

KENT GARDEN *of* ENGLAND

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A ROYAL PROGRESS AROUND THE GARDEN OF ENGLAND

Tour Kent in the footsteps of kings and queens

On April 29th this year, the world will celebrate as the Royal Wedding between Prince William and Kate Middleton will take place in a lavish ceremony at Westminster Abbey. The following year, Her Majesty The Queen will commemorate her Diamond Jubilee marking 60 years of her reign, an occasion that will be feted across the country. The only other British monarch to achieve such an historic landmark was Queen Victoria in 1897.

As the Monarchy celebrates such momentous occasions, there's never been a better time to come and share Kent's wealth of royal connections, which span the centuries right up to the present day. Discover how the Garden of England has provided England's kings and queens with country escape and entertainment, a route to travels on the Continent, a beautiful place for their castles – and fortresses on the frontline of coastal defence.

Follow, too, in the footsteps of modern members of the Royal Family, who maintain these close ties: with some 180 visits around the county in the last ten years alone, both as patrons of many organisations and for pleasure. The title of Duke of Kent dates back to the 11th century, when William the Conqueror conferred it on his half-brother, Bishop Odo. It was revived at the end of the 18th century and the present Duke, The Queen's cousin, is a familiar figure, not least as patron of Kent County Cricket Club – Prince Philip meanwhile, is a Life Member! The Queen is "First Friend On The Roll" of The Friends of Canterbury Cathedral, her daughter-in-law The Countess of Wessex attended school and college in Kent, Prince Charles is a Freeman of Canterbury – the connections grow and flourish. And of course, Prince William and Kate will be married by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams.

In light of the Royal Wedding, relive the romances and dramas that have played out through history for some of Britain's royals at a young age, such as Queen Victoria and Anne Boylen, and uncover how very different life was for some of the country's most prominent figures.

So come on a Royal Progress to cathedral, castle and coast, to hear compelling tales and view dazzling treasures.

DAY ONE: CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL AND THE ISLE OF THANET

Morning We begin our tour in Canterbury, one of England's oldest cities. Here, in St Augustine's Abbey, Anglo-Saxon kings of Kent were laid to rest and today the impressive remains of the abbey, founded shortly after AD 597 when St Augustine arrived to rekindle Christianity in southern England, is part of Canterbury UNESCO World Heritage Site – along with St Martin's Church, the private chapel of 6th-century Queen Bertha of Kent, and Canterbury Cathedral.

Step inside **Canterbury Cathedral** and discover not only the glories of its soaring perpendicular nave and medieval stained glass, but also a tumultuous drama played out across the centuries between Crown and Church.

King Henry II who reigned 1154–89 is renowned as one of England's most influential and charismatic kings; he also had an explosive temper and in his power struggles with the Church he fell out with his former friend, Archbishop Thomas Becket. His notorious outburst – “Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?” – provoked four knights to slay Becket in 1170: view the very site of the martyrdom in the cathedral, now marked by a sculpture of jagged metal shards. The crime sent shockwaves through Christendom, Becket was made a saint in 1173, and pilgrims flocked to his shrine, including a penitent King Henry, who arrived barefoot and clad in sackcloth in 1174 to be whipped by 70 monks in the cathedral priory.

King Henry VIII also paid homage to the saint in the 1530s, though when he broke from the Roman Catholic Church and ordered the Dissolution of the Monasteries, Becket was declared a traitor and the cathedral was stripped of his shrine. When Henry's daughter, “Bloody Mary”, became Queen, she had Archbishop Thomas Cranmer burnt at the stake for refusing to become a Catholic.

Wander further around the cathedral and you will find that, at other times, royal relations have been perfectly cordial. King Edward III's eldest son, the Black Prince (1330–76) whose bravery in the Hundred Years War against France made him a legend in his own lifetime, had close associations with the cathedral and specifically requested burial here – see his magnificent tomb chest and armour-clad effigy.

