

The Southeast



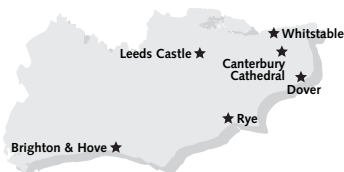
From the site of the Battle of Hastings to the secret war tunnels at Dover castle and the scattered ruins of Roman palaces, this corner of the country is rich with reminders of its crucial role as the nation's front line of defence against Continental invaders. The formidable cliffs, castles and fortified ports still remain, but these days they're raided by sightseers armed with cameras and picnics rather than belligerent Normans.

The wealthy counties of Kent, East and West Sussex and Surrey are some of the most popular parts of the country to live and visit. It's a middle-class enclave of picturesque villages, narrow country lanes, and faceless commuter-belt towns, wrapped up in manicured farmland and gently sloping downs. A string of resort towns line the shore, with something to please all-comers, from the chi-chi charm of Londoners' favourite Whitstable, to the Bohemian spirit of hedonistic Brighton, to sedate septuagenarian magnet Eastbourne. And all along the coast you can soak up maritime history, dine out on seafood, and charge around battlegrounds and cliff tops.

Here too you'll find England's spiritual heart at Canterbury, with its magnificent cathedral and ancient winding streets. And scattered throughout the countryside, stately homes, royal residences and castles serve as reminders of the region's long-lasting ties with the monarchy.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Shopping, dining and partying in boisterous **Brighton & Hove** (p204)
- Following in the footsteps of pilgrims to ancient **Canterbury Cathedral** (p177)
- Lapping up tales of ghosts and smugglers in the cobbled backstreets of romantic **Rye** (p194)
- Strolling past candy coloured beach huts and feasting on oysters on the beach at **Whitstable** (p182)
- Conjuring up knights and dragons at the romantic moated marvel that is **Leeds Castle** (p193)
- Exploring the atmospheric WWII tunnels under sprawling **Dover Castle** (p188)
- Finding a clear day to amble along the **White Cliffs of Dover** (p190)



■ POPULATION: 8 MILLION

■ AREA: 3,560 SQ MILES

■ NUMBER OF TOWNS WITH THEIR OWN CURRENCY: ONE (LEWES)

Information

Tourism South East (www.visitsoutheastengland.com) is the official website for south and southeast England. Other helpful websites include:

Kent Attractions (www.kentattractions.co.uk)

Visit Kent (www.visitkent.co.uk)

Visit Surrey (www.visitsurrey.com)

Visit Sussex (www.visitsussex.org)

Activities

The southeast of England may be Britain's most densely populated corner, but there are still plenty of off-the-beaten-track walking and cycling routes to enjoy here. We concentrate on the highlights here, but you'll find more information throughout the chapter and in the Outdoor Activities chapter. Regional tourist offices are also well stocked with leaflets, maps and guides to start you off walking, cycling, paragliding, sailing and more.

CYCLING

Finding quiet roads for cycle touring takes a little extra perseverance in the southeast of England, but the effort is richly rewarded. Long-distance routes that form part of the **National Cycle Network** (NCN; www.sustrans.org.uk) include:

Downs & Weald Cycle Route (150 miles; NCN routes 2, 21) London to Brighton and on to Hastings.

Garden of England Cycle Route (165 miles; NCN routes 1, 2) London to Dover and then Hastings.

You'll also find less-demanding routes on the NCN website. Meanwhile there are plenty of uppers and downers to challenge mountain bikers on the South Downs Way National Trail (100 miles), which takes hard nuts two days but mere mortals around four. There are also a number of excellent trails at Devil's Punchbowl in the Surrey Hills.

WALKING

Two long-distance trails meander steadily westward through the region, but there are plenty of shorter ambles to fit your schedule, stamina and scenery wish list.

South Downs Way National Trail (100 miles) At the time of writing the rolling chalk South Downs were hotly tipped to become England's newest national park, and this trail is a beautiful roller-coaster walk along prehistoric drove ways between the ancient capital, Winchester, and the seaside resort Eastbourne.

North Downs Way (153 miles) This popular walk begins near Farnham in Surrey but one of its most beautiful sec-

tions runs from near Ashford to Dover in Kent, and there's also a loop that takes in Canterbury near its end.

Both long-distance routes have sections ideal for shorter walks. History buffs will revel in the 1066 Country Walk (p195), which connects with the South Downs Way. Devil's Punchbowl offers breathtaking views, sloping grasslands and romantic wooded areas.

Getting There & Around

The southeast is easily explored by train or bus, and many attractions can be visited in a day trip from London. Contact the **National Traveline** ([☎ 0871 200 2233](tel:08712002233); www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk) for comprehensive information on public transport in the region.

BUS

Explorer tickets (adult/child £6.40/4.50) provide day-long unlimited travel on most buses throughout the region; you can buy them at bus stations or on your first bus.

Stagecoach Coastline (www.stagecoachbus.com) services run through the coastline, East Kent and East Sussex areas. Travellers can buy an unlimited day (£7) or week (£18) ticket.

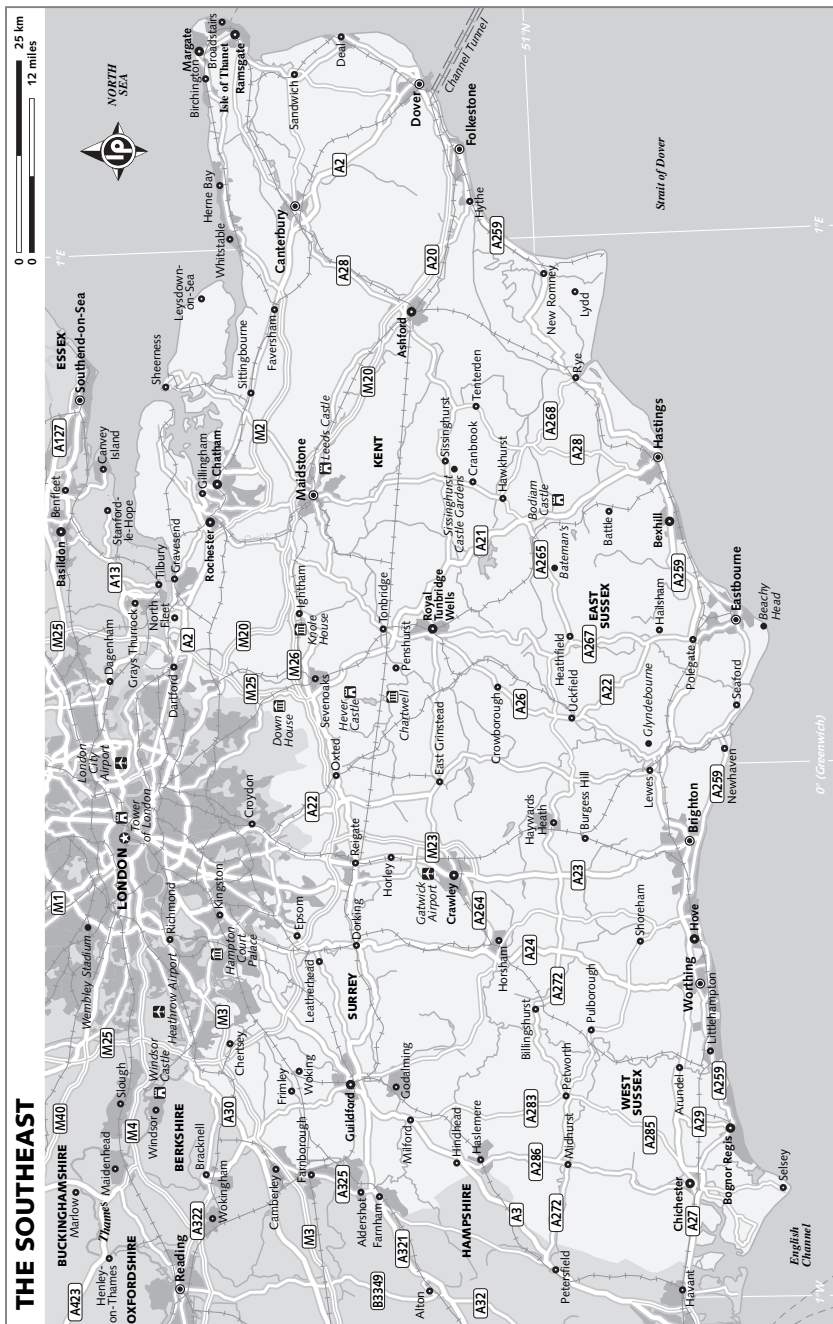
TRAIN

If you're based in London but day-tripping around the southeast, the BritRail London Plus Pass allows unlimited regional rail travel for two days in eight (£102), four days in eight (£164), or seven days in fifteen (£197) and must be purchased outside the UK; see p810 for more details.

You can secure 33% discounts on most rail fares over £10 in the southeast by purchasing a **Network Railcard** ([☎ 08457 225 225](tel:08457225225); www.railcard.co.uk/network/; per yr £20). Children under 15 can save 60%, but a minimum fare of £1 applies.

KENT

Kent isn't described as the garden of England for nothing. Inside its sea-lined borders you'll find a clipped landscape of gentle hills, lush farmland, cultivated country estates and fruitful orchards. It also serves as the booze garden of England, producing the world-renowned Kent hops, some of the country's finest ales and even award-winning wines from its numerous vineyards. At its heart



KEEP YOUR ENEMIES CLOSE...

Not one to shy away from nepotism, in 1162 King Henry II appointed his good mate Thomas Becket to the highest clerical office in the land, figuring it would be easier to force the increasingly vocal religious lobby to toe the line if he was pally with the archbishop. Unfortunately for Henry, he had underestimated how seriously Thomas would take the job, and the archbishop soon began disagreeing with almost everything the king said or did. By 1170 Henry had become exasperated with his former favourite and, after a few months of sulking, 'suggested' to four of his knights that Thomas was too much to bear. The dirty deed was done on December 29. Becket's martyrdom – and canonisation in double-quick time (1173) – catapulted Canterbury Cathedral to the top of the premier league of northern European pilgrimage sites. Mindful of the growing criticism at his role in Becket's murder, Henry arrived here in 1174 for a dramatic *mea culpa*, and after allowing himself to be whipped and scolded was granted absolution.

is spellbinding Canterbury crowned by its fascinating cathedral.

Here too are beautiful coastal stretches dotted with beach towns and villages, from old-fashioned Broadstairs to gentrified Whitstable, to the aesthetically challenged port town of Dover, which is close enough to France to smell the garlic or hop over on a day trip to taste it.

CANTERBURY

pop 43,552

Canterbury tops the charts when it comes to English cathedral cities and is one of southern England's top attractions. The World Heritage-listed cathedral that dominates its centre is considered by many to be one of Europe's finest, and the town's narrow medieval alleyways, riverside gardens and ancient city walls are a joy to explore. But Canterbury isn't just a showpiece to times past; it's a spirited place with an energetic student population and a wide choice of contemporary bars, restaurants and arts. But book ahead for the best hotels and eateries: pilgrims may no longer flock here in their thousands but there's a year-round flood of tourists to replace them.

History

Canterbury's past is as rich as it comes. From AD 200 there was a Roman town here, which later became the capital of the Saxon kingdom of Kent. When St Augustine arrived in England in 597 to carry the Christian message to the pagan hordes, he chose Canterbury as his *cathedra* (primary see) and set about building an abbey on the outskirts of town. Following the martyrdom of Thomas Becket (see boxed text, above), Canterbury became

northern Europe's most important centre of pilgrimage, which in turn led to Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, one of the most outstanding poetic works in English literature (see boxed text, p180).

Blasphemous murders and rampant tourism thrown aside, the city of Canterbury still remains the primary see for the Church of England.

Orientation

The Old Town is enclosed by a bulky medieval city wall that makes a wonderful walk. The Unesco World Heritage Site encompasses the cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey and St Martin's Church. Much of the centre is pedestrianised, but there is parking inside the wall.

Information**BOOKSHOPS**

Chaucer Bookshop (☎ 01227-453912; 6-7 Beer Cart Lane) Antiquarian and used books.

Waterstones (☎ 01227-456343; 20-21 St Margaret's St)

INTERNET ACCESS

Dotcafe (☎ 01227-478778; 19-21 St Dunstan's St; per hr £3; ☎ 10am-7pm) Large cyber cafe near the railway station.

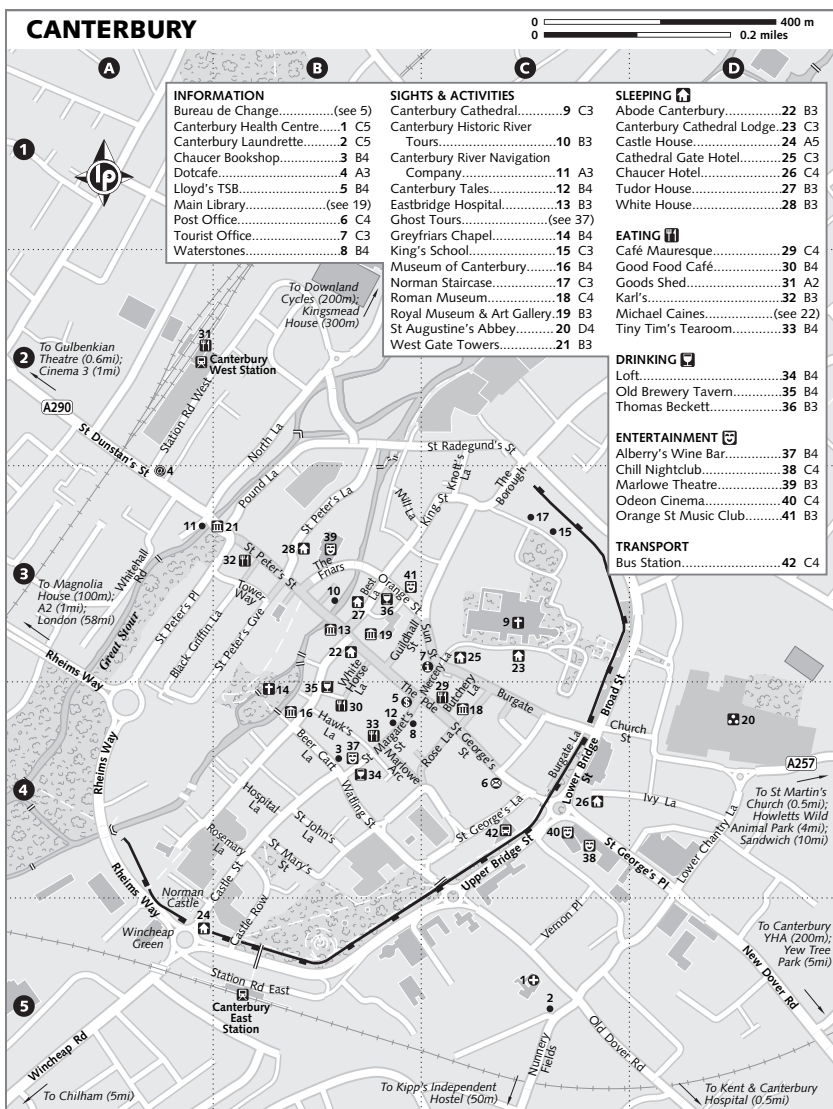
Main library (☎ 01227-463608; 18 High St; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Free internet access in the same building as the Royal Museum & Art Gallery.

LAUNDRY

Canterbury Laundrette (☎ 01227-452211; Nunnery Fields; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat, to 3pm Sun)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Canterbury Health Centre (☎ 01227-452444; 26 Old Dover Rd) For general medical consultations.



Kent & Canterbury Hospital (☎ 01227-766877; Etherbert Rd) Has an emergency room and is a mile from the centre.

MONEY

ATMs and other major banks are on High St, near the corner of St Margaret's St.
Lloyd's TSB (28 St Margaret's St) Has a bureau de change.

POST

Post office (19 St George's St, inside WH Smiths; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

TOURIST OFFICES

Tourist office (☎ 01227-378100; www.canterbury.co.uk; 12 Sun St; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter) Situated

opposite the cathedral gate; the staff can help you book accommodation, excursions and theatre tickets.

Sights

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

The Church of England could not have a more imposing mother church than this extraordinary early Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 01227-762862; www.canterbury-cathedral.org; adult/concession £7/5.50; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat Easter-Sep, 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Easter, also 12.30-2.30pm & 4.30-5.30pm Sun year-round), the centrepiece of the city's World Heritage Site and repository of more than 1400 years of Christian history.

It's an overwhelming edifice filled with enthralling stories, striking architecture and a very real and enduring sense of spirituality, although visitors can't help but pick up on the ominous undertones of violence and bloodshed that whisper from its walls.

This ancient structure is packed with monuments commemorating the nation's battles. Also here is the grave and heraldic tunic of one of the nation's most famous warmongers, Edward the Black Prince (1330-76). The spot in the northwest transept where Archbishop Thomas Becket met his grisly end has been drawing pilgrims for more than 800 years (see the boxed text, p175). It is marked by a lit candle and striking modern altar.

The doorway to the crypt is beside the altar. This cavernous space is the cathedral's highlight, an entrancing 11th-century survivor from the cathedral's last devastating fire in 1174, which destroyed the rest of the building. Look for original carvings among the forest of pillars.

The wealth of detail in the cathedral is immense and unrelenting, so it's well worth joining a one-hour **tour** (adult/child £5/3; ☎ 10.30am, noon & 2.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am, noon & 1.30pm Sat Apr-Sep, noon & 2pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar), or you can take a 30-minute self-guided **audio tour** (adult/child £3.95/1.95). There is an additional charge to take photographs.

When you leave the cathedral, go round the eastern end and turn right into **Green Court**, surrounded on the eastern side by the Deanery and on the northern side (straight ahead) by the early-14th-century Brewhouse and Bakehouse, which now house part of the very exclusive prep school, **King's School**. In the northwestern corner (far left) is the famous **Norman Staircase** (1151).

MUSEUMS

Good for history buffs, the Museum Passport (adult/child £6.20/3.70) grants free admission to all the following. Individual charges are given with each listing.

A fine 14th-century building, once the Poor Priests' Hospital, now houses the absorbing **Museum of Canterbury** (☎ 01227-475202; www.canterbury-museums.co.uk; Stour St; adult/child £3.50/2.25; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, also 1.30-5pm Sun Jun-Sep), which has varied exhibits from pre-Roman times to the assassination of Becket, Joseph Conrad to locally born celebs. The kids' room is excellent, with a memorable glimpse of real medieval poo among other fun activities. There's also a fun Rupert Bear Museum and a gallery celebrating that other children's favourite of old, Bagpuss.

A fascinating subterranean archaeological site forms the basis of the **Roman Museum** (☎ 01227-785575; Butchery Lane; adult/child £3/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, also 1.30-5pm Sun Jun-Oct), which actually lets you handle the artefacts and walk around reconstructed rooms, including a kitchen and a market place. The museum culminates with a display of the original mosaic floors.

The city's only remaining medieval gateway – a brawny 14th-century bulk with murder holes pointing over the passing cars below – is home to the small **West Gate Towers** (☎ 01227-789576; St Peter's St; adult/concession £1.25/75p; ☎ 11am-12.30pm & 1.30-3.30pm Mon-Sat), a museum of arms and armour. The rooftop views are worth squeezing up the spiral staircase for.

The mock-Tudor facade of the **Royal Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 01227-452747; High St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a splendid display of Victorian foppery, with intricate carving and big wooden gables. The interior houses mostly ho-hum art and military memorabilia, but has a few surprises from the likes of Pissarro, Henry Moore and Van Dyke.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

A three dimensional interpretation of Chaucer's classic tales through jerky animatronics and audio guides, the ambitious **Canterbury Tales** (☎ 01227-479227; www.canterburytales.org.uk; St Margaret's St; adult/child £7.25/5.25; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Jun, 9.30am-5pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Sep & Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Feb) is certainly entertaining but could never do full justice to Chaucer's tales. It's a lively and fun introduction for the young or uninitiated, however.

ST AUGUSTINE'S ABBEY

An integral but often overlooked part of the Canterbury World Heritage Site, **St Augustine's Abbey** (EH; ☎ 01227-767345; adult/child £4.20/2.10; 🕒 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Sep-Mar, 10am-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Jun) was founded in AD 597, marking the rebirth of Christianity in southern England. Later requisitioned as a royal palace, it was to fall into disrepair and now only stumpy foundations remain. A small museum and a worthwhile audio tour do their best to underline the site's importance and put flesh back on its now humble bones.

ST MARTIN'S CHURCH

This stumpy little church (☎ 01227-768072; North Holmes Rd; admission free; 🕒 11am-4pm Tue, Thu & Sat Apr-Sep, to 3pm Oct-Mar) is thought to be England's oldest parish in continuous use, and where Queen Bertha (the wife of the Saxon King Ethelbert) welcomed Augustine upon his arrival in the 6th century. The original Saxon church has been swallowed by a medieval refurbishment, but it's still worth the 900m walk east of the abbey.

EASTBRIDGE HOSPITAL & GREYFRIARS CHAPEL

A 'place of hospitality' for pilgrims, soldiers and the elderly since 1180, the Hospital of St Thomas the Martyr **Eastbridge** (☎ 01227-471688; www.eastbridgehospital.org.uk; 25 High St; adult/5-16yr/senior/under 5yr £1/50p/75p/free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is worth a visit for the Gothic-arched undercroft and historic chapel. Its 16th-century almshouses are still in use today.

In serene riverside gardens behind the hospital you'll find **Greyfriars Chapel** (admission free; 🕒 2-4pm Mon-Sat Easter-Sep), the first English monastery built by Franciscan monks in 1267.

Tours

Canterbury Historic River Tours (☎ 07790-534744; www.canterburyrivertours.co.uk; adult/child £6.50/5; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Sep) Will take you on a rowing-boat tour including (prebooked) candlelit tours, from behind The Old Weaver's House on St Peter's St.

Canterbury River Navigation Company (☎ 07816-760869; www.crncc.co.uk; Westgate Gardens; adult/child £7/4; 🕒 Apr-Sep) Relaxing punt trips.

Canterbury Walks (☎ 01227-459779; www.canterbury-walks.co.uk; adult/under 12yr/senior & student £4.70/3.20/4.20; 🕒 2pm daily Apr-Oct, also 11.30am Mon-Sat Jul-mid-Sep) Chaperoned walking tours; leave from the tourist office.

Ghost Tours (☎ 07779-575831; adult/child £7/5.50)

Depart from outside Alberry's wine bar in St Margaret's St at 8pm year-round every Friday and Saturday. Only groups need book.

