

TRAVELLING THE JURASSIC COAST

Recording 185 million years of Earth's history across 95 miles of serene coastline is the iconic Jurassic Coast. As a natural World Heritage Site, it is a true wonder to behold, inscribed by UNESCO in 2001 for the outstanding universal value of its rocks, fossils and landforms. From crumbly limestone cliffs to sea-carved bays, gorgeous beaches and a wealth of walking trails, the natural beauty here is almost unfathomable. Yet, the Jurassic Coast's appeal does not end with the great outdoors. Along the route, beginning at Orcombe Point in Exmouth, Devon, and stretching to Old Harry Rocks, near Swanage, Dorset, there are plenty of picture-perfect seaside towns and attractions to explore, including castles, museums, waterparks and quarry caves.

The span of the Jurassic Coast takes in four distinct geographic regions – East Devon, West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland, and Purbeck. There are a variety of ways to access and explore each, including by bus and rail. However, as travellers would have to mix the two to see the majority of the coast, with some areas not covered at all, it is highly recommended to complete the trip in full with an unforgettable drive. For those who are brave enough to get out on the coast on their two legs, there are hundreds of miles of connecting footpaths and bridleways that provide the option of a circular trek, with part of the South West Coast Path National Trail included. Guided walks also take place throughout the year.



Exe Estuary

EAST DEVON

Located on the route's western gateway, Orcombe Point in Exmouth marks the official start of the Jurassic Coast. On the ascent to the start point, which is distinguished by the impressive landmark known as 'The Geoneedle', travellers can discover various types of stones relating to the geological periods covered by the Jurassic Coast – from the Triassic to the Jurassic and the Cretaceous. These three time periods of Earth's history collectively make up the Mesozoic Era, running from around 250 to 65 million years ago, with the rocks at Orcombe Point providing just a snippet of what's to come on this epic adventure through time.

With Exmouth beach being made up of two glorious miles of golden sand flanked by cool and calm waters, it would be a real sin to begin the Jurassic Coast route prematurely without enjoying the rare treasures on offer here. Full of fascinating rock pools and plenty of opportunities for exhilarating water sports, Exmouth is a paradise for children and adults alike. It is the ideal place to try your hand at kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding and windsurfing, with RED Rock Leisure providing lessons, activity packages and team challenges suited to all – from beginners all the way to advanced.

The nearby Exe Estuary is further an unmissable stop. As a haven for birdlife, including wintering waders and wildfowl, the eight-mile-long thriving area is responsible for supporting thousands of birds. Numerous cycleways, footpaths and ferry routes provide visitors with a one-of-a-kind chance to get up close and personal with a variety of species, including notably the rare avocet and sandpipers.

As one of the greatest wilderness areas in southern England, the Undercliffs National Nature Reserve promises a dramatic sight. Situated between Axmouth in East Devon and Lyme Regis in Dorset, the Undercliffs have been formed from sandstone and chalk slipping over clay and limestone, leaving a ragged coastline dissected by some of the largest coastal landslides in the country. An incredible diversity of plant and wildlife have become established amongst the reserve's seven miles of broken ground – there are few opportunities to encounter nature so untamed.



Orcombe Point, 'The Geoneedle'



WEST DORSET

Nestled in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the charming seaside town of Lyme Regis carries a magical aura and marks the point where the rugged East Devon and West Dorset coastlines meet, forming the heart of the Jurassic Coast. Apart from its captivating environs, Lyme Regis is also renowned for its fascinating history stretching back to the 8th century. It is famously the birthplace of Mary Anning – one of history's most important fossil collectors and palaeontologists. Visitors can learn more about Mary's extraordinary life and significant discoveries at the Lyme Regis Museum, which is built on the site of her family's home. Inside, guests can roam through the interactive geology gallery and learning centre, as well as (tide permitting) join guided fossil hunting walks.

Rising to 627 feet, the great rocky shoulder of the Golden Cap is the highest point on the south coast of England, offering magnificent views at every compass point. Though the climb to the summit is a challenge, the reward is most certainly worth it, with panoramic views stretching from Portland in the east to Dartmoor in the west. For those who want to experience every single metre of the climb, flanked by meadows, streams and woodland (all part of a National Trust estate), starting at sea level at Seatown is highly recommended. Look out for carpets of bluebells in spring, spot large numbers of blue butterflies in summer, follow the treasure trail at Stonebarrow, and track down the ruins of a medieval church hidden at St Gabriel's.

