# National Trust imposes ban on coach trips to Birling Gap amid safety concerns



Tourists at Birling Gap, a coastal hamlet in East Sussex, have been spotted standing perilously close to the edge of the famed Seven Sisters chalk cliffs, raising concerns regarding safety and environmental impact. The National Trust, which oversees this area, has initiated a ban on coach trips in an effort to manage the surge of visitors and minimise damage to the natural landscape.

Birling Gap attracts approximately 600,000 visitors annually, a number that has recently escalated due to the popularity of the site on social media and its stunning vistas. However, this influx has led to significant wear on the grasslands, pathways, and verges, prompting the National Trust to act decisively. This ban is reportedly the first of its kind imposed by the Trust.

Local residents have generally welcomed the decision, noting the destruction wrought by the record number of visitors in recent years. Philip Myerson, a local resident, described the increase as "a tsunami" that has taken a toll on the area, commenting, “Everything is being worn away” as visitors crowd the once peaceful spot known for its natural beauty.

Concerns about safety have also been a recurring theme. East Sussex County Council has previously urged visitors to maintain a safe distance from the cliff edges, highlighting the unstable nature of the cliffs which are known to collapse suddenly. A council spokesperson remarked that the “iconic white cliffs are very popular with visitors but they are extremely unstable and can give way at any time with no warning.”

The cliffs are not only a spectacular natural landmark but are also historically significant, featuring in various films, videos, and even reality shows, which have contributed to their allure. Dot Skeaping, an 80-year-old local and former National Trust worker, pointed out that while the Trust seeks to welcome visitors to Birling Gap, they also aim to ensure they can appreciate the area’s beauty without contributing to its degradation.

Recent images demonstrate the recklessness of some tourists who, in pursuit of perfect photographs, have come dangerously close to the cliff edges. Children have also been seen in precarious positions near the edges, prompting heightened safety concerns. The area has witnessed tragic incidents in the past, including the death of South Korean student Hyewon Kim, who fell while attempting to pose for a photograph in 2017, underscoring the inherent risks of the location.

In response to these safety and environmental issues, the National Trust has clarified that while the ban on coaches is specific to Birling Gap, other means of travel to the site remain permitted. A spokesperson from the Trust mentioned their concerns about the substantial increase in coach visits, stating, “the site is unable to cope with [the increase].”

In light of rising temperatures and an increase in tourists during warmer weather, East Sussex County Council, along with other local authorities, has also been vocal about the risks associated with coastal erosion and the dangers posed by the cliffs to visitors.

The unique charm of Birling Gap and the surrounding Seven Sisters cliffs remains a vital draw for many, but addressing the balance between preservation and access to this natural wonder continues to pose a complex challenge for the National Trust and local authorities.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/03/29/birling-gap-risky-chalk-cliff-edges-recent-collapses/> - This article highlights the safety concerns at Birling Gap, particularly the unstable chalk cliffs and recent collapses, which supports the urgent need for safety measures and visitor regulation.
* <https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g186277-d654101-r769665264-Seven_Sisters_Country_Park-Seaford_East_Sussex_England.html> - This TripAdvisor review underscores the need for safety improvements in the Seven Sisters area, which echoes concerns about visitor safety and environmental impact.
* <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/seven-sisters-country-park> - This National Trust webpage provides information on managing visitor numbers and protecting natural areas, aligning with efforts to reduce environmental impact at Birling Gap.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-57207319> - BBC reports on the historical significance and appeal of the Seven Sisters cliffs, including their depiction in films and media, which contributes to their allure and visitor numbers.
* <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/news/2023/08/09/coastal-erosion-and-safety> - East Sussex County Council's comments on coastal erosion and safety risks highlight the ongoing concerns about cliff stability and visitor safety.