



# “We do like to be beside the seaside...” – views on the coast

**“...the high summer of the English holiday resort is over. Some have deteriorated so much that they have become vulgar, almost squalid. Even day-trippers have deserted them.” Bill Cormack (1998)**

According to the popular BBC series, ‘Coast’, nowhere in Britain is more than seventy miles from the sea. Our coastal margins offer plenty of potential for interesting geography. We love being beside the seaside apparently: houses with a sea-view sell for considerably more than those without. Locations such as Sandbanks in Dorset are amongst the most expensive in terms of land value in the whole country, if not the world, with houses selling for millions of pounds.

The traditional ‘bucket-and-spade’ holiday has grown in popularity recently as the squeeze on family budgets has led to the rise of the ‘staycation’ and a resurgence of interest in camping. The glamour of the remaining seaside piers is also a major attraction for the towns that have them.

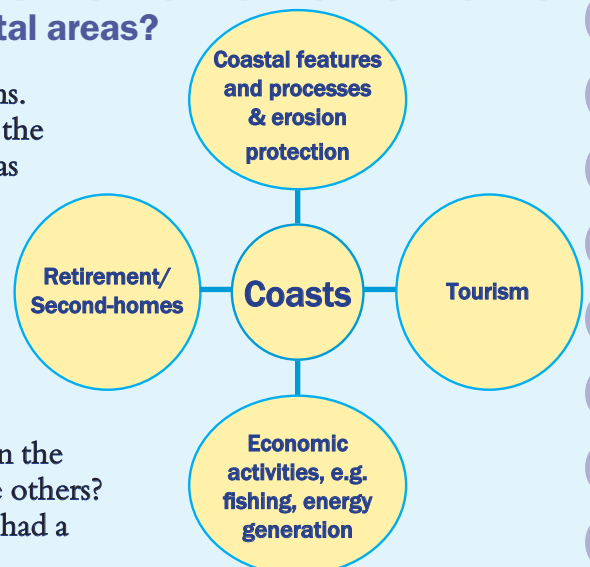


Coastal communities are having mixed fortunes, and these inequalities are worth studying. Some communities have a high proportion of elderly residents, or recently-arrived migrants. Some are threatened by rapid rates of erosion, coupled with reduced spending on coastal protection. Others have tried to rebrand themselves as competition from overseas destinations has reduced visitor numbers.



## Why should geographers be interested in coastal areas?

Coasts are of interest to geographers for a number of reasons. A principal reason for exploring coastal areas is to focus on the processes that shape the coastline: the energy of the waves as they interact with the geology and shape of the coastline. This creates a varied and sometimes fragile balance between erosion, transportation and deposition. Features such as cliffs, beaches, spits, sea-stacks and rock-pools on wave-cut-platforms are the result. In some places, sea defences such as piles of imported granite boulders, or curving concrete sea walls can act as a barrier to tourists trying to access the beach beyond. Consider the diagram on the right for some coastal connections – can you think of some others? Which of these would you prefer to concentrate on if you had a few lessons to learn about the topic of ‘coasts’?



Most people’s experience of the coast comes during the warmer months of the year. An out-of-season seaside resort can seem a bleak place, and in many coastal towns, most economic activity is concentrated during the ‘summer season’. Employment tends to be seasonal: more people have part-time jobs during the summer months. The weather at key times, such as bank holidays, can mean the difference between a profit and a loss over the year, and business-owners watch the weather forecast anxiously as the British weather is notoriously changeable: on a hot day there may be a cold sea mist (sometimes called a fret or a haar) clinging along the coast, while a few miles inland the landscape is bathed in brilliant sunshine.

<i>Good points</i> <i>(Flags on sandcastles)</i>	<i>Bad points</i> <i>(Sand on your ice-cream)</i>
Property prices are higher nearer the coast, which is good news if you’re looking to sell...	... but bad news if you’re a young person wanting to buy a house in your home town.
Sea defences can slow down or prevent coastal erosion...	..but if they are damaged you may find the value of your house reduce and insurance costs rise.
Access to the sea can be good for your health with the fresh sea air...	...but the salt-laden air means higher building maintenance costs and problems for gardeners.
There are plenty of jobs in seaside resorts during the summer...	...but a lot of these jobs are not there during the winter months.
The weather in winter can be milder on the coast than further inland ...	...but sea breezes and coastal fogs can make it cooler on a hot summer day.
Popular resorts can get very crowded on bank holidays and during the summer, which is good news for local businesses...	...but not convenient for residents who might be caught in jams or unable to park near their houses.
The sound of seagulls is a real sign that you are near the seaside...	...but they can be a nuisance and make a mess of buildings.

