



GRAND TOUR
Bath & Bristol



BENIMAR
Mileo 283



DURATION
5 nights

A tale of TWO CITIES

A city break can be the best of times... **Claudia Dowell** explores the beauties of Bath, while **Bryony Symes** visits vibrant Bristol



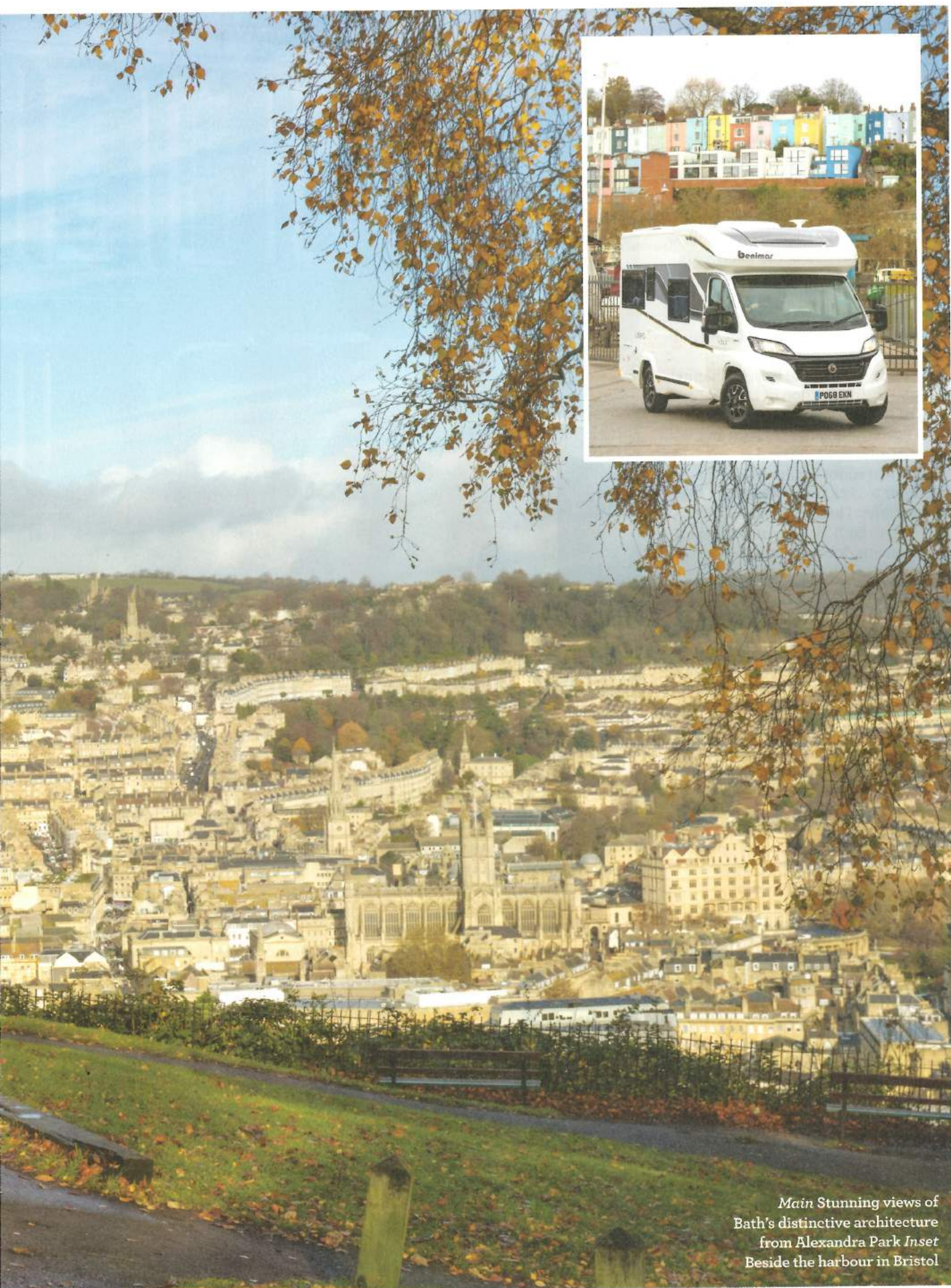


WHEN

November 2018



Two great city tours, with historic houses, great art and good food wherever you look



Main Stunning views of Bath's distinctive architecture from Alexandra Park Inset Beside the harbour in Bristol

Bath



Claudia Dowell

The cities of Bath and Bristol lie just 13 miles apart on the River Avon, although it will take you around 50 minutes to

make the journey between the two.

