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CHANNEL HOPPING

Close to home yet strikingly different, the Channel Islands are the answer to many a holiday dilemma this year. But which to choose?

WORDS BY ANTONIA WINDSOR



We're speeding along on a catamaran towards Corbière Lighthouse, the cliffs of Jersey's north coast rising into view, when I spot something dark plunging into the water. At first I think it might be a northern gannet, the large seabird that nests in its thousands on a rocky outcrop of Alderney, but then it jumps out of the water in a perfect arc. This is no gannet. "Dolphin!" I shout, and other passengers flock to the ferry's windows to spot not just one but five picture-book perfect bottlenose dolphins leaping in the Channel.



This isn't an unusual sight when travelling by ferry to the Channel Islands, which in order of size are Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, Sark and Herm. But I wasn't expecting dolphins in February (April to October is more common), and my children, aged 10, nine and seven, are delighted. It's a great start to our holiday.

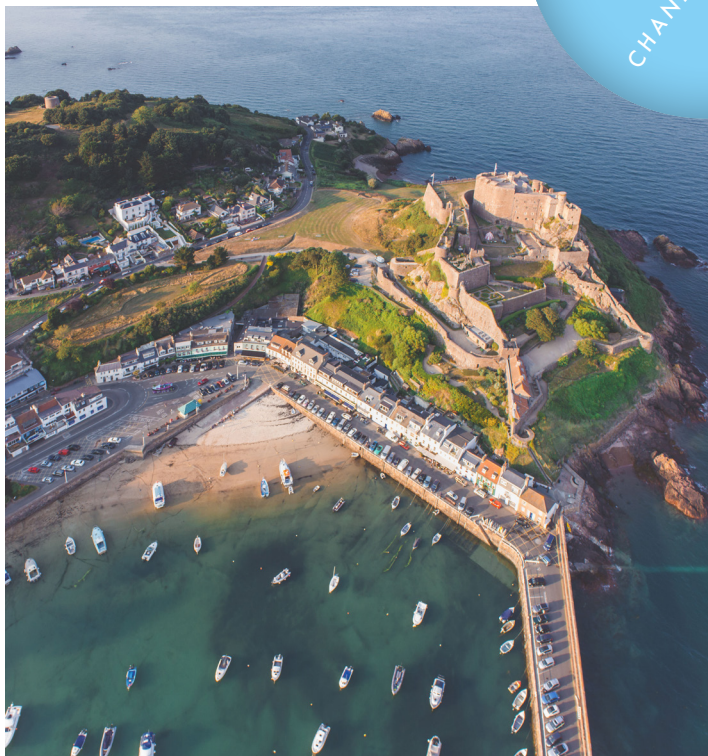
On the car deck below, our Cavapoochon (a cuddly crossbreed of cavalier King Charles spaniel, bichon frise and poodle, in case you're wondering) is asleep in the back of the car. Taking a dog to the Channel Islands is very straightforward. Pets don't need passports and the ferry company, Condor, includes pets in cars for free. Halfway into the crossing, anxious owners are allowed an escorted visit to their vehicles.

I was born and brought up in Jersey so am biased when I say it offers everything you want from a holiday, with or without a dog: glorious beaches, castles and museums, a world-class conservation zoo and a capital jam-packed with independent shops, lively bars and top-notch restaurants. In recent years I've begun to explore the other Channel Islands, which offer a more sleepy, step-back-in-time experience. Guernsey, with its floral cliff paths and connections to the writer Victor Hugo and artist Renoir; Alderney with its historic fortifications; Sark with its tractor-drawn fire engine and shed-like dark sky observatory; and car-free Herm with beaches to rival the Caribbean. They're all worth taking time to explore, whether for a quick revitalising weekend break in the shoulder seasons or for longer, more leisurely summer holidays.



YOUR EXPERT

Antonia Windsor is the Channel Islands destination expert for *The Telegraph*, and current TravMedia freelance writer of the year. She grew up on Jersey.



BEST FOR...

