



Newquay

AS AN OUTSIDER, NEWQUAY IS THE PLACE EVERYONE LOVES TO HATE. IN FAIRNESS THOUGH THERE IS A LOT OF HERITAGE IN THE UK'S FIRST 'SURF TOWN' AND OUTSIDE THE CARNAGE OF THE INFAMOUS TOWN CENTRE IT HAS A LOT TO OFFER. THERE ARE COOL PLACES TO STAY, HANG OUT, PARTY AND ACCESS TO MORE BEACHES WITHIN FIVE MINUTES THAN ANY OTHER PART OF THE COUNTRY. PHOTOS: MIKE SEARLE

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FISTRAL ACTUALLY GETS PRETTY GOOD!



Background: I wouldn't be the first journo to dub the place 'Surf City' but that's exactly what it is. When Aussie lifeguards Bob Head, Ian Tiley, John Campbell and Warren Mitchell rolled in to Newquay in April 1962 with glass-fibre performance surfboards and paddled out at Great Western, they unwittingly changed the face of the town forever. Shortly after, Bob Head started to make boards at Mawgan Porth and Bill Bailey shaped in a garage in Newquay. They soon decided to combine forces and the beginning of a massive industry really took shape when 'Bilbo' began producing and selling boards for £25 each in a second hand shed in Pargolla Road. The man who originally dubbed Newquay 'Surf City' was Roger Mansfield, in a surf magazine article that he wrote back in 1983. Roger is a long-time local of Newquay. He recalls the early era with fond memories. The hub of the scene, much like the broken-up stairs in the film Big Wednesday, was the slope which leads down to Great Western beach.



The next generation of surfers in Newquay's talent rich tapestry was led by Nigel Semmens and Fistral took over from the Bay beaches and became the spot of choice with the crew congregating around the public toilet blocks as the place to hang out. The toilet block was knocked down in the early noughties when the redevelopment of north Fistral occurred and the retail complex and restaurant was built. Many locals call it Castle Grey Skull! Today there is a big new lifeguard complex being built at Fistic so at last we appear to be catching up with our European cousins who've had amazing beach facilities for years.



Waves: With nine surfing beaches that each have a variety of decent waves at various stages of the tide, the Newquay locals are more fortunate than pretty much any other Brit surfers. Favourite with the local crew is North Fistral at low tide. Here you'll find the hollowest waves in the area. It's offshore on a south easterly wind. Be prepared to jockey for waves before or after work. It is fun though and is the most consistent beach in the south west. At the opposite end of the beach, south Fistral has a good left hand wedge that gets crowded when it's on. It holds up to eight feet but gets bumpy with size. The bonus is that you can jump off the rocks so no first paddle out. In Newquay town is the bay area, made up of four main beaches, Towan, Great Western, Tolcarne and Lusty Glaze.

Notoriously a closeout at low tide the bay is offshore on the predominant wind, south westerly. Particularly in winter, well groomed lines stack up in the bay and unload in to hollow but pretty much unrideable close outs. Tolcarne on high tide offers some fun wedges that even kick up an okay wave when it's onshore.

Swell info: It's a pretty uncomplicated chart that makes the north coast of Cornwall light up. Watch for a northerly tracking low pressure heading up the Atlantic and a high pressure over Cornwall. It's fairly rare that you can't find a rideable wave somewhere.

Best time: Autumn is the best time of the year. September and October stays relatively warm in the water and the summer crowds soon thin out.

Rubber: If you have a few weeks of decent weather in July or August you can get a way with a shortie. Through to December you can get away with a good quality 3/2mm full suit. January onwards and you need a 5/3 with a built in hood, then if you can afford a fourth suit whack a 4/3mm suit on by April. Then back in your 3/2mm at the end of May. No wonder there are 40 odd surf shops in town.

Where to stay: A town that was once rich in surf lodges and surfer friendly accom' has now seen most of the big hotels and lodges turned in to luxury flats. That said, there are still options and if you're coming down with a few mates. If you want something a bit more up market then check out the Blue Chip Vacations website (bluechipnewquay.co.uk) for holiday apartments designed with the surfer in mind like Rocklands overlooking Tolcarne Beach, with its plush interiors, storage for boards and wet rooms. Or try the contemporary Ocean and Zinc apartments near Fistral. Goofys (goofys.co.uk) is a boutique surf hostel offering accommodation 300 metres from Fistral and the town beaches with a variety of rooms with ensuite facilities. Reef Surf Lodge (reefsurflodge.info) is a state of the art surf lodge equipped with flatscreen TV's and CD players. It also has a cool bar with plasmas and Bose sound systems, and live music in the evening. Another cool apartment geared up for surfers is The Pad (thepadnewquay.co.uk), in Newquay town centre — a stone's throw from both the beaches and clubs.