

Best of British Getaways

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THE DETAILS

Dog-friendly Moorlands Barn, which sleeps up to 4 people, costs from £437 for 3 nights and from £583 for 7 nights. For more information and to book, call 01548 202 020 or visit toadhallcottages.co.uk

Clockwise from main pic: views across windswept Dartmoor; tender venison haunch at Castle Inn; the 'epitome of cool' Moorlands Barn

Devon

HELENA LANG



The village of Belstone, high on Dartmoor, is a place that captures the imagination and stuns with its spectacular natural beauty – and this little cottage is the perfect base to explore it from

When I was little, my family used to regularly stop off in Belstone, en route to seaside holidays or for family picnics. It always captured my imagination, particularly in the valley where the bubbling River Taw tumbles over huge mossy stones, creating – in my girlish mind – the perfect home for fairies and the like. And then there is the windswept moor itself, complete with wild ponies and mysterious stone circles. There really is nothing quite like it.

Visiting in the spring of this year, I was delighted to see not much has changed. There are no new housing developments here, just a gaggle of attractive cottages and houses, a village hall, a church and a most excellent pub, The Tors Inn. In fact, only around 250 people live in Belstone and one of those families has refurbished our lovely home for the weekend.

Moorlands Barn is at the end of the little road that leads through the village and ends at the moor. It stands sturdily in its beautiful, leafy surroundings and is the epitome of cool, country chic. There's a large open-plan kitchen with everything a cook could need, a stylish peppermint-green Smeg fridge, damson-coloured cupboards, slate-tiled floors and light that floods in from large wooden-framed windows. The sitting/dining area is cosy and comfortable with plenty of spots for finishing that book or

attempting a jigsaw puzzle, and there's a bijou outdoor terrace for sunny morning coffees or warm-evening G&Ts. Upstairs, two snug bedrooms and a swish modern shower room provide ample space for four.

My husband, Simon, and I had cleverly stocked up at the excellent Blacks Delicatessen in nearby Chagford. The homemade quiche made a great arrival-evening supper alongside local cheeses, including Brie from the Sharpham Estate, and chutneys from Waterhouse Fayre – all washed down with local Otter beer and cider from the Winkleigh Cider Company.

Dinner the following evening at The Tors Inn was accompanied by a local folk band and featured delicious potted crab with sourdough bread and paprika butter, a decent fish pie and a glorious Belstone mess, loaded with raspberries and Taw River Dairy blackcurrant ice cream. Papillon Gin from the nearby distillery in Newton Abbot hit the spot along with a pint of Tors Powderkeg Lager.

For something more sophisticated in a truly historic setting, head to Castle Inn at Lydford, a short drive away. This gorgeous 16th-century property would be a highwayman's paradise with its snug corners, giant open fireplaces and hidden passages. We were served a spectacular supper of excellent roast Devon sirloin of beef with roasties, red cabbage, carrots, parsnips and a huge Yorkshire pud, some tender venison haunch with celeriac, chestnuts, kale and creamed mash, and a caramelised rhubarb rice pudding.

On a rainy morning, we headed into Tavistock, or 'Tavie' as the locals call it, for a rummage around the indoor market and small independent shops before a drive back over the moor – and past the intimidating prison – stopping off to walk amongst the ponies and imagine the ancient tribes that lived on the moor amid the rows of standing stones.

So yes, take your wellies, your raincoats and your brollies to Dartmoor, just in case. But also take your imagination and a sense of wonderment – with all that gorgeousness, the weather really won't matter. ►

