

Bingeing on bay watch

Avoiding Storm Ciaran to make the best of a hop over the Channel to Jersey

WORDS AND PHOTOS: Mark Cummings

I love an adventure that starts with the sensation of gentle butterflies in the stomach ahead of a journey involving a few 'unknowns'. You wouldn't have thought a simple hop to the Channel Islands would include such precariousness but ours did. On our first trip to Jersey, we drove to Luton Airport knowing that Jersey Airport was shut but we had our fingers crossed it would reopen in time for our autumnal exploration. Thanks to Storm Ciaran parts of the island had been torn to shreds but we were determined to get there. On the M25 we heard the good news that access to our weekend retreat was open and we landed with a bump on one of the first flights in.

I grew up with bracing, windswept holidays on remote isles off the north-west coast of Scotland so I was intrigued and excited for my first visit to the waters off Normandy. Our home was the stunning St Brelade's Bay Hotel on the south-west coast of Jersey. We were told by locals that we'd chosen the worst weekend possible as storm-damaged roads

were shut and many tourist attractions had closed for the winter. If all we'd managed to do for three days was look at the view from our room, I'd have been a happy man. A bay view is one of life's simple but most magical pleasures. I've been lucky enough to wake up to the sight of some of the world's most stunning coves from San Francisco to Sydney, Iona to Mallorca's Puerto Pollensa and the best that Greece, Sicily and New Zealand have to offer. I can now add St Brelade's to this list.

Every morning the sun shone, and we drank gallons of tea on the balcony soaking up the view before legging it down for breakfast. There's always one couple who play 'fast and loose' with the breakfast deadline. We've made an artform of this morning Russian roulette, enjoying a long lie-in dicing with the possibility of missing out on the supreme joy of a hotel breakfast. On this occasion the friendly staff didn't bat an eyelid. We devoured a delicious feast including Jersey fruit yogurt, Jersey black butter on the toast >

left:
View from Mont Orgueil Castle

right:
View of the hotel from the beach

far right:
Our breakfast with a view



COTSWOLD TRAVEL

and a full English. We didn't talk to each other, we just gazed out of the window at that stunning ocean view.

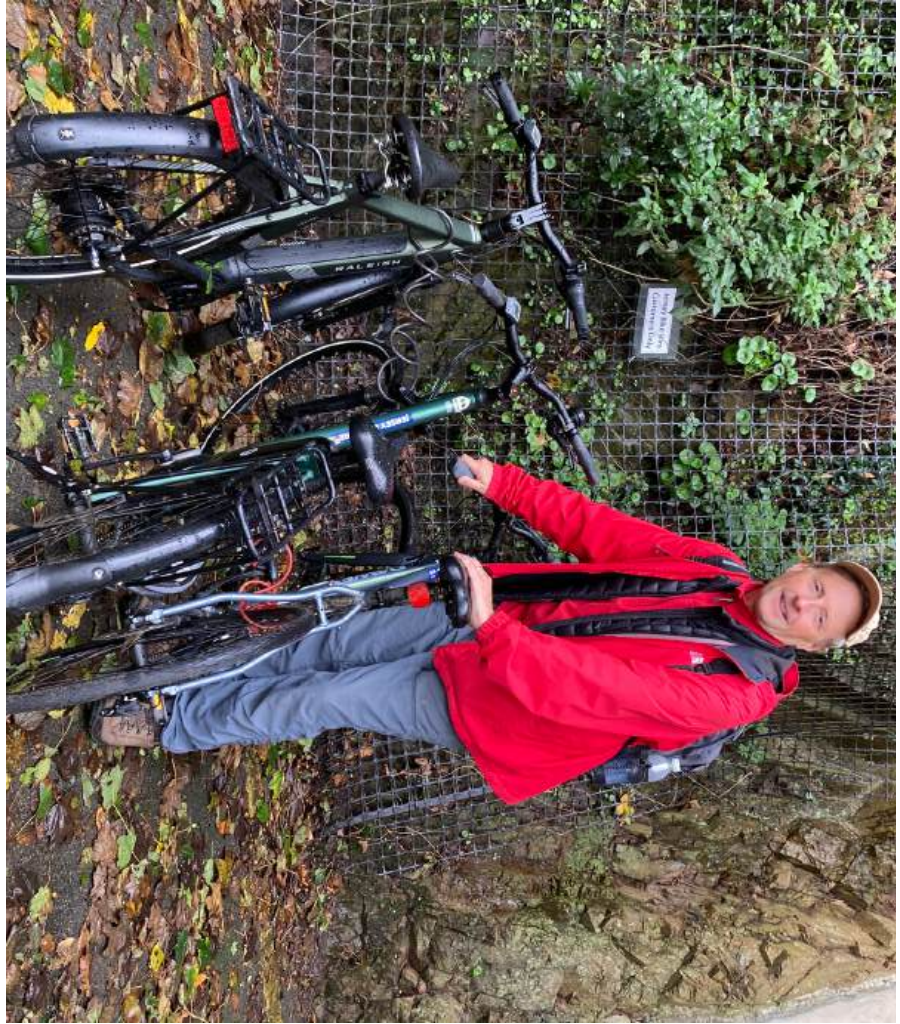
I always like to 'nose' around a building that has clearly evolved over the centuries. On my tour I found out that the hotel started life as a pub in the late 19th-century and gradually expanded with a succession of owners into the stunning building we see today. The Germans invaded Jersey on July 1, 1940, and took over the hotel which was used as a *Soldatenheim*, a place of recuperation away from the front line.

