



#### READER SURVEY

# UK's best seaside towns and villages

#### RATED BY YOU

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From beach huts and lidos to fish and chips on a bench, visitors rate nearly 100 of the country's coastal destinations

**T**ake your bucket and spade to Wales if you're planning a UK break. That's according to nearly 3,000 of you who rated the seaside towns, villages and resorts from your recent UK trips. Wales had four seaside towns in the top 20, from the Italian Riviera-inspired Portmeirion and reassuring seaside tradition of Llandudno to beaches in Pembrokeshire that rival anywhere in the world. Price plays a part as well. All four Welsh destinations got four or more stars for value for money. That's no surprise when the average cost of a hotel room is around £100 in every one of them. In Cornwall's St Ives it's £160. Worried about the Welsh weather? Then head to East Anglia. The wrap of wild sandy beaches that surround its coastline means both Suffolk and Norfolk each have two places in the top 20.





## **Winner**

### **Bamburgh, Northumberland 89%**

The best seaside destination in the UK, and you only need to look at the picture to see why: what a beach. It's wild and unspoilt, with views to the Farne Islands in one direction and imposing Bamburgh Castle dominating the other.

If you're the kind of person who thinks a good walk by the sea will blow away all manner of cobwebs, then this is the perfect spot for you to wrap up and stride forth, with its long,

dramatic sweep of sand.

There's been a castle here in one form or another since the 6th century. The current one dates mostly from the end of the 1800s when it was rebuilt by Lord Armstrong, whose descendants own it today. It's certainly worth a look round, with an impressive armoury and a medieval kitchen.

Although food is available in the village itself, you'd be missing out if you didn't go for fish and chips in Seahouses, three miles away. **WH**



Above: Italian architecture in Portmeirion.  
Above right: North Berwick's sandy beach

## 2nd place

### Portmeirion, Gwynedd 88%

Who needs Italy?

Find colonnaded villas, Renaissance-domed mansions and an Art Deco lido in this recreation of a small Italian seaside village on the fringes of Snowdonia.

Built over 50 years with bits of abandoned heritage buildings from across the country, it doesn't quite pull off the Amalfi Coast, but with cobbled streets and blooming tropical flowers on every corner, it has a fairy-tale appeal. There are upmarket hotels, cafés and restaurants, and even a gelateria. The beach is only accessible at low tide, and a bit of mud pit to walk on, but it's wide and sandy, and woodlands make a pretty backdrop. **1 RB**



### Dartmouth, Devon 83%

More of a historic coastal port than a seaside resort, Dartmouth in south Devon has long been associated with the Royal Navy, and also features in the story of the Pilgrim Fathers and novels by Agatha Christie. In short, there is plenty to distract if you don't want a break that means the beach every day.

Today, a yacht club and boat chandlers share the high street with boutiques, gift shops, art galleries and restaurants serving fresh Devon crab. There is no notable beach in Dartmouth itself, but the Blue Flag Blackpool Sands is just a 10-minute drive west. **2 LC**



### St Mawes, Cornwall 83%

Set amid the greenery of the Roseland Heritage Coast, where fields of sheep meet hidden coves, the attraction here is its remoteness.

St Mawes itself is a small fishing village-turned-stylish getaway. There are upmarket hotels and smart restaurants serving seafood among whitewashed cottages, while Henry VII's St Mawes Castle stands watch. It's more a place to sip a pint of Tribute at the lazy inns on the waterfront, than hit the beach. Summers Beach is where kids play in rockpools among the pebbles, while parents try to get comfy on the stone steps. **3 FT**





### North Berwick, East Lothian **83%**

The fact that it's just half an hour by train from Edinburgh makes North Berwick a popular choice for day trippers from the Scottish capital.

There's also lots to do beyond building sandcastles and dabbling your toes in the Firth of Forth along West Beach and Milsey Bay. The Scottish Seabird Centre is based here and runs boat trips between March and October, including to Bass Rock, which has the world's biggest colony of Northern Gannets.