The spa city of Bath is set in a hollow at the southern end of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, while Bristol developed as a port at the confluence of the rivers Avon and Frome, around eight miles inland from the Bristol Channel.

Extreme tides in the Bristol Channel allowed the navigation of large ships into Bristol's harbour. The two cities both have water at their heart, but for very different reasons.

So, when editor Sarah suggested a joint tour to both to see which had the most to offer, I jumped at the chance to return to Bath. Bryony, meanwhile, put her name down for Bristol.

Healing hot springs

In truth, I was very happy with my choice. Bath is by far the most historic of the two cities: legend has it that it was founded in 860 BC, when Prince Bladud, father of King Lear and stricken by leprosy, followed the example of some diseased pigs and covered his skin in the mud from a hot spring (as you do).

Miraculously, he and the pigs were cured of their ailments, marking the beginning of centuries of exploitation of the hot springs' healing qualities.

In the first century AD, the Romans built a temple here, dedicated to the Celtic god Sul (to appease the Britons) and the Roman goddess Minerva. Public baths were added and a town, known as Aquae Sulis, grew up around the temple. The Saxons occupied it in the sixth century, Alfred the Great fortified it in the ninth, and in the 10th century, the first king of England, Edgar, was crowned here.

It gained an abbey in the 12th century, which was remodelled in the 16th. All the while, people continued to visit, to heal their ailments in the hot springs.

A golden crescent

It was during the reigns of four Georges that the golden city of Bath acquired its current good looks, which it mainly



Classical architecture on Bath's famous Circus

owes to three men: architects John Wood the Elder and the Younger, and postal worker-turned-entrepreneur and philanthropist Ralph Allen. I learnt more about the latter at No 1 Royal Crescent.

This famous sweep of 30 houses – its facade built in the Palladian style between 1767 and 1774

in the shape of a crescent moon – was designed by John Wood the Younger, and built in Bath stone extracted from quarries owned by Ralph Allen.

No 1 is now a museum of Georgian life in a city celebrated as the place in which to see and be seen. And, in keeping with the best Georgian households, a footman greets you at the door. Houses in the Crescent were leased for the season and the address was important in terms of social status.

No 1 was rented for some 20 years by Henry Sanford, a retired Irish MP with land in Ireland, and it is his occupation of the house that is depicted.

An introductory video gives you a flavour of life at the time. The guides

in each room are very knowledgeable and explain how they would have been used – all very elegant on the surface, but there was no electricity at the time, neither were there bathrooms.

What struck me was that the house was not overly large. As one guide said, if you look at the backs of many of the grander houses in Bath, they will have a box-like extension where a bathroom has been added. In fact, the houses in the Royal Crescent were all constructed by different builders so, although the facade is unified, the backs are not.

No 1's occupants received guests in the withdrawing room on the first floor. When you consider that the kitchen was in the basement, that meant a lot of running up and down stairs when the master called for tea.

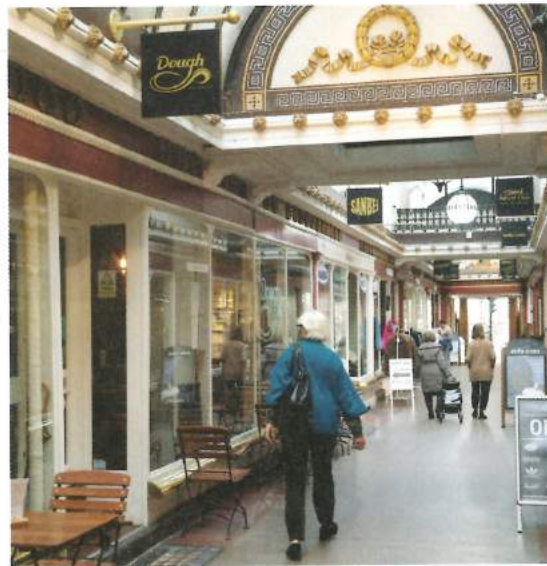
Honey-coloured stone

Ralph Allen's part in the improved look of Bath began with his meteoric rise from postboy to postmaster for Bath by the tender age of 19.

