



# Wondrously remote

St Kilda in Scotland is hauntingly beautiful and strikingly atmospheric. >2

**Desolate:** Looking out through one of the abandoned houses on St Kilda. Photo: SREEREMA BANOO



**MSL Travel Sdn Bhd**  
 ROC: 26641-U KKKP 0261/2/3  
 Student Travel Centre

**Head Office**  
 66, Jalan Putra,  
 50350 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
 Tel: (03) 404 73 722

**Branch — Petaling Jaya**  
 Suite 1006, Level 10, PJ Tower  
 AMCORP Trade Centre  
 Tel: (03) 795 84 722

**Branch — Penang**  
 Red Rock Hotel Lobby,  
 Macalister Road  
 Tel: (04) 227 26 55



contact@msltravel.com  
 www.msltravel.com

## Travel Around Europe by RAIL EUROPE™

Rail Passes & Train Tickets available for :

- |            |          |                    |
|------------|----------|--------------------|
| Austria    | Belgium  | Bosnia Herzegovina |
| Bulgaria   | Croatia  | Czech Rep.         |
| Denmark    | Finland  | France             |
| Germany    | Greece   | Hungary            |
| Ireland    | Italy    | Luxembourg         |
| Montenegro | Norway   | Netherlands        |
| Poland     | Portugal | Romania            |
| Serbia     | Slovakia | Slovenia           |
| Spain      | Sweden   | Switzerland        |
| Turkey     | Britain# |                    |

\*condition apply.



### Eurail Global Pass Flexible Pass

5 days within 10 days  
 10 or 15 days within 2 months

### Continuous Pass

15 days to 3 months  
**Prices start from Euros 293.00**

**Eurail Continuous Global Pass Promotion**  
 (Buy before 31 March 2015 & activate within 6 months from issue)

- FREE extra days of travel**
- Buy 15 days Pass & GET 2 days
  - Buy 22 days Pass & GET 3 days
  - Buy 1 month Pass & GET 5 days

### Eurail One Country Passes Flexible Pass

03 days to 10 days within 1 month  
**Prices start from Euros 58.00**

### Eurail Regional Passes (2 Countries) Flexible Pass

04 days to 10 days within 2 months  
**Prices start from Euros 103.00**

### Eurail Select Pass (4 countries) Flexible Pass

04 to 10 days within 2 months  
**Prices start from Euros 112.00**

### Product Update!!!

• Children can **NOW** travel **FREE** on all Eurail Passes except Britain & France

• Youth can **NOW** travel **FIRST CLASS**

**We have Student, Youth, Teacher fares plus fares for Everyone worldwide**

*Terms & Conditions:- All prices are subject to change and subject to availability. Surcharge may apply for peak seasons.*

