

The Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, of which I am a member, is currently looking into tourism in the UK. The inquiry has a really interesting remit looking at a range of issues from regulatory barriers through to fiscal incentives, as well as basic promotion of attractions and accommodation.

We live in such a beautiful and remarkable country and yet we often choose to go abroad for our holidays or short breaks. Why is this? Affordability is one key aspect but then so is connectivity. I was speaking to a neighbour recently and they booked a 3 night weekend break in Barcelona for 4 adults and one child that turned out to be significantly cheaper than the equivalent stay in Centre Parks. So cost is clearly a major issue, which is why I have become rather attracted to the Cut Tourism VAT campaign for accommodation and attractions.

However while cost is important so is connectivity and infrastructure improvements are needed massively if we are truly able to promote the best of British. The Committee spent the first two days of this week in the South West. We had a public meeting and a private meeting in Exeter followed by meetings in Cornwall the following day. The journey back from the Eden project to London took nearly 6 hours, part by mini bus and part by train. In 6 hours I could fly to North Africa, any part of Europe, Russia, Scandinavia or even Dubai.

The Committee are following up the trip to the South West with a visit to Kent. Some of the issues around connectivity might not be an issue but other challenges to our local tourism industry will be raised for sure. Our report is due to be published before the Election and will no doubt make key recommendations that will aim to boost what is a vital part of our economy both here in Kent and to the whole of the UK.