



## The Seafront at Weston

Weston-super-Mare without its seafront and attractions is hard to imagine. It frames the town and divides the natural and the man-made landscape. Today, its beaches and promenade are full of entertainment catering to both residents and tourists. How did the town become a resort?



*Beach Lawns and the esplanade, 1964 © Weston Mercury*

For residents of Bristol and Bath, Weston was the nearest coastal village and early tourists visited to 'take the sea air'. Tourists increased in numbers from the 1830s, especially after the arrival of the railway in 1841, though many arriving by boat stayed at the piers and did not venture into the town.

**With the creation of bank holidays in the 1870s the town's population could double in a day. Hotels and entertainments were needed as well as public spaces where visitors could take a walk.**

The Seafront Improvement Scheme of the 1880s created the sea walls and two miles of promenade that are still in use today. All work had to be carried out between the tides, building on rock, clay and quicksand. In the days before machinery, it was a great feat to complete this work by hand using local stone. Sand dunes were replaced with gardens and lawns, a road was built and the esplanade created.

In 1902 electricity arrived in the town enabling trams to run along the seafront, a familiar sight for many years until they could no longer compete with the buses. Hotels became larger to accommodate more people and in 1924 work began on the Winter Gardens and pavilion where dancing and concerts became very popular. Now a part of Weston College, its grand appearance is still a feature of the seafront.



*Marine Lake in the mid-1930s © Geof Sheppard*

During the 1920s, Marine Lake was built so holidaymakers could bathe in the sea without having to wait for the tide to come in. The first amusement arcades were also built at this time.

In 1937 the open air pool was built by the town council and was the biggest in Europe. Its main feature was the 10m diving platform and the pool had space for 1500 bathers. The pool was popular throughout the decades until a decline in numbers from the 1970s.

In the 1980s the diving platform was demolished and the pool recreated as the Tropicana Leisure Centre. In 2015 the artist Banksy created a pop up 'Bemusement Park' within the site attracting more than 150,000 people. The Tropicana is again a place of entertainment with music and theatre.

Since the end of the Second World War, the town council had looked to housing and employing its residents.

By the 1960s all resorts faced increasing numbers of people looking abroad for their holidays. Weston's seafront had solid foundations and views but needed to regenerate.

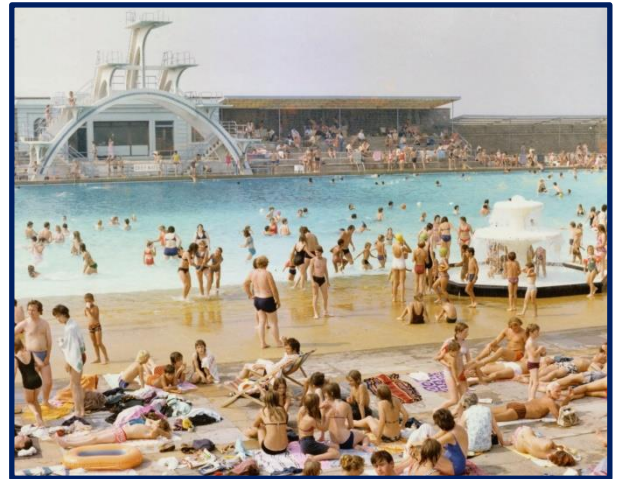
The council's aim in the 2000s is to "make people feel good about the places they live, work and relax". Tourism is essential but the seafront is just as important to the people who live near it.



*Dismaland at the Tropicana in 2015 ©M*

The seafront enhancements of 2000s saw the installation of 300 concrete blocks weighing up to 20 tonnes each.

Much of the defence is hidden below the sand, but around 100 tonnes of stone sculpted into seating has been included in its design for visitors to enjoy the view. A new splash wall was created to protect homes and businesses from flooding.



*Bathers at the Tropicana in the 1970s © Weston-super-Mare Library*

Today the formal entrance to the seafront is the impressive granite "Weston Arch". Weighing 113 tonnes it was shipped to Weston from China and became a new landmark for the town. The wide pavements along the seafront make a grand sweep alongside the sea.

From its Victorian beginnings and bank holiday heyday through war, flooding and economic depression the seafront has remained a busy attraction. Its oldest buildings and piers stand alongside new bistros and a big wheel. There have been many changes but a sense of heritage and town pride ensures the seafront will be a thriving place for years to come.



Weston-super-Mare  
Town Council