

MAKING A SPLASH

Dive into the exciting world of coasteering and the National Coasteering Charter



Author profile

Tom Partridge is Head of United World Colleges (UWC) Atlantic Experience where he is responsible for the delivery of both student and external participants' outdoor learning. He is the South Wales representative of the IOL Cymru and has been involved in outdoor and adventure education for over 20 years. Amongst other things, Tom is also the regional representative for the National Coasteering Charter (NCC) in South Wales, a representative on the NCC Committee and a provider of the NCC Guide Award.

Whether you are new to the term 'Coasteering' or you are a current guide, this article covers a range of topics including who the National Coasteering Charter are, how to get hold of the latest safety advice and where to go for training and certification as a guide.

What is coasteering?

Coasteering is a popular and growing activity that takes place in many locations around the UK Coastline and, increasingly, in other parts of the world. It provides a unique activity that allows people to explore and experience the coast like never before with many challenges, learning opportunities and excitement to be had along the way.

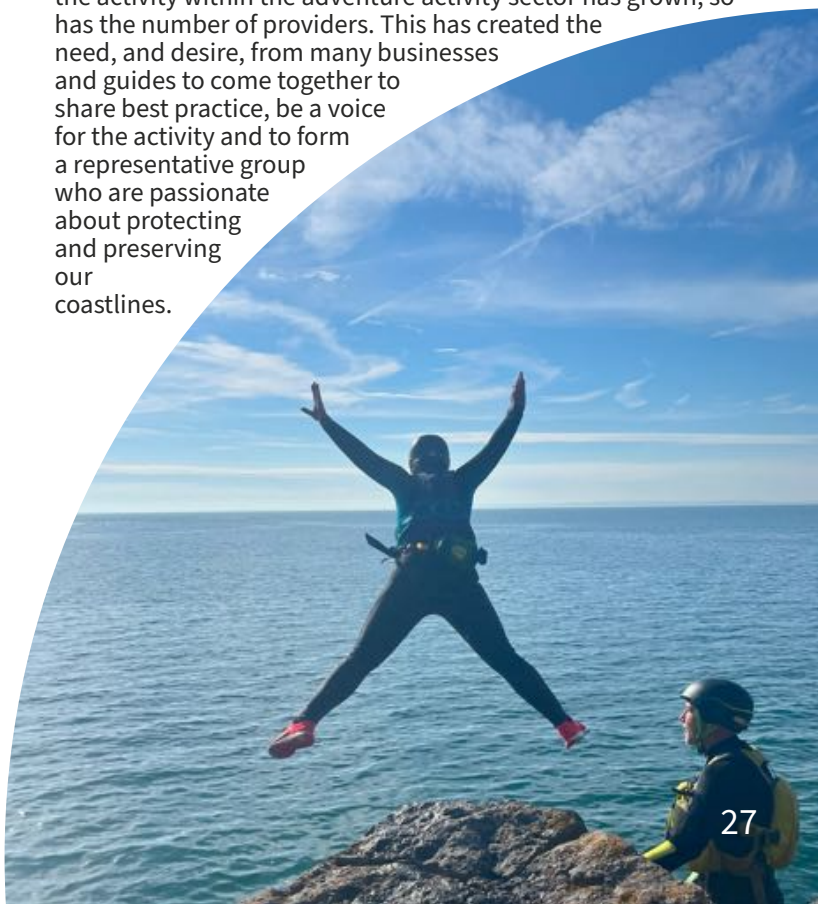
While the term coasteering can be used to describe a range of activities linked to activity around the sea, the National Coasteering Charter (NCC) defines coasteering as:

“An activity that includes swimming, jumping, scrambling, and or traversing along and in the fore-shore region of a coastline under the guidance of a coasteering guide. When participating in the activity of coasteering, participants should wear an appropriate wetsuit, personal floatation device, helmet and closed-toe footwear that is secured to the foot.”

Most people have their first experience of coasteering as part of a programme of activities with an adventurous activity provider. This is the best way to learn the basic skills needed to have a go safely, paying particular attention to the environment and safety issues under the expert advice and guidance of a guide.

