Out and about

Travel Take off
Late availability

UK/IRELAND

■ **JERSEY:** Modern Hotels (01534 759 529) offers three nights' room-only at three-star Mayfair Hotel through Mar from £199, ex-Gatwick, with four days' car hire.
■ **BELGRAVIA:** Pride of Britain (0800 089 3929) offers B&B, with two-course pre-theatre dinner for £180 per person through March, saving £99 per person sharing standard room.
■ **DUBLIN RUGBY:** England Rugby Travel (0844 788 5000) offers two nights' weekend break from £499 (excl flights) and £599 (with flights ex-Heathrow) to see Ireland v England decider on March 19 in Six Nations. Package incl match ticket and invitation to Q&A session with England manager Martin Johnson.

■ **CABARET BREAK IN BOURNEMOUTH:** Shearings (0844 209 7143) offers three nights' half-board at Shearings Bay Majestic Hotel, East Cliff, from £134, saving up to £50, and incl return coach travel and nightly entertainment on March/April deps.
■ **GUERNSEY:** Green Acres Hotel (0845 230 3240) offers three nights' B&B from £199 through March, incl return flights ex-Gatwick and local car hire. Same holiday, incl fast ferry ex-Weymouth/Poole, starts at £139.

SHORT BREAK

■ **NORMANDY:** Brittany Ferries (0871 244 1444) offers three nights' B&B in Trouville hotel close to beach from £128, incl return crossings with standard car.
■ **BOSTON:** BA Holidays (0844 493 0758) offers two nights' room-only at 2.5-star Midtown Hotel, Boston, from £429 on deps through March, incl BA flights ex-Heathrow.
■ **SAN FRANCISCO:** BA Holidays (0844 493 0758) offers three nights' room-only at three-star Whitcomb Hotel from £499, on deps through March.
■ **MIAMI:** BA Holidays (0844 493 0758) offers three nights' room-only at three-star Casablanca on the Ocean, Miami, from £659, ex-Heathrow with BA.
■ **MALAYSIAN GRAND PRIX 2011:** Thomas Cook Sport (020 8739 2360) offers four-night package, based on two adults sharing, with B&B accom at four-star Doubletree Hilton in Kuala Lumpur, coach transfers to track on race days (April 8, 9, 10). Package incl Weekend Citrine Grandstand tickets, direct flights ex-Heathrow from April 6 and transfers starts at £1,478 per person.
■ **AMSTERDAM MINI-CRUISE:** DFDS (0871 882 0885) offers two-night St Patrick's Day cruise ex-Newcastle Mar 18 from £94, incl two nights in en suite cabin, entertainment, coach transfers to/from Amsterdam and sightseeing tour.

SHORT-HAUL SUN

■ **CANARIES:** On the Beach (0871 911 0202) offers seven nights' self-catering at three-star golf bungalows in Gran Canaria from £195, with return flights ex-Bristol Mar 22.
■ **COSTA BLANCA:** Thomson (0871 231 5595) offers seven nights' full-board at three-star Hotel Ambassador Playa, from £249, saving £106, ex-Gatwick Mar 8.

South West is best

PAULINE LEIGHTON ditches the sun for a thrilling trip

WE were around 500ft up when our Sikorsky S61 banked dramatically over the tiny island of Tresco, providing us with a bird's eye view of some of Britain's most dangerous yet beautiful waters.

On a crisp and sunny Saturday afternoon, we were glued to the windows as waves crashed endlessly against countless rocks which pierced the shallow almost clear blue sea surrounding the Isles of Scilly.

It is no wonder that there have been more recorded shipwrecks in the Scillies than anywhere else in the world – some 530 chronicled with probably as many again which are not.

There were more thrills in store as the giant helicopter – the civilian version of the Royal Navy's Sea King – also offered spectacular views of one of Britain's botanical wonders.

On Tresco they like to refer to the sub-tropical Abbey Gardens – where 20,000 exotic plants thrive amidst the scenic grounds of a ruined Benedictine priory like something out of a Claude Lorrain painting – as Kew Gardens without the glass.

