

My Somerset Life

A diary by Brian Snellgrove

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Are cheap UK package holidays worth it?

Also see Notes on a visit to Norfolk



An exceptional rainbow caught on arrival in Great Yarmouth 28 March 2024

Once a Yorkshire man, always a Yorkshire man?

Maybe it is because I was born in Yorkshire but I'm always on the lookout for a bargain and back in October I spotted in the Midsomer Journal a deal for a five-day holiday in Great Yarmouth which for non UK readers is about as east as you can get in the United Kingdom.

The price for four nights/five days including dinner bed and breakfast plus transport plus excursions was £207 per person making a total of £414 including travel from a local pick up point. Was this offer too good to be true?

Benefits of group travel

First of all, this is a 'time of the year' sensitive offer. It is the week before Easter Day. Everyone starts their holiday either on Good Friday or Saturday before Easter Day and takes advantage of the extra paid statutory holidays.

Holiday firms have considerable bargaining power with hotels which means that if the hotels are going to be half full they make a job lot offer. The hotel is glad to fill the accommodation until they get going in the season which is normally between Easter and October.

Holiday firms are not going to organize rubbish accommodation since they have their reputation to maintain and the last thing they want is a bad review on TripAdvisor or one of the other platforms.

Let us imagine I had decided to do the same holiday on our own. Distance from Midsomer Norton to Great Yarmouth? 265 miles. Multiply that by 2, add-on the two excursions one of which was Norwich and the other one which was Sheringham and Cromer and you've got the best part of 630 miles. With my car which is quite a heavy drinker I can't see that as giving much change out of £140. If you add on four nights bed breakfast (say £80 a night) and 4 evening meals (£20 per head) that's £480 giving you a total of £620 plus any liquid refreshment.

I cannot tell you what a pleasure it is to be driven around with no parking to worry about. What about companions? Such tours do attract people of a certain age. I reckon pretty much everybody on the coach, which was full by the way, were retired people. They were however very jolly and positive, making lots of jokes sometimes at the expense of the driver. For such jobs drivers are employed because of their good temperament and willingness to help.

I should add that I went with the firm Just Go that has

rapidly expanded over the last few years. What you do is to get a notification by text a few days beforehand telling you when and where you are expected. We had to be at a pickup point in Bath at 8:55 a.m. On Monday 25th March. We were taken by pick up van to a meeting point at a service station on the M4. Due to the length of the journey it was necessary for the driver to have stops and we eventually arrived about five pm.

Understand that the coach journey is long and of course depends on the state of the traffic. Ask for the food, I found it unexciting but adequate but not really enough attention given to vegetarians. I do understand that they will working to a budget. Francoise made a request for an alternative to cottage pie and she got roasted pepper with vegetables which she found quite attractive. Each morning at 9:30 p.m. we went off for a special coach excursion which was included in the price.

The first one was to Cromer and the second one to Norwich. We were let loose in Norwich for about three and a half hours. Each day we returned at about 4:30 pm in time for a fixed time dinner at 6 p.m. Afterwards, various standard drinks were offered for 99 pence which are very good value for money.

We preferred to retire to our room and read or watch TV. On Tuesday and Thursday there were entertainments. Retro in their appeal they were, but very good for those who wished to be entertained and sing along with the music.

My observation and conclusions are as follows:

1 the tour is very good value for money. If there are an equal works of things that don't quite right, just take it as part of the features and characteristics of a tour. If you tried to do it yourself you would spend 50% extra at least and have all the trouble of driving a considerable number of miles.

2. Meals. Fruit juices, porridge, conflicts, toast plus limited buffet for breakfast. Three courses for supper with one alternative offered per course but if you can't take either of them the chef will not something up such as a stuffed pepper or omelette. No, it is not gourmet food but you lead the table satisfied

3. The organizing firm has their reputation to lose if things do not go well and you can always complain to them and they are more likely to take notice of you as part of a group rather than an individual. That is a sort of insurance policy against being disappointed.

4. Also, you have the company or quite jolly and knowledgeable people so you are not traveling on your own and this may keep tensions down in some cases.

5. If things do not go well, just laugh and move on. Can the event a 'feature' or 'quirk'.

To tip or not to tip?

It is worth mentioning the topic of giving tips. There is usually an opportunity to tip the waitresses at the end of a visit that if arrangements are not made then drop them a fiver or so. As for the driver if he has given good service then a tip is de rigour. Some people pass around a hat and give it to the driver but I prefer to give it direct. On Friday our driver drove 270 miles plus the distance from Bristol to Exeter which on a bank holiday with the enhanced rate of traffic jams and accidents, must have taken its toll.

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