

'AN IDYLIC SEASIDE ESCAPE WITH TOP NOTCH DINING'

Danielle Lett heads to the seaside for an overnight fine dining coastal experience in Holland-on-Sea

With temperatures hitting record highs this summer, who needs to head abroad when we're blessed with some pretty great resorts here in the UK?

Recently I made my way to the affectionately-dubbed 'Essex Sunshine Coast' to check out the seaside town of Holland-on-Sea for an overnight stay.

Just a stone's throw away from the popular resort of Clacton-on-Sea (Clacton's famous pier is only a half an hour walk away), Holland-on-Sea is a quiet, idyllic escape. The beaches are less packed, which makes them perfect if you're looking to seek the sun with fewer crowds.

And it's where you will find The Kingscliff Hotel. Directly opposite the seafront, the 31-room property is loved by locals and tourists alike - and as soon as I arrived, I realised it's not hard to see why.

Upon entering, you're met with fresh, contemporary interiors. Think lots of rich blues and summery teals, with pops of gold, yellow, and green throughout. The hotel was actually refurbished in 2020 - and definitely has that new feel

to it still.

My mum and I headed to the front desk, where receptionist Amy checked us in and told us we were staying in one of the hotel's sea view executive rooms.

We made our way up the staircase and headed to our room - which really felt like a home away from home.

Spacious and airy, it had everything you could need. A comfy double bed layered with crisp, white linens; a flatscreen TV on the wall; plenty of space for your clothes; a desk with a coffee machine; and a large en-suite bathroom. Then, of course, that gorgeous sea view.

Once we'd unpacked, we headed back out to spend some time in the terrace garden which overlooks the sea. A sun trap (but with plenty of tables in the shade too), it's definitely a lovely place to catch some rays on a hot summer's day as you have a natter over some food and drinks.

We quickly met my aunt and uncle who live nearby for a quick pint outside before mum and I made our way into the dining pod.

But before I get onto that, it's worth mentioning that the hotel has a number of food options and

deals that cater to a variety of tastes and budgets - including its 'wine, fish and chips' for £12.95 per person (served daily between 12pm and 5pm), afternoon tea, and a range of breakfast, lunch and dinner dishes.

If you're looking to put a boozy spin on your afternoon tea however, the hotel does a specialist 'G & Tea', in which visitors can enjoy all of the traditional accompaniments that come with afternoon tea - as well as a refreshing gin and tonic from its premium gin club menu.

Anyway, back to the pod.

The hotel boasts a seafront see-through pod, in which visitors can enjoy a few hours being wined and dined in a private space, overlooking the sea. Open all-year round, I was especially keen to see what it was like in summer.

Prices start at £30 for seven or eight guests, going up to £40 for four to six, and £50 for two or three. It can also be hired for bottomless afternoon tea (£40), or bottomless brunch (£60).

"Well this is cute," I said as we both made our way in.

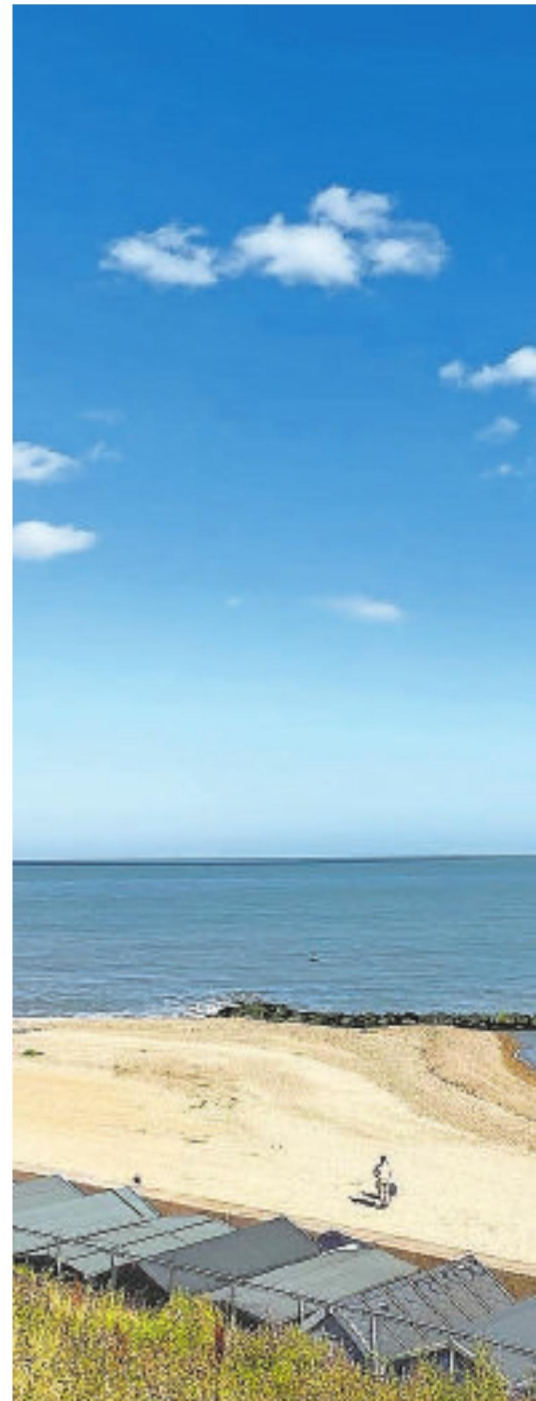
As I had a nosey around, I couldn't help but notice the table in the corner, which featured a Bluetooth speaker, and a basket full of blankets for when it's a nippy out. Perfect for getting cosy and making it your own space.

