

getaway



Making the most of your time off

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FALMOUTH is a 'pearl' of a location, says **SARAH HAMILTON**, when she visited its Oyster Festival

Is it really October? We're in Falmouth and I've had to remove yet another layer – and is that someone in shorts over there? This area of Cornwall has a unique climate, which today is beaming sun-rays, glittering the boat-teeming harbour.

This weekend, bustling Falmouth is hosting its annual free Oyster Festival, now in its 16th year, where the shucking is vigorous and cuisine varied.

We make our way through the small town centre to an Events Square of huge marquees. We enter a corner and the aroma of fresh cooked food hits us like the humidity on an exotic holiday. The tent includes paella making sizzling somersaults in pans, homemade pies, Champagne (glasses at £8 a pop), a main stage with cooking demonstrations and oysters, oysters being guzzled.

Next door you can buy delicious Cornish cheddar and other cheesy treats – I buy smoked goats cheddar – various antipasti, pillowy cakes and multifarious brownies. Outside are freestanding stalls offering everything from doughnuts to venison burgers. We opt for something a bit more adventurous – I have a buffalo burger while Husband has zebra.

We chomp while looking out onto the harbour – small fishing boats bob in the shadow of huge container ships. I wish I'd brought my sketch pad. The festival also showcases local crafts and another tent offers woodcrafts, jewellery, needlecraft and plants.

The weekend also includes a working boat race, sea shanty lunch, celebrity guests like Monty Halls and live music. After a quick chat with former Tilehurst and Reading School lad Nigel Carpenter, owner of the famous St Michael's Hotel and Spa which is the event's main sponsor, we explore the town centre.

If a festival wasn't on here, the Events Square holds a few restaurants, including Rick Stein's, shops and bars – but nothing to



FEAST FOR FOODIES – AND THE EYES: Falmouth Oyster Festival offers adventurous tastes as well as plenty of oysters – while the picturesque setting makes it a charming destination at any time of year



Clotted cream with your zebra burger?

write home about. However, the Maritime Museum is located here and is worth a visit.

The town centre is cutely small and winding and has the regular High Street basics like Boots and WHSmith, but there are also some fun vintage clothes shops, antique outlets stacked with curios and little gift shops dotted about. If we had more time, seeing the area from the water is a great thing to do – boat tickets can be bought at

the pier. As a small shower descended we made our way back to the Greenbank Hotel, which incidentally is about a 20 minute walk from the train station (and the station is a five minute walk from the Events Square in the opposite direction). The hotel mixes tradition with contemporary design. It has some elegant old fashioned features, but rooms are chic and cosy, plenty of posh blankets and puffy pillows. It was

also where author Kenneth Grahame penned stories in letters to his son, which inspired *Wind in the Willows*.

We had a super dinner at the hotel; classic dishes expertly cooked. I had the sushi plate to start, with Cornish native oyster, kohirabi, wasabi and shoyu dip (£8.50) while Husband had tian of Cornish crab, pickled rock samphire and Bloody Mary shot (£9.25). For mains I had the roast

rump of lamb in a blackberry jus (£19.95) while my guest had grilled Cornish sardines, saffron potatoes and balsamic duck egg (£18.25). The puddings were exciting with things like seabuckthorn sorbet, amaretto espresso milkshake and rosewater yoghurt but I went for the 'caramel' package which was dulce du leche tart, sticky toffee pudding, peanut brittle and salty peanut ice cream (£6.75), all divine except the pud could have been a bit moister. Husband galumphed a slate of West Country cheeses. The whole menu reminded me of something the judges get on Great British Menu. And it was a treat to have such locally sourced produce, topped off with charming staff.

The next day, breakfast was served looking out on to the lower harbour and the rolling hills.

Coastal holidays are always a magical experience and Falmouth perfect for a gentle weekend.



Fact File

- Sarah stayed at the Greenbank Hotel, Harbourside Falmouth, Cornwall, TR11 2SR. Visit www.greenbank-hotel.co.uk.
- She travelled with First Great Western trains. Reading to Falmouth requires a change at Truro. Visit www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk.
- For more about Falmouth visit www.falmouth.co.uk and for Christmas events see <http://searches.falmouth.co.uk/home/events/a-falmouth-christmas-p1289003>.