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SPRING 2025



Explore
Essex

ESSEX EXPLORER

Magazine



Art and culture

History and heritage

Wildlife and walks

WIN

Family tickets to
Audley End House
and Gardens



ESSEX
COUNTRY
PARKS

Escape to your Essex Country Parks



Make time to
walk, run, play.
And breathe.

Welcome . . .

To the spring edition of Essex Explorer magazine. In this issue we have a fantastic competition for you to win one of two sets of family tickets worth a minimum of £35.40 to one of the great heritage venues in England, Audley End House and Gardens (see page 35 to enter).

We bring you the stunning winning and runners-up images from our Essex Day photography competition, 10 great ideas to get you out and about during the spring months, the best bluebell walks in our parks, as well as a year in the life of the Belhus Woods Country Park team.

You can read the latest news about the Extraordinary Essex Art Commission, a fascinating project focusing on the deaf history of Southend-on-Sea, how you can become a friend of the Essex Record Office and fun crafts for you and your kids to enjoy this Easter.

Also, if you or your younger ones have a head for heights then read our interview with climbing specialist and manager of Essex Outdoors Harlow and The Lock Climbing Wall, James Harris.

There are some excellent ideas for days out over the coming months in the listings pages (see page 37) as well as much more.



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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Landscape restoration at the Essex Country Parks

Over the winter, work has been taking place at Weald, Thorndon and Hadleigh Country Parks as part of the long-term landscape restoration programme covering 1,000 hectares in the Essex Country Parks.

The ambitious programme - overseen by leading ecologists and approved by Natural England - is funded by the government's Countryside Stewardship Scheme and National Highways.

The work over winter has seen new livestock fencing and scrub clearance taking place at Hadleigh, Thorndon and Weald, as part of the grassland restoration. At Weald, the woodland management has opened up areas to help plants, insects and animals thrive in the future.

Read more: www.explore-essex.com/blog/countryside-stewardships



Thorndon reptile success

Surveys by Thorndon conservation volunteers and members of the Essex Amphibian and Reptile Group (EARG) have found that Thorndon Country Park is a 'key reptile site'.

The surveys revealed that common lizards, slow worms and grass snakes are widespread within all areas monitored at the park, including juveniles during the breeding season.



Slow worm

Numerous small mammals, including voles, mice and shrews, were also observed using the reptile mats as refuge and nesting sites throughout the whole park.

Reptiles are in decline across the country, so it is important to understand their distribution in the park. The survey results will help the team manage the reptiles and park in the future.

Funding for all materials and the reptile survey mats was provided by EARG.



Common lizard

Campaign launched to S.C.R.A.P. Fly Tipping

Did you know that most fly tipped waste comes from households? Or that you could be prosecuted if your waste isn't disposed of correctly and a fly tip is traced back to you?

To combat the scourge of fly tipping a new campaign, in partnership with the Environment Agency and the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, has been launched by Love Essex called S.C.R.A.P. Fly-Tipping.

The campaign highlights your responsibilities and the problem of fly tipping, which unfortunately has become a common blight throughout Essex and the rest of the country.

In fact, last year at Weald Country Park 20 tonnes of hazardous waste was fly tipped in a car park that's used as a drop off point for local primary schoolchildren.

Due to the asbestos in the waste, specialist contractors had to be employed which cost thousands of pounds to clear up.

It also meant that the car park couldn't be used until the waste was removed.



To tackle fly tipping, the S.C.R.A.P. campaign highlights your duty of care when disposing of household or business waste with some simple rules.

- Suspect all waste carriers.
- Check with the Environment Agency that the provider taking your waste away is licensed. You can call them on 03708 506 506 or visit: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency
- Refuse unexpected offers to take your waste away.
- Ask what will happen to your waste.
- Paperwork is your proof – get a full receipt.

It's important to follow these simple rules as under the law you can be issued with a fixed penalty notice or face prosecution if you don't dispose of your waste correctly.

It's easy to find someone to collect your rubbish but remember, it's a crime not to care what happens to your waste.

To find out more about the S.C.R.A.P. campaign and how to report fly tipping in your area visit the Love Essex website: www.loveessex.org/flytipping

For more information about recycling centres and to book your timed slot visit: www.loveessex.org/find-recycling-centre



10 spring things to do

We've pulled together our top tips of what to do and where to go to put a spring in your step this season.



Credit: English Heritage

ONE

Visit Audley End House and Gardens. Step back in time, explore upstairs and downstairs and discover events and activities. Read more on pages 34 and 35.



Credit: English Heritage

TWO

Reflect and spot new signs of life. Discover ducklings on the lakes, look out for blossom and blooms at the Essex Country Parks. Make the most of the seasons. Find out more about the bird box project and use our guide to see which garden birds you can spot.



Credit: Andrew Adams

THREE

Visit a farm or zoo. Meet the animals at Barleylands, Marsh Farm, Old MacDonald's Farm or Colchester Zoo or many of the other animal attractions across the county. For more: www.visitessex.com/things-to-do/attractions/animal-encounters





FOUR

Spend quality time with your little ones. Discover 50 things to do before you're five from Talk Listen Cuddle on pages 28 and 29. Or take an Easter trail and discover many delightful family friendly activities around the county in our 'What's On' listings from page 38.

FIVE

Make time for tea. Take a trip to Tiptree Tea Rooms or the museum and discover the home of Essex jam. Tiptree have been making quality preserves since 1885 and have been awarded a royal warrant. For more seasonal afternoon tea inspiration, see our listings from page 38.

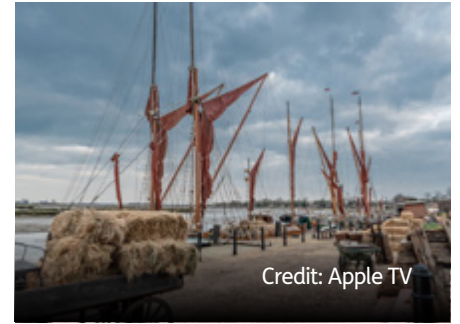


SIX

Bluebell bliss. Revel in the blue carpets springing up in woodlands everywhere. Discover some of the best places to take a bluebell walk in the Essex Country Parks on pages 14 and 15.

SEVEN

Reach new heights. Visit The Lock, Essex's largest indoor climbing centre, see pages 32 and 33. You might also like Sky Ropes and Harlow High Adventure – open for school holidays and weekends.



Credit: Apple TV

EIGHT

Bring the big and small screen to life. Take a tour of some of our very own film locations in Essex, pages 36 and 37. Find out more about the Extraordinary Essex Art Commission and celebrate the very first Essex International Film Festival.

