

Episode 216. England in Autumn: Lake District, Cotswolds and Devon

With Tracy Collins, Bryony from Mountain Goat Tours, Lisa Benjamin from Go Cotswolds and Alex Graeme from Unique Devon Tours

Part one of a two part autumn special. Three local experts share what autumn really looks like in England's countryside, covering autumn colour in the Lake District, quieter market towns and harvest produce in the Cotswolds, and tree tunnel lanes, moorland wildlife and cider season in Devon.

TRACY

Golden woodlands, quiet villages, dark skies and cosy pubs. Autumn in the UK has a magic all of its own. Thinking about visiting London and the UK this autumn? There are some very good reasons it might be the smartest season to choose.

TRACY

Hi everybody, and welcome to this week's edition of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Following on from our very popular spring and summer episodes, the spring one came out on the 1st of March and the summer one around the 1st of June, telling you what to expect in the UK and London in those seasons, we have decided to once again bring together five local experts from across the country to tell us what autumn really looks like in their part of the UK. This time there was so much to share that we have made it a two part special. So this week we are exploring England's countryside, and we are starting in the Lake District with Bryony from Mountain Goat Tours.

TRACY

Then it is over to the Cotswolds with Lisa from Go Cotswolds, and finally down to beautiful Devon with Alex from Unique Devon Tours. Then next week in part two we are heading all the way up to the far north of Scotland with Sally-Ann from North Coast Explorer Tours, before finishing in London with Charlie and Becky from Walks and Devour Tours, who share where to find the best autumn colour in the capital and why late November may just be London's best kept secret if you love a bit of Christmas sparkle without the December crowds. So if London is on your itinerary, part two has you covered.

TRACY

A couple of practical things worth knowing. If you are planning an autumn trip, September is actually one of the busiest months in many parts of the country. It is a real sweet spot for visitors because the schools have gone back, which means accommodation, especially in smaller towns and villages, can book up well in advance. And once the clocks go back at the end of October, the days do get shorter, so it helps to plan around the daylight and to pack layers and a waterproof, whatever your plans.

TRACY

With this being a two part special, now is the perfect time to hit follow on your favourite podcast app so part two lands in your feed automatically next week. A quick review helps other travellers planning their UK trips find us too, and we appreciate every single one. Okay, let's get into it.

The Lake District with Bryony from Mountain Goat Tours

TRACY

We are starting this week in the north of England, in one of our favourite destinations, the beautiful Lake District, to find out how the lakes and fells change once September arrives. Joining us from the heart of the lakes is Bryony from Mountain Goat Tours. Hi Bryony, it is lovely to welcome you onto the podcast for the first time representing Mountain Goat, because Asia, who has been on the last two episodes, is away on maternity leave at the moment. For anybody who does not know who you are, and who Mountain Goat are, would you like to give us a brief introduction?

BRYONY

Yes. I'm Bryony, and I'm very excited to be here. I've been with Mountain Goat nearly a year now, back in my hometown, so it's lovely to be back and celebrating all the greatness that is the north west of England and the Lake District. Mountain Goat Tours are based in the Lake District, but we also have offices over in York and in Warrington that cover basically all of the north west. We've been doing tours for over 50 years. We run scheduled and private minibuses all across the Lake District and the north west of England, but we can take you wherever you want to go, so we can make that countrywide. We specialise in small group sightseeing tours, typically on 16 seater minibuses with local driver guides.

BRYONY

So you get a real insight into the heritage, the culture, and plenty of amazing views while you're out on your different day trips. And we've got a whole range of trips to take you on for all different interests.

TRACY

Doug and I were lucky enough to do a couple of your tours in June when we were back over. We did the Ten Lakes Tour in the Lake District, which was just fabulous. We had the best weather and it was the best day. We also did, which I was so excited about, the All Creatures Great and Small Tour out of York, which was also brilliant. We loved both of those tours so much. Turning back to the Lake District in autumn, how does the Lake District change once September arrives, and where are the best places to go for the autumn colours?