Festivals & Events

Myriad musicians, comedians, theatre groups and other artists from around the world come to the party for two weeks in mid-October, during the **Canterbury Festival** (☎ 01227-452853; www.canterburyfestival.co.uk).

Sleeping BUDGET

Yew Tree Park (☎ 01227-700306; www.yewtreepark.com; Stone St, Petham; tent & 2 adults £11.80-16.80; 🕒 Mar-Sep; 📶 wi-fi) Set in gentle rolling countryside 5 miles southeast of the city, this lovely family-run camp site has plenty of soft grass to pitch a tent on and a heated swimming pool. Call for directions and transportation information.

Kipp's Independent Hostel (☎ 01227-786121; www.kipps-hostel.com; 40 Nunnery Fields; dm/s/d £15/20/35; 📶) This red-brick town house is popular for its laid-back, homely atmosphere with friendly hosts and long-term residents, lots of communal areas, clean though cramped dorms, bike hire and garden. It's just south of the centre.

Canterbury YHA (☎ 0845 371 9010; www.yha.org.uk; 54 New Dover Rd; dm £20.95; 📶) This grand Victorian Gothic-style villa is a little way out of town, but it's spacious and organised, with a garden and cheaper, prepared-tent accommodation. It's a great deal, and also has single rooms. It's 1¼ miles southeast of the centre, and open year-round by advanced booking. Wheelchair access available.

MIDRANGE

Tudor House (☎ 01227-765650; 6 Best Lane, s £25-35, d £48-55) Three overlapping storeys decorated with whitewashed shingles introduce this historic guest house, which sits beside the river near the High Street. The plain rooms don't make much of its period features, but they're clean and cosy, with sloping floors and the odd exposed beam, and there's a cute little cabin bedroom at the bottom of the garden.

Cathedral Gate Hotel (☎ 01227-464381; www.cathgate.co.uk; 36 Burgate; s/d from £67/100, without bathroom from £42/72) This often-photographed 15th-century hotel adjoins the spectacular cathedral gate, which it predates – a fact that becomes evident upon exploring its labyrinthine passageways, where few rooms lack

an angled floor, low door or wonky wall. Rooms are simple but worth it for the fantastic position.

Castle House (☎ 01227-761897; www.castlehousehotel.co.uk; 28 Castle St; s/d/f from £50/70/90; P 📶 wi-fi) This historic guest house sits opposite the ruins of Canterbury's Norman castle, and incorporates part of the old city walls. The deep reds of the guest lounge and reception give the hotel a warm feel and many of the tasteful, high-ceilinged rooms have great views.

Magnolia House (☎ 01227-765121; www.magnoliahousecanterbury.co.uk; 36 St Dunstan's Tce; s/d from £55/65; P 📶 wi-fi) A gorgeous Georgian guest house, complete with pretty rooms, lovely gardens and delicious breakfasts.

White House (☎ 01227-761836; www.canterburybreaks.co.uk; 6 St Peter's Lane; s/d £55/70; 📶) This elegant white Regency town house, supposedly once home to Queen Victoria's head coachman, has a friendly welcome, seven spick-and-span rooms with crisp white linen and country touches, and a grand guest lounge complete with fireplace and beaten leather sofas.

Canterbury Cathedral Lodge (☎ 01227-865350; www.canterburycathedralodge.org; Canterbury Cathedral precincts; r from £79; 📶 wi-fi) The position of this modern, circular lodge is unbeatable. It's right opposite the cathedral within the precinct itself. The clean, modern rooms – done out in white and blond wood – have excellent facilities but what really makes this place are the views. Call in good time, as it's often booked up with large groups.

TOP END

Abode Canterbury (☎ 01227-766266; www.abodehotels.co.uk; 30-33 High St; s/d from £89/109) The only boutique hotel in town, rooms here are graded from 'comfortable' to 'fabulous' and for the most part they live up to their names. They come with little features such as handmade beds, cashmere throws, velvet bathrobes, beautiful modern bathrooms and little tuck boxes of locally produced snacks. There's a splendid champagne bar, restaurant and tavern here too.

Chaucer Hotel (☎ 01227-464427; www.swallowhotels.com; 63 Ivy Lane; s/d from £105/130; P) Just outside the old city walls, this once elegant red-brick Georgian house now has the aura of a chain hotel: plush but more than a little bland. The position makes up for its lack of personality, however.

Eating

Karl's (☎ 01227-764380; 43 St Peter's St; snacks £3-7; 📶 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) The walls of this bright little deli are crammed with fine cheeses, artisan breads and pastries, coffee beans and food-friendly wines. You can sample the delicious wares (including fantastic deli sandwiches and cheeseboards) in a comfy dining space at the back of the shop or in the small garden.

Good Food Cafe (☎ 01227-456654; 1 Jewry Lane; soups £3.95, specials £6.95; 📶 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-4pm Sun) This unfussy little cafe sits above an equally healthy wholefoods store. It's full of delicious locally sourced, organic and biodynamically grown vegies and daily specials such as quiches and lasagne.

Tiny Tim's Tearoom (☎ 01227-450793; 34 St Margaret's St; mains £7-13; 📶 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-4pm Sun) Not a hint of chintz in this English tearoom, it's pure 1930s elegance. Come in to enjoy big breakfasts full of Kentish ingredients or tiers of cakes, crumpets and sandwiches for high tea. There's a sunny courtyard garden outside and there are chutneys, breads and local Kentish wines for sale.

Cafe Mauresque (☎ 01227-464300; www.cafemauresque.com; 8 Butchery Lane; mains £7-17; 📶 noon-10pm Sun-Thu, to 10.30pm Fri & Sat) Fun little North African and Spanish spot with a plain cafe upstairs as well as a romantic basement swathed in exotic fabric, serving up rich tagines, couscous and tapas. There are hubbly bubbly hookah pipes to finish off your meal.

ourpick Goods Shed (☎ 01227-459153; Station Rd West; lunch £8-12, dinner £10-16; 📶 market 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, to 4pm Sun, restaurant lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Farmers market, food hall and fabulous restaurant all rolled into one, this converted station warehouse by the railway is a hit with everyone from self-caterers to sit-down gourmets. The chunky wooden tables sit slightly above the market hubbub but in full view of its appetite-whetting stalls, and country-style daily specials exploit the freshest farm goodies available.

Michael Caines (☎ 01227-826684; Abode Canterbury Hotel, 30-33 High St; mains £20-28; 📶 lunch & dinner) Owned by Michelin star-winning chef Michael Caines, this is Canterbury's only 'fine dining' restaurant, with elegant taupe and caramel decor and an elaborate menu of Kentish ingredients, such as shellfish from Whitstable, Romney Marsh lamb or Tamworth pork, twisted into (rather small) culinary delights. It's on the ground floor of the Abode Canterbury Hotel.

Drinking

Old Brewery Tavern (☎ 01227-826682; Adobe Canterbury Hotel, 30-33 High St) Trendy boozier in a large open space adorned with black-and-white prints of brewery workers of old and a white brick courtyard with a huge curved wood and soft leather sofa. The choice of beers is plentiful, and there's a good wine list as well as a solid menu of English pub classics like fish pie and gammon, egg and chips – albeit a swanky version. Enter from White Horse Lane.

Thomas Beckett (☎ 01227-464384; 21 Best Lane) A classic English pub with a garden's worth of hops hanging from its timber frame, several quality ales to sample and a traditional decor of copper pots, comfy seating and a fireplace to cosy up to on winter nights. It also serves decent pub grub (mains £6 to £9).

Loft (☎ 01227-456515; 516 St Margaret's St) Miles away from Canterbury's quaint alehouses, this slick bar plays chilled electronic beats in a retro-edged setting with one extremely long couch, a black granite bar and DJs spinning house at the weekend. It draws a youthful crowd and serves a medley of multicoloured cocktails.

Entertainment

NIGHTCLUBS

Alberly's Wine Bar (☎ 01227-452378; St Margaret's St) Every night is different at this after-hours music bar, which puts on everything from smooth live jazz to DJ-led drum and bass to commercial pop. It's a two-level place where you can relax over a French Kiss (cocktail or otherwise) above, before partying in the basement bar below.

Chill Nightclub (☎ 01227-761276; St George's Pl, New Dover Rd; admission £3-6) Canterbury's newest club is a large, fun, cheesy place with a popular student night on Mondays and house anthems and old skool at the weekends.

Orange St Music Club (☎ 01227-760801; www.orangestreetmusic.com; 15 Orange St; ☎ Tue-Sat) This Bohemian music and cultural venue in a 19th-century hall puts on a medley of jazz, salsa, folk, DJ competitions, comedy and even poetry.

CINEMAS

Odeon Cinema (☎ 0871-224 4007; cnr Upper Bridge St & St George's Pl) Catch the latest movies here.

Cinema 3 (☎ 01227-769075; University of Kent) Part of the Gulbenkian Theatre complex. Shows a mix of mainstream and arty films and old classics.

THEATRE

Marlowe Theatre (☎ 01227-787 787; www.marlowetheatre.com; The Friars) Canterbury's central venue for performing arts brings in touring plays, dances, concerts and musicals year-round.

Gulbenkian Theatre (☎ 01227-769075; www.kent.ac.uk/gulbenkian; University of Kent) Out on the university campus, this large long-time venue puts on plenty of contemporary plays, modern dance and great live music.

Getting There & Away

Canterbury is 58 miles from London and 15 miles from Margate and Dover.

BUS

The bus station is just within the city walls on St George's Ln. There are frequent buses to London Victoria (£12.70, two hours, hourly)

THE CANTERBURY TALES

If English literature has a father figure, then it is Geoffrey Chaucer (1342/3–1400). Chaucer was the first English writer to introduce characters – rather than 'types' – into fiction, and he did so to greatest effect in his most popular work, *The Canterbury Tales*.

Written between 1387 and his death, the *Tales* is an unfinished series of 24 vivid stories as told by a party of pilgrims on their journey from London to Canterbury and back. Chaucer successfully created the illusion that the pilgrims, not Chaucer (though he appears in the tales as himself), are telling the stories, which allowed him unprecedented freedom as an author.

Chaucer's achievement remains a high point of European literature, but it was also the first time that English came to match Latin (the language of the Church) and French (spoken by the Norman court) as a language of high literature. *The Canterbury Tales* remains one of the pillars of the literary canon, but more than that it's a collection of rollicking good yarns of adultery, debauchery, crime and edgy romance, and filled with Chaucer's witty observances of human nature. That said, contemporary modern readers tend to make more sense of modern transliterations than the often obscure original Middle English version.

and services to Dover (£5.20, 35 minutes, hourly). There are also buses to Margate (53 minutes, three per hour), Broadstairs (one hour, twice hourly), Ramsgate (80 minutes, twice hourly) and Whitstable (30 minutes, every 15 minutes).

TRAIN

There are two train stations: Canterbury East (for the YHA hostel), accessible from London Victoria; and Canterbury West, accessible from London's Charing Cross and Waterloo East stations.

London-bound trains leave frequently (£20.90, 1½ hours, two to three hourly), as do Canterbury East to Dover Priory trains (£6.70, 16 to 28 minutes, every 30 minutes).

Canterbury will be a stop on the UK's first high-speed rail line, with trains pulling in at London St Pancras from late 2009. It is expected to reduce journey times significantly.

Getting Around

Canterbury's centre is mostly pedestrianised. Car parks are dotted along and just within the walls, otherwise parking is by pay and display. Day trippers may prefer to use one of the city's three park-and-ride sites, which cost £2.50 per day and are connected to the centre by buses every 10 minutes from 7am to 7.30pm Monday to Saturday, or 10am to 6pm Sunday.

Taxi companies include **Cathedral Cars** (☎ 451000) and **Cabwise** (☎ 01227-712929). **Downland Cycles** (☎ 01227-479643; www.downlandcycles.co.uk; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun) rents bikes from the Malthouse on St Stephen's Rd. Bikes cost £12 per day with helmet.

AROUND CANTERBURY

Howlett's Wild Animal Park

You can trade grins and glowers with the world's largest captive breeding collection of lowland gorillas at this 28-hectare **park** (☎ 01227-721286; www.totallywild.net; Bekesbourne; adult/4-16yr/under 4yr £14.45/11.45/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar). The animals here live in an environment as close to their natural habitat as possible. Rather than simply keeping the animals in captivity, the park funds projects to reintroduce these rare and endangered animals back to their natural habitat. You'll also see tigers, a black rhino breeding sanctuary, African elephants, monkeys, giant anteaters and more.

A COTTAGE OF YOUR OWN

If you'd prefer a self-catering holiday using a cottage as your base, try these websites as a starting point:

Best of Brighton & Sussex Cottages
(www.bestofbrighton.co.uk)

Garden of England Cottages (www.gardenofenglandcottages.co.uk)

Kent Holiday Cottages (www.kentholidaycottages.co.uk)

The park is 4 miles east of Canterbury. By car, take the A257 and turn right at the sign for Bekesbourne, then follow the signs. Several regular buses run from Canterbury bus station to Littlebourne, from where it's about a mile's walk.

Chilham

Five miles southwest of Canterbury on the A252, compact little Chilham is one of the best examples of a medieval village you'll see anywhere in England. Built in typical feudal fashion around a square beside the 12th-century castle, the village consists of a 13th-century church and a cluster of Tudor and Jacobean timber-framed houses.

The town makes a great destination for a lovely day's walk from Canterbury via the North Downs Way (see p173). Alternatively, hourly trains run from Canterbury (nine minutes). The centre is a half-mile walk from the station.

ROCHESTER

pop 27,000

Romans, Saxons and Normans have all occupied this historic riverside town and their architectural remains can be seen to this day, most vividly in a grand Cathedral and a ruined Norman Castle that loom over the town's medieval walls, cobbled streets and half-timbered buildings. Charles Dickens spent a large chunk of his childhood and the last few years of his life here, and many of the town's streets and buildings feature (albeit disguised) in his books.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01634-843666; 95 High St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri; 10am-5pm Sat; 10.30am-5pm Sun) has details of local accommodation. Free tours of the town leave here from Easter to September on weekends, bank holidays and Wednesdays at 2.15pm.

OAST HOUSES

While travelling through Kent you're bound to spy the jaunty conical tips of the county's distinctive oast houses peeking out from amid the trees. These giant kilns were used for drying hops, a key ingredient in beer, introduced to the region in the early 15th century. The odd cone-shaped roof was necessary to create a draught for the kiln fire, and the crooked nozzles sticking out from their tops could be moved to regulate the airflow to the fire.

If your curiosity is piqued, you can stick your nose into a few prime examples at the **Hop Farm Country Park** (☎ 01622-872068; www.thehopfarm.co.uk; Paddock Wood, Tonbridge; adult/child £7.50/6.50; 🕒 10am-5pm), which also re-creates the history of hop picking in Kent. It's signed off the A228 near Paddock Wood, southwest of Maidstone.

Many oast houses have been converted into homes and oast-house B&Bs are becoming more common throughout the county; check with the various tourist offices for information on local possibilities.

Ghost Tours (☎ 07939-241580) leave from Rochester Cathedral at 8pm on the first Wednesday of every month.

For three days in June, the streets of Rochester take on an air of Victorian England during the town's annual **Dickens Festival**, when parades, music and costumed characters make his best-loved novels come to life.

Rochester Castle (☎ 01634-335882; adult/child £5/4; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep; to 4pm Oct-Mar) is one of the finest examples of Norman architecture in England and has lived through three sieges and partial demolition. The flooring of the 12th-century, 35m Norman keep is long gone, allowing awesome views of the keep's structure and open roof from the ground. You can also climb to the top of the battlements for panoramas over the town.

Rochester Cathedral (☎ 01634-861232; admission free; guided tours £4; 🕒 7.30am-6pm; to 5pm Sat), founded in AD 604, is the second-oldest cathedral in England. Although construction on the present building started in 1080 and remodelling has left a mixture of styles, much of the Norman building remains, including an impressive nave and remains of a 13th-century wall painting featuring a wheel of fortune.

Housed in a splendid 17th-century building, **Guildhall Museum** (☎ 01634-848717; High St; admission free; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) contains a range of exhibitions including a Dickens room, where you can find out which parts of the town feature in his books, and a dramatic exhibition of life on hulks – prison ships used to contain convicts in the 18th century.

Eating

Precinct Pantry (☎ 01634-409645; 3 Cottage Yard; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat; from 11am Sun) This little cafe

has a prime location next to the cathedral and opposite the castle. There's a tiny dining room inside and in summer you can enjoy the great sandwiches, homemade cakes and tea on the pavement tables outside.

Topes (☎ 01634-845270; www.topesrestaurant.com; 60 High St; 🕒 lunch Wed-Sun; dinner Tue-Sat) Deservedly popular, modern-European food served in a cosy restaurant with low-beamed slanted ceilings, wood panelling and a large, inviting fireplace. Some windows look out onto the castle.

Getting There & Away

Trains to London Victoria (£12.30; 40 to 55 minutes) leave four times an hour and there are less frequent services to Charing Cross (£12.30; one hour 10 minutes). Trains to Canterbury leave twice hourly (£9.60; 45 minutes).

WHITSTABLE

pop 30,159

Best known for its succulent oysters, which have been harvested here since Roman times, pretty little Whitstable has transformed into a popular destination for weekend metro-politans, attracted by the clapboard houses, pretty shingle beach and candy-coloured beach huts that line the shore. The town has nevertheless managed to retain the character of a working fishing town, its thriving harbour and fish market coexisting with boutiques, organic delis and swanky restaurants.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01227-275482; www.visitwhitstable.co.uk; 7 Oxford St; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, to 4pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) can help you find and book accommodation, though at the time of writing there were plans to shut the office down,

in which case Canterbury would become the nearest tourist office. The nearby **library** (☎ 01227-273309; 31-33 Oxford St; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 10am to 4pm Sun) can make you a temporary member to use its internet terminals.

The modest **Whitstable Museum & Gallery** (☎ 01227-276998; www.whitstable-museum.co.uk; 8 Oxford St; admission free; ☹ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat year-round, 1-4pm Sun Jul & Aug) has good exhibits on Whitstable's oyster and fishing industry as well as a corner dedicated to the actor Peter Cushing, the town's most famous resident, who died in 1994.

For a week at the end of July, the town hosts a seafood, arts and music extravaganza, the **Whitstable Oyster Festival** (www.whitstableoysterfestival.co.uk), offering a packed schedule of events, from history walks, crab-catching and oyster-eating competitions to a beer festival and traditional 'blessing of the waters'.

Sleeping

Pearl Fisher (☎ 01227-771000; www.thepearlfisher.com; 103 Cromwell Rd; s/d £50/75; (P)) A few minutes' walk from the high street, this B&B has comfortable, themed rooms and plenty of thoughtful touches, such as chocolates on the pillows at night. There's a warm welcome and huge, top-quality breakfasts.

Hotel Continental (☎ 01227-280280; www.hotelcontinental.co.uk; 29 Beach Walk; s/d/huts from £60/70/100, d with sea view & balcony £100; (P)) The rooms in this elegant seaside art-deco building are nothing special – come for the quirky converted fishermen's huts right on the beach. Room rates increase by £15 to £100 a night during high season.

Eating & Drinking

Whitstable's famous oysters are harvested between September and April.

Crab & Winkle (☎ 0845 257 1587; South Quay, The Harbour; mains £12-18; ☹ 12pm-9pm) Sitting above the Whitstable Fish Market in a black clapboard house, this bright restaurant has large windows overlooking the harbour, a buzzing vibe and excellent seafood with a few options for meat lovers thrown in.

Wheeler's Oyster Bar (☎ 01227-273311; 8 High St; mains £13-19; ☹ lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) Squeeze onto a stool by the bar or into the Victorian dining room of this teeny pink restaurant, choose from a seasonal menu and enjoy the best seafood in Whitstable. They know their stuff – they've been serving oysters since 1856. It's a BYO venue; no credit cards.

Old Neptune (☎ 01227-272262; www.neppy.co.uk; Marine Tce) About as far onto the beach as it's possible to be, with plenty of strategically placed outside tables, wonky wooden floorboards, window seats and even a honky-tonk piano in the corner, Whitstable's most famous pub is ramshackle and fun. It puts on regular live music and there's a friendly vibe, although it can get massively crowded throughout summer.

Getting There & Away

Buses 4 and 6 go to Canterbury (30 minutes) every 15 minutes.

AROUND WHITSTABLE Herne Bay

The only reason to visit Herne Bay is to join one of its waterborne tours, the best of which is on the **Wildlife** (☎ 01227-366712; www.wildlifesailing.com; 8 Western Esplanade; ☹ Apr-Oct), a traditionally styled boat with a knowledgeable skipper that sails to an offshore sandbank packed with seals. Trips last five hours and prices depend on group size but start from £19.50 each. Another company to try is **Bayblast Tours** (☎ 01227-373372; www.bayblast.co.uk; 3hr seal trip £32; ☹ Mar-Oct).

There's an enjoyable coastline walk 2 miles east from Herne Bay into **Reculver Country Park** (admission free), where you'll find the remains of a Roman fort built in AD 280 and the 7th-century Saxon Church of St Mary. The church collapsed in 1809 due to coastal erosion, but the distinctive 12th-century twin towers have been rebuilt. It's an atmospheric if melancholic site that dominates the flat scenery around it.

Buses run from Whitstable to Herne Bay (20 minutes, every 15 minutes). Stagecoach bus 7 goes from Herne Bay train station to Reculver Park.

ISLE OF THANET

You won't need a ferry or a wetsuit to reach this island, which was swallowed by the mainland during the first millennium as the Watsun Channel dried up. It now forms a perky peninsula jutting out to sea at the far eastern tip of the country. But in its island days, Thanet was the springboard to several epoch-making episodes of English history. It was here that the Romans kicked off their invasion in the first century AD, and where Augustine landed in AD 597 to begin his conversion of the pagans.

These days, Thanet's pretty coastline is home to a string of Victorian resorts that are only invaded by the summer bathing-suit brigade. Walkers can also look to conquer the **Thanet Coastal Path**, a 20-mile trail that hugs the shore from Margate to Pegwell Bay via Broadstairs and Ramsgate.

Margate

pop 57,000

A popular seaside resort for more than 250 years thanks to its fine-sand beaches, Margate's tatty seafront and amusement arcades seem somewhat removed from the candy-striped beach huts and crowd-pleasing Punch and Judy puppet shows of its Victorian heyday. Major cultural regeneration projects – including the spectacular new Turner Contemporary art gallery – should reverse the town's fortunes.

Visit the **tourist office** (☎ 01843-292019; www.tourism.thanet.gov.uk; 12-13 The Parade; ☎ 9.15am-4.15pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) for maps and information.