An industrious and ambitious man, he reorganised the postal system and eventually became Mayor of Bath.

DID YOU KNOW?

Bath has its own currency, known as the Bath Oliver, a coupon used for local trade



Clockwise from top left Among Bath's many fine treasures is the magnificent Abbey, with its ladder of angels and fan-vaulted ceiling; Claudia peruses the menu at The Pump Room, where you can dine in style; if you enjoy specialist shops, head for The Corridor arcade

He accumulated a substantial fortune and bought several quarries, supplying local builders with the honey-coloured limestone for which Bath is famous.

Allen collaborated with John Wood the Elder in the building of his house, Prior Park. It was John Wood the Elder who built the magnificent Queen Square and planned the Palladian-style Circus, which was completed by his son. Past occupants of The Circus include politician William Pitt the Elder, artist Thomas Gainsborough and George Spencer, 4th Duke of Marlborough.

The Royal Crescent and The Circus are said to represent the sun and the moon – the stunning architecture in Bath certainly helped earn it UNESCO World Heritage Site status in 1987.

Sun, moon and stars

A 15-minute walk away, in New King Street, you'll find the Herschel Museum of Astronomy.

This fascinating museum was home to William and Caroline Herschel, the

brother and sister astronomers whose work doubled the size of the known solar system in the 18th century.

William worked in Bath as a musician and composer, but his interest in the night sky led him to build telescopes; through these he discovered the planet

Uranus from the garden at 19 New King Street. This won him fame throughout Europe and he was offered the position of Court Astronomer by George III. Caroline, who was trained by her brother, discovered several comets and also became a highly regarded astronomer. Your museum visit begins in the

basement, where a video, narrated by Sir Patrick Moore, tells the Herschels' story.

Also in the basement are the kitchen and William's workshop, where he ground lenses and turned wood to make his telescopes.

On the floors above you can see facsimiles of Herschel's telescopes and the brass orrery (a model of the solar system) that he would have used to demonstrate his teachings.

DID YOU KNOW?

Bath's famous spa water was being bottled and sold as far back as 1661

After two museums, I needed a cup of coffee. Just down from the Herschel Museum is the Green Park Brasserie, located in a rather handsome former railway station.

I caught it at a quiet time, but it has an excellent reputation for food and drink and offers friendly service. The concourse behind the brasserie hosts a farmers' market on Saturdays and there are a few shops here, and parking.

Fashionable city

Bath has been a city of fashion for several centuries, and that is reflected in the fantastic Fashion Museum in the Assembly Rooms.

The museum holds almost 100,000 items and brings fashion right up to the present day.

Fashion is also evident in Bath's centre, where Roman columns and Georgian architecture mix with brightly lit retail windows. And for a modern shopping complex, head to Southgate, opposite the train station, where you will find familiar high street names.

After browsing in the shops, and a brief stop to watch fudge being made, ☺



Clockwise from main Claudia browsing for gifts in the Guildhall market; heading along the towpath alongside the River Avon; for the best view of Pulteney Bridge, stop here with the weir in front; the many interesting shops can easily distract en route across the bridge



it was time to retrieve the Benimar Mileo 283 from the Charlotte Street car park. Here, £6.40 buys you a four-hour stay and £9.60 will pay for six hours.

I just wanted to catch a view of the city from somewhere high up before the day drew to a close. Alexandra Park in Bathwick, on the other side of the River Avon, is a wonderful green space high on Beechen Cliff, and can be accessed by vehicles from Wells Road and Shakespeare Avenue.

It's free to park, gives fabulous views over the city and is a lovely spot for walking dogs; but just be mindful of a couple of chicanes in the road around the park that might prove tricky for larger motorhomes.

It was only 3.5 miles to Bath Marina & Caravan Park, where I pitched our Benimar Mileo 283 before heading off to The Boathouse for supper. You can reach this pleasant pub via the towpath

from the marina, but do take a torch: it is very dark and can be a little slippery in winter. It is also walkable by road.

Newbridge Park and Ride is opposite The Boathouse and that, I decided, was the most sensible way to continue my exploration of Bath the next day.

The following morning, leaving the Benimar on site, I caught the 21 bus into Bath, which dropped me off at Westgate Buildings. The Holburne Museum, on the other side of the River Avon, was on the agenda – it was about a 20-minute walk. En route, I passed the Guildhall Market, where you can buy just about anything, including curtain hooks, which were on my shopping list.

