



AllWays

Suffolk, England, UK

www.allwaystraveller.com



History, culture and heritage come together in Suffolk

The English county of Suffolk offers some 50 miles of the North Sea coastline that forms the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This takes in RSPB Minsmere nature reserve, and the wetlands of the Suffolk Broads.

The landscape inland is one of gently rolling arable land scattered with small country towns and villages including Lavenham, Britain's best preserved medieval village.

Ipswich is the county town, Lowestoft a traditional seaside resort and historic Bury St Edmunds named after Edmund, a King of East Anglia and grandson of Alfred the Great.

Edmund became England's first Patron Saint until this status was shifted to St George in the 13th Century.

www.visitsuffolk.com

Ashley Gibbins
Commissioning Editor
AllWays traveller



No ignoring the past in Suffolk today

For my first trip to Suffolk, I began with two nights on the coast, moved inland for another two and ended at Bury St Edmunds.

By Ashley Gibbins

In planning for the trip, I took a brief look into the history of the county, which was certainly worth the effort.

The Suffolk past and present are likely to form an intrinsic part of any visit to the county.

An Anglo-Saxon kingdom

The area of East England that now embraces the adjoining counties of Suffolk and Norfolk was, back in the 5th Century the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of East Anglia.

The Angles were a tribe from Anglia, in what is now northern Germany.

People living in the south of this realm were the 'south folk', and this morphed into Suffolk. The 'north folk' lived in what became Norfolk.

Edmund the Martyr



Edmund, known subsequently as *Edmund the Martyr*, was king of East Anglia from about 855 until his death in 869.

He was very gruesomely murdered by marauding Danes (Vikings), for refusing to renounce his strong Christian faith.

The subsequent shrine to Edmund's memory formed the central attraction at the all-powerful and hugely wealthy Abbey of St Edmund, in the town, and became one of England's most popular pilgrimage locations with much royal patronage.

Edmund's cult flourished into the Middle Ages and he, and Edward the Confessor, were regarded as England's patron saints until this status was 'usurped' by Saint George in the 15th Century.

St Edmund remains patron saint of kings; pandemics; torture victims along with wolves, and Douai Abbey, Toulouse.

The Abbey of St Edmund along with the shrine lasted until 1539, when both were destroyed as part of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries.

While the whereabouts of Edmund's 'body' has been the subject of conjecture ever since, the townfolk of Bury St Edmunds have not lost their fondness for their king.

Having named the town after him they also celebrate St Edmund's Day every 20 November.



Bury St Edmunds Abbey Gardens and Cathedral



Sutton Hoo

Not forgetting Rædwald

Suffolk is also fascinated by King Rædwald, another King of East Anglia.

His royal burial mound, along with others were built at Sutton Hoo.

Those that were not grave robbed were found, when excavated, to contain a long ship, jewellery, coins, goblets, plate, weapons and an ornate gilded helmet.

Also in the itinerary

Lavenham is proud of its claim to be Britain's best preserved, medieval village.

A short drive from Lavenham and we are in Constable Country - and back to the beginning of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



The Sutton Hoo mask

More information

www.visitsuffolk.com



I had to go down to the sea again – but not in it

As a West Country lad, I was never far from the Somerset and Devon coastlines, and I would get there as often as I could.

There is something soothing but also a little nervy about being near to the sea.

Perhaps it's the way one can never take it for granted. At one time serenely calm and the next crashing with great ferocity.

Living in London for many years, the 'sea' has been less easily accessed, but has never lost its mesmerising allure.

The ANOB

The Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was designated in 1970 to 'conserve and enhance the habitats and biodiversity within the 170 square miles of wildlife-rich estuaries, ancient heaths and windswept shingle beaches'.

The ANOB area takes in a number of historic towns and villages including Aldeburgh and Southwold along with the RSPB Minsmere Reserve.

There are three other National Nature Reserves here and many Sites of Special Scientific Interest

The Suffolk Coast Path is one of three long-distance footpaths within the Area.

The Suffolk Coast's online tourism guide for the coastal area with information on what to do and see and what's on at any given time.

Onto the beach

The first chance I got saw me wrapped up and taking an invigorating walk along the pebbles to the Martello Tower, a coastal fort.

This was built between 1808 and 1812 to help thwart Napoleon's attempts to invade.

On a fine autumn day, the blustery November wind forced the waves onto the shore with relentless hammering and thumping velocity.

