



### Kent for inspiring winter getaways

Come to Kent this winter – you'll be surprised by just how much is going on. Many castles and attractions offer a glowing welcome throughout the season and lots of special events bring festive cheer.

Enjoy the unique treats of the Garden of England sparkling with frost, Rochester's colourful new Dickens Christmas Market, winter-warming fare, cosy pubs, and feel-good escapes on the coast. It's a magical time to visit.

So take your pick from our itineraries for inspiring day trips and memorable short breaks, leave the summer crowds behind and enjoy the gentle richness of this time of year. You'll also find venues offering group-friendly deals and discounts – just ask, just get away.

#### Day one: Christmas cheer with Dickens in Rochester

**Rochester** makes an evocative trip any time in winter, filled as it is with impressive architecture, curious nooks and delightful shops. But do make a date for December and treat yourself to a whole day of festive spirit, gift hunting and indulgence!

**Morning** Charles Dickens lived nearby and he frequently featured the city in his writings – enjoy your own *Christmas Carol* with a morning browsing the colourful new **Dickens Christmas Market**, in the grounds of Norman **Rochester Castle**. From 3 to 19 December, up to 300 German-style market huts will be selling festive gifts and handcrafted goodies, creating what's believed to be the country's largest authentic Christmas market. Fairylights fill the trees, Dickensian characters and carol singers bring good cheer, and what more tempting flavours of the season than roasting chestnuts and glühwein?

**Afternoon** If you time your visit for the ever-popular **Dickensian Christmas Festival** (4-5 Dec), there's more heartwarming entertainment around the streets that the great author knew. Or spend the afternoon looking up the places Dickens described in his books – many buildings on the **Victorian High Street** carry plaques as clues. If you haven't ticked off all the Christmas presents from your list, then explore the independent **speciality shops** along this atmospheric street – antiques, books, collectibles and fashions to name just a few, while a variety of eateries offer scrumptious pitstops.

Afternoon into early evening is a stirring time to experience **Rochester Cathedral**. The Romanesque west façade inspires to this day, while new audio tours help to bring the ancient

history of England's second-oldest cathedral to life. Check the calendar for a series of special **concerts** that add a memorable finale to winter days in this intriguing city.

Dickens Christmas Market [www.dickenschristmasmarket.com](http://www.dickenschristmasmarket.com)

Dickensian Christmas [www.whatsonmedway.co.uk](http://www.whatsonmedway.co.uk)

Medway Visitor Information Centre [www.medway.gov.uk/tourism](http://www.medway.gov.uk/tourism)

Rochester Castle [www.english-heritage.org.uk/southeast](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/southeast)

Rochester Cathedral [www.rochestercathedral.org](http://www.rochestercathedral.org)

### **Day two: Maritime and military adventure – and possibly more Dickens**

**Morning** Begin your second day in **maritime Medway** with a morning at **The Historic Dockyard Chatham**. The 80-acre site is open every day until mid-December especially to allow more time for visitors to catch the splendid Stanley Spencer exhibition in **No. 1 Smithery**. Launching in July 2010, this historic industrial building has been transformed into an exciting new cultural venue and centre for world-class maritime collections. The inaugural exhibition featuring Spencer's WW2 'Shipbuilding on the Clyde' paintings certainly blazes a trail – it's the first time all eight panels have been on public display following extensive restoration.

While you're here, also take the chance to explore some of the Historic Dockyard's other **galleries and attractions**, including its three great warships (check for sequential or restricted opening).

**Afternoon** The afternoon opens up with a variety of options. Continue on the trail of Dickens with an adventure at **Dickens World** indoor visitor complex at nearby **Chatham Maritime**. It's great fun if the grandchildren are with you, or if you simply want to rediscover the life, books and times of the author – costumed characters you might meet include Scrooge's seasonal ghosts! Chatham Maritime's new **restaurant quarter** beckons and so do the cut-price designer shops at the **Dockside Outlet Centre**.

Alternatively, head straight for the **Royal Engineers Museum, Chatham**, to discover the part played by the engineers over the centuries. Internationally important collections tell the explosive history of Britain, its empire and the rest of the world since the 1700s. Be enthralled by an array of rare artefacts that really engage heart and mind – the Waterloo Map used by the Duke of Wellington in 1815, still marked by blood; medals, and even a *papier mâché* head used as a sniper's decoy in the First World War.

Dickens World [www.dickensworld.co.uk](http://www.dickensworld.co.uk)

Dockside Outlet Centre [www.docksideshopping.co.uk](http://www.docksideshopping.co.uk)

The Historic Dockyard Chatham [www.thedockyard.co.uk](http://www.thedockyard.co.uk)

Royal Engineers Museum [www.remuseum.org.uk](http://www.remuseum.org.uk)

### **Day three: Secrets of garden, orchard and brewery**

Combine Brogdale and Shepherd Neame in one day, or split into two enriching visits – with time to browse the market town of Faversham and maybe Belmont Gardens.

