

10 best things to do in Sunderland



**City of
Sunderland**

www.mysunderland.co.uk

Looking for a great family day out in a friendly, exciting city by the sea?

Looking for fascinating museums, breathtaking wildlife and plenty of space for your little ones to run off their excess energy?

Look no further, because Sunderland ticks all those boxes and more.

Here are our ten best things for all of the family to do in Sunderland. Many of them offer free entry and free parking, but all of them offer great memories.

Sunderland's a doddle to get to by public transport or car from across the UK.

So check out our recommendations and make plans for your next day out in Sunderland.

You can keep up to date with the latest news, offers and events in Sunderland by following us on social media or checking out our website.

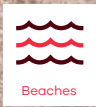
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City of **Sunderland** Experiences



Beaches



Landmarks



Library



Lighthouse



Museum



Theatre



Wildlife



Sunderland Museum, Library and Winter Gardens

With a collection dating back to 1846, there are plenty of surprises in store for visitors to Sunderland Museum, Library and Winter Gardens. Sunderland's rich history of industries is explored throughout the museums four floors.

Exhibition spaces are dedicated to shipbuilding, coal mining, glass making and pottery as well many other aspects of the city's past.

The Museum's Art Gallery shows a significant collection of the works of LS Lowry, an artist who spent lots of time in Sunderland. Our temporary exhibitions have included high profile visiting exhibitions including works by Leonardo Da Vinci and Canaletto.

The Winter Gardens, a 21st century addition to the museum is a tropical paradise and home to our resident Koi Carp.

Over 2,000 plants thrive in the glass rotunda and from the tree top walkway visitors have a bird's eye view of beautiful Mowbray Park. Alongside our permanent and temporary exhibitions, our ever-changing events programme means that there is always something new and exciting to see and do for all the family.



The Museum is right in the heart of Sunderland city centre, on Burdon Road, SR1 1PP.

See page 27 for directions



Admission free



Cafe



Monday–Friday: 9.30am–5pm*:
Museum Shop, Ground Floor Galleries and Library
*Late night opening on Wednesday until 7pm.

Monday–Friday 10am–4pm:
Upper Level Galleries including the Art and Special Exhibitions Galleries, Winter Gardens and Bennelli's Cafe
Saturday: 10am–4pm
Sunday: Closed

Sunderland Library is also housed within the Museum and is open late on Wednesday evenings until 7pm.



www.sunderlandmuseum.org.uk




museums@sunderland.gov.uk



0191 561 2323



See map on page 27

A man in a dark t-shirt and dark trousers is walking on a silver metal walkway with a mesh railing. The walkway is elevated and curves through a conservatory filled with various green plants, including ferns and ivy. Large windows in the background show an outdoor area with a red and white striped canopy. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Discover Sunderland's fascinating history all in one place in the city's first ever museum, which opened its doors back in 1810!



Roker and Seaburn beaches

Sunderland's twin beaches at Roker and Seaburn are the perfect place to unwind. Whether you're looking for somewhere to let the kids run off some excess energy or to sit and relax with a picnic; there's miles of beautiful coastline to choose from.

Roker and Seaburn beaches have been family favourite spots for hundreds of years and the golden sands are a sandcastle builder's paradise. The wide-open promenade and landscaped seafront make for a perfect stroll in the sea air too.

If you really want to take in the air though, a stroll along the recently restored Roker Pier towards the lighthouse is perfect. If you're feeling brave why not take an underground tour through the pier tunnel into the lighthouse?





See map
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Linking directly to the beach front is Roker Park. This is a fantastic traditional park with play areas, a lake and a miniature railway alongside the floral displays you'd expect to find. It's ideal if you fancy a break from the sands.

Sunderland's Blue Flag award-winning beaches are ideal for traditional seaside fun.



Roker and Seaburn can be found on the A183 between Sunderland and South Tyneside.



There's lots of parking, much of it free.



Bus services E1, E2 and E6 from Sunderland city centre get to the seaside in under 15 minutes.



[www.mysunderland.co.uk/
rokerand-seaburn-beaches](http://www.mysunderland.co.uk/rokerand-seaburn-beaches)



Roker Pier and Lighthouse

After restoration, the pier and lighthouse reopened its doors to the public in August 2018. This means that visitors can now access the unique and rarely seen tunnel which stretches the full length of the pier.

