



South West Coast Path

THE COMPLETE GUIDE



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Contents

- 01** Overview
- 02** Key Data
- 03** Introduction
- 04** Stage-by-Stage Guide
- 05** Recommended Itinerary
- 06** Planning the Route
- 07** Towns, Villages and Overnight Stops
- 08** Getting to the Start
- 09** Getting Home from the Finish
- 10** Which Direction Should You Walk?
- 11** Accommodation Along the Route
- 12** Camping and Wild Camping
- 13** Food, Water and Resupply
- 14** Navigation and Waymarking
- 15** Terrain, Conditions and Difficulty in Practice
- 16** Weather and Best Time to Walk
- 17** Safety Notes
- 18** Gear Recommendations
- 19** Budget and Costs
- 20** Luggage Transfer, Guided Tours and Support Services
- 21** Shorter Hikes and Best Sections
- 22** Highlights and Points of Interest
- 23** Common Mistakes and Planning Tips
- 24** Final Advice

Overview

South West Coast Path: England's 630-Mile Coast Hike

The South West Coast Path is a 1,014 km / 630 mile National Trail around the coast of Somerset, Devon, Cornwall and Dorset in [England](#). It is a strenuous point-to-point hike, officially split into 45 day-stages, with about 35,000 m of total ascent despite never going high. Expect constant climbs and descents between cliffs, coves, estuaries and harbour towns. It suits fit walkers planning a full 4–8 week through-hike, or section hikers tackling the coast over several trips.

Route Overview

The conventional direction is from Minehead, Somerset, to South Haven Point near Poole Harbour, reached from Studland via the Sandbanks chain ferry. The path follows the South West peninsula through Porlock Weir, Lynmouth, Ilfracombe, Clovelly, Bude, Tintagel, Padstow, St Ives, Land's End, Marazion, Lizard Point, Falmouth, Plymouth, Dartmouth, Lyme Regis, Weymouth, Lulworth Cove, Swanage and Old Harry Rocks. It is linear, but public transport makes section walking practical, with bus links along much of the coast and rail access near several key towns. For shorter coastal ideas, compare the [Anglesey Coastal Path](#), [Ayrshire Coastal Path](#) and [Arran Coastal Way](#).

Coastguard Paths, Smuggling and National Trail Status

The South West Coast Path grew from routes used by HM Coastguard from the early 19th century to watch for smugglers. Patrols needed sightlines into every bay and cove, which is why the modern trail stays so close to the cliff edge rather than taking direct inland shortcuts. The route was progressively linked and waymarked through the 20th century and became a full National Trail in 1978, when the final section was completed.

Notable highlights

- **Great Hangman (318 m):** The trail's highest point near Combe Martin in North Devon. Its seaward face is regarded as the highest cliff on mainland Britain, with wide views over the Bristol Channel.
- **Land's End:** The westernmost point of mainland England and a major Cornish milestone. The granite headland, Atlantic cliffs and famous signpost make it one of the path's best-known stops.
- **St Michael's Mount:** A tidal island off Marazion crowned by a medieval castle and church. Walkers can cross the cobbled causeway at low tide or use a boat at high tide.
- **Tintagel Castle:** Cliff-top ruins on the North Cornwall coast with legendary associations to King Arthur. The headland setting and modern footbridge make it a memorable coastal detour.
- **Jurassic Coast:** The East Devon and Dorset section follows a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its long geological record and fossils, including landmarks such as Golden Cap and Lulworth.
- **Durdle Door and Old Harry Rocks:** Durdle Door is a natural limestone sea arch near Lulworth Cove; Old Harry Rocks are white chalk stacks near the eastern end of the trail.

Challenges to expect

The main challenge is cumulative ascent: the path climbs and drops repeatedly at river mouths, valleys and headlands, so daily distances feel harder than the map suggests. Surfaces range from dirt and grass to rock, mud, sand, shingle, steps and short road or promenade sections. Plan around tide times, ferries and weather, especially on exposed cliffs and remote North Devon and Cornwall stretches with fewer facilities. For wilder coastal terrain, see the [Assynt Coastal Path](#).

Key Data

Country	United Kingdom, England
Distance	1014 km
Duration	45 days
Difficulty	Strenuous
Trail type	Point to point
Elevation gain/loss	35000 m
Highest point	318 m
Terrain & landscape	Coastal, Moorland, Grassland
Trail surface	Dirt, Grass, Rocky, Muddy, Sandy, Paved
Accommodation	Hotels, Guesthouses, Hostels, Campsites
Average daytime temp.	18°C
Chance of rainfall	Moderate
Estimated cost	\$\$
Optimal season	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Accessibility	Family Friendly, Dog Friendly On Leash
Facilities	Restrooms, Established Campsites, Picnic Areas, Public Transport Access Points
Permits & fees	No permits or fees

Introduction

The South West Coast Path is England's longest National Trail: 630 miles / 1,014 km from Minehead in Somerset to South Haven Point beside Poole Harbour. It suits walkers who want a serious coastal journey rather than a high-mountain expedition, with reliable waymarking but very little flat walking.

The route stays close to the edge of the South West peninsula, linking Exmoor cliffs, North Devon coves, Cornish headlands, South Devon estuaries and the Dorset coast. It passes harbour towns and busy resorts, but also long, exposed stretches where facilities thin out and poor weather changes the feel of the day quickly.

Its rewards are constant: Great Hangman above the Exmoor coast, Hartland Quay, Tintagel, Land's End, Lizard Point, Fowey, the Jurassic Coast, Durdle Door, Old Harry Rocks and the final marker at South Haven Point. Most walkers take it in sections, while a continuous end-to-end walk usually means around 7–8 weeks on the trail.

The challenge is not altitude but repetition. The path drops to coves, river mouths and estuaries, then climbs back out again, building roughly 35,000 m of ascent over the full route; ferries, tides, accommodation gaps and remote North Devon and North Cornwall sections all need proper planning.

This guide covers stages, walking days, accommodation, food, transport, terrain and the common mistakes to avoid.

Stage-by-Stage Guide

The stages below are long through-hiking blocks, not ordinary single-day walks. Most walkers will split each one into several shorter days, especially on the steeper North Devon, North Cornwall and Jurassic Coast sections. Use them as planning sections for accommodation, resupply and transport rather than as a fixed itinerary.

Stage 1: Minehead to Lynmouth (approx. 55 km)

This opening block leaves the official start on Minehead seafront and climbs west onto North Hill, giving an immediate taste of the route's main challenge: repeated climbing and descending rather than high altitude. The path enters the Exmoor coast, with a mix of clifftop, coastal moor, woodland and steep-sided combes before reaching the Lynmouth and Lynton area.

Key places and landmarks include Porlock Weir and the Valley of Rocks near Lynton, a distinctive dry valley of twisted rock above the sea. The views are broad and exposed, but this is not an easy warm-up: the gradients arrive quickly and the coast feels wilder than many walkers expect so early in the trail.

Food and water are straightforward at Minehead and available again at Porlock Weir and Lynmouth/Lynton, but do not assume frequent services between settlements. Carry enough water and food for the whole day's walking section, particularly if splitting this block across smaller overnight stops.

Accommodation is available in Minehead and around Lynmouth/Lynton, with Porlock Weir also a natural intermediate stop. Book ahead in busy periods and be cautious about overloading the first days with excessive mileage.

Minehead has road access and Lynmouth/Lynton are useful road-access points for section walkers. Bus options on this coast can vary by season and day of week, so onward travel should be checked before travelling.

Navigation is generally simple: follow the National Trail acorn waymarks and stay with the coastal line unless the official route directs inland. The main warnings are steep ground, exposure to Atlantic weather, mud after rain and the temptation to underestimate the first section because the highest hills are still modest in absolute height.

Stage 2: Lynmouth to Ilfracombe (approx. 34 km)

This is one of the classic North Devon stages, crossing the high Exmoor coast towards Combe Martin and Ilfracombe. It includes Great Hangman near Combe Martin, the highest point on the South West Coast Path at 318 m, with its seaward cliff face often described as the highest sea cliff on mainland Britain.

The walking is strenuous, with steep climbs out of coastal valleys, exposed clifftop traverses and rougher ground than on the resort sections later in the trail. It is well waymarked, but the effort is cumulative and the coastal weather can make progress slower than the map distance suggests.

Lynmouth/Lynton, Combe Martin and Ilfracombe are the main service points. Carry food and water between them, as this is not a section where frequent cafés or shops should be assumed outside the named settlements.

Ilfracombe has a good range of accommodation by coast-path standards and makes a practical end point. Combe Martin can also be used to split the block, particularly for walkers easing into the early climbing.

Road access is available at Lynmouth/Lynton, Combe Martin and Ilfracombe, with coastal bus services providing section-walking options where timetables work. These should be checked before travelling, especially outside summer.

Navigation is mainly a matter of staying with the acorn waymarks over open coastal ground. In poor visibility or strong wind, take particular care near cliff edges and on steep descents, where wet grass, mud and rock can be slippery.

Stage 3: Ilfracombe to Barnstaple / Bideford (approx. 55 km)

This block changes character from the high cliffs around Ilfracombe to broader beaches, dunes and estuary walking. The route passes Woolacombe, Braunton, Braunton Burrows and the Taw estuary before reaching the Barnstaple, Instow and Bideford area.

The terrain is more varied than the previous two stages: expect sand, dunes, grass paths, short road or seafront sections and estuary-side walking as well as coastal path. It can feel less dramatic than Exmoor, but the distance is still substantial and navigation around the estuary needs attention.

Food and water are available in the larger settlements, including Ilfracombe, Woolacombe, Braunton, Barnstaple, Instow and Bideford. Services are more frequent than on the remotest coast, but opening hours can still be seasonal, so carry enough for the gaps.

Accommodation options are strongest in the larger towns, particularly Barnstaple and Bideford, with other overnight options around the coast depending on budget and season. This is a useful section for adjusting an itinerary after the harder opening coast.

Barnstaple is one of the important rail access points for North Devon, making this a practical place to start, finish or pause a section walk. Buses serve parts of the coast, but connections around the estuaries should be checked before committing to a same-day transfer.

Navigation is usually straightforward on waymarked paths and seafront sections, but estuary walking can be less intuitive than cliff walking. Do not try to improvise across tidal ground or dunes; follow the official line and check for live diversions before setting out.

Stage 4: Bideford / Westward Ho! to Bude (approx. 60 km)

This is one of the toughest and most remote blocks on the whole trail. From Bideford and Westward Ho! the route heads past Clovelly and Hartland Quay, then crosses the Devon-Cornwall border around the Marsland Mouth area before reaching Bude.

The Hartland peninsula is a defining section: wild, switchbacked and physically demanding, with tilted rock strata, steep-sided valleys and storm-battered cliffs. Progress can be slow because the path repeatedly drops to coves and climbs straight back out.

Food and water planning matters here. Westward Ho!, Clovelly, Hartland Quay and Bude are the main named service points, but facilities are noticeably thinner than in resort areas and some services may be seasonal or limited. Carry more food and water than on the more populated stretches.

Accommodation is available at the larger end points and in some coastal settlements, but this is not a section to leave to chance in peak season. Bude is a major practical stop after a hard run of coast.

Public transport is sparser along this section than on the south coast and around the larger resorts. Road access exists at the named settlements, but bus times and any onward connections should be checked before travelling.

Navigation follows the National Trail acorns, but the repeated steep climbs, muddy descents and exposed clifftops demand care. Strong wind, heavy rain and short winter daylight can turn this block into a serious undertaking, so build in realistic daily distances.

Stage 5: Bude to Padstow, via Tintagel and the Camel estuary ferry (approx. 80 km)

This is the heart of the North Cornwall coast: steep, rugged, exposed and often slower than the mileage suggests. From Bude the path continues through Boscastle, Tintagel and Port Isaac before reaching the Camel estuary crossing for Padstow.

The terrain is classic Atlantic cliff walking, with repeated short, sharp ascents, rougher field and cliff paths, steps, mud after rain and open headlands. Tintagel Castle is the major landmark on this block, with cliff-top medieval ruins reached by a modern footbridge.

Food and water are available in Bude, Boscastle, Tintagel, Port Isaac and Padstow, but there are long exposed stretches between the main villages. In poor weather, do not rely on finding shelter or services exactly when needed.

Accommodation is available in the main coastal settlements, but North Cornwall is popular and can book out well ahead in summer. Padstow is a natural major stop, while intermediate nights are often needed to keep the walking manageable.

The Camel estuary ferry between the Rock side and Padstow is an integral part of the official route. Ferry times, operating season and weather disruption should be checked before travelling, as missing the crossing can mean a long inland detour.

Navigation is generally clear, but this section punishes inattention near cliff edges and on steep valley descents. Expect mud, slippery rock and exposed conditions in wind and rain, and be conservative with daily distances if carrying a full pack.

Stage 6: Padstow to St Ives, via Newquay (approx. 90 km)

This long block follows the north Cornish coast through a more developed but still demanding run of beaches, headlands, coves and resort towns. The main named places include Padstow, Newquay, St Agnes and St Ives.

The walking alternates between open clifftop path, sandy sections, short road or promenade walking and steeper headlands. It is less continuously remote than the Hartland and Tintagel coast, but the Atlantic exposure remains a real factor.

Food and water are easier to manage than on the wildest stretches, with Padstow, Newquay, St Agnes and St Ives providing major service points. Even so, carry enough between towns, as smaller seasonal facilities can close early or not open outside peak periods.

Accommodation is plentiful in the larger towns but heavily demanded in summer, especially around the popular Cornwall resorts. Booking ahead is strongly advised, particularly for weekends and school-holiday periods.

St Ives is one of the useful rail access points on or near the route. Padstow and Newquay also have road and bus access, though coastal bus timetables should be checked before using them as fixed itinerary links.

Navigation is usually straightforward on the National Trail, but beaches, dunes and built-up seafronts can be less obvious than cliff paths. Watch for waymarks at exits from beaches, around headlands and through resort areas.

Stage 7: St Ives to Penzance / Marazion, via Land's End (approx. 55 km)

This is a major milestone section, rounding the far west of Cornwall from St Ives past Zennor, Land's End, Sennen and Porthcurno before reaching Penzance and Marazion. It is one of the more memorable and exposed parts of the entire trail.

The terrain is rugged granite coast, with rougher clifftop paths, steps, rocky ground and little protection from Atlantic weather. Land's End is the westernmost point of mainland England and a psychological turning point on the route.

Food and water are reliable at St Ives and Penzance, with further opportunities in named settlements such as Zennor, Sennen, Porthcurno and Marazion, subject to season and opening hours. Do not underestimate the gaps on the more remote north-western side of the peninsula.

Penzance and Marazion offer strong accommodation options, and Penzance is a particularly useful logistical base. St Michael's Mount is seen from the path at Marazion; it is a tidal island reached by causeway at low tide or boat at high tide, not a required part of the coast-path line.

St Ives and Penzance are both rail access points, making this stage one of the easier far-west sections to arrange by public transport. Local bus links still need checking if using intermediate villages as start or finish points.

Navigation is clear in settled weather but demands attention on rough coastal ground. The main warnings are exposure, slippery rock and mud after rain, and long-feeling sections where services are limited until the next village or town.

Stage 8: Penzance to Falmouth, via Lizard Point and the Fal ferries (approx. 90 km)

This stage rounds the south-western corner of Cornwall, passing Marazion and the Lizard peninsula before continuing towards Falmouth. Lizard Point, the most southerly point of mainland Britain, is the key landmark.

The path mixes open clifftop, coves, rocky sections, short road links and exposed headlands. The Lizard coast can feel remote between settlements, and the weather can change quickly on open ground.

Penzance, Marazion and Falmouth are the main service centres, with smaller coastal settlements providing additional options where open. Carry food and water for the longer stretches, especially if walking outside the main summer season.

Accommodation is available at the larger towns and in some coastal villages, but this is a long block that normally needs breaking into several nights. Falmouth is a major practical stop before the ferry-dependent south Cornwall coast.

Penzance is a rail hub on the main line, while Falmouth is a key harbour and ferry point for the next part of the route. Fal estuary ferries are part of the official route pattern around Falmouth; current timetables and operating conditions should be checked before travelling.

Navigation remains based on acorn waymarks, but pay close attention where the path moves between cliff, village lanes and ferry links. The main warnings are exposed clifftops, slippery descents in rain and the risk of delays if ferry times are missed.

Stage 9: Falmouth to Plymouth, via Fowey and Looe (approx. 105 km)

This is one of the longest planning blocks in the guide and should be divided into several realistic walking days. From Falmouth the route works along the south Cornwall coast through Mevagissey, Fowey, Polruan, Polperro and Looe before reaching Plymouth via the Tamar crossing.

The character is a mix of harbour towns, wooded inlets, open cliffs, coves and short built-up or road sections. Fowey and Polruan are a key ferry crossing, and the Cremyll/Tamar ferry is part of the approach to Plymouth.

Food and water are available in the main settlements, including Falmouth, Mevagissey, Fowey, Polperro, Looe and Plymouth. There are still quiet stretches between harbours, so do not plan this stage as if it were continuous town walking.

Accommodation is varied, with good options in the larger towns and harbours. Peak summer demand can be high along the popular south Cornwall coast, so book ahead if walking a fixed schedule.

Plymouth is a major rail and road access point, making it one of the best places on the whole trail to start, finish, rest or reorganise. St Austell is also a regional rail hub near this part of the coast. Ferry times at Fowey–Polruan and the Tamar crossing should be checked before travelling.

