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A holiday home on the North Norfolk Coast

Blakeney, Norfolk



What the papers say about North Norfolk

A compilation of articles and features

These articles are of general interest and whilst some are older than others they offer a good guide to North Norfolk. As some are older than others prices may have changed.

Paul Gogarty gets the best out of the beaches and bays of north Norfolk.

Daily Telegraph 17th July 2004

Last summer I drove 2,800 miles round the edge of England. On this journey - the subject of my new book, *The Coast Road* - there were so many rich new experiences that it's difficult to pick out a single coastal stretch that stands above the rest. Difficult but not impossible. My bouquet goes to the finely fretted 47-mile Norfolk fringe between Hunstanton and Cromer.

This coastline is among the most protected in the country and has landed just about every accolade around, from SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) to SPA (Special Protection Area under EU birds directive) and Ramsar (a designation for internationally important wetlands).

The acronyms are shorthand for an area that is outstanding for cycling, messing about in boats, birdwatching or simply playing on pristine sandy beaches beneath those big blue Norfolk skies.

Forming the eastern bookend is Cromer, a mainstream resort complete with freshly refurbished pier - restrained by Skegness standards, but no doubt viewed as wild and debauched by places such as Cley-next-the-Sea.

Hunstanton, in the west, is also a resort but not as Devon, Lancashire or Yorkshire know them. First, there are the distinctive carrstone homes gracing the village green. Then there's the demure amusement arcade and a small, rather sweet funfair. The pier was snatched years ago by the sea, the lighthouse is abandoned and the very elegant, grassed Boston Square has been made into a sensory garden with fragrant plants, Braille messages and a wheelchair trail.

East of Hunstanton, hand-painted oak signs introduce a succession of exquisite knapped-flint villages that serve as stepping stones along the coast - Holme-next-the-Sea, Burnham Deepdale, Wells, Stiffkey and Blakeney. Each hamlet and each town has its own character and story to tell. In 1999 druids gathered to play nose flutes to a 4,000-year-old henge, the oldest yet found constructed by axe, when it was uncovered at Holme-next-the-Sea.

Stiffkey had 15 minutes of notoriety 67 years earlier, when its incumbent rector, Harold Davidson, the saviour of London prostitutes, was found to be saving a few for himself. The defrocked vicar quit the village, became a lion tamer and was subsequently eaten by one of his charges in Skegness.

Norfolk moves slowly and its mostly tiny villages can be passed through in a twinkling if you don't slow down. Thankfully, there are no real resorts in the grand sense and little that you really must do. Activities consist of walking, sailing, fishing, swimming and looking.

On the beach beyond the RSPB reserve at Titchwell, I shared the endless expanse of sands with terns, skylarks and a pair of abandoned Second World War tanks. As I swam, Norfolk was barely visible, an intermediary world of shingle spits, dunes, tidal marsh, brackish lagoons and reed beds. Following lunch (crab presented four different ways) at Titchwell Manor, I strode out along a dyke from the beached boats, caked mudflats and fanning dykes of Burnham Overy Staithe.

It was in these marshes, bizarrely, that the opening Korean paddy-field sequence in the last Bond movie (*Die Another Day*) was filmed. Somehow they managed to keep out of shot the National Trust windmill and the Royal West Norfolk Golf Club, where Prince Andrew and other members play with water on three sides. The club house appears like an island floating out to sea.

Just a couple of miles inland, the Georgian town of Burnham Market is always buzzing. It has become a focus of London downshifters, complete with hat shop, tea room, 17th-century coaching inn (The Hoste Arms), fine wine merchant, wet fish shop and deli.

Jamie Oliver was spotted in the deli a week before my visit and on that same day, the Arsenal footballer Thierry Henry and his bride-to-be were in nearby Wells, Hugh Grant on the links at the Royal West Norfolk Golf Club, and the Strangers in Hunstanton on a photo shoot for their new album cover.

At sunset on a glorious summer day there is nowhere I'd rather be than on the terrace of the White Horse in Brancaster Staithe, with a jug of Pimm's in front of me. The rippled creeks become quicksilver, the still ponds copper, and everywhere birds twist, turn and sing in this in-between world of land and water. In a country blessed with an extraordinarily beautiful and varied coastline, it is quite simply the finest place I know to watch the sun go down.

Paul Gogarty's 'The Coast Road - A 3,000 mile journey round the edge of England' (Robson Books) is available for £16.99. To order, please call Telegraph Books Direct on 0870 155 7222. Please add £2.25 p&p per order.

What's new

Oceanus Sailing (01328 864141, mobile 07901 510236, (www.ocean-us-sailing.com) Opened this summer, this school in Wells offers sailing for adults and children and powerboating for the more adventurous. Two-day sailing courses cost from £160 (£120 for children). Alternatively, you can hire boats from £10 an hour (or £20 an hour with an instructor). Powerboating costs £40 an hour including tuition from a skipper.

Cromer Pier reopened last month, following a £2.5m facelift. End-of-the-pier shows run through the summer. Check out the programme at www.thecromerpier.com.

Until last year few people even in Norfolk had heard of Margaret's Tea Room, in the inland hamlet of Baconsthorpe. Then it was named by the Tea Council as the Best in Britain (it has an impressive line in coffee, too). Now it's mobbed. Lunchtimes are particularly busy (quiches, salads, homemade soups), so go early. Closed Mondays and Tuesdays. No bookings.

Priory Maze Gardens (01263 822986, www.priorymazegardens.com), between Sheringham and Cromer, opened last year: 10 acres of peaceful walks, diverse habitats, and Norfolk's only copper beech traditional maze. Adult admission £3.50, children £2, family of five ticket £10. Closed Mondays and Wednesdays.

