

Foodie days out THIS SUMMER

BENJAMIN PARKER EXPLORES SOME GREAT WEST COUNTRY PLACES TO VISIT THIS SUMMER

The West Country is a hub for great food and drink. When planning excursions, trips and days out this summer, don't forget the great gourmet delights that can be experienced across the region. Here is a selection of different activities to try and places to visit, all of which have local fare at their heart.

JEKKA'S HERB FARM

Starting this year, an opportunity for a fun, interesting and arguably unique foodie day out has arisen. Jekka's Herb Farm, situated in south Gloucestershire's glorious countryside, is now opening for 'Herb Fridays', a chance for visitors to buy herbs directly from the farm or to view the construction of their herboretum, which officially opens in spring next year.

A wide selection of herbs will be available to buy on 'Herb Fridays' throughout September, with a chance to see the creation of the herboretum, which will hold the largest collection of culinary herbs in the UK – a true gastronomic experience for chefs.



Don't forget to check the website to read the 'looking good list' before buying your herbs!

At the end of the visit, as if a day out would be complete without it, a stop at the shop is highly recommended, with a range of refreshments and homemade cakes on offer. www.jekkasherbfarm.com



THE PICNIC BOAT

It may seem increasingly infrequent, but when the summer sun shines down on the South West there is something brilliant about being able to pack a hamper and enjoy a simple picnic.

In Dartmouth they do things slightly differently. For a truly exceptional experience, hop on board The Picnic Boat, a lovely way to celebrate a special occasion or just enjoy a bright blue sky while cruising along the River Dart. There is an assortment of ways to enjoy an excursion. You can go for breakfast on the boat, which includes homemade granola, fresh fruit and local yoghurt, and, depending on your mood, possibly even a glass of

bubbly. On a lunchtime journey you can enjoy a luxury picnic, the best the West Country has to offer, from home-cooked ham to home-smoked mackerel paté. The trips can provide great photo opportunities, with both Kingswear and Dartmouth castles alongside the river.

The menus are created by skipper Kevin, and everything is homemade, locally sourced where possible and all with the tranquil sound of the river to accompany you. Even if there is the slightest chance of rain, a full weather-proof canopy and on-board heating mean you can stay cosy and dry while drifting aboard The Picnic Boat.

www.thepicnicboat.co.uk

TREHANE NURSERY

Every summer, Trehane Nursery in Wimborne, Dorset, throws open its gates and lets visitors loose on the plantations. The company pioneered the growing of blueberries in the UK during the middle of the twentieth century and now aims to grow the highest quality fruit, both organic and conventional.

The simplicity of a 'pick your own' day out is something that has experienced a mini-revival, in an age when people care

more about where their food is coming from, how local it is and its environmental impact.

Blueberries are now one of the most popular soft fruits in the country, ahead of raspberries, and are very easy to pick thanks to no thorns. A family day out at Trehane Nursery is a back-to-basics approach that will leave you feeling wholesome and most certainly weighed down by fruit!

www.trehane.co.uk

CHEDDAR GORGE CHEESE COMPANY

Cheddar may be synonymous with cheese, but the Cheddar Gorge Cheese Company is now the only cheese maker in the village.

The area has been involved in the dairy industry since the fifteenth century and while there are many stories about the origins of the village's namesake cheese, the heritage and history of the place is undeniable.

For the chance to see the whole cheese making process you can visit the Cheddar Gorge Cheese Company factory and, as the routine only takes around eight hours, you can watch various stages as the local milk is transformed into the authentic cheese. During the summer there is a guide available who can answer any questions you may have.

After the tour, all visitors can treat themselves to a free taste at the taster bar, and visit the shop to buy any of the cheddars, as well as local pickles, biscuits and more. When, in 1170, King Henry II purchased 464kg of Cheddar for £10.67 he got himself a fantastic bargain! A trip to see cheese making in action here is also great value for money, at only £1.95 per adult and two children under 16 per paying adult get in for free. www.cheddargorgecheese.co.uk



BARLEY WOOD WALLED GARDEN

Open to the public every day, Barley Wood Walled Garden is a relaxing, peaceful getaway aimed at both those who are passionate about food and those who love beautiful gardens.

Located in Wrington and built in 1901, Barley Wood is a painstakingly restored kitchen garden looked after by gardener Mark Cox. Fruit and vegetables grow in vast array here, as do plenty of non-edible plants, with stunning views across the Mendip Hills.

Mark takes great pride in his work and runs a weekly vegetable box scheme, which can also be

found at local farmers' markets. On a visit to the garden the fruit and veg grown here is available to buy.

The enjoyment of this setting is furthered by The Ethicurean restaurant, an establishment founded on what it describes as a 'sense of place'. Using the produce grown here, the restaurant attempts to update and reinvent historical recipes that pay respect to the surrounding land.

The garden also hosts five resident artists, who have studios open to the public. Their platforms can range from enamel to glass, pottery to ceramics.

www.walledgarden.co.uk