NINE

Make your own. Create delicious Easter treats and decorations at home, pages 24 and 25, or learn a new skill or gain a qualification with Adult Community Learning Essex.



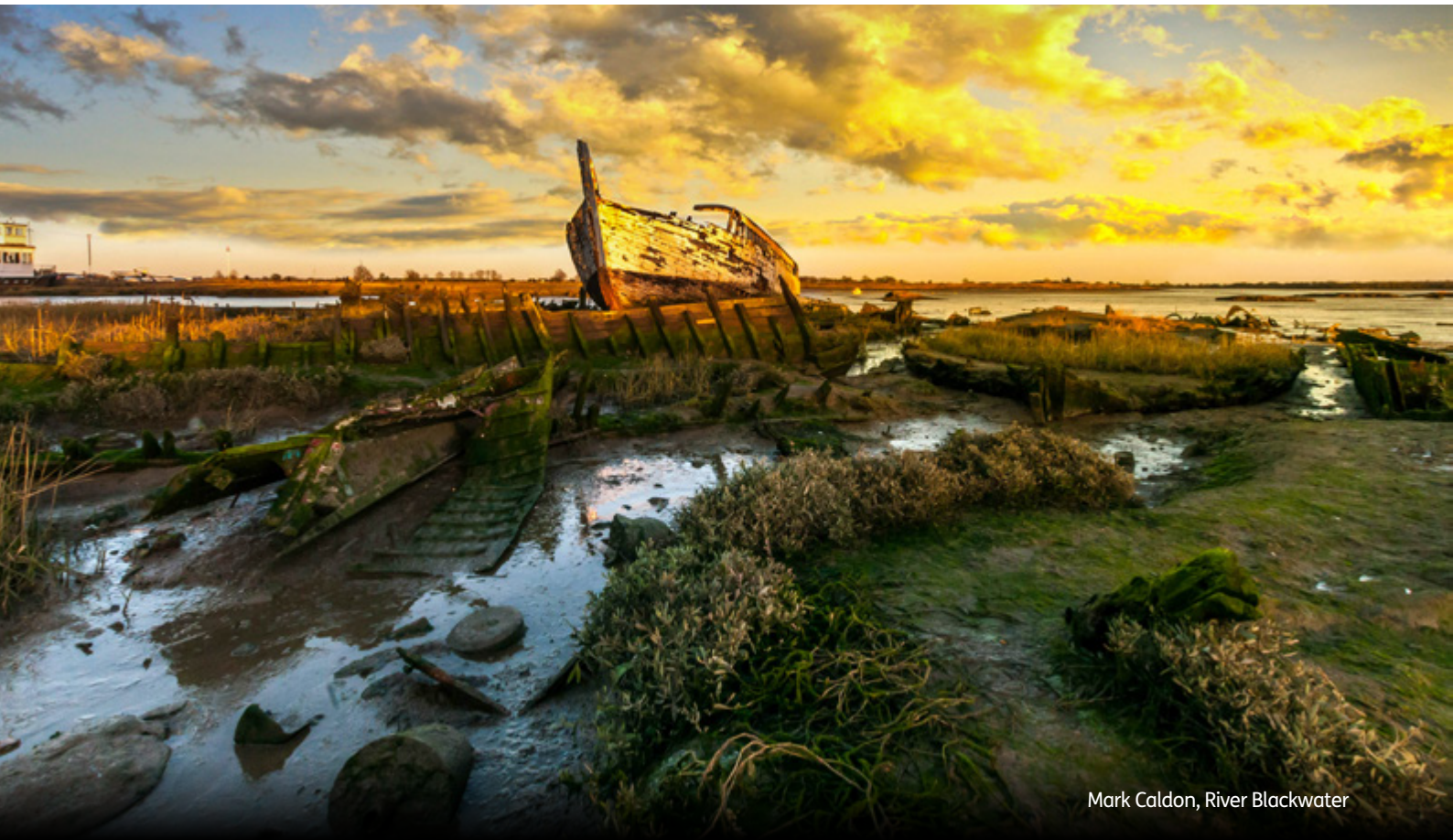
TEN

Get going in the garden and get your hands dirty. Read our feature on gardening with children, pages 26 and 27. You might also like to visit the stunning kitchen gardens at Audley End or Cressing Temple Barns.



Essex Day photography competition winner announced

Congratulations to Mark Caldron whose stunning image of the River Blackwater at Maldon won the Essex Day photography competition.



Mark Caldron, River Blackwater



Mike Pountney, Byrhtnoth statue, Maldon



Dr. Edmund Ranasinghe, Stock windmill



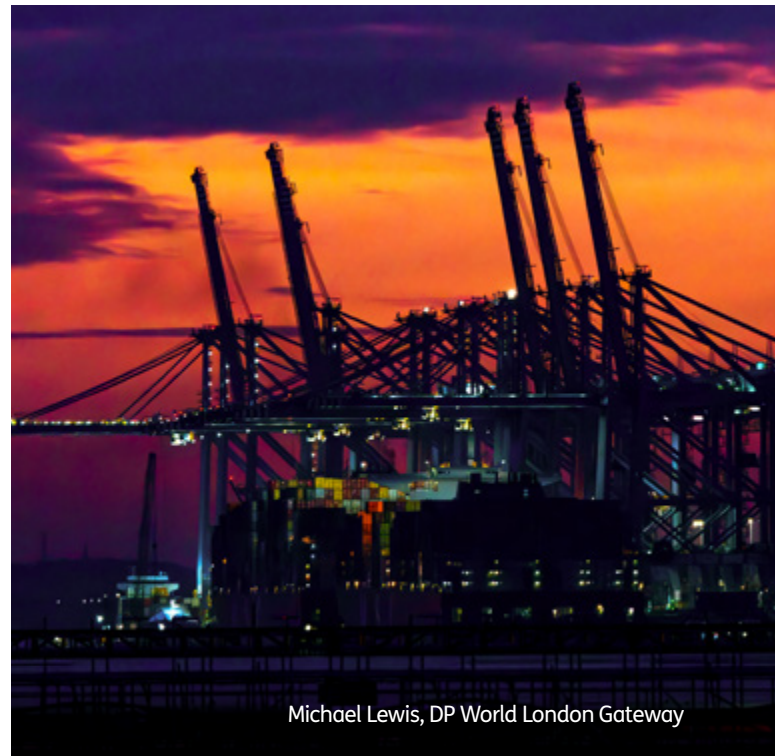
Andy Morss, Hylands House



Kate Jacobs, Shoebury beach



John Flower, Great Wakering church



Michael Lewis, DP World London Gateway

Mark's beautiful picture of the River Blackwater took first prize in the competition which called for budding photographers to capture the county's iconic locations and landmarks.

