

teenage tricks in exmoor & africa

Words by Olivia Greenway



Taking a teenager on holiday is not without its challenges — being a single mother, just added to them. I could have gone down the easy route and taken her to a theme park with a friend, but I really wanted to spend some quality time with my daughter. It didn't have to be complicated; it was the being together that mattered. And, in case things went horribly wrong, I also wanted to be able to crawl back home with relative ease.

Our first foray together was by car to Exmoor and the north Devon coast. I hadn't been to the area since I was a student, and a modest B&B in the hamlet of Meshaw suited us perfectly.

The first morning, we made our way to remote Simonsbath on Exmoor. After a while, the muddy track along the river climbed and we ambled along a stony path, still following the meandering water. Eventually, we had to remove our coats as the late October sun became too warm and we paused for a rest. No cars, no people, no sign of habitation: all we could hear was the running stream and

the odd chirp from a bird. We walked on for about an hour, both enjoying the simple beauty of the place and each others' company.

Feeling peckish back at the car, we made our way to South Molton. It's one of those sweet Georgian places that looks like it should be filmed for a period television drama. It also has a lovely old-fashioned tearoom, straight out of an Enid Blyton story. The early afternoon sun cast a yellow glow across the chunky honey pine tables and chairs that crowded the room. Conspiratorially, we put our heads together over the menu. Soon,



huge helpings of home made sticky toffee pudding with lashings of clotted cream arrived, thus undoing the good work of the previous few hours.

Our final stop was the pretty town of Lynmouth, on the north coast. The river Lyn seemingly falls from the sky, tumbling over craggy rocks before its final escape into the sea. A lumbering walk along the shingle beach would have had my son skimming stones across the water but Rachael placed herself dramatically on a rock and demanded a picture be taken for the memory.

Pleased with our successful domestic jaunt and feeling brave, I wanted to organise something spectacular for our next holiday, even if it meant dipping into my savings. Rachael's love of animals and the fact I lived there when I was her age made it easy — we'd go to the Eastern Cape of South Africa. As we landed at Prince Albert in our private eight-seater Airvan plane, I knew we were in for a very special experience. The African Relish cookery school was fun

and unpretentious, located in a delightful small village with plenty to do for an adventurous teenager. As well as cooking local dishes and bonding with the other guests, we sweated up the nearby Swartberg Pass on borrowed mountain bikes and toured the local dairy, where Guernsey cows produced the best yoghurt Rachael has ever tasted.

Reluctantly, we left our new friends behind as our small plane soared over the Sneeuberg Mountains. Mount Camdeboo, near Graaff-Reinet is hidden deep in the Great Karoo. Rachael was in her element during our adventure-packed stay with wildebeest, giraffe, zebra and rhino as well as a myriad of birds, all at close quarters. After daybreak one day, she rode out with the ranger to see a lioness with her cubs. Before my eyes, this quiet young girl I had taken to Exmoor was turning into a confident woman.

With several thousand game reserves in South Africa, what makes this one so special? My cynical reservations about game lodges and game drives

soon evaporated and answered such a question when our ranger, Etienne, took us cheetah tracking on foot. Crouching in the long grass, slowly creeping up on a cheetah we still couldn't see, I whispered concern about wearing a bright red coat. He dismissed my enquiry with "Don't worry, you look like red meat!" Rachael's hand covered her mouth hiding an emotion mixed with laughter and fear.

My next challenge is to top this experience. It's not whether we should go; it's where we should go.

■ **How to do it:** Our trip to South Africa was through Odyssey World. Our trip covers half of "The Incredible Journey"; prices for the eight day trip start at £2,650 per person for two people, fully inclusive apart from air travel. Trips to Mount Camdeboo and African Relish may be booked independently and both locations have airstrips. BA, Virgin and South African Airways fly directly to Johannesburg; internal flights from there to George with South African Express. www.odyssey-world.co.uk >>

From left: Sign in Exmoor, Somerset; African Relish kitchen; Boma and staff