

It's an area rich in naval history, backdropped by a lively clubbing scene



DESTINATION

Portsmouth and Southsea

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Located along England's south coast, Portsmouth and Southsea is an area rich in naval history, backdropped by a lively clubbing scene. Its Historic Dockyard at Portsmouth Harbour is home to the Royal Navy and famous ships like the HMS Victory, which was captained by Lord Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar, and HMS Warrior, which, when built in 1860 was the world's first steam-powered, armoured warship. Both are open to public viewing and the Mary Rose – the oldest Tudor battleship ever recovered – is also on display. If you want to see it, though, get there quick – from mid-September it's being covered up for conservation work.

Along from the dockyard, trendy outdoor shopping complex Gunwharf Quays hosts a range of top-end shops, restaurants and the uber-contemporary Spinnaker Tower, a spectacular cage-like structure which, at 170m high, is taller than Blackpool Tower, Big Ben and the London Eye. It also features Europe's largest glass floor, 100m up, from which

you can see into the ocean. At the top of the tower there's an amazing 23-mile view across the south coast and on a clear day you can spy the Isle of Wight, a short hovercraft ride away.

A four-minute train journey from Portsmouth Harbour, the city centre is home to some slightly oppressive Brutalist architecture – a style coined from the French *breton brut*, which translates as "raw concrete". However, it's less gloomy at night when the colourful nightclubs of Guildhall Walk open. Hardcore revellers end their evening with a 10-minute taxi ride to Southsea Parade's clubs.

During the day, at nearby Clarence Parade on Southsea Common, its amusement arcades noisily come to life, creating a Blackpool-esque atmosphere. You can buy candyfloss or a Mr Whippy and chill out on the pebble beach in a deckchair, or trundle up to Eastney naturist beach where you can let it all hang out. Whatever your thing, there's something for everyone.



Previous page: The Spinnaker Tower at Portsmouth Harbour **Clockwise from bottom:** Rosie's Vineyard; the Cooper room at the Retreat; the Terracotta room at the Clarence; a bathroom at the Clarence; the Follow Your Heart room at the Clarence; HMS Victory; South Parade Pier; Southsea Common



GET A ROOM! The Clarence

Under-18s aren't allowed at this boutique hotel, recently rated best in Portsmouth by travel site TripAdvisor.co.uk. Located just a stone's throw from Southsea Common, it features eight individually designed luxury rooms complemented by whirlpool baths, sunken baths and LCD TVs. A hot tip is that the hotel's restaurant chef cooks a legendary steak.

Rates: From £85-£150 per room per night, depending on size of room and time of year. Rates include breakfast.

Check in/out: 3pm/12pm, but times can be flexible.

Breakfast in bed? Continental breakfast can be delivered to the room but full English breakfasts are only served in the dining room.

Facilities: Air-con, 24hr room service, LCD TV with satellite, Wi-Fi, underfloor bathroom heating, luxury bathrobes, turn-down service and complimentary slippers, bottled water and chocolates. *The Clarence, Clarence Road, Southsea, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO5 2LQ, 023 9287 6348, TheClarenceHotel.co.uk.*

The Retreat

A Grade II-listed Victorian guest house in the heart of Southsea, the Retreat has been extensively redecorated to combine the house's original charm with modern comforts. There are four en-suite rooms to choose from but no single-occupancy rates offered or children allowed, so this is one for couples seeking some peace and quiet.

Rates: £70-£105 per night. Rates include breakfast.

Check in/out: 2pm/11am, but times can be flexible.

Breakfast in bed? No.

