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The English Riviera? It's all the rage again now the Fawltly Towers image has been banished for good

- Simon Heptinstall visits Torbay in Devon and enjoys a stay at the Cary Arms hotel
- He also checks into Beacon House B&B with its elegant decor and stylish garden
- The area is fast becoming Britain's seafood capital - visit Brixham's fish market

By [SIMON HEPTINSTALL FOR THE MAIL ON SUNDAY](#)

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I normally start my mornings trying to decide what to eat for breakfast. But in Torbay I need to work out where to eat. Staff at the Cary Arms hotel say I can sit by the fire in the bar, on the garden terrace next to the dolphin bell (rung whenever there's a sighting), or on the deck of an elegant yacht moored in the harbour.

Yes, my time in Torbay shows why the Devon Riviera is all the rage again. Like all the best British tourist sites, this picturesque series of bays in South Devon has been transformed. The Fawltly Towers image has been banished for good.

Admittedly, the Cary Arms ([caryarms.co.uk](#)) is sampling the top-end of the Riviera experience. Set in its own secluded cove, with two-storey 'beach-hut' rooms and a spa built into the cliff, Peter de Savary's converted seaside pub offers a sensational rival to Mediterranean boutique resorts. It costs from £265 a night B&B for a double room, but at least you don't need to head overseas to enjoy it. Nor do you need deep pockets to enjoy Torbay.

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Shipshape: Brixham Harbour has a replica of the Golden Hind (centre)

In a friendly B&B at the other end of the bay in Brixham, I find similar attention to detail. The lovingly restored Beacon House (beaconbrixham.co.uk) offers elegant decor and a stylish garden from just £89 a night for a double room.



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The whole area is fast becoming Britain's seafood capital. The fish market in Brixham offers early morning guided tours, ending with a fresh fish breakfast at Mitch Tonks' Rockfish restaurant.

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There are also boat trips to offshore mussel farms, seal and dolphin colonies, or evening 'catch-and-cook' trips where you prepare and barbecue what you hook. Still hungry? I recommend the Simply Fish bistro, where takeaway options include monkfish curry or cuttlefish and chips.

Torbay's traditional attractions are the string of small beaches along its coast – and three of them have been awarded Blue Flags for cleanliness. But there's culture, too, of the non-stuffy kind. The recently restored Torre Abbey once housed captured Spanish Armada sailors but a great art collection now takes pride of place, including a gallery of works by pre-Raphaelite Edward Burne-Jones.

And the Torquay Museum, a mock Venetian landmark, has thrown off its dusty roots as a club for retired botanists thanks to its entertaining displays about Victorian explorers and a marvellous gallery featuring local resident Agatha Christie.



One of the rooms at Beacon House B&B, which Simon said has 'elegant decor and a stylish garden'

Torbay has also been declared a Unesco 'Geopark' because of its geology. I joined guide Linda Wheatley on a four-hour walk (with a break for a Devon cream tea) and learned that Watcombe Beach's red sand was once part of a scorching desert and the local stone gave its name to the global Devonian geological period.

And while a British break means I avoid hell in an airport, I do still get to fly in Torbay. The Virtual Jet Centre has one of the UK's biggest flight simulators – a heart-racing experience I'll never forget.

• For more information visit englishriviera.co.uk.

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