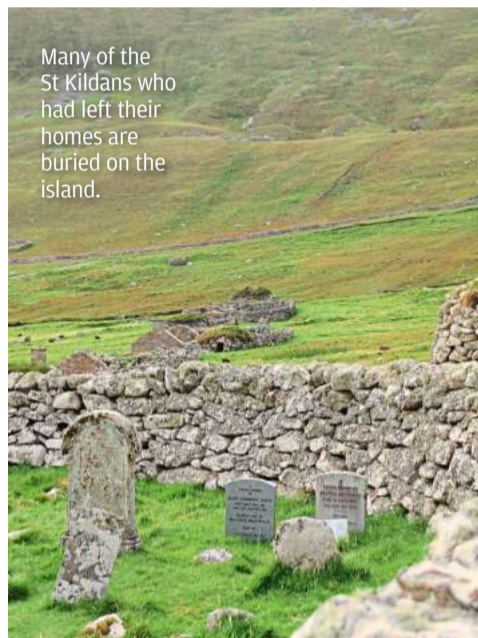
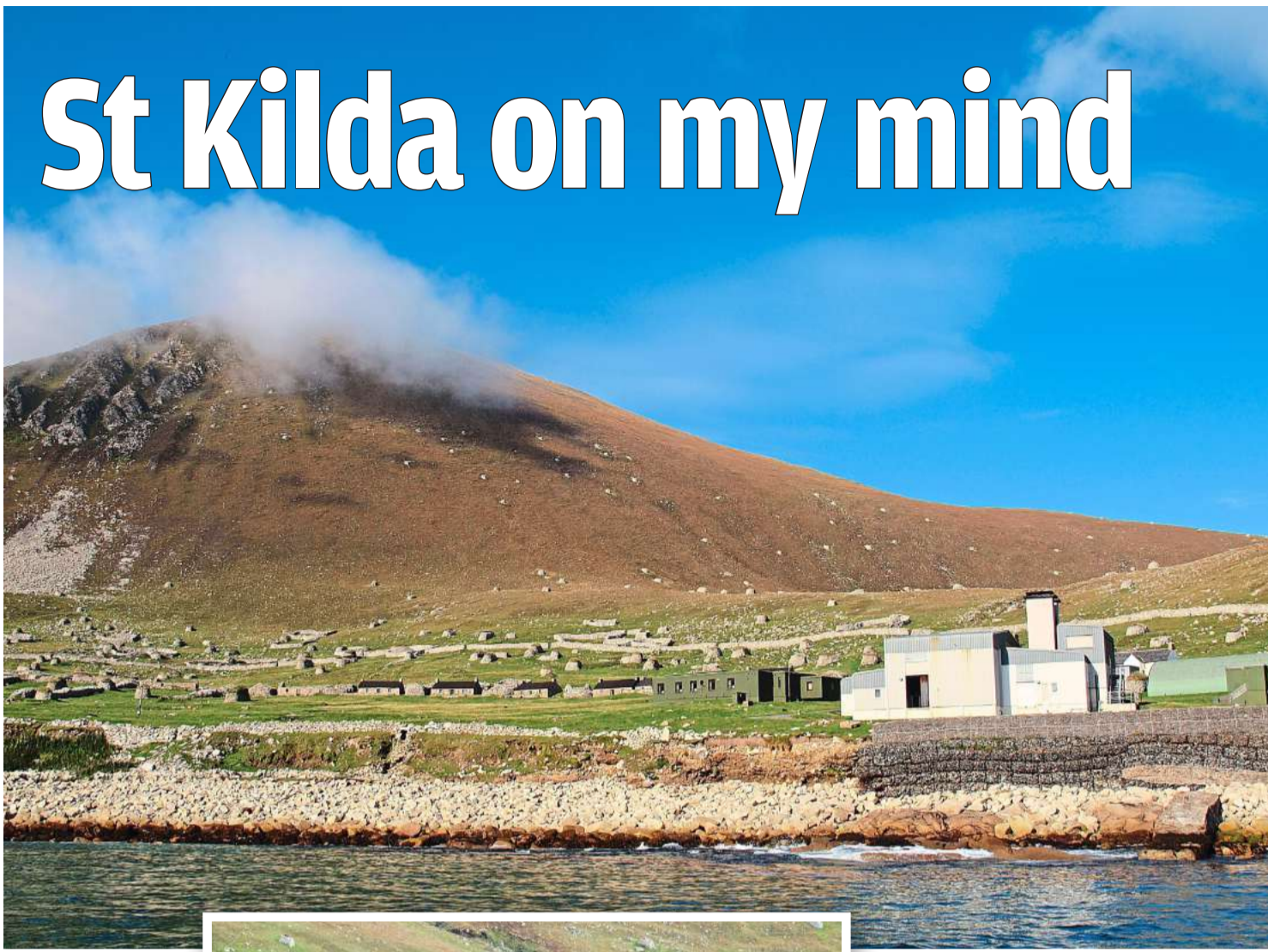
A visit to this remote archipelago in Scotland's north-west will leave an indelible mark on any visitor.

Story and photos by **SREEREMA BANOO**  
star2travel@thestar.com.my

**H**ALF an hour into the walk and my lungs are already screaming. Somewhere in the far recesses of my soon-to-be oxygen-starved brain (OK, I exaggerate) I recall Ranger Paul's words: "If you get to that bend at the top where the road disappears from view and your legs and lungs are hurting, then it's time to turn back because if you go any further and get lost or fall off the cliff we won't know until it's too late."

