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SUMMER 2026



Explore
Essex

ESSEX EXPLORER

Magazine

History and heritage

Wildlife and walks

Family days out



**Hello
Essex**
See it. Do it. Feel it.



**ESSEX
COUNTRY
PARKS**

Escape to your Essex Country Parks



**Discover kids
trails, events
and activities.**



Welcome ...

To the summer edition of Essex Explorer magazine. In this issue we have a fantastic competition where you have a chance to win a mixed case of Barons Lane wine (total six bottles) from our friends at New Hall Vineyard.

We bring you some great ideas to get you out exploring Essex this summer, the Pete Wicks Dog Walking Trail at Weald Country Park, our Pup Stars competition winner and the best spots in our parks for a picnic with family and friends.

We reveal a 'day in the life' of an Essex Outdoors Instructor, the amphibians and reptiles you might find at our parks and how an archaeological dig will uncover a Tudor blockhouse at Cudmore Grove.

There are ideas for days out over the coming months in the listings (see page 38) or take a trip and meander around the county thanks to the Essex Film Office movie map as well as much more.

As a county, Essex has a beautiful landscape – from 'Constable Country' to coast – so get out and about and enjoy all that the parks and green spaces have to offer during the long summer days.



This magazine is available as an accessible PDF.
To request a copy email Explore.Essex@essex.gov.uk

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About us

Explore Essex brings together a unique group of green spaces and heritage places owned and managed by Essex County Council. Our mission is to provide a range of facilities and activities for the people of Essex to enjoy. Conservation is also at the heart of what we do, and any money spent with the Explore Essex group of places is ultimately reinvested to maintain and develop our sites for the benefit of visitors and to protect the flora and fauna within.

Get Connected

Keep up-to-date with our news, activities and competitions.

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Please share or recycle this magazine where possible.





Funding improves children's play equipment at Essex Country Parks

We're pleased to announce that improvement work to install new play equipment at some of the Essex Country Parks has taken place.

Following an investment of over £300,000, we've worked with playground equipment specialists, Kompan UK, to upgrade the play trail at Great Notley, while Belhus Woods and Hadleigh have also seen improvement works take place.

While Great Notley was already home to the county's longest play trail, elements have been replaced and renewed, including new sand play equipment, a climbing forest, sensory equipment, an agility route, a 12-metre rope bridge and more.

Both of the children's play areas at Belhus Woods and Hadleigh Country Parks have been resurfaced as well, with possible further investments to follow in the future.

All the improvements are designed to stimulate children's imaginative play, improve communication skills, strengthen muscles and co-ordination and help burn off excess energy.

An Essex Country Parks spokesperson said: "Outdoor play itself is vital for children's wellbeing as it provides physical health benefits like improved fitness and stronger immune systems.

"It's also known to have mental health advantages including better mood, social and natural world connection and increased resilience."

Discover children's play trails. www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go/kids-play-and-trails



Bring history to life with Heritage Open Days

Look out for upcoming Heritage Open Days (Friday 11 to Sunday 20 September) and step back in time.

The Heritage Open Days celebrate the county's history and culture, giving you the chance to explore some of the marvellous mills we have across Essex, the historic Grade I listed Cressing Temple Barns and the highly popular arts and community venue, Jaywick Martello Tower.



Many Essex Country Parks are also steeped in history, from connections to landscape architect, Capability Brown, to World War Two trails, there's something for everyone who's interested in the past.

Explore our heritage walks and take a meander down memory lane.

Discover Cressing Temple Barns and the mills opening times by visiting: www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go/heritage-places

Image: Cressing Temple Barns

Summer of Culture for county's residents

The county will come alive this summer thanks to a range of exhibitions, cinema screenings, artistic workshops and music festivals for Essex residents and visitors of all ages.

The Summer of Culture and Heritage celebrates the county's vibrant arts, cultural and heritage sectors by providing free and low-cost activities.

All the events taking place throughout the summer are designed to celebrate the creative industries and unite the Essex cultural sector.



10 ways to explore Essex this summer

This summer we have 10 ways to make the most of our great county. So come and Explore Essex with us.



ONE

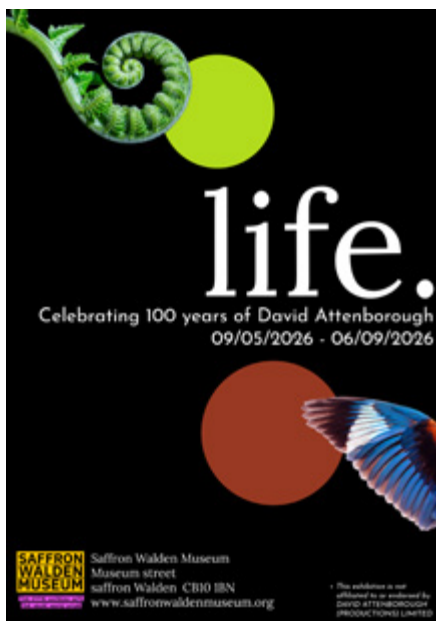
Visit an Essex vineyard and win a box of wine. [Pages 36 and 37.](#)



Credit: New Hall Vineyard

TWO

Step back in time with Essex Museums, discover a variety of events and exhibitions for all ages. [Pages 34 and 35.](#)



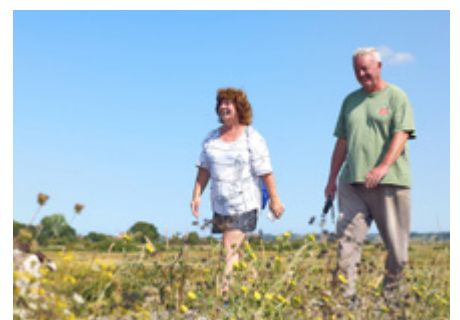
THREE

Head to the Festival of Essex Archaeology and Heritage on Thursday 23 July. [Pages 18 and 19.](#)



FOUR

Visit an archaeological dig and enjoy a day out at Cudmore Grove Country Park. [Pages 16 and 17.](#)



FIVE

Take the Pete Wicks Dog Walking Trail at Weald Country Park.
[Pages 8 and 9.](#)



Credit: James Rudland

SIX

Pack a picnic and find a shady, sheltered spot for a walk.
[Pages 10 and 11.](#)



SEVEN

Have a two-wheeled adventure and keep kids active with Essex Outdoors. [Pages 30 to 33.](#)



EIGHT

Visit the 'Lovejoy' locations with Essex Film Office.
[Pages 22 and 23.](#)



Image: Hedingham Castle

NINE

Relax at home with our recipes and crafts and take the Summer Reading Challenge with Essex Library Service. [Pages 24 to 27.](#)



TEN

Meet the experts, discover more about the people behind our spaces and their career paths.
[Pages 28 to 31.](#)

For more inspiration head to our listings pages to see 'what's on' this season at our parks, places and Visit Essex attractions.



Image: Scarlett Wilde

WIN an Explorer Pass worth £88.50

An Explorer Pass gives you unlimited car parking at Essex Country Parks with some café discounts too.

Tell us why you love Essex Country Parks to enter our prize draw.

Email your sentence to:
explore.essex@essex.gov.uk

By midnight Sunday 16 August 2026.

Let us know which country park(s) from the list below you are referencing.

- Belhus Woods Country Park
- Cudmore Grove Country Park
- Danbury Country Park
- Great Notley Country Park
- Hadleigh Country Park
- Marsh Farm Country Park
- Thorndon Country Park
- Weald Country Park



Discover the Pete Wicks Dog Walking Trail at Weald Country Park this summer



Did you know that we named a new dog walking trail after mental health and rescue dog ambassador Pete Wicks earlier this year?



Images of Pete Wicks credit James Rudland





Honoured to have the trail named after him, Pete said: “One thing I didn’t have on my bingo card this year was having an Explore Essex dog walking trail named after me. That said, I am grateful to see the brilliant work of rescue centres and their volunteers being recognised in this way. Getting outside in nature is good for all of us, so I genuinely hope people come along with their dogs and enjoy Brentwood’s Weald Country Park.”

Keen to offer all residents of Essex, and their waggy-tailed friends, great spaces to enjoy responsible dog walking experiences, Ricky Hooper, Essex Country Parks Manager, said:

“All eight of our country parks provide the perfect place for dog owners and their four-legged friends to explore the diverse landscapes we have right here in our county. From woodlands to marshes to beachside environments, there’s something for everyone and every dog to enjoy and explore.

“Weald Country Park in particular offers spectacular views and space throughout its 520 acres of unique historic parkland, and being close to the M25 and A12, it’s the perfect place to meet with family and friends.”

Take the trail

Head to Weald and leave your vehicle at the Cricket Ground car

park. Please note: You can join the trail from any of the Weald Country Park car parks.

Then, take the three-kilometre (approximately one hour) trail with its variety of paths and landscapes. Be aware that the trail includes some hills and may be muddy at times depending on the weather and the time of year you visit.

If you’re looking for a quicker and easier route, then you can follow the shortcut via the lake path.

Simply, download the ‘[Pete Wicks Dog Walking Trail](#)’ map and flyer and get going.

Read our blog on visiting the Essex Country Parks with your dogs and be aware of how to visit responsibly: www.explore-essex.com/dogs-essex-parks

Share your selfies

Find the Pete Wicks Dog Walking Trail selfie boards at the start of the trail and outside the café and share your selfies: @exploressex #petewicksdogwalk #weald

Take our survey to win an Explorer Pass

We’re seeing more dogs and their owners visiting, so we’d like to hear what you think of our country parks. So far, the most popular breed from our survey results is a cockapoo.

Take our [Dog Walking at Essex](#)

[Country Parks survey](#) and be entered into a prize draw to win an Explorer Pass.

Park Pup Stars

Meet Moose: Our Pup Star for April.

Lauren Killeen, Moose’s owner, said: “Moose is a blind, three-year-old rescue pup, who adores visiting lots of the Essex Country Parks. Although he can’t see, it doesn’t hold him back and he loves exploring and enjoying all the different smells and textures on offer. He particularly likes Weald Country Park and the woodland there, as it changes throughout the seasons. He loves the new Pete Wicks Trail too and featured on ‘Pete Wicks: For Dogs’ Sake’. We hope Moose will continue his adventures in the parks for many years to come.”

