Orford
Explorer Guide

Bartholomew. Beside the river Ore, the quay faces mysterious Orford Ness. Cottages surround the dramatic Norman Castle and the ancient church of St Orford is a beautiful town on the Suffolk Coast. Streets of red brick are arranged in a grid pattern, a common sight at Orford. The town of Orford was historically an important port, and tower date from the early 1300s when the church was re-built to accommodate Orford's growing population. The church keep remains today. Originally there would have been a surrounding wall or 'bailey'. The castle is an effective navigation mark for shipping. From the castle roof you can savour views stretching for many miles.

Highlights of Orford

1. The Quay is a bustling place, with boats leaving for Orford Ness, children crabbing and fishermen returning with their catch. Many boats are drawn up on the shore in front of the black painted fishing sheds.

2. Orford Ness is a huge bank of shingle built as wave and tide move pebbles down the coast, a process known as 'long shore drift'. Behind this bank marshes and lagoons have formed that are home to wading birds, wildfowl, marsh harrier and hares. Each year the river mouth at the southern end of the shingle spit changes shape. The strange pagoda-like structures were used during the Cold War to develop and test nuclear bombs. Orford Ness is owned by the National Trust and holds the best preserved area of vegetated shingle in Europe, a globally rare and extremely fragile habitat. The Ore estuary and the Ness have international recognition as a nature reserve.

3. The River Ore starts life as the River Alde but changes its name at Orford. Shingle blocked the Alde’s former estuary at Aldeburgh, forcing it to run parallel to the coast for miles. The River’s winding has created islands and creeks, including Havergate Island. This RSPB reserve provides a summer habitat for breeding avocets and terns. In late summer, the salt marshes are washed blue and purple by the flowers of sea lavender.

Orford is a beautiful town on the Suffolk Coast. Streets of red brick cottages surround the dramatic, Norman Castle and the ancient church of St Bartholomew. Beside the river Ore, the quay faces mysterious Orford Ness.

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of Britain’s finest landscapes. It extends from the Stour Estuary in the south to the eastern fringe of Ipswich and, in the north, to Kessingland. It covers 403 square kilometres, including wildlife-rich wetlands, ancient heaths, windswept shingle beaches and historic towns and villages.

Orford was commissioned by Henry II and completed in 1173. Built to assert Henry's authority over the powerful Suffolk Barons, the castle keep remains today. The town of Orford has fine buildings, many constructed of warm, red brick. The roads are arranged in a grid pattern, a layout dating from the Norman period. Until the 16th Century, fishing and the wool trade brought prosperity to Orford. However, the growing shingle spit of Orford Ness cut off the harbour and Orford lost its buzzing port.

St Bartholomew’s Church dates from the mid to late 1100s. The oldest section is the ruined Norman chancel. The nave and tower date from the early 1300s when the church was re-built to accommodate Orford’s growing population. The church remains a beautiful building, with fine stained glass and a 19th century stone font.

Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB

www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org

Access via the B1078 or B1084 from Orford.

Key to Map

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Visiting Orford

Orford Explorer has been produced with the generous support of the National Trust at Orford Ness National Nature Reserve. 01728 648024
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/orford-ness

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‘Across the Marshes to the Castle’

Time: 2 hours  
Terrain: Paths and tracks, which can be muddy. The path along the river wall is exposed. Part of route on public roads. Please be aware of traffic. We recommend high visibility clothing.

Leave car park and turn left. Walk to quay and turn right along path beside river. Follow this path along river wall towards Chantry point. Round point and follow path as it leads along winding river wall. Ignore path that leads back across Chantry point.

Follow river wall around to left until path turns right and drops down off river wall towards gate. Go through gate and follow track inland. When you reach road, turn right.

Walk along lane until you come to wall of High House on left. Opposite end of wall, take footpath that leads off right. Follow path beside fields and across dyke to river wall. Turn right and follow path back to quay.

‘River and Village Stroll’

Time: 1 hour  
Terrain: Paths and tracks, which can be muddy. The path along the river wall is exposed. Part of route on public roads. Please be aware of traffic. We recommend high visibility clothing.

Leave car park and turn left. Walk to the quay and turn right along path beside river. 

Keep walking along river wall, away from the town, until you reach path that leads off right. Take this path as it drops down off the river wall and goes through gate. Turn right shortly after gate, along path that leads inland. Follow this path past sewage works and join access track.

Walk across Market Hill and enter churchyard beside King’s Head Inn. Walk up to church porch and turn right. Leave churchyard by second gate and turn left along lane (if you want to shorten route, walk straight down road to quay). Follow lane for short while, before taking first turning right. At end of lane, turn left.


The area has a network of footpaths and bridleways. We have shown suggested routes on this map. Here are a few simple suggestions to help you enjoy the area safely and assist our work in caring for it.

Follow the Countryside Code:

- Protect plants and animals, control fires and take your litter home.
- Dogs are very welcome, please keep them under close control at all times and on lead as advised.
- Thank you.

Find out more about the Countryside Code: www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk