



# MARGATE



*Beyond the Beach*



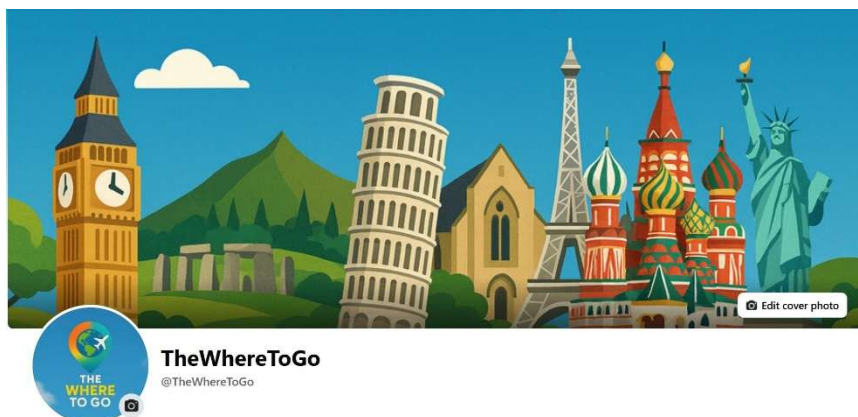
## The inside cover for your information.....



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# Margate - Beyond the Beach

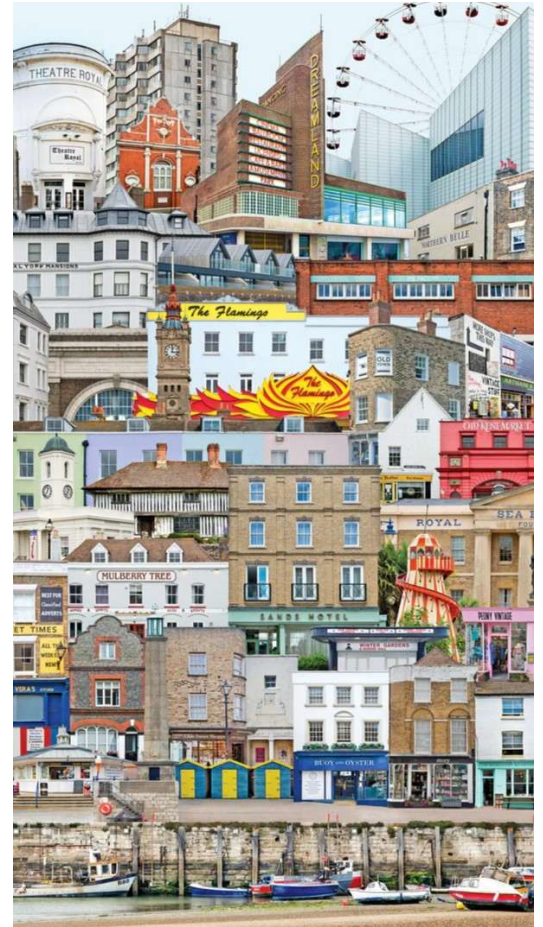
## Introduction

Margate was originally a small fishing settlement on the Kent coast but began to grow during the medieval period thanks to its natural harbour and maritime trade. By the 18th century it had become fashionable with wealthy Londoners who travelled by boat along the River Thames to experience the town's sea air, which was widely believed to have health benefits.

The arrival of the railway in the 19th century transformed Margate into a major Victorian holiday destination. Large hotels, theatres and amusement attractions appeared as thousands of working-class visitors arrived from London during the boom years of British seaside tourism. Sandy beaches, donkey rides and entertainment venues became central to the town's identity.

However, during the second half of the 20th century, Margate went into decline as cheap overseas holidays reduced domestic tourism. Many historic buildings fell into disrepair and parts of the seafront struggled economically. In recent years, however, the town has undergone a cultural revival driven by independent businesses, art galleries and restoration projects.

