

Great British Weekend: Falmouth, Cornwall



Pendennis Castle, Falmouth, Cornwall Dave Penman/Rex Features

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It was only when we crossed her wake that I realised that I do, after all, suffer from seasickness.

“Hold tight, might get a little bit bumpy,” warned Dave Cockwell, the boat-builder and skipper of our vessel, as we rounded the bow of *Adela*, a magnificent 180ft classic superyacht that makes *The Onedin Line* look like a soap opera about cross-Channel ferries. One headlong lurch across the cabin later and it was only a matter of time before my stomach made its way back down the alimentary canal. Such are the rigours of sailing.

Was it wet? You bet. But almost anyone who opts to take time out in Britain gets poked in the eye by the dripping finger of fate. So if you are going to get damp, you may as well do it in a place that makes the most of water. Nobody could accuse Falmouth folk of being aquaphobic. To judge by the names on their jackets, the town has more Henri Lloyds than

a middle-class phone book. But it is also a resort whose rich heritage is shaping what the town fervently hopes will be an enriched future.

Falmouth has pastel-coloured terraces, cobbled streets, beach cafés and posh surfers, but you can get those almost anywhere in Cornwall, a county that has become so fashionable that the Prime Minister's wife went into premature labour at the thought of an extended break.

As I wandered down the quayside streets, it dawned on me: none of those picture-postcard themes would exist were it not for Falmouth. For instance, a visit to Pendennis Castle, on the west side of the Fal Estuary, is an impressive reminder of the town's military and defensive importance. Built for King Henry VIII in the 16th century, it faced down Spanish sailors who fancied a piece of the Cornish coast and, as a royalist position, withstood a five-month siege carried out by Cromwell's troops little more than 100 years later.

A short walk into town from Pendennis took us to the National Maritime Museum, which had upped sticks and shifted since my previous visit 20 years ago. Its historic symbols of adventure and expedition now form the centrepiece of the aptly named Discovery Quay, a wonderful celebration of Falmouth's unique nautical heritage. Here we strolled among some of the craft that gave Britain its seafaring reputation and, when we had finished, walked outside to witness why the legacy is safe.

Falmouth is on the way to becoming the UK's most important location for the manufacture of superyachts, the place that billionaires choose when they want a new floating holiday home. But the real triumph here is in the harmony between industry and indolence: who would have thought a shipyard could feel like Cannes?

All that sea air worked up the appetite and gave us an excuse to sample some of the natural resources. You can't go to Falmouth without visiting Rick Stein's new restaurant — it's the law, obviously, and a brilliant addition — but actually you could pick almost any eatery to enjoy the fruits of the sea. The Hut, an intimate 32-seater on Quay Street, is highly recommended.

Food, protection, employment; Falmouth has granted all three to the people of Cornwall down the centuries, and when it was time for us to take a rest and reflect on it all, we headed down to the spectacular Gylly Beach to soak up the sun.

It rained. It does sometimes, but who cares? We were in Falmouth and the water was lovely.

Need to know

Bed down at . . .

St Michael's Hotel (01326 312707, stmichaelshotel.co.uk) has food to match the fantastic views of Falmouth Bay from its award-winning restaurant. Rooms from £59pp, with dinner and breakfast.

Chow down at . . .

Rick Stein's Fish & Chips (rickstein.com) — what else did you expect? Book early and get a

table upstairs in the Oyster Bar .

More information

Freewinds Yacht Charter (01326 373821, www.freewinds.co.uk) offers a range of sailing breaks. A day's skippered sailing on a 38ft boat for six people costs about £400.

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