And in the modern era, the Royal Family closely supports the Mother Church of the Anglican Communion. The Queen is First Friend On The Roll of The Friends of Canterbury Cathedral, which raises funds for conservation work – Prince Charles is also a patron. The Duke of Kent is patron of the Save Canterbury Cathedral Appeal UK. You will spot members of the Royal Family at important occasions here, too, from Prince Charles at the 1400th anniversary service in 1997 to recall St Augustine's arrival in Kent, to The Queen presenting the traditional Maundy money to local pensioners in 2002, as well as a host of concerts and services before and since.

Afternoon Now, let's breeze around the **Isle of Thanet**, ever the quintessential English seaside escape with its chain of sandy beaches and bays. The tangy sea air has sparked some royal high spirits here in past years and you're equally sure to be energised by the vistas we pass through.

Prince Frederick, ‘The Grand Old Duke of York’ of nursery rhyme fame, was so enamoured with **Margate** that he lived here from 1763 to 1827: a blue plaque on Royal York Mansions on The Parade marks where his house stood. A century earlier, King Charles I developed a soft spot for the area after his boat was safely landed during a squall in St Bartholomew's Bay – he gratefully ordered it to be renamed **Kingsgate Bay**. The Queen and Prince Philip, The Duke of Kent, and his sister Princess Alexandra have all contented themselves with naming lifeboats on their trips to Thanet!

On, then, to **Broadstairs**, where a young Princess Victoria stayed in the summer of 1829 and where the Victoria Gardens were later named in her honour. She also holidayed several times at nearby **Ramsgate**, while Royal Villa in Vale Square has reputed connections with philandering Edward VII and his mistress, actress Lillie Langtry. Maybe pause for late refreshment in England's only Royal Harbour, where cafés, bars and restaurants overlook the marina. Edward's great uncle George IV gave the harbour royal status in 1821, in thanks for the warm welcome he had received from the townsfolk the previous year as he embarked with the Royal Squadron on his way to Hanover.

If you fancy an evening stroll, there's plenty to admire in Ramsgate's handsome Victorian and Regency architecture. Prince Charles – famed for his passion for architecture – is just one fan to have paid a special visit to The Grange, built from 1843 by leader of the Gothic Revival Augustus Pugin.

DAY TWO: WALMER CASTLE TO DOVER

Kent, providing the shortest sea crossing to mainland Europe, has witnessed the comings and goings of many kings and queens through the centuries. It has also been a first line of defence against invasion and today we get the keys to some of England's most imposing royal castles along the coast.

Morning Journeying south from Ramsgate we pass **Sandwich**, once a great port until silting took its toll on the harbour. It was here that Edward the Black Prince landed following his celebrated victory at Poitiers in 1357, and where Queen Elizabeth I became 'very merrye' during a sojourn of 1573. The present Duke of York has previously dropped in to Royal St George's Golf Club – the royal status was conferred by King Edward VII in 1902. But we whisk on, past the squat bulk of **Deal Castle**, one of the chain of fortresses King Henry VIII hastily constructed to fend off potential attack from Catholic Europe.

Then stop to explore **Walmer Castle**, also built by Henry, though it has since evolved into the elegant official residence of the Lords Warden of the Cinque Ports. In days gone by, the Lord Warden was among the most powerful figures in the country, with control over the important medieval ports along the south coast: as princes, both Henry V and Henry VIII held the post, and the late Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother was another royal incumbent. The "Queen Mum" enjoyed many summers here and you can view some of the rooms she used, then amble in her steps through the delightful garden created for her 95th birthday. Take a close look at the armillary sphere made to celebrate her 100th birthday, inscribed with the motto, "The sun shines on beggars and kings alike" – Her Majesty is said to have loved it!

