



CULTURAL PURSUITS IN THE GARDEN OF ENGLAND

The county of Kent has much to offer anyone wishing to experience a cultural short break. Kent's seaside towns are rapidly evolving, shaking off their 'kiss-me-quick' reputations, and acquiring a chic, artistic image. Away from the coast Canterbury and Maidstone's arts venues are the subject of major regeneration projects.

Recent years Margate's long-awaited Turner Contemporary gallery opened, Canterbury's New Marlowe Theatre building was unveiled, and the Triennial Arts Festival returned to Folkestone.

Come for a weekend or short break, tour cultural treasures and grand designs.

Escape and find your own space.

DAY ONE

Make **Canterbury** the gateway for your cultural tour, beginning with the thrilling statement in stone that is **Canterbury Cathedral**. Look up to the sprays of rib vaulting in the 14th century Perpendicular Gothic nave and feel your imagination soar with such daring medieval design.

Also in the heart of the historic city of Canterbury, newly restored in September 2012, lies **The Beane House of Art & Knowledge**. This inspiring art museum and library now offers state-of-the-art exhibition galleries, excellent learning facilities and a varied programme of interactive events for all ages. It is also home to a collection of national importance by Victorian animal painter Thomas Sidney Cooper, one of Canterbury's most famous artists. Displays include over 1,000 objects, showcased in permanent galleries, alongside special temporary exhibitions.

Named after the playwright Christopher Marlowe, who was born and attended school in the city, the ambitious new **Marlowe Theatre** reopened its doors in October 2011. The building, designed by architect Keith Williams, is fronted by a dramatic, glazed foyer that unites all the areas of the theatre, its two stages and the riverside café, with the magnificent medieval streets of Canterbury. It's a great place to take in a show, or meet friends and soak in the artistic vibe. The Marlowe plays an important part in the **Canterbury Festival** in October each year, an exciting time to visit the city. The festival has something for everyone, from classical, jazz and rock music, to theatre, stand-up comedy, art exhibitions, walks, workshops and other fringe events. The **Gulbenkian Theatre**, a lively venue overlooking the city, situated on the University of Kent Campus, has a varied programme all year, almost an everlasting festival in its own right.

Once you've toured the cultural venues let curiosity be your compass as you browse the cobbled streets of one of the oldest cities with a continuous history.

DAY TWO

Head to the coastal town of **Margate**, the birthplace of the British seaside, and witness its renaissance. Since April 2011, visitors to the town have been able to enjoy world-class art in the new Turner Contemporary gallery overlooking the town's famous golden sands.

Designed by Stirling Prize winning architect David Chipperfield, **Turner Contemporary** is a stunning addition to the town. Margate was often visited by the artist JMW Turner and the gallery always has some of his work on show for visitors to enjoy. There is a rolling programme of exhibitions featuring work by leading international contemporary artists alongside historic works from 1750 onwards.

Walk over to The Piazza between **Margate Old Town** and the gallery. During the summer, it is filled with tables spilling out from restaurants, where you can enjoy the view, watching the sea, fishing boats, fireworks, dancing, carnivals and bands. Live music is staged throughout the season, and if you like jazz, don't miss the Margate Jazz Festival in July. Behind the Piazza in the Old Town you can discover the private galleries, teashops, gift-shops, cafés, restaurants and bars with friendly proprietors providing an alternative shopping experience. Pick up a copy of the Old Town map from the Visitor Information Centre for your own guided tour.

For an art of a different kind, **The Hornby Visitor Centre**, based at the global headquarters of Hornby in Margate, features treasures from the Company's archives dating back as far as the 1920s. The Visitor Centre features fascinating displays about some of the nation's best loved toys, with sections dedicated to the iconic brands of Hornby, Scalextric, Airfix and Corgi. Visitors are able to see some stunning model rail layouts and also try their skills on a Scalextric circuit.

One of Margate's more curious 'architresures' is the **Shell Grotto**, uncovered in 1835. Ancient temple or Regency folly? Descend the chalk stairway and see for yourself the 2,000 sq ft of mosaic created from 4.6 million shells, depicting gods and trees of life.

2014 is due to bring the much-anticipated opening of **Dreamland Heritage Park**, Margate; the world's first amusement park to feature historic rides that will authentically recreate a thrilling seaside amusement park from the past. The 21st-Century tourist attraction will be based around the listed Scenic Railway and Cinema building.

Making the ideal lunch stop on any tour, **Quex Barn**, is a farmers' market and restaurant that is passionate about Kent produce! Enjoy the very best of fresh produce from the butchery, fish monger and café, and tuck into fruit and vegetables, fresh bread and a huge variety of Kent produce including jams and honeys – not forgetting the newly launched Kent Crisps.

The 19th century architect Augustus Pugin, leader of the Gothic Revival, knew and loved nearby Ramsgate from visits in his youth, declaring in 1844: 'I would give anything to get to Ramsgate.' He designed a house for himself, **The Grange**, which has recently been restored by the Landmark Trust and is now open for holiday lets. And while you're there, follow the unique **Pugins Town Trail** from east to west cliffs, linking the splendid buildings designed or associated with the talented Pugin family.

Sit back with a drink at the end of the day and share JMW Turner's admiration for Nature's artistry. The painter was drawn here by the quality of light and the coast's 'glorious sunsets... the loveliest skies in Europe.' Share the enchantment and take the memory home with you.

DAY THREE

We continue our coastal route via **Dover's** Georgian seafront to **Folkestone**, whose Edwardian seaside vibe is invigorated by the burgeoning **Creative Quarter** around the cobbled Old High Street.

