

Explore

Canals

in South Northamptonshire



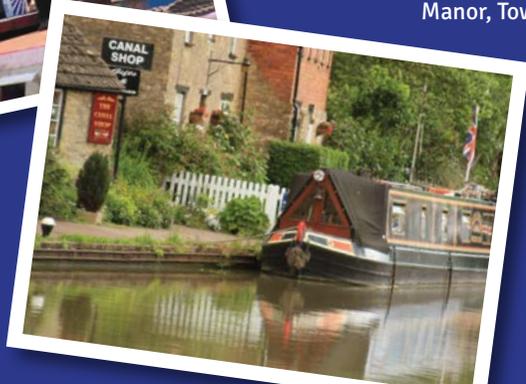
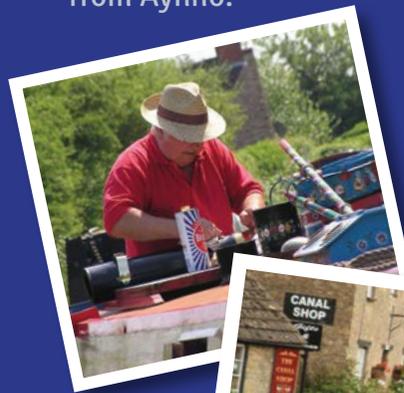
Welcome to the Canals of South Northamptonshire

Approximately seventeen and a half miles of the Grand Union Canal winds its way through South Northamptonshire, from the Iron Trunk Aqueduct at Cosgrove up to Stowe Hill bridge on the A5 near Nether Heyford. A short stretch of the 77-mile Oxford Canal, which goes from Oxford to Coventry, also slips into South Northamptonshire, approximately one mile from Aynho.

Although originally associated with the industrial revolution, today the local canal network is a tranquil haven from which to enjoy the unspoilt countryside. Many pretty canal villages sit alongside the Grand Union where you will find welcoming pubs, restaurants and shops, as well as interesting historic features such as the Iron Trunk Aqueduct, Ornamental Bridge and horse tunnel at Cosgrove, the Canal Museum and flight of locks at Stoke Bruerne and the Blisworth Tunnel.

If you spend even a short time along the banks of the canal you'll no doubt end up in conversation with one of the many people who are holidaying on, or who live or work on the water. Delightful flower and herb gardens adorn the brightly painted boats and you'll encounter plenty of friendly dogs – and even cats – who like to watch the world go by from their floating vantage points.

If you have time, combine your trip with a visit to one of the area's lovely attractions, such as Castle Ashby Gardens, Evenley Wood Gardens, Salcey Forest, Silverstone Circuit, Stoke Park Pavilions, Sulgrave Manor, Towcester Racecourse and the pretty market towns of Brackley and Towcester.





History of the Grand Union Canal

The demand for quicker and cheaper means of transport caused by the Industrial Revolution and the poor state of roads between London and the Midlands, led to the passing of an Act of Parliament in 1793, authorising the building of the Grand Junction Canal between Braunston and Brentford.

The existing route via the Oxford Canal and River Thames was long, narrow in parts and difficult to navigate. The same year, a group of businessmen and investors, including local landowners the Marquis of Buckingham of Stowe, The Duke of Grafton, Earl Spencer of Althorp and the Hon. Edward Bouverie, devised a plan that would cut the route by 60 miles. Setting up the Grand Junction Canal Company, they hired Banbury surveyor, James Barnes and civil engineer, William Jessop. Over 3,000 men were employed along the route.

Opening in 1805, the Grand Junction Canal became one of the busiest arterial canals in the country. However, the opening of the London and Birmingham Railway in 1838 initiated a slow decline as canals struggled against the competition.

Constructed by different companies, the region's canals were of different sizes and

standards. To overcome this, in the 1930s, a number of canal companies amalgamated with the Grand Junction Canal Company to form the Grand Union Canal Company. This would form a continuous route, linking London with Birmingham and the rest of the country. A modernising programme saw improvements to boats, locks and bridges and with increased capacity, the canal provided vital support carrying supplies during the Second World War. However with the arrival of the motorway network, canal freight declined.

As part of the programme to nationalise transport, ownership of the Grand Union Canal (with most of the rest of the canal network) passed to the British Transport Commission in 1948 and in 1963 to the new British Waterways (now The Canal & River Trust).

