

Travel news

■ **Dubai** - Travelbag (www.travelbag.co.uk; 0207 001 4112) offers three nights at the five-star Anantara Dubai The Palm Resort & Spa (half board) from £559pp (two sharing) - saving up to £465 per couple. Includes flights with Emirates from Heathrow for travel in June 2016. Book by tomorrow.

■ **Caribbean Stay and Cruise** - Virgin Holidays Cruises (www.virginholidayscruises.co.uk; 0344 557 3870) offers four nights at the 4V Wyndham Lake Buena Vista Resort (room only), before joining 'Carnival Valor' for seven nights from Port Canaveral (Florida), calling at Cozumel, Belize, Mahogany Bay and Costa Maya, from £1,199pp (two sharing). Includes meals on board, car hire and flights from Gatwick this Tuesday.

■ **Mauritius** - ITC Luxury Travel (01244 355 527; www.itcluxurytravel.co.uk) offers seven nights at the Four Season Mauritius (half board) from £3,010pp (two sharing) - saving up to £1,595pp. Includes transfers and flights from London. Travel from October 1-21 and December 1-20. You must book by this Monday.

■ **Kenya** - Rainbow Tours (www.rainbowtours.co.uk; 020 7666 1250) offers the nine-day Kenya's Great Migration Safari to the Masai Mara including stays at Nairobi Tented Camp, Porini Bush Camp, Porini Lion Camp from £2,300pp (two sharing). Includes flights from Heathrow to Nairobi, transportation, all meals and game activities. Valid for departures in September and October this year.

■ **Greece** - Just Resorts (justresorts.co.uk/europe/ikos-olivia/offers; 01625 865071) offers seven nights at the Ikos Olivia (all inclusive) in Halkidiki from £2,644 per family - saving 20pc. Includes flights from Gatwick (other airports available) and private transfers. Travel in October.

■ **Bruges Cruise** - P&O Cruises (www.pocruises.com; 0843 373 0111) offers a three-night on family friendly Ventura (N533) to Le Harve and Zeebrugge for Bruges from £249pp (two sharing) for an inside cabin. Includes full-board meals and afternoon tea, round the clock kids' clubs and entertainment on board. Departs Southampton in November.

Local offers

■ Latest holiday offers from flights from Norwich. Call Travel Norwich Airport on 01603 428700, email enquiries@travelnorwichairport.co.uk or visit www.travelnorwich.com to check availability.

■ **Bulgaria** - September 6, seven nights, 4* named hotel in Sunny Beach, all-inclusive from £365pp

■ **Bulgaria** - September 13, seven nights, 4* named hotel in Sunny Beach, all-inclusive from £349pp

■ **Corfu** - October 2, seven nights, 4* named hotel in Aghios Gordios, all-inclusive from £509pp, saving £412 per couple

■ **Turkey** - October 12, seven nights, 5* Sensatori Hotel in Fethiya, all-inclusive from £719pp - saving £602 per couple

■ **Majorca** - October 20, 11 nights, 4* named hotel in Palma Nova, half-board from £509pp - saving £272 per couple

■ **Tenerife** - November 29, seven nights, 4* named hotel in Puerto Santiago, half-board from £395pp; 11 Nights, 4* Named Hotel in Playa De La Arena, all-inclusive from £555pp

■ Prices correct at time of going to print, subject to availability and based on maximum occupancy. Prices excludes £10/ adult Norwich Airport Development Fee payable at the airport.

MARK NICHOLLS heads to the Isle of Wight with his family for a traditional English summer holiday.

It would have been easy to miss the narrow opening from the beach.

Leaf-covered steps wound their way up from the shoreline into a copse via a pathway lined with wild-growing hydrangeas and on toward the church of St Boniface.

I could imagine medieval monks trudging silently to mass at the small 11th-century church, hidden in the wood.

We were staying close by, at Bonchurch, in a cottage called Strawberries.

Just along the coast from Ventnor - with its promenade, restaurants and trappings of seaside life - it nestled in a sheltered spot on the cliff face with its own discreet path down to the beach.

And as we soon discovered, we were in the midst of a community oozing with history: Charles Dickens came here to write chapters for David Copperfield, renowned artists sketched the beach and the village hosts many grand houses.

This is so typical of the character of the Isle of Wight, where links to the past sit alongside the present with modern tourist attractions and ancient sites often uncannily conjoined by hidden arteries.

The island off the south coast remains one of the nation's treasures; a magical destination which seems to have childhood memories for many of us with its sandy beaches and harbours, quaint villages and towns, royal residences, lovely pubs and restaurants and a rolling natural landscape.

Yet it has also evolved with attractions that appeal to families and those with a sense of adventure, encapsulated in the island's "Pure Wight" initiative which encourages anything from tree and rock climbing to walking with alpacas and enjoying the shoreline and sea, with sailing a pivotal element.

We spent a wonderful week on the island at the beginning of August - during Cowes Week - using Strawberries as our base.

Taking its name from the old strawberry farm nearby, our two-bedroom retreat was cosy and comfortable with a kitchen diner, under-floor heating and sofas to laze on and it became our bolthole on an island where everything seems little more than a short drive away.

Blessed with a coastline of sandy beaches or pure white rock faces, the landscape is steep in places and then mellows out into rolling terrain and agricultural countryside.

Our days were filled with adventure, activity and discovery.

We headed to Cowes, to experience one of the landmark sailing events in the UK, with the town alive with racers and sightseers.

The UKSA, a charity which encourages more people to sail, was offering taster sailing sessions taking small groups out onto the water with informative and user-friendly instruction designed to whet the appetite of potential sailors.

Whilst holding the promotion throughout Cowes Week (in August), it offers training on the island and beyond throughout the year in an effort to encourage more to take up the



Our 'Wight' good

sport. But there are more quirky activities too; we went trekking with llamas and alpacas with West Wight Alpacas - run by the enthusiastic Neil Payne and his wife Michelle.

And leading a small group of llamas with names such as Boycie, Rodney, Icarus and Loco around the farm for an hour was more amusing than we ever envisaged, even therapeutic.

After taking the good-natured beasts on a stroll, you can see mothers and their offspring in the fields and feed them carrots.

This is the island where the poet Tennyson chose to live, where Benedict Cumberbatch chose to wed, and where Queen Victoria and her beloved Prince Albert chose to build their coastal island retreat of Osborne House.

"It is impossible to imagine a prettier spot," she famously remarked.

Now run by English Heritage, having initially been bequeathed to the nation soon after Victoria's death by her son Edward VII, the grounds and rooms offer a snapshot into informal royal life.

Queen Victoria - who died in the

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property on January 22, 1901 - loved Osborne, as did her nine children. The Swiss Cottage in the grounds, where the family played, is lovingly preserved.

Elsewhere, there are classic attractions such as the Blackgang Chine and Robin Hill theme parks, but the island definitely retains its bucket and spade appeal with excellent beaches at Ryde, Shanklin and Ventnor, as well as curiosities such as the Model Village at Godshell, which is absolutely worth a visit - if for nothing more than a reminder of childhood summer holidays.

The Needles, close to Freshwater and Yarmouth, is the iconic landmark.

Set on the westerly tip, you can trek down the cliff with its lines of multi-coloured sands, or take the chairlift to the beach, and then create your own souvenirs in sand back at the top, watch glassblowing and sweet making demonstrations, play crazy golf or ride the carousel.

One of the newest attractions on the Isle of Wight is Tapnell Farm, a resort that pays homage to the cow.

Developed on a farm with the long