



Exploring Suffolk's Heritage

a guide for parents and teachers
of children with autism

David Blakesley and Tharada Blakesley

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www.autismandnature.org.uk

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Authors' Foreword and Acknowledgements

Suffolk has some fantastic museums of rural life, several castles, a wealth of mediaeval buildings set in picturesque towns and villages, and some exciting archaeological sites. Suffolk's heritage, coupled with its natural landscapes, has attracted many artists, musicians and writers to the county. Families planning a day out in Suffolk today may be spoilt for choice. This guide sets out to help parents, carers and teachers to engage children with autism and related disabilities with Suffolk's heritage.

Whilst the guide does not provide solutions to the many difficulties associated with autism and related disabilities, it does seek to offer appropriate information to make visits to the heritage places featured as relaxed and enjoyable as possible, so that the benefits can be accessed by all the family. Where possible, we have selected heritage places that are located in the countryside, by the sea, or set in gardens, offering a calm place for children to retire to during a visit. The description of each location should help parents and carers to judge its suitability for their child. Preparation for a visit to a new place can be very important. Many children with autism appreciate being shown pictures of their destination, so we have included photographs in the guide that we hope children will find attractive. Many of the places featured require dogs to be kept on leads, whilst several only allow assistance dogs, which may help children with autism who are scared of dogs.

The guide has been generously funded by four funds administered by Suffolk Community Foundation including: The Skinner's Family Fund; the Kingsfleet Community Fund and the Catalyst Fund. It has also been generously funded by Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Amenity and Accessibility Fund; Nineveh Charitable Trust; and Baily Thomas Charitable Fund. We are grateful to Andrew Powling, Catherine Smith and Peter Buckley for reviewing various sections of the text. We would also like to thank all the organisations who own and/or manage the heritage places featured in this guide for kindly providing comments on our descriptions of their sites. We would also like to thank Suffolk County Council for providing maps of the Suffolk AONBs and Suffolk Wildlife Trust for kindly allowing us to use their map of Suffolk. We would especially like to thank Activities Unlimited for their help with the distribution of this guide.

We are also indebted to Peter and Barbara Creed (Pisces Publications) for the design of the guide and Alison Brown (NatureBureau) for reading the proofs. Photographs were taken by David Blakesley with additional photographs by Tone Blakesley.

Part 1 Introduction

This guide aims to help parents, carers and teachers to engage children with autism and related disabilities, and their families, with Suffolk's historical and cultural heritage. For many children, outings to heritage places may not feature in their everyday lives, yet these can be inspiring and fun places for any child to visit. If a child really enjoys visiting a heritage place, and they return with their family, it could become a special place offering comfort and relaxation, as well as learning, and might stimulate a new interest for the child.

Museums may have interactive exhibits that children can touch, smell or listen to that will inspire and help them to learn about Suffolk's heritage. The Tide Mill for example has a working model of the mill and an interactive activity that enables children to discover how the cogs in the mill actually work. Some heritage places have information and fun activities for schools that might also help parents and carers to support a visit with their child. Check websites for information on educational activities for schools or contact the education officer. Some places, such as Sutton Hoo, have activity-backpacks that a child can borrow for the duration of their visit. Many children with autism have special interests, and certain places featured in this guide might appeal more than others. For example, there are places that would appeal to children interested in horses (Suffolk Punch Trust); steam trains (Mid-Suffolk Light Railway); buses and trams (East Anglia Transport Museum); aircraft (Norfolk and Suffolk Aviation Museum); fossils (Southwold Museum); and archaeology (Sutton Hoo). The town of Lavenham might appeal to fans of Harry Potter, as film scenes set in the fictional village of Godric's Hollow were filmed in the town. Visits to heritage places might inspire children to find new interests, perhaps in some of the examples listed above. Visits might also be beneficial to a child's social skills and well-being.

Greyfriars Monastery, Dunwich



Finding suitable heritage places to visit with a child with autism can be challenging, and it can be difficult to anticipate problems that might arise when walking around a museum or gallery with a child with autism. Some heritage places are located in busy town centres or may themselves be busy at certain times. Where possible, we have selected heritage places for inclusion in this guide that are in a rural location, by the sea, or have their own garden. These places offer families the opportunity of somewhere quiet to go if a child becomes overwhelmed during a visit. For example, families visiting the museum at Gainsborough's House or The Red House can relax in a quiet, calming garden. Families visiting the Norfolk and Suffolk Aviation Museum can follow the short boardwalk down to the River Waveney; they may decide to explore the static display of aircraft in the grounds, and not go into the hangars that are packed with exhibits and might be overwhelming for some children. Visitors to Southwold and Aldeburgh can stroll along the shingle beach with their child, whilst Orford Castle is a short distance from Orford quayside and the Suffolk Coastal Path; this can be a tranquil spot with wide ranging views across the Ore Estuary to Orford Ness and Havergate Island. Other locations such as Leiston Abbey, Suffolk Punch Trust and Sutton Hoo are located in the countryside. Most of our featured places have quiet spaces within them, or nearby where parents can retire to if a child becomes anxious during their visit.

Visiting a heritage place for the first time represents a change in routine that might cause anxiety to a child with autism. There could be elements of the experience that some children might find challenging; parents might be concerned about factors such as lighting (too bright, too dim or transitions between the two), sound (from videos for example), interactive displays or the presence of mannequins (some with a recorded voice). Whether a place is busy at certain times might be particularly important. Some children with autism may express particular anxieties themselves before a visit, such as: how far will they have to walk? will they get back in time for the next activity? will it be noisy? will there will be dogs off lead?, and so on. We hope that the information provided in this guide about these, and many other issues will help adults to judge the suitability of the various places for their child and, critically, help with planning so that any issues can be managed or avoided.

East Anglia Transport Museum (TONE BLAKESLEY)



Planning your visit

Planning and preparation for a visit to a new place is very important, to ensure that a child enjoys their experience. In this guide, we present information that will help parents and carers to prepare their children, as best they can, for a visit to a particular heritage place. As with any activity, we recommend that parents, carers and teachers assess the risks of such a visit.

For all children, there may be real risks associated with a new environment, such as steps to climb, unprotected machinery, open water and so on. For each of the places included in the guide, in the information bar and the accompanying text, we have highlighted some of the issues that parents and carers might be concerned about, such as: quiet areas in which to relax; how busy the venue is; areas that might over stimulate or overwhelm a child; admission charge; can a shop or café be avoided when arriving; and so on. However, as autism is a spectrum disorder and every child is different, there may be issues that are not covered in this book, or on the website of the venue.

If parents or carers are concerned about a particular place, a family member could visit first to assess its suitability for their child. They could also use this opportunity to take a few photographs or a short video to show their child, or make into a visual schedule. We hope that the photographs in this guide will be useful to show children, and we have also highlighted some websites with images that children can look at. If making a pre-visit is difficult, readers should consult the information in this book, visit the website, and telephone the venue if necessary with any specific queries or concerns, such as the dates of special events, which could ruin a visit if a place is very busy on a particular day.

Suffolk Punch Trust



Here are a few tips on how to prepare for an outing to a heritage place with your child, pupil or friend with autism. Careful planning means that, as far as possible, you can select suitable locations, avoid the unexpected and reduce anxiety for the child with autism. For example:

- Use visual supports and timetables to prepare a child before the outing; the photographs in this guide and photographs or videos on the website of the venue might help
- A sketch map of a walk might be helpful – you could estimate how long to go from one stage to another, for example “in so many minutes we’ll be back at the entrance”
- Check the distance to be walked, the terrain and whether there are any steep steps
- Check if interactive exhibits are suitable for your child
- Check on availability of refreshments and toilets
- Consider visiting at quieter times (contact the venue)
- Check if there are areas that would be best avoided, due to noise, challenging lighting or number of visitors
- Check if there are quieter areas to escape noise, crowds, lights etc.
- Do the necessary risk assessments – essential if you are a support worker
- Have a plan in case your child becomes separated from you
- Have some games to play or activities that you can do while going along.

Planning a visit can help to minimise stress and make a visit relaxing and enjoyable, that might otherwise have been daunting. We hope that this guide and the accounts of the heritage places will help to achieve this.

West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village

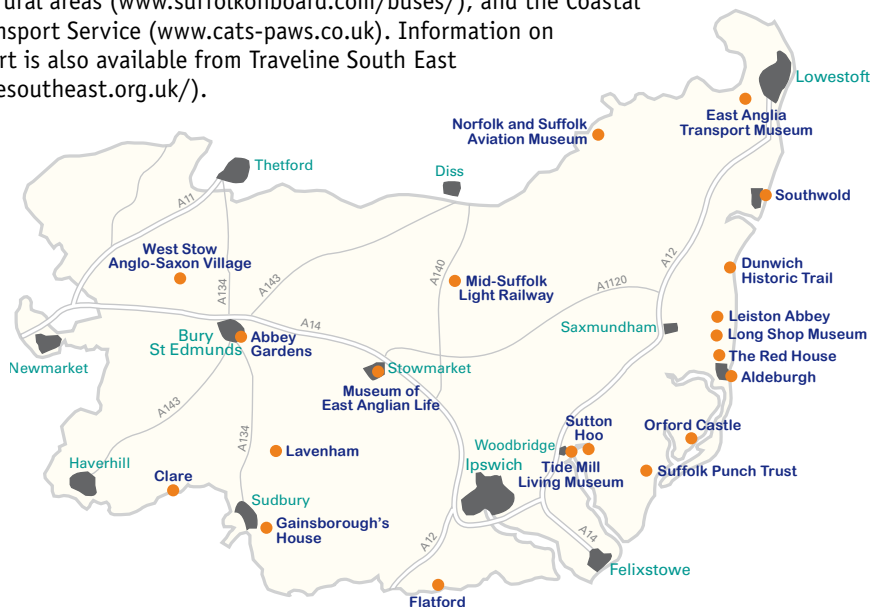


Part 2 Heritage places to visit in Suffolk

Suffolk is a rural county that has a rich cultural and natural heritage. It is well known for its agricultural landscapes, rich wildlife habitat and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB (page 21) is perhaps most familiar to families for traditional seaside towns like Southwold, archaeological sites such as Sutton Hoo and villages with 'Suffolk Pink'-washed cottages; the area has inspired artists, writers and musicians. Dedham Vale AONB & Stour Valley Project (page 37) has been captured through the paintings of artists such as John Constable and Thomas Gainsborough, and today visitors head for its picturesque towns and villages such as Clare and Dedham, and their museums and churches.

Suffolk is also well known for its Wool Towns, of which Lavenham, with its magnificent mediaeval timber-framed buildings, is one of the best examples. The town's Crooked Houses Trail is an excellent way for families to discover buildings that tilt, overhang the pavement, or are just plain crooked. Bury St Edmunds offers the opportunity to explore the ruins of an 11th century abbey, set in the peaceful Abbey Gardens, next to the magnificent St Edmundsbury cathedral. There are also some remarkable museums to interest families in Suffolk, including the Norfolk and Suffolk Aviation Museum, East Anglia Transport Museum and the Museum of East Anglian Life. Children fascinated by steam might enjoy a visit to the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway or the chance to see static engines in the Long Shop Museum. Others might prefer to discover the Anglo-Saxon treasure of kings, excavated at the Sutton Hoo ship burial. We hope that families will visit these, and many of the other heritage places featured in this guide.

