

Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Accessible resort guide 2021

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Tourism Information Details

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All details correct at the time of going to press

Welcome to Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole

A breath-taking coastline, 15 miles of award-winning beaches, crystal clear waters, boutique hotels, traditional high streets, an enviable restaurant scene and watersports for all ages and abilities. These are just some of the experiences you can enjoy at Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Located on the beautiful south coast of England you will find a unique temperate microclimate – perfect for a heady mix of seaside fun, luscious gardens and parks, historic forests and scenic nature reserves all just a short journey away.

With a vibrant nightlife, festivals and events, coastal villages with independent retailers and a plethora of eateries to match all budgets and tastes, there is something for everyone in this outstanding part of the world.

To the west lies Poole Harbour; the largest natural harbour in Europe and the gateway to the UNESCO World Heritage Site Jurassic Coast. To the east lies Hampshire and the ancient New Forest, to the north lies enchanting Wiltshire and the medieval city of Salisbury and to the south an endless horizon of blissful blue waters.

The resort offers the ultimate escape at any time of the year. At Highcliffe Beach, Christchurch feast your eyes on the Isle of Wight on a clear day, then venture to the geologically renowned Hengistbury Head. Take in the beauty of the beaches, the activity-packed Purple Flag-accredited town of Bournemouth, before you head to iconic Sandbanks at Poole for some relaxation.

Our gorgeous seafront consists of 16 individual beaches; many widely accessible, with Blue Flag awards aplenty – indicating the highest standards – and beachside activities taking place all year round. Festivals celebrating food, arts, culture, boats and the air are held every year along with a programme of seasonal events. So come and discover our beautiful part of the world and build those treasured memories you'll never forget.

Bournemouth

Welcome to bustling Bournemouth – home to no less than seven glorious miles of Blue Flag-laden coastline, Victorian architecture, Green Flag gardens and parks. And that is just the start.

Surrounded by coastal villages, packed with boutique shops and buzzing restaurants, the beating heart of Bournemouth promises clifftop hotels, B&Bs and self-catering accommodation to suit all budgets, a rich nightlife with Purple Flag status, a number of open-air and indoor attractions and those all-important award-winning sandy beaches for your perfect trip at the seaside.

Voted the UK's favourite beach and named the fifth best-rated beach in Europe and 20 in the world by TripAdvisor this year, Bournemouth is as pretty as it is diverse. Bistros, coffee houses, independent and high-street name restaurants line the pedestrianised town centre nestled among picture-perfect Grade II listed Victorian gardens – Lower, Central and Upper – home to festivals and events year-round.

Whatever the weather there are eclectic museums and galleries to explore, amusement arcades, beach huts, two piers, playgrounds, adventure golf, the Oceanarium and Rock Reef keeping you entertained come rain or shine.

Gardens line the footpaths to a number of beautiful chines, including Boscombe Chine and Alum Chine, all accessible via the endless promenade. Amble at your leisure along the promenade or travel by Beryl Bike (cycling not permitted July-August).

Excellent rail and road networks make this town and its neighbouring quaint suburban areas a deservedly celebrated beauty spot. Offering sweeping panoramic views over the sea from the majestic clifftops laden with pockets of woodland and parks, this is the jewel of the south coast.

Events take place across this vibrant town all year round. For an action-packed programme please visit bournemouth.co.uk/whats-on

Did you know?

The first band to perform at the Bournemouth International Centre was Wham, as a part of their 'The Big Tour', in 1985.

Top 5 things:

The iconic Bournemouth Pier was first constructed in 1855 as a wooden jetty. Today it is home to PierZip – the world's first pier-to-shore zip wire. At 250m it promises to get your heart racing.

The town's first library and museum was founded by philanthropist Sir Merton Russell-Cotes at the close of the 19th Century. Overlooking the beautiful East Cliff, the views from the Russell-Cotes museum are as spectacular as its unique collections.

Take in a show at the Grade II listed Pavilion Theatre and Ballroom. Built in the 1920s it retains much of its original splendour and is home to live shows and dance performances all year.

Bournemouth is home to the first purpose-built municipal beach hut, constructed in 1909, marked by a blue plaque easily spotted on the seafront.

