

48 hours in LEWES

As Glyndebourne Festival celebrates its 90th anniversary, there's no better time for a weekend away in the neighbouring town of Lewes in East Sussex, says Sarah Riches

C hampagne picnics, alliums in bloom and stiletto heels sinking into the lawn can only mean one thing: Glyndebourne's opera season has begun. Established in 1934, Glyndebourne Festival turns 90 this year, with five operas performed from May to August, and an autumn season in October.

Just six kilometres away lies the historic market town of Lewes, on the edge of the South Downs National Park. Not to be outdone, Lewes has its own celebrations (11th–12th May) in honour of the 760th anniversary of the clash between Henry III and Prince Edward's Royalist forces, and Simon de Montfort's rebel barons. The town will mark the occasion by re-telling the events of 14th May 1264, with a battle reenactment on the High Street and around Lewes Castle & Museum, culminating at Lewes Priory. Combat displays and demonstrations by historians take place at a medieval camp on Convent Field, nearby.

If you tend to favour shopping and pottering over battle reenactments, then Lewes has plenty to offer here, too. With its meandering river, pretty markets, antiques shops and eateries, it makes a charming weekend destination all year round.

Shop

Lewes Flea Market

Established in 1990 in a former kilt factory that was once a Victorian redbrick Methodist chapel, this daily market is held over two floors. Up to 70 local dealers, and one based in France, sell stock all year round. You can spend hours in here, rummaging through cabinets and shelves stuffed with English and French antiques, from ceramic pots and apothecary bottles to military jackets. There's a large selection of furniture, too, such as tasselled velvet armchairs and French Louis XV wardrobes.

14a Market Street; flea-markets.co.uk

Lewes Antiques Centre

Distressed garden mirrors, lampshades with golden geese for a base, and framed illustrations of exotic birds are just some of the items you might discover while

FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Lewes Castle offers panoramic views of the South Downs; historic streets and houses abound in Lewes; discover new artists at Meiklejohn Gallery; The Fifteenth Century Bookshop's beamed building has recently undergone a sensitive renovation; more beams at Anne of Cleves House and Gardens.

CENTRE Pack a picnic with fresh produce from Lewes Friday Food Market.

searching through this vintage emporium. As it's spread over five floors, you can easily lose track of time here as you peruse a vast range of stock from over 80 vendors, and you may find yourself staying longer than planned.

20 Cliffe High Street; 01273 476148

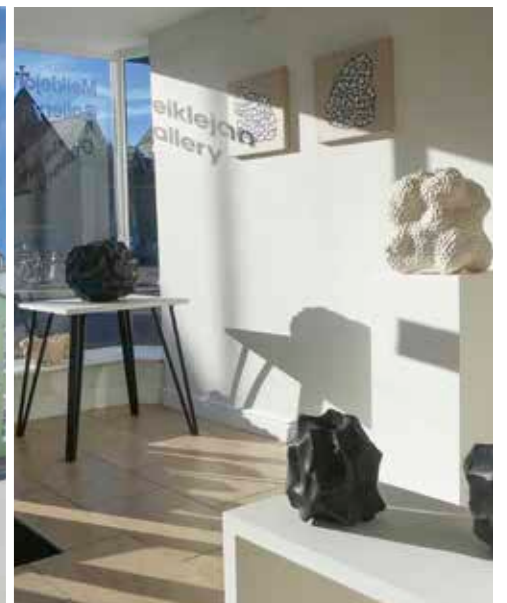
Pastorale Antiques

Since this antiques warehouse was founded in 1985, it has garnered a reputation for its affordable prices and eclectic stock, which the owners source from dealers across Europe. Merchandise ranges from vintage lampshades and hand-carved Georgian chests to garden furniture, which is displayed in a flower-filled courtyard. It also has an enchanting selection of curios: Victorian folding screens and 1930s coupe glasses alongside vintage toys. Stop for lunch in the café before moving on.