Before visiting the places featured in the guide, we recommend readers look at the relevant websites. Many include leaflets or maps and details of public transport. More information to help plan journeys by public transport is available from Suffolk County Council, including Suffolk Links, which is a demand-responsive transport service providing connections to bus and train links in many rural areas (www.suffolkonboard.com/buses/), and the Coastal Accessible Transport Service (www.cats-paws.co.uk). Information on public transport is also available from Traveline South East (www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk/).



i Iliffe Way car park and the museum are signposted on the B1115 in the centre of Stowmarket (IP14 1DE)

- Public transport: buses to Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds stop on Bury Street, 275 m from the museum (Mon to Sat); the railway station is 600 m from museum
- Museum open Tues to Sun, late Mar to Oct (check website for details); admission charge (carer free); pay-and-display car park (175 m from entrance)
- Abbot's Hall and garden open April to Oct and some days in Dec (check website), admission free
- Accessible toilets and café in museum, accessible toilets in Abbot's Hall
- Children's play area in museum grounds (300 m from entrance)
- Terrain: 'easy route' around site has firm surfaces with gentle inclines; uneven surfaces along other paths and nature trail; electric buggy available; access statement on website and DisabledGo website
- Stairs in several buildings (lift in Abbot's Hall)
- Several buildings have low lighting and machinery
- Small animal area with hand wash stations
- Unfenced river along Nature Trail; several ponds including one with deep water
- Assistance dogs only in Abbot's Hall; elsewhere dogs should be on lead
- Site map available on website and in reception (not to scale).

Museum of East Anglian Life

so much to see and learn ...

The Museum of East Anglian Life is a fascinating place to visit, offering something of interest for many children with autism and their families. Download the site map to show your child where you will be walking (note this is not to scale). The grounds are extensive (30 hectares), and parents should be aware that the distance between some buildings is deceptive; whilst Home Close is close to the entrance; the industrial zone is 300 m from the entrance; and the historic hamlet is a further 500 m. Exploring Home Close, your child's attention might be drawn to the colourful collection of gypsy wagons and a Fairground showman's wagon, some dating back to the 19th century. Imagine travelling and living in such a colourful wagon! In the former animal houses you will find old wooden toys such as a doll's house, various games and teddy bears sitting on a shelf. You can talk to your child about life in the past, as home interiors are displayed, including a Victorian kitchen and bedroom. Your child can sit in a Victorian classroom, and perhaps play with the giant abacus at the front of the class. Shops are also recreated, including a tailor's, chemist's and grocer's.

The industrial zone also has a lot of interesting exhibits. Your child might be amazed to learn that Edgar's Farmhouse was originally built somewhere else! It was reconstructed at the museum; the wooden beams are constructed with pegs, not nails or screws. There are two models of the timber-frame joints that children can take apart, and then attempt to reassemble. Nearby, the Bobby Building displays a wide range of objects relating to Suffolk's rural heritage.

The Bobby Building



On entering you will find yourself up close to a magnificent Steam Ploughing Engine, originally constructed in 1879. Static displays relate to weaving, and the making of bricks, clocks, wheels and ropes. Children can investigate a treasure tub of ropes of many different sizes. Some children might find the Letterpress Printing of particular interest – they will be able to handle the letter blocks and on certain days see the printing press in action (contact museum for details), perhaps printing a poster of their name! On the first floor you will find the working mechanism of the Stowmarket Parish Church clock, made circa 1620. Your child might be fascinated to watch the giant cogs turning, and the pendulum swinging to and fro.

More grand traction engines are housed in the Mortlock building; you can get very close to these engines, but some children may find the smell of oil overwhelming. Close by is a small play area, that is likely to attract many children. Before you leave the industrial area, be sure to visit the Blacksmith's Forge. It would be hard to imagine more tools and equipment packed into this small space! If your child still has plenty of energy, walk to Home Farm to see animals such as rabbits, goats, sheep, pigs and chickens. From here, you can visit the water mill in the historic hamlet, or wander along the nature trail past the windpump and along Rattlesden River (the full trail is approximately 2 km). If you are lucky, you might spot a kingfisher as it flashes past. Finally, Abbot's Hall and gardens also lie within the museum grounds, close to the entrance. Your child might particularly enjoy walking round the Walled Garden, run as a Victorian kitchen garden, looking for vegetables that they are perhaps familiar with.

www.eastanglianlife.org.uk/home.html

www.disabledgo.com/access-guide/suffolk-county-council/abbots-hall-2

Steam traction engine



Stowmarket clock



i On the B1062 at Flixton, approximately 2 miles southwest of Bungay in the north of the county (NR35 1NZ)

- No suitable public transport
- Open April to October, Sun to Thurs; Nov to March Tues, Wed and Sun (closed Dec 15 to Jan 15); free admission and car park
- Accessible toilets, café serving light refreshments
- Several picnic tables
- Terrain: level, firm surfaces; typical walk around the main hangars 300 m; typical walk around the aircraft displayed outdoors 400 m
- Several wheelchairs available to borrow; younger children can be pushed around the hangars in wooden model aeroplanes if available (helicopter, biplane and spitfire)
- No heating, so buildings are cold in winter
- Link Trainer (flight simulator) may be in operation, ask museum staff; many mannequins around the museum
- Raised boardwalk to the River Waveney (320 m return)
- Dogs should be on a lead
- Map of site and good range of photographs on website.

Norfolk and Suffolk Aviation Museum

so close to real aircraft...

This is a museum that might interest older children with autism, especially those fascinated by aircraft and aviation. Other children, who have no special interest, may still be excited when they first see the grounds of the Aviation Museum from the road. As you turn in, past a Gloster Javelin and follow the drive to the car park, you pass fourteen more aircraft, all parked just alongside the drive. Rather than go into the main exhibition in the hangars, your child might want to explore the grounds first, to get a closer look at the static aircraft. You will find several early RAF and Royal Navy jets, together with several aircraft from overseas, including an Argentinian Pucara and a Czech MiG. The largest of these aircraft, just a few metres from the car park is a Vickers Valetta, a transport aircraft used by the RAF. Close by is a Hawker Hunter, standing just outside the main hangar. You cannot touch most of these aircraft, but you can get to within a few metres of them. Surely a new and thrilling experience for many children with autism.

Explain to your child that the museum was set up close to the former Flixton Airfield, to preserve something of the history of the airfield, and the history of aviation in Suffolk and Norfolk. Inside the hangars you will find more aircraft, and an amazing display of aircraft artefacts, including just about everything associated with aviation in Eastern England. Hangar 1 for example, includes a Spitfire, Sea Harrier and English Electric Lightning, together with two training aircraft. As you walk past these aircraft, your child's

Hawker Hunter



eyes might be drawn to glass display cases packed with model aircraft, both military and civil. Close by is a reconstructed partial cockpit from an English Electric Canberra; your child can sit in the pilot's seat, hold the control wheel, flip the switches and look at the compass and other dials. There is also a scale model of a spitfire cockpit for younger children to sit in. Another interactive exhibit that might interest your child is a telegraph key for tapping out Morse code, with a chart showing the code for letters and numerals. Perhaps they could tap out their name? Parents should note that almost every square metre of space in the hangar seems to have been utilised for the displays. Some children with autism might find this overwhelming, unless you are able to focus their attention, for example on the items mentioned above. There are several other rooms to explore in the same building displaying other large exhibits including biplanes, helicopters, aircraft engines, armoured cars, radio equipment and many more cases of model aircraft and other artefacts. Behind the shop there are glass cases exhibiting more models and toys relating to aircraft.

Around the site, there are several small museums dedicated to individual squadrons, including the 446th Bomber Group that was originally based at Flixton Airfield, and the Royal Observer Corps. These have narrow corridors and may be of less interest to your child, especially if they have spent some time at the museum already. Before you leave, there is a short but very pleasant walk behind the museum, down to the River Waveney. Adair Walk follows a boardwalk for 160 m or so across a damp area of rough vegetation planted with cricket bat willows. This is a peaceful walk, and may allow time to reflect with your child on what they have seen.

www.aviationmuseum.net/

Vickers Valetta



Sea Harrier in Hangar 1 (TONE BLAKESLEY)



i From the A140, approximately 7 miles north of Needham Market, take the minor road to Wetheringsett, following the brown signs to the Railway Museum, which is 0.6 miles south of Wetheringsett (IP14 5PW)

- No suitable public transport
- Open every Sunday in the summer, Bank Holidays, and occasionally at other times of the year (check website for details); admission charge (tickets allow holders to visit for up to 12 months, excluding special events); large car park in field opposite the site (150 m from the station ticket office) and disabled car park adjacent to the station (70 m)
- Regular trains on open days offering short train rides, small museum of artefacts and model trains
- Accessible toilets; café and shop separated from entrance (check museum website for details)
- Terrain: mostly firm and level surfaces; typical walk around site 400 m
- Wheelchairs can be accommodated on trains (note there is a gap between the carriages and platform)
- No barriers in engine workshops to prevent children reaching out for tools and other materials
- Dogs may be encountered off lead
- Selection of photographs on the website.

Mid-Suffolk Light Railway

steam train rides!

If your child is interested in trains, as many children with autism are, a visit to the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway (MSLR) might offer a very enjoyable experience. Also known as 'The Middy', the MSLR is the only steam railway in Suffolk. The railway is situated in the heart of the Suffolk countryside, therefore the only people you are likely to encounter are visitors to the railway itself. Parents should be aware that it can be busy at any time, particularly on Bank Holiday weekends. The highlight of your visit might be a ride on a steam train, from Brockford Station to Dovebrook Station. Explain to your child that the railway track is currently just 400 m in length, so the journey time between the two stations is about three minutes. Steam trains typically pull three quite different restored Victorian coaches, including: a third-class coach with wooden seats; a third-class coach modified to include a first-class saloon, with soft seats surrounding a square table, and a separate compartment for the guard; and a first-class carriage dating back to 1863, with several compartments (originally designed as 'lounges') that include soft seats and a central round table.

On steam days, trains run regularly and you can have as many rides as you wish. This would give your child the opportunity to travel in each of the three carriages. You can assure your child that their ticket allows them to travel in the first-class carriage! Visitors in wheelchairs can travel with the guard in the third-class carriage.

LNER Y7 No.985 (TONE BLAKESLEY)



Children might also find the platform of interest, as it looks very much as it might have done when the railway was in operation, more than 50 years ago. Milk churns stand alongside porters' trolleys stacked with leather suitcases. Volunteers who work on the railway also wear original uniforms to add to the authenticity of the experience. There are workshops close to the station platform that some children will find very exciting. In 2017, one contained a 'Saddle Tank' locomotive, originally built in 1923, that was being completely overhauled (see photograph below); the engine's saddle tanks had been removed and the boiler sent away for restoration; work was underway in the other workshop to restore an old coach. Parents and carers should note that visitors have relatively open access to the workshops, which means that engineering tools and equipment are within reach of children. There is also an unguarded inspection pit under one of the wagons in the workshop.