The opening of Turner Contemporary helped establish Margate as an important creative destination once again. Today Margate combines traditional British seaside nostalgia with modern arts culture, vintage attractions and historic architecture, attracting visitors interested in both heritage and contemporary coastal life.

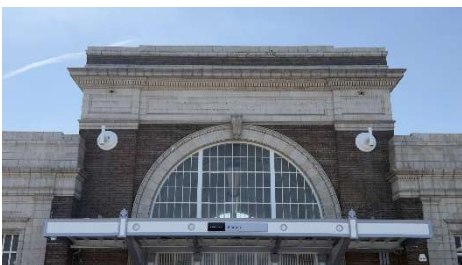


*My thanks to David for his wonderful hospitality and for showing me around his second home.*

## Margate Railway Station

Margate Railway Station played a crucial role in the development of the Margate. Travel from London was quicker and more affordable with Victorian excursion trains bringing thousands of holidaymakers to Margate for summer holidays, weekends by the sea and day trips. Then, the train took over 2 hours but nowadays the high-speed services from London St Pancras can reach Margate in as little as 1 hour 25 minutes,

The current station dates from 1926 and replaced the earlier Victorian station called Margate West. In those early days, Margate had several competing railway stations including Margate Sands, Margate West and Margate East. The original seafront station, Margate Sands, stood roughly where Arlington House stands today.....more on that later.



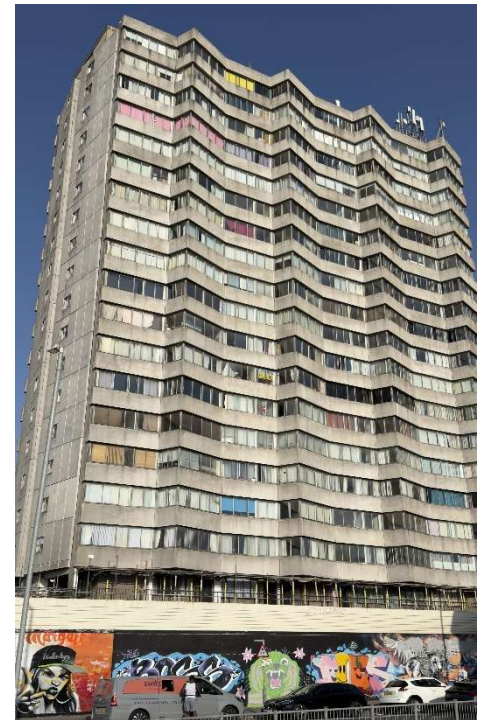
The station was designed by architect Edwin Maxwell Fry and is a Grade II listed building because of its architectural importance. The enormous booking hall still survives and is much larger than most modern stations because it was built to oversee thousands of summer tourists at once. In the steam era, the station had extensive sidings, engine sheds and goods yards to manage the vast number of excursion trains.

## Arlington House



As you exit the railway station, you cannot fail to notice Arlington House, which is one of Margate's most recognisable modern buildings, dominating the seafront skyline near the harbour. The tower block was built during the 1960s as a large 18 -storey residential tower block, reflecting the Brutalist post-war architectural style that transformed many British coastal towns during periods of redevelopment.

The buildings striking concrete design contrasts sharply with Margate's Victorian terraces and traditional seaside buildings. Although opinions on its appearance remain divided, Arlington House has become an unmistakable Margate landmark and frequently appears in photographs of the seafront. The sides of the building have a wave-like design, offering sweeping views across the North Sea and Margate Main Sands.



## Royal Sea Bathing Hospital

The former Royal Sea Bathing Hospital is one of Margate's most remarkable historic buildings and played a significant role in the town's development as a seaside health resort. Founded in 1791 by the physician Dr John Coakley Lettsom, the hospital was created to treat poor patients suffering from tuberculosis that were once believed to be eased by fresh sea air, sunshine and cold seawater treatments.

