

# Let's staycation in... FLATFORD

Lose yourself in this charming Suffolk settlement that John Constable loved so dearly. By Danielle Lett

**S**ituated in the heart of East Anglia's Dedham Vale is Flatford - a picturesque hamlet that has to be seen to be believed.

Readers may recognise Flatford from some of famed artist John Constable's works - most famously, the depiction of the River Stour and Willy Lott's House in his 1821 landscape painting 'Hay Wain', and 'Flatford Mill (Scene on a Navigable River)', the first in his Stour series of paintings.

Take a trip there this season and lose yourself in its serene, picture-perfect surroundings, where you can see a variety of flora and fauna as you wander around the River Stour thanks to a number of walking trails.

## Where to stay in Flatford

**Thorington Hall:** If you're looking to holiday in Flatford, then this stunning eight-bedroom farmhouse really makes you feel like you've stepped back in time. With historic detailing throughout, Thorington Hall is one of Suffolk's oldest homes, and oozes stacks of charm.

With plenty of space inside and outside, it's ideal for large families and groups looking to escape it all - and even better, up to four dogs are welcome. Upstairs, there are a number of large, bright bedrooms, with a large kitchen and reception areas below. To help you keep cosy this time of year, there are also log burners throughout, and outside there is a large enclosed garden with an orchard, stables and a badminton net.



**Thorington Lodge:** Next to Thorington Hall is Thorington Lodge, a cosy gate lodge that occupies the oldest part of the 17th century farmhouse. Retaining much of its original character, this rustic residence has two bedrooms and sleeps up to three guests and one dog. Visitors can marvel at its exposed beams, living room with stone floors, cosy log burner, and cobbled courtyard garden.

Both Thorington Hall and Thorington Lodge are under the care of the National Trust. To enquire about bookings and availability, visit [nationaltrust.org.uk](http://nationaltrust.org.uk)

## What to do in Flatford

**Explore Flatford:** There's nothing better than getting back to basics and losing yourself in the beauty of the great outdoors - and Flatford is perfect for that. There are a number of walking routes dotted around, at varying lengths that will allow you walk in Constable's footsteps, and really see why he was so besotted with the place.

To truly immerse yourself, why not head out on the 'Flatford and Constable' walking trail? This moderate, four-to-seven-mile route was actually featured on ITV's 'Britain's Favourite Walks: Top 100' and guides you gently around the Stour Valley and Dedham Vale. Remember to pack sensible shoes though, as some parts could prove particularly muddy at this time of year.

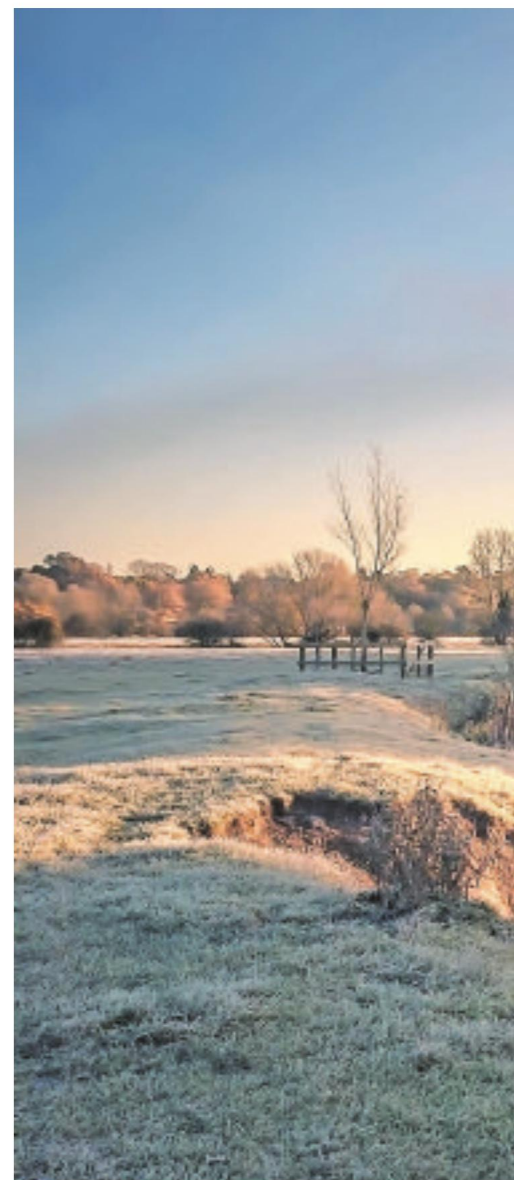
Whatever the weather, there is always plenty to see though - including never-ending skies, swans gracefully gliding down the river, grazing livestock, and if you're lucky, you may catch sight of an otter or two in the river.

