

Press release

Summer 2009



Dunorlan Park



Chiddingstone Castle

Picnic Hot Spots around Kent

The Heart of Kent tourism partnership have researched the top ten best value picnic spots around Kent to spread your blanket this summer.

The Heart of Kent, which has 21 years experience promoting attractions and accommodation in and around Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks, Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling and Ashford, is well placed to highlight some of the counties best value or free picnic sites.

Dunorlan Park

Once a private landscaped garden, Dunorlan is now a popular public park and due to its historical importance has benefitted from recent restoration after being awarded £2.1 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the restoration of its historic features and improvements to access. Dunorlan has many lovely features including beautiful meadows and a lake, where boats can be hired during summer and model boats are permitted (members of Royal Tunbridge Wells model boat club only). There is plenty of birdlife on the lake and children can feed the ducks. Visitors can enjoy their picnics on the parks many grassy slope which provide lovely views across the lake and Weald. The café in the park sells ice creams and if you forget your picnic, light lunches and snacks are also on offer. Dogs are permitted.

Located: Tunbridge Wells Dates: open all year 7:30am – dusk visit www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Scotney Castle Garden and Estate

One of the Seven Wonders of the Weald, Scotney Castle, which is open to the public, has an impressive estate which comprises 770 acres of parkland where visitors can enjoy quiet country walks and picnics. The estate can be accessed for free and has lovely views of the 14th century fairytale castle ruin from some of the footpaths. If you choose you can also visit Scotney Castle on the days it is open to the public but picnics are not allowed in the grounds

Scotney Castle dates: 28 February – 1 November 11-5 Wednesday – Sunday. 7 November -20 December Saturday – Sunday 11-4. Admission (garden only): Adult: £7.20 Child: £3.90 Family: £20 www.nationaltrust.org.uk/scotneycastlelegarden New rooms in the mansion are open to the public this year as well as a new restaurant.

Chiddingstone Castle

This ancient property is home to 35 acres of stunning grounds with a lake and beautiful orangery. During the summer months the courtyard rose garden is home to an abundance of sweet smelling roses, whilst the waterfall by the lake is a wonderful place to relax. Visitors can enjoy a picnic anywhere in the grounds, which are ideal for children who want to burn off some steam while exploring. If you don't feel like making a picnic, children's packed lunches can be purchased from the Castle's Victorian tea room for just £2.50 along with homemade cakes and sandwiches. You can also visit the Castle and its collections on the days it is open to the public or why not time your visit so that children can take part in the special children's activity days which are free with Castle admission. Check the website for details. Castle grounds and tea room can be accessed for free between Sunday and Wednesday. *Chiddingstone Castle – dates: 10 April – 27 September 2009 11am – 5pm. Sun, Mon, Tue and Wednesday and some Thursdays for special events Admission: Adults: £6.00 Children £4 (under 5 years free) family season pass £38.50 (family of four) please visit www.chiddingstonecastle.org.uk for more information.*

Teston Bridge Country Park

Teston Bridge comprises three beautiful meadows tucked away by the River Medway and is the ideal place to cool down this summer. Visitors can relax by the river side as they watch boats cruise up and down and if they are lucky, spot a Kingfisher or Otter playing in the water. In summer the meadows are alive with vibrant wild flowers and the Teston Ruins on the eastern bank are draped in ivy. Small mammals are common to the site, particularly Field Voles and Shrews; look out for Kestrels and Barn Owls which can often be seen hunting them over the grassland. As dusk approaches during the summer months, bats including pipistrelle, noctule and daubenton glide up and down the banks. Picnics and barbeques can be enjoyed on the large open area overlooking the bridge, where children will love exploring the play area. Many events take place in the park during summer including bat walks and kite festivals. *Located Teston Lane, Teston Open 9am-9pm visit. A pay and display car park operates in Teston Bridge Country Park throughout the year, seven days a week. Charges are Monday - Friday £1.20, weekends and Bank holidays £1.70 www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/explore-kent for more information.*

Manor Park Country Park

There is plenty to enjoy at Manor Park, which comprises meadows, lovely brand new children's play equipment, a lake and an ancient ice house, once used to store ice for the estate kitchens. During the summer the ice house fields are a blanket of colour as wild flowers including dog daisy, buttercups, and the unusual 'hay rattle' bloom. Visitors can enjoy relaxing walks through the meadows, whilst the lake provides a plentiful supply of wildlife, including swans, coot, moorhen, mallard and dabchicks. There is also a variety of native trees on the site including willow, sweet chestnut and oak which provide homes to the Squirrels, woodpeckers, nuthatches, blue tits and robins, are all found in the park. In Autumn the park will be have a new lovely new café and toilet facilities. *Located in St Leonards Street, West Malling and open 9am – 9pm. Car park charges - Monday - Friday £1.20, weekends and Bank holidays £1.70*

