

[By John McAllister](#)

A good holiday doesn't have to be expensive. Airline tickets, if booked early enough, cost less than car parking charges at the airports.

Budgeting is the most difficult part of the holiday. Set a budget for that weekend break and stick to it. Patricia and I did and we nearly succeeded.

'I never get the credit,' said Patricia when she read my most recent holiday review in the News Letter. True, she plans the holiday, calculates the budget and makes the arrangements. She claims that all I do is tag along, write up the holiday afterwards and get the by-line in the paper. So I challenged her for full credit, a weekend break in England for two, with a budget of £200. 'Easy,' she said, and surfaced from the internet an hour later with airline tickets for two to Bristol, cost £75, and an arrangement to blow the balance of the budget at Colleys in exchange for free accommodation and transport from her sister. On the flight with us was a party of Bath University students. Apparently they chose different regions for weekends away, and this was their first trip to Ireland. They were impressed with the pub life.

Colleys in Lechlade-on-Thames is a Victorian style Dining Room, where the waiters dress in period costume. You sit down to dinner at seven forty five exactly and the carriage is called at eleven fifteen. Colleys has to be booked weeks in advance to be sure of a table. The chef had briefed every waiter as to my dietary needs and even made tomato soup specially so that I could enjoy all seven courses. He told us that a lactose free diet is quite common. The house wine is the one supplied to Her Majesty the Queen Mother.

Bristol is two hours from London and one hour from Cardiff. We stayed in Shrivenham, near Oxford. Our route from the airport took us past Swindon and the McArthur Glen Designer Outlets, 106 designer label shops under the one roof. Everything sold there has to be at least 30% off normal retail price but unfortunately we were between seasons and the choice of clothes was disappointing.

On the Friday we went to see Oxford of the dreaming spires. We spent two hours wandering round the old city. In an alleyway under Oxford's copy of the famous Venetian "Bridge of Sighs" we found The Turf, arguably the oldest pub in England. Watch out for the low beams. The Covered Market is worth a visit for small local craft shops and the food is value for money.

In keeping with our budget weekend I chose a walking tour of Oxford as opposed to the open-top bus tour. There is a ghost in the library of St John's college and things that go bump in the night in the adjoining study. Meanwhile Patricia and her sister, Margaret, had gone to check out Bicester Village Shopping Centre on Junction 9 of the M40. It got a five star rating for value shopping. The outlets there were even better than McArthur Glen.

On Saturday we went to explore Burford, a traditional and totally authentic town in the Cotswolds, with one long main street full of nooks and crannies and old houses of yellow stone. The craft shops there were expensive but good. Cirencester, where we went next, is a more traditional shopping town with all the usual outlets. Nice but fairly soulless. It set us up nicely for dinner in The French Horn, a traditional pub in Pewsey, Wiltshire. The food was superb and the table was ours for the evening.

On Sunday morning we were offered a chance to watch the parachuting at Netheravon. Arthur, our host, said that, statistically, the journey was more dangerous than jumping, but we opted instead for a drive through Lambourne, past Jenny Pitman's house and stables. Then it was time to head back to Bristol and the airport.

Unfortunately for Patricia, she fell for two china pugs, Hooray and Henry, in Burford, and the budget was blown so she doesn't get her by-line.

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