Escaping the crowds

Inland, you'll find quiet lanes tailor-made for cycling. Bikes can be hired from a number of places along the coast. The more adventurous can cycle from King's Lynn to Cromer on the Norfolk Coast Cycleway (www.cycle-norfolk.co.uk); families however may prefer Kelling Bicycle's (07788 132909) Huff & Puff trip - a five-mile ride (mostly traffic-free) and then a puff on the north Norfolk Railway from Sheringham to Holt - starting and finishing at Kelling Heath: £9.75 for adults and £8.25 for children, inclusive of railway travel. Alternatively, you could simply hire bikes and explore: £8 for adults, £5 for children, £4 for tag cycles (those that clip to the back of normal bikes for children to ride).

Walking

Take the coast path from Burnham Overy Staithe to Gun Hill (half a mile from Holkham and twice as quiet). Even in the height of summer you can usually find a spot of beach to yourself. For information on coastal walks here visit www.nationaltrail.co.uk/peddersway.

Little Walsingham was recently voted the most spiritual place in Britain by listeners to the Today programme on Radio 4. The village (perversely larger than Great Walsingham) is just a short drive inland from Wells and has been a place of pilgrimage since 1061. The Anglican shrine is in the village itself and that of the Roman Catholics a mile outside, adjacent to the hamlet of Houghton St Giles. Where there are pilgrims there are souvenir shops and tea rooms, and you'll find both in Little and Great Walsingham.

Where to eat

The best places tend to be in the hotels or gourmet pubs.

Morston Hall in Morston (01263 741041, www.morstonhall.com). The owner, Galton Blackiston, provides a different four-course set menu daily, £40. The Sunday lunch I had here (£26) was the best meal I had during my trip round the coast.

The White Horse, Brancaster Staithe (01485 210262, www.whitehorsebrancaster.co.uk). Starters on the table d'hôte menu cost £4-£5.50; main courses £9-£13. Typical dishes: whole plaice with samphire, chive and tomato cream (£10.95), and grilled calf's liver with creamed potatoes and bacon (£12.25). Children's menu from £3.95.

Titchwell Manor (01485 210221, www.titchwellmanor.com) has a relaxed restaurant serving beautifully presented modern British cuisine. At lunch, tapas-sized dishes cost from £2.50, dressed Cromer crab £6.95, or there is a range of sandwiches for £4.95. Evening menu: starters from £4.50 and main courses from £9.50. (PS they do great fat chips!)

The Red Lion, Stiffkey (01328 830552, no website) is perhaps the best traditional pub along the coast, serving local beer such as Woodforde's Wherry and a good range of bar meals.

The Cafe in Cley-next-the-sea (01263 740336, www.thecafe.org.uk) is an organic restaurant providing four vegetarian courses for £22.50. It also has two contemporary rooms (from £195 for two nights' half board for two).

Fishes, in Burnham Market, a specialist in local fish (01328 738588, www.fishesrestaurant.co.uk), serves a three-course lunch for £15.50 and two courses in the evenings for £27.50 (Note: now closed).

Where to shop

Holt, a Georgian market town five miles from the coast, has plenty of quality clothes and food shops (the food hall at Bakers and Larners is like a miniature Fortnum & Mason). Norfolk's Deli of the Year, Byfords, is definitely worth a visit, but it's mobbed at weekends and holidays.

Burnham Market is the most fashionable place in Norfolk despite being no more than a village. The primarily upmarket and eclectic mix of shops includes Pentney House for hats, Brazen Head for antique books, the chic Ruby and Tallulah clothes shop, Humble Pie delicatessen, Satchells wine merchant and the Hoste Arms pub.

Cley-next-the-Sea has a handful of Hampstead-type shops. Picnic Fayre delicatessen is where second-home owners pick up their lavender bread, wines, stuffed olives, local chutneys and gourmet meals such as Moroccan lamb and apricot tajine. For smoked mackerel, or kippers, they head to the Cley Smoke House. Contemporary art is on show at the Michael Chapman Gallery, and for pottery and jewellery, Made in Cley is the place.

Attractions

The North Norfolk Poppy Line runs a steam train (01263 820800, www.nnrailway.co.uk) from Sheringham to Holt -10½ miles of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Adults £8, children £4.50, family of four £23. No booking.

The Norfolk Broads are connected by natural rivers and were created when the sea level rose 700 years ago, filling up medieval peat pits. There's more than 120 miles of lock-free cruising on unspoilt waterways with boats available on a day-hire basis through Barnes Brinks Craft (01603 782625, www.barnesbrinkcraft.co.uk), £57-£82 for 10-man launches; or week-long cruising through Connoisseur (01603 782472, www.connoisseurafloat.com) on 2-8 berth boats, £799-£1,269.

Hop aboard open-topped boats from Morston or Blakeney to see the seals (there are about 250) at Blakeney Point, the National Trust-owned spit that juts out into the North Sea. Departures depend on the tide. A one-hour trip through Temples (01263 740791) or Beans Boat Trips (01263 740038) costs adults £6 and children £4.

Holkham Beach, a three-mile stretch (used as a backdrop in the film Shakespeare in Love), is one of the finest in Britain. Parking £2.

Holkham Hall (01328 710227, www.holkham.co.uk) is home to the Earl and Countess of Leicester. The Palladian mansion, deer park and lake (with boat trips), pottery, Nursery Gardens, Bygones Museum (history of farming), restaurant and cafes (plus the Victoria pub) are deserving of a day of your holiday. Open 1-5pm daily except Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Admission to Hall £6.50 or, combined with Bygones Museum, £10 (both half price for children aged 5-16); Family of four ticket £25.

RSPB National Nature Reserve at Titchwell (01485 210779, www.rspb.org.uk) has 300 species of birds calling in a year and in excess of 100,000 human visitors - more than any other RSPB reserve in the country. Entry to the reserve is free, with binocular rental costing £2.50 and car parking £3. There are guided walks, a cafe and shops.

Norfolk Shire Horse Centre (01263 837339, www.norfolk-shirehorse-centre.co.uk), West Runton, near Cromer, offers wagon rides and the opportunity for children to meet mares, foals and small furry animals. Adults £5.50, children £3.50, family discounts on the website. Closed Saturdays.