SIGHTS

Margate's unique attraction is the mysterious, subterranean **Shell Grotto** (☎ 01843-220008; www.shellgrotto.co.uk; Grotto Hill; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm daily Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Easter). Discovered in 1835, it's a claustrophobic collection of rooms and passageways embedded with millions of shells arranged in symbol-rich mosaics. It has inspired feverish speculation over the years but presents few answers; some think it a 2000-year-old pagan temple, others an elaborate 19th-century hoax. Either way, it's an exquisite place worth seeing.

A new **Turner Contemporary** (☎ 01843-294208; www.turnercontemporary.org) gallery – to highlight the town's links with the artist JMW Turner – is due to open in 2010.

In the meantime, Turner Contemporary exhibitions take place at the **Turner Contemporary Project Space** (53-57 High Street) and **Droit House** (Stone Pier).

SLEEPING & EATING

Margate YHA (☎ 0870 770 5956; www.yha.org.uk; The Beachcomber, 3-4 Royal Esplanade; dm member/nonmember £15/18; ☎ ☎ wi-fi) Clean and family-friendly hostel in what used to be a hotel, a gentle stroll from a sandy bay and about half a mile west of the tourist office. Book a couple of days in advance.

Walpole Bay Hotel (☎ 01843-221703; www.walpolebayhotel.co.uk; 5th Ave, Cliftonville; s/d from £50/70) For a hefty slice of Victoriana, look no further than this eccentric part-hotel, part-shrine to the 19th century. The pink, flouncy rooms are furnished with antiques, while public spaces are filled by glass-cased displays of memorabilia from the 1800s. The hotel is a mile from central Margate, in Cliftonville.

No 6 Brasserie (☎ 01843-295603; 6 Market Pl; mains £12.95-16.95; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of the best places to eat in Margate – an elegant bar and restaurant full of heavy beams and squishy leather sofas, serving up decent European food and a great selection of cocktails.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses to Margate leave from London Victoria (£12.10, 2½ hours, five daily). From Canterbury, take bus 8 (55 minutes, three hourly).

Trains run twice hourly from London Victoria and less frequently from Charing Cross (£23.90, one hour 50 minutes). Margate is due to be joined to London St Pancras from December 2009 when the UK's first high-speed rail line opens.

Broadstairs

pop 24,370

Unlike its bigger, brasher neighbours, the charming resort village of Broadstairs revels in its quaintness, plays the Victorian nostalgia card at every opportunity, and names every second business after the works of its most famous holidaymaker, Charles Dickens. The town's elegant cliff-top buildings, neatly manicured gardens, wide saffron-sand bay and wistful Punch and Judy shows hide a far grittier history of smuggling and shipbuilding.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01843-861232; 2 Victoria Pde, Dickens House Museum; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sun Jun-Sep, Tue-Sat April-Jun, Wed-Sat Sep-Apr) has details of the annual, week-long **Dickens Festival** in mid-June, which culminates in a banquet-cum-ball in Victorian dress (£18). It's located in the quaint **Dickens House Museum** (☎ 01843-861232; www.dickenshouse.co.uk; 2 Victoria Pde; adult/child £2.50/1.30; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct), which was actually the home of Mary Pearson Strong, inspiration for the character of Betsey Trotwood in *David Copperfield*. Diverse Dickensiana on display includes letters from the author.

Dickens wrote parts of *Bleak House* and *David Copperfield* in the handsome, if slightly

worse for wear, cliff-top house above the pier between 1837 and 1859. Now private property, it suffered severe fire damage in 2006.

SLEEPING & EATING

East Horndon Hotel (☎ 01843-868306; www.easthorndonhotel.com; 4 Eastern Esplanade; s/d £35/66; 📶 wi-fi) This elegant hotel sits on manicured lawns a few yards from the beach. The comfortable rooms are slightly bland but have sea views to make up for it, several with little balconies where you can sit out to enjoy the sunset over the bay.

Copperfields Guest House (☎ 01843-601247; www.copperfieldsbb.co.uk; 11 Queen's Rd; d & tw from £65; 📶 wi-fi) This vegetarian B&B has three homely, if rather chintzy, rooms and a warm welcome from the owners and pet Yorkie. It also caters for vegans and all products in the bathrooms are cruelty free. It's a short hop away from the seafront and there's space to store muddy bikes.

Tartar Frigate (☎ 01843-862013; 42 Harbour St; mains £14-16.50) Dating back to the 18th century, this seafront pub is a great place to be in summer when tourists and locals alike spill out onto the beach. The seafood restaurant upstairs has excellent food and great views of the bay and the pub has regular live folk music.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Thanet Loop bus runs every 10 minutes through the day to Ramsgate (£2, 20 minutes) and Margate (£2, 20 minutes).

Bus 8 runs to Canterbury (1½ hours, three per hour) via Margate and bus 9 via Ramsgate (hourly). National Express buses leave High St for London Victoria (£12.10, three hours, five daily).

Trains run to London Victoria (£25.80, two hours, twice hourly) and there are less frequent services to London Bridge and Charing Cross. You may have to change at Ramsgate.

Ramsgate

pop 38,200

The most diverse of Kent's coastal towns, Ramsgate has a friendlier feel than rival Margate and is more vibrant than quaint little neighbour Broadstairs. A forest of sails whistle serenely in the breeze below the town's handsome curved harbour walls, surrounded by laid-back seafront bars and cosmopolitan street cafes that give the town a tang of nearby France. History buffs are kept busy

TOP FIVE CASTLES

- Leeds Castle (Kent Weald; p193)
- Dover Castle (Dover; p188)
- Hever Castle (Kent Weald; p192)
- Bodiam Castle (Around Battle; p197)
- Arundel Castle (Arundel; p212)

by the town's neo-Gothic architecture and rich maritime heritage, whilst the town's wide Blue Flag beaches appeal to families, surfers and sun worshippers.

On a small alleyway off Leopold St, the **tourist office** (☎ 01843-583333; www.tourism.thanet.gov.uk; 17 Albert Ct; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat Apr-May, daily Jun-Sep, to 12.15pm Wed-Sat Sep-Mar) has information and a self-guided walking map of the area's smugglers' caves.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

When the sun's out, rollerbladers, surfers and sunbathers all head to the east of the main harbour where Ramsgate's reddish-sand-and-shingle beach and elegant promenade sit under an imposing cliff.

At least 620 ships have been wrecked in the notorious Goodwin Sands off this stretch of coast, and an intriguing assortment of loot from their barnacled carcasses is in the **Ramsgate Maritime Museum** (☎ 01843-290399; www.ekmt.fogonline.co.uk; The Clock House, Royal Harbour; adult/child £1.50/75p; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Easter-Sep, 11am-4.30pm Thu-Sun Oct-Easter), inside the town's 19th-century clock tower near the harbour. Here, too, is a line marking Ramsgate's meridian (the town has its own Ramsgate Mean Time).

SLEEPING

Glendevon Guesthouse (☎ 01843-570909; www.glen devonguesthouse.co.uk; 8 Truro Rd; s/d from £35/55) This ecofriendly guest house, run by energetic and outgoing young hosts, is a 10-minute stroll from the action down at the harbour. The hallways of this grand Victorian house are decorated with watercolours by local artists, and there are bookshelves full of games, books and videos to borrow. All the rooms have very comfy beds and small kitchens, and breakfast is a convivial affair taken around one large table.

our pick Royal Harbour Hotel (☎ 01843-591514; www.royalharbourhotel.co.uk; Nelson Crescent; s/d from £65/85,

superior £100-215; ☑ wi-fi) Occupying two regency town houses on a glorious seafront crescent, this boutique hotel feels enveloped in warmth and quirkiness – an eclectic collection of books, magazines, games and artwork line the hotel, and there's a gramophone with old LPs and an honesty bar in the lounge, complimentary cheese and biscuits in the evening and hot-water bottles when it's chilly. Rooms range from tiny nautical-style 'cabins' to country-house style, four-poster doubles, most with postcard views over the forest of masts below.

EATING

Pete's Fish Factory (97 Harbour St; fish & chips from £3.50; ☎ 11.30am-11.30pm) Follow the tangy smells of salt and vinegar to this classic fish-and-chip shop (with a roof in the shape of a giant sandcastle), where cheap, sinful and salty treats can be devoured on outside seating.

Surin Restaurant (☎ 01843-592001; www.surinrestaurant.co.uk; 30 Harbour St; mains £6-13; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Ramsgate is an unlikely spot to eat some of the best Thai, Cambodian and Laotian food this side of the Hindu Kush, but sure enough, the tasty menu in this restaurant delivers. The restaurant is a dumpling's throw from the seafront and even serves its own label of microbrewed beers.

DRINKING

Miles Cafe Culture (☎ 01843-585008; 54-56 Harbour Pde; ☎ 8am-1.30am) This relaxed and understated bar, cafe and restaurant right next to the harbour attracts an exuberant crowd of all ages. There's a good selection of wine and cocktails to enjoy by candlelight whilst slumped into a deep leather sofa, and the action spills out onto outside tables as well.

Rokka (☎ 01843-599999; 64 Harbour Pde; ☎ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu; till 2am Fri & Sat) This kitsch red-and-white bar looks like the kind of place Austin Powers might frequent: curved, white plastic chairs, red-leather sofas, devilish red chandeliers and beaded curtains. It also does a nice line in cocktails and Mediterranean snacks.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

National Express bus 22 runs to London Victoria (£12.70, three hours, five daily) via Margate and Broadstairs. There are also local buses to Canterbury, Broadstairs and Ramsgate. Trains run to London Victoria and Charing Cross (£25.80, 1¼ to two hours, twice hourly).

There's also a ferry service to Ostend in Belgium run by **Transeuropa Ferries** (☎ 01843-595522; www.transeuropaferry.com) from Ramsgate New Port just west of the centre (five hours, from £36 per passenger with car, four each day).

When the UK's first high-speed rail line opens (due late 2009 at the time of writing), there will be a direct link between Ramsgate and London St Pancras, which should significantly reduce journey times.

SANDWICH

pop 4398

With a top slice of ancient churches, gables and peg-tiled roofs, a juicy filling of medieval streets and timber-framed houses, and a wholesome base slice of riverside strolls and superb golf links, Sandwich makes a very tasty morsel for passing travellers. Today it's a sleepy little inland settlement, but the town retains a certain salty tang from its days as an important Cinque Port before the coastline shifted and its harbour silted up in the 17th century.

Inside the Elizabethan guildhall, the **tourist office** (☎ 01304-613565; www.open-sandwich.co.uk; New St; ☎ 9.30am-4pm Apr-Oct) has information packs on short and long walks in the area. Guided tours of town can be arranged by contacting the **Sandwich Local History Society** (☎ 01304-613476; tours £2; ☎ evenings only).

Sights & Activities

Sandwich's spiderweb of medieval and Elizabethan streets is perfect for ambling and getting pleasantly lost. **Strand St** in particular has one of the highest concentrations of half-timbered buildings in the country. Steeped gables betray the strong influence of Protestant Flemish refugees who settled in the town in the 16th century.

A cute little flint-chequered **Barbican** tollgate, also dating from this period, controls traffic flow on the waterfront.

Architecture buffs should head for the **Church of St Clement**, which has a handsome Norman tower. The oldest church in Sandwich is **St Peter's** (King St), now out of action. It's a real mixture of styles and years: its tower collapsed in dramatic fashion in 1661 and it was rebuilt with a bulbous cupola. It houses sparse displays on the often scandalous earls of Sandwich, the fourth of which is credited with inventing the sandwich as a quick snack to eat whilst engrossed in gambling.

The historic guildhall hosts a small but thorough **museum** (☎ 01304-617197; adult/child £1/50p; ☎ 10.30am-12.30pm & 2-4pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, 2-4pm Thu & Sun) on Sandwich's rich past as a Cinque Port.

On fair-weather days, hop aboard the **Sandwich River Bus** (☎ 07958-376183; www.sandwichriverbus.co.uk; adult/child 30min trip £5/4, 1hr £10/7; ☎ every 30-60min 11am-6pm Thu-Sun Apr-Sep, Sun only Oct-Mar) beside the toll bridge for a quick river jaunt or trip out to Richborough (below).

Sandwich is also home to **Royal St Georges** (☎ 01304-613090; www.royalstgeorges.com), one of the most challenging golf links in England.

Sleeping & Eating

Bell Hotel (☎ 01304-617330; Strand St; s/d from £95/115; (P) (W) wi-fi) The Bell Hotel has been sitting on the town's quays since Tudor times, although much of the remaining building is from the 19th century. A splendid, sweeping staircase leads up to recently redecorated snazzy rooms, some with great views. There's also a smart brasserie serving good food (mains £9.25 to £16.80) below.

King's Arms (☎ 01304-617330; Strand St; mains £7.95-18.75; ☎ lunch & dinner) This 15th-century inn near the water has a beamed dining room with large fireplace serving quality English food and very popular Sunday lunches. For sunny days there's a walled, vine-covered garden complete with child's playhouse. There are a few B&B rooms upstairs.

Getting There & Away

National Express runs buses from London Victoria to Deal (£12.10, 3¼ hours, two daily), from where a local bus takes you to Sandwich (25 minutes).

Trains run from Dover Priory (23 minutes, half-hourly) or from London's Charing Cross (twice hourly) and from London Victoria (£24.10, two hours, hourly) to Sandwich.

Buses also go to Ramsgate (25 minutes, hourly), Dover (50 minutes, hourly) and Canterbury (40 minutes, hourly).

AROUND SANDWICH

Richborough

Roman Britain began here amid the wind-swept ruins of **Richborough Roman Fort** (☎ 01304-612013; adult/5-15yr/under 5yr £4.20/2.10/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mar-Sep), just 2 miles north of Sandwich. This is the spot from which the successful AD 43 invasion of Britain was launched. To celebrate

their victory, a colossal triumphal arch was planted here, the base of which remains. The fort's clearest features today – high walls and scores of deep defensive ditches that give it the appearance of a vast jelly mould – came later as the Romans were forced to stave off increasingly vicious seaborne attacks.

There's a small onsite museum and an audio tour to steer you through the rise and fall of Roman Richborough. To arrive as the Romans did – by boat – take the Sandwich River Bus (see left) from Sandwich. Return passengers pay an extra £2, but get a 25% discount for fort admission.

Deal

Julius Caesar and his armies set foot on Deal's peaceful shingle beach in 55 BC, for their first exploratory dip into Britain. Today there's a gorgeous little 16th-century **castle** (EH; ☎ 01304-372762; Victoria Rd; adult/5-15yr/under 5yr £4.20/2.10/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep) with curvaceous bastions that form petals in a Tudor rose shape. Far from delicate, however, it is the largest and most complete of Henry VIII's defence chain along the south coast.

And hardly a mile south is another link in the 16th-century coastal defences, **Walmer Castle** (EH; ☎ 01304-364288; Kingsdown Rd; adult/5-15yr/under 5yr £6.50/3.30/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Wed-Sun Mar & Oct), the much-altered and really rather lavish official residence of the warden of the Cinque Ports (see boxed text, p188). English hero, the Duke of Wellington, died here.

DOVER

pop 39,078

As a town itself, depressing Dover's air of decay and run-down, postwar architecture has little to offer to travellers, most of whom pass quickly through on their way to, and from, the Continent. Lucky, then, that the town has a couple of stellar attractions to redeem it. The port's vital strategic position so close to mainland Europe gave rise to a sprawling hilltop castle, with some 2000 years of history to its credit. Also here are the spectacular white cliffs that are as much a symbol of English wartime resilience as Winston Churchill or the Battle of Britain.

Orientation

Dover Castle dominates the town from a high promontory east of town, above the white

CINQUE PORTS

Due to their proximity to Europe, the coastal towns of southeast England were the front line against raids and invasion during Anglo-Saxon times. In the absence of a professional army and navy, these towns were frequently called upon to defend themselves, and the kingdom, at land and sea.

In 1278, King Edward I formalised this already ancient arrangement by legally defining the Confederation of Cinque (pronounced 'sink', meaning five) Ports. The five head ports – Sandwich, Dover, Hythe, Romney and Hastings – were granted numerous perks and privileges in exchange for providing the king with ships and men. At their peak, the ports were deemed England's most powerful institution after Crown and Church.

Even after shifting coastlines silted up several Cinque Port harbours, a professional navy was based at Portsmouth and the ports' real importance evaporated, the pomp and ceremony remains. The Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports is a prestigious post now given to faithful servants of the crown. The Queen Mother was warden until she passed away, succeeded by Admiral Lord Boyce. Previous incumbents include the Duke of Wellington and Sir Winston Churchill.

cliffs. Ferry departures are from the Eastern Docks southeast of the castle. Dover Priory train station is a short walk west of the centre. The bus station is on Pencester Rd.

Information

Banks and ATMs are located on Market Sq.

Mangle laundrette (21 Worthington St; per load £4;

☎ 8am-8pm)

Post office (Pencester Rd; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist Office (☎ 01304-05108; www.whitecliffs country.org.uk; Biggin St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm daily Jun-Aug, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri & 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Sep-May)

Located in the Old Town Gaol on Biggin St; has accommodation and ferry-booking services (both free).

White Cliffs Medical Centre (☎ 01304-201705; 143 Folkestone Rd)

Sights & Activities

DOVER CASTLE

The almost impenetrable **Dover Castle** (EH;

☎ 01304-211067; adult/5-15yr/under 5yr £10.30/5.20/free;

☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct, to 4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Mar;

Ⓟ), one of the most impressive in England, was built to bolster the country's weakest point at this, the shortest sea-crossing to mainland Europe. It sprawls across the city's hilltop, commanding a tremendous view of the English Channel as far as the French coastline.

The site has been in use for as many as 2000 years. On the vast grounds are the remains of a **Roman lighthouse**, which date from AD 50 and may be the oldest standing building in Britain. Beside it lies a restored **Saxon church**.

The robust 12th-century **keep**, with walls up to 7m thick, is filled with reconstructed scenes

of Henry VIII's visit, and its base shelters a sound-and-light re-creation of a 13th-century siege. But it's the warren of claustrophobic **secret wartime tunnels** under the castle that are the biggest draw. Excellent 50-minute tours delve into the hillside passageways, which were first excavated during the Napoleonic Wars and then expanded to house a command post and hospital in WWII. They now house reconstructed scenes of their wartime use, complete with sounds, smells and erratic lighting. One of Britain's most famous wartime operations, code-named **Dynamo**, was directed from here in 1940. It saw the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of troops from the French beaches of Dunkirk.

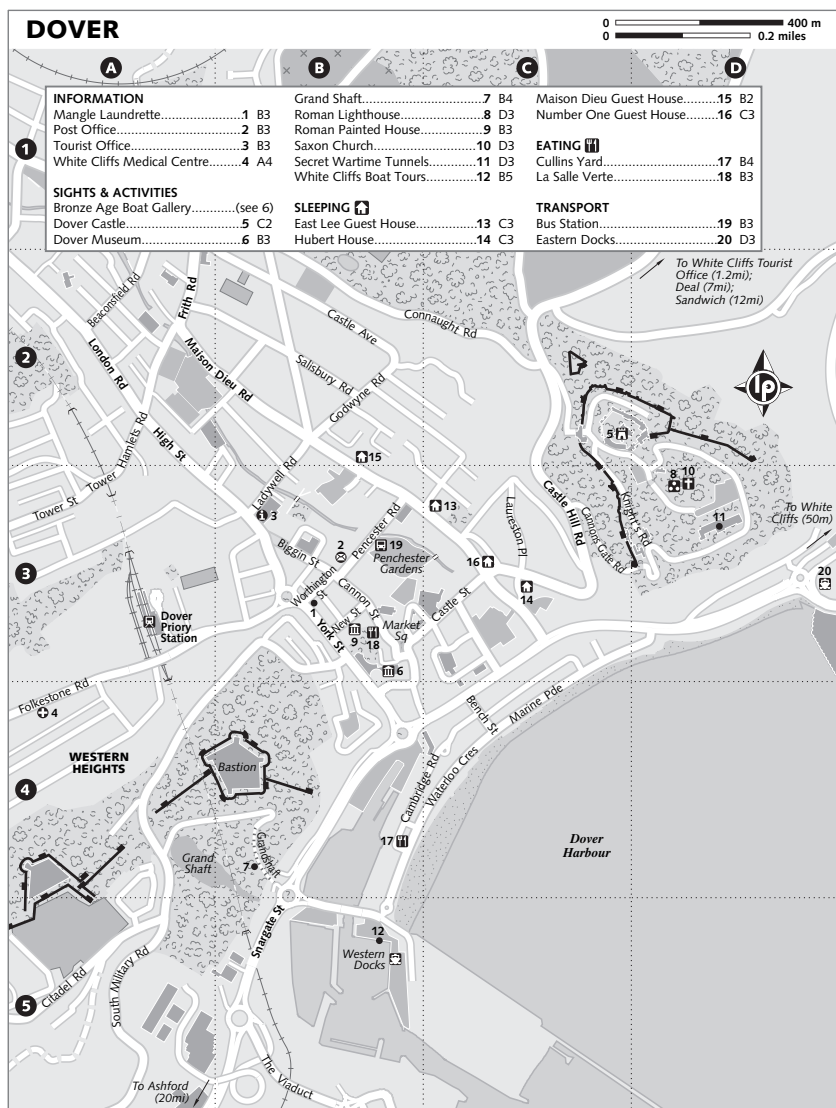
Buses 90C and 111 run from Dover Priory station to the castle.

ROMAN PAINTED HOUSE

Some of the most extensive, if stunted, Roman wall paintings north of the Alps are on show at the **Roman Painted House** (☎ 01304-203279; New St; adult/child £2/80p; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep), although they're housed in an amateurish museum. Several scenes depict Bacchus (the god of wine and revelry), which makes perfect sense as this large villa was built around AD 200 as a *mansio* (hotel) for travellers in need of a little lubrication to unwind.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

By far the most enthralling exhibit in the three-storey **Dover Museum** (☎ 01304-201066; www.dover museum.co.uk; Market Sq; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat year-round, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Aug) is that of an astonishing 3600-year-old Bronze Age



boat discovered here in 1992. Vaunted as the world's oldest-known seagoing vessel, it measures a thumping great 9.5m by 2.4m. Kids will love the touchy-feely activities, white coats and microscopes that accompany the exhibit.

The easily dizzied may prefer to avoid the **Grand Shaft** (Snargate St; admission £1; ☎ 2-5pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug), a unique 43m triple staircase cut

into the chalky white cliffs as a short cut for troops during the Napoleonic Wars. Phone the tourist office before arriving as it doesn't open every year.

Sleeping

B&Bs cluster along Castle St, Maison Dieu Rd and Folkestone Rd.

