

Gallivanting in Camber

Once a 1970s motel, The Gallivant in Camber has transformed into a chic, Californian-style beach hang-out. The ambience may be laid back, but the little touches turn it lux. Giselle Whiteaker heads to the coast.





Picking my way between clusters of people, I plonk down in the first gap I find and scrabble around in the sand in search of some weighty rocks to peg down the corners of my beach sheet. There's a light breeze whispering in the air, but it's still scorching, so I walk down to the water, planning to paddle in the shallows. I haven't swum in Britain – the water is far too cold for my Antipodean sensibilities – but I figure letting the chilled water lap at my feet on this hot day will be bearable. Gentle waves roll in as I tentatively dip one toe in, then the rest of my foot. Within seconds, I'm pushing through the breakers.

The water temperature is perfect; refreshing, rather than numbing. I duck my head under and break back through the surface with a smile on my face.

Several hours later, dry with a light coating of sand, I make my way back to The Gallivant and take a seat on a comfortable couch on the sun-drenched terrace. Tea and cake are served from 4pm each day, included in an overnight stay, so I snag a home-baked brownie and sip on a cuppa, reading a book. It's so relaxing that I feel like I'm sitting in my own backyard.



I arrive at The Gallivant spectacularly unprepared for a day at the beach, despite being familiar with its seaside location across the road from the dunes of Camber Sands. "I have some sunscreen you can take with you," offers Freya, the friendly receptionist. "Would you like a sunhat too?" she asks, popping both into a Gallivant hessian beach bag for me, along with a beach sheet. Freya unloads me of my luggage – I'm too early to check in – and off I trot, ready for some down time.

Crossing the road, I clamber up the grass-fringed dune path and pause when the five-mile stretch of beach comes into view. Unlike most beaches along the Sussex coast, which are lined with pebbles and shingle, Camber Sands is covered in fine, golden sand. The tide is in, too, and on this sunny Monday, there are a surprising number of sunseekers staked out along the waterline.

I rip my sandals off and dig my toes into the warm sand, kicking up small clouds as I make my way onto the beach. Growing up in Australia, I spent a large swathe of my youth doing just this. Sandy beaches are my happy place.



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Freya finds me curled up in the corner and guides me to my room. What a room it is. I'm in a luxury garden room, which features a freestanding bathtub that is open to the room, or can be closed off for privacy, and a monsoon shower. The chic coastal theme is beautifully executed, with wood panelling and floorboards and a colour palette of white, blue and sand. Beyond the enormous bed, double doors open onto a semi-private deck with a table and chairs that leads directly to the beautiful coastal garden.



I have just enough time for a quick shower to rid myself of salt and sand before my spa appointment. The therapist meets me in reception and leads me through the garden to the Beach Hut, a mini spa, where she slathers me with WiDEYE natural products to prevent my tan turning to leather. She teases the residual tension from my body with a delicious Karma De-Stress Massage, inspired by traditional Swedish methods, until I am putty in her hands.



In the dining room later in the evening, the doors to the terrace stand open, allowing the sea air to swirl gently through. Seated at a driftwood table, I start with a light dish of hand-picked white crab that tastes like it has just been pulled from the sea, paired with fennel and lemon mayonnaise. This sets me up for the tender Romney salt marsh lamb with confit potatoes and broccoli. To complete the repast, I opt for a slice of decadent salted caramel tart, the deep, treacly flavour lightened by Northiam yoghurt sorbet and a sprinkle of candied lemon. The Gallivant has won awards for both its food, and its sustainable local sourcing. I can taste the reasons why.



Sinking onto my comfortable bed post-meal, I know I'm going to sleep well. The recuperative sea air, time at the beach, the massage, and a fabulous meal have left me feeling like I've been on a week-long holiday. Tomorrow, I may pop over to the medieval town of Rye, around 4 miles away. My thoughts are interrupted by a yawn. Or, I may just stay right here.



Salt marsh lamb, summer vegetables



Lemon tart, meringue, Brookland raspberries



Vanilla panna cotta, local strawberries