

Travel



Devizes, Wiltshire



Jon and Judy have lived there since the 1970s. Eleven years ago they converted their barns into three luxury self-catering holiday cottages, recently adding a three bedroom house for larger families.

We stay in Kestrel cottage, a cosy two bedroom property surrounded by 50 acres of countryside. It is ideal for children or those with disabilities because everything is on one level. Interestingly, all the electricity for these cottages is generated from solar panels while the farm's water comes from a borehole which provides chemical-free water filtered through the chalk downs of Salisbury Plain.

Two things that immediately strike us about the area are its sheer beauty and how quiet it is as you can see in the videos at travelwriter.biz. While there we discover that Wiltshire is famous for its white horses carved in the white chalk. It's here that the expression 'chalk and cheese' originates. This describes the huge contrast between the chalky uplands used for grazing sheep and the lush dairy country beneath used for grazing milk cows.

While Devizes is home to Wadworth brewery, which operates 250 pubs in Wiltshire, JD Wetherspoon has proved that there is still room for another pub in the town. It operates The Silk Mercer in St John Street and it is busy with numerous families eating there. We grab a two course meal and drinks for a little over £30. Spokesman Eddie Gershon explains the appeal: "Families are looking for value for money and we offer this in spades. All our pubs have a welcoming friendly environment where children can feel at home."

Another business enjoying brisk trade is Jimmy Deane's Fruit, Veg & Salad shop at 19 The Brittox. Established in 1970 it has its own market stall directly outside the shop. At the end of a day staff sell produce by shouting: "Get your cherry punnets – 99p a punnet."

Simon Fisher, Deputy Town Clerk at Devizes Town Council concludes: "Devizes is fairly

fortunate. It's a small market town with a good selection of independent traders which, touch wood, have done better than the national chains during recession. Devizes Town Council has a portfolio of properties that it lets out to businesses. We have had high occupancy levels throughout the downturn. It's been tough though. However, people have continued to shop locally. People from other surrounding towns come to shop here, too."

There is so much to do in Devizes that it surprises me that this quaint market town does not even receive a mention in the much acclaimed *Lonely Planet Great Britain* book.

Not far away in the National Trust owned village of Lacock, Harriett has the ideal opportunity to roam free without the worry of traffic. Lacock is like a living film set where you can walk in the footsteps of the stars (*Cranford*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Harry Potter*). There is also an excellent second hand bookshop where I picked up a Colin Dexter in perfect condition for just £2.

Our holiday ends much too quickly. We all loved it and want to return. □

RECOMMENDED PLACES TO VISIT

- Kennet & Avon Canal, The Wharf, Devizes, family ticket £16. Jazz evenings with professional jazz musician £15 per person including fish and chips.
- Lacock Abbey, Fox Talbot Museum and village owned by the National Trust.

POP IN FOR A PINT AND A PIE AT

- The Silk Mercer, St John Street, Devizes. SN10 1BL Tel: 01380 736760

BOOKS OF INTEREST

- *Lonely Planet Great Britain*
- *AA Walks*

Watch the videos at www.travelwriter.biz

More of us are holidaying at home and this becomes apparent during a trip to Devizes, which is experiencing a booming tourism trade.

"We have already beaten last year's bookings and we're not even half way through the year," reveals Michael Messam, volunteer at Kennet & Avon Canal Trust, which has just received the Queen's Voluntary Award. "I think we're successful because of our keen prices (£16 for a family ticket) which appeal to people with their limited budgets. More and more of us are holidaying at home rather than going abroad and we're benefiting."

We board Kenavon Venture, a 30 year old and 60ft long canal boat – one of four the trust owns. Trust volunteer Jean Cook – one of 450 volunteers – explains about the Flight of Locks, where 29 locks tackle a 367ft drop. These, as you can see in one of the videos at travelwriter.biz act a bit like a lift for canal boats to climb sharp inclines. Very clever indeed and quite something to watch.

At nearby Etchilhampton Jon and Judy Nash run Tichborne's Farm Cottages. "We have held our prices for the last two years so that we remain competitive and this has helped maintain steady numbers of tourists from as far away as Australia," says Jon. "We are booked well into next year."