

The Isle of Wight — A splendour of scenic beauty

The Isle of Wight is a relatively large island at the foot of England. Shaped like an uneven diamond, the island is located in the English Channel and has a population of roughly 130,000. It is the second most populous island in England and home to poets like Swinburne and Tennyson. It is divided into seven major towns — Newport, Cowes, East Cowes, Ryde, Sandown, Shanklin and Ventnor.

Queen Victoria had her summer residence and final home in Osborne House in East Cowes.

GETTING THERE

For international students in London, the Isle of Wight is a favourite destination due to its proximity and scenic beauty. The most common way to get there is from Portsmouth.

Last year while a student living in London, my friend and I made a sudden plan to go there for the weekend. We took a bus from Victoria at 8.30AM in the morning and reached Portsmouth in two hours. Tickets, including return, on the National Express cost us £20 each.

A twenty-minute ferry ride from Portsmouth took us to the north-eastern coastal town of Ryde. From there, we found a bus to drive us to our hotel, which was more south-east, in an area called Shanklin.

We had booked a room online, which is the easiest way for students to find cheap accommodation anywhere in Europe. The twin-bed room cost us £22 per night, which was reasonable given we had planned the trip at the very last moment. There can be cheaper hotels if booked earlier, or searched thoroughly online. Similarly, there are more exquisite places to live in with prices as high as £80-£100 per night.

SHANKLIN

It was Saturday and a warm sunny summer of May when we checked into our hotel. The island looked exactly like the quiet picturesque English seaside towns that we grew up watching on television.

The hotel with the rest of the town was located on a higher plane and from the cliffs the view of the blue ocean stretching endlessly was incredible. After taking a short nap, we walked down to the beach.



Like most English beaches, this was full of pebbles too, but there were a few piers to take us to the middle of the water. The waves crashed against the piers splashing water on the tourists. The water was extremely cold and the wind chilly, but the summer sun was lavish in providing some comforting heat.

We walked by the beach and watched families lounging and enjoying their summer holidays — grandparents dozing on chairs, fathers drinking beer and mothers shouting after children who were running wild.

We went for a short hike up the hills adjacent to our hotel so that we could reach for a higher cliff and get a panoramic view of the ocean. The walk which took us through deserted and eerie woods of wilderness was exciting and refreshing. The view from the top was as beautiful as promised.

We were left speechless by nature's beauty.

As the sun started to set, we came down and settled on one of the restaurants by the beach and ordered dinner. There was live music and the food was served hot. It was a delightful ambience to just sit back, relax and forget all the worries of our busy lives back in the city.

NEEDLES

The next day we started early because we had decided to travel to the other end of the island — to a place called Needles — which was southwest in the Alum Bay cliffs. The other option was to go towards north and visit the castles — Carisbrooke Castle in Newport and the Osborne House in East Cowes.

We decided on nature over history and went west. The bus ride took us through the green valley while my headphones played Tagore; it was an unforgettable journey of self-discovery and satisfaction.

While I missed my family and Dhaka terribly, I was immensely grateful for having had the opportunity of travelling and exploring different places in the world, and the Isle of Wight, though had never been on my list, I was definitely glad to have come there and witness nature at its quietest and serene.

On reaching Alum Bay, we had breakfast in one of the cafes in town and scampered upwards on the cliff that was connected to the "Needles", which were mainly three stalks of chalk in the shape of needles, rising about 30m out of the sea at the end of cliff.

There was a small lighthouse at the end of the last chalk which was not accessible from there. Most tourists, as we did too, gaze over the beautiful white blocks of chalk and the blue ocean surrounding them from The Needles Battery, which is an artillery base used during the Second World War and other wars when England needed protection from enemies' naval attack.

The views from that cliff are one of the most splendid I have seen in my life and no words can do justice to the expanse of infinitely still blue water that stretched ahead of us.

On looking back, the cliff carved into a semi-circular geological majesty of green on top, white chalk in the middle and multi-coloured sands on the beach.

YARMOUTH

Close to Alum Bay is Yarmouth. Those who have read Dickens cannot miss the place where David Copperfield was partly set and allegedly written. The small town swarmed with boats of all shapes, sizes and colours; and, yes, they were far modern than described in David Copperfield but as popular and eye-catching as put in the novel. From Yarmouth, we took the bus to Ryde and there caught the ferry around sunset then the bus from Portsmouth and reached London by eleven at night.

TIPS

There are many travel guides and hop-on buses that can make the experience more interesting and yes, while our two-day trip was amazing, I would suggest staying another day or two which would help cover the whole island and all the attractions.

By Anika Saba

Photo courtesy: Anika Saba