Sandringham Estate (01553 612908, www.sandringhamestate.co.uk). The house is open when the Queen isn't in residence, and the 600 acres are available for visitors to enjoy all year round. Admission: adults £6.50, children £4. Family of five ticket costs £17 for the house, museum and gardens, or £11.50 for the museum and gardens.

Children will enjoy catching crabs from Cromer pier or Blakeney Quay. All they'll need is bacon bait, a line and a bucket, which are available locally.

Tips

Roads

Once you hit the coastline, the roads become narrow and the signposts a little infrequent just a few miles inland. Head for the Tourist Information Centre at Deepdale Farm (01485 210256, www.deepdalefarm.co.uk/information) and pick up a local OS Map (£5.99); you can also get leaflets on walking, cycling and all the local attractions.

Swimming

The Norfolk coastline has some great beaches, but near the salt marshes, mudflats and estuaries there are some fast-flowing tides. Beware of rising water if you go off the beaten track, and keep a close eye on children when they're using inflatables in the channels. For information on tides, see www.bbc.co.uk/weather/marine/tides.

Restaurants

If you're planning a special holiday meal it's best to book rather than turn up on the offchance.

Public transport

If you're not travelling by car, the best way to see the coast is by bus, as there aren't any trains travelling farther than Sheringham or King's Lynn. The Coastal Hopper services the coast from King's Lynn to Cromer, including Sandringham. For travel information call Traveline on 0870 608 2608 or visit www.travelineeastanglia.org.uk.

For further information, visit, 01603 222846.

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Norfolk: the English seaside as it should be.

The north Norfolk coast offers a rare and unspoilt insight into the good old-fashioned coastal holiday down south, discovers Tom Lappin

You'd be amazed by how fond crabs are of bacon. A couple of diminutive sisters are sitting on the quayside at Blakeney jabbing chunks of their leftover breakfast onto the end of a length of string, and dipping it into the water where they can find a gap between the cramped fishing boats and pleasure craft. It takes less than a minute for the crabs to bite and be hauled out of the water, stubbornly refusing to let go of their scrap of streaky. The kids put them in a bucket for a while, just to watch the pugnacious crustaceans fight each other, then they are thrown back into the water. If shellfish have arteries, then those of Blakeney crabs are severely clogged.

That kind of innocent seaside fun is an endangered species these days. Children's holidays tend to be mediated, thoroughly choreographed affairs at artificial resorts or holiday parks, where they will cast a jaded eye over the outdoor amenities before heading back to the chalet and the PlayStation. An idle fortnight messing about by the seaside doesn't seem to be allowed any more.

Some places have escaped ruthless commerce-led modernisation though, and Blakeney is a case in point. In fact this entire stretch of the Norfolk coastline, roughly extending from shabbily quaint Hunstanton in the west round to Cromer to the east is like a time capsule of old England. For Scots who are dismayed by the brutal vulgarity of so many English resorts, the conservative gentility and well-preserved watercolour beauty of the Norfolk coastline will come as a breath of bracing North Sea air. The birdlife, the marshlands and estuarine swamps give it a character you won't find elsewhere in England. And its proximity to the capital has given the region a market-led profusion of restaurants and delicatessens to satisfy the haughtiest of gastronomy fiends.

Blakeney hotel is an independent establishment that would induce fits of exasperation in any corporate hotelier. It seems in a perpetual state of dithering whether to be smart and chic or comfortable and homely. Some of the rooms are poky and stuffy, others airy and spacious, with views over the waterfront. It's a place where you can potter around on a wet Sunday afternoon reading the papers, but it's also somewhere you'll find one of the best restaurants in Norfolk, serving simply prepared but impeccable meals utilising the best of the local seafood.

The village is blessed with a beautiful, meandering main street, with the traditional pebble-dashed cottages, and an atmospheric local pub, the King's Arms, with its low beams and cosy nooks. A local preservation society has been instrumental in preserving and renovating the old cottages, without succumbing to that "preserved in aspic" feel that makes many heritage villages seem like museums rather than real communities. Outside the hotel, makeshift stalls sell seasonal shellfish, usually crab in an unfussy sandwich, but fresh oysters as well, served up with a slice of lemon and optional Tabasco.

The classic day out from Blakeney is the trip to Blakeney Point, the tip of a long shingle spit, home to colonies of seals and the breeding ground for terns. There are two ways to get there. From Blakeney or nearby Morston, boat trips leave on a variety of tours depending on the tides, allowing both close-up viewing of the seals and landings at Blakeney Point. More rewarding is the four-mile walk along the spit, starting from the beach near the village of Cley-next-the-Sea. The somewhat arduous but exhilarating hike along the shingle brings you to the spectacular sight of a sandbank crowded with common and grey seals.

Back on terra firma, those with cars can head off down the back roads into one of the best-preserved regions of England. Burnham Market, a few miles inland, is a picture-postcard village in the sense that it looks as if it has been touched up by an artistic hand in search of olde worlde charm. Its pristine Georgian buildings cluster around a central green in a neat array, and in summer you feel it has been created for the sole purpose of weekends or day-trippers. It is the urban vision of bucolic bliss, with traditional butchers and delicatessens selling convincing versions of timeless rustic fare, all game pies, home-churned butter and toothsome pâté.

There are beaches in the vicinity too, infused with that purity that seems to characterise a north-coast shoreline, wherever you are in the world. Holkham has that exposed freshness that means it will never be the regular haunt of sun worshippers, although that pretty much applies to most of the Norfolk coast. These are sands seen at their best around dusk in late summer, with still a little residual heat lingering around, and a red haze reflecting off the waves. Further around towards the west, Hunstanton is the classic example of a decaying seaside resort, trying hard, but always seeming sepia-tinged. You only need a few Victorian bathing machines and a marching tune from the bandstand and the period ambience would be irresistible.

Back at the Blakeney hotel, there may be a few rain clouds scudding in from the North Sea, but in the restaurant, they are dishing up fish cooked with a delicacy that would have the likes of Gary Rhodes and Rick Stein purring their approval. In the television lounge, gents of a certain age and a determined G and T habit are snoozing into their newspapers, while down 17 convoluted corridors, somebody has discovered the billiard room and is lining up a red into the corner pocket. Here it is forever an age of innocence untainted by Starbucks, broadband and Thai-style chicken nuggets. This was what England must have been like before the fall.



