

Indulge yourself among pavlovas and ragged cliffs

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From its perch overlooking a swathe of cream sand and the sea sparkling into the distance, the Carbis Bay Hotel on the north Cornish coast makes for the perfect place to press the pause button, writes Fran McElhone.

WHEN a sentence has the words 'chocolate' and 'velvet' in it, why read on? My delight at devouring the exquisitely scrumptious white chocolate and Bailey's torte with a milk chocolate velvet and nut cluster, was only spoilt by Mr McElhone plopping a dollop of his own passion fruit pavlova roulade filled with double cream and pistachio ice cream dessert on my plate.



I managed to contain my anger though.

I know what you're thinking. Why could she possibly be angry at her other half's brazen generosity? Because I simply didn't want any interruptions to the enjoyment this velvety chocolate deliciousness was delivering.

On the menu at The Sands restaurant at the hotel was an adventurous mix of wholesome, quality ingredients (yes, chocolate is wholesome) including a mix of fresh fish and meat dishes and a vegetarian option. And the fare was always beautifully presented - imagine for a moment a slice of star fruit with a blob of vanilla ice cream on top, a few centimetres to the left is a single plump raspberry, above, a careful smear of white chocolate sauce and smiling over everything, a wedge of chocolate walnut cake. Case in point.

Other than the food, it was clear on our recent visit to the 19th-century hotel that there are so many other reasons to visit.

Not least is the stunning location over Carbis Bay with its minty blue waves that lap gently at its soft sand - the bay is sandwiched between some of Cornwall's top surf beaches but is itself not one of them.

The beautiful hotel is only about a mile round the ragged cliffs from St Ives with its trinket and trendy clothes shops, cafes, pubs and art galleries.

And if you decided to take the leafy coast path there, you have the option of hopping on the train for the short journey back.

So strategically placed is the hotel, in fact, it is possible to pack an unimaginable amount in.

In our three-day stay we indulged in a little wild swimming around the base of the jagged cliffs of the bay, surfing at Hayle river mouth, shopping in St Ives, of course, on a very rainy day, hiking round Mousehole on the south coast, a visit to a wild bird sanctuary, also at Mousehole, sauntered barefoot along the sand poking our noses in the caves at Carbis Bay and even managed to squeeze in some much-needed relaxation in the hotel's conservatory or in our apartment.

The hotel has 47 rooms, all decked out individually, some traditionally toned, some with a contemporary twist, but all one, neat and cosy, clean and stylish.

Every nook of the hotel oozes quality, but despite its size and apparent grandeur, has an unpretentious, relaxed feel, though that could be partially down to the friendly staff who I couldn't imagine letting the word 'no' pass their lips that often.

We felt extremely fortunate to stay in one of seven luxury granite cottage-esque apartments, hidden in the leafy shadow of the hotel and towering railway archway.

Spotlessly clean and again, oozing quality and thought, it was a chic yet comfortable home away from home to unwind after our many exploits.

There was just the one thing we didn't manage to cram in - a dip in the hotel's heated outdoor pool while gazing out to sea.

For details, call 01736 795311 or see www.carbisbayhotel.co.uk