Grade I listed gothic revival-style St Peter's Church is home to the Shelley family vault where Mary Shelley, author of Frankenstein, is interred along with poet husband Percy.

Christchurch

Nestled between golden sandy beaches and the vistas of the New Forest lies the Saxon town of Christchurch. Peacefully placed between two rivers, this quaint town is steeped in history abundant with surprising little gems.

Home to the largest parish church in England, this beautifully bijou town boasts a thriving high street: a mix of independent boutiques as well as high-end and budget-friendly restaurants catering to all tastes. Mouth-watering award-winning produce flourishes locally and is celebrated at a number of food festivals as well as the eateries and the weekly market.

From luxury hotel groups to family-run guest houses and a great selection of self-catering options, you'll find your home from home amid this bountiful and picturesque place of tranquillity.

Intermingled with the retailers is a lively bar scene – from traditional pubs offering live music and comedy clubs to modern wine bars – and the town's Art Deco Regent Centre provides entertainment for all ages.

Cobbled streets lead to the historic ruins of the town's castle overlooking the river while luscious parks and glades open to life upon the water at the quayside. From high-adrenaline watersports such as windsurfing and kayaking to leisurely boat trips or paddle-boarding, the idyllic harbour can be enjoyed by all.

Further upriver endless walkways offer extra exploration options. Whether it's ambling along the water's edge to the beautiful beaches or clifftop views or plush ancient forests, Christchurch is the hiker's haven.

With a central train station, regular buses and family-run taxi services, as well as car-parking facilities, Christchurch is as accessible as it is accommodating. Few other places offer such a wealth of activities and richness of history all in one conveniently compact location which you can discover at whatever pace you choose.

Take a look at visit-christchurch.co.uk/whatson

Did you know?

First called Twynham, formed at the watersmeet of the Avon and the Stour, Christchurch was designated its current name in 1094.

Top 5 Things:

Visit Highcliffe Castle: A Grade I listed family-friendly Romantic and Picturesque architectural building with an incredible history. Explore its beautiful grounds, enjoy a tea at the café and take in the sight of the Isle of Wight on the horizon.

Take in the atmosphere with a walk down the bustling high street. You'll find a number of independent shops, bars and restaurants boasting mouth-watering local produce all within a short walk.

For an amazing view visit 53m high St Catherine's Hill Nature Reserve. With rolling hills, heathland and forest below you can see out to the Isle of Wight and Needles, just incredible!

Take in a show at the Regent Centre – an Art Deco cinema and theatre, recently renovated to a beautifully high standard, providing entertainment to suit all ages.

Enjoy a ferry trip: between Hengistbury Head and Mudeford is a regular ferry crossing for pedestrians so you can explore the sights and take in the beautiful harbour views.

Poole

Luxurious golden sands, lush green gardens and a rich maritime history make this town a destination you'll never forget.

Set against the backdrop of the Jurassic Coast, Poole is an endless stretch of spectacular coastline with award-winning beaches bursting with Blue Flags.

Bordering rolling Purbeck hills this is a watersports-lover's haven, with both the open water or the harbour – the largest natural one in Europe – offering opportunities to both novices or highly-experienced paddle-boarders, kayakers, windsurfers and sailors.

The water's edge provides the perfect place to indulge in locally-sourced produce from a number of eclectic eateries. Take in this town by bicycle or City Sightseeing bus and discover the number of activities available, open to all ages, from waterparks and theatres to museums and the town's newly developed shopping precinct. Explore the historic quayside, host to visiting tall ships, fishing vessels and luxury motor yachts, before delving into the heart of the Old Town to discover more about this town's links to its maritime past. Book a boat trip from the quay to discover the harbour's unique islands and striking peninsula as well as the National Trust's Brownsea Island. Venture further afield to Swanage and along the Wareham River.

If a trip to the seaside is what you need then grab a bucket and spade and head down to Sandbanks where crystal clear waters lap against the golden sandy shore. If you're feeling energetic, try your hand at beach volleyball or handball or simply sit back and take in the beautiful sights, the endless horizon laid out before your eyes. Discover the town's beautiful and perfectly kept parks. Poole Park's lake is home to much wildlife, playgrounds, entertainment and refreshments. Harbourside Park, made up of Baiter and Whitecliff, boasts a skate park, a BMX track and children's play areas.

