

Globus Tour

Southern England and West Country

by Kathy Balster, Willamette International Travel
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Our tour started with two days in London. We stayed in a Novotel London West Hotel in Hammersmith. Globus has an area for checking and meeting for tours. This helped speed up the checking in process. The hotel is large with nicely appointed rooms. There is a bus stop two blocks away and you can get a bus to the Knightsbridge area and to Harrod's.

Day 1. Sightseeing of London — Kightsbridge, Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, Whitehall's mounted horseguard and Buckingham Palace. We toured St. Paul's Cathedral and saw the Changing of the Guard. In the afternoon we went to Windsor Castle. Wonderful castle and village, with free time to enjoy a snack and look around. Dinner out and a cruise on the Thames finished off a full day.

Day 2. We joined 36 more people for the rest of our journey through the West Country and Southern England. Our bus driver was Keith English (from Scotland) and our tour guide was Peter Scott (from England) - yes, those are their actual last names. We left London for Stratford-upon-Avon, Bath and Bristol. In Stratford-upon-Avon we toured Anne Hathaway's Cottage and the birthplace of William Shakespeare and had time to explore this lovely village. After a drive through the wonderful Cotswolds we arrived at Stow-on-the-Wold. This is a medieval village and we had some time to explore. Next stop was Bath. The highlight here was the Roman Bath's. What an achievement. The afternoon was spent exploring Bristol. The Clifton suspension bridge, SS Great Britain and the historic harbor. John Cabot left from here in 1497 to discover America. Bristol was our stop for the night at Jury's Inn.

Day 3. We left Bristol to make our way to Plymouth where we would spend two nights. We drove through Cheddar Gorge, King Arthur country - Glastonbury - and Exmoor National Park. Made a stop in Exmoor and it was very windy. Had lunch in Plymouth on the coast. Wonderfully picturesque fishing village. We made stops at Okehampton and Tavistock in Devon county. This is the area that Sir Frances Drake and Sir Walter Ralieggh were from. Arrived at Plymouth in the late afternoon. Plymouth is where the Pilgrims left for America and there is a monument at the port.

Day 4. Today we went into Cornwall. We toured the Lost Gardens of Heligan. These gardens have recently been restored to their former glory. We were there all morning and still did not see all of the Gardens. The afternoon was spent exploring the Eden Project. The Eden Project has reclaimed an abandoned open pit mine. There are huge bubble biodomes that house different climates. There is a rain forest biodome that holds plants and smells of a rain forest. There is one that has warm climate plants. And one for arid desert-like climate plants. This is a wonderful project and we could have spent all day here. The domes are in the bottom of the pit and the sides of the pit have been reclaimed with walking paths thru gardens of vegetables, flowers and trees.

Day 5. We left Plymouth for Southampton. We drove through Dartmoor National Park. where we saw wild ponies. We stopped in the very small village of Widcombe in the Moor. This is where Sir Conan Doyle set his book Hounds of Baskervilles. We drove through Dorset County next to Cerne Abbas where we had lunch and saw the 180 foot tall 2000 year old Celtic fertility figure carved into the chalk hillside. Our next stop was Winchester, ancient capital of Wessex. We visited the Cathedral where King Rufus and Jane Austin are said to be buried. We stayed in Southampton at the Hilton.

Day 6. Left Southampton and at Lymington we took a ferry to Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight. On the Isle of Wight we visited the Osborne House, one of Queen Victoria's homes. We left the Isle of Wight at Fishbourne to Portsmouth. At Portsmouth we toured the HMS Victory, Lord Nelson's flag ship, actually smaller than I expected but it was interesting to tour. After leaving Portsmouth we arrived in Brighton where we spent the night at the Thistle hotel. This hotel is located across from the boardwalk and in the center of town.

Day 7. Today we saw the Royal Pavilion. What an impressive palace built for the Prince Regent in the early 1800s. Very lavish and a lot of wonderful paintings and history. The rest of the day was ours to do as we wished. There is a wonderful pedestrian mall with shops and eateries. We spent a leisurely afternoon exploring.

Day 8. We left Brighton to return to London. On the way we stopped at Hever Castle in Turnbridge Wells. William Waldorf Astor restored Hever Castle, the childhood home of Anne Boleyn. Arrived back in London at the Novotel London West Hotel. Tonight we went to dinner and saw the Phantom of the Opera. We have seen this before in the states, but it was still wonderful the see it in London.

Day 9. Left London to go back to Oregon.

All in all this was a great trip. As always Globus does a great job and we had wonderfully delightful driver and guide. Our driver, Keith, did a fantastic job of navigating the very narrow and charming back roads of England. Our tour guide, Peter, was full of great stories and knowledge of the area. And between the two of them, they kept us all on schedule. Our group was made up of Aussies, New Zealanders, Canadians and Americans. Ages ranging from mid 40's to mid 70's.

Overall I'm glad we stayed at the less commercial areas of Hana and Kihei, less crowded and more relaxing!