

Press Release

30 January 2009



### **The Heart of Kent highlights combined tickets for Groups**

With 2009 set to be a challenging year the Heart of Kent forecasts a growth in demand for money saving group tickets offered by attractions round the county.

The Heart of Kent tourism partnership [www.visitheartofkent.com](http://www.visitheartofkent.com) has been providing tourism advice for residents and visitors to Kent for the past 21 years and their annual holiday guide and website list all the best attraction, event and accommodation information you need to make the most of Kent's glorious gardens, stately homes and castles.

Some of the best joint tickets on offer in the county include:

**Kent and East Sussex Railway** which has expanded its offering to take groups to stations where they can visit nearby attractions on a special combined ticket.

The combined days are:

- **Rails and Ramparts:** Trip to historical **Bodiam Castle** with return steam train ride. *Groups of 15+ £16.50pp.*
- **Gardens and Guards:** Arrive at great **Dixter House and Gardens** followed by a steam train ride to Tenterden with a cream tea served on board. *Groups of 15+ £21.75pp*
- **Vines, Wines, and Railway Lines:** Arrive at **Biddenden Vineyard** where a Ploughmans platter will be served with a glass of wine followed by a tour of the

vineyard and winery with wine tasting. Afterwards there is a steam train ride through the Rother Valley to Tenterden. *Groups 15+ £25.95pp*

- **Tracks and Trails:** Morning steam train ride to Bodiam where coffee/tea and a Danish pastry will be served on board. Next move on to **Bedgebury national Pinetum and Forest** for a relaxing day among the Worlds largest conifer collection. Alternatively start at Bedgebury and enjoy a cream tea at the end of the day. *Groups 15+ £17.10pp.*
- **Cream and Steam away:** Arrive at **The Chapel Down Winery** for coffee and a guided tour of the Vineyard and winery, followed by wine tasting and a visit to the wine and food store. Lunch can be pre ordered at an extra cost in the restaurant or visitors can browse the shops in the picturesque town of Tenterden. Steam train ride to Bodiam, with a cream tea served on board, to meet the coach. *Groups 15+ £22.15pp* Alternatively groups can do Steam Away which includes the above without a cream tea. *Groups 15+ - £17.25pp*

The Kent and East Sussex railway has facilities for both disabled and elderly passengers. The train includes a specially designed disabled carriage which can accommodate ten wheel chairs and has ramped wheelchair access, wide aisles and moveable seating. The stations at Tenterden, Northiam and Bodiam all have disabled restrooms and there are disabled parking spaces at the Northiam and Tenterden stations.

As well as the combined days out groups can also enjoy a relaxing train ride for the day along the Kent and East Sussex Railway's ten mile line which bends through the beautiful natural countryside of the Rother Valley and terminates in the shadows of Bodiam Castle. On board guests are offered a selection of catering from cream teas to superior picnic hampers. The KESR team can cater for any group function, arranging every detail to ensure a memorable day. Special offers include a 10% discount on all fares for groups of 20+ (not applicable for combined visits), free parking for cars and coaches and free train travel and refreshments at Tenterden for the driver. *For more information please call 01580 765155 or visit [www.kesr.org.uk](http://www.kesr.org.uk)*

For 2009 the town of **Royal Tunbridge Wells**, which this year celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being granted the royal prefix by Edward VII in 1909 has created two combined tours specifically for groups, offering the unique opportunity to enjoy a memorable day out at a discounted price. The visit includes a guided tour of this fascinating spa town with a visit to either Finchcocks Musical Museum or Penshurst Place and Gardens.

The Spa Town and Music Tour which includes a trip to Finchcocks Musical Museum can be booked at the discounted rate of £9pp (min 20 people) or The Spa Town and Country House Tour which includes a visit to Penshurst Place and Gardens can be booked at the discounted price of £10pp (min 20 people).

The day begins with a 1 hour tour of the town conducted by Tourist board accredited Blue Badge guides and can be conducted in French, Dutch and German and tailored to suit a particular groups' interests. The tour of the town includes the Old High Street and picturesque Pantiles where visitors learn about the town's fascinating history, including some of its famous visitors, and can try a glass of the original Chalybeate Spring water. After the tour groups are given the chance to explore the towns many shops and enjoy lunch in the cafes before moving on to their chosen attraction.

**Finchcocks Musical Museum** is a beautiful grade II listed Georgian manor house and is home to a wonderful collection of over 100 period keyboards including pianos, harpsichords and organs. Upon arrival the group will be given a brief history of the house by owner Katrina Burnett before being treated to a personal recital by owner and concert pianist, Richard Burnett using the instruments on display. After the recital visitors can marvel at the magnificent instruments displayed throughout the house, or take a quiet stroll through the beautiful grounds and indulge in one of Finchcocks delicious cream teas. Finchcocks Musical Museum hosts events throughout the year from garden fairs to summer concerts.