BRYONY

September is when you really start to notice the Lake District changing. This year the weather has been really dry and quite warm, quite different for us, so everything is a little bit more crispy than we're used to, not quite as green and summery as we'd like it. But September is when the horizon changes, when that green starts to turn a little bit more yellow. You get some really beautiful colours from the trees, the reds, the oranges, the browns. Then as the clocks change you really notice how much it changes across the mountains, in the lighting and in the reflections on the lakes. Everything just looks a little bit more stunning. For me, my perfect day out is a trip to Tarn Hows. It's hard to beat that sight in the autumn, if I'm honest. You've got the woodland all around, the reflections from the water, the fells behind it.

BRYONY

If you're into your photography, this is the place you want to be. That's the kind of picture you're going to put on the wall, not in a photo album. And then you can head out across to the Western Lakes and look at Wastwater. That one's really dramatic. As you head into autumn you get a real mixture of low cloud sitting, the sunlight and the colours. Just beautiful.

TRACY

Wonderful. Is there a sweet spot in the season? How do September, October and November differ, and how should people plan around the changes, because we know we are heading towards shorter days and cooler conditions?

BRYONY

It's probably a cop out to say the sweet spot is bang in the middle, so let's go for October, but I think it's true. September is a really lovely transition month. A lot of the children go back to school in our area around that time, and while you still get quite a lot of hot days, you'd typically get one or two weeks in September that are still quite warm. You can get away with just a light rain jacket and you'll get much more stable weather, but you're still going to get some of that rainfall that makes the area so green and colourful, because unfortunately it's the rain that makes those vivid oranges and yellows pop. You're also starting to get those first hints of autumn.

BRYONY

Then when it comes to October, everything looks more like the autumnal colours you'd be expecting. It's the time when you want to go on our trips and see places like Cartmel, get some warm sticky toffee pudding while you're out for the day, lovely warm custard, and really embrace those cosy vibes. October is where that starts for me, and there's never an exact date. The Lake District can be quite sporadic with its weather, so always pack and be prepared. Solid shoes, a good rain jacket just in case. You'd sometimes see more rain in August than you do in other months. It would surprise you.

BRYONY

So always be prepared. I just think October looks beautiful, and even if the rain bothers you a little, you can hide in one of our amazing pubs or restaurants. There's nothing quite like a trip to the Lake District or to Yorkshire with those cosy pubs, the lit fires and all those warm vibes. And that carries on into November. You might hit your first snow. It's not always guaranteed, but if that's what you're coming to look for you really can get those winter views as you head further up into the lakes where it's a little higher and a little cooler. The atmosphere can really change.

BRYONY

You get the darker nights and the darker mornings, and it compacts your day a little. That's one of the things we do with our tours, we change the timings a little so you can get the most out of your day. We start a little later and we try to fit as much into your day as we can, because we're aware that the light changes. Again, that can be brilliant if you're trying to take photos. It's just something to be a little bit aware of.

TRACY

The Lake District is very famous for walkers and walks. I even did one on this last trip, and I am known as not being a hiker, but I have started to wonder if I might be getting into it, because I thoroughly enjoyed it. If people are heading to the Lake District and planning a walk, where should they go, and is it a time to do something more strenuous, or would you recommend the slower, less steep walks, which would appeal more to me?

BRYONY

I've lived in the Lakes a very long time, and I still think the lower lying walks are where it's at for me. Something where you can go a little bit further but stay a little bit flatter. The Lake District is definitely not flat, so if you're coming from a distance and you're not used to hill walking, there are still plenty of opportunities. There are some great guidebooks. We work with Windermere Tourist Information Centre and there's a brilliant range of guidebooks in there, and the team can advise you on some brilliant walks. I'd certainly say you don't have to climb one of the highest mountains. If you enjoy walking in the Lake District in autumn, the low level walks are probably your best bet, especially at this time of year with the rain and the cold, when it can get a little icy and slippery. Always be prepared, come with good boots, and definitely comfy shoes that you're used to walking in.

BRYONY

You might end up going a little bit further than you think you have, and always bring a good jacket because you never know. In Keswick and a number of other places, is it even a trip to the Lake District if you haven't ended up buying an emergency jacket that you bring back on every trip? Pack for what you think. You aren't coming in July, you're coming in the colder seasons, so be prepared. Bring all the layers, you can always get changed. The low level walks are probably your best at this time of year. You're walking through the woodlands, you can walk beside the lake. Somewhere like Tarn Hows, which is accessible, is a circular walk.

