

Salcombe Faces Tourism Decline Over £10 Parking

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Salcombe, Devon, Tourists are turning away from one of the UK's most expensive coastal towns after the introduction of a controversial £10 daily parking fee. The charge, imposed by South Hams District Council, has triggered frustration among business owners and residents, who say the cost is deterring visitors and damaging local trade.

Known for its high proportion of second homes, which make up roughly 60% of housing, Salcombe was named the UK's priciest seaside location by Lloyds Bank in 2022. However, average house prices have since dropped by 22%, now sitting at £970,657. Despite the fall, Salcombe remains among the most exclusive coastal markets, with Dorset's Sandbanks and Canford Cliffs still commanding average asking prices of £1.5 million and £1.2 million respectively, according to Rightmove.

The new parking charge means visitors without a permit must now pay £10 per day. In contrast, residents can buy an annual permit for just £5, which gives access to an £8 daily rate, a marginal discount, but one many feel is insufficient to attract day-trippers.

Local businesses are already feeling the impact. Beck Gordon, who owns a café and a fishmonger's in the town, told *Devon Live*: "It's quieter generally. The parking's an issue." She added, "In terms of day-trippers, if you talk about more local people, they don't come any more."

Highlighting the disparity in parking costs, Gordon said: "It's cheaper to buy a weekly parking ticket for £25 or £50 than pay £70 at the meter. It's ridiculous." Another café manager claimed she now spends up to £120 a week on parking alone.

Councillor Julian Brazil, who oversees community services at South Hams District Council, defended the changes, saying: "We'd like to do everything to help the tourism trade and we have kept our car parking charges as competitive as possible." He pointed to benefits for local workers: "Many workers in Salcombe have benefited from our competitive parking permits, which offer significantly lower long-term parking compared to our pay-on-the-day rates."

Addressing the broader rationale, Brazil added: "Our prices have been frozen for four years, and now everyone who benefits from our public services is being asked to contribute – that includes our visitors. Be under no illusion, we don't want to increase prices, but this is the best choice for us under the circumstances."

Despite the backlash, South Hams remains a highly desirable region. Property experts at Zoopla have described the area, including Dartmouth, Totnes, Kingsbridge and Ivybridge, as offering a broad range of quality homes from traditional cottages and terraced houses to luxury waterfront flats.

While the district continues to attract wealthy buyers, there is growing concern that decisions made by cash-strapped local authorities may be undermining the very tourism that keeps towns like Salcombe thriving.