



SNAIL TRAIL SHORT BREAKS



LOCATION
Bristol

DURATION
2 days

MILEAGE
85

AUTHOR
Phil Curry

VEHICLE
2008 Danbury Surf



Day one

Baltic Wharf Caravan Club site is a friendly and traditional site. However, it's also located in the heart of Bristol so makes an ideal base to explore the city.



The 'SS Great Britain' has sailed around the world 32 times. This signpost, located beside the main entrance, breaks this incredible feat down into nautical miles.



BRISTOL 

Brunel's Bristol

 **Phil Curry** takes a Danbury Surf into the heart of Bristol to discover more about this popular West Country city and the great British engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GAVIN ROBERTS

The Clifton Suspension Bridge spans the river Avon in Bristol

Taking a motorhome into a busy city for a short break may seem like a bold idea, but I decided to take the plunge. Bristol has always appealed to me because being a technically-minded sort of fellow there's lots to see in the place where the famous British engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel spent much of his time and effort. His most famous work is the Clifton Suspension Bridge that spans the River Avon in Bristol. It has become a symbol of the city and is one of the gems in the crown of his engineering brilliance.

Previously, I have only paid flying visits to Bristol but I've always been impressed by the city and its beautiful surrounding countryside. Between my times there, I've also been amazed by the regeneration of the area. After heavy bombing during WWII, Bristol was rebuilt using brutalist architecture (an architectural style favouring concrete and steel that was popular in England in the 1950s and '60s). Today, these functional buildings are being torn down and replaced with modern designs in all shapes, sizes and colours. As I write this, I am already looking forward to my next visit and seeing the progress.

I had a VW Danbury Surf at my disposal: a small, agile panel van conversion, which was perfect for tackling roads like those around the city centre. So, armed with a map and a list of places to go, I set sail for my first port of call, the Baltic Wharf Caravan Club site (www.caravanclub.co.uk).

This site is ideally located in the heart of the city. Bristol, like many other cities, has very few places to park motorhomes, so the public transport and ferry connections beside the campsite made it a lot easier to get around.

That night, I went for a walk along the riverside. With the lights of the city reflecting on the water, it was a serene experience. It was quite late by the time I returned to the 'van, so I settled down for the night.

TOP TIP

Parking is limited in Bristol, but the public transport system is good. Go to the council's website for more details. Web www.bristol.gov.uk

FOR SITES IN THE AREA, TURN TO p65 

Day two

Clifton Downs is made up of four-acres of parkland and boasts great views of the Avon gorge and the Clifton Suspension Bridge. It's also an ideal spot for a picnic.



A ferry service operates from the Baltic Wharf club site. The ferry takes you across the River Avon into the city centre.

BRISTOL



I awoke early the next day and took a short walk from the site to the 'SS Great Britain'. It was designed by Brunel and was the first iron-hulled steam ship to use a screw propeller. It paved the way for the famous ocean liners of the early 20th century. Today, the 'SS Great Britain' (www.ssgreatbritain.org) stands in the dry dock where she was originally built, and is open to visitors throughout the year. In order to keep her from rusting, the Great Britain Trust has fitted a sheet of rippled glass at her waterline and the open area below is kept at a constant humidity level of 22 per cent. This means you can walk beneath the ship and even touch the hull while staying completely dry. Going on board, the free audio guides help to transport you back to the mid-19th century, giving visitors a sense of what it would have been like on board for the ship's Victorian passengers.

The interactive dockyard museum is fun, too. I felt like a child again as I learnt about the history of the ship, raised the propeller and set a course across the open seas.

Having enjoyed my time on board the 'SS Great Britain', I headed up the hills to

the area of Clifton in search of another Brunel story. The Clifton Suspension Bridge was designed by Brunel in 1830, but the project was dogged with political and financial difficulties and so the project wasn't completed until 1864, five years after Brunel's death. Today, it is a vital link between Clifton and Leigh, in Somerset. Unfortunately, there is a weight limit on the bridge (four tones) so the only motorhomes that can use it are van conversions. However, free guided tours are provided for the public every Sunday afternoon from Easter Sunday to mid September. The tours start at 3.00pm ➔



Visitors are allowed beneath the 'SS Great Britain'



The Avon gorge separates Bristol from Somerset



Phil alongside the Clifton Suspension Bridge



The Danbury Surf parked up besides the famous 'SS Great Britain'

THE KNOWLEDGE

Feed me now!

The Kensington Arms
Stanley Road, Cotham, Bristol BS6 6NP.
Tel 0117 944 6444

The Kensington Arms is located near to Clifton Downs. It has a local pub atmosphere that is unrivalled in the city.

