

The Southeast of England

The rolling fields, orchards, pastoral villages, and chalky downs of southeastern England have nurtured any number of great figures, from Charles Dickens to Henry James to Winston Churchill, to name just a few. Once you begin exploring the back roads of this small corner of England—the most remote bit of which is only two hours from London—it’s easy to see why so many writers, kings, queens, statesmen, and, especially in recent times, untold numbers of vacationers seeking a rural retreat have taken refuge in these landscapes. In these southern counties of Kent and Sussex, you’ll find beautiful countryside, miles of English Channel beaches, and the palaces, gardens, cathedrals, and historic homes that past residents have left behind. As you maneuver the twisting lanes, you may want to remember a line from another great English writer, C. K. Chesterton: “Before the Roman came to Rye or out to Severn strode, the rolling English drunkard made the rolling English road.”

Not to Be Missed in the South of England

Canterbury, cathedral and town
(page 196)

Dover Castle (page 214) and the
White Cliffs (page 215)

Gardens at Sissinghurst (page 234)

Ightham Mote, a medieval manor
house (page 231)

The town of Rye (page 218)

Canterbury

Bell Harry, the famous bell tower of **Canterbury Cathedral**, is visible for miles across the orchards and fields of the Kentish countryside. As you enter the beautiful city beneath the towers, you’re in good company. Pilgrims have made their way here for centuries, and in their footsteps you’ll find one of England’s great cathedrals, the seat of the Anglican church since 597, and a small, friendly medieval city that is a pleasure to explore.

Canterbury, of course, was the goal of the pilgrims in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, and the medieval lanes and squares still seem as lively as Chaucer depicted them. In fact, it's all the easier to step back in time a bit in Canterbury because that intrusive beast of modern times, the automobile, has been banned from most of the city center.

Planning Your Visit to Canterbury

The Canterbury **Visitor Information Centre** (12–13 Sun Street, The Buttermarket, Canterbury CT1 2HX; www.canterbury.co.uk) provides maps, listings of major attractions, and notices of special events and can help you find a room—a blessing in the busy summer months when the city fills to bursting. For information, call (01227) 378-100; for accommodations, call (01227) 378-108. Open January–Easter: Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; Easter–October: Monday–Saturday, 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m., Sunday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; November–December: daily, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

Special Events in Canterbury

Canterbury hosts many performing-arts events throughout the year. Some are held in the cathedral and, given this setting, provide a memorable experience. Check with the Visitor Information Centre when you arrive for a list of goings-on; the center also sells tickets to many events.

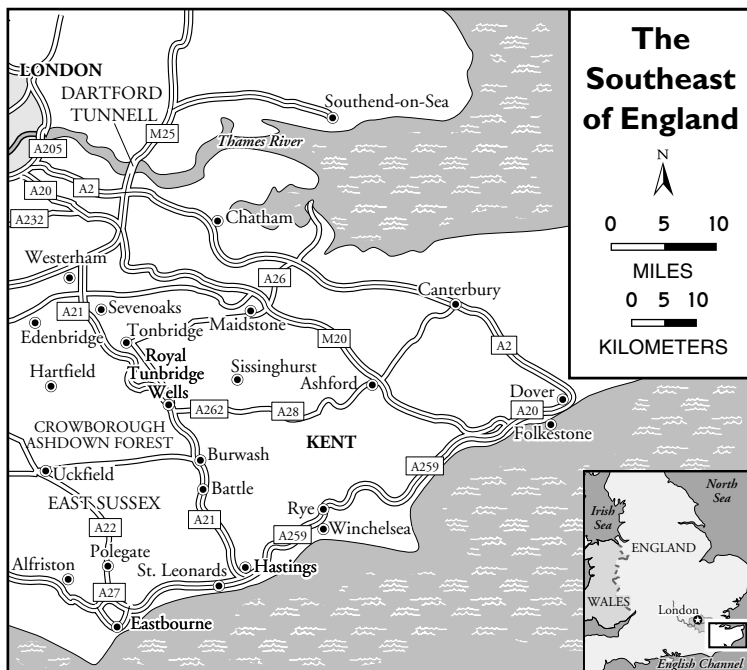
For two weeks in October, the **Canterbury Festival** presents a superb program of concerts, dance performances, plays, and readings at the cathedral and other venues around the city; the festival also stages a carnival procession that brings a great deal of color to Canterbury's medieval streets. For information and tickets, call (01227) 378-188.

December music programs in the cathedral include traditional English carols and a performance of *The Messiah*—not to be missed if you are anywhere near Canterbury at this time; for information and tickets, call (01227) 378-188.

Arriving and Getting Oriented in Canterbury

Canterbury is 62 miles southeast of London. Trains run about every half hour from London's Victoria Station to Canterbury East Station, and about every hour from London's Charing Cross Station to Canterbury West Station. The trip takes about an hour and a half and costs about £17 return. For information, call **National Rail Enquiries** at (08457) 484-950 or go to www.nationalrail.co.uk. Both train stations are at the edge of the city center and within easy walking distance of the cathedral and other sights.

By car, the quickest route from London is the M25/M20 toward Folkestone; exit at Ashford onto the A28 for the short drive north to Canterbury.



The trip takes just over an hour, but traffic in and around London can add considerable time. Several car parks are located on the outskirts of Canterbury and are well marked along the routes into the city. Free shuttle buses connect these car parks with the city center and operate Monday–Saturday, 7 a.m.–7 p.m.; at other times, parking attendants provide a token for a free ride on city buses. The fee is £2 per car per day. You can also use the car parks at the fringes of the city center; in these, obtain a ticket from a machine by punching in numbers from your license plate and place it on the dashboard in easy view; the fee is about £1 an hour, 7 a.m.–7 p.m., and about £2 flat rate, 7 p.m.–7 a.m.

National Express buses leave London's Victoria Coach Station for Canterbury about every hour. The trip takes about one hour and 50 minutes and costs £10.50. For more information, call (08705) 808-080 or go to www.nationalexpress.com. The bus station is on St. George's Lane at the edge of the pedestrian zone of the city center and within easy walking distance of the cathedral and other sights.

Canterbury is small and compact, and strolling along its medieval lanes is a pleasure. You can easily walk to all of the major sights in town. The main thoroughfare changes its name from St. George's Street to Parade Street to High Street to St. Peter's Street as it bisects the center of

the old city; signposts along the street point the way to all the major attractions.

Hotels in Canterbury

Canterbury Gate

£60–£90

OVERALL ★★★★★ | QUALITY ★★★½ | VALUE ★★★★★

Canterbury Gate Hotel, 36 Burgate, Canterbury, Kent CT1 2HA; (10227) 464-381; fax (10227) 462-800; cgate@cgate.demon.co.uk; www.cathgate.co.uk

Location 30 paces away from the cathedral

Amenities and services 26 rooms. The public areas are unusually pleasant, and include a comfy lounge, a rooftop patio with view of the cathedral towers, and a bow-windowed breakfast room overlooking medieval Burgate.

Elevator No

Parking For £3 a day, the hotel provides a voucher for city-run car parks

Pricing Includes Continental breakfast; full English breakfast available for £6

Credit cards AE, D, MC, V

The character-filled and atmospheric Canterbury Gate is wonderfully located in a 1438 building that abuts Cathedral Gate and overlooks the cathedral and precincts. In the spacious and comfortable rooms, you'll find all the sloping floors, heavy beams, leaded windows, and low doorways you need to take you back several centuries. Furnishings are comfortably old style without being coyly antique, and they include a few modern amenities, such as TVs and telephones. Bathrooms were carved out of the ancient warren of rooms late in the hotel's life, so they tend to be a bit small but nonetheless are well maintained, and many have shower-tub combinations. Rooms on the top floor are bathless and, while they are quite spartan, some have views of the cathedral and are an exceptional bargain (from £26 single or double). Ask for a room at the rear of the hotel (and preferably one with a cathedral view); those in front can be noisy at night when Canterbury's young people congregate in the square below. Steep stairs render the Canterbury Gate a poor choice for travelers with mobility problems.

County Hotel

£110–£130

OVERALL ★★★ | QUALITY ★★★ | VALUE ★★★

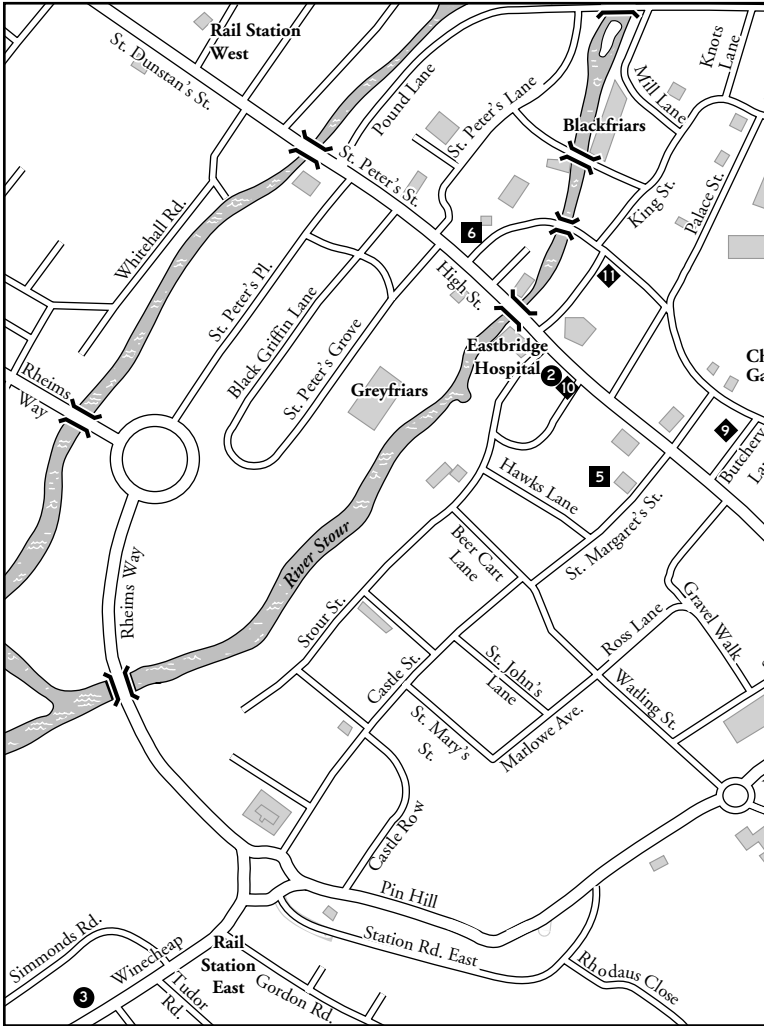
High Street, Canterbury, Kent CT1 2RX; (01227) 766-266; fax (01227) 451-512; county@macdonaldhotels.co.uk; www.macdonaldhotels.co.uk

Location In the center of town

Amenities and services 73 rooms. With its paneling, fireplace, and leaded windows overlooking High Street, the Tudor Bar off the lobby is one of the most pleasant places in town for tea, a drink, or a light lunch or snack. Service throughout the hotel is friendly and attentive.

