



Sherlock Holmes Mystery Tour of Kent

Visit scenes from the new movie Sherlock Holmes, and enjoy an adventure around Kent in the footsteps of the iconic detective and his creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

The big screen film, starring Robert Downey Jr as the cool, creative sleuth and Jude Law as his sidekick Dr Watson, is set to be a box office hit. It also coincides with the 150th anniversary of the birth of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930). What better time to tour Kent, to discover inspirational locations behind the movie and stories – you'll be surprised by the county's intriguing connections. Doyle's tales of his pipe-smoking hero, swirling fogs, cobbled streets, Gothic landscapes and cunning villains are as captivating today as ever. So dust off your deerstalker hat and follow the clues – Kent, as Holmes knew, is just a short journey from London.

Day 1

Our first destination is Groombridge Place Gardens and Enchanted Forest – or should that be Birlstone Manor from *The Valley of Fear* (1915): across a 'beautiful broad moat, as still and luminous as quicksilver in the cold winter sunshine.' When Doyle wrote the book he was living nearby at Crowborough and was a frequent visitor to the 17th-century moated manor, sometimes taking part in séances, which were popular at the time. In his novel he sends Holmes and Watson here to investigate after someone is found brutally murdered. Is it John Douglas or 'the bicyclist from Tunbridge Wells'?

Keep your wits about you as you wander the magical walled gardens, past the crazy topiary of the Drunken Garden – a favourite of Doyle. It's said Groombridge is haunted, not by Douglas or a cyclist, but by an ostler who allegedly drowned in 1808. Doyle describes an encounter with the ghost in his non-fiction book, *At the Edge of the Unknown*.

Next we head north via West Kingsdown adjacent to the beautiful Darent Valley. During the Second World War RAF West Kingsdown was a 'Y' Service hq, part of a network of secret listening stations. Doyle's daughter Lena was the admin officer here at Hollywood Manor. The Manor has since gone, replaced by houses on Manor Lane, but perhaps you can imagine for a moment the fraught world of espionage as enemy planes threatened England's shores. Sir Arthur didn't live to see this conflict, but he had been a great patriot: during the First World War he bombarded the War Office with suggestions for life-saving measures, like inflatable rubber belts for servicemen at sea. While many had found him meddlesome, Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, was sympathetic to his ideas (Churchill also later claimed to have read every Sherlock Holmes story).

Continue northeast and we come to The Historic Dockyard Chatham, where the spirit of naval adventure abounds across 80 acres. Filmmakers love the authentic backdrop of ships, cobbled streets, and Georgian and Victorian architecture – little wonder that director Guy Ritchie and the stars came here to shoot atmospheric scenes for *Sherlock Holmes*. The new film follows Holmes (Robert Downey Jr) and Watson (Jude Law) as they try to foil evil Lord Blackwood (Mark Strong) and prevent a plot to destroy Britain.

Test your powers of deduction to work out the real-life locations for the crucial movie moments: including the boxing scene shot in the tarred Yarn Store and the exciting action sequence filmed in slip 7. Then, what

about the prison scenes, the hanging, the mysterious Victorian alleys, the coach chase and even the sewers – all shot at The Historic Dockyard Chatham.

Round off your day in style with a stay at nearby Bridgewood Manor where Ritchie, all the 'A' list actors – and one large Golden Retriever – chilled after filming. The hotel has a superb spa, where you can wind down with some pampering therapy treatments just like the stars.

Day 2

After breakfast, it's time to set off for the seaside where you'll find something more than a little fishy. Quirky-chic Whitstable is famous for its oysters, weatherboarded cottages, winding lanes and alleys. Actor Peter Cushing was so enchanted that he and his wife came to live here in 1959. Cushing, of course, was renowned for playing Sherlock Holmes, starting with Hammer's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in 1959 – the first Holmes film made in colour. Drop into Whitstable Museum on Oxford Street and pick up the town trail, Peter Cushing's Whitstable (£1), then saunter past his house, share his favourite beach scenes and relax at Cushing's View: he gave a seat from his garden (he was an avid gardener) to place on the spot where he liked to watch activities in the harbour.

Now skim along the coast to Margate. What is it about English seaside resorts that makes them such colourful settings for curious encounters? You might want to have a paddle or some fish-and-chips as you ponder this one from Holmes, recalled in the short story, *The Adventure of the Second Stain*: 'And yet the motives of women are so inscrutable. You remember the woman at Margate whom I suspected for the same reason. No powder on her nose – that proved to be the correct solution. How can you build on such a quicksand? Their most trivial action may mean volumes, or their most extraordinary conduct may depend upon a hairpin or a curling tongs.'

If you're baffled, remember that Holmes, 'the most perfect reasoning and observing machine', could conjure character, motives and whole case histories from noting apparently trivial details. Doyle had been taught to pay meticulous attention to physical details when he was studying medicine at university and, when he turned to writing, he gave the skill to his detective. Incidentally, when he completed his medical studies in 1881, Doyle drew a humorous sketch of himself with the caption, 'Licensed to Kill' – a prediction that later came true in a fictional sense, at least!

