

East Anglia



Unfurling gently eastwards to the sea, the vast flatlands of Cambridgeshire, Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk are a rich web of lush farmland, melancholy fens and sparkling rivers. Between them they offer miles of sweeping sandy beaches and a host of picture-postcard villages, magnificent cathedral cities and Edwardian resorts. The region's most renowned attraction, however, is the world-famous university town of Cambridge, an ancient seat of learning with a hushed and earnest attitude and a backdrop of some of England's most stunning classical architecture.

While the country's upper crust and brilliant minds were busy establishing the university as one of England's most exclusive institutions, the rest of East Anglia was growing rich on the backs of the medieval wool trade. Right across the region soaring churches and cathedrals, implausibly picturesque villages and pretty market towns remain testament to the enormous wealth amassed during medieval times when the wool and weaving industries flourished. No expense was spared on the delicate stonework of the superb cathedrals in Ely, Peterborough, Norwich and Bury St Edmunds. And in rural areas, half-timbered houses still exist, and elaborate decorative parquetry (plasterwork) and ornate thatch still adorn the former homes and halls of rich wool merchants.

In between, gentle hills and placid valleys shelter slow-flowing rivers and the same bucolic scenes that once inspired Constable and Gainsborough. The big skies and dramatic sunsets are still a magnet for artists and tourists alike. The coast too remains largely untouched with broad, sandy beaches, pretty seaside villages, traditional resorts and a whole host of new gastropubs and boutique hotels to cater for trendy city visitors.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Dreaming of your student days as you **punt** (p434) past Cambridge's historic colleges
- Wandering aimlessly along the pristine sands of **Holkham Beach** (p466)
- Soaking up the medieval atmosphere in topsy-turvy **Lavenham** (p449)
- Walking the prom, dining on sublime food and just chilling out in understated **Aldeburgh** (p453)
- Relaxing on a slow boat through the tranquil waterways of the **Norfolk Broads** (p463)



■ POPULATION:
3.3 MILLION

■ AREA: 6055
SQ MILES

■ LENGTH OF SOUTHBEND PIER (WORLD'S
LONGEST PLEASURE PIER): 1.33 MILES

History

East Anglia was a major Saxon kingdom and the treasures unearthed in the Sutton Hoo burial ship (see p447) proved that they enjoyed something of the good life here.

The region's heyday, however, was in the Middle Ages, during the wool and weaving boom, when Flemish weavers settled in the area and the grand churches and the world-famous university began to be established.

By the 17th century much of the region's marshland and bog had been drained and converted into arable land and the good times rolled. The emergence of a work-happy urban bourgeoisie coupled with a strong sense of religious duty resulted in the parliamentarianism and Puritanism that would climax in the Civil War. Oliver Cromwell, the uncrowned king of the parliamentarians, was a small-time merchant residing in Ely when he answered God's call to take up arms against the fattened and corrupt monarchy of Charles I.

East Anglia's fortunes waned in the 18th century, however, when the Industrial Revolution got under way up north. The cottage industries of East Anglia dwindled and today crops have replaced sheep as the rural mainstay. During WWII East Anglia became central to the fight against Nazi Germany. With plenty of flat open land and its proximity to mainland Europe, it was an ideal base for the RAF and the United States Air Force. The remains of these bases can still be seen today.

Information

You can get tourist information for the region from the **East of England Tourist Board** (☎ 01284-727470; www.visiteastofengland.com).

Activities

East Anglia is a great destination for walking and cycling enthusiasts with miles of coastline to discover, vast expanses of flat land for leisurely touring and plenty of inland waterways for quiet boating. We concentrate on the highlights here, but you'll find more information throughout the chapter and on p790. Regional tourist websites are packed with walking, cycling and sailing information, and tourist offices are stacked high with leaflets, maps and guides covering outdoor activities.

CYCLING

East Anglia is famously flat and riddled with quiet roads; even the unfit can find vast swathes

for a gentle potter on two wheels. All four counties boast networks of quiet country lanes, where the biggest natural hazard is the wind sweeping in unimpeded from the coast. When it's behind you though, you can free-wheel for miles. There's gorgeous riding to be had along the Suffolk and Norfolk coastlines and in the Fens. Finding quiet roads in Essex is a little more of a challenge but not impossible. Mountain bikers should head for Thetford Forest, near Thetford, while much of the popular on- and off-road Peddars Way (below) walking route is also open to cyclists.

WALKING

East Anglia is not everybody's idea of classic walking country; you won't find any challenging peaks here, but gentle rambles through farmland, beside rivers and lakes and along the wildlife-rich coastline are in ample supply.

The **Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path** (www.nationaltrail.co.uk/peddarsway) is a six-day, 88-mile national trail from Knettishall Heath near Thetford to Cromer on the coast. The first half trails along an ancient Roman road, then finishes by meandering along the beaches, sea walls, salt marshes and fishing villages of the coast. Day trippers and weekend walkers tend to dip into its coastal stretches, which also cover some of the best bird-watching country in England.

Curving round further south, the 50-mile **Suffolk Coast Path** (www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org) wanders between Felixstowe and Lowestoft, via Snape Maltings, Aldeburgh, Dunwich and Southwold, but is also good for shorter rambles.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

With wind and water so abundant here, it's a popular destination for **sailing**, both along the coast and in the Norfolk Broads, where you can easily hire boats and arrange lessons. It's also possible to just put-your way around the Broads in **motorboats**. Alternatively, the wide and frequently empty beaches of the Norfolk coast make great spots for **land yachting** and **kitesurfing**.

Getting There & Around

Getting about East Anglia on public transport, both rail and coach, is straightforward. Consult **Traveline** (☎ 0871 200 2233; www.travelineeastanglia.org.uk) for all public transport information.



BUS

First Group (www.firstgroup.com) offer a FirstDay pass for a day's unlimited bus travel on its regional services. It costs £10/6.50 per adult/child. There's also a FirstWeek pass costing £25 or £17 respectively.

Stagecoach (www.stagecoachbus.com) Explorer and Meraider tickets allow one-/seven-/28-day

travel across Southern England (excluding London) for £8/20/75.

TRAIN

National Express East Anglia (☎ 0845 600 7245; www.nationalexpresseastanglia.com) offers some handy regional rail passes to explore Norfolk, Suffolk and parts of Cambridgeshire. The Anglia

Plus Pass is a great option for families and gives unlimited regional travel after 8.45am on weekdays and any time at weekends. It costs £13 for one day (plus £2 each for up to four accompanied children) or £26 for any three separate days over a period of seven days (plus £2 each for up to four children).

You can also get discounts of up to 33% on most rail fares over £10 in the southeast by purchasing a **Network Railcard** (☎ 08457 225 225; www.railcard.co.uk/network; per yr £20). Children under 15 can save 60%, but a minimum £1 fare applies.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Many visitors to Cambridgeshire never make it past the beautiful university town of Cambridge, where august old buildings, gowned cyclists, wobbly punters and glorious chapels await. But beyond the breathtaking city and its brilliant minds lies a county of vast open landscapes, epic sunsets and unsullied horizons. The flat reclaimed fen, lush farmland and myriad waterways make perfect walking and cycling territory while the extraordinary cathedrals at Peterborough and Ely, and the rip-roaring Imperial War Museum at Duxford, would be headline attractions anywhere else.

Getting Around

The region's public transport radiates from Cambridge, which is a mere 55-minute train ride from London. This line continues north through Ely to King's Lynn in Norfolk. From Ely, branch lines run east through Norwich, southeast into Suffolk and northwest to Peterborough. The useful *Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Passenger Transport Map* is available in tourist offices.

CAMBRIDGE

pop 108,863

Drowning in exquisite architecture, steeped in history and tradition and renowned for its quirky rituals, Cambridge is a university town extraordinaire. The tightly packed core of ancient colleges, the picturesque 'Backs' leading onto the river and the leafy green meadows that seem to surround the city give it a far more tranquil appeal than its historic rival Oxford.

Like 'the other place', as Oxford is known, the buildings here seem unchanged in cen-

turies and it's possible to wander the college buildings and experience them as countless prime ministers, poets, writers and scientists have done. The sheer weight of academic achievement seems to seep from the very walls with cyclists loaded down with books negotiating narrow cobbled passageways, earnest students relaxing on manicured lawns and great minds debating life-changing research in historic pubs. Meanwhile distracted punters drift into the river banks as they soak up the breathtaking views, tills whirl with brisk trade in the city's designer boutiques, and those long past their student days wonder what it would have been like to study in such auspicious surroundings.

History

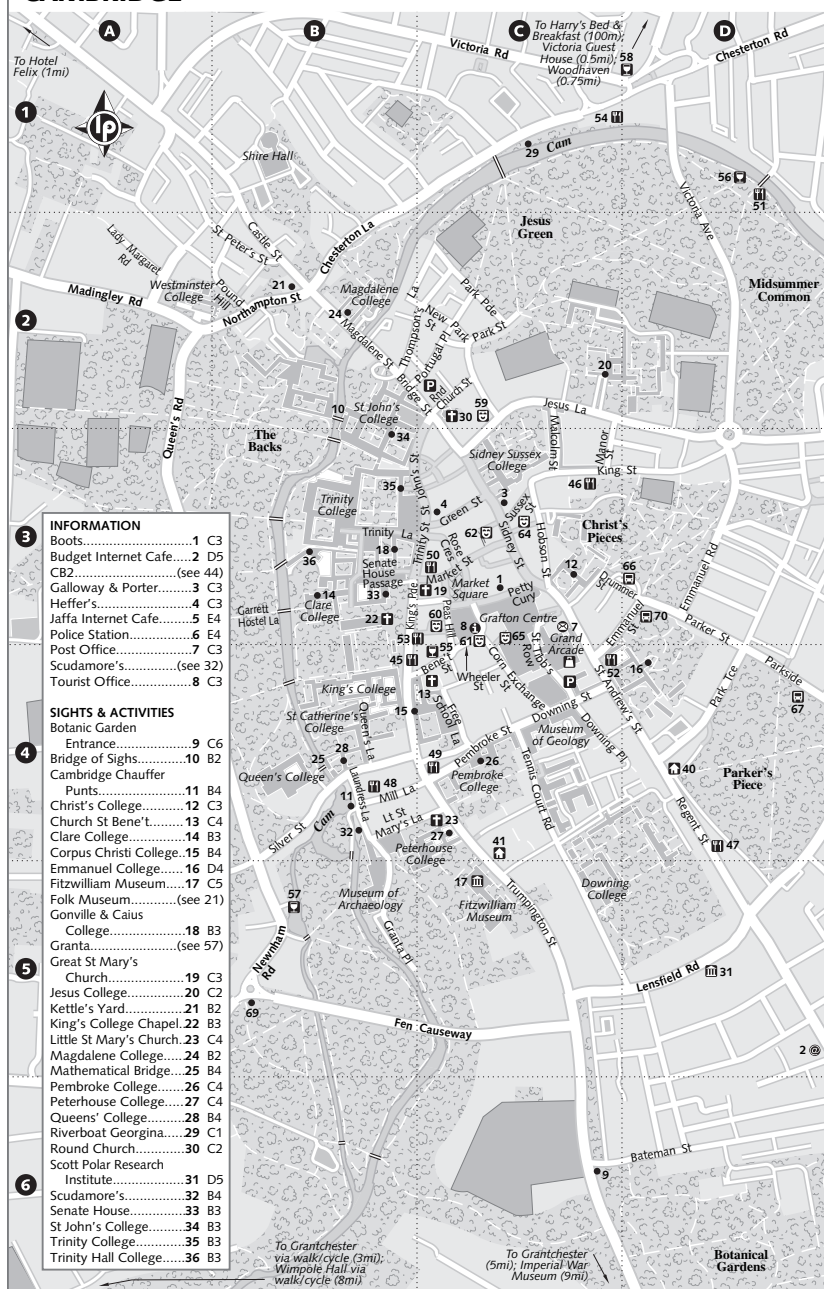
First a Roman fort and then a Saxon settlement, Cambridge was little more than a rural backwater until 1209, when the university town of Oxford exploded in a riot between town and gown (see boxed text, p226). Fed up with the constant brawling between locals and students, a group of scholars upped and left to found a new university in Cambridge.

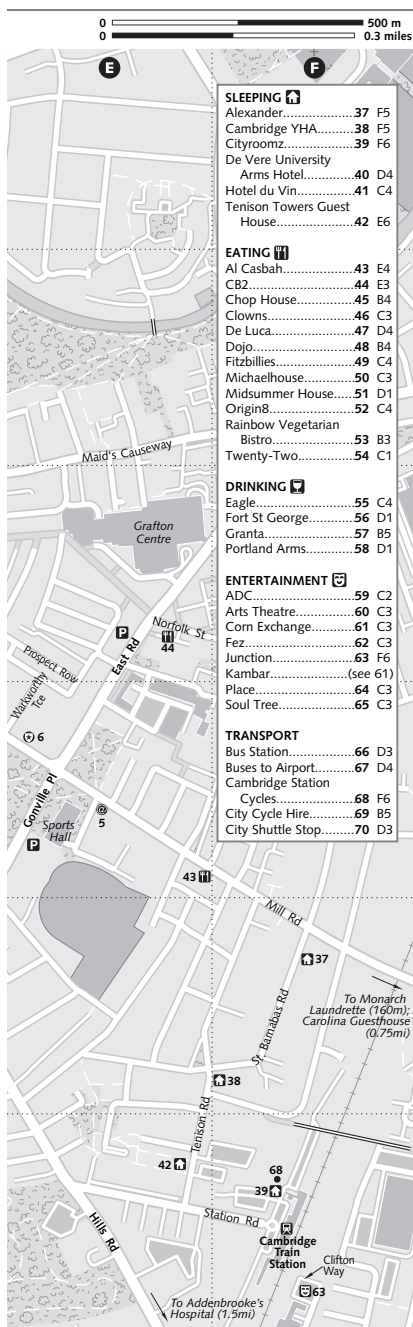
Initially students lived in halls and religious houses but gradually a collegiate system, where tutors and students lived together in a formal community, developed. The first Cambridge college, Peterhouse, was founded in 1284. The collegiate system is still intact today and unique to Oxford and Cambridge.

By the 14th century the royalty, nobility, church, trade guilds and anyone rich enough to court the prestige that their own institution offered began to found their own colleges. It was 500 years before female students were allowed into the hallowed grounds though, and even then in women-only colleges Girton and Newnham, founded in 1869 and 1871 respectively. By 1948 Cambridge minds had broadened sufficiently to allow the women to actually graduate.

The honour roll of famous Cambridge graduates reads like an international who's who of high achievers: 81 Nobel Prize winners (more than any other institution in the world), 13 British prime ministers, nine archbishops of Canterbury, an immense number of scientists, and a healthy host of poets and authors. Crick and Watson discovered DNA here, Isaac Newton used Cambridge to work on his theory of gravity, Stephen Hawking is a professor of

CAMBRIDGE





mathematics here, and Charles Darwin, William Wordsworth, Vladimir Nabokov, David Attenborough and John Cleese all studied here.

Today the university remains one of the top three for research worldwide, and international academics have polled it as the top university in the world for science. Thanks to some of the earth-shaking discoveries made here, Cambridge is inextricably linked to the history of mankind. The university celebrates its 800th birthday in 2009; look out for special events, lectures and concerts to mark its intriguing eight centuries.

Orientation

The colleges and university buildings comprise the centre of the city. The central area, lying in a wide bend of the River Cam, is easy to get around on foot or by bike. The best-known section of the Cam is the Backs, which combines lush river scenery with superb views of six colleges, and King's College Chapel. The other 25 colleges are scattered throughout the city. The bus station is on Drummer St, but the train station is a 20-minute walk to the south. For cheap and cheerful restaurants, internet cafes, laundrettes and late night shops try Mill Rd.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Galloway & Porter (☎ 01223-367876; 30 Sidney St) Remastered and damaged stock.

Heffers (☎ 01223-568568; 20 Trinity St) Vast temple of academic tomes and lighter reads.

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 01223-358966; Parkside)

INTERNET ACCESS

The going rate for internet access is about £1 per hour.

Budget Internet Cafe (☎ 01223-313875; 30 Hills Rd; ☎ 9am-11pm)

CB2 (☎ 01223-508503; 5-7 Norfolk St; ☎ noon-midnight)

Jaffa Internet Cafe (☎ 01223-308380; 22 Mill Rd; ☎ 10am-10pm)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Visit Cambridge (www.visitcambridge.org) The official tourism site for the city.

What's On (www.cam.ac.uk/whatson) Listing of all public events at the University.

LAUNDRY

Monarch Laundrette (☎ 01223-247599; 161 Mill Rd; per wash £3.50; ☎ 8.30am-8pm) Near the train station.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Scudamore's (☎ 01223-359750; www.scudamores.com; Granta Pl; per piece £5)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Addenbrooke's Hospital (☎ 01223-245151; Hills Rd) Southeast of the centre.

Boots (☎ 01223-350213; 28 Petty Cury)

MONEY

You'll find all the major banks and a host of ATMs around St Andrew's St and Sidney St.

POST

Post office (☎ 01223-323325; 9-11 St Andrew's St)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 0871 266 8006; www.visitcambridge.org; Wheeler St; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat Oct-Mar) This large, busy office helps with maps, accommodation, tours and tickets. You can pick up a guide to the Cambridge colleges (£3.99) here or a leaflet (£1.20) outlining a city walk.

Sights**CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY**

Cambridge University comprises 31 colleges; five of these – King's, Queen's, Clare, Trinity and St John's – charge tourists admission. Some other colleges deem visitors too disruptive and simply deny them entry. Most colleges close to visitors for the Easter term and all are closed for exams from mid-May to mid-June. Opening hours vary year to year, so contact the colleges or the tourist office for up to date information.

King's College Chapel

In a city crammed with show-stopping architecture, this is the show-stealer. Chances are you will already have seen it on a thousand postcards, tea towels and choral CDs before you catch your first glimpse of the grandiose **King's College Chapel** (☎ 01223-331212; www.kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel; King's Pde; adult/concession £5/3.50; ☎ during term 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3.15pm Sat, 1.15pm-2.30pm Sun, outside academic terms 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun), but still it inspires awe. It's one of the most extraordinary examples of Gothic architecture in England, and was

begun in 1446 as an act of piety by Henry VI and finished by Henry VIII around 1516.

While you can enjoy stunning front and back views of the chapel from King's Pde and the river, the real drama is within. Mouths drop open upon first glimpse of the inspirational **fan-vaulted ceiling**, its intricate tracery soaring upwards before exploding into a series of stone fireworks. This vast 80m-long canopy is the work of John Wastell and is the largest expanse of fan vaulting in the world.

The chapel's length is also remarkably light, its sides flanked by lofty **stained-glass windows** that retain their original glass, rare survivors of the excesses of the Civil War in this region. It's said that these windows were ordered to be spared by Cromwell himself, who knew of their beauty from his own studies in Cambridge.

The antechapel and the choir are divided by a superbly carved **wooden screen**, designed and executed by Peter Stockton for Henry VIII. The screen bears his master's initials entwined with those of Anne Boleyn. Look closely and you may find an angry human face – possibly Stockton's – amid the elaborate jungle of mythical beasts and symbolic flowers. Above is the magnificent bat-wing organ, originally constructed in 1686 though much altered since.

The thickly carved wooden stalls just beyond the screen are a stage for the chapel's world-famous **choir**. You can hear them in full voice during the magnificent **Evensong** (admission free; ☎ 5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am & 3.30pm Sun term time only). If you happen to be visiting at Christmas it is also worth queuing for admission to the incredibly popular Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols on Christmas Eve.

Beyond the dark-wood choir, light suffuses the **high altar**, which is framed by Rubens' masterpiece *Adoration of the Magi* (1634) and the magnificent east window. To the left of the altar in the side chapels, an **exhibition** charts the stages and methods of building the chapel.

Trinity College

The largest of Cambridge's colleges, **Trinity** (☎ 01223-338400; www.trin.cam.ac.uk; Trinity St; adult/child £2.50/1 Mar-Oct; ☎ library noon-2pm Mon-Fri, hall 3-5pm, chapel 10am-5pm), is entered through an impressive Tudor gateway first created in 1546. As you walk through have a look at the statue of the college's founder Henry VIII that adorns it. His left hand holds a golden orb, while his

right grips not the original sceptre but a table leg, put there by student pranksters and never replaced. It's a wonderful introduction to one of Cambridge's most venerable colleges, and a reminder of who really rules the roost.

As you enter the **Great Court**, scholastic humour gives way to wonderment, for it is the largest of its kind in the world. To the right of the entrance is a small tree, planted in the 1950s and reputed to be a descendant of the apple tree made famous by Trinity alumnus Sir Isaac Newton. Other alumni include Tennyson, Francis Bacon, Lord Byron, HRH Prince Charles and at least nine prime ministers, British and international, and a jaw-dropping 31 Nobel Prize winners.

The square is also the scene of the run made famous by the film *Chariots of Fire* – 350m in 43 seconds (the time it takes the clock to strike 12). Although many students attempt it, Harold Abrahams (the hero of the film) never actually did, and the run wasn't even filmed here. If you fancy your chances remember that you'll need Olympian speed to even come close.

The college's vast hall has a dramatic hammer-beam roof and lantern, and beyond this are the dignified cloisters of Nevile's Court and the renowned **Wren Library** (📖 noon-2pm Mon-Fri, plus during term 10.30am-12.30pm Sat). It contains 55,000 books dated before 1820 and more than 2500 manuscripts, including AA Milne's original *Winnie the Pooh*. Both Milne and his son, Christopher Robin, were graduates.

Henry VIII would have been proud to note, too, that his college would eventually come to throw the best party in town, the lavish May Ball in June.

Gonville & Caius College

Known locally as Caius (pronounced keys), **Gonville and Caius** (📞 01223-332400; www.cai.cam.ac.uk; Trinity St) was founded twice, first by a priest called Gonville, in 1348, and then again in 1557 by Dr Caius (Keys – it was common for academics to use the Latin form of their names), a brilliant physician who supposedly spoilt his legacy by insisting the college admit no 'deaf, dumb, deformed, lame, chronic invalids, or Welshmen!' Fortunately for the college his policy didn't last long, and the wheelchair-using megastar of astrophysics, Stephen Hawking, is now a fellow here.

The college is of particular interest thanks to its three fascinating gates: Virtue, Humility

and Honour. They symbolise the progress of the good student, since the third gate (the *Porta Honoris*, a fabulous domed and sundial-sided confection) leads to the Senate House and thus graduation.