The Grand Union Canal has always remained open. Today it is one of South Northamptonshire's most popular attractions, for its heritage, boating, walking, fishing and wildlife. In 1993, the 145-mile Grand Union walk opened creating a continuous route from Little Venice in London to Gas Street in Birmingham.



Canalside activities

CYCLING AND FISHING

You can cycle along much of the towpath. Fishing is allowed with a rod licence on nearly the entire length of the canal through angling clubs. Fish include roach, perch and bream, chub, pike and carp. Certain restrictions apply to both cycling and fishing. Please check with The Canal & River Trust for details.

WILDLIFE

Whether you're walking or boating along the canal, or visiting one of the four nature reserves, some of the things you're likely to encounter are swans, ducks, geese, grey heron, wild birds, rabbits and hares, deer and foxes. You'll also see lots of insects and wildflowers.

MILL CROOK AND GRAFTON REGIS MEADOW

These are the last fragments of traditionally managed hay meadows in this part of the Tove Valley. They still show evidence of medieval ridge and furrow farming. In the summer, they are full of wild flowers and grasses - saxifrage, meadowsweet, bog stitchwort, meadow vetchling, great burnet, quaking-grass, meadow foxtail and yellow rattle, an indicator species of old grassland. Insects and birds include orange-tip and meadow brown butterflies and five-spot burnet moths, kingfishers, curlews, lapwings, long-tailed tits, bullfinches, yellowhammers and wrens. Grafton Regis Meadow is accessible via the Grand Union Canal walk. For access to Mill Crook, contact 01604 405 285.

STOKE BRUERNE BRICK PITS NATURE RESERVE

Created in the late 18th century, the area is now home to a reed bed, grassland, ponds and a redundant side arm of the canal. It is an important habitat for a variety of plant life, invertebrates and dragonfly species, including the white-legged damselfly. The grassland is good for small mammals, making it an ideal feeding ground for barn owls. Other fauna and flora includes field voles, red foxes, grass snakes, frogs and toads, great crested newts, orange tip and ringlet butterfly, redwing, fieldfare, reed warbler, sedge warbler, reed bunting, marsh-marigold, water mint and water forget-me-not.

These nature reserves are managed by The Wildlife Trusts for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire www.wildlifebcn.org.

THE QUARRIES, COSGROVE

Formerly a medieval limestone quarry, this haven of wildlife has lots of limestone-loving plants, including the spotted cat's ear and fragrant orchid. You might also see ground beetle, skylarks and barn owls.

Do you enjoy Gongoozling?

If you find yourself leaning over a bridge, or standing by a lock watching the boats go by, don't be surprised if someone calls you a Gongoozler - old canal slang to describe people who stood idly by on the towpath!



Canal services

MARINAS

BLISWORTH MARINA, GAYTON JUNCTION

A traditional and attractive marina that offers private and temporary moorings. 01604 879 827, www.blisworthmarina.co.uk

GAYTON MARINA, BETWEEN GAYTON AND BLISWORTH

A large marina offering holiday boat hire, private moorings, full boatyard facilities and a shop. 01604 858 685, www.gaytonmarina.com

NETHER HEYFORD FIELDS MARINA

Strictly long term, private moorings. 07902 216 870, www.heyfordfieldsmarina.co.uk

THRUPP WHARF MARINA, NEAR COSGROVE

A family run marina with 60 private moorings situated next to the Navigation Inn at Bridge 64 overlooking the countryside. 01908 542 113, www.thruppwharfmarina.com

OTHER SERVICES

WALKER SERVICES, NEAR AYNHO

Offers moorings, boatyard services, chandlery and narrowboat repairs. The shop sells basic food provisions, gifts, supplies and ice creams. 01869 338 483, www.walker-services.co.uk

MILL WHARF BOAT COMPANY AND BLISWORTH TUNNEL NARROWBOATS, BLISWORTH

Run by the same family, the two companies are situated next to bridge 51 in Blisworth. The Mill Wharf Boat Company offers a boat building service. Blisworth Tunnel Narrowboats offers boat yard services, repairs and day boat hire. 01604 858 868, www.millwharfboats.co.uk

THE NEW & USED BOAT CO, BLISWORTH MARINA

Specialises in new and used boat sales. 01604 859 376, www.newandusedboat.co.uk

COSGROVE LAKESIDE STORE, COSGROVE LEISURE PARK

Situated a few minutes' walk from the canal, the shop sells general supplies and gas. It is open seven days a week, 1 April to 31 October. 01908 565 797