On the road to nowhere

By Justin Marozzi, Financial Times

Published: 9 September 2006

"How long have you been up here?" No dinner party in Norfolk can be considered properly under way until someone has asked the question. Not long ago if your answer was less than a thousand years you were deemed an arriviste.

These days you can go to dinner parties where the entire cast consists of DFLs (down from London), especially in north Norfolk. This part of England's easternmost county teems with traditional brick-and-flint cottages and market towns and has one of the country's most unspoilt, mesmerising stretches of coastline. Over the past decade, it has seen an influx of well-heeled immigrants akin to the great migratory movements across the African plains.

They have been drawn to Norfolk's version of the continent's watering holes and grazing pastures - the delicatessens, art galleries and design studios, to Bakers and Larners of Holt (East Anglia's answer to Fortnum & Mason) and the Victoria at Holkham country hotel. Above all, they come for a landscape that is authentically old-fashioned, sparsely populated and framed by the widest skies imaginable.

The arrival of the SW3 second-home hordes, identifiable by their large BMWs, Audis, Range Rovers and the occasional Porsche, has altered the demographics. Locals say Burnham Market, alternatively known as Chelsea-on-Sea or Burnham Mark-up on account of the village's inflated property prices, now has 60 per cent of its housing stock given over to weekend or holiday homes. Come the infamous slashing wind-and-rain winters and the place is almost deserted.

Whatever the old guard think of these newcomers, they don't appear unduly ruffled by the invasion in the stateliest circles. "Norfolk is the last bastion of the English upper-class system," says the interior designer Miv Watts, mother of the Hollywood actress Naomi, who has a base in the county. "The grand houses haven't been sold off as they have been in Suffolk and elsewhere. It still has that Us and Them feel, the Windsor factor."

The Windsors have Sandringham, a slightly underwhelming 19th-century country retreat. Underwhelming, that is, when compared with the Earl of Leicester's Palladian mansion, Holkham Hall, seat of the Norfolk grandees' grandees. And then there's Houghton Hall, completed by England's first prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole, in the 1730s and now the seat of the Marquess of Cholmondeley. Add up the acreage from this trio (not much change from 50,000 acres), see what's left of north Norfolk and the expression "land reform" springs to mind.

When we first moved to Norfolk in 2001, one of the local landowners joked that we hadn't asked his permission first. I suspect he was accustomed to more deference.

It is fashionable to criticise such feudal arrangements but you can see the benefits in a supremely well-managed countryside that harks back to a more innocent era, a time before the big supermarkets descended on our towns. Gamekeepers might not tug their forelocks so slavishly any more but they still do an excellent job in conservation and land management.

There's a greater emphasis on high-quality, locally produced food such as you can find in Walsingham's new farm shop, an added attraction for the thousands of pilgrims who visit the medieval shrine village known as "England's Nazareth" every year.

Outsiders tend to think of the Norfolk landscape as "very flat" after Noël Coward's famous dismissal of the place. In fact, he got it quite wrong. Though no one would call it mountainous or even hilly, there is a rolling beauty to the county, particularly in the north, that takes visitors by surprise if they're expecting the pitiless horizontality of the Fens.

Norfolk's bulging geographical isolation - it sticks into the North Sea and the Wash like a surgically enhanced Brazilian bottom - lends the county a pronounced individuality. Hemmed in by the sea on two sides and with communications to the south and west that could charitably be described as limited, the county is literally on the road to nowhere. It is a blissfully motorway-free zone. You never pass through Norfolk, goes the saying, you only arrive. That is a large part of its charm.

"Once you've been in Norfolk it never leaves you," says the portraitist and creative artist Simon Menzies. He moved up to Burnham Thorpe for six months and stayed six years, moving to the West Country recently to get married. "The landscape gives a freedom and peace of mind I haven't found in any other county and which is highly conducive to painting. Because it's a 'no through road' to Norfolk, it tends to attract interesting people doing creative things."

People like Marie Willey and partner Will Brown, who set up Old Town, a handmade clothing business now based in the Georgian market town of Holt. "If you like a certain type of rural lifestyle, you can't beat it," says Willey, who is from Newcastle. On the company's website is a spoof shipping report for Norfolk, which nicely captures some aspects of the county. Edited highlights include:

"Population: Elderly. Memory: Hazy. Visibility: Poor. Numbness In All Areas. Small Shops: Abundant. Dover Sole, Whiting: Plentiful. Coastline: Fair. Flint Cottages: Farrow And Ball, Widespread. Brancaster, Blakeney: Prosperous. Sheringham, Cromer: Moderate To Rough. Caravans Moving Across From Midlands: Imminent. Transport: Poor. Leading To Deep Depressions . . . "

Graham Clarke, master potter and former chairman of the Norfolk Contemporary Crafts Society, moved up with his family in 1991. Clarke designs a range of porcelain with many of his images inspired by Norfolk, from game to landscape, even the traditional wherry trading boats.

"We love the space here," he says. "We went down to London last weekend and were amazed there were more cars than trees, speed bumps everywhere. It was a nightmare."

Space is at a premium on Britain's ever more densely populated island. Norfolk is a step away from all that sprawl. It luxuriates in space, revels in sky-wide horizons and scouring winds from the North Sea, that wicked East Wind of winter described so palpably in Graham Swift's novel *Waterland*. "Norfolk people say, 'That wind don't go round you, it go right through you!'" says Miv Watts.

Vernon Banham, who runs the wine department at Bakers and Larners, says outsiders wrongly take Norfolk's geographical otherworldliness for a lack of sophistication. The pejorative acronym NFN (normal for Norfolk) is used to satirise supposedly backward, inbred tendencies here.

"People who are trying to sell me wine say, 'You shouldn't even be here' because of where we are. They expect civilisation to end at the bottom of the motorway. I tell them it's precisely because we are where we are that we're doing so well. That's part of the draw."