Visit pooletourism.com/whats-on for all the town's vibrant events.

Did you know?

At approximately 36km² Poole Harbour is believed to be the second largest natural harbour in the world, after Port Jackson, Sydney.

Top 5 Things:

A blast from the past: visit beautiful Old Town for a trip down memory lane. Discover the Cockle Trail: follow the brass plaques in the pavement to retrace Poole's rich history, cobbled streets and medieval architecture.

Celebrate the town's maritime connection with a visit to Poole Museum and take a stroll along the quayside – home to luxury motor yachts, pleasure boats and the RNLI. Poole is home to watersports of every description, for all ages and abilities.

Visit Compton Acres, one of the finest privately owned gardens in England, which boasts some lovely tea rooms, a plant centre and gift shop.

Explore Lower High Street, home to interesting buildings, independent retailers and a varied dining scene. Continue along the pedestrianised high street, to the indoor shopping centre, to enjoy a spot of retail therapy.

Take in a show at Lighthouse – an impressively spacious arts centre right in the heart of the town centre and home to the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.

Heritage and Culture

The conurbation boasts fascinating and diverse places of historical interest.

The extraordinary Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum is housed in a quirky Victorian Italianate villa with stunning panoramic sea views. Hosting visiting exhibitions, borrowing notable works of art from national and international galleries, it has a quirky gift shop and an airy café, with regular guided tours throughout the year.

Poole Museum is set in a Victorian quayside warehouse and atrium extension. The museum's galleries tell the story of the historic maritime town of Poole and its stunning natural harbour from pre-history to the 21st Century. Visitors can enjoy talks and tours, fascinating and diverse exhibitions, the terrace café and imaginatively stocked shop.

Nestled in sight of the magnificent Christchurch Priory is the Red House Museum & Gardens located in a charming Georgian, Grade II listed building. Packed with fascinating local social history items and artefacts dating from the ice age to modern times, the outside space is equally wonderful featuring an aromatic walled herb garden and a small woodland walk where dinosaurs lurk.

Top 3 Things:

1. Discover the hidden gem of Scaplen's Court (next door to Poole Museum) – a Grade I listed medieval building, complete with a quaint walled garden.
2. Embrace Merton and Annie Russell-Cotes and their eccentric collection at the purpose-built East Cliff Hall with its panoramic vista.
3. Uncover stories at the Red House's archaeological galleries from Bronze Age to Iron Age and the origins of Tweoxneam (the town's original name).

Beyond the Beach

We all know Bournemouth beach is one of the best in the country, but did you know there are beautiful beaches either side of Bournemouth?

And even better, there are lively towns too, just waiting to be discovered. **Westbourne, Boscombe, Pokesdown, Southbourne, Tuckton** and **Hengistbury Head** are all within five miles of Bournemouth town centre.

Each of these diverse places is just a hop, skip and a jump away and well worth the effort to explore. Each has its own atmosphere and places of interest, from quirky independent shops, tea rooms, bars and restaurants to museums (see page 18) and boat trips.

Away from the popular Bournemouth Beach lie a number of beautiful quieter locations including Alum Chine and Southbourne. Beyond the beach you will find independent shops, bars and restaurants, glorious gardens and hidden treasures. You can reach these locations by strolling along the promenade or you can hire a Beryl Bike or e-scooter, which you will find across the conurbation. Just [download the app](#) and off you go. Or why not hop on a bus or train? Within minutes you can be exploring the parts of the conurbation popular with residents year-round. If you are lucky you might catch one of the events and festivals, from vintage music to food festivals and cultural events. They pop up all over throughout the season.

Find out why so many people choose to move from different parts of the country and put down roots here; visit the places where the locals go to get a true flavour of what it is like to live by the beach.

There is always something to do and always somewhere to go – whatever age you are or interests you have – with a great range of restaurants, attractions and accommodation options.

There really is more beyond the beach.

Did you know?

