

Food and Drink

We update this annually, however places open and close all the time, so please do share any great new finds!

The nearest pubs/bars are:

The Brotherswater Inn, 2 miles south along the main road towards the Kirkstone Pass.

The White Lion, Patterdale, one mile north along the main road.

The Travellers Rest, Glenridding, 2 miles north turn left off main road in the village centre.

The Inn on the Lake, Glenridding – As well as an a la carte restaurant, you can order bar food. This is served in the back bar and also (depending on demand) sometimes in orangery and the bar in the main hotel. The hotel is nicely decorated and a really pleasant place to be, and service cheerful and friendly. Food is average and reports have varied. Probably the best at this end of the valley and the location is lovely which makes up for a lot.

The Ullswater Inn, Glenridding – Another refurbishment by this enormous pub/hotel chain. A bit of a Wetherspoons with a higher price tag. Mixed reports.

The Brackenrigg Inn – Watermillock. About 7 miles north along Ullswater this beautifully located roadside inn with lake views and its own micro-brewery has recently been bought by the hotel “Another Place” and totally refurbished. Interior nice however several reports of disappointing food and service. See Trip Advisor for the latest.

Horse and Farrier, Dacre (017684 86022) – Lovely little village pub with good home-made pub grub in the small bar or nice restaurant room with pretty views. Mains average at £17 and has an excellent changing range of local beers on tap. The burgers get Richard’s vote and we have had good reviews of Sunday lunch too. Best to book. This is by far the best pub grub within a 25 minute drive

The Queens Head, Troutbeck – 7 miles back over Kirkstone Pass this old coaching inn was refurbished after a devastating fire about 5 years ago and is now part of the Individual Inns group. No positive reports of late with comments that service and food not what it was.

Eating Out:

We have had a variety of good reports from the following pubs/restaurants, but as with all eating places standards to vary and chef’s/managers can change, so feedback is always welcome to pass onto future guests. Please note prices quoted are from 2022, but are subject to change.

The Bistro at The Lakes Distillery, Bassenthwaite (01768 788852) – The distillery has been set up in a beautiful set of converted barns and they are making boutique whisky, gin and vodka. A 45 minute distillery tour (£15pp) provides a tasting at the end and the bistro is excellent and open all day with last booking at 4.30pm. The menu has simplified and is more café style except on Sunday when a 2 course Sunday lunch is £23 and 3 courses £28. It is a long drive so we do recommend booking which can be done online.

Dodds, Ambleside (015394 32134) – The manager, Tomas runs a buzzing Trattoria serving good stone-baked pizzas with imaginative toppings, good pasta plus a sensible number of more substantial main courses – all freshly cooked (the kitchen does not

have a microwave!). Food is served at a pace, so not for a relaxed evening but good value for money. Top tip for those with little ones, they open at lunchtime and then re-open at 5pm, so you can grab an early evening meal when small tummies are rumbling! Pizza or pasta and a dessert for under £20 or if choosing a proper main course expect to pay around £26 for 2 courses and £33 for 3.

Dog and Gun, Skelton (017684 84301) – Tiny village pub, that isn't a pub but a restaurant with fabulous food cooked by Ben-Queen Fryer. Opened in 2017 and awarded its first Michelin Star in 2022. Lovely to have a simple 3 course menu with a choice of 4 dishes per course such as Cartmel Valley Venison Suet Pudding or Sourdough encrusted Cod Loin. Delicious food at £59 per head. Need to book but being off the beaten track it is often easier to book here than others.

Doi Intanon, Market Place, Ambleside (015394 32119) – A really authentic Thai restaurant with delicious food at reasonable prices. Chris has been running this delightful restaurant since 2000 and it the best Thai restaurant around. Fresh ingredients, delicious flavourings and the menu has a chilli rating so if you don't like spicy you can chose milder dishes. A set meal for 2 is around £29 per head or you can build you own meal from the menu.

The Drunken Duck Inn (015394 36347), off the B5926 between Ambleside and Hawkshead – This is a dining pub par excellence with a truly imaginative menu that changes regularly. This is an eternal favourite and recently seems to be in every press article about The Lakes so it gets very busy so booking is advised well in advance – weekends tend to be booked weeks in advance and residents get first dibs, so try midweek. Dinner is a set menu: 2 courses for £45 for 3 for £55, however lunch is a simpler affair with a hearty main course setting you back around £20. They do Sunday lunch as well.

