

CHANNEL ISLANDS

# Land of the free

Channel Islands expert, **Antonia Windsor**, chooses 10 of her favourite things to see and do in an important anniversary year

**T**his year, the Channel Islands are celebrating 80 years since being liberated from German occupation during the Second World War – they were the only part of the British Isles to be occupied by the Germans.

Liberation Day, which is celebrated annually on 9 May in Jersey and Guernsey and on 10 May in Sark, sees an explosion of colourful cavalcades, historic re-enactments, music festivals and fireworks.

In Alderney, where all residents were evacuated during the war, they will be celebrating Homecoming Day on 15 December 2025, while its inaugural History Festival (18-20 September 2025) will include talks,

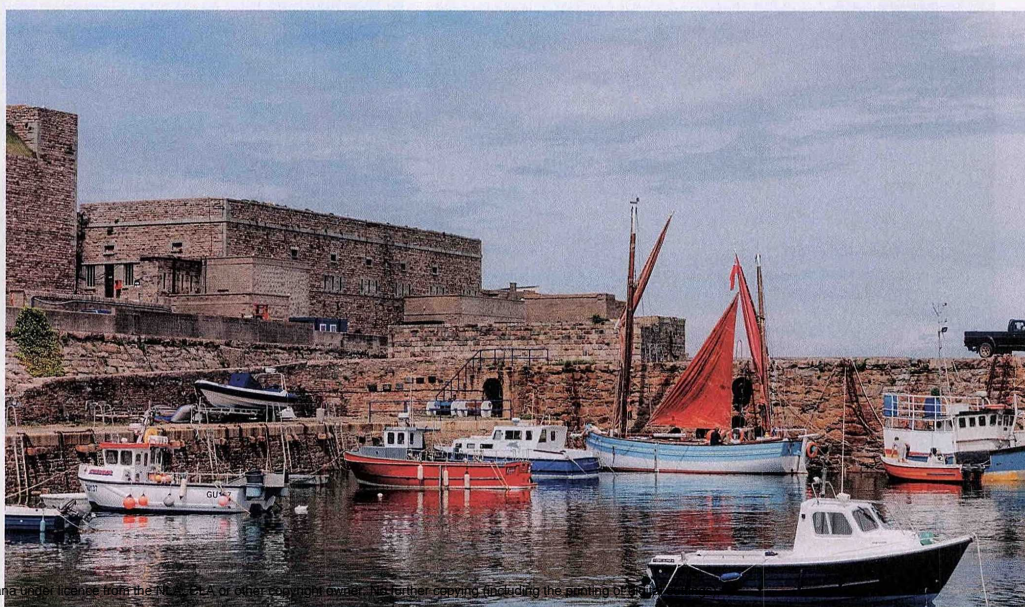
tours, workshops, and social activities that will offer insights into the island's wartime experiences.

Whether you want to investigate concrete bunkers and look-out towers that were built as part of Hitler's Atlantic Wall, wander through eerie underground hospitals or encounter the history in interactive museums, there's plenty to learn about what life was like in the islands during those five hard years.

And while war history is at the forefront of islanders' minds this year, you'll find so much more to explore in these fascinating British Crown Dependencies that lie off the coast of France. Here are some of the things I recommend you see and do.



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## 2 Visit the home of Victor Hugo

Victor Hugo is to the French what Shakespeare is to the British and the famous author of *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* has connections to both Jersey and Guernsey where he spent time after he was exiled from France. Guernsey is the place he made his home for 15 years and he decorated Hauteville House in a truly extraordinary way, with each room a cacophony of styles, textures and colours. It is like an interior design poem. [visitguernsey.com/experiences/activities/victor-hugo-house-hauteville-house](https://visitguernsey.com/experiences/activities/victor-hugo-house-hauteville-house)

## 1 Take a boat trip to explore the sea life

Whichever island you decide to base yourself on, a whizz about on the water is one of the most enjoyable things you can do. You can spot puffins and dolphins, depending on the season, off each of the islands, while around Herm you can get close to a colony of Atlantic seals and watch them basking on the rocks.

