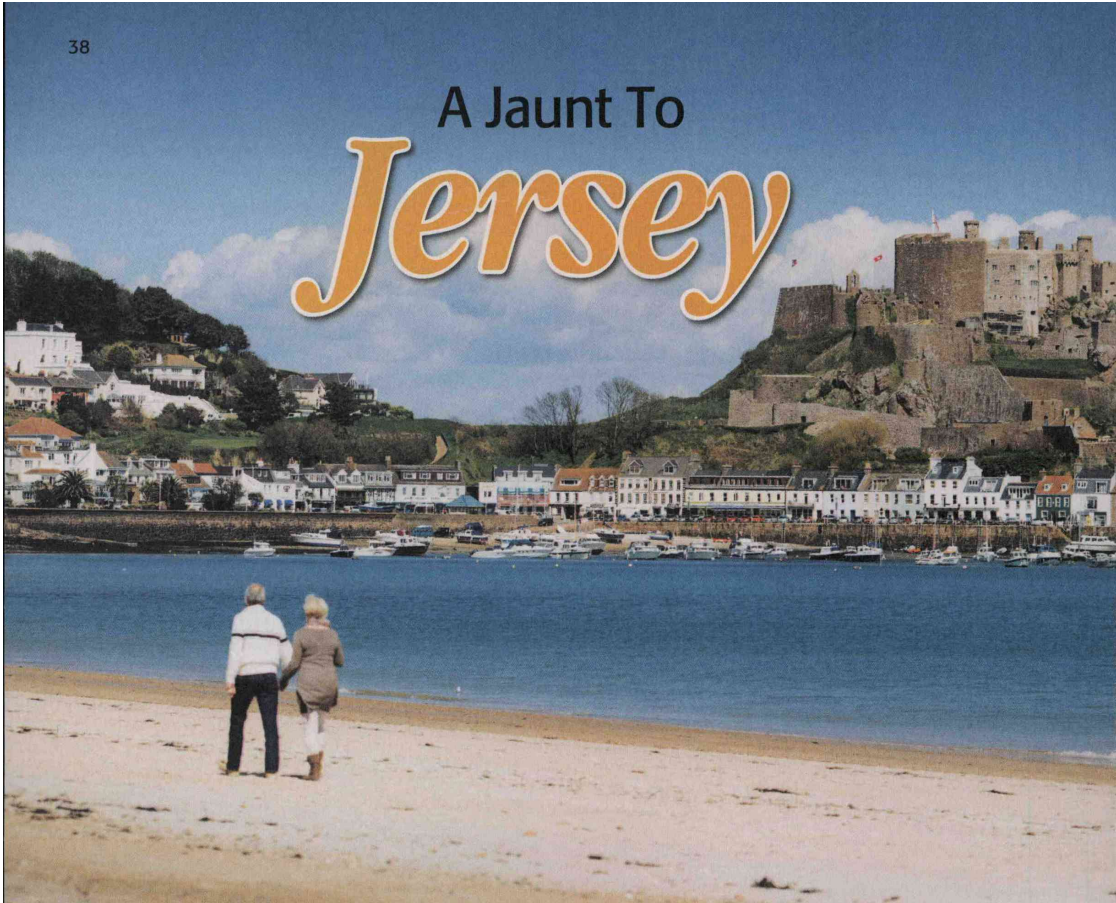


A Jaunt To *Jersey*



COME and walk on the sea bed!" Trudie, my guide for the afternoon's adventure, enthused.

It seemed too good an opportunity to miss, so I swiftly accepted her invitation.

It was my first day on Jersey, the largest and southernmost of the Channel Islands, and it was living up to its claim of being the warmest place in the British Isles.

Under clear blue skies, I donned wellies – kindly loaned to me by Trudie – as I prepared to venture out across the significant stretch of coastline at La Rocque, situated on the island's south-eastern tip.

Jersey has one of the world's largest tidal ranges, and at low tide the island nearly doubles in size.

The ebbing and flowing

Richard Webber extols the natural beauty of the largest of the Channel Islands.

create an ever-changing backdrop as the island transforms from turquoise bays to rocky, lunar-like landscapes.

But that's not all. This twice-daily occurrence also creates low water habitats for rare sea creatures like ormers, a prized delicacy in many cultures.

