Did you know that Kielder Water & Forest Park is home to the UK’s largest outdoor art gallery? A great way to experience a different take on this unique environment is by exploring some of the unusual and engaging contemporary art and architectural works that are sited here.

Day one

A great starting point is Kielder Skyspace. Situated high on a hill overlooking Kielder village, Cat Cairn, where Skyspace can be found, provides fantastic views out over the landscape, the top end of Kielder Water and the edge of the Scottish border. The sculpture, which is by world renowned artist James Turrell, is a place of contemplation where you can watch the sky pass by and in the early evening experience the sculpture’s unusual lighting.

A little further up the forest road is the award winning Kielder Observatory, looking a bit like a wooden ship sailing above the rugged fellside. This is a place where you can enjoy a nightwatch or astronomy talk by experienced astronomers as part of a programme of public events throughout the year.

On the south shore of the Lakeside Way you will pass Bakethin nature reserve and John Maine’s Kielder Column on the way to Leaplish Waterside Park. Along the way discover the Mirage deck, where the Mirage art installation used to hang in the trees - the perfect place to have a picnic lunch amongst some of the oldest trees in the forest.

Leaplish Waterside Park is home to three sculptures; Shadow was amongst the earliest works created at Kielder; and Mapping minigolf and Play Garden which form part of the centre’s activities and are more recent. Mapping takes features and names from old and new maps of the Kielder valley to create a multi-layered and brightly coloured minigolf course. Play Garden is a children’s playground but also an imaginary environment inhabited by ‘forest follies’ that invites users to consider the many and varied elements that make up the complex landscape of Kielder Water & Forest Park.

Beyond Leaplish Waterside Park you will quickly arrive at Freya’s Cabin, a gold clad house balanced on stilts. Home to a character in a fairy story written by designers Studio Weave, Freya’s Cabin is intricately carved inside and offers shelter and views out over the lake towards Robin’s Hut which can be seen directly opposite on Kielder Water’s remote north shore.

If you still have time to spare, pick up a Keepsake pack from reception at Leaplish Waterside Park and complete the brass rubbing trail on Bull Crag peninsula beyond Freya’s Cabin. This enchanting artwork provides you with all the tools you need to track down twelve rubbing plaques featuring scenes created by artist Nicola Moss and create your own Kielder Keepsake.
Day two

Starting on top of Deadwater Fell, at 1900’ the highest point around, take in the huge views up into Scotland and across the breadth of Kielder Water & Forest Park to the south from Specere, architect David Adjaye’s mountain bikers’ shelter. Descend to Kielder village to get lost in the Minotaur maze, designed by architect Nick Coombe and artist Shona Kitchen. Why not stop for lunch at the Duke’s Pantry?

Head on the Lakeside Way past Gowanburn farmhouse to Silvas Capitalis, a giant wooden head created by American artists SIMPARCH and a mile further on rest at the Janus Chairs – three Goldilocks style rotating seats designed by Ryder Architecture, that can be orientated in an infinite number of positions depending on the visitor’s desires.

Another couple of miles will take you to Robin’s Hut, paired with Freya's Cabin (see above), and shortly after you will arrive at the Belvedere, Kielder’s first architectural commission and winner of many prestigious accolades.

From April to October the Osprey ferry will pick up visitors wanting to return to Leaplish or Tower Knowe visitor centres from the Belvedere jetty next to the shelter.

If you’re ready to complete the north shore walk, continue on to Cock Stoor, the isolated stand of Scot’s Pine trees at the water’s edge to the east. Here you will find 55/02, a bright orange shelter designed by sixteen*(makers), featuring a cluster of unusual places to sit and enjoy different views of the main lake and the more intimate Belling inlet. 55/02 refers to the latitude and longitude of the site and relates to the idea that the complex design of this shelter developed out of a study of this exact spot, and that its form would have been different had it been conceived for anywhere else.

From Cock Stoor the path leads deep into the Belling inlet and then back out to the Belling, a promontory only just joined to the shore by a narrow neck of land. A waymarked spur path will take you to the Wave Chamber, a camera obscura created by artist Chris Drury in the form of a stone beehive shaped hut. Inside on sunny days, an image of the waves on the lake is projected onto the floor in the darkness of the circular chamber.

The final part of the walk passes through Hawkhope car park and leaving the main Lakeside Way, proceeds to Falstone below the dam. Along the village riverside walk you can discover Stell, a sculpture by Colin Wilbourn in the shape of a traditional Northumbrian sheepfold. When you get close enough, it transforms into a small ‘room’ flanked by two carved stone sofas to sit on and rest your weary feet.

Note: there is a considerable distance between artworks. Visitors that wish to walk this route should first download the Trails Guide from the website to ensure they know how long it will take to get to each sculpture and how to plan their return journey. For advice, call 01434 220 616.