



START: Practical Motorhome HQ, Teddington  
DESTINATION: Chenonceaux in the Loire Valley, France (see p37 for our route)

The sandy cove at Croyde is one of the best surfing beaches in North Devon

# Surfing heaven in Devon

GARY BLAKE introduces a new generation of motorcaravanners to the touring life by taking his grandchildren to his coastal haunts of 50 years ago when modern-day surfing was in its infancy



GARY and WENDY took up motorcaravanning after spending years sailing in cruising yachts. Today they enjoy touring across Europe and further afield

Anisha, nine, and Arun, four, were belted in behind us in the Marquis Majestic 145, which had far more living space than campervans of yesteryear.

Ours came with a sleeping cabin over the driving cab, standing headroom, second diner rear area that doubled up as two single beds or a double, 2kW Whale space-saving ducted heating, 15 litres of hot water, a family-size fridge, and a washroom. How our expectations of comfort have moved on.

**W**e're back in Croyde, the surfing mecca of Devon, and it's not the 1960s in a Vee Dub, but the 2013 school holidays in a coachbuilt motorhome with the grandchildren.

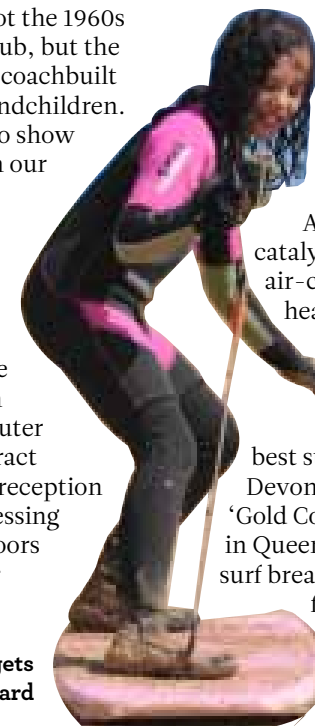
The two of us wanted to show them what we enjoyed in our campervan life when younger. Back then, we were more sailors than surfers, but we loved outdoor living, water sports and wandering around Britain's coastline with our own home from home. With no TV, computer games or internet to distract our young campers (bad reception in the Croyde area is a blessing for once), the great outdoors was top of the agenda for the week ahead.

This level of motorhome luxury would no doubt be the starting point for our grandchildren in the future. A far cry from our gas-bottle catalytic heater or running the air-cooled engine to get blown heat from the heat exchanger.

### SURF ON DOORSTEP

The sandy cove in Croyde is one of the best surfing beaches in North Devon and is part of the county's 'Gold Coast'. You can imagine being in Queensland, Australia, seeing the surf breaking as the rollers come in from America.

Right beside the beach is the Ruda Croyde Bay site, part of the Parkdean



Granddaughter Anisha gets to grips with a surfboard

Holidays Group, which owns the horseshoe-shaped bay. The beach and high sand dunes act as a windbreak to the site's Croyde Burrows touring area. The resort also accommodates tents and static homes, and offers plenty of facilities for family entertainment.

What with the children's clubs, play areas, beach volleyball and tennis courts, Anisha and Arun were well catered for, and we couldn't keep them out of the tropical adventure pool. There was even a fishing pond to keep granddad happy.

Access to the surf is through paths in the dunes and it's all next to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We all enjoyed a walk to Putsborough, via the National Trust's Baggy Point - the headland at Croyde - viewing the bones of a whale washed up in 1915 and passing the Coastguard climbing mast en route. On the return journey we called into the trust's Sandleigh Tea Room on the coastal path, for a fabulous Devon clotted cream

*"Croyde's thatched-cottage, old-world charm echoes the simpler British life of the 1940s and 1950s"*

tea with the lightest scones and delicious home-made coffee cake.

