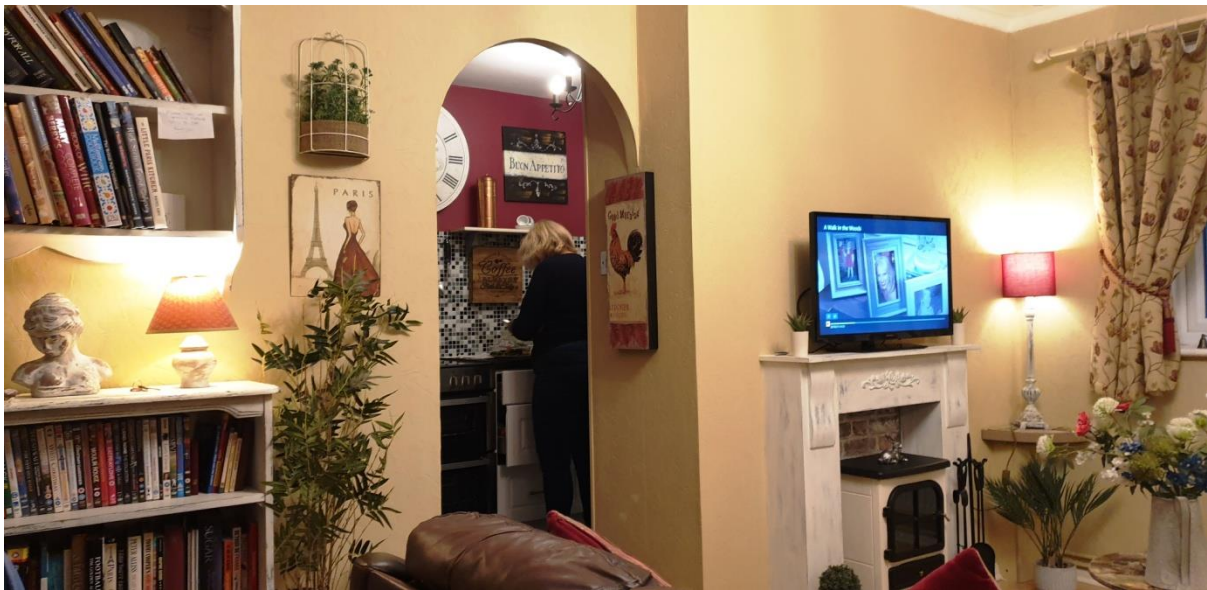


Somewhere there's a place for us



Our hundred days of separation ends in the car park at the St Mimms M25 Services. We share smiles, stories and hand gel but there's no touching.

Three garden trysts later, Anne-Marie becomes an empty-nester and the easing of the Lockdown lets us hug again in a social bubble

2020 was to be a year of SKIng - spending the kids' inheritance. After a month in New Zealand, we anticipated several more thrills: a WHO concert in Glasgow, Renaissance Football in Florence, the Fringe in Edinburgh and a Literary Cruise to New York on the Queen Mary 2.

Come Covid19, come cancellations. Only Cunard keep my deposit though they have no confirmed sailings.

Now, in July, the economy needs treatment and hotels, restaurants, and pubs are reopening. A short break looks safe. The hairdressers are cutting again and we can lose our long Sixties hairstyles.

We won't go far and opt for two days in Suffolk, booking a stay in Sudbury.

Our apartment is rated 9.6 on Booking.com, close to the town centre and parking is free. The only drawback is the late 5pm access. We must do some touring during the day.

Sudbury is an easy drive and we're there by 11.30am. Confused by lane changes in the town centre we take two circuits to find our apartment. It's in a modern housing estate, littered with cars some parked on kerbs and at awkward angles, though all still have four wheels.

"Don't jump to conclusions," Anne-Marie says and adds smiling, "But remember we can be home in less than an hour."

Sudbury's market square is presided over by a statue of the town's most famous resident Thomas Gainsborough, holding his palette and brushes. We celebrate the first coffee out for five months in

David's Café-Deli-Bar, breaking our no-cakes rule with delicious warmed almond croissants. Refreshed we drive to Bury St Edmunds for lunch in its elegant Georgian centre.

Returning to Sudbury, we detour through time, from 18th century Bury to Medieval Lavenham. No salesman of Cuprinol, or other wood preservative products, needed to call here for the last 500 years. The village is a forest of half-timbered buildings, their oak frames looking good for another few centuries.

Just before 5pm we ring the bell to the apartment block.

"I'm Pete. I suppose we should be socially distancing," says our landlord as we squeeze into the 5ft square hall.

Our close encounter lasts half an hour but finally we can inspect the flat. It's a work of art, a decorator's show flat, with themed zones.

Torn brick wallpaper around the dining table suggests a renovated period cottage; French prints, vases of dried flowers and typical flea market ornaments are a reminder of Paris in the lounge area. Multiple wall lights, a six foot gilded framed mirror, floral decorated wardrobes and several shelves with cookbooks, travel guides and novels conjure other worlds.

Inside this dream cocoon of romantic places is the somewhere we can forget about Covid.