



Spiritual Quest Leads Seekers to the British Isles

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by Steph Winter

When Linda Baker and Donna Niles traveled to England in 1994, they didn't know they were embarking on a journey that would lay the groundwork for future spiritual explorations and a developing career. It wasn't until they returned a second time and found themselves helping other travelers that they realized they could lead their own tours to the British Isles.

In 1997 Baker and Niles created Sacred Sites Tours, an excursion business operating out of their south Minneapolis home. Currently scheduled for tours to the British Isles in July and September, Niles and Baker are self-taught experts in leading spiritual seekers to sites of the ancient Goddess religions. Baker sounds like the ultimate adventurer when she describes her love for travel: "If I had my druthers, I'd rather be poking at the ground with a stick and be totally lost that's all I want to do in my life. There is so much beauty in not knowing where you are. There is so much beauty in not even knowing what day it is. Making a way for a seeking heart that also appreciates being lost, that would be perfect."

Baker and Niles tailor their expeditions with that seeker in mind. "What we've sort of evolved towards is more of a quest, a pilgrimage, a spiritual intention in your travel," Baker said. "We like to quote a Buddhist saying that says, "That which you are seeking is causing you to seek." And I think that is absolutely true. That really sums up what happens to people when they want to go on these types of quests. There is something that is compelling and it has an intelligence to it, if you will, an intelligence of the heart. It just quietly waits for you and when you are open to it, it's there to accept you, it's there to embrace you."

Sacred Sites' present itinerary wends its way from the Uffington White Horse to prehistoric burial mounds, Glastonbury and the Chalice Well, Bath, Avebury and Stonehenge. "You can go to these places and they are absolutely lovely, there's big stones, there's atmosphere, there's electricity, that's a lovely thing. But you can also go with the realization that these are the remnants of the matrifocal age," Baker said.

Baker is the researcher/anthropologist/archeologist of the pair, and she frequently launches into a history of various sites in the British Isles and the



people who lived there. She is fascinated with these ancient peoples who lived their lives so closely connected to the earth.

But Baker is also quick to point out that the land itself was considered sacred even before the stone monuments were built. The sites date back to before Christianity, when the land was considered Mother and provider, and the life-giving Goddess was revered and celebrated. "You can go to Stonehenge and be overwhelmed with how much the rocks weigh, where they were brought in from, what year they're carbon-dated to, but you don't necessarily understand what you're looking at in terms of the people who built them," Niles explained. She said the ancient land-dwellers who lived over 5,000 years ago 'were people who worked probably two days a week and the rest of the time they had time to build reverence into their daily lives."

The leisurely pace offered by Sacred Sites Tours permits travelers plenty of time to explore and take in the atmosphere of each site. Tour groups are limited to 12 people. Throughout the tour Baker and Niles discuss the history of the people and the land. They also focus on finding little-known, uncrowded sites filled with the spirit of place. "Spirit of place is like a ghost, spirit of place is one person or set of people that actually reside at that place, that have loved that place so much for whatever reason in whatever age and they stay at that place and they assess the intent of visitors," Baker said.

"If you go as a seeker with questions in your heart, these people who have some of the answers in their spirit form will connect with you. You're putting out little psychic tendrils, if you will, and they're putting back little psychic tendrils. And you will feel met, you will feel embraced, you will feel welcomed at these sites. And people tell me over and over again, this is what happens to them."

Warm, engaging, playful and eager to talk about this passion they share, Niles and Baker frequently interrupt each other as they describe their trips. Their excitement is infectious. Lynn Bower traveled with Sacred Sites Tours in 1998 and explained, "Their passion is an inclusive passion. But it's like, "We are so excited about this and we'd like you to experience the joy of it too."

The paths that Baker and Niles chose in their own lives and the manner in which those paths intersected attest to the spiritual nature of their tours. In 1994, while living in Washington, D.C., Baker found her upcoming plans for a trip to England upended three weeks before departure. Casting about for a traveling companion,



she awoke one morning with Niles' name in mind. Baker was acquainted with Niles because of Niles' earlier job at Washington, D.C.'s Lammas Bookstore. She located Niles in Minneapolis and invited her to come along to England. They refer to that trip as their "magical mystery tour." It was then that they discovered their attraction to each other, they've been life partners for five and half years, and their mutual interest in the myriad sacred sites and synchronous events that awaited them in the British Isles.

Even though Baker and Niles make their living through their housecleaning business, Sacred Sites Tours is the work they feel called to do. Baker is the researcher and historian who can cite dates and locations like a walking encyclopedia, while Niles provides the heart of the tour, focusing on creating an environment of loving care and connection. Niles emphasized that there are over 900 stone circles still standing in all of Britain and Ireland. The fact that stone was used in the construction of these sacred sites is significant. "Why stone? Was it simply because that's what would last through time? No. What we are also emerging into understanding now is that stones are witnesses, aren't they? They are amplifiers of emotions, keepers of wisdom and memory. They store human emotion and memory."

Niles explained further. "A lot of the Britons believe, of course, that in the earth's system (comparable to the human body) the heart chakra [energy center] is actually located in the British Isles. That's why there is so much still standing that is so ancient and why there is so much UFO activity and crop circles [large unexplained shapes formed overnight in fields when the crops are flattened or laid on their sides]. "There is an incredible ley line system [a series of lines that carry life force energy similar to meridians running through the human body] that crisscrosses all throughout Great Britain. Every one of those stone circles and sacred sites are thought to be connected in this spider web of connection within the earth. I believe the ancients had full knowledge and we're coming back into remembering."

Sacred Sites' client Marjorie Noonsong joined her friend, Lynn Bower, on Niles' and Baker's first tour in September 1998. Both women were intrigued by Jean Shinoda Bolen's book, "Crossing to Avalon," which tells about Bolen's midlife pilgrimage to sacred locations in Britain. Noonsong and Bower wanted a tour that could lead them to some of the same places mentioned in Bolen's book.



Niles and Baker encouraged Noonsong and Bower to develop rituals to perform at the sites and to bring along objects they wanted to leave behind. Since Noonsong had to have her 15-year-old cat put to sleep just prior to the trip, she took some of the cat's fur, placed it in a pouch and hung it from a tree at the Chalice Well Gardens in Glastonbury.

Bower first traveled abroad on a cathedral/castle tour in 1996. But after her Sacred Sites trip in 1998 she admitted, "If I never go any place again, I could live with that. And I'm a real travel bug. But having gone on the Sacred Sites Tour was it. It's the one thing I would not have wanted to miss in my life. It was spectacular. [I don't know how to describe] how my spirit feels when I even think about the places that we saw. Just the sense of continuity with ancient peoples and yet a sense of freedom. I think that has to do with those sites being outside and in the most beautiful scenery. A feeling of freedom like my spirit has room to soar. When I'm thinking about it, it's the one place I can go in my mind where I feel rooted and I can fly at the same time."

Baker and Niles present Sacred Sites slide shows at area bookstores and by request from groups wishing to learn more. For further information about upcoming trips call 612-823-2442 or visit their web site at <http://www.sacredsitetours.com>