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Priceless

WYFA The

SWANSEA'S LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

WHAT'S A
NAUTICAL
GIG?

FIND OUT IN LIZ BARRY'S
PHOTO FEATURE ON THE
SCILLY ISLES
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Travel with Liz Barry



THE ISLES OF SCILLY



A short plane journey from mainland UK, a leisurely ferry crossing or for the more adventurous a helicopter flight, will transport you to a different time and place where life is slower, skies seem endless and the sea shimmers across deserted white sandy beaches.

There is no foreign currency to figure out or a strange new dialect to master. Where have I landed you may ask? On the Isles of Scilly, a destination I had long been inquisitive about and was finally going to discover.



Pic above: rowing boat on St. Martin's Island

lifestyle & LEISURE

The Isles of Scilly form an archipelago of five inhabited islands and numerous small islets (around 140 in total) just 28 miles off the coast of Cornwall at Lands End. Fishing, farming and tourism make up the island's economy. Beautiful gardens, rugged coastline, lots of water sports and wildlife offer a destination for all to enjoy.

Everyone arrives on St Mary's. You can choose to stay here and explore the other islands by a daily boat service or stay on one of the other inhabited islands. St Mary's is the largest of the islands,

two and a half miles wide and three quarters long. Hugh Town – (yes this is a place and not a person) has several pubs serving good local food and there are plenty of fish dishes on the menu at cafes and restaurants. There are gift shops and galleries. Along Silver Street I came across local artist Steve Sheris painting in his studio, bold graphic work, vivid colours of rowing boats known as Gigs, Oyster Catchers and stormy seas that capture the essence of the islands.



Pic above: Where everyone arrives, Hugh Town - St. Mary's

continues over ▶



Artist at work



Bus tours

◀ Along Hugh Street (yes, a street and not a person) is the Tourist Information Office where the helpful staff can advise you where to eat and sleep, ranging from hotels, bed and breakfast to self catering accommodation. I was staying on the island for the best

built wooden rowing boats. From mid April to September on Wednesday evening ladies race and on Friday it is the men's turn. Outside there is a lovely terraced area overlooking the quay where you can indulge in afternoon tea. And if that doesn't stave off your hunger the restaurant boasts excellent views as you relax over dinner and sample locally caught fish and other fresh regional produce.

For my last few days I chose a bed and breakfast, the Lyonesse Guest House, a Grade II listed building. My room had a sea view; I could lie in bed and watch the red, blue and green splashes of coloured fishing boats bobbing on the waves anchored off the harbour wall. I couldn't have wished for more attentive hosts. Along with the usual choices of breakfast cereal their homemade granola was a scrumptious way to start the day. And their kitchen Aga also proved invaluable for drying my clothes after one very wet boat trip.

Most people enjoy walking around the Island. You don't encounter a lot of traffic, but if you prefer to cycle there is a bike hire shop. For a gorgeous view I strolled up to Garrison Hill where you can look out to sea, across town beach and walk around the Ramparts. It is also the unique setting for the Star Castle Hotel built in 1593, (during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, for the defence of Scilly Islands), which boasts a Dungeon bar where over 400 years ago some of the most notorious prisoners in the country were held. Nautical paintings and ancient seafaring memorabilia hang on the rugged stone walls. Whilst candle light flickers and you soak up the atmosphere of the surroundings you start to believe the rumours that it is apparently haunted.



Wildflower hedges

About twenty minutes walk from Hugh Town through wildflower hedged lanes you arrive in Old Town, there is a pub, several cafes, artist's studios, a sandy cove and a church. In the graveyard lays the final resting place of former Prime Minister Harold Wilson. Small holdings offer vegetables, fresh eggs, honey, jams and chutney for sale at road side stands with no sales person in sight -- only an honesty box for payment.

I wanted to explore the other islands as I had been told they all offered a different experience. The St Mary's Boatmen's Association provides the service between the islands. Trips are planned each morning depending on the tides and weather conditions and written up on boards throughout the town and on the quay.

After paying for my ticket at the stone kiosk I strolled along the quay to find my boat. First thing in the morning it is a hive of activity as walkers, photographers and day trippers make their way to the island of choice. There are also boat trips to the uninhabited islands such as Annet or Samson to bird watch, observe the seals or glimpse the colourful puffin.



Boats moored in the harbour - St Mary's



Hugh Town - St Mary's



Mens Gig crew



Ladies Gig crew



Tregarthen's Hotel - St Mary's



Wildflower hedges

part of a week and spent a relaxing weekend in the Tregarthen's Hotel which offers unrivalled sea views and a great location just a stone's throw from the Quay.

A spacious lounge, comfy sofas and large picture windows reveal the ever changing moods of the sea. And a good vantage point to see the Gig crews strenuously rowing in training for the Gig racing, a favourite pastime of the islanders. The gigs are up to 32 feet in length and are traditionally



Tresco Island fishing boat



Tresco Island

On the island of Tresco I wandered at leisure through the Abbey Gardens which date back to 1834. The garden is laid out according to the native land of the plants, a journey which takes you across Australia, Mexico, South Africa the Mediterranean and onto South America amongst others. The collection contains over 4,000 specimens; the Gulf Stream creates the ideal condition

for these tropical species to flourish. Throughout the gardens there are sculptures, terraces and the Valhalla Museum which includes 28 figureheads from ancient shipwrecks most of which come from around the Isles of Scilly.

After a long walk I headed to the New Inn, known on Scilly as having one of the best selections

of real ales on the islands. I sat in the garden and listened to a local group Six Wet Fish play a selection of songs as it happened to be the weekend of the Scilly Folk Festival. The atmosphere was of a summer party as children and parents danced between the tables of the patio and gardens and the sun shone making it the ideal way to enjoy a Sunday afternoon.



Flowers at Abbey Gardens



Tresco Island



Figureheads at Valhalla Museum



Abbey Gardens

lifestyle & LEISURE

Over the next few days I visited St Agnes to sample the delicious homemade ice cream on Troytown Farm, walk through the maze and meander through the patch work of bulb fields, also photographing the striking stone stacks that appear as if by magic along the deserted coves.



At St Martin's, a tranquil place with unspoilt beaches and the palest blue water, I was tempted to paddle in the shallows, but the

spring waters were still a bit chilly, so the experience was short. Instead I searched along the shore for brightly coloured shells and watched the sailing boats pass by. There is one hotel and a pub looking out on uninhabited islands that sit as a backdrop for magnificent sunsets.

The only other inhabited island is Bryher and on my visit there I uncovered a local connection – I'll tell you about that another time.

St. Martin's Island



FACT FILE

Accommodation

Many thanks to Tregarthen's Hotel – www.tregarthens-hotel.co.uk for their hospitality. Liz also stayed at Lyonesse Guest House e: lyonessee-scilly@tiscali.co.uk

Getting There

Many thanks to Skybus for organising flights. Direct flight from Bristol Airport by Skybus daily schedule from May-September, less frequent schedule in April. www.islesofscilly-travel.co.uk www.islesofscillyhelicopter.com St Mary's Boatmen's Association www.scillyboating.co.uk

General Information

Isles of Scilly Tourist Information Centre www.simplyscilly.co.uk

Abbey Garden Tresco www.tresco.co.uk www.star-castle.co.uk

The Gig sheds can be found at Porthemellon beach, view the boats close up and discover their history as they were used for carrying cargo, as lifeboats and even smuggling. www.scillygigs.com

Bus tours of St Mary's www.islandrover.co.uk

