

Travel feature – a weekend in Brighton

A weekend away that feels more like a week – that's our experience of Brighton.

From our parking space in Buckingham Road – booked through Just Park – we have driveway parking and can forget about the car altogether.

We stay at Leonardo Hotels in Stroudley Road, near the railway station. It's a nice modern structure with clean lines inside and out. A contrast to that more traditional architecture, it is very welcoming and so are the staff. Two bathrooms, each with a bath, as well as a shower in our interconnecting rooms.

Aside from the Regency architecture, which reminds us of Bath, there are some steep hills. Great for Henry's scootering.

It's now time to walk to Bistro du Vin in Ship Street, which is down the other end of the city by the seafront. Bistro du Vin is a beautiful old building, superbly maintained. Our waitress for the evening is Paulina, who greets us and takes our coats. This is sophisticated dining celebrating French cuisine. When Paulina expertly pours the Pinot Grigio she does so with one hand behind her back, cradling the bottle in her other hand, ensuring that she doesn't lean over the diner. These little things make for a superior dining experience. The cutlery and glasses are pristine and the white table cloths are crisp and immaculate when we arrive (not when we leave...). For starters Henry has melon and a red berry compot as do his sisters, Heidi and Harriett. Henry loves the melon. Curry soup

for Caroline, prawn cocktail for me. It's the main course where Bistro du Vin really excels. Caroline goes for Beef Provençale and the beef melts in the mouth, one of the diners on the next table agrees. "It's the best meal I've ever had," says Caroline.

"What, better than my spaghetti Bolognese?" my bottom lip droops, only playfully though!

My cod and vegetables can't be faulted. The accompanying glazed carrots, parsnips and French fries make for a really delightful meal. Henry enjoys his two Cumberland sausages and chips. The girls have chicken. A sundae follows for Henry's dessert while the girls have crème brûlées.

Back at our warm hotel we all get ready for bed and I have a luxuriating bath. This is so nice. We all have a good night's sleep thanks to Leonardo Hotels' Dream beds and pristine white bed linen. In the morning Henry is up at seven o'clock ready to look out of the window at the railway station opposite. Trains coming and going and...

"There are lots of police about," he reveals. "Look at them all."

"They're looking for you son, for waking us up so early," I mutter from under the covers.

Room service rings half an hour later, which is just as well because we've got lots to do today. By eight-thirty we're in the brightly coloured, modern dining hall having a leisurely breakfast – we don't need to check out until eleven. There's so much choice, continental, full English and vegetarian. I have to try a little of each and it's all very good. The children love the self-service experience because it gives them control.

The Sealife Centre is the oldest aquarium in the world. It is housed in quite a magnificent Victorian building, too where

some of its large windows are cleverly incorporated into some of the fish tanks. Here we have a great educational experience. As we arrive we have photos taken by eventsphototeam.com. There are so many sea creatures here, of all shapes, colours and varieties. We're mesmerised at the power of nature and saddened at how man continues to destroy it.

Virtual reality from ImmotionVR helps us to further immerse ourselves at Sealife. We each sit down and strap a headset on, which introduces us to Manta rays and makes us feel like we are actually in the boat speeding through the water in somewhere like the Maldives, diving down, seeing the shark bite in a Manta ray's tail and getting close up to a pregnant one. With the headset on you can turn and see all the way round as if you're actually there.

At The Royal Palace we learn that this India inspired dome-roofed John Nash architectural wonder was built from 1787 to around 1815 for King George IV as a party palace and that the artist Constable, who lived in the city for a while, couldn't stand it. As you might expect, this once royal residence is lavishly decorated with exquisite wallpapers and chandeliers. The banqueting hall is massive.

Our time in Brighton draws to a close but it's been an enriching experience.

- For more information:
- leonardohotels.co.uk
- hotelduvin.com
- visitsealife.com
- immotionvr.com
- eventsphototeam.com
- justpark.com
- brightonmuseums.org.uk

- Royal Pavilion, Brighton BN1 1EE. Tel 03000 290900
- Open daily Apr-Sep 9.30am-5.45pm (last admission 5pm)
Oct-Mar 10am-5.15pm (last admission 4.30pm)
- Admission fee payable.
- Watch the videos at www.travelwriter.biz





