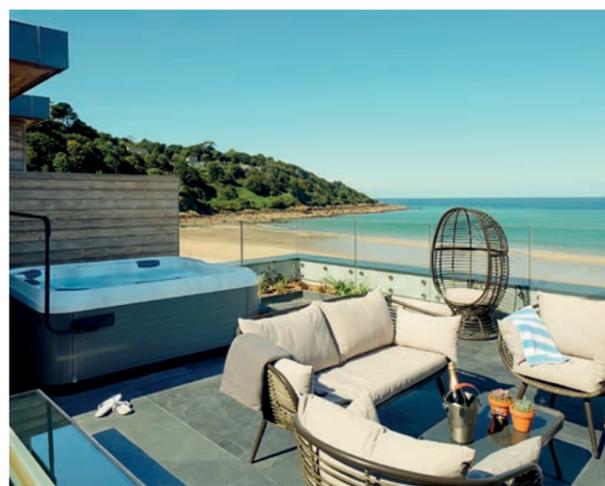




SEASIDE CHIC

THE CARBIS BAY HOTEL HAS BEEN WELCOMING FAMOUS LITERARY FIGURES AND HAPPY HOLIDAYMAKERS TO CORNWALL SINCE ARCHITECT SILVANUS TREVAIL BUILT IT IN 1894. THE NEW BEACHFRONT LODGES, THOUGH, ARE UPPING THE GAME. GISELLE WHITEAKER LUXURIATES BY THE BAY.



It's dark when my boyfriend Elio and I pull up at the Carbis Bay Hotel, a stone's throw from St Ives on Cornwall's Atlantic coast. The soothing sound of waves licking at the sandy shore is the only evidence of the private Blue Flag beach that is part of the Carbis Bay Estate. I'm excited about waking up here in the morning, when we'll be able to see where we are.

I'm even more excited when we are guided into the three-bedroom beach lodge that will be our home for the next few days. The recently launched row of luxury lodges sits between the main hotel and the beach. Entered on the upper level, the front door is flanked by a private almost-rooftop terrace with a large hot tub tucked into a secluded corner. Inside, three bedrooms branch off the entry hallway; the master has a balcony and a large marble en suite with a walk-in rain shower and a free-standing bath.

MAIN AND ABOVE
Poolside at the Carbis Bay Hotel; the view from the beach lodge balcony

A spectacular floating concrete staircase spirals down to the ground floor, the majority of which is an open kitchen, dining and lounge area of generous proportions – proportions that make my compact city apartment feel like a hobbit house. The gunmetal-grey kitchen, equipped with all the mod cons and incorporating a full-size fridge, dominates one end of the room. A lemon drizzle cake sits on the island bench, along with a bottle of champagne in an ice bucket and a loaf of freshly baked bread. There's butter in the fridge along with milk, tea and coffee on the counter, and a basket of local treats, ranging from Cornish fudge to Mr Filbert's nuts and Kernow hot chocolate spoons.

Past the bookshelf cut into the wall containing board games, there's a large wooden dining table, a bowl of fruit on top, with bench seating that would fit at least eight. Two sofas laden with cushions enclose the lounge area, which is dominated by a wall unit with a built-in fireplace. "That," says Elio in a voice tinged with awe, "...is a Bang and Olufsen television." I'm more impressed by the wall of windows facing the darkness of the night. The beach is in our backyard.

It would be rude not to avail of the hot tub. Soaking in the steamy water, the cool night air swirling around our faces, we pledge to bathe here every day of our stay. It's a promise we are both determined to keep.

When morning comes, the draw of the view drags me from the comfortable cocoon of the bed. Flinging open the

RIGHT ABOVE AND BELOW
The beach side of the lodges; a master bedroom suite





curtains, I am greeted by an expanse of golden sand, leading to an aquamarine ocean. The whole of the bay is visible, curving at each end as if enfolding us in an embrace. There's a light mist hovering and it feels magical. Only the thought of breakfast takes me away from the panorama.

Fortified by a delicious repast of fresh fruit, followed by Cornish hog's pudding and hash topped with a poached egg, we follow the winding South West Coast Path, crossing the railway tracks that hug the coast. It isn't long until the picturesque town of St Ives comes into view, across a broad expanse of sand - the tide is well out and fishing boats rest on an angle by the harbour breakwater, the lighthouse standing sentinel. The clouds are lifting, revealing patches of deep blue sky, and gulls wheel on the sea breezes as we wander arm in arm past the whitewashed, slate-hung cottages and Victorian villas that climb away from the fishing harbour. This quaint town has provided inspiration for artists for centuries. Turner was reportedly the first artist to visit in 1811 and by the early 20th century, artists and craftspeople began taking up residence.

Late afternoon, we wander back to Carbis Bay and spend time on the beach before making good on our pledge - a pre-dinner float in the hot tub is the ideal way to farewell the fading sun. Post-soak, as we complete our final preparations before dinner, the doorbell rings, signalling an unexpected delivery of pre-dinner cocktails and canapés.

The Beach Lodges are Carbis Bay Hotel's most desirable residences yet. Situated directly on the beach, they combine seaside chic with hot tubs and roof or beach gardens. Boasting spacious open-plan lounges whose floor-to-ceiling windows lead to private sun decks and all have bay-facing balconies. Guests can avail of all of the Estate facilities, including the restaurants, C Bay Spa, conservatory, terrace bar and lounge, beach and water sports. See www.carbisbayhotel.co.uk.

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

Delectable dishes at Sands restaurant; boats on the sand at St Ives

The meal that follows in the hotel's Sands restaurant - one of several dining options available - is equally delightful. An amuse-bouche of Parma ham and cornichons kick-starts a series of mouthwatering dishes, from a roulade of crab, with courgette and apple, bitter apple puree and crab custard to seared loin of venison with roasted fig, spiced raspberry jam and chive and Parmesan risotto. The Creedy Carver duck breast and leg is intriguingly paired with saffron potatoes, braised carrots, kimchi cabbage and marmalade and duck tea, while the tender Jacob's Ladder is shored up with horseradish mash, Crown Prince squash, Cornish kale and wine sauce.

For dessert, we opt for "A Ferris Wheel of Fun to Share". All eyes turn our way when a silver Ferris Wheel frame is brought to our table, loaded with funfair flavours like miniature brownies, toffee apples and sugar doughnuts. It certainly lives up to its name.



All too soon, it's time for us to continue our exploration of the Cornish coast. There's much to discover in this part of the country, from the granite cliffs that rise out of the Atlantic Ocean at Land's End to the tidal island of St Michael's Mount and the open-air Minack Theatre at Porthcurno. There's no doubt Cornwall is home to some spectacular scenery, but the impeccable service, fine food and breathtaking views across the beautiful bay at the Carbis Bay Hotel are beyond compare.

