

With a subtropical climate warmed by the Gulf Stream, the pristine beaches on the Isles of Scilly are a unique locale for relaxation and tranquility.



Tropical Britain?

... WELL ... ALMOST

by Glenn Swift

Palm trees sway amidst gentle ocean breezes, while dolphins frolic in crystal-clear waters alongside sparkling, white-sand beaches teeming with abundant bird life and exotic foliage ... Welcome to the Isles of Scilly (pronounced “silly”), a unique chain of tranquil, isolated islands located just 28 miles off the southwest coast of England. You heard it right!

Due to a bizarre combination of meteorological phenomena, the sub-tropical Scilly Islands offer a climate and quality of life nearly unimaginable for the

British Isles. Populated by a friendly community of just over 2,000 islanders, the little-known Scillies offer excellent accommodations and numerous amenities – an ideal destination for those seeking a short break or longer holiday.

In addition to their extraordinary natural beauty, the isles feature a number of sites of historical interest due to a long and colorful past. First inhabited by the ancient Celts nearly 20 centuries before Christ, the islands contain a number of historic landmarks. Archaeological evidence shows that activity on the islands increased dramatically with the discovery of large quantities of tin around 1500 B.C. It was at this time that the archipelago became known as the *Cassiterides* – Celtic for “Tin Islands.”

Tin was found in such great quantities that Phoenicians, from as far away as the eastern Mediterranean, routinely began visiting the islands to engage in the thriving commerce. Trade in the Scillies began to flourish, to such an extent that a dispute over the control of trade routes to the islands actually led to the entry of the Phoenicians into one of the great struggles of antiquity, the Trojan War.

Recent scholarship also verifies that during the same period, the islands became places of religious pilgrimage by numerous peoples from all over Western Europe. Several large stone megaliths still dot the islands (Harry’s Walls and McFarland’s Downs).

The Romans arrived in Britain in A.D. 43 and made their way to the Scillies a short time later. For reasons not completely understood, they decided not to colonize. Instead, the Romans chose to

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make the islands into a penal colony. Interestingly, several features of the “Roman Era” remain on the Scillies.

The Anglo-Saxons began arriving in England in the fifth century, but they ignored the islands altogether. This left the islands solely in the possession of their original inhabitants, the Celts. Life changed very little on the Scillies for the next several centuries. Finally, after nearly 3,000 years of Celtic occupation, the Norsemen arrived in the eighth century. Although the Celtic inhabitants remained, the islands were firmly under Viking control for the next 300 years.

In the 11th century, the Normans arrived and the Vikings were soon on their merry way. The islands have remained an integral part of the English nation ever since.

Today, like most of Cornwall, the

islands still retain much of their traditional Celtic heritage, with old-time occupations of flower farming and fishing still predominant. Amazingly, it was not long ago (mid-19th century) that the regional Celtic tongue of Cornish was still being spoken on the islands.

Although some of the Scillies are little more than rocky islets home only to birds and seals, all five of the inhabited islands (St. Mary’s, Tresco, Bryher, St. Martin’s and St. Agnes) boast a magnificently beautiful and natural landscape, with glorious beaches and a multitude of exotic plants and wildlife.

At 2.5 square miles, St. Mary’s is the largest of the islands and the hub of Scilly commercial and social life. Home to most of the “big island’s” shops and businesses is Hugh Town, a quaint English village of narrow streets and