Navigation is usually uncomplicated, but the practical challenge is linking the walking day with ferries and accommodation. Missing a ferry can mean a long detour or a lost day, and wet weather can make the wooded and stepped descents slippery.

Stage 10: Plymouth to Salcombe, via Wembury and Newton Ferrers (approx. 60 km)

This South Devon block leaves the urban scale of Plymouth and returns to a coast broken by estuaries, coves and exposed headlands. The main named places include Wembury, Newton Ferrers and Salcombe, with the Yealm and Erme crossings affecting route planning.

The walking is varied: expect clifftop paths, short road links, estuary approaches, muddy sections after rain and steep climbs out of coves. The coast can feel surprisingly awkward because crossings, tides and transport links matter as much as distance.

Food and water are straightforward in Plymouth and Salcombe, with more limited opportunities around Wembury and Newton Ferrers. Carry enough for the full walking day, particularly where the route leaves the larger settlements.

Accommodation is available in Plymouth and Salcombe, with intermediate options more limited and more seasonal. This section rewards careful booking because an unavailable bed can force an awkward inland transfer.

Plymouth is a major public transport hub. Smaller settlements along this section rely more on local road and bus access, and times should be checked before travelling.

Navigation requires more planning than the map line suggests. The Yealm and Erme crossings are the critical points: tide, ferry or crossing arrangements can determine whether the official line is practical, and current details should be checked before committing to the day.

Stage 11: Salcombe to Dartmouth (approx. 40 km)

This is a shorter but still serious South Devon block, shaped by estuary crossings and steep coastal walking. The route leaves the Salcombe area, where the estuary ferry to East Portlemouth is part of the official route pattern, and continues towards Dartmouth and Kingswear.

The terrain combines cliff paths, coves, open coastal fields and short road sections. It is not as long as the surrounding blocks, but the climbs and ferry logistics can make it slower than expected.

Food and water are available in Salcombe and Dartmouth, with Kingsbridge an inland service option rather than a simple on-path assumption. Smaller coastal services may be seasonal, so carry supplies between the main towns.

Dartmouth is a practical overnight stop with a range of accommodation, while Salcombe is also a major base at the western end. Booking ahead is important in summer, when this coast is very busy.

Road and bus access exists at the main towns, but public transport should be checked before building a tight schedule around it. The Dartmouth/Kingswear ferry connection is integral to the onward route and should be checked before travelling.

Navigation is generally clear, but ferry timing is the main issue. Allow enough margin for missed or delayed crossings, and take care on steep, muddy descents after rain.

Stage 12: Dartmouth to Exmouth, via Torbay, the Teign and the Exe (approx. 75 km)

This stage links the Dartmouth/Kingswear area with the more built-up Torbay coast and the estuaries of the Teign and Exe. The main places include Brixham, Torquay, Teignmouth, Dawlish and Exmouth.

The walking is more mixed than on the wild Atlantic coast. Expect clifftop paths, seafront promenades, built-up resort sections, short road links and ferry crossings, with open coastal views between the towns.

Food and water are easier to manage here than on remote North Devon and North Cornwall stages, with regular service points in the main towns. Even so, carry water through the walking day and do not rely on every seafront facility being open outside peak season.

Accommodation is plentiful in the larger resort towns, especially Torquay and Exmouth, but summer demand can still be high. Dawlish and Teignmouth also provide useful staging options.

Exmouth is a rail access point, and Exeter is a major nearby hub for onward travel. The Teign ferry at Teignmouth/Shaldon and the Exe ferry from Starcross to Exmouth are important route links; current

timetables should be checked before travelling.

Navigation through built-up seafronts can be less obvious than on open cliffs, so watch for acorn waymarks at harbour edges, promenades and road crossings. Ferry disruption or reduced seasonal service is the main logistical warning.

Stage 13: Exmouth to Lyme Regis (approx. 55 km)

This block enters the East Devon and Dorset Jurassic Coast, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of cliffs recording 185 million years of geology. From Exmouth the path passes Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth, Beer and Seaton before reaching Lyme Regis.

The terrain is a mix of cliff paths, steep climbs, coastal towns, short road or promenade sections and potentially muddy ground after rain. The scenery changes noticeably from resort coast to fossil-rich cliffs and more enclosed coastal valleys.

Food and water are available in Exmouth, Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth, Beer, Seaton and Lyme Regis. Services are reasonably frequent by coast-path standards, but the climbs between towns can still make this a tiring section.

Accommodation is available in the main towns, with Lyme Regis a popular overnight stop. Book ahead in busy holiday periods, especially if trying to keep to a fixed end-to-end schedule.

Exmouth has rail access and good onward links via the wider Exeter area. Lyme Regis and the intermediate towns are useful road-access points, but bus connections should be checked before travelling.

Navigation is straightforward in clear conditions, but take care where the route moves between seafronts, cliff paths and inland links. Mud, wet grass and exposed cliff edges are the main practical hazards.

Stage 14: Lyme Regis to Weymouth, via West Bay, Chesil Beach and Portland (approx. 75 km)

This is a major Jurassic Coast stage, passing Charmouth, West Bay, Abbotsbury and the Chesil Beach area before reaching Weymouth, with Portland included in the wider route block. Golden Cap, the highest point on England's south coast, is one of the key landmarks on this part of the coastline.

The terrain is demanding and varied: steep coastal climbs, cliff paths, shingle, beach or shoreline sections, short road links and exposed open coast. Shingle and hard surfaces can be tiring in a different way from the steep grass and mud of the earlier path.

Food and water are available at Lyme Regis, Charmouth, West Bay, Abbotsbury and Weymouth, with additional options depending on the exact daily split and season. Carry enough for the less serviced sections, particularly around the more open coast.

Weymouth has a wide range of accommodation and is a strong logistical base. Intermediate accommodation should be booked ahead in peak periods, as the Jurassic Coast is extremely popular.

Weymouth is a useful rail access point. Road and bus access exists at several towns and villages, but timetables should be checked before relying on them for section starts or exits.

Navigation is mainly well waymarked, but stay alert where the route leaves beaches, promenades or shingle and returns to the cliff line. Wind, rain, slippery mud and tiring shingle underfoot are the main warnings.

Stage 15: Weymouth to Swanage, via Lulworth Cove, Durdle Door and Kimmeridge (approx. 45 km)

This is one of the best-known Dorset sections, linking Weymouth with Lulworth Cove, Durdle Door, Kimmeridge and Swanage. The landmarks are famous, but the walking remains strenuous and exposed.

The path crosses a sequence of cliffs, coves and open coastal ground, with steep climbs and descents continuing almost to the end of the National Trail. Durdle Door and Lulworth Cove are major highlights, while Kimmeridge sits on a quieter stretch of coast between the busier honeypot areas.

Food and water are available at Weymouth and Swanage, with further options around Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge depending on season and opening hours. Carry supplies between settlements, as this stage includes stretches where services are not frequent.

Accommodation is available in Weymouth and Swanage, both useful bases for section walkers. Intermediate stays are possible but should be arranged in advance, particularly in summer.

Weymouth has rail access, while Swanage has road and bus access. Public transport along this coast can be seasonal and should be checked before travelling.

Navigation is clear on the National Trail, but the area around major landmarks can be busy and distracting. Keep to the waymarked route, take care near cliff edges, and expect slow going in wet, windy or crowded conditions.

Stage 16: Swanage to South Haven Point, via Old Harry Rocks and Studland (approx. 20 km)

The final block is short by South West Coast Path standards but still deserves proper planning. From Swanage the route passes Old Harry Rocks and Studland before finishing at South Haven Point beside the Sandbanks chain ferry slipway at the mouth of Poole Harbour.

Old Harry Rocks is the key scenic landmark, with chalk sea stacks and arches marking the eastern end of the Jurassic Coast. The walking is less relentlessly mountainous than the earlier stages, but there are still exposed edges and coastal conditions to respect.

Food and water are easiest to arrange in Swanage and Studland. Do not count on extensive facilities at the finish itself; plan the final day's food, water and onward travel before leaving Swanage.

Accommodation is available in Swanage and around Studland, with onward options beyond the finish depending on transport plans. Many walkers prefer to finish the trail and then cross towards Poole using the Sandbanks chain ferry, rather than trying to organise a remote pick-up.

The Sandbanks chain ferry is the crucial transport link at the finish and should be checked before travelling. If it is not running, onward travel from South Haven Point becomes more complicated.

Navigation is simple in principle: follow the acorn waymarks through the final coastal section to the large steel sculpture marker at South Haven Point. Allow time for photographs, ferry logistics and the

possibility of weather delays rather than treating the last 20 km as an administrative formality.

Recommended Itinerary

The South West Coast Path is best planned as a series of multi-day blocks, not as a literal 16-day hike. The table below uses the route blocks and distances supplied for this guide; each one should be broken into shorter walking days around accommodation, ferries, tides and personal pace.

For a continuous end-to-end, a standard schedule is roughly **7–8 weeks**, broadly in line with the commonly cited **about 52 walking days**. The National Trail is also often split into **45 official stages**, while faster and slower walkers may combine or divide those further.

Standard itinerary: 7–8 week end-to-end plan

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
1	Minehead	Lynmouth	55 km	A demanding Exmoor opening block from the official start, taking in the early high, steep coastline towards Lynmouth and Lynton. It sets the tone for the constant climbing and descending ahead.	Minehead, Porlock Weir, Lynmouth and Lynton give useful stopping options. Do not try to treat this as one walking day unless moving exceptionally fast; split it carefully from the start.
2	Lynmouth	Ilfracombe	34 km	A compact but strenuous North Devon section, including the high ground around Great Hangman near Combe Martin. The shorter distance still carries hard ascent.	Lynmouth/Lynton, Combe Martin and Ilfracombe provide practical overnight points. Accommodation should be planned before committing to daily mileage.
3	Ilfracombe	Barnstaple / Bideford	55 km	Links the resort coast around Woolacombe with Braunton and the Taw–Torridge estuary area. This is a useful transition from cliff walking into estuary logistics.	Woolacombe, Braunton, Barnstaple, Instow, Bideford and Westward Ho! give more options than the wilder coast either side. Barnstaple and Bideford are useful service hubs.
4	Bideford / Westward Ho!	Bude	60 km	One of the wilder and more committing blocks, passing Clovelly, Hartland Quay and the Hartland peninsula before reaching Bude and the Cornwall border area.	Accommodation and facilities are thinner on the remote North Devon and North Cornwall coast. Book this block with particular care and avoid overlong days through the Hartland section.

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
5	Bude	Padstow	80 km	A hard North Cornwall block through Boscastle, Tintagel and Port Isaac, finishing with the Camel estuary ferry approach to Padstow. The coastline is steep, broken and slow-going.	Bude, Boscastle, Tintagel, Port Isaac and Padstow are key service points, but spacing and availability can make daily stages awkward. Check the Camel estuary ferry timetable before booking accommodation around Padstow and Rock.
6	Padstow	St Ives	90 km	A long but more settlement-rich Cornish block, passing Newquay and St Agnes before reaching St Ives. It suits a multi-day progression with several possible overnight stops.	Padstow, Newquay, St Agnes and St Ives are all important planning points. This coast is popular in summer, so accommodation should be booked well ahead.
7	St Ives	Penzance / Marazion	55 km	A classic exposed western Cornwall section via Zennor, Land's End, Sennen and Porthcurno before reaching the more serviced Penzance and Marazion area.	St Ives, Sennen, Porthcurno, Penzance and Marazion provide the main options. The Zennor and Land's End coast can feel remote between settlements, so keep daily distances realistic.
8	Penzance	Falmouth	90 km	A major south Cornwall block via Marazion, Lizard Point and the Fal estuary approach to Falmouth. It is long, varied and heavily influenced by ferry logistics.	Penzance, Marazion, Lizard Point and Falmouth are the principal planning anchors. The Fal ferries must be checked before travelling, especially outside the main season or in poor weather.
9	Falmouth	Plymouth	105 km	The longest planning block in this itinerary, linking several harbour towns including Mevagissey, Fowey, Polperro and Looe before Plymouth. It contains important estuary and ferry logistics.	Falmouth, Mevagissey, Fowey, Polperro, Looe and Plymouth give services, but some harbour settlements have limited accommodation in peak periods. Check the Fowey-Polruan ferry and the Cremyll/Tamar ferry before relying on them.

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
10	Plymouth	Salcombe	60 km	A South Devon block with more intricate coastal and estuary planning, including the Yealm and Erme crossing area noted for this section. Daily timing matters as much as distance.	Plymouth and Salcombe are the main service hubs, with Wembury and Newton Ferrers useful intermediate planning points. Tide and crossing information should be checked before booking each day.
11	Salcombe	Dartmouth	40 km	A shorter block after several long sections, still involving steep South Devon coast and estuary logistics around Salcombe and Dartmouth.	Salcombe, Kingsbridge inland and Dartmouth are the key named service points. Check the Salcombe estuary ferry and Dart crossing arrangements before travelling.
12	Dartmouth	Exmouth	75 km	Links Dartmouth with Torbay, Teignmouth, Dawlish and Exmouth, combining busier resort coast with the Teign and Exe ferry crossings.	Brixham, Torquay, Teignmouth, Dawlish and Exmouth provide useful services and transport options. The Teign ferry and Exe ferry from Starcross to Exmouth should be checked before setting daily stages.
13	Exmouth	Lyme Regis	55 km	Moves from East Devon into the Jurassic Coast section via Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth, Beer and Seaton. This is a good-sized block with frequent coastal towns but continued steep walking.	Exmouth, Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth, Beer, Seaton and Lyme Regis are practical stopping points. Accommodation demand rises on popular Jurassic Coast sections in summer.
14	Lyme Regis	Weymouth	75 km	A substantial Dorset block via Charmouth, West Bay, Abbotsbury and the Weymouth area, taking in a long stretch of Jurassic Coast walking.	Lyme Regis, Charmouth, West Bay, Abbotsbury and Weymouth are the main named service points. Book ahead in peak season and check official mapping before fixing exact overnight stops.
15	Weymouth	Swanage	45 km	A shorter but high-value Dorset block through Lulworth Cove, Durdle Door and Kimmeridge before Swanage. The terrain remains strenuous despite the lower overall distance.	Weymouth, Lulworth Cove, Kimmeridge and Swanage are the key planning points. This is a very popular stretch, so summer accommodation should be arranged early.

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
16	Swanage	South Haven Point	20 km	A deliberately short final block via Old Harry Rocks, Studland and the finish marker at South Haven Point. It allows time for the finish and onward travel.	Swanage and Studland are the last main service points. The Sandbanks chain ferry at South Haven Point links to Poole; current running times should be checked before travelling.

Slower and faster variants

Variant	Shape of the itinerary	Who it suits	Planning notes
Slower itinerary	Around 55–60 walking days, or the 45 official stages with extra short days and rest days added.	Walkers carrying camping kit, anyone new to long-distance coastal walking, or hikers who want more flexibility around weather, ferries and accommodation.	Most useful on the steep North Devon and North Cornwall sections, the remote Hartland peninsula, the Zennor and Land's End coast, and ferry-heavy South Devon. Extra days reduce the risk of being forced into very long stages between beds.
Standard itinerary	About 7–8 weeks end-to-end, using the 16 blocks above as booking and resupply sections rather than literal walking days.	Fit independent hikers wanting a continuous through-hike at a sustainable pace.	Plan each block as several day walks. Check official mapping, ferry timetables, tide-dependent sections and live trail information before booking.
Faster itinerary	About 30–45 walking days by combining shorter stages and taking fewer rest days.	Experienced long-distance hikers with strong hill fitness, light packs and the ability to handle repeated long days on steep coast path.	Accommodation, ferries and tide windows may still dictate the schedule. Faster walkers should avoid assuming that higher mileage is possible every day, especially through North Devon, North Cornwall and South Devon.

For section-hikers, the 16 blocks above are often more useful than a continuous day count. They group the path into recognisable coast sections with natural service hubs, but exact daily stops should still be fixed only after checking current accommodation, ferry times, buses or trains, and official trail information.

Planning the Route

Allow enough days

A continuous end-to-end walk is best treated as a long expedition rather than a fast coast holiday. National Trails cites about 52 days for the full route, and a practical through-hike usually needs roughly 7–8 weeks once rest days, ferry timings, weather delays and transport gaps are allowed for.

The official route is commonly divided into 45 shorter day-stages. Those stages are more realistic for steady walking than the large regional blocks sometimes used to summarise the path, such as Minehead to Lynmouth, Bude to Padstow or Falmouth to Plymouth. Those longer blocks should be planned as several walking days, not single-day targets.

Trying to compress the route too aggressively is rarely sensible. The daily mileage is only part of the workload: the constant drops to coves, river mouths and estuaries, followed by steep climbs back to the cliffs, make short-looking days harder than they appear on a map.

Let accommodation and ferries shape the stages

Daily stages are naturally dictated by towns, villages, campsites, bus links and estuary crossings. Harbour towns and resorts give plenty of possible stopping points, but the wilder parts of North Devon and North Cornwall have fewer facilities and can force longer days between beds.

Accommodation should be booked well ahead in peak summer, especially on popular Cornwall and Jurassic Coast sections. In quieter seasons, the issue is different: there may be more beds available, but ferries, buses and some services may run reduced timetables or stop altogether.

The most important planning rule is to build stages around the ferries rather than treating them as an afterthought. Crossings on the Camel estuary at Padstow/Rock, the Fal around Falmouth, Fowey–Polruan, Plymouth/Cremyll on the Tamar, Salcombe/East Portlemouth, Dartmouth/Kingswear, Teignmouth/Shaldon, Starcross/Exmouth and the Sandbanks chain ferry at the finish are part of the route logistics. If a ferry is not running, the alternative may be a long inland detour.

