# Welcoming car-free visitors to the Cotswolds

## A toolkit for tourism businesses

Gain visitors
Cut carbon
Widen access
Ease traffic
Boost sustainability

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good journey

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# Let's get started...

**Welcoming car-free visitors to the Cotswolds is good for business, people and planet. You can attract new audiences while cutting carbon and traffic. And you can open up to the 22% of UK households without a car. It's great to have you on board.**

This toolkit is packed with practical tips, ideas and case studies. So, grab a pen and a cuppa, and mark how many you could do in the short, medium and longer term.

# 5 simple steps to take right now

**1.** Choose someone to lead on green travel and get buy-in from managers and staff (if you're a small business, this may all be you!).

**2.** Upgrade your travel info, online and onsite (see overleaf for our handy guide).

**3.** Link to your webpage on Good Journey to give visitors step-by-step car-free directions and a journey planner.

**4.** Confirm how you'll track car-free visitors.

**5.** Plan how to promote green travel options and your car-free reward throughout the year.

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**Let's chat! No matter what size your business, we can help you with any aspect of green visitor travel. Email us at: hello@goodjourney.org.uk**

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# 5 ways to improve your car-free travel information

**Clear information on how to reach you without a car is key to influencing behaviour change. Follow our five steps to help car-free visitors have a good journey.**

1. **Add a prominent car-free message to the top of your 'Getting Here' webpage.** Highlight your car-free reward. Link to your Good Journey webpage for bespoke car-free travel directions and a door-to-door journey planner:

> *Travel a greener way and enjoy 30% off entry. Plan your journey by train, bus, bike or foot at Good Journey. We hold the Good Journey Mark for welcoming car-free visitors.*

2. **Update your travel information for arriving by train, bus, bike and foot to bring it in line with your Good Journey webpage.** Ensure the information is clear and accurate.

3. **Feature green travel messaging across your website:**
   - on the homepage
   - in the footer (add the Good Journey Mark)
   - as part of booking and discount information
   - on sustainability pages
   - in blogs/news stories.

This encourages more people to consider green travel options and shows your commitment to sustainability.

4. **Highlight green travel across your channels,** including on social media, in emails, and with onsite signage.

5. **Use this checklist to add the following to your Getting Here webpage:**

- [ ] An eye-catching message and link at the top of the page
- [ ] An appealing discount for car-free visitors
- [ ] Public transport directions given before car directions
- [ ] Positive words to describe car-free travel, such as: *easy, scenic, fun, ride, stroll*
- [ ] The **Good Journey Mark**.

Promote the short URL in print and online: **goodjourney.org.uk/yourattraction**

# Marketing tips

**There are over 16 million day-trips to the Cotswolds every year. Marketing is key to widening travel choices. Follow these tips to promote car-free days out and holidays.**

- [ ] **Offer an appealing car-free discount or reward.** It might be a big leap for people to come car-free, so give them a good incentive. Remember, half-price entry or 2for1 brings new visitors and increased shop or café spend.

- [ ] **Display the Good Journey Mark.** Put up stickers in your reception, shop and café. Add the logo to your newsletter, magazine, leaflets and website.

- [ ] **Be positive about green travel in your marketing messaging:** *It's an easy 20-minute stroll.* **Say why you value car-free visitors:** *Help us preserve this special landscape.*

- [ ] **Include green travel information in your main leaflet,** e.g. *It's easy to reach us by train, bus, bike or foot. Plan your car-free visit at:* ***goodjourney.org.uk/yourattraction***

- [ ] **Add your car-free offer to your Google My Business profile, tourism websites and TripAdvisor.**

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- [ ] **Promote your car-free offer in news stories and on social media.** Tag your local train companies as they have big audiences. Use key dates such as Earth Day (April), Bike Week (June) and Catch the Bus Month (September) to raise awareness. Find our calendar of key dates at **bit.ly/GJdates2025**

Tag us in your social posts so we can support you: **@goodjourneyuk**

- [ ] **Connect with tourism partners,** including Cotswolds Tourism. Share your car-free offer with hotels, holiday homes and campsites along bus, train and cycle routes. Team up with a tour provider to be part of their itinerary.

