

033 Canterbury, Kent



An Aladdin's cave of ancient buildings, quirky shops and a small but lively arts scene, Canterbury is nearly 2000 years old, although much of the city's architecture dates from the Middle Ages. It's best known for its cathedral, which became a major destination for pilgrims following the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket on its altar in 1170.

The city's pilgrim heritage was the inspiration behind Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and is explored at The Canterbury Tales, St Margaret's Street (01227 479227, www.canterburytales.org.uk), which takes visitors back in time on a pilgrimage with audio tours (hearing loops available) and actors playing some of Chaucer's most colourful characters – the flickering lights, atmospheric smells and sudden noises may be overwhelming for those with sensory disabilities, however. There's room for one wheelchair, though there are a few steps in the first room with no grab rails. Rest benches are provided throughout, and those with visual impairments can experience the displays through touch and feel. The city's medieval centre with its cobblestones and half-timbered buildings is a stone's throw from Canterbury Cathedral, 11 The Precincts (01227 762862, www.canterbury-cathedral.org). Dating from 597, it's one of England's oldest cathedrals so parts of it aren't wheelchair accessible: uneven surfaces and worn stairs can be an issue, and some interior steps don't have grab rails. Other attractions worth visiting include the nearby King's Mile (01227 785699, www.thekingsmile.org.uk) with its array of boutique and gift shops, patisseries and cafés; the Beane House of Art and Knowledge art gallery and museum, 18 High St (01227 452747, www.thebeaney.co.uk); and the fully-accessible St Augustine's Abbey, Longport (01227 767345, www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/st-augustines-abbey).

Driving into central Canterbury can be tricky, with on-street parking hard to come by: Orange Street is the city's only disabled car park, with eighteen dedicated parking bays (though it's unsigned and hard to find). However, it's better to use the Park and Ride, which is served by three accessible bus routes. By their very nature, the most interesting parts of Canterbury can be hard for disabled visitors to navigate due to the cobblestones, although some roads have drop-down kerbs and smoother paved areas. Many of the historic King's Mile shops are small and narrow, with medieval and Tudor buildings overhanging the pavements, though the modern, pedestrianised end of Canterbury's high street is fully accessible. Whitefriars shopping centre has a good selection of high-street chain stores, as well as the city's Shopmobility store (01227 459889, www.cshopmobility.org.uk), on the second floor of Whitefriars multi-storey car park: here, you can hire scooters and electric or manual wheelchairs (around £4/hour; advance booking recommended). Most of the city's public toilets require a RADAR key, though the visitor centre (01227 862162, www.canterbury.co.uk), in Beane House, has several clean and spacious accessible toilets.

034 Leeds Castle, Kent

Address: Leeds Castle, Maidstone, Kent, ME17 1PL **Web:** www.leeds-castle.com **Tel:** 01622 765400

Hours: Daily: Apr–Sep 10.30am–4.30pm; gates close 6pm; Shop 10am–5.30pm; grounds & gardens 10am–6pm; playgrounds, maze, grotto and birds of prey centre 10am–5pm; train 10am–5.15pm; Oct–Mar 10.30–3pm; gates close 5pm; shop 10am–4pm; grounds & gardens 10am–5pm; playgrounds, maze,

grotto and birds of prey centre 10am–4pm; train 10am–4.30pm **Dates:** Castle closed on Nov Fireworks weekend & Christmas Day **Entry:** [D]£21 [C]free [A]£24 [4–15s]£16 [Disabled 4–15s]£14.40 [Under 4s] free [Seniors & students] £21. Tickets valid for one year after issue: 10% discount online



So much more than just a historic building, the extensive grounds in and around Leeds Castle play host to a range of family-friendly activities, from a ferry trip on the lake, through a birds of prey centre, formal gardens and a maze, to the downright bizarre dog collar museum.

The castle itself is the focal attraction with good reason. The building's rich architectural history spans nearly 1000 years: from Norman beginnings, it served as a royal palace for several medieval and Tudor queens, before becoming the private residence in the 1920s of Lady Baillie, who restored much of the castle to its former glory. A visit round the castle starts at the Norman keep, continuing through a series of magnificently furnished royal apartments complete with tapestries, ornate carvings and a spiral staircase, before finishing up in 1920s-styled apartments. Garden lovers will enjoy the formal and Mediterranean-inspired gardens, maze and grotto, while there are play areas for children and acres of woodlands and extensive grounds to explore.

There are disabled parking bays near the entrance, though these fill up quickly. Book online to avoid the long queues at the ticket kiosks in summer. Relatively clean and spacious accessible toilets are available throughout the attraction, including at the main entrance, the Fairfax Courtyard and the Knight's Realm Playground. From the entrance, it's a fifteen-minute walk through the woodland gardens to the castle: if you can't manage the walk, borrow a free manual wheelchair from the ticket kiosks (book in advance at busy times). Alternatively, a minibus runs from the ticket kiosks to the castle entrance, or a little train runs along the same route, although it can't take wheelchairs.

The drawbridge at the castle entrance has several yards of cobblestones, but relatively even ground on the other side. There's alternative access into the castle via a ramp at the main door for those who can't manage the initial steps into the wine cellar. Wheelchair users will be taken on an accessible route around the ground floor of the castle, against the flow of visitors. A wheelchair lift is available between the first corridor and the Heraldry Room, with staff on hand to assist, though the upper floor is inaccessible for wheelchair users. There are several rest seats throughout and audio guides are available with a Braille keypad and, on request, an induction loop. The castle corridors get very congested in summer, so those who find crowds overwhelming may want to visit in the last hour before closing where it tends to be quieter.

The maze and grotto are not suitable for wheelchair users, though the falconry display and dog collar museum have level access, and the ferry boat has space for up to three wheelchairs. The formal gardens, although on different levels, are accessible via slopes and ramps. The Culpeper Garden and the Mediterrean-style garden, in particular, have several rest seats and tend to be the quietest areas.

FOOD & DRINK ►► There are several food and drink spots including the level-access *Fairfax Restaurant* (around £10 for a main), plus kiosks and cafés (sandwiches start at £4), though the food kiosks, particularly around the courtyard, have a step up and limited space to manoeuvre a wheelchair. Alternatively, enjoy a picnic in one of the beauty spots within the 500-acre grounds.