

Catching waves in Cornwall

JODY ROBBINS
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

When I travel, I usually try to blend in. But it wasn't my jet-lag glaze or that funny North American accent that gave me away. It was my clothes. Specifically, that they were dry and not made of neoprene. I was surrounded by suits — wetsuits. Welcome to Newquay, surfing capital of the U.K.

Home of seven dramatic beaches, rimmed with imposing cliffs on Cornwall's Atlantic coast, this town has a reputation as being party central for the beach-bum set. But Newquay isn't exclusive to those who paddle out at dawn looking for the best swell. It's actually an ideal holiday spot for families, too. For a bit of affordable luxury, head to The Hotel at Watergate Bay, eight kilometres outside of town.

I've come to this idyllic seaside resort to take a breather from London with the intention of attending a seafood cookery school. But those plans flew out the window the minute I learned about the Extreme Academy, a sports school with an impressive list of activities all year.

According to Carl Coombes, manager of Extreme Academy (and former world champion wave skier), the options are limitless.

"Poor surfing conditions means it's a great time to kite surf. Whatever the season, there's a wide variety of extreme sports available."

The wetsuit fashions in the lobby started to make more sense. With a seamless transition from bedroom to beach, The Hotel offers direct access to the Extreme Academy, where, donning a wetsuit, I attempted to fit in.

By speaking my language, the instructor made this

If You Go

- Air Canada and British Airways offer daily direct flights to Heathrow.
- Trains operate from London's Paddington Station to Newquay several times a day.
- First Great Western: www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk/BuyTickets.aspx
- The Hotel at Watergate Bay: www.watergatebay.co.uk
- Extreme Academy: www.watergatebay.co.uk/extremeacademy.htm
- Fifteen: www.fifteen-cornwall.co.uk

easy. Dave Read is a transplanted Vancouverite who's been studying, (if you can believe it,) Surf Science and Technology at Plymouth University. For some reason, I'm placed in the 9 to 11-year-old group, but I'm not fussed. Dave's great with us kids, impressing us all with headstands on the board (in the water!) and imitations of Cher, long strands of seaweed draped over his hair.

I still snowboard, so Dave thinks I'll be a natural. But snowboarding doesn't help me get from my belly to standing on a moving board in a shifting sea. Channeling my yogi, I launched from Cobra to Warrior II and was up on the board.

The elements may be different than the frozen ocean I snowboard on, but I'm quickly converted. Awash with sea foam and adrenalin, I'm able to catch rides, though admittedly, in whitewater, not the clean green face veterans seek-further out. Spotting swells on the horizon and making the quick decision to get up or have waves crash over me, has me hooked. I ditch cooking school.

Surfing works up quite the appetite and one thing I never miss is a meal.

Venus Cafe's sustainable surf-shack snacks such as whiting baps; a fish and fennel bunwich slathered with lime mayo are more than satisfying. There's also the Beach Hut, a casual beachfront restaurant where dogs are welcome, sand litters the floor and parents can watch their offspring frolicking in the waves while tucking into daily fish specials.

But the real dining draw at Watergate Bay is Jamie Oliver's Fifteen restaurant.

The mood here is fun and lighthearted with psychedelic pink and grey graffiti adorning the walls and impressive views of the Atlantic.

Walters walk you through the menu, explaining each type of fish or the farm where the veggies and spuds were sustainably grown. You won't find many kids at posh restaurants in London, but families are welcome here.

After tucking into hearty fare, it's off to bed and The Hotel with its blissful, breezy atmosphere is an ideal place to bed down. Cheeky signs such as "No Dancing Dads," and the abundance of Parent's Kitchens, small nooks dotted throughout The Hotel with a microwave, fridge and kettle, illustrate the hotel's relaxed attitude and dedication to families.

The Hotel's daycare facility for children 3 to 7 years offers qualified childcare, allowing parents to brave the waves or enjoy a quiet meal. Babysitting services are also available with some exceptions.

While the resort is open year-round, autumn offers the larger swells and the warmest water with sea temperatures rising five degrees higher than in summer. Just be sure you slip into a wetsuit prior to check-in.



Matt Cardy, Getty Images

Surfers head to the beach in Newquay. You'll fit in much better in this surf-crazy U.K. town if you're wearing neoprene.