BRYONY

It's only about a mile, a mile and three quarters. Somewhere like the lakeshore with the valley routes, or going around Grasmere, Rydal or Ullswater, you're going to see beautiful sights wherever you go. And if it's not an area you're used to, you don't have to go on one of these big planned walks. You'll find something around every corner. It's a beautiful area. You don't have to be the people trying to climb Scafell Pike or Striding Edge. You don't have to tick off these bucket lists just because you can. I know plenty of people trying to tick off the Wainwrights, and they're beautiful books to read, but you can take inspiration and read those lovely books while cuddled next to a fire in a pub if you want to.

BRYONY

You can experience the Lake District on a little walk around the corner. It doesn't have to be a big, exerting, adventurous holiday. There's plenty to do in the Lakes even at this time of year. Visit Honister and their new zip wire. There's loads you can do to get a bit of adventure. It doesn't have to be climbing a mountain to hit those bucket lists.

TRACY

That really hits with me, because that is exactly how I felt when I was there in June. I'm not a hiker. I think maybe I'm a walker. I did the most wonderful short walk. It took us a couple of hours, and it was perfect. We got up and had the most wonderful view over Windermere. We went from the visitor centre in Windermere beside the train station and walked up to the top of the hill. It was absolutely fantastic. We loved it. So next time I'll certainly look at some of those shorter walks, because the thought of going on a walk and then stopping in a pub, what is better than that?

BRYONY

You'll be a true Lake District person if that's what you've done. It's how the north of England celebrates. You have to reward yourself with a pint or a nice warm hot chocolate afterwards. It's just where it's at.

TRACY

Absolutely, couldn't agree more. Let's talk a little about Mountain Goat and the tours running through the autumn. What is coming up tour wise, how far ahead do people need to think about booking, and what would be the one experience you would say not to miss if you are heading to the Lake District over the next three months?

BRYONY

One of the great things about Mountain Goat is that we don't stop when the summer finishes, we continue with our tours all year round. We have a slightly different catalogue for the summer than we do for the winter, but that's purely down to daylight hours and what's most sensible and what we think guests will enjoy most. Some of our Lake District tours continue all the way through the autumn. These include the Ten Lakes, which runs year round. This is our award winning tour, and you did this while you were on your trip. This is the bucket list tour. It lets you see everything you need to see in the Lake District. When you come back and say you've seen Windermere, you've seen Castlerigg, you've seen all these amazing sights, the Ten Lakes does it all. But if you don't have an eight hour day because of a tight travel schedule, then join us on the Six Lakes.

BRYONY

These are, for different reasons, some of my favourite tours. The Six Lakes combines a lot of the highlights of the Ten Lakes but squeezes it into half a day to work around your schedule. It's perfect when it's a darker or gloomier day, because you fit it into those daylight hours. With the Ten Lakes you're still going to see everything and get the brilliant sights, but depending on how your travel schedule works, these are brilliant highlights to say you've done the bucket list options you wanted to see. My other personal favourite tour is our Mountain Passes tour. That one ends at the end of September, purely because even though we have expert drivers with amazing local knowledge, we take you all the way over the mountain passes and those high roads, and sometimes we just can't trust it during the winter with the ice and the weather. So we end that tour at the end of September, and for that reason, if you're coming in September, that's the one to do.

BRYONY

This is also an award winning tour. We've just won an award for it as Experience of the Year, which we're very excited about, so I recommend it to anybody I can. You get to experience the wonder that is Muncaster Castle, which has amazing bird demonstrations, a weapons hall, a lovely house you can walk around, and beautiful gardens where, even as we turn into autumn, you get to see all these different flowers and greenery. It's not always about the spring and summer flowers in a place where a garden is really managed and looked after. You see these beautiful changes, and that's another highlight for me of going to Muncaster at this time of year. You can do the Ten Lakes any time of year, and I know a number of guests who have come on it in practically every month of the year because they love to see how the seasons change across the Lake District.

