

Culture in Dorset 2023



Arts
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Dorset is a county famous for its culture.

Creativity thrives here, and the enormous variety and volume of cultural events is astounding.

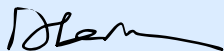
It's one of the things that makes the county such an attractive proposition to visitors. Fields become festivals, churches transform into creative hubs, and community halls house wondrous, theatrical experiences.



My brilliant team and I have had both the privilege and challenge of celebrating a small selection of cultural moments in 2023, from the thousands of activities that have taken place. Our choice is far from exhaustive. We hope, though, that it reflects the diversity of the creative year, encompassing both the epic and the intimate.

As always, this doesn't happen by chance. We're incredibly lucky in Dorset to have a local authority that understands and values culture and its key role in creating stronger, healthier communities. We're also blessed with an array of welcoming venues and talented organisations, the rocks on which a dynamic cultural community can flourish.

But most of all, we're lucky to have around 10,000 creative practitioners whose dedication and creativity constantly inspire, and without which, life has slightly less purpose and far less joy.



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The Arts Development Company is a social enterprise. We work with Dorset Council to support culture across the county.



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Sources: The Economic Impact of Dorset's Visitor Economy 2021, Creative UK and UK Government's Headline findings for the Participation Survey (October 2021 to March 2022)

Visitors spent over

**£105
MILLION**

on entertainment and
attractions in Dorset in 2021

The Creative Industries employ

**2 MILLION
PEOPLE**

That's three times the national average

**MORE PEOPLE
ENGAGED WITH
CULTURE THAN
FOOTBALL**

88% engaged with culture and 65%
engaged with football

Artz+, across Dorset



Lunchtime on a warm summer's day in rural Dorset. Among a gathering audience in an intimate village hall are disabled children and their siblings, waiting in eager anticipation for a performance of Squashbox Theatre's 'Journey to the Stars'. For the next hour, they'll share the joyful experience of live performance, before getting the chance to create their own puppets in a special workshop.

Every school holiday brings cultural experiences like this. Organised by Dorset Council's Artz+ Sportz+, disabled children are given opportunities to engage with the county's fantastic range of museums, performances and concerts. As with this show, part of Artsreach's Creative Summer Programme, they get to enjoy something new, something transformative, and, in this case, something other-worldly.



Lead: Dorset Council



Guggleton Farm Arts, Stalbridge

We turn a corner and my passenger exclaims “wow”.

Known affectionately as the Gugg to its many friends, this venue is extraordinary and defies description. Part art studio, part gallery, part performance space, it's home to 13 community groups and over 300 creatives. What those impressive numbers don't convey is the purpose or the spirit. It's a place that understands the role culture plays in changing lives, whether in hearing a musician or throwing a clay bowl.

In torrential rain, a herd of 8 and 9-year-old school kids talk animatedly through the gallery. “What do you like about coming here?”, they're asked. One comments on the quality, another on how it always changes. A third responds: “It makes me feel differently about the world”. Wow indeed.

Supporters: Dorset Council, HAF, Dorset Community Action, Stalbridge Town Council, Vision FR, Stalbridge Community Shop, Anne Harris Children's Fund, Social Enterprise UK, UK Association of Men's Sheds



Eype Centre for the Arts Bridport

In 1863, Gregory Raymond left the vast sum of £3,000 to build a church for the community in Eype. 140 years later, the community still strong but congregations smaller, funds was found to transform the church, and Eype Centre for the Arts was born. New, in a way, but rooted in what churches had been for centuries; the heart of the community.

Every year in the lighter months, the space transforms into a cultural hub for exhibitions, concerts, opera, literary festivals and even a recording studio. It's an incredible example of transformation and the continuous dedication of community.



West Bay Discovery Centre Bridport

**Our cultural lives are, like so much,
formed by our earliest experiences.**

And children are notoriously harsh critics. So this July, West Bay Discovery Centre chose to join the British Museum, Natural History Museum and Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art in adopting the Kids in Museums manifesto.



Already known for their interactive displays, the Centre is now laser-focused on being even more welcoming and comfortable for families. From marine conservation to railway history, via Jurassic Coast fossils, their programme pulls together artefacts, talks and performances to illuminate each subject, always with children and their families at the forefront of their thinking.



Dorset

County of Culture



Lyme Regis



Dorchester



Portland

illingham



Verwood





Museum of East Dorset Wimborne

Sometimes change is spectacular, other times almost invisible. The Museum of East Dorset completed an astonishing refurbishment in 2020 that has deservedly led to a South West Tourism Excellence award. They even changed their name, leaving behind the wonderfully mysterious, if slightly confusing, name of the Priest's House.

