

Tourist Information for Your Stay at The Willow House

History:

The Domesday Book records that Watton (or Originally Wadetuna) featured a church, manor house and Anglo-Saxon settlement.

The hare (wat) and the barrel (tun) Although speculative it is believed that because of the areas commercial ties to the rabbit/hare (wat) production, and the importance of the its principal industry was the manufacture of woollen cloth in Elizabethan times, the raw material being brought in barrels (tun) the nineteenth century derivative of wat being the local dialect word for hare, and ton for barrel, reflects the town name. The motif can now be seen both on the Clock Tower and as the weather vane.

The Location and The Willow House:

The clock tower of Watton was built in 1679 by Christopher Hey, a wealthy mercer. The tower was built to hold a fire warning bell following the 'Great Fire of Watton' that destroyed more than sixty properties in 1674. This early warning bell, known as 'Ting-Tang' sits in an ornate cupola on top of the tower.

The Willow House, dates back from around 1556 and is the only thatched and one of the oldest buildings in Watton. Built on the western edge of the town. When the great fire took hold, blowing to the east, The Willow House survived. This was in 1674. The town was later re-developed: around and to the west of The Willow House.

Watton is situated fairly equal distant from the surrounding coastal area, so on a good run you can get from Watton to all points from Kings Lynn round to Great Yarmouth in about an hour, so you can imagine how many attractions there are, for all tastes to visit and see.

Some Information:

We have compiled some things to do, for just an hour or two, or if you have time, a good few days of exploration:

By foot, either car or bus, we believe some or all the following will be of some interest.

Walking:

If walking is one of your interests, many people use us as a stop over point when walking the Peddars Way trail:

<http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/peddarsway>

But you could just as well walk the parts immediately north and south of Watton and arrange either a pick up or a drop off so as to get as far as possible, in a stint.

A good days walk south of the [The Willow House](#) will take you past St Peters church, Merton, on to Thompson and Thompson Water, this is owned and managed by Norfolk Wildlife Trust and is a shallow lake of 40 acres; which was artificially created in 1845 by the draining of a tributary of the River Wissey?

Here the Peddars way briefly joins The Great Eastern Pingo Trail:

<http://www.countrysideaccess.norfolk.gov.uk/walk.aspx?section=1&id=25> this is an eight mile circuit that explores the eastern edge of the Brecks.

The Battle Area, known as Stanford Training Area, which is the country's main battleground and amounts to 17,500 acres of unofficial nature reserve. This trail passes Cranberry Rough:

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6EYEV4>

This provides a wide range of wetland habitats, which support an exceptionally rich diversity of wetland plants, insects and birds. This wetland site was formerly a lake known as Hockham Mere. It is now a 'Site of Special Scientific Interest'.

With Great Hockham to the east, this would be another fine chance to break from the trail for a picnic in a pretty Brecks village.

Now, back on the Peddars Way still heading south you will cross the A1075 at East Wretham, On southwards across the A 11 to Thorpe Woodlands across the river Thet, again a few miles to the east is East Harling, the home of The St. Georges Distillery, England's only Whiskey Distillery, well worth a detour. They run tours most days followed by a tasting: <http://www.englishwhisky.co.uk/>

If this did not dissuade you from your path, it's on to Rushford and Knettishall Heath Country Park. Here you will find a circular 'Warren' this might not be the first you warren you have come across on your trek, as rabbit 'farming' or Warrening was a massive industry from the mid 13th century though to the early 1900's throughout the Brecks.

You have now come to the start (or in this case) the end of the official Peddars way route. (Total Walk 14.5 miles)

Thetford lies about 5 miles north west of here. There you will also find Thetford Priory, Castle hill earth works and one of the best preserved warren lodges and banks in the area, also the Little Ouse river trail.

If you were to head North on the Peddars Way Trail out of Watton, this would pick up at Little Cressingham, past Great Cressingham, on to All Saints church at South Pickenham, through North Pickenham village. North across the A47 and the last leg of this journey along the Nar Valley way to South Acre where you will find St. Georges church. And finally, make sure you visit the Priory and Castle ruins at Castle Acre. (Total Walk: 11.7 miles).

Places of Interest:

A little further afield is Thetford Forest. A patchwork of pines, heathland and broadleaves providing the ideal setting for a day out and picnic, and a welcome refuge for a rich variety of animal and plant life. Many visitors are attracted by the peace and tranquillity of Thetford Forest as well as the wide range of recreation facilities.