On top of Boscombe's Sovereign Centre are a collection of beehives, the honey from which is sold by the Grounded Communities charity.

Top 5 Things:

Visit Hengistbury Head and take in amazing panoramic views and wonderful walks - you might even spot seals and dolphins.

Follow fishermen's footsteps along Fisherman's Walk in Southbourne, from the beaches, past the Victorian bandstand, to the Grove home to a host of quirky shops, cafés, pubs and restaurants.

Visit the wooded paths of Alum Chine and Branksome Dean leading from the beach to Westbourne and its Victorian glass-roofed walkway or relax in one of the foodie spots and watch the world go by.

Spend a lazy afternoon on a boat from Tuckton; pootle along the River Stour or head to Christchurch Harbour where you can see the spectacular Priory.

In Boscombe see if you can spot its 'Devil' – an architectural grotesque – as well as colourful street art. Then lose yourself in the independent shops, boutiques and bazaars of the Pokesdown Mile.

More Beyond the Beach

Packed full of upmarket independent boutiques and interesting shops, a Victorian arcade as well as pubs, bars and restaurants, **Westbourne** is the perfect place to explore the sophisticated side of Bournemouth. The beach and gardens lead you to the town centre via a beautiful woodland walk or it's just 10 minutes on the bus.

A mile from Bournemouth town centre you will find down-to-earth, arty and independent **Boscombe**. It has a beautiful beach, a Grade II-listed pier and fine gardens. You will also discover plenty of shops, restaurants and bars – not to mention a real Tardis police box, impressive street art and murals.

Located between Boscombe and Southbourne, **Pokesdown** is serviced by its own railway station - handy for fans of AFC Bournemouth. It is easy to lose yourself for a couple of hours nosing through the mile long stretch of antique and retro shops before rewarding yourself with a well-earned beverage in one of the many cafés.

Just along the coast from Boscombe is **Southbourne**. Boasting two independent breweries on the high street and its own gin distillery just down the road, it is loved by locals for its quirky independent shops and an altogether more grown-up night-time scene. Here you will find everything from Italian delicatessens, a hidden cocktail bar, old school pubs and a Michelin-recommended restaurant.

Tucked away on the edge of Southbourne is the village of **Tuckton**, nestled on the banks of the River Stour. Pubs, cafés and independent shops are springing up as word spreads about this little gem. Head for a pint or cuppa by the river to watch the boats go by or hire a boat and explore the river and drift past the Priory in Christchurch, which dates to 1086.

If you want stunning views of the beach and coastline from up high then the best place is **Hengistbury Head**. You can see from the Isle of Wight right around to Old Harry Rocks.

Kids will love the nature reserve and visitor centre. You can play golf or go for a walk and round it all off with a cooling ice cream.

Did You know?

In an average year 750,000 ice creams are sold in Bournemouth – many eaten by visitors sitting on the 3,000 deckchairs available for hire.

Top 5 Things:

In 1897 a Dr Simpson bought a deceased blue whale that had washed up on Boscombe beach. He paid the king £25 for it. The 70ft long, 40 ton whale became a health hazard and eventually the proud owner was arrested whilst fighting a policeman who was trying to remove it. Eventually he auctioned off the remains for a fraction of the purchase price.

In the Victorian arcade in Westbourne, beneath the Vintage Lounge coffee shop, is the 'UK's smallest cinema' – the Colosseum. Why not take in an art house film?

The O2 Academy in Boscombe opened in the 1890s as the Grand Theatre, before it became Boscombe Hippodrome hosting circuses. Rumours are that a tunnel leads all the way to Kings Park through which the animals were led.

Fisherman's Walk Cliff Lift in Southbourne made it into the 2015 Guinness World Records as the world's shortest funicular railway.

Bournemouth Natural Science Society is home to a 25th Dynasty Egyptian mummy called Taheema. At 2,700 years old she is Bournemouth's oldest resident.

Festival Coast Live!

A brand new jam-packed activities and events programme comes to life throughout this summer.