FAMILIES

JERSEY



ISLANDER'S TIP



"Watch the sun go down from the ancient dolmen on Grantez headland in St Ouen. Take a flask of tea and stay past dusk to enjoy stargazing in the quiet stillness."
Kate Kirk, local marketing director

The largest of the Channel Islands at nine miles by five miles, Jersey is a separate jurisdiction to Guernsey and the other islands and has its own mint (they still issue pound notes) and its own government (they were never part of the EU). The island is characterised by steep granite cliffs with sheltered harbour bays to the north and great sweeps of sandy beaches to the west and south. The most dramatic beach is five-mile St Ouen's Bay on the west coast, where surfers congregate on the breakers, families play on the sands, couples eat al fresco lunches at trendy beach cafés and dog owners take rambling walks in the adjacent dunes. Family days out include riding the amphibious vehicle to 16th-century Elizabeth Castle, which occupies a tidal island in St Aubin's Bay. Once there, you can watch the midday cannon being fired and walk to a tiny hermitage that housed the reclusive Saint Helier in the sixth century. Don't miss Jersey Zoo, founded by conservationist Gerald Durrell, which welcomed a pair of Linne's two-toed sloths to its cloud forest last autumn.

LOCAL INFO

WHERE TO STAY

Family- and dog-friendly accommodation includes five-star Longueville Manor (doubles from £325; longuevillemanor.com), and Harbour View apartments (£100pp per night; harbourview.je).

GETTING THERE AND AROUND

Six airlines fly to Jersey from the UK, including EasyJet, Loganair, Blue Islands and British Airways, while Condor Ferries sail from Poole or Portsmouth (the fastest route is four hours). A regular and reliable bus service serves attractions and beaches, and electric bikes can be hired via the Evie app (evieondemand.com). »



BEST FOR...

WALKERS

GUERNSEY

Guernsey is noticeably more laid back than Jersey, with fewer chain stores in its capital, St Peter Port. Its flower-strewn cliff paths are a walker's dream – you can simply amble from one pretty cove to the next, or download the VisitGuernsey app for more than 35 self-guided routes. Local history is full of myths and folklore, such as the witches' seats built into houses in the west to encourage these sorcerers to relax rather than create mischief on the island. Such tales inspire the folklore trails, available until October, which take walkers on twists and turns to uncover these myths and legends (look for the 'Once Upon an Island' walks on the VisitGuernsey app). In September, a major Renoir exhibition opens, commemorating the Impressionist painter's time in Guernsey. There's also a Renoir Walk, a short, self-guided trail of the locations where Renoir painted during a summer holiday in 1883. Guernsey's other famous resident was French writer Victor Hugo, who was exiled on the island for 15 years and wrote much of *Les Misérables* at Hauteville House, now a fascinating museum full of Hugo's eccentric interior design and well worth a visit.



ISLANDER'S TIP



"Visit Fort Grey on a dropping 6m tide at sundown: the tide will be just lapping over the lower end of the slipway. Swim out to the manmade pier: there's a huge anchor resting on the seabed."

Jayne Packham,
local wild
swimming guide

LOCAL INFO

WHERE TO STAY

For walks directly from your accommodation try four-star Fermain Valley Hotel (doubles from £140; fermainvalley.com) or glamping at Wild Guernsey (from £220 for two nights for two people; wildguernsey.wordpress.com).

GETTING THERE AND AROUND

The airport is served by Aurigny, Blue Islands, Logan Air and British Airways. Bring your car on Condor (journey time from Poole is three hours) or hire one from the airport or harbour (don't forget to use your discount with Holiday Autos – boundless.co.uk/holidayautos).

St Peter Port, on the east coast of Guernsey, offers views to Herm and Sark

Arch Beach – a sheltered bay that's popular with families, and links to neighbouring Corblets Bay at low tide



BEST FOR...

HISTORY BUFFS

ALDERNEY

Alderney is perhaps the most heavily fortified island in the world owing to its strategic position just eight miles off the French coast and 80 miles from southern England. The oldest fortification dates from the fourth century when the Romans built the Nunnery above Longis Bay (now considered the best preserved small Roman fort in Western Europe). Later the Victorians, fearing a French invasion, built 18 forts and batteries, and a new harbour to house the British fleet. The impressive Fort Tourgis, the second largest of the Victorian forts, is open to explore. Alderney was evacuated during the Second World War, when Guernsey and Jersey were occupied by German forces, and in 1942 Hitler ordered the island's conversion into an impregnable fortress as part of his Atlantic Wall. Thousands of slave workers arrived to build bunkers, anti-tank walls and tunnel complexes. These German wartime defences are visible at every turn and characterise the landscape. Other things to do include nature walks to discover bats and the island's eye-catching blonde hedgehogs, and boat rides with the Alderney Wildlife Trust to spot nesting northern gannets.

