



We do like to be beside the seaside

With British seaside resorts and hotels looking to beat the woe of the current economic recession, Bridget Baker packs her bucket and spade and sets off for the coast to investigate what Britain has in store...

REGENERATION

After several years of booming demand levels hoteliers are bracing themselves for difficult trading conditions this year. PriceWaterhouseCoopers forecasts business travel volumes will be down by as much as eight percent in 2009. Hotels rely heavily on corporate travellers and will be seeking to replace this lost business from other sources, particularly the leisure market.

There may, however, be a glimmer of hope for some UK hotels. The significant drop in the pound against the euro over recent months has made the UK a good value destination for European visitors. This is good news particularly for strong tourist destinations such as London but may also benefit other holiday locations around the country. In addition, statistics from Visit Britain show that 20 percent of Britons who holidayed overseas last year are planning to choose a UK break in 2009.

So, who will benefit from this potentially large increase in visitors? Travel insurer Towergate Bakers estimates that, of the 65 percent of Britons opting for a UK holiday this year, 23 percent will head for a seaside resort. British holiday park operators are already experiencing increases in booking levels for 2009. Butlins saw an increase in visitor numbers of 15 percent last summer. This was not just demand for low budget self-catering accommodation and was no doubt assisted by the impact of Butlins' impressive Shoreline Hotel (pictured

above) at its resort in Bognor Regis. Designed in the style of a ship, the hotel was 'launched' in 2005, and offers high quality bedrooms furnished in the style of cabins, many with spectacular sea views. The hotel has been so successful that another with spa facilities is already under construction.

Indeed, the sad image of the run-down British seaside town is becoming a thing of the past. Last year the Department for Culture, Media and Sport launched a £45m grant programme for coastal towns under its Seachange programme. The first three recipients were Blackpool, Dover and Torbay. The aim of these grants is to assist in the regeneration of coastal resorts through cultural investments and so attract more visitors. The first tranche of the £10m of grants was matched with locally-sourced funding.

Despite the downturn in the economy some hotel groups are still seeking to continue to expand their portfolios and are heading for the coast. Budget hotel operator Travelodge are planning to open an average of one seaside hotel a month, with a target of 55 new hotels in coastal towns by 2015. This represents some £150m of investment and the creation of around 1,000 new jobs.

It's not just the budget hotel groups that are taking a trip to the seaside. Boutique hotel chain myhotels opened a funky hotel in the heart of Brighton last year (pictured to the right). Blackpool has seen the development of a stylish contemporary hotel, 'The Big Blue', adjacent to its Pleasure Beach. Other



Top: The Shoreline Hotel is designed in the shape of a ship; Clockwise from Above: myhotel offers a modern 'boutique' feel for their rooms and lobby

seaside resorts are also starting to see the emergence of quirky boutique hotels such as Beiderbeckes in Scarborough and the Zanzibar in Hastings.

With such a range of accommodation the UK's seaside resorts have a chance to appeal to different types of leisure visitors now and in the future. But these hotels cannot survive on tourists alone. Local authorities need to make their towns more attractive to visitors all year round including to business travellers and conference delegates. This will require facilitating regeneration schemes through the planning process and supporting initiatives with funding. Done properly, with the right co-ordination

and co-operation, the expansion of the hotel industry and the renaissance of seaside towns can be as closely linked as sea and sand, bucket and spade, and swimsuit and suncream. 🏠



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