

Suffolk travel guide

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Discover the county's seaside resorts, vibrant food scene, historic castles, diverse wildlife, charming 'wool' towns, and its rich Anglo-Saxon history



Southwold is a charming seaside town on the Suffolk Heritage Coast, with a sandy beach and hut-lined promenade

ALAMY

Claire Boobbyer

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Suffolk is made for slow exploration. There are no motorways — in their place is a spidery web of rural lanes which lead you to the county's every treasure. The coast gets lots of press and deservedly so — the shifting shoreline is home to resorts such as smart Southwold, artsy Aldeburgh and emerging Felixstowe with beaches, piers, fish and chips and ice cream. Breaking the coastal flow are the mouths of several rivers that loop lazily through field, farm and marsh spilling into the North Sea. Thousands of waders and migrant birds flock to their estuaries, each sprinkled with pleasure boats tinkling in the breeze. In secluded creeks otters and seals mill about in the rushes. To journey up this coast uninterrupted, you'll need to board little foot ferries that putter to and fro. Between these natural features are expanses of heathland, marsh, and sandy soils — known as the "sandlings" — interspersed with unique historical sites: the mostly submerged Dunwich, the faux-Tudor resort of Thorpeness with its Peter Pan-inspired lake, and the almost vanished Covehithe.

Inland, low-lying arable fields are strewn with hundreds of churches dating back to the late medieval period; the county is home to the greatest number of church roofs with decorative carved angels in England — better known as "angel roofs". Suffolk's heyday was in the medieval era when the wool trade was at its peak. This prosperity is seen in an extravaganza of painted timbered homes and halls, especially in south Suffolk. Today's visitors come for the music, too, celebrated especially at the annual June Aldeburgh Festival, founded by Benjamin Britten in 1948. Year-round festivals fill churches, halls,

and garden estates. Then there's the food: indulge in freshly-caught shellfish and an array of award-winning cheese, wines, cyder (undiluted and made from a single pressing of vintage fruit), gins and locally brewed beers.

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What to do





Walberswick has lovely little sand dune backed beach just across the River Blythe from Southwold

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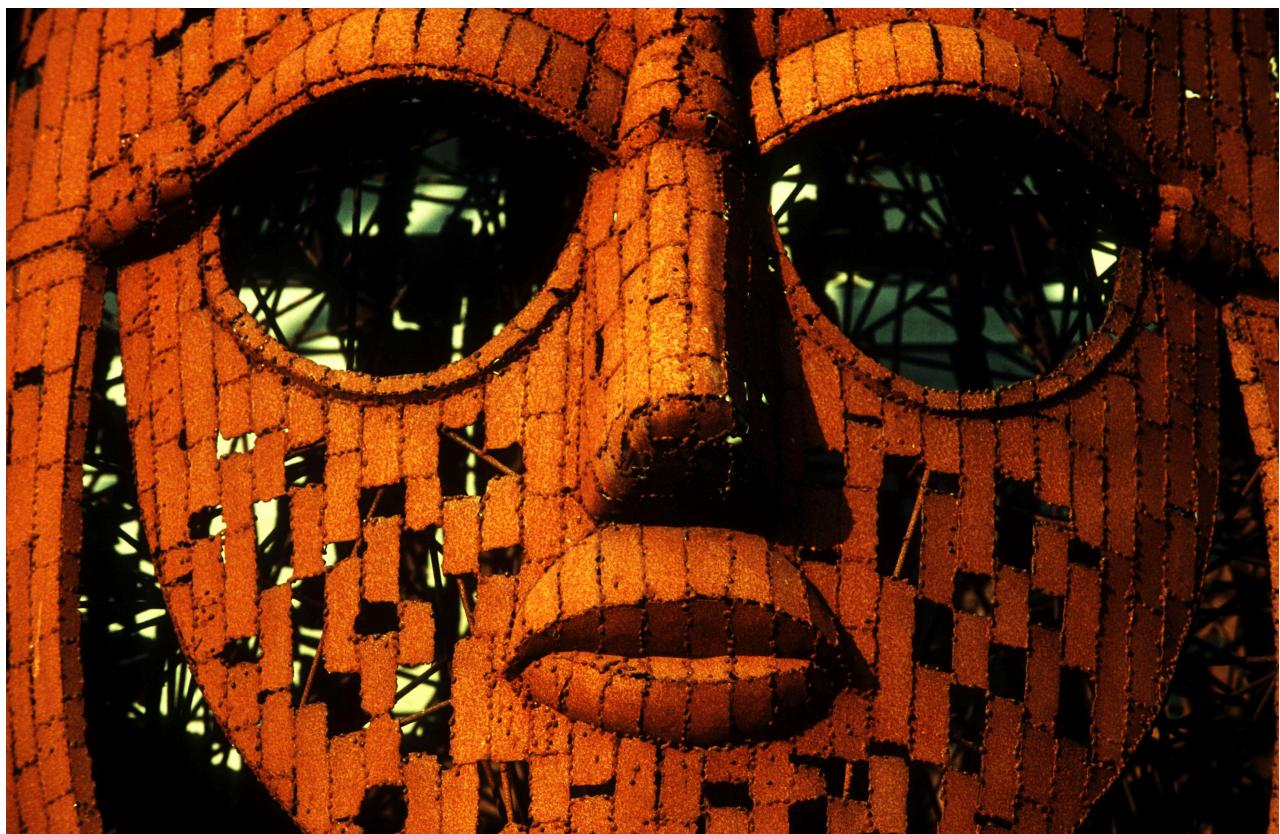
The greatest beaches can be found in Lowestoft, where you can bask on vast stretches of golden sand. Elsewhere in Suffolk, enjoy the blue flag-awarded beaches of Southwold and Felixstowe, or explore the more secluded shores of Covehithe. For a refined beach experience, opt for Walberswick or Dunwich. Don't miss the shingle slope at Aldeburgh, which is backed by a promenade lined with pretty pastel-coloured houses and is a short walk from the High Street.

