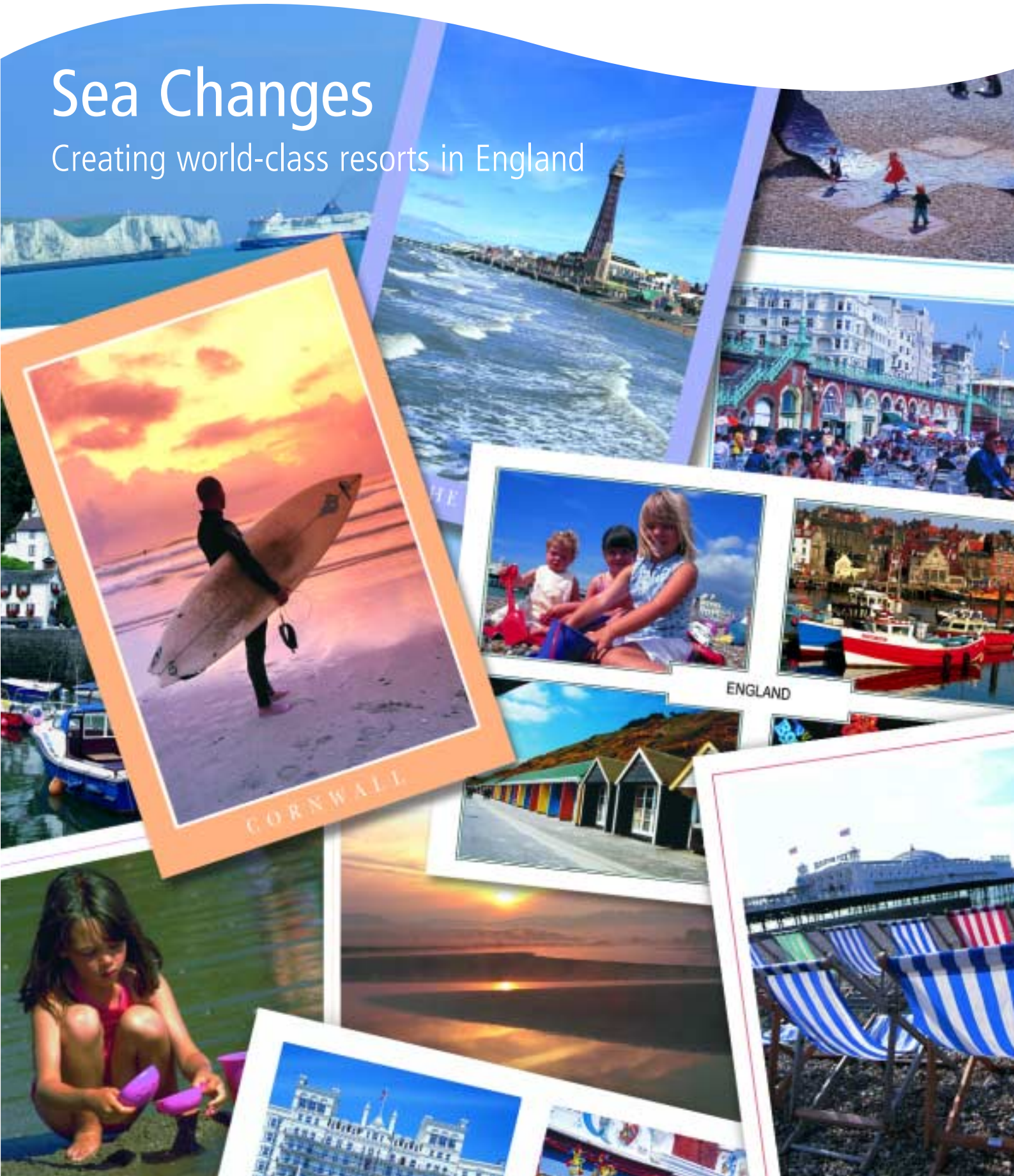


# Sea Changes

Creating world-class resorts in England



# Sea Changes

This is a summary of the English Tourism Council's (ETC) strategy for the regeneration of England's traditional seaside resorts. Its findings are based on a year-long examination by the ETC's Resort Regeneration Task Force and cover a number of issues.



