

Hampshire shore excursion itinerary ideas for the cruise market

Hampshire County Council



Outline

Hampshire is a diverse county with an exciting array of top visitor attractions catering for a range of ages and tastes. Many of these businesses are keen to welcome cruise ship passengers, having already established themselves as group-friendly attractions with UK and international land based tour operators.

Several cruise lines already conduct shore excursions to different parts of the county (for example Winchester and the New Forest), along with visits to destinations outside of Hampshire (Stonehenge, London). Due to Hampshire's close proximity to its neighbouring counties, there is scope to combine shore excursions across two regions to maximise the passenger day trip experience (such as a combined Stonehenge and Sir Harold Hillier Gardens visit).

The aim of this document is to make people aware of what Hampshire has to offer cruise ship passengers, encouraging them to explore the wider area, outside of the port of Southampton. All options can be tailored towards individual cruise ship and passenger needs, dependent on ability, taste and time restraints.

These are example itineraries at this stage, but there is also scope to maximise activity or 'experience' excursions. The New Forest and South Downs National Parks have excellent bike hire facilities and cycle trails for visitors to explore. There are also options of boat rides along the Solent with so many local boat hire companies in the region. Other unique options could include vineyard tours, afternoon tea, indoor skydiving, a visit to one of Hampshire's historic forts and walking tours of our historic cities.

Please note: Passengers would not see the breakdown of the timings of tours. This would be for internal use only. They would be told a start and finish time along with the tour duration.

Below is an outline of the key group-friendly tourist attractions in the county:

Portsmouth Historic Dockyard

One of Portsmouth's main visitor attractions, the Historic Dockyard houses Lord Nelson's flagship HMS Victory, Queen Victoria's HMS Warrior 1860 and Henry VIII's beloved Mary Rose. The latter is housed in a new multi-million pound museum, opened in May 2013. The Dockyard receives many group visitors each year, so it has excellent facilities catering for a range of group sizes, abilities and nationalities.

Tours here will involve walking over cobbles and HMS Victory and HMS Warrior have steep steps on board. Coach parking is limited but there are coach drop off points outside the museum, and allocated parking nearby.

A visit to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard could be combined with a stop at SeaCity Museum, Royal Navy Submarine Museum or Spinnaker Tower.

Beaulieu National Motor Museum

Beaulieu National Motor Museum received a Visit England Gold Award for top Large Visitor Attraction in 2013. Known internationally, Beaulieu is owned by Lord Montagu and the museum houses 250 motor vehicles from different periods in motoring history. These include motorbikes, caravans, Formula One cars and land speed record breakers such as the 'Bluebird.' Entrance to the museum also includes access to the historic Beaulieu Abbey ruins, Lord Montagu's private home Palace House and the on site mono-rail system.

The site has a café and gift shop with good facilities, and they welcome large groups throughout the year.

A visit to Beaulieu could be combined with a stop at Exbury Gardens.

SeaCity Museum

This museum is housed in a former police station at Southampton Civic Centre. Opened in 2012, SeaCity has a permanent Titanic exhibition charting the fateful tragedy and its links to the Southampton. Another permanent exhibition recounts the people who have arrived or departed in the city over the past 200,000 years. There are also temporary exhibitions year round.

There is a café on site and good, accessible facilities but coach parking is limited. Next door to the museum is the free Southampton City Art Gallery, which houses a range of works by well known artists.

A visit to the museum could be combined with a visit to Winchester, Portsmouth Historic Dockyard or the Royal Navy Submarine Museum.

The Needles Park & Alum Bay

The Needles and Alum Bay sit to the south west of the Isle of Wight, close to the town of Yarmouth. The iconic rocks can be viewed via chairlift which transports guests from the top of the cliff, to the beach below. Alum Bay is famous for its multi-coloured sand cliffs and this, along with the Needles, draws thousands of visitors to the area each year.

Other on site activities include boat trips, glass blowing and a sand shop, where people can purchase multi-coloured sand from the cliffs. Facilities include a café and catering kiosks, toilets, shops and some wheelchair accessible areas. Due to the nature of the chairlift, this part of the tour is unsuitable for wheelchair users.

