

EXCURSIONS

EXCURSIONS

No matter how much you love, enjoy, live and breathe London, it's good to get out of the city every now and then. Many Londoners appreciate their city more once they've had a chance to relax from its relentless pace. For visitors, getting out of London is fantastic for understanding just how different the capital is from the rest of the country. You don't really know England (or indeed, Britain) until you leave the capital – it's wildly unrepresentative of the rest of the country. Forget ethnic and religious diversity, urban chaos and architectural variety (for the most part) – you're up for a whole different experience, a classic England that's about fish and chips, thatched roofs, cream teas, and pubs open until 11pm. That's not to say there isn't quality outside London – you'll find some fantastic places to eat (among them one that's run by Britain's best chef, Heston Blumenthal), and the alfresco culture that's taken over London is spreading to the provinces, too. If you're here in the summer and head for the coast, you may even get to have a swim in the sea.

There are plenty of options to choose from in London's surroundings: the classic towns of Oxford and Cambridge offer a serene but intellectual day out, while coastal towns will give you quaint streets, a sense of space and long, windy beaches. If you're a castle lover, some of Britain's best castles are within London's easy reach. But whatever you go for, we can bet you'll be glad when you come back to London, step out of the station and feel the big city's buzz.

CLASSIC TOWNS

If you want to immerse yourself in the historical and academic, [Oxford](#) (p366) and [Cambridge](#) (p369) are the obvious choices. Just over an hour away from London, both have quarters that have remained largely unchanged for eight centuries. Commanding [Canterbury Cathedral](#) (p376) may also take your fancy.

SEASIDE

'I do like to be beside the seaside' goes the 1920s song, and if you like the seaside and come from the Continent, prepare for something completely different. The weather may be unreliable, but that's part of the English experience. The sea here is not so much for enjoyment and swimming, but for gazing at while battling to save your chips from being blown away by gale-force winds. The coastal towns are usually more working-class, with charming fish-and-chip shops and seafood

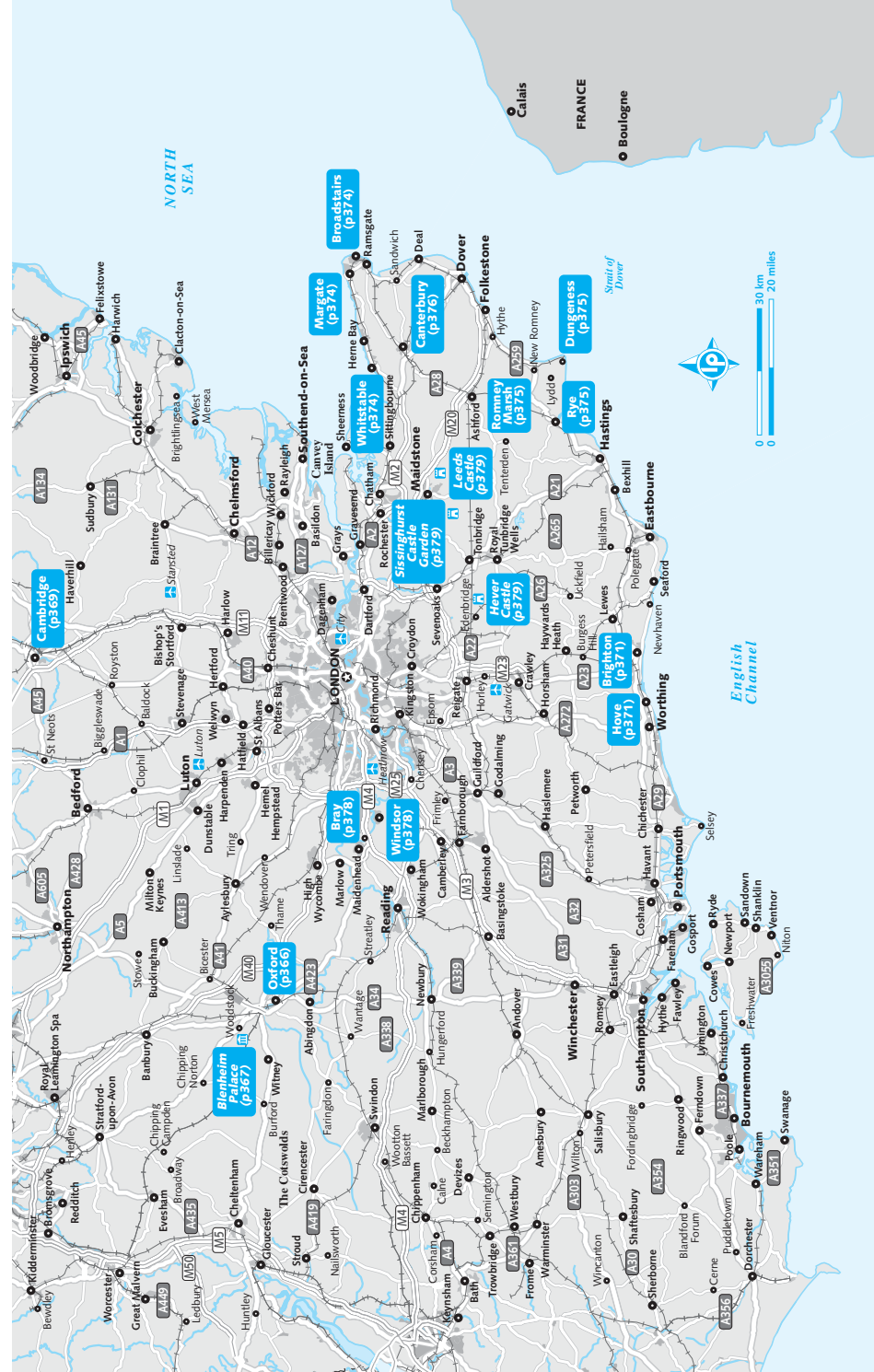
stands (selling lobster tails, jellied eels and so on), kitsch game halls and fantastic long beaches. But having said that, [Brighton](#) (p371) is only half like that – it's the most vivacious of the seaside places, its rapid gentrification having made it almost an extension of London, with cool bars, clubs and restaurants. During the summer you can even swim at its lovely pebbly beach. But the real charm is in the classic English seaside towns such as nostalgic [Broadstairs](#), kitschy [Margate](#) or mussel- and oyster-rich [Whitstable](#) (for all three, see p374). Medieval [Rye](#) (p375) is a great combination of the seaside with a historic town. [Romney Marsh](#) and [Dungeness](#) (both p375) coastal areas bordering Rye are some of the weirdest you'll ever encounter – in an extremely beguiling way.

CASTLES

As if to prove the saying that an Englishman's home is his castle, successive kings, queens, princes, dukes and barons have outdone each

WHY NOT WALK?

Another way to get out of London for the day is to join an organised country walk. A good-value, quality and fun option is [English Country Walks](#) (www.englishcountrywalks.com; per person incl lunch, transportation & admission fees £30-68), which takes small groups rambling through farm fields, exploring castles such as [Leeds](#) (p379) in Kent or take you teetering on the edges of the seaside White Cliffs at Dover. You get the added delight of refreshing (with a beer, usually) at one of the traditional pubs along the way. The charming guide is full of informative and entertaining stories about local history, and walks start and finish at rural train stations that are easily accessible from London terminals.



other by building some of the world's finest country houses over many hundreds of years. **Windsor** (p378), official residence of the Queen, is the oldest inhabited castle in the world (and while you're out this way you can delve into the gastronomic delights of nearby **Bray**, p378). Winston Churchill's birthplace, **Blenheim Palace** (see the boxed text, opposite), is amazingly opulent, while **Hever Castle** (p380), the childhood home of Henry VIII's second wife, Anne Boleyn, has lovely landscaped gardens. Set on two lakes, fairytale **Leeds Castle** (p380) – nowhere near Leeds but actually in Kent – has been called 'the loveliest castle in the world'. **Sissinghurst Castle Garden** (p380) is home to one of the planet's most famous contemporary gardens.

