

BY TIM SAUNDERS

GET AWAY FROM IT ALL

A SLOWER PACE OF LIFE CAN BE FOUND IN SUFFOLK, DESPITE THE FACT THAT IT'S NO MORE THAN A COUPLE OF HOURS OR SO AWAY FROM THE ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE OF THE SOUTH EAST. TIM SAUNDERS EXPLORED ITS POTENTIAL FOR A STRESS-RELIEVING BREAK.

In Suffolk there is great support for local produce and the independent trader, so much so that I am told even a well known supermarket chain has been unable to secure planning permission to build a store in Halesworth.

"The owner of the wine shop here has been trading for over 30 years," one local entrepreneur who has relocated from Surrey tells me.

"I was an accountant for BP for 30 years and every day as a commuter I used to leave my house in the dark and return in the dark and did not even know my next door neighbour. It's different here; it takes me twice as long as it should to walk up the street in the morning because I'm talking to so many people."

Although farming still seems to be very much a thriving industry in this part of the world, barn conversions are incredibly popular for both commercial and residential use.

We stayed in a fabulous barn conversion by Marion and Philip Anthony, who established Heritage Hideaways in 1999.

On our drive up the weather is absolutely atrocious, with lashing rain and heavy winds, but it seems that as soon as we arrive at Plough Cottage, Yoxford, the sun starts shining, something it keeps doing for our entire stay. As the chickens give a welcome cluck we quickly start to wind down.

The two-bedroomed property – each with an en-suite - makes for a luxurious stay. Breathtaking views of the surrounding farmland can be enjoyed from each room and the only sounds are from wildlife; there is no traffic whatsoever. Rarely can we sit and enjoy watching the sun go down but we do here.

Self-catering is by far the best option for us with two small children because you never quite know how they are going to behave. While generally well behaved, they can be temperamental, as Marion and Philip can testify.

When we lunch at the Black Lion Hotel in Long Melford, three-year-old Harriett wakes up in a rather challenging frame of mind. Ten minutes into our meal at this delightful Georgian hotel, she insists on going for a walk about on the thick wool tartan carpet. While we quietly try to beckon her back to the table, she prefers to try opening a door.

As the sun continues to shine, we head for the Victorian walled garden, a far better environment for our little ones because they can roam free without pestering other diners.

A stone's throw from the National Trust's imposing Melford Hall, the Black Lion has ten bedrooms and is steeped in history. General Manager Michael Ruthven informs me that Suffolk is renowned for its hand-woven silk and attracting visitors and businesspeople from all over the world.

On another occasion we dine at The 12 Lost Churches at Dunwich Heath, where fish and chips and Adnams beer are the order of the day. Cliff House Holidays has ploughed £1m into this venue, another barn conversion, and the restaurant has a remarkable tale or two to tell.

Its name refers to the churches said to have been lost as the result of coastal erosion during the 12th and 13th centuries and it was once owned by Jock Horsfall, a racing driver and MI5 agent who drove an Aston Martin.

During World War Two Jock was a specialist driver for MI5 and involved in Operation Mincemeat, which convinced the Germans that the Allies planned to land in Greece rather than Italy and was featured in the film The Man Who Never Was.

Jock was killed in an accident in 1949 at Silverstone, and today the Aston Martin Owners Club maintains an annual race meeting in his memory.

Such a holiday is full of memories, and while it is all too easy to take your own snaps, getting a decent family photo is trickier, and so North Norfolk Visuals works in conjunction with Heritage Hideaways to offer a complimentary photo shoot.

We meet directors Colleen Howe and Justin Bailey on the beach at Aldeburgh. The sun is shining, which is troublesome for taking good shots, but Justin quickly spots the best places for backdrops and also builds a rapport with our two little rascals.

Unfortunately it's too cold to swim in the sea but Marion finds us a pool at Bucks Farm at Halesworth where locals as well as guests can enjoy the facilities. After swimming the girls enjoy playing on the pedal cars and the playground and seeing the animals.

Our trip also includes a visit to Bury St Edmunds, where we enjoy exploring the abbey, floral park and playground. There is so much to do in Suffolk we're going to have to revisit.



Information:
www.heritagehideaways.com
www.blacklionhotel.net
www.cliffhouseholidays.co.uk
www.northnorfolkvisuals.co.uk
www.travelwriter.biz



› Plough Cottage, Yoxford

› Beach shoot by North Norfolk Visuals of Harriett, Tim, Caroline and Heidi on Aldeburgh beach

› HARRIETT AND HEIDIS LUNCH: BLT and carrot and cucumber at The Black Lion Hotel