The **Folkestone Triennial**, is one of the most ambitious public art projects presented in the UK. Artists are invited to use the town as their 'canvas', utilising public spaces to create striking new pieces that reflect issues affecting both the town and the wider world. The Triennial takes place every three years, the next one being in Summer 2014, and is the flagship project of the Creative Foundation charity, which is leading a large scale renewal of the old town area close to the scenic harbour. Over 100 artists and creative businesses live and work in Folkestone's flourishing Creative Quarter.

Nineteen international artists were commissioned to create works for the 2011 Triennial, including Cornelia Parker, who cast a life-size bronze statue of a female Folkestone resident in the pose of Copenhagen's famous Little Mermaid; Cristina Iglesias, who created an architectural structure on the ramparts of one of Folkestone's historic Martello Towers, which gave the illusion of an entrance into another world; Hew Locke, who suspended 100 model ships collected from around the world in the nave of St Mary and St Eanswythe's church, the oldest building in Folkestone; and Zineb Sedira, who made a film about an extraordinary lighthouse in Algeria. The film was housed in the former deckchair storage hall in Folkestone's cliff-face, which had not been accessible for years. Eight artworks from the 2008 Triennial remain on permanent public display around Folkestone, including works by Tracey Emin, Patrick Tuttofuoco, Mark Wallinger, Richard Wentworth, Pae White and Richard Wilson.

The Triennial is part of a wider regeneration programme to redevelop Folkestone's harbour and seafront.

The Quarterhouse, at the heart of Folkestone's Creative Quarter, is Folkestone's performing arts centre which attracts a wide range of music, theatre, comedy and family performances including Michael McIntyre, Sean Lock, and the team at BBC Kent Introducing. It is also the home venue for Folkestone Book Festival, Stand Up! Comedy Festival and The Hook Music Festival. The whole Quarter fizzes with cultural activities, its galleries, studios, cafés and bars jostling with each other, down to the picturesque harbour, an area full of surprises and delights.

Enjoy a delicious at Mark Sargeants "Rocksalt" restaurant, situated overlooking the harbour on the former site of Jetty's pub. The menu features meat and fish smoked and cured onsite, as well as plenty of fresh local seafood which is landed daily a short distance from the restaurant. Alongside Rocksalt there is also a separate fish and chip shop located in an old smokehouse nearby called The Smokehouse. The fish and chip shop has four rooms available to provide accommodation should you be too full of fresh fish to wander any further.

Also in Folkestone are the **Metropole Galleries** (www.metropole.org.uk), housed in a striking Edwardian building set on the seafront. Exhibitions have featured Tacita Dean, Phyllida Barlow and Mark Titchner.

Get away from it all at the end of the day scrunching along the shingle bank of **Dungeness**, which has been slowly moulded by the sea. It's the largest shingle beach in Europe and a third of all known plant species grow among the pebbles (have a look!). Dungeness is home to Derek Jarman's famous garden at Prospect Cottage, which combines local plants, flints, stones, driftwood and fishing nets on a huge bank of shingle. It also boasts several small art galleries, including the Dungeness Gallery, situated between two lighthouses on the shingle beach.

OTHER CULTURAL LOCATIONS TO BE EXPLORED:

No. 1 Smithery is a museum experience and all-round treasure house for the whole family. Since July 2010, "National Treasures and Magnificent Art" have been on show for the first time under one roof at **The Historic Dockyard Chatham**. No.1 Smithery is a joint project between Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, the National Maritime Museum and the Imperial War Museum that showcases unique and previously unseen maritime artefacts, national and international touring art.

A vibrant contemporary arts scene has emerged in Medway in recent years is stimulating growing interest. **Rochester Arts and Crafts Trail** is rapidly gaining recognition for its diverse cultural offering. The trail is easy to discover and enjoy Rochester's hidden gems and highlights. Inspired by famous faces who grew up here, Zandra Rhodes, Tracey Emin and Jeff Banks, its central location between London and the Channel Ports and its continuing maritime traditions have created a hubb of creativity ready to be explored. Begin the trail at **Rochester Guildhall Museum** and see where it will take you!

For total contrast, hire a bike (or bring your own) and cycle the 7.5-mile **Crab and Winkle Way** to **Whitstable**, admiring fascinating modern sculptures and medieval earthworks as you go. Suddenly, you're in a delightful harbour town of weatherboarded cottages, smugglers' dwellings and winding lanes. Seafood and quirky-chic vistas: the perfect match for lunch or a leisurely evening meal.

Deal beckons with further proof of a cultural heritage that's cherished. The Middle Street Conservation Area is a maze of quiet, unspoilt streets, and everywhere you'll spot contrasts of building periods and materials. Bring your paints or camera: the variety of viewpoints gives superb light and shadow effects. Latest developments include a striking new café at the end of the pier, the subject of a competition organised by the Royal Institute of British Architects. Kent's land- and seascapes constantly inspire artists – see what they do for you.

Away from East Kent both the **Maidstone & Bentsley Art Gallery** and the **Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery** own rich and diverse collections and hold contemporary art shows. **Marle Place Gardens** also hosts varied exhibitions of painting, ceramics, sculpture and print.

ANNUAL CULTURAL EVENTS

Spring

- Rochester Sweeps Festival
- Rochester Dickens Festival

Summer

- Broadstairs Dickens Festival
- Lounge on the Farm, Music Festival
- Live at the Castle: Leeds Castle Open Air Classical Concert
- Whitstable Oyster Festival
- Ramsgate Week
- Broadstairs Folk Week
- Canterbury Eurofair

Autumn

- Canterbury Festival

Winter

- German Christmas Market, Canterbury

For further information on places to visit, stay and eat in Kent please go to www.visitkent.co.uk