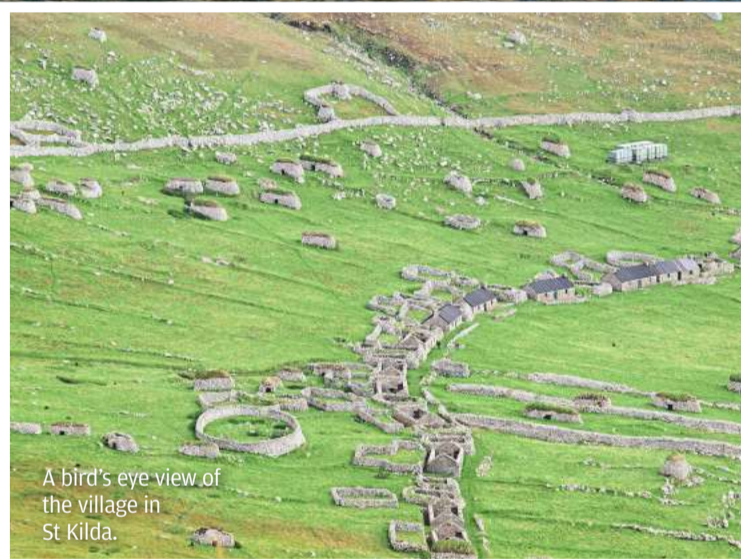
He said this very matter-of-factly so I didn't know at the time if he was joking but now that I can barely hear my thoughts over the heavy breaths, I seriously contemplate turning back. But I hesitate for the simple reason

# St Kilda on my mind



Many of the St Kildans who had left their homes are buried on the island.

**Dreamy:** Abandoned in 1930, St Kilda is now home to people who work on the military base, and National Trust for Scotland staff and researchers who are there from April to September.



A bird's eye view of the village in St Kilda.

and beyond the gentle curve of the bay lie the remnants of a 19th century crofting (small-holding) settlement.

I am on Hirta, an island in the archipelago of St Kilda located some 80km west of the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides, which in turn is 64km off the north-west coast of Scotland. This is about as far west as you can get in Europe – keep heading westward and the next stop is North America.

Owned and managed by the National Trust for Scotland, St Kilda is one of only a few locations in the world to be awarded the mixed status for natural and cultural heritage by Unesco. Apart from Hirta, which is the largest island in St Kilda and the only one that allows visitors, the other islands in this chain which is made up partly of the remains of an extinct volcanic system, include Dun, Soay and Boreray as well as a scattering of giant sea stacks.

The archipelago's remote location and its extraordinary human history intrigued me; but I was warned not to pin too much hope on making the trip there, especially in September. The weather in the Outer Hebrides is notoriously unpredictable, rains are common and boat trips (which are only available from April to September) are often cancelled if the seas are too rough.

But on this mid-September day, the weather gods are in a charitable mood – there are few swells during the crossing from Leverburgh in Harris, but even then our skipper, Chris of Kilda Cruises, says "this is as good as it gets".

The two-and-a-half-hour boat ride is fairly uneventful

that the views before me are spectacular – the bay shimmering in the morning light and the sky so unbelievably clear and blue. And I am just barely halfway up, so the views at the top of this small hill should be even more spectacular.

So, I rest, catch my breath and continue to make my way up the hill. Finally, after half an hour I arrive at the top of the hill, and yes, the views are sensational. Rocky islands jut out of the ocean like dragons, sheep graze on the grassy cliff's edge unperturbed by the steep drop, waves ebb and flow against the rocks

(Left) The bell of *HM Vessel Agheila*, first visited St Kilda in 1957 and given to the National Trust for Scotland when the vessel was retired on her last voyage to St Kilda in July 1975.