Elevator Yes

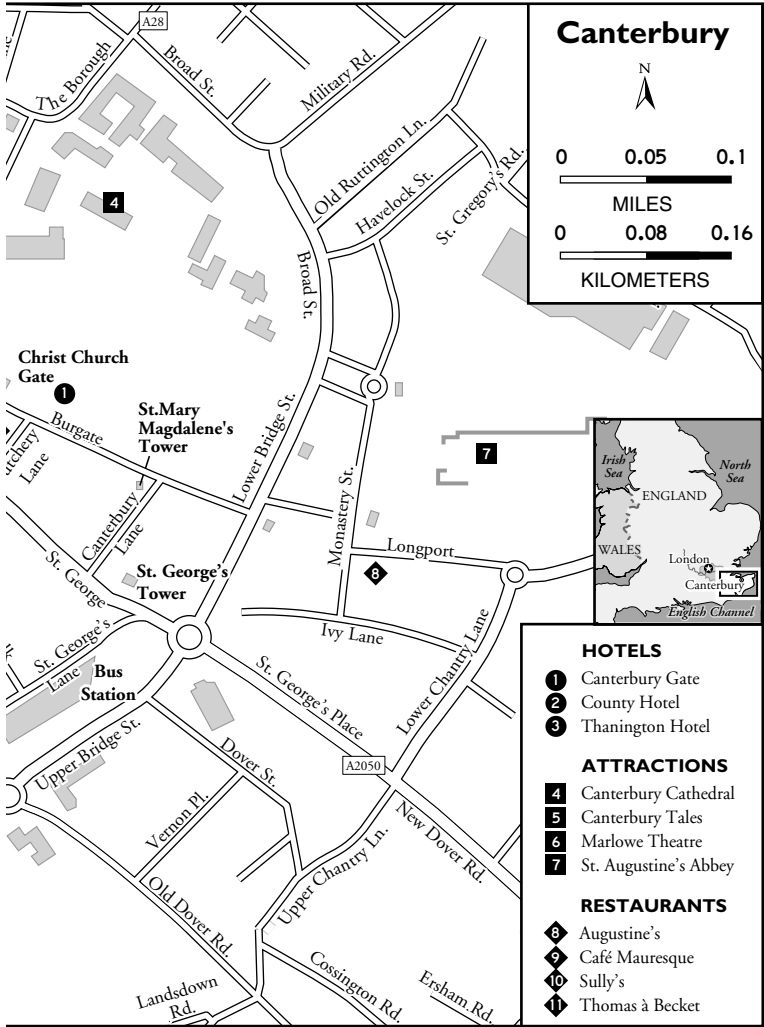
Parking The hotel has a garage (£2 a day) and free outdoor parking



Pricing Some rates include a lavish buffet breakfast; check the Web site for bed, breakfast, and dinner specials

Credit cards AE, D, MC, V

Part of this handsome brick building with an air of solid comfort in the center of town dates from the 17th century, while a new wing has been seamlessly added, and all rooms have been fitted with spacious, well-appointed modern baths. Unfortunately, the standard rooms have been brought up to date in fairly bland hotel style. If you're looking for atmosphere, ask for one of the "specialty" rooms in the old wing. These are larger and nicely furnished with wing chairs, four-



poster beds, and other distinctive touches. The hotel dining room, Sully's, is one of the best restaurant in town (see profile under "Restaurants in Canterbury," below).

Thanington Hotel

£57-£75

OVERALL ★★★ | QUALITY ★★★ | VALUE ★★★★★

140 Wincheap, Canterbury, Kent CT1 3RY; (01227) 453-227;
fax (01227) 453-225; www.thanington-hotel.co.uk

HOW HOTELS COMPARE

Hotel	Overall Rating	Quality Rating	Value Rating	Price
Canterbury				
Canterbury Gate	★★★★	★★★½	★★★★	£60–£90
Thanington Hotel	★★★	★★★	★★★★	£57–£75
County Hotel	★★★	★★★	★★★	£110–£130

Location Just outside the old city walls, about 10 minutes' walk from the center

Amenities and services 16 rooms. Drawing room, bar/lounge, indoor heated swimming pool, walled garden.

Elevator No

Parking Free, on premises

Pricing Includes English breakfast

Credit cards AE, D, V

This Georgian house is an especially good base for families, with a pool and garden to amuse young guests, and two large family units. Ten rooms in a modern wing linked to the main house by a conservatory are quiet but a bit worn and dowdy; the four on the main floor would be a good choice if hauling bags up a flight of stairs is a problem. Rooms in the old house are larger, have a lot more character, and have recently been redone in traditional, comfortable style, including some rooms with four-poster beds. For the best the hotel has to offer, ask for one of these rooms in the back of the house, away from noisy Wincheap. All rooms have well-equipped bathrooms, and the free car park allows you to stash the car without worry and explore Canterbury on foot.

Exploring Canterbury

To the west, the main street of Canterbury is known as St. Peter's Street as it passes **West Gate Tower**, a perfectly intact, fortified medieval gate house on the banks of the River Stour (the surrounding gardens are a nice place to enjoy a break from the sightseeing routine). The street then crosses town to the eastern section of the old walls near St. George's Tower, which rose above a medieval church bombed in World War II. A walk down this busy, pedestrian-only street takes about 15 minutes. Many of the major shops and restaurants are on and off High Street, as are some of Canterbury's finest medieval buildings, including Greyfriar's hospital and the Weaver's House. To reach the cathedral precincts from High Street, walk north on Mercery Lane through Christ Church Gate, built in 1517.

IN THE SOUTHEAST OF ENGLAND

Hotel	Overall Rating	Quality Rating	Value Rating	Price
Rye				
Jeake's House	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	£37–£84
King Charles II Guest House	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	£80–£95
The Mermaid Inn	★★★	★★★★	★★	£80–£160
White Vine House	★★★	★★★	★★★	£50–£100

Tours in Canterbury

While you are not going to have a difficult time finding your own way around Canterbury, guided walking tours of the cathedral precincts and other sights provide an excellent introduction to the city. From April through October, the 90-minute walks leave daily at 2 p.m. from the front of the **Canterbury Visitor Information Centre** (12–13 Sun Street on Buttermarket); in July and August, walks also leave at 11:30 a.m. Monday through Saturday. For information, call (01227) 459-779 or visit www.canterbury-walks.co.uk. The fee is £3.75 adults; £3.25 students, seniors, and children ages 14–17; £2.75 children under age 14; £10 families (up to two adults and three children under age 12).

Half-hour **Canterbury Historic River Tours** on the River Stour allow you to relax while a rower provides lively commentary on bridges, mills, riverside chapels, and other Canterbury sights you might otherwise overlook. Tours depart from the ducking-stool dock (where miscreants were once submerged for their infractions) behind the 15th-century Weaver's House (1 St. Peter's Street). For more information, call (07790) 534-744, or visit www.canterburyrivertours.co.uk. Tours operate April–September, Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., and Sunday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m. (weather and river conditions permitting). The fee is £5 adults, £3.80 children under age 16, and £15.50 families of two adults and two children.

The **Ghostly Tour of Canterbury** will amuse young travelers. The one-hour guided walk departs from the corner of St. Margaret's Street and Alberry Street every Friday and Saturday evening at 8 p.m. and explores nooks and crannies of the town that are allegedly haunted by ghosts from the city's 2,000-year past. For information call (07779) 575-831. The fee is £5 adults, £4 children, and £17 families of two adults and two children.

HOW ATTRACTIONS COMPARE

Attraction	Comments	Author's Rating
Canterbury		
Canterbury Cathedral	Seat of Archbishop of Canterbury and mother church of Anglicanism	★★★★
St. Augustine's Abbey	Ruins of monastic sites and Tudor palace	★★★
The Canterbury Tales	Multimedia exhibition recreating Chaucer's story	★★
Broadstairs		
Bleak House	House where Charles Dickens wrote	★★
Dover		
Dover Castle	One of England's most famous castles	★★★
Gateway to the White Cliffs	Famous cliffs facing the English Channel	★★★
Bearsted and Leeds Castle		
Leeds Castle	Romantic castle in lake	★★

Attractions in Canterbury

Canterbury Cathedral

Type of attraction Seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury and mother church of Anglicanism

Location The Precincts

Admission £4.50 adults; £3.50 seniors and students; free for children under age 5; £12.50 for families of 2 adults and 2 children, £10.50 for families of 1 adult and 2 children

Hours Easter–September 30: Monday–Saturday, 9 a.m.–6:30 p.m.; Sunday, 12:30–2:30 p.m., 4:30–5:30 p.m. (and for services). October 1–Easter: Monday–Saturday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sunday, 12:30–2:30 p.m., 4:30–5:30 p.m. (and for services)

Phone (01227) 762-862

Web site www.canterbury-cathedral.org

When to go Very crowded in summer, so go late in the day, when many visitors have left Canterbury; the cathedral is especially atmospheric and quiet on a winter weekday.

Special comments For a memorable experience, try to attend one of the recitals, classical musical concerts, and other performing-arts events the cathedral hosts. These are listed on the cathedral's recorded phone message and Web site and with the Canterbury Visitor Information Centre.

IN THE SOUTHEAST OF ENGLAND

Attraction	Comments	Author's Rating
Rye		
Lamb House	Historic home of famous writers	★★★
Rye Castle Museum	History of Rye area	★★
Battle		
Battle of Hastings 1066, Battlefield and Abbey	Scene of England's most important battle	★★★★
The Historic Houses of Kent		
Hever Castle	Medieval castle	★★★★
Ightham Mote	Medieval manor house	★★★★
Sissinghurst Castle Garden	Elizabethan manor house and world-famous gardens	★★★★
Chartwell	Historic home of Winston Churchill	★★★
Knole	Historic home	★★★
Penshurst Place	Historic home	★★★

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade school ★★★	Young adults ★★★★★	Seniors ★★★

Author's rating ★★★★★

How much time to allow At least 1 hour

Description and comments You are bound to feel a bit humbled upon entering this soaring, vaulted edifice, destination of Chaucer's pilgrims, scene of the murder of Thomas à Becket, and arguably the most famous cathedral in England. Despite the cathedral's ecclesiastic importance and its august history, which begins in 1070, the structure is surprisingly inviting. Soft gray stone, much of it shipped to England from French quarries, lends a great deal of warmth to the long interior, and a holiday atmosphere prevails as thousands of modern pilgrims troop through daily.

The cathedral is most famously associated with Thomas à Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury whom knights of Henry II murdered in 1170 (a slab in the northwest transept marks the spot). The zealously loyal knights had heard the King cry out, "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?" This was not an execution order, the penitent king later claimed, but simply frustration at Thomas's relentless defense of the church against encroachment by the state. Thomas was canonized three years later, and pilgrims began coming to Canterbury from all over Europe to worship the fallen martyr. In the Trinity Chapter, at the end of the longest choir in Europe, stood an elaborate shrine to Becket, who, even in death, ran afoul of another king—Henry VIII had the shrine destroyed as part of his campaign to diminish the power of the church. But he did not remove the chapel's magnificent stained-glass windows that

depict the miracles of Christ, nor could he erase the grooves that thousands of pilgrims made in the tiles as they made their way past the shrine on their knees. Henry did manage, however, to have most of the wall paintings that once covered the interior removed. A vivid remaining fragment depicts St. Paul and the Viper; you can see it high in the northeastern corner of the chapel.