Discover more about our competition: www.explore-essex.com/essex-parks-pup-stars

To read more about Dogs Trust and to donate visit: www.dogstrust.org.uk

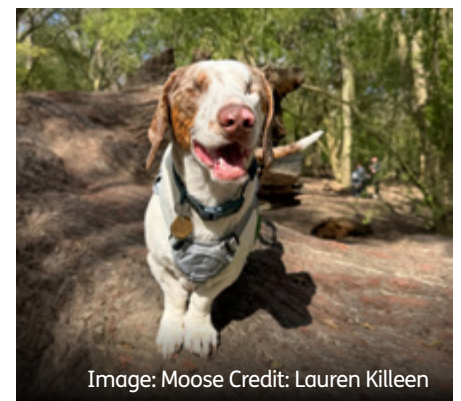


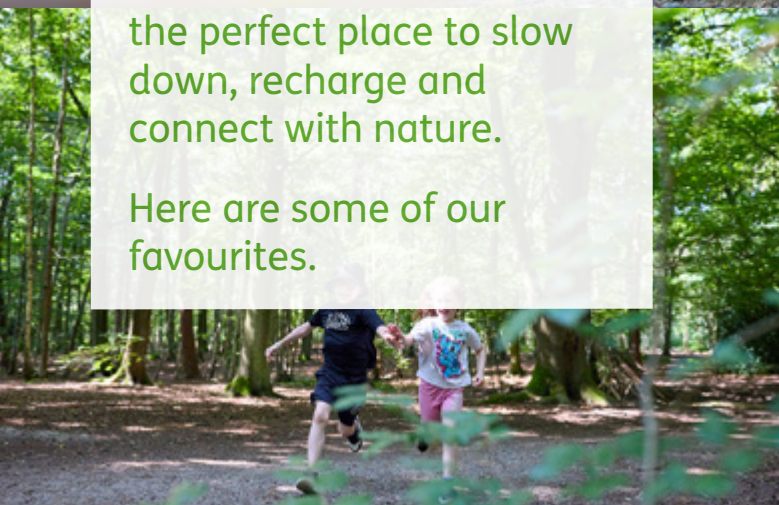
Image: ‘Moose’ Credit: Lauren Killeen

Shaded spots and woodland walks

When the sun is shining, there's nothing better than escaping beneath a leafy canopy for a gentle woodland stroll.

Across the Essex Country Parks, winding woodland paths and peaceful shaded benches offer the perfect place to slow down, recharge and connect with nature.

Here are some of our favourites.



Belhus Woods Country Park

Located in Aveley - on the southern edge of Essex - visitors can wander through more than 300 acres of ancient woodland, flower meadows and lakeside trails at [Belhus Woods](#).

Benches tucked among the trees provide welcome shady spots for picnics, birdwatching or simply pausing to hear the spectacular sounds of nature.

For the best shaded stroll, take a detour off the main pathways and use the alternative tracks through Running Water Wood towards Brick Kiln Wood.

Also, and new for this summer, is the Belhus Woods Butterfly Trail. Pick up your free trail booklet at the Visitor Centre and discover a world of colour by spotting different species along the way.

Danbury Country Park

[Danbury](#) is ideal for relaxed woodland walks beneath towering veteran oak trees.

The park's well maintained pathways weave through ancient woodland and around three lovely lakes, with plenty of perfectly positioned seating areas for quiet moments in the shade.

For a peaceful shaded picnic, park at The Woods car park and meander through the trees and over the bridge towards the Picnic Meadow. Set down your blanket and soak in the sights and smells of the woodland floor.

If you like this location, you might also like [Great Notley Country Park](#).



Weald Country Park

[Weald](#) offers wide open green spaces alongside beautiful, less known shaded woodland walks, making it a favourite for families and dog walkers alike.

Explore tree-lined paths, spot grazing deer and pause on hilltop benches - it's great for picnics and painting.

Park at Lincolns Lane, then journey across Lodge Field towards Beach Wood. Explore the vast wooded areas, before resting at the kids play area.

Alternatively, picnic at Belvedere Mound and watch the world unfold.

You might also like to try the Pete Wicks Dog Walking Trail (see more on [pages 8 and 9](#)).

Thorndon Country Park

For those looking to immerse themselves in deeper woodland scenery, look no further than [Thorndon](#).

The cool forest trails at Thorndon North make it a favourite on warm summer days. The park offers walking routes through mature woodland, where wildlife thrives and people gather to take in the surroundings. Not to mention this is where The Gruffalo and his sculptured friends reside.

With much to enjoy at Thorndon North, many people are unaware of Thorndon South's hidden shaded spots like the Old Deer Park or Ruin Wood.

Essex's woodlands are magical in summer, when the sunlight filters through the trees and wildlife thrives on the warm soil beneath the canopy.

So, pack a picnic, lace up your walking shoes and discover the quieter side of the county.

Woodland works at Essex Country Parks

Exciting conservation work is underway across Essex Country Parks, bringing new life to the woodlands. As dense shrub layers are carefully reduced, the woodland floor is beginning to flourish once again, bursting with renewed plant growth and colour.

Opening up these spaces is vital for wildlife, creating richer habitats for bats, birds, voles, weasels, as well as a wide range of insects and butterflies. By removing non-native conifers and invasive laurels, more natural light can reach the ground, allowing native wildflowers and plants such as bluebells and foxgloves - once lost or hidden - to return and thrive.

This thoughtful restoration is helping to create healthier, more diverse ecosystems for both wildlife and visitors to enjoy.

Read under a tree book bags

Borrow a bag from visitor centres and cafés and discover the magic of learning outdoors. Containing lovely picture books, a ground sheet and seasonal spotter's guide bags are available to share with your little ones at [Belhus Woods](#), [Cudmore Grove](#), [Danbury](#), [Great Notley](#), [Hadleigh](#), [Thorndon](#) and [Weald](#).

Find your favourite shaded spot and see what you can discover.

Amazing amphibians and reptiles at Essex Country Parks

Amphibians and reptiles are important for our grassland, wetland and woodlands and we're lucky to have many of the native species at Essex Country Parks.



Whether you think they are cute or creepy, amphibians and reptiles can be found in your local country parks, and whilst you're not that likely to spot these often shy creatures, they are important to our countryside.

They provide natural pest control by consuming large quantities of insects, beetles and spiders, and even rodents. They also help to show how healthy a habitat is, as their presence and numbers signal the overall quality of the land.

Many hibernate, emerging in early spring to mate and produce young into summer – look out for them on your next visit.

Reptiles are cold blooded and love a sunny spot to warm up, with some species living up to 20 years. Amphibians start life in the water and need a damp place to shelter as adults.

At Essex Country Parks we're working with [Amphibian and Reptile Conservation](#) and [Essex Amphibian and Reptile Group](#) to survey and monitor populations using artificial 'refugia' sheets, a kind of corrugated felt which provide shelter and protection.

If you find a refugia sheet when visiting please don't touch them as the disturbance is a risk to the reptiles. On your visit remember to respect all wildlife, keep a good distance away and keep dogs under control. Also, stick to paths, tracks and trails so as not to disturb these creatures.

All these species are protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Many are also Priority Species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework, with some being of international importance and protected under European acts.

Amphibians

Smooth newt: The smooth newt is grey-brown, with an orange belly and neat black spots all over. In the breeding season, males have a smooth crest running the full length of their body and tail.



Great crested newt: These newts breed in ponds during the spring months, feeding on invertebrates in woodland, hedgerows and damp grassland through the summer. Listed as a European Protected Species under Annex IV of the European Habitats Directive.

Palmate newt: The UK's smallest native newt, it looks similar to the smooth newt, favouring acidic soil and shallow ponds and can be found at Thorndon Country Park.



Common toad: Active from February to October, toads can be found in shady woodland, hedgerows and long grass through the summer. They often hibernate through the winter under log piles and stones.

Common frog: Much smaller than the toad, frogs tend to be found in shallower ponds during the spring, feeding in woodland, hedgerows and tuft grass. They feed on invertebrates and even smaller amphibians.



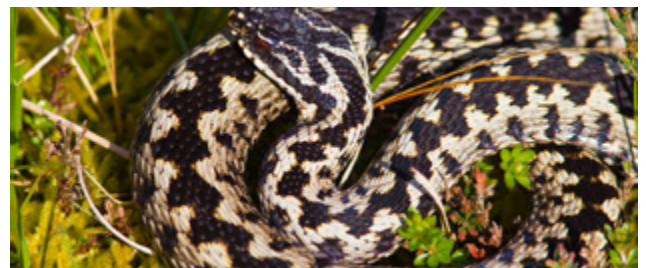
Reptiles

Common lizard: Look out for lizards sunbathing in grasslands, coastal areas and woodland glades from March to October.



Grass snake: This is the UK's longest snake but it's harmless. It's normally spotted in grassland and wetlands from April to October where they feed on amphibians and fish.

Adder: This shy snake can sometimes be spotted soaking up the sun in woodland and meadow glades from March to October. As the UK's only venomous snake it's worth being able to recognise an adder, although bites are extremely rare. It's distinctive by the dark diamond pattern on its back. Adders are secretive and well camouflaged and it's unlikely you'll see them, apart from in early spring when they are warming up after hibernation and competing for mates. Simply stick to the paths and that way you won't disturb them.



Slow worm: The slow worm is actually a lizard with no legs and it's not a worm or a snake. If you're lucky you might spot one in a sunny spot on grasslands from March to October or even in your garden as it likes compost heaps.

Read our blog to find out more about the work we are doing in our parks to support these species.
www.explore-essex.com/blog

Sources: Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust.

Be captivated by Cudmore Grove Country Park

On the eastern tip of Mersea Island, nestled between the Blackwater and Colne estuaries, lies the magical Cudmore Grove.



There is something special for everyone whatever the season at Cudmore. It's the perfect place to paddle and picnic, birdwatch, beachcomb and walk with friends and family. You can even arrive via the foot ferry from Brightlingsea during April to October.

Visit the friendly kiosk and pick up hot and cold refreshments, including ice creams to keep the kids happy. Open every weekend, with some summer holiday openings (see [website](#) for up-to-date hours).

Paddle, picnic and play

Pack a picnic and head to the meadow when you've parked up. Set up camp on one of the picnic benches close to the car park and the play areas (whilst the Pirate Ship is currently closed, two play areas remain open for kids to enjoy).

