

AFTER THE LOCKDOWN

Plan now, go later: 30 great breaks in Devon and Dorset

From vineyard stays to art holidays and rambling escapes, we pick the best West Country trips for when we're travelling again



Durdle Door

ALAMY

[Chris Haslam](#)

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1. Lulworth to yourself

The shingle circle of Lulworth Cove and Algarve-like arch at Durdle Door were suffering from overtourism long before anyone had heard of Dubrovnik, but if you're staying at the Limestone you can probably have both to yourself. Slip out just before dawn, follow the lane south for a quarter of a mile, then take the path to the right across the fields just past the farm buildings. It takes you round the back of Hambury Tout to drop you, if you've timed it right, on Durdle's doorstep just as the rising sun backlights the arch. Snap it, swim it and swan back to the Limestone for a full English. Later, follow Main Road south to Lulworth Cove. The day-trippers have mostly gone by 6pm.

Details Two nights' B&B from £240 (limestonehotel.co.uk)

2. Dartmoor art school

Janet Brady spent 15 years designing for Burberry before becoming an art teacher. Peter Davies studied fine art, and in 2003 the pair opened the Brambles Art Retreat in a 17th-century cottage between the rivers Lyd and Thrushel, just west of Dartmoor. Offering instruction in everything from charcoal to oils, and providing all equipment, they take you to scenic locations on the moors and along the coast to hone your skills. After that, you'll go home to a house-party vibe where the food — breakfast and dinner are included, as are some lunches — is another work of art.

Details Five-day course from £625pp (bramblesartretreat.com)



Eweleaze Farm

3. Clifftop camping fest

Glastonbury may be cancelled, but the best fest in the west is still scheduled to go ahead, running for the entire month of August at Eweleaze Farm, a clifftop campsite just round the bay from Weymouth. The owner, Peter Broatch, confirmed that the attractions that have made Eweleaze a summer tradition for the lucky few who can book in will go ahead if restrictions are lifted. These include the petting farm, collie walking, sheep shearing, sauna, spa and yoga sessions, guided meditation, candlelit dining in the barn and the swim rafts down on the beach.

Details Seven nights' self-catering for a family of four from £259 (eweleaze.co.uk)

4. Writing retreat

Arvon describes itself as the UK's home of creative writing. Pat Barker, Maggie Gee, Andrew Miller and Anne Aylor are just some of the authors whose careers began on an Arvon retreat, and Hilary Mantel, Willy Russell and Mark Haddon are some of the tutors who have worked here. You don't need a track record or experience, just the passion and determination to weave a story from imagination and thin air. Totleigh Barton is Arvon's

Devon outpost, a 16th-century manor in a bend of the River Torridge. This year's residential courses are full board — although you're expected to help with the cooking — and range from short-story tutorials to tuition in writing for theatrical performance and musicals.

Details Five-day course £815pp (arvon.org)

5. Cycle Drake's Trail

This delightful slow-travel adventure is a six-night potter along Devon's north-to-south Drake's Trail, overnighting in hotels, inns and a B&B. Rolling out of Barnstaple, you follow the gorgeous Tarka Trail beside the River Torridge to Great Torrington; skirt Dartmoor to Tavistock on the Granite Way; then follow National Cycle Network Route 27 down to Plymouth. You'll cycle between 15 and 26 miles a day, riding built-for-comfort hybrids. Electric bikes are available, and return transfers from Plymouth to Barnstaple are included.

Details Six nights' B&B from £1,155pp (the-carter-company.com)

6. Exmoor adventure

Exmoor's Calvert Trust is a fully accessible outdoor education centre specialising in adventure breaks for everybody, regardless of age, ability or additional needs. Set at the foot of Exmoor, 20 minutes from Ilfracombe on the banks of the Wistlandpound Reservoir, it has the specialist equipment and instructors to offer family activities ranging from abseiling and archery to canoeing, horse riding and sailing, along with wheelchair-accessible, full-board accommodation.