Kids will love the retro pier and Harris & James gelato at Southwold. Fish for crabs at Walberswick, take in the art galleries and Benjamin Britten locations in Aldeburgh, see a show alfresco in the bomb crater-turned-theatre at Thorington, and spy marsh harriers

and otters at RSPB flagship reserve Minsmere. On this heritage coast, the Suffolk Coast Path meanders down the North Sea border for 60 miles. Walk the heath — all purple with heather, at Dunwich — the UFO trail at Rendlesham Forest, and the medieval Tolkienesque woodland at Staverton Thicks.

Prefer to take to the water? Set sail on a boat trip up the River Alde from Snape Maltings, an artsy music complex nestled in the reeds, or navigate the Ore from picturesque Orford, the Deben from charming Waldringfield, and the wide Orwell from Ipswich. River tours are available at all these waterside locations.

Suffolk's curious coastal histories are found at Dunwich, once the tenth largest place in [England](#) before a storm in 1286 snatched a third of the town which now lies beneath the waves. At the National Trust-run Orford Ness, you'll find a shingle spit colonised by rigid pagodas that was once used to secretly test G-force fractures on fake atomic bombs. The Tide Mill at Woodbridge is one of the last working tide mills in the world, and on the Bawdsey Peninsula a museum details the story of the world's first operational radar station which played a decisive role in the Second World War. Woodbridge is also home to the Anglo-Saxon burial site of Sutton Hoo, where the ship burial chamber, jewels, and fragments of a helmet believed to belong to a 7th-century king were unearthed in 1939.



Sutton Hoo is one of the richest sources of archaeological evidence for England's Anglo-Saxon period

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The River Waveney coils about the northern border with [Norfolk](#). Roger Deakin, wild swimming pioneer and author, loved a dip here. Paddleboard or kayak its clear, silky waters, and explore the lovely towns of Bungay and Beccles along the way. The Stour ripples along Suffolk's southern border with Essex and is the route of the "wool towns". For magnificent and wonky timbered architecture visit Lavenham, Clare, Cavendish and Long Melford. At Sudbury is the expanded and illuminating Gainsborough's House, with its new architect-designed museum showcasing Thomas Gainsborough's work plus a

fascinating section on Sudbury's silk heritage. East along the valley is ridiculously picturesque East Bergholt, birthplace of painter John Constable, and nearby Flatford Mill, enshrined by Constable in his famous 1820s work *The Hay-Wain*.

The grand Christchurch Mansion at Ipswich exhibits numerous works by Constable, too. County town of Suffolk, Ipswich has a fabulous marina lined with drinking and dining options. It's known as the birthplace of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, the HQ of DanceEast, and home to a variety of multi-cultural arts, music and drinks' festivals. Its treasure trove of Tudor buildings is largely overlooked by visitors to Suffolk. Get up close to exotic animals at Jimmy's Farm & Wildlife Park nearby where rare breeds, including the endangered Suffolk Punch horse, are raised.