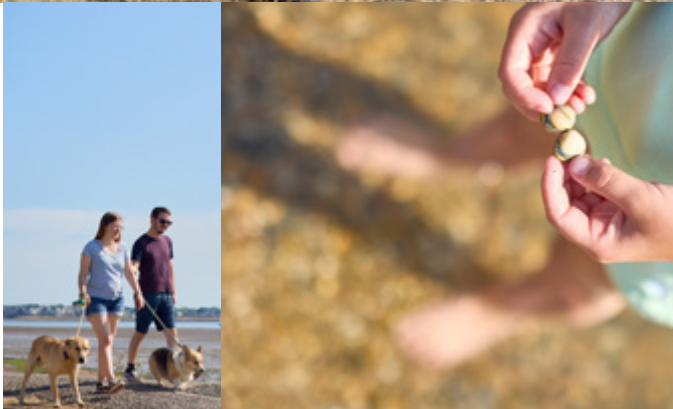
If you fancy meandering a bit further, head down to the small beach at the bottom of the cliffs for lunch with a view. Bring a bucket and spade and take a paddle to cool off when the tide is right.

Beachcombing, birdwatching and butterflies

The section of the beach under the cliffs is ideal for beachcombing. Discover thousands of discarded oysters eaten by the resident wading birds and hundreds of shells of all shapes and sizes. You might even find the odd shark's tooth or ancient flint. But remember to stay well back from the cliffs which are subject to coastal erosion.

Wander along the beach enjoying the views out to the estuaries. Look out for gulls and terns, oystercatchers and smaller waders such as plover and dunlin.

For more birdwatching head to the hide on the far side of the wildflower meadow where you're likely to spot little egrets.



In the summer, the meadow is buzzing with up to 15 varieties of butterflies and other insects – the grass is kept long for the wildlife that calls this place home. Stick to the tracks so as not to disturb them.

Cudmore history

The history of Cudmore is fascinating, from the ancient prehistoric geology and interglacial cliffs to Roman and military defences from a Tudor blockhouse to World War Two fortifications.

A dig is taking place this summer to uncover the Tudor blockhouse fort before it is lost to coastal erosion – see overleaf to find out more.

But Cudmore is not just a beautiful place for people to explore, it's also a home for coastal birds. We are working with Bird Aware Essex to help us all enjoy this stunning stretch of coastline responsibly.

Plan your visit: www.explore-essex.com/cudmore-grove

Be Bird Aware

Bird Aware Essex Coast is an initiative to raise awareness of the birds on the county's coastline so people can enjoy the landscape without disturbing the wildlife.



Birds perceive people and their dogs as a threat and when they get too close, the birds sense danger. They may stop feeding, nesting and fly away.

It's important to understand what you can do to ensure there's space for everyone.

Beach nests

Some coastal birds lay their eggs in well camouflaged nests on the beach. They're difficult to see but easy to step on. At Cudmore, these birds include oystercatcher and ringed plover. Avoid walking directly on the shingle at the spit between March to September, stay close to the water's edge and keep dogs on a lead and under control in these areas.

Read more about what you might spot along the Essex Coast and the work Bird Aware are doing: www.birdaware.org/essex

Funded work was recently undertaken to protect the birds on the grazing marsh (a Site of Special Scientific Interest) and borrow dyke with anti-predator fencing so that animals including dogs, foxes and badgers can't access these important habitats.

www.explore-essex.com/landscape-restoration-cudmore



Visit an archaeological dig at Mersea

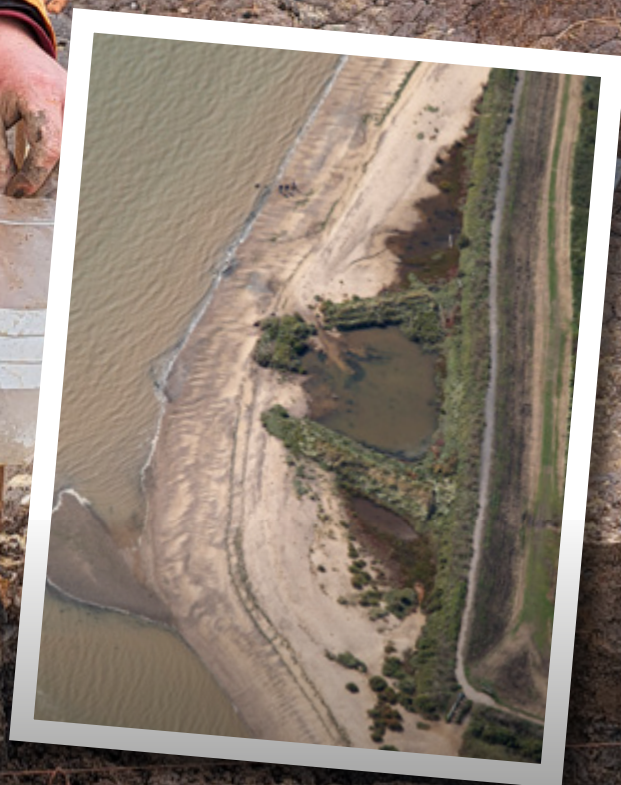


Image: A member of the dig team with an unearthed musket ball.

Visitors to Cudmore Grove Country Park can observe an archaeological dig to uncover the fortifications of a former Tudor blockhouse this summer.

Built in 1543 under Henry VIII's reign, dig volunteers will help explore the defensive strategies of the blockhouses which were part of a coastal military defence programme to defend the mouth of the Colne estuary.

Located at Cudmore Gove, the blockhouse is the only example in Essex with upstanding earthworks instead of the typical stone structure, as the defences were constructed of 'earth and board'.

Currently, there are 27 examples of Tudor blockhouses surviving in various states of repair, but most have been destroyed or incorporated into military constructions.

The blockhouse at Mersea held a small artillery garrison of 12 guns. Its cannons were removed in 1553, but the fortification was repaired to counter the Armada in 1588 and in 1648 it played a part in the Civil War.

It was also used briefly as a court, where local fishermen were prosecuted for dredging oysters out of season, before Cromwell ordered its demolition. It survived because the landowner forbade its destruction.

Place Services at Essex County Council have been working in partnership with Historic England to organise the excavation, while the Colchester Archaeological Trust will create a record of the site before it is lost to coastal erosion.

The excavation - funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and supported

by the Countryside Stewardship Heritage Service - is being carried out by volunteers from the local community and former members of the armed forces as part of Operation Nightingale.

Founded in 2011, Operation Nightingale is a UK Ministry of Defence initiative that uses archaeological excavations to aid the recovery of wounded, injured and sick military veterans.

Adrian Gascoyne, Essex County Council Head of Place Services, said: "The excavation of the Tudor blockhouse at Cudmore Grove Country Park is a unique opportunity for volunteers to help better understand the history and archaeology of Henry VIII's fortification of the English coast against the threat of invasion.

"The blockhouse is a rare survivor from that period and must be recorded now so that this unique part of our nation's story is not lost forever to the sea."

Image credits: Colchester Archaeological Trust and Place Services.



Visit the dig

During the excavation, from Tuesday 21 to Friday 31 July, visitors will be able to see the dig site and ask the team more about what they're doing and their recent finds.

Check [@cudmoregrove](#) on Facebook for updates.



Free Festival of Essex Archaeology and Heritage returns to Cressing

On Thursday 23 July at Cressing Temple Barns, the free family-friendly festival is back having proved to be highly popular last year.





This year's event aims to build on the success of 2025's festival and will feature even more exhibitors and reenactments to entertain visitors. It's ideal for all ages and anyone with an interest in archaeology, history and the heritage of Essex.

Organised by Place Services at Essex County Council, this year's festival will once again bring the county's past to life through a programme of family activities, museum exhibitions, archaeological organisations, societies re-enactment groups, falconry displays and much more.

Many of the exhibitors will be undercover in Cressing's historic wheat and barley barns so visitors can enjoy the event whatever the weather.

Tim Murphy, Place Services Historic Environment Manager, added: "Last year's festival exceeded our expectations as we saw over 1,000 people of all ages visit, however we want this year's event to be bigger and better.

"Within the county there are lots of fascinating historical assets which we want to celebrate and promote to the public as widely as possible.

"This festival is ideal for those who want to meet Essex's leading experts and those involved in discovering, preserving and presenting the best of the county's heritage"

For more visit:

www.explore-essex.com/whats-on/festival-of-essex-archaeology



Water Stories tell Jumbo's history

A nine-month heritage filmmaking project for young people will focus on the links between Colchester's historic 'Jumbo' tower and global water supply issues.

Water Stories, under The Jumbo Project programme, will train 12 to 18-year-olds to become heritage researchers, filmmakers and interpreters.





Backed by the Arts and Cultural Fund, Balmerne Water Tower, known as ‘Jumbo’, is Britain’s largest surviving Victorian municipal water tower having been built in the 1800s during the ‘Golden Age’ of industrial water engineering.

The Grade II listed building – which is visible above the city skyline – was built using locally made bricks and originally supplied water for the city’s first fire service. It also played a vital role in transforming public health by providing clean drinking water, this was at a time when cholera was devastating communities across England.

Building preservation trust and charity - North Essex Heritage - is leading The Jumbo Project. This once-in-a-generation scheme, made possible by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and players of the National Lottery, will restore the tower and re-purpose it into a visitor attraction and commercially viable, accessible heritage and events venue for the city.

The Water Stories project will see the young people work with international charity, WaterAid, to make video content about the tower’s heritage, while drawing attention to today’s global water issues, such as accessing clean water, climate change and environmental sustainability.

The young people will also take part in 16 sessions mixing research, group production, creative experimentation, technical skills and practical workshops in research and interviewing techniques.

They’ll also research Colchester’s water network through site visits, archive work and guided discussions.

The final film created by the project’s participants will premiere at a reopening event and will be projected inside the historic water tank.

‘Jumbo’ water tower will reopen to the public in 2027 when the project has been completed.

Joseph Rawlings, Jumbo Project Programme Manager, said: “We are overjoyed to have the support of the Essex County Council Arts and Cultural Fund for the Water Stories project.

“Jumbo has been a key part of Colchester’s water story since 1883, and we look forward to working with young people to creatively explore the importance of water on a local, national and international level.”

