

# HYTHE

ANCIENT CINQUE PORT TOWN

Welcome to Hythe, Jewel of South East Kent and where the countryside meets the sea. However long your stay, this panel will help you to make the most of your visit.



## HERITAGE AND HISTORY

In Roman times, Hythe lay three miles west, at Port Lympne, but by the 4th century the harbour there was virtually silted up. The new port of Hythe was established in the 11th century and, in 1278, King Edward I confirmed the borough as one of five Cinque Ports – the others being Hastings, Romney, Dover and Sandwich. This charter gave royal duties to Hythe shipmasters and seamen to protect the English coastline.

In later centuries, fire, plague, storm and shipwreck brought economic disaster to Hythe and eventually the 'new' harbour silted up. Efforts to keep it clear failed, and in 1588 Hythe could send only one ship against the Spanish Armada.

A long period of stagnation followed until Napoleon threatened invasion, and defensive projects – the Royal Military Canal, Martello towers and military barracks – brought money and work to the town, and trades prospered.

The invasion never happened, but in 1940, after Dunkirk, the towers and canal featured in the defensive plan when we stood against the threat from Hitler.

Hythe is now a charming seaside town with a wealth of attractive places to see and things to do.



### Royal Military Canal

Started in 1804 to counter the threat of invasion by Napoleon, the canal was dug by hundreds of labourers on the orders of the Prime Minister William Pitt and was finally completed in 1809. It stretches 28 miles from Hythe to Pett Level, near Hastings in East Sussex, and now the Royal Military Canal Path runs the whole way along it. There are lengths for cycling and horse riding and places to fish and picnic amid some of the best scenery in South East England. Boating is also available during the summer months.



### Parish Church of St Leonard

The Church (open all day to visitors) was founded soon after the Norman invasion on the site of a previous Saxon church. It occupies a prominent position on the hillside above the town. It has grown and changed over the centuries, reflecting changes in religious practice and the changing fortunes of the town. The chancel was added in the 13th century and the entrance porch with 'Parvise' above (once used as a meeting place for the 'Jurats', or Town Councillors) in the 14th. The present tower replaced the original one that collapsed in 1739.



### The ossuary or 'bonehouse'

This is a fascinating place and one of only two of its kind in the country. The ossuary beneath the chancel of St Leonard's Church contains some 1,200 skulls and 8,000 thigh bones. There are many theories about their origin, but it is probable that the first of the bones were dug up and deposited there when the chancel was extended into the churchyard in the 13th century. The ossuary is open to visitors at set times. For more information please visit: [www.stleonardschurchhythekent.org](http://www.stleonardschurchhythekent.org)



### Centuries

Centuries is one of Kent's oldest inhabited 13th century vernacular buildings. The original structure is said to have been built around 1107, although there are earlier indications that occupation of the site was viable as early as Roman times. Hamo Noble was born in the house in 1270: he became a Benedictine monk and went on to become Bishop of Rochester in 1319, retaining the house and leaving it to the church upon his death in 1358. Today, it is a beautiful private residence.



### Town Hall

This fine building, with bold columns supporting the upper part, was completed in 1794 and replaced the Parvise above the St Leonard's Church porch as the meeting place for the Council. In the last century it was used as a magistrates' court. The undercroft below was the old town market, and the ornate clock (refurbished in 2014) was added in 1871 and originally lit by gas. There is access between June and September on Thursday mornings as part of a Civic Society Guided Walk.



### Recreation

One of the jewels in Hythe's crown is its bracing, attractive sea front, which stretches for more than two miles, and is ideal for walking, jogging and cycling - as is the

Royal Military Canal. At the recreation ground in summer there are public facilities for tennis and lawn bowls and the indoor swimming-pool is not far away. Whatever the weather or season, there are lots of things to see and do in Hythe.



### Eating, drinking and staying in Hythe

The High Street and its vicinity contain an abundance of places to eat and drink: whatever your taste and budget there will be something to delight you ... from old-fashioned tearooms to smart coffee houses, from traditional English pubs to a wide range of cosmopolitan restaurants and cafes. Wander along the High Street and take your pick.

Hythe also boasts a wide range of accommodation to suit every taste: smart hotels, friendly B&Bs, self-catering establishments. Sites for camping and caravanning are within easy reach.



### Shopping in Hythe

Locals claim that Hythe has the longest High Street in Kent. It is certainly packed with friendly and attractive individual shops, including a long-established leather goods family business, a specialist chocolate shop, many gift and clothes premises, a French patisserie, a department store over 200 years old and lots more. There are supermarkets for regular shopping needs and ample parking just a short walk from the High Street.



### Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway

The railway – the smallest miniature public railway in the world – was opened in 1927, and attracts many visitors on its 13½ mile-long, 15-inch narrow-gauge track. It operates daily from Easter to October, and at weekends for much of the winter with special runs before Christmas. For details see [www.rhdr.org.uk](http://www.rhdr.org.uk)



### Malthouse

This two-storey arcade was once the bonded store of the famous Mackeson Brewery, now long-gone but an important local employer in its day. It is now an appealing mecca for browsers and buyers of collectibles with numerous small shops selling all manner of bric-a-brac. Open on Fridays and Saturdays.

This map is included in the 'Hythe Visitor Guide' available free of charge from many shops, hotels and restaurants in the town and from Tourist Information locations at the Library and the Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway station, where a leaflet outlining a self-guided walk around 'Old Hythe' may also be found.

Also visit websites: [www.hytheguide.co.uk](http://www.hytheguide.co.uk) [www.theeyesofhythe.org](http://www.theeyesofhythe.org) [www.hythelife.org.uk](http://www.hythelife.org.uk)

