

THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF ACTUARIES



Master's Weekend 2020



Isles of Scilly Thursday 9th to Monday 13th July 2020

Introduction

For my Master's Weekend in 2020 I have chosen a trip to the beautiful Isles of Scilly. This small archipelago 28 miles off the south west tip of Cornwall is described as England's own sub-tropical paradise, with crystal clear turquoise waters and its own micro-climate that enables exotic plants from around the world to thrive in its beautiful gardens.

The archipelago comprises around 140 islands and rocky islets, of which five are still inhabited. They boast a rich history with many bronze and iron age stone structures dotted around the moors, as well as castles and fortifications which are open to wander into at your will – there are no fences or entry fees here! The total population is now around 2000, three quarters of whom live on the main island of St Mary's. The islands are a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and are world renowned for their

wildlife, including the UK's largest population of grey seals and many rare birds. The second largest island, Treco, is privately owned by the Dorrien-Smith family and home to the world-famous Treco Abbey Gardens, established in the nineteenth century and boasting a collection of exotic plants from all over the world, protected by the mild winter climate and long hours of summer sunshine. The gardens have long been home to a population of golden pheasants and more recently there has been a successful project to introduce red squirrels to the island. They are easily spotted jumping through the trees or running through the gardens.

I have chosen to visit in July so that we should be able to see puffins and seals, see the gardens at their best and enjoy long light evenings and hopefully warm summer weather, although of course I can't guarantee the latter! Be warned though, the sea temperature averages a chilly 16°C even in summer!

I am looking forward to welcoming you to my favourite place in the world and sharing a memorable weekend at the start of my Master's year. If you have any questions at all about the weekend please do phone or email me.

Julie Griffiths, Master 2020-21 (subject to election)

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Accommodation

We will be staying at the Star Castle Hotel on the main island of St Mary's. Built in 1593 during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, it stands on the fortified Garrison Hill and commands magnificent views of the sea and the islands in every direction. The Star Castle is owned and managed by the Francis family and retains its essential historic character whilst offering both traditional sixteenth century castle rooms or more modern and spacious garden rooms.



The Dining Room was the original officer's mess and retains the Elizabethan character of the castle, whilst the Conservatory restaurant offers a light and airy alternative. We

will have the exclusive use of one or other restaurant for breakfast and dinner each day during our stay. Both restaurants offer award winning food with a focus on fresh local fish and seafood, including crab and lobster caught by the proprietor Robert Francis.

The hotel bar is situated in the former dungeon where four hundred years ago some of the country's most notorious prisoners were incarcerated. They would still recognise some features but fortunately today it is more welcoming!

Itinerary

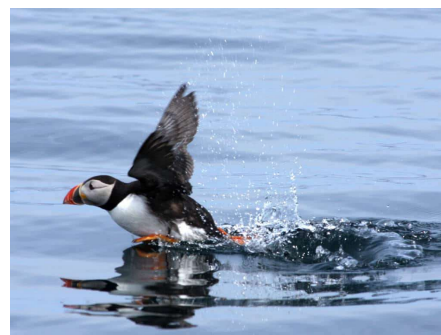
- **Thursday 9th July** – Travel to the islands and check-in; if you get there early take the chance to wander round Hugh Town before meeting for drinks in the Dungeon Bar and dinner in the Conservatory restaurant.
- **Friday 10th July** – Guided walking tour of the Star Castle and Garrison to learn about its history as a strategic military base from Elizabethan times to the first world war, whilst enjoying stunning views over the whole archipelago. Lunch at a local restaurant with terrace views over the harbour with a free afternoon to explore at your leisure. Champagne reception on the ramparts, followed by a black-tie banquet in the original Officers' Mess Dining Room.



- **Saturday 11th July** – Private boat trip to Treco and a guided tour of the Abbey Gardens with the curator or head gardener. Lunch at the Flying Boat Club on Treco before returning to St Mary's for a wine tasting at the castle's own Holy Vale vineyard and dinner in the Conservatory restaurant.



- **Sunday 12th July** – Boat trip around the islands to see puffins and seals, landing on one of the off-islands for a pub lunch and a chance for a leisurely walk post lunch or to just sit and take in the views. Return to St Mary's for dinner in the Conservatory restaurant.



