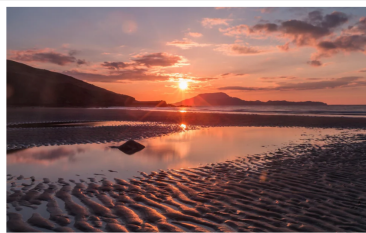


The quietest Blue Flag beaches in the UK and Ireland revealed

Analysis mapping how many people live within an hour's drive of the gold-standard beaches helps to pinpoint best strips of sand for solitude

By **Arling O'Leary**, **EDITORIAL ASSISTANT, TELEGRAPH TRAVEL**
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Clare Island in Co Mayo, Ireland only has a population of 22 within an hour's drive. (Credit: Getty Images)

Sand between your toes, blue skies, warm salty air and an ice cream in hand: is there anything better than being on a beach? Well, yes there is. That would be not spending hours in traffic to get there, only to be packed in like sardines.

We're not enjoying the most consistent of summers, but when the sun does show its face, we like to be beside the sea. Ever-changing travel guidelines and concerns regarding new Covid-19 variants are driving record domestic holiday bookings. So demand has never been higher for the 202 Blue Flag beaches that can be found in the UK and Ireland. Ideally, you want to avoid the squish that happened on Bournemouth beach last June, when an estimated half a million people descended on the sand. But that was hardly surprising when you learn that 1.6 million people live within an hour's drive of Bournemouth's shoreline.

The latest spatial analysis from **Easi UK**, a leading supplier of geographic information systems, shows that 36% of the population or 36 million people in the UK and Ireland live within an hour's drive of a Blue Flag beach. The study also shows that 1% of the population (9.8 million people) live within a 30-minute drive. To work out the rankings, researchers mapped all the beaches belonging to the Blue Flag scheme, along with Scotland's equivalent **Beach Awards**, before drive-time catchment areas were applied and population numbers calculated.

The most crowded Blue Flag beaches within an hour's drive, UK and Ireland

Beach	Population within 60 mins
Aberdeen Beach (Silver Sands), Fife	2,746,807
Shanemore Beach, Kent	2,556,664
Roker Beach, Tyne and Wear	2,444,511
Prentiss Beach, Strathclyde	2,165,855
Seagirt Beach, Dublin	2,187,751
Whitmore Bay, Glamorgan	1,876,292
Hawking Island Beach, Hampshire	1,854,855
Howe Beach (Brighton), East Sussex	1,747,791
Southbourne Beach (Bournemouth), Dorset	1,570,495

Easi UK

If you're looking for some peace and quiet, your best bet is Clare Island in Co. Mayo, Ireland with a population of just 211 within 60 minutes' driving distance. And with no quarantine restrictions when travelling to Ireland, all the better. As well as an island linked with legendary Pirate Queen Grace O'Malley, there's also a 12th century Cistercian Abbey, various Bronze Age sites and a Napoleonic tower to discover nearby.

You could also try West Sandwick in the Shetland Islands – with just 881 locals within the hour – or Sango Sands in the Highlands. The latter's north-facing location at the very top of Scotland means you can see the sun both rise and set over the ocean. Aberlarian in Gwynedd is your best option to escape the crowds in Wales.

At the opposite end of the analysis is Aberdeen Beach in Fife, Scotland, and Silvermore Beach in Kent, both topping the rankings with over 2.5 million living within an hour's drive. Roker Beach in Tyne and Wear comes a close third.

The least crowded Blue Flag beaches within an hour's drive, UK and Ireland

Beach	Population within 60 minutes
Clare Island, County Mayo, Ireland	211
CR Wharfedale, County Gwent, Ireland	711
West Sandwick, Shetland Islands, Scotland	881
Sango Sands, Highlands, Scotland	1,014
Noelton Beach, Isle of Cumbrae, Scotland	1,356
Mullaynoe Beach, County Mayo, Ireland	12,737
Braes Beach, Highlands, Scotland	31,119
Balkin Sanday, County Kerry, Ireland	31,981
Barrymore, County Cork, Ireland	42,779
Aberdare, Gwynedd, Wales	58,648

Easi UK

"Once the location of all beaches was plotted, drive times were calculated using the built-in travel time tool and the population living within each catchment area was calculated," said Sam Rank, cartographer at Easi UK.

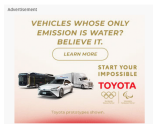
"With so much uncertainty surrounding foreign holiday travel, it's interesting to understand which award-winning beaches are located in the least and most populated areas of the British Isles, as the coastline braces itself for a very busy summer," he said.

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