

Coast along

A chance to take in a seaside destination famed for its palm trees? I was certainly swayed, says Steve Reed...

WE'VE BEEN TO many places across our wonderful country, but working in Devon is always a treat. The English Riviera Business Improvement District – or BID – beckoned us to do our thing by inviting tour planners from all over the country to a showcase of all that's good for groups in this beautiful part of the world. So that's just what we did: and they came, they saw and they chuckled...

The English Riviera Group Showcase puts group organisers, coach and tour operators, inbound operators and tour wholesalers directly in touch with the hotels, attractions, transport providers and tourism businesses in the region. It's such a big event we needed several hotels to host the many buyers, and these were the Carlton, Abbey Sands, Livermead Cliff and the Grand in Torquay, along with the Redcliffe Hotel in Paignton.



STEVE REED is an expert in the world of group travel and runs Steve Reed Tourism with his wife Judith. He's the new Champion of

Travel World Association (see page 96 to discover the benefits of becoming a member), and for more on Steve go to stevereedtourism.co.uk

The event was centred on an excellent English Riviera BID Company set piece, the English Riviera Show, which each year features many of the BID partners in a fun exhibition, much of which is devoted to tourism. Here we met and were welcomed

by Carolyn Custerson, CEO of the English Riviera BID Company. Attendees were many and included Norman Allen Group Travel from Hereford, Simply Groups from Yorkshire, Albatross Group from Kent, Cabin Coaches from Essex and Miki Travel from London.

THE STARBURST SHOW

The event started with an explosion of fun in the shape of the Babbacombe Theatre's Starburst show. If you're ever keen to find the very heart of coach and group travel in the UK, look no further. It's almost as if your coach has been turned into a time machine for the night and your group have been transported back to the days of the Carry On films and good old family fun.

Sharon Waring is the manager at the theatre, and she deserves a curtain call for how she welcomes groups of all types.

The next day saw the delegates attend the English Riviera Show, hosted by the excellent English Riviera Centre. Angela Wright of the BID Company organises the exhibition, and what a brilliant job she does.

This year we decided to add a touch of the game show to the proceedings. A special 'dinger' bell allowed me to have the pleasure of announcing each finely timed meeting slot for the buyers. Apparently, I'm getting one for my birthday. All I know is that the 'meet the buyer' session really worked well and we shall repeat this success in the future – dinger or no dinger.

Next up it was full steam ahead for a »



Devon

delightful and picturesque trip on board the Dartmouth Steam Railway from Paignton to Kingswear. Sereny Damon of the Dartmouth Railway is a group travel legend in these parts. She looked after the group so well as we travelled in style in our beautiful and historic observation carriage. We didn't want to get off...

KENTS CAVERN

Do you know the difference between a stalagmite and a stalactite? No? Well, you should have been with our group at our next stop. Kents Cavern kindly put on a Gala Supper for us.

How many times have you enjoyed a glass of bubbly underground with bats flying over your head? We all loved the tour, which is perfect for groups – especially now they have a new café. You'd be batty not to book it.

TORRE ABBEY

It's always good to be surprised, and we certainly were at an attraction »

For help planning your trip to the region, email angela@englishrivierabid.co.uk or call her on 01803 296296



Steve meets the team from prehistoric attraction Kents Cavern

The Dartmouth Steam Railway runs from Paignton to Kingswear



Torre Abbey and Gardens, in the heart of Torquay



Above: The English Riviera Group Showcase celebrates all that's great about this part of Britain

new to many of the attendees, even though it's been there for hundreds of years. Torre Abbey and Gardens, in the heart of Torquay, proved a real bonus ball. Did you know that it has a stunning 'potent plants' garden reflecting some of the devilish murders Agatha Christie once made fashionable? You have the choice of inside or outside – I guess depending on the weather – and both are great options. I guess it's a case of 'what's your poison?'. Matt Newbury at Torre Abbey will advise on group bookings for this top attraction.

FUN IN MINIATURE

Bygonies in Babbacombe is a must-see spot, lovingly looked after by Richard Cuming. A Victorian Street right in the heart of



Babbacombe Theatre

Babbacombe, it's a family-friendly attraction over three floors, packed with curiosities and displays. It has a lovely quaint café too.

Bygonies is just around the corner from the Babbacombe Model Village, another iconic tourist attraction. Although the fun came in miniature for us, the memories of this super

attraction will be large for our guests.

I first went here 30 years ago while on a seaside holiday with our young family, and what I like about the Model Village is that although it has its beautifully constructed displays and scenes, the site updates regularly to reflect modern themes. [GTVV](#)