

# Movie Magic in Kent

*Go behind the scenes on a set-jetting tour of Kent's dazzling attractions.*

The rich variety of Kent's landscapes, from the White Cliffs to the rural villages of the Garden of England, makes it a filmmaker's dream. Castles, cathedrals, historic towns and maritime sites provide authentic backdrops to period movies. And the quality of light that captivated the artist JMW Turner now inspires flourishing local film companies.

You'll be surprised just how many box office hits have put Kent in a starring role – come set-jetting to spot the locations, it's a great way to discover and explore the county.

## Day 1

First stop: **The Historic Dockyard Chatham**, whose authentic cobbled streets, industrial buildings and fine Georgian and Victorian architecture have provided the backdrop for an array of period and modern films since the 1980s. Follow the special film trail to some of the most frequently used sites and see if you can identify your favourite scenes.

Big screen hits partly located here range from the Bond extravaganzas *Diamonds are Forever* and *The World is Not Enough* to *Children of Men*, *The Mummy* and *Amazing Grace*: the dockyard chapel doubled as the House of Commons in the latter. The Kent connection in this tale of William Wilberforce and the fight for the abolition of slavery is apt, as it was in Teston in 1787 that Wilberforce (played in the film by Ioan Gruffudd) agreed to head the parliamentary campaign [www.thedockyard.co.uk](http://www.thedockyard.co.uk).

Rising from a lake in 500 acres of ravishing parkland, **Leeds Castle** is the epitome of fairytale enchantment. It has been home to six medieval queens, Henry VIII poured money into building work and decoration, and it's said Anne Boleyn may have stayed in the Maiden's Tower when she was a royal maid-of-honour. Little wonder that sumptuous regal period film – *Elizabeth*, *The Golden Age* found authentic settings for splendid exterior shots. In the movie the castle makes a cameo appearance as the exterior of Chartley Hall (where Mary, Queen of Scots is held) as well as Whitehall Palace.

Other films to steal scenes here include *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949), in which Alec Guinness famously played all the characters; the 1980s film version of the popular US TV private detective series *Magnum* starring Tom Selleck; and the lavish TV drama *Henry VIII* (2004), featuring Ray Winstone and Helena Bonham Carter. After touring the castle to relive history and movie magic, explore the gardens and yew maze – but don't get lost. [www.leeds-castle.com](http://www.leeds-castle.com)

We round off our day at 15<sup>th</sup>-century **Lullingstone Castle**, Eynsford, scene of the endearing BBC 2 series *Save Lullingstone Castle* (2006) and *Return to Lullingstone Castle* (2007). See how far modern-day plant hunter and young eccentric Tom Hart Dyke (20<sup>th</sup> generation heir to the estate) has progressed with his award-winning World Garden of Plants – the fascinating subject of the TV programmes. Plants from around the globe grow in their respective continents of origin, laid out in the shape of a world map, and eventually over 10,000 species will feature.

[www.lullingstonecastle.co.uk](http://www.lullingstonecastle.co.uk)

## Day 2

Hold off on breakfast this morning and head to **Leybourne Lakes and Kings Hill**, just north of Maidstone, the real-life setting of Meadowlands in the Channel 4 psychological thriller *Cape Wrath* (aka *Meadowlands* in the USA). It was filmed entirely in Kent and production was based at The Maidstone Studios. Life doesn't go to plan when Danny, his wife and family relocate under a witness protection scheme to the seemingly idyllic village of Meadowlands (recognise the distinctive New England-style houses?), but for us Leybourne Lakes Country Park is the ideal spot for a picnic breakfast (refreshments are also available daily during summer holidays and at weekends and Bank Holidays through the rest of the year). [www.tmbc.gov.uk](http://www.tmbc.gov.uk)

Continue the day in captivating fashion with a visit to **Groombridge Place Gardens & Enchanted Forest**, near Tunbridge Wells: beautiful stage for the lavish 2005 film adaptation of Jane Austen's classic story of love and social mores, *Pride and Prejudice*. The 17<sup>th</sup>-century moated manor was chosen to be Longbourn, the Bennet's family home, because (in the words of the film's location manager), "This house has immense charm and is untouched by redevelopment." Scenes were shot around the lake and gardens, as well as inside the house (not open to the public), and an exhibition records the experience, including photographs of Elizabeth Bennet (Keira Knightley) and Mr Darcy (Matthew Macfadyen) in action. [www.groombridge.co.uk](http://www.groombridge.co.uk)

Next we travel to **Penshurst Place**, Tonbridge. This spellbinding stately home amid Tudor gardens became the film double for Whitehall Palace in *The Other Boleyn Girl* (adapted from Philippa Gregory's best selling novel of the same name). Follow the sumptuous tale of the beautiful sisters Anne (Natalie Portman) and Mary (Scarlett Johansson) Boleyn, driven by their family's blind ambition to compete for the love of dashing King Henry VIII (Eric Bana).