If you want a hearty walk with a superb view, head to the top of 187 metre-high Berwick Law, which will assuage any guilt as you tuck into tea and delicious cake back in town afterwards. **4 WH**



### St Andrews, Fife **82%**

In term time red-gowned students from the famous university are as familiar a site as American tourists heading for an early tee-off on the Old Course. St Andrews is the home of golf.

A walk on the West or East Sands (as the beaches are called) will build up a healthy appetite for exploring the town centre, which is compact and has a cosmopolitan collection of cafés and shops for a town of its size. If you bring just one thing home, make it a box of freshly made fudge doughnuts from Royal Warrant-holders Fisher and Donaldson bakery on Church Street. **5 WH**



### Beer, Devon **82%**

Beer may be small, but the scenic spot on Devon's Jurassic Coast is world famous for its quarry stone, used to build Westminster Abbey, as well as its delicate lace, which trimmed Queen Victoria's wedding dress.

The sheltered shingle beach, where fishermen still haul in nets full of mackerel, and its white chalk cliffs, offer dramatic walks – and the occasional fossil if the weather has been rough. There are half a dozen pubs and restaurants on the pretty street that climbs away from the shore, and that's about it. Perfect for peace and quiet. **6 LC**



### Southwold, Suffolk **81%**

Spectacular refurbishment over the years has this Suffolk town balmily anchored in the early 20th century.

But Southwold, unlike many UK seaside resorts, is time-trapped gracefully. It's wrapped around the iconic Adnams Brewery and whitewashed lighthouse, both of which are open for visits, while the pretty pier beyond the shingle beach thrives. The retro-looking pier amusements and an independent cinema modelled on the town's 1912 original show Southwold blossoms with a pride and culture that go beyond mere coastal cachet. **7 LW**

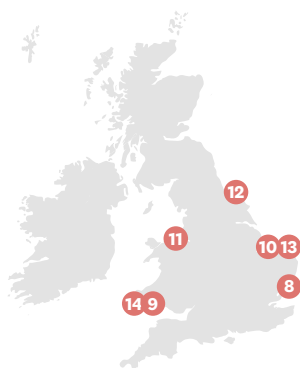


*Above:* Aldeburgh's endless shingle beach.  
*Above right:* Traditional Llandudno tram above the coastline

## Aldeburgh, Suffolk **81%**

Some come for the art, others for the music; most come back for the fish. Still caught by the town's fishermen, you'll find it smoked and sold in shacks. It's seemingly endless shingle beach is lined by toy-town-sized cottages as well as Maggi Hambling's giant steel Scallop sculpture. Benjamin Britten's legacy is as strong as ever, with the annual June Aldeburgh Festival at Snape Maltings and the museum at Red House, the composer's former home.

Follow the seafront path north to Thorpeness, the whimsical village with a Peter Pan theme, complete with Wendy's Island in the boating lake and the red-topped House in the Clouds. **8 MN**



## Tenby, Pembrokeshire **81%**

With buff sand expanses straddling either side of a promontory studded by a castle, Tenby is one of the UK's most attractive seaside towns. Blue Flag beaches blend with venerable history and a working fishing port, where boats and ferries dot the shoreline, while pastel-hued fishermen's houses flank the seafront.

So old is Tenby that medieval walls ring its outskirts, while the 12th-century abbey on Caldey Island is still manned by Trappist monks. Refreshments? The ice cream In Tenby has been voted Wales' best. **9 LW**



## Blakeney, Norfolk **80%**

The best thing about Blakeney is leaving it. Not to go too far, mind. Walk out of town east or west and you'll soon be among marshes or sand dunes or walking along the never-ending north Norfolk coast beaches. You'll be with the birdwatchers who flock to this area, so wonderfully rich in wildlife. You can even head north, chartering a boat out to sea to watch the resident seals pop their heads above water.