Hence the customers who don't blanch at £230 bottles of claret or even, in one case this summer, a £3,000 bottle of 140-year-old cognac. Eighteen years ago Banham stocked six champagnes. Today he has 30. "We try to sell sparkling wine," he says, "but no one wants it."

The Daily Telegraph

February 2007

**Nicholas Crane's of "Coast" television series
favourite walking holidays.**

North Norfolk

Few parts of Britain feel as spacious as the north Norfolk coast on a winter's day. Depending on your mood, you can stride across the sands at Holkham, or use loops of the coast path to explore the salt marsh between Stiffkey, Morston, Blakeney and Cley. In spring, the boats return to the muddy creeks, but in winter they are home to the empty wind and egrets. For an expedition rather than a stroll, try the three-mile trek along the shingle bank to Blakeney Point, where seals wallow at the tide line and the dunes have a Saharan scale.

Telegraph.co.uk

Anthony Gardner on a new farm shop in Norfolk where the goods are ultra-fresh and the food miles are almost zero

If you had been spirited away to the new Walsingham Farms Shop, the contents of the shelves would give you a clue to your whereabouts.



Style and substance: manager Giles Blatchford at Walsingham Farms Shop

With the exception of the wine and olive oil, shipped from a Spanish estate by its Norfolk-based owners, this is produce so local that you half expect it to lean over a gate and bend your ear about the relative merits of the B1338 and the B1105.

Not that anybody could accuse the shop of being provincial. Converted from a derelict granary in the centre of Little Walsingham, it was designed by Justin Meath Baker, whose projects include the hip Cobden Club in Notting Hill, west London.

The beautiful old flint-and-brick walls have been carefully restored and married to futuristic stainless-steel piping that octopuses its way around the ceiling.

In its fusion of traditional and contemporary, the shop is symbolic of Britain's changing countryside. With many farmers losing the subsidies on which they had become dependent, it is essential for them to find new ways of making money. One is to sell directly to the public.

But, as the Walsingham Estate and its tenant farmers realised, a farm shop is more likely to succeed if the costs are split several ways.

The result is a pioneering partnership whose trading assets include Morley Farm pork, Martin's Farm guinea fowl and Hill House Farm beef and potatoes.

"Initially we imagined doing it on a much smaller scale, but then we decided that a proper butcher's shop was vital," says tenant farmer James Woodhouse.

"As well as fresh meat, you can buy pies and sausages made on the premises. We will also be selling these products in a restaurant and fish-and-chip shop which we're opening over the road."

To broaden the range of merchandise, manager Giles Blatchford has enlisted more than 50 suppliers, ranging from Cley Smokehouse to the Natural Soap Company at Wells-next-the-Sea.

"One of the great things is that everyone involved has contributed their own ideas and expertise," says another of the partners, Elizabeth Meath Baker (sister-in-law of Justin).

She drew on her experience as a former shopping editor of Tatler, and her years abroad as a diplomat's wife. "None of the foreign countries I've lived in has convenience stores or supermarkets," she says. "In Turkey, for instance, no one cooks anything but completely fresh food, and the quality of the fruit and vegetables in ordinary shops is stunning. So why should the British eat nasty stuff out of frozen packets?"

"Fortunately, people around here aren't so urbanised that they've forgotten about making good food from scratch. They still grow their own vegetables, and if someone wants to sell stuff off their allotment we'll put it in the shop, provided it's good enough." But isn't a shop selling lavender vinegar a bit highfalutin' for Norfolk? "Some people were iffy to begin with," Elizabeth admits.



"But even the sceptics are now saying, 'We'll bring you some of our artichokes when they're ready.'"

For the less mobile, a home delivery service is planned, to the delight of Defra. It contributed £200,000 to the project, which it sees it as a blueprint for other estates.

"It's a real focus for the community," says Nicola Newell from the Rural Development Service. "It has created 12 jobs for local people, and it helps educate visitors to the countryside about the provenance of their food."

Walsingham is a pioneering food partnership where quality is paramount

To this end a series of walks are being mapped out, so that having bought your free-range eggs, you can go to meet the hens which laid them.

Walsingham attracts plenty of outsiders, thanks to its two shrines to the Virgin Mary, and the shop's owners hope that it too will become a place of pilgrimage.

Walsingham Farms Shop, Guild Street, Walsingham, Norfolk (01328 821877); is open seven days a week, and will be offering a mail-order service.

Day tripper watches in horror as 4x4 rolls into sea



Blakeney Quay

Boating can be hazardous at the best of times. Powerful currents, gusting winds, storms and other vessels all present problems for the most experienced sailor.

But yachts, canoes and dinghies at one British beauty spot were forced to avoid another obstacle - a floating Honda car.

Astonished tourists saw the unoccupied people carrier bobbing gently in the North Sea after it rolled from the quayside at Blakeney, Norfolk. The vehicle's hand-brake is understood to have failed after the driver parked in the scenic coastal town on Saturday.

And as our pictures show, tourists weren't content to watch the spectacle from the shore. Two youngsters in a canoe paddled around the stricken vehicle as two young swimmers tread water close to the floating 4x4.

Meanwhile, a dinghy containing five curious onlookers and a sailing boat passed within a few feet of the vehicle, which was submerged almost up to its roof.

But not everyone was so curious. One woman can be seen with her hands clasped to her mouth, watching horrified as the vehicle floated in the estuary.

She is thought to be one of hundreds of tourists who visited Blakeney to enjoy sweltering temperatures, golden sands and watch white and grey seals splashing about at nearby Blakeney Point wildlife sanctuary.

After rolling into the sea, the 4x4 floated towards open water before becoming stuck on a sandbank at about 10.30am.

Rescuers had to wait until the tide retreated about two hours later before they could attach a rope to the vehicle and drag it onto dry land. Unsurprisingly, it failed to start and had to be lifted onto the back of a lorry and taken to be repaired.

The car is understood to belong to a family of holidaymakers who were staying in Cley next the Sea, the next village along the coast.

