

Southeast England



SOUTHEAST ENGLAND

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A region riddled by contradictions, the southeast of England skips effortlessly between natural beauty and rock-candy kitsch, rich history and cutting-edge culture. The closest stretch of land to Continental Europe, it has a rough-and-ready military heritage. Yet thanks to its proximity to London it's also a middle-class stronghold of cosy home comforts and high property prices.

Fanning out from the capital are the Home Counties of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Surrey. Though known as the capital's wealthy and well-spoken commuter belt, there's more to them than suits and boots (of the Wellington variety). Sleepy villages, pretty market towns, stunning natural vistas and stately homes pepper the landscape. The whole area is accessible by day trip from London, so you can pop in and out for some respite from city life. That's exactly what the Queen does, spending private weekends at her castellated pad at Windsor Castle.

The southeast coast meanwhile was once the nation's front line of defence, bolstered by formidable cliffs, castles and fortified ports. But like a veteran soldier, it's now fonder of its own age-old tales and mellow ales than maintaining its vigil. The counties of Essex, Kent, East and West Sussex and Hampshire are enfolded in a blanket of agricultural fields and rolling chalk downs, speckled with medieval villages and ancient cathedral cities. A string of alternately tacky, nostalgic and hedonistic seaside resorts exploit the mild climate and fast links from London. In short, this is the ideal region to soak up some maritime history, dine out on seafood, and charge around beaches, battlegrounds and traditional boozers to your heart's content.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Partying the night away beside beautiful **Brighton beach** (p234)
- Following in the footsteps of pilgrims to the enchanting cathedral city of **Canterbury** (p190)
- Playing at being Queen (or King) for a day at **Windsor Castle** (p206)
- Bringing on the vertigo peering down the 150m chalk cliffs of **Beachy Head** (p233)
- Taking a turn around 2000 years of history in **St Albans** (p185)
- Clambering aboard mighty warships in the historic naval dockyard of **Portsmouth** (p214)



■ POPULATION: 9.3 MILLION

■ AREA: 9784 SQ MILES

Information

- Kent Tourism** (www.kenttourism.co.uk)
- Tourism South East** (www.visitsoutheastengland.com) The official website for south and southeast England.
- Visit Bedfordshire & Luton** (www.visitbeds-luton.com)
- Visit Hampshire** (www.visit-hampshire.org.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 (p83). 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 southeast England, but the effort is richly rewarded. Long-distance burns that form part of the **National Cycle Network** (www.sustrans.org.uk) include the following:
Downs & Weald Cycle Route (150 miles) London to Brighton and on to Hastings.
Garden of England Cycle Route (165 miles) London to Dover and then Hastings.

You'll also find less-demanding routes on its 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. A great spot for gentler off-roading is the New Forest, which has a vast network of tracks and numerous rental shops.

WALKING

There may not be mountains in southeast England, but there are still beautiful rolling landscapes through which to ramble. Several long-distance trails meander steadily through the region, but there are plenty of shorter ambles to suit your schedule, stamina and scenery wishlist.

North Downs Way (153 miles) This popular walk begins near Farnham in Surrey but one of its most beautiful sections runs from near Ashford to Dover in Kent, and there's also a loop that takes in Canterbury near its end. The Box Hill and Devil's Punchbowl offer eye-watering views, sloping grasslands and romantic wooded areas.

Ridgeway (87 miles) From a starting point near Avebury Stone Circle in Wiltshire, this route runs to Ivinghoe Beacon near Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire.

South Downs Way (100 miles) The rolling chalk South Downs are hotly tipped to become England's newest national park during the life cycle of this book, and this trail is a beautiful roller-coaster walk along prehistoric droveways between the ancient capital of Winchester and seaside resort of Eastbourne.

Thames Path (184 miles) This one winds along the River Thames from its source in the Cotswolds (p343) right to the Thames Barrier in London. Before it reaches the capital, it skirts Windsor in Berkshire.

All these long-distance routes have sections ideal for shorter walks. History buffs will revel in the 1066 Country Walk (see p230), which connects with the South Downs Way. England's newest national park – at least for the moment – the New Forest is also popular walking country. And the Isle of Wight (see p222) is crisscrossed by paths and has some fine coastal stretches to explore on foot.

Getting There & Around

Regular trains and buses chunter in and out of London in this region but it's less easy to move sideways through the area using public transport. Renting a car is ideal for touring, but beware the rush hours of 6am to 9.30am and 4pm to 7pm when commuters can snarl the traffic to a snail's pace. Contact **National Traveline** ([☎](tel) 0870 608 2 608; www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk) for information on public transport in the area.

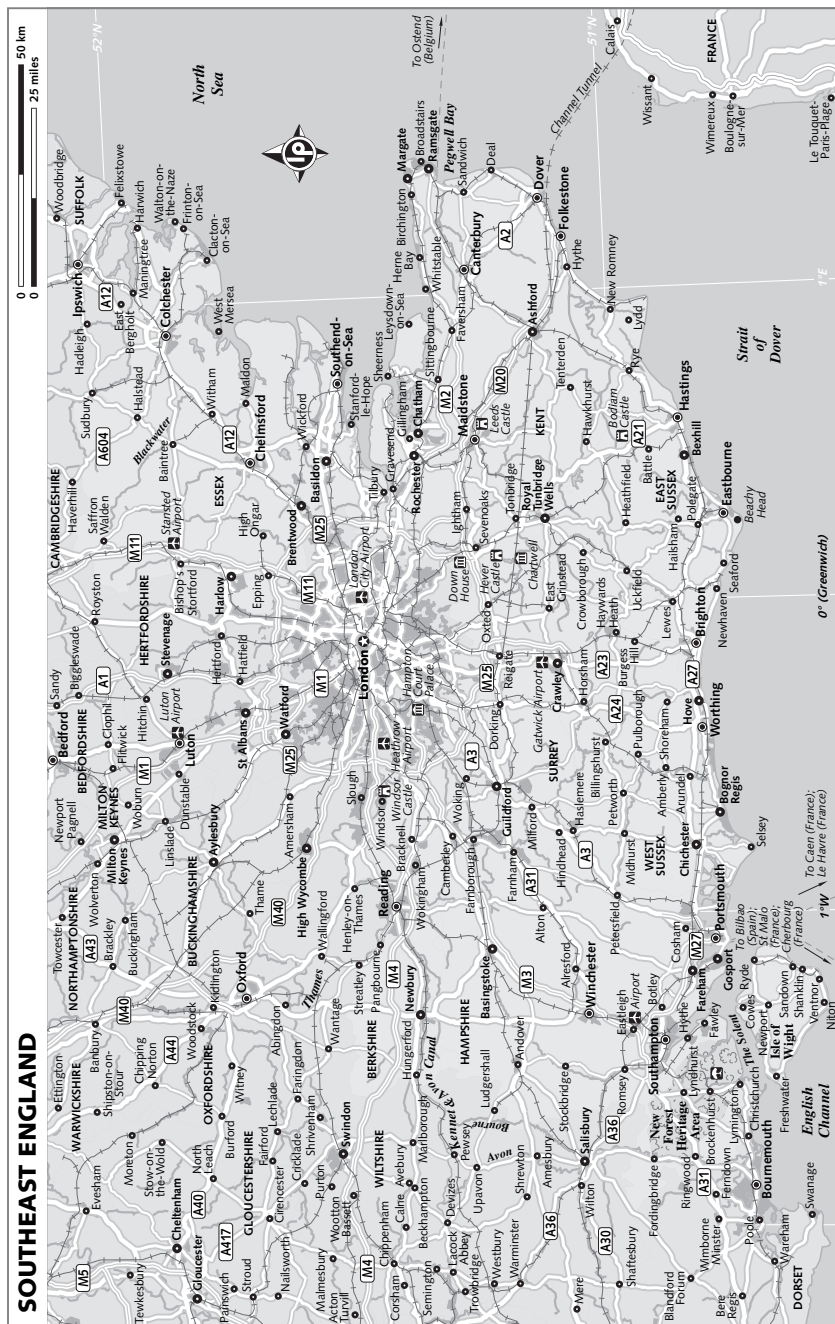
BUS

Explorer tickets (adult/child £6.80/5.30) provide day-long unlimited travel on most buses throughout the region; buy them at bus stations or on your first bus.

First Group (www.firstgroup.com) offers a FirstDay Essex pass for a day's unlimited bus travel on its county services. It costs adult/child/family £6/4.40/12. It operates a similar service in Hampshire for £4.40/3.35/10. There's also a FirstWeek pass available in both counties for £28 or £16.50 respectively.

Stagecoach Coastline (www.stagecoachbus.com) serves the coastline, East Kent and East Sussex areas. Travellers can buy an unlimited day (£5.50) or week (£20) Solent Travel Card (www.solent-travelcard.org.uk), good on major bus lines along the Hampshire coast.

Arriva ([☎](tel) 0870 120 1088) also offers a variety of day, weekly and monthly passes.



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 (£70), four days in eight (£132), or seven days in fifteen (£176) and must be purchased outside the UK; see p973 for more details.

You can secure 33% discounts on most rail fares over £10 throughout the southeast of England by purchasing a **Network Railcard** (☎ 08457 48 49 50 for the phone number of your nearest station; www.railcard.co.uk/network/network.htm; per yr £20). Children under 15 can save 60%, but a minimum £1 fare applies. There are some restrictions on usage (see website for details), and you can't travel before 10am Monday to Friday.

HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire is a small county of fast-disappearing though still pastoral farmland. But it's not all daisies and buttermilk here. Hertfordshire is also home to stunning St Albans, a predominantly Georgian town that dates back to Roman times, and Hatfield House, one of Britain's most important stately homes and the county's top attraction.

ST ALBANS

☎ 01727 / pop 114,710

A mere 25-minute train ride from London, St Albans is one of the most interesting and attractive spots in southeast England.

Founded as Verulamium after the Roman invasion of AD 43, St Albans was renamed in the 3rd century after a Roman soldier, Alban, lost his head (both literally and, his detractors believed, figuratively) in punishment for sheltering a Christian priest in 209. He became England's first Christian martyr, and the small city was soon a site of pilgrimage – visitors can still see the shrine in the majestic cathedral.

Other attractions include the Georgian and Tudor architectural eye-candy, the excellent Roman museum, the bustling market on Wednesday and Saturday, good shopping, even better pubs and the local love of beer (see the boxed text, p187).

Orientation & Information

St Peter's St, 10 minutes' walk west of the train station on Victoria St, is the focus of

A COTTAGE OF YOUR OWN

Sometimes a hotel just isn't as convenient or relaxing as a self-catering cottage. 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)

If these fail to tick your boxes, visit the tourism office for the entire southeast (www.visitsoutheastengland.com) and search under Accommodation/Self Catering.

the town. East of St Peter's, St George St turns into Fishpool St, a charming lane that winds its way past old-world pubs to leafy Verulamium Park.

The **tourist office** (☎ 864511; tic@stalbans.gov.uk; Market Pl; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm every 2nd Sun of month & public holidays) is in the grand town hall in the marketplace. It has bags of literature on the town's attractions including the useful *Discover St Albans* town trail (95p) and the free *Visitors Guide*, which features a handy town map. If you like guided walks, a selection of themed options including 'Monks, Mysteries and Mischief' and the intriguing combination 'Pubs & Chapels' start from here – check times (tours are usually on Wednesday and Sunday but it varies) and buy your ticket (£2) at the tourist office.

All the major banks and ATMs are on St Peter's St, near the tourist office. The main **post office** (St Peter's St; ☎ 9.30am–5pm Mon–Sat) is also in the town centre. Internet access is free in the **library** (☎ 737333; Maltings Shopping Centre).

Paton Books (34 Holywell Hill) is a marvellous bookshop full of new and dusty old books (including hard-to-find titles) housed in an elegant 17th-century building.

There's a **laundrette** (13 Catherine St) off St Peter's St.

Sights

ST ALBANS CATHEDRAL

This magnificent **cathedral** (☎ 890200; ☎ 8am–5.45pm) started life in 793 as a Benedictine church, built by King Offa of Mercia around the tomb of St Alban. Between 1077 and 1115 the church was completely rebuilt using material

from the old Roman town of Verulamium, and then in the 12th and 13th centuries Gothic extensions and decorations were added. The resulting mishmash reveals a host of interesting features, including semi-lost wall paintings, stunningly ornate ceilings (a surprise after the relatively plain nave), a 20th-century luminescent rose window unveiled by Princess Diana, the elaborate nave screen and of course the shrine of St Alban (which in many ways is less impressive than these other delights).

There are guided **tours** (🕒 11.30am & 2.30pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am & 2pm Sat, 2.30pm Sun) of the cathedral and there's a café in the chapterhouse. Admission is by donation.

VERULAMIUM MUSEUM & ROMAN RUINS

Arrowheads, glassware, grave goods (items the dead take to the afterlife), interactive and audiovisual displays and re-created rooms make this **museum** (📞 751810; St Michael's St; adult/child £3.30/2; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-5.30pm Sun) a fantastic exposé of everyday life under the Romans. Most impressive is the Mosaic Room, where five outstanding floors, uncovered between 1930 and 1955, are laid out. Tickets allow you a return visit on the same day.

Adjacent **Verulamium Park** has remains of a basilica, bathhouse and parts of the city wall. A mobile-phone tour (£2; ask at the museum) will guide you by text message (don't forget to look up in case you bump into a ruin).

Across the busy A4147 are the grassy foundations of a **Roman theatre** (📞 835035; adult/child £2/1; 🕒 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb).

MUSEUM OF ST ALBANS

For an uncomplicated history of St Albans, this **museum** (📞 819340; Hatfield Rd; admission free; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) does a good job. Exhibits include tools used between 1700 and 1950 by English tradespeople, and artefacts dug up by archaeologists in the city.

CLOCK TOWER

The only medieval belfry in England stands on High St. It was built around 1410 and 'Gabriel' (the original bell) is still there. Take a deep breath and climb the 93 steps of the **tower** (High St; admission 30p; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Sat, Sun & Bank Holidays Apr-Oct) for great views over the town.

Sleeping

Mrs Thomas' (📞 858939; 8 Hall Place Gardens; s/d without bathroom £25/50) This well-kept, friendly B&B has a

lovely single room with balcony and a spacious double, both of which share a bathroom.

White Hart (📞 853624; 25 Holywell Hill; s & d £40, family r £75; 🍷) A charming half-timbered hotel with exposed beams and creaky floors just a couple of minutes' walk from the centre. A full English breakfast is £5.50 extra.

our pick St Michael's Manor (📞 864444; Fishpool St; s/d from £145/180) Set in 2.5 hectares of beautiful grounds complete with a lake, this traditionally decorated hotel makes a wonderful retreat on photogenic and historic Fishpool St.

Eating

St Albans has plenty of restaurants, cuisines and good pub food vying for your appetite.

Waffle House (📞 853502; St Michael's St; mains £4.95-6.95; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) Everything in this Saxon-era low-beamed snug comes with a Belgian waffle made with organic flour. Choose from savoury delights such as ham, cheese and mushroom, or satisfy your sweet tooth with a banoffee waffle. Yummy.

Thai Rack (📞 850055; 13 George St; mains £5-10) This peaceful and small restaurant has a meditative outdoor patio and excellent curry.

our pick Lussmanns Eatery (📞 851941; Waxhouse Gate; mains £6.20-16.45) This stylish three-floored Mediterranean restaurant off High St, with oak, leather and metal décor and plenty of glass for natural light, is understandably popular with locals. Book in advance for Friday and Saturday night.

Drinking

St Albans has one of the best collections of pubs in southern England.

our pick Ye Olde Fighting Cocks (📞 865830; 16 Abbey Mill Lane) Reputedly the oldest pub in England (a former manager allegedly proved a pub stood here in AD 795!), this unusual octagonal-shaped inn has oodles of charm. Oliver Cromwell spent a night here, stabling his horses in what's now the bar; underground tunnels lead to the cathedral. Drink in this historic atmosphere while you nurse your pint.

Rose & Crown (📞 851903; 10 St Michael's St) Another St Albans favourite, this 16th-century pub with beautiful beer garden features live music on Monday at 9pm and Irish music on Thursday at 8pm.

Goat (📞 833934; 37 Sopwell Lane) Tucked away on a residential lane, this delightful pub is a warren of little rooms including library and games room with Chesterfield sofas.

ST ALBANS BEER FESTIVAL

Beer means business in Britain, and to prove it the South Hertfordshire branch of Campaign for Real Ale (Camra) puts on a four-day festival at the end of September to celebrate the sanctity of good beer and its key role in the national culture. There are many beer festivals in Britain worth checking out, and this one is no exception. Close to 5000 people converge on the Alban Arena off St Peter's St to sample and talk about hundreds of real ales from Britain and overseas. (For more information on real ales, see p105.) There's food available, and on Friday and Saturday evenings there's music to keep everyone entertained. Depending on the day you go, tickets range from £2 to £3, which is a bit of a bargain. For more information see www.stalbansbeerfestival.info or www.hertsale.org.uk.

Also recommended:

Black Lion Inn (📞 851786; 198 Fishpool St) Roman malting ovens were found here. Probably the least atmospheric of all St Albans pubs.

Lower Red Lion Freehouse (📞 855669; 36 Fishpool St) Has regular beer festivals. A little rough around the edges, but there's a charming outdoor beer garden.

Six Bells (📞 856945; 16-18 St Michael's St) Next door to the Rose & Crown, this popular, low-ceilinged spot has a cosy fireplace and good pub food.

Getting There & Away

Rail is the most direct way to get to St Albans, although if you are coming from Heathrow you can catch Green Line bus 724, which leaves hourly and takes an hour. St Albans station is on Victoria St, a 10-minute walk east of St Peter's St. Thameslink trains depart every 15 minutes from London King's Cross to St Albans station (£7.80, 23 minutes).

AROUND ST ALBANS

Hatfield House

England's most magnificent Jacobean mansion, **Hatfield House** (📞 01707-287010; adult/child £8/4, park only £2; 🕒 noon-4pm Wed-Sun & public holidays, gardens 11am-5.30pm Easter-Sep) was built between 1607 and 1611 for Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury and secretary of state to both Elizabeth I and James I.

Inside, you'll find a grand marble hall, famous portraits and a magnificent oak staircase decorated with carved figures, including one of John Tradescant, the 17th-century botanist responsible for the gardens.

Four-course Elizabethan banquets, complete with minstrels and court jesters, are held in the great hall on Friday nights for around £40. Book on 📞 01707-262055.

The house is opposite Hatfield train station, and there are numerous trains from London King's Cross station (£6.80, 25 minutes).

Regular bus services run between St Albans and Hatfield.

Shaw's Corner

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) spent the last 44 years of his life in this attractive **Arts & Crafts house** (📞 01438-820307; Ayot St Lawrence; adult/child £4.20/2.10; 🕒 1-5pm Wed-Sun mid-Mar–Nov) and it has been preserved pretty much as he left it. In the garden is the writing hut (which revolves to catch the sun) where he penned several works including *Pygmalion*, the play on which the film *My Fair Lady* was based and which won him an Oscar.

Bus 304 from St Albans drops you at Gustard Wood, 1.5 miles from Ayot St Lawrence.

ESSEX

Poor old Essex has been the butt of English jokes and target for snobbery for decades. Its inhabitants are ridiculed for their bottle-blond manes, promiscuous persuasions, witless ways and loud cars. But throw the stereotypes aside and you'll discover a county filled with diversity and diversions. Here lies historic Colchester, Britain's oldest town with a burgeoning arts scene. Sleepy medieval villages hide down winding lanes and amid countryside that inspired the painter Constable. But if you'd rather skip culture and seek out Essex's saucy stereotypical soul, make a beeline to Southend-on-Sea, the most popular fun-in-the-sun resort near London.

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA

📞 01702 / pop 160,257

On the doorstep of London, the seaside resort of Southend certainly has its selling points to the capital's weekenders: sandy sprawling beaches for one and an absurdly long pier for

another. However, it's also one of the more gaudy and belligerent of England's summer sun-and-sea destinations, thick with lurid amusements and seedy nightclubs. But if you have a craving for ice cream, fish and chips and salty sea air, it will be well satisfied here.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 215120; www.visitsouthend.co.uk; Southend Pier, Western Esplanade; ☎ 8.15am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-8pm Sat & Sun Apr-May & Oct, 8.15am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-10pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep, 8.15am-4pm Nov-Mar) is at the entrance to the pier. Banks and shops crowd along High St.

Sights & Activities

Other than mile upon mile of tawny imported-sand and shingle **beaches**, Southend's main attraction is the world's longest **pier** (☎ 215620; www.southendpier.co.uk; admission Apr-Sep/Oct-Mar £2.50/50p; ☎ 8am-10pm Apr-Oct, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), built in 1830. At a staggering 1.33 miles long it's an impressive edifice and a magnet for boat crashes, storms and fires, the last of which ravaged its tip in 2005. The surprisingly peaceful stroll to its tip will help burn off those rock-candy calories, and a wheezy Pier Railway (included in admission price) can save you the long slog back.

Afterwards, dip beneath the pier's entrance to explore an old 'toasts-rack' pier train and antique slot machines at the **museum** (☎ 611214; adult/under 12yr 60p/free; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Wed, Sat & Sun May-Oct).

Kids can come nose to nose with sharks in glass tunnels and meet celebrity sea horses while parents grit their teeth at the saccharine seaside soundtrack in the good little **Sealife Adventure** (☎ 442211; www.sealifeadventure.co.uk; Eastern Esplanade; adult/child £6/4.50; ☎ 10am-7pm) aquarium, half a mile east of the pier.

Or you can embrace Southend's tacky sea-side soul, inhale Rossi's velvety ice cream, rock candy or candy floss before jumping on head-spinning rides or ramming each other in dodgems at lurid amusement park **Adventure Island** (☎ 443400; www.adventureisland.co.uk; Western Esplanade; ☎ daily Apr-Aug, Sat & Sun Sep-Mar), beside the pier.

Sleeping & Eating

Gleneagles Hotel (☎ 333635; www.thegleneagleshotel.co.uk; 5 Clifftown Pde; s/d/ste £32.50/55/80; ☎) A handsome mid-19th-century terraced building facing out into the estuary, Gleneagles has many of its Victorian features intact. It also has crisply maintained rooms with period style and thoughtful extras, an extra-special suite with panoramic windows and cute little patio café.

WORTH THE TRIP

A Cistercian abbey before Henry VIII got dissolving and gave it to the earl of Bedford, **Woburn Abbey** (☎ 01525-290333; www.woburnabbey.co.uk; adult/child £10.50/6; ☎ 11am-5.30pm Apr-Oct) is a wonderful stately home set in a deer park and stuffed with mainly 18th-century furniture, porcelain, silver and paintings. Highlights include Queen Victoria's bedroom where she slept with Prince Albert in a marvellous bed fit for – well – a queen; the beautiful wall hangings and cabinets of the Chinese Room; the inspiring and ultimately mysterious story of the Flying Duchess; the design of the Long Gallery, perfect for perambulating; and the dining room adorned with a collection of Canaletto paintings commissioned by the fourth duke of Bedford and enjoyed by the current duke (the 15th) when the family entertains.

Just a giraffe's neck away is **Woburn Safari Park** (☎ 01525-290407; www.woburnsafari.co.uk; adult/child £15/11; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Nov-Feb), the country's largest drive-through animal reserve. Your car will skirt rhinos, tigers, lions, zebras, bison, elephants, giraffes and a host of other animals you'd never expect to see so close up in Bedfordshire. Don't be surprised if a monkey climbs all over your car (no convertibles allowed) and chews your wing mirror. There's also a 'foot safari' area with sea lions, penguins, and lemurs, plus adventure playgrounds, a restaurant and a bounce funland for toddlers. Feeding times and demonstrations are scattered throughout the day.

If you visit the safari park first you'll be given a 50%-off voucher for the abbey and vice versa.

Although the abbey and safari park are easily accessible by car off the M1 motorway, trains from King's Cross with Thameslink only run to Flitwick, leaving you to take a taxi for the last 5 miles. If you have time, pop into the very pretty village of Woburn after your visit.

Fleur de Provence (☎ 352987; www.fleurdeprovence.co.uk; 54 Alexandra St; mains £16-18, set meal £15; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) For a glimpse of Southend's sophisticated side head away from the seafrost to this chic Continental restaurant behind a frosted-glass façade, with pastel blush walls, blonde-wood floors and romantic ambience.

Getting There & Around

The easiest way to arrive is by train. There are several services each hour from London Liverpool St to Southend Victoria station or from London Fenchurch St to Southend Central station (£10.90, 55 minutes). The seafrost is a 10- to 15-minute walk from either train station. For taxis, try **Southend Radio Cars** (☎ 345678).

