



Changing British Seaside Resorts

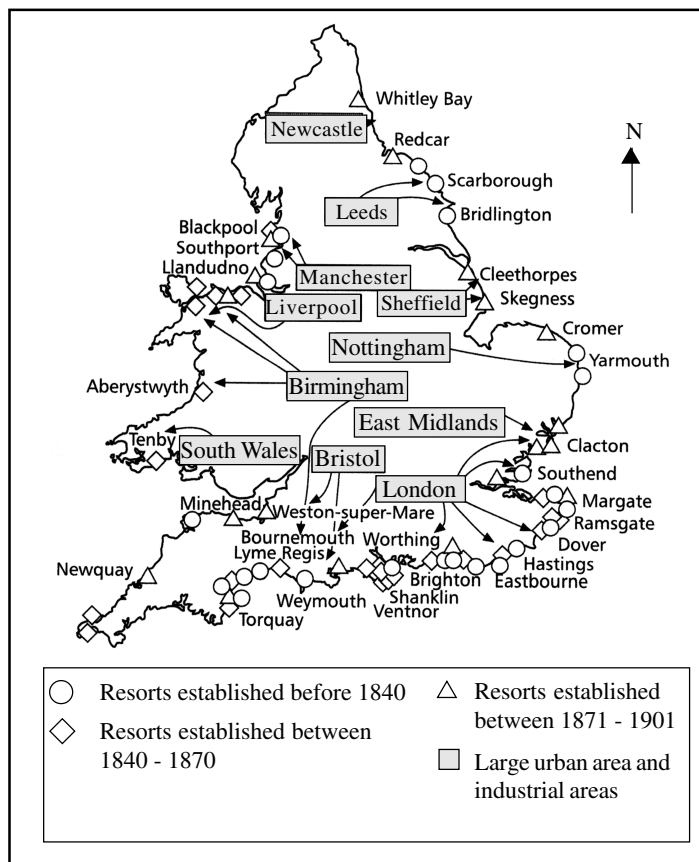
The Growth of British Seaside Resorts:

Today, many people in the UK take one or more holidays each year, either at home or abroad, but before 1850 it was only a few, wealthy people who took even one holiday as they were expensive luxuries.

During the late 1700s 'taking the waters' at popular spa towns such as Bath and Buxton was popular with the middle and upper classes. Around this time Dr Richard Russell pointed out that seawater had the same medicinal effects as spa waters and promoted it as a cure for a wide range of illnesses. So these upper classes started to visit seaside towns such as Brighton, Scarborough and Blackpool.

The Industrial Revolution brought about a change in holiday patterns. The lower classes now had jobs in the factories in the expanding industrial towns and could use some of their wages for day trips and annual holidays. At the same time the UK railway network was also extending rapidly and most industrial towns were within easy access of at least one length of coastline and its seaside resorts. For over one hundred years these towns enjoyed a period of considerable growth and prosperity. (Fig 1)

Fig 1. Seaside resorts of England and Wales



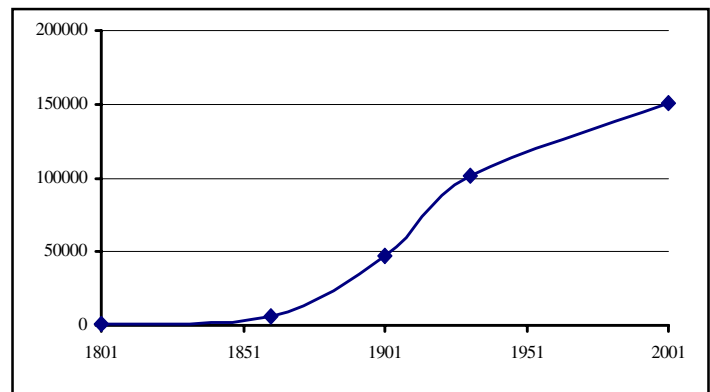
However, in the last 30 years or so, due to a fall in popularity of UK seaside holidays, many of these resorts have had to undergo quite large-scale changes in order to survive. Here we will first of all look at the growth of our main case-study, Blackpool. Then Blackpool, one of Britain's leading resorts is used as a case study too look at changing British seaside resort

The Growth of Blackpool

Blackpool is the largest seaside resort anywhere in Europe and in 2001 had a resident population of just over 151,200. It attracts around 17 million visitors annually, who spend around £ 545 million, (around £32 each), and tourism provides employment for over 29,000 people. However, over the last 30 years the number of visitors each year has fallen quite considerably

The 'father of Blackpool' was Henry Banks and his family built the first holiday cottages, promenade and assembly rooms in Blackpool in the 1820s. A railway line reached Blackpool in 1846 and after that the town became a popular holiday destination for the workers in the Lancashire mining and cotton industries and developed rapidly (Fig 2).

