

NORWICH: TRULY, A FINE CITY

Barnham Broom, your Norfolk home, is a sportsman's paradise, with a fully equipped gym, squash courts, an indoor heated swimming pool... and if it's pampering you need, the country club's on-site Spa will leave you utterly relaxed. And the food and drink's not bad either! The Sports Bar and Brasserie à-la-carte restaurant cater for all tastes, and budgets. But it's most famous for golf, boasting not just one but two 18-hole Championship-standard courses.

But what if golf really isn't your thing? What if you come to Norfolk looking for something else? What are your options then?

Myriad, is the answer. Norfolkman and Norwich denizen Jonathan Broom made a brave stab at listing them all – but in the end gave it up for a bad job. There's more than enough to see and do – and write about – in the city he calls home...

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The graveyard of ambition. A sleepy backwater. Stuck in a time-warp. I've heard them all, and worse. I even agree with some of them. But the fact remains that, no arguments, Norfolk's county capital is one of the loveliest places I know – to live in, and to visit.

Norwich wears its beauty lightly. Not for my city the self-consciousness of, say, Bath, or Cheltenham. Norwich is possessed of an inordinate number of architectural gems, ranging date-wise from the Norman Conquest to the present day, plus disproportionate acres of green space; but this a functional city, not a town pickled in aspic.

That said, the four must-sees – in my book anyway – have to be the Castle, with its 11th-Century keep; the Anglican Cathedral, which dates from 1096 and is so transcendent as to make the most ardent atheist come over all spiritual; the Market, as colourful and lively now as it surely was in 1086; and the latest jewel in our crown, the Forum, a glorious glass-fronted edifice, to fun as well as to erudition.

Skateboarders and others gather there to do their stuff outside, while students and readers head inside for the quieter confines of the fantastically wide-ranging library. And there are eateries and cafés aplenty for all.

Talking of which, there is no excuse for going thirsty or hungry in Norwich. The city offers a really good selection of what I'd call "mid-range" restaurants; there's the usual – now ubiquitous – high-street homogeneity, but also loads of independents, specialising in cuisines from around the world. As for pubs... we used to boast that there were 365 pubs in the city (as well as 52 churches). Neither of these "facts" are true – if indeed they ever were – but there are certainly a heck of a lot of convivial hostleries, perfect for a drink and a bite to eat, and a chat with the locals.

Because that's another thing: we're really friendly. Norfolk has a reputation for being a bit cold, a bit standoffish. Wrongly, I might add. And it's certainly in no way true of the county capital. During the 11th Century Norwich was the largest



“Norwich Cathedral is about as majestic, and spiritual, as a cathedral can be”



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Norwich 'Forum'

city in England after London, and one of the most important; but its size, importance, and long-term prosperity were dependant on influxes of immigrants – Vikings, Normans, Jewish merchants, Flemish weavers (who brought their pet canaries with them), Huguenots, Walloons and others made a home there, and it's the combination of these disparate legacies that gives the city its distinctive look and feel.

And Norwich remains outgoing and welcoming to newcomers. Just ask the 15,000 or so students at the University of East Anglia. Opened in 1963, the UEA's campus buildings, row upon row of Brutalist zigurrats, are among the ugliest I've ever seen (though in a gorgeous setting). But the students love it: both the university and the city itself, to judge by the number who hang around after graduation. My own wife being one such. Was it me she fell for – or Norwich? I must remember to ask her sometime.

Norwich attracts its fair share of international theatrical productions and performers, to the Theatre Royal (at one time the UK's most successful provincial theatre) and the newer Playhouse, and big-name pop acts regularly play at the UEA. Norwich also hosts an annual arts festival (mostly performing arts these days), and has done since 1772 – the first festival of its kind in the UK, and today the fourth-biggest in Europe. This in a city of 140,000 people. The festival takes place every May.



Take a tour of the Cathedral

Tours - take a free (donations welcome) guided tour and learn about how the Cathedral survived riot, war, plague and fire, and its work today. Tours are available Monday to Saturday every hour between 11.00am and 3.00pm and last approximately one hour.





And in terms of “static” art, the city punches well above its weight. The Norman Foster-designed Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (itself a masterpiece) houses, as permanent exhibits, some of the most remarkable works of art ever assembled in the UK. Picasso, Degas, Giacometti, Modigliani and other seminal European modern artists are all represented – along with Francis Bacon, a major exhibition of whose work has sadly just finished. Meanwhile the Norwich Castle Art Gallery is hosting an exhibition of works by Jeff Koons – an artist over whom opinion is most assuredly divided – until 6th September. And there are a host of smaller galleries around the city, displaying – and selling – works by local and national artists. Go along: you might grab yourself something special!

But above all, Norwich is a place that makes its own entertainment. We’re on the way to nowhere, which means two things: 1) unless by accident of birth, the people who make a home there do so because they love the place; and 2) they (and we) recognise the fact that it’s no good sitting around waiting for stuff to happen – you’ve got to create your own good times. So that’s what we do. And we’d like you to come and share them with us.

Norfolk boasts many attractions, all easily accessed from your Barnham Broom home and all promising rich rewards. And I promise to do them justice; but to come to Norfolk without spending a day – at least – in its beautiful, friendly, easygoing capital? That would be an injustice indeed!

A PERFECT DAY OUT IN THE FINE CITY

There are as many opinions on things to do in Norwich as there are things to do in Norwich. Barnham Broom site manager Shirley Carr doubtless has her own ideas – but here, for what it’s worth, are mine:

Bearing in mind that Norwich is a small city, it makes sense to head for the centre – which really means the Market. Look out over the marketplace, with the City Hall behind you, and admire the view as well as getting your bearings. Pretty much everything you could wish to see is laid out – the Castle, front and centre; the Cathedral, ahead

and a bit to the left; over your right shoulder, the Forum and the mighty St Peter Mancroft church; and ahead, of course, the Market.