Worthy runners-up entries were Mike Pountney's photo of the Brythnoth statue in Maldon's Promenade Park and Dr. Edmund Ranasinghe's picture of Stock windmill in a snowstorm.

We received hundreds of high quality entries of many iconic places in Essex. For more places to go in 2025 and to discover hidden gems visit: www.explore-essex.com/blog/25-in-2025

A year at Belhus Woods

With over 300 acres in south Essex, Belhus Woods Country Park combines ancient woodland, a children's play area, meadows, lakes and café.



But what goes on behind the scenes? Read about a year in the life of the park from the perspective of the Belhus Woods park manager, Gavin Leonard, and his team.



January to March

During January the team are coppicing to let in sunlight and expose the ancient wood bank to help woodland flora flourish.

The end of February sees them finish the coppicing plot. The activity includes replanting and dead hedging the area and making it ready for the forthcoming spring.

They also carry out repairs to the play park as well as routine works including fencing.

As March draws close, the weather starts to improve along with wildlife activity. Woodland works are carried out to bring in light around one of the woodland ponds that's home to the protected great crested newt.

Wildlife spotted during these months include siskins, redwings, lesser spotted woodpeckers and bullfinches.



Credit: Andrew Adams





Carder bee



April to June

April sees the start of the butterfly survey. Every year staff and volunteers walk a set route each week and record butterfly numbers, this is then fed into national data.

With the warmer weather in May, path clearance works start. The team cut back overgrown vegetation on the pathways. They also dredge streams, drainage channels and dig a new sluice, so water can be released into ditches during summer.

During June the team are mostly occupied with mowing 33 acres of grassland. Happily, the Countryside Stewardship bid was approved, a scheme that funds conservation works to improve natural resources.

Bird and butterfly surveys continue, but now reptile, bat, newt and orchid surveys are introduced.

Wildlife spotted in the park include a barbastelle bat, shrill carder bee, osprey and a nightingale, a species that had been absent from the park for five years.

July to September

During July, new benches are installed, more vegetation clearance along pathways takes place and the species surveys continue.

August is the peak season for the park with approximately 15,000 visitors. With high temperatures and low rainfall, the team work to strengthen dams and repair bridges while the water levels are low.

The continuing good weather in September sees further woodland works take place involving elm and sycamore. The team also create plots for turtle doves to hopefully bring the endangered species back to the park.

Wildlife spotted includes painted lady, marbled white and silver washed fritillary butterflies, brown banded carder bees, lesser spotted woodpeckers, swifts and barn owls. Pleasingly, a kestrel family which took up residence in a bird box had chicks.

October to December

October sees a shift in focus from grassland to woodland habitats and the team starts coppicing as part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Other works in October include flailing hedges and more preparation work on the wood pasture.

November is a time for reflection, as the nights draw in the team finish the years firewood processing and continue with coppicing.

During December, the coppicing plot is sealed off with dead hedging to protect the regrowth from hungry deer. The team also start constructing tree shelters to protect the oaks in the new wood pasture area near long pond.

Wildlife spotted includes green sandpipers, redwings, great white egrets, greenshanks, firecrests, and a short eared owl. A marsh harrier, lesser redpoll and goosander appeared on the lakes for the second year running. Hopefully they're now regular visitors.

Find out more about Belhus Woods Country Park and plan a visit: www.explore-essex.com/belhus-woods

Bird box project helps wildlife and inmates

Visitors can now buy bird boxes from some of our country parks following a project to help rehabilitate both wildlife and prisoners.



The unique programme between Essex County Council's Entry to Work team, the country parks and HMP Chelmsford has seen inmates make the environmentally friendly bird boxes from recycled materials, which are now for sale in some of the Essex Country Park cafés.

Designed to have an ecological impact while helping inmates gain new skills, the boxes will help increase bird populations by providing a safe habitat to breed and raise fledglings in during the spring.

Made from ecologically friendly materials, the boxes feature wood from a local independent timber supplier while the rubber waterproof roofs are made from recycled bike inner tubes from Hadleigh Park Cycles. Not only does the bird box project provide inmates with new skills but it also helps them increase their confidence and gain a sense of achievement and purpose.

For more information visit: www.explore-essex.com/blog/new-project-helps-wildlife-and-inmates

Bird boxes are available to purchase for £10.00 from Belhus Woods and Weald Country Parks while stocks last. Enquire at the cafés.

Spotters guide: Garden birds

Spring is the perfect time to enjoy your local wildlife. Here we bring you a spotters guide of the most common birds you are likely to see in your garden, local green spaces and country parks.

Blackbird



Blue tit



Collared Dove



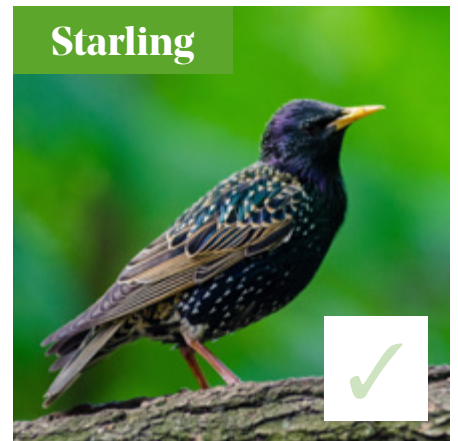
Long Tailed Tit



Robin



Starling



Sparrow



Wood Pigeon



Wren



Best bluebell walks

We've pulled together some of the best spots to enjoy these vibrant blooms at the Essex Country Parks.

During the months of April and May huge swathes of woodland come alive with carpets of beautiful bluebells, transforming parks and forests and providing the most incredible backdrop for photos.



Belhus Woods Country Park: Best for exploring

Home to 300 acres of ancient and working woodlands, with traces of a settlement dating back to the Bronze and early Iron Age. Belhus Woods has meadows, lakes and a children's play area. During the Norman era the settlement was retained as a working woodland with coppicing employed to produce timber products, as well as grazing and hunting.

In the spring, areas of the woods are awash with carpets of flowers and some of the best places to see bluebells are near the car park and visitor centre.

Take the main path from the centre towards the children's play area and explore further into Running Water Wood or Whitehall Wood by taking the small paths on either side of the main route.

Running Water Wood south is also excellent for violets and other flowers, so definitely worth a visit.

Danbury Country Park: For a short, accessible loop

Danbury is a grade II listed park and garden set in the remains of the 13th century Danbury Palace.

For the best bluebells start your visit at the Lakes car park and take the path down towards the icehouse, meander through the woodland paths and head back up towards the fishing lake and beyond.

Enjoy the many benches and the accessible paths around the three historic lakes. Late spring is a good time to spot ducklings as well as enjoy spectacular displays from the rhododendrons and other flowering plants in the gardens.