Fig 2. Growth of Blackpool's population



A wide selection of hotels, boarding houses and eating establishments were built along with theatres and music halls, amusement arcades, souvenir shops, pleasure gardens and funfairs. Services such as Punch and Judy shows, deckchairs for hire, and candy floss and ice cream stalls grew up along the seafront which became known as the 'Golden Mile'. Three piers were built extending out into the sea, so that people could feel its beneficial effects without actually getting wet. The famous 'Winter Gardens', was also built in this Victoria era. This was a huge cast iron structure covered with glass like a huge conservatory filled with exotic plants. Visitors could spend time in this building, especially on wet days, walking around or sitting listening to the band. Two of Blackpool's other famous attractions, also appeared at this time, the Tramway in 1885 and in 1894, the most distinctive feature of the town's urban skyline, **Blackpool Tower**, 518 feet in height.

In the early 1900s, new roads 7 miles in length were built along the seafront known as Promenades. For a long time the highlight of the holidaymaker's day was to walk along these promenades, and take the fresh sea air. The attractions of the sandy beach and sunbathing only really became fashionable in late 1920s. Until then people wore hats and the ladies carried parasols to protect them from the sun's rays.

Blackpool in the early years of the last century thus contained all the features of what can be termed 'a typical Victorian Seaside Resort'. During the next fifty years or so the town continued to develop, trying to keep pace with the increasing and changing demands of its visitors. In the 1950s, when holiday camps became fashionable, Blackpool's south shore became the home of 'Pontin's'. Extra attractions were added such as **Madame Tussaud's Waxworks** and bigger and better 'rides' on the **Pleasure Beach**, which is currently the single biggest tourist attraction in the country with 6.5 million visitors each year.

Changing tourist trends

However, from the late 1950s and early 1960s, Blackpool and other seaside resorts started to decline in popularity. There were several reasons for this:

- **Foreign holidays:** people now had even more disposable income and could afford to pay for foreign holidays. In 1970 only 30% of the UK's population had a foreign holiday but by 2000 this figure had reached 80%.
- **Improvements in air transport:** many destinations in Southern Europe were now only a few hours away from home. The weather was certainly more favourable and reliable here which was important as holidaymakers now regarded sunbathing and 'getting a tan' as an important part of their holiday agenda. Charter flights provide low cost holiday journeys.
- **The development of 'package' holidays,** i.e. holidays arranged by tourist operators to places such as Spain which included accommodation, travel, transfers etc. which made foreign travel much easier. The prices were competitive and it often cost the same amount to go to Mediterranean as to go to Blackpool.
- **Changing expectations:** The holiday requirements and values of the British holidaymaker were changing because of improved standards of living, better education and increased knowledge of the world. This newer type of tourist wanted to take different holidays in more interesting and exotic locations. Tourists started to demand higher quality tourist products and more choice of destination. The 'kiss-me-quick hat and candy floss' type of holiday had lost its appeal.

