

# Devon

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## Where to stay **By Sally Shalam**



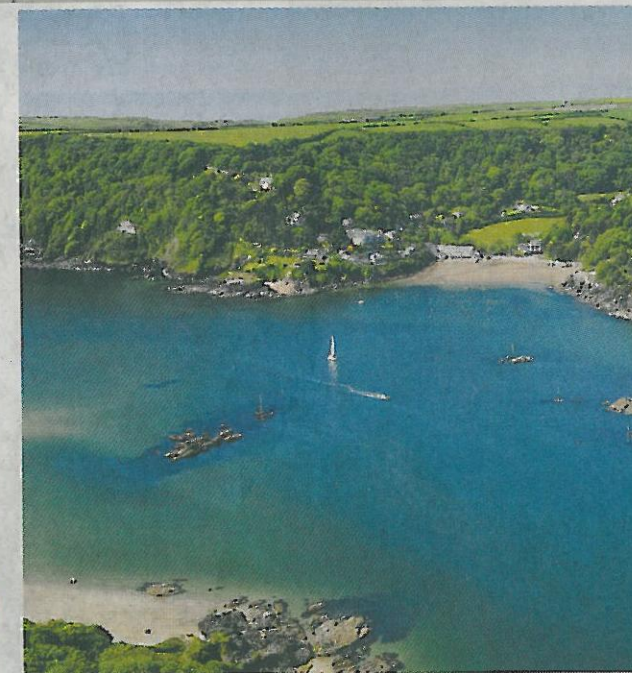
### South Sands, Salcombe

Is it just that I haven't noticed them or do we, an island nation, have virtually no hotels on the beach? I mean right on the beach - like in the Caribbean? It is only as I descend the hill to South Sands bay, passing one hotel on my right, that I realise mine, the only other one here, beside an old lifeboat house, really is beachfront.

This 24-room newly built boutique hotel opened last year. Everything about it looks glossy and expensive - from its website to the brochures - yet it has no star grading. It is one of the modern wave (inevitable pun) of hotels which thumb their noses at both the AA's and Visit Britain's star-rating schemes. Perhaps it can afford to, with such a position - not only is the hotel on a wonderful sandy bay but the population of the nearest town, Salcombe, swells from 2,000 in winter to almost 10 times that in summer.

Salcombe is to Devon what Rock is to Cornwall. It is no accident that this was where the first Jack Wills shop opened, in 1999. In summer a ferry takes passengers from South Sands to the pretty town, which hugs a harbour further up the Kingsbridge estuary.

I'm spiralling up a modern cantilevered staircase of wood and steel, then heading along a coconut



matting-covered corridor to my sea-facing room with balcony. Clean lines, tasteful blues and greys, seascapes on the wall. Peachy beachy.

In the wetroom, Molton Brown lip balm, bath salts, even a washing line to string up wet bathing things. Two baths seems excessive, but since they are right in front of double windows this is clearly a room for show-offs. This room isn't cheap, but there are smaller versions and, more affordable still, others on the landward side.

If I lean over my balcony I can see people coming in from their bucket-and-spade day, pulling on faded rugby shirts and deck shoes, settling on the hotel veranda for a snifter before putting the kids to bed or changing for dinner. I join the throng, first on the terrace and later in the bar, which

serves as the sitting room but is, in truth, a corridor between reception and restaurant, then eat an early dinner, among families, couples and even a wedding party. Young, efficient staff in skinny jeans ferry home-cured salmon gravadlax with beetroot and pot-roasted venison.

"Ooh, let's take one more photo for luck," booms a voice from the next-door balcony as I study the night sky from the depths of my right-hand bath. I struggle to find a convenient power point for the kettle, and no amount of unplugging turns off a relentless blue light on the wall-mounted TV (so I drape the bedspread over it). Windows thrown open, I drift off, and wake to the shoosh of waves. Isn't that what everyone wants on holiday?

Lots of kids and gallons of fruit

**Two baths seems excessive, but since they are by double windows it's clearly a room for show-offs**



juice at the breakfast buffet table, plus delicious spiced cake and honey on the comb, and people like me munching behind the newspaper.

South Sands is proof that "family friendly" need not mean "style bypass". The only minus is its lack of a sitting room. Having turned its back (with no discernible detriment) on the rating system, though, couldn't it, in a continued spirit of anarchy, take another risk or two? The occasional injection of character - perhaps less predictable paintings in the rooms? - to set against a ubiquitous backdrop of pale, measured perfection.

● Bolt Head, Salcombe (01548 859000, southsands.com). Doubles from £135 B&B, or £170 for dinner B&B in low season; high season from £190/£240 sally.shalam@guardian.co.uk

# What to do in the area By the locals

## Sand, sea and surf

Shoreboard Wakeboard and Waterski School (07967 989779, shoreboard.co.uk, £40 for a 35-minute beginner's lesson) at South Sands is a local company running lessons and trips. It's very well organised and supervised - we had a staff party with them a couple of years ago. It's really fun even if you

have never done it before. **Margaret Denning, co-owner of Gallery 5 (gallery5.org), Salcombe**

## A boat trip to the pub

Take a boat from Salcombe across the estuary to the Millbrook Inn (01548 531581, millbrookinnsouthpool.co.uk). This charming waterside

pub and restaurant sits on the edge of a creek near the village of South Pool. Its reputation stretches far, and afternoons spent in the picturesque outdoor setting or inside the quaint pub are something of a South Hams tradition. The Millbrook kitchen serves fantastic food, made using fresh local produce, and washed down with local ales and fine wines. There are regular



Goodie gumdrops ... old-fashioned treats at Cranch's

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAMY

barbecues, paellas and live jazz. **Jeff Gillard, manager of South Sands**

## Where to eat

The Beach House (01548 561144, beachhousedevon.com) in South Milton Sands is new this year and already a favourite. It's a small beach hut-style restaurant (seats 30 inside) serving lots of fresh fish, amid relaxed beach-style decor with driftwood and funky lighting, just by the beach. **MD**

Boatswain's Brasserie (6-7 Russell Court, 01548 842189) in Salcombe is a small bistro tucked up a picturesque alleyway. It's slightly hidden away but well worth finding for really good food - the standard's always high and it's not too pricey. **MD**

## A sweet treat

Cranch's Sweetshop (78 Fore Street, 01548 843493, cranchs-sweetshop.co.uk) in Salcombe is a must for the kids - and grown-ups taking a trip down memory lane. The old-fashioned, family-owned business dates back to the days of Queen

Victoria and the shop is lined with shelf upon shelf of boiled sweets and mouth-watering chocolates and toffees. **JG**

## Live music

One of the most popular places to watch a band is the Island Street Bar & Grill (Hannafords Landing, 01548 844007, islandstreet.co.uk). The venue hosts live music throughout the month, with rock, acoustic, indie, pop and the occasional DJ. The waterside terrace, great menu and colourful cocktail list always proves a big hit. **JG**

## An art excursion

Salcombe is home to an increasingly vibrant arts scene with an interesting choice of galleries and studios and an impressive flow of artists to the area. Two places particularly worth visiting are Gallery 5 (07989 794802, gallery5.org), an informal, waterside gallery featuring West Country-based artists, and Bangwallop (01548 843100, bangwallop.co.uk), an innovative studio displaying work by local and international photographers. **JG**

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