Find out more by visiting: www.jumbo.org.uk/jumbo-to-recruit-young-creatives

Images courtesy of North Essex Heritage.



Visit 'Lovejoy' locations with Essex Film Office

The highly popular BBC comedy-drama series that followed the loveable rogue 'Lovejoy' could be revived for modern audiences.



Image: Dedham

Boosting the county's tourism industry and putting the Essex antique industry on the map, 'Lovejoy' – played by actor Ian McShane – could return to the small screen 30 years since the programme last aired.

Image: Hedingham Castle





Image: Hedingham Castle

Take a trip to Battlesbridge Antique Centre

If you're interested in antiques don't forget to visit the Battlesbridge Antiques Centre on the River Crouch midway between Chelmsford and Southend-on-Sea. Consisting of several historic buildings and courtyards and home to over 80 antiques dealers, it's a haven for vintage art, military, furnishings, decorations and much more. It even has a motorcycle museum featuring classic and vintage motorbikes.

For more information visit: www.battlesbridge.com

Looking for a great day out?

Then why not visit all the 'Lovejoy' filming locations using the Essex Film Office movie map?

Featuring all the locations that were filmed for the programme, the movie map is also home to all the areas that have featured in television programmes and Hollywood blockbusters.

Discover more: www.essexfilloffice.co.uk/essex-movie-map



Based on the novels by John Grant, who wrote them using the pen name Jonathan Gash, 'Lovejoy' aired on the BBC from 10 January 1986 until 4 December 1994.

Adapted for television by Ian La Frenais, the programme ran for 71 episodes over six series and focused on the adventures of the rogue antiques dealer in East Anglia and his friends and colleagues 'Tinker', 'Eric' and 'Lady Felsham'.

Throughout the series 'Lovejoy' was portrayed as a 'divvy' (or 'divvie'), a slang term in the antiques industry to describe someone who can identify genuine antiques and instantly recognise fakes.

Filmed in in the picturesque areas of Essex and Suffolk - mainly in the Stour Valley - the programme also

shot scenes in the areas surrounding Braintree, Coggeshall, Halstead, Hedingham Castle and Long Melford.

Now, production company See-Saw Films (producers of TV programmes 'Slow Horses' and 'The Kings Speech') have acquired the rights to the novels and are looking to revive the popular programme for modern audiences.

An Essex Film Office spokesperson said: "The beloved drama really helped to showcase the pretty historic villages and towns in Essex to both a national and international audience.

"The charm of the places that were in the production of 'Lovejoy' has never gone away, and we'd be very keen to welcome film companies to Essex to showcase 'Lovejoy' to a new generation."

Images courtesy of Visit Essex.

Take the Summer Reading Challenge with Essex Library Service

The much loved Summer Reading Challenge returns, welcoming thousands of children into libraries over the school holidays and helping them keep up their reading skills in an easy, fun way.



The challenge runs across all Essex libraries, supported by a vibrant programme of events and activities, as well as community connectors and mobile libraries helping families to join the challenge from where they are.

This year's theme, **Read to the Beat**, developed by The Reading Agency, uses the universal appeal of music to spark a love of reading.

From rhythm and rhyme to sound, songs and stories, the theme will see Essex Libraries hosting an exciting mix of music inspired events that engage children's creativity while reinforcing the joy and importance of reading for pleasure.

Families can visit their local library this summer to sign up, collect challenge stickers and work towards earning a medal on completion.

Find out more:

www.libraries.essex.gov.uk/news/summer-reading-challenge

Make at home clay nature art

Bring a touch of nature into your home with these crafty clay prints. They're a great way to get your kids into arts and crafts and you get to explore the great outdoors.



To create your nature clay decorations, you will need some air-dry clay, a knife or plastic clay tools, a glass jar and some materials from nature.

On your next woodland walk collect different types of leaves, wildflowers and seeds - each with unique different textures and shapes.

Step 1

Cut away a chunk of clay and roll it around in your hands until it becomes warm and mouldable. This may take a few minutes.

Step 2

Use your glass jar to flatten the clay and place your leaf or chosen nature material on top.

Step 3

Press your nature material into the clay with either your fingers or by using your glass jar. (Top tip: Leave part of your leaf over the edge so you can easily lift it up again).

Step 4

Gently lift your leaf away from the clay and ta da, your masterpiece is revealed.

Step 5

Insert a hole if you want to hang your creation or place it inside a bowl to create a curved shape.

Step 6

Allow the clay to dry in a safe dry place (like a windowsill) for one to two weeks.

Step 7

Once dry you can paint it, colour it, varnish it or leave it as it is. It's up to you.

Tantalising Tiptree summer recipe

Enjoy a tasty tea with this delicious summer recipe from our friends at Tiptree.



BBQ Chicken Quesadillas



Turn left over chicken into these easy Mexican-style barbecue chicken quesadillas. Soft tortillas are folded around a smoky-sweet filling of shredded chicken tossed in tangy Tiptree barbecue sauce, tomato salsa and gently spiced peppers and onions, with plenty of mozzarella for that irresistible melt.

Toasted in a hot pan until crisp on the outside and deliciously gooey in the middle, it's the kind of meal that works just as well for a lunch as it does for an easy midweek dinner. Served with guacamole and sour cream these are guaranteed to be a hit.

Makes four quesadillas

Prep Time: 30 mins

Cook Time: 25 mins

Ingredients

For the tomato salsa

4 large tomatoes
 ½ a red onion
 Pinch of chilli flakes
 ½ tbsp lime juice
 1 tbsp chopped coriander
 ½ tbsp apple cider vinegar (or any vinegar)
 1 tbsp olive oil
 Salt and pepper to taste

For the quick guacamole

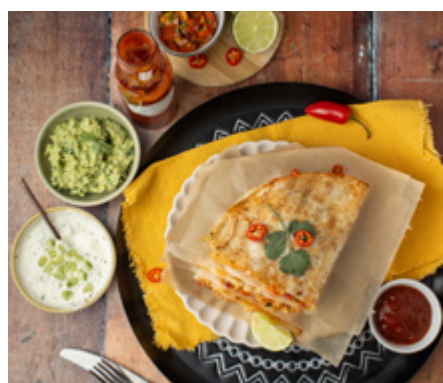
2 avocados
 Juice of 1 lime
 A handful of coriander leaves, chopped
 Salt and pepper to taste

For the sour cream dip

150ml sour cream
 2 spring onions, finely sliced

For the quesadillas

2 tbsp olive oil
 1 red pepper, sliced
 1 yellow pepper, sliced
 1 small onion, sliced
 ¼ tsp chilli powder
 ½ tsp ground cumin
 ½ tsp dried oregano
 Pinch of salt
 200g leftover cooked chicken, shredded or cut into pieces
 8 tbsp Tiptree barbecue sauce
 4 tsp sunflower oil
 4 large wheat flour tortillas
 100g grated mozzarella



Method

Make the tomato salsa

Finely chop the tomatoes, red onion and chilli and add to a medium bowl. Add the lime juice, coriander, vinegar and olive oil, season to taste and set aside to let the flavours mingle.

Prepare the sour cream dip

Mix the sour cream with the sliced spring onions. Place in the fridge until ready to serve.

Make the guacamole

Halve the avocado, remove the stone and scoop the flesh into a bowl. Roughly mash with the lime juice and coriander, season to taste, then set aside until ready to serve.

Make the quesadillas

Heat one tbsp olive oil in a large frying pan over a medium-high heat. Add the sliced peppers, onion, chilli powder, cumin, oregano and salt and fry until just softened, around five minutes. Transfer to a bowl.

Add the leftover cooked chicken to the same pan, then stir in the barbecue sauce. Cook for about five minutes, stirring, until hot. Transfer to a bowl, then wipe out the frying pan with kitchen towel.

Heat one tsp of sunflower oil in the frying pan over a medium heat. Place one tortilla in the pan and top half of the tortilla with one tbsp tomato salsa, ¼ of the cooked chicken mixture, ¼ of the pepper-onion mixture and 25g mozzarella cheese. Fold the other half of the tortilla over, pressing the edges together and cook until golden, flipping once, around three minutes per side.

Repeat to make four quesadillas.

Keep the cooked quesadillas warm, on a baking tray, in one layer, covered with foil, or in the oven on a very low heat until ready to serve.

Cut each quesadilla in half and serve as triangle wedges with the guacamole and sour cream dip on the side.

Additional Information

Use your biggest frying pan for this. It will be easier if the tortillas are the same diameter, or smaller than your pan.

Use any leftover meat, veg or cheese or whatever needs using up in the fridge in these BBQ quesadillas.

Swap the flour tortillas for corn tortillas for a more authentic quesadilla.

For vegetarians, use a protein, such as cooked beans or tofu.



Visit Tiptree Tea Rooms for an idyllic breakfast, lunch or afternoon tea:
www.tiptreetearooms.com

For more recipes:
www.tiptree.com/blogs/recipes

Behind the scenes: running an Essex Country Park

Ever wondered what it takes to run a country park? Here, Hadleigh's Manager explains their daily routine and how you can become a passionate environmentalist too.

How long have you been Hadleigh's Manager?

I joined Essex County Council (ECC) as a Country Park Manager just over a year ago. I've worked in the environmental sector for eight years, mainly for non-profit organisations.

Would you recommend working for Essex Country Parks?

Absolutely, it's a welcoming and friendly team and you can make a difference to your local green spaces while learning lots of new skills. In fact, I got my tractor driving licence last year.

What qualifications do you need to work in an environmental role?

If you're looking to gain a qualification then studying biology, wildlife conservation or countryside management at college or university is useful.

However, while there are many different routes into the role, volunteering is the best place to start as country parks and nature reserves are often looking for extra help. Not only do you learn about the natural world, but it also helps you decide whether you're drawn to the more practical, scientific or people-based roles.

What tips do you have for someone looking to get into your line of work?

Learn as much as you can about the environment and if you enjoy spotting wildlife, then get involved in 'citizen science' recording schemes. A great place to start is the Natural History Museum's nature recording hub: www.nhm.ac.uk

What does your day entail?

Being a park manager is really varied. I could be meeting with partners, line managing the ranger team, delivering projects to improve the park or working towards Countryside Stewardship targets.

What was your role previously?

