

Travel deals

◆ If you are looking for a Scottish break with a difference then how about this – a new package which offers visitors a chance to jet off on a sea plane. Hotel du Vin Glasgow's One Devonshire Gardens has launched a deal in which guests get to explore the leafy suburbs of Glasgow coupled with the stunning views of Loch Lomond. The Highland High Flyer includes two beds b&b, the sea plane trip and various other extras. It costs from £299pp and for more details call 0141 339 2001 or email reservations.odg@hotelduvin.com



◆ Christmas is coming. Norwich-based Grand UK Holidays has unveiled a new Christmas markets tour. The over-55s specialist has seen its upmarket Gold coach tours selling well and the latest addition is: Berlin and the Harz Mountains Christmas Markets.

◆ The seven-day escorted tour visits the Christmas markets in a beautiful part of the country. It leaves on November 25 and costs £439pp. Call Norwich (01603) 619933 or visit www.grandukholidays.com

◆ Explore the best of Mexico from £1,895, a saving of £200 per couple. Virgin Holidays Worldwide Journeys is offering a 15-day Highlights of Mexico tour which includes flights to Mexico City via Houston and accommodation across the country. Prices are per person based on two sharing on a mixed board basis and include sightseeing with guides and transfers. The holiday leaves on July 28 and you need to book by April 30. Call 0844 225 1235 or visit www.virginholidaysjourneys.co.uk



Local offers

Late holiday offers with flights from Norwich. Telephone Travel Norwich Airport on 01603 428700, email enquiries@travelnorwichairport.co.uk to check availability. Or visit our website www.travelnorwich.com

◆ Turkey - May 3, four-star named in Colakli, seven nights, all-inclusive from £335pp.

◆ Sorrento - May 5, three-star allocated on arrival, seven nights, bed and breakfast from £369pp, half-board available for an additional £63pppw.

◆ Tuscany - May 5, three-star allocated on arrival, seven nights, bed and breakfast from £369pp, half-board available for an additional £63pppw. Includes three excursions.

◆ Jersey - May 5, 12 and 19 May, Stafford Hotel, seven-nights, half-board from £399pp, includes saving £300 per couple.

◆ Prices are correct at time of sending, all subject to availability and based on maximum occupancy.

Why not forget airport hassles and start your holiday a few miles from home on the Broads? **Stephen Pullinger** reports.

After decades of gradual decline from its heyday of 3,000 hire boats, last year witnessed plenty of encouraging signs of a comeback for the Broads.

The first cause of celebration in the spring was the prestigious award of "Pathfinder" status by Visit England, the Broads becoming one of only four destinations nationally to be granted special help in marketing itself internationally.

Following that, Norfolk Broads Direct became the first hire boat company in the country to be awarded a Green Mark accreditation for eco-friendly boats.

And to cap these successes, the Broads Authority was awarded the prestigious European Charter for Sustainable Tourism for a second time.

However, the acid test for its future economic success must be whether the Broads can still float the boat of families who have become accustomed to the holiday era of cheap continental packages and flights.

I took to the water with my wife and two young children more used to holidays in France, and sought the views of fellow holidaymakers on the way.

The first favourable impression was made when we arrived at the Barnes Brinkcraft basin in Wroxham and saw the line-up of sleek, modern-looking craft.

Ten years ago, when my wife Andrea and I last took to the water, we were lucky enough to have a boat with all mod cons, but my abiding memory of that short break was of the pristine environment being sullied by all manner of tatty hire craft, their engines spluttering and belching.

The five-star cruiser – Superstar – that we were shown on to certainly embodies the dramatic transformation taking place as the hire boat industry positions itself for an era of more demanding holidaymakers.

My daughters Fay, nine, and Hannah, eight, have become used to far greater comfort on holiday than I ever enjoyed at their age. However, despite them growing up in an era when even camping has been given a new dimension of luxury, I was reassured by their reaction to life on water.

Thrilled with their cabins, they immediately showed interest in the "toys" – colour television, DVD etc – that we certainly never had 10 years ago.

They were wowed even further at a later stop when a family on another cruiser showed them their on-board whirlpool bath!

The era of change even embraced the slim-fit lifejackets issued to us – far more comfortable and likely to be worn than the chunky ones of old.

Hand-over day is hectic, but Barnes Brinkcraft's friendly staff certainly did not cut any corners on their vital instruction on how to drive the boat and safely navigate the waterways.

However, subsequent conversations with other holidaymakers revealed there might still be room for improving hand-over procedures to create an industry standard of best practice.

