



Flight - free holidays let's go to England

Roger Wheeler - *The roaming pen...*

It's the time to plan for summer holidays - summer, remember that, it was occasionally warm and the sun shone, sometimes.

We've heard a lot over the past few years about carbon footprint, buying carbon offset when you fly, all the horrible pollution that aircraft cause, protesters closing airport runways, it goes on and on.

Not to mention the hassle of booking cheap flights, being extremely careful to read everything, even the smallest print on the website, not forgetting to 'uncheck' insurance boxes, only take one piece of hand luggage and carefully checking the exact size of your case.

Whilst it is acknowledged that aircraft flying from the UK contribute only about 3% of the greenhouse gasses maybe we should think about staying home for a change.

In 2008 we went to Cornwall, Bournemouth, Somerset, South Wales, Cheshire and Potters Bar and I'd happily go back to them all, well maybe not Potters Bar.

I really dislike Lenny Henry and the Premier Inn ad campaign featuring him could almost put you off, but don't let it. Premier Inn, Holiday Inn and Travelodge's identikit hotels offer some of the best value for money around, from around £55 per night per room and one assumes there will be two people in the room. They are clean and comfortable, very rarely in town centre locations but if you travelling by car then it is no great problem. They are also always on a bus route, so without a car they are actually just as accessible. Of course once you are in one of these hotels you have no way of knowing exactly where you are, they are the bedroom equivalent of a shopping mall, featureless and boring but do exactly what it says on the tin. Holiday Inns have the edge in that there are restaurants, bars and swimming pools actually on

site, the others usually have a Beefeater or some other type of pub/food establishment next door. Probably the worst meal I have ever eaten was at a Beefeater in Ferndown, Dorset, not so much food as fuel, disgusting is putting it mildly. But amazingly cheap and there was no where else to go, we ate it and didn't die.

The star of these mega hotel chains is the Premier Inn Bournemouth Central, there are several in Bournemouth but the Central is the flagship of the group. An amazing hotel, a Grade Two listed building, built in 1933 in pure art deco style, refurbished by the previous owners (Hilton and then Golden Tulip who subsequently when bust) and bought, presumably for a song, by Whitbread, owners of Premier Inns.

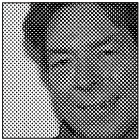
It has been renovated to an amazingly high level, they obviously had to, due to listed building constraints, the rooms are huge, stunning bathrooms and the details are just not what you get at a standard Premier Inn. I give it a qualified 5 Star rating, don't forget although the building may be five star you are only getting a three star product at three star prices, we paid £70 per night for the room, make sure you get one with a sea view (stunning by the way) and that all the lights work, we had to change rooms after we had got to bed as the lights would not turn off. Three star product, you were warned. They are waiting for planning permission to enable you to open the doors to the balcony; they blame this problem on the local authority planning regulations which I can believe. The hotel does have two restaurants and bars and an 'arrangement' with the car park at the rear, for £6.00 per night. Most Premier Inns have free car parking.

Bournemouth is lovely, a bit like Brighton but with class, Cornwall is of course beautiful. We loved St Ives, Hale, Perranporth and The Lizard. Chester

and the surprise that is Nantwich all very picturesque. Cardiff is a knockout with the beautifully redeveloped Cardiff Bay, the stunning City centre - a shopper's paradise, and the surrounding beautiful Brecon Beacons, put quite simply, you should go. One note of warning though, we stayed at the excellent Holiday Inn in Newport, actually it's on the M4, but avoid going into Newport at all costs.

Newport is the pits, it must rank as one of the most awful cities in the UK, admittedly in the middle of a 10 year redevelopment but there is no excuse for the current dreadful condition of what was once, a hundred or so years ago, a thriving port. It hasn't so much as going downhill but has reached the bottom and is sinking further. Sorry Newport but I will not be returning, even proud Welsh friends are ashamed of what has become of the town. I was always told that if you can't think of something nice to say then say nothing, so maybe I've said too much already. So let's make 2009 a stay at home year, no one has much money and you can have a really good time, sorry about the weather though, that would be easier to plan the UK's weather than Brighton's rubbish collection, but that's another story.

Take it easy and just enjoy.



Grumpy old git, Gary

Ginger whinger

Well, here we all are again looking forward to the coming year (I'm writing this on New Years Day.) And I imagine by now we've all suffered those endless TV programmes and magazine articles reflecting on the events of last year. Am I going to buck the trend? Am I bugger!

For example, who would have thought that Lewis Hamilton would become president of the USA? (I may be a bit confused on this. There was a lot going on at the time.)

Once again Mick Jackson failed to make a triumphant come-back, despite the investment of four and half million pound in his career by an obviously deluded Arab prince.

Apparently, Mick thought it was a present. Bet you're glad he's not on your Christmas list, aren't you? Of course, if he'd listened to me and copyrighted his nose he could have sued every Japanese cartoonist and manga comic over the last ten years for unauthorised use of his nose image, he'd be worth a mint. Sorry, another mint.

I suppose it all demonstrates the perils of visiting a plastic surgeon with one fist full of money and the other full of comic books. "I'd like a Rockfist Rogan's jaw, thank you!"

Anyway, enough of Mick, I'm sure he'll be here to amuse us all this year. As will Madonna.

Oh dear, where do you start? If memory serves, when she first hooked up with Guy Richie they spent their time going down the boozier for a few pints and a bit of a knees up with some pearly kings and queens. There may have been pie and mash involved. Possibly the queen mother and some Kray associates.

It was all a bit unlikely, wasn't it? Another one of her re-inventions, I assume. I just wish she'd re-invent herself as a human being, aging a bit, but don't we all? Look at Grace Jones, Sly and Robbie, Rolf Harris. All cool as f*ck. To cut this wittering short, a word of warning to people who may be young talented musicians, producers, etc. Should you become well-known, your career's going well, resist all approaches from emissaries of A) Madonna, B) Elton John, or C) Sting. Your career will never recover. These people are not big or clever. They are riding on the back of your cool. Resist them, for they will dump you for the next Blue, or Will Young, or whatever. Plus they never asked me. Bastards!

Also, of course, we've had the kredit crunch. What a disaster! Everything's suddenly got cheaper!

Well not beer and fags, obviously. That would be too much to hope for.

Chancing sounding dim, if we can all afford to buy goods and services, surely that provides jobs and cash-flow, and hence security. At the risk of disagreeing with Margaret Thatcher, trickle-down economics never worked.

The only way money trickles down from rich people is to the nearest yacht-dealer or Ferrari franchise, whatever. Although, perhaps I'm being a bit unfair to rich people, who are actually re-distributing their wealth amongst poor and needy Lamborghini dealers, jewellers, etc. If any wealthy people reading this find my comments both unfair and offensive, all I can say is you're rich and I'm not, so bollocks!

And on that note, Happy 2009.

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