It is at times like this that the power of the sea is most in evidence and most dramatic.

The next morning, I woke to see the sun rising on a sea that was as flat as the proverbial mill pond.

And so proved my routine for the next two days, with a totally different experience walking the same stretch in early morning.

Joining me, and the first dog walkers of the day were, what is apparently, the regular swimming fraternity.

I thought about joining them for a nano-second.

Onto the beach before breakfast, with the sun rising, and again in the evening with it setting.

A wonderful routine.

More information

www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org
www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk



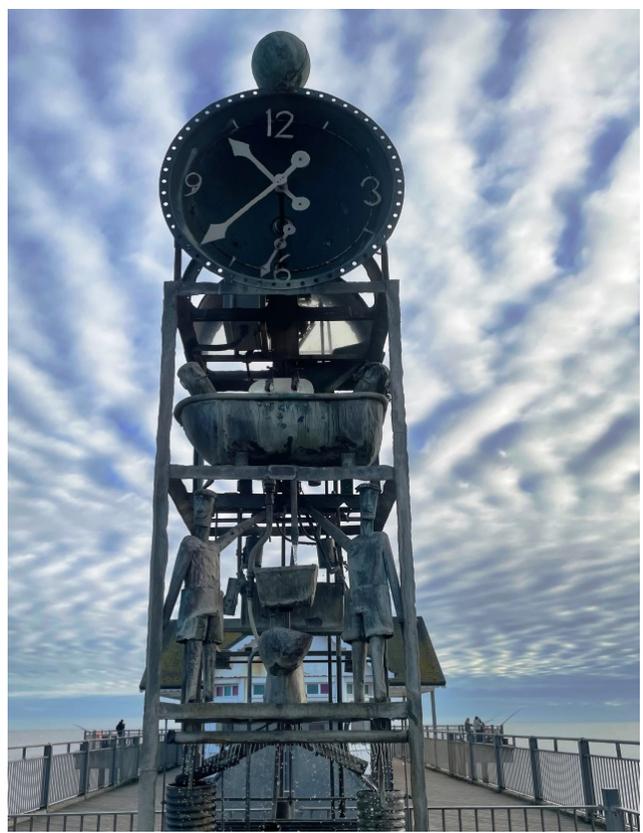
The Scallop by Maggi Hambling



Martello Tower

Barking mad attractions on Southwold Pier

Seaside piers hold a particular allure that is uniquely their own.



As a young lad, strolling with my mum and dad along the pier Weston-super-Mare, my face sticky with candy floss, was the highlight of a day to the beach.

I think it was that there was so much crammed into one long stretch high above the sand or incoming sea.

A few years older now, Southwold Pier achieved the same sense of excitement for me – even when visiting on an early morning in November.

The pier itself stretches some 620 metres into the North Sea and, at its end, provides a good fishing spot for the dedicated anglers found there.

Getting there one passes either side of a string of white painted gift shops and inviting looking cafes and restaurants, with outside seating.

One then gets to Tim Hunkin's quirky water clock with its figures 'weeing' recycled water on the hour and half hour.

Hunkin is also responsible for creating the *Under the Pier Show*, to house his 'mad' collection of interactive and totally unique machines.

For a couple of coins these allow you to *Rent-a-Dog*, and take it for a walk on a traveller, or go on a *Micro Break* by watching holiday snaps on an 'antique' telly from an old armchair.

There's the chance to get into the mind of a fly and my favourite (given my age), the *Mobility Masterclass* helping you cross a 'toy-town' motorway with a zimmer-frame.

Yes, totally barking but tremendous!

More information

www.southwoldpier.co.uk



Adnams Brewery tour



While Southwold itself is yet another attractive Suffolk town, I am real ale man and so was always going to take the Adnams Brewery Tour.

Back to the history lesson, the Swan, next to the current brewery, is recorded as brewing beer back in 1345.

It was though in 1872 that George and Ernest Adnams set up their brewery, and Adnams has been one of the successful, regional brewing companies ever since.

The 90-minute guided tour (ours led by the excellent Barry) takes in the history of the company, explains the current brewing process, and ends with the inevitable product tasting.

More information

www.adnams.co.uk



The RSPB nature reserve at Minsmere

Minsmere is a 1,000-hectare nature reserve of reedbeds, lowland heath, acid grassland, wet grassland, woodland and shingle vegetation.



