

The best Channel Island beaches

The beaches of the Channel Islands offer white sands, solitude and unique wartime history. Here are **Matt Baird's** magnificent seven

1 SHELL BEACH, HERM

Just a 20-minute boat trip from Guernsey, car- and bike-free Herm is a walking, swimming and picnic paradise. Its northern tip is dominated by the white sands (and titular tiny shell fragments) of the 700m-long Shell Beach, one of the British Isles' finest shorelines. While the turquoise sea may recall the Caribbean, the average water temperature of 12°C might result in an expletive or two breaking the island tranquillity. A seasonal shack sells cups of tea, crab sandwiches and other essentials.

2 BELVOIR BEACH, HERM

Shell Beach might hog most of the plaudits but the adjacent Belvoir Bay is a close second for the title of the Channel Islands' most glorious stretch of sand. More secluded and sheltered than Shell, Belvoir is easily found along Herm's four-mile coast path and offers views of France on a clear day. Its gently sloping shoreline makes this a favourite for young families, aided by the seasonal café.

3 PETIT BOT, GUERNSEY

In contrast to the broad northern sands of Cobo and Vazon, the sheltered swimming hotspot of Petit Bot on the southern coast offers – as the name suggests – a small bay of golden sands once the tide departs. Historical fortifications are present, this time from the early Napoleonic era in the form of one of the 15 Loophole Towers built to defend Guernsey in 1778–9. There's also a tearoom.

4 VAZON BAY, GUERNSEY

The wide arches of Vazon Bay and Cobo Beach dominate Guernsey's north-western coastline. The former scores well on Channel Island beach bingo: vast sands and clear waters are all ticked off, with Vazon boasting the Victorian-era Fort Hommet and Second World War-era bunkers built by German forces. After a day rockpooling, sink a sunset drink on The Rockmount's terrace on Cobo.



5 BRAYE BEACH, ALDERNEY

Reachable from Guernsey on a daily ferry during the summer (and from Cherbourg in France twice a week), isolated Alderney also offers a host of uncrowded sands, cerulean waters and, yes, Second World War relics. Close to the island's only town of St. Anne and sheltered by a breakwater, this family-friendly gem hosts a sandcastle competition and a Daft Raft race during Alderney Week in August.

6 ST. BRELADE'S BAY, JERSEY

Over on the largest and most southerly of the Channel Islands sits the broad sweep of St. Brelade's Bay, one of Jersey's most popular and family-friendly beaches. Soft sands, agapanthus and palm trees provide a tropical air, while the nearby Coleron Battery and a German gun emplacement are reminders of the Channel Island's strategic military importance. A wealth of cafés and restaurants sit north of the bay.

7 DIXCART BAY, SARK

The coves and rock pools of car-free Sark – the world's first Dark Sky Island – are harder to locate than those on nearby Herm but rewards await for the intrepid. Popular with paddleboarders, Dixcart Bay on the south coast of Great Sark (Little Sark is joined by the narrow isthmus La Coupée) is one of the easiest to reach via the cliff path and some steps, where sheltered waters and a pebble beach, which becomes sandy at low tide, lie. ☺