One of the most enticing regions of the cathedral is the 12th-century crypt, where Henry II did his penance for Becket's murder; a fantastic bestiary is carved into the capitals of the support pillars. Just off the northwest transept, next to the crypt staircase, is the vast and beautiful Great Cloister. Before leaving the walled Cathedral Precinct, walk past the buildings of King's College, founded as a monastery in the seventh century and converted to a boy's school by Henry VIII. Alumni include 16th-century dramatist Christopher Marlowe and 20th-century novelist and short-story writer W. Somerset Maugham.

Touring tips The admission fee is often waived late in the day; the church is less crowded then, too.

The Canterbury Tales

Type of attraction Multimedia exhibition that re-creates Chaucer's story

Location St. Margaret's Street

Admission £6.95 adults; £5.25 children under age 16; £5.75 seniors; £5.95 students; £22.50 families of 2 adults and 2 children

Hours January 1–February 10: daily, 10 a.m.–4:30 p.m.; February 11–June 30: daily, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; July 1–September 1: daily, 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.; September 2–October 27: daily, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; October 28–December 31: daily, 10 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Phone (01227) 479-227

Web site www.canterburytales.org.uk

When to go Early or late, when the exhibition is less crowded and you will find it easier to get into the spirit of medieval misadventures

Special comments Stairs and dark passageways make a visit treacherous for anyone with limited mobility or low vision. A kids' version of the audio tape edits out Chaucer's ribald language and sexual innuendo.

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade school ★★★	Young adults ★★★	Seniors ★★

Author's rating ★★

How much time to allow About 1 hour

Description and comments Visitors who prefer to absorb history through serious reading and the touch of old stone will probably not be amused by the theatrics that have taken over the medieval church of St. Margaret. Walk-through sets depict scenes from *The Canterbury Tales*—from Tabard Inn in London, where Chaucer's pilgrims begin their journey, to Becket's shrine in Canterbury—accompanied by a lively audio-tape commentary, all meant to provide a taste of what it was like to be a 13th-century pilgrim. Along the way, animated puppets re-create

the lusty wife of Bath, the chivalrous knight, the uncouth miller, and other pilgrims, who recite their particular tales. For young visitors especially, the colorful animations may bring history alive. Others may well ask why they're spending their time in a Hollywood spectacle when so much real history lies just beyond the exit—which, not surprisingly, can only be reached through a large souvenir shop.

Touring tips If you plan on including this exhibition in your visit to Canterbury, stop here before walking through town or visiting the cathedral so you can get the most out of the historical perspective the commentary provides.

St. Augustine's Abbey

Type of attraction Ruins of one of Britain's oldest monastic sites and a Tudor palace

Location Long Port

Admission £2 adults; £1.50 children under age 16

Hours March 22–October 31: daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; November 1–March 31: daily, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

Phone (01227) 767-345

Web site www.english-heritage.org.uk

When to go In good weather, since you'll be spending most of the time here outdoors

Special comments The sight is accessible to visitors in wheelchairs

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★	Teens ★★	Over 30 ★★★½
Grade school ★★	Young adults ★★	Seniors ★★★½

Author's rating ★★★

How much time to allow At least 1 hour

Description and comments These highly evocative ruins encompass a huge sweep of British history and are set in a grassy field just outside Canterbury's medieval walls. St. Augustine founded an abbey here in 598, when Kentish King Ethelbert granted him permission to preach Christianity in Britain. By 1500, the complex was one of the world's leading centers of learning, with a scriptorium and 2,000-volume library. Henry VIII gave orders to destroy the abbey in the middle of the 16th century and constructed a palace on the grounds to welcome Anne of Cleves when she arrived from France to marry him. The ruins are now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and an intelligent and informative self-guided audio tour shows off the Saxon and Norman churches, tombs, the palace and its gardens, and other remnants of the once-great complex. Some fascinating finds, including carved stonework and the remains of a young woman buried on the grounds in the Middle Ages, are housed in a small museum.

Touring tips After touring the abbey ruins, continue east up Long Port to North Holmes Road and an even older remnant of early Canterbury, St. Martin's Church. Parts of the small church date to the Roman period. It is known that King Ethelbert presented the church to his Christian bride, Queen Bertha, which

HOW RESTAURANTS COMPARE

Name	Cuisine	Overall	Quality	Value	Price
Canterbury					
Augustine's	British	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★	Exp
Café Mauresque	North African	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	Mod
Sully's	British/Continental	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★	Exp
Thomas à Becket	British/Pub	★★★	★★	★★★	Inexp
Rye					
Landgate Bistro	French/ British	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	Mod
The Flushing Inn	British	★★★★	★★★★	★★	Exp

makes it the oldest parish church in Britain that has been in continuous use. The church is open Tuesday and Thursday, 10 a.m.–3 p.m., and Saturday, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.; admission is free.

Restaurants in Canterbury

Two good spots for a snack or light meal in Canterbury are **Alberry's**, 38 St. Margaret Street (phone (01227) 452-378), a friendly bistro in the center of town serving sandwiches and salads as well as pastas and more substantial fare, open Monday–Saturday, noon–11 p.m.; and the **Old Weavers House**, 1 St. Peters Street (phone (01227) 464-660), where you can enjoy sandwiches and other pub fare beneath medieval timbers or in a garden beside the River Stour, open daily, 11 a.m.–10:30 p.m.

Augustine's

★★★★½

MODERN BRITISH | EXPENSIVE | QUALITY ★★★★★½ | VALUE ★★★

1 and 2 Longport; (01227) 453-063

Reservations Required on weekends, recommended other times **Entree range** £12.50–£17; prix-fixe lunch, £12 2 courses, £13 3 courses **Payment** AE, MD, V **Bar** Full service **Disabled access** Yes

Hours Tuesday–Saturday, noon–1:30 p.m., 6:30–9:30 p.m.

Menu recommendations Any dish with local lamb, and innovative seafood creations such as crab and avocado gateau.

A Georgian house just outside the ruins of St. Augustine's Abbey is the setting for innovative cuisine served in an atmosphere of wood-plank floors, appealing blond furnishings, and earth-hued accents. Service is attentive and friendly, and the emphasis is on providing a leisurely and enjoyable meal—most welcome after a day amid Canterbury's tourist crowds.

IN THE SOUTHEAST OF ENGLAND

Name	Cuisine	Overall	Quality	Value	Price
Rye (continued)					
The Union Inn	Pub	★★★	★★★	★★★	Inexp
Mermaid Bar	Pub	★★★	★★	★★	Inexp
Battle					
Orangery	British/French	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	Mod
The Historic Houses of Kent					
The Spotted Dog	Pub/British	★★★	★★★	★★★	Mod

Café Mauresque

★★★★

ANDALUSIAN/NORTH AFRICAN | MODERATE | QUALITY ★★★★★ | VALUE ★★★★★

8 Butchery Lane; (01227) 464-300

Reservations Not necessary **Entree range** £6.50–£7.50 **Payment** MC, V **Bar** Full service **Disabled access** Yes**Hours** Daily, noon–10 p.m.**Menu recommendations** Couscous, any of the tapas.

In a town where mediocre eateries abound, this escape to exotic lands is rather exciting and a nice break from quaint medievaldom. Moroccan tiles and furnishings, and candlelight, provide plenty of atmosphere, making a meal an event in itself. The deftly prepared food is just as transporting. The same management provides Canterbury's other outpost of exotic cuisine, Café des Amis du Mexique, near West Gate at 93 St. Dunstan's Street.

Sully's

★★★½

BRITISH/CONTINENTAL | EXPENSIVE | QUALITY ★★★★★ | VALUE ★★★

County Hotel, High Street; (01227) 766-266

Reservations Recommended **Entree range** £15–£18.50 **Payment** AE, D, MC, V **Bar** Full service **Disabled access** Yes**Hours** Daily, noon–2:30 p.m., 7–9:30 p.m.

Menu recommendations Rack of Kentish lamb; filet of salmon with fennel; pan-roasted breast of duck with red onions; start with the vodka and lemon-scented risotto.

One of Canterbury's better restaurants serves accomplished cuisine in quiet surroundings. Service is impeccable, too, yet Sully's retains a comfortable, welcoming

air. Our only complaint is the rather bland and uninspired decor, which doesn't do justice to the fare that comes out of the kitchen.

Thomas à Becket

★★★

BRITISH/PUB | INEXPENSIVE | QUALITY ★★ | VALUE ★★★

21 Best Lane; (01227) 464-384

Reservations Recommended on weekends **Entree range** £5–£8 **Payment** AE, D, MC, V **Bar** Full service **Disabled access** Yes

Hours Daily, noon–11:30 p.m.

Menu recommendations Stick to the basic pub fare: liver and bacon casserole; lamb and apple pie; lamb shank. A selection of vegetarian dishes (including a delicious stir-fry) are available, and daily specials often include fresh fish.

The Becket is the favorite of the many locals who crowd into the cozy, beamed rooms every evening. This is not just a place for drinking—the food is good, filling, quite inventive for pub fare, and very fairly priced. Service is remarkably attentive given the number of customers that pack in here.

Entertainment and Nightlife in Canterbury

The **Gulbenkian Theatre** is part of the University of Kent, which spreads across a hill above the town named for Wat Tyler, who led the Peasant's Revolt of 1381. The theater, on Giles Lane, hosts a year-round program of theater, dance, and many visiting entertainers, and also includes a British Film Institute cinema that shows classic and contemporary films. The Visitor Information Centre has listings of Gulbenkian events; call (01227) 769-075 or visit www.ukc.ac.uk/gulbenkian. The **Marlowe Theatre**, in the center of Canterbury on the Friars, is named for the 16th-century dramatist who was born in Canterbury. It is the major regional theater for southeastern England and, in addition to dramatic productions, hosts many visiting theater, dance, and music groups. For information, check with the Visitor Information Centre, call (01227) 787-787, or go to www.marlowetheatre.com.

Shopping in Canterbury

A lively market selling clothing, household wares, and some crafts fills medieval **Burgate** on Wednesdays and Fridays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Far more interesting is the **Canterbury Farmers Market**, in a refurbished Victorian goods shed outside the Canterbury West Railway Station; fresh produce from local Kent farms fills the stalls and shows up on the menu of the **Goods Shed** restaurant; the market and restaurant are open Monday–Saturday, 8 a.m.–7 p.m. and Sunday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m. For more information, call (01227) 459-153.

The **Canterbury Cathedral Shop**, down the street from the cathedral entrance at 25 Burgate (phone (01227) 865-300), is well stocked with reproductions of gargoyles, stained glass, and tapestries, and has a good

selection of music and Christmas cards and decorations. The shop is open Monday–Saturday, 9:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. and Sunday, 10:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Recreation in and around Canterbury

Some of the most enjoyable hiking in England is along the **North Downs National Trail**. This much-trod path follows the route of Chaucer’s pilgrims across the beautiful Kent countryside for 150 miles, passing through orchards, forests, and villages and ending at the **White Cliffs of Dover** (see profile, pages 215–216). **Leeds Castle** (see profile, pages 217–218) is on the route, and a northern spur passes through Canterbury. The Visitor Information Centre in Canterbury provides maps of the North Downs Way and related literature. In addition, the National Trails Web site (www.nationaltrails.gov.uk) is a great source of info on the route.

