

Nearby Pubs & Restaurants

Pubs

The Wreckers' Retreat, which is a bar in The Hartland Quay Hotel, is stunningly located and a pint at the Wreckers is a must for those jaded souls who have journeyed to us from the Land of Starbuck in the East. It is about a mile and a half away on the other side of Stoke and the hotel nestles on the side of the cliffs. It is well worth a visit just for the view and on a stormy evening it is an exhilarating place for a drink. If there is a good sunset it can be memorable. You will pinch yourself and ask yourself if this is really England as the sun sinks gloriously to the horizon and the light burns great flames across the sea.

On some Sunday afternoons in the summer the Hartland Brass Band plays at the Quay. the location acts as alchemist and transmutes brass into gold.

Sitting outside the hotel on a warm evening with a pint of "Wreckers" in your hand watching the sun slowly set is a very popular activity amongst men of a certain age and disposition. It is highly recommended as an antidote to the M25.

Children are very welcome and they can play around you as you sit drinking on the benches outside the bar.

Hartland Quay Hotel provides basic pub food that doesn't try to be of restaurant quality but the Wreckers Retreat has a lovely atmosphere and on a nice day is crowded with walkers and day-trippers down to see the Quay.

The Kings' Arms at the bottom of The Square in Hartland is run by a lovely local couple and food is served on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings. Their food is traditional bar food, but they cook their own chips – no frozen chips here! The food is very good value for money. The Kings' Arms also has a lovely beer garden to the rear with views across the valley. They also offer a pizza takeaway service; the pizzas are stonebaked. Their phone number is 01237 440151.

The Old Bakery Coffee Shop can be found on the Square in Hartland and has just opened this Easter. This is a very pleasant stop for coffee, light lunches or cream teas.

A little further away is *The Red Lion* in Clovelly Harbour. Another superb location and a lovely place to go for a meal or a drink on a summer's evening. Their restaurant looks right out over the picturesque harbour. Regular informal folk music evenings are held here. If you are eating at the Red Lion at night you can drive down to the hotel and park on the pebbles. Please ring 01237 431237 to book a table. See if you can reserve a 'window table' to enjoy views over the little harbour whilst having your meal.

The Coach and Horses at Buckland Brewer (01237 451395) is one of the pubs in the area that we really enthuse over. It is a lovely pub and has good food, good beer, bags of atmosphere and in Oliver a very friendly landlord. We also think that their steaks are the best in the area whether you are in pub or restaurant. (On one occasion we asked for two fillet steaks and the chef came out to apologize. They were out of fillet steak but they'd phoned the butcher. The apology was for the fifteen-minute delay while the butcher finished his tea!) It's worth booking a table in the bar before travelling over. The only down side is that service can be very slow if the pub is crowded.

The Bush Inn at Morewenstow is a lovely looking pub that serves good pub food. It also serves a very acceptable Sunday lunch using locally reared beef and pork.

The Beaver Inn on Irsha Street in Appledore (01237 474822) is very acceptable with an emphasis on fresh fish. Do try and get a window table looking out to the Estuary. On a Saturday you will often find a folk singer or band in the bar.

The location of *The Beaver* is excellent. It has lovely views over the estuary and Irsha Street is lovely to walk through on a nice evening, tremendous charm and character.

One pub that we should mention that is not “nearby” – and is not really a pub anymore! - but is an excellent stopping point for lunch or dinner on the way to or from Downe Cottages is *The Mason’s Arms* at Knowstone. Knowstone is a mile off the A361 and about twelve miles from Junction 27 of the M5. *The Mason’s Arms* is signposted and it’s well worth planning your journey so that you can stop here for lunch. More restaurant than pub in the kitchen, the pub is now the proud possessor of a Michelin Star. We call there for lunch or dinner if we’re travelling to and from the wide world beyond Bristol. (Do phone ahead even if it’s only as you come off the M5 and check that it’s open as there is no point driving off the road to the *Mason’s Arms* if it’s not able to serve you - 01398 341 231)

If you do eat at one of the above pubs please mention to the proprietors that you are staying at Downe Cottages. If a proprietor knows that our guests regularly eat at his or her pub it can only encourage the right quality of service for individual guests.

We recommend the above pubs and restaurants because we want our visitors to get the best out of the area. Many of our visitors take this guide out with them on day trips and we are quite happy for them to do this. One advantage of doing this is that you can give a quick call on the mobile to check opening hours and availability before you make a detour on your journey. All of the above pubs and restaurants are small businesses and can therefore close at short notice for domestic emergencies.

