

An unexpected adventure on the Isle of Wight

Elise Britten discovers the island's wild side as a guest of Visit Isle of Wight

AFTER a breezy drive and a no fuss Red Funnel ferry from Southampton, it is easy to slip into a haze of total relaxation when you step onto the Isle of Wight. No-one seems in a hurry on an island that appears to be perpetually on holiday. It is easy to imagine spending far longer than the weekend we have booked reclining in one of the many scenic spots.

But that's not what my long-suffering friend Sandie and I are signed up for – we are here to sample everything the isle has to offer. Including jumping off a cliff or two.

The excitement starts with arriving at our adorable Tiny Homes accommodation. Small footprint living never felt so stylish – and you won't truly believe it possible before you go, but the composting toilets are really quite pleasant.

Our Tiny Home is called Hygge and the name definitely fits, with a cosy wood-burning stove and a treehouse-like ladder up to the sleeping area. Relaxing at the picnic table on the decking overlooking a peaceful wildflower meadow, I forget just how close I am to everything.

After a restful night's sleep we are well-prepared for an early start and head to Appley Beach for our 8am appointment with Island Riding Centre. Urging my horse into a trot we head towards the horizon across the vast exposed beach at low tide. Half way through our session a heavy mist

descends. But far from being a disappointment, the mist adds romance to the ride. With the shore hidden and pools of water disguising where the land ends and sea begins, a spirit of adventure reigns and I feel like I could have been transported to a time long ago and a land far away. I never want it to end, but of course it must.

Returning to the workshop at Tiny Homes, our next activity is Mrs B's soy candle-making class. Perhaps it's a little out of place on an adventure weekend, but I'm surprised by how much I enjoy learning all about the art and in the end I am disproportionately proud of my handiwork.

Then it's time to head back to the seaside to explore the cobble streets of Cowes. We continue along the coast and stop for lunch at the Little Gloster in Gurnard, soaking up the sunshine and sea views. We both choose to start with a cheeky cocktail, the Little Gloster Refresher, which is quite possibly the most delightful tippie I've ever indulged in. The mix of gin, Prosecco, elderflower, cucumber and a sprinkle of magic is dangerously drinkable. But almost as perfect is the rhubarb and biscuit crème caramel dessert we fight over.

Later arriving at Compton Bay, we huff up the steep incline to be rewarded by stunning views of white cliffs, rolling fields and pebbly beaches



Paragliding



Horseriding



Tiny Rooms



Cycling to the Needles

FACTFILE

- » Elise was hosted by Visit Isle of Wight, a not-for-profit company dedicated to showcasing all that the island has to offer. Visit visitisleofwight.co.uk for a full guide
- » Red Funnel runs very regular and convenient car ferries from Southampton. Fares vary, starting from just £46 for a day return. See redfunnel.co.uk
- » Tiny Homes offers unique small-footprint holidays and included workshops near Newport, visit tinyhomesholidays.com

as far as the eye can see. Paddy at High Adventure Paragliding has kindly agreed to take us on a taster flight. Being told to run straight at a cliff edge brings on a few nerves but I don't get far before being gently lifted into the sky and relaxing back into my seat. I immediately discover that paragliding is not an extreme sport at all, but a serene moment of soaring weightlessly through the sky.

But if we were looking for something high-octane, we are about to find it at Tapnell Farm. The packed live music venue is strikingly diverse, with both young, old and every dress sense possible. What they all have in common is reckless abandon; everyone is throwing themselves about with evident disregard to how they might appear. And the cause is clear – to say Mr Bruce from The Correspondents is full of energy would be a massive understatement. He simply explodes on stage with limbs whirling impossibly fast.

On Sunday morning we allow ourselves a more relaxed start, before making our way to Yarmouth to pick up a set of bikes from Wight Cycle Hire. Being way out of practice, I'd forgotten the simple freedom of getting on a bike and streaming away at speed. We cheat and opt for electric

bikes, which we are very thankful for when we begin to face the many hills. It turns out to be a perfect way to explore more stunning scenery, riding along a disused railway track to Freshwater Bay and onto the Needles.

Racing back we have time to enjoy lunch at the unique Off the Rails café. Occupying a former railway station, the café is packed full of character and has a stunning green outlook. They even have their own set of swans who reach their necks over the platform to be fed. I dig into a satisfying chilli, with salsa and crisp wrap shreds and truly divine warm bread on the side, while Sandie opts for a traditional fish chowder.

After getting kitted up we are ready for our final escapade; coasteering with Adventure Activities. Clambering over rocks with the sea crashing around us, I truly feel like I'm taking on the elements. We explore cave networks and practice jumping into the sea. But the showstopper is a climb up and across a sheer rock face to take on a 20 foot drop. Watching the instructor do it, it seems impossibly high.

My heart races as I scramble for foot and hand holds, slowing inching across the rock, absolutely petrified. But I make it and with a pre-emptive scream I hurl myself into the sea. Down, down I go, before my flotation vest propels me to pop back to the surface, adrenaline coursing through my veins. But do I want to take the same jump again? No thanks – of some adventures, once is enough!