

Sightseeing and Diving – Underwater Trails Are England’s Attractions

While tourists who visit England usually seek to explore its palaces and historical buildings, most of them are unaware that there are a plethora of shipwrecks, which are scattered just off England's coastline, that are easily accessible and offer the divers a unique opportunity to learn about the kingdom's rich maritime history.



For the past ten years, English Heritage, who are responsible for preserving the nation's historical buildings have carried out significant work to ensure the preservation of England's shipwrecks, as well as creating and maintaining a variety of underwater trails.

The purpose of them is to ensure the shipwrecks are accessible for visitors who have an interest in maritime history or underwater archaeology. English Heritage currently offers 47 protected wreck sites in England and a total of 62 protected wreck sites within the United Kingdom. Since the wreck sites are classified as being protected, interested individuals and groups are required to apply for a license in advance.



Although it is relatively easy to be granted a permit, one of the stipulations of an underwater trail permit is that divers must follow the seabed signage and stick to the trail, in order to protect parts of the ship wrecks which may be fragile and easily destroyed. In further efforts to protect each of the wreck sites, English Heritage also organizes a team of volunteers, who maintain the underwater trails and report back to English Heritage on any damage an underwater trail may have sustained.

One of English Heritage's most popular underwater trails is located just off the coast of the Isles of Scilly and guides visitors around the **HMS Colossus**, which was launched by the Royal Navy in 1787. The Colossus underwater trail boasts a series of numbered observation points and free waterproof

guidebooks which provide an in-depth commentary on the Colossus's Navy career and teaches divers about some of the ships remains. Since it opened to the public in 2009, over 1,000 divers have explored the Colossus's underwater trail.



Those who want to explore a slightly older shipwreck may be interested in exploring an unidentified medieval shipwreck, which is located south of the entrance to **Poole Harbour**, just off the coast of Studland Bay. The Spanish ship is a light armored merchant vessel which is believed to be built in around 1520 and exported figs and iron in exchange for wheat and cloth.

Visitors who explore the merchant ship's underwater trail can learn more about the ship by reading the signage on the sea bed and by visiting the Poole Waterfront Museum, which offers a permanent exhibition about the Spanish ship wreck. Visitors may see there a myriad of artefacts, such as rare Spanish pots, which were excavated from the ship wreck in the early eighties.

There is no better way to learn about England's rich maritime history than to dive down and explore one of English Heritage's underwater trails. After all, while visiting an exhibition on maritime history may be interesting, there is nothing like the feeling of getting so close to a ship wreck that you could reach out and touch it.

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