



## Chichester & the South Downs

Great houses & gardens

**26 June–1 July 2025 (ML 727)**

6 days • £2,690

Lecturer: Janet Sinclair

The stunningly beautiful landscape of the West Sussex Downs.

Great country houses and landscaped parks, charming country towns, inspiring upland and lowland countryside.

Special arrangements and private openings are a feature.

One hotel throughout.

The chalk ridge of the South Downs runs 80 miles across Hampshire and Sussex to meet the sea at Eastbourne. With spectacular viewpoints, unique natural history and ease of access, it also contains a glittering string of great stately homes, housing personal collections that reflect changing national fortunes as well as personal tastes and triumphs.

For successive generations of settlers and great builders, the strategic importance of the South Downs overlooking the Channel was gradually replaced by the attraction of their spectacular beauty. Be inspired by histories of fortifications and pleasure palaces: repositories of treasured collections as symbols of power, and places of leisure and entertainment.

Exploitation of natural resources, from flint-mining, charcoal burning and iron-smelting to sheep-farming and forestry, shaped the Downland landscape. The great family estates helped to conserve this area of outstanding natural beauty, now protected and sustainably managed as a protected National Park.

Changing attitudes to conservation are illustrated by the contrasting fortunes of Midhurst's Cowdray Ruins and rebuilt Stansted House – each destroyed a century apart by disastrous fires and reborn in a new context.

Two thousand years of history, taste and politics survive, including one of the most important collections of fine art in the care of the National Trust at Petworth. Exquisite medieval sculpture at Boxgrove and Chichester, the unique Stansted Chapel and High Victorian Gothic at Arundel are highlights of religious patronage. Splendid historic houses that are still private homes reflect the tastes and fortunes of royal Dukes, Earls and Lords of church and country.

The story of the English country house



*Arundel Castle, engraving c. 1880.*

would not be complete without an exploration of life 'downstairs'. At both Petworth and Stansted these stories are vividly brought to life.

Contemporary patronage can be enjoyed in Chichester Cathedral and at England's oldest continuously occupied castle at Arundel, where the seventeenth-century Collector Earl is commemorated in a wonderful modern garden commission by the Duke of Norfolk. Modern art sits in a striking contemporary setting alongside one of the finest eighteenth-century houses in Chichester at Pallant House.

### Itinerary

**Day 1: Chichester.** The coach leaves Chichester railway station at 1.30pm. Chichester Cathedral houses an extraordinary range of modern religious commissions, as well as nationally important Tudor panel paintings. Pallant House is a unique combination of a Queen Anne townhouse with a recent award-winning extension, which holds one of the best collections of 20th-century British art in the country.

**Day 2: Petworth, Woolbeding, Pulborough.** In one of 'Capability' Brown's most poetic landscapes, immortalised by Turner, Petworth is an impressive ducal palace of the 17th century. It contains major works by Turner, van Dyck and Blake. Woolbeding Gardens are one of the South Down's hidden gems. A horticultural haven, the 26-acre garden was created by Simon Sainsbury and Stewart

Grimshaw with garden designers Lanning Roper in the 1980s and the Bannermans in the late 1990s. Woolbeding's new Orchid House (by Heatherwick) was awarded a 2024 Sussex Heritage Trust Award. Bignor Roman Villa in Pulborough has fine mosaic floors in a beautiful Downland setting.

**Day 3: Arundel, Fontwell.** Home to the Duke of Norfolk, England's premier duke, Arundel Castle has Norman origins, later mediaeval parts and 18th- and 19th-century embellishments. The totality is splendid, the art collection outstanding. The picturesque and unspoilt little town of Arundel is capped by a soaring 1870s Catholic cathedral in Gothic style. Denman's Garden in Fontwell was started in the 1940s by Joyce Robinson and is the former home and garden of the late John Brookes, one of Britain's most influential landscape designers and garden design authors.

**Day 4: Weald and Downland, Parham, Cowdray, Boxgrove.** The Weald and Downland Museum at Singleton is an assembly of rescued and re-erected vernacular buildings from the 14th to the 19th centuries, including two hall-houses. One of the loveliest of Elizabethan buildings, Parham House has an extensive collection of 16th- and 17th-century portraits and tapestries, and a clutch of award-winning gardens. Cowdray Ruins are the dramatic remains of a noble and extensive Tudor palace. At medieval Boxgrove Priory, the remains include a vaulted Gothic choir of cathedral-like proportions.

Chichester & The South Downs  
continued

**Day 5: Stansted, West Dean, Petersfield.**

Stansted Park provides a fascinating insight into the social history of an English country house in its Edwardian heyday. The Edward James Foundation at West Dean has extensive, beautifully-kept gardens. Some free time in Petersfield.

**Day 6: St Mary's, Goodwood, Chichester.**

St Mary's Almshouses in Chichester, a medieval hospital with superb 13th-century woodcarvings. Goodwood House, seat of the Duke of Richmond, is a magnificent late Georgian country house with excellent furniture and paintings by Stubbs, Canaletto and van Dyck. The coach takes you to Chichester railway station by 3.30pm before returning to the hotel.

*Please note that some appointments cannot be confirmed until early 2025.*

## Lecturer

**Janet Sinclair.** Art historian, curator and lecturer. After a curatorial career, Janet joined the University of Birmingham's Barber Institute and lectured in art history and heritage studies while researching early 19th-century British country house collections. She has held teaching and senior management posts at significant heritage sites in the UK including Petworth House in Sussex, Worcester Cathedral and West Dean College (University of Sussex). Janet is a member of the Attingham Society, ICOM and a Trustee of Petersfield Museum in the South Downs National Park. She is a member of the Fabric Advisory Committee of St George's Chapel, Windsor, representing the Cathedrals Fabric Commission.

## Practicalities

**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £2,690.

**Single occupancy:** £3,210.

**Included:** hotel accommodation; private coach throughout; breakfasts, 1 lunch and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

**Accommodation. Harbour Hotel, Chichester** ([harbourhotels.co.uk](http://harbourhotels.co.uk)). A smart, boutique hotel in the centre of town. This 4-star hotel is within walking distance of the Cathedral and Pallant Gallery. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

**How strenuous?** The tour involves a lot of walking in town centres, where coach access is restricted, and a lot of standing in museums and churches. Uneven ground and irregular paving are standard. A good level of fitness is essential. You will be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time. Average distance by coach per day: c. 25 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.