

CAN there be a better place to be on a sunny day than the south coast of Devon?

Not as far as I'm concerned, and so it was with great delight we headed to one of our favourite parts of the country to enjoy this hot weather.

The sun was shining and it was a beautiful warm early afternoon as we drove up onto Dartmoor for a brief stroll over one of the lesser challenging tors – and it's all the more enjoyable if there's an incentive.

The carrot came in the form of another favourite haunt The Old Inn at Widecombe. We could quite easily have sat in the sun-drenched garden sipping the local cider all day, but we had a rendezvous with Soar Mill Cove near Salcombe.

Having got lost and been told by a local 'don't turn off the road' we found a sign for Soar Mill Cove Hotel and headed in that direction.

A word of warning – don't think you're going the wrong way when it seems as if you are constantly driving down narrow country tracks with only the sea at the end, you will get there.

We were warmly greeted at reception and shown to our room, a spacious junior suite with private patio – all 22 recently refurbished rooms offer either a sea view or garden view, but if you don't get a sea view don't despair you don't have to look far here to see the sea.

All are stylishly decorated and come with all the mod cons you expect from a hotel of this quality and if it's not there, dial '0' and your wish will be answered.

So having unpacked we set off to explore the 10 acres of grounds and find out what was on offer. There were several young families staying as it was Easter hols – no need to worry about the volcano here – and there was plenty to keep youngsters and the young at heart occupied.

KAREN NEVILLE took advantage of the recent warm weather to check in at Soar Mill Cove Hotel on the stunning south coast of Devon

As well as an indoor and outdoor pool, there's a nine-hole pitch and putt, lawn tennis court and games room with billiards and table tennis, and if it's relaxation of a more, well, relaxing kind you're after, then the Ocean Spa can offer a full range of massages and health and beauty treatments.

Want more? The hotel can also arrange a variety of activities from sailing to horse riding, golf to painting – just ask.

And so to dinner. After a brief stop in the elegant boutique-style cocktail bar for a Cosmopolitan (almost as good as any mixed in New York), we took our table which offered a view out to sea as indeed do all the tables in the dining room, deliciously named Serendipity.

The room itself boasts a mix of classic elegance with a contemporary feel and this is carried through to the menu.

We dined on a crab and lobster bisque appetiser, carpaccio of beef, a trio of lamb with shallot puree, and local cheese and biscuits and had empty plates after each course.

Feeling pleasantly full after, we took a turn around the grounds for a last gasp of sea air and said good night.

Glorious sunshine once again greeted us on Saturday and, after a hearty English breakfast, we walked to the beach down a rather steep slope – you always forget that 10 minutes down a slope is at least twice as long on the way back.

But the view and the roar of the sea were more than worth however



ROOM WITH A VIEW: Many of the newly-refurbished rooms at Soar Mill Cove Hotel have glorious views over Devon's south coast. The sandy beach is a 10 minute walk from the hotel

long it would take to trek back as we stood in the sandy cove surveying the headland.

Right, next stop, nearby Salcombe. After a rather perilous drive up a winding hill that's barely wide enough for modern cars we reached Overbeck's, a National Trust property once owned by an eccentric inventor set in stunning gardens featuring large and very impressive magnolias. Well worth a wander whatever the weather but on a day full of spring sunshine, perfect!

In need of refreshment we stopped at one of the town's charming pubs, the Victoria Inn, for a late lunch and then drove the 10 minutes back to Soar Mill Cove. We enjoyed the pub's hospitality so much we returned for dinner that evening and wouldn't hesitate to go back again and again.

Whenever you go away for the weekend you always eat and drink more than you should and always all sorts of things that definitely fall



into the 'treat' category, and this was no exception as we sat in the stunning glass-fronted lounge and tucked into the wonderful cream tea. I really could have sat there for hours just looking out to sea, basking in the warmth of the sun streaming through the windows – as long as there were enough yummy jam and cream scones.

We left on Sunday morning as we'd arrived, with more sunshine, but more importantly with more happy memories.

FACTFILE

■ Karen stayed at Soar Mill Cove Hotel, nr Salcombe, Devon TQ7 3DS, 01548 561566, www.soarmillcove.co.uk.
■ Rooms cost from £190 per room from May to early July and September and from £240 mid-July and August. All rates are inclusive of breakfast and cream tea one afternoon.