



GEM OF THE SOUTH

THERE'S NO BETTER WAY TO EXPLORE THE DELIGHTFUL ISLE OF WIGHT THAN IN A 1975 VW CAMPERVAN CALLED COMPTON

I have very fond memories of caravan holidays on the Isle of Wight as a child with my grandparents, who used to take my brother, my cousins and I in the school holidays. I hadn't been back as an adult, however, so when Will and Jubee from Isle of Wight Campervan Holidays invited us to explore the island for a few days in one of their campervans, my boyfriend and I jumped at the chance.

FRIDAY

When we stepped off the ferry from Southampton, we were met by Compton, aged 43 and bright orange! It was love at first sight. (I should explain that Compton is a 1975 VW campervan.)

After a few tips from Will on how to look after Compton, plus a list of friendly campsites, we were off to explore stopping off to stock Compton's fridge at the supermarket on the way.

For our first night we stayed at the quirky Windmill Campersite, which includes a BBQ area, a fully-equipped

kitchen, an honesty shop and a disco shower which you just have to experience! This family-run site was incredibly friendly and Compton was very much at home amongst some of their more unusual static properties including shepherds' huts, a Hobbit house, the 1950s-designed Shack, and a Westland Wessex helicopter that sleeps two adults and two children!

SATURDAY

After a comfortable night's sleep in Compton's three-quarter-width rock-and-roll bed, we enjoyed a cooked breakfast before driving off to do some sightseeing.

Our first stop was Godshell, the quintessential English village with some of the oldest architecture on the Isle of Wight. Delightful medieval church, thatched-roofed cottages, traditional tearooms – Godshell has it all, plus a beautifully-intricate vintage model village, complete with miniature railway.

Godshell also boasts a shop selling local cider (we decided

against the Gait Crasher at 8 per cent), and The Pantry, which was bursting with local produce. With Compton's fridge cool from the overnight hook-up, we could treat ourselves to a tasty selection of produce to enjoy later.

We then drove along the coast to park at the Ventnor Botanic Garden (ample parking for the campervan and just £5 all day). The garden is spread across 22 acres and has an impressive collection of over 30,000 rare and sub-tropical plants and trees. Thanks to the unique microclimate of the Ventnor Undercliff, which is on average five degrees warmer than mainland UK, this is Britain's hottest garden. As a result, plants that should be found in glasshouses grow happily outdoors.

From the gardens, it's just a five-minute walk to Steephill Cove, an unspoilt fishing cove with a safe, sandy beach between rocky cliffs. This little bay has no road access, making it a unique noise- and pollution-free spot.

We stopped here to enjoy our picnic of fresh, crusty bread from The Island Bakers, Gallybagger cheese from the Isle of Wight Cheese Company, speciality tomatoes, Proper Piccalilli and Spicy Sweetcorn Relish from Ryde-based Borneo Pantry, and ginger beer – all purchased from The Pantry in Godshell.

It was incredibly hot that day so we walked back to Ventnor, found a shady spot by the Botanic Garden and stopped to





watch the local cricket team.

Later, we strolled along the Ventnor seafront and enjoyed an ice cream on the beach, which is lined with beach huts converted from Victorian bathing machines.

A campervan makes such a lovely change from a hotel or B&B as we were able to see so much more of the island. We quickly got used to the friendly waves from other holidaymakers who, like us, were charmed by Compton's classic good looks.

Driving along the coast to Grange Farm campsite in Brighstone Bay on the south-west coast, the views were beautiful and the roads made for an easy drive. Grange Farm is a small, family-run working farm with plenty of friendly animals to admire including alpacas, pigs, goats, water buffalo, a donkey and chickens. The campsite itself offered equally amazing views of the Chine and Brighstone Forest, along with a range of self-catering holiday cottages and static caravans, as well as pitches for tents, motorhomes and campervans.

After parking Compton, we strolled to the local pub for an evening meal in their large beer garden.

SUNDAY

Compton's kitchen allowed for yet another cooked breakfast –

well, we were on holiday after all!

We took a scenic drive along the coast, enjoying yet more breathtaking views on our way to Stoats Farm campsite at Totland Bay. We arrived mid-morning and owners David and Lynne Leonard greeted Compton like an old friend (this was not his first visit).

From Stoats farm, both Alum Bay and Totland Bay are just a mile away. As Compton doesn't swim, we left him at the site busily cooling the wine and beer for our evening meal. We walked the short distance to Alum Bay, with its multi-coloured sand cliffs and the famous Needles – the three distinctive chalk stacks rising out of the sea – taking the steps down to the beach rather than the chairlift. We couldn't resist a swim in the crystal-clear waters before heading back to the top of the cliff and Marconi's Restaurant, the perfect place to enjoy a coffee. We even had live entertainment courtesy of a local band.

We found more live music at Totland Bay, where we treated ourselves to a lunch of freshly-caught crab and prawns at The Waterfront restaurant.

That evening, we sat outside Compton and enjoyed a meal which we paired with Beachcomber and Islander beers, both brewed on the Isle of Wight by Yates Brewery.

We finished our evening by taking a short stroll to The Hut, an easy-going beach restaurant at Colwell Bay, to watch the sun go down with a nightcap.

MONDAY

After breakfast, it was time to return Compton to Campervan HQ. We met the rest of the fleet, too, from 1972 Oliver to brand-new campervans Isla and Dylan.

There's no better way to holiday on the Isle of Wight and we can't wait to go back. If you're there before us, please give our love to Compton.

ADDRESS BOOK

Isle of Wight Campervan Holidays

www.isleofwightcampers.co.uk

Stay at:

www.windmillcampersite.com

www.grangefarmholidays.com

www.stoats-farm.co.uk

Visit:

www.modelvillagegodshill.co.uk

Eat at:

www.waterfrontiow.com

Enjoy a sundowner at:

www.thehutcolwell.co.uk

ISLE OF WIGHT LOCAL ALEX'S MUST DO'S...

The Hut at Colwell Bay for drinks or food and brilliant sunsets. Coolest place on the IOW

The Garlic Farm is good for lunch but book as it will be busy

Coast Bar in Cowes for dinner or brunch (sit downstairs in the pizza section) – good food and great atmosphere, plus you can wander around Cowes afterwards

The Old Fort, Seaview, great for watching the boating activity and it's a lovely village.

The Little Gloster in Gurnard Marsh, Thompson's in Newport or Seaview Hotel for posh food

The Causeway at Newtown Creek (park at the National Trust Car Park)



FLIGHT DETAILS

Flybe has flights to Southampton from Aberdeen, Alicante, Amsterdam, Avignon, Bastia, Belfast City, Bergerac, Biarritz, Bordeaux, Chambéry (winter only), Dublin, Düsseldorf, Edinburgh, Faro, Geneva (winter only), Glasgow, Jersey, La Rochelle, Limoges, Málaga, Manchester, Nantes, Newcastle, Palma Mallorca, Paris CDG, Perpignan, Rennes, Toulon Côte d'Azur and Verona. Flybe's franchise partner Blue Islands has flights to Southampton from Guernsey and Jersey. Flybe's franchise partner Eastern Airways has flights to Southampton from Leeds Bradford.