Elsewhere, children can see various examples of restored, 19th and early 20th century rolling stock in the sidings, including a brake van, a ventilated van and various open freight wagons (these terms may mean more to some children than others!). A fire engine that was in service from 1981 to 1995 is often parked close to the railway line, where it is used to fill steam locomotives with water. During special events, one or two traction engines might also be in steam. Finally, no visit would be complete without a visit to the small exhibition hall that houses various railway artefacts and a range of model trains of different gauges.

www.mslr.org.uk

Rolling stock



Workshop



i The museum is on Chapel Road, just off the A1145 (Castleton Avenue) in Carlton Colville (Lowestoft); follow the brown signs depicting a tram (NR33 8BL)

- Public transport: buses from Beccles and Southwold (Mon to Sat) and Lowestoft (Mon to Sun) stop adjacent to the museum
- Open April to October, check website as opening days vary each month; admission charge and free car park (close to a busy road)
- Event days: check website for details of park-and-ride, as there is no parking at the museum on these days, when the site may be very busy
- Accessible toilets, café serving light refreshments
- Terrain: level, mostly firm surfaces; some cobblestoned areas challenging for wheelchairs (typical walk around the museum 500 m)
- Trams and trolleybuses cannot accommodate wheelchairs
- Narrow gauge railway accommodates wheelchairs
- Dogs should be on a lead
- Map of site available and good range of photographs on the website.

East Anglia Transport Museum

tram and trolleybus rides!

The East Anglia Transport Museum offers an excellent opportunity for your child to experience how much street transport and street scenes have changed in Suffolk over the past hundred years or so. This will be immediately evident, as the entrance to the museum is adjacent to the 'Chapel Road Terminus'. On a typical day, you will find two trams and a trolleybus parked here. These vehicles offer short rides around the site; volunteers will inform you which will be the next to leave. Tell your child not to worry when the conductor clips their ticket, as they can have as many rides as they wish! The tramway runs over a distance of 300 m or so, initially on the museum street and then through woodland to Hedley Grove picnic area, before returning along the same route (you have the option to walk back if you wish). If your child has travelled by bus, they will find that riding on a tram is a very different experience – they may notice the sound is different for example, the seats on the upper deck are reversible, and the seats in the Blackpool tram are made of wood. They will also notice the rails upon which the tram runs and the overhead electric power cables. The trolleybus is similar to a bus, as it runs on rubber tyres, but it is also powered by electricity from overhead wires. Some children with autism might prefer the trolleybus, as it offers a smoother ride, and is much quieter than the trams. Each ride on the trolleybus takes you around the site three times, covering a distance of 1 km. Your child will get a better view of the site if they are able to climb the steep

Trams



steps to the upper deck of the vehicles. Explain to your child that trams once operated in Lowestoft and Ipswich in the first part of the 20th century; trolleybuses replaced trams in Ipswich, but they were phased out by the early '60s.

As you walk along the museum street (partly cobbled), ask your child to look out for the old post boxes, phone boxes, street signs and other street furniture. Along the way you will pass an old post office which you can go into, a taxi office and a shop front. You will also walk past a bus depot where many of the museum's fleet of old buses are parked (you cannot walk around the depot or get on the buses for safety reasons). The museum also has several exhibition halls, housing various old vehicles and transport artefacts. These include a 1937 Austin London taxi-cab, an electric milk float dating from the 1940s, a Morris Minor van from the late 1960s and an enormous steam roller called "Stormer". Ask your child to look out for the Reliant car that runs on three wheels!

Finally, you can have as many rides as you wish on the East Suffolk Light Railway. This is a short ride over a distance of 300 m return, pulled by an industrial diesel locomotive. Despite the relatively short length of track, many children will enjoy the ride (some children may find it a little bumpy and noisy). Next to the station is a fully equipped signal box; you cannot enter, but your child will be able to climb the steps and look through the open door at the many levers.

<http://eatransportmuseum.co.uk/>

London bus



Trolleybus





From the A134 Bury St Edmunds to Sudbury road, take the A1141 south to Lavenham; parking on High Street and in the Market Place opposite Lavenham Guildhall museum; small car park in Prentice Street (off Market Place) and larger car park in Church Street (B1071)

- Public transport: bus service from Sudbury and Bury St Edmunds (Mon to Sat)
- Guildhall open daily, admission charge (free for up to two carers); note entrance opposite car park
- Toilets in both car parks; accessible toilet in Guildhall; many eating places in the town
- Play area on Water Street
- Terrain: level pavements in the vicinity of the Guildhall; parking in Church Street or following the Crooked Houses Trail (distance of 700 m) around the town entails walking down and back up a gentle slope; access statement on the Guildhall Museum website and on the DisabledGo website
- Guildhall includes staircases to upper floor and cellar
- Assistance dogs only in the Guildhall
- Crooked Houses Trail guide available and good range of photographs on the National Trust website, which also has an easy to follow map of Lavenham.

Lavenham

timber-framed and crooked houses...

Lavenham was once a prosperous wool town with impressive timber-framed cottages. The subsequent decline in the weaving industry meant that many buildings were not modified. Visiting Lavenham today is like travelling back in time to a mediaeval, 15th century village; several hundred timber-framed cottages remain. Your child may enjoy following the Crooked Houses Trail, which starts outside the Guildhall. To make this more engaging, the trail guide does not name streets, but gives compass directions (you can borrow a compass from the Guildhall). This short trail (700 m) passes many buildings that your child might find very interesting – they may wonder why the cottages have not fallen down! There are buildings that tilt in one direction or another; others are just plain crooked! The cottages are also painted in a range of pastel colours, and at one point the trail guide asks you to look down the street and count how many different coloured houses you can see. Perhaps your child has a favourite colour?

There are two museums in Lavenham, the Guildhall and Little Hall. Both museums are fascinating places to visit, telling stories of life in Lavenham in the past, but the Guildhall might be especially interesting for families with a child with autism. The museum is a tactile place – children can touch many of the exhibits on display. On the ground floor, children can see examples of the famous Lavenham Blue Woollen Broadcloth and touch soft sheep's wool

The Guildhall



that is ready for spinning. Down a steep staircase, the cool cellar houses several barrels, one of which – at 112 gallons – is taller than most children! Upstairs, the first room you come to is the Bridewell, where paupers convicted of petty crimes were punished. There are some seated stocks here – your child could actually sit in them to see how it feels! Next to the Bridewell is the Workhouse – explain to your child that this is where poor people, including children, worked long hours to spin hemp, flax or yarn. There are 18th century ‘apprentice uniforms’ to try on (children can put these over their clothes, to avoid the feel of unfamiliar cloth against their skin), wooden looms, and furniture to touch around the room. A vintage typewriter sits on a desk in the ‘Early 20th Century Room’ – many children will be fascinated to try their hand at typing a message, rather more slowly perhaps than on their mobile or tablet! Strung luggage tags hang from a wooden frame, all bearing visitor’s thoughts and messages. Ask your child to write something about the museum, and display their label with many others.

The Guildhall also has a pleasant courtyard garden, with a bench to sit on under a very old hazel tree. Some of the plants in the garden are grown to produce natural dyes for wool. There is also a small village jailhouse here – not a pleasant place to be locked up. If your child needs some play time after visiting the Guildhall or walking round the Crooked Houses Trail, there is a play area on the Common at the end of Water Street (A1141) heading out of Lavenham towards Hadleigh, approximately 350 m from High Street.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lavenham-guildhall

www.disabledgo.com/access-guide/suffolk-county-council/lavenham-guildhall-2

www.littlehall.org.uk/

Crooked Houses Trail





Abbey Gardens are close to Bury St Edmunds town centre, entrances include those on Angel Hill Crown and Mustow Street (IP33 1LS)

- Public transport: bus station on St Andrews Street North, 650 m walk to Abbey Gardens; railway station on Station Hill, 1 km walk (pavement but busy roads)
- Open daily (check website for opening hours) and free admission (note some gates are locked earlier than others); pay-and-display car park (up to 2 hours) opposite Abbey Gate entrance is the most convenient; long stay pay-and-display car park on Cotton Lane (250 m to Mustow Street entrance along busy road)
- Gardens sometimes used for events
- Toilets and café serving light refreshments in gardens
- Children's play area and crazy golf in gardens; skittles, ring toss and Connect 4 outside games for hire (ranger's shop)
- Terrain: generally flat, surfaced paths and lawns (small flights of steps in places); typical walk around the Abbey 1 km
- Ruined walls of different heights
- Sensory garden close to Abbey Gate
- Aviaries with small selection of exotic birds
- Unfenced pond and River Lark (along the eastern boundary)
- Dogs should be on a lead
- Information panels and model of abbey in gardens; map of grounds on boards around the gardens.

Abbey Gardens

a ruined abbey, cathedral and tranquil gardens...

Abbey Gardens offer a peaceful sanctuary in the centre of bustling Bury St Edmunds. Within the gardens lie the ruins of Bury St Edmunds Abbey, built in the 11th and 12th centuries and once one of the richest monasteries in England. An artist's impression on the Cathedral website shows how the abbey would have looked in the 16th century, before the dissolution of the monasteries. Show this to your child as you walk around the ruins. The Abbey Gate, Cathedral, St Mary's Church and the Norman Tower are all that survive of the complex of church buildings – the abbey itself is now in ruins. Try to identify the buildings as you walk around the ruined towers and walls with your child. Information panels also illustrate what the abbey would have looked like, before the dressed stone was removed and the walls collapsed. Walk up to the foundations of the abbey with your child, to allow them to feel the rough texture of these ancient walls, but they should be careful not climb on the walls. As you stand on the grass in the centre of what was once the nave or the choir, ask your child if they can imagine what the building might have looked like in the 12th century!

Explore the gardens to discover the Old English Rose Garden, full of fragrance in the summer months. Close by is the Pilgrim's Herb Garden, with fragrant plants that might stimulate the senses of a child with autism. Children might like to touch the polished metal surface of the 1.5 m high teardrop that is the centre piece of the Garden of Reflection (even if they are too young to understand what the garden commemorates). The water garden has an unfenced

Abbey ruins



pond with Koi carp, but the garden can only be accessed through a gate. Special food for the carp is available from the ranger's shop at certain times. Close to the Abbey Gate, a sensory garden offers a place to sit with your child and reflect on your visit, with plants chosen to appeal to the senses that are tactile or scented. Some children might enjoy watching water gently cascading down the water feature in the centre of the garden. From here, you might also hear the calls of birds in the aviaries – if your child is comfortable with seeing birds in cages, they will find some very colourful species, including parrots, lorikeets, budgerigars and rainbow lorikeets. There is a small play area by the river.

