

Channel island charm

Slow down to appreciate the quiet beauty of Guernsey, says Meera Dattani

The 35mph speed limit on Guernsey explains a lot. Everything feels calm and relaxed here, which is why the guide who is leading my gentle cycle ride along the northern coast has time to regale me with little snippets of island life, and let me in on the friendly rivalry with its larger neighbour.

"Jersey folk call us donkeys, or ânes," says Caryn Byrne. "That's why I called my company Donkey's Days Out. We call them *crapaud*, after the Jersey toad."

It's one of several random conversations as we pedal out of Bordeaux Harbour and westwards past Beaucette Marina, a former stone quarry, and the white sands of Pembroke and L'Ancrese. The views from Rouse headland on the

northwest coast are spectacular, before quiet Ruettes Tranquilles (lanes with a 15mph speed limit that give priority to walkers, cyclists and horse-riders) lead us through the interior to Bordeaux.

At 25 square miles, Guernsey is the second-largest of the Channel Islands. Sitting 75 miles south of England and 27 miles from France, it's accessible by ferry from England's south coast, and by air with Aurigny, Flybe and Blue Islands.

Its potted history is played out in the architecture, culture and outlook. After King John of England lost Normandy in 1204, two centuries after William the Conqueror's Norman Conquest, the Channel Islands chose crown dependency status. The Bailiwick of Guernsey, which includes Sark,



Guernsey feels English, French and neither - and that's the island's charm

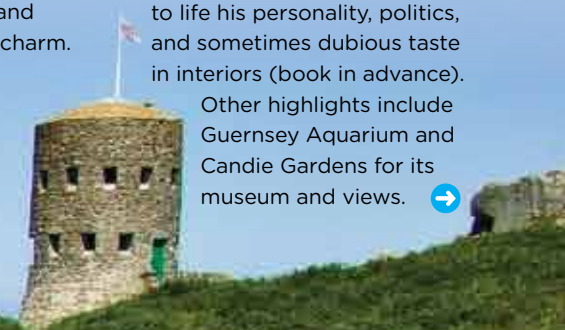
Alderney and Herm, has its own parliament; is British but not part of the UK; and self-governing while still recognising the Queen. It feels English, French and neither - and that's the charm.

CAPITAL ATTRACTION
Guernsey's capital, harbour town St Peter

Port, is the oldest community in the Channel Islands, and *barrière* stones still mark the old medieval town. Home to a thriving finance industry, the busy marina, excellent restaurants and independent shops give it huge appeal.

Sights include 13th-century fortress Castle Coronet and Hauteville House, home-in-exile of 19th-century French novelist Victor Hugo, who wrote *Les Misérables* while living on Guernsey. Excellent one-hour guided tours of the house bring to life his personality, politics, and sometimes dubious taste in interiors (book in advance).

Other highlights include Guernsey Aquarium and Candie Gardens for its museum and views. →





Airways Holidays offers seven nights' bed and breakfast at the three-star Les Rocquettes in St Peter Port from £676, or from £655 at the beachfront Cobo Bay Hotel. Both prices include flights from Gatwick or Southampton, departing May 21. airwaysholidays.com

Premier Holidays features five nights' bed and breakfast at the four-star Bella Luce from £489 by sea from Poole, or from £559 by air. Five days' car hire adds £135. The prices are valid from May to September. trade.premierholidays.co.uk

Four nights' bed and breakfast at the five-star Old Government House Hotel starts at £499 with **Prestige Holidays**, including afternoon tea, flights and private transfers, departing October 4. prestigeholidays.co.uk

→ St Peter Port is a good base, not least for its restaurants, which include brasserie Mora, cocktail bar Red, harbourfront Le Nautique and Pickled Pig gastropub at the Duke of Normandie hotel.

Accommodation includes the island's only five-star, elegant Old Government House Hotel, with its conservatory restaurant and Crown Club bar. Four-star options include La Fregate, an 18th-century house with fantastic views and a renowned restaurant, quirky Red Carnation hotel Duke of Richmond and 14-room boutique newcomer Hotel Ziggurat, with its Moroccan-inspired decor. Among Guernsey's excellent three-star options is Les Rocquettes, a short walk from town.

GREEN SCENES

With plentiful free parking, a low speed limit and filter signs instructing cars to take turns at junctions, driving is relatively unstressful. Bucolic scenes of wildflowers and grazing Guernsey cows in green fields are a common sight,



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thanks in part to a sustainable dairy economy that's kept farming viable.

Look out for the quirky Little Chapel in Saint Andrew parish, and the historic house and gardens at Sausmarez Manor, then get a glimpse of local craftsmen at work at gold and silversmith Bruce Russell & Son. The family business has been making traditional jewellery for four generations, and offers free entry to its workshop and showroom, while its three-hectare garden is a nice spot for a stroll, and there's a popular Mint Brasserie and Tea Room.

