



PHOTO: GERTH ECKLES/GETTY

LET'S VISIT

TOTNES

This South Hams town has a winning formula – and what makes it such a success? It's all about the independents, says **CHRISSY HARRIS**

Random Tuesday, summer Saturday, wet Wednesday in November. I've visited Totnes on each of these occasions recently and it's always buzzing. They've nailed year-round footfall and the formula is one other towns across the country would love to replicate. It's all about the independents, which sounds obvious but it's one thing to have them and quite another to support them with the kind of passion that Totnes does. The locals here love to keep it local, whether that's by buying their provisions in the greengrocers (Happy Apple, Annie's) browsing the markets (legendary here) or catching a film at the cinema in Fore Street. One butcher I spoke to said he's been in the business 20 years, set up shop here five years ago and is still amazed by the level of trade that doesn't seem to dip when the tourists head home.

Totnes' commitment to the independent cause has been well documented and is even good geography A-level revision. Students looking for a human geography case study have been encouraged to make notes about the time the town defeated the attempts of high street coffee brand Costa to open a branch here in 2012. And then there was the Totnes Pound, a currency established to support local businesses (it was discontinued in 2019 because of today's cashless economy).

The counterculture, bohemian vibe sets Totnes apart from most other places on the planet and, guaranteed, you'll see something



PHOTO: GEOFF ECCLES/GETTY

during your visit that will make you think: Ah, that's so Totnes. Goats on a lead, a man walking an owl, people walking in bare feet, an ostrich riding a bike – all confirmed sightings. (The ostrich riding a bike is a sculpture in Redworth Terrace. Elsewhere, there's a tiger climbing a tree, a fire breathing dragon, a monkey in a woolly hat...)

It's best to pull up a chair outside one of the many cafés/pubs and watch in wonder before doing something more energetic. There are loads of lovely walks that start in town and take you along the River Dart towards the beautiful Sharpham Estate. Or else go the other way along the river towards Dartington, where there are more trails, historic gardens, food and events.

Mostly though, just go and enjoy being in a town that manages to be both functional and fantastical, depending on your state of mind. There really is nowhere like Totnes.

Business time



Rhythm and Light sells a wonderfully eclectic mix of crystals, fossils, jewellery, gemstone carvings, Tibetan artefacts and puppets. The shop is in Totnes' famous Butterwalk section of the High Street, a covered pavement arcade that dates back to Tudor times. Sandi Whale is the owner. She says Totnes really is one of a kind, a bustling town with a strong community. She has many regular customers who come to see what treasures she's managed to find. At one point, there was a crocodile in the window. Sandi has also had a fossilised dinosaur egg on display, much to the delight of young passers-by. After 25 years running her business, Sandi is looking to retire and would love to sell Rhythm and Light to a like-minded new owner. sandi@rhythmandlight.co.uk

3 TO SEE



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

Totnes' cinema closed its doors in 1964 but was brought back to life by a successful crowdfunder campaign. Today, the 88-seater venue and café is run as a social enterprise. On screen, there's a mix of arthouse films, new releases, documentaries and more. There's a cocktail bar, plus snacks on offer.

totnescinema.co.uk



GHOSTLY GOINGS-ON

Totnes Museum is in a beautifully restored Elizabethan merchant's house in Fore Street. The building is home to many fascinating objects, stories and displays, as well as a couple of ghosts, apparently. There have been reports of supernatural happenings, including ghostly visions of cats, children and an angry man.

totnesmuseum.org



PHOTO: VISION

FABULOUS VIEWPOINT

Founded in the early years of the Norman conquest, Totnes Castle at the highest point of town is the country's best-preserved example of a Norman motte and bailey castle. Explore the keep while enjoying views over the River Dart. Hot day? Head for the shade of one of the ancient trees standing in the bailey of the castle. One is thought to be more than 150 years old. english-heritage.org.uk

MEET THE LOCALS



OLIVER HORROCKS

Butcher

Oliver is the owner and head butcher of his business in Fore Street. He's been a butcher for 20 years and set up here in Totnes five years ago.

'The footfall here is incredible,' he says. 'That's the magic of the area. I've been doing this for 20 years and I've never known anything like it. The first year was amazing and it's never really plateaued.'

Oliver, who has a baby daughter, says the area is fantastic for families. 'You've got Dartmoor and the South Hams right nearby. It's the best of both worlds.'



KRISTINA TINKER

Shop owner

Kristina and her parents Jackie and Dave run the Out of the Blue gift shop in Fore Street. The family has been here for nearly 20 years.

'What I like about Totnes is its uniqueness,' says Kristina. 'The people here are so friendly and very supportive of their independents. That's why we came here in the first place really. We knew there would be that all-year round trade.'

'It's great being here because there's so much to do. You can do the moors and the sea, Plymouth isn't far away, or Exeter. Everything is so close by.'



PHOTO: HARMAN BAGELS

Harman Bagels

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Ooh, where to start. Let's go from the bottom up, as it were. On The Plains, you've got **The Curator**, a popular place for wood-roasted coffee and hand-baked things, especially in the sunshine. The outdoor tables here get rammed. The Curator has also just opened another café overlooking the market square. **The Waterside Bistro** is good for a beer and a pizza. Happy hour is between 4pm and 6pm. A bit further along the river is the **Steam Packet Inn** which has a lovely terrace and a decent selection of real ales.