The remarkable scenes were captured on camera by Paul Bishop, 44, who runs a business sailing tourists to Blakeney Point so they can get a close look at one of Britain's biggest seal colonies and watch seabirds wheeling above the cliffs.

He said: 'Because of the fabulous weather we had hundreds of tourists arrive in the town on Saturday morning, but one clearly got more than she bargained for.

'She left the vehicle in the car park, which is at the top of a sloping gravel bank about 20 yards from the water.

'But the hand-brake must have failed and it rolled into the sea. 'I was selling tickets for the boat trips when someone said: 'There's a car in the sea.' 'The tide was going out and it picked up the Honda which started floating out into the channel.

'Swimmers and people in canoes and dinghies started going up to it to have a look and several hundred people were watching from the quayside.

'Finally it came to rest on a sandbank but even then it took a couple of hours before it could be winched ashore.

'There was a lot of interest because it's not everyday you see a floating car but the owners seemed very embarrassed.'

Guardian Unlimited network

Even at the height of summer, the five-mile stretch of Holkham Sands is under-populated. It's not so much a question of finding a place to lay your towel but making sure the rounders pitch you've marked out doesn't encroach on your neighbours' sandy recreation of the Palace of Versailles. But in winter, Holkham Sands is yours alone. Choose a blustery day and you'll have the tufted dunes, rippled inlets and miles of sand all to yourself. Borrow a dog, wrap up well and head out to the horizon from Burnham Overy Staithe. Turn right when you hit the ocean. It's two hours to Wells- Next-the-Sea and, as you walk across the acres of white sand washed clean of all footprints, stop and let the vast, exhilarating emptiness make you feel tiny.



WELLS-NEXT-THE-SEA, Norfolk

January 14, 2007

Next-the-Sea? Who are they trying to kid? Like most of the little shellfishing ports on the North Norfolk coast, Wells is now marooned a mile inland, stranded behind salt marshes, shingle spits and mazy creeks. But this only adds to the romance, because a narrow-gauge railway glides you out along the sea wall to the tot-friendly beach, where you can pootle in warm summer shallows guarded by sandbanks and dunes

There's usually a smattering of fishing boats hauled up onto the sands, while a cheerful parade of stilted beach huts in dolly-mixture colours exfoliates gently along the shore. On a coast known for epic skies and elastic horizons, Wells beach has a beautifully intimate feel.

The town is a tangle of cobbled streets knotted against the wee quay, possibly the most picturesque working port in England. There are rock shops and fish shops – and, along Staithe Street, proper family butchers where you can pick up bacon rashers for your crab hooks.

Wells is the geographical capstone of the 50-mile road that coasts along the rooftop of Norfolk, extending all the way from the majestic bling of Sandringham estate to the pleasure-pier ker-ching of Cromer. Just to the east, the flint-knapped village of Blakeney offers even better crabbing, as well as seal-watching excursions with Beans Boats (01263 740505, www.beansboattrips.co.uk). To the west is Burnham Market, with its boutiquey collection of clothes stores and knick-knack emporiums. And for a nostalgic day trip, skip aboard the steam train from Wells and chuff inland to Walsingham Abbey.

If Wells beach gets busy or you crave wide-eyed wonderment, there are seven sweeping miles of it just to the west, at Holkham. This beach is a vast sea-bird reserve, with room enough for naturalists and naturists, kite-flying and cricket – and for the Queen, who walks her corgis here when at Sandringham, presumably in her kiss-me-quick crown.

But what clinches Wells as a top beach destination is the Globe Inn (01328 710206, www.holkham.co.uk), newly overhauled by the people behind the Victoria at Holkham (01328 711008; doubles from £160), a longstanding Sunday Times favourite that specialises in colonial decor and stylish cooking. The Globe is a stripped-down version of the same, on a Georgian square; and even in high season, rooms go for just £110.

Telegraph.co.uk

6 August 2008

Joanna Symons delights in the stunning beaches, bountiful seafood and curious wildlife of north Norfolk.



The beaches of north Norfolk are where to go to re-enact the rose-tinted romance of your childhood holidays **Why go now...**

To re-enact the rose-tinted seaside holidays of your childhood. The stretch of north Norfolk coast between Brancaster and Weybourne has barely changed over the past 50 years. This is the best of coastal England: vast beaches that stretch to distant horizons, rolling sand dunes, little sailing harbours among the creeks and salt marshes, and, just inland, gently rolling patchwork fields edged by ancient oaks, churches and villages of pretty brick and flint cottages.

But the restaurants and delis have upped their game since the 1950s, making the most of the local seafood, and there's no hint of rationing in the area's chic shops and galleries. Book tickets and accommodation now for the **North Norfolk Music Festival** (August 30-September 7, www.northnorfolkmusicfestival.com).

Travel by...

Train from London Liverpool Street to Norwich, then Norwich to Sheringham (0845 600 7245, www.nationalexpresseastanglia.com) from where the CoastHopper bus service runs regularly to all points west along the coast. Trains also go from King's Cross to Kings Lynn (www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk) and Peterborough to Norwich (www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk). There are flights from regional UK airports to Norwich with **Flybe** (0871 700 2000, www.flybe.com) and **British Midland** (0870 6070 555, www.flybmi.com).

Stay at...

Vine House (01328 738777, www.vinehouseboutiquehotel.co.uk), a new, seven-bedroom hotel in a Georgian house in the dapper little town of Burnham Market. Under the same ownership as the Hoste Arms opposite, it is decorated in peaceful greys. Two night breaks from £235 for a double room with breakfast.

Cley Windmill (01263 740209, www.cleywindmill.co.uk) offers six comfortable rooms in a friendly, well-run converted windmill with spectacular views across the saltmarsh. Sited just yards from the north Norfolk coastal path, it has a large garden. Double rooms with breakfast from £120 a night.