L'Enclume (015395 36362) Cartmel

This is for serious foodies and since obtaining its 3rd Michelin star, you will need a healthy bank balance too! However you are eating in one of top restaurants in the UK. Simon Rogan, the owner and chef is runs an incredible kitchen and much is also grown in their kitchen garden. There is just an 15 course tasting menu (£250 per head) The food is simply stunning and a real dining event that takes over 4 hours and despite the courses being small (but perfectly formed) the volume does creep up on you. A special treat and must be booked – weekend nights tend to get booked up 3 months in advance.

Forest Side, Grasmere (015394 35250) on the main A591 on the right if heading north

Andrew Wildsmith's latest venture (he also owns Hipping Hall and The Rybeck) is a triumph. He has lovingly restored a Victorian mansion to become a restaurant with rooms in an elevated position overlooking Grasmere. The attention to detail is immense, even the kitchen garden has been restored with the aim of provisioning the restaurant.! It gained a Michelin star after just 7 months and has retained it although the chef has now changed, we have had positive reports that Paul Leonard has competently taken the reins. The food is beautifully presented and delicious. Tasting menus only (with a vegetarian option) – Evening: 4 or 8 course (£85/£130) Lunch: 4 or 6 course (£55/85) They occasionally have special offers on lunch so worth checking Cumbria Life magazine for these. Our only slight criticism is that the drinks are expensive and the lunchtime 4 course menu has been described as "very small" by guests.

Fellinis, Ambleside (015394 32487) – The owners of Zeffirellis newer restaurant venture is another cinema screen (no.5!) with a more Arts based selection of films plus a “Vegeterranean” restaurant below. It is in the old Conservative Club, just down from Lucy’s, but there are no blue rinses visible in the extremely stylish interior. Food is deliciouseven for carnivores who may even not notice the lack of meat on the menu. Really reasonably priced menu with 2 courses at £24 and 3 at £32. Meal deal to include a reserved cinema seat in any screen can also be booked for £27.75.

George and Dragon, Clifton, Nr Penrith (01768 865381)

Owned by the Lowther family this nicely refurbished pub has a monthly changing menu and also a good specials board. This is wholesome pub grub with much sourced from their own gardens at Askham Hall. Charles Lowther has a herd shorthorn cattle which provides the beef, however I was recently pleasantly surprised with the vegetarian selection. Good range of local beers too. Large-ish portions so 2 courses will often suffice and would be around £25 per head.

Gilpin Lodge, Nr Bowness on Windermere (015394 88818)

This beautifully refurbished hotel set in lovely landscaped grounds between Windermere and Kendal is a true labour of love for the Cunliffe family. The best place to stay in The Lakes at the moment, and also one of the most welcoming – it really does feel like a home from home, but one with a non-minimalist interior designer at heart. Aside from the stuffed cats and ornaments, the place is immaculate and intimate with several small dining rooms which together with the friendly, relaxed service means that you don’t get the hushed tones and fussiness that some hotels apply to “fine dining”. The food is great and the main restaurant gained a Michelin star in 2016. They have added a more casual restaurant called Spice which we enjoyed – relaxed, tapas-style food in very colourful surroundings and very reasonable – around £30 per head. And new for 2023 is The Knipe Grill at The Lake House. So 3 new chefs with excellent provenance – reports please! Booking essential.

Heft, High Newton, LA11 6JH www.hefthighnewton.co.uk

Opened in August 2021 this sensitively refurbished 17th century Inn run by Kevin (ex L-Enclume and Forest Side) and Nicola Tickle has a bar serving quality beers, carefully selected wines, accompanied by seasonal small plates and snacks, many of which will provide guests with an insight into their restaurant menus and a 28 cover restaurant serving up Kevin’s unique take on modern British food using a wealth of locally reared and farmed produce in his dishes. Fixed evening menu at £95 and lunch £37 plus a proper Sunday Lunch at £33. We love their bar snacks: homemade posh soup, a cheese pasty, sausage roll have all been delicious. And their evening meal is sublime – everyone is served together so expect to roll out around 11pm) R said beer excellent too. What’s not to like? Well drag it closer and we would be holding up the bar! Michelin Star

Horse and Farrier, Dacre (017684 86022) – Lovely little village pub with good home-made pub grub in the small bar or nice restaurant room with pretty views. Mains average at £17 and has good range of local beers on tap. The burgers get Richard’s vote and we have had good reviews of Sunday lunch too. Best to book. Takes about 25 minutes to get there.

