

Kent, England: A Travel Feature

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

With America and Britain sharing a common language and history, perhaps it's no surprise that travelling between our two countries is so popular.

Most people heading east to the United Kingdom are coming for one thing -- London. But there's so much more to the country than that and a new transatlantic service, operating out of Norfolk, Virginia, allows visitors to discover that for themselves.

Operating weekly between May and October, the service will fly into Kent International Airport on the southeast coast of England. Just over an hour's drive from the outskirts of London, this airport is an attractive alternative to Heathrow and Gatwick. Particularly because it's so quiet, which means no long waits to get through customs. But it's also situated by some beautiful places, which are well worth exploring.

Kent is a county -- the British equivalent of a state -- whose history goes back 2,000 years. Home to Roman invasions and the place where St. Augustine first came ashore to establish Christianity in Britain, that history can still be seen today in Richborough Roman Fort and Canterbury Cathedral.

The Cathedral, just 16 miles from the Kent airport, is one of the area's most popular tourist spots and with good reason. The name is known worldwide not only as the mother church of the Anglican community and from Chaucer's famous Canterbury Tales, but also as where Archbishop Thomas Becket was murdered in 1170. More than that, it's an impressive building and one that can easily rival the likes of Westminster Abbey or St. Paul's Cathedral.

Closer to the airport, there's even more history to be found in Broadstairs, a coastal town that was the favorite holiday retreat of Charles Dickens. Bleak House, where he wrote David Copperfield, still stands, overlooking the beautiful Viking Bay below. The Dickens House Museum on the cliff top was once the home of Miss Mary Pearson Strong, on whom Dickens based much of the character of Miss Betsey Trotwood in David Copperfield. The author's links with the town are celebrated every June during the Dickens Festival, which sees performances of his plays and parades of costumed Dickensian characters.

It's easy to see why Dickens fell in love with this town, with its array of

quaint shops, narrow roads and seven beautiful beaches that offer a range of activities from surfing to donkey rides. During August, the town is filled with music from international Folk Week, which attracts over 100,000 visitors each year. Some of the best folk acts from the UK and Europe perform. Even better, many of the performances are free to attend.

A little further down the coastline is the beautiful harbor town of Ramsgate, the only place in Britain that can boast a Royal Harbour. Awarded the status in 1820 by King George IV in appreciation of the hospitality he received, the harbor remains one of the most picturesque in the country, surrounded by hundreds of buildings dating back to the 18th and 19th century. This is a town packed full of stunning architecture. By evening, it comes alive with bustling cafes and restaurants along the waterfront.

The town's maritime past is celebrated at the Ramsgate Maritime Museum. As well as looking at the development of the history of the area, this museum is packed with items rescued from shipwrecks from the nearby Goodwin Sands. Many of these date back to the Great Storm of 1703 and provide a fascinating look at warships from centuries gone by. It's also the site of the unique Ramsgate Meridian, the site where the town's own mean time, 5 minutes and 41 seconds ahead of London, was calculated. It makes Ramsgate the first place in the country that can rightly claim to celebrate each New Year!

There's more maritime entertainment with powerboat racing in July, when the top competitors race just off the coast. That's followed by the Ramsgate Regatta Week in August, one of the country's biggest sailing regattas. In 2007, the Royal Temple Yacht Club which organizes the regatta will celebrate its 150th anniversary. The club was first founded on the Temple Steps in London (which is how it got its name), before moving down the coastline to Ramsgate 40 years later.

Kent is also the place to explore some of Britain's finest coastline with 14 sandy bays, some quiet and romantic, some lively family beaches, in a 26 mile stretch of coastline. Home to some of Europe's most unusual wildlife, the area was also described by artist JMW Turner as having the "loveliest skies in Europe." The sunsets are something to see.

Of course, the area wouldn't be complete without its own castle. Dover, famous for its white cliffs, is also home to an ancient castle that played a key role in defending the country during World War Two. The secret wartime tunnels underneath Dover Castle became the nerve center for Operation Dynamo, launched in May 1940, to rescue British forces and French troops from the beaches of Dunkirk in Northern France. As the

Nazis took hold of mainland Europe, 338,000 were saved; almost ten times the original estimate of 45,000 troops that it was believed would be rescued. It's a fascinating place to visit. You can't help but wonder how so many people coped with living in the dingy tunnels while commanding such a successful operation.

The medieval town of Sandwich, with its city walls and period houses, is probably known more widely for the food of the same name. Rumor has it that the sandwich was invented here. Nearby are three stunning golf courses, St. George's, Prince's and the Royal Cinque Ports, all of which have hosted the British Open Championship in their time.

And if that isn't enough for you, getting over to France for the day is easy enough, with ferries running from Dover. Or perhaps you'd rather take a car over on Eurotunnel or let the train take the strain, with both options allowing you to enjoy the Channel Tunnel between Britain and France.

With so much history, such beautiful coastlines and fine dining and sporting opportunities, it's perhaps no surprise that Kent welcomes something like four million visitors each year. Now, with new flights starting straight from Virginia, the potential is there to welcome many more.

To find out more about Kent and the flights into Kent International Airport, visit:

<http://www.hoptoengland.com/>

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!](#)

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