Maison Dieu Guest House (☎ 01304-204033; www.brguest.co.uk; 108 Maison Dieu Rd; s/d from £25/44; P) (Q) (wi-fi) Not the most exciting option in town, guest house with chintzy decor is good value and well located.

Hubert House (☎ 01304-202253; www.huberthouse.co.uk; 9 Castle Hill Rd; s/d incl breakfast from £40/55; P) (Q) (wi-fi) The comfortable bedrooms in this Georgian house may be overly flowery but the welcome is warm, and it uses ecofriendly and fair-trade products. It has its own little bistro downstairs which opens out onto a front terrace.

Number One Guest House (☎ 01304-202007; www.number1guesthouse.co.uk; 1 Castle Street; d from £45; P) Set in a grand Georgian town house at the foot of Dover Castle, with rooms decorated in traditional Victorian style. There's also a pretty walled garden with lovely views and breakfast is served in bed.

East Lee Guest House (☎ 01304-210176; www.eastlee.co.uk; 108 Maison Dieu Rd; d with/without breakfast from £55/50; P) This lovely terracotta-shingled town house makes quite an impression with its grand, elegantly decorated communal areas, energetic hosts, super-comfy beds and excellent, varied breakfasts.

Eating & Drinking

La Salle Verte (☎ 01304-201547; 14-15 Cannon St; snacks £2-6; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sun) The funkier little coffee shop in Dover serves great cakes, coffee and snacks both inside and in a little suntrap patio garden. It also lays on regular live music evenings showcasing local musicians.

Cullins Yard (☎ 01304-211666; 11 Cambridge Rd; ☎ 10am-12pm Mon-Sun) This bar, restaurant and sometime music venue has a nautical theme (including a bar in the shape of a boat) and a great location down by Wellington Docks. A variety of seafood dishes is on offer as well as a wide choice of beers from around the world. Local bands play on Sunday afternoons and there's jazz on Fridays.

Getting There & Away

Dover is 75 miles from London and 15 miles from Canterbury.

For information on the Channel Tunnel services, see p805.

BOAT

Ferries depart for France from the Eastern Docks (accessible by bus; see right) below the castle. Fares vary according to season and advance purchase. See the websites for specials.

Norfolk Line (☎ 0870 870 1020; www.norfolkline.com) Services to Dunkirk (1¼ hours, every two hours).

P&O Ferries (☎ 08716 645645; www.poferries.com) Runs to Calais (1½ hours, every 40 minutes to an hour).

Seafrance (☎ 0871 423 7119; www.seafrance.com) Ferries to Calais roughly every hour and a half.

SpeedFerries (☎ 0871 222 7456; www.speedferries.com) Services to Boulogne (50 minutes, up to five daily).

BUS

Dover's **bus station** (Pencester Rd) is in the heart of town. Stagecoach East Kent has a Canterbury to Dover service (35 minutes, hourly). National Express runs 20 daily coaches from London Victoria (£12.10, 2¾ hours). Stagecoach buses also go to Deal (40 minutes, hourly) and Sandwich (55 minutes, hourly).

TRAIN

There are more than 40 trains daily from London Victoria and Charing Cross stations to Dover Priory via Ashford and Sevenoaks (£26, two hours). In late 2009, Dover is due to be linked to London via a high-speed railway.

Getting Around

The ferry companies run regular shuttle buses between the docks and the train station (five minutes) as they're a long walk apart.

Heritage (☎ 01304-204420) and **Star Taxi** (☎ 01304-228822/201010) have 24-hour services. A one-way trip to Deal costs £15 and £20 to Sandwich.

AROUND DOVER The White Cliffs

Immortalised in song, film and literature, these iconic cliffs are embedded in the national consciousness, acting as a big, white 'Welcome Home' sign to generations of travellers and soldiers.

The cliffs rise 100m high and extend for 10 miles on either side of Dover, but it is the 6-mile stretch east of town – properly known as the Langdon Cliffs – that particularly captivates visitors' imaginations. The chalk here is about 250m deep, and the cliffs themselves are about half a million years old, formed when the melting icecaps of northern Europe were gouging a channel between France and England.

The Langdon Cliffs are managed by the National Trust, which has a **tourist office** (☎ 01304-202756; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Feb) and **car park** (£3 for nonmembers) 2 miles east of Dover.

KENTISH SAFARI

Spend the day out on a game drive before retiring to your lodge and enjoying a cocktail while watching the wildlife gather round the watering hole...but this isn't the Serengeti, this is rural Kent. The people at Port Lympne safari park, the sister park to Howlett's (p181), have created **Livingstone Safari Lodge** (☎ 01303-234190; www.totallywild.net/portlympne; adult/child £150/80; 📍 📞), the only place in Europe to run overnight safaris. You're taken on safari drives by a Zimbabwean ranger, you can stay in luxury safari tents, and there's an open-to-the-elements lounge where you eat food cooked on an open fire whilst looking out over the zebra and giraffe filled plains...and over to France. It's different, and great fun.

From the tourist office, you can follow a stony path as it winds its way further east along the cliff tops for a bracing 2-mile walk to the stout Victorian **South Foreland Lighthouse** (NT; ☎ 01304-215484; adult/child £4/2; 📍 guided tours 11am-5.30pm Fri-Mon mid-Mar-Oct). This was the first lighthouse to be powered by electricity, and is the site of the first international radio transmissions in 1898.

The cliffs are 2 miles east of Dover along Castle Hill Rd and the A258 road to Deal or off the A2 past the Eastern Docks. Buses 113 and 90/1 from Dover stop near the main entrance.

To see them in all their full-frontal glory, **White Cliffs Boat Tours** (☎ 01303-271388; www.whitecliffsboatours.co.uk; adult/child £6/3; 📍 daily Jul & Aug, Sat & Sun Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct) runs 40-minute water tours at 10am, noon, 2pm and 4pm from the Western Docks.

Romney Marsh

This eerie landscape of flat reed beds, sparsely populated and echoing with the whistling wind and lonely squawks of sea birds, was once a favourite haunt of smugglers and wreckers. It's now home to an incredibly cramped tourist attraction: the world's smallest-gauge public railway. Opened in 1927, the pocket-sized **Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway** (☎ 01797-362353; www.rhdr.org.uk; adult/child £12/6; 📍 daily Apr-Sep, Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) trains trundle and toot their way 13.5 miles from Hythe to Dungeness lighthouse and back (roughly an hour each way). Cute, undoubtedly. But prone to cramped leg space and sore heads? You better believe it.

Dungeness

Sticking out from the western edge of Romney Marsh is a low shingle spit dominated by a brooding nuclear power station. In spite of the apocalyptic desolation, this spot is home

to the largest sea-bird colony in the south-east at the **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Nature Reserve** (☎ 01797-320588; www.rspb.org.uk; Dungeness Rd; adult/child £3/1; 📍 9am-9pm or sunset, visitor centre 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb), which has displays, binocular hire, explorer backpacks for kids, and information on bird-watching hides.

THE KENT WEALD

Taking its name from an old German word *wald*, meaning 'forest', the Weald, as it's known by locals, is all out of woodland these days, but you'll find postcard villages, manicured lawns and ripe fields. The region also has more than its fair share of country estates, castles and gardens.

Sevenoaks

pop 26,699

A bland commuter town off the M25, Sevenoaks is home to one of England's most celebrated country estates. The gates to **Knole House** (NT; ☎ 01732-450608; adult/child £9/4.50; 📍 noon-4pm Wed-Sun mid-Mar-Oct) sit on the southern High St, and from there it's a beautiful winding walk or drive through a rolling medieval park dotted with bold deer. The estate was built in the 12th century, but in 1456 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Bouchier, snapped the property up and set about building a vast and lavish house 'fit for the Princes of the Church'. Its curious calendar design encompasses 365 rooms, 52 staircases and seven courtyards. The house was later home to Vita Sackville-West, whose love affair with Virginia Woolf spawned the novel *Orlando*, set at Knole.

The house is 1.5 miles southeast of Sevenoaks **train station** (London Rd). Trains leave from London Charing Cross station (£8.20, 35 minutes, every 15 minutes) and continue to Tunbridge Wells (20 minutes, two per hour) and Hastings (£14.20, one hour).

ENGLISH WINE

Mention English wine not too long ago and you'd likely hear a snort of derision. Not any more. Thanks to warmer temperatures and determined winemakers, English wine, particularly of the sparkling variety, is developing a fan base all of its own.

Legend has it that the Romans first brought over grapevine cuttings 2000 years ago, and that vineyards blossomed in English soil. But by the time the 20th century rolled around, there wasn't a wine producer in sight – until some bright spark started planting vines again in the 1950s.

These days, there are more than 400 English vineyards and interest (and sales) in domestic wine has grown dramatically, with the likes of Nyetimber, Chapel Down and Ridgeview enjoying award-winning success around the world.

The best vineyards are in the south, particularly Sussex, Essex and Kent, whose chalky soil is likened to the Champagne region in France. Many vineyards now offer tours and wine tastings. Two of the most popular are **Chapel Down Vinery** (☎ 01580-763033; www.englishwinesgroup.com; adult/child £6.50/2; ☎ tours Jun-Sep), and **Denbies Wine Estate** (☎ 01306-876616; www.denbiesvineyard.co.uk; adult/child £7.25/3; ☎ tours year-round).

Down House

Charles Darwin's home from 1842 until his death in 1882, **Down House** (EH; ☎ 01689-869119; adult/5-14yr £7.20/3.60; ☎ 11am-5pm Jul & Aug, 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Mar-Jun & Sep-Oct, closed Nov-Feb) witnessed the development of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. The house and gardens have been restored to look much as they would have in Darwin's time, including Darwin's study, where he undertook much of his reading and writing; the drawing room, where he tried out some of his indoor experiments; and the gardens and greenhouse, where some of his outdoor experiments are re-created. There are three self-guided trails in the area, where you can follow in the great man's footsteps. You can pick up trail booklets at the house. At the time of writing, the UK was putting forward Down House, Downe village and the surrounding area as its World Heritage Site Nomination bid for 2009. The same year sees the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *The Origin of Species*, his seminal work.

Down House is in Luxted Rd, Downe, off the A21. Take bus 146 from Bromley North or Bromley South railway station, or service R8 from Orpington.

Chartwell

The home of Sir Winston Churchill from 1924 until his death in 1965 (see boxed text, p45), **Chartwell** (☎ 01732-868381; Westerham; adult/child £11.20/5.60, garden & studio only £5.60/2.80; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, Tue-Sun Jul & Aug), 6 miles east of Sevenoaks, offers a breathtakingly inti-

mate insight into the life of England's famous cigar-chomping bombast.

This 19th-century house and its rambling grounds have been preserved much as Winnie left them, full of books, pictures, maps and personal mementos. Churchill was also a prolific painter and his daubings are scattered throughout the house and fill the garden studio.

Transport options are limited without a car. Kent Passenger Services bus 238 runs from Sevenoaks train station (30 minutes, every two hours) on Wednesdays from May to mid-September. Arriva 401 runs on Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays only.

Hever Castle

This idyllic little **castle** (☎ 01732-865224; www.hevercastle.co.uk; adult/5-14yr £11.50/6.30, gardens only £9.30/6; ☎ noon-5pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov) seems to have leapt right out of a film set. It's encircled by a narrow moat and surrounded by family-friendly gardens, complete with cute topiary of woodland creatures and wandering ducks and swans.

The castle is famous for being the childhood home of Anne Boleyn, mistress to Henry VIII and then his doomed queen. It dates from 1270, with a Tudor house added in 1505 by the Bullen (Boleyn) family. The castle later fell into disrepair until 1903, when American multimillionaire William Waldorf Astor bought it, pouring obscene amounts of money into a massive refurbishment. The exterior is unchanged from Tudor times, but the interior is thick with Edwardian panelling.

From London Bridge trains go direct to Hever (£8.50, 40 minutes, hourly), a poorly

signposted 1-mile walk from the castle); and to Edenbridge (£8.50, 50 minutes), from where it's a 4-mile taxi or bike ride. If you're driving, Hever Castle is 3 miles off the B2026 near Edenbridge.

Penshurst

The pretty village of Penshurst, on the B2176, just off the A21, is lined with timber-framed Tudor houses and features a fanciful four-spired church, but most people come for grandiose medieval manor house **Penshurst Place** (☎ 01892-870307; www.penshurstplace.com; adult/5-16yr/under 5yr £8.50/5.50/free; ☎ noon-4pm Apr-Oct). Its pride and joy is the splendid **Baron's Hall**, built in 1341, where a number of royal visitors, including Queen Elizabeth I, were entertained beneath its stunning 18m-high chestnut roof. Just outside the main house is a vintage-toy museum, whose empty-eyed dolls, classic rocking horses and mechanical red-eyed bear are enough to give even adults nightmares.

Outside, Penshurst's famous **walled gardens** (☎ 10.30am-6pm Apr-Oct) were designed in 1346 and remain virtually unchanged since Elizabethan times. There are also lovely river-side walks in the grounds.

From Edenbridge, buses 231 and 233 leave for Tunbridge Wells via Penshurst every hour (27 minutes).

Leeds Castle

This immense moated pile is for many the world's most romantic **castle** (☎ 01622-765400; www.leeds-castle.com; adult/4-15yr/senior & student £15/9.50/12.50; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar), and it's certainly one of the most visited in Britain. While it looks formidable enough from the outside – a hefty structure balancing on two islands amid a large lake and sprawling estate – it's actually known as something of a 'ladies castle'. This stems from the fact that in its more than 1000 years of history, it has been home to a who's who of medieval queens, most famously Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon.

The castle was transformed from fortress to lavish palace over the centuries, and its last owner, the high-society hostess Lady Baillie, used it as a princely family home and party pad to entertain the likes of Errol Flynn, Douglas Fairbanks and JFK.

The castle's vast estate offers enough attractions of its own to justify a day trip: peaceful

walks, a duckery, aviary and falconry demonstrations. You'll also find a quirky dog-collar museum and a hedge maze, overseen by a grassy bank where fellow travellers can shout encouragement or misdirections.

Since Lady Baillie's death in 1974, a private trust has managed the property. This means that some parts of the castle are periodically closed for private events.

Leeds Castle is just east of Maidstone. National Express runs one direct bus daily from London Victoria coach station, leaving at 9am and returning at 3pm (£12.30, 1½ hours). It must be prebooked. There is a combined entrance and bus-fare ticket that costs £22.

You can also get a train from London Bridge, London Victoria or London Cannon St to Bearstead (£15; 50 minutes) from where you can catch a connecting coach to the castle (£5 return).

Sissinghurst Castle Garden

One of England's most famous and romantic gardens is at **Sissinghurst** (NT; ☎ 01580-710700; Sissinghurst; adult/child £9/4.40; ☎ 11am-6.30pm Fri-Tue mid-Mar-Oct). Though the castle dates to the 12th century, writer Vita Sackville-West crafted the delightful gardens after she bought the estate in 1930. Highlights include the exuberant rose garden and the virginal snowy-bloomed White Garden. Sissinghurst is 2 miles northeast of Cranbrook and 1 mile east of Sissinghurst village off the A262.

EAST SUSSEX

Home to lush countryside, medieval villages and gorgeous coastline, this lovely corner of the country is besieged by weekend Londoners whenever the weather is fine. Here you'll find an air of romance amid the cobbled medieval streets of Rye, historic Battle, where William the Conqueror first engaged the Saxons in 1066, and the breathtaking white cliffs of Beachy Head, near the civilised seaside town of Eastbourne. Brighton, a highlight of a visit here, offers vibrant nightlife, offbeat shopping and shingly shores. But you needn't follow the crowds to enjoy East Sussex. It's just as rewarding to get off the beaten track, linger along its winding country lanes and stretch your legs across the rolling South Downs.

RYE

pop 4195

If you're searching for a perfect example of a medieval village, look no further than Rye. Once a Cinque Port (p188), this exquisitely pretty place looks as if it's been pickled, put on a shelf and promptly forgotten about by old Father Time. Even the most hardened cynic can't fail to be bewitched by Rye's cobbled lanes, mysterious passageways and crooked half-timbered Tudor buildings. Romantics can lap up the town's folk's tales of resident smugglers, ghosts, writers and artists, and hole up in one of a slew of gorgeous accommodation in its heart.

The town sits prettily atop a rocky outcrop, and sheep graze where the waters once lapped. If you do visit – and you absolutely should – try to avoid summer weekends when hoards of day-trippers dilute the town's time-warp effect.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 01797-226696; www.visitrye.co.uk; Strand Quay; ☏ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov, Dec & Mar, to 3pm Jan & Feb) runs a town-model audiovisual

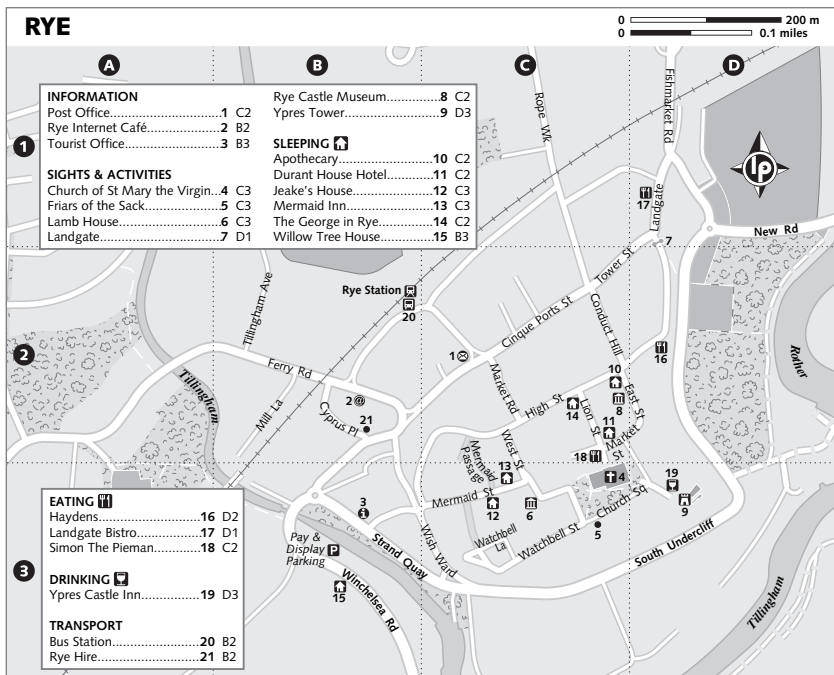
history for £3. More fun is the freaky collection of penny-in-the-slot novelty machines upstairs. It also sells a *Rye Town Walk* map (£1), and rents out multilingual audio tours (adult/child £3/1).

You can jump online at **Rye Internet Cafe** (☎ 01797-224276; 46 Ferry Rd; per min 5p; ☏ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-9pm Sun). The **post office** (☏ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) is on Cinque Ports St.

Sights

From the tourist office, turn your back to the water, go through Strand Quay and wobble up the cobblestones of famous **Mermaid St**, bristling with 15th-century timber-framed houses with quirky house names such as 'The House with Two Front Doors' and 'The House Opposite'.

Turn right at the T-junction for the striking Georgian **Lamb House** (NT; ☎ 01797-229542; West St; adult/child £3.50/1.80; ☏ 2-6pm Thu & Sat late Mar-Oct), a favourite stomping ground for local apparitions, but not that of its most famous resident, American writer Henry James, who lived here from 1898 to 1916, during which he wrote *The Wings of the Dove*.



Continue around the dogleg into cobbled Church Sq, ringed by historic houses, including the **Friars of the Sack**, which was once part of a 13th-century Augustinian friary but is now a private home. The pretty **Church of St Mary the Virgin** (☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) is a hotchpotch of medieval and later styles and its turret clock is the oldest in England (1561) still working with its original pendulum mechanism. You can climb the church **tower** (adult/child £2/free) for great views of the town and surrounding countryside.

Turn right at the square's east corner for the sandcastle archetype **Ypres Tower** (tower & museum adult/child £3/1.80; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct, 10.30am-3.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), pronounced 'wipers'. This 13th-century building has great views over Romney Marsh and Rye Bay, and houses one part of Rye Castle Museum. It's overseen by a friendly warden, who's full of colourful tales from the tower's long history as fort, prison, mortuary and museum (the last two at overlapping times).

The other branch of the **museum** (☎ 01797-226728; www.ryemuseum.co.uk; 3 East St; adult/child £2.50/1.80; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct), a short stroll away on East St, is home to an 18th-century leather fire engine and other intriguing loot.

At the northeastern edge of the village, the thickset pale-stone **Landgate** dates back from 1329, and is the only remaining gate out of four.

Activities

To combine history and a hearty hike, the well-signposted **1066 Country Walk** meanders 31 miles from Rye to Battle and Pevensey where it connects with the South Downs Way.

Festivals & Events

Rye wholeheartedly celebrates its maritime heritage with a two-day festival in August, and in September the town gets arty for the two-week **Rye Arts Festival** (☎ 01797-224442; www.ryefestival.co.uk).

Sleeping

Rye boasts an exceptional choice of unique historic accommodation.

Jeake's House (☎ 01797-222828; www.jeakeshouse.com; Mermaid St; s/d from £55/110; Ⓟ) An inviting, ivy drenched 17th-century town house on cobbled Mermaid St, Jeake's was once home to US poet Conrad Aitken. Today it lives life as a

handsomely furnished guest house. You can literally take a pew in the snug book-lined bar and, continuing the theme, breakfast is served in an 18th-century former chapel.

Durant House Hotel (☎ 01797-223182; www.duranthouse.com; 2 Market St; s/d from £70/95) Tucked discreetly away on a cobbled lane, the rooms in this Georgian guest house range from opulent four posters to a little attic nook, some with peaceful views over the river toward Romney Marsh. There's also a snug lounge with an honesty bar.

The George in Rye (☎ 01797-224065; www.thegeorgieinrye.com; 98 High St; d from £125; ☎ wi-fi) This coaching inn at the heart of Rye has managed to reinvent itself as a contemporary boutique hotel whilst staying true to its roots. Downstairs, an old-fashioned wood-panelled lounge is warmed by roaring log fires, whilst the bedrooms are chic and understated with the odd splash of psychedelic colour. The George's restaurant – dealing in contemporary Sussex-sourced food and good English wine – can compete with the best Rye has to offer.

Mermaid Inn (☎ 01797-223065; www.mermaidinn.com; Mermaid St; d £150-240; Ⓟ) Few inns can claim to be as atmospheric as this ancient hostelry, dating from 1420. Every room is different – but each is thick with dark beams and lit by leaded windows, and some are graced by secret passageways that now act as fire escapes. Small wonder it's such a popular spot – these days you're as likely to spot a celeb or a royal as the resident ghost.

More great choices:

Apothecary (☎ 01797-229157; www.bedandbreakfastrye.com; 1 East St; d from £60) Originally the home of the town's apothecary, this characterful B&B has three rooms and its own coffee shop.