Created during construction of the pier between 1885 and 1903, the tunnel was given a 'light touch' restoration, backed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, in order to retain its original character.

Considered a triumph of engineering at the time, both the lighthouse and pier used the finest craftsmen and materials available. The pier itself was built of granite-faced concrete blocks each lowered into place by a massive hydraulic crane nicknamed 'Goliath' which came to dominate Roker seafront over an 18 year period.

Guided tours of the 610 metres long tunnel are available throughout the year (weather depending) and can be booked online at www.rokerpier.co.uk.

Tours begin at the new entrance building, right next to the golden sands of Roker Beach, and finish inside the 138ft tall lighthouse.

During a tour, visitors get the chance to learn how engineer Henry Hay Wake pioneered a variety of techniques to build the pier and how skilled craftsmen used granite blocks weighing up to 45 tons each to produce the landmark structure.



Admission free



Roker Pier and Lighthouse are situated in Roker which can be found on the A183 between Sunderland and South Tyneside, SR6 OPL.



There's lots of parking, much of it free.



Bus services E1, E2 and E6 from Sunderland city centre get to the seaside in under 15 minutes.

Tours can be pre booked at www.rokerpier.co.uk and operate most days depending on the weather.



www.rokerpier.co.uk





The historic Roker Pier with its distinctive red and grey granite lighthouse, was officially opened on 23 September 1903. It is one of Sunderland's most iconic and recognisable landmarks, standing as a symbol of Victorian innovation and endeavour.



Washington Wetland Centre

WWT Washington is a wildlife haven for rare species where you can get up close to a variety of cute and friendly creatures.


Feed the gentle Hawaiian geese; they're so timid that even children can enjoy letting a goose nibble corn from their hands.


The shocking pink Chilean Flamingo flock is a family favourite too. You can learn more about these fascinating birds during talks by their keepers every day.

During the summer months the duckery is a great place to see freshly hatched, and seriously fluffy chicks up close.

But if it's cute animals you're looking for then you'll struggle to beat WWT Washington's otter family. They're Asian short clawed otters, the smallest of all the otters and can be seen playing and frolicking in and around the water, having a great time! Their daily feeding times include a commentary by their keepers.


And if your little ones want to frolic around too, there's a great play area at WWT Washington as well as a year-round programme of events and activities to entertain all of the family.

 Washington Wetland Centre is just off the A1231, follow the brown duck signs. Two minutes from A19, ten minutes from A1M (junction 65), NE38 8LE.

 Open from 9.30am every day except Christmas Day. Last admission 3.30pm in winter, 4.30pm in summer.

 Free parking

 Café and gift shop

 North East bus number 8 from Sunderland to Washington and Stanley stops just a short walk from the entrance.

 Admission: See website for current admission fees.

 info.washington@wwt.org.uk

 0191 416 5454

 www.wwt.org.uk/wetlandcentres/washington/



A large group of pink flamingos is gathered in a pond, surrounded by lush green trees and a small wooden building. The scene is set in a natural, wooded area with tall reeds in the foreground. The flamingos are in various poses, some standing in the water and others on the bank. The background is filled with dense green foliage under a cloudy sky.

Meet exotic birds and some of the most adorable otters you'll find anywhere.



Hylton Castle

Much loved by local people, it has provided a home for barons and schoolboys (including Sir Joseph Swan, inventor of the incandescent light bulb), a stronghold for knights and a headquarters for soldiers.

New life has been breathed into this ancient building, which is now a community-based heritage-led visitor attraction.

The shell of the gatehouse has been transformed into a new space for the 21st century with new floors, stairs and a lift created inside the historic structure, housing a café, exhibition and flexible spaces for community and educational use.





See map
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Led by Hylton Castle Trust, the castle is a fun, versatile place for the whole family to explore.

For opening times and upcoming events and activities please check the website at:
www.hyltoncastle.org.uk

Built around 600 years ago, Hylton Castle stands in the heart of the community as a magnificent reminder of the past.



Hylton Castle is currently in the guardianship of English Heritage and is located at Craigavon Road, Sunderland SR5 3PA



Cars can be parked adjacent to the site, next to the Hylton Dene play area.