Restaurants

Appropriately for such a coastal area the best news about the local restaurants is that there is a selection of good fish restaurants very near to us and one of the best fish restaurants in the country not so far away. In practice, you can eat beautifully cooked fish every night of the week at a different restaurant during your stay at Downe. The only caveat is that it is always sensible to book before you begin your journey because some of the restaurants are quite small.

We do suggest that you take advantage of the selection of restaurants that we identify in these pages and eat at a different one each evening. They really are quite lovely and offer very good value. Each restaurant also provides a very different experience and together they give a real variety to your evenings.

The nearest restaurant to Downe is *The Pattard Kitchen*. It is located less than a mile from Downe and set amongst old farm buildings. It is quite exceptional and we recommend to all of our visitors that they take the opportunity to dine there at least once during their stay. (01237 441444).

Going North from Hartland on the A39 takes you to Appledore on this side of Bideford. (Appledore is a lovely old fishing village and well worth a visit on a sunny afternoon.) The

village hosts a restaurant called *Benson's at No 22 The Quay*. The service is friendly. The food is good and the restaurant has real atmosphere. It's necessary to book on most evenings during the season (01237 424093) as it's a very small restaurant.

On the other side of the estuary is Instow. On the sea front is *The Commodore Hotel*. The Commodore is beautifully located with lovely views across the estuary. The snacks in the bar are quite good and we particularly enjoy morning coffee or afternoon tea on the terrace looking across the bay to Appledore when the weather is fine.

The *coffee shop attached to the Burton Art Gallery and Museum in Bideford* is a good place for a coffee or a light lunch. The Gallery is located in Kingsley Road adjacent to Victoria Park that in turn is next to the large car park by the Quay. The opening hours are Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 4pm.

The *fish and chip shop on the Quay in Bideford* is very good for traditional fish and chips. On a nice evening when we are "fish and chipping" we tend to buy our fish and chips and drive into Instow. We park on the front and enjoy a lovely view across the estuary while we "dine from the morning paper". Chose a public bench and the beach wall provides an acceptable resting-place for feet, drink or whatever. Not very sophisticated maybe but it can be great fun on the right evening.

The best restaurant in Bideford is *Mariners*. Located in Cooper Street just off Mill Street in the centre of Bideford it is an intimate little restaurant and provides a very pleasant restaurant experience. Do book – 01237 476447.

Another place to stop and have a light lunch during the day is *The Quay Café* at Fremington Quay (between Bideford and Barnstaple just off the B3360 and on the Tarka Trail). Housed in a renovated railway station it looks out over the Taw Estuary. Open daily throughout the year it is closed on Mondays from November to April and is closed all of December. During the mussel season it serves a lovely bowl of "Moules Mariniere" from locally caught mussels which is served piping hot with hot bread. (01271 378783).

Going in South on the A39 from Downe takes you into Bude.

The restaurant we enjoy most in Bude is "*Life's a Beach*" which is a beach bistro. Located on Summerleaze Beach in Bude it has a sensational location overlooking the sea. Getting there might discourage you (past the public loos, through two car parks) but don't be discouraged – persevere! It's casual, crowded and fun. The food is very good and we think it offers the best fish in the area.

On a warm summer's evening you will need to be reminded that you are still in England. The restaurant has "a new-world feel" about it. Lovely views through open glass doors with the waves crashing below. One recent meal at Life's a Beach took place during a summer storm. It was magnificent with the waves pounding the beach and the spray from the Ocean creating a Jack the Ripperesque feel to the whole coastline. (Do book if you can: 01288 355222)

Another interesting restaurant in Bude is the "*El Barco*" restaurant in The Bencoolen pub. Juan, the proprietor and chef, is Spanish and the food has a heavy Spanish influence. The fish is the best choice but do be careful of the quantities, there can be very substantial portions on the plate and it's easy to over order.

El Barco's particular contribution to our recommended fish evenings is the paella. It is genuine paella made freshly when ordered and therefore takes half an hour to arrive. It's rustic and unsophisticated but it's delicious. We suggest you consider ordering the paella when booking your table to avoid disappointment or an overlong wait. But do beware of quantities. The "Paella for Two" is much more than the two of us can manage. We find the quantities so large that they can easily overwhelm the dinner and spoil the meal so we do emphasize caution. El Barco does however provide "doggy bags" to take the remnants of the paella home for lunch the next day.

