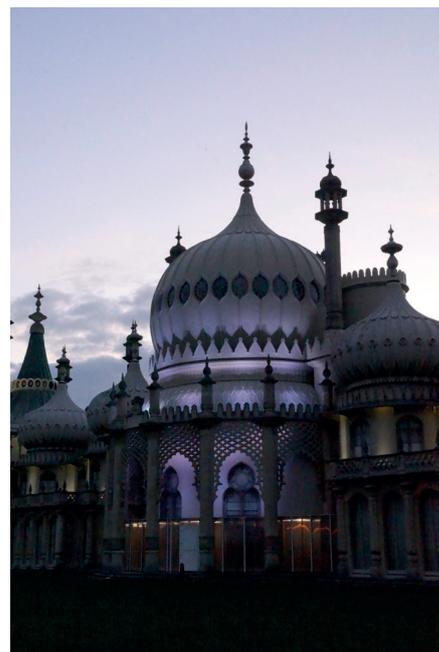


SKELETONS, SUNSETS AND SCULPTURES IN BRIGHTON



Top: The Royal Pavilion.
Above: Brighton Fishing Museum.

BRIGHTON HAS A REPUTATION AS A LOVABLY ECCENTRIC CITY, WORTHY OF EXPLORATION. GISELLE WHITEAKER TAKES TO THIS SEASIDE ENCLAVE TO SEE WHAT THE FUSS IS ABOUT.

The elliptical carriage glides up the 138-metre pole of the world's tallest moving observation tower, the British Airways i360, as I watch from Regency Square near the beach in Brighton. Tiny faces are pressed up to the windows of the futuristic glass viewing pod, peering at the 360-degree views across Brighton, the South Downs and, given the sunny, clear afternoon, possibly all the way to Beachy Head and the Isle of Wight. This is my introduction to Brighton, but I want to see the city at ground level.

I've already meandered through part of the town on my way to check in to Artist Residence, taking note all of the boutique stores I want to go back to, but the sights are calling me more than retail therapy and I'm determined not to miss the sunset from a vantage point on the beach.

Reaching the waterfront, there's a light tang of salt in the air as I descend past the West Pier Tea Room and crunch over the pebble beach towards the perfect sunset shot. The skeleton of West Pier makes a melancholy statement, its black outline backed by hues of warm blue and orange as the sun edges towards the water. Small groups of people sit on a ridge of pebbles for the spectacle, and two young men dip their fishing poles into the water, hoping for a bite.

Strolling along the promenade in the fading light, I pass by café and bars, music of all genres spilling from open doorways. Outside the Brighton Fishing Museum I find an old winch on the beach, rusting into obsolescence. The Museum is closed at this time of day, but fishing boats are assembled outside, as if preparing for an early morning expedition.

Further along, at the end of a walkway jutting out towards the water, I spy an artwork resembling a donut. The large globe cast in bronze is called "Afloat" and was generated by taking a world globe and pressing the south and north poles together to form a torus. Placed on its side, the lines

of longitude radiate from the central hole, linking the sea and sky. Peering at the green-tinged monolith, I notice the shrunken shapes of the major continents, adrift like dark shadows on its surface.

Across the water, the lights of Brighton Palace Pier twinkle in the dusky gloom. Completed in 1899, the pier has hosted the likes of Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel and still draws visitors from far and wide with its traditional seaside amusements. I'm content to view it from a distance, turning off before the pier, walking briskly towards the Royal Pavilion. Built as the seaside pleasure palace for King George IV, this spectacular edifice has a colourful history to match its soaring spires, minarets and domes, a far cry from a traditional British castle. The Pavilion was a major influence on Brighton's growth and prosperity during the 19th Century, and is inextricably linked with the vibrant city Brighton has become. It's certainly a sight to behold.

It's close to dark by the time I make my way back to Artist Residence. The 24-bedroom townhouse hotel has already impressed me with its relaxed vibe and eclectic décor. Inspired by the Brighton art scene, artists were invited to decorate each of the rooms in the hotel in return for board, and the result is a delightful mix of creative influence. My sea-view room features reclaimed-wood panelling, limited-edition prints, retro furnishing and a claw-footed bathtub in an open, tiled nook. The leather lounge chair screams comfort, looking like it belongs in a gentleman's library.

After freshening up, I pull up a stool at the in-house Cocktail Shack, a quirky cocktail bar decked out in tropical livery. The cocktails are named after celebrities – Jimmy Kummel, Banana del Wray and Tequila Kunis vying for attention. The tequila wins, paired with curacao, cinnamon, Tonka and tropical foam, resulting in a frothy, bright yellow concoction that warms my cheeks.

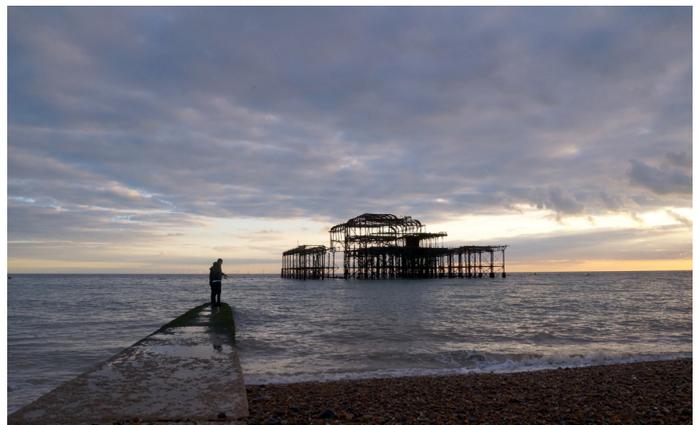


British Airways i360.

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The "Afloat" sculpture.



A fisherman in front of West Pier.



Artist Residence's rooms are all individually designed.



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Before the cocktail can go to my head, I move next door to The Set Café for a bite. Although tempted by the tasting menu at The Set Restaurant, I settle on simpler fare – cod croquettes with squid ink taramasalata and an ox cheek slider in a brioche bun with Tunworth cheese and gherkin. The two tapas-style servings sate my appetite and I move back to the Cocktail Shack for a liquid dessert in the form of Rhubarba Streisand before retiring.

Whether it's the sea air, the cosy atmosphere, or the comfortable king-sized bed, I sleep so soundly that I'm surprised when my alarm sounds. I have a lazy breakfast at The Set Café to fortify me for a shopping session in the Lanes, the city's historic quarter with its fabulous maze of twisting alleyways. I'm beginning to understand why so many people are drawn to this seaside gem. This sampler has given me a taste of Brighton, but now my palate has been whetted, I'll have to return for the main course. ■

INFO

The Artist Residence Hotel faces the iconic remnants of West Pier and is so much more than its 19th Century façade. Reclaimed industrial décor, artist-designed interiors, two modern British restaurants featuring seasonal, local produce and the best cocktails in town make this the perfect escape destination. www.artistresidencebrighton.co.uk



Tequila Kunis.



Cod croquettes.



The appealing cuisine at The Set Restaurant.



Aperitifs at the Cocktail Shack.