

# THE BEST OF THE BRITISH ISLES

There's something special about travelling to an island, it feels like the ultimate escape from the modern world, somewhere to reconnect with nature and slow down the pace of life.

**H**UNDREDS OF ISLANDS dot the coastline of Britain; they're perfect for those who love the outdoors, and you don't need to leave the trappings of comfort behind, with plenty of luxurious accommodation to choose from. Here's a selection of some of the best of the British Isles where you can discover ancient history, forgotten cultures, fantastic wildlife and incredible views.

## SKYE

The largest and most northerly of the Inner Hebrides, Skye offers truly breath-taking scenery with the towering peaks of the mountains known as The Cuillin, the mirror-like lochs, heather-clad moorland and rugged sea cliffs. It's a fabulous spot for wildlife watching too, with sea eagles and golden eagles soaring majestically overhead and seals, otters and whales in the waters around the island. Spend time on Skye and you'll return home refreshed and invigorated.

**Do:** Go wild swimming in the fairy pools at Glen Brittle - magical pools of crystal clear, sparkling green, very cold water. ✨ Visit Dunvegan Castle, home to the Clan MacLeod, and Armadale Castle, home to Clan Donald. ✨ Take a boat trip from Elgol into Loch Coruisk for spectacular views of the Cuillin. ✨ Visit the Talisker whiskey distillery. ✨ Feeling adventurous? Try a spot of sea kayaking. **Stay:** For beautiful self-catering accommodation there's the architect designed Skye Shed with spectacular views of the Cuillin. [skyeshed.com](http://skyeshed.com) The Cabin marries 5-star luxury with modern design, or, for a romantic retreat for two, there's An Airigh. [thecabin-skye.co.uk](http://thecabin-skye.co.uk), [anairigh.co.uk](http://anairigh.co.uk). For a luxurious hotel, try Kinloch Lodge, with its renowned Michelin-starred restaurant, or, for a stylish bed and breakfast, there's The Spoons. [kinloch-lodge.co.uk](http://kinloch-lodge.co.uk), [thespoonsonskye.com](http://thespoonsonskye.com).

**Eat:** The Three Chimneys is a gourmet restaurant set in an old crofter's cottage at the side of a loch at Colbost. Luxury rooms are available too. The Loch Bay Restaurant at Stein serves contemporary Scottish food with a French ►

*Words: Louise Curley*



FAIRY POOLS AT GLEN BRITTLE © KENNY LAM/VISITSCOTLAND



influence. The Red Roof Gallery Café at Holmisdale is a great place for coffee, cake and light lunches.

**Travel:** It's a 5–6 hour drive from Glasgow Airport and a 2 hour drive from Inverness Airport. Trains run from Inverness to the Kyle of Lochalsh and from Fort William to Mallaig, both connecting with the sleeper trains from London Euston. The quickest route if driving is via the Skye Bridge.

## LEWIS/HARRIS

Lewis and Harris are situated in the Outer Hebrides, a chain of islands 40 miles off the north-west coast of Scotland. They actually make up one island with the north known as Lewis and the south as Harris. It's a remote, windswept location steeped in history and culture, and a place where you get a sense of traditional island life – Sundays are still observed as special days, with no ferry crossings, and many shops close. The landscape of Lewis is flat moorland and

peat bogs, while Harris is mainly rocky with incredible Caribbean-like beaches such as Luskenlyre.

**Do:** ✱ Buy the world famous Harris Tweed. ✱ Explore the beaches along the west coast of Harris. ✱ Visit the Callanish standing stones. ✱ Go in June or July to see the spectacular machair – vast expanses of wildflowers stretching down to the beaches. ✱ The Hebridean Celtic Festival is held from 13–16 July. **Stay:** It may be remote but there are some fabulous places to stay, whether it's architect grand designs or traditional island homes. Stay on the Borve Estate in the luxuriously refurbished hunting lodge. borvelodge.com The incredible sea views, retro furnishings and eco-friendly design of the Sound of Harris make this a perfect island escape. soundofharris.co.uk Or stay in Blacksheep House, Grand Designs House of the Year in 2008. blacksheephouse.co.uk If you want to stay in a hotel, Scarista House has pretty rooms and good food.

scaristahouse.com

**Eat:** There's the Boatshed in Stornaway, the Skoon Art Café at Geocrab, and Croft 36 will deliver freshly prepared meals, using local produce, to your cottage.

