



Cream of the crop



Find superb UK seaside breaks in Devon, says Joanna Booth

What's the difference between a cream tea from Devon and one from Cornwall? If you're as serious about scones as I am, you'll know that the sensible Devonians layer the denser cream on first, before the jam, whereas the crazy Cornish plaster cream on top of jam which, experience has taught me, creates a structurally unsound scone.

Local historians in Tavistock, west Devon, have claimed that the cream tea was invented at the Benedictine Abbey near the town more than 1,000 years ago and, in 2010, Devonians made an unsuccessful attempt to obtain Protected Designation of Origin status for their cream tea from the EU. No matter that they failed – there are still more scone spots in the county than you can shake a stick at, from the upmarket Orangerie at Bickleigh Castle or the two-AA-rosette Orestone Manor Hotel to more homely cafes in every village.

Devon, here I come.

● **SELL: CLOSE COAST**

Devon has long provided quintessential English seaside holidays, with the majority of visitors heading for the calm shores of its southern Riviera, while a smaller number choose the wilder charms of its north coast or the rolling countryside in between.

“As one of the most beautiful holiday destinations in the UK, the county offers outstanding visitor breaks and value for money, whether for a family holiday in the summer or a short break throughout the year,” says Visit Devon chairwoman Carolyn Custerson. “Like-for-like comparisons show a week’s holiday in Devon can be one-third of the price of a holiday abroad and, with 450 miles of coastline to choose from as well as the splendour of Dartmoor, there is something for everyone.”

However, it hasn't historically proved easy to access. The M5, the only motorway to enter Devon, can become congested, so driving can be a slow process – less of an issue

if clients are heading down for a full week but not ideal for short breaks. Happily, Flybe links Exeter to a range of other UK regional airports, with summer services of varying regularity to Manchester, Newcastle, Belfast and Edinburgh and now also a double daily flight to London City – all of which make a shorter break more appealing.

● **SEE: NATURAL FUN**

An impressive cathedral, Roman walls and cobbled streets make

Exeter a pleasingly historic small city, although one that is bang up to date when it comes to both high street and one-off boutique shopping. The River Exe cuts through the centre, so visitors can take walks or sit in cafes on the waterside, or even try canoeing.

Half an hour south is Exmouth, a historic seaside resort with two miles of sandy beach. It's the gateway to Devon's section of the Jurassic Coast, which is significant both for its beauty ▶



Goodrington Beach



South West Coast Path



Dartmouth Steam Railway



and its geology, with rocks up to 250 million years old. Walks along the South West Coastal Path pass along this shoreline's red rock cliffs, chalk caves, pebbly beaches and pretty seaside villages.

Further west lie the sandy beaches of Torquay and the English Riviera, great for family-friendly fun: think water parks, steam railways, historic sailing ships, Paignton Zoo and Babbacombe Model Village.

Torquay is also famous for its Agatha Christie connection – the author was born here and there's an annual literary crime festival. This year's International Agatha Christie Festival, running from September 11-19, will commemorate what would have been her 125th birthday.

Inland, Dartmoor's green hills are punctuated with granite tors and archaeological remains, and visitors will spot the semi-wild ponies in the national park.

Devon's wilder north coast borders the Bristol Channel, with the massive cliffs of Exmoor National Park's coast dropping down to the Victorian seaside town of Ilfracombe, the surf beaches of Croyde and Woolacombe and the historic fishing village of Clovelly.

STAY: PARKS AND RECREATION

Haven's Devon Cliffs holiday park sits on an escarpment above

a Blue Flag beach just outside Exmouth on the Jurassic Coast. There are indoor and outdoor heated pools, water slides and flumes, water sports from the beach, an aerial adventure course and, new for this year, Nature Rockz outdoor activities which range from bug hunts to bird-box building. Four nights from April 27 in a superior caravan sleeping up to six starts at £115.

Three of the six Hoseasons parks offering new Bouja luxury caravans – think hot tubs, decking, flatscreen TVs, free Wi-Fi and top-quality towels and linens – are in Devon, including Primley Meadow near Paignton and Woodbury Woods just outside Exeter, where a three-night weekend

break for a family of four starts from £515 in the summer holidays. Beach Cove Coastal Retreat at Ilfracombe has the even swankier Bouja Boutique beach-hut-style lodges. Deluxe Autograph Lodge accommodation is on offer at Ruby Country Lodges in a secluded woodland setting in between the northern edge of Dartmoor and the rugged north coast. For families focused on action, Finlake Lodges, a Go Active park on the southern edge of Dartmoor, offers everything from snorkelling, archery and quad bikes to high ropes, kayaking and yoga. A week here for a family of four starts from £320.

You can book 30 hotels in Devon through SuperBreak with

options from two to five stars in towns and resorts including Torquay, Woolacombe, Paignton and Exeter. A popular choice is the four-star Saunton Sands, just outside Croyde, which overlooks five miles of golden beach and has indoor and outdoor heated pools. Stays start from £75 with breakfast.

When it comes to private lets,

Cottages4You offers a range from sweet, stone-built, traditional cottages and barn conversions sleeping just two people up to farmhouses with room for a family or two together. For the top end of the market, Loyd & Townsend-Rose offers commissionable stays at Pamflete Estate, a Grade II listed manor house sleeping 17, with tennis courts, a private beach

and three acres of gardens, from £6,500 per week.

Shearings Holidays has three holidays in Devon. Two five-day options are based in Exmouth; the more luxurious Grand Tourer itinerary called Cream Teas & Devon Delights includes staying at the Imperial Hotel and time seeing the historic sights of Exeter and Sidmouth, garden visits and

afternoon teas, from £369. An eight-day Delightful Devon tour, from £424, is based in Ilfracombe and excursions are to north Devonian highlights including Clovelly and Barnstaple. **TW**

Find out more: visitdevon.co.uk



TOP TIP
For an overview of accommodation options in Devon, visit devonhotels.com

TRIED & TESTED The Magdalen Chapter, Exeter

When Chapter Hotels purchased the former West England Eye Hospital, its vision was to make it a first-class city-break pad. The 59-room Magdalen Chapter opened in 2012 following a makeover that retained the historic exterior facade but totally transformed the interior. Though the location is central, it feels more secluded than one might expect from a city hotel, possibly due to its walled garden, which is overlooked by the restaurant, one of Exeter's best dining choices. The spa, where expert

technicians use REN products, is also excellent. The lobby still feels a little bit municipal, but happily the rooms, which start at £150 a night with breakfast, have mostly shaken this off, although I missed certain elements often found in something purpose-built, including a proper wardrobe. However, the sumptuous king-sized beds, deep tubs, Nespresso machines and in-room iPads definitely lift the experience way beyond anything available on the NHS.

chapterhotels.com





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