The village of Croyde has a laid-back vibe. Its thatched-cottage, old-world charm echoes British life from the 1940s and 1950s, when things seemed simpler and the Famous Five spent the summer holidays solving mysteries. A pleasant 10-minute stroll from the site, along a path edged with wild flowers, is the village, where you'll find pubs that welcome children, restaurants and cafés, surf shops and a general store, plus the Croyde Deckchair Cinema, which screens films in the village hall throughout the summer months. ☺



The Ruda Croyde Bay site where Gary and Wendy stayed is right near the horseshoe bay



Anisha and Arun wake up slowly for a day full of activity in the sun



Clockwise from main photo Gary and Anisha are all suited up for 10C water. Surfboards are never boring. A museum traces the history of UK surfing





Clockwise from top Arrrrr, a splendid pirate hideout – and a great spot for Granddad to hide. Croyde village was charming. Life on the pitch

The local weather is definitely something of an anomaly: Croyde is blessed with a microclimate that keeps it sunny even when it is overcast or rainy in Barnstaple, which is a mere 10 miles away.

People of all ages walk around the village in wetsuits carrying boards, whether surfboards for riding the waves standing up or bodyboards for those who prefer lying down. For us, frolicking in the waves with the grandkids on small boards was what it was all about.

While in Braunton, stocking up at the local Tesco for a barbecue that evening, we called into Tim Heyland's outlet shop. In just half a century, the British surf scene has evolved from

*“Croyde has a microclimate that keeps it sunny even when it is overcast or rainy in Barnstaple”*

a cult to a thriving industry and in the early 1970s Tim, co-founder of Tiki Surf, with a shop and factory outlet in Braunton, was one of the early surfing pioneers of the region. He has shaped boards in South America and California and still rides the surf.

Tim had one eye glued to the webcam pictures from the beach as we chatted. A large swell was due that

evening after forming in the Atlantic. His choice of surfboard is now an eight-foot longboard, similar to the original Hawaiian/Malibu board of yesteryear. He said that the ‘pop-up’ – that is springing from horizontal to a vertical crouch on the board – is now too much for him on a short board and it is an easier ride once you catch a wave on a longboard.

Our early evening barbecue involved taking the toll road just behind the sea wall to Crow Point, a perfect spot on the estuary overlooking the River Taw. We had to weave between the sheep and their lambs, which seemed to prefer sleeping on the Tarmac, and en route we spotted a sheep shearer at work, which the children enjoyed. ☺



We learned how one of the most thrilling sports made a splash in the UK at the Museum of British Surfing. Visit [www.museumofbritishsurfing.org.uk](http://www.museumofbritishsurfing.org.uk) for details



**Clockwise from top** One of the National Trust's area properties is Arlington Court. A lifeguard points out a safe surfing area. Croyde Burrows pitches are near the bay

**THERE'S EVEN A SURFING MUSEUM**

Often, we were able to leave the motorhome on site and make use of the frequent local bus that stops right outside Croyde Burrows and serves several coastal towns and villages. One such trip was a visit to the Museum of British Surfing in Braunton.

For a full introduction to surfing there's no better place than this. Staff at the museum helped with the production of the surfing film *The Endless Winter*, which premiered at the Croyde Deckchair Cinema in August 2012 and features footage of Tim Heyland riding waves in the 1970s.

The museum's theme this year is the 'Sixties Surfer', which looks at the decade when modern surfing reached our shores. Museum founder Peter

Robinson describes the decade as "the Swinging Sixties, when the UK met Malibu, Bondi and the Beach Boys head-on, and a new surfing culture was imported from foreign shores. In the years before this, surfing had been quite a genteel affair with a handful of hardy pioneers, wooden surfboards and woolen bathing suits."

The children's interest was held by the interactive games, as well as the

*"The 1960s was when the UK met Malibu, Bondi and the Beach Boys, and a new culture was imported"*

evolution of surfing exhibition. Wendy and I enjoyed listening to the Beach Boys music as we wandered round.

After the visit and feeling hungry, we popped into a local café for home-made pasties and Devon ice cream – some cultures are timeless.

**ON THE BEACH**

The theory dispensed with, it was time to face the water and our first lesson. As Ruda Holiday Park owns Croyde beach, the site provides six RNLI lifeguards who mark the different surfing areas with coloured flags: one for bodyboards and swimmers, the other for large surfboards.

Surf South West at Croyde provided the lessons on what was a great day. The tweets went out early in the ☺



As you might expect, a surf shop is right next to the reception of Ruda, Parkdean's site in Croyde.

Visit [www.parkdeanholidays.co.uk](http://www.parkdeanholidays.co.uk) or call 0844 335 3450

morning for good surf at high tide. The professionals were soon in the 'tubes' and 'tunnels' before the waves died down at midday to become surf that beginners could manage.