And if you're wondering how a giant plastic and wooden pod stays cool in the summer, two of the panels are actually windows to let fresh air in. There's also a fan and portable air conditioning unit inside.

Our host for the evening, Jack, made sure we well-looked after and had everything we needed before we started our three-course dining experience.

But before we even looked at the food, we knew we needed wine. Jack definitely knew his vinos and talked us through the options before we settled on the bottle of Fontana D'Italia Trebbiano (£18.50). A white wine felt right as it was a hot day, and mum and I both knew we'd be having fish-based dishes rather than meat. I mean, it would be rude not to sample freshly-caught fare when holidaying on the coast.

For starters, I went for the steamed green lip mussels (£8.25), while mum had chilli crab tacos (£8.25). My mussels were steamed



BELOW: The dining pod at The Kingscliff Hotel

in white wine paprika and garlic, lemon and dill gratin and chorizo butter - and they were absolutely heavenly. The flavours were fantastic and they were cooked to perfection.

Meanwhile, the chilli crab tacos were a twist on the usual tortilla-based snack, and were instead served on crispy fried wonton pastry. Fresh and light, they packed a punch and were a great way to start the evening.

Now, onto the mains. The beer battered cod and chips (£11.95) was calling my name - it is tradition to have fish and chips if you're on the coast after all. Mum went for the seafood linguine (£16.95), and when our plates arrived, we knew we'd both made great choices.

My fish and chips were possibly some of the best I've ever eaten. The beer battered cod was incredibly crispy, but not too



Cappuccino chocolate fondant pudding



greasy, and the hand cut chips were amazing. Served with a side of mushy peas and tartare sauce, it didn't put a foot (or should that be fin) wrong.

The pasta was comprised of Scottish mussels, tiger king prawns, smoked salmon, cod loin, and blue swimming crab in a light garlic cream and parsley butter sauce. The sauce was delightfully creamy, and the seafood serving was plentiful - they certainly didn't skimp on the good stuff.

By this point, we were stuffed. But when our host, Joe, came out with the dessert menu, we knew we'd have to sample a couple of the afters.

I went for the sticky toffee pudding (£5.95), while mum had the cappuccino chocolate fondant pudding (£6.95). Both desserts were the perfect way to round off an excellent dining experience - my dessert was served with

vanilla ice cream while mum's was topped with whipped cream, dark chocolate shavings and vanilla ice cream.

By our third and final course, we were stuffed. We polished off the rest of our wine, and headed up to the room to watch Love Island before falling asleep.

The sleep was incredibly restful, and of course waking up, opening the curtains and seeing the sea on a clear day just out the window really helps set you up for the day.

But before checking out, we had to sample breakfast. The hotel offers a continental buffet, featuring all of the usuals you'd get (think pastries, fruit, cereal), or there's a variety of cooked breakfast options, such as a full English, vegetarian breakfast, eggs Benedict, smoked salmon and scrambled eggs, porridge, and homemade pancakes.

I ordered the eggs Benedict

(£7.50), while mum had the full English (£9.95). Both were incredibly delicious. My eggs were poached to perfection (who doesn't love a runny yolk?), and the full English had everything you'd expect - sans the grease that often comes with a fry-up.

In fact, everything we ate during our stay tasted so healthy and fresh. You can tell the chef makes the most of locally-sourced fare and top quality ingredients, as it really came through in everything we sampled.

As we checked out and made our way back our homes, we both agreed The Kingscliff is a great place for a short stay. If we ever need a quick coastal getaway, we'll be sure to head back to Holland-on-Sea.

If you're looking to explore further afield, as I said, Clacton-on-Sea is just a short stroll or drive away. Clacton has its own

beach with bars and restaurants along the seafront, as well as the aforementioned pier. Clacton is also home to the West Cliff Theatre, and the beloved Clacton Airshow will be taking place this year on August 25 and 26.

All in all, the customer service at The Kingscliff Hotel was excellent, the food was top notch, and the hotel itself felt really fresh and contemporary throughout.

I may have to pop back in the winter to see what the pod is like then - I can only imagine it feels like you're inside a snowglobe when the fairy lights are on.

Book your stay
Visit suryahotels.co.uk/kingscliffhotel

A double room, sleeping two, midweek this summer starts at £160.65, or £180.65 including breakfast.

MAIN: Holland-on-Sea

ABOVE: The Kingscliff Hotel in Holland-on-Sea

Pictures: DANIELLE LETT