Another popular walking and cycling route is the seven-mile-long **Crab and Winkle Way**, which follows the long-abandoned Canterbury and Winstable railway line from Canterbury to the sea. If you wish to explore the city and surrounding countryside on cycle, contact **Downland Cycles** at Canterbury West Railway Station (phone (01227) 479-643; www.downlandcycles.co.uk). Rentals are £10 a day for adult bikes, £7 a day for kids’ bikes, and £20 a day for tandems. The shop also provides suggested routes into the nearby countryside and coastal regions on treks that range from 10 to 25 miles.

Around Canterbury

Sooner or later the green downs and fertile farmland surrounding Canterbury may entice you to venture out, and there’s much to see within a short distance.

Broadstairs

Any devoted reader of Charles Dickens will want to make the short pilgrimage from Canterbury to this attractive seashore town, where brick houses climb steep streets above a snug little harbor and pebbly beach. Dickens began coming here in 1837, when he was just 25 and already famous for *The Pickwick Papers*. To him, Broadstairs “beat all other watering places” and the author began returning every summer to watch his growing brood become “brown as berries,” “to walk upon the sands at low-water,” and to commit to paper the words that flowed out of him at a prodigious volume.

Arriving and Getting Oriented in Broadstairs

Broadstairs is about 15 miles northeast of Canterbury along A28. Trains from Canterbury West make the trip in half an hour or 45 minutes, depending on whether or not it’s necessary to change; the trip costs about

£9 return. For information, call **National Rail Enquiries** at (08457) 484-950 or go to www.nationalrail.co.uk. The **Broadstairs Visitor Information Centre** is at 6B High Street (phone (10843) 583-333).

Exploring Broadstairs

Like Dickens, you can walk on the sands and follow the author's footsteps through narrow streets where signs inscribed with "The Old Curiosity Shop" and other Dickensian monikers swing in front of many businesses. For a bracing adventure, walk along the seaside promenade facing Viking Bay just north of the harbor, where winds whip the North Sea high into the air and send it crashing over the walkway.

You'll be in for a bit of a shock if you pull into town in mid-June, during the annual **Broadstairs Dickens Festival**. Dickens enthusiasts dress like their favorite characters from the master's novels and promenade on the seafront, play croquet, and swim in Victorian bathing costumes. In mid-August, the town hosts the **Broadstairs Folk Week**, one of England's larger folk festivals, with a program of dance, music, and a crafts fair.

Bleak House

Type of attraction The cliff-top house where Charles Dickens spent his summers and wrote some of his most famous works

Location On cliff top above Viking Bay

Admission £3 adults; £2.50 seniors and children under age 16

Hours End of February–mid-December: daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m. (to 9 p.m. in July and August)

Phone (01843) 862-224

Web site www.bleakhouse.ndo.co.uk

When to go Anytime a school group is not tromping through the house

Special comments If you're a Dickens fan, you'll want to linger over the writer's ephemera at leisure; others in your party may be bored, so leave them on the beach.

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★	Teens ★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade school ★★	Young adults ★★	Seniors ★★★

Author's rating ★★

How much time to allow About ½ hour

Description and comments The souvenir shop and garish signs that surround the entrance to this handsome brick house overlooking the English Channel can dissuade a serious Dickens fan from entering. Don't let the clutter deter you, though, because inside several rooms poignantly capture the daily life of the writer, who wrote the eponymous *Bleak House* and most of *David Copperfield* in a bright upstairs study overlooking the sea. Dickens's pen, pocketknife, corrected proofs, the lectern he used at public readings, and other personal effects look as if

the author has just stepped out for one of his daily 12-mile walks on the beach; upon his return, he would enjoy a hearty lunch in the dining room. Cellars beneath the house are filled with exhibits that trace Broadstairs's infamy as a smuggling port, and a downstairs parlor pays tribute to the ships that floundered on the treacherous Goodwin Sands, visible just beyond the windows.

Touring tips Visitors are welcome to picnic in the house's extensive gardens, and it's hard to find a more appealing spot in Broadstairs.

Dover

While nearby Folkstone is the terminus of the Channel link between France and England, this busy Channel port, for centuries Britain's portal to the Continent, still bustles with nonstop activity as ferries continually move in and out of its extensive docks. Dover was an important Roman settlement, and became the chief city of the Cinque Ports (Five Ports), which also included Sandwich, Hythe, Romney, and Hastings. These seaside towns were afforded special privileges in return for defending the land and fitting out the Royal Fleet for skirmishes with the French and Spanish. Dover came under continual bombardment and shelling during World War II, when the townspeople frequently took shelter in the castle. Postwar builders launched their own assault on Dover with acres of ugly concrete, but the magnificent castle and famous **White Cliffs** are among the great sights of England.

Arriving and Getting Oriented in Dover

Dover is about 12 miles southeast of Canterbury along A2. Trains from Canterbury East make the trip in about half an hour; the trip costs about £9 return. Call **National Rail Enquiries** at (08457) 484-950 or go to **www.nationalrail.co.uk**. If you are visiting Dover from London (and it's an excellent day trip from the capital), trains run every half hour through the day from Victoria and Charing Cross Stations to Dover Priory Station, and the trip takes about an hour and 45 minutes; the fare is around £11. You can reach the castle from the station by bus (number 113) or taxi (they often wait outside the station, or call Heritage at (01304) 225-522). The walk, only a mile or so, is fairly pleasant, though the downhill trek is easier than the climb up. The **Dover Visitor Information Centre** is in the Old Town Gaol, on Biggin Street (phone (01304) 205-108; **www.whitecliffscountry.org.com**). The office is open daily, June 1–August 31, 9 a.m.–5:30 p.m., and September 1–May 31, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

Exploring Dover

Dover is not England's most appealing town, but if you have some time before hopping back on the train, you can spend a pleasant hour or so poking around. Aside from the castle, one of the other major remnants of old Dover is the **Maison Dieu Hall** in the town hall on Biggin Street. The cavernous room, built in 1221 as a hostel for Canterbury-bound pilgrims, is

open to the public for free Tuesday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–4:30 p.m. and Sunday, 2–4:30 p.m. Even older is the **Roman Painted House**, which, ironically, is on New Street. Vivid paintings and an elaborate under-floor heating system are preserved within a modern shelter. The house is open April–June, Tuesday–Sunday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; July and August, daily, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; and September, Tuesday–Sunday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Admission is £2 adults, £0.80 seniors and children; for information, call (01304) 203-279. You can enjoy stunning views of the White Cliffs and see the hubbub of busy Dover Harbour—without boarding a boat to France or beyond—on **White Cliffs Boat Tours**. Forty-minute trips leave from the clock tower in Dover Marina, Western Docks, and operate April–May and September–October, weekends, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; and June–August, daily, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Fee is £5 adults and £3 children ages 3–5. For more information, call (01303) 271-388 or go to www.whitecliffsboattours.co.uk.

Dover Castle

Type of attraction One of England's most famous castles

Location On cliffs above the east side of town

Admission £8.50 adults; £6.40 seniors; £4.30 children ages 5–15; free for children under age 5; £21.30 families of up to 2 adults and 2 children

Hours April–September: daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; October: daily, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; November–January: Thursday–Monday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; February–March: daily, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; closed December 24–25, January 1

Phone (01304) 201-628

Web site www.english-heritage.org.uk

When to go Try to avoid weekends, when the castle fills up with day-trippers from London and France.

Special comments The compound covers 70 acres, so pick up a free map at the entrance gate and plan your visit before setting off. A Land Train (free) makes a circuit of the grounds, and you can hop on and off at the attractions you want to see. If you are accompanied by restless children, you may want to head right to the kid-pleasing highlights: the 1216 Siege Experience, the Secret Wartime Tunnels, and a view over the Channel from one of the lookouts.

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade school ★★★	Young adults ★★★	Seniors ★★★

Author's rating ★★★

How much time to allow About 2 hours

Description and comments A fortification has stood on the site of Dover Castle since Roman times, and the Roman pharos (lighthouse) still stands, which makes it the oldest building in Britain. Much of the castle's mighty fortifications date from the 12th century, when the castle came to be known as the "key of England" because to take it would have meant to take the rest of the country.

There's a lot to see in the castle, and even the most ardent history buff may tire before touring the many rooms, towers, and dungeons. To maintain a historical perspective, look at the pharos and the Saxon church next to it, then enter the Keep Yard, where a short introductory film is shown. Before exploring the rest of the castle, climb up to Battlement Walk or Admiralty Lookout—here you'll get a sense of its strategic location high above the Channel. Make your next stop the 1216 Siege Experience, an audio tour that uses sound and light effects to dramatize a French attempt to seize the castle. It's possible to walk through a portion of the medieval tunnels that were cut into the chalky cliffs on which the castle is built, but the Secret Wartime Tunnels are far more interesting. During World War II, these housed a hospital, living quarters, and a military command center and can be visited only on a 40-minute guided tour that is accompanied by the sound of shells, airplanes, and air-raid sirens.

Touring tips If Dover Castle whets your appetite for more castles, travel north up the coast to two fortifications that Henry VIII built. Walmer Castle, seven miles northeast of Dover, is the official residence of the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. Among those holding this post have been the Duke of Wellington, who lived at Walmer 1829–1852; Sir Winston Churchill; and the late Queen Mother. Deal Castle, a mile north of Walmer, is built on a plan of concentric circles. The small port of Deal looms large in history—Caesar landed here in 55 B.C. and William Penn set sail from here for the American colonies in 1682. Both castles are open April–October, daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; and November–March, Wednesday–Sunday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

Gateway to the White Cliffs

Type of attraction Trails across the top of the famous cliffs facing the English Channel

Location Langdon Cliffs; about a quarter mile beyond the castle

Admission £1.50 per car

Hours March 1–October 31: daily, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; November 1–February 28: daily, 11 a.m.–4 p.m.; closed Christmas Day

Phone (01304) 202-756

Web site www.nationaltrust.org.uk

When to go Not in the rain, when the trails can be treacherously slippery and views are obscured

Special comments Parking and some of the paths to the viewpoints are wheelchair accessible; with its isolated location and spiral staircase, the lighthouse is not easily accessible to visitors with limited mobility. Children will love running around the downs and watching the shipping traffic in the Channel, but keep a close eye on them—some of the trails are close to the edge of the cliffs.

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade school ★★★★★	Young adults ★★★	Seniors ★★★

Author's rating ★★★

How much time to allow If you're going to walk as far as the lighthouse, allow at

least 2 hours. But even a brief 15-minute excursion from the parking areas to one of the many viewpoints along the clifftop is rewarding.

Description and comments This National Trust recreation area comprises the rolling downs atop the famous White Cliffs of Dover and affords a chance for a memorable walk in the bracing sea air. The big draw, of course, is the exhilarating view of the Channel, Dover Castle perched high above, and the chalk cliffs. The cliffs are indeed white, though slowly browning because of air pollution; they are made up of millions of fossilized sea creatures and coral that aeons ago thrived on the bottom of a tropical sea. The Straits of Dover at the bottom of the cliffs are the narrowest part of the Channel, and just 17 miles of water separate Dover from Cape Gris Nez, in France. This proximity has proved irresistible to generations of adventurers, from Francois Blanchard, who floated across the Straits in a balloon in 1785, to Captain Webb, who became the first swimmer to complete the crossing, in 1875; he reached Calais from Dover in 21 hours and 45 minutes.

