

DESTINATION WESSEX

SCENIC JURASSIC COAST

Attached are two Jurassic Coast itineraries for those travelling by car:

- one for those who are genuinely interested in the scenic coast and its marine heritage.
- one for those whose interest is in castles and gardens but who would also like to see something of the coastal scenery.

Here are some general comments on them:

- these are itineraries that are aimed at the growing number of people who want to slow down on holiday, experience the authentic and meet local people. They differ from many German and Dutch market tours to Britain in that they involve relatively short travel distances and thus offer more time for visitors to explore and to make some of their own choices of what to do and when, as they go along.
- 2 night stays are used wherever possible. Since some visitors prefer to stay in the country rather than in town, the itineraries indicate a hotel or B&B within an area of about five miles radius from the town mentioned. I can assist with suggestions as to specific places to stay if this would be helpful.
- being a coastal area, some of the locations can be very busy in July and August. Probably the best times to visit would be April/June and September/October. The routes selected avoid the often congested routes along the Sussex coast.
- some short walks have been include to enable the visitors to get out in the sea air and enjoy the scenery.
- if the travel to Wessex is fly/drive to Heathrow or Gatwick instead of Calais/Dover ferry/car, the itinerary can start with the trip to Winchester on Day 2 thus making it a six night tour. Alternatively, Day 1 can still be a visit to Canterbury but from a hotel or B&B near the airport used and then the rest of the itinerary as shown would apply.



SCENIC JURASSIC COAST

Dover/Dover car tour for those with an interest in Scenery and Marine Heritage.

Day 1. Arrive Dover in the afternoon or later. Proceed to a hotel on the motorway route (M29, M26, M25) at or beyond Maidstone.

Arrive Dover at or before lunch. Leave for **Canterbury**, 17 miles. (A2, A28). Lunch and visit Canterbury Cathedral, the Mother Church of the Church of England, founded in 597AD by St Augustine.

Continue to a hotel in the area of M26 or M25 beyond Maidstone.

Day 2. Leave for **Winchester**, England's first capital, after the rush hour, at 9.30am. (M25, M3 to Junction 9). Check into the hotel. Before lunch, a walking tour of the centre of King Alfred the Great's city..

Lunch.

Visit Winchester cathedral, the great Norman cathedral, the construction of which began in 1079. This is where King Alfred is buried along with other well known figures including Jane Austen.

Free time to visit the Great Hall of Winchester Castle, which contains what is claimed to be the Round Table of King Arthur and his Knights, and other Winchester attractions.

Day 3. Depart for **Corfe Castle**, 53 miles (A3090, M27, A31, A35, 351). One of England's most majestic and romantic ruins, the castle controlled the gateway through the Purbeck Hills to the eastern end of the Jurassic Coast. It has been an important stronghold since 1066, the time of William the Conqueror.

Lunch in Corfe Castle.

You are now in the so-called Isle of Purbeck, known for its building stone and scenery. The afternoon will be mainly short distance drives along country lanes. Continue south on A351 to Langton Matravers and then turn right to the attractive villages of Worth Matravers and Kingston. (If you start early and have time, a side trip involving a one mile walk will take you to St Alban's Head, a high cliff on which there is an isolated tiny chapel built in 1175 for the performance of masses in aid of those passing by sea.)

Head back to Corfe Castle and then through Church Knowle to **Kimmeridge Bay** where the shale industry dates back to 400BC. Visit the Kimmeridge Marine Centre.

Then drive through the Purbeck Hills to West Lulworth and **Lulworth Cove**, a beautiful inlet enclosed by a circle of cliffs with only a narrow entrance. It is one of the most photographed beauty spots on the South Coast of England. Visit the Lulworth Heritage Centre to learn about this part of the coast.

Leave for the hotel or B&B in the Weymouth area (24 miles).

Day 4. **Weymouth** was a very important port as far back as 800 years ago. A side trip to see the old harbour is well worth while.