The Needles Park caters for groups regularly. Coach parking is free and there is no admission charge to get in to the park itself.

A visit is best combine with another 'Island' attraction such as Osborne House.

Osborne House

Osborne House was once the home of Queen Victoria and her family. She once said 'it is impossible to imagine a prettier spot' which is still true to this day. Visitors can enjoy an intimate glimpse into the Queen's life as they tour the nursery and private rooms, along with the Royal Apartments, gardens and private beach.

The house is located in East Cowes, not far from the Red Funnel and Red Jet ferry terminals. A range of guided tours are available to groups, along with combined Osborne House/ferry tickets. There is free parking for up to 20 coaches, located 350 metres from the main entrance to the house. Much of the house and its grounds is wheelchair accessible.

A visit is best combine with another 'Island' attraction such as The Needles Park and Alum Bay.

Paultons Park

This world famous theme park is perhaps best known as being the home of Peppa Pig World. Attracting visitors from across the world, Paultons Park is aimed at children and families, perfect for the younger cruise market.

The park is set within 140 acres of land in the New Forest. It features 60 child-friendly rides which include a Water Kingdom, Peppa Pig's theme park and roller coasters.

Paultons does cater for groups but it is very much aimed towards children and families. There are on site catering facilities and the majority of the park is wheelchair accessible.

Highclere Castle

Famed as the backdrop for popular ITV drama series Downton Abbey, Highclere Castle sits on the Hampshire/Berkshire border. Home to Lord and Lady Carnarvon, the estate attracts visitors from across the world. Groups are welcome, however they are advised to pre book well in advance.

There is plenty of coach parking, as the front lawn serves as a car park. There is also an on site café and shop, although seating is fairly limited.

Exbury Gardens

The spectacular Exbury Gardens is an impressive 200 acres of colour. Famed for its rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias, Exbury was the inspiration of Lionel Nathan de Rothschild and the family still own the gardens today. As well as stunning woodland gardens, Exbury also has a grand country house, steam railway and lakes.

They regularly welcome cruise ship groups and have excellent facilities which include a café and gift shop. There is also the option for the less mobile to use a buggy. Part of the gardens are not easily accessible by wheelchair, so the buggy is recommended.

This stop could be combined with a visit to Beaulieu or Sir Harold Hillier Gardens.

Sir Harold Hillier Gardens

Set up by the late Sir Harold Hillier in 1953, these gardens cover 180 acres of land in Ampfield, Test Valley. Collections include Magnolia Avenue, Winter Garden, Centenary Border, Heather Garden and Peony. The gardens regularly host modern outdoor art exhibitions and ...

Sir Harold Hillier Gardens welcome groups and they are keen to break in to the cruise sector. With a modern visitor centre, café and shop, along with plenty of coach parking, they would be a good addition to any cruise itinerary. Most of the gardens are wheelchair accessible.

This stop would be well suited for any excursions visiting Stonehenge or Exbury Gardens.

Winchester Cathedral

Dating back over fifteen centuries, Winchester Cathedral remains one of the county's best loved visitor attractions. Located in the city centre, the Cathedral has the longest nave in Europe and is the final resting place of author Jane Austen and St Swithun. Open throughout the year, it holds regular events such as music concerts and art exhibitions. At Christmas, it hosts the well known Winchester Cathedral Christmas Market and Ice Rink which attracts visitors from across the country.

The Cathedral regularly welcomes tour groups and is set up with a range of good group facilities. These include a refectory with home made food, a shop, toilets and guided tours. The Cathedral is wheelchair accessible, although there are no toilet facilities once inside.

A visit to the Cathedral could be combined with a stop at Jane Austen's House Museum, the Great Hall or Stonehenge.

The Great Hall and the Round Table

The Great Hall is the only surviving part of Winchester Castle, constructed for William the Conqueror in 1067. Inside hangs King Arthur's legendary Round Table, believed to have been constructed originally for a tournament in 1290. Originally it was standing and would have had 12 outer legs and a central support. Outside is a small garden dedicated to Queen Eleanor of Provence and her daughter-in-law.

