



Channel some good times

From Victor Hugo's former home to scrambling along the coastline, Guernsey and Herm are a delight, finds Neil Geraghty

Sea spaghetti might not be the most attractive of seaweeds but what it lacks in looks, it more than makes up for in flavour. I'm taking part in a coasteering lesson, one of many sea-based activities run by adventure sports specialist Outdoor Guernsey. The route takes us clambering along rocks on the southern tip of Herm, one of Guernsey's neighbouring islands. We then jump into the water where I immediately become entangled in a floating mat of olive green sea spaghetti.

"All seaweed in the Channel Islands is edible," explains Harvey, our enthusiastic guide. "Why don't you try some?" In for a penny, in for a pound I pluck a strand, take a bite and I'm pleasantly surprised. Although it resembles a tape worm, it's not remotely slimy

and has a pleasing crunch with a nutty flavour.

Guernsey and its outlying islands are all blessed with magnificent coastlines of high cliffs, coves and sandy beaches which are perfect for outdoor pursuits. A short drive from Guernsey's tiny airport I check into the Fermain Valley Hotel. The hotel is located above a wooded dell and has views overlooking Fermain Bay, one of Guernsey's most picturesque coves. After settling in I stroll down to the beach which is home to a popular beach café, an excellent place to try crab sandwiches, a Guernsey lunchtime favourite. And the crabs couldn't be any fresher. Just offshore dozens of bobbing buoys float above crab pots from which the café owners collect fresh crabs each morning.

After lunch I head over to



Hauteville House, the former home of Franch author Victor Hugo, main; coasteering, above

“If it wasn't for the freezing water we could almost be swimming in the Caribbean

Hauteville House, the former home of Victor Hugo who lived in exile on Guernsey from 1856 to 1870. Already a famous and successful author, he bought an imposing Georgian townhouse overlooking St Peter Port and furnished it with eccentric bric a brac from all over the world. After returning to France the house remained in his family's hands until 1927 when his descendants donated it to the City of Paris. From April to September the house is open to the public for guided tours and is a popular pilgrimage site for French

literature enthusiasts. I arrive early and take the opportunity to visit the garden where an enormous oak tree planted by Hugo now dominates the lawn. Inside, the sumptuous interiors are decorated with eclectic collections of tapestries, Delft tiles, ornate woodcarvings and Japanese silk screens. On the top floor, Hugo built a glass conservatory with a high desk where standing up he wrote some of his most famous works including *Les Misérables*.

Wild swimming is a popular outdoor pursuit in Guernsey and just before dawn I join several locals for a bracing sunrise swim in Fermain Bay. The beach is east facing and we're in luck; with just a few powder puff clouds in the sky we're treated to a tropical fanfare of crimson and orange dawn colours and if it wasn't for the freezing water we could almost be swimming in the Caribbean. After breakfast I head out for a coastal walk along the cliffs from Fermain Bay to the capital St Peter's Port, one of 49 walks devised by Visit Guernsey which can easily be

followed using geo location on the Visit Guernsey app. The route follows a well signposted path which undulates up and down the cliff tops before reaching Clarence Battery, one of dozens of late 18th century forts that protected Guernsey during the Napoleonic Wars. After the cliff top walk I have a new burst of energy and set off with a spring in my step to explore the picturesque Georgian streets of St Peter Port. The next morning I head over to the rugged western tip of Guernsey to follow Visit Guernsey's intriguingly named Guernsey ice cream, shipwrecks and Fairies walk. The walk begins at Fort Grey, known locally as the Cup and Saucer which guards Portelet Beach, where you can often spot seals frolicking on the sand. On a promontory overlooking the beach I reach a stone circle strewn with flowers which is popularly believed to be a fairy ring. Guernsey is steeped in superstitious folklore although the fairy ring is in fact the remains of an outdoor resting area that was set up each year during the annual Corpus Christi procession around the island. In the afternoon I hop on a ferry for the 20 minute crossing to Herm. Just two miles long and half a mile wide, Herm is the definition of island escapism. It's a short walk uphill to Herm's only hotel The White House which was converted from a country house in 1949. With its long white facade punctuated by elegant bay windows and terrace dotted with palm trees, the hotel exudes a genteel charm redolent of an Agatha Christie novel.