**Morning** The rich lands of Kent are rightly known as the Garden of England and here's your chance to learn some of the secrets of orchard and brewery. **Brogdale Farm, Faversham**, is famous as the home of the **National Fruit Collection**, and while the orchards may be dormant in winter, the **Marketplace** of local rural crafts, produce and plants is open. There are also some stimulating day courses for the green-fingered – from planning a fruit garden (Oct) to pruning (Nov) and grafting (Jan). A brilliant chance to pick up tips from the experts! (Pre-booking essential.)

**Afternoon** If you're not at Brogdale for the whole day, spend the afternoon at **Britain's oldest brewer, Shepherd Neame, Faversham**. November-February you can take a guided tour behind the scenes: see the traditional mash tuns, taste the natural mineral water from the brewery's well, try some malted barley and smell the distinctive aroma of Kentish hops. Then relax over a tutored tasting of Kentish ales and speciality lagers. December's **Yuletide Brewery Tours** feature winter-warming mulled beer and mince pies. Or time your visit for Wednesday-Saturday evenings in December and enjoy a superb four-course **Beer Dinner**, with experts on hand to impart all sorts of fascinating facts about each beer and how it is matched to what you eat. (Advance booking essential for all tours and dinners.)

Depending on how you choose to arrange your day(s), you may have time to look around **Faversham**. Known as The King's Port from when its tidal creek bustled with trade, it has some beguiling medieval nooks that can be discovered on the town trail. **The Fleur de Lis Museum and Gallery** on Preston Street presents a vivid picture of the past, including the town's erstwhile role as a centre for the country's explosives history. If time allows, the **gardens at Belmont House**, just to the south of town, offer a wonderful winter stroll.

Belmont House and Gardens [www.belmont-house.org](http://www.belmont-house.org)  
Brogdale [www.brogdalecollections.co.uk/venue.html](http://www.brogdalecollections.co.uk/venue.html)  
Shepherd Neame [www.shepherdneame.co.uk](http://www.shepherdneame.co.uk)

### **Day four: Festive Canterbury**

There is no better time to meander the captivating streets of **Canterbury** than in the lead-up to Christmas, when festive lights are on, city shops have late-night opening and the cathedral prepares to celebrate.

**Morning** Begin in light mood at **The Canterbury Tales** visitor attraction, particularly if you've youngsters in your party – they just love the fun, laughter and horror of this stunning recreation of 14<sup>th</sup> century England. Meet some of Chaucer's colourful characters on their pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral and make the most of new audio guides that help provide a thought-provoking introduction to the city and its famous literary connection.

There's also plenty of time in the morning for **shopping** and soaking up the atmosphere of cobbled lanes and medieval buildings. Wander the 'forgotten' **King's Mile** (Palace Street/Northgate) for independent retailers and must-have gifts. Or take your pick of museums: the **Museum of Canterbury** showcases the city's history and the **Roman Museum** takes you to the preserved remains of a town house complete with famous mosaics.

**Afternoon** In the afternoon, tour Canterbury's **World Heritage Site**: Saxon **St Martin's Church** (Tues, Thurs, Sat) and **St Augustine's Abbey**, culminating with **Canterbury Cathedral** itself. The 14<sup>th</sup>-century perpendicular nave and stunning medieval stained glass enthal, and there's an extra-special, skin-tingling atmosphere as Christmas approaches. View the life-size crib, designed and made by cathedral staff and 'sewing ladies', and stay for a service to hear the voices of the choir fill the glorious edifice. Worship and events, including main Christmas services, are publicised on the cathedral's website.

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

Canterbury Cathedral [www.canterbury-cathedral.org](http://www.canterbury-cathedral.org)

Canterbury Museums [www.canterbury-museums.co.uk](http://www.canterbury-museums.co.uk)

The Canterbury Tales [www.canterburytales.org.uk](http://www.canterburytales.org.uk)

### **Day five: History, mystery and eccentricity along the coast**

There's a marvellous sense of pick 'n' mix with something for everyone along **Thanet's ribbon of resorts**. Time your visit for a weekend, it's when most venues are open in winter for a lovely coastal escape. The following give a flavour of what there is to do – combine two or three according to your interests to create an entertaining day:

Perhaps begin in **Margate** with a leisurely **morning walk on the sands** – kick off your shoes and get the circulation going! Then, just five minutes' saunter from the seafront, mystery awaits at the subterranean **Shell Grotto** (open weekends 11am-4pm, Hallowe'en to Good Friday). Discovered in 1835, the grotto is a rare puzzle to this day: is it a curious temple or Regency folly? See what you think as you view the chamber and 2,000-sq-ft mosaic created from millions of shells.