We enjoyed a relaxed cruise through



Boating heaven,

Wroxham and Horning to our first overnight stop at Acle Bridge.

Spotting the abundant wildlife and passing cruisers – quickly becoming experts at identifying the different hire company logos – was more than enough to keep the children happy.

Next to us on the moorings was a Swan Craft cruiser from Brundall with Plymouth-based police officer Hugh Porter on board with his wife Sandra and family including grandchild.

In holidays spanning 20 years on the Broads, he was quick to praise improvements to the quality of pub food and the rising standard of moorings.

His wife's one grumble was the lack of a Broads "bible" giving comprehensive information on everything from pubs which had children's play areas to ones which allowed in dogs, to the location of such facilities as laundrettes.

While remarking on on-board improvements such as televisions and DVDS – making the Broads experience a "doddle" compared to 20 years ago – Hugh's one negative observation, a timely warning to us, was the apparent upsurge in unruly stag parties taking to the water at weekends.

After an evening in the Acle Bridge pub – more positive comments on pub food and the helpfulness of boatyard staff – we explored Acle's shops and tearooms the following morning before setting off for Yarmouth after lunch.

It was on the bends of the River Bure that a cruiser with an all-male party on board came up fast behind us, one standing on the roof shouting out, 'I am a Greek god, look at me'.

We eventually found sanctuary at Yarmouth yacht station where friendly quay ranger Nathan Betts admitted that single-sex parties, could be unruly at times, but it was normally sufficient for him to have a quiet word with them.

At Yarmouth, I spoke to Colin Orme, of Loughborough, whose family have become Broads converts since they first took to the waterways five years ago. Yarmouth's White Swan pub was singled out for praise as was the service and standards of their

All aboard: Stephen Pullinger and his family head for the beautiful Broads in a Brinks Superstar cruiser, meeting some boating regulars on their holiday.

hire company Norfolk Broads Direct.

As we continued our journey stopping at Potter Heigham, Acle again, Stalham and Horning it became apparent why the whole Broads experience is so family friendly. There is plenty of time to stop off at all the attractions – from Yarmouth's Pleasure Beach to Bewilderwood near Horning – but added to that is the wow factor of being on a boat and enjoying a cruise through often breathtaking countryside every day.

Significantly, during our trip I discovered a nearly 100pc satisfaction rating from other holidaymakers, many of whom are drawn back every year.

Stories that will give confidence to the Broads boating industry include that of the Clifton-Fowles family who we met at Potter Heigham.

Father and son Basil and Stuart are now so hooked on their two-week Broads holiday that they book up two years in advance looking for the latest cruiser from their favoured yard, Norfolk Broads Direct.

At Stalham, 19-year Broads veterans Arthur and Joyce Williamson remarked on the continued improvements to boats and were complimentary about the service of their yard, Silverline Marine, at Brundall, and the rising quality of pubs.

The Pullinger family took out the Brinks Superstar, six-berth (three double-sized cabins), four-star cruiser during the first week of July in 2011. The cost for the same week this year would be £1,970, £150 fuel deposit, and £40 non-refundable damage waiver. Pets are allowed at an extra charge of £35, which includes use of a pet blanket and life jacket to fit any shape or size. Brinks Superstar features include two toilets, shower facilities, microwave, bow-thrusters, digital television, DVD, cooker and fridge, and dual steering, and outside furniture. Length 44ft, beam 12ft, the boats will not pass under the bridges at Potter Heigham or Wroxham. Details and bookings from Barnes Brinkcraft on 01603 782625, www.barnesbrinkcraft.co.uk.

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Turkish delights for golfers and non-golfers alike

Peter Franzen finds some Turkish delight in a golfers' paradise that tees off from Norwich Airport.

Golf tourism is big business in countries like Spain and Portugal, but despite the problems of the Euro it can be an expensive hobby to play the courses of the Iberian Peninsula.

One of the little "rewards" I promised myself when I retired was to try and learn to play golf. Everyone told me that I would not have the patience to learn and it was a lost cause.

Probably to spite the doubters, I adopted the game and have stuck with it in rain or shine, summer and winter. It's a frustrating game and I now need some more help from a professional if I am to reach the next level.

Looking for some late sunshine and the opportunity to play a few rounds of golf on foreign soil, a good friend recommended that I consider Belek in Turkey, a golfers' delight where there are a 14 world-class golf courses within a 20-minute drive of each other.

