

ISLE OF WIGHT



By Graham Custance

Table Of Contents

Introduction: Where is the Isle of Wight?	3
How was the Isle of Wight formed?	3
1. Bembridge	3
About the Bembridge Pier photo	4
About the Bembridge Windmill photo	5
About the Bembridge area	6
2. Compton Beach & Bay	7
About this Compton Beach photo	7
About the Compton Beach area	8
About this Compton Bay photo	10
About this Compton Beach photo	10
3. Freshwater Bay	11
About this Freshwater Bay Sunset photo	11
About the Freshwater Bay area	12
About this Freshwater Bay photo	13
About this Freshwater Bay Cliffs photo	15
4. Osbourne House	16
About this Osbourne House photo	16
About this Osbourne House Staircase photo	17
5. Ryde	18
About this Ryde Pier photo	18
About this Ryde Sunset photo	19
About the Ryde area	20
About this Ryde Beach photo	20

9 beautiful places to visit in the Isle of Wight England

6. Sandown	21
About this Sandown Sunrise photo	21
About the Sandown area	22
About this Magical Sandown Sunrise photo	22
7. Shanklin	23
About this Shanklin Deckchairs photo	23
About the Shanklin area	24
About this Shanklin Fisherman's Cottage photo	25
About this Shanklin Old Village photo	26
About this photo of The Crab	26
About this photo of the Crab Inn	27
About this photo of Shanklin Beach	29
About this Shanklin Sunrise photo	29
8. Steephill	30
About this Steephill Cove photo	30
About the Steephill Cove area	31
About this photo of Steephill Cove	32
9. Totland	33
About this Totland Sunset photo	33
About the Totland Bay area	33
About this Totland Pier Sunset photo	34
About this Totland Bay photo	35
About this Totland Bay Sunset With Three Boats photo	36
9. Walking the wonders of the Isle of Wight	38
About this Walking in the Isle of Wight photo	39
About this Isle of Wight Walks photo	41
About this Picturesque Coastal Walks photo	41
About this Getting This Walking Boots On photo	42

9 beautiful places to visit in the Isle of Wight England

Discover 9 beautiful places in the Isle of Wight on a virtual tour with the super talented photographer, Graham Custance. Graham captures the essence of The Island in magical moments, where the landscape and light merge to make pretty postcards of perfection.

Introduction: Where is the Isle of Wight?

The Isle of Wight is located in the English Channel. It lies between two to five miles off the mainland coast of Hampshire. Separated by the Solent strait, the Isle of Wight is England's largest island, with the second biggest island population.

Renowned for its mild climate and beautiful scenery, the Isle of Wight has been a holiday destination since Victorian times. It is also known simply as The Island, and its abbreviation is IoW.

How was the Isle of Wight formed?

Did you know that the Isle of Wight is often nicknamed the Dinosaur Island?

Considered by experts to be the diamond in Britain's "[geological crown](#)," the oldest rocks that have been visible there are estimated to have been laid down around 110 million years ago. At that stage the majority of England's south and the English Channel made up part of a valley in a large river.

Those 110 million year old rocks contain the bones of various reptiles including dinosaurs.

Later on when this area sank, a deepening sea invaded it laying down clay and sands. As this sea became gradually deeper a new type of material was laid in it, which was the Chalk.

Made up of microscopic planktonic algae's fossilised skeletons, this limestone continually accumulated over millions of years, forming the large thickness of Chalk that you can see today in Tennyson Down.

1. Bembridge



Bembridge Pier

About the Bembridge Pier photo

The Bembridge Lifeboat Station is located on the eastern side of the island and was founded in 1867. I wanted to capture this iconic pier structure that leads out to the lifeboat launching station and coincided my visit with the high tide. When on the coast I always check one of the free iPhone apps that list all the details for tide times so that I can arrive at the correct time, depending on whether I am after a beach or sea scene.

The passing yacht offered an extra bonus to the picture that I was after and I just had to wait and release the shutter as it sat in the centre of two of the columns.

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Bembridge Windmill

About the Bembridge Windmill photo

A pre-dawn alarm call was required for this photograph. Initially I had intended to take a shot of the nearby Bembridge harbour with the early morning mist but when I arrived there I couldn't find a composition that I was happy with, so as a back up I thought I would try and get one of the windmill instead.

It was a mad rush (as it so often is at sunrise) to park the car and run the couple of hundred metres into the dew soaked field to set up this shot. The colours in the sky were beautiful and I decided that I would try and capture a silhouette of the windmill and set the tripod up to ensure the sun burst through the gap between the tree and the windmill.

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As I walked back to the car, I looked on the camera screen and on seeing this photo felt that the soaking wet feet that I now had was well worth it.