ISLANDER'S TIP



"Alderney has endless beauty at every turn, rare wildlife at your fingertips, and exceptional history to immerse yourself in. The Roman Nunnery is without doubt the best place to start. Open year round and free entry."
Alex Flewitt,
resident

LOCAL INFO

WHERE TO STAY

For a memorable experience, rent Victorian Fort Clonque through the Landmark Trust (from £1,016 for four nights – the fort sleeps up to 13 people; landmarktrust.org.uk). Or try boutique hotel Blonde Hedgehog in St Anne (doubles from £170 per night, including breakfast; blondehedgehog.com).

GETTING THERE AND AROUND

Fly from Guernsey and select mainland airports with Aurigny or Blue Islands, or take the Alderney Ferry Service from Guernsey. Hire a car from Braye Hire Car (brayehirecars.com) or rent a bike from Cycle and Surf in St Anne (adult bikes from £10 per day; cycleandsurf.co.uk). >>



BEST FOR...

BIRD WATCHING

SARK

Sark is like stepping back in time, with dirt roads to cycle or walk along and no motorised vehicles other than the occasional tractor. The world's first dark-sky island, the night skies are phenomenal and a shed-like observatory houses the island's telescope (sastros.sark.gg). There are 226 different bird species here, while the human population is less than 600. Get up early for a dawn chorus bird walk through Dixcart Valley to hear warblers in full song, or take a round-island boat trip with George Guille (adults £35, children £20; sarkboattrips.com) to see puffins nesting on L'Etac, the guillemot colony on Les Autelets, and shags basking near Port du Moulin. The waters around Sark are great for kayaking, which is the best way to explore the abundant caves here, many of which were historically used to store smuggled contraband.



ISLANDER'S TIP



"Sark's dark night sky makes for spectacular stargazing – a priceless view of the universe that costs nothing."
Joh Harvey, wellness entrepreneur

LOCAL INFO

WHERE TO STAY

Upmarket Stocks Hotel (doubles from £216 per night including breakfast – two-night minimum stay; stockshotel.com), or rent a luxury yurt at the Clos a Jaon campsite (tents sleeping up to six from £190 per night – three-night minimum stay; sarkcampingholidays.co.uk).



GETTING THERE AND AROUND

There's no airport on Sark so take the Isle of Sark Shipping Company ferry from Guernsey (55 minutes, adult day return from £28; sarkshipping.gg). A tractor trailer runs from harbour to town. Hire bikes from Avenue Cycles (from £7.50; avenuecyclessark.com) or splash out on a horse and carriage (from £120; sarkcarriages.co.uk).



Belvoir Bay, on Herm's east coast, affords views of neighbouring Sark

BEST FOR...

BEACHES

HERM

Car-free Herm is the smallest inhabited Channel Island you can visit. The other two, Jethou and Brecqhou, are privately leased from the Crown. The bijou island is home to one hotel, a campsite and a couple of pubs. Wander the sandy paths that crisscross the grassy common at the centre of the 200-hectare island, stop to inspect what may be the world's smallest prison (just a single cell) and take time to admire butterflies flitting among wildflowers. Herm's capital, Manor Village, is just a few granite buildings, a primary school and a tiny chapel. The island's biggest draw is its beaches – which, on a sunny day, look like they're lifted from the Caribbean. Shell beach, which gets its name from the millions of tiny shells that are swept ashore by the Gulf Stream, is the perfect place to idle away a summer's day. Take a picnic or buy crab sandwiches and ice creams from the beach kiosk (you can even pick up a cold beer). On a clear day you can see across to the coast of France. The island is open all year, and you can see puffins from early April to mid July. ■

ISLANDER'S TIP



"You can't beat a snorkel in the clear waters of Shell Beach. This spectacular underwater habitat is rich in marine life and colour, with large shoals of fish, sea grass and seals. Remember to pack a mask and snorkel and avoid the high-tide currents."
Chris Harvey, teacher

LOCAL INFO

WHERE TO STAY

Check in to the White House Hotel, pictured below (doubles from £145) or book a holiday cottage in Manor Village (from £476 per week for a property that sleeps four). All bookings via herm.com.

GETTING THERE AND AROUND

The Isle of Herm ferry departs from Guernsey between two and seven times per day depending on the season, and crossings take around 20 minutes (adults £8; book via herm.com).



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