

# BEYOND THE SURF

Newquay in Cornwall is a surfer's paradise, but it's far more than that. Giselle Whiteaker inhales some curative sea air.



The Headland Hotel, Newquay

Newquay, situated in a prime location on Cornwall's Atlantic coast, lures surfers throughout most of the year. In summer, a flotilla of boards can be seen bobbing in the swell, their riders waiting for the perfect wave. During our winter visit, only a few hardy souls are braving the cooler temperatures and just watching them makes me shiver. My friend Lizzie and I are sitting in The Terrace, the lovely casual dining space at The Headland Hotel. We have extended views of Fistral Beach and we are mesmerised by the white caps washing onto the shore. It's spectacular scenery but on a somewhat chilly day, there's little that could tempt me into the water.

The Headland Hotel occupies a dramatic position overlooking the beach, a highly coveted spot which caused no small amount of controversy during the building's construction. When work commenced, strong opposition came from local fishermen, who

claimed the hotel was being built on common land they had used to dry their nets for generations. Local workmen were intimidated and The Newquay Riots saw a group pull down the foundation walls, burn the scaffolding and throw the foreman's hut into the sea. Undeterred by this spate of trial and tribulation, The Headland Hotel opened its doors in June 1900. Finished to the highest standards, it was built with the sole purpose of creating the finest hotel in South West England.

Today, the hotel maintains its remarkable ambience. The striking red brick facade exudes Victorian grandeur, no doubt a significant part of the reason it was selected as the set for the 1987 Roald Dahl movie *The Witches*, starring Angelica Houston and Rowan Atkinson – who flooded the hotel by overflowing his bath during filming.



The Relaxation Room, The Headland Hotel



Surrounded by the raw beauty of the Cornish coast on three sides, the views from our suite are breathtaking, but if truth be told, we came to relax. The Headland's spa – recognised as Cornwall's only 'five bubble' rated spa – is our primary destination.

After a lap or two of the pool, we make our way into the Cornish salt room and it's here that we truly unwind. Tiny pin-pricks of light in the ceiling make it feel like we are star-gazing as we slowly lapse into a comfortable silence, our gazes drawn to the salt blocks as they morph from kryptonite green to tiffany blue. The steam wraps us in a warm, moist hug, gently easing the tension from our bodies.

Revitalised, we head into the darkness to find a meal. We walk aimlessly for some time before we spy a promising grouping of lights down by the water and make our way to them. Jutting out over the sand, The Boat House restaurant is an ideal spot for a glass of wine and a fresh seafood feast. We dine and chat the evening away before picking our way across the dark beach to the path back to The Headland and our soft, inviting pillows.

The sun is filtering through the clouds when we wake up the next morning, inviting us outside. It's far from bikini weather, but still we observe a few intrepid surfers jogging into the water from our breakfast spot by the windows. Inspired, we take a stroll along the cliffs to the viewpoint, the breakers below forming the backdrop of a romantic, windswept ocean panorama.

Around five miles from The Headland is the Bowgie Inn pub, perched on the edge of the South West Coast Path. We wander aimlessly along the trail, spotting birds and admiring the coastal

views. The sun warms our backs despite the chill breeze and the fresh air is a welcome pleasure, reminding us just how far we are from the city. This is what our weekend is all about; good company, superb scenery and sheer respite.

The afternoon finds us once again in our plush robes, tiptoeing into The Headland's spa. Today we have both booked treatments – Lizzie has chosen a relaxation massage, while I've splurged on a rejuvenating facial. Therapist Sadie leads me into the treatment room and makes sure I am comfortable before she gently smooths away my worries and wrinkles, her soothing hands swirling the Elemis lotions onto my thirsty skin. I am toasty warm and drifting towards delirium as she slides her hands to my scalp, her fingers sure as she banishes the last few coherent thoughts from my mind.

Lizzie and I regroup in the relaxation room, a subterranean wood-panelled cave with fur-like blankets cast across the curved loungers. Fairly lights twinkle in place of spring buds on a tree that forms the focal point of the cosy space, where we sip tea in tranquil contemplation.

It is somewhat languidly that we make our way to the restaurant later in the evening, but the smoked salmon topped with a perfectly poached egg, guarded by diced ratatouille-style vegetables, gently nudges our taste buds into consciousness. The hearty venison stew is a flavour-packed dish that warms the heart, ideal for a wintry evening, and I top it off with a heaped serving of brownies with vanilla ice-cream, while Lizzie opts for the sweet crème caramel. It's a satisfying end to a restful weekend.

Piling into the car for the drive home, we are reluctant to leave. We take a last glance at today's duo of surfers, paddling out to wait for the waves. After a momentary pause, Lizzie gives a small sigh. "Please tell me we can do that again soon," she says and I wholeheartedly concur.



The Pool, The Headland Hotel

Check out the Headland's "Spring into Summer Spa Retreat", where guests can luxuriate in two nights' accommodation in a beautiful bedroom including a complimentary upgrade, full Cornish breakfast each morning, a sumptuous three course dinner served in The Restaurant on arrival night, two relaxing spa treatments per person per stay, unlimited use of The Leisure Area throughout and Elemis toiletries in your room on arrival. This package is priced from £99 per person per night, based on two sharing a Coastal double or twin room for two nights. For more information about The Headland Hotel see [www.headlandhotel.co.uk](http://www.headlandhotel.co.uk)



The Restaurant, The Headland Hotel



The Spa, The Headland Hotel