

## Travel

by Marcus Thompson

echonews@expressandecho.co.uk

**G**OOD 'Quintessential English Boutique Hotels' are out there, but the problem is finding them. I can, however help you find your way to one of Wirral's very own, The Hillbark Hotel, an exquisite jewel in Wirral's sparkling crown.

I woke up in possibly the most comfortable bed I've ever known and with my only incentive for dragging myself out of this sumptuous place of rest, the luxury bathroom with whirlpool bath and steam power shower.

Fully pampered, I head for the Hillbark's award-winning breakfast. This is where you'll enjoy a truly relaxed dining experience in the softest leather seats, in the charming oak panelled grill room that serves the finest British food, cooked like you have never tasted before. The sublime quality makes it a hard place to leave. The service there is professional and courteous. This is the perfect place and the only way to start your day.

The Hillbark is on the beautiful Wirral peninsula set in 250 acres of parkland, just minutes from Liverpool and Chester's most exclusive shopping, you'll find top attractions, theatre and culture close by.

After breakfast I headed off for a visit to Church Farm, winner of Wirral Attraction of the Year 2012 and finalist in Liverpool City Region tourism Awards 2012. This is a great place for families, couples and those who just want to take in the magic of farm life.

For youngsters you can get up close to the animals and if you want to dig your own potatoes the opportunity is there. As for transport on the farm, there's the tractor tour, or for the more adventurous, the barrel train; either way you'll have great fun and have plenty to do.

Refreshed we head off to Wirral Country Park, the first country park in Britain. The park, a former railway line, runs from West Kirby to Hooton. The Wirral Way is a 12-mile footpath/cycle path and a 10-mile separate horse ride, both run parallel to the Dee Estuary and afford spectacular views across to Wales.

Wirral Country Park is a place of contrasts. Badgers and foxes hunt the quieter parts, birds nest in the dense hedges or feed on the berries in winter, and you may see up to 10 kinds of butterfly in summer. We however found much joy just sitting on the shore soaking up the sunshine and taking in the breath-taking views across the estuary.

Full of fresh air and vigour we went for lunch at West Kirby Sailing Club, perfect timing since the club was holding its highly prized event, The Wilson Trophy. 200 Olympic-class sailors compete annually on West Kirby's marine amphitheatre in one of the sailing world's favourite events for three days in May. Thousands come to watch this amazing show.

Back on land in the comfort of the sailing club we could really appreciate



# The best of British on a weekend in the Wirral



**Great break:** Sailing on the marine lake, top, woodland walks, above left, and Hillbark Hotel – 'the jewel in the Wirral's sparkling crown'

the beauty of this graceful but equally skilful sport. I would urge anyone, young or old to make this trip and enjoy a fantastic weekend of Olympic class sailing, even as a spectator you will become part of this club's world stage – West Kirby's marine Lake.

We spent our evening at the Wro Lounge and Bar and it proved to be



the perfect way to end our day. Four times winner of Wirral's Most Professional Bar Team and winner of Merseyside's Bar of the Year, the Wro team have again been shortlisted for 2012. When we arrived at the Wro proprietor Sally Boyd welcomed us with open arms and immediately made us feel at home. The menu had

choice without being too fussy, the quality of food was second to none and the sophisticated setting with its lively atmosphere made the whole experience a night to remember.

I will now leave you with Sally's parting words to sum up my weekend in the Wirral, "happy days and even happier nights".



**Luxury:** The five-star Shangri-La Al Waha

## Finding the five-star deals

IF you can never quite bring yourself to pay for a five-star hotel room, this summer could be the time to treat yourself, a new survey says.

According to the latest Hotels.com Hotel Price Index, there were some dramatic falls in this sector of the market, all over the world.

Nigel Pocklington, marketing chief at Hotels.com, says: "Various factors influence prices for luxury accommodation including supply and demand, currency fluctuations and wider socio-economic trends.

"With so much information available online and in the mainstream media, travellers are increasingly savvy in their choices and many use the internet to bag great five and four-star bargains while money is so tight."

If you don't want to track down your own five-star hotel bargain, operators can offer a very wide selection instead.

Travelbag has plenty of five-star hotels in its long-haul packages: five nights' bed and breakfast at the five-star Shangri-La Al Waha in Oman in early June costs £659, including return Gulf Airlines flights; and seven nights' bed and breakfast in May/June at the five-star Lillianfels in the Blue Mountains of Australia starts at £1,784, including return flights on the new Vietnam Airlines service from Gatwick.

## Jumble sales

Car boot/ jumble sales/ fairs for charity and good causes

Saturday, June 2

■ **Car boot, table top and craft Fair, 9am to 5pm at Elizabeth Hall, Exmouth Seaford, Exmouth. Stalls £10 each. Call 01395 597253. In aid of Exmouth Carnival**

■ **Charity car boot sale at The Royal Oak at the top of Redhills in Nadderwater, Exeter, 10am to 1pm. Sellers £3 car, £6 van. Buyers free entry. In aid of Troop Aid.**

To list your event please email the details two weeks in advance to [whatson@expressandecho.co.uk](mailto:whatson@expressandecho.co.uk)



**Cyprus:** Two-for-one holidays on offer

## Not everyone is staying in the UK to celebrate the Jubilee...

AS many as six million Britons could turn the Queen's Diamond Jubilee holiday at the start of June into a holiday of their own, according to the Association of British Travel Agents (Abta).

One of the leading UK travel websites, lowcostholidays.com, believes that "unreliable and miserable British weather" is a significant factor in a 50 per cent-plus surge in searches and bookings for the Jubilee week, measured year on year.

The other important factor is the calendar: because of the late May bank holiday and an extra day off for

Jubilee celebrations, thousands of holidaymakers needed little persuading to turn three working days out of the office into a nine-day break.

With children off school that week too, there are some great value deals on offer to escape the dreary UK weather.

The obvious place to find a bargain is Greece, where operators are stuck with thousands of unsold packages over the next few weeks.

Platon Loizou, managing director at Jewel in the Crown Holidays, says: "After all the demonstrations, they can't shift holidays for love nor

money; seven nights with accommodation on Zante and Corfu start at £129, flights-only from £125."

One leading operator to Greece has a remarkable "buy one, get one free" offer to shift unsold holidays for early summer.

Olympic Holidays' discount campaign to stimulate sales for May and June includes departures to Cyprus and a range of Greek islands.

"The market is still sluggish, so we're virtually offering two holidays for the price of one, with reductions of 50 per cent from original prices," says Photis Lambrianides, commercial director at Olympic Holidays.

According to lowcostholidays.com, Majorca is emerging as the top choice for families keen to take a break. For the Jubilee week, it says, its bookings are currently up 60 per cent year on year.

Other popular destinations include Florida, the Algarve and Turkey – all up more than 55 per cent year on year.

Matt Hall, deputy managing director at lowcostholidays.com, says: "More than 12,000 holidaymakers have already booked to travel with us bank holiday week. There are some great value deals across a wide range of sunny destinations – and some really attractive city breaks."