



Talking up Torquay

Torquay is a lively place in a beautiful location. So why don't we shout about it more? **CHRISSY HARRIS** explains why it's time to take this English Riviera town more seriously

Not long after we moved to Torquay, I overheard two tourists chatting as they walked along the palm tree-lined seafront: "I tell you what, if you squint yer eyes a bit, you could be in Barcelona!" I smiled to myself. Torquay is obviously nothing like Barcelona.

Five years later, however, and I'm not so sure. We've definitely got all the ingredients here – sun, sea, beautiful sandy

beaches, pavement cafés for people-watching, palm trees, a microclimate and a holiday atmosphere. With squinted eyes this could be the Spanish coast.

So why has it had such a rough time over the years? Once the playground of the Victorian gentry, Torquay has been through its fair share of boom and bust. The growth of foreign travel, reliance on seasonal trade plus a lack of industry and investment

means, like many other coastal communities, the area has suffered from economic and social deprivation. In fact, the three towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham, which make up Torbay, are ranked the most deprived local authority in the South West.

The problems in this seaside resort town are real but now so is the desire for change. In the short time I've been here, I've seen some bright glimmers of hope that make me think Torquay could be about to shine again.

One such glimmer is the 25 Boutique B&B in Avenue Road, recently named best B&B in the world in the Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards for the second year running. They've also just won gold for B&B of the Year at the Visit England Awards for Excellence 2020. Owners Andy and Julian Banner-Price came to Torquay to set up their B&B six years ago and instantly fell for the town's charms.

"There's just so much to do around here," says Andy, before



Photo: The English Riviera BID Company

Corbyn Head beach is full of seaside charm:

reeling off a list of places just down the road: Torre Abbey, the seafront gardens, Abbey Sands, plus all the nearby cafés, bars and restaurants. “We had purely positive thoughts when we first got here.”

Andy realises that Torquay is not without its problems. “But there is far more positive than negative,” he says. “We live in a gorgeous area with so much going for it. We’ve all got to work together as a community to help move things along.”

There are great plans in place. Last year, Torquay was named as one of 101 towns in the UK invited to develop regeneration plans as part of the government’s multi-million pound Towns Fund. As part of the fund, Torquay could receive up to £25 million to help improve the town centre and the harbour area.

In the meantime, global firms have been investing. The Singapore-based Fragrance Group has bought four former hotels in Torbay, including the Palace and Corbyn’s Head in Torquay, with the intention of turning them into luxury hotel schemes.

In the past year, the embarrassingly decaying buildings in Torwood Street have been demolished to make way for a new Hampton by Hilton hotel, due to open in January. The area seems to have perked up in preparation. It looks and feels cleaner and smarter, with a couple of new arrivals, including Jun Jaow Thai restaurant.

There has also been a £2 million government boost to progress a development at the ‘Gateway’ into Torquay at Edginswell. The land on the junction of the South Devon Highway is set to be turned into office and industrial space. It’s hoped new homes and a train station will follow.

There’s still much work to be done, of course. Our beautiful Grade II-listed Victoria Pavilion still stands empty and neglected, weeds growing out of the roof while plans for its future are discussed. The town centre could do with a lot more going on; there are far too many shuttered shops. Lockdown has also taken its toll on some prominent local hotels, businesses and attractions,



Photos: The 25 Boutique B&B



ABOVE: Torquay is home to the ‘best B&B in the world’, the 25 Boutique.

LEFT: Award-winning B&B owners Andy (left) and Julian Banner-Price instantly fell for Torquay’s charms.



Picture: Getty Images/Stockphoto/TheBristolNomad

Torquay has so much to offer

including Living Coasts, our much-loved coastal zoo, which has been forced to close.

These are uncertain times for all of us. But whenever I walk past a bloke from the council quietly watering the stunning floral displays on the seafront, or eat my sandwiches in the car, looking out to sea at Meadfoot, or watch the ‘sandman’ creating another incredible low tide work of art at Abbey Sands, or take the dog for a walk in Cockington Country Park, I realise how lucky I am to live here. Forget what you think you know about Torquay and come and enjoy a place that might even be better than Barcelona.

A whole article about Torquay and not one mention of *Fawlty Towers*. I think I just about got away with it.... ♦

‘Forget what you think you know about Torquay and come and enjoy a place that might even be better than Barcelona’

MY PERFECT DAY IN TORQUAY

Breakfast at Visto Lounge overlooking Abbey Sands beach before climbing up Royal Terrace Gardens (Rock Walk) for stunning views over the bay.

Walk along the seafront, including the pier and Princess Gardens. Head to the marina to wesup coffee house and stand up paddleboard hire experts.

Take your spare change to try your luck and have some good old-fashioned seaside fun in Golden Palms amusement arcade in Cary Parade.

Walk up Torwood Street (after popping into the brilliantly traditional department store Hoopers) and visit Torquay Museum – full of fascinating exhibits about Torbay and its heritage, including our explorers and famous Torquay resident Agatha Christie.

Lunch at the Michelin-starred The Elephant or Meat 59 in Abbey Road for a burger.

In the afternoon, a walk along the coast path at the amusingly named Daddyhole Plain, followed by trip up to Babbacombe Downs and a ride on the famous cliff railway down to Oddicombe Beach. If on the other side of town, rock pooling at Corbyn Head beach and a stroll through Cockington thatched village and country park, plus maybe a cheeky pint at The Drum, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and said to be one of the country’s most distinctive pubs.

Dinner at Small World restaurant and tapas bar in Abbey Road or at the Brasserie at the Meadfoot Bay hotel in Meadfoot Sea Road.

Drinks outside at The Offshore bar (sometimes there’s live music), watching the twinkling harbour lights.