- [ ] **Work with your local bus and train companies to promote car-free visits.** Ask to feature on their 'destinations' or 'days out' webpages. Advertise on posters and screens onboard and at stations. Add messages to timetables, leaflets and websites.

If you need support to connect with train and bus companies, the Destination Marketing Organisation or Local Visitor Economy Partnership, just let us know.

- [ ] **Brief your staff or volunteers,** so they can answer visitor questions on bus timetables, walking routes or bike racks.

- [ ] **Track progress.** Track the number of car-free visitors by logging everyone who claims the reward. This could be through website bookings, a button on a till, or a simple logbook. Make sure front of house staff are on the case. Use data and targets to demonstrate progress to managers and funders, and to plan improvements. A new bike rack this year? A new cycle path in five years?

# How to give a warm welcome onsite

**Prominent cycle racks, well-signed bus stops and green travel posters will send a positive message to all your visitors, staff and volunteers. People arriving by car might come car-free in the future, or tell friends about your offer.**

☐ **Share your offer and flag travel info on posters in reception/café/loos, or on table talkers:**

*Visit us car-free for a green and healthy day out. Enjoy a free drink when you arrive by train, bus or bike. Get door-to-door directions at* ***goodjourney.org.uk/yourattraction***

☐ **Add a sign by your car-park ticket machines or on orientation boards:**

*Next time visit car-free and get 20% off entry – ask at reception or see* ***goodjourney.org.uk/yourattraction***

☐ **Help visitor-facing staff and volunteers to be positive about car-free travel.** Promote existing services with a glass-half-full mentality and have bus times, taxi numbers and a map showing bus stops and cycle parking to hand.

**Do say:** *There's a bus here every morning and we're just a short walk from the bus stop.*

**Don't say:** *There's only one bus and it doesn't stop here.*

☐ **Make a poster of bus times to the nearest station/ town** and display at reception and by the exit. People might consider the bus for their next visit.

☐ **Add welcome signs for walkers and cyclists at entrances, signing the way:**

**Member tip:** RHS Garden Wisley promote their shuttle bus and 30% off at key places across their site – both inside and outside.

# How Blenheim Palace got 25,000 more car-free visitors in just 2 years

**Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire go big on promotion of their car-free offer – and the results speak for themselves.**

### Prominent messaging

Blenheim have prominent green travel messages across their website. Up to 500 people a week use their Good Journey page to plan journeys there. They also highlight green travel options in print marketing.

### Green travel discount

Visitors enjoy a 20% discount when they arrive at Blenheim by train, bus or bike – a saving of over £8 per adult. Discount tickets are booked in advance via the website, with proof of travel shown on arrival.

### Connecting the last mile

Blenheim have run a free shuttle bus from the local train station at Hanborough to connect up the last mile for train passengers. The bus has run at weekends and school holidays during the summer and brought in new visitors.

### Staff on board

All staff are involved from the CEO to Front of House. Staff have even been incentivised to come car-free – with their postcodes mapped to available public transport options. They calculated potential carbon savings of around 32,000kg of carbon. Those staff who could easily make greener journeys can join a points and rewards system, earning themselves free pizza!

### Strong results lead to an ambitious target

Car-free visitors went up from 5,000 to over 30,000 in just two years – an increase of over 500%. Blenheim have now set ambitious targets to cut more carbon.

# Boosting bus & train travel

**Do you know local bus and train routes? Or where your visitors typically travel from? These questions are key to choosing which routes to promote and where to aim for tweaks.**

- [ ] **Get to know services and stops.** Ask staff or volunteers who use the bus or train, or try the journeys yourself.

> Promote what you do have. Less frequent buses could just mean a more leisurely visit to your site.

- [ ] **Help visitors find their way to you.** Ask your local bus operator/local authority (it varies who is responsible) for permission to add a sign to your nearest bus stop poles, e.g. "Alight here for Badgerland".

> Vinyl graphics or 'gateway' signs on bus shelters welcome visitors and are good marketing tools.

- [ ] If your local trains/buses have automated stop announcements or displays onboard, ask to have "Alight here for..." added to the system.

- [ ] **Help visitors find their way back.** Make sure it's clear where to wait for the bus back and that there's an up-to-date timetable on display at the stop.

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- [ ] **Connect with marketing teams at train companies** about joint promotions or combined travel and entry tickets. We can put you in touch with the right person.

- [ ] **Help visitors get a great deal.** Families and younger or older people can save with railcards or bus passes. There may be discounts like GroupSave (34% off for a group of 3 or more) or PlusBus (bus travel add-on to train tickets). See details on your Good Journey page and share any offers on your channels.

**Member tip:** Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre joined National Rail's 2for1 scheme to encourage green travel: **daysoutguide.co.uk/become-a-partner**

- [ ] **Build a relationship with local bus operators** to promote bus travel and improve services over time. Speak to someone at HQ rather than the local bus depot. Find contact details at: **cpt-uk.org/about-us**

**Do say:** *How can we work together to get more people using the bus to get here?*

**Don't say:** *Can you divert the bus up the drive to reception?*

- [ ] **Map ideas for increasing bus use** to your site and open conversations with the bus company about trialling tweaks. Some ideas are:

- Buses could call into your site on certain journeys (e.g. for a full or half day visit)
- Trial and promote more services on summer Saturdays
- Perhaps a new bus stop, closer to your site, could be added to an existing route?
- Advertise your site and car-free discount onboard buses
- Work with the local authority/bus operator to upgrade your bus stops with a shelter, seats and gateway signage
- Suggest free bus ticket giveaways for big event days – to promote the route and for joint comms
- Talk to local community groups or other attractions. Find out shared issues or ideas and pitch in together.

# Last mile solutions: the final bit from a bus stop or station

**If you're not served by a regular bus, or the stop or station is a bit of a walk, you'll need to think about bridging the 'last mile'. Here are some tried and tested solutions.**

- [ ] **Tell visitors how to reach you from the train station.** Give bus times, taxi numbers and walking routes. Link to your Good Journey page.

- [ ] **Set up a fixed-price taxi transfer.** Team up with a reliable local taxi operator to offer a bookable fixed-price transfer from the nearest train station or town.

- [ ] **Trial a shuttlebus** from your nearest station or town. This could be run by staff/volunteers, or by a local bus, taxi or community transport operator – see **ctauk.org**. Start with a bus at peak weekends, or for special events. For advice on setting up a shuttlebus, just get in touch.

> It'll take time for visitors to pick up on it, so do lots of publicity (online and onsite) well before the shuttlebus starts running. Run the bus for a decent trial period, to give time for word to spread.

- [ ] **Waymark routes from the nearest town, village, bus stop or National Cycle Route (if nearby).** Show cycling and walking times. You could turn the walk into a trail with things to spot, benches, or a quiz.

- [ ] **Audit bike routes and footpaths.** There are over 3,000 miles of footpaths and bridleways in the Cotswolds. Improve your nearest paths with the local authority and Ramblers group. Make a separate path (mowed or paved) for walkers and cyclists on your site or open a back gate to them.

- [ ] **Connect up rail and bus links.** Team up with your Community Rail Partnership (CRP) or station Friends Group to get more people arriving by train: **communityrail.org.uk**

Good Journey

> **Member tip:** Harewood offer a free dial-a-ride from the village and bus stop in a wheelchair-accessible electric shuttlebus.

# Building a buzz with a free bus

**National Trust Wallington and English Heritage Belsay Hall run a free seasonal bus service from Newcastle. It stops at both places on Saturdays from May to September. The bus provides a lift for many who couldn't visit otherwise.**

### Understanding local need

No local bus service served either property, so they secured a contract with Go North East. It started with a minibus, and the service has now expanded with extra stops along the route.