Willow Tree House (☎ 01797-227820; www.willow-tree-house.com; 113 Winchelsea Rd; s/d £70/80; Ⓟ). Lovingly decorated B&B in a listed building, it features a big garden dominated by – you've guessed it – a large weeping willow.

Eating & Drinking

Simon the Pieman (☎ 01797-222207; 3 Lion St; snacks £1.50-5; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-5.30pm Sun) Rye isn't short of quaint little tea shops, and this is one of the more traditional, with calorific cream teas, freshly baked cakes and simple lunches.

Haydens (☎ 01797-224501; 108 High St; snacks/meals from £3/9; ☎ 10am-5pm daily, dinner Fri & Sat) Staunch

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

Start by checking into boutique splendour at the **George in Rye** (p195). Hear tales of the town's ghosts and smugglers over dinner, then out to roam the cobbled medieval streets after dark. After a night untroubled by spirits (unless they come in a glass), set out to explore the town's beauty by daylight. Navigate your way through narrow country lanes to fairytale **Bodiam Castle** (opposite). Explore its ramparts, then picnic in its pretty parkland. In the afternoon, drive on to historic site of the 1066 Battle of Hastings at **Battle** (below), and see the spot where King Harold met his end. Have dinner at the stunning **Pilgrim's Restaurant** (opposite) and then on to Hastings to settle in at the beautiful **Swan House** (p198). After a leisurely breakfast on Sunday, it's time for a bracing stroll around town. Check out the Old Town's galleries and boutiques (p198), before taking the **West Hill Cliff Railway** (p198) up to the ruins of Hastings castle, with awesome views out to sea. When you get back down again, fortify yourself with fish and chips on the beach in time for the long trip home.

believers in organic and fair-trade produce, these guys dish up delicious omelettes, ploughman's lunches, salads and pancakes in their light, breezy cafe. There's a wonderful elevated terrace at the back with great views over the town and surrounding countryside.

Ypres Castle Inn (☎ 01797-223248; www.yprescastleinn.co.uk; Gun Gardens; meals £7-15; ☺ lunch noon-3pm, dinner 6-9pm) You can have a match on a boules pitch, enjoy some live bands or chow down on scrumptious seasonal food like Rye bay scallops at this warm, country-style pub. The beer's not bad either.

Landgate Bistro (☎ 01797-222829; www.landgatebistro.co.uk; 5/6 Landgate; mains £13-15.50; ☺ dinner Tue-Sat & Sun before bank holiday, lunch Sat & Sun) There's fine dining to be had in these two old Georgian cottages. Take a seat amongst the beams and exposed brickwork of their graceful dining room for a top-notch feast of local delights such as game, Dover sole and Romney Marsh lamb.

Getting There & Away

Bus 711 runs between Dover (two hours, hourly) and Hastings (30 minutes) via Rye. Trains run to London Charing Cross (£22.60, two hours, three per hour), but you must change either in Hastings or Ashford.

Getting Around

You can rent all-terrain bikes (per day/four hours £12/8) from **Rye Hire** (☎ 01797-223033; 1 Cyprus Pl; ☺ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, till noon Sat). Call ahead for Sunday hire.

BATTLE

pop 5190

This little, unassuming village has a monumental place in British history. Battle grew

up around the point where invading French duke William of Normandy, aka William the Conqueror, scored a decisive victory over local King Harold in 1066, so beginning Norman rule and changing the face of the country forever.

Orientation & Information

The train station is a short walk from High St, and is well signposted. The **tourist office** (☎ 01424-773721; Gatehouse; ☺ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) is next to Battle Abbey. The post office, banks and ATMs are also on High St.

Sights

Another day, another photogenic ruin? Hardly. On this spot raged *the* pivotal battle in the last successful invasion of England in 1066: an event with unparalleled impact on the country's subsequent social structure, architecture and well...pretty much everything. Only four years later, the conquering Normans began constructing **Battle Abbey** (EH; ☎ 01424-773792; adult/child £6.50/3.30; ☺ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar), right in the middle of the battlefield: a penance ordered by the Pope for the loss of life incurred here.

Only the foundations of the original church remain, the altar's position marked by a plaque – also supposedly the spot England's King Harold famously took an arrow in his eye. But other impressive monastic buildings survive and make for atmospheric explorations.

The battlefield's innocently rolling lush hillsides do little to evoke the ferocity of the event, but high-tech interactive presentations and blow-by-blow audio tours do their utmost to bring the battle to life.

Sleeping & Eating

Tollgate Farmhouse (☎ 01424-777436; www.tollgatefarmhouse.co.uk; 59 North Trade Rd; s/d from £35/65; (P)) A homely atmosphere can be found 10-minutes' walk away from the centre of Battle at this large domestic residence, with a handful of florid en suite rooms dotted with embroidery and fake flowers, and several extra surprises tucked up its sleeve: a Jacuzzi, sauna and outdoor pool among them.

Powdermills (☎ 01424-775511; www.powdermills.hotel.com; Powdermill Lane; s/d £115/125; (P)) Rebuilt in the 18th century after a Napoleonic gunpowder works saw off the previous manor with a bang, this graceful, ivy-covered country-house hotel has classic four-postered rooms, a wonderful orangery restaurant, a swimming pool and 200-acre grounds of tranquil lakes and woodland adjoining Battle Abbey's grounds.

Pilgrim's Restaurant (☎ 01424-772314; www.pilgrims-battle.co.uk; 1 High St; 3-course dinner £19.95; ☞ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Misshapen beams, rough-plastered walls and a vaulted ceiling make this 15th-century pilgrim's lodging the most spectacular place to eat in Battle. The food is tasty as well as beautiful to look at, and the chef is committed to using local produce.

Getting There & Away

National Express bus 023 from London (£11.60, 2¼ hours, daily) to Hastings passes through Battle. Bus 4/5 runs to Hastings (26 minutes, hourly). Trains also run to London Charing Cross (£18, one hour 20 minutes, twice hourly).

AROUND BATTLE

Bodiam Castle

Surrounded by a square moat teeming with oversized goldfish, this four-towered archetypal castle (NT; ☎ 01580-830436; adult/child £5.20/2.60; ☞ 10am-6pm mid-Feb-Oct, to 4pm Sat & Sun Nov-early Feb) makes you half expect to see a fire-breathing dragon appear or a golden-haired princess lean over its walls. It is the legacy of 14th-century soldier of fortune (the polite term for knights who slaughtered and pillaged their way around France) Sir Edward Dalyngrigge, who married the local heiress and set about building a castle to make sure everybody knew who was boss.

Parliamentarian forces left the castle in ruins during the English Civil War, but in

TOP FIVE PAMPERED GETAWAYS

- Mermaid Inn (Rye; p195)
- Powdermills (Battle; left)
- Drakes (Brighton; p208)
- Abode (Canterbury; p179)
- Swan House (Hastings; p198)

1917 Lord Curzon, former viceroy of India, bought it and restored the exterior. Much of the interior remains unrestored, but it's possible to climb to the battlements for some sweeping views.

You'll most likely hear the tooting of the nearby **Kent & East Sussex steam railway** (☎ 01580-765155; www.kestr.org.uk; adult/3-15yr £12/7), which runs from Tenterden in Kent through 11 miles of gentle hills and woods to Bodiam village, from where a bus takes you to the castle. It operates three to five services on most days from May to September and at the weekend and school holidays in October, December and February. It's closed November, January and most of March.

The castle is 9 miles northeast of Battle off the B2244. Stagecoach bus 349 stops at Bodiam from Hastings (38 minutes) once every two hours during the day Monday to Saturday.

Bateman's

It was love at first sight when Mr Rudyard Kipling, author of *The Jungle Book*, set eyes on **Bateman's** (NT; ☎ 01435-882302; adult/child £7.20/3.60; ☞ 11am-5pm Sat-Wed mid-Mar-Oct), the glorious little 1634 Jacobean mansion he would call home for the last 34 years of his life, and where he would draw inspiration for *The Just So Stories* and other vivid tales.

Even today, the house is pervaded by a sense of Kipling's cosy contentment here. Everything is pretty much just as the writer left it after his death in 1936, down to the blotting paper on his study desk. Furnishings often reflect his fascination with the East, with many oriental rugs and Indian artefacts adding colour.

The house is surrounded by lovely gardens and a small path leads down to a water mill that grinds corn on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 2pm.

Bateman's is about half a mile south of the town of Burwash along the A259.

HASTINGS

pop 85,000

Forever associated with the Norman invasion of 1066 even though the crucial events took place 6 miles away, Hastings thrived as a Cinque Port, and in its Victorian heyday was one of the country's most fashionable seaside resorts. After a period of steady decline, the town is enjoying a renaissance, and these days, it's an intriguing mix of tacky resort, fishing port and chic Bohemian retreat.

Orientation & Information

The new train station is a five-minute walk up from the seafront on Havelock Rd. National Express buses leave for the bus station on Queen's Rd. The main **tourist office** (☎ 0845 274 1001; Queen's Sq; ☎ 8.30am-6.15pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun) is in the Town Hall.

Sights

The best place to hang out is **Old Town**, a hotchpotch of narrow streets and half-timbered buildings filled with antique shops, boutiques, bistros, quaint local pubs and galleries.

Down by the seafront, the **Stade** – the stretch of shingle in front of Rock-a-Nore Rd – is home to distinctive, tall black clapboard **Net Huts**, built as storage for fishing gear back in the 17th century.

There are three nautical attractions on Rock-a-Nore Rd itself: the **Fishermen's Museum** (☎ 01424-461446; www.hastingsfish.co.uk; Rock-a-Nore Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Mar), the **Shipwreck and Coastal Heritage Centre** (☎ 01424-437452; www.shipwreck-heritage.org.uk; Rock-a-Nore Rd; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Mar) and the **Blue Reef Aquarium** (☎ 01424-718776; www.bluereefaquarium.co.uk/hastings; Rock-a-Nore Rd; adult/child £7.50/5.50; ☎ 10am-5pm).

To scale up the high cliffs that shelter the town, there are two Victorian funicular railways, the most useful of which is the **West Hill Cliff Railway** (☎ 01424-781030; George St; adult/child £1.80/1.10; ☎ 10am-5.30pm summer, 11am-4pm winter), which takes visitors up to West Hill and the ruins of a Norman fortress built by William the Conqueror in 1069, now known as **Hastings Castle** (☎ 01424-444412; www

.discoverhastings.co.uk; Castle Hill Rd; adult/child £3.75/2.70; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Sep, 11am-3pm Oct-Easter).

Hokey Smugglers Adventure (☎ 01424-444412; www.smugglersadventure.co.uk; St Clement Caves; adult/child £6.75/4.75; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Easter-Sep, 11am-4.30pm Oct-Easter) is also on West Hill. Meander through underground caverns to hear yarns of smuggling along the Sussex coast, told through interactive exhibits and a ghostly narrator.

Sleeping & Eating

Lavender and Lace (☎ 01424-716290; www.lavenderlace1066.co.uk; 106 All Saints St; s/d from £50/70; ☎ wi-fi) Old-world charm comes as standard in this cute little 16th-century house in the old town, along with genial hosts and spotless, comfortable rooms.

ourpick Swan House (☎ 01424-430014; www.swanhousehastings.co.uk; 1 Hill St; s/d from £70/100; ☎ wi-fi) Inside its ancient, timbered 15th-century shell this place blends contemporary and vintage chic to perfection. Rooms feature organic toiletries, fresh flowers, hand-painted walls and huge beds. The guest lounge, where pale sofas, painted floorboards and striking modern sculpture sit alongside beams and a huge stone fireplace, is a stunner. The hosts are warm but unobtrusive, and their fabulous breakfasts feature kippers, muesli, smoothies and smoked salmon.

Dragon Bar (☎ 01424-423688; 71 George St; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Atmospheric, laid-back bar full of dark walls, mismatched furniture and beaten leather sofas, attracting the younger end of the alternative old-town crowds. There's an eclectic menu featuring everything from Thai curry to braised goat to pizzas.

Getting There & Away

National Express buses run from London (£12.60, 2½ to 3½ hours, twice daily) to Hastings. Trains also run to London Charing Cross (£16.90; one hour 30 minutes, twice hourly) and to London Victoria (two hours, hourly). There are three services an hour to Brighton (£10.60; one hour 10 minutes).

EASTBOURNE

pop 106,562

This classic, old-fashioned seaside resort has long brought to mind images of octogenarians dozing in deck chairs, but whilst many of Eastbourne's seafront hotels still have that retirement-home feel, there's been a con-

THE LAST INVASION OF ENGLAND

The most famous battle in the history of England took place in 1066: a date seared into every English schoolchild's brain. The Battle of Hastings began when Harold's army arrived on the scene on 14 October and created a three-ring defence consisting of archers, then cavalry, with massed infantry at the rear. William marched north from Hastings and took up a position about 400m south of Harold and his troops. He tried repeatedly to break the English cordon, but Harold's men held fast. William's knights then feigned retreat, drawing some of Harold's troops after them. It was a fatal mistake. Seeing the gap in the English wall, William ordered his remaining troops to charge through, and the battle was as good as won. Among the English casualties was King Harold who, as tradition has it, was hit in the eye by an arrow, and struck down by Norman knights as he tried to pull it out. At news of his death the last English resistance collapsed.

In their wonderfully irreverent *1066 And All That* (1930), WC Sellar and RJ Yeatman suggest that 'the Norman conquest was a Good Thing, as from this time onward England stopped being conquered and thus was able to become top nation...' When you consider that England hasn't been successfully invaded since, it's hard to disagree.

certed effort to promote its many charms to sprightlier generations. You certainly can't doubt the appeal of its pebbly beaches, scrupulously snipped seaside gardens and picturesque arcade-free promenade, but if you're looking for cosmopolitan buzz, grab your ice cream and head for Brighton.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0871-663 0031; www.visit eastbourne.com; Cornfield Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Sat Mar & Oct, to 1pm Sat Nov-Feb) can fix you up with accommodation for £3.

Nearby, email can be found at **Coffee Republic** (☎ 01323-438576; 69 Terminus Rd; per 20min/hr £1/3; ☎ 7am-6pm).

Sights & Activities

Eastbourne's pretty filigree-trimmed pier, a lovely place to watch the sunset, also has a curious Victorian **Camera Obscura** (adult/child £2/1; ☎ noon-5pm Apr-Sep) that projects images of the outside world into a dish within a darkened room. In July, daredevils in feathery frocks hurl themselves from the pier in the annual birdman competition.

Eastbourne's two museums are entirely given up to nostalgia. The **Museum of Shops** (☎ 01323-737143; 20 Cornfield Tce; adult/child £4.50/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm) is swamped by an obsessive collection of how-we-once-lived memorabilia, while **Eastbourne Heritage Centre** (☎ 01323-411 189; www.eastbourneheritagecentre.co.uk; 2 Carlisle Rd; adult/child £1/free; ☎ 2-5pm mid-Mar-early Oct) livens up exhibits on the town's history with eccentric asides, such as on Donald McGill, the pioneer of the 'naughty postcard'.

As part of Eastbourne's drive to attract younger visitors, water sports are increasingly popular. **Spray Water Sports Centre** (☎ 01323-417 023; Royal Pde) offers courses in sailing, wind-surfing, kayaking and power boating.

At the time of writing, a swanky new **Cultural Centre** (☎ 01323-417961) was due to open in early 2009 at Devonshire Park. It will provide a home for Eastbourne's Towner Art Collection (moved from the town's old Towner Gallery), as well as providing general exhibition space, a cafe and sun terrace.

Tours

City Sightseeing (☎ 0170-8866000; www.city-sightseeing.co.uk; adult/child £7/3.50; ☎ tours every 30 min 10am-4.30pm May-Sep, every hr till 4pm Oct & mid-Mar-end Apr) runs buses around local sights, including Beachy Head cliffs.

Sleeping

At the time of writing, a new YHA hostel was due to open in Eastbourne in 2009. For further details, contact the **YHA** (☎ 01629-592700; www.yha.org.uk).

Albert & Victoria (☎ 01323-730948; www.albertandvictoria.com; 19 St Aubyns Rd; s/d £45/70) Book ahead to stay at this delightful Victorian terraced house with opulent rooms, canopied beds, crystal chandeliers and wall frescoes in the breakfast room, mere paces from the seafront promenade.

Da Vinci Hotel (☎ 01323-727173; www.davinci.uk.com; 10 Howard Sq; d from £69; ☎) Pegged as an 'art hotel', each room in this boutique B&B is named after a famous artist and prints are hung accordingly, with bold, bright colours

to match. There's a space in the reception dedicated to displaying the work of local artists.

Eating

Eastbourne's 'restaurant row' can be found on the seafront end of Terminus Rd.

Beach House (☎ 01323-738228; www.thegreenhousebar.com; light meals £5-10; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) The nicest of Eastbourne's beachfront cafes is a laid-back space with a large wooden deck on the beach outside. It serves great big breakfasts and homemade burgers, as well as wines and beer on tap.

Meze Restaurant (☎ 01323-731893; 15 Pevensey Rd; www.meze-restaurant.com; mains £11-18.50; ☺ lunch & dinner) Great Turkish food is prepared before your eyes over a large open grill at this popular local restaurant. The decor is part bistro, part Turkish bazaar, the large portions are great value and the ebullient proprietor offers a warm welcome.

Getting There & Around

National Express operates buses to London Victoria (£12, 2¼ hours, daily) and to Brighton (£3.20, 55 minutes to 1¼ hours, daily). Bus 12 runs to Brighton (one hour and 15 minutes, three per hour, twice hourly on Sunday).

Trains for London Victoria (£21.60, 1½ hours) leave every half an hour. There's a thrice-hourly service to Brighton (£7.80, 30 to 40 minutes).

Wheely Good Fun (☎ 01323-479077) hires out skates and bikes from Fisherman's Green on Royal Pde.

AROUND EASTBOURNE

Pevensey Castle

The ruins of William the Conqueror's first stronghold, **Pevensey Castle** (EH; ☎ 01323-762604; adult/child £4.20/2.10; ☺ 10am-6pm mid-Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct, to 4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) sit 5 miles east of Eastbourne, off the A259. Picturesquely dissolving into its own moat, the castle marks the point where William the Conqueror landed in 1066, just two weeks before the Battle of Hastings. And shortly afterwards, Old Bill wasted no time in building upon sturdy Roman walls to create a castle, which was used time and again through the centuries, right up to WWII. You can roam about its decaying husk with an enlightening audio guide, free with entry.

STRANGE SOUTHERNERS

A few oddball regional events include the **World Marbles Championship** on Tinsley Green, near Crawley, in mid-April, when teams compete to knock each other's balls out of action. Another event some may put down to lost marbles is the Isle of Wight's late-August **Newchurch Garlic Festival**, where visitors can achieve new heights of bad breath by trying garlic ice cream, garlic jelly beans, garlic beer and more bulb-inspired products. And what could be more English than October's almighty shouting match – the **National TOWN Criers Championship** in Hastings? These iconic newspapers-on-legs once roamed the streets with a bell and throaty 'Oyez, Oyez, Oyez...' from as early as 1066 right up to the 19th century.

The 14th-century **Mint House** (☎ 01323-762337; admission £1), just across the road from the castle, is worth visiting for its nutty collection of antiques and curios.

Regular train services between London Victoria and Hastings via Eastbourne (10 minutes) stop at Westham, half a mile from Pevensey.

Beachy Head

The famous cliffs of Beachy Head are the highest point of a string of chalky rock faces that slice across this rugged stretch of coast at the southern end of the South Downs. It's a spot of thrilling beauty, at least until you remember that this is also one of England's top suicide spots.

From Beachy Head, the famous **Seven Sisters Cliffs** roller coaster their way west. Along the way, you'll stumble upon tiny seaside hamlet Birling Gap, where you can stop for a drink, snack or ice cream at the **Birling Gap Hotel** (☎ 01323-423197; **Seven Sisters** Cliffs, Birling Gap, East Dene).

Beachy Head is off the B2103, from the A259 between Eastbourne and Newhaven. Eastbourne's City Sightseeing tour bus (see p207) stops at the cliff top.

The Long Man

If you're travelling along the A27 between Eastbourne and Lewes, be sure to look southwards, just east of the town of Wilmington,

to see the spindly stick-figure-like **Long Man of Wilmington**. No one really knows how this leggy 70m-high man – now marked out with white concrete – arrived here or what he represents.

There is a turn-off for the Long Man at the town of Wilmington, 7 miles west of Eastbourne, from where you can get a better view. If you're walking this section of the South Downs you will pass him and get a close-up view.

Charleston Farmhouse

Five miles west of Eastbourne, **Charleston Farmhouse** (☎ 01323-811265; www.charleston.org.uk; Firle, off A27; adult/child £6.50/4.50; ☎ 2-6pm Thu, Fri & Sun, 11.30am-6pm Wed & Sat Apr-Oct) was the Bohemian country getaway of the Bloomsbury Group. Even now that the joyous frescoes and vivid furniture have begun to fade, and the last of its pioneering occupants and visitors have long since passed away, it's still a tangible example of the rich intellectual and aesthetic life that they came to represent (see boxed text, below).

In 1916, Virginia Woolf's sister, painter Vanessa Bell, moved here with her lover Duncan Grant, and they set about redecorating with abandon in a style that owed much to the influence of the post-Impressionists. Hardly a wall, door or piece of furniture was left untouched, and the walls featured paintings by Picasso, Derain, Delacroix and others. There's also a striking garden, interesting outbuildings and medieval dovecote.

Visits are by guided tour only, except on Sunday and bank holiday Mondays. The nearest train station is at Berwick, on the Brighton to Eastbourne line, a 2-mile walk from the farmhouse.

LEWES

pop 15,988

Strung out along a thin High St flanked by elegant Georgian buildings, a part-ruined castle and a traditional brewery just across the River Ouse, Lewes (pronounced 'Lewis') is a charming hillside town with a turbulent past and fiery traditions (see boxed text, p203). Off the main drag, however, there's a more intimate atmosphere as you descend into twisting narrow streets called twittens – the remainder of the town's original medieval street plan. The town occupies a steep ridge between the river and the castle ruins, with High St climbing the spine and the twittens running off it.

The town made headlines in late 2008 when it introduced its own currency to encourage more money to be spent in the local economy. The Lewes Pound has the same value as sterling and can be used in some 70 local businesses and farmers markets.

You'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 01273-483448; lewes.tic@lewes.gov.uk; 187 High St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5.30pm Sat & 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Oct-Mar) at the top of the hill. The **main post office** (High St) is a short walk west.