It has been run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds since 1947, for bird conservation including the bittern, stone-curlew, marsh harrier, nightjar and nightingale.

However, the diversity of habitats protected has also led to a wide variety of other animals and plants being attracted here.

For the visitor, there are well marked walks through the reserve with hides strategically placed for a good chance to view the resident and migrating birds.

Among the many resident and migratory birds that can be seen here are the avocet, a distinctively patterned black and white wader with a long up-curved beak and the bearded tit, a brown, long-tailed bird, usually seen flying rapidly across the top of a reedbed.

Minsmere is proud of its bitterns, a thickset heron with all-over bright, pale, buffy-brown plumage covered with dark streaks and bars.

It is a secretive bird that moves silently through reeds at water's edge, looking for fish.

More information

www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/minsmere

The Red House

Before heading inland, I took the chance to visit *The Red House*, which offers a fascinating glimpse into the lives of Edward Benjamin Britten and Sir Peter Neville Luard Pears.

Britten was one of the twentieth century's great composers, known for his operas along with a wide range of vocal, orchestral and chamber pieces.

Pears was a tenor of world renown who became and remained Britten's personal and professional partner for nearly forty years.

The couple moved to *The Red House* in 1957, with the serene setting allowing Britten to work without distraction, give or take a nesting blackbird.

Visiting the house, a Grade II 17th-century farmhouse, one gets to see the place very much as it would have been when home the two musicians. And crammed with their eclectic collection of art, artefacts and furniture.

Equally interesting is Britten's composition studio, in the converted upper floor of a mid-19th century cart-shed and hay store. The furniture, piano, books and other items in the room are all part of the original collection.

A visit starts with the chance to take in an exhibition covering their rise to fame and there is also the chance to stroll through the five-acre garden.

More information

www.brittenpearsarts.org



Medieval England preserved for all to enjoy

The good folk of Lavenham proudly lay claim to living in Britain's best preserved medieval village.

Claiming something, of course does not necessarily make it true.

In Lavenham's case they have real justification.

The street layout in the village centre is just as it would have been in Tudor England, when Lavenham was the 14th richest town in the country.

Lavenham blue

That this small town in rural Suffolk was so mightily prosperous in the early 1500s was due to the manufacture of Lavenham Blue broadcloth.

This high-quality broadcloth, which got its distinctive blue colour from a dye produced from the woad plant, was exported throughout Europe and the Middle East.

The main streets of Lavenham, at this time, were resplendent with fine timber framed houses and the town flourished.

Lavenham's hey-day was, however, not that long lived.

Its decline came during the reign of Henry VIII and his appalling mismanagement of the economy.

In addition, Dutch refugees arrived and brought with them weaving techniques that produced lighter, cheaper and more fashionable cloths.

Cottons and silks were also arriving from Italy.

This triple whammy saw Lavenham slump into steep economic decline and it dropped to being the 49th wealthiest place in Suffolk.

Centuries of hardship

Two hundred years of real hardship ensued but that was an ironic saving grace that we can appreciate today.

For while Lavenham's Tudor buildings were sturdily well constructed, and stood the test of time, they avoided being demolished to meet the passing architectural fads that swept through more prosperous parts of the country.

And so today we visitors, along with the good folk of Lavenham, can wonder at over 320 listed buildings of special historic and architectural interest.

It is here one finds The Guildhall and Little Hall, two particularly striking buildings, that are also open to the public.



The Market Place, and the streets leading to and from it, are on much the same scale as they would have been in the 15th century.

There are a range of independent boutique shops and galleries, along with fine restaurants and cafes and a couple of great pubs

The once thriving Lavenham is flourishing once again.

More information

www.lovelavenham.co.uk
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lavenham-guildhall
www.littlehall.org.uk





Constable's inspiration for us to enjoy at Flatford Mill

Flatford Mill is a Grade I listed watermill on the River Stour at Flatford in East Bergholt, a 35 minute drive from Lavenham



According to the date-stone the mill was built in 1733, but some of the structure may be earlier. Attached to the mill is a 17th-century miller's cottage which is also Grade I listed.