Café on site



hyltoncastle@outlook.com



Call the Hylton Castle department at Community Opportunities on 0191 537 3231



www.hyltoncastle.org.uk



Sunderland Sculpture Trail

Discover Sunderland's story along the banks of the River Wear with this scenic outdoor art trail as it guides you from the City Centre along the stunning Roker coastline. Running from Keel Square past St Peter's Church towards Roker Harbour and Marina, the Sunderland Sculpture Trail combines striking public artworks with lovely riverside views and local history making it as photogenic as it is meaningful.


Created by artists working closely with the community, the trail reflects the city's shipbuilding and maritime heritage, alongside themes of education and the natural environment. Sculptures include carved stone books, metal figures and thought-provoking installations that explore the past, present and future of Sunderland many set against eye-catching backdrops ideal for photos.

Highlights range from Pathways to Knowledge at the University of Sunderland to High Tide at Roker Harbour, where sculpted forms echo the rhythm of the sea. Newer works honour the everyday lives of shipyard workers and the people who shaped the city.

Most recently, the installation of Molly by renowned North East artist Dr Ron Lawson - a Sunderland-born sculptor whose career began in heavy industry - has added a new landmark to the city's growing sculpture trail along with


Ray Lonsdale's Gan Canny, It Says Here and Launch Day they offer some of the trail's most Instagrammable locations!

Easy to explore on foot or by bike, the trail offers a peaceful, inspiring, and highly enjoyable way to experience Sunderland's creativity and character.

 Beginning at St Peter's Wharf, Roker, SR6 0GL, which can be found on the A183 between Sunderland and South Tyneside

 **Admission Free**

 There's lots of parking, much of it free

 Bus services E1, E2 and E6 from Sunderland city centre run along the extent of Roker to Seaburn. Alternatively start your walk at the Wear Bridge and follow the trail along the riverside towards Roker

 www.mysunderland.co.uk/sculpture-trail





Discover Sunderland's story along the banks of the River Wear with this scenic outdoor art trail.



Landmarks



Museum

Washington Old Hall

Washington Old Hall is the ancestral home of George Washington's family. Indeed, it's the very reason that he was called Washington and of course the capital of the USA is named after him.

The surviving stone manor house of Washington Old Hall includes parts of the original medieval home of George Washington's ancestors. Step into the 17th century on the ground floor and walk through the great hall, kitchen and panelled room.

Get a close look at a cookbook written in 1660 and find out what people were eating and how food was prepared. An incredible collection of George Washington related memorabilia commemorating his life and achievements can be found in the 'liberty room'.

It's not all glamour though; on the first floor is a recreation of the home of a family that lived in the hall up to the 1930s. At that time the hall was divided into accommodation for up to nine families.

Developed at different times, the gardens are small and contrasting showcasing elements of the past and present. They are unexpected and a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle, nestled in the heart of Washington.

Look out for a host of indoor and outdoor events all year round.



Washington Old Hall is in Washington Village just off the A195, only a couple of minutes from the A1M or A19, NE38 7LE.



Go North East bus number 86 calls in Washington Village, a short walk from Washington Old Hall.



Cafe



washington.oldhall@nationaltrust.org.uk



0191 416 6879



www.nationaltrust.org.uk/washingtonold-hall



Visit the ancestral home of the first president of the USA. The fact that the town of Washington shares a name with the capital of the United States of America is no coincidence.





Theatre



Landmarks

Sunderland Empire Theatre

Grab a seat in a stunning Edwardian theatre and be entertained by some of the best shows, and biggest names in showbiz at Sunderland Empire.

The opulently decorated auditorium with its deep reds and intricate detailing is a textbook example of theatre design from over a century ago and the perfect place to be transported to another world.

There's nothing to beat the magic of live theatre when it comes to truly captivating an audience. Whether it's a good old-fashioned pantomime or the latest stage spectaculars direct from the West End, you can guarantee for a few hours at least, you'll be a million miles away from the real world.

Since the doors opened in 1907, everyone from the likes of Charlie Chaplin to The Beatles have performed on the Sunderland Empire stage.

Situated right in the heart of Sunderland city centre, it's really easy to extend your visit to Sunderland Empire by grabbing a pre-show bite to eat or a post-show drink at the Garden Place Bistro or one of the many bars nearby.

There's lots of city centre parking nearby too, and if you're arriving by public transport, the Empire is just a short walk from Park Lane Transport Interchange or Sunderland station.