OXFORD

☎ 01865

Who hasn't heard of Oxford, England's first university town, full of spires, narrow ancient streets, great old pubs and masses of robed students? The city is so strongly defined and influenced by its university that most attractions, from its superb architecture, quads (quadrangles or courtyards) and gardens, are the university's property. It's better to visit in

term time if possible, because this is Oxford's real guise – without the students it may feel a little dead.

The town dates back to the early 12th century (having developed from an earlier Saxon village) and in the intervening period has been responsible for educating 26 UK prime ministers, among them Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. Even Osama bin Laden and former US president Bill Clinton briefly studied here (the latter puffed pot, as well).

Oxford's 35 colleges and five 'halls' are scattered around the city, but the most important and beautiful are in the centre. A good starting point is the **Carfax Tower** (☎ 792653; nr Queen & Cornmarket Sts; adult/7-16yr £2/1; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-3pm Nov-Mar), part of the now-demolished medieval Church of St Martin. There's a great view from the top (99 steps).

Christ Church College (☎ 276150; www.visitchristchurch.net; St Aldate's; adult/child £4.70/3.70; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun, last entry 4.30pm), the grandest of the colleges, was founded in 1525 and is massively popular with Harry Potter fans, having appeared in several of the movies. The main entrance to Christ Church is below Tom Tower, the top of which was designed by Sir Christopher Wren in 1682. However, the visitors'

entrance is further down St Aldate's via the wrought-iron gates of the Memorial Gardens and Broadwalk. The college chapel, **Christ Church Cathedral**, is the smallest in the country.

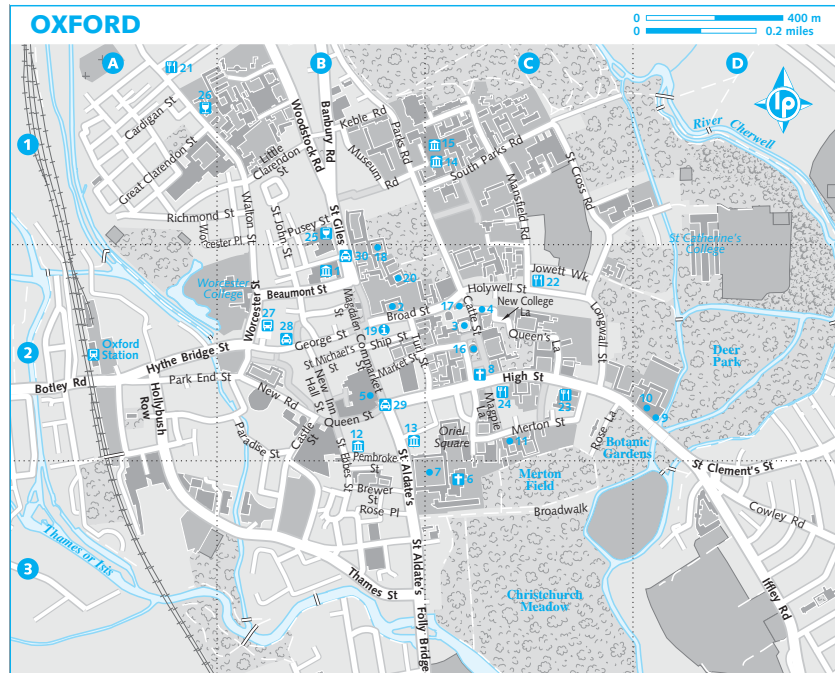
Merton College (☎ 276310; www.merton.ox.ac.uk; Merton St; admission free; ☎ 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun), founded in 1264, is on the brilliantly named Logic Lane, with the oldest medieval library still in use in the UK – the 14th-century **Mob Quad**. JRR Tolkien, author of *Lord of the Rings*, taught English at Merton from 1945 until his retirement in 1959.

The **Church of St Mary the Virgin** (☎ 279112; www.university-church.ox.ac.uk; tower admission adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☎ 9am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Sep-Jun) has a 14th-century tower that can be climbed for a fantastic view of the town's many spires. The stunning **Magdalen College** (☎ 276000; www.magd.ox.ac.uk; adult/child £3/2; ☎ noon-6pm mid-Jun-Sep, 1pm-dusk Oct-mid-Jun), on the River Cherwell (and pronounced maud-len), has huge grounds, including a **deer park** and Addison's Walk, which meanders through meadows to an island in the Cherwell. On 1 May it's traditional for students to leap off the Magdalen Bridge, al-

AROUND OXFORD

If you wish to extend your visit around Oxford, there are two obvious choices. First, **Blenheim Palace** (☎ 0870 060 2080; www.blenheimpalace.com; palace, park & gardens adult/child £14/8.50, park only £9/4.50; ☎ palace & gardens 10.30am-4.45pm mid-Feb-Oct, 10.30am-4.45pm Wed-Sun Nov-mid-Dec, park 9am-4.45pm year-round), near Woodstock, is the famously over-the-top Oxfordshire home of the Dukes of Marlborough and the birthplace of Winston Churchill. His bedroom is included on the interesting guided tour of the house, although the tapestries made for the first duke in the aftermath of his incredible military feats at Blenheim (in Germany) against the French are perhaps the highlight. You won't be alone in your journey, however, as the palace is hugely popular, especially in summer.

Oxford also acts as a secondary gateway to the rolling green hills of the Cotswolds (the primary gateway is Cheltenham). For information on sights and accommodation in the area, try www.oxfordshirecotswolds.org, www.cotswolds.gov.uk/tourism or Lonely Planet's *England* guide.



OXFORD

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though low water levels and recent injuries have left a question mark over this practice. The **University Botanic Gardens** are Britain's oldest, sitting by the River Cherwell since 1621.

Trinity College (☎ 279900; www.trinity.ox.ac.uk; Broad St; adult/child £1/0.50; ☎ 10.30am-noon & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 2-4pm Sat & Sun) was founded in 1555, and next to it, at the corner with Magdalen St, is **Balliol College** (☎ 277777; www.balliol.ox.ac.uk). The wooden doors between the inner and outer quadrangles still bear scorch marks from when Protestant martyrs were burned at the stake here in the mid-16th century. A little further up St Giles, behind Trinity College, is **St John's**, whose previous students included Tony Blair.

The Palladian-style **Radcliffe Camera** (1749) is Oxford's most photographed building and functions as a reading room for the **Bodleian Library** (☎ 277000, tours 277224; www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk; nr Broad St & Parks Rd; tours £4; ☎ 9.30am-4.45pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat, tours 10.30am, 11.30am, 2pm & 3pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am & 11.30am Sat Mar-Oct, 2pm & 3pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am & 11.30am Sat Nov-Feb), with Britain's third-largest dome. Check out the **Bridge of Sighs**, a 1914 copy of the famous Venice bridge, spanning New College Lane. Wren's first major work, the 1677 **Sheldonian Theatre** (☎ 798600; www.sheldon.ox.ac.uk; adult/child £2/1; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Sat), is where graduations and

TRANSPORT: OXFORD

Distance from London 57 miles (92km)

Direction Northwest

Travel time 1½ hours by bus, one to 1½ hours by train

Bus Oxford Tube (☎ 01865-772250; www.oxfordtube.com) and Oxford Bus Company (☎ 01865-785400; www.oxfordbus.co.uk) run round-the-clock services from Victoria coach station (single £10, return £13). Megabus (☎ 01738-639095; www.megabus.com) has six departures per day from Victoria coach station and from Gloucester Green in Oxford (online returns from £2.50). Oxford Express (☎ 01865-772250; www.oxfordbus.com) also has frequent services (return £13).

Car The M40 provides access from London, but Oxford has a serious traffic problem and parking is a nightmare. We highly recommend that you don't drive. If you do, use the Park & Ride system – as you approach the city follow the signs for the four car parks.

Train There are two trains (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.nationalrail.co.uk) per hour from London's Paddington train station (adult same-day return £18.80).

other important ceremonies and occasional concerts take place.

