

# Oxfordshire

August 2016

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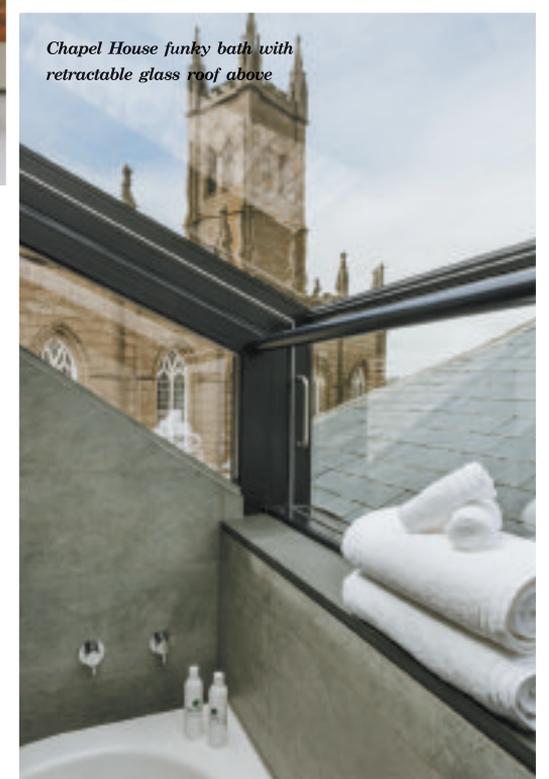
Wish you were here?

On the trail of travel and adventure in our summer special

Plus: the Friday Night Dinner stars, strolling at Stonor Park, gardening, motors, short story, making a new life overseas, Bake Off winner Nadiya Hussain... *and lots more*



*Chapel House - the elegant lounge*



*Chapel House funky bath with retractable glass roof above*

# Sunny delight

**Denise Barkley** heads west and samples the best of what this historic Cornish port has to offer

I can't say I have ever met anyone who doesn't love Cornwall - for me, it's the magnificently wild and diverse coastline where the sun, sea and sky collide in such splendour that floats my boat.

Every time I go there, and whatever the weather, the sheer beauty of this western peninsula tumbling into the vast Atlantic ocean takes my breath away.

In May, I had the chance to base myself in the historic port of Penzance on the south-facing shores of Mount's Bay - and it has so much to offer the visitor, as I found during my four-night stay when I sampled three of the town's finest guest accommodation options.

Penzance may be famous for its operatic pirates but one of the biggest lures is its mild climate. Palm trees and sub-tropical trees thrive here and a leisurely stroll along the promenade - one of the longest in Britain - is a

must. Look out across the bay to St Michael's Mount and, if you have never visited, walk across the granite causeway at low tide, or take a boat to enjoy this fairytale island castle.

On your promenade walk you are likely to pass the refurbished and reopened Jubilee Pool, a vast open-air lido constructed in the 1930s and just the place for a bracing dip. The harbour is the place to book a boat or fishing trip, or to board the ferry to the Scilly Isles, the peaceful and unspoiled archipelago 35 miles off the Cornish coast.

Just a short distance from the seafront seek out Morrab gardens, landscaped in Victorian times and turned into a municipal park in 1889. It's the perfect place to relax and watch the world go by.

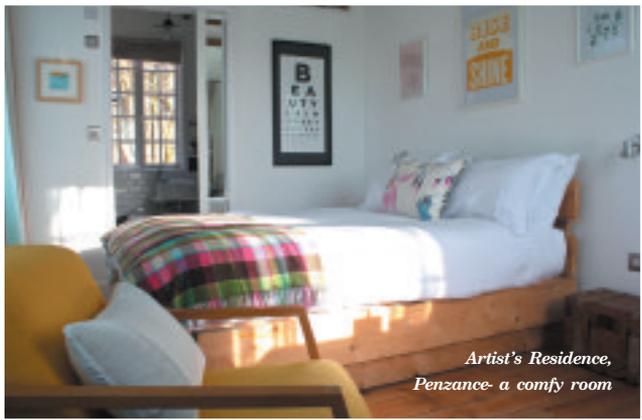
With its art galleries, booksellers and new age shops, Penzance town centre has a pleasant Bohemian vibe. Chapel Street, lined with gracious 18th-century

houses, is particularly full of character with ancient pubs like the Admiral Benbow, which features in the first few pages of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, and the home of Maria Branwell, mother of the Bronte sisters.

