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time to EXPLORE

For holidays in the new normal...

Time travel

BY VICKY LISSAMAN



Milford Haven Marina celebrates 30 years

On the far South West tip of Wales, Milford Haven has one of the deepest, natural harbours in the world and a long heritage firmly connected with the sea.

A port since the Middle Ages, it is famous for fishing and shipbuilding, has a history that includes associations with Lord Nelson, Oliver Cromwell and Henry Tudor, as well as playing a key role in the energy industry.

Although Shakespeare referred to it as "blessed" in his tragicomedy Cymbeline, any prizes for prettiness went to the holiday hotspots along the Pembrokeshire coast. However, the tide is turning thanks to its multi-million pound development programme. The waterfront and marina is fast becoming a magnet for tourists thanks to an exciting variety of places to eat and drink and an array of independent shops.

This summer will mark 30 years since the opening of Milford Marina and changes have gathered pace with more former industrial buildings converted into restaurants and for retail.

Those who want to experience life on the water can also book into one of four stylish one-bedroom "floating" cabins in the marina itself, (from £80 per night, two sharing, dogs welcome in two cabins).

The next phase of development is due to be completed in spring 2022 and will see the opening of a dramatic 100-room waterfront hotel by The Celtic Collection.

Milford Haven may not have a beach, but it offers visitors plenty to do and a chance to see a different side to Pembrokeshire.

Alongside shopping, eating out and watching the endless flow of boats and ships on the estuary, there's a fascinating museum documenting Milford Haven's history, walking trails, boat trips, sea fishing and wildlife watching off Skomer and Skokholm.

Prior to the pandemic, the waterfront played host to a lively programme of events including beer festivals, street food events, an annual fish festival and live music which, restrictions permitting, will start reappearing later this year. milfordwaterfront.co.uk

Rock up to the new, later-date Isle of Wight Festival 2021 on September 16-19 with a Wightlink ferries day return foot passenger ticket from Portsmouth for £10 per person. Headliners including Liam Gallagher, Tom Jones, Kaiser Chiefs and Duran Duran. wightlink.co.uk

VIVA BOS VEGAS Boscombe Beach



CABIN FEVER Mudeford beach huts are hot property



David McClay gets on board with a motorhome for a family trip to Dorset



BIG HIT The family loved "Big Bertha"



IT'S GOT THE LOT Alum Chine Beach



GLOWING FOR GOLD Sunset over Sandbanks



MAJESTIC Bournemouth pier

Back a bit, back a bit, bit more... stop! Forward a bit, back a bit, keep going... WHOA!

Chuck in a muttered curse here and a look of despair there and, bingo, you have successfully parked your Chausson Flash 25.

This motorhome lark is easy. Mild panic had set in when I first clapped eyes on the six-berth behemoth we had hired for the weekend. How the heck would I get to grips with this 23ft-long whopper of a wagon?

Thankfully, after some tips and words of reassurance from the nice people at motorhome specialists Vaaroom in Romford, East London, it soon became a lot less daunting. In fact it's amazing how quickly you settle into the driving seat.

And so, after a near miss with a stop sign at our very first junction, we were chugging along cheerily in our diesel-powered dwelling all the way to Dorset.

The irony, though. Fresh from a year of being cooped up in Covid captivity, perhaps spending three nights with the family in this 18sq yd humble abode on wheels wasn't the brightest idea. Honey, I shrunk the house.

If this doesn't crank the kids' petty squabbling up to 11, nothing will.

Stay tuned for an episode of Breaking Dad.

But I am glad to report we not only survived – we thrived. In fact, we're already planning our next motorhome escapade (with added parking sensors).

These things come with all mod cons. Hob, oven, fridge, shower, toilet, TV and just enough room to swing a cat (not sure why you would want to, though).

Our girls, eight and six (strange names, I know), made a beeline for the bunk beds while my wife and I kipped on the surprisingly spacious and comfy level above the driver's compartment. The lounge area also transforms into a sleeping area for two.

Sure, it comes with its problems (see parking, above). But if you want adventure and don't mind the odd mishap or two, a motorhome holiday could be for you. An electrical malfunction (OK, operator error...) meant we spent our first night huddled round the fold-out dining table, eating takeaway pizza in the dark. But we had a right old laugh. On day two, the heating didn't work (OK, operator error... next time I promise to read the provided instruction manual) but

we had a ball playing board games, wearing bobble hats and wrapped up in sleeping bags. Now that is making memories.

As for the daily cleaning out of the cassette toilet, you kind of get used to it.

We stayed at the well managed and well positioned Meadowbank holiday park in Christchurch, around five miles outside Bournemouth. From here you can cycle along the River Stour all the way into the pleasant town centre, which is dominated by a magnificent 12th-century Norman Priory.

Christchurch has one of the oldest populations in the country but you wouldn't think it. The harbour in particular is buzzing with life and there are opportunities here for boating, fishing and all manner of watersports.

