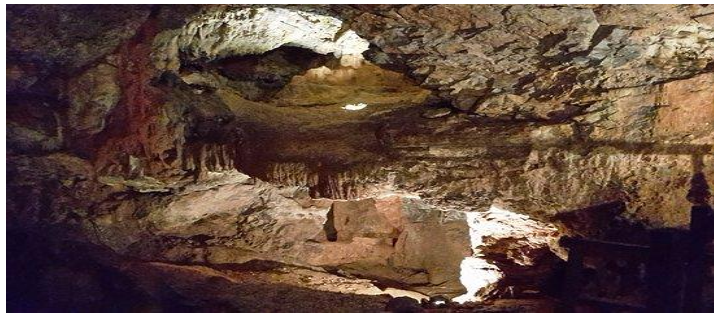


Torquay



Torquay is a seaside town in South Devon, 18 miles from the County Town of Exeter and 28 miles from Plymouth.



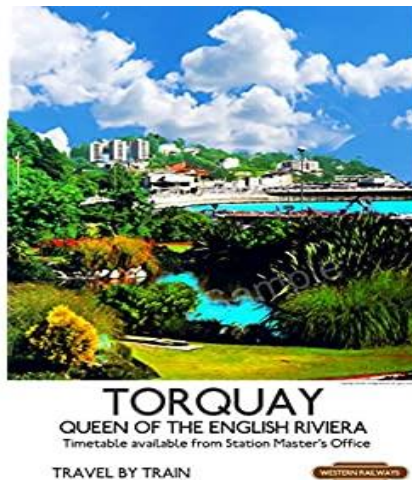
The area of Torquay and its surroundings has been inhabited since Paleolithic times. Hand axes found in Kents Cavern have been dated to 40,000 years old and some remains found there are thought to be the oldest examples of a modern human in Europe dating back to 37,000-40,000 years ago.



The first major building in Torquay was Torre Abbey, a monastery founded in 1196. It is the best preserved monastery in Devon and Cornwall. Nowadays the building can be explored, as well as the art galleries and gardens.

The mild climate attracted many visitors who considered the town a convalescence retreat where they could recover from illness away from the cold and cloudy winters of more northerly or easterly locations. The population of Torquay grew rapidly from 838 in 1801, to 11,474 in 1851.

The town's economy was initially based upon fishing and agriculture, but in the early 19th century it began to develop into a fashionable seaside resort, initially frequented by members of the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars while the Royal Navy anchored in the bay. Later as it became more well known it became popular with Victorian society and renowned for its mild climate, the town earned the nickname of the English Riviera.



The second phase in the expansion of Torquay began when Torre railway station was opened on 18th Dec 1848. The improved transport connections resulted in rapid growth at the expense of nearby towns not on Isambard Kingdom Brunel's railways. The more central Torquay railway station was opened on 2 August 1859 with views of the sea from the platforms. After the growth of the preceding decades, Torquay was granted borough status in 1872. Previously regarded as a convalescence retreat, Torquay began to encourage summer visitors, and 1902 saw the first advertising campaign to market Torquay to summer tourists.

Torquay Tramways operated electric street trams from 1907. The line was extended into Paignton in 1911 but the network was closed in 1934.

It is interesting to discover that Agatha Christie was born in the town and lived there during her early years.

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution's Torquay Lifeboat Station was at the Ladies Bathing Cove from 1876 until 1923. A second lifeboat was kept at the harbour from 1917 until 1928. Torquay was regarded as a "Spa Town" after the Marine Spa was built on Beacon Hill near the harbour. Originally called the "Bath Saloons complex", it had an open air tide-filled swimming bath. The complex was opened in 1853 after Beacon Hill headland was dynamited to make space for it. Charles Dickens was said to have made readings there. In the 1900s, a ballroom and a new sea water-filled swimming pool were built. The

Marine Spa provided various therapies such as seaweed baths, needle showers, hot and cold water baths and electric shock treatment. Bands such as Ted Heath played at the Marine Spa ballroom. Four stone arches that were part of the Marine Spa are still visible on the outside of the harbour wall.

During World War 1 military hospitals were sited in Torquay – many survivors from the Battle of Gallipoli recuperated in the town – and it was used as a troop staging area. In September 1915, King George V and Queen Mary visited the town. After the war, the Great Western Railway launched an advertising campaign to attract tourists, and this helped the town grow to a major south coast resort.

During World War II Torquay suffered minor bomb damage, mainly from planes dumping excess loads after participating in the Plymouth blitz. In the months leading up to D Day thousands of US Army personnel arrived. During Operation Overlord more than 23,000 men of the American 4th Infantry Division departed Torquay for Utah Beach.

The loading ramps used by the American army are still visible in front of the Regina Hotel where there is a plaque giving details.

The water sport events of the 1948 Summer Olympic Games were held in Torquay, and the Olympic Flame was brought from London to Torre Abbey Gardens.

After the 2nd World War, several private high-rise blocks of flats were constructed above the Rock Walk Cliffs and harbour. The Marine Spa was replaced by the Coral Island leisure complex, opened in 1977 and closed in 1988 and replaced in 2002 by the Living Coasts coastal zoo.

Torquay also boasted rehabilitation facilities for the blind at America Lodge, which was owned by the RNIB for a number of decades. Like many RNIB properties, this was sold off in the 1990s and the building is subdivided into private apartments.

A new shopping centre was opened in the 1980s, followed by new pubs and night clubs around the harbour.

Areas around Torquay have also been affected by either refurbishments or closure. For instance, the Rock Walk located on the town's seafront was refurbished through a £3 million funding project, resulting in its reopening in 2010, as part of the Royal Terrace Gardens festival. In 2013, the Torquay Pavilion was closed after a loss in funding and attempts to reopen it under new funding are ongoing.

With overseas holidays becoming more popular after the 2nd WW Coastal towns became more popular for short stays. Torquay has seen an increase in foreign visitors and is a major destination for foreign exchange students who come to the town to learn English in summer schools.