Join the royal entourage in the magnificent medieval Baron's Hall, the big screen stage for Henry and Anne's wedding feast that seems to seal Boleyn victory in the marriage stakes. Penshurst's giant 16<sup>th</sup>-century trestle tables were the perfect props for the celebrations. A number of Penshurst's room guides had a break from their usual duties to become film extras for three days – have a chat and share their experiences. [www.penshurstplace.com](http://www.penshurstplace.com)

## Day 3

After breakfast, we head north to **Knole**, on the outskirts of Sevenoaks. As you arrive, half close your eyes and imagine the exterior lit in darkness: this is London by night in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, the shadowy edifice standing in for the stone buildings of the capital in the Tudor period. You might further recognise the night scene of Mary riding away from London. Then, positions please, in the Green Court and Stone Court: cleverly transformed into the movie setting for the arrival of the Boleyn family at Henry's Whitehall Palace. [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/knole](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/knole)

Next Chaucer's pilgrims are our companions around **Canterbury**. His *Canterbury Tales* was the first book to be printed in England, in 1476, and it has made rich material for filmmakers here: from Michael Powell and Emeric Presburger's complex and personal *A Canterbury Tale* (1940), to Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Canterbury Tales* (1980) whose candour and ribald humour illuminate the

classic adventures of romance, deception, murder and lust as a host of passionate lovers unite for a glorious – and surprising – journey through medieval England.

Behind Chaucer's tale, of course, was the martyrdom in 1170 of Archbishop Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral, which has inspired countless pilgrims to visit over the centuries. The 1952 screen version of T S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* recounts the powerful love-hate relationship between Becket and King Henry II, and how the latter's careless words wishing that he could be rid of the troublesome cleric led to the murder. The fact-based *Becket* (1964), with Richard Burton as Becket and Peter O'Toole as Henry II, is another compelling insight to the tragedy.

[www.canterbury.co.uk](http://www.canterbury.co.uk)

*En route: if you have time for a detour, follow Jane Austen to **Goodnestone Park Gardens**, Goodnestone. The author frequently stayed with her brother and sister-in-law here and after a visit in 1796 she began writing the book that became *Pride and Prejudice*.*

Finally, we set off for an afternoon of fresh seaside air. In *Venus*, the ageing Lothario Maurice (actor Peter O'Toole) returns to his childhood world of **Whitstable**, in order to dip his toes in the sea and savour the local oysters for a final time – and to have one last fling. In the process he strikes up a friendship with a young girl and learns a lesson or two. Sample the town's famous oysters: they've been harvested here for more than 2,000 years. Or simply soak up the quirky-chic charm of smugglers' alleys, art galleries and craft shops. [www.visitwhitstable.co.uk](http://www.visitwhitstable.co.uk)

#### **Day 4**

Following breakfast, we spend the day exploring the Kent coast. Traditional sandy beaches, chalk cliffs, Regency architecture, cobbled streets, trendy wine bars and eight rural villages have offered a great backcloth to filming: as varied as *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *Last Orders* and Ramsgate-based Medb Films' award-winning *Gypo* and *Ruby Blue*.

The artist JMW Turner lived at **Margate** and adored the quality of light along the Thanet coast, which he thought had 'glorious sunsets... the loveliest skies in Europe'. It's another reason the area is popular among filmmakers. *Gypo*, the bittersweet story of an asylum seeker befriended by a local woman, was shot in just two weeks in Margate. *Exodus* (by ArtAngel, Channel 4 and Arts Council UK), a modern take on the Old Testament story, involved many local people – a highlight is the musical performances in Margate's Winter Gardens, themed on the ten Biblical plagues.

*Last Orders* (2001), by contrast, is a touching mix of comedy and sadness. When London butcher Jack Dodd (Michael Caine) dies, his 'last orders' are for his ashes to be scattered in the sea at Margate. His mates and foster son (played by Tom Courtenay, David Hemmings, Bob Hoskins and Ray Winstone) set off to oblige – reviving memories, conflicts and emotions along the way.

Next we head to **Deal** to find out more about *Ruby Blue*. Filmed here and in Thanet, the picture follows recently widowed Jack (Bob Hoskins) as he finds comfort in new relationships with a young girl and woman. Once a smugglers' haunt, Deal is now a peaceful town characterised by its maze of unspoilt streets, though if you visit Henry VIII's Deal Castle you are quickly reminded of its compelling place in the defence of the realm.

*En route: Ian Fleming based Sir Hugo Drax's Moonraker plant at Kingsdown. During the 1950s and 1960s the author lived in St Margaret's village and you'll find many more real-life settings for his novels in this area: he was a member of Royal St George's Golf Club, Sandwich Bay, the model for the venue of the golf match between Bond and Goldfinger, for example. It's even believed that Fleming took the famous 007 tag from the number of the London to Dover coach.*

Keeping with the 007 theme, we now head for **Dover**, where the ferry terminal and port featured in the film *Diamonds are Forever*. Dover Castle has made many screen appearances, from the 2001 TV series *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* to *The Other Boleyn Girl*. The Castle was chosen by the filmmakers to play the brooding presence of the Tower of London, with the courtyard the spot for Anne's execution by the sword in the latter. [www.english-heritage.org](http://www.english-heritage.org)

The iconic White Cliffs are also scenic stars, featuring as the race take-off in the 1965 classic, *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*, while Shakespeare Beach was the place for *Little Britain's Big Swim* in 2006 in aid of Sport Relief. There are miles of public footpaths where you can blow away the cobwebs in more relaxed fashion!

Neighbouring **Folkestone** also got in on the action for *Amazing Grace* and *Johnny English*, while further back in film time it was a venue for *The First Great Train Robbery* and *Around the World in 80 Days*. After such a high-adrenaline set-jetting day, you might like to unwind along the mile-long cliff-top promenade of The Leas and enjoy the superb views across the English Channel.

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