


FEATURE: Jersey

A hidden

Island



The daylight was slipping behind me and the only sound ahead was of a wave gently swooshing into the blackness and the voice of Gary calling me to paddle towards him.

It wasn't quite like this at the start. I'd turned up at Greve de Lecq bay in Jersey, on a kayaking trip with Jersey Kayak Adventures along the North Jersey coastline. What I hadn't expected was to find myself sitting in the most awesome sea cave I'd ever been in - so deep that the legend Gary told of it being a smugglers cave running under the parish church half a mile away, seemed to have some truth in it.

Right from the start I realised this was not just a gentle paddle around the bay at the seaside. Sure, there was the beach café selling some seriously good food and ice cream, and a beach full of dads busily constructing tower block sand castles while their children lazed about listening to their iPods.

Within minutes of going afloat (after a safety briefing and instruction), Gary, our guide, was giving personal coaching tips and a guided history of Jersey. Then we began to see the 'jumpers' - people who were throwing themselves off the cliff face into the sea!

Jersey's national sport is jumping. "If it was in the Olympics we'd get gold," said Gary. Just watching them throw themselves off rocks maybe 30 feet up was stomach churning and made me wonder whether the local's had some sort of death wish or were related to Lemmings. But everyone seemed to come up smiling and keen to do it again.

Then it was our turn to be adventurous. Our little group of kayakers who hadn't met until 30 minutes ago were already starting to feel like explorers as we cruised between the rocky granite channel of Rouge Nez and the Rhino rock.

Depending on how long you looked at it perhaps the outcrop did look like a Rhino head, but I couldn't see the red nose on the headland - maybe it was because it was not the week of comic relief. Drifting on the sea we listened to the description of the bird life around us before Gary suddenly announced "Follow me." and vanished into a foreboding hole in the cliff face. Time to remember the old ski school advice "Always follow close behind your instructor," I thought. I followed cautiously.

I felt a blast of air on my face. Suddenly the cave opened up around me. In front of me sat our guide under a beam of sunlight. Looking up I now saw that I was sitting in a cave with not one but two entrances. One at sea level, the other 20 feet above me.

I sat quietly taking it all in. The stillness and gentle sound of the waves slopping against the rock face made



Greve de Lecq beach seem a very long way away. As I looked into the darkness the water seemed strangely emerald green in colour. I was sitting in a kayak in a blue hole cave, one where light is entering through another underwater entrance and shining upwards. I thought these only existed in the Mediterranean and Caribbean. "Well, tourism did advertise Jersey as Britain's South Sea Island years ago" replied Gary.

Passing beneath the cliffs we were getting close to the wildlife. "Shags" announced Gary. I looked at them. They were behaving themselves and not doing anything of the sort. Then I realised that this was the name of these elegant black sea birds whose diving skills were even more awesome once they plunged underwater and could be seen swimming under our kayaks searching for fish.

Another cave suddenly came into view and this time I could sense that the other seven kayakers were all intent upon dashing in. But first the guide was going ahead to check it was safe in case there were any sudden swells and to make sure we did not stray too deep into the darkness of the cave. As we paddled into the cave it dawned on me just how huge it was. The roof arched maybe 30ft above our heads and was so wide we could

Reaching places other boats cannot reach



cliff jumping is Jersey's national sport

easily turn our kayaks around if we wanted. No way was I leaving until I'd explored further into the darkness. I wanted to be an explorer. To my right the walls were encrusted in sea life. As I looked closer it seemed that the walls

were constructed like a weathered dry stone wall full of rocks and mortar creating a path into the blackness. This had all the makings of a real smugglers cave. That is until Gary pointed out that in a few hours the sea would have risen by some 30 feet and I'd then be banging my head on the distant ceiling of the cave.

Squinting on my return to the daylight, our exploration of the coast continued as we wound our way between sea stacks and channels and discovered natural arches and incredible lagoon blue ponds which without a guide we'd have missed.

Then on to Ille Agois and a tiny inaccessible bay that left me feeling as if we were on some remote unexplored coast complete with views of distant islands on the horizon. This really was a voyage to discover a hidden Jersey.

Returning to Greve de Lecq I felt like the explorer back from an expedition. The ice cream definitely tasted good! ●

Hilary Nicolson

FACTS :

Hilary Nicolson paddled with Jersey Kayak Adventures Ltd, tel 07797 853 033, www.jerseykayakadventures.co.uk.

They run tours and courses around the coast of Jersey and to offshore islands with qualified BCU Coaches throughout the week. All equipment is provided. For experienced kayakers they offer a range of sea kayaking trips and courses using a range of sea kayaks to suit all abilities and ages.

Further information on Jersey can be obtained from Jersey Tourism, www.jersey.com.

Jersey has some of the highest tide ranges in the world of up to 40 feet and with it the chance to see a mass of different sea environments. Though only 12 by 8 miles the island offers a huge range of activities and experiences to suit all interests.