

THE RAMBLERS

HOME PLACE FARMHOUSE
& HIGHCLIFFE HOUSE

EXMOOR

Getting dropped off in the middle of the moors and then realising you brought the wrong map isn't the best start to a hiking adventure in Devon but, as art editor Corrie Heale and boyfriend Jamie work out, there are worse places to get lost.



'Jamie and I had been craving a bit of country air for a while. So we dig out our walking boots from the back of a cupboard and plot a few days exploring the Two Moors Way, a coast-to-coast route that links Dartmoor and Exmoor. After a five-hour drive from our home in north London, we find ourselves in a blissful hydrotherapy spa at Home Place Farmhouse in Challacombe, gazing out at Exmoor's rolling hills. Nestled in a valley, our cosy adults-only self-catering cottage is a short stroll from 16th-century village pub The Black Venus Inn (blackvenusinn.co.uk), a friendly, characterful bar with beer for dogs (yes, beer for dogs). After three delicious courses and a bottle of red wine, we're ready to turn in, our bellies full of homemade apricot and raspberry crumble.'

WALKING THE WALK

The 102-mile Two Moors Way runs from Ivybridge in South Devon, across Dartmoor and Exmoor national parks to Lynmouth on the North Devon coast (visit-exmoor.co.uk). As we are only staying two nights, we focus on the last leg, walking eight miles from Prayway Head to Lynmouth. After being dropped off in a taxi, the wrong-map situation sinks in and we are relieved to find that our destination is signposted and the terrain not too challenging. The path flits in and out of woodland as you drop into the valley, and the views are extraordinary. Lynmouth is a vision nestling in green hills – it's easy to see why visitors call this area Little Switzerland – and the bright green of the forests and deep blue where the East Lyn River and Hoar Oak Water meet is stunning. We stroll into town, past the pretty harbour, to the landmark Rhenish Tower, which was built in the 1860s to store salt for indoor bathing. After a late fish and chip lunch admiring

the harbour views at The Ancient Mariner Restaurant in The Bath hotel (bathhotellynmouth.co.uk), we hop on the Victorian funicular railway to travel 500ft up to Lynton, Exmoor's little twin, an unspoilt town with a handful of independent shops, an impressive town hall, and home to Highcliffe House, our next overnight stop. With gorgeous panoramic views of Exmoor and the North Devon coastline, this luxurious boutique B&B is the perfect place to put your feet up after a long day's walking. Dinner is a delicious meal at The Vanilla Pod (thevanillapodlynton.co.uk), where, for a very reasonable £22 per head, you can share a mezze starter and have a main course each.

The next day we stay local and set off for a shorter coastal walk to the well-known beauty spot The Valley Of Rocks. Despite the weather taking a turn for the worse and soaking us to the bone, it didn't detract from the spectacular landscape.

Five miles and two soggy sandwiches later, we find our way back to Highcliffe House, where we dry off and enjoy a well-deserved cream tea. In the car heading back to London, our GPS efficiently sorts out our route home, but I rather miss the romance of our mapless amble across the moors, not knowing what lay over the next hill, or behind the next tree.

And, of course, we still have another 94 miles to go...'



From top: luxurious Highcliffe House; the spa at Home Place Farmhouse; views from the funicular railway



WHERE WE STAYED

HOME PLACE FARMHOUSE SPA
Each cottage at these converted barns is cosy, charming and well equipped. A selection of cooked farmhouse breakfasts are served in your cottage or you can opt for a continental self-catered breakfast. Prices from £250 for a two-night weekend break for two, with use of the spa facilities (farmhousespa.co.uk).

HIGHCLIFFE HOUSE
With stunning sea views and luxurious bedrooms, this period B&B offers complimentary cream tea on arrival, tailor-made breakfast and opulent décor. We wanted to stay forever. Prices from £115 per night, based on a two-night stay for two people, including breakfast (highcliffehouse.co.uk).