COLCHESTER

☎ 01206 / pop 104,390

An easy day or weekend foray from London, Colchester is a charming place with a likable easygoing feel and a history that's hard to beat. It claims the title as Britain's oldest recorded city, with settlement noted here as early as the 5th century BC. Centuries later in AD 43, the Romans came, saw, conquered and constructed their northern capital Camulodunum here. So too, the invading Normans, who saw Colchester's potential and built a monstrous war machine of a castle on Roman foundations. But it's not all bygones and battlements here. By the end of 2007, Colchester will also be home to a spectacular new horseshoe-shaped gallery, Firstsite.

Orientation & Information

There are two train stations, but most services stop at North station, about half a mile north of the centre. The current bus station is off Queen St near the tourist office, but by 2010 will move to a new location on Vineyard St.

The **tourist office** (☎ 282920; www.visitcolchester.com; 1 Queen St; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) is opposite the castle. **Pulse** (☎ 570577; Centurion House, St John's St; per hr £2; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun) has internet access. There are a couple of post offices on North Hill and Longe Wyre St, while banks with ATMs can be found on High St.

Sights & Activities

England's largest surviving Norman keep, bigger even than that of the Tower of London

and once a hair-raising symbol of foreign invasion, now slumbers innocently amid a sweet-smelling park across from the tourist office. **Colchester Castle** (☎ 282939; www.colchester-museums.org.uk; adult/child £4.90/3.10; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun) was begun in 1076, building upon the foundations of a Roman fort. The interactive castle museum is exceptional, with plenty of try-on togas and sound effects to keep young curiosity alive. There are also illuminating guided tours (adult/child £1.90/1) of the Roman vaults, Norman rooftop chapel and castle walls.

Tymperleys, a magnificent timber-framed 15th-century building 100m east of the castle just off High St, also houses the hypnotic **Clock Museum** (☎ 282939; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct), which echoes to the steady ticktocking of one of the largest clock collections in Britain.

Sidestep the town's lacklustre natural-history museum in favour of the world-class naturalistic enclosures of **Colchester Zoo** (☎ 331292; www.colchester-zoo.co.uk; Maldon Rd, Stanway; adult/child £13.50/7.50; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 9.30am-6.30pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-dusk Oct-Mar), 5 miles northeast of the castle, where you can get hands-on with elephants and giraffes, and watch sea lions prouette from underwater tunnels. Eastern National bus 75 stops at the zoo.

Tours

The tourist office has a variety of themed, guided **walking tours** (adult/child £3/2; ☎ Apr-Oct) of the town at 11.30am on weekends, and on Monday in July and August. Visit www.colchesterwhatson.co.uk or call ahead for details. The tourist office also sells tickets for **City Sightseeing** (www.citysightseeing.co.uk; adult/child £7.50/3; ☎ Apr-Sep) open-top bus tours.

Sleeping

Old Manse (☎ 545154; www.doveuk.com/oldmanse; 15 Roman Rd; s/d incl breakfast £35/60; ☎) A lovely Victorian home with a chunk of Roman wall in its garden. Old Manse is only a few minutes' walk from the centre and is a run by a motherly hostess. Its three rooms are tastefully done and breakfast is a sociable communal affair.

Red Lion (☎ 577986; www.corus-hotels.com; High St; s/d from £75/85; ☎ wi-fi) This show-stealing oak-timbered hotel built in 1465 and overhanging High St doesn't disappoint inside either, especially not in the high-beamed banquet hall where guests can enjoy traditional

English fare. A few of the shipshape rooms also boast exposed oak beams and wattle-and-daub walls.

Rose & Crown Hotel (☎ 866677; www.rose-and-crown.com; East St; s/d from £90/100; (P) (X) (Q)) This endearingly lopsided 14th-century posting inn, with leaded windows, overhang and exposed timber frame, is the oldest hotel in town, but features a showroom-perfect modern wing. Its bar is the most atmospheric in Colchester, and its restaurant is renowned for its fusion of French and Indian flavours.

Eating

Garden Café @ the Minories Art Gallery (☎ 500169; 74 High St; mains £4-6; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) An eccentric little neo-Gothic folly graces the sprawling garden behind this artsy café, housed in a town house art gallery of big repute. It dishes up generous daily specials until 3pm.

Lemon Tree (☎ 767337; 48 St John's St; mains £9-13.50; ☎ 10.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat) This zesty little eatery is graced by a knobbly Roman wall and cavern in the corner and creative British and Continental cuisine on the menu. Décor strikes a nice chic-to-rustic balance and there are tasty blackboard specials, frequent gourmet nights and occasional live jazz.

Getting There & Around

Colchester is 62 miles from London. There are three daily National Express buses from London Victoria (£9.80, 2½ hours) and rail services every 15 to 20 minutes from London Liverpool St (£18.70, 55 minutes). For a cab, call **A1 Taxis** (☎ 544744).

KENT

Sitting demurely in London's backyard, Kent is justly described as the garden of England. This neatly manicured landscape of lush farmland, cultivated country estates, fruitful orchards, and carefully nurtured tourist attractions seems to mirror its own glorious public gardens on a grand scale. It's also the beer garden of England, producing the world-renowned Kent hops and some of the country's finest ales. Here too are long coastal stretches dotted with old-fashioned beach resorts, spellbinding Canterbury crowned by its fascinating cathedral, and the port of Dover, which is close enough to France to smell the garlic or hop over on a day trip to taste it.

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, which was 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.

CANTERBURY

☎ 01227 / pop 43,552

With history along every lane, an old alehouse on every corner and a captivating World Heritage-listed cathedral plump in its heart, Canterbury is one of southern England's top attractions. Its narrow medieval alleyways and precarious timber-beamed buildings are a joy to explore, as are its riverside gardens and ancient city walls. Yet Canterbury is no mere showpiece to times past, but a spirited and lively place with a large student contingent 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 *cathedral* (primary see) and set about building an abbey on the outskirts of town. Following the martyrdom of Thomas Becket (see the boxed text, opposite), 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 p193).

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

Orientation

Canterbury's Old Town is enclosed by a bulky medieval city wall that itself makes a wonder-

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

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

INTERNET ACCESS

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

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

MEDICAL SERVICES

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

Kent & Canterbury Hospital (☎ 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.

LAUNDRY

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

POST

Post office (29 High St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

TOURIST OFFICES

Tourist office (☎ 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; staff can help book accommodation, excursions and theatre tickets.

Sights

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

It's hard to imagine a more imposing mother church for Anglicanism than this majestic early Gothic **cathedral** (☎ 762862; www.canterbury-cathedral.org; adult/concession £5/4; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat May-Aug, 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Sep-Apr, plus 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.

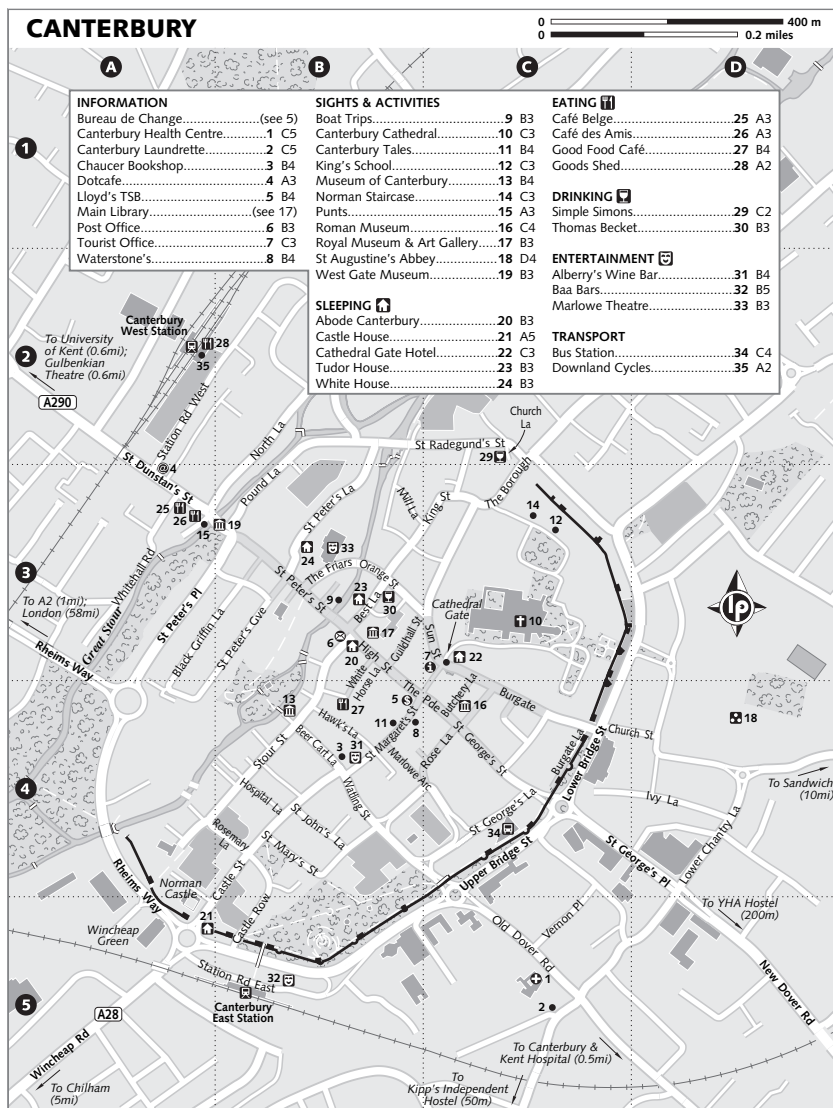
It's an overwhelming edifice filled with enthralling stories, striking architecture and a very real and enduring sense of spirituality, though visitors can't help but pick up on the ominous undertones of violence and bloodshed that whisper from its walls.

This great antique war machine is chock-a-block 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). And of course, it was here that saintly Archbishop Thomas Becket met his grisly end at the altar (see the boxed text, below). You'll find the very spot that has drawn pilgrims for more than 800 years in the northwest transept, 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.

KEEP YOUR ENEMIES CLOSE...

In 1162 King Henry II did what every good monarch should do. He appointed his good mate Thomas Becket to the highest clerical office in the land in the hope that a friendly archbishop could force the increasingly vocal religious lobby to toe the royal line. But Henry didn't count on Thomas taking his job as seriously as he did, and by 1170 Henry had become exasperated with his former favourite's penchant for disagreeing with virtually everything the king said or did. He sulked and raged for a while, then late in the year 'suggested' to four of his knights that Thomas was a little too much to bear. The dirty deed was done on 29 December. Becket's martyrdom – and canonisation in double-quick time (1173) – catapulted the cathedral to the top spot in northern Europe's top 10 pilgrimage sites. Mindful of the growing opprobrium 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.



The wealth of detail in the cathedral is immense and unrelenting, so it's well worth joining a one-hour **tour** (adult/child £4/2; ☎ 10.30am, noon & 2.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am, noon & 1.30pm Sat Sep-Oct, noon & 2pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar), or you can take a 30-minute self-guided **audio tour** (adult/child £2.95/1.95). 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

If you're in the mood for museums, the Museum Passport (adult/child £6/3.60) will grant you free admission to all the following. Individual charges are given with each listing for those without the passport.

A fine 14th-century building, once the Poor Priests' Hospital, now houses the absorbing **Museum of Canterbury** (☎ 475202; www.canterbury-museums.co.uk; Stour St; adult/child £3.30/2.20; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 1.30-5pm Sun Jun-Sep), which has varied exhibits from pre-Roman times to the assassination of Becket, and from Joseph Conrad to locally born celebs. The kids' room is excellent, with a memorable glimpse of real medieval poo among other amusements. There's also a fun Rupert Bear Museum (Mary Tourtel, creator of the yellow-checked trousered bear, was born in Canterbury).

A fascinating subterranean archaeological site forms the basis of the **Roman Museum** (☎ 785575; Butchery Lane; adult/child £3/1.85; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 1.30-5pm Sun Jun-Oct), which lets you get hands-on with artefacts and walk around reconstructed rooms. The museum culminates with the original mosaic floors, which despite dim lighting and awkward display, are impressive.

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 Museum** (☎ 789576; St Peter's St; adult/concession £1.20/75p; ☎ 11am-12.30pm & 1.30-3.30pm Mon-Sat) of arms and armour. The rooftop views are worth squeezing up the spiral staircase for.

The mock-Tudor façade of the **Royal Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 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, Henri Moore and Van Dyke.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

Aiming to resurrect Geoffrey Chaucer's classic characters in all their respective smutty, bawdy, conniving and holier-than-thou technicolour, the ambitious **Canterbury Tales** (☎ 479227; www.canterburytales.org.uk; St Margaret's St; adult/child £7.25/5.25; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9.30am-5pm Jul & Aug, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Feb) certainly makes for an entertaining 45 minutes trailing through a series of reconstructed scenes from the book. While the jerky animatronics could never do full justice to the classic tales, it's a lively introduction for the young or uninitiated.

ST AUGUSTINE'S ABBEY

An integral but oft-overlooked part of the Canterbury World Heritage Site, **St Augustine's Abbey** (EH; ☎ 767345; adult/child £3.90/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Oct-Mar) 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.

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 Old English version.

Tours

Canterbury Historic River Tours (☎ 07790 534744; www.canterburyrivertours.co.uk; adult/child £5.50/4; ☎ 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 Walks (☎ 459779; www.canterbury-walks.co.uk; adult/under 12yr/senior & student £4.25/3/3.75; ☎ 2pm daily Apr–Oct, plus 11.30am Mon–Sat Jul–mid–Sep) Chaperoned walking tours; leave from the tourist office.

Ghost tours (☎ 07779 575831; adult/child £5/4) Depart from outside Albery's wine bar in St Margaret's St at 8pm every Friday and Saturday. Only groups need book.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Kipp's Independent Hostel (☎ 786121; www.kipps-hostel.com; 40 Nunery Fields; dm/s/d £14/18.50/32; ☎ ☎) This gabled town house impresses with its relaxed, just-like-home atmosphere with friendly folk and long-term residents, communal areas, clean though cramped dorms, bike hire, space for a few tents in the garden and an adorable pet Labrador. It's just south of the centre.

YHA Hostel (☎ 462911; canterbury@yha.org.uk; 54 New Dover Rd; dm £16.95; ☎ ☎ ☎) Further out but worth the trip, this grand Victorian Gothic-style villa is spacious and well organised, with a grassy garden and cheaper ready-prepared tent accommodation. It's a terrific deal, and has single rooms and a bureau de change. It's 1.25 miles southeast of the centre, and open year-round by advanced booking.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Tudor House (☎ 765650; 6 Best Lane, s £25–35, d £48–55; ☎) Three overlapping storeys decorated by whitewashed shingles introduce this historic guesthouse, which sits beside the river near High St. While the interior underplays its period features, it has a cheerful and personable atmosphere, seven clean rooms with downmarket but cosy décor, sloping floors and the odd exposed beam.

Cathedral Gate Hotel (☎ 464381; cgate@cgate.demon.co.uk; 36 Burgate; s/d from £60/90, without bathroom from £35/50; ☎) Canterbury's most-photographed hotel adjoins the spectacular cathedral's gate, which it predates: a fact increasingly believable upon exploring its labyrinthine passageways where few rooms escape an angled floor, low door or wonky walls. Rooms are simple, but barring camping on the cathedral's stone porch you simply can't get a better position.

Castle House (☎ 761897; www.castlehousehotel.co.uk; 28 Castle St; s/d/f from £45/65/85; ☎ ☎ ☎) Sitting opposite the ruins of Canterbury's Norman castle, and incorporating part of the old city walls, this tastefully decorated early-18th-century guesthouse has an amiable welcome and seven classic high-ceilinged rooms. Families are very welcome.

White House (☎ 761836; www.canterburybreaks.co.uk; 6 St Peter's Lane; s/d/f £50/70/80; ☎ ☎) This exceedingly handsome Regency town house, supposedly once home to Queen Victoria's head coachman, has a friendly welcome, nine spick-and-span rooms with delicate floral patterns, period features and a few unexpected frills like tasselled light switches and classical music over breakfast.

Abode Canterbury (☎ 766266; www.abodehotels.co.uk; 30 High St) Right in the very heart of the city on a busy shopping street opposite the striking Royal Museum & Art Gallery, Canterbury's most central top ender was set to reopen after a thorough revamp and ownership change at the time of writing. Check the website for details.

Eating

Good Food Café (☎ 456654; 1 Jewry Lane; soups £3.95, specials £6.95; ☎ 11am–3pm Tue–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat) It isn't kidding. The vegetarian food at this simple but elegant café above a health-food store is more than good. Plates overflow with locally sourced, organic and biodynamically grown veggies and daily specials such as tortillas and lasagne.

Café des Amis (☎ 464390; 95 St Dunstan's St; mains £7–13; ☎ lunch & dinner) This fun Mexican restaurant is well loved for its all-afternoon lunch, great food in enormous portions and a lively colourful atmosphere augmented by Latin music, entertaining artwork, beautiful staff and chilled margaritas.

Goods Shed (☎ 459153; Station Rd West; lunch £8–12, dinner £10–16; ☎ market 10am–7pm Tue–Sat & 10am–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.

Café Belge (☎ 768222; 89–90 St Dunstan's St; mains £8.95–16; ☎ lunch & dinner) Think Belgian mealtimes and mussels, *frites* (chips) and beer spring to mind,

but this award-winning restaurant will astonish with its variety. Its '50 ways to eat a mussel' leaves diners drooling, and the list of beers tops a hundred. The cosy dining area is decorated with images of Tin Tin and pop art.

Drinking

Simple Simons (☎ 762355; 3–9 Church Lane) If you've come to Britain on a real-ale pilgrimage, this is one stop you shouldn't miss. A medley of local beers, guest ales, stouts, porters and scrumpy line the bar in this atmospheric 15th-century pub, which has a heavy-beamed ceiling, a roaring fire and a rhododendron-dotted rear garden.

Thomas Beckett (☎ 464384; 21 Best Lane) Another quintessentially English pub with a garden's worth of hops hanging from its timber frame, several quality ales to sample and a traditional décor 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).

Entertainment

Albery's Wine Bar (☎ 452378; St Margaret's St) Every night is different at this hip 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.

Baa Bars (☎ 462520; 15 Station Rd East; admission £3) There are three floors of different DJs, dance floors and bars at this edgy, almost industrial-looking, nightclub beside the train station.

Marlowe Theatre (☎ 787787; www.marlowetheatre.com; The Friars) Canterbury's central venue for performing arts brings in some wonderful touring plays, dances, concerts and musicals year-round.

Gulbenkian Theatre (☎ 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 off High St. There are frequent buses to London Victoria (£11.40, two hours, hourly), and hourly services to Dover (35 minutes).

Around three buses per hour run to Margate (53 minutes), and two per hour run to Broadstairs (one hour) and Ramsgate (one hour 20 minutes). Services to Whitstable leave every 15 minutes (30 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, Victoria and Waterloo stations.

London-bound trains leave frequently (£18.70, 1½ hours, two to three hourly), as do Canterbury East to Dover Priority trains (£5.20, 16 to 28 minutes, every 30 minutes).

Getting Around

Canterbury's centre is mostly pedestrianised. Car parks are dotted along and just within the walls. Central parking vouchers cost from £6 to £10 for 24 hours or £1 to £1.60 per daytime hour. Day-trippers may prefer to use one of the city's three Park & Ride sites, which cost £2 per day and are connected to the centre by buses every 10 minutes from 7am to 7.30pm Monday to Saturday, and 10am to 6pm Sunday.

Taxi companies include **Cathedral Cars** (☎ 451 000) and **Cabwise** (☎ 712929). **Downland Cycles** (☎ 479643; www.downlandcycles.co.uk; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sat, 11am–5pm Sun) rents bikes from the London-bound platform at Canterbury West station. Bikes cost £12 per day with helmet.

WHITSTABLE

☎ 01227 / pop 30,159

Famous for its succulent oysters, which have been harvested off these warm shores since Roman times, Whitstable has an unspoilt charm far removed from other regional resorts. Still a humble fishing village at heart, its streets sport names like Squeeze Gut Alley and Skinner's Alley, and are home to a host of venerable old seafood restaurants. The shingle beach is barbed with rows of groins, but is a pretty stretch nonetheless, dotted with multicoloured beach huts and overlooked by sharp cliffs east of town. And from atop the grass-topped Tankerton Slopes you can spy the Street, a narrow shingle ridge stretching half a mile out to sea but only exposed at low tide.

The **tourist office** (☎ 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, while the nearby **library** (☎ 273

309; 31-33 Oxford St; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, to 1pm Wed, to 4pm Sat) can make you a temporary member to use its internet terminals.

Festivals & Events

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), which not only gives you double the excuse to wash down juicy oysters with Guinness or champagne but offers a packed schedule of events, from the traditional 'blessing of the waters' to samba and jazz bands, oyster-eating competitions to a beer festival.

Sleeping

Alliston (☎ 779066; bobgough57@aol.com; 1 Joy Lane; s/d £40/60; (P) ☒) A 10-minute walk from the centre, this delightful B&B is run by a charming double act of Ernie Wise and Albert Finney lookalikes. It has just three spacious, pristine rooms with plenty of daylight, and breakfast is served looking out over the pretty garden.

Hotel Continental (☎ 280280; www.hotelcontinental.co.uk; 29 Beach Walk; s/d/huts from £55/60/100, d with sea view & balcony £100; (P) ☒) This elegant three-storey Art Deco building by the waterfront has cheerfully decorated if somewhat overpriced rooms as well as a row of charmingly converted fisherman's huts on the beach. Room rates increase by £35 to £45 at weekends, and in July and August.

Eating

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

Wheeler's Oyster Bar (☎ 273311; 8 High St; mains £13-19; ☎ lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) This adorable little spot has served oysters since 1856, and continues to peddle the freshest catch as passionately as ever. It also has a tiny Victorian parlour, filled with sea-faring gear and old photos, for a dignified sit-down meal.

Whitstable Oyster Fishery Co Restaurant (☎ 276 856; www.oysterfishery.co.uk; The Horsebridge; mains £13-25; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) The most famous

seafood restaurant in the region sits right beside the water and serves a variety of simply cooked, fresh-from-the-nets treats from sea bass to cockles.

Getting There & Away

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

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 1st 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

☎ 01843 / pop 57,000

A popular seaside resort for more than 250 years thanks to its fine-sand beaches, Margate still strives to recapture its Victorian heyday of candy-striped beach huts, donkey rides and Punch and Judy puppet shows. But these days it's more about amusements and chippies, and outside summer has the melancholy air of a town past its prime.

Visit the **tourist office** (☎ 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 mystifying subterranean **Shell Grotto** (☎ 220008; www.shellgrotto.co.uk; Grotto Hill; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm daily Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Apr), a snug set of passageways discovered in 1835 and plastered with several million 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.

SLEEPING & EATING

YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5956; margate@yha.org.uk; The Beachcomber, 3-4 Royal Esplanade; dm members/nonmembers £10.95/13.95; ☎) This faintly hotel-like hostel sits mere paces from a sandy Blue Flag beach and about half a mile west from the tourist office. It caters especially well to families. Book 48 hours in advance.

Walpole Bay Hotel (☎ 221703; www.walpolebayhotel.co.uk; 5th Ave, Cliftonville; s/d from £50/70; ☎) For a dose of good ol' English eccentricity look no further than this musty part-hotel, part-museum of Victorian life. The pink flouncy rooms are furnished with antiques while public spaces are filled by glass-cased displays of 19th-century memorabilia. The hotel is a mile from central Margate, in Cliftonville.

Newbys Wine Bar & Brasserie (☎ 292888; 1 Market St; mains £8-13; ☎ dinner Thu, lunch & dinner Fri & Sat) In a town not blessed by good eateries, this is the best place for fine wines, country-fresh food and bubbly French atmosphere. It serves seasonal menus with good local seafood.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses to Margate leave from London Victoria (£11.50, 2½ hours, five daily). From Canterbury take bus 8 (53 minutes, three hourly).

Trains run twice hourly from London Victoria and less frequently from Charing Cross (£21.60, 1¾ hours).

Broadstairs

☎ 01843 / pop 24,370

Unlike its bigger, brasher neighbours, the pretty little 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. Behind the neatly manicured gardens, the cute little orange-sand bay and its wistful Punch and Judy shows, however, is a far grittier history of smuggling and shipbuilding.

