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Liz Chadwick, DAWN Advice Column

Northumberland: The Best Holiday You've Never Had?

Tourism in Northumberland is, quite rightly, big business. It's an industry that's worth £3.8bn to the region as a whole and, although I might be slightly biased, I don't think there's any doubt that Northumberland is the jewel in the North East's crown.

Though I realise most people will have booked their summer holidays this year – and in many cases already taken them – but how many considered Northumberland as a destination? Probably very few, which is a shame.

We may not be able to offer any of the big UK seaside resorts such as Blackpool, Brighton, Skegness or Weston Super Mare, but some would possibly consider that a blessing.

What we have got is nearly 2,000 square miles of virtually unspoilt countryside and Northumberland remains the least populated county in the UK – when people talk about 'getting away from it all', there's nowhere better.

Thirty years ago, of course, before the arrival of cheap overseas flights, it was seen as perfectly normal for people to remain in the region for their holidays – travelling from County Durham to Whitley Bay, for example.

Now, scientists are speculating that as global warming really takes hold, destinations like Spain will simply become too hot in the summer months to make them comfortable destinations, and that UK seaside tourism will enjoy a boom once more.

In the interests of saving the planet, we have to hope that never happens – but we have plenty of other reasons to consider taking our breaks here anyway.

First of all, the cost: cheap package deals may look like a bargain, but they frequently carry hidden costs and are rarely as much of a bargain as they appear to be in the travel agent's window.

Then there's the idea of supporting the local economy. It's incredibly important to do this – arguably more so at the moment than ever before. Yes, tourism is continuing to bring money and jobs to the region, but there will always be plenty of room for growth.

Finally, there's the experience – there is so much to do here that it would be impossible to list in this column – or even a month's worth of columns. Yet it is sadly true that many people fail to take advantage of what's on their doorstep – an American friend once told me they were staggered that so many people from the UK bothered to visit the US whilst there was so much on offer in our own country.

I'm not saying people shouldn't explore different cultures when given the chance, but when there is so much on offer on our very own doorstep, when times are hard it makes perfect sense to make the most of what's closer to home.

Liz Chadwick is the Chief Executive of DAWN Advice, a Northumberland-based social enterprise which offers free, confidential and impartial advice on a range of matters including debt, housing, employment, welfare benefits and family law, reachable on 0844 4111 309 or at www.dawnadvice.org.uk. DAWN Advice is a member of the Citizens Advice service.

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