For fans of English literature, a tour of literary England will leave you with goosebumps on your arms and a yearning to delve right back into the pages of those well-thumbed volumes. Walk in the footsteps of the giants of English literature by hitting this bookish trail.

For so many of us the charms of England are vividly experienced long before setting foot on this glorious, rainy island. Blame it on the literary giants. Novelists such as Dickens and Austen and poets such as Wordsworth and Keats, have done more than any tourism board could have, to draw foreigners to its shores. Ye olde England lives in their pages and is an inextricable, enchanting part of the outsider’s idea of England.
This is an invitation to make those classics come alive – literally by treading the paths those authors walked. To leave the well-trampled roads towards Buckingham Palace and Madame Tussauds, and head off into the English countryside.

**FINDING DICKENS**

On the Kentish coast in southeast England lies the Victorian seaside town of Broadstairs. A sweeping arc of blue water hugs the beach which is lined with small, brightly-painted beach huts. Steep winding lanes take you past fishermen’s cottages and a clifftop promenade. Charles Dickens holidayed here regularly over 22 years, from 1837 to 1859, and worked on many of his novels here, including *David Copperfield*. He often stayed at The Royal Albion Hotel where he wrote part of *Nicholas Nickleby*, and where, today,
you can feast on fresh seafood. Dickens House Museum is a house where Dickens regularly had tea with its owner, Mrs Mary Pearson; no ordinary old woman, for she was the direct inspiration for the formidable character of Betsey Trotwood in *David Copperfield*, who, like her real-life counterpart, believed in her divine right to stop all donkeys from crossing her front yard. The parlour is identical to its description in the novel, in the scene where the young David arrives dishevelled and starving to see his aunt. Also on display are Dickens’ writing box, mahogany sideboard, a collection of prints by his illustrator Phiz, and other memorabilia. Dickens wrote of Broadstairs: “You cannot think how delightful and fresh the place is, and how good the walks”. Surely no better endorsement is needed.

The Dickens Festival, held annually in June (scheduled to be held from June 17–23 this year), has been running since 1937 with Victorian-style events such as a country fair, village cricket match and traditional afternoon teas.

**THE LAMB HOUSE**

Rye, in East Sussex, is an ancient village of steep cobbled paths and charming nooks where carefully tended roses bloom. EF Benson, the author of the delightful Lucia and Mapp novels, moved here in 1917. He used Rye as the basis for Tilling, his fictional English village where everyone minds everyone else’s business to hilarious effect. He could hardly have chosen a more illustrious residence, for his home, Lamb House, had belonged to the American writer Henry James who lived in the house for 18 years.
till his death in 1916. James wrote some of his best-known works here including *The Wings of the Dove*, and entertained famous writers such as Edith Wharton, Rudyard Kipling and HG Wells.

A MEETING WITH THE BRONTË SISTERS

Head north to Yorkshire, for a full dose of those promised goosebumps. The Brontë Parsonage in the village of Haworth was the home of Anne, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and is preserved with much of the original furniture intact. In the dining room is the very table on which were written *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily and *Agnes Grey* by Anne. Every night the three sisters would walk around the dining table discussing their novels with each other – till Emily and Anne died young, barely out of their twenties, and Charlotte was left alone. A servant described how it broke her heart to hear Charlotte walking round and round the table in solitude. Charlotte wrote of Emily’s last moments, “She was torn conscious, panting, reluctant though resolute out of a happy life”; here is the sofa where that terrible death occurred. By the fireplace is the rocking chair where Anne sat to warm her feet. It is impossible to be in this room without a feeling of awe at the talent and tragedy that unfolded here. Other memorabilia in the house and neighbouring church, are Emily’s rosewood writing desk; a cupboard painted with the faces of the Twelve Apostles, described so ominously in a blood-soaked scene of *Jane Eyre*; Charlotte’s wedding veil; and much more. In the village are reminders of the darker side of the Brontë saga –

the Black Bull pub where their brother Branwell turned alcoholic, and the druggists shop – now a stunning Victorian-style soap and perfume shop – where he bought opium and fell into addiction.

Close to Haworth are the moors which formed the wild, bleak backdrop to Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. A bracing uphill walk takes you to Top Withens, a low-built, stone farmhouse, the location of which is believed to have inspired the setting of the novel. It now stands a crumbling ruin, flanked by two solitary
leafless trees. One cannot think of a more exhilarating place of pilgrimage for lovers of *Wuthering Heights*, for all around is the landscape made world-famous by Emily, with its vast, windswept hills of heather, bracken and grasses.

**CHASING PETER RABBIT**
The nearby county of Cumbria couldn’t feel further away from the bleakness of the moors. The Lake District, with its rolling green hills and the charms of Lake Windermere, is the landscape of the timeless tales of Beatrix Potter, beginning with *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Hill Top is the 17th-century farmhouse which she bought in 1905 and where she farmed, wrote, and painted. The house is filled with objects that Potter used to illustrate her stories – here is the chest of drawers where Tom Kitten’s mother kept his ‘elegant, uncomfortable clothes’; there the doll’s house with the little plates of fish and ham that appear in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*; and the red polka-dotted handkerchief that appears around Peter Rabbit’s neck. Outside is an informal garden filled with plants such as roses, hollyhocks and tomatoes. Pause a while, and you feel that a little blue-coated rabbit might – just might – scamper out from behind those lettuces.

**WANDERING LIKE WORDSWORTH**
The Lake District was also the home of the grand old man of poetry, William Wordsworth, whose work was inspired by the beauty of the landscape. He lived initially in Dove Cottage in Grasmere, where the Wordsworth Trust runs regular events including literature courses and cozy tea-and-toast afternoons by the fireside where you can sit back and imagine the voices of...
ACCOMMODATION
All the locations mentioned offer a good variety of mid-range hotels and quaint B&Bs. Live it up like Dickens did at The Royal Albion Hotel.
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QUICK FACTS
Jet Airways operates daily flights to London Heathrow from Mumbai and New Delhi.

William, his sister Dorothy and his friend Coleridge, filling the room with discussion. In 1813, Wordsworth moved to a larger house, Rydal Mount, and lived there till his death in 1850. It was here that he published the final version of his most famous poem, The Daffodils. In the dining room the chairs are covered in the original embroidery done by his wife and sister. In his bedroom, is a letter from Wordsworth to Queen Victoria, declining the post of Poet Laureate. He later accepted the post on the condition that he would not be obliged to write any poetry! Wordsworth designed the four acres of garden himself, a carefully tended mix of wilderness and manicured lawn. Rydal Mount was truly the scene of literary greatness, for by the early 19th century it became almost de rigueur for writers to visit the great poet. The list of his guests reads like a roll-call of the royalty of Romantic and Victorian literature, including Dickens, the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, Walter Scott, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Mary Shelly and John Keats.

And that’s just the tip of the iceberg. You can visit the Charles Dickens Museum in London, Jane Austen’s home in Hampshire, Shakespeare’s home town of Stratford-upon-Avon, and much more. The literary tourist simply has to face the thorny question of what among these riches can be fitted in, and what must be left out.