

# Northeast England



As far removed from London and the genteel pleasures of England's pastures green as you could imagine, the northeast has always been frontier country – passionate, independent and generally isolated from the rest of the island below. Its brooding beauty is in evidence throughout the epic countryside, from the windswept coastline lined with long empty beaches punctuated by lonely castles to the vast sweep of the interior, home to the heather-carpeted Cheviots and the awe-inspiring wilderness of Northumberland National Park, which stretches to the North Pennines. Beyond them is Scotland, the other actor in an 800-year-old historical drama of war, bloodshed and conquest: no wonder the folks up here have a reputation for being hardy.

It's been tough round these parts since prehistory, and it's taken an almost superhuman effort to leave a mark on this indomitable landscape. The Romans were especially successful; their legacy is the magnificent Hadrian's Wall, which served as their empire's northern frontier for nearly 300 years. The Normans weren't half bad either: they dotted the landscape with more castles and built one of the most beautiful cathedrals in the world. Against their splendid backdrops, these marvellous constructions serve only to reinforce an impression of a landscape that hasn't changed all that much since it was part of the ancient kingdom of Northumbria.

If you look closely, however, you will see that the landscape is run through with dark, menacing scars: dotted throughout are the rusting hulks of an industry that drove this region for nearly 700 years. Mining is all but defunct now, yet the cities it built are still very much alive, none more so than Newcastle, one of the most dynamic urban centres in England.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Gettin' doon in toon with a bottle of dog, aka taking on **Newcastle's wild nightlife** (p624)
- Walking like a Roman – hiking along the stunning **Hadrian's Wall** (p632)
- Castle-spotting along the blustery white-sand beaches of **Northumberland** (p637)
- Reliving Durham's industrial history during a fabulous day out at the **Beamish Open Air Museum** (p630)
- Going Norman in **Durham** (p627), whose cathedral is a spectacular World Heritage Site
- Hiking to the top of the Cheviot in **Northumberland National Park** (p641)

■ POPULATION: 2.5 MILLION

■ AREA: 3320 SQ MILES



## Orientation & Information

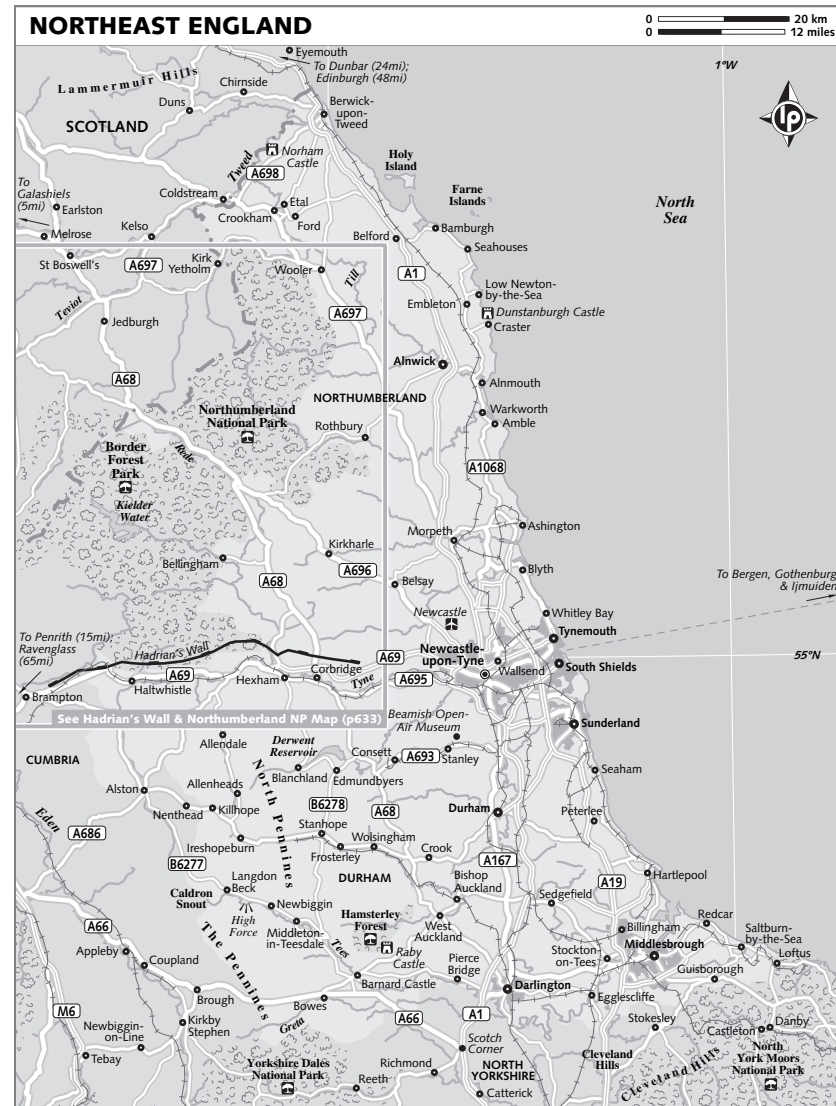
The Pennine hills are the dominant geological feature, forming a north-south spine that divides the region from Cumbria and Lancashire in the west and provides the source of major rivers such as the Tees and the Tyne.

The major transport routes are east of this spine, from Durham northwards to Newcastle

and Edinburgh. Newcastle is an important ferry port for Scandinavia (see p625 for details). There's a northeast region website at [www.thenortheast.com](http://www.thenortheast.com).

## Activities

With the rugged moors of the Pennines and stunning seascape of the Northumberland



coast, there's some good walking and cycling in this region. If you're out in the open, be prepared for wind and rain at any time of year. But when the sun shines, you can't go wrong. More details on walking and cycling are given in the Outdoor Activities chapter (p83), and suggestions for shorter routes are given throughout this chapter. Regional tourism websites all contain walking and cycling information, and tourist information centres (TICs; referred to throughout this book simply as tourist offices) all stock leaflets (free) plus maps and guides (usually £1 to £5) covering walking, cycling and other activities.

### CYCLING

There are some excellent cycling routes in this part of the world. A longtime favourite is the **Coast & Castles Cycle Route**, which runs south-north along the glorious Northumberland coast between Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Berwick-upon-Tweed, before swinging inland into Scotland to finish at Edinburgh. (This route is part of the National Cycle Network – see the boxed text, p88.) Of course you can also do it north-south, or just do the north-east England section. The coast is exposed, though, so check the weather and try to time your ride so that the wind is behind you.

The 140-mile **Sea to Sea Cycle Route** (C2; [www.c2c-guide.co.uk](http://www.c2c-guide.co.uk)) runs across northern England from Whitehaven or Workington on the Cumbrian coast, through the northern part of the Lake District, and then over the wild hills of the North Pennines to finish at Newcastle-upon-Tyne or Sunderland. This popular route is fast becoming a classic, and most people go west to east to take advantage of prevailing winds. You'll need five days to complete the whole route; the northeast England section, from Penrith (in Cumbria) to the east coast, is a good three-day trip.

The other option is the brand-new **Hadrian's Cycleway** ([www.cyderoutes.org.uk](http://www.cyderoutes.org.uk)), a 172-mile route opened in July 2006 that runs from South Shields in Tyneside west along the wall and down to Ravensglass in Cumbria.

### WALKING

The North Pennines are billed as 'England's last wilderness', and if you like to walk in quiet and fairly remote areas, these hills – along with the Cheviots further north – are among the best in England. Long routes through this area include the famous **Pennine Way**, which keeps

mainly to the high ground as it crosses the region between the Yorkshire Dales and the Scottish border, but also goes through sections of river valley and some tedious patches of plantation. The whole route is over 250 miles, but the 70-mile section between Bowes and Hadrian's Wall would be a fine four-day taster. Elsewhere in the area, the great Roman ruin of **Hadrian's Wall** is an ideal focus for walking.

There's a huge range of easy loops taking in forts and other historical highlights. A very popular walk is the long-distance route from end to end, providing good options for anything from one to four days (see p633).

### Getting There & Around BUS

Bus transport around the region can be difficult, particularly around the more remote parts of Northumbria in the west. Call ☎ 0870 608 2 608 for information on connections, timetables and prices.

Several one-day Explorer tickets are available; always ask if one might be appropriate. The **Explorer North East** (adult/child £5.75/4.75), available on buses, covers from Berwick down to Scarborough, and allows unlimited travel for one day, as well as numerous admission discounts.

### TRAIN

The main lines run north to Edinburgh via Durham, Newcastle and Berwick, and west to Carlisle roughly following Hadrian's Wall. Travelling to/from the south, it may be necessary to make connections at Leeds. Phone ☎ 0845 748 4950 for all train inquiries.

There are numerous Rover tickets for single-day travel and longer periods, so ask if one might be worthwhile. For example, the **North Country Rover** (adult/child £61.50/30.75) allows unlimited travel throughout the north (not including Northumberland) any four days out of eight.

## NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE

☎ 0191 / pop 189,870

Newcastle a hipster capital? It wouldn't have seemed at all possible a couple of decades ago when the city was orphaned by the demise of coal and coal-related industry. Newcastle stumbled around a bit before falling firmly into the arms of urban rejuvenation, which

has seen it transformed into the superstylin' burg it is today, bursting with art galleries, restaurants and trendy bars.

Tell that to the tens of thousands of punters who roll into town on a Friday and stumble back out on a Sunday having partied to near-exhaustion in what is undoubtedly Britain's most powerful magnet for hen and stag nights. Because for all of its new-found sophistication, Newcastle is still about the wild and crazy nightlife, the alpha and omega of so many visits to the city.

If you do come, we hope you take a moment to cherish the city's greatest strength: the locals. Geordies are a fiercely independent bunch, tied together by history, adversity and that impenetrable dialect, the closest language to 1500-year-old Anglo-Saxon left in England. They are also proud, hard-working and indefatigably positive – perhaps their greatest quality considering how tough life has been.

### ORIENTATION

The River Tyne marks the boundary between Newcastle to the north and Gateshead to the south; it is also one of the focal points for visitors to the city. Newcastle's attractive Victorian centre – which the local council has called Grainger Town to the uncertain shrugs of the locals – is only a short, uphill walk from the river. Between the river and the centre is Central Station (train). The coach station is on Gallowgate, while local and regional buses leave from Eldon Square and Haymarket bus stations. Jesmond is north of the city centre, and easily reached by bus or with the excellent Metro underground system.

### NEWCASTLE IN...

#### Two Days

Newcastle is all about Quayside, where you'll find the famous **Tyne bridges** (p621) and the remaining bits of 17th-century Newcastle, including **Bessie Surtee's House** (p621). A good walk is to cross the Millennium Bridge into Gateshead and check out **Baltic** (p622) and the **Sage** (p625). Wander back across the bridge and hop on a Quayside Q2 bus out to the Ouseburn Valley to visit the **Biscuit Factory** (p622) and (if you're with the kids) **Seven Stories** (p622).

Back in the elegant Victorian centre, visit the **Laing Art Gallery** (p621) and the **Life Science Centre** (p621). Stop off in **Blake's Coffee House** (p624) for a pick-me-up. Work your way up to the **Trent House Soul Bar** (p624) and find that song you love but haven't heard in years on the incredible jukebox. And just keep going; everyone else is, so why shouldn't you?

The next day, if your head can take it, take the bus south through Gateshead to the **Angel of the North statue** (p626). Unfortunately, there's not much else going on here, so you'll have to head back into town. Pick a bar, any bar, and do as they do round these parts. But remember: short sleeves only!

The Tyne's southern bank – home to the impressive Baltic gallery and stunning Sage – is as far into Gateshead as you'll likely need to venture.

### Maps

All tourist offices have handy, free tearaway maps of Newcastle and Gateshead. The Ordnance Survey's *Mini-Map* (£1.50) is a handy foldaway pocket map of Newcastle, but not Gateshead. The **Newcastle Map Centre** (☎ 261 5622; [www.newtraveller.com](http://www.newtraveller.com); 1st fl, 55 Grey St) supplies copious maps and guides.

