



# GOURMET GARDEN TRAILS

## 3 days of eating and exploring in Essex

Gardens and gourmet dining throughout the  
county of Essex

### Itinerary highlights

For gourmet food and gorgeous gardens, follow this three-day itinerary of wonderful Essex. We've selected our favourite things to see and do, which are:

- Exploring both **RHS Garden Hyde Hall's** 360-acre estate and the **Beth Chatto Gardens**
- Discovering the delectable delights of both **New Hall Vineyard** and **West Street Vineyard**
- Savouring quintessentially English afternoon tea at **The Lock Tearoom**
- Enjoying a pint in Maldon's traditional Essex pub, the historic **Le Bouchon**
- Unwinding in the English countryside with a quaint little stay at **Milsoms Hotel**

### What to expect from your trip

In this itinerary, we've covered some of Essex's finest gourmet food and drink experiences alongside the nearby gardens and outdoor areas waiting to be explored.

A county of stark contrasts, Essex is rich in sites and scenery, as well as a notably strong standing within the British television entertainment industry (TOWIE, anyone?). Aside from the more well-known residents and local hotspots of the area, there is another side of Essex waiting to be explored.

During your trip, we'll take you on a traditional tour of this famous English county and want to show off the rural and rustic side of Essex, which includes glorious countryside, beautifully landscaped gardens, fine restaurants and robust English wine and beer.

So without further ado, let's start your discovery of Essex with this three-day itinerary.

## Day 1: Chelmsford

### **MORNING: RHS GARDEN HYDE HALL**

Your experience begins in Chelmsford, the heart of Essex. Start off the day nice and early at the horticultural gem, RHS Garden Hyde Hall, which is located amongst rolling grassy hills, not usually found in Essex.

Spend the morning exploring and admiring the array of different gardens dotted about the 360-acre estate. The Dry Garden is an interesting display of over 400 different types of 'drought-tolerant' plants, whilst The Hilltop Garden is the epitome of an authentic, English cottage style garden adorned with brightly coloured flowers. Finally, The Farmhouse Garden resonates more closely with that of a palatial garden, with its immaculately trimmed hedges and square flower beds. Ramble at your leisure and admire the gardens all year round.

### **EARLY LUNCH: THE GARDENERS REST RESTAURANT OR THE CLOVER CAFE**

For lunch we're suggesting not one, but two places for a bite to eat. We couldn't choose between The Gardeners Rest Restaurant or The Clover Café at RHS Garden Hyde Hall and decided we'd just leave the decision-making up to you!

Both serve fine quality, hearty food and the team's head chef is dedicated to creating and providing local, seasonal and fresh food – most of which is homegrown by the staff in the on-site garden!

If you're hankering for something really substantial then head to The Gardeners Rest Restaurant for a traditional English roast lunch on Sundays. Otherwise, expect scrumptious soups, salads, pies and more throughout the week from the fully licensed eatery. There's also a wonderful terrace area for those warm summer days.

For those preferring a lighter bite, newly refurbished and super-stylish Clover Cafe serves speciality teas and coffee to accompany your delicious cake or sandwich. Whichever venue you choose, we guarantee you're in for a treat nonetheless.

### **AFTERNOON: NEW HALL VINEYARDS**

After a lovely morning, head to New Hall Vineyards. It's located in rural Essex and is said to be one of the oldest vineyards in England. Wander through the vineyards and sample some of the award-winning wines. If you would like a tutored tasting, be sure to book in advance.

Established in 1969, the 100-acre vineyard has been run by the Greenwood family for three generations. Head to the Cellar Shop and stock up on their award-winning tipples, after

spending some relaxing downtime meandering along the Vineyard Trail where you can learn about the vineyard's history and how to produce some of the best English wine. Cheers to that!

#### **LATE AFTERNOON: THE LOCK TEAROOM**

Feeling peckish after a busy day, head to the Lock Tearoom and grab a bite to eat and recharge with a nice cuppa. Home to the famous Tiptree jam and other quintessentially British products,

this is *the* place to go for a traditional English cream tea.

