



Age of steam

A 6.7-mile heritage railway on the former Great Western Railway branch line links Paignton and Kingswear. The train runs along the bank of the River Dart.

As a lifelong sailor, I find few areas in Britain as pretty as the Devon and Cornwall coastlines. Rugged cliffs give way to pretty rivers and stunning vistas over waters that often seem clearer and bluer than elsewhere.

My memories of previous visits to Dartmouth are of sunny weather and spectacular scenery. It is fair to say only one of these traits was experienced when we went for a poke around on a cold February day. But, in spite of the breeze swirling light snow into our faces, the views out over the River Dart itself were as fine as I had remembered.

Dartmouth and the nearby towns of Torquay and Salcombe have a long and illustrious maritime history. Naval and general heritage abounds as you make your way around the little streets and shops, all seemingly with some connection to the water.

Although there are a significant number of spots to moor or pick up a buoy on the River Dart, we have focused on the recently refurbished Dart Marina Yacht Harbour, located on the Dartmouth side of the river, and the larger Darthaven Marina on the Kingswear side.

FACTFILE

DART MARINA YACHT HARBOUR

Contact: +44 (0)1803 837 161, dartmarinayachtharbour.co.uk

Berths: 105

Facilities: Wi-Fi, electricity, showers, spa, hotel

Tides: Dover -0510

VHF: Channel 11

Maximum size: 65ft

Price: £4.20 per metre per day

Dart Marina Yacht Harbour

This is the only marina on the Dartmouth side of the river. Smaller than Darthaven across the fairway, and with fewer visitor berths, it is nevertheless newer. The complex also contains a hotel and spa.



Darthaven Marina

Bigger than Dart Marina Yacht Harbour and a little noisier. There are more yachting amenities and easy access to Dartmouth via the ferry.

Eating out

Dartmouth is home to many restaurants, but the Mitch Tonks-owned fish and chip shop, Rockfish, and his fine dining restaurant, Seahorse are recommended.

GULL'S EYE

DARTMOUTH DELIGHT

Gateway to the West Country and peaceful river anchorage

WWW.DARTMOUTH.CO.UK

Cruising grounds

Dartmouth, Salcombe and Torquay all represent some of the finest cruising in the UK. Sailing to either from Dartmouth, sitting halfway between the two, is easy. This arguably provides Dartmouth the best options of the three – though those who live in Torquay and Salcombe might disagree.

Lyme Bay

One can easily port-hop throughout Lyme Bay, though harbours do become sparser further to the east.

At the far side of the bay is Portland Bill, with the good shelter of Weymouth at its foot. Crossing the bay from tip to tip is the fastest route to Weymouth, but be warned: with strong tides and little scenery, it can be something of a long slog – even with the prevailing winds at your back.

Cornish coast

Dartmouth is really the gateway to the West Country, with Salcombe and the beautiful, rugged coastline of Cornwall to the southwest. Shelter is good in ports like Plymouth, St Mawes and Falmouth, but the distance between them is greater than in Lyme Bay.

Cross Channel

The passage to Alderney or Guernsey is surprisingly short and can easily be made over the course of a long summer's day. Although a real attraction in their own right, the islands also provide a good staging point for onwards travel to Normandy or Brittany.

FACTFILE DARTHAVEN MARINA

Contact: +44 (0)1803 752 242,
www.darthaven.co.uk

Berths: 250

Facilities: Wi-Fi, electricity,
showers, water, 35 ton hoist

Tides: Dover –0510

VHF: Channel 80

Maximum size: 65ft

Price: £2.40 per metre per day

Local berth holder

Patrick Kilmartin – Nimbus 32 Coupe



Patrick Kilmartin purchased his current motorboat from Lymington and kept her there for the remainder of the season. On a weekend trip to Dartmouth he rediscovered

his passion for the area, where he had grown up. Next season, Patrick chose Dartmouth as his home port, despite living up in Rutland at the time. He has since sold up in the East Midlands and is in the process of moving to Dartmouth full-time.

When Patrick was deciding where best to moor on the river, the Dart Marina Yacht

Harbour was his prime choice for a number of reasons. But it was the location on the Dartmouth side of the river that proved the strongest draw. The marina itself is a 10 minute walk from the centre of the town – close enough for a stroll but crucially free of the noise in the town itself. He does use some of the facilities at Darthaven, however.