About the Bembridge area

Congratulations to Bembridge for winning Village of the Year 2019 in the [BBC Countryfile Awards](#). Behind the spectacular chalk cliff of Culver, lies the village of Bembridge on The Island's most easterly point. With a population of around 4000, the village is the largest in England. It is home to three beaches, an airport and a harbour.

2. Compton Beach & Bay



Compton Beach

About this Compton Beach photo

Many years ago, we stayed in a **Bed & Breakfast in Shanklin** and the lovely owners tipped us off about the best beach to visit on the island. Compton Beach, located on the west of the island is a two mile stretch of beautiful golden sand stretching out towards the cliffs at Freshwater Bay. There is a National Trust car park at the the top that leads down steep steps onto the beach.

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I love the natural patterns in the sand that form here as the tide recedes. Crouch down onto the sand when you take your photo to emphasise those textures and lead-in lines. The cliffs are full of fossils and there is a shipwreck, The SS Carbon, which makes an appearance at low tide.

About the Compton Beach area

On the Isle of Wight's west coast lies a stunning two mile stretch of beach, with striking contrasting sands of dark and golden hues. Overlooked by sandstone cliffs and Freshwater's white chalk cliffs, Compton is a popular spot for surfers. It is also a wonderful place for exploration, to go horse riding or cycling, or hunting for dinosaur fossils.

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Compton Bay Sunrise

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About this Compton Bay photo

Compton Bay is a stunning location to photograph at sunrise, where you can capture the colours in the pools of water left behind on the sand. When you are the only person there, it is magical experience to be at one with nature.



Compton Beach

About this Compton Beach photo

There's always lots of dogs walking in the water at Compton beach and I am such a dog lover, I always end up being greeted by a wet nose and paws when I am there. Great to see them galloping in the surf!

3. Freshwater Bay



Freshwater Bay Sunset

About this Freshwater Bay Sunset photo

Just a little bit further along the picturesque coast road that leads to the western end of the Isle of Wight is the beautiful town of Freshwater Bay. The beach is surrounded by tall cliffs and is mostly pebbles, although there are some sandy parts to sit on. **An old haunt for smugglers who once used the caves that are exposed at low tide.**

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The memory of this photograph is rushing from nearby Compton Bay down the cliffs and quickly setting my tripod up as the sun set over the headland on Tennyson Down.

About the Freshwater Bay area

Embraced by tall, white chalk cliffs and striking coastal formations, Freshwater Bay is an idyllic, picturesque beach located on the island's western tip. Formed from thousands of years of exposure to the Channel's waves, this is another popular spot for surfers and water sports enthusiasts. If you head there at low tide, you'll see a rock ledge where you can have great fun rock-pooling with your children.

To explore the smugglers' caves, it is best to use a local guide, so as not to be stranded when the tide changes. Kayaking is a fantastic way to discover these caves and the small bays of Scratchells and Watcombe.

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Freshwater Bay

About this Freshwater Bay photo

This photograph is taken on Compton beach looking towards Freshwater Bay cliffs. Those pink pastels only lasted briefly but were beautiful to witness.

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Freshwater Bay Cliffs

About this Freshwater Bay Cliffs photo

Tennyson Down in the distance and Stag Rock in the foreground offer a breathtaking view of West Wight. The poet, [Lord Tennyson](#), lived nearby at Farringford House for nearly 40 years.

There are so many picturesque walks on the Isle of Wight and the one that takes you over those cliffs towards The Needles is spectacular. **Extreme care has to be taken when photographing close to the cliff edge due to the continual erosion.**

4. Osbourne House



Osborne House

About this Osbourne House photo

Anyone that knows me well, will tell you how much I love my history. The rein of Queen Victoria over the Empire is one of my favourite eras too, with so many world events; the Industrial Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. To be able to combine my passion of photography with Queen Victoria's home on the island is one not to miss.

This beautiful Italian Renaissance styled house was built between 1845 and 1851 and the location reminded Prince Albert of the Bay of Naples. Queen Victoria said that 'It is impossible to imagine a prettier spot' and I have to agree with her.



Osbourne House staircase

About this Osbourne House Staircase photo

The palatial staircase inside Osborne House is quite spectacular and then you see this wonderful piece of art hanging on the wall. Inside, I have to raise the ISO setting on the camera because I do not like the harsh light of a flashgun. Although there will be some noise (graininess) on the image, modern digital SLRs can keep this to a minimum and you can always reduce it further with post processing in Adobe Lightroom.

5. Ryde



Ryde Pier

About this Ryde Pier photo

The second longest seaside pier in the country can be found at Ryde, only [Southend Pier](#) is longer. This is where the train line that uses London Underground trains, that were built in the 1930's, transports passengers all the way to Shanklin, when they arrive on the island by catamaran from Portsmouth.

