

## Britain

# Ten UK islands that put Europe in the shade

With airports in disarray this summer, why not swap the continent's offshore assets for some flight-free alternatives closer to home? Rob Crossan compares and contrasts

With flight cancellations galore, epic airport queues and staffing crises everywhere from check-in to baggage handling, that longed-for European island escape is looking more complicated than usual. Perhaps, then, this isn't such a bad time to explore options that are rather closer to home. The Isles that dot our shores offer everything from boutique accommodation to upmarket dining, wilderness escapes to cultural wonders. So, banish thoughts of cancellations and chaos, pack an overnight bag and book a ticket to explore some of our very own island getaways.

## Swap IBIZA'S BIG BEATS for JERSEY'S SUBTLE COOL

The largest Channel Island may not party quite as hard as Ibiza, but Jersey is no slouch for nocturnal options these days. The late-night party scene is hottest at the belle époque-style Ce Soir (cesoirjersey.com), with its throbbing beats and potent cocktails; try a Holy Grail with rum and Grand Marnier, then recover at St Helier's Grand Jersey Hotel and Spa (01534 722301; handpickedhotels.co.uk), which offers soothing views out over the ramparts of Elizabeth Castle. Doubles cost from £124 including breakfast. For sustenance, Bohemia (01534 880588; bohemiajersey.com), located inside the Club hotel in St Helier, is the only Michelin-starred restaurant on the island, serving up Jersey Angus beef tartare and local crab panna cotta.

The return ferry fare from Portsmouth to Jersey is £70 (duration 10hr 20mins). Book at [condorferries.co.uk](http://condorferries.co.uk)

## Swap A BUDGET BREAK IN MALTA for VALUE IN BUTE

Malta being one of the most wallet-friendly Mediterranean islands to visit, switching it for Bute may seem perplexing. But if you want sandy bays, ancient Christian sites and gentle walking routes without extensive travel times or high prices, this Argyll island carries weight. Bijou Victoriana is the vibe in Rothesay, the island's only town, where beyond the palm tree-lined promenade and esplanade gardens lies the fancy side of the island. Mount Stuart, whose vaulted marble hall stands testament to the grand tastes of the 7th Marquess of Bute. For added glamour, you can tell your friends that Stella McCartney got married here. The sandy stretch of Scalpsie Way has an eponymous farm (scalpsie-farm.com) boasting three solar-powered glamping "pods", with kitchen, indoor fireplace and patio, all just a sporrán's throw from the beach. From £68 per night.

The return ferry fare from Wemyss Bay to Bute is £6.90 (duration 35mins). Book at [calmac.co.uk](http://calmac.co.uk)

## Swap LUSH MADEIRA for TRESCO'S HOME-GROWN EXOTICISM

As one of the most sun-drenched places in the UK, Treco, in the Isles of Scilly, will give you the rays you need to travel to Madeira to relish, combined with a tropical lushness that is unexpected this far north of Funchal. The Abbey Gardens, set in the grounds of a ruined 12th-century priory, are full of coconut palms. Elsewhere, rolling fields, abandoned tin mines and shaded churchyards make for brilliant walking. Explore the island's two castles: Cromwell's spiral staircase tower on the north-west coast, and King Charles's unfortunate ruin, blown up by its own defenders as they retreated after the English Civil War, located right behind it. Then, check into the New Inn (01720 422849; tresco.co.uk). Here, order lobster with Tresco rocket salad in the dining room and luxuriate in guest rooms that are bright and breezy with a vibe more akin to the Caymans than Cornwall. Double rooms from £185 B&B.

The return ferry fare from Penzance to St Mary's is £65.95 (duration 2hr 45mins). The connecting boat to Treco costs £6 (duration 20mins). Book at [islesofscilly-travel.co.uk](http://islesofscilly-travel.co.uk)

## Swap SARDINIA'S SEAFOOD for THE ISLE OF WIGHT'S PISCINE PLEASURES

With a rugged coastline, narrow streets and a sense of "otherness" from the mainland, the Isle of Wight stands tall against the Italian Med outpost. It goes for to toe on the culinary front, too. Sardinia may have its bottarga and sea urchins, but this Solent outpost has the platters of local crab and tempura marinated anchovies served at the Seaview Hotel (01983 61271; seaview-hotel.co.uk), on the north-east coast of the island. Then there is the Isle's garlic, which is celebrated at the Garlic Farm Restaurant in Newchurch.



waterfront, a Victorian townhouse given a loving makeover. Rooms deftly segue between quirky and elegant, with vintage tea sets and roll-top baths. Doubles from £295 including breakfast.

The return hovercraft fare from Southsea to Ryde starts at £27 (duration 10mins). Book at [hovertel.co.uk](http://hovertel.co.uk)

## Swap NAXOS'S LAKES AND VILLAGES for ISLAY'S CRAGGY DELIGHTS

Naxos may have sun-drenched coves galore, but Islay's lochs on a summer's day beguile in equal measure. If you only have time to visit one of the island's seven distilleries, opt for Laphroaig (laphroaig.com), producer of the only Islay malt made by royal appointment to Prince Charles. The whitewashed houses that line Port Ellen are the first things you will see when the boat chugs into dock. Push on from the fudge-coloured sands here and head to Loch Gruinart for a wild swim in the warmest waters on the island. Then hit Machir

✓ Surf's up: you are never too young to try it

Bay, on the west coast, for a stroll on its gargantuan, tufted dunes. Bed down at the Machrie (01496 302310; themachrie-links.com), with its championship golf course and vast, high-ceilinged lounges offering floor-to-ceiling views over the churning Atlantic. Doubles from £130.50 including breakfast.

