

The most picturesque villages in Cornwall

Cornwall's wild, rocky coast is dotted with charming villages. Rosalyn Wikeley picks the ones you can't miss, with delightful places to stay

By Rosalyn Wikeley
16 November 2022



Long lauded by writers and poets for its ethereal, craggy beauty, Cornwall continues to charm its guests. They come for Polkdarkian cliffs that jut out into the Atlantic, Caribbean-grade coves and fishing villages with ale-soaked inns at their heart. While some of its prettiest villages heave with tourists at high season, a few remain blissfully under-the-radar – typically a cluster of fisherman houses that tumble towards a harbour or cliff edge amid veins of cobbled paths, but also inland cottages surrounded by wild meadows that seem to have been that way forever. Far from being a summer-only destination, Cornwall's allure is year-round, and is perhaps even more thrilling in winter as Atlantic waves pound the cliffs and village pubs are a cosy refuge of crackling log fires and mellifluous chatter. From the classics hosting some of Cornwall's grande dame hotels to the lesser-known with scant signs and phone signal, here are the most scenic villages in Cornwall.

Port Isaac



Paul Biggins / Alamy Stock Photo

A 14th-century time capsule of white-washed cottages and teahouses, all convening along a seaweed-strewn port in auditorium style, Port Isaac is the quintessential Cornish village on the photogenic northern coastline. Its filmset good looks (Doc Martin was filmed here) and palpable sense of history consume wide-eyed visitors, whose coastal walks are rewarded with local brews or fish and chips at the legendary Lion's Inn (perched just above the harbour for a front-row view). Naturally, the charming fishing village excels in the seafood department: star chef Nathan Outlaw's two restaurants and the more buttoned down 'Fresh from the Sea' are stellar spots for beautifully-cooked coastal plunder.

Where to stay: The cliff-perching [Porthole](#), set high above the harbour.

Mousehole



Simon Maycock / Alamy Stock Photo

Let's start with pronunciation – it's *Mowzle* – before moving onto this fishing village's evocative stone houses and sandy Mount's Bay. An enclave of sardine pies, brightly-painted boats and petite art galleries, Mousehole was described by Dylan Thomas as 'the loveliest village in England.' Fiercely independent cafes lather cream onto scones, delis show off local produce and locals convene over scampi and cider in the dimly lit taverns. Walkers make the pilgrimage to nearby Lamorna along the coastal path, a dappled cove that glows an ethereal turquoise in the sunlight. The Bawcock legend endures (a fisherman's tale of braving a storm for the village on the brink of starvation) and is celebrated each year at his namesake festival, with lanterns, stargazy (sardine) pies and merriment.

Where to stay: A whitewashed ode to coastal living, [The Old Pilchard Works](#) is a series of self-contained, light-filled rooms on the heart of Mousehole.

Portloe



Education Images/Getty Images

The best things in life are nearly always the hardest to reach. Such a truism applies neatly to the old world village of Portloe, whose secluded location on the impossibly pretty Roseland peninsula has lent it a sense of unspoilt charm. White-washed fishermen's houses with slate roofs and brightly painted window frames gaze out to sea, while below them grey, jagged rocks dip into ethereal blue water and ribs are prepared to taxi fishermen out to their vessels. There is no 'scene' here – the days are at the mercy of the tide and occasionally punctuated by the bark of a seal or enthusiastic gull. The coastal path leads walkers to sleepy coves and some of Cornwall's finest beaches, including Porthcurnick Beach, whose buttermilk sands play host to cult café, The Hidden Hut.

Where to stay: The 17th-century smuggler's inn-turned-boutique, [The Lugger Hotel](#) hugs the water's edge and is known for its superb seafood.

St Mawes



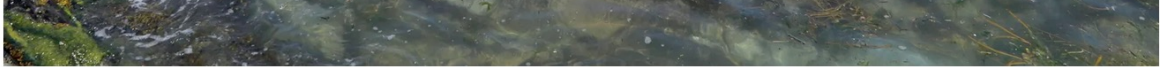
Education Images/Getty Images

A handful of glamorous hotels have quite rightly moved in on St Mawes' hair-raising sea views, its top-notch restaurants and year-round smart clientele. This is as close as the UK can get to a Mediterranean style Riviera – where elaborately decorated coastal fortresses and genteel hotels sit alongside surfers, exotic palms and ice-cream shops. The village is protected by St Anthony Head (where you can find the lighthouse from Fraggie Rock) and enjoys a mild micro-climate, with its two sandy beaches backed by a line of bakeries, breakfast spots and holiday cottages. Take the ferry across Carricks Road for Trellisick House and Gardens' roster of exhibitions, often supporting local artists, or, a little further afield, the whimsical Lost Gardens of Heligan.

Where to stay: Olga Polizzi's fabled [Hotel Tresanton](#) for a classically stylish spin on the English Riviera.