I worked for the national charity Butterfly Conservation. In my role I worked with councils, schools and community groups on habitat creation, species surveying and community engagement to help protect the UK's butterflies and moths. One of my favourite parts of the role was bringing conservation to life for people – giving them the chance to see caterpillars and butterflies up close.



What's your favourite part of your role?

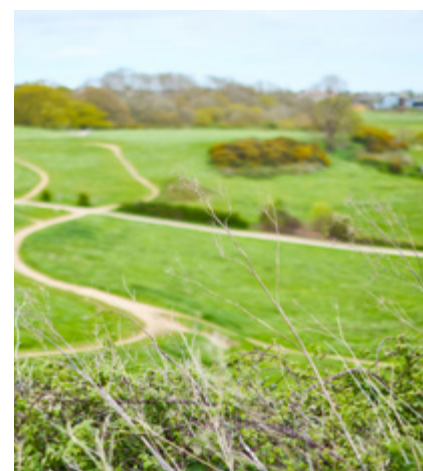
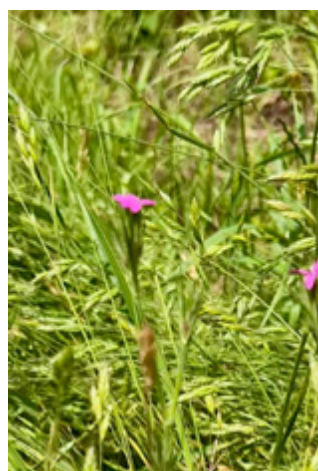
Getting to see wildlife while surveying and sharing what we find with visitors is a highlight - you never know what you might spot. Also, using all the different vehicles and machinery is great fun too.

What are the main works being carried out at Hadleigh?

We're restoring grasslands through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and have joined wildlife monitoring schemes like the National Reptile Survey, National Harvest Mouse Survey and Bumblebee Conservation Trust's Bee Walk transect.

What do you like most about Hadleigh Country Park?

I grew up visiting Hadleigh for wildlife events such as adder walks and glow worm searches with the rangers, so it holds fond memories for me. It's a real green sanctuary and home to some incredible species only found in a handful of places in the UK, including the shrill carder bumblebee and rare plants like bythinian vetch and deptford pink.



Have your hobbies helped you in your career?

Definitely, learning from college or university is valuable, but spending time out in the field is what really brings everything together. It's the best way to build real-world experience and you meet other naturalists who can become great mentors.

To plan a visit to Hadleigh Country Park and find out more about volunteering visit:

www.explore-essex.com/hadleigh-country-park

Scale new heights as an Essex Outdoors Instructor

Essex Outdoors offers action-packed activity days, residentials for school groups and much more at four Essex Outdoors centres – Bradwell-on-Sea, Danbury, Harlow and Mersea.



Here we meet Scarlett Wilde who tells us more about what it is like to be an Essex Outdoors Instructor and why outdoor learning and play is so important.

How did you become an instructor?

I've been an instructor for just over 12 months as I joined in April last year. My mum had a friend who was an Essex Outdoors Instructor a few years ago and she suggested I might enjoy the job. I applied online and was successful and have been working at Essex Outdoors since then.

What's your favourite part of your role?

I love that every day is different. I enjoy the variety of activities I run and each session is unique as it depends on the group that I'm working with. Generally, the groups are really enthusiastic and because of that we have a lot of laughs and fun along the way and throughout the day.

Would you encourage others to enter a career as an instructor?

I absolutely would. Being an instructor can be challenging but it is incredibly rewarding and enjoyable. You don't need any qualifications, what's far more important is enthusiasm for the role and a willingness to try new things. For our high ropes activities you'll also need a head for heights.

What kind of courses do you offer and oversee?

We offer day visits or residential trips for school groups, a holiday club for half term and summer breaks at our centres. And of course, there's Sky Ropes - the aerial adventure course at Great Notley Country Park. In the main, the courses all involve a wide range of activities such as high ropes, paddle sports, archery and zip wire. We also have our residential courses that allow groups to stay on-site in cabins, camping pods or tents.

How do the courses benefit children and young people?

All the courses teach something positive and contribute by providing a wide variety of skills. It could be from something practical and activity-based - such as how to paddle a kayak - to the more generic, like improving a young person's teamwork and communication skills. The courses also benefit young people as it gets them outside and allows them to better appreciate the great outdoors. Also, our residential courses teach independence, as for a lot of young people it's the first time they've stayed away from home.

What do you like doing in your spare time?

Well I've also started climbing and kayaking in my spare time as well. However, I mainly enjoy reading, making things, travelling and socialising with my friends. I also enjoy creative pastimes and I've found that being imaginative has really helped me to create games and develop new ways of delivering sessions, which are more engaging and enjoyable for the groups.

Essex Outdoors is the home of extraordinary adventures and has activities for all ages. Find out more: www.essexoutdoors.com

Express your interest in working as a seasonal instructor at Essex Outdoors for summer 2027: www.essexoutdoors.com/careers

essex
/outdoors

THRILLING SUMMER FUN ON YOUR DOORSTEP

Enjoy action-packed sessions for children and families at four centres.

- Kids Holiday Activity Days
- Sailing Experiences
- Sky Ropes

BRADWELL . DANBURY . HARLOW . MERSEA

www.essexoutdoors.com/family-fun

 Essex County Council

**HOLIDAY
ACTIVITY DAYS
BOOK 4
GET 1
FREE!**



SKY ROPES
adventure

High
adventure

Take a two wheeled adventure at an Essex Country Park

It doesn't matter if you haven't cycled in years, you're a beginner or are looking to hire a bike for a day, we've got some ideas to get you riding and have a 'wheelie' good time.

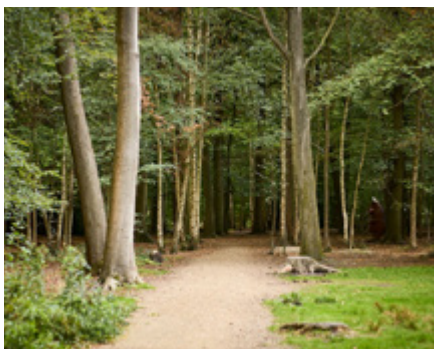
For woodland cycle trails and tours

Nestled in the deep, dark woods at [Thorndon](#) is [Trailnet](#), a Community Interest Company (CIC) that's committed to helping people of all ages and abilities to cycle for health, recreation and travel.

Trailnet offers bike hire so you can pedal around the park at your own pace or take part in one of their group rides that take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

They offer a choice of weekly rides (and bespoke rides if needed), varying in duration and difficulty. So, no matter what your level, they have something for you.

Why not push the pedals around Thorndon this summer and enjoy the quiet pathways off-road?



For pump tracks and off-road trails

Home to the 2012 Olympic mountain biking, [Hadleigh](#) is also a haven for those looking to start their two-wheeled adventures.

With two pump tracks and plenty of trails throughout the park, it's the ideal place to hone your off-road skills in a quiet traffic-free environment.

Need equipment or to hire a bike? Then [Hadleigh Cycles](#) can help -situated on site, they offer cycle hire, bike servicing and riding lessons from beginners to advanced.

Whether you're cycling for fun, fitness or adventure at Hadleigh, the team can help to get you or your younger ones riding and experiencing the freedom that comes from cycling.

So, why not start cycling at Hadleigh this summer and begin a 'life behind (handle) bars'?



For flat, traffic-free routes

Not only is it home to the longest play trail in Essex (it's 1.2km long) and Sky Ropes, [Great Notley](#) is also perfect for those cyclists seeking to boost their confidence.

Away from the roads and with flat, hard surfaces throughout the park, you and your children can pedal until your heart's content before stopping for a refreshing drink or snack at the café.

If you fancy something more adventurous, then continue from the park onto the former railway line, the [Flich Way](#).

Passing through 15 miles of rural Essex, the Flich Way is perfect for pushing the pedals for all ages as it offers easy and flat terrain, that's straight and well-surfaced (you may have to cross some roads though).

Ideal for both road and off-road cyclists, you and your family can ride at your own pace away from the traffic.

There's also interesting sites along the way, including the former Rayne station (now the Booking Hall café) which offers sweet treats and savoury snacks to keep you fuelled.

Peaceful routes for bike beginners

With 45 acres of park to explore, [Danbury](#) is perfect pedalling for beginners and those with little legs.

Featuring hard packed and well surfaced paths throughout the park, riders can cycle past historic lakes, through woodland havens and around wildflower meadows.

With flat traffic-free paths, you can ride a route that can be broken into a longer or shorter journey depending on you and your children's fitness and abilities.

You might even see a variety of wildlife as you pedal along, such as squirrels, ducks and maybe a deer.



Quiet paths for recreational riders

From grassland areas to meadows and lakes, cycling at [Belhus Woods](#) will take you on a trip through different and stunning surroundings.

With flat and well-maintained pathways, cyclists can take a two-wheeled adventure away from the hustle and bustle of the busy roads.

Not only is there a large car park* offering plenty of space to load and unload your bikes, but there's also cycle racks at the café making it easy for you to grab a refreshing snack or drink before or after your ride.

*Please note that there is a height barrier to the entrance to the car park, so if you have bikes on the top of your car you will need to go into the visitor centre and they'll be happy to open it for you.

Plan your visit to an Essex Country Park. www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go

Step back in time with Essex Museums



Image: Southend Museums Anglo-Saxon weekend

Essex is where rural tradition meets industrial invention and Essex Museums make that bridge visible and tangible through their collections and exhibitions.

Nearly 70 heritage sites in Essex are members of Museums Essex, a charity that supports the county's museums, galleries and heritage organisations.

Essex Museums has been busy preparing exhibitions and events for all to enjoy. Here are just a few highlights with a largely Roman theme.

Find out more about Essex Museums by visiting: www.museums-essex.org

Epping Forest District Museum

Town and Country:
Life in Roman Durolitum

Now until Monday 14 December

Epping Forest District Museum's new exhibition 'Town and Country: Life in Roman Durolitum', explores what it was like to live at the Roman settlement of Durolitum almost 2,000 years ago.

Join them to explore Roman hygiene, bathing, food, daily life, religion and so much more. View 2,000-year-old sections of mosaic, decorated pots and smaller, personal objects such as jewellery and religious pieces.

