

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE



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TRAVEL CULTURE **HERITAGE** STYLE

DIGITAL GUIDE

Explore
DEVON
Countryside, coastline and cream teas



GLORIOUS DEVON

From combe to tor, beach to clifftop, England's second largest county is a tapestry of landscapes waiting to be explored, before sitting down to a good cream tea

The 630-mile South West Coast Path gives stunning views of the North Devon coastline, parts of which are under the care of the National Trust: Great Hangman (England's highest sea cliff) and Little Hangman, near Combe Martin

PHOTO: NITEL DAVID NOTON



Top left: Bayards Cove, the oldest surviving quay in Dartmouth. Centre: yachts moored in Salcombe Harbour. Top right: Brixham, a thriving fishing port on the English Riviera. Bottom right: The Taw Estuary across to Codden Hill, in the North Devon Biosphere Reserve



PHOTOS: DAVID OAKES/WWW.BRITAINONVIEW.COM/COURTESY OF NORTH DEVON COAST AONB

When he wasn't being carried over the sea to Skye, song writer Sir Harold Boulton, was waxing lyrical about a certain county in the West Country. "When Adam and Eve were dispossessed, Of the garden hard by Heaven, They planted another one down in the West, 'Twas Devon... glorious Devon!"

For Boulton, over a century ago, Devon was a land of "Combe and tor, green meadow and lane, Birds on the waving bough, Beetling cliffs by the surging main, Rich red loam for the plough." The county still has these in abundance, despite subsequent urbanisation and the area's popularity with holidaymakers. When Napoleon's wars cut off access to the Mediterranean, the Brits headed west to their own English Riviera and we've kept up the tradition of holidaying in Devon to this day.

A holiday for the Brits has usually meant seaside, and Devon, sat comfortably between Somerset, Dorset and Cornwall on the great peninsula of the West Country, has two coastlines with beaches aplenty. Take your pick from the rich red sands of Sidmouth, Teignmouth and Dawlish

on the south or the wide golden expanses of Woolacombe and Saunton in the north. For me, a Grockle (local name for tourist) who grew up with a beach hut at Southend-on-Sea, the other side of the country, it was enough to discover that icon of the English seaside also in abundance here. They stand in their brightly-painted glory at resorts such as Paignton, Budleigh Salterton and Woolacombe.

The coast is not just about bucket and spades, though. There are sand dunes at Braunton Burrows, sheltered estuaries for yachties at Salcombe and Dartmouth, and dramatic clifftops where Exmoor meets the sea. It can all be explored from the South West Coast Path, a 630-mile-long national trail that skirts both sides of Devon on its way from Somerset round to Dorset. As the path runs through Devon, it gives you some of the most stunning views Britain has to offer: from Great Hangman, England's highest sea cliff and the Hartland Heritage Coast in the north, round to Start Point and Bolt Head down at Devon's most southerly tip.

No surprise, then, that both coasts include Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (in fact, Devon boasts five).

