



GO WEST

Penzance makes the ideal base for exploring the western part of Cornwall – that’s if you can drag yourselves out of the comfy sofas at The Artists Residence

By DERI ROBINS



Clockwise from top left: short of jumping in the sea, you can’t get further West on the UK mainland than this; luxurious rooms and impeccable smokehouse fare at Artists Residence; the Admiral Benbow – flying the flag for pirates for 400 years

Don’t let the name bother you. You don’t need to know your Picassos from your Pollocks to stay at the Artists Residence. You’re not obliged to doodle a masterpiece on the napkin. There will be no humiliating quiz at checkout.

Nonetheless, those of a creative spirit will love this place. Tucked away in the historic quarter of Penzance, in a tall Georgian house with narrow stairs, this is the kind of retreat that the phrase ‘boutique hotel’ was coined for, and makes the ideal base for discovering the ancient Cornish town.

You won’t find many pirates left in Penzance, contrary to expectations raised by the Jolly Roger fluttering from the 17th-century Admiral Benbow directly opposite. This inn was the fictional home of Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island*, but spare the staff your best Long John Silver impression; they’ll have heard it before.

Sleeping quarters at the Residence are decorated in quirky, coastal style. Slate and bleached wood abound. Tea chests serve as tables; raw planks for shelves. Roberts radios are plugged in, and tuned to Radio 3 for your tasteful listening pleasure.

Downstairs, The Cornish Barn smokehouse is usually packed with residents and locals alike, attracted by the superior BBQ-style cooking and the big lit-up signs. We snaffled a bowl of maple and chilli-roasted nuts and fennel salt pork scratchings before getting stuck into parsnip rösti with caramelised onion and goat cheese, chicken wings with apricot and soy, served by the kind of friendly, attractive staff that Cornwall does so well.

Excellent breakfasts are served here too; alternatively, you can have a hamper stuffed with Danish pastries delivered to your room. This is the sort of place where you want the weather report to say, ‘Deep frontal system moving in, ahead of an even deeper depression. The Met Office advises the public to make no unnecessary journeys’.

Even if your day has been planned around as little activity as possible, at some point you’ll want to get out and explore. The Residence lies on Chapel Street, which runs from the centre of town down to the harbour; this is Penzance’s former main

street, and along this thoroughfare have marched (or crept) smugglers, soldiers, sailors, pilgrims, and – yes! – pirates. The now defunct Georgian theatre on the street is said to be where the first public announcement of Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar took place. Elsewhere in town are art galleries, booksellers and the usual sprinkling of antique and charity shops – reputed to contain rich pickings for bling and bric-a-brac aficionados.

Admittedly, the delights of Penzance itself are limited, but this narrow end of the peninsula is the perfect jumping-off point for all the starry beaches and historic little fishing towns so beloved by the guidebooks.

Ease yourself in with a walk along nearby Mount’s Bay, overlooking the fairytale pile of St Michael’s Mount, then head west, taking in the adorable fishing port in Mousehole en route. Remember to call it ‘Muzzle’, or the locals will laugh at you.

Eventually, you’ll hit Land’s End. It’s one of those places you have to tick off your list, bucket or otherwise; a modest enough headland, with some kind of holiday complex thing which you’ll probably want to body-swerve. But it’s still impressive enough, topographically; paths wend their way above cliffs carved out by the waves of the mighty Atlantic Ocean, while seabirds, basking sharks, seals and dolphins regularly put in an appearance.

You also need to stick Porthcurno on the list. A sheltered sandy cove, the waters here are among the warmest waters in these islands, thanks to the Gulf Stream, and somehow manage to look as turquoise as the Caribbean on even a grey November day.

If sunbathing is off the cards, the coastal path winds round the cove, with great viewing points to watch out for passing cetaceans. It also passes by the Minack, Cornwall’s extraordinary open-air amphitheatre, constructed above a gully with a rocky granite outcrop jutting into the sea. The cast will perform in any weather, so don’t expect your money back if it rains.

Still not persuaded to head West? An Artists Residence is due to open in Bristol next year, with a similarly boutiquey offering; though admittedly, opportunities for dolphin-spotting on Harbourside are comparatively limited. **BL**

FACT FILE

In a nutshell The Artists Residence combines eclectic luxury with a homely, intimate ambience. At present, there are three quirky, design-led outposts in Penzance, Brighton and London – Bristol is due to get one next year **Staying over...what are the options?** 17 individually decorated bedrooms 2 apartments each with 2 bedrooms 1 cottage that sleeps up to 6 guests. **What does it cost?** From £90 b&b for hotel rooms; from £250 b&b in The Cottage, based on 4 guests sharing. **Anything else?** Like the other Artists Residence properties, the artwork is a big focus of the Penzance hotel and has been handpicked by owners Justin and Charlotte from an eclectic mix of local artists and galleries. Notable artwork includes prints by Tracey Emin and Peter Blake.

Artist Residence, 20 Chapel Street, Penzance TR18 4AW; 01736 365664; www.artistresidencecornwall.co.uk