

Off the Beaten Track – Stepping along the Devonshire Ward, Eastbourne

Eastbourne is a town I am rediscovering. After a misspent youth on the pier I am ashamed to admit I gave the place a wide berth in my twenties. I am now based at the Towner Art Gallery coordinating the Coastal Culture Trail and it's given me the opportunity, not just to work in the area but really get to know it.

Eastbourne seafront is noticeably smarter than Hastings and a lot busier than Bexhill. It has immaculate gardens and a gleaming bandstand that boasts open air productions, however, for Off The Beaten Track I am taking you east of the pier.

To discover a bit more about Seaside, or the Devonshire Ward, as it is politically referred to, I arrange to meet tour guide Harry the Walker (also known as Harry the Talker) who runs the heritage trail East of the Pier and into the heart of Eastbourne's original artisan hub.

Unlike the grand squares and Georgian terraces, the Devonshire Ward is where the original fishing village once stood and is built on shingle. The Redoubt fortress marks the area's military importance and pubs like The Marine Pub (now famous for its Christmas decorations) reflect the naval history of Eastbourne.

Harry tells us stories of Roman forts and tunnels used by prostitutes in the 19th Century as well as ghosts and glamour of faded theatres. He brings the area to life in a way that wandering round on your own wouldn't. This area of Eastbourne makes you work hard for the gems you discover when you scratch beneath the surface. On the seafront the incredible Fuscicardis, established in 1967, with its brightly coloured tiles is a step back in time with homemade ice cream and a relaxed atmosphere.

A day could easily be spent in the independent record shop, Not Just Records, and the traditional model and kit shop, The Eastbourne Models & Collectors Centre, that sit on Seaside. I make my way even further up this traditional high street to check out The Shed.

A sliding tin door opens to reveal the Age Concern project and several "Shedders" beavering away on their latest projects. One gentleman shows me the boat he is making for his Great Grandson and another, dressed in a white work coat asks what I'll be making today. Set up last year, The Shed, offers members a carpentry workshop with access 7 days a week and tea on tap. They take commissions, share skills, give advice and tease each other endlessly. Oscar, who runs the project, welcomes anyone to pop in and learn about how they can get involved. The place is crammed with donated tools and offers a community base with real purpose.

Seaside is an area that despite its name feels cut off from the sea and the ornate promenade that I approach it from. It's a place of trade and tinkering that visitors would miss unless residences like Harry led you there. The artisans still choose to have their businesses there and this is like the engine room of Eastbourne.

Take a peek and you'll be surprised by what you find.

Shops

The Eastbourne Models & Collectors Centre, 37 Seaside, Eastbourne, BN22 7NB
<https://www.scalemates.com/shops/shop.php?id=627>

Not Just Records, 188 Seaside, Eastbourne, BN22 7QR
<http://notjustarecordshop.co.uk/>

Places of Interest

East of The Pier, Walking Tour
<http://eastofthepier.co.uk/>

The Shed, Fort Lane, Eastbourne, BN22 7SP
<http://www.ageconcerneastbourne.org.uk/the-eastbourne-shed/>

Redoubt Fortress, Royal Parade, Eastbourne, BN22 7AQ
<http://www.eastbournemuseums.co.uk/>

Leaf Hall, 51 Seaside, Eastbourne, BN22 7NB
<http://www.leafhall.co.uk/>

Food & Drink

Fusciardis , 30 Marine Parade, Eastbourne BN22 7AY
<http://www.fusciardiicecreams.co.uk/>

The Marine Pub, 61 Seaside, Eastbourne, East Sussex County BN22 7NE
<http://themarinepub.co.uk/>

The Town House, 12 Seaside Road, Eastbourne BN21 3PA,
http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Restaurant_Review-g190722-d4589311-Reviews-The_Town_House-Eastbourne_East_Sussex_England.html

General info

www.coastalculturetrail.wordpress.com
<http://www.townereastbourne.org.uk/>
<http://www.townereastbourne.org.uk/artist-opportunities/bluemonkeynet/>