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Handwritten shorthand symbols: a vertical line with a hook, a curved line, a vertical line with a dot, a vertical line with a horizontal bar, a vertical line with a horizontal bar and a dot, and a vertical line with a horizontal bar and a dot.

Handwritten shorthand symbols: a vertical line with a hook, a vertical line with a horizontal bar, a vertical line with a horizontal bar and a dot, a vertical line with a horizontal bar and a dot, a vertical line with a horizontal bar and a dot, and a vertical line with a horizontal bar and a dot.

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Traditional British Seaside

My ideal summer day out is a trip to one of the seashores in Kent or Sussex, most of which are just over an hour's drive from where I live. I keep my eye on the sky and hope that any clouds will vanish by the time we get to the coast. Being a passenger I can occupy myself with admiring the scenery and it is sometimes a surprise when we arrive, seemingly suddenly, at our destination. The first seagull or his cry is the confirmation that I am looking out for. The sudden glimpse of the blue strip of the sea between the town buildings brings the same sense of anticipation every time. When younger, we wanted the tide to be out, so that we could play on the sand. Now older, we prefer the tide to be in, so that we can view the drama of the sea and waves, and we feel somewhat cheated if the water's edge is a long way off in the distance.

There are several essentials that make up a traditional British seaside. Number one must be the gift shops, selling cheap souvenirs and beach equipment. Their goods are invariably seen spilling out into the street, with piles of buckets and spades, wire baskets full of plastic footballs, boxes of flags and whirling windmills on sticks, and racks of postcards. Safely tethered there might be the inflatables, such as dinghies, rings and rafts in the shape of sharks or dolphins. Inside are ornaments, crockery, toys, beach hats and sandals. If I buy a souvenir, I prefer it to be something practical, like a mug, tea-towel or notebook, so that it can be enjoyed whilst in use but which will eventually be used up, worn out and thrown away, and not sit around forever gathering dust. I might buy a sunhat but I no longer want to collect varnished pebbles with goggle eyes and felt feet stuck on, or a wooden jewellery box with pink satin interior, covered in iridescent shells. I still find these shops hugely entertaining, and admire the originality and fertile imaginations of those who create the knick-knacks and toys that fill the shelves.

I often go into the amusement arcades and try to remember why I was drawn into using some of my precious pocket-money on the penny-pushing machine, hoping to see an avalanche of coins fall down the hole at the front and emerge into the outside dish where I could scoop it out. If only I had known then about the two concealed side holes, where most of the coins are slowly flowing over the edge and out of reach. These games gave some hope of a favourable outcome, but I never bothered with the weak-fingered crane that always dropped whatever it managed to grab. The excitement of the possibility of a jackpot payout was what we were buying, and we certainly got that. The free excitement was finding lost coins on the densely patterned carpets, or maybe someone had walked away with their winnings and then later on another coin or two would fall out of the machine. Hopefulness is what keeps the children inside, until they tire of the quest or run out of allotted time. It is a relief to come out of the deafening music and sound effects, into the fresh air and the brilliant sunshine.

I love to see the kiosks selling sweets and ice cream, the white of the bothies contrasting with the rainbow of sweets, artwork and advertisements. In the bright sunlight they are very attractive, especially if they are free-standing on the promenade, with the beach, green sea and blue sky as a backdrop. I enjoy this treat for the eyes and camera, but have no wish to bite into sticky coloured sugar lollies. On an overcast day, these kiosks brighten everything up and almost make you think that the sun has come out and that an ice cream would be a good idea despite the lack of sunshine or warmth.

Traditional British Seaside

Funfairs can be found everywhere, whether a solitary bouncy castle and one or two rides at a tiny seaside town, or a large noisy collection that includes the more boisterous rides for older children and young adults. As long as there is a carousel with painted horses, and a cup and saucer ride, I feel that tradition is fulfilled. The ubiquitous deckchairs for hire fill in the scenery along the seafront either side of the main central attractions. Their shape is truly "laid back" and sitting in one produces the same frame of mind, banishing thoughts of work, activity or anything other than almost motionless enjoyment of the surroundings, possibly with newspaper or towel draped artfully over the face for a brief snooze.

Bandstand, pier and showy municipal bedding are also warmly welcomed on my list of seaside accessories, but they count as optional extras, to be enjoyed whenever found. Pictured is the long promenade at Eastbourne in Sussex, which has all of these, dense colourful bedding displays, often designed with the latest national events in mind, an attractive and well-kept central pier in good order, and a large ornate sunken bandstand, with seating area and stage, offering an extensive diary of summer concerts and events. There is nothing quite like the sound of the band or orchestra drowning out the sound of the seagulls and the constant swishing of the waves on the pebbly beach.

Absolutely essential is the presence of a variety of fish and chip shops, with their enticing artwork of friendly-faced fish characters serving up plates of chips or the mythical King Neptune with his trident, giving up the bounty of his sea. The smell of vinegar being splashed about is indispensable to the enjoyment, although the aroma of hot fat does not have the appeal that it once did. Seeing

people sitting about on every available seat, wall and step, with paper bags full of voluminous giant chips, golden yellow, crispy outside, and soft and fluffy inside, somehow produces an illusion of hunger that was absent a few minutes ago. We like to save such pleasures for later in the day, when we have seen everything else, and whilst it is still too early to go home. When the clouds are beginning to gather at the end of the afternoon, we can sit and watch the waves, and let the warmth of the hoard of chips prevail over the increasingly cool sea breezes. One hopes that the day's exercise will cause the calories to be burned up quickly, although there are always numerous seagulls watching every move, ready to swoop in and help dispose of the fatty calories for us.

After the feast of chips, there is time for a walk down to the water's edge, looking for interesting things underfoot. My eyes instantly sort the beach debris into man-made and natural. I tut-tut over the litter and hurry past to find shells, bits of seaweed, and interesting stones with strange shapes, patterns or holes. Next on the list of must-do activities is seeing how close to the sea's edge I can stand without getting wet feet, and experiencing yet again the folly of being surprised when an extra large wave makes a lunge at me. Retreating up the steeply-shelving stony beach is another adventure, as I imagine giant waves licking at my heels, whilst I scabble up the treacherous slope, but only succeed in treading the pebbles down. A zigzag course up the stones gets me back to safety and the car. Having wrung every last minute out of the day, we make our satisfied journey home to our sea-less dry suburb, where we are finally safe not only from the dangers of the deep, but also the temptation to devour another bag of chips. (1302 words)