### INFORMATION

#### Bookshops

**Blackwell's Bookshop** (☎ 232 6421; 141 Percy St) A comprehensive range of titles.

**Waterstone's** (☎ 261 6140; 104 Grey St) There's another branch, also near Monument Metro, but this one is particularly finely housed.

#### Emergency

**Police station** (☎ 214 6555; cnr Pilgrim & Market Sts)

#### Internet Access

**Internet Exchange** (☎ 221 1746; Newcastle City Library, Princess Sq; per 30min £1; ☎ 9am-7.45pm Mon-Sat, noon-3.45pm Sun)

#### Laundry

**Clayton Road Laundrette** (☎ 281 5055; 4 Clayton Rd, Jesmond)

#### Medical Services

**Newcastle General Hospital** (☎ 273 8811; Westgate Rd) Half a mile northwest of the centre, off Queen Victoria St.



**museum** (☎ 232 6789; www.twmuseums.org.uk; Blandford Sq; admission free; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun). The exhibits, spread across three floors of the former Co-operative Wholesale Society building, surround the mightily impressive 30m-long *Turbinia*, the fastest ship in the world in 1897. The different sections are all worth a look; our favourites were the self-explanatory Story of the Tyne and the interactive Science Maze.

### CASTLE GARTH KEEP

The 'New Castle' that gave its name to the city has been largely swallowed up by the train station, leaving only the square Norman **keep** (adult/child £1.50/50p; ☞ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar) as one of the few remaining fragments. It has a fine chevron-covered chapel and great views across the Tyne bridges from its rooftop.

### Ouseburn Valley

About a mile east of the city centre is the **Ouseburn Valley**, the 19th-century industrial heartland of Newcastle and now one of the city's hippest districts. Pubs, bars, restaurants and clubs now occupy the once-derelict Victorian mills and warehouses. To get there, jump onto the yellow Quayside Q2 bus that runs a loop through the valley from the city centre.

### BISCUIT FACTORY

No prizes for guessing what this brand-new public **art gallery** (☎ 261 1103; www.thebiscuitfactory.com; Stoddart St; admission free; ☞ 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) used to be. What it is now, though, is the country's biggest art shop, where you can peruse and buy work by artists from near and far in a variety of mediums, including painting, sculpture, glassware and furniture. Prices are thoroughly democratic, ranging from £20 to £25,000, but even if you don't buy, the art is excellent and there's a top-class restaurant upstairs.

### SEVEN STORIES – THE CENTRE FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS

A marvellous conversion of a handsome Victorian mill has resulted in **Seven Stories** (☎ 0845 271 0777; www.sevenstories.org.uk; 30 Lime St; adult/child £5/4; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, to 6pm Thu, 11am-5pm Sun), a very hands-on museum dedicated to the wondrous world of children's literature. Across the seven floors you'll find original manuscripts, a growing collection of artwork

from the 1930s onwards and a constantly changing programme of exhibitions, activities and events designed to encourage the AA Milnes of the new millennium.

### Gateshead

You probably didn't realise that that bit of Newcastle south of the Tyne is the 'town' of Gateshead, but local authorities are going to great lengths to put it right, even promoting the whole kit-and-caboodle-on-Tyne as 'NewcastleGateshead'. A bit clumsy, but we get the point. To date, the ambitious programme of development has seen the transformation of the southern banks of the Tyne, but there's as yet little to make you travel further afield than the water's edge.

### BALTIC – THE CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Once a huge, dirty, yellow grain store overlooking the Tyne, **Baltic** (☎ 478 1810; www.balticmill.com; admission free; ☞ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue, to 8pm Wed) is now a huge, dirty, yellow art gallery to rival London's Tate Modern. Unlike the Tate, there are no permanent exhibitions here, but the constantly rotating shows feature the work and installations of some of contemporary art's biggest show stoppers. The complex has artists-in-residence, a performance space, a cinema, a bar, a spectacular rooftop restaurant (you'll need to book) and a ground-floor restaurant with riverside tables. There's also a viewing box for a fine Tyne vista.

### NEWCASTLE FOR CHILDREN

Newcastle is friendly, full stop. Although at first glance the bonhomie mightn't seem to extend past buying rounds in the pub, on closer inspection there's plenty to keep the young 'uns entertained. The new and utterly wonderful **Seven Stories** (left) is the perfect destination for any kid who has an imagination, while closer to the centre the Life Science Centre (p621) and the Discovery Museum (p621) are brilliant and should keep the kids busy for the guts of a day.

### QUIRKY NEWCASTLE

Take in the David Lynch vibe at Blackie Boy (p624), where it's not all it appears to be. Pop your coins into the world's best jukebox at the Trent House Soul Bar (p624) for the stomping sound of northern soul and pretend that James Blunt had stayed in the army. Buy some art at

the Biscuit Factory (opposite) before checking out the gig list at the Head of Steam@The Cluny (p624). Cross one of the Tyne bridges (p621) on foot.

### TOURS

There are a handful of tour options:

**River Tyne Cruises** (☎ 296 6740/1; www.tyneleisureline.co.uk; adult/child £12/7; ☞ tours noon Sat & Sun May-early Sep) Three-hour river cruises departing from Quayside pier at Millennium Bridge, opposite Baltic.

**Tom Keating Tours** (☎ 488 5115; www.tomkeating.co.uk) Expert, tailor-made tours of the city by a well-respected blue-badge guide. Tours of surrounding region also available.

**Walking Tours** (adult/child £3/2; ☞ 2pm Wed & Sat Jun & Sep, Mon-Sat Jul-Aug) One-and-a-half-hour walking tours of the main sites of interest, run by and departing from the Grainger St branch of the tourist office.

### SLEEPING

Although the number of city-centre options is on the increase, they are still generally restricted to the chain variety – either budget or business – that caters conveniently to the party people and business folk that make up the majority of Newcastle's overnight guests. Most of the other accommodations are in the handsome northern suburb of Jesmond, where the forces of gentrification and student power fight it out for territory. As the city is a major business destination, most places drop their prices for Friday and Saturday nights.

### City Centre

With only one exception, the closer you get to the river, the more you'll pay.

**Albatross Inn!** (☎ 233 1330; www.albatrossnewcastle.com; 51 Grainger St; dm/d from £16.50/22.50; ☐ ☑ ☒ ☓) Finally, a hostel in the city centre! It's brand new, clean and fully equipped with decent-sized dorms, a self-catering kitchen, top-notch bathroom facilities, CCTV, electronic key cards, an internet station and even a small car park.

**Premier Lodge** (☎ 0870 990 6530; www.premierlodge.com; Quayside; r from £28) With a superb location in the old Exchange Building, this budget chain is right in the heart of the action. If you're here for the party, you shouldn't care that your room has about as much flavour as day-old chewing gum – if all goes according to plan, you won't be spending much time here anyway!

**Malmaison** (☎ 245 5000; www.malmaison.com; Quayside; d £119-140, ste £225-350; ☐) The affectedly stylish Malmaison touch has been applied

to this former warehouse with considerable success, although it could pull the brake on the quasi-poetic publicity. Big beds, sleek lighting and designer furniture flesh out the Rooms of Many Pillows.

**Greystreethotel** (☎ 230 6777; www.greystreethotel.com; 2-12 Grey St; d/ste £135/175; ☐) A bit of designer class along the classiest street in the city centre has been long overdue: the rooms are gorgeous if a tad poky, all cluttered up with flat-screen TVs, big beds and handsome modern furnishings.

### Jesmond

The bulk of Newcastle's budget and mid-range accommodation is concentrated in the northeastern suburb of Jesmond, mainly on Osborne Rd. There are literally dozens of hotels and B&Bs along this street; here we recommend our favourites.

Catch the Metro to Jesmond or West Jesmond, or bus 80 from near Central Station, or bus 30, 30B, 31B or 36 from Westgate Rd.

**Newcastle YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5972; www.yha.org.uk; 107 Jesmond Rd; dm from £13.95; ☞ end Jan-end Dec) This nice, rambling place has small dorms that are generally full, so book in advance. It's close to the Jesmond Metro stop.

**Adelphi Hotel** (☎ 281 3109; 63 Fern Ave; s/d £39.50/60) Just off Osborne Rd, this attractive hotel has nice floral rooms that are clean and very neat – a rare thing around here for this price range.

**Gresham Hotel** (☎ 281 6325; www.gresham-hotel.com; 92 Osborne Rd; s/d from £50/70) Plenty of colours light up the rooms at this pleasant hotel attached to the trendy Bar Bacca; it's extremely popular with weekend visitors who swear by the attentive-but-informal service.

**Our pick** **Jesmond Dene House** (☎ 212 3000; www.jesmonddenehouse.co.uk; Jesmond Dene Rd; s £115, d £145-195, ste £225-270; ☐) As elegant a hotel as you'll find anywhere, this exquisite property is the perfect marriage between traditional styles and modern luxury. The large, gorgeous bedrooms are furnished in a modern interpretation of the Arts & Crafts style and are bedecked with all manner of technological goodies (flat-screen digital TVs, digital radios, wi-fi) and wonderful bathrooms complete with underfloor heating.

### EATING

The Geordie palate is pretty refined these days and there are a host of fine dining options in all price categories that make their



mark. Conversely, if all you're looking for is stomach-lining crappy fast-food and dodgy ethnic cuisine, well there's plenty of that too.

### City Centre

**Blake's Coffee House** (☎ 261 5463; 53 Grey St; breakfast £2-3.95, sandwiches £3; ☎ 9am-6pm) There is nowhere better than this high-ceilinged café for a Sunday-morning cure on any day of the week. It's friendly, relaxed and serves up the biggest selection of coffees in town, from the gentle push of a Colombian blend to the toxic shove of Old Brown Java. We love it.

**Big Mussel** (☎ 232 1057; www.bigmussel.co.uk; 15 The Side; mains £6-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) Mussels and other shellfish – all served with chips – are a very popular choice at this informal diner. There are pasta and vegetarian options as well, and students get 15% off everything. There's another branch (☎ 261 8927) on Leazes Park Rd, close to St James' Park, that does a roaring trade on match days.

**Paradiso Café Bar** (☎ 221 1240; 1 Market Lane; mains £8-12; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, to 7pm Sun) Hidden away in a small alley off Pilgrim St is one of the city's most popular spots. Good food, a mellow atmosphere and a fabulous little balcony for alfresco action keeps this place full almost all the time.

**Secco Ristorante Salentino** (☎ 230 0444; 86 Pilgrim St; mains £17-22; ☎ lunch & dinner) Top-notch food from Salento in the Italian heel of Puglia makes this place an easy contender for best Italian restaurant in town. Some punters have been disappointed with the slowish service, which, for the price, should probably be a little snappier.

### Jesmond

**Pizzeria Francesca** (☎ 281 6586; 134 Manor House Rd, Jesmond; mains £4-12; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This is how all Italian restaurants should be: chaotic, noisy, friendly, packed cheek-to-jowl and absolutely worth making the effort for. Excitable, happy waiters and huge portions of pizza and pasta keep them queuing at the door – get in line and wait because you can't book in advance.

### DRINKING

Hey, guess what? Geordies love a good night out! Whether it's the scantily clad brash and brazen draining coloured cocktails in and around the bars of Bigg Market or the more sophisticated punter sipping the same in the hotspots along Quayside and Mosley St, there are few cities that pursue the art of the bevvy

with the same untrammelled fervour. And if you're looking for a spit 'n' sawdust kind of place to enjoy a traditional ale, well there are plenty of those too.

We daren't even begin to list the pubs and bars in town, but here's a handful to start with. Get a bottle of dog and get doon.

**Blackie Boy** (11 Groat Market) At first glance, this darkened old boozier looks like any old traditional pub. Look closer. The overly red lighting. The single bookcase. The large leather armchair that is rarely occupied. The signage on the toilets: 'Dick' and 'Fanny'. This place could have featured in *Twin Peaks*, which is why it's so damn popular with everyone.

**Crown Posada** (31 The Side) An unspoilt, real-ale pub that is a favourite with more seasoned drinkers, be they the after-work or instead-of-work crowd.

