

December 2019

New or not-so-new but unusual events and developments in the Hampshire area of the South Downs National Park (East Hampshire) for 2020

From new or refurbished accommodation, facilities and events through to nature, unusual and learning activities as well as more besides, you'll find it all here in the Hampshire South Downs in 2020. Visitors to the area can expect the treats below to tempt them on their way. Some are new, others are old favourites that happen year after year but offer interesting and unusual experiences.

These can be combined with special places to stay – from hotels, traditional pubs with rooms and B&Bs, farmhouse and self-catering accommodation through to yurts, shepherd's huts, lodges and camping. There are also great walking and cycling opportunities in stunning countryside, gardens, country parks, historic houses, museums and other attractions, making for the perfect break away.

New / regenerated accommodation

Old Thorns – new self catering apartments featuring 14 penthouse suites and 37 2 – bedroom apartments These are located within the hotel complex overlooking the golf course and stunning South Downs countryside. All have floor to ceiling windows, allowing natural light to pour in.

<https://www.oldthorns.com/accommodation/self-catering-apartments/>

New venue for weddings, parties and private hire - Dyers Barn at Chawton House

Dyers Barn is a beautiful historic structure, once located in the nearby market town of Alton and donated in recent years by Sainsbury's to Chawton House, the former home of Jane Austen's brother. Now sitting within the estate's parkland and with sweeping views up to the house, it is the perfect venue for any occasion. Early in 2020 the barn will be receiving a makeover, with new flooring, fixtures, fittings, lighting and landscaping. Contact info@chawtonhouse.org for more information and rates.

New-look visitor centre for Queen Elizabeth Country Park and Staunton Country Park

The centre-piece of one of East Hampshire's beauty spots, Queen Elizabeth Country Park, has re-opened to the public following a £1.2m refurbishment. The visitor centre has been transformed into a light and airy hub with open-plan atrium, re-vamped café bathed in natural light with extra seating in and out and new and tempting menu based on locally sourced produce with healthy options. The exciting project is part of a Country Park Transformation project being led by the Countryside

Service at Hampshire County Council.

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/countryparks/qecp> And Staunton Country Park has been granted planning permission to restore its historic park to its former glory and improve its visitor facilities.

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/countryparks/staunton>

Re-development of largest Stone Age house and enclosure at Butser Ancient Farm

Butser Ancient Farm's experimental archaeology work continues next year with the re-development of the largest Stone Age house and enclosure, helping to tell the story of the earliest permanent dwellings discovered in this country. The farm's timeline of ancient life will further be expanding, with the continuing construction of a second Anglo-Saxon house. Prehistoric, Roman, Saxon and Viking reenactors will be taking up residence at special events throughout the year to bring the buildings to life. www.butserancientfarm.co.uk

New Events

Summer Evening with Gin Austen, Jane Austen's House Museum. Enjoy a long summer evening at Jane Austen's House, complete with strawberries and cream and a hand-crafted Gin Austen cocktail (or mocktail) in Jane's cottage garden. Visitors can explore the House and garden after hours, brought to life with pop up theatrical performances and live music from Jane Austen's Music Books. This is part of the Jane Austen Regency Week programme. Jane Austen's House, 26 June, 6-9 pm. Booking is essential <https://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk/>

Chawton House launches Man Up! Exhibition - A celebration of 17th – 19th Century women who defied convention and made their mark in a man's world. Opening on 17 February, this entertaining and illuminating exhibition highlights the lives of individuals who dared to step outside of traditional female roles. These women, who lived between the 17th and 19th centuries, risked physical perils as well as public outrage in disguising themselves as men. They threw themselves into employment as soldiers, sailors, actors and adventurers. Sometimes this arose from a desire for excitement and independence, but for an orphaned girl or deserted wife it was a desperate means of surviving alone. Facing musket balls, sailing the high seas or fighting a duel were all in a day's work to these intrepid, and sometimes, reckless, women. The exhibition also considers the lives of writers such as George Eliot, the Brontë sisters and George Sands who attained successful publication while concealing their gender, and the redoubtable Elizabeth Knight, a rare female landowner and mistress of Chawton House. Paintings, artefacts and interactive exhibits bring these unique stories to life. The exhibition is free with general admission. <https://chawtonhouse.org/>

New spring colour and cut flower border in the gardens at National Trust property

Hinton Ampner Thousands of new spring bulbs have been planted at Hinton Ampner, to provide delightful fresh colour from March to May. Richly scented narcissus thalia will be on show, along with eight new varieties of tulip, including frilly candy-pink tulip Huis Ten Bosch in the Sunken Garden. In the Kitchen Garden you'll find tulip varieties including deep-red Lasting Love and tangerine-pink Dordogne. Elsewhere in the garden visitors can take in frothy cherry blossom in the orchard, camellias and magnolias.

