



UK

Inside the most popular beach house on Airbnb

The Blue House on Camber Sands is among the website's most wish-listed homes — here's why



Airbnb's most bookmarked house: the Blue House

Hannah Summers | Wednesday July 26 2023, 12.01am, The Sunday Times

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When it comes to admiring glances, this place does well because when you take a walk at Camber Sands — one of the longest and most dramatic sweeps of sand in the South East — you're not just appreciating the sea on one side, but also the homes on the other. And one of them has particular curb appeal, with a triangle-shaped roof, steel-blue exterior, floor-to-ceiling windows and a sundeck that leads directly to the sand.

It's called the Blue House, and it's so popular that it is one of the top 70 most desired holiday rentals in the UK on Airbnb. It has appeared on the wish lists of 3,000 people in the past year alone, putting it on the same level as a tree house in Bali, a cave in Santorini and a cottage in Canada.

Wish-listing is described by Airbnb as “window shopping”, but it is essentially an online record of the Airbnbs where you would most like to stay (almost a third of bookings last year started out on a wish list, the company tells me). And it's immediately obvious why the Blue House has been such a hit — it isn't just by the beach, it's on the sand. Behind it are the only dunes in East Sussex; in front, a vast expanse of butter-coloured sand with gentle waves beyond.



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Getting there is a mini adventure. With no road or footpath, guests and their belongings are driven by the host, Georgina, in a 4x4 along the sand from the car park to the front door. “Guests who think they know better and try to drive there themselves do sometimes get stuck in the sand,” she tells me. “We’ve had to get the local farmer to pull a Porsche Cayenne out by tractor.” That can cost £100 or more, depending on the farmer’s mood.

The plot was previously occupied by a tired-looking bungalow and a wooden beach shack. These were bought in 2012 by Simon Pack, and permission to build was granted to build the Blue House because it was replacing existing dwellings (no new builds are allowed). The architect, Stuart Martin at WAM Design, devised a scheme that would minimise its visual and physical impact on the environment. That meant lots of recyclable low-carbon and sustainable materials. There are no gutters blemishing the exterior, while ridges and eaves highlight the Kebony timber that wraps the house.



The result is a £750-a-night, year-round beach hideaway that is cosy in the winter, with 200mm of natural sheep’s wool insulation and a wood-burning stove, and cool in the summer thanks to large glass sliding doors and cleverly planned airflow — perfect conditions for the owner and his young family, who lived there during its first year.

Inside it’s predictably plush. Ply panels line the staircase, which sounds a little stark, but when combined with linen cushions, Ammonite-coloured Farrow & Ball paint on the walls and boho Weaver Green rugs (made from recycled plastic, of course), it feels serene. We go for the beach-view super king, one of four bedrooms, and open the ceiling-height glass doors each morning. Drinking tea, we slip into a mild meditative state — a rare thing for new parents — as we listen to the waves.

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This accounts for most of our stay. My bum makes a dent in one of the Nkuku armchairs that face the beach. I thumb through a copy of *Adrift* by Tracey Williams, a fascinating book that follows the journey of Lego and other plastic items such as Smartie caps and Monopoly houses that are lost at sea for decades. Another book made available to guests encourages me to try “sound-mapping”, in which you find a spot to sit near the water and tune in to every noise — the gulls, marram grass blowing gently in the breeze and the thunk of a beach ball being patted about.



Cocker spaniel in the sandat Camber Sands

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I also read about the benefits of strolling barefoot in the sand, a result of the 20,000 sensory receptors in our feet, so I strap on the baby and slip off my sandals as my dog kicks half the beach into her fur coat while we walk. And the book is right: I feel more grounded and energised afterwards. When a seagull swoops in to steal a sausage off the barbecue that evening I let out a contented sigh instead of my usual shriek in such situations.

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Previous guests have also been impressed. The online reviews go big on clichés, with “amazing”, “stunning” and “wonderful” featuring heavily. The only problem? The waiting list for the Blue House is as long as its wish list.

Hannah Summers was a guest of the Blue House, which has three nights’ self-catering for eight from £2,150 (camberholidaycottages.co.uk or airbnb.com)

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