The walk took me across Pulteney Bridge: somewhere I had long wanted to see, but never quite managed on previous visits. Walking across the bridge, it looks like an ordinary street

of two-storey buildings. It's only when the buildings get taller that you realise you've crossed it.

Far more impressive is to see it from the towpath with the weir in front, especially at dusk, when the buildings light up and reflect in the water.

Prosperous bridge

Constructed in the latter half of the 18th century, this is the youngest of the four bridges in the world with shops on both sides.

Designed by Robert Adam, it was commissioned by William Pulteney, who had land on the other side of the river and wanted to build a town to rival Bath. I like Bathwick: it has a more open aspect than the older city.

It's a 10-minute walk from Pulteney Bridge to the Holburne Museum, built at the very end of the 18th century.

The museum was formerly a hotel that gave access to Sydney Gardens, one of the few remaining pleasure

DID YOU KNOW?
The first letter sent with a postage stamp was posted from Bath

gardens from the 18th century – a place author Jane Austen, who lived at No 4 Sydney Place, would have known.

At public breakfasts held then, tea, coffee and Sally Lunn buns would have been followed by dancing – clearly a different era, but there is now a great café in the museum's glass extension, which has access to the gardens.

A penchant for art

The building has been a public museum for 125 years, beginning with a bequest of 17th- and 18th-century ceramics, glass and silver collected by William Holburne, a naval officer who had a penchant for art. The original collection has been added to over the years.

When I visited, the museum was showing Rodin's *The Thinker*, David Hockney's *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy* (a portrait of designers Ossie Clark and Celia Birtwell, and their dog), and an exhibition of Gainsborough paintings and drawings.

The pay and display car park at the museum could accommodate a 'van, but it isn't very big and gets busy.

Now it was time for a cuppa and I was a little bit hungry, too. I decided to seek out the original bakehouse of that Bath delicacy, Sally Lunn buns.

I headed back across the bridge past the Roman Baths – a must-see if you have never been to Bath – and the magnificent Abbey, with its ladder of angels and fan-vaulted ceiling.

Then it was past the delightful Abbey Green, with its cafés and ancient plane tree, and down an alley once known as Lilliput Alley, but now named North Parade Passage.

Sally Lunn's house purports to be the oldest in Bath, and it certainly seems ancient as you pass through the low front door. A museum in the basement depicts Solange Luyon (Sally Lunn), a young Huguenot refugee from France, at work in front of an oven, baking those famous buns.

I settled down for a Sally Lunn cream tea, noting that the menu stipulated only half a bun would be served unless a whole bun was requested. When it arrived, I understood why.

The half bun was enormous, but it was incredibly light – rather similar to a brioche, and the perfect foil for clotted cream and strawberry jam. The recipe is apparently secret and only passed on with the house.

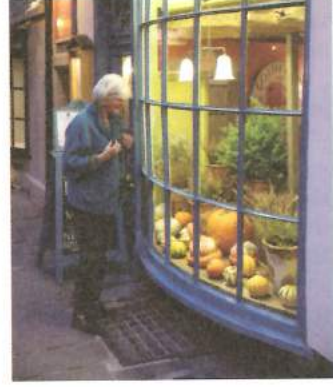
Heading for home

With the cream tea despatched, I had to get back to Westgate Buildings to catch the bus to the campsite.

There was still so much of Bath to explore, but I wanted to save that for another visit – not that I needed an excuse to return to one of Britain's most beautiful cities.

I ate dinner in the 'van and readied it for an early start in the morning, when I would be driving to Bristol to hand over to Bryony for her tour there. ☺

Main The Holburne Museum has a fine art collection
Below (L-R) Don't miss the famous Sally Lunn's Eating House; if you're dining solo, you might prefer the half-bun option – they're not small, as Claudia found; basement museum shows how the buns would have been baked in Sally's time; autumnal produce on display in the stylish shops



Bristol



Bryony Symes

Bath and Bristol are similar in many ways: both centre on the River Avon and have been important settlements since Roman times and beyond. Yet they are also very different.

While Bath is all Georgian elegance – as Claudia discovered – Bristol is more gritty, but with no less illustrious a history. I was keen to discover more of its industrial heritage and its longstanding attraction for free-thinkers and activists.