**Forth** (Pink Lane) It's in the heart of the gay district, but this great old pub draws all kinds with its mix of music, chat and unpretentious atmosphere.

**Tokyo** (17 Westgate Rd) Tokyo has a suitably darkened atmosphere for what the cognoscenti consider the best cocktail bar in town; but we loved the upstairs garden bar where you can drink, smoke and chat with a view.

**Ourpick Trent House Soul Bar** (1-2 Leazes Lane) The wall has a simple message: 'Drink Beer. Be Sincere.' This simply unique place is the best bar in town because it is all about an ethos rather than a look. Totally relaxed and utterly devoid of pretentiousness, it is an old-school boozier that out-cools every other bar because it isn't trying to. And because it has the best jukebox in all of England – you could spend years listening to the extraordinary collection of songs it contains. It is run by the same folks behind the superb World Headquarters nightclub.

### ENTERTAINMENT

Are you up for it? You'd better be, because Newcastle's nightlife doesn't mess about. There is nightlife beyond the club scene – you'll just have to wade through a sea of staggering, glassy-eyed clubbers to get to it. For current listings go online to www.thecrackmagazine.com. Club admissions range from £4 to £15.

### Live Music

**Head of Steam@The Cluny** (☎ 230 4474; www.headofsteam.co.uk; 36 Lime St, Ouseburn Valley) This is one of the best spots in town to hear live music,

attracting all kinds of performers, from experimental prog heads to up-and-coming pop goddesses. Touring acts and local talent fill the bill every night of the week. Take the Metro to Byker.

**Sage Gateshead** (☎ 443 4666; www.thesagegateshead.org; Gateshead Quays) Norman Foster's magnificent chrome-and-glass horizontal bottle is not just worth gazing at and wandering about in – it is also a superb venue to hear live music, from folk to classical orchestras. It is the home of the Northern Sinfonia and Folkworks.

### Nightclubs

**Digital** (☎ 261 9755; www.yourfutureisdigital.com; Times Sq) The newest of Newcastle's megaclubs is this two-floored danceteria with one of the best sound systems we've ever heard. Our favourite night is Thursday's Stonelove (£4), a journey through 40 years of alternative rock and funk. Saturday's Shindig (£10 before 11pm, £12 after) is all about four to the floor.

**Foundation** (☎ 261 8985; www.foundation-club.com; 57-59 Melbourne St) This warehouse-style club features a massive sound system, fantastic lighting rig and regular guest slots for heavy-weight DJs from all over. If you want a night of hard-core clubbing, this is the place for you.

**World Headquarters** (☎ 261 7007; www.trenthouse.com; Curtis Mayfield House, Carlill Sq) Dedicated to the genius of black music in all its guises – funk, rare groove, dance-floor jazz, northern soul, genuine R & B, lush disco, proper house and reggae – this fabulous club is strictly for true believers, and judging from the numbers, there are thousands of them.

### Theatre

**Theatre Royal** (☎ 232 2061; www.theatre-royal-newcastle.co.uk; 100 Grey St) The winter home of the Royal Shakespeare Company is full of Victorian splendour and has an excellent programme of drama.

### Sport

**Newcastle United Football Club** (☎ 201 8400; official www.nufc.co.uk, unofficial www.nufc.com; St James' Park, Strawberry Pl) It's more than just a football team: it is the collective expression of Geordie hope and pride as well as the release for decades of economic, social and sporting frustration. Its fabulous ground, St James' Park (☎ box office 261 1571) is always packed. Match tickets go on public sale about two weeks before a game or you can try the stadium on the day, but

### GAY & LESBIAN NEWCASTLE

Newcastle's gay scene is pretty dynamic, with its hub at the 'Pink Triangle' formed by Waterloo, Neville and Collingwood Sts, but stretching as far south as Scotswood Rd. There are plenty of gay bars in the area and one outstanding nightclub.

**Camp David** (8-10 Westmorland Rd) An excellent mixed bar that is as trendy with straights as it is with the gay community.

**Powerhouse Nightclub** (☎ 261 4507; 9-19 Westmorland Rd) Newcastle's brashiest queer nightclub, with flashing lights, video screens and lots of suggestive posing.

there's no chance for big matches, such as those against arch-rivals Sunderland.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

**Newcastle International Airport** (☎ 286 0966; www.newcastleairport.com) is 7 miles north of the city off the A96. It has direct services to Aberdeen, London, Cardiff, Dublin, Belfast, Oslo, Amsterdam, Paris, Prague, Brussels and a number of destinations in Spain.

#### Boat

**DFDS Seaways** (☎ 0870 533 3000; www.dfdsseaways.co.uk) operates ferries to Newcastle from Kristiansand in Norway, the Swedish port of Gothenburg and the Dutch port of Ijmuiden, near Amsterdam. For online ferry bookings, check out www.newcastleferry.co.uk.

#### Bus

National Express buses arrive and depart from the Gallowgate coach station. You can get to most anywhere, including London (£27.50, seven hours, six daily) and Manchester (£16.60, five hours, six daily). For Berwick-upon-Tweed (two hours, five daily) take bus 505, 515 or 525 from Haymarket bus station.

Local and regional buses leave from Haymarket or Eldon Square bus stations. For local buses around the northeast, don't forget the excellent-value Explorer North East ticket, valid on most services for £6.50.

#### Train

Newcastle is on the main rail line between London and Edinburgh. Services go to Alnmouth (for connections to Alnwick; £6.20,

20 minutes, four daily), Berwick (£15.30, 45 minutes, every two hours), Edinburgh (£39, 1½ hours, half-hourly), London King's Cross (£105.50, three hours, half-hourly) and York (£21.30, 45 minutes, every 20 minutes). There's also the scenic Tyne Valley Line west to Carlisle. See p634 for details.

## GETTING AROUND

### To/From the Airport & Ferry Terminal

The airport is linked to town by the Metro (£3, 20 minutes, every 15 minutes).

Bus 327 links the ferry (at Tyne Commission Quay, 8.5 miles east), Central Station and Jesmond Rd. It leaves the train station 2½ hours and 1¼ hours before each sailing.

There's a taxi rank at the terminal; it costs about £15 to the city centre.

## Car

Driving around Newcastle isn't fun thanks to the web of roads, bridges and one-way systems, but there are plenty of car parks.

## Public Transport

There's a large bus network, but the best means of getting around is the excellent underground Metro, with fares from 55p. There are also several saver passes. The tourist office can supply you with route plans for the bus and Metro networks.

The **DaySaver** (£4.20, after 9am £3.40) gives unlimited Metro travel for one day, and the **DayRover** (adult/child £5/2.50) gives unlimited travel on all modes of transport in Tyne and Wear for one day.

## Taxi

On weekend nights taxis can be rare; try **Noda Taxis** (☎ 222 1888), which has a kiosk outside the entrance to Central Station.

# AROUND NEWCASTLE

## ANGEL OF THE NORTH

The world's most frequently viewed work of art is this extraordinary 200-tonne, rust-coloured human frame with wings (aka the Gateshead Flasher) towering over the A1 (M) about 5 miles south of Newcastle – if you're driving, you just can't miss it. At 20m high and with a wingspan wider than a Boeing 767, Antony Gormley's most successful work is the country's largest sculpture. Buses 723 and 724

from Eldon Sq station, or 21, 21A and 21B from Pilgrim St, will take you there.

## SEGEDUNUM

The last strong post of Hadrian's Wall was the fort of **Segedunum** (☎ 295 5757; www.twmuseums.org.uk; adult/child/concession £3.95/free/2.25; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Apr–Aug, 10am–5pm Sep, 10am–3.30pm Nov–Mar), 4 miles east of Newcastle at Wallsend. Beneath the 35m tower, which you can climb for some terrific views, is an absorbing site that includes a reconstructed Roman bathhouse (with steaming pools and frescoes) and a fascinating museum that gives visitors a well-rounded picture of life during Roman times.

Take the Metro to Wallsend.

# COUNTY DURHAM

Picturesque, peaceful villages and unspoilt market towns dot the lonely, rabbit-inhabited North Pennines and the gentle ochre hills of Teesdale. At the heart of it all is County Durham's simply exquisite capital, one of England's most visited towns and an absolute must on your northern itinerary.

Ironically, this pastoral image, so resonant of its rich medieval history, has only come back to life in recent years; for most of the last three centuries the county was given over almost entirely to the mining of coal, and the countryside is punctuated with the relics of that once all-important industry, now slowly being reclaimed by nature. Brutal and dangerous, coal mining was the lifeblood of entire communities; its sudden end in 1984 by stroke of a Conservative pen has left some purposeless towns and an evocatively scarred landscape.

Durham has had a turbulent history, though it pales in comparison with its troublesome northern neighbour. To keep the Scots and local Saxon tribes quiet, William the Conqueror created the title of prince bishop in 1081 and gave it vice-regal power over an area known as the Palatinate of Durham, which became almost a separate country. It raised its own armies, collected taxes and administered a separate legal system that – incredibly – wasn't fully incorporated into the greater English structure until 1971.

## Getting Around

The Explorer North East ticket (see p618) is valid on many services in the county.

## DURHAM

☎ 0191 / pop 42,940

The best way to arrive in Durham is by early-morning train on a clear day. As you emerge from the train station, look across the River Wear to the hilltop peninsula, and you'll see the main reason for coming in all its resplendent glory. England's most beautiful Romanesque cathedral, a masterpiece of Norman architecture, rates pretty high on our brilliant Britain list. Consider the setting: a huge castle, the cathedral and, surrounding them both, a cobweb of cobbled streets usually full of upper-crust students attending Durham's other big pull, the university. It's all so...English.

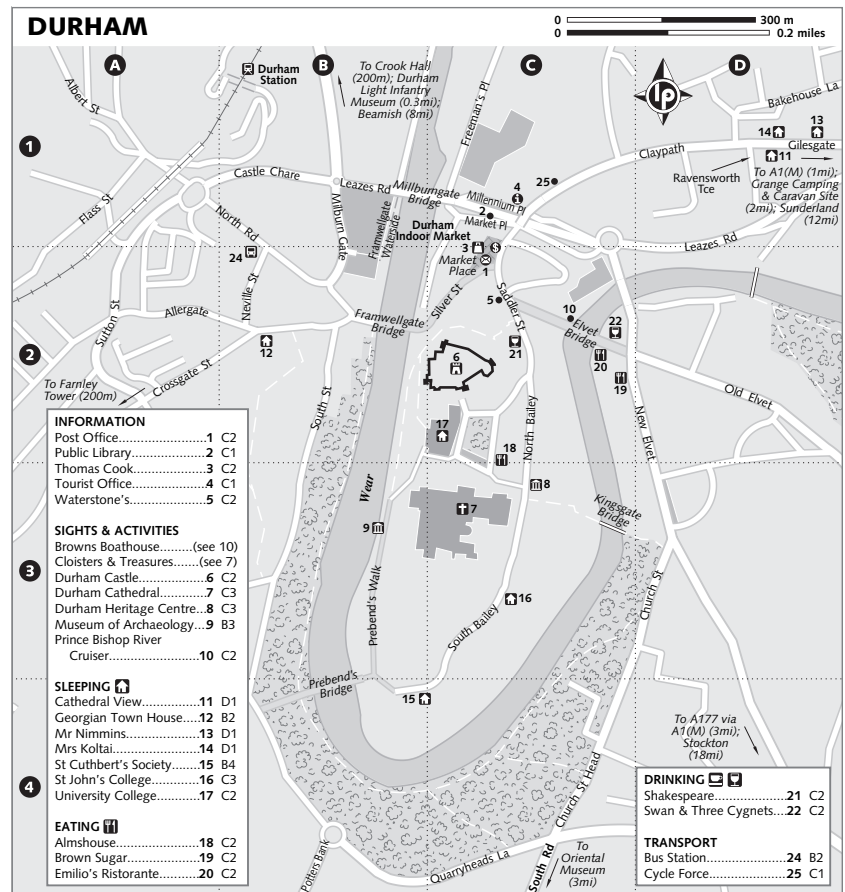
OK, so the university may not have the hallowed prestige of Oxbridge – it was only

founded in 1832 – but its terrific academic reputation and competitive rowing team make the disappointment of not getting into Oxford or Cambridge that bit easier to bear.