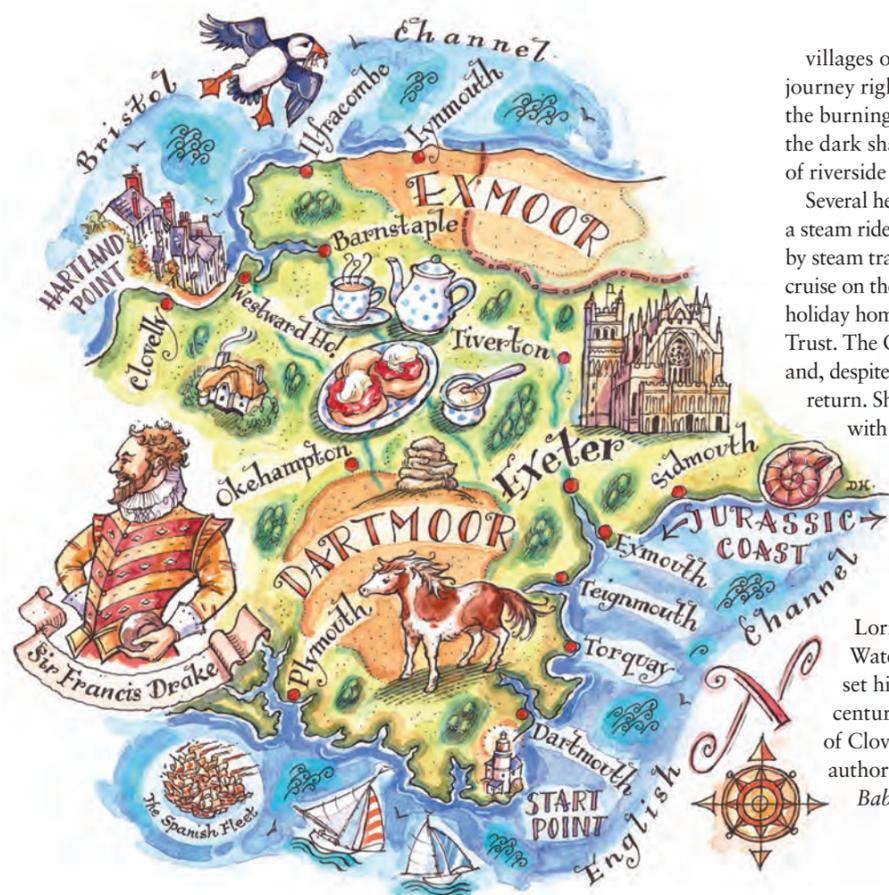
The catchment area of the Rivers Taw and Torridge from Dartmoor National Park out to sea to the island of Lundy is a UNESCO biosphere, and the whole of Torbay is a UNESCO geopark. Devon's *curriculum vitae* of worthy titles shows just how special and well worth exploring its landscapes are. And while we're showing off, East Devon forms part of the World Heritage Site of the Jurassic Coast.

Between these two glorious Devon coastlines there's much to explore, not least two National Parks (Exmoor and Dartmoor) and the beautiful and varied riverscapes, such as the Exe and Otter in the east, the Teign (pronounced "Teen") and Dart in the south, and the Tamar running along the border with Cornwall in the west.

Devon's few railway routes are also well-placed to let you enjoy its scenery. The Tarka Line, for example, follows the river valleys of the Yeo and Taw from the county town of Exeter for 39-miles up to Barnstaple in North Devon. From Eggesford to Barnstaple, the line forms part of the Tarka Trail, a 180-mile, figure-of-eight route tracing the journeys of Tarka the Otter in Henry Williamson's novel.

Try to get a window seat to enjoy the stretch of Brunel's railway line from Exeter to Newton Abbot. Trains chug down the River Exe past Powderham Castle (home of the Earl of Devon) and the wading birds of the Dawlish Warren nature reserve, around the red coast with the seaside resorts of Dawlish and Teignmouth, then up the River Teign with views across to the chocolate-box ►

Devon boasts five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a UNESCO biosphere, a UNESCO geopark, two national parks... and East Devon forms part of the World Heritage Site of the Jurassic Coast



villages of Shaldon and Ringmore. If you time your journey right and catch one of Devon's spectacular sunsets, the burning red skies are reflected in the rivers below, with the dark shapes of moored yachts flashing by and the lights of riverside inns twinkling across the water.

Several heritage railways also let you step back in time for a steam ride through the countryside. For example, travel by steam train from Paignton to Kingswear then join a river cruise on the River Dart, to Greenway, Agatha Christie's holiday home now open to the public with the National Trust. The Queen of Crime was born in Torquay in 1890 and, despite traveling as far as Iraq and Syria, she loved to return. She socialised at the Imperial Hotel, honeymooned with Archibald Christie at The Grand Hotel and featured Devon locations in 15 of her books.