Details Three-night weekend breaks from £330pp (calvertexmoor.org.uk)



7. Dart estuary kayaking

It's not just the yacht owners who know that a vessel is a hole in the water that needs filling with money. Kayak enthusiasts start with rented sit-on-top craft and before they know it they realise they're going to need a bigger boat. And a carbon-fibre paddle. And a throw rope, a paddle float and some cool foul-weather kit. Sea kayaking is dangerously addictive, as you'll see for yourself on a taster weekend on the south Devon coast. Over two days on the sheltered waters of the Dart estuary you'll learn how to launch and land your kayak, how to paddle effectively, how to read the tides and how to plan a trip. We suggest bedding down at the Café Alf Resco (B&B doubles from £80; cafealfresco.co.uk).

Details Two-day taster weekend £175pp (seakayakdevon.co.uk)

8. Family escape

If lockdown lasts six weeks you'll have had the joy of your children's company for the equivalent of an entire school summer holiday — without the opportunity to offload them on the grandparents. Then it will be the actual school summer holidays (or the 2020 version thereof) and social distancing between yourselves and the kids will be your top priority. A family room at Moonfleet Manor, sleeping four, can help. A creaky old place filled with storybook artefacts, it offers free childcare, children's dining and three supervised swimming pools. There are guided fossil walks on the Jurassic Coast for them, and gin for you. The newest attraction is a fun family escape room that absolutely nobody will want to use.

Details Seven nights' B&B from £1,853

(moonfleetmanorhotel.co.uk)



Watersmeet Hotel

9. Devon's biggest beach

Woolacombe's two-and-a-half-mile beach and beginner-friendly

surf offer so much joy that I'm giving you three accommodation choices. The cheap and cheerful option is the Woolacombe Sands Holiday Park, with sea-view camping pitches from £147 a week for a family of four (woolacombe-sands.co.uk). Next up is the Thatched Cottage in Putsborough, at the southern end of the sands: pure chocolate box, half a mile from the beach and sleeping four from £695 a week (putsborough.com). Finally, to the north past Barricane Beach, the Watersmeet Hotel is a family-friendly Edwardian seaside palace with a spa, indoor and outdoor pools and wall-to-wall sea views.

Details Three nights' B&B for two from £780 (watersmeethotel.co.uk)

10. Learn the ropes in Brixham

Lockdown has taught us that life's too short to put our ambitions on hold, so when this is all over, chase those dreams. If one of those involves skippering a yacht around the world — or even just around the South West — kick-start it with a five-day, live-aboard Royal Yachting Association (RYA) competent crew course off the south Devon coast on a 2017 Dufour 382. The experience will teach you the basic seamanship principles and safety procedures you need to make yourself useful. Courses set sail from Brixham harbour on dates up to November 29. In the meantime, you can take the RYA's online Essential Navigation and Seamanship course while confined to quarters (£89; sailtrain.org.uk).

Details Five nights' full board from £695pp (torbayseaschool.co.uk)



Lundy island
ALAMY

11. Conservation break in Lundy

The National Trust offers nearly 200 working holidays for conservation volunteers, with jobs from hedge-laying and coppicing to taming Victorian gardens and path-building. There are plenty of such breaks on offer in Devon and Dorset, but the standout, should you fancy more isolation, is a week on Lundy island building dry-stone walls and ripping out invasive rhododendrons. Your recommended holiday wardrobe should

comprise waterproofs and steel toe-capped safety boots. Accommodation is included, but you will need to book your own heli flight to the island (£131 return; landmarktrust.org.uk). **Details** Seven nights' full board from £190pp (nationaltrust.org.uk)

12. Riverside cooking

If your baked-bean-and-tuna cornflake pasta bake is going down a storm in lockdown you're probably an innately talented chef. All you need is a little formal training over four days at River Cottage on the River Axe in Dorset. The course covers veg, nose-to-tail meat preparation, fish skills, and bread and baking; and yes, you get to eat what you've cooked. Courses are scheduled for August 10-13 and October 15-18. A four-night stay in a B&B double in the River Cottage Farmhouse costs from £520.