## The rise and fall of resorts

Resorts began to be developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, in the main, flourished well into the twentieth century. They were able to capitalise on changes in society, such as the growing amount of leisure time, increasing discretionary income and greater mobility, provided first by the railways and then the car.

In the 1970s, however, the situation began to change. Packaged holidays to overseas destinations with a more reliable climate, followed by cheaper air travel and a growth in the number of domestic destinations meant that resorts faced increasing competition both at home and abroad. Coupled with this, particularly over the last three decades, has been an inability or refusal to change due to a lack of vision, information or pertinent investment. Many resorts have failed to evolve into a product that meets modern quality standards in entertainment experience, accommodation and service delivery.

## Recent trends

Over the last ten years, there has been a move away from long stay holidays in seaside resorts in favour of short breaks and day visits. A number of key market opportunities for resorts have been identified such as business tourism, visits to friends and family, a resurgent interest in heritage and the increasing use of the Internet. Headline results from

consumer research commissioned by the ETC reveals that there is still a demand for trips to the seaside but that most resorts are falling short of consumer expectations of quality in a number of key areas, such as accommodation, beach facilities, retail opportunities and overall ambience.

## The speed of decline and the need for regeneration

The decline in resorts has been slow and subtle and, therefore, difficult to detect. Nonetheless, the overall result of changes over the last 30 years has seen the share of domestic holidays taken at the seaside decline dramatically.

The seriousness of this decline should not be underestimated. If no action is taken, the decline in some resorts will be terminal. Inactivity will also have a wider social cost. The Government has recently announced substantial funding for the renewal of our most deprived neighbourhoods. Continuing decline will, for many of our resorts, result in them becoming the major regeneration problems of tomorrow, with the attendant costs and social implications that that entails.

## The role of tourism in regeneration

Whilst the strategy is fundamentally about tourism, it also recognises the need for a sustainable and diversified economy in resorts. The market for resort holidays is unlikely to return to its heyday. Tourism alone cannot, therefore, be a regeneration solution for all our resorts. Most will need to diversify their economy to some extent; indeed, some will be unable to compete and may need to move away from tourism altogether.

However, resorts still make up a significant component of the domestic tourism industry. Many still have a viable future as tourism destinations, but with tourism providing a major component of a more mixed economic base. Some have responded to the challenge and have begun to revitalise themselves and be rediscovered by visitors. Examples of innovative projects are highlighted throughout the full strategy report (see back page).

## Principles for success

Regeneration will need concerted and sustained action by all concerned. This requires a two-pronged approach: involving action by the resorts themselves to improve their product offer; and action by local, regional and national organisations working together to assist resorts in their efforts.

Looking at overseas tourism destinations that have managed successfully to address their problems has led to the identification of a set of principles for successful resort regeneration. These principles cover three basic phases in the regeneration process:

- **Creating a vision, planning and leadership** – recognising the scale of the problem, securing leadership, developing a unified approach and drawing up a masterplan.



- **Taking a holistic approach to the tourism experience** – identifying a catalyst to act as a major draw, putting in place the support facilities, quality accommodation, infrastructure, ambience, beach, sea front and town centre management needed to make a resort appealing to visitors.
- **Securing the tools needed to achieve delivery of the masterplan** – bringing in external expertise, securing the necessary funding, undertaking research, improved marketing and using information and communications technology (ICT).

## Key partners

A wide range of key organisations at local, regional, national and international level are identified that have an immediate impact on resorts. These organisations need to consider the impact of their activities on resorts, take positive action to assist resorts and co-ordinate their activities.

## The challenge for key partners

The ETC strategy recommends a set of actions that need to be taken by the key partners. The recommendations are grouped under ten action areas and form the second element of the ETC's suggested two-pronged approach. The ETC is committed to making progress on these issues and the action items appropriate for the ETC to take forward are highlighted below.

### Funding for resort regeneration

- 1 The Government and the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) should ensure that the needs of resorts are taken into account in the implementation of both the Urban and Rural White Papers and that resorts benefit proportionately from the incentives provided by them. This might include, among other initiatives, the setting up of a separate unit to co-ordinate the case for resorts within Government and/or ring fencing some of the new funds announced in the White Papers for use in resorts.
- 2 The Department for Culture, Media and Sport should produce guidance for funding agencies to ensure that co-ordination and take up of funding for resorts is improved.
- 3 The Lottery distributors should assess the levels of take up in resorts, promote the availability of lottery grants to resorts and offer appropriate advice on applications to help resorts develop projects which better meet the distributors' funding priorities.