For visitors to Alderney, a boat ride will bring you close to two per cent of the world's northern gannet population, which favour some rocks here to nest – it's certainly smelly and noisy but an awe-inspiring experience just the same. [visitalderney.com/see-do/sightseeing-tours/wildlife-tours](https://visitalderney.com/see-do/sightseeing-tours/wildlife-tours)



## 3 Crawl into one of the oldest buildings in the world

The neolithic site La Hougue Bie in Jersey contains a passage grave from 3500BC, which is thought to be one of the oldest buildings in the world and one of the best-preserved passage graves in Europe. Crawl in to find a chamber that is exactly angled towards the rising sun on the solstices. Further dolmen and passage graves can be found in both Jersey and Guernsey, left behind by pagan ancestors. [jersey.com/things-to-do/attractions/listings/la-hougue-bie-museum](https://jersey.com/things-to-do/attractions/listings/la-hougue-bie-museum)



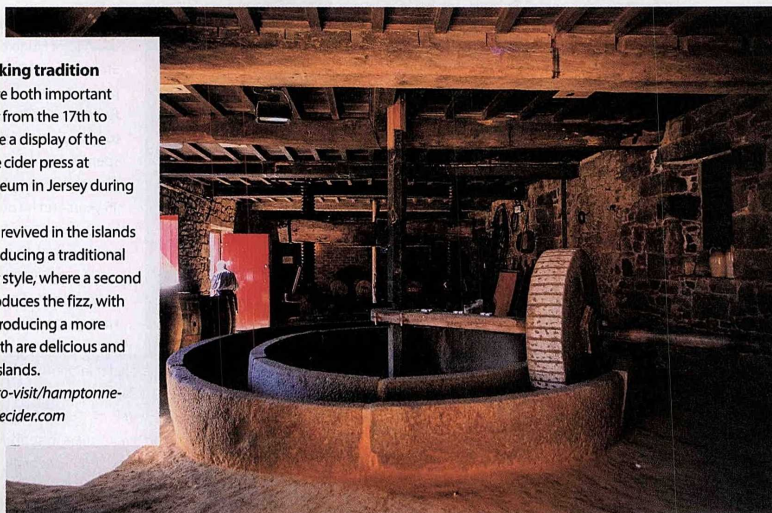
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### 4 Discover the cider-making tradition

Jersey and Guernsey were both important makers and exporters of cider from the 17th to 19th centuries and you can see a display of the traditional horse-drawn stone cider press at Hamptonne Country Life Museum in Jersey during the cider festival in October.

Cider-making is now being revived in the islands with La Robeline in Jersey producing a traditional *cidre bouché* in the Normandy style, where a second fermentation in the bottle produces the fizz, with Roquette Cider in Guernsey producing a more modern, carbonated cider. Both are delicious and worth trying on a visit to the islands.