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UPGRADE to 4.5-star accom from \$17 per night.</p> <hr/> <p>Miami Air + 7 Nights <small>from \$749 + taxes & fees \$117</small> INCLUDES resort-style accom on Miami Beach. ADD Everglades airboat tour from \$66.</p> <hr/> <p>Honolulu Air + 7 Nights <small>from \$839 + taxes & fees \$153</small> INCLUDES central accom near Waikiki Beach. UPGRADE to 4-star accom from \$8 per night. ADD Polynesian cultural center and Luau dinner show from \$134.</p> <hr/> <p>Houston Air + 4 Nights 4-Star <small>from \$939 + taxes & fees \$121</small> INCLUDES lakeside spa accom and 4-day economy car rental with unlimited mileage.</p> <hr/> <div style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Family Vacations</div> <p>Anaheim Air + 4 Nights <small>from \$284 + taxes & fees \$127</small> INCLUDES accom near theme parks. Price per person based on family of 4. ADD 3-day Disneyland Resort Park Hopper Bonus Ticket from \$198/adult, \$175/child (ages 3-9).</p> <hr/> <p>Orlando Air + 7 Nights <small>from \$439 + taxes & fees \$131</small> INCLUDES accom near major attractions. Price per person based on family of 4. UPGRADE to 4-star accom from \$23 per night. ADD 5-day Walt Disney World Resort Magic Your Way Base Ticket from \$283/adult, \$262/child (ages 3-9).</p> <hr/> <div style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Canada</div> <p>Vancouver Air + 3 Nights <small>from \$418 + taxes & fees \$108</small> INCLUDES central accom on Robson Street, near Stanley Park and attractions. UPGRADE to Fairmont accom from \$34 per night. ADD Whistler daytrip from \$146.</p> <hr/> <p>Quebec City Winter Carnival Air + 3 Nights 4-Star <small>from \$589 + taxes & fees \$143</small> INCLUDES luxury accom during opening celebrations. ADD city tour from \$50.</p>	<div style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Christmas Vacations</div> <p style="text-align: center;">Banff New Year's Eve, 2 Nights \$229 <small>from + taxes & fees included</small></p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">INCLUDES accom located on Banff Avenue over New Year's Eve.</p> <hr/> <p>Anaheim Air + 4 Nights <small>from \$499 + taxes & fees \$104</small> INCLUDES accom near theme parks.</p> <hr/> <p>Los Cabos Air + 7 Nights <small>from \$688 + taxes & fees \$331</small> INCLUDES adults only, beachfront, all-inclusive accom.</p> <hr/> <div style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Vacations</div> <p>London Christmas Markets Air + 6 Nights \$574 <small>from + taxes & fees \$562</small></p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">INCLUDES central accom only 2 Tube stops from Harrods during the Christmas Markets season. BONUS breakfast daily included. ADD hop-on, hop-off tour from \$43.</p> <hr/> <p>Hong Kong Air + 7 Nights <small>from \$924 + taxes & fees \$363</small> INCLUDES central accom facing Victoria Harbour. BONUS upgrade to harbour view room upon arrival. ADD Symphony of Lights cruise from \$53.</p> <hr/> <p>Kuala Lumpur Air + 7 Nights <small>from \$969 + taxes & fees \$406</small> INCLUDES central accom near the World Trade Centre, restaurants and rail. ADD elephant sanctuary trek from \$91.</p> <hr/> <div style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Escorted Tours</div> <p>Mexico 6-Day Tour <small>from \$900 + taxes & fees included</small> HIGHLIGHTS Mexico City, Merida, Chichen Itza, Cancun and Playa del Carmen. Tour for ages 18-35's. Travel from Mexico City to Cancun.</p> <hr/> <p>Africa 10-Day Tour <small>from \$1224 + taxes & fees included</small> HIGHLIGHTS Zanzibar, Korogwe, Arusha, Serengeti National Park, Nairobi, Ngorongoro conservation area and crater. Travel from Zanzibar to Nairobi.</p>	<div style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">All-inclusive Vacations</div> <p style="text-align: center;">Manzanillo 7 Nights 4-Star \$498 <small>from + taxes & fees \$341</small></p> <hr/> <p>Los Cabos 7 Nights 4-Star <small>from \$509 + taxes & fees \$339</small></p> <hr/> <p>Panama 7 Nights 4-Star <small>from \$577 + taxes & fees \$310</small></p> <hr/> <p>Varadero 7 Nights 4-Star <small>from \$607 + taxes & fees \$274</small></p> <hr/> <p>Punta Cana 7 Nights 4-Star <small>from \$897 + taxes & fees \$386</small></p> <hr/> <div style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Cruise & Stay</div> <p style="text-align: center;">Anaheim Valentine's Day Air + 4 Nights + 4-Night Cruise \$729 <small>from + taxes & fees \$192</small></p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">INCLUDES all airfare, 4 nights accom within walking distance of the Disneyland Resort and 4-night cruise sailing roundtrip Long Beach visiting Catalina and Ensenada. UPGRADE to oceanview stateroom and accom from \$16 per night.</p> <hr/> <p>Las Vegas Air + 3 Nights + 4-Night Cruise <small>from \$889 + taxes & fees \$205</small> INCLUDES airfare to Las Vegas, return from Vancouver, 2 nights accom on the Strip, airfare to San Diego, 1-night accom near Sea World and the San Diego Zoo and 4-night cruise sailing from San Diego to Vancouver visiting Port Angeles. UPGRADE to 4-star accom and oceanview stateroom from \$35 per night.</p> <hr/> <p>Dubai Air + 2 Nights + 7-Night Cruise <small>from \$1629 + taxes & fees \$670</small> INCLUDES roundtrip airfare to Dubai, 2 nights 4-star central accom near Jumeira Beach, restaurants and shopping, and 7-night cruise sailing roundtrip Dubai visiting Al Fujairah, Muscat and Abu Dhabi. UPGRADE to 5-star accom and oceanview stateroom from \$23 per night.</p>
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