

## Nature's designs

Whatever man has built in coastal Kent, Nature more than matches, from the wild beauty of **Dungeness** to the iconic **White Cliffs** and sandy bays of **Thanet**. And there's nothing like majestic seascapes, organically fashioned over millennia, for rebalancing the yin and yang.

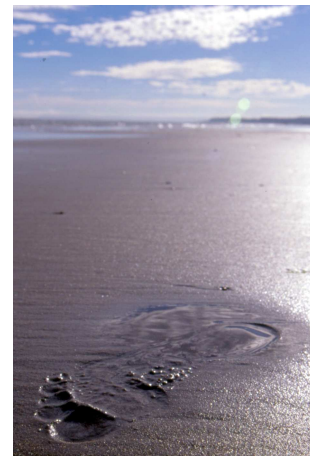
As a prelude, join the long-distance North Downs Way, meandering over the **Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** from **Canterbury** to **White Cliffs Country**. A truly refreshing ramble!



The Gateway Visitor Centre at the **White Cliffs of Dover** introduces five miles of coast and countryside, with breathtaking views of the English Channel and Port of Dover. No matter how often you come to this Heritage Coast, it's always mind-blowing to think you're walking over 80 million years of Nature's handiwork. Because that's how long it took to build the dazzling cliffs from the crushed remains of billions of tiny seaweeds and animals. Much of the chalk downland is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is home to interesting flora and fauna.

North or south? Let's do both. Skirt the coast down to **Romney Marsh** and discover 100 square miles of hauntingly attractive marshes and dykes. Drained and reclaimed from the sea over centuries, it's a haven for wildlife – Man and Nature working together. The flat terrain is perfect for cycling: why not follow the trail around intriguing medieval churches and lunch in traditional old pubs. Then get away from it all scrunching along the shingle bank of **Dungeness**, which has been slowly moulded by the sea. It's the largest shingle beach in Europe and a third of all known plant species grow among the pebbles (have a look!).

Go north from Dover and **Sandwich and Pegwell Bay Nature Reserve** unfolds through an amazing, complete series of seashore habitats: from mud, through salt marsh, shingle, dunes and cliffs to wave-cut platforms. Spot a correspondingly varied array of botanical jewels, including rare golden samphire on the saltmarsh and yellow-horned poppy on the shingle. Sandwich Bay alone supports 95% of the national population of lizard orchid. Take your time – Nature's way is best enjoyed at a leisurely pace – and stay in self-catering accommodation offered by Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust.



Then curl north around the 26-mile bubble of **Thanet's coastline**, where 14 sandy bays and beaches link **Ramsgate**, **Broadstairs** and **Margate**. Their billowing ribbon of shoreline boasts 20% of the UK's and 12% of Europe's coastal chalk, which is quite a thought as you feel the sand between your toes. Keep your feet on the ground and join a free Rock Doc Walk to find out more about the ancient wonders of the chalk cliffs, flints and fossils – just one of the year-round activities organised by Thanet Coast Project which safeguards the area.



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

For more information see [www.visitkent.co.uk](http://www.visitkent.co.uk)