The Great Hall attracts thousands of visitors annually, and it is free to enter the hall, although visitors are encouraged to make a financial donation. The Hall is wheelchair accessible. There are no catering or toilet facilities on site, and coaches can drop off only.

A visit to the Great Hall would work well combined with a visit to Winchester Cathedral.

Jane Austen's House Museum

Jane Austen's House Museum sits in the sleepy village of Chawton in east Hampshire. Once home to author Jane Austen, visitors can explore the small rooms full of artefacts and factual information about the Austen family. The house itself dates back to the 17th century and was once part of the Chawton Estate (owned by Jane's brother). Jane revised many of her novels here, including *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Key artefacts in the house include her writing table, jewellery and replica clothing. Outside visitors can stroll around the pretty garden.

There are no catering facilities on site and coaches can only drop off. However, there is a small café and a pub across the road. There are stairs inside the house and due to the nature of the rooms, it can be quite difficult to manoeuvre wheelchairs.

A visit to this museum could coincide with a stop at nearby Chawton House or Winchester Cathedral.

Spinnaker Tower

The 170 metre Spinnaker Tower dominates Portsmouth's skyline and is regularly seen by cruise ships passing by. The tower is a popular tourist attraction, welcoming groups on a regular basis. Its location next to Gunwharf Quays, makes it a great place to stop when in the area.

There are two indoor viewing platforms, an outdoor platform and a glass floor, which allows visitors to see panoramic views across Portsmouth Harbour and beyond. There is an on site café towards the top of the tower, and a gift shop below. The viewing decks are accessible for wheelchair users, although the outdoor viewing platform is not.

A visit to Spinnaker Tower would work well with a combined visit to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, Royal Navy Submarine Museum or Gunwharf Quays.

Royal Navy Submarine Museum

The Royal Navy Submarine Museum in Gosport charts the history of submarines, both past and present. In 2014 it reopened its most famous World War II era submarine HMS Alliance. After a multi million pound restoration project, visitors can now experience what life was like under the waves as they climb aboard this impressive vessel. Ex-submariners give visitors an insight in to their time serving on board, and exhibitions bring to life photographs, documents and artefacts.

The museum has a coffee shop, gift shop and toilets. All parts of the museum are fully wheelchair accessible and there is plenty of coach parking.

A visit to the museum would work well with a combined visit to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard , SeaCity Museum or Spinnaker Tower.

RMS Titanic and Portsmouth Historic Dockyard



Hampshire is a county steeped in maritime history dating back hundreds of years. Currently the home of the Royal Navy, the county has played an important role during several key historical milestones including the tragedy of RMS Titanic, the sinking of Henry VIII's Mary Rose and Lord Nelson's Battle of Trafalgar.

Your journey of discovery will begin as you learn about the fateful voyage of RMS Titanic and its links to Southampton, at state-of-the-art SeaCity Museum. The ship has strong ties with the city, as not only did she set sail from Southampton docks, but many of her crew lived locally. There will also be time to browse the temporary exhibitions or enjoy refreshments in the café.

After your visit, your coach will take you to the naval city of Portsmouth. Immerse yourself in over 800 years of naval history at the world renowned Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. Begin by climbing on board HMS Warrior 1860, once the pride of Queen Victoria's fleet. Then follow in Lord Nelson's footsteps on board HMS Victory, his flagship which played an important role in the Battle of Trafalgar. Finally discover 19,000 artefacts at the state-of-the-art Mary Rose Museum, home to Henry VIII's beloved warship which sank in Portsmouth Harbour.

During your excursion you will enjoy a delicious lunch at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, along with free time to browse the gift shop.

8.30am: Passengers depart cruise terminal via coach

8.45am: Arrive at SeaCity Museum for a guided tour and toilet stop

10.45am: Board coach and depart for Portsmouth Historic Dockyard

11.30am: Arrive at Historic Dockyard and commence guided tour of HMS Warrior

12.30pm: Lunch stop at a café within the Dockyard

1.30pm – 4pm: Continue tour of the Historic Dockyard with guided visits of Mary Rose Museum and HMS Victory. If there's time, Museum of Royal Navy.

