

Everything you wanted to know about Essex... ...but were TOWIE afraid to ask.

Culturally vibrant, redolent with over two thousand years of history and an economic powerhouse, Essex is a fascinating place to discover and explore or do business in. So, ignore the received wisdoms and come and enjoy one of Britain's most surprising and rewarding counties.

Rural Essex



Much as it is renowned for its bustling conurbations like Chelmsford, Britain's latest city and Colchester, Britain's oldest recorded town, Essex remains a predominantly rural county. In fact, over 70% remains undeveloped.

Picturesque market towns, traditional villages and tiny hamlets dot the landscape – many of which enjoyed national fame when the *Lovejoy* TV series was filmed here in the 1980's.

Undulating farmland, interspersed with copses and small woodlands, are also characteristic of the county. The celebrated artist John Constable immortalised scenes from his native Dedham Vale, in paintings such as the iconic *Haywain*.

Hatfield Forest in the west of the county was originally planted by the Norman kings as a hunting ground and remains to this day Britain's best preserved example.

Danbury Common, near Chelmsford, is home to the country's largest adder population.

Boasting an astounding 31 Green Flags between them, Essex's green spaces are wonderful places for the whole family to spend time together in the open air.

The county is blessed with rich and varied wildlife with 89 Essex Wildlife Trust sites and eight RSPB reserves including the largest conservation project in Europe at Wallasea Island.

The undulating countryside is also perfect for cycling. With a huge choice of routes, from traffic-free rides along disused railway and scenic riverside trails, perfect for a family adventure, to the heart-pumping, off-road thrills of hurtling around a forest track, it's a great way to soak up your surroundings – however energetic you want to be. Or you can pull on your walking boots and strike out on a bracing stroll through the beautiful Essex countryside. With over 5,000 km of footpaths and bridleways, there are routes to suit all energy levels, from lazy leaf-strewn forest rambles to long-distance footpaths like the Essex Way.

Coastal Essex



580 km of glorious coastline awaits you. No other county in Britain can claim that.

At Essex's southernmost part, aptly-named Southend-on-Sea, you can find the world's longest pleasure pier. At 1.3 miles long, it offers a unique chance to stroll out over the Thames Estuary and catch one of the special trains back to the shore.

Neighbouring Leigh-on-Sea offers a charming insight into the historical fishing industry that still exists today. The Old Town is a charming mix of a cobbled main street, lined with quaint houses, sail lofts and welcoming pubs, cafes and restaurants.

Reputed to be the UK's most dangerous path, the Broomway, leaves Wakering Stairs near Southend and heads out across Maplin Sands – an expanse of mudflats – before doubling back towards the island of Foulness. With treacherous tides, sea mist and flat topography, many people have lost their lives after becoming disorientated. Some of the path's victims are buried in the churchyard on Foulness.

In the north, the port of Harwich is a must-see destination for history-lovers. It is the place where the Pilgrim Fathers built the *Mayflower* and where its captain, Christopher Jones, hailed from. You can visit the yard where a recreation of the famous ship that sailed to America is being built and see the work in progress. The plan is to sail to America in 2020 for the 400th anniversary. Other attractions include the Electric Palace, one of Britain's first cinemas, and the atmospheric Redoubt Fort, which dates back to the Napoleonic Wars.

Mersea Island and nearby Maldon, are home to Essex's famous native oysters. Mersea also has a thriving vineyard and apple orchards, so is the perfect place for bon viveurs to stop and sample the local delicacies.

Surely one of the most haunting and memorable sights on a tour of the Discovery Coast, is the remote chapel of St Peter-on-the-Wall, near Bradwell-on-Sea. It was built by St Cedd in 654, using the stones from an abandoned Roman fort on the site. It is also the 19th oldest building in the country.

Historic Essex



In some ways, it could be said that the history of Britain starts in Essex. Colchester is the country's oldest recorded town and was the Roman's capital city during their occupation.

Under the Normans, Colchester castle was built on the foundations of the Roman temple of Claudius and is one and a half times the size of the Tower of London. According to Wikipedia, the keep is both the largest ever built in Britain and surviving example in Europe.

Mountfitchet Castle at Stansted is a faithful recreation of a wooden Norman motte and bailey defensive structure. The castle grounds also feature a Norman village that vividly brings to life the sights, sounds and smells of the Middle Ages.

Another Norman landmark is the magnificent keep that forms Hedingham Castle. Dating back to 1140, Hedingham was built by Aubrey De Vere II, whose father had fought alongside William the Conqueror during the Norman invasion of 1066.

