

theguardian

Sally Shalam

As soon as I've slung the car into a parking spot, I'm following holidaymakers, beachbag-toting parents and children swathed in multicoloured towels, flip-flopping towards the harbour. Just as the marina comes into view, so does a big, green steam engine, heaving and sighing its way into Watchet station.

You've probably heard of Minehead - home to Butlin's and a wide sandy beach - and also Hinkley Point, the nuclear power plant about 20 miles east of the resort, but you might not have come across Watchet. The pint-sized harbour town is poised on the rocky coastline between the two, the Bristol Channel ahead of it, Exmoor behind.

The vibe is industrial-luxe, the walls dark slate - a shade I liked a lot more before this washout summer - and at the far end is a fat (grey) sofa, cast-iron fireplace

The river Washford flows between cottages towards the sea, the heritage West Somerset Railway runs down to the port, which dates back 1,000 years, and the tiny main street is a Victorian gem. Get to the point... where's the B&B? In the middle of that high street - an old shop, by the look of things. I ring the bell. Here's Jason Robinson at the door to let me in. He and his wife, Annie, discovered the town while searching for a wedding venue. Former creatives at Disney, they fell in love

at work, and then with Watchet. On that wedding-plan trip they ended up buying a holiday house, then, when the old bric-a-brac shop next door came up for sale they bought that too. Jobs were chucked and renovation began just after last Christmas. This is their B&B's first week in business.

Jason tells me all this in the flagstoned "shopfront", perched at a wooden table large enough to seat all eight guests (so a place for sociable types). The vibe is industrial-luxe, the walls dark slate - a shade I liked a lot more before this washout summer - and at the far end is a fat (grey) sofa, cast-iron fireplace, a Mickey Mouse figure in a glass case and shelves of design books. As guest sitting rooms go, it's compact. I predict sunlounger-style sofa bagging at wine o'clock when all four rooms are full.

These are on the first and second floors: larger rooms at the front, smaller ones overlooking pretty courtyard gardens at the back. My monochrome bedroom faces a quaint-looking chemist's over the street and has a dressing area and bathroom with slipper bath, walk-in shower and full-size REN products.

The only splash of colour is a picture wall, but attention to detail comes in spades. Water in a stoppered bottle, a tea tray has sugar tongs and muffins in a paper bag, the black wardrobe contains iron and board and the TV is subtly placed. The shower has a recessed shelf and, joy, controls I can reach before stepping under the shower head.

Gripes? Dark roman blinds mean I have to choose between privacy or daylight, and the extractor fan goes on for ever.

A quick blast up on to Exmoor, and dinner at The Culbone, a pub serving Brixham fish and moorland beef, then sleep. Mmm, bed's wonderful.

Herby mushrooms and poached egg on toast, and fresh carrot and ginger juice go down very nicely in the morning. Never had breakfast sitting in a shop window before... gosh, the Quantock Pharmacy is busy. "Wish you were here," I scribble in my notebook, thinking of London friends, because Swain House is a rather chilled place to be.



marathon a day for a week sound like fun? » Page 4



Larkin around Hull » Page 8

Magical Malaysia Style and sticky rice in historic Penang



Escapism
Daily downward dogs are just part of the story at EcoYoga, an off-grid retreat in Argyll, Scotland. Dotted about the five-acre site on the southern tip of Loch Awe are hot tub, Jacuzzi, sauna, and two riverside baths. Add hot stone massages, healthy veggie food and spectacular Highland scenery and you're sure to return glowing with health. Places are still available on the last 2012 yoga retreat, 15-22 Sept, at £775pp full-board. 01546 810259, ecoyoga.org. Self-catering stays all year round £50pp a night or £90 for two



Somerset Swain House

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● Accommodation was provided by Swain House (48 Swain Street, Watchet, Somerset, 01984 631038, swain-house.com, rooms £125 per night B&B). Main courses at The Culbone from £11.50 (01643 862259, theculbone.com). For more information see visit-exmoor.co.uk Sally Shalam (follow Sally on Twitter @sallyshalam, sallyshalamsbritain.co.uk)

Travel website Holiday guide to Dorset

Quick! Unpack your tent - with the country basking in late summer sun there's still time for one last camping trip. And there can be few more idyllic spots than Eweleaze Farm in Dorset. Situated between Durdle Door and Weymouth on the Jurassic coast, with views out across the curved coastline, it's "one of the loveliest places to camp in England," according to Cool Camping Guides founder Jonathan Knight, who lists his 10 favourite Dorset campsites in our interactive holiday guide to the county, featuring 80 expert tips. If you prefer breakfast delivered to your room over sausages cooked on a campfire, take a look at our round up of gorgeous small hotels and B&Bs, from a Grade II boutique townhouse



minutes from the beach to a former post office with two cosy rooms. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall put Dorset on the food map, but there's much more to the county than River Cottage. Nick Fisher, a mate of HFW and co-author of The River Cottage

Fish Book, picks the best places in the county to eat seafood, whether it's fish and chips on Weymouth's harbour wall or crab sandwiches at the Watch House Cafe, the new little sister to the much-loved and praised Hive Beach Cafe.

Meanwhile, on the beach at Osmington Mills, seashore forager John Wright serves Alastair Sawday an alfresco meal of laverbread outcakes, deep-fried seaweed and winkles in our video slot.

Finally, our list of the best music venues is proof that the sleepy Dorset depicted in films like Tamara Drewe is way off the mark. Read our top 10 guide to gig venues to find the best places to tap into the local music scene. guardian.co.uk/travel/dorset