We couldn't quite believe that here we were, kitted out, lying on long boards in a semicircle on the sand, having lessons with trained teachers. The minimum age for lessons is eight, so Arun had to watch, but he still joined me on a beached surfboard to learn the pop-up.

We had a good ratio of teachers to pupils and were taken through safety and the theory of surfing. Then we entered the water, which was only 10C following the long winter and unusually cold spring but, in our thick wetsuits, boots and gloves, we were as warm as toast. How wetsuit technology has moved on – rather different now from the old frogman suits made of black neoprene. Today there are various thicknesses and the suits are flexible and fairly lightweight with better thermal qualities, even to the extent of heated suits. ☺

*“The water was only 10C but, in our thick wetsuits, boots and gloves, we were as warm as toast”*



Flags clearly mark which sections of water are safe for swimming and surfing



From left The grandchildren settled into their belted seats in the Marquis. Bodyboards were the order of the day, as Wendy takes one to the beach



A coastal path leads from the site to the village of Croyde



An instructor demonstrates how a surfer pops up when he catches a wave *Right*  
Visitors in wetsuits walk through the site and the village, on their way to the beach



We learned that at these temperatures, it may be too cold for very small children. So we opted for two suits each – their own ‘shorties’ underneath – to keep them warm.

Surf South West also operates at Saunton Sands and transports pupils in its minibus. Both beaches enjoy a famed reputation for the consistency of the surf, warmed by the Gulf Stream. With its gently sloping beach, Saunton Sands is perfect for beginners and can produce line after line of beautiful long slow rollers that are irresistible for longboarders from all over the country. In addition to surfing, Saunton Sands hosts kite surfing, kayaking, paddle boarding and other activities.

We were taught how to catch a wave at the right point for a good ride. We found that agile bodies can pop up

*“Saunton Sands is perfect for beginners and can produce line after line of beautiful long slow rollers”*

in a flash, while lesser mortals have to try harder. Anisha got the pop-up right away and was riding the crests of waves while we floundered in the surf!

We have to mention there is a rip tide at Croyde, so caution is required – especially on an ebbing low tide. If you adhere to the lifeguard-flagged areas you should have no problem.

After two hours, we returned to the site to wash out the suits and went back to hunt in the beach rockpools. ☺

### WAVE HEADLINE

A ‘perfect’ wave has several factors

**The shape** The most important influence on wave shape is the topography of the seabed directly behind and beneath the breaking wave.

Ideally, a light to moderate offshore wind will blow into the front of the wave, making it a ‘barrel’ or ‘tube’ wave to keep the wave’s head up.

**Fetch** Unrest at sea (a storm, for example) causes a swell, which ripples or ‘races’ for land and breaks on the beach. Long fetch is from a mid-Atlantic swell; short fetch from a swell nearer the UK.

**Tide** Incoming tide is better than outgoing. Various combinations of all these make it complex, and that’s where the skill comes in!



South West Surf teaches beginners how to ride the waves at Croyde and Saunton Sands. Visit [www.surfsouthwest.co.uk](http://www.surfsouthwest.co.uk) or call 01271 890 400



## GRAND TOUR Devon

Swells can start as far away as the mid-Atlantic before reaching Devon



*“Everyone on the beach is trying to catch a wave. And with Ruda close by, it couldn’t be easier”*

### BACK ON DRY LAND

A visit to the Tuesday open-air market, held in spring and summer next to the National Trust car park, is an ideal place for children with access to their grandparents’ wallets! All sorts of beach equipment, toys and clothes are available – even VW campervan moneyboxes, circa 1962.

For energetic older children, activity company Point Breaks offers coasteering, wakeboarding, kayaking and paddle boarding. Roylands Riding Stables, right behind Croyde Burrows, offers pony riding, with ‘tiny treks’ for four- to six-year-olds.

The main attraction is the surfing, though: it’s a fun sport and Croyde is a place with a happy atmosphere. Everyone there has the common goal of trying to catch a wave. And with Ruda as close as a site can be to a beach, with the equipment hire and tuition and the lifeguards all at hand, it couldn’t be any easier.