Expect fresh, homemade fruit scones with Tiptree Little Scarlet jam alongside a pot of English tea. There is also a selection of freshly made cakes, sandwiches and salads on the menu. If you're feeling especially fancy or the afternoon in the vineyard hasn't quite quenched your thirst, why not push the boat out even further and treat yourself to a sparkling afternoon tea for two, which includes wine?

#### **EVENING: LE BOUCHON, MALDON**

The perpetually warm and inviting Le Bouchon in Maldon offers the perfect blend of modern sophistication and traditional dining and accommodation, making it a wonderful place to end your first day. Dress code for dinner is chic and smart, so expect top-quality food made with locally sourced ingredients and fine wine in a refined environment.

The town of Maldon, famous all over the world for its quality salt, is near the Blackwater Estuary and a wonderful place for walking, boating and fishing. A little closer to home, the restaurant overlooks a canal, which makes for a perfect excuse to get some fresh air before bed during the lighter summer evenings.

### **Day 2: Colchester**

#### **MORNING: BETH CHATTO GARDENS**

After a restful night's sleep, wake up and get a good start to your second day with a full English breakfast. Make your way to the quaint little village of Elmstead Market, just east of Colchester, to visit The Beth Chatto Gardens. Born and raised in the area, Beth Chatto OBE, an award-winning plantswoman, is renowned for transforming a once overgrown wasteland into what we see today.

A real treat for the senses, you can't help but wonder about the hard work and magic that went into transforming this once barren and forgotten land into an oasis.

With five key gardens to explore, it is estimated that visitors can spend up to four hours at the Gardens so feel free to take your time and marvel at the magic of what humans and nature can do together. A particular favourite area is The Water Garden. With a series of ponds, moisture-loving plants, and a gentle breeze in the air, you can really lose yourself in the peace and serenity in Essex's little taste of paradise.

## **LUNCH: THE BETH CHATTO GARDENS TEA ROOM**

After absorbing the history and passion behind these wonderful gardens, take a break at The Tearoom and enjoy a traditional afternoon tea of homemade scones and sandwiches. In fact, while you're there, why not try the Beth Chatto Gardens coffee? It's been specially selected by the team and considered to be *the best local coffee around!*

## **AFTERNOON: DEDHAM**

The beautiful village of Dedham has lots of charming things to do in the afternoon. The quintessential country church dates back to the late 15th century and has a viewing platform that overlooks the Stour Valley, which is open to the public between Easter and Harvest.

Dedham sits along the River Stour, where punting is a delightful activity during the warmer months. Regardless of the weather, Dedham Art and Craft Centre is a wonderful stop on any itinerary. Pick up books, artwork, ornaments, furniture, clothes, jewellery, toys and then enjoy some afternoon refreshments in the tearoom before heading to your next location.

## **EVENING: MILSOMS HOTEL & LE TALBOOTH**

Come to the end of the day, make your way to the Milsoms Hotel for the night, a beautiful country house surrounded by picturesque Essex scenery.

Depending on your time of arrival (and energy levels!) there is a bike and canoe hire service if you fancy exploring Dedham Vale, a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the Essex- Suffolk border. The area itself is breathtakingly beautiful and the perfect setting for taking stock, admiring your surroundings and feeling at one with nature alongside your nearest and dearest.

When you're finally ready to settle down for the night, we recommend the riverside restaurant Le Talbooth for dinner. You will not have to travel far as it is just around the corner and is owned by the hotel. The restaurant boasts an exquisite, carefully designed menu of beautifully presented gourmet dishes alongside a generous wine list.

## **Day 3: Coggeshall**

### **ALL DAY: WEST STREET VINEYARD**

If you are a wine lover, you must visit the local vineyard. West Street Vineyard is a contemporary, micro-vineyard based in the picturesque village of Coggeshall. If you are visiting on a Saturday, you could sign up for the *Introduction to Wine* workshop, which is perfect for any budding connoisseur or would-be sommelier. This is a wonderful, immersive experience for wine lovers wanting to learn more about tasting, varieties and food matching.