The Jumble Room, Grasmere (015394 35188) – Tucked around the back of Grasmere on the small road opposite the garden centre, this quirky (especially the loos!), brightly decorated café/restaurant serves good, home-cooked food. Excellent

wine list and good vegetarian choice, plus friendly service makes this a delightful place for lunch or dinner. Owner Chrissie is back in the kitchen and we have had good reports. Tables on the ground floor a little cramped so if you can book upstairs it is more peaceful. Closed on Monday and Tuesday.

Kysty, Ambleside (015394 33647) – same owners as The Old Stamphouse, with a more bistro-style seasonal a la carte menu that reflects the Cumbrian landscape. 3 courses in the evening around £50 ph. Less for lunch. We like it here. Open Tuesday to Saturday.

The Lake Road Kitchen, Ambleside (15394 22012) – A much acclaimed restaurant (given 10/10 by The Guardian and 5/5 by The Times) the chef had a spell at Noma in Copenhagen and this shows...the menu showcases the best meat, fish and shellfish of Northern Europe and is supplemented by local sourced and foraged ingredients. This has been our favourite place to eat in the past and we have enjoyed every plate of food set before us. The chef and owner, James Cross's attention to detail is simply amazing and his passion is clear to see. A typical meal included quail, a delicate and stunningly presented vegetable broth, cod with a rich "ragu-style" sauce, pork with super crackling and an elderflower custard with Yorkshire rhubarb and crunchy crumble bits. This description does not do it justice – just go and enjoy this relaxed tiny restaurant with its scandi – Hygge vibe. Open Wed – Sun and you must book, it only seats about 24. 8/12 course tasting menus £95/145. Booking essential. Michelin Star awarded Feb 2024.

Lamplighter's Dining Rooms, Windermere (015394 43547) – Visited and praised by restaurant critic Jay Rayner in 2014, this family run guest house with bar and dining room is famous for its Sunday lunch where, if you book 48 hours in advance, you can elect what you would like roasted for your table. However don't let this put you off if you are not a carnivore. Lots of local sourcing, great fish (they have a catch of the day which was simply and perfectly cooked with butter), delicious chips and warm and friendly service. We haven't eaten here for a while however its prices are still reasonable and the menu full of old favourites with a local flavour - our only criticism is the dining room felt like it was part of a guesthouse and lacked ambience – but we forgave it quickly when the food arrived!

The Old Stamp House Restaurant, Ambleside (015394 32775)

Opened in February 2014 by award winning chef Ryan Blackburn, Ryan has held a Michelin Star since 2019. Focussing on local sourcing, his food is imaginative, beautifully presented and delicious. The small basement restaurant has recently been enlarged. They offer a tasting menu at lunch and dinner at £55 and £95. Must book.

The Punchbowl at Crosthwaite (015395 68237) – A bit of a trek but if you are heading to Blackwell or Cartmel or indeed going due west out of Kendal, it is worth the visit. The menu is excellent with old favourites like cheese soufflé and duck à l'orange followed by an excellent lemon tart with damson sorbet. Service is friendly, although when very busy it can struggle, but it is a lovely place to wait and the tables on the terrace nice for sipping a glass of their lovely pink fizz. Around £48 per head for 3 courses.

Rogan and Co. Cartmel (015395 35917), The Square, Cartmel – Simon Rogan's relaxed bistro is in the heart of pretty Cartmel and well worth the drive. Also with a Michelin star the food has a whiff of the L'Enclume style but without the price tag or (hurrah!) tasting menu. A simple a la carte offering a choice of around 5 dishes per course, Richard and I loved our meal here in Feb 2023 and came away very full after

4 courses with intermediary nibbles and lovely bread (£79/head for dinner) and would definitely return. Service was relaxed, warm and friendly, wine list interesting plus good local beers. Book!