BRYONY

You're never going to miss out on a beautiful opportunity like these. We always recommend booking as far in advance as you can. We do sometimes have space last minute, but the world is a changing place. So we say if there's more than a couple of you, book as far in advance as you can. If you book direct we've got flexibility and we can help you out with your bookings. If you're choosing the latest experience in the autumn, get through to the national parks. You can see some amazing places.

BRYONY

Tarn Hows, Grasmere, Ullswater. These are the places at the top of my list. Also, if you've got the opportunity, especially when it's a little bit misty, and personally I like it later on in the season, get yourself on a boat trip. That's included in some of our tours, like our Beatrix Potter tour. Get on the boat and go and see the lake. It's a brilliant way to save your legs if you've been on a walk the day before, and you get to see so much of the area in such a beautiful way. You can have a little picnic while you're at it. Perfect experience.

TRACY

That sounds absolutely lovely, Bryony. I cannot wait to do more Mountain Goat tours. We thoroughly enjoyed both the tours we were on, so highly recommend, if you are listening and heading towards the Lake District, the north west or York, get yourself booked on a Mountain Goat tour, because you are going to love it. I will be speaking to you again in a few months, Bryony, because we are going to be covering the winter season in the Lake District. But for this episode, thank you so much for coming on the podcast.

BRYONY

No problem, lovely to be here.

The Cotswolds with Lisa from Go Cotswolds

TRACY

From the lakes and fells we are heading south now to the golden stone villages of the Cotswolds, and a welcome return for our favourite Cotswolds expert, Lisa from Go Cotswolds, who shares their favourite spots for autumn colour, the farm shops full of harvest produce, and a first peek at their Christmas market tours. Lisa, what do the Cotswolds feel like once the summer coaches thin out, and which villages and experiences should be on anyone's autumn list?

LISA

The first thing to say about the Cotswolds in autumn is that it's much less busy than it is in the summer. I think that's a given. The peak season in the Cotswolds is typically between May and September. After that the crowds dissipate a little. The summer holiday people disappear off back home, and it starts to feel again a little more like a place where people actually live, not just a Disneyland attraction. I say that with a pinch of salt, because not everywhere in the Cotswolds is like Disneyland all the time, even in the summer. I've mentioned before that there are certain honeypot villages that are always busy. But the Cotswolds in general as a region definitely feels a lot calmer, quieter and more authentic outside of the busy peak season.

TRACY

Which villages would you encourage people to experience in the autumn particularly? Have you got favourites?

LISA

Oh yes, I've lots of favourites. My favourite changes all the time. I think my favourites in autumn would be the market towns. Autumn feels like a better time to go shopping. Not that you can't enjoy the countryside of the Cotswolds in autumn, you absolutely can, but it's a nice time to wander the shops, look at the markets and have a cosy lunch in a nice cafe with a roaring fire if it's cold. That definitely feels like a good thing to do in the autumn.

TRACY

You know how much I absolutely love the gardens in the Cotswolds. They are at their peak in the summer, we know that, but what is worth seeing in the autumn instead? And is there a best window for autumn colour in the Cotswolds?

LISA

It definitely changes depending on how good or bad the summer has been. If we've had a very hot summer, or a cold summer, then the autumn colours can be a bit variable. But generally speaking I'd say the best colours are around October, even towards the end of October and early November. Gardens in the Cotswolds are not just a summer destination. Lots of people think you can only visit gardens in the summer, but some of the brilliant ones in the Cotswolds, Hidcote, my absolute favourite, and Batsford Arboretum, are designed and planted to give colour and interest all year round. One of my favourites in autumn particularly is Batsford Arboretum. There's also Westonbirt Arboretum, a little further south.

LISA

I took my daughter to Batsford Arboretum when she was very tiny, so we have loads of absolutely beautiful photographs of this cute little baby sitting amongst lovely colourful autumn leaves and being very cute. So it's definitely a lovely time of year to visit.

TRACY

It is also the time for harvest and farm shops. Not that you cannot go to farm shops any time of year, but in autumn it is the perfect time. Tell us a little about what is going on with the local food and pubs. Are there any autumn events or festivals that visitors should know about?