With Bristol's Baltic Wharf Caravan and Motorhome Club Site fully booked, I decided to pitch up at Bath Chew Valley Caravan Park, which has a good bus service connecting it to Bristol.

Powered by people

This city was built on a convergence of two rivers – the Avon and the Frome – so waterways are at its heart. Fittingly, as I started my explorations I passed Narrow Quay – home of renowned arts venue Arnolfini – on my way to the Wapping Wharf area of Spike Island, the heart of Bristol's harbour.

Here you'll find M Shed, a disused 1950s transit shed that has been transformed into a free museum, all about Bristol and its people.

I learnt about all sorts of characters, such as George Pocock, who designed kite-powered carriages, and Harry Dolman, who used a 'Flying Flea' kit to build his own aeroplane.

They also have a work by Banksy, Bristol's famous street artist. *The Grim Reaper* originally appeared on the side of the *Thekla*, a former cargo ship.

Ships in the harbour

It was time to move on, but I didn't go far: the *Matthew* is docked just outside M Shed. This is a replica of the caravel sailed by explorer John Cabot when he reached Newfoundland in 1497.

As I walked the deck, it struck me just how small the ship is, compared with the vast expanse of the Atlantic.

Following the tracks of the Bristol Harbour Railway, I soon found the shops and restaurants of Wapping Wharf. This area has recently been redeveloped and is now home to many businesses, some in old shipping containers.

The harbourside walk carries on around Spike Island, where I soon



This page, from top The Avon Gorge, spanned by Clifton Suspension Bridge; M Shed's kit-built biplane Opposite page, clockwise from main Banksy's 'Girl with a Pierced Eardrum' on Spike Island; SS Great Britain; The Matthew docked outside M Shed; Banksy's 'Grim Reaper' was removed from the Thekla and is on display in M Shed

came to one of Bristol's icons, Brunel's *SS Great Britain*. There's a ferry landing just outside, so you can hop on a boat if you don't feel up to walking all the way from the city centre.

When she was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, this was the longest passenger ship in the world, the first to combine an iron hull and a screw propeller, and the first steamship to sail across the Atlantic.

Chalking up 90 years of service as a passenger and a cargo ship, she is now a national treasure and remarkably well conserved. Below decks you can experience some of the sights, sounds and smells of those early crossings, and compare the cramped, noisy steerage to the luxury of first-class cabins.

Soon I was back on the harbourside. There is one point where the walk takes you away from the waterside, to see more of the interesting street art.

In an inconspicuous corner near the marina, Banksy's *Girl with a Pierced*

Eardrum decorates a wall, surrounded by tags from other graffiti artists.

As the day drew to a close, I hopped on a ferry back to the city centre, just in time to catch the bus to the site.

Street art gallery

Banksy is not Bristol's only street artist by any means. In fact, Stokes Croft is a veritable outdoor gallery of graffiti and street art. This is where I started the next day, wandering from street to street to see what I might find.

I also discovered eateries, vintage stores and more along Gloucester Road, then stopped for breakfast at The Canteen, in Hamilton House, at the centre of this creative community.

If you prefer to explore the city's more traditional attractions, don't miss Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, which is free to visit and has fine collections of art, nature and history.

When I visited, the museum was hosting a special exhibition, 'Masters



of Japanese prints: Hokusai and Hiroshige landscapes' – very fitting after I'd seen the Stokes Croft wave mural, by Phlegm and other artists (see p4). Locals call it 'Tsunami'.

Opposite, I saw one of my favourite pieces so far – a tabby cat by Gloucester artist Beastie.

I walked on, past the grand Wills Memorial Building Tower and across to Brandon Hill. The walk to Cabot Tower is really steep, then there's the spiral staircase inside the 105-foot tower to climb, but if you can make it to the top, the views are breathtaking.

I could also pick out the harbour attractions I'd visited earlier and spot more huge murals. It's the closest thing to a bird's eye view of Bristol you can get, and worth the hard slog.

Taking it slowly for the rest of the afternoon, I wandered back down the

hill to Bristol Cathedral, a religious site for more than a thousand years. You can still see the impressive gatehouse to the Abbey of St Augustine here.

Back to the present day, just south of the cathedral is Millennium Square, where you'll find the Aquarium, a science centre and plenty of bars and restaurants.

DID YOU KNOW?

