

St Marychurch & Babbacombe

Level
B2
Intermediate



250 feet above the sea, a little further around the coast from Torquay is Babbacombe.

From earliest times it was a tiny fishing community based around the small, protective harbour next to Babbacombe beach. The fact that Babbacombe was such a quiet place meant that it was very popular with smugglers who wanted to stay away from the larger harbours at Torquay, Paignton and Brixham. In fact, in 1789 the customs house was attacked by smugglers who wanted to bring their goods ashore.

With the increasing popularity of the English

Riviera as a wealthy tourist destination during the reign of Queen Victoria, Babbacombe soon became a very desirable place to stay, especially for those who wanted to have rooms in the cliff-top hotels, with their magnificent views over Lyme Bay. In 1846 the Queen and Prince Albert arrived in the bay on board the royal yacht, Victoria described Babbacombe in her journal in 1846:

'It is a beautiful spot, which before we had only passed at a distance. Red cliffs and rocks with wooded hills like Italy, and reminding one of a ballet or play where

nymphs appear, such rocks and grottoes, with deepest sea on which there was no ripple'.

More hotels and holiday villas were built and soon there was a need for some form of transport to help visitors up and down the incredibly steep hill to Oddicombe Beach, the larger of the two beaches in the area: it was decided to build a tramway from the cliff-top down to the beach. The cliff railway was an instant success and has been running ever since it opened in 1926.

Towards the end of the 19th century Babbacombe became front page news

in the national newspapers when, on Saturday, 15th November 1884, Emma Keyse was murdered at her villa at Babbacombe Bay. 20 year old John Lee was arrested for the murder and sentenced to death by hanging. On the day of his execution a series of 'unexplainable' events caused the executioner to try to hang Lee three times, and each time the execution failed. John Lee was transferred to prison still alive and went into criminal history as "The Man They Couldn't Hang". In 1911 he fled Britain and moved to America where he lived until his death in 1946.

If you're looking for

“ It is a beautiful spot ... with wooded hills like Italy ”



Opposite page: Oddicombe Beach from Babbacombe Promenade.
Left: Babbacombe Cliff Railway



some entertainment in Babbacombe then you could go to one of the popular shows performed at the Babbacombe theatre. Opened in 1939, it is well known in the area for its typical seaside entertainment such as 'stand-up' comedians and 'sing-along' musical shows.

A little inland from the cliff-top hotels is another very popular tourist attraction The Babbacombe Model Village was opened in the 1970s and has continued to amaze young and old ever since. With thousands of incredibly detailed scale models, this attraction recreates towns, villages, countryside scenes and local landmarks, as well as a '4D' theatre, model

railway and model circus.

Next to Babbacombe, and within walking distance of the cliff-top hotels, you will find the small parish of St Marychurch, dominated by two very large churches at the top of the High Street, the Roman Catholic church with the high steeple and the Anglican church with the tower.

In the early days of the parish, St Marychurch was famous for being the location of the Devon county show, the biggest agricultural exhibition in the county (now held in Exeter). Despite the two large religious buildings there were also two breweries in the area and with the increased popularity of

Bygones

A visit to St. Marychurch would not be complete without a visit to the remarkable 'Bygones' museum. Opened in 1987 this family-run attraction re-creates a Victorian street scene, complete with sound effects, and shops filled with authentic products from the time, you can also see a huge model train set, a re-creation of a World War I trench and militaria collection and an interactive fantasy land. Bygones is open daily from 10.00 – 17.00. Adult entry costs £6.50.

Babbacombe, St Marychurch soon became a very desirable place to live that was close to the coast but not surrounded by hotels and the tourists in the summer.

Many visitors are surprised by this peaceful little parish. It may be small but it has a number of pubs, and a good selection of shops along the pedestrianised high street.

AT

Babbacombe Model Village

The Model Village is open 10.00 to 15.30 in February. Normal adult price is £7.90 (until 31st March).

Visit www.laltorbay.co.uk/stoppress to get a voucher worth £1 off admission, valid until 28th February!

To get to Babbacombe and St. Marychurch you can get the number 12 bus from Paignton bus station and then get off at the arcades in Torquay, from here get the number 32 bus up to Babbacombe.