The exhibition starts with some Iron Age items found in Waltham Abbey and explores what the area was like before the Romans invaded. Children are also welcome to dress up as Roman gods or goddesses and enjoy extra crafts and activities.

www.ticketsource.co.uk/efdmuseum



Museum of Chelmsford

Timeless Treasures:
The Great Baddow Hoard

From Saturday 18 July

The Museum of Chelmsford is displaying a recent local significant find, The Great Baddow Coin Hoard.

Purchased with a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, this hoard of gold Iron Age coins, thought to be possibly linked to Julius Caesar, will be displayed for the first time in their exhibition 'Timeless Treasures' and helps shed a light on the activity of Iron Age tribes in the East of England.

Supported by an events programme, from talks to school holiday activities, the exhibition will explore how it came to exist.

www.chelmsford.gov.uk/museums/collections/the-great-baddow-hoard



Southend Museums

Anglo-Saxon Weekend

Saturday 2 and Sunday 3 August

Get ready for a very Saxon summer at Southend Museums' 'Anglo-Saxon Weekend'. Travel back in time and wander through Age of Penda's living Anglo Saxon re-enactment camp.

The weekend features combat displays, traditional textiles and blacksmithing, medicine and cooking demonstrations. You can even try your hand with your own sword to see if you have what it takes to be an Anglo Saxon warrior for the Kingdom of Essex.

www.anglo-saxon-weekend-tickets.eventbrite.com

Saffron Walden Museum

A wild summer

Now until Sunday 6 September

2026 marks the 100th birthday of much-loved broadcaster and national treasure David Attenborough. To celebrate, Saffron Walden Museum will present a new exhibition, 'Life: Celebrating 100 Years of David Attenborough'.

This special exhibition honours the extraordinary life and work of the nation's favourite naturalist, bringing together objects from across the museum's rich human and natural history collections.

Visitors will be inspired to explore and help protect the natural world - continuing a legacy that has shaped how we see our planet. There are themed family-friendly activities throughout the school holidays.

www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org



Rayleigh Town Museum

Romans!

Now until Saturday 29 August

This new exhibition at Rayleigh Town Museum will show how the Romans are connected to the local area.

Discover the everyday lives of the Romans in Britain, enjoy children's activities (for a minimal cost) and dressing up. With free entry, this exhibition is a must see for all ages.

www.rayleightownmuseum.org

Thaxted Windmill

A wide range of free activities
are taking place this summer

Thaxted Windmill, built by local entrepreneur John Webb in 1804, is currently undergoing repair and conservation in a two-year £1.6 million project.

As well as repairing the structure and the millwrighting machinery, this project is about community involvement through education, the sharing of history and the celebration of heritage.

Training in heritage skills will enable volunteers to be researchers, interpreters, guides, producers of learning activities and conservators.

Subjects and themes have been extended to the wider related heritage, such as researching family history, agriculture past and present, photographing historic buildings and landscapes, mills in paintings, folksongs and folklore.

To find out how to take part email: johnwebbswindmill@gmail.com



Explore these excellent Essex vineyards

Did you know there are approximately 50 vineyards in our county? From Crouch Valley to Saffron Grange, these Essex vineyards are sure to tickle your tastebuds this summer.



Image: New Hall Wine Estate

Crouch Ridge Vineyard: Althorne, near Chelmsford

Planted in 2010 with classic cool climate grape varieties on the gentle south facing slopes overlooking the River Crouch in Althorne, Crouch Ridge welcomes visitors to the tasting room all year round. It also runs a number of events and even has accommodation options.

Take a grand tour and tasting running through August and September (subject to weather). Other events are also available on their website: www.crouchridge.com



Dedham Vale Vineyard: Boxted, near Colchester

Take a trip to the vineyard of the year. Set in a stunning location of 40 acres on the edge of Dedham Vale, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and on the edge of the Essex Way. From Pinot Noir to Chardonnay and Bacchus, discover a variety of grapes and wines at this charming site. Discover upcoming tours and tastings here:

www.dedhamvalevineyard.com



Great Lodge and Bardfield Vineyard: Near Braintree

Great Lodge is a tranquil, rural estate in north Essex. Originally a medieval deer park, it was given to Anne of Cleves by Henry VIII when their marriage was annulled and the magnificent Grade I listed brick and tile barn dates from that period. Nestled behind the barn is Bardfield Vineyard which has been producing award-winning wine for almost 30 years.

Visitors can enjoy a tour of the vineyard and wine tasting either with a self-guided trail or for groups by appointment. Wine can be purchased from the vineyard shop. www.greatlodge.co.uk



New Hall Wine Estate: Purleigh, near Maldon

Located in the heart of Essex, this 120-acre vineyard produces award-winning wines, nurturing every drop from grape to glass. First established in 1969, the business remains family owned and is run by the third generation.

Multiple winners of Vineyard of the Year, Winemaker of the Year and various national and regional trophies, New Hall holds one of the largest collection of awards in the country and a firmly established stellar reputation for both still and sparkling wines.

In 2025 a new tasting room was launched, which is now home to tour and tasting events as well as Cellar Door Social Saturdays over the summer months.
www.newhallwines.com



Tuffon Hall Vineyard: Sible Hedingham, near Halstead

Discover a young, award-winning wine maker at this modern, boutique vineyard specialising in sparkling and high-end wines. Their Beatrice 2022 Pinot Noir Rosé was crowned 'Best Still Rosé in Great Britain' at the Wine GB Awards. Elegant, fresh and full of character, it's been praised by Oz Clarke as "deliciously easy drinking and knocks the socks off any Provence stuff."

Discover tours, tasting, events and wedding hire. www.tuffonhall.co.uk



Saffron Grange Vineyard, Little Walden

A family-run vineyard nestled on chalky slopes just outside Saffron Walden, Saffron Grange produces premium quality English Sparkling Wines.

Take a tour and tasting throughout the year. You can even learn about the rare chalk seam of the region that runs all the way from France's renowned regions and hear about how the woolly mammoth once roamed here.
www.saffrongrange.com

All vineyards featured in our article are Visit Essex members.

To find out more about becoming a member:
www.visitessex.com/industry-and-press/become-a-member



Win a box of wine from New Hall Vineyard worth over £90!

We're delighted to have a mixed case of Barons Lane wine (total six bottles) to giveaway.

Perfect to enjoy with family and friends, or savour for a special occasion and delight your palate.

Find out more: www.newhallwines.com/shop

To enter:

To enter our prize draw simply email the answer to the question below to Explore.essex@essex.gov.uk and title your email: New Hall comp.

Closing date: Midnight Sunday 26 August 2026.

Open to UK residents over 18-years-old.

Q: Who first popularised wine making in Essex?

- Romans
- Saxons
- Tudors

Prize to be collected in person or £9.00 to be delivered by courier.

Read our full terms and conditions: www.explore-essex.com/ee-comp



Days out summer 2026



Image: Audley End House and Gardens. Credit: Visit Essex

Audley End House and Gardens

Now until Sunday 13 September

Discover a variety of events and activities for all ages. Enjoy small scale workshops and classes, including craft, art, yoga and much more. Suitable for all ages. Price: See website. www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/audley-end-house-and-gardens/events

Beth Chatto's Plants and Gardens

From Snapper to Photographer

Saturday 11 July:
10.30am to 3.30pm

Step into a vibrant world and begin your journey from casual snapper to confident photographer. Learn to move beyond auto mode and explore manual settings, gaining creative control of your camera. Suitable for: See website. Price: See website. www.rootsshootsphotography.com

Shadows, Light and Still Life

Saturday 8 August:
10.30am to 3.30pm

Celebrate the peak of summer at Beth Chatto's Plants and Gardens in an August Photography Workshop, designed for beginners. Suitable for: See website. Price: See website. www.rootsshootsphotography.com

Castle Hedingham

Wonky Wheel Gallery

Now until September

Discover a packed programme of exhibitions and creative events, including the spring exhibition Awakening the Earth and workshop experiences. Suitable for all ages. Price: See website. www.wonky-wheel.co.uk

Castle Park Open-Air Theatre

Castle Park After Dark Presents:
The Adventures of
Sherlock Holmes

Now to Saturday 1 August: Gates
8.00pm, show starts 9.00pm

Revel in the thrilling tales of Sherlock Holmes after the park has shut to everyone else. Suitable for 12-years-old and over. Price: Adults £16.00, £14.00 concessions (under 18-years-old and over 65-years-old). www.castleparktheatre.co.uk

Chelmsford Theatre

Discover Workshops

Thursday 23 July to
Friday 7 August

A packed programme of musical workshops and performance masterclasses for the littlest theatre goer to budding teenage stars. Ending with the annual Musical in a Week challenge. Suitable for three to 17-years-old. Price: See website. www.chelmsfordtheatre.co.uk/discover/discover-for-young-people

The Ultimate Bubbles Show

Wednesday 29 July

Enjoy a whirlwind of excitement and surprises, as Ray Bubbles creates a volcano bubble, a soap bubble carousel, a bubble ghost and even a tornado inside a bubble.

Suitable for children and adults with additional needs. Price: See website. www.chelmsfordtheatre.co.uk/events/the-ultimate-bubbles-show

The Lion Inside

Monday 31 August to
Tuesday 1 September

A heart-warming tale about confidence, self-esteem, and a shy little mouse who sets out on a journey to find his roar. Suitable for three-years-old and over. Price: See website. www.chelmsfordtheatre.co.uk/events/the-lion-inside

Cliffs Pavilion

High Society

Tuesday 28 July to Saturday 1
August: 7.30pm

Helen George ('Call the Midwife', 'The King and I') leads the cast as glamorous socialite Tracy Lord, where plans for the society wedding of the year descend into chaos. Suitable for: See website. Price: Tickets from £35.50. www.trafalgartickets.com/cliffs-pavilion-southend

Lord of the Dance

Tuesday 11 to Thursday 13
August: 7.45pm

Lord of the Dance, the global phenomenon that redefined Irish dance, is set to celebrate its 30th anniversary with a new tour. Suitable for: See website. Price: Tickets from £46.50. www.trafalgartickets.com/cliffs-pavilion-southend/en-GB/event/dance/michael-flatleys-lord-of-the-dance-tickets

Colchester Fringe Festival

Summer Weekender

Thursday 23 to Sunday 26 July

Across four days, local artists and international groups transform theatres, music venues, bars and cultural spaces with an exciting mix of theatre, music and comedy. Suitable for all ages. Price: See website. www.colchesterfringe.com

Colchester Zoological Society

Summer Holidays

Saturday 18 July to Monday 31
August: 9:30am to 6:00pm

This summer, enjoy a wild adventure filled with daytime activities for children. Suitable for all ages. Price: Event included in standard admission. www.colchesterzoologicalsociety.com/event/summer-holiday

Cressing Temple Barns

Festival of Essex Archaeology and Heritage

Thursday 23 July:
10.00am to 5.00pm

A family-friendly festival for anyone with an interest in archaeology, history and the heritage of Essex (some talks are bookable in advance). Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.explore-essex.com/whats-on/festival-of-essex-archaeology

Essex Country Parks

Summer Trails

Running throughout the school
summer holiday

Pick up or download a free summer trail at Belhus Woods, Cudmore Grove, Danbury, Great Notley, Hadleigh, Thorndon and Weald Country Parks – as well as Cressing Temple Barns.

