

THE ROCK IS ON A ROLL

by YORK
MEMBER

THIS could be a big moment for Gibraltar. We have the green light to travel again and, if you go there now, there are no restrictions at all — plus, even in winter, temperatures are mild and inviting.

Gibraltar, which lies 1,000 miles south of the UK, is a mere two-and-a-half hour flight from Heathrow. (The number of those who have tested positive is in just three figures.)

As a result, more of us are expected to head for this English-speaking, 2.6 sq mile British territory — a one-time garrison town turned dynamic mini-city state. It is also an increasingly popular wedding destination due to Gib's unique location, the ease with which a marriage licence can be obtained and the 20 people allowed to attend a ceremony.

So what does 'Gib' have to offer solo travellers, couples and families thinking of visiting over the February half-term break?

MONKEY BUSINESS

YOU have to venture up the near 1,400 ft high Rock with its nature reserve and Barbary macaques (monkeys). The easiest way to get to the top and enjoy the magnificent views is by cable car. However, be warned: the macaques will grab your backpack if it contains anything edible so leave any snacks at your hotel. There is a restaurant adjoining the cable car station, The Mons Calpe Suite (monscalpesuite.com), where you can have a meal while enjoying the scenery.

BIG DEAL FOR LITTLE ONES

GIBRALTAR has three family-friendly sandy beaches on its east coast. My favourite is Sandy Bay, with its sheltered waters ideal for young children.

The Europa Point Play Park, on Gib's southern tip, has wonderful views across the Straits, as well as swings and slides to keep the little ones happy. While the King's Bastion Leisure Centre (kingsbastion.gov.gi), an old military fortress that is now home to a bowling alley, cinema and arcade, provides the perfect rainy day entertainment.

THRILLS FOR ALL

COMPACT Gibraltar, with its steep roads and sea views, is made for e-cycling. Electronic bikes are also a good way to get up the Rock. Suitable for those aged 12 and over who can ride a bicycle (ebike-gibraltar.com).



Holiday hopeful: The rock of Gibraltar, as seen from Spain. Inset: A resident Barbary macaque

The Gibraltar Skywalk, opened by Star Wars' Mark Hamill in 2018, is higher than the London Shard — and with its 360-degree views and reinforced glass floor is sure to bring out the teenager in everyone.

HITTING THE WATER

A DOLPHIN cruise gives all the family a chance to glimpse these beautiful creatures up close, as well as see the majestic Rock in all its glory. (dolphin.gi; £25 adults; £12.50 children; less if booked online)

If you're feeling adventurous you can also go on a Try Dive (divegib.gi; £55 pp) course in Rosia Bay (where Admiral Nelson's body was bought ashore after the battle of Trafalgar) and see octopus, eels and fish. Minimum age is 10, so, great for the whole family.

If you want to try paddle boarding, head to Gib's east coast where In2Adventures offers 'Born to ride' courses for 9-15 year olds and 'Ready to ride' courses for those aged 16-plus — ideal for beginners or those wanting to

improve their technique (in2adventures.com; £35 for a 2-hour course).

STEPPING OUT

A NUMBER of trails lead up to the Rock from the centre of Gibraltar; the views are stunning except on days when the Levant cloud descends. Narrow alleyways also lead off Main Street, giving you a chance to see Old Gibraltar.

If you're looking for a challenging cliff walk, head for Jews' Gate and take the Mediterranean Steps — a steep 90-minute hike — up to O'Hara's Battery. It's not for the faint-hearted, or those who suffer from vertigo, and what's more, you're likely to encounter macaques, so bring water but not food.

PINES AND PALMS

THE territory has a surprising amount of greenery. The smallest such space is Trafalgar Cemetery, an oasis in the heart of Gibraltar where those laid to rest include two British sailors killed in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. A five-minute walk away is the 15-acre Gibraltar Botanic Gardens with their umbrella pines, palms and dragon trees.

But the most important green space is the nature reserve (ticket required) on the upper rock which is also home to historical sites such as St Michael's Cave.

QUICHE & CHEESECAKE

TRY the all-day Saturday brunch at the Kasbar, a funky underground veggie restaurant in the Old Town. For a light lunch, head to Sacarello's, a warren-like café-restaurant in Irish Town which is popular with locals and famous for its quiches. Or enjoy afternoon tea (4-6pm) on the terrace at the iconic art deco Rock Hotel, which overlooks the harbour.

For dinner, eat at Rendezvous Chaggrill in classy Queensway Quay, where luxury motor yachts line the water's edge. The salted caramel cheesecake is to die for.

WHERE TO STAY

THE Rock Hotel counts everyone from Winston Churchill to Sean Connery among its guests; and John Lennon and Yoko Ono exchanged their wedding vows here. Doubles from £160 (rockhotelgibraltar.com).

For a cheaper option, stylish Caleta Hotel has an enviable beachside location on the east side of the Rock. Doubles from £92 (caletahotel.com).

The luxury Sunborn Yacht Hotel, in Ocean Village, has a casino, spa and gym — and is the perfect place to watch the sun set. Doubles from £145 (sunborngibraltar.com).

Return flights with BA (ba.com). Prices from £24 each way. For more information: visitgibraltar.gi.

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TEST AND FLY

EASYJET and EasyJet holidays (easyjet.com) have partnered with two Covid-testing firms to offer results ahead of travel. You will be able to book home tests at a reduced price: £75 (was £120) with Confirm Testing and £100 (was £150) with City Doc — both providing results within 48 hours. Customers will receive their discount code when making a flight or holiday booking.

QUIETER CANARIES

WITH travel back on the agenda, the quarantine-free Canary Islands make a great option for a warm winter break. With this in mind, Prestige Holidays has launched a selection of trips exploring the quieter side of these islands. A rural escape for a

Travel Notes

What's new and how to get the best from your holiday

week in a quiet La Palma cottage is from £576pp, including flights. See the collection at prestige-holidays.co.uk.

TRAVEL TEMPTATIONS

DISCOVER The World (discover-the-world.com) is offering a selection of trips to tempt Brits abroad in 2021, with destinations including Canada, the Poles and a trip to Greenland hosted by Ben Fogle. Full refunds available up to 45 days prior to departure. A 14-night self-drive tour of Iceland is from £1,912pp from May to September.

HUGO BROWN