

# England's unknown charms

For the language travel student, England's Midlands and north may seem like uncharted territory. However, those who choose to venture away from the south coast or London will find a warm welcome waiting for them, as AMY BAKER finds out.

The history, geography and economy of the region will be largely closed books to our students," says Alison Blythe at Students International in Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. "Indeed, most of our students come with little or no knowledge of the local area at all beyond the pre-course information we have sent them."

Tim Melling at English Language in the Lakes in Rydal, Cumbria – which is much further north of Leicestershire – makes a similar point about international students' knowledge of his local area. "The Lake District is a popular tourist destination.

Within a small area there are the highest mountains and deepest lakes in the country, yet it is surprisingly undiscovered by language students."

Such points are echoed by many other education providers located in England's north or Midlands, emphasising that there is a real journey of discovery

awaiting visitors to the region, which encompasses a wide variety of cities, towns and countryside, including some of the best known areas of natural beauty in England.

James Rogers at Severn Vale Academy in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, makes another point about the benefits awaiting students who want to discover a new part of the country. "This is the 'real England' – friendly and welcoming," he says. "[Shrewsbury] is a small, friendly school with very high academic standards, situated in a beautiful, historical town, but without too many foreign visitors."

At English in Chester, directly north of Shrewsbury, Richard Day agrees that students appreciate the fact that there are few foreign residents in the city. "Students like being away from the main concentrations of overseas students in the UK," he says, adding that Chester boasts "northern hospital-

ity, a cheaper cost of living and lots to see and do".



**The Rows, Chester**  
Chester's unique two-level shopping streets provide a convenient sheltered promenade along the four ancient streets fanning out from the High Cross, which marks the city centre

## Agent viewpoint



"We recommend schools in Scotland, Newcastle, Scarborough, Harrogate, the Lake District and Cheltenham. I originally come from the North and

I believe (and have experienced) that these schools tend to have a more personal touch, they really look after their students and don't just see them as a statistic. In general, there are very few German speakers in the schools in these areas, which is very important to most of our clients. We recommend York [for example] because it's a very 'English' city with a wealth of historical

heritage. It's also very beautiful, clean and safe. There's something for everyone. Students can visit the many museums like Jorvik [Viking Centre] and other places of historical interest like the Minster or go to the races. The shopping is also very good with many quaint streets full of all kinds of shops. My clients assure me that the nightlife is also very lively, and for the energetic, the surrounding countryside is magnificent for walking, biking, hiking etc."

**Shirley Beck, Castle's Language Institute, Liechtenstein**



"We recommend Chester first of all for the quality of the school. But definitely also for the charm of Chester as a genuine British destination that is

unknown to most foreigners. English in Chester has a mix of different activities that it offers. There are lots of things to do but it varies a lot because we have students of all ages there. Many of our students also take the opportunity to see Wales, Manchester and Liverpool. We also work with very good schools in Manchester and Newcastle where our students are very happy. The north of England

*View of Loughrigg fell near the local town of Ambleside in the Lake District (main picture)*



To the north of Shrewsbury and Chester lies Manchester, considered by many to be England's "second city". Frances Corley, at Manchester Academy of English, maintains that more students are realising the appeal of choosing a "different" study destination. "Having always had to compete against the south of England, we find that now students and agents are looking for different [language travel] destinations where they can lead 'English lives' and have contact with English people," she says.

Manchester is famous around the world for its football team, Manchester United, and Corley testifies, "Particularly in the aftermath of the World

Cup and Beckham mania, many students chose to come to our school because of [football]." She says the school has responded to this new market of keen footballers, "and now has its own football team, Manchester Academy International".

As well as playing football, students in Manchester can take advantage of great

cultural facilities, enjoy its contemporary urban architecture and sample the vibrant music and club scene. "Manchester is renowned for having some of the best nightlife in the UK and some of our students love to sample what's on offer," says Corley. "The

city has produced some of the most innovative music in the last 30 years and the city's craving for music is reflected in the raft of gigs, club nights, concerts and events [held] throughout the year."

Another popular city with British students is Leeds, which is the fastest growing city in Britain.

"Although Leeds has a population of around 750,000, it is a compact city with a fascinating blend of old and new," says Julie Lewis, Marketing Officer at the University of Leeds' Language Centre. She explains that, "Leeds was voted Britain's number-one tourist destination in a recent travel magazine poll, largely due to its excellent shops,

nightlife and friendly people". Students at the language centre can access all the services at the university and also join some of the 150 clubs and societies available for different interest or nationality groups.

Birmingham is another central city that attracts many British students. It is also the second largest city after London, and home to a significantly cosmopolitan population. "Birmingham [offers] the cultural highlights of the Sir Simon Rattle's Symphony Hall,

the Birmingham Royal Ballet at the new Hippodrome and the Pre-Raphaelites at the City Art Collection," states Michael Boyd at Berlitz Manchester.