A large new cut flower border has been created in Hinton's historic walled kitchen garden. Cut flowers were a favourite of former owner Ralph Dutton, and displays will

feature prominently in the house throughout the year. Described by Hinton's head gardener as a 'jewel box of colour', the cut flower border will feature a wide selection of flowers, from tulips, narcissi, delphiniums and astrantia, to peonies, roses, alliums and irises, creating beautiful drifts of colour that change with the seasons. Find out more about Hinton Ampner's spring colour: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hinton-ampner/features/spring-at-hinton->

Upcoming anniversaries

Gilbert White 300 2020 is a very special anniversary – 300 years since the birth of one of our greatest ecologists and naturalists – the eighteenth century author and clergyman Gilbert White, who lived in Selborne. The village and its surrounding landscape inspired his incredible life-long investigation of the natural world, culminating in his world-famous book *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*. Gilbert White's story is told within the walls of his family home and unique 18th century garden – at Gilbert White's House. Throughout 2020 there will be special events, including temporary exhibitions – Gilbert White Around the World, (3 January-28 June 2020), celebrating the global impact of his work, and Gilbert White 300 Exhibition, displaying a collection of items connected to Gilbert White (opens July 2020). There will also be talks in Selborne and London and Flora Selbornienis, which will record the natural world in Selborne every day following Gilbert's record in 1766. The year's events will culminate in a magnificent birthday party (18 July) with free admission all day, stalls, entertainment and the unveiling of a statue of Gilbert by a celebrity. This will be the main press event of the year.

<https://gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk/>

Gilbert White was one of the first people to comment on the fact that lost species would have a detrimental effect on the rest of the natural world. He was one of the first to realise that humans did not own nature, but that we are part of it and that everything is linked. He is for this reason considered to be Britain's first ecologist and he has influenced today's most famous naturalists including Darwin, Attenborough and Packham.

Learning experiences/nature experiences/wellness breaks

Fly fishing experience days at Meon Springs - Designed specifically for novices, Experience Days provide everything you need to get started in fly fishing. You'll receive professional tuition and friendly advice throughout the day. And if you're lucky, you may even leave with a couple of trout. You'll learn how to put a rod, reel and line together and attach a fly. You'll be shown how to cast making sure that your timing and rod movement is just right with constant feedback from instructors. And once you've got to grips with casting, you'll learn about fly selection, retrieval and how to play and land a fish. Then, you'll be free to fish for the rest of the day with someone always on hand to provide help and encouragement if needed. It really is one of the best introductions to fly fishing around. <https://www.meonsprings.com/experience-days.html>

Learning ancient skills at Butser Ancient Farm and the Sustainability Centre – choose from workshops such as Ancient Living and Ancient Skills, Bronze Casting, Flax and Weaving, Pottery, Nettle workshop, Flint Study Day, Saxon Medicine, Natural dyeing, Flint knapping and much more at Butser www.butserancientfarm.co.uk or Hand Sewn book making, Willow garden sculpture, Coppicing, Willow obelisks, Spoon carving, Trug making, Clay Oven building,

Wooden stool making, Blacksmithing, Deer Butchery, Foraging and Folklore and more at the Sustainability Centre https://www.sustainability-centre.org/store/c8/Adults_Courses.html

More from the Sustainability Centre - Unwind in the Woods, Combining meditation and an introduction to basic whittling techniques, this workshop will give you the time and space to get away from a hectic everyday life and connect with nature. You will be guided to fully engage your senses in the relaxing skill of wood carving. In the morning you will immerse yourself in learning the skill of whittling and carve your own spatula to take home with you. Following a warming campfire cooked lunch you will visit one of our yurts for a meditation session incorporating woodland folklore. The day is designed to leave you with the feeling of peace and calm that whittling and time spent in nature can bring. <https://www.sustainability-centre.org/unwind-in-the-woods.html> Or try Woodland Folklore. On this one day introduction course, discover the spiritual practises of the Celtic Bard: stories, poems, woodland traditions and meditation. This unique course will take you through an in-depth exploration of the trees, plants, landscape and seasons. Discover how woodland traditions and folklore are relevant to our lives today and explore nature-based meditation. <https://www.sustainability-centre.org/woodland-folklore-course.html>

