



## My Lords, Ladies...

*Treasure a wealth of high living history*

*Kent has more castles and historic houses than any other county. The Garden of England has been playground to royals and aristocrats for centuries. Come and relive the razzle-dazzle of high society and be inspired by the present day lords and ladies who keep alive Kent's rich heritage.*

### Day One

We begin in magnificent style at **Knole**, Sevenoaks, in the footsteps of royalty, aristocrats, the literati and social glitterati of centuries. Once coveted by King Henry VIII, this former archbishop's palace was transformed into a Renaissance mansion in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century by the noble Sackville family, who still live here today. View it from afar and it appears like a fascinating little village in a timeless deer park; explore inside and you find 13 glorious staterooms laid out much as they were in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: a world-renowned collection of royal Stuart furniture, paintings by Gainsborough, Van Dyck and Reynolds and wonderful 17<sup>th</sup>-century tapestries.

Stroll outdoors to the garden and superb 1,000-acre medieval deer park. Novelist and poet Vita Sackville-West, who spent a happy childhood at Knole, declared it to be above all an English home: "It has the tone of England; it melts into the green of the garden turf, into the tawnier green of the park beyond, into the blue of the pale English sky."

Next, we take a short jaunt to **Chartwell** at Westerham. "I love the place," Sir Winston Churchill said. From 1924 until his death in 1965, this was his family home and place of inspiration. Before you go inside, enjoy the breathtaking vistas over the Weald countryside: "I bought Chartwell for that view," he explained, and with Lady Churchill, he turned the Victorian mansion into a personal oasis.

Here you really do open the door on the soul of the man behind the iconic image. Alongside the study, where you can still picture him brooding and working, belongings evoke day-to-day life: family mementos, his walking sticks, hats and cigar boxes and his preferred yellow armchair. Browse Churchill's paintings in the garden studio and admire the terraced gardens.

### Day Two

**Hever Castle**, near Edenbridge, is our third destination. This enchanting 13<sup>th</sup>-century, double-moated castle was made for romance. And it arrived big time in the shape of King Henry VIII. Hever was the home of the ruthless, upwardly mobile Boleyn family, most notably sisters Anne and Mary, who both attracted Henry's roving eye. But it was Lady Anne who won his heart to become his second wife. Many artifacts plot the fateful course of their affair, culminating in the couple's

joint armorial bearings that celebrated their union in 1533. See also the two prayer books, inscribed and signed by Anne: one is believed to be the book she clasped as she stepped to her execution.

Costumed figures and Tudor portraits tell the notorious story of the King and his six wives, while 125 acres of spectacular gardens delight all year round.

Continue east through the rural Weald and we come to **Penshurst Place** where Henry VIII would sometimes stay on his way to court Anne at Hever. Since 1552 it has been the seat of the Sidney family and today it's the much-loved home of Philip Sidney, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount De L'Isle. The mellow sandstone manor, surrounded by ancient parkland, is both medieval masterpiece and vision of friendly charm. Stand at its heart in the Barons Hall beneath the soaring 60-ft high chestnut roof and you'll have your breath snatched away.

Tour the staterooms through generations of family history, changing fortunes and decorative tastes, furniture, paintings and porcelain. Sidney ancestors gaze down from portraits in the Long Gallery, most charismatic of all was 16<sup>th</sup>-century Sir Philip, poet, soldier and the epitome of aristocratic chivalry and honour. Find out why he was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth I.

Then relax in the beautiful 11-acre formal garden, a rare surviving example of Elizabethan design crowned by the Italian Garden. Records of Penshurst's garden date right back to 1346 but it constantly evolves – Lord and Lady De L'Isle believe in horticultural change to keep everything fresh and surprising.

We head now for nearby **Royal Tunbridge Wells**. Dudley, Lord North, put the town on the map after he discovered the Chalybeate Spring in 1606 and told all his friends how he had been rejuvenated by its cool, iron-rich water. The great and the good soon flocked here to disport themselves: Queen Henrietta Maria, Queen Anne and Princess (later Queen) Victoria and diarist Samuel Pepys, while King Edward VII added 'Royal' to the town's name in 1909.

Lovers of the finer things in life can still enjoy them: sample a glass of the spring water served by costumed 'dippers' in summer. Watch the world go by from cafés, pubs and wine bars along the elegant 17<sup>th</sup>-century colonnaded Pantiles. Antiques shops, fine architecture, picturesque countryside, all add up to blissful escape.

### **Day Three**

**Leeds Castle**, near Maidstone, is a true tableau of fairytale splendour rising from its lake in 500 acres of parkland. Follow its intriguing history from Norman stronghold to royal residence of six medieval queens, palace of Henry VIII to home of illustrious English families. The castle you admire today has been fashioned over 900 years but also owes much to its last private owner, Olive, Lady Baillie, daughter of an English lord and heiress to an American fortune.

Lady Baillie bequeathed her beloved castle to the nation in perpetuity under a charitable trust on her death in 1974. And so it is that you can share its lustre and the many dramas that have been played out here.

Our next destination is quite a surprise, a tranquil haven hidden away in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: **Goodnestone Park Gardens**. The FitzWalter family, who count leading Tudor courtiers and politicians among their ancestors, built their house here in 1704 and over generations they have created one of England's most alluring country gardens.

Step into the Walled Garden, and enjoy quintessential English views through mellow brick-walled enclosures to the church tower. Go with the flow of the old-fashioned rose garden and winding paths lead through the Woodland Garden; parterre, terraces and arboretum entice. The recently completed Gravel Garden strikes a contemporary note and, while you sit here contemplating the house and glimpses of 18<sup>th</sup>-century parkland, maybe you'll picture novelist Jane Austen arriving on one of her frequent visits: her brother Edward married a daughter of the house. Following one sojourn, in 1796, she began writing the novel that became *Pride and Prejudice*.

Our final location **Walmer Castle and Gardens** was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as part of a chain of coastal forts to withstand the wrath of the French and Spanish following Henry VIII's break with the Roman Catholic Church. Walmer later evolved into the elegant official residence of the Lords Warden of the Cinque Ports, an ancient title that originally involved control of the five most important medieval ports on the south coast. The Duke of Wellington, a Lord Warden for 23 years, adored staying – you can still see his many possessions, including a pair of original "Wellington boots". Another Lord Warden, the late Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, also enjoyed regular visits and her magnificent garden, given to her on her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday, is a delightful haven.

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