

Stockham Farm:

A Rural Enterprise Exmoor business case study



Stockham Farm is nestled in the hills above the pretty moorland town of Dulverton, overlooking the River Exe Valley. They offer award-winning luxury self-catering accommodation in two unique period cottages sporting glorious views.

Stockham Farm was established just two years ago and is family owned and run.

The farm is located just outside the pretty market town of Dulverton, with its excellent independent shops and pubs. Guests are encouraged to shop and dine locally, and to explore all corners of Exmoor taking in the full experience.

Advocates of supporting local communities, Stockham offer a welcome pack to guests which currently includes delicious home-baked scones from Esme The Baker and Exmoor jam from The Selworthy Pantry. They are Gold members of Visit Exmoor and accredited as an Exmoor DarkSkies Friendly Business.

The Victorian Wing cottage and The Piggery (sleeping 4 and 6 respectively) offer every possible convenience and have their own private gardens for guests to fully relax and enjoy.

Not only do Stockham welcome dogs, they have fantastic stabling facilities ensuring horse owners are able to bring their noble steeds and enjoy the vast beauty of Exmoor on horseback.

Benefits and challenges of working on Exmoor

Benefits

“Exmoor is a wonderful place to live and work, with glorious unspoilt countryside, a very supportive local and business community and excellent pubs and eateries – all of which helps simplify the job of marketing our self-catering accommodation; using images of Exmoor and describing the guaranteed tranquillity, the breadth of choice of things to do and the warm reception that guests will receive in our local towns, villages, pubs etc.”

Challenges

“Being in such a remote area it has been very challenging and expensive to install future-proof essentials such as excellent reliable WiFi; metred electric car trickle-charging points; USB points in most rooms; solar power etc.”

We have discovered our own USP at Stockham Farm, which is that guests can bring their own horses on holiday here – with the horses guaranteed 5 star accommodation too! This has been challenging with guests facing the steep and narrow access lanes of Exmoor, but we have overcome those negative elements by promoting additional features such as new fencing, warm horse washing facilities etc and by becoming accredited by the British Horse Society as a ‘Horses Welcome’ destination.”

Aspirations and advice

Aspirations

“Over the next 3-5 years we plan to continue as we are, moving hopefully to 90% occupancy in both cottages throughout the year (leaving 10% for maintenance). With this in mind, we would definitely be looking to recruit local staff to assist with cleaning & maintenance.”

“Entering awards competitions and seeking tourism accreditations are both time-consuming but worthwhile to keep your business top of mind with the local tourism industry, the community and repeat/potential guests, so we’ll be doing that too”

“We will also concentrate on continually updating our website and social media to keep it fresh and prominent on search engines – an absolute essential for a rural family-run enterprise.”

Advice

“I would probably advise anyone setting up a business locally that they should be aware that nothing happens quickly on Exmoor. Learn to be patient with providers and make sure you embrace the community, don’t try to change how it operates.

I’d also say that if you’re considering a tourism business, be aware that not everyone in the UK has heard of Exmoor and certainly if your business is in Somerset (rather than Devon), and if it is rural (rather than coastal), you will have to work hard to ‘sell’ this part of the country to the potential visitor.

UK-inbound tourists also tend to gravitate directly towards Devon and Cornwall. The lack of accessibility to Exmoor (no big roads, no railways) is clearly part of its charm and keeps it unspoilt and fabulous, but if you’re setting up a new business be aware that success and high visitor numbers will not come overnight.”