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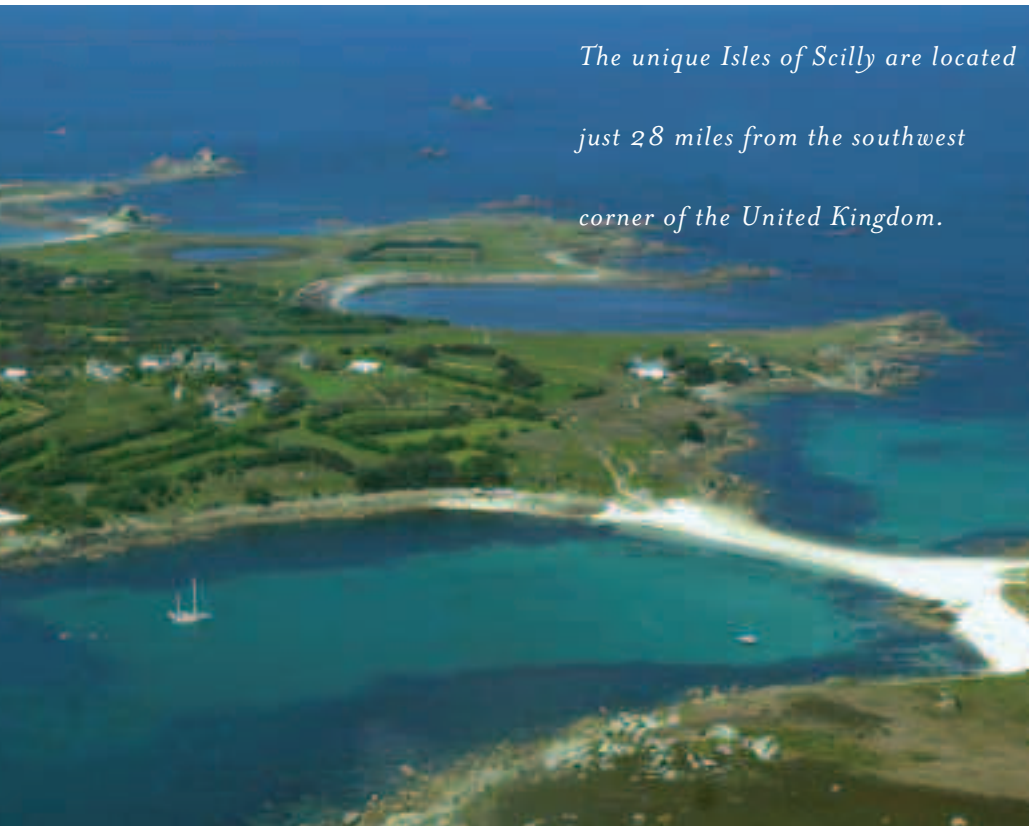
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The unique Isles of Scilly are located just 28 miles from the southwest corner of the United Kingdom.

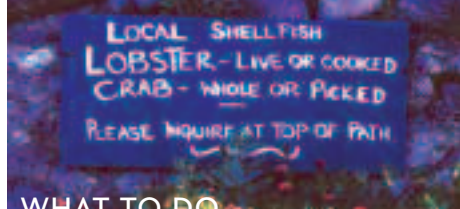
thatched-roof houses with beautiful and well-manicured gardens.

Besides having two bank branches and a number of delightful pubs, Hugh Town also serves as the “capital” of the Scillies. Unlike the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands (which are technically crown possessions with their own self-governing parliaments and not an integral part of the United Kingdom), the Scillies are an administrative district of the English county of Cornwall. The British government, however, permits the islands a measured level of self-government. Through the popularly-elected Scilly Council, the islanders are given a democratic voice on matters of local concern. Curiously, one of the first laws passed by the council in the 19th century, and still in effect today, is to give all sailors found washed-up on its shores a decent funeral. Hopefully, if

you visit the islands you won’t have to witness this brilliant piece of British jurisprudence in action.

For more information or to make reservations, call the Isles of Scilly Travel Center at 1736-334220. (To place this call from the United States, first dial 011-44, then the telephone number.) For more information on the Isles of Scilly, call Visit Britain at (800) 462-2748, or visit www.travelbritain.org, www.scillyonline.co.uk or e-mail sales@islesofscilly-travel.co.uk for reservation information.

So, if you want an entire beach to yourself to relax and soak up the summer sun, with a touch of Merry Ole England thrown in, why not do something a bit different and visit what many Brits call “the Caribbean without the hassle.” And one last thing: I know it’s Britain, but don’t forget suntan lotion. ♪



WHAT TO DO

Whether it is visiting a megalithic village, a crumbling Civil War castle (English Civil War that is, 1642–1651) or the always-popular Shipwreck Museum, there are numerous ways to discover the fascinating history of the isles. For sports enthusiasts, facilities available include golf (nine holes), tennis, squash, cycling, horseback riding, sailing, windsurfing, scuba diving, billiards, clay-pigeon shooting, cricket (if you’ve done everything else) and of course, fishing.

GETTING AROUND

In Hugh Town, coach, minibus and vintage car tours operate throughout the summer, with taxis available year-round. Bicycles are also available for hire at reasonable rates.

WHERE TO STAY

Star Castle Hotel is the hotel of choice for most. For more information or to make reservations at Star Castle Hotel, call 1720-422317. (To place this call from the United States, first dial 011-44, then the telephone number.)

WHERE TO EAT

Chez Michel, Pilot’s Gig, Scilly Plaice, The Galley, Old Town Café and Tolman Café are popular favorites.

GETTING THERE

There are a number of air and sea links between the Scillies and the mainland.

You have the choice of going by plane, helicopter or ferry. Regularly scheduled flights by fixed-wing aircraft are available from several mainland airports with connecting flights to all major U.K. airports.