The hospital became one of the first specialist hospitals of its kind in Britain and was built close to the seafront so patients could benefit directly from the coastal environment. In the early years, patients were even taken into the sea using bathing machines. Long verandas allowed beds to be wheeled outdoors, as doctors believed constant exposure to fresh air aided recovery.

During the Victorian era, the complex expanded significantly, gaining a chapel, indoor saltwater pool and new wards funded by surgeon Sir Erasmus Wilson. The hospital continued operating well into the twentieth century before eventually closing in the 1990s. Today, the Grade II listed building has been carefully converted into apartments, but its grand columns and imposing seafront position still reflect its unique medical and architectural history.



### The Bus Café

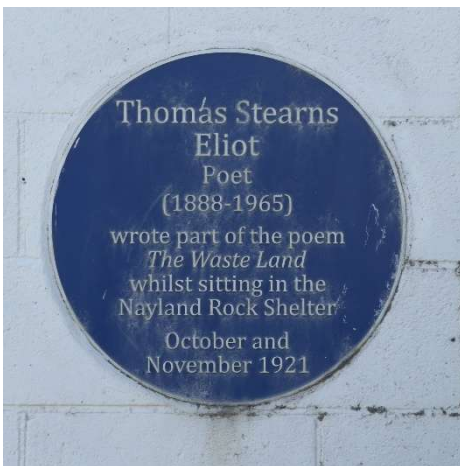
The Bus Café is one of Margate's most distinctive seaside cafés, created inside a converted double-decker bus beside the beach. The colourful attraction reflects the town's creative and independent character, combining quirky design with relaxed coastal atmosphere. Positioned close to the seafront, the café offers views across the sands and sea while serving drinks, snacks and light meals to visitors exploring Margate.



The Bus Café forms part of Margate’s wider cultural revival, where old or unconventional structures have been transformed into artistic and community-focused spaces. Its informal style fits perfectly with the town’s blend of vintage nostalgia and modern creativity. The café has become a recognisable feature of the seafront and an example of how Margate continues to reinvent classic seaside experiences for modern visitors.

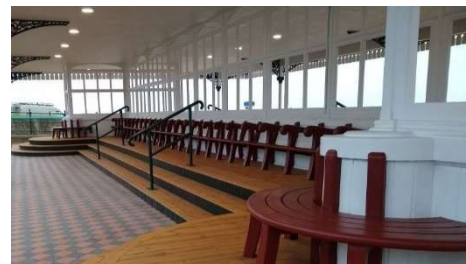


## Nayland Rock Shelter



Next door to the Bus Café is the Nayland Rock Shelter which is a small but historically important shelter located along Margate’s seafront promenade. The shelter was built during the Victorian era when promenades were lined with covered shelters to provide protection for visitors escaping the wind and rain....and presumably the sun in the hotter months?

The Nayland Rock Shelter became famous mainly because the poet T. S. Eliot wrote part of his masterpiece *The Waste Land* there in 1921. While recovering from physical and mental exhaustion, Eliot stayed in Margate on medical advice. He spent prolonged periods sitting in the Victorian shelter overlooking the beach, where he drafted sections of what later became one of the most important poems of the 20th century.





## The Clock Tower

Margate Clock Tower is one of the town's best-known landmarks and stands prominently on the seafront overlooking Margate Main Sands. Completed in 1889, the tower was built to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, marking fifty years of her reign. In those days, the clock tower was a practical landmark for a growing seaside resort, helping residents and visitors track time before wristwatches were commonplace.

The clock tower has four fully functioning clock faces and a time ball which stopped working in the 1920's although it was temporarily restored in 2014. A few minutes before 1.00 pm each day, the ball would slowly rise and then, exactly at 1pm it dropped, allowing observers to check their clocks and adjust them accurately. Today, only a small number of time balls are still working \*, but Margate is not one of them.

\*Including the Deal Time Ball Tower and the Royal Observatory Greenwich.