Trinity Hall College

Henry James once wrote of the delightfully diminutive **Trinity Hall** (📞 01223-332500; www.trin.hall.cam.ac.uk; Trinity Lane), 'If I were called upon to mention the prettiest corner of the world, I should draw a thoughtful sigh and point the way to the gardens of Trinity Hall.' Wedged cosily among the great and the famous, but unconnected to better-known Trinity, it was founded in 1350 as a refuge for lawyers and clerics escaping the ravages of the Black Death, thus earning it the nickname of the 'Lawyers' College'. The college's 16th-century library has original Jacobean reading desks and chained books (an early anti-theft device) on the shelves. Writer JB Priestley, astrophysicist Stephen Hawking and actress Rachel Weisz are among Trinity Hall's graduates.

St John's College

After King's College, **St John's** (📞 01223-338600; www.joh.cam.ac.uk; St John's St; adult/child £2.80/1.70; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat & Sun Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov-Feb) is one of the city's most photogenic colleges, and is also the second-biggest after Trinity. Founded in 1511, it sprawls along both banks of the river, joined by the Bridge of Sighs, a masterpiece of stone tracery. Over the bridge is the 19th-century New Court, an extravagant neo-Gothic creation, and out to the left stunning views of the Backs.

Christ's College

Over 500 years old and a grand old institution, **Christ's** (📞 01223-334900; www.christs.cam.ac.uk; St Andrew's St; 🕒 9am-dusk) is worth visiting if only for its gleaming Great Gate emblazoned with heraldic carving of spotted Beaufort yale (antelope-like creatures), Tudor roses and portcullis. Its founder, Lady Margaret Beaufort, hovers above like a guiding spirit. A stout oak door leads into First Court, which has an unusual circular lawn, magnolias and wisteria creepers. Pressing on through the Second Court there is a gate to the Fellows' Garden, which contains a mulberry tree under which 17th-century poet John Milton reputedly wrote *Lycidas*. In 2009 the college celebrates the 200th anniversary of the birth

of Charles Darwin, who studied here, with a special exhibition in his college rooms.

Corpus Christi College

Entry to this illustrious college (☎ 01223-338000; www.corpus.cam.ac.uk; Trumpington St) is via the so-called New Court that dates back a mere 200 years. To your right is the door to the Parker Library, which holds the finest collection of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in the world. As you enter take a look at the statue on the right, that of the eponymous Matthew Parker, who was college master in 1544 and Archbishop of Canterbury to Elizabeth I. Mr Parker was known for his curiosity, and his endless questioning gave rise to the term 'nosy parker'. Meanwhile monastic atmosphere still oozes from the inner Old Court, which retains its medieval form. Look out for the fascinating sundial and plaque to playwright and past student Christopher Marlowe (1564–93), author of *Dr Faustus* and *Tamburlaine*.

Other Colleges

Tranquil 15th-century **Jesus College** (☎ 01223-339339; www.jesus.cam.ac.uk; Jesus Lane), was once a nunnery before its founder, Bishop Alcock, expelled the nuns for misbehaving. Highlights include a Norman arched gallery, a 13th-century chancel and art-nouveau features by Pugin, William Morris (ceilings), Burne-Jones (stained glass) and Madox Brown.

Originally a Benedictine hostel, riverside **Magdalene College** (☎ 01223-332100; www.magd.cam.ac.uk; Magdalene St) has the dubious honour of being the last college to allow women students; when they were finally admitted in 1988, male students wore black armbands and flew the college flag at half-mast. Its greatest asset is the Pepys Library, housing the magnificent collection of books the famous mid-17th-century diarist bequeathed to his old college.

The oldest and smallest college, **Peterhouse** (☎ 01223-338200; www.pet.cam.ac.uk; Trumpington St), is a charming place founded in 1284. Much of the college was rebuilt or added over the years, including the exceptional little chapel built in 1632, but the main hall is bona fide 13th century and beautifully restored. Just to the north is **Little St Mary's Church**, inside which is a memorial to Peterhouse student Godfrey Washington, great-uncle of George. His family coat of arms was the stars and stripes, the inspiration for the US flag.

The gorgeous 15th-century **Queen's College** (☎ 01223-335511; www.queens.cam.ac.uk; Silver St; adult £2) sits elegantly astride the river and has two enchanting medieval courtyards: Old Court and Cloister Court. Here too is the beautiful half-timbered President's Lodge and the tower in which famous Dutch scholar and reformer Desiderius Erasmus lodged from 1510 to 1514. He had plenty to say about Cambridge: the wine tasted like vinegar, the beer was slop and the place was too expensive, but he did note that the local women were good kissers.

The 16th-century **Emmanuel College** (☎ 01223-334200; www.emma.cam.ac.uk; St Andrew's St) is famous for its exquisite chapel designed by Sir Christopher Wren. Here too is a plaque commemorating John Harvard (BA 1632) a scholar here who later settled in New England and left his money to found his namesake university in the Massachusetts town of Cambridge.

THE BACKS

Behind the grandiose facades, stately courts and manicured lawns of the city's central colleges lies a series of gardens and parklands butting up against the river. Collectively known as the Backs, these tranquil green spaces and shimmering waters offer unparalleled views of the colleges and are often the most enduring image of Cambridge for visitors. The picture-postcard views of college life, graceful bridges and weeping willows can be seen from the pathways that cross the Backs, from the comfort of a chauffeur-driven punt or from the lovely pedestrian bridges that meander across the river.

The fanciful **Bridge of Sighs** (built in 1831) at St Johns is best observed from the stylish bridge designed by Wren just to the south. The oldest crossing is at **Clare College**, built in 1639 and ornamented with decorative balls. Its architect was paid a grand total of 15p for his design and, feeling aggrieved at such a measly fee, it's said he cut a chunk out of one of the balls adorning the balustrade so the bridge would never be complete. Most curious of all is the flimsy-looking wooden construction joining the two halves of Queen's College known as the **Mathematical Bridge**, first built in 1749. Despite what unscrupulous guides may tell you, it wasn't the handiwork of Sir Isaac Newton (he died in 1727), originally built without nails, or taken apart by students who then couldn't figure how to put it back together.

GREAT ST MARY'S CHURCH

Cambridge's staunch university **church** (☎ 01223-741716; www.gsm.cam.ac.uk; Senate House Hill; tower adult/child £2.50/1.25; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun, to 4pm Sep-Apr) was built between 1478 and 1519 in the late-Gothic Perpendicular style. If you're fit and fond of a view, climb the 123 steps of the tower for superb vistas of the dreamy spires, albeit marred by wire fencing.

The beautiful classical building directly across King's Pde is the **Senate House**, designed in 1730 by James Gibbs; graduations are held here in summer, when gowned and mortar-boarded students parade the streets to pick up those all-important scraps of paper.

ROUND CHURCH

The beautiful **Round Church** (☎ 01223-311602; www.christianheritageuk.org.uk; Bridge St; adult/child £2/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1-5pm Sun) is another of Cambridge's gems and one of only four such structures in England. It was built by the mysterious Knights Templar in 1130 and shelters an unusual circular nave ringed by chunky Norman pillars. It now houses an exhibition on Cambridge's Christian heritage.

CHURCH OF ST BENE'T

The oldest structure in the county, the **Saxon tower** of this Franciscan **church** (www.stbenets.org.uk; Bene't St) was built around 1025. The round holes above the belfry windows were designed to offer owls nesting privileges; they were valued as mouse killers.

FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

Fondly dubbed 'the Fitz' by locals, this colossal neoclassical pile was one of the first **public art museums** (☎ 01223-332900; www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk; Trumpington St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) in Britain, built to house the fabulous treasures that the seventh Viscount Fitzwilliam had bequeathed to his old university. An unabashedly over-the-top building, it sets out to mirror its contents in an ostentatious jumble of styles that mixes mosaic with marble, Greek with Egyptian and more. It was begun by George Basevi in 1837, but he did not live to see its completion: while working on Ely Cathedral he stepped back to admire his handiwork, slipped and fell to his death.

The lower galleries are filled with priceless treasures from ancient Egyptian sarcophagi to Greek and Roman art, Chinese ceram-

ics to English glass, and some dazzling illuminated manuscripts. The upper galleries showcase works by Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, Rubens, the Impressionists, Gainsborough and Constable, right through to Rembrandt and Picasso.

SCOTT POLAR RESEARCH INSTITUTE

For anyone interested in polar exploration or history the **Scott Polar Research Institute** (☎ 01223-336540; www.spri.cam.ac.uk/museum; Lensfield Rd; admission free; ☎ 11am-1pm & 2-4pm Tue-Fri, noon-4pm Sat) has a fantastic collection of artefacts, journals, paintings, photographs, clothing, equipment and maps in its museum. You can learn about the great polar explorers and their harrowing expeditions and read the last messages left to wives, mothers and friends by Scott and his polar crew. You can also examine Inuit carvings and scrimshaw (etched bones), sledges and snow scooters and see the scientific and domestic equipment used by various expeditions.

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY BOTANIC GARDEN

Founded by Charles Darwin's mentor, Prof John Henslow, the beautiful **Botanic Garden** (☎ 01223-336265; www.botanic.cam.ac.uk; entrance on Bateman St; adult/under 16yr £4/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Feb-Mar & Oct, to 4pm Nov-Jan) is home to 8000 plant species, a wonderful arboretum, tropical houses, a winter garden and flamboyant herbaceous borders.

KETTLE'S YARD

Neither gallery nor museum, this **house** (☎ 01223-352124; www.kettlesyard.co.uk; cnr Northampton & Castle Sts; admission free; ☎ house 2-4pm Tue-Sun, gallery 11.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) nonetheless oozes artistic excellence, with a collection of 20th-century art, furniture, ceramics and glass that would be the envy of many an institution. It is the former home of HS 'Jim' Ede, a former assistant keeper at the Tate Gallery in London, who opened his home to young artists, resulting in a beautiful collection by the likes of Miro, Henry Moore and others. There are also exhibits of contemporary art in the modern **gallery** next door.

While here, take a peek in the neighbouring **Folk Museum** (☎ 01223-355159; www.folkmuseum.org.uk; 2/3 Castle St; adult/child £3.50/1; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun), a 300-year-old former inn now cluttered with the detritus of centuries of local domesticity.

HOW TO PUNT

Punting looks pretty straightforward but, believe us, it's not. As soon as we dried off and hung our clothes on the line, we thought it was a good idea to offer a couple of tips on how to move the boat and stay dry.

1. Standing at the end of the punt, lift the pole out of the water at the side of the punt.
2. Let the pole slide through your hands to touch the bottom of the river.
3. Tilt the pole forward (that is, in the direction of travel of the punt) and push down to propel the punt forward.
4. Twist the pole to free the end from the mud at the bottom of the river, and let it float up and trail behind the punt. You can then use it as a rudder to steer with.
5. If you haven't fallen in yet, raise the pole out of the water and into the vertical position to begin the cycle again.

Activities

PUNTING

Gliding a self-propelled punt along the Backs is a blissful experience once you've got the knack, though it can also be a manic challenge to begin. If you wimp out you can always opt for a relaxing chauffeured punt.

Cambridge Chauffer Punts (☎ 01223-354164; www.punting-in-cambridge.co.uk; Silver St; per hr £16, chauffeured per punt £60 or per person £11)

Granta (☎ 01223-301845; www.puntingincambridge.com; Newnham Rd; per hr £14, chauffeured per person £10)

Scudamore's (☎ 01223-359750; www.scudamores.com; Silver St; per hr £18, chauffeured per person £12-14)

WALKING & CYCLING

For an easy stroll into the countryside, you won't find a prettier route than the 3-mile walk to Grantchester (see p439) following the meandering River Cam and its punters south-west through flower-flecked meadows.

Scooting around town on a bike is easy thanks to the pancake-flat landscape, although the surrounding countryside can get a bit monotonous. The Cambridge tourist office stocks several useful guides including the free *Cambridge Cycle Route Map*.

Tours

City Sightseeing (☎ 01223-423578; www.city-sightseeing.com; adult/child £10/5; ☽ 10am-4pm) Hop-on hop-off tour buses with 21 stops around town.

Green Wheels Pedicabs (☎ 01223-858485) Trishaw tours around the city on 20-minute (£6 per person) or 45-minute (£10 per person) loops. Minimum two people.

Riverboat Georgina (☎ 01223-307694; www.georgina.co.uk; per person £16-24) Two-hour cruises from the river at Jesus Lock including a cream tea or boatman's lunch.

Walking tours (☎ 01223-457574; tours@cambridge.gov.uk; tickets incl entry to King's/St John's Colleges adult/

under 12yr £10/5; ☽ tours 11.30pm & 1.30pm, with extra tours at 10.30am & 2.30pm Jul & Aug.) The tourist office also arranges colourful 'Ghost Tours' (adult/under 12 years £5/3; 6pm Friday) and 'Punt and Ghost Tours' (adult/under 12 years £15/7.50; 7pm Saturday). The tourist office has more details; book in advance.

Festivals & Events

Cambridge has a jam-packed schedule of almost continual events from beer festivals to hippie fairs, of which the tourist office has exhaustive listings. One of the biggies is late July's **Folk Festival** (☎ 01223-357851; www.cambridgefolkfestival.co.uk), which has hosted the likes of Elvis Costello, Paul Simon, kd Lang and Joan Armatrading. Although you'll need to be a student to join in, the biggest event in the college year are the **May Balls** (held in June) when students glam up and get down after exams. Also popular are the traditional rowing races, the **Bumps** (☎ 01223-467304; www.cubc.org), held in March and May, in which college boat clubs compete to collide with the crew in front.

Cambridge University mark's its **800th birthday** in 2009. A series of special events is planned to celebrate throughout the year. Ask at the tourist office for details.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Cambridge YHA (☎ 0845 371 9728; www.yha.org.uk; 97 Tenison Rd; dm incl breakfast £19.95; ☽) Within walking distance of the city centre and cheap and cheerful; it's hard to knock this well-worn hostel close to the train station. The dorms are small and pretty basic and with lots of groups using the hostel it can be noisy, but it's got a great atmosphere and a surprisingly good breakfast.

Cambridge Rooms (www.cambridgerooms.co.uk; r £40-120) If you fancy experiencing a night inside the hallowed college grounds you can rent one of the student rooms and see how life is on the inside. Accommodation varies from functional singles (with shared bathroom) overlooking the college quad to more modern, en suite rooms in a nearby annexe. Although some twin and family rooms do exist, most rooms are singles, but the website will give a clear indication of what you can expect before you make a booking. If you do decide to stay you can wander the grounds, see the chapel and have breakfast in the ancient college hall. There's limited availability during term time but a good choice of rooms during university holidays.

MIDRANGE

Some of Cambridge's most central B&Bs use their convenient location as an excuse not to upgrade. Some of the better places are a bit of a hike from town but well worth the effort.

Carolina (www.carolinaguesthouse.co.uk; 138 Perne Rd; s/d from £30/55;   wi-fi) This lovely, bright B&B is a homely place with cosy rooms decked out in pale blue colour schemes, crisp linens and rustic wooden furniture. Almost all rooms are en suite and there's a spacious garden as well as free wi-fi. It's a 30-minute walk from the city centre but right on a regular bus route.

Woodhaven (www.stayatwoodhaven.co.uk; 245 Milton Rd; s £30-45, d £60-75;   wi-fi) Although a 10-minute bus trip from town, this place is worth the effort for its warm welcome and bright, simple rooms with pine furniture and uncluttered style. Cheaper rooms share bathrooms but all have free wi-fi.


Victoria Guest House (www.cambridge-accommodation.com; 55-57 Arbury Rd; s £35-60, d £50-75, all incl breakfast;   wi-fi) A fairly central option worth seeking out, the Victoria has a range of tasteful rooms with contemporary decor and a hint of period character. Rooms vary in size and not all have en suite facilities but the friendly owners and incredible breakfasts are a real bonus.

Tenison Towers Guest House (www.cambridgecitytenison-towers.com; 148 Tenison Rd; s/d £35/60) This exceptionally friendly and homely B&B is really handy if you're arriving by train, but well worth seeking out whatever way you arrive in town. The rooms are bright and simple with pale colours and

fresh flowers and the aroma of freshly baked muffins greets you on arrival.

Alexander (www.beesley-schuster.co.uk; 56 St Barnabas Rd; d & tw incl breakfast £60-75) Set in a Victorian house in quiet residential area, the Alexander has two homely rooms with period fireplaces, big windows and lots of light. There's a two-night minimum stay but with a convenient location and friendly atmosphere it's worth booking in advance. Continental breakfast only.

Other possibilities:



Cityroomz (www.sleeperz.com; Station Rd; s/d £45/65;  Modern minimalist rooms, a good location and great rates make this place a popular option but it can be pretty noisy and the single rooms are simply tiny.

Harry's Bed & Breakfast (www.welcometoharrys.co.uk; 39 Milton Rd; s £60-65, d £70-75;   wi-fi) An incredibly warm welcome and plenty of little extras such as free calls to UK landlines make this place stand out from the crowd. It's just north of the centre.

TOP END

ourpick Hotel du Vin (www.hotelduvin.com; Trumpington St; d from £140;  wi-fi) This boutique hotel chain really knows how to do things right. Its Cambridge offering has all the usual trademarks from quirky but incredibly stylish rooms with monsoon showers and luxurious Egyptian cotton sheets to the atmospheric vaulted cellar bar and the French-style bistro (mains £12.75 to £22.75). The central location, character-laden building and top-notch service make it a great deal at this price.

Hotel Felix (www.hotelfelix.co.uk; Whitehouse Lane, Huntingdon Rd; s/d incl breakfast from £145/180;   wi-fi) This luxurious boutique hotel occupies a lovely grey-brick Victorian villa in landscaped grounds a mile from the city centre. Its 52 rooms embody designer chic with minimalist style but lots of comfort. The slick restaurant serves Mediterranean cuisine with a modern twist (mains £14.50 to £19).

De Vere University Arms Hotel (www.devere-hotels.com; Regent St; d from £155;   wi-fi) The grande dame of Cambridge hotels, this Victorian pile dominates Parker's Piece and exudes an air of old-school refinement. Inside the public spaces ooze gentleman's-club atmosphere, while the bedrooms are very traditional in style.

Eating

You won't go hungry in Cambridge, it's packed with chain restaurants, particularly around the city centre and on Bridge St. If you're looking for something more authentic though you'll have to search a little harder.

QUICK EATS

Bright and airy **Origin8** (☎ 01223-354434; 62 St Andrew's St; mains £3-6.50; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) is a cafe-cum-deli and butchers shop and prides itself on its local organic ingredients. It's a great place to stop for lunch or pick up some goodies for a picnic. Alternatively try **Fitzbillies** (☎ 01223-352500; www.fitzbillies.co.uk; 52 Trumpington St; ☎ shop 9am-5.30pm, restaurant 9am-9.30pm), Cambridge's oldest bakery, beloved by generations of students for its ultrasticky buns and quaint wood shopfront. For a heartier meal, **Dojo** (☎ 01223-363471; 1-2 Miller's Yard, Mill Lane; mains £6-7; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a popular student haunt offering a great range of Chinese, Thai, Japanese, Vietnamese and Malaysian noodle and rice dishes served up in generous portions.

BUDGET

our pick **Michaelhouse** (☎ 01223-309167; Trinity St; mains £3.55-6.35; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) You can sup fair-trade coffee and nibble focaccia among soaring medieval arches or else take a pew within reach of the altar at this stylishly converted church, which still has a working chancel. The simple lunch menu is mostly vegetarian, and wine and beer is offer to sweeten the deal.

CB2 (☎ 01223-508503; 5-7 Norfolk St; mains £4-13; ☎ noon-midnight) Internet cafe, bistro, music venue and cinema all rolled into one, this lively place dishes up a great range of rustic global cuisine in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. The menu features everything from salads, pastas and wraps to heartier bistro specials. There's live music on the top floor on Wednesday nights and every other Thursday.

Clowns (☎ 01223-355711; 54 King St; mains £5-9; ☎ 8am-midnight) A cheap and cheerful Cambridge institution frequented by students and dons, town and gown, this thoroughly laid-back place dishes up some of the best Italian dishes in town. It also does a range of great sandwiches and gelato, best consumed on the roof terrace.

MIDRANGE

Al Casbah (☎ 01223-579500; www.al-casbah.co.uk; 62 Mill Rd; mains £7.50-9) Decked out like a Bedouin tent, this Algerian restaurant dishes up steaming plates of classic North African favourites. Expect tabouleh, felafel, brochettes, *merguez* (spicy lamb sausage) and wonderful grills from the indoor charcoal barbecue.

De Luca (☎ 01223-356666; www.delucacucina.co.uk; 83 Regent St; mains £8-19.50; ☎ 11am-late) Contemporary style and classic Italian food collide in this light-filled restaurant in the centre of town. The open kitchen, glass ceiling and exposed brickwork make it a bright and lively place to dine and with a great wine list and plenty of cocktails it's as popular for long lunches as it is for boozy nights out.

our pick **Rainbow Vegetarian Bistro** (☎ 01223-321551; www.rainbowcafe.co.uk; 9a King's Pde; mains £8.50-9.50; ☎ 10am-10pm Tue-Sat) First-rate vegetarian food and a pious glow emanate from this snug subterranean gem, accessed down a narrow passageway off King's Pde. It's decorated in funky colours and serves up organic dishes with a hint of the exotic, such as scrumptious Indonesian gado gado and Moroccan *tagine*.

Chop House (☎ 01223-359506; 1 Kings Pde; mains £9-15; ☎ 11am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, to 11pm Sat, 10am-10.30pm Sun) Set on the busy corner of Kings Pde and Bene't St, this place has giant windows overlooking the street, wooden floors and a menu of classic English cuisine. If you're craving for sausage and mash, a sizzling steak, suet pudding, fish pie or potted ham, look no further.

TOP END

Twenty-Two (☎ 01223-351880; www.restaurant22.co.uk; 22 Chesterton Rd; set dinner £27.50; ☎ 7-9.45pm Tue-Sat) Discreetly disguised amid a row of Victorian terraced housing is this outstanding restaurant, blessed by both its romantic candlelit ambiance and its wonderful gourmet English and European menu with a commitment to local produce.

Midsummer House (☎ 01223-369299; www.midsummerhouse.co.uk; Midsommer Common; set lunch £30, 3-course dinner £60; ☎ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) For sheer gastronomic delight this sophisticated place serves up what is possibly the best food in East Anglia. With two Michelin stars and a host of rave reviews from famous foodies it's *the* place to go for a special occasion. The menu is French Mediterranean and the setting a wonderful Victorian villa backing onto the river.