Travel the short distance south to the picturesque village of Minster with its ancient abbey dating back to 670 AD. From quite a young age, Doyle was fascinated by spiritualist beliefs, mediums, séances and psychical research, which he considered an extension of scientific inquiry. 'The burly, moustachioed author came to Minster to investigate an alleged haunting at the Old Oak Cottage on the High Street. One suspects that Holmes would have dismissed any supernatural goings-on and found a rational, down-to-earth explanation.'

Our final destination for the day is Sandwich, birthplace in 1879 of Sydney Greenstreet, another actor who helped bring Sherlock Holmes to life. The Hollywood great may well be best remembered as Kasper Gutman ('The Fat Man') in *The Maltese Falcon* and the crooked club-owner in *Casablanca*, but his stage debut was as a murderer called Craigen in a Sherlock Holmes production at the Marina Theatre, Ramsgate, in 1902. Greenstreet had first taken acting lessons to escape the boredom of managing a brewery! Doyle would no doubt have approved, because he, too, liked to dabble in theatre and it was the US actor/producer William Gillette who first gave Holmes his catchphrase, 'Elementary, my dear Watson.'

Day 3

Now our tour takes a curious twist, which would have surprised even Doyle. It's well known that the author got fed up with Sherlock Holmes and killed him off at the height of his popularity in 1893 (he called it 'justifiable homicide'). But public outrage was so great and publishers' entreaties so lucrative, that the author had to revive him – in the end there were four novels and 56 short stories. However, set course for Canterbury and you'll come across three additional short stories...

The conundrum is soon explained because these 'alternative Sherlock Holmes' stories are not by Doyle but rather Miles Elward, included in *Sherlock Holmes in Canterbury* (1995). The city's cobbled streets and ancient buildings are, of course, perfect for his modern pastiches. Get on the trail of *The Missing Cleric*, for example, which inevitably draws on magnificent Canterbury Cathedral, as well as St Martin's Church, England's oldest parish church still in constant use. *The Ball of Twine* involves Holmes and Watson in a case of murder and missing jewels. Maybe you'll be inspired to write your own detective tales after a visit.

Then it's time to head back to the coast at Dover and in particular historic Dover Town Hall on Biggin Street: scene of a real-life celebration in Doyle's life where appearances certainly turned out to be deceptive. Would Holmes have spotted something amiss? In 1913 Doyle, a celebrity much in demand, was guest speaker at a dinner here to give the Freedom of Dover to Arthur Burr, founder of the Kent coal industry. He gave a fine speech about how the coal mines (in which he had invested) were going to transform the town and east Kent into the new industrial heartland of Britain – Dover would be one of the six biggest cities in Britain, he declared. Within a year Burr was convicted of fraud, the mines virtually all closed, and plans for iron and steel works, power stations and other major industries were abandoned.

Doyle also came to Dover in 1921, this time to promote a spiritualist called Thomas Powell who gave a demonstration at the Town Hall. Afterwards they travelled to America where Doyle hoped to convince his friend Harry Houdini of Powell's powers, but the magician and escapologist remained a lifelong sceptic.

The final leg of our journey takes us to 'jewel of the Weald', Tenterden. Watch your speed past Folkestone – in the early 1900s Doyle, who loved motoring, picked up a speeding ticket not far from here, thought to be one of the first ones ever issued. He was so indignant that he wrote a blistering letter to the *Daily Mail*!

En route you could detour via Mersham – did Doyle convert the name to Marsham, the Kent setting for *The Adventure of the Abbey Grange* and the murder of Sir Eustace Brackenstall? Equally puzzling is the real-life location in Kent of 'The Cedars' in 'Lee,' stage for *The Man with the Twisted Lip*. The plot thickens, but don't get distracted – the evening train stands waiting for us in Tenterden.

Now it's all aboard the Kent & East Sussex Railway, which gently wends along the Rother Valley. Sound idyllic? 'Come, Watson come, the game is afoot!' Throughout the year there are Sherlock Holmes Murder Mystery evenings on board the luxury dining train, *The Wealden Pullman* – next dates are 10 and 25 October. You'll be greeted by Holmes and Watson, but as you're enjoying your aperitif suddenly a commotion erupts – someone lies dead. Did you hear a gun shot, was the victim strangled or poisoned?

The detective and his trusty friend go swiftly into action and the main part of the evening begins. The race is on for you to solve the tricky case before Holmes does, or will you be bamboozled by red herrings? Your meal is served and further scenes unfold – you may find yourself acting a part (costumes provided). Then, having collected as many clues as you can, you deduce the motive, name the murderer and maybe win a prize. When Holmes lines up the suspects and their secrets are revealed, is the real culprit found?

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