Monday to Sunday

**ANN MARIE CHANDY**  
Senior Editor, Features  
☎ 03-7967 1290  
star2@thestar.com.my

**TAN CHENG LI**  
Editor, Environment  
☎ 03-7967 1285  
star2green@thestar.com.my

**IVY SOON**  
Editor, Family & Woman  
☎ 03-7967 1693  
star2@thestar.com.my

**JULIE WONG**  
Senior Editor, Food  
☎ 03-7967 1690  
star2@thestar.com.my

**GORDON KHO**  
Editor, Entertainment  
☎ 03-7967 1292  
entertainment@thestar.com.my

**DZIREENA MAHADZIR**  
Editor, Fashion  
☎ 03-7967 1774  
star2@thestar.com.my

**PAUL YEO**  
Senior Editor, Health  
☎ 03-7967 1689  
starhealth@thestar.com.my

**IAN YEE**  
Editor, R.AGE  
☎ 03-7967 1774  
alltherage@thestar.com.my

**MADHAVAN M.**  
Editor, Technology  
☎ 03-7967 1262  
bytz@thestar.com.my

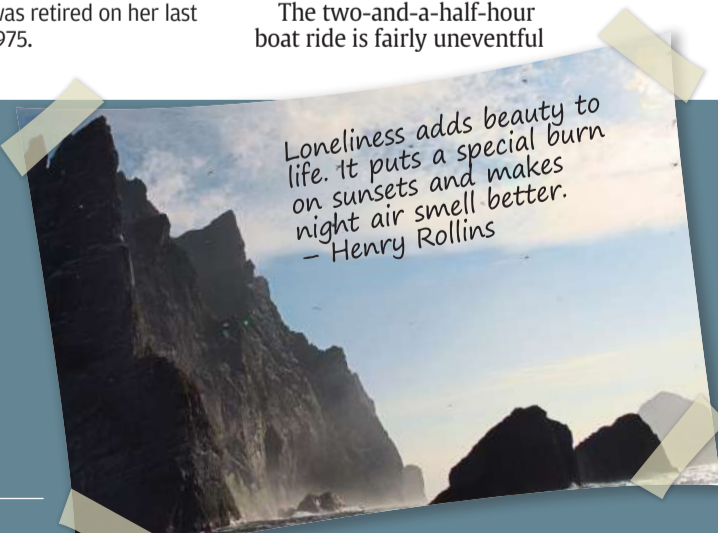
**DAVIN ARUL** Associate Editor, Features ☎ 03-7967 1245 star2@thestar.com.my

ADVERTISING: ☎ 03-7966 8388

thestar.com.my/lifestyle ■ rage.com.my

@MyStarTwo ■ @thestar\_rage

Customer Service: 1300 88 7827





Sea stacks are home to large colonies of seabirds. (Inset) St Kilda is home to the largest gannet breeding colony in the world.

but we do spot some wildlife – a fair number of puffins and gannets, and in the distance a few common dolphins.

We arrive sometime mid-morning. The boat moors up in Village Bay at Hirta and we're ferried to the island via a rubber dingy. At the island, we're greeted by Paul, a ranger with the National Trust for Scotland, who briefs us on the things to see and do during the five hours we have on the island. Apart from a few walks, the main sights are of course the remains of the village, which has been preserved over the years.

St Kilda's human history piqued my interest from the moment I first heard of this island chain – it is thought to have been inhabited for at least 2,000 years and there has been some evidence indicating that St Kilda may have been occupied as early as 5,000 years ago. Around these islands there are traces of Neolithic sites and of a Norse presence prior to the settlement by Gaelic-speaking Scots.

The village on Hirta is more recent, believed to have been built between 1830 and 1869. The setting of the village could not be more stunning – flanked by rolling hills and offering views of smaller islands, sea stacks and the Atlantic Ocean. As idyllic as it looks, though, the reality was that life on St Kilda was a tough one.

The community lived off the land but

mainly survived on seabirds – they would navigate steep cliffs using long ropes made of horsehair and collect eggs and harvest young gannets, fulmar chicks and puffins. Huge numbers of birds were killed. Around the 1830s, it's estimated that around 4,000 gannets and 12,000 fulmars were killed in one season. Apart from eating the meat and eggs, the community used every part of the bird – bones were made into needles and skin was turned into shoes.

This was a remote and isolated community, so much so when the first steamship of tourists called at the island in 1836, the St Kildans – who had never seen a steamship before – thought that the ship was on fire!