Once you've visited the cathedral, there's little else to do save walk the old town streets and find new spots from which to view Durham's main attraction. We recommend that you visit as a day trip from Newcastle unless you're planning some in-depth exploration of the surrounding county, in which case Durham is a tidy base.

## Orientation

Market Pl, the tourist office, castle and cathedral are all on the peninsula surrounded by the River Wear. The train and bus stations



are to the west, on the other side of the river. Using the cathedral as your landmark, you can't really go wrong. The main sites are within easy walking distance of each other.

## Information

**Post office** (Silver St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

**Public library** (Millennium Pl; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) The only place in town to check email.

**Thomas Cook** (☎ 382 6600; 24-25 Market Pl) Near the tourist office.

**Tourist office** (☎ 384 3720; www.durhamtourism.co.uk; 2 Millennium Pl; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) In the Gala complex, which includes a theatre and cinema.

**Waterstone's** (☎ 383 1488; 69 Saddler St) A good selection of books.

## Sights

### DURHAM CATHEDRAL

Durham's most famous building – and the main reason for visiting unless someone you know is at university here – has earned superlative praise for so long that to add more would be redundant; how can you do better than the 19th-century novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne, who wrote fawningly: 'I never saw so lovely a magnificent a scene, nor (being content with this) do I care to see better. Let's not go nuts here. No building is *that* beautiful, but the definitive structure of the Anglo-Norman Romanesque style is still pretty amazing. We would definitely put it in our top-church-in-England list – as do many others, including Unesco, who declared it a World Heritage Site in 1986.

The **cathedral** (☎ 386 4266; www.durhamcathedral.co.uk; donation requested; ☎ 9.30am-8pm mid-Jun–Aug, 9.30am-6.15pm Mon-Sat & 12.30-5pm Sun Sep–mid-Jun, private prayer & services only 7.30-9.30am Mon-Sat, 7.45am-12.30pm Sun year-round) is enormous and has a pretty fortified look; this is due to the fact that although it may have been built to pay tribute to God and to house the holy bones of St Cuthbert, it also needed to withstand any potential attack by the pesky Scots and Northumberland tribes who weren't too thrilled by the arrival of the Normans a few years before. Times have changed, but the cathedral remains an overwhelming presence, and modern-day visitors will hardly fail to be impressed by its visual impact.

The interior is genuinely spectacular. The superb nave is dominated by massive, powerful piers – every second one round, with an equal height and circumference of 6.6m,

and carved with geometric designs. Durham was the first European cathedral to be roofed with stone-ribbed vaulting, which upheld the heavy stone roof and made it possible to build pointed transverse arches – the first in England, and a great architectural achievement. The central tower dates from 1262, but was damaged in a fire caused by lightning in 1429, and was unsatisfactorily patched up until it was entirely rebuilt in 1470. The western towers were added in 1217–26.

Built in 1175 and renovated 300 years later, the **Galilee Chapel** is one of the most beautiful parts. The northern side's **paintings** are rare surviving examples of 12th-century wall painting and are thought to feature St Cuthbert and St Oswald. The chapel also contains the **Venerable Bede's tomb**. Bede was an 8th-century Northumbrian monk, a great historian and polymath whose work *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is still the prime source of information on the development of early Christian Britain. Among other things, he introduced the numbering of years from the birth of Jesus.

The **Bishop's Throne**, built over the tomb of Bishop Thomas Hatfield, dates from the mid-14th century. Hatfield's effigy is the only one to have survived another turbulent time: the Reformation. The **high altar** is separated from **St Cuthbert's tomb** by the beautiful stone **Neville Screen**, made around 1372–80. Until the Reformation, the screen included 107 statues of saints.

The cathedral has worthwhile **guided tours** (adult/child/student £3.50/free/2.50; ☎ 10.30am, 11.30am & 2.30pm Mon & Sat). Evensong is at 5.15pm from Tuesday to Saturday (Evening Prayer on Monday) and at 3.30pm on Sunday.

There's a splendid view from the top of the **tower** (adult/child £3/1.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat mid-Apr–Sep, to 3pm Oct-Mar), but you've got to climb 325 steps to enjoy it.

### Cloisters & Treasures

The monastic buildings are centred on the cloisters, which were heavily rebuilt in 1828. The west door to the cloisters is famous for its 12th-century ironwork. On the western side is the **Monks' Dormitory** (adult/child £1/30p; ☎ 10am-3.30pm Mon-Sat, plus 12.30-3.15pm Sun Apr-Sep), now a library of 30,000 books and displaying Anglo-Saxon carved stones, with a vaulted undercroft that houses the Treasures and a restaurant. There is also an **audiovisual display** (adult/child £1/30p; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Apr-Nov) on

the building of the cathedral and the life of St Cuthbert.

The **Treasures** (adult/child £2.50/70p; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun) refer to the relics of St Cuthbert, but besides his cross and coffin, there's very little here related to the saint. The collection is made up mostly of religious paraphernalia from later centuries.

### DURHAM CASTLE

Built as a standard motte-and-bailey fort in 1072, **Durham Castle** (☎ 374 3800; www.durhamcastle.com; adult/concession £5/3.50; ☎ tours only, on the hour 10am-noon & 2-4pm Jun-Oct, 2-4pm Mon, Wed, Sat & Sun Nov-May) was the prince bishops' home until 1837, when it became the first college of the new university. It remains a university hall, and you can stay here (see p630). The castle has been much altered over the centuries, as each successive prince bishop sought to put his particular imprimatur on the place, but heavy restoration and reconstruction were necessary anyway as the castle is built of soft stone on soft ground. Highlights of the 45-minute tour include the groaning 17th-century Black Staircase, the 16th-century chapel and the beautifully preserved Norman chapel (1080).

### OTHER SIGHTS

Near the cathedral, in what was the St Mary le Bow Church, is the **Durham Heritage Centre** (☎ 386 8719; St Mary le Bow, North Bailey; admission £1.50; ☎ 2pm-4.30pm Jun, 11am-4.30pm Jul-Sep, 11am-4.30pm Sat & Sun Apr, May & Oct), with a pretty crowded collection of displays on Durham's history from the Middle Ages to mining. It's all suitably grim, especially the reconstructed prison cells.

**Crook Hall** (☎ 384 8028; www.crookhallgardens.co.uk; Sidegate; adult/child £4.50/4; ☎ 1-5pm Fri-Mon Easter, Sun May & Sep, Fri Jun-Aug) is a medieval hall with 1.6 hectares of charming small gardens, about 200m north of the city centre.

### Activities

#### BOATING

The **Prince Bishop River Cruiser** (☎ 386 9525; Elvet Bridge; adult £4.50; ☎ 2pm & 3pm Jun-Sep) offers one-hour cruises.

You can hire a rowing boat from **Browns Boathouse** (☎ 386 3779; per hr per person £3), below Elvet Bridge.

#### WALKING

There are superb views back to the cathedral and castle from the riverbanks; walk around

the bend between Elvet and Framwellgate Bridges, or hire a boat at Elvet Bridge.

**Guided walks** (adult/child £3/free; ☎ 2pm Wed, Sat & Sun May-Sep) of 1½ hours leave from Millennium Pl – contact the tourist office for details. **Ghost walks** (☎ 386 1500; adult/child £3/1; ☎ 6.30pm Mon Jun-Sep, 8.30pm Jul & Aug) lasting 1½ hours also drift around town.

### Sleeping

It's all about a cathedral view round these parts. But when you consider that it's visible from pretty much everywhere, it's quality, not quantity, that counts. The tourist office makes local bookings free of charge, which is a good thing considering that Durham is always busy with visitors: graduation week in late June results in accommodation gridlock.

**Farnley Tower** (☎ 375 0011; www.farnley-tower.co.uk; The Avenue; s/d from £55/75; P ☒) A beautiful Victorian stone building that looks more like a small manor house than a family-run B&B, this place has 13 large rooms, none better than the superior rooms, which are not just spacious but have excellent views of the cathedral and castle. The service is impeccable.

**Cathedral View** (☎ 386 9566; www.cathedralview.com; 212 Gilesgate; s/d from £60/75) This plain-fronted Georgian house has no sign, but inside it does exactly what it says on the tin. Six large rooms decorated with lots of cushions, and coordinated bed linen and window dressings make up the numbers, but it's the three at the back that are worth the fuss: the views of the cathedral are superb. A small breakfast terrace with the same splendid vista is an added touch of real class.

**Georgian Town House** (☎ /fax 386 8070; 10-11 Crossgate St; s/d from £60/80) This listed building in the middle of town has large, airy rooms decorated in the true spirit of Laura Ashley: elaborate stencilling, plenty of pillows and fancy window dressings. It's close to the cathedral, so the rooms facing it have great views. There's also a small garden with flowers and a rockery.

A couple of small, similarly priced B&Bs on Gilesgate may not offer much in the way of décor, size or cathedral view, but are worth a try if you're stuck:

**Mr Nimmins** (☎ 384 6485; www.nimmins.co.uk; 14 Gilesgate; s/d £24/44)

**Mrs Koltai** (☎ 386 2026; 10 Gilesgate; s/d £25/42)

### Eating

Cheap eats aren't a problem in Durham thanks to the students, but quality is a little

### UNIVERSITY ACCOMMODATION

Several colleges rent their rooms during the holidays (Easter and July to September). The rooms are generally modern and comfortable, like most contemporary student halls. Phone ☎ 374 7360 or click on [www.dur.ac.uk/conferences/tourism](http://www.dur.ac.uk/conferences/tourism) for more information.

**St John's College** (☎ 334 3877; 3 South Bailey; s/d without bathroom £25.50/48) This college is right next to the cathedral; none of the rooms come with en suite.

**St Cuthbert's Society** (☎ 374 3364; 12 South Bailey; s/d £24/45) A few doors down from St John's, with similar student-style rooms.

**University College** (☎ 374 3863; s/d with bathroom £36/66, without bathroom £25/45) Smack on the Palace Green, this has the best location. Some rooms are available year-round, such as the bishop's suite (per person £85), decked out with 17th-century tapestries.

thin on the ground. Some pubs do good bar food; see Drinking (below).

**Almshouse** (☎ 386 1054; Palace Green; dishes £4-7; ☎ 9am-5pm) Fancy imaginative and satisfying snacks (how about spicy beef with red-bean casserole and rice?) served in a genuine 17th-century house right on Palace Green? It's a shame about the interior, though, which has been restored to look like any old museum café.

**Brown Sugar** (☎ 454 2242; New Elvet; dishes £5-7.50; ☎ 7.30am-11pm Mon-Sat, 9am-10.30pm Sun) This trendy coffee shop-cum-bar is a favourite with university students, who fold into the oversize leather couches, nibble on a ciabatta sandwich (no ordinary bread here, mate) and talk about how much study they should be doing. A perfect hang-out.

**Emilio's Ristorante** (☎ 384 0096; 96 Elvet Bridge; pizza or pasta from £6.95; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner only Sun) Durham's top spot for pizza, pasta and other Italian staples has a wonderful location overlooking the Wear. Try the *malfatti al forno*, a kind of oven-baked ravioli filled with ricotta cheese and spinach.

### Drinking

Durham may have a big student population, but most students seem to take the whole study thing really seriously, because the night-life here isn't as boisterous as you might expect from a university town. There is, however, a fistful of lovely old bars. The tourist office has a bimonthly *What's On* guide.

**Shakespeare** (63 Saddler St) As authentic a traditional bar as you're likely to find in these parts, this is the perfect local's boozier, complete with nicotine-stained walls, cosy snugs and a small corner TV to show the racing. Needless to say, the selection of beers and spirits is terrific. Not surprisingly, students love it too.

**Swan & Three Cygnets** (☎ 384 0242; Elvet Bridge) This high-ceilinged riverside pub with courtyard tables overlooks the river. It also serves some pretty good bar food (mains around £8.50) – usually fancy versions of standard bar fare such as bangers and mash.