4.00pm: depart Portsmouth to return to ship for 4.45/5.00pm

This tour involves extensive walking and comfortable shoes are required. Both attractions have toilet facilities. Most of Portsmouth Historic Dockyard is outdoors so passengers are advised to bring some form of wet weather clothing with them, in case of rain. This tour is not suitable for people with mobility issues or those in a wheelchair, due to cobbles and ladders at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. Passengers will be transported by coach.

New Forest Delights



Soak up the delights of the New Forest National Park, a superb example of quintessential English countryside, breath-taking scenery and unique wildlife.

Your journey will take you to the world famous 200 acre Exbury Gardens in the heart of the National Park. Explore the stunning collection of rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias, all located in a superb setting along the Beaulieu River.

Once described as 'heaven with the gates open' Exbury Gardens were the inspiration of Lionel Nathan de Rothschild and his vision has made them what they are today.

After light refreshments, your coach will take you on a panoramic tour of the New Forest, allowing you to soak up the picturesque chocolate-box villages, cosy thatched pubs and wild ponies which adorn the heathland.

Your final stop will be at the award-winning Beaulieu National Motor Museum. Uncover a fascinating collection of over 250 automobiles and motorcycles telling the story of motoring from when it began to the present day. Enjoy free time to explore the on site exhibitions such as Top Gear, the ruins of Beaulieu Abbey, historic Palace House and the mono-rail.

Your tour will include lunch at Beaulieu and time to browse the gift shop before returning to the ship.

9.00am: Passengers depart cruise terminal via coach.

9.30am: Arrive at Exbury Gardens for walking tour with refreshment stop

11.30am: Depart Exbury Gardens and embark on a panoramic drive around the New Forest

12.30pm: Arrive at Beaulieu National Motor Museum and have lunch

1.30pm: Tour of Motor Museum commences

4.15pm: Leave Beaulieu and return to the ship for 5.00pm

This tour involves extensive walking, although passengers can opt out of the guided tours. Flat, comfortable shoes should be worn during the excursion. There are toilet facilities at both attractions. Entry to Beaulieu Abbey, Palace House and the mono-rail at Beaulieu National Motor Museum, is included in your entry ticket. Both attractions will require walking outdoors, so it is advisable to take some form of wet weather clothing ashore with you, in case of rain.

Jane Austen and the Ancient Capital of England



Follow in the footsteps of Hampshire author Jane Austen with a visit to her former home, now an intimate museum in east Hampshire. Spend time exploring the rooms in which she used to live and write and see some of the fascinating artefacts she once owned.

Jane fell in love with the Hampshire countryside, which inspired some of her work. After your visit to the museum you will enjoy a panoramic drive through the South Downs National Park, allowing you to soak up some of the scenery she enjoyed so much.

The second stage of your tour will take you to Winchester, former Ancient Capital of England. The city has strong links with King Alfred and it is home to King Arthur's legendary Round Table. The city is a postcard picture of medieval cobbled streets, period buildings and historic attractions ripe for exploration.

Your afternoon will commence with a lunch stop and guided tour of Winchester Cathedral, where you can visit Jane Austen's grave and a permanent exhibition dedicated to her memory. Jane lived in the city for a short time before her death and burial in 1817.

Complete your Jane Austen experience with a guided walking tour of the Winchester, with free time to explore the city's boutique shops and unique cafes before returning to the ship.

9.00am: Depart cruise terminal via coach

10.00am: Arrive at Jane Austen's House Museum for guided tour

11.30am: Depart museum and drive to Winchester

12.00pm: Stop for lunch at Winchester Cathedral

1.00pm: Jane Austen walking tour including interior of Cathedral

2.30pm: Free time to explore Winchester

4.15pm: Depart Winchester

4.45pm: Arrive at ship

This excursion requires a lot of walking so flat, comfortable shoes are essential. The walking tour of Winchester will be outside, so it is advisable to bring some form of wet weather clothing with you. There are toilet facilities at Jane Austen's House Museum and Winchester Cathedral Refectory, but not in the Cathedral itself. Passengers will be transported by coach.