Once a glorious medieval church, St Andrew's in Covehithe now stands as a picturesque ruin by the sea

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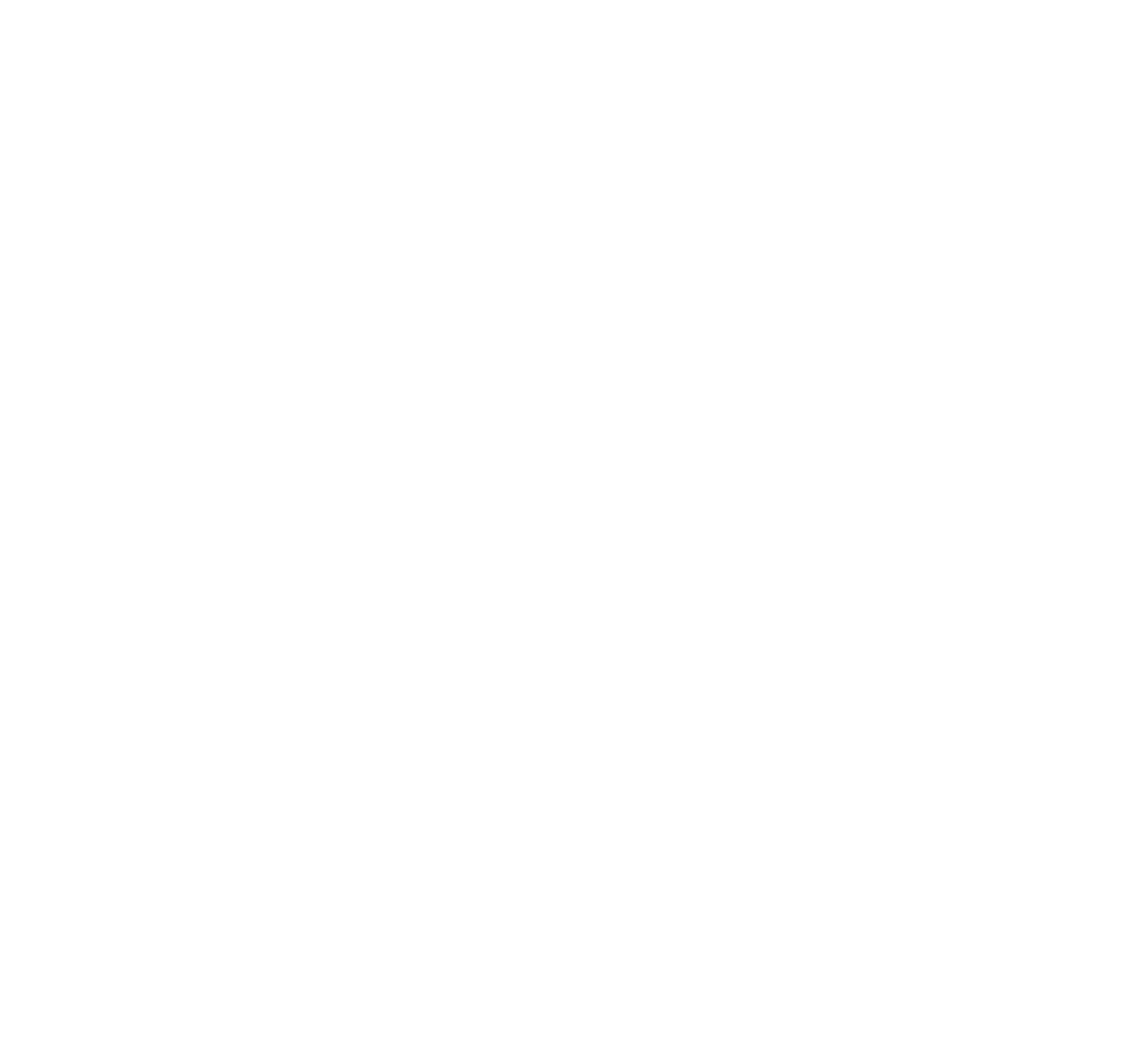
Inland, visit lovely Framlingham, famous for its “castle on the hill”, links to singer Ed Sheeran and location spots for hit BBC drama *Detectorists*. Nearby is Parham Airfield Museum, which commemorates the enormous sacrifice of the [United States](#)’ Eighth Air Force during the Second World War. Thousands of young American pilots flew “Flying Fortress” B-17s from East Anglian airfields when America joined the RAF to bomb Nazi Germany from the air. The memorial to pilot Joseph Kennedy, brother of US president JFK, can be found in ethereal Blythburgh Church, known as the Cathedral of the Marshes.

At Bury St Edmunds, explore the Benedictine Abbey ruins with Bury Tour Guides. The Abbey, once one of the richest and most powerful Benedictine monasteries in England, and was the fourth longest in Europe. Bury is a foodie place, too, with the county's only Michelin-starred restaurant, Pea Porridge. Don't pass on a drink in The Nutshell either — it's the smallest pub in Britain.