Find the clues and complete the activity sheets. Enjoy the kid's play and other features of the parks. Take a picnic and make a day of it. Suitable for all the family, for children eight-years-old and under. Price: Free. www.explore-essex.com/events

Sky Ropes at Great Notley Country Park

Running on summer weekends and throughout the school summer holiday.

Sessions run from 10.00am to 3.00pm approximately.

Swing, swoop and soar on our high ropes course. Suitable for adults and children from one metre tall. The 75-minute adventure includes the harness briefing. Suitable for: Children must be over 1.22m (four foot) to go on unaccompanied. A toddler course is also available. Price: See website. www.explore-essex.com/sky-ropes

Wild Wednesdays at Danbury Country Park

Running every Wednesday throughout August: 11.00am to 2.00pm

Free family forest school sessions on the meadow for every generation. Activities can include hammocks, den building, mud kitchen, water play, swings and slacklines. Informal drop-in session. No need to book. Car parking charges apply. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.explore-essex.com/events

Essex Outdoors

School Holiday Activity Days

Various dates, throughout summer holidays: 9.00am to 4.30/5.00pm

Running at four centres, Bradwell-on-Sea, Danbury, Harlow and Mersea.

Affordable kids' clubs with exhilarating outdoor activities. Children enjoy four sessions in small groups with friendly and experienced instructors. Activities include archery, climbing, paddlesports, sailing and zip wire – depending on the centre and the day you book.

Suitable for: Eight-years-old and over. Price: £40.00 per child (book four sessions and get the fifth for free). www.essexoutdoors.com/school-holiday-activities

Set sail on the River Blackwater

Sailing Experience Days

Learn to Sail Adult Weekends

Learn to Sail Kids Weeks

Various dates throughout the summer months. Learn to sail with Essex Outdoors camps for all ages. Suitable for ages seven-years-old and over. Price: See website. www.essexoutdoors.com/experience-days-on-the-water

Essex Record Office

ERO Presents: The life and work of J.A. Baker (1926 to 1987)

Tuesday 28 July: 10.40am to 12.00pm

Join speaker Dr Sarah Demelo for this talk about the life and work of the author of 'The Peregrine', J. A. Baker. Suitable for all ages. Price: £6.75. www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/whats-on/events

Experience days at the ERO

Friday 14 and Tuesday 25 August

Interested in a career in archives and heritage? Come along to the ERO experience days on to find out more about working in an archive. Suitable for ages 16 to 20-years-old. Price: Free. www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/whats-on/events

ERO Presents: A Victorian Family Album

Tuesday 1st September: 10.40am to 12.00pm

Join speaker Professor Jane Hamlett for this talk about the Luards of Aveley in the late 19th century. Suitable for all ages. Price: £6.75. www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/whats-on/events

Essex Museums

Various exhibitions – see pages 34 and 35.

Firstsite

Godfried Donkor: It's a Numbers Game

Now until Sunday 30 August

Firstsite is transformed by the work of international artist Godfried Donkor. The exhibition fills the building and invites visitors to think about history in a completely new way. Suitable for: See website. Price: Free. www.firstsite.uk/whats-on

Arpita Shah: Nalini

Now to Monday 5 October

An intimate exploration of family, memory and identity, Nalini is an ongoing series of work by Arpita Shah that focuses on the artist, her mother and grandmother. Suitable for: See website. Price: Free. www.firstsite.uk/whats-on

Krafty Kids Workshops

Sunday 19 July and Sunday 16 August: 10.00am

Krafty Kids is a monthly creative workshop designed for young people. Suitable for: Nine to 14-years-old. Price: Tickets £11.00, members £8.00. www.firstsite.uk/whats-on

Holiday Fun

Saturday 18 July to Saturday 29 August (Tuesdays to Saturdays): 10.00am to 2.30pm

Free drop-in creative and outdoor activities for families during the school holidays. www.firstsite.uk/whats-on

Gateway 978 Radio

Summer School

Monday 1 to Saturday 29 August (excluding Sundays): 10.00am to 2.00pm

Join Gateway 978 for this series of radio broadcasting workshops. Suitable for 11 to 20-years-old. Booking required. Please email reception@gateway978.com to book. Price: See website. www.gateway978.com

Great Ruffins

Wild Arts Presents Mozart: An Evening of Opera

Sunday 26 July: 3.30pm

A summer treat featuring favourite arias and songs from classic musicals by Rogers and Hammerstein, Bernstein and Noel Coward. Suitable for eight-years-old plus. Price: £45.00. www.wildarts.org.uk

Hanningfield Reservoir Nature Discovery Park

Family Bat Evening

Thursday 23 July, Monday 27 July, Thursday 30 July, Monday 3 August, Saturday 8 August, Monday 10 August, Thursday 13 August: 7.30pm to 9.30pm
Monday 17 August and Thursday 20 August: 7.00pm to 9.00pm

Join Essex Wildlife Trust for an evening in Hanningfield Woods, where we will give an informative presentation about the bats that call Hanningfield home, before heading out to listen to the bats on bat detectors and spot them flying around using torches. Suitable for eight-years-old and over. Price: £10.88. www.essexwt.org.uk/events

Grange Farm Nature Reserve

Grange Farm Family Survival Adventure

Monday 24 August: 10.00am to 12.00pm

Do you have the skills to survive and thrive in the woodland? This event will test and grow your knowledge whilst exploring wildlife. Suitable for ages five-years-old and over. Price: £8.80. www.essexwt.org.uk/events/2026-08-24-grange-farm-family-survival-adventure

Grange Farm Pond Dipping and Bat Evening

Thursday 20 August: 6.30pm to 8.30 pm

As the evening draws in, let's discover what creatures live beneath the surface in our pond at Grange Farm. We'll then grab our bat detectors and take a walk around the grounds to see what nocturnal life might be flying above our heads. Suitable for all ages. Price: £10.88. www.essexwt.org.uk/events/2026-08-20-grange-farm-pond-dipping-and-bat-evening

Hanningfield Reservoir and Waterside Park

Summer Kids Craft Club

Tuesday 4, Tuesday 11, Tuesday 18 and Tuesday 25 August:
11.00am to 1.00pm

Let the creativity loose at the craft club for two hours of entertainment with no mess. Enjoy a well-stocked crafting session followed by time in our adventure playground. There's no need to book, just turn up and have fun. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.watersideparksuk.com/news/?park-location=hanningfield&s=craft

Hylands Estate

Sunday 12 July and Sunday 9 August: 10.00am to 3.00pm

Hylands Estate is fully open to explore, with free family activities to keep everyone entertained. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.hylandsestate.co.uk/explore/openestate

Beginners Glass Workshops

Various dates

Spend a fun day learning a new skill and creating your own glass creations with Hylands artist Mona Marnell. Suitable for 18-years-old and over. Price: £115.00 per person. www.hylandsestate.co.uk/organiser/mona-marnell

Ignite Chelmsford

Ignite Social

Thursday 13 August:
7.00pm to 10.00pm

A monthly social meet with talks from inspiring local creatives across a range of topics. Suitable for 16-years-old and over. Price: Free. www.ignitechelmsford.org.uk

Jaywick Martello Tower

JMT Summer Talks: German Occupation of the Channel Islands

Tuesday 28 July:
6.30pm to 7.30pm

This talk by Alan Moorcroft provides details of the German forces and their efforts to strengthen the islands along with the methods the population and the occupying forces used to communicate with family and friends. Suitable for all ages. Price: £3.00 entry www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/1985280071135

JMT Summer Talks: British Prehistory

Tuesday 4 August:
6.30pm to 7.30pm

Join JMT for a fascinating journey into the earliest chapters of human history, led by one of the UK's foremost prehistoric archaeologists. Professor Nick Ashton will reveal groundbreaking discoveries that are transforming our understanding of the first people to inhabit Britain and northern Europe. Suitable for all ages. Price: £3.00 entry. www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/1985280610749/

JMT Summer Talks: Fred Olsen's "small ships with big personality"

Tuesday 11 August:
6.30pm to 7.30pm

Join Matt Bailey for this talk on the history of Fred Olsen Cruise Lines. The company began in a small town on Oslo fjord in Norway in 1848 when the three Olsen brothers bought their first ships. Suitable for all ages. Price: £3.00 entry. www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/1985280831409

JMT Summer Talks: Railways and Scenery in New Zealand

Tuesday 18 August (New Zealand North Island):
6.30pm to 7.30pm
Tuesday 25 August (New Zealand South Island):
6.30pm to 7.30pm

Join Adrian Wright for a two-part illustrated talk portraying a journey using New Zealand's three long-distance passenger trains from Northland through both major islands to the aptly-named Greymouth on the Tasman Sea coast. Suitable for all ages. Price: £3.00 entry. www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/1985281098207 (Tuesday 18 August) www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/1985281351966 (Tuesday 25 August)

Exhibition: Holland Art Society

Wednesday 29 July to
Sunday 6 September

Experience an inspiring showcase of creativity from the Holland Art Society. The exhibition highlights the strength and diversity of art being produced within the local community, making it a must-see for art lovers and visitors alike. Suitable for all ages. Price: See website. www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go/find-whats-near-me/jaywick-martello-tower

