

Good old Sussex by the sea

Strike up the band because there's plenty to celebrate on England's south coast says John Bateman



“Whether you want seaside vitality, a rural retreat, history, a night at the theatre or sporting action – it's all here”



Sussex has always struck me as a county with a smile on its face – and for very good reason. Blessed with glorious downland weald and an enviable sunshine record, dotted with historic towns and villages of charm, and bordered by a south-facing coastline of rich variety, it is one of the country's most attractive regions. Castles, churches and remarkable archaeological evidence remind us that some pushy people, Romans and Normans among them, were so keen to take up

residence that they sailed over, told the locals to shove off and moved in without so much as an invitation. Rank bad manners, I reckon, but if you add it all up, and as any brass band conductor will tell you, “Oh Sussex, Sussex by the sea/Good old Sussex by the sea” makes a truly splendid holiday destination. For me, the county brings back the sights, sounds and scents of summers past, and when bandstand musicians belt out the chirpy strains of the county's familiar ‘anthem’, I for one sing along joyfully as childhood reminiscences of >>

DON'T FORGET

You can book your pitch online at caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook, by calling our Advance Booking Service on 01342 327490 or, for AS sites, calling them direct.

Brighton's Palace Pier is a memorable south-coast landmark

FAMILY FUN

Beaches

Camber Sands is an award-winning beach handy for Battle and Broomfield Farm while West Wittering (from Northbrook Farm) and Littlehampton (Rowan Park) have sands backed by picnic-friendly grassland.



Science fun

The Observatory Science Centre at Herstmonceux gives kids and adults the chance to try a variety of indoor and outdoor experiments and see the giant telescopes.

T 01323 832731
W the-observatory.org

ANIMAL MAGIC



Zoo park

Drusillas Park, Alfriston, is home to smaller wild and domestic animals. There is also a large adventure area and indoor soft-play zone.

T 01323 874100
W drusillas.co.uk

THIS MONTH'S FEATURED SITES

BATTLE

See p200 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2011/12*

BROOMFIELD FARM

See p202 of the *Directory*

NORTHBROOK FARM

See p208 of the *Directory*

ROWAN PARK

See p204 of the *Directory*



Steam trains

Take a trip into the past and hop aboard the Bluebell Railway at Sheffield Park – roughly equidistant from Worthing and Battle.

T 01825720800
W bluebell-railway.com



FOOD + DRINK

Fine wines

Established in 1971 and situated near Hastings, Carr Taylor Vineyard is home to award-winning wines. Enjoy toasts, tastings and a shop.

T 01424 752501
W carr-taylor.co.uk



FOOD GALORE



Perfect pub

The Netherfield Arms wins the author's vote, offering excellent meals not far from the Battle site. Friendly hosts.

T 01424 892650
W netherfieldarms.co.uk



City choice

Preston Street in Brighton is described as 'a world of food in one street'. Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Italian, Indian – there's something to suit all tastes.

T 01273 290337
W visitbrighton.com



Seaside flavour

The Lobster Pot in Felpham, Bognor, serves great seafood as well as other options right on the seafront.

T 01243 862751
W lobsterpotfelpham.com



Broomfield Farm

“ Battle is set into the landscaped greenery of a former country house garden ”

coach day-trips to Brighton, Bognor Regis, Hastings, Littlehampton and the rest come flooding back.

Club sites dotted around the coastal plain, chalkland downs and leafy weald offer a choice of quality bases that makes it easy to plan a modest-mileage tour taking in many of Sussex's tourist attractions.

So, pen at the ready? Make a note of these four friendly, well-run sites and you're well on the way to a memorable holiday, whether you want seaside vitality,

a rural retreat, a dip into the county's rich past, a night at the theatre or sporting action – it's all here.

Battle Caravan Club Site (formerly Normanhurst Court) is a star turn. Set into the landscaped greenery of a former country house garden, terraced and studded with specimen trees and colourful shrubs, it sits three miles from historic Battle's shops and restaurants, the famed abbey and battlefield. It's also close to coastal goodies and, unsurprisingly, has long been a family favourite.

The site's name is not the only thing to have undergone change. Shower and toilet blocks have been refurbished and there are now extra showers, new baby-toddler and laundry amenities and 'indoor' vegetable preparation facilities.

Out on the 18-acre site, there are now more hardstandings and pitches with awning space. Improved roads and a tree management programme mean that the site's 144 pitches are accessed more easily or tuck themselves away even more neatly around this former 18th-century estate.

The town of Battle is rich in history



Northbrook Farm

While Battle offers all mod cons, Broomfield Farm – 19 miles away and also in East Sussex – has a different ace up its sleeve. This is the essence of rural life – you won't find a shower/toilet block but you will enjoy a tranquil, happy, welcoming site.

Pitched around a central grassy expanse, with recreation and protected wild-flower areas, or in a secluded woodland glade, this is the perfect place to unwind.

Offering some 80 pitches (50 grass) spread over 11 acres, this member-only location offers genuine escapism, blending seamlessly into unspoiled countryside patterned by winding lanes.

You can cycle, walk the Vanguard Way off site, join the South Downs Way or stroll to a village pub oozing character. Look out for the resident white squirrel, listen to the birds or just watch the grass grow but, if the tour is to continue, West Sussex is calling.