The restaurant has lots of atmosphere with tables close together and the service is friendly. (We recommend that you book: 01288 354694).

Going a few miles past Bude on the coast road between Bude and Widemouth Bay is *Elements* a restaurant that has lovely views over the ocean. The food is mainly Italian-based.. Elements is a lovely addition to the area's restaurants. The phone number is 01288 352386 and booking is essential. .

The choice of ethnic restaurants is limited in such a rural area. Barnstaple is the nearest town offering a reasonable number of acceptable ethnic restaurants, including Chinese, Indian and Greek restaurants, and we will be happy to provide recommendations. They tend to be ordinary of their kind rather than exceptional but you can still find a pleasant Italian or Indian meal.

If you have deep pockets and are prepared to travel a good hour for your meal we do have the following recommendations:

The first recommendation is either of the two restaurants run by the television celebrity Rick Stein at Padstow: *Rick Stein's Fish Restaurant* or *Rick Stein's Bistro* (one number for both: 01841 532700). Don't bother to try and get a meal at these unless you have booked a table. The queue for even the least prestigious of his eateries (Rick Stein's Café) was out into the street when we were last there. (The existence of his restaurants, his café and his delicatessen has caused the locals to re-christen the village "Padstein"!) The food in his restaurants is excellent although we do prefer the Fish Restaurant to the Bistro. (We take an hour and a quarter to drive to Padstow from Downe and we know the road.)

An alternative in Padstow is Paul Ainsworth's "*No 6*" on Middle Street (01841 532093). The restaurant occupies an old house with a variety of different sized rooms turned over to dinning. The décor and ambience is lovely as is the food. We felt that it was not quite as good as Rick Stein's Fish Restaurant but better than his Bistro.

The second recommendation is *Northcote Manor* at Burrington near Umberleigh. This has established itself as one of the places to eat in Devon. Lovely food, lovely surroundings. (01769 560501)

Northcote Manor is off the A377 from Barnstaple. The entrance is on the right hand side of the road four and a half miles past Umberleigh. The entrance is signposted just past the Portsmouth Arms Railway Station and opposite the Portsmouth Arms public house.

It's worth noting that morning coffee and cream tea is available to non-residents. It can make a lovely stop in the middle of a busy day. Beautiful service in lovely surroundings. The Manor has the happy knack of letting it's visitors take their time over their coffee or tea and we've spent a leisurely hour and more having tea in their lounge. (We take about forty-five minutes to drive to Northcote Manor but again we do know the road.)

Our third recommendation is *Percy's* at Virginstow. Percy's is a forty-five minute drive from Downe and is just off the A388 just south of Holsworthy. (Drive south to St Giles-on-the-Heath and just as you enter St Giles-on-the-Heath turn left. Percy's is signposted from there.) Tina Bricknell-Webb, the chef-cum-proprietor, is an excellent chef. Her cooking is original and intelligent. Do book (01409 211236). Children under 12 are however not permitted in the restaurant. (We take forty-five minutes to drive to Percy's.)

The fourth recommendation is the furthest from us which is "*Andrews on the Weir*" at Porlock Weir. (See our suggested Day Trip to Porlock Weir.)

Rick Stein's, Northcote Manor, and Percy's are lovely restaurants that provide lovely evenings. The drives there are through charming countryside and are usually quite easy drives. (Don't try driving to Padstow on Friday evening in the summer though!) We often compare it to driving up to London for the theatre or an evening meal when we were living in Surrey - it takes about the same time although you are travelling greater distances in Devon.

We are often asked our favourite places to eat and we reply as follows:

- Best Hartland restaurant: The Pattard Kitchen (the best by a league).
- Best local restaurant Life's a Beach at Bude.
- Best restaurant within a comfortable drive: Rick Stein's Restaurant in Padstow.)

Before we sign off on our guide to restaurants we should mention "Sunday Lunch". We think that The Coach and Horses in Buckland Brewer does the best Sunday Lunch in the immediate area.

Our advice to every visitor to Downe is to enjoy the cuisine close to Downe and we recommend that you seriously consider the following mealtime agenda during your visit:

- Do eat at The Pattard Kitchen and at Life's a Beach in Bude at least once during your visit. They really are worth it.
- Thereafter the choice is to run through our recommended list choosing the places convenient to your journey.

Whatever the weather do make sure you pay at least one visit to the Wreckers Bar in the Hartland Quay hotel. The location is breathtaking.