In fact, not only were the St Kildans completely unaware of the world beyond their shores, the outside world, too, only "discovered" St Kilda sometime in the late 17th century. Even so, it wasn't until sometime in the 1800s that the Victorians began operating steamer cruises to the island from Glasgow, carrying naturalists and tourists keen to see the island and its people. Before long there was a postal service in St Kilda for tourists to send postcards from the island (for the novelty of the St Kilda stamp and postmark) and it's said that at one time the mailbag would be filled with thousands of postcards bound for mainland Scotland, Britain and the rest of the world.

With the influx of tourists, the economy of St Kilda began to change – villagers began selling tweed and souvenirs to tourists, which would have been a boost to their income. But more significantly, the visitors also brought with them stories of what life was like in other parts of Britain and the world, and it was inevitable that residents began leaving the island in search of a better life elsewhere. William MacDonald who lived in the house that is today a small museum was the first to evacuate his family for an easier life.

St Kilda's links with the outside world also left a darker impact. Given its remoteness, the islanders were susceptible to diseases brought by the outside world – it's said that in 1727, the population dipped to 30 because of a smallpox epidemic when the clothes of a native St Kildan who had died of the disease on the mainland were brought home.

Still, it seemed that despite these challenges, the community seemed to persevere. But by the turn of the 20th century, those who remained found it increasingly difficult to live on St Kilda, as there were now fewer able-bodied people on the island. Towards the end of the 1920s, crops failed many times and the islanders were on the brink of starvation. In May 1928, the Police Constable from Harris

reported that the community was in its death throes – there were only seven able-bodied men left and there was talk of leaving the island for good. Two years later on Aug 29, 1930, the 36 remaining islanders – at their own request – were evacuated and resettled on the Scottish mainland.

In 1956, the Fifth Marquis of Bute, the owner of St Kilda, bequeathed the island to the National Trust for Scotland (later leasing a small area of land on Hirta to the Ministry of Defence as a radar tracking station). A year later St Kilda was declared a National Nature Reserve and in 1986 a Unesco World Heritage Site. In 2004, the designation was extended to include protection for the marine environment around the archipelago.

Over the years, some St Kildans would return to revisit their homes. Chris, the Kilda Cruises skipper, remembers ferrying a few of them and their descendants to the island. Many had resettled in many parts around the world, returning in their old age with children and grandchildren to see the home they left behind. It must have been such an emotional homecoming for many.

One of the most poignant reminders of the sorrow and heartbreak that the St Kildans must have felt when they left the island is at the cemetery, located at the edge of the village. There are tombstones here that date to the 1970s and more recently to 2010 with inscriptions that read "Together Again" – in a sense not only reuniting with a long passed loved one but also with a home that was left behind but never really forgotten.

It was here at the edge of the cemetery that I felt the pathos of St Kilda – undoubtedly it is one of the most beautiful places I've visited but what moved me was the inspiring story of its people and their ability to survive and, for a long while, triumph over the harshest of environments.

James Fisher, a naturalist wrote in 1947 that "... the future observer of St Kilda will be haunted the rest of his life by the place, and tantalised by the impossibility of describing it to those who have not seen it."

There is much truth in those words.



Pictures like this one of the former residents now hang in the old school house.

# FIERY FORTUNE FEASTS!



MANHATTAN FLAMING SEAFOOD PLATTER FROM RM 57.90



MANHATTAN STAR PLATTER RM 57.90



FISHERMEN'S PLATTER RM 57.90



GRILLED FLAMING LOBSTER PLATTER RM 127.90

ADD ON RM 16.80 FOR 2 TROPIC COOL AND FREE SALMON YEE SANG



Terms & Conditions: For Dine In Only. • Salmon Yee Sang & Tropic Cool are available for Limited Time only. • Salmon Yee Sang ala carte is available for Take Away. • Valid at all The Manhattan FISH MARKET except East Coast Mall & Kota Bharu Mall. • Not valid with other ongoing discounts and promotions. • All prices quoted are in Malaysian Ringgit (MYR) and are subject to Service Charge and applicable Govt. Tax. • Images are for illustration purposes only. • The Manhattan FISH MARKET reserves the right to amend the terms and conditions without prior notice.

www.manhattanfishmarket.com | f MFM.my | t MFMmalaysia