



# Visitor attendance in Lancashire 2023 and 2023/24

Key findings for Lancashire-12

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# 1 Summary

The national visitor attractions report for 2023 includes results for just 17 visitor attractions in the Lancashire-12 area and 1 more in Blackburn with Darwen, one of the unitary authorities that complete the Lancashire-14 area. In 2023 there were no figures provided for any visitor attractions in Blackpool, which clearly has many popular attractions. Only a small number of tourism attractions in Lancashire submit visitor figures for publication and some, like country parks, have to give estimations of their large numbers of visitors. The local results are therefore of only limited value, but of the 18 Lancashire attractions that submitted results four attractions recorded no change in visitor numbers, twelve saw visitor numbers increase from 2022 and two saw small decreases. Compared to 2019 six recorded decreases which ranged from -12% to -70% and four recorded increases. There was no data available for the number of visitors to some attractions in 2019 so their percentage changes cannot be calculated.

The size of attractions ranged from the Martin Mere Wetland Centre in West Lancashire with 132,646 visitors, to the 164 counted at the Weaver's Cottage in Rossendale. Another nature reserve, the RSPB Leighton Moss site, had the second highest number of visitors with over 90,000.

This article also includes a separate table that shows visitor numbers at eight sites originally managed by the Lancashire Museums Service during the more recent 2023/24 season. Before 2018 there were 12 sites, but a budget review in 2015 began a process of transferring control or closure. Major repair work at some sites and the Covid-19 pandemic then caused further closures. The Fleetwood Museum is one attraction that was previously run by the Lancashire Museums Service, but now appears in Table 1 independently. The Clitheroe Castle Museum used to attract most visitors in this list, but the numbers have not recovered since the Covid-19 lockdown and in 2023/24 Lancaster Castle was top with 37,903.

This article is largely dominated by attractions that are either operated by non-profit making trusts, or public-sector organisations. Private enterprises are naturally reluctant to release commercially sensitive figures, such as visitor numbers, therefore this article only provides a limited insight into the commercial viability of private-sector visitor attractions.

## 2 Introduction

Visitor attractions make a significant contribution to the overall tourism infrastructure of the county and to economic development and regeneration in the communities they serve. It is therefore very useful to know the visitor numbers at sites across Lancashire and whether the figures are showing patterns of growth or decline. Where there are clusters of attractions that publish visitor numbers, they can together provide a range of complementary options for local visitors and an indication of the vitality of the local visitor economy.

The visitor figures contained in table 1 have been taken from the [Visitor Attractions Trends England 2023](#) report. This is an annual, self-completion, survey, so the visitor numbers are provided by the attractions themselves. For the purpose of the

survey, the definition of a visitor attraction is: *"an attraction where it is feasible, but not necessary, to charge admission for the sole purpose of sightseeing. The attraction must be a permanently established excursion destination, a primary purpose of which is to allow access for entertainment, interest, or education and can include places of worship (but excludes small parish churches); rather than being primarily a retail outlet or a venue for sporting, theatrical, or film performances. It must be open to the public, without prior booking, for published periods each year, and should be capable of attracting day visitors or tourists as well as local residents. In addition, the attraction must be a single business, under a single management, so that it is capable of answering the economic questions on revenue, employment etc."*

There are various categories under which attractions are classified, but we have merged some to avoid similar attractions appearing in separate categories. The tourist attractions which provided visitor figures for 2023 was 1,112. Some of these are run by local authorities, so if in any one year they do not submit numbers, it might well be that a large group of attractions disappear from the results. Unfortunately these and attractions run by charities or small organisations drop out of the listings only to reappear a short number of years later. The East Lancashire Railway amongst others, was not included in the report for 2019, re-appeared in 2020, but has not been listed since. These omissions make the calculation of change in numbers difficult to measure.

In addition to the visitor numbers obtained via the national survey, this article also includes a table that lists yearly visitor numbers to a range of sites managed by the Lancashire Museums Service. The Clitheroe Castle Museum appears in both.