### Getting There & Away BUS

The bus station is west of the river on North Rd. All National Express buses arrive here, while bus 352 links Newcastle and Blackpool via Durham, Barnard Castle, Raby Castle and Kirkby Stephen. Destinations include Edinburgh (£21.50, four hours, one daily), Leeds (£13.80, 2½ hours, four daily) and London (£27.50, 6½ hours, four daily). There are three daily National Express buses to Newcastle (£2.50, 30 minutes); bus 21 provides a half-hourly service but takes twice as long because it makes plenty of stops along the way.

### TRAIN

There are services at least hourly to London (£105.50, three hours), Newcastle (£4.60 single, 20 minutes) and York (£20.60, one hour).

### Getting Around

**Pratt's Taxis** (☎ 386 0700) charges a minimum of £2.40. **Cycle Force** (☎ 384 0319; 29 Claypath) charges £10/17 per half-/full day for mountain-bike hire.

### AROUND DURHAM Beamish Open-Air Museum

County Durham's greatest attraction is **Beamish** (☎ 0191-370 4000; [www.beamish.org.uk](http://www.beamish.org.uk); admission Nov-Mar £6, Apr-Oct adult/child £16/10; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun Nov-Mar, last entry 3pm year-round), a living, breathing, working museum that offers

a fabulous, warts-and-all portrait of industrial life in the northeast during the 19th and 20th centuries. Instructive and lots of fun to boot, this huge museum spread over 121 hectares will appeal to all ages.

You can go underground, explore mine heads, a working farm, a school, a dentist and a pub, and marvel at how every cramped pit cottage seemed to find room for a piano. Don't miss a ride behind an 1815 Steam Elephant locomotive or a replica of Stephenson's Locomotion No 1.

Allow at least three hours to do the place justice. Many elements (such as the railway) aren't open in the winter – call for details.

Beamish is about 8 miles northwest of Durham; it's signposted from the A1 (M) – take the A693 west at junction 63. Buses 709 from Newcastle (50 minutes, hourly) and 720 from Durham (30 minutes, hourly) run to the museum.

### BARNARD CASTLE

☎ 01833 / pop 6720

Barnard Castle, or just plain Barney, is anything but: a thoroughly charming market town packed with atmospheric pubs and antique shops, with a daunting ruined castle at its edge and an extraordinary French chateau on its outskirts. If you can drag yourself away, it is also a terrific base for exploring Teesdale and the North Pennines.

Staff at the **tourist office** (☎ 690909; [tourism@teesdale.gov.uk](http://tourism@teesdale.gov.uk); Woodleigh, Flatts Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) handle visitor inquiries.

### Sights

#### THE CASTLE

Once one of northern England's largest castles, **Barnard Castle** (EH; ☎ 638212; [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk); admission £3.40; ☎ 10am-6pm Easter-Sep, to 4pm Oct, Thu-Mon only Nov-Mar) was partly dismantled during the 16th century, but its huge bulk, on a cliff above the Tees, still manages to cover more than two very impressive hectares. Founded by Guy de Bailleul and rebuilt around 1150, its occupants spent their time suppressing the locals and fighting off the Scots – on their days off they sat around enjoying the wonderful views of the river.

#### BOWES MUSEUM

The 19th-century industrialist and art fanatic John Bowes didn't do things by halves, so

when he commissioned French architect Jules Pellechet to build a new museum to show off his terrific collection, the result was this extraordinary, Louvre-inspired French chateau 1.5 miles west of town. Opened in 1892, the **Bowes Museum** (☎ 690606; [www.bowesmuseum.org.uk](http://www.bowesmuseum.org.uk); adult/child £7/free; ☎ 11am-5pm) could give the Victoria & Albert Museum a run for its money, with lavish furniture and paintings by Canaletto, El Greco and Goya. The museum's most beloved exhibit, however, is the marvellous mechanical silver swan, operated at 12.30pm and 3.30pm.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Marwood House** (☎ 637493; [www.kilgarriff.demon.co.uk](http://www.kilgarriff.demon.co.uk); 98 Galgate; s/d £27/48) A handsome Victorian property with tastefully appointed rooms (the owner's tapestries feature in the décor and her homemade biscuits sit on a tray), Marwood House's standout feature is the small fitness room in the basement, complete with a sauna that fits up to four people.

**Greta House** (☎ 631193; [www.gretahouse.co.uk](http://www.gretahouse.co.uk); 89 Galgate; s/d £28.50/55) This lovely Victorian home stands out for the little touches that show that extra bit of class – fluffy bathrobes, face cloths and posh toiletries. What really did it for us though was the stay-in service: a tray of lovely homemade sandwiches and a superb cheeseboard to nibble at from the comfort of bed.

**Old Well Inn** (☎ 690130; [www.oldwellinn.co.uk](http://www.oldwellinn.co.uk); 21 The Bank; s/d from £34.50/79) You won't find larger bedrooms in town than at this old coaching inn, which makes it an excellent option for families – it even takes pets. It has a reputation for excellent, filling pub grub, although the service is somewhat lacklustre at times.

### Getting There & Away

Bus 352 runs daily between Newcastle and Blackpool via Durham, Bishop Auckland, Barnard Castle, Raby Castle and Kirkby Stephen.

### AROUND BARNARD CASTLE

The ransacked, spectral ruins of **Egglestone Abbey** (☎ dawn-dusk), dating from the 1190s, overlook a lovely bend of the Tees. You can envisage the abbey's one-time grandeur despite the gaunt remains. They're a pleasant mile-long walk south of Barnard Castle.

About 7 miles northeast of town is the sprawling, romantic **Raby Castle** (☎ 660202; [www.rabycastle.com](http://www.rabycastle.com); admission £7; ☎ castle 1-5pm, grounds 11am-5.30pm Sun-Fri Jun-Aug, Wed & Sun May & Sep), a



stronghold of the Catholic Neville family until it engaged in some ill-judged plotting (the 'Rising of the North') against the oh-so Protestant Queen Elizabeth in 1569. Most of the interior dates from the 18th and 19th centuries, but the exterior remains true to the original design, built around a courtyard and surrounded by a moat. There are beautiful formal gardens and a deer park. Buses 8 and 352 zip between Barnard Castle and Raby (20 minutes, eight daily).

## NORTH PENNINES

The North Pennines stretch from western Durham to just short of Hadrian's Wall in the north. In the south is Teesdale, the gently undulating valley of the River Tees; to the north is the much wilder Weardale, carved through by the River Wear. Both dales are marked by ancient quarries and mines – industries that date back to Roman times. The wilds of the North Pennines are also home to the picturesque Derwent and Allen Valleys, north of Weardale.

For online info, check out [www.northpennines.org.uk](http://www.northpennines.org.uk).

## HADRIAN'S WALL

Britain's most famous Roman construction is proof that when it came down to the big jobs, the Romans weren't shirkers. Besides their other accomplishments, they threw up this bloody great big wall between AD 122 and 128 to keep 'us' (Romans, subdued Anglo-Saxons) in and 'them' (hairy barbarians from Scotland) out. Or so the story goes.

The truth, however, is a little more prosaic. Emperor Hadrian didn't order the wall built because he was afraid of northern invasion. The truth is no part of the wall was impenetrable – a concentrated attack at any single point would have surely breached it – but was meant to mark the border as though to say that the Roman Empire would extend no further. By drawing a physical boundary, the Romans were also tightening their grip on the population to the south – for the first time in history, passports were issued to citizens of the empire, marking them out not just as citizens but, more importantly, as taxpayers.

Irrespective of the whys and wherefores, the wall was a mighty impressive bit of engineering, a spectacular 73-mile testament

to ambition and the practical Roman mind stretching across the narrow neck of the island from Solway Firth in the west almost to the mouth of the Tyne in the east. Even today, almost 2000 years after the first stone was laid, the sections that are still standing remain an awe-inspiring sight, proof that when the Romans wanted something done, they just knuckled down and did it.

The section from Newcastle to the River Irthing was built of stone, and turf blocks were used on the section to Solway – roughly 3m thick and 4.5m high. A 3m-deep, 9m-wide ditch and mound were excavated immediately in front (except where there were natural defences). Every Roman mile (1.62 miles; even in measurement the Romans outdid us) there was a gateway guarded by a small fort (milecastle) and between each milecastle were two observation turrets. Milecastles are numbered right across the country, starting with Milecastle 0 at Wallsend and ending with Milecastle 80 at Bowness-on-Solway. Between each was a series of turrets, tagged alphabetically, so Milecastle 39 was followed by Turret 39B, Turret 37B and then Milecastle 40.

A series of forts were developed as bases some distance south (and may predate the wall), and 16 actually lie astride it. The prime remaining forts on the wall are Cilurnum (Chesters), Vercovicium (Housesteads) and Banna (Birdsowald). The best forts behind the wall are Corstopitum, at Corbridge, and Vindolanda, north of Bardon Mill.

## Orientation

Now a World Heritage Site, Hadrian's Wall crosses beautiful, varied landscape. Starting in the lowlands of the Solway coast, it crosses the lush hills east of Carlisle to the bleak, windy ridge of basalt rock known as Whin Sill overlooking Northumberland National Park, and ends in the urban sprawl of Newcastle. The most spectacular section lies between Brampton and Corbridge.

Carlisle, in the west, and Newcastle, in the east, are good starting points, but Brampton, Haltwhistle, Hexham and Corbridge all make good bases.

The B6318 follows the course of the wall from the outskirts of Newcastle to Birdsowald; from Birdsowald to Carlisle it pays to have a detailed map. The main A69 road and the railway line follow 3 or 4 miles to the south. This section follows the wall from east to west.

## Information

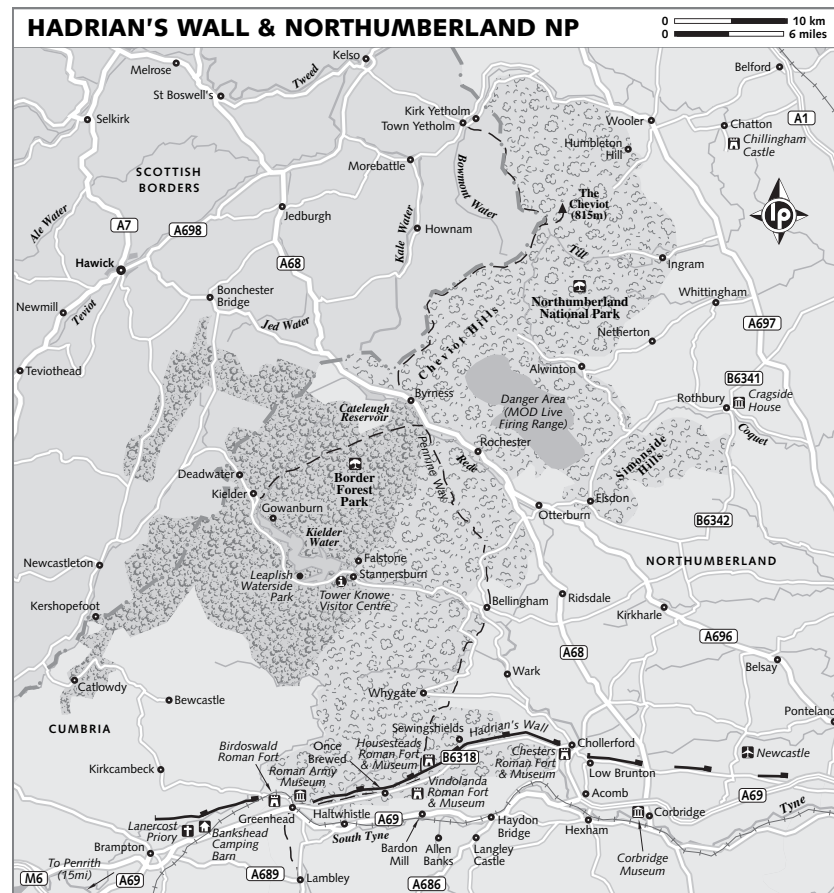
Carlisle and Newcastle tourist offices are good places to start gathering information, but there are also tourist offices in Hexham, Haltwhistle, Corbridge and Brampton. The **Northumberland National Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 01434-344396; Once Brewed; ☒ 10am-5pm mid-Mar–May, Sep & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Aug) is off the B6318. There's a **Hadrian's Wall information line** (☎ 01434-322002; [www.hadrians-wall.org](http://www.hadrians-wall.org)) too. May sees a spring festival, with lots of re-creations of Roman life along the wall (contact tourist offices for details).