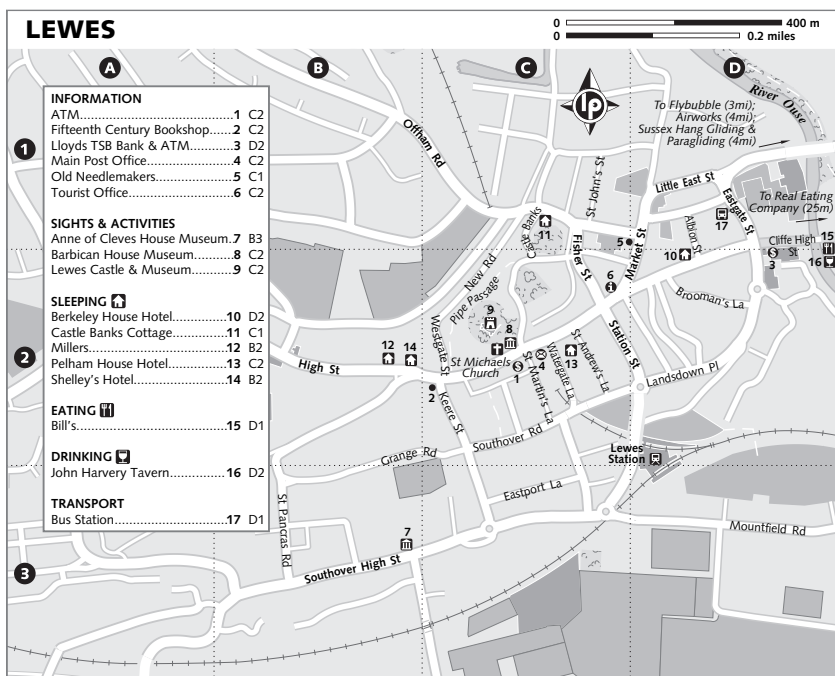
Lloyds TSB (Cliffe High St) has ATMs at either end of the centre. While you're here it's worth

THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP

The Bloomsbury Group was Britain's most influential artistic and intellectual circle to arise from the first half of the 20th century, a set of Cambridge graduates, artists and scholars who all gravitated to London's Bloomsbury area pre-WWI. Its most famous members included Virginia Woolf, Maynard Keynes, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Lytton Strachey, TS Elliot and EM Forster.

The outspokenly pacifist group gained notoriety for stunts that embarrassed the military forces during WWI, and scandalised London society with their intergroup relationships and, in several cases, bisexuality. Their tastes in post-Impressionist art and avant-garde literature were ahead of their time, and were often savaged by critics only to be later hailed as masterpieces. Woolf of course was winning herself acclaim as a novelist, and with her husband Leonard founded the Hogarth Press. Her artist sister Vanessa and Vanessa's lover Duncan Grant were two of several group members to make a name through the modernist design firm Omega Workshops. Keynes, meanwhile, became one of the foremost economic theorists of the day, and Strachey had several uncompromising biographies under his belt.

Though the group gradually drifted apart after the war and Woolf committed suicide in 1941, their once-controversial views were steadily accepted into the mainstream and their work has continued to influence generations of new writers, poets, artists and musicians.



browsing the quaint craft shops and the cafe of the **Old Needlemakers** (West St), and rummaging through antiquarian treasures and new editions at the fabulous, half-timbered **Fifteenth Century Bookshop** (☎ 01273-474160; 99 High St).

Sights

LEWES CASTLE & BARBICAN HOUSE MUSEUM

Now little more than a set of ruins, this **castle** (☎ 01273-486290; www.sussexpast.co.uk; 169 High St; adult/child £4.90/2.55; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5.30pm Sun-Mon) was built shortly after the 1066 Norman invasion. It never saw warfare, not counting the riotous celebrations following the Navy's victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588, when happy citizens blew great chunks out of the castle's walls! They left enough standing for it to remain an impressive sight, however, and its windy top affords excellent views over the town. The castle grounds also host summertime plays and concerts.

The attached **Barbican House Museum** has a good collection of prehistoric flint axeheads, Anglo Saxon jewellery and medieval long swords.

Admission to Lewes Castle and the Anne of Cleves House (below) can be purchased together (adult/child £7.30/3.65).

ANNE OF CLEVES HOUSE MUSEUM

When Henry VIII divorced Anne of Cleves in 1541, he gave her this timber-framed **house** (☎ 01273-474610; 52 Southover High St; adult/child £3.65/1.70; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat year-round, to 5pm Sun & Mon Mar-Oct) as part of her divorce settlement, although she never actually moved in. The creak-and-groan floors and spider's web wooden roof today houses an idiosyncratic folk museum, with everything from a witch's effigy complete with pins to a rack of Tudor costumes to try on.

Activities

Paragliders can get one step closer to heaven in the South Downs near Lewes, an excellent spot for the sport. A half-hour tandem flight costs about £100 to £120. Companies include:

Airworks (☎ 01273-858108; www.airworks.co.uk; Glynde)

Flybubble (☎ 01273-812442; www.flybubble.co.uk; Ringmer)

Sussex Hang Gliding & Paragliding (☎ 01273-858170; www.flysussex.co.uk; Tollgate)

Sleeping

Castle Banks Cottage (☎ 01273-476291; www.castlebankscottage.co.uk; 4 Castle Banks; s/d £32.50/65) Tucked away off the High St in a quiet lane, this tiny, pretty guest house has only two rooms. The easy-going proprietor is a mine of information about the area's local history. Breakfast is served in the pretty garden in summer.

Berkeley House Hotel (☎ 01273-476057; www.berkeleyhouselewes.co.uk; 2 Albion St; s from £55, d £75-105; ☑ wi-fi) Lovely extras such as a front balcony and a roof terrace looking over the South Downs make this Georgian town house worth a look, as do the tastefully decorated rooms and courteous service.

Shelleys Hotel (☎ 01273-472361; www.the-shelleys.co.uk; High St; s/d from £125/170; (P)) Full of old-fashioned charm, this 16th-century manor house was once home to the earl of Dorset and was owned by the Shelley family (of Percy Bysshe fame). It has cosy, country rooms and a good restaurant overlooking a lovely walled garden.

Other options:

Millers (☎ 01273-475631; www.millersbedandbreakfast.com; 134 High St; s/d £75/85) Chivalrous service in a 16th-century, timber-framed town house.

Pelham House Hotel (☎ 01273-488600; www.pelhamhouse.com; St Andrews La; s/d from £90/120) Swish contemporary town house hotel with an excellent restaurant.

Eating & Drinking

our pick **Bill's** (☎ 01273-476918; 56 Cliffe High St; snacks £2.50-5, specials £5-10; ☑ lunch) There's something

doubly delicious about a forkful of fresh food when its ingredients are piled all around you. Part grocers, part delicatessen, part rustic-styled cafe, Bill's envelopes customers in its colours and smells then dishes up melt-in-the-mouth tartlets, gourmet pizzas, salads, deserts and other artisanal snacks.

Real Eating Company (☎ 01273-402650; 18 Cliffe High St; mains £7-15; ☑ 10.30am-5.30pm Mon, to 11pm Tue-Fri, 8am-11pm Sat, 11.30am-4pm Sun) At the rear of an excellent deli, this large, airy cafe-cum-brasserie stretches back to a lovely outside terrace and serves delicious cheese and charcuterie plates, breakfast, omelettes and top-class main meals such as wood pigeon and braised pork belly.

John Harvey Tavern (☎ 01273-479880; Bear Yard) Warm and friendly place just off the high street serving a great selection of ales from the local Harveys brewery. It also serves pretty decent food and hosts regular live music nights.

Getting There & Away

Lewes is 9 miles northeast of Brighton and 16 miles northwest of Eastbourne, just off the A27.

The bus station is north of the town centre off Eastgate St. Buses 28 and 29 run to Brighton (£2.80, 30 minutes, every 15 minutes) on weekdays and Sundays (hourly). The 29 bus continues north to Tunbridge Wells (one hour).

Lewes is on the main train line between London Victoria and Eastbourne and the coastal link between Eastbourne and Brighton. Trains leave from London Victoria (£19, 1¼ hours, every 10 to 20 minutes) and Brighton (15 minutes) and from Eastbourne (20 minutes, four times an hour).

LEWES' FIERY HISTORY

The English enjoy an evening of frenzied pyromania nationwide on **Guy Fawkes Night** (5th November) in memory of a 1605 plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament. But unassuming little Lewes has double the reason to host one of the craziest fireworks celebrations you're ever likely to see.

In 1555, at the height of Mary Tudor's Catholic revival, 17 protestant martyrs were burned at the stake in the town's High St. Lewes has not forgotten, and every 5 November tens of thousands of people gather for the famous fireworks display, in which effigies of the pope are burnt in memory of the martyrs. These days he's often joined by modern-day figures, prime ministers, presidents and terrorists among them. Locals parade the streets in outlandish medieval garb with flaming crosses, and send barrels filled with bangers to crack and fizzle their way down to the river, chased by local youth.

Though not shy of controversy, there's no sectarian fervour these days and it's one of the most enjoyable nights on the southeastern calendar.

AROUND LEWES

In 1934 science teacher John Christie and his opera-singer wife decided to build a 1200-seat opera house in the middle of nowhere. It seemed a magnificent folly at the time. But now, **Glyndebourne** (☎ 01273-812321; www.glyndebourne.com) is one of England's best places to enjoy the lyric arts, with a season that runs from late May to the end of August. Tickets can be like gold dust so book well ahead. And bring your glad rags: dress code is strictly black tie and evening dress. Glyndebourne is 4 miles east of Lewes off the B2192.

BRIGHTON & HOVE

pop 247, 817

Brighton and Hove is the most vibrant seaside resort in England and a high point of any visit to the region. It's a thriving, cosmopolitan city with a Bohemian spirit; home to an exuberant gay community, a dynamic student population and a healthy number of ageing and new-age hippies, as well as traditional candy-floss fun. Brighton rocks all year round, but really comes to life during the summer months, when tourists, language students and revellers from London, keen to explore the city's legendary nightlife, summer festivals and multitude of trendy restaurants, slick boutique hotels and shops, pour into the city.

Brighton has embraced the outlandish ever since the Prince Regent built his party palace here in the 19th century (see boxed text, p206). Celebrities rub shoulders with dreadlocked hippies, drag queens party next to designer-clad urbanites, and kids toddle around the tables of coffee-quaffing media types.

The town's increase in popularity over the past few years isn't all good, however. Chain bars are slowly sneaking into once staunchly alternative areas, and some long-term residents grumble that the city's trendy status and the influx of moneyed Londoners are prompting a sharp rise in prices and pretension, detracting from the very alternative spirit that makes the city unique in the first place.

Orientation

Brighton Town and its western neighbour Hove were jointly made a city in 2000. The train station is half a mile north of the beach, while the tiny bus station is tucked away in Poole Valley close to Brighton Pier. Old Steine (pronounced 'steen') is the major thoroughfare linking pier and centre.

To the west lies the Lanes, a tangle of pedestrian alleyways, packed with pubs, restaurants and shops. A short walk north is the North Laine, full of quirky stores and Bohemian cafes. The city's effervescent gay scene flourishes in Kemptown, east of Old Steine along St James' St.

Brighton's burgeoning marina, east of town, is also a vibrant waterside shopping, dining, drinking and water-sports centre.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Borders Books (☎ 01273-731122; Churchill Square Shopping Centre; ☹ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun)
Brighton Books (☎ 01273-693845; 18 Kensington Gardens; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Secondhand bookshop.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet Junction (☎ 01273-607650; 109 Western Rd; per hr £2.50)

Jubilee Library (☎ 01273-296961; Jubilee St; ☹ 10am-7pm Mon & Tue, to 5pm Wed, Fri & Sat, to 8pm Thu, 11am-4pm Sun) Bring ID and sign up to use machines for free.

Netpama (☎ 01273-227188; 37 Preston St; per hr £2)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Brighton City Guide (www.brighton.co.uk)
visitbrighton.com (www.visitbrighton.com)

LAUNDRY

Preston Street Laundrette (☎ 01273-738556; 75 Preston St; ☹ 8am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-7pm Sun)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Royal Sussex County Hospital (☎ 01273-696955; Eastern Rd) Has an accident and emergency department 2 miles east of the centre.

Wistons Clinic (☎ 01273-506263; 138 Dyke Rd) For general medical consultations, under a mile from the centre.

MONEY

American Express (☎ 01273-712906; 82 North St) Has bureau de change.

NatWest (Castle Sq) Bank with ATM.

POST

Post office (2-3 Churchill Square Shopping Centre; ☹ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 0906-7112255; www.visitbrighton.com; Royal Pavilion Shop, Royal Pavilion; ☹ 9.30am-5.30pm) Overworked staff, along with a 50p-per-minute

BRIGHTON & HOVE

INFORMATION

- American Express.....1 C3
 Borders Books.....2 C3
 Brighton Books.....3 E2
 Internet Junction.....4 A2
 Grapvine.....5 E2
 Netnam.....6 B3
 Post Office.....7 B3
 Preston St Laundrette.....8 B3
 Tourist Information.....10 E3

SLEEPING

- Amsterdam.....14 E4
 Baggies Backpackers.....15 B3
 Brighton House Hotel.....16 B3
 Drakes.....17 F4
 Infinity Foods Cate.....18 D4
 La Fourchette.....19 B3
 Mamma Cheri's.....20 B3
 Hotel Una.....21 E2
 myHotel.....22 B3
 St Christopher's.....23 E4

EATING

- Al Fresco.....24 B3
 Blue Man.....25 D4
 China Garden.....26 B3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- Brighton Museum & Art Gallery.....11 E3
 Brighton Sea Life Centre.....12 E4
 Royal Pavilion.....13 E3

ENTERTAINMENT

- Audio.....(see 14)
 Brighton Dome.....50 E3
 Brighton Dome Box Office.....51 E3
 Concorde 2.....52 F4
 Digital.....53 D4
 Funky Buddha.....54 F4
 Funky Fish Club.....55 D4
 Honey Club.....56 D4
 Komedie Theatre.....57 D2
 Legends.....58 F4
 Ocean Rooms.....59 E2
 Odéon Cinema.....60 C4
 Revenge.....61 E4
 Theatre Royal.....62 D3

TRANSPORT

- Bus Station.....63 E4
 Planet Cycle Hire.....64 B3
 Taxi Rank.....65 E3

DRINKING

- All Cats.....39 E4
 Amsterdam.....(see 14)
 Brighton Coalition.....40 D4
 Brighton Rocks.....41 F4
 Café 22.....42 E4
 Candy Bar.....43 E4
 Donsét.....44 D2
 Evening Star.....45 D1
 Koba.....46 B2
 Pinko People.....47 B2
 Queen's Arms.....48 E3
 Riki Tik.....49 D2

ENTERTAINMENT

- Delhi India.....27 E1
 Due South.....28 C4
 English's Oyster Bar.....29 E3
 Food for Friends.....30 D3
 Gingham.....(see 17)
 Infinity Foods Cate.....31 D2
 La Fourchette.....32 B2
 Mamma Cheri's.....33 D4
 Hotel Una.....34 D3
 Piccolo's.....35 E2
 Pompoko.....36 E3
 Red Roaster.....37 E3
 Tea Cosy.....38 E4
 Terre à Terre.....38 E4

EATING

- Al Fresco.....24 B3
 Blue Man.....25 D4
 China Garden.....26 B3

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 Ocean Rooms.....59 E2
 Odéon Cinema.....60 C4
 Revenge.....61 E4
 Theatre Royal.....62 D3

TRANSPORT

- Bus Station.....63 E4
 Planet Cycle Hire.....64 B3
 Taxi Rank.....65 E3

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THE PRINCE, THE PALACE & THE PARTYING

It's widely known that England's George III was, to be polite, a little nuts. But you'd be forgiven for thinking that 'Mad King George's' eldest son Prince George (1762–1830) was the eccentric in the family upon visiting his princely pavilion at Brighton. The young prince began drinking with abandon and enjoying the pleasures of women while still a teenager. And to daddy's displeasure, he soon started hanging out with his dissolute uncle the Duke of Cumberland, who was enjoying himself royally by the sea in Brighton.

In 1787 George commissioned Henry Holland to design a neoclassical villa as his personal pleasure palace. While he waited to accede to the throne (when his father was declared officially insane in 1810 he was sworn in as Prince Regent), George whiled away the years with debauched parties for himself, his mistresses and his aristocratic mates.

Ever conscious of what was trendy, George decided in 1815 to convert the Marine Pavilion to reflect the current fascination with all things Eastern. He engaged the services of John Nash, who laboured for eight years to create a Mogul Indian-style palace, complete with the most lavish Chinese interior imaginable. George finally had a palace suited to his outlandish tastes and, to boot, he was now the king.

His brother and successor, William IV (1765–1837), also used the pavilion as a royal residence, as did William's niece Victoria (1819–1901). But the conservative queen never really took to the place and in 1850 sold it to the town, but not before stripping it of every piece of furniture – 143 wagons were needed to transport the contents. Thankfully, many original items were later returned and the palace is now restored to its former glory.

telephone line provide local information. You may find the website and on-site 24-hour-accessible computer more helpful.

Sights

ROYAL PAVILION

An absolute must-see of Brighton is the **Royal Pavilion** (☎ 01273-290900; www.royalpavilion.org.uk; adult/under 15yr £8.50/5.10; ☎ 10am–4.30pm Oct–Mar, 9.30am–5pm Apr–Sep), the glittering party-pad-cum-palace of Prince George (see boxed text, above), later Prince Regent then King George IV. It's one of the most decadent buildings in England and an apt symbol of Brighton's reputation for hedonism. The Indian-style domes and Moorish minarets outside are only a prelude to the palace's lavish oriental-themed interior, where no colour is deemed too strong, dragons swoop and snarl from gilt-smothered ceilings, gem-encrusted snakes slither down pillars, and crystal chandeliers seem ordered by the tonne. While gawping is the main activity, you can pick up an audio tour (included in the admission price) to learn more about the palace.

BRIGHTON MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Set in the Royal Pavilion's renovated stable block, this **museum and art gallery** (☎ 01273-290900; Royal Pavilion Gardens; admission free; ☎ 10am–7pm Tue, to 5pm Wed–Sat, 2–5pm Sun) has a glittering collection

of 20th-century art and design, including a crimson Salvador Dali sofa modelled on Mae West's lips. There's also an enthralling gallery of world art, and an 'images of Brighton' multimedia exhibit containing a series of oral histories of the city.

BRIGHTON PIER

This grand old centenarian **pier** (Palace Pier; www.brightonpier.co.uk; admission free), full of glorious gaudiness, is the place to come to experience the tackier side of Brighton. There are plenty of stomach-churning fairground rides and dingy amusement arcades to keep you amused, and candy floss and Brighton rock to chomp on while you're doing so.

Look west and you'll see the sad remains of the **West Pier** (www.westpier.co.uk), a skeletal iron hulk that attracts flocks of birds at sunset. It's a sad end for a Victorian marvel upon which the likes of Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel once performed. Construction of a *Jetsons*-esque Brighton i-360 observation tower on this site is imminent, and the planners hope to open to the public in 2010. Much of the West Pier wreckage will be left intact, however, in the hope that it can one day be restored.

BOOTH MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

This odd Victorian taxidermy **museum** (☎ 01273-292777; 194 Dyke Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am–

5pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 2-5pm Sun) has several creepy sights such as walls full of mammoth butterflies and cabinets of birds poised to tear apart small mammals. Particularly disturbing if you've seen the Hitchcock movie. The museum is about half a mile north of the train station. Buses 27 and 27A stop nearby on Dyke Rd.

HOVE MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

It may surprise you that Hove can justifiably claim to be the birthplace of British cinema, with the first short film shot here in 1898. You can see it alongside other fascinating films at this attractive Victorian **villa** (☎ 01273-290200; 19 New Church Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 2-5pm Sun). Another highlight is the kids' room, full of fairy lights and reverberating to the snores of a wizard and the whirr of an under-floor train. Exhibits include old zoetropes, a magic lantern and a small cupboard with a periscope inside. From central Brighton take bus 1, 1A or 6.

BRIGHTON SEA LIFE CENTRE

This grand old Victorian **aquarium** (☎ 01273-604234; www.sealifeeurope.com; Marine Pde; adult/child £12.95/9.50; ☎ 10am-5pm) is the world's oldest operational sea-life centre, and makes for a fun hour or two pressing your nose up against glass and making fishy faces at sea horses, rays, sea turtles and other inhabitants.

Activities

There is a huge range of activities on offer in Brighton, from rollerblading to beach volleyball to skateboarding, to paragliding and of course myriad water sports: ask the tourist office for details. **Lagoon Watersports** (☎ 01273-684260; www.lagoon.co.uk; West Jetty, Brighton Marina) can help you onto the waves, whether in a yacht or dinghy or on water-skis.

Tours

The tourist office can organise a range of guided tours, including:

Brighton Walks (☎ 01273-888596; www.brightonwalks.com; adult/child £6/3.50) Offers a huge variety of standard and offbeat themes including a Murder Walk and a Rich & Famous tour. Show up for prescheduled walks or contact to book.

City Sightseeing (www.city-sightseeing.co.uk; adult/child £7/3; ☎ tours every 30min late May-late Sep) Has open-top hop-on hop-off bus tours that leave from Grand

Junction Rd near Brighton Pier and take you around the main sights.

Tourist Tracks (www.tourist-tracks.com) Has MP3 audio guides downloadable from its website (£5) or available on a preloaded MP3 player at the tourist office (£6 per half-day).

Festivals & Events

There's always something fun going on in Brighton, from **Gay Pride** (late Jul; www.brightonpride.org) to food and drink festivals, but the showpiece is May's three-week-long **Brighton Festival** (☎ 01273-709 709; www.brighton-festival.org.uk), the biggest arts festival in Britain after Edinburgh, drawing theatre, dance, music and comedy performers from around the globe.

Sleeping

Despite a glut of hotels in Brighton, prices are relatively high and you'd be wise to book well ahead for summer weekends and for the Brighton Festival in May.

BUDGET

Brighton's hostels are a varied bunch. Several cater to raucous stag and hen nights; others are more traditional and homely. Choose wisely!

Baggies Backpackers (☎ 01273-733740; 33 Oriental Pl; dm/d £13/35) A warm familial atmosphere, worn-in charm, motherly onsite owner and clean, snug dorms have made this long-established hostel something of an institution. It's also blessed with a homely kitchen, a cosy basement music room thick with cassettes, and a TV room piled high with videos. Some travellers complain that it can get a little cliquey, though.

Grapevine (☎ 01273-703985; www.grapevinewebsite.co.uk; 75-76 Middle St; per person from £15; ☑ wi-fi) The Spartan rooms in this hostel-cum-budget-hotel have the air of a hospital ward but are generally clean and well kept. It's popular with hen and stag nights so can get noisy but on the plus side it has a great central location and young energetic staff. There's a sister hotel by the seafront on North Rd.

