

Introducing England

The Cotswolds

In England these days, most people live in towns or cities. But people's hearts are often in the countryside. When English people dream of "home", they are probably thinking of rolling countryside rather than crowded cities.

There are many areas of England with beautiful countryside. One of the most famous is the Cotswolds, an area of rolling English countryside about 100 kilometres northwest of London.

Historically speaking, the area is characterized by two things: sheep and stone.

From the eleventh to the nineteenth century, the Cotswolds were an important wool-producing region. Wool was exported to all over Europe. The wealth generated by the wool trade helped to build the magnificent churches and manor houses that are dotted throughout the region.

The second characteristic of the Cotswolds is stone. There are many limestone deposits. These were used to build houses, churches and walls. There is a distinctive light-brown colour to most buildings in the region.

In the late nineteenth century, however, the wool trade went into decline. There was growing competition from countries like New Zealand and Australia. Into the twentieth century, the Cotswolds became more famous as idyllic tourist destination. In 1966, the area was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This means that there are restrictions on new buildings and the appearance of the region must be conserved.

Old buildings of historical significance may not simply be knocked down to make a new building. Shopkeepers and homeowners may redecorate the inside of the building, but the external appearance must match the rest of the area's architecture. Here in the town of Burford, modern boutiques and shops are in buildings dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

If you want to build a new building, it must use the traditional architectural style. Look at this modern house built with a thatched roof.

Let's look at a few villages in the Cotswolds. This is the village of Bibury. The village is particularly famous for a row of cottages, called Arlington Row, which was built in 1380 as a wool store. People still live in the cottages today. The River Coln flows through the village. There is a trout farm and you can stop at the Swan Hotel for some afternoon tea. The village has a charming beauty, and on the day I visited, there was some typically English weather: it was cloudy and rainy!

This is a town called Bourton-on-the-Water. It has an interesting nickname: the Venice of the Cotswolds. The River Windrush flows through the centre of the village and is crossed by many charming bridges. In summer the banks of the river are crowded with people. There are many tea shops and souvenir shops for visitors to enjoy.

But perhaps my favourite village in the Cotswolds is Lower Slaughter. This is a picture-perfect village. Do not be confused by the name. Slaughter does not mean "killing". It probably comes from the name of a Norman knight called Philip de Sloitre, who was given land in the area in the 11th century. There is an old mill and water wheel in the village. Visiting a place like Lower Slaughter is like taking a trip back in time. It is a charming, peaceful village, with an unforgettable name!

The Cotswolds deserves its reputation as one of the most beautiful parts of England. But I wonder if you have noticed something familiar as you have been watching this video. We have seen the rolling hills of the Cotswolds, but look at this picture. This is Biei in central Hokkaido. We have seen beautiful streams flowing through villages with willow trees on the banks. This is a picture of Central Lawn on the campus of Hokkaido University. And the national flower of England is the rose. Here are roses in a garden in Hokkaido. Perhaps after seeing this video, you will understand why this Englishman feels very much at home living in Hokkaido.