Go Ape:

There is also 'Go Ape' <http://www.goape.co.uk>

A tree top adventure park in the hart of the forest at High Lodge Forest Centre, Santon Downham, for those of a less sensitive disposition. This is also the venue where children can explore trails, use the play furniture and have fun on the large grass area.

Grimes Graves:

A little further north into the forest and you will be taken back in time to when 'The Brecks' was the flint capitol of Briton, which does not now sound too impressive, but back when EVERY useful tool was made of flint, most building used flint in one way or another, and then the prolific use of the flintlock pistols and rifles this made the area very significantly important, from the stone age though to the last century The Brecks also has the largest Neolithic flint mining site in Britain, at Grimes Graves:

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.12454>

Thetford Forest:

Lynford Arboretum, and its Lakes in Thetford Forest Park, also has their own trails and attractions. Lynford Hall was the site of some of the filming of the popular 70's sitcom 'Dads Army'. Mundford is the nearest village, which is home to the Icenib Brewery:

<http://www.icenibrewery.co.uk> .

If you were to head north from here along the A1065 Munford To Swaffham Rd, across to your left, (west) there is the Village of Cockley Cley and its The Icenivillage which is a reconstruction of the type of village occupied by the British tribe, whom Boudicca was their queen some 2000 years ago:

<http://www.icenivillage.com/>

There is also to be found the church of St. Mary. It is thought that this is one of the oldest churches in the country and that it may originally have been built during the time of the Augustine mission in 628AD.

If you have small children a visit to Melsop Farm Park is a must, just 10 minutes by car is an indoor / outdoor interactive farm:

<http://www.melsopfarmpark.co.uk/>

Swaffham:

Heading north again this will bring you to the market town of Swaffham, or you may know it as 'Market Shipborough,' or the town that Kingdom, the TV series starring Stephen Fry was based. Have a look around and see if you can spot the central shooting scenes.

You can also visit the Swaffham Ecotech Centre, where you can see the benefits of wind power and is an environmental education centre. Swaffham 1 includes a 65m high viewing platform, which has already been visited by over 50,000 people. The unique public viewing platform is situated just below the hub and can be reached by climbing a 300-step spiral staircase inside the tower:

<http://ecotech.org.uk/contacts.html>

Bodney Camp:

On your return trip to Watton from Swaffham, along the B1108 will take you past Bodney camp, home to many of our country's armed forces whilst on training manoeuvres, throughout the year, but in August it opens its doors for three weeks to the Household Cavalry, for training and fresh air for the horses. Near the end of their stay at Bodney, a free open day of horsey entertainment is provided for all who wish to attend, which is always very well subscribed to.

Wayland Wood Country Park: Closer to Us

If its just a gentle stroll is what you would prefer, walk or take the car to Wayland wood car park, (Less than a mile from the Willow House) and follow the trails set out for you, and whilst wondering through this ancient woodland you might be lucky enough to spot a Golden Pheasant. This is also the woods that inspired the Legendry tales of the 'Babes in the Wood'

The Watton heritage trail is an organised snippet of local history that guides you around the town, more info can be found at the Wayland visitors centre, found at the western end of the High St.

Golf:

If you wish to go 'off piste', stroll through Watton high St and head off north past Richmond Park Golf Club:

<http://www.richmondpark.co.uk/index.htm>

Facilities include a full 18-hole golf course plus driving range. You might even like to take advantage of a few lessons with the Club professional!

Continue on to Saham Toney, the Saxon word Saham means a hamlet on the lake. The local's call it Saham Mere. Heading east will bring you to Ovington and further on to Carbrooke, here if you head back to Watton, this will bring you past St. Mary's church which is generally accepted to have been built between 1100 and 1135. It is the only church in Norfolk that is wider than it is long, due to the extensions put on it as the population grew in Watton. The walk back from here to the Willow House is down a ¼ mile tree lined foot path.

Wayland Prison:

Just to the south of Watton lie the villages of Caston and Griston, which is the home of HM Wayland Prison; a major employer in the area.

Shipdham:

To the north is the village of Shipdham where the air field was constructed in 1941-1942 and was the first US heavy bomber base in Norfolk. Shipdham was also the continuous host to B-24 Liberators longer than any other Eighth Air Force combat airfield in Britain. It is now home to the 44th bomb group museum.

http://www.shipdhamflyingclub.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=4

Onward will bring you to Dereham, here you will find The Mid-Norfolk Railway Preservation Trust:

<http://www.mnr.org.uk/>

Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse museum:

<http://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/default.asp?Document=200.50>

Norwich City:

This is a must for those spending a few days with us.
You will need to take the car or catch a bus.