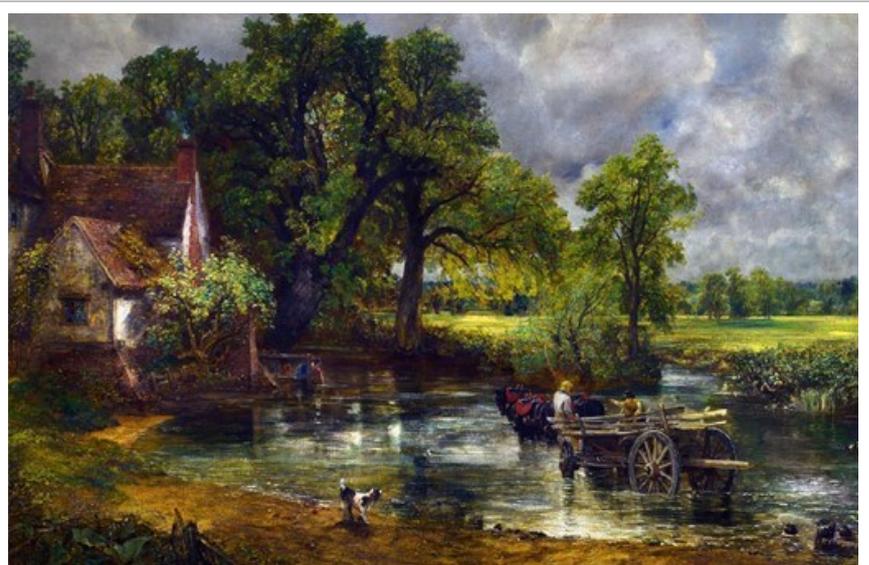
The mill was owned by the artist John Constable's father and is noted, along with its immediate surroundings as the location for many of Constable's works.

It is referred to in the title of one of his most iconic paintings, Flatford Mill (Scene on a Navigable River), and mentioned in the title or is the subject of several others including: Flatford Mill from a lock on the river Stour; Flatford Mill from the lock (A water mill); The Lock.

The Hay Wain, which features Willy Lott's Cottage, was painted from the front of the mill.

The mill is located downstream from Bridge Cottage which, along with neighbouring Valley Farm and Willy Lott's Cottage, are owned by the National Trust.

The site is also rumoured to be haunted by the ghost of a murdered bride that sometimes appears on foggy days.



This was said to be the reason for John Constable's work at the site as a front for his occult activities.

This Flatford and Constable walking trail, which can be taken from the mill has been featured on ITV's Britain's Favourite Walks.

This is a moderate, 4 to 7 mile walk that explores the Stour Valley and Dedham Vale, the locations painted by John Constable in the 18th Century.

More information

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/flatford

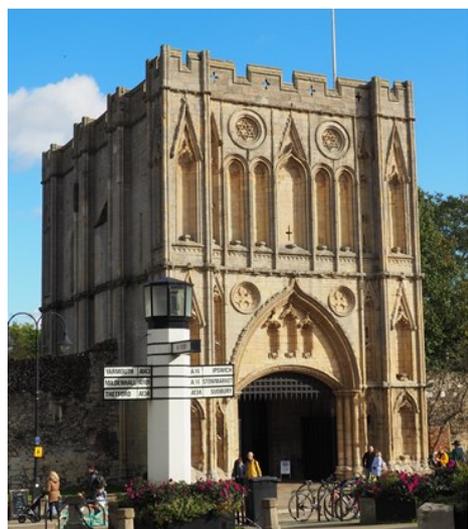
Snape Maltings

Also in the area is Snape Maltings, on the bank of the River Alde.

It is a complex of converted Victorian buildings that now house a range of independent shops and galleries, places to eat, and performance venues – including the renowned Snape Maltings Concert Hall.

More information

www.brittenpearsarts.org/visit-us/snape-maltings



Edmund's legend and legacy lives on in Bury St Edmunds

The last stop on my greatly enjoyable short break to Suffolk was its cathedral town of Bury St Edmunds.

It was then, according to the MP and journalist William Cobbett (1763-1835) the *nicest town in the world*.

And while Bury St Edmunds has naturally developed during the couple of centuries since Cobbett's visit, it remains a very attractive and bustling market town.

What remains its focal point, as it has done for the last thousand years is the, now ruined, 11th century Abbey of St Edmund in the stunning Abbey Gardens.

The Abbey, once one of the most important monasteries in medieval Europe, ensures Edmund's legend and legacy to live on.

Edmund's gruesome death

As we know, King Edmund was murdered by the Danes in 869.

