

SCHOOL HOUSE

SPRING/SUMMER 2021

BOOSTING CONFIDENCE

Teaching to students' strengths is key

EXAM CHAOS

Professor Geraint Jones gazes into a crystal ball

SUSANNAH FIELDING remembers Christ's Hospital School

CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE CURRICULUM

COUNTRY & TOWN HOUSE

HOT WINTERS, CHILLED SUMMERS

Catherine Fairweather explores the two faces of North Cornwall family beach holidays



From the comfort of my foaming, geranium-scented bath at The Pig at Harlyn Bay, a new hotel in North Cornwall, I can spy on the 'youth'; the hoody-clad broods accompanying parents for the Christmas holidays, slouched across the adirondack chairs on the lawns of the 16th century manor house-come-hotel that meet swaying wheatfields above the Atlantic beach.

And in the course of two weekends' worth of long, scented soaks, in winter and again, during a brief lockdown respite in the summer of 2020 when it opened, I watch the full theatre of the elements of the Trevoze Headland as we transition from sunbaked mini-beat waves when the sea is pebble smooth, to the Daphne du Maurier-esque rain-lashed melodrama of afternoons where you feel like you are on the prow of a ship as the windows rattle and the winds howls through the surrounding corn and poppy fields, which ripple like waves. Echoing the wild moodiness of North Cornwall in its interiors, owner-decorator Judy Watson cleverly exploits the unique, mercurial oceanic light that shafts into dark painted rooms reminiscent of the ecclesiastical interiors of BBC's Wolf Hall which provided the inspiration.

That same light glows red and blue through the ranks of coloured glassware displayed against the bar's window panes. It is a style and atmosphere far removed from the popular image of a candy-striped, blue and white, bucket and spade, seaside boarding house of Cornish holiday brochure cliché, or indeed my own personal memories of polyester pillowcases, Teasmaids and Heinz tomato soup of teenage vacation rentals. Sophisticated, layered and romantic as befits an ancient and intriguing manor house there are secret passages with wonky Jacobean floorboards and doors, forgotten priest holes, overlaid with Georgian stuccoed ceilings, friezes and weathered panelling that showcase the Hutson's collection of both flea market and antique oils.

But such grown up, seductive allure, doesn't dilute an ethos that is no less inclusive and family-minded than that of the other Pig Hotels in the sty. Its restaurant, the al fresco Lobster Shed, is both celebratory and unstuffy without a dress code, and organised on a first-come, first-served basis; it offers food you can eat with your hands and Knicker-bocker Glories that encapsulate summer memories.

Teenagers will relish their own space in the large shepherds' huts or garden wagons with outdoor showers and wood burning stoves, borrowing bicycles or practising on the driving range of the neighbouring, legendary Trevoze Golf Club that also rents outdoor tennis courts for eight pounds an hour. The excellent facilities of the two well-established surfing schools in the bays of Constantine and Harlyn are both within teen-strolling distance. North-facing Harlyn Bay has calmer water that's perfect for beginners and some of the safest and best swimming is from Mother Ivey Beach around a headland where you can see seals bask and the cinematic silhouette of the Art Deco villa, Polventon, Rick Stein's childhood home, which now rents through Harbour Holidays.

Just beyond is the equally cinematic lifeboat station built in 2006. Younger teens and children can visit and try on the lifesaving gear and watch the drill of the boat being released into the sea at six pm on Wednesdays, or coasteering, paddle-boarding and kayaking at the same surf school.

One windswept morning we leant into gale-force winds and walked the seven mile stretch along the famous South West coastal path to Padstow with white horses galloping for shore below the granite

If the weather is right, the Cornish Riviera is said to rival the French



ABOVE: The Pig at Harlyn Bay

Staying at the Pig at Harlyn Bay is the perfect antithesis to the holiday “scene” that draws the crowds and Volvos in Padstow, Rock and Polzeath on the other side of the Camel estuary. In high summer, these towns, but the latter especially, vibrate to a similar vibe as any popular Alpine ski resort frequented by home-county Brits, except of course that this is all about sun, sand and surf



headlands where guillemots and fulmars cruise above giant sea stacks. We sated our hunger at Ricks Stein’s fish and chip place (Stein outlets are a dime to the dozen, but this is a favourite) and ordered a taxi back in time for crumpets in front of the snug’s hearth.

