

England's south coast



There is no shortage of things to do in England's southern coastal cities and towns, with the added benefit of quality language courses and accommodation generally available at a good price. Gillian Evans finds out more.

Spreading out from the county of Kent in the southeast across to Cornwall in the southwestern corner, England's south coast offers language travel students from around the world a rich mix of experiences. "In a nutshell," says Sue Edwards, Principal of Aspect College in Bournemouth, Dorset, "the UK's south coast attracts international students year after year with its stunning scenery, pleasant climate and picturesque towns with access to beaches and watersports."

Like most other schools in this region of England, Alexandra Fletcher at Churchill House School of English Language in Ramsgate, Kent, is keen to emphasise the benefits of studying close to the UK's capital city and yet not directly in it. "Ramsgate is only one-hour-and-45-minutes from London, so it is easy for us to profit from all that our capital city has to offer, then 'escape'; back to fresher air, beach walks and a substantially lower cost of living!"

Studying outside of London does not mean that language travellers have to compromise on the quality and range of language schools or the abundance of activities available. For example, Plymouth in Devon is home to the Theatre Royal, which according to Tessa Finlayson of the Mayflower College, which is located on Plymouth's seafront, often previews some of the big plays and musicals before they go on to the West End in London. In addition, she says, "Plymouth Pavilions has an ice skating rink and a fun pool – complete with pirate ship – and is a major venue in the southwest for bands, concerts and shows."

Plymouth is also rich in history. "The Pilgrim Fathers left from Plymouth on their famous voyage to colonise the New World and the great explorers Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh and Captain James Cook are all connected to Plymouth," explains Finlayson. "Students can get a real feel for the age and history of Plymouth by visiting The Barbican (a maze of narrow streets preserved in their original Medieval layout), just a 10-minute walk from the Mayflower College."

Being a university city, Plymouth has plenty of nightclubs, restaurants, bars and pubs but it is also close to stunning countryside and a breathtaking coastline. "Dartmoor National Park is located right on the edge of Plymouth," says Finlayson, "and students can participate in all the activities of the great outdoors – hiking, climbing, riding, etc." There are also several diving schools and watersports centres in the city.

Students studying at Churchill House in Ramsgate can also make the most of the proximity of the coast. "Our social club takes full advantage of the seaside location for evening activities in summer: beach BBQs, watersports, sandcastle sculpture and so on – all ages love it!" says Fletcher.

With only 46,000 people, Ramsgate is, according to Fletcher, "a good place to go for a nervous 'first timer'; to the UK, as it is an easy place in which to orientate yourself – very difficult to get lost!" Ramsgate itself has a long maritime history, attractive Regency architecture, famous "big skies" that ex-resident Van Gogh like to paint, and a relaxed atmosphere in the summer. "Sandy beaches, pavement cafés and good restaurants give Ramsgate a continental feel in summer," says Fletcher. In addition, being a resort town means that there are part-time jobs available to students in the summer, including hotel, restaurant and bar work, as well as fruit and salad picking in the surrounding villages.

Similarly, in Brighton & Hove, there are plenty of work opportunities for international students thanks to the city's large leisure industry. Sarah Williamson at EF Brighton says, "We help students to use the language they've learnt by

encouraging them to get part-time jobs here whilst they study. Some students even volunteer to work so that they can practise their speaking and listening skills."

Brighton & Hove itself has a large student population, which means certain advantages for language travellers. "The availability and range of student accommodation is good, the city has a diverse cultural mix and there are regular events, gigs and shows," reports Seamus Murphy at Regency College.

Williamson dubs Brighton "the perfect city by the sea". She goes on to say, "[Brighton] offers a fantastic mix of sophisticated chic, eccentricity, a lively beachfront, fantastic art scene, extensive range of attractions and yearly events."

Another lively university town is Bournemouth in Dorset. "Bournemouth has an excellent student nightlife with a huge variety of bars, clubs, great shopping, international restaurants and the beach, all within a 20-minute radius," states Edwards at Aspect College Bournemouth. "Throughout the summer there are spectacular firework displays from Bournemouth pier and boat parties timed to enjoy them." Bournemouth is also easy to get to know and feel at home in, according to Edwards. "The town provides a welcoming and friendly environment for international students, yet it is still large enough to offer a great variety of entertainment and leisure activities," she explains.