The **tourist office** (☎ 861232; Dickens House Museum, 2 Victoria Pde; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) has details of the annual, week-long **Dickens Festival** in mid-June which culminates in a banquet-cum-ball in Victorian dress (£15). It's located in the quaint **Dickens House Museum** (☎ 861232; www.dickenshouse.co.uk; 2 Victoria Pde; adult/child £2.30/1.20; ☎ 10am-4pm Apr-Oct), 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

Victoria (☎ 871010; www.thevictoriabroadstairs.co.uk; 23 Victoria Pde; s from £52-117, d £88-129; ☎) A refined spot with service to match, this Victorian house has plentiful period style and features six spotlessly maintained bedrooms. And if that doesn't convince you, it's a mere stone's throw from the beach.

Thai Four Two (☎ 862925; 42 York St; mains £4.50-7; ☎ 6-9pm Mon-Thu, 6-11pm Fri & Sat) This restful little nook with trickling fountains, lush greenery and bamboo chairs serves wonderful home-style Thai food, most of which can be adapted for vegetarians.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Thanet Loop bus runs every 15 minutes through the day to Ramsgate (20 minutes) and Margate (20 minutes).

Buses 8 and 9 also run twice hourly to Canterbury (one hour 20 minutes) via Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate. National Express buses leave High St for London Victoria (£11.50, three hours, five daily).

Trains to London Victoria (£22.50, 1¾ to 2¾ hours) leave twice hourly and there are less frequent services to London Bridge and Charing Cross. You may have to change at Ramsgate.

Ramsgate

☎ 01843 / pop 38,200

More welcoming than jaded big sis Margate and livelier than twee little neighbour Broadstairs, Ramsgate is the kind of varied and often quirky resort town that can appeal to all ages. While families and surfers splash about along the Blue Flag beach, cosmopolitan bars and easygoing street cafés line the marina and seafront promenade, and a different breed of cultural visitor is drawn to the town's rich maritime history and neo-Gothic architecture. And picturesquely sheltered below the handsomely arched harbour walls is a forest of rigging that creaks and whistles in the sea breeze.

On a small alleyway off Leopold St, the **tourist office** (☎ 583333; www.tourism.thanet.gov.uk; 17 Albert Ct; ☎ 9.15am-4.15pm Mon-Fri) has information and a self-guided walking map of the areas smuggler's caves.

TOP FIVE CASTLES

- Arundel Castle (Arundel; p226)
- Dover Castle (Dover; p199)
- Hever Castle (Kent Weald; p202)
- Leeds Castle (Kent Weald; p202)
- Windsor Castle (p206)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

When the sun shines, Rollerbladers, coffee quaffers, surfers and sunbathers all make a beeline to Ramsgate's reddish-sand and shingle beach and pleasant promenade, to the east of the main harbour under an imposing cliff.

At least 620 hapless ships have been wrecked in the notorious Goodwin Sands off this stretch of coast, and an intriguing assortment of loot from their barnacled carcasses can be found in the **Ramsgate Maritime Museum** (☎ 290399; www.ekmt.fsnet.co.uk; 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 clocktower near the harbour. Here too is a line marking Ramsgate's own meridian (the town has its own Ramsgate Mean Time).

SLEEPING

Crescent (☎ 591419; www.ramsgate-uk.com; 19 Wellington Cres; s/d without bathroom from £25/50) This guesthouse is the prettiest building in a row of curvaceous three-storey Georgian homes on a seafront cliff-top. It's run by very affable DIYers who keep its dozen rooms in good order. There are a few en-suite rooms for £10 more.

Royal Harbour Hotel (☎ 591514; www.royalharbourhotel.co.uk; Nelson Crescent; s/d from £65/85, superior r £100-215; ☎) Occupying a parallel seafront crescent to the west, this boutique hotel exudes an infectious enthusiasm. Books, paintings and newspapers lie everywhere and the 'cabins' have squeaky clean blue-and-white wood-panelled décor and postcard views over the forest of masts below.

EATING & DRINKING

Surin Restaurant (☎ 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 Lao food this side of the Hindu Kush, but sure enough, this darling little restaurant delivers. The restaurant is a dumpling's throw from the seafront and even serves its own label of microbrewed beers.

Ramsgate Brew House (☎ 594758; 98 Harbour Pde) Revelling in its own eccentricity, this part bakery, part brewery, part nuthouse on the harbour-front thumbs its nose at tradition. You're equally likely to see elderly bow-tied gents tinkering on the piano as ale-swilling holidaymakers, and civilised townfolk partaking of tea and pastries. Choose between

outdoor tables or a vast sawdusty interior with ale-making paraphernalia and nude statues.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

National Express bus 22 runs to London Victoria (£11.50, three hours, five daily) via Margate and Broadstairs. There are also local buses to Canterbury, Broadstairs and Ramsgate. Trains run twice hourly to London Victoria and Charing Cross (£22.50, two hours).

There's also a ferry service to Ostend in Belgium run by **Transeuropa Ferries** (☎ 595522; www.transeuropaferrries.com) from Ramsgate New Port just west of the centre (per passenger with car £39, five hours, three daily).

DOVER

☎ 01304 / pop 39,078

Dreary Dover is the kind of ugly port town that you either visit to pile on and off its cross-channel ferries to France, or else to make a dash for its premier attractions and move quickly on. That said, as attractions go it has several humdingers. The port's vital strategic position so close to the Continent gave rise to a vast and unusual hilltop castle with 2000 years of history under its belt. Also here are the spectacular white cliffs that are as much a symbol of British wartime resilience as Winston Churchill or the Battle of Britain. However, the town itself has an embattled aura, with run-down postwar architecture and often palpable tensions between asylum seekers and long-term residents.

Orientation

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

Internet Café (☎ 242474; 21 High St; per hr £3;

☎ 9am-10pm)

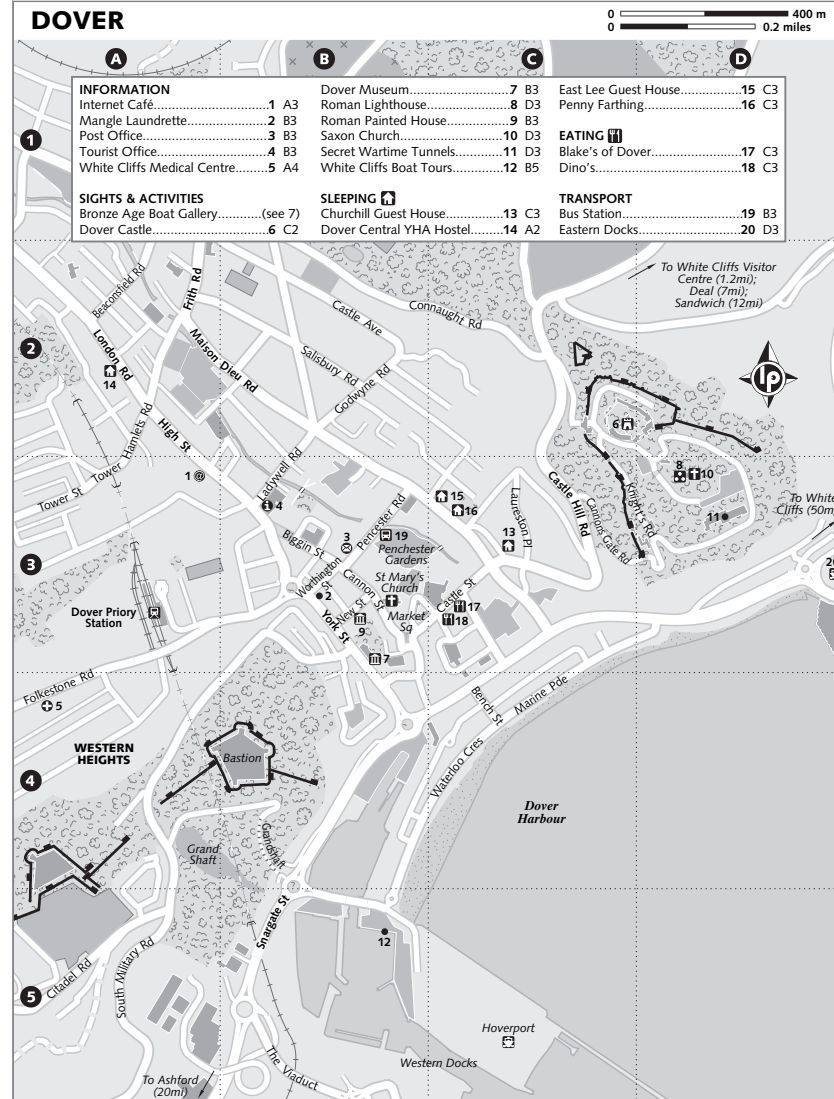
Mangle laundrette (Worthington St; per load £3;

☎ 8am-8pm)

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

Tourist office (☎ 205108; www.whitecliffscountry.org.uk; Biggin St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) Located in the Old Town Gaol and has accommodation- and ferry-booking services (both free).

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



Sights & Activities

DOVER CASTLE

Top contender for England's most formidable fortress, the gargantuan **Dover Castle** (EH; ☎ 211067; adult/under 5yr/5-15yr £9.50/free/4.80; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Nov-Jan, 10am-4pm Feb-Mar; P) was built to bolster the country's weakest point at this, the

shortest sea-crossing to the Continent. It commandeers the sprawling hilltop over the city and commands a superb 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 dates 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 brutal 13th-century siege. However, the castle's biggest attraction is the warren of claustrophobic **secret wartime tunnels** that honeycomb the cliff-side. 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** (☎ 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. Some things never change.

DOVER MUSEUM

By far the most enthralling exhibit in the three-storey **Dover Museum** (☎ 201066; www.dovermuseum.co.uk; Market Sq; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat year-round & noon-5pm Sun Apr-Sep) 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.

Sleeping

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

Dover Central YHA Hostel (☎ 201314; dover@yha.org.uk; 306 London Rd; dm incl breakfast £16.95; ☎ ☑) This dignified Georgian building, a short walk

from the town centre, is a little neglected on the exterior but has a neatly maintained interior. Still, it's friendly and clean. It's often full so book ahead.

Churchill Guest House (☎ 208365; www.toastofdover.co.uk; 6 Castle Hill Rd; s/d from £35/50, winter £30/45; ☎ ☑) A stately old-timer with modern comfort levels, this traditionally decorated, welcoming Georgian town house sits close to St Martin's and Hubert House, and has six comfortable rooms stocked with books and thoughtful extras. It does not cater to young children.

Also recommended:

Penny Farthing (☎ 205563; www.pennyfarthingdover.co.uk; 109 Maison Dieu Rd; s/d £27/44; ☎ ☑) Grey-brick Victorian house with frilly rooms.

East Lee Guest House (☎ 210176; www.eastlee.co.uk; 108 Maison Dieu Rd; d with/without breakfast from £52/46; ☎ ☑) Lovely terracotta-shingled town house.

Eating & Drinking

Dino's (☎ 204678; 58 Castle St; mains £7-14; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) More than a hundred bottles hang from the ceiling – their corks forming an arch and decorating the front desk – of this wonderfully authentic family-run Italian restaurant. What it lacks in natural light, it makes up for with delicious freshly made pasta.

Blake's of Dover (☎ 202194; www.blakesofdover.com; 52 Castle St; mains £10-18; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-11.30pm Mon-Fri, lunch only Sat) This snug but stylish English restaurant has an intimate cellar bar with fine wines, malt whiskies and microbrewed ales, or you can stay above ground for the sophisticated wood-panelled restaurant, serving locally caught fish dishes on candlelit tables.

Getting There & Away

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

BOAT

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

Norfolk Line (☎ 0870 164 2114; www.norfolkline.com) Services every two hours to Dunkirk (1½ hours).

P&O Ferries (☎ 0870 598 0333; www.poferries.com)

Runs to Calais (1½ hours) every 40 minutes to an hour.

SeaFrance (☎ 0870 443 1653; www.seafrance.com)

Ferries to Calais roughly every hour and a half.

SpeedFerries (☎ 0870 2200 570; www.speedferries.com) Up to five daily services to Boulogne (50 minutes).

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 (£11.50, 2¾ hours). Buses also go direct to Hastings (£6, two hours 50 minutes, hourly), Deal (45 minutes, hourly) and Sandwich (one hour, hourly).

CHANNEL TUNNEL

The Channel Tunnel begins its descent into the English Channel 9 miles west of Dover, just off the M20 between London and Dover. The nearest station foot passengers can board the **Eurostar** (☎ 08705 186186; www.eurostar.com) train is at Ashford. From Dover, it's easier if you have a car: follow signs from junction 11A for the Channel Tunnel. Crossing with your car via the **Eurotunnel** (☎ 08705 353535; www.eurotunnel.com) can cost anywhere from £49 to £199 depending on specials and how far ahead you book. For more information, see p968.

TRAIN

There are more than 40 trains daily from London Victoria and Charing Cross stations to Dover Priory via Ashford and Sevenoaks (£22.50, two hours).

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 (☎ 204420) and **Star Taxis** (☎ 228822) have 24-hour services. A one-way trip to Deal costs £12; to Sandwich it's £17.

AROUND DOVER

White Cliffs

Immortalised in song, film and literature, these iconic cliffs are more than just precipices of 100m-high white chalk extending for 10 miles on either side of Dover and visible from France. They are a part of the national psyche, acting as a big white welcome-home sign to generations of travellers and soldiers.

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 **visitor centre** (☎ 01304-202756; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Feb) and **car park** (nonmembers £2.50) 2 miles east of Dover.

From the visitor centre, a stony path snakes its way further east along the cliff-tops for a bracing 2-mile walk to the stout Victorian **South Foreland Lighthouse** (NT; ☎ 01304-202756; adult/child £3.60/1.80; ☎ guided tours 11am-5pm Fri-Mon late Apr-Oct). This was the first lighthouse to be powered by electricity, and 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.

KENT WEALD

Known simply as the Weald by locals, this gently rolling stretch of Kent and East Sussex gets its name from the Old German *wald*, meaning 'forest'. But today the timber is long-since harvested and replaced by lush fields, sleepy villages and neatly trimmed gardens, including the green-fingered triumph at Sissinghurst Castle. The region also hosts a huddle of extraordinary castles and manor houses.

Chartwell

A breathtakingly intimate insight into the life of Sir Winston Churchill (see the boxed text, p55), England's famous cigar-chomping bombast, can be found at **Chartwell** (☎ 01732-868381; Westerham; adult/child £10/5, garden & studio only £5/2.50; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 11am-5pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug), 6 miles east of Sevenoaks; this 19th-century house was his home from 1924 until his death in 1965.

The house and its lake-speckled grounds have been preserved much as Winnie left them, and you can almost picture him pacing about his study with a furrowed brow (he would often work standing up, saying he found it easier to think). 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. Coaches run from Sevenoaks train station

(30 minutes) every two hours on Wednesday from May to mid-September. Metrobus 401 runs on Sunday only.

Hever Castle

A few miles west of Tonbridge, this too-cute-to-be-true **castle** (☎ 01732-865224; www.hevercastle.co.uk; adult/5-14yr £9.80/5.30, gardens only £7.80/5; 🚗 noon-6pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov) sits amid a narrow duck-trailed moat, in family-friendly grounds with kooky topiary of woodland creatures in its outer courtyard, and no fewer than three mazes scattered about.

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 it was bought by the American multimillionaire William Waldorf Astor, who poured 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 Victoria trains go to Hever (£7.70, 50 minutes, hourly; change at Hurst Green), a poorly signposted 1-mile walk from the castle. Alternatively, you could take a direct train from London Bridge to Edenbridge (£7.70, 37 to 50 minutes), from where it's a 4-mile taxi or bike ride.

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 £13.50/8/11; 🚗 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 3.30pm 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 actually has a reputation as something of a 'ladies castle': in its more than 1000 years of history it's 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 invite 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: there are 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 4.40pm (£10.80, 1½ hours). It must be prebooked. There is a combined entrance and bus-fare ticket that costs £18.

Southeastern Trains also offer an 'All-In-One' ticket combining travel from London Victoria to Bearsted Station (£25.50, one hour), a connecting coach service to and from Leeds Castle and castle admission.

SURREY

Surrey is *the* place for wealthy London commuters to choose when they sprog (reproduce), move out of the city and buy a country pad. As such there are two strands of residents – those who commute and earn fat bonuses and those who are local and don't – and some people mix better than others. Further away from the roaring motorways, the county reveals some inspiring landscapes made famous by authors Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen.

FARNHAM

☎ 01252 / pop 36,298

Farnham is Surrey's most attractive market town. It's practically empty during the week, which makes it a lovely and relaxing place to visit. The town's main enticements include admiring the exquisite Georgian homes, shopping in the independent boutiques (some of which are on the pricey side), walking and cycling in the surrounding countryside, visiting the charming museum and popping into one of Surrey's only intact castles.

Orientation & Information

The easiest and most pleasant 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 **Waverley Locality Office** (☎ 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* and an updated list of accommodation in the area. It also offers free internet access.

You'll find an ATM on the Borough, near the corner of Castle St (where banks can be found). The main post office and a bureau de change are on West St, which is the continuation of the Borough.

Guided walks (☎ 718119; adult/child £3/1) of approximately 1½ hours run at 3pm 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

The **castle keep** (☎ 252 2000; admission £2.80, audio tour free; 🕒 noon-5pm Fri-Sun & public holidays Apr-Sep) was constructed in 1138 by Henry de Blois, the grandson of William the Conqueror. There's not much left 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** (🕒 2-4pm Wed).

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

MUSEUM OF FARNHAM

This appealing **museum** (☎ 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'. Kids will envy the amazing 1780s **dolls' house**, modelled on the house next door and built for the Manwaring children.

Possibly the most precious exhibit is a morning cap that once belonged to Charles I. He stayed in the house that's now the Waverley Locality Office on his way to trial in Westminster Hall in 1648, and gave the cap to his host Sir Henry Vernon as a souvenir, perhaps mindful that he would no longer be needing it...

Sleeping

Accommodation in Farnham tends towards the midrange to top end.

Sandiway (☎ 710721; 24 Shortheath Rd; s/d £30/50; 📶) This spot is about a 15-minute walk from town in a 1920s house with a pleasant garden.

Exchange Hotel (☎ 726673; Station Hill; s/d £49.35/69.95; 📶) After a full refurb there are nine attractive en-suite rooms with TV at a good price just by the station.

our pick **Bush Hotel** (☎ 0870 400 8225; www.macdonald-hotels.co.uk/bush; the Borough; s/d Mon-Thu £168/178, Fri-Sun £117/130; 📶) Set back from the road, this central, charming 17th-century inn has 82 well-turned-out rooms, a cosy Coachman's Bar with suitably wonky-beamed ceiling and a pleasant restaurant.

Eating & Entertainment

Farnham has a good choice of tempting eateries.

Colony Restaurant (☎ 725108; 68 Castle St; dishes £3.50-7.50; 🕒 dinner only Mon, closed Sun) Very tasty Peking cuisine on attractive Castle St.

our pick **Nelson Arms** (☎ 716078; 50 Castle St; 2-course lunch £7.95, dinner £8.95-16.50) A superb mix of old-world charm and contemporary chic, this gastropub is understandably popular with the locals. Try the delicious homemade burger.

Coach Bar Restaurant (☎ 724520; Castle St; mains under £10) This blue-and-white-fronted tapas bar at the bottom of Castle St has a sleek metal bar, cool colour scheme, DJs, occasional salsa nights and great nosh. There are larger dishes if tapas won't sate your hunger.

Farnham Maltings (☎ 726234; Bridge Sq; www.farnhammaltings.com) This multipurpose venue has a riverside bar, live music, exhibitions, fairs, movies, workshops and comedy.

Getting There & Away

Half-hourly train services run from London Waterloo (50 minutes). From Winchester, trains depart every 45 minutes for Woking (30 minutes). Change there for half-hourly trains to Farnham (25 minutes). The train station is

STROLL THE SURREY HILLS

There are plenty of enchanting walks through the Surrey Hills. Find different routes on www.surreyhills.org or grab leaflets from the Waverley Locality Office (p203). Frensham Ponds, Box Hill and Tilford are particularly scenic spots.

at the end of South St, on the other side of the A31 from the old town centre.

Stagecoach (☎ 01256-464501) 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

The inspiration for Sir Walter Scott's eponymous novel, the Waverley Abbey ruins sit almost forlornly 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, like Beaulieu Abbey in the New Forest, was based on a parent abbey at Citeaux 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 military hospital in WWI. Since 1973 it has been the headquarters of the Crusade for World Revival (CWR), 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 several excellent trails and bridle paths here.

For the best view, head for Gibbet Hill (280m), which was once an execution ground.

The **Hindhead YHA Hostel** (☎ 01428-604285; www.yha.org.uk; Devil's Punchbowl, Thursley; dm £11.95) 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.

Bus 19 runs every hour to Hindhead from Farnham.

BERKSHIRE

Home to royals and prime ministers, posh and prosperous Berkshire is and has long been the home county of many of England's most important figures. The top toff of the lot, the Queen, regularly stops in to spend time at her favourite castle. But aside from the impressive fortress at Windsor, the county is full of exquisitely maintained villages and fabulous countryside.

WINDSOR & ETON

☎ 01753 / pop 30,568

Windsor and the adjacent college town of Eton are two of the most visited destinations in the country, and with good reason. Windsor Castle, with its romantic architecture, superb state rooms and traditional changing of the guard, is an absolute must-see. It's so prominent, you'd be hard pressed to visit Windsor and avoid it. Over the water, Eton is a quieter town with England's most famous public school and a clutch of endearing antique shops. Not forgetting the Thames itself, which flows attractively between the two towns and is just asking for a boat trip.

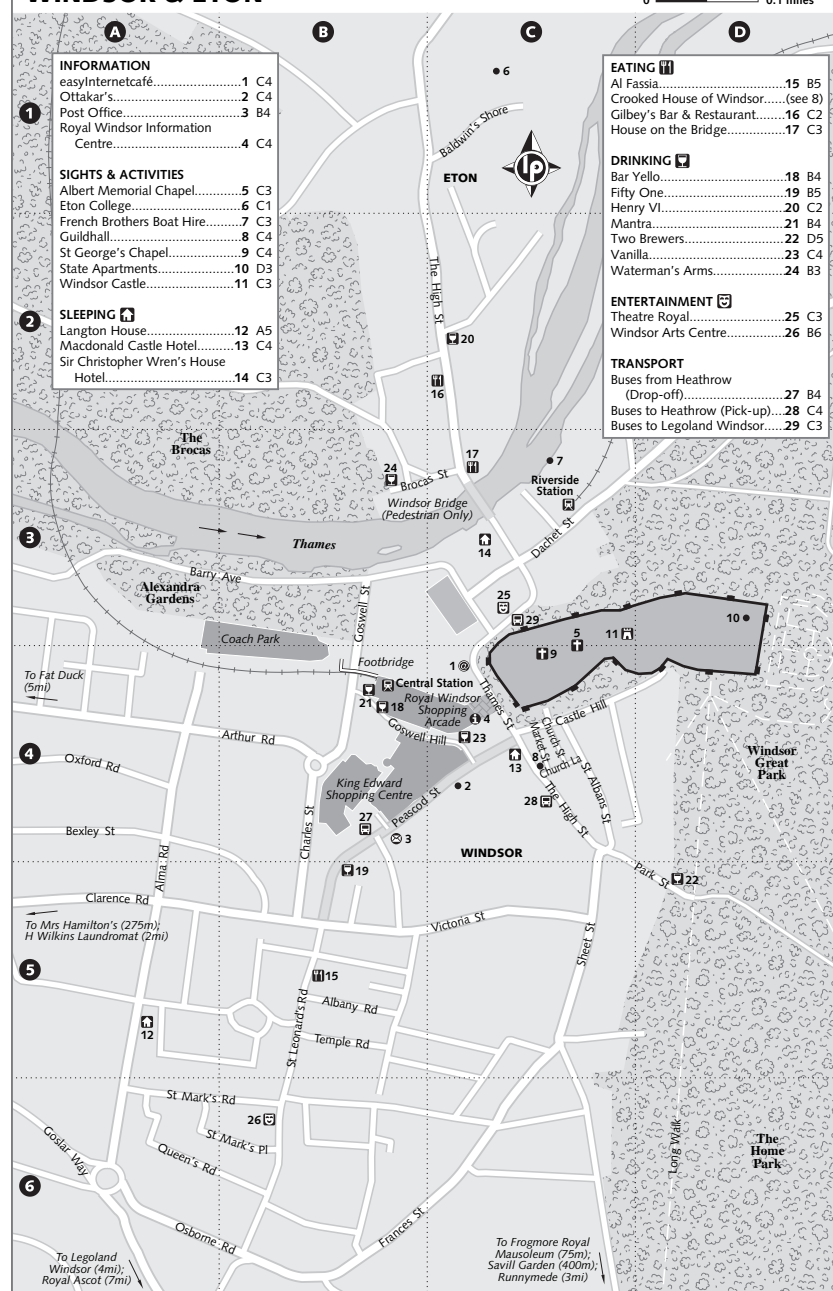
Orientation

The town of Windsor sits beside the River Thames, dwarfed by Windsor Castle. Skirting the castle are Thames St and Castle Hill, but the town's main drag is pedestrianised Peascod St. The village of Eton is on the far side of a small pedestrian bridge spanning the swan-filled Thames.

