

Escaping from the office for a weekend break, **HELEN PEARSE** headed for Marazion in West Cornwall and discovered why the area is a hot favourite with tourists



IDEAL SPOT: Marazion has clean, sandy beaches, with stunning views toward the Lizard Peninsula

A wonderful Haven out west

THERE'S nothing like escaping your everyday life for a weekend, to get away from work and head for somewhere new.

And for me, West Cornwall proved to be the perfect tonic.

Just an hour and 40 minutes drive from my home in Plymouth, Marazion and its surrounding area seemed a different world away.

Situated just 12 miles from Land's End, set on the shores of beautiful Mounts Bay, Marazion is a hot favourite with tourists visiting West Cornwall, and you can see why.

Its clean, sandy beaches, with stunning views toward the Lizard Peninsula, provide an ideal spot for seaside-lovers, whether they want a romantic walk at sunset, a swim, or a little more action – Marazion is also a popular destination for windsurfing, kitesurfing and sailing.

The town is renowned for being the gateway to St Michael's Mount, always a favourite place for visitors, but it is also an ideal spot from which to explore West Cornwall, with Land's End, St Ives, Penzance and Sennen just a short drive away.

We stayed at the Mount Haven Hotel in Marazion, a family-run hotel overlooking Mounts Bay with a stunning view of St Michael's Mount from the rooms.

It proved to be a wonderful base for exploring. A wander through the ancient market town of Marazion itself, with its mixture of shops, pubs, and galleries was the best way to start, sampling, of course, the local mussels and wine as we went.

Obviously a trip to St Michael's Mount is high on the agenda for most when staying in Marazion. It seems silly to spend the entire weekend looking out at the Mount from your hotel room and not venture over to it.

At low tide you can walk across the sand to it, or use the boat. For centuries, the Mount has belonged to the St Levan and St Aubyn families. Lord St Levan



HOTEL: Katie Trenary, Mount Haven therapist, above. Left: comfort and a view

retired a couple of years ago when his wife died and now lives on the mainland, but his nephew, James St Aubyn, now lives on the Mount with his wife and children. The house and chapel are well worth a visit, as well as the gardens, but it's worth remembering the whole Mount is closed to the public on Saturdays so the family can have it to themselves.

The Minack Theatre is another must. Whether you want to see a performance or just have a quick tour around the open air theatre and visitors centre. I'd seen a Shakespeare play performed there on a previous visit years ago, so this time it was enough to take the coastal path around from Porthcurno, take a peak at the theatre then walk on to the next cove.

We parked at Porthcurno beach late afternoon, and just to see the scenery was a treat. The beach looked like something out of a Greek holiday brochure. The sea was tempting, but the coastal path and the views it offered were even more so. The steep climb up was worth it, and it didn't stop just at the

Minack. We decided to carry on around the coast to the next bay, and what a treat that was. As the sun was setting, we were the only ones on the deserted sands. It was perfect for a paddle and a romantic walk along the shore as the sun slid down behind the striking coastline.

With Marazion so close to Land's End, we decided to head in that direction. Not to Land's End itself, which we'd been warned had become over commercialised and expensive, but to nearby Sennen Cove. I'd heard great things about the place from friends but had never been there, and would now recommend it to anyone. The sea was full of surfers whilst the beach was attracting dozens of people to the shoreline. Whether they were walkers hiking around the coastal path, couples dog walking, or families paddling in the waves, everyone was making the most of the late September sunshine and the chance to enjoy such a beautiful place.

The Mount Haven Hotel is perfectly situated to make the most of what the

area offers, but you would be forgiven for not wanting to leave the hotel at all.

Owned by Mike and his wife Orange, they run it with a great team of staff most of who have been with them for a long time. And this really showed.

I've never experienced such good service in any hotel, from the helpful and informative reception staff, to the attentive and polite restaurant team. We even sat at the bar after our meal chatting to the staff, learning more about the area and taking in their recommendations. It was the staff that definitely set this place apart from elsewhere.

The original hotel building dates back to the 1840s when it was the coach house for two Victorian villas in front of it. It has been run as a hotel since the 1920s. Orange and Mike took it over in 2001 and have been working on it ever since. When they bought the hotel the vendor congratulated them on now owning the ugliest building in Cornwall - their response was that they had just bought the best view in the world, and we could definitely vouch for that.

The hotel is homely and enticing, you're greeted by the scent of incense, fresh flower arrangements, and chic and contemporary decor – an inspired fusion of Eastern culture and Western comfort. There are also tapestries from Jaipur, caskets from Bhutan and figurines from Nepal, Bali and India displayed throughout the hotel's public areas.

Our room, furnished with sumptuous fabrics and exotic artwork, overlooked the bay, and the loungers on the balcony proved to be a relaxing way to chill out with a glass of wine whilst taking in the view of St Michael's Mount.

But the highlight of the weekend was the hotel's restaurant. It blew us away and definitely deserved its two AA rosettes. The menu was one of the best we'd seen, and the food was just sensational. It is all locally sourced, and they have the best fish delivered from Newlyn daily. Again, delightful staff made the whole experience ten times better. Whether it be offering their honest opinions and recommendations when I was poring over the menu while sip-

ping a G&T in the bar, or their unfailing attention to detail, the diner's wellbeing or just their plain friendliness, they made it one of the best, if not the best restaurant we had ever been to. We couldn't rave about it enough and have already insisted many of our friends try it. It was also the ideal place to sample a Sunday afternoon cream tea on the terrace.

The Mount Haven also boasts its own Healing Room. Therapist Katie Trenary treated me to a two-hour deep tissue massage, something I'll never forget. Not for the faint-hearted, the massage borders on painful, as Katie pummels every inch of you from head to toe. But the feeling afterwards was amazing. Every stress and strain I'd been carrying around for months felt like it had disappeared.

And hotel guests don't need to feel guilty about indulging themselves on treatments. The Mount Haven gives all its profits from the Healing Room to its adopted school and orphanage in India, where Orange used to see these children begging on the streets. The hotel also supports medical camps to tribal villages and a colony of Tibetan monks in the north of Karnataka in India.

The brochure in the hotel room said Mike and Orange's main aim was to help us make the most of our time in 'wonderful West Cornwall', and that's exactly what it was - totally 'wonderful'. The couple say they are totally in love with the place and you can see why. Whether it is the beaches, the beautiful bays, moors, walks, gardens and art galleries there is something for everyone. And if you do fancy the short trip down, the Mount Haven is most definitely the place to stay. We will certainly be returning.

■ Helen and Marko stayed in the Mount Haven Hotel in Marazion. For more information, log onto www.mount-haven.co.uk, email reception@mount-haven.co.uk or call them on 01736 710249.