

To Brit Stop, or Not?

Firstly, before I write this post, I need to make it clear that I have no affiliation with Brit Stops, and pay each year like everyone else for our copy of what we call the Brit Stop Bible. This post comes on the back of 5 years of paid membership, and many, many happy stopovers at Brit Stop locations, but mainly after a discussion that Keefy and I had last night, whilst enjoying our latest Brit Stop evening.



For probably as long as we've been members of **BritStops**, I've also been a lurker on many of the Facebook Motorhome and Cam-

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pervan Discussion pages. Over the last couple of years I've noticed more and more people on these pages asking "Is Britstops worth it?" - and watched with interest people sharing their different opinions before sometimes feeling somewhat disappointed in people's responses. Now don't get me wrong, I know everyone is entitled to their own opinion, and actually isn't that what makes the world wide web a wonderful place to be part of- so please don't think that this post is intended to suggest that anyone who doesn't agree with my opinion is wrong. Far from it. But last night, Keith and I experienced such a wonderful evening, that only came about because of our membership into Britstops, it really highlighted to me why we will always choose to be a member. So I thought I would share it.

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Earlier this week, faced with a pretty long week at work, we decided we would nip out in Ruby the camper van on Saturday night for a change of scenery. We faced two choices- a BritStop location or a quiet CL site somewhere. It coincided with our brand new edition of the 2017 BritStop bible arriving, so after a loooooong day teaching on Tuesday, we sat down together for a leaf through to see if anywhere grabbed our fancy. So much these days is web based and online, and so we LOVE the fact that we can sit and flick through a proper book, page by page to see the locations available. This also is rather handy when you're out and about on a tour and you need to change your plans but you

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don't have any internet, like we did [here](#).

BritStops: 1 / other online database of pub stops: 0

You've got a user-friendly map page so you can see what's available in each area. In the case of us nipping away for a night we tend to say an hour's journey from home- and we are lucky that this perimeter gives us lots of choice (although I'm sad that some of our favourites on the North Norfolk Coast are gone this year!) What we like about the BritStops book is that each place has a little write up from the owner describing their place. This really helps us to decide what we are in the mood for.

Our personal favourite types of stop are the

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farm shops and vineyards, of which there are loads in this years edition. I just love cooking, so to be able to buy fresh produce and cook it for our dinner that night is perfect. That or buying a local wine/beer and drinking it that night on site, knowing you've experienced a local taste, local flavour and given something back to the owner in return for a free night's stopover is just brilliant- and very, very similar to France Passion, which is what Britstops is based upon. The misconception between people who don't rave about BritStops seems to be that its only pubs and in theory most pubs will let you stay overnight. There **are** loads of pubs included. But it's not **only** pubs, and for that we think it's worth the £27.50 membership alone.

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Sunrise amongst the vineyards- the morning after an amazing meal and wine tasting from an English vineyard in 2014.

We stumbled across this inviting advert from BritStop no. 232/2017's host.

"Completely refurbished in May 2013, this characterful 16th Century pub still offers traditional games. Next to a farm that supplies us with local produce. (Landlord) doesn't work from a menu, but is more than happy to make most dishes if he has the ingredients in!"

This sounded an unusual, quirky place, and so we wasted no time in giving them a call on the number provided, to book in for Satur-

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day night. After a bit of a chat to the landlord, he asked us what we fancied to eat, gave us a few options and after asking whether we were fish, veggie or meat eaters he said leave it with me, I'll see you Saturday! I'm not going to lie, we were quite excited! This seemed a novel approach to hospitality and a quick look on trip adviser soon told us people were raving about this place, although we were slightly anxious that we may have signed ourselves up to a private dining experience and therefore may need to re-mortgage the house on our return as we forgot to check the price!

The rest of the week went in a blur with work, but Saturday soon dawned and it was time to set off on our mini break. We

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checked the postcode and directions and used the handy key to see if we needed water, would have electric etc. Everything about the book is convenient and you can just tell it has been lovingly assembled by keen motorhomes, Steve and Mandy, who started BritStops in 2011. Since then they have increased the number of stops from 75 to 761!



Over 700 new stopovers added since 2011. Obviously doing something right!

