

Isles of Scilly information sheet

Welcome to the Isles of Scilly ... twenty eight miles south west of Land's End in clear, blue Atlantic water, fabled in distant legend to be indeed the last remnant of the magical land of Lyonesse, these beautiful islands of low hills exude a timeless peace and natural tranquillity.

But don't think timeless islands need to be behind the times. All the inhabited islands offer excellent amenities, safe sandy beaches, pubs and opportunities for outdoor sport. There are many sites of historical interest throughout the islands. The bird watching and scuba diving are renowned and most importantly, Scilly is virtually crime free, making it one of the safest environments in the world.

In spring the early flowering of daffodils and narcissi carpet the islands small fields and in the autumn there is the opportunity to spot rare and wonderful birds as they make their way to the warmer climes of southern Europe or have been blown across from America.

There are good communications. Aeroplane and ferry services connect the islands to the mainland and regular launch services, seven days a week, link the islands to each other.

So, welcome to unique Scilly. Enjoy the peace and the tranquillity of one of the world's most beautiful archipelagos.

Life on the Islands ... the Isles of Scilly is a wonderful holiday destination, but the islands are much more than a group of beautiful islands complete with glorious beaches, wonderful views, magnificent seascape and abundant wildlife. Scilly is also the home of a vibrant, working community of around 2000 people. The Isles of Scilly has bred vigorous, successful people throughout history from sea going pilots to master mariners, flower growers and shipbuilders. Islands normally attract independent people and it will come as no surprise that to discover that over a third of the working population is self-employed from farmers to fishermen, shopkeepers, guest house owners, boatmen, carpenters and carriers. Most of the work on the islands is centred on tourism, but the ancient industries - farming and fishing continue. The farms resemble the kind of smallholding that still flourished on mainland England at the end of the 19th Century with small fields and high hedges, and because Scilly is blessed with a remarkably temperate climate, frost and snow being extremely rare, the growers produce very high quality heavily scented early spring flowers. Lobster, crawfish and crabs are pulled up in traditional inkwell pots and hake, turbot, sole, plaice, megrim, whiting and monkfish are caught in nets, trawls or on lines by the small fleet of some 35 local boats. Much of the fish is exported to Newlyn and then on to Europe, but the fishermen also supply the local hotels, guest houses and restaurants.

St Mary's ... the largest island in the group yet still only 2.5 miles by 1.75, St Mary's is the administrative hub of the islands and the terminus for year round transport links with the mainland.

The capital is Hugh Town which sits on a narrow sandbar and is in reality no bigger than a village. However, most of the town's facilities may be found here - Barclays and Lloyds Bank, a sub post office, hospital/health centre and various shops offering groceries, hardware, clothing, books, newspapers and suntan lotion.

The ship to Penzance and the fleet of colourful inter-island launches to the off-islands operate from the quay. St Mary's has an Anglican, Methodist and a Roman Catholic Church, four public houses, hotel bars, a social club, disco, cafes and restaurants. St Mary's has many hidden secrets and the walks around the coast and across the island are a delight with many contrasts from woodlands, heaths and marshland to sand dunes with marram grasses thick with wild agapanthus flowers from Africa.

There are many ancient monuments to be discovered on the island from a megalithic village and tombs to Civil War fortifications. The small museum in Hugh Town displays much of Scilly's rich history.

Sport enthusiasts are certainly not forgotten on St Mary's. Facilities available include squash, golf, cycling, tennis, horse-riding, windsurfing, gig rowing, sailing, scuba diving, canoeing, fishing, snooker, cricket and clay pigeon shooting.

Scilly in the Winter ... this is a time of year when, in Scilly, the elements reassert themselves in awesome majesty. Spray and spindrift fly high above the granite headlands driven by gales in the Western Approaches. Rare birds shelter amongst the hardy evergreen pittosporum hedges surrounding the small flower fields that owe their bewitching greenness to sea frets and soft rain. Yet there are still many days of cloudless skies and brilliant sunshine catching the colours of the flower pickers working their way through field after field of budding narcissi before packing and sending them to far off markets on the mainland.

Scilly in the winter is a time of rolling swells and shining sands and sharp, bright skies. Walks around all the Islands are exhilarating.

Spring comes earliest of all to the Isles of Scilly. The first narcissi can be picked before Christmas and may be seen in full flower in the fields through March and early April. Countless wild flowers festoon the granite hedges and many rare species of camellia, azalea, magnolia and rhododendron brought back by mariners from the Isles may be seen in Tresco Abbey Garden and numerous small and quiet corners around the Islands.

It is time for finding your own entertainment, but if you are happy to walk and explore the islands, when the boat trips to the off-islands are ruled by weather and tides, when the low sun delivers dramatic late afternoon sunsets and when you can look forward to dinner and curling up with a good book, then you will not be disappointed and you can experience the true curve of nature at its most elemental.

How to get to the Islands ... there are daily sea links from Penzance to the islands and Penzance can be easily reached by either road or rail. There are also scheduled flights by fixed winged aircraft from Lands End, Newquay and Exeter. Further connections are available from various other airports including Gatwick, Brussels, Cork, Teeside and Sheffield.

The rail network is the ideal way of getting to and from Penzance, the nearest station on the Cornish mainland. There are regular connections with Paddington and Waterloo in London (by sleeper), and also Plymouth, Exeter, Bristol and the principal stations in the Midlands and the North.

With the M5 motorway to Exeter and new dual carriageway through Devon and large parts of Cornwall, the journey down to Penzance and Lands End has never been quicker and easier.

Banking ... although there are no banks on the off islands, there are two - Lloyds and Barclays on St Mary's. There are Post Offices on all the islands which offer National Girobank and National Savings facilities. The Co-op Store on St Mary's offers a 'cashback' facility accepting Switch and Delta cards. There is a cash machine outside Lloyds Bank which takes the following cards - Lloyds Bank, TSB, Barclays Bank, Royal Bank of Scotland, Bank of Scotland, Eurocard, Eurocheque Card (with ATM pictogram), Visa, Mastercard, Cirrus (not Nat West and older Midland Bank cards at present), Plus Card and American Express.

Health facilities.... excellent medical services are centred at the new, purpose built Health Centre. As well as District Nursing Services there are two resident doctors with regular visits by specialists (including an optician and physiotherapist) from the mainland. Near by, there is also a small hospital with facilities for the local dentist.

The Council of the Isles of Scilly ... the Council is unique in the United Kingdom. It has the powers of a County Council and a District Council and has sole responsibility for the local government of the Islands. It provides a comprehensive range of services over and above that of any mainland unitary authority in the country due to it being the only public water authority in the country and runs systems on St Mary's and Bryher. The Council is non political and consists of 21 Members who are responsible for education, housing, waste management, fire services, highways, environmental health, planning, social services, tourism, coast defence, sea fisheries, promotion of economic development and emergency planning. The Council also owns and operates St Mary's Airport which is central to the local economy.