Facilities: LCD TV, whirlpool baths in two of the suites, tea- and coffee-making facilities, complimentary toiletries and newspapers, plus use of the hotel's guest lounge. *The Retreat, 35 Grove Road South, Southsea, Hampshire PO5 3QS, 023 9235 3701, TheRetreatGuestHouse.co.uk.*

EAT, DRINK & BE MERRY 8 King's Road

Since opening in 2006, 8 King's Road has stolen the glory of other eateries in the area. It won the local Restaurant of the Year Award in 2007 and was shortlisted in the *Michelin Restaurant Guide* in both 2008 and 2009. Chef James Harrison is an ex-Buckingham Palace cook and his menu includes fancy dishes such as red pepper and chilli soup, vegetarian truffle and goat's cheese risotto. Save some room for the house speciality of paprika chips, though – they're not to be missed! Every Friday night the restaurant has live music – normally big-band style – and on Saturday and Sunday lunchtimes a pianist tinkles the ivories for your dining pleasure. Dishes start at £17.95 and Saturday evening menus can see you spending £40 or more for two courses. *8 King's Road, Southsea, Hampshire PO5 3AH, 0845 130 3234, 8KingsRoad.co.uk.*

Rosie's Vineyard

Another restaurant hosting live music – in this case jazz, and only between 1pm and 4pm on Fridays and Sundays



Albert Road is dotted with specialist cuisine stores, from Afro-Caribbean to Thai

– Rosie's Vineyard has a cosier vibe. After 20 years, it's established a reputation locally for good food, including dishes such as duck-liver parfait and blackberry relish, honey and lavender aubergine, and lemon and blueberry cheesecake. Outdoors, its lovely *Jardin du Vin* has a distinctly Mediterranean feel, featuring wooden decking, water features and canopies. Mains start at £15.90. *Rosie's Vineyard, 87 Elm Grove, Southsea, Hampshire PO5 1JF, 023 9275 5944, Rosies-Vineyard.co.uk.*

Lou Lou's

Once a butcher's shop, this place has been transformed into an adorable French-with-an-English-twist cafe. Where carcasses once hung, flowers and fairy lights are now draped, making it a charming pit stop for lunch or a light snack. You can even shop for art, as the paintings on the walls – created by local artists – are for sale. Specialities include Croque Oo La La – croque monsieur with redcurrant glaze and chutney – and Lou Lou's rarebit. Food is sourced locally, made fresh and served in generous portions, yet prices start at only £3.25! *Lou Lou's, 37 Marmion Road, Southsea, Hampshire PO5 2AT, 023 9282 5113.*

SHOP TILL YOU DROP Albert Road

Don't expect to see many chain stores here – Albert Road's shops tend to sell

things such as antiques, herbal remedies and vintage clothes. In fact, Style in the City, an Aladdin's cave of vintage fashion goodies, was once featured in *Vogue*. Albert Road is also dotted with specialist cuisine stores, catering for people with a multitude of tastes – from Afro-Caribbean to Thai. Shoppers should take a second out to grab some homemade sweets from Taluli's Confectionery and, if you can, plan a visit for 27 September, when the annual Love Albert Road Day will see locals and visitors alike celebrating in the street as live bands play on the rooftops. *See AlbertRoad.InSouthsea.co.uk for more details.*

Gunwharf Quays

Seasoned bargain-hunters as well as hardcore shoppers won't get a better shopping fix in Portsmouth than at Gunwharf Quays. Boasting over 80 high-end and designer outlets, including the likes of Polo Ralph Lauren, Karen Millen and French Connection, this is where the last of the recession's big spenders go for a style buy. If you get bored with shopping, there's a bowling alley, a 14-screen cinema and more restaurants than you can shake a stick at. You can easily spend all day at Gunwharf. For more info, see *Gunwharf-Quays.com*. To plan your visit to Portsmouth and Southsea, and for more local info, visit *VisitPortsmouth.co.uk* or call the Tourist Information Centre on 023 9282 6722.



LOVE IT

Dickens' Birthplace

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in a house in Old Portsmouth. He lived there till he was three years old and, after leaving, only returned to the area three times: to do research for his book *The Life*



and *Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*; to give a public reading; and, the final time, to try to find the house he was born in, which he never did. Today the house has been converted into the Charles Dickens Birthplace Museum, displaying, among many other artefacts, the couch on which he died in Kent, in 1870, aged 68. *See CharlesDickensBirthplace.co.uk for more info.*

Images: VisitPortsmouth.co.uk, Portsmouth City Council