



## FURTHER AFIELD?

Having trouble finding gay friendly holiday accommodation? Roger Wheeler checks out Further Afield

About six years ago when I had just met my partner, Mike, we decided to take a weekend trip into rural Ireland, he was living in Galway. I was looking for a simple B&B when he expressed concern about finding somewhere that would accept same-sex couples. I was very surprised that he should say this, thinking that such a problem could not exist. I now understand that prejudice still exists even in some parts of the UK.

This is the reason that **Andrew Craven** and **Simon Forrester** started a new company called **Further Afield**. Based close to Hay on Wye on the border of England and Wales, the idea came from their frustration at wading through endless websites promising 'gay friendly' guest houses, which hardly ever lived up to expectations.

Londoners Andrew and Simon, who have been together for 15 years, living what can only be described as a genuine high flying gay life in the Capital, did the classic relocation (without the help of Phil and Kirsty) and built a new life in the country. 47 year-old Simon was head of media with WWF and Andrew, 45, was development director at the Natural History Museum, so the jump to the idyllic country life was quite a shock. They bought a

house in Hay and developed an adjoining property into a self catering cottage aimed at the gay market. They couldn't find a suitable site to advertise their new venture so started their own and called it Further Afield. And it seems to be working.



THE PERON HAY-ON-WYE

Their first venture into self catering accommodation with a barn conversion has been greeted by the likes of *The Guardian* and *The Independent* as among the best places (or 'rural retreats' as we must now call them) in the country. So they set about collecting a portfolio of hotels and guest houses that welcome same sex couples with the respect that everyone should expect in 2010. They launched their website a few months ago with a collection of nearly 40 hotels, guest houses and self catering accommodation.

Most of these properties are in the **West Country**, the **Yorkshire Dales**, the **Lake District**, a few in **Spain** and **Portugal** and even **Margate**. Not cheap, the much overused word 'luxury' is brought fully into use in the descriptions and no doubt they probably are. Whether the problem of finding a gay hotel or guest house is perceived or not you have got to hand it to these guys for initiative. It is

true that when we decided to go to Crete a few years ago finding a gay friendly guest house was very difficult, in fact almost impossible online. In the UK it should not be a problem, but occasionally it can be. Of course the major hotel groups will have no problem so long as you have the cash.

I haven't visited any of the 40 or so properties they list on their very well designed website, but they all look pretty good. But as we all know to our cost, websites can be very deceptive. Andrew and Simon state that they have visited most of their recommendations - that must have been quite a trip.



SHAKESPEARE HOUSE - AYLESBURY

### TRAVELLING LIGHT...

Whilst we are talking about holidays, if you're thinking about flying **easyJet** this year the good news is that, without any fanfare, they have quietly increased the size of the case you can carry on to the aircraft. It used to be smaller than the other main airlines, now you can take a case measuring 56x45x25cm. There is no weight limit so long as you can lift it into the overhead locker without help, pack what you like. They tend to keep news like this quiet. Ssh!

### SKY HIGH...

Their low cost competitor **Ryanair** has increased its 'extras' prices by up to 700%. The airline has announced it will increase the fee to check in luggage by 33 per cent, making it to £40 per bag per return flight. Passengers must also now pay a £10 online check-in fee per return flight. A fee of £10 per person per return flight is also added to all payments made by credit or debit card, with the exception of those involving prepaid MasterCard debit cards. Ryanair has been criticised for attracting customers with low headline fares, then adding a host of 'optional' charges. Last year it received around £650 million in 'ancillary' revenues. A spokesman said the airline was temporarily raising its fees to check in luggage to "incentivise passengers to travel light". It simply 'incentivises' me to fly with another airline.

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