Some of the most powerful men and women in Western Europe during the Middle Ages once owned Hadleigh Castle, near Leigh-on-Sea. In their heyday, the romantic ruins literally provided a happy hunting ground for Edward I and royal retreat for Edward III. A succession of handovers saw the castle passed amongst the nobility and was variously the property of Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen Margaret and Isabella of France. During the reign of Henry VIII, Hadleigh was gifted to Catherine of Aragon, Anne of Cleves and Catherine Parr.

Associations with Henry VIII – and indeed, Elizabeth I – abound in Essex. Further down the Thames Estuary from Hadleigh Castle, is one of the most famous sites of Tudor history – Tilbury Fort. Built by her father, Elizabeth famously rallied her forces in the face of the oncoming Armada. Built by her father, Elizabeth famously rallied her forces in the face of the oncoming Armada in July 1588 with her famous speech *“I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king.”*

Step back in time and experience a real life period drama as you explore life above and below stairs at the most magnificent Jacobean mansion near Saffron Walden. At Audley End House and Gardens you can get a sense of below stairs life in the restored Service Wing and see horses in the historic Jacobean stables. The nursery, opened last year for the very first time, reveals the daily life of the Victorian children who once played there.

The Royal Gunpowder Mills at Waltham Abbey are bursting with over 300 years of explosive history. This once top secret location retells the science and drama behind the former ballistics base.

The Jaywick Martello Tower, near Clacton, is a fine example of its type and offers a far, far warmer welcome to visitors than it would have done back in 1809.

Stow Maries Aerodrome, near Maldon, is the last surviving World War 1 airfield and was originally created to combat German Zeppelin raids and bombing attacks from its Gotha aircraft. Many of the original buildings are still in situ and several have been faithfully restored to their original wartime condition. The airfield still plays host to visiting aircraft from the WW1 era and the museum gives a fascinating insight into this important and now unique aspect of our Great War heritage.

The oldest wooden church in the world, and the oldest ‘Stave Built’ timber building in Europe, can be found in the idyllic setting of Greensted, outside the village of Chipping Ongar. St Andrews’ timbers pre-date the Norman Conquest (by six years) but earlier structures from the 6th and 7th centuries existed there before.

The body of Saint Edmund, King of East Anglia, and England’s first patron saint martyred in 869AD (the Normans replaced him later with St. George) rested in the church in 1013 on its way to Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk. The church’s oldest grave, is that of a twelfth century Crusader, thought to be a bowman.

Naturally, as the home county of radio in the UK, Essex was also at the forefront of developing radar technology during WW2. Beacon Hill Fort, Harwich, is a fine example of how ancient buildings were called into service in the 20th Century, hundreds of years after they were first constructed. Dating back to 1534, Beacon Hill became home to the country's first radar tower during the early 1940's.

Cultural Essex



The gentle beauty of the Essex landscape not only shaped and defined the artistic sensibilities of John Constable but a wealth of other creative talents. The celebrated equestrian artist, Sir Alfred Munnings also lived in Dedham and his work captures not just horses but also the surroundings and people around them. You can see much of his work at Castle House, his home on the outskirts of the village.

In recent years, Southend has become a mecca for film fans. The annual Southend Film Festival and Horror-on-Sea fright-fest have attracted increasing numbers of stars, directors, producers and, of course, cinema goers.

Head over to the West of Essex, to Harlow and you'll find a veritable treasure trove of sculpture. Spread across the town centre, in various public buildings and schools, sculptures by both famous and lesser known artists can be found. Henry Moore's Family Group looks out from the foyer of the Civic Centre on to the Water Gardens, where Elisabeth Frink's Boar and Rodin's Eve both stand.

The Gibberd Garden is a haven of tranquillity, composed of formal lawns, pools, streams and glades, a dramatic mature lime avenue (complete with medieval fonts), a brookside walk with a waterfall and over forty sculptures, ceramic pots and architectural pieces.

The theatres across the county offer a wide variety of different cultural escapes; including opera recitals from touring companies, stand-up shows by Britain's most popular comedians, hit musicals from the West End, ever-popular plays and new works, plus scores of gigs featuring established stars and up-and-coming bands.

Culinary Essex



Celebrity chef Jamie Oliver famously hails from Clavering – where his mum and dad still own and run *The Cricketers* pub - and consistently champions his home county in his books and TV shows; for good reason. Essex is foodie heaven and boasts a multitude of award-winning restaurants, producers and growers.

With 350 miles of coastline, Essex is renowned for its fishing industry, especially its shellfish. The Colchester Native Oyster is much-sought after by epicures across the globe.

Wine lovers will be in their element at Dedham Vale Vineyard. Set in stunning countryside, this boutique producer offers its own red, white, rose and sparkling wines, plus a range of ciders and liqueurs. Tastings and viticulture experiences are available at the family-run vineyard.

One of the world's most famous and highly-regarded jam producers is based in Essex; *Wilkin and Sons*. Synonymous with its base in Tiptree, the company also owns a number of farms in the area and tea rooms, where you can sample their delicious products.