At the traditional fishing village of West Bay, crumbling golden cliffs of sand reveal falling sea levels from some 175 million years ago. Here the 18-mile-long shingle barrier Chesil Beach, born from

landslides that eroded after the last ice age around 20,000 years ago, finds its western end. Wild, rugged and at the mercy of Mother Nature, this landmark landscape not only provides unparalleled vistas, but is also renowned as a fishing haven. West Bexington is one of the most popular spots, situated just offshore on a unique strip of unbroken sand.

Behind Chesil Beach lies the large saline lake Fleet Lagoon – one of the world's few remaining undisturbed brackish lagoons. Designated an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), the Fleet Lagoon is a crucial natural wildlife habitat; a particularly vital shelter and feeding area for egrets, dark-bellied brent geese and greenshanks. Visitors can learn more about the area's incredible wildlife at the Chesil Beach Visitor Centre or discover one of the UK's most important Marine Protected Areas first-hand onboard the Fleet Explorer – a shallow drafted boat specifically designed to investigate the lower reaches of the Fleet Lagoon.



Lyme Regis Museum



Portland Bill Lighthouse

WEYMOUTH & PORTLAND

Weymouth has long been one of the most popular seaside resorts in Britain, hosting holiday-makers right from the time King George III was a regular visitor more than 200 years ago. The picturesque coastal town is doused in colour, its seafront housing a wide range of hotels, restaurants, pubs and quirky specialist shops. What's more, the sheltered, shallow waters of its fine sandy shores are ideal for bathing, and with the region enjoying more sunshine than anywhere else in England (even in winter), there really is no bad time to visit. Nearby Portland Harbour is additionally home to the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy, which was host to the sailing events of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Day passes are available for those who wish to get out on the water in a rented sailboat.

The most southernly point of the Jurassic Coast, the Isle of Portland juts out into the English Channel, connected to the mainland by a thin strip that marks the start of Chesil Beach on one end and Weymouth Bay on the other. Its isolated location makes it a real explorer's land, best traversed on foot along the South West Coast Path, which loops around its entirety. Be sure to check out the Portland Bill Lighthouse, open to the public for tours. This renowned coast guard station features a visitor centre in the former lighthouse keeper's

quarters containing fun and informative maritime displays. The newest exhibition area, 'Into The Dark', additionally offers guests the opportunity to encounter a stormy sea journey, and it is also possible to climb all 153 steps to the top to enjoy sweeping views across the coast.

A visit to the Isle of Portland would further not be complete without exploring Tout Quarry. Here over 60 sculptures carved from rocks dating back to the late Jurassic period are hidden amongst a maze of trails. The prehistoric environments of the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous truly feel less distant when we realise they have provided raw materials to feed our creativity.



Tout Quarry Sculpture Park - Image by: RogerMechan / Shutterstock.com



PURBECK

A beautiful secluded pocket of the Jurassic Coast whose existence is owed to the collision of continents and the birth of the Alps, Lulworth Cove is world-famous for its unique geology and landforms, including the Lulworth Crumple and Stair Hole. Making up part of the 12,000 acre Lulworth Estate – owned and managed by the Weld family since 1641 – Lulworth Cove welcomes thousands of visitors each year, offering a wealth of activities. From rock-pooling and water sports to walking, coasteering and simply taking in the view with an ice cream in hand, there is plenty to enjoy here.

A short yet steep climb up Lulworth Cove's hill will get you to the iconic Durdle Door – without a doubt the poster child of this entire region. The natural stone arch, jutting almost vertically out of the sea, formed around 10,000 years ago when waves pierced through the hard limestone of the surrounding cliff. A must-see for any trip across the Jurassic Coast route, Durdle Door is reached via a steep path that leads to a pair of shingle beaches, with Durdle Door to the west and Man O'War Cove to the east.

Located one mile from the easy-going seaside town of Swanage, Durlston Country Park is a 280-acre countryside paradise, offering imposing views of Jurassic limestone cliffs, ample wilderness walks, and a huge variety of wildlife, including regular sightings of dolphins. The historic Great Globe, one of the largest stone spheres in the world, and the Victorian Durlston Castle can also be found within the expansive grounds.

A further three-mile walk northeast from Swanage along the South West Coast Path will get you to the renowned chalk stacks of Old Harry Rocks. Here, at the eastern end of the Jurassic Coast, the serene route finds its end. Those who are not ready to close the final chapter of this epic adventure can head down to the seashore, where boats and kayaks await all who wish to see the mesmerising landmark from a different point of view.



Old Harry Rocks



Old Harry Rocks