LISA

Food wise, harvest is happening now. We're recording this in August, so harvest is happening now, and we know that because our tour vehicles keep getting stuck behind combine harvesters on narrow country lanes. By the time the harvest is done the shops are absolutely full of local produce, and it's absolutely wonderful. There are lots of lovely farm shops you can go to. There's obviously the famous one from Clarkson's Farm, Diddly Squat Farm Shop. It's not my favourite, even though we do a tour that goes there. There are other, more authentic farm shops out there.

TRACY

It is also quite small. I was a bit surprised.

LISA

Yes, it's really tiny, and even in the winter or autumn you get queues that are miles long. So there are definitely better, more authentic farm shops to go to, but obviously if you want to tick off that box and go to Clarkson's farm shop, that's all good. Some of the others include Daylesford Organic Farm Shop, which is very expensive, but it is lovely. And it's more than a farm shop, it's a whole experience. There are all sorts of different shops, concessions and restaurants there, so that is lovely. There's another one, I've forgotten the name of it now, just called the Cotswold Farm Shop I think, on the way to Moreton-in-Marsh. That's a lovely one as well. Lots of local produce, and that's really nice. In terms of festivals, continuing on a farming theme, in September there's the Moreton Show, which is a big agricultural show that's fun to go to. You can go and see all sorts of different sized vegetables and all the different kinds of livestock that we keep.

LISA

There are agricultural events and activities you can get involved with. That's a really nice day out, especially for families.

TRACY

What about Guy Fawkes and Bonfire Night? Is there anything big for the 5th of November?

LISA

Blenheim Palace, I believe, always has a massive firework display that is probably the biggest one in the region. There are lots of local firework displays as well, which I think are sometimes even better. They're certainly less expensive and they feel really nice, with a community feel. I tend to go to one that's quite local to me, just on the edge of the Cotswolds. Pretty much every village, or sometimes the pubs, will do their own little firework displays. A lot of places now combine bonfire night, which is the 5th of November, with Halloween on the 31st of October.

LISA

So that whole week from the 31st of October to the 5th of November, and maybe a few days either side, there will be firework displays somewhere near you in the Cotswolds.

TRACY

What about walking in the Cotswolds in autumn? Is the Cotswold Way still a good idea in October and November, and what should people know to prepare for the conditions?

LISA

Yes, absolutely. Any time of year is great as long as you're prepared. There's that great Scandinavian proverb, there's no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong kind of clothing. Obviously the closer we get to winter, it gets darker earlier, and it gets wetter and colder, so you have to be prepared for that. Trails can get a bit muddy, but equally we can have some absolutely glorious autumn days where it's cool, crisp, bright sunshine and absolutely lovely. So it really depends. Walking is good at any time of year in the Cotswolds, but you do have to check the weather forecast before you go.

TRACY

What are your favourite tours that people are booking over the autumn period? And I should have asked, are you going to be doing those Bath tours again where you go down to the Christmas market? Myself and my mum did that and loved it.

LISA

Just looking at the booking data that's come through in the last few weeks, our tours which depart from Oxford, which you've also been on, are doing really well. Like I said earlier, I think visiting towns and market towns feels like a bit more of an autumnal thing to do. So there are lots of people visiting Oxford during the autumn and then wanting to take a little trip out into the Cotswolds as well. Our new Oxford departure tours are doing very well for September, October and into November. And yes, we are doing our Christmas tours again this year. I'm very excited, even though I can't go on one.

TRACY

I am so excited.

LISA

I forget the actual dates now, but from around the middle of November through to the middle of December there's a huge Christmas market in Bath, which is absolutely fantastic. It's very busy, but it's one of the best in England, certainly outside of London. So our Bath and Southern Cotswolds tour will be visiting Bath for the duration of that Christmas market, which is a nice little bonus when you take that tour with us. We also have a few select local Christmas market tours on a handful of weekend dates towards the end of November and the beginning of December. We'll be visiting Chipping Campden Christmas market, which I think is lovely, and Cirencester has some great Christmas markets too.

TRACY

Doug and I did do one of your tours out of Oxford, and we will be writing that up for the website. So if you are interested to find out what Doug and I did on the Go Cotswolds day, we will be sharing that very soon. What would be your one top tip for anybody thinking about visiting the Cotswolds in autumn?