Festival Coast Live! brought to you by BCP Council will feature a whole host of local artists and performers ready to entertain and inspire you. Organised across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, a series of pop-up activities promises to celebrate live music, dance, food, heritage, culture, literature, health and fitness, wellbeing, lifestyle, nature and the environment. Highlighting the diverse and rich cultures that make up our communities, live musicians, storytellers, dancers and street entertainers will provide something for everyone and connect with our vibrant communities in this beautiful part of the world. Arts by the Sea Festival will be collaborating with Festival Coast Live! to curate a special programme of cultural outdoor events showcasing local professional and community performers.

So celebrate the summer, celebrate the outdoors, celebrate the greenery, the wide open spaces, celebrate with loved ones and celebrate the chance to sit back and enjoy the entertainment. Visit festivalcoastlive.co.uk for more information.

The Great Outdoors

Just beyond the coastline sits an array of natural wonders waiting to be discovered. Start your exploration at Hengistbury Head; a landmark of archaeological and geological importance with incredible walking trails taking in sights of the spectacular bay and a visitor centre. Neighbouring Stour Valley Nature Reserve and Kingfisher Barn feature a two mile stretch of riverside footpath, meadows, hedgerows and woodland.

Head towards Christchurch to explore Steamer Point Nature Reserve and Stanpit Marsh; abundant in wildlife and fauna.

From here venture to the New Forest National Park, widely popular with walkers, offering 140 miles of tracks leading to unspoilt woodland, heathland and river valleys. Here you'll also find pockets of olde-worlde towns and villages. Beaulieu (home to the National Motor Museum), Brockenhurst, Burley and Lyndhurst are some of the most photogenic and tranquil areas where you are also never too far from a traditional country pub. Here you'll find the New Forest Wildlife Park for that great family day out.

Heading west you'll find a number of fun and welcoming attractions in rural Dorset. At Verwood discover the Dorset Heavy Horse Farm Park – an award-winning park offering educational day trips. A short journey from here takes you to Adventure Wonderland at Hurn – a great family fun day. If you fancy something for the younger ones head over to Farmer Palmers at the edge of Poole for indoor and outdoor play areas, farm animals and an impressive seasonal maize maze.

For a bit of history consider venturing to the medieval cathedral city Salisbury or perhaps over to Sherborne Castle and Gardens – a 16th-century Tudor mansion with outstanding collections of art and furniture and landscape gardens with lake views.

From mysterious woodland to vast open heaths – we have it all.

Did you know?

At 129 metres (423 feet) above sea level, Pipers Wait (located near to Nomansland), is the highest point of the New Forest national park.

Top 5 Things:

1. Once a popular royal hunting ground for William the Conqueror, the New Forest is now home to wandering deer, ponies, donkeys and cattle.
2. Alice Liddell, the inspiration of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, lived close to Lyndhurst – discover the numerous references throughout the town.
3. Highcliffe Castle was constructed between 1831–1835 and its architecture is described as Gothic Revival in style. The Steamer Point Nature Reserve, that sits within the castle grounds, covers 24 acres across from the castle to the hugely popular Friars Cliff beach.
4. Lymington features a golden postbox in recognition of the Gold medal achievements of Olympic sailor Ben Ainslie – the most decorated sailor in Olympic history.
5. Award-winning Upton Country Park on the edge of Poole promises fun for the whole family – from art collections in the old house to an impressive wooden playground, tea rooms, walking trails and more.

Wider Dorset

Whether you're based in Bournemouth, Christchurch or Poole the delights and sights of the surrounding wider county of Dorset are never too far away.

The world-famous Jurassic Coast of course offers the stunning beauty spots of Lulworth Cove and Durdle Door as well as the iconic, thousand-year-old Corfe Castle - the jewels in the Dorset crown if you will. There is so much to see and enjoy.

The county is perfect for long weekends in an idyllic cottage, dog-friendly breaks, lazing around on sandy beaches, walking, horse riding and cycling adventures of all kinds. Meanwhile there is plenty to please foodies, surfers, sailors and even lovers of monkeys!