St Christopher's (☎ 01273-202035; www.st-christophers.co.uk; Palace Hotel, 10/12 Grand Junction Rd; dm £16-19.50, s/d £25/50; ☑) Don't count on getting a peaceful night's sleep at this basic seafront hostel – it's a magnet for party people thanks to its location in the heart of the Brighton

action. While quiet is a rare luxury, it boasts sea views, a spot near Brighton Pier and a pub downstairs for cheap meals. There are under-bed cages to stash your stuff (bring a lock) but no kitchen.

MIDRANGE

Brighton is blessed with a wide selection of midrange accommodation.

Snooze (☎ 01273-605797; www.snoozebrighton.com; 25 St George's Tce; s/d incl breakfast from £35/65; ☑ wi-fi) This eccentric Kemptown pad is very fond of retro styling. Rooms feature vintage posters, bright 60s and 70s patterned wallpaper, flying wooden ducks, floral sinks and mad clashes of colour. It's more than just a gimmick though – rooms are comfortable and spotless, and there are great veggie breakfasts.

Brighton House Hotel (☎ 01273-323282; www.brighton-house.co.uk; 52 Regency Sq; s/d from £45/85; ☑ wi-fi) You'll get honest value at this welcoming Regency town-house B&B. Rooms are immaculate and traditionally styled (some with four-posters) and they serve healthy breakfasts with organic ingredients and vegetarian options. Children under 12 not allowed.

Hotel Pelirocco (☎ 01273-327055; www.hotelpelirrocco.co.uk; 10 Regency Sq; s £50-65, d £90-140, ste £300; ☑ wi-fi) One of Brighton's first theme hotels, this is still the nuttiest (and one of the most fun) places to stay in town. There's a range of individually designed rooms, some by artists, some by big-name sponsors, from a basic single done up like a boxing ring, to the Motown room, full of gold satin, LPs and a vintage record player, to the playroom suite with a 3m circular bed, mirrored ceiling and pole-dancing area.

Amsterdam (☎ 01273-688825; www.amsterdam.uk.com; 11-12 Marine Pde; d with bathroom £60-140, without bathroom from £50) Popular gay-run hotel that also welcomes tolerant straights, with tastefully decorated, spacious, bright rooms and wonderful sea views, including a fabulous penthouse suite (£160 to £200). It sits above one of Brighton's best gay bars and saunas, which guests can use for half price. Request a room on higher floors if you're a light sleeper.

Hotel Una (☎ 01273-820464; www.hotel-una.co.uk; 55/56 Regency Sq; s/d from £70/110; ☑ wi-fi) A simple, unpretentious place, Hotel Una is devoid of the themes or kitsch decor that are popular in so many of the city's hotels. Instead you'll find caramel-coloured floorboards and rooms

in soothing shades of brown and cream, with the odd miniature sauna or whirlpool bath thrown in.

Paskins Town House (☎ 01273-601203; www.paskins.co.uk; 18/19 Charlotte St; d from £90; ☑ wi-fi) An environmentally friendly B&B spread between two elegant town houses. It prides itself on using ecofriendly products such as recycled toilet paper, low-energy bulbs and biodegradable cleaning materials. The individually designed rooms are beautifully maintained, and excellent organic and vegetarian breakfasts are served in the art deco-inspired breakfast room.

Neo Hotel (☎ 01273-711104; www.neohotel.com; 19 Oriental Pl; d from £105; ☑ wi-fi) You won't be surprised to learn that the owner of this gorgeous hotel is an interior stylist. The eleven rooms could have dropped straight out of the pages of a design magazine, each finished in rich colours and tactile fabrics, with bold floral and Asian motifs and black-tiled bathrooms. Kick back in satin kimono robes and watch a DVD on your flat-screen TV, or indulge in massage and beauty treatments. Wonderful breakfasts include homemade smoothies and fruit pancakes.

TOP END

Drakes (☎ 01273-696934; www.drakesofbrighton.com; 43-44 Marine Pde; r £100-325; ☑ wi-fi) Drakes oozes understated class: a stylish, minimalist boutique hotel that eschews the need to shout its existence from the rooftops. Feature rooms have giant free-standing tubs set in front of full-length bay windows with stunning views out to sea. It also has one of Brighton's best restaurants, Gingerman (see p210).

Blanch House (☎ 01273-603504; www.blanchhouse.co.uk; 17 Atlingworth St; d from £100; ☑ wi-fi) Themed rooms are the name of the game in this boutique hotel, but there's nothing tacky about them – plush fabrics and a Victorian roll-top bath rule in the Decadence suite and the Alice room is an ice-cool vision of silver and white. There's a magnificently stylish fine dining restaurant here – all white leather banquettes and space-age swivel chairs – and a fine cocktail bar.

myhotel (☎ 01273-224300; www.myhotels.co.uk; 17 Jubilee St; r incl breakfast £140-600; ☑ wi-fi) The rooms in this trendy new hotel look like space-age pods, full of curved white walls, floor-to-ceiling observation windows and suspended flat-screen TVs, with the odd splash of neon orange or

pink. You can even hook up your iPod and play music through speakers in the ceiling. There's a cocoon-like cocktail bar downstairs, and if you've money to burn, a suite with a steam room and harpooned vintage carousel horse.

Eating

Brighton easily has the best choice of eateries on the south coast, with cafes, diners and restaurants to fulfil every whim.

BUDGET

Brighton is one of the UK's best destinations for vegetarians, and its innovative meat-free menus are also terrific value for anyone on a tight budget.

Pompoko (☎ 01273-703072; 110 Church St; mains £4-5; ☎ 11am-10pm Tue-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat, to 9pm Sun) Simple Japanese food in a small but perfectly formed little cafe. It's quick, cheap and delicious, with an emphasis on home-style curries, soups and noodle dishes.

Deli India (☎ 01273-699985; 81 Trafalgar St; curries £5; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Fri, to 6pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) Light and healthy Indian food made without artificial flavours, cream or heavy oil is on offer in this delicatessen and teashop. The deli's shelves are packed with lentils, chapatti flours, chutneys, spices and cookbooks to take home.

Infinity Foods Cafe (☎ 01273-670743; 50 Gardner St; mains £5-8; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) The sister establishment of Infinity Foods wholefoods shop, a Brighton institution, serves a wide variety of vegetarian and organic food, with many vegan and wheat- or gluten-free options including tofu burgers, mezze plates and falafel.

Food for Friends (☎ 01273-202310; www.foodforfriends.com; 17a Prince Albert St; mains £8-13; ☎ lunch & dinner) This airy, glass-sided restaurant attracts the attention of passers-by as much as it does the loyalty of its customers with an ever-inventive choice of vegetarian and vegan food. Children are also catered to.

Other worthy contenders:

Piccolo's (☎ 01273-203701; 56 Ship St; mains £3.60-8.50; ☎ 11.30am-11.30pm) Cheap, tasty pizza served in this fast, friendly and bustling restaurant.

Red Roaster (☎ 01273-686668; 1d St James' St; mains £4-5; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm Sat, 9am-6.30pm Sun) You can smell the aroma of roasting coffee from across the street at this fine independent coffee house, which also serves sandwiches and salads.

Tea Cosy (☎ 01273-677055; 3 George St; Diana Spencer memorial tea £8; ☎ noon-5pm Wed, 11am-6pm Thu-Sat,

noon-6pm Sun) Barmy tearoom full of strict etiquette rules and royal family memorabilia.

MIDRANGE

Al Fresco (☎ 01273-206532; The Milkmaid Pavilion, Kings Rd Arches; mains £9-20; ☎ noon-midnight) The star here is the view. Al Fresco sits a mere 100m from the West Pier, in a curved-glass structure with a huge, staggered outdoor terrace and amazing views up and down the seafront and out to sea. The pizzas, pastas and Italian meat dishes make a tasty accompaniment to the views.

ourpick Terre à Terre (☎ 01273-729051; 71 East St; mains £10-15; ☎ noon-10.30pm Tue-Fri, to 11pm Sat, to 10pm Sun) Even staunch meat eaters will come out raving about this legendary vegetarian restaurant. Terre à Terre offers a sublime dining experience, from the vibrant, modern space, to the entertaining menus, to the delicious, inventive dishes full of rich robust flavours.

La Fourchette (☎ 01273-722556; www.lafourchette.co.uk; 105 Western Rd; set lunch/dinner from £10/26.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Thu, 11am-11pm Fri-Sun) Grown up, romantic dining, sleek decor and fine French bistro food are the name of the game at this charming Gallic bistro. There are particularly good, locally caught fish dishes and the service is excellent if a little over-attentive.

English's Oyster Bar (☎ 01273-327980; www.englishs.co.uk; 29-31 East St; mains £10-29; ☎ lunch & dinner) A 60-year institution, this Brightonian seafood paradise dishes up everything from oysters to lobster to Dover sole. It's converted from fishermen's cottages, with echoes of the elegant Edwardian era inside and buzzing alfresco dining on the pedestrian square outside.

Blue Man (☎ 01273-325529; 11 Little East St; mains £11-16; ☎ 3-6pm) Tiny dining room tucked away near the seafront serving excellent, large portions of North African food, in a spicy, cosy atmosphere, full of ambient lighting, mosaic tables and scatter cushions. After you're full, you can sit back and suck on an apple hubble bubble.

Due South (☎ 01273-821218; www.duesouth.co.uk; 139 Kings Rd Arches; mains £14-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Sheltered under a cavernous Victorian arch on the seafront, with a curvaceous front window and small bamboo-screened terrace on the promenade, this refined yet relaxed restaurant specialises in dishes cooked with the best environmentally sustainable and seasonal Sussex produce.

Gingerman (☎ 01273-696934; Drake's Hotel, Marine Pde; mains £16-24) Chic and minimalist, this well-loved eatery has a modish menu bolstered by classical French influence. It's set in an exclusive hotel and occupies a curvaceous room with red blinds, cream-leather seating and soft jazz. It also has an equally good but more informal venue on Norfolk Sq.

Also try:

China Garden (☎ 01273-607835; 88-91 Preston St; mains £7-18; ☎ noon-11.30pm) Well-loved Chinese restaurant, with fantastic dim sum at the weekend.

Momma Cherri's (☎ 01273-325305; 2-3 Little East St; mains £8-14.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, noon-7pm Sun) Try ribs, southern-fried chicken or jambalayas at this popular soul-food restaurant.

Drinking

Outside London, Brighton's nightlife is the best in the south, with its unique mix of sea-front clubs and bars. Drunken stag and hen parties and charmless, tacky nightclubs rule on West St, which is best avoided. For more ideas, visit www.drinkinbrighton.co.uk.

Evening Star (☎ 01273-328931; www.eveningstarbrighton.co.uk; 55 Surrey St) This cosy, unpretentious pub is a beer-drinker's nirvana, with a wonderful selection of award-winning real ales, Belgian beers, organic lagers and real ciders. It's a short stagger away from the station.

Brighton Coalition (☎ 01273-772842; 171-181 Kings Rd Arches) On a summer's day, there's nowhere better to sit and watch the world go by than at this popular beach bar, diner and club. It's a cavernous place with a funky brick-vaulted interior and a wide terrace spilling onto the promenade. All sorts happen here, from comedy, to live music, to club nights.

Pintxo People (☎ 01273-732323; www.pintxopeople.co.uk; 95 Western Rd; ☎ to midnight Mon-Fri, to 1am Sat) This place is principally a Spanish restaurant, but go upstairs and you'll find a sultry bar with huge squishy sofas, red-leather stools, a martini station and a staggering cocktail list. Or sit on one of the rustic wooden tables downstairs, sink a few sangrias and nibble on tapas.

Dorset (☎ 01273-605423; www.thedorset.co.uk; 28 North Rd) This laid-back Brighton institution throws open its doors and windows in fine weather and spills tables onto the pavement. You'll be just as welcome for a morning coffee as for an evening pint here, and if you decide not to leave between the two, there's always the decent gastropub menu.

Riki Tik (☎ 01273-683844; 18a Bond St; ☎ 10am-late) Coffee bar by day, popular preclub venue by night, this place has been pumping out cool cocktails and funky breaks for years. It's stylish, dark and sexy and much bigger than it looks from the outside. DJs play here most nights.

Brighton Rocks (☎ 01273-601139; 6 Rock Pl; ☎ 4pm-late) This cocktail bar is firmly on the Kemp-town gay scene, but welcomes all-comers. The cocktails are tasty, there's a damn fine 'grazing' menu and the bar plays regular host to theme parties and art launches.

Alli Cats (☎ 01273-220902; Brills La; ☎ 7pm-midnight Wed-Sat) In the early evenings, this super-chilled, windowless, subterranean dive is an informal picture house, playing classic cult movies. Later, it turns into an alternative bar serving cheap beer and playing drum and bass, jungle, electro and old skool.

Entertainment

Brighton offers the best entertainment lineup on the south coast, with clubs to rival London and Manchester for cool. Keep tabs on what's hot and what's not by searching out publications such as the *List*, the *Source* and *What's On*.

NIGHTCLUBS

When Britain's top DJs aren't plying their trade in London, Ibiza or Aya Napia, chances are you'll spy them here. All Brighton's clubs open until 2am, and many as late as 5am.

Funky Buddha (☎ 01273-725541; www.funkybuddha.co.uk; Kings Rd Arches; admission £2-8) Twin giant, brick, subterranean tunnels, with bars at the front and back, playing funky house, 70s, R&B and disco to a stylish and attitude free crowd.

Audio (☎ 01273-606906; www.audiobrighton.com; 10 Marine Pde; admission £3-10) Some of the city's top club nights can be found at this ear-numbing venue, where the music's top priority, attracting a young, up-for-it crowd. Every night is different, with music ranging from breakbeats to electro to indie. Next to the Amsterdam Hotel.

Ocean Rooms (☎ 01273-699069; www.oceanrooms.co.uk; 1 Morley St; admission £3-10) This enduring favourite crams in three floors of dance variety, from an all-white bar to a dance floor where you can lap up the efforts of top DJs, from hip-hop to drum and bass, to breakbeat.

Funky Fish (☎ 01273-699069; www.funkyfishclub.co.uk; 19-23 Marine Pde; admission £3-10) Fun, friendly, and

unpretentious little club playing soul, funk, jazz, Motown and old-skool breaks. No big-name DJs or stringent door policies, just cheap drinks and a rocking party atmosphere.

Digital (☎ 01273-227767; www.yourfutureisdigital.com/brighton; 187-193 Kings Rd Arches; admission £3-12) Formerly the famous Zap club, this new place on the Brighton scene hosts indie, house and cheesy student nights.

Honey Club (☎ 01273-202807; www.thehoneyclub.co.uk; 214 Kings Rd Arches; admission £5-12) A cavernous seafront club that jumps from strength to strength, almost as popular with DJs as it is with the weekly queues of clubbers who pile into its glittering depths. Dress up, party hard, then cool off on the balcony chillout area or dip your aching feet in the sea.

Concorde 2 (☎ 01273-673311; www.concorde2.co.uk; Madeira Dr, Kemptown; admission £8-20) Brighton's best-known and best-loved club is a disarm-

ingly unpretentious den, where DJ Fatboy Slim pioneered the Big Beat Boutique and still occasionally graces the decks. There's a huge variety of club nights and live bands each month, from world music to rock.

CINEMAS

Odeon Cinema (☎ 0871-224 4007; cnr King's Rd & West St) Check out this seafront cinema for mainstream movies.

Duke of York (☎ 01273-602503; Preston Circus) About a mile north of North Rd, showing art-house films and classics.

THEATRE

Brighton Dome (☎ 01273-709709; www.brighton-dome.org.uk; 29 New Rd) Once the stables and exercise yard of King George IV, this art-deco complex houses three theatre venues within the Royal Pavilion estate. The box office is on New Rd.

GAY & LESBIAN BRIGHTON

Perhaps it's Brighton's long-time association with the theatre, but for more than 100 years the city has been a gay haven. Gay icons Noel Coward and Ivor Novello were regular visitors, but in those days the scene was furtive and separate. From the 1960s onwards, the scene really began to open up, especially in the Kemptown area and around Old Steine. Today, with more than 25,000 gay men and 10,000 to 15,000 lesbians living in the city, it is the most vibrant queer community in the country outside London.

Kemptown (aka Camptown), on and off St James' St, is where it's all at. In recent years the old Brunswick Town area of Hove has emerged as a quieter alternative to the traditionally cruisy (and sometimes seedy) Kemptown, but the community here has responded by branching out from the usual pubs that served as nightly pick-up joints. Now you will find a rank of gay-owned businesses, from cafes and hotels to bookshops, as well as the more obvious bars, clubs and saunas.

For up-to-date information on what's going on in gay Brighton, check out the websites www.gay.brighton.co.uk and www.realbrighton.com, or pick up the free monthly magazine **Gscene** (www.gscene.com) from various venues or the tourist office.

For drinking...

Cafe 22 (☎ 01273-626682; 129 St James' St; snacks £2-3; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) This cool coffeshop hangout and internet cafe is the place to get word on everything going on in town.

Amsterdam (☎ 01273-688825; www.amsterdam.uk.com; 11-12 Marine Pde; ☎ noon-2am) Hotel, sauna, restaurant and extremely hip bar above the pier; its sun terrace is a particular hit.

Candy Bar (☎ 01273-622424; www.thecandybar.co.uk; 129 St James' St; ☎ 9pm-2am) Slick cafe-bar-club for the girls, with pink-lit arches, curvaceous bar, pool table and dance floor.

Queen's Arms (☎ 01273-696873; www.queensarmsbrighton.com; 7 George St; ☎ 3pm-late) Plenty of camp in the cabaret and karaoke acts at this pub make it a definite stop on the Brighton gay trail.

For dancing...

Bars and pubs may be fun, but the real action takes place on and off the dance floor.

Revenge (☎ 01273-608133; www.revenge.co.uk; 7 Marine Pde; ☎ 10.30pm-3am) Nightly disco with occasional cabaret.

Legends (☎ 01273-624462; 31-34 Marine Pde; ☎ 9am-2am) Club and basement bar underneath the Amsterdam, playing 1990s music and club anthems with the odd touch of drag.

Theatre Royal (☎ 01273-328488; New Rd) Built by decree of the Prince of Wales in 1806, this venue hosts plays, musicals and operas.

Komedia Theatre (☎ 01273-647100; www.komedia.co.uk; Gardner St) This former billiards hall and supermarket is now a stylish comedy, theatre and cabaret venue.

Shopping

A busy maze of narrow lanes and tiny alleyways that was once a fishing village, the **Lanes** is Brighton's most popular shopping district. Its every twist and turn is jam-packed with jewellers and gift shops, coffee shops and boutiques selling everything from antique firearms to hard-to-find vinyls. There's another, less-claustrophobic shopping district in **North Laine**, a series of streets north of the Lanes, including Bond, Gardner, Kensington and Sydney Sts, that are full of retro-cool boutiques and Bohemian cafes. Head west from the Lanes and you'll hit Churchill Square Shopping Centre and Western Rd, where you'll find all the mainstream high street stores.

Getting There & Away

Brighton is 53 miles from London and transport is fast and frequent.

BUS

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.national.express.com) coaches leave for London Victoria (£10.90, 80 minutes, hourly), and there are regular coach links to all London airports.

Buses 28, 29 and 29A go to Lewes (£2.80, 35 minutes), bus 12 to Eastbourne (£3, 80 minutes), bus 700 to Chichester (£3, 80 minutes) and Arundel (two hours).

TRAIN

There are two hourly services to London Victoria (£19, 50 to 70 minutes) and two to London Bridge (50 minutes to 1¼ hours). For £2 on top of the rail fare, you can get a PlusBus ticket that gives unlimited travel on Brighton & Hove buses for the day. There's one direct service to Portsmouth (£14.50, 1½ hours, hourly), twice-hourly services to Chichester, Eastbourne and Hastings, and links to Canterbury and Dover.

Getting Around

Brighton is a sizable place, but you'll be able to cover most of it on foot. Alternatively, you can buy a day ticket (£3) from the

driver to scoot back and forth on Brighton & Hove buses.

Parking can be expensive. Brighton and Hove operates a pay-and-display parking scheme. In the town centre, it's usually £1.50 per half hour with a maximum stay of two hours. Alternatively, there's a park-and-ride on the outskirts of town at Withdean.

Cab companies include **Brighton Streamline Taxis** (☎ 01273-747 474) and **City Cabs** (☎ 01273-205205), and there's a taxi rank on the junction of East St with Market St.

Planet Cycle Hire (☎ 01273-748881; West Pier Promenade; bikes per half day/day £8/12; ☎ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue May-Sep, to 4pm Fri-Mon Oct-Apr), next to West Pier, rents bikes. Deposit and ID required.

WEST SUSSEX

After the fast-paced adventures of Brighton and East Sussex, West Sussex is welcome respite. The serene hills and valleys of the South Downs ripple across the county, fringed by sheltered coastline. Beautiful Arundel and cultured Chichester make good bases from which to explore the county's winding country lanes and remarkable Roman ruins.

ARUNDEL

pop 3297

Arundel is perhaps West Sussex's prettiest town. Clustered around a vast fairy-tale castle, its hillside streets burst with antique stores, teashops, excellent restaurants and the odd boutique hotel – it makes a great weekend break or stopover. While much of the town appears medieval – the whimsical castle has been home to the dukes of Norfolk for centuries – most of it dates to Victorian times.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 01903-882268; www.sussexbythe.sea.com; 61 High St; ☎ 10.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-3pm daily Nov-Easter) has maps, an accommodation-booking service (£1.50) plus a small **museum** (☎ 01903-883890; www.arundelmuseum.org.uk; admission free; ☎ 10am-3pm Easter-Aug, 11am-1pm Sep-Easter), temporarily located in the Mill Rd car park while it looks for a new home.

Sights & Activities

Originally built in the 11th century, all that's left of the first **Arundel Castle** (☎ 01903-882173; www.arun

TOP FIVE BEACH TOWNS

- Brighton & Hove (p204)
- Whitstable (p182)
- Ramsgate (p185)
- Hastings (p198)
- Broadstairs (p184)

delcastle.org; adult/under 16yr/student & senior £13/7.50/10.50; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun Easter-Oct) are the modest remains of its keep at its core. Thoroughly ruined during the English Civil War, most of what you see today is the result of passionate reconstruction by the eighth, 11th and 15th dukes of Norfolk between 1718 and 1900. The current duke still lives in part of the castle. Highlights include the atmospheric keep, the massive Great Hall and the library, which has paintings by Gainsborough and Holbein.