Or just kick back in the Boathouse cafe and watch the world go by with a drink and some delicious, fresh seafood.

There are also wonderful walks from here to the headland at Hengistbury and its stunning views of the Isle of Wight and Purbeck.

Three miles to the east is Mudeford Quay, which offers a similar vibe plus the bonus of an adjacent sandy beach. And crabbing. Boy, do the kids love crabbing. Mudeford is also where you will find Britain's most expensive beach huts... one 12x10ft cabin sold for an eye-popping £325,000 last year.

You have seven miles of golden sands to choose from in these parts, but Southbourne Beach is a favourite for locals who know where to head to avoid the crowds that swarm round Bournemouth Pier. Up the road in trendy "SoBo" there are chic cafes and swish restaurants galore, but the beach is the real pull and there is always enough space to find your own spot.

Same applies in more down-at-heel Boscombe (dubbed "Bos Vegas" by locals). It's here where £3million was spent on an artificial surfing reef in the hope it would help regentrify one of Bournemouth's most deprived areas. The doomed

folly was closed two years after its launch in 2009. Still, the beach end of Boscombe ain't too shabby and a visit to Urban Reef, where you can enjoy top-notch coffee and brunch with unrivalled vistas out to sea, is a must.

Alum Chine Beach to the west of the town centre is another cracker. Far enough away from all the hustle and bustle, this beach is backed by majestic tropical gardens and coastal pines. It takes the phrase "family friendly" and runs with it... toilets, playground, ice creams, restaurant, cafe, lifeguards – you name it, Alum Chine has it.

And don't be afraid to brave the sea – these are some of Britain's warmest waters and can even reach 20C in the summer.

It's not all about the beaches down here. Get a ferry to Brownsea Island to seek out red squirrels. Embrace your

“This belter of a staycation was all the better for having our motorhome”



STEAM AHEAD Corfe Castle seen from Swanage Railway



GREEN DREAM Compton Acres



COMFORT BREAK Inside the motorhome

inner Enid Blyton and ride the steam-powered Swanage Railway. Stroll round the 10-acre horticultural heaven of Poole's Compton Acres. Get on your bike in the enchanting New

Forest. Head to Chez Fred in Westbourne for phenomenal fish and chips. Go Harry Redknapp spotting in Sandbanks (OK, maybe that's just us...).

Back in Christchurch, the kids would not let us ignore the signs to Adventure Wonderland, a small but pleasingly queue-light theme park offering thrills and spills. They also loved racing down the dry ski slope in rubber rings at the nearby Snowtrax centre.

As staycations go, this has been a belter and all the better for having our, by now beloved,

STAR SPOTTING Harry Redknapp lives at Sandbanks



Having a Ball on this cruise

BY JULIE DELAHAYE

Looking to plan a holiday that's full of sun, beautiful destinations and glamour? A new luxury Canaries cruise could tick all of those boxes.

Imagine Cruising's new 14-night Ultimate Canaries Sailing not only boasts an itinerary packed with sun-soaked hotspots, but passengers will also be treated to some dazzling entertainment.

Think exclusive performances by West End star Michael Ball, an interview with TV icon Eamonn Holmes, performances by Britain's Got Talent winner Paul Potts, and a celebration of all things ABBA courtesy of parody pop group Björn Again.

Cunard's regal Queen Elizabeth cruise ship will provide the luxurious setting, complete with perks such as White Star Service, fine dining, gala balls and a luxurious spa.

Staterooms and suites boast king-sized beds with plush bedding, nightly turndown service and a seven-pillow menu.

There's plenty to explore onboard too from the plethora of restaurants serving everything from fine dining to classic pub fare, to the Royal Arcade with its shop-lined promenade.

As for the itinerary? Get ready for plenty of bucket list-worthy destinations.

Departing from Southampton, the ship will sail to Madeira's vibrant capital Funchal, where passengers will have an overnight stay (on the ship) with plenty of time to explore highlights such as the Botanical Gardens.

Then it's time to head to three Canary Islands – Tenerife, Gran Canaria and Lanzarote – where golden beaches, dramatic volcanic landscapes and an abundance of marine life await.

Other highlights include a trip to Spain's Cadiz, famed for its tapas and flamenco, followed by Portuguese capital Lisbon where you'll find historic buildings and a vibrant atmosphere.

BOOK IT: Cabins cost from £1,499pp on board the 14-night Ultimate Canaries Sailing, sailing on a round trip from Southampton on October 18, 2021. Book at imaginecruising.co.uk/reach

*Reach PLC will gain commission from bookings.



STAR Eamonn Holmes

BOOK IT

Vaaroom has motorhome hire depots in Bristol, Edinburgh, Romford (East London) and Sheffield, with two berth and six berth vehicles available. Rates start at £50 a night. vaaroom.com 0330 403 5164

MORE INFO

visit-dorset.com