After walking around Abbey Gardens, your child might be interested to visit the magnificent St Edmundsbury Cathedral, just a short walk (100 m) from Abbey Gate. The cathedral is open every day, entry is free but donations are welcomed. Your child may be amazed by the high roof, supported by tall pillars and the enormous sense of space in the building; they may look in wonder at the beautiful knave and choir, and the colourful stained glass windows. At the back of the nave, a Lego model of the cathedral is being constructed, which might interest many children (although they are not allowed to touch). A cartoon-style leaflet is available that gives children some information about the story of King Edmund, who ruled East Anglia in the 9th century. The cathedral has five choirs, one of which may be practising when you visit; some children might find the choral music relaxing or even moving to listen to.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/bury-st-edmunds-abbey/
www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/leisure/Parks/abbey-gardens.cfm
www.stedscathedral.co.uk/

Abbey Gardens



Cathedral





From the A1101 Mildenhall to Bury St Edmunds road just north of Lackford, follow the brown signs along the minor road for 0.8 miles (IP28 6HG)

- No suitable public transport
- Open daily, except over the Christmas period (check website for details and opening hours); admission charge (children under five and carer free), note entry is through the visitor centre shop; pay-and-display car park
- Accessible toilets and café
- Children's play area
- Terrain: museum galleries and Visitor Centre are wheelchair accessible via ramps; village is in a grassy field, with a slight incline (wheelchair accessible with assistance), typical walk around site 700 m; Beowulf and Grendel Trail follows uneven grassy or earth paths (1.3 km)
- Galleries dimly lit in places, with illuminated display cases
- Anglo-Saxon houses: dark inside, may contain embers in fire places and smell of smoke
- Mannequins in the museum
- Pigs in an enclosure in the village (not in winter)
- Unfenced river along Beowulf Trail
- Assistance dogs only in the village, but dogs may be encountered off lead in the country park
- Village map available in the Visitor Centre; small charge for Beowulf Interactive Trail pack.

West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village and Country Park

explore a fantastic archaeological site...

For any child interested in history, this is a fantastic place to visit. Entry to the site is via the Anglo-Saxon themed gift shop in the Visitor Centre, from where you can explore the archaeology gallery and/or the Anglo-Saxon museum, or head straight to the village itself. The archaeology gallery is a room in the Visitor Centre, where a short video about the history of the site is played on a loop. The lighting is subdued, but there are well-lit wall mounted display cases housing artefacts collected in and around West Stow, from the time of the dinosaurs through more recent Ice Ages and the Neolithic to Anglo-Saxon times. Everything is well labelled, allowing you to talk to your child about the items on display. Some children might be amazed to see the vertebrae of a plesiosaur and the enormous ammonite, others might be interested in the Bronze Age flint arrow heads, or perhaps the Anglo-Saxon artefacts and swords.

Heading out to the village itself, you first pass a compound with rare breed pigs that Anglo-Saxon villagers would have kept (the pigs are not present over the winter). Close by is the archaeological 'mini-dig' (open at weekends and school holidays), where your child can dig for artefacts in sand pits. If they like the feel of sand on their hands, they should love this activity. Posters provide more information about life in the village. The collection of buildings in front of you represents a range of different types of wooden

Sunken house



homes, reconstructed using ancient Anglo-Saxon methods, on the site of the original Anglo-Saxon settlement at West Stow. Your child may be keen to look at all the houses, so you can explore each one in turn. The map provided in the Visitor Centre shows the position of each house, and provides information about them. You can walk into many of the buildings, but you should be aware that most of them do not have windows, so they are quite dark. Some have a hearth in the middle that may have a fire or glowing embers; the low light, coupled with the smells of smoke and the materials used to construct the houses, should give your child a real sensory experience of what it was like to live in an Anglo-Saxon village. You may feel that you are walking in the footsteps of the villagers. The Living House for example has raised platforms with animal skins laid out across them, where people would have slept. If the low light levels are difficult for your child, there is one building – the workshop – that has windows and is therefore brighter than the other houses. It has wattle and daub walls and a thatched roof. The nearby hall has two doors, so it too is not quite as dark as the other houses.

The museum is close to the Visitor Centre and artificial hobbit house (note this is only a door). The museum contains a wide range of artefacts collected in and around West Stow. There are interactive exhibits, including a dressing-up station for your child to dress like an Anglo-Saxon, and a replica helmet to try on. If your child still has plenty of energy, you could follow the Beowulf and Grendel Adventure Trail through the country park to find six large themed sculptures. An Interactive Trail Pack, purchased from the Visitor Centre, includes a Rune quiz, map and other activities.

www.weststow.org

The Hall



Beowulf Trail





From the A12 (south), take the A1094 signposted to Aldeburgh, then the B1069 to Leiston; from the A12 (north) take the B1122 from Yoxford; the museum is signposted off the B1122 in the centre of Leiston (IP16 4ES)

- Public transport; buses to Leiston from Aldeburgh, Saxmundham, Halesworth and Ipswich (Mon to Sat) stop 50 m from the museum
- Open daily June to September, closed Mondays March to May and October (check website for details); admission charge (carer and under 4s free) and free car park
- Accessible toilets; picnic tables; several eateries nearby in Leiston (check museum website for details)
- Terrain: mostly level access or gentle incline; steep stairway with low rails to first floor of the Long Shop; typical walk around the museum 250 m; access guide on DisabledGo website; note car park at rear, but museum entrance near to a busy road
- Small garden play shed; many objects in the museum can be touched; hands-on activities for children; engineer 'tool kits' containing items such as a measuring tape, magnet and spirit level can be borrowed and taken around the museum
- Wide range of special events including Workshop Wednesdays during school holidays
- Dogs should be on a lead
- Informative guide book to purchase (some photographs on website).

Long Shop Museum

for young steam enthusiasts!

Being awarded the first 'Family Friendly Special Award' from the Association for Suffolk Museums in 2016 reflects the museum's ethos to welcome families and provide a range of events and activities, particularly in the summer months. If a member of your family is interested in steam engines or engineering, then they should enjoy a visit to this museum. The Museum essentially tells a story about Suffolk's industrial heritage on the site of Richard Garrett & Sons, manufacturers of steam engines. It includes the Long Shop itself, which was the world's first purpose-built workshop for the assembly line production of steam engines.

As you walk around, the highlights for your child might be several magnificent Garrett engines on display, such as the Suffolk Punch, a steam-powered tractor; a Portable Steam Engine; a Garret Tractor; a Merryweather Steam Fire Pump; and a horse-drawn Fire Engine. There is even a small steam locomotive – a shunter engine named Sirapite. The Long Shop itself has several display cabinets with drawers to open that introduce visitors to the range of materials that were used in the Garret Works, including 'marvellous metals' and 'why wood?'. Elsewhere, by the entrance is a spacious play shed that includes a toolbox with plastic cogs and chains to play with; and hoopla and wooden horseshoe pitching to play on the lawn by the picnic tables. Other activities include jigsaw puzzles, colouring sheets, engine rubbings and sand moulds. Families should note that the staircase to the first floor of the Long Shop is steep, and the handrails are quite low.

www.longshopmuseum.co.uk/

<https://www.disabledgo.com/>

Garrett Steam Roller

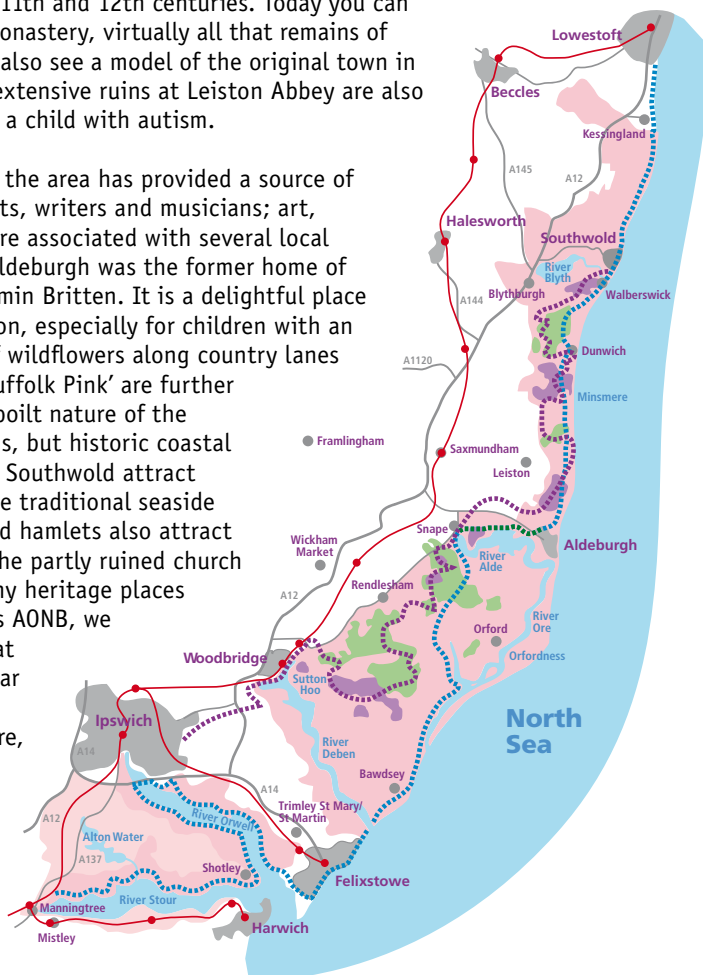


Garrett Tractor



Introduction

The peace and tranquillity of the area has provided a source of inspiration to countless artists, writers and musicians; art, music and literary festivals are associated with several local towns. The Red House near Aldeburgh was the former home of Suffolk-born composer Benjamin Britten. It is a delightful place to visit on a summer afternoon, especially for children with an interest in music. Displays of wildflowers along country lanes and cottages washed with 'Suffolk Pink' are further testament to the largely unspoilt nature of the area. There are no large towns, but historic coastal towns such as Aldeburgh and Southwold attract many visitors, offering a more traditional seaside experience. Small villages and hamlets also attract visitors, for example to see the partly ruined church at Covehithe. Among the many heritage places in the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB, we have selected nine places that we believe will be of particular interest to families with children with autism. There are, however, many more places to explore and we would urge families to use the resources cited at the end of this guide to seek out these places.





Follow the signs to Westleton from the A12 at Yoxford (from the south) or Blythburgh (from the north); in Westleton follow the minor road (Dunwich Road) signposted to Dunwich, and then signs to the beach car park (limited parking on St James's Street near to the museum)

- Public transport: for buses contact Suffolk Links
- Museum open weekends in March (2 to 4 pm), and daily from April to October (11.30 am to 4 pm), free admission (donations welcome); Greyfriars open daily, free admission
- Toilets and café in the car park; disabled toilet in the Museum; the Ship Inn serves food and has a large garden
- Terrain: roadside pavement from car park to Museum (400 m return, gentle slope); walk to Greyfriars either directly along the roadside (no pavement for 200 m) or via Dunwich Historic Trail (which approaches unfenced cliff top in places) along a partly wooded, sandy trail with gentle slopes (800 m return); complete Trail including Greyfriars, Museum and St James' Churchyard 2 km
- Museum has wheelchair access and a lift accommodating wheelchairs
- Other walks along the beach
- Dogs may be encountered off lead
- Information panels along trail
- Trail map with photographs available in the Museum and on their website.

Dunwich Historic Trail

the dramatic story of a great port lost to the sea...