The massive tide changes mean walking offshore is only advisable if you have knowledge of the area and its dangerous fast tides.

As I didn't, it was reassuring to explore with a local expert like Trudie, whose company, Jersey Walk Adventures, organises regular theme-based walks.

It wasn't long before we'd left the sandy beach where

families built sandcastles and relaxed in the afternoon sun.

Trudie and I, meanwhile, were heading out to explore Europe's largest rocky intertidal zone.

It didn't take me long to understand why people describe this corner of Jersey as resembling a moonscape at low tide.

We passed jagged rocks, gullies and sandbars and stopped to stare into rock pools.

"Where we're standing now will be thirty feet under water at high tide," Trudie explained.

She truly was a walking encyclopaedia when it came to the ocean and marine life in this part of

the world.

"There is such a wealth of nature here," she said, turning over a rock.

Clinging to the underside was a tiny, chubby starfish.

"That's a cushion starfish."

Apparently, all cushion starfish are born male, but develop into females when they grow beyond a certain size.

Although they're found in rock pools, they also take occasional deep dives to the sea bed.

At La Rocque, the tide retreats more than two miles. On the horizon, I noticed a tower.

"That's Seymour Tower," Trudie, who organises overnight stays at the stone building, replied.

Built in 1782 following the Battle of Jersey, it was used as a guard tower against French attacks.

Thirty were due to be



Mediaeval Mount Orgueil Castle stands imposingly on Jersey's east coast.

A reminder of Jersey's wartime history.

Mount Orgueil Castle seen at high tide.

You can book a night in Seymour Tower – but don't forget your sleeping bag!

built around the island, but only 23 were erected ultimately.

There are so many interesting elements to this corner of the island.

Take Violet Bank, comprising puzzle-like gullies beyond Seymour Tower.

Here coralline algae, with its purple hue, congregate – just one of several sites around the island.

Trudie pointed out laver, which is used in rolling sushi, and took great pleasure in showing me as many types of seaweed as she could find.

Remarkably, Jersey boasts over 200 species of seaweed, all of them healthy, great to bake with or for using as condiments to bring the sea to your kitchen.

Channelled wrack and spiral wrack were just two of many shown during our

afternoon stroll on the seabed.

“You can tell the age of seaweed by the number of air sacks – this one has eleven years of growth,” Trudie said, holding up a lengthy strand.

Eventually, we reached Seymour Tower, which sleeps seven in bunk beds. You can book a night here for £350, but you'll need to bring, among other items, your own sleeping bag and food.

Perhaps I'll try it one day, but for now it's a case of returning to shore and exploring more of Jersey's delights.

The island measures just nine miles by five, and it's claimed that you're never more than 10 minutes from the sea.

Jersey's coastline and myriad beaches, which come in all shapes and sizes, are a major draw for the thousands of visitors each year, so it seemed only right to book a hotel that offered a stunning sea view.

The Atlantic Hotel sits above St Ouen's Bay, and after a busy day exploring I enjoyed nothing more than staring out at the ocean and listening to the distant sound of waves breaking over rocks.

With a coastline measuring over 40 miles, there are plenty of beaches and rocky coves to discover.

St Ouen's soon became a favourite, and I enjoyed several evening strolls along this five-mile stretch of uninterrupted sand.

St Ouen's is home to one of Europe's oldest surfing clubs and a day doesn't pass without spotting surfers enjoying the Atlantic rollers crashing on to the beach.

As well as beaches and hidden coves, the island is perfect for coastal walks.

The wild north coast is particularly special, so next morning I donned walking boots.

The energetic often trek the entire 16 miles of coastal path from the north-west to the north-eastern corner in one day.

Most people, though, split it into manageable chunks.

All along the cliff path running across this rugged part of Jersey you'll be accompanied by the roar of the powerful ocean crashing on to rocks below.

I particularly enjoyed the four-mile stretch from Bouley Bay to Bonne Nuit Bay via the evocatively named Egypt Headland.

At 375 feet above sea level, it's just short of being the island's highest point, which, incidentally, is just a few strides inland at Les Platons.

One of the challenges when visiting Jersey is trying to fit everything in to your itinerary.