Create Your Own Eco Mini-Break Combine an overnight stay with one of the many courses offered by The Sustainability Centre, booking tickets for their events or by visiting local attractions. Camping in your own tent, hiring a yurt or B+Bing in the eco lodge. Situated in the heart of Hampshire's South Downs, this beautiful 55 acre wooded site is right on the National Trail linking an extensive network of footpaths and with character country pubs nearby. Courses available include Hand Sewn book Making; Willow Garden Sculpture; Coppicing; Willow Obelisks; Spoon Carving; Trug Making; Clay Oven building; Wooden Stool Making; Blacksmithing; Deer Butchery; Foraging and Folklore at https://www.sustainability-centre.org/store/c8/Adults_Courses.html and <https://www.sustainability-centre.org/stay-with-us.html>. 2020 events include the South Downs Green Fair on Sunday May 10th – a real showcase for green living and sustainable solutions; Folk in the Forest on Saturday the 6th June - a celebration of local folk music and Handlebards, an outdoor production of Macbeth on Wednesday 17th June. <https://www.sustainability-centre.org/whats-on.html>

A look toward to springtime at Jane Austen's House Museum. In her talk, 'To look upon verdure', gardener, historian and author Carol Chernega will present a look at what the garden at Jane Austen's house was like when Jane lived here, how it developed when the Museum opened in 1949 and how it has expanded in the past twenty years. This event is inspired by Fanny Price's sentiment in Mansfield Park: 'to sit in the shade on a fine day, and look upon verdure, is the most perfect refreshment'. Jane Austen's House Learning Centre, Saturday, 15 February 2.00 pm.. Booking is essential due to limited capacity. <https://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk/>

Spring Flowers workshop at Jane Austen's House Museum This practical and inspiring floristry workshop celebrates the joys of spring. Be inspired by the beautiful cottage garden at Jane Austen's House as you learn to put together a hand-tied bouquet full of spring blooms. Experienced florists from Winchester's Blooming Workshop will guide you through the process of flower selection and arrangement, with professional floristry tips and tricks along the way. Take home a hand-tied bouquet for your own home, or to give as a special gift! Jane Austen's House Learning Centre, Sunday 3 May 10:00 am – 1:00 pm. Booking is essential due to limited capacity. . <https://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk/>

Wellness breaks/spa treatments/beauty treatments, Champneys Forest Mere indulge in a relaxing spa break at the secluded lakeside resort of Champneys Forest Mere. New levels of relaxation have been introduced thanks largely to the new cutting-edge Thermal Poolside Suite. Choose from spas, holistic therapies like Reiki and Reflexology, massage, health and fitness, beauty treatments, wellness treatments and more. You can also enjoy a range of special wellness or fitness overnight retreats including the Janet Thomson Placebo Diet (12 Jan) and Chill Out Yoga (17 Jan) as well as skills days including Front Crawl with Art of Swimming (29 Feb) and Learn or improve your Breaststroke with Art of Swimming (1 March). Or you can really kick-start your fitness with a 4 night Bootcamp (27 Jan or 16 March for 4 nights) <https://www.champneys.com/spa-resorts/champneys-forest-mere/>

A magnificent bluebell walk at National Trust's Hinton Ampner This is one of the best places in Hampshire to see bluebells. Lace up your walking boots and head out to explore acres of native bluebells in ancient woodland. Wide beech avenues make it easy to get up to the blooms and take in their delicate perfume. Pick up a map at reception and follow the Dutton Estate Walk, or download the walk. Bluebells are a wonderful part of our natural heritage, a welcome sign that spring is well under way and the warmer days of summer are not far off. Find out more about Hinton Ampner's spring colour: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hinton-ampner/features/spring-at-hinton->

Spring delights at National Trust's Uppark House At delightful National Trust house and garden, Uppark, near Petersfield, the garden gives visitors a real spring treat. Thousands of scented narcissi litter the lawn, driveway and café frontage, so you can enjoy the delights of spring as you tuck into home-made cake from Uppark's café. Visitors can also take part in Guided Tours of the Servants quarters (8 Jan – 14 Feb between 11am and 3pm, free but admission applies) <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/uppark-house-and-garden>

