



## A trip to the Isles of Scilly is the perfect family escape, writes Lucy Kane

Stepping off the boat onto the white sandy beaches of St Martin's Lower Quay, with views out to tranquil green seas and uninhabited islands, we took a deep breath of the freshest air and were warmly welcomed to the sanctuary of hotel Karma St Martin's for a half-term holiday escape.

Standing in calm solitude our hotel built in traditional Cornish stone stood watch over wild unbroken vistas across the sea towards the islands of Tresco and Bryher. The natural world perfectly framed by large hotel windows set the scene for contemplative breakfasts and snoozy afternoons as we shrugged off hectic London life. Just 120 people inhabit the island of St Martin's – it remains one of the most unspoiled islands of the six inhabited Isles of Scilly. The remaining 140 uninhabited Isles are a sanctuary for wildlife, a major stopping-off point for migrating birds.

There is a magical feel to these Isles, many artists enjoy the creative haven island life offers, including Michael Morpurgo who retreated here to write more than 20 years ago. The sensational wild scenery of the Isles has become the setting for five of his children's books and we chose the children's laureate *Island Tales* for our family holiday reading.

As we explored the island we began to appreciate why so many people holiday here year after year. The mild climate and wilderness made our family walk round the island both pleasant and packed with postcard scenery. Blue skies, open

landscapes and wild seas turned our walk into a children's adventure book for our four-year-old who hates walking. We picked wild blackberries, discovered historic mazes and played on deserted beaches with glittering white sands. A half-term visit has the benefit of being off season and it was two hours before we saw any other people,



but even in peak season there is a limit to the number of people who can visit the island as only two boats come in each day keeping the isolation.

Our walk culminated at the island pub, the Sevenstones. Climbing 111 steps was rewarded with a spectacular view and warm hospitality. The fire was stoked; candles lit and jovial locals were welcoming. Making such a lasting impression, it made it into my husband's top ten pubs.

The preserved English landscape is due to the Islands' owner, The Duchy of Cornwall, who imposed strict building regulations. The result is a complete haven from modern buildings. Previously I'd thought Prince of Wales's architectural opinions antiquated, but as we enjoyed uncompromising natural scenery we fully appreciated the benefits of his protection. Remaining one of the few undeveloped areas of the world, I slipped into the tranquillity of childhood memories and soaked up a world where time stands still.

The islanders have a strong local ethos and the team at Karma St Martin's has done much to include local produce on the menu. For dinner we tucked into lobster, caught that morning by Steve the fisherman on the beach. It was so fresh the meat had a delicate sweetness, tenderly cooked by their chef.

Island vegetables are on the menu daily, grown by the only organic farmer on St Martin's. Artisan breads and pastries come from the island bakery. Rachel Lambert leads foraging weekends at the hotel, during a three-hour walk you forage for food found naturally and take it back to the chef who turns it into dinner.

After exploring the local islands, we maximised our winding-down with a visit



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to the spa. The spa is an indulgence our family can't resist. Aching muscles were relaxed by a hot stone massage and neglected skin was brought back to life by a facial by therapist Rolina.

Our trip to Karma St Martin's was deeply relaxing, mobile signal was intermittent (although there is a working telephone box) and the service was friendly and professional. Décor is modern and soothing. You can be super active or convalesce from the busy life of London. Most of all we loved the connection we

found with nature, surrounded by fresh, sweet smelling air, unpolluted water, exotic plants and rare breeds of animals thrive, as did we. Our imaginations and senses were stimulated, batteries recharged and children and adults alike can play freely. On our last morning as we finished off the second story from Morpurgo's *Island Tales* I decided, if I were ever to write 'my' novel, this is where I'd come. The Isles of Scilly gives you space to breathe, switch off, connect with nature, with yourself, with life, and forget all about the other world we inhabit. t&g

The Sevenstones Pub



#### WHERE TO STAY:

Hotel Karma St Martin's, [www.karmagroup.com](http://www.karmagroup.com)

#### GETTING THERE:

It's quite a trip to the Isles of Scilly, flying from London to Exeter or Newquay provides the quickest route but the journey is part of the adventure.

- Train or drive to Exeter, Penzance or Newquay
- Fly from London City airport to Exeter or Newquay
- Fly Skybus from Exeter, Lands End or Newquay
- Ferry from Lands End to St Mary's
- Boat from St Mary's to St Martin's

#### ACTIVITIES

- Boat Trip to Isle of Tresco: visit the tropical Abbey Gardens. Bike ride around the island.
- St Martin's Vineyard tour
- Horse riding
- Kayaking
- Stand up paddling
- AT THE HOTEL**
- Yoga on the lawn, silk scarf painting
- Foraging weekend



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