Coastal Open 2026

Saturday 12 September to
Sunday 1 November

Explore the vibrant work of local artists as they bring the themes of 'Heritage', 'Community' and 'Environment' to life through captivating paintings, handcrafted ceramics and much more. Suitable for all ages. Price: See website.

www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go/find-whats-near-me/jaywick-martello-tower

Langton Hall

Artimate: Two-Day Stop Motion
Animation Workshop

Tuesday 21 and Wednesday 22
July and Tuesday 18 and
Wednesday 19 August:
10.00am to 2.00pm

Children learn on professional equipment the art of stop motion. Booking required. Suitable for seven to 12-years-old. Price: £65.00 early bird and £75.00 general admission. www.artimate.co.uk

Layer Marney Tower

Treasure Island

Tuesday 4 August:
3.30pm to 5.00pm

This swashbuckling adventure is bursting with swordfights, sea shanties and Long John Silver. Suitable for: See website. Price: Adult £20.00, child £12.00. www.layermarneytower.co.uk/events/treasure-island-2

London Alpacas

Guided Tour

Various dates

Meet a whole herd of alpacas and their babies without fences in the way, as you meet and feed them on a guided tour inside the Alpaca paddocks. Suitable for all ages. Price: £25.00 per person on shared tours (eight-years-old and over). Private tours start at £95.00, which includes the first three people. Children on private tours are just £15.00, additional adults £25.00. www.londonalpacas.co.uk/visit-us

Museum of Chelmsford

Roots Chelmsford
Windrush Exhibition

Now until Tuesday 1 September:
10.00am to 5.00pm

This exhibition will shine a light on the lives of the Caribbean Windrush community and those who left their mark on Chelmsford. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free with admission to the museum (£4.00 or free for members). www.chelmsford.gov.uk/museums

Iron Age Day

Saturday 18 July

Celebrate the opening of Timeless Treasures showcasing the Great Baddow Coin Hoard with a free Iron Age Day, includes living history stalls and more. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.chelmsford.gov.uk/museums/whats-on

Naze Tower

Summer Exhibition

Saturday 20 June to
Sunday 6 September

Over 20 artists from the region shown over six floors of Naze Tower. Suitable for all ages. Price: Adult £4.50, senior and students £4.00, four to 15-years-old £3.50, under four-years-old free, family (two adults and up to four children) £14.00. www.nazetower.co.uk

Palace Theatre

I'm Sorry Prime Minister

Tuesday 21 to Saturday 25 July

From the BAFTA Award-winning co-creator of 'Yes, Minister' and 'Yes, Prime Minister', Jonathan Lynn, comes the long-awaited final chapter of British political satire. Suitable for: See website. Price: Tickets from £23.50. www.trafalgartickets.com/palacetheatre-Southend

Rayleigh District Council

Rayleigh Windmill Anniversary

Sunday 26 July 26:
1.00pm to 4.00pm

An event to celebrate 20 years since the rescue and restoration of the Rayleigh Windmill. Parking is free in all local council car parks on Sundays. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.explore Rochford District.co.uk

RHS Garden Hyde Hall

Summer holidays: Brick Explorers

Saturday 18 July to Monday 31 August: 10.00am to 5.00pm

Discover and learn with incredible wildlife sculptures in the garden this summer, made from hundreds of thousands of bricks. Suitable for all ages. Price: Adults £18.40 (book online in advance and save), children aged five to 16-years-old £6.00. RHS Members and children under five-years-old free. www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall/whats-on/summer-holidays

Flower Show

Wednesday 5 to Sunday 9 August: 10.00am to 5.00pm

Discover floral displays, nurseries and trade stands, live music and food and drink. Suitable for all ages. Price: Adults £18.40 (book online in advance and save), children aged five to 16-years-old £6.00. RHS Members and children under five-years-old free. www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall/rhs-garden-hyde-hall-flower-show

Contemporary Craft and Design Show

Friday 28 to Monday 31 August: 10.00am to 5.00pm

Purchase from a stunning treasure trove of original and affordable designs created by some of the finest craftsmen and artists in the UK, including textiles, paintings and much more. Suitable for all ages. Price: Adults £18.40 (book online in advance and save), children aged five to 16-years-old £6.00. RHS Members and children under five-years-old free. www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall/viewevent?EFID=2159&ESRC=CMS

Mountfitchet Castle

William The Constructor 1066: Giant Brick Building Event

Saturday 1 to Sunday 16 August: 10.00am to 5.00pm

Forget William the Conqueror, become William or Wilma The Constructor. A unique experience for girls and boys to build a castle within a castle. Suitable for all ages. Price: The event is included in the normal admission price: Adult £18.00, child £14.00 (children under three-years-old, free), £16.00 senior. www.mountfitchetcastle.com/william-the-constructor-giant-brick-building-event

Nuclear Wild Forest: Splash

Various dates in July and August

From bouncing and climbing to splashing and sliding, children can explore the Lake Zone in a safe environment. Epic water obstacles include Upslide-Down, Doughnuts and more. Buoyancy aids are provided for all lake activities, with experienced water safety-trained staff on hand throughout. Suitable for ages six-years-old and over. Price: See website. www.nuclearessex.com/nuclear-wild-forest/splash

Just Get Over it

Tuesday 28 July to Thursday 27 August: 10:30

Ninety minutes of action-packed obstacle and muddy fun, led by designated and qualified instructors. Children will work way around the course in a session designed for all abilities, Suitable for ages six-years-old and over. Ages six-years-old and over includes the Slip N Slide, ages 10-years-old and over includes the Deathslide. Price: £24.00 per person. www.nuclearessex.com/nuclear-wild-forest/just-get-over-it

Unlimited Summer Pass

Monday 20 July to Monday 31 August

The Nuclear Adventures Summer Pass is the ultimate ticket for adrenaline-seekers and families looking to stay active all holiday long. This year, the pass is more inclusive than ever. Suitable for ages six-years-old and over (minimum height of 1.2 metres). Price: Adults £80.00, children £60.00. www.nuclearessex.com/offer/adventures-summer-pass

Street Eats and Beats Festival, Chelmsford

Saturday 5 September: 12.00pm to 10.30pm

Award winning, family-friendly, Electronic Dance Music Festival held at Central Park, Chelmsford, with street food, boutique bars and cool beats. Suitable for all ages. Price: See website. www.streeteatsnbeats.com

Signals Media

Stop Motion Animation (Harwich Electric Place)

Wednesday 29 July: 2.00pm to 4.00pm

Create characters and backgrounds with our craft materials and props. If you can imagine it, we can help you animate it. Suitable for ages 11 to 17-years-old. Price: Free. www.signals.org.uk/events

Escape Room Game Making (Harwich Arts Centre)

Tuesday 18 August: 10.00am to 12.00pm.

Join us and create your own unique 2D Escape room game in a neurodivergent friendly setting. Suitable for ages 11 to 17-years-old. Price: Free. www.signals.org.uk/events

Signals Four Day Summer Film School

Tuesday 4 August to Friday 7 August: 10.00am to 3.00pm

Join Signals for filmmaking fun at the Electric Palace Harwich. In teams, you'll work against the clock to plan, act and shoot your original short film. No experience needed, just your imagination. Suitable for ages 10 to 16-years-old. Price: Free. www.signals.org.uk/events

Signals Three Day Summer Code School

Wednesday 12 August to Friday 14 August: 10.00am to 3.00pm

Learn and build upon your coding and design skills while tackling fun challenges at Harwich Library. No experience is needed – just an interest in technology, robots, and computers. Suitable for ages 10 to 16-years-old. Price: Free. www.signals.org.uk/events

World Photo Day Photography

Wednesday 19 August: 10.00am to 1.00pm

Enjoy a fun outdoor workshop. Explore your surroundings and capture the moment. Bring your own camera or borrow one of Signals. Suitable for ages 11 to 17-years-old. Price: £35.00. www.signals.org.uk/events

Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome

The Stow Maries Air Show

Sunday 16 August: 10.00am to 3.00pm

A celebration of all things aviation, including (weather permitting) vintage aircraft performing in the skies above. Suitable for children aged six to 15-years-old. Price: Adults £25.00, children six to 15 years-old £12.00, children 0 to five-years-old free. www.stowmaries.org.uk/events

Visit Colchester

Constable's Dedham Guided Walking Tour

Thursday 18 July: 2.00pm

Celebrate Constable's 250th birthday with a guided walk through Dedham. Price: £9.50 per person, under 15-years-old, free (children must be accompanied by a paying adult). Suitable for: See website. www.visitcolchester.com/event

Roman Colchester Guided Walking Tour

Saturday 1 August: 12.00pm

Follow in the footsteps of the Emperor Claudius and Queen Boudica to uncover Colchester's fascinating Roman history. Price: £9.50 per person, under 15-years-old, free (children must be accompanied by a paying adult). Suitable for: See website. www.visitcolchester.com/event

Leafy Lexden Guided Walking Tour

Saturday 29 August: 2.00pm

Join your guide to explore a unique historic part of Colchester, perfect for exploring in the summer months. Price: £9.50 per person, under 15-years-old, free (children must be accompanied by a paying adult). Suitable for: See website. www.visitcolchester.com/event/guided-tour%3a-leafy-lexden/250336101

Vulcan Restoration Trust

Music and Beer Festival at the Vulcan

Friday 31 July to Saturday 1 August: 2.00pm to 10.30pm

The festival features the very best in local bands, local breweries and street food, with seven hours of live entertainment each day. Suitable for all ages. Price: Adults £18.00 (Friday), £22.00 (Saturday), accompanied under 18-years-old, free on both days. www.avrovulcan.com

Visit the Vulcan Classic Jets Day

Sunday 16 August: 10.00am to 4.00pm

Visit the Vulcan Classic Jets Day is a great chance to get 'up close and personal' with Vulcan XL426 inside its hangar at London Southend Airport. Suitable for all ages. Price: Adults £10.00, under 16-years-old, free, cockpit tours £8.00. www.avrovulcan.com

Vineyards, various

See article on [pages 36 and 37](#).



Listings provided by Visit Essex and Cultural Network Essex members.

Find out more about Visit Essex and sign-up to become a member:

www.visitessex.com/industry-and-press/become-a-member

www.culture-essex.co.uk



Wild Wednesdays

**Danbury
Country Park**

**Every Wednesday
throughout August**

**Drop in sessions
11.00am to 2.00pm**

FREE

