

Culture in South Lakes - Coniston & Hawkshead

The charming villages of Coniston and Hawkshead offer plenty by way of arts and culture. Home to famous figures like John Ruskin and Beatrix Potter, it's not hard to see why artists have found inspiration here for centuries.

With country houses, museums, galleries and more, [discover culture in the South Lakes](#) with a trip to these Lakeland villages.

Coniston can be reached by road via the A593; Hawkshead is located on the B5285. Stagecoach bus service 505 serves both Hawkshead and Coniston.

1 - Brantwood - Home of John Ruskin



Once home to Victorian artist and art critic John Ruskin, [Brantwood](#) in Coniston is a historic house and estate on the shores of Coniston water. Today it is open for visitors to explore, with plenty for all to see and do.

Wander through the nine rooms originally used by John Ruskin, and marvel at the stunning views of the Coniston fells outside the window. Discover art exhibitions in the Blue Gallery, located within the house; and the Severn Studio Gallery. As well as pieces by Ruskin himself, there is also a regular programme of contemporary shows from established and new artists; while the events calendar includes theatre, music and craft shows.

Once you've finished exploring the house and galleries, head outside to stroll through the extensive gardens; before relaxing with coffee and cake at the on-site Terrace café.

Open hours: between March – November, Brantwood is open daily from 10:30am – 5pm. Between December – March, Brantwood is open Wed – Sun from 10:30am – 4pm.

On-site parking is available. Brantwood can also be reached by boat on board Steam Yacht Gondola: a traditional boat with opulent saloons and open air decks, run by the National Trust.

2 - Hill Top - Beatrix Potter's House

Discover the former home of author and illustrator Beatrix Potter, who used the profits from her first illustrated books – including *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* – to buy [Hill Top Farm](#) in 1905. Step back in time and see the house as it would have been when Potter lived here: see her own belongings throughout, and admire the interiors which feature in classic stories like *The Tale of Tom Kitten*.



Photo: Hill Top
©National Trust Images.

The Treasure Room at the top of the house displays beloved items including a doll's house, which inspired scenes from *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*.

In the garden, you can see the rhubarb patch where Jemima Puddle-Duck laid her egg; and the garden where Tom Kitten and his sisters played, before visiting the gift shop to pick up a souvenir of your visit.

Open hours: Hill Top is usually open every day except Friday; the house is open 10am – 5pm; the garden and shop are open 10am – 4pm. On-site parking is available; from Windermere Car Ferry and Hawkshead it's a two-mile walk.

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3 - The Ruskin Museum



In Coniston, [The Ruskin Museum](#) offers a fascinating insight into the story of this Lakeland village, with exhibitions centred around a number of local icons.

The Coniston Gallery looks at Coniston's history, heritage and geology; the Bluebird Wing is dedicated to speed record breaker Donald Campbell CBE; while the Ruskin Gallery features works by writer, artist and social thinker John Ruskin, who lived in Coniston for much of his life. There are also pieces related to Arthur Ransome's Swallows and Amazons, which features numerous locations said to be in Coniston.

Open hours: Tuesday – Sunday, 10:30am – 2:30pm.

Parking is available in Coniston, with a number of car parks within walking distance of the museum.

4 - Grizedale Forest & Visitor Centre (studios and gallery)

Nestled in the heart of the Lake District, [Grizedale Forest](#) is a stunning natural attraction – and home to a rich variety of arts and culture exhibitions.

The Visitor Centre is home to a gallery space which hosts art exhibitions throughout the year, inviting visitors to stop and think.

There are also artist's studios and a regular programme of performances and events.

Open hours: daily, 10am – 4pm. Parking is available on-site.



Photo: Treepole, Sculpture by Simon Clements & Harriet Fraser 2018
© Rob Fraser

5 - Hawkshead Grammar School



Located in the picturesque village of Hawkshead, the [Hawkshead Grammar School](#) Museum offers a fascinating insight into school life between 1585 – 1909. There's historic classroom furniture, 17th century artefacts, and plenty more to discover. Plus, you can see where famous poet William Wordsworth studied – he was a student here from the ages of 9 to 17.

In 2023, three exhibitions highlight the lives of three Williams – each of whom was a student at the school. They include William Wordsworth; William Pearson, who founded the Royal Astronomical Society; and William Carter Preston, who was one of the last students to attend the school before it closed in 1909 and tragically lost his life in WWI.

Open hours: The Hawkshead Grammar School Museum is open Thursday – Monday, 11am – 4pm, from the 1st April to the 31st October.

Parking is available in Hawkshead, with a public car park across the road from the museum. You can also reach the museum by bus: the 505 Stagecoach bus service stops in Hawkshead.

Visit Lake District, Cumbria

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We hope you've had a great time visiting just a few of South Lakeland's attractions. Searching for inspiration on where to visit next? Download more cultural itineraries visitlakedistrict.com/cultureinsouthlakes

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