The Isle of Wight and its hidden treasures



No visit to the South Coast of England would be complete without a visit to the Isle of Wight. A haven of sandy beaches, quaint villages and open countryside, the 'Island' spans 150 square miles and sits three miles off of the coast of Hampshire. It is reachable only by boat or ferry, making it one of the most expensive waterways in the world.

Your tour commences with a short shuttle bus journey to the Red Jet ferry terminal, where you will pick up the fast ferry to Cowes. Your journey will take approximately 35 minutes and along the way you will have stunning views across the Solent.

Once on the Isle of Wight, embark on a scenic drive across the island to the impressive Needles Park and Alum Bay. Enjoy free time to take the chairlift down to Alum Bay, whilst enjoying superb views of the Needles rocks. There will also be the chance to browse the shops where you can buy the famous coloured sands native to the area.

The next part of your journey will take you to the pretty town of Yarmouth for a delightful lunch stop and free time to explore the local shops. The town also has a castle and a Grade II listed pier with views across the Solent.

After lunch, your coach will take you back to Cowes to the magnificent Osborne House. Once Queen Victoria's family home, your guide will take you through the opulent private apartments, extensive grounds and pretty walled garden. Find out why this property was so close to the Queen's heart and why it has become one of the island's most popular visitor attractions.

8.30am – Depart ship and drive to Red Funnel terminal

8.45am – Red Jet (half hourly)

9.15am – Embark coach at the ferry terminal

9.45am – Visit the Needles Park and Alum Bay, including a chair lift ride and free time to explore. Refreshments.

11.45am – Lunch stop at Yarmouth

1.30pm – Depart for Osborne House

2.00pm – Arrive at Osborne House for guided tour

4.15pm – Embark Red Jet ferry

4.45pm – Arrive at ferry terminal

5.00pm – Arrive at ship

The Needles is not fully wheelchair accessible and it is not suitable for anyone who suffers from vertigo. Comfortable shoes should be worn during this excursion. The journey to the ferry terminal from the docks will be via shuttle bus. Passengers will then be left unattended on the ferry. They will pick up their guide and coach on the Isle of Wight. It is advisable to take some form of wet weather clothing ashore, as part of this tour will take place outside.

Downton Abbey and Gardens



Follow in the footsteps of the fictional Grantham family with a visit to Highclere Castle, the backdrop for popular period drama Downton Abbey. Soak up the magnificent library, bedrooms, drawing room and entrance hall, now familiar to millions. Away from the cameras this superb country estate belongs to Lord and Lady Carnarvon and their presence is felt around the house. From family photographs to painted portraits, visitors will gain an insight in to how important this home has been to the Carnarvon's over generations.

After a tour of the house, passengers can explore the extensive grounds, gift shop and Egyptian exhibition before enjoying a light lunch in the on site café.

The second part of this excursion will take you to Sir Harold Hillier Gardens in the Test Valley region of the county. Opened in 1953, this 180 acre site is famous for its magnolias, seasonal gardens and centenary border. Enjoy a relaxing stroll learning more about the flora and fauna, before a short refreshment stop. After some free time in the gift shop, passengers will be taken back to the ship by coach.

8.30am – Depart docks by coach and drive to Highclere Castle

9.30am – Tour of Highclere commences with free time to explore the grounds, Egyptian exhibition and gift shop

12.00pm – Lunch

1.00pm – Depart Highclere Castle and drive to Sir Harold Hillier Gardens

1.30pm – Commence a tour of Sir Harold Hillier Gardens

3.30pm – Refreshment stop at the café

4.00pm – Depart the gardens by coach and drive back to the ship

4.30/4.45pm – Arrive at ship

Tours of Highclere Castle will be unguided, although groups will enter together. There may be some queuing at the site, due to its popularity. Passengers can explore the Egyptian Exhibition, gift shop and grounds at their own leisure. The ground floor staterooms and Egyptian Exhibition are wheelchair accessible, but there is no lift to the upper floor. Motorised wheelchairs/scooters are not permitted at Highclere Castle. Sir Harold Hillier Gardens is predominantly wheelchair accessible with tarmacked pathways. Refreshments will consist of tea, coffee and cake. It is advisable to take some form of wet weather clothing ashore, as part of this tour will take place outside.