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The story behind this photograph: We were having a fish and chip supper on the seafront after a day's shooting on the island when I noticed the beautiful light in the sky as the sunset. I went down to the beach and captured this perspective of the structure as it reached out to the horizon, trying to get the reflections in the pools of water.



Ryde Sunset

About this Ryde Sunset photo

Taken on the same evening as the previous picture of the pier, looking towards the mainland as the sun dips below the horizon. Again, natural patterns in the sand make for a beautiful scene. My feet and tripod were quickly sinking into the sand here, so I had to keep moving about.

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About the Ryde area

In 1814, the original pier, which was a wooden structure opened at Ryde. Measuring 1740 feet (530 metres), it could allow ferries to berth, even during the low tide. Further extensions were carried out in 1824 and by 1842, the pier had reached its current length of half a mile. (2640 feet - 804 metres). In 1864, a parallel pier was constructed for a horse drawn tramway, which went through the town connecting steamer passengers.



Ryde Beach

About this Ryde Beach photo

This was taken on a return visit to to Ryde because I knew at low tide I would be able to photograph those patterns again. The lines point the viewers eye into the scene and that couple walking across on the horizon added a nice touch of scale to the scene.

6. Sandown



Sandown Sunrise

About this Sandown Sunrise photo

A memorable sunrise on Sandown beach looking towards Culver Cliffs. I was on my way to another location when I drove along the promenade at Sandown. The smoothness of the wet sand and the ripple effect created a beautiful picture. I have really fond memories of this beach, spending many hours of my childhood here, staying at Yaverland holiday camp and Whitecliff Bay. The view from the top of the cliffs is quite spectacular looking across this bay.

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About the Sandown area

The Isle of Wight was not content with only winning Village of the Year 2019, but decided it should also be the proud owner of the title of: [Beach of the Year, in the BBC's Countryfile Awards](#).

Sandown Beach is The Island's beach that scooped that prestigious title. Sitting on the south coast, Sandown Beach is the picture perfect example of a best of British bucket and spade beach. Its vast stretch of gold sandy beach is sheltered by a broad, beautiful open bay. With plenty of attractions to choose from, including the interactive Dinosaur Museum and a Zoo in an ancient fort, Sandown is a great location for a fun family day out.



Sandown Sunrise

About this Magical Sandown Sunrise photo

Another view of that magical Sandown sunrise, the wooden posts made for an interesting foreground interest.

7. Shanklin



Shanklin deck chairs

About this Shanklin Deckchairs photo

This photo was taken at the sheltered cove at the far end of Shanklin beach. To the right of here is Shanklin Chine, a wooded coastal ravine, with footpaths that meander down amongst waterfalls, trees and vegetation. It was from this location that 'PLUTO' (Pipe Line Under The Ocean) ran from. The idea of Lord Mountbatten, laying a pipeline 70 miles across the seabed from the Isle of Wight to Cherbourg, delivering 56,000 gallons of fuel a day to the allies during the Normandy invasion.

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About the Shanklin area

Nestling between Sandown and Ventnor in a beautiful bay, Shanklin is undoubtedly one of the island's best known resorts. This charming seaside town comes complete with gorgeous quirky shops and its own theatre, which opened in 1874.

From relaxing on your deckchair to livelier activities on the Shanklin Esplanade, or from open air concerts to a deliciously, irresistible Isle of Wight Cream Tea, there is something to please all the family.



Shanklin Fisherman's Cottage

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About this Shanklin Fisherman's Cottage photo

Nestling under the cliffs at Shanklin you will find The Fisherman's Cottage, a thatched roof inn dating back to 1817. Built by William Colenutt, who also made the original pathway for visitors to Shanklin Chine. It's the perfect location to sit and have a drink or a bite to eat right on the beach.



Shanklin Old Village

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About this Shanklin Old Village photo

The picture postcard of Shanklin Old Village. Pastel coloured tea rooms, a windy road through the centre, an abundance of thatched roofs and quaint souvenir shops. Set at a lower level the main town of Shanklin, here you will find some of the oldest dwellings on the island.



The Crab

About this photo of The Crab

The Crab Inn has been servicing the local community since the 1830s when Shanklin was no more than a few cottages; its Longfellow Room being named after the stay of Longfellow in July 1868.

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On the bend is Holliers Hotel selected by Sir Edward Elgar for his honeymoon in 1889.



The Crab

About this photo of the Crab Inn

I was fortunate enough to be on the island during a snow storm, waking up in the morning to several inches of snow. Quite a rarity for the Isle of Wight and one that I was keen to capture. I headed quickly to the Old Village and to my delight the quaint thatch cottages had a lovely iced topping on their roofs.

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Shanklin Beach

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About this photo of Shanklin Beach

Smooth, silky sand and calm waters on the beach at Shanklin, ideal for a bucket and spade day out at the seaside.