The return ferry fare from Kennacraig to Islay is £14.50 (duration 2hr 10mins). Book at [calmac.co.uk](http://calmac.co.uk)

## Swap WINDSWEEP FUERTEVENTURA for TIREE'S SURFER CHIC

The buffeting winds of the most surf-friendly Balearic island attract breaker bunnies in droves, but the Tiree Wave Classic (tireewaveclassic.co.uk) - held every October in this most westerly of Inner Hebridean islands - holds its own as a place to ride the waves. Known as the Sunshine Isle, the most westerly of the Inner Hebrides benefits from the Gulf Stream and numerous crescents of deserted, sugar-white sandy beaches.

Elsewhere, spot the minke whales, dolphins and porpoises that visit Tiree's waters, while navigating past Skerryvore, a lighthouse (with museum) described by Robert Louis Stevenson as "the noblest of all deep sea lights". The surf vibe extends to the Reef Inn (07990 633953; reef-tiree.com), a chic retreat where, if you pick up some of the (scarce) island beach litter, the owners will give you a free coffee. Doubles from £145 including breakfast.

The return ferry fare from Oban to Tiree is £22 (duration 4hr). Book at [calmac.co.uk](http://calmac.co.uk)

## Swap CRETE'S HISTORICAL BEAUTY for SKYE'S GAELIC TRADITIONS

Antiquity abounds in Crete, of course, but Skye has its own - equally robust - ancient history as the epicentre for Gaelic culture. Bellow a hearty "feasgar



math" (good evening) in the village of Eilean Iarmain located in the southerly Sleat Peninsula, before experiencing a ceilidh at the Hotel Eilean Iarmain (01471 833332; eileaniarmain.co.uk).

The An Talla Dearg gallery (art-skye.co.uk), by the village pier, showcases local artists. While the entire island celebrates its Gaelic traditions with the Festival of Small Halls, in November (seal.co.uk). This week of live music across the island ends with a huge ceilidh on St Andrew's Day.

Quieter joys beckon at Mint Croft (mintcroftskeye.com), a couple of beautifully restored crofters' cottages filled with sheepskins and crisp linens, one of which has a turf-roofed smothered in wildflowers, overlooking Loch Snizort. Both cottages sleep two; four-night minimum stay from £1,320.

The return ferry fare from Mallaig to Armadale starts at £6.40 (duration 50mins). Book at [calmac.co.uk](http://calmac.co.uk). You can also drive to Skye over the bridge from the Kyle of Lochalsh to Kyleakin

## Swap THE WILDNESS OF THE AZORES for JURA'S STARK LANDSCAPES

Craggy and remote, the Azores may seem almost undiscovered at times, but Jura's quiet isolation and tricky-to-ascend peaks are just as mighty and aloof as the Atlantic islands' volcanoes. The "Paps", Jura's most striking feature, are three cone-shaped, steep-sided quartzite hills on the western side of the island. The other thing you will spot here are the deer, whose population outnumbers people by about 40 to one.

Walk the six miles to the far end of the island and you will find Barnhill, the isolated farmhouse that George Orwell held up in to write *1984*. The island's only village, Craighouse, is home to Jura's sole hotel (01496 820243; jura-hotel.co.uk), an old-school charmer with just the right amount of tweed and tartan. Rooms come with whisky-infused toiletries and the dining room serves local lamb roasts and venison

▲ Family favourite: Portelet Bay, on the south coast of Jersey

▲ Looking tropical: the Abbey Gardens in Treco, in the sun-drenched Isles of Scilly

## Swap CHILLED CAVALLIO for RELAXING RATHLIN ISLAND

Shaped like a badly chiselled boomerang, Rathlin is the only inhabited off-shore island in Ulster - a place, like Cavallo, on which to embrace the art of doing nothing. The 150-strong population shares the island with grey seals, and puffins which nest on the western cliffs. Meander past damp meadows and finish at the Manor House café (manorhouserathlin.com), for plates of lobster and lythe - the local name for pollock. There are no hotels on Rathlin, so check into Shore House (07858 730764; ballycastleandrathlinrentals.com), a sturdy Victorian-built self-catering home on the edge of Church Bay. There are three cosy bedrooms, plus chairs in the front yard, and it is just a two-minute walk to McCuaig's Bar for a pint. From £150 a night.

Return ferry fares from Ballycastle to Rathlin start at £12 (duration 25mins). Book at [rathlinballycastleferry.com](http://rathlinballycastleferry.com)

## Swap BUCCOLIC VIL for THE RURAL IDYLL OF ANGLESEY

With its tumbledown cottages, tapering, narrow roads, footpaths galore, and a feeling of being at the end of the earth, the Croatian island has much in common with the north-western head of Wales. Anglesey's 150-mile circular footpath is worth tackling, at least in part, as it meanders past precipitous headlands, sandy coves and the grey immensity of Edward I's Beaumaris Castle. Ostentatious accommodation beckons at Château Rhanfa (01248 880090; chateaurhanfa.co.uk), a Grade II-listed castle with turrets and cloisters looking out across to the crumpled peaks of Snowdonia. Doubles from £175 including breakfast.

Return train fares from London Euston to Holyhead start at £76



<p>(01983 865378; thegarlicfarm.co.uk), in its truffle risotto and king-prawn Caesar salad. North House (01983 209453; northhousecowes.co.uk) is the most demure spot on the Cowes</p>		<p>Doubles from £130 including breakfast.</p> <p><i>The return ferry fare from Tayvallich to Jura starts at £45 (duration 50 mins). Book at <a href="http://jura.passengerferry.com">jura.passengerferry.com</a></i></p>	<p>(duration 2hr, 50mins). Book at <a href="http://avantwestcoast.co.uk">avantwestcoast.co.uk</a></p> <p><i>All ferry prices are for one adult foot passenger</i></p>
--	--	--	---