

# Molly Southwood

## MY DEVON

She loves sea swimming and is passionate about her home town, but the CEO of a Devon charity does occasionally yearn for a fabulous curry

### Tell us briefly about yourself and what you do in the county.

I grew up in the USA but have lived in the UK for 20 years. In 2022, I became chief executive officer of Exeter Leukaemia Fund (ELF), a great local charity supporting people in Devon with blood cancer and other blood disorders. Outside of work I volunteer in my local community as a school governor, and I love to spend time in the sea.

### Where in Devon do you live?

In Bradninch, about 10 miles north of Exeter. It's a great community to be part of, with so much going on. Although Bradninch is tiny, it is very proudly a town, after receiving a Royal Charter in the 12th century.

### How long have you been here and what brought you here?

I first came to Devon in 2003, just after finishing university. I was away for a long time, after taking a job in Somerset, but returned in 2021. We moved back to be closer to family, which has been wonderful. I have two daughters and they love living close to their grandparents and cousins.

### What's the best thing about living in Devon?

The people. Definitely. Since joining Exeter Leukaemia Fund, I've been humbled by the kindness of communities across the county. We have volunteers and donors who give so much of themselves to support others. The people I meet through my work – ELF colleagues, doctors and nurses, patients, donors and volunteers – have been wonderful. I love the feeling of being part of something bigger.

### And the worst?

That's a tricky one. Let's see. I lived in the Midlands for a few years, and although I'm delighted to be back in Devon, I do miss the excellent curry houses. Perhaps I just haven't found the right one yet!

### Describe your ideal day out in Devon

A day at the beach, always my favourite thing to do in any season, in any weather. Ideally followed by some seafood, and cold white



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wine. We are lucky to have fantastic beaches, all with such different characters. Budleigh and Woolacombe are favourites, but I also love exploring our tiny coves. I discovered some lovely places near Dartmouth a few weeks ago. We were joined by a friendly seal as we poked around rock pools – magical.

### What is your favourite Devon journey, by any mode of transport?

I've only done it once, but I really enjoyed swimming around Burgh Island last summer. That was quite an exciting, and very scenic, journey!

### What is your favourite month to be in Devon?

I could probably make a calendar with something wonderful about every month. January – Bradninch Twelfth Night

Celebrations, February – watching snowdrops emerge, March – coldest (and therefore best!) water for sea swimming. Is that cheating?

### What is your favourite view in the county?

Coming into Bradninch from Cullompton, looking across the town, with views of Killerton and Exeter in the distance. That's pretty hard to beat.

### What gift from Devon would you give to a friend?

I suppose it depends on the friend, but you really can't go wrong with some Salcombe Distillery gin.

### What three words best describe Devon?

Community. Nature. Paradise. ●