Many children with autism may find Dunwich a comfortable place to engage with Suffolk's mediaeval history; it is a small village, often quiet, in a rural setting by the sea. There is a large beach car park, where the sea is clearly visible. If this is likely to be a distraction to your child, you could park along St James's Street, close to the Museum. Visit Dunwich Museum first, to get a copy of the Dunwich Historic Trail leaflet (small charge). The Museum is relatively small, on two floors (accessible lift). The first thing you will encounter when you enter the museum is a model of Dunwich as it was in the 13th century, when the town had a population of approximately 4,000 people. Explain to your child that during the time of the Anglo-Saxons, Dunwich was one of the most important ports on the east coast, similar in size to London at that time! Today, it has a population of less than 100 people. You could ask your child what might have happened to the town? Looking at the model, you can clearly see that most of the town was lost beneath the waves. Storms in the 11th and 12th centuries are thought to have contributed to its decline. The Museum tells the story of this once great port, through posters, exhibits and hands-on items. For example, there is a small beachcombing touch table; a display of historic hats for children to try on; a dimly lit smuggler's hut with an audio tale about smuggling (some children might find this a little scary); and a few small wooden houses for children to make their

Greyfriars Monastery



own 'lost street'. For older children, there is a 'Time Traveller's Quiz' sheet (small charge) to complete as you walk around the museum.

The ruins of Greyfriars Monastery founded in 1290, are one of the last examples of mediaeval Dunwich that escaped the sea. Whilst the ruins are not extensive – comprising the precinct wall, two gatehouses and the remains of a cloister, they are nevertheless an interesting place to visit, and for children with autism, often very quiet. It is just 300 m or so from the museum, but note that if you follow the lane, there is no pavement; if you follow Dunwich Historic Trail, you will come close to unfenced, high cliffs in several places. You can walk across the site, right up to the ruined cloister, where your child might like to touch these ancient walls. An interpretation board shows what the monastery may have looked like.

The Historic Trail also includes a short walk through Greyfriars Wood, just beyond the monastery. In the wood, you will find a sunken footpath, known as Middlegate Street. This was once one of the main routes into the lost town of Dunwich. Some children might be able to imagine the people, domestic animals and carts that would have once made this a busy thoroughfare, bustling with people. Close to the Museum is St James' Churchyard, another tranquil spot where you will find the ruins of a mediaeval hospital – there is a bench here, where you might take the opportunity to sit for a while and talk about what you have seen.

www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk

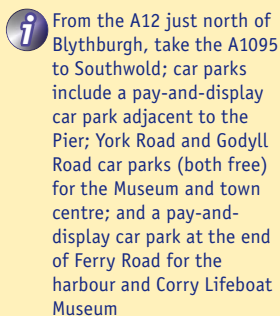
www.dunwichgreyfriars.org.uk/

Gateway



Museum





- Public transport: bus service from Beccles (contact Anglian Bus)
- Pier open daily (free admission); check websites for opening times of museums (free admission) and lighthouse (admission charge)
- Toilets by the Pier and Ferry Road car parks; toilets in town centre; RADAR toilet on Cumberland Road, close to Southwold Museum; numerous eating places in the town
- Terrain: level pavements in town; North Parade slopes gently towards the Pier; steep steps or ramp down to the promenade close to town centre, no steps by the Pier; short flight of steps from the promenade to the beach; uneven road along harbour; using the town map the busier shopping area can be avoided
- Assistance dogs only on main town beach from April to September; dogs may be encountered off lead at other times
- Unfenced harbour wall
- Useful town maps on Explore Southwold website; web addresses on opposite page.

museums and a traditional seaside pier...

Southwold is a lovely Suffolk coastal town, with a traditional seaside pier, Southwold Museum, harbour and Albert Corry Lifeboat Museum being four of the places that might be of most interest to families with a child with autism. If your child likes to look at different colours, there are colourful beach huts along much of the promenade; and if you explore the town, some of the houses have been painted in pastel 'seaside colours', whilst others have colourful front doors. On the High Street by the Town Sign (two galleons at sea) there is a very colourful display of several hundred tiles painted by local children that your child might enjoy looking at (a few of these are pictured below).

Southwold Museum, in Victoria Street, might be a good place to start (usually open from 2–4 pm, daily from Easter to October). The nearest parking is York Road (300 m) or Godyll Road (600 m). This small, but accessible museum will be especially interesting to children who like fossils. There are several drawers that children can open, which they will discover are packed with fossil bones from mammals that roamed the ‘Suffolk’ countryside between 2.6 million and 11,000 years ago, including elephant, mammoth and deer. And from the sea, walrus and whale bones too! A few large fossils, including a mammoth tooth and animal bones can be handled by your child. The mammoth tooth is really an amazing object to touch, especially if you imagine how big the animal must have been. There are many other drawers for children to open, and objects to investigate, all telling the story of life in Southwold

Tiles painted by local children

from prehistory to the present day. Note that plastic screens prevent visitors from touching the objects in the drawers. However, there is a special children's area with objects to handle, and the dressing-up cupboard might be popular with some children. Close by (250 m) is Southwold Lighthouse – to climb the lighthouse, visitors must join a tour (up to 20 people), and be at least 1.1 m tall – this will not suit many families, but at least you can walk up to the lighthouse and look from the outside. If it is open, you could perhaps walk inside and look up towards the light, without joining a tour. Southwold Pier is an 800 m walk from the museum, much of it along the seafront. Note there is a car park adjacent to the Pier. The Pier dates from 1900, and is 190 m long. It has the feel of a pier of a bygone age; it includes an amusement arcade that features quirky, hand-built amusement machines; an interesting Water Clock; and several shops.

At the end of your visit, or perhaps on another occasion, you might visit the southern end of the town, where six 'eighteen pound' cannons stand on Gun Hill, a grassy area above the beach. You can walk around the cannons with your child, and explain that they were probably put there several hundred years ago to protect against pirates! From here, you can walk or drive down to the Harbour car park, and the Alfred Corry Lifeboat Museum. This museum is also free, and houses a restored lifeboat that was in use over 100 years ago. Alternatively, you could walk along the harbour front to look at the various boats, but note that there is no fence along the harbour wall, and traffic moves up and down the unsurfaced road.

www.exploresouthwold.co.uk/

<http://southwoldmuseum.org>

<http://alfredcorry.co.uk/>

Southwold Museum



Southwold seafront (TONE BLAKESLEY)



i From the A12 (south), take the A1094 signposted to Aldeburgh, then the B1069 to Leiston; leave Leiston on the B1122, the Abbey is on the left after 1 mile; from the A12 (north) take the B1122 from Yoxford, the Abbey is on the right after 4.5 miles (IP16 4TD)

- Public transport; buses to Leiston from Aldeburgh, Halesworth and Ipswich (Mon to Sat) but 1 mile walk to Abbey from the town (pavement along B1122)
- Open during daylight hours, free admission and car park
- Grounds sometimes used for special events, when the car park might be busy, or the site closed (check Pro Corda website before visiting)
- No facilities; accessible toilets in the Long Shop Museum (Leiston); public toilets opposite the museum (1.1 miles from the Abbey)
- Terrain: gently sloping gravel track to gatehouse (100 m); grassy paths, uneven in places; typical walk around the Abbey 500 m
- Sensory garden by the Pro Corda box office (signposted from the car park)
- Dogs should be on a lead
- Several information panels (a few photographs on English Heritage website).

Leiston Abbey

extensive monastic ruins to explore...

Leiston Abbey is owned and managed by the Pro Corda Trust with the support of English Heritage. The Trust is a music and education charity, providing residential courses for young people with special educational needs. The ruined abbey should be of interest to many families with a child with autism, particularly if a family member is interested in history. The Abbey is in the countryside, surrounded by fields and hedgerows. Consequently, it is a peaceful place; often the only sounds you will hear are birdsong, perhaps the wind and on some occasions the sound of music drifting across the ruins from the Tudor House or the Lady Chapel. You may also find that you are the only visitors, although the site may close for events (check Pro Corda website).

The ruins are extensive and well preserved in places. From the car park, it is a short walk (100 m) down a gravelled track to the remains of the original gatehouse. Information boards around the site describe its history, and will show your child how the abbey would have looked in the past. Explain to your child that the Abbey was built in the 1360s, over 600 years ago! The Abbey was in use until 1537, when the monks were turned out by King Henry VIII during the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Although the Abbey gradually fell into ruin, some of the walls, such as the choir and transepts are almost at their full height. Perhaps your child might be able to imagine what life might have been like in the Abbey. A short flight of steps allows you to get a good view of the remains of the Refectory.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/leiston-abbey/
www.procorda.com/

Abbey ruins



i From the A12, take the A1094 to Aldeburgh, then follow the B1122 (signposted to Leiston and The Red House); turn left after 0.5 miles into Golf Lane, a private road (signposted to The Red House)

- Public transport: free minibus from Aldeburgh during school summer holidays (check website for details); buses daily to Aldeburgh from Woodbridge, Ipswich, Leiston, Saxmundham and Halesworth
- Open March to October (check website for details); admission charge (free for carers and under 16s); limited parking on site
- Visitor Reception with accessible toilets
- Outdoor games available during school summer holidays
- Terrain: level, gravel paths and lawns; stairs to Britten's studio; typical walk around the gardens 200 m; access statement on website
- Children's trails for the gardens and exhibition, and iSpy book (free of charge from reception)
- Overshoes must be worn in The Red House, or visitors may walk in their socks (bare feet not allowed)
- Dogs may be encountered off lead in gardens; assistance dogs only inside
- Site map and information leaflet available upon request (info@brittenpears.org); useful photographs on 'What's here?' page on the website.

The Red House

a fascinating museum set in peaceful gardens...

The Red House was the former home of Suffolk-born composer Benjamin Britten and his partner, the tenor Peter Pears. It is a delightful place to visit on a summer afternoon, especially for children with an interest in music. Visitors are encouraged to park in Aldeburgh and catch the free minibus, but if this would be difficult for your child, you should find parking on site. Staff in the visitor reception are helpful and friendly. The Gallery houses an exhibition about the life and works of Benjamin Britten. The first thing you will come across is an interactive soundscape – 'slung mugs' is a collection of mugs hanging from a string, with wooden spoons to strike them. This was devised by Britten to create the sound of raindrops. Close by are a range of replica animal head-dresses to try on, originally created for Britten's work for children, Noye's Fludde (pronounced Noah's Flood). A lovely rocking horse that Britten played with as a child may be admired, but sadly not ridden. You can also visit Britten's composition studio – press the buttons to hear short excerpts from some of his most famous works, for some children the music might be too loud.

You can also walk through The Red House, furnished to show the house as it would have looked when Britten and Pears lived there in the '60s and '70s. Children might be particularly interested in the colourful artwork on display here. The sitting room overlooks a lawn, on which Britten would have played croquet. In the summer months, croquet hoops, mallets and balls are set out on the lawn for visitors to use. Your child might enjoy this, or one of the other outdoor games, including quoits, tennis, dominoes and musical steps. The gardens are very peaceful, often quiet, and might be the highlight of the visit for some children.