### Great offer and great promotion

Free bus travel and 20% off entry for non-members mean everybody wins. Posters (see right) and social media helped promote the bus. Social posts were widely shared.

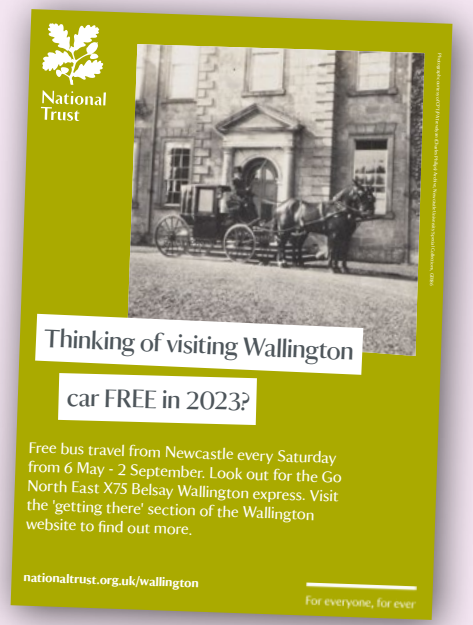
### Self-funding service

The attractions fund the service 50/50. At NT Wallington, the entry fees and visitor spend generated by the bus passengers now outweigh the cost of providing the service. The team have now added green travel to their operating budget and plan.

### Widening access

Use of the service is growing year on year, with 800 people using it in 2024 (representing 3% of visitors on days of operation). Volunteers surveyed people waiting for the bus back and 8/10 said it was their only way to visit.

***"It felt like a small gesture at one day a week for part of the year only, but we know it has made a difference and widened access."*** (NT Wallington)




52% of visitors to National Trust properties surveyed said they'd like to come car-free.

# Welcoming more walking, cycling and wheeling

**Walking, cycling and wheeling, known as 'active travel', might be the first or last leg of a public transport journey. However, locals might walk or wheel the whole way. Here are simple tips to make everyone welcome.**

- [ ] **Create a green travel map,** showing train/bus stops, walking and cycling routes. Show indicative (gentle pace) walk times. Add the map to your website, orientation boards and leaflets.

> Beef up the 'By bicycle' section on your website. Link to your Good Journey page, which has a cycle route planner.

- [ ] **Signpost cycle parking, onsite and online.** Provide bike racks, ideally under cover and near reception.

> Cyclehoop provide secure covered pods for six bikes in just half a car parking space, and give 20% off for members (quote GJ20).

- [ ] **Add a welcoming sign at the cycle parking itself,** advertising your offer.
- [ ] **Provide tools, storage and water refills.** Offer loans of cycle locks, cycle repair kits, pumps and somewhere safe for cyclists to leave helmets and gear during their visit. You could install a cycle pump/repair station from a company like Cyclehoop (quote GJ20 for a 20% discount), or a water fountain from **refill.org.uk**
- [ ] **Offer free e-bike charging.** This could be a well-signed waterproof plug socket at your existing cycle parking, or simply a mains plug socket behind your reception.
- [ ] **Team up with a bike/e-bike hire business** and the train operator, to offer hire onsite or from a nearby station/town. Some rail stations have turn-up-and-go cycle hire – like Brompton and Bike & Go. See: **cyclinguk.org/article/guide-cycle-share-schemes**
- [ ] **Re-think your car park area** and create an Active Travel Hub. Provide information on walking and cycling trails, public transport stops, cycle parking, your car-free offer, plus hire of cycles and off-road accessible scooters like **tramper.co.uk**

Chris Boulton

# You don't need a car to visit the Cotswolds

**Lisa Benjamin from Go Cotswolds tours shares why car-free tourism is so important and her experience of welcoming car-free guests.**

In recent years there has been a boom in tourism in the Cotswolds. There are several reasons for this: the influence of social media, TV and filming locations, and a post-pandemic desire to escape the cities and explore the countryside, for example.