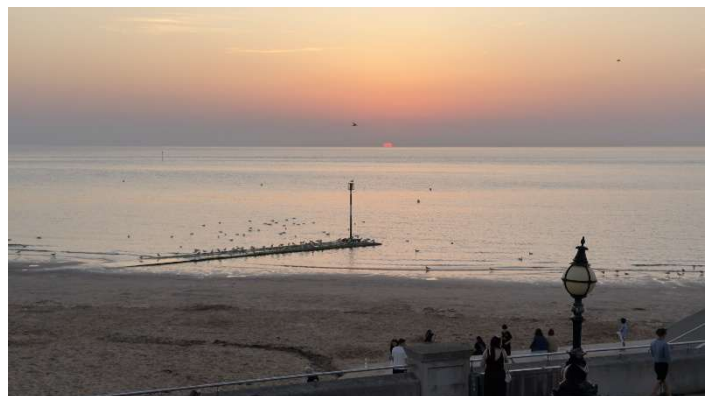
## Margate Beach

Margate Main Sands is one of the most famous sandy beaches on the Kent coastline and has attracted visitors for centuries. Known for its wide golden sands and shallow waters, the beach became hugely popular during the Victorian era when seaside holidays grew fashionable among families from London and the south-east.

The beach sits beside Margate Harbour and is overlooked by cafés, amusement arcades and traditional seaside attractions. In summer, the beach becomes lively with holidaymakers, while throughout the year it provides a scenic setting for coastal walks and cultural events connected to Margate's artistic revival. During low tide, large expanses of sand are revealed, making it ideal for walking and sunbathing.



The beach is also famous for its sunsets, which inspired the painter J. M. W. Turner during his visits to the town. For a particularly amazing view of the beach and its sunsets you should visit the top floor of No. 42 by GuestHouse which is probably one of the smartest hotels currently operating in Margate and has become part of Margate's wider cultural and tourism revival.



## Margate Old Town

Margate Old Town, which forms the historic heart of the town, was once the centre of Margate's fishing and trading community. Today the Old Town is known for its narrow lanes, independent shops, art galleries, cafés and restored historic buildings. Cobbled streets and traditional architecture give the area a distinctive atmosphere that contrasts with the larger modern developments elsewhere.

In recent years, the Old Town has played a leading role in Margate's cultural regeneration. Artists, creative businesses and small independent traders have helped transform previously neglected buildings into vibrant spaces filled with studios, vintage stores and restaurants. The area also contains several important attractions including museums, pubs and access to the harbour and Margate's maritime heritage.





## Margate Caves

Margate Caves are a fascinating underground attraction which are believed to have originated as chalk mines during the 17th or 18th century, when chalk was extracted for building materials. Over time the tunnels were expanded and eventually opened as a visitor attraction during the Victorian era. During the 19th century they were decorated and illuminated for tourists who visited the seaside resort seeking unusual entertainment.

The attraction later closed for many years before extensive restoration work allowed the caves to (safely) reopen to the public. Today visitors can explore the atmospheric underground chambers while learning about the geology, archaeology and social history of Margate. The caves form an important part of Margate's heritage and provide a cool contrast to the blazing sun above ground.



