

AN EVEN GREENER AND MORE PLEASANT LAND

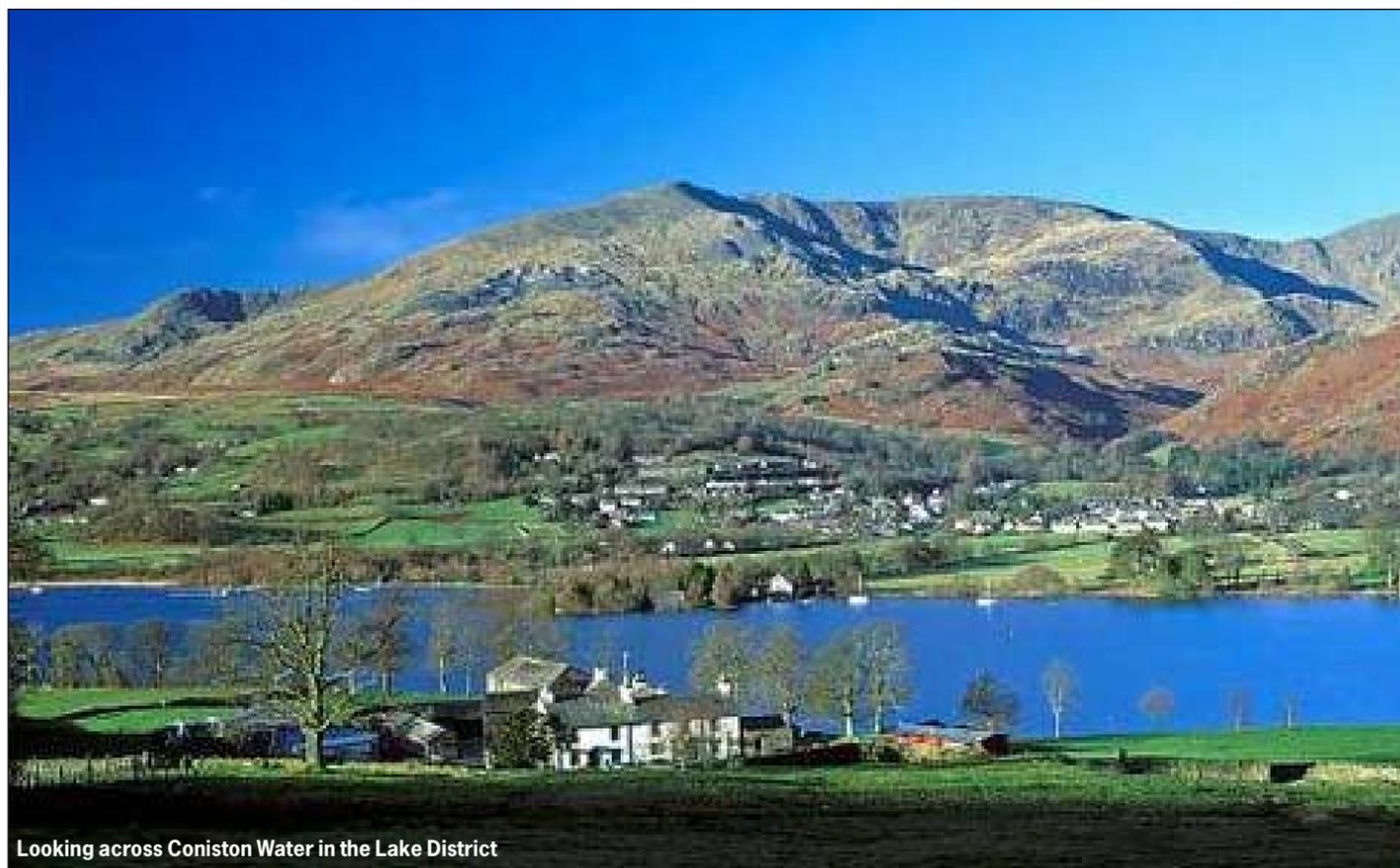
Most people's idea of a responsible holiday is somewhere long-haul and exotic. But you could always take one very much closer to home...

The truth is, going on holiday is rarely environmentally sound. Just by flying out of the country your personal contribution to global warming goes way up. A return trip across the Atlantic is roughly equivalent to a year's motoring. Stay in the UK and you are already picking up the greenie points. But travelling responsibly is not simply a case of reducing pollution. Minimising environmental damage, supporting local economies and being sensitive to cultural differences is as relevant to a trip through the English countryside as a visit to a Costa Rican rainforest.

These concepts needn't be complex; it's simple to start travelling responsibly within the UK. With rural communities being depleted by urban migration, spending your money at locally owned businesses strengthens their economy and provides people with a reason to stay rather than leave. So shop locally for self-catering holidays, don't stock up at the supermarket and haul it all with you. In the same way that many wildlife parks in Africa need the support of tourists to survive, English nature reserves also depend on tourist expenditure. Traffic jams in the city are bad enough but gridlock in the countryside somehow seems even worse. Reduce pollution and congestion, take local transport once you get there, ride a bike or walk.

English rural communities have strong cultural identities, different from, yet no less valid than, modern urban attitudes. Be respectful of these cultures. Talk to people in the pub and you might be given local knowledge that can really improve your stay. For many tourists, the highlight of a long-haul trip is the time they spend with local people, the personal relationships they form and the insights they gain into how life is lived elsewhere. Such connections are just as valuable if the people involved are a teacher from Fulham meeting a farmer from the Fells.

Travelling responsibly in England doesn't just mean changing your attitude. During the foot and mouth crisis it came as a surprise for many to learn that this country had a vibrant rural tourism industry, estimated to be worth £14 billion per annum. With vast tracts of the countryside in virtual or actual quarantine, the estimated damage to the domestic holiday market exceeded the economic impact to agriculture. The growth of responsible tourism practices in the UK has partly come about as a reac-



Looking across Coniston Water in the Lake District

Ben Barden/Cumbria Tourist Board

tion to foot and mouth. Small tourism businesses have realised the advantage of supporting each other. They have also realised the obvious: that people come to see the countryside and it is in their economic interest to preserve it. As a result, whether it's for a day out, a weekend break or a fortnight's holiday, there are now many hotels, restaurants, activities and attractions across England with well-developed responsible tourism policies and practices. At one end of the scale, you can relax at a rural boutique hotel that serves gourmet organic meals made from local produce. Or if you want more tangible proof that you are a responsible traveller, you can get dirt under your fingernails on a working conservation holiday.

Several regions of England have developed integrated responsible tourism policies. They encourage local businesses to operate more responsibly, promote public transport geared towards tourist routes, implement recycling schemes and support conservation programs. Cumbria Tourist Board and the Lake District National Park Authority are working on a scheme called Car Free, Care Free to reduce traffic congestion in the Lake District. By cooperating with local transport companies, the scheme has provided bus services connecting boat trips on the lakes with towns and beauty spots. One of their

partners, Mountain Goat also runs half- and full-day tours in minibuses equipped with cycle racks designed to get people out of cars and big coaches and onto the network of bike trails. Other local businesses have developed their own schemes as a result of the increased awareness of responsible tourism in the area. Derwentwater Hotel adds a voluntary £1 levy to guest bills which goes towards maintaining an important local pathway. The hotel has also introduced new habitats to its 16 acres of grounds in order to attract wildlife and plants. The Lake District Tourism and Conservation Partnership operates a similar eco-tax where visitors are asked to contribute between £1-£10 towards local conservation projects. So far they have raised £500,000 in donations through 170 accredited businesses. As well as the donation scheme, the Partnership publishes a holiday guide with a list of shops, accommodation and activities in the area that comply with responsible tourism criteria.

In Lancashire companies have been given advice on how to operate more responsibly and grants to help achieve it. In return they are awarded a Green Lantern standard and promoted to visitors as responsible tourism businesses. South-east Cornwall has a similar scheme where businesses recognised as being responsible receive a Green Acorn award. The logo is

displayed on the Tourism Authority's literature and web site so visitors can easily identify them. South Hams in Devon runs a green business club where small businesses get together to share responsible tourism information and share bulk-buying discounts for green products such as detergent. A recent survey carried out by Visit, a European green tourism accreditation organisation, revealed that companies in the South Hams Green Tourism Business scheme use less energy and water per guest night than any of the other European schemes. Their businesses are rated gold, silver or bronze according to their level of responsible practice.