Heading east will take you though the village of Hingham.

Samuel Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's great, great, great grandfather was baptised here and left to help colonise the Americas in 1637.

Hingham's grand architecture surrounds the market place and village green. In the 18th century, when the socialites of high society built and took residence in Hingham, it became fashionably known as "little London".

More recently, the Lotus F1 Team has made this its base.

The trip will take you past the village of Barford and on across the A47 past the new Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital, then the University of East Anglia which is home to The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts:

<http://www.scva.org.uk/>

We recommend a visit to the cathedral's (Yes there are two) you will probably past the Catholic cathedral of St. John the Baptist, on you way into Norwich, its building took place at the turn of the 19th C but was not designated a cathedral until 1976.

Without bias, the much grander and substantially more interesting of the two for the religious and non-religious alike, is the 900-year-old Anglican Cathedral of Norwich: <http://www.cathedral.org.uk/>

Do not miss a visit to Norwich Castle, this also has exhibitions of the Egyptian Pharos, the Iceni tribes, Boudicca, local history, art exhibitions, and guided battlement and dungeon tours: <http://www.aboutbritain.com/NorwichCastleMuseum.htm>

It then might be time to relax in one of the many restaurants and bars of Tombland.

Take a stroll though the city center, with a mix of small individual boutiques and large high street stores. You will find two modern shopping malls, one of the largest covered outdoor markets in England and many picturesque lanes, alleys and streets: <http://www.tournorfolk.co.uk/norwich.html#shopping>

There are guided tours, depicting some of the deep history of the city:

<http://www.visitnorwich.co.uk/blue-badge.aspx>

Why not download a pocket tour to your MP3 player here:

<http://www.pocketnorwich.co.uk/mobileindex.html>

For further information visit the Forum which is the tourist information hub of the city and much more:

<http://www.theforumnorwich.co.uk/>

You might wish to catch a show at the Theatre Royal:

<http://www.theatreroyalnorwich.co.uk/>

Play House:

<http://www.norwichplayhouse.org.uk>

A top-flight band at the U.E.A:

<http://www.ueaticketbookings.co.uk/>

Other recommended local attractions are:

Explore the whole of the Norfolk Coastline from Hunstanton to Caister on Sea.

A few others to mention:

A day trip (or half day) on the Norfolk Broads:

Take a picnic, and be your own Skipper!

http://www.finewayleisure.co.uk/html/day_boat_hire.html

Relax on a paddle steamer: <http://www.pocketnorfolkbroads.co.uk/pnbfiles/southerncomfort.html>

Take a boat trip to see the seals:

<http://www.beansboattrips.co.uk/>

Great couple of hours, what ever your age. Right on the north Norfolk coast

Check the tides times on the web site for sailing times.

Thursford collection:

<https://www.thursford.com>

This attraction houses the World's largest collection of steam engines and organs. It is home to the famous Thursford Christmas Spectacular.

Bressingham:

<http://www.bressingham.co.uk/>

Steam, Gardens & Dads Arm Collection

Holkham Hall:

<http://www.holkham.co.uk/>

The Hall, The Beach, Concerts, Plays, Exhibitions.

Sandringham:

<http://www.sandringhamestate.co.uk/>

The Queens favorites

Dinosaur Adventure Park:

<http://www.dinosauradventure.co.uk>

A kiddies Adventure

Bewilderwood:

<http://www.bewilderwood.co.uk/>

A kiddies Adventure

Pleasurewood Hills:

<http://www.pleasurewoodhills.com/index.php>

A kiddies Adventure

Castle Rising:

<http://www.castlerising.co.uk/main.html>

A 12th Century castle with yet more history

Snetterton Race Circuit:

<http://www.motorsportvision.co.uk/snetterton/>

There is always something going on, either practice, bring and run, or racing.

Snetterton Sunday Market:

<http://www.snettertonmarket.co.uk/>

Some retail therapy with a barter.

THE WILLOW HOUSE
INN, RESTAURANT & HOTEL
2 HIGH STREET
WATTON
NORFOLK.
IP25 6AE

Telephone: 01953 881181

www.thewillowhouse.co.uk