Thorndon Country Park: For a longer, circular ramble

The tranquil woodlands of Thorndon North attract many migrant and overwintering birds such as bramblings, siskins and redpolls. In spring, the woods fill with the scent and colour of bluebells and anemones.

For a decent ramble, park at Thorndon North and walk along the bridleway through the forest to Childerditch Wood – the best spot for bluebells at Thorndon – loop back through the forest or head to Childerditch pond and back up for a longer circuit.



Weald Country Park: For a photogenic and historic backdrop

Weald started as a medieval deer park in the 12th century and was home to a great mansion originally built in the Tudor period and that once dominated the land here.

For Weald's best bluebell spots, park at Belvedere car park and head up the hill – with St. Peter's church on one side – to the historic Belvedere Mound and revel in the stunning bluebells. Later on stunning displays of rhododendrons and foxgloves can also be seen.

You can also find several remaining historical features at the top of Belvedere Mound from the remodelled Weald estate of the 18th century. Discover the remains of the folly and the stairs. To find the ha-ha, walk back down the hill towards the cricket ground car park.

Plan your visits to the Essex Country Parks: www.explore-essex.com/places-to-go/our-parks-and-places

Images courtesy of Andrew Adams.



Fascinating facts

Did you know that over half of the world's populations of our native bluebell, *hyacinthoides non-scripta*, grow in the UK?

The bluebell spends most of the year as a bulb underground and flowers from late March to early May, depending on how cold the winter has been, before the tree canopies grow too dense to let in much sunlight. They are usually an indicator of ancient woodland where the soil is undisturbed and rich.

Our beautiful British bluebell is protected, so please be careful where you tread and admire them from the paths. You can't dig up these flowers, if you do, you could be issued with a hefty fine under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

The British bluebell also has a Spanish cousin, which was introduced by the Victorians as a garden plant, but it's much paler and has no scent.

Peering into the past at Weald

An archaeological dig at the site of a Tudor mansion that was demolished 70 years ago peered into the past and uncovered a trove of ancient artefacts.



Organised by Essex County Council's Place Services, and working with Oxford Cotswold Archaeology, the free volunteer community excavation at Weald Country Park saw 24 amateur archaeologists take part in the dig on the site of the former Weald Hall.

Built in the 16th century, Weald Hall was owned by the Tower family until World War Two, it then became occupied by the military. The hall was demolished in the early 1950s following a fire, the park was then purchased by Essex County Council as public open space.

Funded by the National Highways Lower Thames Crossing project, the dig aimed to uncover the history of Weald Hall. As part of the two-week-long dig, Oxford Cotswold Archaeology trained volunteers in excavation techniques as an introduction to archaeology as a career or hobby.

Maria Medlycott, Place Services Senior Historic Environment Officer, said:

"The excavation has revealed more about the origins and development of Weald Hall, so we are delighted and surprised with the results.

"Where we expected to find part of the stable yard and laundry we found a stone lined sunken bath of probable Georgian origins, complete with steps and a stone seat to sit on. Next to the bath a bone toothbrush was also recovered."

Read more: www.explore-essex.com/blog/excavation-at-weald-country-park

Images courtesy of Oxford Cotswold Archaeology.





Discover the history of the park and Weald Hall by taking on the heritage walking trail.

Learn about how the manor of south Weald was held by Waltham Abbey for nearly 500 years until the dissolution in 1540, when it reverted to the crown. King Henry VIII sold it to one of his favourites, Sir Brian Tuke, Treasurer of the Royal Household.

The hall underwent renovations and extensions by various owners. It contained 40 bedrooms, including one in which the princess, Mary Tudor, was said to have stayed.

The Weald Country Park Discovery Trail, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Land of the Fanns project, aims to bring the history of the park to life.

Visit: www.explore-essex.com/park-trails/weald-trail



Credit: Essex Record Office

ERO project records city's deaf history

A digital zine telling the story of Southend's deaf history from 1900 to the present day has been launched by the Essex Record Office (ERO).

Following a grant from The National Archives, the project saw the ERO work with Deaf Visual Artist Damien Robinson, the local community and British Sign Language (BSL) users to explore and record the city's deaf history.



Between May and July 2024, Damien and the ERO held open workshops at the Forum in Southend inviting people from the local area and south Essex. Using census records, newspaper archives and records from the Essex Deaf Council and The Royal Association for Deaf People (RAD) as a starting point, participants shared their memories of community spaces, such as Southend Deaf Club at the St. Mellitus Centre and The Last Post, home to Southend Deaf Pub.

As part of the project, short interviews with the participants have now been preserved in the Essex Sound and Video Archive at the ERO.

Featuring excerpts from these interviews, alongside archive images, the zine provides fascinating facts for each decade until the present day in English and BSL.

One of the earliest records the project explored is the national census from 1911, which had a specific question about deafness.

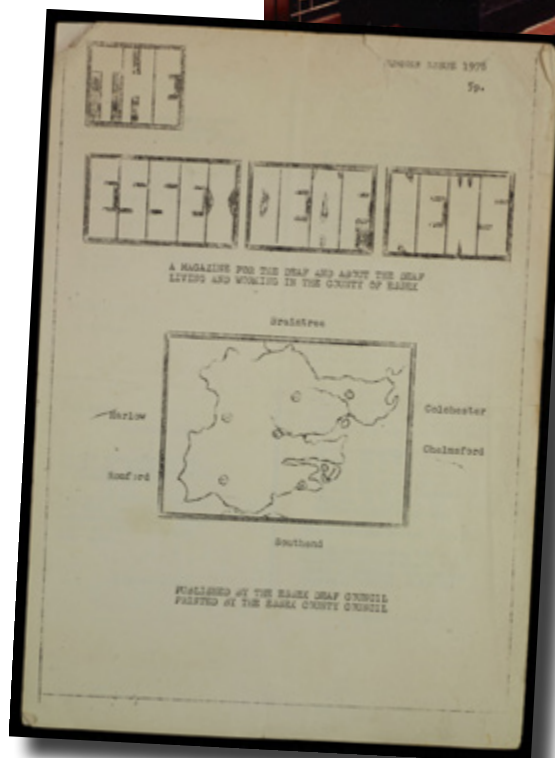
While official definitions and the language used was medical, these records show that there were around 50 deaf people living in Prittlewell, Southchurch, Eastwood and Leigh-on-Sea at the time, ranging in age from four-year-old Herbert Royale to 79-year-old Emma Osborne.

The zine also describes how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the deaf community and how people might look back on the current times in the future.

Kate O'Neill, ERO Sound Archivist, said: "We were delighted to have received The National Archives funding for this important project. Through working with Damien, we found that the history of deaf communities in Essex was not recorded and at risk of being lost."

