

the riviera line

Sit back and enjoy the view: the railway line from Paignton to Exeter is one of the most dramatic journeys in Britain.

1: Paignton station

Paignton Station is the start of our journey. It is now the end of the Riviera Line, but until 1972 trains travelled south to Kingswear (for Dartmouth). This part of the line is now operated by steam trains for tourists. On the main line the train passes through (2) Torquay and (3) Torre stations before travelling out of Torbay.

4: Newton Abbot station

Newton Abbot is a junction where you can take trains south either towards Paignton or towards Penzance, in Cornwall. The large station was badly damaged in the Second World War, possibly by bombers who mistook it for Exeter.

5: Tuckers Maltings

The long building next to the railway line is one of only a handful of floor Maltings that produces malt from barley grains in the traditional way. Malt is used in the brewing of beer, and the Maltings will hold a Beer Festival on 12th 13th & 14th April .

6: Newton Abbot Race Course

An important venue for racing horses. Many national races are held here throughout the year.

7: The Teign Estuary

The railway line emerges from the fields into the calm waters of the Teign

Estuary, a wide, tidal water where the river Teign enters the sea. At low tide you will often see people with buckets digging on the beach, and lots of straight lines of stones. This is because the bottom of the estuary is a great place to find cockles and mussels, tasty shellfish that earn a high price in our restaurants. The stones are put on the estuary bed to make places where the sea birds can't eat the shellfish before the collectors can find them!

8: The Amazingly Tuneful Teignmouth and Shaldon Bridge

As the train approaches Teignmouth you can see the 600m (660yds) bridge that connects Teignmouth on our side of the river with Shaldon on the other side. This was 'improved' a few years ago, but locals now complain that the bridge whistles or sings when the wind is blowing fast!

9: Teignmouth

The railway runs right through Teignmouth, which is a small seaside town. Just after the station the line joins the seafront, right next to the English Channel. If you look south you can see Teignmouth Pier sticking out into the sea, which has been voted the best pier in the country.

10: A stroll along the prom

Now the line gets really dramatic! The railway runs alongside the promenade,

and lots of people enjoy walking along here to enjoy the sea air.

11: Red Cliffs

On the landward side you can see the huge cliffs towering above the train. The cliffs are a bright red, and made of iron-rich sandstone. The stone is easily washed away by the rain and the sea, and the cliffs often collapse after bad weather. Major engineering work has been carried out in the last few years to try to stop the line being blocked by falling rocks, including the wire fences and nets on the cliff.

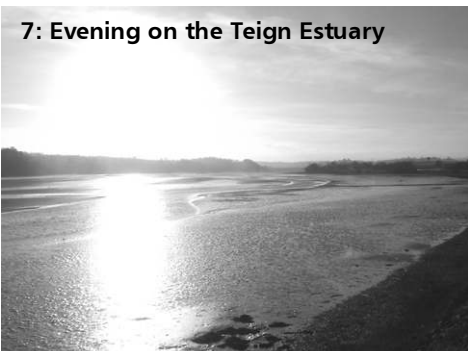
Bring an umbrella...

The line runs right alongside the English Channel. There is nothing now between the train and France. If the tide is high and there are strong winds, the waves will crash over the line and hit the windows of the train. In the early days of the railway the carriages were not very waterproof, and ladies used to stand on the seats to keep their feet dry. In 2000 Virgin's new trains had to be taken off this line in bad weather, because the waves and spray caused the trains to break down.

12: Parson's Tunnel and Shag Rock

Sticking out of the sea next to the cliff is the Shag Rock. Until recently the rock was an excellent example of a sea stack, but now it's only a stump. The train plunges into the longest tunnel

7: Evening on the Teign Estuary



7: Mussels in the Teign Estuary



10: Walkers by the railway



18: Murals at Exeter St David's



16: Powderham Castle

on the journey. This is called the Parson tunnel, after the rock formation at the other end, the Parson & Clerk rocks, named after characters trapped on the rocks by the Devil, according to local legend.

Tunnels & Coves

Along this stretch of the line the railway rushes in and out of the cliffs. Between the five tunnels you will get sudden, brief glimpses of sandy beaches. Above the railway is the Smugglers Inn, and these coves would have been ideal places to land illegal goods in years gone by.

