

MAGNIFICENT ST MAWES

International Life's Peter Doherty goes in search of a world class holiday destination and service to match with the obligatory sunny climes. His discovery means he'll never have to scramble for his passport again

If I described a stunning holiday destination with numerous beaches, clear blue waters and average summer temperatures of 19°C, admit it, you would be thinking 'Mediterranean' at the very least? Then if I added the fact that due to the Gulf Stream, part of this area had a sub-tropical climate which resulted in the prolificacy of botanical gardens and in places you may find yourself chaperoned by palm trees. Surely then you'll be thinking Canaries or even the Caribbean Islands? However, I'm suggesting you leave the passport in the bottom drawer, forget about the vaccinations and stop pouring liquids into tiny 100ml containers, because I'm describing the warmest place on mainland Britain... Cornwall.

I know the next thing you're going to say, 'what about fantastic hotels and wonderful service levels abroad?' but I'm going to counter that again with a story of world class, luxury accommodation where stunning design, premium interior detailing and bespoke concierge combine to provide guests with a fantastic 'home' and an unforgettable holiday experience.

I'm talking about owner, Amanda Selby's grand vision. It was part inspired by her holiday to New Zealand, staying in exciting luxury holiday homes and getting the feeling for the dos and don'ts for her own project which at the time was merely a series of sketches and ideas floating in the ether.

On her return, Amanda embarked on what one could describe as a 'white knuckle property ride' on the Cornish coast, buying, reshaping and renovating to the finest detail, four properties in St Mawes - a place that is described by the more astute and educated traveller as 'in the know Cornwall'. Less than

eight months later her 4 projects were sparkling and ready to go.

This is more than just a tale of tears and late nights. It is one informed by an enviable CV that includes stints at Blenheim Palace, working for the Duke & Duchess of Malborough, running Guest Relations at Ascot and holding Sales & Marketing positions in numerous hotels. It also encompasses the hectic, 24/7 world of conference and banqueting, where she managed a team that serviced City establishments, the Chelsea Flower Show, Wimbledon and all of Britain's major racecourses. 'After that' declared Amanda, 'I knew I could give my own guests the very best. Nothing is impossible in my world'.

Under the umbrella, 'St Mawes Retreats', the four luxury properties, three of which have the signature luxuries of two lounges, one for children, the other for adults and bedrooms accompanied by state-of-the-art en-suites, have enjoyed healthy occupancy. These properties have been designed and conceived for large families, groups and events, from wedding breakfasts to anniversaries. Because of the favourable climate, the season can stretch an impressive 10 months. I think I can hear the Bank Manager purr with satisfaction.

As you tour the properties, statement names abound, from the peerless Hypnos beds beloved of Her Majesty, to the finest Egyptian cotton towels, Villeroy & Boch bathroom fittings, Designers Guild furnishing and Denby crockery. Even the paintings are carefully chosen from acclaimed local artists, one of which has completed commissions for Downing St.

I stayed at 'Moonrakers' the biggest and boldest property. It is palatial, with 5 bedrooms each with en-suites. It's a contemporary, luxury home with



postcard sea views. I spent some time with French garden designer and demi-god Jean Mus in Cannes recently and he would have doffed his panama in appreciation of the beauty, diversity and composition of the property's exquisite landscaped gardens.

The open plan layout invites light to illuminate the interior space which in turn offers incredible panoramas across the gardens to the waters where Vintage Cutters artfully choreograph the bay in their annual boat challenge.

We had the choice of the 12 seat dining table or the spacious balcony area complete with barbecue. Informally we chose the latter as it was accompanied by warm skies in excess of 26°C. Before sunset I opted for the indulgence of champagne in the free standing bath cleverly designed to enable lingering views out to sea.

You are instantly struck by the layout of this house and the consideration and thinking behind it. For example the ground floor has a bedroom, ideal for grandparents who may want their own privacy. It could also be used for staff like an au pair or nanny. This arrangement is not only ideal for Westerners but one could argue even more so for the Asian market who often holiday with their extended family and

are more used to travelling with their own staff.

The thing that is striking about St Mawes itself, is that there is so much to do and the option of using the in-house luxury concierge service ensures virtually anything is achievable, on request. Many guests would want a child-free day so accredited minders come in and can take the kids on activity days rock-pooling, rambling or crabbing. Even though there is a fully functioning laundry room, the House Manager can easily take away any clothes for washing and pressing. Added to that there are three great chefs at your disposal with the ability to create gastronomic delights, from freshly caught lobster to chocolate fountains. Most guests opt to internet shop before they arrive and the staff are on hand to receive and unpack all groceries, so when you walk through the door the sight of a fully stocked pantry makes you feel at home immediately.