Details Four-day course £780pp (rivercottage.net)

13. Chocolate-box cottage

To while away the long lockdown evenings I've been in search of the archetypal chocolate-box cottage for a return-to-normality treat. It needs to be white, thatched, with a river in the garden and within walking distance of a pub where half the locals are Jack Russells. Goodshelter, in East Portlemouth (sleeps six; from £622pw; toadhallcottages.co.uk), came close; so did Hearthstone East Cottage, in Brixham (sleeps eight; from £710pw; sykescottages.co.uk). But the winner is East Burton Farmhouse in Wool, Dorset. It's Milk Tray on the outside, John Lewis on the inside, sleeps eight, has the River Win in the garden and is five minutes from the Seven Stars inn.

Details Seven nights' self-catering from £884 (ruralretreats.co.uk)

14. Harmonious retreat

The Partridge Family, the Osmonds, the Jackson Five, Bros, the Nolan Sisters and the Carter Family proved, to a greater or lesser extent, that being related was no bar to harmony. You, too, could join this list by booking a stay at Candyland Studios, a woodland retreat just west of Torrington. Built *Grand Designs*-style, with local timber, straw bales and reclaimed tin, the house sleeps eight, has a grand piano, guitars, a log burner, hammocks, acres of woodland and a professional recording studio.

Details Four nights' self-catering from £776 (canopyandstars.co.uk)

15. Charmouth trucking

As you climb out of Wootton Fitzpaine through the west Dorset bocage you come to 12-acre Brigs Farm with its views of Charmouth and the Channel, three miles to the south. At the top of this wild campsite — compost toilets, free showers and

campfires welcome — there's an ex-army Bedford four-tonner that's been converted into a bijou holiday home for two with separate bedroom and living areas, a solar-powered electrical system and a wood-burning stove you'll use even if there's a heatwave, just because you can.

Details Two nights' self-catering from £100

(brigsfarmcamping.co.uk)

16. Retro cabin stay

It's north Devon rather than Minnesota, but the pioneering vibe is the same except for a significantly lower risk of wolf attack. There are five seductively retro cabins here, scattered around the edge of an eight-acre field. They sleep six, have wood-burning stoves, fire pits, banjo-pickin', liquor-sippin' verandas and minimal power points. Some even have showers. There's a wood-fired pizza oven, friendly farm animals and eggs you have to collect yourself. It's all very 1875, or, as they say in these parts, quarter past seven.

Details Seven nights' self-catering from £720

(berridonfarm.co.uk)



Woodsman's Treehouse

17. Cool camping

You don't build a children's wonderland of Middle Earth abodes deep in a Dorset wood and then allow children to come and spoil the atmosphere, so Crafty Camping is strictly adults only. The Woodsman's Treehouse is the main attraction here: a Riba award-winning folly with a hot tub, sauna and stainless steel slide that costs an eye-watering £1,485 for a weekend break. Better value, and just as comfortable, are the yurts and the teepees hidden throughout the wood, the best of which is Coracle, built in a clearing overlooking the pond. There's a wood-fired oven, and the camp shop sells pizza dough, so bring passata, pepperoni and mozzarella.

Details Two nights' self-catering for two from £278

(mallinson.co.uk)

18. Storm-watching quay

Hartland Quay is the last place you want to be in Devon on a bright summer's day. There are far safer, sandier spots along the coast to enjoy the sunshine, but when there's a storm brewing there's nowhere better in the county than this tempest-furrowed spot. The rocky, west-facing shore — frankly, a terrible place to build a quay — catches the full force of Atlantic hooleys, and the Hartland Quay Hotel is the best place to watch them thunder in. Room 17 has the bay window and unobstructed sea views.

