

Sunshine state



SIMONE HELLYER heads to the sunniest spot in the UK – the Channel Island of Jersey

With staycations on the rise, where better to enjoy the last vestiges of summer than in the sunniest place in the UK? That enviable honour belongs to Jersey, the largest of the Channel Islands and the place I spent my summer holiday this year.

At nine miles by five miles, Jersey is the biggest of the Channel Islands and is easy to reach either by air or sea from the south coast. Attracted by the chance to explore the island in our own car (and by the fact that cars drive on the left) we chose to travel by ferry. From Poole the crossing takes just four and a half

hours or just over ten hours from Portsmouth. To maximise our time on the island we plumped for Poole, arriving just in time for lunch and feeling a bit like we had landed in another country.

Neither wholly French nor English, Jersey has a quirky history and some unique quasi-feudal customs. Termed the Peculiar of the Crown, collectively the Channel Islands pledge allegiance to the English Crown but not to the Parliament of the UK. Jersey thus has its own government, legal system, postage stamps and even prints its own currency (it still has the £1 note).

The ferry docks in St Helier,

the island's capital and the only real town in Jersey. I've wanted to visit St Helier for a long time, mainly due to it being the supposed origin of my surname, so we delved straight into the town's bunting-lined streets as soon as we'd found somewhere to park the car (there are no shortage of places to park in Jersey, we discovered). The rest of the day was taken up by exploring the Victorian architecture and fresh produce at the Central Market, devouring a fresh Jersey milk ice cream. We also took a moment at Liberation Square, where crowds of islanders gathered on 9 May 1945 to greet the British soldiers who would release them after five gruelling years of German occupation.

We were staying at Hotel Cristina, a four star boutique hotel in St Lawrence that offered

ABOVE:
Lighthouse of
St Brelade, Jersey,
at sunrise

ABOVE RIGHT:
Low tide footpath
leading to
Elizabeth Castle,
off the coast of
St Helier

BOTTOM RIGHT:
Simone and
her mum at
Plemont Bay

stunning panoramic views of the bay of St Aubin and the attractive 16th century Elizabeth Castle, which you can walk to at low tide, or otherwise get the duck boat. There's a pretty (albeit steep) path from the hotel which takes you to Coronation Park and St Aubin's beach, with its soft sand and beach cafes.

The original part of the hotel was once occupied by the Nazis during World War II and it was this aspect of the island's history that we were eager to explore with a trip to the underground war tunnels, located a few minutes away from the hotel. The Channel Islands were the only German-occupied part of Britain and remained so for one day after VE Day. The Jersey War Tunnels, which were once an underground German hospital, explores the history of the occupation, what life was like for the islanders and shines a light on the lives of the Russian prisoners forced to help build the tunnels.

Next we set off to explore the rest of the island by car. First up was Devil's Hole in the north of the island – an eerie but spectacularly beautiful blowhole that has been eroded



Photo: Alardi / Stock / Getty Images Plus

into Jersey's coastline over millennia. The devil himself – a large bronze sculpture – can be seen on the descent to the hole. Keep an eye out for peregrine falcons, oystercatchers or even bottlenose dolphins while gazing out over the rugged coast around Devil's Hole. You can even see France on a clear day.

Jersey's coastlines are certainly one of its big draws – when the tide is out the size of the island grows by a fifth. If you like vast sandy beaches (who doesn't?) you'll be spoilt for choice – our favourites were Plemont Beach for its treasure trove of magical caves; St Ouen's Bay, where there is a sand-racing course and a dramatic offshore tower; and St Brelade's Bay, where the sand whipped our legs during a breeze and we cooled off with a dip in the clear blue sea.

There are some great places to eat in St Brelade's Bay too – the Crab Shack is good for laid-back sea food lunches, while its sister restaurant The Oyster Box has a more upmarket feel. There are two Michelin-starred restaurants in St Helier (Bohemia and Samphire), as well as a number of three- and four-AA rosette star restaurants. You can even go on a walking food tour where you can sample some of the island's seafood and dairy treats. One of

the great things about travelling by ferry meant that we could stock up on plenty of Jersey Royal potatoes, Jersey milk and cream and some of the island's famous Black Butter to enjoy at home.

One place we just had to visit before heading home was Jersey Zoo. The zoo was founded in 1959 by Gerald Durrell, the author of *My Family and Other Animals*. Gerald set up the zoo to have a strong focus on conservation and that mission continues today – you can learn all about the zoo's work during one of the many keeper talks and his life at a special exhibition. On our visit we were especially taken with the characterful family of gorillas and playful orangutans.

There are loads of places on the east coast that we didn't have time to explore, but we have already marked them up on the map for future visits as well as pencilled in a trip to the islands of Guernsey and Sark too. 🐼

GOOD TO KNOW

Condor Ferries operates a year-round service to the Channel Islands from Poole with its fast ferry Condor Liberation, alongside a conventional ferry service from Portsmouth. **0345 609 1024; condorferries.com**

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