

Hit the beach

With weathermen predicting a red-hot summer in 2009, more and more of us will be heading to the county's coast. Natalie Bollu helps make sure you don't get left out in the cold with her insider's guide to the best beaches in Essex



Southend on Sea

WITH more than 3million visitors each year, Southend on Sea is one of the most popular beach resorts in Essex. Attractions include the world's longest pier and Adventure Island, one of the UK's best free admission theme parks.

Along the seafront you will also find arcades, mini golf, the Sea-Life Adventure centre and the historic Kursaal function hall.

But, of course, its is the beaches that bring people to Southend. The Three Shells Beach is a small and friendly beach that is valeted daily. It is only

ten minutes walk from Southend Central Railway Station and is close to Adventure Island.

Pleasure boat trips are a great way to see the beauty of the Essex coast and in Southend you can take a boat from the new sand and shingle Jubilee Beach that stretches from Southend Pier to Thorpe Bay. Thorpe Bay itself offers a more peaceful day out, with its clean, secluded beach lined with beach huts for those looking to enjoy the natural elements of the coast.

Southend also has more than 300 restaurants and bars to turn your day trip into an evening out.

Where to park

Central parking is available in the Sea-Life Adventure centre car park. Free parking can also be found down the side road just opposite the centre

What not to miss

The world's longest pier

For fish and chips

Try Baileys Fry Inn with a portion of large chips just £1



MARK THOMASSON TEL: 07827 500182



Shoeburyness

Shoeburyness Beach is around three miles east of Southend town centre and offers a more sedate experience than its much larger neighbour. The award-winning sandy beaches and grassy headland is popular with families. Cafés, fish and chips and other facilities are available on Shoeburyness High Street, which is just a short walk from the beach. There is also a shallow paddling pool cornered off in the sea for swimming or, for the more adventurous, a secluded area for water sports.

Where to park Parking is available at the beach car park for 80p per hour

What not to miss This is a great spot for water sports

For fish and chips Find Sun Lee chip shop in Shoeburyness High Street



Leigh on Sea

Just ten minutes from Leigh Railway Station you'll find Old Leigh. Renown for its beautiful cobble streets, shops, cafés and the view of the fishing boats on the sea, Old Leigh offers the chance to enjoy fresh seafood and a glimpse of the cockleboats unloading their daily catch.

Bell Wharf Beach lies at the end of Old Leigh and is a perfect stop for families as it is clean and has great access to all facilities. For an extra treat catch the Leigh Fishing Festival on August 23.

Where to park In Old Leigh town, 80p per hour

What not to miss Leigh Fishing Festival on August 23

For fish and chips Fresh seafood is the order of the day in Old Leigh

Clacton

Clacton is one of the most popular seaside destinations along the Essex coast, with a buzzing atmosphere and packed promenade. There are beautiful beaches, two theatres, a fun-packed pier and a large shopping village. Stunning gardens surrounding the promenade make an idyllic spot to sit and relax while the pier offers 19 fairground rides plus further amusements, restaurants and shops are within an easy walk.

Martello Bay is a child-friendly sand and shingle beach with good facilities while West Beach is more lively and closer to the pier. Visitors from August 27 to 28 will also see the Clacton Air Show.

Where to park Park for free for one hour along the promenade

What not to miss Clacton Pier

For fish and chips Find cod and chips for £5.70 at the end of pier or chips for £1.50 at the front of the pier



Mearsea Island

The island's most famous beach is Bathing Beach to the west of the island, however there are many other secluded beaches. Bathing Beach is a shingle/sandy beach with good facilities including shops and restaurants.

Mersea Island also offers some of the best oysters in the world.

Where to park Bathing Beach has a few free car parks to look out for

What not to miss The tide, as the only road to and from the island can be submerged at high tide

For fish and chips Try oysters instead at the West Mersea Oyster Bar



Walton on the Naze

This quiet, picturesque resort boasts sandy beaches and cliff-top gardens. Walton also features regular farmers' markets and there is an indoor swimming pool and Marine Museum.

Just five minutes walk from town is the gently sloping Albion Beach and to the north of the town is Naze Beach which is sandy and backed by the cliffs. Here you will also find the Naze Tower, which offers fabulous coastline views.

Where to park Parking is available at Church Road car park at £1.50 for two hours or is free along the promenade

What not to miss Naze Tower

For fish and chips Naze Fish and Chips is just opposite the pier

Brightlingsea

At the entrance of the River Colne between Colchester and Clacton, Brightlingsea features a pleasant sandy beach backed by beach huts and a shallow paddling pool. Brightlingsea's boating lake is a great place for picnics and two large outdoor swimming pools face the sea. Throughout August Brightlingsea is also home to a popular festival of live music.

Where to park Free parking is available along the promenade but get there early

What not to miss The selection of live entertainment at Brightlingsea Music Festival

For fish and chips Try Bateman Café or The Waterbridge



Frinton on Sea

Although Frinton is not as busy as its neighbour, Clacton, it is definitely a hidden gem. Its untouched coastline is immaculately clean and lined with Victorian beach huts. Frinton also offers fascinating boutiques, antiques shops and historic buildings.

Where to park Parking is free along the promenade

What not to miss Cliff top walks

For fish and chips You'll find fish and chips in Frinton's town centre

Dovercourt

Dovercourt seafront features a sandy beach that runs for two miles from Earlams Beach to Beacon Hill. Facilities are centered around the swimming pool and boating lake in Low Road. The bay and estuary provide excellent windsurfing and dinghy sailing and there are zoned areas for water sports.

Where to park Free parking on the promenade

What not to miss The picturesque iron lighthouses which sit along the beach

For fish and chips You'll find more choice in neighbouring Harwich



Westcliff on Sea

To the west of Southend you'll find Westcliff on Sea, with its spectacular cliff-top view over the Thames estuary. Enjoy lunch or coffee at one of the cafés along the coast for the best views or for a wider choice of eateries and shops try Hamlet Court Road.

Westcliff Beach is a long, sandy beach, just ten minutes walk from Westcliff Station. From Chalkwall Beach it is easy to access Southend and Leigh beach. Westcliff's charming gardens set within the cliffs are popular for picnics and visitors can also add a touch of theatre to their day with a visit to the Cliffs Pavilion.

Where to park Parking is available along the promenade

What not to miss Westcliff's beautiful gardens

For fish and chips Just pick a coastal café

Harwich

Harwich is a busy coastal town and international port located on the estuary of the Stour and Orwell rivers. The old town of Harwich is a Conservation Area also containing many historic buildings.

Visitors from July 1 to 10 can enjoy the Harwich Trafalgar Festival of the Arts and on the July 31 you'll find the Harwich Sea Festival.

Where to park Parking is available along the harbour

What not to miss Harwich's maritime heritage

For fish and chips Why not dine in at The Pier restaurant?



Find out more

Clacton
Town Hall
Station Road
Clacton on Sea
CO15 1SE
01255 686633

Southend
Southend Pier
Western Esplanade
Southend on Sea
SS1 1EE
01702 215 120

Harwich
Iconfield Park
Parkeston
Harwich
CO12 4EN
01255 506 139

Maldon
Coach Lane
Maldon
CM9 4UH
01621 856 503

Walton
Princes Esplanade
Walton
01255 675542
Open weekly from mid May to mid September. Out of season contact the Clacton TIC office

