

GREAT ESCAPES

For a while back there, we really thought we'd discerned a silver lining in the clouds of global warming – long, hot Mediterranean summers, right here, in the UK!

Since then, we've wised up a bit. We now suspect that, rather than being the promise of endless sunshine, that shiny edge of the cumulo nimbus was just the sheen of imminent rain.

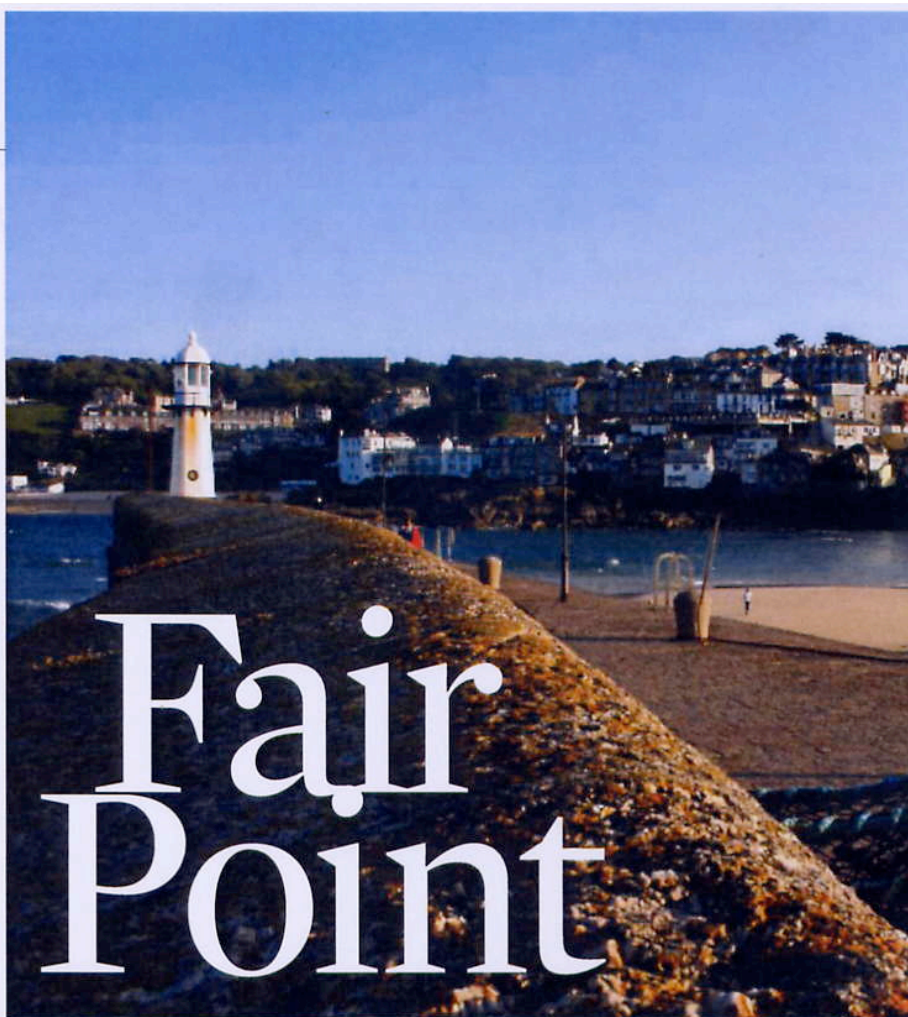
Those who bought into the whole 'barbecue summer' dream this year may justifiably be feeling a little hard-done by. Rain-lashed July gave way to soggy August; campers have been far from happy, while those who booked up quaint country cottages on the basis of blue-sky brochures will be forever haunted by the memory of wet clothing steaming gently and ineffectually in front of quaint country fires.

The fact remains that the English summer holiday is as much of a meteorological gamble as it ever was, and what we need, when committing ourselves to a week or two in Cornwall, is some kind of back-up plan.

Luxury living

Gradually, though, the catering industry is getting with the programme. Chic new hotels now dot both the south and west coasts, the philosophy being that, hey, if it rains, you can always hit the spa.

Following in their wake, a new breed of self-catering accommodation has begun to spring up. Goodbye, damp and poky cottages adorned with chintzy curtains and horse brasses; hello large, spacious apartments with picture windows – not so much a home from home as a serious upgrade, with great entertainment systems and the kind of kitchen efficiency most of us can only aspire to. In short, the bucket and spade seaside holiday has gone boutique.



Getting the balance absolutely right is Hawkes Point, a new collection of luxurious apartments close to St Ives. If it's a beach holiday you're after, it's hard to imagine anywhere in the world to rivalling its setting, Carbis Bay – three minutes down the hill – is just staggeringly beautiful, its pale golden sands and clear blue waters (impossible to avoid the clichés here) regularly earning it a big tick in 'Most Beautiful Bays in the World' lists.

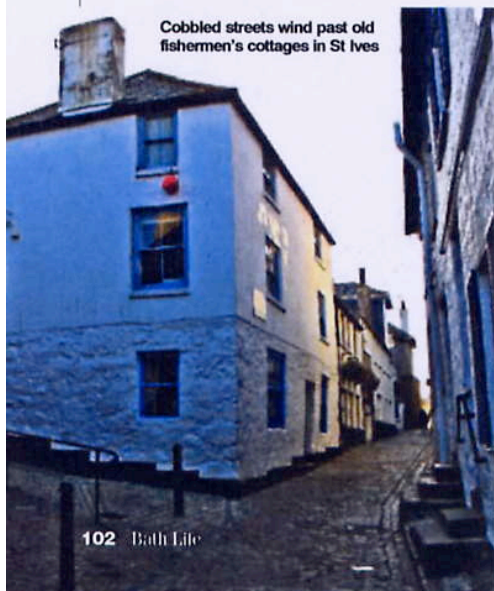
We'd left Bath in a torrential downpour, which followed us doggedly as far as Dartmoor, after which a strange blue expanse began to appear over the sea to our right. After the summer we'd had, this brief respite lent the sunshine the kind of rarity value more normally associated with sightings of the Northern Lights; terrified lest the one sunny afternoon of the month slipped through our grasp, we shoved out bags through the front door when we arrived and rushed

down to the shore.

