

Exploring local towns

Royal Tunbridge Wells

Tunbridge Wells is 6 miles north-east of Crowborough.

Tunbridge Wells, officially Royal Tunbridge Wells, has been attracting visitors for almost 400 years.

Mineral springs were first discovered on the site in 1606. Building of the town began in the 1630s, from which time, until the late 19th century, it was a fashionable spa frequented by royalty. The Pantiles, its elegant shopping area, was laid out in 1638.

Today the town still retains much of the charm and elegance of its Georgian heyday, making for a great day out from Crowborough.

Spa Town

The town owes its existence to a nobleman called Lord North. Travelling to London by horse, he was suffering from a rather large hangover and stopped to take a drink from some reddish waters that were seeping from the ground. The water made him feel so much better that he concluded that it must have health giving properties.

Word spread quickly after the chance discovery of the spring in the early 1600's. People began to flock from London to try the 'health-giving' water.

Pubs, shops and accommodation soon sprang up near the spring. These were covered by a colonnaded walkway that later became known as the Pantiles.



The Pantiles is still a thriving area to visit today, with its small shops, cafés, bars and restaurants.

In Georgian times, Tunbridge Wells became particularly popular, a rival to Brighton. It was commonplace for the rich to spend the summer season in Bath and the winter season in Tunbridge Wells.

Visitors would start the day with a glass of spring water then spend the rest of the day promenading, gossiping and gambling, with a short break for church. The day would often finish with a dancing, music or a ball.



You can still sample the spring water during summer months at the Chalybeate Spring, near the Pantiles (see photo).

Royal Tunbridge Wells

Early in the 1800's many houses were built and Tunbridge Wells became a desirable place for the rich to live as well as holiday. The town expanded over the next 100 years and in 1909 King Edward VII officially recognised the popularity of Tunbridge Wells by granting the town its "Royal" prefix. Only two towns have been granted this title in the United Kingdom.

The current population of the town is 60,000.

Eastbourne

Eastbourne is 20 miles south from Crowborough.

Eastbourne's broad tree-lined avenues, splendid Victorian façades and grassy squares give a feeling of Regency splendour from days gone by.

Covenants stipulate that no shops or other commercial buildings are allowed on the seafront and, as a result, the elegant 3-mile promenade is lined with fine buildings, such as The Grand, Queen's and Burlington hotels. The town also has a fine array of concert halls and theatres.



Although the railway came here in 1849, it was not until 1858 that the main development really started. Once a collection of small hamlets (the old village of Bourne can be found a mile inland), Eastbourne's fate changed when the Earl of Burlington became the seventh Duke of Devonshire and one of the most wealthy men in England. The Duke owned some two-thirds of the land where the town now stands. He went about creating a 'town for gentlemen' on this practically green-field site.

The garish entertainment venues of other seaside towns are missing from the promenade. If you do have a yearning for penny arcades then these can be found on the pier.

The shopping area is a mix of the modern well-known high street stores and smaller specialist shops as well as areas dedicated to the antique hunter. The area known as 'Little Chelsea' contains many second hand bookshops.

Opened in 1993, Eastbourne's Sovereign Harbour now contains over 600 permanent moorings and more than 3,000 yachts visit each year. Well worth a visit, the marina has cafés, bars, restaurants and shops. Visitors can relax, taking in the picturesque views from the restaurant terraces or stroll along the walkways.

Eastbourne has had many rich and famous visitors since it was built. Charles Darwin wrote part of his 'Origin of Species' in Eastbourne and Claude Debussy composed here in 1905.

Having won many awards for its gardens and beach, Eastbourne is one of the finest resorts on the South Coast and the ideal place to visit.

Brighton & Hove

Brighton is approximately 25 miles south-west from Crowborough.

Known as 'London by the Sea', Brighton is the largest and most famous seaside resort in Sussex. Hove, by contrast, is quieter. The two borough councils were joined together in 1997, with Brighton & Hove officially becoming a city soon afterwards.

After a downturn in the fortunes of the area in the 1970's, the city of Brighton & Hove has emerged as one of the finest seaside resorts in Britain. With a wealth of facilities that range from conference venues to amusement arcades and modern shopping centres to sun drenched beaches - the city has something to offer everyone.

