

# Norfolk Explorer



Monday 27 April - Friday 01 May 2026

The wide open spaces of present day East Anglia give little indication of the region's rich past, a time when Norfolk was one of England's most densely populated and wealthiest areas. During the Middle Ages, a vibrant economy based on trade and farming resulted in the creation of beautiful churches and fine buildings in the towns. Wealth and power went hand in hand as the centuries passed, and politics also loomed large in East Anglia. For those at the top of the political tree, in many cases men from merchant backgrounds, the system of patronage enabled the building of some of the country's most magnificent country houses, each with its own glorious architectural embellishments and splendid art collections.

### MONDAY 27 APRIL 2026

We will depart from our local pick-up points by coach and travel to the hamlet of **Flatford** (*National Trust*) to explore Constable Country and visit the **John Constable Exhibition**. The artist spent his entire childhood in the Dedham Vale and many of his most famous paintings from the early 1800s are in and around Flatford and the Dedham Vale area. One of Constable's most eminent works is *'The Hay Wain'* (1821), a scene depicting a horse-drawn cart in the water, haymakers at work in the distance and a little cottage rented by a farmer called Willy Lott. Willy Lott's Cottage and Flatford Mill are today owned by the National Trust but leased to an environmental education charity so are not accessible to the public. There will be time to take lunch.

We will continue to **Norwich** where we will check into the centrally located **Maids Head Hotel** (4 star) for 4 nights' bed and breakfast accommodation. **Dinner** will be taken together in the hotel restaurant.

### TUESDAY 28 APRIL 2026

After breakfast at the hotel we will meet our local Blue Badge Guide for **walking tour** of Norwich. Located on the River Wensum, Norwich is one of the best preserved cities in Britain. The arrival of Flemish settlers in the 12<sup>th</sup> century led to the establishment of a thriving textile industry and Norwich soon became a very prosperous market town and the second city of England. Remnants of the city's prosperity remain, and it boasts one of the finest medieval streets in England. We will take in the exterior of **St Peter Mancroft**, the largest parish church in Norwich built in the mid 1400s.

This morning we will also have a **guided tour** of **Norwich Cathedral**. Founded in 1096 by Bishop Losinga, the cathedral boasts the second tallest spire in England. Built from white stone shipped in from Normandy, the surviving cloister is the most extensive in the country. There will be time for lunch in Norwich.

We will travel by coach to visit **Sandringham House**. Hidden in the heart of 60 acres of beautiful wooded grounds, this royal country retreat is still maintained in the style of Edward and Alexandra. The main ground

floor rooms are full of treasured family ornaments, portraits and furniture, while the old stable-block now houses a Museum. In the gardens there are informal glades, dells, lawns and lakes, bordered by colourful shrubs, flowers and magnificent specimen trees. During our visit there will be free time to explore the house and gardens on an independent basis, and Room Stewards are available throughout the property.

We will return to our hotel in Norwich by coach for an evening at leisure.

### WEDNESDAY 29 APRIL 2026

After an early breakfast at the hotel we will join our coach and travel to Wells-next-the-Sea for a **private guided tour** of **Holkham Hall**. One of England's finest Palladian country houses, Holkham Hall has been the seat of the Earls of Leicester and home of the Coke family for almost 250 years. Built by William Kent in 1734-61 for the first Earl, it is a fine example of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Palladian style. The central block of State Rooms is linked by corridors to the four symmetrical blocks of rooms for ordinary use. The most striking room is the Marble Hall where Kent used fine English alabaster to magnificent and sumptuous effect. Holkham is renowned for its fabulous collection of art-classical Greek and Roman statuary; paintings by Van Dyck, Rubens, Claude, Poussin and Gainsborough; a copy of Michelangelo's lost Bathers cartoon; and original furniture. The 3,000-acre park, with its mile-long lake, was landscaped by 'Capability' Brown in 1762. There will be time to take lunch after the tour.

This afternoon we will travel by coach to Blakeney for a **boat trip** to **Blakeney Point**. This coastal area features uninterrupted views of the beautiful North Norfolk coastline. It is home to both the Blakeney National Nature Reserve and a colony of around 500 Grey and Common seals. *Please be aware that the April 2026 tide times have not yet been published. These will determine when we are able to include this excursion within the itinerary.*

We will return to our hotel in Norwich by coach for an evening at leisure.

