



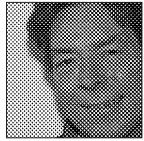
The great train lottery

Roger Wheeler – The roaming pen

More things they don't want you to know.

I've been roaming around again and looking at ways you can go places without a second mortgage, if you could get one these days. But by now everyone must be aware of the availability of cheap train fares through the many specialist websites and those nice people in the 1 Stop Travel shops. But there are some websites that can give some really amazing value fares, www.nationalexpresseastcoast.co.uk is well known. The name might suggest otherwise but the National Express East Coast system covers the whole UK, has no booking fees and sometimes gives extra discounts if your journey uses its network. One advantage of this is it includes a low fare finder, which will also find alternative routes which may be cheaper. But www.megatrain.com beats them all. We all know about the cheap bus fares offered by Megabus, owned by Stagecoach. When they started buying train franchises they slipped the megatrain website online without any fanfare, the reason being that the site undercuts prices being offered by its other companies. You can book train tickets up to 45 days in advance and fares start at £1.00, but it's very unlikely you will actually get a ticket at that price. As you would expect you can't use railcards, you

must use the services you have specified and you can't break your journey. As with Megabus they do add a 50p booking fee but it is about the best value around at the moment. Scotrail's extraordinary £19 each way sleeper fare to Edinburgh is another incredible fare, take a look at www.firstgroup.com/scotrail, click on fares and tickets and then sleepers. Some basic things to remember when looking for cheap train fares; Two singles are often cheaper than a return; e tickets or text tickets to your mobile phone are always cheaper (Virgin, Chiltern and National Express offer these) Railcards will give a third off most fares. Beware of The Trainline and Raileasy both of which charge booking fees and extra for using credit or debit cards, how else are you going to pay, I have tried pushing cash into the computer but it doesn't seem to work, so you are always going to pay 2.5% extra for using your card. Don't forget that from September all tickets bought on the day of travel will be either Anytime or Offpeak but you can buy Advance tickets up to 45 days ahead. The new system was designed to make life easier, nothing on Britain's complicated privately run railway network will ever really be simple, but this is progress of sorts.



Grumpy old git, Gary

Ginger whinger

I may have mentioned this before but apart from the vast sums of money the editor throws at me for these regular diatribes, I also have a sideline in driving coaches; which is how I come to find myself writing this while sitting under the olive trees in a bar at the side of Lake Garda. You poor bugger, I hear you say, the things you have to do to earn a panini.

I agree, a rough old job, but some-ones got to do it. (A brief digression here. I have a company credit card with me, so before I left I explained that Birra was Italian for motor oil, and that owing to the heat I'd probably go through gallons of the stuff. They wouldn't wear it though, bastards!) Anyway, our first week we stayed in a little place called Arpy, which was, by road, 8 kms up the side of a mountain. A road I drove up and down four times in the time we were there, doesn't sound much I know, but the bits that weren't hairpin bends would have challenged a mountain goat. But it was worth the drive up for the glittering night-life. Ah, the clubs, the bars that never closed, the exotic Italian women. How shall I describe it? Well, non-existent is how. The liveliest thing that happens in Arpy is the lobbing of turnips at the local pig. (Her husband didn't like it, but take your fun where you can find it, that's what I say.) However, the place we were in had a bar and was surrounded by gorgeous scenery, and I don't ask for much more than that. Actually, the young Gina Lollobrigida cling to my arm while whispering filth into my ear would have been nice, but you can't have everything. So what did we do while we were there? The usual old stuff. To Courmayeur for the cable car ride up to Mount Blanc (Pretty adventurous for a man who gets vertigo looking out of his first floor window.)

White-water rafting (I niftily avoided this by claiming that if I died a hideous watery death there could be a problem with getting back to Arpy.) A meal out in a restaurant higher up the mountain than we were (I swear we were batting off golden eagles trying to grab our Gnocchi.) Then, the second week, on to Malcesine; right on the edge of Lake Garda. Now, I haven't driven coaches to Italy for some fifteen years, and thus had forgotten the horrors of the Italian motor-way system.

This is how it works: you arrive at the junction you want, only to find it's signposted for destinations either end of the motor-way, nothing in-between. Certainly nothing on the page of the map you've looked at. So you hurl your map-book to the nearest available person, who has no idea which page you want, I may be doing some shrieking at this point. I know, with my unerring coach-drivers sense of direction, that given a choice of two directions I will inevitably choose the wrong one... It's one of the joys of coach-driving that when you make a cock-up you've got an audience of 49 people to watch you do it. And yet we still got to where I am now, and what a lovely place it is. Tomorrow, though, I've got to find Venice. I'm told the main road into the city centre can get a bit damp. Ah well, I'm sure I'll cope. In conclusion, many thanks to Geoff, Karen, David, Eileen, Rick and all at Bookham Explorer Scouts & Ranger Guides. One day they'll go somewhere where it's easy to park the coach at the end of the day, but I wouldn't bet on it.



Crosby & Moore

SOLICITORS

- Gay & lesbian partnership issues
- Personal injury/accident claims
- Hospital negligence claims
- Criminal injury/assault claims
- Family and children issues
- Debt recovery
- Contractual and other civil disputes

To speak to a local, friendly solicitors' firm contact us:
01273 863295 or 01273 863297

Dolphin House
2 - 5 Manchester Street
Brighton BN2 1TF
Fax: 01273 863296
www.crosbymooresolicitors.co.uk

Local wordsmith

Available to meet your
copywriting needs
Good rates and results

steve moore
limited

Steve Moore Ltd
0775 959 0113
www.stevemoore.org.uk



BADGERS
TENNIS
CLUB

Church Place
KempTown

A friendly tennis club
situated in the heart of
Kemp Town for players
of all standards.

- Group and individual coaching
- Social and tournament play
- Floodlit courts
- Licensed Clubhouse

www.badgerstennis.com
Tel 01273 677795