Then head for the Isle of Portland, A354, (8 miles). Before crossing the causeway, visit the **Chesil Beach** Centre. This remarkable beach is a spit almost nine miles long that is joined to the land at each end and is said to contain over 100 million tons of pebbles. The lagoon inside Chesil Beach, is teeming with bird life especially in the winter. Low cliffs near the lagoon are made up entirely of 200 million year old oyster shells preserved in clay. Learn more about it in the Centre.

Then cross the causeway into **Portland**. There is evidence of human occupation here 7,000 years ago. The island is famous as the home of the British Navy for hundreds of years, for its lighthouse at Portland Bill and for its stone which has built St. Pauls cathedral, the UN headquarters in New York and many other iconic buildings.

Head for Portland Bill. On the way, you will see signs for the Portland Heights Hotel. Drive up to the hotel and you will find stunning views over the coastline in both directions including the whole of Chesil Beach. You may wish to have lunch in the hotel restaurant.

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After lunch, drive on to the isolated Portland Bill and its famous lighthouse. You can have an informal lunch out there, if you like, sitting on the grass with something from the nearby cafe and looking out to sea. If so, stop at the Portland Heights Hotel lookout point on the way back.

After you cross over the causeway, you can get a closer view of Chesil Beach from the grounds of Moonfleet Manor Hotel in Fleet which overlooks it. Turn left on B 3157 and then left again after about 2 miles. The unusual hotel is itself an attraction and you might wish to have tea or something stronger there before returning to Weymouth.

Return to A354 and head north to the Weymouth area hotel or B&B.

Day 5. Leave for the **Abbotsbury**. There is no hurry and you might want to head coastwards again to B3157 and follow this past Fleet until you see a sign on the left to Langton Herring and then follow the signs to Abbotsbury.

Before you arrive, there will be a sign on the left for **Abbotsbury Swannery** which lies in a small coastal inlet. You will suddenly find yourself in a world of swans especially in May and June when hundreds of them will be all around you as you walk among their nests. It is a memorable experience.

Rejoin B3157, drive through the attractive old village of Abbotsbury on B3157 and just beyond it, follow the signs to **Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens**.

They were established in 1765 and extended to 20 acres of Grade 1 listed magnificent woodland valley gardens. The collection contains rare and exotic plants from all over the world. Camellia groves, magnolias, rhododendrons, azaleas and hydrangeas are featured in spring and early summer and there is a wealth of sub-tropical colour throughout the rest of the summer.

Lunch in the restaurant before, during or after seeing the gardens .

Leave for **Burton Bradstock**, 9 miles. (B3157), passing through the pretty village of Swyre on the way. Burton Bradstock itself is also a charming village but the main aim this afternoon is to join the South West Coast Path, to take a walk along the top of the cliffs to West Bay, a distance of about one and a half miles, and to enjoy the fine scenery.

West Bay is a village set around an inlet that used to be the busy harbour of Bridport but now lives on tourism. Stop for a cup of tea or whatever. look around West Bay and. when you are ready, retrace your steps to Burton Bradstock, looking this time towards Portland Bill.

Continue on B3157 into Bridport (3 miles) and on to the Bridport area hotel or B&B.

If the weather is bad for the coastal walk, you can spend more time in Burton Bradstock, check into the Bridport area B&B earlier and explore the community where this is located.

Day 6. Leave for Chideock which will be within about 5 miles of the Bridport area hotel or B&B probably along A35. From Chideock, head down to Seatown, one mile .

From here, for those who enjoy another walk, it is a one mile walk up to the top of **Golden Cap** which at over 600 feet is the highest cliff on the South Coast of England. The climb is well worth it for the breathtaking panoramic views that await the climber at the top.

Return to Seatown and then in Chideock take A35 to Charmouth, 4 miles. This is a centre for fossicking, the collection of fossils on the beach. It is especially well known for the dinosaur and ammonite fossils that have been found here.