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

Start your weekend in style by ensconcing yourself for a night of romance and fine dining at Cambridge's **Hotel du Vin** (p435) and venture out for a nightcap at the celebrated pub the **Eagle** (below). Next morning check out the university colleges, dip into the sublime **King's College Chapel** (p430) and then reward yourself with lunch at swanky **Midsummer House** (opposite). In the afternoon, work off your excesses by **punting** (p434) along the Backs before bidding farewell to the dreamy spires and breezing east to the **Stour Valley** (p448) and the time-transcending streets of gorgeous **Lavenham** (p449). Install yourself in the spectacular and none-too-frugal **Lavenham Priory** (p449), and explore the town's higgledy-piggledy lanes to work up an appetite for slick French cuisine at the **Great House** (p450). On Sunday morning roll west to check out the twin stately homes of **Long Melford** (p448) then east for the picture-postcard hamlet of **Kersey** (p450), where you can toast the weekend with a pint and pub lunch at the medieval **Bell Inn** (p456).

Drinking

Cambridge is awash with historic pubs that echo with the same equal mix of intellectual banter and rowdy merrymaking that they have done for centuries past.

Eagle (☎ 01223-505020; Bene't St) Cambridge's most famous pub has loosened the tongues and pickled the grey cells of many an illustrious academic in its day; among them Nobel Prize-winning scientists Crick and Watson, who discussed their research into DNA here. It's a traditional 16th-century pub with five cluttered cosy rooms, the back one popular with WWII airmen, who left their signatures on the ceiling.

Fort St George (☎ 01223-354327; Midsummer Common) The ideal English summertime pub sandwiched between the grassy expanse of Midsummer Common and the punt-littered River Cam, this place has lots of outdoor seating and great views of the river. The 16th-century interior with its crooked beams and sloping floors makes a fine alternative when the sun goes in.

Portland Arms (☎ 01223-357268; 129 Chesterton Rd) The best spot in town to catch a gig and see the pick of up-and-coming bands, the Portland is a popular student haunt and music venue. Its wood-panelled interior, unpretentious attitude and spacious terrace make a good bet any day of the week.

Granta (☎ 01223-505016; Newnham Rd) If the exterior of this picturesque waterside pub, overhanging a pretty mill pond, looks strangely familiar it could be because it's the darling of many a TV director. Its terrace sits directly beside the water and when your Dutch courage has been sufficiently fuelled, there are punts for hire alongside.

Entertainment

Thanks to a steady stream of students and tourists there's always something on in Cambridge. Look out for the noticeboards around town laden down with posters advertising classical concerts, theatre shows, academic lectures and live music. It's also worth picking up a *What's On* events guide from the tourist office or logging on to www.cam.ac.uk/whatson for details of university events.

NIGHTCLUBS

Despite the huge student population, Cambridge isn't blessed with the best clubs in the country. Many students stick to the colleges bars late at night and swear that they are the best venues in town. Pity they're not open to the rest of us.

Fez (☎ 01223-519224; www.cambridgefez.com; 15 Market Passage; admission £5-10; ☎ 8pm-3am) Hip-hop, dance, R&B, techno, funk – whatever you're into you'll find it at Cambridge's most popular club, the Moroccan-themed Fez. Famous for booking top-name DJs, hosting great club nights and its sought-after VIP lounges, it's well worth arriving early to avoid the massive queues.

The Place (☎ 01223-324600; www.placenightclub.co.uk; 22 Sidney St; admission £5; ☎ 10pm-2am) This sleek club aims to be *the* place to see and be seen in the city, with designer decor and VIP booths with moody blue lighting and white leather sofas. In reality it's pretty mainstream with club classics, crowd-pleasing tunes and the usual suspects on the dance floor.

Other options:

Kambar (☎ 01223-842725; www.kambar.co.uk; Wheeler St; admission £3-5; ☎ 9pm-3.30am Tue-Sat) Cambridge's alternative venue is a dark and dingy place

CAMBRIDGE FOR CHILDREN

Consider taking your little bears to meet the original Winnie the Pooh in a manuscript by ex-alumnus AA Milne at Trinity College's **Wren Library** (p431). Or take advantage of myriad events laid on partly or wholly for kids, including the **Midsummer Fair** (mid-June), the **Big Weekend** (mid-July) and the **Children's Marquee** (early August); details for all these events can be found at www.cambridge-summer.co.uk. Another possibility is to book them in for a 90-minute guided walk with **Cambridge Junior Explorers** (☎ 01223-246990; www.geocities.com/cambridgejunioexplorers; adult/child £4/3).

Alternatively, if you're hoping a little of the university's vast reserves of knowledge will rub off, there are a host of museums on **Downing St**, covering subjects such as geology, archaeology and anthropology, zoology and the history of science.

playing Gothic, industrial, '80s, punk, metal, indie, electro and rock.

Soul Tree (☎ 01223-462277; www.soultree.co.uk; 1-6 Guildhall Chambers, Corn Exchange St; admission £1-4; ☎ 10pm-3am Mon & Thu-Sat) Funk, disco, '80s classics, and not-so-big name DJs at this popular club.

THEATRE

Corn Exchange (☎ 01223-357851; www.cornex.co.uk; Wheeler St) This colossal ex-market building near the tourist office is the city's main centre for arts and entertainment, attracting the top names in pop and rock to ballet.

Arts Theatre (☎ 01223-503333; www.cambridgearts.theatre.com; 6 St Edward's Passage) Cambridge's biggest bona-fide theatre puts on everything from pantomime to drama fresh from London's West End.

ADC (☎ 01223-300085; www.adctheatre.com; Park St) Students' theatre and current home to the university's Footlights comedy troupe, which jump-started the careers of scores of England's comedy legends, including John Cleese and Peter Cook.

Junction (☎ 01223-511511; www.junction.co.uk; Cambridge Leisure Park, Clifton Way) Theatre, dance, comedy, live music and club nights at Cambridge's newest venue near the railway station. Tickets can be bought at the Corn Exchange box office.

Getting There & Away

Cambridge is quite well served by trains, though not so well by bus. Trains run at least every 30 minutes from London's King's Cross and Liverpool St stations (£17.90, 45 minutes to 1¼ hours). There are also three trains per hour to Ely (£3.30, 15 minutes) and hourly connections to Bury St Edmunds (£7.60, 44 minutes) and King's Lynn (£8.30, 48 minutes).

From Parkside, Parker's Piece there are regular buses to Stansted airport (£10.50, 55 minutes), Heathrow (£26, 2½ to three hours) and Gatwick (£30.50, 3¾ hours) airports while a Luton (£13, 1½ hours) service runs every two hours.

Buses to Oxford (£9, 3¼ hours) are regular but take a very convoluted route.

Getting Around BICYCLE

There aren't many cities that are more bike-friendly than Cambridge, and joining the ranks of students on their mad dashes to lectures or leisurely rides around town is an experience in itself.

Cambridge Station Cycles (☎ 01223-307125; www.stationcycles.co.uk; Station Bldg, Station Rd; per half-day/ day/week £8/10/20)

City Cycle Hire (☎ 01223-365629; www.citycyclehire.com; 61 Newnham Rd; per half-day/day/week from £5/10/15)

BUS

A free gas-powered City Shuttle runs around the centre stopping at Emmanuel St every 15 minutes from 9am to 5pm. City bus lines run around town from Drummer St bus station; C1, C3 and C7 stop at the train station. Dayrider passes (£3) offer unlimited travel on all buses within Cambridge for one day; Megarider passes (£10) are valid for one week. Buy them on board.

CAR

Cambridge's centre is largely pedestrianised. It's best to use one of the five free Park & Ride car parks on the outskirts of town. Shuttle buses (£2.20) run to the centre every 10 minutes between 7am and 7pm daily, then every 20 minutes until 10pm.

TAXI

For a taxi, phone **Camtax** (☎ 01223-242424) or **Panther** (☎ 01223-715715).

AROUND CAMBRIDGE**Grantchester**

Old thatched cottages with gardens dripping in flowers, breezy meadows and some classic cream teas aren't the only reason to make the pilgrimage along the river to the picture-postcard village of Grantchester. You'll also be following in the footsteps of some of the world's greatest minds on a 3-mile walk, cycle or punt that has changed little since Edwardian times.

The journey here is idyllic on a sunny day and once you arrive you can flop into a deckchair under a leafy apple tree and wolf down calorific cakes at the quintessentially English **Orchard tea garden** (☎ 01223-845788; www.orchard-grantchester.com; Mill Way; ☞ approx 9.30am-5.30pm). This was the favourite haunt of the Bloomsbury Group (see p120) and other cultural icons who came to camp, picnic, swim and discuss their work. If you're after something stronger to whet your thirst the riverside **Red Lion** (☎ 01223-840121; 33 High St, Grantchester) makes a good stop.

Imperial War Museum

The romance of the winged war machine is alive and well at Europe's biggest **aviation museum** (☎ 01223-835000; www.iwm.org.uk; adult/under 16yr £16/free; ☞ 10am-6pm mid-Mar-Sep, to 4pm Oct-mid-Mar) in Duxford, 9 miles south of Cambridge at Junction 10 of the M11. Almost 200 lovingly waxed aircraft from dive bombers to biplanes, Spitfire to Concorde are housed on this vast airfield, which was a frontline fighter station in WWII. Once home to the Dambuster squadron of Lancasters, it is now home to the Red Arrows.

Also included is the stunning **American Air Museum** hangar, designed by Norman Foster, which has the largest collection of American civil and military aircraft outside the USA, and the slick **AirSpace hangar** which houses an exhibition on British and Commonwealth aviation. WWII tanks and artillery can be seen in the **land-warfare hall** and the regular **airshows** of modern and vintage planes are legendary.

Monday to Saturday, Stagecoach bus Citi7 runs to Duxford (45 minutes, every half-hour) from Emmanuel St in Cambridge. The last

bus back from the museum is at 5.30pm. The service runs hourly on Sundays.

ELY

pop 15,102

A small but charming city steeped in history and dominated by a jaw-dropping cathedral, Ely (*ee-lee*) makes an excellent day trip from Cambridge. Beyond the dizzying heights of the cathedral towers lie medieval streets, pretty Georgian houses and riverside walks reaching out into the eerie fens that surround the town. The abundance of eels that once inhabited the undrained fens gave the town its unusual name and you can still sample eel stew or eel pie in local restaurants. Ely is a sleepy kind of place where traditional tearooms and antiques shops vie for attention, but it also ranks as one of the fastest-growing cities in Europe, so change is surely on the way.

Information

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 01353-662062; http://visit.ely.eastcamps.gov.uk; 29 St Mary's St; ☞ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Mon-Fri & Sun, 10am-5pm Sat Nov-Mar) makes accommodation bookings and dishes out leaflets on the town's 'Eel Trail' walk. The tourist office also organises a guided walking tour of the city at 2.30pm on Sundays (£3.50).

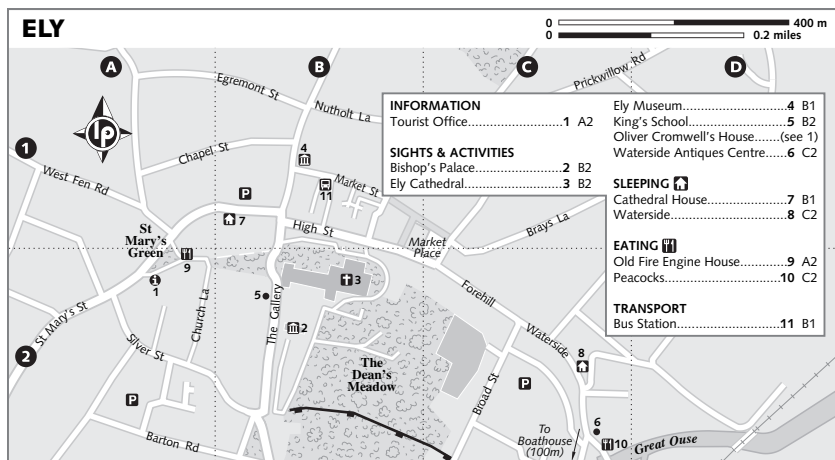
Sights**ELY CATHEDRAL**

Dominating the town and visible across the flat fenland for vast distances, the stunning silhouette of **Ely Cathedral** (☎ 01353-667735; www.cathedral.ely.anglican.org; adult/under 16yr/concession £5.50/free/4.70; ☞ 7am-7pm Easter-Aug, 7.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 5pm Sun Sep-Easter) is locally dubbed the 'Ship of the Fens'.

Walking into the early-12th-century Romanesque nave, you're immediately struck by its clean, uncluttered lines and lofty sense of space. The cathedral is renowned for its entrancing ceilings and the masterly 14th-century octagon and lantern towers, which soar upwards in shimmering colours.

The vast 14th-century Lady Chapel is the biggest in England; it's filled with eerily empty niches that once held statues of saints and martyrs. They were hacked out unceremoniously by iconoclasts during the English Civil War. However, the astonishingly delicate tracery and carving remain.

The cathedral is a breathtaking place, its incredible architecture and light making



it a popular film location. You may recognise some of its fine details from scenes in *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* or *The Other Boleyn Girl* but wandering back to the streets it can be difficult to imagine how such a small and tranquil city ended up with such a fine monument.

Although a sleepy place today, Ely has been a place of worship and pilgrimage since at least 673 when Etheldreda, daughter of the king of East Anglia, founded a nunnery here. A colourful character, Ethel shrugged off the fact that she had been twice married in her determination to become a nun and was canonised shortly after her death. The nunnery was later sacked by the Danes, rebuilt as a monastery, demolished and then resurrected as a church after the Norman Conquest. In 1109 Ely became a cathedral, built to impress mere mortals and leave them in no doubt about the power of the church.

For more insight into the fascinating history of the cathedral join a free **guided tour** (☎ 10.45am, 1pm, 2pm & 3pm May-Sep, 10.45am, 2pm & 3pm Oct-Apr). You can also explore the **Octagon Tower** (£3.50; ☎ 10.45am, 1pm, 2.15pm, 3pm May-Sep) on a tour or attend the spine-tingling **Evensong** (☎ 5.30pm Mon-Sat, 4pm Sun) or Sunday **choral service** (☎ 10.30am).

Near the entrance a **stained-glass museum** (☎ 01353-660347; www.stainedglassmuseum.com; adult/child £3.50/2.50; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 5.30pm Sat, to 6pm Sun Easter-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Easter) tells the history of decorated glasswork from the 14th century onwards. Joint admission to the ca-

thedral and museum is £8 for adults and £6.50 for children.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Historic sites cluster about the cathedral's toes. Within spitting distance of the tower are both the former **Bishop's Palace**, now used as a nursing home, and **King's School**, which keeps the cathedral supplied with fresh-faced choristers.

A short hop across St Mary's Green is the attractive half-timbered **Oliver Cromwell's House** (☎ 01353-662062; adult/under 16yr £4.85/3; ☎ 10am-4pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Mar), where England's warty warmonger lived with his family from 1636 to 1646, when he was the local tithe collector. The house now has Civil War exhibits, portraits, waxworks and echoes with canned commentaries of – among other things – the great man's grisly death, exhumation and posthumous decapitation. You can take a guided tour of the house (included in the admission price) on Saturdays at 2.30pm.

If you're interested in the history of the town and the surrounding fens, **Ely Museum** (☎ 01353-666655; www.elymuseum.org.uk; Market St; adult/child £3/free; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun May-Oct, 10.30am-4pm Wed-Mon Nov-Apr) has everything from Roman remains to archive footage of eel catching. The museum is housed in the Old Gaol House complete with prisoners' cells and their scrawled graffiti.

Ely is also a great place for rummaging through antiques, and signs lead down to the river and bargain-hunting heaven **Waterside**

ANGLIAN ANTICS

Ah, the English; stifflingly proper, embarrassingly prudish and impeccably reserved. And just a little bit eccentric. Where else could you see laser technology employed to shoot peas, watch Elvis roll a wooden blue cheese down a village high street or find grown adults painting snails with racing stripes? Well, East Anglia of course.

Here you can enter your own pet invertebrate in the **World Snail Racing Championships** (www.snailracing.net) in Congham, about 7 miles east of King's Lynn. Each year over 300 racing snails gather here in mid-July to battle it out for a tankard full of juicy lettuce leaves.

In Witcham, about 8 miles west of Ely, it's the **World Pea Shooting Championships** that draws contestants from far and wide. The school-room prank of blasting dried peas through a tube at a target (not the school master this time round) is alive and well with shooters gathering in early July on the Village Green.

And in the village of Stilton, a few miles south of Peterborough, every May Day bank holiday sees teams in fancy dress scramble along the High St to become **Stilton cheese rolling champions**.

Antiques Centre (☎ 01353-667066; The Wharf; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-5.30pm Sun). From here, charming riverside ambles flank the **Great Ouse**; turn left for a quiet walk, or right for the pub and tea garden. If you continue along this path you'll see the Fens stretching to the horizon.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation is mostly one- or two-room B&Bs so book ahead for your first choice.

Cathedral House (☎ 01353-662124; www.cathedralhouse.co.uk; 17 St Mary's St; s £50, d £75-90; ☎) Set in a lovely Georgian house bursting with antiques and curios, this elegant B&B offers three individually decorated rooms all with period features and cast-iron baths. Outside there's a beautiful walled garden and views of the cathedral.

Waterside (☎ 01353-614329; www.29waterside.org.uk; 29 Waterside; d £60) This pocket-sized B&B is in a wonderfully character-rich 18th-century oak-beamed and wooden-floored building near the waterfront. It's furnished with reclaimed pine and has a pretty walled garden.

Peacocks (☎ 01353-661100; www.peacockstearoom.co.uk; 65 Waterside; cream tea £5.50; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Wed-Sun) Voted one of Britain's top teashops by the ladies who know at the Tea Guild, this wisteria-clad place serves a vast selection of leaf teas, as well as luscious homemade cakes, and soups, salads and sambos.

Boathouse (☎ 01353-664388; www.cambscuisine.com; 5 Annesdale; 2-/3-course set lunch £11/15, dinner mains £10-17; ☎ noon-2.30pm daily, 6.30-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 6.30-8.30pm Sun) This sleek riverside restaurant dishes up excellent modern English food at

very reasonable prices. It has wonderful patio dining overlooking the water, while the stylish interior is lined with oars.

Old Fire Engine House (☎ 01353-662582; www.oldfireenginehouse.co.uk; 25 St Mary's St; mains £14-17; ☎ closed dinner Sun) Backed by beautiful gardens and showcasing a variety of artwork, this delightfully homely place serves classic English food and top-notch afternoon teas. Expect the likes of steak-and-kidney pie or roast pheasant with bread sauce and redcurrant jelly, washed down with a carefully chosen wine.

Getting There & Away

Ely is on the A10, 15 miles northeast of Cambridge. Following the Fen Rivers Way (map available from tourist offices), it's a lovely 17-mile towpath walk.

The easiest way to get to Ely from Cambridge is by train (15 minutes, every 20 minutes); don't even consider the bus, it takes a round-about route and five times as long. There are also twice hourly trains to Peterborough (£8.10, 35 minutes) and Norwich (£13.50, one hour), and hourly services to King's Lynn (£5.40, 30 minutes).

PETERBOROUGH

pop 156,061

A lively city that's shopping mad, Peterborough is riddled with shopping malls but the real reason to visit is the glorious cathedral, which alone makes it worthy of a day trip from Cambridge or London. There's a scattering of other mildly interesting attractions to beef up the town's credentials,

but really, see the cathedral and you can leave happy.

Peterborough's bus and train stations are an easy walk west of the city centre. The **tourist office** (☎ 01733-452336; www.visitpeterborough.com; 3-5 Minister Precincts; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 10am-5pm Tue, 10am-4pm Sat) is in front of the cathedral's west front.

Peterborough Cathedral

England may be filled with fine cathedrals boasting ostentatious facades, but few can rival the instant 'wow' factor of Peterborough's unique early-13th-century western front, with its three cavernous Gothic arches.

Visitors enter the **cathedral** (☎ 01733-355300; www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk; requested donation £3; ☎ 9am-5.15pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun), which was founded in 1118, through an odd 14th-century porch that peeks out between the arches. Inside, you'll be immediately struck by the height of the magnificent three-storeyed Norman nave and by its lightness, created by the mellow local stone and fine clerestory windows. The nave is topped by a breathtaking early-13th-century painted-timber ceiling that is one of the earliest and most important of its kind in Europe, and still sports much of its original diamond-patterned paintwork.

Press on below the Gothic tower, which was painstakingly reconstructed in the 19th century, to the northern choir aisle and you'll find the rather plain tombstone of Henry VIII's first wife, the tragic Catherine of Aragon, buried here in 1536. Her divorce, engineered by the king because she could not produce a male heir, led to the Reformation in England. Her only child (a daughter) was not even allowed to attend her funeral. Just beyond this is the cathedral's wonderful 15th-century eastern tip, which has superb fan vaulting thought to be the work of master mason John Wastell, who worked on King's College Chapel in Cambridge.

Loop around into the southern aisle, and you'll find gold lettering marking the spot where the ill-fated Mary, Queen of Scots was once buried. On the accession of her son, James, to the throne, her body was moved to Westminster Abbey.

Getting There & Away

There are regular trains to London (£24.50, 55 minutes to 1½ hours), Cambridge (£13, 50 minutes) and Ely (£8.90, 35 minutes).

ESSEX

Ah, Essex; home to chavs, bottle blondes, boy racers and brash seaside resorts – or so the stereotype goes. The county's inhabitants have been the butt of some of England's cruelest jokes and greatest snobbery for years, but beyond the fake Burberry bags and slots 'n' dodgems resorts there's a rural idyll of sleepy medieval villages and rolling countryside. One of England's best-loved painters, Constable, found inspiration here, and the rural Essex of his time remains hidden down winding lanes little changed for centuries. Here too is the historic town of Colchester, Britain's oldest, with a sturdy castle and vibrant arts scene, and even Southend-on-Sea, the area's most popular resort, has a softer side in the traditional cockle-sellers and cobbled lanes of sleepy suburb Leigh.

COLCHESTER

pop 104,390

Dominated by its sturdy castle and ancient walls, Colchester claims the title as Britain's oldest recorded city, with settlement noted here as early as the 5th century BC. Centuries later in AD 43, the Romans came, saw, conquered and constructed their northern capital Camulodunum here. So too the invading Normans, who saw Colchester's potential and built the monstrous war machine that is the castle.