The English Riviera celebrates its association with the world-famous crime writer and holds an Agatha Christie Festival each September and a Festival of Crime Writing in April. Devon's literary connections also include

Lorna Doone Country based around Badgworthy Water in the north. Richard Doddridge Blackmore set his 'romance of Exmoor' here in the 17th century. And the famously steep and pretty village of Clovelly in north Devon was childhood home to author Charles Kingsley and inspired his *The Water Babies*, while the village of Westward Ho!, along

the coast opposite Saunton Sands, was named after his 1855 novel of the same name. Dartmoor is famously the setting for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes mystery, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* – one of the charms of the National Park is the atmospheric landscape of its rocky tors and valley. However, you are more likely to meet a friendly Dartmoor pony than a fantasy beast.

Lewtrenchard, a Jacobean manor house, now a Von Essen hotel, in the Tamar Valley, was where the Reverend Sabine Barrington Gould composed *Onward Christian Soldiers* and other hymns, and Devon's musical heritage also takes you to the National Trust's Coletton Fishacre, a charming Arts and Crafts house with an Art Deco interior, with a delightful garden running down to the sea near Kingswear. The story goes that the Doily Carte family (of Gilbert and Sullivan and Savoy fame) were sailing along the Devon coast and spotted the valley. They decided to buy it for a holiday home.

The Doily Cartes were not the only successful entrepreneurial families building homes in Devon. Knightshayes Court, near Tiverton, was built by architect William Burges in Gothic Revival style for the family of pioneer lace-maker

John Heathcoat in 1869. On Dartmoor, the National Trust's Castle Drogo was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens for retail tycoon Julius Drewe. He had discovered in his family ancestry a Norman baron named Drogo, and wanted a castle to reflect his line of descent. One of his cousins was coincidentally rector of Drewsteignton and he bought land from him in 1910 to build his dream castle.

Nearby, hidden away at the end of a seemingly endless winding country lane is Gidleigh Park, a mock Tudor house built in 1928 for Australian shipping magnate, CHC MacLlwraith. In 1977 it became a hotel, adding Enjoy England's Hotel of the Year to its long list of awards.

Also on Dartmoor, in 1880 William Henry Smith (of Britain's newsagent chain) bought the land where Bovey Castle stands today; his son Frederick built the manor house, completed in 1907. In 2004, it became the five-star resort Bovey Castle under another Devon-born entrepreneur Sir Peter de Savary and today is one of the Pride of Britain hotel collection. Lana de Savary, Peter's sister, recently brought a touch of luxury to the Cary Arms at Babbacombe, relaunching it as a boutique gastropub, ▶

Top left: Hele Bay near Ilfracombe in North Devon. Centre: Hound Tor on Dartmoor. Top right: Thatched cottages in the village of Otterton in East Devon. Above right: Malmsmead in what is known as Lorna Doone Country, after Richard Doddridge Blackmore's 'romance of Exmoor'

Dartmoor is famously the setting for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes mystery, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. However, you are more likely to meet a friendly Dartmoor pony than a fantasy beast



This picture: Ness Beach at Shaldon.
 Top left: Exeter's Cathedral Close.
 Left: Hartland Lighthouse in North Devon.
 Right: Exeter cathedral's nave, with the longest unbroken Gothic ceiling in world.
 Below right: The village of Cockington near Torquay



COASTLINE, CHRISTIE AND CLOTTED CREAM

- ◆ **Agatha Christie Mile** on the English Riviera explores locations connected with the crime writer. www.englishriviera.co.uk/agathachristie
- ◆ **Braunton Burrows**, the important dune system at the heart of the UNESCO North Devon Biosphere. www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk
- ◆ **Circular walk in East Devon** (allow a half day) from Budleigh Salterton to Otterton, including River Otter and Heritage Coast, via tearoom/restaurant at Otterton Mill. One of many walks on www.southwestcoastpath.com
- ◆ **Combe House Hotel** (3-star), Honiton, nr Exeter. Elizabethan manor house hotel with two rosette restaurant in peaceful countryside. [tel:\(01404\)540400](http://tel:(01404)540400); www.thishotel.com
- ◆ **Dart Marina** (4-star), Dartmouth. Luxury hotel on the waterside with spa and