The ready-erected tepees at **Burnham Deepdale** (01485 210256, www.deepdalefarm.co.uk) sleep up to six – and you can also bring your own tent or opt for simple hostel-style accommodation at this attractive site just inland from Brancaster Staithe. Meals are available at the excellent Deepdale Café nearby. A tepee sleeping two costs £60 a night, or it's £90 for a six-person tepee.

Spend the morning...

On a boat trip from Morston (01263 740505, www.beansboattrips.co.uk) to see the seal colony at Blakeney Point. Look out for common seal pups this month, as well as terns and oyster catchers; adults £8, children £4. Other operators include **Temples** (www.sealtrips.co.uk) and **Bishop's** (www.bishopsboats.com). Or combine seal viewing with sailing in Blakeney Harbour in a skippered wooden day boat taking up to six people (01263 740704, www.norfolketc.co.uk; £68 for 90 minutes). Nearby at Wells-next-the-Sea is the charming **Wells-Walsingham steam railway** (01328 711630, www.wellswalsinghamrailway.co.uk), which chugs for 30 minutes through fields and villages to the pilgrimage centre of Walsingham; adult return £7.50, child £6.

Have lunch at...

Fishes, Burnham Market (01328 738588, www.fishesrestaurant.co.uk). This popular restaurant has just become a café and seafood bar, now open from 9am (last orders 7pm). But it still serves the same excellent seafood; lobster salad is a highlight (from £15).

Wiveton Hall, off the coast road between Blakeney and Cley, has a charming, slightly eccentric café set among fields of soft fruit, with tables looking across Cley marsh and beach. The menu features fruit grown on the farm and home-reared pork and bacon. Pick your own fruit and veg there, too (01263 740515, www.wivetonhall.co.uk).

Arrive early at the **White Horse**, Brancaster Staithe (01485 210262, www.whitehorsebrancaster.co.uk), to bag one of the sought-after outdoor tables with views over the coast; local mussels with white wine, cream and parsley, £7.95/£9.50. Or guarantee yourself a sea view by heading for the coast with a picnic.

Stroll around...

Holkham Hall (01328 710227, www.holkham.co.uk). The local stately pile, home of the Earl and Countess of Leicester, has a well-informed and enthusiastic staff; highlights include an impressive marble entrance hall modelled on a Roman Temple of Justice and some fine Old

Master paintings and Brussels tapestries. Entry £7 per adult, £3.50 child; closed Fri and Sat; limited opening from the end of September.

Alternatively, hire a bike from **On Yer Bike cycle hire** at Wighton, near Wells-next-the-Sea (01328 820719, www.norfolkcyclehire.co.uk; from £8 per adult for half a day) and visit some of north Norfolk's remarkable churches: those at Salthouse, Wiveton, Cley and South Creake are outstanding.

Buy...

Chi-chi homewares and furnishings, contemporary art and local seafood. Burnham Market is great for browsing, as is the pretty little Georgian town of Holt, about four miles inland from Blakeney.

Have dinner at...

Morston Hall, Morston (01263 741041, www.morstonhall.com). Chef Galton Blackiston's beautifully balanced, no-choice menu is unmatched in north Norfolk, using fresh, local produce. Set dinner costs £52 per person.

Try the **Hoste Arms**, Burnham Market (01328 738777, www.hostearms.co.uk). There's always a buzz in this old coaching inn, marked by a good wine list and well-prepared local food: plump oysters, £8.95; Gressingham duck breast with confit cabbage and wild mushroom and truffle dressing, £15.25.

Wiveton Bell (01263 740101, www.wivetonbell.co.uk) is a refurbished village inn with stripped beams and friendly, young staff serving above-average pub food. Locally smoked haddock with spinach, mashed potato and mustard salad, £12.95.

Stay up late at...

The pub – unless you manage to crash a party on the beach.

Recover at...

The coast. Walk from Burnham Overy Staithe along a causeway across the marshes to a vast dune-backed beach. Or head for the magnificent beaches at Holkham (featured in the closing scenes of Shakespeare in Love), Wells or Brancaster.

At all costs avoid...

The busy, clogged and narrow coast road – especially if you're on a bike.

12 July 2008

The great British foodie summer holiday

Whether you're self-catering in Norfolk, Yorkshire or Devon, England is full of healthy, tasty, regional goodies

Market stalls overflowing with seasonal produce, specialist shops stacked floor to ceiling with delicacies unique to that part of the world, vineyard tours and wine tastings, farmhouse cheesemakers, bakers making bread to a traditional recipe. There are thousands of good food reasons for having a holiday in Britain.

According to a recent Populus poll, a third of us are switching plans from a holiday abroad to one in Britain. So when once we would set off for the gîte with *French Provincial Cooking* (Penguin Classics), by Elizabeth David, it's comparatively cheaper to spend the summer making gooseberry fool in Southwold. Eco and economic arguments are winning out - and if guilt about carbon footprints can't stop us straying overseas, the euro will.

What's more, with the revival of artisan producers, butchers and vegetable box schemes challenging the supermarkets' stranglehold, it's easier than ever to find all the edible goodies that we used to go abroad for.

In *Go Slow England*, the author and guidebook publisher Alastair Sawday celebrates eco-friendly places to stay and the enterprising markets, mills, tea shops and cider-makers that are making England somewhere to savour.

"Not long ago, given the choice between a pub lunch in Penzance and pasta and a glass of wine in Palma, most of us would be tempted to fly abroad for a holiday," he says. "But no more." However, he adds that rural economies remain fragile "and every one of us who holidays in Britain will be reinforcing the gains made over the past few years".

So eat well on holiday and help British food to get better still.

NORFOLK

Norfolk is full of fantastic food, from Cromer crab, samphire, free-range pork and lamb, to every sort of fruit and veg. Check out events, markets, producers, shops and places to eat on www.tastesofanglia.com.