From the parking areas near Dover Castle, a two-mile-long trail crosses grazing lands and follows the cliff top to South Foreland Lighthouse, built in 1843. Guglielmo Marconi made the first shore-to-ship radio transmissions from here on December 24, 1898, and a climb to the top affords memorable views of the Channel and the White Cliffs. The lighthouse is open March 1–June 30, Thursday–Monday, 11 a.m.–5:30 p.m.; July and August, daily, 11 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Admission is £2 adults, £1 children under age 16, £5 families of 2 adults and 3 children.

Touring tips A tea shop near the parking area offers snacks and light lunches on a terrace or in a bright, airy room overlooking the downs and Channel.

Bearsted and Leeds Castle

Bearsted is an attractive village where conical-roofed oast houses, once used to dry hops, rise above a verdant green village common. But the real attraction is nearby Leeds Castle, about five miles east.

Arriving and Getting Oriented at Bearsted and Leeds Castle

Bearsted is about 15 miles west of Canterbury, via M2 and M26. Trains from Canterbury West run to Bearsted about every 45 minutes, and the trip can be as quick as 45 minutes; the cost is £9.60 return; buses outside the station make frequent trips to the castle, and the fare £4 is round-trip. For more information, call **National Rail Enquiries** at (08457) 484-950 or go to www.nationalrail.co.uk.

Leeds Castle is a popular day trip from London, and it's just 40 miles southeast of the city. **National Express** (phone (08705) 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) offers all-inclusive packages that include round-trip transportation to and from Leeds from Victoria Coach Station and admission to the castle and grounds. The price is £15 adults Monday–Friday, £17 Saturday and Sunday; and £10 children ages 4–15 Monday–Friday, £11 Saturday and Sunday. **Connex** (phone (0870) 030-405; www.connex.co.uk), the rail operator, offers a similar package with train service from Victoria Station, transportation between Bearsted Sta-

tion and Leeds Castle, and admission to the castle and grounds. The price is £22 adults and £11 children ages 4–15.

Exploring Leeds Castle

Leeds Castle

Type of attraction A romantic castle in the middle of the lake

Location Outside the village of Bearsted, near Maidstone

Admission March 1–October 31: £12.50 adults; £11 seniors and students; £9 children ages 4–16; £39 families of 2 adults and 3 children. November 1–March 4: £10.50 adults; £9 seniors and students; £7 children ages 4–16; £33 families of 2 adults and 3 children.

Hours March–October: daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; November–February: daily, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

Phone (0870) 600-8880

Web site www.leeds-castle.com

When to go Unlike most historic properties in Britain, Leeds Castle is open year-round. However, you probably won't want to fork over the substantial admission fees in inclement weather when you can't enjoy the grounds.

Special comments There are several refreshment concessions on the grounds.

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★
Grade school ★★★	Young adults ★★★	Seniors ★★

Author's rating ★★

How much time to allow 2–3 hours

Description and comments “The Loveliest Castle in the World” is how this fairytale home of queens, kings, and nobility bills itself, and it's hard to argue. The castle is a mirage of light gray stone that seemingly floats on a lake. However, the mirage is soon shattered by the aura of commercialism that pervades the castle, which now hosts flower shows, fireworks displays, vintage-car exhibits, Christmas pageants, and many other flashy events. Four restaurants, several shops, a Dog Collar Museum (housed in the castle's gate house), a well-stocked aviary, and a nine-hole golf course are among other attractions on the grounds.

Leeds traces its origins to ninth-century fortifications and was transformed into a royal palace for Edward I in 1278. Henry VIII was one of many kings who resided at Leeds, and the castle was later the country estate of Lord Culpepper, governor of Virginia from 1680 to 1683. While the Gloriette, the keep that rises from the lake waters at the north end of the castle, is authentically medieval, much of the castle was rebuilt in the 19th and 20th centuries. Olive, Lady Baillie, purchased the castle in 1926 and amassed many of the furnishings and paintings that are on view in a series of exquisite and attractive salons and living quarters; the medieval Queen's Rooms and Henry VIII's banqueting hall retain some of their original furnishings.

The grounds are beautiful. Black swans and other waterfowl swim in the stream that bubbles through the Wood Garden and Duckery, and the castle's own vineyard

has been yielding grapes since the 11th century and is listed among the tax records of the Domesday Book. An English cottage garden and a Mediterranean bower are delightful, and a maze of 3,000 yew trees surrounding a secret tunnel and an underground grotto festooned with seashells will keep youngsters amused for hours.

Touring tips A nice time to enjoy the grounds is during one of the summertime outdoor concerts the castle hosts. Though you'll find many eateries on the castle grounds, a far more pleasant option is one of the historic pubs in Bearsted. The White Horse, facing the green, serves excellent pub lunches and full meals.

Rye

Rye is the English equivalent of an Italian hill town and just as charming, set on an outcropping above the plain and salt marshes, surrounded by walls, and entered through medieval gates. Once a port and now two miles inland, Rye has fought off pirates and invaders, provided hideouts for smugglers, and harbored an unusually large number of writers, whose presence you will encounter all over town.

Rye is today a much-visited weekend retreat for Londoners, and with its cobbled lanes and half-timbered houses, one of the most beautiful towns of England. Rye is a lovely place to stay, with many historic inns where you can curl up with a pint and a copy of Henry James or E. F. Benson (among the aforementioned local writers). The town is an excellent base from which to explore the surrounding countryside of Sussex and Kent. For more of the same, all you need to do is pop over to Winchelsea, two miles southwest of Rye. Winchelsea is a picturesque village perched on a hill above marshes and the sea, with an old church of time-mellowed stone that dates from 1300.

Planning Your Visit to Rye

The Rye Tourist Information Centre is part of the **Rye Heritage Centre**, located in an old sail-making workshop on Strand Quay (phone (01797) 226-696; Rye TN31 7AY; www.visitrye.co.uk). The office provides a wealth of information on local sights, services, and events; sells bus tickets and tickets for ferry service to France; and provides an accommodation booking service, which can be especially handy on weekends when Rye's hotels often fill up with Londoners. Open daily: November–February, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; and March–October, 9 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Another excellent source of information on Rye is the city resources Web site, www.rye-tourism.co.uk.

Special Events in Rye

Rye hosts the **Rye Winter Festival** in late January–early February and the **Rye Festival** in September; both bring classical music, jazz, theater works, and films to town. For information and tickets, call (01797) 22444 or visit www.ryefestival.co.uk. Rye gets into the spirit of Guy

Fawkes Day (November 5) on November 9 with the **Rye Bonfire Night**, which includes an evening torchlight procession through town, an enormous bonfire, and fireworks.

Arriving and Getting Oriented in Rye

Rye is 60 miles southeast of London. Trains run about every hour from London's Victoria Station with a change in Ashford, and also about every hour from London's London Bridge Station with a change at Hastings. The trip from either station takes about two hours and costs about £20 return. For information, call **National Rail Enquiries** at (08457) 484950 or go to **www.nationalrail.co.uk**. The Rye station is just north of the town center, about a ten-minute walk along Market Street.

By car, the quickest route from London is M25/M20 toward Folkestone; exit at Ashford onto the A2070 and A259 for the drive east to Canterbury. The trip takes just over an hour, but traffic in and around London can add considerable time. Several short-stay car parks are located at the edge of the town center, just a few minutes away by foot. In these you obtain a ticket from a machine and place it on the dashboard in easy view; the fee is about £1 an hour, 7 a.m.–7 p.m., and about £2 flat rate, 7 p.m.–7 a.m. Long-term visitor parking is available in a car park off the Battle road; the fee is £1.50 per car per day. Car parks are well signed off A259 and the other routes that ring the old town.

Hotels in Rye

Jeake's House **£37–£84**

OVERALL ★★★★★ | QUALITY ★★★★★ | VALUE ★★★★★

Mermaid Street, Rye, East Sussex TN31 7ET; (01797) 222-828;
fax (01797) 222-623; jeakeshouse@btinternet.com; www.jeakeshouse.com

Location On a cobbled street in the old town

Amenities and services 12 rooms. Drinks are available on the honor system in the book-lined bar, and a small, beamed parlor provides a quiet place to relax in front of the fire; breakfast is served in a two-story high, galleried room that once served as a Quaker chapel.

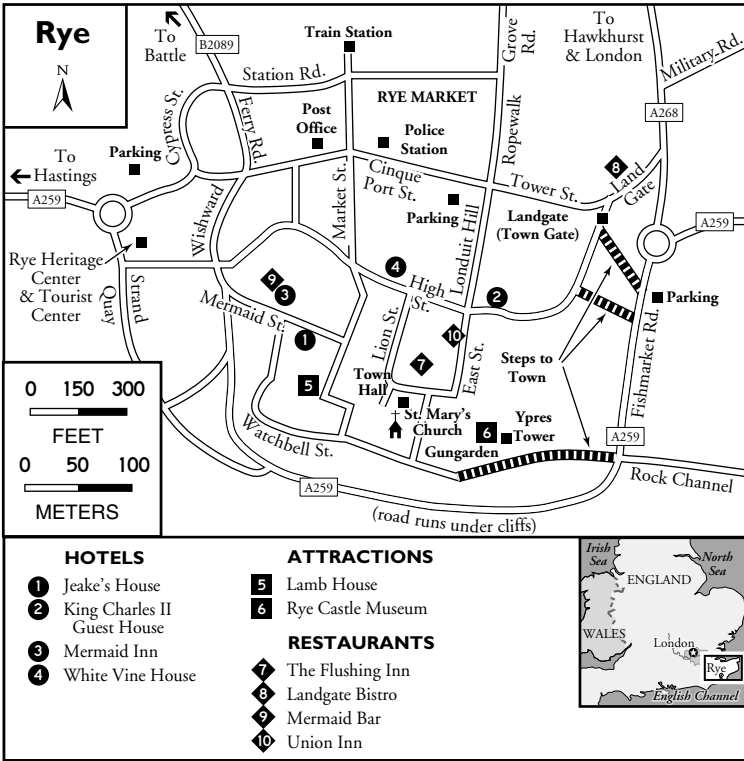
Elevator No

Parking Available in a private lot a short walk away from the inn for £3 a day

Pricing Includes traditional English or vegetarian breakfast

Credit cards MC, V

Managing to provide atmosphere and comfort without overdoing the “cute” quotient is an accomplishment, and this wonderful inn that comprises several historic buildings does so seamlessly. In the early 20th century, Jeake's House was home to the American poet Conrad Aiken and is now in the capable hands of Jenny Hadfield, a former opera singer, and John Burke. They have made the award-winning Jeake's House into what may well be the most inviting and comfortable bed-and-breakfast



inn in England. All of the rooms are attractively furnished with a fine eye to comfort, with wonderful old beds, fine linens, and plush reading chairs. Many are quite large, encompassing sitting alcoves or loft bedrooms, and most have well-equipped baths, though a few share facilities. Reserve well in advance, especially on weekends; many repeat visitors to Rye would not think of staying anywhere else, and you may well become one of them.

