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Norfolk and Suffolk's Top 10

The high spots of this fascinating and picturesque region cater for all tastes, whether you're a beach fan, bird-spotter, boat enthusiast or culture vulture.



▲ **Boating on the Norfolk Broads.** Hire a boat for the day, take a cruise trip or ideally paddle your own canoe on the delightful waterways of the Norfolk Broads. See page 43.



▲ **Ely Cathedral.** Make a detour to this magnificent Norman cathedral that towers above the flat landscape of the Fens. See page 98.

▶ **Blakeney seals.** Take a boat trip from Morston to Blakeney Point to see a colony of several hundred common and grey seals. See page 38.



▲ **Sutton Hoo.** You don't have to be an archaeology buff to enjoy this fascinating site of an Anglo-Saxon burial ship, discovered in 1939. See page 71.





▲ **Cambridge.** Hop across the county border to see the fine colleges of this celebrated seat of learning. See page 85.



▲ **BeWILDerwood.** Take the kids to this magical eco-friendly playground with tree houses and zipwires and meet the forest folk who live deep in the woods. See page 45.



▲ **Holkham Hall.** All part of the Holkham estate are the grand Holkham Hall, extensive parklands, nature reserve and the glorious Holkham bay, with miles of unspoilt golden sands. See page 34.

▼ **Southwold Pier.** This quirky pier is one of the best in the country, and one of the few along the coast to have survived the storms. See page 59.

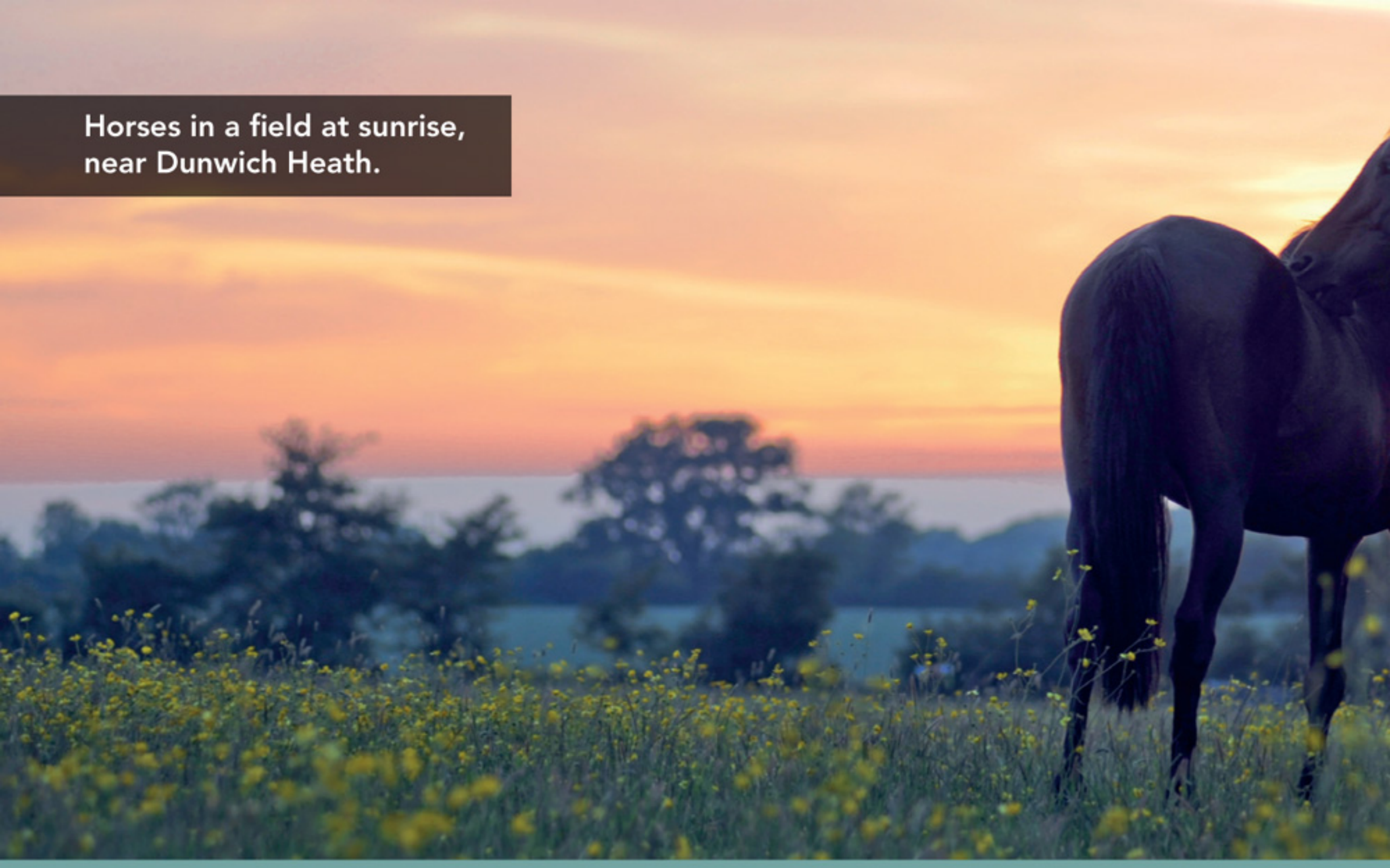


▼ **Minsmere RSPB Nature Reserve.** Seek out birds and other wildlife at this expertly run reserve, known for bitterns, marsh harriers and avocets. See page 64.