Ferry times, seasonal operation, weather disruption and any live route diversions should be checked before travelling. This matters especially outside summer and when a stage depends on catching a late crossing.

Section hiking is often the most practical approach

Most walkers complete the South West Coast Path in sections over several trips. This works well because the route passes many coastal towns with bus or rail access, including hubs such as Barnstaple, St Ives, Penzance, Plymouth, Exmouth and Weymouth.

Section hiking also makes the hardest stretches easier to manage. Remote North Devon and North Cornwall can be planned with lighter packs, pre-booked beds and shorter commitments, while busier resort sections can be fitted around accommodation availability.

For section planning, choose start and end points with reliable transport rather than simply stopping after a neat mileage total. Some coast villages have limited services, and remote stretches can be

awkward to leave at short notice. Bus and rail times should be checked before travelling.

Build in flexibility

A good schedule leaves slack. Weather, ferry disruption, tide-dependent sections, accommodation gaps and cumulative fatigue can all alter a day's plan.

Rest days are most useful at larger service towns where food, laundry, onward transport and replacement kit are easier to manage. Penzance, Falmouth, Plymouth, Exmouth and Weymouth are examples of practical hubs on or near the route.

Shortening or extending individual days is often possible in built-up coastal areas, but much less so on exposed or facility-poor sections. North Devon, the Hartland peninsula and parts of North Cornwall need more careful commitment before setting out for the day.

Food, water and resupply

Resupply is straightforward in many towns and resorts, but should not be assumed on every stage. Carry enough food for the full day, with extra margin on remote stretches where cafés, shops or pubs may be absent, closed seasonally or a long way off the line of the path.

Water planning matters more than the map suggests. The route is coastal, but long clifftop sections can be exposed with few guaranteed refill points between settlements. Start each day with enough water for the full stage unless a reliable stop has been planned.

Navigation and weather planning

The path is a National Trail and is waymarked with acorn symbols, but navigation should not be left to signs alone. Carry appropriate mapping or a guidebook, and keep a backup method available for poor visibility, diversions or confusing exits from towns and beaches.

OS mapping for the whole route spans multiple sheets, so many end-to-end walkers use a dedicated guidebook and map booklets instead of carrying full-size maps for every section. The Cicerone guidebook and its three map booklets cover Minehead to St Ives, St Ives to Plymouth and Plymouth to Poole.

Weather planning is central. The path is often exposed on open clifftops, with mud, rock, grass, sand, shingle, steps and road sections underfoot. Wind and rain can make steep coastal descents slippery and can also affect ferry operation.

What matters most

The key planning priorities are accommodation, ferry timings, tide-aware scheduling, food and water between settlements, and transport at section start and finish points. Permits are not the main challenge here; logistics and day-to-day resilience are.

For a continuous walk, plan the route as a chain of manageable walking days with rest and contingency time. For a section walk, plan each trip around transport-accessible endpoints and book the harder, remoter stretches before committing to dates.

Towns, Villages and Overnight Stops

The South West Coast Path is well served by coastal towns, harbour villages and resorts, but the spacing is uneven. Accommodation is generally easiest in larger places and busy holiday towns; it becomes noticeably thinner on the remote North Devon and North Cornwall coast, where booking ahead matters and short-notice options can be limited.

Peak summer is the hardest period for finding beds, especially in popular Cornwall and Jurassic Coast sections. Ferries, buses and seasonal services can also affect where it is realistic to stop, so ferry and transport times should be checked before travelling.

Minehead

Minehead is the official start of the trail, on the Somerset seafront at the sculpted hands-and-map gateway monument. It is the natural place to stay the night before starting, especially if beginning early onto North Hill and the Exmoor coast.

As a large seaside town, it is one of the better places on the first part of the route for accommodation, food shopping and a final kit check. Public transport arrangements to Minehead should be checked before travelling.

Porlock Weir

Porlock Weir sits early on the Exmoor coast between Minehead and Lynmouth. It is a useful first-stage stop or lunch target for walkers splitting the long Minehead-to-Lynmouth opening section.

Accommodation and food options are more limited than in larger towns, so do not assume there will be spare rooms in busy periods. It is a practical place to break the exposed early miles before committing to the next stretch towards Lynmouth.

Lynmouth

Lynmouth is a key overnight stop at the end of the first major Exmoor section. It works well as a recovery point after the steep, high-effort opening miles from Minehead.

Accommodation and food are more realistic here than in the smaller settlements either side, but summer demand can still be high. It is also a sensible place to reassess weather before continuing towards Lynton, the Valley of Rocks and Combe Martin.

Lynton

Lynton sits close to Lynmouth and is useful for walkers who want an alternative base around the Valley of Rocks area. It can also be used to vary stage lengths on the Exmoor section.

Treat Lynmouth and Lynton together when checking beds and evening food, as either may work depending on availability. Local transport options should be checked before relying on them.

Combe Martin

Combe Martin is the main settlement before or after the climb over Great Hangman, the highest point on the South West Coast Path. It is a useful overnight or meal stop between Lynmouth/Lynton and Ilfracombe.

This is a practical place to break a demanding North Devon stage. Accommodation is likely to be more limited than in Ilfracombe, so book ahead if using it as a fixed stop.

Ilfracombe

Ilfracombe is one of the stronger service towns on the North Devon coast and a good overnight base. It comes after a tough Exmoor and North Devon opening sequence and before the route continues towards Woolacombe and the Taw estuary.

Accommodation, pubs, cafes and resupply are generally easier here than in the smaller villages nearby. It is also a useful place for section walkers joining or leaving the trail, although current bus connections should be checked before travelling.

Woolacombe

Woolacombe is a useful coastal resort stop between Ilfracombe and Braunton. It is particularly practical for walkers wanting to avoid carrying food too far through the North Devon coastal section.

Expect more accommodation demand in peak summer. For a continuous walk, it can be used either as an overnight stop or as a food-and-rest point before continuing towards Braunton and the Taw estuary.

Braunton

Braunton is an important staging point before the Taw estuary section and Braunton Burrows area. It is useful for walkers who need a more serviced stop before the route turns towards Barnstaple.

Accommodation and supplies should be easier here than on more remote clifftop stretches, but availability still needs checking in holiday periods. It is a practical place to plan the next day around estuary walking rather than cliff walking.

Barnstaple

Barnstaple sits on the Taw estuary and is one of the main North Devon transport and service hubs associated with the route. Rail serves Barnstaple for North Devon, making it a strong access point for section walkers.

It is a good place for accommodation, resupply, laundry and rest-day logistics. Walkers not needing a town stop may still use Barnstaple to reset plans before continuing around the Taw-Torridge estuary system towards Instow, Bideford and Westward Ho!.

Instow

Instow lies on the Taw-Torridge estuary section between Barnstaple and Bideford. It is a useful shorter-stage stop if accommodation in Barnstaple or Bideford does not suit the itinerary.

Facilities are smaller-scale than in the larger towns. Check food and accommodation availability before building a day around it, especially outside the main season.

Bideford

Bideford is a practical overnight town on the Torridge side of the estuary route. It is one of the more useful North Devon stops for accommodation and resupply before the path continues to Westward Ho! and the wilder coast beyond.

This is a sensible point to prepare for the longer and more remote run towards Clovelly, Hartland Quay and Bude. Local buses may help with section logistics, but current services should be checked before travelling.

Westward Ho!

Westward Ho! is a convenient coastal stop after Bideford and before the more committing North Devon coast towards Clovelly and Hartland Quay. It can be a useful overnight choice if breaking the Bideford-to-Bude block into manageable days.

Accommodation and food are more dependable here than on the remote stretches ahead, but summer demand can be high. Leaving with enough food and water for the next stage is sensible.

Clovelly

Clovelly is a distinctive North Devon stop: a privately owned, traffic-free fishing village with a steep cobbled street dropping to a small harbour. It is one of the memorable places on the route, but the steep access and limited space make advance planning important.

Do not treat Clovelly as a guaranteed resupply point without checking current opening times and accommodation. It is best used as a carefully planned overnight or pause before the wild Hartland peninsula.

Hartland Quay

Hartland Quay sits on one of the wildest and most strenuous parts of the path, where the coast is heavily folded into steep descents and climbs. It is a strategic stop between Clovelly/Westward Ho! and Bude.

Accommodation and food options are limited compared with the larger resorts, so this section needs tighter planning than much of the south coast. It is a poor place to arrive without a booking in peak season or bad weather.

Bude

Bude is the main town after the North Devon and Hartland coast and is a major reset point before continuing into North Cornwall. It is a good overnight stop with stronger accommodation and food options than the smaller villages either side.

Many walkers use Bude for resupply, rest and reorganising stages. Public transport along this stretch is less comprehensive than in larger urban areas, so onward or section-walking connections should be checked before travelling.

Boscastle

Boscastle is a useful North Cornwall stop between Bude and Tintagel. It helps break a demanding part of the coast where the path repeatedly drops into coves and climbs back out.

Accommodation and evening food should be booked rather than assumed, particularly in summer. It is a practical place to shorten the approach to Tintagel and Port Isaac.

Tintagel

Tintagel is a popular North Cornwall overnight stop and a natural base for walkers visiting the cliff-top ruins associated with Tintagel Castle. Its popularity means accommodation can book out well ahead in peak season.

Food and basic services are more likely here than in smaller coves, but plan rather than rely on late arrivals. It works well as a staged stop before Port Isaac and the Camel estuary.

Port Isaac

Port Isaac is a compact harbour village between Tintagel and Padstow. It is a useful overnight stop, but availability can be tight because it is a popular coastal village rather than a large service town.

Book accommodation early if fixing a night here. For resupply, treat it as a useful pause rather than a guaranteed full restock point unless current shop opening is checked before travelling.

Padstow

Padstow is a key North Cornwall logistics point on the Camel estuary. The official route uses the Camel estuary ferry to Rock, so ferry times directly affect the onward stage.

It is one of the better overnight and resupply stops in this part of the route, but it is also very popular in summer. Book accommodation well ahead and check the current ferry timetable before relying on a same-day crossing.

Newquay

Newquay is a major coastal resort between Padstow and St Ives and a useful service base for accommodation, food and rest. It is one of the more practical places on the north Cornwall coast for walkers needing a flexible stop.

Because it is busy in the holiday season, accommodation should still be booked in advance. It is also a useful section-walking access point, but current bus and onward transport arrangements should be checked before travelling.

St Agnes

St Agnes is a smaller North Cornwall stop between Newquay and St Ives. It can be useful for breaking this long coastal run into shorter walking days.

Accommodation and food options are more limited than in Newquay or St Ives, so confirm availability before fixing the itinerary. It is a good practical pause before continuing towards the far west Cornwall section.

St Ives

St Ives is one of the most important overnight and transport hubs on the west Cornwall part of the path. Rail serves St Ives, making it especially useful for section starts, finishes and rest days.

Accommodation, food and supplies are generally more available here than in the smaller villages west towards Zennor, but demand is very high in summer. It is a sensible place to stock up before the rougher-feeling coast towards Zennor, Land's End and Sennen.

Zennor

Zennor is a small but strategically useful stop between St Ives and Land's End. It sits on a more remote-feeling stretch where services are thinner and stage planning matters.

Do not rely on last-minute accommodation or food here. If using Zennor as a fixed stop, book ahead and check current opening times before travelling.

Land's End

Land's End is a major route milestone rather than primarily an overnight base. It marks the westernmost point of mainland England and is a useful psychological checkpoint between St Ives/Zennor and Sennen/Porthcurno.

For accommodation, most walkers are likely to look to nearby route settlements such as Sennen or Porthcurno rather than assume options at the headland itself. Food and transport arrangements should be checked before planning a long day to finish here.

Sennen

Sennen is a practical overnight stop close to Land's End. It helps break the west Cornwall section before the path continues towards Porthcurno and Penzance.

Accommodation can be in high demand in the main season. It is a useful place to pause after the exposed Atlantic headland walking, but should be booked rather than left to chance.

Porthcurno

Porthcurno is a useful stop between Land's End/Sennen and Penzance. It can be used to reduce the length of the approach into Mount's Bay.

Facilities are smaller-scale than in Penzance, so check accommodation and food before fixing the night there. It is best treated as a planned stop on a remote-feeling section rather than a flexible town base.

Penzance

Penzance is one of the strongest logistics hubs on the whole route. Rail serves Penzance on the Paddington–Penzance main line, making it a major section start, finish and resupply point.

Accommodation, food, shops and transport options are generally much better here than in the smaller west Cornwall settlements. It is a sensible rest-day location before continuing past Marazion towards the Lizard and Falmouth.

Marazion

Marazion sits east of Penzance, with the path passing by views of St Michael's Mount offshore. The mount is seen from the path; walkers should not assume the island visit is part of the trail day.

Marazion can work as a short-stage overnight alternative to Penzance, but accommodation demand can be high because of its location. Check food, beds and any St Michael's Mount access arrangements separately if adding a visit.

Lizard Point

Lizard Point is the most southerly point of mainland Britain and a key milestone between Penzance and Falmouth. It is more of a route landmark and staging area than a major service town.

Accommodation and food options nearby should be checked before travelling. If walking the Lizard section, plan conservatively around weather and exposure rather than assuming frequent services.

Falmouth

Falmouth is a major South Cornwall stop and an important ferry-planning point on the Fal estuary. The official route depends on Fal estuary ferries, so current timetables are essential.

It is a strong overnight and resupply base before heading east towards Mevagissey, Fowey and Looe. Book ahead in busy periods and check ferry times before setting the next day's schedule.

Mevagissey

Mevagissey is a harbour stop between Falmouth and Fowey. It is useful for breaking the South Cornwall coast into manageable stages.

Accommodation and food are more limited than in Falmouth, so it works best as a booked overnight rather than a speculative arrival. It is a practical pause before the Fowey ferry logistics ahead.

Fowey

Fowey is a key South Cornwall harbour town and ferry point. The official route uses the ferry to Polruan, so the day's timing should be planned around the crossing.

It is a good overnight stop with more services than the smaller villages on either side. Ferry times can be reduced or suspended outside summer or in poor weather, so check the current timetable before travelling.

Polruan

Polruan sits across the water from Fowey and is reached by ferry on the official route. It can be used as an overnight stop if accommodation in Fowey is full or if a shorter day is preferred.

Facilities are smaller-scale, so check beds and food in advance. Missing or mistiming the ferry may force a long inland detour, so do not treat this crossing casually.

Polperro

Polperro is a compact harbour village between Fowey/Polruan and Looe. It is a useful overnight stop for splitting the South Cornwall coast.

Because it is small and popular, accommodation should be booked early in summer. Food and shop opening times should be checked if relying on it for more than an evening meal.

Looe

Looe is one of the stronger service stops between Fowey and Plymouth. It is a practical overnight base with better prospects for food and accommodation than smaller harbour villages.

It is a sensible place to resupply before the approach towards the Tamar crossing and Plymouth. Local transport may be useful for section walkers, but current services should be checked before travelling.

Plymouth

Plymouth is the largest urban logistics point on the route and a major transport hub served by rail. The official route uses the Cremyll/Tamar ferry in this area, so ferry times matter when entering or leaving the city section.

It is a strong place for a rest day, kit replacement, laundry, resupply and transport connections. Accommodation choice should be broader than in small villages, but booking ahead remains sensible in peak periods.

Wembury

Wembury is the first named coastal stop after Plymouth on the South Devon section. It is useful for walkers easing back into coastal walking after the urban and ferry logistics around Plymouth.

Facilities are more limited than in Plymouth, so check accommodation and food before using it as a fixed overnight. It can be a practical staging point before the Yealm and Erme area mentioned in the route summary.

Newton Ferrers

Newton Ferrers is a South Devon village stop between Plymouth and Salcombe. It can help break the coast into shorter days where estuary planning is important.

Accommodation and food should be checked in advance. Do not assume frequent public transport or late-opening services in this quieter part of the route.

Salcombe

Salcombe is a key South Devon overnight stop and ferry point. The official route uses the estuary ferry to East Portlemouth, so the next stage must be planned around the crossing.

It is a practical place for food, accommodation and a rest before continuing towards Dartmouth. Summer demand can be heavy, and ferry timetables should be checked before travelling.

Kingsbridge

Kingsbridge is listed as an inland option rather than a straightforward coast-path overnight on the trail line. It may be useful for accommodation, resupply or transport when coastal options around Salcombe are full or awkward.

Using Kingsbridge normally adds logistical complexity compared with staying on the path. Any bus, taxi or walking connection should be checked before travelling.

Dartmouth

Dartmouth is a major South Devon stop and ferry point. The official route uses the ferry to Kingswear, so the crossing is part of the route logistics rather than an optional add-on.

It is a good overnight base before continuing towards Brixham and Torbay. Accommodation and food are generally more realistic here than in smaller villages, but book ahead during busy periods and check ferry times.

Brixham

Brixham is a practical harbour-town stop between Dartmouth and Torquay. It is useful for breaking the South Devon coast before the more built-up Torbay section.

Accommodation and food are more likely here than on quieter headland stretches. It can also work as a shorter-stage alternative if Dartmouth-to-Torquay is too long for the day's conditions.

Torquay

Torquay is one of the larger resort towns on the south coast part of the route. It is a useful base for accommodation, food, resupply and rest between Brixham and Teignmouth.

As a major resort, it can be busy and accommodation prices and availability vary by season. It is a practical section-walking access point, but current public transport should be checked before travelling.