Oxford has some excellent (free) museums, among them **Oxford University Museum of Natural History** (☎ 272950; www.oum.ox.ac.uk; Parks Rd; admission free; ☞ noon-5pm), famous for its dinosaurs and dodo skeletons, and the eccentric **Pitt Rivers Museum** (☎ 270927; www.prm.ox.ac.uk; Parks Rd; admission free; ☞ noon-4.30pm), dark and crammed with crazy things such as voodoo dolls and shrunken heads from South America and the Pacific. Some days the museum hosts a children's exploration session, giving the kiddies torch lights and letting them open all the drawers. Brilliant stuff.

The **Ashmolean Museum** (☎ 278000; www.ashmol.ox.ac.uk; Beaumont St; admission free; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) is Britain's oldest (opened in 1683), housing a stunning collection of European art from Rembrandts, Michelangelos and Pre-Raphaelite paintings to Turners and Picassos. Its antiquities area (2nd floor) was being renovated at the time of research, and is planned to open in 2009. The antiquities highlights are currently on the 1st floor. Check the fantastic Kandinsky landscape in the Sands room and the wonderful Moore and Hepworth sculptures.

Modern Art Oxford (☎ 722733; www.modernartoxford.org.uk; 30 Pembroke St; admission free; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is far removed from the musty and academic side of Oxford, having established itself as the best contemporary art museum outside London.

The **Museum of Oxford** (☎ 815559; www.oxford.gov.uk/museum; St Aldate's; admission free; ☞ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun) offers an easy

introduction to the city's long history, from prehistoric creatures to modern times.

A great way to soak up Oxford's atmosphere is to take to the Isis in a punt. These can be hired from **Howard C & Sons** (☎ 202643; www.oxfordpunting.com; Magdalen Bridge; punting per hr £10, on weekends £12, deposit £30, ID required, chauffeured boat max 5 people per 30 min £20; ☞ 10am-8pm Apr-Oct). If you want to pretend to be from 'round 'ere, note that in Oxford the tradition is to punt from the sloping end of the boat.

INFORMATION

The city centre is a 10-minute walk east from the train station and a few minutes' walk from the bus station at Gloucester Green.

Tourist office (☎ 726871; www.visitoxford.org; 15-16 Broad St; ☞ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 10am-3.30pm Sun Apr-Sep) Staff can book accommodation; 1½-hour guided walking tours of the colleges (adult/child £6.50/3) leave the tourist office at 11am and 2pm Sunday to Friday, and at 11am, 1pm and 2pm Saturday.

EATING & DRINKING

In addition to the following, there are plenty of ethnic eateries along Cowley Rd, off High St southeast of Magdalen College.

Quod (☎ 202505; 92-94 High St; mains £10-17) Perennially popular for its smart surroundings, as well as for its char-grills, fish and pasta; try its afternoon tea (£5.50; from 3.30pm to 5.30pm).

Branca (☎ 556111; 111 Walton St; mains £9-17) In the Jericho district a short walk northwest of the centre, this trendy brasserie serves modern Italian cuisine.

Grand Café (☎ 204463; 84 High St; snacks £6-12.50) This museum-piece of a café is on the site of England's first coffee house (1650), with great cream teas in the afternoon.

Edamame (☎ 246916; 15 Holywell St; mains £6-8; ☞ 11.30am-2.30pm Tue & Wed, 11.30am-2.30pm & 5-8.30pm Thu-Sat, noon-3.30pm & 5-8.30pm Sun) An excellent little Japanese joint with massive queues that move fast. One of Oxford's best.

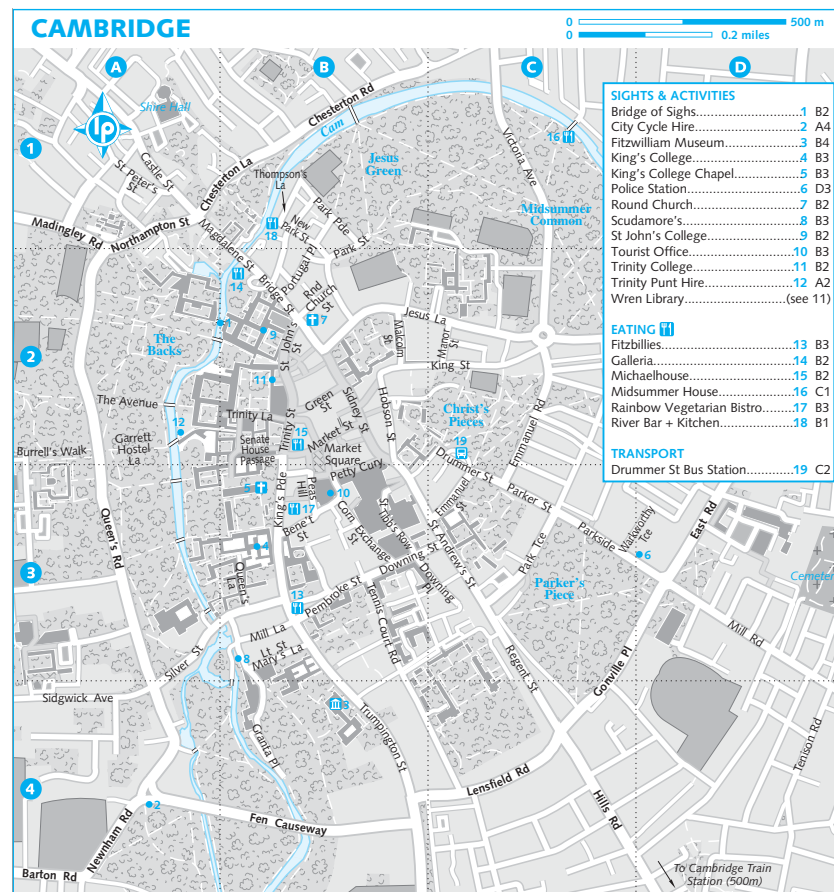
Freud Arts Café (☎ 311171; 119 Walton St; mains £5-8) A boho hangout in a restored church, with pews, stained-glass windows and funky wire figures hanging from the ceiling. It's popular with students, and serves sandwiches and pizzas.

Eagle & Child (☎ 302925; 49 St Giles; ☞ noon-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-10.20pm Sun) This fantastic old pub is so atmospheric you'll easily conjure up JRR Tolkien, CS Lewis and other literati sipping a pint in one of the wooden booths.

CAMBRIDGE

☎ 01223

Even though Oxford students wouldn't like to admit it, Cambridge beats Oxford as the quintessential English university town. And whereas Oxford has a solid record in educating political grandees, Cambridge's reputation lies more in the technological sphere. Past names to have worked and studied here range from Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin to the discoverers of DNA, James Watson and Francis Crick, and renowned physicist Stephen Hawking. In some senses it's the mother of English scientific ideas. And even though you may think all those medieval and neo-Gothic buildings look serious, Cambridge was where English humour was nurtured, producing John Cleese, Michael Palin and others of the Monty Python team.



TRANSPORT: CAMBRIDGE

Distance from London 54 miles (87km)

Direction North

Travel time Two hours by bus, 55 minutes by train

Bus National Express (☎ 0870 580 8080; www.nationalexpress.com) runs hourly shuttle buses (day return £10).

Car The M11 connects the London Orbital Motorway (M25) to Cambridge. Take Exit 13 onto A1303 (Madingley Rd) and follow it towards the city centre.

Train There are trains (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.nationalrail.co.uk) every 30 minutes from King's Cross and Liverpool St stations (day return £17.90).

Founded in the 13th century, contemporary Cambridge is less touristy and more manageable than its competitor. However, note that during exam time – mid-April to late June – its colleges are often shut to the public.

The centre of town lies in a wide bend of the River Cam. The best-known section of riverbank is the mile-long Backs, which combines lush scenery with superb views of half a dozen colleges (the other 25 colleges are scattered throughout the city).

The **Round Church** (Church of the Holy Sepulchre; ☎ 311602; www.christianheritageuk.org.uk; cnr Round Church & Bridge Sts; adult/child £1/free; ☹ 10am–5pm Tue–Sat, 1–5pm Sun & Mon) was built in 1130 to commemorate its namesake in Jerusalem, and nearby is **St John's College** (☎ 338676; www.joh.cam.ac.uk; St John's St; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☹ 10am–5pm), with a 16th-century gatehouse and three beautiful courtyards, two of which date from the 17th century. From the third court, the picturesque **Bridge of Sighs** spans the Cam. Stand in the centre and watch the punts float by.

