

PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

From stunning cliff paths to hidden country lanes, from St Peter Port's cobbled streets to relaxing coastal walks, Guernsey offers plenty of variety for walkers. And as **Martyn Tolcher** explains it's all easily accessible - just put your best foot forward and start exploring.



COASTAL FOOTPATH ON HERM

One of the really special things about Guernsey is that on arrival you can step out of the airport or ferry terminal and within a matter of minutes you can be walking along one of the island's spectacular coastal pathways, gazing out to sea without a care in the world.

No time is wasted fighting your way through an unfathomable arrivals zone or boarding a coach for an enduring drive to your accommodation, everything's right there for you to explore.

It is this instant accessibility, combined with the stunning variety of routes and trails, that makes Guernsey a veritable walkers' paradise. There are walks to suit every possible taste and level of fitness and the options range from fully guided tours to self-guided or completely independent, going just where the fancy takes you.

One of the best ways to get started is to head for the superb cliff path network that meanders along the island's rocky southern coastline. It stretches all the way from St Peter Port's pretty outdoor bathing pools on the eastern side to the ancient stone fairy ring at Pleinmont in Guernsey's south west corner.

In all there are more than 28 miles (45 kilometres) of gently undulating pathways interspersed with a few steeper sections of carefully hewn steps. These cliff-top trails are beautifully kept and together they take you through some of the island's most spectacular and spellbinding natural environments.

You can traverse along woods that are carpeted with bluebells in the spring or stop at any time of the year to take in the breathtaking scenery



CLIFF PATH SIGNAGE



WALKING IN RURAL GREEN LANES

at beautiful spots like Moulin Huet Bay, which happened to be the favourite of the great French impressionist Pierre-Auguste Renoir, providing inspiration for some of his finest works.

The cliff paths are simple and easy to reach from the town centre or from almost any other point along the way. This means walkers can choose to embark on a day of tough trekking to cover the entire distance, or opt for an undemanding half hour stroll along one of the easier sections.

The pure ease of access to all Guernsey's prime walking areas, not just the cliffs, has spawned a whole infrastructure for those who love to explore by foot. The island has special maps for walkers, annual walking festivals and a team of accredited tour guides who take great pride in showing off their island in its best light.

"There's such a variety for such a small island and I think that's what motivates us," says gold accredited guide Gill Girard. *"Yes, you've got the cliffs which are quite demanding in places, but you've also got all the flatter coastal paths on the west coast and in the north which are quite different."*

All around Guernsey's ever changing coastline going by foot brings its unique rewards but stride inland and you will get a totally different kind of experience as you enter the island's rural heart, with its green country lanes, old granite farmhouses and charming roadside stalls.

Then there is the beautiful town of St Peter Port, whose half hidden steps and alleyways provide the first glimpses of a fascinating island history that stretches back to medieval times and beyond.

Whether you prefer a gentle amble, a little adventure or something in-between, there really is something for everyone, and if you are very serious about your exploits on two feet there are the Spring and Autumn Walking Weeks to consider. Held during May and September these mini walking festivals provide up to 50 separate tours crammed into the space of just eight or nine days.

"The choice is incredible, it really is," says Gill. *"The Walking Weeks bring out all the guides together, including those who do their walks exclusively for these two events. This gives you the choice of two or three different walks every morning and every afternoon plus one or two each evening as well."*

With titles like 'Pink Rocks, Forts and Fairies', 'Forgotten Castles, Crafts and Green Lanes' and 'Many a Menhir' (to name but a few), the organised walking tours delve into every aspect of island life, from Guernsey's social history and folklore to its unspoiled natural wonders.

"The guides are all genuine enthusiasts," Gill explains. *"They don't do it as a job, they do it as a passionate hobby and they are constantly updating their knowledge. As a guide you put a huge amount of research into every walk you do, then you condense it into an interesting tour, but all the time you're finding something new, so the walk is always evolving."*

Some walks, such as the one Gill leads across the tidal causeway to tiny Lihou Island off Guernsey's west coast – when conditions allow – are best done with a knowing guide. However, in the main the island lends itself perfectly to self-guided tours with nothing more for accompaniment than a local guide map.



SOUTH COAST CLIFF PATH

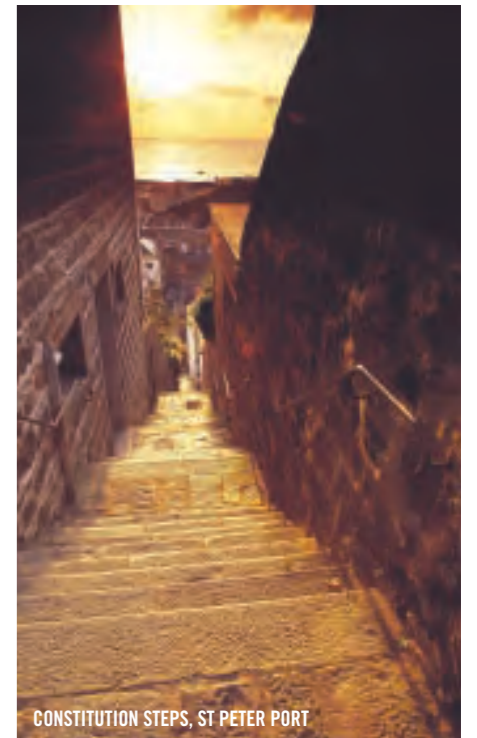


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"Lots of people love to walk as part of a group but we also recognise that many walkers are independent spirits who prefer to walk on their own," says Gill. *"The maps available at the Guernsey Information Centre and many other outlets are perfect for those who want to go it alone and there are quite a few excellent little booklets around as well."*

"The other great thing about Guernsey for walkers is that we've got a very good bus service, so you can walk without worrying necessarily about getting back to where you started from. Also, I always tell people not to worry if they get lost. If you can't see a signpost relax, take a breather and then carry on because you won't be lost for very long and it's all part of the adventure."

At any time of day, any time of year, in Guernsey you really do not have to walk miles to be miles away from it all. It's just a case of putting your best foot forward.



CONSTITUTION STEPS, ST PETER PORT