One of South Hams' gold-award winners is Beeson Farm Holiday Cottages – a collection of five self-catering units in Victorian barns refurbished using traditional techniques and building materials. Beeson employ a recycling policy, use energy-efficient appliances and have established a nature reserve. They also provide visitors with information packs about local walks, public transport and the wildlife that can be found in the surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. As the accommodation is self-catering, the farm sells its own organic fruit and vegetables and other local produce.

If self-catering isn't for you, then Strattons Hotel in Swaffham, Norfolk may prove an attractive

Small tourism businesses have realised the obvious: people come to see the countryside and it is in their economic interest to preserve it



Cycling through the Eskdale Valley



Comfort at Strattons hotel. Top, Melmerby's Village Bakery

option. This family-owned converted Queen Anne Villa has won several awards for the quality of its service and its dedication to pursuing responsible travel practices. It has a comprehensive recycling scheme and the menu includes locally produced seasonal organic food. All eggs come from their own free-range chickens that are fed on the organic waste from the kitchen. The hens then do their bit by producing manure that fertilises the trees in the orchard. Strattons also tries to educate its guests about responsible practices by explaining why it employs these policies and how effective they are. The owners found that putting miniature cosmetics bottles in the bathroom was not environmentally sound as most were thrown out half full. Now they use dispensers, with notes to guests explaining the change.

Towing a caravan may not mean economical motoring, but the Caravan Club claims it is responsible tourism once you arrive. They conducted research that showed families on caravan holidays spend on average £25 per family per day with local businesses, that amounts to over £82 million spent in England's rural economies. The club has also employed ecologists to carry out biodiversity audits of caravan parks to identify what animals, birds and plants are present and how these and others can be encouraged.

If relaxation is not in your travel plans then try a working holiday. The British Trust for Conservation

Volunteers runs holidays across the country on projects like pathway maintenance and habitat management of conservation areas. As the name suggests, World-Wide Opportunities on Organic farms (WOOOF) offers working holidays where, in return for your labour on organic farms, small holdings or gardens, you get free organic meals, accommodation and the chance to learn how organic food is produced.

Whatever your requirements for a holiday in England, with the growing range of tailored breaks available on top of the simple steps you can take yourself, it's becoming easier and easier to travel responsibly.

Huw Williams

For further information, contact:

