

TRAVEL

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BREAKAWAY



Perfect family weekend away

Charlie Mullan visits CHESTER

THERE were more hairy apes than Hollyoaks when we enjoyed a two-day break in Chester at the start of October.

A trip to Chester Zoo, close to where the Channel 4 soap is filmed, was the highlight of the trip, although dinner at Marco Pierre White's Steakhouse restaurant came a close second.

After a leisurely two-and-a-half-hour drive, me, my girlfriend and her two-year-old daughter, Mia, received a very warm welcome from the staff of Days Hotel Chester North. Located just off the M56 means no driving around a busy city centre - with kids getting excited that their long journey is about to end and their holiday about to start.

A refreshing swim in the hotel's health club was the perfect way to revitalise before making our way to the Blue Planet Aquarium to get inside the Tarantula Tower and watch sand tiger sharks swim over our heads. Mia loved it, especially feeding the ducks, even if she got wet doing so.

After a long but enjoyable day, dinner at the hotel was as good as you would find in any top restaurant in Chester and the service matched the quality of food.

To fully appreciate any zoo, it's probably best to go at a quiet time so you can enjoy it all in your own time. So a Friday morning during school term with the rain lashing from the sky meant we practically had the 400-acre site to ourselves.

The weather did little to put a dampener on things as we watched the blue tongued giraffes take cover from the rain, elephants spraying sand over their backs and the

TRAVELGUIDE

Where: Chester

Accommodation: Days Hotel Chester North

Call: 01244 330332

Web: www.dayshotelchesternorth.co.uk

lions relaxing under trees ruling the roost.

It was a shame the weather wasn't better, but it was October after all.

The weather improved as we rolled up to Marco Pierre White's highly sought after Steakhouse.

You can see why it's so difficult getting reservations in the celebrity chef's diner.

The food exceeded my expectations that the portions might be small.

The serving staff couldn't have been more helpful as they helped Mia relax with crayons and a colouring-in book. She stayed inside the lines better than me.

The waiters always had a smile and a joke for her as they went about their job of serving up my steak and my partner's beautifully prepared halibut dish.

It was the perfect way to end the day.

Before setting off for home, we enjoyed a half-hour boat trip along the river Dee, dodging rowers from some of Chester's oldest and poshest schools.

It offered a different but educational view to the city and should be added to anybody's itinerary.

THREE THINGS TO DO



1 Chester Zoo www.chesterzoo.org, 01244 390280

2 Blue Planet Aquarium www.blueplanetaquarium.com, 0151 3578800

3 Chester Boat Trip www.chesterboat.co.uk, 01244 325394

HOLIDAYHEAVEN

PUSHING THE BOAT OUT IN THE MED

Claudia Tanner enjoys a Mediterranean cruise

As first-timers, we feared cruises were all blue-rinses, bingo, tiaras and ties. Thankfully, sailing with Star Clippers was a very different experience.

Holding just 170 passengers, the head-turning Star Flyer - one of the world's largest tall ships - had the atmosphere of a private yacht.

There's no casino, spa, gym, cinema or Jane McDonald in sight.

Entertainment is distinctively low-key - a pianist tinkling away in the background, quizzes, local performers, talks with the captain and the odd "dress like a pirate" night.

Dress code for dinner is smart-casual. There's no need to worry about being trapped at dinner with the same guests all week.

You can move and mingle and could even find yourself eating with the captain one evening.

Our journey across the Tyrrhenian Sea began in the fabulous Monte Carlo, then to Calvi, Figari Beach, Bonifacio, Costa Smeralda, Giglio, Lerici, Cannes and back to Monte Carlo.

"Setting sail is a majestic affair, Vangelis' Conquest Of The Paradise sets the scene"

Many of our fellow passengers told us they were attracted by the appeal of visiting ports untouched by larger ships.

My boyfriend and I stayed the night before the cruise in Nice's old town, a labyrinth of picturesque narrow streets.



SHIP-SHAPE: One of the clippers.

THE MED

Holiday snapshot: Perfect for those who don't like cruises and something different for those who do.

Holiday highlight: Monte Carlo, the playground of the rich and famous.

Must see: The idyllic and picturesque small island of Giglio off Tuscany.

Don't go there: All destinations were impressive, either for their fabulousness or their quaint charm. Although Olbia in Sardinia, where bad weather forced us to stop instead of Costa Smeralda, was less so.

Climate check: Warm to hot, dry summers and mild to cool, wet winters.

Contact: Call 0845 200 6145 or visit www.starclippers.co.uk

As soon as we boarded, we were greeted with towels and cold refreshments - the start of a first-class service with staff who can't do enough for you.

We sipped cocktails on deck while moored among the boats of the rich and famous in Monte Carlo's exclusive Port Hercule - something passengers on the bigger cruises way out at sea couldn't boast.

Monte Carlo was as impressive as we imagined; you can't help but admire the vast wealth around you.



BEAUTIFUL: Bonifacio in Corsica.