"The workshops showed how vital it is to record the experiences of deaf people for both current and future generations."

To find out more about the project and to view the digital zine visit: www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/whats-on/projects/southends-deaf-history



The ERO is currently looking for more material related to deaf clubs, events and organisations that can be archived for future generations to enjoy. If you have any interesting information that needs to be archived email ero.enquiry@essex.gov.uk

Make friends with history

A charity which has been supporting the Essex Record Office for over 70 years is seeking new members.

Since 1954, the Friends of Historic Essex have been helping to preserve the county's archival heritage. Working with the ERO, the Friends have helped purchase documents, maps and images – along with audio and video recordings – that tell the story of 1,000 years of the county's history.



Recent acquisitions purchased by the Friends include records formerly in the collection of the Foyle family at Beeleigh Abbey, pre-First World War postcards of the county's villages and much more.

Now for just £12.00 a year, you can join the Friends of Historic Essex and help preserve the county's heritage for future generations.

As a Friends of Historic Essex member, you'll help raise funds to:

- Purchase documents for permanent preservation at the ERO so they're available to researchers both now and in the future.
- Conserve documents at the ERO to give them the best chance of long-term survival.
- Support ERO projects that provide opportunities for people to discover, use and enjoy the unique collections.
- Publish books and copies of historic maps.
- Purchase materials for education activities.
- Support researchers working on Essex history.

As a member you'll also receive a newsletter and the opportunity to attend the Friends annual general meeting, along with special events, talks, presentations and quizzes at the ERO.

Martin Astell, ERO manager, said: "The Friends of Historic Essex play an important role in supporting the ERO and our work in helping to bring to life the county's heritage.

"Becoming a member has a number of positive benefits and for a small annual fee you can help preserve the county's heritage for future generations."

To become a Friends of Historic Essex member visit: www.friendsofhistoricessex.org



Hollywood celebrity backs first Essex film festival

A-list Hollywood celebrity and former Essex resident, Dame Helen Mirren, is backing the first ever international film festival to be held in the county.



Supported by the Arts and Cultural Fund, the Essex International Film Festival - in partnership with the Essex Film Collective - is taking place in some of the county's independent cinemas and venues.

**ESSEX
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 25**

Shining a light on local and international emerging talent, as well as established movie makers, the festival will offer screenings, networking opportunities and masterclasses with BAFTA and Oscar nominated industry leaders.

Venues such as Chelmsford Theatre Studio, the Mercury Theatre and Curzon Cinema in Colchester and the Electric Palace in Harwich will be showcasing the best films from the region.

Festival goers can enjoy over 50 exclusive screenings from across the world ranging from animation, comedy, drama, documentaries and horror.

Former Southend-on-Sea resident, Dame Helen Mirren, said: "I'm excited and proud that my home county of Essex will be hosting a countywide film festival. The Essex International Film Festival will remind the industry that we have a thriving and talented film industry right on the doorstep of London."

Lily Streames, founder of the Essex Film Collective, said: "I've been blown away by the quality of the films submitted. We've had films entered from all over Europe and America, but some of the best have been made by Essex based talent. That makes me exceptionally proud of my county and the talent inside it."

For more information visit:
www.essexinternationalfilmfestival.com

A range of projects are coming to the county this year thanks to the Arts and Cultural Fund.

This year the fund received almost 150 submissions from community groups, organisations and individuals.

Now in its fifth year, the Arts and Cultural Fund has supported 86 projects since its launch.

Find out more.
Visit www.culture-essex.co.uk

An extraordinary art commission for Essex

Discover a new project about regeneration, the people of Essex and the land that nourishes them.



Credit: Marley Karazimba



Credit: Chelsea Louise Photography



Credit: Marley Karazimba

Artist Marley Karazimba has been awarded the Extraordinary Essex Art Commission by Essex County Council. For this opportunity, artists were invited to submit proposals for a new cultural work which sums up why they think or feel Essex is an extraordinary place.

Marley will create a short film that explores the connection between people and the land in Essex, focusing on their relationships with soil, food and community.

Drawing on his experience as a multimedia artist and filmmaker, as well as his work in community supported agriculture and permaculture, the film will document diverse individuals in their gardens, allotments and community farms.

Titled 'Don't Fight The Land That Feeds You', the film follows the journey from soil to kitchen, featuring recipes from around the world made with ingredients grown in Essex.

The project will involve the local community, including participants from initiatives like Bennison Farm and Common Ground Colchester.

Interviews will highlight participants reflections on Essex, its land and culture. The final film will be showcased at several free screening events across Essex and online, as well with an associated exhibition, in spring 2025.

Marley said: "I'm so grateful to hear that Essex County Council is keen to support my vision for Extraordinary Essex.

"The project is a culmination of ideas and my work through Essex as an artist and community organiser. I'm looking forward to getting started and capturing the essence of Extraordinary Essex, before eventually bringing people together at screenings and events across the county."

To find out more about events, activities and screenings visit: www.culture-essex.co.uk

Easy Easter bakes

Pop on your apron and bake these easy Easter vanilla cupcakes, perfect for gatherings or gifts.



Ingredients: Serves 12

- 110g softened butter
- 110g golden caster sugar
- 2 large eggs
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- 110g self-raising flour

For the buttercream and decoration

- 150g softened butter
- 300g icing sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 tbsp milk
- Chocolate mini eggs
- Food colouring paste of your choice (optional)
- Edible sugar flowers



Heat your oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4 and fill a 12 cupcake tray with cases.

Beat 110g softened butter and the golden caster sugar together until pale and fluffy then add two large eggs.

Add ½ teaspoon of vanilla extract, self-raising flour and a pinch of salt, whisk until combined then spoon the mixture into the cupcake cases.

Bake for 15 minutes until golden brown. Leave to cool.

To make the buttercream, use an electric whisk and beat 150g softened butter until soft then add 300g icing sugar, one teaspoon of vanilla extract and a pinch of salt.

Whisk together until smooth then beat in three tablespoons of milk.

To add some colour, stir in the food colouring. Spoon or pipe onto the cooled cupcakes.

Finally, sit three mini eggs on top of each cupcake for a fun Easter touch.

Easter potato prints

Have an 'egg-cellent' time this Easter with our make at home egg potato prints.



Kids and parents alike can make their own Easter greeting cards and decorations. This low-cost and simple craft adds a colourful stamp effect and homemade touch to cards.

What you will need

- Potatoes
- Paintbrush
- Paint
- Card
- String
- Colourful pens (optional)

How to make your stamps

Find a potato which resembles the shape of an egg.

Cut your chosen potato in half and carefully carve out some shapes – spots, stripes or a zigzag pattern look good. Children may need an adult to help them.

