



Five winter walks

From a literary amble to a historic city stroll some great routes to suit all interests.

Guildford

Alice in Wonderland walk

Walk in the footsteps of writer Lewis Carroll as you leave Guildford station for the castle gardens and the statue of Alice through the Looking Glass. Pass his former home on Castle Hill and continue up Semaphore Road (where Royal Navy signals were sent from London to Portsmouth) to reach Pewley Down viewpoint.

From here, it's a detour left to St Martha's Church, with excellent views. Otherwise turn right and follow the North Downs Way to Shalford and the River Wey. Cross via the Ferry Bridge and continue right to Guildford passing, at Millmead, Edwin Russell's sculpture of Alice, which includes a rabbit darting down a nearby hole.

Nearest station: Guildford

Difficulty: About five miles; moderate ascent.

Map: 50 Walks in Surrey by David Foster

(AA Publications, £7.99; theAA.com).

Isle of Wight

Ryde to Cowes

With half the island an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Isle of Wight is a walkers' paradise. The eight miles from Ryde to Cowes offers a sample of the 70-mile coast path, passing Quarr Abbey and Queen Victoria's former summer residence, Osborne House.

It's not the most isolated section—there is much pavement and country lane walking west of Wootton. However, the setting of the Abbey and the treasures of Osborne House (winter tours 01983 200022, booking essential; closed 24-26 Dec and 1 Jan) make it worthwhile. For dramatic cliffs and coastal downland along the blustery western shore, try walking from Yarmouth to Brighstone.

Nearest station: Portsmouth Harbour. Catch a Wightlink FastCat service from Portsmouth Harbour to Ryde Pier Head. From here, it is a 10-minute walk along the pier to Ryde Esplanade, the start of the walk. To return to the mainland, take the ferry from East Cowes to Southampton Central station. For where to stay on the island, visit islandbreaks.co.uk.

Difficulty: Eight miles; moderate: expect numerous ascents and descents, and there are diversions inland on the coast path.

Map: Download from the sports and outdoor activities section at islandbreaks.co.uk.

View our ferry links pages for getting to and from the Isle of Wight>>

Winchester

A literary walk

Take in the best of the city on this Winchester tour, a four-hour self-guided walk, divided into three loops; or meet a Blue Badge Guide at the Tourist Information Centre (Sat 11am) for a 90-minute guided walking tour of Saxon, medieval and Tudor Winchester.

The literary-minded can see where Jane Austen stayed at 8 College Street. Around the corner at Kingsgate, visit the nearby church, which featured in Anthony Trollope's novel *The Warden*. Walk along the River Itchen, through the meadows that inspired John Keats to pen *Ode to Autumn* (warning: they can be very wet) to the hospital at St Cross (signposted). Having arrived on foot, you are entitled to the "traveller's dole": some bread and a small mug of ale. St Cross was the inspiration for Trollope's series of Barchester novels.

While you're there, check out the shops and the beautiful Christmas market in the magnificent setting of Winchester Cathedral.

Nearest station: Winchester

Difficulty: 3 miles; easy; waterproof boots for the meadow.

Map: Winchester Walk leaflet from Tourist Information Office, Guildhall, The Broadway (01962 840 500; visitwinchester.co.uk).

Thames Path

Putney to Richmond

Begin this fabulous riverside walk at Putney station. Turn right on exiting, head down the High Street and on to Putney Bridge. Follow the signed Thames Path to Kew along the south bank (about five miles) and continue a further three miles to Richmond.

Passing the London Wetland Centre (charged access is along Queen Elizabeth Walk), continue along the river, passing the former Harrods depository (now flats) and Hammersmith, Barnes, Chiswick and Kew bridges. Arrive at Richmond Riverside, a modern recreation of architectural styles from the 17th to 19th centuries with restaurants and shops.

Other highlights include a glimpse of Kew Palace in the Royal Botanic Gardens (charged access signed at Kew Bridge). Kew decks itself out as a winter wonderland at Christmas with a huge ice rink outside the Temperate House. Syon House comes into view on the far bank, possibly accompanied by the sound of the green parakeets that have bred here. On the near bank, passing the site of the King's Observatory (built for George III in the Old Deer Park), you arrive at Richmond Bridge. From here follow the signs to Richmond station, left off the riverside path.

Nearest stations: Start at Putney Bridge, finish at Richmond (or Kew Bridge for a shorter walk—directions to Kew station are signposted).

Difficulty: 8.5 miles; easy level path; occasionally prone to flooding.

Map: Excellent free map and guide, London's Rural River Thames, from visitor information centres along the path, including Richmond Information Centre (020 8940 9125), or at vistilondon.com

London Jubilee walk

Jubilee Walkway

Kings and queens, legal eagles and Dickens' London are some of the themes on this 14-mile Jubilee Walk linking more than 30 of London's attractions, and it can be done in a day—just about.

From London Waterloo, leave the station by exit 5 and follow the signs to London Eye/Jubilee Walk, where you pick up the route on the Embankment at point 12 on the map. From here, follow the route east towards the Southbank Centre with its theatres and cinema past the Tate Modern gallery and on to Tower Bridge, the City, returning via the West End, Bloomsbury and the Palace of Westminster.

On the way, you'll pass the 25-metre-tall Norwegian Christmas tree at Trafalgar Square, the carol singers raising money for charity, and Somerset House, where you can ice skate (Nov-Jan; 0870 166 0423; ticketmaster.co.uk). Follow in the footsteps of Dickens and continue on to Fleet Street and Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese pub for a pie and ale lunch. For a more sophisticated and modern place for a drink and meal, try Albannach bar and restaurant, 66 Trafalgar Square.

This walk, marked by discs in the shape of a crown in the pavement, is easy to break into stages so it's one that you can keep coming back to.

Nearest station: London Waterloo

Difficulty: 14 miles; easy but long; consider dividing the walk up into sections.

Map: Free map and guide at jubileewalkway.org.uk.