Information

The **Royal Windsor Information Centre** (☎ 743900; www.windsor.gov.uk; Old Booking Hall, Windsor Royal Shopping Arcade; ☎ 10am–5pm Apr–Jun & Sep, 10am–5.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am–4pm Sun–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat Oct–Mar) is an agent for the National Express bus service

WINDSOR & ETON



and sells tickets to some local attractions. It also offers an **accommodation booking service** (☎ 743907; £5).

Both the tourist office and post office have bureaux de change. There are plenty of ATMs along the High and Thames Sts.

The **post office** (☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) is in Peascod St, Windsor. High-speed internet is available in McDonald's easyInternetcafé on Thames St, Windsor, and for books there's **Ottakar's** (20/21 Peascod St, Windsor).

H Wilkins (67 Dedworth Rd, Windsor; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) will take care of all your washing and dry-cleaning needs.

Sights

WINDSOR CASTLE

The largest and oldest occupied fortress in the world, **Windsor Castle** (☎ 020-7766 7304; adult/child £13.50/7.50; ☎ 9.45am-4pm Mar-Oct, 9.45am-3pm Nov-Feb) is a majestic and robust vision of battlements and towers, and the Queen's weekend retreat.

At 30m above the Thames, the only naturally defensible spot in the Thames valley was the perfect pitch for William the Conqueror to build a Norman motte and bailey in 1070 as part of his fortifications around London. And once he clocked the quality hunting nearby, the site got its second purpose – a royal residence. Successive monarchs have put their own stamp on the castle: Henry II replaced the wooden stockade in 1165 with a stone round tower and built the outer walls to the north, east and south; Charles II gave the state apartments a baroque makeover; George IV swept in with his preference for Gothic style; Queen Victoria left the beautiful Albert Memorial Chapel. The castle largely escaped the bombings of WWII, but in 1992 a shocking fire sparked in the Queen's private chapel and tore through the building destroying or damaging more than 100 rooms. Thankfully the rooms were being rewired at the time and most artistic treasures had been removed. The marvellous restoration took five years and that devastating night is now a mere memory.

Weather and other events permitting, the **changing of the guard** takes place at 11am Monday to Saturday April to June and on alternate days the rest of the year. In summer the crowd congregates by the gate but if you stay to the right you'll have a better view. A fabulous spectacle of pomp, with loud commands, whispered conversations, shuffling and stamping feet (no wonder they

have such big boots), all accompanied by the triumphant tootles of a military band, it's not to be missed.

The State Apartments and St George's Chapel are closed at times during the year – see www.royalcollection.org.uk for details. To see whether the Queen is in residence, look for the Royal Standard flying from the Round Tower.

St George's Chapel closes on Sunday but you can attend Evensong at 5.15pm (daily). There are two free guided tours of the castle precinct per hour, which leave from the audio-tour shop and end at the State Apartments. Multilingual audio tours of the castle (including the State Apartments) are included in your ticket price or you can purchase a guidebook for £4.95.

Finally, this is a really popular attraction so arrive early and be prepared to queue.

Queen Mary's Dolls' House

Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens for Queen Mary in 1924, this incredible dolls' house was intended to accurately depict households of the day, albeit on a scale of 1:12. The attention to detail is spellbinding and there's even running water, electricity and lighting and vintage wine in the cellar!

State Apartments

After the dolls' house, a **gallery** with drawings by Leonardo da Vinci and a **China Museum**, visitors enter the stunning State Apartments, home to some exquisite paintings and architecture and still used by the Queen.

The **Grand Staircase** sets the tone for the rooms, all of which are elaborate, opulent and suitably regal. Highlights include **St George's Hall**, which incurred the most damage during the fire of 1992. The dining chairs here, dwarfed by the scale of the room, are standard size. On the ceiling, the shields of the Knights of the Garter (originally from George IV's time here) were re-created after the fire.

For intimate gatherings (just 60 people), the Queen entertains in the **Waterloo Chamber** – the super shiny table is French-polished and then dusted by someone walking over it with dusters on their feet (an unconventional but clearly effective approach). During large parties this room is used for dancing (try to imagine the princes rocking to a DJ in here) and the table is tripled in size and set up in St George's Hall.

The **King's Dressing Room** has some of the most important Renaissance paintings in the royal collection. Alongside Sir Anthony Van Dyck's magnificent *Triple Portrait* of Charles I you'll see works by Hans Holbein, Rembrandt, Peter Paul Rubens and Albrecht Dürer. Charles II kipped in here instead of in the **King's Bedchamber** – maybe George IV's magnificent bed (now on display) would have tempted him.

St George's Chapel

This elegant chapel, commissioned for the Order of the Garter by Edward IV in 1475, is one of Britain's finest examples of Perpendicular Gothic architecture. The nave and fan-vaulted roof were completed under Henry VII but the final nail was struck under Henry VIII in 1528.

The chapel – along with Westminster Abbey – serves as a **royal mausoleum**, and its tombs read like a history of the British monarchy. Here you'll find the tombs of Edward IV (r 1461–83), George V (r 1910–36) and Queen Mary (1867–1953), and George VI (r 1936–52). The most recent royal burial occurred in April 2002, when the body of George VI's widow, Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother (1900–2002), was transported here in a splendid and sombre procession and buried alongside her husband.

In between the garter stalls, in the **Royal Vault** lie George III (r 1760–1820), George IV (r 1820–30) and William IV (r 1830–37). Another vault contains Henry VIII (r 1509–47); his favourite wife (the third of six) Jane Seymour (1509–37); and Charles I (r 1625–49), reunited with his head after it was chopped off during the Civil War.

The gigantic **battle sword** of Edward III, founder of the Order of the Garter, is mounted on the wall near the tombs of Henry VI (r 1422–61 and 1470), and Edward VII (r 1901–10) and Queen Alexandra (1844–1925).

On 9 April 2005 Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles were blessed here following their civil marriage in the **Guildhall**. A full symphony orchestra and around 800 guests probably made up for the Queen's apparent refusal to hold the wedding due to both parties being previously divorced.

Albert Memorial Chapel

Originally built in 1240 and dedicated to Edward the Confessor, this small chapel was the place of worship for the Order of the Garter

until St George's Chapel snatched that honour. After the death of Prince Albert at Windsor Castle in 1861 Queen Victoria ordered its elaborate redecoration as a tribute to her husband. A major feature of the restoration is the magnificent vaulted roof whose gold mosaic pieces were crafted in Venice. There's a monument to the prince, although he's actually buried with Queen Victoria in the Frogmore Royal Mausoleum in the castle grounds.

Windsor Great Park

Stretching behind Windsor Castle almost all the way to Ascot, Windsor Great Park covers about 40 sq miles. There is a lake, walking tracks, a bridleway and gardens. The **Savill Garden** (☎ 860222; ☎ 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) is particularly lovely. Admission ranges from £4 to £5.50 (adult) and £2 to £2.75 (child) depending on the time of year.

The **Long Walk** is a 3-mile walk along a tree-lined path from King George IV Gate to the Copper Horse statue (of George III) on Snow Hill, the highest point of the park. Locals have informed us that the Queen occasionally drives herself down the Long Walk, accompanied only by a bodyguard. The walk is signposted from the town centre.

ETON COLLEGE

Cross the Thames by the pedestrian-only Windsor Bridge to arrive at another enduring symbol of England's class system: **Eton College** (☎ 671177; adult/child £4/3.25, tours £5/4.20; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Mar, Apr & Jul-Sep [school holidays], 2-4.30pm term-time, guided tours 2.15pm & 3.15pm), the

WORTH THE TRIP

Get your best hat out for *the* event of the horse-racing calendar: **Royal Ascot**, a four-day festival taking place at the Ascot racecourse in the middle of June. Following a £200 million makeover, the ground is now an even more spectacular setting for spotting royalty, celebrities, men in suits, women in incredible couture confections – oh, and horses. Book tickets well in advance. In 2006 tickets for the Grandstand and Paddock started at £54 per day, but you can soak up the atmosphere in less formal attire in the Silver Ring from a mere £15. Call ☎ 01344-876876 for information, or check the website at www.ascot.co.uk.

largest and most famous public (meaning very private) school in England. It was founded by Henry VI in 1440–41 with a view towards educating 70 highly qualified boys awarded a scholarship from a fund endowed by the king. Every year since then, 70 King's Scholars have been chosen based on the results of a highly competitive exam for boys aged 12 to 14; these pupils are housed in separate quarters from the rest of the 1000 or so other students, who are known as Oppidans.

While the King's Scholars are chosen exclusively on the basis of exam results, Oppidans must be able to foot the bill for £23,000-per-annum fees as well as passing entrance exams. Its alumni count no fewer than 18 prime ministers, as well as a few royals, including hunky Prince William.

The college is open to visitors. Tours take in the **chapel** (which you can see from Windsor Castle), the **doisters**, the **Museum of Eton Life**, **lower school** and the **school yard**.

LEGOLAND WINDSOR

Windsor's other great attraction – for those still in short trousers – **Legoland** (☎ 08705 040404; www.legoland.co.uk; adult/3–15yr £30/23; ☎ 10am–5pm/6pm/7pm depending on day of the week, see website) is a crazy world of model masterpieces, live shows, 3-D cinema, white-knuckle rides and tamer activities (drive your own JCB digger anyone?). If you prebook online you save about £2 (but you need to be able to print out your ticket).

Buses run from Thames St to Legoland between 10am and 5.15pm.

Tours

Open-top double-decker bus tours of the towns are run by **City Sightseeing Tours** (adult/child £7/3.50; ☎ every ½hr daily Mar–Sep, Sat & Sun Nov & Dec) and leave from Castle Hill opposite Ye Harte & Garter Hotel. From Easter to October, **French Brothers Boat Hire** (☎ 851900; www.frenchbrothers.co.uk; Clewer Court Rd, Windsor; ☎ 11am–5pm) runs a variety of boat trips to Runnymede, Maidenhead and around Windsor and Eton. The 45-minute round trip to Runnymede costs £4.50 for adults and £2.25 for children. Boats leave from just next to the Windsor Bridge. If you fancy doing the hop-on-hop-off bus plus a 35-minute boat trip, a combined boat-and-bus ticket costs £9.50/5.

Sleeping

Windsor has a good selection of quality hotels and B&Bs. Since the YHA hostel burned down

in 2004 there are few budget options. At the time of writing Travelodge (uninspiring but affordable) was due to open in summer 2007 on the corner of Goswell Hill and Goswell St (www.travelodge.co.uk).

Mrs Hamilton's (☎ 865775; 22 York Ave, Windsor; s/d £35/58; Ⓟ) Large bright rooms and very friendly service make this an extremely comfortable place to stay.

Langton House (☎ 858299; www.langtonhouse.com; 46 Alma Rd, Windsor; s/d/tr £63/75/90; Ⓟ ☎) The four elegant rooms at Langton House are superb (three are en suite, one has a private bathroom), and its friendly owners are always on hand to fill you in with local information, offer guided walks, provide tips on surviving Legoland etc.

Macdonald Castle Hotel (☎ 0870 400 8300; www.macdonaldhotels.co.uk/castle; 18 High St, Windsor; s/d weekdays £132/170, weekends £235/210; Ⓟ ☎ wi-fi) This newly refurbished traditional-style hotel has a smashing location and large car park right in the centre of town. Guests can see weddings at the Guildhall opposite – recent celebrity ceremonies include Charles and Camilla, and Elton John and David Furnish – and the castle turrets from the 1st floor. Opt for a four-poster bed in the main building, a 500-year-old coaching inn with charming sloping floors and wooden beams.

our pick **Sir Christopher Wren's House Hotel** (☎ 861354; www.sirchristopherwren.co.uk; Thames St, Windsor; s/d £165/220; Ⓟ) For comfortable rooms, wonderful river views, a terrace overlooking Windsor Bridge and a pampering spa and gym, this luxurious 90-room hotel built by the man himself in 1676 fits the bill. Its 'sister' hotel the Christopher, across the way in Eton, is a delightful boutique hotel (but there's no spa).

Eating

There are plenty of eateries in Windsor and Eton: here's a selection.

our pick **Crooked House of Windsor** (☎ 857534; 52 High St, Windsor; mains £5.50–9; ☎ dinner Wed–Sat only) This little black-and-white house looks like it's had too much to drink. Enjoy a light lunch, a Royal cream tea (tea and scones with clotted cream and jam; £7 to £12) or dinner (bring your own wine). A member of the Slow Food movement, which advocates healthy eating, this adorable restaurant sources its produce locally.

Al Fassia (☎ 855370; 27 St Leonard's Rd, Windsor; mains £8.50–12.95) Situated away from the tourist hub-

bub, this Moroccan restaurant has a very good reputation. With its traditional wall hangings, mosaic tables, lanterns and other knick-knacks, it's a pleasant place for lunch or dinner.

Gilbey's Bar & Restaurant (☎ 854921; 82–83 High St, Eton; mains £11–18.50) This attractive restaurant has a courtyard garden and good wines.

House on the Bridge (☎ 790197; 71a High St, Windsor Bridge, Eton; mains £16.50–20.95) This formal, elegant restaurant overlooks the Thames and the castle.

Drinking

Windsor and Eton are packed with pubs, and a few trendy bars have sprung up.

Henry VI (☎ 866051; 37 High St, Eton) A supercool pub in which to sip an afternoon pint and discuss poetry. On Friday and Saturday evenings rock out to live pop music.

our pick **Two Brewers** (☎ 855426; 34 Park St, Windsor) A gorgeous 17th-century inn perched just near Windsor Great Park and the Long Walk.

Mantra (☎ 831331; 19–21 The Arches, Goswell Hill, Windsor; after 9pm £5; ☎ Fri & Sat, closed Mon) The chandeliers and exposed brickwork make this bar-club under the railway arches a chic evening option (no trainers) for the over-25 crowd.

Vanilla (☎ 831122; 15a Goswell Hill, Windsor; after 9pm Sat £5, prices vary Fri) This funky bar-club has a champagne-and-cocktail bar, dance floor, lounge area and a snappy dress code.

Also recommended:

Bar Yello (☎ 622667; Goswell Hill, Windsor) Another boozing option under the railway arches.

Fifty One (☎ 755950; 51 Peascod St, Windsor) Slightly lacking in atmosphere, this bar has live music on Wednesday and theme nights such as Brazilian samba.

Waterman's Arms (☎ 861001; Brocas St, Eton) The place to meet rowers.

Entertainment

Windsor Arts Centre (☎ 859336; cnr St Leonard's & St Mark's Rds, Windsor) A comedy, film, theatre, live music and dance venue with events for kids.

Theatre Royal (☎ 853888; 32–34 Thames St, Windsor) Features a wide repertoire of theatre productions, from pantomime to first runs.

Getting There & Away

Windsor is 21 miles west of central London and 15 minutes by car from Heathrow airport.

BUS

Green Line bus 702 departs for Windsor and Legoland from London Victoria coach station hourly (about every two hours on Sunday; £7, 1¼ hours). Bus 77 connects Windsor with Heathrow airport. Buses depart from High St, Windsor, opposite the Parish Church and head to Heathrow Central Station. For further details phone **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2 608).

TRAIN

There are two Windsor and Eton train stations – Central station on Thames St, opposite Windsor Castle, and Riverside station near the bridge to Eton.

From London Waterloo, trains run to Riverside station every half-hour (hourly on Sunday). Some services from London Paddington to Central station require a change at Slough, five minutes from Windsor, but take about the same time with a similar fare (£7, 50 minutes).

AROUND WINDSOR & ETON Runnymede

In June 1215 King John met his barons and bishops in a large field 3 miles southeast of Windsor, and over the next few days they

WORTH THE TRIP

Fat Duck (☎ 01628-580333; High St, Bray) If you've ever fancied mixing sweet and savoury tastes, with dishes such as smoked-bacon-and-egg ice cream, sardine-on-toast sorbet or snail porridge, this is the place to visit. The menu may sound odd, but experimental and self-taught chef Heston Blumenthal was awarded an OBE by the Queen in January 2006 and the Fat Duck was voted 'The Best Restaurant in the World' by 600 critics the year before – so he must be doing something right. This acclaimed gastronomic outing comes at a price – the Tasting Menu costs £90 per person including wine, while dining à la carte will set you back at least £80 – but it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience. (It could help you with future 'how can I combine the random leftovers in my fridge into a nice meal?' dilemmas too.) To get there by car take the A308 from Windsor then follow signs for Bray Village. Drive into the village and you'll see the Fat Duck on your right.

hammered out an agreement on a basic charter of rights guaranteeing the liberties of the king's subjects and restricting the monarch's absolute power. The document they signed was, of course, Magna Carta, the world's first constitution. It formed the basis for statutes and charters throughout the world's democracies. (Both the national and state constitutions of the United States, drawn up more than 500 years later, paraphrase directly from this document.)

Runnymede – from the Anglo-Saxon words *runnige* (take council) and *moed* (meadow) – was chosen because it was the largest piece of open land between the king's residence at Windsor and the bishop's palace at Staines. Today the field remains pretty much as it was, except now it features two lodges (1930) designed by Sir Edward Lutyens. In the woods behind the field are two memorials, the first to Magna Carta designed by Sir Edward Maufe (1957). The second is to John F Kennedy, and was built by Geoffrey Jellicoe in 1965 on an acre of land granted in perpetuity to the US government following Kennedy's assassination in 1963.

Magna Carta Tea Rooms (☎ 01784-477110; Gate Lodge, Windsor Rd), in one of Lutyens' lodges, does a pretty good cream tea in the afternoons.

Bus 41 stops near here on the Windsor–Egham route.

HAMPSHIRE

Think of Hampshire and images of petticoated heroines, stiff-backed gentlemen and rolling rural landscapes of novelist Jane Austen (1775–1817) may spring to mind. But while still blessed with those undulating chalk downs and fertile agricultural valleys, this is a remarkably varied county. Winchester, once capital of the powerful Kingdom of Wessex that extended into Wiltshire and Dorset, delights with its fascinating cathedral and beautiful setting. The coastline too is rich in maritime history, not least at Portsmouth, home of the once-mighty Royal Navy. And Hampshire's south-western corner also claims the lovely open heath and woodlands of the New Forest.

WINCHESTER

☎ 01962 / pop 41,420

The ancient, wistful and often eye-wateringly lovely cathedral city of Winchester is a must

for all visitors to the region. A capital of Saxon kings and power-base of bishops, the city's rich history is reflected in heroic statues, handsome Elizabethan and Regency buildings, narrow winding streets and, above all, the wondrous cathedral that marks its centre. Thanks to its moist location, nestled in a valley of the River Itchen, there are also charming waterside trails to explore, and as walkers will be well aware, the city marks the beginning of the beautiful South Downs Way (see p183).

History

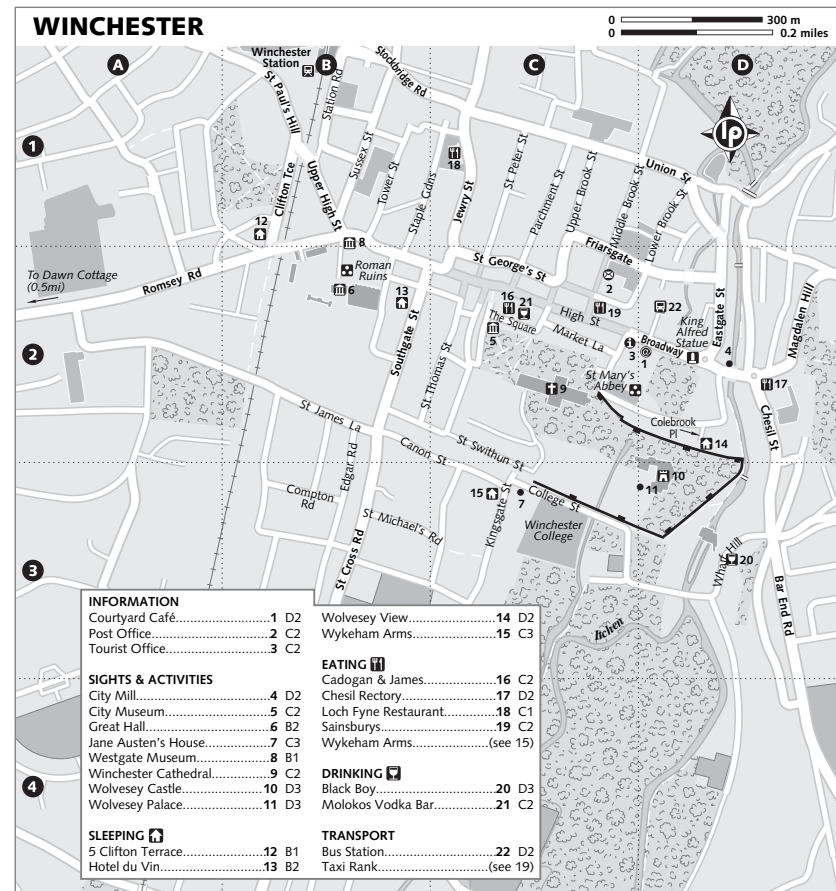
The Romans first put their feet under the table here, but Winchester really took off when the powerful West Saxon bishops moved their Episcopal see here in AD 670. Thereafter, Winchester was the most important town in the powerful kingdom of Wessex. King Alfred the Great (r 871–99) made it his capital, and it remained so under Knut (r 1016–35) and the Danish kings. After the Norman invasion of 1066, William the Conqueror arrived here to claim the throne of England, and in 1086 he commissioned local monks to write the all-important *Domesday Book*, an administrative survey of the whole country and the most important clerical accomplishment of the Middle Ages. Winchester thrived until the 12th century, when a fire gutted most of the city, after which London took its crown. A long slump lasted until the 18th century, when the town revived as a market town.

Orientation

The city centre is compact and easily managed on foot. Partly pedestrianised High St runs from west to east through the town. The bus station is smack in the middle of town opposite the Guildhall and tourist office, while the train station is five minutes' walk northwest. Jewry St borders the western centre and was once part of the Jewish quarter.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 840500; www.visitwinchester.co.uk; Broadway; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, 11am–4pm Sun May–Sep, 10am–5pm Mon–Sat Oct–Apr), in the pompous Gothic Revival Guildhall, has information and an accommodation booking service. The **Courtyard Café** (☎ 840820; per 30min £2), also in the Guildhall, has internet access. There's a **post office** (☎ 9.30am–6pm Mon–Sat) on Middle Brook St, and there are plenty of banks and ATMs on High St.



Sights

WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL

Almost a thousand years of history is crammed into Winchester's superb **cathedral** (☎ 857200; www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk; adult/under 16yr/student £4/free/2; ☎ 8.30am–6pm), which is not only the city's star attraction but one of southern England's most inspirational buildings. Admittedly it makes an unusual picture from outside, with a squat, almost half-hearted tower, a slightly sunken rear and a fine Gothic façade. But once inside you'll be struck by the one of the longest medieval naves (164m) in Europe, and a fascinating jumble of features from all eras.

The cathedral sits beside foundations marking the town's original minster church built in 643. It was begun in 1070 and completed

in 1093, and subsequently entrusted with the bones of its patron saint, St Swithun (bishop of Winchester from 852 to 862), who is best known for the proverb that if it rains on St Swithun's day, 15 July, it will rain for a further 40 days and 40 nights.

Soggy ground and poor workmanship did not augur well for the early church; the original tower collapsed in 1107 and major restructuring continued until the mid-15th century. At the cathedral's rear you'll spy a monument to diver William Walker, who is celebrated as having saved the cathedral from collapse by delving repeatedly into its waterlogged underbelly from 1906 to 1912 to bolster rotting wooden foundations with vast quantities of concrete and brick.