## Walking & Cycling

The newish **Hadrian's Wall Path** is an 84-mile National Trail that runs the length of the wall

from Wallsend in the east to Bowness-on-Solway in the west. The entire route should take about seven days on foot, giving plenty of time to explore the rich archaeological heritage along the way. Anthony Burton's *Hadrian's Wall Path – National Trail Guide* (Aurum Press; £12.99), available at most bookshops and tourist offices in the region, is good for history, archaeology and the like, while the *Essential Guide to Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail* (Countryside Agency; £3.95) is a top guide to everyday facilities and services along the wall.

If you're planning to cycle along the wall, tourist offices sell the *Hadrian's Wall Country Cycle Map* (£3); you'll be cycling along part of Hadrian's Cycleway (see p618).



## Getting There & Around BUS

The AD 122 Hadrian's Wall Bus (get it? three hours, six daily June to September) is a hail-and-ride, guided service that runs between Hexham (the 9.15am service starts in Wallsend) and Bowness-on-Solway. Bus 185 covers the route the rest of the year (Monday to Saturday only).

West of Hexham the wall runs parallel to the A69, which connects Carlisle and Newcastle. Bus 685 runs along the A69 hourly, passing near the youth hostels and 2 to 3 miles south of the main sites throughout the year.

The **Hadrian's Wall Rover** (adult/child 1-day £6.50/4.50, 3-day £13/9) is available from the driver or the tourist offices, where you can also get timetables.

## TRAIN

The railway line between Newcastle and Carlisle (Tyne Valley Line) has stations at Corbridge, Hexham, Haydon Bridge, Bardon Mill, Haltwhistle and Brampton. This service runs daily, but not all trains stop at all stations.

## CORBRIDGE

☎ 01434 / pop 2800

The mellow commuter town of Corbridge is a handsome spot above a green-banked curve in the Tyne, its shady, cobbled streets lined with old-fashioned shops. Folks have lived here since Saxon times when there was a substantial monastery, while many of the buildings feature stones nicked from nearby Corstopitum.

The **tourist office** (☎ 632815; www.thisscorbridge.co.uk; Hill St; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun mid-May-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-mid-May & Oct) is part of the library.

## Corbridge Roman Site & Museum

What's left of the Roman garrison town of **Corstopitum** (EH; ☎ 632349; admission incl museum £3.80; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov-Mar) lies about a half a mile west of Market Pl on Dere St, once the main road from York to Scotland. It is the oldest fortified site in the area, predating the wall itself by some 40 years, when it was used by troops launching retaliation raids into Scotland. Most of what you see here, though, dates from around AD 200, when the fort had developed into a civilian settlement and was the main base along the wall.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Riverside Guesthouse** (☎ 632942; www.theriverside.guesthouse.co.uk; Main St; s/d from £42/62, without bathroom from £32/50; (P)) An excellent guesthouse in the middle of town, Riverside has large, comfortable rooms and unfussy, friendly service. It's especially popular with walkers.

**Errington Arms** (☎ 672250; Stagshaw, B6318 off A68 roundabout; mains £8-13; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun) About 3 miles north of town is this marvellous 18th-century stone pub where delicious food is served up in suitably atmospheric surroundings. From the mouth-watering ploughman's lunch to more intricate delicacies such as loin of lamb with mushroom and chive risotto, it won't disappoint; you can wash it all down with a pint of real ale.

**Valley Restaurant** (☎ 633434; www.valleyrestaurants.co.uk; Station Rd; mains £9-14; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) This fine Indian restaurant in a lovely building above the station supplies a unique service as well as delicious food. A group of 10 or more diners from Newcastle can catch the 'Passage to India' train to Corbridge accompanied by a waiter, who will supply snacks and phone ahead to have the meal ready when the train arrives!

## Getting There & Away

Bus 685 between Newcastle and Carlisle comes through Corbridge, as does the half-hourly bus 602 from Newcastle to Hexham, where you can connect with the Hadrian's Wall bus AD 122. Corbridge is also on the Newcastle-Carlisle railway line.

## HEXHAM

☎ 01434 / pop 10,690

Long famed for its fine Augustinian abbey, handsome Hexham was awarded Country Life's Best Market Town award for 2005, a fitting tribute to this bustling town interlinked with cobbled alleyways. It is the most substantial of the wall towns, with more restaurants, hotels and high-street shops than anywhere between Newcastle and Carlisle. The **tourist office** (☎ 652220; www.hadrianswallcountry.org; Wentworth Car Park; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun mid-May-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-mid-May) is northeast of the town centre.

## Sights

Stately **Hexham Abbey** (☎ 602031; ☎ 9.30am-7pm May-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Apr) is a marvellous example of Early English architecture. Inside, look out for

the Saxon crypt, the only surviving element of St Wilfrid's Church, built with inscribed stones from Corstopitum in 674.

The **Old Gaol** (☎ 652349; adult/child £3.50/2; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Apr-Oct, Mon, Tue & Sat Oct-mid-Nov), completed in 1333 as England's first purpose-built prison, was recently revamped and all four floors can be visited in all their gruesome glory. The history of the Border Reivers – a group of clans who fought, kidnapped, blackmailed and killed each other in an effort to exercise control over a lawless tract of land along the Anglo-Scottish border throughout the 16th century – is also retold, along with tales of the punishments handed out in the prison.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Acomb YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5664; www.yha.org.uk; Main St; dm £9.50; ☎ Easter-Oct) Simple accommodation – basic bunks and functional bathrooms – is on offer in this converted stable on the edge of Acomb village, 2.5 miles north of Hexham and 2 miles south of the wall. Hexham can be reached by bus (745 and 880, frequently) or train.

**West Close House** (☎ 603307; Hextol Tce; s/d from £22/48; (P) ☎) This immaculate 1920s house, in a leafy cul-de-sac off Allendale Rd (the B6305) and surrounded by a beautiful garden, is highly recommended for its friendliness and comfort.

**Dipton Mill** (☎ 606577; Dipton Mill Rd; mains around £6-10) For sheer atmosphere, you can't beat this superb country pub 2 miles out on the road to Blanchland, among woodland and by a river. It offers sought-after ploughman's lunches and real ale, not to mention a terrific selection of whiskies.

There are several bakeries on Fore St and, if you turn left into the quaintly named Priestpople near the bus station, you'll find a selection of restaurants.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 685 between Newcastle and Carlisle comes through Hexham hourly. The AD 122 and the winter-service bus 185 connect with other towns along the wall, and the town is on the Newcastle-Carlisle railway line (hourly).

## CHESTERS ROMAN FORT & MUSEUM

The best-preserved remains of a Roman cavalry fort in England are at **Chesters** (EH; ☎ 01434-681379; admission £3.80; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm

Oct-Mar), set among idyllic green woods and meadows and originally constructed to house a unit of troops from Asturias in northern Spain. They include part of a bridge (beautifully constructed and best appreciated from the eastern bank) across the River North Tyne, four well-preserved gatehouses, an extraordinary bathhouse and an underfloor heating system. The museum has a large collection of Roman sculpture. Take bus 880 or 882 from Hexham; it is also on the route of Hadrian's Wall bus AD 122.

## HALTWHISTLE

☎ 01434 / pop 3810

It's one of the more important debates in contemporary Britain: where exactly is the centre of the country? The residents of Haltwhistle, basically one long street just north of the A69, claim that they're the ones. But then so do the folks in Dunsop Bridge, 71 miles to the south. Will we ever know the truth? In the meantime, Haltwhistle is the spot to get some cash and load up on gear and groceries. Thursday is market day.

The **tourist office** (☎ 322002; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun May-Sep, 9.30am-noon & 1-3.30pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Sat Oct-Apr) is in the train station.

**Ashcroft** (☎ 320213; www.ashcroftguesthouse.co.uk; Lanty's Lonnen; s/d from £34/68) is a marvellous Edwardian home surrounded by beautifully manicured, layered lawns and gardens from which there are stunning views (also enjoyed from the breakfast room). The owners like their flowers so much they decorated most of the house accordingly. Highly recommended.

Bus 685 comes from Newcastle (1½ hours) and Carlisle (45 minutes) 12 times daily. Hadrian's Wall bus AD 122 (June to September) or 185 (October to May) connects Haltwhistle with other places along the wall. Bus 681 heads south to Alston (55 minutes, three daily Monday to Saturday). The town is also on the Newcastle-Carlisle railway line (hourly).

## AROUND HALTWHISTLE Vindolanda Roman Fort & Museum

The extensive site of **Vindolanda** (☎ 01434-344277; www.vindolanda.com; admission £4.95, with Roman Army Museum £7.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Feb, Mar, Oct & Nov) offers a fascinating glimpse into the daily life of a Roman garrison town. The time-capsule

museum displays leather sandals, signature Roman toothbrush-flourish helmet decorations, and countless writing tablets such as a student's marked work ('sloppy'), and a parent's note with a present of socks and underpants (things haven't changed – in this climate you can never have too many).

The museum is just one part of this large, extensively excavated site, which includes impressive parts of the fort and town (excavations continue) and reconstructed turrets and temple.

It's 1.5 miles north of Bardon Mill between the A69 and B6318 and a mile from Once Brewed.

### Housesteads Roman Fort & Museum

The wall's most dramatic site – and the best-preserved Roman fort in the whole country – is at **Housesteads** (EH; ☎ 01434-344363; admission £3.80; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar). From here, high on a ridge and covering 2 hectares, you can survey the moors of Northumberland National Park, and the snaking wall, with a sense of awe at the landscape and the aura of the Roman lookouts.

The substantial foundations bring fort life alive. The remains include an impressive hospital, granaries with a carefully worked-out ventilation system and barrack blocks. Most memorable are the spectacularly situated communal flushable latrines, which summon up Romans at their most mundane.

Housesteads is 2.5 miles north of Bardon Mill on the B6318, and about 3 miles from Once Brewed. It's popular, so try to visit outside summer weekends, or late in the day when the site will be quiet and indescribably eerie.

### Other Sights

One mile northwest of Greenhead near Wall-town Crags, the kid-pleasing **Roman Army Museum** (☎ 016977-47485; www.vindolanda.com; admission £3.95, with Vindolanda £7.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Feb-Mar & Oct-Nov) provides lots of colourful background detail to wall life, such as how far soldiers had to march per day and whether they could marry.

Ok, so *technically* it's in Cumbria (we won't tell if you don't), but the remains of the once-formidable **Birdoswald Roman Fort** (EH; ☎ 016977-47602; admission £3.80; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mar-Oct), on an escarpment overlooking the beautiful Irthing Gorge, were part of the wall and so merit

inclusion in this chapter on logical grounds. They're on a minor road off the B6318, about 3 miles west of Greenhead; a fine stretch of wall extends from here to Harrow Scar Milecastle. About half a mile away, across the impressive river footbridge, is another good bit of wall, ending in two turrets and the meticulous structure of the **Willowford Bridge abutment**.

Still in Cumbria, about 3 miles further west along the A69, are the peaceful raspberry-coloured ruins of **Lanercost Priory** (EH; ☎ 016977-3030; admission £2.70; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Thu-Mon Oct), founded in 1166 by Augustinian canons. Ransacked several times, after the dissolution it became a private house, and a priory church was created from the Early English nave. The church contains some beautiful Pre-Raphaelite stained glass. The AD 122 bus can drop you at the gate.

### Sleeping

**Holmhead Guest House** (☎ 016977-47402; www.bandbhadranswall.com; Thirlwall Castle Farm, Greenhead; dm/s/d £10/43/66) Four fairly compact rooms are available in this lovely remote old cottage; most of the space is taken up by the big beds. All the rooms have a shower rather than a bath. A barn was recently converted into a large dorm room, perfect for budget walkers and cyclists. It's about half a mile north of Greenhead.