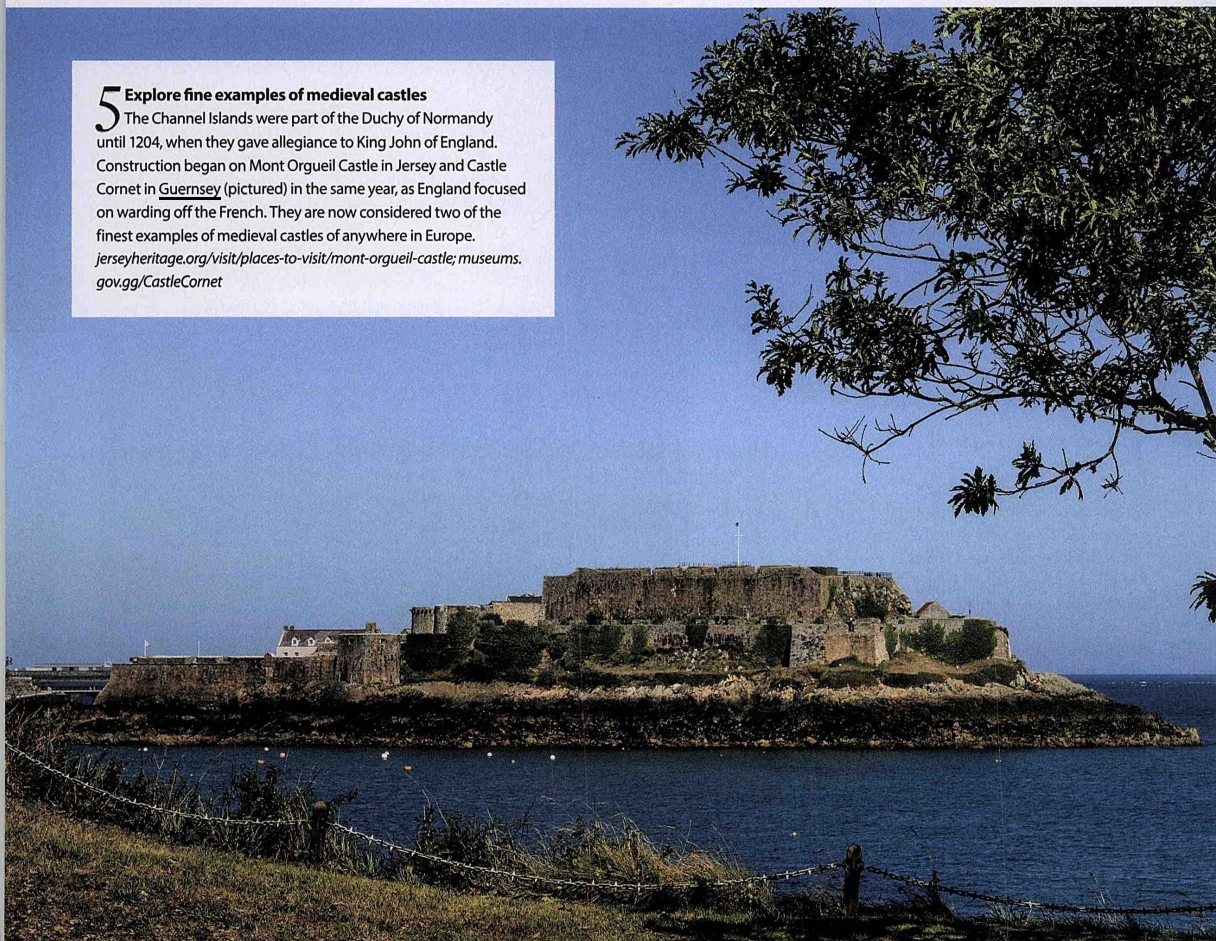
[jerseyheritage.org/visit/places-to-visit/hamptonne-country-life-museum](http://jerseyheritage.org/visit/places-to-visit/hamptonne-country-life-museum); [larobelinecider.com](http://larobelinecider.com)



