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## Art, body and sole in East Sussex

Liz Hoggard heads South for a new series of coastal walks linking three East Sussex galleries in Hastings, Bexhill and Eastbourne



Coast with the most: the Old Town in Hastings, connected to Bexhill and Eastbourne by a 20-mile coastal path (Picture: Clive Sawyer)

**LIZ HOGGARD**



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As A gym-phobic girl, I've long had a fantasy of setting up a website called The Greedy Walker, where you can work out how many calories you will burn off, book a splendid lunch nearby and throw in some art, too. Make it a long weekend, and there's a hot

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bath and a gin at the end of it — preferably in a charming local B&B.

The thing that holds me back is my fear of rucksacks (why go for a lovely long walk with a kitchen sink on your back?). So all credit to East Sussex's new Coastal Culture Trail, organised by three of our most interesting galleries by the sea — the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea, the Jerwood in Hastings and the Towner in Eastbourne — which will help you send on the luggage by taxi.

All you need to do is walk or cycle along the trail each day, then check into your hotel, and go out and explore the nightlife.

The galleries share a 20-mile stretch of coastline, less than 90 minutes from London. You can visit them in any order but I'd recommend getting the train down to Hastings on a Friday night and staying in one of the designer B&Bs in the Old Town, or its arty satellite St Leonard's.

With its vintage shops and cool bars, Hastings combines grit and glamour. It has its very own Banksy. You can take the funicular railway to the top of the East Hill, or have fish and chips on the beach.

My friend George and I booked a night at The Cloudsley, a five-star, five-bedroom eco-friendly guesthouse run by photographer Shahriar Mazandi. Rooms, named after Persian poets, have hand-made beds with Egyptian cotton linen, ecclesiastical furniture and Persian textiles.

True, our double was compact (greedy girls never relish a tiny shower) and the neatly typed house rules are a tad exacting. But there's an honesty bar, a library of books and DVDs, and a garden of rare bamboo (Shahriar is also a former Chelsea Flower Show gold medal winner).



**Landmark art: the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill**

Ten minutes down the hill from the B&B we had the most delicious supper at St Clements on St Leonard's Mercatoria. Chef-patron Nick Hales worked at L'Odeon and Le Caprice for 16 years before opening his own restaurant using local seasonal produce. We started with scallops (so fresh they tasted of the sea) grilled with lemongrass, chilli and coriander, followed by melt-in-the-mouth turbot with Thai spices; then creamy white chocolate mousse with Kentish strawberries. We swore we'd return for another day trip — lured by the lunch menu (a remarkable £18.50 for three courses). Next day, after a Persian-inspired breakfast of bespoke spicy aromatic omelettes and smoothies, we walked down to the seafront to visit the Jerwood gallery, a modernist cube clad in dark, pewter-glazed tiles. Inside it's a lovely serene space displaying a permanent collection by British artists, including Stanley Spencer and LS Lowry. But the current show by those bad boys, the Chapman Brothers, who grew up in Hastings, has shaken things up. After lunch at the gallery (we split a seafood plate on the sun terrace over the fishing beach), we waved off our suitcases in a taxi and the walking started in earnest. It's five miles from Hastings along the sandy coastal path to Bexhill, with its historic art deco De La Warr Pavilion. As you march past the pier, the crazy golf and the brightly painted beach huts, following the train track, it's like a mini

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art trail with sculptures, cacti and fields of sea lettuce. And the great thing is you can gossip as you exercise.

As Bexhill's Edwardian townscape loomed into view, we were already plotting a glass of wine at the De La Warr café with its views across the Channel, then a tour of the galleries (look out for the archive show of Magnum photographers). The De La Warr also stages live music and comedy (Elvis Costello was playing that week).

Our next stop was Eastbourne. We cheated and got the train from Bexhill (10 minutes) but you can hire bikes locally. Collapsing into baths at the five-star Grand Hotel right by the 1930s bandstand, with its wedding cake architecture, was heaven.

"It feels like you're being enveloped in a grandmotherly bosom," declared George, looking around our suite with its four-poster. To soothe aching muscles, we drank whisky on sofas in the hotel's Great Hall with its marble colonnades (though anyone under 75 might give the tea dance a miss). The next day, after a huge English breakfast, we walked to the sleek, award-winning Towner gallery for a terrific show about the textile artist Peggy Angus, whose home, Furlongs, on the Sussex Downs, became a creative hub for artists in the 1930s and 1940s. After yet another gallery lunch (Lebanese flatbreads with red pepper and houmous), we strolled along the seafront and sunbathed.

Then it was back on the train to Victoria, feeling self-righteous after all that exercise, sleep (and, ahem, five meals a day).

*The Grand, Eastbourne, has two-night breaks from £214.50pp per double, [grandeastbourne.com](http://grandeastbourne.com)*

*The Cloudesley has two-night breaks from £69pp per double, [thecloudesley.co.uk](http://thecloudesley.co.uk)*

*[dlwp.com](http://dlwp.com); [jerwoodgallery.org](http://jerwoodgallery.org);*

*[townereastbourne.org.uk](http://townereastbourne.org.uk); [stclementsrestaurant.co.uk](http://stclementsrestaurant.co.uk);*

*[coastalculturetrail.com](http://coastalculturetrail.com)*

*[visit1066country.com](http://visit1066country.com);*

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