

Alderney, a Channel Island hideaway that's heaven for families (and blonde hedgehogs)

By [Tim Chalmers](#)

Could my wife and I handle a whole week on tiny Alderney with our two children — when the weather seldom behaves and the shops shut for a long lunch?

The island was once described as, well, it's never been described as very much by anyone particularly famous, and you get the feeling the locals prefer it that way.

Yes, you've guessed it...we fell in love with the place. If fast-lane driving and wild nightlife are your thing, stay well away.



Private haven: Braye Bay offers plenty for families who can often find themselves alone on the beach

But if you are partial to deserted stretches of white sand the consistency of granulated sugar, and turquoise seas that would not disgrace a Caribbean resort — oh, and a glimpse of the island's fabled yet elusive blonde hedgehog — try Alderney.

This most northerly of the Channel Islands is only a 45-minute flight from the British mainland.

We realised immediately that we were veering away from the package holiday mainstream the moment we set eyes on the plane charged with transporting us from Southampton to Alderney, which lies eight miles off the French coast.

Our aircraft was very small, and had a painting of a puffin on the side. We only had one man for company — and he was flying the thing. Our pilot unnerved us a touch by leaning over to complete some bookwork on the vacant seat next to him once we had gained full altitude.



© Tim Chalmers

Sea view: Head for The Georgian House Hotel if you find everything else is shut

Or was he revising for his elementary flying exams?

We went to Alderney with our son, ten, and daughter, 18 months, staying at the four-star Braye Beach Hotel. The setting was delightful, as was hotel manager Richard Proctor, who took the 'hands on' concept to an exalted level.

Our room was smart and comfortable and the sea view from our balcony window was a treat. Throwing open the shutters each morning made you feel you were starring in one of those feel-good adverts promoting an alarmingly healthy wholegrain cereal.

On our first day, we walked from breakfast on the hotel deck down a short run of wooden steps leading straight to the sweeping Braye beach.

If you felt the urge for an afternoon sharpener, the deck was the perfect place to sit enjoying a cheeky cold beer while waving cheerily to family members down on the sand with the implication that you were on the verge of rejoining them.



Traditional: Alderney only has one town - St Anne - which is home to 2,000 people

But not before you had finished eavesdropping on the latest extravagant tale being spun by one of the sailing set who favour the hotel as a stopover on the way to the south of France. At least that's what they claimed.

There's no need to hire a car, as the island is only three miles long and 1.5 miles wide. Bikes are the perfect way to explore. We spent most of our time cycling from one empty beach to another, contentedly enjoying the peace and beauty of the place.

The clock in the hotel foyer is set to 'Alderney time', with the hours marked off '1ish', '2ish', '3ish' and so on.

We soon happily adopted a similar approach and baby's bedtime routine was easily abandoned in favour of joining the 'last off the beach' club.



Elusive: One reason to go to Alderney is to catch a glimpse of its fabled - and rather cute - blonde hedgehog

Dinner in the hotel restaurant was cheerful and of a high standard, but we were also compelled to visit the legendary Braye Chippy, near the harbour, on several occasions. There is only one town, St Anne (estimated population 2,000), situated about a mile from our hotel.

Unfortunately that mile is straight up a lung-bustingly steep hill, requiring low bike gear selection and a whirr of pumping thighs. By the end of the week, we could all get up there without a stop.

Most food outlets in the town stop serving by around two in the afternoon. If it is later than that, save yourself an unrewarding trudge around the streets looking for a suitable lunch venue and go straight to The Georgian House Hotel, where Holly and her team will look after you brilliantly.

They delivered one of their superb picnic hampers to our hotel reception one day and we sat up against the dunes on our newly adopted 'home' beach scoffing the contents.



Poignant: The entrance to the former German concentration camp SS Lager Sylt is a chilling reminder of past events on Alderney

On reflection, we may have dealt with the liquid provisions a little too enthusiastically considering our childcare duties — and the fact I was required to bowl from the sea wall end in a game of beach cricket which, eventually, swelled to 14-a-side and was building to a thrilling climax.

Alderney was occupied by the Germans during World War II and is littered with the remnants of Hitler's Atlantic Wall fortifications. These provided ideal exploring territory for a ten-year-old, even if the history behind the occupation is chilling.

The Germans shipped in slave labour from Europe to build four concentration camps, while the native population fled. The understated plaques which commemorate this troubled time dot the countryside and give a poignancy to the natural beauty which surrounds you.

In more settled times, Alderney has been favoured as a secluded retreat, whose fans include former cricketer Ian Botham, actress Julie Andrews and Beatles producer George Martin.

As we left after a wonderful stay, I was slightly nonplussed to find myself sitting next to Brian, a black Labrador on the return flight. Gazing dolefully out of his window, Brian seemed even more down in the mouth to be leaving than me.

'He never did find that blonde hedgehog,' explained his owner.

Better luck next time.