Winter in the Lake District

Full of crisp, frosty fell walks, hearty dinner spots and cosy pubs with crackling fires, the Lake District is the place for a bracing, British winter retreat. Use this list to plan out a perfect seasonal holiday.

**SIGHTS**

**Brantwood**
(brantwood.org.uk; Coniston)
The great 19th-century thinker John Ruskin bought this lakeside house and spent 20 years altering it, championing handmade crafts (he even designed the wallpaper). Look out for his vast shell collection. Highlights include the grand but cosy drawing room, the tome-filled study and the tiny upstairs bedroom decorated with some of his favourite watercolours. Outside the house, 100 hectares of gardens and terraces stretch up the fellside.

**Hill Top**
(nationaltrust.org.uk/hill-top; Hawkshead)Two miles south of Hawkshead, in the tiny village of Near Sawrey, this idyllic farmhouse was purchased in 1905 by Beatrix Potter and used as the inspiration for many of her tales: the house features directly in *Samuel Whiskers*, *Tom Kitten*, *Pigling Bland* and *Jemima Puddle-Duck*, among others, and you might recognise the kitchen garden from *Peter Rabbit*. The house reopens in mid-February, and until then you can visit the gardens and shop (Fri–Sun).

**Rydal Mount**
(rydalmount.co.uk; Ambleside)The poet William Wordsworth’s most famous residence in the Lake District is undoubtedly Dove Cottage but, he actually spent more time at Rydal Mount. 1.5 miles northwest from Ambleside, off the A591. This was the Wordsworth family’s home from 1813 until the poet’s death in 1850, and the house contains a great deal of Wordsworth memorabilia. You can visit by arrangement in December and February.

**ACTIVITIES**

**Helm Crag Walk**
(walklakes.co.uk/walk_77.html; Grasmere)If you only do one winter walk in Grasmere, make it Helm Crag. Sometimes referred to as ‘the Lion and the Lamb’, for the twin crags atop its summit, it’s a rewarding two-hour climb, dauntingly steep in places, with around 335m of elevation gain.

**Wrynose and Hardknot Passes**
(visitcumbria.com; Little Langdale & Eskdale)Tackle an infamous mountain road traversing England’s two highest drivable passes: Wrynose and Hardknot. Sometimes reaching a gradient of one in three, it’s single-carriage and there are few passing places. Before you set out, top up the oil and radiator, as you’ll mostly be in first or second gear.

**EATING**

**Drunken Duck**
(pubfood.co; Unit 2 The Courtyard, Rothay Rd, Ambleside)Based in Cheshire, this much-garlanded pie maker has opened an Ambleside outlet, and it’s rightly become a town favourite. Go for a classic such as Swaledale beef mince or Lancashire cheese and onion, or opt for something on the seasonal pie menu: they’re all delicious, and served with lashings of mash and gravy (veggie, should you wish).

**Kirkstile Inn**
(kirkstile.com; Loweswater)A finer country pub you could not hope to find – crackling fires, oak beams, worn carpets, wooden bar and all. It’s particularly known for its award-winning ales.

**Crafty Baa**
(21 Victoria St, Windermere)The craft-beer revolution comes to the lakes, with an ample supply of brews: Czech pilsner, Weissbier, smoked lagers, even mango and gooseberry beers.

**Dog & Gun**
(01768 773463; 2 Lake Rd, Keswick)Benches, beams, hearths, rugs: the old Dog is the picture of a Lakeland pub. Have a Rescue ale, which donates proceeds to the Keswick Mountain Rescue Team.

**Good to know**

Hunkering above Coniston like a benevolent giant, the Old Man of Coniston (803m) presents an irresistible challenge. The most popular route is up the east side along the Coppermines Valley – a leg-sappingly steep slog, but you’ll be rewarded with the views from the top. Along the way you’ll pass the remains of several slate and copper mines. This is a true winter adventure for those who come prepared.
**Sleeping**

**Rooms at the Apple Pie**
Best for a family-friendly B&B
(applepieambleside.co.uk; Rydal Rd, Ambleside)
Not content with making the best apple pie in town, the eponymous café has expanded into a separate accommodation building next door. There are eight supremely good-value rooms, plainly furnished and on the small side, perhaps, but thoroughly comfy. The top-floor loft rooms share a landing, so are ideal for those with young children.

**Langstrath Inn**
Best for a cosy winter hideout
(thelangstrath.com; Stonethwaite)
A simple country inn that's one of the best little stays in the Borrowdale Valley. Its eight rooms are snug and simple, with the occasional roof beam to add character, but it's the views that really sell the place. Hearty food and ales are served in the restaurant, and it's an ideal base for attempting England's highest peak, Scafell Pike.

**Eltermere Inn**
Best for gorgeous surroundings
(eltermere.co.uk; Elterwater)
This charming inn is one of the Lakeland's loveliest backwater bothies. Rooms are simple and classic, tastefully decorated in fawns and taupes, with quirky features such as window seats and free-standing baths. The food's excellent, served in the inn's snug bar. Afternoon tea is available, too, if you're back for it. All the rooms have great views over the Northern Fells.

**FURTHER READING**
Our England guide has a section on the Lake District & Cumbria (£17.99), or download it as an eBook (£12.59) or separate chapters (£2.99 each).