[www.finchcocks.co.uk](http://www.finchcocks.co.uk) for more information.

**Penshurst place** is a beautiful garden and manor house and is one of the oldest gardens still in private ownership. Once owned by Henry VIII, the stunning stately home contains an impressive collection of historical artefacts including tapestries, furniture, porcelain and armour. The gardens reflect the Elizabethan period in which they were built and exotic flowers and plants display enchanting blooms throughout the year. The toy museum will bring back much loved memories for adults whilst the playground will provide entertainment for children. Guided tours of the house and/or garden are available by prior arrangement and at an extra cost. Visit [www.penshurstplace.com](http://www.penshurstplace.com) for more information.

The tours are suitable for disabled and elderly visitors. For more information or to book a tour please visit [www.visittunbridgewells.com](http://www.visittunbridgewells.com) or call Jan Spencer on 01892 515675.

Other combined tickets for groups are offered by **Biddenden Vineyard** which is the oldest commercial vineyard in Kent. Guided day and evening tours of the Vineyard can be

arranged for a minimum of 15 people and the price includes tastings, a glass of wine for adults and apple juice for children, or dinner with the evening tour (at an extra cost). Day tours: Adults £4.85 Children: £2.40 (10-17) under 10 £1. Evening tours (only available Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and with a meal): Add £6.95 to the cost of the meal. Please visit [www.biddendenvineyards.com](http://www.biddendenvineyards.com) for more information.

The Vineyard also offers combined trips for groups which include visits to local attractions:

- **Tranquil time before the wine:** The group will arrive at Hadlow's **Broadview Gardens** to walk round 10 acres of beautifully manicured gardens where lunch will be served. After lunch there will be a tour of the gardens which include a stunning water garden, Italian garden and oriental garden. After viewing the gardens the group will move on to Biddenden vineyard where they can enjoy a tour through the vines and a glass of wine and a cream tea to complete the day. *Minimum of 15 adults - £18.75pp.*
- **The Lake and the Grape:** The day will begin at the beautiful **Bewl Water**, the largest lake in the South East, where the group will embark on a sailing trip around the 17 mile reservoir before enjoying a buffet lunch. After lunch the group will leave for Biddenden where they will enjoy a tour of the Vineyard and a glass of wine and a cream tea. *Minimum of 15 adults - £19.80pp*
- **Vines, Wines and Railway Lines:** Groups will arrive at Biddenden Vineyard where a delicious Ploughmans platter with a glass of wine will be served for lunch. Afterwards there will be a relaxing tour of the vineyard and winery followed by wine tasting. After the tour groups will experience the Kentish scenery on the nostalgic **Kent and East Sussex** steam train through the Rother Valley. *Minimum 15 adults - £25.95pp.*
- **Pines and Wines:** The day begins at Biddenden with a Ploughmans lunch and a glass of wine followed by a tour with wine tasting. The group will then depart for **Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest**, home to the largest conifer collection in the world. Groups can view the impressive trees, lake, wild flowers and wildlife as they take part in a variety of activities including walking, riding and cycling along the tranquil woodland paths. The onsite café provides delicious light lunches and refreshments in a relaxing seating area. *Minimum 15 adults - £17.30pp*
- **Narrow Lines and Wines:** Guests will enjoy a ride to New Romney on the **Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway**, upon arrival guests can explore the railway museum or relax in the café. Next the group will head for Biddenden where a Ploughmans platter will be served with a glass of wine followed by a guided tour with wine tasting. *Minimum 15 adults - £18.30pp*

- **Garden Delights and Vineyard Sights:** Visitors will arrive at the lovely **Pashley Manor Gardens** for a tour of the beautiful gardens and sculptures. Lunch will be served in the garden terrace overlooking the moat or in the Garden Room café if the weather is unsuitable. After lunch the group will depart for Biddenden where they will enjoy a tour of the vineyards with wine tasting, and a cream tea. *Minimum 15 adults - £16.30.*

For details of other attractions or to request a holiday guide for 2009 visit the Heart of Kent website [www.visitheartofkent.com](http://www.visitheartofkent.com)

#### Editor's Notes

1. For more information please visit [www.visitheartofkent.com](http://www.visitheartofkent.com)
2. The Heart of Kent consortium was created in 1988 as a tourism marketing partnership between Maidstone Borough Council, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Sevenoaks District Council. Ashford Borough Council joined the consortium in 2002.
3. The five local authorities work together to market and promote the five Heart of Kent towns and the surrounding countryside to visitors. As well as producing the Heart of Kent website, the consortium publishes an annual Holiday Guide, available through the website and from the tourist information centres, and works closely with other tourism enterprises in Kent and the South East of England on numerous other marketing activities for the area. The consortium also supports a network of Tourist Information Centres to meet the needs of visitors once they have arrived in the Heart of Kent area.