Haysden Country Park

For the last three years Haysden Country Park has been a Green Flag Award winning park. The Park has two lakes to relax by and a stretch of the River Medway running through it. The water features add to the Park's individuality and result in a variety of wildlife throughout the year, including an array of colourful dragonflies. To add further interest, throughout the Park there is a large variety of wildflowers to be enjoyed, particularly in summer when many of them are in full bloom. In the park visitors can enjoy a mix of activities, including sailing and fishing and children will love exploring the adventure park with plenty of swings and slides. There are a number of events which take place in the park throughout the year. *Located Tonbridge down lower Haysden Lane. Dates: Open daily all year, from 7.30am to dusk. Daily closing times are displayed at park entrance. Admission: Main car park (including the oversized bays outside the height barrier at the entrance) 60p up to 4 hours, £2.40 over 4 hours. Visit www.tmbc.gov.uk*

Leeds Castle

A former home to Royalty for over 100 years, Leeds Castle is filled with culture and history. The beautiful gardens are full of colour and fragrance whilst the grounds are home to wildlife from Black Swans in the duckery to exotic birds such as toucans in the famous aviary. The Castle has a range of play equipment and a challenging maze as well as many exhibitions such as the dog collar museum. The Castle and moat is a wonderful backdrop to picnics which can be enjoyed on the lawns. Pay once at Leeds Castle and visit all year for free. *Dates: Open all year Open: 10.30am-5.30pm. Admission: Adults: £16.50 Senior Citizens/Students/Visitors with Disabilities £13.50 Children (4-15) £9.50. www.leeds-castle.com*

Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest

Recently voted best picnic site in the South, Bedgebury offers a peaceful setting for visitors with lakes, woodland trails and the largest conifer collection on one site in the world. The Forest itself has plenty of excitement on offer with the Go Ape Assault course plus dedicated

routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. There are twelve children's adventure play sites located throughout the forest dedicated to the plant hunters of old. Bedgebury has plenty of well sited picnic benches all around the National Pinetum, many of which are sited close to the lily filled lakes where children can watch the dragonflies skimming the water. There is also an excellent site to observe other wildlife including birds and butterflies. *Located in Darent Valley between Eynsford and Shoreham. Dates: open all year between 8am and 8pm. Admission £7.50 per car. <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/bedgebury> for more information.*

Kings Wood

Once the hunting ground for King Henry VIII, Kings Wood comprises 1,500 acres of forest located in the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The ancient woodland site is home to a diverse range of flora and fauna, including a wonderful collection of species of trees such as Sweet Chestnut, Corsican Pine and Douglas Fir. Dotted throughout the site are wonderfully unique art sculptures, such as Andy Frost's colourful picnic tables and benches, which draw on the natural habitat and materials, creating art work that blends perfectly with its natural surroundings. There is plenty of wildlife including deer, badgers and owls to be admired whilst, foxgloves, bluebells and wood sparges are just some of the pretty flowers that bloom here. After enjoying a picnic visitors can amble along the forests many routes, including the green route which takes in the lovely art pieces as well as revealing the full beauty of the woodland. *Located in Challock. The car park and entrance to King's Wood is situated off the A251, 1km along the road to Wye.*

Lullingstone Country Park

Lullingstone Country Park was recently shortlisted as one of the UK's favourite picnic spots in this year's Warburton's Picnic Awards. The parkland is the ideal place to enjoy a summer picnic and beautiful Oxeye daisies, birdsfoot trefoil, yellow rattle and fragrant orchids are just some of the wild flowers visitors can enjoy in June. Not to be missed are the stunning views across the valley and neighbouring fields which are a mass of lavender in July. The park is best known for its collection of ancient trees, some of which are believed to be 800 years old. There are many events held at Lullingstone Country Park, including a seasonal walk and Lavender tour in June. *Dates: daily all year 10am – 5pm. A pay and display car park operates throughout the year, seven days a week. Charges are Monday - Friday £1.20, weekends and Bank holidays £1.70 Visit www.kentattractions.co.uk/Lullingstone%20Park.htm*

The Heart of Kent's website and holiday guide have detailed information on all accommodation and attractions in the Heart of Kent, as well as detailed information on

events taking place. The website also provides other inspirational itineraries to help you plan great days out this summer. Visit www.visitheartofkent.com for more information.

For more information about the Heart of Kent or to request images please contact Caroline Edmunds on 01892616647 or email caroline@penningtonpr.com

Editors Notes:

1. For more information please visit 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.