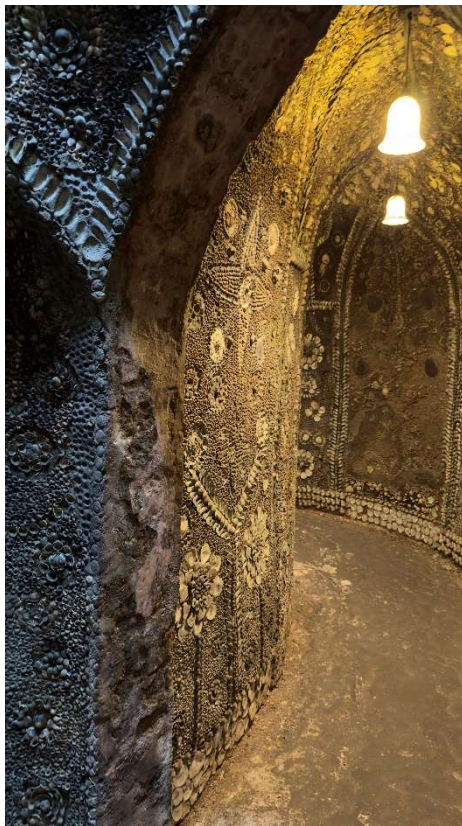
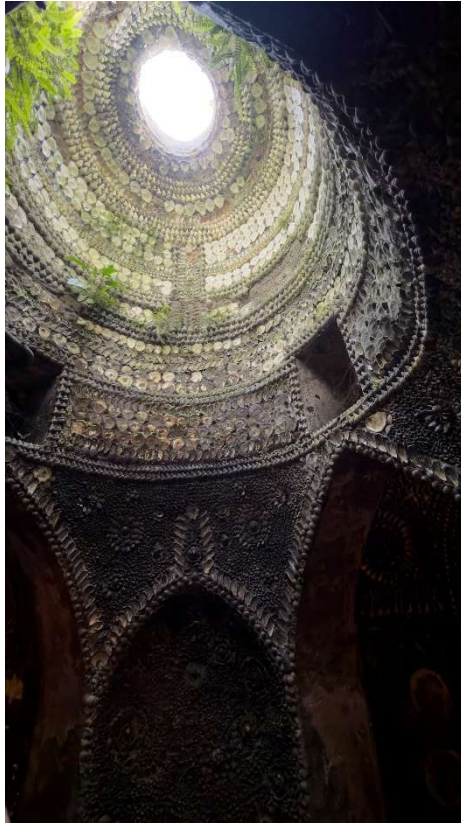
## Shell Grotto

The Shell Grotto is one of Britain's most mysterious underground attractions. The grotto was discovered by accident in 1835 and consists of a network of subterranean passages and chambers decorated with millions of seashells arranged in elaborate mosaics and patterns.... the guidebook suggests 4.6 million, but I did not get around to counting them.

The origins and purpose of the grotto remain completely unknown. No reliable records explain who created it or why, leading to numerous theories involving secret societies, religious rituals, ancient temples or eccentric Victorian decoration. The shell-covered walls feature symbols, geometric shapes and intricate designs that continue to fascinate historians and visitors alike.



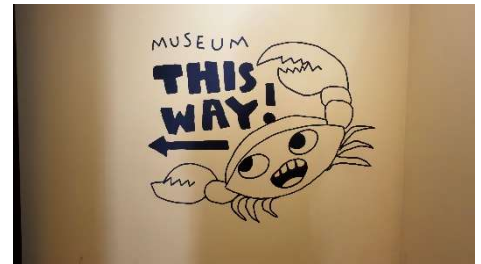
The underground passages create a unique atmosphere unlike any other attraction I have ever visited. Visitors walk through dimly lit corridors lined entirely with shells including mussels, cockles, whelks and oysters carefully arranged into decorative artwork. Its combination of art, archaeology and speculation continues to attract tourists interested in unusual heritage sites and unexplained historical discoveries.



## The Crab Museum

Another unusual Margate attraction is The Crab Museum which opened in 2021 as a small independent museum whose displays combines humour, science and environmental awareness through exhibits focused on crabs and marine ecosystems. Despite its playful appearance, the museum addresses serious subjects including climate change, overfishing, pollution and biodiversity loss.

The museum deliberately mixes entertainment with education, making it popular with families and younger visitors. Thus, the attraction reflects Margate's growing reputation as a creative and unconventional cultural destination. Its quirky style fits well within the town's artistic identity and independent spirit. Although relatively small, the Crab Museum has gained national attention for its originality and quirkiness.



