The Charms of Whitby

There is a seaside town in England that has a special place in my heart. The little town of Whitby, squeezed ___1___ the coast and the North Yorkshire Moors, may seem overshadowed in many ways by its larger and more affluent rival, Scarborough, a few miles further south. However, for those who know ___2___ to look, Whitby’s majestic cliffs, post-card pretty harbour and gently curved beaches hold clues to the town’s unique past.

The cliffs ___3___ this part of the coastline are eroding and daily strew the beaches with rock debris, stones and pebbles. In fact it is not advisable to stand too close to the foot of the cliffs ___4___ you want to risk having chunks of rock fall on your head.

In the Lower Jurassic period around 200 million years ago, this part of Yorkshire along with most of Europe was covered by a shallow sea. But seas ___5___ come and gone and glaciers have shifted landmasses, providing perfect conditions for preserving fossils. Dinosaur footprints have been ___6___ in the area as well as the petrified bones of an almost complete ancient crocodile, now on display at the local museum. Whilst such spectacular finds are rare, at low tide it is by no means ___7___ to find rocks containing smaller fossils, for example of beautiful coil-shaped ammonites, or bullet-like belemnites.

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Ammonite. Photo: Dlloyd
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Another __8__ to visit Whitby is for its connection to Dracula. In Bram Stoker’s classic Victorian Gothic horror story, Count Dracula’s coffin was __9__ ashore in Whitby harbour after a shipwreck during a wild storm and a mysterious, dog-like animal was seen bounding up the 199 steps to the abbey ruins.

The town is not __10__ to take advantage of the Dracula story. Bram Stoker stayed in a house on West Cliff in 1890 and found __11__ for his novel in the windswept abbey ruins and dramatic coastal scenery. Stoker set some of his most dramatic scenes in Whitby. Guided walks on the Dracula theme are well __12__. The town’s connection with the story has also inspired the Whitby Goth Weekend which takes place twice a year as well as the annual Bram Stoker International Film Festival.

However, no trip to Whitby is complete without __13__ a visit to the famous fish and chip shop by the harbour. It is said to sell the best fish and chips in the world, and __14__ in a downpour there are usually queues outside the restaurant. But, weather permitting, the most authentic way to eat your take-away haddock and chips is with your hands, standing outside, __15__ plenty of salt and malt vinegar.

These are just some of the reasons why Whitby is well worth a visit.

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