

Off The Beaten Track – St Leonards

I have the privilege as Coastal Culture Trail Coordinator for the Towner in Eastbourne, De La Warr in Bexhill and Jerwood Gallery in Hastings to travel the East Sussex coastline on a daily basis. In this blog I will be sharing my tips for wandering off the beaten track and revealing areas of unique independent shops, passionate locals and cultural treats.

If you want to see an example of a coastal town resort done good, gone bad and making itself excellent again, this is it. Built in the 1820's and the brain child of James Burton, the area fell into decline when the British seaside holiday nosedived in the 1970's and large villas and hotels were bought up by irresponsible landlords. The area has been quietly changing for the last 10 years and now is keen to shout about it.

I couldn't have picked a sunnier day in May to wander along the seafront of Hastings to discover the delights of St Leonards for myself. Turning up into London Road I pass Kassa where locals are sunning themselves while drinking coffee and eating their famed chicken biryani for their lunch. Unfortunately I have just stated my journey and need to build up an appetite.

Taking a left onto Norman Road which boasts an incredible selection of galleries including the domineering Baker Mamonova Gallery, holding a selection of 20th century Russian and Lucy Bell, a photography gallery plus a host of special interest shops like Bung Ho!, which is packed to the rafters with home brew equipment. One particular place to make sure you pop into is the Wayward Haberdashery which stocks endless reals of lace, fabric and buckets of buttons all presented with great style.

St Leonard's is a mixing pot of huge wealth and huge poverty all stitched together by unique people with quirky style and a longing for bohemia. You quickly get a sense of the community that roams it's streets making deals over antique chairs and locally made cakes. Until recently the area lacked a friendly pub for visitors and this hole has been filled by the St Leonard on London Road which makes up for its lack of outdoor space with a great selection of ales and bar snacks.

We take a detour up past The Lawn, a is a row of Georgian Villas which are a true example of Burton's vision of the area, and onto the beautiful St Leonards Gardens where we spot the Kingfisher which resides in the parks pond.

Onto Kings Road and I am keen to stop at Grey's Emporium for afternoon tea before a rioja at The Wine Shed. Both have opened in the last year and are really raising the game of food in the area. The Wine Shed, which was opened by the owners of Pheonix and Plum wine shop on the same street, is an intimate space offering tapas to compliment the wine menu.

St Leonards is catered for with excellent links on the train to London, Brighton and Ashford as well as being a short walk from its big sister Hastings. It is busy and loud and slightly dodgy in parts but this all adds to the charm. There's a lot still to be discovered here and new businesses opening all the time as entrepreneurs discover the previously hard to let shops.

If you are looking to stay in the area treat yourself to 5 The Lawn, <http://www.5thelawn.com/>, or try St Benedict <http://www.victorian-bed-and-breakfast.com/> for an authentic Victorian experience.

Shops

Felt

65 Norman Road St Leonards on Sea East Sussex TN38 0EG

<http://valeriemay.co.uk/>

Wayward Haberdashery

68 Norman Road St Leonards on Sea East Sussex TN38 0EG

<http://www.wayward.co/contact/index.html>

Bung Ho!

76 Norman Road St Leonards on Sea East Sussex TN38 0EJ

Kings Road Antiques

45-46 Kings Road, St Leonards on Sea, East Sussex TN37 6DY

<http://www.kingsroadantiques.co.uk/>

Galleries

Lucy Bell

46 Norman Road St Leonards on Sea East Sussex TN38 0EJ

Fleet Gallery

53 Norman Road St Leonards on Sea East Sussex TN38 3OJ

Baker Mamonova Gallery

43-49 Norman Road St Leonards on Sea East Sussex TN38 0EG

<http://www.bakermamonova.co.uk/>

Hastings Art Forum

36 Marina, St. Leonards on Sea, East Sussex TN38 0BU

<http://www.hastingsartsforum.co.uk/>

Food & Drink

The Wine Shed

52 Kings Road, St Leonards

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Wine-Shed/395652627285753?fref=ts>

Gray's Emporium

21 Kings Rd, St Leonards, St Leonards on sea, East Sussex TN37 6DU

<https://www.facebook.com/GraysEmporiumTeaRoom>

Kassa

15 Grand Parade, Saint Leonards, Saint Leonards-on-sea TN37 6DN

St Leonard

16 - 18 London Road, St Leonards, TN376AN

<http://www.thestleonard.co.uk/>

General info

www.coastalculturetrail.wordpress.com

<http://www.burtonsstleonardssociety.co.uk/home.html>

<http://verystleonards-on-sea.co.uk/>