## Dreamland

Dreamland Margate is one of Britain's most famous amusement parks and an important symbol of traditional seaside entertainment. The venue was originally developed from a popular pleasure garden featuring a menagerie, sideshows, and a roller-skating rink. In 1919, entrepreneur John Henry Iles purchased the site and inspired by New York's Coney Island, renamed it Dreamland.

The park's most celebrated feature is the historic Scenic Railway roller coaster which opened in 1920 and is now recognised as one of the oldest wooden roller coasters in the world.....presently closed. Throughout the 20th century Dreamland attracted huge crowds during the golden age of British seaside holidays, offering arcades, fairground rides and live performances.

Following periods of decline and closure, Thanet District Council bought the site in 2013. A major £18 million restoration followed, and Dreamland triumphantly reopened in 2015. Today Dreamland blends vintage amusement rides with modern festivals, concerts and retro-themed entertainment. Its colourful appearance and nostalgic atmosphere make it a major attraction for visitors exploring Margate's cultural revival.

Dreamland represents both the history of British seaside tourism and Margate's ongoing reinvention as a destination combining heritage, creativity and entertainment. While smaller than mega-parks, its unique blend of nostalgia, culture, and coastal setting has made it a beloved symbol of Margate's revival, attracting families, thrill-seekers, and hipsters alike.



## Turner Contemporary



Turner Contemporary is a major modern art gallery that has played a vital role in Margate's cultural regeneration. The building was opened in April 2011 on the town's seafront and was inspired by the connection between Margate and the painter J. M. W. Turner, who frequently visited the town and admired its distinctive coastal light.

The building was designed by architect David Chipperfield and is built on the site of the guesthouse where Turner used to stay. The gallery features floor-to-ceiling windows offering famous views of the same skies painted by Turner.

The gallery has no permanent collection but instead hosts a dynamic programme of historic and contemporary exhibitions.....during my visit it was the turn of Hulda Guzmán (born 1984) who is a celebrated Dominican painter known for her vibrant, psychedelic landscapes that blend ecological awareness and environmental vulnerability with Caribbean identity.

Since opening, the Turner Contemporary has attracted millions of visitors and is credited as a catalyst for Margate's regeneration. Beyond exhibitions, the gallery has helped reshape perceptions of Margate from a declining seaside resort into a respected cultural destination. Today it is regarded as one of the leading art galleries in the UK outside London and stands as a symbol of Margate's artistic revival.

Standing in the sea beside Turner Contemporary, don't miss Antony Gormley's *Another Time* sculpture which has become one of Margate's most distinctive modern landmarks. The life-sized cast-iron figure stands alone on Fulsam Rock and is only fully visible at low tide, giving it an eerie and dramatic appearance as it slowly emerges from the water.

The sculpture was installed in 2017 and is based on a cast of Gormley's own body forming part of a series of similar sculptures across the world exploring human isolation, reflection and the relationship between people and nature. Facing the open horizon, the figure appears calm as it contemplates the same landscapes that once inspired Turner.





## The River Stour in Canterbury

A short train ride away from Margate is the historic city of Canterbury offering a brief respite from Margate and a wonderful opportunity to go punting on the River Stour. This is a quintessential English experience and one of the best ways to see the historic city from a unique vantage point as you glide quietly past medieval buildings, gardens, bridges and hidden corners of the city that are often missed on foot.

Traditional flat-bottomed punts are guided by local historians explaining Canterbury's history, architecture and famous landmarks, including former religious sites. The river has played an important role in Canterbury's development for centuries but, today the peaceful waterways provide a scenic contrast to the busy streets above.

Punting has become a popular visitor experience, in Canterbury, especially during warmer months, allowing tourists to appreciate Canterbury from a unique perspective. The gentle pace and historic surroundings make river tours one of the city's more enjoyable and atmospheric attractions. It is an unmissable, relaxing activity that offers both fun and fascinating insights.