Sunderland Empire Theatre is on High Street West in the centre of Sunderland, SR1 3EX.



The nearest car parks are St Mary's and The Bridges all only a short walk away and signposted from main through routes.



From Park Lane transport interchange, take a short walk towards Keel Square and bear left onto High Street West, Sunderland Empire Theatre is on your right.

To book your ticket to an evening of entertainment in Edwardian splendour, call or visit:

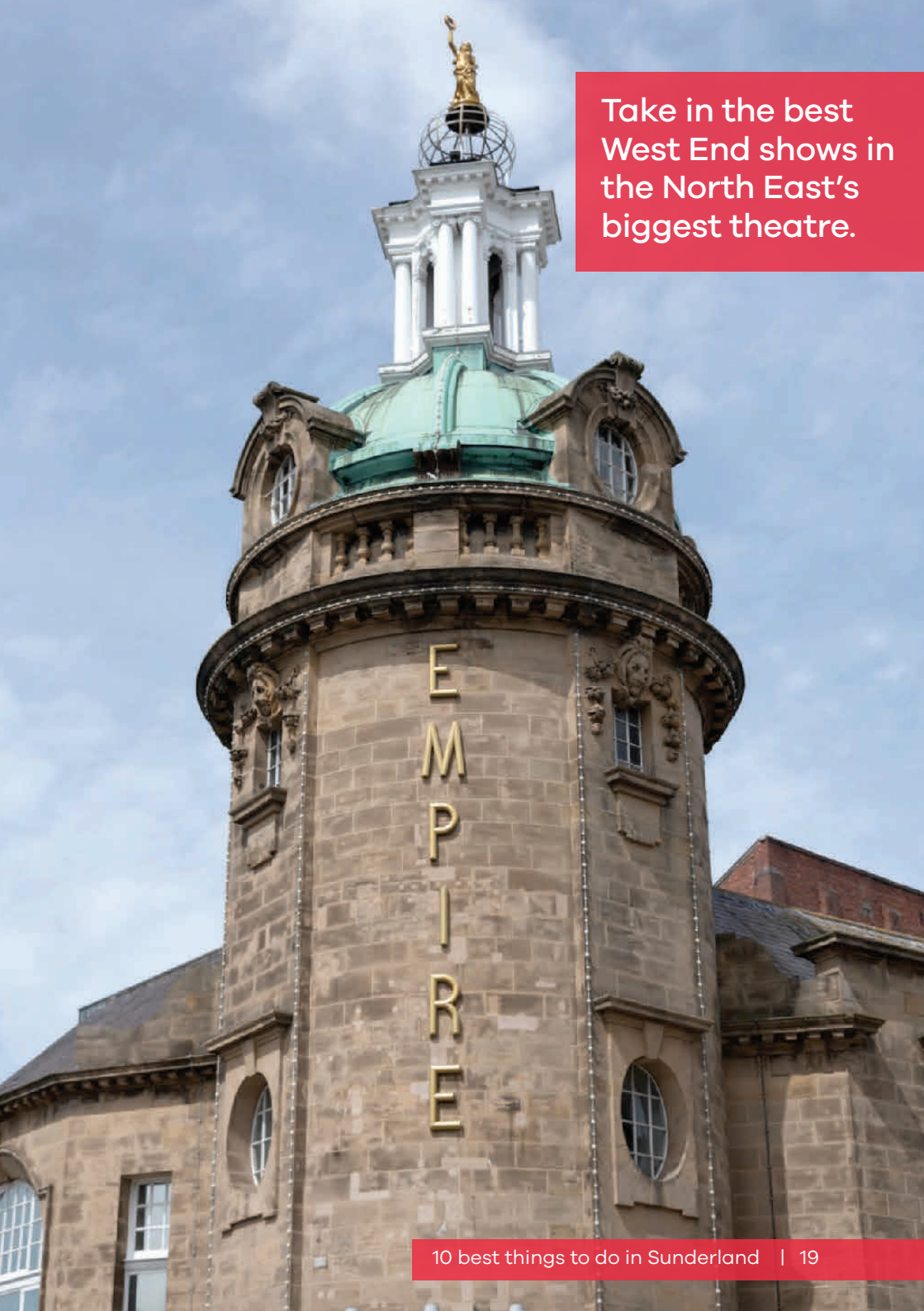


0844 871 3022



www.atgtickets.com/
Sunderland





Take in the best West End shows in the North East's biggest theatre.



