

TORQUAY AND THE ENGLISH RIVIERA: A Weekend at The 25

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As the summer gods have granted us with some of the most astonishingly agreeable weather that the UK has ever experienced – at least within my lifetime – and with the weak pound buying far less foreign currency than it did in years past, 2018 is an opportune year in which to reexplore the delights of the English south coast, and enjoy the excellent, new-generation B&Bs that wait for your arrival.

I must admit that, similarly to many of my generational cohort, I have spent most of my nascent adulthood rudely neglecting the appeal of the ‘staycation’. In 2017, us 16-34-year olds indulged in 1.4 million fewer holidays within UK borders than we did a decade ago, for a number of reasons: the rise of budget airline flights to Europe, the sad but irrefutable decline of some British resort towns, and the simple allure of the exotic have all contributed to young(ish) people’s oversight of holidays on home turf. So, when the opportunity arose to spend a long weekend in a boutique B&B on the south Devon coast, I jumped at the chance.

Keen to rediscover as an adult a destination I remember only from childhood holidays, I threw my holdall onto the back seat of the car and began eating into the 150 miles from west Oxfordshire to Torquay. As you wind past Bristol, taking on the inclines of the M5, and finally crossing over the River Exe, the emergence of Torbay palm trees forms a wonderfully incongruous display of ‘otherness’ from the landlocked lowlands that we Oxonians call home. Reaching Torquay itself, cruiser boats moored on the marina and the imposing Torquay Big Wheel are a reminder of the golden age of English resort tourism. Torquay hasn’t enjoyed the most glowing reputation over past two decades, but the waterfront – at least on the gloriously clear day of my visit – feels clean, pleasant and thoroughly modern. Two minutes back from the shoreline, I reached The 25 – the five-star, adults-only B&B that was to be my home for the next two days.

The 25 is a delightful place. Unconventional design gives the rooms a dash of personality, and all the usual high-end trappings – waterfall

showers, separate dressing rooms, superking beds and ample natural light – are present and correct. However, the relentlessly charming owners, Andy and Julian, are what really make The 25 stand out, with faultless attention to detail, expert local recommendations and even homemade cakes waiting for you in the rooms. Little details make all the difference.



With an afternoon to spare, a car at my disposal, and a tip-off from my Devon-obsessed father, I manoeuvred the perilously narrow country roads to Kingswear and took the ferry to Dartmouth. Both sides of the River Dart are ludicrously, preposterously beautiful, with pastel-coloured townhouses giving way to rolling fields on one side, and the expanse of the Dart Estuary on the other.

Blackpool Sands, just a little further southwest, is one of the most attractive beaches I've seen in the UK, and after a relaxing few hours taking in the sun and a heroically brave attempt at entering the water, I took the 15-mile route back to Torquay.

By this point, I'd worked up an all-encompassing hunger. Restaurants on the Torquay waterfront, around the corner from The 25, were a pleasant surprise; given the tourist-heavy nature of the area, repeat custom is far less necessary than in other areas. However, On The Rocks, at the top of Torbay Road, serves a contemporary menu of well-thought out cooking, heavy on local seafood and Asian flavours – how about sea bream with Elberry mussels, bok choy and galangal broth? Then, after some civilised drinks at a terrace bar around the corner, and a few nail-biting rounds of whack-a-mole at the harbour amusements – which remains one of the most