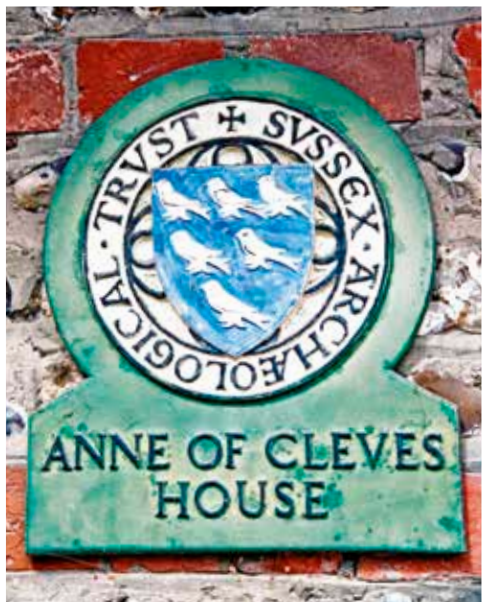
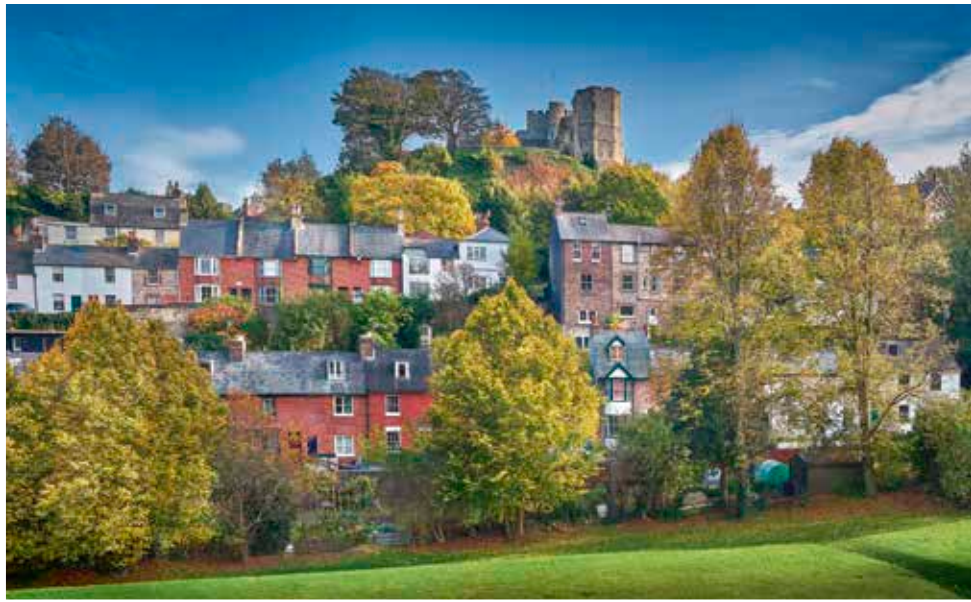
15 Malling Street; antiquessussex.co.uk

The Fifteenth Century Bookshop

Whether or not you're a bookworm, it's well worth seeking out this bookshop for the Tudor building alone. The owner, Susan Mirabaud, will welcome you as soon as she hears the tinkle of the bell that heralds your arrival. Once inside, make time to browse its nooks and crannies. Cubby holes hiding



Top: photography/Alamy Stock Photo; Prisma by Dukas Presseagentur GmbH/Alamy Stock Photo; Lewes Friday Food Market; Wirestock/Getty Images; mpalis/Getty Images



beneath low ceilings, and shelves tucked into narrow walkways are packed with second-hand and rare collectors' books. While it specialises in children's and illustrated fiction, topics range from needlework and crafts to gardening and antiques. 99–100 High Street; oldenyoungbooks.co.uk

Meiklejohn Gallery
This new exhibition space, situated in a clapboard house at the end of the High Street, highlights the work of emerging and established artists. Its diverse programme includes solo and group exhibitions by creatives specialising in contemporary craft, ceramics, print, sculpture and paintings. It has also hosted shows focusing on hand-sewn dolls, folk whistles made from clay, and flat-pack tree-of-life symbols constructed from plywood. 1 Malling Street; meiklejohngallery.co.uk

