

a very sensible
alternative



Reaching sun-filled islands without spending most of the day at an airport or flying might seem a dream too far but the Isles of Scilly can deliver, says **Alan Orbell**

If ever you find yourself organising a quiz, how about this for a question?

Where in the UK has higher average January temperatures than Cannes in the South of France? The answer? Tresco, one of five inhabited islands among the 56 that make up the Isles of Scilly some 28 miles south-west of Cornwall's Land's End.

Amazingly, the Isles of Scilly enjoy a fluctuation of just nine degrees in monthly mean temperatures throughout the year, which is why many of the early spring flowers you can buy in mainland UK will have come

from the Scillies. And just for good measure, the islands enjoy some 240 more hours of sunshine each year than does Kew Gardens in London.

Just as important for agents is the knowledge that some worthwhile commission can be earned from selling packaged holidays to the islands, primarily through specialist tour operator **Prestige Holidays**.

But why should you recommend this most westerly part of the UK? For a start, it's doubtful that you'll find your clients a more relaxing place in the UK. It's a little like stepping back in time,

although all the 'essentials' of modern life like satellite TV, wi-fi, mobile phone coverage and ATMs are readily available for those who want them.

More importantly, the islands are a designated Area of Outstanding Beauty, with empty sandy beaches to rival the Caribbean and clear blue waters to go with them, as well as a multitude of colourful flowers – both wild and cultivated – that would seem equally at home on a tropical island.

Nowhere is this more so than on Tresco where the sub-tropical Abbey Gardens are home to flowers and plants

“The islands are a designated Area of Outstanding Beauty, with empty sandy beaches to rival the Caribbean”

normally seen in Mediterranean, South African and Australasian climes and rarely seen growing outside anywhere else in the UK.

There are no cars on Tresco, just bikes, electric golf buggies and the occasional farm vehicle. The island is also famous for being the place from where some 1500 agents in German-occupied Europe were controlled during the Second World War and strolling the beautiful empty beaches it's very easy to understand why the island was chosen for such a crucial role.

But it's St Mary's where visitors will usually have their first taste of island life, whether they arrive via the *Scillonian III* ferry or British International helicopter, both from Penzance, or the Skybus aircraft which operates from Land's End, Newquay, Bristol, Southampton or Exeter airports.

It's the largest and most vibrant of the islands; a gently hilly island with narrow lanes which are great for cycling – bikes are easy to hire – walking or taking the little island bus. There are lots of coastal paths and nature trails where guided walks are available.

Other activities include glass-bottom boat rides, windsurfing, kayaking, rock

climbing, diving, snorkelling and lots of boat links to the other islands and to see wildlife

In St Mary's main town, Hugh Town, there is a myriad of shops, galleries, restaurants – the Boat Shed bistro and restaurant is a great place for an early evening drink overlooking the sea – pubs and cafes. A few other tea shops, galleries and arts and crafts outlets are dotted around the island.

There is a surprisingly wide choice of island accommodation, with eight properties featured by Prestige, and a further four on Tresco and one each on St Martins, Bryher and St Agnes.

Tregarthen's Hotel in Hugh Town is the closest to the St Mary's Harbour, no more than 100 yards or so from the foot of the *Scillonian III*'s gangplank but little more than a few minutes from the island airport. If your clients arrive by sea a porter collects the luggage and takes it to the hotel.

A back entrance to the hotel leads straight up to the spacious bar and the reception. The Scillies' friendly and relaxed atmosphere is reflected in the welcome: I was immediately asked if I was 'Mr Orbell'. Unusually for the 2010s, the male receptionist was wearing a white shirt and bow tie, somehow appropriate for the generally older and *Daily Telegraph*-reading clientele in the hotel bar.

Tregarthen's 33 en-suite rooms are spacious, many with views over the quay and across the harbour to the off-islands, and include towelling robes, tea/coffee making facilities, hair dryer and trouser press. The hotel has a large lobby bar, restaurant and garden terrace overlooking the harbour.

If your client quizzes you on the ideal place for sunshine, relaxation, good food, delightful scenery and a slow and easy pace of life, a very sensible suggestion would be the UK's very own Isles of Scilly.

asktheoperator



John Dixon, chairman and managing director, Prestige Holidays

"The Isles of Scilly continue to sell

extremely well. Last year we saw more than a 100% increase in business and this year a more modest but significant rise of 10%.

"On average holidaymakers spend five nights on the islands. St Mary's, the hub, is the most popular island followed by Tresco, although this year we have seen a sharp increase in business to St Martins and also, generally, a growth in family bookings to the islands.

"Tresco, with the Flying Boat Club and an abundance of self-catering accommodation, is ideal for larger families. The Isles of Scilly is not a cheap destination but we offer a wide range of properties, including several small guest houses, so we can appeal to most budgets." ●

Isles of Scilly FACTFILE



Where to Book it Prestige Holidays

01425 480600, www.prestigegrouptravel.co.uk/scilly-isles

Prestige is offering a short break in October from £349pp, which includes return flights from Lands End to St Mary's, private return airport transfers, three nights' accommodation at the Schooners Hotel on St Mary's on a bed and breakfast basis and holiday insurance.

Note: Generally, with some exceptions in mid-summer, the *Scillonian III*, Skybus flights and helicopter services operate only on Monday/Saturday



More Information Isles of Scilly Tourism

T: 01720 424031

E: tic@scilly.gov.uk

W: www.simplyscilly.co.uk



Left: St Mary's welcoming harbour Right: One of Tregarthen's stylish bedrooms

PRESTIGE HOLIDAYS

Prestige Holidays to the Isles of Scilly - need we say more?



Prestige Holidays on 01425 480600



www.prestigeholidays.co.uk



HOLIDAYS WITH
100% FINANCIAL PROTECTION



ABTA
ATA/AT/AT/AT/AT