

GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

ENGLISH (Specification 1900)

Unit 1 Non-Fiction, Media and Information
(Higher Tier)

2431/02/RBI

READING BOOKLET INSERT

Thursday 8 January 2009
Morning

Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes



INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

- The material in this READING BOOKLET INSERT is for use with the questions in Section A of the question paper.

INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

- This document consists of 4 pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

Non-fiction

In his book, *'The Pillars of Hercules'*, travel writer, Paul Theroux, describes a visit he made to the Spanish resort of Benidorm in the 1990s and his journey on the ferry to Palma in Majorca.

The Ferry to Palma

Benidorm was a mass of beachside high-rises, the worst place I had seen on the coast so far, worse than Torremolinos, which was slap-happy seaside tackiness of a familiar and forgivable kind. But Benidorm was ugliness on a grand scale – tall blocks of apartments, hideous hotels, winking signs, the whole place badly built and visually unappealing. Everything that Spain was said to stand for – charm, dignity, elegance, honour, restraint – was denied in the look of Benidorm. And because this was wet chilly winter, the wide streets were empty, most of the hotels were shut, no one sat on the beach or swam in the sea: the useless horror, naked and raw in the low season, was demoralising and awful.

In 1949, Benidorm was a tiny impoverished fishing village, “said to be an open door for smugglers,” an English visitor wrote. I walked around it. I had a pizza. I sat on a bench surveying the Mediterranean, and then the wind picked up and the rain began.

The rain delighted me. It whipped against the sea. It darkened the stone of the hotels and tore at the signs. It coursed down the empty streets and flooded the gutters and cut gullies through the beach sand. A bit more wind and the lights would fail, a bit more rain and it would be a real flood. And that would be the answer, the cure for Benidorm – nature’s revenge, an elemental purifying storm that would wipe the place out.

It lifted my spirits to imagine the destruction of such a place, and I boarded the onward train feeling joy in my heart at the prospect of the wholesale destruction. The rain swept loudly against the side of the railway car like a shower of gravel. I was the only passenger. Darkness fell as we shuttled towards Denia in the storm. The rain was torrential. I could not see Denia’s famous lighthouse. There were flooded streets in the little town, the station was drenched, the rain glittered in the lights of the port where the ferry was moored by an empty puddled quay.

It was possible that this look of desertion meant that I had the departure time wrong.

“You are sure this ferry goes to Palma tonight?”

“Yes. No problem.”

“Where are the other passengers?”

“Perhaps there are no other passengers tonight.”

It was ten o’clock. I bought my ticket and boarded ten minutes later. The ferry *Punta Europa* had space for 1,300 passengers. A sign on the upper deck spelled it out:

Maximum authorised passengers	– 1,300
Crew Members (<i>Tripulantes</i>)	– 31
Total of passengers and crew	– 1,331

Then a man and his son came aboard. That made three of us on the *Punta Europa*. There were five inside saloons for passengers, filled with seats; every seat was the same, narrow, hard-edged moulded plastic, and so we sat bolt upright as the ferry sailed out of Denia, roaring like an express train in the storm. The saloon lights still burned, the crew stayed below, the wind made the doors bang, the whole ferry stank of oil and the reek of decaying cork on its interior decks. A television set had been left on in each saloon – a man loudly reading the news. Outside was the black, furious Mediterranean. It was my first storm on this sea and it thrilled me, because I had been seeing it as a sink of grey slopping water, and the wind and waves tonight gave it the look of a great ocean.

Media text

The journalist, Giles Tremlett, reflects on the opening of the tallest hotel in Benidorm.

Benidorm Gets High and Mighty Ugly

It was life as normal at the Dog and Duck, the Jolly Sailor and the Bridewell, a row of three union flag-bedecked establishments dedicated to keeping Benidorm's legion of beer-drinking British tourists happy last night. Tetley's and John Smith's Smooth Bitter were on tap; there were pies, chips and all-day British breakfasts to be had and the promise of Sky Sport or karaoke later in the evening.

But the talk was not about soccer or the horses. Instead it was of their latest neighbour, a giant hotel which, even by the brash standards of Europe's tackiest resort, promises to take British package tourism to new heights.

Those who stepped outside inevitably found themselves craning their necks upwards and staring at the neon-lit superstructure of the concrete and glass Gran Bali Hotel – the newest addition to a skyline already bristling with ugly skyscrapers – which opened its doors yesterday. At 48 floors, it has the dubious distinction of being the tallest hotel in Europe.

“What happens if it is bombed? We will all die,” muttered one worried Bridewell drinker.

At 186 metres tall, the glitzy, garish Bali is Europe's 13th largest skyscraper. Its presence here confirms Benidorm's status as the high-rise tourism capital of the world. Some 1,500 holidaymakers at a time will squeeze into the Bali's 778 rooms, together with several hundred more who already stay at a smaller hotel on the same site. Eighteen lifts, including two on the outside of the building, will send them hurtling backwards and forwards to their rooms.

Guests can have their wrinkles zapped by lasers, get their blonde streaks re-done or tan themselves by the pool while enjoying a view of the neighbouring skyscrapers that populate this concrete oasis. Fake mountain waterfalls make a vain attempt at reminding visitors of the real tropical paradise that gave the hotel its name. Jacuzzis and 150m high sun decks are on offer to those prepared to take the most luxurious penthouse suites.

The owners, who dream of turning Benidorm into a Mediterranean Las Vegas, are lobbying for a new gambling law to be passed so that they can also offer their guests the joys of one-armed bandits, blackjack and roulette wheels. “I am proud. This is the start of a new era for Benidorm,” explained Joaquin Perez, one of the co-owners. “Soon we will have more hotel beds here than even London or Paris. We must bring people from all over the world.”

More than five million visitors a year is not enough for Benidorm, despite the elbow-room-only crowds in its old town or the battle for sunloungers on its beaches. The Bali is just part of a plan to add 10,000 holiday beds to the 50,000 plus already here within the next two years. Special deals with package tour companies mean that many of the rooms at the Bali will be taken by some of the 1.2 million British tourists who come here every year. Elton John was expected to be the first of what the management hopes will be many showbiz guests to cast some glamour on the town's tawdry reputation. His glitzy style is just what the new Benidorm wants.

British tourists who went to gaze at the Bali yesterday were sceptical. “I wouldn't stay up there,” said Lynn Hall from Manchester. “Our tour rep said there were rumours that it was either sinking or beginning to lean over.”

The Bali is at its most spectacular at night, and from a distance, when it looks like a massive, silver knife, projecting beams of light up into the clouds. By day it becomes a dull, grey, concrete and glass giant, visible for miles. “We kept waiting for them to paint it,” said one local.

Town authorities denied that the resort, which already has to recycle its water, had reached saturation point. “Benidorm will now have to grow upwards, just like this,” said a spokeswoman. “Anyone who insults the five million people who come here every year is insulting the ordinary people of Europe. Benidorm is just one of those places that you either love or hate.”

Its newest building is no exception to that rule.

Extract from Giles Tremlett, *Benidorm Gets High and Mighty Ugly*, 18 May 2002, © Guardian News & Media Ltd 2002.



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