Eventually head back to the harbour, though, with its boats bobbing, a fresh seafood meal waiting, and a feeling that you've somehow stepped back 50 years in time. **10 MG**





### Llandudno, Conwy **78%**

Where afternoon teas are still served on silver platters, and fish and chips come in a bag for eating on a bench. While other resorts have reinvented themselves Llandudno has resisted, and this grand Victorian town stretched around the North Wales coast is the traditional British seaside experience at its best.

Staying in locally run B&Bs and eating at family owned pubs gives a village appeal, while days are spent strolling the handsome promenade or eating ice cream on the historic wooden pier. There are better beaches elsewhere, but with the Great Orme headland to walk and Snowdonia at your back you won't lack reasons to step into the sunshine. **11 RB**



### Robin Hood's Bay, North Yorkshire **78%**

This small Yorkshire village is a classic collection of old fishing cottages and cobbled lanes. In the late 18th century it was a hotbed of smugglers and swashbucklers, but now tourism is its main industry, which is evident in summer if you don't arrive early enough to nab a prized parking spot.

You can find out more about the town's seafaring past at the visitors' centre in the Old Coastguard Station down by the harbour. When the tide is out, hunting for fossils on the shoreline is a lot of fun. But be aware that the steep walk back up to town can be very tiring.

**12 WH**



### Sheringham, Norfolk **78%**

Sheringham manages to be pleasantly frozen in a bygone age without being fuddy-duddy. The star is the sandy Blue Flag beach with seafood shacks and a long seafront promenade that merges with the Norfolk Coast Path. And it's hard to resist a ride on the North Norfolk Railway, the steam train that runs to Holt.

There's character to the high street, too, with rare sightings of an ironmonger and a greengrocer plus the town's Little Theatre. If the seafront novelty wears off, there are 1,000 acres of landscaped gardens in National Trust-run Sheringham Park. **13 MN**



### St Davids, Pembrokeshire **78%**

A pilgrimage place for 1,500 years and Great Britain's smallest city, St Davids isn't your usual seaside resort. Today, this green peninsula of Pembrokeshire attracts nature-loving holidaymakers as well as faithful regulars.

A fetching high street slopes down to one of the country's most magnificent cathedrals, but the sea is not immediately evident. When you do make the short trip out to the water, it yields a diverse choice of coasts. The likely birthplace of Saint David perches atop tumbling cliffs to the south; north-west is the blonde strand of Whitesands Bay. **14 LW**