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fine dining. Bedrooms with great views. [tel:\(01803\)832580](http://tel:(01803)832580); www.dartmarina.com

◆ **Docton Mill Gardens**, Hartland, N Devon. With the Best Tea Room (2009 North Devon Food & Drink Awards). [tel:\(01237\)441369](http://tel:(01237)441369); www.doctonmill.co.uk

Take a nostalgic trip on one of Devon's heritage railways. www.heritagetrains.com

◆ **Spekes Mill Mouth**, near Milford. North Devon's tallest waterfall, on the



with one of the best seaside locations to be found (rooms take advantage of the ever-changing views along Devon's red coastline). On a clear day, you can see Teignmouth peaking out behind the Ness headland and right around Lyme Bay to Portland Bill in Dorset.

Devon's built heritage is not just large-scale: near Exmouth, the National Trust's A la Ronde is a crazy little 16-sided house with weird and wonderful interiors, built to house the mementoes of the two Parminter sisters from their grand tour in the 18th century. And, across to Ottery St Mary, there's the small but perfectly formed Elizabethan manor of Cadhays, with beautiful gardens. Elizabethan history continues over in the maritime city of Plymouth, on its historic Barbican. The house of an Elizabethan merchant has been restored to take you back in time to the Plymouth of Sir Francis Drake, the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe. Born in Tavistock in 1540, Drake was knighted by Queen Elizabeth I and was Vice Admiral in the fleet that defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588. Plymouth is forever known as the city where, reputedly, Drake calmly continued playing a game of bowls beside the sea on the Hoe as the Armada approached.

It was also said that Drake declared the Ship Inn, off the cathedral close in Exeter, to be his favourite place on earth. The close is certainly one of mine in Devon. At its heart, the cathedral, formerly a Norman Romanesque church, was rebuilt around 1265 in Decorated Gothic style. Enter through the beautiful West Front, with its tiers of saints and angels.

Inside, after admiring the nave with the longest unbroken Gothic ceiling in the world, look under the seats of the choir for the oldest set of misericord carvings in England.

On Cathedral Close sits the Royal Clarence Hotel, built in 1769 and now one of the Abode Hotels, jointly run by acclaimed Exeter-born chef, Michael Caines. Caines made his name at Gidleigh Park and is still executive chef there. He's one of Devon's growing list of top chefs, with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall in Axminster, the Tanners in Plymouth, Simon Hulstone at the Michelin-starred Elephant in Torquay and Mark Streeter at the Dart Marina.

While the county might now be famed for its fine dining, the regional dish remains the much-loved Devon cream tea. There's an enormous choice of places to try it, including any National Trust tearoom, or head for the Georgian Tearoom in Topsham, Docton Mill Gardens tearoom near Hartland, or quaint and quirky Angels on the Babbacombe Downs. It's certainly a heavenly mixture: scones (of various styles from fruit to wholemeal), jam and thick clotted cream. The perfect indulgence after a long walk on Dartmoor or along the coastal path. ■

For our full report on Devon, visit www.britain-magazine.com
 For more ideas of what to see and do and where to stay, www.visitdevon.co.uk. Tourist Information Centres: Barnstaple, [tel:\(01271\)375000](tel:(01271)375000); Dartmouth, [tel:\(01803\)834224](tel:(01803)834224); Exeter, [tel:\(01392\)665700](tel:(01392)665700); Torquay, [tel:\(01803\)211211](tel:(01803)211211).



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www.clovelly.co.uk

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