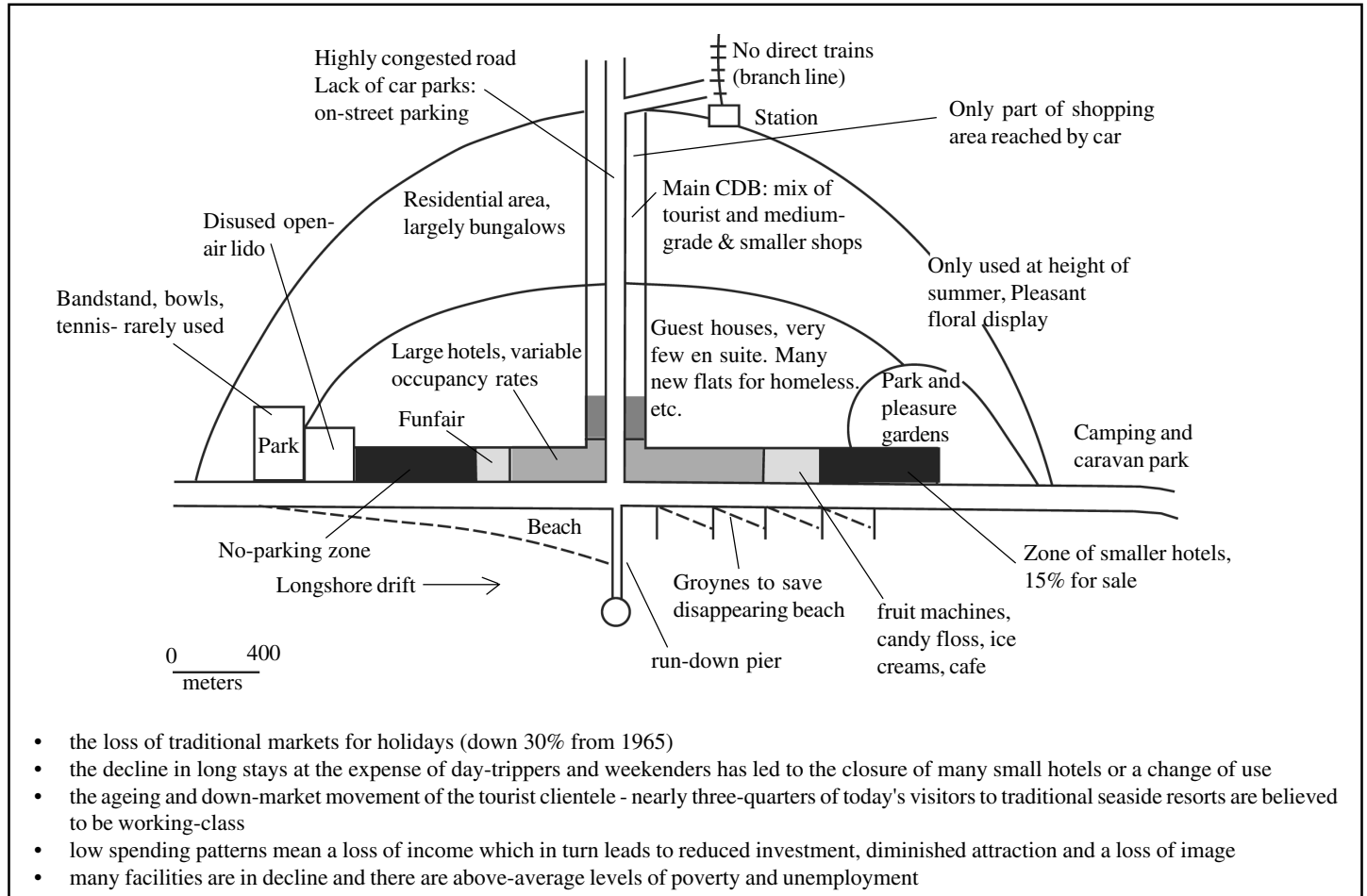
It is interesting to note that Spain, one of the first European countries to benefit from the development of package tours, is currently having problems similar to those of the British resorts twenty years ago, (see Fig 3).

- **The UK's changing age-structure:** the UK is undergoing an 'ageing' of its population as life expectancy increases, and the proportion of retired and elderly people is rising. The type of holiday offered by a seaside resort in this country is often more suited to younger age-groups and so the number of visitors is likely to fall.
- **Changing holiday patterns:** People can often now afford more than one holiday each year. This often means a longer-stay holiday at a foreign location and a shorter break in the UK. Long holidays of over 8 days now make up only 7% of the total holidays taken in Britain.
- **An increase in car-ownership:** there has been a dramatic rise in the numbers of car-owners, especially during the 1970s, so that people can now visit nearby seaside towns for a day trip, at any weekend or bank holiday. They no longer want to spend a longer holiday there as well and often opt for rural tourism.

Between 1989 and 1999 the number of hotels in Blackpool fell from 2800 to 1750, a fall of over 40%, reflecting the change to shorter stay holidays and /or day trips.