Although I don't regard myself as a history buff, I do like to discover as much as possible about a destination's past – and, boy, this island has plenty of that!

Its more recent history involves German occupation during most of World War II.

After my north coast walk, I joined the throngs of tourists visiting the Jersey War Tunnels.

Between 1941 and 1944, forced labourers working in horrendous conditions dug nearly a mile of tunnels and chambers out of the rock, producing an underground network



protected from air or land attack. More history is evident in the shape of coastal fortifications dotted all around the island, dating from different periods, including World War II.

But for a glimpse into the island's more distant past, I strolled around La Hougue Bie, where I learned about Jersey's Neolithic community 6,000 years ago.

I wandered up to a mediaeval chapel sitting atop a prehistoric mound before checking out the treasures, including swords and spears, on display in the geology and archaeology museum.

As well as history, wine-making was on my agenda for the day.

Jersey may be diminutive, but what it lacks in size it makes up for in other ways, including a highly respected local wine industry.

While output may seem insignificant in commercial export terms compared to more recognised viticultural regions, the island's wine has its own fan base, particularly amongst locals.

The primary producer – with a growing reputation beyond Jersey's shores – is La Mare Wine Estate, a 20-acre plot nestled amid lush countryside in the north of the island.

Here, a blanket of vines and apple trees (a popular apple brandy is also produced) surrounds an 18th-century farmhouse.

The first vine was planted in 1972, marking the birth of Jersey's only commercial vineyard.

Before long, a distillery was added and the creation of genuine island produce, including preserves and hand-crafted confectionery, as La Mare became an increasingly popular tourist attraction.

From its nine acres of vineyards, around 20,000 bottles of still and award-winning sparkling wine are produced annually, and I had the pleasure of sampling some of their offerings while enjoying a guided tour of the winery. It was the perfect end to a fascinating day.

All too soon it was time to leave Jersey and, sadly, I didn't have enough time to see or do everything on my list. Still, that gives me a good reason to return, so roll on next time. ■

Please check latest advice before planning your trip.

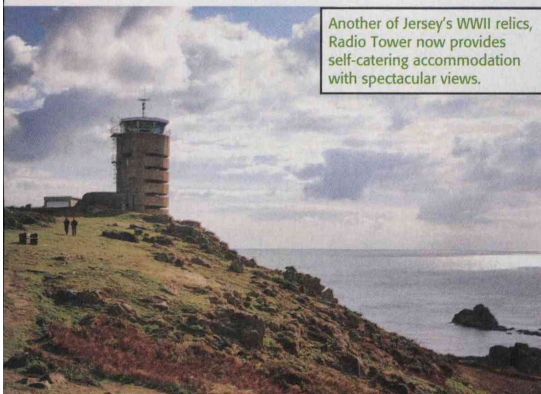
Want To Know More?

Jersey Tourist Information, Liberation Station, St Helier JE2 3AS. Tel: 01534 859000; www.jersey.com

The Atlantic Hotel, Le Mont de la Pulente, St Brelade JE3 8HE. Tel: 01534 744101; www.theatlantichotel.com

Condor Ferries Tel: 0345 609 1026; www.condorferries.co.uk

Jersey Walk Adventures Tel: 01534 853138; www.jerseywalkadventures.co.uk



Fact File

■ A British Crown Dependency, Jersey forms part of the British Isles but isn't classed as part of the UK. The island is self-governing, so has its own banking, legal systems and courts of law.

■ The island was famous for its woollen trade, with knitting a key industry. Because of Jersey wool's popularity, knitted jumpers were known as jerseys, after the island. The first recording of a jumper being called a jersey was in 1837.

■ The Jersey cow is the world's second most popular cattle breed and is found all over the world, including India, USA and New Zealand. The cows are famous for their rich, creamy milk.

■ Look closely at many older houses and you might notice a stone jutting out of the gables. Known as a witches' seat, islanders believed that providing a seat for passing witches to rest on would prevent them from falling foul of evil spells.

Getting there

You can reach Jersey by air and ferry. Flights are available from over a dozen UK airports. Richard travelled with Condor Ferries (www.condorferries.co.uk), which operate a fast ferry from Poole as well as conventional ferry services. Covering Guernsey and St Malo as well, the sailing time to Jersey is around four hours.