Some areas of coastline, such as salt marshes or sand dunes, provide a habitat for particular plants and animals. These can sometimes become an attraction by themselves, such as the seals on the Norfolk Coast, or the puffins that nest on Bempton Cliffs in East Yorkshire. RSPB reserves encircle the coastline, and many miles of coastline are

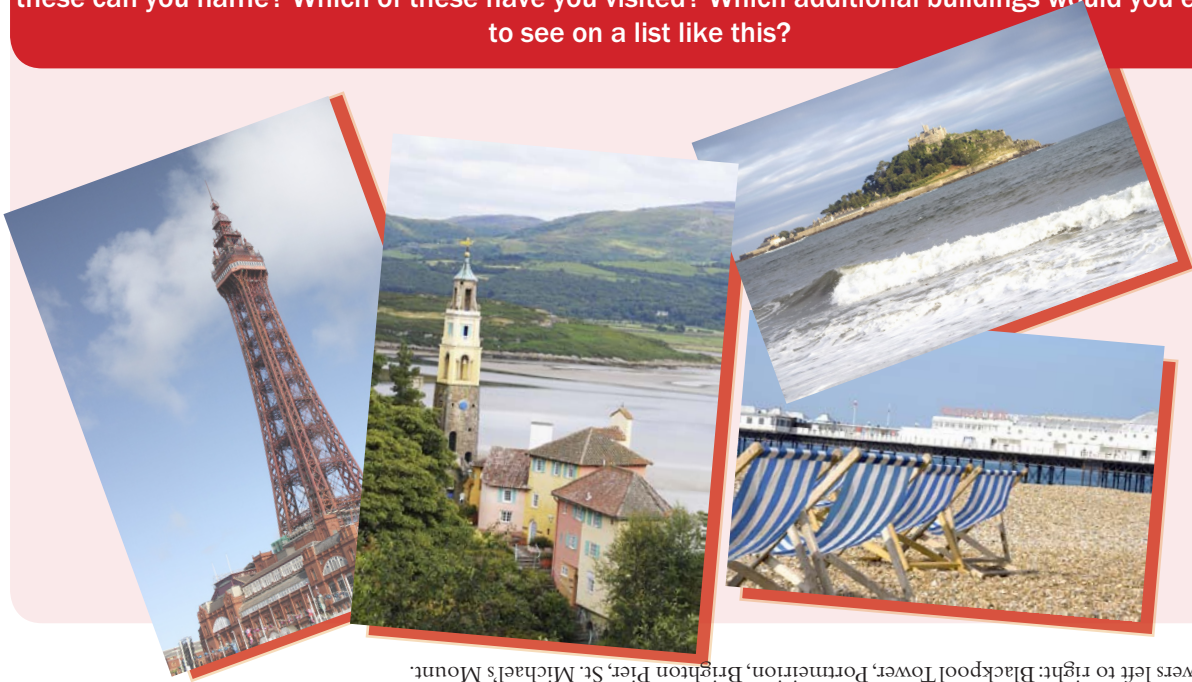


owned and managed by the National Trust. Visitors also need managing, with interpretive boards to explain what they should and shouldn’t do.

In some cases, such as Budleigh Salterton in Devon, there are fines for people who remove the pebbles from the beach as souvenirs. Although this might be seen as an over-reaction, the sediment on the beach is a vital part of the sea defences for the local community and every stone plays its part.



There are certain iconic buildings in seaside resorts that most people would recognise. How many of these can you name? Which of these have you visited? Which additional buildings would you expect to see on a list like this?



Answers left to right: Blackpool Tower, Fortmeitron, Brighton Pier, St. Michael's Mount.

