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SOMERSET AND THE WILD BEAUTY OF EXMOOR

Monday 17th – Friday 21st May, 2010

Explore the timeless beauty of rural Somerset - rolling hills, sweeping moorlands, ancient woodlands, specially protected landscapes and wildlife reserves

The Holiday Inn, Taunton 4*

The hotel is situated on the outskirts of Taunton and is a lovely modern building. All bedrooms are en-suite with television, telephone and tea/coffee making facilities, The Spirit Health Club includes an indoor swimming pool, gymnasium and sauna which are available to all hotel guests.



Monday 17th May – Day one:

We depart Nottingham area this morning and travel to the lovely cathedral city of Wells, cradled at the foot of the Mendip Hills. The cathedral and associated buildings form England's largest medieval ecclesiastical precinct. A favourite with visitors is the 14th century clock with moving figures that strike the hours. A medieval gateway called the Bishops Eye marks the entrance to the grounds of the Bishops Palace with its absorbing state rooms. The Palace moat is home to swans which ring a bell by the gatehouse when they want to be fed. Later this afternoon we take a scenic drive through the spectacular Cheddar Gorge calling at the Cheddar Cheese Company for a guided tour and cheese tasting. We continue to Taunton to the hotel where we check into our rooms with time to relax before dinner.



Tuesday 18th May – Day 2:

After a leisurely breakfast, we transfer you to the county town of Taunton, located on the river Tone in the vale of Taunton Deane. The town was a major centre of the wool trade for 500 years, but now a lively commercial and agricultural centre whose livestock markets are one of the most important in the West Country. Apple orchards thrive in the mild climate and fertile soil of the vale so cider making is a very important local industry. The Norman Castle houses the Somerset County and Military Museums. This afternoon we visit the stunning Gardens at Hestercombe created by Coplestone Warre Bampfylde in 1750. Bampfylde's vision was complemented with the addition of a Victorian terrace and shrubbery in the 1870's and was followed by the creation, between 1904 and 1908, of the outstanding Edwardian gardens designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll. Lose yourselves in forty acres of walks, streams, temples, vivid colours, formal terraces, woodlands, lakes, cascades, and views that take your breath away. The Courtyard Cafe serves delicious refreshments and the Gift Shop is well stocked with books, crafts and locally grown plants.



Wednesday 19th May – Day 3:



The highlight of today is a scenic coach tour with a local guide discovering the rugged wild beauty that makes Exmoor unique. From the Brendon Hills to the coast at Coombe Martin, 265 square miles has been designated as a National Park. There are rolling green hills, a hidden network of valleys and belts of woodland with red deer as well as ponies still roaming the moor, an enchanting sight. We continue to the view point to overlook the foreboding Doone Valley, the setting for RD Blackmore's famous book, "Lorna Doone". We continue to the delightful coastal resorts of Lynton and Lynmouth, where there will be

time for lunch and to explore these picturesque towns. A recommended attraction is the unique Victorian Cliff Railway which links the twin towns. This afternoon we visit the medieval village of Dunster with a wealth of heritage and history from its splendid Castle perched high at the top of the village to its ancient Yarn Market in the centre. There are a host of specialist shops, traditional pubs and tea rooms for you to enjoy.

Thursday 20th May – Day 4:

This morning we travel to Bishops Lydeard and the West Somerset Steam Railway station, then it's all aboard for an enthralling train ride through the pretty Somerset countryside to the coastal resort of Minehead. The town offers traditional seaside fun with a colourful sea-front packed with amusements and attractions for all the family. Stroll along the smart promenade with its award winning floral displays; explore the pretty area around Quay Street and the harbour. Discover the beautiful Blenheim Gardens and the picturesque higher town, with its lime washed thatched cottages that are a delight. Later we visit Torre Cider Farm for cider tasting straight from the barrel.



Friday 21st May – Day 5:

Sadly, we depart Taunton this morning and travel to the ancient borough of Malmesbury. The town is famous for its Abbey but better known for the Abbey House Gardens, a 5-acre garden based around the medieval Abbott's House. The gardens, which stretch from the town centre down to the River Avon below, were created by Ian and Barbara Pollard, also known as 'The Naked Gardeners' and opened to the public in the late 1990s. We include admission to the gardens and a guided tour of the House. There is a café which serves refreshments, but alternatively wander into the town centre where there are numerous cafes, bars and restaurants available. This afternoon we continue our journey home and arrive in the Nottingham area early evening.



Tour includes: Door to door taxi, executive coach travel with hostess service, 4 nights dinner, bed and breakfast at the Holiday Inn, Taunton, full excursion programme with visits to Wells, a scenic drive through the Cheddar Gorge, calling at the Cheddar Cheese Company for a guided tour and cheese tasting, Taunton, and admissions to Hestercombe gardens, a scenic tour of Exmoor with a local guide, Lynton and Lynmouth, Dunster, West Somerset Steam Railway train ride, Minehead, Torre Cider Farm for tasting, Malmesbury with admission to the Abbey House Gardens and a guided tour of the House.

Tour costs from: £335.00 per person

Single room supplement: £15.00 per night

Deposit: £60.00 per person