

Keep right on to the end of the road

*Property hunters in Cornwall are waking up to the far-flung charms of Penzance and its nearby villages, finds **Graham Norwood***

What a difference a decade or two makes. Back in the 2000s, Penzance was an outpost in every sense of the word. Its overnight rail link to London was losing £1million a year and faced the axe; the high street was hit by closures long before the Amazon revolution; then in 2012 the heliport, with daily flights to the Scilly Islands, was shut.

There were few reasons to visit Penzance, let alone live there; it was a poor relation of glitzier parts of Cornwall like Rock, Padstow and St Ives.

But look at it today: it may still be 255 miles from London and rely heavily on traditional jobs – there's a large fishing fleet of which locals are enormously proud – but Britain's most south-westerly town has been reborn and is now welcoming those from outside, too.

A petition saved the rail sleeper service, flights from a new heliport will resume next year, and even the dreaded A30 – the road link which has been a deterrent to many visiting the far west – will be turned into a dual carriageway for its entire length, with work due to start in 2020.

That's only the beginning. Penzance's Jubilee Pool, an art deco salt-water lido, has just been renovated. It

is every bit as impressive as the view to St Michael's Mount, a small tidal island, that you can enjoy while having a dip.

Chapel Street, once known only for its quirky Egyptian House, is now the centre of an artistic quarter where there is also a sculpture garden. The spruced-up promenade is the longest in Cornwall at over half a mile, while the website SchoolGuide lists four Penzance schools among the county's 15 best.

The housing market has followed suit. House prices are up eight per cent in the past 12 months and 30 per cent over five years, according to Zoopla. Since the Millennium they have soared 277 per cent, far more than for Bristol,

Exeter or dreamy Padstow, albeit from a lower base.

Penzance's rise is seen by agents as a draw for a new type of buyer, made up of more adventurous second-homers who previously looked only at long-established tourist hotspots. "Buyers who would once only have considered Rock are now increasingly looking for large expensive properties in west Cornwall," explains Clare Coode of Stacks Property Search, a buying agent. "But there are far fewer £1million homes on the coast than there are further east."

If you are happy to spend far less than a million, look inland – by just a street or two – to find a warren of roads and squares lined with Victorian and Georgian houses. An eight-bedroom late Victorian terraced house, ideal for a large family or to set up as a b&b, can be yours for £550,000; a Grade II listed



five-bedroom house in prestigious Regent Square will go for £525,000; new-build flats very close to the harbour start from £227,000.

“Penzance is 20 minutes from St Ives and often seen as the less touristy option,” according to Ben Davies of Savills. “The majority of buyers in St Ives are looking for second homes, whereas those in Penzance mainly seek primary residences, and you can get good value for money by regional standards.”

Part of Penzance’s new-found popularity is down to the infrastructure improvement across all of Cornwall. There are now four new daily flights from Newquay to Heathrow, Truro High is the UK’s top ranked small independent school for A-level results, and a broadband programme has made the county one of the best virtually-connected places in the world.

It’s peaceful down at the end of the road too: traffic is relatively light once you get down to Penzance, and as a result, travelling into the town itself from any one of a dozen tiny but strikingly pretty nearby villages takes no more than 10 minutes. Mousehole, one of the closest, has a remarkable Christmas lights event each year, attracting tens of thousands of visitors over three weeks.

“The best areas if you want to be close to Penzance are Marazion, Gulval and Ludgvan, sought after for elevated views across the bay,” says Ben Standen of Jackson-Stops estate agency. “Newlyn is also a hotspot for those looking to be part of a long-standing artistic community, while Porthcurno and Sennen, with its magnificent beach, are also very popular.”

There are downsides of course. Penzance town still feels, very obviously, like the end of the line; even Bristol is over a three-hour drive away and the train to London takes at least five hours. Tourists who previously passed through en route to Land’s End 10 miles away now linger, which is good for the economy, but less so for parking.

But if you want a part of authentic Cornwall, where the house next door is almost certainly occupied by a local

and not a here-today gone-tomorrow Airbnb resident, then Penzance is for you. And, for now at least, its house prices are among the best value in the West Country.

277%

House price
growth in
Penzance since
the Millennium



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Ad data: page rate £46,000.00, scc rate £214.00
Phone: 020 7931 2000
Keyword: Stacks Property Search



CHARMER
Holly Cottage,
above and
below, is in
Madron, just
outside
Penzance,
£395,000 with
Jackson-Stops



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THE DEEP BLUE SEA

Penzance's
harbour, main; a
house in Gulval, the
town's outskirts,
£995,000 with
Jackson-Stops,
below; an
apartment in
Mousehole,
bottom, £800,000
with Savills

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ALAMY

Britain's
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those from
outside too