#### THURSDAY 30 APRIL 2026

After breakfast at the hotel we will travel by coach to **Blickling Hall** (*National Trust*), a great Jacobean house dating from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Built in red brick with a gabled façade and elegant corner turrets, the house was greatly altered in the 1760s. The State Rooms include the Peter the Great Room with fine Russian tapestry, a 123 ft Long Gallery with exceptional Jacobean plaster ceiling, and the State Bedroom. The formal garden dates from 1729. There will be time to take an early lunch.

We will continue to **Aylsham Station** where we will board a **steam train** on the **Bure Valley Railway**, a heritage railway line built on the trackbed of the former Great Eastern Railway between Wroxham and Aylsham.

From Wroxham we will rejoin our coach for onward travel to **East Ruston Old Vicarage Gardens**. Alan Gray and Graham Robeson incorporated innovative design and clever planting when they laid out their gardens around the Arts and Crafts Vicarage more than fifteen years ago, and today the site covers an area of 32 acres. We hope to arrange an **introductory talk** on arrival, followed by free time to explore the gardens.

We will return to our hotel in Norwich by coach.  
**Dinner** will be taken in a local restaurant.

#### FRIDAY 01 MAY 2026

We will check out of the hotel after breakfast and travel by coach to Ely to visit **Ely Cathedral**. Once known as 'Eel Island', this beautiful city with its magnificent Romanesque Cathedral overlooks the vast expanse of the fens. Originally founded by St Etheldrada, a Saxon Princess, the towering cathedral dates from 1083 and is surrounded by superb ecclesiastical and domestic buildings. The Norman Transitional style of the late 11<sup>th</sup> century is clearly visible in the striking West front with its Early English Galilee Porch at its base. Among the cathedral's later embellishments are the delightful 14<sup>th</sup> century Lady Chapel, and the 16<sup>th</sup> century Chantry of Bishop West where medieval and classical motifs are combined. We will be split into two smaller groups for **guided tours** of **Ely Cathedral** and the **Stained Glass Museum**. *Please be aware that the Stained Glass Museum can only be accessed via a spiral stone staircase of 40 steps and there is no lift.* There will be some free time to take lunch on an independent basis in Ely prior to departure.

We will re-join our coach and continue our journey homeward, arriving in the early evening.

*Please note: As this tour has been arranged many months in advance the final itinerary may vary from the above.*



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## TOUR PRICE

**£1,160** per person sharing a twin/double room  
**£200** single supplement (*double room for sole occupancy*)

## PRICE INCLUDES

Executive coach travel throughout  
4 nights' bed and breakfast accommodation  
2 dinners  
Services of a local guide in Norwich for 1 half day  
Guided tour of Norwich Cathedral  
Private guided tour of Holkham Hall  
Boat trip to Blakeney Point  
Travel on the Bure Valley Railway (*Aylsham/Wroxham*)  
Introductory talk at East Ruston Old Vicarage  
Gardens (*subject to availability*)  
Guided tour of Ely Cathedral  
Guided tour of the Stained Glass Museum  
Gratuities  
All entrance charges and booking fees  
(*excluding National Trust properties*)

*Please note charges to National Trust properties are not included  
as these are free of charge to National Trust members upon  
production of a valid membership card.*

## HOTEL DETAILS

**Maids Head Hotel** (4 star)  
20 Tombland, Norwich, NR3 1LB  
[www.maidsheadhotel.co.uk](http://www.maidsheadhotel.co.uk)

## FINANCIAL PROTECTION

ABTOT provides protection for your booking as set out  
in the Financial Protection clause of our  
Booking Conditions.

## MINIMUM NUMBERS

The price of the tour is based on a minimum of 25  
paying participants.

## OPTIONAL TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is not mandatory for the UK, but we  
strongly recommend that you have adequate insurance in  
place to cover any COVID-related issues. We have  
arranged a scheme with specialists Brokersure Limited  
who are fully authorised and regulated by the FCA (firm  
reference number 501719) full details of which can be  
found on the FCA website [www.fca.org.uk](http://www.fca.org.uk). Please call  
Brokersure on 0330 880 3625 for a quote.  
*Please ensure that any policy has adequate cover for  
COVID-19 related issues.*

## PAYMENT DETAILS

A deposit of **£325** is due **as soon as possible** and no later  
than **Friday 14 November 2025**. Please note that as  
places on the tour are limited, bookings will be accepted  
on a 'first come, first served' basis. The final balance will  
be due by **Monday 02 February 2026**.

## BOOKING & FINAL TRAVEL DETAILS

To reserve your place on the tour, please send your  
completed booking form and payment to Heritage Group  
Travel. You will receive a confirmation of your booking.  
The final travel details (itinerary, hotel details and luggage  
label) will be available approximately 10-14 days  
prior to travel.

*Heritage*  
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