Head down the right-hand side of the Market, towards Gentleman’s Walk – always busy, and at weekends positively heaving with shoppers and buskers – and the Castle. Cross Gentleman’s Walk and stroll through the Royal Arcade, opened in 1899 and an exquisite example of Art Nouveau style. Stop at the Colman’s Mustard Shop for a jar of Norwich’s finest, then head on. The Castle is dead ahead.

You’re probably keeping half an eye on the clock, but the Castle is worth an hour of anyone’s time. As well as the various exhibitions in the museum and various art galleries, there’s the overall history of the place, probably best absorbed via a battlements and dungeons tour. The former afford the most fantastic views of the city; while the latter provide an uncomfortable reminder of the privations some of the Castle’s previous inhabitants were forced to endure.

Back up in the open air and looking back at the Royal Arcade, turn right and walk along Castle Meadow, then hook left onto Bank Plain. At the end of Bank Plain, fork right onto the cobbled Redwell Street, then jink left and right onto Elm Hill, an historic cobbled lane, many of whose buildings date back to Tudor times. You’ll want to stroll down it – and you will, taking care not to turn an ankle on the cobbles – but first stop for a coffee at the Britons Arms. Opinions differ as to the age of this charming building – some say 1420, while others aver 1347 – but all agree that the food, drink, service and atmosphere are first-class. Keenly priced, too.

Elm Hill – short, but utterly charming – emerges onto Wensum Street, and indeed the river of same name is a short distance to your left. If time allows, you might want to take the hour-long return cruise from Quay Side to Riverside (I know, confusing), which gives fantastic views, particularly of the Cathedral. The cruise – the one you want, anyway – departs at 11.30am, and costs £6 per adult.

But cruise or no cruise, the Cathedral is an absolute must. Back on Wensum Street, head up a slight hill.



When you get to a roundabout, with the Maid's Head Hotel to your left, ahead of you is Tombland and, to the left, the Cathedral and Cathedral Close.


I'm not going to add much about Norwich Cathedral – the place speaks for itself – save to say that I have seen many places of Christian worship. Perhaps the result of having a clergyman for a father. And to my mind, Norwich Cathedral is about as majestic, and spiritual, as a cathedral can be. Enter the close via the Erpingham Gate to get the full grandeur – and look out for the magnificent new stained-glass windows.

Spiritual sustenance is one thing, but by now you'll be feeling a mite peckish. I suggest you head across Tombland to the Edith Cavell, a pub named after the Norfolk nurse and WW1 heroine, whose body is buried at the Cathedral. The pub – unlike the nurse – has seen its reputation seesaw over the years, but is now apparently very good, with exceptional food.

The Edith Cavell stands on the corner of Tombland and Princes Street. Lunch done, stroll up Princes Street – almost as pretty as Elm Hill – to the T-junction with Saint Andrews Street. Cross Saint Andrews Street (a quick right and left) onto Saint Andrews Hill. Follow Saint Andrews Hill until the road ends at a T-junction. Turn right onto London Street – all pedestrianised. Keep right where the road forks, and eventually you will find yourself facing the 15th-Century Guildhall, and the Market to the left.

If you want to shop at the Market, now's the time; and there's a lot to recommend it. Fresh produce, of course – but also clothes, secondhand books, rare LPs... It's a pretty eclectic mix. And there are bargains to be had.

Finally, after a look at the Forum – a vibrant place, and a magnificent example of 21st-Century architecture – head for the Georgian elegance of the Assembly House, just across Theatre Street, for a classic afternoon tea in one of the city's finest dining rooms.

That'll do for the day. You've had a good day out – but you've barely scratched the surface. You'll just have to come back again. And again... And again... 

NORWICH BY NIGHT

Norwich has a vibrant nightlife, but it's concentrated in two areas (or two-and-a-half): Tombland, Riverside (close to the railway station), and the Waterfront live music venue on King Street. The rest of the city is relatively quiet, though no less atmospheric.

For a “grown-up” evening out, I suggest heading for the Market (again) – floodlit at night, and very pretty – for pre-dinner drinks at the Sir Garnet. Formerly the Garnet Wolsley, the pub was a proper market tavern, and the last word in “rough”. No more, however – today the place is comfortable, friendly, and elegant, with great views across the city.

Your options for dinner are legion, and none are far away. Roger Hickman's Restaurant, on Upper Saint Giles Street, is surely only a whisker away from its first Michelin star; but Benedict's, on Saint Benedicts Street, is a worthy contender. The latter thoroughfare is home to several other independent eateries – B'nou for Mediterranean, Pinocchio's or Umberto's for Italian, Don Pepé for Spanish... prices vary, but the quality and atmosphere do not. And if you fancy a post-dinner snifter, there are numerous quirky and characterful late-night cafés and bars to choose from.

Of course you might want to combine this with a trip to the theatre. The Theatre Royal, close to the Forum, is one of the UK's most successful theatres, attracting top talent from around the world. To view the theatre's autumn programme, visit www.theatreroyalnorwich.co.uk.

GETTING THERE FROM BARNHAM BROOM

If you have your own transport, drive to Longwater – a journey of no more than 12 minutes by car. Then catch the park-and-ride service to Norwich Bus Station. There are regular buses; the 9.40am service arrives in the city at 10.05am. The cost is around £2.30 to £3.50 per adult all-in, depending on concessions and any special deals. The last return park-and-ride service leaves at 6.30pm.

If you are without a car, or you wish to spend a car-free evening in Norwich, Shirley Carr will advise as to your best travel options.