The Monaco Le Grand Tour bus was a great way to see the magnificent panoramic views of the port and sights. Setting sail on a Star Clippers boat is a majestic affair.

Most passengers come up on deck to soak up the drama as Vangelis' Conquest Of The Paradise sets the scene.

With this 19th-century clipper replica, traditions are combined with modern comforts including two small swimming pools, a library, outside and inside bars and cabins with TV, air conditioning and showers or whirlpool baths.

There's plenty of excursions and

activities, such as scuba-diving, and old seadogs can steer the ship, climb up to the crow's nest and help with the unfurling of the sails.

The food was delicious and varied - especially the buffet-style breakfast and lunches.

The evening à la carte four-course menu would please most people, with posh nosh such as lobster as well as simpler options of steak and pasta.

With early bird continental delights and afternoon and midnight snacks, you could never go hungry - as the scales proved when

I came back five pounds heavier.

Next, we sailed the length of Corsica, beginning in the old town of Calvi where a walk up the Genoese citadel is a must for the stunning views of the bay and snow-capped mountains.

The next day, the water was too choppy to stop at Figari so we headed straight to Bonifacio in the south.

The region around the town, with its chic and buzzing marina, has some of the most magnificent beaches.

Here, we were treated to an overnight stay

STAR CLIPPERS

Destinations: Mediterranean, Central America and the Caribbean.

2011 Departures: Between May and October.

Fares: Seven night Mediterranean sailing costs from £1,295 per person, including all meals, port taxes and entertainment, based on two sharing. Excludes flights.

Bookings: Call 0845 2006145 or visit www.starclippers.co.uk

- unusual on a cruise - where we found a few bars on the marina open late.

The next morning, it was too rough again to stop at Costa Smeralda and so we found ourselves in the less tourist-centric Olbia.

The only downside to the holiday was the discovery that myself and my partner both suffer from seasickness - a peril on a small cruise when the weather turns. And I can tell you it's tricky dancing on deck in a mini-storm when you haven't yet got your sea legs.

Once I got my land legs back, we fell in love with the small island of Giglio off Tuscany, with its quaint fishing villages and medieval hill-top town, before a call at picturesque Lerici on the mainland, a good base for exploring nearby Cinque Terre.

Ending on a high-note, it was on to Cannes, another playground of the rich and famous.

The average age of passengers was about 50, with a handful of younger people, including a couple in their mid 20s on their honeymoon.

Is cruising solely for the blue-rinse brigade? All I know is a Star Clippers holiday is enchanting whether you are 25 or 75.

COME FLY WITH US The Travel Centre

Winter getaways & weekend breaks



As the temperature chills and festive adverts start to emerge, we see an increasing number of customers wanting a winter getaway.

Log cabin breaks are popular for couples and families alike and we have also booked a lot of people in accommodation near York this December so they can tie in Christmas shopping. Just add a glass of mulled wine, a hot tub and it's the perfect festive escape.

If you want to get a sun-kissed glow

in time for Christmas, we've found you Lanzarote from East Midlands on December 2nd at £144.00 pp, based on four sharing.

Shrek the musical is brand new for 2011 and we've found a great deal for a family of four staying in central London with tickets on May 29th (half term). At £232 - so you can afford the West End!

With Christmas around the corner customers forget that booking early is the way to save lots of money on your summer holiday. Free child places, low deposits and big discounts go to those who book first. Remember air taxes increase on January 1st, so call my team and get your holiday secured. We have searched all the operators to find you those with the lowest deposits, just take a look at my deals.



withn Kinderland, Priory Park, Hull, HU4 7DY 1/2 mile past Village Hotel Tel. 01482 420140 OPEN 7 DAYS

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All we ask is the chance to quote ...

Daniel Wilson Rebecca Minns Travel Manager



FREE CHILD PLACES AVAILABLE NOW SUMMER 2011 - DON'T MISS OUT

Advertisement for The Travel Centre featuring various holiday deals with prices and terms. Deals include: SKI BULGARIA (03 Jan 2011, Manchester, 6 Nights, Half Board, £229 PP 2 Share), WINTER SUN EGYPT (06 Jan 2011, Manchester, 7 Nights, All Inclusive, £388 PP 2 Share), PRE-XMAS TREAT (Lodge With Hot Tub 10th Dec 2010, Near York, Ideal For Xmas Shopping, Then Chilling! NOW ONLY £49 PP 4 Share), MARMARIS (18 May 2011, Doncaster, 14 Nights, Bed & Breakfast, £274 PP 2 Share), BEAT THE AIR TAX INCREASE!! (Low Deposits Available... Jet2 Holidays £60 PP, Olympic £51.50 PP, Red Sea Holidays £50 PP, Balkan £50 PP, Keycamp £35 Per Booking!!), PANTO PARTY SPECTACULAR (Kinderland Play Centre Wed 22nd December 4pm-7pm, 96.9 Viking FM Partrick Billington Disco, Panto Scenes By Caveplayers Games, £5 per child £1 for up to 12 months Adults FREE).

FOR MORE INFORMATION: CALL 01482 420140