

For the ultimate surfing holiday, ride the waves at Newquay in Cornwall before chilling out on the town's perfect beaches and classy restaurants.

STEVE HENDRY

Boarding party



LIFE'S A BEACH The Cornish coastline



ACTION Surfing lessons at Newquay



BUSTLING Newquay's busy harbour

'Newquay's laidback atmosphere makes it easy to relax here'

Fistral Beach in Newquay is a mecca for surfers. Offering some of the most consistent waves in the UK and Europe, it plays host to festivals and championships throughout the year and attracts some of the best surfers to the Cornish coastline.

There is room for everyone however and today, its guests include me and my mate Paul.

Our glory days on a board are decades behind us but, so far, things are going well.

We've hooked our feet over the back of the board to make sure we have a firm grip in the swell, we're sitting up on our arms as the waves approach, then, in one fluid movement, we're dragging our feet under our bodies and going into a perfect crouched squat, arms out and looking awesome.

Easy. Then again, we are still on the beach. And any waves are being provided by Karl Fice-Thomson, instructor with the Newquay Activity Centre, who is occasionally grabbing our boards and shoogling them about with customary vigour and good humour.

It's all part of the preparation before getting into the sea where men soon become boys, toddlers in fact, unsteady on our legs and unable to stand up.

As soon as we are on the board, we are off it, rolled over and served up with a coating of sand and salt.

We're battered too, in Paul's case by his own surfboard when he gets on the wrong side of it heading out into the waves.

No harm is done, primarily because

we have foam boards – which are great for beginners – and the guidance of Karl, a veteran surfer and qualified instructor.

It is easy to hire a surfboard and wetsuit and hit the water in Newquay but the sea is a big, dangerous beast and you really need to know what you are doing.

Karl's help, advice and steady encouragement was invaluable as we gradually found our feet.

By the time we left the water, we were exhilarated but exhausted.

Fortunately for us, it's just a short walk back to where we were staying, the Carnmarth Hotel on Headland Road.

Comfortable and stylish, it enjoys stunning views and is close to the town centre. In other words, a perfect location.

The hotel is a good place to eat but Newquay is not short of restaurants and one of the pleasures after a day spent surfing is finding somewhere to satisfy your appetite.

Little Italy on Tower Road hit the spot. A lovely restaurant perfectly described by its name, it sits on a corner location and serves perhaps the best pizza I've tasted all year.

Freshly made food, friendly staff and, you have to get used to this in Newquay, a laidback atmosphere.

It makes it very easy to relax.

Or you could also just go for a lovely Cornish tea. And Martha's tearoom in Central Square is an ideal stop.

While surfing and surf culture is obviously a vital part of Newquay's economy so are the stag and hen parties of which there were plenty, all intent on enjoying themselves.

Not my cup of tea, personally, but it would be churlish not to look beyond that and, for families especially, there is

loads to do. Newquay Activity Centre also offers coastline coastering for groups and families while Karl's Fistral Kids Rangers offers a coastal adventure tailor-made for kids.

Newquay Harbour's sheltered cove is an ideal place to soak up the sun and enjoy sheltered waters.

Blue Reef Aquarium, situated on Towan Beach in the centre of Newquay, offers a close-up view of native and tropical marine species.

And Trenance Gardens and Leisure Park offers everything from the award-winning Newquay Zoo to a skate park, mini railway, cafe, Crazy Golf and landscaped gardens.

Of course, there are beaches galore no matter what you are looking for, be it building sand castles with the kids or walking your dog along the coastlines.

For all Newquay and Cornwall's chilled-out atmosphere, however, there is a core of solid substance beneath the sun and the sand.

The West Country was battered by storms this winter and the Dawlish train line, which links Cornwall and Devon to the rest of the UK, was swept away in early February.

Fistral Beach, facing west-north-west on to the Atlantic, also took a heavy hit and the foundations of the shop and bar complex, which sits on the beach, were still exposed in April.

The area has made a remarkable recovery however.

A monumental effort has ensured the spectacular Dawlish line, which skirts the coast, re-opened ahead of schedule and Fistral is its usual, thriving self.

Nothing stops Newquay – or Cornwall, for that matter – which is very much open for business.

Surf's up. What are you waiting for?

Travel info

■ We stayed at the Carnmarth Hotel, 22 Headland Road, Newquay, Cornwall TR7 1HN. Tel 01637 872519 or www.carnmarth.com ■ We surfed with Newquay Activity Centre, 22 Headland Road, Newquay, TR7 1HN. Tel 01637 879571 or www.newquayactivitycentre.co.uk ■ We ate at Little Italy, 1 Tower Road, Newquay, TR7 1LR. Tel 01637 852021 and Martha's, 2 Central Square, Newquay, TR7 1EX. Tel 01637 498166



THRILL A surfer rides a wave at Newquay