



Travel | Culture | Adventure

# Escape

TRAVEL SECTION OF THE YEAR



**KEYESKNEES**

**Chick lit queen Marian joins the Book Chat bunch**

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## We're going a bit SCILLY



**T**HE last time I visited The Scilly Isles was as a surly teenager. I remember microwave-hot jacket potatoes, lace doilies and that distinctive dampness you get on the inside of a cagoule. We played cards in the evening, except one night when we went to a photo slideshow in the village hall. It was

The once-staid Scilly Isles are now the UK's offshore foodie hot spot, says **Rachel Walker**

the late-nineties and the islands, 28 miles off Land's End, were firmly rooted in British holidaying traditions.

These southwest outcrops – a mix of pale

beaches and periwinkle blue skies – have always had an Enid Blyton-type appeal. Traditionally, it's been watercolours, walking and whist with the emphasis on teatime

rather than cocktail hour. There have been whisperings of change though: now it is crab shacks, island wine, fragrant heather honey and pop-up restaurants. Recently the islands launched Low Tide Events – a biannual sandbank feast – and last year saw the

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PIC: VISIT ISLES OF SCILLY

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There's nothing quite like posting an envy-inducing picture of your travels online, so here are some of the most jaw-dropping spots to snap in the good old US of A...

FLORIDA

Your first destination has to be the State Road 471, where you'll wind through Floridian fields and forests to the eerie beauty of Green Swamp Wilderness Preserve. You can get some surreal snaps here, then head back north to the sunny city of Stuart to capture the nearby woodland at sunset. And don't miss out on the brilliant blue water of The Florida Keys while you're in town – an amazing sight to behold, dotted with small islands and bursting with marine life.

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CALIFORNIA

Kick off your Californian adventure with a road trip on State Route 120 through the picturesque Yosemite National Park, then on to the wonder of the Tioga Pass, an awesome and dramatic mountainous landscape. After a long day of exploring – and spying on the local wildlife – head south towards the 101 Freeway and pay a visit to San Buenaventura beach for an afternoon of soaking up rays and taking a few dreamy pics of the long golden coast.

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LAS VEGAS

Make the most of the dazzling lights high above Vegas by visiting the Mandarin Bar, where you'll be able to enjoy unspoilt views of the cityscape from 23 floors up with a cheeky cocktail in hand. Then when the sun comes back up, head north to the Bellagio Hotel and photograph the world-famous fountain there. Check out the incredible landscape of the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area while you're in the area too – what a view!

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Yosemite's mountains loom over the lush forests

Oxidised iron gives Red Rock Canyon its iconic colouration

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# Culinary new wave is salty sweet

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inaugural Taste Of Scilly food festival, which is running until September 30, and serving plenty of shellfish – the perfect dish for late-season sunshine. So before autumn descends I hotfoot it to Penzance with my terrier Tonka and hop on an early ferry to make the three-hour crossing to St Mary's. It's late morning when the boat pulls into the harbour, and a hot sun hovers high. The hedgerows burst with sea fennel and agapanthus swaying in a warm sea breeze, proof of the islands' unique microclimate. Giant, leathery succulents burrow out of dry stone walls and the last blots of blackberries gleam within tussles of brambles. There's no better place to admire the surroundings than on Tresco. The



Cracking: Rachel at The Crab Shack – Tonka the terrier not pictured...



**The kitchen garden highlights how the unique climate has boosted the food scene – aubergines, melons and chillies all flourish**

privately owned island is famed for its botanical gardens, built on the ruins of a Benedictine Abbey (entrance £15, tresco.co.uk). They're home to towering palms, elaborate ferns and exotica collected in the age of Victorian exploration. But it's the kitchen garden that highlights how the islands' unique climate has boosted the blossoming food scene. Aubergines, melons and chillies have all flourished on this Atlantic outcrop. 'We have long hours of sunshine, without any really cold spell,' says Emma Lainchbury, who recently moved to the islands to manage the kitchen gardens, after graduating as a trainee horticulturist. She plucks two varieties of tomatoes from head-height vines: sweet million and sun gold. They're swollen with sunlight and as sweet as their names suggest. The flavours are exotic in comparison to my memories of limp



Shelling out: Enjoy seafood dishes at the Crab Shack

lettuce and cress salads in pub ploughman's lunches. Nearby, Ruin Beach Cafe (mains from £12, tresco.co.uk) is one of the lucky recipients of the fresh produce. The rose-covered stone building opens on to a terrace overlooking the bay. Seafood platters are stacked with shellfish just-hoiked out of the Atlantic, followed by bittersweet mouthfuls of apple-cider sorbet. That afternoon I make the short hop across the bay (£9 returns to any island, scillyboating.co.uk) to Bryher for dinner at The Crab Shack (crab for two from £20, hellbay.co.uk). The old barn is packed with holidaymakers who wisely

booked ahead. It's simple but brilliant: bibs and communal tables as sea-fresh crab flies out of the marquee kitchen. Dusk falls as we get a boat home, and the sea stack rocks turn hazy blue against the night sky. With leftover wine in one hand and Tonka under the other arm, I make friends easily as we bounce across the bay. A group of us plan ways to join island life forever. The following day I meet Tom Matthews, who has done just that. He runs a campsite on Bryher with his fiancée Jo – a petite blonde born on the island. She hurtles past on a tractor, ferrying luggage from the harbour to the

new bell tents (from £50 night, bryhercampsite.co.uk). 'There are lots of young people moving here or returning,' says Jo, referring to the boom reinvigorating the islands. She cites brewers, duck farmers, ethical fishermen and friends setting up a succulent plant company. Although the honesty boxes, tattie scones and painted souvenir pebbles remain, a creative new era means jacket potatoes are out and rose geranium ice cream with Wingletang gorse flower gin are in. Doubles from £154 per night, star-castle.co.uk, ferry from £90 return, visitislesofscilly.com



Unspoiled charm: The southwestern islands have long been an attraction for tourists who make the three-hour crossing



Beach barbie: So much of the food you will enjoy in the Scilly Isles is fresh and local

## 2017'S HOT SCILLY SUPPLIERS



**Tresco Abbey Garden Honey**  
The bell heather-scented honey flies off the shelves – the last 140lb batch of it was gone in a fortnight. Tresco Abbey Garden honey, £7.50/454g, tresco.co.uk



**Holy Vale Vineyard**  
This seven-acre vineyard is making Burgundy-style reds. There are daily tastings and you can book ahead for a lobster lunch. Wine by the glass, £5, holyvalewines.co.uk



**Tanglewood Kitchen**  
Walk through the Post Office on St Mary's to find Euan Roger's deli at Tanglewood Kitchen. The Tegen Mor crab quiche (£4) is an award-winner. tanglewoodkitchen.co.uk

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