An impressive statue bears tribute to Penzance's greatest son, the revered scientist Sir Humphry Davy - inventor of the Davy lamp, a revolution in the mining industry which vastly reduced the number of underground explosions.

Just around the corner, and in stark contrast, you will find the ultra-

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*Artist's Residence,  
Penzance - a comfy room*

From page 39

contemporary Exchange Gallery where exhibitions feature international works alongside those from the thriving local art scene.

You don't have to go far from Penzance to find fantastic beaches - Perranuthnoe, Lamorna Cove, Keneggey and Praa Sands are lovely.

Penzance is a foodies' paradise, with lots of choice. The fish restaurants were my favourite and I sampled a couple. At The Bakehouse on Chapel Street the tempura soft-shell crab and Helford mussels were tasty choices, while at The Shore, a contemporary new restaurant with a seafood menu based on the best fish available that day, renowned chef Bruce Rennie wowed me with mackerel and monkfish.

Fortunately, I had a couple of days' warm weather so took the opportunity get out and about. This was one section of the Cornish coastline I had never visited, and it is staggeringly beautiful. The highlight was the rugged, breathtakingly wild coastline of the St Just region - the Cornish Mining World Heritage site. It's featured in the remake of the blockbuster TV series *Poldark* and you can pick up and follow a guide to the locations that "star" in the series.

I wandered along the cliffs, strewn with the remains of tin mines bearing lasting testament to those who laboured in them. A must-see are the engine houses of Botallack Mine clinging precariously to the rocks above the crashing waves, and at Levant mine there is a restored steam winding engine in the care of the National Trust.

I drove leisurely towards Land's End, stopping at some of the fabulous coves and bays dotted along this scenic coastline. Stand-outs for me were Porthgwarra beach, a rocky cove with a spooky man-made tunnel, and the sweeping surfing beaches at Sennen, the most westerly village in Britain.

And I dropped in at Cornwall's world-famous open-air Minack Theatre,

clinging spectacularly to a tiered granite cliff overlooking the golden beach and blue seas of Porthcurno Bay. This theatre is quite something, and I have vowed to book tickets to see a production there next time I'm in these parts.

Just outside Penance, at Gulval, is Tremeneheere Sculpture Gardens - hidden among the plants in this exotic valley are some magnificent sculptures and it's definitely worth a visit.

So where did I rest my head during our Cornish sojourn? Well I enjoyed the best of what Penzance has to offer, starting with a couple of nights at Chapel House, a fairly new (it has been open for just over a year) addition to the visitor accommodation scene.

And it made an auspicious start, being named best B&B in the Sunday Times' "Ultimate 100 British Hotels 2015", which was quite a jolt - pleasant, of course - for owner Susan Stuart, who has quite obviously poured her heart and soul into creating this chic six-bedroom guest house. I was struck by the light-filled and sublimely relaxing interior, where ultra-modern furnishings tone with Susan's carefully selected antiques - many passed down her family.

The rooms are artistically stylish and beautifully co-ordinated, with quirky

touches such as the feature bath in one of the rooms under the eaves where the glass roof slides back to allow the bather to wallow under the stars. Absolutely delightful.

My room was elegant and comfortable with views across the bay to St Michael's Mount, and a simply huge bath which took up the majority of the bathroom!

Guests take breakfast together, informally, around tables in Susan's gorgeous kitchen. She and her staff prepare your bacon and eggs, omelette or whatever your desire, in front of you, and it makes for a convivial start to the day.