<https://brittenpears.org/>

The Red House



Croquet



i From the A12, take the A1094 to Aldeburgh; park on High Street or Market Cross Place (2 hour limit); pay-and-display car parks include King Street (small), Thorpe Road (large beachside car park by the Scallop sculpture) and Fort Green (southern end of town); free parking by the Yacht Club to the south

- Public transport: buses daily to Woodbridge, Ipswich, Leiston, Saxmundham and Halesworth
- Lifeboat Station open daily (free admission); Moot Hall museum open April to October (admission charge)
- Toilets by Moot Hall; numerous eating places in the town
- Terrain: level pavements in town; shingle beach; uneven road past Yacht Club to Martello Tower; some roads busy
- Steep stairs in Moot Hall and short spiral staircase in the Lifeboat Station
- Take care around old fishing gear near the fishing boats
- Unfenced sea wall and unfenced ditch around the Martello Tower, both with a drop of several metres
- Assistance dogs only on main town beach from May to September; dogs may be encountered off lead at other times
- Aldeburgh Town Guide including map available in local shops (free); activity sheets and posters on the RNLI website.

Aldeburgh

a traditional Suffolk seaside town...

In Tudor times, Aldeburgh was a thriving port with a ship building industry; Sir Francis Drake's galleon 'Golden Hind' was built here, and later went on to circumnavigate the globe! As the River Alde silted up, larger ships could no longer access the port, and Aldeburgh continued as a fishing village. It is now best known as a seaside resort, although you can still find wooden fishing boats hauled up onto the shingle by the old Fishing Huts. Most of the boats have retired, and have been restored and painted. Your child might enjoy walking around the boats, looking at the varied shapes, colours and textures of the tangled mass of fishing gear on the shingle (please take care around the fishing gear). As you walk amongst the boats, ask your child to look out for the many colourful flowers that make their home on the shingle. They might find the white flowers of sea kale, contrasting with the purple and pink flowers of valerian and the delicate yellow-horned poppies. Close by is the Lifeboat Station, where your child can get very close to the Aldeburgh lifeboat 'Freddie Cooper', and climb the spiral steps to look at the deck. You will also see the tractor used to transport the boat to and from the sea.

The Aldeburgh Beach South Lookout is 200 m south of the Lifeboat Station. This is a small building on the pebble beach that welcomes a new artist, poet or musician every week, as its artist in residence. It is usually open to the public on Saturdays. Outside the Lookout you will find 'Pebble Homage', a participative art installation that might interest your child. You should find a

South Lookout



table and chairs, with marker pens, and pebbles on the beach that people have written messages on. After a walk on the beach, ask your child to write a short thought or message on a pebble that they have collected, which they can then add to the others on the beach (bring a marker pen if your child has a favourite colour). To the north of the fishing boats, 'The Scallop' stands proudly on the shingle. This large, stainless-steel sculpture by artist Maggie Hambling is quite tactile, and your child might want to explore its textures and shapes. Or they might just want to sit by the sculpture and watch the waves crashing against the shingle and listen to the sound of the water flowing back down the beach before the next wave hits.

Moot Hall is an impressive 16th century Tudor building housing an interesting museum about the cultural history of Aldeburgh that might be more suitable for older children with autism. Displays include fossil shells and bones, flint tools and arrowheads, roman artefacts, and display cases showing the flora and fauna of the shingle. For more recent history, drive to the south of the town; there is a car park on Slaughden Road, or you can continue along the gravel track by the sea wall as far as the Aldeburgh Yacht Club. From here, walk south along the sea wall, with the Yacht Club on your right and the sea defences on your left. The Martello Tower, one of many built along the east coast in the early 19th century to repel a Napoleonic invasion, is about 500 m along the track. This is a peaceful place, with good views of the Alde estuary and yachts.

www.aldeburghmuseumonline.co.uk/

www.aldeburghbeachlookout.com

<https://rnli.org/find-my-nearest/lifeboat-stations/aldeburgh-lifeboat-station>

Moot Hall



The Scallop (TONE BLAKESLEY)



i Follow the brown tourist signs from the A12 at Woodbridge for approx. 2 miles, initially along the A1152 and then the B1083 (IP12 3DJ)

Sutton Hoo

Anglo-Saxon history...

- Public transport: taxis from Melton Railway Station (Ipswich to Lowestoft line); Ipswich to Aldeburgh bus stops at Melton Railway Station (Mon to Sat); 2 km to Visitor Centre
- Open regularly, check website for details; admission charge for non-National Trust members (free for two carers); large free car park
- Visitor Centre with accessible toilets and café; toilets in Tranmer House
- Adventure play area and picnic tables close to Visitor Centre
- Terrain: level, sandy gravel track to burial mounds (0.5 km); Burial Mound circular walk (1.5 km); countryside walks (1.7 to 2 km) with steeper slopes, electric fence in places, undulating paths, partly following a quiet lane; access guide on DisabledGo website
- Exhibition Centre (with mannequins)
- Viewing platform by burial mounds
- Countryside walk tracker packs available to borrow
- Free-range pig farm on southern boundary of site
- Dogs should be on a lead
- Livestock grazing along parts of Burial Mound Walk
- Clear-print information panels
- Map of site available at Visitor Centre.

Sutton Hoo is a great place to introduce children with autism to the Anglo-Saxon history of Suffolk. It is set in open countryside just to the east of Woodbridge, close to the River Deben. It should suit children with a wide range of disabilities and interests in history and archaeology. Opportunities at Sutton Hoo for families with a child with autism include a short walk to view the ancient burial mounds, and an Exhibition Hall that tells the story of the ship burial of an Anglo-Saxon king and displays the treasure of kings.

The Visitor Centre is spacious; very helpful staff will provide a map of the site and help you to plan your visit. If your child is interested in history, then the staff are likely to direct you first to the Exhibition Hall. If your child is able, it is well worth watching a 10-minute film that introduces the Anglo-Saxon people, their origins and way of life (note that this is in a small, dimly lit side room). In the exhibition itself, your child will discover that 1,400 years ago, a great warrior, thought to be King Raedwald, was buried in a 27 m long ship, together with many of his treasured possessions. The exhibition includes a full-size reconstruction of the ship burial chamber; you can walk through to see replicas of treasures such as shields and swords, that were found when the burial mound was first excavated in 1939. Parents should be aware that the light in the chamber is very dim, to create an atmosphere, and it contains a mannequin. Next to the ship is a dressing-up area with a mirror (see opposite), where children can try on a range

Play boat



of Anglo-Saxon clothes. The clothes are put on over a child's own clothes, which may help children who have difficulty with the feel of some fabrics against their skin. Close by (200 m) is Tranmer House, an Edwardian property whose owner, Mrs Pretty, asked local archaeologist Basil Brown to excavate the burial mounds in 1938. The house is as it would have been at this time, with a lot of effects relating to the archaeological dig; unusually for open houses, visitors are allowed to sit on the chairs.

The Burial Ground is a short walk (500 m) from the Visitor Centre; families can walk around the site to get a closer view of the burial mounds that remain. Explain to your child that this is where the ship was found, that has been reconstructed in the Exhibition Hall. Sheep may be grazing, and skylarks singing overhead. Note, there is a free-range pig farm immediately adjacent to the burial area, which some children might find difficult if the wind is from a southerly direction. Some children may wish to go on one of two circular walks around the wider estate. The Chestnut Walk is particularly special in spring, when the woodland floor at the start of the trail is carpeted with bluebells. Further along, the walk affords good views across the River Deben to The Tide Mill and Woodbridge. Finally, there is a small adventure playground with a zip wire by the car park, with a small wooden boat where children can play with building bricks. And close by, a small second-hand bookshop, where your child may feel more comfortable browsing the children's section than in a busy town bookshop.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/sutton-hoo

www.disabledgo.com/access-guide/suffolk-county-council/sutton-hoo-centre

Dressing-up area



King Rædwald's shield





The Tide Mill is on Tide Mill Way, off the B1438 (Quay Road) in Woodbridge (IP12 1BY); pay-and-display car parks at Woodbridge Station adjacent to the nearby railway station (IP12 4AU) and Hamblin Road (IP12 1BG) are both approx. 350 m from the mill

- Public transport: trains to Lowestoft and Ipswich; buses to Ipswich (daily), Felixstowe and Aldeburgh (Mon to Sat)
- Open daily 1st April to 1st October, then weekends and half term in October; admission charge (carers free); no parking at the mill itself
- From both car parks, access the Tide Mill along Quay Road and Tide Mill Way (note there is no pavement along Tide Mill Way, which includes crossing the railway); alternatively use the railway footbridge just beyond the station and walk along the quayside footpath (usually not busy) directly to the museum
- Accessible toilet in the mill; public toilets in the station car park
- Terrain: two flights of stairs in the museum and steps over the railway footbridge
- Quayside (riverside) path unfenced, and may be impassable at high tide
- Wheel turning and milling demonstrations (check website for times)
- Informative posters around the museum (video with sound playing in reception area)
- Dogs may be encountered off lead
- Map of Woodbridge showing the location of the Tide Mill.

Tide Mill Living Museum

experience a working tide mill...

The Tide Mill is not only a fascinating museum to visit, it is often quiet, which will suit many families with a child with autism. Although nearby car parks are adjacent to a busy main road, the mill itself is on the quayside, overlooking the Deben Estuary. If you park in the station car park, you can avoid the main road by walking past the station, crossing the railway bridge, and following the quayside path for 250 m along the river to the museum (note this may become impassable at high tide). This in itself is an interesting walk, because it takes you past a number of classic boats, moored alongside the quay. Although you cannot board these private vessels, several have notices that describe their history. 'Waterdog' for example, was originally a steam powered barge that carried cargos such as coal and cotton along the inland waterways of Yorkshire in the late 19th century. In contrast, 'Tommy Lee' is a river and dock tug that operated on the Thames in the mid-20th century. If your child is interested in boats, the owners of Waterdog have a very informative website.

The Tide Mill itself is one of only two working tide mills in Britain. The wardens who work in the museum are very helpful and will explain to your child, with the use of a working model, exactly how a tide mill works. Your child may be fascinated to learn that a mill pond behind the mill fills up with the rising tide, and that the water is held there by a sluice gate as the tide goes out. As low tide approaches, the water in the mill pond is released through the

Tide Mill (TONE BLAKESLEY)



sluice and turns the water wheel. This is also explained in a short film. The Tide Mill's giant wooden wheel (6 m in diameter) was replaced in 2011, and the mill is in working order. Your child may be able to see the wheel turning; if the falling tide coincides with mill opening hours, the wheel will be in operation – check the Tide Mill website for details of dates and the exact time, to ensure that they get to experience this. Originally the pond held sufficient water to turn the wheel for four hours, twice a day, but you should be aware that the current pond is much smaller, holding sufficient water to turn the wheel from a half to two hours.

The Tide Mill is very spacious inside, affording you and your child excellent views of the wheel, and the machinery of the mill. Another working model will allow your child to see how the Tide Mill operates through a series of cogs, by turning a wheel. There is also an interactive display with various sized wooden cogs, that will allow your child to better understand how cogs of different sizes can be fitted together in such a way, that when you turn one, all will move. The purpose of the mill machinery of course is to turn the millstones that grind grain to produce flour. There are also demonstrations of milling, and the Tide Mill is once again producing stoneground wholemeal flour for local bakers. Milling dates and times can be found on the website. Posters around the mill explain, with the use of diagrams, how the mill works; and there are several buttons for your child to press to hear short stories about the mill, told for example, by the miller's family.