In Brighton, the area occupied by the original fishing village has become The Lanes - a collection of narrow alleyways now filled with a mixture of antique shops, restaurants,

bistros and pubs. In Hove, peace and tranquillity fills the wide boulevards, creating a welcome retreat.

The past and the present have fused co-operatively, creating a city that is as vibrant as it is relaxing.

Brighton was once the fishing village of Brighthelmstone, with a surrounding wall that had been built to protect it from fourteenth-century raids by the French. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, the sea had washed part of Brighthelmstone away and as a result the village was in a fairly run down state.

Brighthelmstone's fortunes changed in 1753 when Dr Russell of Lewes published his thesis on sea bathing, which proclaimed the benefit to health of the salt water. By 1780, development of the Regency terraces had started and the town quickly became the fashionable resort of Brighton.

Lewes

Lewes is 10 miles south-west from Crowborough.

Lewes is the county town of East Sussex and features a broad range of speciality shops, an array of architectural styles plus an assortment of antique shops.

With its twisting alleyways and medieval streets, Lewes is a fascinating place to come, either to browse, to buy or simply to wander.

Lewes has always been an important town for local trade. The Saxons first developed Lewes on one of their cross country trade routes. They called it 'Hlaew' (which means small hill). In fact, the steep High Street, with its assortment of old buildings and ancient passageways (called 'twittens' in Sussex), is the path the traders took from the ancient port below.



Hastings

Full of history and character, Hastings is 20 miles south-east from Crowborough on the coast.

It has a very attractive Old Town, nestled between the East and West Cliffs. The narrow streets and twittens contain numerous small antiques shops, pubs and restaurants.

Hastings is also the heart of the region's fishing industry with Europe's largest beach launched fishing fleet. At the base of the East Cliff is the area known as the Stade. It contains tall buildings used for drying and mending the fishing nets.

Both the East and West Cliffs offer panoramic views of the surrounding countryside and coastline.

At the top of the East Cliff, there is Hastings Country Park, lovely for strolling or relaxing and taking in the views. On a clear day you can see the coast of France from here. To get up to the top, one can walk the many flights of steps from the Old Town or take the Cable Railway from the Harbour.



The cliff top has been inhabited from the Stone Age to the present day. Remains of a Stone Age encampment have been found on top of the cliff. During the age of smuggling false harbour lights were placed on the cliffs to lure boats onto the rocks.

The views down into the Old Town are spectacular, small lanes and houses nestled against the rock of the West Cliff.

The West Cliff divides Hastings Old Town from the rest of Hastings and St Leonards. The Normans built the first English castle here on the West Cliff in 1086.

Getting to the top is similar to the East Cliff. You can walk the many flights of steps from the Old Town or you can take a hidden cable railway from the George Street to the top. It is also possible to drive to the top from the Town Centre or by going inland from the Old Town.

There is a café on top of West Cliff and a large grassy park. You can see the whole of Hastings from here as well as the South Downs and Eastbourne in the distance.

It is possible to park in front of the Old Town at the harbour pay and display. There is a Tourist Information Office there as well.

Further along the seafront there is the recently refurbished pier that now boasts many interesting small shops.

Rye

Rye is 10 miles east of Hastings, near the border with Kent.

The sea that once surrounded this hilltop town has now retreated leaving Rye looking out over the river Rother and surrounding areas.

Rye was originally called 'Atter Ie' by the Saxons, meaning 'on the island'. Over the years this became 'Atte Rie' and finally just Rye.



Full of character, the ancient town has changed little through the ages. Medieval, Georgian and half-timbered Tudor buildings line the pretty cobbled streets and huddle around St Mary's Church at the highest point.

A good place to start is the local Tourist information Office housed in The Heritage Centre. This has free exhibitions and information on Rye, including details of guided and audio walks.

Perfect for strolling around on foot, there are many views to enjoy in Rye. The view from the Church tower shouldn't be missed. From the Church you can walk down Mermaid Street to the Quay. Have a drink in the Mermaid Inn, built around the 11th Century. Full of history it was once frequented by smugglers.

One of the most impressive views is from the old Town Gaol (Rye Castle Museum) looking back out towards Camber and the marshes.

Rye is the nearest town to Camber with a range of restaurants and shops. There are also many antiques shops and art galleries to explore. Rye has always attracted artists, potters and authors. It was once the home of author Henry James and E F Benson, creator of Mapp and Lucia.