Afternoon Spend the afternoon in **Dover**, known as the "Key to England" for its centuries-old role as guardian of the coast. **Dover Castle** is a must, boasting a history reaching back to Roman times: explore the curtain walls and inner bailey buildings of King Henry II, and step right into the thick of his life and times in the Great Tower sumptuously furnished in authentic period style. Henry used Dover on his way between his vast properties in France and England, and following the canonisation of Thomas Becket the castle served to receive – and impress – high-status pilgrims on their trek to the saint's shrine at Canterbury.

Check out Henry VIII's defensive additions, too, and gaze down to the waterside that has witnessed so many comings and goings, including his 1520 departure across the Channel for the iconic Field of the Cloth of Gold where pageantry sought to warm relations with Francis I of France. Throughout history monarchs have paid keen interest in Dover's strategic site and King James I gave Dover Harbour Board a Royal Charter in 1606 – Prince Philip came along in 2006 to help celebrate its 400th anniversary.

If you've time, take a leaf out of the royal diaries and look up some of the local attractions: following The Queen and Prince Charles to see the **Bronze Age Boat** in Dover Museum and marvel at the bravery of sea travellers who used such a wooden vessel 3,550 years ago – compare that with the slick service through the Channel Tunnel whose inauguration Her Majesty and Prince Philip attended in 1994! Or follow Prince Michael of Kent to the **Battle of Britain Memorial** to "the Few", at Capel-le-Ferne, where in 2010 he joined 70th anniversary commemorations of the Battle of Britain that saw the courageous men of Royal Air Force Fighter Command defend southern England skies.

DAY THREE: ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND HEVER CASTLE

Morning After breakfast, set course westwards for **Royal Tunbridge Wells** and a taste of the spa life enjoyed by erstwhile aristocratic society. En route we pass **Bedgebury Pinetum**, dazzling home to the world's finest collection of conifers – little wonder The Countess of Wessex is happy to be an Honorary Friend and come for a stroll on occasion.

Dudley, Lord North put **Tunbridge Wells** on the map when he happened upon the Chalybeate Spring in 1606 and enthused to his friends about how he had been rejuvenated by its cool, iron-rich waters. The great, the good and the royal immediately flocked to the town to avail themselves of its pleasures, among them Queen Henrietta Maria, Queen Anne and Princess (later Queen) Victoria. King Edward VII bestowed the 'Royal' on Tunbridge Wells in 1909, and Princess Anne happily pitched up in 2006 for the town's 400th anniversary celebrations as a spa. She also opened the Victoria Cross Grove – oak trees planted to commemorate local recipients of the Victoria Cross medal for bravery instituted 150 years earlier by Queen Victoria.

Maybe sample a tipple of the town's renowned spring water, served by costumed 'dippers' in summer, or browse the shops as the late Princess Diana once did. Saunter the elegant 17th-century colonnaded Pantiles where the Georgian gentry promenaded, or find out more about the town's illustrious history in Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery.

Afternoon Continue westwards for an afternoon of royal romance at **Hever Castle**. You might pause in passing for a glimpse of **Penshurst Place** along the way, which is where King Henry VIII would sometimes break his journey to Hever to court Anne Boleyn, and where Queen Elizabeth I partied as a guest of the Sidney family – who still live in the beautiful house to this day.

And so to enchanting 13th-century, double moated **Hever Castle**, near Edenbridge. This was the home of the upwardly mobile Boleyn family, and in particular sisters Mary and Anne, both of whom caught King Henry VIII's roving eye. Portraits bring you face to face with all three, while fascinating treasures spin out the tragic tale of Anne's ill-fated wooing and marriage. See the replica of the ornate clock the King presented to her as a wedding gift, and then the prayer book she is believed to have tightly clasped as she walked to her execution in 1536 – her "crime" having been the failure to provide Henry with a male heir.

Meet costumed figures of Henry VIII and his six wives in the Long Gallery and ponder the King's relentless quest for a healthy son and heir. Soon after Henry's tragic tangle with Anne, he appropriated Hever Castle from the Boleyn family and gave it to his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, who had acquiesced without fuss to their marriage being annulled once the King decided she was too ugly for his tastes. Such torrid tales are all a far cry from the pragmatic motives behind The Duke of Kent's 2009 visit to the castle, to open a new woodchip boiler – such are modern times!

