

SEASIDE RESORTS ACTION PLAN

Vision

To maximise the potential of seaside resorts and contribute to 5% growth, year on year, in the England tourism market by 2020.

Objectives

1. To raise awareness of the importance and potential of seaside resorts to the overall England tourism product across a range of private sector businesses and public sector bodies.
2. To build on the success of the 'staycation' effect and transform perceptions of the product and experiences available in seaside resorts.
3. To examine alternative solutions to tackling longstanding issues impacting on resorts and to seek innovative ways of improving seaside resort infrastructure.
4. To develop a coordinated approach towards activities and events to grow the value of tourism in seaside resorts throughout the year.

What is a Seaside Resort?

This Action Plan defines seaside resorts as purpose-built destinations which, in most cases, have under-utilised capacity and readily available tourism infrastructure. Seaside resorts are the biggest single sector within England's tourism offer and are of major significance to England's visitor economy. They offer a sustainable option to absorb much of the predicted growth in England's leisure markets.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has defined a list of 37 'principal' seaside towns in England which can be identified as stand-alone coastal destinations but this Action Plan extends to 103 small, medium and larger seaside towns which have a tradition and significant reliance on tourism. The Plan does not include ports or estuary towns which are principally commercial or industrial in nature and neither does it include rural stretches of coastline.

Why take action on Seaside Resorts?

Resorts, and the role of tourism, need to be better and more widely supported in order to achieve their full potential. A number of significant problems need to be resolved; many are not tourism related but impact directly on the quality of the offer and its continuing ability to improve. The role of resorts in providing a major outlet for domestic leisure activity needs to be explored and supported by local and national policies.

The physical infrastructure, social, economic and employment make up of resorts are geared towards the visitor economy and they maintain a physical and service structure which could not be sustained

by the resident and surrounding populations alone. If tourism declines or prospers, so too do the social and economic fortunes and the physical fabric of the resorts themselves. As well as making these destinations attractive places to visit, visitor services and infrastructure make resorts better places to live and work.

There is a perception, often driven by media, that most resorts are in decline and have been affected by Government welfare policies. However, many resorts have been through various phases of the product life cycle and have subsequently had to re-invent themselves, providing excellent examples of what could be achieved elsewhere.

Seaside resorts present a vital opportunity to contribute to the overall growth of England's visitor market as they already have the accommodation and wider visitor infrastructure which, if better utilised, could drive up value through extending overnight stays and avoiding displacement to other areas where additional spend by visitors is limited.

As in rural areas, tourism creates employment and opportunities for growth where other business and employment opportunities may be limited. The unique structure of seaside resorts means that they can offer seasonal employment, entry level opportunities, flexible working hours, part-time working, opportunities for carers, students and returners to work as well as short-term employment expansion and retraction in response to economic changes or weather patterns.

Challenges and Opportunities

- Many resorts have increasing resident, but not necessarily working, populations which can undermine the economic sustainability of the destination. Resorts which have diversified and attracted alternative employment have generally thrived much more than those that rely too heavily on tourism. Some resorts, such as Bournemouth and Brighton, have been particularly successful in promoting themselves as 'lifestyle' locations for new industries, attracting sectors such as banking, insurance, high-tech and educational employers. These industries can deliver a range of benefits to the tourism industry by encouraging business meetings and conferences and providing an all-year round working resident population that will use visitor services such as restaurants and help reduce the seasonal impact.
- Seaside resorts are often at 'the end of the line' in terms of the rail or road network. This relative isolation can generate a range of problems as well as presenting inward investment opportunities. There needs to be better understanding of barriers to growth in seaside resorts and greater understanding of the economic impact of transport planning that and how it can support leisure travel.
- Many seaside resorts are fully developed physically, constrained by the sea and other geographical features or, in some cases, by green belt policies. The main potential for growth is likely to fall on brownfield land or from the redevelopment of existing under-utilised infrastructure. One of the greatest threats lies with uncontrolled or poorly planned conversion of traditionally large housing, former guest houses and hotel stock, to Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) which often house people who are inactive in the workforce and generally dependent on state welfare. While it is necessary to have affordable housing for local people, creating surplus HMOs encourages inward migration without necessarily creating an economic benefit to the resort.
- There is a trend toward operators targeting the budget end of the leisure trips market on the assumption that this is the only area where they can successfully compete. This puts pressure on

margins, especially in the accommodation sector, and contributes to a lack of reinvestment and infrastructure decline.