Portscatho





David A Eastley / Alamy Stock Photo

Picture a patchwork of rocky and sandy beach peering over the twinkling Gerrans Bay, flanked by a yellow flush of Bird's Foot Trefoil flowers and weathered houses with stories to tell. Porthscatho's east facing cove renders it a mild oasis from south-westerly winds and also makes it a terrific swimming spot. The village welcomes tourists though it retains its own authentic rhythms. Fishermen debrief the week's coastal adventures over local ales and pub fare at the Plume of Feathers, and locals stop by the grocers on the way back to their fairytale cottages overlooking the bay. Boats line up in neat formation as if ready to be inspected by a rising tide.

Where to stay: [A fresh, tastefully renovated former fisherman's cottage](#) in the village centre, with the beach right on its doorstep.

Mullion



Keith Larby / Alamy Stock Photo

Steeped in smuggling and fishing lore, Mullion is the Lizard Peninsula's largest village with a warren of artisanal shops, cafes and galleries. Its privileged perch, atop high chalk cliffs and at the convergence point of two rivers and the sea, serves up wildly romantic Atlantic views. Craggy, mottled rock suddenly gives way to azure waters not usually associated with the UK and the South West Coast Path snakes past quiet coves and sandy beaches such as Poldhu, with its lovely sand dunes. The National Trust-owned Mullion Cove, a working harbour originally built for pilchard fishing, lies a mile away from the village centre with an eerie cave revealing itself at low tide.

Where to stay: Unapologetically and comfortingly traditional, [The Old Vicarage](#) is within walking distance of the cove and Mullion's maze of shops and cafes.



Mark Clemas Street Scenes And Landscapes / Alamy Stock Photo

It is said that most of Coverack’s stone cottages host hidden smugglers’ cellars – once a thriving industry for this pocket-sized fishing village on the largely rugged and resplendent Lizard Coast. Set along a rocky promontory, with a sandy beach to one side and a small harbour to the other, Coverack’s coastal views are lovely from all angles. The Manacles reef is one of them – responsible for shipwrecks throughout the centuries and consequently a diving hotspot. Coverack is also popular with sailors and windsurfers - as well as (occasionally dolphins).

Where to stay: Self-catered [Prospect House](#) is a cosy bolthole smothered in creeping roses and warmed with wood burners after a long afternoon on Coverack’s lovely beach.

St Agnes



Terry Mathews / Alamy Stock Photo

ADVERTISEMENT

Discover the ideas and technologies shaping our world. [READ THEM NOW](#)

GREEN ENERGY
how to build a sustainable future

SUPERBUGS
how to prevent the next global health threat

GENOMICS
how genome sequencing will change our lives

The very embodiment of Cornwall’s rural soul, St Agnes (Aggie to locals) is a cluster of weathered stone cottages edging down a hill, all inhaling the salty air and relishing the far-reaching coastal views. At the foot of St Agnes, sheltered Trevaunance Cove lures in the surfers and gives over its bounty to local fishermen. The village’s mining history looms large in silhouettes of disused engine houses, which have been used as a backdrop for the BBC’s Poldark adaptation (Winston Graham repeatedly featured St Agnes in his novels). Exposed to the Atlantic and flanked by two dramatically surging cliffs, National Trust-owned Chapel Porth is a short walk along the coastal path and a Cornish ice cream hotspot.

Where to stay: More earthy and modish than the old inns or fishing houses, [this AirBnb](#) strikes a tastefully swishy chord in the centre of St Agnes.

Rock



2C14JM2 Looking from Padstow to Rock, North Cornwall, Ferry 'Black Tor' setting out for Padstow. Lesley Pardoe / Alamy Stock Photo

Those who first set eyes on Rock and its Camel Estuary views are rarely disappointed. This beauty on the north coast has more sandy beaches than its name denotes, and a mix of old stone and more modern houses scattered across its coastline like a string of beads. A mix of surfers, foodie pilgrims and loafered Londoners pile in during the summer months, washing oysters down with West Country sparkling wines at renowned chef Paul Ainsworth's pub. Cast adrift from the shops, cafes and restaurants, on the other side of a long sandy beach lies one of Cornwall's prettiest churches, whose stained glass windows pull in the pure coastal light with dazzling effect. Walkers are in for a treat, with Polzeath under an hour's walk away, while the gourmands can head to Padstow once they've sampled the best of Rock's fiercely seasonal and local menus.

Where to stay: Cornish stalwart [Hotel Enodoc](#) is a clipped, seaside escape of manicured lawns, heart-tugging Camel Estuary views and white table cloth breakfasts.

Mevagissey



John Corry / Alamy Stock Photo

A labyrinth of steep and narrow streets trickles down to Mevagissey's old centre and twin harbour, where gulls circle the spoils of returning fishing boats. Here, a slew of quirky independent shops, cafés dispensing just-caught scallops as effortlessly as teacakes and galleries adorned with local artworks all coalesce around the harbour or dot Mevagissey's time-warp streets. Knightor Vineyard and the Lost Gardens of Heligan are a short drive away, although visitors would be forgiven for leaning into Mevagissey's spanking fresh seafood at the Salamander and whiling away the hours at the Sharksfin along the harbourfront, surveying the water as it moves through various shades of blue.

Stay: Adults-only guesthouse, [The Pebble House](#) clings to the cliffs above the village and serves up thrilling floor-to-ceiling views featuring Chapel Point and Eddystone Lighthouse.