

Downe Cottages - Day Trips

We've prepared this list because we find that when we visit a new area for the first time we often miss the best of the area. Armed with a little local knowledge the best of the area is very easy to access and if found enhances the enjoyment of the day enormously.

The North Cornish Coast

A lovely day out is to drive down the coast beyond Bude taking the unmarked roads that hug the cliffs. Join the road at Lynstone, which is just the other side of Bude, and follow the road South. *Widemouth Sand* is a lovely sandy bay very popular with surfers all through the year and lovely for young children in the summer. Drive past Widemouth Sand, past Foxhole Point to Dizzard Point and beyond. It's a lovely road with super sea views and super walks at any number of stopping places. Stop at *Crackington Haven* and walk onto the beach. It's very beautiful and dramatic.

At Crackington Haven there is the Combe Barton Inn which provides a pleasant stop for a meal. The Inn is not particularly inviting on the outside and modern in terms of decor but the food is very reasonable.

Drive on to Newton Farm and then join the B3263 for the run into Boscastle. *Boscastle* is beautifully located although we are not too enthusiastic about the tourist trappings around the car park. The walk from the car park out to the sea is lovely. We don't suggest you stop at Tintagel (which despite its Castle is little more than a series of car parks and unattractive little shops) but carry on down to Port Issac on the B3314 and B3267. Stop in Port Issac (at low tide the beach is used as a car park) and walk around the village. There is a modern car park outside the village and a lovely short walk along the coastal path to the village centre.

Port Issac really is a delight. In the centre of the village, at No 12 Fore Street, is very pleasant coffee shop with lovely pastries. On the way down to the centre from the car park you pass The Old School House Hotel which looks down over the bay. On a nice day it's a great place to have a cream tea sitting on the benches outside. The Old School House also has a nice restaurant that serves a simple lunch at midday and a more formal dinner menu. (01208 880 721). There you can get a bowl of mussels and a slice of fresh bread and butter for lunch that is as welcome as it is simple.

After Port Issac drive along the unmarked roads into Rock. *Rock* is a little bit of suburbia that somehow has got lost on the North Cornish Coast. It is a pleasant little village that has become very "in" and up market. Then drive into Padstow (or take the ferry across if it's running – people only of course). If you're going to eat in Padstow it ought to be at one of Rick Stein's two restaurants. Do book to avoid disappointment. Padstow is a lovely fishing village that is well and truly on the tourist map. It's at its best when there are fewer of us about.

The Eden Project

The Eden Project is described in some detail in the section entitled “Gardens to Visit”. A trip to the Eden Project preceded by a stop at Pencarrow or by a visit to Fowey does make a lovely day out. We suggest you “do the Eden” in the morning or afternoon with the visit to Pencarrow or Fowey occupying the other part of the day. You can then take lunch as you travel between the two.

Nearby places to eat are the Crown at Lanlivery and the Royal Oak at Lostwithiel. The Crown is signposted off the A390 between Lostwithiel and St Austral and is one of Cornwall’s oldest pubs. It has a lovely sheltered garden. The Royal Oak is on Duke Street in the centre of Lostwithiel and is visible from the A390 in the town centre. Both provide good pub food.

Lydford Gorge

Located just off the A386 about six miles past Okehampton, Lydford Gorge is well worth the hour’s drive from Downe Cottages. It is a beautiful gorge cut through the rocks by the River Lyd that is fed by the waters that pour off Dartmoor. Stop at the Waterfall Entrance and walk down the steep steps to the White Lady Waterfall then walk the footpath cut into the rocks down to the Devil’s Cauldron.

The complete circuit is about 3 miles and takes an easy two hours for a wonderful walk. Don’t miss the Devil’s Cauldron or the walk beyond the Cauldron to Marker 30 that ends the walk. One of the National Trusts little known treasures it makes for a glorious morning or afternoon. Do wear good walking shoes, as some of the path that is cut into the rocks alongside the Lyd is steep and can be slippery.

A visit to the Gorge will occupy a lazy half a day and we suggest you combine it with a visit to Castle Drogo (which is described in the section entitled “Craft Centres and Buildings”) to make a delightful day.

The Dartmoor Inn is on A386 just outside Lydford and is a pleasant place to stop for lunch. It is rated a “3” in the Good Food Guide which we think is generous, however it’s a very pleasant stop. The Inn is not particularly attractive from the road (the Americans would say that it lacks “curb appeal”) but it has a very pleasant interior. One of the rooms is however the result of a recent expansion and is a bit disappointing. Ask to be near an open fire if you book and you’ll be in one of the attractive rooms in the pub.