Just south of St John's, **Trinity College** (☎ 332500; www.trin.cam.ac.uk; Trinity Lane; adult/concession £2.20/1.30, check website for free entry periods; ☹ 10am–5pm) is one of the largest, wealthiest and most attractive colleges. It was established in 1546 by Henry VIII, whose statue peers out from the top niche of the great gateway (he's holding a chair leg instead of the royal sceptre, the result of a student prank). The **Great Court**, the largest in either Cambridge or Oxford, incorporates some fine 15th-century buildings. Beyond the Great Court are the cloisters of Nevile's Court and the dignified **Wren Library** (☹ noon–2pm Mon–Fri, plus 10.30am–12.30pm Sat full-term time), built by Sir Christopher in the 1680s.

Next come Gonville and Caius (pronounced keys) College and **King's College** (☎ 331212, 331100; www.kings.cam.ac.uk; King's Pde; adult/concession £4.50/3; ☹ 9.30am–3.30pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–3.15pm Sat, 1.15–2.15pm & 5.30–6pm Sun term time, 9.30am–4.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun out of term time), one of the most sublime buildings in Europe and Cambridge's foremost tourist attraction. The **chapel** was begun in 1446 by Henry VI and completed around 1516. Henry VI's successors, notably Henry VIII, added the intricate fan vaulting and elaborate wood-and-stone carvings of the interior. The chapel comes alive when the choir sings and there are services during term and in July (phone for performance times).

The **Fitzwilliam Museum** (☎ 332923; www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk; Trumpington St; admission free, tours £3; ☹ 10am–5pm Tue–Sat, noon–5pm Sun, guided tours 2.45pm Sun), otherwise known as 'The Fitz', was one of the first art museums in the UK. It houses Egyptian sarcophagi, Greek and Roman art, Chinese ceramics and English glass in the lower galleries, while the upper galleries have paintings by Titian, Leonardo, Rubens, Rembrandt and Picasso, among others.

Taking a punt along the **Backs** is great fun, but can also be a wet and hectic experience. The secret to propelling these flat-bottomed boats is to push gently on the pole to get the punt moving and then to use the pole as a rudder to keep on course. In Cambridge, as opposed to Oxford, the tradition is to punt from the flat, decked end of the boat (for hire, see Information, below).

INFORMATION

City Cycle Hire (☎ 365629; www.citycyclehire.com; 61 Newnham Rd; bikes per hr/half-day/day/week from £3/5/8/15; ☹ 9am–6pm Apr–Sep, 9am–5.30pm Mon–Sat Oct–Mar)

Scudamores's (☎ 359750; www.scudamores.com; Granta Pt; per hr £12, chauffeured rides £40) Has punts for hire and chauffeured rides.

Tourist office (☎ 322640; www.visitcambridge.org; Old Library, Wheeler St; ☹ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, 11am–4pm Sun Apr–Sep, 10am–5.30pm Mon–Sat Oct–Mar) Just south of Market Sq. Staff can arrange accommodation and two-hour walking tours (adult/child including entry to King's College £9/7), leaving at 1.30pm year-round, with more during summer.

Trinity Punt Hire (☎ 338 4800; www.trin.cam.ac.uk; Trinity St, Trinity College; punts per hour £6) Has punts for hire and chauffeured rides.

EATING

In addition to the places listed below, cheap Indian and Chinese eateries can be found where Lensfield Rd meets Regent St towards the train station.

Midsummer House (☎ 568336; www.midsummerhouse.co.uk; Midsummer Common; set lunch £20, 3-course dinner £55; ☹ Mon–Sat) Two Michelin stars adorn this fantastic modern French-cuisine restaurant, which has one of the best lunch offers around. It's a formal affair, with the restaurant's two floors sitting on the corner of the common, near the river. Book ahead.

River Bar + Kitchen (☎ 307030; www.riverbarkitchen.co.uk; Quayside; mains £9–13) Conran-designed, light and modern, this is a two-storey riverside brasserie that attracts a smart young crowd with its modern Mediterranean cuisine.

Galleria (☎ 362054; www.galleriacambridge.co.uk; 33 Bridge St; mains £7–10, 2-course set lunch £6.50) If you didn't manage the punting, watch others try from this Continental-style café overlooking the Cam that serves good French and Mediterranean cuisine.

Rainbow Vegetarian Bistro (☎ 321551; 9a King's Pde; mains £7–9) Massively popular and loved by herbivores, there's experimental vegetarian and vegan food, such as Latvian potato bake and spicy Indian veggie curries.

Michaelhouse (☎ 309167; Trinity St; mains £3.50–6; ☹ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri) A beautifully converted church, this stylish café has fair-trade coffee and sandwiches, eaten in a few amid impressive medieval arches. A top choice.

Fitzbillies (☎ 352500; www.fitzbillies.co.uk; 52 Trumpington St) Cambridge's much-loved, oldest bakery is famous for its super sticky Chelsea buns and cakes, but it serves as a restaurant in the evenings.

BRIGHTON & HOVE

☎ 01273

Brighton is a bit like London on the sea, but with its own, distinct personality. If you want a cosmopolitan vibe, good food, atmospheric cafés, great clubbing and a long beach, this is your place. Despite its rapid gentrification (and rising house prices), Brighton hasn't lost its working-class soul, with the tacky but charming Brighton Pier and beach seafood huts still extant. The Victorian West Pier was sadly torched some years ago – the darkened skeleton of its former beauty still stands mid-water, like a ghost.

Brighton has a young student population because of its university and language schools, a happening nightlife, as well as a decent cultural life. The Kemp Town (dubbed Camp Town) area, east of Brighton Pier, is home to one of the country's most vibrant gay scenes.

Brighton first became popular when the dissolute Prince Regent (later King George IV) built his outrageous summer palace, the Royal Pavilion, here in the 18th century as a venue for lavish parties. And that charmingly seedy, 'great-place-for-a-dirty-weekend' vibe lasted throughout the gang-ridden 1930s of Graham Greene's novel *Brighton Rock* and the mods-versus-rockers rivalry of the 1960s – think *Quadrophenia*. Julie Burchill, Nick Cave, Zöe Ball, Norman Cook (aka Fatboy Slim) and other media folk all live here (well, in Hove, actually, to the west).

Any visit to Brighton is essentially about life's simple pleasures – pottering about and shopping in the trendy boutiques in the narrow streets called 'The Lanes' or in the separate 'North Laine'; and eating, hanging out and buying a stick of hard 'Brighton rock' candy among the tacky stalls and amusement rides on **Brighton Pier** (Palace Pier; www.brightonpier.co.uk; Madeira Dr; admission free).

The **Royal Pavilion** (☎ 290900; www.royalpavillion.org.uk; Pavilion Pde; adult/child/student £7.70/5.10/5.90; ☹ 9.30am–5.45pm Apr–Sep, 10am–5.15pm Oct–Mar) should be your first port of call on any visit to the town. Originally a farmhouse and converted to a neoclassical villa in 1787, it only began to take its current shape when John Nash, one of London's prime architects (responsible also for Piccadilly Circus, Regent St and many of London's parks), got his hands on it between 1815 and 1822. As all things Asian were then the rage, he added onion domes and minarets to produce the final Mogul-inspired design. The interior features giant bamboo staircases and carved wooden palm trees. Don't miss the **Music Room**, with its nine lotus-shaped chandeliers and Chinese murals in vermilion and gold, nor the **Banqueting Room**, with its domed and painted ceiling.

Across from the Pavilion Gardens you'll find the redeveloped **Brighton Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 290900; www.brighton.virtualmuseum.info; Church St; admission free; ☹ 10am–7pm Tue, 10am–5pm Wed–Sat & public holidays, 2–5pm Sun). Three new galleries – Fashion & Style, Body, and World Art – now join its ceramics, costume and fine-arts collections from the 15th to 20th centuries.