**Greenhead YHA Hostel** (☎ 016977-47401; www.yha.org.uk; dm £11.95; ☎ Jul & Aug, call to check other times) A converted Methodist chapel by a trickling stream and a pleasant garden, 3 miles west of Haltwhistle. The hostel is served by bus AD 122 or bus 685.

**Once Brewed YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5980; www.yha.org.uk; Military Rd, Bardon Mill; dm £13.95; ☎ year-round) This modern and well-equipped hostel is central for visiting both Housesteads Fort, 3 miles away, and Vindolanda, 1 mile away. Bus 685 (from Hexham or Haltwhistle train stations) will drop you at Henshaw, 2 miles south, or you could leave the train at Bardon Mill 2.5 miles southeast. The Hadrian's Wall bus drops you at the door June to September.

**Birdoswald YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 6124; www.yha.org.uk; dm £15.50; ☎ Easter-Oct, call to check other times) This farmhouse within the grounds of the Birdoswald complex has recently been converted into a hostel with basic facilities, including a self-service kitchen and laundry. The price includes a visit to the fort.

## NORTHUMBERLAND

England's last frontier has much more in common with the wilds of Scotland to the north than the genteel landscapes to the south. Utterly wild and stunningly beautiful, with ne'er a trace of man save the fortified houses and friendly villages that speckle the rugged interior, Northumberland natural riches are immense, from the long, stunning beaches bookmarked by dramatic wind-worn castles to the east through the national park that protects much of the region right down to Hadrian's Wall, the most strikingly evocative part of which slices through the south.

### Getting Around

The excellent *Northumberland Public Transport Guide* (£1.60) is available from local tourist offices. Transport options are good, with a train line running along the coast from Newcastle to Berwick and on to Edinburgh.

### ALNICK

☎ 01665 / pop 7770

Northumberland's historic ducal town, Alnwick (no tongue gymnastics; just say 'annick'), is an elegant maze of narrow cobbled streets spread out beneath the watchful gaze of a colossal medieval castle. Not only will you find England's most perfect bookshop, but also the most visited attraction in the northeast at Alnwick Garden.

The castle is on the northern side of town and overlooks the River Aln. The **tourist office** (☎ 510665; www.alnwick.gov.uk; 2 The Shambles; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) is by the marketplace, in a handsome building that was once a butcher's shop.

There has been a market in Alnwick for more than 800 years. Market days are Thursday and Saturday, with a farmers market on the last Friday of the month.

### Sights

#### ALNICK CASTLE & GARDEN

The outwardly imposing **Alnwick Castle** (☎ 510 777; www.alnwickcastle.com; adult/child/concession £8.50/free/7.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct), ancestral home of the Duke of Northumberland and a favourite set for filmmakers, has changed little since the 14th century. The interior is sumptuous and extravagant; the six rooms open to the public – staterooms, dining room, guard chamber and

library – have an incredible display of Italian paintings, including Titian's *Ecce Homo* and many Canalettos.

The castle is set in parklands designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. The woodland walk offers some great aspects of the castle, or for a view looking up the River Aln, take the B1340 towards the coast.

As spectacular a bit of green-thumb artistry as you'll see anywhere in England, **Alnwick Garden** (☎ 510777; www.alnwickgarden.com; adult/child/concession £8/free/7.50; ☎ 10am-7pm Jun-Sep, to 6pm Apr, May & Oct, to 4pm Nov-Jan, to 5pm Feb & Mar) is one of the northeast's great success stories. Since the project began in 2000, the 4.8-hectare walled garden has been transformed from a derelict site into a spectacle that easily exceeds the grandeur of the castle's 19th-century gardens. A series of magnificent green spaces surround the breathtaking Grand Cascade – 120 separate jets spurting over 31,822L of water down 30-odd weirs for everyone to marvel at and kids to splash around in.

Other gardens include the Franco-Italian-influenced **Ornamental Garden** (with more than 15,000 plants) and the **Rose Garden**, with its pergola-lined paths and lots and lots of roses. It's an ongoing project: new gardens are being added all the time and 2006 saw the opening of a new visitor centre.

### Sleeping & Eating

**White Swan Hotel** (☎ 602109; fax 510400; Bondgate Within; s/d from £59/118; ☎ Alnwick's top address is this 300-year-old coaching inn right in the heart of town. Its rooms are all of a pretty good standard, but this spot stands out for its dining room, which has elaborate original panelling, ceiling and stained-glass windows filched from the *Olympic*, sister ship to the *Titanic*.

A row of handsome Georgian houses along Bondgate Without offer several worthwhile options that all charge around £28 per person, including **Lindisfarne Guest House** (☎ 603430; 6 Bondgate Without) and the **Teapot** (☎ 604473; 8 Bondgate Without), which has the largest teapot collection in town.

A number of atmospheric pubs do a good line in traditional food. The **Market Tavern** (☎ 602759; 7 Fenkle St; stottie £5.50), near Market Sq, is the place to go for a traditional giant beef stottie (bread roll), while **Ye Old Cross** (☎ 602735; Narrowgate; mains around £6) is good for a drink and is known as 'Bottles', after the dusty bottles

in the window: 150 years ago the owner collapsed and died while trying to move them and no-one's dared attempt it since.

### Getting There & Away

There are regular buses from Newcastle (501, 505 and 518; one hour, 28 per day Monday to Saturday, 18 on Sunday). Bus 518 has 10 to 14 daily services to the attractive towns of Warkworth (25 minutes) and Alnmouth (15 minutes), which has the nearest train station. Buses 505 and 525 come from Berwick (45 minutes, 13 daily Monday to Saturday). The **Arriva Day Pass** (adult/child £5/4) is good value.

### WARKWORTH

☎ 01665

Biscuit-coloured Warkworth is little more than a cluster of houses around a loop in the River Coquet, but it makes for an impressive sight, especially if you arrive on the A1068 from Alnwick, when the village literally unfolds before you to reveal the craggy ruin of the enormous 14th-century castle.

A 'worm-eaten hold of ragged stone', **Warkworth Castle** (EH; ☎ 711423; adult £3.40; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct, Sat-Mon only Nov-Mar) features in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* Parts I and II and will not disappoint modern visitors. Yes, it is still pretty worm-eaten and ragged, but it crowns an imposing site, high above the gentle, twisting river. The film *Elizabeth* (1998), starring Cate Blanchett, was filmed here.

Tiny, mystical, 14th-century **Warkworth Hermitage** (EH; admission £2.30; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed & Sun Apr-Sep), carved into the rock, is a few hundred metres upriver. Follow the signs along the path, then take possibly the world's shortest ferry ride. It's a lovely stretch of water and you can hire a **rowing boat** (adult/child per 45min £3/2.50; ☎ Sat & Sun May-Sep).

Fourteen huge, country-style bedrooms sit above a cosy bar at the **Sun Hotel** (☎ 711259; www.rytonpark-sun.co.uk; 6 Castle Tce; s/d from £49/75, with dinner £75/104; (P)), and an elegant restaurant serves local dishes given the French treatment. There are excellent views of both the castle and the river.

Right in the centre of the village the **Green-house** (☎ 712322; 21 Dial Pl; mains £7-13; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon & Wed-Sat, lunch only Sun) is a café-bistro that serves great coffee, cakes and more substantial fish and meat dishes on large pine tables.

Bus 518 links Newcastle (1½ hours, hourly), Warkworth, Alnmouth and Alnwick. There's

a train station on the main east-coast line, about 1.5 miles west of town.

### FARNE ISLANDS

One of England's most incredible sea-bird conventions is to be found on a rocky archipelago of islands about 3 miles offshore from the undistinguished fishing village of **Seahouses**. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 01665-720884; Seaford Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) near the harbour in Seahouses and a **National Trust Shop** (☎ 01665-721099; 16 Main St; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) for all species-specific information.

The best time to visit the **Farne Islands** (NT; ☎ 01665-720651; admission £5.20, in Apr, Aug & Sep £4.20; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Apr, Aug & Sep, Inner Farne also 1.30-5pm May-Jul, Staple also 10.30am-1.30pm May-Jul) is during breeding season (roughly May to July), when you can see feeding chicks of 20 species of sea bird, including puffin, kittiwake, Arctic tern, eider duck, cormorant and gull. This is a quite extraordinary experience, for there are few places in the world where you can get so close to nesting sea birds. The islands are also home to England's only colony of grey seals.

To protect the islands from environmental damage, only two are accessible to the public: Inner Farne and Staple Island. Inner Farne is the more interesting of the two, as it is also the site of a tiny chapel (1370, restored 1848) built in memory of St Cuthbert, who lived here for a spell and died here in 687.

### Getting There & Away

There are various tours, from 1½-hour cruises to all-day specials, and they get going from 10am April to October. Crossings can be rough, and may be impossible in bad weather. Some of the boats have no proper cabin, so make sure you've got warm, waterproof clothing if there's a chance of rain. Also recommended is an old hat – those birds sure can ruin a head of hair!

Of the operators from the dock in Seahouses, **Billy Shiel** (☎ 01665-720308; www.farne-islands.com; 3hr tour adult/child £12/8, all-day tour with landing £25/15) is recommended – he even got an MBE for his troubles.

### BAMBURGH

☎ 01668

Bamburgh is all about the castle, a massive, imposing structure high up on a basalt crag and visible for miles around. The village itself – a tidy fist of houses around a pleasant green –

isn't half bad, but it's really just about the castle, a solid contender for England's best.

**Bamburgh Castle** (☎ 214515; www.bamburghcastle.com; adult/child £6/2.50; ☎ 11am-5pm mid-Mar-Oct) is built around a powerful Norman keep and played a key role in the border wars. It was restored in the 19th century by the great industrialist Lord Armstrong, who also turned his passion to Cragside (p642) and was the owner of Jesmond Dene House in Newcastle (p623). The great halls within are still home to the Armstrong family. It's just inland from long open stretches of empty white-sand beach, ideal for blustery walks.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Victoria Hotel** (☎ 214431; www.victoriahotel.net; Front St; s/d from £50/100; (P)) Overlooking the village green is this handsome hotel with bedrooms decorated with quality antiques and – in the superior rooms – handcrafted four-posters. Here you'll also find the best restaurant in town, with a surprisingly adventurous menu (mains £12 to £14) where, for instance, chorizo is preferred over Cumberland sausage.

**Bamburgh Hall** (☎ 214230; cresswell@farming.co.uk; r £80; (P)) This magnificent farmhouse built in 1697 has only one room, but we highly recommend it for the sheer pleasure of the views, right down to the sea, and the huge breakfast, served in the very dining room where the Jacobite officers met during the rebellion of 1715.

**our pick** **Waren House Hotel** (☎ 214581; www.warehousehotel.co.uk; Waren Mill; d/ste £137/184) This most romantic of getaway hotels presents a delicious dilemma: whether to spend more time enjoying the superb setting, overlooking Budle Bay and Holy Island to the east and the Cheviot Hills to the west, or to lock yourself indoors and lose yourself in the luxurious trappings (try the three-course dinner, £27) of this magnificent house. The hotel is in the small hamlet of Waren Mill, 2 miles northwest of Bamburgh along the B1340.

The **Copper Kettle** (☎ 214361; 22 Front St; afternoon tea £4-6) is a gift shop with a pleasant tea room; you can stock up for a picnic at the **Pantry** (☎ 214455; 13 Front St; sandwiches £2-4).

### Getting There & Away

Bus 501 runs from Newcastle (2¼ hours, two daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday) stopping at Alnwick and Seahouses. Bus 401 or 501 from Alnwick (four to six daily) takes one hour.

### HOLY ISLAND (LINDISFARNE)

☎ 01289

Holy Island is often referred to as an unearthly place, and while a lot of this talk is just that (and a little bit of bring-'em-in tourist bluster), there is something almost other-worldly about this small island (it's only 2 sq miles). It's tricky to get to, as it's connected to the mainland by a narrow, glinting causeway that only appears at low tide. It's also fiercely desolate and isolated, barely any different from when St Aidan came to what was then known as Lindisfarne to found a monastery in 635.