**'We just GAZED
out of the window
at that STUNNING
OCEAN VIEW'**

I was shown the evidence of this occupation on the terrace at the front of the hotel. This is a lovely spot to chill and be even closer to that beach, but I wonder how many visitors are aware that lurking underneath is an air raid shelter. Hitler saw Jersey as strategically vital and had a defensive sea wall built around the bay including the air raid shelter I was able to peep into.

After my hotel tour and history lesson it was time to get hiking and work off that breakfast. Our destination was Corbière (a place where crows gather) on the extreme south-western point of the island. We opted for the exposed coastal path which I found exhilarating. It reminded me of the dramatic Cornish coastline with plenty of ups and downs and sheer drops. In the strong wind I felt I was being blown towards the French mainland. Luckily, the breeze took us safely within sight of the Corbière lighthouse nestled on a tidal island out at sea.

As a thrifty traveller I was delighted that, from the hotel, we could explore the island either by foot, bike or bus. Our adventures during the visit took us to the next cove at St Aubin's Bay, the capital Saint Helier, the east coast fishing village of Gorey



with the magnificent Mont Orgueil Castle and the 700-metre-long St Catherine's Breakwater. The joy of exploring the island was compounded by the thought of coming home in the afternoon to our cosy bay, the spa, two swimming pools, that view and delicious local food served, you guessed it, with that stunning vista of the sea.

If you can have such a rich experience on the worst weekend of the year (in weather terms), then that tells you something about a visit to Jersey. Simple pleasures included trying to decipher the local accent (a bit South Africanish), discovering Jersey black butter (fig-like jam), enjoying the immaculate public toilets and the cheap, clean, reliable bus service. The locals were lovely, and we met many who had suffered badly in the wake of Storm Ciaran. I raised a glass of the local

Resistance Ale to the friends we made and felt a bit ashamed that I needed to be reminded of Jersey's independence. The islands are not part of the UK or European Union, but rather a possession of the British Crown with an independent administration.

Waiting for the taxi back to the nearby airport we spent our last two hours in the lounge watching the autumnal afternoon light quickly dissolve into darkness. The post-storm wind was still a little lively so we could hear the crashing of the waves and see our favourite bay reflected in the lights across the water. After three days of bay watch it was time to leave. We will be back. ●

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above:

Jersey cycling

right:

Traversing the
Jersey coastal path

centre:

The wartime bunker
on the hotel lawn

far right:

Enjoying afternoon
tea with a
perfect view