

Exploring Dover, England: A Disney Cruise Line Port Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Last year, I did a [series of articles](#), looking at various home ports for the Disney Cruise Line ships, focusing on places as diverse as [Venice, Italy](#); [San Juan, Puerto Rico](#); [Barcelona, Spain](#); and [Vancouver, Canada](#).

At that stage, although Dover, England had once been used as a home port, back in 2010 for Disney's first Baltic cruises, I had no idea that it would soon be returning to use as a home port for Disney in the 2015 cruise season.

The Disney Magic heads first from Copenhagen, Denmark to Dover, via the Norwegian fjords and Iceland, arriving in England on July 10, 2015. If you haven't already booked this cruise, you're already out of luck, as it's no longer available on the Disney Cruise Line website, having already sold out. The Magic then makes Dover its home port for its next two cruises, both 12-nights long, following the Baltic route. The only difference between the two is that the second itinerary gives you two nights in Copenhagen, removing Warnemunde in Germany to make way for that. When the Magic returns from those trips, it then heads south to Barcelona on a repositioning cruise.

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□Dover is an interesting home port, mainly because the biggest draw for visitors to the area isn't actually the town itself. Let's be honest, if you're crossing the pond, most people want to see London, and rightly so, as it's got an impressive history and is packed with things to see and do. It's one of the most visited cities in the world, and one I absolutely love, so thoroughly recommend. If you do want to see London, you'll need at least a couple of full days there, although it's very much like Disney, in terms of there's so much to see, you could return a number of times and still not do everything.

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□The chances are if you're heading to or from Dover from outside the UK, you'll be flying into London, either Gatwick or Heathrow. Of the two, we much prefer Gatwick, as it's a much smaller airport. Rail links from both into London are very convenient, making it easy to add it on as a destination to your trip.

However, for this article, I'm going to focus on Dover itself, and places closer to it, as the area boasts plenty of attractions. The biggest one by far, and one you can't miss, is Dover Castle, which looms over the town below. Work started on this fortress in the 1160s, and like many British castles, it hosted Royalty for many years, but this castle is very different

to many others, as it played a unique role during World War Two.

□ It became home to secret wartime tunnels, and it was from there that the dramatic rescue of thousands of troops from the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940 was masterminded. Today, it's brought back to life, with the sounds of what you might have heard back then, and it's a sobering reminder of the vital role this place played, and also an eye opener of the conditions people had to work under.

□ With so much history to explore, you can easily spend the day at Dover Castle, which we have done in the past. There are superb, sweeping views across the town, and if the weather is cooperating, you may even be able to see France 30 or so miles away across the Channel. For us, the castle is the one thing you really have to see during any visit to Dover.

□ Another fascinating aspect of Dover's history can be found at the Dover Museum and the Bronze Age Boat Gallery in the center of the town. As you'll gather from the name, one of the star attractions here is a Bronze Age boat that was found in 1992, when work was underway on a new road out of the town. It's believed to be around 3,000 years old and may be the world's oldest known seagoing boat. Some of the boat had to be left underground, but they managed to salvage about 10 meters of it, and at the museum, you can see ideas of how the whole thing might have looked.

□ Just a short walk along the road is the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, which dates from 1100, and the building you see today still has elements of that original structure remaining. Turn a corner and you find yourself in New Street, with a building that doesn't look much, but it's home to the Roman Painted House, one of the finest Roman houses on show in Britain, which dates from around 200 AD. It's thought that it formed part of a large mansion or official hotel for travellers who crossed the channel. You see, even back then, Dover was making money from visitors.

□ Today that trend continues, and although it's not particularly picturesque, you can't ignore Dover Docks. The cruise terminal is located away from it, but the docks are home to Europe's biggest port, and it takes up a huge amount of ground at the edge of Dover.

□ One of the most famous sights in Dover is something you'll see as you sail into and/or out of the town. That is of course the White Cliffs, which have greeted people for centuries. I have to be honest, I never tire of seeing them whenever we take the ferry from Dover. It's one of the few advantages it has for me over taking the channel tunnel, which

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is a lot quicker and poses no risk of seasickness. If you want to get closer to the White Cliffs on land, there is a coastal path you can walk along, and there's a visitor center that explains the history of the cliffs.

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□ If shopping's your thing, then a visit to the De Bradelei Wharf is well worth it, as it offers discount shopping on various designer products. It's close to the town center, and about a mile's walk from the cruise terminal, a walk which takes you past the marina and seafront.

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□ Outside of the town, those with more time to spare can head to Canterbury to see the famous cathedral that has attracted pilgrims for almost 1,000 years. It's an easy train ride over there, while tour companies will offer you the chance to visit Leeds Castle, about 40 miles away, known as the loveliest castle in the world, and with good reason. It's right on our home doorstep, and love being able to visit it regularly. You can also drive there, if you're brave enough to drive on the other side of the road, that is!

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□ There's certainly plenty to explore before or after any cruise from Dover, and it's definitely worth adding some extra time to your trip to ensure you can do this part of the world justice. Your only problem may well be deciding how to fit everything in, there's so much to choose from!

[Authors' Note: Detailed port guides to Dover and the other ports mentioned in this article are all available in the [upcoming 12th edition of PassPorter's Disney Cruise Line guidebook](#), which is now available for pre-order with an immediate download of the online edition!]

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

Article last updated: 09-04-2014

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