GRAND JUNCTION BOAT COMPANY

Situated on the Blisworth Arm. Boat repairs and servicing. 01604 858 043, www.narrowboat-repairs-northampton.co.uk

BOAT TRIPS AND BOAT HIRE

BLISWORTH TUNNEL NARROWBOATS

Day boat hire is available on one of two 30-foot day boats. 01604 858 868, www.millwharfboats.co.uk

COSGROVE NARROWBOAT COMPANY

Private charter, public trips and day boat hire on narrowboats, Elizabeth of Glamis and Skylark. Public trips from Easter to October between Cosgrove and Northampton and Cosgrove and Milton Keynes. 01525 372 853, www.cosgrovenarrowboats.co.uk

INDIAN CHIEF, STOKE BRUERNE

Public and private charter cruises from Stoke Bruerne along the canal and through the Blisworth Tunnel on the luxury narrowboat, Indian Chief. 01604 862 428, www.boatinn.co.uk

STOKE BRUERNE BOAT COMPANY

Return trips from the Canal Museum to the Blisworth tunnel on narrowboat Charlie, on weekends and school holidays from Easter to October. Longer trips through the tunnel to Blisworth Village available for private charter. 07966 503 609, www.stokebruerneboats.co.uk

EATING AND DRINKING

There are many lovely places to eat and drink within easy walking or driving distance of the canals. For full details, see South Northamptonshire Council's food and drink guide, *A Taste For All Seasons*, available to download at www.southnorthants.org.uk, or to pick up in local restaurants, pubs and cafés.

AYNHO WHARF

Great Western Arms, 01869 338 288, www.great-westernarms.co.uk

AYNHO

Cartwright Hotel and Restaurant, 01869 811 885, www.cartwright-hotel.co.uk

BLISWORTH

Royal Oak, 01604 857 676, www.blisworthroyaloak.co.uk
The Walnut Tree, 01604 859 551, www.walnut-tree.co.uk

BUGBROOKE

The Wharf, 01604 832 585, www.the-wharf.co.uk

COSGROVE

Navigation Inn at Thrupp Wharf, 01908 543 156, www.navigationinn.net
Barley Mow, 01908 562 957, www.thebarleymowcosgrove.co.uk

NETHER HEYFORD

Foresters Arms, 01327 340 622

STOKE BRUERNE

The Boat Inn, 01604 862 428, www.boatinn.co.uk
Spice of Bruerne, 01604 863 330, www.spiceofbruerne.com
The Navigation, 01604 864 988, www.navigationpubtowcester.co.uk

WEEDON

The Narrow Boat, 01327 340 333, www.narrowboatatweedon.co.uk





Special Events

BLISWORTH CANAL FESTIVAL

Spread along the canal and in seven nearby villages, this free family event is the largest canal festival in Northamptonshire. Raising money for canal side projects it has over 100 stands and canal boats selling a range of items, including crafts, cheese, fudge, jewellery, gifts, books and sweets. There are boat trips, a blacksmith demonstration, pony rides, live music, free walks and talks, art gallery and laser shooting arena.

Held in August

www.blisworthcanalfestival.co.uk

GRAFTON REGIS HISTORY FAYRE

Featuring re-enactments of dark age and medieval battles, with living history tents, historical characters such as Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, stalls and lots to eat and drink. Held in July. www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

STOKE BRUERNE CANAL MUSEUM

Just some of the many events held each year are the **Gala Weekend** in June, **Pirate Weekend** in August, **Village at War** in September and an **Illuminated Boat Procession and Carols** in December. www.friendsofcanalmuseum.org.uk

For further information about things to see and do in South Northamptonshire, go to www.southnorthants.gov.uk/tourism and for details about the canal network, contact the Canal & River Trust, www.canalrivertrust.org.uk.

This guide has been produced by South Northamptonshire Council (SNC) as one of a number of initiatives to encourage tourism in the district, with the active participation of the businesses mentioned. Every care has been taken by SNC to ensure that all the information contained is accurate and up to date at the time of printing and that all relevant establishments have been included. No responsibility or liability can be taken by the Council for any errors or omissions, or for any inconvenience caused after the guide has gone to press.

Please send comments, corrections, or recommendations for other businesses that might be suitable to include in a future edition of this guide to: Strategic Planning and the Economy, South Northamptonshire Council, The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester, Northamptonshire, NN12 6AD, tourism@southnorthants.gov.uk
www.southnorthants.gov.uk

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