Peaceful retreats and sea-view hotels

are plentiful across the island's 10 parishes. Suggest the three-star La Barberie, a farmhouse hotel with award-winning restaurant, or four-star Bella Luce, also renowned for its food, both in the southeastern parish St Martin.

Other recommendations include luxury hotel Fleur de Jardin and La Grande Mare Hotel, Golf & Country Club near Vazon Bay, and boutique four-star The Farmhouse in St Saviour.

COASTAL PURSUITS

Guernsey's coast is its shining jewel, with irresistible walking and cycling, as well as 27 bays that are excellent for surfing, windsurfing and fishing. Mac's Adventures has a self-guided Guernsey Coastal Path holiday suited to keen walkers, and companies such as Outdoor Guernsey offer abseiling, kayaking and climbing, while Island Rib Voyages has trips on inflatable boats.

The south coast is particularly spectacular, with towering granite cliffs, quiet beaches such as Petit Port, and the Pea Stacks, a series of large



ABOVE: The Little Chapel

rocks off the coast. From L'Eree Bay on the west coast, suggest walking at low tide to Lihou Island's bird sanctuary.

The sweeping crescent of Vazon Bay, home to Guernsey Surf School, and Rocquaine Bay, are sunset favourites, especially from the terrace of the Cobo Bay Hotel or Rockmount pub.

Other beaches include Petits Bay and Pembroke Bay in the north and

southeasterly Fermain Bay and Moulin Huet Bay, the latter much loved by French impressionist painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

Catamarans and ferries link St Peter Port to Herm and Sark, and most touring itineraries will feature day trips to these smaller car-free islands. Saga's A Channel Island Sojourn divides its time between Jersey and Guernsey, →

Dining out

Locals love Rouse kiosk's Guernsey gâche, and crab sandwiches at Fermain Beach Café in Fermain Bay, though for finer dining, book the clifftop Auberge restaurant at Jerbourg for locally inspired dishes. In St Peter Port, suggest

The Pavilion for crab risotto and pork with Torteval blue cheese sauce from celebrated chef Tony Leck. Long-standing favourite Le Petit Bistro serves classic French dishes, while sister restaurant Le Petit Café does excellent breakfasts.



LEFT: St Peter Port
BELOW: Hauteville House
BOTTOM: Hotel Ziggurat



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* Price per person based on departing 28th May from Poole by sea, 7 nights at Norfolk Hotel on BB basis. Transfer, ATOL and Baggage included. Prices are subject to availability and change.



RIGHT:
Guernsey
bean jar

FAR RIGHT:
'Hedge veg'



ASK THE EXPERT

“Guernsey has one of Europe’s most beautiful harbour towns, fantastic restaurants and eclectic shopping. With nearly 30 miles of cliff paths, it’s great for walkers, with a full programme of guided walks and walking weeks in the spring and autumn. For foodies, there are more than 70 restaurants. Guernsey’s also perfect for exploring the neighbouring islands of Sark, Herm and Alderney.”

➔ including a full-day trip to Sark from the latter.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

While Jersey’s culinary reputation has been growing, thanks to four Michelin-starred restaurants, Guernsey has stayed under the radar – until recently. Confidence in the island’s culinary scene is such that in September, the inaugural Guernsey International Food Festival was held.

Tennerfest, which has been running for more than 15 years, involves more than 170 restaurants across the Channel Islands offering three-course menus from £10-£20 in October and November.

Visit Guernsey has also developed a series of Tasty Walks ideal for



The German Occupation Museum is an impressive extension of a schoolboy collection started in 1966

recommending to foodie clients, with downloadable podcasts and maps of 15 self-guided food-themed trails.

Local and seasonal are the buzzwords, be it roadside ‘hedge veg’ stalls selling fresh produce, or ormers, the rare mollusc caught at low tide. Specialities include thick yellow Guernsey butter, ice cream, Fort Grey

cheese, fruit loaf *gâche* (‘gosh’) and Guernsey bean jar, traditionally made with pig’s trotter.

Guernsey’s kiosks such as Port Soif and Richmond are excellent spots at which to sample such treats.

THROUGH THE AGES

Historically and culturally, Guernsey is fascinating. Dating from 8000BC, when it separated from mainland Europe, its numerous neolithic and bronze age monuments include Dehus burial chamber and La Varde Dolmen, the island’s largest megalithic structure.

Other sights include the Fort Grey Shipwreck Museum and the 15 defensive loophole towers, built by the British in 1778-79 after France allied with US rebels during the American Revolutionary War.

As the only British territory to be occupied by the Germans, Second World War history lures many to the Channel Islands. Suggest the German Military Underground Hospital and German Occupation Museum. The latter, run by Richard Heaume since 1966, is an impressive extension of what started as a schoolboy collection.

Victor Hugo described the Channel Islands as “fragments of France that fell into the sea and were gathered up by England”.

Guernsey is that – and more. Compact and captivating, it also has a certain *je ne sais quoi*.



LEFT: Fort Grey Shipwreck Museum