



Canterbury & Southeast England

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Why Go?

Rolling chalk hills, venerable Victorian resorts, fields of hops and grapes sweetening in the sun: welcome to England's southeast, four soothing counties' worth of country houses, fairy-tale castles and the country's finest food and drink. That fruit-ripening sun shines brightest and longest on the coast, warming a string of seaside towns wedged between formidable chalk cliffs. There's something for everyone here, from the medieval quaintness of Sandwich to the bohemian spirit of hedonistic Brighton and the more genteel air of Eastbourne.

The southeast is also pock-marked with reminders of darker days. The region's position as the front line against Continental invaders has left a wealth of turbulent history, including the 1066 battlefield, Dover Castle's secret war tunnels and scattered Roman ruins.

England's spiritual heart is Canterbury; its cathedral and ancient Unesco-listed attractions are essential viewing for any 21st-century pilgrim.

When to Go

- ➔ May is a good time to get creative in Brighton at Great Britain's second-largest arts festival.
- ➔ During June, don your top hat and breeches to revel in frilly Victoriana at the Dickens Festival in Broadstairs.
- ➔ Any time between May and October is ideal for a hike along the South Downs Way, which runs the length of England's newest national park.
- ➔ In summer head to Thanet's glorious beaches for some proper seaside fun.



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.

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 the following:

Downs & Weald Cycle Route (110 miles; NCN Routes 2, 20 & 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 walking trails, such as the South Downs Way National Trail, which takes between two and four days to complete.

Walking

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

South Downs Way National Trail (www.nationaltrail.co.uk/southdowns) This 100-mile National Trail through England's newest national park is a beautiful roller-coaster walk along prehistoric drove roads between Winchester and Eastbourne.

North Downs Way National Trail (www.nationaltrail.co.uk/northdowns) This 153-mile walk begins near Farnham in Surrey, but one of its most beautiful sections runs from near Ashford to Dover; a loop takes in Canterbury near its end.

1066 Country Walk Heads from Pevensey Castle to Rye (32 miles) and serves as a continuation of the South Downs Way.



Information

Kent Attractions (www.kentattractions.co.uk)

Tourism South East (www.visitsoutheastengland.com) The official website for south and southeast England.

Visit Kent (www.visitkent.co.uk)

Visit Surrey (www.visitsurrey.com)

Visit Sussex (www.visitsussex.org)



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 (www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk) for comprehensive information about public transport.

BUS

Explorer Tickets (adult/child £6.20/3.10) provide unlimited day-long travel on most buses throughout the region. Buy them on the first bus you board.

TRAIN

Secure 33% discounts on most rail fares in the southeast by purchasing a **Network Railcard** (www.network-railcard.co.uk; per year £30). Three adults can travel with you for the same discounted fare, and you save 60% on fares for children under 15.

KENT

Kent isn't described as the garden of England for nothing. Within its sea-lined borders you'll find a fragrant landscape of gentle hills, fertile farmland, cultivated country estates and fruit-laden orchards. It could also be described as the beer garden of England as it produces the world-renowned Kent hops and some of the country's finest ales and wines from its numerous vineyards. At its heart is spellbinding Canterbury, crowned by its enthralling cathedral.

You'll also find beautiful coastal stretches dotted with beach towns and villages, from old-school Broadstairs to gentrified Whitstable and the aesthetically challenged port town of Dover.

Canterbury

POP 151,200

Canterbury tops the charts for English cathedral cities and is one of southern England's top attractions. Many consider the World Heritage-listed cathedral that dominates its centre 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 for the past – it's a spirited place with an energetic student population and a wide choice of contemporary bars, restaurants and arts venues. Book ahead for the best hotels and eateries: pilgrims may no longer flock here in their thousands, but tourists certainly do.