It was a gruesome end with the king tied to a tree, shot through with many dozens of arrows and having had his head cut off, to stop him being able to cross over to the next world.

When Edmund's followers looked to retrieve Edmund's body and head, legend has it they found both joined again and being protected by a giant wolf.

The body was preserved, the veneration of Edmund began, and some 30 years later Edmund's body was moved to Beodericsworth (now Bury St Edmunds) and laid in a small church built for it.

This was in 1020 and is why, in 2022, the town will be celebrating the 1000th anniversary of the Abbey (albeit delayed by two years due to the pandemic).

A site of pilgrimage

People started making the pilgrimage to the site and, in 1043, Edward the Confessor granted 8½ hundreds of land (the equivalent of West Suffolk) to the now magnificent Abbey of St Edmund.

Over the centuries, the Abbey became one of the biggest and richest in Europe, and an all-powerful, and benevolent institution.

It became a veritable and hugely affluent 'pilgrimage theme park', but all came to a crashing end with Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries.

However, Edmund's body had been removed then, maybe buried in an iron coffin in the monks' cemetery, in the Abbey gardens, or taken to Toulouse in France. The fact is no one knows.

But there is a great deal we do know about the momentous, and sometimes turbulent times of Edmund, the Abbey and Bury St Edmunds.

Bury Tour Guides

The best way to make the most of a visit, by far, is to get a tour through *Bury Tour Guides*.

This is a group of local, dedicated and hugely knowledgeable experts who can bring what you get to see to 'vivid life'.

The tour guide for my trip was the tremendously knowledgeable John Saunders.

Had I not had him with me I would have taken in the ruined Abbey and gardens in, I guess, 20 minutes.

After his 90-minute Abbey tour, during which I was riveted to every word, I would happily have stayed longer.



From April 2022 *Bury Tour Guides* will be providing their daily standard daily tours, at 11 am and 2 pm.

A range of more specialised tours will also be available by pre-booking.

Also rightly very popular are the *Bury Tour Guides Ghostly and Macabre Tours* after dark.

More information

www.burystedmundstourguides.org
www.burystedmundsandbeyond.co.uk
www.abbeyofstedmund1000.co.uk

Also in Bury St Edmunds

St Edmundsbury Cathedral and St Mary's Church

While taking in the Abbey will be the 'must' while in Bury St Edmunds, adjoining it is the magnificent St Edmundsbury Cathedral and next to that St Mary's Church, which is the final resting place of Mary Tudor, Queen of France, Henry VIII's sister.

The Moyses Hall Museum

The Moyses Hall Museum, in one of the last surviving Norman houses in Britain, has a series of permanent historic displays and special exhibitions.

The Angel Hotel

The grand Angel Hotel has literary links to Charles Dickens, who first stayed there in 1835 as a journalist for the Morning Chronicle and returned twice more to read to audiences at the nearby Athenaeum.

The room he slept in at the Angel, now number 215 is furnished from the Dickens era.

Ending with a beer

The town's Greene King Brewery offers history and tasting tours, and I could not leave Bury St Edmunds before paying a visit to the Nutshell, Britain's smallest pub.

Serving beer since 1967, it measures just 15ft x 7ft and today serves a great pint of, you've guessed it, Greene King's Abbot Ale.

More information



www.burystedmundsandbeyond.co.uk
www.visitsuffolk.com
www.stedscathedral.org
www.moyesshall.org
www.theangel.co.uk
www.greeneking.co.uk/our-beers/brewery-tours-beer-cafe/
www.thenutshellpub.co.uk





The Brudenell Hotel, Aldeburgh

For those who like a sea view, the Brudenell Hotel has a location that is about as good as it's possible to get.



It sits right on the beach, a short stroll to the very pleasing Aldeburgh High Street, and has that good feel as soon as one walks through its front door.

It is modern and stylish, with fresh strong colours throughout and a definite nautical feel.