- **Monday 13th July** – departure time depending on your choice of transport.

The itinerary is subject to change depending on weather, tides etc. This itinerary gives you a taste of what the islands have to offer, but if you would like to stay a few extra days either before or after the weekend the Star Castle are pleased to offer a 20% discount on all room bookings. This would give you time to explore the other islands, take in a complementary round on the tricky and spectacular St Mary's golf course (clubs available to hire), take a boat trip to see the Bishop Rock lighthouse, go horse riding over the historic moors on St Mary's or even go snorkeling with the seals off the Eastern Isles.



Getting There

There are a number of options for travelling to the Isles of Scilly:

- Helicopter from Penzance – the helicopter service was suspended a few years ago when the heliport at Penzance was turned into a supermarket, however the good news is that work is underway on a new heliport and the service is expected to resume next year. Assuming the work is completed this would be my recommended option, not least because you have a 20kg luggage allowance. The trip takes about 20 minutes, usually with stunning aerial views of the islands as you arrive.
- Flights from Land's End, Newquay or Exeter – if you're not keen on helicopters, the Isles of Scilly has its own Skybus airline with flights from Land's End (15 minutes), Newquay (30 minutes) or Exeter (60 minutes). These are small planes; Land's End is either an 8 seat Islander or 16 seat Twin Otter and Newquay and Exeter are both Twin Otters. If flying from Land's End there is a free shuttle bus available from Penzance train station. Exeter is ideal for those who don't want to drive or train all the way to the tip of Cornwall, or Newquay offers connecting flights from Heathrow or regional airports. Luggage allowance on all flights is 15kgs so you need to pack light! The small planes also offer great views of the islands in good weather.
- Finally, if you don't like helicopters or small planes, the Scillonian ferry operates daily from Penzance, usually leaving about 9am depending on tides. The journey takes around 2¾ hours and is not recommended for those of a delicate disposition – the incidence of seasickness is quite high. Hence this is really a last resort, although it has the benefit of no luggage restrictions. The return journey arrives back at Penzance around 7.45pm.

Please note that there are very limited travel options on a Sunday, hence the proposed itinerary continuing until Monday. It is not yet known if the helicopter will fly on Sundays, but there are no other flights. The Scillonian usually offers Sunday sailings in the summer months, so if you really do need to get back on Sunday we can ensure you are back at the quay to catch the ferry in the afternoon, but this is probably your only option. Your room rate will be adjusted accordingly.

The Star Castle will book your transport for you later this year when the timetables and prices are available. Prices range from around £110 return for the Scillonian to £350 return from Exeter. The helicopter is expected to be around £220 return. Transfers from St Mary's Airport or the quay to the hotel are included, this takes around 5-10 minutes.

Accessibility

The Star Castle hotel is not able to offer disabled access and you will need to be able to negotiate some uneven stone steps both to get into the Castle and to get from the quay onto the boats. However, I do want to make sure that the trip is open to as many people as possible, so I will arrange transport and alternatives to walking for anyone who is not able to walk very far, including back up the hill to the castle at the end of the day!

Extra Guests, Children and Dogs

For obvious reasons numbers are limited, so initially I will limit bookings to one guest per member, but do let me know if you would like to bring children or additional guests and we will accommodate if possible. The hotel is dog-friendly – please let me know if you want to bring your dog.

Booking

The cost of the weekend is £800 per person for four nights in a standard Garden double or twin room, to include breakfast and dinner, wine at the banquet and wine tasting and all trips. Lunches and drinks at other meals will be at your own expense and travel is extra, depending on how you choose to get there. You can upgrade to a superior castle or sea view garden room with veranda, or request a single room, on a first-come, first-served basis when you book – please ask for details of availability and rates.

Please book directly with Sarah at the Star Castle on 01720 422317, making sure she knows you are booking for my Master's Weekend. You can also book additional nights before or after the weekend at a 20% discounted rate. At this stage a deposit will be required, and I will advise when it is time to book transport – you will get a small discount on the published fares by booking through the hotel. Insurance is strongly recommended as all travel options are weather dependent.

Please do let me know when you have booked, as GDPR probably prevents the hotel from telling me! Please also advise any dietary or mobility requirements and your preferred method of travel to the islands.

