

TRAVEL LAKE DISTRICT

5 PLACES TO VISIT IN CUMBRIA

1. Keswick is a charming Cumbria market town at the north end of Derwentwater. It dates back to the 13th century and is closely associated with the poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey. It is a very busy town centre, especially at weekends.
2. At 3054ft above sea level, Skiddaw is the fourth-highest mountain in England. It is just north of Keswick and within easy walking distance of Ravenstone Lodge Hotel and its easy walking path to the summit makes it popular with climbers.
3. Bassenthwaite Lake is, at four miles long, one of the largest in the Lake District. It is a popular fishing and birdwatching spot and is easily accessible from Ravenstone by a path leading through farmers' fields.
4. St Bega's Church is a grade-two listed building on the shores of Bassenthwaite. It was named after an Irish princess and dates to 950AD. The church is still used for regular services and weddings.
5. Castlerigg Stone Circle is a 10-minute drive from the hotel and dates from 3000BC. Thousands of tourists travel to the prehistoric site every year and it is recognised as one of the most impressive and atmospheric stone circles in the UK.

PICTURE PERFECT

MIKE Cornish, proprietor of the Ravenstone Lodge Hotel, describes himself as a "bumbling amateur" when it comes to his second love, photography. But his modesty is obviously misplaced. The walls of his dining room and bistro contain some very good examples of his work, all landscapes from the wonderful countryside on his doorstep. Mike has sold a few prints, mostly online, and this year completed the first sale of one of his photos to a customer in Australia. So it seemed a straightforward request: take us out to your favourite location and show us how to take the perfect landscape shot.

If not quite perfect, at least Mike could give us a few tips. He was using a Nikon camera, complete with filters and lenses which, he explained, keeps the lens open longer and better captures the movement. Our rather more basic Canon EOS Rebel XS1 had manual settings and we tried to keep the water and the ripples in shot. Mike was disarmingly honest – Photoshop is nowadays your best friend.



Ospreys, which are regarded as a Scottish national treasure, have been nesting near Bassenthwaite Lake in the Lake District for 13 years

Where ospreys dare

Want to see some of Scotland's most iconic birds of prey? Try heading south of the Border. By Iain Lundy

THE magnificent bird was unmistakable. Gleaming white feathers, streaked with brown, its bright yellow eyes scanning the water below for prey. It then dropped its wings, hovered briefly and plunged with talons extended. Seconds later it emerged clutching a writhing fish.

The hunting ritual of the osprey is one of the most spectacular natural wonders the Scottish Highlands has to offer. The fish-eating raptor with a five-foot wingspan was reintroduced to Scotland in the 1950s and holds a special place in our hearts north of the Border. Along with the equally magnificent golden eagle, the osprey is regarded as a Scottish national treasure.

Bird-lovers have been flocking to Loch Garten in the Cairngorms, where the original reintroduction programme was carried out, to get close-up views of birds – both adults and chicks – at the nest. Exhibitions of fishing in the loch add the wow factor

to a memorable experience. In Perthshire, the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Loch of the Lowes is an equally big draw.

But what we had just witnessed wasn't in the Highlands. It wasn't even in Scotland. This bird was one of a small number now breeding and attracting visitors to sites in the north of England.

We were a few miles north of the Cumbria market town of Keswick in the heart of the Lake District, overlooking Bassenthwaite Lake. There have been nesting ospreys at this site for 13 years now and local conservationists count themselves incredibly fortunate to have them as "celebrity" residents.

KL, the female, is named after the lettering on the ring round her leg. She was originally a Scottish bird, born near Fort William. Her partner has not yet been ringed and has been given the imaginative name of No-Ring. In Scotland, ospreys can be seen far more easily than most people realise. They are regular visitors to rivers and estuaries the length and breadth of the country.

But it is only in the past 15 years that they have extended their range into England. The Bassenthwaite site has held a pair of birds for 15 consecutive years and during the breeding season the nest is protected by volunteers from the Lake District Osprey Project.

If the birds had been looking for a piece of real estate with a panoramic vista, they could not have chosen a better site. The nest, at the south end of Bassenthwaite, is Lake District scenery at its finest.

The hike to the bird hide, a track which climbs through a forested area known as Dodd Wood, will leave the unfit peching a little. But the effort is worth it. The viewing area is about a mile from the nest but telescopes are provided and the birds can be seen clearly at the right time of year.

Project volunteers are on hand to explain to visitors the history of the osprey in Cumbria and the contribution the birds now make to the area's wildlife tourist industry.

It was in the late 1990s that ospreys were first spotted fishing over a number of

lakes in Cumbria. Volunteers, hoping that they would breed one day, built a platform for the birds to nest at an area called Wythop Woods.

When they nested and bred in 2001, it was the first time osprey chicks had been born in the Lake District for 150 years – and the birds have come back every year since.

The area around Dodd Wood makes for a pleasant walk and the osprey hide car park is well served by the Old Sawmill Tearoom and, 10 minutes along the A591, the stunning Ravenstone Lodge Hotel.

The three-star hotel, a converted estate building, sits in outstanding countryside. It has a relaxing feel, the rooms are first-class – but the hotel's crowning glory is the food served in its bar and bistro. It is of a wonderfully high standard and makes Ravenstone Lodge an unquestioned culinary gem.

Ravenstone lies between Skiddaw, one of the highest peaks in the Lake District, and Bassenthwaite Lake. As scenic beauty goes it doesn't get much better.