

Jersey's medieval
Mont Orgueil Castle

Island hopper

Just a short hop from UK shores, the Channel Isles are, quite simply, epic, as **Darren Calpin** discovers...

AS CROWN DEPENDENCIES, the diminutive islands of Jersey, Guernsey, Sark, Herm and Alderney are resolutely British. However, their position in the English Channel 14 miles off the coast of Normandy ensures this independent, self-governing archipelago retains a strong French connection. This curious and often quite beguiling mix is something which,

along with each island's natural beauty and individual character, helps to make the Îles d'la Manche such a captivating destination to visit and explore.

JERSEY

Nine miles wide and five miles long, Jersey is the largest and liveliest of the Channel Islands. The capital, St Helier,

has more charm, and bustle, to it than many visitors expect, with quaint tea shops, elegant parks and evocative Victorian markets rubbing shoulders with organic cafés, smart boutiques and top-class restaurants like Ormer and Bohemia.

Indeed, the island's cuisine, which is big on super-fresh seafood and inspired by French influences, is an integral part of Jersey's identity. Along with perennial seafood faves like oysters, sea snails and lobster, the local cuisine offers up unique treats like Jersey Black Butter (made of apples, Jersey cider and spices).

Whether on foot, by bike or via a hire car, Jersey's highly scenic yet entirely sleepy

countryside is a delight to explore. Foray down the peaceful lanes and you'll soon discover a Blyton-esque landscape of rolling green fields and pretty meadows dotted with heather, foxgloves and other wild flowers.

With nowhere in Jersey more than ten minutes' walk from the sea, you'll eventually come to the clifftop paths and coastal views for which the island is so famed, the rugged cliffs in the north providing the most dramatic photo opportunities of all. If you're lucky, you may even spot dolphins playing in the archipelago's epic tides!

Wherever you may end up along the island's 50 miles of surprisingly varied

coastline, you can bet you won't be far from a scenic beach. Bearing in mind Jersey receives more hours of sunshine than anywhere else in Britain, this is a huge draw for residents and visitors alike.

In fact, it's common for locals (and savvy tourists) to spend an entire day following the sun around the island, starting in the east at beaches like super-sandy Grouville, then moving on to family-friendly St Brelade's Bay on the south coast, before ending the day in the west watching the sunset with surfer dudes along the five-mile stretch of wave-lapped coast at St Ouen's Bay.

Visitors with little ones in tow can splash around to their hearts' content at Havre des

Pas, where an elegant (and free) late-19th-century seawater lido provides perfect paddling conditions all day long. It's only a ten-minute walk from St Helier and, unlike other coastal areas, isn't affected by the monumental tides.

History buffs will already know that Jersey was the only part of the British Isles to fall under Nazi control during the Second World War. Whether you're into history or not, a visit to the Jersey War Tunnels is an absolute must. Using a combination of historical artefacts, audio visual displays, photographs, interactive exhibits and reconstructed props, this honeycombe wartime tunnel complex underneath the Meadowbank valley, »



SHUTTERSTOCK/ARNDALÉ

Guernsey's capital, St Peter Port

constructed with forced labour, illustrates what life was really like for the occupied islanders who faced oppression, collusion and collaboration on a daily basis for five torturous years between 1940-45. Moody and moving in equal measure, this excellent, award-winning museum reminds you that there is far more to Jersey than you may initially think.

GUERNSEY

Quaint, historic and blessed with astounding natural beauty, the picturesque Bailiwick of Guernsey (which includes the islands of Alderney, Herm and Sark) is an easy place to fall in love with. Though it covers just 25 square miles, this enticingly charming island serves up a raft of landscapes, with sheer

cliffs, rock pools and caves hugging the rugged north coast and rolling marshlands and sandy beaches typifying the west.

Inland, a mere stone's throw from the islands' glut of arcing bays and hidden coves, is an unspoilt rural haven where idyllic farmlands and lush, bluebell covered forests spill over winding country lanes

Slightly more lively yet no less appealing is St Peter Port, Guernsey's hilly capital. With its neat cobbled streets, fine Regency buildings and colourful yachts bobbing up and down in the harbour, it's about as pretty as harbour towns come. Visit on 'Seafront Sundays' (select Sundays from May to September) when the seafront is closed to traffic so that local restaurants and stallholders can

sell food and put on cookery demonstrations, and you'll feel like you're in a super-quaint Richard Curtis film.

Two of Guernsey's most popular attractions are in St Peter Port: Castle Cornet, an 800-year-old fortress standing guard over the harbour; and Hauteville House, the elaborate, and eccentrically laid-out, former home of Victor Hugo, famed author of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* and *Les Misérables*, which he finished here.

Flights to Jersey and Guernsey are available from more than 30 airports around Britain. From London it's about a one-hour flight. Those who prefer to travel by sea can get a ferry from Poole or Weymouth, which generally takes around four hours. »

ALDERNEY

The third largest and most northerly of the islands, Alderney is a wildlife spotter's paradise, with everything from seals and puffins to gunnets and even blonde hedgehogs popping up along the island's 50-plus miles of walking trails.

As well as unspoilt golden beaches and a supremely laid-back vibe, Alderney boasts the honour of having the only working railway in the Channel Islands. A 15-minute flight is the easiest way to get here, although ferries are likely to run every other day during peak season.

SARK & AND HERM

Often dubbed the 'crown jewel' of the Channel Islands, Sark is something of a geo-physical time machine. With cars prohibited, visitors have no choice but to adopt a much slower pace of life, exploring the island's unspoilt landscape and charming unpaved roads on foot, bicycle or, best of all, horse drawn carriage.

No cars means no street lamps, thus, when the sun goes down, the night skies here blaze with stars. Small wonder then that Sark became the world's first Dark Sky island in 2011. It's a 50-minute boat ride from Guernsey, with

several ferries running daily during the summer and daily trips operating in the off-season.

At just three miles wide, Herm makes Jersey look like Manhattan. In many respects, it is the quintessential island: no cars, no stress and more unspoilt beaches, clear waters, cute rock pools and scenic paths than you can shake a camera at. The fact that it's also home to Europe's most southerly puffin-breeding colonies and a colony of Atlantic grey seals is the cherry on the cake.

Ferries make the 20-minute crossing from St Peter Port all year round, with services operating hourly from May to September. **GTV**

