



promenade, arcade games, sweet shops and an aquarium. North of the pier, it's blue rinse territory, with a string of sleepy seaside hotels. Dotted along this coast, there are a slew of more secluded beaches: Flaghead, Middle, Alum and Branksome Chine. All are reached via romantic, hilly wooded paths (chines, in old English) that lead to the beach. Leafy, quiet Branksome Chine is the loveliest. To the north, Boscombe will soon draw wave-riders, following the construction of an artificial surf reef offshore.

Sandbanks beach, south of the Bournemouth strand, is a big star in this area. Literally across the water, it is Studland's flashy sister, sprinkled with upmarket hotels, mansions and billionaire boat people. It boasts similarly sparkling sands, though it gets rammed.

Swanage, south of Studland, is a vintage family resort. It has a striking harbour, a long and fine sandy beach – recently shored up by rows of groynes – and clifftop walks galore, plus more Enid Blyton connections (she summered and wrote many of her books around here). Once a fishing village, it came of age as a seaside resort in Victorian times, and still retains a pier from that period, plus a diving school (there are lots of shipwrecks in the area) and a bustling lifeboat station.