

JOE DANIEL PRICE / GETTY IMAGES

A weekend in ... Beer, Devon

We're on the pebble beach at Beer, hanging on to the gunwale of a boat owned by local fisherman Kim Aplin. He has just jump-started the engine using leads connected to a tractor and now the same tractor is about to push us down a steep slope of pebbles, a drop of about 20ft, into the English Channel. "Hang on, lads," he cries as we plunge backwards into the cold sea. Water slushes over the stern as though we're about to sink. Then the boat bucks sharply upwards, righting itself. And we are on our way. There's no harbour at Beer, so this is how its small fleet of fishing boats is launched.

We chug beyond the crimson-hued cliffs of Beer Head into wide choppy water. The plan is to catch whiting, but they have different ideas. The anchor is dropped, lines are cast ... and nothing much happens at all. "Where are you, you fishies!" booms Aplin in frustration, his voice echoing across the waves.

It doesn't matter, it's just great being out at sea on a traditional working fishing boat. After a while we — Aplin, my brother and I — return to near Beer Head, where we pull in a net with four pop-eyed cod, a couple of skate, a slimy smooth-hound shark and several inedible spider crabs.

Going fishing gives an insight into life on this border of east Devon and west Dorset — the pretty village of Beer is in Devon, while we are staying just over the border in Dorset, at a converted farmhouse on the edge of Uplyme. Just inland from Lyme Regis, Uplyme is spread over hills with a church, village hall and solitary pub, the cosy and sometimes noisy Talbot Arms. The latter is famous locally for its roaring fires, fine ales and Newcastle United-supporting landlord (a club flag hangs proudly in the beer garden).

It's a perfect base for the area, especially for those exploring the South West Coastal Path on the stretch between West Bay in Dorset — where much of *Broadchurch* was filmed (an entrepreneurial local woman offers tours of locations from the television series) — to Branscombe.

This is the heart of the fossil-filled Jurassic Coast, with crumbling cliffs and undulating trails skirting fields of brown cattle, thickets of gorse and dense woodland populated by bullfinches, ravens and squirrels. Down below, waves rumble and fizz on single beaches hidden between great columns of orange stone.

One of the best walks is from Beer Head to Branscombe and back; about four miles. It begins along a dramatic cliff, before veering down a zig-zag path, with steps dropping steeply between stacks of weather-beaten rock, to a path leading to the long pebble beach at Branscombe. It's neither for the faint-hearted nor for anyone who's not fit. The Sea Shanty restaurant-bar at Branscombe Mouth makes a good halfway stop-off.



Need to know

Where to stay

The Dolphin Hotel in Beer has B&B doubles from £60 a night (dolphinhotelbeer.co.uk). Baby Friendly Boltholes (babyfriendlyboltholes.co.uk) has Hill Farm, sleeping 12, in Uplyme, from £1,700 a week.

Where to eat

The Anchor Inn in Beer (oldenglishinns.co.uk) has good fish and chips.

What to do

Kim Aplin (07989 631321) offers three-hour fishing trips from £25pp. See: mackerelfishinglymeregis.com, and visitdevon.co.uk

We can't resist trying a beer in Beer. My brother and I can recommend the ales at the cheery Anchor Inn, in pride of place overlooking the bay. The inn is next to the excellent little "Wet Fish Shop", where freshly caught dover sole, cod, turbot, pollock and skate are for sale. Earlier, the owner had kindly gutted and filleted the cod and skate that Aplin gave us.

Later, we tried the walk through the Undercliffs National Nature Reserve between Lyme Regis and Seaton, though the stony path is blocked near Seaton because of a landslip. It's about a ten-mile circular ramble through secretive glades, with vine-covered trees, tantalising glimpses of the sea and many great spots for picnics. Seaton itself, which we drove to see, has a long pebble beach and a little high street with a handful of cafés and shops selling collectibles.

Next came the big hike: from Lyme Regis to West Bay — about 11 miles. After taking in the eclectic museum at Lyme Regis (once curated by John Fowles, author of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and full of tales of the port's past glory days), we set off eastwards from the Cobb in the town's harbour.

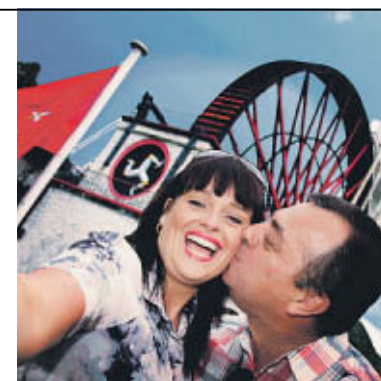
Up and down we went on a series of headlands, having skirted Charmouth and its glittering fossil shops.

The Golden Cap loomed ahead; at 191m, the highest cliff on the south coast of England. The ascent is grueling, but the views are worth it: the great sweep of the coast back to Lyme Regis, and the cliffs of West Bay ahead.

Do not miss the wonderful collectibles market in Bridport, just inland from the old harbour at West Bay. It was bustling and full of bargains from gramophone players to antique furniture and crockery sets in original boxes. Old-timers played folk songs and jazz by the town hall — everyone having a marvellous time.

The highlight of the weekend? Cooking our catch. The freshest fried cod we'd ever eaten, plucked from the waters of Beer Head that very morning.

Tom Chesshyre



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We love the flexibility of being able to take our car and drive on holiday, so taking the ferry was ideal. It meant we were totally free to explore everything the island has to offer. We took a trip on a Victorian steam train and visited the Laxey Wheel — the world's largest working water wheel — as well as taking some lovely walks along the coast. A truly refreshing break!

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