Continuing on an exotic note, the **Powell-Cotton Museum at Birchington** (Sun 1-4pm, Nov-Mar) is an enticing afternoon option. It was established in 1896 by Major Percy Horace Gordon Powell-Cotton to house the diverse natural history specimens and cultural objects he gathered on expeditions to Asia and Africa. You'll also find local archaeology, weaponry and ceramics, jade and ivory from Europe, China and Japan, all assembled by the adventurous Powell-Cotton family.

Nearby **Broadstairs** offers another afternoon option, to **Crampton Tower Museum** (weekends 1-4pm, Nov-Mar). A genuine hidden gem, partly housed in a flint tower, the museum recalls the great Victorian engineer Thomas Crampton, who not only designed locomotives and railways, but also laid the first effective telegraph cable under the English Channel. Drawings, interactive displays and working model railways all make for an absorbing visit.

Further heroes are celebrated at the **Spitfire and Hurricane Memorial Museum, Manston** (10am-4pm daily in winter), which is dedicated to the pilots and aircrew of WW2. Two magnificently restored spitfire and Hawker Hurricane aircraft are on display here. Afterwards, unlock more wartime derring-do at **RAF Manston History Museum** (weekends 10am-4pm, Nov-Feb). It was at Manston that the longest and widest runway in southern England was built, to provide a safe haven to damaged aircraft returning from Europe.

Then, how about this as a quirky end-of-day – to be found nowhere else. The **Pinball Parlour** is **Ramsgate's** latest offbeat treasure, housing some 30 or so machines dating back to the 1950s

(weekends, 1-6pm). It's a hands-on place so there's no excuse not to give in to nostalgia and set the parlour buzzing and ping-pong. Index fingers at the ready...

Crampton Tower [www.cramptontower.co.uk](http://www.cramptontower.co.uk)

Pinball Parlour [www.pinballparlour.co.uk](http://www.pinballparlour.co.uk)

Powell-Cotton Museum [www.quexmuseum.org](http://www.quexmuseum.org)

RAF Manston History Museum [www.rafmanston.co.uk](http://www.rafmanston.co.uk)

Shell Grotto [www.shellgrotto.co.uk](http://www.shellgrotto.co.uk)

Spitfire and Hurricane Museum [www.spitfirememorial.org.uk](http://www.spitfirememorial.org.uk)

### **Day six: Coastal heritage and culture**

More coastal allure awaits in a day of contrasts at **Sandwich, Dover and Folkestone** – though you may choose to combine just two or to spend all day at Folkestone during **Book Festival** time, 5-13 November.

**Morning** **Sandwich**, one of the most complete and best-preserved medieval towns in England, is an architectural delight. At its heart look out for the aptly named **Secret Gardens of Sandwich**: 3.5 acres of ornamental and formal gardens by Sir Edwin Lutyens. Unseen for 25 years, the gardens and lake were restored and now provide all-year colour – and if you need any more encouragement, there's free entry during December and January, with half-price entry during November and February.

**Morning/afternoon** On, next, to **Dover Castle**, guardian of the coast and the Key to England. Step inside the Great Tower, resplendent since its £2 million-plus transformation by English Heritage, and immerse yourself in the authentically evoked medieval world and royal court of Henry II. You'll also want to travel deep inside the White Cliffs and explore the maze of Secret Wartime Tunnels from which Operation Dynamo was directed to evacuate the beaches of Dunkirk 1940. Keep an eye on the calendar for a special winter/Christmas themed period involving Dover's costumed interpreters, to add seasonal flavour to your adventure.

**Afternoon or Day** **Folkestone** puts a highlight in diaries, too, with its **Book Festival** 5-13 November. The whole week is packed with entertaining live performances in the **Creative Quarter**, featuring well-known and emerging authors and poets. Come and be inspired! Wide-ranging events include many for children and young people, too. Both inside and outside of Book Festival time, of course, you can always enjoy the seaside vibe of **The Leas**, the mile-long cliff-top walk which is one of Europe's finest marine parades. Just the place to relax and blow away the winter cobwebs at the end of a day sightseeing.

Dover Castle [www.english-heritage.org.uk/southeast](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/southeast)

Folkestone Book Festival [www.folkestonebookfest.com](http://www.folkestonebookfest.com)

The Secret Gardens of Sandwich [www.the-secretgardens.co.uk](http://www.the-secretgardens.co.uk)

## Day seven: Childhood Christmas magic or a romantic escape?

Are you giving the kids a treat? **Heart of Kent** conjures up days full of childhood magic at Christmas, as well as romantic escape if that's what you prefer. Follow one of two itineraries to suit your group –

### *Childhood Christmas magic*

**Morning** If you're up for Christmas fun, then it's all aboard the **Kent and East Sussex Railway** at **Tenterden**. England's finest rural light railway runs **Santa Specials** in December (weekends plus 22-24 December).

