

On the road

NATALIE MILLAR-PARTRIDGE takes a food-themed South West 660 road tour of the South Devon coast

PHOTOS: Frankie Thomas



For a foodie-focussed road trip I hit the South Devon coast road, seeking out the West Country's pioneers of sustainably-driven produce – and discovered some emerging names you need to have on your radar.

FIRST STOP: RIVER COTTAGE HQ

Amongst the many businesses who have made it their mantra to champion the thriving land and seascapes of our county, there's one recognisable name that stands apart. Broadcaster, writer and campaigner, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall shot to fame with his sustainable venture at River Cottage near Axminster 25-years ago.

The team at **River Cottage HQ** has been influential in sustainably-driven developments across the county, with Hugh a trailblazer of the field-to-fork food scene. Much of the produce served in the River Cottage Canteen comes from the 100-acre, organic farm and we're treated to wholesome dishes, created with ingredients grown metres away. You can stay here too. Gardener's Cottage is an original longhouse dating back to the 17th century or there's the Planted Cabin, an off-grid space created

to bring the outside-in. River Cottage is a brilliant spot to take part in a foraging workshop, enjoy a feast night, wander the grounds and browse the farmhouse goods. It's a peaceful location, a stone's throw from the Jurassic Coast in the Axe valley, with the fishing towns of Lyme Regis, Beer, Branscombe and Charmouth on the doorstep. It's a foodie haven too, with Trill Farm's **Old Dairy Kitchen**, just 10 minutes away.

MOVING ON TO BEER

For our next leg of the trip we hug the winding coast road to Beer, home to **Marine House at Beer** and **Steam Gallery**.

We arrive at the iconic pebble beach, flanked by chalky-white cliffs, and it's hard not to be impressed with this idyllic spot and its colourful little boats.

It's here that you'll find **Beer Fisheries Ltd**, run by Marc and Leanne – a quirky little hole-in-the-wall fish market, selling the daily catch from Brixham and the Lyme Bay Reserve.

right: Pizza is one of the dining choices at Darts Farm near Topsham

above: Pretty boats at Beer



FOODIE ROAD TRIP

BRANSCOMBE BECKONS

A short drive along the coast takes us to another celebrated foodie spot, **The Masons Arms** at Branscombe. This chocolate-box 14th century thatched pub with rooms is in a prime location for both coast and countryside and is just 15-minutes' walk from Branscombe beach.

It's a great base from which to explore the Jurassic Coast and the inn's accommodation includes a handful of converted cottages – The Branscombe is a huge lofty space with a freestanding bath, separate seating area and a gorgeous little patio with valley views. Think solid oak beams and wooden floorboards with rattan lampshades hung from the peaked-ceiling to a backdrop of heritage hues, vintage florals and ornamental trinkets. The pub boasts a large beer garden, cosy bar with low-beamed ceilings and a warming log fire. Its menu makes good use of local produce. Dishes include line-caught fish from the area; the chargrilled sardines and whole baked sole are an instant hit.



Stay in comfort at the Masons Arms

WINE TASTING AT KNOWLE

The following day, we head to **Lily Farm Vineyard**, situated in a valley at Knowle, within walking distance of Budleigh Salterton. At just 1.5 acres, it's one of the UK's smallest vineyards and it's in a stunning spot with its south-facing sandstone slopes sitting 40m above sea level. The vineyard, run by Alan and Faye Pratt, was previously the couple's horse paddock. After realising that the conditions were perfect for viticulture, they changed direction to vines, creating red, rosé and sparkling varieties that have proven to be a hit – the award-winning bacchus is a zesty, dry wine with fresh floral aromas and tropical notes.

FOODIE ROAD TRIP



SHOP AND DINE AT DARTS FARM

After a morning's wine tasting, we head to **Darts Farm** at Topsham to take a deep dive into some of the innovative Devon-based producers and growers. It's come a long way from its humble beginnings as a roadside hut some 50 years ago and is now one of the most well-known farm shops in the South West, leading the way in selling sustainable, hyper-local produce.

It's a great opportunity to stock up on fresh produce with its deli bar, cheesemonger and butchery and it has its own vineyard, cidery and chocolate maker. There's a diverse selection of eateries to enjoy, from the **Cow and Cacao Café** for handmade pizzas, gelato and waffles to **The Farm Table** for woodfired pizzas and flatbreads. It's also dog-friendly with numerous signposted walks to enjoy

with your four-legged friends, taking in stunning estuary vistas.

FINAL STOP: DARTMOUTH

We take the winding coastal route along Torbay with its epic views across to Berry Head and Thatcher's Point – and the added thrill of driving on Slapton Ley's thin strip of land, surrounded by the sea.

Arriving at the bustling waterside town of Dartmouth we head to the chic new foodie offering, **Zephyr**, at the **Dart Marina Hotel**. Blending bistro-style classics with laidback drinks, menus brim with fresh seafood and dishes showcasing regional flavours. We enjoy oysters and clam chowder, native mussels, steak tartare and freshly baked breads, washed down with Sharpsham Dart Valley Reserve. After some time spent kayaking along the River Dart, there's just one foodie spot left to visit. Mitch Tonks' inimitable restaurant, **The Seahorse**, is a family-run Mediterranean-inspired brasserie offering relaxed dining with Michelin-worthy plates.

Booth-style seating is set against colourful abstract art and wine bottles adorning the walls. Dishes of shellfish and seafood are plated at the table: red mullet and John Dory from Brixham market, cooked whole over a charcoal grill, along with Torbay scallops, langoustine fritti and seafood pappardelle.

This exceptional seafood lunch rounds off our trip and this taster of the county's sustainable food movement – there's plenty of food for thought. ●

Natalie cruised the South West in the Audi Q8 e-tron, courtesy of [audi.co.uk](https://www.audi.co.uk)

ROAD TRIP ROUTES

With a focus on supporting local businesses and communities, and promoting out-of-season, sustainable slow travel, South West 660 creates routes that encourage visitors to experience this part of the country year-round, with the opportunity to discover some lesser known places, igniting a little curiosity along the way. southwest660.co.uk

top left: The Dart Marina Hotel
top right: Dining at The Seahorse