Fig 3 shows how resorts such as Blackpool have declined and the impact it has made on the land use and buildings

Fig 3 Decline of seaside resorts

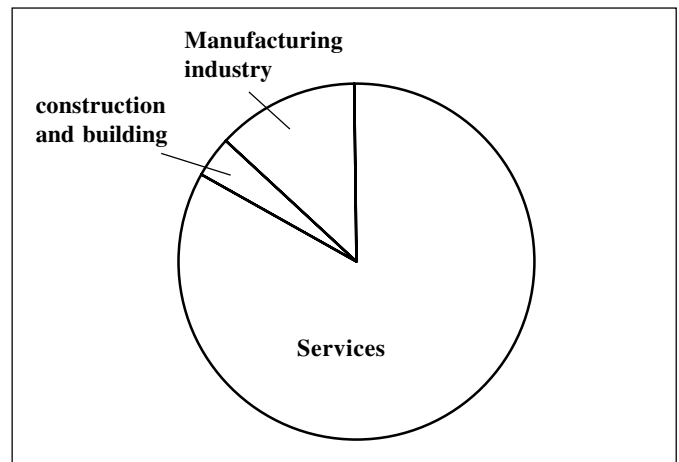


The Changing Face of UK Resorts:

As demands have gradually changed both local councils and private individuals such as business men, hotel-owners etc. within the UK's seaside resorts have tried to work together to try to maintain their share of the tourist market in a variety of ways:

- **An extension of the holiday season:** traditionally the British summer season is relatively short-lived, about 4 months, due to the weather limitations. This has always meant that workers in the tourist industry have had to earn enough money during summer for a whole year as there are often limited alternative job and business opportunities within these towns. Various schemes such as cheaper holiday bargains at the beginning and end of the season, Christmas and New Year breaks etc. have extended the holiday season in many resorts.
- **Developing business tourism:** this is the fastest growing, highest quality and highest earning branch of the industry. In the UK it is worth over £15 billion annually and it has been found that 40% of the business tourists revisit their locations with their families at a later date. On a spend-per-day basis business tourists spend three times as much as the average tourist. Many British resorts have thus started to provide specialised facilities such as conference centres. Business tourism is also an all-year-round activity which helps to provide employment during the out-of-season winter months and so compliments the busy summer period. Brighton, Blackpool and Scarborough are often the locations of the annual political party conferences, often in the spring or autumn, and these take over most of the accommodation and other facilities in the town for at least a week
- **Different types of accommodation:** In the early days of seaside tourism, visitors often preferred hotel accommodation with all meals provided. Nowadays, visitors often prefer self-catering accommodation which is more flexible, and so hotels have been converted into apartments. Today's visitors often require a higher standard of accommodation in the past with better facilities and so many establishments have been upgraded.
- **Special events:** many resorts have tried to introduce special attractions to tempt visitors. For many years Blackpool has held its annual 'illuminations' when the entire promenade is lit up by a spectacular display of tableaux and lighting spectacles. This takes place in the autumn and so extends the holiday season. The authorities have worked hard to maintain high standards and to constantly improve the displays so that tourists return to see them. Other resorts have tried to develop 'niche markets', e.g. folk festivals, film and heritage tourism, often during the 'off-peak season'
- **Special packages:** Many resorts have also introduced special short-break holiday packages such as 'hen party' weekends and 'stag night' breaks etc. These take place throughout the year and so are important to maintain an even employment distribution.
- **Special attractions:** Many resorts have built indoor entertainment centres so that visitors can enjoy themselves even if the weather is not hot and sunny. Blackpool has its Sandcastle with special indoor pool and water slides set in a tropical atmosphere. Rhyl has its Sun Centre.
- **Widening of the economic base:** many seaside towns have tried to introduce different sources of employment and industrial establishments to increase their economic stability. Fig 4 shows the current employment structure of Blackpool.

Fig 4. Employment structure of Blackpool



- **E-tourism:** Although many resorts relied on their past reputations for many years and seemed reluctant to update their profiles many have now branched into e tourism and have impressive web sites for potential holidaymakers to visit
- **Outside Funding:** In many cases the resorts are financially limited in their resources and so have applied for government, lottery and EU funding. Blackpool acquired Objective 2 status in 2000 for European funding to help the town develop and improve its accommodation and conference facilities

'Shifting Sands Report' by Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. (CABE).

In 2003 CABE held a series of seminars in several of the major resorts and published its 'Shifting Sands' Report, which looked at the changing image of English seaside towns. The report commented on the value of refurbishing the seaside resorts by combining new schemes with the re-use of existing historic buildings. The idea of 'sustainable development' is important here as it is vital that the traditional character and atmosphere of the English Seaside resort is preserved for the benefit of future generations of holiday makers.