The National Coasteering Charter - NCC

Exploring the coastline by kayaking, scrambling, fishing and swimming are all long-established activities. Coasteering is a relatively new activity and involves groups making their way around a well-established series of routes at a coastal location wearing wetsuits, helmets and buoyancy aids. As popularity for the activity within the adventure activity sector has grown, so has the number of providers. This has created the need, and desire, from many businesses and guides to come together to share best practice, be a voice for the activity and to form a representative group who are passionate about protecting and preserving our coastlines.



A brief history of the NCC

In 2011, around eighty coasteering providers and interested parties such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) came together to form an organisation that would represent and advise the coasteering industry on a national scale. From this meeting, the fledgling National Coasteering Charter (NCC) was born.

Throughout the UK there are more than 400 members of the NCC today. They are made up of a range of companies, organisations and individual members (who are often freelance guides, sole-traders or staff at coasteering businesses). The NCC works regionally and nationally to support coasteering. It is split into regional groups that have representatives who ensure that members in their area are kept up-to-date with current practice, share information and learning and facilitate annual regional meetings.

The NCC also hosts a symposium every two years that is located in a different region, where members come together for workshops, practical sessions, see practice from other regions and keep abreast of the latest guidance from the NCC. The NCC works to represent its members and the activity of coasteering with the sector. With the growth in popularity of the activity, providers of coasteering now have an organisation that can advise and represent the sector, while promoting safe practice more broadly.

Another key part of the work of the NCC is to support access and conservation. At many coasteering sites around the UK there is a need for providers to engage in access schemes that permit responsible and sustainable coasteering. Through our national voice, the NCC has been able to work closely with key partners and landowners to support regional groups and representative bodies to maintain and provide access for coasteering. The NCC continues to promote environmental responsibility and actively encourages a range of environment-specific topics in our regional workshops and symposiums to ensure there is always the opportunity for learning more about the unique environment we get to explore.

Safety advice for coasteering providers

Providing up-to-date guidance for safe coasteering to NCC members and the wider coasteering community is an important and ongoing part of the work. In March of 2024, the NCC published an updated version of 'Safety Advice for Coasteering Providers' following a series of consultations at both committee and membership level.

This document is available on the NCC website and anyone involved in providing or guiding coasteering should be aware of the advice and guidance within.

An award to recognise competence - The NCC Guide Award

In 2021, work began on the first draft of a 'Coasteering Guide Award'. With input from members and experienced providers, a working group went through the first draft of the syllabus, training and assessment criteria. Regions voted for and proposed 'Guide Award Providers' from each region who would deliver the first training and assessment courses. Following ongoing scrutiny of the syllabus, development of an administration system and a face-to-face weekend of standardisation, skills assessments, and further tweaks to the syllabus, the NCC Guide Award was launched to the public in April of 2022.

What has happened since then...

- Over 200 guides have been trained and 100 assessed.
- The committee has appointed an 'Award Administrator' to ensure the awards are correctly processed and to ensure important information is shared between providers.
- A two-year review of the award has been undertaken which took into account any changes or reviews to the syllabus, the proposal of a standardisation and moderation policy, and a pathway for new providers of the award.

The success of the Guide Award has led to a dramatic growth in the number of members, specifically individual members. In addition, as the NCC grows so does its need to revisit the constitution on which it was based. Work for the coming two to three years will include: (1) redrafting the constitution to reflect how the NCC functions currently; (2) developing a strategic plan and vision for the NCC to take us into the next five years; (3) establishing new projects and work streams to support the development of coasteering; (4) embedding a robust standardisation and moderation policy into the NCC Guide Award as well as supporting probationary providers to achieve full status.

If you are interested in finding out more about NCC Guide Training then you can head directly to the website where you will find a range of information including the syllabus, criteria and other supporting documents. You will also find a calendar of advertised courses and a list of providers of the Guide Award by region ▲

For more information regarding the NCC Guide Award visit: nationalcoasteeringcharter.org.uk/coasteeringguideaward or contact coasteeringguideaward@gmail.com

For more general information on Guidance, Membership and Regional Representation visit: nationalcoasteeringcharter.org.uk or contact coasteeringsecretary@gmail.com

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