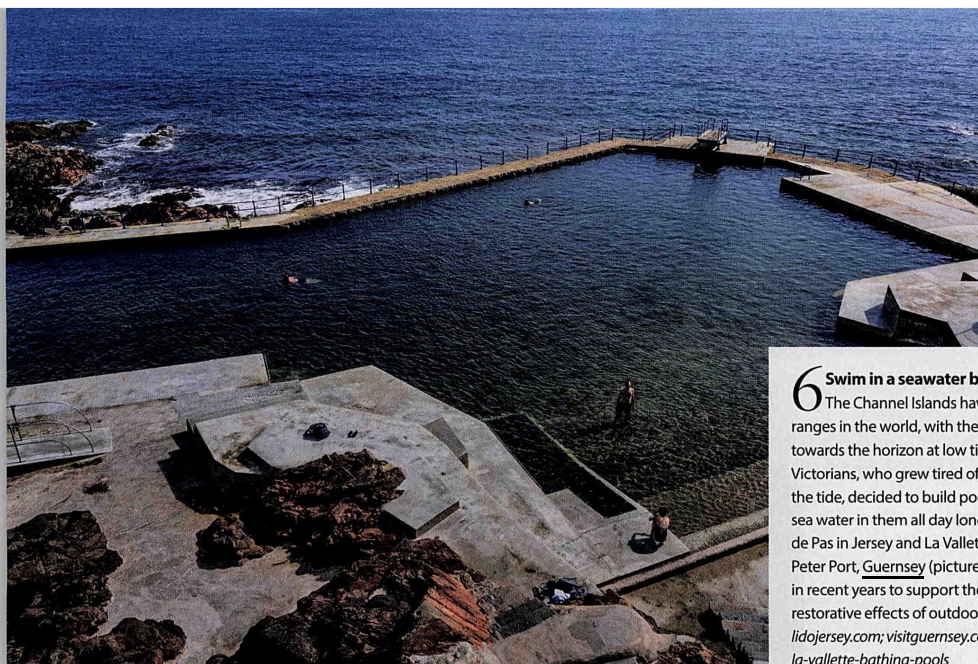
### 5 Explore fine examples of medieval castles

The Channel Islands were part of the Duchy of Normandy until 1204, when they gave allegiance to King John of England. Construction began on Mont Orgueil Castle in Jersey and Castle Cornet in Guernsey (pictured) in the same year, as England focused on warding off the French. They are now considered two of the finest examples of medieval castles of anywhere in Europe.

[jerseyheritage.org/visit/places-to-visit/mont-orgueil-castle](http://jerseyheritage.org/visit/places-to-visit/mont-orgueil-castle); [museums.gov.gg/CastleCornet](http://museums.gov.gg/CastleCornet)







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## 6 Swim in a seawater bathing pool

The Channel Islands have one of the largest tidal ranges in the world, with the sea disappearing far off towards the horizon at low tide. However, savvy Victorians, who grew tired of timing their swims with the tide, decided to build pools that would keep the sea water in them all day long. Both The Lido at Havre de Pas in Jersey and La Vallette Bathing Pools in St Peter Port, Guernsey (pictured) have been renovated in recent years to support the revived interest in the restorative effects of outdoor swimming.

[lidojersey.com](http://lidojersey.com); [visitguernsey.com/experiences/activities/la-vallette-bathing-pools](http://visitguernsey.com/experiences/activities/la-vallette-bathing-pools)



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## 7 Stargaze in Sark

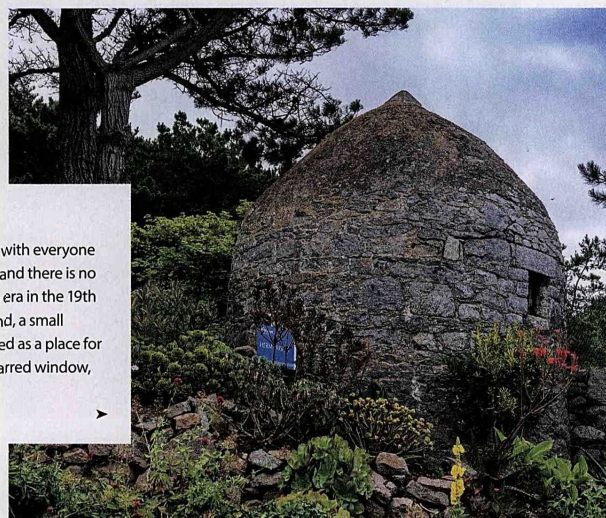
Car-free Sark became the world's first Dark Sky Island in 2011 and inspired Irish musician Enya's album of the same name. Stargazing here is a rustic affair as you cycle to a field a couple of hours after sunset in which a wooden shack houses the island's telescope, rather grandly called the Sark Observatory. While the set-up might seem basic, the night sky above is majestic with constellations clearly seen along with the Milky Way and satellites.