www.lakespartnership.co.uk

015394 34630

www.golakes.co.uk/enjoyengland

015394 44444

www.lancsgreentourism.com

01772 551888

www.secta.org.uk/

01208 76616

www.Beesonhols.co.uk/

01548 581270

www.strattonshotel.com/

01760 723845

www.caravanclub.co.uk/

01342 326944

www.btcv.org/

01302 572 24

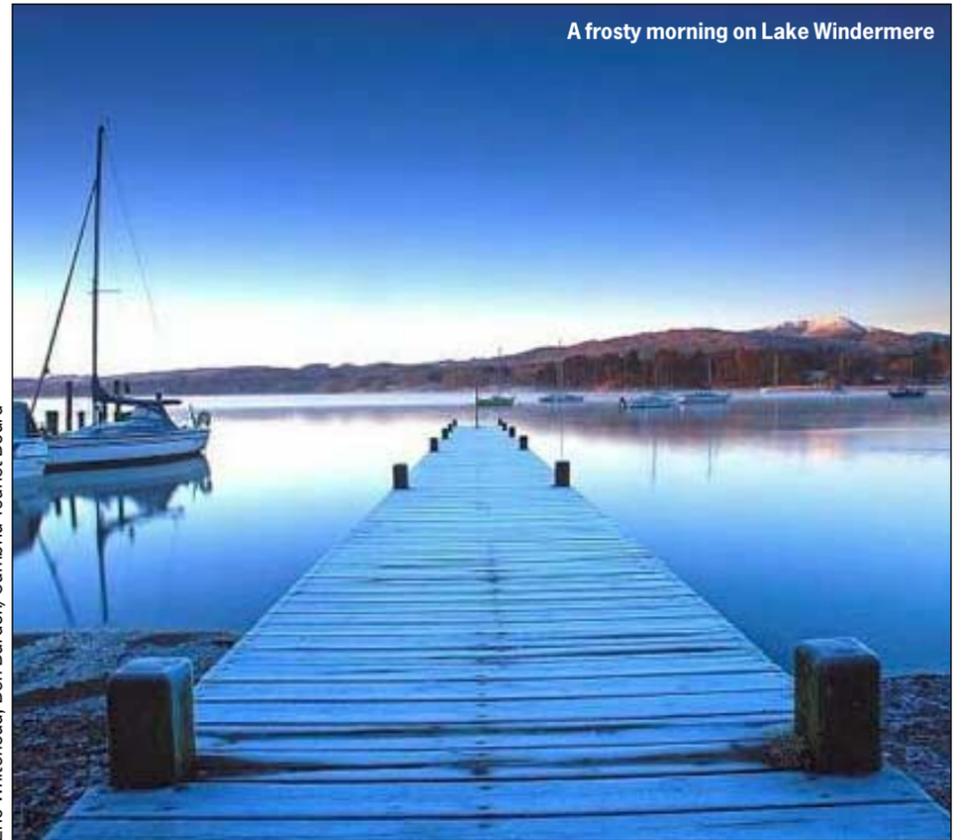
www.wwoof.org/wwoof_uk/

01273 476 286

www.visitengland.com/outdoor

0845 330 0220

A frosty morning on Lake Windermere



Eric Whitehead; Ben Barden/Cumbria Tourist Board

ENGLAND EXPECTS THESE TO BE FUN

Even more responsible holiday ideas...

EARTHWATCH DISCOVERY PROJECTS

Are sharks your thing? Or perhaps you'd like to take a closer look at badgers? Earthwatch – which enables people to get involved with scientific research that promotes a sustainable environment – needs volunteers for projects in England (alongside those it offers all over the world). Specifically designed for the time-poor, the English trips last between three to five days. You could join scientists who are looking for signs of otters along the Wiltshire riverbanks and help speed the otters' return by building an artificial otter holt (den). Volunteers stay in self-catering lodges at the Cotswold Water Park. Half-board £155.

Dinosaur-lovers can take a trip to the Yorkshire coast and help palaeontologists learn more about the dinosaurs that once roamed this part of Yorkshire by analysing footprints and recording geological data. Accommodation is in a small and comfortable hotel, close to the centre of Scarborough. Full board £285. www.earthwatch.org/europe/discovery/uk.html 01865 318831

CHURCHWOOD VALLEY CHALET PARK

Seven-times winner of the David Bellamy gold award for conservation, Churchwood Valley is 'an oasis of peace in an environmental paradise'. To receive a David Bellamy conservation award, parks must show that they are helping to protect and enhance flora and fauna and have positive policies on issues such as recycling.

In the middle of the South Hams in southern Devon, this peaceful chalet park has 54 comfortable timber cabins, each with its own secluded patio, as well as modern appliances including microwaves, TVs and central heating.

The park's commitment to preserving the natural environment means that there is abundant wildlife; it is in a beautiful wooded valley, a short walk from Wembury Beach – a marine conservation area – and the South West Coastal Path, so it has plenty of natural advantages. There is also horse-riding available in the park, surfing, angling and rambling on the beach. www.ukparks.co.uk/churchwoodvalley 01752 862382 Chalets from £200 per week. Many other award-winning parks are also detailed on the www.ukparks.co.uk site.

GET CYCLING!

What could be more responsible than cycling? From the lightly rolling terrain of Suffolk and Norfolk, to the steep hills of the Lakes or the Pennines, a bike trip is healthy, fun, and light on the environment.

If you want someone else to organise the logistics – including baggage transportation, evening entertainment, packed lunch provision, and a leader to help you – there are companies to arrange it. Country Lanes, for instance, which operates from the New Forest, has won many business and green tourism awards. It offers a range of small-group guided and self-guided trips, staying in B&Bs or luxurious country house hotels, depending on your budget.

Country Lanes also has bike-hire shops at stations in the Cotswolds (Moreton-in-Marsh), the New Forest (Brockenhurst) and the Lake District (Windermere) – so arrive by train, hire a bike, and set off for a great adventure.

Sue George
www.countrylanes.co.uk
01425 655 022 Two days cycling/two days B&B (bike hire inc) from £150 per person.

For even more ideas and information about where to go, try *The Green Holiday Guide for Great Britain and Ireland* (Green Books £9.95)