The grandchildren may be back with their parents, and so will we. ☺



They can bank on it: start saving for their future



Croyde beach is ideal for youngsters, who may even stick to the shore for some kite flying. Left Bodyboards and wetsuits are at the ready





OR YOU  
COULD TRY...



**Damage Barton C&CC site**  
Mortehoe Station Road,  
Woolacombe EX34 7EJ  
Tel 01271 870 502

Web [www.thefriendlyclub.co.uk](http://www.thefriendlyclub.co.uk)

A great alternative to Ruda Holiday Park is the Camping and Caravanning Club's Damage Barton site: it's about seven miles from Croyde Bay. Damage Barton was one of our Top 100 sites for 2012: it has tremendous sea views and is handy for coastal walking. Facilities include a pair of shower blocks, a laundry, a motorhome service point and more. It's only open to Club members, but you can join on site.

**Price £17.25-£21.75 ('van, two adults and hook-up)**

**Open March-3 November 2013**



**Ruda Holiday Park**  
Croyde Bay, Devon EX33 1NP  
Tel 01271 890 671/0844 335 3677  
Web <http://bit.ly/14UOYZD>

Green hills surround the horseshoe-shaped bay and the site's 91 large, marked-out grass pitches with 240V hook-up. Its location, with no through-road and right next to the beach, doesn't come much better for the surfer. Once sited there is no need to move the 'van again as everything is to hand and buses stop outside Croyde Burrows on the hour for visits to nearby towns and villages.

The nearest village is within easy walking distance, while the South West Coast Path is just 300 yards away. The nearest supermarket is six miles away at Braunton but in summer you can avoid busy coast

road traffic jams by getting the supermarket to deliver right to your pitch.

Ruda is a well-run Parkdean holiday park, with 24-hour security and excellent facilities, including a shop/off-licence. The refurbished washrooms have free hairdryers, an outdoor washing-up area and wetsuit-washing tubs. Motorhome service point takes 'vans up to 42ft. The grass pitches are large enough for barbecues. Across the road you can use the holiday resort's adventure playground, soft play area, summer beach volleyball, playing fields and tennis courts. Cascades Tropical Adventure Pool with slide and rapids costs £1.50 per head per session.

**Price £19-£49.50 ('van, two adults with hook-up). Two nights min stay. Max length of 'van: 42ft Open March-November**

**Food and drink**

The site can cater for most meals. Try Café@Ruda for quick refreshments or the Coast Bar and Kitchen for lunch or dinner. And the Costa Coffee has a big-screen TV and outdoor terrace. A Fish 'n' Chip take-away, and beach café and ice cream parlour by Croyde Bay cater for informal feasting.

**Find out more**

Hire surf equipment and book lessons at the Offshore Surf Shop, either at the main shop next to Ruda's reception or on the beach at Croyde Bay. Call 0844 335 6726 to book. £10 per person per suit per 24hrs, £4 each for boots and gloves per 24hrs. Boards £10 per 24hrs. For more information, see [www.surfparadise.co.uk](http://www.surfparadise.co.uk)

**The motorhome**

At 6.29m (20' 7"), the Marquis Majestic 145 is an ideal size for two adults and two children. It's based on a Peugeot Boxer 110bhp Tempo Libero 2.2-L6 diesel with a six-speed manual gearbox, so it coped well with the hills en route in Devon.

On the road, we could chat to the kids, who were safely belted into the two forward-facing seats behind the driver's seat.

The rear U-shaped lounge seats six and makes up into two single beds or a double. We found the windowless overcab double a bit claustrophobic and the ladder steep. The rear of the 'van has three large picture windows and a large skylight. The factory-fitted sun awning made an ideal wet-suit changing area but we could have done with outside locker access. For more information see [www.marquismotorhomes.co.uk](http://www.marquismotorhomes.co.uk)

**The costs**

Site: 8 nights at £34 .....	£272
Fuel .....	£165
Surfing equipment hire .....	£62
Food and drink.....	£29
Eating out.....	£82
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>£610</b>

**Way to go**

Leave M5 at J27, take A361 (North Devon link road) to Barnstaple then continue, following signs for Braunton and Ilfracombe. In Braunton, turn left after second traffic lights onto B3231, to centre of Croyde village. Turn left onto Jones's Hill, signed Baggy Point and Cascades. Ruda is on Moor Lane.