Use a paintbrush to paint your chosen paint colours onto the potato. Pastel colours are a great choice.

Then use your potato as a stamp to make egg patterns for your Easter greetings cards and party decorations.

Add string or ribbon to a triangle shaped card to make fun seasonal bunting.

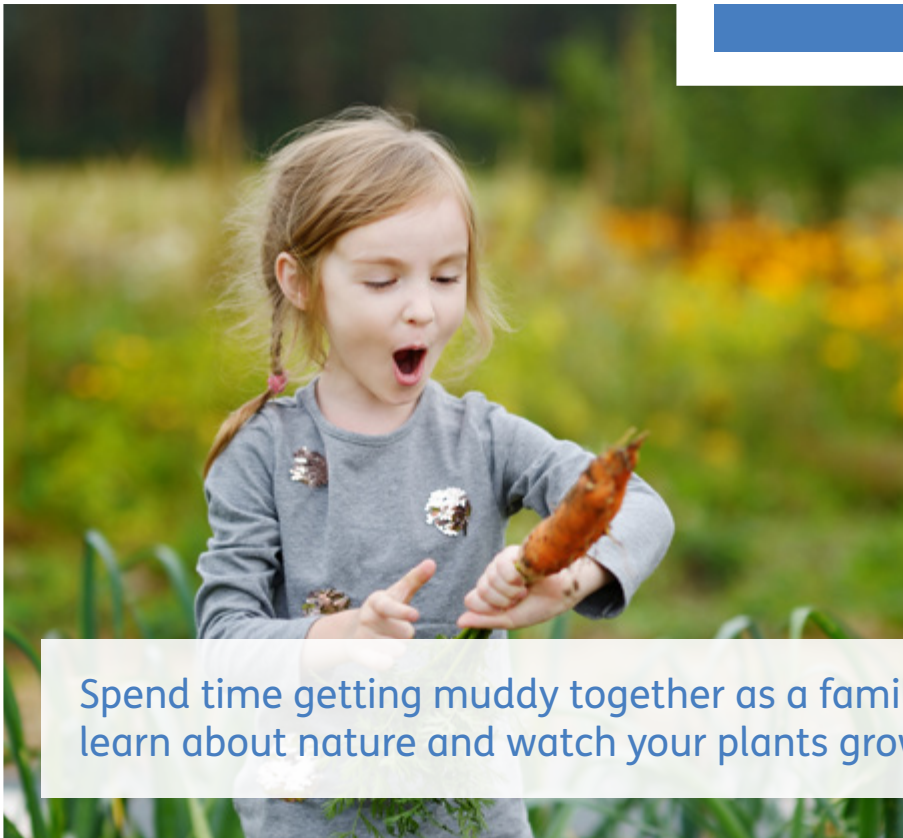
Use a colourful pen to add some 'egg-stra' sparkle to your creations.



Get going in the garden

Spring is great time to get going in the garden. We've come up with five fun garden projects that are an ideal way to get you outside.





Spend time getting muddy together as a family, learn about nature and watch your plants grow.



Plant some flower seeds

Seeds can be found in gardening centres all year round. All you'll need to get started are some small pots, compost, a sunny windowsill and seeds of your choice.

We recommend starting with some easy to germinate seeds.

Consider cosmos for abundant flowers from June to October. Start them off on a windowsill in March or April and you'll be rewarded with a pretty flower display in just 12 weeks.

Move your delicate plants outside once the threat of frost has passed and keep an eye out for flower buds to appear. They'll look great in pots or in a flower bed. They also make lovely cut flowers to bring indoors or to give out as gifts. Pollinators like bees and butterflies love them too.

Quick win carrots

Carrots are a great choice for growing with children or as a novice gardener. The seeds can be planted directly into containers or beds outside from February through until July and are fun to pull up and eat.

Go for baby varieties for quick harvests and plant them at weekly intervals, so you have enough carrots to last all season. Carrots need little watering, but the bed will benefit from some gentle weeding.

Sumptuous strawberries

Strawberries are easy and rewarding to grow, especially for children and those who enjoy sweet treats. Watch the pretty white flowers bloom and then transform into this summertime snack. Growing strawberries from seed can be difficult and unreliable so we suggest buying plant plugs.

Strawberries grow very well in pots, window boxes, hanging baskets and growing bags, as well as in the ground. This means they can be grown in small gardens, on balconies and even on windowsills.

Play with your senses

Noses at the ready. Take a trip to a garden centre and hunt for the smelliest plants you can find.

Garden centres have an abundance of plants that can be a pleasant assault on your senses. Lemon balm is a highly fragrant herb which is safe for children and pets, while lavender is another aromatic plant which can be cut, tied and given as a gift or hung in your house to bring the outdoors inside.

Make a mini pond

Find a light spot in your garden and sink a watertight container or old plant pot into the ground. You can dig a hole but you might get a bit muddy. Add a layer of gravel and rocks and use logs or stones to create a range of depths and a slope for creatures to climb in and out.

Fill your pond with rainwater and add some plants. Great plants for small ponds include miniature waterlilies and lesser spearwort. Then you and your children can watch and wait for wildlife to arrive in their new home.

50 things to do before you're five

Talk, Listen, Cuddle is an Essex campaign to help parents, carers and families give young children the best start in life. Take their '50 things to do before you're five' challenge and spend some quality time with your little ones.



Essex County Council
Children and Families

50

things to do before you're 5

Playing with your child is one of the most important things you can do to support their development. The time you spend playing together will help them learn all sorts of things - from counting and writing, to exploring and making new friends.

Our list of 50 things to do before you're 5 will give you lots of ideas to support your child's learning through play - Complete it online or print it off, stick it on the fridge and tick off each activity!