The Little Scarlet Strawberry is grown in very few places but positively thrives in the rich soils of Essex and is perhaps unsurprisingly one of Wilkin & Sons favourite preserves.

The Pheasant at Gestingthorpe has just won the Pub of the Year accolade and this heads a long list of acclaimed pubs and restaurants across the county that use local ingredients and serve local beers to their customers. *The Company Shed* on Mersea Island is popular with locals and visitors alike, whilst the *Le Talbooth* restaurant in Dedham has a five-star reputation. *The Pipe of Port* in Southend on Sea is equally famed for its heroic pies and astonishingly-good wines, as it is for its Dickensian ambience and décor.

Also in Southend and also Leigh on Sea, Henry Burgess' duo of Henry Burgers restaurants have garnered a reputation for gourmet quality cooking and charming service. Consequently, it has attracted an enthusiastic and somewhat evangelical following.

Top Ten Essex Facts

1. According to Essexherald.com Essex is not only the UK's wealthiest county but would qualify as the world's 53rd largest economy. Forbes Magazine has also stated that the county's tax revenue alone would be sufficient to pay off the national debts of several emerging economies.
2. Manningtree is Britain's smallest town.
3. Whilst Tiptree is the UK's largest village
4. In January 1905 it was so cold that the Thames froze over at Southend-on Sea
5. Waltham Abbey is the burial place of King Harold who died in the Battle of Hastings. Ironically, his final resting place is one of the finest examples of Norman church architecture in Britain.
6. The largest village green in England is at Great Bentley. It covers an area of roughly 43 acres – big enough to have been used as a golf course a century or so ago.
7. Great Dunmow is home to the oldest recorded competition in the world still running, the Flich Trials. Mentioned in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and believed to have begun in the 13th century, the Trials aimed to find a married couple who had not quarrelled or repented their marriage during the preceding year and a day. A mock court of locals would test the veracity of stories of marital bliss, with a flich of bacon the prize for success.
8. Between 1560 and 1680 in Essex, 545 people were accused of witchcraft and at least 74 are known to have been executed at the Essex Assizes. Matthew Hopkins, known as the 'Witchfinder General', was a lawyer from Manningtree.
9. Iconic Scottish king, Robert the Bruce might have been an Essex boy. Historians have claimed that he was born at Montpelier's Farm in Writtle, near Chelmsford, in 1274.
10. Brentwood, home of the wildly popular TV show *The Only Way Is Essex*, or TOWIE as it is known, is also where the Peasant's Revolt began in May 1381.

Top Ten Essex Figures

1. Tourism is a key contributor to the Essex economy – there are around 43,530,700 total and staying day trips made to Essex each year with £2,912, 750, 150 the total value of tourism. 8% of all people in Essex are employed in the tourism industry (55,152 people).
2. Population of Essex is 1,737, 900 (second most populous in the UK)
3. Essex covers 3670 sq km
4. Essex has 75 sites of special scientific interest
5. Essex has 14 districts (Basildon, Braintree, Brentwood, Castle Point, Chelmsford, Colchester, Epping Forest, Harlow, Maldon, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea, Tendring, Thurrock and Uttlesford)
6. Over 14,000 buildings have listed status in Essex, and around 1000 of those are recognised as of Grade I or II* importance.
7. UK's longest coastline at 580kms
8. Essex is 70% rural.
9. The highest point of Essex is Chrishall Common near the village of Langley, close to the Hertfordshire border, which reaches 482 feet (147 m).
10. Essex has 5 Sister Countries / Regions – Jiangsu (China), Picardy (France), Thuringia (Germany). Henrico County (Virginia, USA) and Accra (Ghana)

Ten celebrities from Essex

1. Helen Mirren (Actress)
2. Jamie Oliver (Chef)
3. Tony Benn (Politician)
4. Phil Jupitus (Comedian)
5. Lee Evans (Comedian)
6. Damon Albarn and Blur (Rock Group)
7. Johnny Herbert (Racing Driver)
8. Dorothy L Sayers - the creator of amateur sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey, theologian and Dante scholar, lived and died in Witham
9. John Constable (Artist)
10. Frank Bruno (Former Boxer)

Ten films shot in Essex

1. *The Woman in Black* – Osea Island
2. *Goldfinger* – London Southend Airport
3. *Goldeneye* - Stansted Airport
4. *Four Weddings and a Funeral* - Grays
5. *The Forth Protocol* - Chelmsford
6. *Full Metal Jacket* - Epping Forest and Upminster
7. *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* - Tilbury
8. *Ivanhoe* - Heddingham Castle
9. *Porridge* - Chelmsford
10. *Bridget Jones' Diary* - Stansted Airport