Today the city is a maze of narrow streets but despite its historic setting and the odd half-timbered gem, the city has a rather dowdy atmosphere. But at the time of writing this was set to change, with a series of major redevelopments planned for the city, including a spectacular new cultural centre, Firstsite.

Orientation & Information

There are two train stations, but most services stop at North station, about half a mile north of the centre. The current bus station is off Queen St near the tourist office, but by 2010 will move to a new location on Vineyard St.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01206-282920; www.visitcolchester.com; 1 Queen St; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) is opposite the castle. **Compuccino** (☎ 01206-519090; 7-19 Priory Walk; Centurion House, St John's St; per hr £2.50; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) has internet access. There are a couple of **post offices** (North

Hill & Longe Wyre St) while banks with ATMs can be found on the High St.

Sights & Activities

England's largest surviving Norman keep, bigger even than that of the Tower of London and once a hair-raising symbol of foreign invasion, now slumbers innocently amid a lush park.

Colchester Castle (☎ 01206-282939; www.colchester-museums.org.uk; adult/child £5.20/3.40; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) was begun in 1076, building upon the foundations of a Roman fort. The interactive castle museum is exceptional, with plenty of try-on togas and sound effects to keep young curiosity alive. There are also illuminating guided tours (adult/child £2.10/1.10) of the Roman vaults, Norman rooftop chapel and castle walls.

Beside the castle, a solid Georgian town house hosts the **Hollytrees Museum** (☎ 01206-282940; admission free; High St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun), which trawls through 300 years of domestic life with quirky surprises that include a shipwright's boat-cum-pram and a make-your-own Victorian silhouette feature.

Tymperleys, a magnificent timber-framed 15th-century building 100m east of the castle just off the High St, also houses the hypnotic **Clock Museum** (☎ 01206-282939; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat Apr-Oct), which echoes to the steady tick-tocking of one of the largest clock collections in Britain.

A short stroll north of High St will bring you to the Tudor **Dutch Quarter**, where the half-timbered houses and rickety roof lines remain as a testament to the 16th-century Protestant weavers who fled here from Holland.

Sidestep the town's lacklustre natural-history museum in favour of the world-class naturalistic enclosures of **Colchester Zoo** (☎ 01206-331292; www.colchester-zoo.com; Maldon Rd, Stanway; adult/child £14.99/7.99; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep, to 6.30pm Jul & Aug, to dusk Oct-Mar), 5 miles north-east of the castle. Bus 75 stops at the zoo.

Already being promoted as a future star attraction at the time of writing, **firstsite: newsite** (☎ 01206-577067; www.firstsite.uk.net) will be a massive purpose-built arts and education centre in St Botolph's. The stunning curved glass and copper building will contain gallery space, a library, auditorium and conference facilities and will play host to exhibitions, events and performances. Although construction has been much delayed, it is hoped the centre will open in late

2009. Check the website or tourist office for the latest information.

Tours

The tourist office has a variety of themed, guided **walking tours** (adult/child £3/2; ☎ 11.30am Mon-Sat, 2pm Sun Jul & Aug, 11.30am Sat Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct) of the town and sells tickets for **City Sightseeing** (www.city-sightseeing.com; adult/child £7.50/3; ☎ Apr-Sep) open-top bus tours.

Sleeping & Eating

Colchester has some excellent, lovingly cared for and reasonably priced B&Bs that give the town's ancient hotels a real run for their money. Independent restaurants are in short supply but you'll find all the usual chains along North Hill.

ourpick **Charlie Browns** (☎ 01206-517451; www.charliebrownsbedandbreakfast.co.uk; 60 East St; s £30-45, d £45-60; ☎ (P) (Q) wi-fi) A former hardware shop turned boutique B&B, this place offers incredible value with a couple of stunning rooms blending 14th-century character with 21st-century style. Antique and modern furniture mix seamlessly with the half-timbered walls, limestone bathrooms and rich fabrics to create an intimate, luxurious feel. It's an absolute steal at these rates and should be your first port of call.

Rutland House (☎ 01206-573437; www.rutlandhousebandb.co.uk; 121 Lexden Rd; s £40-55, d £60-75; ☎ (P)) This is another great B&B with three gorgeous individually furnished rooms in a 1920s house. Choose from Victorian character, 1930s style or contemporary design. Each room has TV and DVD, soft colour schemes and plenty of little extras.

Red Lion (☎ 01206-577986; www.red-lion-hotel.co.uk; High St; s £65-95, d £70-105; ☎ (Q) wi-fi) This oak-timbered hotel built in 1465 overhangs the High St and is an atmospheric old place complete with exposed oak beams, wattle-and-daub walls, sloping floors and a resident ghost. The rooms are decked out in Tudor style and are cosy but a bit rickety while the high-beamed banquet hall serves classic English fayre.

Life Cafe (☎ 01206-574777; 3 Culver St; mains £5-5.50; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) This cafe-cum-gallery is bathed in light from the giant floor-to-ceiling windows that look out over the busy street. The menu features a good selection of interesting panini, pastas and salads, as well as plenty of cakes and speciality brews.

Lemon Tree (☎ 01206-767337; www.the-lemon-tree.com; 48 St John's St; mains £11-15; ☎ 10.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat) This zesty little eatery is graced by a knobbly Roman wall and serves creative English and Continental cuisine. Decor strikes a nice chic-to-rustic balance and there are tasty blackboard specials, frequent gourmet nights and occasional live jazz.

Getting There & Around

Colchester is 62 miles from London. There are three daily National Express buses from London Victoria (£10.30, 2½ hours) and rail services every 15 to 20 minutes from London Liverpool St (£18.70, 55 minutes). For a cab, call **A1 Taxis** (☎ 01206-544744).

AROUND COLCHESTER

Dedham Vale

'I love every stile and stump and lane... these scenes made me a painter'

John Constable (1776-1837)

Born and bred in East Bergholt, John Constable's romantic visions of country lanes, springtime fields and babbling creeks were inspired by and painted in this serene vale. The area has hung onto its rural charm despite the intervening centuries, and although you may not see the rickety old cart pictured in his renowned painting *The Hay Wain*, the background of picturesque cottages, beautiful countryside and languid charm remains.

Now known as Constable country, Dedham Vale centres on the villages of Dedham, East Bergholt and Flatford. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 01206-299460; flatford@babbergh.gov.uk; Flatford Lane; ☎ 10am-4.45pm Easter-Oct, 11am-2.45pm Sat & Sun Nov-mid-Mar) beside the vale's top attraction, a riverside mill once owned by the artist's family. **Flatford Mill** is now used as an education centre and there is no public access.

Near the mill is thatched **Bridge Cottage** (NT; ☎ 01206-298260; Flatford Lane, East Bergholt; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm May-Sep, 11am-4pm Oct, 11am-5pm Wed-Sun Mar & Apr, 11am-3.30pm Wed-Sun Nov & Dec, 11am-3.30pm Sat & Sun Jan-Feb), which has an exhibition on the artist, a tea garden and boat hire.

If you'd like to base yourself here try **Dedham Hall** (☎ 01206-323027; www.dedhamhall.demon.co.uk; Dedham; s/d £55/95), an atmospheric 15th-century manor house where you can also take three-/seven-day painting courses (£190/230) if you fancy following in Constable's footsteps.

The area is best explored by bike or in your own car, though there are bus and train services. Buses 93 and 93A from Colchester run to East Bergholt, from where it's less than a mile to the mill. Or come by train to Manningtree (eight minutes), and you get a lovely 1¼-mile walk along pretty footpaths.

SAFFRON WALDEN

pop 14,313

The sleepy, higgledy-piggledy town of Saffron Walden is a delightful knot of half-timbered houses, narrow lanes, crooked roofs and ancient buildings. It's a really lovely place to wander with some real architectural gems and a host of antique shops, galleries and second-hand bookshops to catch your eye.

The town gets its curious title from the saffron crocus, which was cultivated in the surrounding fields from the 15th century right through to the first half of the 20th century.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01799-524002; www.saffronwalden.gov.uk; 1 Market Pl; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 10.30am-1pm Sun Apr-Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) provides a useful town trail leaflet with information on the town's historic buildings.

Sights

The town's most famous building is probably the 14th-century **Sun Inn** (Church St), an ornate wooden structure once used as Cromwell's HQ. The inn is famous for its stunning 17th-century parquetry (decorative plaster work).

Nearby is the jumbo-sized 15th-century **Church of St Mary the Virgin** (Church St). A symbol of the town's saffron-inspired golden age, it is one of the largest in the county and sports some impressive Gothic arches and decorative wooden ceilings.

In the little **museum** (☎ 01799-510333; www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org; Museum St; adult/under 18yr £1/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Mar-Oct, closes 4.30pm Nov-Feb), itself dating from 1835, you'll find an eclectic collection of artefacts covering everything from local history to costume and needlecraft, Victorian toys and ancient Egypt. The bramble-covered ruins of **Walden Castle Keep**, built about 1125, lie in the grounds.

Tucked down at the end of quiet lanes off Bridge St and Castle St is **Bridge End Garden** (www.bridgeendgarden.org; admission free; ☎ daylight hr), a restored Victorian garden, and on the eastern side of the town, a tiny turf **labyrinth** thought to be 800 years old.

Sleeping & Eating

Saffron Walden YHA (☎ 0845 371 9137; www.yha.org.uk; 1 Myddylton Pl; dm member/nonmember £13.95/17.95; ☹ mid-Apr–mid-Sep) This stunning medieval timber-framed hostel is the town's oldest inhabited building. It was once a malt house, and although facilities are relatively basic the place just drips with character. The hostel often gets booked up with groups so make a reservation in advance.

Archway Guesthouse (☎ 01799-501500; www.archways.co.uk; 13 Church St; s/d from £40/60; (P) (Q)) Contemporary style and unfussy decor design make this bright, airy place well worth an overnight stay. The rooms feature big, comfortable beds, modern art on the walls and flat-screen TVs. There's a warm welcome for children and a family suite available.

Eight Bells (☎ 01799-522790; 18 Bridge St; mains £11-16; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch only Sun) A warm mix of medieval character and contemporary style, this 16th-century gastropub is the top spot in town. Scrubbed wooden floors, half-timbered walls, abstract art, deep leather sofas and roaring fires make it a great place to sip on a pint or enjoy a top-notch meal from the modern European menu.

Getting There & Away

On weekdays, trains leave London Liverpool St twice hourly (£15.40, one hour) for Audley End station, 2.5 miles west of town. Services run hourly on Sunday. Trains from Cambridge (18 minutes) run approximately every 20 minutes.

Buses 301 and 59 run from the station into Saffron Walden (six minutes) regularly on weekdays, less often on weekends.

The Citi7 bus runs into Cambridge hourly (70 minutes).

AROUND SAFFRON WALDEN

Positively palatial in its scale, style and the all-too-apparent ambition of its creator, the first earl of Suffolk, the fabulous early-Jacobean **Audley End House** (EH; ☎ 01799-522399; adult/child house & garden £10.50/5.30, garden only £5.50/2.80; ☹ 11am-5pm Wed-Fri & Sun, 11am-3.30pm Sat late Mar-Sep, 11am-4pm Wed-Sun Oct) eventually did become a royal palace when it was bought by Charles II in 1668.

Although hard to believe, the enormous building today is only one-third of its original size, but it's still magnificent. Its lavishly decorated rooms glitter with silverware, price-

less furniture and paintings, making it one of England's grandest country homes. The sumptuous interior was remodelled in Gothic style by the third Baron Braybrooke in the 19th century and much of his creations are what remain today. You can also visit the service wing where a new exhibition explores the lives of those who worked in the house in Victorian times.

Outside, the house is surrounded by dreamy landscaped **park** (☹ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun, to 5pm Mar & Oct, to 4pm Nov, Dec & Feb) designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. The grounds play host to a series of concerts throughout the summer months.

Audley End House is 1 mile west of Saffron Walden on the B1383. Audley End train station is 1¼ miles from the house. Taxis will ferry you here from the town marketplace for around £4.

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA

pop 160,257

Crass, commercialised and full of flashing lights, Southend is London's lurid weekend playground, full of gaudy amusements and seedy nightclubs. But beyond the tourist tat, roller coasters and slot machines there's a glorious stretch of sandy beach, an absurdly long pier and in the suburb of Old Leigh, a traditional fishing village of cobbled streets, cockle sheds and thriving art galleries. Southend is also becoming increasingly well known for its live music scene and is a good place to catch a gig.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 01702-215120; www.visitsouthend.co.uk; Southend Pier, Western Esplanade; ☹ 8.15am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-8pm Sat & Sun Apr-May & Oct, 8.15am-8pm Jun-Sep, 8.15am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-6pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) is at the entrance to the pier. Banks and shops crowd along the High St.

Sights & Activities

Other than miles upon miles of tawny imported-sand and shingle **beaches**, Southend's main attraction is its **pier** (☎ 01702-215620; pier train adult/child £3/1.50, pier walk & ride £2.50/1.50; ☹ 8.15am-8pm Easter-Oct, 8.15am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-6pm Sat & Sun Nov-Easter), built in 1830. At a staggering 1.34 miles long – the world's longest – it's an impressive edifice and a magnet for boat crashes, storms and fires, the last of which ravaged its tip in 2005. It's a surprisingly peaceful

stroll to the lifeboat station at its head and you can hop on the Pier Railway to save the long slog back.

Afterwards, dip beneath the pier's entrance to see the antique slot machines at the **museum** (☎ 01702-611214; www.southendpiermuseum.co.uk; adult/under 12yr £1/free; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Wed, Sat & Sun May-Oct) and embrace Southend's tacky seaside soul on the head-spinning rides at **Adventure Island** (☎ 01702-443400; www.adventureisland.co.uk; Western Esplanade; ☎ roughly 11am-8pm daily Apr-Aug, Sat & Sun Sep-Mar).

If the seaside tat is not your thing, swap the candyfloss for steaming cockles wrapped in newspaper in the traditional fishing village of **Old Leigh**, just west along the seafront. Wander the cobbled streets, cockle sheds, art galleries and craft shops for a taste of life before the amusement arcades took over. The **Leigh Heritage Centre** (☎ 01702-470834; High St, Old Town, Leigh-on-Sea; ☎ 10.30am-3pm) offers an insight into the history and heritage of the village and its buildings.

Sleeping & Eating

Beaches (☎ 01702-586124; www.beachguesthouse.co.uk; 192 Eastern Esplanade; s £40, d £65-85; ☑ wi-fi) A welcome respite from violent florals and heavy swag curtains, rooms at Beaches are bright, simple and tasteful with white Egyptian-cotton bed linen, feather duvets and subtle colour schemes. The uncluttered rooms, Continental breakfast and quiet location make it one of the best deals around.

Pebbles (☎ 01702-582329; www.mypebbles.co.uk; 190 Eastern Esplanade; s from £45, d £60-85; ☑) Almost next door is Pebbles, with its subtle, contemporary style. The rooms here still retain their Victorian features but the decor is modern with funky wallpapers, plenty of cushions and big, comfy beds.

Pipe of Port (☎ 01702-614606; www.pipeofport.com; 84 High St; mains £9-16) A Southend institution, this subterranean wine bar-cum-bistro is an atmospheric place with old-world character, candlelit tables, sawdust-covered floor and its own unique charm. It's famous for its pies, casseroles and fish dishes as well as the lengthy wine list.

Fleur de Provence (☎ 01702-352987; www.fleurdeprovence.co.uk; 52 Alexandra St; mains £16-18, 3-course set meal £15; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Chic, sleek and sophisticated, this is probably Southend's top dining establishment, serving modern French cuisine with a flourish.

It's away from the centre of town but well worth the trip for its romantic ambience and fine food.

Entertainment

Southend has a lively music scene with a powerful new wave of bands collectively known as the 'Southend sound' putting the town on the map and forcing the national music press to sit up and take notice. Along with local hopefuls you'll also get regular gigs by big-name bands at **Chinnerys** (☎ 01702-467305; www.chinnerys.co.uk; 21 Marine Pde) and the **Riga Music Bar** (☎ 01702-348020; www.rigamusicbar.co.uk; 228 London Rd).

Getting There & Around

The easiest way to arrive is by train. There are trains roughly every 15 minutes from London Liverpool St to Southend Victoria and from London Fenchurch St to Southend Central (£8.90, 55 minutes). The seafront is a 10- to 15-minute walk from either train station. Trains leave Southend Central for Leigh-on-Sea (10 minutes) every 10 to 15 minutes.

SUFFOLK

Littered with picturesque villages seemingly lost in time, and quaint seaside resorts that have doggedly refused to sell their souls to tourism, this charming county makes a delightfully tranquil destination. Suffolk built its wealth and reputation on the back of the medieval wool trade and although the once-busy coastal ports little resemble their time in the limelight, the inland villages remain largely untouched, with magnificent wool churches and lavish medieval homes attesting to the once-great might of the area. To the west are the picture-postcard villages of Lavenham and Long Melford; further north the languid charm and historic buildings attract visitors to Bury St Edmunds; and along the coast the genteel seaside resorts of Aldeburgh and Southwold seem miles away from their more brash neighbours to the north and south.

Information

You can whet your appetite for the region further by visiting these two websites:

www.visitsuffolkattractions.co.uk and www.visit-suffolk.org.uk.

Getting Around

Consult **Suffolk County Tourism** (www.suffolконboard.com) or **Traveline** (☎ 0871 200 2233; www.traveline.eastanglia.co.uk) for local transport information. The two main bus operators in rural areas are **Beestons** (www.beestons.co.uk) and **Chambers** (www.chamberscoaches.co.uk).

IPSWICH

pop 117,069

Suffolk's county capital was one of the very first Saxon towns in England and a thriving medieval centre, but today its handful of medieval churches and beautiful timber-framed buildings are lost in the sea of plastic shopfronts. Change is nigh though with waterfront warehouses filling up with trendy bars and restaurants. Ipswich doesn't merit a detour or an overnight stay, but it's the main transport hub of the region and has a few gems worth seeking out if you're passing through.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01473-258070; www.visit-ipswich.com; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is in 15th-century St Stephen's Church, off St Stephen's Lane. The tourist office is a 15-minute walk northeast of the train station, across the roundabout and along Princes St.

Just north of the tourist office is the glorious wedding-cake facade of decorative parquetry on the 17th-century **Ancient House** (40 Buttermarket; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), its four panels each representing the known continents at the time. It's one of the finest examples of the craft you'll see anywhere and crawls with mythological creatures and characters. The building now houses a kitchen outfitters, but you can take a peek at the hammer-beam roof inside.

Set in a lovely rolling park 300m north of town, the multigabled 16th-century **Christchurch Mansion** (☎ 01473-433554; Soane St; admission free; ☎ mansion & gallery 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-4.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-dusk Tue-Sat, 2.30pm-dusk Sun Nov-Mar) is filled with period furniture, and displays works by the likes of Constable and Gainsborough.

ourpick **Samford Restaurant** (☎ 01473-786616; Suffolk Food Hall, Orwell Bridge; mains £8-12; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun) in the Suffolk Food Hall looks down over the river and the busy deli, butcher, cheesemonger, baker and

vegetable stalls below. The menu features a bumper crop of seasonal dishes using local ingredients. Everything is made to order and even the butcher is on hand to explain the cuts of meat to you.

Alternatively try **Seventy Seven** (☎ 01473-231177; 77 Fore Hamlet; mains £10-15; ☎ 11am-11pm Tue-Sat, noon-6pm Sun) with its giant windows and an open-plan layout. Despite the stylish look, it's down to earth with friendly service and a tempting modern English menu.

There are trains every 20 minutes to London's Liverpool St station (£34.50, 1¼ hours), twice hourly to Norwich (£11.50, 40 minutes) and Bury St Edmunds (£6.40, 30 to 40 minutes). There are bus services roughly every half-hour to Sudbury (one hour) Monday to Saturday and less frequently on Sunday.

AROUND IPSWICH

Sutton Hoo

Somehow missed by plundering grave robbers and left undisturbed for 1300 years, the hull of an enormous Anglo-Saxon ship was discovered here in 1939, buried under a mound of earth. The ship was the final resting place of Raedwald, King of East Anglia until AD 625, and was stuffed with a fabulous wealth of Saxon riches. The massive effort that went into his burial gives some idea of just how important an individual he must have been.

Many of the original finds and a full-scale reconstruction of his ship and burial chamber can be seen in the **visitors centre** (NT; ☎ 01394-389700; www.nationaltrust.org.uk/suttonhoo; Woodbridge; adult/child £6.20/3.20; ☎ 10.30am-5pm daily Jul & Aug, Wed-Sun mid-Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, Sat & Sun 11am-4pm Nov-mid-Mar). The finest treasures, including the king's exquisitely crafted helmet, shields, gold ornaments and Byzantine silver, are displayed in London's British Museum (p120) but replicas are on show here.

Access to the original burial mounds is restricted but you can join a one-hour **guided tour** (adult/child £2.50/1.25) which explores the area and does much to bring this fascinating site back to life.

Sutton Hoo is 2 miles east of Woodbridge and 6 miles northeast of Ipswich off the B1083. Buses 71 and 73 visit Sutton Hoo 10 times per day Monday to Saturday, passing through Woodbridge (10 minutes) en route to Ipswich (40 minutes).

STOUR VALLEY

The soft, pastoral landscape and impossibly pretty villages of the Stour Valley have provided inspiration for some of England's best-loved painters. Constable and Gainsborough grew up or worked here, and the topsy-turvy timber-framed houses and elegant churches that date to the region's 15th-century weaving boom are still very much as they were. This now-quiet backwater once produced more cloth than anywhere else in England, but in the 16th century, production gradually shifted elsewhere and the valley reverted to a tranquil, pastoral landscape.

Long Melford

pop 3675

Strung out along a winding road, the village of Long Melford is home to a clutch of historic buildings and two impressive country piles. The 2-mile High St is supposedly the longest in England and is flanked by some stunning timber-framed houses, Georgian gems and Victorian terraces, and at one end has a sprawling village green lorded over by the magnificently pompous **Great Church of the Holy Trinity** (☎ 01787-310845; ☞ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Mar & Oct, to 3pm Nov-Feb). A spectacular example of a 15th-century wool church, it has wonderful stained-glass windows and a tower dating from 1903.

