

Travel & Outdoors

WISH YOU WERE HERE



Photograph: Acceleratorhamis

In search of sea serpents

Let myths, magic, adventure – and some well-known TV series – inspire your trip to Cornwall, advises author **Karen Hoyle**

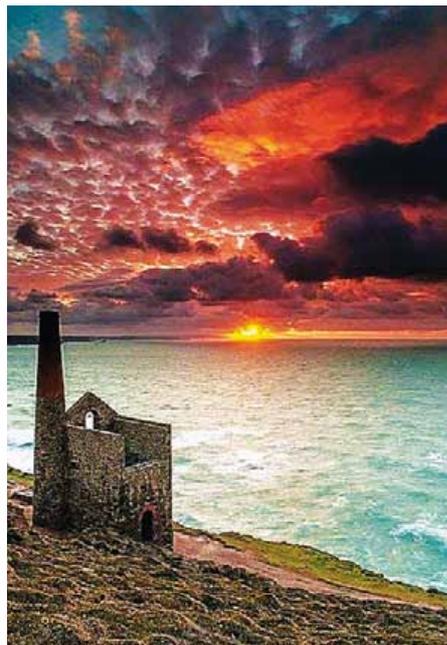
The pace slows as you leave the A30 and turn towards St Agnes in Cornwall. Tarmac gives way to purple heather and roads become uneven into the cliff top car park. Wheal Coates is a majestic tin mine towering over Chapel Porth Beach, a symbol of Cornwall's mining heritage and as the sun explodes into an orange display ready for evening, the mine looks alive again. Dark mine shafts seem to have no base and as you look below you can almost imagine Aiden Turner, shirtless, hammering at the rock and Poldark's dream of tin and copper under your feet.

Cornwall has an irresistible ability to tell stories through its landscape, the moody moors, the dark mines, the bleak and vicious sea, winds lashing against the skin. In a stunning twist the darkness then becomes turquoise clear waters and white sands. At night lighthouses sweep their lights, seagulls glide on patrol through the day and tourists from around the world buzz and tread worn paths all

along the stunning coastline of 200 foot high cliffs.

Poldark, *Doc Martin*, *Jamaica Inn* and many more TV series and books flicker in the mind and perception of Cornwall, but one thing is unique about all these stories – they all have real locations, real camera shots, real people and real intensity. Forget television studio sets and fictional backgrounds, you can visit Bodmin Moor and *The Jamaica Inn*, you can see and touch Poldark's tin mines, you can stand outside Doc Martin's house and hundreds of German tourists have toured the locations of Rosamunde Pilcher's many Cornwall-set novels, which have become a staple of Sunday night drama on German TV. Cornwall allows its visitors to appear in their own favourite scenes; all you need is a map and imagination, and a love of cream teas and saffron cake.

As I leave Mawgan in Pydar School after my latest book reading to a group of creative youngsters, I hope I have brought an old side of Cornwall back to life as my mother and



The beach at Mawgan Porth in north Cornwall, main; the remains of Wheal Coates tin mine by Chapel Porth Beach near St Agnes, above

teachers did for me. Cornwall has a different past, a magical and mythical past where lines blur between reality and 'it could be true'. I have found that I have had a significant response from Cornish parents who had almost forgotten stories of knockers, pixies, sea serpents and myths from around Cornwall. I did a book signing recently and the parents were saying that they were reading the books and enjoying them as much as the children and it made a change from unreal computer games about magical creatures when they could tell their children about the magic just outside their front doors or at the end of their gardens. So look down the tin mine and instead of Poldark imagine knockers, little creatures that stand about two feet high and eat pasty crusts, can you hear them singing?

Walk along the lower cliffs of the Roseland Peninsula and you will find 'The Morgawr Mile', a place of regular sightings of sea serpents, with spiny horns on their heads and long sleek bodies slipping through the water. Can you regress to your six-year-old self and open your imagination to let magical creatures and stories in? In Cornwall it seems you can.

Standing on Cape Cornwall looking

drown towards Land's End, you can surmise a sea where eplandards swim, fishermen go about their work and on a bright day you can just glimpse the Isles of Scilly on the horizon. Between the head and horizon there is another story; hold your breath, look beneath the waves and you will find the underwater city of Yonese, a sunken community alive with magic and impossible power. This is a lost kingdom and a link to the times of King Arthur and Merlin who walked the earth together up the coast from the great port of Cornwall. It is here, for centuries, that legends roared and grew, overcoming evil.

Surely no other county in England can have so much story-telling power? But there is more. A giant stands strong with a causeway at St Michael's Mount, a beast as black as night roams the moors and swam sightings have been very recent, and we haven't even mentioned pikies. Pikes twinkle through the trees and in the long grass of meadows and streams across the whole of the county. Mischiefers, medievalism and magical pixies keep the fantasy world of Cornwall alive in many children's minds. They are lucky, they live in the garden and how can that not be better than hunting for Pokémon?

So what makes Cornwall the film set and backdrop of choice for many a writer? For me it's the sheer variety. The scenery is the easiest to see and the most beautiful. The views of Cornwall, the sophistication and depths of its coastline contrasted with the stunning coast and the artistic light not found anywhere else. The history of Cornwall has become such a mix of folklore and reality that the line between the two is beautifully blurred and no one seems inclined to straighten things out.

My scores were handed to me through my family. My mother told me about knockers and showed me the mines, and when I asked a class of seven-year-olds what they want in a book, I am an odd 'Practical, a party with a golden crust, handkerchiefs and lightning sandwiches and a giant'. Both the Scots and the Cornish share a zeal of celebrating distance from the normal at times; there

is no pressure to conform, just an appreciation of nature and power around you in wild locations.

