

Postcard from St Ives

Forget kiss-me-quick hats and fish and chips, these days the British seaside experience can be a whole lot more sophisticated, writes Tim Metcalfe

I have memories of family holidays in Cornwall which are dominated by rain — lots of it — wet tents and food half-cooked on a Primus stove. And having to get up while it was still dark to load the car and set off before sunrise.

I'm sure that it must have been sunny on some occasions (in fact our family photographs prove that it was) but, you know how bad experiences in your youth fix themselves in your brain. So I've not really been tempted to go much past Somerset ever since. And certainly not with a tent.

But, fancying a short spring break by the sea, I was persuaded to venture west once more — and in some luxury (see page 55). The persuasion came in the form of a kind invitation from Andrew Bliss and his wife, Sue, owners of the elegantly modern Primrose Valley Hotel in St Ives. Checking out the hotel's website showed that this was no ordinary seaside B&B. The boutique-hotel style rooms all looked well-appointed and there was a well-stocked bar, with nearly 50 wines on the list.

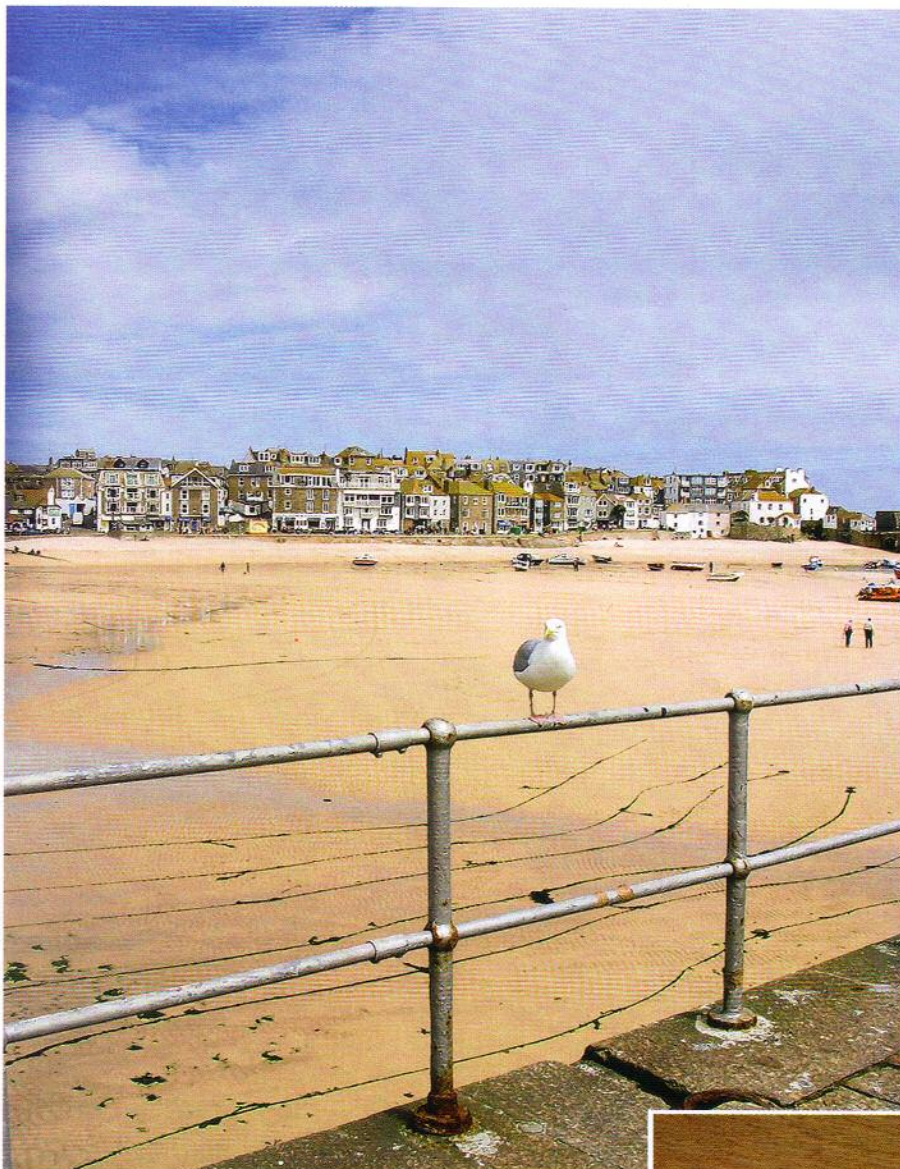
So St Ives it was — with a side trip to the Eden Project also on the cards.

The website didn't lie, Primrose Valley Hotel, reached down a narrow, steep, lane from the main road into St Ives, is immediately welcoming, its Edwardian facade overlooking

Continued on page 62



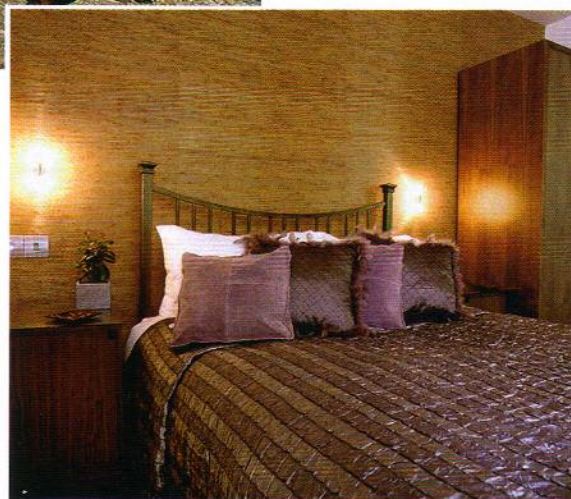
Porthminster Beach, St Ives



Above, the harbour at St Ives at low tide. Below the elegant Edwardian exterior of Primrose Valley Hotel



Above and below, two of the hotel's comfortable, well-appointed, bedrooms



Below, Primrose Valley Hotel's cosy and well-stocked bar. "I can't deny that any sensible hotel of our size with a bar only open to guests would think we were mad! But we are passionate about our wine," says hotel owner Andrew Bliss



... from page 61

Porthminster Beach presenting a friendly face to the world. Stepping into the lounge area, with its sofas and stripped-wood floor, the warm welcome continues. It is obvious that Andrew and Sue love this place, and have made it their home. If you want further proof, just take a look at all the family photographs that adorn the walls and windowsills.

