

My Experience at Kintbury

If people see the word 'Catholic' and 'retreat' put together they're usually going to think of a pilgrimage of some sort which, unless you are religiously devoted, can seem boring to the casual person. That is exactly what I thought when I got told about the school's planned Catholic retreat to a place called, which I had never heard of before, Kintbury.

To me this sounded very boring, like it was going to be a waste of my mother's money, but, to my past expectations surprise, it was far from that. The three, four days I spent at this place was something that I will never forget, an experience filled with joyful, and sad, memories alike, an affinity that even to this day I still remember nearly every detail of – the rides of emotions and, most importantly, the strengthened bond that it created between me and God.

Kintbury was truly something magical and something that everybody should experience in their lives. My name is Joshua and this is my personal experience at the blessed Kintbury.

When I first got told by my friend that the school was planning a retreat to Kintbury I was indecisive about whether or not I wanted to go. People think that a retreat is something boring and that is exactly what I was thinking at the time, but I did want to go, spend some time and just have a laugh with my mates; this is surprisingly the main reason why most people did go to Kintbury. Kintbury is far from a boring place, it is filled with activities, plenty of time to balance out relaxing in your room to socialising with everybody else that is there, jammed with fun times and everlasting memories and also devoted time to strengthen your relationship with God.

To someone like me, and most of the other boys that were there, who didn't get any information from another teenager rather than an adult about what Kintbury is really like (along with the fact that I wasn't really religiously devoted at the time) it honestly doesn't sound like a very interesting place to go to. However, I then thought to myself that this could possibly be a once in a lifetime experience. So I decided to go and it was possibly one of the best decisions I could have ever made in my life.

When you get to Kintbury, you feel this instant overwhelming feeling of the existence of a presence greater than you in your surroundings, at least for me that's what I felt. I felt engulfed by this feeling, but in a good way, like I was being cleansed of all my bad intentions. Then the next three days after that were probably the best ones of my year so far. It was constant activities every day you never stop moving, always talking to everyone else, always interacting and partaking in sessions.

We also weren't allowed to go on our phones at all. This may sound like a chore to an ordinary teenager but, trust me, once your active and enjoying yourself with everyone else you seem to forget about the fact that you have a phone on you at all, sometimes I even left it in my room because I had no desire to go on it whatsoever.

This was the same with everybody else at the retreat, you look around and you see nobody on their phones everyone is being friendly and social and constantly talking and interacting with each other; nobody is ever left by themselves or in an awkward situation. There were two things at the retreat that were really my most favourite thing about the place. The people you meet there, including the staff members as they are all very friendly and helpful, and the small groups everybody was placed into. Starting off with the people you meet, everybody at Kintbury is extremely unique; no two people are the same there. At first me and my three other mates thought that we wouldn't find anyone as outgoing, funny and loud as we are. But, as if destined, we met these three other boys that to this day none of us have forgotten of, nor have we forgotten the times we all shared.

These boys, who were from a school in Kent while me and my friends were from Swindon, were like brothers to us. This was the same for everybody, everyone started off in their own little group and eventually found another group who ended up being exactly like them. This adds to the feeling of God watching this place, to me it just seemed too lucky how everyone got along with each other so easily and perfectly.

Another thing was the small groups everybody got assigned to. I didn't have anyone from my school in my group so at first this was very frightening for me as I didn't know how I was going to cope with making completely new friends. But what I kept in mind, and what everyone should keep in mind when going to Kintbury, is that this is possibly a once in a lifetime opportunity and I might never see this people ever again in my life. So I tried my best to give off a good impression to everybody, trying to make people laugh whenever I can and also be as friendly to everyone as I could.

You end up becoming really close with everyone in your little group as the staff member in the group comes up with activities and asks everybody questions that can sometimes end up being personal to some people, leading to some really intimate moments but also helps everybody to get to know one another a bit better. At the retreat we did a lot of fun activities like go on walks with one other person so that you have time to get to know them better personally, dedicated time periods for everyone to reflect on the retreat, sessions where we talked about God, our relationship with him and how we can strengthen and sustain it and at the end of every day we would go up to this place called the Quiet Room and have a group prayer together.

On the very last day, everybody was overwhelmed with emotions. It was very sad to depart and say goodbye to everyone that we had met and some people ended up crying I think but it just added to the beauty of the place, how in only four days we all managed to build such strong bonds with each other. Before this very final day where everyone had to leave we had one last session in the Quiet Room. This time we said our prayers and a candle went round the room. If you were holding the candle you had to say what you were thankful for and how this retreat had affected you.

I made everyone laugh with what I said as it sounded more like an insult rather than me complimenting the place as I explained that I'm glad I met everyone at Kintbury as if I didn't then the place would've seemed very boring. But, thinking back on it now, I think that I spoke for everyone when I said that. I'm almost certain that everybody thought the place was going to be very boring as a 'Catholic Retreat' doesn't exactly sound very appealing to an ordinary teenager but people decided, myself included, to just go

anyway as we might not get the chance to again. Then came the very last day where we all said our goodbyes to each other. There was one boy that I will never forget from that place and it's because me and him were so alike, he truly was just like a brother to me, one that I had never had but always, and still do, wish for. Everybody found their brother/sister here, someone that they could relate to so well and had such a strong, close link to. Someone that would end up having their name engraved in their memory.

Everybody was upset on the final day as we were all thinking and realising the same sad reality, that we might never see that person ever again as they were in a completely different area of England to us. But, again, it just adds to the beauty of Kintbury.

Overall, Kintbury was such a great experience for me and everybody else that went there the same time I did. The staff members there told us that they had never seen a group of people at Kintbury bond so quickly with each other like we did, especially, he said, the group of boys that were there – me, my mates and the boys from Kent as we all connected with each other extremely quickly.

The ride back home was somewhat upsetting as all you could think about was all the memories you made with everyone there and how you hope to one day see and spend time with them again. Although I stay in contact with the boys from Kent every now and then I do have to admit that I miss them a lot and I know for certain that I'm not the only person that feels this way. Kintbury is a very magical place.

This retreat is a once in a lifetime experience and everyone needs to be witness to such a great and beautiful place. I recommend this place to everybody, whether you're religious or not, as you will most likely never get the opportunity to do something even remotely similar to Kintbury at all.

I'm Joshua and this was my experience at the divine Kintbury, a place that I will never forget, filled with people that I will never forget, brimmed with memories that will forever stay engraved.