

# COUNTRY & TOWN HOUSE

JANUARY 2011

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# South Sands Hotel, DEVON

This smart seaside sanctuary is reminiscent of summers in New England, says *Richard Hopton*

The Salcombe estuary is one the best-known stretches of water in the country, a yachtsman's paradise, whose surroundings attract tens of thousands of visitors every summer. Down the estuary from Salcombe itself, out towards the open sea at Bolt Head, is South Sands, a sandy cove sheltering beneath high, wooded headlands. Here, nestling at the back of the beach is the South Sands Hotel.

The hotel, which reopened in May this year after a complete refurbishment, has clean modern lines, finished outside in clapboard and steel, which conjure up images of carefree summers on Cape Cod. The terrace and seafront façade were extended towards the beach and the rooms fitted out in New England style. The dining room, which looks out over the cove and estuary, has a lightly bowed front with tall French windows leading onto the terrace, lending it a wonderfully bright, airy atmosphere.



The waiters, kitted out in mildly yachty clothes, add to the hotel's smart yet informal, seaside ambience. The menus, which were conceived by the renowned chef Mitch Tonks, consist largely of seafood, fish and shellfish, all locally sourced and delicious.

For all its clean lines, bright rooms and good seafood, it is the hotel's atmosphere that sets it apart: the owners like to think that it is 'family friendly' nor are they wrong. Entire families were eating together in the dining room while outside there were several beach games of cricket going on. After a bracing walk along the cliff tops guests will be able to curl up on a sofa by a open fire.

The hotel has an intimate atmosphere. The cove feels private almost, protected with the gables of grand Edwardian seaside villas peeping out from above the trees. From the terrace and the seafront bedrooms there is an endlessly engaging view. Out in the estuary the yachts



pass to and fro, past a host of boats swinging at their moorings on the tide. In the cove itself, the sea tractor chugs out across the beach into the surf to greet the ferry before heading round the point, past the jagged, stump-like remains of Fort George, towards Salcombe. At night, sitting on the terrace swathed in one of the woolly wraps provided by the hotel, the red and green lights of the navigation buoys wink under the looming mass of the far shore.

This new boutique hotel – there are only twenty two rooms and five self-catering beach suites – is a bold, imaginative venture which combines the virtues of modern, unfussy design with the age-old traditions of comfort and good cheer in matchless surroundings. As you drift off to sleep, listening to the soft rhythm of the waves, the world will seem a very peaceful place.

From £120 per double per night, including breakfast. 01548 859000; southsands.com

## TRAVEL TIPS

**EAT:** The wonderfully named Winking Prawn is right on the beach in Salcombe and offers breakfast, brunch, lunch, supper and barbecues in the summer. 01548 842326; [winkingprawn.co.uk](http://winkingprawn.co.uk)

**DRINK:** The Millbrook in South Pool has local ale on tap and is accessible by boat from Salcombe. 01548 531581; [millbrookinnsouthpool.co.uk](http://millbrookinnsouthpool.co.uk)

**BUY:** Salcombe is home to the headquarters of many sporting and yachting brands such as Crew, Jack Wills, Fat Face and Quba Sails, so stock up on outdoorsy clothing.

**VISIT:** The exceedingly picturesque town of Dartmouth, with its lovely shops, fun bars and restaurants and a boat trip out on the River Dart.

**DO:** Walk – there are bags of coastal walks with organised paths to choose from.

