

GETAWAY

ADRIAN CAFFERY ENJOYS THE CORNISH HOLIDAY DESTINATION FOUNDED BY A SAINT

A FAMILY HIT THAT WAS HEAVEN SENT

THE thousands of families who holiday each year at Cornwall's Perran Sands resort probably don't realise their caravans stand next to one of Britain's earliest places of Christian worship.

Back in the sixth century, so the story goes, tribal kings in Ireland grew afraid of the power and influence of a holy man named Piran (or Perran), who was renowned for performing miraculous deeds.

They tied a millstone around Piran's neck and threw him over a cliff into a tempestuous sea. However, the sea immediately calmed and the millstone floated – all the way to the north Cornish coast.

In thanks to God, Piran built a chapel in the large expanse of sand dunes next to where he was washed up and it is said that his first Christian converts were a fox, a badger and a boar.

People flocked to see Piran as news of his teachings spread. He reputedly lived to the grand old age of 206, his relics were venerated for over 1,000 years and he became Cornwall's patron saint.

Piran also rediscovered an ancient method of smelting and his crest – a white cross on a black background, which was adopted as the Cornish flag – is said to signify the tin coming out of black ore.

On St Piran's Day, every March 5, hundreds of people dressed in black and white march across the dunes to watch a reenactment of his life. Almost every Cornish community stages some kind of celebration.

Over time, his chapel became more and more susceptible to the surrounding sands and around the 12th century it was abandoned in favour of a new church built further inland. However, the sands kept encroaching and by 1795 this new place of worship was also left to the elements after parishioners had got fed up of digging their way in and out.

The beach St Piran was washed up on and the town that grew up near to his chapel were both named after him – Perran Sands and Perranporth respectively.

Today, Perranporth is a family-friendly holiday resort, better known

nationwide for its connections to the literary character Poldark than to St Piran. The second season of the BBC's adaptation of the books, starring the brooding Aidan Turner, was recently drawing eight million viewers on Sunday nights.

Poldark author Winston Graham was in the Coastguard during the Second World War and was stationed overlooking Perranporth beach. He wrote the first of his 12-book series, *Ross Poldark*, during the depths of the war and his second book, *Demelza*, towards the end.

The first BBC series, screened in 2015, was based on these two books, in which Ross returns to Cornwall from the American Civil War to find the family fortune in tatters and the woman he loved engaged to his cousin.

Perranporth, with its steep cliffs, surfer-friendly waves and, derelict tin mines, was Winston's inspiration for *Hendrawna* in his stories.

Separated from Perranporth by a golf course is Haven's cliff-top Perran Sands resort, offering a sports court, crazy golf, a climbing wall, bungee trampolines, roller blading, kart hire, sand art, amusements, bowling and an abundance of playgrounds.

There are heated indoor (with waterslide) and outdoor pools where you can ride Aqua Gliders – a mix between a dodgem car and a jetski – or grab hold of an Aquajet and be propelled underwater.

Sea paddle boarding and surfing lessons take place on the beach.

There's also an all-inclusive and extensive leisure and entertainment schedule organised by the yellow-

jacketed Funstars, including crafts, dance, music and sporting activities.

They are ably assisted by the Seaside Squad – Rory the tiger, Bradley the bear, Greedy the gorilla and Anxious the elephant, who, as the name suggests, is of a nervous disposition.

In the evenings, the Funstars take to the stage to reveal their hidden talents, such as dancing and singing, in interactive shows for all ages.

Haven's beach (where Piran was washed up) is nice and wide but walking back up the the zig-zag ramp can be tiring, especially with a pushchair, so we preferred to take the five-minute drive to Perranporth.

The easily accessible beach there is a dream for children (big and small!) with stepping stones, rock pooling and a natural tidal pool, plus caves

and stunning rock formations formed through mining.

For our midweek break we stayed in a "Prestige" caravan, which came with two bedrooms, central heating, double glazing, a surprisingly large shower and decking with views over the sand dunes to the sea.

The decking was the perfect spot for a Cornish cream tea, I thought, so off I went to the Spar shop not more than 100m from our caravan for some calorific supplies.

While tucking into my scones I foolishly turned my back on my plate for two seconds and, whoosh, a thieving sweet-toothed seagull had swooped. After that, word must have got round of my foolish behaviour and there was a permanent gathering of seagulls on our caravan roof.

I wasn't at war with all the local



There's plenty to see and do. You could cross Perranporth beach on stepping stones or have a little peaceful contemplation by the ruins of St Piran's chapel



HOLIDAY DEALS

ESCAPE PLANS

Fancy getting away from it all? We've rounded up our pick of the top destinations on offer from travel agents



The beautiful view at Panama City Beach

■ FLY from London Heathrow to Panama City Beach, Florida via Atlanta, travelling on April 12, from £1,268 per person. This package is based on two adults sharing and staying seven nights at the 3* Hampton Inn Panama City Beach, on room only basis. This package includes return flights with Virgin Atlantic and Delta Airlines and fully inclusive Hertz car hire. To book,

visit www.americaasyoulikeit.com or call 020 8742 8299.