The historic **West Pier** (www.westpier.co.uk) began to collapse into the sea in December 2002 and, having since caught fire twice, is a dark shadow on the water. It's still quite an arresting, beautiful sight and many visitors flock to see it. It's a shame that there are plans to replace it with a 360-degree observation mast – Brighton would lose one of its main landmarks.

INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 0906 711 2255; www.visitbrighton.com; 10 Bartholomew Sq; ☏ 9am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat, 10am–4pm Sun Mar–Oct, 9am–5pm Nov–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat Nov–Feb)

EATING

Brighton and Hove have more restaurants per head of population than anywhere in the UK, bar London. Pick up some fresh seafood in the little huts by the beach: lobster tails, jellied eel, mussels, oysters, king prawns and other delicacies start at £1.50. Perfect for eating on the beach while watching the sea.

Regency (☎ 325014; 131 King's Rd; mains £3–20) All things to everybody is how famed seafood chef Rick Stein has described this traditional seafood place, which is the equivalent of a greasy-spoon caf (though with good food), serving everything from fish soup to lobster, as well as pastas and steaks.

Terre à Terre (☎ 729051; 71 East St; mains £10–15) This gourmet vegetarian establishment proves that meatless food can be just as eventful as meat-based dishes. Though dishes sound overly complicated, the taste is simply delicious.

De Vere Grand Hotel (☎ 224300; King's Rd; afternoon tea £14; ☏ 3–6pm) You have to take afternoon tea at least once while you're in England, and if in Brighton, make it here. Piano music, sandwiches and tea inside the bright conservatory. Perfect.

Due South (☎ 821218; 139 King's Rd Arches; mains £11–14) On the seafront, with a wonderfully arched ceiling, this has been one of Brighton's top restaurants for years. The seasonally changing menu might include local wild rabbit kebabs with spicy peanut sauce or sirloin with garlic and onion butter confit, but always features lots of fish, mussels and oysters.

Nia Café (☎ 671371; 87–88 Trafalgar St; mains £9–14) Rustic chic, solid wood tables, large windows and a chalkboard menu make this one of the loveliest cafés in town. It's great for breakfast or lunch.

Real Eating Company (☎ 221444; 86–87 Western Rd, Hove; dishes £4–12.50; ☏ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Wed & Sat) This hip deli-cum-café is about everyday eating and makes a top spot for breakfast (apparently it does 'the best eggs Benedict in town').

SLEEPING

Most places have a minimum two-night stay on weekends. You should book ahead for weekends in summer and during the Brighton Festival in May.

Hotel du Vin (☎ 718588; www.hotelduvin.com; Ship St; d/ste from £135/235) Located in a former wine merchant's Gothic home, this award-winning hotel has an ornate staircase, unusual gargoyles and elegant rooms.

De Vere Grand Hotel (☎ 224300; www.devere.co.uk; King's Rd; s/d from £140/220) Brighton's top hotel, this is a five-star affair with luxurious rooms, wrought-iron balconies and top-hat-wearing bellboys. A piece of lushness.

brightonwave (☎ 676794; www.brightonwave.com; 10 Madeira Pl; d £80–190) Combining the cool, muted design you'd expect from an expensive boutique hotel with the warm welcome of the small B&B it really is, brightonwave offers great value, service and style. Fantastic breakfasts, too.

Seaspray (☎ 680332; www.seaspraybrighton.co.uk; 25 New Steine; s £40–60, d £60–190) Themed rooms go from Venetian (suite) to New York (another suite), the Dalí room has the lobster phone

TRANSPORT: BRIGHTON & HOVE

Distance from London 51 miles (82km)

Direction South

Travel time One hour 50 minutes by bus, 50 minutes by fast train

Bus National Express (☎ 0870 580 8080; www.nationalexpress.com; return from £10, online funfares from £1) and Megabus (www.megabus.com; online fares from £1.50) run hourly services.

Car The M23/A23 runs straight into Brighton town centre.

Train There are about 40 fast trains (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.nationalrail.co.uk) each day from London's Victoria station (return £17.70), and slightly slower Thameslink trains from Blackfriars, London Bridge and King's Cross (return £16.40)

and the Warhol room's tables are soup cans. A fun choice in Kemp Town.

Oriental Hotel (☎ 205050; www.orientalhotel.co.uk; 9 Oriental Pl; s £35-40, d £60-125) Stylishly decorated in mint and rouge, this groovy boho hotel has fresh flowers, aromatherapy lights and organic breakfasts.

Drakes (☎ 696394; www.drakesofbrighton.com; 43-44 Marine Pde; s/d from £95/115) Classy atmosphere, fantastic sea views, obliging staff, and beautiful 'feature rooms' (£145 to £450) with clawfoot baths in front of curtained windows overlooking the sea. Need we say more?

Hotel Pelirocco (☎ 3327055; www.hotelpelirocco.co.uk; s/d from £50/80) Brighton's original punk 'n' fashion hotel may not be at the cutting edge anymore, but its rooms are still brilliant – choose from Durex Play, Betty Page, Muhammad Ali, polka-dot room, Jamaican dub and more.

Baggies Backpackers (☎ 733740; 33 Oriental Pl; dm/d £13/35) Relaxed and central, this is the best host in a town, with a good kitchen, and great music and a TV/video room.

BROADSTAIRS, MARGATE & WHITSTABLE

Each of these seaside towns has distinct character and bags of charm. Broadstairs is a nostalgic place with a patina of both Victorian and postwar history. Slightly dilapidated Margate is the archetypal kitsch English seaside resort, now forever associated with homegirl Tracey Emin, the Brit artist. Increasingly gentrified Whitstable is the best place for fresh, locally farmed oysters. It's been nicknamed 'Islington-on-Sea' since arty and wealthy Londoners began buying up the gorgeous fishermen's huts as second homes.

People mostly head to Broadstairs to soak up the atmosphere, swim (in good weather)

and just hang around. Stroll along the **Broadstairs Promenade**, or take the cliffside walkway from **Viking Bay** to secluded **Louisa Bay**. The **Dickens House Museum** (☎ 01843-863453; www.dickenshouse.co.uk; 2 Victoria Pde, Broadstairs; adult/concession £2.30/1.20; ☎ 10am-4.30pm) commemorates the writer's love of, and association with, Broadstairs; there's also a **Dickens festival** in the middle of June.

Alternatively, you could visit Margate's unusual **Shell Grotto** (☎ 01843-220008; www.shellgrotto.co.uk; Grotto Hill, Margate; adult/child £2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Apr), a mysterious underground temple dating from pagan times. It's off Northdown Rd. The 1000-year-old **Margate Caves** (☎ 01843-220139; 1 Northdown Rd, Cliftonville; adult/concession £3/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Apr) have a church, smugglers' refuge, dungeon, cave paintings and some witty (if not 100% proven) historical explanations.

Check out the summer huts on the beach in Whitstable, the traditional working-class summer weekend hangouts, painted in a rainbow of colours and given affectionate names. The annual **Whitstable Oyster Festival** (www.whitstableoysterfestival.co.uk) is held in the third week in July.

INFORMATION

Broadstairs tourist office (☎ 01843-583333; www.tourism.thanet.gov.uk; 6b High St; ☎ 9.15am-4.45pm Mon-Fri year-round, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-4.45pm Sat Oct-Mar)

Margate tourist office (☎ 01843-583333; www.tourism.thanet.gov.uk; 12-13 The Parade; ☎ 9.15am-4.45pm Mon-Fri year-round, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-4.45pm Sat Oct-Mar)

Whitstable tourist office (☎ 01227-275482; www.canterbury.co.uk; 7 Oxford St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun)

TRANSPORT: BROADSTAIRS, MARGATE & WHITSTABLE

Distance from London Whitstable 58 miles (93km), Margate 74 miles (118km), Broadstairs 78 miles (125km)

Direction East

Travel time 1¼ to 2¾ hours

Bus Five daily departures to Ramsgate stop at all three towns (outward 10.30am to 8.30pm, return 8.05am to 5.55pm). Same-day returns are £11 to Whitstable, £11.80 to Broadstairs or Margate.

