

Beach hut bliss



Thanet's gorgeous bays boast a colourful array of beautiful beach huts.

Words: Kaz Graham

Once the seaside was for fishermen – and the odd smuggler. But in the 1700s, doctors noticed the health benefits of seawater. The rush of patients from smoggy cities, and the cultural requirement for decency and privacy, heralded the invention of the bathing machine. This horse-drawn covered box took the patient directly to the water, where they could then bathe naked – a delicate arrangement that lasted throughout the Victorian era. But by the 1900s, attitudes were changing. Men and women bathed next to one another, even daring to walk about in their swimwear. The bathing machines lost their wheels and became handy huts. Popular and useful for shelter, new huts were erected, and so the

beach hut we recognise today was born, firmly establishing itself as a quintessential ingredient of the British seaside.

When Linda Ryder's young family arrived in Thanet 23 years ago, having a beach hut at Stone Bay was living the dream. Linda recalls kids playing together and a real community atmosphere. Often there for a whole day, they'd cook bacon and eggs on the beach, take collective responsibility for watching the kids and love the outdoors. The kids grew, using it independently as they got older, and Linda still adores it now. "You get a good sense of the seasons," she says. "It's friendly too; everyone respects one another and there's something for all age groups."



**Photograph of Stone Bay
by Mel Chennell**

Another aficionado, Sue Bray, wouldn't be without her hut. Starting out in West Bay over 30 years ago, her family dabbled in Stone Bay for a few years before returning to West Bay to capture the evening sun. They make the most of it too. "Friends drop in for a cup of tea, you can stay till late – and there's been a lot of shrimping and winking," she says. Over last year's amazing summer, many people dipped into Thanet waters who may not have before. Sue, however, with the beach hut a perfect base, has taken that pleasure many times. "It's a real pleasure to swim at high tide, stepping right off the promenade and into the sea," she muses.

You can hire a beach hut for a day or a week – or

join a waiting list to hire a plot, which means that you supply a hut yourself. This arrangement gives creative owners the opportunity to make a quirky beach hut statement – showing their character and tastes and often bringing smiles to the faces of folk promenading the shore.

Beach hut creativity is in abundance in Thanet. Bright stripe and patterns joyfully complement the coastal atmosphere, but some owners' huts are works of art: vintage seaside scenes, Punch and Judy and underwater worlds are just a few. If you spot a squid in Stone Bay, it belongs to a hut owned jointly by Sam Clark's young family and their family friends,

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John Harvey (right) paints his beach hut with vintage seaside images. Pictured here with his son Alfie.

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also with children; the husband happens to be a fine artist, who designed and painted the magnificent cephalopod (left). Not only is the hut gorgeous to observe – and beautiful on the inside, it allows the families long days and BBQs on the beach (or bacon sandwiches on a gas stove!) without having to lug everything about. “We love sunny days, but go on cloudy ones, too,” says Sam. “There’s a great community we’ve got to know over the years, and having the lifeguards mean it’s safe for the children. We can see the sweep of the bay... and relax.”

There’s nothing like sharing the beach with a like-minded bunch of people. But did you know that local schools, nurseries, or community-based groups can rent a community beach hut at either Margate Main Sands or Ramsgate? In fact, the aim of these beach huts is to encourage local families and children from these organisations to enjoy and explore the beach area. Each hut is filled with sports equipment, arts and crafts and educational materials: all you need for creating an active and creative day! Rental fees are £15 an hour up to £70 for a full day.

You can hire a beach hut from Your Leisure (who call them ‘chalets’) on a daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal and annual basis. Unsurprisingly they are immensely popular - you may have to join a long waiting list. So, if possible, decide as soon as you can, and then enjoy the benefits of long days at beautiful bays, checked by trained and professional bay inspectors and with lifeguards provided by the RNLI.

Hire is seasonal or annual (chalet provided) or a private plot (chalet provided by yourself). The bays include Dumpton, Louisa, Minnis, St Mildred’s, Stone Bay, West Bay, Westbrook and Kingsgate – however, note that Stone Bay, West Bay and Westbrook have private plots only, and Kingsgate has no private plots at all. The size of a private chalet is also prescriptive - up to 6ft by 6ft – or 8ft by 8ft at Minnis and Westbrook.

Prices for hire vary, depending on factors of duration, private or provided. West Bay, seasonal, provided by Your Leisure, costs £840. Private, seasonal, at Louisa Bay costs £355. – but check online for details and up-to-date costs.

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www.yourleisure.uk.com/beach-chalets

Daily hire from £22 a day, subject to availability.

Contact 01843 292795