Taking a helicopter to the Scillies is an exhilarating alternative to going by boat or aeroplane. The 30 mile journey from Penzance took around 20 minutes which – sorry about this – literally flew by.

A couple of days on the Scilly Islands was part of an eight-day sojourn we took into the heart of the South West. Swindon once marketed itself as "Gateway to the West", so instead of taking a February break to sunnier climes abroad we thought 'why not go West'.

Our first port of call was Soar Mill Cove Hotel at Salcombe near Kingsbridge in a secluded corner of Devon, a leisurely three hour drive from Swindon.

Once off the main roads, we found ourselves driving through a warren of narrow, winding, high banked country lanes, constantly fearing coming face to face with a tractor around the next bend.

Tentatively wending our way around the tiny often hilly roads – the sort which in all likelihood surround The Shire in Middle Earth – became a constant over the following week; that and the squawking of seagulls.

Soar Mill Cove, and its rugged surrounding coastline, is an archetypal "getting away from it all" location.

You can't even get a mobile phone signal there, and have to drive into quaint Marlborough – no not that one – a couple of miles away to get the thing working.

But that's the beauty of the place, which is handily situated to explore the likes of Dartmouth, with its colourful houses tumbling from the hillside into a harbor spiked with masts, and Totnes – a new age haven of book sellers, craft shops and eco cafes.

Across the Tamar Bridge and into Cornwall, we made our way to the whitewashed village of Portloe, which clings to a jagged, rocky edge of the picturesque Roseland Peninsula.

Battered by a thunderous sea – at least during the winter – Portloe, with its history of fishing and smuggling, has a real olde world feel, instantly triggering memories of the Seventies TV series Poldark and its 18th Century seafaring goings-on.

We stayed at The Lugger, a former smugglers' inn which overlooks a scenic, minuscule harbor fringed by steep cliffs.

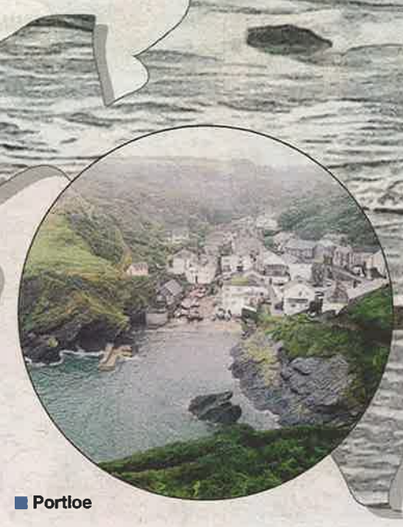
If you've a mind you can clamber onto the Cornish Coastal footpath, which winds its way around the hotel, and take in some captivating, sea sprayed views.

It is also a fine base to explore the likes of Mevagissey, whose archetypal Cornish harbor is stacked with boats, and Fowey – pronounced Foy – with its steep, enchanting streets and quirky looking houses.

We were conveyed from the helipad to the New Inn – Tresco's only pub - by tractor trailer (what else).

Arriving in the Scillies is like finding yourself in the pages of an Enid Blyton story; I'm thinking Famous Five rather than Noddy.

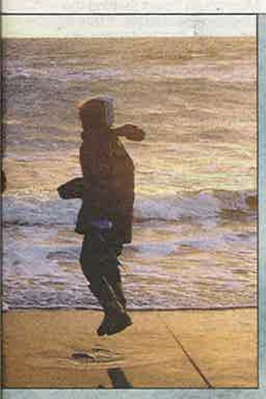
It has a frozen-in-time 1940s/50s feel where people either walk everywhere or go by bike,



