

Holidays on the South Coast and Travels Abroad

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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Our sympathies go to those caught in travel horrors. A day of delay in a week of holiday can be a long time, especially if there are children or elderly friends to care for in a crowded terminal or on a train stuck because overhead lines sagged. I also feel for the staff trying to cope with a multiplied set of tasks.

Often I think that the clever management consultants who devise schemes of service and of staffing structures assume everything goes smoothly. Would that they could hold my hand as I try to wend a way through a set of options that do not fit the problem I need to resolve.

There are times when a human comes to the telephone, listens appropriately and gives practical guidance that works. There are notable occasions when a weekend email on behalf of a person left unreasonably stranded by a visa not or not yet issued by a foreign government is read and then action is taken without delay. That is great.

The small caring team with whom I work have developed our system to be more helpful. We aim for faster, simpler responses of greater value to constituents. This caring service is confidential, so it is not appropriate to give details of examples. In general terms, we try to set appointments when needed by telephone or by email: it is always helpful when contact details are included.

The links to the constituency matter. I am grateful to the Association for having convenient offices in Tarring road near West Worthing station where people can call or arrange for us to meet. The location is close to the home of Virginia's godmother. Anna Hedley had been a legendary head teacher at Worthing High School for girls. Her reputation was awesome. To us as young parents setting up a home, she was kind and generous. It in those golden days that we came to love Worthing as a place to live, to work and to come for holidays. We used to look across the water to the other side of the Solent.

In an ancient book on natural history I remember tables of sunshine in favoured places. I am convinced that Worthing and the eastern point of the Isle of Wight were most favoured. Every few years when we take a week to visit family and friends in France, I recall the care with which a cousin found where a contour of desired rainfall, an isopleth, met a contour of height: there he built a family home. Here he might have settled near the windmill at High Salvington?

I set off for a break with good intentions and little hope of meeting them. I should only take half the number of books that I might actually read, and I should leave a tidy home and office. Neither ambition has been achieved.

When I mention my representative role to people away from West Sussex, most people say that they had enjoyed holidays in Kingston or East Preston, that they have family in Rustington or Ferring: they might say how they enjoy walking from the South Downs at Highdown towards the seashore.

Wherever we work and however we take a holiday, little beats our home town or village. When away, I delight in hearing from locals about their pride in local features, customs, their food and their drink. One day I may write about a conversation in French on the equator: it led to the then prime minister of France suggesting that for me possibly and for him with certainty, it would be more comfortable in English. I had tried.