Teignmouth

Teignmouth is an important estuary stop because the official route uses the Teign ferry to Shaldon. The ferry can affect the timing of the day between Torbay and Dawlish/Exmouth.

It is a useful overnight town with better services than the smaller coastal settlements nearby. Check the Teign ferry timetable before relying on the crossing, particularly outside summer or in poor weather.

Dawlish

Dawlish sits between Teignmouth and the Exe estuary. It is a useful overnight or food stop if splitting the route before Exmouth.

Accommodation and services are more developed than on remote sections, but still subject to seasonal demand. It is a practical place to pause before planning the Exe ferry connection.

Exmouth

Exmouth is a major logistics point on the East Devon coast and is served by rail. The official route uses the Exe ferry from Starcross to Exmouth, so ferry timing is important when approaching from the west.

It is a strong overnight and resupply base before the route continues towards Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth, Beer and the Jurassic Coast. Check ferry times and any onward transport before travelling.

Budleigh Salterton

Budleigh Salterton is a useful coastal stop east of Exmouth. It can be used to shorten the walk towards Sidmouth and Beer.

Accommodation and food should be checked in advance, especially in busy holiday periods. It is a practical intermediate stop rather than a major transport hub.

Sidmouth

Sidmouth is one of the main East Devon overnight towns before the route continues towards Beer and Seaton. It is useful for accommodation, food and resupply on the approach to the Jurassic Coast section.

It is a good place to break the Exmouth-to-Lyme Regis block into manageable days. Public transport should be checked before relying on it for section logistics.

Beer

Beer is a smaller coastal stop between Sidmouth and Seaton. It is useful for walkers who want a shorter day or who cannot find suitable accommodation in the larger towns.

Facilities are more limited, so book ahead and check food availability. It is best treated as a planned overnight rather than a flexible fallback.

Seaton

Seaton is a practical East Devon stop before the route continues towards Lyme Regis. It is useful for accommodation, food and stage adjustment before entering the Dorset part of the Jurassic Coast.

Services are more dependable than in smaller villages, but should still be checked outside the main season. It is a sensible place to prepare for the next stretch towards Lyme Regis and Charmouth.

Lyme Regis

Lyme Regis is a key Jurassic Coast overnight stop and a useful section boundary between East Devon and Dorset. It is popular, so accommodation can be tight in peak season.

Food and services are generally more available here than in the smaller places either side. It is a practical place to rest, resupply and plan the onward walk towards Charmouth, West Bay and Weymouth.

Charmouth

Charmouth is a useful stop east of Lyme Regis. It can shorten the next stage along the Jurassic Coast if accommodation in Lyme Regis or West Bay is unavailable.

Facilities are smaller-scale than in the bigger resort towns, so check beds and food before committing to it. It is a good planned pause, not a guaranteed fallback.

West Bay

West Bay, associated with Bridport, is an important Dorset overnight and resupply point between Charmouth and Abbotsbury/Weymouth. It helps break a longer Jurassic Coast section into more manageable walking days.

Accommodation and food are generally more realistic here than in smaller coastal villages, but summer demand can still be high. It is a sensible place to check onward conditions before continuing towards Chesil Beach and Weymouth.

Abbotsbury

Abbotsbury is a useful smaller stop between West Bay and Weymouth. It can be valuable for walkers who do not want a long push into Weymouth in one day.

Accommodation and food should be checked before travelling, as options are more limited than in Weymouth. Treat it as a booked stop rather than a place to improvise late in the day.

Weymouth

Weymouth is one of the main Dorset logistics hubs and is served by rail. It is a strong overnight, rest-day and resupply town before the final stretch of the South West Coast Path towards Lulworth Cove, Kimmeridge, Swanage and Studland.

Accommodation and food choices are generally broader here than in the smaller settlements ahead, but it remains busy in summer. It is a practical place for section walkers to join or leave the trail.

Lulworth Cove

Lulworth Cove is a major landmark stop on the Dorset coast, close to the well-known Durdle Door area. It is useful as an overnight or meal stop between Weymouth and the Kimmeridge/Swanage section.

Because it is very popular, accommodation and food should be booked or checked in advance. It is a good place to break the final Dorset coast, but do not rely on last-minute availability in peak periods.

Kimmeridge

Kimmeridge is a smaller Dorset stop between Lulworth Cove and Swanage. It is useful for shortening what can otherwise be a demanding final coastal stretch.

Facilities are limited compared with Weymouth and Swanage, so plan carefully if stopping here. Accommodation and food availability should be checked before travelling.

Swanage

Swanage is the main final overnight town before the last approach to Studland and South Haven Point. It is a practical base for accommodation, food, rest and section-walking logistics.

It works well as the last full-service stop before the finish. Book ahead in busy periods, especially if timing the final day to connect with the Sandbanks chain ferry at South Haven Point.

Studland

Studland is the final village area before South Haven Point. It is useful for walkers who want to finish early the next morning or avoid a long final day from Swanage.

Accommodation and food should be checked ahead, as it is not a large town. It is the most practical near-finish stop before the trail's endpoint at the mouth of Poole Harbour.

South Haven Point

South Haven Point is the official finish, beside the Sandbanks chain ferry slipway at the mouth of Poole Harbour. It is a finish marker rather than a conventional overnight base.

Most walkers should plan accommodation either before the finish, such as Swanage or Studland, or after crossing onward by the Sandbanks chain ferry. Ferry operation and onward transport should be checked before travelling, particularly outside the main season or in poor weather.

Getting to the Start

The South West Coast Path starts on the seafront at Minehead in Somerset. The official start is marked by the distinctive sculpted hands-and-map gateway monument, with National Trail acorn waymarks leading west onto North Hill.

Plan the journey to Minehead as a separate logistical step rather than assuming the trailhead is directly rail-served. The first walking soon leaves the seafront and climbs towards Exmoor, so a late arrival can make for a poor start.

By train

Minehead is not one of the mainline rail hubs listed for the South West Coast Path. Most rail-based approaches involve travelling to a South West rail hub, then making a final onward journey to Minehead by bus or taxi.

Exact railhead, connection times and through-ticketing options should be checked before travelling. This is especially important if arriving from London or another major city, as the final leg to Minehead may be the part of the journey with the least flexibility.

Allow a generous buffer between the train and any onward bus or taxi. Missing the last practical connection can mean an expensive taxi or an unplanned overnight stop before even reaching the trailhead.

By bus

A bus is likely to be part of many public-transport journeys into Minehead. Buses serve much of the South West coast, but services are not equally frequent everywhere and timetables can change by season, day of week and public holiday.

Check the current bus timetable into Minehead before booking accommodation or committing to a start time. This should be checked before travelling.

If arriving late in the day, pre-booking a taxi for the final leg may be sensible. Do not assume that a taxi will be waiting at a rural interchange or available at short notice in the evening.

By car

Driving to Minehead is straightforward in principle, but parking is the main issue. This is a point-to-point trail ending at South Haven Point near Studland in Dorset, so leaving a vehicle at the start creates a long retrieval problem after the hike.

For a full end-to-end walk, public transport, drop-off, or pre-arranged long-stay parking is usually more practical than leaving a car in an ordinary short-stay or seafront car park. Long-stay rules, maximum stays, overnight restrictions and charges should be checked before travelling.

For a short section beginning at Minehead, accommodation with agreed parking can be useful. Get permission in advance and be clear about how many nights the vehicle will remain there.

From the nearest airport

There is no airport at the trailhead, and flying rarely removes the need for a train, coach, bus or taxi transfer into Minehead. Overseas walkers should choose an arrival airport based on the simplest onward public-transport connection into Somerset rather than distance alone.

Current rail, coach, bus and taxi links from any airport should be checked before booking flights. This should be checked before travelling.

Where to stay before starting

Staying in Minehead the night before starting is the cleanest option. It allows an early start from the seafront marker and avoids combining a long travel day with the initial climb onto North Hill.

Book ahead in busy periods, especially if starting in summer or at weekends. Accommodation along the South West Coast Path ranges from hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs to hostels and campsites, but availability can tighten quickly in popular coastal towns.

If staying outside Minehead, make sure the morning transport to the seafront is already planned. A missed or infrequent bus can delay the first walking day, and the early Exmoor section is not a good place to begin short of time.

Getting Home from the Finish

The South West Coast Path finishes at South Haven Point, near Studland, beside the Sandbanks chain ferry slipway at the mouth of Poole Harbour. The finish is not a major transport hub, so most walkers should treat the final logistics as a two-step journey: first get away from South Haven Point, then make the onward rail, coach or car connection.

The key transport dependency is the Sandbanks chain ferry, which links the finish area with the Poole side of the harbour. Its timetable and operating status should be checked before travelling, especially outside summer, in poor weather or if aiming to finish late in the day.

By train

For onward rail travel, plan to connect through Poole after crossing the Sandbanks chain ferry. The exact station connection from the ferry landing, and current train times, should be checked before travelling.

Do not assume that finishing at South Haven Point automatically gives an easy same-day rail connection. Build in time for the final walk from Swanage via Studland, the finish photos at the steel marker, the ferry crossing, and the onward local transfer on the Poole side.

If the chain ferry is not running, the journey to rail becomes more awkward and may require a long inland detour or a pre-booked taxi. This is one of the few end-point logistics that should be checked before setting out on the final stage, not after arriving at the finish.

By bus

Local bus options around Studland, Swanage, Sandbanks and Poole are timetable-dependent. Services may be less useful in the evening, on Sundays, in winter or outside the main visitor season, so current times should be checked before travelling.

For many walkers, Swanage is the most practical place to manage the final day if relying on public transport. It sits before the last section to Studland and South Haven Point, and gives more flexibility than arriving at the finish with no onward plan.

If using buses after finishing, check both sides of the harbour: the Studland/Swanage side and the Poole/Sandbanks side after the chain ferry. Missing the last workable connection can turn a straightforward finish into an expensive taxi journey.

By car/taxi

South Haven Point is a point-to-point finish, so car logistics need planning. If a vehicle has been left near the finish, check current parking rules and access arrangements before travelling; do not rely on being able to leave a car informally at the ferry slipway or in a nearby village.

Taxis are the safest fallback if finishing late, if carrying heavy kit, or if the chain ferry or buses do not line up with onward travel. Book ahead where possible, particularly in peak summer, on weekends and outside normal daytime hours.

For section hikers, a practical approach is often to base the final night around Swanage or Studland, walk to South Haven Point with a light pack, then return by pre-arranged taxi, bus or ferry connection. Exact availability and costs should be checked before booking.

From the nearest airport

No airport connection is integral to the finish at South Haven Point. For flights, first plan the ground journey out through Poole or another larger transport hub, then connect onwards by rail, coach or taxi as required.

The nearest suitable airport and transfer route will depend on flight availability, season and final destination. This should be checked before travelling.

Where to stay at the finish

Staying overnight near the finish is sensible if the final day from Swanage is likely to run late, if the chain ferry timetable is uncertain, or if onward travel requires several connections. Studland and Swanage are the most relevant trail-side options at the eastern end of the route.

Accommodation on the South West Coast Path can be busy in peak summer, especially in popular coastal areas. Book ahead rather than assuming last-minute availability after completing the trail.

If the aim is to travel home immediately after finishing, start the final stage early and check the chain ferry, bus and rail times before leaving Swanage. South Haven Point is a memorable end to the trail, but it is not a place to reach at dusk without a transport plan.

Which Direction Should You Walk?

The South West Coast Path is traditionally walked from **Minehead to South Haven Point**. That is the official start-to-finish direction: the route begins at the Minehead seafront monument, follows National Trail acorn waymarks west onto North Hill, then traces the peninsula through Devon, Cornwall, South Devon and Dorset to the steel finish marker at South Haven Point beside Poole Harbour.

Walking in reverse is perfectly possible. The path is waymarked and the physical challenge is much the same either way, but most end-to-end itineraries, route descriptions and mental milestones are easier to follow in the standard direction.

Standard direction: Minehead to South Haven Point

The main advantage of the standard direction is clarity. The route's conventional sequence runs naturally from **Minehead, Porlock Weir, Lynmouth and Combe Martin** into the hard North Devon and North Cornwall coast, then around **Land's End, Lizard Point, Falmouth, Plymouth, Dartmouth, Exmouth**, the **Jurassic Coast, Swanage, Studland** and finally **South Haven Point**.

It also gives a strong sense of progression. The walk starts with the Exmoor coast and the high point at **Great Hangman**, then moves into the long, remote switchbacks of **Hartland Quay, Bude, Boscastle** and **Tintagel** before reaching the big psychological milestones of **Land's End** and **Lizard Point**. The final weeks then become more broken by estuaries, resort towns, ferries and the famous Dorset coast, with **Old Harry Rocks** just before the finish.

For many walkers, finishing at South Haven Point has a clear end-to-end feel. The marker stands at the mouth of Poole Harbour beside the Sandbanks chain ferry slipway, making it an obvious final point rather than simply stopping in another coastal town.

Reverse direction: South Haven Point to Minehead

Walking east-to-west in reverse can still work well, especially for section hikers whose transport, accommodation or available dates fit better that way. It also gives an immediate start through **Studland, Old Harry Rocks, Swanage, Kimmeridge, Lulworth Cove, Durdle Door** and the **Jurassic Coast**, rather than saving Dorset for the end.

The trade-off is psychological as much as logistical. In reverse, the walk becomes progressively wilder towards Cornwall and North Devon, with some of the most remote and facility-poor sections coming late in the route. The final approach to Minehead is still a proper finish, but it does not have the same conventional "end of the National Trail" feel as arriving at South Haven Point.

Reverse walkers also need to be particularly disciplined with ferry planning. The official route depends on several estuary ferries, including crossings around the Camel, Fal, Fowey, Tamar, Salcombe, Dart, Teign, Exe and Sandbanks areas. Direction does not remove this issue: ferry timetables, seasonal reductions, weather disruption and tide-dependent sections must be checked before travelling.

Does one direction make the climbing easier?

No meaningful amount. The South West Coast Path's difficulty comes from repeated descent and re-ascent at coves, river mouths, beaches and estuaries, not from one long gradient that is easier in one

direction.

Over the full **1,014 km / 630 miles**, the total ascent is around **35,031 m**, and that work remains whichever way the route is walked. The steep, switchbacked stretches of **North Devon** and **North Cornwall** are strenuous in both directions.

Weather and exposure

Do not choose direction on the assumption that one way will avoid bad weather. The route is an exposed coastal trail with Atlantic-facing headlands, open clifftops, muddy paths, steps, beaches and estuary crossings, and conditions can change quickly.

Wind and rain can make either direction harder, particularly on remote clifftop sections. Forecasts, ferry status and any live trail diversions should be checked before each leg.

Transport and accommodation flow

For a continuous walk, neither direction removes the need for careful logistics. Public transport is good at many hubs such as **Exeter, Barnstaple, St Ives, Penzance, St Austell, Plymouth, Exmouth** and **Weymouth**, but remote sections have sparse services, and some official route options depend on ferries.

Accommodation availability is also more important than direction. Beds are plentiful in many harbour towns and resorts, but thinner on the remote North Devon and North Cornwall stretches. In peak summer, book well ahead on the popular Cornwall and Jurassic Coast sections, whichever way the route is walked.

Recommendation

Walk **Minehead to South Haven Point** unless there is a strong practical reason to do otherwise. It is the traditional and clearest direction, follows the standard route sequence, gives strong landmark progression around the peninsula, and finishes at the recognised eastern trail marker beside Poole Harbour.

Choose the reverse only if accommodation, transport or section-walking plans genuinely work better that way. The path is just as walkable in reverse, but it offers no real advantage in climbing, ferries or overall difficulty.

Accommodation Along the Route

Accommodation on the South West Coast Path is very mixed. The route passes frequent harbour towns, resorts and transport hubs with hotels, guesthouses, B&Bs, hostels including YHA options, and campsites, but it also crosses long exposed sections where places to sleep are thinly spread.

For an end-to-end walk, accommodation planning is one of the main logistical jobs. The path's constant climbing makes it risky to assume that a "short" coastal section will feel easy at the end of the day, and on the remoter North Devon and North Cornwall stretches the next realistic bed may be a long way on.

Where accommodation is easiest

The strongest choice is in the larger towns, resorts and transport-linked hubs. Minehead, Ilfracombe, Barnstaple, Bideford, Bude, Padstow, Newquay, St Ives, Penzance, Falmouth, Plymouth, Torquay, Exmouth, Lyme Regis, Weymouth and Swanage are the most useful names to build around when sketching an itinerary.

These places are also better for rest days, resupply, public transport links and bad-weather flexibility. If walking in shorter sections over several trips, they make the most practical start and finish points.

Where accommodation is tighter

The awkward gaps are mainly on the wild and less developed coast, especially North Devon and North Cornwall. The Hartland peninsula, the coast around Clovelly and Hartland Quay, and the long switchbacking sections between Bude, Boscastle, Tintagel and Port Isaac need particular care.

Smaller places such as Porlock Weir, Zennor, Porthcurno, Lizard Point, Mevagissey, Polperro, Wembury, Newton Ferrers, Kimmeridge and Studland may work well as overnight stops, but choice is more limited than in the larger towns. Availability should be checked before building a fixed day plan around them.

Booking strategy

Book ahead for peak summer, school holidays and weekends, especially in Cornwall and on the Jurassic Coast. These are popular holiday areas as well as long-distance walking corridors, so the pressure is not only from hikers.

For a continuous 7–8 week walk, many hikers use a rolling booking system: key pinch-points and weekends are fixed early, while easier resort sections are left slightly more flexible. This only works if there is a fallback plan, because ferry timings, weather and cumulative fatigue can all affect where a realistic walking day ends.

