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In praise of Kent

LYDIA BELL EXTOLS THE VIRTUES OF THE COUNTY, AND ITS ELEGANT NEW LODGING

Full of charm and splendour, the Kent Coast isn't showy about its assets. Whitstable has long been the Londoners' favourite, and now, left-field Margate with its Turner Contemporary gallery, mid-century furniture shops and high-quality vintage clothing is turning heads. Further south-east in Ramsgate is Albion House, a restored hotel and restaurant, which offers fin de siècle loveliness and delectable British lunches.

Kent has a glut of farmers' markets, food festivals, serious British sparkling wines (such as Hush Heath), and microbreweries. In the bucolic hinterland, the small but picturesque stately home Goodnestone Park circa 1704 has reinvented itself as a private rental. A favourite of Jane Austen, whose brother married into the family, it is the seat of Julian Brook Plumptre, 22nd Lord FitzWalter. With its garden already open to the public, the faded Palladian interiors were sensitively refurbished. All 12 bedrooms are distinct, retaining their original charm but now suited for twenty-first century living. Add-ons include dinner by Rocksalt at Folkestone, which uses Kent produce from sea and land and is led by chef Mark Sargeant, formerly of Claridge's. Its owner, Josh de Haan, also owns the nearby Duke William gastropub. His family is embroiled in the redevelopment of Folkestone Harbour, with plans to make Folkestone the Padstow of the Home Counties. So watch this space.

Goodnestone Park: 01227 806987; reservations@goodnestone.com

Three nights costs from £5,760, excluding catering, for up to 24 guests D