



Let's go on... a holiday in Britain

From rockpooling to glamping, travel expert Simon Calder explains why our island can more than hold its own as a venue for a great family break

Chances are, your favourite beach is the same as mine: the first you can remember from childhood. My first holiday memory is splashing around in the resort of Swanage in Dorset, with the ghostly outline of the Isle of Wight shimmering on the horizon. Add in rockpooling, fish and chips on the pier and a rapidly melting ice cream during a Punch and Judy show, and you have a recipe for holiday bliss.

Today, the travel horizons of the average British family extend beyond the Isle of Purbeck (an island not surrounded by water, a novel notion for a six-year-old). While some resorts on our shores have acquired a past-their-best look, Swanage Pier is thriving, and still costs only 90p to enjoy. So it's time to look back in fondness at the way we travelled and invest at least a weekend in reclaiming the joy of a British holiday.

Before foreign package holidays became commonplace, the average Brit couldn't afford to venture abroad. In 1950, the number

of UK citizens travelling abroad hit one million for the first time. Today, we exceed that number in a week. But try this: wave the neighbours goodbye as they set off for the endurance test of an overseas break. While they're still removing their shoes at the airport security checkpoint, you are unpacking at the seaside or a country cottage. And when they're midair paying stratospheric prices

for mediocre snacks, you are free to wander off in search of the best of British cuisine at sea level.

The essentials for a great holiday are here on your doorstep: sea-side and scenery, scope for adventure, and space for serendipity. And that most precious commodity, time, is more abundant when you holiday at home. Good weather is a bonus.

So take the family back to your joyful youth, but with all the benefits borne by the 21st century. If you take my advice, perhaps we'll meet this summer on some shore or hillside; beats a close encounter in the queue at passport control.

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WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE Britain has more coastline per person than most of Europe – perfect to enjoy sailing, snorkelling, swimming and surfing

Camping with altitude

Don't worry, I'm not urging a night in a bivouac on Ben Nevis. These days, glamping is so popular that if you don't have a futon and an icebucket in your pre-prepared tent, then you're slumming it.

So aim higher: for a treehouse. West Lexham Treehouse Holidays can be found deep in the north Norfolk countryside. Simply ascend the stairway to your heavenly treehouse to find preposterously comfortable beds and a wood-burning stove (careful) awaiting. The rustling leaves will help you drift into a sylvan slumber.

Bookings are heavy for the school summer holidays, but you can book a three-night stay in the Sunrise Tree House (right, sleeps six) from £755. westlexham.org

Three more starlight snoozes
Brecon Beacons (right) The National Trust recommends



camping on Blaenglyn Farm to make the most of the Dark Sky Reserve for Milky Way views. nationaltrust.holidays.org.uk
Bristol Brooks Guesthouse in the city centre features Retro Rocket caravans on the roof. brooksguesthouse.bristol.com
Almost anywhere in Scotland A 21st-century law now allows you to camp on most

Wild and wonderful beaches

The key variable for a great seaside holiday? The shoreline-per-citizen ratio. Thanks to our crinkled coastline, the average Brit enjoys far more shore than the average European (three times more than the Spanish, five times more than the French, not even counting islands).

If you narrow down the focus to Wales, the ratio increases; the country has a ridiculous number of excellent beaches.

My favourite is Rhossili Bay, the sweep of sand at the far end of the Gower Peninsula, with a wild, western aspect that makes it ideal at the end of a warm summer afternoon. The family run Worm's Head Hotel,

four minutes from the sand, has a range of family rooms. thewormshead.co.uk

Three other great beaches on islands

St Agnes, Scilly The southernmost in Britain, rewarding the effort of reaching it with plenty of room for idyllic idling. visitislesofscilly.com

Beaumaris, Anglesey For the silhouette of Snowdonia decorating the horizon as much as the gentle sea. visitbeaumaris.co.uk

Luskentyre, Harris Perfect in every respect (white sand, turquoise water, stunning backdrop) except, perhaps, the temperature. visitscotland.com



Back to the future transport adventure

Remember hovercraft? The great British invention was big in the 60s and 70s, but when fuel prices punctured the dream, that hovered away into the sunset. Except it actually didn't. The link between Southsea in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (right) kept going, and this summer, the UK's only hovercraft route gets a pair of new £5 million

low-flying crafts. Your ticket to Ryde lifts you above the waves and gets you to the island in eight minutes – where, some say, you can still set your watch back several decades. Hovertravel (hovertravel.co.uk) won't be drawn on an exact date when the new craft will enter service, but promises it will be during the school summer holidays.



Photography: Getty, Camera Press

Three other retro travel options: train, bus, boat

Ryde Step off the hovercraft onto the Isle of Wight railway line, which uses 1938 London Underground trains.

London The new Routemaster buses respect their 1959 predecessor in exterior looks and interior style; route 11 takes you past the most sights.
Various UK locations The 70-year-old Waverley (left), the world's last sea-going paddle steamer, is paddling her way around the country.

BOOK IT NOW

Quentin Letts



The theatre critic's guide to what's on



French Without Tears

Richmond upon Thames and touring

Playwright Terence Rattigan may have been the master of tragic understatement and quivering English repression – Noël Coward without the bitching. But Rattigan also thought of himself as a writer of comedies and his 1936 *French Without Tears* is just such an effort. Five English chaps trying to learn to parlar français at a family house in the west of France. The irascible old man teaching them has a pretty but shy daughter. The other young woman in the house is sassy Diana, an English girl who is decidedly more va-va-voom.

Florence Roberts (above) plays the vampish Diana in this agreeable revival. We are sometimes told that women's sexual liberation started with the Second World War – when women did men's jobs and could no longer be so easily ignored – but this play suggests the process may have been well under way by the mid-1930s. Diana eyes up men rather as a Jack Russell will eye up an unattended chipolata.

The story ambles along – there is a lot of French dialogue, not all of it much better pronounced than in *Allo Allo* – and the male characters may now seem a bit dated. Some will find the humour a little schoolboyish in places, but it is all done with a judicious degree of self-mockery in Paul Miller's production. In a youthful cast, look out for Beatriz Romilly as the French teacher's daughter and Tim Delap as a naval commander who has his head turned by Diana. The evening will interest Rattigan fans and will suit those who are seeking some blameless and droll entertainment. There is also a pleasing twist at the end.

Runs until 30 July at the likeable Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond before going on a three-month tour to Exeter, Harrogate, Barnstaple, Cheltenham, Doncaster, Oldham, Warwick, Poole and Huddersfield.

Scooby-Doo Live! Musical Mysteries

London Palladium

Warner Brothers have a new family musical show based on the Scooby-Doo cartoons and it will occupy the Palladium stage for just 12 shows from 18-21 August (three each day). The tight run means that while I'm able to alert you to it, I have not yet road-tested the product. You have been warned. For any enthusiasts, particularly those under eight, this could make for a jolly outing. Songs include the celebrated (if infuriating) *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You?*

Yerma

Young Vic, London

Billie Piper opens next week at the Young Vic in *Yerma*, a harrowing play by the Spanish playwright Federico Garcia Lorca. Yerma is a young woman unable to have a baby. All her being aches to become a mother but her body will not cooperate – and her husband is coldly indifferent. Miss Piper has an enviable urgency on the stage and this show, which runs until 24 September, is likely to attract a lot of attention, not just for shallow celebrity reasons. Directed by Simon Stone.