

Holiday World



with STEVE RACE

Q&A Your travel queries answered

Q. We are a large family wanting to have a special weekend away for a celebration? Ideally we'd like a large house with a games room/pool hopefully within reasonable reach of Teesside. We'll be about 18 adults, six children, two babies and three well behaved dogs. We'd like a three night break in January or February. Hope you can help.

Ann Elgey, Normanby

A. One of the problems with large houses is that they often get booked well in advance, but there are quite a few around. A search on the internet threw up a few within two hours drive of here - including Romaldkirk Holiday Cottages in Teesdale, three large houses near Penrith and, very impressively, Gillingham Hall at Alnwick, all of which can be found at www.cottageguide.co.uk and there's Gorton House and cottages near Edinburgh at www.theholidaycottages.co.uk (01749 685153). You could also try www.cottages4you.co.uk who have the large Mark Close Farmhouse at Alston.

Send your questions to Travel Queries, Steve Race, Evening Gazette, Borough Road Middlesbrough TS1 3AZ or email steve.race@eveninggazette.co.uk

Gazette on tour

In association with



Barbara Goodman, of Cleveland Park, Guisborough reads the Gazette with a local woman in Pago Pago, Samoa, during a cruise from Australia to New Zealand with her husband.



Allan and Cynthia Eyre, of Brookfield, Middlesbrough, enjoying the Gazette and Sports on holiday in France

FOR a bit of holiday fun, we want you to send in pictures of yourself reading a copy of the Evening Gazette on your holidays - with a chance to win a cruise for two to Amsterdam, courtesy of DFDS Seaways.

Every three months the best picture, or one at the most unusual location, will win the prize - but you must be pictured with a copy of the Gazette.

Send your entries to: Steve Race, Evening Gazette, Borough Road, Middlesbrough TS1 3AZ. Or email your entries

as jpegs to: steve.race@eveninggazette.co.uk. Include details of who is in the picture, along with when and where it was taken, and a contact phone number.

To send your pictures via MMS, start your message with the word GAZETTE and send to 07736 544873. Picture messages are charged at your normal network rate.

● **WINNER** will get a two-night city cruise break to Amsterdam for two people.

Usual GMC rules apply, available on request. The Editor's decision is final.

Capital fun



Travel facts

- visitlondon.com for information on most of these attractions
- theo2.co.uk for the O2 complex
- theontcollection.com for details on the Colonnade hotel
- www.londonrivvoyages.com for information on the speedboat

It's not just the streets of London that are paved with gold - there's fun to be had on the river too, says GLORIA McSHANE

LEISURELY narrowboats, roaring speedboats, efficient catamarans ... you can go with the flow and take a new perspective on London while escaping the heaving tube trains, buses and pavements.

The views along the Thames, from the Houses of Parliament to dynamic Docklands, are reason enough to enjoy a watery trip or two. Even better, some of London's newest attractions are here.

Over a weekend we had the chance to see a range of waterside sights, starting with the O2, a new entertainment hub reincarnated from the flop that was the Millennium Dome at Greenwich.

Up close the much-derided structure is a striking design and inside it's a comfortable 23,000-seat arena with good sight lines and facilities - so comfortable, in fact, that Prince is doing shows there all this month and well into September. In the meantime, all the better for us to enjoy an electric performance by the irrepressible Scissor Sisters.

There is also a smaller concert venue, the Indigo2, and the O2 Bubble, an exhibition space due to host the blockbuster Treasures of Tutankhamun show from November.

The O2 also makes much of its long Entertainment Avenue with a multi-screen cinema and myriad bars and restaurants. But as many of these are chains, it seems more suburban-mall than urban-edge - although there is also a quirky indoor beach with tons of real sand.

The Marriott Hotel at West India Quay in Docklands was a convenient choice for the O2, and a luxurious one too, and the

SURF AND TURF: On the London RIB Voyages trip, above, and below - Gorilla Kingdom at London Zoo



next day it was time for a river cruise to the Southbank Centre, home of the Royal Festival Hall. The complex has recently had a multi-million pound refurbishment, and from the lively atmosphere of the outside spaces, it looks like increasing numbers of people are enjoying the buzz of this greatly improved area.

A major draw was the Antony Gormley exhibition at the Hayward Gallery at the Southbank. The Angel of the North's creator has far more ideas up his sleeve, including Blind Light, where you can grieve sightlessly in a vapour-filled, glass-walled room until you finally find your way out.

While this show is only on till the end of this week, upcoming exhibitions promise to be full of more creative dynamism.

As a refuelling stop, we tried Canteen, a restaurant on the South Bank which serves traditional British food, but don't overdo the comfort food, though - at least not if your next stop is the same as ours. To continue the adventure, we tried an unusual Thames tour with London RIB Voyages - as in rigid inflatable boat.

Unlike other Thames vessels, you need a lifejacket. "We'll take you down past Tower Bridge and then see what this baby can do," grins the guide.

You're at water level in the boat, which provides a more exciting experience

than calmer cruising. And then suddenly you're careering down the river on a fast, wild and wonderful ride that's more theme-park thrills than sedate sightseeing.

After this it was quite a contrast to decamp to the placid, pretty Little Venice area on the Regent's Canal.

We stayed at the Colonnade Hotel, an elegant Victorian building with antique-style furniture. It had many lovely little touches such as jars of sweets, which made it seem more like a luxurious private home than a hotel.

Still, despite the Inca influence, we managed to arise the next day to take the Regent's Canal waterbus at a state 4mph to the London Zoo.

