

DAILY EXPRESS WINTERBREAKS

The secrets of Jersey's shores

A memorable night in an 18th-century tower showed TINA EDISS a different side of this atmospheric island

IF THEY had told me about the bathroom (or lack of), I might have said no. If they had told me I had to sleep in a bunk in a room with five men, only one of which I was married too, I might have stayed at home.

Yet if I hadn't come I wouldn't have walked on the sea bed in the moonlight or watched the waves as they parted from the east and west to reveal an astonishing lunar-like landscape. Nor would I have seen the tide come rushing in until we were left stranded, surrounded and astounded by the sea.

I was in Jersey, taking part in a guided walk to the 18th-century Seymour Tower, which stands a mile and a half out to sea in the Royal Bay of Grouville. The walks take place when the influence of the moon is at its strongest and the tides are so great that the waves pull back for miles, uncovering a path to the tower.

They're known as Moonwalks. They last about three hours and you'll need to wrap-up warm and wear your wellies. It can be dangerous; the sea comes back in unevenly and with surprising speed, so you need to be guided by an expert.

"It's a chance to see marine life that only divers see," guide Derek Hairon explains.

You can add to the experience by spending the night at the tower. So, at noon, a group of us set off, carrying everything we'd need for the next 24 hours.

We picked our way across the bay, sinking into seaweed and splashing in rock pools. After an hour we reached the stone steps that lead to the tower.

The door is about 8ft up the wall, reached by a stepladder. We climbed up to find basic but well-equipped accommodation. Just don't look for a bathroom - there isn't one.

Downstairs is a kitchen area with a table and chairs and two bunks for the guide and one guest. Upstairs is one room with high windows and six bunks.



BIRD'S EYE VIEW: The azure waters of the Royal Bay of Grouville

Stairs lead to a chemical toilet and a roof terrace with terrific views out to sea.

"If you don't like communal living, it's not for you," says Derek. "If you snore a lot you might wake with a pile of boots on your head."

We went for a walk before the tide came in, climbing over rocks of granite in reds, pinks and greys and pebbles of khaki green. As the tide rushed back in we sat on the rocks that surround the tower until the tide finally cut us off.

Later, I watched the sun set over the island and a full moon rise over the sea, a soft glow that intensified to a blinding silver as darkness deepened.

Just after midnight the tide was out far enough again for us to take our moonwalk. I switched on my torch but the huge moon was throwing down a big spotlight and stars shone like diamonds so I didn't need it. I walked out some way and looked back at the impressive

outline of Seymour Tower, a black silhouette that has remained unchanged for hundreds of years.

In the darkness the rocks surrounding it were ash grey, like a picture of the moon itself.

WE PADDED though rock pools where plankton gave off phosphorescent glows so that ribbons of light in greens and blues and yellows seemed to stream from our wellies. We put some leftover bait in the pools and watched as hermit crabs and shrimps made tentative steps out of their caves, as if they knew there was no such thing as a free lunch.

I wasn't sure if I'd sleep that night, yet the mattress was more comfy than it looked and it was too dark for the lack of privacy to be an issue. So with the sound of the sea roaring - and men snoring - I drifted off to sleep, glad I'd made this journey to the bottom of the sea.

INFORMATION:

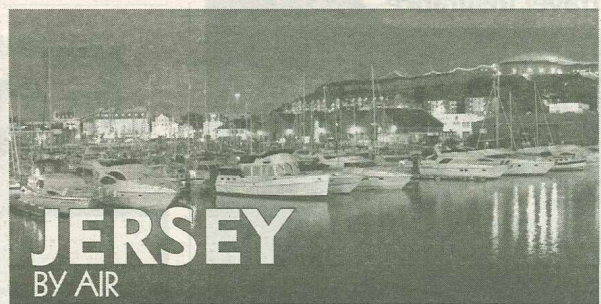
Jersey Walk Adventures (01534 853138/www.jerseywalkadventures.co.uk) offers Moonwalks from £12pp for up to 12 people. Overnight stays at the tower cost from £40pp, excluding food. Sole group use from £200 with guide.

Flyjersey.com (0845 603 3125/www.flyjersey.com) offers two nights B&B at the Golden Sands Hotel, St Brelades Bay, from £234pp (two sharing), including return flights from Southampton and transfers.

Jersey Tourism: 01534 448800/www.jersey.com



POOLS OF PLENTY: Check out the sea life on the way to the tower



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