Another nice stop for lunch is the Northmore Arms at Wonson. The Northmore Arms is located off the A382 half a mile from the A30 at Whiddon Down. You turn right down a lane signposted Throwleigh and Gidleigh. Continue down the lane and over the humpbacked bridge. Turn left to Wonson and the pub is off this road. It’s very rustic and unspoiled, a charming little pub with good simple pub food.

An alternative stop is the Drewe Arms which is in The Square at Drewsteignton a village no more than two miles from Castle Drogo. The Drewe Arms is a very picturesque Devon pub that just happened to arrive in a village house a couple of hundred years ago somewhere between lunch and supper and no one has stopped to think it odd in the intervening years. There is genuine character in every room in the pub. The bar is a hole in the wall in one room and the absence of a wall from another room. There is a charming little restaurant in the back where a couple of rooms have been knocked into one. The real ale is excellent and the food is good. (01647 281 224).

Lynmouth and the Valley of the Rocks

A very pleasant day can be spent visiting Lynmouth and the Valley of the Rocks in North Devon proper.

Lynmouth is close to Lynton and is a beautiful coastal village with very pleasant beaches and a small shopping area. It's very easy to spend an hour here just mooching about and having a coffee.

The Rising Sun in Lynmouth is a good place for lunch. Excellent sandwiches and coffee and good service. (The lounge is lovely but the loos could do with some investment.)

After lunch the Valley of the Rocks is well worth a visit. Drive back out of Lynmouth and turn right following the signs to the Valley of the Rocks. Drive through the built up area and out to the Valley where there is car parking. It's a very good place to get out of the car and walk through the Valley. The Valley has a large number of quite unusual rock formations.

After you've walked around and through the Valley continue on in the car in the same direction. The road (part of which is a toll road) takes you past Lee Abbey, Lee Bay and on to Woody Bay. It is a delightful little track that follows the coast to Martinhoe. You continue onwards and eventually rejoin the A39 heading towards Barnstaple.

On your way back to Barnstaple you can either visit Arlington Court (which is just off the A39) or you can turn right off the A39 towards Guineaford and then on to Marwood Hill Gardens, which are well worth a visit in their own right (see the section on Gardens).

Local Potteries

A great day can be spent visiting local potteries. It's the best way to appreciate the richness and quality of the work produced by the local potters.

The standard of pottery is exceptionally high in the immediate area and there is wide variety in the potters' work. This is the product of history (Large numbers of potters were employed at Brannam's in Barnstaple at the beginning of the Twentieth Century and many left to start up small workshops as the workforce contracted. This established the industry in the area), the ready availability of local clays and the appeal of the North Devon lifestyle to those of an artistic nature.

Clovelly Pottery is a small pottery set up in 1981 by Clive Pearson. Stoneware is the principal product with a wide range of household pots being produced, many are “oven to table” ware. The most popular of the glazes used is the Chun glaze, a beautiful deep blue glaze originally from the Sung Dynasty. The pottery is open most of the year but during the summer months will be open from 10.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. Monday to Saturday.

Springfield Pottery in Hartland is run by Philip and Frannie Leach, potters who belong to the great West Country dynasty of Leaches. Philip is grandson of the legendary Bernard Leach, and son of the late Michael Leach, in whose pottery Frannie was trained. Frannie also studied in New York, and Philip spent six years in Iran, where he was involved in setting up student workshops. Married in 1977, they opened their Springfield Pottery two years later.

They produce a wide range of work: oven-to-tableware, tiles and individual pieces. They produce decorative earthenware. Most of the glazed ware is made using a red marl from Stoke-on-Trent combined with a local earthenware boulder clay and a whitish Devon ball clay. The glazed ware has all been fired twice and the second ‘glaze’ firing goes to a temperature of 1080°C. This temperature is within the higher end of earthenware and gives a limited scope in available glazes.

They mix the glazes to our own recipes. These are basically lead bisilicate, borax and alkaline glazes.

They use many methods of decoration; slip combing, slip trailing, brushwork, imprinting and some spongework. These methods, combined with an extensive palette of pigments give a wide variety in the work

Phillip and Frannie are gifted and imaginative potters and their products are clearly “collectable”.