[darkskyisland.co.uk](http://darkskyisland.co.uk)

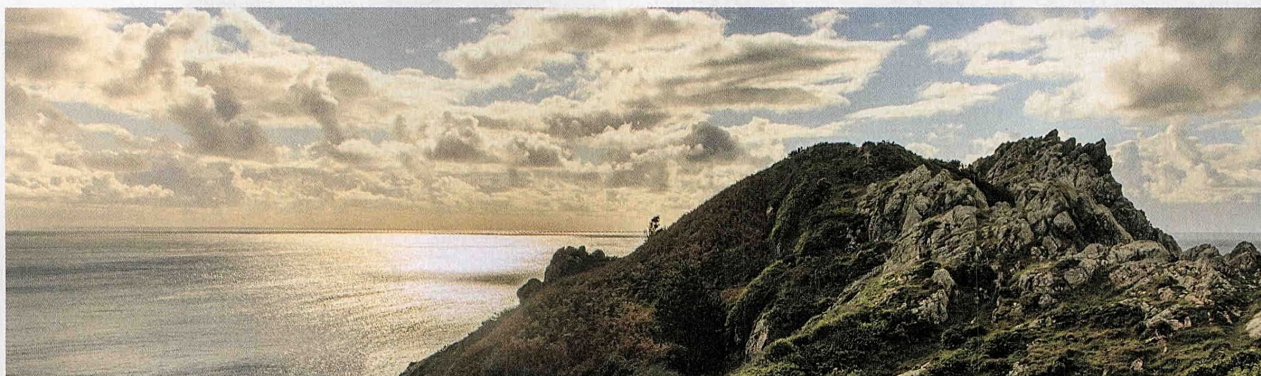
## 8 See the world's smallest prison

On the island of Herm, there are just 65 inhabitants, and with everyone knowing one another, unsurprisingly, crime is at a minimum and there is no working prison on the island. However, during the quarrying era in the 19th century, when more than 400 men were working on the island, a small single-cell prison was constructed. The prison was mainly used as a place for drunk and disorderly workers to sober up but with a small, barred window, prisoners had an uninterrupted sea view as they did so.

[herm.com/visitor-info/history](http://herm.com/visitor-info/history)







## 9 Walk the cliff paths

Glorious rocky cliffs rise along the south coast of Guernsey (pictured) and the north coast of Jersey (the two islands were once joined to mainland France and it's fun to imagine that if the cliffs were pushed together, they might fit like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle). Both have cliff paths that are fragrant with yellow gorse and dabbed with colourful wildflowers in spring and summer. In Guernsey, stop off for a crab sandwich at Moulin Huet Bay, which was captured in the paintings of Renoir. In Jersey, get the same from the Hungry Man café in Rozel Harbour. [visitguernsey.com/experiences/activities/moulin-huet-bay](https://visitguernsey.com/experiences/activities/moulin-huet-bay); [thehungryman.je](https://thehungryman.je)



Don't miss  
our report on  
the islands'  
Liberation Day  
celebrations  
next issue



## 10 Enjoy an afternoon tea

Afternoon tea, commonly called a 'cream tea' in the Channel Islands, is best enjoyed in beautiful surroundings. In Sark you'll want to head to La Seigneurie Gardens (pictured), often named the prettiest in the Channel Islands. In Guernsey, you can try a fancy tea on the sea-view terrace of Old Government House, the only five-star hotel on the island, while in Jersey you can enjoy it poolside with a view of the landscaped gardens at Longueville Manor, the island's only Relais & Châteaux property. ■ [visitguernsey.com/experiences/activities/la-seigneurie-gardens-sark](https://visitguernsey.com/experiences/activities/la-seigneurie-gardens-sark); [theoghhotel.com](https://theoghhotel.com); [longuevillemanor.com](https://longuevillemanor.com)