



Weekend away

WALKING BETWEEN THE FISHING VILLAGES OF EAST NEUK IN FIFE DELIVERS PRETTINESS APLENTY, AND HEAPS OF DELICIOUS FOOD

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Neuk is an old Scottish word for ‘corner’ – an appropriate name for East Neuk, which feels like a nook, tucked away from the hurly-burly, bypassed by time. The Fife Coastal Path links its fishing villages, the stone harbours, pantiled, whitewashed cottages and Dutch-style merchant’s houses of which many remain steadfastly unspoilt.

Between them lie rocky coves and stretches of Blue Flag-awarded, butterscotch-coloured beaches. It all feels very painterly – and sure enough, its villages are home to a smattering of artists. There’s also a growing band of food producers supplying all manner of tasty goods, many of which ended up in our picnic basket. All the ingredients necessary, then, for a few days walking, eating, and seaside mooching.



Where we stayed

Falling asleep and waking up to the sound of waves lapping ashore is what you always hope for from a coastal break. The Ship Inn in Elie has two rooms that look over the Blue Flag beach, where it is possible to listen to the sea rolling in and rolling out, and watch cricket matches played on the sand from May to September (the pub has its own cricket team). Our room was decorated in limpid ocean colours and was a calm place to return to and flop as gulls squawked outside. The bar is popular with both guests and locals, as is the restaurant upstairs, which dishes up Scottish sourced meat and local shellfish. A hearty bowl of Cullen skink and a plate of fresh, flaky hake, fresh from the sea, served with asparagus and new potatoes, hit the spot after a long day strolling the coastal path.



What we did

This stretch of the Fife Coastal Path is among the least daunting of seaside walks. We comfortably sauntered from The Ship Inn at Elie to St Monans, with its 14th-century church and graveyard looking poignantly out to the sea where many local people perished. The path continues on to the other villages, each with its own particular charm. Pittenweem is that rare thing – a fishing village with a working harbour; we stopped for excellent mochachinos made with dark chocolate at Cocoa Tree Café. A rainy walk to Anstruther drove us into the Scottish Fisheries Museum. Crockery lust was satisfied at Crail Pottery, further up the coast, where we bought two cereal bowls fresh from the potter's kiln, while seafood cravings were satisfied with lobster rolls bought from The Lobster Hut on Crail harbour and eaten on the pier.



What we ate

East Neuk is fast becoming a serious foodie destination. The Ardross Farm Shop, a short walk from the Ship Inn, has shelves of fruit and vegetables, as well as fridges full of locally reared meat. At nearby Mill House, chef Chris Jacobs dished up sourdough pizzas with surprising toppings (pickled artichoke, golden beetroot, anchovies, rocket and parmesan,

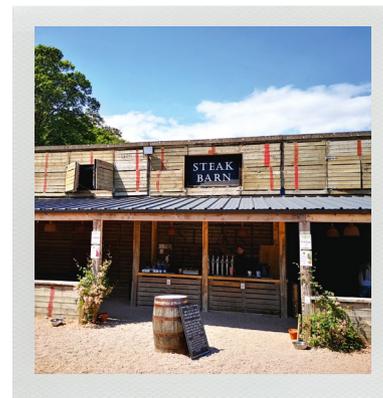
was my choice) fresh from his wood-fired oven.

Mill House is part of Bowhouse, a food hub in converted farm buildings that connects local food producers with customers and each other. We sunk a swift half at the East Neuk Organic Brewery, and left with bags bulging with rolls from Scotland The Bread, langoustine from Langoustine The Box, and a bunch of flowers from Keeping The Plot.



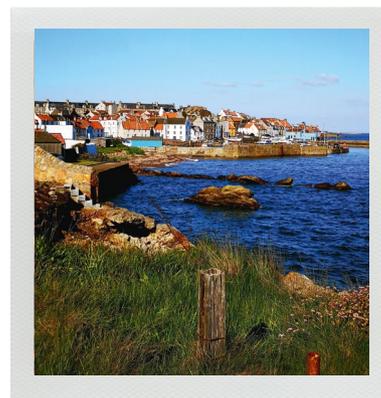
We also liked

St Andrews may be best known for golf and for its university's royal alumni but, with its handsome wide streets, elegant Georgian town houses and two white sand beaches, it is also a most civilised city in which to while away a few hours. We drove there and wandered down South Street to Jannetta's Gelateria for a Fife Strawberry ice-cream (Irn Bru flavour is also available), and to cheese shop I.J. Mellis to buy a chunk of local Anster cheese, before exploring the city's curious Gothic alleyways. On the outskirts of the city is Balgove Larder Farm Shop, packed with tempting local produce: we headed to its Steak Barn, and tucked into a filling steak-and-chips lunch in a building constructed from old potato crates, as soul music played soothingly on its sound system.



The best thing

Finding one pretty village, then another, all strung out along the coastal path and within easy walking distance of each other. Unlike other seaside areas in the UK, the villages are largely inhabited by locals, not devoted exclusively to holiday accommodation. People greeted each other cheerily as they nipped in and out of shops. In Crail, washing was pegged out in front gardens, and in Pittenweem, lobster pots stacked up on the harbour had just been emptied and weren't just there for display. It felt like a real place, and a real find.



Double rooms at The Ship Inn start at £125 a night, bed and breakfast; shipinn.scot.