

# Travel

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'Knock-out crescents of sandy perfection — sheltered by junipers'

Grace Bradberry on the beaches of Sardinia



Piel Castle on Piel Island, Cumbria and, below, Bryher (10), in the Isles of Scilly

## 20 great little British isles

From medieval castles to bird sanctuaries and boutique hotels, these little-visited islands have lots to offer, says **James Ellis**

### West Coast

#### 1 Piel Island

Cumbria

You don't need much to populate an island — but a pub, a castle and a king are a good start. And that's about all there is to Piel Island, a 50-acre flat, grassy mass at the top of the Furness Peninsula. The "king" is an honorary title carried by the landlord of the Ship Inn and the castle a 14th-century fort, thought to have been built as a store house to keep pirates at bay. The Ship has three double rooms and two bunkhouse rooms that sleep four.

**Details** Double rooms are from £85 per night. B&B (07516 453784).

### 2 Walney Island

Cumbria

If Piel sounds too isolated, its larger neighbour, Walney, might suit. Formed from silt when the River Duddon was still a glacial lake, it is now a low isle about 11 miles long and no more than a mile wide, with a population of about 11,000. There are nature reserves at either end and its west coast has long sandy beaches. Unless you're staying in Barrow-in-Furness, across the Jubilee Bridge that links the island to the mainland, the best option is the Brow Head Hotel that has en suite rooms, or ones with shared facilities for those on a budget.

**Details** Doubles start from £85 per night. B&B (01229 473600).

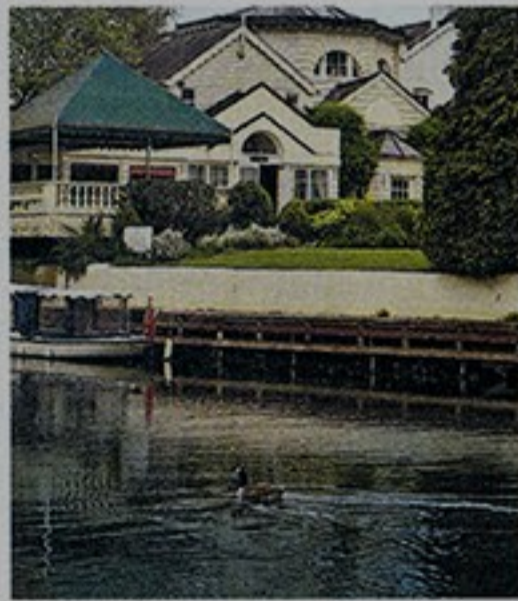


### 3 Calf of Man

Isle of Man

Everyone has heard of the Isle of Man but few know about his Calf. This small island is separated from its larger sibling by the Calf Sound. The name comes from the Norse word *kalfr*, which conveniently means a small island off a large one. Once in private hands, it is now owned by Manx National Heritage and is a bird observatory thanks to the number of Manx shearwaters that live there. There are four lighthouses, an unnamed 128m peak with great views and the chance of a stay in hostel-style accommodation in the warden's house.

**Details** One night's self-catering is from £15pp (01624 648000).



the Blackwater and Colne estuaries, a large, mainly flat expanse that, like Osea, is reached by a causeway, although tides don't cut it off on a daily basis, as with its neighbour. Inhabited since Roman times, the island is mainly rural with farming and fishing — especially oyster harvesting — the main industries, while there is also a vineyard and pretty beaches edged by colourful huts. The Victory Inn is an Edwardian pub that is home to seven comfortable rooms, three of which face the sea.

**Details** Doubles start at £90 per night, B&B (01206 382907, victoryatmersea.com)

### Channel Islands

#### 14 Herm Island

Guernsey

Enter a different world by forgoing the busier Channel Islands and heading to car-free Herm, off Guernsey. A mile and half long and half a mile wide, the island goes from flat sandy shores at one end to dramatic cliffs at the other, and one can take an invigorating walk along the coastal path in about two hours. In the village at the harbour, there is a

monks to the Germans in the Second World War, who used the island for target practice. Purchased by the States of Guernsey in 1995, it is now a nature reserve with a host of wild birds and the ruins of the old priory of St Mary to discover. There is one seven-bedroom house on the island which has dorm-style accommodation to which guests need to take everything from food to bedding.

**Details** One night's self-catering costs from £25pp (01481 266294, lihousland.com)

### Scotland

#### 16 Eilean Shona

Argyll

Eilean Shona is a private island off western Scotland that is owned by Sir Richard Branson's sister Vanessa, but that is not its only claim to fame. J. M. Barrie penned much of *Peter Pan* here and the author may well have been inspired by the 200 acres of forests, wild hills and long sandy beaches. There is a swanky eight-bedroom house on the island, ideal for special events and parties. Although it is hired out on a self-catering basis, the housekeeper can arrange for provisions to be delivered.

**Details** Seven nights' self-catering costs from £5,500 for ten, or £8,800 for 16 (07768 270416, eileanshona.com)

### 17 Isle of Ronay

Outer Hebrides

Many head to the already remote Hebrides for famed siblings Harris and Lewis, recently reinvigorated by an increased interest in Harris Tweed. But if you are looking for an even more splendid isolation, Ronay is the place to go. Nestled

the Atlantic between the town of Ballycastle and the Mull of Kintyre in

Scotland. Shaped like an inverted

L, it is home to some of

Britain's most

spectacular scenery

and one of its

enduring legends:

that of Robert the

Bruce and the

spider that tried

and tried again

when the then

King of Scotland

was exiled here in

the 14th century.

Today, twitchers

flock to Rathlin thanks

to the RSPB reserve and

there are a number of places to

stay, including the quaint Coolnagrock

B&B with its three double rooms and

views over to Scotland.

**Details** Double rooms cost from £60 per

night. B&B (028-2076 3983,

rathlin-island.co.uk)

### Ireland

#### 20 Tory Island

Co Donegal

Manage to hit Leac na Leannán, a flat, rocky outcrop on Tory, with three thrown stones and legend has it you can make a wish — but it's unlikely you'll ask to be anywhere else. The island off the Donegal coast is as wildly beautiful as they come and redolent with myths, legends and history. First settled as early as 2500BC, it is home to megalithic ruins, Iron Age forts, ancient monasteries and Tau crosses (shaped like a T), as well as the last

"king" in Ireland, who greets everyone who arrives personally. The island's one hotel is being renovated, so try one of the B&Bs instead. Noelle & Eddie Doohan's place has four rooms, all of which are en suite.

**Details** Double rooms cost from €70 per night. B&B (00 353 87 7950176)



off when the seas rise is via a suspension bridge. There are three double bedrooms, a magnificent deck, spectacular views and a bar area with TV and billiards table. **Details** Four nights' self-catering costs from £4,575 for four (01637 879754, uniquehomestays.com)

### 10 Bryher

Isles of Scilly

Bryher, the most southwesterly of the Scilly Isles, attracts many visitors to the Hell Bay Hotel — but you don't have to stay in super luxury to enjoy this dramatic island. Samson Hill Cottage is a delightful guesthouse featuring two classically styled double rooms. Its breakfast will set you up for the day's activities, such as enjoying the gorgeous beaches, or taking trips to Bishop Rock Lighthouse for the panoramic views. **Details** Doubles cost from £120 per night, B&B (01720 423951, samsonhill.co.uk)

### 11 Monkey Island

Berkshire

OK, it's not quite the South Coast but definitely in the south of England.