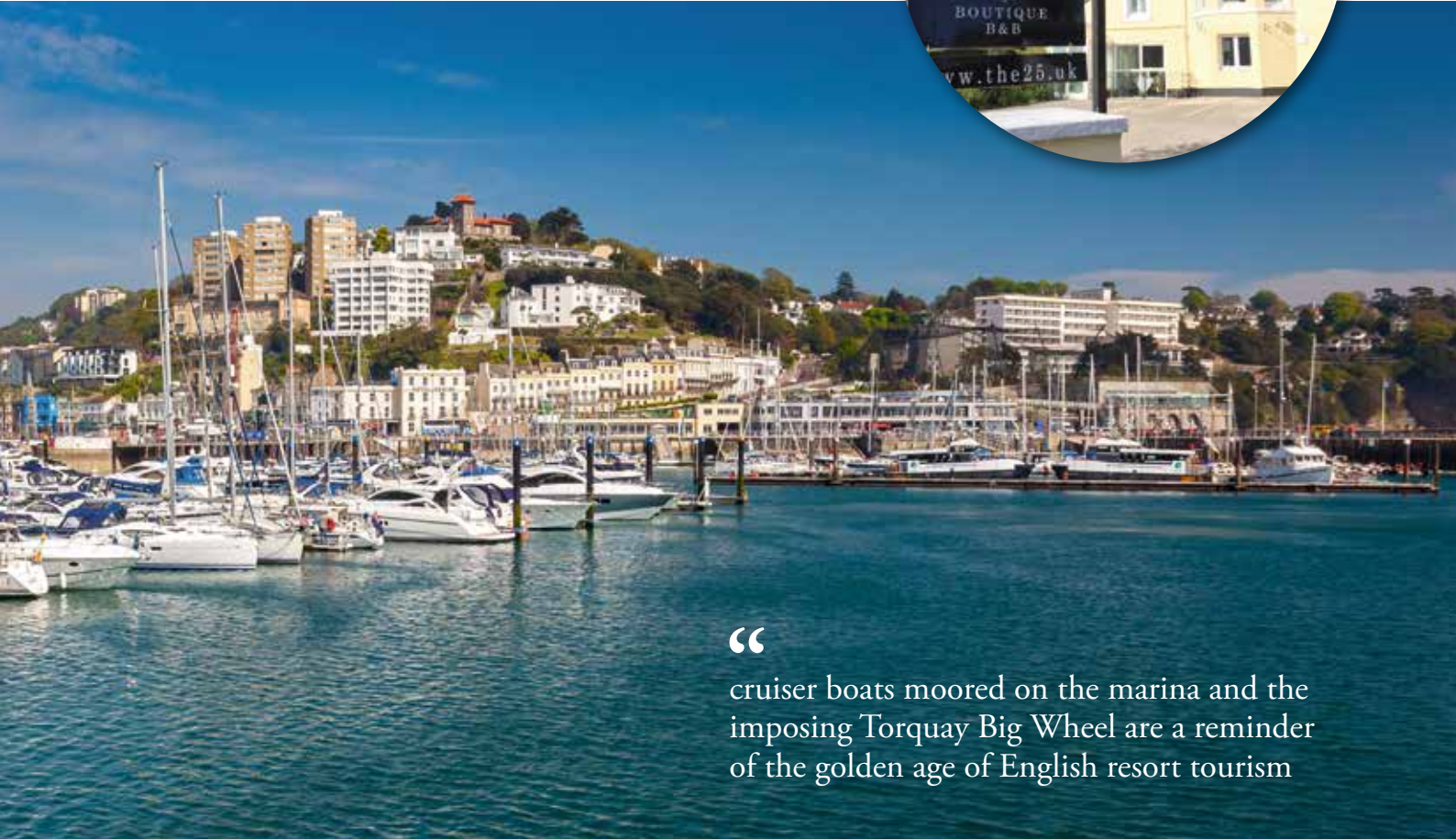
hilarious of the UK's inventions – I returned to The 25's welcoming arms wholly impressed with Torquay's redevelopment.

Breakfast the next morning was a reprise of the attention to detail on display elsewhere at The 25; bacon and sausages come from Prentice Butchers, just 300 yards away. Eggs are from around the corner, preserves are from a family business, and the owners even make their own yoghurt – very nice it is too. Again, the personal touches are what lift this place above the ample local competition.

Back in Oxfordshire after a short detour to some of East Devon's dramatic cliffs, I found myself feeling more than a little guilty for having ignored my native holiday destinations for so long. The trend of overlooking round-the-corner resorts needs to be reigned in, and it's only through the younger generation's rediscovery of their simplistic pleasure that some of the less fortunate towns can be reinvested in. With highly agreeable, expertly run and wholly up-to-date accommodation taking resort towns as seriously as this one, you'd be a fool to only be looking abroad.

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