From outside, the romantic Elizabethan mansion of **Melford Hall** (NT; ☎ 01787-376395; www.nationaltrust.org.uk/melfordhall; adult/child £5.80/2.90; ☞ 1.30-5pm Wed-Sun May-Sep, 1.30-5pm Sat & Sun Apr & Oct) seems little changed since it entertained the queen in 1578. Inside, there's a panelled banquet hall, much Regency and Victorian finery and a display on Beatrix Potter, who was related to Parker family who owned the house from 1786 to 1960.

There's a noticeably different atmosphere at Long Melford's other red-brick Elizabethan mansion, **Kentwell Hall** (☎ 01787-310207; www.kentwell.co.uk; adult/child £8.50/5.50; ☞ 11am-5pm Apr-Sep). Despite being full of Tudor pomp and centuries-old ghost stories, it is still used as a private home and has a wonderfully lived-in feel. It's surrounded by a rectangular moat and there's a Tudor-rose maze and a rare-breeds farm that'll keep the kids happy. Kentwell hosts special events throughout the year, including several full Tudor re-creations when the whole estate bristles with bodices and hose. Check the website for details.

Long Melford is also famed for its **antique shops**, thanks in part to a hit '80s TV series called *Lovejoy* that was shot here. Viewing appointments are required in some.

SLEEPING & EATING

High Street Farmhouse (☎ 01787-375765; www.highstreetfarmhouse.co.uk; High St; s/d incl breakfast £35/60; (P)) This 16th-century farmhouse offers a choice of big, bright rooms full of rustic charm. Expect patchwork quilts, pretty florals, knotty pine and cast-iron or four-poster beds. There's a lovely mature garden outside and hearty breakfasts on offer.

Black Lion Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 01787-312356; www.blacklionhotel.net; the Green; s £97.50-110, d £150-195; (P)) Flamboyant rooms with serious swag curtains, four-poster and half-tester beds, rich fabrics and a creative combination of contemporary style and traditional elegance are on offer at this small hotel on the village green. Go for the deep red Yquem for pure, sultry passion or try the Sancerre for something a little more restful. The hotel has two restaurants (mains £12 to £17) and a lovely walled Victorian garden.

Scutcher's Bistro (☎ 01787-310200; www.scutchers.com; Westgate St; mains £12-19; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Despite the rather mismatched decor this unpretentious place is renowned throughout the Stour Valley for its exquisite food. The menu features classic and modern English dishes that leave locals coming back regularly for more.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses leave from the High St outside the post office. There are hourly services Monday to Saturday to Bury St Edmunds (52 minutes) and twice-hourly to Sudbury (10 minutes).

Sudbury

pop 11,933

Birthplace of celebrated portrait and landscape painter Thomas Gainsborough (1727-88) and the model for Charles Dickens' fictional town Eatanswill in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), Sudbury is a bustling market town that makes for a pleasant hour or two of wandering.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01787-881320; sudburytic@babergh.gov.uk; Market Hill; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri year-round, plus 10am-4.45pm Sat Apr-Oct, 10am-2.45pm Sat Oct-Mar) dispenses advice from alongside the town hall.

Most visitors come to see the birthplace of painter Thomas Gainsborough, **Gainsborough's House** (☎ 01787-372958; 46 Gainsborough St; www.gainsborough.org; adult/child £4/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), which showcases the largest collection of his work in the world. The 16th-century house and gardens feature a Georgian facade built by Gainsborough's own father in the 18th century, and a mulberry tree that features in some of his son's paintings. Inside, look for his earliest known work, *A Boy and a Girl in a Landscape*, and the exquisite *Lady Tracy*, celebrated for its delicate portrayal of drapery.

Sudbury has a train station with an hourly service to London (£20.40, 1¼ hours). **Beestons** (www.beestons.co.uk) runs about eight buses daily Monday to Saturday to Ipswich (one hour), while **Chambers** (www.chamberscoaches.co.uk) runs regular services to Long Melford, Lavenham, Bury St Edmunds and Colchester.

Lavenham

pop 1738

One of East Anglia's most beautiful and rewarding towns, topsy-turvy Lavenham is home to a wonderful collection of exquisitely preserved medieval buildings that lean and lurch to dramatic effect. Lavenham's 300 half-timbered and pargeated houses and thatched cottages have been left virtually untouched since its heyday in the 15th century when it made its fortunes on the backs of the wool trade. Curiosity shops, art galleries, quaint tearooms and ancient inns line the streets, where the predominant colour is 'Suffolk pink', a traditional finish of whitewash mixed with red ochre. On top of the medieval atmosphere and beautiful streetscapes, Lavenham has an excellent choice of accommodation making it one of the most popular spots in the area with visitors.

If you're visiting at a weekend it's well worth joining a guided village walk (£3, 2.30pm Saturday, 11am Sunday) run by the **tourist office** (☎ 01787-248207; lavenhamtic@babbergh.gov.uk; Lady St; ☎ 10am-4.45pm mid-Mar–Oct, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Nov–mid-Mar).

SIGHTS

Many of Lavenham's most enchanting buildings cluster along High St, Water St and around Market Pl, which is dominated by the early-16th-century **guildhall** (NT; ☎ 01787-247646; www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lavenham; adult/child £4/1.65; ☎ 11am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov,

A COTTAGE OF YOUR OWN

For self-catering country cottages in the area, have a browse through these sites:

Farm Stay Anglia (www.farmstayanglia.co.uk)

Holiday Cottages Cambridge (www.holidaycottagescambridge.co.uk)

Just Suffolk (www.justsuffolk.com)

Norfolk Cottages (www.norfolkcottages.co.uk)

Suffolk Secrets (www.suffolk-secrets.co.uk)

11am-4pm Wed-Sun Mar), a superb example of a close-studded, timber-framed building. It is now a local-history museum with displays on the wool trade, and in its tranquil garden you can see dye plants that produced the typical medieval colours.

Also on the Market Pl, the atmospheric 14th-century **Little Hall** (☎ 01787-247019; www.littlehall.org.uk; adult/child £2.50/free; ☎ 2-5.30pm Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun Easter-Oct) is another gem, with soft ochre plastering, timber frame and crown-post roof. Once home to a successful wool merchant, it's now a private residence open to the public.

At the village's high southern end rises the stunning **Church of St Peter & St Paul** (☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 3.30pm Oct-Mar), a late Perpendicular church that seems to lift into the sky with its beautifully proportioned windows and soaring steeple. Built between 1485 and 1530, it was one of Suffolk's last great wool churches, completed on the eve of the Reformation, and now a lofty testament to Lavenham's past prosperity.

SLEEPING & EATING

De Vere House (☎ 01787-249505; www.deverehouse.co.uk; Water St; s £75, d £80-95; (P)) This stunning medieval house is just dripping with character and the two guest rooms are decked out in classical style. One features a carved four-poster bed, chaise longue and roll-top bath while the other is all exposed beams and Edwardian style. There's a private reading room for guests and a courtyard garden for breakfast.

our pick **Lavenham Priory** (☎ 01787-247404; www.lavenhampriory.co.uk; Water St; s/d from £75/100;

(P)) A rare treat, this sumptuously restored 15th-century B&B steals your heart as soon as you walk in the door. Every room oozes Elizabethan charm with cavernous fireplaces, leaded windows and exquisite period features. Now an upmarket six-room B&B, it must be booked well in advance.

Swan Hotel (☎ 01787-247477; www.theswanatlavenham.co.uk; High St; s £75-85, d £115-280; (P)) A warren of stunning timber-framed 15th-century buildings now shelters one of the region's best-known hotels. Rooms are suitably spectacular, some with immense fireplaces, colossal beams and magnificent four-posters. Elsewhere the hotel cultures a gentlefolk's country-club feel. The stunning beamed Great Hall is an atmospheric place to try the modern English cuisine (three-course set dinner £31.95).

Great House (☎ 01787-247431; www.greathouse.co.uk; Market Pl; s £85-120, d £85-180; (W) wi-fi) Chic design blends effortlessly with 15th-century character at this much-loved restaurant with rooms in the centre of town. The guest accommodation is decidedly contemporary with funky wallpaper, sleek furniture and plasma-screen TVs but there are plenty of period features and a decanter of sherry on the side. The acclaimed French restaurant (three-course lunch/dinner £16.95/26.95) serves classic French dishes with a modern flourish.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Chambers Buses connects Lavenham with Bury St Edmunds (30 minutes) and Sudbury (20 minutes) hourly until 6pm Monday to Saturday (no service on Sunday). The nearest train station is Sudbury.

Kersey

Slithering down either side of a steep slope to a shallow ford, picture-perfect Kersey is a pocket-sized hamlet lined with handsome timber-framed houses. Strolling the length of the street takes all of five minutes, after which there is little to do here save snap photos, visit the wonderful church of **St Mary** at the top of the hill, pop into the **Kersey Pottery** (☎ 01473-822092; www.kerseypottery.com; The Street; (M) 10am-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) by the ford, or grab some lunch and a pint at the 14th-century, oak-timbered **Bell Inn** (☎ 01473-823229).

Kersey is 8 miles southeast of Lavenham off the A1141, though there are no direct buses connecting the two. Bus No 772 runs from Kersey to Hadleigh from where you can pick up hourly services to Ipswich or Sudbury.

Hadleigh

pop 7239

Though it's hard to envisage now, the quiet country town of Hadleigh was once one of

the biggest and busiest wool towns in East Anglia, and hidden just off the High St is a lovely cluster of buildings to prove it.

The town's principal jewel is its handsome three-storeyed 15th-century **guildhall** (☎ 01473-827752; Church St; www.fohg.co.uk; admission free; (M) 2-5pm Sun-Fri/late Jun-late Sep), timber framed and topped by a splendid crown-post roof. Next door, there are some fabulous original features (including a very stiff oaken door) to appreciate in 12th-century **St Mary's Church**, with its lanky spire and lofty ceiling.

Also beside the church is the high-and-mighty **Deanery Tower**, built in 1495 as a gatehouse to an archbishop's mansion that never actually got built. It's a very fanciful affair embellished with decorous battlements and oriel windows.

Hadleigh is 2 miles southeast of Kersey. There are hourly buses from Ipswich (28 minutes) and Sudbury (28 minutes).

BURY ST EDMUNDS

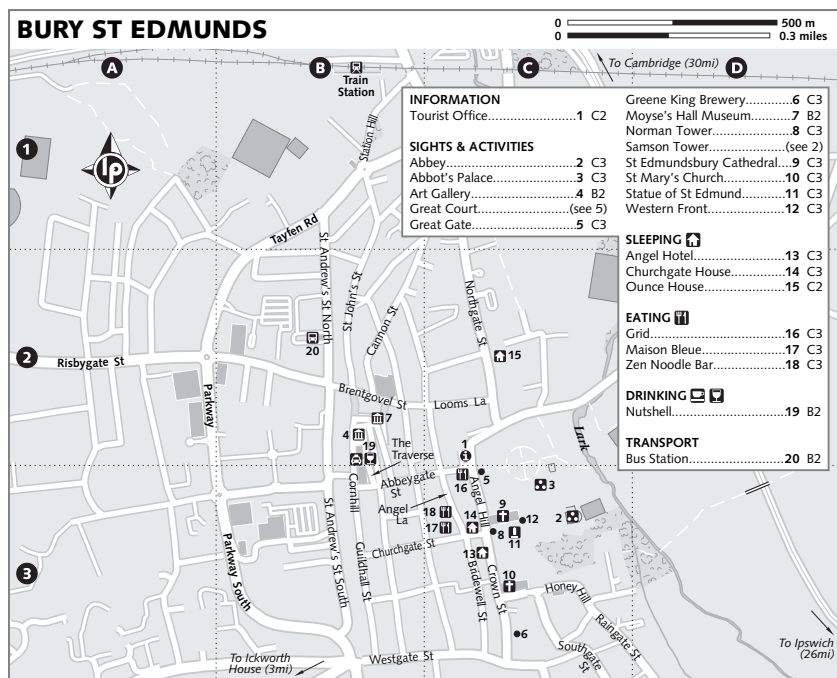
pop 36,218

Once home to one of the most powerful monasteries of medieval Europe, Bury has long attracted travellers for its powerful history, atmospheric ruins, handsome Georgian architecture and bustling agricultural markets. It's a genteel kind of place with tranquil gardens, a newly completed cathedral and a lively buzz. Bury is also home to Greene King, the famous Suffolk brewer.

History

Bury's slogan 'Shrine of a King, Cradle of the Law' recalls two defining events in the town's history. St Edmund, last Saxon king of East Anglia, was decapitated by the Danes in 869 and in 903 the martyr's body was reburied here. Soon a series of ghostly miracles emanated from his grave and the shrine became a centre of pilgrimage and the core of a new Benedictine monastery. In the 11th century, King Canute built a new abbey which soon became one of the most famous and wealthy in the country. Meanwhile the town thrived on the flocks of visiting pilgrims and with the creation of a planned town surrounding the abbey, came an influx of craftspeople.

In 1214 the English barons chose the abbey to draw up a petition that would form the basis of the Magna Carta, making it a 'Cradle of the Law' and setting the country on the road to a constitutional government. In me-



ieval times the town grew rich on the wool trade and prospered until Henry VIII got his grubby hands on the abbey in 1539 and closed it down as part of the Dissolution.

Orientation & Information

Bury is easily navigated thanks to the original 11th-century grid layout. The train station is 900m north of the tourist office, with frequent buses to the centre. The bus station is in the town's heart.

Bury's **tourist office** (☎ 01284-764667; tic@stedsbcc.gov.uk; 6 Angel Hill; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, 10am-3pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat Nov-Easter) has maps and advice and is also the starting point for guided walking tours (£3, 2.30pm Easter to September). Audio tours (adult/child £2.50/1.50) of the abbey ruins are also available.

Sights

ABBEY & PARK

Now a picturesque ruin residing in beautiful gardens behind the cathedral, the once all-powerful **abbey** (admission free; ☎ dawn-dusk) still impresses despite the townspeople hav-

ing made off with much of the stone after the Dissolution. The Reformation also meant an end to the veneration of relics, and St Edmund's grave and bones have long since disappeared.

You enter the park via one of two well-preserved old gates: opposite the tourist office, the staunch mid-14th-century **Great Gate** is intricately decorated and ominously defensive, complete with battlements, portcullis and arrow slits. The other entrance sits further up Angel Hill, where a gargoyle-studded early-12th-century **Norman Tower** looms.

Just beyond the Great Gate is a peaceful garden where the **Great Court** was once a hive of activity, and further on a dovecote marks the only remains of the **Abbot's Palace**. Most impressive, however, are the remains of the **western front**, where the original abbey walls were burrowed into in the 18th century to make way for houses. The houses are still in use and look as if they have been carved out of the stone like caves. Nearby is **Samson Tower** and in front of it a beautiful **statue of St Edmund** by Dame Elisabeth Frink (1976). The rest of the abbey spreads eastward like

a ragged skeleton, with various lumps and pillars hinting at its immense size.

ST EDMUNDSBURY CATHEDRAL

Completed in 2005, the 45m-high Millennium Tower of **St Edmundsbury Cathedral** (St James; ☎ 01284-748720; www.steds cathedral.co.uk; Angel Hill; requested donation £3; ☎ 8am-6pm) is a vision in Lincolnshire limestone, and its traditional Gothic-style construction gives a good idea of how the towers of many other English cathedrals must once have looked fresh from the stonemason's chisel.

Most of the rest of the building dates from the early 16th century, though the eastern end is postwar 20th century, and the northern side was completed in 1990. The overall effect is light and lofty, with a gorgeous hammer-beam roof and a striking sculpture of the crucified Christ by Dame Elisabeth Frink in the north transept. The impressive entrance porch has a tangible Spanish influence, a tribute to Abbot Anselm (1121-48), who opted against pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in favour of building a church dedicated to St James (Santiago in Spanish) right here.

For a proper insight into the church's history and heritage join one of the guided tours of the cathedral at 11.30am from May to September.

ST MARY'S CHURCH

One of the biggest parish churches in England, **St Mary's** (☎ 01284-754680; www.stmaryspeter.net/stmarychurch; Honey Hill; ☎ 10am-4pm Mar-Oct, to 3pm Nov-Feb) contains the tomb of Mary Tudor (Henry VIII's sister and a one-time queen of France). Built around 1430, it also has a host of somewhat vampirish angels swooping from its roof, and a bell is still rung to mark curfew, as it was in the Middle Ages.

GREENE KING BREWERY

Churning out some of England's favourite booze since Victorian times, this famous **brewery** (☎ 01284-714297; www.greeneking.co.uk; Crown St; day/evening tours £8/10; ☎ museum 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, tours 11am Mon, 2pm Tue, 11am & 2pm Wed-Fri, 10.30am, 12.30pm & 2.30pm Sat, 11.30am Sun, evening tour 7pm Mon-Fri) has a museum (admission free) and runs tours, after which you can appreciate what all the fuss is about in its brewery bar. Tours are popular so book ahead.

ART GALLERY & MOYSE'S HALL MUSEUM

Bury's grand **art gallery** (☎ 01284-762081; www.burystedmundsartgallery.org; Cornhill; adult/child £1/50p; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sat) is housed in a beautiful 18th-century former theatre and hosts a top-notch selection of temporary exhibitions of contemporary art.

Just across the square, **Moyses Hall Museum** (☎ 01284-706183; Cornhill; adult/child £3/2; ☎ 10am-5pm) wows with its impressive 12th-century undercroft and tells some particularly gruesome stories in a room dedicated to death, burial and witchcraft. Among other curiosities, you'll discover a mummified cat that was purposefully buried alive in a building's walls, and a book bound in the tanned skin of an infamous murderer.

Sleeping

Churchgate House (☎ 01284-750233; www.churchgatehouse.co.uk; 35 Churchgate St; s/d from £55/90; (P) ☎ wi-fi) This beautiful Georgian house in the centre of town has spacious rooms decked out in glorious period style. From the antique beds and dressers to the gilt-framed prints and cosy armchairs this place just oozes tradition.

Ounce House (☎ 01284-761779; www.ouncehouse.co.uk; Northgate St; s/d from £75/110; (P)) Heavy swag curtains, plenty of gilt, antique furniture and tasteful florals abound at this dignified Victorian merchant's house in the centre of town. There are only a few rooms up for grabs here so if classical elegance is your thing, book in advance.

Angel Hotel (☎ 01284-714000; www.theangel.co.uk; 3 Angel Hill; s/d from £75/137; (P) ☎) Peeking from behind a shaggy mane of vines, this famous old coaching inn has hosted many a dignitary in its long history, including fictional celebrity Mr Pickwick who, Dickens wrote, enjoyed an 'excellent roast dinner' here. Rooms are split between a slick contemporary wing and a traditional Georgian building.

Eating

Zen Noodle Bar (☎ 01284-723559; 6 Angel Lane; mains £7-9; ☎ closed Sun) Floor-to-ceiling windows bathe this sleek and contemporary Japanese restaurant in light. The menu also features Thai and Chinese rice dishes and a tempting array of starters for sharing.

Grid (☎ 01284-706004; www.thegridrestaurant.co.uk; 34 Abbeygate St; mains £9-15, set 2-course lunch/dinner £10.50/14.95) Set in a 16th-century building but all slick, modern style, this relaxed restaurant

THE ECCENTRIC EARL

The Hervey family had such a reputation for eccentricity that it was said of them that when 'God created the human race he made men, women and Herveys'. Perhaps the biggest weirdo of them all was the creator of Ickworth House, Frederick. As Bishop of Derry (Ireland) he was renowned not for his piety but for his agnosticism, vanity and oddity: he would force his clergymen to race each other through peat bogs in the middle of the night, sprinkle flour on the floor of his house to catch night-time adulterers, champion the cause of Catholic emancipation (he was, after all, a Protestant bishop) and earn himself the sobriquet of 'wicked prelate' from George III.

Not content with his life in Ireland, in later years Frederick took to travelling around Europe, where he indulged each and every one of his passions: women, wine, art and intrigue. He tried to pass himself off as a spy in France, horrified visiting English aristocrats with his dress sense and manners in Italy, and once chucked a bowl of pasta onto a religious procession because he hated the sound of tinkling bells.

serves a good selection of sandwiches (£6) and light bites (£5) as well as full meals during the day and a menu of modern English dishes by night.

Maison Bleue (☎ 01284-760623; www.maisonbleue.co.uk; 31 Churchgate St; mains £13.50-19.95; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Muted colours, pale leather banquettes, white linens and contemporary style merge with a menu of imaginative dishes in this seafood restaurant. Although the menu is heavy on fish and seafood there are some vegetarian and meat dishes available.

Drinking

Nutshell (☎ 01284-764867; The Traverse) Recognised by the *Guinness Book of Records* as Britain's smallest, this midget-sized timber-framed pub is an absolute gem and a tourist attraction in its own right. Mind how you knock back a pint here as in the crush you never know who you're going to elbow.

Getting There & Away

Centrally placed, Bury is a convenient point from which to explore western Suffolk. There are three daily National Express buses to London (£12.80, 2½ hours). From Cambridge, Stagecoach runs bus 11 to Bury (65 minutes) hourly from Monday to Saturday; the last bus back to Cambridge leaves at 7.45pm.

Trains go to Ipswich (£6.40, 30 to 40 minutes, two per hour), Ely (£7.60, 30 minutes, six daily) and hourly to Cambridge (£7.60, 44 minutes), all of which have links to London.

AROUND BURY ST EDMUNDS

Ickworth House & Park

The puffed-up pomposity of stately home **Ickworth House** (NT; ☎ 01284-735270; www.national

trust.org/ickworth; adult/child house & park £8.30/3.30, park only £4.20/1.10; ☎ house 1-5pm Fri-Tue mid-Mar-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct, park 8am-8pm year-round) is palpable from the minute you catch sight of its immense oval rotunda and wide outspread wings. The building is the whimsical creation of fourth earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry, Frederick Hervey (1730-1803; see above), and contains fine paintings by Titian, Gainsborough and Velasquez. There's also a lovely Italian garden, parkland bearing the landscaping eye of Capability Brown, a deer enclosure and a hide to explore.

The east wing of the house now functions as the slick **Ickworth Hotel** (☎ 01284-735350; www.ickworthhotel.com; d from £290; ☎ P ☎), where the traditional surroundings mix with designer furniture and contemporary style to create a luxurious country hideout. Despite its glam design families are very welcome with a play group and games room laid on.

Ickworth is 3 miles southwest of Bury on the A143. Burton's buses 344 and 345 from Bury train station (15 minutes) to Haverhill can drop you nearby.