Penshaw Monument and Herrington Country Park

The Greek style temple dominates the skyline, but it wasn't built as an attraction or a means of enjoying those amazing vistas. It's actually a monument to one of the most popular men Sunderland has ever known, the first Earl of Durham, John George Lambton..

The 70ft high Penshaw Monument was built as a memorial to him in 1844 after over £6,000 was raised by local people. It's modelled on the Greek temple of Hephaestus in Athens.

During weekends and Bank Holidays from Easter to the end of September you can get an even more spectacular view by climbing to the top as part of a National Trust tour. There is a small charge for the tours which run from 10am to 4.40pm.

Just across the road from Penshaw Monument is Herrington Country Park. Once the site of a Lambton colliery, today it is a peaceful green oasis. It's a great place for family bike rides or strolls past the lake loved by swans and ducks.





See map
on page 27

There's a play park and café too all under the watchful gaze of Penshaw Monument of course!

If you're feeling more adventurous, it's not too far to riverside strolls beside the Wear at Fatfield, famed home of the legendary Lambton Worm. In folklore, the worm was a 'horrible beast' which terrorised the local people and the Lambton Family until finally defeated by John Lambton.

A stairway to the heavens and a step into the past. The view from Penshaw Monument is an impressive one. On a clear day vast swathes of the North East can be seen all around.



Penshaw Monument and Herrington Country Park are just off the A183, a couple of minutes from the A19, DH4 7EL.



Go North East bus numbers 2 and 78 call at the foot of Penshaw Monument.



Free parking



0844 249 1895



www.nationaltrust.org.uk/penshawmonument



St. Peter's Church

Founded in the 7th century by the pioneering Benedict Biscop, it developed into one of the greatest and most influential centres of learning in the northern world.

The church is one of the earliest sites of English Christianity, a place where 'modern' skills such as stonemasonry and glass making were brought to the British Isles and even where the timing of Easter was decided.

Creativity and innovation lie at the heart of St Peter's church. Great manuscripts were produced here that have survived to the present day and which represent some of Britain's greatest cultural treasures. These include the 8th century Anglo Saxon Bible, the Codex Amiatinus (now in Florence, Italy) and the oldest intact European book, the St Cuthbert Gospel, the latter of which was bought by the British Library in 2012 for the astonishing sum of £9m!

The monk and scholar, the Venerable Bede, flourished in this creative environment. Bede is perhaps most famous for his seminal work: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People, a work that is still one of the main sources of information on the origins of the English people and the rise of Christianity in Britain.

Although much of the original monastery no longer remains, thanks in part to the Vikings and the Reformation, it is still possible to walk the pathway through the original west porch door and examine the intricate Anglo-Saxon carvings and stonework - a pathway almost certainly walked by Bede himself over 1,300 years ago.



St. Peter's church is just off the A1018, between Sunderland city centre and Roker. Follow the brown signs from Sunderland city centre and the A19, SR6 0DY.



St Peter's Metro station is just a short walk away. St. Peter's is also on the Sunderland



Connect bus route, service numbers 700 and 701.




Free parking



Admission free



See map on page 27

A photograph of St. Peter's Church in Sunderland, a large stone building with a prominent square tower on the left. The church features several Gothic-style windows with intricate tracery. In the foreground, a field of purple and white crocuses is in full bloom. A red banner at the top right contains white text. The sky is overcast with grey clouds.

St. Peter's Church in Sunderland is one of the most significant historical sites in Britain.



Vibrant city life

Hopefully our ten best things to do have piqued your interest, but if you fancy a little bit more why not squeeze in a day of retail therapy with plenty of relaxation coupled with good food and drink.

Shop

The Bridges shopping centre is at the heart of the city. The bright and airy covered mall is home to everything you need for some great retail therapy.

If high street brands are your thing it's the place to be. If you're looking for something more unusual, independent and speciality stores are just around the corner too.

Relax

Sunderland city centre's Keel Square is a fantastic public square complete with fountains and plenty of seating that makes for an ideal place to break a shopping journey.

There's a programme of events taking place in Keel Square too, so you might well catch a food festival, live music or other performances while you're there.

