

Fascinating Kent ***80 intriguing facts about England's oldest county***

Countryside and coast

1. Kent has two beautiful Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – the Kent Downs (878 sq km/339 sq miles) and the High Weald (371 sq km/89 sq miles) – and they stretch across approx. one third of the county
2. The county is known as the Garden of England because of its wealth of farming and crops, including fruit and hops
3. Some 67% is agricultural
4. Kent has the largest area of semi natural woodland of any county in Great Britain
5. In the Elham Valley around 40 different wild flower species grow per square metre
6. Some 6,876 km/4,273 miles of public rights of way criss-cross the rural landscape – wonderful for walking, riding and cycling
7. Dungeness is the largest shingle beach in Europe
8. You can find around one third of all UK plant species growing among the pebbles of Dungeness
9. It took 80 million years to form the White Cliffs of Dover from billions of crushed shells, sea-dwelling plants and animals
10. The White Cliffs are a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest: home to many species of birds, wildlife and flora, including a unique type of sea cabbage
11. There are six wetland sites important for bird life along the coast of the Thames estuary to Thanet
12. Kent has more conservation areas than any other county in England
13. Over 500 sites of interest for nature conservation account for nine per cent of land
14. You can take time out at more than 80 country parks, picnic sites and nature reserves

Town and city heritage

15. Kent is the oldest county in England
16. Canterbury is among the oldest cities with a continuous history – trace its rich heritage through the architectural styles of buildings along its narrow cobbled streets
17. The collection of 12th- and 13th-century stained glass in Canterbury Cathedral is the finest in the country
18. St Martin's, part of the Canterbury World Heritage Site, is the oldest working parish church in England
19. Rochester Cathedral, founded in AD 604, is the second oldest cathedral in England
20. Rochester Cathedral recently unveiled the first real fresco to be painted in an English cathedral for nearly 800 years
21. Kent outscores every other county for listed buildings and sites of archaeological interest
22. Wander the atmospheric streets of Sandwich and you'll come across the highest density of listed buildings of any town in England
23. Sandwich also has more medieval buildings than anywhere else
24. The handsome colonnaded walks of Royal Tunbridge Wells are known as The Pantiles. Less well known is that in 1698 Princess (later Queen) Anne gave £100 to pave the area with small clay tiles – pantiles – after her son fell on the slippery ground

Castles, historic houses and gardens

25. Kent has more castles and historic houses than any other county – there are 18 castles alone, from romantic Hever to the fortress of Dover
26. Penshurst Place, near Tonbridge, has been home to the Sidney family for more than 450 years
27. Penshurst's formal garden is a rare surviving example of Elizabethan design, but its records go back even further, to 1346, making it among the oldest in private ownership
28. Fifteenth-century Lullingstone Castle, Eynsford, has been home to 20 generations of the Hart Dyke family
29. Visit the castle today and you can watch the first-ever World Garden of Plants being established by plant hunter Tom Hart Dyke. It will eventually feature 10,000 species from around the globe
30. Brogdale, near Faversham, is home to The National Fruit Collections – 2,300 different varieties of apple, 550 of pear, 350 of plum and 320 of cherry

Maritime heritage

31. You can tour the whole Kent coast, through thousands of years of adventure, following The Maritime Heritage Trail, www.maritimeheritagetrail.co.uk
32. The intriguing remains of the world's oldest known seagoing boat are on show at Dover Museum, the 3,550-year-old Bronze Age Boat
33. The Historic Dockyard Chatham is the world's most complete dockyard of the Age of Sail, also spanning 80 acres of naval heritage and 400 years of maritime history
34. Dover is the busiest port in the world, with £50 billion of goods shipped through it each year
35. In 2006 it celebrates the 400th anniversary of its establishment as a trust port, by Royal Charter in 1606
36. Ramsgate is the country's only Royal Harbour, a title it earned from King George IV
37. The town also has its very own Mean Time
38. At Gravesend you can see the world's oldest remaining cast iron pier (1834)
39. The diving helmet was invented in Whitstable
40. In 2001 Whitstable Museum and Gallery won the international Nautiek Award for services to diving history, the first time the trophy had been awarded in the UK