These buildings are able to attract millions of visitors by themselves and in some cases the regeneration of an area relies on a single new building, such as the recently opened Turner Contemporary gallery in Margate, or the renovation of the Midland Hotel in Morecambe. There are also stretches of coastline that are given particular names that suggest sophistication, such as the 'English Riviera' for the area around Torquay. Resorts also hope to be awarded 'blue flags' to 'guarantee' the cleanliness of the bathing waters and the management of the beach areas.

Sometimes the attractions are natural, rather than man-made. Consider these other attractions which were created by natural processes. How many of these can you name? Do visitors to these places lead to more problems than benefits?



Answers left to right: Durdle Door, Spurn Head, White Cliffs of Dover, Old Man of Hoy.

## Did you know?

- The place that is furthest from the sea in the UK is apparently a field at Church Flatts Farm, near Cotton-in-the-Elms in Derbyshire. If you've been reading carefully you'll know how far away from the sea it is.
- 7% (or 1 in 14) of the British population live by the seaside.
- Blackpool attracts 10 million visitors every year, many of whom never set foot on its beach.



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Old photographs from the early 20th Century show that the British seaside was once far more popular. Its main period of growth came when the railways allowed mass tourism to take place and when workers gained the right to paid holidays for the first time. The enlargement of Britain's railway network at the start of the 20th Century allowed more people to reach the seaside. Many resorts such as Southport still have railway stations which seem to be far larger than one would expect for a town of their size.

They were built to accommodate the holiday visitors during the summer months, particularly in the weeks when factories in inland cities closed for holidays. These social trends are very much part of human geography. Many families returned to the same resort year after year. Some resorts even arranged for special editions of newspapers, from the cities where the majority of the holidaymakers came from, to be printed during the summer months.

Over the years, cheaper flights and the arrival of 'package holidays' made European destinations, with their 'guaranteed' sunshine more popular than British seaside resorts, and their popularity declined. You might want to research the extent to which resorts have declined since their peak of popularity.





Many people planning their retirement look for a coastal community to live in. A map of the concentrations of elderly people reflects this, or it may be that the coastal lifestyle is healthier and weather is better. The separation from families that often occurs when people retire can put extra strain on local social care resources. There are larger than average concentrations of elderly people in some south coast resorts, such as Bournemouth and Eastbourne. Other areas with larger than average concentrations of elderly residents include Devon and the North Norfolk coast.

## Case Study: North Norfolk

Blakeney is a small village on the Norfolk coast, about 20 miles north-west of Norwich. Most of the coastline is classed as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Blakeney had a population of just under 800 people at the last census. The area around Blakeney has become known as “Chelsea-on-Sea” because of the number of people from London who own property, or spend weekends and holidays in the area. The village has a range of services which are aimed at the regular visitors, as well as for the permanent residents. The quayside area has expensive homes and a number of popular hotels. The village has one of the highest percentages of second homes of any village in the country. It also gives its name to the prominent spit, which is an important depositional feature on that stretch of coastline. The spit protects the salt marshes that have built up behind it at places like Stiffkey.



*Blakeney in Norfolk*

A large proportion of houses in Blakeney are not lived in permanently: they are holiday lets, or second homes. Many of the villages along the North Norfolk coast have similar residency patterns. There is a demand for more affordable housing to be built and this is on the Parish Council’s plan. Over the years, small cottages in the area have been bought by people with the ability to afford a second home, who could often outbid local people. The cottages often need renovation and repairs, which provides work for local trades: builders, plasterers, plumbers and landscape contractors. Holiday lets also need letting agents, cleaners and maintenance. The absence of families living permanently in homes in these coastal areas can impact on local services, such as schools and local shops, as time passes.

Burnham Deepdale is a village along the coast from Blakeney. It has a well-developed parade of shops clustered around a petrol station, which attracts people from the other coastal villages. The [Burnham Deepdale website](#) lists the businesses and other attractions, which include an award-winning campsite with eco-friendly credentials. Some villages and businesses are clearly benefiting from their location on an increasingly popular stretch of coastline.

## Activities for Students

1. Source a large outline map of the UK and mark on the locations that you or your friends in the class/year group have visited in some way. You might prefer to use an online map-making tool such as Scribble maps or Google maps, or use your Ordnance Survey Digimap account if the school has one.