The pub is a British institution and you'll find no finer example of a classic British pub than the Dun Cow on High Street West. It's an Edwardian triumph with carved wood, mirrors and polished brass.

In a similar vein and just down the road is The Isis, looking just how a traditional pub should. The drinks range is impressive too, with a focus on ales, particularly those brewed locally.

Refresh

Sunderland boasts a variety of great bars and restaurants, as well as cafes, takeaway eateries and pubs. The City offers a wide range of cuisines, including delicious American-style burgers, locally sourced steak and flavourful Italian food as well as Indian, Chinese and more!

Take a much needed break from shopping or exploring Sunderland's sights with a cuppa, a coffee or slice of cake at one of Sunderland's quaint cafes, or why not finish your working day with a pint or a cocktail at one of Sunderland's excellent bars? You can even settle down for local seafood, fish and chips or ice-cream at Sunderland's nearby coastal eateries.



[www.mysunderland.co.uk/
eat-and-drink](http://www.mysunderland.co.uk/eat-and-drink)



Getting to Sunderland

A hassle free journey to our city by the sea.



By train

Direct train services to Sunderland from London, the East Midlands, York and North Yorkshire are operated by Grand Central and LNER. Direct trains also operate from Carlisle and Teesside to Sunderland.

From the North West, Scotland and other parts of Britain, change at Newcastle for a short Northern Rail or Tyne and Wear Metro transfer to Sunderland.



By bus

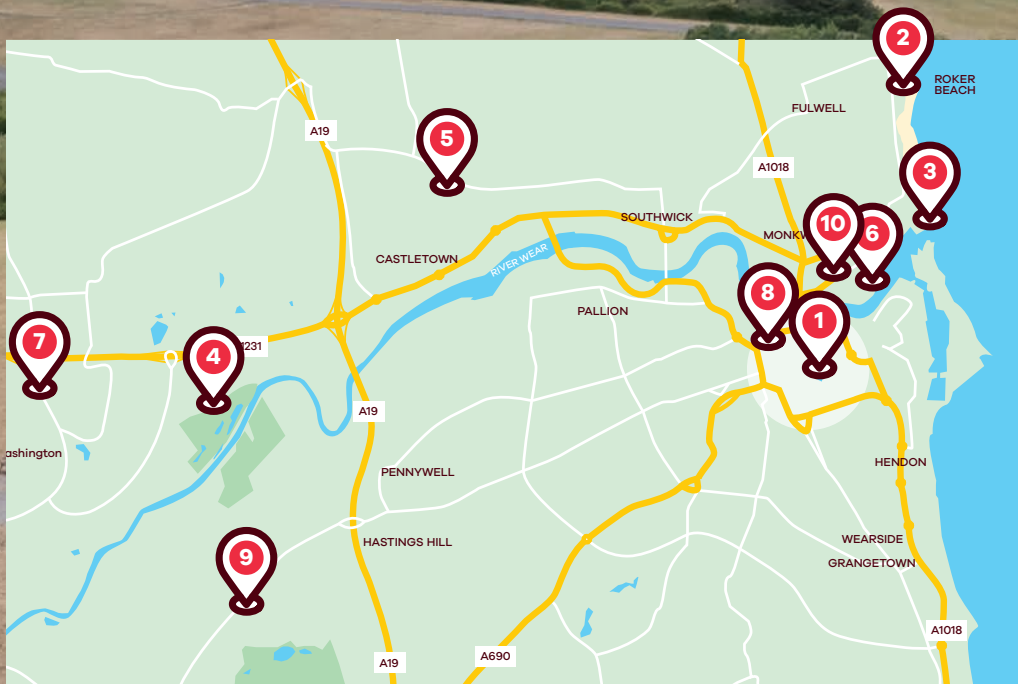
National Express bus services from Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Chester, North Wales and London serve Sunderland. All services call at Park Lane interchange in the heart of Sunderland city centre for easy onward connections to local bus services and the Tyne and Wear Metro.



By car

Sunderland is just off the A19 main trunk road, follow signs for Sunderland. The city centre is also only a short drive from the A1M. From the south use Junction 62 and the A690. From the north use Junction 65 and the A1231.

There's lots of low cost parking available right throughout the city centre.



Sunderland Museum, Library and Winter Gardens

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