Advancing down the south side of the nave, it's worth being sidetracked by the **Cathedral Library & Triforium Gallery** (adult/senior & under 16yr £1/free; ☎ 11am-4pm Tue-Sat, 1-4pm Mon-Apr-Oct), which affords a fine elevated view of the cathedral body and an up-close view of the dazzling illuminated pages of the 12th-century *Winchester Bible* – its colours as bright as if they were painted yesterday.

There's also the opportunity to walk over the bones of one of England's best loved authors, Jane Austen, whose grave is near the entrance in the northern aisle. Austen died a stone's throw from the cathedral in 1817 at **Jane Austen's House** (College St), where she spent her last six weeks; it's now a private residence.

The transepts are the most original parts of the cathedral, and the intricately carved medieval choir stalls are another must-see, sporting everything from mythical beasts to a mischievous green man.

Flooding often prevents **crypt tours** (free; ☎ tours 10.30am, 12.30pm & 2.30pm Mon-Sat) from going ahead, but you may still be able to peek inside to see the poignant solitary sculpture by Anthony Gormley called *Sound 2*.

Cathedral body **tours** (free; ☎ tours every hour 10am-3pm Mon-Sat) are run by enthusiastic volunteers and last one hour. There are also **tower and roof tours** (£4; ☎ tours 2.15pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Sat, plus 11.30am Sat Oct-May, 2.15pm Mon-Sat, plus 11.30am Sat Jun-Sep) up narrow stairwells and with views as far as Portsmouth. Sunday services take place at 8am, 10am and 11.15am, with evensong at 3.30pm. Evensong is also held at 5.30pm Monday to Saturday.

GREAT HALL

Winchester's other showpiece is at the cavernous **Great Hall** (☎ 846476; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm), the only part of 11th-century Winchester Castle that Oliver Cromwell spared from destruction. It's just south off Romsey Rd. Crowning the wall like a giant-sized dartboard of green and cream spokes is what centuries of mythology have called **King Arthur's Round Table**. Before you get too excited, it's a 700-year-old fake, but a fascinating one nonetheless. It's thought to have been constructed in the late 13th century and later painted in the reign of Henry VIII (King Arthur's image is strangely reminiscent of Henry's youthful face).

This hall was also the stage for several dramatic English courtroom dramas, including the trial of adventurer Sir Walter Raleigh

in 1603, who was sentenced to death but reprieved at the last minute.

Outside, near the hall's entrance, there's also a section of the old Roman wall, built around AD 200.

MUSEUMS

City Museum (☎ 863064; www.winchester.gov.uk/heritage; The Square; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) whizzes through Winchester's fascinating Roman and Saxon history, lingers on its Anglo-Norman golden age, pays homage to Jane Austen, and reconstructs several early-20th-century Winchester shops.

Fitting snugly into one of Winchester's two surviving medieval gateways, **Westgate Museum** (☎ 848269; High St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Feb & Mar) is a one-time debtors' prison with a macabre set of gibbetting irons last used to display an executed criminal's body in 1777. Scrawled crudely all over the interior walls is the 17th-century graffiti of prisoners.

WOLVESY CASTLE & PALACE

The crumbling remains of early-12th-century **Wolvesey Castle** (EH; ☎ 023-9237 8291; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep) still sulk in the protective embrace of the city's walls, despite the building having been largely demolished in the 1680s. According to legend, its name comes from a Saxon king's demand for an annual payment of 300 wolves' heads. It was completed by Henry de Blois, and served as the bishop of Winchester's residence throughout the medieval era. Queen Mary I and Philip II of Spain celebrated their wedding feast here in 1554. Today the bishop lives in the adjacent Wolvesey Palace.

CITY MILL

This 18th-century water-powered **mill** (NT; ☎ 870057; Bridge St; adult/child £3.20/1.60; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Apr-Dec, also Mon & Tue Jun-Dec) straddles the river with an island garden. It's now a working water mill once again, and you can see the grinding process in action.

Activities

There are several options for a quiet amble through surrounding countryside, lanes or riverside parks. The 1-mile **Water Meadows Walk** can be picked up near the entrance to Wolvesey Castle and goes to the fascinating 12th-century Hospital of St Cross, built to

feed and bed pilgrims and crusaders en route to the Holy Land. The tranquil **Riverside Walk** trails a short distance from the castle along the bank of the River Itchen to High St. The stiffer walk up to **St Giles' Hill** rewards with fine city views. It's at the top of East Hill, half a mile from the castle, and is signposted.

Tours

A variety of 1½-hour **guided walks** (adult/under 16yr £3/free; ☎ tours 11am & 2.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 2.30pm Sun Jun-Sep, 11am Sat Nov-Mar) are organised through the tourist office. From May to September, evening walks also leave every Tuesday at 6.30pm (adult/child £4/1), and encompass subjects as diverse as Jane Austen's Winchester and a spooky 'Bring out your dead' plague tour.

Sleeping

Budget accommodation is hard to come by. The tourist office's booking service costs £5, but can arrange some great deals.

Wolvesey View (☎ 852082; www.wintonian.com; 10 Colebrook Pl; s/d without bathroom £44/58; ☎ ☎) Squirrelled away in a quiet cul de sac in the middle of town, this family home is easy strolling distance from the cathedral and Wolvesey Castle, which its Yellow Room overlooks. The three simplistic rooms share a bathroom, and its owners are extremely knowledgeable about the city.

5 Clifton Terrace (☎ 890053; chrisiejohnston@hotmail.com; 5 Clifton Tce; s/d/f £55/65/80; ☎ ☎) This polished two-room B&B has a pleasant mix of new and antique furnishings, and a charming proprietor. It sits amid an elegant row of Georgian terraced town houses that rises to the west of town, a short walk from the train station.

Wykeham Arms (☎ 853834; www.accommodating-inns.co.uk; 75 Kingsgate St; r without bathroom £57, s/d £85/95; ☎ ☎) A Winchester institution, as much for its quirky bar and food (see right) as its accommodation, this 18th-century inn also has 14 lovely, traditionally styled rooms above the pub and in the charming converted post office across the road. Highly recommended.

Dawn Cottage (☎ 869956; dawncottage@hotmail.com; 99 Romsey Rd; d £68; ☎ ☎) Worth the mile-long hike outside town, this utterly charming vine-covered property offers a particularly tranquil stay and friendly welcome, with lovely views, a sun deck and pretty gardens, and just three tastefully decorated rooms.

Hotel du Vin (☎ 841414; www.hotelduvin.com; Southgate St; r £120-175; ☎ ☎ wi-fi) Simple yet sophisticated, this fashionable boutique hotel will not

only impress the wine-savvy clientele. Set in a handsome Georgian building from 1715, it offers 23 deeply comfortable rooms with organic, textured fabrics and plenty of mod cons. The bistro's famous in its own right. Breakfast is extra.

Eating

Sainsburys (☎ 861792; Middle Brook St) For everyday supplies try this supermarket.

Cadogan & James (☎ 840805; 31a The Square; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Self-caterers will need to be dragged out of this delightful delicatessen, full of the smells of freshly baked breads, herbs and spices, and gourmet goodies.

Wykeham Arms (☎ 853834; 75 Kingsgate St; mains £9-13.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) You might face each other across graffiti-dotted old school desks in this character-packed pub-restaurant, but the mood is far more mischievous than studious. Walking canes and tankards hang from the ceiling and open fires warm clients in winter. The food is sublime, the sausages (flavoured with local bitter) are famous, and the sticky-toffee pudding addictive.

Loch Fyne Restaurant (☎ 872930; 18 Jewry St; mains £9-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Winchester's branch of this quality seafood chain is housed in a stunning Tudor jailhouse, full of twisted beams, wooden galleries and beautiful fireplaces. Depending on which section you're in, the atmosphere can be both lively and romantic.

Chesil Rectory (☎ 851555; 1 Chesil St; 2-/3-course lunch £19/23, 3-course dinner £45; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Duck through the hobbit-size door of this gorgeous 15th-century half-timbered building, Winchester's oldest house, to enjoy a romantic and refined setting in oak-beamed rooms. Its modern Continental cuisine is perfect for a special night out.

Drinking

Black Boy (☎ 861754; 1 Wharf Hill; ☎ 11am-11pm) A celebration of English eccentricity, this adorable old pub is filled with obsessive and sometimes freaky collections, from pocket watches to wax facial features, bear traps, sawn paperbacks and tobacco pipes. Even the women's toilets cheekily sport gynaecological clamps and fish murals.

Molokos Vodka Bar (☎ 849236; 31b The Square; ☎ noon-midnight, to 2am Fri) One of the city's slicker contemporary venues, Molokos lures in the youth of Winchester with just about every flavour of vodka under the sun; it touts

an R & B soundtrack and buzzing ambience. It graduates into a club on weekend nights.

Getting There & Away

Winchester is 65 miles from London and 15 miles from Southampton.

BUS

National Express has several direct buses to London Victoria Bus Station (£12.60, 2½ hours). Buses also run to Southampton (30 minutes). Wilts & Dorset Explorer Tickets (£7.90, one hour). There are also fast links to the region to the west, including the New Forest.

TRAIN

Train is often the more direct option. Trains leave every 20 minutes from London Waterloo (£22, one hour) and Southampton (15 to 23 minutes) and hourly from Portsmouth (£7.90, one hour). There are also fast links to the Midlands.

Getting Around

Your feet are the best form of transport. There's plenty of day parking within five minutes' walk of the centre or you can use the Park & Ride service for £2 per day. If you're staying for longer, consider joining the **Bikeabout** (☎ 847474; www.winchestermiracles.org; membership £15) scheme, which lets over-18s borrow bikes free for up to 24 hours at a time, as often as you like. Bikes can be picked up and dropped off at the tourist office, train station and St Catherine's Park & Ride.

For a taxi try the rank outside Sainsbury's on Middle Brook St or phone **Wintax Taxis** (☎ 878727).

PORTSMOUTH

☎ 023 / pop 187,056

Be sure to swash those buckles and practise your salty sea-dog arrrs before arriving at this brawny harbour city. For Portsmouth is the principal port of Britain's Royal Navy, and its historic dockyard ranks alongside Greenwich as Britain's most fascinating centre of maritime history. Here you can jump aboard Lord Nelson's glorious warship *HMS Victory*, which led the charge at Trafalgar in 1805, and glimpse the timber-shivering remains of Henry VIII's 16th-century flagship, the *Mary Rose*.

Regeneration at the nearby Gunwharf Quays has added new glitz to its scurvy-riddled waterfront. A spectacular millennium-inspired

structure, the Spinnaker Tower – keelhaunched by the British media for its delays and spiralling costs – finally opened here in 2005, with views to knock the wind from its critics' sails.

However, Portsmouth is by no means a city noted for its beauty; it was heavily bombed during WWII and a combination of soulless postwar architecture and surprisingly deserted waterfront promenades can leave a melancholy impression. An array of museums justify an overnight stay for naval nuts, however, and the suburb of Southsea boasts some fair beaches, bars and good restaurants.

Orientation

The central quay known as the Hard is where you'll find the Historic Dockyard, tourist office, train station, Spinnaker Tower and the passenger-ferry terminal for the Isle of Wight. Another hop east is Old Portsmouth and the Point, a cluster of sea-worn, atmospheric buildings around the old harbour. Southsea is about 2 miles south.

Information

Plentiful ATMs can be found on Osbourne Rd.

Laundry Care (☎ 9282 6245; 59 Osbourne Rd; ☎ 8am–6pm)

Online Café (☎ 9283 1106; 163 Elm Grove, Southsea; per 10min/hr 50p/£2.60; ☎ 9am–10pm)

Post office (Palmerston Rd) In Southsea.

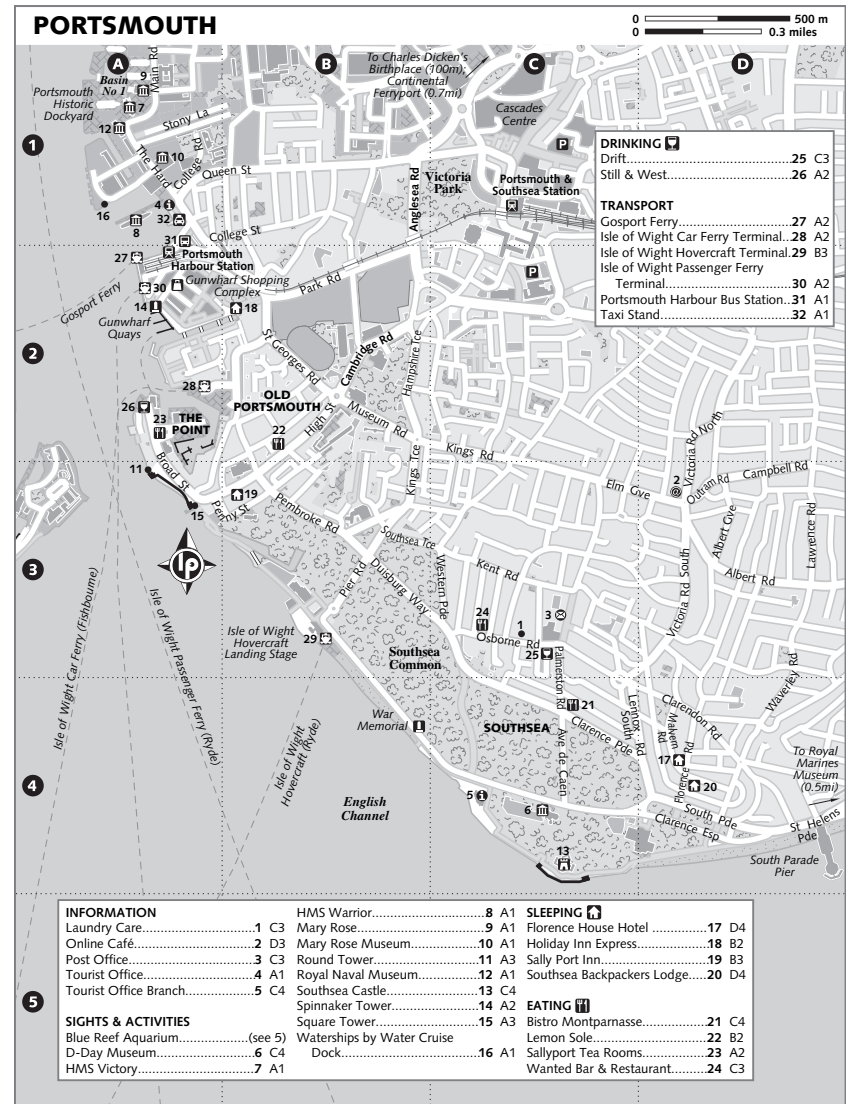
Tourist office (☎ 9282 6722; www.visitportsmouth.co.uk; The Hard; ☎ 9.30am–5.45pm Apr–Sep, to 5.15pm Oct–Mar) Can arrange walking tours and has an accommodation service (£2).

Tourist office branch (☎ 9282 6722; Clarence Esplanade; ☎ 9.30am–5.45pm Jun–Sep, to 5.15pm Mar–May, to 4pm Oct–Feb) Next to the Blue Reef Aquarium in Southsea, this branch gives discounts to several attractions for tickets bought in advance.

Sights & Activities

SPINNAKER TOWER

Spiking the sky 170m above Gunwharf Quays is Portsmouth's unmistakable new seamark and symbol of the city's newfound razzle-dazzle, the **Spinnaker Tower** (☎ 857520; www.spinnakertower.co.uk; Gunwharf Quays; adult/child £5.95/4.80; ☎ 10am–10pm Jun–Aug, 10am–5pm Sun–Thu, 10am–10pm Fri & Sat Apr, May, Sep & Oct, 10am–5pm Sun–Fri, 10am–10pm Sat Nov–Mar). Opened an impressive *five years* later than originally planned in late 2005, and vastly over budget at £36 million, the construction is the tallest publicly accessible structure in the UK.



Its two sweeping white arcs resemble a billowing sail from certain angles, and a sharp skeletal ribcage from others. There are extraordinary views from its three observation decks (not to mention the hair-raising view through a glass floor). Below, the glitzy mall, wide people-watching patios and promenade dotted with palm trees complete the designers'

vision of Portsmouth in the new millennium – give or take a few years.

PORTSMOUTH HISTORIC DOCKYARD

Portsmouth's biggest attraction, the **Historic Dockyard** (☎ 9286 1512; www.historicdockyard.co.uk; adult/child single-attraction ticket £10/8, all-inclusive ticket £16/13, season ticket £30/25; ☎ 10am–6pm Apr–Oct,

10am-5.30pm Nov-Mar, last admission 1½hr before closing) is a real bobby-dazzler. Set in the heart of the country's most important naval port, it comprises three stunning ships and a clutch of museums that pay homage to the historical might of the Royal Navy. Together they make for a full day's outing, though you may spend much of your time swimming through a tide of schoolchildren. The all-inclusive ticket lets you scramble about all the ships and museums and if you miss anything on your first visit, you can return within the next year to see the rest.

Ships

As resplendent as she is venerable, the dockyard's star attraction is **HMS Victory** (www.hms-victory.com), Lord Nelson's flagship at the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar and the site of his infamous 'Kiss me Hardy...' dying words when victory over the French had been secured. This remarkable ship is topped by a forest of ropes and masts, and weighted by a belly filled with cannons and paraphernalia for an 850-strong crew. Clambering through its decks is a stirring experience, though these days cannon fire is replaced with the dull thuds of visitors so in thrall that they forget the low overhead beams. There are excellent 40-minute tours.

Equally thrilling are the adjacent remains of 16th-century warship and darling of Henry VIII, the **Mary Rose** (www.maryrose.org), the only such ship on display in the world. This 700-tonne floating fortress sank off Portsmouth after a mysterious incident of 'human folly and bad luck' in 1545. In an astoundingly ambitious piece of marine archaeology, the ship was raised from its watery grave in 1982. It now presents a ghostly image that could teach Hollywood a few tricks, its vast flank preserved in dim lighting, dripping and glistening in a constant mist of sea water.

Anywhere else the magnificent warship **HMS Warrior**, built in 1860, would grab centre stage. This handsome fella was at the cutting edge of technology in its day, riding the transition from wood to iron and sail to steam. Visitors can wander freely around its four decks to imagine life in the Victorian navy.

Mary Rose Museum

You can bear witness to the Herculean salvage operation that raised the 16th-century *Mary Rose* and see many of its recovered treasures at this fascinating museum, which is filled with fascinating facts and audiovisual insights.

Every half an hour there's a 15-minute film about the raising of the ship, which is a must for all who didn't see coverage of the astonishing event in 1982. Purchasing a single-attraction ticket to this museum includes admission to the ship itself.

Royal Naval Museum

This huge museum has five galleries of naval history, ship models, battle dioramas, medals, paintings and much more. Audiovisual displays re-create the Battle of Trafalgar and one even lets you take command of a battleship – see if you can cure the scurvy and avoid mutiny. One gallery is entirely devoted to Lord Nelson.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

A short hop over the water from Gunwharf Quays but a world apart in atmosphere, the **Point** is home to the characterful cobbled streets of Old Portsmouth, populated by salty-dog pubs with outdoor seating ideally positioned to watch the passing stream of ferries and navy ships, and to ponder the Spinnaker Tower from a new angle.

Just off the Point you can mount the **Round Tower** (originally built by Henry V) and the **Square Tower** of 1494 and take a stroll along the old fort walls.

There's a cluster of attractions on Clarence Esplanade at the Southsea end of the waterfront. The unusually hands-on **Blue Reef Aquarium** (☎ 9287 5222; www.blureefaquarium.co.uk; adult/child £7.50/5; 🕒 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb) has open-top tanks and huge underwater walkways and is a sure hit with kids. Another short stroll away is the bunkerlike **D-Day Museum** (☎ 9282 7261; www.ddaymuseum.co.uk; Clarence Esplanade; adult/child £6/3.60; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar), which recounts Portsmouth's important role as departure point for the Allied D-Day forces in 1944.

Then right next door by the water is ugly grey **Southsea Castle** (☎ 9282 7261; www.southsea castle.co.uk; adult/child £3/1.80; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct), built by Henry VIII, and, by all accounts, from where he would have watched his beloved *Mary Rose* sink. The castle was much altered in the early 19th century and there's now a lighthouse plonked on its top.

Further south, the **Royal Marines Museum** (☎ 9281 9385; www.royalmarinesmuseum.co.uk; Barracks Rd; admission £4.75; 🕒 10am-5pm Jun-Aug, to 4.30pm Sep-May) tells the story of the navy's elite force, and

has a jungle warfare display complete with live snake and scorpions.

You can also poke your nose into **Charles Dickens' Birthplace** (☎ 9282 7261; www.charlesdickens birthplace.co.uk; 393 Old Commercial Rd; adult/child £3/1.80; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct) to see where the hard-hitting author drew his first breath in 1812 and to ponder the very couch upon which he breathed his last in 1870.

Tours

Local Haunts Bus Tours (☎ 0800 389 6897; www.localhaunts.com; adult/child/student £6.50/2.50/4.50; 🕒 Mar-Oct) Runs 1½-hour sightseeing tours on old Routemaster buses from the bus station.

Walking tours (adult/child £3/free; 🕒 tours 2.30pm) A wide range of themed tours is operated through the tourist office, which also rents out self-guided audio tours for £5.

Waterbus (☎ 07746 628169; Gunwharf Quays; complete circuit adult/child £5/3, one stop only £1/50p) Runs circular harbour tours on the water, dropping off passengers between attractions in the process. The whole circuit takes one hour.

Sleeping

Most B&Bs are in Southsea. Centrally located spots fill up quickly so book ahead.

Southsea Backpackers Lodge (☎ 9283 2495; www.portsmouthbackpackers.co.uk; 4 Florence Rd, Southsea; dm/d £13/30; 📶) This grungy but friendly hostel with no-frills rooms packs three score beds into four- to eight-bed dorms, and has plenty of extras facilities such as lockers, pool table and garden. Bike storage is available.

Sally Port Inn (☎ 9282 1860; High St, Old Portsmouth; s/d/f £45/65/75; 🍷) If history makes you happy, and you don't mind a few shared facilities or mildly musty rooms, this creaky 16th-century inn has slanting floors, beams scavenged from ships and a Georgian cantilever staircase built with a ship's mast. The comfortable bar below serves food and there's a pay-and-display car park close by.

Holiday Inn Express (☎ 0870 417 6161; www.hiexp.com; The Plaza, Gunwharf Quays; r Mon-Thu/Fri-Sun £60/99; 📶 📺 📺 📺) The location has it. Part of Gunwharf Quays shopping city, within stumbling distance of restaurants and bars, and spitting distance from the Spinnaker Tower, this spotlessly bland chain cuts a few corners (no cooked breakfasts or restaurant here) but still wins hands down for convenience.

Florence House Hotel (☎ 9275 1666; www.florencehousehotel.co.uk; 2 Malvern Rd, Southsea; d £70-90; 📶 📺 wi-fi) One of the city's most stylish

boutique hotels is in this lovingly restored Edwardian house, studded with original features that sit comfortably amid contemporary décor. Bedrooms vary from chaste Victorian to ultramodern, and feature designer bathrooms with blissful power shower.

Eating

Southsea has the best eating options.

Sallyport Tea Rooms (☎ 9281 6265; 35 Broad St, the Point; breakfasts £3.75-5.25, lunches £3-5; 🕒 10am-5pm) Just as a traditional teashop should be: homely, civilised, filled with fussy collectibles and serving up loose-leaf speciality teas and other old-fashioned tearoom delights to the strains of 1940s jazz.

Wanted Bar & Restaurant (☎ 9282 6858; 39 Osborne Rd, Southsea; mains £6-10, 3-course set meal £21.95; 🕒 11am-11pm) This swish restaurant-bar boasts an inventive menu and a sleek minimalist vibe, featuring an illuminated wall of bottle bases and a light soundtrack of chill-out acoustics.

Lemon Sole (☎ 9281 1303; 123 High St, Old Portsmouth; mains £9.50-18; 🕒 lunch & dinner) A colourful little pick-your-own seafood restaurant, Lemon Sole lets you size up freshly netted critters at a counter, then choose how you want it cooked. It's in an attractive period building near the Point and has a cellar bar below.

Bistro Montparnasse (☎ 9281 6754; 103 Palmerston Rd, Southsea; 2-/3-course lunch £14.50/17.50, dinner £22.50/27.50; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) This classy but cosy bistro serves zesty French dishes with an English twist amid chic décor and polished wood floors.

Drinking

For a taste of modern Portsmouth, pick your way through the rows of bars and trendy terraced and balconied eateries that line the Gunwharf Quays.

Still & West (☎ 9282 1567; 2 Bath Sq) This relaxed salty-dogs pub on the Point has served many a sailor and smuggler in its day, and is still great for a drink on its waterside terrace, watching the passing yachts and ferries, and looking back toward the Spinnaker Tower.