King Charles II Guest House **£80-£95**

OVERALL ★★★★★ | QUALITY ★★★★★ | VALUE ★★★★★

4 High Street, Rye, East Sussex TN31 7JE; (01797) 224-954;
www.rye-tourism.co.uk/kingcharles

- Location** In the center of town
- Amenities and services** 3 rooms. Lovely lounge and breakfast room.
- Elevator** No
- Parking** In nearby municipal lots

Pricing Includes a full buffet breakfast; 2-night minimum stay on weekends, reduced rates on weekdays

Credit cards No

This medieval house dates to 1420, and it is said that Charles II stayed here on his secret trips back to England during his 17th-century exile in France. In more recent times, the novelist Radclyffe Hall lived here in the 1930s. The current owners, Nicola and Margrit, have restored every square inch of the house to the last beam and filled it with polished antiques and rich fabrics, creating an exquisite inn where the level of comfort and charm of the surroundings far exceed the price. The three rooms are furnished with carved-wood beds, antique writing desks, and other unique pieces and have modern baths. The Country Room is especially pleasant, with a four-poster bed and views over the countryside through leaded-glass windows.

The Mermaid Inn**£80–£160**

OVERALL ★★★ | QUALITY ★★★★★ | VALUE ★★

Mermaid Street, Rye, Sussex TN31 7EY; (0179) 223-065; fax (0179) 225-069;
www.mermaidinn.com

Location On a cobblestone street in the old town

Amenities and services 31 rooms. One of England's oldest inns has 2 cozy lounges in which plump furniture is grouped around hearths, a heavily beamed bar with a roaring fire, and a formal dining room; steep and creaky staircases make many rooms inaccessible to guests with disabilities. Bellhop.

Elevator No

Parking Free outdoor parking behind the hotel

Pricing Includes early-morning tea, breakfast, and VAT; Sunday–Thursday, the inn provides room, early-morning tea, breakfast, and a 4-course dinner for £110 per person for 1 night, £190 per person for 2 nights

Credit cards AE, MC, V

The Mermaid dates from 1300 and is full of enough beams, polished wood floors, and blazing hearths to satisfy any connoisseur of the quaint old English look. The atmosphere extends to the guest rooms, all of which are furnished distinctively. Eight of the rooms have four-poster beds; Dr. Syn's Bedchamber once accommodated the late Queen Mother and has a richly carved mantel and a secret passage that leads to the bar below; the Nutcracker is a cozy family suite tucked beneath the beams. All rooms have private bathrooms, which are relatively late additions and may tend to be small. While a stay in this character-filled and well-run hotel is bound to be comfortable, you can find an equal amount of charm in slightly less precious and less expensive surroundings at many of Rye's other inns.

White Vine House**£50–£100**

OVERALL ★★★ | QUALITY ★★★ | VALUE ★★★

24 High Street, Rye, East Sussex TN31 7JF; (01797) 224-748;
fax (01797) 223-599; www.whitevinehouse.co.uk

Location In the center of town

Amenities and services 7 rooms. Guests can relax in a handsome lounge (the

Elizabeth Room), and breakfast is served in a sunny parlor in front of a blazing hearth.

Elevator No

Parking In nearby municipal car parks or on street

Pricing Includes breakfast; a family room sleeps 4 and costs £140

Credit cards MC, V

This gracious Georgian house in the center of town on High Street was once the home of a 19th-century mayor of Rye, and the inn still seems like a grand private home. Guest rooms have enough beams and antique furnishings to provide character without being overwhelmingly quaint. The best rooms in the house are the two large doubles with canopied four-poster beds, but all of the rooms are spacious, nicely appointed, and extremely comfortable. Bathrooms throughout are large and well equipped, and all the modern amenities are here, including color TV.

Exploring Rye

Rye claims to have more historic buildings per square foot than any other town in England. Although this claim has never been officially authenticated, walking through the small town center along cobbled lanes past medieval and Georgian houses is a satisfying experience that will keep you pleasantly occupied for several hours.

A good place to begin is the **Rye Heritage Centre**, on Strand Quay (phone (01797) 226-696; Rye TN31 7AY; www.visitrye.co.uk). The center presents a free exhibit of artifacts and historic photos and a 20-minute sound-and-light show, *The Story of Rye*, that uses a town model to re-create some 700 years of smugglers, highwaymen, royals, and other characters from local history. The fee is £2.50 adults, £1 children, £1.50 seniors, and £6 families. Open daily: November–February, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; March–October, 9 a.m.–5:30 p.m.

From the Heritage Centre, follow Wish Street and Cinque Ports Street to **Landgate**, the main entrance to the old city and part of the medieval fortifications that for many centuries protected the town from French incursions. The climb into town up East Cliff affords views over salt marshes and the River Rother and soon comes to High Street. From here Lion Street leads north toward the castle and St. Mary's Church and the narrow lanes that surround them.

Commanding a hilltop above the old town, **St. Mary's Church** dates to the 11th century and has withstood raids, fires, and pirate attacks. French looters took the church bells off to France in 1377, but a rescue party from Rye retrieved them a year later. The giant bells continue to toll the hour, though the church's so-called "Quarter Boys," which strike the quarter hours, are more of an auditory presence in Rye. The enormous 1561 pendulum clock on the turret is said to be the oldest in England that still works, though the stained-glass windows are relatively

recent; one, from 1891, is by Edward Burne-Jones, the pre-Raphaelite painter. A climb to the tower is rewarded with a view across the salt marshes that surround Rye to the sea. The church is open daily, 9 a.m.–6 p.m. (until 4 p.m. in the winter); admission to the tower is £1.50. The tall, hulking structure just to the east is **Ypres Tower**, what remains of Rye's castle and now housing the town museum (see pages 224–225). Mermaid Street leads out of the historic warren of streets and lanes that surround the church down to the riverside quays, where 19th-century warehouses once bustled with seafaring trade.

Tours in Rye

The **Rye Heritage Centre** (Strand Quay; (01797) 226-696; Rye TN31 7AY; www.visitrye.co.uk) equips visitors with headsets for self-guided **Historic Audio Walking Tours**; an Audio Ghost Walks version is available for nighttime explorations and is an excellent way to entertain young travelers. Both take one to three hours, depending upon how long you choose to spend at each stop, and rent for £2.50.

Anyone who's read the Mapp and Lucia novels by E. F. Benson will enjoy **Mapp and Lucia's Rye**, a walking tour with the Secretary of the E. F. Benson Society. Benson lived and wrote in Rye (see profile for Lamb House, below), and turned the town into Tilling for his humorous and astute novels set in the 1920s and 1930s. The walk begins at **Hidler's Cliff Belvedere** at the east end of High Street, lasts about an hour and a half, and ends at **Lamb House**, passing many of the locales that Benson worked into his delightful novels. The walks are conducted on Wednesday and the first and third Saturday of each month; starting time is 2 p.m., and the cost is £4.75 per person. You may want to read the novels before coming to Rye, or watch the ten-part series based on them produced in the 1980s and now available on video; much of the series was filmed in Rye.

Attractions in Rye

Lamb House

Type of attraction Historic home of famous writers

Location West Street

Admission £2.75 adults; £1.30 children ages 5–15; £6.90 families of 2 adults and 2 children

Hours April–October: Wednesday and Saturday, 2–6 p.m.

Phone (01372) 453-401 (National Trust regional office)

Web site www.nationaltrust.org.uk

When to go The house is open so seldom you may not have a choice, but if possible, visit on Wednesday to avoid the weekend crowds.

Special comments The house stewards are well-versed in the history of the house and its residents and are eager to share their knowledge.

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★	Teens ★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade school ★★	Young adults ★★	Seniors ★★★

Author's rating ★★★

How much time to allow 30 minutes

Description and comments Anyone who has read the novels of Henry James or E. F. Benson will enjoy seeing this house, which still seems to resound with their presence. James moved here in 1898 and remained until his death in 1916. The American man of letters wrote some of his most famous novels at Lamb House, including *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*; H. G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, and Edith Wharton were among his visitors. Some of the handsome, paneled rooms still contain James's personal effects, and the garden is especially charming. James often worked there, in a pavilion that was leveled by a bomb in 1940. E. F. Benson lived in the house from 1918 until his death in 1940; he wrote his humorous Mapp and Lucia novels here, and they provide a good introduction to the house, which figures in many of the scenes. Even without these literary associations, Lamb House would have a worthy past: it was only three years old when King George I was forced to come ashore during a storm and take lodgings here. The King could not have spent a restful time here, though, as Mrs. Lamb gave birth the night of this arrival.

Touring tips You may want to linger in the garden with a copy of a book by James or Benson.

Rye Castle Museum

Type of attraction History museum occupying the castle and another historic building

Location Ypres Tower and East Street

Admission £2.90 adults; £2 seniors and students; £1.50 children ages 7–16; £5.90 families of 2 adults and 2 children

Hours April 1–October 31: Ypres Tower, Monday, Thursday, and Friday, 10 a.m.–1 p.m., 2–5 p.m.; East Street building, Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 a.m.–1 p.m., 2–5 p.m.; November 1–March 31: Ypres Tower only, Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m.–3 p.m.

Phone (01797) 226-728

Web site www.rye-tourism.co.uk

When to go Anytime; the museum is rarely crowded

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★★	Teens ★★	Over 30 ★★
Grade school ★★	Young adults ★★	Seniors ★★

Author's rating ★★

How much time to allow 30 minutes for a quick run-through

Description and comments Ypres Tower, named for 15th-century inhabitant John de Ypres and known locally as “Wipers,” is what remains of Rye's castle. Built

in 1249 and surviving numerous fires and attacks, the tower's past is more colorful than the collection of medieval pottery and torture items now filling its rooms would suggest. Over the years, the structure has served as a fortification, a residence, a mortuary, and a prison. One of the most interesting displays is a series of maps showing how the coastline has changed over the years, which helps illuminate how landlocked Rye could once have been a major port. Part of the collection is housed across Church Square in a former bottling factory on East Street, where Rye's 18th-century fire engine is on display among other historic items.

Touring tips If you want to enjoy the castle precincts while sparing yourself the price of admission, take a stroll in the Gungarden, a patch of lawn beneath the tower.

Dining in Rye

Rye seems to have a teashop on every corner. One of the most pleasant is **Simon the Pieman**, near St. Mary's Church on Lion Street (phone (01797) 222-207), which serves lunch as well as a filling cream tea; it's open Monday–Saturday, 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sunday, 1:30–5:30 p.m. If you decide to take a stroll in nearby Winchelsea, the **Tea Tree** on High Street (phone (01797) 226-102) is a good place to stop for a light meal or tea; it's open Wednesday–Monday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m. (until 5 p.m. November–March).

Restaurants in Rye

The Flushing Inn

★★★★

MODERN BRITISH | EXPENSIVE | QUALITY ★★★★★ | VALUE ★★

4 Market Street; (01797) 223-292

Reservations Recommended **Entree range** 3-course dinner, £26.50–£37; 3-course lunch, £16.50–£18; light meals, £7–£11 **Payment** AE, D, MC, V **Bar** Beer and wine only **Disabled access** Yes

Hours Wednesday–Monday, noon–2 p.m., 7–9 p.m.

Menu recommendations Fresh seafood any way it appears on the menu: Dover sole caught in Rye Bay; fish soup with garlic sauce; mussels; oysters; and for a light meal, crab sandwiches; lamb from nearby farms is also memorable.