As a result of this increased tourism, there is also an increase in traffic. In some villages, congestion is threatening to overwhelm and alienate local communities. Reducing the number of cars on the Cotswolds' narrow lanes would mean less traffic, less pollution and fewer parking problems.

## Championing car-free travel

Good Journey membership helps show potential customers and partners that we're on a sustainability journey. We're not perfect but we want to be part of the solution, not the problem. We absolutely believe you don't need a car to visit the Cotswolds and want to champion this!

It's important to provide access to the countryside for people who can't or don't want to drive. We've chosen the pick-up points for our tours to be accessible by public transport, then we can do the rest.

## Trains and buses benefit our business

Each of our minibus tours has the potential to take 16 cars off the roads, yet still enables people to use the less-travelled scenic routes that big coaches can't use.

We're on the list of stakeholders for Great Western Railway so we're informed about planned engineering works, strikes, etc. This means we can advise our tour guests and help find solutions.

We used to collect people from Stratford-upon-Avon. Now we collect from Moreton-in-Marsh too, and 76% of our tour guests join there, largely down to the connectivity with trains and buses.

Go Cotswolds

# More partners, less traffic

**Heights of Abraham in Derbyshire have teamed up with local bus and train operators to offer a 20% discount on cable car tickets. The result has been more car-free visitors, less car park congestion and a boost for other local businesses, too.**

## Linking to Good Journey

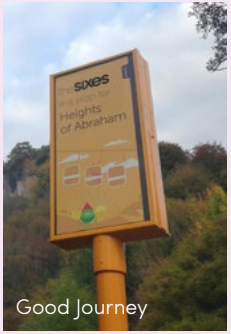
Following tips from Good Journey, Heights of Abraham added prominent links to their Good Journey page across multiple pages on their website. They also increased marketing of their car-free offer. The number of people using their Good Journey page to plan car-free visits went from 10 a week to 200 a week.

## Creative social media

They promote their offer with eye-catching social posts, especially around key dates and holidays. Tagging in their train company (with 75K followers), they flag key stations to travel from and highlight car-free benefits, e.g. *"Let the train take the strain... No need to worry about parking."*

## Teaming up

Special signs at bus stops show visitors where to get off. They're also working with their local Community Rail Partnership to get more people using the train – ask us about your local group.



Good Journey

Heights of Abraham

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# Get familiar with car-free options in the Cotswolds

### Trains

Trains run direct from London, Reading, Oxford, Worcester and Hereford to Charlbury, Kingham and Moreton-in-Marsh. For train times and tickets visit **gwr.com**, **trainline.com** or **trains.goodjourney.org.uk**

### Buses

You can explore much of the area by bus with a bit of planning. Most buses on the western side of the Cotswolds are run by Stagecoach or Pulhams. There's a handy guide and map for all Cotswold bus routes at **explorethecotswolds.com/cotswolds-by-public-transport**

### Bike hire

There's a good choice of bike and e-bike hire operators, including TY Cycles, Bainton Bikes and Cotswold Electric Bike Tours. For cycle tours and routes visit **cotswolds.com**

### Tours

A bus tour with a local company like Go Cotswolds offers a friendly and convenient way to explore many of the area's fascinating highlights.

Discover car-free Cotswolds adventures at **goodjourney.org.uk/cotswolds**

Chris Boulton

Chris Boulton

## Need advice on green visitor travel?
## Email: hello@goodjourney.org.uk

## Ask us about:

- Money-saving offers on buses and trains for your visitors
- Setting up a fixed-price taxi transfer service from your nearest station or town
- Advice and discounts for installing bike storage or pump and repair stations
- Working with your local bus and train operator or Community Rail Partnership
- Trialling a shuttlebus for peak dates or events
- Funding possibilities for things like cycle racks or cycle paths
- Any other aspect of green travel for your visitors or staff

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COTSWOLDS

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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