Car Follow the M2; at the Margate/Ramsgate sign, follow the Thanet Way.

Train Trains (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.nationalrail.co.uk) from London's Victoria station to Ramsgate leave every 30 minutes (1¼ to two hours); a day return is £17 to Whitstable, £21.60 to Margate and £22.50 to Broadstairs.

EATING

Wheeler's Oyster Bar (☎ 01227-273311; 8 High St, Whitstable; mains £6-18; ☎ Thu-Tue) This tiny place is a favourite with locals, with delicious fresh Whitstable oysters.

Whitstable Oyster Fishery Company (☎ 01227-276856; www.oysterfishery.co.uk; Royal Native Oyster Stores, Horsbridge, Whitstable; mains £13-25; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Enjoy all kinds of seafood in the refurbished company HQ with great sea views. Have your oysters with champagne, of course.

RYE, ROMNEY MARSH & DUNGNESS

☎ 01797

The impossibly picturesque medieval town of Rye looks like it has been preserved in historical formaldehyde. Not even the most talented Hollywood set-designers could have come up with a better representation of a Ye Olde English Village: the half-timbered Tudor buildings, Georgian town houses, winding cobbled streets, abundant flowerpots and strong literary associations should be enough to temper even the most hard-bitten cynic's weariness of the made-for-tourism look. (All the same, such cynics should avoid crowded summer weekends.)

The town is easily covered on foot. Around the corner from the tourist office, in Strand Quay, are a number of **antique shops** selling all kinds of wonderful junk. From here walk up cobbled **Mermaid St**, with its timber-framed houses dating from the 15th century.

Turn right at the T-junction for the Georgian **Lamb House** (☎ 224982; www.nationaltrust.org.uk; West St, Rye; adult/child £3/1.50; ☎ 2-6pm Wed & Sat Apr-Oct), mostly dating from 1722. It was the home of American writer Henry James from 1898 to 1916 (he wrote *The Wings of the Dove* here). Continue around the dogleg until you come out at gorgeous Church Sq. The **Church of St Mary the Virgin** (tower views adult/child £2/1; ☎ 9am-4pm winter, 9am-6pm rest of the year) incorporates several styles. The turret clock (1561) is the oldest in England and still works with its original pendulum mechanism. There are great views from the church tower. Turn right at the square's east corner for **Ypres Tower & Castle Museum** (☎ 226728; 3 East Rye St, Rye; adult/child £2.90/1.50; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct, tower only 10.30am-3.30pm Nov-Mar), variously pronounced yeeps or wipers, part of Rye's former fortifications.

The town celebrates its medieval heritage with a two-day **festival** each August, and in September there is the two-week **Festival of Music & the Arts**.

East of Rye lie Romney Marsh and Dungeness, England's most otherworldly coast, pictured in Derek Jarman's film *The Garden*. The vast, flat Romney Marsh has a unique ecology, with unusual flora and fauna, and was once a favourite place for smuggling. Dotted across Romney Marsh is also a collection of tiny **medieval churches** – start with **St Augustine's** in Brookland. Desolate, barren Dungeness is the world's largest expanse of shingle and home to an unlikely combination of an **old lighthouse** (☎ 232 1300; tower views adult/child £3/2; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Jul-mid-Sep, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep-Jun), a **nuclear power station** and the **Dungeness Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Nature Reserve** (RSPB; ☎ 320588;

TRANSPORT: RYE, ROMNEY MARSH & DUNGNESS

Distance from London 54 miles (90km)

Direction Southeast

Travel time One to two hours

Bus To Dungeness, catch the hourly 711 from Rye train station to the Ship pub at New Romney, from where you can take the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway. Alternatively, get a bus to Romney and carry on down to the world's smallest railway, the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway (www.rhdr.org.uk; tickets from New Romney to Dungeness £6.50) which covers 13.5 miles from Hythe via Romney to Dungeness, on old-fashioned locomotives and cranky carriages. The service thins out at the end of the year, so check the timetable.

Car Follow the M2, M20 then A20.

Train Trains (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.nationalrail.co.uk) head to Rye from Charing Cross station via Ashford International or Hastings, where you will have to change. Two trains leave every hour, but both leave about the same time (day return £20.40).

www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/Dungeness; Dungeness Rd, Lydd; adult/child/concession £3/2/1; ☒ reserve 9am–dusk, visitors centre 10am–5pm Apr–Oct, 10am–4pm Nov–Mar). Jarman’s famous garden can still be seen on the road to the old lighthouse, although the new owner of the black cottage has a sign out asking you to respect their privacy, so please do.

INFORMATION

Hythe Visitors Centre (Red Lion Sq; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat) Can book accommodation and offer information on Dungeness; open to personal callers only.

Romney Marsh Countryside Project (☎ 367974; www.rmp.co.uk) This project has a useful website and organises all sorts of interesting guided walks across the marsh.

Rye Hire (☎ 223033; Cyprus Pl; bicycles per day £12) There is a cycle path to Lydd, followed by a road down to Dungeness.

Rye tourist office (☎ 226696; www.visitrye.co.uk; Strand Quay; ☎ 10am–5pm Apr–Oct, 10am–4pm Mon–Sat Nov–Mar) Gives out a free guide to the town and offers audio tours (adult/concession/child £2.50/1.50/1). Can also help with basic information on Dungeness.

EATING

Fish Café (☎ 222226; www.thefishcafe.com; 17 Tower St, Rye; mains £7–12; ☎ 10am–11pm) A new restaurant in a renovated antiques warehouse with simple and delicious, locally sourced seafood and fish dishes.

Mermaid Inn (☎ 223065; Mermaid St, Rye) is typical of the olde-worlde half-timbered English pubs in Rye. There’s also a casual restaurant. The similar **Old Borough Arms** (☎ 222128; The Strand, Rye) is a 300-year-old former smugglers’ inn with a truly lovely guesthouse and an excellent café.

CANTERBURY

☎ 01227
Canterbury’s greatest treasure is its majestic **cathedral** (☎ 762862; www.canterbury-cathedral.org; Sun St; adult/concession £5/4; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 9am–2pm & 4.30–5.30pm Sun Apr–Oct, 9am–4.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm & 4.30–5.30pm Sun Nov–Mar, access may be restricted for services 9am–12.30pm Sun). Yet, despite the impressive 66m **Bell Harry Tower** lording it over the surrounding countryside, it’s the assassination of archbishop Thomas Becket in 1170 inside that made the building famous, turning it into the site of one of Europe’s most important medieval pilgrimages, as immortalised by Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Becket clashed with Henry II over tax and then over the coronation of Henry’s son. Hearing Henry mutter ‘who will rid me of this turbulent priest?’, four knights dispatched themselves to Canterbury, where they scalped the archbishop and amputated his limbs in the late afternoon of 29 December. The murder caused indignation throughout Europe, and Henry was forced to do penance at Becket’s tomb, which was later said to be the site of many miracles.