■ Portloe

> We found ourselves driving th
> of narrow, winding, high banke
> constantly fearing coming fac
> tractor around t

and chil
beaches
"I wen
didn't ev
from the
us. It's th
Island
Scillies.
largest is
around it
ale, Whip
Back
River Fal
in order
scenic d
The be
Rosevine
wander a
Portscas
heaven i
When
best" on
wasn't re
was right



hrough a warren
d country lanes,
ce to face with a
he next bend

dren scamper on the near-white sandy
, collecting shells and looking for crabs.
t on holiday for a couple of weeks and
en bother locking my door," a barman
spa-restaurant Flying Boat Club told
hat type of place.
hopping is a wonderful pastime on the
We took a trip from Tresco, the second
sland, to St Martin's, the third, and idled
s lovely lanes before sampling the local
pped and Laid, at the Seven Stones inn.
on the mainland, we took a ride over the
on the 120 year-old King Harry Ferry
to reach another gloriously remote and
estination, the Rosevine hotel.
each is a two minute stroll from the
e, and – when the tide is out – you can
along it to the charming village of
stho. Bracing in February, it must be
n the summer.
Jim Morrison sang "the west is the
The Doors' epic The End he probably
eferring to Devon and Cornwall. But he
t, anyway.

Soar Mill cove

PAULINE'S CORNISH RETREATS

THE LUGGER

IF you turn right instead of left upon arriving at The Lugger then you'll end up in the sea.

Built next to – and almost on top of – the pocket-sized harbour of Portloe, the Lugger oozes charm, elegance and romance.

When the sun is out, there are sumptuous views of a sparkling sea set beneath harsh, craggy cliffs.

It might even be better when it's raining, as the sea sloshes and crashes virtually beneath your feet as you enjoy a wine in the warmth of the bar/restaurant.

The whitewashed building has been there for at least two centuries, and a previous landlord – the delightfully named Black Dunstan – was hanged for smuggling.

As I write, The Lugger has just made it into Lonely Planet's 2011Britian's Best Places To Stay guide.

Tel: 01872 501322.
www.luggerhotel.co.uk

SOAR MILL

"OH, there's one of our deer", says the manager of Soar Mill Cove Hotel.

A beautiful stag has appeared from the bracken, some 50 metres from the dining room where we are eating breakfast.

Seconds later it is gone, gracefully vanishing down a grassy slope which slides onto the beach.

Soar Mill Cove Hotel is set in 2,000 acres of gloriously unspoiled National Trust coastal countryside, a 10 minute drive from the busy, charming Devon market town of Kingsbridge.

The recently refurbished luxury hotel offers a peaceful retreat from the hubbub of daily life, with an emphasis on fine Devon cuisine amidst beautiful surroundings.

Tel: 01548 561566.
www.soarmillcovehotel.co.uk

THE NEW INN

AS you'd expect at Tresco's only pub, The New Inn has a distinct seafaring atmosphere which reflects life on the Scilly Islands.

It is an ideal place to stay while at the Scillies, central to just about everything on Tresco and a few minutes' walk from a number of quays where you can embark and disembark from boats to other islands.

The food is excellent – way above pub grub, although they do that too – having become one of just 12 Cornish hostelries to make Michelin's Eating Out In Pubs guide.

The rooms are compact and comfy; ours had a lovely view of Tresco's "sister" island, Bryher.

A short stroll away is the Flying Boat Club, a chic, modern spa-pool-restaurant and chalet centre. When you're walking back from the club to the New Inn, though, don't forget the torch!

Tel: 01720 422 844.
www.tresco.co.uk/stay/new-inn

ROSEVINE

A grand Victorian mansion recently refurbished and updated, The Rosevine is cosily tucked away on Cornwall's scenic Roseland coast.

The National Trust-owned beach is just a two-minute stroll away. Follow the spacious, sloping, grassy garden and you can't miss it.

There is a strong family emphasis at The Rosevine, with a well equipped children's den (TV, Xbox, assorted toys and games) located next to a 'grown-ups only' drawing room.

The 12-apartment venue is a cross between a hotel and self-catering – the customer decides. You can eat here one night, and cook your own food on another.

There is a real air of relaxation about the place, even with excited youngsters charging around the garden.

Tel: 01872 580 206.
www.rosevine.co.uk