This handsome inn dates from the 13th century, though the present building has been restored and rebuilt many times over the centuries. It seems that everyone who enjoys a meal beneath the dining room's wall frescoes knows each other, and service is attentive and friendly.

Landgate Bistro

★★★★

FRENCH/MODERN BRITISH | MODERATE | QUALITY ★★★★★ | VALUE ★★★★★

5–6 Landgate; (01797) 222-829

Reservations Recommended on weekends **Entree range** £9–£15 **Payment** AE, ME, V **Bar** Beer and wine only, with a thoughtful selection of French wines **Disabled access** Yes

Hours Tuesday–Saturday, 7–9:30 p.m.

Menu recommendations Fish of the day, which is always fresh and beautifully prepared, and fresh lamb. Starters often include fresh-caught squid and fresh, local asparagus with hollandaise, or tomatoes with goat cheese and other vegetable creations.

The atmosphere in this bright, pleasant ground-floor restaurant in an old building near the center of town is that of a simple bistro, and it soon becomes clear that the emphasis is on excellent, straightforward cuisine. The service matches the surroundings—it's welcoming and unfussy, and you'll probably want to linger over coffee and dessert.

Mermaid Bar

★★★

PUB | INEXPENSIVE | QUALITY ★★ | VALUE ★★

Mermaid Street; (01797) 223-065

Reservations Not necessary **Entree range** £5.50–£14.50 **Payment** AE, D, MC, V **Bar** Full service **Disabled access** Yes

Hours Daily, 11 a.m.–11 p.m.

Menu recommendations Sandwiches; seafood platter.

We recommend the beamed and paneled bar at the back of this historic inn rather than the formal and expensive hotel restaurant because the bar is a pleasant, atmospheric setting for a light meal or snack. Some excellent wines and ales are available, and service is attentive. Should you want more than bar fare, you can also order from the full restaurant menu. In good weather, there is seating on a small terrace that, unfortunately, overlooks the car park.

The Union Inn

★★★

PUB | INEXPENSIVE | QUALITY ★★★ | VALUE ★★★

East Street; (01797) 222-334

Reservations Not necessary **Entree range** £6–£13 **Payment** MC, V **Bar** Full service **Disabled access** Yes

Hours Monday–Saturday, 11 a.m.–3 p.m., 6–11 p.m.; Sunday, noon–3 p.m., 7–10:30 p.m.

Menu recommendations Steak and ale pie; plaice and other fresh fish from local waters.

The Union is one of Rye's busiest and friendliest pubs, and it offers a nice alternative to more formal restaurants if you want a light meal in a relaxed atmosphere. Plus, in a town with very little nightlife, the Union is one of the liveliest places around after dark.

Recreation in and around Rye

Rye Harbour Nature Reserve lies between the town walls and the sea, and it's laced with footpaths that lead to old fortifications, pools where

seabirds gather, and the ruins of **Camber Castle**, built by Henry VIII and abandoned in 1642. Viewpoints overlook the marshes, sea, and islands, and part of the walk is along windswept beaches. Walks are well marked and take from one to three hours; the entrance is off Harbour Road. The **Rye Tourist Information Centre** (Strand Quay; (01797) 226-696; Rye TN31 7AY; www.visitrye.co.uk) provides a walking map.

Around Rye

Rye is a convenient base from which to explore many of the attractions of the southeast. Driving is the easiest way to get around these parts.

Battle

The Battle of Hastings, that decisive event in English history, took place not in Hastings but at what is now the site of this pleasant country town, 6 miles north of Hastings and some 17 miles southwest of Rye. Here, on October 14, 1066, Duke William of Normandy slew Harold, the Saxon king of England. The king, who would become known as William the Conqueror, was crowned in London on Christmas Day of that year and during his tumultuous reign brought some degree of unity to England. The Tower of London is among his accomplishments, as is the Domesday Book—the king had this listing of property throughout England compiled for purposes of taxation, and it survives as one of the most illustrative records of the times.

Arriving and Getting Oriented in Battle

It's possible to reach Battle from Rye by train, though the trip requires a change in London and takes about an hour and a half. Trains from London's Charing Cross Station run about every half hour throughout the day, and the fare runs about £16. For information, call **National Rail Enquiries** at (08457) 484-950 or go to www.nationalrail.co.uk. Battle is less than half an hour from Rye by car, via the A259 coast road to Hastings and then a short trip inland on A2100. The **Battle Tourist Information Centre** (88 High Street; (01424) 773-721; www.1066country.com) provides a town map and information about the battlefield and other local attractions. The office is open April–September, daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m., and November–March, daily 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

Exploring Battle

A stroll down High Street and Upper Lake Street leads past handsome homes, shops, and the town's Romanesque church of **St. Mary the Virgin**, with 14th-century wall paintings; open Easter–September: Monday–Friday, 10:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.; October–Easter: Wednesday–Friday, 10 a.m.–noon. The big attraction, though, is the open field where the monumental event in English history was played out.

Battle of Hastings 1066, Battlefield and Abbey**Type of attraction** Scene of England's most important battle**Location** Off High Street**Admission** £5 adults; £3.80 seniors and students; £2.50 children ages 5–15; £12.50 families of 2 adults and 2 children**Hours** April 1–September 30: daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; October 1–October 31: daily, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; November 1–March 31: daily, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.; closed December 24–26 and January 1**Phone** (01424) 773-792**Web site** www.english-heritage.org.uk**When to go** Avoid the weekend crush if you can, and try to visit in good weather so you can linger comfortably on the battlefield and in the abbey ruins.**Special comments** Mock battles and other events are staged throughout the year and can be quite colorful.**Overall appeal by age group**

Preschool ★	Teens ★★★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade school ★★★	Young adults ★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Author's rating ★★★★★**How much time to allow** About 2 hours for everything**Description and comments** A video, an exhibit, and a self-guided audio tour of the battleground precincts, cleverly produced by the English Heritage preservation society, bring the most famous date in England history vividly to life. The tour begins with a video presentation and a museum-like exhibition of maps, drawings, and text panels; both put the battle in historical context and thoroughly explain the events and circumstances leading up to the Norman conquest. Visitors then wander at leisure through the site, which encompasses the battleground and the ruins of the massive abbey that William the Conqueror erected to atone for the bloodshed. (A later king, Henry VIII, had the abbey destroyed when he broke with the Church of Rome.) At marked spots along the paths, visitors stop to listen to fictional firsthand accounts of the battle from the perspective of Aelfric, a Saxon soldier; Henri, a Norman knight; and Edith, mistress of King Harold.**Touring tips** Visitors have a choice of an in-depth version of the audio tour or a shorter one; opt for the longer version, as there is much to be learned here and the presentation is excellent.**Dining in Battle**A good stop for a light meal or tea in Battle is the **Copper Kettle** in the **Almonery**, a medieval beamed hall on High Street (phone (01424) 772-727); open Monday–Saturday, 9:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m.**Orangery**

★★★★★

BRITISH/FRENCH | MODERATE | QUALITY ★★★★★ | VALUE ★★★

PowderMills Hotel, PowderMills Lane, behind the abbey; (01424) 775-511

Reservations Recommended **Entree range** £8–£13; 2-course dinner, £24; 3-course dinner, £27.50 **Payment** AE, D, MC, V **Bar** Full service **Disabled access** Yes
Hours Daily, 7–9 a.m., noon–2 p.m., 7–9 p.m.

Menu recommendations Seafood, especially fresh fish of the day and a delicious seafood ravioli.

Battle's finest restaurant, in a country-house hotel just outside of town, is a restful place to take a break during a sightseeing visit to the battleground and abbey. The service is warm, and the surroundings are airy and casually attractive, with wicker furniture and marble floors. This is an especially nice place to dine in good weather, when meals are served on a flowery terrace overlooking the gardens; allow time to take a stroll around the 150-acre grounds after your meal. Children are not welcome in the restaurant in the evenings.

The Historic Houses of Kent

Rye is well situated for a drive north into Kent and the rolling forests and farmland known as the Weald. Some of England's finest houses are located on the Weald, and many are open to the public. A relatively easy drive through some lovely countryside will bring you to all the houses we list here.

Arriving and Getting Oriented in Sussex and Kent

A good map is essential when you set off into the twisting lanes of Sussex and Kent. All the houses can be reached from turnings off A268 and A21, which lead north from Rye, and are well signed; the drive to any of these houses should take from half an hour to an hour. Some of the houses are not well served by public transportation, and an alternative to driving is to travel to the town of **Royal Tunbridge Wells** by train and take a taxi from there. Tunbridge Wells is about 18 miles north of Rye; all of the houses we list below are within a ten-mile radius. Trains between Rye and Tunbridge Wells run about every half hour; the trip takes an hour, and fares run about £9 return. For information, call **National Rail Enquiries** at (08457) 484-950 or go to www.nationalrail.co.uk. These houses can also be visited on day trips from London, and we provide details on reaching them by train from there (see "Touring tips" at the end of each profile).

Exploring the Historic Houses of Kent

Chartwell

Type of attraction Historic home of Winston Churchill

Location 2 miles south of Westerham (fork left off B2026 after 1.5 miles); 12 miles northwest of Tunbridge Wells

Admission £7 adults; £3.50 children; £17.50 families

Hours March 20–June 30, September 1–November 7: Wednesday–Sunday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m.; July 1–August 31: Tuesday–Sunday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m.

Phone (01732) 868-381

Web site www.nationaltrust.org.uk/places/chartwell

When to go In good weather, as you'll want to enjoy the house and the grounds

Special comments Chartwell provides an evocative glimpse into the life of Winston Churchill, and anyone with an interest in the remarkable man should go out of the way to visit this house; young people will probably find that the surroundings provide an especially rich introduction to the life of one of England's greatest 20th-century statesmen and the country's wartime prime minister.

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool —	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★
Grade school ★★★	Young adults ★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Author's rating ★★★

How much time to allow At least 2 hours for the house and grounds

Description and comments Sir Winston and Lady Churchill moved into this brick house overlooking hills and a wooded valley in 1924 and made it their home for the next 40 years. The house, still furnished as the Churchills left it, not only provides a glimpse into the home life of the couple but still seems to resound with activity. The couple entertained many of the great statesmen of the 20th century in the five reception rooms, Sir Winston wrote his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* and other books here, and the couple planted gardens and transformed the 80-acre grounds with ponds and a swimming pool. The carpet of the study is worn with the path Sir Winston made while dictating through many nights, the wall he built around the kitchen garden still stands, and the rose garden Lady Churchill planted blooms throughout much of the summer. Many of Sir Winston's paintings hang in the studio where he often retreated.

Touring tips The grounds are ideal for walking and provide stunning views over the Kentish countryside. You can easily combine a visit to Chartwell with visits to nearby Ightham Mote and Knole. To reach Chartwell by public transport from London, take the train to Sevenoaks (see profile of Knole, below, for details), and continue from there by taxi or by bus 401, which runs from Sevenoaks train station to Chartwell only on Sunday, every two hours between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m.; the fare is £1.60.