For art, film and live events and vast sweeping beaches perfect for TV dramas, Bridport and West Bay are well worth a visit while Lyme Regis, or The Pearl of Dorset, on the westerly tip of The Jurassic Coast, is a favourite of fossil hunters, film directors and seafood aficionados alike. Dorchester is the pretty bustling county town associated with Thomas Hardy and boasts an impressive roster of museums, Roman ruins, the vibrant commercial Brewery Square and a thriving arts and festival scene. Meanwhile Weymouth has all the charm of an old school English seaside town while being a modern, fast growing coastal hub: the home of an internationally renowned sailing academy and the annual multi-award-winning Dorset Seafood Festival. There are any number of smaller, picturesque but equally interesting towns and villages dotted all over the county including Swanage, Wimborne Minster and Shaftesbury. Wherever you explore, you'll find a warm welcome and a wide array of activities – from coastering to hiking or just an easy totter along the cliff tops – Wider Dorset is your oyster.

Did you know?

The 2020 film about acclaimed palaeontologist Mary Anning *Ammonite*, featuring Kate Winslet and directed by Francis Lee, was filmed at Lyme Regis.

Top 5 Things:

Home to over 250 rescued and endangered monkeys and apes is Monkey World which also boasts the south of England's largest play area – a perfect day out for the whole family.

Discover Purbeck by train: the heritage Swanage Railway travels from Norden to Swanage and features a dining train. Book a railway photography day for that extra special experience.

Visit the world's best collection of armoured vehicles at the Tank Museum at Bovington, also the start of the Lawrence of Arabia walking trail for the history buffs among us.

Learn about life and death in the Kimmeridgian Seas over 150 million years ago at the Etches Collection. This fascinating museum is just the ticket when it comes to Jurassic marine life.

Visit the ruins of Corfe Castle which overlooks its picturesque village in the heart of Purbeck. Built in 1086, it was one of the county's great strongholds before an inside betrayal led to its downfall.

Sustainable resorts

Here on the south coast we are committed to keeping our beautiful part of the world beautiful. Which is why we continue to work hard to ensure that our beaches and green spaces are kept clean, promote clean and sustainable travel, and preserve our many breath-taking nature sites that our abundant wildlife calls home.

Our Leave Only Footprints campaign strives to deliver exactly what it says on the tin. The initiative was created to ensure Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole are kept as beautiful as can be and continually strives to be at the forefront of sustainable and eco-friendly tourism. It is a process of continuous improvement aiming to encourage residents, visitors and workers to be environmentally conscious. With Eco-tourism on the increase we urge anyone willing to join our dedicated volunteers and take part in a litter pick (equipment provided). We encourage everyone visiting to always take away everything they bring with them and dispose of litter responsibly.

The new Durley Chine Environmental Innovation Hub, currently undergoing development, is a dedicated place to educate the public about waste reduction and recycling.

Find your sustainable stay: Accommodation providers across the conurbation are more mindful of the environment than ever before with many working to reduce their carbon footprint while striving for greener tourism. New initiatives are being introduced including investing in solar panels, EV charge points and working with local suppliers to bring you mouth-watering produce while enhancing their menus.

The region is set to benefit from £100m of sustainable transport improvements including 78kms of new cycling and walking routes, smart technology to provide improved bus travel options and green travel hubs - all aimed at offering environmentally friendly, safer and quicker journeys to work, education and leisure in South East Dorset.

Top 5 Things

1. Enjoy stunning coastal walks connected by swathes of the coastline, allowing you to stroll between the destinations while surrounded by gorgeous sea views. Or head inland for river and forest walks.
2. Find your perfect spot with the BCP Beach Check app – free to download for any Apple or Android device. Visit bournemouth.co.uk/things-to-do/beaches
3. Be at one with nature: We have a number of Ramsar sites (conservation and sustainable use of wetlands) as well as beautiful and accessible nature reserves awaiting explorers of all abilities.
4. Take in the sights on two wheels by renting a Beryl Bike. With plenty of pick-up and drop-off locations and the handy app it's so easy to travel across our lovely part of the world in a clean and healthy way. Visit beryl.app/download
5. Join our dedicated Leave Only Footprints volunteers to give mother nature a helping hand and keep our beaches clean. Visit bournemouth.co.uk/leaveonlyfootprints

Did you know?

Reduce waste from takeaway cups and plastic bottles and download the Refill app: bring your own cup and take advantage of the numerous stations available.