

THE JURASSIC COAST

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Millions of years ago the Jurassic Coast was under water. Creatures that swam in these waters have since turned into fossils. These can still be discovered by a keen eye, making for a wonderful holiday memento.

We have visited the area before, and in fact I grew up here, but it is only now that the children are old enough that our attentions turn to this hugely important aspect of Devon and Dorset. At school Heidi (6) has been learning about famous Lyme Regis fossil hunter Mary Anning.

We didn't imagine being able to walk on a beach and find any fossils but at world renowned Charmouth, this is just what we do. There's a fascinating heritage centre that even David Attenborough has visited, and the staff will happily confirm if what you bring back from the beach are genuine fossils. Never before have we visited a beach where so many people are bent double looking for ammonites. The staff at the centre recommend that we walk down the beach for 10 minutes for the best fossil hunting spot, which we duly do and while away the best part of a glorious summer's day carefully sifting through pebbles. At the end of the day we all find something of which to be proud.

Alighting at Seaton Tramway station, Seaton Jurassic shouts out to be visited. We learn that a massive Jurassic landslide exposed fossils and we are taken on a memorable interactive journey through time. The designers have really excelled themselves incorporating period furnishings through to 3D imagery. There are 13 boxes to discover where the children have to answer questions and at the end they receive a gemstone. Harriett (8), Heidi (6) and Henry (3), all avid watchers of TV's Octonauts are instantly drawn to what they call the Octopod where they can see underwater life. There is also a large outside area that runs alongside Seaton Tramway. Here there is plenty of flora and fauna including dreaded



The pebble beach at Beer

horsetail, which we gain a newfound respect for discovering that this stuff that we have resorted to burning in our garden to eradicate, actually existed before dinosaurs.

After a bite to eat we make our way to the beach where we fly our kite. And then it's time to board the tram back to Colyford. We love this form of transport. Sitting on the top deck with the wind blowing our hair we can really appreciate how it works as the cable above us captures the electricity to power it. The backs of the seats can be pushed forward or back so that no matter which direction it travels, passengers sit the right way round. The journey cuts through wetlands beside the River Axe where there is a nature reserve featuring all kinds of birds including curlews and fields where there are cows and sheep grazing and even rabbits.

Crossing the main road we wave to the traffic. Along the way model dinosaurs have been placed beside the track, guaranteeing to keep the attention of younger passengers. It is such a relaxing and enjoyable form of transport, reminding older passengers of how they used to travel in their childhood.

At Beaminster Museum, Brian is a mine of information. His enthusiasm is infectious and helps bring the wonderful exhibits in the museum to life. So much can be learnt about the area from the fascinating axes used for killing mammoths through to smuggling, crime and the hanging of witches. Henry particularly enjoys the naughty burglar that a local WI group created. We also learn about the importance of flax to the area, which is further emphasised by our visit to Bridport Museum. "Locals stake claim to winning the Battle of Trafalgar," smiles Brian, adding that sails made in the area, to exacting Royal Navy specifications, were used on the ships in Nelson's fleet.