ALDEBURGH

pop 2790

One of the region's most charming coastal towns, the small fishing and boat-building village of Aldeburgh has an understated charm that attracts visitors back year after year. Ramshackle fishing huts sell fresh-from-the-nets catch, handsome pastel-coloured houses, independent shops and art galleries line the High St and a sweeping shingle beach stretches along the shore offering tranquil big-sky views. Although it's a popular place, the town remains defiantly unchanged with

a low-key atmosphere and a great choice of food and accommodation.

Aldeburgh also has a lively cultural scene. Composer Benjamin Britten and lesser-known poet George Crabbe both lived and worked here; Britten founded East Anglia's primary arts and music festival, the **Aldeburgh Festival** (☎ 01728-687110; www.aldeburgh.co.uk), which takes place in June and has been going for over 60 years. Britten's legacy is commemorated by Maggi Hambling's wonderful *Scallop* sculpture, a short stroll left along the seashore.

Aldeburgh's other photogenic gem is the intricately carved and timber-framed **Moot Hall** (☎ 01728-454666; www.aldeburghmuseum.ork.uk; adult/child £1/free; ☎ 2.30-5pm Sat & Sun Apr, 2.30-5pm May, Sep & Oct, noon-5pm Jun-Aug), which now houses a local history museum.

If you fancy a day in the kitchen, the popular **Aldeburgh Cookery School** (☎ 01728-454039; www.aldeburghcookerschool.com; 84 High St) offers hands-on day courses (£150) ranging from fish or Italian food classes to Thai, vegetarian, and shellfish, and cookery courses aimed specifically at men.

Information can be found at the **tourist office** (☎ 01728-453637; atic@suffolkcoastal.gov.uk; 152 High St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun Nov-Mar).

Activities

A fun way to enjoy the bracing salt air is by following the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Path, which passes around half a mile north of Aldeburgh, along the coast for a few miles. Alternatively, from Aldeburgh follow the path inland for a 3-mile walk towards the village of Snape, through some pleasant wooded areas and fields.

Sleeping

Blaxhall YHA (☎ 0845 371 9305; www.yha.org.uk; Heath Walk; dm £15.95; Ⓟ) Housed in an old school building that gives it an extra-institutional aura, this hostel nonetheless has small great-value dorms. It's situated in good walking, cycling and birding country 6 miles from Aldeburgh, and west of Snape Maltings. Book ahead as it's popular with groups.

Toll House (☎ 01728-453239; www.tollhouse.travelbugged.com; 50 Victoria Rd; s/d £60/75; Ⓟ) You'll find small but immaculate rooms at this lovely Victorian-era B&B on the way in to town. The rooms have cast-iron beds, pretty floral bedspreads and simple but tasteful style.

our pick Ocean House (☎ 01728-452094; www.oceanhousealdeburgh.co.uk; 25 Crag Path; s/d £70/90) Right on seafront and with only the sound of the waves to lull you to sleep at night, this beautiful Victorian guest house has wonderfully cosy, period-styled rooms. Expect pale pastels, subtle florals and tasteful furniture and the sound of classical music wafting from the rooms occupied by visiting music students. There's a grand piano on the top floor, a gaily painted rocking horse, bikes to borrow and table tennis in the cellar.

Dunan House (☎ 01728-452486; www.dunanhouse.co.uk; 41 Park Rd; r incl breakfast £75-85) Set well back off the street in lovely gardens, this charming B&B has a range of individually styled rooms mixing contemporary and traditional elements to surprisingly good effect. With friendly hosts and breakfast assembled from local, wild and home-grown produce it's a real treat.

Eating

Fish and Chip Shop (☎ 01728-452250; 226 High Street; fish & chips £4-5; ☎ noon-2pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, noon-7pm Sun) Aldeburgh has a reputation for the finest fish and chips in the area, and this place generally has a queue coming right out onto the street thanks to its succulent battered fish, and crisp and airy chips.

Regatta Restaurant (☎ 01728-452011; www.regattaaldeburgh.com; 171 High St; mains £8.50-13.50; ☎ noon-2pm & 6-10pm) Good ol' English seaside food is given star treatment at this sleek, contemporary restaurant where local fish is the main attraction. The celebrated owner-chef supplements his wonderful seafood with meat and vegetarian options and regular gourmet nights.

Lighthouse (☎ 01728-453377; www.lighthouserestaurant.co.uk; 77 High St; mains £9-17; ☎ 10am-2pm & 6.30-late) This unassuming bistro-style restaurant is a fantastic place to dine, with wooden tables and floors, a menu of simple but sensational international dishes, and a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Despite the top-notch food and accolades piled upon it children are very welcome.

Cafe 152 (☎ 01728-454594; www.152aldeburgh.co.uk; 152 High St; mains £10-15; ☎ 10am-3pm & 6-10pm) Freshly netted seafood is always the dish of the day in this stylishly minimalist bistro, which serves a creative seasonal menu of modern English dishes ranging from fantastic fish to local beef and pork.

Getting There & Away

Aldeburgh is not well connected in terms of transport and your best bet is to take one of the frequent bus services to Ipswich (1½ hours) and to continue on from there.

AROUND ALDEBURGH

Strung along the coastline north of Aldeburgh is a poignant trail of serene and little-visited coastal heritage towns that are gradually succumbing to the sea. Most dramatically, the once-thriving port town of Dunwich is now a quiet village, with 12 churches and chapels and hundreds of houses washed away by the sea.

The region is a favourite haunt of the binocular-wielding bird-watcher brigade, and **RSPB Minsmere** (☎ 01728-648281; Westleton; adult/child £5/1.50; ☞ 9am-dusk) flickers with airborne activity year-round. Another step south towards Aldeburgh is the odd early-20th-century 'Tudorbethan' holiday village of **Thorpeness**, which sports idiosyncratic follies, a windmill and a boating lake. Looming just north of Thorpeness is **Sizewell**, a notorious nuclear-power plant topped by a golf-ball-shaped tumour.

With public transport lacking you'll need your own wheels, or the will to walk or bike this stretch of peaceful and varied coastline.

Orford

This diminutive village, 6 miles south of Snape Maltings, is worth visiting for the odd polygonal keep of the English Heritage **Orford Castle** (☎ 01394-450472; adult/child £4.90/2.50; ☞ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Thu-Mon Oct-Mar), an innovative 12th-century, 18-sided drum design with three square turrets.

From here you can catch a ferry to **Orford Ness** (NT; ☎ 01728-648024; admission incl ferry crossing adult/child £6.50/3.25; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Jul-Sep, Sat only May-Jun & Oct), the largest vegetated shingle spit in Europe. Once used as a secret military testing ground, it is now home to a nature reserve and many rare wading birds, animals and plants. There's a 3-mile path lined with information boards and military installations. Ferries run from Orford Quay: the last ferry departs at 2pm and returns from the reserve at 5pm.

On your return make a beeline for the **Butley Orford Oysterage** (☎ 01394-450277; www.butleyorfordoysterage.co.uk; mains £7-10), where you'll find fresh seafood, smoked fish and local oysters just waiting to be gobbled up. For overnight

stays try the **Old Butcher's Shop B&B** (☎ 01394-450517; www.oldbutchers-orford.co.uk; 111 Church St; s/d from £45/65), a handsome 19th-century house with simple, traditional rooms.

SOUTHWOLD

pop 3858

Southwold is the kind of genteel seaside resort where beach huts cost an arm and a leg (one reputedly changed hands recently for a whopping £48,000) and the visitors are ever so posh. Its reputation as a well-heeled holiday getaway has earned it the nickname 'Kensington-on-Sea' after the upmarket London borough, and its lovely sandy beach, pebble-walled cottages, cannon-dotted clifftop and rows of beachfront bathing huts are all undeniably picturesque. Over the years the town has attracted many artists, including Turner, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Lucian Freud and Damien Hirst.

However, this down-to-earth town also has a traditional pier, boat rides, fish and chips and its very own brewery **Adnams** (☎ 01502-727200; www.adnams.co.uk; Adnams Pl, Sole Bay Brewery). The **tourist office** (☎ 01502-724729; www.visit-southwold.co.uk; 69 High St; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Easter-Oct, 10.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sat Oct-Mar) can help with accommodation and information.

Starting inland, the **Church of St Edmund** (Church St; admission free; ☞ 9am-6pm Jun-Aug, to 4pm rest of year) is worth a quick peek for its fabulous medieval screen and 15th-century bloodshot-eyed Jack-o-the-clock, which grumpily overlooks the church's rear. A mere stone's throw away is an old weavers' cottage that now houses the **Southwold Museum** (☎ 01502-726097; www.southwoldmuseum.org; 9-11 Victoria St; admission free; ☞ 10.30am-noon & 2-4pm Aug, 2-4pm Apr-Oct), where you can gen up on the explosive 132-ship and 50,000-men Battle of Solebay (1672), fought just off the coast.

But Southwold's shorefront is really the place to be. Take time to amble along its promenade and admire the squat 19th-century **lighthouse** before ending up at the cute little **pier** (☎ 01502-722105; www.southwoldpier.co.uk), first built in 1899 but recently reconstructed. In the 'under the pier' show you'll find a quirky collection of handmade slot machines, a mobility masterclass for zimmerframe-users and a dog's-eye view of Southwold.

If you fancy a bit of a water jaunt, the **Coastal Voyager** (☎ 07887 525082; www.coastalvoyager.co.uk)

offers a range of boat trips, including a 30-minute high-speed Sea Blast (adult/child £18/9), a leisurely river cruise (£22/11) to nearby Blythburgh and a three-hour trip to Scroby Sands (£27/13) to see a seal colony and wind farm.

Southwold's hippest event is the **Latitude Festival** (www.latitudefestival.co.uk) held in Henham Park in mid-July. An eclectic mix of music, literature, dance, drama and comedy, its stunning location and manageable size make it popular with festival-goers fed up with fields of mud and never-ending queues.

Sleeping & Eating

Despite Southwold's charm and popularity, decent accommodation is thin on the ground.

Gorse House (☎ 01502-725468; www.gorsehouse.com; 19B Halesworth Rd; Reydon; d from £55; (P)) A 10-minute walk from the seafont but well worth the effort, this lovely B&B is one of the best in the area. The two rooms here are newly decorated in simple, contemporary style with subtle-patterned wallpapers, silky throws and flat-screen TVs.

Home at 21 (☎ 01502-722573; www.northparade.southwold.info; 21 North Pde; r £65-85) This friendly place has rooms with four-poster or half-taster beds that are slightly out of keeping with their surroundings but comfortable none the less.

Sutherland House (☎ 01502-724544; www.sutherlandhouse.co.uk; 56 High St; d £140-200; (P) (wi-fi) Set in a beautiful 15th-century house dripping with character and period features, this small hotel has just three rooms featuring pargeted ceilings, exposed beams and elm floorboards but decked out in sleek, modern style. The top-notch restaurant (mains £10 to £20) specialises in local food with the menu showing how many miles the principal ingredient in each dish has travelled.

Crown (☎ 01502-722275; www.adnams.co.uk; 90 High St; mains £12-17; (☎) lunch & dinner) This special old posting inn has a superb restaurant that changes its meaty seasonal menu daily. It also has a wine bar, wood-panelled snugs and serves real ales. It also has a few plush rooms (doubles from £132).

Getting There & Away

Bus connections are surprisingly limited: your best bet is to catch one of the hourly services to Lowestoft (45 minutes) or Hales-

worth train station (30 minutes) and continue from there.

AROUND SOUTHWOLD

Walberswick

These days it requires an interstellar leap of the imagination to picture the sleepy seaside village of Walberswick as the thriving medieval port it once was. Nestled behind sandy dunes, it's a tranquil little backwater popular with well-heeled holidaymakers and home to a huddle of fresh-fish stalls.

If you've got your timing right, don't miss the chance to participate in the bizarre **British Open Crabbing Championships** (☎ 01502-722359; www.walberswick.ws/crabbing), held here in July or August, in which contestants compete to capture the heaviest crustacean. Anyone can take part, and competition is fierce with baits a closely guarded secret.

Just south of the village is the largest block of freshwater reedbed in Britain, incorporated into the **Walberswick National Nature Reserve** (☎ 01502-676171; www.naturalengland.org.uk) and home to otters, deer and rare butterflies. It's accessed by a web of public footpaths.

Oak beams, open fires and flagstone floors make the 600-year-old **Bell Inn** (☎ 01502-723109; www.bellinn-walberswick.co.uk; mains £8-10) your best bet by far for food and bedding (singles/doubles from £70/90). The bar downstairs serves award-winning seafood but also invites hiding behind high wooden settles with a pint and newspaper. The spacious en suite rooms have pretty decor and muted colour schemes.

Walberswick is a mile south of Southwold separated by the River Blyth. Pick up the path from Southwold's High St to reach a pedestrian bridge, or catch the summer **ferry** (70p; (☎) 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Jun-Sep, 10am-5pm weekends only Easter-May & Oct), which crosses at half-hourly intervals.

NORFOLK

Big skies, sweeping beaches, windswept marshes, meandering inland waterways and pretty flint houses make up the county of Norfolk, a handsome rural getaway with a thriving regional capital. You're never far from water here, whether it's the tranquil setting of rivers and windmills in the Norfolk Broads or the wide sandy beaches,

fishing boats and nature reserves along the coast. They say the locals have 'one foot on the land, and one in the sea' and beach and boating holidays are certainly a highlight of the area, but twitchers flock here too for some of the country's best bird-watching, and in Norwich, the county's bustling capital, you'll find a stunning cathedral and castle, medieval churches, a lively market and an excellent choice of pubs, clubs and restaurants.

Information

Some handy websites:

Independent Traveller's Norfolk (www.itnorfolk.co.uk)

Norfolk Coast (www.norfolkcoast.co.uk)

Norfolk Tourist Attractions (www.norfolktouristattractions.co.uk)

Visit Norfolk (www.visitnorfolk.co.uk)

Visit West Norfolk (www.visitwestnorfolk.com)

Activities

Waymarked walking trails include the well-known Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path (p425). Other long-distance paths include the **Weavers Way**, a 57-mile trail from Cromer to Great Yarmouth, and the **Angles Way** (www.eastsuffolkkinewalks.co.uk/anglesway), which negotiates the valleys of the Rivers Waveney and Little Ouse for 70 miles. Meanwhile the **Wherryman's Way** (www.wherrymansway.net) is a 35-mile walking and cycling route through the Broads, following the River Yare from Norwich to Great Yarmouth.

For a real challenge, the **Around Norfolk Walk** is a 220-mile circuit that combines most of the above.

If you're planning to do the Norfolk Coast Path and don't fancy carrying your bags, **Walk Free** (☎ 01328-711902; www.walk-free.co.uk; per bag £5) provides a bag courier service.

Getting Around

For comprehensive travel advice and timetable information contact **Traveline East Anglia** (☎ 0871 200 22 33; www.travelineeastanglia.co.uk).

NORWICH

pop 121,550

The affluent and easy-going city of Norwich (pronounced norritch) is a rich tapestry of meandering laneways liberally sprinkled with the spoils of the city's heyday at the height of the medieval wool boom. A magnificent cathe-

dral lords it over the city centre from one end and a sturdy Norman castle from the other. Around these two landmarks a series of leafy greens, grand squares, quiet lanes, crooked half-timbered buildings and a host of medieval churches pan out across this compact and artsy city. Meanwhile thriving markets, modern shopping centres, contemporary-art galleries and a young student population give the city a genial, debonair attitude that makes it one of the most appealing cities in East Anglia. Add easy access to the Broads and sweeping beaches along the coast and you have an excellent base to use for touring the area.

History

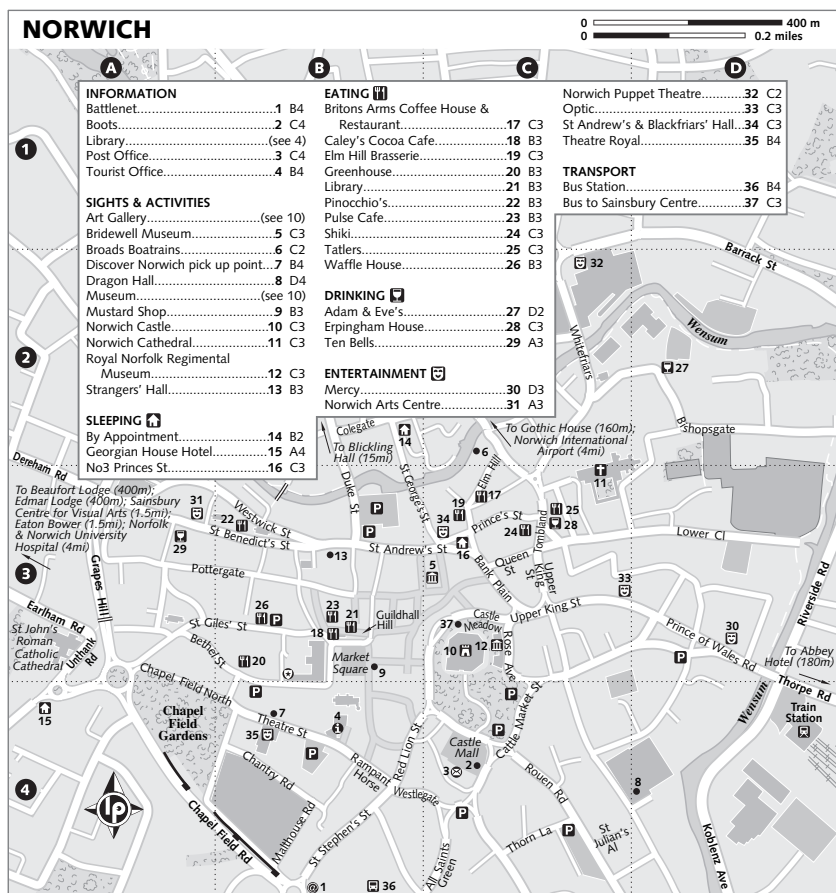
Though Norwich's history stretches back well over a thousand years, the city's golden age was during the Middle Ages, when it was England's most important city after London. Its relative isolation meant that it traditionally had stronger ties to the Low Countries than to London and when Edward III encouraged Flemish weavers to settle here in the 14th century this connection was sealed. The arrival of the immigrants helped establish the wool industry that fattened the city and sustained it right through to the 18th century.

Mass immigration from the Low Countries peaked in the troubled 16th century. In 1579 more than a third of the town's citizens were foreigners of a staunch Protestant stock, which proved beneficial during the Civil War when the Protestant parliamentarians caused Norwich little strife.

Today the spoils of this rich period in the city's history are still evident, with 36 medieval churches (see www.norwichchurches.co.uk) adorning the streets whose layout is largely unchanged since this time.

Orientation

The castle crowns central Norwich, surrounded by a compact medieval street plan. Within the circle of river and city walls, there are scattered medieval churches and the Anglican cathedral. At the city's heart is its candy-stripe canopied market (Market Square; open approximately 8am to 4.30pm), one of the biggest and oldest markets in England, running since 1025. The enormous modern Forum building houses Norwich's main library and the tourist office.



Information

Banks and ATMs can be found around the Market Square.

Battlenet (☎ 01603-765595; 2a Queens Rd; per hr £2; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Tue, 11am-9pm Wed, 11am-10pm Thu & Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) Internet cafe popular with gamers.

Boots (☎ 01603-767970; 19 Castle Mall) Well-stocked pharmacy.

Library (☎ 01603-774774; The Forum; ☎ 9am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8.30pm Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun) Free internet for those with ID and the patience to fill out a few forms.

Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital (☎ 01603-286286; Colney Lane) Four miles west of the centre.

Post office (☎ 01603-761635; 84-85 Castle Mall)

Tourist office (☎ 01603-727927; www.visitnorwich.co.uk; The Forum; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-

4.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) Just inside the Forum on Millennium Plain.

Sights

NORWICH CASTLE, MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Perched on a hilltop overlooking central Norwich, this massive Norman **castle keep** (☎ 01603-493636; www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk; castle & exhibitions adult/child £5.80/4.25, exhibitions £3/2.20; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 1-5pm Sun, 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat school hols) is a sturdy example of 12th-century aristocratic living. The castle is one of the best-preserved examples of Anglo-Norman military architecture in the country, despite a 19th-century facelift and a gigantic shopping centre grafted to one side.

It's now home to an art gallery and superb interactive museum. The **museum** crams in a wealth of history, including lively exhibits on Bouicca and the Iceni, the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, natural-history displays and even an Egyptian gallery complete with mummies. Every room is enlivened with plenty of fun for kids, but best of all is the atmospheric keep itself, which sends shivers down the spine with graphic displays on grisly punishments meted out in its days as a medieval prison. Guided tours (£2) also run around the battlements (minimum age eight) and dungeons (minimum age five).

Meanwhile the **art gallery** houses paintings of the acclaimed 19th-century Norwich School of landscape painting founded by John Crome and – trust the English – the world's largest collection of ceramic teapots.

A claustrophobic tunnel from the castle also emerges into a reconstructed WWI trench at the **Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum** (☎ 01603-493649; www.nrm.org.uk; Shirehall, Market Ave; adult/child £2/1.20; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat), which details the history of the local regiment since 1830. It has another less dramatic entrance from the road.

NORWICH CATHEDRAL

Norwich's most stunning landmark is the magnificent Anglican **cathedral** (☎ 01603-218300; www.cathedral.org.uk; suggested donation £5; 🕒 7am-7pm mid-May–mid-Sep, to 6pm mid-Sep–mid-May), its barbed spire soaring higher than any in England except Salisbury, while the size of its cloisters is second to none.

Begun in 1096, the cathedral is one of the finest Anglo-Norman abbey churches in the country, rivalled only perhaps by Durham. The sheer size of its nave is impressive but its most renowned feature is the superb Gothic rib-vaulting added in 1463. Among the spidery stonework are 1200 sculpted roof bosses depicting bible stories. Together they represent one of the finest achievements of English medieval masonry.

Similar bosses can be seen in closer detail in the cathedral's remarkable cloisters. Built between 1297 and 1430, the two-storey cloisters are unique in England today and were originally built to house a community of about 100 monks.

Outside the cathedral's eastern end is the grave of the WWI heroine Edith Cavell, a

Norfolk-born nurse who was executed for helping hundreds of Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium. The cathedral close also contains handsome houses and the old chapel of King Edward VI School (where English hero Admiral Nelson was educated). Its current students make up the choir, which performs in at least one of the three services held daily.

Fascinating guided tours of the cathedral (minimum donation £1.50) take place daily at 10.45am, 12.30pm and 2.15pm.

