

Bournemouth – The truly international town!

Eamonn Hi, my name is Eamonn O'Donnell and welcome to Bournemouth. If you arrive in the town your first task is probably to find yourself some suitable accommodation. And that's precisely what I did when I enjoyed a cup of tea with my host Susan Coughlan. I started by asking whether Bournemouth was still a magnet for tourists.

Susan Bournemouth is a very varied place. It's a very fun place, it's vibrant and young and lively, but there is lots to do in Bournemouth for all ages and all types of people. And that's also reflected in the hotels and guesthouses. There are lots of guesthouses, but there are also many hotels and guesthouses that have been converted into flats, it's take, it's reduced the number of beds. There are lots of young people in Bournemouth, there's the university here and there are many language schools. It's now also known as a place for shopping and for nightclubs and bars, which attracts the younger crowd also.

Eamonn The next morning when I went to the seafront I met this individual, who told me that tourism was still a vital part of the Bournemouth economy.

Roger Yes hello, my name is Roger. I am promoting the Russell Coates Art Gallery and Museum in Bournemouth. It's a little gem that we have in Bournemouth which a lot of people don't know about, which I am out promoting in my Edwardian dress. I'm actually dressed up as Sir Merton Russell Coates, who founded the museum and donated the museum and gallery to Bournemouth Council in the 1920s.

Eamonn: It's a very windy day today, there are a lot of people out nevertheless.

Roger: Yes, oh yes, it's an ideal day. Lots of people are looking for places to go particularly when it's windy, but we haven't got any rain at the moment.

Eamonn: But is there more to life than just tourism in Bournemouth?

Roger: Oh yes, well, I mean tourism is the core of the centre of the town because of all the hotels.

Eamonn: Of course there are a lot of landmarks in Bournemouth. On my way from the seafront, I passed by one of southern England's biggest convention centres, the Bournemouth International Centre, or the 'BIC' as it's more fondly known.

Gerald: My name is Gerald Ashby. I'm from Port Talbot, a little place in South Wales. We are here, forty of us strong, we are singing tonight in a concert in Bournemouth International, and then we will be going back then and having a day in Bournemouth then tomorrow to look around the place.

Eamonn: So it seems Bournemouth still attracts visitors from all areas, but is there a different type of visitor to Bournemouth than just coaches full of tourists and convention goers? To investigate this further, I went back to school where I met Simon Freeman, who told me about the importance of the English language schools to the Bournemouth economy.

Simon: The contribution made by international students to the local economy makes it the biggest single contributor to the economy of Bournemouth and Poole. So we have a very strong identification between the contribution that international students bring to the local economy and how it sits in the tourism which is the major selling point of the Bournemouth and Poole area.

Eamonn: How did Bournemouth become such a Mecca for English language students?

Simon: I think its natural attractions of the seaside area itself, which went on to make it a major holiday destination for UK citizens, were also very attractive to the first international students. Schools have been active in the area for many many years and there are several schools which have been operating for periods of thirty, forty to fifty years. The UK is definitely seen by students as a safe destination, and it's one area of our provision that we work very closely with local police to ensure that the concerns of international students are fed back into the town.

Eamonn: Continuing on my tour I met Njeri, a Kenyan graduate of Bournemouth University, who seemed to emphasise the international character of Bournemouth.

Njeri: I came here as a student, I did my Masters...which was a lovely year, a brilliant year to be at uni. The best thing about being in Bournemouth I suppose is...it gives you some sense of warmth, in terms of climate because it tends to be the warmest part of England so I can sort of... I really wouldn't mind, coming from Africa, being in a warmer place, as much as they are so hard to come across in England, so that does give you that. And er, yeah, the best part: I got married to a guy from here who is a native, born and bred here, which is quite nice, so I also have got a bit of family going on around...[FADES]

Eamonn: So, welcome to Bournemouth: a truly international town, and it seems the capital of the English Riviera. My name is Eamonn O'Donnell and I hope to see you here soon.