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS



Ashore

The name of popular food writer and famous seafood chef, Mitch Tonks comes up time and again when you talk to people here about restaurants. He owns two in Dartmouth: a high quality restaurant, The Seahorse, and fish and chip shop Rock Fish.

Bracketed by those two establishments in terms of pricing is Kendrick's, a regular haunt for locals we spoke to as an 'everyday' restaurant.

On the Dartmouth side of the river, the main supermarket is a Sainsbury's, but it's a fair trek out at the town's western extremity. There's a Co-operative on Fairfax Place.

Cliff walks

Scenery features highly in the list of attractions in and around Dartmouth, where there are a wide variety of planned walks to take in the surroundings. To the northeast, at the top of the River Dart, lies the Dartmoor National Park – a huge expanse of scenic moorland.

Part of the 630-mile South West Coast Path runs through the town, and is an easy way to explore the surrounding area by foot.

On upriver

The River Dart itself is navigable on a rising spring tide all the way up to Totnes.

The views on the river are spectacular and there is a great deal of history to be taken in, not to mention a number of fine pubs and eateries along the way. One does not have to go too far before draught limitations become an issue and by the time you reach Totnes, almost every anchorage dries out.



Passage planning

DARTMOUTH: 50°19'.99N 003°33'.11W

Castle Ledge buoy at the mouth of the river



The view across river to Kingswear and Darthaven Marina

A big estuary, easy to enter, but sometimes busy – these are the headlines for the River Dart. Some care must be taken on the approach to avoid the various lit and unlit rocks close to the shore on either side of the river mouth.

From the east, yachtsmen will need to stay well out in order to clear the Mew Stone and West Rock, both of which are marked by cardinals. We would strongly advise maintaining a sensible distance from these dangers as the tide can set onto them. Once round, head up towards the Castle

Ledge buoy, at which point an upriver course can be steered. Note, also, that Castle Ledge marks the start of the strongly enforced 6 knot limit within the confines of the river.

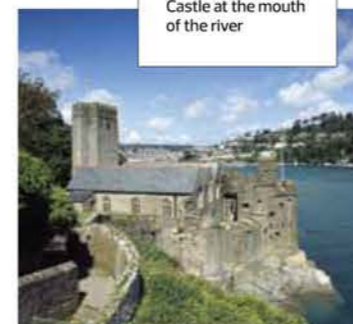
From the southwest, there are various unmarked drying rocks that need to be given plenty of space. Stay well off when rounding Combe Point to avoid grounding on these many dangers and set a course to seaward of Homestone buoy. From here it is once again a case of making for the Castle Ledge buoy before continuing on upriver.

Once into the mouth of the river, leading lights from Kingswear will guide you up the first leg. The channel is well marked with another set of leading lights taking you round the first significant bend. The rest of the river is subsequently marked by regular and clear buoyage.

Car ferries

As Kingswear appears on the eastern side of the river, you need to keep a watch for the Lower car ferry – this, the passenger ferry operating from the same spot and the Higher ferry up by the Dart Marina Yacht Harbour, have full right of way in the river. Next, you'll pass the big

Dartmouth Castle sits opposite its twin, Kingswear Castle at the mouth of the river



SOUTHAMPS

'maintain a sensible distance from these dangers as the tide can set onto them'



Ports of call:

SW: Salcombe, Plymouth and Falmouth

NE: Torquay, Exmouth, Portland and Weymouth

Cross Channel: Alderney, Guernsey, Brittany

Alternative berths

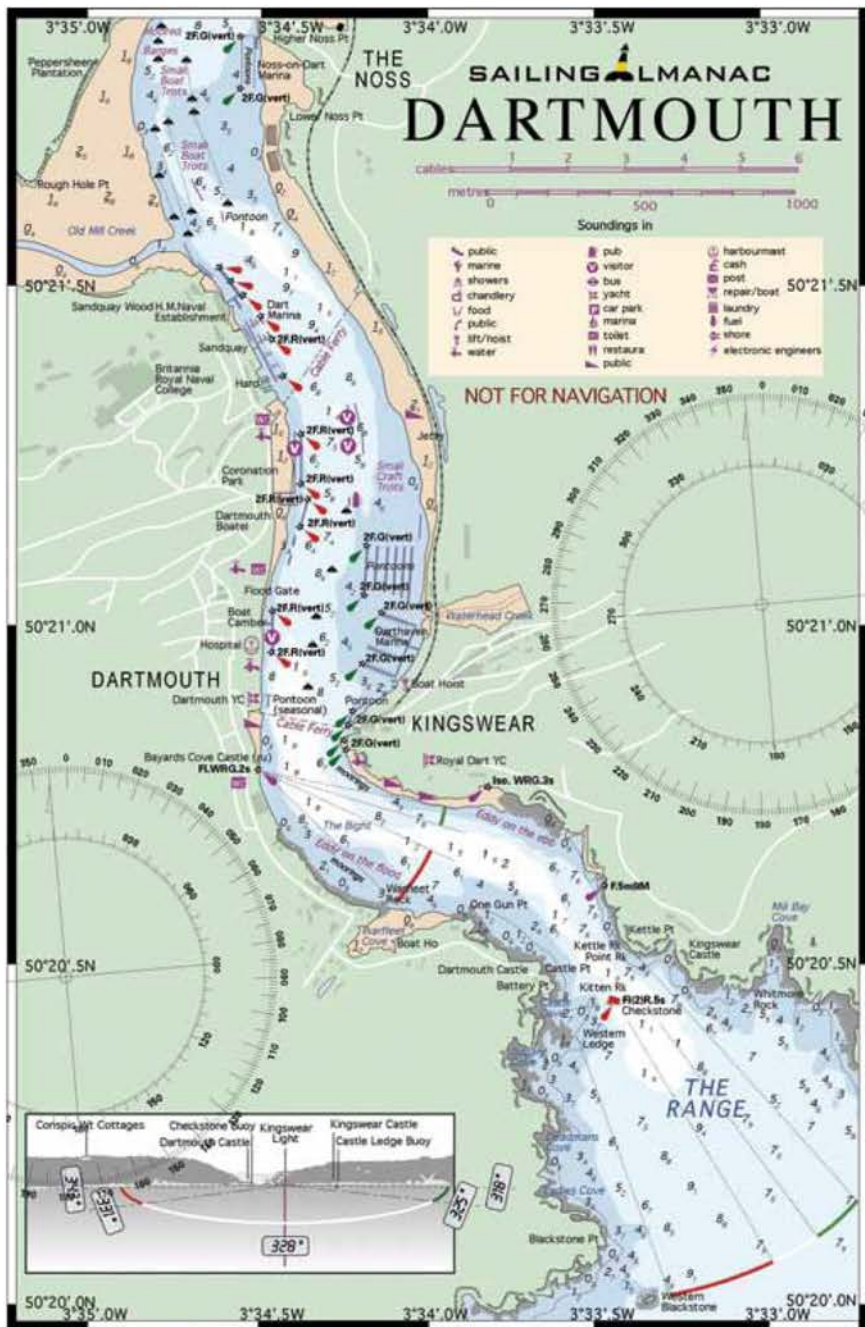
If there is no space at Dart Marina Yacht Harbour, or you require services such as a crane hoist or facilities for major repair work, Darthaven Marina on the Kingswear side of the river is potentially the better option. Sitting just across the river from Dartmouth, the marina tends to be a more regular stop for visiting yachtsmen.

Here, you will find a much larger marina with the associated increase in resources. It can also be a little louder, especially in August when the annual Port of Dartmouth Royal Regatta takes place.

Similarly to the Dart Marina Yacht Harbour, pontoons at Darthaven are not bounded by harbour walls, lying far enough upriver to benefit to lie well clear of any Channel chop.

It is also worth noting that Darthaven is where the Lower car ferry docks, needing careful attention when coming in to berth, but the ferry also provides quick access to the town of Dartmouth itself, for those wishing to explore.

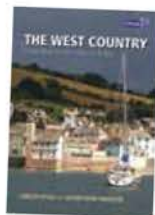
In addition to these two marinas there are visitor berths available through Dart Harbour (VHF ch11) these are located in various spots along the river, including outside Dartmouth Yacht Club and the Town's public jetty.



Reader offer

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Pontoons are easily accessed at Dart Marina Yacht Harbour