▼ **Norwich Cathedral.** Norwich has many medieval buildings but the magnificent Cathedral, with its soaring spire, is the jewel in the crown. See page 18.





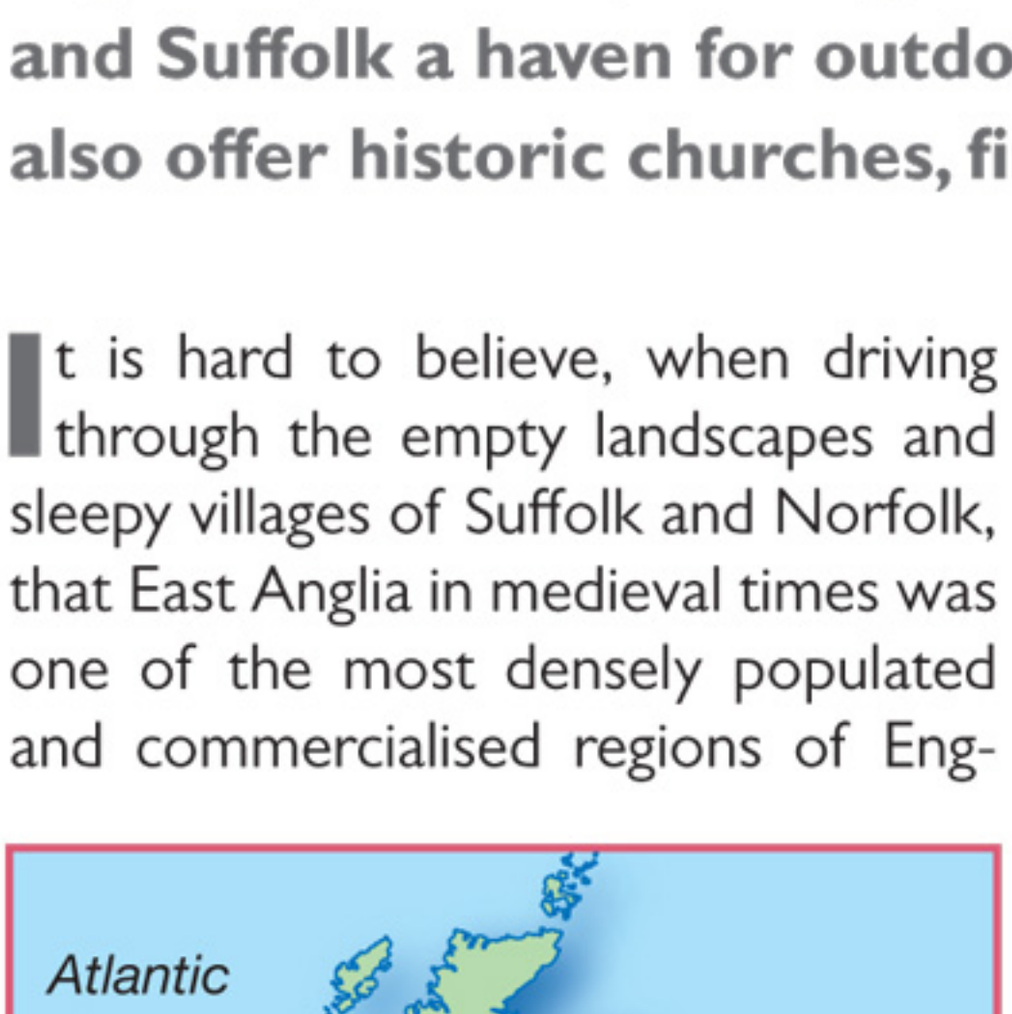
Horses in a field at sunrise, near Dunwich Heath.

Overview

Rural Retreat

Big skies, beaches, boating and birding make Norfolk and Suffolk a haven for outdoor enthusiasts, but they also offer historic churches, fine dining and cosy pubs.

It is hard to believe, when driving through the empty landscapes and sleepy villages of Suffolk and Norfolk, that East Anglia in medieval times was one of the most densely populated and commercialised regions of England. The broad acres of chalk and grassland provided ideal grazing for sheep, and huge quantities of wool were exported, boosted by the arrival of expert Flemish weavers in the mid-14th century. The main legacy of this era of wealth and prosperity is the region's medieval churches – more than 1,000 of them. It is largely thanks to the region's location, separated from the main north–south axis through Britain, that it has managed to preserve its distinctive architecture, as well as time-honoured traditions and rural character.