Details Two nights' B&B for two from £220

(hartlandquayhotel.co.uk)

19. Creek-to-coast walk

New for 2020 from Foot Trails is a self-guided inn-to-inn expedition in Devon following the River Dart from Totnes to the sea and then west along the coast to Salcombe. It's a clever itinerary built to highlight the fabulous — Sharpham vineyard, Greensway House, Blackpool Gardens — and skip the tedious. Sometimes you're dropped by car at the start point to walk back to your inn, and on other days your luggage is taken ahead while you follow. Either way you'll end up in Chillington, where, if you're clever, you'll have booked a celebration dinner at the Bear and Blacksmith (thebearandblacksmith.com).

Details Four nights' B&B from £790pp (foottrails.co.uk)





Shaftesbury
ALAMY

20. Hike Hardy's Wessex

Like a BBC Sunday night costume drama, this self-guided walk through Hardy's south Wessex takes in some of England's most glorious countryside. It starts in Salisbury, passes through Shaftesbury (Shaston to Hardy), ends a week later in Lyme Regis and passes through real-life locations from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *The Woodlanders* and *Interlopers* at the Knap. You can go medium-hard, covering up to 15 miles a day, or take it easier, up to 11 miles. Accommodation is in B&Bs, inns and the Acorn Inn — the "Sow and Acorn" in *Tess* — and your luggage is transferred daily.

Details Seven nights' B&B from £830pp (onfootholidays.co.uk)

21. Dart mindfulness

The Sharpham Trust is a charity founded to bring together eastern and western philosophies, to foster the arts and promote conservation. It's based at Sharpham House, a Palladian villa on the Amazon-like reaches of the River Dart, and specialises in mindfulness, ranging from one-day courses to eight-week retreats. Our pick is a five-night silent retreat, involving meditation, exercise and relaxation, with vegetarian dining. It's not totally silent — morning meetings allow you to discuss your experience with your group.

Details Five nights' full board from £515 (sharphamtrust.org)

22. Torbay by rail

This five-day escorted tour begins with the 13-mile stretch from Exwell Hill along the River Exe, beside the sea at Dawlish Warren and up the Teign Estuary before looping through Newton Abbot to Torquay. Base camp is the Livermead House Hotel on the seafront, from where excursions depart to Totnes to ride the steam trains of the South Devon Railway to Buckfastleigh — home of the otter sanctuary — and via Churston to Kingswear for a river cruise up the Dart. There's a day off in Torquay, offering the opportunity to visit Babbacombe Cliff Railway. Rail travel from your home station is included.

Details Five days' half-board from £555pp (railtrail.co.uk)

23. Reunion in Salcombe

#WellMeetAgain is the clarion call for the post-virus family reunion, where grandparents greet long-lost grandchildren — and parents happily leave them to it. You need a hotel with

specific elements to make this work, including a beach, an indoor pool, a spa and a games room. A restaurant specialising in comfort food is essential and the dog should be welcomed. Finally, the property should be on a single level so Grandad can't say that walking up and down all those stairs has tired him out. The hotel is Soar Mill Cove, named after one of Devon's prettiest beaches.

Details Seven nights' half-board for four adults and two children from £4,886 (soarmillcove.co.uk)



Corfe Castle, Purbeck
4CORNERS IMAGES

24. Jurassic Coast snaps

Those who say that smartphones have made photographic skills redundant are wrong. While technology has expanded the art, the serious photographer still needs to understand what's going on under the bonnet. On this three-day course on Dorset's Jurassic Coast, the professional snapper Gary Fooks uses the magnificent scenery and salty light to demonstrate composition, exposure, the difference between AV and TV, and basic photoshopping. Locations include Corfe Castle, Portland Bill, Durdle Door and Old Harry Rocks. Half-board accommodation is at the Springfield Country Hotel & Spa near Wareham.