Lewes Friday Food Market
This is the place to stock up on cheese, vegan pastries, fruit cultivated on a nearby farm, and sourdough bread baked around the corner at Flint Owl Bakery. You can even sample and buy surplus from local allotments – in fact, you'll find everything you need for a spring picnic right here. Held in a clock tower built in 1792, the market was founded by a not-for-profit company that promotes sustainable, local produce and pumps profits back into food-related community initiatives. Time your visit to coincide with the craft market, held every second Saturday of the month, selling handmade jewellery, textiles, prints and more. Market Street; lewesfoodmarket.co.uk

Eat
The Snowdrop Inn
Sandwiched between a chalky cliff and the River Ouse, this pub bursts with colour both inside and out. Hanging baskets overflowing with petunias cascade down its

FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP LEFT Enjoy an intimate chat at The Tea Garden; the castle occupies a commanding position in the town; porthole mirrors and maritime art at Lewes Flea Market; there's space for six guests in this eco-friendly holiday home; combine your stay with a trip to Glyndebourne to celebrate its 90th anniversary; Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* is a Glyndebourne favourite. **CENTRE** Anne of Cleves House dates back to the 15th century.

exterior, while a spiral staircase is painted in bold primary colours indoors. Order a pizza and grab a table out in the garden, or seek shade inside beneath bunting, birdcages and milk pails, which dangle from the ceiling. 119 South Street; 01273 471018

The Tea Garden
This place has everything you could wish for in a tea garden: traditional wrought-iron furniture, and hot drinks served in gold-rimmed teacups paired with mismatched saucers – the perfect accompaniment to a slab of homemade cake, or scones served on tiered stands with dollops of jam. If you want a more intimate tête-à-tête, there is even a small boatshed that seats two on comfortable wicker chairs, its walls adorned with model yachts and shelves of pretty teacups. 5 Station Street; 01273 285704

Stay
The Grain Store Lewes
Nestled in the heart of the South Downs, this former barn is situated in St Ann Without, a pretty hamlet halfway between Lewes and Falmer. Now a charming three-bedroom eco retreat, it boasts beautiful views across a large private garden to the meadows beyond, while inside there are plenty of spots in which to curl up with a good book. Skylights and glass walls flood the space with natural light, making the most of its rural location, and an al fresco jacuzzi is the ideal spot for evening stargazing. thegrainstorelewes.com

The Hovel at Housedean
Another converted barn near Falmer, this one-bed cottage has kept its original oak beams and flint wall. Unwind in the roll-top bath or in the lounge, which has a wood-burning fire for cool spring nights. Bi-folding doors open onto a patio and garden, bordered by fields where cows and horses graze. Thoughtful touches include underfloor heating and a hamper full of sustainable goodies. thehovelathousedean.co.uk

Visit
Lewes Priory
Founded between 1078 and 1082 on the site of a Saxon church, Lewes Priory was constructed for monks and became a prominent religious institution – one of the country's wealthiest – before it fell into ruin. The king's army retreated here during the Battle of Lewes, and a large burial ground was discovered in 1845, containing hundreds of bodies from the battle. Today, the Grade I-listed property offers a captivating glimpse into medieval history, as you explore remnants of the chapter house and cloister, museum and grounds. lewespriory.org.uk

Anne of Cleves House
Henry VIII's wife never actually lived in this 15th-century cottage; rather, she acquired it as part of the annulment of her marriage to the King. Today, the Tudor-era timber property gives us a fascinating insight into domestic life from the 16th to the 19th century through restored period rooms, a medicinal herb garden and a recreated kitchen garden. 52 Southover High Street, sussexpast.co.uk

Don't miss
Stroll 'the twittens' – a network of narrow cobbled lanes constructed in the Anglo-Saxon era. Running north to south, they weave their way past 15th-century homes, ancient flint walls, and the enchanting Southover Grange Gardens, which date to 1542. 📍

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