# SEASIDE TOWNS AND VILLAGES

	AVERAGE HOTEL RATE	BEACH	SEAFRONT	FOOD	ACCOMMODATION	ATTRACTIONS	SCENERY	PEACE & QUIET	VALUE FOR MONEY	SCORE
<b>BAMBURGH</b> Northumberland	£95	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	89%
<b>PORTMEIRION</b> Gwynedd (W)	£102	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	88%
<b>DARTMOUTH</b> Devon	£125	na	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	83%
<b>NORTH BERWICK</b> East Lothian (S)	£143	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	83%
<b>ST MAWES</b> Cornwall	£105	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	83%
<b>BEER</b> Devon	£95	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	82%
<b>ST ANDREWS</b> Fife (S)	£129	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	82%
<b>ALDEBURGH</b> Suffolk	£121	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	81%
<b>SOUTHWOLD</b> Suffolk	£160	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	81%
<b>TENBY</b> Pembrokeshire (W)	£99	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	81%
<b>BLAKENEY</b> Norfolk	£115	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	80%
<b>LLANDUDNO</b> Conwy (W)	£89	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	78%
<b>ROBIN HOOD'S BAY</b> N Yorkshire	£101	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	78%
<b>SHERINGHAM</b> Norfolk	£112	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	78%
<b>ST DAVIDS</b> Pembrokeshire (W)	£96	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	78%
<b>WELLS-NEXT-THE-SEA</b> Norfolk	£109	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	78%
<b>RYE</b> East Sussex	£120	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	77%
<b>ST IVES</b> Cornwall	£160	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	77%
<b>BUDE</b> Cornwall	£87	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	76%
<b>CRICCIETH</b> Gwynedd (W)	£97	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	76%
<b>LOOE</b> Cornwall	£87	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	76%
<b>SIDMOUTH</b> Devon	£140	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	76%
<b>SWANAGE</b> Dorset	£109	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	76%
<b>WHITBY</b> North Yorkshire	£101	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	76%
<b>CONWY</b> Conwy (W)	£100	★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	75%
<b>LYME REGIS</b> Dorset	£121	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	75%
<b>LYMINGTON</b> Hampshire	£139	na	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	75%
<b>PADSTOW</b> Cornwall	£119	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	75%
<b>PORTHMADOG</b> Gwynedd (W)	£102	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	75%
<b>SALCOMBE</b> Devon	£210	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	75%
<b>SALTBURN-BY-THE-SEA</b> N Yorkshire	£94	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	75%
<b>SWANSEA</b> Swansea (W)	£87	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	75%
<b>TYNEMOUTH</b> Tyne and Wear	£64	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	75%
<b>WHITSTABLE</b> Kent	£121	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	75%
<b>APPLEDORE</b> Devon	£85	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	74%
<b>BEAUMARIS</b> Anglesey (W)	£100	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	74%
<b>LYNMOUTH</b> Devon	£87	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	74%
<b>BOURNEMOUTH</b> Dorset	£99	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	73%
<b>DEAL</b> Kent	£67	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	73%
<b>DUNGENESS</b> Kent	£76	★★	★	★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	73%
<b>MEVAGISSEY</b> Cornwall	£100	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	73%
<b>LYTHAM ST ANNES</b> Lancashire	£99	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	73%
<b>PLYMOUTH</b> Devon	£76	★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★	73%
<b>SOUTHSEA</b> Hampshire	£88	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	73%
<b>FILEY</b> North Yorkshire	£73	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	72%
<b>FOWEY</b> Cornwall	£130	★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	72%
<b>OBAN</b> Argyll and Bute (S)	£109	na	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	72%
<b>SCARBOROUGH</b> North Yorkshire	£75	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	72%
<b>BROADSTAIRS</b> Kent	£110	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	71%
<b>CROMER</b> Norfolk	£86	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	71%
<b>TEIGNMOUTH</b> Devon	£93	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	71%
<b>BERWICK-UPON-TWEED</b> Northumberland	£87	★★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	70%
<b>FALMOUTH</b> Cornwall	£125	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	70%
<b>BRIGHTON</b> East Sussex	£116	★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★	★★	69%
<b>GRANGE-OVER-SANDS</b> Cumbria	£102	na	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	69%
<b>EASTBOURNE</b> East Sussex	£64	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	68%



From top to bottom:  
Mevagissey in Cornwall.  
Appledore in Devon.  
St Mary's Lighthouse,  
Whitley Bay.