<http://woodbridgetidemill.org.uk>

<http://waterdog.co.uk/>

Crown Wheel



Millstone



i From the A1152 just east of Woodbridge, take the B1083 south for 0.7 miles, before turning left onto a minor road, following the brown tourist sign; follow the minor road for 3.2 miles, then fork left following the sign to Hollesley Bay Colony; continue over the cross roads into Woodbridge Walk to find the entrance on the right (IP12 3JR)

- No suitable public transport
- Open mid-March to end of October (check website as opening days vary each month); admission charge (carer free); free car park
- Visitor Centre with accessible toilets, café and gift shop
- Adventure play area and all-weather play area (under 10s)
- Terrain: compact surfaces around the farm buildings, play areas and pets paddock (typical walk around farm buildings 750 m); sign-posted farm walks (1.4 to 2.7 km) along relatively flat tracks (with electric fence in places) which may be muddy after wet weather, with areas of soft sand
- Heritage museum and barn
- Stables with horses and Shetland ponies
- Small animal area with hand wash station
- Fenced wildlife pond
- Dogs should be on lead
- Frequent information boards about the animals; site map available in reception.

Suffolk Punch Trust

close encounters with Suffolk Punch horses...

The Colony Stud and rare breeds farm at Hollesley Bay is a fantastic place to immerse your child in Suffolk's rural heritage. The primary aim of the Trust is to preserve the Suffolk Punch breed, and the skills needed to handle these magnificent horses. Most of the attractions on the farm are relatively close to the Visitor Centre and accessible for wheelchairs and pushchairs. Visitors have to walk through a small retail area to access the farm. Once you have purchased your tickets look at the map and decide with your child where to go first. There are usually timetabled demonstrations and farm rides, so these might influence your decision. Many children will be keen to see the small animals, and opposite the Visitor Centre you will find the Pets Paddock. In this grassy area, children (and their parents) might be immediately attracted to the rather cute guinea pigs, the rabbits or perhaps the pygmy goats. You will also find several rare breeds in the paddock that originated in Suffolk, including Ixworth chickens and Silver Appleyard Bantam ducks. A pets' feeding time is usually held in mid-afternoon.

If you walk round to the stables, look out for the rare Large Black Pigs, and Red Poll cattle that originated in Suffolk. The stables offer your child an opportunity to meet some of the Suffolk Punch horses and foals in their stalls (see photograph opposite). Suffolk Punches are beautiful animals, always chestnut in colour, although some animals have white on their faces. The Suffolk Punch is a large working horse, whose immense strength is ideally suited to farm work. Suffolk Punches would have been a common sight on Suffolk farms before the widespread use of tractors. If your child is

Suffolk Punch horses (TONE BLAKESLEY)



at all intimidated by the horses, they may also find several Shetland ponies in the stables, which look so small in comparison! On some days, harnessing demonstrations are held in the stables.

If you would like to walk around the paddocks, continue on from the stables to follow the 'short' farm walk (1.4 km). This is a lovely walk on a summer's day, and you should see more horses; the oldest registered flock of Suffolk sheep with their characteristic black faces; and delightful Kunekune pigs from New Zealand, which apparently love human company! Alternatively, you may be able to take a tractor-trailer ride around the same route, although these only run in the early afternoon. The Heritage Museum is also well worth a visit, with fascinating exhibits related to rural life in Suffolk in general, and working with Suffolk Punches in particular. Some children might prefer the nearby barn, which houses a display of vintage farm machinery and a collection of colourful wagons that would have once been drawn by Suffolk Punches. Other children might be more comfortable in the heritage garden, especially if the farm is particularly busy. This is a quiet space that has been stocked with plants that have some association with Suffolk – perhaps being bred in Suffolk or named after a Suffolk person or place. Finally, there are two play areas; the outdoor play area is next to the Visitor Centre, so your child is sure to spot it as soon as you start to explore the site.

<http://suffolkpunchtrust.org/>

Guinea pig (TONE BLAKESLEY)



Kunekune pig (TONE BLAKESLEY)



'Colony Wren II' (TONE BLAKESLEY)





From the A1152 in Woodbridge, take the B1084 signposted to Orford, or from the A12 in Wickham Market, take the B1078, which joins the B1084 after Tunstall Forest; in Orford, follow the brown signs to the castle (IP12 2ND); for the Quay, continue through Orford to Quay Street pay-and-display car park (IP12 2NU)

- Public transport: for buses contact Suffolk Links
- Open daily April to Oct, weekends from Nov to Mar (check website for opening in holiday periods); admission charge (carers and children under five free); pay-and-display car park refunded at entrance to castle (note entry through a small shop)
- No facilities; public toilets off Market Hill (200 m from the Castle); toilets in Quay Street car park (0.4 miles)
- Terrain: 10 long steps up to the castle (can be slippery in wet weather); flight of 21 steep steps to castle entrance; 91 steep steps to the top of the Keep (castle chambers on several levels); grassy area around the castle is uneven and undulating
- Narrow, dimly lit passages in castle walls
- Dogs should be on a lead across the whole castle site
- Orford Quay: harbour wall unfenced, deep water, strong currents and soft mud
- Map of Orford on Orford town website.

Orford Castle

a chance to explore a mediaeval keep...

Orford is a very peaceful Suffolk town, at the 'end of the road', on the banks of the Ore Estuary. The landscape around the village is dominated by Orford Castle. The curtain wall that once surrounded the castle has long since disappeared, but the original keep, standing on a huge mound of earth (the motte) has survived. The entrance leads you into the central hall, actually the first floor. This is spacious with a very high ceiling, but the passages leading to small chambers in the wall itself are narrow, and dimly lit. Some children with autism may find these passages rather uncomfortable, to others they may be exciting! The spiral stairs are steep, but well lit. They lead down to the ground floor, and to the Upper Hall on the third floor. The Upper Hall houses Orford Museum, although this might be of less interest to younger children. Above and below the third floor, are more chambers and narrow passages in the castle walls. Exploring the keep, your child should get some sense of what life might have been like for those living in the castle. The stairs continue up to the roof; from here there are panoramic views of the town, the surrounding countryside and estuary. After your visit, your child could also run around and explore the extensive earthworks that were once part of the castle's defences.

If you have time, walk or drive down to Orford Quay (0.4 miles from the castle), which can be a very peaceful place. Sit for a while with your child and look at the boats moored in the estuary, across to the lighthouse on Orford Ness, or down the estuary to the RSPB's Havergate Island nature reserve. There will always be gulls, or waders such as oystercatchers calling to add to the atmosphere.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/orford-castle/
www.orford.org.uk/visit-explore-stay/

Orford Castle (TONE BLAKESLEY)



Orford Quay



Dedham Vale AONB & Stour Valley Project

Introduction

This is a peaceful, rural landscape on the Suffolk-Essex border that is quite distinct from the rest of Suffolk and Essex. The area is widely known through the paintings of landscape artists such as John Constable and Thomas Gainsborough, which adds to its popularity with visitors. The landscapes around Flatford and Dedham that inspired John Constable are still recognisable today, in what is sometimes called 'Constable Country'. The countryside is characterised by rolling farmland, ancient lanes, traditional villages, meadows, rivers, ancient woodland and plantations of cricket bat willows and poplars. Families can walk around the peaceful hamlet of Flatford, the inspiration for some of Constable's most famous paintings, such as *The Hay Wain*, and look around the 16th century Bridge Cottage. Thomas Gainsborough's House in Sudbury is now a museum and gallery, with a delightful garden. Some of Gainsborough's works are displayed in the gallery. Just over the county boundary, the Munnings Art Museum in Dedham displays works by equestrian artist Sir Alfred Munnings.

The River Stour itself is a key feature as it meanders through the lowland landscape; distinctive willow pollards can be found along the riverside. The river rises in Cambridgeshire and flows in a generally south-easterly direction through Sudbury, Dedham and Flatford before becoming tidal at Manningtree. One way to enjoy the Stour Valley is to explore the Stour Valley Path – a 97 km footpath from Cattawade near Manningtree in the east to Newmarket in the west. The Stour Valley Path Guide splits the path into 10 sections of 7.2 to 13.7 km in length, most of which can be walked in one direction with a return to the starting point on public transport. The route passes through picturesque towns and villages such as Clare, Cavendish and Stoke-by-Nayland. Clare Castle Country Park is a popular destination for families wishing to see the remains of the 'motte and bailey' castle, the disused railway station that was once part of the Great Eastern Railway line, and the Church of St Peter and St Paul. The nearby village of Cavendish has a lovely village green, colour-washed timbered cottages and the 14th century church of St Mary.

www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org





Clare is on the A1092, between Sudbury and Haverhill; from the A1092 in Clare, follow the sign for Clare Castle Country Park car park along Malting Lane (CO10 8NW)

- Public transport: buses from Sudbury, Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill (Mon to Sat) stop in the town centre (150 m from the country park)
- Country Park open daily, free admission, pay-and-display car park; the Church of St Peter and St Paul is open daily; Priory grounds open every day except 1st Jan
- Toilets in the Country Park at the end of Station Road; several eating places in the town
- Play area in the Country Park (park can be busy at times)
- Terrain: relatively flat, surfaced paths in Country Park and town; steep, surfaced path (150 m) to ruined castle keep; Ancient House Trail up to 2 km (many opportunities for short cuts)
- Bridge with railings over the River Stour, dangerous for children to climb on
- Several unfenced ponds and the river in the Country Park
- Dogs may be encountered off lead in the Country Park but should be on a lead in Clare Priory grounds
- Town trail map on Ancient House Museum website and on an information board in the Country Park car park; a useful map of Clare showing sketches of various buildings is available in the church.

Clare

a wool town full of history...

Clare is a mediaeval wool town in the southwest corner of Suffolk. For families with a child with autism, the history and culture of the town can be explored from the relatively relaxed surroundings of Clare Castle Country Park, where Clare Castle once stood. The 'motte and bailey' castle was built soon after the Norman conquest of England in the 11th century. Suggest to your child that they explore the park, and try to work out the layout of the original castle. The first clue is rather obvious – adjacent to the car park is the motte (some 30 m high), with the ruined wall of the keep on top. Follow the path as it winds its way round the motte to the ruined keep. From here you can look down on the remains of the wall that separated the inner and outer baileys. There are fine views from the motte across the town to the north, dominated by the Church of St Peter and St Paul; and to the south, the countryside of neighbouring Essex. If you walk around the park, you will pass several ponds that may once have formed part of the castle's protective ditches or moat.