Drift (☎ 9277 9839; www.driftbar.com; 78 Palmerston Rd; 🕒 9pm-3am) This hip London-style bar languishes behind whirlpool frosted glass and pebble-dashed front, has a slick chrome and wood interior, and lounge showcasing DJs on the weekends. Be sure to visit the quirky ultracool bathrooms.

Getting There & Away

Portsmouth is 75 miles southwest of London.

BOAT

There are several ways to reach the Isle of Wight from Portsmouth (see p223 for details).

P&O Ferries (☎ 0870 598 0333; www.poferries.com) sails twice a week to Bilbao (around 10 hours) in Spain. **Brittany Ferries** (☎ 0870 366 5333; www.britanyferries.co.uk) has overnight services to St Malo (10¾ hours), Caen (5½ hours) and Cherbourg (three hours) in France. **Acciona Transmediterranea** (☎ 0871 720 6445; www.transmediterranea.es) sails to Bilbao several times weekly, and **LD Lines** (☎ 0870 428 4335; www.ldlines.co.uk) has daily overnight ferries to Le Havre (8½ hours) in France. **Condor Ferries** (☎ 0870 243 5140; www.condorferries.co.uk) runs a weekly car-and-passenger service to Cherbourg (5½ hours).

For prices and more information, check the websites. The Continental Ferryport is north of the Historic Dockyard.

BUS

There are 15 National Express buses from London (£13.90, 2½ hours) daily, some via Heathrow airport (£13.90, 2¾ hours) and continuing to Southampton (50 minutes). Bus 700 runs to Chichester (one hour) and to Brighton (3½ hours) half-hourly Monday to Saturday, hourly on Sunday.

TRAIN

There are trains every 10 minutes or so from London Victoria (£23, two hours 20 minutes) and Waterloo stations (£23, one hour 40 minutes). Trains also go to Southampton (£7.10, 40 to 55 minutes), Brighton (£13.80, one hour 40 minutes, hourly), Winchester (£7.90, one hour, hourly) and Chichester (£5.30, 30 to 46 minutes, two hourly).

For the Historic Dockyard get off at the final stop, Portsmouth Harbour.

Getting Around

Bus 6 operates between the Portsmouth Harbour bus station and South Parade Pier in Southsea via Old Portsmouth.

The **Gosport Ferry** (☎ 9252 4551; www.gosportferry.co.uk; £1.80 return, bicycles travel free) shuttles back and forth between the Hard and Gosport every 10 to 15 minutes.

For a taxi try **Aquacars** (☎ 9261 1111, 9278 7666) in Southsea. There's also a taxi stand near the bus station.

Waterbus (p217) boats will drop you between Gunwharf Quays and Old Portsmouth for £1/50p per adult/child.

SOUTHAMPTON

☎ 023 / pop 234,224

This down-to-business port city and gateway to the Isle of Wight has a long and eventful past thanks to its position on the Solent, an 8-mile inlet into which flow the Rivers Itchen and Test. However, Southampton's history does not always make happy reading. While the city was once a flourishing medieval trading centre, its centre was gutted by merciless bombing in WWII and consequently there's little left of its early heritage. The city's gritty waterfront is also the point from which the *Titanic* set sail on its ill-fated voyage in 1912, and larger-than-life ocean liners such as the *QEII* still dock on the waterfront.

The **tourist office** (☎ 8083 3333; www.visit-southampton.co.uk; 9 Civic Centre Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 10.30am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep) has details of accommodation and guided walks.

Sights & Activities

The city's top attraction is **Southampton Art Gallery** (☎ 8083 2277; www.southampton.gov.uk/art; Commercial Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1-4pm Sun), in the colossal Civic Centre opposite the tourist office. The collection is spaced through airy surrounds and features the best of 20th-century British art, including work by Stanley Spencer, JMW Turner and Gainsborough.

A boxy little 14th-century warehouse on the waterfront now houses the **Maritime Museum** (☎ 8022 3941; Wool House, Town Quay; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat year-round, to 4pm Sun Apr-Oct), which tells the tragic story of the *Titanic*, as well as running through Southampton's port history since 1838. The building was once used as a prison, and has an impressive timber roof upon which inmates carved their names.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Southampton International Airport (☎ 0870 040 0009; www.southamptonairport.com) has flights to around 40 destinations in the UK and Europe, including Amsterdam, Paris, Dublin and holiday resorts in Spain. There are five trains hourly between the airport and the main train station (seven minutes).

BOAT

Red Funnel (☎ 0870 444 8898; www.redfunnel.co.uk) runs regular passenger and car ferries to the Isle of Wight and there is a ferry service to Hythe in the New Forest.

BUS

National Express coaches run to London and Heathrow 16 times per day (£13.40, 2½ hours). It also runs a 6.50pm bus to Lymington (40 minutes) via Lyndhurst (20 minutes) in the New Forest.

Bus M4 runs to Portsmouth three times daily (40 minutes). Bus 32 runs to Winchester (30 minutes) approximately hourly, with reduced services on Sunday. Bus 56/56A goes to all the main towns in the New Forest hourly (departures every two hours on Sunday). When boarding buses, ask about the good-value Explorer tickets valid on these routes.

TRAIN

Trains to Portsmouth run twice hourly (£7.10, 46 to 59 minutes) and to Winchester (15 to 23 minutes) every 20 minutes.

NEW FOREST

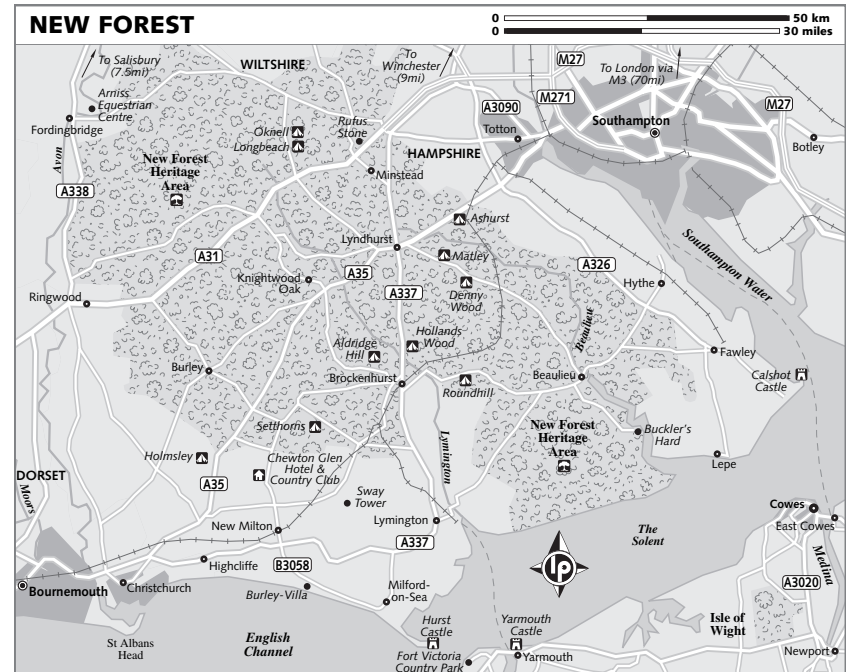
The only thing new about this ancient swathe of wild heath and woodland is its status of National Park, finalised in 2005. It's a unique place, with an even more singular history and archaic traditions that date back almost 1000 years (see the boxed text, p220), but more than that it's a joy to explore. Wild ponies mooch around its picturesque scrubland, paying no attention to the walkers and cyclists that pant past. Deer flicker in the distance and rare birds flit among the foliage. A scattering of genteel villages dot the landscape and a web of walking and cycling trails connects them.

The park is also a hugely popular destination for campers, and Lyndhurst's tourist office has a free brochure detailing its many designated camping areas. For more information, go to www.thenewforest.co.uk.

Activities

CYCLING

This is an ideal spot for two-wheel explorations and there are several rental shops. You



VERDERERS, AGISTERS & PONIES

The New Forest is the only area of England to remain relatively untouched since Norman times, thanks in large part to its unsuitability as agricultural land. If the presence of so much unfenced territory is remarkable enough, what is fascinating about the New Forest is that it still retains a code of law handed down during the reign of William the Conqueror.

William officially declared the whole area a royal hunting preserve in 1079, thereby protecting it from development. The crown still owns 100 sq miles of the New Forest, while the remaining 50 sq miles are owned by verderers, or commoners, who in the past reared wild ponies as work horses. Today the ponies are mostly left to graze the land at will.

The verderers' status is still protected by the 1077 Commoners' Charter, and every year, they elect five agisters, who are responsible for the daily management of area's ponies, cattle, donkeys, pigs and sheep.

will need to pay a deposit (usually £20) and provide identification.

AA Bike Hire (☎ 023-8028 3349; www.aabikehirenewforest.co.uk; Fern Glen, Gosport Lane, Lyndhurst; adult/child per day £10/5)

Country Lanes (☎ 01590-622627; www.countrylanes.co.uk; Train Station, Brockenhurst; bike/tandem per day £14/25; ☹ Easter-Oct)

Cyandexperience (☎ 01590-624204; www.cyclax.co.uk; Brookley Rd, Brockenhurst; per half-/full day from £6.50/11)

Forest Leisure Cycling (☎ 01425-403584; www.forestleisurecycling.co.uk; the Cross, Village Centre, Burley; per day from £11)

HORSE RIDING

No, we're *not* talking about saddling up one of the wild ponies. But nonetheless riding is a wonderful way to roam the New Forest. The following stables can arrange rides, and welcome beginners:

Arniss Equestrian Centre (☎ 01425-654114; Godshill, Fordingbridge)

Burley-Villa (Western Riding; ☎ 01425-610278) It's off the B3058, just south of New Milton.

Getting There & Around

Southampton and Bournemouth bracket the New Forest and there are regular bus services from both. Trains run every half-hour to Brockenhurst from London Waterloo station (£29.50, 1½ hours) via Winchester (£8, 31 minutes) and on to Bournemouth (£5, 15 to 27 minutes). Local trains also link Brockenhurst with Lymington.

The **New Forest Tour Bus** (www.city-sightseeing.co.uk; adult/child £9/4.50; ☹ tours hourly 10am-4pm Jun-Aug) runs two-hour hop-on hop-off bus tours that pass through Lyndhurst main car park, Brockenhurst Station, Lymington and

Beaulieu; it also has a cycle trailer to rest tired legs.

Busabout tickets offer unlimited travel on main bus lines in the region for seven days and cost £25/16 per adult/child; details are on www.wdbus.co.uk, along with local timetables.

LYNDHURST

☎ 023 / pop 2281

A good base from which to explore the national park or simply stop off for a pint, a cuppa or a map, the quaint little country village of Lyndhurst is one of the larger settlements in the area and has an excellent tourist office, good facilities and several cosy pubs and restaurants.

The **tourist office** (☎ 8028 2269; www.thenewforest.co.uk; High St; ☹ 10am-5pm) sells a wide variety of information on the New Forest, including cycling maps, a map showing walking tracks, and a free camping and caravanning guide. It also sells the Ordnance Survey (OS) map (No 22, £7.49), which covers the area in greatest detail. In the same building, the informative **New Forest Museum** (☎ 8028 3444; www.newforestmuseum.org.uk; adult £3) runs through the unique ecology and social history of the region.

Just across the car park, the **library** (☎ 8028 2675; ☹ 10am-1pm Fri & Sat, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue, 3-5pm Wed) has free internet access.

Sleeping & Eating

Forest Cottage (☎ 8028 3461; www.forestcottage.co.uk; High St; s/d £28/50; ☎ ☹) A cosy little 300-year-old cottage perched at the far end of High St, but just a two-minute walk from the centre, this wholesome B&B lets you relax into the country mind-set with inviting rooms, a library of natural history and pretty garden.

Crown Hotel (☎ 8028 2922; www.crownhotel-lyndhurst.co.uk; High St; s/d £87.50/145; ☎ ☹) An old English country house with mullioned windows and creaky staircases now hosts this reliable hotel, with pleasant enough if slightly fuddy-duddy décor, teddy bears on the beds and pleasant professional service.

Le Poussin@Parkhill (☎ 8028 2944; www.lepoussin.co.uk; Beaulieu Rd; set lunch £15-20, 4-course dinner £35) The self-taught Michelin-starred chef at this superb restaurant and hotel uses the freshest organic and local foods to orgasmic effect, and the classy rooms (£70) overlook its own private park. It also has a beautiful former royal hunting lodge near Brockenhurst at Whitley Ridge.

Getting There & Away

Buses 56 and 56a run twice hourly to Southampton (34 minutes) daily except Sunday. Lyndhurst has no train station, and the nearest stop is Brockenhurst, 8 miles south, see opposite.

White Horse Ferries (☎ 8084 0722; www.hytheferry.co.uk) operates a service from Southampton to Hythe, 13 miles southwest of Lyndhurst, every half-hour (£4 off-peak return, 12 minutes).

AROUND LYNDHURST

Rev-heads, historians and ghost-hunters all gravitate to **Beaulieu** (☎ 01590-612345; www.beaulieu.co.uk; adult/child £15/7.75; ☹ 10am-6pm May-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Apr), pronounced bewley, a tourist complex based around the site of what was once England's most important 13th-century Cistercian monastery. Following Henry VIII's monastic land-grab of 1536, the abbey fell to the ancestors of current proprietors, the Montague family.

Moto-maniacs will be in clover at Lord Montague's **National Motor Museum**, but you

don't need to be one to enjoy the comedy or sheer glossy splendour of its vehicles, which come in every shape and size. Some will even leave you wondering if they really are cars, or strange hybrid planes, boats or metal bubbles with wheels. It's hard to resist the romance of the early classics, or the oomph of winning F1 cars. Here too are several jet-powered land-speed record breakers including *Bluebird*, which famously broke the record (403mph, or 649km/h) in 1964. There is even a large collection of celebrity bangers such as Mr Bean's Austin Mini and James Bond's whizz-bang speed machines. Outside you can hop aboard a veteran bus from 1912, or settle down for racing games in the PS2 computer area.

Beaulieu's grand but indefinably homely **Palace** began life as a 14th-century Gothic abbey gatehouse, but received a 19th-century Scottish Baronial makeover from Baron Montague in the 1860s. Around the corner, an exhibit in the 13th-century **abbey** walks visitors through everyday life in the monastery. If you hear eerie Gregorian chanting or feel the hairs on the back of your neck quiver, you won't be surprised to learn the abbey is supposedly one of England's most haunted buildings.

The New Forest Tour Bus stops directly outside the complex on its circular route via Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst and Lymington. You can also get here from Lymington (35 minutes) by catching bus 112 which continues to Hythe and the ferry to Southampton.

LYMINGTON

☎ 01590 / pop 14,227

The bustling little harbour town of Lymington has several strings to its tourism bow, being not only a popular yachting base with two marinas freckled with fiberglass floaters, but also a handy base for the New Forest and a

WORTH THE TRIP

Unquestionably one of the top hotel-spas in Britain (some say Europe or even the world), five-star **Chewton Glen Hotel & Country Club** (☎ 01425-275341; www.chewtonglen.com; r from £290; ☎ ☹) lives up to every one of its rave reviews. A country house in sprawling grounds, with a croquet lawn and golf course that seem snipped by nail scissors, the building itself is filled with character and antiques. The staff is programmed to anticipate every need before you've even realised them, the sophisticated rooms and facilities astound and the superb Marryat restaurant has won many a plaudit on its own merits. Enough superlatives already? Well we've one more reserved for the hotel spa, which is the absolute epitome of luxury.

Chewton is situated a mile north of New Milton village, in the southern reaches of the New Forest.

jumping-off point to the Isle of Wight. It's a pleasing Georgian town with a few cobbled streets and a range of quirky bookshops, inns and nautical stores.

Information

Free internet can be arranged at Lymington's main **library** (☎ 673050; North Close; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Wed, 9.30am-5pm Sat), a few blocks from Lymington Town train station.

Lymington Laundrette (☎ 672898; 11 New St; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) is on hand to make hiking gear smell sweet again; it's next door to the tourist office.

ATMs, banks and shops line the Georgian and Victorian High St. There's a post office at the end of High St near St Thomas Church.

The **tourist office** (☎ 689000; www.thenewforest.co.uk; New St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), a block off High St next to the museum, sells walking tours of town and will help you find accommodation.

Sights

Lymington was once known as a contrabandist port, and you can learn about the local smugglers, salt makers and yachties in **St Barbe Museum** (☎ 676969; www.stbarbe-museum.org.uk; New St; adult/child £3/2; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat).

Sleeping & Eating

Angel Inn (☎ 672050; www.roomattheinn.co.uk; 108 High St; r Mon-Thu/Fri-Sun £44.95/79.95; ☎ ☒) Striking a fair balance between traditional and modern, this boutique hotel in a renovated Georgian coaching inn features clean, warmly decorated and woody rooms and a cosily lit and imaginative bistro downstairs.

Wistaria (☎ 688090; www.wistaria.org.uk; St Thomas St; mains £11-20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Festooned with flowering wisteria, this converted Georgian town house was formerly a doctor's surgery, and is now an airily elegant eatery with fawning service and exquisite seasonal food. It also offers three sumptuously decorated top-end rooms (single/double £95/120). It's 200m up High St from the Angel Inn.

Getting There & Away

The bus station is just off High St. Lymington has two train stations: Lymington Town and Lymington Pier; the latter is where the Isle of Wight ferry drops off and picks up. Trains to Southampton (£7.80, 45 minutes) via Brockenhurst leave every half-hour.

Wightlink Ferries (☎ 0870 582 7744; www.wightlink.co.uk) cross to Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight every half-hour costing £10/45.60 return for foot passenger/cars (30 minutes).

ISLE OF WIGHT

This lovely island, just a few miles off the Hampshire coast, does its utmost to bottle traditional childhood-holiday nostalgia and sell it. A popular escape for yachties, cyclists, walkers and the bucket-and-spade brigade since Victorian times, it alternates between chocolate-box quaint and crazy-golf kitsch, rosy-cheeked activity and rural respite. But the last few years have also seen a fresh youthful buzz injecting life into its southern resort towns, attracting a new generation of urbanites and romantic weekenders with gastropubs, slick hotels and big music festivals. Still, the island's principal appeal is its surprisingly mild climate, its myriad outdoorsy activities and its lush green hills that roll gently down to 25 miles of clean, unspoilt beaches.

For good online information, check out www.islandbreaks.co.uk.

Activities

CYCLING

Cyclists will be in clover here. There is a 62-mile cycleway, and the island has its own **Cyding Festival** (☎ 01983-203891; www.sunseandcycling.com) every September.

Bike rentals are available all over the island for around £10 to £15 per day or £45 per week. Companies include the following:

Extreme Cycles (☎ 01983-852232; www.extremecycles.co.uk; Church St, Ventnor)

Island Pedal Power (☎ 01983-292665; www.islandpedalpower.co.uk; 5-7 York St, Cowes) There's also an outlet at Brading train station.

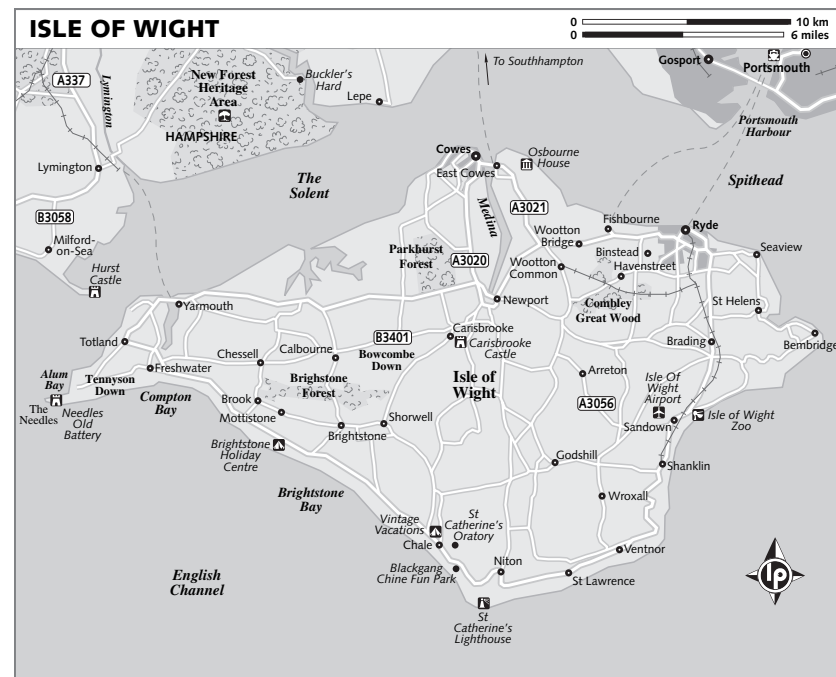
Tavcycles (☎ 01983-812989; www.tavcycles.co.uk; 140 High St, Ryde)

Wavells (☎ 01983-760738; The Square, Yarmouth)

Wight Cycle Hire (☎ 01983-731888; www.wightcyclehire.co.uk; Calbourne) Offers delivery and collection across the island.

WALKING

This is one of the best spots in southern England for gentle rambling. Walkers can pick and choose their way via an impressive 500 miles of well-marked walking paths through



lush green landscapes and coastal routes. The island's annual **Walking Festival** (☎ 813818; www.isleofwightwalkingfestival.co.uk & www.walkthewight.org.uk) is fêted as the largest in the UK, and takes place over two weeks in May. Tourist offices have trail pamphlets from £3.

Getting There & Away

Wightlink (☎ 0870 5827744; www.wightlink.co.uk) operates a passenger ferry from the Hard in Portsmouth to Ryde pier (15 minutes) and a car-and-passenger ferry (35 minutes) to Fishbourne. Both ferries run about every half-hour (£11 day return). Car fares start at £47 for a short-break return.

The Wightlink car ferry between Lymington and Yarmouth costs £10 per day return for passengers and from £45.60 for cars (30 minutes, every half-hour). Children travel for half price.

Hovertravel (☎ 01983-811000; www.hovertravel.co.uk) hovercrafts zoom back and forth between Southsea (near Portsmouth) and Ryde (£10.70 per day return, 10 minutes).

Red Funnel (☎ 0870 444 8898; www.redfunnel.co.uk) operates car ferries between Southampton and

East Cowes (£10.50 return, from £40 with car, 55 minutes) and high-speed passenger ferries between Southampton and West Cowes (£10/12.60 one way/return, 22 minutes). It also runs combined deals including admission to island attractions: see the website for details.

Getting Around

Southern Vectis (☎ 532373; www.islandbuses.info) runs relatively comprehensive bus services around the island. Only the remote southwest side between Blackgang Chine and Brook does not receive regular services. Buses run between the eastern towns approximately every 30 minutes. **Stagecoach Island Line** (www.island-line.com) runs trains twice hourly from Ryde to Shanklin (25 minutes) and the **Isle of Wight Steam Railway** (☎ 884343; www.iwsteamrailway.co.uk; ☎ May-Sep) branches off from this line at Smallbrook Junction and goes to Wootton (adult/child £8.50/5.50, 1st class £12.50/8.50).

Rover Tickets give you unlimited use of buses and trains for £9 for a day, £16 for two days and £35 for a week.

COWES

☎ 01983

This hilly Georgian harbour town on the island's northern tip is famous for **Cowes Week** (www.skandiacowesweek.co.uk), one of the longest-running and biggest annual sailing regattas in the world. Started in 1826, the regatta still sails with more gusto than ever in late July or early August. Lopped into two by the River Medina, the town's long waterfronts are fringed by fibreglass toys and vintage sailboats.

The **tourist office** (☎ 813818; Fountain Quay; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3.30pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10am-3.30pm Tue-Sat Nov-Easter) can point you towards local attractions and a rather dry (no pun intended) maritime museum.

Most people simply head for the right-royal hideaway of Queen Victoria, **Osborne House** (EH; ☎ 200022, 281784; East Cowes; adult/child £9.50/4.80; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep), which is the kind of lemon-frosted confection of pomp that only the Victorian era knew how to execute. Built between 1845 and 1851, it's the island's top attraction. Queen Victoria grieved here for many years after the death of her husband, and died here in 1901. There are some obscenely extravagant rooms, notably the stunning Durbar Room, and the gardens have a delightful Swiss Cottage where the royal ankle biters would play.

The house is across the River Medina from West Cowes; a chain ferry crosses regularly. From October to March it opens from 10am to 4pm Sunday to Thursday for guided tours only.

