

## Travel No-fly trips

**T**hese are choppy times for the ferry industry. The storm over the sacking of 800 staff by P&O Ferries rages on, with the company's crossings to Calais suspended and the renewed focus on staff wages on all lines operating out of UK ports likely to have ramifications for rival operators.

There's happier news from Portsmouth, where Brittany Ferries' new liquefied natural gas-powered Salamanca took over the Bilbao route last week, and reports from the Isle of Wight, the Isles of Scilly and the Irish Sea all point to a summer of much plainer sailing ahead.

Demand in this comeback year, when many travellers will be scrutinising their budget as closely as their carbon footprint, is set to be high (some Brittany Ferries Spain sailings are sold out for August). So don't delay. Here's a reminder of some great routes and breaks to the British Isles and further afield.

### 1 NORMANDY IN STYLE

This luxurious self-drive exploration of Normandy begins on the ferry from Portsmouth to Cherbourg, from where a slow roll through the Cotentin peninsula, swinging past Omaha Beach, brings you to the elegant Château La Chenevière. You have three nights here to enjoy local food and history, from the Bayeux Tapestry to the dairy produce of Isigny-sur-Mer, and Pegasus Bridge to Mont St Michel's salt-marsh lamb and the local Calvados. From here you move to the glitzy belle-époque Hôtel Barrière Le Normandy in Deauville for four nights. Caen, Pont L'Évêque and arty Honfleur are within striking distance, but if the sun is shining, stick to the beach.

**Details** From £1,380pp for seven nights' B&B, including ferry crossings (kirkerholidays.com)

### 2 TOUR DE NETHERLANDS

See Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, Delft and Gouda on this bargain seven-day Dutch cycling holiday, overnighting in three and four-star hotels and, but for the 46-miler on day six, pedalling between 18 and 25 miles a day on the Netherlands' superb network of mainly flat designated cycle paths. There'll be enough time to explore the five cities, and also the towns, villages and landscapes you pass en route. You can bring your own bike or rent one, upgrading to an e-bike if the Dutch landscape doesn't seem flat enough for you.

**Details** From £585pp for seven nights' B&B, departing on June 11. Hybrid bike hire £75; e-bike £135 (thenaturaladventure.com). Return ferry crossings from Dover to Calais from £128 (irishferries.com)

POKEY/GETTY IMAGES; NICOLA FERRARI/ALAMY



# 20 FABULOUS FERRY BREAKS

Ferry travel has been rocked by the P&O scandal. But it remains a great flight-free option for families whether to Spain, Flanders or the Hebrides. By *Chris Haslam*



## A WHIFF OF SEA AIR AND NOSTALGIA

JENNY COAD



P&O Ferries has behaved appallingly, its reputation, as the transport secretary Grant Shapps put it (rightly), left in tatters. Many holidaymakers (me among them) will want to show their support for the 800 sacked workers by not booking with P&O, but we shouldn't turn our backs on ferries altogether. They are a brilliant way to access Europe and islands off the UK and, for me, have a particular nostalgia that air travel simply cannot match.

For years all our family holidays began at the port of Dover. Even being directed to park very close to the car in front by someone in a high-vis jacket was a thrill — one more inch — then the race up through those narrow metal doors to

find a spot. I loved the ritual, industrial banging and clanging of doors and chains before we set off. Getting on a ferry still gives me that rush of anticipation. We're off on our holidays.

The view of the White Cliffs, the fresh air even in the drizzle... that underlying smell of painted railing. There are countless pictures of me and my sister, Felicity, on deck, windblown. Inside wasn't up to much — all swirly carpets and zero entertainment. Better, by far, to be outdoors watching the French coastline come into view.

Parents don't have to run the gauntlet that they do at the airport either. There's no tunnel of Baileys, perfume and grab-bags to navigate.

We sailed early, and that meant croissants on board (so continental) and the promise of a baguette picnic, acquired in Calais. I thought the lorry drivers' VIP lounge must be the height of luxury — although I am sure lorry drivers would tell me otherwise.

Once, we took the ferry from Portsmouth to Bilbao, an overnight trip

that my father billed as a cruise — a mis-selling that could be the reason that I have not been on a cruise since. The Bay of Biscay, as everyone knows, can be rough, and the ship was tainted by the smell of vomit. People lurched in the corridors clutching sick bags, restaurants were empty, cinemagoers rushed out of the film midway through.

But I still remember it fondly. Even sleeping in those train-seat-narrow beds. It helps that I have a strong stomach. We passed some of the time in the pool (the weather meant we were banned from deck) in the bowels of the ship. As it rolled, the water slid in and out, like our own private wave machine. The sauna was a rollercoaster. No one else was down there.

The one time the ferry let us down was on a return trip from France after a weekend in Bruges. The wind was so high that someone broke their arm holding open a car door (or so the rumour passing through the queue of vehicles went). We got the Eurotunnel home and it wasn't nearly as exciting.

### Cycling in the Netherlands, below, and the Giant's Causeway in Co Antrim, below left

Cushendall, where McCollam's Bar puts on good trad music.

**Details** From £695pp for seven nights' B&B, including transfers (macsadventure.com). Foot passenger ferry crossings from £62 return in June (stenaline.co.uk)

### 4 SLOW DOWN IN JERSEY

Just before you reach Château La Chaire, on a narrow lane along the north side of Jersey's Vallee de Rozel, you'll see a sign warning "slow squirrels crossing". Their slowness is probably due to the languid pace of life in this lovely valley, where this 19th-century manor has been transformed into an antique-filled, 14-room foodie hotel with its own pub — the Rozel — a two-minute walk

down the lane towards Rozel Bay. You could easily spend a car-free week here: Jersey's Liberty Bus No 3 connects you with St Helier, and the rest of the island is accessible from there.

**Details** From £669pp for seven nights' B&B, including

foot passenger ferry crossings arriving on July 2 (channelislandsdirect.co.uk). Car £135 extra

### 5 BURGUNDY BOOZE CRUISE

Brexit replaced almost unlimited wine imports with a pathetic personal allowance of 18 litres — or two cases — per person. On this seven-night self-drive tour of Burgundy, that 24-bottle consignment could include Vosne-Romanée Premier Cru; chardonnay from the Château de Chassagne-Montrachet; Grand Cru Chablis from Olivier Leflaive; and Pouilly-Fuissé straight from the source. They're among the 11 wineries you'll visit, tasting 54 wines, staying in some of Burgundy's loveliest hotels and travelling by chauffeured car, on e-bikes and on foot. Just remember: if you're pulled over by customs and you're even one litre over the limit, you'll be charged duty on the entire load.

**Details** From £2,266pp for seven nights' B&B, including tours, three vineyard lunches and ferry crossings (grapeescapes.net)

### 6 PYRENEAN FAMILY ADVENTURE

Disembark the ferry in Bilbao and drive four hours east via Pamplona to Romanesque Ainsa at the confluence of the Cinca and Ara rivers, loomed over by the 7,530ft ridge of the Peña Montañesa. Based in an apartment in town, you'll spend the next ten days hiking,



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