



ALDERNEY
ALEX ZOUAGHI @A_ONTHEROAD

ISLAND TIME

ONE OF NEXT YEAR'S TOP TRENDS PUTS TRAVELLERS TOTALLY IN CHARGE, AND THE BEST PLACE TO ROAM FREE IS CLOSER TO HOME THAN YOU MIGHT EXPECT

Words: Anna Prendergast

If 2019 was the year solo travel went mainstream, 2020 will be the year of solitary travel – for those who want to explore the borders of new places alongside the boundaries of their own solitude. It's the year for soul-searching, star-gazing and forest-bathing without the stress of strangers or the shackles

of shared itineraries. And where better to begin than the handful of islands scattered off our very own coast, with their rugged landscapes and lilting languages, where the journeys to reach them constitute half the fun? Here, we shine a light on four corners of the country calling voyagers to the fringes and beyond.

Channel Islands

English Channel

Safety is a point of pride for Lapins, the name by which Alderney locals go, after the island's abundance of rabbits. There are only three police officers, making it the perfect place for travellers seeking carefree quiet. It's so safe, in fact, that author Anthony Horowitz is setting his next novel on the island, to up the murder rate from zero (fictionally, anyway). The only crime so far has been how few decent places there are to stay, but a new hotel opening marked a new chapter for the island in November. The Blonde Hedgehog has nine boutique bedrooms – our favourite is The Den, with its view of St Anne's pretty cobbled streets – and a sustainable slant. Kitchen gardener Sam Pycroft turns foraged seaweed and veg grown in his polytunnel (chantenay carrots, kohlrabi, salsify) into a locavore menu that nods to the farm-to-fork movement set in motion by places like Coombeshead Farm and Daylesford; you'll vow not to eat here every night, but you will. The hotel will also hook you up with local wildlife experts, who can lock down a sighting of the rare eponymous hogs. With a new one-hour ferry running from Guernsey between May and September, aerophobics can now avoid the journey by seaplane and get a glimpse of the island as it should be seen, from the ocean. Look out for gannets, puffins and seals on the voyage.

visitalderney.com



THE BLONDE HEDGEHOG



ALDERNEY, CHANNEL ISLANDS



▲ There are no hotels on Tresco, but plenty of serviced homes to rent such as Seabreeze, which looks out over Old Grimsby harbour



TRESCO

Isles of Scilly

England

A new helicopter route between Penzance and Tresco will launch in March 2020, making the privately-owned island easily accessible for the first time since the last helipad closed in February 2019. The archipelago's subtropical microclimate draws British beachcombers to the warm waters of Pentle Bay, where hemmed-in city-escapees seek out ocean views and salty air. Newly-completed property Seabreeze is a five-bedroom crashpad looking out over Ravens Porth beach filled with Hugo Dalton wallpaper, brushed brass and blonde wood, but if you're leaving the family behind, book a private apartment at Sea Garden around the corner. This December, head to Abbey Garden to spot golden pheasants who wear technicolour coats of feathers all year round, and New Zealand Pohutukawa 'Christmas' trees. With time dictated by the tide, make sure to set aside a day to snorkel with seals off St Martin's. The playful underwater pups are as curious as they are cute – don't be alarmed if they chew gently on your flippers or roll over for a belly rub. Eat



THE CRAB SHACK

the catch of the day at the Flying Boat (or Hell Bay's Crab Shack on Bryher), and head to The Ruin Beach Café to make the most of the car-free roads by ordering as many Trescotinis as you like. Made with Tresco gin and Scillian samphire, they're one of the many ways locals have got creative with home-grown ingredients. Island-hop to St Mary's for another, at Tanglewood Table's secret supper club. It's hidden at the back of the Post Office – call ahead as there are only eight spots – and pick up a seascape on Bryher from Richard Pearce's studio, where you can peep his Atlantic muse through jars of paintbrushes propped against the hut's blue window frames.