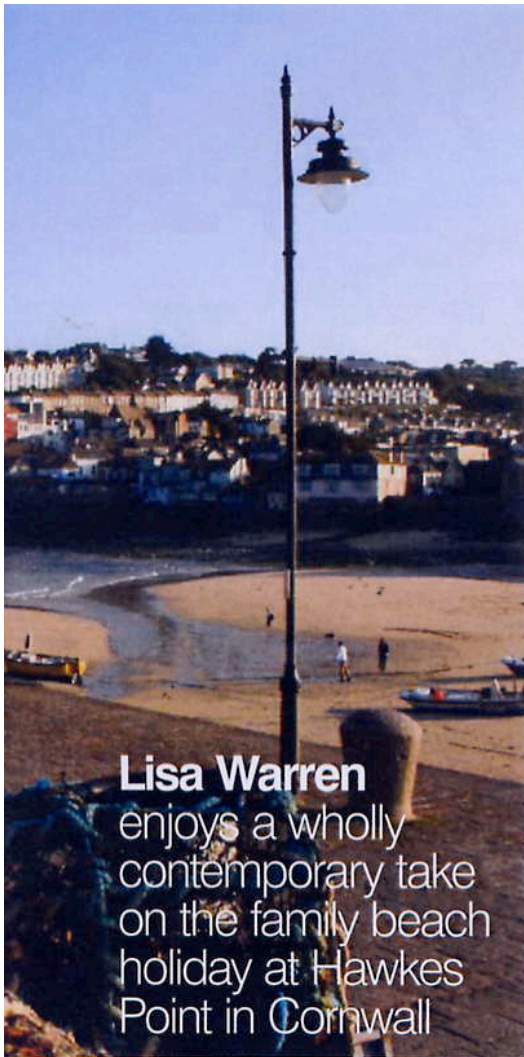
There, we were met with a scene from a Janet and John picture book – apart from the wet suits. When, exactly, did children start requiring these outfits to brace the waves in midsummer? Dads were digging competitive sandcastles, some kind of organised barbie was being conducted in a roped-off area, children were fighting a losing battle with dripping ice-creams, while opportunist gulls swooped past at eye level for the crumbs. Just delightful.

Once the diem had been comprehensively carped, it was time to check out the accommodation (see panel). It looked bandbox new, and immensely luxurious and tasteful; it was the smaller, thoughtful touches, though, that impressed the most – someone had gone to a lot of trouble to select a pile of DVDs that would appeal to just about anybody, from mainstream to indy, while on a bookcase stood a copy of the

“When, exactly, did children start requiring wetsuits to brace the sea in midsummer?”



Cobble streets wind past old fishermen's cottages in St Ives



Lisa Warren enjoys a wholly contemporary take on the family beach holiday at Hawkes Point in Cornwall



latest Harry Potter to have been turned into a film. There was even a telescope.

Surfer heaven

On the second day, two of the kids were booked into the nearby Gwithian Academy of Surfing for a lesson. This turned out to be a great place, with friendly, highly experienced tutors who had both Tom (18) and Isobel (11) up on the boards in under an hour.

Obviously, this place is surfer heaven, but even if the prospect of catching the perfect wave leaves you cold there's plenty more to do. Walkers will love it here – coast paths lead off in both directions – while the little harbour of St Ives is a ten-minute drive away.

TravelFile



Spacious, luxurious and modishly open-plan – the penthouse living area

We stayed at a penthouse apartment in Hawkes Point, Carbis Bay, Cornwall

How did we get there? We drove from Bath - it took just over four hours

First impressions: The optimistic cream carpets and upholstery are teamed with a kind of Hamptons-meets-French-provincial chic. The penthouse comes with a roof terrace, huge comfy sofas, widescreen TV and a state-of-the-art kitchen; a bottle of local Camel Valley champagne and the makings of a cream tea await you in the fridge. The bathrooms are equipped like five-star hotels, with fluffy bathrobes for all and gorgeous Cornish Seboni hair and body products.

What else can I do? Potter around St Ives, admire/buy the art; swim or try wind- and kitesurfing, walk along the cliff paths; eat ice-creams...

Top tip: Order a hamper from the excellent Food4myholiday ('you surf, we shop') before you set off. Not only will this mean you don't have to dash straight out to the supermarket, but you'll be introduced to some of the best local high-quality foodstuffs.

Our verdict: The ultimate base for the ultimate Cornish beach holiday

St Ives lights up at dusk: the view from the penthouse



Hotel-style boutiquery



Hawkes Point
The Sands, Carbis Bay, Cornwall
tel: 01726 884072
www.hawkes-point.co.uk
www.food4myholiday.com
www.surfacademy.co.uk

Even if you didn't know that two hugely prestigious art galleries are to be found here – The Hepworth Museum, and The Tate St Ives – the fact that every other shop sells paintings and pastels is a giveaway; this is a hot spot for art and culture. It's also stacked with Cornish fishing village charm, with whitewashed

cottages and an almost inexhaustible supply of pasty-purveying cafes; there are some good restaurants here too, though serious gastronomes should schedule in a visit to Rick Stein's fish restaurant in Padstow.

Possibly the ultimate base for the ultimate UK beach holiday; rain (probably) or shine. ☀