## Canterbury Cathedral

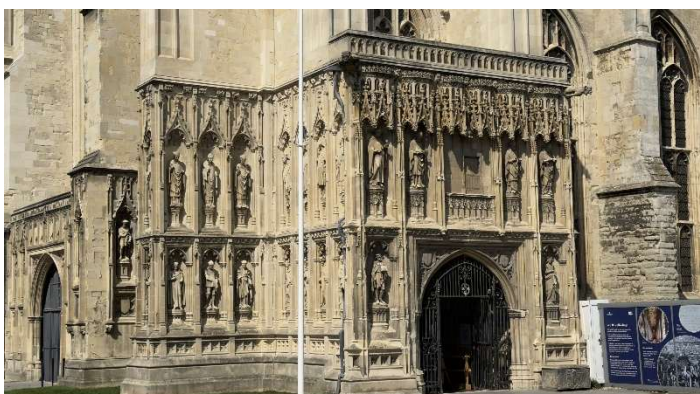


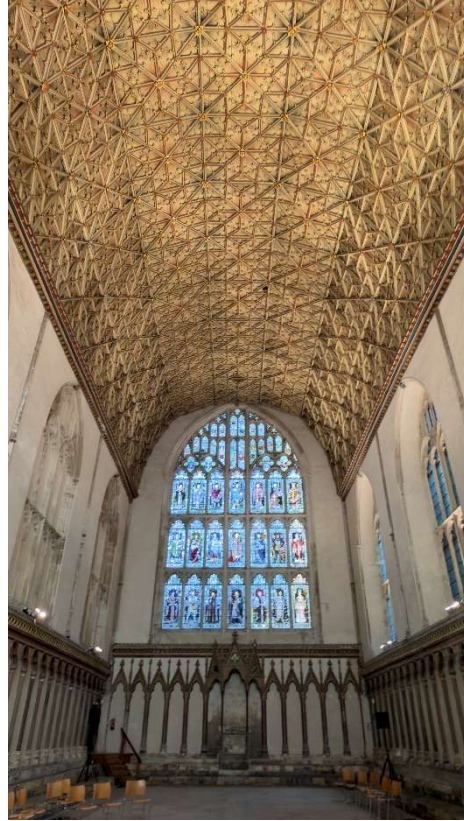
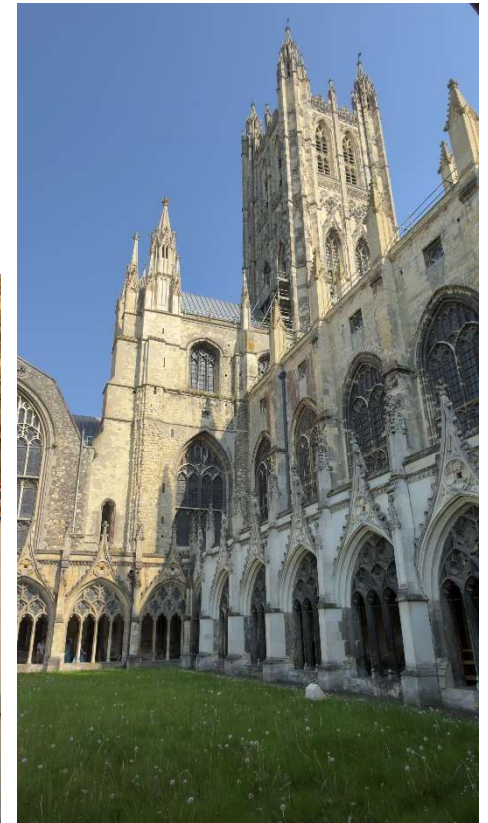
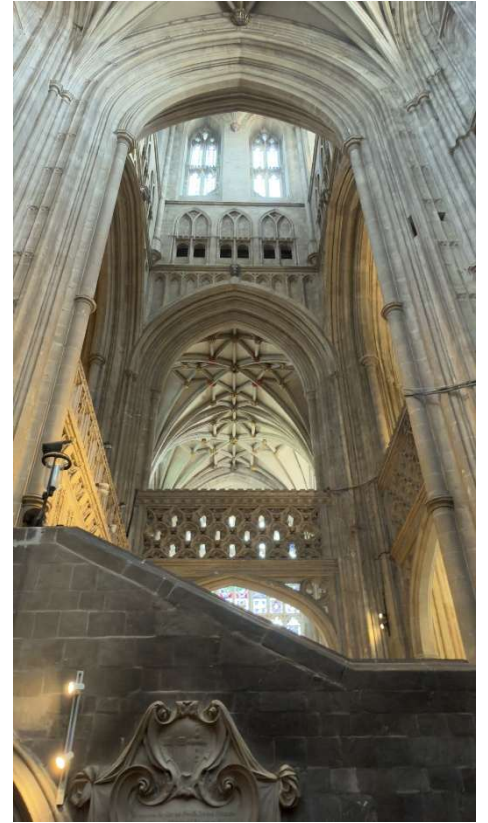
After such a relaxing start, it is time to visit Canterbury Cathedral which is officially the Cathedral and Metropolitan Church of Christ at Canterbury. This is one of the oldest and most famous Christian structures in England. The cathedral serves as the spiritual centre of the Church of England, the mother church of the worldwide Anglican Communion and the seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

