

# KENT

by travel writer  
Tim Saunders



*Oystercatchers at rear*

The oystercatcher is a bird associated with the coast since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This is a fact that we learn while staying at Oystercatchers, a delightful holiday home at Seasalter in Whitstable, Kent. Its primarily wooden structure is painted powder blue and reminds us of a Norwegian home.

This part of the world is famed for oysters and sitting looking through the telescope in the sitting room it is easy to spot oystercatchers with their distinctive orange beaks and black bodies. During our break they tend to visit quite early in the morning to do their fishing in groups with some returning nearer lunchtime for another forage. Birdwatching is not something that I have previously thought to do but sitting down in a comfy chair on a heated floor on a bitter winter's day I am drawn to the telescope, as are the children. The stone floor with its underfloor heating ensures that while temperatures are sub zero outside thanks to the harsh arctic winds, we really are toasty warm inside.

It is quite unique to find a house where the beach is quite literally at the back door and with views over to the Isle of Sheppey. The many windows make it a joy to just sit inside and watch the different weather patterns and the changes in light. In fact on our first day we do little else but lounge about supping coffee and savouring the views. A

selection of fresh coffee is kindly provided together with a coffee machine and it is not long before Caroline sets about trying it. With magazines (local and national), books about art and games to keep us all amused it is a good opportunity to relax and unwind. We find ourselves totally inspired. It really gets the creative juices flowing. In fact I pick up an Ian Rankin *Rebus* novel and manage to read 100 pages over the short break. And I start planning my own novel...

Just down the road is The Oyster Pearl Pub and Restaurant and when we do venture out we are tempted to pop inside. I always like to try the local ale when travelling and in this neck of the woods Spitfire is the pint of choice, brewed by Shepherd Neame, Britain's oldest brewer, trading since 1698. You cannot help but admire a company that has weathered countless recessions, survived and conquered. Many businesses would like to know its success, I am sure. Over 300 years of experience certainly produces a tasty pint. Accompanied with a splendid and highly recommended homemade tomato soup it is followed by beer battered fish and chips, which we all thoroughly enjoy. "Oh you must try one of the desserts," recommends our extremely helpful waitress. So we all decide on the poached pear with cream and chocolate. All the food is beautifully presented. It is rare to have the luxury of such a fine restaurant right on your doorstep. It is such a joy to be presented with delicious food that you cannot make at home.