



Soar Mill Cove in Devon

Happy days

Harking back to the halcyon days of her childhood, Louise Cummings heads to the West Country for a relaxing break with her mum

Some of my best summers were spent building sandcastles with my brother on Devon and Cornwall's finest beaches. Whether it was blisteringly hot so we could strip off to our swimming gear and splash about in the waves, or blustery when we'd have to don day-glo cagoules and Wellingtons to prod around rock pools for crabs, our family would always be happiest on the beach.

Most summers we'd pack up the car and head down to the Lizard, Land's End or the quaint fishing village of Mousehole – and we never once had a bad holiday. Keen to relive those happy memories, my mum and I booked ourselves a break in Devon and Cornwall, then limbered up for four days of clotted cream teas, Cornish pasties, fine fare and fair weather.

Our first stop was Soar Mill Cove, nestled

in a secluded spot on Devon's southernmost tip. Having spent a gorgeous girlie morning shopping in nearby Salcombe's trendy boutiques, we found ourselves negotiating windy narrow roads meandering down to Soar Mill Cove.

A picture postcard scene emerged as we arrived at the family-owned hotel, sat resplendent amid the meadows of a quiet valley within 2,000 acres of National Trust countryside and flanked by dramatic coastal headlands, leading down to the best Blue Flag beaches around.

We were ushered into a gorgeous, bright lounge with panoramic views of the bay. Settling into some contemporary egg-shaped chairs we enjoyed a complimentary Cornish clotted cream tea and sat mesmerised by the vista before us.

We were allocated one of Soar Mill's

spacious contemporary bedrooms, decorated in contrasting hues of turquoise, brown and cream. Huge patio doors opened onto a private terrace with views of the gardens, boasting a riot of colourful blooms from pink and white roses to blue lobelia.

That evening we dined in Serendipity Restaurant, facing the ocean, so we could see the sea while sampling some of its finest produce. Boasting two AA rosettes, the fine dining restaurant reflects owner Keith Makepiece's passion for food, with its fresh, regional produce sourced from Devon's larder.

Our meal started with a delicious appetiser of broccoli and stilton soup, followed by a tasty caramelised red onion tartlet with Cornish brie and basil oil, and a main of pan-roasted salmon with



samphire, creamy mashed potatoes and saffron sauce, which was melted in the mouth scrumptious. After a decadent dessert of caramelised pear tart, we retired to the lounge for petit fours and a game of Scrabble before bed.

Next day, we set off on a vigorous seven-mile coastal walk, enjoying spectacular views over the cliffs and nearby Hope Cove and, as the mist rolled in off the sea, it made for some wonderfully atmospheric pictures. As we neared Soar Mill, we diverted down to the sheltered bay, to wash our tired feet in the gentle waves; it's no wonder Enid Blyton was inspired to write her children's adventure stories in this unspoilt secluded spot.

There was just time to visit the holistic Oceanic Spa, overlooking the water, where I enjoyed an Indian head massage before dinner, which was wonderfully relaxing and calming.

After a sound night's sleep, we bade goodbye to serene Soar Mill and drove to Cornwall, fitting in a morning of shopping in Truro before heading to our next retreat – The Luggier in Portloe.

Set right on the water's edge in the sleepy fishing village of Portloe, and housed in a 17th century smugglers inn, you couldn't really get more away from it all if you tried. It has become a celebrity favourite, with fans including Will Young, Catherine Tate, Dawn French and PM David Cameron, who worked off his dinner with an early-morning swim from the jetty on a recent stay.

Arriving at The Luggier, my mum instantly recognised it as one of the settings for Martin Clunes' TV series *Doc Martin*, and got her phone out to text my dad, then realised as we were at the foot of a deep valley there was no signal; yet another reason to love this idyllic hideaway!



The Luggier Hotel in Cornwall

Each of The Luggier's 22 bedrooms has a New England meets traditional Cornwall style, with cool white linens and bleached Portuguese woods. Ours had a calm minimalist feel to it, and our own private balcony where we could recline in our wicker loungers and listen to the hypnotic sound of the waves lapping the bay.

Heading across the road for dinner, the view from the restaurant onto the cove

Soar Mill Cove
Double rooms are from £140 per room per night, include breakfast, and VAT. A 2-night break costs £199 per person, for 3-course dinner, bed & breakfast. Book on 01548 561566, www.soarmillcove.co.uk

The Luggier
Double rooms cost from £130 per night, based on two-sharing, including breakfast and VAT. To book, call 01872 501322, www.luggierhotel.co.uk

was breathtaking – and as I savoured a glass of pinot grigio, I could just imagine smugglers drinking rum and plotting their dastardly deeds as the waves crashed below.

My starter of slow-roasted duck salad, celery, grapes, apple, teriyaki sauce and croutons was like nothing I had ever tasted, and the presentation was fantastic. Seafood being a speciality, with the daily catch coming from the fishermen that launch their boats daily from Portloe's harbour, I ordered the pan-fried bream with saffron risotto, mussel and scallops in a lobster cream, while mum plumped for local pollock in beer batter with hand-cut chips. My dish was a seafood lover's dream, with juicy fat scallops and a devilish sauce, while mum waxed lyrical about her lightly-battered pollock.

Lulled to sleep by the sound of the waves as we snuggled beneath luxury linens, we had a great night's slumber.

After a smoked salmon and scrambled egg breakfast, we decided to explore Portloe's surrounding cliffs and headlands, which form part of the Roseland Peninsular conservation area.

Making our way along the headland, we wandered through patches of wild flowers, including pink campion, purple foxgloves and cow parsley, and were rewarded for our exertion with dramatic views of the waves crashing on the rocks below. As the weather took a turn for the worse, we had to turn around and head back. Arriving at The Luggier somewhat sodden, we had the perfect excuse to laze in front of the crackling log fire in the lounge to dry off.

It's no surprise The Luggier is such a hit with celebrities as it really is a hidden gem, and with an Elemis spa on site for a spot of pampering, it offers a great option for a blissful, rejuvenating break.