Southeast at the Food Museum in Stowmarket, explore food heritage and hands-on cooking classes. Thetford Forest is north, the largest lowland man-made forest in England, with its peaceful cycling, walking, horse riding trails, and Go Ape adventures. To the north and south rare wildlife lives amid the chalky, sandy soils of The Brecks, a landscape pockmarked by ponds that emerged in the Ice Age. Close by is RSPB Lakenheath Fen where you may spy the rare golden oriole. Newmarket, in the west, is where more than 2,500 horses are trained. Get the low down at the National Horse Racing Museum and plan a race day visit at the town's two racecourses.

Where to stay





The grade II listed House in the Clouds in Thorpeness village was originally built in 1923

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Suffolk has a cracking choice of places to sleep. You'll find seaside hotels and countryside retreats as well as fine B&Bs, smart self-catering lodges, hideaway cabins, glamping and camping sites.

Smart coastal stays include Southwold's grande dame, The Swan, and Aldeburgh's boutique hotel, The Suffolk. Nearby, Thorington's [Husk](#) and the cozy [Five Acre Barn](#) B&B offer more intimate settings. For something unusual, consider the iconic House in the Clouds at Thorpeness, the Hobbity home at West Stow Pods, or a quirky houseboat at Hippersons Boatyard. Explore historic accommodations like the Martello Towers in Aldeburgh and Bawdsey, the Balancing Barn in Thorington, a moated Tudor home at Wilderness Reserve, or restored railway carriages at Brockford. Alternatively, try the off-

grid cabin in Hartest through Unyoked or the unique Windmill in Cockfield. For those who enjoy pub stays, check out the excellent Westleton Crown, the dog-friendly Weeping Willow, and the wonderful Low House in Laxfield.

If you're drawn to Suffolk's scenic campsites and glampsites, consider The Croft, which hosts its own music festival; Mill Hill Farm, adjacent to a nature reserve; the cozy Sunnyside; the award-winning Secret Meadows; and the uniquely eccentric Little Lodge Glamping, built from recycled materials. For self-catering options, try the green tourism winner Ivy Grange Farm Barn, or the luxurious Farmstead Lodges, or Blyth Rise Stays which are set in a rewilded location. In the west and south of the county, don't miss hotel and culinary gems like [Tuddenham Mill](#), [The Angel Inn](#) and Bildeston Crown.

Food & drink





Suffolk hosts a number of food and drink festivals throughout the year

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As well as the North Sea bounty — crab, native lobster and Butley Creek oysters — Suffolk is pig country. Expect delicious pork dishes, sausages, hams and superb charcuterie. Fen Farm Dairy's Brie-de-Meaux-style Baron Bigod cheese made from its Montbeliarde dairy herd is found in all the best places to eat.

Indulge in Suffolk's finest beers by visiting renowned breweries like Greene King in Bury St Edmunds, Adnams HQ in Southwold, and St. Peter's Brewery in the winding lanes of an area known as The Saints. You can also explore Mauldons in Sudbury, Nethergate in Long Melford, and several other small breweries scattered throughout the region. Some of the county's vineyards — Giffords Hall, Wyken, Burnt House and Shotley — offer tours,

too. Aspall, in mid Suffolk, produces award-winning cyder. Sip award-winning Adnams smooth Copper House Dry gin or Heart of Suffolk's Betty's Gin at pubs and restaurants. Fishers Gin in Aldeburgh is the closest distillery to the sea in the UK.

Tuck into Suffolk's Alder Tree fruit ice creams, Truly Traceable game pies, and LA Brewery kombucha. The Suffolk Food Hall, located just outside Ipswich, is a winning one-stop shop. For serious taste journeys, mark your calendars for annual food and drink festivals at Aldeburgh, Sudbury, Bury, Beccles and Bungay, and beer festivals in Bury and Ipswich.

Don't miss





Enjoy an early morning walk along Walberswick beach

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Lowestoft's First Light Festival. The only free [UK](#) festival held on a beach, it celebrates the arts, crafts and science across the June solstice weekend. Exciting international arts festival SPILL livens up multiple venues in Ipswich every autumn. At beautiful Blythburgh church, monthly Evensong is sublime. Live music at the remote community-owned pub The Locks Inn at Geldeston with the silky River Waveney as a summer backdrop is pretty unforgettable as is any performance by Suffolk-based genius wordsmith, poet Luke Wright.

Know before you go





The Aldeburgh seafront promenade is lined with pretty pastel-coloured houses

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With no coastal road you'll be weaving in and out of seaside cul-de-sacs mostly with a car. Apart from Felixstowe and Lowestoft, the Greater Anglia East Suffolk Line does not serve the seaside. You can walk, of course, and the cycling is wonderful as it's mostly flat. Buses wind their way to various Suffolk beaches and inland isolated villages, and Greater Anglia trains serve larger towns in the county. Know your plans? Use Uber-like Katch and the Suffolkonboard website to plan and reach remote locations.

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