**Afternoon** Then for more starry-eyed cheer, head for **Santa's Magical Kingdom at The Hop Farm Family Park, Paddock Wood, Tonbridge**. The Hop Farm is open all year and bursts with family attractions whatever the weather, but Christmas casts a wow-factor spell when Santa's Magical Kingdom appears from 13 November. Hop aboard another Santa's train and travel to his kingdom and toy workshop, explore the elves' forest of lights, reindeer land and other enchanting scenes – until you meet Santa himself.

Either morning or afternoon, depending on your schedule and Santa Special trip timetables, **Kent Life at Sandling** is also irresistible to kids. Here's an all-action place to burn off energy in the winter months in the exciting indoor and outdoor play areas. Tuck into the tasty winter warmers menu in the Tea Room, including delicious soups, sandwiches, luxury hot chocolate and scrummy cakes that will keep everyone happy. And then it's off again to spot naughty geese on the pond and journey through the farmyard.

The Hop Farm Family Park [www.thehopfarm.co.uk](http://www.thehopfarm.co.uk) / Santa's Magical Kingdom [www.santasmagicalkingdom.co.uk](http://www.santasmagicalkingdom.co.uk)  
Kent and East Sussex Railway [www.kesr.org.uk](http://www.kesr.org.uk)  
Kent Life [www.kentlife.org.uk](http://www.kentlife.org.uk)

### *Romantic escape*

**Morning** Sit back and let the picturesque scenery glide by on a gentle trip back in time aboard the **Kent and East Sussex Railway** from **Tenterden**. The line weaves through 10.5 miles and is a wonderfully nostalgic escape.

Or step straight out for a stroll in the fresh air and revitalising scenery of **Bedgebury** near **Lamberhurst**. The world's finest collection of conifers in the **National Pinetum** really comes into its own over the winter months and sprinklings of frost add their silver glitter. Some conifers change colour in winter, like the Golden Scots Pine that metamorphoses from blue-green to beautiful golden yellow. You might also spot some early flowering rhododendrons on a late January walk. And keep a look out for birds – gold crests and long-tailed tits – that find winter refuge and food amid the conifers' evergreen foliage. A wander here certainly cheers heart and soul.

**Afternoon** Spend your afternoon at **Leeds Castle**, near **Maidstone**: what more romantic sight than this magnificent edifice rising from the lake amid stunning parkland? A royal residence for six

of the medieval queens of England, the castle has plenty of stories to share. Enter a world of enchantment as you wander through rooms that this Christmas are decorated with scenes inspired by classic pantomimes (6-24 Dec). Father Christmas will be in his grotto and there are special evening openings – check out the castle's calendar of dining events, which include **Christmas Kentish Evenings** throughout December. You can always return with the kids for the **Christmas Trail** (26 Dec-3 Jan) when you can follow pantomime character clues through the grounds – with a reward for children completing the trail.

Bedgebury [www.forestry.gov.uk/bedgebury](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/bedgebury)  
Kent and East Sussex Railway [www.kesr.org.uk](http://www.kesr.org.uk)  
Leeds Castle [www.leeds-castle.com](http://www.leeds-castle.com)

### **Day eight: Keys to villa and castle**

It's your final day and two top attractions crown your tour with insights into the opulent lifestyles of days gone by.

**Morning** **Lullingstone Roman Villa, Eynsford**, was begun circa AD 100 and developed to suit the tastes and beliefs of successive wealthy owners – possibly including Pertinax, Governor of Britain and later Roman Emperor in AD 193. Admire spectacular mosaics, wall paintings and Roman artefacts, all offering tantalising links to the villa's residents. Galleries overlooking the fully excavated remains add further imagination-tugging insights.

**Afternoon** Then head for a glorious afternoon finale at double-moated **Hever Castle and Gardens** (Weds-Sun, 1 Nov-24 Dec), near **Edenbridge**. The idyllic childhood home of Anne Boleyn reveals a rich history through paintings, tapestries and treasures, while garden topiary and statuary particularly catch the eye in winter. Narnia comes to the castle 2-24 December, with twinkling trees, decorations and spectacular illuminated gardens plus Father Christmas, music and carols. Treat yourself to a visit during **Christmas Late Night Specials** (9, 10, 16, 17 Dec) and you'll see the castle bathed in festive lights as you enjoy last-minute shopping and a few indulgences in the restaurants. Enjoy!

Hever Castle [www.hevercastle.co.uk](http://www.hevercastle.co.uk)  
Lullingstone Roman Villa [www.english-heritage.org.uk/southeast](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/southeast)