Sleeping & Eating

Halcione Villa (☎ 291334; Grove Rd, West Cowes; s £22.50-40, d £45-70; (P) ☒) You'll be made to feel right at home in this family-run B&B a short walk from the centre of town. It's an unpretentious but very clean spot with shared bathroom but in-room sink.

Fountain (☎ 292397; www.fountaininn-cowes.com; High St, West Cowes; s/d £65/90) This classic old pub has a handful of neatly kept rooms with modern amenities, CD players and en suite, and serves enormous portions of food (mains £6.50 to £9) as well as a good pint in its downstairs bar.

NEWPORT & AROUND

The capital of the Isle of Wight, rambling Newport has little for holidaymakers except for nearby **Carisbrooke Castle** (EH; ☎ 522107; adult/child £5.50/2.80; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar). An oft-repeated local saying states that whoever con-

trolled Carisbrooke also controlled the island. As you scramble around the sturdy ramparts of this medieval castle, spare a thought for the unfortunate Charles I, who was imprisoned here before his execution in 1649. Kids adore the Carisbrooke donkeys, which still draw water from a well using a treadmill.

RYDE

☎ 01983

The nippiest foot-passenger ferries to Wight alight here in this none-too-charming Victorian town with its tacky seafront arcades and workaday atmosphere. There is a **tourist office** (☎ 813818; 81-83 Union St; ☎ 9.30-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct) to help you get oriented and track down accommodation or transport.

Ryde Castle (☎ 563755; www.rydecastle.com; Esplanade; d £85-100; (P)) is one of the more characterful places to stay in Ryde. Located only a short hop from the passenger ferry, this is a grey-crenulated castle sure enough, though not quite as ancient as they may have you believe. Rooms could belong in a chain hotel.

SANDOWN & SHANKLIN

☎ 01983

The island's southeast coast is home to some of its best-known beaches, and families wielding buckets, spades and blow-up dinghies descend in their droves to the twin resort towns of Sandown and Shanklin. Once you've had your fill of candyfloss, beachside frolics and funfair rides you can also go and growl at Britain's largest collection of tigers in the sprawling **Isle of Wight Zoo** (☎ 405562; Sandown; adult/child £5.95/4.95; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Feb-Mar & Oct).

VENTNOR

☎ 01983

The Victorian town of Ventnor slaloms steeply down along the island's southern coast, and these days it's the island's creative epicentre, brimming with a new wave of quirky boutiques, musicians and artists.

Perched right on the seafloor esplanade, the **Spy Glass Inn** (☎ 855338; www.thespyglass.com; The Esplanade; 2-person flats from £60) has several self-contained flats with fuddy-duddy décor but sea views; no kids allowed. The lively pub below is festooned with nautical knick-knacks.

Or for a taste of new Wight and a spot of pampering in the process, book yourself in at chintz-free boutique hotel the **Hambrough** (☎ 856333; www.thehambrough.com; d with sea view £160-

WIGHT'S OWN WOODSTOCK

The tranquil Isle of Wight is commonly described as 'England, only a few decades ago', making reference to its genteel traditions and largely unspoilt charm. But the last few years have seen an altogether different revival of past decades. For this island was the once the setting for a series of infamous rock festivals that burned short but bright from 1968 to 1970.

The final festival is the stuff of rock legend: an incredible 600,000 doped-up hippies gathered here to see the likes of The Doors, The Who, Joni Mitchell and – most famously – the last performance of rock icon Jimi Hendrix. He was to die less than three weeks later, aged just 27. The festival also bit the dust in the same year after a bunch of the so-called love children ran amok; the incident led to an 'Isle of Wight' Act being passed in parliament, and all gatherings of more than 10,000 people were henceforth banned.

But the 2000s have recently seen a rekindling of the island's revolutionary festivals, which are fast growing into some of England's top music events. The new generation of **Isle of Wight Festivals** (www.isleofwightfestival.com), held in mid-June, has already been headlined by the likes of REM and Coldplay, while dance-oriented newborn **Bestival** (www.bestival.net), in mid-September, has seen the Pet Shop Boys, Scissor Sisters and more.

200; (P) ☒), where chic décor, lots of natural light and sea views seal the deal. Room six even has a sea-view bath for two.

SOUTH WIGHT

The southernmost point of the island is marked by sturdy mid-19th-century **St Catherine's Lighthouse**. Far more exciting for visitors, however, is the stone rocket-ship lookalike, **St Catherine's Oratory**. This odd construction is a lighthouse dating from 1314 and marks the highest point on the island.

You'll find something for the kids a couple of miles further west at **Blackgang Chine Fun Park** (☎ 01983-730052; www.blackgangchine.com; 4yr & up £8.50; ☎ 10am-10pm mid-Jul-Aug, 10am-5pm Apr-early Jul, Sep & Oct), a Victorian landscaped garden-turned-theme park with water gardens, animated shows and a hedge maze.

Slightly further west, a dairy farm hosts the glorious hippy-throwback **Vintage Vacations** (☎ 07802-758113; www.vintagevacations.co.uk; Chale; 4-person caravans per weekend £135-165, per week £315-425; (P) ☒), which rents out four 1960s dazzling-aluminium Airstream trailers from California; they've been lovingly refitted with retro furnishings. Flower-power two-man tents can also be hired for £20 per night. Camping has never been so cool.

WEST WIGHT

The island's southwestern corner is its most remote, with bumpy scenic drives past sheep and cattle farms, thatched farmhouses and secluded beaches. The most stunning stretch of cliffs is on its western tip, also home to the most famous chunks of chalk in the region: the

Needles. These jagged white rocks rise shardlike out of the sea, forming a perfect line like the backbone of a prehistoric sea monster.

Here too you'll find the military **Needles Old Battery** (NT; ☎ 01983-754772; admission £3.90; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Jul & Aug, 10.30am-5pm Sun-Thu Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct), a fort established in 1862 and used as an observation post during WWII. There's a 60m tunnel through the cliff to a searchlight lookout.

You can get to the point by a 1-mile cliff-top walk from Alum Bay or hold out for one of the tourist buses that run between bay and battery hourly, or twice hourly in July and August.

In Alum Bay you'll also find the happy hullabaloo of kiddies rides, boat trips and souvenir shops at the **Needles Park** (☎ 0870 458 0022; www.theneedles.co.uk; admission free; ☎ 10am-dusk Apr-Nov), which also has a chairlift down to the beach and a sweet factory with demonstrations of how its teeth-rotting treats are made. There are fireworks nightly in August.

Sleeping

Totland Bay YHA (☎ 0870 770 6070; totland@yha.org.uk; Hirst Hill, Totland; dm £10.95; (P) ☒) A large, marvellous Victorian house overlooking the water, with mostly family-oriented dorms and a maximum of eight beds per room.

Brightstone Holiday Centre (☎ 01983-740244; www.brightstone-holidays.co.uk; tents 2/4 persons £12/18, caravans from £16, B&B adult/child £25/13, 2-person cabins per week from £230; (P) ☒) Long-time family favourite, this self-contained caravan and cabin park and B&B perches atop cliffs overlooking a stunning stretch of coastline. It's located on the A3055, 6 miles east of Freshwater.

WEST SUSSEX

Serene West Sussex comes as a little light relief after the faster-paced adventures of Brighton and East Sussex. The tumbling hills and valleys of the South Downs dominate the countryside. And both dramatic Arundel and dignified big sister Chichester make good bases from which to explore the county's winding country lanes and scout out its remarkable Roman ruins.

ARUNDEL

☎ 01903 / pop 3297

There's something irresistibly romantic about Arundel: this attractive little town with its vast fairy-tale castle and steep hillside streets lined with excellent restaurants and antique stores makes a great weekend break or stopover. While much of the town appears medieval – especially the whimsical castle that has been home to the dukes of Norfolk for centuries – most of it dates to Victorian times.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 882268; www.sussexbythesea.com; 61 High St; ☎ 10.30am–4pm Mon–Sat, 2–4pm Sun Easter–Oct, 10am–3pm Nov–Easter) has maps and an accommodation-booking service for £1.50. Here too is a small **museum** (☎ 885708; www.arundel-museum.org; adult/child £2/1) on Arundel's history.

Sights & Activities

The 18th- and 19th-century English gentry were famously fond of a good folly, but you'll see few more elaborate than **Arundel Castle** (☎ 883136; www.arundelcastle.org; adult/under 16yr/student & senior £12/7.50/9.50; ☎ 11am–5pm Sun–Fri Apr–Oct), which builds upon the altogether more modest remains of an 11th-century keep in its heart. The original castle was largely razed during the Civil War, but it was enthusiastically reconstructed

to heroic proportions by the eighth, 11th and 15th dukes of Norfolk between 1718 and 1900. The castle is still home to the current duke. Highlights include the atmospheric keep, the massive Great Hall and the library, which has paintings by Gainsborough and Holbein.

While you're here, take a quick tour of Arundel's ostentatious 19th-century **cathedral** (☎ 882297; www.arundelcathedral.org; ☎ 9am–6pm summer, to dusk winter), built in the French Gothic style by the 15th duke. It houses 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.

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 (☎ 0870 770 5676; arundel@yha.org.uk; Warningcamp; dm £15; ☎ ☒ ☑) Muddy boots and young families are welcome at this excellent hostel, housed in a Georgian mansion and principally catering to South Downs walkers. It's in sprawling grassy grounds on a charming country lane a 20- to 30-minute walk from town off the A27 (call for directions).

Norfolk Arms (☎ 882101; www.forestdale.com; High St; s/d from £75/125; ☎ ☒ ☑) A rambling old Georgian coaching inn built by the 10th duke, the Norfolk Arms has a comfortable feel that resists any hint of modern pizzazz but has beautifully kept country-style rooms and a family of plastic ducks to accompany you at bathtime.

Eating

Tudor Rose (☎ 883813; 49 High St; mains £5–8; ☎ 9am–6pm) There's a likeably kitsch spirit to this bustling family-run tearoom, with shades of pub-décor and walls cluttered with everything from faux armour to brollies, and ship wheels to a portrait of the Queen. The staff is uncommonly welcoming and efficient.

Lezinc (☎ 884500; www.lezinc.co.uk; 51 High St; mains £6–10; ☎ 9.30am–7pm Fri–Wed, to 10pm Thu) Slick modern designware and silver-grey rattan furniture combine with the low ceilings and oak beams of an old town house at this chic Parisian-style bistro, where it's all too easy to linger over fine wines by the glass, great coffees or light bites including *pain Poilane* (an unusual French bread with a slightly sour flavour) and gourmet tarts.

Town House (☎ 883847; www.thetownhouse.co.uk; 65 High St; 2-/3-course set lunch £12.50/16, set dinner £22/25; ☎ Wed–Sat) The only thing that rivals the stunning 16th-century Florentine gilded walnut ceiling at this elegant eatery is its five wonderful Regency-style rooms (single/double from £65/75), variously furnished with white four-poster beds, filmy fabrics and panelled walls.

Getting There & Away

Trains are the way to go. They run to London Victoria (£19.70, 1½ hours, twice hourly), and to Chichester (20 minutes, twice hourly). There are also links to Brighton (£7.30, 1¼ hours, twice hourly).

CHICHESTER

☎ 01243 / pop 27,477

Compact Chichester is a well-to-do Georgian market town that manages to straddle the divide between countryside charm and cosmopolitan culture. On the one hand, it's home to an array of traditional tea-and-crumpet shops, well-mannered townsfolk, a fine cathedral and streets of handsome 18th-century town houses. While on the other, Chichester boasts a famous theatre and arts festival and a superb modern-art gallery. Also the administrative capital of West Sussex, the town is within easy striking distance of some fascinating Roman remains that recall its days as a sprawling port garrison shortly after the invasion of AD 43.

Orientation & Information

The centre of town is marked by a striking crown-shaped Market Cross, built in 1501. The streets around it are pedestrianised and everything you'd want to see is within walking distance. There is a **tourist office** (☎ 775888; www.visitchichester.org; 29a South St; ☎ 9.15am–5.15pm Mon–Sat year-round, plus 11am–3.30pm Sun Apr–Sep) and a **post office** (nr Chapel & West Sts) in town. **Internet Junction** (☎ 776644; 2 Southdown Building, Southgate; per hr £1; ☎ 9am–8pm Mon–Fri, 11am–8pm Sat & Sun) has double-quick internet access.

Sights

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

A vision in clean-cut elegance, this **cathedral** (☎ 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 19th century. There are also a few 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 goose bumps during the daily **evensong** (☎ 5.30pm Mon–Sat, 3.30pm Sun).

PALLANT HOUSE GALLERY

Based in a wonderful Queen Anne town house once owned by a wealthy wine merchant, this outstanding **art gallery** (☎ 774557; www.pallant.org.uk; 9 North Pallant; adult/child/student £6.50/2/3.50; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sat, 12.30–5pm Sun) reopened with a swish new wing in 2006. It houses a superb collection of 20th-century British art, with names such as Caulfield, Freud, Sutherland and Moore represented. There are also historic works from British and international artists, from Picasso to Cézanne, Gainsborough to Rembrandt.

Festivals & Events

Running for more than 30 years, the annual **Chichester Festivities** (☎ 785718; www.chifest.org.uk) squeezes a wealth of terrific theatre, art, remarkably high-brow and fun low-brow speakers, fireworks and performances of virtually every musical genre into three weeks in June and July.

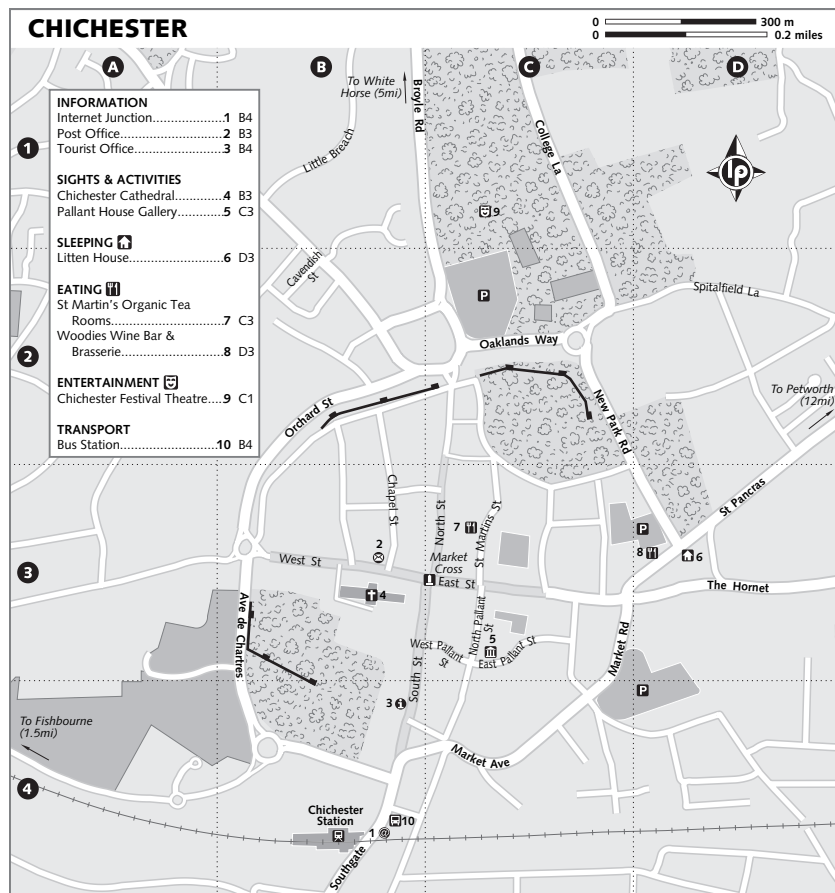
Sleeping

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

Litten House (☎ 774503; www.littenho.demon.co.uk; 148 St Pancras St; s/d from £30/44; ☎) Freshly home-baked bread and jams are served for breakfast in the garden or conservatory at this disarming central Georgian town house, which has three spacious and gracious old-style rooms. Request room two for an idyllic little balcony overlooking the garden. A car park lies across the way on New St.

WORTH THE TRIP

After cooing over majestic Arundel Castle, you might find yourself fancying a piece of that princely lifestyle pie for yourself. And hidden away in the countryside near the pretty village of Amberley, about 5 miles north of Arundel, **Amberley Castle Hotel** (☎ 831992; www.amberleycastle.co.uk; Amberley; d £165–780; ☎ ☒ ☑) lets you convert your daydreaming into reality. Set in a 900-year-old castle complete with moat and 2-tonne oak portcullis that is lowered every night, this luxurious hotel feels anything but embattled. Rather, its 19 sumptuous rooms, Jacuzzi bathrooms, landscaped gardens complete with tennis, croquet, golf, thatched treehouse and traditional British dining will leave you feeling utterly at peace. At least until you get the credit-card bill.



White Horse (☎ 535219; www.whitehorsechilgrove.co.uk; Chilgrove; s/d Mon-Thu £65/95, Fri-Sun £95/120; 🅇) For those with their own wheels, this beautiful whitewashed 18th-century coaching inn covered in wisteria is well worth the 6-mile drive north of Chichester. It has a first-rate restaurant (with a renowned 600-strong wine list) and nine polished contemporary rooms with king-sized beds, bathrobes and CD players.

Eating

St Martin's Organic Tea Rooms (☎ 786715; www.organictearooms.co.uk; 3 St Martins St; snacks £3-5; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) An oasis of quirky English calm in a part-18th-century part-medieval town house, this passionately organic café serves

freshly ground coffee and wholesome fare from salmon sandwiches to Welsh rarebits. But best of all is the ambience of its low-beamed interior, snug hideaways and winter fire.

Woodies Wine Bar & Brasserie (☎ 779895; 10-13 St Pancras St; mains £8-12; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) This classy but relaxed, lively but romantic restaurant has a darkly beamed front and a rustic-chic conservatory dotted with citrus trees and entwined with grapevines and fairy lights at the back. It serves quality Mediterranean food.

Entertainment

Chichester Festival Theatre (☎ 781312; www.cft.org.uk; Oakland's Park) This modern playhouse was

built in 1962 and has a 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 taken to the stage 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 every half-hour (hourly on Sunday) between Brighton (2¼ hours) and Portsmouth (one hour). National Express has a rather protracted daily service from London Victoria (£11.40, four hours).

TRAIN

Chichester can be reached easily from London Victoria (£18.50, 1¾ hours, three hourly) via Gatwick airport and Arundel. It's also on the coast line between Brighton (£9, 44 to 58 minutes) and Portsmouth (£5.30, 30 to 40 minutes). Trains run twice hourly.

AROUND CHICHESTER

Fishbourne Roman Palace & Museum

Anyone mad about mosaics should make a beeline to **Fishbourne Palace** (☎ 01243-785859; www.sussexpast.co.uk; Salthill Rd; adult/child £6.50/3.40; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Jul, Sep & Oct, to 6pm Aug, to 4pm Nov-Feb), where the largest known Roman residence in Britain is located. Mostly excavated in 1960, the once-luxurious mansion is thought to have been built around AD 75 for a Romanised local king. The modern pavilion that houses its foundations, hypocaust and painstakingly re-laid mosaics give the site a rather sterile atmosphere but the mosaics are enthralling enough to propel the visitor back in time. The centrepiece is a spectacular floor depicting Cupid riding a dolphin flanked by sea horses and panthers. There's also a fascinating little museum and replanted Roman gardens.

Fishbourne Palace is 1.5 miles west of Chichester, just off the A259. Buses 11 and 700 leave hourly from Monday to Saturday (bus 56 on Sunday) from outside Chichester Cathedral and stop at the bottom of Salthill Rd (five minutes' walk away). The museum is a 10-minute stroll from Fishbourne train station.

EAST SUSSEX

East Sussex is a richly varied county that absorbs armies of weekend Londoners whenever the weather is fine. Some come for the scintillating nightlife and shingly shores of Brighton, others to explore the white cliffs and civilised seaside charms of Eastbourne. Many more opt for romance amid the medieval streets of Rye or historic Battle, where William the Conqueror first engaged the Saxons in 1066. But you needn't chase the Chelsea tractors to enjoy East Sussex. It's just as rewarding to get off the beaten track and explore its lush countryside, linger along its winding country lanes and stretch your legs across the rolling South Downs.

RYE

☎ 01797 / pop 4195

Seemingly pickled, put on a shelf and promptly forgotten about by old Father Time, Rye is one of England's most beautiful medieval villages. You can't help but fall under its spell as you slip and wobble through the cobbled lanes, past mysterious passageways and crooked timber-beamed buildings. Romantics can lap up the townsfolk's tales of resident smugglers, ghosts, writers and artists, and even the most hardened cynic will be seduced by a slew of exquisite accommodations in its heart.

Once a coastal Cinque Port but long since abandoned by the shifting coastline, 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 weekends during the summer, when hordes of day-trippers dilute the town's time-warp effect.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 226696; www.visitrye.co.uk; Strand Quay; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb) runs a town model audiovisual history for £3. More fun is the freaky collection of penny-in-the-slot novelty machines upstairs. The tourist office also sells a *Rye Town Walk* map for £1, and rents out multilingual audio tours costing £3/1 per adult/child.

You can get online at **PC Hut** (☎ 224367; 46 Ferry Rd; per min 5p; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Sat). The **post office** (☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) is on Cinque Ports St.

Sights

From the tourist office, turn away from the water through Strand Quay, and clamber up the famous cobbled **Mermaid St**, thick with 15th-century timber-framed houses with quirky house names like 'The House with Two Front Doors', 'The House Opposite' and more.

Turn right at the T-junction for the Georgian **Lamb House** (NT; ☎ 229542; West St; adult/child £3/1.50; ☹ 2-6pm Thu & Sat late Mar-Oct), a handsome house supposedly home to several ghosts, but not that of its most famous resident, American writer Henry James, who lived here from 1898 to 1916; James wrote *The Wings of the Dove* here.

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 mishmash of medieval and later styles and its turret clock is the oldest in England (1561) still working with its original pendulum mechanism. There are great views from its **tower** (adult/child £2/free), weather permitting.

Turn right at the square's east corner for the sandcastle-archetype **Ypres Tower** (tower & museum adult/child £2.90/1.50, tower only adult/child £1.90/1; ☹ 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct, 10.30am-3.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), pronounced 'wipers'. This 13th-century building, with great views over Romney Marsh and Rye Bay, houses one part of Rye Castle Museum. It's overseen by a friendly warden fit to bust with colourful tales from the tower's history as fort, prison, mortuary and museum (the last two at overlapping times).

The other branch of the **museum** (☎ 226728; www.ryemuseum.co.uk; 3 East St; adult/child £1.90/1; ☹ 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct), a short stroll away on East St, is home to a 1745 fire engine made of leather and wood and other intriguing loot.

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

Activities

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

Sleeping

Rye boasts an exceptional choice of unique historic accommodation.

Windmill Guest House (☎ 224027; www.ryewindmill.co.uk; Mill Lane; s/d from £30/58; (P) ☹) It's not every night that you sleep under the arms of a windmill, this one rebuilt in 1932 and a working bakery until 1976. This riverside mill-turned-guesthouse sits a short hop from town and its eight bedrooms (one with private bathroom) are simply decorated and trimmed with wood. It's off Ferry Rd.

Old Vicarage (☎ 222119; www.oldvicaragerye.co.uk; 66 Church Sq; s/d £50/78; (P) ☹) This fairy-pink former vicarage is tucked discretely away on a cobbled lane. It wins intense loyalty from guests with its pretty walled garden, four prim rooms with sherry and biscuits, and superb breakfasts of homemade bread, jams and a complimentary newspaper. Children over five only.

Mermaid Inn (☎ 223065; www.mermaidinn.com; Mermaid St; d £160-220; (P) ☹) 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, lit by leaded windows and some are graced by secret passageways that now act as fire escapes. Small wonder it's a favourite spot for celebs, royals and honeymooners. But mind out for the resident ghost.

Eating & Drinking

Simon the Pieman (☎ 222207; 3 Lion St; snacks £1.50-3.50; ☹ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-5.30pm Sun) Ever-so-English Rye seems to have a pretty teashop for every occasion. This is one of the more traditional spots with calorific cream teas of freshly baked scones and simple lunches.

White Vine House (☎ 224748; www.whitevinehouse.co.uk; 24 High St; mains £7.50-11) Fine dining in a fine setting can be had at this elegant vine-covered Tudor building, with an exquisitely painted dining room and a reputation for cooking the freshest local produce. It also has pristine rooms (singles/doubles from £70/115).