Campsites add flexibility in some areas, but they do not remove the need to plan. Remote clifftop sections can still leave long gaps between formal places to stay, and carrying camping kit adds weight on a route with about 35,000 m of cumulative ascent.

Inn-to-inn walking, baggage transfer and taxis

The South West Coast Path works well as an inn-to-inn route, provided stages are planned around actual accommodation rather than neat map distances. The best approach is to anchor each section in larger

overnight bases, then adjust daily distances around the tougher coastal terrain and ferry crossings.

Luggage transfer can make the trail much more manageable, particularly for walkers staying in B&Bs, guesthouses and inns rather than camping. Taxi transfers can also solve awkward gaps where the only available bed is inland or behind the walking line, but local availability varies and should be checked before travelling.

Do not rely on being able to improvise every night in the remote sections. A missed ferry, full accommodation or bad-weather delay can create a long detour or an overlong final push, particularly outside the main summer timetable period.

Key accommodation planning points

Place	Accommodation level	Best for	Notes
Minehead	Good	Start-night logistics	Practical place to stay before beginning at the official seafront start.
Porlock Weir	Limited	Shorter early stages	Useful before the Exmoor coast, but choice is smaller than in Minehead or Lynmouth/Lynton.
Lynmouth / Lynton	Good	Exmoor section break	Stronger overnight base after the first demanding coastal section from Minehead.
Combe Martin	Limited	Breaking up the Exmoor–Ilfracombe stretch	Useful if avoiding a long push over the North Devon coast.
Ilfracombe	Good	Rest, resupply and section logistics	One of the more useful North Devon bases.
Woolacombe	Good	Resort stop and flexible staging	Better choice than many smaller coastal villages nearby.
Braunton	Good	Taw estuary logistics	Useful before or after the Taw estuary section.
Barnstaple / Bideford	Good	Transport, resupply and section starts	Stronger service centres around the Taw–Torridge estuaries.
Westward Ho!	Good	Coastal overnight before the wilder north coast	Useful before committing to the Clovelly and Hartland sections.
Clovelly	Limited	Atmospheric overnight or short-stage break	Accommodation choice is limited; book early if relying on it.
Hartland Quay / Hartland peninsula	Limited	Breaking a tough remote stretch	One of the key accommodation pinch-points on the North Devon coast.
Bude	Good	Recovery and resupply after North Devon	Major practical stop at the Cornwall border end of a strenuous section.
Boscastle	Limited	North Cornwall staging	Useful but smaller; do not assume last-minute availability.

Place	Accommodation level	Best for	Notes
Tintagel	Limited	Breaking the Bude–Padstow coast	Popular visitor stop; peak-season pressure can be high.
Port Isaac	Limited	North Cornwall overnight	Useful for splitting the coast before Padstow, but choice is not as broad as in larger towns.
Padstow	Good	Camel estuary ferry logistics	Strong base, but very popular in summer; book well ahead.
Newquay	Good	Transport, resupply and flexible stages	One of the strongest accommodation hubs on the north Cornwall coast.
St Agnes	Limited	Shorter coastal stages	Useful between Newquay and St Ives where daily distances need controlling.
St Ives	Good	Rest day and transport	Strong accommodation base, but very busy in peak season.
Zennor	Limited	Breaking the St Ives–Land’s End coast	Important small-stop option on a demanding stretch; check availability early.
Land’s End / Sennen	Limited	Milestone stop or shorter day into west Cornwall	Useful around the western tip, but do not rely on broad choice.
Porthcurno	Limited	Short-stage planning before Penzance	Helpful if not walking the whole western section in one push.
Penzance / Marazion	Good	Rest, resupply and transport	One of the best logistical bases in west Cornwall.
Lizard Point	Limited	Splitting the Lizard section	Remote-feeling compared with the larger towns; book ahead if using it overnight.
Falmouth	Good	Ferries, rest and resupply	Key base before or after the Fal estuary ferries.
Mevagissey	Limited	South Cornwall staging	Useful small harbour stop, but choice is narrower than in Falmouth or Plymouth.
Fowey / Polruan	Good	Ferry-linked overnight	Practical stop around the Fowey–Polruan crossing.
Polperro	Limited	Short-stage break before Looe	Attractive but smaller; peak-season demand can be strong.
Looe	Good	South Cornwall overnight	More practical choice than many smaller villages nearby.
Plymouth	Good	Major rest, transport and resupply hub	One of the best places on the whole route for resetting plans.

Place	Accommodation level	Best for	Notes
Wembury / Newton Ferrers	Limited	South Devon staging	Useful for managing the coast towards Salcombe, but availability should be checked before travelling.
Salcombe	Good	Estuary ferry logistics and rest	Popular and busy; book ahead in summer.
Dartmouth	Good	Ferry-linked overnight	Strong base around the Dart crossing to Kingswear.
Brixham / Torquay	Good	Torbay accommodation and transport	Good choice compared with smaller coastal stops.
Teignmouth / Dawlish	Good	Teign and Exe coast staging	Useful for splitting the coast before Exmouth.
Exmouth	Good	Transport and Exe ferry logistics	Practical base before the East Devon and Jurassic Coast sections.
Sidmouth / Beer / Seaton	Good	East Devon staging	Useful chain of overnight stops before Lyme Regis.
Lyme Regis	Good	Jurassic Coast base	Popular and busy in high season; book ahead.
West Bay / Bridport	Good	Splitting Lyme Regis to Weymouth	Practical overnight point on the Dorset coast.
Abbotsbury	Limited	Breaking the Chesil Beach area	Useful but smaller; confirm availability before committing to the stage.
Weymouth	Good	Major Dorset base	Strong accommodation, transport and resupply stop.
Lulworth Cove	Limited	Short-stage planning before the final Dorset coast	Very popular; book early if using it overnight.
Kimmeridge	Limited	Remote Dorset coast break	Important pinch-point where accommodation choice is limited.
Swanage	Good	Final-stage base	Best practical overnight stop before Studland and South Haven Point.
Studland	Limited	Near-finish overnight	Useful if not finishing through to transport the same day; choice is smaller than in Swanage.
South Haven Point	None	Finish marker only	Plan accommodation before or after the finish rather than at the marker itself.

Camping and Wild Camping

Camping is a workable way to tackle the South West Coast Path, but it needs more planning than the number of coastal towns suggests. The route passes many resorts, harbour towns and holiday areas where established campsites can be found on or near the trail, but provision is uneven. Remote North Devon and North Cornwall sections have fewer facilities, steeper ground and longer gaps between services, so campsite spacing should be checked carefully before committing to a camping itinerary.

Most walkers using a tent will still need to book ahead in the busiest periods, especially in summer and on popular Cornwall and Jurassic Coast sections. Do not assume that a campsite will have space for a small backpacking tent at short notice; many coastal sites are busy with caravans, campervans and family holidays in peak season.

Does the route suit camping?

The path can suit camping if the aim is flexibility and lower accommodation costs, but it is not an easy lightweight trail. The constant climbing and descending makes pack weight matter: carrying camping kit, food and extra water will be felt on the repeated cove-to-cliff-top ascents.

A camping approach works best when daily stages are planned around known campsites rather than simply walking until tired. The official route repeatedly drops into towns, villages and estuaries, but it also has exposed cliff sections where there may be no legal or practical place to stop.

Camping is most straightforward around the busier coastal settlements and resort areas, where services are generally more frequent. It becomes more demanding on the wilder North Devon and North Cornwall coast, particularly around the Exmoor coast, Hartland Quay and the long switchbacking stretches towards Bude, Boscastle and Tintagel.

Wild camping

Wild camping should not be treated as a default option on the South West Coast Path. In England, there is no general right to wild camp without the landowner's permission, and much of the coast is farmland, managed cliff, protected landscape, National Park, AONB or World Heritage Site land.

If a legal, permitted wild-camping arrangement is wanted, it must be agreed locally with the landowner or relevant land manager before pitching. Rules can vary by land ownership and conservation status, so this should be checked before travelling.

Do not pitch on cliff edges, dunes, beaches affected by tides, access tracks, grazing land, private gardens, village greens, heritage sites or anywhere that blocks the coast path. The route is narrow and exposed in many places, and a seemingly quiet headland can still be working farmland or sensitive habitat.

Water and resupply for campers

Water planning is one of the main practical limits on camping the route. Treat towns, villages, cafés, shops and campsites as the dependable water points, rather than relying on natural sources. The path spends long periods on open clifftop, sand, shingle, dunes and exposed headlands where there may be no tap or reliable drinking water.

Carry enough water for the full walking day, with extra capacity when camping away from a serviced site. This is especially important in warm weather, on remote North Devon and North Cornwall sections, and when ferry timings or tide-dependent sections could delay progress.

Food resupply is usually manageable because the path passes many settlements, but gaps still exist on the wilder stretches. Campers should avoid planning every meal around finding a shop at the end of the day unless that shop's location and opening hours have been checked.

Fires, stoves and Leave No Trace

Open fires are not appropriate on this route. The coast includes dry grass, heath, dunes, farmland, woodland edges and protected landscapes, and wind can spread fire quickly. Disposable barbecues should also be avoided unless a site explicitly permits them in a designated area.

Use a camping stove only where it is safe and permitted, preferably at an established campsite. Keep cooking well away from dry vegetation, tents and exposed cliff edges, and pack out all gas canisters, food packaging and litter.

Leave No Trace standards matter throughout the South West Coast Path. Camp only where permitted, keep groups small, arrive and leave quietly, avoid damaging vegetation, use toilets where available, and pack out all waste. Human waste should never be left near the path, watercourses, beaches, campsites, farmland or villages.

Seasonal camping considerations

Late spring to early autumn is the most practical camping window. Summer gives the best chance of full ferry timetables and open coastal facilities, but it is also the busiest time for campsites and accommodation along the Cornwall and Dorset coast.

Winter camping is a much more serious undertaking. Storms, short days, mud, exposed clifftops and reduced or suspended ferry services can make progress slow and awkward. If camping outside the main season, check campsite opening dates, ferry timetables, bus links and any live trail diversions before travelling.

Practical camping strategy

For a long section or full end-to-end, build the itinerary around confirmed overnight stops first, then fit walking days between them. The South West Coast Path's difficulty comes from cumulative ascent as much as distance, so a campsite that looks close on the map may still sit beyond several steep descents and climbs.

A sensible plan is to mix campsites with occasional indoor accommodation in towns such as Minehead, Ilfracombe, Bude, Padstow, St Ives, Penzance, Falmouth, Plymouth, Dartmouth, Exmouth, Lyme Regis, Weymouth or Swanage. This gives opportunities to dry kit, recharge devices, wash clothes and reset before more remote sections.

Where an estuary ferry is needed on or near the day's route, do not leave the crossing until late if the campsite is beyond it. Missing a ferry can force a long inland detour, which is much harder with a camping pack and may put the planned overnight stop out of reach.

Food, Water and Resupply

Food and water logistics on the South West Coast Path are generally straightforward in the larger harbour towns and resorts, but they become more serious on the remote North Devon, North Cornwall and exposed headland sections. The path repeatedly drops into coves and villages, yet not every settlement has a reliable shop, and seasonal cafés can close early or not open at all outside the main holiday period.

For most walkers, the safest routine is to start each day with breakfast arranged, carry lunch and emergency snacks, and refill water whenever a reliable tap is available. Do not plan a long clifftop section around a single pub, beach café or village shop without checking opening times first.

Food resupply

The best resupply points are the larger towns on or near the route, including Minehead, Ilfracombe, Barnstaple, Bideford, Bude, Padstow, Newquay, St Ives, Penzance, Falmouth, Fowey, Looe, Plymouth, Salcombe, Dartmouth, Torquay, Exmouth, Lyme Regis, Weymouth and Swanage. These are the places to buy proper walking food rather than relying only on pub meals.

Smaller places such as Porlock Weir, Lynmouth, Combe Martin, Clovelly, Hartland Quay, Boscastle, Tintagel, Port Isaac, Zennor, Sennen, Porthcurno, Marazion, Mevagissey, Polperro, Wembury, Beer, Charmouth, West Bay, Abbotsbury, Lulworth Cove, Kimmeridge, Studland and similar coastal villages may have pubs, cafés or small shops, but availability varies by season and day of the week. This should be checked before travelling, especially outside summer.

Peak-season resort areas usually make eating easy, but they can also be busy and fully booked in the evenings. In remote sections, particularly around the Hartland peninsula and parts of North Cornwall, carry enough food to finish the day even if the planned pub or café is closed.

Water planning

Mains water from accommodation, cafés, pubs and shops is the most reliable option. Fill bottles before leaving each overnight stop and top up whenever the opportunity appears; there can be long exposed clifftop stretches between settlements.

Natural water should not be relied on as a primary source. Streams and run-off may pass through farmland, settlements or beaches before reaching the sea, and filtering or treating water may still not deal with every contamination risk. If using natural water in an emergency, filter and treat it, and avoid any source that looks brackish, stagnant or affected by livestock or pollution.

For typical day walks, most hikers should carry at least enough water to cover several hours of exposed climbing and descending, with extra in hot weather or where the next settlement has uncertain services. On remote North Devon and North Cornwall days, leaving with a full day's water is often the sensible choice.

Resupply by broad section

Section	Food availability	Water availability	Notes
Minehead to Lynmouth / Lynton	Good at Minehead; more limited once on the Exmoor coast, with Porlock Weir and Lynmouth / Lynton as key stops	Fill before leaving Minehead and at accommodation or businesses in settlements	Do not underestimate the first section: the path climbs onto North Hill and continues through steep coastal terrain before Lynmouth
Lynmouth / Lynton to Ilfracombe	Moderate, with Combe Martin and Ilfracombe important for meals and supplies	Reliable in towns and accommodation; limited on open cliff sections	Great Hangman and the Exmoor / North Devon coast make this a strenuous stretch, so carry lunch and snacks rather than depending on mid-walk food
Ilfracombe to Barnstaple / Bideford	Generally better through Woolacombe, Braunton, Barnstaple, Instow, Bideford and Westward Ho!	Good in larger settlements	The Taw–Torridge estuary area has more services than the wilder coast either side, making it a useful reset point
Bideford / Westward Ho! to Bude	Limited between settlements, with Clovelly, Hartland Quay and Bude the key named points	Fill whenever possible; do not assume frequent taps	One of the more serious resupply sections. The Hartland peninsula is wild and switchbacked, so carry a full day's food and generous water
Bude to Padstow	Mixed: Bude and Padstow are strong resupply points; Boscastle, Tintagel and Port Isaac may provide meals or small supplies	Usually available in towns and villages, but gaps can feel long on exposed cliffs	North Cornwall is steep and slow-going. Check food options in smaller villages before relying on them
Padstow to St Ives	Good in larger centres such as Padstow, Newquay and St Ives; variable in smaller coastal places	Good in towns; limited on dune, beach and headland sections	The Camel estuary ferry affects timing at Padstow / Rock, so avoid planning food or water around a tight crossing without checking ferry times
St Ives to Penzance / Marazion	Good at St Ives, Penzance and Marazion; more limited around Zennor, Land's End, Sennen and Porthcurno	Fill before the wilder west Cornwall sections	The far west can be exposed and remote between villages. Carry food through the Land's End section rather than assuming regular resupply
Penzance to Falmouth	Good at Penzance and Falmouth; mixed around Marazion, Lizard Point and smaller villages	Reliable in larger towns; refill opportunities depend on open businesses elsewhere	A long southern Cornwall block with exposed headlands. Seasonal opening hours matter away from the main towns
Falmouth to Plymouth	Good at Falmouth, Fowey, Looe and Plymouth; smaller places such as Mevagissey and Polperro may have useful but seasonal options	Good in towns; less predictable between ferry-linked settlements	Several estuary ferries shape the official route, including around Falmouth, Fowey / Polruan and Plymouth. Carry food and water in case a missed ferry delays the day

Section	Food availability	Water availability	Notes
Plymouth to Salcombe	Good at Plymouth and Salcombe; more limited around Wembury, Newton Ferrers and smaller South Devon settlements	Fill from accommodation and businesses before committing to coast sections	This section includes estuary logistics and can involve long detours if crossings are not available. Start with enough food to absorb delays
Salcombe to Dartmouth	Good at Salcombe and Dartmouth; limited between smaller coastal settlements	Best topped up at the main towns	The Salcombe and Dartmouth ferry timings can affect when shops and food stops are reached. Check current ferry times before planning a long day
Dartmouth to Exmouth	Generally good through Brixham, Torquay, Teignmouth, Dawlish and Exmouth	Good in towns; refill before exposed cliff sections	This is one of the easier sections for regular food, but the Teign and Exe ferries still need timing checks
Exmouth to Lyme Regis	Good at Exmouth and Lyme Regis; useful smaller stops include Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth, Beer and Seaton	Available in towns and villages when businesses are open	East Devon has regular settlements, but Sunday and out-of-season opening can still be restrictive
Lyme Regis to Weymouth	Good at Lyme Regis, West Bay / Bridport and Weymouth; more limited around Charmouth and Abbotsbury	Reliable in larger towns; carry enough between smaller villages	The Jurassic Coast section is popular, but popularity does not guarantee late-opening shops or year-round cafés
Weymouth to Swanage	Good at Weymouth and Swanage; limited around Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge outside busy periods	Fill before leaving larger towns; limited on open Dorset coast sections	The coast between Weymouth and Swanage includes exposed, strenuous walking. Carry a proper lunch and enough water before leaving serviced areas
Swanage to South Haven Point	Good at Swanage; limited once heading towards Studland and South Haven Point	Fill before leaving Swanage or Studland	The final leg is short compared with earlier sections, but there is no reason to arrive at the finish short of water

Practical carrying strategy

For serviced resort sections, one day's lunch, snacks and a normal water carry are usually enough, provided shops and cafés are open. For remote sections, carry breakfast, lunch, high-energy snacks and an emergency meal if accommodation or evening food is uncertain.

