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HAPPY BAYS . . . Devon's Ladrám Bay, main picture. Waterslides at Woodlands, below. Callum takes Golly for a walk through the countryside, bottom



Devon's heaven

LLAMA-FILLED FUN ON LADRÁM BAY CARAVAN GETAWAY

A WEEKEND break in Devon conjures up images of cream teas in genteel seafront cafés and brisk walks across unspoiled countryside.

Sounds great, right? Only a relaxing weekend escape wasn't quite what we had in store.

My travel companions, you see, included a two-year-old and a four-month-old baby. So what has Devon got to offer for a young family juggling two kids under three? Llamas, for starters. Nine of them, nestled in a tiny hamlet on the cliffs above the pretty seaside town of Sidmouth.

For the past six years, Maggie Jee, the owner of Peak Hill Llamas, has led curious tourists on treks along the spectacular Jurassic coastline.

I didn't know much about llamas – besides their alleged tendency to hurl spittle at humans they take a dislike to. So I approached Maggie's stables with caution.

But my fears were unfounded. Not only is the spitting thing a myth – they only do it to each other when they're really upset – they're actually rather charming.

Up close they look part camel, part sheep, with the camp trot of an

ostrich thrown in. Callum, two, took an instant shine to Golly, our llama companion for the day – tugging on the lead as it trundled behind him.

It was a unique and fun way to explore the countryside.

On a high from our llama adventure, we headed a few miles down the coast to our home for the weekend, Ladrám Bay Holiday Park, Otterton.

It's been at least two decades since I set foot in a caravan.

I was pleased to discover they've got a lot better in that time. They even make a gold-standard version – fitted kitchen, three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a balcony overlooking the bay itself. And Ladrám Bay was far from what I expected from a caravan park. With a heated indoor pool and entertainment complex, it had a bustling, village feel. The jewel in its crown is its private beach.

A steep path leads down to a pebbly inlet. Another path stretches the length of the Jurassic Coast, passing right through Ladrám Bay itself. An hour west from Ladrám Bay we discovered the River Dart Country Park – a campsite and adventure playground on the southern fringe of Dartmoor National Park.

Kids bounded around on treetop assault courses and whizzed overhead on zipwires. Looking for something more sedate, Callum and I hired a canoe and launched off into the tranquil River Dart.

Back on dry land we explored the rest of the park – and found an adventure playground, packed with forts and a wooden pirate ship.

A short drive from the River Dart is Woodlands Leisure Park. Most

of the slides and rides were better suited for older kids but there was plenty to keep Callum entertained.

Callum loved the toboggan ride and mini hovercrafts and had to be dragged away from the tractor ride through a life-like dinosaur exhibit. We enjoyed our fill of superb seafood during the weekend, including crab caught in nearby Brixham.

But it's not all fish in this corner of England. On our way out of the county we couldn't resist stopping in Exeter – to see what happens when city and countryside meet.

Just past the cathedral and its gardens we found a slice of Americana at the Ruby Modern Diner.

We feasted on generous burgers, homemade pulled pork, salt beef sandwiches and milkshakes.

You could have rolled us back up the M5 – the perfect end to a Devon-only weekend.

IAN GARLAND

GO: DEVON

STAYING THERE: Three nights in a two-bed gold-standard caravan, at Ladrám Bay is from £325. See ladrambay.co.uk. **OUT AND ABOUT:** Half-day llama experience is from £120 with Peak Hill Llamas. Call 01395 578 697 or see walkingwithllamas.co.uk. **MORE INFO:** visitdevon.co.uk



MAKING WAVES
... Ian and Callum explore Ladrám Bay in motorboat