LISA

I would recommend, as I always do, book your accommodation. Even in September and October, in terms of summer holidays it's not the most popular time for people to visit the UK, but it seems to be a very popular time for people to visit the Cotswolds, particularly because of the autumn colours and the fact that it's quieter than in the cities. So accommodation in September particularly gets booked up well in advance, so definitely sort that out in advance. And obviously take a Go Cotswolds tour to make the most of your time.

TRACY

Absolutely, 100%. Thanks so much, Lisa, for coming on and chatting all about the Cotswolds in autumn. You will be back in December to talk about the winter months in the Cotswolds, which is also a fantastic time to go. A few years ago I rented a cottage just outside Burford in January, and it was just wonderful. What you did not mention earlier when we were talking about pubs is just how wonderful it is in the Cotswolds going into November and December, going out for a walk and then going into a pub and sitting around a fire. You cannot beat it, can you?

LISA

Absolutely magical. We have some great pubs with great atmospheres, lovely roaring fires, hearty food. I'm definitely an autumn kind of girl.

TRACY

Thanks so much, Lisa, for coming on again.

LISA

Thank you.

Devon with Alex from Unique Devon Tours

TRACY

From the Cotswolds we are continuing south west to Devon, a county with two coastlines, wild moorland and some seriously good cider. Alex from Unique Devon Tours is back to tell us what changes when autumn arrives, from tree tunnels ablaze with colour to the apple harvest. Hi Alex, lovely to chat to you again on the podcast. This episode we are talking about autumn in Devon, which is a time of year I have not been down in Devon, so it will be great to get the insider information. Would you like to tell us a little about what changes when autumn arrives in Devon, and what the highlights are for someone visiting for the first time across September, October and November?

ALEX

Good morning, Tracy. Thank you very much for having me on the podcast again, it's a pleasure to be here talking to you and your listeners. Devon is always a bit different from year to year. It's hard to know what kind of autumn we're going to have this year, having had our longest, hottest summer on record, so we'll have to wait and see. But typical changes are that it gets a bit cooler, and the autumn colours start to kick in, normally October going into November. The evenings get shorter. There's a very strong differentiation between summer and autumn as we go through those months.

ALEX

September can sometimes have long, hot summer days, the Indian summer as we sometimes call it. It can carry on going. But then we start to think of lighting fires, putting the heating on, going for crisp autumnal walks and seeing the leaves change on the trees. It's a beautiful time of year as a photographer as well as a tour guide. I love going out with my camera, finding particularly the beech woods where you get these beautiful coppers, oranges, reds and yellows on the leaves. And in Devon we have these wonderful narrow roads that we call the Devon lanes, and we have tree tunnels that go over the top of these lanes. Sometimes you're driving down one and you've got these incredible colours over your head.

ALEX

If you get the right sunlight coming through the leaves it can make for some spectacular sights. And nature does its thing with mushrooms and toadstools, so it's a great time of year to go out and spot these beautiful, differently shaped and coloured things growing out of the ground. You can even go foraging, which is something you can do with a professional just to keep yourself safe. Some of nature becomes a bit more active too, especially after a hot summer. I think the bird life will really enjoy it when the temperatures drop.

ALEX

And we have more rain. So it's a great time of year to go into the woods. There's a woodland near here called Yarner Wood, and they have at least two, maybe three bird hides, and you can go and watch the birds feeding, which is something I like to do with my camera as well. It's a nice time of year, especially after a hot summer. It almost feels like this year it's going to be a relief that the temperatures have dropped back to more typical levels. I'm looking outside now and it's just overcast. After so many hot days the ground has gone brown, everything's gone brown, and it's going to be a relief whenever the green returns.

TRACY

It has been incredibly hot and very dry this summer, hasn't it, and it feels like quite a long summer. I was there in June and May and June were both incredibly warm and dry for the UK. Talking about animals, and thinking about Dartmoor and Exmoor, what changes on the moors and what can you see with the animals there?

