



Bella wears gingham top, £148, Pinco Pallino; jumper with flowers, £38, Billieblush; skirt, £230, Simonetta; sunglasses, £45, Finger in the Nose & Vuarnet; jelly shoes by Juju.

Photography Tim Marsella
Stylist Julie Vianey
Hair and make-up Isabelle Bertrand
Fashion shot on location at South Sands Hotel (southsands.com)



THE OTHER SIDE TO SALCOMBE

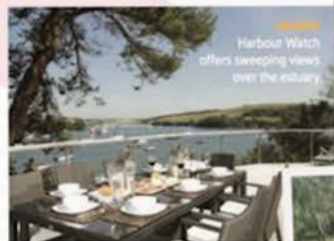
Louise Hall hires a holiday home across the water from Salcombe in East Portlemouth

Salcombe may be to Devon what Rock is to Cornwall, but it is also simply the salty seadog southern Devonshire seaside fishing town I grew up with – a far cry from the glamorous British holiday destination, it is today. For me, holidaying here isn't about minimalist boutique hotels. It's about cosy, family-owned holiday homes on the seashore. The type of place your grandparents, your parents and your toddler, everyone, will be happy to muck in together.

My family have been coming to Salcombe for generations. My grandparents first discovered this area of outstanding natural beauty – 'our English Riviera', as Nan would fondly refer to it – on their honeymoon between the wars, when it first evolved as a holiday sailing destination. Post-war, they returned and bought a holiday home here. Aged 11, my parents upgraded our home-from-home to Little Rockside, known locally as the 'Sugar Box', a square white former boathouse on the waterfront, just along from the Marine Hotel. Here, we'd spend almost all our holidays. My brother and I were always allowed to bring a friend, but we had to be out on the water every day. Together, we learnt to brave the cold without complaining, and slowly discovered how to row, sail, windsurf and waterski, when not floating out to sea and being rescued. But it's the wild beauty of the place that seeps into the soul and has me bringing my family and friends back, too.

We have been bringing my son, Hamish, here since he was dot. We tend to visit out of season, once the town has shrunk back to its 1,800 inhabitants – but with Hamish now six, my parents retired 20 miles along the coast in the sailing hub of Newton Ferrers, and my Salcombe friends holidaying back here for the summer with their young families, it felt the right time to return in mid-summer to

SALCOMBE



Harbour Watch offers sweeping views over the estuary.



The house nestles among the trees and has its own private beach.

replicate the family formula.

This time, a first, we explored Salcombe from East Portlemouth, on the other side of the estuary. After a surprisingly long search last Christmas, I came across the mesmerising Harbour Watch – a large waterfront house with a sweeping deck, hot tub and winding walkway down to its own private beach (yes, really) – and, as its name suggests, extensive harbour views. Blowing the budget, I booked two weeks and invited family and friends. A stunning, practical, much-loved, family-owned holiday rental property, perched among the pines on the south side of the water, it is a stone's throw from the bustle of Salcombe without the High Street throngs. For two weeks, we fell asleep to the sounds of the sea, and woke with excited kids scampering down to the beach in their pyjamas. (It gave the rest of the adults a lie in!) It also offered a backdrop for quiet swims, fishing from the rocks, lazy beach days and the obligatory sundowners.

Most of Salcombe Estuary's beaches can be reached by car down winding lanes of hedgerows exploding with wildflowers but, as all Salcombers know, it's best to park the car: Salcombe is far more rugged and fun when water-landing on the beaches. Throughout the fortnight, various friends dropped in by boat, tied up and came for dinner. We hired a self-drive boat from Salcombe Boat Hire and Fishmongers (salcombeboathire.co.uk, 01548 844475 – book in advance, boats are limited), where we also, conveniently, picked up fishing rods for the kids, bait and the catch of the day for dinner. Having a boat was a lifeline for early morning bakery trips (croissants, pasties for the beach, scones for tea), daily newspapers from Fore Street, fishing trips for the kids and the odd adult sundown trip to the Ferry Inn opposite.

Exploring by foot from Harbour Watch,



THE LOWDOWN

WHERE TO STAY

Harbour Watch costs from £2,645 a week. Dogs allowed, £25 extra. Contact Adam Ford at Toad Hall Cottages. toadhallcottages.co.uk, 01548 202020

INSIDER TIP

Stock your freezer with sensational feasts from Milla's Kitchen, an independent catering business run by food-lovers Fenella Goldsworthy and Milla Basset. They book up fast, so place your order months ahead. Tell them your numbers and they'll help sort the menu plan and deliver fresh weekly meals to your door: millaskitchen.co.uk, 01548 561895

you could stroll up to the sandy beaches of Mill Bay or Smalls, or ride the ferry (a few minutes' walk from the house) across the estuary to the Ferry Pier for lunch at the Ferry Inn, or to explore town. South Sands was a 10-minute journey on a blue, yellow and red bathtub-boat lookalike ferry (southsandsferry.co.uk) that the kids adored. A typical day would involve sending half our party somewhere by ferry and the rest would pile into our tiny boat, loaded with buckets, spades, blankets, beach games and picnic paraphernalia.

One lacklustre day, we took this boat/ferry combo and strolled from South Sands

to Overbeck (nationaltrust.org.uk), an Edwardian house with an interesting history – it was once owned by a local inventor and features stunning gardens and a secret passageway that the kids loved. Further on is Starehole Bay, where tales of smuggling, shipwrecks, sunken Bronze Age treasure abound –

a 17th-century ship carrying 400 gold coins went down here, as did a WWII submarine.

Another stormy day, we donned waterproofs and took the dramatic South West Coast Path four miles from the house, past Mill Bay and the romantic ruins of Fort Charles to the jagged rocky outcrop of Gara Rock. It's a must-do for its views of the estuary.

Other favourites for the kids were dam-building and giant SUPing (stand-up paddleboarding – several people get onto one huge board) at South Sands, a walk down to Millbrook Inn – the kids loved paddling in the stream – and pootling downriver to Kingsbridge for a play at the fairground and a crab sandwich at the award-winning Crabshell Inn.

When, on the last evening, snuggled down in the kids' dorm, I asked Hamish what the best thing about the holiday had been, he whispered with the biggest smile that it had been like two weeks in 'magical, real-life Peter Pan land'. For me, the best memory was watching the golden glow of the sun setting on the harbour estuary – all windswept hair, sand between toes and salt-caked skin – to the distant cacophony of gulls as the fishing trawlers returned from sea, and the children playing on the beach as the barbecue was fired up. But the all-round win for everyone was simply heading into town for the tastiest, creamiest Devonshire ice-creams from Salcombe Dairy (salcombeidairy.co.uk) and eating them, feet hanging over the dock, watching the tide roll away... ■