- In many seaside resorts there are assets that can be updated and used to spearhead further private sector investment. By using in-depth knowledge of what contemporary consumer perceptions and expectations are and, by following best practice examples from other regeneration initiatives, the offer can be improved and ride on the renewed interest in coastal resorts generated by projects such as pier refurbishments and major cultural capital investments such as Sea Change.
- After many years of decline, domestic tourism has seen growth throughout the period 2008-10. It is still to be determined whether the 'staycation' effect is a structural change in the market as opposed to a short-term reaction to the recession, but it appears that increased domestic holiday-taking will continue. Much of the domestic tourism growth, around 20% in 2008, has been experienced in seaside resorts.
- The age profile of domestic overnight seaside resort visitors tends to be older than other destinations. Capitalising on the 'staycation' effect, attracting first time domestic holiday makers and converting them to repeat seaside resort customers, presents a significant opportunity to grow new markets. This can be enhanced through development of activity themes, such as surfing or water sports, and unique activities such as fossil hunting, as well as capitalising on new cultural investments or creating new events programmes. The ageing population still presents significant opportunities to generate low season overnight stays, especially through coach-based and other group travel tourism.
- Many resorts rely heavily on small to medium, established independent hotels. There is an opportunity to create more diversity in accommodation by attracting budget chains and larger independent operators. Budget chains have access to better national occupancy data and can offer substantial short-term discounts, follow loss-leader strategies or displace internal customers, which can benefit all accommodation providers within a local economy. There is scope for more chains to buy up existing stock in seaside resorts and local resorts need to be proactive in appealing to them. As resorts develop and re-invent themselves, there is still a significant opportunity for independents to provide a niche accommodation offer.
- An increase in short-breaks alongside the traditional one or two week holidays has seen an increasing demand for self-catering accommodation. On the whole, seaside resorts have not developed the range of quality self-catering properties typically seen in rural areas and in cities. However, seaside resorts do host a significant proportion of England's self-catering and owner occupied caravan stock. By providing more high-quality self-catering accommodation, seaside resorts can match visitor expectations more closely.
- Day visitor traffic is growing in most areas but its impact is largely under-estimated because it is not measured to the same extent as the overnight market and there have been issues regarding breakdown of national data. With new technologies and real time data, such as tourism 'apps', people are choosing to visit seaside resorts at shorter notice, perhaps based on weather, traffic conditions, special events and other demand issues. Enhanced use of technology, especially that supplying real time information, needs to be delivered.
- There is no such thing as a 'typical' seaside resort. They have their individual charms and strengths and seaside resorts need to build on this unique status. Many already have the assets to do so, be they historical structures such as piers, art deco architecture, natural features such as

cliffs and sandy beaches, or other attractions such as local seafood. Resorts may need to redevelop these assets as part of a wider marketing approach and can act as 'dispersal' destinations offering unique attributes that may not be available in a larger 'attract' destinations. For example, they may have an active harbour, independent niche shopping or a Victorian ambience not present in a larger nearby resort.

- Resorts need to explore ways to extend their season, taking advantage of the lower occupancy levels and lower costs in low seasons. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is through offering events and encouraging business tourism. Seaside resorts could also re-evaluate the way they market themselves out of season, perhaps focusing on the outdoors and the coastline itself for walking or other activities.
- A local strategic approach is perhaps the most important opportunity for seaside resorts. It is vital that Local Authorities acknowledge the importance of tourism to seaside resorts and their local economies. Local Authorities are enablers and the provider of many direct and indirect tourism related services and the responsible body for legal and statutory influences from licensing to planning. Without Local Authority commitment to tourism and the visitor economy, it is unlikely that the private sector will have the confidence to invest. This commitment will best be demonstrated by integrating tourism into local strategies and planning, focusing on coordination and longer-term approaches to developing the visitor economy.

The Action Plan

Seaside resorts need to adapt in order to maximise the potential benefits for the local economy and contribute to national growth. While addressing issues created by their own success, such as excessive residential growth, dealing with an elderly population structure and lack of job opportunities and skills, the Seaside Resort Action Plan has identified several opportunities for success.

The Seaside Resorts Action Plan will focus on innovation and the flexibility as the key components of that success. While many resorts have common problems which will enable shared best practice, many also have unique issues which require individual solutions. In most resorts there will be parallel pressures of economic survival and day-to-day maintenance but the two are inter-related.

While acknowledging that seaside resorts make a major contribution to the visitor economy, the focus of this Action Plan will be on sectors of the tourism industry within resorts that contribute to this wider economic benefit, such as accommodation, attractions and restaurants.

Objective 1: To raise awareness of the importance and potential of seaside resorts to the overall England tourism product across a range of private sector businesses and public sector bodies.

ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS (where appropriate)	PARTNER SIGN UP	OUTCOME OR SUCCESS MEASURE
i. Provide a centralised resource of existing and new local and national research material that demonstrates the social and economic importance of seaside resorts and their importance to the England visitor economy.	VisitEngland	British Destinations; English Tourism Intelligence Partnership (ETIP); Universities; Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS); Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG); Coastal Communities Alliance (CCA)	Consistent data sets available for free use by stakeholders. Assist with the identification of critical information gaps.
ii. Provide detailed case studies of management/partnership models, place-shaping regimes and practical implementation that can be used by resorts to help inform working practices; facilitate the sourcing and sharing of best practice where it is identified centrally or where requested by individual resorts.	VisitEngland/British Destinations; DMOs	British Destinations; Tourism Management Institute (TMI)/Tourism Society (TS); Local Government Association (LGA); CCA; Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID); Universities; DCMS; DCLG; Seaside	Application of Best Practice and improvement in local business, resident and visitor perceptions.
iii. Work with DCMS and others to facilitate the use of existing and new intelligence resources on seaside resorts to inform other Government Departments and help improve policy formulation and consultation.	VisitEngland/DCMS	DCMS; British Destinations; Universities	Better understand and more appropriate consideration of the issues affecting and policy impacts on seaside resorts in the national policy-making process.
iv. Identify how seaside resorts can bid directly for funding from both the Regional Growth Fund or other funding pots such as the European Investment Bank.	Seaside resorts; DMOs; VisitEngland	Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs); Destination Management Organisations (DMOs); Local Authorities; DCLG; LGA	Number of successful bids achieved.
v. Identify best practice solutions for local authorities in seaside resorts to provide more integrated approach to economic development and use tourism and other intelligence more effectively.	British Destinations	TMI/TS; LGA; CCA	Integrated economic development approach incorporating tourism criteria and baseline data demonstrated by key Local Authorities.

Objective 2: To build on the success of the staycation effect and transform perceptions of the product and experiences available in seaside resorts.

ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS (where appropriate)	PARTNER SIGN UP	OUTCOME OR SUCCESS MEASURE
i. To encourage England's resorts individually or collaboratively to undertake peer group brand awareness and brand development activities.	Seaside resorts	LEPs; DMOs; Local Authorities; private sector partners	Evidence through marketing collateral.
ii. To encourage England's resorts individually or collaboratively to undertake brand awareness and brand development activities.	VisitEngland	Local Authorities; DMOs; British Destinations; tourism partnerships; Seaside	Production of a branding toolkit and branding guidelines evidenced by marketing collateral.
iii. To encourage England's resorts individually or collaboratively to participate in appropriate national advertising activities.	VisitEngland	Local Authorities; DMOs; tourism partnerships	Marketing collateral.
iv. To encourage and help facilitate England's resorts to share market intelligence, best practice in marketing, trend assessment and developments in new technologies.	British Destinations; TMI/TS	LGID; DCMS; DCLG; Defra; LGA; Local Authorities; tourism partnerships; Universities; Seaside	Best Practice Toolkit could feed into DMH resource.
v. To provide seaside specific data from within existing national GBTS and other data sets for promotional and PR purposes.	VisitEngland	VisitBritain; ETIP; Office for National Statistics (ONS); Universities	PR collateral.

Objective 3: To examine alternative solutions to tackling longstanding issues impacting on resorts and to seek innovative ways of securing seaside resort infrastructure.

ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS (where appropriate)	PARTNER SIGN UP	OUTCOME OR SUCCESS MEASURE
i. To explore social enterprise options to sustainably manage and maintain tourism infrastructure; to promote community-based partnership approaches to managing micro-sites at strategic locations within seaside resorts; examine voluntary management	VisitEngland; Seaside resorts	CLG; CCA; Destination Alliances; Development Trust Association; Seaside; Universities; local community groups	Asset transfers of infrastructure under threat.

arrangements of public realm facilities at coastal resort gateways such as railway stations and coach interchanges.			
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Objective 4: To develop a national approach towards activities and events and disperse the benefits of visiting seaside resorts throughout the year.

ACTION	LEAD PARTNERS (where appropriate)	PARTNER SIGN UP	OUTCOME OR SUCCESS MEASURE
i. To develop seaside resorts as a key theme of the England Marketing brand.	VisitEngland	DMOs; Local Authorities; local tourism partnerships	Increase level of expenditure on national seaside resort marketing and draw in higher percentage of private sector spend.
ii. Work towards developing a year round programme of events that provides opportunity to visit a seaside resort at any time.	Seaside resorts	DCMS; DMOs; Local Authorities; Seaside; local tourism partnerships	Establish a sustainable all-year events programme across England's resorts.
iii. Give greater focus to off-peak thematic marketing campaigns aimed at reducing seasonality.	Seaside resorts	DMOs; Local Authorities; local tourism partnerships; Seaside	Demonstrate increased occupancy, spend and day visits during shoulder seasons and off-peak periods.
iv. Encourage marketing exchange partnerships that facilitate co-operation between cities and seaside resorts and ensure they are taking greater advantage of low cost off peak capacity.	Seaside resorts	DMOs; Local Authorities; local tourism partnerships; Seaside	Number of marketing exchange partnerships established.