When Clifton Arcade was renovated in 1989, some 60 tonnes of debris was removed

A trading hub

The city centre is a mix of newer buildings around historic streets, such as Christmas Steps and the lanes around St Nicholas Market. The latter is a covered market of craft, gift and food stalls housed in the Corn Exchange, Bristol's trading hub since 1743, and a great place to pick up some Christmas gifts.

After another long day of exploring, it was time for me to get back on the bus and head for the warm motorhome and some well-earned rest.

For my final day in Bristol, I decided to drive the motorhome into the city and park up in Brunel Lock Road.

I headed first for The Create Centre, an environmental centre with an Ecohome that you can explore.

Then it was off to Underfall Yard, a historic boatyard on Spike Island, where I stopped to buy a delicious bacon roll from Pickle, the visitor centre café, and set off up the steep hillside on the other side of the Cumberland Basin, to Clifton.

Above it all

Known locally as Clifton Village, the main streets here house a selection of welcoming pubs, cafés, eateries and independent shops.

This includes Clifton Arcade, which has gone by many names over the years; opened in 1879 by Joseph King, it was an initial failure and became known as 'King's Folly'. But it is far from a flop now, despite the building



Bristol's harbour is a thriving area for creativity and culture, and the city has great street art, including work by Decay, Aspire and 3Dom

coming close to collapse in the 1990s. Today it is bustling with people and thriving businesses.

After browsing through the shops in the village, I carried on up the hill to the Downs, where you can find the most spectacular views of Clifton Suspension Bridge. The Downs' 442 acres are a haven for wildlife, as well as home to several Bristol landmarks.

Observatory Crest

Just above the bridge, Clifton Observatory stands in the centre of an Iron Age hill fort, ringed by earthworks. Originally a mill, the building burnt down in 1777, after which the ruin was transformed into an observatory by William West, a local artist and pioneer in photography. He installed a camera obscura in the tower, which you can still see today.

The camera obscura isn't the only thing to admire here, though. Delve deeper, via a crude staircase in the rock, and you eventually emerge into Ghyston's Cave, teetering on the side of the Avon Gorge.

According to legend, this was once home to a giant, one of two said to have roamed this area.

More recently (and more credibly), the cave was part of a small chapel in 305 AD and has had various religious

affiliations since. Now, though, as well as being home to nesting pigeons, this is a great look-out spot for anyone seeking a more unusual view of the Gorge and Clifton Suspension Bridge.

Over the bridge

It's a rather tiring climb back from the cave, but on emerging onto the Downs, there was still one final attraction that I wanted to see, and it was a big one. Ever since I joined *Practical Motorhome*

I've always wanted to visit Clifton Suspension Bridge.

Not only is it a spectacular sight, it's also a work of engineering genius, and another example of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's achievements.

The inscription, *Suspensa vix via fit* ('A suspended way made with difficulty'), is certainly fitting for the bridge's Leigh Woods Tower.

Building the bridge was a long and convoluted journey to completion, which started in 1754 when money was bequeathed for a toll-free bridge across the Avon Gorge.

After a public competition in 1829 for suspension bridge designs came up with nothing viable, a second competition eventually saw the then 23-year-old Brunel appointed as project engineer. Sadly, he never saw what he referred to as "my love, my

darling" come to fruition – work on the bridge wasn't completed until 1864, five years after he died.

The statistics for this most imposing structure speak for themselves: a span across the gorge of 702ft, the body of the bridge sitting at 245ft above the River Avon, supported by chains recycled from London's Hungerford Suspension Bridge – it is impressive.

One of the most fascinating things I learned from a tour around the very informative Visitor Centre is that the Leigh Woods Abutment contains a series of cavernous chambers, which form part of the support structure of the suspension bridge.

What's even more amazing is that this wasn't discovered until 2002. Sadly, I visited too late in the year to join a hard-hat tour of the abutments (these run from Easter to October).

Icons of creativity

Walking back across the bridge to return to the motorhome as my trip wound to an end, I could certainly feel the slight sway of the structure – one final nudge to remind me about the incredible work that went into making this iconic landmark, which is now a world-famous symbol of Bristol.