GEOGRAPHY

This is the most easterly region of England, bulging out between the shallow Wash to the north and the River

Stour to the south. Characterised by vast skies and hazy, low horizons, the landscape is flat or gently rolling, with shallow valleys and slow-flowing rivers. The region as a whole incorporates some very distinctive areas. The popular Norfolk Broads are a network of navigable rivers and open lakes which were formed by the flooding of shallow pits made by medieval peat diggers. In western Norfolk the sandy heaths of The Brecks were covered in dense woodland until Neolithic man, using axes made from the flint pits at Grimes Graves, cleared the forest for farming. Bordering the Brecks the haunting flat Fenland is one of the richest arable areas of England, but before the 17th century, when the Dutch masterminded the drainage of the fens, this area was marshland, inhabited by fishermen and wildfowlers.

The magnificent coastline provides diverse seascapes, from multi-coloured cliffs and golden swathes of sands to wild marshland, tidal creeks and mudflats. Many of the harbours



The river by the Pakenham Watermill, Suffolk.



A sign in Southwold depicting the Battle of Solebay (1672) between the English and the Dutch.

have silted up over the centuries and where there were once thriving ports there are now coastal villages, with just a handful of fishermen.

WHEN TO GO

The region has its attractions all year round. It is the driest part of the UK, and ideal for walking or cycling at any time. The warm summer months attract the most visitors, especially to the coast, but even in mid-summer you should be prepared for northerly and easterly winds from the North Sea. May, June, early July and early autumn are good times to go, while the latter part of July and August are invariably the most crowded. Autumn and winter are great times for walking, and especially for birdlife. Thousands of pink-footed geese migrate from Iceland and Greenland, flying inland at dawn to feast on arable farmland. Coasts provide bracing walks off-season, and winter is the best time to see seals on the beach. At the end of the day there is always a cosy pub nearby with local ale and a log fire roaring.

TOURISM

Although agriculture and fishing still have a role to play, the economy increasingly relies on tourism. The great outdoors is the main attraction, with walking, touring, visiting beaches and exploring villages the most popular activities. The extensive waterways of the Broads are among the top attractions, both for boating and for rare wildlife. To the east lies exuberant Great Yarmouth, to the north a coast of huge sandy beaches, well-established English seaside resorts such as Cromer and Sheringham, and tiny coastal villages backing on to wildlife-rich creeks and marshes. The Suffolk coast attracts an arty crowd, particularly Aldeburgh with its famous music festival and little Walberswick with its artistic traditions. Inland Suffolk has some idyllic villages, with quaint timber-framed houses, immaculate village greens and vast flint-faced churches.

In addition to great medieval churches, the cultural legacy survives in its Norman keeps, relics of medieval castles, abbeys and monasteries and – from a later era – its magnificent country mansions. Both counties have

Guide to Coloured Boxes

Eating
Fact
Green
Kids
Shopping
View

This guide is dotted with coloured boxes providing additional practical and cultural information to make the most of your visit. Here is a guide to the coding system.

a vibrant cultural scene with festivals, museums, galleries and arts events. For sightseers the finest towns in the region are Norwich, King's Lynn, Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge (we've crossed over the county border for this unmissable city).

The most notable change in the region in recent years has been the food scene. Pubs, restaurants and cafés have gone from strength to strength, a remarkable number now sourcing high-quality produce from local suppliers. Fashionable delis have taken the place of dusty grocers and Michelin rosettes can be found even on the north Norfolk coast. It's no wonder well-heeled Londoners have been snapping up so many properties here. In desirable spots like Burnham Market or Southwold over half the houses are now second homes.

COASTAL ENVIRONMENT

For centuries the coastline has faced an ongoing battle with coastal erosion. In the case of Dunwich an entire port was lost to the sea in medieval times. More recently the coast bore the full force of the wild weather in 1953, with the loss of 307 lives in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Lincolnshire. As a consequence storm-surge barriers were constructed on the River Thames and coastal defences were strengthened at high-profile resorts and villages. Others have suffered from more recent tidal surges. Hemsby in Norfolk lost seven houses to the sea in the tidal surge of December 2013. This was the worst storm surge since the 1953 floods, with ferocious waves battering seaside towns and villages and breaching coastal defences. New sea defences at Hemsby were installed in 2015, which held firm in the tidal surge of January 2017. Further schemes have been implemented, but the whole coastal area is constantly under threat. The average loss to the sea is a yard a year, and however great the efforts to protect it, the loss of further coastline is inevitable.

Go green

The Green Traveller Guide (www.greentraveller.co.uk) gives you the low-down on all things green: staying in yurts, farmers' markets, visiting National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other protected landscapes. Find out about the greenest accommodation, from camping and country cottages to chic hotels, the best pubs and restaurants with locally sourced food and ales and details of low-impact activities such as walking, cycling, sailing and kayaking.



View over Dunwich Heath and the Suffolk coastline.