## SEASIDE TOWNS AND VILLAGES

	AVERAGE HOTEL RATE	BEACH	SEAFRONT	FOOD	ACCOMMODATION	ATTRACTIONS	SCENERY	PEACE & QUIET	VALUE FOR MONEY	SCORE
SEAHOUSES Northumberland	£85	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	68%
WEYMOUTH Dorset	£95	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	68%
EXMOUTH Devon	£84	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	67%
ABERYSTWYTH Ceredigion (W)	£83	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	66%
BRIXHAM Devon	£85	★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	66%
DAWLISH Devon	£94	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	66%
POOLE Dorset	£116	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	66%
WHITLEY BAY Tyne and Wear	£61	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	66%
FELIXSTOWE Suffolk	£59	★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★★	64%
SHANKLIN Isle of Wight	£76	★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	64%
SOUTHPORT Merseyside	£79	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	64%
AYR South Ayrshire (S)	£76	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	63%
NEW BRIGHTON Merseyside	£83	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	63%
PORTHCAWL Bridgend (W)	£68	★★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★	63%
TORQUAY Devon	£79	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	63%
VENTNOR Isle of Wight	£107	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	63%
HASTINGS East Sussex	£87	★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★★	62%
HUNSTANTON Norfolk	£87	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	62%
FOLKESTONE Kent	£55	★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★★	62%
LOWESTOFT Suffolk	£75	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★	★★	★	★★★★	★★	62%
NEWQUAY Cornwall	£119	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★	★★	61%
BARMOUTH Gwynedd (W)	£95	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★	★★★★	★★★	★★	60%
ILFRACOMBE Devon	£86	★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	60%
PENZANCE Cornwall	£115	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	60%
WORTHING West Sussex	£81	★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★	60%
HERNE BAY Kent	£121	★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★	58%
BLACKPOOL Lancashire	£70	★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★	★	★★	57%
LITTLEHAMPTON West Sussex	£138	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	57%
RAMSGATE Kent	£90	★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	★★	★	57%
BRIDLINGTON E Riding of Yorkshire	£65	★★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★★	56%
MINEHEAD Somerset	£82	★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	56%
MORECAMBE Lancashire	£60	★★	★★★	★★	★★★★	★	★★	★★★	★★	55%
MARGATE Kent	£104	★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★	★	★	★	54%
GREAT YARMOUTH Norfolk	£69	★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★	★	★	★	53%
WESTON-SUPER-MARE Somerset	£74	★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★	★	★	53%
FLEETWOOD Lancashire	£65	★	★	★★	★★	★	★	★★★★	★	51%
SKEGNESS Lincolnshire	£65	★★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★	★	★	★	50%
BURNHAM-ON-SEA Somerset	£77	★★	★	★★	★★★	★	★★	★★★	★	49%
BOGNOR REGIS West Sussex	£96	★	★	★★	★★★★	★	★	★	★	47%
CLACTON-ON-SEA Essex	£116	★★★	★★	★★	★★★★	★	★	★	★	47%

(S) = Scotland (W) = Wales. **Average hotel rate:** kayak.co.uk. **Star ratings:** one to five. **Score:** combination of overall satisfaction/likelihood to recommend. **Contributors** RB Rory Boland, LC Lorna Cowan, MG Mike Gerrard, WH Will Hide, MN Mary Novakovich, FT Fiona Tapp, LW Luke Waterson

## SUMMER HOLIDAY SAVINGS

There may not be a flight involved, but hotel prices mean UK breaks aren't cheap. Here's how to save.

✓ Folkstone and Felixstowe had the cheapest hotels, but weren't popular with holidaymakers. Instead head for Deal. Hotel rooms are £67 a night on average, and the town gets five stars for value for money

✓ Children are off for Easter between 8-22 April. And again for summer from 23 July. Avoid those dates if you can as prices will shoot up.

✓ There are fantastic deals available on UK breaks. Travelzoo is highly rated by Which? members and publishes a list of swanky UK stays, available at the last minute for under £100 every week.

✓ More tips on p48

IMAGES ALAMY, GETTY

## In defence of Clacton

The Essex seaside resort came last in our survey. Travel writer Julia Hammond lives up the road and feels it's wrongly maligned

Clacton can't quite shake its 'cheap-as-chips' caravan-holiday image. But while you can still buy a static on a holiday park (some rather comfy) things have moved on along the Sunshine Coast.

Admittedly, Jamie Oliver doesn't cook at the end of Clacton pier but he couldn't compete with Armstrong's at the Pavillion anyway. August's famous air show fares well in the hold your attention stakes, but if you get a crick in the neck you can always admire the award-winning seafront gardens.

What's not changed is the weather – more than 1,600 hours

of sun each year; almost desert-worthy rainfall totals. (Proud Essex moment: nearby St Osyth is the driest place in Britain.) But I'm not saying this is the Med. The same gales that blow in off the North Sea delighting sandboarders and kitesurfers are the bane of overambitious picnickers who'll be spitting grains of sand out of

their mouths as penance for their foolishness. How we laugh (when it's not us!)

Add to the mix a broad swathe of sand nicked from the beaches of Norfolk and Suffolk (thanks to coastal erosion rather than the actions of enterprising residents). Neighbouring Jaywick's generally considered the best but the town beach is pretty good, too.