Another day we hired bikes in Padstow to cycle the Camel trail on the flats of a disused railway all the way to Bodmin via Wadebridge, with a great pitstop at the Camel estuary winery for the Cornwall’s answer to champagne.

Even in high season the Trevoze Headland is about peace and quiet family-time, which is why the former Conservative PM Margaret Thatcher and her husband Denis returned here year after year. For

action, another Conservative PM, David Cameron, opts for the energy and mayhem of Polzeath where he owns a summer house in neighbouring Daymer Bay. In high summer, it vibrates to a similar vibe as any popular Alpine ski resort frequented by home-county Brits, except of course that this is all about sun, sand and surf.

The sporting paraphernalia, the hordes of blonde, Boden-clad kids and ponytailed mothers, the big four-by-fours into which multi-generations pile at the beginning and the end of the day, and the queues for the board rentals, pizzas or hot chocolates are interchangeable with any Alpine counterpart, as is the atmosphere. Volvos park up early against the chilly tidelines alongside vans selling crab sandwiches and tacos on the dune. And you couldn’t ask for a more sensational beach as your playground. With vast tides the beach is immense and when the sea retreats, it is wide and deep enough for beach parties, rock pooling and racing the dogs. The surf is easy to access, safe with a regular decent swell, even,

or especially, in inclement weather. And it is bookended by sensational walks – one way to the family-favourite Daymer Bay and over the dunes to the fashionable yachties honeypot resort of Rock, on the other to the wilder headlands of Pentire and onto Port Quinn and Port Isaac. On the dunes above Polzeath beach, The Cracking Crab offers fresh seafood and sunset views or spoil yourself at Surfside with a fresh plate of oysters and a mojito at the Rum Bar next door. Returning home one night from a cocktail session, the beach is lit up like a starlit sky with little pools of light from a hundred or so mobile phones emanating from the huddles

of teenagers silhouetted against small bonfires, some strumming on their guitars, some passionately kissing, others furtively or languidly smoking.

For front tier seats on all the beach action and to keep a distant watch over your brood, there is no better place to book, well in advance, than the new villa Gwel Trelsa, which sleeps ten (or up to 28 if one books the adjacent interconnecting houses). With four floors, one entire wall is glass-fronted so you can view the big event of the sun setting over the Atlantic. There is the giant

hammock sling suspended from the top floor from which to admire the views and various different terraces and balconies, with outdoor kitchens, bean bags and BBQ. It's the ultimate surf-in, surf-out destination; outdoor showers and surfboard storage on the ground floor. As Mariella Frostrup, with whom I holidayed with our children proclaimed, 'Only a fool would look further afield for thrills.' But for me, the highlight of our week's routines was the complimentary pre-breakfast yoga sessions on the strand in front of our villa, along with a post-yoga latte grabbed on the seafront in the peace and quiet of the morning, before the day-trippers had painted themselves onto the pristine, empty canvas of the sandy beach and before our household stirred and pressed 'play' with their domestic demands. ■

LEFT & BELOW: Trevoze Golf Course; Gwel Trelsa



NEED TO KNOW

The Pig at Harlyn Bay
From £150 a night.
thepighotel.com

Polventen
Sleeps nine from
£1,253 per week.
harbourholidays.co.uk

Gwel Trelsa
Sleeps ten from £26
to £83 per person per
night. latitude50.co.uk
harbourholidays.co.uk

Surfside Cafe & Bar
surfsidepolzeath.com

Camel Ski School
camelskischool.com