Best pork pies

Bray's Cottage Pork Pies, made from the best cuts of saddleback pork, are sensationally meaty. Buy them cooked or bake them yourself for £2.40 each or £15.50 for a monster pie. Call first to collect

from the converted barn at Bayfield Brecks, between Holt and Cley, 01263 860944, www.perfectpie.co.uk

Best ice-cream

Glimpse Lakenham's award-winning ice-cream being made when you buy from the factory shop, open Monday to Saturday. Lakenham Creamery, 2 Trafalgar St, Norwich, 01603 620970, www.lakenhamcreamery.co.uk

Best crab

Cley Smokehouse catches and dresses Cromer crabs. Buy kippers, bloaters (a Great Yarmouth speciality), eel and other smoked-treated delicacies. Open daily. High Street, Cley, 01263 740282, www.cleysmokehouse.com

Best pick your own

One of a dwindling number of pick-your-own farms, Wiveton Hall Fruit Farm grows strawberries and raspberries, red and blackcurrants, even artichokes. Tasty fruit tarts in the café. Open daily. Wiveton, Holt, 01263 740525, www.wivetonhall.co.uk

Best farm shop

In a glorious 18th-century barn, Back to the Garden sells organic meat, fruit and veg from its 1,000-acre farm. It also sells charcuterie, baked goods, organic pasta and every British cheese imaginable. Open Tuesday to Saturday. Leatheringsett, 01263 715996, www.back-to-the-garden.co.uk

Best organic veg box

Give Salle Moor Hall Farm 48 hours' notice and, if you're living locally, they'll drop off a box of their organic fruit, veg and eggs. From £10 for a small veg box. Reepham, 01603 879046, www.salleorganics.co.uk

Sunday 12 April 2009

The Escape guide to spring days out

A new book by The Ramblers brings together Britain's top walks, as voted for by its members. Here they select their 20 favourite spring hikes.

Cley-Next-The-Sea, Norfolk

The Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path winds through a network of nature reserves littered with abandoned fishing boats and crisscrossed with boardwalks and birdwatching hides. On the approach to Cley-next-the-Sea, the broad landscape and open skies are neatly punctuated by the silhouette of the 18th-century windmill, one of Norfolk's defining landmarks.

The second half of this route retreats inland through the fens of the Glaven Valley, before climbing onto Blakeney Esker for panoramic views of north Norfolk. The churches at Blakeney, Wiveton and Cley decorate this tapestry of golden marshland stretching north to the shingle spit of Blakeney Point, and from the ridge of the esker you finally glimpse the elusive North Sea, on the final leg of your journey back to Blakeney harbour.

Eat Picnic Fayre and the Cley Smokehouse in Cley-next-the-Sea are perfectly positioned to stock up for the second leg of the route. For a more substantial meal, the Three Swallows (01263 740526), off the old village green, has open fires and pub games.

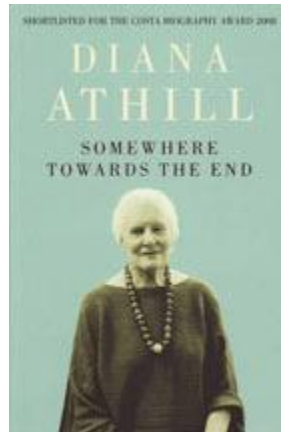
Stay Cley Windmill (01263 740209; cleywindmill.co.uk), Holt, has upmarket B&B and self-catering accommodation with sweeping views of the marshes

Map OS Explorer 251.

Start/finish Circular from the Blakeney Quay, Blakeney (TG027441).

Length 9.7 miles, can be muddy but mostly lanes and bridleways with good surfaces.

This is not an article from a newspaper, but an extract from "Somewhere towards the End" by Diana Athil.



“My brother, who died last year, was less lucky, but not because he was painfully ill for a long time, or afraid of death. His trouble was that he resented it because he loved his life so passionately. He was eighty-five. He knew death was coming because, having stubbornly refused to pay attention to various ailments of old age which were obvious to his anxious wife and other people, he was finally forced to recognize that his appetite had gone and that he was feeling dreadfully cold. But he still longed to be out messing about with his boats – he lived on the Norfolk coast in a place he adored and to have to leave that place and its occupations seemed to him the worst possible fate.

One afternoon not long before he died he took me out for a sail. His house is just inland from Blakeney Point, a long spit of sand dunes that runs parallel to the shore, partially enclosing a stretch of water which at low tide becomes a river snaking its way out to sea through exposed mud, but at high tide is a wide, sheltered expanse busy with small sailing boats and easily navigated by larger ones provided they are careful to observe the markers showing where the deeper channels run. On that day there was hardly a breath of wind. Sky and water were mother-of-pearl and the breasts of doves, a blend of soft blues and pinks so delicate that I had never seen its like. A small group of sailing dinghies was lying becalmed, hoping to be able to start a race (we, who were motoring, gave one of them which had no outboard engine a tow to join the group). None of the people lounging at the tiller of these little boats looked impatient or bored, because no one could mind being becalmed in the middle of so much loveliness. When we were some way past them, near the end of the Point, almost in the open sea, a tiny popple began under our hull and a cat's paw of breeze – a kitten's paw, more like it – just ruffled the water's surface enough for sunlight to start twinkling off the edges of each ripple; I was once told that fishermen at Aldeburgh used to call that effect of light 'tinkling cymbals'. I shall always think of it as that, and no tinkling cymbals I ever saw were better than those we moved through when Andrew was at last able to hoist canvas and very, very gently we started to sail. We didn't talk much. Although we didn't often see each other and differed widely in many of our opinions, he and I had never lost touch with the closeness we had enjoyed in early childhood and there was much that we could understand about each other without words. That afternoon was brimming with a loveliness peculiar to that particular place; he knew that I was appreciating it, and I knew without any doubt how profoundly he was penetrated by it. He was a man

who, with the help of the right wife, had finally found himself the place and the life that fulfilled him, and lived it with a completeness and intensity more often seen in an artist than in someone who should have been a farmer, had to become an army officer, and ended by teaching people sailing, and growing oysters, on the edge of the North Sea. What filled him as death approached was not fear of whatever physical battering he would have to endure (in fact there was not, at the end, any of that), but grief at having to say goodbye to what he could never have enough of.”



A copy of this guide can be downloaded from our website:

www.thecuddy.co.uk