13: A railside resort

Dawlish is a small resort, which is famous for its pretty gardens and black swans. Unfortunately the town's view of the sea is spoiled by speeding trains. When the railway was built it was such a novelty that it must have seemed a real crowd-puller for the town: lots of towns have beaches, but Dawlish was the only one to have Brunel's atmospheric trains rushing past. Now it just looks very odd. Half of the station at Dawlish is built on the beach.

14: Dawlish Warren

Dawlish Warren is a spit of land sticking out into the sea at the start of the Exe estuary. The warren has a small amusement park, which is popular with families (wave at the children!), and a golf course, but its main attraction is its nature reserve. Beyond the small area of land is a huge area that is uncovered at low tide and under water when the tide is high, and these sand and mud 'flats' are very popular with birds. See how many different types you can spot - there have been over 300 spotted over the years!.

15: Brunel's pumping station at Starcross

This odd red building is one of the engine houses built for Isambard Kingdom Brunel's atmospheric railway.

Brunel decided that it would be possible to move his trains by 'sucking' them along the line. His idea was to use huge engines to suck the air out of a long iron tube that lay between the iron rails of the track. A large piston attached to the train fitted into the tube through a slot, and this was sucked along the tube, dragging the train. Leather flaps lay across the slot to stop air flowing in, but these often tore off or stuck open, which stopped the engines sucking the train along. The railway was supposed to run to Plymouth and Paignton, but was soon replaced by ordinary trains.

16: Powderham Castle & Estate

The small castle is home to the Earl of Devon, his family and several ghosts. The estate is home to around 600 deer. This is one of Britain's most important deer herds, which was started in 1723, and the estate breeds deer which are sent all over the world.

17: Turf Locks & Exeter Canal

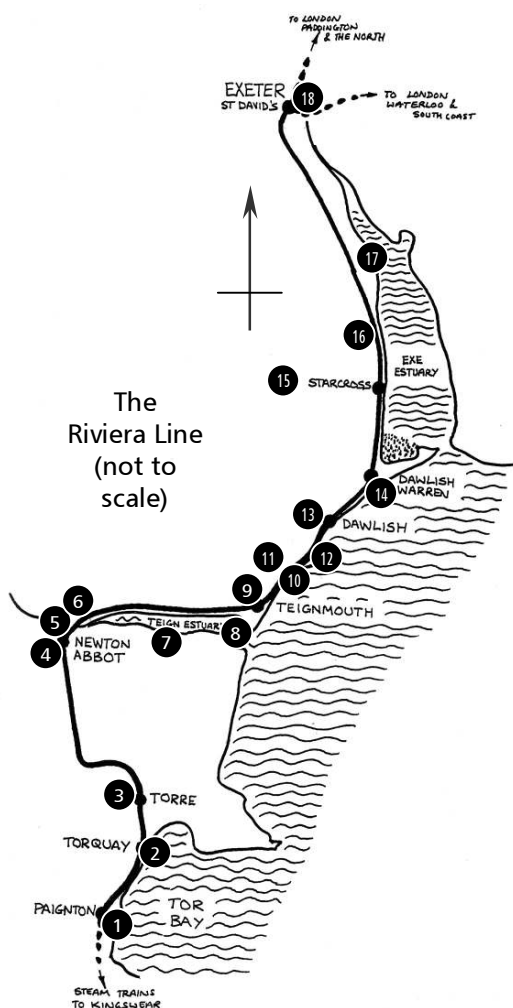
The line moves inland now as the train approaches Exeter. But the fields are flat, and you can still see the estuary. A short way along you can see a small building surrounded by small sailing yachts; this is the Turf Locks hotel which marks the start of a canal that used to allow ships to sail to Exeter to supply the city. The canal was used until 1997.

18: Exeter

Our journey ends at Exeter, Devon's County Town and a city full of things to do... but that's for another issue.

Tickets: A Cheap Day Return from Paignton to Exeter and back costs £5 and is available at weekends and after 09.30.

You can alight and board at any station on the line if you want to explore on foot. – but beware that some stations have very few trains!



15: Starcross Pumping Station



11: The line alongside the sea