At Capital School of English, also in the town, Spencer Fordham, Principal of the school, says they work hard to ensure their students put their language skills into practice. "We promote local community courses and programmes to give students the opportunity to find often the most difficult part of the language learning jigsaw, that is, native, friendly communicators," he says. "Many of our students comment on how they are impressed with how the school makes them feel part of the family-oriented school environment and their local community."

Eastwards from Bournemouth, Portsmouth in Hampshire is a less well known but lively town. A student population of around 20,000 means "there is something for everyone and all ages", says Mel Vaughan, Director of the International College of English in Portsmouth. The school itself organises activities from canoeing, archery and rock climbing to local history tours and treasure hunts. Portsmouth is also an historic city with an interesting maritime history. Allan Gray, Marketing Director of Language Specialists International in Portsmouth, states, "[Portsmouth] has the most important naval and maritime heritage site in the world in the Heritage Dockyard, with its authentic historic ships and the 18th-century original harbour area."

Gray adds that some people expect Portsmouth – the birthplace of Charles Dickens – to be "a slightly grubby industrial harbour city and are very surprised and pleased at how attractive and lively the city is, and also how convenient; it's built on an island and hence very compact".

A more tranquil experience of south coast life is offered by Eastbourne, close to Brighton & Hove. "Eastbourne is quiet, safe, clean and elegant," relates Graham White of Eastbourne School of English. "People are friendly, the town is not too big so you can walk everywhere, including to and from host families; there are lots of tourist attractions and facilities for visitors, and good nightclubs and pubs in the city centre and on the pier."

There are also some notable annual events in Eastbourne such as the Airbourne Airshow in August, which involves four days of free air displays at the seafront; and the Women's Tennis Championship in June, where students can see some of the best women players in the world before they go on to Wimbledon.

There is also plenty to see in the surrounding area, and White says that this is often a surprise to students. "Students know about the seaside location but are not aware of the spectacular scenery of the Seven Sisters and South Downs nearby. They are amazed that such unspoiled countryside is so close to large towns like Brighton and not far from London."

For the most spectacular scenery, the county of Cornwall in the southwest of England is renowned, and popular with visitors for its coastal walks, beaches and global plantlife attraction, the Eden Project. Kenneth Moss of English in Cornwall in Penzance attests that many students choose his school "because they know it's a very beautiful area". While the school organises some free-time activities, Moss says that "often we find students like to enjoy walking the coast path, having long walks and looking at the fantastic countryside and the ancient monuments that we have here".

Agent viewpoint



"We send students to Portsmouth, Bournemouth, Southampton and, to a lesser degree, Brighton. Price is a major consideration especially when you compare these cities with other places like Cambridge [and] London. Course fees are generally lower in the south coast but also accommodation costs are considerably less as well, which makes a big difference for students who want to stay for long periods. The work opportunities in hospitality also draw students to the south. A lot of students are surprised by the spectacular inland countryside and landscapes, the old cities as well as the welcoming, courteous, open and kind nature of the people there."

David Leonida, Estudiafuera, Spain



"We send students to Margate, Broadstairs, Folkestone, Eastbourne, Brighton, Worthing and Bournemouth. Among them, Brighton and Bournemouth are always the most popular as vibrant cosmopolitan cities offering a wide range of entertainment and nightspots. Brighton is especially popular for long-stay students planning frequent trips on weekends as it has easy access to London. There are many quality language schools located in the south coast, with a great advantage over London in low accommodation costs."

Tsuyoshi Yamaguchi, British Study Abroad Services, Japan



"Bournemouth is very attractive for junior and adolescent students. Portsmouth offers a unique university student environment and also great facilities for executive students. Something interesting, in particular for our French students, is the fact that you can just cross the Channel by ferry from various French cities saving transportation costs and allowing you to bring your own vehicle. Low-cost airlines flying into Southampton and Bournemouth have further improved access to the south coast."

Patrick Mueller, StudyGlobal, International



"Bournemouth and Brighton are most popular – Brighton especially because of the size of the town and proximity to Gatwick. In Bournemouth we work with a very reasonably priced school, which also helps to make it a popular destination. All locations are popular with the Swiss because of the sea (coming from a landlocked country). Portsmouth is interesting because there are fewer Swiss students studying there."

Nick Gibbons, Castle's English Institute, Switzerland



"Torbay Language Centre and International House Torquay are the main centres we send junior students to. These centres give very good group prices and include interesting excursions and activities. Portsmouth has the best school on the south coast, very high quality of teaching, friendly atmosphere, excellent facilities, very good families."

Anatoly Neizhko, Lant, Russia