■ FLY from London Gatwick, Bristol or Newcastle to Gran Canaria, travelling on March 20, from £749 per person. This package is based on two adults sharing, staying at the 4* Seaside Hotel Sandy Beach, half board. It includes coach transfers and a saving of up to £234 per person. For more information or to book visit www.firstchoice.co.uk or call 0203 451 2720.

■ GET a taste of Goa, India, on this seven-night holiday staying at the 3* Indismart Woodbourne Resort from £711. Price includes return flights from Manchester Airport on February 23 and seven nights accommodation on a bed and

breakfast basis. Book online at www.southalltravel.co.uk or call on 0208 705 0086.

■ TELETEXT Holidays (www.dealchecker.co.uk; 0117 347 8317) offers five nights at the four-star Hotel Marina Torrenova, Majorca, (all-inclusive) from £169pp (two sharing). Includes flights from Stansted on May 13. Book by February 28. Flights from East Midlands Airport are available from £174 or £179 from Manchester.

■ CHEAPFLIGHTS (www.cheapflights.co.uk/hot-travel-deals) offers seven nights at the four-star Clube Praia Da Oura Apartments in the Algarve, (self-catering) from £204pp - saving up to £88pp (30%). Includes flights from Liverpool on May 2.



Clube Praia da Oura Apartments



The area around Perranporth is stunning and you can enjoy the views from the comfort of your own holiday home - who knows, you might even spot Ross and Demelza Poldark

wildlife, though, and I caught my first ever glimpse of a stoat. Apparently, a tribe of them hangs out in the dunes.

The giant dunes were just a stone's throw from our caravan and our children, aged five and two, had a great time charging down them, despite sometimes going splat on their faces.

But, like any good father, I put a stop to their fun to give them a lesson in local history then led the family in search of the remains of St Piran's chapel.

After scaling the highest dune, we spotted a giant stone cross atop another dune, which seemed like it might be a clue. Sure enough,

from beneath the cross (erected in the 1940s to act as a waymarker for pilgrims) we could see the remains of the chapel, although from a distance it looked more like a building site.

The chapel - probably built of wattle and daub originally and replaced in stone later - was engulfed by sand in the Middle Ages but became visible again in 1835.

It started to attract visitors from far and wide but in 1910, following damage by treasure hunters and the encroaching sands, it was encased in a protective concrete structure.

During these works, a large number of burials from as

early as 900AD were uncovered, including the skeleton of a woman with a child in her arms near the doorway, plus a skull placed in a stone cist.

In 1980, after further problems with vandalism, the chapel and its concrete shell was reburied for its own protection. But two years ago it was uncovered again and the casing removed and work is ongoing to conserve the building, and eventually open it to the public.

■ Since our visit, a fun app called Dune Detectives has been launched to help holidaymakers explore the area. It's available on iOS and Android.

LATE BREAKS

LAST-MINUTE HOLIDAYS

YORK
HEAD back in time and follow in the footsteps of Viking invaders as part of the Jorvik Viking Festival this month.

Journey through Viking camps, watch warriors in combat and take part in have-a-go archery as part of the largest Viking Festival in Europe. As well as dramatic events, history buffs will have the chance to meet archaeological experts.

Stay in a VIP lodge complete with outdoor hot tub just a short drive from ancient York. A three-night short break for four people at Woodland Lakes Lodges starting February 24 costs from £509 (was £535). Go to hoseasons.co.uk or call 0345 498 6130. For details on the festival visit jorvik-viking-festival.co.uk

Seaside Hotel Los Jameos Playa



LANZAROTE

FLY from Birmingham or Manchester to Lanzarote, travelling on March 5, from £599 per person. This package is based on two adults sharing, staying seven nights at the 4* Seaside Hotel Los Jameos Playa, half board.

For more information or to book visit www.monarch.co.uk or call 0333 777 4740.

NEED TO KNOW

■ **ADRIAN CAFFERY** was a guest of Haven, which has 36 holiday parks, most little more than a stone's throw from the coast. Its 2017 brochure prices for a week at Perran Sands start from £215 in spring and autumn and from £559 in school holidays. Prices for short breaks start from £129 in spring and autumn and £329 in school holidays. There are caravans, chalets, beach houses, extensive glamping options and a large touring area. For the latest offers and to book go to www.haven.com/offers or call 0333 202 1460.

■ IT is possible to own a holiday home at Perran Sands from £22,995. Owners have exclusive benefits including free parties, clubs and events. They also receive a privilege card which entitles them to a 15 per cent discount on purchases across the park. For more information visit www.havenholidayhomes.com or call 0333 202 1460.