visitislesofscilly.com



RICHARD PEARCE'S STUDIO, BRYHER



TRESCOTINIS AT THE RUIN BEACH CAFÉ

Hebrides

Scotland

The peaty Hebrides are wildly romantic, with fog thicker than smoke and names you want to give your daughters – Islay, Skye, Iona. Whisky flows through the island’s veins with the force of the Atlantic gales that whip up the lochs and the shorelines, but still, it’s a peaceful place studded with cosy refuges and a serious foodie scene. Skye is the largest of the Inner Hebrides, and boasts a roster of big-name chefs such as Michelin-starred Michael Smith at Loch Bay and Paul Rankin, who took over Stein Inn in August 2019. Hotelier Gordon Campbell Gray recently acquired award-winning restaurant-with-rooms The Three Chimneys in remote Colbost – dine and drop at House Over-By across the courtyard. Or check in to the utterly secluded Kinloch Lodge, a family-run former hunting lodge delicately updated with unstuffy antiques and breezy textiles. There’s no better view to wake up to than that of the water stretching back to Ornsay at The Cabin, a green-roofed space designed to have a low impact on its extraordinary environment, but if your idea of enjoying green spaces includes teeing off on them, Campbell Gray has also given The Machrie a much-needed revamp over on Islay. Return with a gaggle of friends to take over Glenevedale House next summer, when its own makeover (and expansion) is due to finish.

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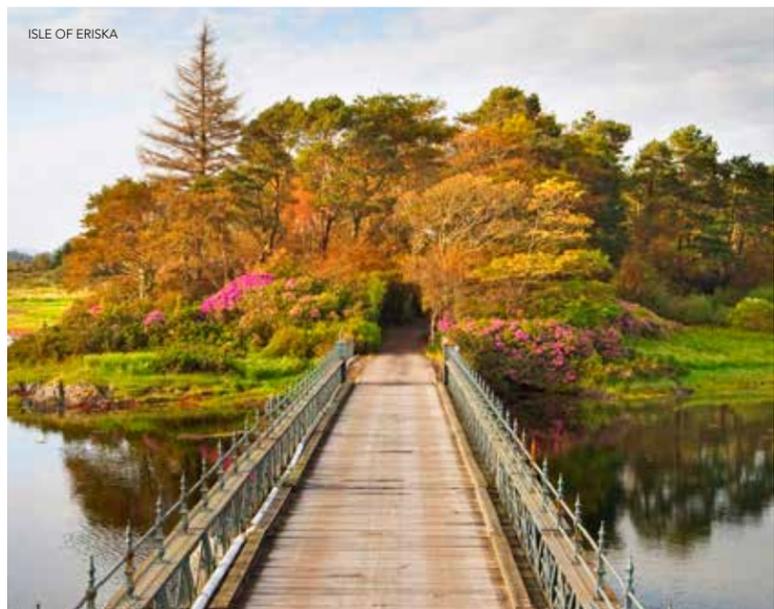
THE MACHRIE, ISLAY



GOLF AT THE MACHRIE



THE THREE CHIMNEYS, SKYE



ISLE OF ERIKA



◀ Try foraging, fly fishing and deer stalking with the resident ghillie at 17th-century loch-side hideaway Kinloch Lodge on the Isle of Skye



Orkney Islands

Scotland

Following the trend for off-grid tiny living – think A-frame cabins and geodesic domes – Scotland’s bothies have been reimagined at Wheems Organic Farm on South Ronaldsay. Eco architect Michael Roberts designed his handful of ‘pods’ with rooftops like upturned boats that fit up to four people – but check in solo and befriend the Simmental cows that roam the surrounding fields. Locals will do away with any risk of loneliness – storytelling is a pastime here, and everyone has a tale to tell of sorcerous Ffolk and shape-shifting Selkies. The new ferry from Gills Bay to St Margaret’s Hope is hailed as Scotland’s most environmentally-friendly, and drops visitors off at a port just six minutes away from the farm. Orkney scallops are so revered in the restaurant world that chefs around the UK such as Jason Atherton and Timothy Kensett design dishes around them – find the best seafood (and exceptional views) at Skerries Bistro and family-run The Foveran. On the Mainland, try windsurfing in Bay of Skail and drop in on Kevin Gauld’s furniture workshop, where he hand-crafts unique Orkney chairs with tall, scooped straw backs that you’ll want to take home. Meanwhile, the Pier Arts Centre celebrates its 40th birthday this year in Stromness; find works by Barbara Hepworth and Olafur Eliasson. In winter, you can catch the Northern Lights (known among



THE ORKNEY ISLANDS



PUFFINS ON ORKNEY ISLAND



THE ORKNEY FURNITURE MAKER

Orcadians as the ‘Merry Dancers’) and between April and May, puffins cling to the vertical clifftops to nest – with so much nature to delight in, it’s no wonder the Orkney Islands ranked as the happiest place to live in Scotland in a recent report from the Office for National Statistics.

orkney.com

Let the Orkney’s whistling winds sing you to sleep at Wheems Organic Farm on South Ronaldsay