**Travel:** Fly to Stornaway on Lewis from Glasgow, Inverness or Edinburgh with Flybe. flybe.com For details of ferry crossings and tickets, including island hopper passes, contact Calmac Ferries. (calmac.co.uk, visitouterhebrides.co.uk)

## TRESCO

Tresco is the second largest of the Isles of Scilly, a cluster of islands lying 30 miles off the south west tip of Cornwall. Bathed by the warming influence of the Gulf Stream these islands have a Caribbean feel to them, with the turquoise sea lapping the white sandy beaches. Exotic plants thrive in the mild climate, adding to the feeling that you're much further from Britain than you actually are. Tresco oozes luxury and sophistication and

the car-free nature of the island means tranquillity is easy to find.

**Do:** ✱ Visit the Abbey Gardens, 17 acres of sub-tropical paradise and home to plants from as far afield as Burma, Brazil and South Africa. ✱ Catch a boat to the other islands of St Mary's, St Martin's, Bryher and St Agnes.

✱ Learn to sail. ✱ Go beachcombing on the beaches at Pentle and Appletree. ✱ Swim with seals.

**Stay:** Accommodation on the private island is offered in a variety of cottages from traditional stone-built houses to contemporary wood-clad New England style properties. Guests can use the facilities of the Flying Boat Club with its pool, spa and restaurant.

**Eat:** There's the laid-back Ruin Café with its wood-fired oven, the Flying Boat restaurant or the New Inn, the local pub. The Tresco Store provides tasty goodies if you want to cook yourself and, if you don't, offers a range of meals prepared daily by the island's chefs.

**Travel:** Skybus flies from Newquay, Exeter and Land's End to neighbouring St Mary's. The Scillonian ferry sails from Penzance to St Mary's. Book travel directly with the Tresco island office for an all-inclusive package which includes transfers from St Mary's to the island. (visitislesofscilly.com, tresco.co.uk)

## BURGH ISLAND

Burgh Island is a small tidal island off the south coast of Devon. Attached to the mainland by a sandy beach at low tide you can travel to the island at high tide in the magnificent sea tractor – the only one of its kind in the world. The big draw to the island is the art deco hotel. Step back in time at the Grade II listed building which has been restored to its 1930s glamour, when the likes of Noel Coward and Winston Churchill visited. It was also a haunt of Agatha Christie, inspiring several of her crime novels.

**Do:** ✱ Bathe in the Mermaid Pool, the natural sea water swimming pool. ▶

## THE COAST IN PICTURES



**Tresco:** the second largest of the Isles of Scilly, a cluster of islands lying 30 miles off the south west tip of Cornwall.



**St Michael's Mount:** Rising out of the glistening water of Mount's Bay off the west Cornwall coast.



**Sark:** A car-free island only three and a half miles long by one and a half miles wide, 80 miles south of the English coast.



**Skye:** Skye offers truly breath-taking scenery with the towering peaks of the Cuillin Mountains.



OSBORNE HOUSE © ENGLISH HERITAGE

\* Take a trip on the sea tractor. \* Sip cocktails in the glass-domed bar and dress up in evening gowns or black ties for the formal dining. \* Enjoy a spa treatment. \* Clamber over the rock pools.

**Stay:** The Burgh Island Hotel offers the only accommodation on the island. Stay in one of the magnificent rooms named after stars who stayed there and be surrounded by art deco opulence.

**Eat:** The hotel sources as much food as possible from within a 30-mile radius. It even has an island polytunnel where it grows salad leaves and herbs. You can never be over-dressed for dinner in the main restaurant, but you can also eat in the less formal Captain's Cabin or the Ganges restaurant and the Pilchard Inn hosts curry nights on a Friday.

**Travel:** There's a helipad on the island if you want to arrive in style. The nearest stations are Totnes and Plymouth with direct services from London. It's about a 4 hour drive from London. Cars can be parked on the mainland. (burghisland.com)

## ISLE OF WIGHT

One of the most accessible islands off the coast of Britain, with the enviable title of the sunniest place in the country.

Half of the island is classed as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and there are miles of stunning coastline and beaches. Discover hidden coves, secluded beaches and pretty villages, like Bembridge, where you'll find one of Britain's leading art galleries, Island Fine Arts. The Isle of Wight has long been a favourite for traditional seaside family holidays, but a variety of music festivals, trendy new places to eat and cool places to stay mean it's developed into a hip place for a break.

**Do:** \* Walk the glorious golden beaches - Ryde and Appley have wide expanses of sand with views of the Solent. \* Take the chairlift to see the iconic Needles Rocks and lighthouse. \* Go fossil hunting at Compton beach and Yaverland - the Isle of Wight is one of the best places in Europe to find fossils.

\* Visit during Cowes Week. The sailing regatta was first established in 1826 and is held this year from 6-13 August. (To find out more visit [aamcowesweek.co.uk](http://aamcowesweek.co.uk)) \* Visit the country retreat of Queen Victoria at Osborne House.