Where is the nearest seaside town to where you live?

Which places / stretches of coastline are the most popular?

Which of these have you visited yourself?

2. Imagine preparing for a walk around the coast of Britain.

What places would you most look forward to visiting?

What would be the top 10 natural and man-made attractions of the trip?

What would the total distance of your trip be?

Assuming you were able to travel a distance of around 20 miles a day, how long would it take to complete the walk?

Which sections of the walk might prove the most difficult because of the terrain involved?

3. Jeremy Clarkson, a controversial TV personality, was in the news in April 2011 because fences erected near his home on the Isle of Man were vandalised. This was a protest at the fencing of a coastal footpath which residents felt they should be able walk on. There are plans to close the gaps that currently exist which prevent the formation of a footpath round the coast of Britain. What benefits would there be in creating such a path?

### Suggestion

**Natural England has produced a range of maps which show the gaps, and put them on their website. Source the one for your nearest stretch of coastline, and explore the potential problems that are holding up the planned footpath.**

4. Watch this [BBC video](#) from Easter 2011 to see the impact that good weather can have on a coastal town.

Which particular jobs or businesses will benefit from a spell of hot dry weather?

5. Are British seaside resorts in decline, or do they have a bright future? Research some recent news articles which offer different opinions on this question. This [interactive map](#) on the Guardian newspaper's website offers a number of local stories.

When reading these stories, did you notice any themes emerging? Are there problems that are common to many coastal towns? Which coastal towns are doing particularly well?

6. Take a Google Earth Street-view trip along the sea-front at one of these seaside resorts, as well as perhaps visiting Blakeney, and put together a list of the attractions for visitors that you can see. Create a piece of publicity for these attractions which connects the human and the natural resources that would attract visitors. To start Google Street View, visit the area on [Google Maps](#), then drag the yellow ‘pin man’ from the left hand toolbar onto the streets of the place you are viewing. Watch a video [here](#).



## Suggested Activities for Teachers

1. Consider putting together a word cloud to sum up “the british seaside” or perhaps “Bank Holidays”. What words and phrases are the most popular? There are various ways of presenting the results of this activity. The following links may help you think of some creative ways that you could use the results as a teaching resource:  
Tagxedo: <http://www.tagxedo.com> or Wordle <http://www.wordle.com/>
2. A number of travel authors have walked around the coast of Britain, or have written about the British coastline. Keep an eye out at car boots and in charity shops, and start to assemble a classroom library of books that you can refer to, or that students can borrow.
3. Imagine that you are going to produce a special edition of the ‘Coast’ series which is based on an area of coastline. Use this context as the opportunity for a range of activities. They could perhaps be given badges, made using the [Flickr Toy badge maker](#) (these can then be re-used for other projects, especially if you put them in plastic badge holders). You will need to allocate jobs for the students which could include the following: picture editor, writers, editors, photographer, interviewer, location scout, researcher, web designer, sound-recorderist.
4. Will Self wrote a column in ‘The Independent’ called Psychogeography which included a description of a walk along the Holderness coastline (one which is rapidly eroding) – [the article](#) might be a useful stimulus piece for some creative writing.
5. Rebranding is a major theme in some of the exam specifications, and it might be a good idea to introduce younger students to the idea. This [powerpoint](#) provides some thoughts on the topic.
6. Try some ‘time-travelling’ – source some old postcards and images, and find out what the view is like now compared with what it was like back then. YouTube provides a whole range of local history videos and images for most locations. Clips can be captured using the Zamzar website for use in the classroom.
7. Read the [Blakeney Council Action Plan](#) which mentions the need for affordable housing. Explore the information on the area that was produced from the 2001 Census at the [Neighbourhood Statistics website](#) and suggest some other developments that might improve the life of permanent residents in Blakeney.

### Suggestion

Students will perhaps have some ideas on how they might want to rebrand their own local examples. Prepare a plan for the renovation of a seaside resort which includes an element of rebranding.

## Weblinks

[Blakeney tourist site, and webcam](#)

[The Visit Norfolk website](#)

[Special Flickr group of images created for this update](#)

[National Piers Society website](#)

[BBC ‘Coast’ on iPlayer](#)

