

Promenades such as this Brighton beauty have all the appeal of a beach, only they're easier to walk on



A STROLL ALONG THE PROM

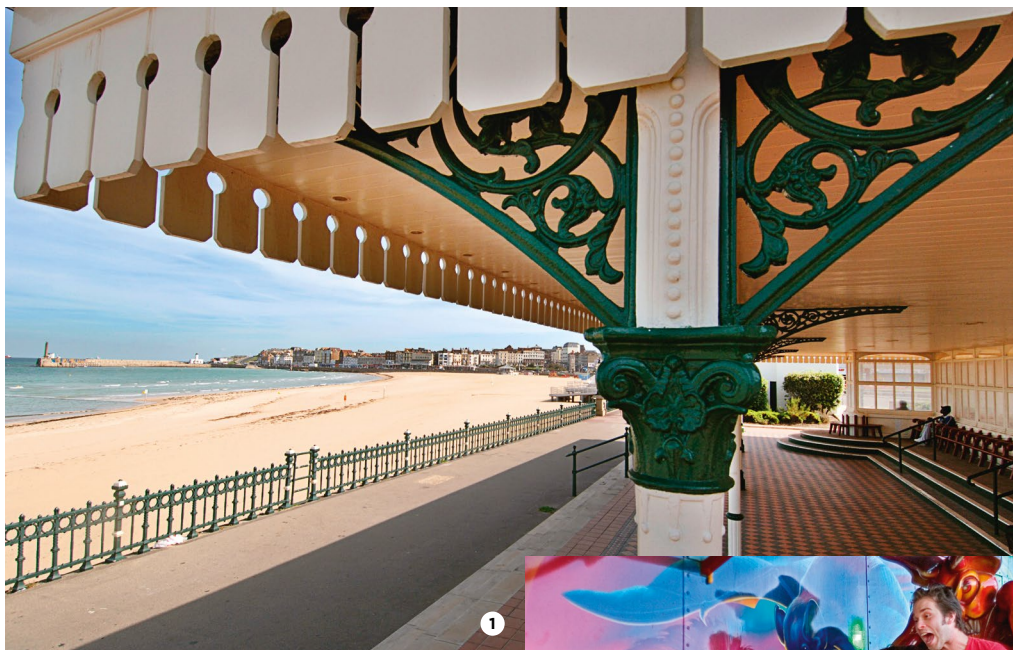
WITH THE SEA BESIDE YOU, AN ICE-CREAM IN HAND AND ATTRACTIONS ALL AROUND, PROMS OFFER A FUN COASTAL WALK WITHOUT THE HIKE, SAYS CLARE GOGERTY

Although there is much to be said for tramping along a wild coastal path, there are times when the pull of a seaside promenade is

hard to resist. A walk along a clifftop may offer an invigorating blast of nature, but a stroll along a seaside prom delivers fun-loving pleasures that are equally mood-boosting.

Take Brighton promenade. Stretching for four miles, it is a flat, straight, car-free walk that is a breeze to saunter along – unlike the pebbly beach below with its knobbly, ankle-turning potential. There's so much to look at: not just the sea with its changing colours and shifting waves, but the people. It's where my Great Aunt Babs, who lived in nearby Rottingdean, promenaded in her best Sunday clothes, captured on a fading sepia photo as a young woman. On a hot summer's day, a parade of sun-scorched daytrippers still ambles, jogs and skates past, providing a »

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY



Brighton breezy

Maybe it's because Brighton is where you run away to from London, but many low-budget British films end there, often badly, and usually on the prom.

Brighton Rock The 1948 film version of Graham Greene's book sees unpleasant gang leader Pinkie Brown (played by Richard Attenborough) fall to his death from Palace Pier. (The 2010 version was filmed on Eastbourne pier, so doesn't count.)

Quadrophenia A series of brawls between mods and rockers was filmed on Brighton promenade. After being arrested and disappointed in love and by his hero (Ace Face played by Sting), Jimmy Cooper (Phil Daniels) drives Ace's scooter over the cliff.