Three years on they're now doing the barely perceptible, but just as important. More important, in fact. They're working hard to improve their access and inclusion, enhancing their visitor experience so they can be experienced and enjoyed by all.

Typically for this organisation, they're approaching this in an accessible and inclusive way. They're creating an 'Include to Develop' group, to gather ideas and suggestions to improve the visitor experience, rather than just assuming what people need and want.





Ancient Technology Centre, Cranborne

“Metal detecting” Lance, the hero of Mackenzie Crook’s modern classic *Detectorists*, declares “is the closest you’ll get to time travelling.” Lance had clearly never been to Cranborne’s Ancient Technology Centre.

From the Neolithic to the Vikings, staff and volunteers recreate buildings and experiences that transport us back through the centuries. Whether it’s reconstructing an Iron Age roundhouse or exploring a Roman Forge, you’re immersed in times past and connected to civilisations and cultures that once made Dorset their home.

Volunteers play a pivotal role at the Ancient Technology Centre. Their diligence and care has been celebrated with a Queen’s Award, and a Princess Royal Training Award. It’s no surprise that their visitor numbers almost doubled in 2023.

Part of Dorset Council’s Outdoor Education Services.



Glow Badbury, Badbury Rings

It's night time on an unseasonably warm Friday in September. For months, 40 artists and over 1000 local children and adults have been working together, learning, sharing and creating. We're at Badbury Rings, a Celtic hillfort now managed by the National Trust, and this epic project is being led by the remarkably talented company, Emerald Ant.

Commissioned to deliver events and workshops around the site, Emerald Ant created Glow Badbury, a programme in four chapters. Part art trail, part film, part concert, part performance. At its heart was the land and its community, and the connection between the two.

Lead: Emerald Ant

Creatives: Sarah Butterworth, Thomas Hughes, Heidi Steller, Holly Miller, Wimborne Community Theatre, Millstream Theatre, the Quarterjacks of Wimborne, WCT choir, The Paper Cinema, Ellen Marsden, Chris Caton, Emma Marie Kabanova, Karen Wimhurst, Jane Silver-Corren, Adrian Newton.

Partners: National Trust Kingston Lacy





Landance, Swanage

Dusk in Swanage. As the light fades, dancers appear on the horizon and enchant their spectators. In two free shows, and an accessible screening, visitors experience a compelling interpretation of the land they stood on, and an exciting new perspective of the town.

Dorset's wonderful Landance worked with sixteen professionals over nine days to create 'Light,' a performance dedicated to Swanage and its community. Over 250 children took part through free dance workshops, held at the local primary school and library, and for groups with learning disabilities.

Creatives: Kip Johnson, Patricia Langa, Emily Thomson-Smith, Reuben Squirrell, Rory Armstrong, Mia Tongo Mesembe, Mataio Austin Dean of Shovel Dance Collective, Ula Taylor Reilly, Ella Huhne, Sherry Coenen, Mihaylina Lefterova, Naomi Watt, Molly Wilsher, Delphine Jones, Cleo Evans



Swanage Blues Festival, Swanage

Steve Darrington, blues musician and festival organiser, visited Swanage for two days in the summer of 2000. He never left. "Swanage has that effect on people." He organised the first blues event in 2001 and it grew from there.

Fans come from all over the world to experience Swanage Blues Festival. They're attracted by the town's many charms, its quirky venues and friendly people. But, more than that, they come for the quality and the variety.

In March and October the town is transformed as audiences join musicians in hotels, bars and even campsites. This autumn's festival saw an incredible 50 performances across fifteen venues in just four days. Little wonder cultural tourists come back year after year. Swanage Blues Festival has that effect on people.



Inside Out Festival, across Dorset

Every two years, tens of thousands of people are mesmerised by performing artists from across the world in Dorset's stunning natural landscape.

Since 2007, Dorset's prestigious Activate Performing Arts have been producing Inside Out Dorset, a key moment in the county's cultural calendar.

This year, Activate took the festival to five locations across Dorset, from Wimborne to Bere Regis. Across ten days over 30,000 visits were made to these remarkable places. From the grand opera-singing dolls sliding through Weymouth town centre, to an intimate sound trail in the forest of Moors Valley, Inside Out Dorset promises the extraordinary. It never fails to deliver.





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Find out more:
theartsdevelopmentcompany.org.uk

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