Hever Castle

Type of attraction Medieval castle

Location 3 miles west of Penshurst on B 2026, 10 miles northwest of Tunbridge Wells

Admission Castle and gardens: £8.80 adults, £7.40 seniors, £4.80 children ages 5–14, £22.40 families; gardens only: £7 adults; £6 seniors; £4.60 children ages 5–14; £18.60 families

Hours March 1–November 30: daily, noon–6 p.m. (last admission at 5 p.m.); grounds open at 11 a.m.

Phone (01732) 865-224

Web site www.hevercastle.co.uk

When to go In good weather, because you'll want to spend time in the gardens

Special comments The castle is well equipped for visitors with disabilities, and visitors in wheelchairs are admitted free of charge.

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool —	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade school ★★★	Young adults ★★★	Seniors ★★★

Author's rating ★★★★★

How much time to allow At least 2 hours

Description and comments This squat, stone fantasy of crenellation and turrets, all of it surrounded by a moat, fits just about anyone's image of what a medieval castle should look like. Hevers has a colorful history, too. Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII, grew up here, and Henry later gave the house to his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves. William Waldorf Astor, the American millionaire, bought the castle in 1903, restored it, built a mock Tudor village alongside the moat to house his staff, and had himself named a viscount.

While the Long Gallery and Gatehouse reflect the house's august history (the Long Gallery is peopled with mannequins of the six wives of Henry VIII), just as interesting are the drawing room, library, and other rooms exquisitely decorated with 20th-century comforts.

Among Viscount Astor's many additions were the classical and natural gardens, on which some 1,800 workers toiled for more than two years. The Italian Gardens surround a 35-acre lake and contain a stunning collection of classical sculpture, including portions of the triumphal arch that the Roman Emperor Claudius erected on the nearby coast in A.D. 52. A massive topiary maze is especially popular with young visitors.

Touring tips There are two restaurants on the castle grounds—one overlooking the moat and one near the lake and Italian Gardens. You can walk from Hever to Penshurst Place, about five miles away, on a series of public footpaths (see Penshurst Place touring tips on page 234). From London, trains leave Victoria Station for Hever about every hour; the trip requires a change at East Croydon or another station en route (ask before boarding at Victoria) and costs £14 return.

Ightham Mote

Type of attraction Medieval manor house

Location Ivy Hatch, 6 miles east of Sevenoaks, 10 miles north of Tunbridge Wells

Admission £6.50 adults; £3.25 children; £16.50 families

Hours March 28–November 7: Monday, Wednesday–Friday, Sunday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m.

Phone (01732) 810-378

Web site www.nationaltrust.org.uk/places/ighthammote

When to go During the week, to avoid weekend crowds

Special comments The garden and ground-floor rooms are wheelchair accessible. The Mote Restaurant is open year-round, Thursday–Sunday, and serves lunch and dinner. Part of the 15th-century stable blocks have been converted into 2 vacation cottages; call (0870) 458-4411 for information.

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade school ★★★	Young adults ★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Author's rating ★★★★★**How much time to allow** At least 1 hour

Description and comments This moated manor house dates from 1330; it's one of the oldest residences in England and one of the best-preserved medieval houses anywhere. ("Mote," incidentally, is a reference not to the romantic water that surrounds the mellowed stone structure but to the fact that it once served as a spot where local landowners would meet.) Ightham Mote seems to have remained nestled in its hidden valley over the centuries without being touched by time, though the rooms show signs of just about every period of British architecture. As a result, a tour of the Great Hall drawing room, billiards room, and family chapels provides a wonderful look into domestic life amid constantly shifting styles and tastes of centuries gone by. While much of the house is remarkably intact, some parts are under restoration, and the work is of great interest: instructive panels explain what's being done and how various preservation methods are applied. The gardens have recently been beautifully restored.

Touring tips The docents are a font of knowledge about architecture and domestic life; try to join one of the tours or talks they sometimes offer. The grounds surrounding the house are open year-round and are laced with woodland trails. To reach Ightham Mote by public transport from London, take the train to Sevenoaks (see profile of Knole, below, for details) and continue from there by taxi.

Knole**Type of attraction** Historic home**Location** Outskirts of Sevenoaks, 11 miles north of Tunbridge Wells**Admission** £6 adults; £3 children; £15 families**Hours** March 27–October 31: Wednesday–Sunday, 11 a.m.–4 p.m.**Phone** (01732) 462-100**Web site** www.nationaltrust.org.uk/places/knole**When to go** On a weekday if possible, because the house is popular with Londoners on weekend day trips**Special comments** The gardens are lovingly tended by the Sackville family but are open only on Wednesdays, May–September.**Overall appeal by age group**

Preschool —	Teens ★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade school ★★	Young adults ★★	Seniors ★★★

Author's rating ★★★**How much time to allow** 1½ hours

Description and comments Knole was built on grand scale for the Archbishop of Canterbury in the 15th century and remains perfectly intact, one of the great treasure houses of England. Queen Elizabeth I presented the house to Thomas

Sackville in 1603, and the Sackville-West family has lived here since. Vita Sackville-West, the 20th-century poet, writer, and friend of Virginia Woolf, grew up here. Woolf, who set her novel *Orlando* here, described Knole as “a town rather than a house,” and Sackville-West once wrote of footmen being stationed at the edges of carpets during dinner to keep them from floating up in the drafts that rush through the 365-room house. Aside from having a room for every day of the year, Knole also has a courtyard for every day of the week and a staircase for every week of the year. The labyrinth of galleries and rooms is rather gloomy; however, the appeal is not domestic charm but an unmatched collection of 17th- and 18th-century furniture, rare textiles, and portraits by such masters as Sir Anthony Van Dyck, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Thomas Gainsborough. Most rooms are the private quarters of the Sackville family; public visits are confined to 13 staterooms and the grounds.

Touring tips A tea room on the grounds is a good spot for a light lunch and can be followed by a walk in the park, where deer roam freely. It's easy to reach Knole from London; trains run about every 15 minutes from Charing Cross to Sevenoaks and the trip costs £8.90 return.

Penshurst Place

Type of attraction Historic home

Location Village of Penshurst, 7 miles northwest of Tunbridge Wells

Admission House and grounds: £7 adults, £6.50 seniors and students, £5 children, £20 families; grounds only: £5.50 adults, £5 seniors and students, £4.50 children, £17 families

Hours March 27–October 31: grounds, daily, 10:30 a.m.–6 p.m.; house, noon–5:30 p.m.; March 6–March 27, weekends only, 10:30 a.m.–6 p.m.

Phone (01892) 870-307

Web site www.penshurstplace.co.uk

When to go With many stands of trees, the grounds are quite colorful in the autumn.

Special comments Parts of the house and much of the grounds are wheelchair accessible. The house is especially child-friendly; printed guides for young visitors are available, and there are child-oriented nature paths and a large playground.

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★	Teens ★★	Over 30 ★★★
Grade school ★★★	Young adults ★★	Seniors ★★★

Author's rating ★★★

How much time to allow 2 hours for house and grounds

Description and comments This lovely manor house dates from the 13th century, though it has been embellished upon many times since then. The stone-floored Baron's Hall, with a ceiling of chestnut wood, a huge, octagonal-shaped central hearth, and a minstrel's gallery, is considered to be among the finest interiors to come down to us from the Middle Ages. Indeed, it's easy to imagine the servants and estate workers huddled around the fire and sleeping on mats on the stone floor; the family of the house resided in paneled rooms upstairs. Many of the

grander staterooms and the Long Gallery date from the Elizabethan period, by which time the house had passed into the Sidney family, a gift of King Edward VI; the Sidneys have lived at Penshurst ever since. Sir Philip Sidney, the soldier, courtier, poet, and personification of an Elizabethan gentleman, was born here. Ben Jonson, the Elizabethan poet and playwright, wrote a long, admiring poem about the house, "To Penshurst," in which he rhapsodizes, "Thou art not, Penshurst, built to obvious show." With its solid stone exterior and battlements, Penshurst is indeed not showy, though the current resident, Viscount de L'Isle, does an admirable job of maintaining the old place in all its grandeur.

Touring tips Take a break in the tea room; seating on a pleasant terrace is available in good weather. You can walk between Penshurst and Hever Castle on public footpaths; the distance is about 5 miles, but be sure to ask for directions since the route can be confusing. Trains run from London's Victoria Station about every hour and the trip costs £8.70 return.

Sissinghurst Castle Garden

Type of attraction A partially ruined Elizabethan manor house surrounded by some of the world's most renowned gardens

Location 1 mile east of Sissinghurst village, off A262; 12 miles east of Tunbridge Wells

Admission £7 adults; £3.50 children; £17.50 families

Hours March 20–October 31: Monday, Tuesday, Friday–Sunday, 11 a.m.–6:30 p.m.

Phone (01580) 710-700

Web site www.nationaltrust.org.uk/places/sissinghurst

When to go The gardens are a delight at any time but are especially colorful in May and June, when many of the flowers are blooming. Because Sissinghurst is so popular, it's best to try to visit on a weekday.

Special comments Sissinghurst attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors a year, and at busy times the number of visitors allowed into the garden may be controlled. Don't be surprised if you are told you must wait for entry.

Overall appeal by age group

Preschool ★★★★★	Teens ★★★	Over 30 ★★★★★
Grade school ★★★	Young adults ★★★	Seniors ★★★★★

Author's rating ★★★★★

How much time to allow 2 hours

Description and comments The poet and writer Vita Sackville-West and her husband, the diplomat Harold Nicolson, bought this property, then derelict, in the 1930s. They restored part of the house, furnishing it richly, and converted the first floor of the Tudor Gatehouse into Vita's study. Their greatest accomplishment, though, was the creation of the gardens, now some of the most famous in England. They are laid out as ten outdoor rooms, each with a distinct look and feel; one is planted almost entirely in whites and grays, another in bright reds and oranges. The trick to appreciating Sissinghurst is simply to wander randomly, slipping

through a gate or opening in a hedge to discover another “room.” So, take your time to enjoy this remarkable place at your leisure. At some point, climb the tower that houses Vita’s study to enjoy the view over the garden.

Touring tips Don’t miss the exhibition in the Oast House, one of the buildings on the estate, that traces the history of Sissinghurst and the transformation of the gardens. The Granary Restaurant serves light lunches and teas. To reach Sissinghurst from London, take the train from Charing Cross Station to Staplehurst (the fare is about £12) then continue to the garden on bus 4/5 from there.

Dining near the Historic Houses of Kent

The Spotted Dog

★★★

PUB/BRITISH | MODERATE | QUALITY ★★★ | VALUE ★★★

About a half mile south of Penshurst village center on Smarts Hill, off B2188; (01892) 870-253

Reservations Recommended for Sunday lunch and evening meals **Entree range** £7–£12 **Payment** MC, V **Bar** Full service **Disabled access** Yes

Hours Daily, 11 a.m.–3 p.m., 6–10:30 p.m.

Menu recommendations The local sausages and kidney pie top the list of the pub fare; for more elaborate meals, the kitchen prepares locally caught fish and an excellent Sunday roast.

A pub lunch is a nice part of a day rambling through the Kent countryside, and this atmosphere, 16th-century inn, with its heavy beams, paneled alcoves, inglenook fireplace, and views over Penshurst Place and the lush Kentish Weald, is a good place to enjoy one. In good weather, you may want to forego the cozy atmosphere and enjoy drinks and meals on the stone terrace.