

# Devon & Dorset

## Bike-to-the-beach in Devon

**Following the flow of the River Torridge,** Devon's Tarka Trail takes its name from author Henry Williamson's magical story about an otter. It is also a bike ride geared for kids – flat, traffic-free, teeming with wildlife and ending with an ice cream. The trail is a 180-mile figure-of-eight loop on an old railway line, but the eight-mile section through ancient woodland to Instow is by far the prettiest and will suit ages seven up. Start at East Yarde for a gentle freewheel past weeping willows, wild garlic and buttercups, then alight at The Puffing Billy (below; puffingbilly.co.uk), a disused railway station in Torrington, for snacks. Keep pedalling alongside part of the old track, eyes peeled for woodpeckers, to grand old Beam Aqueduct, where you can impress the kids with your intel: 'Tarka was born



here'. Otters are notoriously elusive (especially so with noisy kids about), but there are tell-tale signs, such as five-clawed footprints and semi-circular slides on the riverbank.

Continue onwards across bridges and rushing weirs – and through pitch-dark tunnels – until the vista widens and you approach the sea. Bypass Bideford in favour of Instow, a few miles further up-estuary, and ride in alongside the original train platform, with its green-and-cream signal box (left), to find a smattering of cafes and pubs.



The Glorious Oyster at Sandhills car park is worth a few extra wheel rotations. There's room to prop bikes, and the food is first-class, from crab salads to fish finger sarnies. It's skipping distance to the beach, where kids can paddle and order a well-deserved Mr Whippy from a funky ice cream van on the sand. A double scoop with flake should power them (and you) for the return journey.

See [tarkatrail.org.uk](http://tarkatrail.org.uk) for maps and more info, or [tarkabikes.co.uk](http://tarkabikes.co.uk) or [torringtoncyclehire.com](http://torringtoncyclehire.com) for bike hire.

By Gemma Taylor



### Special sleep CARY ARMS, DEVON

Expect a magical world that hints at past smuggling, where you can stay in a historic beachfront inn or beautifully restored fishermen's cottages as well as modern, deluxe family units. Wherever you choose (we loved Foxes Walk Cottage with its hot tub; sleeps 10), everybody can use the hotel facilities: a glass-fronted spa with a waterfall hydrotherapy pool, steam room, sauna and gym; The Inn on the Beach restaurant; and an activities menu that includes yachting, guided walks, horseriding and time on a local farm. It's the perfect base for a family holiday on the English Riviera. [caryarms.co.uk](http://caryarms.co.uk)



## Awesome al fresco: 10 of the best outdoor eats in Dorset and Devon



**The Fontmell Arms, Shaftesbury**  
A village stream that runs through the bar will keep kids amused. Add a colourful garden marquee and a menu spanning local game, mini burgers and wood-fired pizzas, and everybody's smiling. [thefontmell.co.uk](http://thefontmell.co.uk)



**Seaside Boarding House, Burton Bradstock**  
This Cape Cod-style hotel/restaurant has a spacious terrace with cinematic views of Lyme Bay, and kids will be tempted by the mac 'n' cheese. [theseasideboardinghouse.com](http://theseasideboardinghouse.com)



**Shell Bay, Studland**  
On a sunny day, the outlook echoes the Mediterranean at this beachside beauty on the Isle of Purbeck. With sand and shallows for small feet to play in, parents can linger over a whole fish fresh from the fire. [shellbay.net](http://shellbay.net)



**The Crab House Cafe, Wyke Regis**  
It doesn't get more fun than crabs served on a wooden board with hammers and bibs, or oysters from the cafe's own beds. Overlooking Chesil Beach, this is pure unadulterated seaside joy. [crabhousecafe.co.uk](http://crabhousecafe.co.uk)



**The Boathouse, Instow**  
Parasols, festoon lights and a timber-clad upper deck with prime beach views make staying for sunset a cert while your 'junior crew' go overboard on choc brownies. [theboathouseinstow.co.uk](http://theboathouseinstow.co.uk)



**The Pig-at-Combe, Honiton**  
Feast on food from the garden, in the garden, at this Elizabethan manor in the Otter Valley. Its smoky flatbreads are topped with treats most likely picked that morning. [thepighotel.com/at-combe](http://thepighotel.com/at-combe)



**The Winking Prawn, Salcombe**  
This beach shack in cheery ice-cream hues is a hop, skip and jump from the sands, with buckets and spades for sale and its own dressing-up box. Try a cone of popcorn shrimp. [winkingprawn-group.co.uk](http://winkingprawn-group.co.uk)



**The Jetty, Christchurch**  
Mudford Quay is quite a catch, with crabbing and a restaurant on the water's edge. Kids will love the 'Oops I dropped my ice cream' pud – an upside-down cornetto with edible sand and seaweed. [thejetty.co.uk](http://thejetty.co.uk)



**Rockfish, Brixham**  
With nine outposts in Devon and Dorset, local seafood don Mitch Tonks is a pro at seaside dining. Look out for his fishing boat from the terrace while kids get busy with their ocean-based activity pack. [therockfish.co.uk](http://therockfish.co.uk)



**Barricane Beach Cafe, Woolacombe**  
This dinky cove serves the finest Sri Lankan curry on the coast. Bring a picnic rug and wine and watch the kids beachcomb while you tuck in. **Curries from 5 to 7pm (weather dependent), Woolacombe Rise** →