

# Island flings

Robinson Crusoe had the right idea. When it comes to paradise, you can't beat an island. And whether it's traditional seaside fun, tropical climes or romantic seclusion you're after, there's an atoll somewhere in the world to suit you. To prove it we've picked six of the best – three at home, three abroad. And what's more, these days you don't need to get wrecked to enjoy them ►





**TAKE ME TO THE BEACH:** With crystal-clear waters and the whitest-of-white sands, Cuba is a paradise for sun-worshippers and sea-lovers alike.

# The Isle of Wight

**BRITAIN'S BIGGEST ISLAND** now bills itself as the dinosaur capital of Europe thanks to Dinosaur Isle, the £2.7 million, Pterosaur-shaped museum which opened in Sandown last summer. There are reconstructed dinosaur skeletons, fossils and all manner of prehistoric remains that are guaranteed to be a hit with kids. In fact it's families the Isle of Wight is most likely to appeal to: if crazy golf, petting zoos and pirate-ship rides are your thing, there's plenty to keep you occupied.

As well as traditional holiday seaside fun at resorts such as Ryde or Shanklin, the island hosts an extreme sports festival every autumn, when surfers and wavesailers battle it out to become the World's Ultimate Extreme Watersportsman. It's all somewhat different from the island's touristic origins in Victorian and Edwardian days, when doctors sent TB patients to enjoy the balmy climate of Ventnor and Queen Victoria took her children sea bathing in the 1840s.

The sea is still a major attraction, with miles of unspoilt inlets and creeks around the resorts of

Cowes, Yarmouth and Bembridge. Less well-known is the island's interior, half of which has been designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Chalk downland, woods and meadows make good walking country; check out the *Official Guide to Pub Walks* from the tourist office, or the Isle of Wight Walking Festival in late May.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Ferries leave from Portsmouth, Lymington, Southampton and Southsea; some take cars.

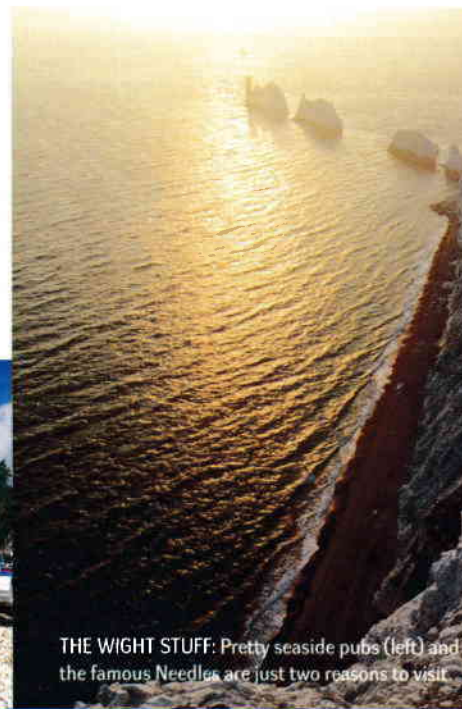
## WHERE TO STAY

The Winterbourne (01983 852535) in pretty Bonchurch village overlooks the sea; doubles from £80. Push the boat out at Priory Bay Hotel in Seaview (01983 613146, [www.priory-bay.co.uk](http://www.priory-bay.co.uk)); it has a golf course and path to the

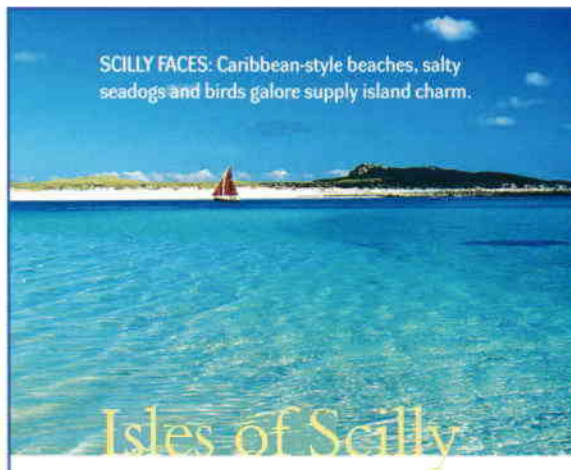
beach, and doubles from £130. Westcourt Farm in Shorwell (01983 740233, [www.westcourt-farm.co.uk](http://www.westcourt-farm.co.uk)) is ideal for walkers; doubles cost £45.

## FIND OUT MORE

Contact Isle of Wight Tourism on 01983 813800, or visit [www.islandbreaks.co.uk](http://www.islandbreaks.co.uk)



THE WIGHT STUFF: Pretty seaside pubs (left) and the famous Needles are just two reasons to visit.



SCILLY FACES: Caribbean-style beaches, salty seadogs and birds galore supply island charm.



**FOR MANY** years the Isles of Scilly have had a bit of a duff image, what with their associations with birdspotters and fields of waving daffodils. And this certainly suits aficionados, who relish the fact that the islands are not overrun with tourists, allowing them to keep the white-sand beaches and Caribbean-blue sea to themselves.

Five of the 100 islands that make up the Scillies are inhabited; the largest, with the most facilities, is St Mary's, while Tresco is one of the most handsome, with sparkling beaches and the famous Abbey Garden stuffed with many rare and Mediterranean plants. The Isles of Scilly suit almost anyone except those looking for nightlife. Instead of tourists, think migrating sea-

birds – there are ample opportunities to watch these, plus the colonies of Atlantic seal, and puffins which nest in late April.

As well as sea safaris, sailing and diving, there are land-based activities too, among them exploring the Tudor garrison at Hugh Town on St Mary's, visiting the vineyard on St Martin's, or soaking up the salty ambience by walking between lighthouses and lookout points and witnessing one of the inter-island boat races.

## HOW TO GET THERE

The quickest way is by helicopter from Penzance. Or take the ferry from Penzance, or fly from Newquay, Exeter, Bristol or Plymouth.

## WHERE TO STAY

St Mary's has the widest choice. Set in an old fortress, The Star Castle (01720 422317, [www.starcastlescilly.demon.co.uk](http://www.starcastlescilly.demon.co.uk)) has friendly service, good food and sun-trap lawns; doubles from £110. Tolman House (01720 422967, [www.scilly-online.co.uk](http://www.scilly-online.co.uk)) has beach access and doubles from about £55; self-catering accommodation too. Annet Cottage (01720 422441, [www.annet-cottage.co.uk](http://www.annet-cottage.co.uk)) offers great views, hearty breakfasts and three doubles from £54.

## FIND OUT MORE

Call the Isles of Scilly Tourist Board on 01720 422536, or visit [www.simplyscilly.co.uk](http://www.simplyscilly.co.uk)