The experience includes all wines tasted throughout the day, plus a delicious two-course lunch.

If you would rather do less learning and more tasting, hour-long wine tastings are also offered throughout the year, and there is also the restaurant serving a contemporary menu for a spot of lunch.

#### **AFTERNOON: MARKS HALL & GARDENS, ARBORETUM**

Ten minutes away, the Arboretum at Marks Hall & Gardens is the last stop on your itinerary. During the autumn, the grounds are awash with oranges, reds and yellows as the trees signify the approach of winter. With miles of woodland to explore and enjoy, this location is perfect any time of year and always a wonderful way to round off your trip to Essex. There's no better place to be at one with nature and revel in being outside.

## **Summary**

And that's the end of our three-day itinerary of Essex, which includes gourmet food and gorgeous gardens. Follow this guide and we guarantee that you'll get your fill of hearty local food, plenty of the county's award-winning wine, plus a taster of some of Essex's long and rich history and unique venues you won't find anywhere else in England. Of course, there is so much more to explore and experience in Essex, but for that, you'll need a longer trip. No matter the season, your experience will be unique and inspiring meaning that you've got the perfect excuse to visit again and again.

There are plenty more itineraries and ideas for exploring England's Gourmet Garden Trails at [www.gourmetgardentrails.com](http://www.gourmetgardentrails.com) – see what else you can discover!

For more inspiration on places to visit in Essex, go to <http://www.visitessex.com>

## Featured Venues

### **RHS Garden Hyde Hall**

Address: Creephedge Ln, Chelmsford CM3 8ET Creephedge Lane, CM3 8ET Phone: 01245 400256  
*The Gardeners Rest opening times:* March – October: 10am – 4.45pm, November – February: 11am – 2.45pm. Closed Christmas Day & Boxing Day  
*Clover Cafe opening times:* March – October: 9.30am – 5.15pm, November – February: 9.30am – 3.15pm. Closed Christmas Day.

### **New Hall Vineyards**

Address: New Hall Vineyards, Chelmsford Road, Purleigh, Essex CM3 6PN  
Phone: 01621 828 343  
Opening times: Monday – Friday: 9am – 4pm, Saturday: 10am – 2pm and Bank Holidays: By appointment only

### **The Lock Tearoom**

Address: The Lock Tearoom, Basin Road, Maldon CM9 4RS  
Phone: 01621 854466  
Opening times:  
• Winter: Monday – Friday: 9am – 4pm, Saturday – Sunday: 9am – 4:30pm  
• Summer: Monday – Sunday: 9am – 5pm

### **Le Bouchon**

Address: The Square, Holloway Road, Heybridge, Maldon CM9 4LT Phone: 01621 856 511

### **Beth Chatto Gardens**

Address: Elmstead Market, Clacton Rd, Elmstead, Colchester CO7 7DB Phone: 01206 822007  
Opening times:  
• March – October: Monday – Saturday: 9am to 5pm, Sunday: 10am – 5pm  
• November – February: Monday – Saturday: 9am – 4pm, Sunday: 10am – 4pm

### **Dedham Art and Craft Centre**

Address: High Street, Dedham, Essex, CO7 6AD Phone: 01206 322666  
Opening hours: 10.00am – 5.00pm every day

### **Milsoms Hotel**

Address: Stratford Road, Dedham, Colchester, Essex, CO7 6HW Phone: 01206 322795

### **Le Talbooth**

Address: Gun Hill, Dedham, Colchester, Essex, CO7 6HP Phone: 01206 323150

### **West Street Vineyard**

Address: 108 West St, Coggeshall, Colchester CO6 1NB Phone: 01376 563303

### **Marks Hall & Gardens, Aboretum**

Address: Colchester CO6 1TG  
Phone: 01376 563796  
Opening times:  
January - March - Friday to Sunday 10am - 4pm  
April - November - Tuesday to Sunday and Bank Holidays - 10am - 5pm Guide price: Adults £5.75, Child £2.75