It's too darn hot in the summer months but in the early spring and October to November the weather is ideal. And being outside the euro-zone it is great value for money.

My wife is not a golfer, so I thought it only fair to try and choose a decent hotel where there would be plenty for her to do while I made a chump of myself on the golf course.

But how do you put the package together – hotel, golf bookings, transfers between the hotel and the golf courses, flights, carriage of clubs and airport transfers, to name but a few of the handicaps?

That's when a company called Alternative Travel came to my rescue. They did the lot, not only that they even managed to book a direct flight to Antalya from my favourite airport – good old Norwich! Yes, I know the £10 a head airport tax is an irritant, compounded by having to walk to the aircraft in the rain because there is no covered walkway, but it is so much more civilised. The airport staff smile and are helpful and welcoming; unlike the place just off the M11 where such qualities seem an alien concept.

Because Turkey is two hours ahead of the UK, the four-hour Norwich flight touched down at Antalya at 2am their time. It's a great airport, by the way, having last year won the accolade of the best airport in Europe (which is a bit odd because I thought it was in Asia Minor).

But thanks to Alternative Travel there was no waiting for a coach. Quickly past the airport formalities and loaded down with cases and golf clubs, we emerged into the arrivals hall to be met and escorted to a waiting Mercedes that whisked us to our hotel in a little over 30 minutes.

And what a hotel. Of those on offer from Alternative Travel we had selected a five-star all-inclusive deal at the Gloria Golf Resort. Situated where the Acisu river runs into the Mediterranean and



Above: Tranquil morning by the pool at the Gloria Golf Resort. Below left: Just desserts! An example of the array of sweets in one of the Gloria's main restaurants. Below right: One of the challenging holes on the Gloria Old Course at Belek, Turkey.



set in several acres of gardens, it has 515 rooms, four speciality restaurants in addition to the two main restaurants, spa and thalasso centre, and an open air amphitheatre with regular shows and concerts in the evening.

But what impressed me most about the hotel was Turkish hospitality and the rediscovery of the lost art of true customer service. Nothing was too much trouble. My expectations were exceeded, whether it was out and about in the hotel or in the restaurants.

In the main restaurants the variety and quality of the food was exceptional, and being an all-inclusive deal I did not expect wine, spirits and beer to be anything other than "local" concoctions. How wrong I was, especially with the spirits that were all proprietary brands.

For our week-long stay we booked three rounds of golf – two at the Gloria Old course and one at the Carya. The Old course features deep bunkers and large lakes, while the Carya is a classic heathland-style course with free flowing holes between pine and eucalyptus trees and a dramatic sand ridge.

The Gloria runs a shuttle bus every 15 minutes from the front door of the hotel to both the old and new courses, and for the round at the Carya, a private transfer bus picked us up for the six-mile journey. The only additional cost was the hire of a golf buggy at 30 euros.

If only my golf had been as good as the beautiful courses deserved, but I at least topped up my tan following the little white ball to parts of the Turkish countryside that few other golfers venture.

For non-golfers, Belek is an interesting little town with plenty of shops and a regular market where you can practise bargaining skills. A

regular cry from the traders was "Prices cheaper than Asda"; and designer-label fakes festoon the stalls. A local bus passes the hotel entrance and a ride into town costs one euro.

The city of Antalya is half an hour from Belek. Founded in 2 BC by the King of Pergamum Attalus II, the thriving port city has been ruled over by Romans, Byzantines, Seljuks and Ottomans. All left their mark and the area is littered with historical sites.

Matrix Travel, part of Alternative Travel, arranged a full day trip for four (including a great lunch overlooking the old harbour in Antalya) for 65 euros a head. That included a driver and guide in our personal Mercedes people carrier.

We took in Aspendos, Asia Minor's best preserved Roman amphitheatre dating from AD161 and the Duden Waterfalls where Alexander the Great set up his camp. The excursion also included a visit to a mosque and guided tour of old Antalya.

It must be 30 years since I was last in Turkey. It was the golf that brought me back, but now I have a thirst to return and see more of this fascinating country – with or without my golf bag.

All-inclusive week at Gloria Golf Resort in October 2011, flying from Norwich Airport with extra legroom seats and in-flight meal. Non-golfers £895 pp; golfers (three rounds of golf, carriage of clubs on flight and golf course shuttle service) £1085 pp. Contact: Alternative Travel and Holidays on 0207 923 3230 and www.turkishgolf.com. Direct flights from Norwich to Antalya from May to October with Thomas Cook. Flight time four hours with no supplement in low and mid season.