### 3 The Lancashire results

Table 1 lists the 18 attractions in Lancashire that feature in the 2023 edition of the visitor attractions report. It may still be more useful to compare the 2023 sites with 2019 rather than, or as well as, 2022. This is because attractions were still affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2022 and because Visit Britain have themselves included the 2019 to 2023 percentage changes in the report. Between 2022 and 2023, of the 18 Lancashire attractions that submitted results four attractions recorded no change in visitor numbers and twelve saw visitor numbers increase by up to 33%. This level of improvement was much lower than in 2022 because that was when reopening after the covid years was taking place. Compared to 2019 six recorded decreases which ranged from -12% to -70% and four recorded increases ranging from +2% to +24%. There was no data available for the number of visitors to some attractions in 2019 so their percentage changes cannot be calculated, but in the case of the Clitheroe Castle Museum we had our own records and have used these. Please note that some of the attractions estimate their visitor numbers which means that their corresponding results should be viewed with a certain degree of caution.

The [Visit Lancashire website](#) lists hundreds of Lancashire attractions of every conceivable type and size, and emphasises the fact that Table 1 mentions only a small proportion of the entire list. It may therefore be misleading to try placing too much emphasis on the results from a limited number of attractions.

Please note that the published results may be affected by factors such as temporary closures for redevelopments, the weather, inaccurate estimates of visitors, and one-off major events/exhibitions that can all distort yearly comparisons.

**Table 1 Visits to tourist attractions in Lancashire, 2023**

Attraction	Authority	Urban, rural or coastal	Paid or free (E=estimated)	Visits 2023	% change in visits 2019-23	% change in visits 2022-23
<b>Country parks</b>				<b>78,453</b>		
<u>Gisburn Forest</u>	Ribble Valley	Rural	Paid (E)	78,453		-3%
<b>Farm / Rare Breeds / Farm Animals</b>				<b>25,006</b>		
<u>Horses and Ponies Protection Association</u>	Burnley	Rural	Paid	14,006	+2%	+30%
<u>Ridgeway Farm</u>	Fylde	Rural	Paid (E)	11,000		+29%
<b>Heritage/visitor centre</b>				<b>28,661</b>		
<u>Carnforth Station and Visitor Centre</u>	Lancaster	Rural	Free (E)	15,000	-70%	0%
<u>Lytham Heritage Centre</u>	Fylde	Coastal	Free	13,497	+24%	+5%
<u>Weavers' Cottage</u>	Rossendale	Urban	Free	164		+9%
<b>Historic house/ house and garden</b>				<b>77,336</b>		
<u>Rufford Old Hall</u>	West Lancashire	Rural	Paid	52,336	-16%	+13%
<u>Samlesbury Hall</u>	South Ribble	Rural	Free (E)	25,000	-58%	0%
<b>Museum/ art galleries</b>				<b>83,136</b>		
<u>Bancroft Mill Engine Museum</u>	Pendle	Rural	Paid (E)	1,044	-17%	+33%
<u>Clitheroe Castle Museum</u>	Ribble Valley	Rural	Paid (E)	17,550	-12%*	-1%
<u>Fleetwood Museum</u>	Wyre	Coastal	Paid	18,754		0%

Attraction	Authority	Urban, rural or coastal	Paid or free (E=estimated)	Visits 2023	% change in visits 2019-23	% change in visits 2022-23
<u>Howarth Art Gallery</u> (Tiffany Glass)	Hyndburn	Rural	Free	28,989		+24%
<u>Lytham Windmill</u>	Fylde	Coastal	Free	16,799		+6%
<b>Nature reserve/wetlands/wildlife trips</b>				<b>224,989</b>		
<u>RSPB Leighton Moss Nature Reserve</u>	Lancaster	Rural	Paid	92,343		+8%
<u>WWT Martin Mere Wetland Centre</u>	West Lancashire	Rural	Paid	132,646	-31%	+4%
<b>Place of Worship</b>				<b>36,392</b>		
<u>Blackburn Cathedral</u>	Blackburn with Darwen	Urban		10,392		+19%
<u>Lancaster Priory &amp; Parish Church</u>	Lancaster	Urban	Free (E)	25,000	+14%	0%
<b>Safari Park/Zoo/Aquarium/Aviary</b>				58,600		
<u>Williamson Park</u>	Lancaster	Urban	Paid (E)	58,600	+15%	+1%

Source Regional Attractions Survey; Visit Britain – Survey of Visits to Visitor Attractions \* Clitheroe Castle Museum change from 2019 was calculated using LCC rather than Visit Britain figures for 2019.

