

COASTAL SPECIAL

Ultimate celebrity beach hut

The humble beach hut is hotter than ever: even movie stars love their rustic charm

Charlotte Vowden Published: 24 May 2015

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Celeb paradise: the Beach Hut in the Millook Valley costs from £1,120 to rent for a long weekend

When celebrities crave a spot of R&R, they usually head for the glitziest resort in an sunning themselves with a mojito in hand.

Yet the Beach Hut, a rustic open-plan holiday home perched on a grassy nook above Widemouth Bay, north Cornwall, is anything but prime paparazzi paradise — which is probably why the Hollywood elite flock here. Demi Moore was one of the first guests, during filming for the 2006 movie *Half Light*, and Kate Winslet extended a photoshoot for *Vanity Fair* that took place here with a mini-break.

“A holiday is about getting away from reality,” says retiree Irene Douglas, who runs the property as a self-catering holiday rental with her partner, Roger Barker. “Celebrities are treated like royalty wherever they go, so to stay in a pared-back beach hut, albeit with all the little luxuries, is a break from the norm.”

The couple saved what was once a weather-beaten and graffiti-covered tearoom — along with 52 acres of land and a mile and a half of beach — from being developed into a holiday park when they bought it for £55,000 in 1991. “Everyone thought we were mad. The property had sat derelict and battered by the elements for years,” Douglas says.

Despite a £40,000 restoration, the Beach Hut’s charm lies in the sea-worn chalky-toned paint on the front door and the sun-bleached timber veranda. “It was important that the building retained its integrity, so we took great care to make sure the materials used remained the same. We weren’t looking to make it feel shiny and new — though we did freshen up paintwork and replace windows.”

Inside, chunky, honey-coloured cedar floorboards (from a tree felled in Windsor Great Park in the great storm of 1987) complement the soft palette. In the evenings, the hut — which is in the Millook Valley and costs from £1,120 to rent for a long weekend — takes on a romantic golden glow as sunset streams through the windows.



Shacking up: Demi Moore and Kate Winslet, inset, have both stayed at the Beach Hut, in Cornwall (Alberto E Rodriguez/Karwai Tang/Getty)

Whether it’s a humble shack or slick chalet, letting agents and estate agents report that demand for beach huts is as fierce as ever. Even Butlins has sexed up the old-fashioned wooden chalets at its Minehead branch with pastel-coloured mini-homes that offer flat-screen televisions and balconies.

“Today’s huts are no longer a basic shed where holidaymakers can get changed in privacy, boil a kettle and shelter from the insubordinate English weather,” says David Brooke-Smith, associate director of Stacks Property Search. “Externally they will have been decorated to look ‘just faded enough’ in a cheap-chic status kind of a way, but inside there will be broadband and a host of other technological gadgetry.”

You can find the Widemouth Bay Beach Hut and other stylish options to rent for the weekend through Unique Home Stays (uniquehomestays.com), while the National Trust has 50 basic huts on Studland Beach, in Dorset, to rent on a daily, weekly or three-season basis (nationaltrust.org.uk; the waiting list for three-season rentals will open for one month in April 2016). North Somerset council is also releasing licences on 24 beach huts at Weston-super-Mare by auction (n-somerset.gov.uk).

If you want to buy your own, a traditional hut can cost as little as £10,000, but if you’re hunting for something with electricity and water, the sky is the limit. “Prices can make a couple of weeks in the Caribbean every year look like good value,” Brooke-Smith says. “In popular locations such as Charmouth, St Ives and Southwold, owners can sell them for £100,000 upwards.”

Make sure you know exactly what you’re buying, as freehold, leasehold and licence conditions vary. Insuring a typical beach hut will cost £100-£200 a year.

They can also be a good earner, fetching anything upwards of £160 a night in peak spots, depending on the standard of fit-out. You might even welcome an A-lister or two through the door.

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