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Norfolk

A journey through the area between the county capital of Norwich and the border with Suffolk, consisting mainly of flat farmland, takes you through some beautiful scenery with quiet villages and handsome old farmhouses – punctuated by the charming spires and towers of churches. One such church can be found at Cawston, boasted as being one of the finest examples of Gothic parish churches in England. Possibly the most enchanting backdrop in the county can be experienced in the valleys of Rivers Nar and Wensum.

The major centres of population include Diss, an old market town with a mix of Tudor, Georgian and Victorian houses, and Wymondham with its timber-framed buildings, picturesque market place and an Abbey church that can compare even with the majestic Norwich Cathedral. Norwich has a wealth of heritage, once an important centre of the worsted trade, which has been retained in many medieval buildings, some of which now serve as museums relating the fascinating history of the region.

The unique Norfolk Broads, to the east of the fine city of Norwich, contains beautiful stretches of shallow water, most of them linked by navigable rivers and canals. This is Britain's finest wetland area, a National Park in all but name. Broadland covers some 220 square miles in a rough oval to the northwest of Great Yarmouth. Three main rivers – the Ant, the Thurne and the Bure – thread their way through the marshes, providing some 120 miles of navigable waterways. The Broads have long provided a restful and relaxing holidaying destination for both human and feathered visitors – with a whole host of migrating birds favouring this spot during spring and autumn seasons for a respite on their lengthy journey. This area also supplies a more permanent refuge for many species of endangered birds and plants – making it quite a bustling hive of wildlife activity.

On the coast due east of Norwich is the old port and modern holiday resort of Great Yarmouth. Here it is the miles of sandy beaches, beautiful breezy promenade, two grand old traditional piers and all the fun of the fair, that attracts the huge number of visitors every year – but it is also home to a rich and just as fascinating marine heritage that lives on to this day. Stretching from Great Yarmouth in the east up to Cromer and west to Sheringham, Hunstanton and beyond are rewarding miles of quiet sandy beaches, spectacular sea views and the exhilarating, bracing sea air. The northeast coast includes what are sometimes known as 'the Highlands of Norfolk' – the Cromer Ridge, which rises to the not-so-dizzy heights of 330 feet above sea level. The most important town on the northwest coast is the busy seaside resort of Hunstanton, which has cliffs comprising red, white and brown geological layers. Another curious thing about Hunstanton: it is the only east-coast resort that actually faces west!

King's Lynn, on the Great Ouse three miles inland from The Wash, was one of England's most important ports in medieval times, sitting at the southern end of an underwater maze of sandbanks. To the northeast of King's Lynn is the prosperous market town of Fakenham, around which lie a remarkable variety of places of interest. To the north, in the valley of the River Stiffkey, the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham was in medieval times second only to that of St Thomas à Becket at Canterbury as a pilgrim destination.

Breckland, which extends for more than 360 square miles in southwest Norfolk and northwest Suffolk, is underlain by chalk with only a light covering of soil. The name 'Breckland' comes from the dialect word breck, meaning an area of land cultivated for a while and then allowed to revert to heath after the soil has become exhausted. This quiet corner of the county is bounded by the Rivers Little Ouse and Waverney, which separate Norfolk from Suffolk.

NORWICH

Norwich castle, the most famous landmark in Norwich, with its impressive façade and beautiful views of the city from the keep and roof, is a must for any visitors. Built over 900 years ago by the Normans as a Royal Place – the first castle structure, in wood, was replaced in the late 1100s by a mighty fortress in stone which, unlike most blank-walled castles of the period, is decorated with a rich façade of blind arcades and ornamental pilasters.

Providing a great introduction to much of the regions history, culture and wildlife is the **Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery**, housed within the castle walls. It contains some of the most outstanding regional collections of fine art, archaeological exhibits and natural history displays. The rather gory history of the castle is explored in the dungeons, with a

forbidding display of instruments of torture, along with the death masks of some of the prisoners who were executed here. Among the countless other fascinating exhibits are those devoted to Queen Boudica (Boadicea), which features the life of the Icenii tribe with an interactive chariot ride, the Egyptian gallery with its mummy Ankh Hor, and interactive displays in the Castle keep and keep basement.

The Art Gallery has an incomparable collection of paintings by the celebrated Norwich artist, John Sell Cotman (1782-1842), and others in the group known as the Norwich School. Their subjects were mostly landscape scenes, such as John Crome's *The Poringland Oak*. Quite apart from the artistic quality of their works, they have left a fascinating pictorial record of early 19th century Norfolk.

The **Bulwer and Miller** collection of more than 2,600 English china teapots makes its home in the Twinings Gallery, while the museum's Langton collection of around 100 cats fashioned in porcelain, ivory, bronze, glass and wood, originating from anywhere between Derbyshire and China, and Margaret Elizabeth Fountaine's mind-boggling accumulation of 22,000 butterflies which she had personally netted during her travels around the world, are available to view by appointment at the **Shirehall Study Centre**, next door to the Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum



Norwich Cathedral, Norfolk

on Market Avenue.

Down the road from the castle you can find **Strangers' Hall**, a grand building dating back to 1320, where a selection of costumed guides and informative exhibits bring the lives of Tudor and Stuarts to life. See the Tudor Great Hall where you can find a dining table set for a feast, the Great Chamber which now provides business quarters for the Lord Mayor of Norwich and a beautiful walnut panelled bedroom once belonging to Lady Paine in the 17th century.

The great open space of the Market Square, where every weekday a colourful jumble of traders' stalls can be found, offers just about every conceivable item for sale. Dominating the western side of the Market Square is **City Hall**, modelled on Stockholm City Hall and opened by King George VI in 1938. Opinions differ about its architectural merits, but there are no such doubts about the nearby Guildhall, a fine example of 15th century flintwork that now houses a tea room.

An interesting museum/shop, located in the Royal Arcade, a tiled riot of Art Nouveau fantasy, celebrates the county's great contribution to world cuisine: mustard. Back in the early 1800s, Jeremiah Colman perfected his blend of mustard flours and spice to produce a condiment that was smooth in texture and tart in flavour. Together with his nephew James he founded J & J Colman in 1823; 150 years later **The Mustard**

Shop was established to commemorate the company's history. The shop sells, of course, a large range of mustard including some specialties made uniquely for the shop, as well as a wide selection of mustard pots and spoons, together with tea towels and Colman's memorabilia. On display are some fascinating artifacts covering all aspects of the history and production on loan from the archives.

In addition to Colman, other notable sons of Norwich include Matthew Parker, first Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, nicknamed Nosey by Queen Elizabeth because he had a big nose and was prying by nature; Luke Hansard (1752-1828), Printer to the House of Commons, who gave his name to the official report of parliamentary proceedings; and the actor Rupert Everett.

Millennium Plain just off Theatre Street is where visitors will find **The Forum**, an architecturally stunning modern building designed by Sir Michael Hopkins. Combining

The Assembly House in Theatre Street is one of the city's finest historical houses and also a leading venue for the arts. It contains two concert halls, three galleries featuring changing exhibitions and a restaurant and tea rooms, as well as lovely tranquil gardens; a magnificent Georgian home which must be included in any visit to the city.



Elm Hill, Norwich