The report's 15 case-studies of ideas that have been implemented include:

- In Newquay, the Beach Hut Café and Extreme Academy, 'a ski resort on a Cornish beach', employs 65 staff during the summer season. Its 1999 business plan has forecast an annual turnover of £190,000. By 2002 this figure had already reached £1.1 million.
- At St Ives, the 'Tate St Ives' is widely recognised as the 'pioneer of the new wave of seaside town regeneration'. There had been 1.2 million visitors by January 2000, 78% of which came from outside Cornwall and an estimated 15% from overseas.
- In Whitby in North Yorkshire a 17th century house has been restored to create a new visitor's centre at the site of the medieval abbey.
- At Eastbourne when Southern water built its new plant underground, a structure resembling a Napoleonic fort was constructed at ground level which fitted in with the other buildings along the promenade.

Exam Hint: It is always good to be able to quote recent government actions. The paragraph (pg 4) on gambling also applies in this context.

Blackpool in the twenty first century:

The decline in the tourist industry has left the town with a series of social and economic problems.

- The schools in the central wards have a very high 20% turnover.
- There is a very high percentage of transient population and rough sleepers. The problems it experiences are very similar to the large city areas of Manchester and Liverpool.
- According to the indices of deprivation issued by the government some of the inner wards are amongst the most deprived areas in England. Blackpool has the 3rd worst GDP of its region and 12th lowest of the whole UK.
- Blackpool has the lowest proportion of economically active people in the county of Lancashire
- Blackpool has one of the highest levels of benefit claims during the winter months.

So what does the future hold for Blackpool and its residents? The survival of the town depends on the local Council, people involved with the tourism industry and the wider community of Blackpool all working together to revive and modernise the tourist industry. Blackpool can no longer survive with its traditional image and various organisations have already been established to work on its modernisation.

Blackpool Challenge Partnership,(Bcp), was established in 1996 to bid for and deliver schemes under the government’s Single Regeneration Budget, (SRB). This now involves over 50 organisations including the local council, representatives of main employers, businesses, police and local media who are working together on various schemes. Since 1996, BCP has supported a range of schemes connected to all aspects of the town’s life. Recently the BCP has received £20 million of SRB money which is essential for attracting an extra £74 million from the public and private sector. This funding will be used to finance projects such as:

- Improvements to existing accommodation. This is an enormous task as Blackpool has around 3000 accommodation establishments and about 90,000 bed spaces.
- Incentives to attract new three and four star hotels to the town
- Tackling crime, especially burglary and car theft which can deter visitors.
- An overhaul of the Tower
- Development of Central Station
- The creation of 2000 new jobs in activities other than tourism.

The Masterplan:

In conjunction with the local council BCP has recently drawn up a master plan which forecasts what Blackpool should be like in 15 to 20 years’ time, (Fig 5). This plan will focus on four areas within the town which lie within its Economic Development Zone, (EDZ)

Fig 5. Swot Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Household reputation as Britain’s leading seaside resort giving it publicity and a positive image. Excellent road and motorway links Developing Regional Airport Wide range of accommodation and attractions Great wealth of tourism infrastructure Diverse client base-families, business, young adults, retired Historically unique tramway system.	Multiple economic and social problems linked to large-scale deprivation in the inner wards. Urban decay and anti-social behaviour Environmental issues e.g. quality of bathing water* Lack of investment in railway routes to the town** Traffic congestion and parking problems within the town Loss of quality and ‘big-name’ retail outlets over recent years.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Expected overall 2% national growth in the tourist industry Expected higher growth in conference trade and day trips Available Lottery Funding for capital projects within the town Availability of various EU Funds because of its Objective 2 Status	Increasing competition from both home and abroad The tourism industry’s links to changes in the economic cycle The adverse effect of sand extraction further along the coast An ageing infrastructure

- **Pleasure Beach:** a vast glass-covered entertainment building is to become the new focus of this area. The plans include the construction of a casino and new luxury hotel with 800 bedrooms next to a ‘transformed South Pier’ and a car park for c 4000 cars
- **Town Centre:** this area will become the new commercial and retail centre with many new shops, new Civic Buildings and a new £100 million ‘state of the art’ conference centre. Much of the area will be pedestrianised, with large areas given over to public gardens and car parks.
- **Central Beach:** this area is to be converted into a glass-covered ‘attraction centre’ and leisure complex, ringed by hotels giving 1800 new rooms of 4 and 5 star accommodation.
- **The Village:** the older area of Victorian hotels is to be renovated and refurbished to maintain its traditional character, restore it to its original splendour.