Unexpected/ lesser known unique experiences

Dining and Drinking on the Watercress Line steam Railway Relive the splendour and glamour of steam hauled fine dining on the Watercress Line steam railway, Alresford, near Alton and enjoy a traditional Sunday lunch on the Countryman, step back in time to 1950's ocean liner glamour on the Watercress Belle for a 4-course silver service Saturday night dinner or brush up your sleuthing skills on a Murder Mystery train whilst enjoying a 3-course evening meal. (For dates, more information and availability visit <https://www.watercressline.co.uk/section.php/6/1/dining-trains>) For real ale lovers there's a real treat in store – the Real Ale Train (or RAT) gives you the chance to sample local ales from a restored bar carriage pulled by a steam locomotive. For more information and dates for 2020 visit <https://www.watercressline.co.uk/product.php/121/real-ale-train-rat>

Ride a footplate at the Watercress Line Experience life on the footplate as you ride on board one of the Line's magnificent steam locomotives hauling a passenger service through stunning Hampshire countryside. Join the crews for a journey 'over the Alps' and experience the thrill of the sights, sounds, smell and heat of a steam engine footplate. Expert and highly experienced engine crews will answer questions and point out various points of interest during your journey. This is the perfect taster experience and includes all day standard travel and lunch for the participant and one

guest. <https://www.watercressline.co.uk/product.php/14/steam-locomotive-footplate-ride>

Become a Signaller on the Watercress Line Join an experienced signaller in one of the Watercress Line's idyllic signal boxes throwing the levers, setting signals, points and issuing the single line token for trains to proceed into section. These experiences can be tailored to your requirements. For instance, you could spend half a day in one box and half in another, or even spend time in all 4.

<https://www.watercressline.co.uk/product.php/49/become-a-signaller-with-a-signal-box-experience> You can also learn to Drive and Fire a Steam Engine - <https://www.watercressline.co.uk/product.php/15/introductory-driving-firing-experience>

Celtic Festivals, Butser Ancient Farm Celebrate the changing of the seasons Celtic-style. Samhain in October marks the end of the harvest season and the beginning of winter, or the 'darker half' of the year. Spend the evening in the magical surroundings of the Great Roundhouse at and enjoy live music, professional storytelling and a bar with local ales. Samhain was seen as a time when the boundary between this world and the next could be crossed more easily. Imbolc, or Celtic Spring Festival, in February, celebrates the end of winter. Hosted by Jonathon Huet, the afternoon's entertainment will include storytelling, poetry, singing, fire-lighting and a light, warming meal. Beltain, in May is the ancient Celtic celebration to mark the beginning of summer, with music, dancing and the burning of the giant Wickerman. This sell-out event is the highlight of the Butser year www.butserancientfarm.co.uk/beltain-festival/ Butser will now also be celebrating Lughnasa on 31 July – the celebration of the summer and gathering of the grain harvest and located at the midpoint between the winter and summer solstice and the spring and autumn equinoxes.. This completes the 4 cross quarter Celtic Festivals so they can all be celebrated at Butser to mark the passing of the year. As with each of the other festivals, it will be celebrated with a mixture of fireside storytelling, music, crafts and feasting.

Stargazing at Butser Ancient Farm as part of South Downs National Park Dark Skies at Night Festival Enjoy an evening under the stars with Hants Astro. You'll be given an introduction to the night sky before stepping outside into the Farm's ancient world to view stars and planets millions of years old through state-of-the-art telescopes. In May 2016 the South Downs National Park gained International Dark Sky status due to its low levels of light pollution – what better way to celebrate this achievement than by stargazing on the highest point of the National Park?

www.butserancientfarm.co.uk/

Stargazing is also possible at the award-winning adult only campsite Two Hoots Due to very low light pollution & being on top of Bighton Hill not only gives the site a wonderful view but it also makes for an amazing place to study the stars on a clear night. There are also lovely woodland walks close by and if you time it right you can see snowy kissing tree tunnels, carpets of snowdrops or bluebells whilst enjoying a glamping break in a shepherd's hut or eco-pod. <https://www.twohootscampsite.co.uk/>

Watercress Festival, Alresford near Alton The historic market town of Alresford, near Alton, hosts an annual – and now famous – Watercress Festival, celebrating its locally-grown produce. Join in the huge street festival with over 80 stalls showcasing the very best local food and drink producers, craftsmen as well as items for the house and garden. Enjoy music, dance, watercress-inspired cookery demonstrations by well-known chefs and the World Watercress Eating Championships! (17 May, free event) <https://www.watercressfestival.org/>

Visit one of Britain's largest collections of working Steam! - Hollycombe Steam in the Country You'd be hard-pressed to find such a unique collection of steam machinery, engines and railway of such national importance. Take a wonderful and nostalgic step back in time at Hollycombe and experience the magic of steam in many forms brought lovingly to life. The collection at Hollycombe includes Britain's largest Edwardian steam-driven fairground, two steam railways and a number of steam rollers and road engines.

