

Sorry, the barbecue is off for August as well

VICKY FARNCOMBE

The Met Office has dashed hopes that holiday-makers choosing a "staycation" in the West Midlands would enjoy warm weather, predicting a rainy August instead.

A seasonal forecast issued in April sparked dreams of a warm and sunny British summer with claims that the UK was "odds on for a barbecue summer".

But in an update published on the Met Office website yesterday, forecasters said that "for the rest of summer, rainfall is likely to be near or above average over the UK and much of northern Europe".

Over the weekend, the weather in the West Midlands is predicted to be sunny with occasional showers though Saturday is likely to be a wash-out - bad news for cricket fans heading to Edgbaston for the third Ashes test.

The gloomy outlook has already caused hundreds of families to book last-minute getaways to the Mediterranean which is currently experiencing a heatwave with temperatures in the 40s.

A spokesman for ABTA, the travel association, said some of its members had reported a 30 per cent increase in business during the past two weeks.

But added that the cooler climes of Britain could also attract tourists hoping to escape the scorching sun.

Mark Tanzer, ABTA chief executive, said: "Although we know that poor weather encourages outbound tourism, it's also true to say that by contrast overseas visitors coming from hot countries enjoy our cooler climate."

Dave Hodgson, marketing director at Marketing Birmingham, said the miserable weather actually helped tourism in Birmingham as the city is more renowned for its indoor attractions.

"Of course we all want to see a forecast for sunny weather; however this may prove to be a good thing for the city," he said. "We have so much to offer visitors come rain or shine, that some of the more traditional UK holiday destinations often lack."

He cited the dinosaurs exhibition at Thinktank and Cadbury World as just two attractions to be enjoyed during downpours. "We can show the rest of the

UK that the people of Birmingham know how to have a good time whatever the weather," he said.

Top outdoor attractions in the West Midlands were also optimistic that their visitor numbers would continue to improve on last year as more people chose to holiday at home.

Colin Bryan, managing director at Drayton Manor Theme Park, said: "Drayton Manor Theme Park has already had high visitor numbers this year. I expect this will continue throughout the season, as more families chose to stay in the UK for their holidays."

"Visitors can have a great day out whatever the weather and we have a number of covered attractions to enjoy including the new 4D Cinema, which is fun for all the family."

Jill Hitchman, press officer at Dudley Zoo, said: "This is the third wet summer in a row. We were expecting it. Everywhere I've been this summer I've been drenched. You just learn to take your waterproofs and wellies."

"Once people make up their minds to come here, they come. Once you've promised the kids a trip to the zoo you can't back out! We've been going more than 70 years. It will take more than a drop of rain to worry us."

A spokeswoman for Birmingham International Airport said it was too early to tell whether the recent bad weather had affected flight numbers.

"There's been no spike in flights since the bad weather began," she added. "It's the economy that is affecting whether or not people go abroad."

"But there are plenty of good holiday deals to be snapped up and lots of availability from Birmingham so get in touch with your local travel agent or check online to escape this typically wet British summer."

“We can show the rest of the UK that the people of Birmingham know how to have a good time whatever the weather”

DAVID HODGSON



What happened to the summer? The rain pours down on Emily Nielsen in Colmore Row
Picture, IAIN FINDLAY

Acclaimed flood barrier launched in the Midlands

A revolutionary new flood defence system that ingeniously 'self closes' has been launched in the Midlands.

The brainchild of Worcestershire firm UK Flood Barriers, the Self Closing Flood Barrier weighs less than water and automatically rises like a floating wall when water levels rise.

The award-winning design is already being used worldwide and it is currently being installed to secure the USA's National Archives building in Washington DC, where it will protect documents including the original Declaration of Independence.

The barrier costs around half the amount of conventional flood barriers at £2 million, said Frank Kelly, research and development consultant of UK Flood Barriers in Droitwich.

He said: "It's far more resilient and cheaper than other options as it requires virtually no maintenance."

"It can stay in the ground for up to 50 years with absolutely no human intervention and can save millions of taxpayers money."

Mr Kelly added: "Our Self Closing Flood Barrier provides the ultimate protection to people and properties in any high-risk flood situation."

"The barrier has been used all over the world since its invention in 1996 and has a 100 per cent performance record. That's why it was a clear choice to protect the National Archive in America."

Installed level with the ground, the barrier works via a filling-pipe system which is instantly activated by high water levels caused by heavy rainfall, gales or melting snow.

When the system is full, the rising polyester wall locks the barrier waterproof. When waters recede, it automatically closes, drains out and remains virtually invisible.

The barrier has already received six global awards, most notably as winner of the 'Best Civil Technical Invention in the World' at the Salon Internationale des Inventions.

■ A spokeswoman for the Environment Agency said there were currently nine flood watches across the Midlands.

But she added it was not expecting to see any major problems in the area.

For more information go on-line to the Environment Agency's website - updated every 15 minutes - at www.environment-agency.gov.uk

One in three childminders and nurseries 'are unsafe'

One in three childminders and nurseries are not good enough at keeping children safe, inspectors have warned.

Figures published by Ofsted show that 842 were rated "inadequate" at protecting youngsters in their care in the last year, while a further 6,057 were found to be simply "satisfactory".

It means that of the 21,212 childminders and nurseries inspected in the last year, 6,899 (32.5 per cent) were found to be not good enough at safeguarding youngsters.

Inspectors require nurseries and childminders to prove they are keeping children safe by ensuring their premises are secure, that children do not leave unsupervised and that adults cannot enter unchallenged.

They must make sure children are properly supervised and that they are doing all they can to prevent injury.

Nurseries and childminders must also show that all adults working with youngsters are aware of child protection and safeguarding measures.

They must be clear on what to do if an allegation is made against them or a member of staff, and report any concerns.

The figures also show that many childminders and nurseries are not doing enough to help children to stay safe.

Ofsted says they should be teaching children to behave in ways that keeps them safe, and that encourages them to develop an understanding of the dangers around them.

The statistics show that 730 nurseries and childminders were rated "inadequate" at helping children to stay safe, and a further 5,910 were simply "satisfactory."

This is the first time since the introduction of the new statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) that Ofsted has published overall results of inspections of childminders and nurseries.

Under the EYFS - which has been dubbed the "nappy curriculum" - every nursery, childminder and reception class in England has to monitor children's progress towards Government-set "early learning goals".

Separate figures published by Ofsted show that the number of childminders in England has fallen by almost 2,000 in the last six months.

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