The Sandcastle Waterpark in Blackpool usually having around 300,000 visitors was often the biggest attraction, and certainly the biggest attraction that charged an entry fee. In autumn 2022 the operation of the waterpark was taken over by Merlin Entertainments who also operate Blackpool Tower and Madame Tussaud's amongst a number of other attractions in Blackpool. These attractions have not sent visitor figures to Visit England and the unfortunate consequence is that there are no attractions in Blackpool in the 2023 listings.

Worden Park in Leyland and Cuerden Valley Park which covers parts of both Chorley and South Ribble were both estimated to have regularly had in excess of 200,000 visitors, but neither of these feature in the 2023 listings. The Martin Mere Wetland Centre still had over 100k visitors for all years after the pandemic began, with similar numbers in each and consequently was the biggest attraction for 2023 still mentioned. The second biggest attraction, also a nature reserve, was the RSPB Leighton Moss site with over 90,000.

Carnforth Station and Visitor Centre had estimated visitors at a figure of 50,000 for nine years, but in 2020 the number was down by 42 and a half thousand, and in 2021 by a further three thousand. 2022 saw a healthy improvement in visitor numbers and this has stabilised at 15,000 for 2023. There are few examples across the country where a working railway station on the national network is also a tourist attraction, but Carnforth station attracts thousands of visitors each year because of its connection with the classic film *Brief Encounter*.

## 4 Visitor numbers from the Lancashire Museums Service

Table 1 contains a number of entries under the museum/ art gallery heading, and to further supplement these results, details have been kindly provided by the county council's Library and information Service, of visitor numbers to a range of venues that are either owned or managed by the Lancashire Museums Service (see table 2).

This article also includes a separate table that shows visitor numbers at eight sites originally managed by the Lancashire Museums Service during the more recent 2022/23 season which still cannot be compared with previous years while recovering from the forced closures necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic

Fleetwood Museum was earmarked to close, originally in April 2016, then in reality in October 2016. It reopened in April 2017 as normal, hence there is no major fall off in visitor numbers. Instead of closing it transferred to operation by the Fleetwood Museum Trust. Since then it has been run independently, and as such no longer sends visitor statistics to the County Council. The Lancaster City Museum, Maritime Museum and Cottage Museum are now run by Lancaster City Council, and no figures are available for these for 2019/20 onwards.

During the Covid-19 lockdown all sites were closed. Most reopened in May 2021 but two, Helmshore Mill and Lancashire Conservation Studios, were open from April. The Museum of Lancashire did not reopen until September and Lancaster Castle until October.

In the latest financial year Lancaster Castle was visited by 37,903 people. Next with 23,426 visitors, was Gawthorpe Hall. In third place was Clitheroe Castle, with visitor numbers still well down on pre-covid years. Just behind this came the Judges' lodgings in Lancaster. Visitor numbers here were up by almost two thirds on 2022/23. By far the majority of visitors to this museum were non-paying and may have been children. This was also true of Gawthorpe Hall. The grand total was 120,113, up 3.7% on 2022/3.

The Fleetwood Museum appeared in Table 1 independently for the first time in 2022.