**Action 1** The ETC will work with the Local Government Association and the British Resorts Association to better quantify the scale of the regeneration task facing resorts.

- 4 Each RDA should nominate a Board member to act as resort champion for that region. Each RDA should develop resort regeneration plans in agreement with the Regional Tourist Board (RTB) and local authorities.

- 5 The Government and the RDAs should examine opportunities for setting up Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs) for resorts, or explore similar vehicles, to stimulate partnerships for resort regeneration.

**Action 2** The ETC will provide advice for resorts on funding opportunities to help resorts maximise the opportunities provided by current funding mechanisms.

### The profile of resorts within government

- 6 Ministers should report at the 2001 Tourism Summit on actions that have been taken to support resort regeneration and agree co-ordinated action to address outstanding priorities.
- 7 Each of the government departments whose activities have an impact on resorts should nominate a senior official as a resort champion whose task is to ensure that all departmental policy takes account of resorts' special needs.

### The role of local authorities

- 8 The Local Government Association should examine ways in which authorities can maximise their regeneration activity and, within the context of the current Green Paper on local authority finance, make the case for any necessary fiscal or other incentives.
- 9 Local authorities in resort areas identified by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions as eligible to pilot new neighbourhood management schemes should maximise the opportunity this provides.
- 10 The Compulsory Purchase Order system should be improved to enable local authorities to address regeneration problems in resorts more effectively.
- 11 Local authorities should draw up more representative Asset Management Plans.
- 12 Local authorities should make the most of Local Strategic Partnerships.
- 13 Local authority planning officers should demonstrate a more positive and innovative approach to tourism development and developers should seek to adopt design principles that enhance the visual quality of a resort.

### Improving quality in resorts

**Action 3** The ETC will continue to pursue a wide range of activity to spread quality.

- 14 Local authorities should give greater recognition of the fundamental role they have to play in contributing to the overall quality of their resort by drawing up plans to deliver and maintain such quality within the context of an agreed masterplan.



- 15 Local authorities should ensure the promotion of 'Inspected First' policies when promoting accommodation and work with the ETC and RTBs on ensuring greater uptake of the National Quality Assurance Standards.

#### Product development and diversification

- 16 The Government should consider the most appropriate way of funding a national product development strategy for resorts, once the required preparatory work has been undertaken by the ETC.

**Action 4** The ETC will work with the British Tourist Authority and other partners to produce a specification detailing the scope of a product development strategy and the costs involved.

#### Research and intelligence

**Action 5** The ETC will examine ways in which statistical information on resorts can be improved at a national level. This is likely to include additional data on day visitors and greater insights into the economic impact of tourism.

**Action 6** The ETC will conduct further research into the health and family markets.

#### Transport links

- 17 Local authorities should take better account of the peripheral nature of resorts and their inbound visitor traffic requirements when drawing up local transport strategies. The Highways Agency should pay similar attention to the needs of resorts when making decisions about the development of the trunk road system.

#### Use of information and communications technology

- 18 The Government should implement the recommendations of the E-Tourism Advisory Group on the development of an e-business framework for English tourism.

**Action 7** The ETC will undertake a wide range of activity to facilitate e-business.

#### Support from the Regional Tourist Boards

**Action 8** The ETC will continue to identify resort regeneration as a strategic priority for RTB support.

#### Small business and entrepreneurship

- 19 The Small Business Service should consider how it can best provide specific assistance for micro tourism businesses in resorts given their very special circumstances and how it can best advocate changes in policy to assist small resort-based businesses.

#### Conclusion

The ETC is convinced that the market for resort-based tourism still exists, provided that vision, determination, co-ordination and investment are forthcoming to create a quality experience that can compete with the best.

It is our firm belief that a combination of strength of will and vision in resorts to enact the principles identified coupled with a full implementation of the recommendations by other key partners will provide the building blocks to reverse the decline experienced in our seaside and inland resorts.

Copies of the full strategy report (price £17.50 plus £3.50 p&p) can be obtained from:

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PO Box 22489  
London W6 9FR  
Tel: 0870 606 7204

or via [www.english tourism.org.uk](http://www.english tourism.org.uk)

Please quote reference ETC 8206 on your order.