

# On the Edge

The wild, beautiful coastline of North Norfolk is an ideal place to holiday at any time of year and, for Vanessa Berridge, it is a favourite place

**I**n North Norfolk, during the summer, you can buy locally grown strawberries and asparagus at roadside stalls or opt to pick your own. But this area of marshes and wide skies has a grandeur all of its own worth experiencing in any season. Manor Coach House, where I stay, is tucked into a corner of Cley-next-the-Sea. Not "on-the-sea", for the cluster of brick and flint cottages are set behind a windmill (now a restaurant), a mile inland on the salt marshes. It's all rather bijou, with craft galleries, a fancy deli and a smart second-hand bookshop. Narrow gunnels slot between neat cottages and gardens submerged by hollyhocks, sweet peas, roses and pink and red valerian bursting over every wall.

When I last visited, on a brisk spring day, we drank dark tea served in thick china mugs at the twitchers' hut on Cley beach. This has now been replaced by the sedum-roofed Cley Spy, which has a shop and café with views over the nature reserve. It's almost three miles across the marshes to Blakeney which, compared with sleepy

Cley, positively bustles with activity. There I enjoy a drink in the courtyard garden of the White Horse, which has an excellent menu, using local produce. But as I have bought a dressed crab earlier at the Blakeney Crab House, I return to my home-from-home to savour it there. This is no hardship because Manor Coach House is a welcoming place. Recently renovated, it sleeps up to six in three double

*"No visit to North Norfolk is complete without a cup of whelks, soused with vinegar and picked out with a pin"*

bedrooms, one with an en-suite wetroom. There's an appealing simplicity about the wooden floors, exposed beams and neutral colours throughout. Outside there are benches in the handkerchief of a garden, planted with box balls, French lavender, salvias, honeysuckle and roses.

I breakfast on local kippers one day at the café at Wiveton Hall fruit farm, looking out towards the sea between Blakeney and Cley. Open from April to November, it is housed in a converted 1970s barn and has a retro feel, with multi-

coloured chairs and tables covered with colourful flowery wax cloths.

In Wells-next-the-Sea I admire the dressed crab, lobster and other seafood displayed on a stall on the front. No visit to North Norfolk is complete without a cup of whelks, soused with vinegar and picked out with a pin.

Beyond is Holkham Beach whose expanse of sands is approached through a shelter

belt of pines, planted in the 19th century to improve dune stability and prevent sand from blowing on to farmland behind. The effect is eerily beautiful, providing a dark frame to the dazzling foreground of beach.

I also revisit the garden of the Old Vicarage at East Ruston, which has been magicked out of an inhospitable landscape wracked by coastal erosion and whipping winds.

Returning home, I visit moated Mannington Hall, another of North Norfolk's many delights.

■ Manor Coach House, Cley-next-the-Sea, Holt, Norfolk NR25 7RL (07957-331388; [www.manorcoachhousecley.co.uk](http://www.manorcoachhousecley.co.uk)) costs from £975 per week in high season. Short breaks cost from £375.

■ Wiveton Hall Fruit Farm and Café, Holt, Norfolk NR25 7TE (01263-74052; [www.wivetonhall.co.uk](http://www.wivetonhall.co.uk)).

■ Norfolk Wildlife Trust (01603-625540; [www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk)).

■ The Old Vicarage, East Ruston, Norfolk NR12 9HN (01692-650432; [www.e-ruston-oldvicaragegardens.co.uk](http://www.e-ruston-oldvicaragegardens.co.uk)).

■ Mannington Hall Gardens, NR11 7BB (01263-584175; [www.manningtongardens.co.uk](http://www.manningtongardens.co.uk)).

■ The 5th North Norfolk Music Festival ([www.northnorfolkmusicfestival.com](http://www.northnorfolkmusicfestival.com)) will be held this year from 4 to 13 September.