As you cross the empty flats to get here, it's not difficult to imagine the marauding Vikings that repeatedly sacked the settlement between 793 and 875, when the monks finally took the hint and left. They carried with them the illuminated *Lindisfarne Gospels* (now in the British Library in London) and the miraculously preserved body of St Cuthbert, who lived here for a couple of years but preferred the hermit's life on Inner Farne. A priory was re-established in the 11th century but didn't survive the dissolution in 1537.

The island's peculiar isolation is best appreciated midweek or preferably out of season. Whatever you do, pay attention to the crossing-time information, available at tourist offices and on notice boards throughout the area. Every year there is a handful of go-it-alone fools who are caught midway by the incoming tide and have to abandon their cars.

### Sights

**Lindisfarne Priory** (EH; ☎ 389200; admission £3.70; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct, Feb & Mar, 10am-2pm Sat-Mon Nov-Jan) consists of elaborate red and grey ruins and the later 13th-century St Mary the Virgin Church. The recently refurbished museum next to these displays the remains of the first monastery and tells the story of the monastic community before and after the dissolution.

Twenty pages of the luminescent *Lindisfarne Gospels* are on view electronically at the **Lindisfarne Heritage Centre** (☎ 389004; www.holy-island.info; Marygate; adult/child £3/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, according to tides Nov-Mar), which also has displays on the locality.

Half a mile from the village stands the tiny, storybook **Lindisfarne Castle** (NT; ☎ 389244; adult £4; ☎ 10.30-3pm or noon-4.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct), built in 1550, and extended and converted by Sir Edwin Lutyens from 1902 to 1910 for Mr



Hudson, the owner of *Country Life* magazine. You can imagine some decadent parties have graced its alluring rooms – Jay Gatsby would have been proud. Its opening times may be extended depending on the tide. A **shuttle bus** (☎ 389236) runs here from the car park.

### Sleeping & Eating

It's possible to stay on the island, but you'll need to book in advance.

**Open Gate** (☎ 389222; theopengate@theopengate.ndo.co.uk; Marygate; s/d £32/54) This spacious Elizabethan stone farmhouse with comfortable rooms caters primarily to those looking for a contemplative experience – you're not so much charged a room rate as 'encouraged' to give the listed price as a donation. There is a small chapel in the basement and a room full of books on Celtic spirituality, and there are organised retreats throughout the year.

**Ship** (☎ 389311; www.theshippinn-holyisland.co.uk; Marygate; s/d/tr £52/68/90) Three exceptionally comfortable rooms – one with a four-poster – sit above an 18th-century public house known here as the Tavern. There's good local seafood in the bar.

### Getting There & Around

Holy Island can be reached by bus 477 from Berwick (Wednesday and Saturday only, Monday to Saturday July and August). People taking cars across are requested to park in one of the signposted car parks (£5 per day). The sea covers the causeway and cuts the island off from the mainland for about five hours each day. Tide times are listed at tourist offices, in local papers and at each side of the crossing.

### BERWICK-UPON-TWEED

☎ 01289 / pop 12,870

This salt-crusted fortress town is England's northernmost city and the holder of two unique honours: it is the most fought-over settlement in European history (between 1174 and 1482 it changed hands 14 times between the Scots and the English), and its football team, Berwick Rangers, are the only English team to play in the Scottish League – albeit at the low-level third division in 2006–07.

The **tourist office** (☎ 330733; www.berwick-upon-tweed.gov.uk; 106 Marygate; ☹ 10am–6pm Easter-Jun, to 5pm Jul-Sep, to 4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Easter) is helpful. Access the net at **Berwick Backpackers** (☎ 331481; 56–58 Bridge St; per 20min £2).

### Sights & Activities

Berwick's superb **walls** (EH; admission free) were begun in 1558 to reinforce an earlier set built during the reign of Edward II. They represented state-of-the-art military technology of the day and were designed both to house artillery (in arrowhead-shaped bastions) and to withstand it (the walls are low and massively thick, but it's still a long way to fall).

You can walk almost the entire length of the walls, a circuit of about a mile. It's a must, with wonderful, wide-open views. Only a small fragment remains of the once mighty **border castle**, by the train station. The tourist office has a brochure describing the main sights.

Recommended are the one-hour **guided walks** (adult/child £3.50/free; ☹ 10am, 11.15am, 12.30pm & 2pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct) starting from the tourist office.

### Sleeping & Eating

There are plenty of B&Bs around the town, most of which offer fairly basic but comfortable rooms; the tourist office can assist in finding one.

**Berwick Backpackers** (☎ 331481; www.berwickbackpackers.co.uk; 56–58 Bridge St; dm/s/d from £12/14.95/34; ☹) This excellent hostel, basically a series of rooms in the outhouses of a Georgian home around a central courtyard, has one large comfortable dorm, a single and two doubles, all with en suite. It also has net access. Highly recommended.

**our pick** **No 1 Sallyport** (☎ 308827; www.1sallyport-bedandbreakfast.com; 1 Sallyport, off Bridge St; r £90–140) Not just the best in town, but one of the best B&Bs in Britain. There are only five suites – each carefully appointed to fit the theme. The Manhattan Loft, crammed into the attic, makes the minimalist most of the confined space; the Lowry Room is a country-style Georgian classic; the Smuggler's Suite has a separate sitting room complete with widescreen TV, DVD players and plenty of space to lounge around in. Two new suites were added in 2005: the executive Madison and the superfancy Tiffany.

**Magna Tandoori** (☎ 302736; 39 Bridge St; mains £6–12; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner only Sun) There's nothing much in this handsome Georgian room to suggest an Indian restaurant, but the huge menu, chock-full of dishes, makes this the best of its kind in town.

### Getting There & Away

#### BUS

Buses stop on Golden Sq (where Marygate becomes Castlegate); there are good links from

Berwick into the Scottish Borders; there are buses west to Coldstream, Kelso and Galashiels. Buses 505, 515 and 525 go to Newcastle (2¼ hours, five daily) via Alnwick. Bus 253 goes to Edinburgh (two hours, six daily Mon-day to Saturday, two Sunday) via Dunbar.

#### TRAIN

Berwick is almost exactly halfway between Edinburgh (£16, 50 minutes) and Newcastle (£15.30, 50 minutes) on the main east-coast London–Edinburgh line. Half-hourly trains between Edinburgh and Newcastle stop in Berwick.

### Getting Around

The town centre is compact and walkable; if you're feeling lazy try **Berwick Taxis** (☎ 307771). **Tweed Bicycles** (☎ 331476; 17a Bridge St) hires out mountain bikes for £18 per day.

## NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK

There can surely be no greater wilderness left in England today than the 398 sq miles of natural wonderland that is Northumberland National Park, home to the soft swells of the Cheviot Hills and the seemingly endless spiky moors of autumn-coloured heather and gorse. Even the negligible human influence – there are only about 2000 inhabitants here – has been benevolent: the finest sections of Hadrian's Wall run along the park's southern edge and the challenging landscape is dotted with prehistoric remains and fortified houses – the thick-walled *peles* that were the only solid buildings constructed here until the mid-18th century.

### Orientation & Information

The park runs from Hadrian's Wall in the south, takes in the Simonside Hills in the east and runs into the Cheviot Hills along the Scottish border. There are few roads.

For information, contact the **Northumberland National Park** (☎ 01434-605555; www.northumberland-national-park.org.uk; Eastburn, South Park, Hexham). Besides the tourist offices mentioned in this section, there are relevant offices in **Once Brewed** (☎ 01434-344396; ☹ 10am–5pm mid-Mar–May, Sep & Oct, 9.30am–6pm Jun-Aug) as well as **Ingram** (☎ 01665-578890; ingram@nmpa.org.uk; ☹ 10am–5pm Easter-Oct). All the tourist offices handle accommodation bookings.

### Walking & Cycling

The most spectacular stretch of the Hadrian's Wall Path (p633) is between Sewingshields and Greenhead in the south of the park.

There are many fine walks into the Cheviots, frequently passing by prehistoric remnants; contact the Ingram, Wooler and Rothbury tourist offices for information.

Though at times strenuous, cycling in the park is a pleasure; the roads are good and the traffic is light in this part of Northumberland. There's off-road cycling in Border Forest Park.

### Getting There & Around

Public transport options are limited, aside from buses on the A69. See the Hadrian's Wall section (p634) for access to the south. Bus 808 (55 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday) runs between Otterburn and Newcastle. Postbus 815 and bus 880 (45 minutes, eight daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday) run between Hexham and Bellingham. National Express 383 (£15, three hours, one daily) goes from Newcastle to Edinburgh via Otterburn, Byrness (by request), Jedburgh, Melrose and Galashiels.

### BELLINGHAM

☎ 01434

The small, remote village of Bellingham (bel-lin-jum) is a pleasant enough spot on the banks of the Tyne, surrounded by beautiful, deserted countryside on all sides. It is an excellent base from which to kick off your exploration of the park.

The **tourist office** (☎ 220616; Main St; ☹ 9.30am–1pm & 2–5pm Mon-Sat, 1–5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 2–5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) handles visitor inquiries.

There's not a lot to see here save the 12th-century **St Cuthbert's Church**, unique because it retains its original stone roof, and **Cuddy's Well**, outside the churchyard wall, which is alleged to have healing powers on account of its blessing by the saint.

The **Hareshaw Linn Walk** passes through a wooded valley and over six bridges, leading to a 9m-high waterfall 2.5 miles north of Bellingham (*linn* is an Old English name for waterfall).

### Sleeping & Eating

Bellingham is on the Pennine Way; book ahead for accommodation in summer. Most of the B&Bs are clustered around the village green.

**Bellingham YHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 770 5694; www.yha.org.uk; Woodburn Rd; dm £10.95; ☹ mid-Apr–Oct) A cedarwood cabin with spartan facilities on the edge of the village, this hostel is almost always busy, so be sure to book ahead. There are showers, a cycle store and a self-catering kitchen on the premises.

**Lyndale Guest House** (☎ 220361; www.lyndale.guesthouse.co.uk; s/d from £22/44) The bedrooms in this pleasant family home just off the village green are modern and extremely tidy; it's a bit like visiting a really neat relative.

Pub grub is about the extent of the village's dining; recommended is the Black Bull or the Rose & Crown.

## ROTHBURY

☎ 01669 / pop 1960

The one-time prosperous Victorian resort of Rothbury is an attractive, restful market town on the River Coquet that makes a convenient base for the Cheviots.

There's a **tourist office & visitor centre** (☎ 620887; Church St; ☹ 10am–5pm Apr, May, Sep & Oct, to 6pm Jun–Aug) in town.

The biggest draw in the immediate vicinity is **Cragside House, Garden & Estate** (NT; ☎ 620 333), the quite incredible country retreat of the first Lord Armstrong. In the 1880s the house had hot and cold running water, a telephone and alarm system, and was the first in the world

to be lit by electricity, generated through hydropower. It was closed throughout 2006 but at the time of writing was expected to reopen in April 2007 – call for details of admission price and opening times.

The Victorian gardens are well worth exploring. Huge and remarkably varied, they feature lakes, moors and one of the world's largest rock gardens. Visit in May to see myriad rhododendrons.

The estate is 1 mile north of town on the B6341; there is no public transport to the front gates from Rothbury – try **Rothbury Motors** (☎ 620516) if you need a taxi.

High St is a good area to look for a place to stay.

Beamed ceilings, stone fireplaces and canopied four-poster beds make **Katerina's Guest House** (☎ 602334; Sun Buildings, High St; www.katerinasguesthouse.co.uk; s/d from £40/64) one of the nicer options in town, though the rooms are a little small.

Other similarly priced options include **Alexander House** (☎ 621463; s/d £38/55) and the **Haven** (☎ 620577; Back Crofts; s/d £32/54), up on a hill.

Food options are limited to pub grub. For takeaway you could try the **Rothbury Bakery** (High St) for pies and sandwiches or **Tully's** (High St) for flapjacks.

Bus 416 from Morpeth (30 minutes) leaves every two hours Monday to Saturday and three times on Sunday.