Go to the **Charmouth Heritage Centre** to find out more.

Why not try collecting some fossils to take home. There are regular guided fossil hunts (£2) that do not have to be booked in advance. These walks start from the Centre and take visitors along the beach where the best fossils are to be found. Find out what fossils are, how they were formed and most importantly how to find them safely and successfully. Due to the high rate of erosion visitors are guaranteed to find some fossils, and sometimes spectacular discoveries are made. Allow for up to two and a half hours for the hunt. If you are interested in doing this, you should leave your Bridport hotel or B&B by about 9am.

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Lunch in Charmouth or Lyme Regis.

Head for **Lyme Regis**, a picturesque seaside town, 2 miles further west that is full of history. Its most outstanding feature is its 13th century harbour known as the Cobb which was made famous recently by the film, 'A French Lieutenant's Woman' from the book by local author John Fowles. The town was the seaside residence of Jane Austen who features it in "Persuasion" and the home of Mary Anning, who made one of the most famous dinosaur discoveries nearby.

Go to the Lyme Regis Visitor Centre for information and then and explore the town at leisure. Make a point of visiting the Cobb.

Return to the Bridport Area hotel or B&B.

Day 7. Leave for Dorchester, 24 miles. (A35) Just before reaching Dorchester turn right on to the ring road and then right on A354 for about a mile. Follow signs to **Maiden Castle**.

This is said to be the finest and largest iron age hill fort in Europe. Its massive banks enclose an area equivalent to 50 football pitches. It was home to about 200 families and was clearly involved in the British resistance to the Roman invasion in AD 43. Its earthworks are enormous and there are a whole series of ramparts.

Continue to **Salisbury**, 42 Miles (A354, A35, A354). Check into Salisbury hotel or B&B. Lunch in Salisbury.

In the afternoon there are three choices:

- Visit **Stonehenge**, 10 miles. (A345, A303) The great and ancient circle of Stonehenge is one of the world's wonders. This circle and the landscape surrounding it remain a powerful witness to the once great civilisations of the Stone and Bronze Ages. It has attracted visitors for 5,000 years and was one of the very first places recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.
- Visit **Wilton House**, 3 miles. (A30). Wilton House has been the home of the Earl of Pembroke for 450 years. The Tudor house, rebuilt by Inigo Jones and John Webb in the sixteenth century has an outstanding collection of paintings. It is set in landscaped parkland beside the River Nadder
- Explore the historic city of Salisbury.

There is choral evensong six days per week in Salisbury Cathedral at 5.30pm. Arrive shortly beforehand and listen to the outstanding cathedral choir.

Day 8 This day will vary according to the ferry departure time from Dover or Harwich. If this is in the evening, there will be time to visit Wilton House or explore more of Salisbury in the morning. The main issue is that you must avoid the rush hour on the M25 which means leaving no later than 1.30pm. The distance is 145 miles to **Dover**, about three hours outside 145 miles (A338, A303, M3, M25, M26, M20, A20). the rush hour. The route is A338, A303, M3, M25, M26, M20, A20.

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Free time to visit the **Great Hall of Winchester Castle**, which contains what is claimed to be the Round Table of King Arthur and his Knights, and other Winchester attractions.

Day 3. Depart for **Sir Harold Hillier Gardens**, 8 miles (A3090). The gardens were established in 1953. They are set in 180 acres of rolling Hampshire countryside and contain over 42,000 plants from temperate regions around the world. They hold 11 National Plant Collections and offer a display of colour and interest throughout the year.

Continue to **Corfe Castle**, 45 miles (A3090, M27, A31, A35, 351). One of England's most majestic and romantic ruins, the castle controlled the gateway through the Purbeck Hills to the eastern end of the Jurassic Coast. It has been an important stronghold since 1066, the time of William the Conqueror.

Lunch in Corfe Castle.

