



BUTLINS, BOGNOR & BEYOND

Roger Wheeler discovers nostalgia is not for him

Bognor

There is a myth that George 5th's last words in 1936, upon being told that he would soon be well enough to revisit **Bognor**, were, "*Bugger Bognor!*" And so it came to pass that having been to lots of glamorous hotels and resorts, we ended up in **Butlins** in Bognor! Why? You may well ask.



BUTLINS OCEAN HOTEL

They have just opened their £20m **Ocean Hotel** and being a Brightonian, I remember with great affection our very own Butlins Ocean Hotel in Saltdean, just to the east of the city. Of course, Butlins sold that many years ago and it's now flats, Butlins itself was sold by the Rank Organisation in 2000 to the new operators, Bourne Leisure.

So lured by the promise of a boutique hotel experience, without the knobbly knees or glamorous grannies of yester year, we set off for Bognor. I was very curious to see what one of our national icons would have to offer same sex couples in 2009. The new Butlins Ocean Hotel opened last August. Leaving my preconceptions behind, we checked in, a very slick reception area and uber friendly staff. We were given a map of the attractions and



OCEAN HOTEL BEDROOM

asked to wear bright orange wristbands with Butlins in huge letters. No thanks we said, we know where we are. All very bright primary colours, pink being the overriding theme. Our room was a surprise, very modern, two bedrooms – one for the kids with their own television, huge bathroom, the main bedroom had a huge bed with a snowdrift of white duvets and pillows plus a balcony with table and chairs. Can this be Butlins? The view from our sixth floor balcony was of the car park, itself huge, with the sea in the distance.

We were there for one of their 'adult' weekends, ie: no children. In essence this meant that we were joined by 3,400 'adults' who were there mainly for stag and hen weekends. This meant they were there primarily to get extremely drunk for 36 hours. They were totally harmless; there were no problems, fights or even vomiting. Some of



OCEAN BAR

their costumes were amazing, from *Star Wars* storm troopers to a pack of Little Red Riding Hoods; their capacity for beer, also quite astonishing.

The food was fine, dinner and breakfast really not at all bad, not exactly Michelin starred but, hey, this is Butlins. The restaurant in the hotel was, again, all bright candy floss colours, vivid pink floor and peppermint green columns, so sunglasses essential. The Butlins experience without children was rather soulless, the funfair wasn't working, "*they get too drunk for the rides,*" we were told. Most of the attractions were closed and the Red Coats were not on duty.

We appeared to be the only same sex couple there, so I can't recommend a weekend at Butlins in Bognor for a wild Gay outing. It would not be a good idea to be 'out' in that environment. For families with children it always was and still is unbeatable value, it can start at **£30 per person** for dinner, bed and breakfast up to about **£120** for a peak season for three nights. Although it's not for us, Butlins is fine, a great British institution and long may it remain so.



WEALD & DOWNLAND MUSEUM

Weald & Downland Museum

Although I've lived in Brighton for decades I've never visited the far west coast of Sussex. The **Witterings**, West and East, **Bracklesham Bay**, **Dell Quay** and **West Itchenor** are all beautiful. Just a few miles south of **Chichester**, the coast is gorgeous. Just a few miles north is the wonderful **Weald & Downland Museum** at **Singleton**. If Butlins isn't your cup of tea then this beautiful open air museum will certainly please. A few miles north of Chichester on the A286, just beyond Goodwood, this fascinating museum is educational and entertaining. Set in 50 acres of beautiful Sussex countryside, you can wander amongst a collection of nearly 50 historic buildings dating from the 13th to the 19th century, many with period gardens, together with farm animals, woodland walks and a picturesque lake. The museum was opened in 1970 and now attracts about 140,000 visitors a year. Rescued from destruction, the buildings have been carefully dismantled, conserved and rebuilt to their original form and they bring to life the homes, farmsteads and rural industries of the last 500 years. It's a great place for a day trip.

www.butlins.com
www.wealddown.co.uk



WEALD & DOWNLAND MUSEUM, 14TH C BUILDING FROM HORSHAM