Do a full resupply in the larger towns rather than buying everything from small village shops. Rural shops may have limited stock, short hours or seasonal opening, and Sundays can be especially restrictive.

In summer, heat and exposure can make water the limiting factor even where the walking distance looks modest. In poor weather, the same sections can be slower because of mud, wind and repeated climbing, so food margins still matter.

Where a ferry is part of the day's plan, carry enough food and water to wait, divert or finish late. Ferry timetables, weather disruption and seasonal service reductions should be checked before travelling.

Navigation and Waymarking

The South West Coast Path is a waymarked National Trail, using the standard acorn symbols and Coast Path fingerposts. In normal conditions the line is usually straightforward to follow: keep the sea on the appropriate side, follow the clifftop path, and watch for acorn waymarks where the route drops into coves, crosses beaches, passes through harbour towns or joins short road and promenade sections.

Do not treat the waymarking as a substitute for navigation. At 1,014 km / 630 miles, with ferries, estuaries, tide-dependent sections and occasional inland detours, the route is too long and logistically complex to rely on signs alone.

Waymarks and route finding on the ground

The official start in Minehead is on the seafront, marked by the sculpted hands-and-map gateway monument; National Trail acorn waymarks then lead west onto North Hill. The finish at South Haven Point, near Studland, is marked by a large steel sculpture beside the Sandbanks chain ferry slipway.

Most navigation problems are not on open clifftop, but at transitions: entering and leaving towns, picking the correct side street after a harbour, finding the onward line after a ferry, or following the official route through dunes, estuary edges, woodland and short road sections. Extra attention is worthwhile around larger places such as Ilfracombe, Barnstaple, Bideford, Padstow, Newquay, St Ives, Penzance, Falmouth, Plymouth, Torquay, Exmouth, Weymouth and Swanage, where urban paths, promenades and road walking can make the coast path feel less obvious than on open ground.

Remote sections of North Devon and North Cornwall also demand care. The path is normally distinct, but steep switchbacks, poor weather, mud, wind exposure and long distances between facilities mean a wrong turn can cost time and energy.

Maps, GPX and guidebooks

A GPX track is strongly recommended, especially for anyone walking long sections or linking accommodation, buses and ferries. Load it onto a phone or GPS device before travelling, and make the mapping available offline; mobile signal should not be assumed on remote clifftop sections.

Paper mapping is still sensible. The full trail spans multiple Ordnance Survey Explorer maps, so carrying every sheet is bulky for a through-hike but useful for section walkers. The Cicerone guidebook and its three map booklets cover the whole route in practical sections: Minehead to St Ives, St Ives to Plymouth, and Plymouth to Poole.

For phone navigation, use an app that shows proper topographic mapping rather than a road map. Contours are particularly useful on this trail because the main difficulty is repeated ascent and descent into coves, river mouths and estuaries, not altitude.

Ferries, tides and diversions

Several estuary ferries are part of the official route, including crossings associated with Padstow, Falmouth, Fowey, Plymouth, Salcombe, Dartmouth, Teignmouth, Exmouth and the Sandbanks chain ferry at the finish. Navigation planning therefore includes knowing where the ferry leaves from, where the path resumes on the far side, and what the inland alternative is if the service is not running.

Ferry timetables can be reduced or suspended outside summer and in bad weather. Tide-dependent sections and live trail diversions should also be checked before travelling, using the official National Trail information and current ferry details.

Suitability for less experienced navigators

The South West Coast Path is suitable for walkers with limited navigation experience on shorter, settled sections in good weather, provided they can follow waymarks and read a basic map. It is not a route where complete beginners should rely only on signs for a multi-week through-hike.

For longer sections, you should be comfortable checking a map against the ground, using a GPX track, finding the onward line through towns, and making decisions when a ferry, tide or diversion changes the day's plan.

Terrain, Conditions and Difficulty in Practice

The South West Coast Path is strenuous because of repetition, not altitude. The high point is only 318 m at Great Hangman near Combe Martin, but the full route accumulates about 35,031 m of ascent as the path drops into coves, river mouths and estuaries, then climbs straight back to the clifftops.

Do not judge a day purely by distance. A short section with repeated steep descents, steps and switchbacks can take longer than a flatter promenade or estuary-side stretch, especially with a full pack or in wet weather.

Underfoot terrain

Most of the route is coastal clifftop path, with surfaces changing constantly. Expect dirt, grass, rock, mud, sand, shingle beaches, steps, short road sections and seafront promenades.

The easier walking is usually through resort towns, harbour fronts and promenade sections, where navigation is straightforward and the surface is firm. These stretches can feel like useful recovery ground, but they are not typical of the whole trail.

The slower ground comes on remote clifftops, steep coves, dunes and beach sections. Sand and shingle are tiring underfoot, while rocky or muddy paths can reduce pace sharply after rain.

Braunton Burrows gives a different kind of difficulty: dune walking rather than cliff walking. It is not technical, but soft sand and rolling dune terrain can feel harder than the map suggests.

Climbs, descents and steps

The defining pattern is down and up, repeated for weeks. Many coastal paths contour gently; this one often loses height to reach a cove, harbour, valley or estuary, then climbs directly back out.

North Devon and North Cornwall are especially demanding. The Exmoor coast, the approach to Great Hangman, the Hartland peninsula and the Bude–Tintagel–Padstow area include long, steep switchbacks and relatively few facilities compared with the busier resort sections.

Steps are a major part of the physical load. Long flights of steps can be punishing on knees during descents and tiring on climbs, particularly late in the day.

Exposure and cliff-edge walking

There is no high-altitude or technical mountain ground, but the exposure is real. Much of the trail runs along open cliff, headland and coastal moor, with limited shelter in strong wind or heavy rain.

Wet grass, mud, rock and steps can become slippery. In poor weather, the safest line is to keep well back from cliff edges and avoid rushing descents, even where the path is well waymarked.

The route's waymarking is generally clear, using National Trail acorn markers, but visibility and weather still matter. On open clifftops, strong wind and rain can make otherwise simple walking feel much more serious.

Mud, rock, beaches and promenades

Terrain type	What it means in practice
Cliff-top dirt and grass	The standard surface for much of the trail; fast in dry weather, slippery after rain.
Muddy sections	Most likely to slow progress in wet weather, especially on slopes and shaded or wooded sections.
Rock and rough path	Usually not technical, but requires care when wet.
Sand and shingle beaches	Slow and tiring; allow extra time where the route uses beach or dune terrain.
Steps	Frequent enough to affect daily effort; descents can be as tiring as climbs.
Roads and promenades	Shorter, easier sections through towns, seafronts and harbour areas; useful for faster progress but not representative of the whole route.

Tides, ferries and timing constraints

Some parts of the day are dictated by tides and river-crossing ferries rather than walking pace alone. Estuary ferries are integral to the official route at several points, and if a ferry is not running the alternative may be a long inland detour.

This matters for difficulty because a manageable walking day can become much harder if ferry times force an early start, a long wait, or an extended road or inland route. Current ferry times, tide-dependent sections and any live trail diversions should be checked before travelling.

Seasonal conditions

Late spring to early autumn gives the most reliable overall walking window. Summer usually brings the fullest ferry timetables, but also the busiest towns, accommodation pressure and more crowded popular sections in Cornwall and Dorset.

Wet weather makes the route significantly harder. Mud, grass, rock, shingle and steps all become slower and more hazardous, while open cliff sections are more exposed in wind and rain.

Winter is a much more serious proposition. Short days, storms and reduced or suspended ferry services can make planning difficult, and missing a crossing can add a long detour. For most walkers, winter is better suited to short, carefully planned sections than to a continuous end-to-end attempt.

What makes the route easier or harder

The path is easier when daily stages are kept conservative, accommodation is booked close to the trail, and ferry windows are built into the plan. It is harder when a long mileage day is combined with remote cliff-top terrain, steep switchbacks, wet ground and a fixed crossing time.

Carrying a heavy pack increases the impact of the constant ascent and descent. End-to-end hikers should plan for sustained effort rather than occasional hard days: the cumulative climbing is the real test of the South West Coast Path.

Weather and Best Time to Walk

Late spring to early autumn is the most reliable window for the South West Coast Path. The route is low in altitude, but it is highly exposed: most of the walking is on open clifftops, headlands, beaches, estuary edges and coastal moor, where wind, rain, fog and sea mist can change the character of a day quickly.

The key planning issue is not temperature so much as exposure and logistics. Bad weather can make steep grass, mud, rock, steps and shingle awkward underfoot, and several estuary ferries are part of the official route. Outside the main walking season, ferry timetables may be reduced or suspended, and in poor weather crossings can be disrupted.

Best season

Late spring to early autumn is the best overall period for most walkers. Days are longer, accommodation and campsites are more widely available, and the integral ferry links are more likely to be running useful timetables.

This is especially important for a continuous end-to-end walk, where one missed ferry can mean a long inland detour or a forced change of stage plan. Before committing to any itinerary, check current ferry times for crossings such as the Camel estuary to Padstow, the Fal ferries at Falmouth, Fowey–Polruan, the Tamar/Cremyll ferry at Plymouth, Salcombe, Dartmouth, the Teign and Exe crossings, and the Sandbanks chain ferry at the finish.

Summer

Summer gives the best chance of long walking days and the fullest ferry timetables, but it is also the busiest season. Accommodation should be booked well ahead on popular sections, particularly in Cornwall and along the Jurassic Coast.

Heat can still matter despite the coastal setting. Many exposed headlands offer little shelter, and the repeated descents to coves followed by steep climbs back to the cliffs can feel much harder in still, sunny weather. Carry enough water between settlements, especially on remote North Devon and North Cornwall stages where facilities are thinner.

Spring and autumn

Spring and autumn are often the most practical compromise for experienced walkers: quieter than peak summer, generally workable for long-distance walking, and still within the preferred season for the route. Expect more unsettled weather than in high summer and build flexibility into accommodation and ferry plans.

After rain, the path can be muddy and slippery, particularly on steep grassy descents, woodland sections, exposed cliff paths and the switchback terrain of North Devon and North Cornwall. Shorter daylight in autumn also makes ambitious mileage harder, especially where ferry times or tide-dependent sections dictate the day.

Winter

A winter through-hike is possible only as a serious undertaking and is not the normal way to walk the South West Coast Path. The main problems are storms, strong winds on exposed cliffs, short daylight, wet and slippery ground, and reduced or suspended ferry services.

Winter also makes logistics less forgiving. Some accommodation and campsites may not operate year-round, buses can be sparse on remote stretches, and any ferry disruption can force long inland alternatives. Anyone walking in winter should plan shorter days, carry robust waterproof and warm kit, and check live trail diversions, ferry status and transport times before each section.

Fog, wind and rain

Fog and sea mist are important hazards because the path often stays close to the cliff edge. Navigation is generally helped by National Trail acorn waymarks, but visibility can still be poor on headlands, open cliff pasture, dunes and moorland sections.

Wind is one of the most significant weather factors on this trail. Strong gusts can make exposed cliff paths unpleasant or unsafe, particularly where the route is narrow, muddy or close to steep drops. In bad weather, delaying a section or using a lower-level alternative where one exists is usually better than pressing on to keep to a schedule.

Trail surface by season

The South West Coast Path is never just a dry, even footpath. Underfoot conditions include dirt, grass, rock, mud, sand, shingle, steps, road and promenade, and the balance changes sharply with weather.

In dry settled periods, the main challenge is the constant ascent and descent. In wet periods, steep grass, mud, rock steps and eroded cliff paths become much more demanding, so footwear with reliable grip is essential. After storms, check the official National Trail information for closures or diversions before starting the day.

Daylight and itinerary planning

Long daylight is a major advantage on this route because the cumulative climbing makes progress slower than map distance alone suggests. Even fit walkers can lose time on repeated cove descents, steep switchbacks, ferry waits, tide-dependent sections and rougher ground.

In the shorter days of late autumn and winter, avoid building stages around best-case timings. Plan around confirmed ferry departures, tide constraints where relevant, and realistic escape points rather than simply dividing the mileage evenly.

Safety Notes

The South West Coast Path is a waymarked National Trail, not a technical mountain route, but it is still a serious coastal walk. The main risks are cumulative fatigue, exposed cliff walking, fast-changing weather, tide and ferry timing, and long stretches with limited facilities — especially in North Devon and North Cornwall.

Emergency help

In an emergency in the UK, call **999 or 112**. For coastal, cliff or sea-related incidents, ask for the appropriate emergency service and give your location as clearly as possible, using a grid reference, What3Words, nearby waymark, headland, cove, village or named landmark if available.

Mobile signal should not be relied on everywhere. Remote clifftop sections, deep coves and parts of the North Devon and North Cornwall coast can have patchy reception, so carry downloaded mapping, a paper map or guidebook, and enough battery for navigation and emergency use.

Cliffs, exposure and underfoot conditions

Much of the route follows open clifftops, often close to steep drops. Stay on the signed path, keep well back from cliff edges, and take particular care in strong wind, poor visibility or after heavy rain.

The path surface changes constantly: grass, dirt, rock, mud, sand, shingle, steps, promenades and short road sections all occur. Muddy descents, wet rock and worn steps can be slow and slippery, especially when tired or carrying a multi-day pack.

Great Hangman near Combe Martin is the highest point on the trail at 318 m, but altitude is not the issue. The bigger safety concern is the repeated climb-and-drop pattern over 630 miles, which can lead to fatigue, slips and poor decisions late in the day.

Weather, heat and cold

The path is exposed to Atlantic weather for long periods. Wind and rain can make straightforward clifftop walking feel much harder, and winter storms, short days and reduced services make off-season walking more committing.

In warm weather, exposed headlands, dunes and long cliff sections can feel hotter than expected, with limited shade between villages. Carry enough water for the day, particularly on remote stretches where facilities are thin.

In cool or wet weather, windchill is the main concern. A waterproof layer, warm spare layer and hat are sensible even outside winter, because long exposed sections can be uncomfortable once rain and wind arrive together.

Tides, ferries and water safety

Tide times and estuary ferries affect parts of the official route. Several crossings are integral to the trail, including the Camel estuary ferry to Rock/Padstow, Fal ferries at Falmouth, Fowey–Polruan, the

Cremyll/Tamar ferry at Plymouth, the Salcombe and Dartmouth crossings, the Teign and Exe ferries, and the Sandbanks chain ferry at the finish.

Ferries may run reduced or suspended timetables outside summer or in bad weather. Missing a crossing can mean a long inland detour, so check current ferry times, tide times and service status before setting off each day.

Do not attempt to shortcut estuaries, river mouths or tidal sections unless they are specifically safe and open at the time. Beaches, shingle and rocks can also be slow going and may become unsafe in poor weather or around rising water.

Remote sections and daily planning

The path passes many harbour towns and resorts, but there are also long, exposed and facility-poor sections. North Devon and North Cornwall are especially demanding, with steep switchbacks and fewer easy exits than the busier resort stretches.

Before each day, check:

- the weather forecast, especially wind and rain;
- tide times where the day includes beaches, estuaries or tidal constraints;
- ferry timetables and whether services are running;
- any live trail diversions on the official National Trail information;
- daylight hours and realistic walking time for the ascent involved;
- where food, water, toilets and accommodation are actually available;
- onward bus or rail options if cutting the day short may be necessary.

Road sections and busy places

The route is mostly off-road, but it includes short road, seafront and promenade sections. Use pavements where available, take care on narrow lanes and be more visible in poor light or bad weather.

Busy resort areas can bring a different kind of hazard: traffic, crowds, dogs, cyclists and distractions around harbours and promenades. Slow down through these sections and watch for waymarks, as navigation can be less obvious in built-up areas than on open cliff.

Animals and livestock

Where animals are present, give them space and do not feed them. The Valley of Rocks near Lynton is known for feral goats, and other grazed coastal areas may require normal care around animals.

Keep dogs under close control, particularly near cliffs, livestock, wildlife and busy harbour areas. Cliff edges are a real risk for dogs as well as walkers.

Solo walking

Solo hiking is common on the South West Coast Path, but the remoter sections deserve extra discipline. Leave a route plan with someone, carry a charged phone and backup navigation, and avoid pushing on into bad weather simply to meet a booking.

If walking alone, be conservative with late starts, long stages and ferry-dependent days. The safest plan is one that leaves enough daylight and energy to deal with a missed ferry, slow ground or an unexpected diversion.

Gear Recommendations

Gear for the South West Coast Path should be chosen for repeated climbing and descent, exposed coastal weather and mixed underfoot conditions rather than for altitude. The path is well waymarked, but a light pack, reliable waterproofs and good foot care matter more here than on many higher mountain routes because the ascent is relentless over weeks.

Footwear

Choose footwear with excellent grip and comfort on long, uneven days. The path includes dirt, grass, rock, mud, sand, shingle beaches, steps, road sections and promenades, so soles need to cope with both wet cliff paths and hard surfaces.

Lightweight walking shoes or trail shoes suit many inn-to-inn and section hikers in spring to autumn, especially if they dry quickly after wet grass, mud or rain. Waterproof boots are more useful for walkers carrying heavier camping loads, walking in colder or wetter months, or wanting extra ankle support on steep descents and rougher North Devon and North Cornwall sections.

