles across downland over 4 days with frequent hills. Participants should be of a good level of fitness.

Dates and Prices

See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code GBR377)

Highlights

- Complete one of England's greatest walks
- Butterflies such as Chalk Hill Blue and Dark Green Fritillary
- Orchids and wildflowers on some of England's finest chalk downs
- Iron age hillforts in ancient landscapes
- Birds including Firecrest, Yellowhammer, Grey Partridge and Raven
- Outstanding views from the English Channel to the North Downs



The Seven Sisters, Yellowhammer, Brown Argus



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Introduction

Following the crest of the South Downs from Winchester to Eastbourne, this rewarding walking holiday explores one of Britain's finest National Trails. Stretching for 100 miles across rolling chalk hills, flower-rich grasslands, ancient woodland and dramatic coastal cliffs, the South Downs Way combines outstanding scenery, exceptional biodiversity and a remarkable concentration of archaeological and historical sites. Along the route we encounter prehistoric hillforts, ancient trackways, picturesque villages and some of southern England's most iconic landscapes, including Butser Hill, Chanctonbury Ring, Devil's Dyke, Ditchling Beacon and the Seven Sisters.

The South Downs contain one of the largest surviving areas of chalk grassland in north-west Europe, a habitat often described as Britain's equivalent of a rainforest because of the extraordinary variety of plants and insects it supports. During spring and summer the downs can be alive with wildflowers, whilst butterflies such as Chalkhill Blue, Adonis Blue and Dark Green Fritillary drift across the flower-rich slopes. Skylarks provide a constant soundtrack above the rolling hills and Kestrels frequently hover over the escarpments searching for prey. Combined with ancient woodland, prehistoric earthworks, attractive downland villages and dramatic coastal scenery, the South Downs Way offers one of the finest opportunities to experience the natural and cultural heritage of southern England on foot.

Rather than changing accommodation throughout the journey, we divide our stay between two comfortable centres, Winchester and Eastbourne. Daily transfers allow us to walk the entire route carrying only a daypack, combining the satisfaction of completing one of England's greatest long-distance trails with the comfort of returning each evening to familiar surroundings.



Fragrant Orchids

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of walks.

Day 1

Arrive Eastbourne

Adonis Blue



Today we arrive in Eastbourne, our base for Part 2 of the tour. Situated between the South Downs and the English Channel, Eastbourne provides an excellent centre from which to explore the eastern half of the trail.

The change of base reflects the changing character of the landscape. While the western downs are

characterised by wooded escarpments and broad agricultural ridges, the eastern sections increasingly reveal larger panoramas, open downland and a growing maritime influence.

Depending on arrival time, there may be an opportunity to enjoy the elegant seafront, explore the town's Victorian architecture or simply relax before dinner.

Overnight in Eastbourne.

Day 2

Amberley to Steyning

Returning to Amberley, we resume our progress eastwards through the central Sussex Downs.

One of the principal landmarks is Chanctonbury Ring, perhaps the most famous hilltop feature in the central South Downs. Crowned by a distinctive ring of beech trees, the site occupies the location of an earlier Iron Age hillfort and commands magnificent views across the Weald towards Leith and Box Hill on the North Downs. The site has inspired local legends for centuries and remains one of the most recognisable landmarks in Sussex.

The surrounding chalk grasslands rank amongst the most species-rich habitats in Britain and support an impressive diversity of invertebrates. In favourable conditions we may encounter the beautiful Chalkhill Blue butterfly, one of the South Downs' most characteristic species and a flagship insect of these flower-rich grasslands.

Beyond Chanctonbury Ring, the trail continues across rolling downland before descending towards the attractive market town of Steyning. With its medieval origins and picturesque setting beneath the Downs, it provides a fitting conclusion to another memorable day on the trail.

13 miles - Overnight in Eastbourne.

Day 3

Steyping to Kingston

Today's stage contains some of the most celebrated scenery on the entire route. The trail traverses a succession of open ridges that provide almost continuous views across Sussex and towards the Channel coast.

The undisputed highlight is Devil's Dyke, a spectacular dry valley carved into the chalk escarpment. Its immense scale and dramatic

form have fascinated visitors for centuries and helped establish the South Downs as one of Britain's earliest tourist destinations. According to local folklore, the valley was dug by the Devil himself in an attempt to flood the churches and villages of the Weald.

The scientific explanation is no less fascinating. Devil's Dyke remains one of the largest and finest dry valleys in Britain, formed by geological processes acting upon the chalk landscape over many thousands of years. From the viewpoint, sweeping panoramas extend across the Weald and, in clear conditions, far beyond. Victorian visitors regarded the view as among the finest in England and it is easy to see why.

Continuing eastwards, we pass across the high ridges above Brighton before reaching Ditchling Beacon, one of the highest and most prominent points on the eastern South Downs. Long regarded as an important route marker and lookout point, the beacon provides magnificent views across Sussex, with the English Channel stretching away to the south.