Fort Grey is on the rugged western tip of Guernsey

After check in I head back down to the harbour, don a wet suit, hard helmet and life jacket and set out for our coastering lesson. Our goal is the Bishop's mine, a 19th century silver mine that has an entrance in the cliff face just above sea level. Despite tantalizing deposits of shimmering minerals on the walls, silver was never discovered in commercially viable quantities and the mine was a commercial flop. In the morning I set out for a hike around the island. The southern half of the coastline is mostly cliffs which have eroded into the sea forming dozens of stacks and islets. The water close to shore is shallow and from the high cliff paths the sea takes on an almost tropical aquamarine hue. Turning north the terrain drops in height and taking a footpath lined by wild honeysuckle I reach Belvoir Beach, an idyllic cove fringed by a white powder sand beach. There I get chatting to two elderly ladies who have been holidaying in Herm for 40 years. "It's a tiny slice of paradise right here in the UK," one of them says to me and when I kick off my shoes and feel the soft sand under my feet, I have to say I agree with her.

Aurigny airlines run seasonal flights from Edinburgh to Guernsey from £140 return, www.aurigny.com Return ferry passage from Guernsey to Herm starts at £17, www.traveltrident.com Rooms at the Fermain Valley Hotel start from £128, www.handpickedhotels.co.uk and at the White House Hotel £155, www.herm.com/where-to-stay/white-house-hotel



Relax at Rabat's palace by the sea

Leave the crowds to visit Marrakesh and Fez and enjoy the splendour of Morocco's capital Rabat, where the Four Seasons offers the last word in luxury, writes Kate Wickers

It's a beautiful May evening at the palace, with temperatures around 23C, and I'm drinking a Velvet Amber cocktail with views to the sun slipping slowly into the Atlantic Ocean below a tangerine-splashed sky. This is not my usual Wednesday, but this isn't an average hotel, because while Four Seasons Rabat at Kasr al Bahr (meaning palace by the sea), may have recently opened, its history goes back to the 18th century when Sultan Moulay Slimane chose to build his summer residence here. Perhaps it was the cooling sea breeze that he came for, which also served as free air-conditioning when the abandoned palace became a military hospital, before closing in 1999. There's no doubt that

Morocco's UNESCO recognised capital Rabat is a city screaming for attention, fed up with being overshadowed by much visited Marrakesh and Fez. You only need to look at what's new in the city – Zaha Hadid's Grand Theatre de Rabat has just opened, and the soaring 55-storey Mohammed VI tower (Africa's tallest) will soon be completed, to name just two. Four Seasons is easily the city's most luxurious accommodation (think domed roofs, arched doorways, and bubbling fountains), opening well ahead of exciting times, including the World Cup of 2030, when Morocco will share the championship with Spain and Portugal. The hotel comprises of six heritage buildings and several new additions with views to River Bou Regreg, which flows in from

design from the carved plaster work to the tiling. My room has views to the sea, and there's no mistaking the country I'm in, with bedside lights made of coloured glass, a hammam-like marble bathroom, and a green tiled balcony that any riad would be proud of. Among the six restorations, the oldest – a finely bricked, vaulted-roofed reception room, where visitors once freshened up before being presented to the Sultan – is now the Laila Lounge, reimagined as a 1920s-style cocktail club, often with live music. Spread over 12 acres, it's the blue mosaic-tiled pool etched with bright orange parasols and cabanas (that looks every inch like a still from a Wes Anderson movie) that's the focal point; wonderful to return to after exploring Rabat's major sights. Most are within easy walking distance, so after a breakfast of Moroccan eggs (poached in a tomato sauce flavoured with capsicum, cumin and paprika), I strike out to explore. At the 12th century Kasbah des Oudayas, I pass through the horseshoe-shaped gate of Bab Oudaia, built in 1195, then mosey through whitewashed pedestrian-only alleys to a terrace with views to River Bou Regreg, which flows in from

