



**FIRST-CLASS FOOD, BOUTIQUE HOTELS AND A GROWING ART AND DESIGN SCENE ARE JUST SOME OF THE WAYS THE WEST CORNISH TOWN OF PENZANCE IS REGENERATING. GISELLE WHITEAKER EXPLORES.**

**T**ranslated from Cornish, the name Penzance means holy headland. The fishing port turned market town owes this moniker to the small rocky headland to the south of the harbour and the chapel that once stood just inland, close to the site of the present church. It seems only fitting then, that on our first visit to this part of the country, my boyfriend Elio and I choose to stay at Chapel House.

Chapel House, a stone's throw from the harbour on the listed Chapel Street, has been much-lauded since opening in 2015. It's easy to see why. Standing in the entry way of the Georgian property as new art is hung on the walls – an exhibition is opening tonight – it feels as though we are being welcomed into a friend's home. There's a double drawing room off the hallway, also bedecked in artwork, complete with board games and reading material for guest use, and we catch tantalising aromas wafting from the kitchen, where we'll be having breakfast tomorrow, as owner Susan Stuart guides us down the stairs and out the back door.

We're not staying in any of the six large double rooms in the main house. Instead, we're moving into one of the two new super suites, housed in a Georgian building across the courtyard. Susan points out a secluded corner of the garden, which would have originally supplied produce and bounty for Chapel House's kitchen, as the location for a wood-fired hot tub towards the end of the year. We haven't completed check-in yet, but we already have a reason to return.

The door of our suite opens to a ground-floor bedroom with a handcrafted bed. Hidden behind the wall against which the bedhead rests is a polished concrete en suite wet room, with a basin to one side and a separate WC on the other. The bathroom products come from Pure Nuff Stuff; the shop is just up the road. Local provenance is clearly not only about food.

English walnut floating stairs lead up to the open-plan living, dining and kitchen area, where floor-to-ceiling glass windows offer spectacular panoramic views across the harbour to St Michael's Mount. The design aesthetic here continues to fuse industrial luxury and contemporary minimalism with bright colour pops of blue and orange.

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From top down: The ground-floor bedroom in the super suite at Chapel House; splashes of colour liven up the suite living space; Chapel Street has an interesting, artsy vibe.

# GOING TO THE CHAPEL



Top: Penzance from the water. Above: The exterior of Chapel House. Middle: Breakfast at Chapel House is a casual affair. Right: St Michael's Mount in the distance.



Scallops with curried swede, coconut spinach and sweet potato pickle at The Tolcarne Inn.



Fresh fish features heavily on the menu at The Tolcarne Inn.



Spicy chicken wings at The Cornish Barn.



Pecan pie with honeycomb ice cream at The Tolcarne Inn.

There's a wood burner too, should the evening prove chilly. We pop the kettle on and settle in, content to make the space our own for what's left of the afternoon.

Evening sees us strolling along the Promenade, past Jubilee Pool – an Art Deco saltwater lido – and around the bay to Newlyn, a seaside town and fishing port that for all intents and purposes is part of Penzance. Being on the coast, the catch of the day is calling, and few dish it up fresher than Chef and Restaurateur Ben Tunnicliffe at The Tolcarne Inn. This historic maritime pub, nestled next to the sea wall, plates unpretentious dishes, listed on a chalkboard menu, that bring farm – and sea-fresh flavours to the fore. Think plump scallops paired with curried swede, coconut spinach and sweet potato pickle; breaded monkfish with guacamole and chilli jam; fillet of hake with celeriac, silverskin onion, pancetta and parsley; or sea trout with gnocchi, caponata, anchovy, chilli and rosemary and mint dressing. The pecan pie with honeycomb ice cream is a winner, too.



Above: The cosy interior of The Tolcarne Inn. Below: Jubilee Pool. © Adam Gibbard.

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Clockwise from top left: Wall of Taps by Michael Johnson; the views from Tremenheere Sculpture Garden are spectacular; Black Mound by David Nash; the Minotaur by Tim Shaw.

The culinary delights don't end at dinner. Breakfast at Chapel House is also something of a treat. An array of fruit, cereal, yoghurt and juice is spread out on the kitchen island when we arrive the next morning, supplemented by a menu of morning delicacies. The scoop of smooth avocado with a hint of spice and lime that comes with my poached egg and juicy bacon is a highlight.

We're dedicating the day to art – Penzance's art scene is blossoming, with small galleries dotted along Chapel Street, leading to The Exchange, which along with Newlyn Art Gallery, offers an internationally recognised contemporary art programme. The works are as intriguing as the building housing them. The Exchange was formerly the town's telephone exchange, now featuring a large T-shaped gallery and a striking glass façade.

From here, it's a short drive to Tremenheere Sculpture Gardens, the food offering here as renowned as the artworks. In this sheltered valley, contemporary works are scattered amidst large-scale exotic and sub-tropical planting. It's a stroll of discovery, with site-specific permanent works by artists such as James Turrell, David Nash and Richard Long harmonising with the 22-acre landscape. The views alone are astounding.

Evening finds us with tired feet, so we plod a short distance up Chapel Street to The Cornish Barn smokehouse and bar. This rustic restaurant is another mecca for fresh Cornish produce, but this time we focus on food from the land. We indulge in spicy chicken wings, tender smoked sirloin steak dripping with garlic butter, and home-smoked BBQ belly pork ribs, washing the repast down with zesty cocktails.

Penzance is often overlooked in favour of its glitzy sister, St Ives, but there are plenty of reasons it should be on your long-weekend wish list. An abundance of art, fabulous food, and the uber-funky Chapel House are just a few. ■

**INFO**

STAY AT: Chapel House: [www.chapelhousepz.co.uk](http://www.chapelhousepz.co.uk)

DINE AT: The Tolcarne Inn: [www.tolcarneinn.co.uk](http://www.tolcarneinn.co.uk)

The Cornish Barn: [www.thecornishbarn.co.uk](http://www.thecornishbarn.co.uk)

DON'T MISS: Tremenheere Sculpture Gardens: [www.tremenheere.co.uk](http://www.tremenheere.co.uk)

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