Mona Lisa George (Bob Hoskins) confronts Simone (Cathy Tyson) about her deceptions on the pier before they are chased by vengeful criminals as an accordion plays.

Carry on at Your Convenience Striking bathroom ceramic factory workers return to work for the annual coach trip to Brighton. Much drunkenness ensues resulting in factory owner WC Boggs (Kenneth Williams) romancing his secretary Miss Hortense Withering (Patsy Rowlands).



“A parade of sun-scorched daytrippers still ambles, jogs and skates past – a stream of entertainment”

constant stream of entertainment for the people-watcher.

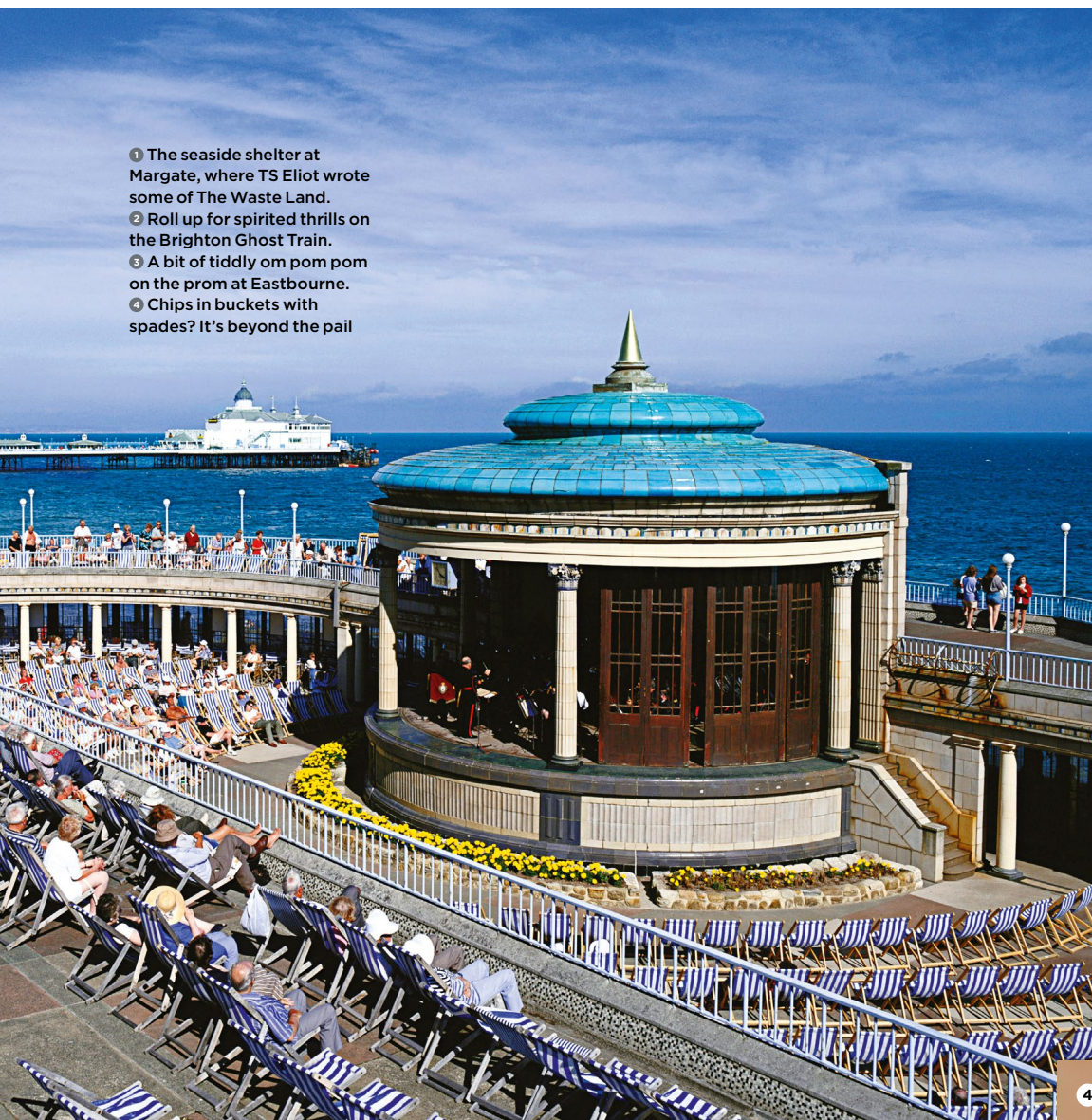
Then there's the attractions: from the Palace Pier with its rollercoaster, ghost train (a personal favourite), to the newer British Airways i360 with its panoramic views from 450ft up. In the arches beneath the prom are bars and restaurants that spill out happy drink- and sun-sozzled sybarites on to the shingle foreshore, while the other end of the prom, towards Hove, is lined with white-stucco crescents and grand hotels offering afternoon tea.

