

“

Is spring ever coming?

Stop-start, stop-start! No, I'm not referring to British Airways' strike-affected service, but to spring. One minute it's here and we're getting excited about casting off our cardigans and listening for cuckoos, the next it has disappeared and we're back to winter coats and bed socks. The weather is so uncertain these days. Allan Trinidad, southern sales manager of Collette Worldwide, tells me it's the same across the globe.

He has recently returned from the UK sales meeting in Israel and Jordan, a trip he'd undertaken with Collette's general manager, Peter Traynor. They had been looking forward to escaping the miserable British climate and had taken great pleasure in packing short-sleeved shirts and factor 50 sunscreen in preparation for the trip to a Bedouin camp that was planned for the party.

The happy band were enjoying all Jordan had to offer: the dates that they would only otherwise see on the supermarket shelves at Christmas; the quiet company of spiritual people; the desert where the sands stretched as far as the eye could see; and where it is said it never rains. It must have been said by a weather forecaster from the Met Office though, because that last one turned out not to be true. As they sat cross-legged on hessian cushions and looked up at the suddenly darkening skies, the heavens opened and the rain came down like stair rods.

They swapped the traditional seating for the more conventional chairs at a nearby local restaurant, trading authenticity for practicality. And practicality raised its head in more ways than one. The rains were completely unexpected and our delegates had brought no waterproofs, so they stopped off at the nearest clothes store where the shopkeeper must have thought all her Christmases had come at once. Between the 10 of them, they stripped her shelves bare



of hats, scarves and long-sleeved tops. Not your typical souvenirs from the Middle East.

You can imagine then, that the photos Allan had brought to show me, were far from the *Lawrence of Arabia*-style shots I had anticipated. No pictures of Allan astride a camel dressed in flowing white robes with the sun beating down on him, I'm afraid.

Instead, blurry images of Peter Traynor, Lee Foster and Allan bundled up inside a jeep, huddling together for warmth.

As I studied the glowering skies, I came to the conclusion that I was better off in Gillingham. When it rains here, it's disappointing, but it doesn't cost me a whole new wardrobe and mug me of my Omar Sharif moment!

Fancy a big portion, sir?

You've got to admire the marketing skills of the Ireland tourist board, whose St Patrick's Day promotion sent folk on their way to work with a smile.

Among the many commuters who received a wicker basket containing a brochure on Ireland and a bag of natural oats was Balkan Holidays sales manager, Rupert Diggins.

"You don't expect to get off a train at Victoria and be asked by a total stranger if you've had your oats that morning," he told me. "Initially I was rather unsettled, especially as she said I looked like a chap who would need a big portion, but I relaxed when she handed over the porridge oats and wished me

a happy St Patrick's Day breakfast!"

Let's hope the enthusiastic sowing of oats in the railway stations brings the Irish a bumper harvest of tourists this year.

I'd Shore liked to go there

It had been a while since I last spoke to Abigail Silver, formerly of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, but we caught up this week.

It was lovely to hear her news, and now that she is mum to her two little girls, Eloise and Esme, lots of our conversation was taken up with how she manages to juggle motherhood and her new role with The Shore at Katathani.

The Shore is a high-end resort nestling in the secluded cover of Kata Noi Beach, in Phuket and it sounds like the embodiment of luxury holidaymaking. According to Abi, The Shore has it all: ocean views, infinity pools, seclusion, stylish design, contemporary international cuisine, great customer care, a spa, yoga lessons - you name it. Is it too predictable to say that my ears pricked up when she mentioned The Cove, a cellar stocked with premier wines from around the world?

The resort's strap line reads: 'Where time has no meaning beyond the pleasure of every moment.' That's a line that speaks to me...get me to that cellar pronto!

Maureen Hill works at Travel Angels in Gillingham, Dorset

MAUREEN

As I studied the glowering skies I realised I was better off in Gillingham. When it rains here, it's disappointing, but it doesn't cost me a whole new wardrobe and mug me of my Omar Sharif moment!

”