Crown your day with a gentle wander through Hever's spectacular gardens, including the Tudor Garden and Anne Boleyn's Walk.

DAY FOUR: LEEDS CASTLE AND CHATHAM OR ROCHESTER

Morning Our final day begins with another royal romantic tour de force, at **Leeds Castle**, near Maidstone. And who wouldn't be bewitched by the fairytale vision of this historic residence of six medieval queens, rising from a lake in 500 acres of parkland? Share, for example, the tale of Catherine de Valois, wife of King Henry V, who held Leeds as a dower castle and, after Henry died in 1422, secretly married the handsome Clerk of her Wardrobe, Owen Tudor: their grandson was Henry VII, first king of the mighty Tudor dynasty.

Maybe that's why Henry VIII was so fond of Leeds Castle, lavishing £1,300 (£390,000 in today's terms) on it between 1517 and 1523. Admire his embellishments, particularly the reconstruction of the Maiden's Tower and the banqueting hall with its wonderful ebony wood floor and carved oak ceiling. Then relax outside in the beautiful grounds, which include the Lady Baillie Garden named after the last private owner of the castle. The Queen's cousin Princess Alexandra, patron of Leeds Castle Foundation, was here for the garden's opening in 1999 and is a stalwart supporter of the castle's many special events.

Afternoon Now two options beckon to round off our royal tour: The Historic Dockyard Chatham or the city of Rochester. Take your pick!

If the **Historic Dockyard Chatham** is your choice, you are in good company: Prince Charles is patron of The National Museums at Chatham, whose project to restore the historic No. 1 Smithery building has recently seen the launch of an imaginative new cultural venue and centre for world-class maritime collections – catch the latest exhibition.

Roll back the centuries and you will find that King Henry VIII first rented a storehouse to service his fleet at anchor on the River Medway in 1507, and the dockyard that grew up at Chatham built and repaired many of the vessels that brought victory against the Spanish Armada in the reign of Elizabeth I. Trace 400 years of further maritime history around this exciting 80-acre site, whose ties with royalty have continued to this day with visits for Navy Days and the like by The Queen, Prince Philip, Princess Anne and Prince Michael of Kent among others. **The Royal Engineers Museum** is also nearby.

Alternatively complete our tour in **Rochester**. First, climb the massive Norman keep of **Rochester Castle** for superb views across the River Medway. The fortress brings us right back to disputes between King Henry II and Thomas Becket, who argued about whether it belonged to the Church or Crown. Henry, waving aside any previous agreements between King and Archbishop, got on with strengthening the castle to maintain his power base beside the river. It was tested later in the reign of his son, King John, when rebel barons took it over. Relive the siege 1215 and discover John's cunning plan to regain the castle using the fat of 40 pigs to set fire to a tunnel dug beneath it!

Rochester also brings us back to King Henry VIII and his marital merry-go-round. Bluff King Hal first met his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, in the timbered Old Hall behind the castle on Boley Hill. But the eager monarch was sorely disappointed by poor Anne – he said the "Flanders Mare" smelled – and he unkindly left without giving her the furs he had brought as a gift to "nourish love". Although they did get married, the union was annulled just six months later – and as we know, Anne received Hever Castle as part of her pay off. The pair even became friends.

Delve into more of Rochester's heritage at the **Guildhall Museum** on the High Street, whose opening attracted The Duke of Kent as far back as 1994. Or take a lead from Prince Charles and check the calendar for concerts at **Rochester Cathedral** – His Royal Highness most recently enjoyed entertainment by popular composer, pianist and band leader Jools Holland. At any time, England's second-oldest cathedral provides a resounding finale.

For further information about visiting Kent go to www.visitkent.co.uk/trade