Details Three-day course £475pp (fotocourses.co.uk)

25. Tuscan tower stay

In 1830 the Rev John Richards Clavell built a 35ft Tuscan-style tower on Hen Cliff above Kimmeridge Bay in Dorset. It was intended to be an observatory rather than a love nest, but by 1862 Thomas Hardy was bringing his Kimmeridge-born girlfriend here. That's not its only literary connection; the folly also inspired PD James's *The Black Tower* after it was burnt out between the wars. In 2006 the tower was dismantled, removed from the crumbling cliff edge and rebuilt farther inland, and is now available to rent as an observatory or love nest. It has a

bathroom in the basement, a kitchen on the ground floor, a bedroom above that and a sitting room on the top.

Details Four nights' self-catering from £510

(landmarktrust.org.uk)

26. Portland twitching

Imagine what the birds make of the coronavirus lockdown. No old ladies feeding the ducks; no chips for the herring gulls to nick; and no ragtag army of Gore-Tex-clad twitchers descending on fields like ravers to see rare vagrants. By early October, after a quiet year, species such as firecrests, chiffchaffs, black redstarts and the vicar-like ring ouzels will be heading south for winter. You can watch them go on an expert-guided weekend break from Naturetrek, with accommodation at the Mortons House Hotel. You'll take part in a ringing exercise at Durlston National Nature Reserve and visit teeming sites such as St Aldhelm's Head, Holes Bay and the Portland Observatory.

Details Three days' half-board from £395pp (naturetrek.co.uk)

27. Wessex farmstay

Luccombe Farm is a 650-acre arable farm in a green valley south of Milton Abbas. Along with the cereals, it offers a riding school, tennis courts, clay shooting and fishing on the River Piddle.

There's an indoor pool, sauna and gym, a play area and a games room. The nine weathered brick and flint self-catering cottages are converted from former farm buildings and sleep between four and seven. There's also a gypsy caravan for £75 a night if you fancy a pared-back couples retreat.

Details Seven nights' self-catering from £610

(luccombeholidays.co.uk)

28. Okehampton safari

Driving to Eversfield Lodge is a journey that proves you don't need to leave these shores to get lost in a jungle. What you're looking for is a 400-acre organic farm — a patch of England at its most defiantly unspoilt — with two luxurious six-berth safari tents overlooking a trout-stocked lake. You're a few miles from Okehampton, and Dartmoor isn't far, but if you're heading out every day you're missing the point. Eversfield is a place to stay put, to potter, to row around the lake, stargaze and perhaps wander up to the Clovelly Inn for a pint of Princeton. And the bacon and sausages made from the farm's own pigs are fabulous.

Details Seven nights' self-catering from £950

(canopyandstars.co.uk)

29. Vineyard in a tent

Toby and Esther McKinnel grow grapes and make wine in north Devon. They also run a campsite in the vineyard with just ten pitches, a fully furnished safari tent sleeping a family of four

(£120 a night) and a couple of unfurnished bell tents, sleeping two and six respectively (from £60 a night). What else do you need to know? That you can see Dartmoor from your tent, there's a playground and a shop selling free-range eggs and local produce? The main thing is that they make their own wine and you can drink it outside your tent while looking at the very vines whence it came.

Details Two nights' self-catering from £32

(tenacresvineyardcamping.co.uk)

30. Cream of Devon

In 1809, on the south-facing slope of a combe above the River Tamar and Wareham Wood, the Duke of Bedford commissioned Humphry Repton to design a hunting lodge. It was built for luxury: a rural retreat reshaped as a sylvan Highland fantasy by the Duchess Georgiana. It's now Olga Polizzi's Hotel Endsleigh, and she hasn't changed much, preferring to enhance and celebrate the languorous self-indulgence for which the house was created. There's fly-fishing, croquet, high tea, champagne cocktails and posh nosh. You'll need a wardrobe, but the Polizzis provide the wellies.

Details Two nights' half-board for two from £700

(hotelendsleigh.com)

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