The British promenade originated when the craze for seaside bathing with its attendant health benefits became popular

in the 18th and 19th centuries. Difficulty in reaching seaside watering places led to the creation of piers where steam vessels deposited passengers. Once off the pier, they required somewhere safe to walk near the sea; somewhere accessible whatever the tide might be doing. As increasing numbers of people arrived, the need for entertainment grew: novelty attractions, from fortune tellers, to pierrot troupes, Punch and Judy shows and miniature railways sprung up along their length.

With the renaissance in the British seaside, the prom is more popular now than ever. It provides a link between different attractions and a transitional walkway between the land, the beach and the sea. It continues to be the place to stroll, be seen and to kick back and have some good, old seaside fun.

- 1 The seaside shelter at Margate, where TS Eliot wrote some of *The Waste Land*.
- 2 Roll up for spirited thrills on the Brighton Ghost Train.
- 3 A bit of tiddly om pom pom on the prom at Eastbourne.
- 4 Chips in buckets with spades? It's beyond the pail



MAIN ATTRACTION

From amusement parks to lidos and grand hotels, proms have much to offer beside(s) the sea

A PLACE OF LEISURE

For many people, including me, the prom is not a place to hurry; it's a place to saunter and, when the fancy takes you, stop, sit, and stare at the sea. Most proms provide plenty of places to do just that. Benches, tucked in among the pampass grass are a welcome place to unscrew a Thermos and, when it's rainy or windy, a Victorian seaside shelter keeps the elements at bay. TS Eliot hunkered down in Margate's shelter in 1921 and penned part of 'The Waste Land', so they can be inspirational,

too. On most proms, deckchairs are also available to hire – a snooze in the sun is an essential part of the prom experience – but not always necessary: perching on a sea wall, legs dangling, with a bag of chips in your hands is one of the prom's particular pleasures.

DEVOTED TO FUN

A promenade is a rare thing: a public walkway dedicated entirely to fun-seeking. As you walk its length, temptation is all around, tugging at your elbow. Will you be drawn into a furiously beeping and flashing amusement arcade to claw a prize or to play a game of Shoot 'em Up? Or maybe the funfair at, say, Southend's Adventure Island or Weston-super-Mare, will whisk you into its adrenaline-charged world of plunging and spinning terror. »

Six snacks for promenaders

Cockles Skewer a few of these vinegary delicacies from a cardboard tub with a cocktail stick for maximum seaside snack authenticity.

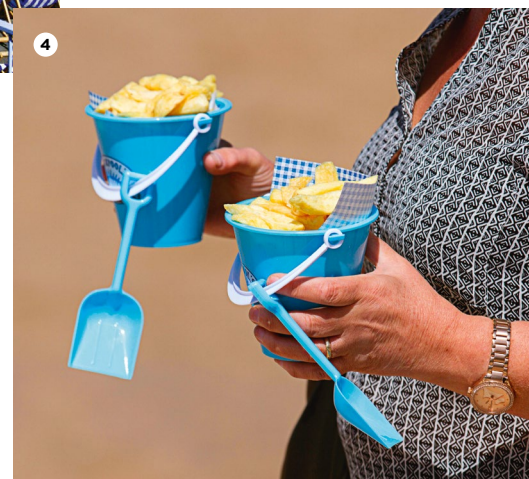
Ice-cream Wherever you find a prom, you will find an ice-cream parlour. It would be a crime not to indulge, whether you go for a simple cornet or a sundae.