Drive to Lulworth Cove, 14 miles, (A351, A352, B3070). You will pass **Lulworth Castle**, an early 17th century hunting lodge, damaged by fire but much restored by English Heritage. Stop if you wish. There is a great view from the top of one of the towers. It can, however, become crowded in summer.

Then drive on to West Lulworth and **Lulworth Cove** (5 miles), a beautiful inlet enclosed by a circle of cliffs with only a narrow entrance. It is one of the most photographed beauty spots on the South Coast of England. Visit the Lulworth Heritage Centre to learn about this part of the coast. Take a stroll while there.

Leave for **Weymouth** (17 miles) via Winfrith Newburgh to A352 then A353 into the town. Weymouth's heritage is as a major seaport and fishing centre. This was overshadowed in the 18th century by its development as a watering-place and most of its finest buildings are remnants of the town's glory days as a Georgian resort. As you enter drive along the waterfront and then head for the old harbour area now a shadow of its former self but still a place that is full of atmosphere.

Leave for the hotel or B&B in the Weymouth area.

Day 4. Head for **Athelhampton**, 17 miles. (A354, A35). Athelhampton is on the left shortly after the A354 leaves A35, north east of Dorchester. It is one of the finest 15th century manors, built by Sir William Martyn in 1485. The Great Hall is an exceptional example of early Tudor architecture. The West wing is Elizabethan in period and contains the library, Great Chamber and wine cellar. Its Grade 1 listed award winning gardens date from 1891. They contain famous topiary pyramids, fountains and the River Piddle. Collections of magnolias, tulips, roses, clematis and lilies can be seen in season. As it is an architectural garden, it has interest all year.

Lunch in Athelhampton restaurant or in Weymouth or Portland.

Leave for **Portland**, 23 miles (A35, A354). There is evidence of human occupation here 7,000 years ago. The island is famous as the home of the British Navy for hundreds of years and for its stone which has built St. Paul's cathedral, the UN headquarters in New York and many other iconic buildings.

Head for the isolated tip of the island called **Portland Bill**, known best for its famous lighthouse which is open to the public. Although it can be quite crowded at times in the summer, this is a unique place that stirs something inside you as you sit on the grass looking out to sea.

On the way, you will see signs for the Portland Heights Hotel. Drive up to the hotel and you will find a lookout point with stunning views over the coastline in both directions including the whole of Chesil Beach.

If you have time, visit **Portland Castle**. This coastal fortress overlooking Portland harbour has enjoyed a long colourful history. Built to defend Weymouth harbour from potential French or Spanish invasion, it remains largely unaltered. Its squat fan appearance is typical of castles built by Henry VIII in the early 1540's. The castle experienced serious fighting during the Civil War when it was seized by both the Royalists and Parliamentarians. It still had an important defence role in the First and Second World Wars.

Return on A354 across the causeway and on to the Weymouth area hotel or B&B.

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Day 6. Leave for **Mapperton Gardens**, 9 miles (A3066 to Beaminster, then B3163 for about 2 miles, then look for a sign on the right to Mapperton.) Beaminster is a charming typically Dorset town. If you like, park in the small square and stroll around.

Continue to Mapperton Gardens which surround the Jacobean manor house. Below the orangery and croquet lawn is a dramatic and unique valley garden. It is an Italianate formal garden with fountains, topiary, ponds and statuary laid out in the 1920's. Beyond the ponds, paths lead down into the Wild Garden which has specimen shrubs and trees.

Continue to **Forde Abbey**, 14 miles. (B3163, B3162 to Winsham and turn left and left again on country lanes, following the signs to Forde Abbey.

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Founded by Cistercian monks over 800 years ago, Forde Abbey was one of the most learned monasteries in England. It was converted into a house in 1649 when Oliver Cromwell's Attorney General bought it. The house contains elaborately plastered ceilings, fine paintings and furniture plus outstanding Mortlake tapestries. Its 30 acre award winning garden has interest through the year from the spring bulbs, herbaceous borders and bog garden to the arboretum, lakes and working kitchen garden.

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