Natural light throughout

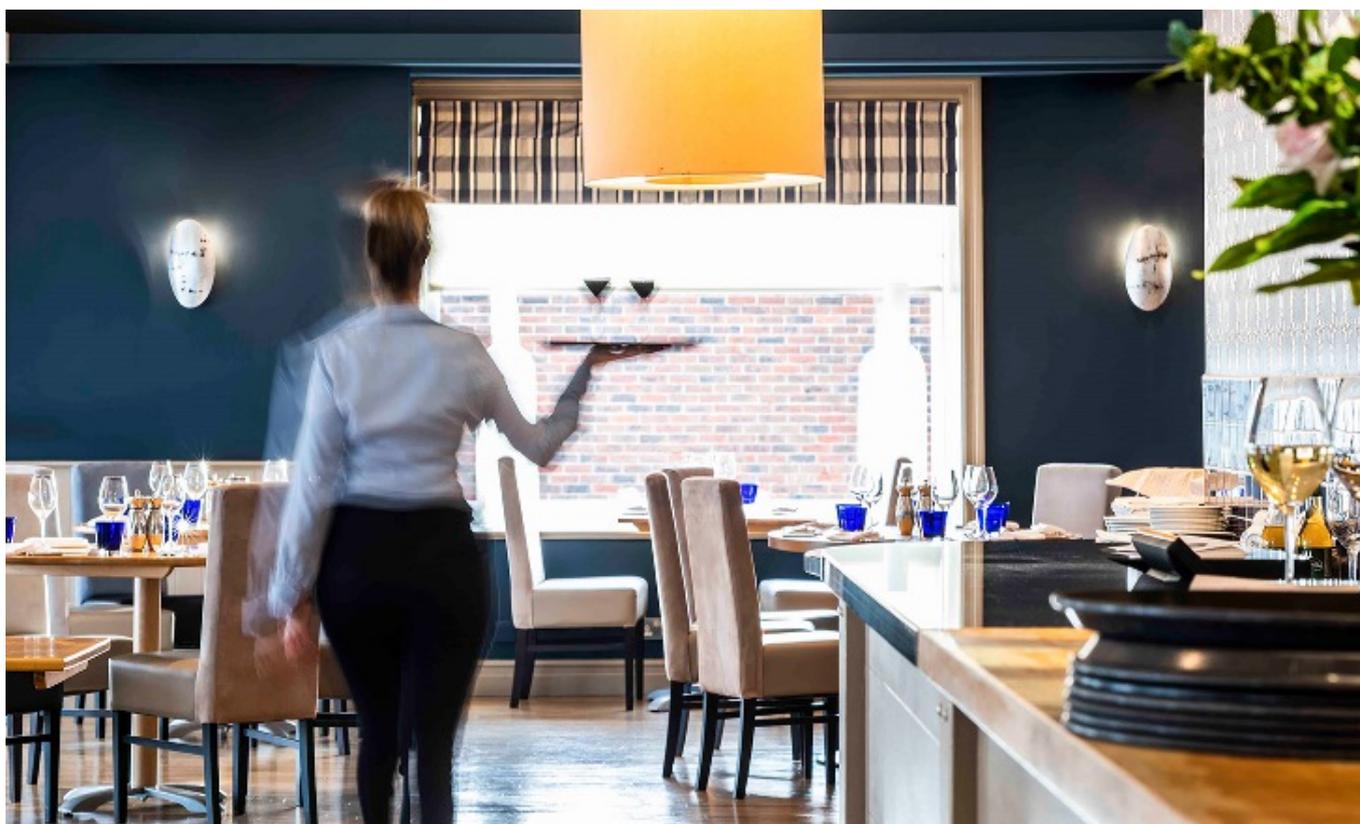
Natural light floods into the two lounge areas and the restaurant that run along the sea facing side of the Brudenell.

As for the bedroom, it matched the reception rooms in quality and comfort.

I was naturally delighted to get one of the many seaward side rooms with a stunning North Sea view.

I understand other rooms are available that overlook the Suffolk countryside or the river Alde.





Dining at the Brudenell

The hotel's Seafood & Grill restaurant is fine dining in relaxed style with an excellent menu courtesy of Head Chef Darran Hazelton.

Darran has created options that are strong on fresh local fish which, as a pescatarian, I greatly appreciated.

I was tempted to start from the restaurant's tasty sounding Tapas by the Sea selection before opting to go with the spiced prawn and coconut soup.

No regrets as it was delicious.

For my main course I was spoilt for choice with the catch of the day, whole plaice or stone bass and mussels.

After serious deliberation, I decided on the fish special, which was local pan-fried Orford skate with herb crushed new potatoes and local greens finished with a herb butter sauce.

Why would it be offered as a special if Darran was not confident it would please? It really did.

While skate can sometimes offer a challenge navigating the bones, I had no difficulty separating these from the fish itself which had real flavour.

