

Reinventing Sunderland's Seaside

A once thriving tourist destination is undergoing a cultural revival, attracting visitors from across the region and beyond.

With miles of golden sands and blue flag status, Sunderland's Roker and Seaburn beaches have a newfound energy thanks to the abundance of vibrant bars, restaurants and cafes that line the seafront.

Stretching from the busy Sunderland Marina all the way to Seaburn, the city's glorious coastline has welcomed significant investment from Sunderland City Council and the private sector over the past two years, welcoming the likes

of Stack Seaburn - a shipping container village offering street food, bars and live entertainment - and the Seaburn Inn, a 40-bedroom inn which is ideally located to eat, drink, sleep and explore the coastal area.

Then you have the independents on Marine Walk, from Love Lily's all-day brunch menu, to luxury charcuterie at SIX, and Fausto, serving speciality coffee and hand-stretched Italian style pizzas.

Sunderland's seaside has a new lease of life - by day and night - and is rivalling some of the most popular UK tourism hotspots, as well as its near-neighbours of Northumberland and Tynemouth, which usually get all the attention.

As part of the seafront transformation that's taking place, historic buildings are also being sympathetically restored to breathe new life into structures that have been long disused. The first of which is a pre-war era toilet block that has been transformed into a third venue for Durham's Tin of Sardines - the world's smallest gin bar - which boasts a hanging garden terrace with panoramas of the iconic Roker pier and lighthouse.

Speaking about the new location, Tin of Sardines co-founder, Ben Davis, said: "The Tin of Sardines brand has been a real success since we first opened our doors in Durham five years ago and we'd been mulling over a third venue for some time before we saw the former Roker Toilet block hit the market.

"As someone born and bred in Sunderland and as a family embedded in the region's hospitality industry for decades, we knew this was an opportunity we couldn't miss out on and were sold on the idea of bringing it to the city as soon as we set eyes on it.

"Our success has been built upon providing a quaint, relaxed atmosphere, where people can meet, eat and drink away from the hustle and bustle. Identifying locations that nurture such an environment is somewhat of a challenge and for my money - with its breath-taking views of the promenade and idyllic location - there aren't many sites in the North East that could come close to this aesthetically."

The investment for Tin of Sardines from Sunderland City Council and grant funding from The Coastal Communities Fund will also be used to transform a further three heritage buildings, including Seaburn's Victorian tram shelter, which will see speciality delicatessen Blacks Corner open a second restaurant.

Down on Seaburn's lower promenade, a new high-end fish restaurant is also set to open later this year in the historic Bay Shelter, led by two local restaurateurs who plan to serve up an array of seafood dishes using locally sourced produce that can be washed down with a selection of natural wines and craft beers.

Back down the coast at Roker, the team behind Sunderland's Vaux Brewery have been given the green light to create a beachfront bar in Roker's empty Victorian shelter, and Washington-born architect and TV presenter George Clarke has invested in the business.

As well as selling Vaux beers, it will also boast an array of craft beers and drinks from around the world, as well



as food options to sit-in and takeaway. With around 100 seats available indoors, and outdoor seating, the new bar will complement the independents on Marine Walk and the burgeoning demand for sea view venues.

Steve Smith, Vaux Brewery co-founder, said: "We've walked past this shelter for ages and have always felt that it would be the perfect space for us. When the council put it out to tender, we thought it was an opportunity that was too good to pass up.

"The new space won't be just a Vaux bar; it will be more of a beachfront bar and kitchen.

"It'll be a space to relax in after a long week with good craft beer, good food and good wine.

"We really see the Roker Shelter as the final piece of the Marine Walk puzzle as it's been crying out for development for years - we are just thrilled to be the ones to take on the challenge."

And adding to the plethora of new and established venues, Sunderland's promenade is undergoing more than £1m of improvements to Whitburn

Road, including an improved walkway, new street furniture and planters to match the look of the eastern promenade and improve the seaside experience for residents and visitors alike. The city council is also planning to put in place a new playpark a stone's throw from the seaside, providing new places for families to stay and play.

Cllr Graeme Miller, leader of Sunderland City Council, said: "We want our seaside to be a place that residents can be proud of, and visitors want to experience.

"To see the transformation taking place is fantastic and we're proud to be supporting the regeneration by providing a stream of investment for improvements and the preservation of important heritage buildings.

"Our city by the sea is bustling, and I look forward to seeing one of our proudest assets continue to thrive."

It seems that Sunderland's seaside has shed its tired and dated coastal image and emerged a vibrant destination that is busily reinventing itself.