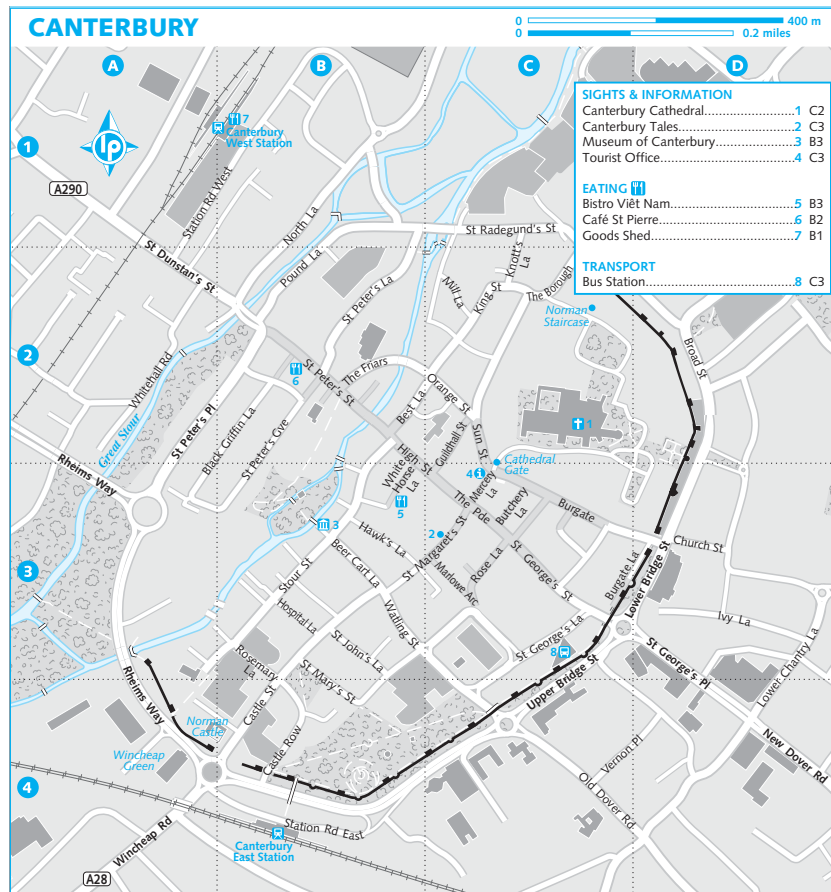
The traditional approach to the cathedral, which dates from 1070, is along narrow Mercery Lane to Christ Church Gate. The main entrance is through the **southwest porch**, built in 1415 to commemorate the English victory at Agincourt. You’ll pass a visitors centre before this, where you can pick up free leaflets, ask for information or book tours. One-hour guided tours (adult/concession £4/3) leave at 10.30am, noon and 2.30pm Monday to Saturday Easter to September, and noon and 2pm Monday to Saturday October to Easter. A 30-minute audioguide tour costs £2.95/1.95 per adult/child.

The perpendicular-style **nave** (1405) into which you enter is famous for its intricate ribbed vaulting, and there’s more fabulous vaulting under the Bell Harry Tower. To your right (east) is the pulpitum screen that separates the nave from the quire.

Thomas Becket is believed to have been murdered in the northwest transept (before you reach the pulpitum); the modern **Altar of the Sword’s Point** marks the spot. On the south side of the nave, you can descend into the Romanesque **crypt**, the main survivor of an earlier cathedral built by St Augustine in 597 to help convert the post-Roman English to Christianity.

Continuing eastwards through the pulpitum into the quire, you’ll come to **St Augustine’s chair**, the seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Behind this, in **Trinity Chapel**, a burning candle and a brass inscription mark the site of the former **Tomb of St Thomas**, which was destroyed on Henry VIII’s orders during the Reformation. The chapel’s stained glass is mostly 13th century, celebrating the life of St Thomas Becket.

Also in the chapel you’ll find the magnificent **Tomb of the Black Prince** (Edward, Prince of Wales, 1330–76), with its famous effigy that includes the prince’s shield, gauntlets and sword. The **Corona** once contained the slightly macabre relic of the part of Thomas’ skull that was sliced off during his murder.



Outside, walk around the eastern end of the cathedral and turn right into **Green Court**. In the northwestern corner (far left) is the much celebrated **Norman Staircase** (1151).

Canterbury’s other attractions are very much epilogues to the main act.

The **Museum of Canterbury** (☎ 452747; 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) has been given a thorough revamp, and is particularly aimed at children and families. New hands-on exhibits include a medieval discovery gallery (where you can look at medieval poo under the microscope) and a ‘whodunnit’ on the mysterious death of playwright Christopher Marlowe (originally a Canterbury lad). Children’s cartoon characters Rupert Bear, Bagpuss and the Clangers also appear.

If you’re really keen to acquaint or reacquaint yourself with Chaucer’s famous stories, head to the **Canterbury Tales** (☎ 454888, 479227; www.canterburytales.org.uk; St Margaret’s St; adult/child £7.25/5.25; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am–5pm Mar–Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am–4.30pm Nov–Feb), where, armed with a storytelling audioguide, you pass puppets recreating various scenes. It might be better to just buy the book, though, to read on the train back to London.

INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 766567, 767744; www.canterbury.co.uk; 34 St Margaret’s St; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm Sun Apr–Oct, 9.30am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm Sun Nov & Dec, 9.30am–5pm Mon–Sat Jan–Mar)

TRANSPORT: CANTERBURY

Distance from London 56 miles (90km)

Direction Southeast

Travel time One hour 50 minutes by bus, 1¼ hours by train

Bus National Express (☎ 0870 580 8080; www.nationalexpress.com) has 16 daily shuttle buses (day return £11.40).

Train Canterbury East train station is accessible from London's Victoria station, and Canterbury West from Charing Cross and Waterloo stations. Trains (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.nationalrail.co.uk) leave regularly (up to every 10 minutes); same day return is £18.70.

EATING

Goods Shed (☎ 459153; Station Rd West; mains £8-16; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) A fantastic place overlooking a farmers market, Good Shed is, unsurprisingly, in a converted railway shed, with high ceilings, huge windows and exposed brick. The changing French country menu uses fresh produce inventively.

Bistro Viêt Nam (☎ 760022; Old Linen Store, White Horse Lane; mains £5-11) The modern Southeast Asian menu here includes a range of Vietnamese tapas.

Café St Pierre (☎ 456791; 40 St Peter's St; pastries £2-3.50) The perfect place for breakfast or an afternoon break, with delicious pastries, pavement seats and a shady back garden.

WINDSOR & BRAY

☎ 01753

British monarchs have inhabited **Windsor Castle** (☎ 831118, 020-7766 7304; www.windsor.gov.uk; adult/5-16yr/senior/family £14.20/8/12.70/36.50, when State Apartments are closed £7.50/4.50/6.50/19.50; ☺ public areas 9.45am-5.15pm & last entry 4pm Mar-Oct, 9.45am-4.15pm & last entry 3pm Nov-Feb) for more than 900 years, but the Queen's weekend home hit the spotlight in 2005 when Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles were married in a civil ceremony (shock, horror!) in Windsor's Guildhall in 2005 (a ceremony his mother, the Queen, did not attend).

Starting out as a wooden castle erected in 1070 by William the Conqueror, and rebuilt in stone in 1165, this is one of the world's greatest surviving medieval castles, and its longevity and easy accessibility from London guarantee

its popularity (indeed, it crawls with tourists all year round). However, it's not the only attraction in the area. Across the River Thames lies Eton College, while the gastronomic hotspot of Bray is a short bus ride away.

The **State Apartments** – open to the public at certain times – reverberate with history. Any damage sustained during a fire in 1992 has long been erased by a £37 million restoration, completed in 1998.

After the **Waterloo Chamber**, created to commemorate the Battle of Waterloo and still used for formal meals, and the **Garter Throne Room**, you move to the **King's Rooms** and **Queen's Rooms**. These are lessons in how the other half lives, with opulent furniture, tapestries and paintings by Canaletto, Dürer, Gainsborough, Van Dyck, Hogarth, Holbein, Rembrandt and Rubens.

Queues form in front of the impossibly intricate **Queen Mary's Dolls' House**, the work of architect Sir Edwin Lutyens. Built in 1923 on a 1:12 scale, it took 1500 craftsmen three years to finish and it's complete in every detail, right down to electric lights and flushing toilets.

One of Britain's finest examples of early English architecture, the castle's **St George's Chapel** (begun in 1475, but not completed until 1528) has a superb nave in perpendicular style, with gorgeous fan vaulting arching out from the pillars. The chapel contains **royal tombs**, including those of George V and Queen Mary, George VI, Edward IV and the Queen Mother.

Have a look at the central columns in Windsor's **Guildhall** (☎ 743900; High St; admission free; ☺ 10am-2pm Mon, except bank holidays) beside Castle Hill: the columns don't actually touch the ceiling. The council of the day, in 1686, insisted upon them, but Sir Christopher Wren was convinced they weren't necessary and left a few centimetres of clear space to prove his point.