Blister prevention is essential. Take spare socks, foot tape or blister dressings, and avoid starting a multi-week hike in new footwear.

Waterproofs and warm layers

A proper waterproof jacket is essential, not optional. Much of the route is on open clifftop, where wind-driven rain can arrive quickly and shelter may be limited between villages.

Waterproof trousers are strongly recommended for through-hikers and anyone walking outside settled summer weather. They are also useful on exposed headlands, muddy grass and long wet days when shorts or softshell trousers quickly become uncomfortable.

Carry a warm mid-layer even in summer. Sea wind, rain, ferry waits and exposed lunch stops can make the path feel much colder than the low altitude suggests.

Navigation and route information

The South West Coast Path is a National Trail with acorn waymarks, but do not rely on signs alone. Carry offline mapping on a phone and either the relevant paper mapping or a guide/map booklet for the section being walked.

The Cicerone guidebook and its three map booklets cover the whole route: Minehead to St Ives, St Ives to Plymouth, and Plymouth to Poole. OS mapping spans multiple sheets, so section hikers should only carry the sheets needed for the current trip.

A phone is also a key planning tool for ferry times, tide-dependent sections, buses, rail links and live trail diversions. Several estuary ferries are part of the official route, and missing one can mean a long inland detour; ferry timetables should be checked before travelling and again during the walk.

Water and food carry

Do not assume every coastal day has regular services. Harbour towns and resorts are frequent on many parts of the path, but facilities are noticeably thinner on remote stretches of North Devon and North Cornwall, especially around the wilder cliff sections.

Carry enough water for the full planned day, with extra capacity in warm weather or when walking long gaps between settlements. Exposed clifftops, steep climbs and reflective sections over sand, shingle or promenade can increase water use quickly.

Food carry can usually be modest on busier resort sections, but through-hikers should keep an emergency meal or substantial snacks in the pack. This is particularly important where accommodation, shops and cafés are sparse or where ferry timing affects the day's finish.

Trekking poles

Trekking poles are highly useful on this route. The difficulty is not technical terrain but the constant descent to coves, estuaries and beaches followed by steep climbs back to the cliffline.

Poles reduce strain on knees during repeated descents and help maintain rhythm on long uphill pulls. They are especially valuable for campers carrying heavier packs and for walkers tackling the switchbacked North Devon and North Cornwall coast.

Power, phone protection and small essentials

Carry a power bank if using a phone for navigation, ferry information, accommodation details and transport planning. This is particularly important on multi-day sections where long days, photos and poor signal can drain batteries quickly.

Use a waterproof phone pouch or dry bag for electronics, maps, tickets and spare layers. Coastal rain and sea spray are not the only issues; wet grass, pack condensation and sudden showers can soak unprotected kit.

A headtorch is sensible for through-hikers, campers and anyone walking in spring or autumn. Shorter daylight, delays at ferries or slower-than-expected cliff sections can leave walkers finishing later than planned.

Sun, wind and insect protection

Sun protection is important on exposed clifftops, beaches, dunes and promenades. Pack a brimmed cap or sunglasses and use sun cream, especially on long summer days where shade is limited.

Wind protection matters as much as warmth. A light windproof layer can be useful on dry but blustery days when a full waterproof is too warm.

Insect protection is not a defining gear issue for the South West Coast Path, but a small repellent can be useful around campsites, woodland and still summer evenings.

Camping gear

Campers should keep the shelter system light but stable in wind. Coastal campsites and exposed pitches can be breezy, so a tent or tarp setup that has only been used in calm conditions is a poor choice for a

long coastal walk.

A warm sleeping bag or quilt, reliable sleeping mat and dry bags are important because wet kit is harder to manage when moving daily. Campers also need to plan food and water more carefully on remote stretches where services are limited.

Avoid overpacking. The South West Coast Path's cumulative ascent punishes heavy loads, and every unnecessary item will be carried up and down hundreds of coastal climbs.

Best setup by walking style

Walking style	Best gear approach
Inn-to-inn hikers	Keep the pack compact: waterproofs, warm layer, navigation, water, lunch/snacks, blister kit, power bank and spare socks. Lightweight shoes or trail shoes often work well in settled conditions.
Campers	Prioritise low weight without sacrificing weather resistance. Use supportive footwear, trekking poles, dry bags, dependable waterproofs and enough food and water capacity for remote sections.
Fast or section hikers	Do not strip the pack too far. Even a short section can involve exposed cliffs, steep climbs, tide or ferry timing, so carry waterproofs, warm layer, offline mapping, water, snacks and phone power.

Budget and Costs

The South West Coast Path has no single realistic “average” cost. A two-day section from a rail-served town can be relatively cheap; a 7–8 week end-to-end walk through peak-season Cornwall and Dorset can become expensive quickly, mainly because accommodation is in holiday towns rather than low-cost trail huts.

All costs should be planned in GBP. Accommodation, ferry fares, baggage transfer, taxis and package prices change by season, demand and operator, so current prices should be checked before booking.

Main cost drivers

Accommodation is the biggest variable. Hotels, guesthouses, B&Bs, hostels and campsites are available along the route, but choice is uneven: resort towns and harbours usually have more options, while remote North Devon and North Cornwall stretches have fewer beds and longer gaps between services.

Summer is the most expensive and busiest period, especially through Cornwall and on the Jurassic Coast. Booking well ahead is the best way to control cost; leaving accommodation late often means paying for whatever is still available, or using taxis to reach beds inland.

Ferries are a genuine budget line, not an optional extra. Crossings such as the Camel estuary ferry to Padstow/Rock, Fal ferries at Falmouth, Fowey–Polruan, the Cremyll/Tamar ferry at Plymouth, Salcombe, Dartmouth, Teignmouth, the Exe ferry and the Sandbanks chain ferry can save long inland detours when running. Check current fares and timetables before relying on them.

Budget approaches

Style	What it usually means on this route	Cost control notes
Budget	Camping where available, using hostels when practical, buying food from shops, limiting taxis and rest-day spending	Works best if planned carefully around campsite locations and ferry timetables. Remote sections may still force paid accommodation or longer days.
Mid-range	Mostly B&Bs, guesthouses or modest hotels, occasional hostel/camping nights, pub/café meals mixed with shop food	The most common comfortable independent approach for section walkers. Book early in Cornwall, South Devon and Dorset in peak season.
Comfortable	Hotels or better guesthouses, more meals out, luggage transfer, taxis to/from accommodation, extra rest days	Reduces pack weight and daily stress, but costs rise sharply in popular coastal towns and resorts.

Accommodation costs

For budgeting, separate the walk into nights rather than miles. A full end-to-end walk of roughly 7–8 weeks means a long sequence of paid nights unless camping is used for a substantial share of the route.

Camping is normally the cheapest accommodation style, but campsites are not evenly spaced along every remote stretch. Hostels, including YHA options where available, can help reduce costs, but should not be assumed at every stage.

B&Bs, guesthouses and hotels give the easiest logistics but are heavily affected by school holidays, weekends and seaside demand. Places such as St Ives, Penzance, Falmouth, Salcombe, Dartmouth, Torquay, Lyme Regis, Weymouth and Swanage can be particularly competitive in busy periods, so prices should be checked before booking.

Food and drink

Food costs are manageable if lunches and snacks are bought from shops in towns and larger villages. Harbour towns and resorts provide cafés, pubs and restaurants, but relying on paid meals throughout a full end-to-end walk will add significantly to the total.

Remote stretches, especially parts of North Devon and North Cornwall, have fewer services. Carrying an emergency meal or enough food for the next day is sensible where the next village or shop is uncertain.

Transport to and from the route

Budget for travel to Minehead at the start and from South Haven Point or the Poole Harbour area at the finish. Mainline rail hubs near or on the wider route include Exeter, Barnstaple for North Devon, St Ives, Penzance, St Austell, Plymouth, Exmouth and Weymouth, with the Paddington–Penzance line serving key parts of the South West.

Section walkers should also budget for local bus links, short train hops and occasional taxis to close gaps between accommodation and the trail. Buses run along much of the coast, but services are sparse in some remote areas and should be checked before travelling.

Ferries, taxis and baggage transfer

Ferry fares are usually small compared with accommodation, but they matter because missing a ferry can create a major logistical problem. Outside summer, some ferries run reduced timetables or may be suspended in bad weather; if a crossing is not operating, the cost may become a long detour, an extra night, or a taxi.

Taxis are useful as a contingency rather than a daily assumption. They are most relevant where beds are inland, public transport is thin, or a ferry/tide timing has disrupted the plan. Current local availability and prices should be checked before travelling.

Luggage transfer can make the route more comfortable, especially for older walkers, section walkers and anyone using B&Bs. Coverage, daily mileage limits and per-bag pricing vary, so obtain route-specific quotes before booking accommodation around it.

Package trips

Self-guided walking packages are relevant on this trail because it is long, popular and accommodation-heavy. These typically bundle accommodation planning and baggage transfer, and may be arranged for shorter sections rather than the full 630 miles.

Guided or fully supported trips are likely to cost more than independent walking, but can remove much of the booking burden. Compare exactly what is included: accommodation standard, luggage transfer, route notes, ferry planning, transfers, rest days and whether remote sections require taxi links.

Luggage Transfer, Guided Tours and Support Services

Support services are useful on the South West Coast Path because the route is long, steep in cumulative ascent, and logistically uneven. The busy harbour towns and resorts make support straightforward on many sections, but the more remote parts of North Devon and North Cornwall need earlier planning, especially where accommodation and public transport are sparse.

Luggage transfer

Door-to-door baggage transfer is widely used by walkers tackling the path in sections. It suits anyone staying in hotels, guesthouses, B&Bs or hostels and wanting to walk with only a daypack rather than carrying a full multi-day load over repeated cliff climbs.

For a continuous end-to-end walk, luggage transfer is possible in principle but more complicated than on a short booked section. The path covers 630 miles / 1,014 km across several counties, so a full-route itinerary may involve different local couriers or a walking-holiday company coordinating the whole arrangement.

Before relying on baggage transfer, check:

Point to check	Why it matters on this route
Accommodation acceptance	Many transfers depend on each night's accommodation being able to receive and store bags during the day.
Remote sections	North Devon and North Cornwall have longer gaps between services, so bag logistics may be less flexible.
Ferry days	Estuary ferries can affect timings and access for walkers; check ferry timetables before fixing stages.
Bag limits and labelling	Couriers normally require clearly labelled bags and may set size or weight limits. Check current rules when booking.
Rest days and split stays	If staying two nights in one place, make sure the courier schedule reflects that rather than moving the bag on automatically.

Luggage transfer is less necessary for short day walks based from a single town, for walkers using public transport to return to the same base, or for experienced backpackers carrying camping kit. It is most valuable on multi-day inn-to-inn sections where the daily ascent is the main fatigue factor.

Self-guided walking packages

Self-guided packages are a common way to walk sections of the South West Coast Path without arranging every bed and transfer separately. These typically include accommodation booking, luggage transfer, route notes or maps, and practical support if plans change.

They are particularly useful for popular and accommodation-constrained stretches such as Cornwall and the Jurassic Coast in peak summer, and for walkers who want fixed stages around ferries, buses and

available beds. They can also help avoid over-long days on the more strenuous north coast sections, where the map distance may understate the effort because of the repeated climbs and descents.

Most self-guided itineraries cover manageable sections rather than the full trail in one booking. A full end-to-end package is a major commitment and should be arranged well ahead, with clear rest days and realistic daily distances.

When comparing packages, check whether the price includes luggage transfer, single-room supplements, ferry fares, transfers to off-trail accommodation, and any support if a ferry is cancelled or bad weather forces a change. Current prices and inclusions should be checked before booking.

Guided walks

Guided options are best suited to walkers who want navigation, local interpretation and a fixed group structure rather than independent planning. On this route, guided walking is more commonly practical as day walks or short section trips than as a full 7–8 week end-to-end expedition.

A guide can be useful on exposed or remote sections, for walkers unfamiliar with British coastal paths, or for groups wanting a planned day around landmarks such as Land's End, Lizard Point, the Jurassic Coast, Lulworth Cove, Durdle Door or Old Harry Rocks. Even with a guide, the route remains physically demanding because of the cumulative ascent and frequent steep steps.

For any guided itinerary, check group size, daily distance, ascent, bad-weather policy, what happens at ferry crossings, and whether transport back to the start point is included. This should be checked before travelling.

Taxis and local transfers

Taxis are useful on the South West Coast Path, but they should not be treated as a guaranteed fallback everywhere. They are most reliable around larger towns and transport hubs such as Barnstaple, St Ives, Penzance, Plymouth, Exmouth and Weymouth, and less convenient on remote headlands or small villages with limited services.

Pre-book taxis where a stage starts or ends away from a transport hub, where accommodation is inland, or where a missed ferry would otherwise create a long detour. This is especially important on the North Devon and North Cornwall sections, where facilities are thinner and walking days can already be long.

Taxi transfers can also help section-hikers link a linear day walk to a parked car, a rail station or a bus stop. Before committing to a stage, check both the outward and return options; bus services are sparse in some areas and may not run late enough for a long coastal day.

Ferries as essential support

Several estuary ferries are part of the practical support network for this trail, not optional extras. Key crossings include the Camel ferry to Padstow, Fal ferries around Falmouth, Fowey–Polruan, the Cremyll/Tamar ferry at Plymouth, Salcombe, Dartmouth, the Teign ferry at Teignmouth, the Exe ferry from Starcross to Exmouth, and the Sandbanks chain ferry at the finish.

Ferry timetables can be seasonal, reduced outside summer, or affected by bad weather. Missing a crossing can mean a long inland detour, so ferry times should be checked before fixing accommodation, luggage transfer or taxi pick-ups.

What to book ahead

Book accommodation first, then align luggage transfer, ferries and any taxis around it. In peak summer, popular Cornwall and Jurassic Coast stages should be arranged well in advance.

For remote or tightly timed sections, avoid assuming that a late change can be solved on the day. Confirm current ferry times, bus and rail connections, taxi availability, baggage-transfer arrangements and any live trail diversions before travelling.

Shorter Hikes and Best Sections

The South West Coast Path is particularly well suited to section walking. The choices below use natural trail towns and the larger route blocks, so the distances are approximate and should still be checked against current mapping before booking accommodation or transport.

Quick picks

Best for	Section	Approx. distance	Why choose it	Transport notes
Best day walk	Swanage to South Haven Point via Old Harry Rocks and Studland	20 km	A strong but manageable final-day section with chalk stacks at Old Harry Rocks, Studland and the official finish marker at South Haven Point.	The Sandbanks chain ferry links South Haven Point to Poole. Check ferry times before travelling; local onward connections from Swanage and Studland should also be checked.
Best weekend section	Weymouth to Swanage via Lulworth Cove, Durdle Door and Kimmeridge	45 km	One of the most concentrated landmark sections on the Dorset coast, with Lulworth Cove and Durdle Door as major highlights.	Weymouth is one of the main rail-served hubs on or near the route. Swanage onward transport should be checked before travelling.
Best 3–5 day section	St Ives to Penzance / Marazion via Zennor, Land's End, Sennen and Porthcurno	55 km	A compact west Cornwall section with big Atlantic scenery, Land's End and views towards St Michael's Mount from Marazion.	St Ives and Penzance are rail-served hubs, making this one of the cleaner public-transport sections to arrange. Check current local bus and train times before fixing walking days.
Best wild scenery	Bideford / Westward Ho! to Bude via Clovelly and Hartland Quay	60 km	A tough North Devon to Cornwall section with Clovelly, Hartland Quay and some of the wilder, more switchbacked coast on the whole trail.	Facilities and transport are thinner here than in the resort sections. Book accommodation early and check bus options before committing to daily distances.
Best for beginners	Swanage to South Haven Point via Old Harry Rocks and Studland	20 km	Short by South West Coast Path standards, well defined, and still gives a proper sense of the National Trail without committing to a remote multi-day section.	Works best as a planned linear walk using the Sandbanks chain ferry for onward travel. This should be checked before travelling.

Best for	Section	Approx. distance	Why choose it	Transport notes
Best for public transport	St Ives to Penzance / Marazion	55 km	A scenic multi-day walk with rail-served towns at both ends, avoiding the most awkward estuary-ferry logistics.	St Ives and Penzance are the key transport anchors. Check current timetables, especially if using buses to shorten or bail out.
Best for villages and accommodation	Dartmouth to Exmouth via Brixham, Torquay, Teignmouth and Dawlish	75 km	A more serviced South Devon section, passing several coastal towns and resorts rather than the sparsest North Devon and North Cornwall stretches.	This section involves the Teign ferry at Teignmouth and the Exe ferry from Starcross to Exmouth. Ferry times and any seasonal reductions must be checked before booking.
Best for planned camping	Padstow to St Ives via Newquay and St Agnes	90 km	A popular Cornwall section with a regular chain of coastal settlements, making it more practical for pre-booked campsites than the emptier remote stretches.	Campsites should be booked well ahead in peak summer. Padstow access and St Ives rail connections should be checked before travelling.

Practical section-planning notes

For a first trip, avoid choosing the hardest North Devon and North Cornwall stretches purely because they look short on the map. The path repeatedly drops to coves and river mouths before climbing back to the cliff, so a 20 km day can feel much harder than an inland walk of the same length.

Sections with rail-served endpoints, such as St Ives to Penzance or routes finishing at Exmouth or Weymouth, are usually simpler to organise than remote cliff sections. Elsewhere, buses may run along much of the coast, but services can be sparse and seasonal; this should be checked before travelling.

