

Radio For Cheltenham

Host: Now it's time for 'Around the Table' on Radio for Cheltenham, the show that brings people together to talk about Cheltenham's issues. This week, we're asking the three members of our panel whether Cheltenham's a small town, or a town for all. Is it affordable, and adorable, or pricey and dicey? A place to live in, or escape from? What exactly does it offer for those who live here? So without further ado, let's meet our guest panelists. Let's start with you, Graham.

Graham: Hello, my name is Graham, I'm 53, and I've been living in Cheltenham for 25 years.

Nadia: Hello, I'm Nadia, I'm a 42 year old mother of three, and I've just moved to Cheltenham from London.

Anna: Hi, I'm Anna, and I'm a 22 year old. I've been here for 6 months or so, in my first job after studying IT at University.

Host: Okay, that's the introductions. Before we get into the discussion, let's find out a little bit more about you. Let's start with Nadia. You've come from London to Cheltenham? Why?

Nadia: Work. My partner found another job, and so we moved.

Host: Was that hard work, leaving London?

Nadia: Not really. We felt like a change. We were thinking of moving anyway. I have two young children coming up to secondary school age, and finding good schools was going to be a problem. We wanted a bigger house too, but the cost of moving...

Host: That's a good point. How do house prices compare in Cheltenham?

Nadia: Cheaper than London (**audience laughs**). We looked at plenty – regency houses, town houses, we even thought about living out in the Cotswolds... there's some lovely property out there. But we've settled on a new estate. It's really nice. Different. More open.

Host: You mentioned schooling. How much of an issue was that?

Nadia: Important. The schools in Cheltenham seem great. The local authority's in the top 20 for SAT performances. But more importantly even than that, Cheltenham just strikes me as a really healthy place for children, with parks and gardens all over the place. My kids' favourite place at the moment is the Lido, with slides and a paddling pool – they can't get enough of it!

Host: Good, thanks, we'll come back to the points you raise there. I think housing is a real hot topic right now. How about you, Anna? Until recently a student, coming out with student debt, have you managed to get your foot on the property ladder?

Anna: You're joking. I rent. I found that easy. The place I work has a huge database of available properties, so it wasn't hard. I share a flat with people from work.

Host: And where's that?

Anna: GCHQ.

Host: But are you saving up to buy somewhere of your own?

Anna: No. I'm enjoying myself right now. It's the first time I've had any money to spend... so I'm spending it. On me.

Host: And what do you spend it on? What does Cheltenham have to offer?

Anna: Bear in mind, as a student I hardly ever went out. I'm making up for lost time. I've done the festivals – folk, literary, jazz and horses – but my favourite's got to be eating and socialising. The pavement cafes are brilliant. It doesn't feel like a town. It's got a different feel. More cosmopolitan. It's just pretty cool. And there's the shopping.

Audience laughs.

Host: I can see Nadia nodding there. But surely, the shopping can't compare with London?

Nadia: It's easier to get around I can tell you. I'm not a huge shopper, but I was still impressed at what's here. Most of the big names, but it's all those designer shops and fashion boutiques around Montpellier Street that really get me. They're fascinating. I've got myself a few new pairs of shoes.

Host: Graham, you're not looking impressed.

Graham: No, I like shopping. I'm just not into shoes.

Host: But tell us about where you live, what you do, what makes you tick? You've been here 25 years, so you obviously like it. Why?

Graham: I just like the town. The avenues, the architecture, the parks and gardens... it's just got a good feel. But for me, the appeal's all about what's out there... it's not Cheltenham so much, it's the area around it.

Host: Okay, good... so we've got the social scene, housing, the surrounding areas, education, things to do for kids... that's plenty to keep us talking for the next half hour. I think I'd like to pick up on the issue of housing first.

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