The Hatchet Inn

Frogmore Street, Bristol
BS1 5NA.
Tel 0117 929 4118

This is the oldest pub in Bristol and is famed for its live music nights. It boasts a superb Sunday lunch menu, too.



Diary dates

29 September

Gorgeous gorge trip

This night time trip takes you on a cruise along the wider Avon gorge to see the spectacular lighting of the Clifton Suspension Bridge. All trips depart and return from Brunel's 'SS Great Britain'.

Tel 0117 927 3146

Web www.bristolferry.com

October 19th

Love food festival

This family-friendly farmers' market festival brings the finest West Country produce into Bristol. The festival is held at the Paintworks, on the A4 Bath Road.

Tel 0117 971 4320

Web www.visitbristol.co.uk

25-26 October

Steam train trips on the harbourside

Take a ride on Britain's only dockside steam railway and enjoy the sights of Bristol's beautiful waterfront. Trips depart from the 'SS Great Britain' every 40 minutes between 11am-5pm. Prices are £3 return.

Tel 0117 922 3571

Web www.bristol.gov.uk/museums



Day two

The old Temple Meads Station, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, now houses the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum. Web www.cmpiremuseum.co.uk.



Bristol is famous for its blue glass and you can see it being made at the Bristol Blue Glass Visitors Centre in Brislington (www.bristol-glass.co.uk). The factory's shop means you can pick up plenty of souvenirs, too.



A ferry service operates across the river Avon



Bristol's traditional and picturesque dockyard



The Surf is dwarfed by the 1000-year-old Bristol Cathedral

from the toll booth at the Clifton end of the bridge. There is also a visitor centre at the Leigh end which displays photos, and reports on how the bridge was built and how it has changed over the years.

The following morning, I decided to take the ferry across to the city centre to experience Bristol on foot. Bristol Cathedral (www.bristol-cathedral.co.uk) was the first destination. It has stood in the same spot for over 1000 years and the area has developed massively around it. You can visit the Cathedral for free and donations are welcomed to aid its upkeep. Once inside, there are areas for quiet reflection and tours of the building are available. Home made scones are also on sale in the Refectory, which I took great pleasure in testing.

After this, I did a spot of shopping in the High Street before returning to the 'van. I stowed away my purchases and went for a walk. I didn't fancy cooking so I strolled along the wharf to the replica of John Cabot's ship 'The Matthew' (www.matthew.co.uk). The ship was

built in 1997 to commemorate the 500-year anniversary of his discovery of North America. (Although Christopher Columbus had discovered the continent of America five years previously, it was South America and the Caribbean, rather than North America.)

As a special treat I decided to book the Fish and Chips Cruise: a two hour sail around Bristol harbour, with a traditional Great British dinner thrown in, all for £15. Sailing in a replica of the 15th-century ship was like taking a trip through time – and the food was great, too. I was disappointed when we docked because I could have spent many more hours at sea. But, alas, I headed back to the 'van and, having been well fed, settled down for an early night.

Bristol has a heady mix of modern culture and historic engineering. And, despite the hustle and bustle, I had a relaxing break. However, my two-day trip barely scratched the surface of this great city and I am already intent on revisiting the area soon. ☺

SECRET SNAIL
An open-top bus tour, taking in all of the city's main sights, stops directly outside the Baltic Wharf CC site. Web www.bristol-tours.net

THE KNOWLEDGE

🚗 Parking, fuel, food

- Parking is famously difficult in Bristol. There is a pay-and-display car park at the 'SS great Britain' exhibition (maximum four hour stay). There are ferry links across to the city centre from here, too.
- The roads in Bristol are quite easy to navigate. However, there are some narrower roads in some of the smaller villages surrounding it, such as Clifton. If possible, stick to main roads such as the A4 and the A4176 when visiting the Clifton Downs.
- There are plenty of supermarkets in Bristol. A small shop is located within walking distance of the Baltic Wharf site, and there's a large supermarket nearby, too.



Need to know

- Weight limits apply on the Clifton suspension bridge: 2.5-tonnes axle weight, or four-tonnes gross weight. Parking nearby is limited, too, so your best bet is to use public transport if you want to visit the area.
- Bristol is undergoing a huge regeneration program at present, so expect traffic jams, especially if entering the city from the M32 motorway.



Tourist information

Visit Bristol
Tel 0906 711 2191
Web www.visitbristol.co.uk
SS GREAT BRITAIN
Tel 0117 926 0680
Web www.ssgreatbritain.org

Number crunching

4200 is the number of chain links used during the building of the Clifton Suspension Bridge.