

FERRY FOCUS

Chloë Hukin sails through our guide to ferrying your motorhome in 2011. From essential advice to operator news, read on for all you need to know...



Brittany Ferry's Pont Aven at sea



LATEST NEWS

DFDS & NORFOLKLINE MERGE

Ferry providers Norfolkline and DFDS merged to become DFDS Seaways in July last year.

DFDS Seaways operates three purpose-built vessels between Dover and Dunkirk with up to 24 crossings a day.

For a timetable take a look at the box in this feature or for more information and to book, visit www.norfolkline.com (still the main booking web site for DFDS Seaways) or www.dfdsseaways.co.uk

FERRY SURVEY

It has been reported that 64 per cent of people would be willing to drive over six hours when travelling to a holiday destination, according to a recent study by DFDS Seaways (formerly Norfolkline). In the same report, only fourteen per cent admitted they have travelled to Europe via a ferry in the last three years.

The survey suggests that a lack of knowledge of European geography could be putting people off driving to Europe. Only half of the 2000 people surveyed correctly identified Paris as being within three hours' drive of Dunkirk, and almost two thirds thought Lille and Bruges were over three hours away, when they are actually both under an hour's drive from the port of Dunkirk.

For more information or to book your ticket with DFDS Seaways (formerly Norfolkline) visit www.norfolkline.com or telephone 08715 747241.



P&O'S NEW SHIP

P&O Ferries took delivery of the first of its two new ships for the Dover-Calais service last month. The Spirit of Britain will be followed by the arrival of its sister ship, the Spirit of France, by September 2011.

At 49,000 gross tonnes and 213 metres in length, the two ships will be the largest ferries operating between the Channel ports. With 3746 metres of lanes in total, there will be space for more than 180 freight vehicles, plus 195 tourist vehicles. In addition the vessels offer department-store-style shopping and a selection of eateries. The onboard Family Lounge offers a child-friendly area.

For further information visit www.poferries.com

RED FUNNEL FOR SMARTPHONES

Red Funnel Ferries has launched a new Isle of Wight travel web site for smartphone users.

The site offers mobile customers detailed timetable information for both Red Funnel's Southampton/East Cowes route and the Southampton/West Cowes Red Jet Hi-Speed service. Service updates are also available including live position information, the latest Red Funnel news and offers.

Visit www.redfunnel.co.uk on your Smartphone and you will be automatically directed to the new site.

As we Britons are surrounded by water on every side we are left with very little choice when travelling overseas with our motorhomes - whether you're voyaging near or far, a ferry probably is going to be your best bet. And, quite often, the easiest.

With our French cousins just a short sail over the channel and Spain, Holland and Scandinavia not much further you could be basking in warm holiday sunshine (if you're lucky enough) in a matter of hours.

If you haven't finished exploring what our own fair island has to offer, why not jump on a ferry and travel round the Isles dotted around the British coastline? You'll be amazed at what sits right on your doorstep, including Ireland, Scotland and the Northern Isles.

But there are some things you need to consider when using a ferry, special offers, protecting yourself and flexibility of your travel times particularly.

Whether you've ferried yourself around the globe or you're new to it all, read on for all you need to know about the world of ferries, home and away...



Don't get caught out

Be aware of any extra charges you may be asked to pay: companies often charge a premium for tickets purchased from the port on the day so booking in advance may save you a fair sum. There may also be a fuel surcharge to pay - bear this in mind when booking your crossing.

Many companies will offer various types of ticket (comparable to business class/economy seating on a flight). Those wishing to pay more for an exclusive lounge and other luxury benefits will find that this is available on some ferries. On the other hand, those wishing to save a bob or two could look at being more flexible with their dates and times - travel one hour earlier or later and you could save a fair sum. A flexible ticket also allows you to change the date and time of your journey in advance, perfect if something crops up on your trip that requires you to travel home a day early or later.

Bagging a deal

No longer just a case of choosing the journey times nobody else will want (either early in the morning or late at night, people have actually caught onto this!) you need to do your research to find the best deal. These days browsing online is a fantastic way of bagging a deal, and so the Internet should most certainly be your first port of call.

The Direct Ferries web site (www.directferries.co.uk) is particularly useful, listing money-off ferry deals and their providers, the latest in ferry news and accurate timetables for most ferry operators.

Also, have a look for special offers on official ferry company web sites.

Booking online may be a cheaper option by cutting out the middle man - many operators charge a booking fee over the phone (ask before you commit if you're unsure).

Agents could save aggro

There are many agents and clubs that will have agreed discounts and deals with ferry companies. The three main ferry savvy service providers are the Camping & Caravanning Club Carefree Travel Service (tel: 08451 307701; web site: www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk), Caravan Club Overseas Travel Service (tel: 01342 316101; web site: www.caravanclub.co.uk) and MTC (tel: 08458 737055; web site: www.ferrytickets.co.uk).

They can also offer holiday packages including activities and sites (go to the company directly for more information). Going through an agent like this could save you a lot of wasted time and effort, although you may need to be a member to benefit.