The landmark **Royal Seven Stars Hotel** is a St Austell Brewery-owned venue with seasonal dishes and pub classics.

Harman Bagels (Ticklemore Street – yep, that's the name!) is a new addition and is already a hit with the locals. They've got another branch in Plymouth that was doing well so they spread the love (and the cream cheese) over this way. Hurrah.

Heading up Fore Street and High Street hungry is always tricky. You've got **Fuller's Bakery**, a comfortingly traditional tea rooms and bakery with pasties, cakes and sarnies.



PHOTO: THE BULL

Seeds 2 Totnes (High Street) is one of our go-to lunch spots. I always end up getting a take-away salad box, full to the brim with delicious things and eat it on a bench in Leechwell Garden.

Good luck trying to decide on what to eat if the market is on. There are so many amazing pop-ups here serving everything from Ethiopian jollof rice to Indian street food and giant pretzels.

Need a sweet treat? **Delphini's** gelato (High Street) is a must. The fab flavours include salted butter caramel, strawberries and cream, Belgian milk chocolate and more.

Totnes is blessed with some decent and different restaurants. The menu at **Gather** (Fore Street) consists of dishes created from locally sourced and foraged ingredients from fields, hedgerows and shorelines. Gather's chef-owner Harrison Brockington recently won the prestigious Roux Scholarship 2026.

Rumour Kitchen and Bar (High Street) is in a 14th century building and is a lively hangout, serving pizzas, plus a good range of local seafood, including River Teign mussels and Brixham scallops.

And right at the top of town overlooking Rotherfold Square is **The Bull Inn** – a delightful experience in every way. The organic-certified, ethical pub and hotel has a veg-centric menu which changes every day. Summer's sample dishes are roasted cabbage, beetroot, brie, smoky onions, beetroot purée and walnuts or sea bass, coconut tomato sauce, potatoes, kale, carrot fennel, coriander salad and cashews. The interiors here are just as heavenly as the food.

Notice board

PHOTO: THE BULL



Inside The Bull Inn

WHERE TO STAY

The Bull Inn's nine bedrooms and its apartment just over the road have been styled with environmental impact in mind. Reclaimed furniture, reworked vintage fabrics and collections of antique market finds give each one a unique look and feel.

Amazing interiors are also available at **Santai** and **Damai**. Santai (which means 'relaxed in Indonesian') and Damai ('peace') are two apartments tucked behind a beautiful ancient Indian door off Leechwell Street. They've been designed by Richard and Zoe Biggs who run local interiors business Society



Santai's amazing interiors

PHOTO: GSHAWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

House. The Royal Seven Stars, a Grade II*-listed 17th century coaching inn, has a good mix of rooms, from small standards to deluxe suites. Town centre pub the **King William IV** has double and twin rooms. The entertainment's good here. The pub has live music every Saturday featuring the best local musicians. You can also stay at **The Steam Packet Inn** in one of its six, recently refurbished rooms. Two are able to accommodate families of up to two adults and two children.

For an oasis of calm, check into **The Old Forge**, a 500-year-old stone building in a quiet spot with a pretty walled garden. It's away from the Totnes hustle and bustle but just a five-minute (flat) walk from the bottom end of town.

The Cott Inn, near Dartington is one of the oldest thatched inns in the UK. It has five boutique-style rooms, all bright and beautifully kitted out with cosy soft furnishings. Food's good here too, btw. And there's an all-year round beer garden.

Proper luxury self-catering options are on offer at the **Gitcombe Estate** between Totnes and Dartmouth. Big family gatherings will be well accommodated in the range of country cottages and houses on this proper lush site. Guests also have use of the indoor/outdoor pool, hot tub, steam and sauna rooms.

Did you know?

Totnes has more listed buildings per head than any other town in Britain. A stroll up the steep and narrow Fore Street takes in the Eastgate arch and many of the town's 66 characterful properties that were built pre-1700. Look for the Tudor Butterwalk and the Poultry Walk, two covered arcades once used for local markets.

PHOTO: THE SHARPHAM TRUST AND SOUTHERN TV



REWILD TOUR

There will be a rewilding tour at the Sharpham Estate on August 7. Participants can find out more about the work going on to restore nature on the 550-acre site near Totnes, including creating rare habitats, protecting areas of saltmarsh, making nests to welcome birds of prey and planting trees.

MARKETS

August 2 is Totnes Good Food and Craft market (held on the first and third Sunday of the month from 10am to 3pm.). Savour the local flavours and creativity as the area's artisan vendors pitch up in the town's famous Market Square.

RAILWAY MURDER

Super sleuths are needed aboard South Devon Railway for an exciting murder mystery event. Murder by Appointment, the longest established murder mystery company in the West of England, will take you back in time to solve a mysterious crime which takes place during a train journey. Dates this month are August 7 and 21. southdevonrailway.co.uk

EAT:TOTNES

The food festival returns on August 23. This free, family-friendly event runs from 10am until 4pm along Steamer Quay and Longmarsh, showcasing more than 70 local food and drink makers, farmers market favourites, street food, and entertainment. Eat:Festivals bring together the best West Country food and drink producers and artisans at festivals in town centres across the region. ●