The short, flower-rich turf surrounding the summit supports an impressive variety of specialised chalk grassland plants and insects. Among the most striking is the brilliant Adonis Blue butterfly, whose vivid colour makes it one of the most sought-after species associated with the South Downs.

From Ditchling Beacon the trail continues across open downland before eventually descending towards Kingston. With far-reaching views and two of the South Downs' most iconic landmarks, this is undoubtedly one of the most memorable walking days of the tour.

15 miles - Overnight in Eastbourne.



Day 4

Kingston to Alfriston

This morning we return to Kingston and continue eastwards through a landscape that gradually takes on a more maritime character. The broad rolling ridges of the eastern Downs provide a wonderful contrast to the hillier country encountered earlier in the week and afford increasingly expansive views towards the coast.

As we progress, the South Downs Way traverses a series of open slopes and ancient grazing lands that have changed little over the centuries. The landscape feels increasingly spacious and remote and, on clear days, there are magnificent views towards the Cuckmere Valley, one of Sussex's most celebrated landscapes.

This section of the trail conveys a particularly strong sense of the South Downs as a working landscape. Sheep grazing has long helped maintain the short turf that characterises the chalk grasslands, preserving a habitat that supports an extraordinary diversity of plants and insects. The interplay between wildlife, agriculture and centuries of traditional land management has created the distinctive scenery we enjoy today.

Eventually we descend towards the attractive village of Alfriston. Nestled beside the River Cuckmere beneath the downs, Alfriston is renowned for its historic buildings, ancient church and tranquil setting. Its winding streets and traditional Sussex character make it one of the most appealing villages along the entire route. It provides an ideal gateway to the dramatic coastal scenery that awaits us tomorrow as we prepare for the final stage of our journey to Eastbourne.

13 miles - Overnight in Eastbourne.

Day 5

Alfriston to Eastbourne

The final stage provides a magnificent conclusion to our journey across the South Downs. Leaving Alfriston, we soon enter the beautiful Cuckmere Valley, where the meandering river creates one of the most recognisable landscapes in southern England.



Looking West to Birling Gap

Beyond the valley, the trail climbs onto the chalk cliffs of the Seven Sisters. These iconic headlands and valleys form one of Britain's most celebrated coastal landscapes and provide a dramatic finale to the South Downs Way. The repeated sequence of steep-sided dry valleys and gleaming white headlands creates scenery that is instantly recognisable and uniquely English.

The cliffs themselves were formed from the compressed remains of microscopic marine organisms deposited when much of southern Britain lay beneath a warm tropical sea. Continuing eastwards, we pass Beachy Head, at 162 metres Britain's highest chalk sea cliff.

The exposed coastal grasslands support a distinctive maritime flora and, in favourable conditions, Dark Green Fritillaries may occasionally be encountered along sheltered slopes. Offshore, seabirds wheel around the cliffs and over the Channel, taking advantage of the updraughts generated by the coastline.

The Pride of Sussex

Eventually the trail descends towards Eastbourne, marking the official end of the South Downs Way. Completing the full route from Winchester to the coast is a considerable achievement and one well worth celebrating during our final evening together. Looking back, we will have crossed the full breadth of the South Downs National Park, experienced some of England's finest walking country and explored a landscape where natural history, archaeology and history are woven

together in a uniquely rewarding way.

11 miles - Overnight in Eastbourne.

Day 6

Depart Eastbourne

After breakfast, the tour concludes and participants depart Eastbourne for home.

Tour Grading & Focus

Grade B+. This tour is designed for those with a good level of fitness who would like to see the wildlife and flora of England's chalk downlands on foot. It is a challenging walk with plenty of up and downhill sections that offers a real sense of achievement for those who take part. Part 1 of the tour covers 52 miles over four consecutive days.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

We will hope for warm, sunny days, but clients should come prepared for all eventualities on this tour. We hope for good weather but even in summer the British weather is unpredictable, so please be prepared for all eventualities. Therefore, warm clothing, waterproofs and sun cream should all be packed. Good quality, comfortable walking boots are recommended and walking poles should be considered.

Binoculars are desirable and cameras optional for those that wish. Macro lenses are perfect for photography, but please be mindful of others who just wish to watch the butterflies and view the wildflowers. Please bring a daypack to carry picnic lunches and water.

Food & Accommodation Included in the Price

Breakfast and evening meals are included in the holiday cost, beginning with the evening meal on Day 1 and finishing with breakfast on Day 6. Accommodation will be a comfortable hotel, in twin, double or single rooms, all of which are en suite. Those making their way to the start of the tour by train should aim to arrive at Eastbourne railway station, from which it is less than half a mile to the hotel (taxis are available if you don't wish to walk). Lunches, daytime snacks and drinks are not included in the cost of this tour, and we will buy these from shops or cafes each day.

Extending Your Holiday

We are more than happy to book additional nights at the hotel for you on a bed and breakfast basis at additional cost. Please request this at the time of booking.

How to Book Your Place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.

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