Cross the River Thames by the pedestrian Windsor Bridge to reach **Eton College** (☎ 671177; www.etoncollege.com; Baldwins Shore; adult/child £4/3.25; ☺ 2-4.30pm term time, 10.30am-4.30pm Easter & summer holidays). This famous public (ie private) school has educated no fewer than 18 prime ministers, and several buildings date from the mid-15th century. One-hour tours (£5/4.20 adult/child) are held at 2.15pm and 3.15pm.

The 1920-hectare **Windsor Great Park** (☎ 860222; admission free; ☺ 8am-dusk), where in 1999 Elizabeth II's husband, Prince Philip, had an avenue of ancient trees beheaded because they got in the way of his horse and buggy, extends from behind the castle almost as far as Ascot.

The nearby village of **Bray** is home to some excellent restaurants (see **opposite**).

TRANSPORT: WINDSOR & BRAY

Distance from London 23 miles (37km)

Direction West

Travel time One hour by bus, 55 minutes by train

Bus Green line buses depart Victoria Central station to Windsor between eight and 12 times per day (day return £10); bus 6 operated by Courtney Coaches (☎ 01344-482200) leaves for Bray outside Barclays Bank on Windsor High St (return £4, 35 minutes, hourly 7am to 6pm).

Train Trains (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.nationalrail.co.uk) from Waterloo station go to Windsor Riverside station every 30 minutes, or hourly on Sunday (£8 day return). Trains from Paddington go via Slough to Eton and Central station (£8 day return). Alternatively, to go straight to Bray, catch a Maidenhead train (£8.20 day return) from Paddington station and take a taxi for the last five minutes of the journey.

INFORMATION

French Brothers (☎ 851900; www.boat-trips.co.uk; Clewer Court Rd; adult/child/concession/family £4.80/2.40/4.50/12) Runs a range of cruises, including 35-minute boat trips from Windsor to Boveney Lock (hourly 11am to 4pm mid-February to mid-March and Saturday and Sunday November to mid-December, half-hourly 10am to 5pm mid-March to October).

Tourist office (☎ 743900; www.windsor.gov.uk; 24 High St; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar)

EATING

In Windsor, Peascod St and its extension, St Leonard's Rd, are full of restaurants, although most are pretty touristy. Bray is where to head for a once-in-a-lifetime gastronomic blow-out.

Fat Duck (☎ 01628-580333; www.fatduck.co.uk; 1 High St, Bray; 3 courses £80, tasting menu £115; ☺ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) Fat Duck is the baby of self-taught chef, Heston Blumenthal, and it was named second-best restaurant in the world in 2007 in two consecutive years, so eating here is an experience to be cherished (once you get a reservation). Blumenthal's fascination with the science of taste means menus include incredible (and sometimes insane) combinations, experimenting with nitrogen (in nitro-green tea and lime mousse) and bizarre taste combinations such as sardine on toast sorbet, oysters and passionfruit, salmon poached with liquorice and smoked bacon and egg ice cream. It's all delicious and mind-boggling, and the atmosphere is refreshingly relaxed. You will need to book up to two months ahead.

Waterside Inn (☎ 01628-620691; www.waterside-inn.co.uk; Ferry Rd, Bray; mains £21-39; ☺ Wed-Sun, plus dinner

Tue in summer) Also voted among the world's top 50 restaurants, this Michel Roux establishment serves French haute cuisine in a rustic riverside environment.

Riverside Brasserie (☎ 01628-780553; Bray Marina, Monkey Island Lane; mains £13.25-15.95; ☺ Tue-Sun) This is Blumenthal's pitch to the less adventurous diner, with a more conventionally British menu. Tuck into pork belly, its most famous dish, while overlooking the river.

KENT CASTLES

Castle buffs can enjoy a fabulous day in each of the three Kentish castles and stately homes. Perhaps the world's most romantic, **Leeds Castle** (☎ 01622-765400, 0870 600 8880; www.leeds-castle.com; Maidstone, Kent; castle & gardens adult/child/concession £13.50/8/11; ☺ 10am-7pm & last entry 5pm Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm & last entry 3.30pm Nov-Feb) is spectacularly located on two small islands in the middle of a lake, provoking oohs and aahs from visitors. Surrounded by rolling wooded hills, it was colloquially known as 'Ladies Castle', being home to many queens over the centuries, including Catherine de Valois, Catherine of Aragon and even Elizabeth I, who was imprisoned here before she took the throne. The grounds are particularly striking, from the glorious moat to the gardens and a **maze** with an underground grotto. There is also an **aviary**, with more than 100 endangered bird species; a **museum of dog collars**; and interesting, avian-inspired wallpaper and other decorative features in the castle interior.

The gardens at the small but sweet **Hever Castle** (☎ 01732-865224; www.hevercastle.co.uk; Hever, Kent; castle & gardens adult/child £9.80/5.30, gardens only £7.80/5; ☺ gardens 11am-6pm Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov, castle opens 1hr later), the childhood home of Henry VIII's second wife, Anne Boleyn, are equally

spectacular. They include roses, bluebells, rhododendrons, topiary, rockeries, Italian sculptures, fountains, lakes and a yew maze, and also combine several of the last two in a **water maze**, which is extremely popular with children. The castle is, however, a little tricky to get to (see transport details, [below](#)).

Sissinghurst Castle Garden (☎ 01580-7128500; www.nationaltrust.org.uk/sissinghurst; Sissinghurst, Cranbrook, Kent; adult/concession/family £7.80/3.50/18; 🕒 11am-6.30pm & last entry 5.30pm Mon, Tue & Fri, 10am-6.30pm & last entry 5.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Mar–Nov) is legendary among writers and the green-fingered – it's one of the most famous 20th-century gardens in the world.

The creation of poet Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson, it broke new ground by grouping similarly coloured plants to create 10 garden 'rooms' with distinct personalities. The famous **White Garden**, with its many shades of white, grey and green, was a particular source of inspiration for Sackville-West as she gazed upon it in moonlight from her study, which is also open to visitors.

INFORMATION

A useful source of information is the **Visit Kent website** (www.visitkent.co.uk).

TRANSPORT: KENT CASTLES

Hever Castle

Distance from London 33 miles (53km)

Direction Southeast

Travel time 40 minutes by car, 40 minutes (Monday to Friday) to 1½ hours (Saturday and Sunday) by train plus 10 minutes by taxi

Car Take the M25, turning off at Junction 5 or 6 and following the signs south to Edenbridge and the castle.

Train Catch a train from London Bridge to Edenbridge Town (£10 day return), then take a taxi (3 miles). Alternatively, the castle is a 1-mile walk from Hever station. On Sunday services terminate one stop down the line at East Grinstead; a taxi will cost £10.

Leeds Castle

Distance from London 44 miles (70km)

Direction Southeast

Travel time 1½ hours by car, 1½ hours by bus, one hour 10 minutes by train

Bus Both National Express (☎ 0870 580 8080; www.nationalexpress.com; adult/child combined ticket £18/13) and Green Line (☎ 0870 608 7261; www.greenline.co.uk; adult/child combined ticket £15/9) offer combined coach/admission tickets to Leeds Castle, with services leaving Victoria Central station in the morning and returning to Victoria around 5pm or 6pm, Monday to Friday.

Car Take the M20 southeast of London, turning off at Junction 8 and following the signs to the nearby castle.

Train Trains (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.nationalrail.co.uk) from London's Victoria station go to Bearsted station (day return £14), from where you can catch the connecting coach to Leeds Castle.

Sissinghurst Castle Garden

Distance from London 46 miles (74km)

Direction Southeast

Travel time 1½ hours by car, one hour by train plus 15 minutes by castle bus

Bus From Staplehurst train station, there's a special link to Sissinghurst Castle Garden on Tuesday and Sunday May to mid-September, leaving just after noon. Phone ☎ 01580-710700 for exact times.

Car Exit the M20 at Junction 5 or 6 and follow the A229 to the A262.

Train Head from Charing Cross station to Staplehurst station (day return £13) and catch the special castle bus (see Bus above) or a taxi (5½ miles).

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