The drive towards Worthing was the longest of my tour – 50 miles – but Northbrook Farm, a couple of miles from the coastal resort and even closer to Goring beach, is another site with family appeal (although there is no toilet block).

Spacious and grassy, it spreads out over 12½ acres given character and charm by a central belt of woodland. There is an activity field for ball games, well away from the caravans. More than half of >>

DID YOU KNOW?
With over 250,000 residents, Brighton and Hove is easily the most highly populated area in Sussex



Coffee or a cream tea treat outside Battle Abbey Gatehouse

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

KEEP ACTIVE

Cycling

From Broomfield Farm: just to the east is the Cuckoo Trail, a 10-mile, traffic-free stretch of cycle path between Heathfield and Hailsham.

From Northbrook Farm: National Cycle Network Route 2 runs close to the site. Pick up the route at Goring-by-Sea and enjoy a mostly traffic-free cycle ride to Hove.

W sustrans.org.uk



Walking

The South Downs Way stretches for 99 miles between Eastbourne and Winchester in Hampshire. Easily accessible from all four sites, the undulating route is enjoyed by walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

W nationaltrail.co.uk



Fishing

Wylands International Angling Centre in Battle has 10 fishing lakes for all standards of angler. Offering specialist carp fishing, a lake dedicated to juniors and an easy-access facility, there is something here for everyone.

T 01424 893394
W wylands.co.uk



Birdwatching

Arundel Wetland Centre is home to a variety of wildlife including rare water birds. Take a boat safari or stroll the paths then enjoy a cuppa in the Water's Edge café.

T 01903 883355
W www.org.uk/arundel

CULTURE

Historical site

Battle Abbey, located on the site of the 1066 Battle of Hastings, houses an exhibition telling the story of the conflict. Visitors can explore the ruins and stand on the spot where the Saxon King Harold is said to have died.

T 01424 773792
W english-heritage.org.uk



Cathedral

Chichester Cathedral is a beautiful building boasting 900 years of history. There are free guided tours as well as self-guiding leaflets and trails for children. Concerts, talks and exhibitions are held throughout the year – see website for details.

T 01243 782595
W chichestercathedral.org.uk



Museum

Brighton Toy and Model Museum is built beneath early Victorian arches supporting Brighton Station's forecourt. It is home to over 10,000 toys and models, including early examples from Dinky, Hornby and Meccano.

T 01273 749494
W brightontoymuseum.co.uk



Theatre

There are theatres at all main coastal resorts but the **Theatre Royal**, Brighton is one of the star venues. Booked in for early 2012 are the likes of comedians Chris Addison and Russell Kane, as well as the Moscow City Ballet's production of *Swan Lake*.

T 08448 606650 (box office) W visitbrighton.com



the 70 pitches are hardstandings and many sit around the leafy fringes, looking inwards across open grassland.

There is a wooded dog walk but if, like me, you have dogs needing more exercise, I recommend a 10-minute walk to Highdown Hill where families can picnic, canines can run free across meadows and through woodland, and everyone can admire views over coastline and country.

Highdown Gardens (no dogs) are another attraction but, for a change, the bus service close to the site whisks you into Worthing – much loved by bowlers (it is home to the English Bowls Association) and all who enjoy traditional seaside resorts.

Next door to Northbrook Farm, the West Worthing Tennis and Squash Club is welcoming and, if you prefer less strenuous sport, will also help you master the subtleties of croquet.

There is a good mix of eating-out opportunities and day-trip options are almost limitless. Arundel, for example, home to a spectacular castle and cathedral, timbered architecture, riverside attractions and shops that are full of local character, is pretty close to both Northbrook Farm and Rowan Park, site number four on my Sussex meander after a 15-mile drive.

This welcoming eight-acre site has full facilities, bags of family appeal and offers the chance to splash in the briny at Bognor Regis, another of the county's traditional coastal resorts just two miles away.



Rowan Park

Rowan Park, where 32 of the 96 pitches are hardstanding, is aptly named, boasting superbly-maintained parkland sweeps of lawn, floral colour and copses of trees that create intimately-screened bays.

The site is close to the A29 and, although it has an on-site play area, even more appealing is immediate access to The Brooks, acres of attractive countryside where youngsters, walkers and dogs can enjoy open fields criss-crossed with inviting tracks. Watch out for deep water.

Chichester Cathedral and theatre, Goodwood and Fishbourne Palace are all within easy reach, so, on the count of four, fall in when the band strikes up... "Sussex, Sussex by the sea..." ■



MEMBERS' VIEW

Richard Aldridge, from Tenby, Wales, has a seasonal pitch at Broomfield Farm.

"It's a long way from home but we have family in the area. The site is beautiful and restful and the wildlife can be stunning," he says.



Ann Comfort Smith, from Torksey, Lincolnshire, loves Northbrook Farm's location. "Not only do we have family in the area and plan to move back here, but it is also good to get a bus pass and travel around," she says. Husband **Colin** likes the fact that The Farmhouse pub is within walking distance. "It serves good food and, with a 10% discount for Club members, it is excellent value, too."

Jeanette Wilson, from Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria, has a seasonal pitch at Broomfield Farm. "It's a superb and happy site," says Jeanette. "It's peaceful but is also excellent and safe for children and good for dog walking. The wardens here are wonderful and the site has a warm, friendly atmosphere."