Shanklin Sunrise

About this Shanklin Sunrise photo

Whether you are visiting Ryde, Compton Bay, Sandown or here in Shanklin you will always find these lovely natural patterns in the sand at low tide to bring your photographs to life. The early morning sunrise complimented the scene perfectly.

8. Steephill



Steephill Cove

About this Steephill Cove photo

One of the islands hidden gems, which I only discovered myself a few years ago, tucked away at the foot of the Ventnor undercliff.

I always try and visit the beach cafe here, where fresh seafood is served or for me one of their delicious cream teas.

An ideal location to capture some traditional fishing boats and equipment with a small lighthouse that has now been turned into spectacular accommodation.

About the Steephill Cove area

Undoubtedly a hidden gem of The Island, Steephill Cove can only be reached on foot. But the walk is well worth it, as you'll discover as you arrive at this jewel under Ventnor Cliff. Steephill Cove is a spectacular spot to relax as you breathe in the beautiful, surrounding scenery, and its inviting clear waters are idyllic for a swim. Don't forget to go exploring its fantastic rock pools.

Steephill Cove is a spectacular spot to relax as you breathe in the beautiful, surrounding scenery, and its inviting clear waters are idyllic for a swim. Don't forget to go exploring its fantastic rock pools.

Another Isle of Wight winner, Steephill Cove was featured in the [Telegraph's 40 best beaches in Britain](#) in 2018. Its charm is perfectly punctuated by the brightly coloured fishermen's cottages, fishing tackle, lobster pots and traditional deck chairs that embellish the background of this artist's dream.

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Steephill Cove

About this photo of Steephill Cove

The cove is not accessible by car and so I park at the undercliff and walk down along the footpath. This is the entrance to this pretty fishing cove.

9. Totland



Totland Sunset

About this Totland Sunset photo

A favourite location of mine to capture spectacular sunsets on the west of the island. Some foreground rocks and the pier added some compositional interest.

About the Totland Bay area

Located on the western shore of the island, Totland Bay has striking, sweeping views back to the mainland. Its turquoise waters are a firm favourite with families, but do be aware that the beach has pebbles and stones. Nearby in the Bouldnor Forest, you may be lucky enough to spot butterflies, migrating birds and red squirrels.

9 beautiful places to visit in the Isle of Wight England



Totland Pier Sunset

About this Totland Pier Sunset photo

The sweeping pebbles lead the viewer into the pier and then follow through to the sun setting on the horizon. A light cloud formation and the reflection on the sea completed the picture.

9 beautiful places to visit in the Isle of Wight England



Totland Bay

About this Totland Bay photo

On the headland I found these wildflowers growing which I thought complimented the scene overlooking the beach whilst the sun set.

9 beautiful places to visit in the Isle of Wight England



Totland Bay Sunset With Three Boats

About this Totland Bay Sunset With Three Boats photo

I had just left Freshwater Bay and drove to Totland Bay to find this gorgeous scene as the sun set over the horizon. I rapidly set up my tripod on the pebbles and started to compose the photograph before the light was lost.

Odd numbers work well for a balanced picture and I was delighted to see these three yachts moored up in the bay. After I had taken quite a few photos from different angles, I was approached by the owners of one of the yachts who asked if I could send them a copy of one of the photos that I had taken. Of course I was delighted to, it was the least I could do -after all the yacht had been integral to creating this wonderful scene.

9 beautiful places to visit in the Isle of Wight England



Totland Sunset

9. Walking the wonders of the Isle of Wight



About this Walking in the Isle of Wight photo

We were invited to join the Warrior Trail, a six mile circular walk in celebration of one of the Isle of Wight's most prominent First World War stories of General Jack Seely and his horse Warrior.

Dubbed back then the 'Horse that the Germans could not kill' having survived some of the war's most famous conflicts. The trail follows the routes that Warrior used to exercise.

We joined the local ramblers and were also accompanied by the Isle of Wight's MP, Bob Seely, whose Great, Great Uncle Jack Seely was the owner of Warrior.

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Isle of Wight Walks

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About this Isle of Wight Walks photo

The coastal path across the Downs towards Freshwater Bay. The Isle of Wight Walking Festival has over 100 different walks to choose from.



Picturesque Coastal Walks

About this Picturesque Coastal Walks photo

As well as the glorious beaches on the island take time out and explore the countryside. This view here looks towards Freshwater Bay on the west of the island.

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Get those walking boots on

About this Getting This Walking Boots On photo

The wide expanse of beach ready to be explored at low tide at Compton Bay. Million of years of geology can be found in the cliff rocks, which are home to ancient fossils and even a dinosaur footprint.

ISLE OF WIGHT PHOTO
DISCOVERY
BY GRAHAM CUSTANCE