ELM HILL

Head west from the cathedral up Wensum St to reach Elm Hill, an utterly charming medieval cobbled street of crooked timber beams and doors, intriguing shops and snug cafes. It's one of the oldest intact streets in the city and now centre of the local antique business. At the far end of Wensum St is Tombland, where the market was originally located. Despite its ominous overtones, 'tomb' is an old Norse word for empty, hence space for a market.

OTHER MUSEUMS

Though it's more shop than museum, the **Mustard Shop** (☎ 01603-627889; www.colmansmustardshop.com; 15 Royal Arcade; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) tells the 200-year story of Colman's Mustard, a famous local product. It's in the lavish art-nouveau Royal Arcade.

Nearby is **Bridewell Museum** (☎ 01603-629127; Bridewell Alley; adult/child £3.20/1.75; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat Easter-Oct), housed in a former merchant's house and 14th-century bridewell or 'prison for women, beggars and tramps', and filled with fascinating paraphernalia and reconstructions of Norwich's principal shops and industries.

Two-hundred and fifty metres west, along St Andrew's St and Charing Cross, is the mazelike **Strangers' Hall** (☎ 01603-667229; adult/child £3.20/1.75; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Wed & Sat), an early-14th-century town house with atmospheric rooms furnished in period styles from Tudor to Victorian. Another remarkable medieval building, originally used as a trading hall, is **Dragon Hall** (☎ 01603-663922; www.dragonhall.org; 115-123 King St; adult/child £5/3; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sun), with a stunning great crown-post roof and a timber-framed great hall dating from 1430.

SAINSBURY CENTRE FOR VISUAL ARTS

Housed in the first major building by Norman Foster, now the darling of Britain's architectural set, the **Sainsbury Centre** (☎ 01603-593199; www.scva.org.uk; admission free; ☺ 10am-5pm Tue & Thu-Sun, to 8pm Wed) is the most important centre for the arts in East Anglia. Filled with an eclectic collection of works by Picasso, Moore, Degas and Bacon displayed beside art from Africa, the Pacific and the Americas, it also houses changing exhibitions that cover everything from local heritage to international art movements. Even if you're not an art buff you're almost guaranteed to find something of interest going on here.

To get here take bus 25, 26 or 27 from Castle Meadow (20 minutes).

Tours

The tourist office organises a dizzying array of guided **city walks** (adult/child £4/1.50) between March and October, with daily walks from June to September. Walks depart at 11.30am or 2pm from the office. Check for up-to-date details online at www.visitnorwich.co.uk. **City Sightseeing** (☎ 0871 666000; www.city-sightseeing.com; adult/child £8/4; ☺ hourly 10.15am-4.15pm Apr-Oct) runs a hop-on hop-off bus service stopping at nine destinations around the city centre including city hall. You can take a similar tour by road train with **Discover Norwich** (☎ 01603-440015; www.discovernorwich.com; adult/child £4/2) from Easter to October. Trains depart from opposite Theatre Royal five times a day from 10am to 3pm, with an evening tour at 7pm Thursday to Saturday from June to August (must be prebooked). Or if you prefer to potter about on the river, **Broads Boatrains** (☎ 01603-701701; www.cityboats.co.uk; 1hr city cruise adult/child £8.50/6.50) runs a variety of cruises from Griffin Lane, Station Quay, and Elm Hill Quay.

Sleeping**BUDGET**

Norwich has a bit of a dearth of budget-range accommodation, and floral-patterned B&Bs that have seen better days are your only choice in this price category. You'll find most of them around the train station or outside the ring road.

Edmar Lodge (☎ 01603-615599; www.edmarlodge.co.uk; 64 Earlham Rd; s/d from £38/43; (P) (Q) wi-fi) Although the rooms here are somewhat dated, the facilities are modern with en suite bathrooms, flat-screen TVs, DVD players and free

wi-fi. It's a 10-minute walk from town but worth the trip.

Eaton Bower (☎ 01603-462204; www.eatonbower.co.uk; 20 Mile End Rd; s/d from £40/50; (P) (Q) wi-fi) A little out of town but worth the effort, this small B&B has a choice of cosy rooms with subtle patterns and traditional styling. En suite bathrooms, free wi-fi, private parking and a touch of period character make it one of the best bets in this price range.

Abbey Hotel (☎ 01603-612915; 16 Stracey Rd; s/d with bathroom £50/65, without bathroom £29/58) This Victorian terraced house behind the station has a range of simple floral rooms, most of which share bathrooms. It's a good deal close to the city centre and has friendly service but there's little character.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Beaufort Lodge (☎ 01603-667402; www.beaufortlodge.com; 60-62 Earlham Rd; s/d £45/60; (P) (Q)) Giant windows wash the rooms in this Victorian house with light, and the spacious bedrooms feature pretty fabrics and wallpapers in period style. The effect is bright and airy, with tasteful traditional touches, en suite bathrooms and plenty of space. It's a great deal and just a 10-minute walk from town.

Gothic House (☎ 01603-631879; www.gothic-house-norwich.com; King's Head Yard, Magdalen St; s/d £55/90; (P) (Q) wi-fi) Set in a quiet courtyard in the heart of the city, this Grade II Regency house has two immaculate rooms with faithful period decor. Each has a private bathroom, great character and buckets of charm.

No3 Princes St (☎ 01603-662692; www.3princes-norwich.co.uk; 3 Princes St; s/d incl breakfast £60/85; (Q) wi-fi) There are four simple, tasteful rooms in this handsome red-brick Georgian home in the city's heart. Each is individually styled and has its own unique character. Three overlook St Andrew's; the other has a view of a pretty gravel-filled back courtyard. The Continental breakfasts are eaten in your room.

ourpick By Appointment (☎ 01603-630730; www.byappointmentnorwich.co.uk; 25-29 St George's St; s/d incl breakfast from £70/110; (Q)) This fabulously theatrical and delightfully eccentric B&B occupies three heavy-beamed 15th-century merchant's houses, also home to a labyrinthine restaurant well known for its classic English fare. Its antique furniture, creaky charm and superb breakfasts make this well worth booking in advance.

Georgian House Hotel (☎ 01603-615655; www.georgian-hotel.co.uk; 32-34 Unthank Rd; s/d from £90/115; (P) (Q) wi-fi) A rambling, elegant Victorian house turned hotel, this place has a choice of spacious, modern rooms decked out in contemporary style. There's a large tree-filled garden and a popular restaurant (mains £12 to £18).

Eating

Norwich has a great choice of places to eat with plenty of options for vegetarians.

BUDGET

Greenhouse (☎ 01603-631007; www.greenhousetrust.co.uk; 42-48 Bethel St; snacks & mains £3.50-6; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) This organic, free-trade, vegetarian/vegan cafe is bound to leave you feeling wholesome with a menu of simple dishes, noticeboards crammed with posters for community events, and a lovely vine-covered, herb-planted terrace.

our pick Pulse Cafe (☎ 01603-765562; Labour in Vain Yard, Guildhall Hill; mains £4.50-7.50; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon, 10am-10pm Tue & Wed, 10am-11pm Thu-Sat, 11.30am-4pm Sun) This funky lounge bar in the old fire station stables serves a bumper crop of hearty vegetarian dishes from Thai curries to smoked tofu and mushroom stroganoff, and leek and potato pie. There's also a great choice of sambos, organic ciders and beers and scrummy deserts. Eat in the tranquil courtyard or in the stylish upstairs lounge.

Waffle House (☎ 01603-612790; www.wafflehouse.co.uk; 39 St Giles St; waffles £5-9; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) Pop in for a crisp and light Belgian waffle with sweet or savoury toppings at this down-to-earth and friendly cafe beloved by Norwich families, students and professionals. Organic and free-range ingredients are used to concoct such delicacies as vegetable and cashew stir-fry and a stunning chocolate mousse.

The Library (☎ 01603-616606; 4a Guildhall Hill; 1/2/3 courses £6/8/10.50; ☎ closed dinner Sun) Set in a 19th-century library complete with original shelving, this chilled brasserie is a great spot for a good-value lunch. The menu is heavy on meats and fish with dishes cooked in a nifty wood-fired grill, while the interior is sleek and stylish with exhibitions of work by contemporary local artists.

Other options:

Caley's Cocoa Cafe (☎ 01603-629364; Guildhall, Market Square; snacks £2-6; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Local

chocolate-maker's cafe serving light meals and luscious sweets in the confection-like Guildhall's old Court of Record.

Britons Arms Coffee House & Restaurant

(☎ 01603-623367; 9 Elm Hill; mains £7; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Fifteenth-century thatched restaurant serving classic English dishes in a historic setting.

MIDRANGE

Pinocchio's (☎ 01603-613318; 11 St Benedict's St; mains £7-8; ☎ noon-2pm Tue-Sat, 5-11pm Mon-Sat) This bubbly Italian brasserie has a cheerful modern interior with plenty of quirky features including a giant modern mural. The menu features the usual array of pizzas and pastas as well as some top-notch specials including slow-cooked wild boar with juniper, orange and thyme. There's live music on Monday and Thursday evenings when it's best to book ahead.

Shiki (☎ 01603-619262; 6 Tombland; sushi £3-5, mains £9-11; ☎ closed Sun) This minimalist Japanese restaurant has a stylish, contemporary interior and a reputation for some of the best Asian food in town. From delicate sushi to superb teppanyaki, it's a firm local favourite with a particularly friendly vibe.

Elm Hill Brasserie (☎ 01603-624847; www.elmhillbrasserie.co.uk; 2 Elm Hill; mains £11-16; ☎ closed Sun) On the corner of the city's most famous street, this simple and elegant restaurant is bathed with light from its giant windows. Scrubbed wooden floors, contemporary style, a relaxed atmosphere and a menu of unfussy, classic French dishes made from seasonal, local ingredients has the punters coming in droves.

Tatlers (☎ 01603-766670; www.tatlers.com; 21 Tombland; set lunch £14-18, dinner mains £12-17; ☎ closed Sun) This converted Victorian town house is home to one of the city's best eateries, where local suppliers and ingredients are as important as the final menu. The truly divine dishes are modern English with a strong French influence and are served in a series of unpretentious dining rooms. The set lunch is an excellent-value choice but book in advance.

Drinking

It was once said that Norwich had a pub for every day of the year and although that may not be completely true, there's certainly plenty of choice. You'll find hip and trendy or quaint and traditional pubs all across the city centre, but start your quest in Tombland or St Benedict's St for a taste of what's on offer.

Adam & Eve's (☎ 01603-667423; www.adamandevenorwich.co.uk; Bishopsgate) A 13th-century brew-house built to quench the thirst of cathedral builders, this is now Norwich's oldest-surviving pub, and an adorable little sunken-floored gem. It's a tiny place just loaded with character and has a pleasant outdoor courtyard.

Ten Bells (☎ 01603-667833; 76 St Benedict's St) This is this kind of faded 18th-century pub where people feel instantly at ease, calmed by the real ales, mellow red velvet and quirky memorabilia, and amused by the red phone booth in the corner. It also fancies itself as an intellectuals' hang-out, with poetry readings and arts-school regulars.

Erpingham House (☎ 01603-630090; www.kitchenandbar.co.uk; 22 Tombland; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Thu, noon-2am Fri & Sat) If you're looking for something more modern, this stylish bar and brasserie is set in a grand old house by the cathedral. There's a sleek interior and plenty of wine and cocktail-drinking luvvies to mingle with.

Entertainment

Norwich has a flourishing arts scene and pulsating weekend nightlife. For what's on information from ballet to boozing try www.norwichtonight.com or for live music www.norfolk gigs.co.uk.

NIGHTCLUBS

Nightclubs seem to cluster around the Prince of Wales Rd and run from 9pm or 10pm to at least 2am.

Mercy (☎ 01603-627666; www.mercynightclub.com; 86 Prince of Wales Rd; admission free-£8; ☎ Thu-Sat) A former cinema complete with mock-marble entrance and Renaissance-inspired decor, Mercy is a massive club with three dance floors, huge projection screens and DJs that favour R&B and club classics.

Optic (☎ 01603-617977; www.optic-club.co.uk; 50 Prince of Wales Rd; admission free-£8.50; ☎ Mon & Wed-Sat) This place markets itself as Norwich's upmarket club, with a strict dress code and a dislike for Burberry, facial piercings and excessive tattoos. Club nights feature everything from '70s funk to chart-topping anthems.

THEATRE

St Andrew's and Blackfriars' Halls (☎ 01603-628477; www.standrewshall.co.uk; St Andrew's Plain) Once home to Dominican Blackfriars, this spookily Gothic-looking place now serves as an im-

pressive civic centre where concerts, markets and festivals are held.

Theatre Royal (☎ 01603-630000; www.theatreroyalnorwich.co.uk; Theatre St) Features programs by touring drama, opera and ballet companies.

Norwich Arts Centre (☎ 01603-660352; www.norwichartscentre.co.uk; St Benedict's St) Also in a medieval church; has a wide-ranging program of alternative drama, concerts, dance and jazz.

Norwich Puppet Theatre (☎ 01603-629921; www.puppettheatre.co.uk; St James, Whitefriars) Set in a cute little repurposed church; goes down a treat with small and big kids.

Getting There & Away

Norwich International Airport (☎ 0844 748 0112; www.norwichinternational.com) is just 4 miles north of town, and has cheap flights to Europe and several British destinations. Bus 11 runs from the airport to the bus and rail stations hourly.

National Express runs buses to London (£14.90, three hours, five daily). First Eastern Counties runs hourly buses to King's Lynn (1½ hours) and Cromer (one hour). There are twice-hourly services to Great Yarmouth (40 minutes).

There are twice hourly train services to Ely (£13.50, one hour), hourly services to Cambridge (£12.40, 1¼ hours), as well as regular links to Peterborough (£15, 1½ hours). Twice hourly trains also go to London Liverpool Street (£40, two hours). For city cabs, call **Loyal Taxis** (☎ 01603-619619).

If you're driving, the city has six Park & Ride locations (£3.30 per vehicle).

AROUND NORWICH

Largely remodelled in the 17th century for Sir Henry Hobart, James I's chief justice, **Blickling Hall** (NT; ☎ 01263-738030; www.nationaltrust.org.uk/blickling; Blickling; adult/child £9.10/4.50, garden only £6/3; ☎ house 11am-5pm Wed-Sun mid-Mar-Jul, Sep & Oct, 11am-5pm Wed-Mon Jul & Aug, gardens 10.15am-5.15pm Wed-Sun mid-Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Thu-Sun rest of year) began life in the 11th century as a manor house and bishop's palace. Today it is a grand Jacobean mansion set in vast parklands and as famous for its ghostly sightings as its spectacular Long Gallery.

In 1437 the isolated house was claimed by the Boleyn family and passed through the generations to Thomas, father of Anne Boleyn. Poor old Anne was executed by her husband Henry VIII in 1533 and it's said that on the anniversary of her death a coach drives up to

the house, drawn by headless horses, driven by headless coachmen and containing the queen with her head on her lap.

If you're not around to witness the spectacle that day there's still quite a lot to see. The grand state rooms are stuffed with fine Georgian furniture, pictures and tapestries and the Long Gallery has an impressive Jacobean plaster ceiling. There's also an exhibition describing life below stairs with stories from those who lived and worked at Blickling over the centuries.

Blickling Hall is 15 miles north of Norwich off the A140. Sanders runs hourly buses here from Norwich bus station from June to August (20 minutes). Aylsham is the nearest train station, 1.5 miles away.

NORFOLK BROADS

A mesh of navigable slow-moving rivers, freshwater lakes, wild water meadows, fens, bogs and saltwater marshes make up the Norfolk Broads, a 125-mile stretch of lock-free waterways and the county's most beautiful attraction. The official name of the national park is the 'Norfolk and Suffolk Broads', but as most of the lakes and waterways are in Norfolk, the area is generally called simply the Norfolk Broads. The Broads are home to some of the UK's rarest plants and animals and are protected as a national park, with flourishing nature reserves and bird sanctuaries attracting gangs of bird-watchers. But the area's appeal reaches far further, with boaters, families and those in search of scenic tranquillity arriving in droves.

Despite the area's popularity, it's easy to lose yourself in the hypnotic peace of the waterways. A boat is by far the best vantage point from which to spy on its myriad wildlife, and anyone fond of splashing about will undoubtedly want to linger here. Apart from the waterways and the wildlife there are restored windmills, medieval churches and glorious gardens to explore. Walkers and cyclists will also find a web of trails crossing the region, and with the Broads' highest point, How Hill, just 12m above sea level, they're accessible for all.

The low-lying nature of the land here was the key to its modern appearance. In the 12th century the land was dug for peat, the only local source of fuel. But dig gaping holes in low-lying land and they're bound to spring a leak. Water gradually seeped through, causing

marshes and eventually lakes to develop. As water levels rose, the peat-cutting industry died out and the broads became a landscape of interconnected lakes and rivers. In no other area of England has human effort changed the natural landscape so dramatically. Around How Hill you'll find many of the picturesque wind pumps first built to drain the marshland and to return water to the rivers.

Orientation

The Broads form a triangle, with the Norwich–Cromer road, the Norwich–Lowestoft road and the coastline as the three sides.

Wroxham, on the A1151 from Norwich, and Potter Heigham, on the A1062 from Wroxham, are the main centres. Along the way there are plenty of waterside pubs, villages and market towns where you can stock up on provisions, and stretches of river where you can feel you are the only person around.

Information

Details on scores of conservation centres and bird-watching hides can be found through the **Broads Authority** (☎ 01603-610734; www.broads-authority.gov.uk), including those at Berney Marshes and Breydon Water, Cocksfoot Broad, Hickling Broad, Horsey Mere, How Hill, Ranworth, Strumpshaw Fen, Surlingham Church Marsh and Whitlingham. There's more information on Norfolk Broads at www.norfolkbroads.com and the RSPB at www.rspb.org.uk.

Getting Around

You can hire a variety of launches from large cabin cruisers to little craft with outboards for a couple of hours' gentle messing about on the water.

Boating holidays are operated by **Blakes** (☎ 0870 220 2498; www.blakes.co.uk) and **Hoseasons** (☎ 01502-502588; www.hoseasons.co.uk) among others. Depending on boat size, facilities and season, a boat for two to four people costs around £450 to £850 for a week including fuel and insurance.

Meanwhile boat yards around Wroxham and Potter Heigham hire out boats for shorter cruises, from an hour to several days. Look out for the traditional flat-bottomed boats known as wherries. In the height of summer, prices start from £30 for two hours, £55 for four hours and £80 for one day. Prices drop outside summer.

No previous experience is necessary, but remember to stay on the right-hand side of the river, that the rivers are tidal and to stick to the speed limit – you can be prosecuted for speeding.

If you don't feel like piloting your own boat, try **Broads Tours** (☎ Potter Heigham 01692-670711, Wroxham 01603-782207; www.broads.co.uk), which runs 1½-hour pleasure trips (adult/child £6.50/5) from April to October.

Bike and canoe hire are available from the **Broads Authority** (☎ 01603-782281; www.broads-authority.gov.uk) from Easter to October. Bikes cost £11 per day (you can also hire child seats and tandems) while Canadian canoes cost £25 per day or £15 per half day. Bikes and canoes are available at Whitlingham, Bungay and Burgh St Peter, canoes only at Wayford Bridge, Geldeston and Wroxham, and bikes only at Clippesby, Ludham Bridge and Stokesby.

GREAT YARMOUTH

pop 90,810

On first glance Great Yarmouth is little more than a tatty traditional seaside resort complete with neon-lit esplanade, jingling amusement arcades, grim greasy spoons, crazy golf and cheek-by-jowl hotels. But scratch under the surface and you'll find the old town rich in history and heritage.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01493-846345; www.great-yarmouth.co.uk; 25 Marine Pde; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm daily Easter-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Easter) is on the seafront and can point you towards the lovely Weavers Way (p457) walking trail, which cuts into the Broads from here.

Most absorbing of Yarmouth's museums is **Time & Tide** (☎ 01493-743930; www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk; Blackfriars Rd; adult/child £5/4.15; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), in a Victorian herring-curing works. It tackles everything from prehistory to penny arcades and naughty postcards, but dwells on maritime heritage and reconstructs typical 17th-century row houses. There's plenty for kids, from touch screens to taking the wheel of a coastal drifter.

You can see how life was in Great Yarmouth's **Row Houses** (EH; ☎ 01493-857900; South Quay; adult/child £3.70/1.90; ☎ noon-5pm Apr-Sep) in these preserved houses reconstructed as they would have been in 1870 and 1942. Displays show how the 'herring girls' lived and how life was for tenants over the centuries, from wealthy merchants to tenement families.

A cluster of other museums surround historic South Quay. The 16th-century **Elizabethan House Museum** (NT; ☎ 01493-855746; 4 South Quay; adult/child £3.20/1.75; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1.15-5pm Sat & Sun Easter-Oct) is a fine merchant's house faithfully reconstructed to showcase Tudor and Victorian domestic life, and home to the 'Conspiracy Room' where Cromwell and his cronies decided Charles I must be executed.

Around the corner, the **Tolhouse Museum** (☎ 01493-745526; Tolhouse St; adult/child £3.20/1.75; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1.15-5pm Sat & Sun Easter-Oct) is a medieval jail dating back 700 years; it dwells on macabre inmates, witchcraft, grisly murders and nasty punishments, and you can peek inside the spooky cells, all of which make it an instant hit with kids.

The **Norfolk Nelson Museum** (☎ 01493-850698; www.nelson-museum.co.uk; 26 South Quay; adult/child £3.20/1.90; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1-4pm Sun Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov & Jan-Mar) celebrates the life, times, romances and death of the one-eyed hero of Trafalgar, who was a regular visitor to Great Yarmouth.

B&Bs are everywhere, especially chock-a-block Trafalgar St, and cost from £20 to £40 per person. One of the best is **No. 78** (☎ 01493-850001; www.no78.co.uk; 78 Marine Pde; s £35, d £45-80; ☎) a chic, modern place that bucks the chintzy local trends and offers really beautiful, bright, contemporary rooms with an eco-conscience. The toilets have water-saving devices, tea and coffee come in resealable containers, the house uses 'green' electricity and you're asked to separate recyclables rather than binning them in your room.

There are hourly buses (40 minutes) and trains (£5.20, 33 minutes) to Norwich.