The care they take is displayed by the comfortably modern décor and cosy bedrooms with mounds of cushions and big white towels for the en-suite bathrooms. And, as they say, when you leave, you just want to come back.

Andrew and Sue also care for St Ives, a fact illustrated by their membership of the Cornwall Sustainable Tourism Project (CoaST) — which involves, among other things, sourcing Cornish produce, minimising waste and addressing energy use. Andrew and Sue also support the Marine Conservation Society by asking guests to pay a voluntary 'tax' of £1 per room per night, which goes towards the work of the MCS.

So, guests at Primrose Valley Hotel can enjoy themselves, happy in the knowledge that the impact they have on the Cornish environment is redressed somewhat.

And the fact that Andrew and Sue source much of their food locally results in some truly delicious breakfasts, which set you up for some serious sightseeing.

As the hotel is right on Porthminster Beach, a short ramble along the seafront takes you to St Ives, its galleries (St Ives is home to The Tate and the Barbara Hepworth museum as well as many smaller galleries) and surprisingly cosmopolitan restaurants. Well, surprising to me — still having visions of arcades full of slot-machines and dodgy fish and chip shops.

We ate well on this trip, first at the trendy Onshore on Wharf Road, which deserved its accolade as UK pizza restaurant of the year, and at



Biomes and sculpture at the Eden Project



Photographs: Jennifer Attoe

the Porthminster Café — think Oxford's Petit Blanc if you want a reference. The Australian chef here cooked up a storm, which was probably why tables were in such demand. I'd like to thank the couple who didn't bother to turn up for their evening reservation — we got their table with a romantic view out to sea. In fact, St Ives' restaurants were surprisingly busy even in late May, and we were turned away by one — but their loss was Onshore's again.

Philistines that we are, we didn't quite make the Tate, thanks to a tight schedule, some spring sunshine and Cornish ice cream, delaying us too long. But we did enjoy wandering around the meandering lanes and visiting the new RNLI station, which has a fascinating display of historic rescues in the shadow of the massive lifeboat which lives there.

We had also promised ourselves to actually make a long-delayed trip to the Eden Project. That's the joy of St Ives — as well as being an attractive location to stay in its own right, it is also within easy reach of many of the area's attractions — such as the lovely Roseland peninsula, Falmouth, Padstow, St Mawes, St Michael's Mount, the list is genuinely endless.

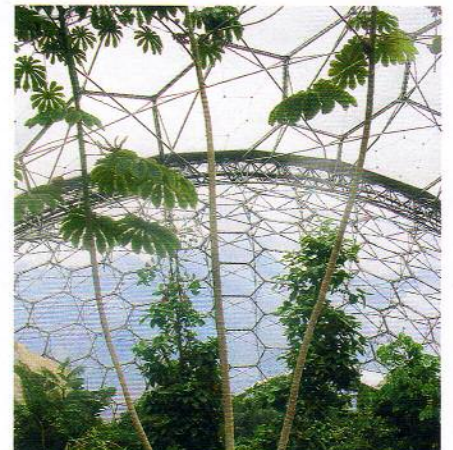
There's no doubt that the Eden Project has transformed the face of tourism in Cornwall, attracting more than five million visitors since it opened in March 2001.

The Eden Project is a totally theatrical experience. The huge 'biomes' — massive 'greenhouses' — of this global garden are hidden away in an old china clay pit. They say that you could squeeze the Tower of London into the largest structure!

The interiors recreate different plantlife from all the climatic regions of the world, from the humid tropics to the Mediterranean. The planting schemes are simply amazing. Perhaps the most impressive is the humid tropics biome, which even has a waterfall crashing from a rocky outcrop. You also come across items of artwork tucked away among the

greenery. I wouldn't want to go when the place is really packed during the height of the holiday season — but the Eden Project is one place you simply must make an effort to get to. It is one of the most inspiring places I have ever visited.

The Eden Project's eco-friendly philosophy reflects that of Andrew and Sue back at Primrose Valley, and, hopefully also appears to be creating a trend in this part of the world. Sustainability is just as important whether you're flying off to foreign climes — or simply travelling around the UK. Leave nothing but footprints, take nothing but photographs, as the old saying goes. End of lesson.



FACT FILE



■ Primrose Valley Hotel, Porthminster Beach, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 2ED. For more information, call 01736 794939, email info@primroseonline.co.uk or visit the website, www.primroseonline.co.uk

■ Eden Project, Bodelva, St Austell, Cornwall PL24 2SG. For more information about seasonal events, concerts and admission prices, call 01726 811900 or visit the website: www.edenproject.com

■ For information about the Cornwall

Sustainable Tourism Project (coaST), call 01872 562057, email info@coastproject.co.uk or visit the website www.coastproject.co.uk

■ For information about the Marine Conservation Society, call 01989 566017 or visit the website: www.mcsuk.org

■ For an online guide to attractions and seasonal events throughout Cornwall, visit the website, www.theguide-cornwall.com