If your child likes railways, they might find the former Clare railway station of more interest (it is also next to the car park). It seems strange to walk along the old platforms, and look down at the lawn that was once the track bed of the Great Eastern Railway. Perhaps your child can imagine the steam trains that once steamed to a halt alongside the now deserted platforms, before the closures of many branch lines in 1967. You might point out to your child that

Clare railway station



this was the only station in Britain that was built within the walls of a mediaeval castle! The 'Clare Ancient House Trail' follows the old track bed for 350 m alongside the River Stour. The trail also passes a number of old buildings, most notably the Ancient House Museum and the Church of St Peter and St Paul. The museum is very small, but your child might be interested in a model of the castle as it may have looked in the 13th century. The church was built in the 14th and 15th centuries, and is open daily; you might want to explore it with your child. On a warm summer's day, the church is a cool, peaceful place. Of particular interest might be the magnificent stained-glass windows, with their many colours. For younger children, there is a table at the back of the church with crayons and colouring sheets; there is also a wooden model of Noah's Ark – remove the top to find soft toys, including hedgehogs, pandas and sheep. Listen out for the church clock that chimes on each quarter-hour. As you walk through the graveyard, point out to your child the mosaics of colour formed by colonies of lichens on the stones. How many different colours can they see on one stone?

At the end of your visit, your child might like to visit the playground in the country park, if it is not too busy. Alternatively, you could cross the river and follow the footpath through Clare Priory (one of the oldest religious houses in England, established in the 13th century) to explore the peaceful gardens and ruins. Visitors are also allowed to go into the shrine and church.

www.clarecastlecountrypark.co.uk/

www.clare-ancient-house-museum.co.uk/the-clare-town-trail/

www.clare-uk.com/

Castle keep



Church of St Peter and St Paul (TONE BLAKESLEY)



i Gainsborough's House is in the centre of Sudbury on Gainsborough Street, at the bottom of Market Hill (CO10 2EU); North Street car park and the leisure centre car park are both about 350 m from the museum

- Public transport: short walk from bus routes; railway station by leisure centre car park
- Open daily (except 24th Dec to 2nd Jan, and Good Friday); admission charge (carers and children under five free), note entry is via the museum shop; no parking on site; nearest Blue Badge parking off street bays on Gainsborough Street (1 hour limit)
- Reception in museum shop, accessible toilets
- Cafés nearby but no food or drink sold at the museum
- Terrain: house has three floors, second floor accessible via platform lift, third floor by stairs; small garden (approximately 500 square metres) is partly accessible, with uneven paths and grass surfaces; access information on museum website, more detailed access guide on DisabledGo website
- Quiet space: families can use a small kitchen area rather than the garden in case of bad weather
- Saturday art clubs for children and young people; family activities on Tuesday mornings during school holidays (check website for details)
- Creative workshops for schools
- Assistance dogs only.

Gainsborough's House

Gainsborough's art and a delightful garden...

Gainsborough's House was the childhood home of Thomas Gainsborough, one of Suffolk, and Britain's greatest artists. The house, which is now a museum and art gallery, is a quiet and peaceful place in an otherwise bustling Suffolk town. Every Thursday and Saturday, the town hosts a busy market (on Market Hill); some children might enjoy looking at the colourful fruit and vegetable stalls, amongst others, but other families may wish to avoid the market and busy Gainsborough Street, approaching the museum along Weavers Lane (if parking in North Street car park). When you arrive at the museum, your child might be surprised to learn that the house is almost 500 years old! It might be the oldest house they have ever visited. The house was already about 200 years old when the Gainsborough family moved in, five years before Thomas was born. What is perhaps more amazing is that the mulberry tree in the garden is thought to have been planted in the early part of the 17th century, and is now around 400 years old. You should certainly introduce your child to this magnificent tree, whose boughs are so old that they need to be supported by tree stumps and posts. Point out to you child that the young Thomas may well have played under this very tree!

The garden is delightful. Although very small, it is deceptively spacious; with terraces, winding paths and lawns. It has a cottage garden feel, with paths lined by fragrant lavender in summer for your child to smell, and more unusual fruits to point out to your

Gainsborough's House



child in autumn, such as quince, medlar and of course mulberry. All the plants in the garden today are thought to have been grown in gardens at the time when Thomas lived in the house. There are many benches and seats around the garden where you might sit for a while, and perhaps read a story or talk about how Thomas might have played in the garden. The garden is also a place for a child to retire to if their visit to the museum and gallery becomes stressful for any reason.

Your child may like to stay in the garden whilst other family members look around the house, but hopefully they will wish to see the artwork in the house too. Thomas Gainsborough was born in the house in 1727, and spent much of his childhood in Suffolk, sketching and painting the Suffolk countryside. In later years he became well known for his distinctive portraiture, but he was also an accomplished landscape painter. It was once said of Gainsborough that 'nature was his teacher, and the woods of Suffolk his academy'. The exhibition of his work is displayed over two floors; the second floor is accessible via a platform lift, but the single room on the third floor is accessed by a staircase. The display on the ground floor focuses on Gainsborough's life and his artistic achievements, with descriptive posters and examples of his artwork, particularly portraits. One of the rooms has a fine brick fireplace, with an interesting texture that your child might like to touch. The two rooms on the second floor display more of his portraits and landscape paintings, and the room on the top floor houses an exhibition about the artist John Constable.

www.gainsborough.org/

www.disabledgo.com/access-guide/suffolk-county-council/gainsboroughs-house-2

Garden



Gallery





From the A12, take the B1070 to East Bergholt, then follow the brown tourist signs to the main car park (CO7 6UL)

- Public transport: for buses check www.suffolkonboard.com/buses/
- Bridge Cottage and tearoom open daily from April to October, for other months check website, free admission; large car park 150 m from the hamlet and RSPB garden (parking charge for non-National Trust members); limited disabled car parking spaces by the information centre, 250 m beyond main car park entrance
- RSPB garden open daily from April to October
- Toilets and adapted toilet in the information centre
- Terrain: gentle slope from the main car park (including steps) to the RSPB garden and information centre (steep, unfenced bank on the left, about 3 m from the path); walk around the hamlet mostly level and surfaced; elsewhere, riverside paths can be slippery in wet weather; typical walk from the main car park to, and around, the hamlet 1 km
- River, mill pond and lock (deep water) unfenced
- Dogs should be on lead around the hamlet (assistance dogs only in the RSPB garden)
- Livestock grazing in riverside meadows
- Map of Flatford available in the car park.

Flatford hamlet

a walk back in time...

The rural hamlet of Flatford is well known for being the inspiration for some of John Constable's best known paintings. Flatford has a sense of timelessness... the hamlet today looks very much as it did in Constable's early 19th century paintings. As you walk down from the National Trust car park, you will come across the John Constable Exhibition, in a small room opposite the RSPB Wildlife Garden. If the exhibition is busy, your child might prefer to walk around the garden, which is covered in more detail in the Autism and Nature guide, *Visiting the Suffolk Countryside*. The exhibition includes reproductions of some of Constable's most famous paintings, such as *The Hay Wain* and *Flatford Mill*. Posters provide background information about these paintings, the artist and life in Flatford at the time, which may not have been as idyllic as the paintings might suggest. Have a close look at the paintings with your child, then explore the hamlet to see how these landscapes look today. The hay wain (or wagon) in the painting is standing in the mill pond directly in front of Willy Lott's Cottage.

Just a few metres from the exhibition is Bridge Cottage. This timber-framed cottage, with its thatched roof, was probably built in the late 16th century. Explain to your child that the walls of the cottage were constructed with wattle and daub – a plaster of mud, straw and animal dung! The floor would have originally been compacted earth, covered with straw. The cottage is furnished as it might have looked when it was lived in by the Clarke family in the 1880s, who might have worked on the river. Look out for the rag

Flatford Mill



doll family and examples of children's toys; as you look around at the furnishings and artefacts, you might talk to your child about life in the cottage in the late 19th century. Close by is Flatford Mill itself, as depicted in the painting you may have seen earlier. At that time the river would have been busy, with barges carrying cargo between Sudbury and the sea port at Mistley on the Stour Estuary. Flatford Mill itself was originally an 18th century fulling mill for cleansing cloth (the first part of the cloth-making process), before being converted to a flour mill. It was owned by the Constable family for about 100 years, when water from the river was used to power the milling of grain to produce flour. You will also see two other fine old buildings in the hamlet: Willy Lott's House is a 16th century cottage, most famous for being depicted in *The Hay Wain*; Valley Farm is even older, built in the mid-15th century.

After visiting the hamlet, you may decide to cross the bridge and have a walk along the river. If you have any concerns about water with your child, do not cross the bridge, for there is a deep lock opposite the mill. Rowing boats can be hired by the bridge, allowing your child to see the countryside of Dedham Vale from a very different perspective. The National Trust estate extends well beyond Flatford hamlet, and an information board invites you to walk in an artist's footsteps, to explore the countryside as John Constable would have done, 200 years ago. You can find more details about these walks in the Autism and Nature guide *Visiting the Suffolk Countryside*. Flatford is a lovely place for a family to visit, but high summer can be very busy.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/flatford

www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/seenature/reserves/guide/f/flatford/

Willy Lott's House



Bridge Cottage



Further reading

Web resources

Activities Unlimited. Short breaks and leisure activities for disabled children in Suffolk:
www.activities-unlimited.co.uk

Autism Anglia:
www.autism-anglia.org.uk/

Coastal Accessible Transport Service:
www.cats-paws.co.uk

Culture 365. Cultural highlights of Suffolk and Norfolk:
<http://culture-365.co.uk>

Dedham Vale AONB & Stour Valley Project. Various walking and cycling guides. Available at:
www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/publications/

DisabledGo:
www.disabledgo.com/organisations/suffolk-county-council/main-2

National Autistic Society. Going to a museum. Available at:
www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/holidays-trips/museum.aspx

National Rail Enquiries:
www.nationalrail.co.uk/

Streetmap:
www.streetmap.co.uk/

Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB. Various walking and cycling guides. Available at:
www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/publications/

Suffolk Coast DM0:
www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk/

Suffolk County Council. Discover Suffolk Walking Guides. Free to download:
www.discoversuffolk.org.uk/walking/

Suffolk Links:
www.suffolkonboard.com/buses/

Suffolk Museums:
<http://suffolkmuseums.org/museums/>

Touching the Tide. Various heritage guides. Free to download:
www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/publications/touching-the-tide-guides

Traveline south east:
www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk/

Visit Suffolk. Promoting Suffolk attractions:
www.visitsuffolk.com/

Popular guides

Blakesley, D and Blakesley, T. 2015. *Visiting the Suffolk countryside: a guide for parents and teachers of children with autism*. Free to download: **www.autismandnature.org.uk**

Blakesley, D and Blakesley, T. 2015. *Alex and Rosie's Adventures in Suffolk*. Free to download: **www.autismandnature.org.uk**

Blakesley, D and Blakesley, T. 2017. *Alex and Rosie's Suffolk Colouring Book*. Free to download: **www.autismandnature.org.uk**

Page, L. 2010. *Kiddiwalks in Suffolk*. Countryside Books, Newbury.



Steam traction engine, at the Museum of East Anglian Life

This is a guide to twenty heritage places to visit in Suffolk, selected specifically for families with children with autism and related disabilities.

It includes fantastic rural heritage museums, castles steeped in history, traditional seaside towns and exciting archaeological sites!

Where possible, we have chosen places that are located in the countryside, by the sea, or set in peaceful gardens, offering a calm place to which children can retire during a visit.

The description of each place should help parents and carers to judge its suitability for their child and make visits as relaxed and enjoyable as possible, so that the benefits can be accessed by all the family.

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and
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