Of course you can take the tube there, but the waterbus has its own landing stage on the canal, so you can avoid the crowds at the main entrance.

The zoo's newest and very popular attraction is Gorilla Kingdom, a large island enclosure where you can see the large but gentle gorillas up close and learn how we can all help save these intelligent relatives of ours from extinction.

The trip was a refreshing change from the usual West End-based London weekend. So - water you waiting for? Get on a GNER train and discover how much action, culture and fun there is down by the riverside.

Late Escapes

This week's exclusive selection of late availability holidays are from Durham Tees Valley Airport unless otherwise stated. All seven nights self-catering unless stated. Prices correct at time of printing and subject to availability and to individual operators' terms and conditions.

DURHAM TEES VALLEY AIRPORT TRAVEL DIRECT	0871 282 0665
MAJORCA: Sept 1,	£261
IBIZA: August 24	£324
MENORCA: Sept 8	£230
BULGARIA: August 31	£311

DURHAM TEES VALLEY AIRPORT TRAVEL DIRECT	0871 282 0665
CORFU: August 24	£398
COSTA BLANCA: Aug 21, BB	£361
COSTA DORADA: August 20	£309
TURKEY: August 23	£315

Short breaks

STEVE RACE found a link with home when he spent a night at one of London latest budget hotels

WHAT do a chain of food shops, a trendy part of London, two lads from Teesside, EasyJet and the latest concept in budget hotels have in common?

You'll find the answer at The Hoxton hotel - or to give it its proper name, Urban Lodge which Sinclair Beecham, one of the founders of the Pret a Manger sandwich shops, opened less than a year ago in Great Eastern Street, in between the City of London and Hoxton Square, the area which became home to many major people in the British art world in the 1990s and early 2000s.

At one time, the area was so cutting edge that it even had its own hairstyle - the Hoxton fin. Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst were regulars here and derelict warehouses were being converted into £1m loft apartments.

Beecham, with a slogan of "budget doesn't have to be boring", decided to run the hotel - pictured left - along the lines of EasyJet - the earlier you book your room, the cheaper it is. As a result you can get a room for anything from £1 up through £29, then £59 and £79 to a maximum of £149.

During November run franchise - the Hoxton Grille - where you can have anything from a quick bite, like eggs benedict (£6.50) or organic porridge (£3.50) for brunch, to sausage and mash for £10 and even a full dinner with wine for around £30.

The Grille is run by John Pallag and Simon Wright - two lads who became friends in Middlesbrough in their 20s and went on to found a successful restaurant business, including the chain of Room Restaurants in Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool.

The second of their Grille brand opened earlier this year at the Balmoral Hotel in Harrogate.

If you've got time during your stay at the Hoxton, it's not far from some of London's top

Philippa Tomson, 29, comes from North Yorkshire and presents ITV1's *News at Ten* Tonight every weekday at 6pm.

Where on earth was it? Australia

Why did you pick this destination? It was a family trip with my parents. My mum had wanted to visit Down Under for years and I was more than happy to go with her.

Accommodation? We stayed in a series of hotels for two or three nights at a time. First stop was Perth, then Ayers Rock, onto Alice Springs, then onto Queensland visiting Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef. Then another flight to Sydney and onto Melbourne, stopping at Canberra on the way.

How long were you there? Three weeks. **The journey there and back?** I'd been to Australia before when I was a newspaper reporter so I knew what to expect. We stopped at Singapore en route which broke up the journey a little. My problem though was jet lag on the way out.

Entertainment? While we were in Alice

● Would you like to see your favourite holiday featured here? Email or write to Steve Race - address below - with your answers to the questions above. Or go to www.gazettelive.co.uk/travel and fill in the form online.



SWEET SMELLING STREET: The Columbia Street flower market in East London

The Teesside connection

attractions like the Tower of London and St Pauls. And you can take a look at some other sides of the capital that you might not normally see, like Jack the Ripper's haunts in Spitalfields or Brick Lane with its markets, art and ethnic eating places.

If you're there on a Sunday, try the Columbia Road Flower Market - known as the sweetest smelling street in London. Not much further away is Borough Market - probably the most famous foodie market in the country.

Travelfacts

● For more information call 020 7550 1000 or visit www.hoxtonhotels.com

My favourite holiday

Spings we went to a barbecue in the middle of the outback. We threw a few boomerangs, sat round a fire singing Waltzing Matilda, saw some kangaroos and used the dunny!

Food and drink? Authentic Australian cuisine such as kangaroo, emu and crocodile doesn't really float my boat. So I stuck to the seafood and it was excellent. I love my white wine. And I



AUSTRALIA - HERE WE ARE: Philippa, front, with members of her family in Sydney Harbour

was pretty well catered for due to Australia's reputation as one of the world's best wine producers.

What are the prices like? Very reasonable. I didn't really notice a great difference between there and Britain.

What was the weather like? Stinking hot, though Queensland has quite a tropical climate so there was a bit of rain. We visited in November so it was fast approaching their summer. We reached Sydney at the beginning of December and it was baking. You couldn't set foot on Bondi beach because it was more than 40 degrees. I wore factor 30 most of the time.

Magic moments? Watching the sun go down over Ayers Rock, a hot air balloon flight over Alice Springs at dawn and climbing Sydney Harbour Bridge. All unforgettable. Oh and I mustn't forget meeting Harold Bishop from Neighbours. We visited the fictional Ramsey Street in Melbourne. Very sad, but I loved it.

Evening Gazette Reader Travel



London Theatre Express By Rail

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- Return standard GNER rail travel from Newcastle, Durham or Darlington to London.
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£129⁹⁵

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