

Carbis Bay

So beautiful – 'like the Maldives'

Hungry for fish and chips and strolls on the beach, Gavin Thompson heads to Carbis Bay, Cornwall, where he finds plenty of happy talk from locals and visitors alike

WISE old heads say judge a man by the company he keeps. Equate that to holidays and you should be able to judge a place to stay by the guests it harbours, in which case the Carbis Bay Hotel is charming, warm and oh-so friendly.

Moments after our arrival at reception to check in, a passing guest stopped, turned to us and said, "it's so lovely here – the service is fantastic but not too formal".

Any scepticism sparked by this unprovoked and impromptu recommendation was allayed after meeting more holidaymakers. It seems this is the kind of place where fellow tourists are so at home, they happily chat to strangers.

At dinner on our first night my Darling Wife was treated to a nugget about the number of spiders the average person swallows in their slumber over a lifetime, after her expression had given away an interest in the mirth and merriment coming from a nearby table.

Passing the same lady-of-a-more-mature-vintage in the corridor the next morning, she quickly inquired "how did you sleep?", while chuckling to herself.

The happy state of mind was not confined to the hotel. On the shortest of hops on the train to St Ives, we quizzed our ticket inspector on the merits of working in this particularly beautiful part of the Cornish coast. Does he get bored going back and forth on the same shuttle service all day? He tells us he "retired" to this job in 2003, and will never tire of it. "I took a picture of the bay this morning and sent it to a friend in America," he says. "He'll think it's the Maldives, it's so beautiful."

The St Ives to St Erth branch line, which runs to within about 100 (steep) yards of the hotel, is a treasure, incidentally, and a reminder of what a loss it was when so many smaller lines were closed in the last century. The views of the beaches and bays are stunning, and at £4 for an adult day ticket it is well worth making the whole hour round trip.

There's no denying part of Carbis Bay's appeal is its proximity to St Ives with its array of delights from vintage stores, local artists, restaurants and sweet shops, not to mention attractions such as the Barbara Hepworth Museum Sculpture Garden (which far outshines The Tate in our view), and beaches for everyone, be it families, surfers, sun seekers or walkers.

We spent a lazy afternoon on one such beach, decked out



SPECTACULAR: Carbis Bay is a view that rivals any of the world's tropical wonders



FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE: The Carbis Bay Hotel

with 1930s beach houses and a café in which the cook was seemingly thrilled to be serving us. "Sausage bap?" he said. "Lovely!" Before breaking into the chorus of Prince's 1999.

That evening we tucked into fish supper (chip supper for the veggie DW) at Harbour Fish & Chips, a sit-in chippy. It was simply scrumptious. The haddock flaked at the most fleeting brush of the fork and tasted fresher than the icy air of December dawn, the hand-cut chips were

perfection, and the pint of Doombar warmed the heart.

There are many top places to eat in this area, and the hotel's fine dining restaurant is one of them. On the other night of our stay we enjoyed a delicious dinner starting with cream of asparagus soup for DW, while I had creamy wild mushrooms and sweet pepper, the most delicate of pastry baskets with beetroot balsamic offering a sharp taste contrast.

Her main of leek, mushroom and Cornish ale bake with veg was surprisingly good – nice to

see ale applied to the veggie option – while my pan-fried lamb fillet, boulangere potatoes and wilted spinach was first class. Even the vegetables of the day were superb; crisp and young.

My elegantly-presented sticky toffee pudding with vanilla ice cream was a treat, and the distinctive aroma heavenly. The Paddock Shiraz from South Eastern Australia was a fine accompaniment.

Coffee (tea, as always, for the DW) and truffles on the lounge's soft old leather chairs is the perfect way to end any evening. The photographs of the hotel workers from the 1920s that line the corridor connecting the two are worth closer inspection, if only to admire the moustaches and bathing costumes men of that era got away with.

If pushed for criticisms of this waterfront hotel, our sea view was rather side-on and the walls in the more modern extension to the main building in which we stayed were a little thin. But none of this overshadowed our enjoyment one bit.

This part of Cornwall is swamped in the summer. But with clearer roads, smaller crowds and plenty of year-round activities, Carbis Bay has a strong pull out of season.

The highlight of our stay was on the morning we left, and the weather had turned against us, we indulged in a well-wrapped wet walk along Carbis Bay beach. We came back smiling. It must be something in the water.

Factfile and offers

Carbis Bay has recently been awarded an EC "blue flag" for water cleanliness and covers an area of some 25 acres.

By road Carbis Bay Hotel and Apartments is 185 miles from Bristol. Branch left on to the A30 at the end of the M5 (southbound) then follow the A30 for 110 miles until you see signs for St Ives A3074. The hotel is signed from Carbis Bay.

The Carbis Bay Hotel's winter break package is available from November 1, 2011 until March 31, 2012, and includes a full Cornish breakfast and dinner in the fine dining Sands Restaurant each evening.

Prices start from £135 per person for 2 nights; £199 per person for 3 nights and £260 per person for 4 nights.

Self-catering cottages are also available.

Call 01736 795311 or go online to carbisbayhotel.co.uk.

The hotel is on the St Ives branch line and offers a number of rail and stay packages.

Two-night stay — three-course dinner, full Cornish breakfast and room, from £190 per person, including standard rail travel from Bristol Temple Meads.

Three-night stay — three-course dinner, full Cornish breakfast and room from £249 per person,

including standard rail travel from Bristol Temple Meads.

Four-night stay — three-course dinner, full Cornish breakfast and room from £310 per person, including standard rail travel from Bristol Temple Meads.

Sea view supplements apply — side sea view - £15 per room per night, full sea view - £30 per room per night.

First class rail fare — supplement of £49 per person.

Apartments: Two bedroom self-catering apartment or cottage based on two occupants, 3 night mini-break — self-catering £499 for two, including standard rail fare from Bristol Temple Meads.

Each additional person — supplement of £135 per person. First class rail fare — supplement of £49 per person.

