

**Celebrating  
BRITAIN**

# The Great British BEACH HUT

*How a painted wooden bolthole  
became a staple of our seaside*




Beachgoers used to get changed in bathing machines, as these two women (right) have done

**P**ainted in bright, cheery colours that delight whatever the weather, the beach hut is as much a part of the seaside as sandcastles and sticks of rock. Yet they're a world away from the rustic fishing huts dotted along other shores. That's because British beach huts came into being in a distinctly different way.

Prior to the 18th century, the seaside wasn't somewhere to go on holiday, unless your idea of fun was socialising with smugglers and fishermen. What changed was a new fascination with the sea,

particularly bathing in it – the salty water being touted as a remedy for a multitude of ailments. And once King George III gave royal approval to sea baths by taking one at Weymouth in 1789, the future of bathing and the seaside resort was set.

However, therapeutic sea baths presented a modesty problem. The solution was the bathing machine, which appeared around 1730 – an enclosed carriage that was rolled or horse-drawn into the

sea so the occupant could change, then step out to take a dip.

However, by the 1890s, attitudes started to change.

**'Bathing machines began to lose their wheels'**

In her book, *Beach Huts and Bathing Machines*, seaside historian Kathryn Ferry says, 'Bathing machines began to lose their wheels and purpose-built day huts appeared. In the interwar period, sunbathing became the new fashion, and bathing machines were seen as outdated. Modern blocks of beach huts or chalets were

**Hut 2359 is the oldest hut in Bournemouth**

Bournemouth Beach Bungalow  
 Constructed 1909  
 First municipal beach hut in the UK  
 Designed and built under the guidance of  
 Frederick Percy Dolamore  
 F.S.I., F.R. San.I  
 1869-1951  
 Chief Assistant Borough Engineer  
 and Surveyor

**built near to huge lidos and, by World War Two, the last of the bathing machines disappeared.'**

The first public beach huts were built in Bournemouth in 1909, and even now, the Dorset coast has more huts

**A row of huts look out over Eastbourne Beach**



WORDS: ANDREW SHAW; PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY, JAN SUTTON





Colourful beach huts at Wells-next-the-Sea, East Anglia

### Before you buy

- ✦ Average prices vary by location, and if there's stay-over permission. For example, the average price in Heacham, Norfolk, is £11,000, while in Hove, Sussex, it's around £25,000.
  - ✦ Councils or private site owners charge annual licensing fees. At the higher end, fees in Mudeford, Dorset, are around £2,000 per year, on top of council tax, while the annual licence for Brighton and Hove is £404.
  - ✦ Huts can be subject to buyer restrictions, such as a proportion that are only offered to locals, and a minimum term of ownership. Owners may also be liable for Capital Gains Tax when the hut is sold.
  - ✦ Rules can be strict. Some councils allow overnight stays in the warmer months, but not at other times. Very few have toilets, but will usually be close to facilities and a water tap.
- In Bournemouth, you can

than anywhere else. Bournemouth is home to nearly 2,000, and hut 2359 is its oldest. It has a blue plaque, and is still available for hire. Much like boats, many huts have names, such as Forget-Me-Not, Seas The Day and Penny's From Heaven.

The heyday of the beach hut was in the 1950s. Even now, there are more than 21,000 across the UK, mostly on the south and east coasts, but more are being built to boost seaside regeneration. Some never come up for sale, but

are handed down within a family. Beach hut owner Jane Barnes, 47, recalls how long she waited for a chance to buy. 'I was on a waiting list for 18 years with Bournemouth Council before I was offered a hut.'

Waiting for a chance to purchase is part of most owners' beach hut-buying stories – the other recurring theme is price. 'Beach huts are strictly for cash buyers, as mortgages aren't available,' explains Anthony Pearce of Stacks Property Search. 'Overpriced huts often make

the headlines – a blue and white number in Southwold, Suffolk, made over £150,000 last year.'

While beach huts can be rented by the day, week or year, for many, the appeal of your own place by the sea to eat fish and chips, shelter from a shower or watch the sun set, is unlike any other. The waiting lists may be long, and the prices budget-busting, yet the appeal of the great British beach hut remains – woven into our culture, our coastline and our love of a glorious seaside holiday.



Calshot Beach, Hampshire, at sunrise



Huts aren't just used for getting changed in

point your hut any colour, but it must be a single shade, while in Brighton and Hove, doors can be painted in vertical multicoloured stripes.

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