Ferries are part of the official route in several places, including the Camel estuary at Padstow, the Fal ferries at Falmouth, Fowey to Polruan, the Tamar/Cremyll crossing at Plymouth, Salcombe, Dartmouth, Teignmouth, the Exe crossing and the Sandbanks chain ferry at the finish. A missed or non-running ferry can force a long inland detour, so build ferry times into the walking day rather than treating them as an afterthought.

For accommodation-based section hikes, the resort and harbour-town stretches are the easiest to plan. The North Devon and North Cornwall sections around Clovelly, Hartland Quay, Bude, Boscastle and Tintagel are more committing, with fewer services between stops and steeper daily walking.

Highlights and Points of Interest

The South West Coast Path has too many worthwhile stops to treat as quick photo breaks. The places below are the main highlights that justify building in extra time, rest days or shorter walking days, especially if walking the route in sections.

Minehead, Exmoor and North Devon

Place	Why it matters	Planning note
Minehead seafront	The official start of the National Trail, marked by the sculpted hands-and-map gateway monument. National Trail acorn waymarks lead west onto North Hill.	Worth allowing time for the formal start before the first climb out of town.
Valley of Rocks, near Lynton	A dry, twisted, rock-strewn valley above the sea, known for its feral goats and dramatic early-route scenery.	A good place for a shorter day or a pause around Lynton and Lynmouth.
Great Hangman, near Combe Martin	At 318 m, this is the highest point on the entire path. Its seaward face drops roughly 244 m and is often described as the highest sea cliff on mainland Britain.	The climb is a useful early reminder that the route's difficulty comes from repeated ascent, not altitude.
Clovelly	A privately owned, traffic-free fishing village built around a single steep cobbled street falling to a tiny harbour.	One of the most distinctive villages on the North Devon coast; do not plan it as a quick level detour.
Hartland Quay and the Hartland peninsula	One of the wildest and most switchbacked stretches of the whole path, with tilted rock strata and an exposed, storm-battered coastline.	Facilities are thinner on this part of the route, so treat it as both a scenic highlight and a logistical pinch point.

The Exmoor and North Devon sections are among the most physically memorable parts of the route. The scenery is big, but the walking is also demanding: high cliffs, steep descents into coves and immediate climbs back out. This is not a section to rush simply because the villages look close together on a map.

North Cornwall: Bude to Padstow

Place	Why it matters	Planning note
Boscastle	A well-known North Cornwall coastal village on the route between Bude and Tintagel.	A natural stopping point when breaking up the harder North Cornwall coast.
Tintagel Castle	Cliff-top medieval ruins long linked with the legend of King Arthur, reached across a modern footbridge.	Allow extra time if visiting the castle rather than simply passing through Tintagel.
Port Isaac	A compact harbour village on the way towards the Camel estuary.	Accommodation and food planning should be handled in advance in busy periods.
Padstow and the Camel estuary ferry to Rock	One of the key estuary crossings on the official route.	Ferry times are part of the day's plan, not an optional detail. This should be checked before travelling.

North Cornwall is one of the classic rugged sections of the path: attractive harbour villages, steep coastal walking and fewer easy escape options than the more developed south-coast resorts. Tintagel is the headline historic stop, but the walking either side is part of the appeal.

St Ives, Zennor, Land's End and Mount's Bay

Place	Why it matters	Planning note
St Ives	One of the major towns on the west Cornwall section and a practical base for walkers.	A sensible place to pause, resupply or split stages.
Zennor	A coastal village on the exposed stretch between St Ives and Land's End.	The surrounding section is committing compared with easier resort promenades elsewhere.
Land's End	The westernmost point of mainland England and a major psychological milestone on the route.	Many walkers build a shorter day around this section to avoid rushing the landmark.
Sennen	A useful coastal stop close to Land's End.	Works well as part of a Land's End stage plan.
Porthcurno	A notable stop on the south-west Cornwall coast before the route turns towards Mount's Bay.	Worth keeping time in hand through this scenic but undulating coast.
Marazion and St Michael's Mount	St Michael's Mount is seen from the path off Marazion: a tidal island crowned by a medieval castle and church, reached by cobbled causeway at low tide or by boat at high tide.	The Mount is not on the trail line itself. Causeway and boat access depend on tide and operating arrangements; this should be checked before travelling.

This is one of the most rewarding parts of the full trail for walkers who like clear milestones. St Ives, Land's End and Mount's Bay each make strong reasons to slow down, while the coastal walking between them remains serious enough to punish over-ambitious scheduling.

The Lizard and South Cornwall harbours

Place	Why it matters	Planning note
Lizard Point	The most southerly point of mainland Britain, with serpentine rock and the historic Lizard Lighthouse.	A major landmark and a good candidate for a shorter, more flexible day.
Falmouth and the Fal estuary ferries	A key harbour town and ferry area on the official route.	Ferry links affect the route line and should be checked before travelling, especially outside summer.
Mevagissey	A South Cornwall harbour village on the route east of Falmouth.	A useful place to break up the coast between larger towns.
Fowey and Polruan	A working harbour and ferry crossing, and one of the integral estuary links on the path.	The Fowey-Polruan ferry is part of route planning; missing a ferry can mean a long inland detour.
Polperro and Looe	Characterful coastal settlements on the South Cornwall section before Plymouth.	Popular places to stop, so booking ahead is sensible in peak season.

South Cornwall mixes harbour walking with repeated estuary logistics. The scenery may feel gentler than the wildest North Devon and North Cornwall cliffs, but the route still gains and loses height constantly, and ferries can dictate the day's timing.

Plymouth to Dartmouth and the South Devon estuaries

Place	Why it matters	Planning note
Plymouth and the Cremyll/Tamar ferry	A major city on the trail and an important crossing point.	A practical resupply and transport hub, but ferry timing still matters.
Wembury	A South Devon coastal stop after Plymouth.	Marks the return to more rural coastal walking after the city.
Newton Ferrers	A village in the South Devon estuary landscape.	Useful when planning shorter South Devon stages.
Salcombe and the estuary ferry to East Portlemouth	One of the key South Devon ferry crossings on the route.	Ferry availability should be checked before committing to the day's plan.
Dartmouth and the ferry to Kingswear	A major South Devon harbour stop with another integral crossing.	A natural place for an overnight stop or rest day.

This part of the route is shaped by estuaries. The walking is not just a continuous line of clifftop path: crossings at places such as Salcombe and Dartmouth can determine where a realistic day begins and ends.

Torbay, the Exe and East Devon

Place	Why it matters	Planning note
Brixham and Torquay	Major coastal towns on the Torbay section.	Useful for accommodation, food and transport compared with more remote sections.
Teignmouth and the Teign ferry to Shaldon	A coastal town and ferry crossing on the official route.	Ferry times should be checked before travelling.
Dawlish	A coastal stop between Teignmouth and the Exe.	Useful when breaking up the walk towards Exmouth.
Exmouth and the Exe ferry from Starcross	A key crossing point before the East Devon coast.	Ferry operation is seasonal and weather-dependent in practice; this should be checked before travelling.
Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth, Beer and Seaton	A string of East Devon coastal towns and villages before Lyme Regis.	Good options for splitting the approach to the Jurassic Coast.

East Devon is a good section for walkers who want regular settlements without losing the feel of a continuous coastal trail. It also marks the transition towards the Jurassic Coast, where geology becomes one of the main reasons to slow the pace.

Jurassic Coast and Dorset landmarks

Place	Why it matters	Planning note
Lyme Regis and Charmouth	Coastal stops at the western end of the Dorset section, associated with the fossil-rich Jurassic Coast.	Allow time if fossil interest is part of the trip, but keep to safe, responsible coastal access.
The Jurassic Coast	A UNESCO World Heritage Site extending for 95 miles, with cliffs recording 185 million years of geology.	One of the richest sections for walkers interested in landscape history and coastal landforms.
Golden Cap	Famous as the highest point on England's south coast.	A major viewpoint on the Jurassic Coast section.
West Bay and Bridport	A natural break point on the Dorset coast.	Works well as an overnight stop when pacing the Lyme Regis to Weymouth section.
Abbotsbury and Chesil Beach	Part of the Dorset coast west of Weymouth, with Chesil Beach a major coastal feature.	The route here feels very different from the cliff-and-cove walking further west.
Weymouth	A major Dorset town and practical base before the Purbeck coast.	A useful place to resupply, rest or reset plans before the final demanding coastal sections.
Lulworth Cove and Durdle Door	Two of England's best-known coastal landmarks: a near-perfect circular cove and a natural limestone sea arch.	Extremely popular in season; an early start or extra time helps avoid rushing the area.
Kimmeridge	A notable stop on the Dorset coast between Lulworth and Swanage.	Useful for breaking up the Purbeck section.
Swanage	The final sizeable town before Studland and South Haven Point.	A practical last overnight stop for many walkers.
Old Harry Rocks, near Studland	Chalk sea stacks and arches marking the eastern end of the Jurassic Coast, just before the trail finish.	One of the strongest final-day highlights.
South Haven Point	The official finish at the mouth of Poole Harbour, beside the Sandbanks chain ferry slipway and marked by a large steel sculpture marker.	The Sandbanks chain ferry links the finish area to Poole; current running should be checked before travelling.

The Dorset section is not just a run-in to the finish. Lulworth Cove, Durdle Door, Kimmeridge, Old Harry Rocks and South Haven Point make the final stages among the most landmark-rich parts of the whole trail.

Wildlife, geology and landscape themes to watch for

The route's wildlife and landscape interest changes constantly: Exmoor coastal moor, remote North Devon cliffs, dunes around Braunton Burrows, Cornish granite headlands, South Devon estuaries, and the fossil-bearing cliffs of the Jurassic Coast all feel distinct underfoot.

Geology is especially prominent on the Hartland peninsula, where tilted rock strata dominate the coast, and on the Jurassic Coast, where the cliffs preserve 185 million years of geological history. The Lizard adds another distinctive landscape, with serpentine rock at the southernmost point of mainland Britain.

For wildlife interest, the Valley of Rocks is the standout named location in the route information, known for its herd of feral goats. Elsewhere, treat cliff edges, nesting areas, livestock and exposed coastal habitats with care, and follow local signs where access is managed.

Common Mistakes and Planning Tips

Mistake: treating the South West Coast Path as a flat coastal walk

The path rarely climbs high, but the cumulative ascent is the defining difficulty: about 35,031 m over the full 630 miles / 1,014 km. The repeated pattern of dropping to coves, river mouths and beaches, then climbing straight back to the cliffs, makes mileage slower than it looks on a map.

Fix: plan stages by ascent, terrain and escape options, not just distance. Be especially conservative through the switchbacked North Devon and North Cornwall sections around Clovelly, Hartland Quay, Bude, Boscastle and Tintagel, where facilities are thinner and the walking is more committing.

Mistake: confusing official stages with through-hiking days

The National Trail is commonly split into 45 shorter day-stages, while a continuous end-to-end walk usually takes around 7–8 weeks. The larger regional blocks often used in summaries are not sensible single walking days for most hikers.

Fix: build a realistic itinerary from overnight stop to overnight stop. If using the 45-stage structure, treat it as a practical framework; if creating longer days, allow for the ascent, ferry timings, accommodation availability and slower progress on muddy or exposed cliff sections.

Mistake: leaving accommodation too late

Accommodation is plentiful in many harbour towns and resorts, but it is not evenly spread. Beds and campsites are noticeably thinner on remote stretches of North Devon and North Cornwall, and popular sections in Cornwall and along the Jurassic Coast can book out in peak summer.

Fix: book key nights early, especially where there are few alternatives within walking distance. For a section hike, secure accommodation before committing to transport; for a through-hike, identify the constrained stretches first rather than booking only the obvious resort towns.

Mistake: assuming every village has food, water and shops

The route passes many towns, but there are also long exposed stretches where services are limited or absent. A village name on the map does not guarantee a shop, evening meal, open café or easy resupply.

Fix: carry enough food and water for the day, with extra margin on remote clifftop sections. Use larger service points such as Minehead, Ilfracombe, Barnstaple, Bideford, Bude, Padstow, Newquay, St Ives, Penzance, Falmouth, Plymouth, Dartmouth, Exmouth, Lyme Regis, Weymouth and Swanage as reliable planning anchors, but check current opening times before depending on smaller stops.

Mistake: not checking ferry times before setting off

Several estuary ferries are part of the official route, not optional extras. Missing a ferry can mean a long inland detour, and services may be reduced or suspended outside summer or in bad weather.

Fix: check ferry times before each affected day, not just before the trip. Key crossings include the Camel estuary at Padstow/Rock, the Fal ferries around Falmouth, Fowey–Polruan, Cremyll/Tamar at Plymouth, Salcombe, Dartmouth–Kingswear, Teignmouth–Shaldon, Starcross–Exmouth and the Sandbanks chain ferry at the finish. This should be checked before travelling.

Mistake: ignoring tides where they affect the day

Parts of the coast path are influenced by tide times, and some crossings or shore-level alternatives may not be available at all states of tide. Around Marazion, St Michael's Mount is seen from the path; its causeway is tidal and should not be treated as part of the trail line.

Fix: check tide times for any day involving beach, estuary or shore-level walking. If a route choice depends on low tide, have a safe inland or official alternative planned before leaving the overnight stop.

Mistake: relying only on acorn waymarks

The South West Coast Path is well waymarked, but waymarks do not replace navigation. Promenades, harbour streets, beaches, dunes, wooded sections and temporary diversions can all make the line less obvious.

Fix: carry mapping for the whole section being walked, plus a guidebook or map booklet if useful. The Cicerone guidebook and its three map booklets cover the full route, and official National Trail information should be checked for live diversions before relying on an old GPX file.

Mistake: underestimating weather exposure

Much of the route is open clifftop walking. Wind and rain can make grassy, muddy, rocky or stepped sections slippery and slow, even when the altitude is modest.

Fix: pack for exposed coastal conditions rather than resort walking. Waterproofs, warm layers, grippy footwear and a secure way to protect maps or electronics are important even in summer; in winter, short daylight and storms make the route a much more serious undertaking.

Mistake: planning too tightly around public transport

Public transport is good at many hubs but uneven along the coast. Main rail access is useful at places such as Exeter, Barnstaple, St Ives, Penzance, St Austell, Plymouth, Exmouth and Weymouth, but remote sections rely on sparser buses or longer transfers.

Fix: plan start and finish points around realistic transport links, especially for section hikes. Do not assume a bus will line up with the end of a long walking day; current bus and rail times should be checked before booking accommodation or committing to a section endpoint.

Mistake: forgetting the finish is not a major town centre

The trail ends at South Haven Point near Studland, beside the Sandbanks chain ferry slipway at the mouth of Poole Harbour. It is a clear official finish, but it is not the same as finishing at a mainline station or large town centre.

Fix: plan the onward journey from South Haven Point in advance. If using the Sandbanks chain ferry or onward public transport, check current operating times before the final day.

Mistake: carrying too much on a route with relentless climbing

A heavy pack is punished by the repeated descents and climbs. The total ascent over the full route is close to four times the height of Everest, and excess weight becomes a bigger problem over consecutive days.

Fix: keep kit disciplined and avoid duplicate items. If using baggage transfer, confirm which accommodation stops can receive luggage before booking; if carrying everything, prioritise waterproofing, foot care and enough food and water over luxury weight.

Mistake: choosing winter for a first end-to-end attempt

Winter brings short days, storms, muddy ground and reduced or suspended ferry services. The route remains possible in sections for experienced walkers, but logistics become much harder.

Fix: for a first long section or through-hike, aim for late spring to early autumn. Summer gives the fullest ferry timetables but also the busiest accommodation market, so the trade-off is between easier logistics and the need to book earlier.

Final Advice

The South West Coast Path is best suited to walkers who enjoy big, repetitive coastal days rather than high-mountain terrain. The walking is not technical, but the constant drop-and-climb pattern, exposed clifftops, steps, mud, wind and long stretches with few facilities make it far more demanding than its modest high point suggests.

For most hikers, the best way to approach the route is in sections. A continuous end-to-end walk is a serious 7–8 week commitment and needs strong fitness, resilient feet, a workable accommodation plan and flexibility for weather, ferries and tides. Section-walking allows the best parts of the path to be tackled in sensible blocks without forcing long days through the more remote North Devon and North Cornwall stretches.

The single most important planning task is checking crossings and onward transport before committing to each stage. Estuary ferries are part of the official route at several points, including around Padstow, Falmouth, Fowey, Plymouth, Salcombe, Dartmouth, Teignmouth, Exmouth and the Sandbanks chain ferry near the finish. Timetables can reduce or stop outside the main season and in poor weather; missing a ferry can mean a long inland detour. This should be checked before travelling.

Accommodation also needs more attention than on many UK trails. Harbour towns and resorts offer plenty of options, but beds and campsites are thinner on wilder stretches, especially in North Devon and North Cornwall. In peak summer, popular Cornwall and Jurassic Coast sections should be booked well ahead.

The reward is the sheer variety of the coastline: Exmoor cliffs, the switchbacks around Hartland, the granite headlands of West Cornwall, the Lizard, the working harbours of South Cornwall, and the chalk and limestone landmarks of Dorset. The path rarely gives easy miles for long, but it remains one of England's great long-distance walks because almost every hard climb is repaid with another headland, cove, estuary or wide Atlantic view.

Treat the official 45 stages as a planning framework, not a rulebook. Build a schedule around fitness, ferry times, accommodation availability and the weather, and keep daily distances conservative where the map shows repeated coves and steep coastal folds. With that approach, the South West Coast Path is demanding but manageable — and far more enjoyable than trying to force it into an over-ambitious itinerary.