Doughnuts Sharing a bag of freshly-fried, sugar-coated doughnuts is an ideal accompaniment to a seaside stroll. Let an increase in appetite caused by the sea air be your excuse.

Fish and chips A piece of sustainably sourced haddock in a light batter with a tray of fat chips and mushy peas? Yes, please.

Milkshake This frothy glass of flavoured milk has bounded into the modern age with new flavours like Oreo Cookies and Cream, and Peanut Butter Fudge. Yum.

Rock Teeth-splintering it may be, yet a sucking a piece of this usually-mint-flavoured pulled sugar is an essential seaside experience.





- ① A cliffhanger of a railway at Hastings.
- ② Is it a bus? Is it a fairground ride? No, it's Weston-super-Mare's land train.
- ③ Tinside Lido in Plymouth was built in 1935 in classic 'Seaside Moderne' style.
- ④ Grand hotels line Llandudno's prom, matched in elegance by its blue-and-white balustraded pier

Perhaps a musical act performing at a bandstand would be more your bag – Eastbourne's, with its ceramic domed roof, is architecturally splendid and hosts tribute bands who play all summer long to audiences of over 1,000.

NEVER-ENDING SEA VIEWS

Whatever else is on offer, the mesmeric pull of the ocean always alongside, is the main attraction of a stroll along a prom. For those not content with a sea-level view, there are various elevated options to enjoy. Victorian cliff railways, including the East Cliff funicular at Hastings and the Leas Lift in Folkestone, still propel visitors to the top of cliffs for greater panoramas. Although many revolving viewing towers,

mostly designed by Thomas Warwick – including examples in Great Yarmouth and Cleethorpes – have been demolished, there is a renewed interest in them as the (non-revolving) i360 at Brighton, opened in 2016, proves.

To gaze at the sea while comfortably seated, miniature railways like the Romney, Hythe, and Dymchurch Railway, or the Blackpool Tramway, with its heritage double-deck carriages, will take you along the entire length of the prom and beyond without walking a step.

HEALTH AND FITNESS

Promenades began as places to walk and breathe sea air then plunge into the sea for health benefits, and they still offer much to those seeking somewhere to exercise, whether it's to run, skate or simply to walk briskly. Although cycling on many promenades is prohibited or restricted at busy times, designated cycling paths are



Peerless piers

Southend-on-Sea, Essex The longest pier in the world, no less: 1.5 miles, complete with a railway that takes you to the end of it.

Llandudno, Caernarfonshire

A pretty pier with an ornate blue and white balustrade stretches out from the curl of the northern foreshore.

Eastbourne, East Sussex Built by Victorian engineering genius, Eugenius Birch, the pier is a proud complement to the town's elegant, white seafront.

Blackpool, Lancashire Boasts three piers – Central, North and South – each reaching out from the promenade and devoted to rides, shows and other hedonistic pursuits.

often provided and run alongside. Outdoor swimmers can benefit from the revival of seaside lidos – many of which are splendid representations of Art Deco or Seaside Moderne (see below). The saltwater Jubilee Pool on Penzance promenade, the Tinside Lido in Plymouth – also saltwater and with a sunbathing terrace – and the Saltdean Lido at the very end of Brighton prom, which reopened last year, are all fine examples.

GRAND STYLE

Many of the once grand hotels that line seaside promenades are a little faded now but still have the power to impress: Llandudno North Shore Beach is lined with Victorian and Edwardian hotels which preside in stately fashion over its wide promenade, and comparisons have been made between the towering white stucco hotels on the seafront at Eastbourne and the Promenade des Anglais in Nice.



(Interestingly, Debussy finished writing *La Mer* in Eastbourne's Grand Hotel.)

An upsurge in holiday makers to the seaside in the 1920s and 1930s led to the building of new pavilions and winter gardens built in an architectural style known as 'Seaside Moderne' to house tea dances, repertory theatre and restaurants. The most striking of these is the De La Warr pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea which, with its white concrete façade, strong geometric shapes, flat roofs and plenty of glass, exemplifies the style. **S**

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