The other architectural landmark in town is Arundel's ostentatious 19th-century **cathedral** (☎ 01903-882297; www.arundelcathedral.org; ☎ 9am-6pm summer, to dusk winter), built in the French Gothic style by the 15th duke. Inside are the remains of his ancestor, St Philip Howard, now a canonised Catholic martyr who was caught praying for a Spanish victory against the English in 1588.

Kids will most likely opt for the **Arundel Ghost Experience** (☎ 01903-889821; www.arundelghostexperience.com; High St; adult/child £4/3; ☎ 10am-6pm), where they'll hear hair-raising ghost stories and see old prison cells that are supposedly haunted themselves.

Bird fanciers will be rewarded by a trip to the 4-hectare **Wildfowl & Wetlands Centre** (☎ 01903-883355; www.wwt.org.uk; Mill Rd; adult/child £6.95/3.75; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Easter-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Easter), a mile east of the centre as the duck flies.

At the foot of High St is the Town Quay, from where you can hire your own boat or hop on a **cruise** (adult/child £6/4) of the River Arun.

Sleeping

Arundel YHA (☎ 0845 371 9002; www.yha.org.uk; Warningcamp; dm £17.95; ☎ ☎) Catering to South Downs walkers and families, this large Georgian hostel has excellent facilities and is set in sprawling grassy grounds on a charming country lane, 20- to 30-minutes' walk from town off the A27 (call for directions).

Norfolk Arms (☎ 01903-882101; www.norfolkarmshotel.com; High St; s/d from £65/90; ☎ ☎ wi-fi) You'll be warmly welcomed at this rambling old Georgian coaching inn built by the 10th duke. Although the rooms are spacious, they are looking dated and a little scruffy.

Arundel House (☎ 01903-882136; www.arundelhouseonline.com; 11 High St; d from £100; ☎ wi-fi) The modern rooms in this lovely 'restaurant with rooms' may be small but they're beautifully styled and very comfortable, with showers big enough for two. The restaurant downstairs serves some of the best food in Arundel (three-course dinner £28), which happily extends to breakfast.

Also worth a look:

April Cottage (☎ 01903-885401; www.april-cottage.co.uk; London Rd; d from £70; ☎ ☎ wi-fi) Charming, friendly B&B with countryside views, a 20-minute walk from town.

Town House (☎ 01903-883847; www.thetownhouse.co.uk; 65 High St; d from £85) Stunning Regency-style boutique hotel.

Eating

Pallant of Arundel (☎ 01903-882288; www.pallantofarundel.co.uk; The Square; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Set yourself up for an English picnic by the river at this irresistible delicatessen. Choose from local cheese, freshly baked bread, pâté, wine and more sinful treats.

Tudor Rose (☎ 01903-883813; 49 High St; mains £4-10; ☎ 9am-6pm) This bustling, kitsch family-run tearoom is cluttered with everything from faux armour to brollies, to ships' wheels, to a portrait of the Queen. As well as tea and cakes, breakfasts, burgers, Sunday roasts and other substantial meals are served here.

Zigs (☎ 01903-884500; www.zigsrestaurant.co.uk; 51 High St; mains £6-18; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm Mon & Tue, to 9.30pm Wed-Sat, to 6pm Sun) The slick, modern furnishings of this Parisian-style bistro fit in perfectly with the low ceilings and oak beams of its old town-house setting. It specialises in *tartines* (*pain Poilane* – an unusual French bread with a slightly sour flavour – topped with assorted hot and cold toppings) and *piérades* (hot volcano stones on which you cook your own food at the table).

Town House (☎ 01903-883847; 65 High St; set lunch £14-18, set dinner £22-27.50; ☎ Tue-Sat) The only thing that rivals the stunning 16th-century Florentine gilded-walnut ceiling at this elegant eatery is the acclaimed Mediterranean-

influenced cuisine and sparkling atmosphere. Book ahead.

Getting There & Away

Trains are the way to go. They run to London Victoria (£20.50, 1½ hours, twice hourly), and to Chichester (20 minutes, twice hourly); change at Ford or Barnham. There are also links to Brighton (£7.80, one hour 20 minutes, twice hourly); change at Ford or Barnham.

AROUND ARUNDEL

Bignor Roman Villa (☎ 01903-869259; www.bignorromanvilla.co.uk; adult/child £4.35/1.85; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Sep, to 5pm May & Oct, Tue-Sun Mar-Apr) is home to an astonishingly fine collection of mosaics preserved within an atmospheric thatched complex that's historic in its own right. Discovered in 1811 by a farmer ploughing his fields, the villa was built around AD 190. The wonderful mosaic floors include vivid scenes of chunky-thighed gladiators, a beautiful Venus whose eyes seem to follow you about the room and an impressive 24m-long gallery design.

While Bignor is well worth the trip, it's a devil of a place to reach without your own wheels. It's located 6 miles north of Arundel off the A29.

CHICHESTER

pop 27,477

Sitting on flat plains between the South Downs and the sea, this prosperous Georgian market town has plenty of country charm. It's home to an array of traditional tea-and-crummet shops, well-mannered townfolk, a fine cathedral and streets of handsome 18th-century town houses. It doesn't stint on cosmopolitan culture either. A famous theatre and arts festival takes place every year, and there's a superb modern-art gallery. The administrative capital of West Sussex, the town is within easy reach of some fascinating Roman remains that recall its days as a sprawling port garrison shortly after the invasion of AD 43.

Orientation & Information

Striking crown-shaped Market Cross, built in 1501, marks the centre of town. The streets around it are pedestrianised and everything you'd want to see is within walking distance.

There is a **tourist office** (☎ 01243-775888; www.visitchichester.org; 29a South St; ☎ 9.15am-5.15pm Mon-Sat year-round, also 11am-3.30pm Sun Apr-Sep) and

a **post office** (cnr Chapel & West Sts), and **Internet Junction** (☎ 01243-776644; 2 Southdown Bldg, Southgate; per hr £1; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-8pm Sat & Sun) has double-quick net access.

Sights

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

This elegant **cathedral** (☎ 01243-782595; www.chichestercathedral.org.uk; West St; requested donation £5; ☎ 7.15am-7pm Jun-Aug, to 6pm Sep-May) was begun in 1075 and largely rebuilt in the 13th century. Three storeys of beautiful arches sweep upwards, and Romanesque carvings are dotted around. The freestanding church tower was built in the 15th century and the spire is from the 19th century. There are also a few bold, modern flourishes, including an entrancing stained-glass window by Marc Chagall and the not-so-pretty disembodied likenesses of the Queen and Prince Phillip outside the main entrance.

Guided tours operate at 11.15am and 2.30pm Monday to Saturday, Easter to October, and the excellent cathedral choir is guaranteed to give you goosebumps during the daily **Evensong** (☎ 5.30pm Mon-Sat, 3.30pm Sun).

PALLANT HOUSE GALLERY

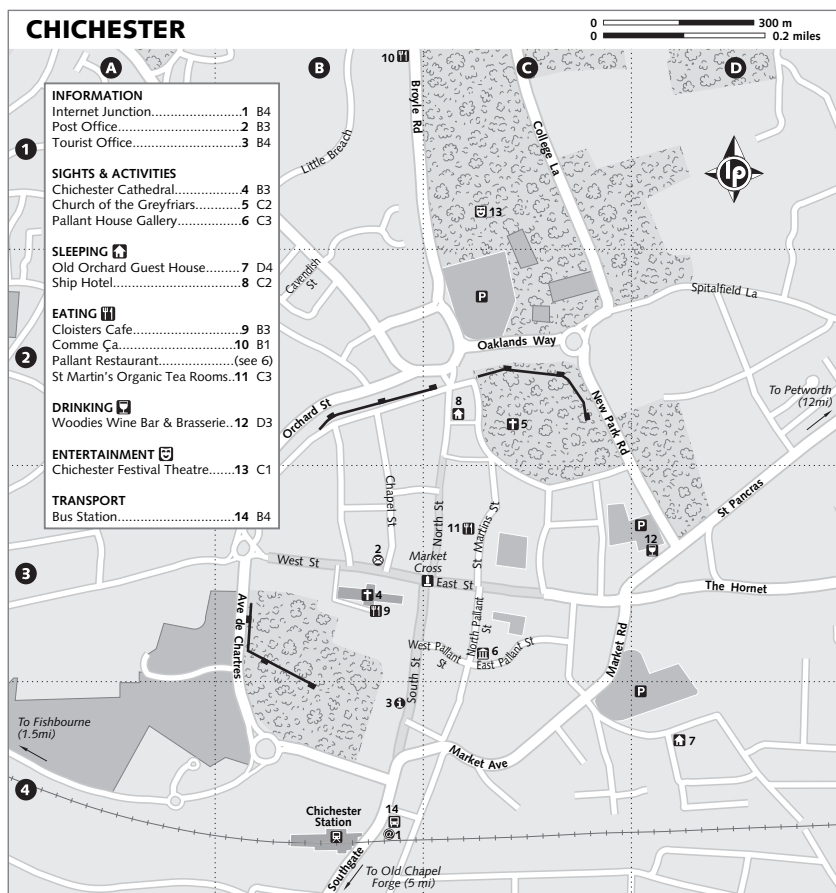
One of many handsome Georgian houses in town, **Pallant House** (☎ 01243-774557; www.pallant.org.uk; 9 North Pallant; adult/child/student £6.50/2/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun), once owned by a wealthy wine merchant, now houses a superb collection of 20th-century, mostly British, art, with names such as Caulfield, Freud, Sutherland and Moore represented, as well as international artists including Picasso, Cézanne and Rembrandt.

CHURCH OF THE GREYFRIARS

If you fancy a stroll in the park, it's worth a peek at the remains of this **Franciscan church** (☎ 01243-784683; Priory Park; admission free; ☎ noon-4pm Sat Jun-mid-Sep), built in the northeastern corner of the town in 1269. After dissolution in 1536, the structure became the guildhall and, later, a court of law, where William Blake was tried for sedition in 1804.

Festivals & Events

For three weeks in June and July, the annual **Chichester Festivities** (☎ 01243-785718; www.chifest.org.uk) puts on an abundance of terrific theatre, art, guest lectures, fireworks and performances of every musical genre.



Sleeping

Most accommodation in Chichester is mid-range, with little for budget travellers.

Old Orchard Guest House (☎ 01243-536547; www.oldorchardguesthouse.co.uk; 8 Lyndhurst Rd; s/d from £45/60) Freshly baked bread and jams are served up for breakfast in the garden or conservatory at this disarming central Georgian town house, which has three spacious and gracious old-style rooms.

Old Chapel Forge (☎ 01243-264380; www.oldchapelforge.co.uk; Lagness; d from £60; P wi-fi) For those with their own wheels, this gorgeous, eco-friendly B&B set in a 17th-century house and a stone chapel, is a good bet. The chapel rooms, with high ceilings and open views across the countryside, are particularly special.

Ship Hotel (☎ 01243-778000; North St; s/d £95/120; P wi-fi) The grand central staircase in this former Georgian town house leads to 36 polished blonde wood, suede and leather rooms; they're the nicest option in the city centre. The Ship Hotel also boasts an excellent all-day brasserie.

Eating

Pallant Restaurant (☎ 01243-784701; 9 North Pallant; snacks £2-6.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 12-5pm Sun) In the Pallant House gallery, this sophisticated cafe has paintings and display cases, and a sunny courtyard that's a good spot for sandwiches, cakes and heartier main meals.

Cloisters Cafe (☎ 01243-783718; Cathedral Cloisters; snacks £2.50-5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun)

Sparkling marble-floored cafe in the cathedral grounds with sunny walled garden and airy atmosphere. It's a good spot for simple sandwiches, cakes and fair-trade drinks.

St Martin's Organic Tea Rooms (☎ 01243-786715; www.organictearooms.co.uk; 3 St Martins St; mains £4-10; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) A little cocoon of nooks and crannies tucked away in a part-18th-century, part-medieval town house, this passionately organic cafe serves freshly ground coffee and wholesome, mostly vegetarian, food from Welsh rarebits to risottos. There's also a sinful selection of desserts.

Comme Ça (☎ 01243-788724; 67 Broyle Rd; mains £8-13; ☎ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) Family-run and family-friendly French restaurant, offering traditional Normandy cuisine in a converted Georgian inn, with a lovely vine-covered alfresco area. It's a short walk north of the town centre.

Drinking

Woodies Wine Bar & Brasserie (☎ 01243-779895; 10-13 St Pancras St; mains £8-12; ☎ 5.30-11pm Mon-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat) Attached to an excellent, low-key brasserie, this sophisticated wine and cocktail bar steps it up a notch with bright colours, corduroy stools and bold pop-art prints. The chilled and friendly vibe draws an eclectic crowd of all ages.

Entertainment

Chichester Festival Theatre (☎ 01243-781312; www.cft.org.uk; Oakland's Park) This modern playhouse was built in 1962 and has a long and distinguished history. Sir Laurence Olivier was the theatre's first director and Ingrid Bergman, Sir John Gielgud and Sir Anthony Hopkins are a few of the other famous names to have played here.

Getting There & Away

Chichester is 60 miles from London and 18 miles from Portsmouth.

BUS

Chichester is served by Coastliner bus 700, which runs between Brighton (2¼ hours, hourly) and Portsmouth (one hour, hourly). National Express has a rather protracted service from London Victoria (£12.60, four hours, twice daily).

TRAIN

Chichester can be reached easily from London Victoria (£20.60, 1¾ hours, half hourly) via

Gatwick airport and Arundel. It's also on the coastline between Brighton (£10.50, 50 minutes, twice hourly) and Portsmouth (£6.20, 30 to 40 minutes, twice hourly).

AROUND CHICHESTER

Spreading its watery tentacles to the south of town, **Chichester Harbour** is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and has a lovely, sandy beach west of the harbour, ideal for a spot of sea air and strolling.

At West Itchenor, 1½-hour harbour cruises are run by **Chichester Harbour Water Tours** (☎ 01243-670504; www.chichesterharbourwatertours.co.uk; adult/child £6.50/3).

Fishbourne Roman Palace & Museum

Anyone mad about mosaics should head for **Fishbourne Palace** (☎ 01243-785859; www.sussexpast.co.uk; Salthill Rd; adult/child £7/3.70; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Jul & Sep-Oct, to 6pm Aug, to 4pm Nov-Feb), the largest known Roman residence in Britain. Happened upon by labourers in the 1960s, it's thought that this once-luxurious mansion was built around AD 75 for a Romanised local king. Housed in a modern pavilion are its foundations, hypocaust and painstakingly re-laid mosaics. The centrepiece is a spectacular floor depicting cupid riding a dolphin flanked by sea horses and panthers. There's a fascinating little museum and replanted Roman gardens.

Fishbourne Palace is 1½ miles west of Chichester, just off the A259. Buses 56 and 700 leave from Monday to Saturday from outside Chichester Cathedral and stop at the bottom of Salthill Rd (five minutes' walk away; roughly hourly). The museum is a 10-minute stroll from Fishbourne train station.

Petworth

On the outskirts of its namesake village, the imposing 17th-century stately home, **Petworth House** (NT; ☎ 01798-342207; adult/child £9.50/4.80; ☎ 11am-5pm Sat-Wed Apr-Oct), has an extraordinary art collection, the National Trust's finest. JMW Turner was a regular visitor and the house is still home to the largest collection of his paintings outside London's Tate Gallery. There are also many paintings by Van Dyck, Reynolds, Gainsborough, Titian, Bosch and William Blake. Other highlights are the fabulously theatrical grand staircase and the exquisite Carved Room, which ripples with wooden reliefs by master chiseller Grinling Gibbons.

The surrounding **Petworth Park** (adult/child £3.80/1.90; ☞ 8am-sunset) is the highlight – the fulfilment of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown’s romantic natural landscape theory. It’s home to herds of deer and is the site of open-air concerts in summer.

Petworth is 5 miles from the train station at Pulborough, from where bus 1 runs to Petworth Sq (15 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday). If driving, it’s 12 miles northeast of Chichester off the A285.

SURREY

Surrey is the heart of commuterville, chosen by well-off Londoners when they spawn, move out of the city and buy a country pad. For the most part, though, it’s made up of uninspiring towns and dull, sprawling suburbs. Further away from the roaring motorways and packed rush-hour trains, the county reveals some inspiring landscapes made famous by authors Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen.

FARNHAM

☞ pop 36,298

Farnham is Surrey’s nicest market town. Practically empty during the week, it’s a relaxing place to visit, and the town’s main enticements include exquisite Georgian homes, independent boutiques (some of which are on the pricey side), walking and cycling in the surrounding countryside and popping into one of Surrey’s only intact castles.

Orientation & Information

The easiest way to explore Farnham is on foot. The most interesting part of town is its historical centre, where East, West, South and Castle Sts meet.

The Borough (the eastern end of West St) is the town’s main shopping street. The train station is at the southern end of South St (Station Hill).

The **tourist office** (☞ 01252-712667; tourism@farnham.gov.uk; South St; ☞ 9am-noon Mon & Sat, 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri) has free maps of the town and surrounding countryside, the free *Farnham Heritage Trail* pamphlet and an updated list of accommodation in the area. It also offers free internet access.

You’ll find a couple of banks with ATMs on the Borough. The main post office and a

bureau de change are on West St, which is the continuation of the Borough.

Guided walks (☞ 01252-718119; adult/child £3/1) of approximately 1½ hours run at 11am on the first Sunday of every month between April and October. Meet at the entrance of the Wagon Yard car park at the southern end of Downing St.

Sights

FARNHAM CASTLE

Constructed in 1138 by Henry de Blois, the grandson of William the Conqueror, there’s not much left of the **castle keep** (☞ 01252-713393; admission £3, free audio tour; ☞ noon-5pm Fri-Sun & public holidays 21 Mar-30 Sep) today except the beautiful old ramparts. Even if the keep is closed, it’s worth walking around the outside (everyone seems to ignore the ‘private’ signs) to drink in the lovely view.

A residential palace house, Farnham Castle was built in the 13th century for the bishops of Winchester as a stopover on London journeys. From 1926 to the 1950s, it was taken over by the bishops of Guildford. It’s now owned by the Farnham Castle International Briefing & Conference Centre, but you can visit it on a **guided tour** (☞ 01252-721194; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☞ 2-4pm Wed & 2.30pm Fri Apr-Aug).

Farnham Castle is located up the old steps at the top of Castle St.

MUSEUM OF FARNHAM

This engaging **museum** (☞ 01252-715094; 38 West St; admission free; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) is located in the splendid Willmer House, a Georgian town house built for wealthy hop merchant and maltster John Thorne in 1718. Since it opened in 1962, the museum has won many awards, including the European Museum of the Year Award.

The museum traces the history of Farnham through themes such as ‘country life’, ‘art and architecture’, ‘on the road’ and ‘town life’. There’s also an amazing **1780s dolls’ house**, modelled on the house next door, and a morning cap that once belonged to Charles I.

Sleeping

Accommodation in Farnham tends towards the midrange to top end.

Mulberry (☞ 01252-726673; Station Hill; s/d £55/75; ☞ ☑ wi-fi) Right by the station and set over an Indian restaurant and bar, this place has nine spic-and-span en suite rooms.

Hotel de Vie (☎ 01252-823030; 22 Firgrove Hill; s/d from £90) This plush, sexy boutique hotel has a naughty edge – around the lounge, bar and lobby are prints from the *moulin rouge* and pictures of ladies in corsets and killer heels. Rooms (with names like ‘Oriental Pleasures’ and ‘Gothic Nights’) come stocked with erotic DVDs and literature; two of them even have a love swing. If you do choose to emerge from your room, there’s a pretty good restaurant.

Bush Hotel (☎ 01252-715237; www.mercure-uk.com; The Borough; s/d £120/150; 🍷) This 17th-century inn is right in the heart of the action and benefits from a cosy beamed bar, a pretty garden at the back and recently renovated rooms.

Eating & Entertainment

Farnham contains a good choice of tempting eateries.

Colony Restaurant (☎ 01252-725108; 68 Castle St; mains £5-7.50; lunch & dinner) Big, tasty portions of Peking cuisine on Farnham’s attractive Castle St.

Nelson Arms (☎ 01252-716078; 50 Castle St; 2-course lunch £7.95, dinner £9.95-18.95) A rustic, low-ceilinged, cosy bar with a few modern touches, a small terrace at the back and good-value, locally sourced food.

Farnham Maltings (☎ 01252-745444; Bridge Sq; www.farnhammaltings.com) Creative, multipurpose spot with a riverside bar, live music, amateur theatre, exhibitions, workshops and comedy.

Getting There & Away

Train services run from London Waterloo (one hour, half hourly). From Winchester, there are trains to Woking (30 minutes, two per hour). Change there for trains to Farnham (25 minutes, half hourly). The train station is at the end of South St, on the other side of the A31 from the old town centre.

Stagecoach (☎ 0845 121 0190) bus X64 runs from Winchester to Farnham at 10 minutes past the hour (one hour and 10 minutes). The stop is on the Borough.

AROUND FARNHAM Waverley Abbey

Said to be the inspiration for Sir Walter Scott’s eponymous novel, Waverley Abbey sits ruined and forlorn on the banks of the River Wey about 2 miles southeast of Farnham. This was the first Cistercian abbey built in England (construction began in 1128) and was based on a parent abbey at Cîteaux in France.

Across the Wey is the impressive **Waverley Abbey House** (closed to the public), built in 1783 using bricks from the demolished abbey. In the 19th century it was owned by Florence Nightingale’s brother-in-law, and the famous nurse was a regular visitor. Fittingly, the house was used as a hospital in WWI. Since 1973 it has been the headquarters of the Crusade for World Revival, a Christian charity.

The abbey and house are off the B3001.

Hindhead

The tiny hamlet of Hindhead, 8 miles south of Farnham off the A287, lies in the middle of the largest area of open heath in Surrey. During the 19th century, a number of prominent Victorians bought up property in the area, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), creator of Sherlock Holmes. One of the three founders of the National Trust, Sir Robert Hunter, lived in nearby Haslemere, and today much of the area is administered by the foundation.

The most beautiful part of the area is to the northeast, where you’ll find a natural depression known as the **Devil’s Punchbowl**. There are a number of excellent trails and bridle paths here. To get the best view, head for **Gibbet Hill** (280m), which was once an execution ground.

The **Hindhead YHA Hostel** (☎ 0845 371 9022; www.yha.org.uk; Devil’s Punchbowl, Thursley; dm £12.95) is a completely secluded cottage run by the National Trust on the northern edge of the Punchbowl. It’s perfect if you like walking – the nearest bus stop and car park are a half-mile away.

Buses 18 and 19 run hourly to Hindhead from Farnham.

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