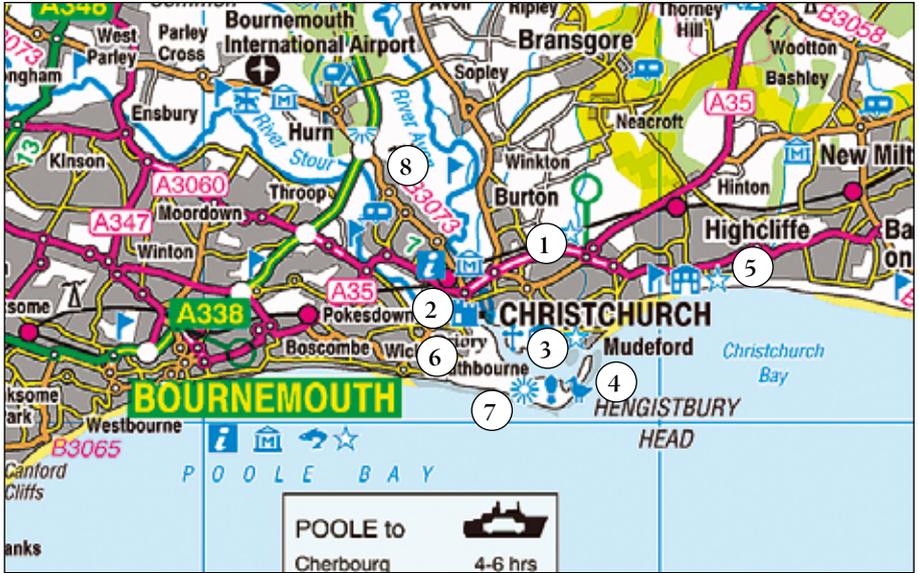


ITINERARY #17 - CHRISTCHURCH

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CHRISTCHURCH

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CHRISTCHURCH was originally called Twynham, on account of standing between the Rivers Stour and Avon, which gave access inland as far as Blandford and Salisbury. Together with the sheltered harbour this made it an obvious site for early human settlement. The Red House Museum has many artefacts from all periods, including Palaeolithic handaxes made 400,000 years ago.

The town underwent considerable development under the Saxons, particularly in the late 9th century by Alfred the Great, when it was fortified against the Danes. In the 12th century the Normans built the Priory and a castle here. As ships increased in size and draught, Christchurch diminished as a port.

Smuggling The quiet backwaters of Stanpit Marsh were for a long time the haunt of smugglers, who landed their contraband goods out of sight of the law. At the Battle of Mudeford in 1784, the authorities failed to prevent the landing and spiriting away of large quantities of illicit alcohol and tea.

The **Town Centre** is in complete contrast to Bournemouth or Poole, much older and more intimate. The town itself is slightly genteel and decidedly not like a seaside resort. Instead it offers a peaceful ambience with its riverside walks, ancient Priory and other historic buildings.

Beaches The Christchurch area offers stunning beaches from Mudeford along to Highcliffe on Mudeford Spit and on Hengistbury Head. These are much less commercialised than those at Bournemouth, but splendid for family outings to the seaside. In winter they are great for long bracing walks along the sands.

Nature The nature reserves of Hengistbury Head, Stanpit Marsh and St Catherine's Hill are all very good places to visit during the bird migration seasons. They also host large numbers of plants, butterflies and dragonflies, some of which are nationally rare. The Natterjack Toad was recently reintroduced and may be heard calling on evenings during May or June.