The front line of history

41. Three out of five of the most important invasions of Britain landed at Pegwell Bay
42. A full-size replica Viking Ship at Pegwell Bay commemorates the arrival of Hengist and Horsa in AD 449
43. Dover, commanding the shortest sea crossing to the Continent, has been known for centuries as the Key to England, a mark of its strategic importance against invasion
44. At Dover Castle you can experience life from Roman times to World War II, while the Secret Wartime Tunnels include the only underground barracks ever built in Britain, dating from the time of the Napoleonic Wars
45. Richborough was the main entry port for legions invading in AD 43 and you can relive the early stages of conquest amid the evocative ruins of Richborough Roman Fort
46. The 'Iron' Duke of Wellington was once Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, which granted him residence at Walmer Castle. You can still see his original Wellington Boots there
47. Kent has more 20th-century defensive fortifications than any other county
48. RAF Manston was the most bombed British airfield during World War II – learn more at RAF Manston History Museum, Ramsgate
49. The Battle of Britain Museum, near Folkestone, houses the largest and most enthralling collection of Battle of Britain artefacts in the country
50. The 'bouncing bomb' was secretly tested off the coast at Reculver, Herne Bay, in 1943 before being used in the Dambuster raids
51. You can see a prototype bouncing bomb in Herne Bay Museum and Gallery

Famous connections, authors and artists

52. The 17th-century Indian Princess Pocahontas is buried at St George's Church, Gravesend
53. Lawrence Washington, great-uncle of the more famous George, lived and was buried in 1619 in All Saints Church, Maidstone. The church contains the family coat-of-arms – three stars and stripes, a clear influence on the US flag
54. Algernon Sidney, of Penshurst Place, helped his friend William Penn draft the Constitution for Pennsylvania, USA, which in turn became the basis for the US Constitution
55. When a boarder at West Heath, Sevenoaks, in the early 1970s a spirited Lady Diana Spencer bought a kitten from a pet shop in Tubs Hill. It lived in the sixth form dorm for a week before anyone found out
56. Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* was the first book to be printed in England, in 1476
57. Jane Austen was a frequent visitor to Goodnestone Park Gardens, near Canterbury. After one sojourn, in 1796, she began writing *Pride and Prejudice*
58. The artist JMW Turner lived in Margate and claimed the area had 'the loveliest skies in Europe'
59. The Kent coast inspired 100-plus of Turner's works
60. Charles Dickens featured Rochester in his writings more than any other town apart from London. While much of the capital that the author knew has vanished, he would still instantly recognise a lot of Rochester
61. The new Dickens World complex at Chatham Maritime will feature Europe's largest 'dark' boat ride, transporting you through Dickensian streets
62. The model for Frances Hodgson Burnett's children's classic *The Secret Garden* was the charming 18th-century walled garden at Great Maytham Hall, Rolvenden
63. Virginia Woolf said of Canterbury (in 1904), 'There is no lovelier place in the world... and I have seen Venice too'
64. It's believed Ian Fleming took James Bond's famous 007 tag from the number of the London to Dover coach
65. Fleming wrote *You Only Live Twice* at The Duck at Pett Bottom, but it's not known if his drinks were shaken or stirred

Good living

66. Kent welcomes 44 million visitors a year, generating £1.8bn for the local economy
67. Kent Tourism Alliance, which champions the county's tourism industry, won the innovation award at the British Travel Trade Fair 2006
68. Royal Tunbridge Wells developed as a spa resort following the discovery of a mineral spring circa 1606. Costumed 'dippers' still serve glasses of the iron-bearing water at the Chalybeate Spring
69. The Royal Day Spa, Royal Tunbridge Wells, offers modern day pampering treatments 'from tiara to toe', including facials based on Ko Bi Do Japanese finger walking and lymph drainage techniques
70. Eastwell Manor, near Ashford, combines the traditional country house hotel experience with state-of-the-art health and beauty facilities
71. Pfizer's pharmaceuticals, near Sandwich, is the biggest single inward investment from the US to the UK
72. Kent has 100-plus golf courses, many of which are of links standard while two have hosted the British Open
73. There are many fine dining opportunities around the county, including two Michelin-starred restaurants, The West House at Biddenden and Read's Restaurant with Rooms near Faversham
74. According to Kentish legend, it was the lure of succulent Whitstable Oysters that prompted Julius Caesar to invade England. You can eat the delicacy in many pubs and restaurants, and the town hosts an annual summer oyster festival
75. The Garden of England is home to more than 20 farmers' markets selling fresh local fare
76. You can find over 700 businesses providing genuine Kent food, drink and products listed on www.producedinkent.co.uk
77. Shepherd Neame, Faversham, is Britain's oldest brewer and also the country's first 'green' brewery
78. Award-winning Chapel Down Winery at Tenterden Vineyard is the country's largest producer of English wines
79. You can enjoy a comprehensive array of retail therapy in Kent: from specialist shops tucked away in Canterbury's medieval side streets, to the 330-plus stores, 13-screen cinema and 40 cafés, bars and restaurants of Bluewater, Europe's most innovative and exciting leisure destination