

instant weekend



PEAK OF PERFECTION: Leith Hill Tower, an 18th-century Gothic relic and, right, The Richard Onslow in Cranleigh, Surrey

Cranleigh

CLAIRE HEWITT explores the largest village in England on two wheels

PLACE

The self-proclaimed largest village in England, Cranleigh sits a stone's throw from the Surrey Hills, one of the UK's areas of outstanding natural beauty.

The bustling village high street is a pretty mix of Tudor and Victorian red-brick gabled properties, housing an array of quirky gift shops and tearooms. It's perfect for browsing before heading out to explore the country houses, footpaths and cycle routes that criss-cross the undulating woodland, rising to the Surrey Hills' peak at Leith Hill.

SEE

The relatively plain exterior of Watts Chapel in nearby Compton belies its ornate and colourful art nouveau interior.

Built by Mary Watts and the villagers, every inch of the walls from the floor to the domed ceiling is covered with painted clay frescos of angels and other ecclesiastical motifs which shine with hints of gold.

Mary, along with her artist husband George, also built their home and studios, Limnerslease in the village and created a gallery and artists' studios (01483 810235 /wattsgallery.org.uk). Tickets £11.50. Guided tours, £5.50.

The 18th-century Gothic Leith Hill Tower marks the highest point in south east England, built as a folly in the grounds of the country house Leith Hill Place in 1765.

It was described as "a place for people to enjoy the glory of the English countryside". Climb to the top for sweeping views, which on a clear day can take in Big Ben.

Stretch your legs on one of the many marked paths that lead from the top. We followed the 2.5 mile Woodland Trail which travels down the wooded slopes from the tower through Rhododendron Wood and on to pretty Leith Hill Place (01306 712711/nationaltrust.org.uk/leith-hill). Tickets £2.

DO

After the Olympic cycle road races took place in Surrey in 2012 the area has become even more popular with cyclists. Get your own piece of the action on a bike from Maison du Velo in Cranleigh (01483 346549/maisonduvelo.cc) and head straight from the high street out on to the Downs Link.

Running from Guildford to Shoreham-by-Sea this dismantled railway line provides a scenic ride

between the North and South Downs. Watch for the beautifully restored Baynards station, used for the filming of the 1957 classic *The Railway Children*. Bike hire £35 per day.

EAT

There is nothing more satisfying after a healthy dose of fresh air and exercise in the morning than to enjoy a big Sunday roast – and pub *The Richard Onslow* didn't



disappoint. The eatery is decorated in a deep plum with hints of gold, plush fabrics and pastoral scenes on linen Roman blinds – a modern take on a country house saloon.

For an indulgent cream tea head a couple of doors up the road to the Cromwell Coffee house (01483 273783/cromwellcoffeehouse.co.uk) to enjoy a large home-made scone with jam and clotted cream in the beamed front room. Its name marks the time Cromwell's troops were based there in 1657.

DRINK

Known locally as the 'Shoes' the Three Horseshoes (threehorse shoescranleigh.co.uk) is the epitome of a traditional village pub, the Tudor white and wood-beam frontage hints at its 15th-century origins and inside its rich red walls and dark woodwork create a cosy air. Order a pint of Loxhill Biscuit brewed by the Crafty Brewing Company down the road in Dunsfold. The landlord helped create the toasty golden ale.

STAY

The rooms at The Richard Onslow (a pub with accommodation) are decorated in warm creams and ooze cosiness, with the tartan wool curtains and bed throws in deep autumnal oranges and reds, and big fluffy duvets. The older rooms above the pub come with roll-top baths to soak in.

Mews rooms are larger and are tucked away behind the pub.

Doubles from £85, B&B (01483 274922/therichardonslow.co.uk).

INSIDER'S TIP

In the village's St Nicolas church (stnicolascranleigh.org.uk) is the carving said to have inspired Lewis Carroll to create the large-grinned Cheshire Cat of *Alice In Wonderland* fame.

The 12th century gargoyle on one of the buttresses, with its moon-shaped face, large round eyes and the hint of a grin, does bear more than a passing resemblance to the feline.



BIKE HIKE: Follow the scenic Downs Link

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