There is a bewildering choice of beaches along St Mawes and the Roseland Peninsula. One could opt for the smaller Summers Beach in St Mawes itself or hire a boat and explore the coastline, find a quiet spot and set up a barbecue. Bliss. The most popular sandy beach is a 20 minute car ride or a hop across the bay on a private boat to

Pendower or venture next door to Carne and dine at the renowned Nare Hotel overlooking the sea.

There is also the option of boarding the award winning St Mawes Ferry to Falmouth for a 20 minute journey. This encompasses the breathtaking scenery of the Carrick Roads (the Falmouth-Truro harbour), with two historic castles, beautiful coastal vistas and the industry of Falmouth's shipyards. Alternatively, there's the opportunity to explore Place Creek and enjoy, soft, white sandy beaches and St Anthony's lighthouse, where you can disembark for short walk routes around the South West Coastal Path. There is also the Smugglers Ferry linking the famed Smugglers Cottage with Trellisick Gardens. Enjoy

a perfect Cream tea enroute. For those wanting to fish or kayak equipment can be hired from St Mawes.

Dining is a treat. Right next to St Mawes Retreats is the lauded Hotel Tresanton, run by members of the Forte family. You descend an idyllic passage way and enter an informal, easy going but effortlessly run hotel restaurant with exquisite seafood concoctions and desserts to die for. You do have the option of sailing further afield to Falmouth to dine at Rick Stein's Fish Restaurant or the Flying Fish, or just enjoy the chilled informality of the Watch House in St Mawes Harbour (ask owner's Will or Caitlin for table 25, it has the best view). Our morning favourite was breakfast at Café Chandlers, with a beguiling choice of patisserie and local, fresh produce and you cannot pass St Mawes Bakery without walking away clutching a bag of saffron buns.

From a cultural perspective you must visit the botanical gardens. The cutely named 'Lost Gardens of Heligan' (a Hollywood film title in the making) and the Eden Project both pull in the crowds, as does the acclaimed Tate St Ives, reflecting the dynamic artistic community in the county. >>

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*previous page: bedroom view across its stunning landscaped garden and out to sea at Moonrakers
this picture: spectacular sea view from the garden at Stargazers*

>> That said, I would opt to walk next door to Lamorran House Gardens. It is a labour of love by Robert Dudley-Cooke who has nurtured over 500 varieties of azaleas, a Japanese garden with a waterfall and Mediterranean style landscaping, which was deservedly voted in to the nation's top 10 Favourite Gardens.

There is also an abundant opportunity to engage in artistic activity with not only numerous galleries but artist's studio open days from 25 May - 2nd June across Cornwall. If you want something more intimate, the concierge service can arrange a visit from an Art teacher for tuition. Just imagine painting seascapes from that garden!

The synergy between St Mawes and these 4 select retreats is tangible. Both are warm and welcoming, drawing you in to enjoy their homespun comfort and luxury. And the ace in the pack for St Mawes is it never really gets crowded. It's at the end of a land mass. There is no burden of 'through traffic'. People don't stop enroute to somewhere else. This is a final destination. You come here to stay, much like St Mawes Retreats, when you open the door, you never want to leave.

Other properties in the St Mawes Retreats collection:

Stargazers enjoys the stunning 180 degree view from living room to master bedroom. You feel like you're at the end of the world looking at St Anthony's Lighthouse. The view is inspiring and infinite. Four en-suite bedrooms, includes a master suite with separate lounge area, private patio and access to a sunroom with kitchen and dining facilities. Generous garden space with trampoline, games room, private parking and a gated driveway. Sleeps 10

Dreamcatchers has the wonderful sea views too, but has a Mediterranean feel, olive trees on the decking. The balustrade is glass so there is no visual interruption on the sea views. Ten seat table for entertaining. There's a great open plan feel. Three of the four en-suites can see the view at every moment even when taking a bath!! Sleeps 8

Shellseekers is a fun 2 bed house with a balcony in the centre of St Mawes, just metres from all local amenities. It's modern, fun, edgy with quirky touches like iridescent tiling and large stainless steel wall radiators. There's an upstairs lounge and kitchen with a 4 seat breakfast bar and dining table that seats up to six people. Sleeps 4

St Mawes Retreats

Call Amanda on: 0845 319 0412 (7 days a week)
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