

# Jersey and the Channel Islands

The seven inhabited Channel Islands of Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, Herm, Jethou and Lithou lie within an archipelago of reefs and islands off the north coast of Normandy, France, in the English Channel. The islands cover 75 square miles in total and are self-governing dependencies of the British crown, with local populations largely of Norman and English descent. Although English is the principle language for all the islands, many of the older residents still speak Patois, a Norman-French dialect that varies from island to island.

Jersey is the largest of the Channel Islands and contains over half of their total population, which almost doubles in the summer months. The largest and most popular town is St Helier, where the central market in an ornate glass-roofed building provides a focus for the busy town. Evidence of the island's long-standing links with the fishing industry can be seen in the Beresford Fish Market that was first established in 1842. A wide variety of fresh fish and seafood is bought here when the daily catch comes in.

Jersey is also home to the world famous Jersey Zoological Park, which is the international headquarters of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust. The park is a centre for breeding, research and professional training in all aspects of wildlife conservation. A number of extremely rare species can be seen at the zoo, including the Western lowland gorilla, the Malagasy giant jumping rat and the pygmy hog.

The mild climate and isolated nature of the Channel Islands provide ideal habitats for a number of unusual or rare animals to thrive in the wild. The island of Alderney boasts a rare population of blonde hedgehogs that have creamy coloured spines as a result of a rare recessive gene that has surfaced in the isolated population. The island also has a population of black rabbits and is home to colonies of puffins, gannets and storm petrels.

The second largest island of Guernsey is famous for its local flower growing industry that is responsible for exporting just under one million boxes of cut flowers every year. As well as being home to many commercial growers, the island is full of a large number of wild flower habitats, including natural bluebell woods and orchid fields, which provide colour all year round. The Guernsey lily, which is indigenous to South Africa, was one of the first flowers to be exported to London but has now been superseded by gladioli, daffodils, freesias, roses and carnations.

Sark is Europe's smallest independent feudal state and at only three miles long and a mile and a half wide, it attracts tourists anxious to get away from the bustle of large town living. The island has no cars and is jointly governed by the Seigneur and the Chief Pleas, the island's own parliament. Residents do not pay income tax and the island has its own laws that still include certain anomalies, such as the fact that no woman is entitled to a divorce. Popular community events for locals and tourists include the Sark Water Carnival, which is held during the summer months.

While each of the islands has its own distinct character and attractions, there are a number of recipes that, with some variations, can generally be found throughout the islands. One of these is *Bean Crock*, which is traditionally cooked for a whole day in the oven in a special earthenware dish. A rumour claims that Heinz baked beans originated from the bean crock made by immigrants in Canada. Another Channel Island speciality is black butter, which contains cider, liquorice, lemons, sugars and spices and was traditionally made over an open fire in a process that took two days and included the whole community.

One of the most distinctive seafoods to be found on the islands are ormers – also called the “ear of the sea” – a species of abalone-like shellfish that is unique to the area. Ormers can grow up to 15 centimetres in size and are collected from the shore at low tide. Nowadays, the shellfish are protected and must be at least eight centimetres long before they can be collected. They are a local delicacy when cooked with bacon, onion, garlic and white wine, while the ormer's mother-of-pearl shells are also used to make jewellery and other objects.



*“Little bits of France  
dropped into the sea and  
picked up by Britain”*

*Victor Hugo, Author and resident  
of Jersey and Guernsey between  
1851 and 1870 (1802-1885)*