Fish Café (☎ 222226; www.thefishcafe.com; 17 Tower St; mains £10-23; ☹ lunch & dinner) A contemporary renovation of an old antiques warehouse, furnished in calm shades with chocolate high-back chairs, this restaurant focuses on its modern local fish and seafood dishes, cooked simply but to perfection.

Getting There & Away

Bus 711 runs twice hourly between Dover (two hours) and Hastings (30 minutes) via

Rye. Trains run three times hourly to London Charing Cross (£20.40, two hours), but you must change either in Hastings or Ashford.

Getting Around

You can rent all-terrain bikes from £12/8 per day/four hours from **Rye Hire** (☎ 223033; ryehire@tiscali.co.uk; 1 Cyprus Pl; ☹ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri). Call ahead for weekend hire.

BATTLE

☎ 01424 / pop 5190

A small but attractive village with 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 for good.

Orientation & Information

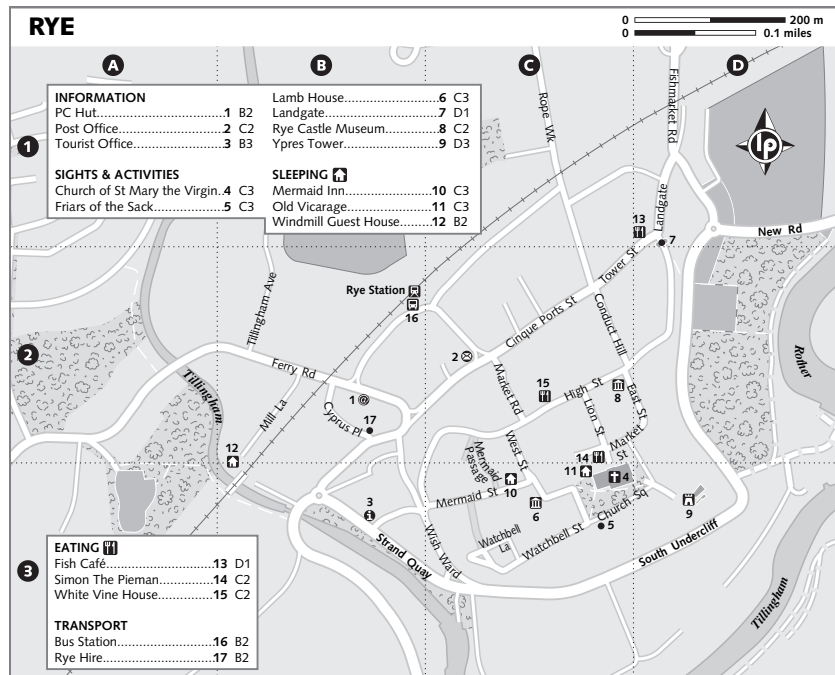
The train station is a short walk from High St, and is well signposted. The **tourist office** (☎ 773721; www.battletown.co.uk; High St; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar) should be operating from a spanking new visitor centre alongside the battlefield site entrance by the time you read this. The post 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. Just four years afterwards, the conquering Normans began work on **Battle Abbey** (EH; ☎ 773792; adult/child £6.30/3.20; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar), smack 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 hi-tech interactive presentations and blow-by-blow audio tours do their utmost to bring the battle to life.



Sleeping & Eating

Tollgate Farmhouse (☎ 777436; www.tollgatefarmhouse.co.uk; 59 North Trade Rd; d £60-70; (P) (X) (♿)) A homely atmosphere can be found a 10-minute walk 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: Jacuzzi, sauna and outdoor pool among them.

Powdermills (☎ 775511; www.powdermillshotel.com; Powdermill Lane; s/d £95/120; (P) (X) (♿)) Rebuilt in the 18th century after a Napoleonic gunpowder works dispatched the previous manor with a bang, this well-heeled country-house hotel revels in 80-hectare grounds of tranquil lakes and woodland that adjoin Battle Abbey's grounds. It has classic four-postered rooms and a wonderful orangery restaurant.

Pilgrim's Restaurant (☎ 772314; 1 High St; mains £11-22; (X) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Misshapen beams crisscross rough-plastered walls in this spectacular 15th-century pilgrim's lodging, now housing the finest and funkiest place to dine in Battle. Committed to using local produce, it's also open for afternoon tea and evening cocktails and there's a children's menu available.

Getting There & Away

National Express bus 023 from London (£10.80, 2¼ hours) to Hastings passes through Battle daily. Bus 4/5 runs every hour to Hastings (26 minutes). Trains also run to London Charing Cross every half-hour (£18, 1½ hours), via Hastings (16 minutes).

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 October 14th 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 graphically depicted in the Bayeux tapestry, was hit in the eye by an arrow. While he tried to pull the arrow out he was struck down by Norman knights. 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.

AROUND BATTLE Bodiam Castle

Seemingly an escapee from a bedtime storybook of medieval knights and feisty princesses, this archetypal four-towered castle (NT; ☎ 01580-830436; adult/child £4.60/2.30; (X) 10am-6pm mid-Feb-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-early Feb) is surrounded by a square moat teeming with oversized goldfish. It is the legacy of 14th-century soldier of fortune (the polite term for knights that slaughtered and pillaged their way around France) Sir Edward Dalyngrigge, who married the local heiress and set about building a castle to make everybody knew damn sure who was the new boss.

Parliamentarian forces left the castle in ruins during the Civil War, but in 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** (☎ 0870 600 6074; www.kesr.org.uk; adult/3-15yr £10.50/5.50), 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 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. Arriva bus 254 stops at Bodiam from Hastings (38 minutes) hourly during the day Monday to Saturday.

EASTBOURNE

☎ 01323 / pop 106,562

A classic golden-oldie seaside resort that has long brought to mind images of octogenarians dozing in deck chairs or tapping their feet to brassy tunes on the 1930s bandstand, elegant Eastbourne nonetheless likes to promote its many charms to sprightlier generations. There's certainly no doubting 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 chocolate-flake ice cream and head for Brighton.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0906 711 2212; www.visitseaste.com; Cornfield Rd; (X) 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat Apr-Sep) can find accommodation for a £3 fee. Access email at nearby **Coffee Republic** (☎ 438576; 69 Terminus Rd; per 20 min/1hr £1/3; (X) 7am-6pm).

Sights & Activities

A lovely vantage point for the sunset, Eastbourne's pretty filigree-trimmed pier also has a curious Victorian **Camera Obscura** (adult/child £2/1; (X) 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 quirky little museums are devoted to nostalgia. The **Museum of Shops** (☎ 737143; www.how-we-lived-then.co.uk; 20 Cornfield Tce; adult/child £4/3; (X) 10am-5pm) is swamped by an obsessive collection of how-we-lived memorabilia, while **Eastbourne Heritage Centre** (☎ 411189; www.eastbourneheritagecentre.co.uk; 2 Carlisle Rd; adult/child £1/50p; (X) 2-5pm Apr-early Oct) perks up exhibits on the town's development 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** (☎ 417023; Royal Pde) offers courses in sailing, windsurfing, kayaking and power boating.

Tours

City Sightseeing (☎ 0871 666 0000; www.city-sightseeing.co.uk; adult/child £7/3.50; (X) tours every 30min 10am-4.30pm Apr-Sep) runs buses around local sights, including Beachy Head cliffs.

Sleeping

Ebor Lodge (☎ 640792; beryl@mnewson.freereserve.co.uk; 71 Royal Pde; s/d from £25/50) A motherly welcome

sweeps you into this homy, well-maintained B&B five minutes' walk west of the centre along the seafront. It's a great deal with en-suite rooms decorated with a feminine eye for frills, and about a 10-second run from the seashore.

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

Eating

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

Café Belge (☎ 729967; www.cafebelge.co.uk; 11/23 Grand Pde; mains £9-16; (X) lunch & dinner) A fabulous position near the pier with large windows facing the seafront, a ridiculous choice of seafood dishes with an emphasis on mussels, and three-score choices of Belgian beer make this a hard restaurant to resist.

Getting There & Around

National Express runs two daily buses to London Victoria (£11.40, 2¼ hours) and to Brighton (55 minutes). The slower bus 12 runs three times an hour (twice hourly on Sunday) to Brighton (one hour 20 minutes).

Trains for London Victoria (£19.60, 1½ hours) and Brighton (£7.90, 30 to 40 minutes) leave every half-hour.

Wheely Good Fun (☎ 479077; www.onelifegroup.co.uk) hires skates and bikes from Fisherman's Green on Royal Pde.

AROUND EASTBOURNE Beachy Head

The famous chalk cliffs of Beachy Head are the highest point of a string of milky-white 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 some fool guidebook spoils it all by mentioning that this is also one of England's top suicide spots.

From Beachy Head, the famous Seven Sisters Cliffs rollercoaster their way west. Along the way, you'll stumble upon tiny seaside hamlet Birling Gap. Stop at the unthatched but still wood-beamed and log-fire-warmed **Thatched Bar** (☎ 01323-423197; mains £4.50-7; (X) 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-11pm Sun), beside the Birling Gap Hotel, for decent pub grub, real ale or

ice cream. One you're fortified, you might want to descend the metal cliffside steps to the grey shingly beach and make the bracing several-mile walk back to the lighthouse. Just keep a wary eye on the tide.

Beachy Head is off the B2103, from the A259 between Eastbourne and Newhaven. Eastbourne's City Sightseeing tour bus (see p233) stops at the cliff-top.

BRIGHTON & HOVE

☎ 01273 / pop 206,648

Brighton, Brighton, Brighton. Where to start? This is the most vibrant seaside resort in England and a high point in any visit to the region. In summer its pebbled shoreline throngs with sunbathers and beachside bars fizzle with energy and music. A multitude of trendy restaurants, slick boutique hotels and shops catering to every taste jam the streets leading back from the sea. The city's nightlife is legendary and more concentrated than its rivals in London and Manchester. Family fun, high-brow culture, an exuberant gay population and cutting-edge club scene all mingle into one good-time getaway not to miss.

Don't listen to the folk that call Brighton little London-on-the-Sea. However cosmopolitan it has become, this is a place with a character and quirkiness all its own. It has embraced the outlandish ever since the Prince Regent built his party palace here in the 19th century. And these days anyone can join in the fun. Celebrities rub shoulders with dreadlocked hippies, drag queens party next to designer-clad urbanites, couples stroll past fishermen and kids toddle around the tables of coffee-quaffing media types. It's a city with a devil-may-care attitude: from its edgy cool underbelly to its hedonistic highs, its chic gloss to its seedy Soho glam, its candyfloss frolics to its Bohemian detachment. Mix all its flavours together to get one heady cocktail, and a place for everyone in the shaker.

Orientation

Brighton Town merged with its western neighbour Hove 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 a tangle of pedestrian alleyways known as the Lanes, packed with

pubs, restaurants and trendy boutiques. A short walk north is the North Laine, full of quirky stores and Bohemian cafés. The city's effervescent gay scene flourishes in Kemp-town, 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 (☎ 731122; Churchill Sq Shopping

Centre; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun)

Brighton Books (☎ 693845; 18 Kensington Gardens;

☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Secondhand bookshop.

INTERNET ACCESS

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

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

Netpama (☎ 227188; 37 Preston St; per 30min 50p)

INTERNET RESOURCES

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

Insight City News (www.theinsight.co.uk)

visitbrighton.com (www.visitbrighton.com)

LAUNDRY

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

MEDICAL SERVICES

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

Wistons Clinic (☎ 506263; 138 Dyke Rd) For general medical consultations; less than a mile from the centre.

MONEY

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

NatWest (Castle St) Bank with ATM.

POST

Main post office (Ship St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 0906 711 2255; www.visitbrighton.com; 10 Bartholomew Sq; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Easter-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep-Easter) Overworked staff and a 50p-per-minute telephone line provide local information. You may find the website and on-site 24-hour accessible computer more helpful.



Sights

ROYAL PAVILION

If you thought the current batch of British royals was an eccentric bunch, just wait until you see Brighton's outlandish crowning jewel, the **Royal Pavilion** (☎ 290900; www.royalpalace.org.uk; adult/under 15yr £7.50/5; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Oct-Mar, 9.30am-5pm Apr-Sep). The dazzlingly exotic palace-cum-playpad of Prince George (see the boxed text, opposite), later Prince Regent then King George IV, is easily one of the most self-indulgently decadent buildings in England and an apt symbol of Brighton's reputation for hedonism. Even the forest of Indian-style domes and minarets outside is 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, room by room.

BRIGHTON MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Set in the Royal Pavilion's renovated stable block, this **museum & art gallery** (☎ 290900; Royal Pavilion Gardens; admission free; 🕒 10am-7pm Tue, 10am-5pm Wed-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) has a glittering collection of 20th-century art and design, including a crimson Salvador Dalí sofa modelled on Mae West's lips. There's also an enthralling gallery of world art, and a multimedia exhibit on Brighton's history where you can listen in on stories told by older and past generations.

BRIGHTON PIER

This grand old centenary **pier** (Palace Pier; www.brightonpier.co.uk; admission free) is Brighton beach's centrepiece and the place to shake off the city's cosmopolitan gloss and embrace its tackier seaside soul. Start by dizzying yourself on a few stomach-churning fairground rides, whizz around the Helter Skelter made famous by the Beatles song, buy a few strips of Brighton Rock, then flop into a candy-stripped deck chair and scoff candyfloss to your heart's content.

Its sad skeletal twin **West Pier** (www.westpier.co.uk) is a ghostly 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. There are now plans to replace it with a *Jetsons*-esque Brighton i360 observation tower.

Tours

The tourist office can organise a range of guided tours:

Brighton Walks (☎ 888596; www.brightonwalks.com; adult/child £6/3.50) Offers a huge variety of standard and offbeat themes including Gay's the Word and Ghost Walk. Show up for prescheduled walks or call to book.

City Sightseeing (www.city-sightseeing.co.uk; adult/child £6.50/2.50; 🕒 tours every 30min mid-Jun-Aug) 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-format audio guides downloadable from its website (£5) or you can hire them on a preloaded MP3 player at the tourist office for £6 per half-day.

Festivals & Events

From Gay Pride to sand sculpture, there's always something fun going on in Brighton, but the showpiece is May's three-week-long **Brighton Festival** (☎ 709709; www.brighton-festival.org.uk), the biggest arts festival in Britain after Edinburgh. A packed programme of theatre, dance, music and comedy features performers from all over the world.

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 the Brighton Festival in May.

BUDGET

Brighton's hostels are a varied bunch – several catering to raucous stag and hen nights, while others are more traditional and homely. Choose wisely!

Baggies Backpackers (☎ 733740; 33 Oriental Pl; dm/d £13/35) A warm familial atmosphere, worn-in charm and motherly on-site owner, as well as clean, snug dorms have made this long-established hostel something of an institution. It's also blessed with a homely kitchen, an all-too-comfy basement music room thick with cassettes, and TV room piled high with videos.

St Christopher's (☎ 202035; www.palacebrighton.co.uk; Palace Hotel, 10/12 Grand Junction Rd; dm £16-19.50, s/d £25/50; 📺) Party people gravitate to this no-frills hostel on the seafront. While quiet is a rare luxury, it boasts sea views and a spot near Brighton Pier and clubbing hot spots. Prices include breakfast and linen, but bring a lock for the under-bed cage. There's no kitchen.

THE PRINCE, THE PALACE & THE PISS-UP

It's widely known that England's George III was periodically, to be polite, off his rocker. 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 extravagant piss-ups 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 restored to its former glory.

MIDRANGE

Brighton is blessed with a wide selection of midrange accommodations.

Oriental Hotel (☎ 205050; www.orientalhotel.co.uk; 9 Oriental Pl; s without bathroom £35-40, d with bathroom Sun-Thu £60-100, Fri & Sat £80-125; 📺 wi-fi) Once home to a famously Bohemian nightclub, this stylishly renovated boutique hotel now houses sleek modern rooms in shades of coffee and mint, with fresh flowers, aromatherapy lights, and CD and DVD players. Downstairs there's a cosy candlelit bar with mosaic-tiled tables. The breakfast is organic.

Brighton House Hotel (☎ 323282; www.brightonhousehotel.co.uk; 52 Regency Sq; s £35-80, d £55-140; 📺 wi-fi) A traditionally styled Regency hotel with immaculate rooms, welcoming proprietors and refreshingly healthy breakfasts with organic ingredients and vegetarian options. Children are not catered to here. There's discounted parking in an underground lot next door.

Neo Hotel (☎ 711104; www.neohotel.com; 19 Oriental Pl; Fri-Sun s £60, d £100-150, Mon-Thu s £55, d £95-135; 📺 wi-fi) No surprise that the owner of this gorgeous designer-chic hotel is an interiors stylist. The nine rooms could belong in a showroom, each finished in rich colours and tactile fabrics, with bold floral and Asian motifs. Kick back in satin kimono robes, and watch a DVD on your flat-screen TV or indulge in massage and beauty treatments. One for couples, but not the kids.

TOP END

Hotel du Vin (☎ 718588; www.hotelduvin.com; Ship St; d from £135; 📺) This endearing jumble of Gothic-styled buildings near the seafront has been gifted with a new gloss of sophistication to become one of Brighton's foremost boutique hotels. Fronted by young, sparky staff and boasting three-dozen elegant rooms with Egyptian linen and irreproachable bathrooms, the hotel's trump card is its wonderful bistro with a wine list to impress savvy connoisseurs. Breakfast is extra.

De Vere Grand Hotel (☎ 224300; www.devere.co.uk; King's Rd; s/d incl breakfast from £140/220; 📺 📺 📺 📺) Attracting the gentry since 1864, this five-star institution overlooks the seafront. Trimmed by confectionlike filigree wrought iron outside, its palatial interior is dotted with top-hatted bell-boys and dignitaries. Luxurious rooms boast superb views and some Lilliputian balconies.

Eating

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

BUDGET

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

Pokeno Pies (☎ 684921; 52 Gardner St; pies £3.85; ☎ 10am-6pm) Bang goes the greasy image of the great British pie shop: this is guilt-free comfort food at its best. The slick glass-fronted café-takeaway has cornered the local market in affordable and surprisingly healthy gourmet pies. There are more than a dozen fillings, from richly flavoured Mediterranean lamb to Moroccan aubergine and feta.

Wai Kika Moo Kau (☎ 671117; 11a Kensington Gardens; mains £5-8; ☎ 9am-6pm) Say its daft name fast and you'll get a clue to the ethos of this primarily veggie-vegan café. It spills onto the pedestrian street outside so you can sip your soyachino or tuck into meat-free specials as the shoppers pass by.

Food For Friends (☎ 202310; 17a Prince Albert St; mains £6-10; ☎ 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.

MIDRANGE

Nia Café (☎ 617317; 87-88 Trafalgar St; mains £8-13; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) There's a very organic, textured feel about this simple rustic-chic café furnished with rough-cut wooden tables, pitted floor and exposed brick. It's a popular spot to chew the fat over a cappuccino or glass of organic wine, or to tuck into daily specials.

Terre à Terre (☎ 729051; 71 East St; mains £10-15; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun, dinner Tue) Herbivores have never had it so good. Terre à Terre offers cultured vegetarian dining in a blissful air-con environment with simple wood furniture, elegant stemware and striking citrus art. The inventive dishes, full of rich robust flavours, are exhaustively explained in the menu.

Seven Dials (☎ 885555; 1-3 Buckingham Pl; set lunch/dinner from £10/26.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Housed in an imposing former bank, this formal and crisply set-out restaurant is praised for excellent seasonal fish dishes. It's almost a mile from the seafront but worth the walk or taxi fare for a special occasion or well-deserved splurge.

Due South (☎ 821218; 139 Kings Rd Arches; mains £11-15; ☎ 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 local, environmentally sustainable and seasonal ingredients.

English's Oyster Bar (☎ 327980; 29-31 East St; mains £11-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) A 60-year institution, this Brightonian seafood paradise dishes up everything from oysters and traditional scampi to lavish lobster thermidor. It's converted from fishermen's cottages, with echoes of the elegant Edwardian era inside and buzzing alfresco dining on the pedestrian square outside.

Drinking

Brighton's nightlife is second only to London's, and has its own unique cocktail mix of clubs and bars along the seafront. For more ideas, visit www.drinkinbrighton.com.

Evening Star (☎ 328931; www.eveningstarbrighton.co.uk; 55 Surrey St) Hopheads heap praise on this beer-drinkers paradise; a snug unpretentious pub with a conveniently short stagger to the station after a sendoff from its wonderful selection of award-winning real ales, Belgian beers, organic lagers and real ciders.

Beach (☎ 722272; 171 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 and club. It has a funky brick-vaulted interior, and a wide terrace spilling onto the promenade within earshot of the surf and within sight of the talent dipping into it.

Koba (☎ 720059; www.kobauk.com; 135 Western Rd; ☎ 5pm-late) This übercool cocktail bar oozes it-crowd extravagance and exclusivity. It's technically a member's club but the sumptuous velvet-draped front bar opens to the hoi polloi until 11pm, just enough time to ingratiate yourself with a member to be invited back into the private 'Champagne Bar' or 'The Gods' with high ceiling and altar-style bar.

Dorset (☎ 605423; www.thedorset.co.uk; 28 North Rd) There's a laid-back Parisian street-café feel to this gastropub and Brighton institution, which 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 its decent menu too.

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* or 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.

Honey Club (☎ 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 that pile into its glittering depths. Dress up, party hard, then cool off your aching feet in the sea.

Audio (☎ 606906; www.audiobrighton.com; 10 Marine Pde; admission £3-8) Some of the city's top club nights can be found at this ear-numbing venue, where the music's top priority, cheap-drink offers roll and the dress-down rule of thumb deters designer dollies. Every night is different.

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 Britain 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 cruisey (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 cafés and hotels to bookshops as well as the more obvious bars, clubs and saunas. There's even a Gay's The Word walking tour (see Brighton Walks, p236).

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...

Amsterdam (☎ 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.

Café 22 (☎ 626682; 129 St James' St; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) This cool coffee shop hang-out and internet café is the place to get word on everything going on in town. It has snacks for £2 to £3.

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

Queen's Arms (☎ 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.

Club Envy (8-9 Marine Pde; ☎ 9am-2am) Stylish, chic but claustrophobic club where every night is different.

Revenge (☎ 608133; www.revenge.co.uk; 7 Marine Pde; ☎ 10.30pm-3am) Nightly disco, occasional cabaret and a dash of drag.

Funky Buddha (☎ 725541; www.funkybuddhabrighton.co.uk; Kings Rd Arches; admission £2-8) Lotus flower lamps and stylish chandeliers illuminate the twin arches of this sexy little subterranean seafront club, which dips into everything from acid house to disco.

THEATRE

Brighton Dome (☎ 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 located on New Rd.

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

Komedia Theatre (☎ 467100; www.komedia.co.uk; Gardner St, North Laine) This former billiards hall

and supermarket is now a stylish comedy, theatre and cabaret venue.

Shopping

An atmospheric jigsaw puzzle 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 packed with jewellers, coffee shops and boutiques selling everything from antique firearms to the latest foot fashions. There's another, less claustrophobic shopping district in North Laine, a series of streets northwest of the Lanes, including Bond, Gardner, Kensington and Sydney Sts, that are chock-full of retro-cool boutiques, music stalls and craft outlets.

Getting There & Away

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

BUS

Coaches leave hourly to London Victoria (£10, two hours 20 minutes) and twice hourly to Lewes (50 minutes) and Eastbourne (one hour 30 minutes). They also go twice daily to Chichester (2¼ hours) and Arundel (two hours). **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) has coach links to all London airports.

TRAIN

There are four hourly services to London Victoria and King's Cross stations (£17.70,

1¼ hours). For £2 on top of the rail fare you can get a PlusBus ticket that gives you unlimited travel on Brighton & Hove buses for the day. There are three services per hour to Portsmouth (£13.80, 1½ hours) and twice-hourly services to Chichester, Eastbourne and Hastings, as well as 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 (£2.80) from the driver to scoot back and forth on Brighton & Hove buses.

Parking can be an expensive nightmare. To park in any central street space you will need a voucher. They can be purchased from various garages and shops around town and cost £1.50 per half-hour in the centre, or per hour further out. Alternatively, there's a Park & Ride outside town with connecting buses, and pay-and-display parking along the Kingsway in Hove.

Cab companies include **Brighton Streamline Taxis** (☎ 747474) and **City Cabs** (☎ 205205) and there's a taxi rank on the junction of East St and Market St.

You can rent bikes from **Planet Cycle Hire** (☎ 748881; West Pier Promenade; 🕒 10am-6pm Thu-Tue May-Sep, 10am-4pm Fri-Mon Oct-Apr), next to West Pier, for £8/12 per half-day/day. A deposit and ID are required.