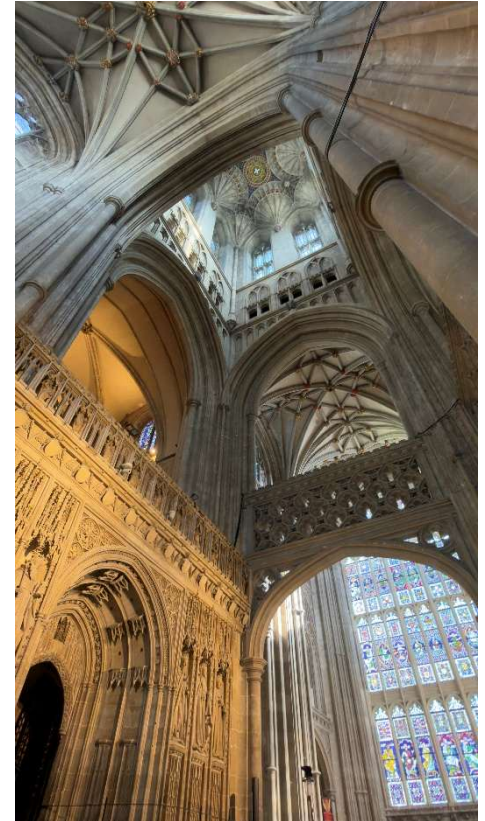
The cathedral was founded in 597 AD by St. Augustine, has been a place of worship for more than fourteen centuries and is now recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The cathedral seen today is a breathtaking masterpiece of Norman and Gothic architecture, built largely between the 11th and 16th centuries.

Its most famous feature is the magnificent stained-glass windows, including the 'Miracle Windows,' which depict the miracles of Thomas Becket, the archbishop murdered in the cathedral in 1170 by knights of King Henry II. Becket's martyrdom made Canterbury the most important place of pilgrimage in medieval England, famously immortalised in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.

Despite surviving the Dissolution of the Monasteries and a major fire in 1872, the cathedral remains a living place of worship. It continues to host daily services, drawing over a million visitors annually. No visit to Canterbury is complete without experiencing the awe-inspiring majesty, history, and spiritual weight of this truly iconic landmark.







## Reflection

My trip to Margate was far more interesting than I expected. Beyond the sandy beach and traditional seaside atmosphere, the town revealed layers of history, creativity and character. I enjoyed exploring the Old Town, discovering unusual attractions like the Shell Grotto, and seeing how Margate has reinvented itself through art and culture. The Turner Contemporary and Dreamland captured the town's modern spirit, while the seafront still retains its nostalgic charm. Margate felt lively, distinctive and full of surprises.

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