We would love to see photos of your children achieving these things, you can email them to tlc@essex.gov.uk

Once you've completed the list, download your own 50 things to do before you're 5 certificate from the TLC website.



www.tlc-essex.info



www.facebook.com/talklistencuddle



tlc@essex.gov.uk

| No. Activity | Tick | No. Activity | Tick | No. Activity | Tick |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 1 Run through long grass (barefoot if you can) | <input type="checkbox"/> | 19 Visit the farm or zoo | <input type="checkbox"/> | 35 Have a sleepover in the den you've made | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Lie in the long grass and feel the grass between your toes, fingers tickling your nose | <input type="checkbox"/> | 20 Paint and create as much as you can | <input type="checkbox"/> | 36 Show your grown up how to hit nails into wood, use real tools and be creative with bits and bobs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Go on a walk through the woods in all seasons and weathers! | <input type="checkbox"/> | 21 Play make believe, and be who you want to be; a spaceman on the moon or a knight in a castle | <input type="checkbox"/> | 37 Play in autumn leaves and throw them over your head. Listen for the crunch under foot, then pick your favourites and make your very own leaf man character! | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 Not near any woods? Go for a walk around your neighbourhood, find a tree and watch it change through the seasons | <input type="checkbox"/> | 22 Have a picnic outdoors or indoors with all your favourite treats | <input type="checkbox"/> | 38 Read a book under a tree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 Plant and care for a beautiful smelling flower | <input type="checkbox"/> | 23 Be an explorer and hunt for bugs | <input type="checkbox"/> | 39 Go out in the rain and jump in puddles | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 Go on a treasure hunt | <input type="checkbox"/> | 24 Help make your own dinner | <input type="checkbox"/> | 40 Lie on your back outdoors and watch the clouds | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7 Have a teddy bear's picnic | <input type="checkbox"/> | 25 Look for worms, and see how they wiggle | <input type="checkbox"/> | 41 Go blackberry picking and eat as many as you can! | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 Climb a tree | <input type="checkbox"/> | 26 Go for a walk on a windy day. Take a scarf or a kite and see how they fly | <input type="checkbox"/> | 42 Make a mud pie | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9 Play 'pooh sticks' | <input type="checkbox"/> | 27 Roll down a hill | <input type="checkbox"/> | 43 Blow a dandelion clock | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 Make an insect house | <input type="checkbox"/> | 28 Dig for treasure | <input type="checkbox"/> | 44 Balance on a log | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11 Learn to ride a bike and go on a long bike ride | <input type="checkbox"/> | 29 Try baking a cake and lick the spoon! | <input type="checkbox"/> | 45 Chase your shadow on a sunny day | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12 Care for a pet (no matter how small) | <input type="checkbox"/> | 30 Make perfume from flower petals | <input type="checkbox"/> | 46 Catch rain or snow on your tongue | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13 Play hide and seek | <input type="checkbox"/> | 31 Go crabbing | <input type="checkbox"/> | 47 Go on a torch-lit walk in the dark, look for stars and night time animals | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14 Take part in an Easter egg hunt at home | <input type="checkbox"/> | 32 Make a snow angel and have a snowball fight | <input type="checkbox"/> | 48 Sleep in a tent | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15 Visit the seaside. Explore, and find treasures at the beach | <input type="checkbox"/> | 33 Play with water, pour, explore, wash toy cars | <input type="checkbox"/> | 49 Toast marshmallows on a camp fire | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16 Paddle in the sea | <input type="checkbox"/> | 34 Use all of the furniture downstairs and all the blankets/towels from upstairs to make a huge den/fort that you can crawl around | <input type="checkbox"/> | 50 Join the library and borrow some books | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17 Build sandcastles | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | |
| 18 Investigate and discover life in rock pools | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | |

Did you know that the way you talk and play with your baby can make a real difference to how they develop and learn?

As new parents, it can be a daunting time and you don't receive special training, but there are a few simple building blocks that you can put into place to provide a positive start in life for your children.

The Talk, Listen, Cuddle website supports new parents and carers by providing top tips, games and resources for supporting the physical and emotional development of children aged nought to five-years-old. The tools available help ensure that children are ready to explore, learn and make friends when they start school.

The 50 things campaign

The time you spend together will help children learn, from counting and writing to exploring and talking, which is why Talk, Listen, Cuddle have developed '50 things to do before you're five' to help inspire you to spend time together as a family.

'50 things to do before you're five' includes suggestions by parents and carers throughout Essex and includes easy to achieve and affordable adventures.

Examples include feeling the grass between your toes, paddling in the sea, going on a treasure hunt, looking for worms and bugs, catching crabs, making dens, sleeping in a tent, baking a cake and much more.

Download the list:

www.tlc-essex.info/downloads

Have ideas of things you love to do with your children and that you'd like to see on the list?

Email: tlc@essex.gov.uk

For more resources, tips and games by age visit: www.tlc-essex.info

Talk, Listen, Cuddle would love for you to share your pictures on social media of you completing challenges. Post them to Facebook or Instagram: [#50thingstodo](https://www.instagram.com/talklistencuddle)

Adventures for everyone

Essex Outdoors are proud to be specialists in leading empowering adventures and activities for people of all ages and abilities.

The Essex Outdoors team helps people access outside activities to boost self-confidence and build independence by providing accessible sessions, along with residential experiences, for individuals and groups. All activities are tailored to the needs of participants.

From day trips to residential and field trips to forest schools, Essex Outdoors offers experiences to suit every appetite for adventure.

A teacher from the Clarity Independent School, said: “We’ve been going on a weekly basis to Essex Outdoors Danbury for around three years and have taken part in the archery, high and low ropes and obstacle course to name but a few.

“The staff are amazing and they totally understand our young people with SEND needs. Activities are adapted on the spot to suit the young people and the thought that goes into the sessions is outstanding.

“Going to Essex outdoors has helped build on their self-confidence and overcome fears, especially those linked with heights. I’d like to thank the staff for their patience and understanding towards our young people.”

All four centers boast accessible accommodation, equipment and facilities, along with welcoming and friendly instructors. Here are some of the Essex Outdoors annual All Ability highlights.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) activity days

Run during the school holidays at Essex Outdoors Harlow, these activity days are specifically and sensitively designed for children aged eight to sixteen-years-old with SEN.

In small groups of a maximum of eight, children have the opportunity to take part in up to four fun and challenging outdoor activities each day. Sessions can include activities such as archery, climbing, canoeing and orienteering, depending on the day you book. All overseen by professional instructors to give parents peace of mind.

A parent whose son attended a SEN activity day said: “My child absolutely loved it and had a great time. The instructors were fantastic, very patient and did a brilliant job. Thank you for being so understanding of his needs.”

Find out more: www.essexoutdoors.com/all-ability-adventure



Mersea Island Festival Summer 2025

The Mersea Island Festival is an incredible opportunity for children, young people and adults living with or without a physical or learning disability to try new things and meet others in a friendly, safe place.

The festival's an annual summer event at Essex Outdoors Mersea since launching in 1981 – which was the United Nations 'International Year of the Disabled'. The camp is ideal for families, inclusive and gateway clubs, youth groups and disabled young people, with activities aimed at those aged eight and above.

A team of staff and volunteers help to ensure that everyone has a great experience, whatever their ability.

Campers can partake in a wide variety of activities during their stay, from archery, climbing and zipwire, or taking part in live bands and evening discos.

The Mersea Island Festival can be a truly transformative experience.

A festival attendee said: "We loved the whole experience. My son moved around and chatted to many people without us.

"I manage my son's care and it was great for me to talk and relate to other carers and share experiences. The inclusivity actually made me cry on several occasions. It felt like joining a large family."