It also includes a steam farm, cider press and blacksmith's forge as well as a beam engine, the oldest example of working steam on the site. Also enjoy many special steam-related events with vintage and classic vehicles, mechanical organs and models on display. Or experience the incredible atmosphere of the Fairground at Night during Autumn months. www.hollycombe.co.uk/

Embroidery workshop with Chrissie Juno Mann: Bullion Knot Roses at Jane Austen's House Museum Join award-winning Royal School of Needlework tutor Chrissie Juno Mann for a relaxing and inspiring morning of hand embroidery. You will be creating – and taking home – a Regency inspired button with a beautiful Bullion Knot Rose as the centre piece of the work, influenced by Jane Austen House's own Chawton Cottage Rose launched in 2019. Jane Austen's House Learning Centre, Wednesday 24 June, 10.00 am – 1.30 pm. Booking is essential due to limited capacity. <https://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk/>

'In quest of two needlefuls of thread': Jane Austen, Needlework and Character - a presentation at Jane Austen's House Museum. It is well known that Jane Austen was clever with her needle, and several fine examples can be seen at Jane Austen's House in Chawton. But what role does needlework play in the plots of Jane's novels and the depiction of her characters? In this lively presentation, author and Jane Austen expert Maggie Lane and actor and writer Angela Barlow explore the ubiquity of sewing in women's lives, the social as well as practical functions the activity fulfilled and, most fascinating of all, the purposes which Jane Austen made it serve in her fiction. Jane Austen's House Learning Centre, Wednesday 24 June 3.00 – 4.00 pm. Book as a standalone event or as a joint ticket with the embroidery workshop: <https://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk/>

Jane Austen's Regency Week Regency Week is an annual Festival of events celebrating all things Jane and the Regency period which takes place between Saturday 20 to Sunday 28 June. The events happen in and around the market town of Alton and the nearby village of Chawton, where Jane lived and worked. The Festival boasts a unique line-up, including Regency period dancing, music, dining, exhibitions, talks and discussions, garden trails and tours, guided themed walks and more. (Events are subject to change and full line up to be announced. For information and booking details visit www.janeaustenregencyweek.co.uk).

Chawton is home to Jane Austen's House Museum where she spent the last 9 years of her life and wrote or reworked her 6 acclaimed novels. The village is also where her brother lived and the manor house and gardens of Chawton House are open to the public. The historic market town of Alton is the place where she shopped, banked, collected and delivered post, visited her friends and caught the stagecoach to London.

There's plenty of accommodation to choose from for your break – including a great choice of B&Bs, hotels, pubs with rooms, farmhouses, and luxury glamping in shepherds huts, yurts, eco-pods, safari tents or lodges. For further information on

accommodation and things to do and visit in this corner of the world go to <http://www.easthants.gov.uk/visit-east-hampshire> or email the Tourist Information Centre in Petersfield: petersfieldinfo@btconnect.com

Ends

For further press information please contact Rachel Shimell on 02380 732981 or email: rachel.shimell@gmail.com

Notes to Editors:

The South Downs National Park

The South Downs National Park's landscapes cover 1,600km² of breathtaking views and hidden gems – rolling hills, glorious heathland, river valleys, ancient woodland, thriving villages and market towns, and the iconic white cliffs of the Heritage Coast. A rich tapestry of wildlife, landscapes, tranquillity and visitor attractions weave together a story of people and place in harmony. www.southdowns.gov.uk/

East Hampshire

The area of the South Downs that spills into East Hampshire - around Chawton where Jane Austen lived – has quite a different feel from the rest of the new National Park. Hidden away between the cathedral cities of Winchester and Chichester, its steep wooded hills and hidden valleys of watercress farms, lavender fields, vineyards, hop gardens and trout-filled streams, together with its picture-perfect villages and peaceful market towns, make it undoubtedly one of the loveliest parts of rural England. www.easthants.gov.uk/tourism