We stopped for a lovely walk at nearby Clare Country Park- which we found by using our **iFootpath app**, something we always do when we are heading to a new town/area be-

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cause we are chasing a BritStop location, and early evening rolled into the car park of BritStop #232, just as the landlord was returning from a food shop. He opened up at 5:45pm and by 6:00pm we were sat at the bar having his last bottle of home brew bitter and having a nice little chat. The home-brew by the way was delicious. Probably just as well he only had the one bottle left though, at 5.5% I think we could have been in for a dangerous night otherwise!

Conversation soon got onto food, and Tony's enthusiasm and passion for cooking immediately shone through. I can't ever remember having such a passionate landlord/chef talk through a menu with us like we experienced here, and that includes my 30th where K

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took me for a Michelin taster menu at **Mors-ton Hall**. He gave us options that included a curry platter, sausage and mash, linguine or home battered haddock and chips. After ten minutes of umming and ahing and numerous changes, we decided on curry- Keith opting for a fish curry and me going for a section that included chicken and cauliflower balti, beef tikka, chickpea and sweet potato, homemade naan, basmati rice, popadoms, homemade ago chutney- the list went on. We asked if he could knock up a starter and he asked us if Garlic mushrooms and dough balls sounded ok. It sounded more like perfect.

We spent some time chatting to a friendly local and before we knew it the food was

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served. Huge portions, piping hot, absolutely gorgeous flavours. We were officially in food heaven. We were asked what we fancied as background music, we had a roaring log fire next to us, and Jazz the pampered pooch was enjoying fist fulls of home cooked ham!

As the evening went on, a couple more tables came in, and we witnessed the same passion and enthusiasm, enabling them to eat exactly what they fancied. It was time to ask for the bill and I'd got my credit card at the ready, with a slight sweat, and not just cos of the curry! You can perhaps imagine my shock when the bill read "Drinks: £21 (well we had had a long walk, and I didn't have to drive!)... Food.....£28". £28?! That's surely per person I whispered to Keith. It was-

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n't. £14 each for a completely home cooked to our specific taste meal. I'm not even sure I could cook it at home for that, and I didn't have to wash up!

There is no way on earth we would have picked this pub, had it not been for BritStops. It's in a tiny hamlet, in the depths of Suffolk. A little way off the tourist route. Not within walking distance of anything too interesting (although I'm sure given more time we may be proved wrong on this). If we had looked at google maps and tried to "pick a pub and call it" we just never would have found this place. It's like trying to find a needle in a haystack. But with the help of BritStops, its taken all this information of where we are welcome and puts it into a user friendly for-

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mat that doesn't rely on internet connection – for us living on the Norfolk/Suffolk border we do not take this luxury for granted by the way! Mobile data hasn't reached our village yet and we are not alone!

We look at our BritStop nights away not, as their tag line suggest, as Free Stopovers, but more like finding the real British gems and giving something back to off the beaten track hosts allowing us to spend the night there. Whether its a haggis pizza and a pint of home-brewed ale, some homemade cheese, local wine, or just old fashioned Great British service in a lonely village somewhere, we feel proud to be members and thank Steve and Mandy for their hard work in keeping the book up to date with regular

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monthly update emails.

It's worth mentioning that the agreement of those listed in the BritStop guide does state that there is absolutely no obligation to buy anything, you just have to go and introduce yourself etc. However, for us, we couldn't even entertain this as a thought – if someone is being kind enough to let you stay on their property the least we can do is have a few drinks and a meal. Pubs and small business' are closing down left right and centre with the increase of larger shops' and chain pubs- if we can't help by spending twenty quid or so in their establishment then I'd rather go and stay in a lay-by somewhere. Or stay at home.

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Some pictures below of our favourite all time stopovers.



So there you go, there's my two - pennies worth on whether BritStops is worth the £27.50 annual fee.

If you are a member and are in/near to Suffolk and like your food - you NEED to pay #232 a visit. I promise you, you won't visit anywhere else like it. Keep an eye on the website- he is doing themed food nights - with Italian night, Greek night, Curry night, and even a beer taster night- where you get 5 courses each matched with a different beer.

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Until Next Time,

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