



Sunbeams and starlight on Sark

The smallest of the four main Channel Islands, Sark is located some 80 miles from the south coast of England and a mere 24 miles from the north coast of France, yet it's worlds apart from both. Giselle Whiteaker explores small-island living.

Almost before the ferry is moored, the passengers alight, disappearing through a tunnel signposted 'Welcome to Sark'. With far less certainty, my boyfriend Elio and I gaze around the dusty port, noting the tiny ticket office and the lighthouse high up on the cliff. We wander through the tunnel just in time to see a tractor tugging a carriage full of people towards the unsealed Harbour Hill Road, wisps of dust rising in its wake. These are the only motorised vehicles on the island. It's tractors, horses and carriages and bicycles from here on out.

Moments later, Andrew Miller appears with a welcome smile. "Don't worry," he says, "the tractor is coming back to take you up the hill on a private ride." Andrew, it seems, has connections. We soon discover, on an island with a population hovering around the 500 mark, everyone is connected.

Andrew gave up his city job and moved permanently to Sark only recently, but he and his family have a long history here. Now, he runs a cottage industry – literally. He is the proud owner of Clos a Jaon, a former pair of cottages and barn that have been transformed into luxury accommodation. The gorgeous Sark granite structures are bright and airy inside, the décor and furnishings well thought out to enhance the open-plan design. Andrew's next project is to launch a glamping site, with high-spec bell tents that focus on the glam element. Chez Nous, our home for the next few days, is part of his collection and features a host of thoughtful touches, like fresh eggs for breakfast and a chest containing board games.

Sark is one of those places where people leave their doors unlocked and their bikes unchained. The island's little barrel-roofed two-celled prison, the smallest jail in the world still in use, doesn't see much action. We're in Sark before peak season and it feels idyllic. It could be a tad warmer, but the sun makes an appearance in an impossibly blue sky every day, people nod in greeting as



Main: La Coupée, the narrow isthmus that links Greater and Little Sark.
Above from left: The largest beach on Sark, La Grande Greve; the gardens of the Seigneurie.

we ride past on our hired bicycles, and while not all of the restaurants have opened their doors for the season yet, there are enough dining options to ensure we won't go hungry.

Our days are filled with pedal-power exploration. Everything moves at a slower pace here, and we do too. We cycle until we run out of road and then we walk along the paths that lead to the coast. We make our way over the narrow isthmus known as La Coupée that leads to Little Sark. On both parts of the island the 'sights' are small: a Buddhist carving on a rock; a circle of stones called Sark Henge; a tidal pool on the edge of the ocean; the remnants of an old silver mine. The views, however, are immense. Rocky cliffs plunge to a cobalt sea, birds hover on the breeze, and blue and yellow wildflowers paint forest paths. The island is looking for a dairy farmer. Views like this make me wish I knew more about cows.

One afternoon, we have tea and cake with the Seigneur – Sark's head of state and a vestige of the island's feudal past. Seigneur Christopher Beaumont, the 23rd Seigneur, and his wife Sarah are delightfully down to earth and while they are not blind to the island's foibles, they have a clear affection for its laid-back ways. They are busy building an amphitheatre in the back yard of the Seigneurie near the walled garden, bringing opera to the island, and they have ideas for promoting Sark to a broader audience. Their enthusiasm is infectious. When I ask how immigration to Sark works, the Seigneur says, "Just move here."

Later that night, we take a seat at the fine-dining restaurant at Stocks Sark, which has a heavy focus on fresh local produce. 'Sark local' is defined as being sourced

from within a five-mile radius of the hotel, incorporating the exclusive three-mile territorial waters around Sark and the hotel's own market garden, 250 metres from the back door of the kitchen. We feast on Sark lobster and cauliflower bisque, hand-dived Guernsey scallops, and Sark lamb and line-caught turbot, finishing off with a dark chocolate brownie and salted caramel fondant. The island certainly provides.

Cycling home, with only small headlamps to light our way – there are no street lights on Sark – the cool air on cheeks flushed with wine is exhilarating. It's a clear night and thousands of stars sparkle overhead – Sark was designated as the World's first Dark Sky Island in January 2011 and with no light pollution, the sky seems endless. Enya wrote an album about it called 'Dark Sky Island', but the question is whether she ever really visited. If she didn't, she missed out.

All too soon, it's time for us to leave. Reluctantly closing the door of Chez Nous, we stroll to the harbour. Waiting for the boat, Andrew tells us of a local legend that says if you throw a flower into the wake of the ferry as you leave, you'll return to Sark. He hands us two perfectly formed yellow blooms and leaves the rest to us. Once onboard, the ferry swings around in a wide arc, preparing to trace a path to Guernsey. We slowly count to three and cast our floral wishes into the sea. ■

Stay at: Clos a Jaon www.closajaonsark.com

Eat at: Stocks Sark www.stockshotel.com

Visit: La Seigneurie Gardens www.laseigneuriegardens.com

Don't miss: Caragh Chocolates www.caraghchocolates.com

For more information: Isle of Sark www.sark.co.uk



From top left: Clos a Jaon; Sark's coastline offers spectacular views; all of the cottages have stylish socialising spaces.

To live the good life on one of the Channel Islands, look no further than these gorgeous properties in Jersey:



St Brelade, Jersey

This unique, 4,300 square-foot detached property is located in a quiet, picturesque area above Ouaisne, boasting lovely sea views over St Brelade's Bay. Approached through electric gates, this beautifully renovated home is presented in immaculate condition, with high-quality finishes throughout.

At the heart of the home is a spacious open-plan kitchen/living and dining room with sliding patio doors out onto the terrace and pool area. The accommodation also includes an additional living room with wood-burning stove, utility room, study, three-bedroom suites on the ground floor and an impressive master suite, which occupies the entire first floor and features a large en suite bathroom, dressing room, private balcony and air conditioning.

Price: £4,600,000

Grouville, Jersey

Set over three floors measuring over 5,600 square feet, this beautifully presented, three-bedroom detached family home is set on the east coast beachfront, with magnificent sea views encompassing Mont Orgueil Castle and the Seymour Tower.

The modern and spacious kitchen has all the mod cons you could need and opens onto a hexagonal dining room, specifically designed to maximise the breathtaking sea and coastal views. The sitting room is bathed in light with full-length windows and doors opening onto the decked terrace.

The property is approached through electric gates, and to the rear of the house is a beautiful, low-maintenance, sun-trap courtyard. The front terrace features sea views and a secure gate allowing direct beach access.

Price: POA



St Helier, Jersey

This contemporary four-bedroom house is located in an elevated position along the top of Westmount. The home offers stunning panoramic views across the town and St Aubin's Bay, including Elizabeth Castle, yet it is within convenient walking distance of St Helier's shops and amenities.

The property has been designed to blend with the surrounding environment and it is positioned along the ridge of the escarpment, arranged internally to take full advantage of the views. The living accommodation extends out onto open terraces, connecting the interior and exterior. The energy-efficient home also features a rainwater harvesting system for external irrigation, low-energy lighting throughout, energy-efficient underfloor heating and solar panels for heating water.

Price: £1,845,000

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