Blackpool and a gambling future

As seen, for many years Blackpool has tended to focus on maintaining its current tourist customers rather than extending into new markets. Most of these tourists were from Economic Groups C and D and so had limited disposable income. It is vital to attract tourists with more money to spend.

October 2004 saw the publication of a report into the UK’s outdated 30 year old gaming laws. To recapture some of its former popularity Blackpool is hoping that this legislation will allow the development of ‘Vegas style’ **gambling resorts** to the UK. It has been planning for this development for several years. The town council has drawn up a plan calling for covered walkways and four casino resorts. Private investors, including one who already owns the tower, piers, winter gardens and built Pontins, are very interested. He wants to build an Egyptian style complex, The Pharaoh’s Palace, with 2,500 slot machines, 70 gaming tables and 500 hotel rooms, on the sea front. It has been estimates that six casino hotels could create 25,000 jobs, generate £2 billion in revenue and attract 30 million visitors to the town each year.

Conclusion

It has been seen that many UK seaside resorts have declined considerably as a result of changing tourist demands. Fig 6 contains selected 2001 census data for five of these resorts. Many, especially those in southern England such as Eastbourne, have taken on a new role as retirement centres for the increasing proportion of elderly people in the country, which often brings with it a completely different set of problems. Brighton and other towns nearer to London have increased their 'dormitory town' function. Some unfortunately will never regain their former prosperity. Fig 6 shows how some of the Northern resorts such as Blackpool have declined and actually show above average levels of poverty and unemployment.

Fig 6 Selected 2002 census data

	E & W	North West	Blackpool	Brighton	Scarborough	Eastbourne	Torbay
% pop change since 1991	+2.5 %	-1.7%	-4.3%	+3.0%	-2.3%	+6.3%	+6.4%
Households without a car	26.8%	30.2%	37.3%	36.5%	30.7%	31.7%	26.8%
Unemployed	3.4%	3.6%	4.2%	3.6%	3.6%	2.9%	4.1%
Retired	13.6%	14.3%	13.6%	11.4%	18.4%	18.0%	18.0%
Qualifications at degree level or Higher	19.8%	17.2%	10.1%	28.7%	16.1%	16.7%	13.5%
% over 75	7.5	7.4	9.6	8.6	10.6	13.9	11.8
% of homes with Central Heating	8.5	11.8	19.2	10.8	14.6	7.7%	14.7%

'Blackpool is a great town, synonymous with seaside fun and entertainment'. Sadly, this is no longer the case and the days when whole towns of Lancashire people would decamp to the resort for their annual holiday has long gone. However, it still has great potential as a tourist centre and is the most visited seaside resort in UK. It just has to catch up and modernise its image. With the implementation of new ideas and schemes put forward and its re-invention as a 'gambling resort' this could happen.

Websites

Changing British Seaside Resorts: a vast range of sites under this heading
www.bbc.co.uk/history/society_culture/society/seaside_print.html

Blackpool Challenge Partnership: www.bcp-ltd.co.uk
www.bcp-ltd.co.uk/

Blackpool Council: www.blackpool.gov.uk

Blackpool Tourism strategy: www.blackpooltourism.com/terms.asp
www.blackpool.gov.uk/sections/publications/Tourism%20Strategy%201997-2002.doc

Questions:

1. (a) Briefly describe the development of seaside holidays in the UK. (5 marks)
- (b) With reference to one named resort:
 - (i) Summarise the growth of the resort and its main attractions (6 marks)
 - (ii) Assess the present economic and social conditions in the resort. (6 marks)
 - (iii) Examine ways in which the resort has attempted to revive its declining economy. (8 marks)

Answer Guidelines

1. (a) Try to devise a time line to show the key events which influenced the rise and fall of traditional seaside holiday

Hint look at **both** general holiday trends (rise of holidays abroad, rising affluence & leisure time) and specific UK holiday trends (rise of car touring)

- (b) Use the factsheet case study on Blackpool

(i) Include both natural & artificial attractions

(ii) Use Fig 3 to act as a framework for exploring the issues at Blackpool

(iii) Read through both page 3 (general) and page 4 (Blackpool specific). Look for opportunities in the SWOT analysis

Acknowledgements; This Factsheet was researched and written by Barbara Melbourne who is a tourism specialist and lives in NW England.

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