**Admire the architecture:** Flatford is where you will find iconic landmarks such as Willy Lott's House - the Grade I-listed building which has been immortalised in Constable's 'Hay Wain'; and Flatford Mill, a water-powered mill that was once owned by the Constable family and features in a number of the artist's works.

Elsewhere, visitors can also marvel at Flatford Bridge Cottage, Flatford Granary, and Valley Farm - the latter of which was built in the mid-15th century, making it the hamlet's oldest building.

LEFT:  
Inside Thorington  
Hall

Picture: MIKE  
HENTON/  
NATIONAL TRUST



**Check out the John Constable exhibit:** Thanks to the National Trust, visitors to Flatford can learn more about the man who helped put the hamlet firmly on the map. The John Constable exhibition - which is free entry - explores his life, work and inspirations, helping paint a full picture of his life and his subsequent legacy.

## Where to eat in Flatford

**Flatford Tea Room:** As you're wandering around, be sure to stop off at Flatford Tea Room for a quick bite to eat this season. Under the care of the National Trust, this tea room serves a range of hot and cold drinks, hot and cold snacks and light snacks including warming soups and scones throughout the year to keep you feeling satisfied. During the winter months, the tea room tends to be open between 10am and 3.30pm - but be sure to check the National Trust website ahead of your visit.

**The Lion Brasserie, East Bergholt:** Just five minutes in the car, The Lion Brasserie in East Bergholt is a great spot for brunch, lunch or dinner that the whole family will enjoy. Firmly in the heart of Constable Country,

LEFT:  
Bridge Cottage at  
Flatford

Picture: NATIONAL  
TRUST IMAGES/  
JUSTIN MINNS





St Mary's Church in East Bergholt

Picture: BARRY PULLEN



The River Stour at Flatford in winter

Picture: NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/JUSTIN MINNS

this luxury bar and eatery is set within a 250-year-old building, and prides itself on serving locally-sourced fare, including fish from nearby Mersea Island, meat from Hadleigh, and fresh fruit and vegetables from Manningtree.

#### Places to visit near Flatford

**Dedham:** Next door to Flatford is the village of Dedham - a similarly quintessential spot that's certainly worth checking out if you have the time.

Officially an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, there's stretches of paths to walk along the River Stour where you can be sure to see some of the local wildlife. In addition, the Dedham Art & Craft Centre is the perfect place to have a wander, shop, and eat. Housed in a converted church, it is spread across three floors and showcases the work of over 60 talented artisans.

**East Bergholt:** No trip to Flatford would be complete without stopping off in East Bergholt - the birthplace of John Constable himself. Attractions worth having a gander at include St Mary's Church which was built in the 15th and 16th centuries, East Bergholt Place, Old Hall, and Stour House.

**ABOVE:**  
A winter's morning  
in Dedham

Picture:  
GETTY IMAGES/  
ISTOCKPHOTO

**RIGHT:**  
A frosty winter  
sunrise over Willy  
Lott's House in  
Flatford, Suffolk

Picture: NATIONAL  
TRUST IMAGES/  
JOHN MILLER