The Wheatsheaf, Brigsteer (015395 68938) – A bit tricky to find tucked away in the heart of this rather rambling south lakes village, but worth the pursuit. In the same group as The Mason's Arms (and now the Queens Head at Troutbeck). Good quality pub grub and a delightful interior. It is worth booking – we have turned up on spec and not got a table (when the pub clearly wasn't full). Good local sourcing and a great family menu – the pizzas are homemade, sausages from Higginsons (a super butcher in Grange-over-Sands) and there are always good specials too. With most mains around £15 – you can get a 3-course meal for well under £30....if you can eat it...portions are generous 😊.

The Yan, Broadrayne, Grasmere (015394 35055) – Cumbrian sheep counting dialect for "The One", The Yan is an excellent new bistro run on a family farm just outside of Grasmere. The menu is inspired by the farm's history with nostalgic bistro classics given a Cumbrian twist: Coq au Yan and Shepherd's pie made with local Herdwick lamb are two favourites. Great sticky toffee pudding too. All homemade and delicious. One of our firm favourites for the food, ambience, interior design and the staff. A truly wonderful counterpoint to tasting menu complexity! Around £30 for 2 courses.

Zeffirellis, Ambleside (015394 31771) – The local independent cinema in Ambleside is not to be overlooked, it has one of the first digital projectors in the country and an excellent vegetarian pizzeria in the extremely stylish ground floor/basement area. This is a firm favourite with us. Why not book a meal deal where for around £25.75 you can enjoy a two-course meal followed by a reserved cinema seat in one of the five screens (three are in the converted school down the road.)

Other suggestions:

We have read or had reasonable reviews on the following as well:
The Coniston Steam Bistro – Simple unlicensed bistro getting great reviews.
The Hare and Hounds at Levens – Great pizzas, burgers, beer and wine.
Worth a detour especially if visiting Leven's Hall.
The Mason's Arms, Strawberry Bank (south Lakes) – was great, then Covid and it went a bit wrong but now hearing good things.

Cafes: OK, So we like cake! If you do as well here are some more suggestions!

Force Café – Ambleside – Opened in summer 2023 and has become our firm favourite. A 10 minute walk up the road alongside Stockhyll Falls in Ambleside and you will be delighted that you made the climb. Soups are fab, burgers brilliant, coffee excellent in a contemporary light-filled room with views and an enormous terrace. Does Sunday lunch too (need to book). Great local sourcing policy and everything cooked fresh. Go!

The Bluebird café – Coniston – lovely modern building on shores of the lake.

Bassenthwaite Lake Station – lunch on an Art Deco style railway carriage at the old station between Kewick and Cockermouth. Sound fun? Our guests have given it great reports and you can book for afternoon tea as well.

The Terrace Café, Brantwood, Coniston – on the opposite shores of the lake to the above with gorgeous views across the lake to The Old Man, this newly refurbished café is double its former size and serves good food.

Chester's – Skelwith Bridge – Now gone self-service and lost its mojo. We would not go back and only list it here to ensure that you don't go and be as disappointed as we were!

Treeby and Bolton – Keswick – nice café under the shop.

Whinlatter Forest Visitors Centre – Whinlatter – simple caff but good cake.

Blackwell – the Arts and Crafts House near Windermere – posh, restrained cakes and light lunches, food a bit disappointing but a lovely place for a coffee.

The Windermere Jetty Museum – Probably the best sited café in the Lakes being on the shore of Windermere looking North up the Lake. Simple menu and food and we like it. Great place for coffee, cake and a chat on a rainy day. Museum worth a visit too.

Levens Hall Café – This super new building opened about 3 years ago and has great food (brunch, salads, wood-fired pizzas, and more substantial dishes). Cakes by Ginger Bakers of Kendal. All good and with our favourite gardens a few steps away this makes the perfect day out.

Askham Hall Café – Askham near Penrith – for wood fired pizzas

Force, Ambleside – new venture on the way to the waterfalls. Not been yet but heard good things.

Lakeland – above the shop in Windermere, a haven for husbands everywhere.

Lingholm Kitchen Portinscale – lovely walled garden, walks down to the shores of Derwentwater and great food with an in-house bakery. Gets busy in the summer but worth a trip

Marra – Kendal – lovely little café and great for lunch. Great homemade pizzas and snacks. Log fires in the winter.

Homeground – Windermere, near Sainsburys – good reports from several guests about this stylish little café.

Baba Ganoush – Kendal – either the canteen or the café, both serve excellent, imaginative food. Worth finding down a side alley near Nationwide Building Society..

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