the mouth of the Atlantic, upon which flouka (traditional Arab wooden boats) ferry goods and passengers. The aromatic Andalusian Gardens, planted when Morocco was under French protectorate in the early 20th century, lies at the foot of the fort. At the spa I book in for an exfoliating massage with argan oil and honey products from luxury brand Maroc Maroc. In autumn, as well as treatment rooms, a gym, and vast indoor pool with bubbling Jacuzzies, the hotel will add an ice chamber, sauna, and traditional hammam. Although the hotel offers top-notch Moroccan cuisine (you'll find the likes of tajine, falafel wraps and fresh Moroccan salads at the all-day dining restaurant, Flamme), there are two others, one serving Michelin-star quality Italian food and French cuisine. On the terrace of Verdello, with views to the gardens, I feast on spiny lobster from Agadir with thyme and celery, marinated in cherry tomatoes and lemon. It takes just 30 minutes to walk the coastal path to Plage de Rabat, passing the lighthouse, built in 1920, and the National Museum of Photography, with its exhibition of over 500 images from the 1950s to present day. I stroll through

The blue mosaic-tiled pool at the Four Seasons Rabat

the hassle-free medina on the hunt for leather sandals, embroidered cushion covers, and dried mint tea, and visit the storks of Chellah that have adopted this ancient necropolis as their nesting ground. To view the finest of Arab-Islamic craftsmanship, the Mausoleum of Mohammed V is a marvel, guarded by soldiers in crimson uniforms and white capes. At Four Seasons' Noora, an elegant, plant-filled lounge in one of the palace's oldest buildings, an afternoon tea of French patisserie and Moroccan pastries is served, while musicians sing play the lute-like rabab. A fittingly luxurious end to my time of being treated like royalty.

Return flights from London Stansted to Rabat from £44, www.ryanair.com Fly direct to Marrakesh from Edinburgh and Glasgow with EasyJet (return fares from £71.98), then catch a train to Rabat (3.5 hours), www.easyjet.com; doubles at Four Seasons Rabat from £420, including breakfast, www.fourseasons.com

The Thames-side hotel with cruise liner vibes

The new Sea Containers cabin suites evoke a golden era of ocean travel, writes Sarah Marshall



The new Edwardian Cabin Suite at Sea Containers

Swapping high seas for a high rise, I'm setting off for a voyage back through time on a ship that will never set sail. My ocean-worthy cabin is one of four new suites to recently open at London hotel Sea Containers. The Thames-side property occupies a wing of a 1978 block once homing a shipping firm. Originally modelled by British designer Tom Dixon to resemble a 1920s cruise liner, the hotel first launched in 2014 and was revamped and renamed Sea Containers five years later. I'm staying in the Edwardian cabin suite, a room decorated with the sort of walnut wood furnishings and plush velvet sofas that might have filled the Titanic. The mood, however, is reassuringly buoyant and the only blocks of ice on my horizon float in a wine bucket, currently keeping cool a bottle of Laurent-Perrier champagne. From my window, I watch mud lark rummage for lost urban treasures on the pebbly Thames shoreline as commuters rush across the Millennium Bridge. All four suites – including the Deco Cabin Suite, Mid-Century Cabin Suite and Dynasty Cabin – huddle together in a private area at the end of a red-carpeted corridor and each has a strikingly individual door.

Cabin design From a collection of 'impossible bottles' filled with galleons to dramatic oil paintings of ships tossed by waves, every surface of the suite celebrates maritime magnificence. Glossy kelp-green tiles decorate the

cloakroom, while a leather-embossed writing desk with ink well and fountain pen provides the perfect tools to write a postcard home.

Shipshape service Every night around 6pm, each suite receives a knock from a mixologist pushing a trolley stacked with all the ingredients to make a negroni – a welcome aperitif on wheels. Inside the room, bottles of spirits are lined up below shelves of crystal decanters, and fine wines fills fridges – all available for consumption as part of the room rate. More 'gifts' can be found inside drawers – candles, room sprays, relaxing balms and tinctures are all available to use and take home.

Hotel extras Award-winning cocktail bar Lyaness and rooftop space 12th Knot are joined by an all-day restaurant with a fine bistro menu championing British ingredients such as Wye Valley asparagus, Porthilly mussels and Suffolk pork belly. Below deck, the Agua Spa offers a menu of treatments. A signature facial uses honey to deep cleanse and gentle massaging of cheeks, forehead and the eye area to achieve a glamorous glow.

How to plan your trip The cabin suites cost from £765 per night with breakfast, seacontainerslondon.com