**Stay:** The Hambrough offers boutique accommodation with coastal views. (thehambrough.com)

The George is a 17th century townhouse set on the water's edge of the harbour town of Yarmouth.

(thegeorge.co.uk)

Stay in the Gate House or Pavillion Cottage at Osborne House or in an apartment at Carisbrooke Castle.

(english-heritage.org.uk)

**Eat:** The George celebrates island produce on its menu. The Pond Café in Bonchurch sells delicious cakes and breads and the Priory Bay Oyster Restaurant specialises in fish and seafood.

**Travel:** Less than 2 hours drive from London. Ferries sail from Portsmouth, Lymington and Southampton. ►

## Your own private island...

Indulge. Relax. Unwind.

Tresco is a family-owned private island in the Isles of Scilly archipelago, just a stone's throw from the Cornish coast.

Miles of white sand beaches. Luxurious holiday cottages. Fine eateries. A world famous garden. An award winning spa. A world apart.

*Quote 'Exclusive' for a complimentary bottle of Prosecco on arrival for stays of one week or longer booked before 31/10/2016*



ISLES  
OF  
Scilly

*The islands' autumnal beauty awaits...*

Order your free 2016 Guide  
[www.visitislesofscilly.com](http://www.visitislesofscilly.com)



Isle of  
Wight

## PURE ISLAND HAPPINESS

"An escape within the British Isles, where stunning scenery, family fun and sophisticated relaxation are just a short ferry ride away."

*From a recent Island visitor.*

Come abroad to the Isle of Wight. [visitisleofwight.co.uk](http://visitisleofwight.co.uk)



ST MICHAEL'S MOUNT © MIKE NEWMAN WWW.OCEANIMAGE.COM

### ST MICHAEL'S MOUNT

St Michael's Mount, a granite pile with a castle perched on top, rises out of the glistening water of Mount's Bay, off the west Cornwall coast. Based on the island abbey of Mont St Michel in Brittany, the buildings date from the 12th century with some later 17th century additions. It's been the home to the St Aubyn family since the English Civil War and only 30 people live on the island permanently. For visitors it's a short walk across the cobbled causeway when the tide is low; if the tide is in, jump on board one of the ferries from Marazion.

**Stay:** The Godolphin Arms in Marazion overlooks the Mount and has pretty coastal-inspired décor. Sip your drink on the terrace with the setting sun and one of the most iconic views in Britain in front of you. [godolphinarms.co.uk](http://godolphinarms.co.uk)

**Do:** \* Visit the castle. \* Wander around the gardens filled with exotic plants, surely one of the most dramatic places to garden in the country.

\* Explore the village and harbour.

**Eat:** Both the Sail Loft and the Island Café serve light lunches, cakes and great coffee. On the mainland try the Chapel Rock Café in Marazion for tasty lunches and dinners.

**Travel:** The nearest station is Penzance with trains from London Paddington, the Midlands and the North. The nearest airport is Newquay. ([flybe.com](http://flybe.com), [stmichaelsmount.co.uk](http://stmichaelsmount.co.uk))

### SARK

If you want to escape modern life there are few better places than the tiny island of Sark, 80 miles south of the English coast. This car-free island, only three and a half miles long by one and a half miles wide, is a haven for wildlife, with pretty hedgerows, quaint villages and a rocky coastline. The lack of light pollution led to Sark being the first island in the world to be designated a Dark Sky Community. The pace of life here is slow. Wander the quiet lanes and listen

to birdsong or while away an afternoon, rockpooling on the beach.

**Do:** \* Visit La Seigneurie gardens – a walled garden teeming with plants which thrive in the virtually frost-free climate. \* Take advantage of the spectacular coastline by going coasteering or diving. \* See the island from a boat. \* Go stargazing. \* Take a horse-drawn carriage ride.

**Stay:** The pretty granite-built Stocks Hotel sits in a secluded valley, surrounded by mature woodland and luscious gardens. There's a heated outdoor pool, small gym, spa facilities and a terrace where food is served. ([stockshotel.com](http://stockshotel.com))

**Eat:** The Stocks Hotel, La Sablonnerie and Hathaways all celebrate local, seasonal food – expect fantastic seafood.

**Travel:** Condor Ferries operate regular services from Poole and Portsmouth to Guernsey. Alternatively you can fly to Guernsey. From here take one of the smaller boats to Sark. ([condorferries.co.uk](http://condorferries.co.uk), [flybe.com](http://flybe.com), [sark.co.uk](http://sark.co.uk)). ■