NORTH COAST NORFOLK

The north coast of Norfolk has something of a split personality, with a string of busy seaside towns with brash attractions and hoards of people clustering along the eastern end and a collection of small villages with trendy gastropubs and boutique hotels littering the western end. In between sit stunning beaches, and the marshy coast that attracts hoards of visiting seabirds.

Cromer

pop 3800

Once a fashionable Victorian coastal resort, Cromer is now firmly part of the bucket-and-spade brigade, with a wonderful stretch of

safe, sandy beachfront, family entertainment on the pier, a glut of fish and chip shops and plenty of trashy amusement arcades. The town has recently seen some major investment and may yet return to its former glory.

Stay long enough to wander off the beach and you'll find the quaint **Cromer Museum** (☎ 01263-513543; www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk; East Cottages, Tucker St; adult/under 16yr £2.90/1.75; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb), set in a Victorian fisherman's cottage. The museum depicts life in the town in the 19th century and displays a series of historic photos of the area.

Just 2 miles southwest of town off the B1436 is **Felbrig Hall** (NT; ☎ 01263-837444; adult/child £7.90/3.70; ☎ 11am-5pm Sat-Wed Mar-Oct) an elegant stately home with a fine Georgian interior. The walled gardens and orangery are particularly lovely, with access to the **Weavers Way** running through the estate.

If you wish to stay overnight the superb **Captain's House** (☎ 01263-515434; www.captains-house.co.uk; 5 The Crescent; d £70-140; Ⓟ) is a bright and airy Georgian house with lovingly decorated rooms. There's plenty of white linen with pale pastel accents, giant, comfy beds, designer bathrooms and modern but not minimalist style.

Cromer has direct trains to Norwich hourly Monday to Saturday and services every two hours on Sunday (£5.20, 44 minutes).

Cley Marshes

One of England's premier bird-watching sites, Cley (pronounced cly) Marshes, is a mecca for twitchers with over 300 species recorded here. There's a **visitors centre** (☎ 01263-740008; www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk; adult/child £3.75/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) built on high ground and a series of hides hidden amid the golden reedbeds.

If you wish to stay in the area, the stunning 17th-century **Cley Windmill** (☎ 01263-740209; www.cleywindmill.co.uk; d £78-145) has nine bedrooms with the one at the top reached by ladder alone. It's a wonderfully quirky place to stay, with a circular living room, great views across the marshes and rooms with four-poster, half-taster or cast-iron beds.

Blakeney Point

The pretty village of **Blakeney** was once a busy fishing and trading port before its harbour silted up. These days it's a good place to jump

aboard boat trips out to a 500-strong colony of common and grey seals that live, bask and breed on nearby Blakeney Point. The hour-long trips (adult/child £8/4) run daily April to October but the best time to come is between June and August when the common seals pup. Trips run either from Blakeney Harbour or nearby Morston.

Beans Boat Trips (☎ 01263-740505; www.beansboattrips.co.uk; Morston)

Bishop's Boats (☎ 01263-740753; www.norfolksealtrips.co.uk; Blakeney Harbour)

Temples Seal Trips (☎ 01263-740791; www.sealtrips.co.uk; Morston)

Wells-next-the-Sea pop 2451

Thronged with crowds on holiday weekends, this harbour town has plenty of seaside tat on the waterfront but a surprisingly tranquil old town set back from the sea. Attractive Georgian houses and flint cottages surround a large green, while kids bounce between toy shops and ice-cream parlours, and pensioners check out the curios.

The small **tourist office** (☎ 0871 200 3071; www.visitnorthnorfolk.com; Staithe St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Mar-mid-Jul, Sep & Oct) can help with all inquiries and information on the **narrow-gauge steam train** (☎ 01328-711630; www.wells-walsinghamrailway.co.uk; adult/child return £7.50/6) that chuffs 5 miles to **Little Walsingham**, where there are shrines and a ruined abbey that have drawn pilgrims since medieval times. The train trip takes 30 minutes and there are three to five departures daily April to October.

If you fancy staying overnight, the **Wells YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9544; www.yha.org.uk; Church Plains; dm £15.95; Ⓟ) has simple rooms in an ornately gabled early-20th-century church hall. Alternatively try the tranquil **Fern Cottage** (☎ 01328-710306; www.ferncottage.co.uk; Standard Rd; s/d £60/80; Ⓟ). Set in a beautiful Georgian house, the rooms here retain some period character with open fireplaces and cast-iron beds.

For food the **Globe Inn** (☎ 01328-710206; www.globeatwells.co.uk; mains 8-14; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-9pm) is a good bet. It's on the green and also has a selection of bright, spacious rooms with contemporary style (£65 to £110).

The Coast Hopper bus goes through Wells roughly hourly in summer on its way between Hunstanton (50 minutes) and Sheringham (45 minutes).

Wells-next-the-Sea To King's Lynn

Once past Wells the atmosphere changes: gone are the tacky seaside resorts and the crowds of weekenders and back come the beautiful Norfolk villages, their flint cottages and narrow streets awash with coloured render and beautiful flowering gardens. Along this stretch of the Norfolk coast are a string of small, quiet villages that seem largely untouched by the tourist crowds save for the wonderful choice of gastropubs, trendy B&Bs and boutique hotels.

HOLKHAM

The pretty village of Holkham is well worth a stop for its imposing stately home, incredible stretch of beach and for the pleasure of walking its picturesque streets lined with elegant buildings.

The main draw here is **Holkham Hall** (☎ 01328-710227; www.holkham.co.uk; hall & museum adult/child £10/5; ☎ noon-5pm Sun-Thu Easter & Jun-Sep), a grand Palladian mansion set in a vast deer park designed by Capability Brown. The slightly industrial-looking brick mansion is the ancestral seat of the Earls of Leicester and has a sumptuous interior, dripping with gilt, tapestries, fine furniture and family history. The Marble Hall (it's actually alabaster), magnificent state rooms and giant kitchen shouldn't be missed. The public entrance brings you to the rear of the building; for the best views continue along the road around the house and past the ice house to see the building as originally intended. You can also visit the **Bygones Museum** (museum only adult/child £5/2.50) in the stable block. It showcases everything from mechanical toys to agricultural equipment and vintage cars.

For many, Holkham's true delight is not the stately home but the pristine 3-mile beach that meanders along the shore. Regularly voted one of England's best, it's a popular spot with walkers but the vast expanse of sand swallows people up and gives a real sense of isolation with giant skies stretching overhead. The only place to park for access to the beach is Lady Anne's Drive (parking £3.50).

Recover after a jaunt on the beach with tea or a snack at the **Marsh Larder** (☎ 01328-711285; Main Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm) in the stunning Ancient House or a more substantial meal at the much-lauded **Victoria Arms** (☎ 01328-711008; www.victoriaatholkham.co.uk; Park Rd; mains £12-17; ☎ noon-2.30pm daily, 7-9pm Mon-Fri, 7-9.30pm Sat & Sun). The menu here is modern English with an em-

RURAL ROMANTICS

Valentine's Day forces most people into one of two camps: misty-eyed romantic or born cynic. In Norfolk, however, it seems everyone turns Cupid. Here a mysterious character called Jack Valentine, a kind of loved-up February Father Christmas deposits a doorstep gift, rattles on the door and then promptly disappears into thin air. In Victorian times lovers went to great lengths to swap parcels on Valentine's Eve, and children rose before dawn the next day to sing valentine rhymes and beg for sweets. The tradition continues today with whole streets waking up and finding valentine's treats stuck to their doors.

phasis on local ingredients. The Victoria also has a choice of individually decorated rooms (£120 to £170) with a relaxed, colonial feel. You'd be well advised to book ahead.

The Coast Hopper bus goes through Holkham roughly hourly in summer on its way between Hunstanton (40 minutes) and Sheringham (55 minutes).

BURNHAM DEEPDALE

In-the-know backpackers and walkers flock to this lovely coastal spot, with its tiny twin villages of Burnham Deepdale and **Brancaster Staithe** (www.brancasterstaithe.co.uk) strung along a rural road. Stroked by the beautiful Norfolk Coastal Path, surrounded by beaches and reedy marshes alive with birdlife, criss-crossed by cycling routes, and a base for a whole host of water sports, Burnham Deepdale is also home to one of the country's best backpacker hostels.

The hostel operates a **tourist office** (☎ 01485-210256; ☎ 10am-4pm Apr-Sep, closed Tue & Wed Oct-Mar), which is flush with information on the surrounding area, and can help arrange accommodation and activities. It's the best place to go to organise kitesurfing or windsurfing on nearby beaches.

Anywhere else it might seem odd to have campers poking their heads out of Native American-style tepees, but at ecofriendly backpackers haven and hostel **Deepdale Farm** (☎ 01485-210256; www.deepdalefarm.co.uk; camping per adult/child £8/4, dm £9.50-12.50, tw £28-42, tepees for 2 /6£60/£90; P) it's just part of a wonderful experience. The set-up includes small and styl-

ish en suite dorms in converted 17th-century stables, camping space, a coffee shop, laundry, barbecue, lounges and picnic tables. Bike hire is also available.

Just west of the hostel is the award-winning **White Horse** (☎ 01485-210262; www.whitehorsebrancaster.co.uk; mains £10-14; ☒ lunch & dinner; ☑), a gastropub with a menu strong on fish and seafood. It also has some light and fresh guest rooms (doubles £100 to £148) but it lacks soul and has terraces overlooking the car park.

The Coast Hopper bus stops outside Deepdale Farm roughly hourly in summer on its run between Sheringham (65 minutes) and Hunstanton (25 minutes); it also goes less frequently to King's Lynn (one hour). Ask at the tourist office for timetables.

AROUND BURNHAM DEEPDALE

Littered with pretty little villages and a host of ancient watering holes, trendy gastropubs and boutique hotels, this part of the Norfolk coast is one of the most appealing.

At the lovely Georgian town of Burnham Market you'll find plenty of elegant old buildings, flint cottages, delis and independent retailers. It's another excellent base with a trio of accommodation options to suit any taste. The **Hoste Arms** (☎ 01328-738777; www.hostearms.co.uk; The Green; d £95-305; ☑) and its sister properties the **Vine House** (d £125-280) and the **Railway Inn** (d £74-140) offer everything from over-the-top classical rooms with swags and florals to trendy, contemporary suites with bold wallpaper, luscious fabrics and mountains of towels.

Just past Burnham Deepdale you come to Titchwell, home to **Titchwell Manor** (☎ 01485-210221; www.titchwellmanor.com; Titchwell; d £130-250; ☑), a slick contemporary hotel set in a grand Victorian house. The conservatory restaurant serves modern English cuisine (mains £11 to £19) and there's a large garden loved by visiting children.

Continue west along the coast road to the village of Thornham for a choice of two more great places to eat. Right by the road is the **Orange Tree** (☎ 01485-512213; www.theorangetree.thornham.co.uk; High St; mains £10-15; ☒ bar 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, to 10.30pm Sun) an old-world pub with a modern interior. The food here is excellent and reasonably priced, and there's a garden with playground for children. Hidden from passing traffic on the village back road is the **Lifeboat Inn** (☎ 01485-512236; www.lifeboatinn.co.uk; Ship Lane; 3-course dinner £29) a 16th-century inn

laden with character and famous for its food. The menu features anything that has been 'caught, shot, picked or dug locally'.

KING'S LYNN

pop 34,565

One of England's most important ports, the area around King's Lynn's medieval harbour is awash with cobbled lanes and narrow streets flanked by old merchants' houses. Unfortunately, the rest of the town is not so pretty, with modern architectural blunders and high-street chain stores blighting the landscape. Stick to the waterfront though and you'll get some sense of just how important the town once was.

Long labelled 'the Warehouse on the Wash', the port was once so busy that it was said you could cross from one side of the River Great Ouse to the other by simply stepping from boat to boat. Something of the salty port-town tang can still be felt in old King's Lynn, though the petite modern-day port barely passes as a shadow of its former self.

Orientation

Old King's Lynn huddles along the eastern bank of the river. The train station is on its eastern side, while unexciting modern King's Lynn and the bus station are between them. Three markets still take place weekly on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. The biggest is the Tuesday market, held in er, Tuesday Marketplace, while the others are conducted in front of St Margaret's Church.

Information

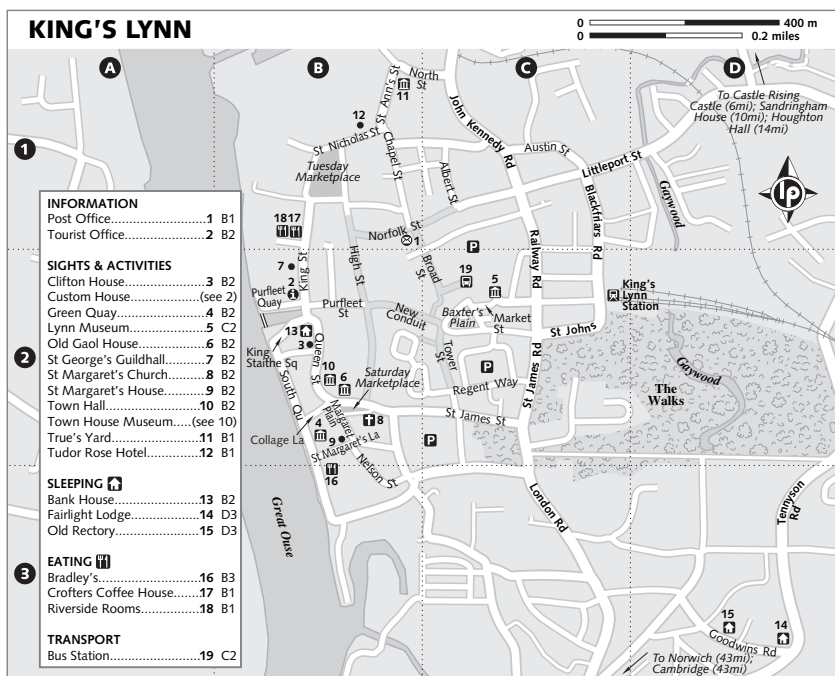
Banks and ATMs can be found around Tuesday Marketplace.

Post office (☎ 01553-692185; Baxter's Plain)

Tourist office (☎ 01553-763044; www.visitwestnorfolk.com; ☒ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Oct-Mar) In the Custom House (Purfleet Quay). Guided walks of historic Lynn start from here between May and Oct (☎ 01553-774297; adult/child £3/1). The walks take 1½ to two hours.

Sights

Start your tour of Old Lynn at grand **St Margaret's Church** (Margaret Plain), which bears flood-level marks by the west door. Inside, two extraordinarily elaborate Flemish brasses are etched with vivid details of a peacock feast, strange dragonlike beasts and a mythical wild man. You can also see a remarkable



17th-century moon dial, which tells the tide, not the time.

Wander across Margaret Plain to take a look at 15th-century **St Margaret's House**, once the warehouse or 'steelyard' of the Hanseatic League (the Northern European merchants' group), then loop around the corner to **Green Quay** (☎ 01553-818500; www.thegreenquay.co.uk; South Quay; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm), a museum charting life in the Wash, and housed in an old Tudor warehouse. Exhibitions look at the wildlife, flora and fauna of the area and the effects of climate change.

Turn right on College Lane to explore the old cells and gawp at the town's priceless civic treasures in the **Old Gaol House** (☎ 01553-774297; adult/child £2.90/2.10; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat Nov-Easter); its pride and joy is the breathtaking 650-year-old King John Cup, exquisitely decorated with scenes of hunting and hawking.

Next door is the flint-and-brick **town hall**, dating back to 1421, and the petite **Town House Museum** (☎ 01553-773450; 46 Queen St; adult/under 10yr £3/1.65; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat May-Sep), which deals with the history of the town from the Middle

Ages up to the 1950s. Quirker exhibits include an outdoor privy and basket made from an unfortunate armadillo.

Continue along Queen St past **Clifton House**, with its barley-sugar columns and strange merchant's watchtower, to **Purfleet Quay**, in its heyday the principal harbour. The odd boxy building with the lantern tower is the 17th-century **Custom House**, which houses the tourist office. Inside are displays on the merchants and smugglers of the Lynn in times past.

A short hop north again is the biggest 15th-century guildhall in England. **St George's Guildhall** has been variously incarnated as a warehouse, courthouse and armoury and now contains art galleries, a theatre and eateries. Then topping King St is the roomy **Tuesday Marketplace**, flanked by handsome old buildings.

Turn right into St Nicholas St to see the **Tudor Rose Hotel**, a late-15th-century house with its original main door. North of here, on the corner of St Ann's St, is **True's Yard** (☎ 01553-770479; www.truesyard.co.uk; North St; adult/child £3/1.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat), a museum exploring the Lynn's maritime past. Housed in two restored

fishermen's cottages, the museum looks at the difficult life fishermen endured and the traditions and lifestyle of the close-knit community that once lived in this part of the city.

From here head back towards the centre of town to visit the newly revamped **Lynn Museum** (☎ 01553-775001; www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk; Market St; adult/child Apr-Sep £3/1.65, Oct-Mar free), which features displays on maritime life in Lynn, Norfolk history, and Victorian fairgrounds, but its highlight is the new Seahenge gallery which displays a 4000-year-old timber circle and explores the lives of the people who created it.

Festivals

The **July King's Lynn Festival** (☎ 01553-767557; www.kingslynnfestival.org.uk) is East Anglia's most important cultural gathering. It offers a diverse program of concerts and recitals of all kinds from medieval ballads to opera. The main festival is preceded by a free rock-and-pop bash **Festival Too** (www.festivaltoo.co.uk), now one of Europe's biggest free festivals.

Sleeping

Fairlight Lodge (☎ 01553-762234; www.fairlightlodge.co.uk; 79 Goodwins Rd; s/d incl breakfast £35/52; (P)) Simple, fresh rooms with subtle florals and plenty of little extras such as homemade biscuits make this B&B excellent value. Not all rooms are en suite but there's a pretty garden, great breakfasts and friendly hosts.

Old Rectory (☎ 01553-768544; www.theoldrectory-kingslynn.com; 33 Goodwins Rd; s/d incl breakfast £38/52; (P)) Set in an elegant former rectory, this B&B offers tastefully decorated rooms with en suite bathrooms. Just a short walk from town via parkland, this place also offers free pick up from the bus and rail stations.

Bank House (☎ 01553-660492; www.thebankhouse.co.uk; Kings Staithe Sq; s £80-90, d £100-120, all incl breakfast; (P) (G)) This outstanding B&B has ticks in all the right boxes: history, location, atmosphere, comfort and welcome. On the waterfront near the tourist office, this 18th-century former bank is now an elegantly furnished town house with five hotel-standard rooms, mixing original features and modern furnishings.

Eating

Crofters Coffee House (☎ 01553-773134; 27 King St; meals £4.50-7; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) This long brick-vaulted undercroft, once used as a Civil War gunpowder store and now a low-lit cafe, scores top marks for atmosphere and serves

light lunches, hot drinks and cakes. It's in the guildhall arts centre.

Riverside Rooms (☎ 01553-773134; 27 King St; mains £12-19; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Overlooking the water from a converted 15th-century warehouse, with criss-crossing beams overhead and elegant white-linen tables below, this place serves a confident but uninspired menu of classic dishes.

Bradley's (☎ 01553-819888; www.bradleysbytheriver.co.uk; 10 South Quay; mains £13-19; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Eat in the elegant Georgian dining room at this riverside restaurant, or relax at the bar with some lighter snacks (£8); either way you're bound to be pleased as this is probably the finest food the city has to offer.

Getting There & Away

King's Lynn is 43 miles north of Cambridge on the A10. There are hourly trains from Cambridge (£8.30, 48 minutes) and London Kings Cross (£25.90, two hours). First Eastern Counties runs hourly buses to Norwich. Bus 29 goes to Hunstanton from where you can catch the Coasthopper service along the north Norfolk coast.

AROUND KING'S LYNN

Castle Rising Castle

There's something bordering on ecclesiastical about the beautifully embellished keep of this **castle** (EH; ☎ 01553-631330; www.castlerising.co.uk; adult/child £4/2.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-Mar), built in 1138 and set in the middle of a massive earthwork upon which pheasants scurry about like guards. So extravagant is the stonework that it's no surprise to learn that it shares stonemasons with some of East Anglia's finest cathedrals. It was once the home of Queen Isabella, who (allegedly) arranged the gruesome murder of her husband, Edward II.

It's well worth the trip 4 miles northeast of King's Lynn off the A149. Bus 41 runs here (13 minutes) hourly from King's Lynn bus station.

Sandringham House

Royalists and those bemused by the English sovereigns will have plenty to mull over at this, the Queen's country **estate** (☎ 01553-612908; www.sandringhamestate.co.uk; adult/5-15yr £9/5, gardens & museum only £6/3.50; ☎ 11am-4.45pm late Mar-Oct unless royal family is in residence), set in 25 hectares of landscaped gardens and lakes, and open to the hoi polloi when the court is not at home.

Queen Victoria bought the estate in 1862 for her son, the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), but he promptly had it overhauled in the style later named Edwardian. Half of the surrounding 8000 hectares is leased to farm tenants, while the rest is managed by the Crown Estate as forestry.

Visitors can shuffle around the ground-floor rooms, regularly used by the royal family, then head out to the old stables, which house a flag-waving **museum** filled with diverse royal memorabilia. The superb royal vintage-car collection includes the very first royal motor from 1900, darling electrical toy cars driven by various princes and the buggy in which the recently deceased Queen Mother would bounce around race tracks. For another oddity, look for the pet cemetery just outside the museum.

There are guided tours of the gardens on offer Friday and Saturday at 11am and 2pm. The **shop** is also worthy of a visit if only to browse the organic goodies produced on the sprawling estate.

Sandringham is 6 miles northeast of King's Lynn off the B1440. First Eastern Counties bus 411 or Coastliner run here from the bus station (24 minutes, every 15 minutes).

Houghton Hall

Built for Britain's first de facto Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole in 1730, the pompous Palladian-style **Houghton Hall** (☎ 01485-528569; www.houghtonhall.com; adult/child £8/3; 🕒 1.30-5pm Wed, Thu & Sun Easter-Sep) is worth seeing for the ornate staterooms alone; you could build another half-dozen houses with the amount of swirling decorative plasterwork here. The interiors are sumptuous and dripping with gilt, tapestries, squeaky velvets and ostentatious furniture. Six hundred deer roam the surrounding parkland and there's an obsessive model-soldiers exhibit with over 20,000 of the little guys.

Houghton is 14 miles northeast of King's Lynn off the A148 but beyond the reach of buses; a taxi ride from King's Lynn will set you back about £13.