Cornwall welcomes visitors at any time of the year, and why not find your own stories? Create your own memories with loved ones, bring family, bring partners, wrap up in a blanket on a beach, listen to the waves. Maybe it's just what each of us wants: a picnic at a knocker in every corner of the land every year. I am happy to start though, and if another generation had to share the magic then I would be happy to share it with them. Here is a checklist for a visit with a silver sea, old (or your six-year-old self).

- ◆ Wheel Coates, St Agnes – Mines and magic to be explored with stunning views
- ◆ Cape Cornwall – Look out to sea, sit with a book and let your imagination run wild
- ◆ Visit the 'Morgwgw Mlle and look for sea serpents on the Bosland Peninsula
- ◆ Wait until dark and watch the lighthouses become illuminated in West Cornwall
- ◆ Cross the bridge to Tintagel Castle and explore the story of King Arthur and Merlin
- ◆ Walk Watergate Bay – Take in smugglers' caves and huge waves
- ◆ Watch the tides of Polkerris – Visit the ruins of Polkerris (Perhaps an opportunity for nannies to explore her imagination)
- ◆ Enjoy the Cornish pasties – You'll have your hand turned and end up with blackberry and apple at the other end. Or a random thought on how the crust away for the knocker stood, just out of sight. ■

The Adventures of Austin the Cornish Miner: The Morgwgw and the Bad Knockers

published by Clink Street Publishing at £5.99 in paperback and £2.98 ebook. www.clinkstreetpublishing.com

Poldark series three is filming now and will be screened next year



Aldan Turner as Ross Poldark in the Cornwall-set drama

SHORTSTAY



A family-friendly camping village in Languedoc is an ideal base to explore, finds Scott Macnab

The Languedoc coast on France's southern Mediterranean coast may not immediately spring to mind for British families thinking of a holiday park break with the kids. But cut price air travel and the dizzying array of stuff to do may be changing that.

The baking summer sun and miles of unspoiled beaches is making this an increasingly attractive option for Scots based in the central belt, who can now jet in to the heart of the region with connectors to Beziers Airport from Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Dragmaner camping village (du could not be more conveniently located less than 10 minutes drive from Beziers) has a range of pitches, other family and village, but there's so much to do on the complex that it hardly matters. And it's truly massive with more than 1,500 chalets and cottages spread over the 30-acre site.

There are three separate swimming areas, complete with lifeguards. A leisure-style aquatic centre is provided for the kids, while adults may be more inclined to chill out at the 25 metre pools at the other end of the complex, and there's also a spa facility.



Take it easy by the Med

Accommodation is fully equipped chalets and cottages

The location is ideal, just a ten minute walk from the beach and offering a range of modern mobile homes or traditional timber-style log cabins. I opt for the bungalow which provides two good sized bedrooms and all the usual self-catering facilities. The site also offers swimming complex, evening entertainment and shows.

Reservants, take-aways and a mini-market on the site just add to the convenience for families looking for an easy all-in-one experience. But if you're looking for a healthier resort experience, the French-

speaking area can also be explored with a range of excursions organised from the site. A day trip to Carcassonne can be booked for €35. If you fancy going further afield, take a trip down to the border town of Figueras, Salvador Dalí's birthplace, for the same price. Tips for local markets in Beziers town or Vilars Plage cost €3.

And although it may be described as a camping village, there isn't a tent in sight. Accommodation is fully equipped chalets and cottages, which do have a kitchen, a bathroom and a covered decking. The chalets are the perfect spot for a snore.

48 HOURS IN

Eastern Algarve, Portugal

Villa are the best option in this quieter part of the Algarve. Casa Idealitas (www.margarita.co.uk) is a luxury resort just 20 minutes from Faro Airport.

2pm Head for Santa Luzia, a village famous for its corcous fisherman. Try the corcous complana at Povo & Companhia (www.restaurante-povo.com/pt/pt/pt).

2pm Catch the nearby wave train out to Praia do Barril, a beach that reclines on a sand island. Enjoy a dip before a drink in the café. If you're feeling energetic, stroll along the sands to the end of the island where a ferry connects to Tavira.

7pm Tavira's grand Pousada Convento do Tavira (www.pousadadortugal.com) provides an elegant venue for a lavish evening meal. Their menu comes seafood feast kicks off with oysters and sassy bowl.

Saturday 9am Get out of bed and see what the local scene has to offer. The village is a lovely place to spend the day. Choose from a daily selection of boat fishing fish.

Monday Nearby, Fabrika do Costa (http://fabricadocosta.pt) is one of the Algarve's finest seafood restaurants. Settle in on their terrace with a view of the lagoon waters and distant surf. Choose from a daily selection of boat fishing fish.

BARGAIN BREAKS

A Place on the prom Visit Blackpool as Great Little Britain is offering a 20 per cent savings on a night at the four-star Imperial Hotel on the beach. www.imperialhotels.com

Greece is the word EasyJet Holidays is offering seven nights at the our sun, sea and sand at Athens on a bed and breakfast basis



2pm A local fisherman docks a neat sideline in ferrying tourists across to the beach in front of the restaurant. Head over and take it easy on the unspoilt, hotel free sands. Be sure to check the time of the last boat back.

7pm It's off to the larger fishing village of Olhao now. Take a peek at the grand exterior of the Gustao Etila designed Fish Market and stroll the waterfront before sipping fresh fish at Vale Volta (tel:0985-027252).

Sunday 9am Enjoy a relaxed stroll around sleepy Tavira. It's a beautiful town that has more to offer than just the beach. It's a lovely town to spend the day. Choose from a daily selection of boat fishing fish.

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