For those wanting a meat dish there was slow cooked beef in red wine, sirloin or local pheasant.

I ended dinner with the selection of local cheeses with grapes and celery.

For dinner on the second evening, and having enjoyed a hearty breakfast, I do as I always tend to do and went for the battered fish and chips, which was scrumptious.

Breakfast is all one could wish for with vegetarian full English setting me up for each day.

Wall to ceiling windows

Needless to say, wall to ceiling windows let diners enjoy great views, whatever the weather, although an al fresco dining option is also available during the spring and summer months.

The staff at The Brudenell are as friendly and efficient as one would expect and could wish for.

There is also a real team spirit here with everyone working together to ensure the best guest experience.

More information

www.brudenellhotel.co.uk





The Swan, Lavenham

The Swan is very much the go to place to stay in Lavenham because it enjoys a history in parallel with the village itself.



The three houses which eventually became the hotel date from 1423, when they were part of the Medieval Guildhall of the Guild of Our Lady.

The hotel itself was taking in travellers by 1667 and expanded as a coaching inn with stabling for some 50 horses and accommodation for the travellers far and wide who arrived by coach, on horseback or on foot.

The Swan is now among the many listed buildings in Lavenham.

And while the Swan obviously cherishes its historic pedigree, it also offers the comfort, quality and attention to service, that guests have a right to expect.

The range of room options all enjoy a contemporary, country house feel with large, very comfortable beds and all the facilities one needs.





Dining at the Swan

Dining at The Swan is in the Gallery Restaurant or the more intimate Brasserie 487.

The fine dining menu will please all tastes although I will always opt for the fish.

I therefore started with the Cornish crab salad with avocado mousse and red peppers. It was light and full of flavour and an excellent lead into the main course.

This was the pan-fried sea bass on a bed of stir-fried vegetables with a sesame dressing and wasabi mayonnaise.

The bass was succulent, with the wasabi adding just that little bite to the flavour.

There was still room for a desert, which was a wonderfully rich banana and chocolate mess.

The Airmen's Bar

More recent, but particularly poignant, recollections are to be found in the hotel's Airmen's Bar.

This is named to commemorate the servicemen from RAF Lavenham, a Second World War airfield that was operational from March 1944 to August 1945.

The 487th Bombardment Group of the 8th US Army Air Force, flew 185 missions losing 233 airmen.

The officers favoured the Swan as a drinking haunt and the signatures of many of these brave airmen remain written on one wall of the bar.

Weavers' House Spa

Finally, the hotel's Weavers' House boutique spa has a sauna, steam room, relaxing garden room and outdoor vitality pool, with treatments using Temple Spa and Tribe517 products.

Though not a spa man I was assured by a female guest that it was 'just the bees knees'.

More information

www.theswanatlavenham.co.uk

The Hotel Folk

The Brudenell Hotel and Swan at Lavenham Hotel and Spa are part of the Hotel Folk collection that also has:

- The White Lion Hotel, Aldeburgh
- Thorpeness Golf Club & Hotel
- The Crown and Castle in Orford (restaurant with rooms)
- Crown at Woodbridge

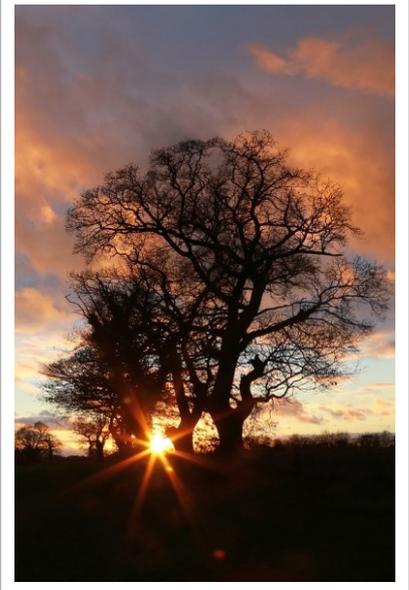
All the hotels offer fine dining focusing on Suffolk's fresh, local produce.

www.thehotelfolk.co.uk



A snapshot of Suffolk





AllWays traveller and the International Travel Writers Alliance



AllWays traveller is the consumer travel magazine from the International Travel Writers, providing independent travellers with views of the world from Alliance travel journalists.

www.allwaystraveller.com



The International Travel Writers Alliance is the world's largest association of professional travel journalists.

www.itwalliance.com



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