Welcome to Gatwick
Discover what’s on our doorstep

ACTIVE & OUTDOORS

8 ways to discover the English coast and countryside near Gatwick Airport

You could simply stand and gaze at the beautiful coast and countryside around Gatwick. Or you could trail your fingers through the rivers, breathe the salty sea air and feel the wind on your face as you immerse yourself in the landscape.

Here are 8 unforgettable ways to discover in the coast and countryside.

1. Walk the trails
The countryside around Gatwick is crisscrossed with footpaths. For a long-distance challenge, trek the 100-mile (160km) South Downs Way National Trail across the rolling chalk hills of the South Downs National Park. You'll see pretty villages, Roman villas and soaring white cliffs. The even-longer North Downs Way (156 miles/251km) follows the footsteps of pilgrims to Kent’s Canterbury Cathedral. The Greensand Way (108 miles/174km) follows the Greensand Ridge along the Surrey Hills.

Website: http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk

Shorter options are just as rewarding. Walk up Box Hill in the Surrey Hills for expansive views across the North Downs; there are regular free guided walks or easy-to-follow trails ranging from gentle to strenuous. In the spring, bluebells fill the shady woodland, in summer, look out for rare orchids and colourful butterflies.

Website: http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/box-hill/lists/walks-at-box-hill

2. Pedal power
Miles upon miles of cycle paths roll through southern England. The Cuckoo Trail is 14-mile (22km) route along a disused railway in East Sussex. It’s relatively flat, traffic-free and passes through quaint villages, leafy woodland and sculptures – perfect for families. Get a direct train from Gatwick to Polegate (45 mins) where you can hire bikes.

Website: http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk

3. In a classic car
Can you picture a more memorable – or photogenic – way to see the English countryside than in a convertible 1927 Rolls Royce tourer? The Vintage Motoring Company offers chauffeur-driven tours in a hand-painted, Royal-blue beauty.

Website: http://www.vintagemotoringcompany.co.uk

4. Take to the skies
Watch the fields, wildflower meadows and country lanes of the South Downs National Park unfurl beneath you as you soar like a bird on a tandem paragliding flight. Fly Sussex Paragliding runs paragliding experiences and pilot courses all year round. They have private training sites around the South Downs so the views depend on the wind direction, but you could find yourself soaring over pretty Downs villages or chalky cliffs.

If you want to take to the skies all by yourself, invest in a one-day solo paragliding voucher and go from absolute beginner to solo flyer in one session. You’ll learn to launch from higher and higher up the slope, and come back down to earth like a pro with a parachute landing roll. Meet at Fly Sussex’s offices, a 5-min walk from Glynde station, which is 1 hour by rail from Gatwick Airport.

Website: http://www.flysussex.com

5. On a canal boat
For much of the 19th century, heavily loaded cargo boats worked the Wey & Arun Canal, which runs for 23 miles (37km) between the River Wey in Surrey and the River Arun in West Sussex. The canal fell out of use in 1871, but 200 years later, ‘London’s Lost Route to the Sea’ is being restored and re-opened for pleasure boats, bit by bit. The canal flows through 23 locks and idyllic countryside, beneath willow trees and along banks that, in spring, whirl with damselflies and butterflies. If you’re lucky you might spot a heron among the wildflowers.

Every weekend from May to October, The Wey & Arun Canal Trust runs public boats cruises along the charming Loxwood Link section of the canal. For a truly English experience, book one of the special cruises, and nibble a cream tea.

Website: http://www.coastalculturetrail.com/travel/bike

For a guided mountain biking ride, try the Surrey Hills Adventure Company and see the Surrey Hills from the trails.

Website: http://www.surreyhillsadventurecompany.com

Website: http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisureandtourism/country-schools/cuckoorail/

Website: http://www.thenationaltrust.org.uk/box-hill/lists/walks-at-box-hill

Website: http://www.gatwickairport.com/at-the-airport/flying-in/discover-local/
**6. Paddle the waterways**

Take to the rivers for a fish-eye view of Kent and Sussex. The Kayak Coach runs kayak and canoe trips along some of the region’s most beautiful waterways. You can make your paddle as strenuous or as relaxed as you like -- let the tide do the hard work for you on a paddle on the River Arun, or spike your adrenaline on canoe chutes on the Medway river. Spot kingfishers, swans, ducks and other birds as you paddle along the scenic waterways.

- Website: [www.kayakcoach.com](http://www.kayakcoach.com)

Another peaceful way to experience the countryside around Gatwick is on a stand-up paddleboard (SUP). The Surrey Hills Adventure Company runs introductions to this increasingly popular sport on a lagoon in Reigate and on the 12th-century Birtley House Estate near Guildford. If you’ve already got experience of SUP, you can book an SUP River Safari along canal sections of the idyllic River Wey. You don’t need any SUP experience to join an SUP River Safari along canal sections of the idyllic River Wey. Another peaceful way to experience the countryside around Gatwick is on a stand-up paddleboard (SUP). The Surrey Hills Adventure Company runs introductions to this increasingly popular sport on a lagoon in Reigate and on the 12th-century Birtley House Estate near Guildford. If you’ve already got experience of SUP, you can book an SUP River Safari along canal sections of the idyllic River Wey. You don’t need any SUP experience to join an SUP River Safari along canal sections of the idyllic River Wey.

- Website: [www.surreyhillsadventurecompany.com](http://www.surreyhillsadventurecompany.com)

**7. Stroll the piers**

A unique example of Victorian engineering, Britain’s heritage piers are both beautiful to look at – and fantastic places to view the coast from. Towering on stilts over the waves below, piers frequently house entertainment arcades, fairground rides, cafes and art installations. They are the height of traditional English seaside holidays with Punch & Judy shows, candy floss stalls and crabbing lines.

- Website: [www.piers.org.uk](http://www.piers.org.uk)

Some of the best places for a walk over the waves are Worthing, Hastings and Eastbourne. Worthing’s Art Deco pier won Pier of the Year 2019 thanks to its elegant appearance and historical significance; have tea and cake in the Southern Pavilion at the pier’s edge. Having hosted performances by Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd and the Rolling Stones in the 60s and 70s, the newly renovated Hastings Pier won the prestigious Stirling Prize for architecture; go for fresh air and expansive sea views from the uniquely uncluttered open deck. Eastbourne’s 300 metre (985ft) pier bedecked with blue-and-white buildings is the place to sit and eat fish and chips as you gaze out to sea.


**8. Aboard a steam train**

A ride on the family friendly Bluebell Railway is a trip back in time. One of the UK’s oldest heritage railways, it stretches for 11 miles (18km), chuffing under curved bridges and through the lush woods and countryside of the High Weald. Its vintage trains form one of the finest collections of steam locomotives and carriages in the country.

The nostalgia extends to the railway’s four stations. Sheffield Park Station has been restored to its 1880s splendour; disembark here to see the locomotives in the engine sheds and the interactive museum. Period drama fans will recognise Horsted Keynes station from Downton Abbey. Kingscote station has been restored to the mid-1950s era. The Bluebell Railway connects to the national network at East Grinstead.

Visit in late April-early May to see bluebells carpeting the woodlands as you steam past. If you’ve ever dreamed of becoming an engine driver, book a Footplate experiences for a hands-on ride.

- Website: [bluebell-railway.com](http://bluebell-railway.com)