Day three and I moved onto my next stop - a very short hop just across Chapel Street to Artist Residence, a fun boutique retreat run by a young and



*Penzance lido  
Picture: Mike Newma*

## THE ESSENTIALS

*Chapel House, Chapel Street, Penzance, call 0781 0020 617, [chapelhousepz.co.uk](http://chapelhousepz.co.uk)  
Artist Residence, Chapel Street, Penzance, call 01736 365664, [artistresidencecornwall.co.uk](http://artistresidencecornwall.co.uk)  
Blue Seas B&B, Regent Terrace, Penzance, call 0173 6364 744, [blueseashotel-penzance.co.uk](http://blueseashotel-penzance.co.uk)  
For more information about holidaying in Cornwall visit the website: [visitcornwall.com](http://visitcornwall.com)*



*The Scarlet - room with a view*

## TRANQUILITY GUARANTEED

I have the perfect antidote to the strains of everyday life – a relaxing sojourn at The Scarlet in Cornwall. We were only there for one night, but the peace and solitude left me totally chilled.

I was blown away by the loveliness of the location, overlooking Mawgan Porth beach near Newquay. Apparently, actress Dawn French was married here, second time around, a few years ago, writes Denise Barkley.

All the rooms have breathtaking sea views and it was so nice to sit on our own private patio and watch the sun set slowly over the waves. We were there in mid-May and the weather was warm and sunny – what a treat.

The Scarlet is a child-free zone, so tranquility is guaranteed. Those with youngsters can stay at the nearby Bedruthan Steps hotel, owned and run in similar style by the same family.

There's nothing stuffy about The Scarlet and if you like your hotels hip and trendy, then this one ticks the box. Its proud of its eco-friendly credentials, but doesn't stint on great design and contemporary décor. Supreme comfort is guaranteed and a friendly bunch of staff provide great laidback service.

We were warmly greeted in the trendy desk-free reception and shown to our room – a tray of tea and homemade biscuits arrived swiftly. Freshly brewed tea and coffee is delivered when you want it, at no extra cost.

Our room had all the trappings a discerning guest requires, from comfy beds with luxury linen to tasteful blonde wood furnishings and monsoon shower.

We went for a walk along the clifftop, noting the reed-fringed outdoor pool, wood-decked sunbed areas, and two wood-fired hot tubs overlooking the sea. I just wish they had mentioned you had to book and pay to use them – that would have avoided an embarrassing moment when a staff member mentioned we shouldn't be in them.

Instead, we swam in the indoor pool, followed by a gentle steam and rather more fierce sauna. The spa here is renowned and specialises in Ayurvedic "journeys", with tented treatment rooms and pods suspended in the dark for "deep relaxation" and a glass sea-facing roof for "light relaxation".

We really enjoyed our stay – from cocktails in the bar to a delicious dinner in the scarlet-hued restaurant with its quirky knitted lampshades. My scallop starter and sea bass with violet potatoes and potted shrimps was scrumptious.

**The Scarlet Hotel, Mawgan Porth, near Newquay, call 01637 861 800, [scarlethotel.co.uk](http://scarlethotel.co.uk).**

*Seafood reigns supreme at The Shore restaurant in Penzance  
photo by Nick Hook*



friendly team. This had a very different vibe to the genteel Chapel House, but if you thrive on excellent hospitality served up in informal style then this is the place for you. The Cornish Barn is the hotel restaurant, which I thought was trying a bit too hard to be hip and trendy – okay if the food lives up to the hype, but the "tasting plates" left me cold. I thought Artist Residence could up their game on the food front.

I spent my last night in Penzance at a stand-out B&B on Regent Terrace, with splendid views of the harbour. Run by Arnaud and Fiona Ruetsch, Blue Seas is everything a good seaside B&B should be, and much more. My hosts could not have been more welcoming, friendly or helpful, and my room with supremely comfy bed and top-notch bathroom, complete with toiletries, was so much more than the average guest house. I

could easily see why Blue Seas is so popular, with guests from home and away returning year-in and year-out.

Arnaud reigns supreme in the kitchen and breakfast was simply stupendous – quite the best I've had in a long time, and in hearty portions that are enough to satiate the biggest appetite. I dined that evening in a nearby Indian restaurant, Taj Mahal. It was pelting with rain, so I was grateful it was but a short sprint from my B&B. The Taj Mahal deserves special mention because it is the best Indian restaurant I've ever visited – and, believe me, I have visited a great deal. The food was exceptional, so make sure you eat there when you visit Penzance.

There's nowhere better than Cornwall for a summer break, and Penzance makes a perfect base for your Cornish travels. Enjoy!