

West Country Road Trip

Tour the stunning scenery of Devon and Cornwall at your own pace from the comfort of a luxury motorhome, says Nicola Gill

Ever two counties were designed to be explored by motorhome, they must be Devon and Cornwall. Peppered with stately homes and gorgeous gardens and picture-book country lanes with cream tea opportunities every few miles, these West Country neighbours make for excellent touring. We picked up our home on wheels for the week, a Swift Escape, from Chief Rentals in Devon's sunny Riviera town of Paignton. This new, cleverly compact, breed of luxury motorhome sleeps up to six but can still be driven without a special driving licence.

That means you can tour in style as a couple, or with friends and family, without sacrificing home comforts (there's even a TV!). A 20-minute one-to-one showed us how everything worked, complete with a tour of the nifty fitted kitchen, which has a toaster, hob, oven and microwave, and we were good to go.

Road, rail and river

But instead of hitting the road immediately to explore the local beaches (or the excellent Paignton Zoo) we hopped on board the magnificent steam train leaving next door from the perfectly

preserved period train station. It whizzed us, whistling loudly, through deep countryside (we spotted several buzzards, many kestrels and a kingfisher) to

Get the rare treat of seeing an otter

the ferry port at Kingswear, where we took a short trip across the River Dart to explore Dartmouth, with its naval college and castle. A meal of deliciously fresh fish and chips, followed by artisan salted caramel fudge from the quaint Foss Street, lined with galleries and independent shops, kept us going on the train ride back. We didn't have time, but the ticket allows you to hop on and off at any of the stops, including Greenway Halt to visit Agatha Christie's glorious summer retreat and its gardens. Exhilarated, if slightly sooty-haired from sticking our heads out of the train windows to wave, we picked up our motorhome and headed past Paignton's brightly painted beach huts to our first overnight stay at the five-star Beverley Holiday Park (beverley-holidays.co.uk) nearby. Here we hooked up, switched the heating on, and watched the sun go down with far-reaching views over a 'home' cooked meal. Cooking on board is easy and eating dinner under a starry sky on the pack-away table and chairs provided was wonderful.

Torquay and around

Whatever the weather, a drive around Torquay's pastel-painted Victorian terraces, palatial white stucco mansions and palm-lined seafront boulevards prove it deserves its reputation as the Nice of England. We couldn't leave Torquay without a visit to Kents Caverns (kents-cavern.co.uk), a hidden gem on the outskirts, which has UNESCO geopark status. Here we went deep underground with a guide and discovered a lost world of scimitar-toothed cat bones, prehistoric cave bear remains and stone chambers, where tools and other finds show how Neanderthal man lived.

Great For Fun-Loving Families

The world-renowned Eden Project, home to the world's largest biosphere, is a short, scenic drive from Little Bodieve Park and provides fascinating, interactive fun for all ages.



A motorhome gives your holiday much more flexibility

Mighty stalagmites and stalactites were everywhere. From Torquay, you're in striking distance of several stunning National Trust properties including the 1920s gem Coleton Fishacre, the gothic splendour of Knightshayes and Saltram's Palladian gracefulness. The only problem is deciding how many you can fit in!

Drive over Dartmoor

On day three we set off to explore Dartmoor, and this is when the motorhome came into its own. Sometimes a downpour would start just as we reached an historic spot so we'd simply park at a viewpoint, make a cuppa, and read on the sofa until it stopped. It's possible to spend an enthralling week doing nothing

more (moor!) than getting to know Dartmoor, trying everything from simple circular walks and bushcraft activities to geocaching, but we contented ourselves with spotting wild Dartmoor ponies, seeking out Bronze Age settlements, climbing to lofty tors and eating an impromptu lunch while enjoying epic views. Tired but smiling, we left an hour before it got dark to enjoy the scenic drive over the border to our overnight stop at the tranquil North Cornwall holiday park Little Bodieve (littlebodieve.co.uk).

Beach combing and dune exploring

Between here and our final North Cornwall stopover at the

fabulous Perran Sands holiday park, we were spoilt for choice for endless sandy beaches to stroll down. We loved Rock, but the poetically-named Polzeath and Constantine are also rightly famous. This section of North Cornwall is the wildest and most windswept and almost any one of the granite villages lining the coast, nestled in deep coves and around picturesque bays, makes a great visit. *Doc Martin* fans can visit Port Isaac where you might even catch a glimpse of filming.

Explore the Lizard

From the north coast we dropped down to the Lizard, a triangular bulge at the bottom of Cornwall, the tip being England's most southerly point. The lighthouse here is well worth a visit - as is Ann's famous pasty shop in the village of Lizard itself. There's something magical about the light and the landscape here - a moderately strenuous one-mile circular coastal path walk to look at the old tin mines from Mullion Cove was hard to do without stopping to admire the endless shale and gorse-covered cliff and hill views every five minutes. You can't come to Lizard without visiting

Great For Spirited Adventurers

Running for 18 miles along a resurfaced disused railway line through sites of special scientific interest, the Camel Trail is a largely traffic-free trail that winds its way through wooded valleys, hugging the Camel estuary. Cycle it if you're feeling adventurous!

the cows at idyllic Roskilly's dairy farm, home of their astonishingly moreish ice cream. Trebah Gardens, a series of walkways through densely planted slopes, tumbling down to a secret cove and packed with tender subtropical tree ferns, giant rhubarb and other botanical marvels is also a must-see. Our overnight pitch was at the charming, family-run Little Trethvas site where free-roaming cockerels woke us up at breakfast-time and the hedgerows were bursting with spring flowers. Our time up, we were sad to hand our motorhome back, it really felt like our home on wheels and something tells me this trip was just the first of many such adventures.

❖ Chief Rentals in Paignton hires out Swift motorhomes from £490 a week. For more info, call 01803 520 494, or visit chiefrentals.com



Hop on a bike to explore the Camel Trail

Great For Tranquil Travellers

Dartmoor Otter Sanctuary allows you to get really close to a variety of these endearing, ingenious, mammals. It's a genuine rescue and rehabilitation centre and the knowledgeable staff give a wonderful tour. We bet you'll fall in love with Mr Squeaks!