**Table 2, Visitor numbers, Lancashire Museums Service**

Museum / Archive	Authority	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20*	2020/21*	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	% change 2022/23 - 2023/24
Clitheroe Castle Museum	Ribble Valley	60,259	69,547	40,637	17,861	1,400	12,421	17,429	17,708	1.6%
Fleetwood Museum <sup>[5]</sup>	Wyre	12,788	14,741	---	---	---	---	---	---	NA
Gawthorpe Hall <sup>[1]</sup>	Burnley	25,138	30,252	31,213	28,679	894	12,309	21,660	23,426	8.2%
Helmshore Mills Textile Museum <sup>[4]</sup>	Rossendale	11,985	5,110	8,104	10,154	246	6,353	9,238	11,338	22.7%
Judges' Lodgings <sup>[4]</sup>	Lancaster	5,517	2,215	4,877	7,466	781	9,719	11,134	17,647	58.5%
Lancashire Conservation Studios	Preston	3,713	4,790	4,067	4,215	92	821	1,544	2,395	55.1%
Lancaster Castle	Lancaster	40,930	48,161	45,271	47,176	---	17,121	48,262	37,903	-21.5%
Lancaster City Museum <sup>[6]</sup>	Lancaster	61,336	53,934	31,971	---	---	---	---	---	NA
Lancaster Maritime Museum <sup>[2][6]</sup>	Lancaster	8,450	5,955	6,048	---	---	---	---	---	NA
Museum of Lancashire <sup>[4]</sup>	Preston	12,771	230	0	106	---	1,064	1,551	2,391	54.2%
Queen St Mill Textile Museum <sup>[4]</sup>	Burnley	9,902	1,253	1,767	3,827	---	2,695	4,985	7,305	46.5%
The Cottage Museum <sup>[3][6]</sup>	Lancaster	3,529	2,805	2,826	---	---	---	---	---	NA

Source: Lancashire County Library and Information Service

[1] Closed Jun 2015 - Mar 2016 and Jan – Mar 2017

[2] Closed Nov 2015 – Jun 2016

[3] Closed Nov 2016 – Mar 2017

[4] Closed from Oct 2016, apart from school visits

[5] Earmarked for closure along with [4], but reopened April 2017, now having transferred to the Fleetwood Museum Trust

[6] Now run by Lancaster City Council

\* COVID-19 affected the end of the 2019/20 season with all but one museum closing to visitors by 17/03/2020. No museum reopened until August and of the five that did only one stayed open till December.

## 5 Lancashire Museums Service budget review

In November 2015, the county council published details of budget proposals for a wide range of services. These included cultural services museums (number 043). The initial proposal was to close five Lancashire museums from 1st April 2016. These were Queen Street Mill, Helmshore, Museum of Lancashire, Judges Lodgings and Fleetwood.

Consideration is being given to alternative service delivery models including their operation by local communities and interest groups. In March 2016, it was

announced that the five museums would stay open until the end of September 2016, to allow more time for discussions with interested organisations. School visits by arrangement were still allowed. Fleetwood Museum has been transferred to the Fleetwood Museum Trust, and opened normally since April 2017, but no longer provides visitor numbers to Lancashire County Council.

In April 2018 a further decision was taken to reopen the Queen Street Mill, the Judges Lodgings and Helmshore for three days a week during the summer, for the next two years. Because of health and safety issues (work is required to strengthen the mill chimney) the opening of Queen Street Mill was restricted to a few special open days. From April 2019 it has opened normally three days a week. The Judges' Lodgings visitor numbers were boosted by frequent school visits and Helmshore Mills Museum opened as planned for three days a week.

Lancashire County Council had a contract to run the Lancaster City Museum, Maritime Museum and Cottage Museum from the early 2000s, but has now relinquished this back to Lancaster City Council.

## 6 Complementary tourism statistics and information

The office for national statistics released in 2015 [sub-national tourism statistics](#) that consider the economic value of tourism for each local authority area in the country. Results are available for the Lancashire County Council area, and the two unitary authorities of Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool. The detailed figures cover domestic day visits, overnight stays, employment, tourism enterprises and foreign visitors.

The [Marketing Lancashire](#) website is an online resource for business advice, the latest industry news, information on skills and training and marketing opportunities for tourism businesses.

The Information Britain website contains details of [attractions in the Lancashire area](#). Please note that some of the places listed are outside the broader Lancashire area.

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