A smaller-scale destination in the Midlands is Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire, in the east Midlands. Only 22

miles from East Midlands Airport, the market town is home to Students International, which accepts mainly academic students who intend to enter the mainstream school system in the UK, according to Blythe. "Students seem to enjoy the experience of visiting new places and learning about the UK through visits," she says. The school offers trips to York, Warwick, London, Oxford and local sites of historical interest. "Melton Mowbray itself has a number of these," she adds.

York is a famous historic city, one of the oldest in the UK. Until the industrial revolution, when canal-based transportation transformed many cities in central England into busy urban hubs, York was the largest city outside of London. York was once home to York Castle, one of two castles established by William the Conqueror, and is still home to York Minster, the largest Gothic building in the UK, religious home to the Archbishop of York and adorned with impressive stained glass windows.

"Students might not know that York is one of the oldest and safest cities in the UK and it has an excellent shopping centre in the heart of the city. It also has a very international flavour with plenty of bars, restaurants and cafés," says Alison Watson, Director of Studies at the English Language Centre in York. She relates that as well as going out to clubs and pubs, students take part in sporting events and go to the cinema



**York Minster**  
Europe's largest medieval cathedral, York Minster is made up of the remains of seven previous buildings and is most famous for its stained glass – particularly in the Great East window



a very professionally-run language school with a very friendly atmosphere. There is something for everyone within minutes from the centre: theatre, opera house, cinema, museums, river boat trips, ghost walks, street performers, restaurants, pubs, cafés and a sports centre. There is plenty of varied countryside within a two-hour radius by car: the coast, the Dales, the Lake District, quaint villages, market towns and large cosmopolitan cities such as Leeds and Manchester."

**Louise Vester, Englischservice, Germany**

and the Midlands are less explored and known to us and therefore more genuinely British. Our students find it easier to get to know people there as well. We have a lot of long-term students who enjoy these kind of destinations."

**Johan Stenhammer, Sprakpunkten, Sweden**

"We recommend York as a destination to clients because it is a beautiful historical city with a character and flair of its own. All the clients we have recommended York to have thoroughly enjoyed the experience thanks to the ELC, which is

in their free time. “Students choose to come and study with us because we are a small, friendly, family-run school in the very heart of York,” she adds.

In terms of going out, Newcastle in the north has an unrivalled reputation for having a young “up for it” population that goes out in all weathers for all occasions. It is also earning a reputation as the short-break capital for British people looking to spend a weekend away. The new contemporary arts centre, the Baltic, and a famous sculpture – Angel of the North by Antony Gormley – are two reasons for its newfound popularity, as well, of course, as the infamous nightlife and friendly locals, the “Geordies”.

“Newcastle is known as a welcoming, reasonably priced city and has a large student population,” says Ian McArdle at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne’s Language Centre. “It has a reputation for knowing how to enjoy itself and there is a vast number of bars and nightclubs.” He

*“[We taught] a group of Icelandic housewives who, on first sight, appeared very serious and unsportsmanlike. However, at the end of their stay, they all bought very expensive hats and new dresses – of the type one would wear to the races – and off they went for a meal at Betty’s tearooms and ended up line dancing at the local working men’s club!”*

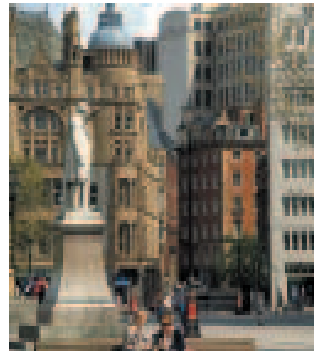
**Alison Watson, The English Language Centre, York**

adds, “It is an old city with a distinctive character.” The university’s social programme ensures that students get to know the city and the surrounding county, Northumbria. In the city, activities organised include “visits to the local BBC TV station, the Newcastle Breweries, a police station and a theatre”, says McArdle.

For students who want a more laid-back study experience, the Lake District, which is a national park with amazing scenic views and walking opportunities among its lakes and mountains, offers a serene, relaxed way of life. David Barry, of Languagegate in Ulverston, Cumbria, teaches business people and uses his contacts with local businesses. He re-

lates, “Most students arrive in the evening and therefore when they wake up in the morning they are faced with the view of the Cumbrian mountains – on a December day, they are crystal clear!”

Even in a rural location such as Cumbria, there are good opportunities to get to know local people. Barry says, “We encourage students to take part in the local weekly evening quiz game that has been attended by more than a few directors [of local companies].” Melling at English Language in the Lakes also recounts a funny tale that indicates how students get involved in the local community. “There was a local village cricket tournament, in fancy dress, and my daughters disowned us when the school minibus arrived and our team strode onto the pitch wearing an exotic collection of dresses, scarves and hats,” he says. “We lost, but got first prize for costumes!” □



**Albert Square, Manchester**  
Dominating Albert Square, which contains a memorial to Prince Albert, is Manchester’s town hall, an enormous Victorian Gothic building complete with a 280 foot high clock tower