ALEX

In 13 years of being a tour guide, I'd say there was only one occasion when I took guests up to Dartmoor and we didn't see the wild Dartmoor ponies, and that was simply because the fog had come down. It was the thickest fog I've ever seen on Dartmoor. After about an hour my guests and I just looked at each other and said, we can't see anything. I was having to drive at about 20 miles an hour at the most because it was that thick. We didn't see any ponies, but it was impossible to see anything at all. Otherwise you can pretty much guarantee you'll see the ponies if you drive around, particularly with a tour guide. There are thankfully enough of the wild ponies that you'll see them. And you tend to see lots of the sheep and the cows. They're still out on the moors.

ALEX

On the high ground their coats are starting to thicken up a little, getting into the colder months, but they're still very active. And you can see the young. The foals are no longer weeks old, they're a bit more sturdy, and their bodies have adapted to their long willowy legs, so they don't look quite as funny as they do when they're first born. You'll see plenty of nature as you drive around Dartmoor and Exmoor.

TRACY

It is always a lovely sight to see the animals when you are out and about. Pivoting a little to food, and thinking about harvest time, cider, and other food and drink you might get in Devon, and vineyards as well, because I believe there is more wine available from the vineyards in England now. What would be the best food and drink to be looking for over the autumn period?

ALEX

We have such an incredible array of restaurants, pubs, inns and cafes now that are really focusing on local produce and making sure it's all seasonal and locally sourced. If you want the best overview of what's on offer, and I do this with my guests quite often, I'll take them to a local market. For instance, the lovely town of Totnes, a very interesting and independent town, has a wonderful market on Fridays and Saturdays where you can see some of the local produce. We also have, not far from Exeter, which is our county capital, a fabulous farm shop called Darts Farm.

ALEX

I think it's the current number one farm shop in the UK. At Darts Farm the display of local produce, all seasonal, is exceptional. I take guests there quite often, particularly if they've expressed an interest in food. So going to see what's on offer there can be really interesting for people. It's hard to pick out a particular restaurant or pub that I take my guests to, because I take them there deliberately, so that apart from making sure I get a really nice meal, my guests do too. That's where they get to experience the local produce. And we're thinking of things like the apple orchards. There's a village on the edge of Dartmoor called Lustleigh, actually within Dartmoor.

ALEX

At Lustleigh they have a community orchard, an apple orchard that was gifted to the community by a couple of people in 1966. You can't pick the apples from this orchard, and there's also mistletoe growing within the apple trees. You can't pick the apples until a given day when the go ahead is given. The community gathers at the orchard and they pick this beautiful harvest of apples. And then the apples go towards making cider, of course. We have a wonderful cider industry here.

TRACY

I have to ask, Alex, because you mentioned them going and collecting. Does everybody get a share in the cider that comes out of all this apple picking?

ALEX

I'm not sure about that, actually, but I think they'd probably be a little bit aggrieved if they didn't. There is a local cider maker here, and if you collect apples from your own private orchard and take them to the cider maker, they will make a batch of cider from your apples and you will get some of it in return. So it's a win win situation. Normally there are often, not every year, but often, a glut of apples. It's hard to tell what this year will be like after the summer. We could probably do with a bit more rain to help the apples fill out. But yes, we do enjoy our cider here, definitely.

ALEX

And then the vineyards. We have some exceptional vineyards here, and I know the UK isn't famous for its vineyards, but I've been told there are over 1,000 vineyards in the UK. The climate seems to be changing, so our wine is improving, and we have some truly exceptional wine, particularly white wines, sparkling whites and rosés. That's something I'll very gladly help my guests with, taking them to a superb vineyard. There's one vineyard I sometimes take guests to, and my guests tell me, even having travelled to California, South Africa and the Champagne region, that this vineyard experience is as good as it gets. The whole experience, the tour, the quality of the wine, the quality of the food, the knowledge of the people giving the tour, it's truly exceptional. I feel very lucky as a tour guide to have these incredible things on my doorstep.

TRACY

The UK is definitely holding its own when it comes to wines, from what I have been hearing about, reading about and watching on TV. I was watching a programme the other day, and I think it might have been down in Devon, saying that wine production in England is still only half a percent of what is drunk in the UK, but it is increasing and becoming more recognised. That is one of the side effects of climate change, that it is warmer, so grapes can grow in the southern part of England quite well. Thinking about after the busyness of summer, when the children go back to school in September and things quieten down into October and November, what changes in the region? Are there changing opening hours? Do things close over that period, and what do your tours look like over these months?