This is certainly a city that was, and still is, made by its people: ambitious, creative, entrepreneurial individuals whose ideas and drive shaped its past and continue to innovate for its future. ☺

DID YOU KNOW?
Street art in Stokes Croft has a political message, as well as looking great

TOUR ESSENTIALS

Way to go

Our Benimar is on loan to us from Marquis Motorhomes' Surrey branch in Gomshall. From there we took the M3, A303 and A36 to Bath. The A36 and A4 connect Bath and Bristol.

When to go

We went in late autumn, which proved a good time of year to visit. Bath was still busy with tourists, but less packed than it might have been in the summer or at Easter time.

Where we stayed

• Bath Marina and Caravan Park

Brassmill Lane, Bath, Somerset BA1 3JT

Tel 01225 424 301

Web <https://bathcaravanpark.com>

Open All year

Pitches 88

Charges (Pitch+2+hook-up) £18.30

This is a popular site for motorhomes: you can take advantage of the Park & Ride just across the road to get into the city, and can hire bikes here. You can also catch buses to Bristol from outside the site.

Facilities here include toilets, showers, launderette and chemical disposal. All of the pitches are hardstanding with 16A hook-up.

• Bath Chew Valley Caravan Park

Ham Lane, Bishop Sutton BS39 5TZ

Tel 01275 332 127

Web www.bathchewvalley.co.uk

Open All year

Pitches 45

Charges (Pitch+2+hook-up) £16.40

Bath Chew Valley, a Regional Winner in our *Top 100 Sites Guide 2018*, is conveniently located halfway between Bath and Bristol, with excellent public transport close at hand.

A return bus ticket to Bristol cost £5.50, and there are services at ideal times for those who want to spend a day in the city. The site itself is immaculate.

The motorhome

Benimar Mileo 283

The Mileo, which rides a Euro 6 Fiat chassis with a 150bhp engine and six-speed gearbox, has four travel seats (including driver) and sleeps three.

The layout comprises parallel sofas at the back, which convert into a double bed, a midships kitchen opposite the washroom, and a front dinette with two travel seats that convert into a single bed.



City bikes are available to hire at Bath Marina's site

Food & drink

• The Boathouse

Newbridge Road, Bath BA1 3NB

Tel 01225 482 584

Web www.boathouse-bath.co.uk

Comfortable eating place overlooking the River Avon.

• Green Park Brasserie

6 Green Park Station, Bath BA1 1JB

Tel 01225 338 565

Web www.greenparkbrasserie.com

Good food and live music in a former railway station hall.

• The Royal Pavilion Café

Victoria Park, Bath BA1 2NR

Open 8am-5pm for simple café food.

• Harbourside Kitchen

Gas Ferry Road, Bristol BS1 6TY

Web www.ssgreatbritain.org

Superb views of SS Great Britain and the harbour while you dine.

• Pickle at Underfall Yard

Cumberland Road, Bristol BS1 6XG

Web www.picklebristol.co.uk

Great sandwiches, excellent coffee.

• The Somerset House

11 Princess Victoria St, Bristol BS8 4BX

Web www.somersetshouseclifton.com

Specialising in seasonal local produce.

Find out more

Bath

• Roman Baths and Museum

Web www.romanbaths.co.uk

• Bath Abbey

Web www.bathabbey.org

• Sally Lunn's Eating House

Web www.sallylunns.co.uk

• Bath Postal Museum

Web <https://bathpostalmuseum.org.uk>

• Herschel Museum of Astronomy

Web herschelmuseum.org.uk

• Bath Assembly Rooms

Web www.nationaltrust.org.uk

• Fashion Museum Bath

Web www.fashionmuseum.co.uk

• Museum of Bath Architecture

Web museumofbatharchitecture.org.uk

• Museum of Bath at Work

Web www.bath-at-work.org.uk

• No 1 Royal Crescent

Web nolroyalcrescent.org.uk

• American Museum & Gardens

Web <https://americanmuseum.org>

Bristol

• Tourist information

Web www.visitbristol.co.uk

• Banksy Bristol tour

Web www.banksybristoltourapp.co.uk

• Bristol Docks tour

Web bristoldockers.co.uk/walking-tour

• Bristol's free museums

Web www.bristolmuseums.org.uk

• Clifton Village

Web www.discoverclifton.co.uk

• Clifton Suspension Bridge

Web www.cliftonbridge.org.uk

Costs (Bath & Bristol)

Fuel	£37
Site fees	£115
Food and drink.....	£59
Public transport	£14
Parking	£13
Attractions.....	£21
TOTAL	£259