

VACATIONS - STAYCATIONS - BOURNEMOUTH



IF STAYING IN IS THE NEW GOING OUT, BRITAIN IS THE NEW ABROAD – SO STAYING HOME FOR THIS YEAR'S HOLIDAY IS THE WAY TO GO. ROGER WHEELER VISITS BOURNEMOUTH, POOLE AND STUDLAND IN DORSET

With the euro virtually at parity with the pound, going abroad is now expensive and by staying at home you can avoid the pain of budget air travel. Have you booked online recently? With a couple of the 'web's favourite' carriers you have to uncheck some boxes on the booking form twice, and if you want to actually use airport check-in desks they will charge you. Never mind luggage – don't take any. Pointless priority boarding or sitting together will cost you more and if you want to eat or drink during the flight, take your credit card. To top the lot, Ryanair is now thinking about charging you to use the toilet.

Last year, we visited Cornwall, Bournemouth, Birmingham, Somerset, Cardiff, Newport, Chester and Potters Bar and we would happily go back to them all. Well, maybe not Potters Bar and definitely not Newport, Wales. I was always told that if you can't say anything nice then it's best to say nothing so I'm saying nothing about Newport.



During this UK tour we stayed in Premier Inns. Cheap and cheerful, they are totally anonymous but they deliver clean, comfortable rooms. Once you're in one you could be anywhere. They're the hotel equivalent of a shopping mall – featureless and boring – but at around £60 per room you don't expect a lot.

The big surprise came in Bournemouth at the **Premier Inn Bournemouth Central**. This hotel is quite amazing: a Grade II-listed building, built in 1933 in original art deco style, it has been restored to the highest possible standard. Not what you'd expect from a

Premier Inn. Whitbread, Premier Inns' owner, bought it a few years ago after a succession of owners – Hilton, Stakis, and Golden Tulip – had overspent on the renovations and couldn't make it work. It's in one of the prime positions in the town and the rooms are big, the beds great, the bathrooms huge with large baths and walk-in power showers, stunning views over the bay, flatscreen TVs and several large armchairs. This really is a three-star hotel selling a five-star product. Unlike the standard Premier Inn, it has an excellent restaurant and bar actually on site in the hotel. We paid £70 per room, which was great value for money. They are still working on the restoration. Listed-building status means having to conform to very high standards. They will be restoring the swimming pool next year. Whatever next in a Premier Inn?

Bournemouth is great; a bit like Brighton with class. It has everything you would want from a major seaside resort without the tatty, scruffy streets and *Big Issue* sellers. It's clean and tidy yet has a lot of style. The shopping centres are a bit identikit, as you would expect, but that's the UK today. Plenty of good restaurants, bars and so on.

The gay scene in Bournemouth is long-established and centred mainly around **The Triangle** in the centre of town. Drag is popular in the bars



and clubs and the club night **Circus** (formerly Bolts) is staged on bank holiday Sundays in the fabulous setting of the **Opera House**. Bournemouth has its own Pride festival, **Bourne Free**, which this year takes place from **July 10 to 12**. Bournemouth's

greatest asset is, without doubt, its beaches, with miles of sand and a very nice pier. Just a bus ride away through **Sandbanks** (which reputedly has some of the most expensive real estate in the world) and then a quick ferry ride and there you are in **Studland Bay**, with the biggest naturist beach in the country.

Bournemouth's sister town, **Poole**, is another big surprise. Once you get through the hideous shopping mall to the old town and the quayside you'll be very happy. It's really nice. Poole Harbour is the second largest natural harbour in the world and the views are stunning. There are loads of bars and restaurants, and the cobbled streets and little shops are fascinating.

The combination of Bournemouth, Poole and Studland make this a great place for a stay-at-home holiday. All you need to organise is the weather!

www.gaybournemouth.net
www.thegaystation.com/bournemouth/
www.enjoyengland.com/value
www.premierinn.com



BOURNEMOUTH VENUES

- **THE BAKERS ARMS** 77 Commercial Road, 01202 555506
- **BAZAAR** 103 Commercial Road, 01202 241998
- **2930 THE TRIANGLE** 29–30 The Triangle, www.2930thetriangle.com
- **THE BRANKSOME** 152 Commercial Road, www.thebranksome.com
- **CIRCUS** @ the Opera House, 570 Christchurch Road, Boscombe, www.operahouse.co.uk
- **RUBYZ** cabaret restaurant, 101 West Hill Road, www.rubyz.co.uk
- **SAUNABAR** 4 Avenue Lane, www.gaysaunabar.com
- **BAR VENTANA** The Cumberland Hotel, East Overcliff Drive, www.barventura.co.uk
- **THE XCHANGE** 4 The Triangle, 01202 294321