ALEX

For me as a tour guide, September is certainly one of my busiest months, being what we call the shoulder season, going into October as well. A lot of people coming to the UK, particularly the sorts of guests I have, are travelling, maybe retired folk, and they recognise that they want to be here when it's a little quieter, when our schools have gone back. So September is an ideal month. I'm really busy in September and going into October. It's a very productive period. It starts to quieten down going into October, and then November gets much quieter. That's when I start to think about hibernating or travelling somewhere like Italy or Peru, as I do. But not that much changes in terms of what's on offer for guests.

ALEX

Museums, galleries and attractions stay open pretty much through September going into October. Then maybe in November they'll reduce their hours. Some visitor centres might cut back an hour off the end of the day, so instead of closing at 5 o'clock they might close at 4. But to be honest, we have a very long season, because people don't come here for the weather, although that might be changing. So you can pretty much, I'd say in October, go to all the places you might go to in June or July, because they stay open. Coming into December, that's another conversation. December and January change in a more pronounced manner. But the pubs, the cafes, the restaurants, the opportunities are out there to carry on as before.

TRACY

You were cheating a bit there, Alex, because we are going to talk about winter in Devon in the next podcast we do, which will be out on the 1st of December. We usually do it for the first of the month for the change in the season. But for anybody listening who is thinking they really fancy going to Devon and experiencing autumn, what would be the one experience you would say not to miss over that period of the year?

ALEX

It's always hard to pick out one thing. You know that, Tracy.

TRACY

I know, I am very cruel.

ALEX

If you can, to witness the autumn colours is a really special thing to do. You won't witness them if you're here on the 12th of September, because they haven't kicked in by then. But during October and November they really flourish. So to go for a riverside walk somewhere on the edge of Dartmoor where you've got these autumn colours. There's a place, for instance, Fingle Bridge. It's a long walk from Chagford to Fingle Bridge, and you can do a nice loop so you get to see different aspects of where you are. At one stage you're within the woods, with the river alongside you and these oranges and golds overhead.

ALEX

Then another part of the walk, you're way up above the canopy looking down onto this valley of spectacular colours. That can be a beautiful thing to do. But it would be wrong of me not to also say that you should certainly include a really nice pub or a tea room during any walk. Particularly if you've had a brisk day, it's a bit cooler and the wind's whistling, to find yourself in a lovely pub with the fire roaring and a nice pint of cider, it can't get much better than that.

TRACY

That does absolutely sound amazing, Alex. Thanks so much for coming on and chatting about autumn in Devon. As I say, you will be on later in the year to talk about what it is like in winter, because we always get so many questions about what it is like in various parts of the UK over the different seasons. It is really good to share that experience and knowledge, because that is where you live. So thanks again so much for coming on, and I will speak to you soon.

ALEX

Thank you, Tracy. Thank you very much.

Closing

TRACY

That brings part one of our autumn special to a close. Thanks so much to Bryony from Mountain Goat Tours, Lisa from Go Cotswolds, and of course Alex from Unique Devon Tours. From golden reflections at Tarn Hows, to market towns and roaring fires in the Cotswolds, and tree tunnels and cider in Devon, England's countryside really does put on a show in autumn.

TRACY

And we are not done yet. Next week is part two, and we will be heading to the far north of Scotland with Sally-Ann from North Coast Explorer Tours to talk rainbows, dark skies, the deer rut and your chances of actually seeing the Northern Lights. Then it is down to London with Charlie and Becky from Walks and Devour Tours, including the tours that really come into their own in the cooler months, and when the Christmas lights actually switch on. So if you are not already following the podcast, that is the easiest way to catch it. Make sure that you subscribe.

TRACY

I will link to each of this week's guests' websites in the show notes at uktravelplanning.com/episode216. Remember, we also have a 10% promo code for Mountain Goat and a discount code for Go Cotswolds, so do head over to the show notes to get those codes. If autumn is in your plans, we would love to hear where you are heading, so do send us a message via SpeakPipe. You will find the link in the show notes. But as always, that just leaves me to say, until next week, happy UK travel planning.

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