To book tickets and for volunteering opportunities visit: www.merseafestival.org.uk

Mersea Minds in Motion 2025

The wellbeing weekend returns for its third year this September. Look out for day and weekend tickets to boost mind, body and soul with a unique combination of outdoor activity and mindful sessions. Visit: www.essexoutdoors.com/mersea-minds

Essex Outdoors offer a whole range of activity sessions for the whole family across its four centres. Find out what's on a centre near you: www.essexoutdoors.com/family-adventures

Reach new heights at The Lock

Whether you're an experienced or first time climber, all are welcome at The Lock, Harlow, Essex's largest indoor climbing wall.



Here we talk to James Harris, Essex Outdoors Harlow manager, to find out more about this exhilarating sport and the facilities available at The Lock.

How did you start climbing?

According to my parents I was climbing from 18-months-old. Stairs led to trees, which led to rock and indoor climbing walls.

As I began in earnest, indoor walls were starting to appear which made climbing more accessible and much easier, especially during the colder months. However, I have to say it was always outdoor and traditional climbing that was my favourite.

Access to climbing was initially through the cubs and scouts but it took off when I began my career in outdoor education.

What are the benefits of climbing?

There are clear benefits from a fitness and a mental health perspective.

Setting your own challenges and achieving targets leads to a sense of success. Whether it's reading a route to planning the climb and visualising it, all are a key part of being successful in climbing and are transferable skills.

Climbers are predominantly a friendly bunch that welcome new members with open arms. They love chatting to someone about a climbing route or discussing that bit of kit hanging from the harness.

How would you describe The Lock and why is it suitable for a range of climbers?

The Lock has hundreds of routes to climb with auto belays and bouldering - a form of climbing on an artificial wall without ropes or harnesses - for lone climbers. There's also top rope climbing, where the rope goes through a fixed top anchor, and lead climbing routes. The lead climbing routes have grades from easy to much harder.

We run courses for novices who've never dreamt of climbing before and offer bespoke sessions for those wishing to develop their skills.

Children can try climbing for the first time and develop their skills through the National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme (NICAS). If they really enjoy it and show an aptitude for climbing, they can try out for our youth competition squad.

Can you describe the different courses available to new climbers?

Led by staff, our 'Give it a Go' sessions are perfect.

If people want to climb without supervision but aren't sure how to start we offer 'Learn to Climb' sessions where they can be taught the fundamental skills needed to become an independent climber.

What do you offer the more experienced climber?

We've over 100 routes of all grades where people can top rope or lead climb. They can also build strength and techniques in the 'courtyard,' our small but effective training area located in the main hall.

We have routes to warm up on and the climbs won't get stale, as walls are reset every month to keep the challenge fresh.

What facilities do you have for children at The Lock?

For children aged eight to 17-years-old we've just the thing. For those wanting to try climbing, we run 'Kids Fun Climb' taster sessions and NICAS sessions for children wanting to develop their skills. We also host children's birthday parties where they can try climbing and eat cake afterwards. All kit is provided and sessions are led by experienced, qualified staff.

You can book a 90-minute instructor led session for youth groups which can be tailored to their needs. We also cater for GCSE climbing so if you're a PE teacher, give us a call.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

You might also like the Essex Outdoors run high ropes, Harlow High Adventure and Sky Ropes at Great Notley Country Park, where you can swing, swoop and soar outside to your heart's delight.

Read more about The Lock and the courses available. www.essexoutdoors.com/the-lock-climbing-wall

Discover more about Harlow High Adventure. www.essexoutdoors.com/harlow-high-adventure

Visit Audley End House and Gardens

Discover more about one of the great heritage houses in both Essex and England.



Tucked away in the northwest of the county, Audley End is a spectacular early 17th century mansion standing proudly in a beautifully landscaped park.



Charles Neville (1823–1902), 5th Baron Braybrooke (centre), with his wife, Florence (d. 1914), to his left, their young daughter, Augusta (1860–1903), in front of him, and other family members at Audley End in about 1868. (© Historic England Archive)

History and stories

Audley End's story begins between 1605 and 1614 when Thomas Howard, 1st Earl of Suffolk and Lord Treasurer to King James 1, rebuilt a mansion on the site of an earlier house which had been created by his grandfather.

The new house was so grand that around 50 years later Charles II bought it as a ready-made palace, as it was well situated for the racing at Newmarket. The Howards bought Audley End back 1701 and reduced it to be more manageable.

In the 1760s the 'celebrity architect' of the time, Robert Adam, modernised the house for Sir John Griffin. At a similar time, Sir John commissioned Capability Brown to recreate the landscape in the natural style of the era and it remains one of England's finest gardens.

In the 1820s Richard Neville, who became 3rd Baron Braybrooke, remodelled the house to restore its original Jacobean character and it is this style that still dominates today.

During the Second World War, as with many of the large houses at the time, Audley End was used for the war effort when Polish soldiers were secretly trained within the house and grounds as part of the Special Operations Executive.

Upstairs and downstairs

In Victorian times the lavish lifestyle of aristocrats like the Braybrooke's was made possible by armies of servants. In the 1880s they employed over one hundred people throughout the estate.

You can step back in time as part of your visit and imagine life as a Victorian servant in the historic kitchens, dairy and laundry rooms.

WIN family tickets to Audley End

You could win one of two sets of family tickets to Audley End House and Gardens, worth a minimum of £35.40.

To enter our prize draw simply email the answer to the question below to: Explore.Essex@essex.gov.uk and title your email: Audley End competition.

Closing date Sunday 27 April 2025.

Which Essex town is Audley End near to?

1. Saffron Walden
2. Braintree
3. Rochford



Victorian stables

Horses have been an important part of Audley End's history for transport and leisure activities.

When the Braybrooke's lived at the house there would have been as many as twenty horses in the stables, however when they had guests they could fit up to forty.

Today, there are just four resident horses which visitors can meet and see in action during special riding displays.

Glorious gardens

Visitors can also explore the glorious gardens that were once among the largest and most opulent in Jacobean England (1603-1625). Discover the views that were originally created by Capability Brown, one of the most famous English landscape architects, and take in the beautifully restored parterre and enjoy watching the kitchen gardens flourish with bountiful produce.

Enjoy a day out at Audley End House and Gardens. Explore the servants wing, state rooms, stables, kitchen garden or beautiful grounds or attend an exciting series of activities and events.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/audley-end-house-and-gardens

All images courtesy of English Heritage.



Discover Essex's TV and film locations

These are some of the fascinating places in Essex used by film and TV production companies, why not experience them for yourself?



Credit: Hylands House

Are you intrigued by film and TV locations? From historical homes to the industrial Thames estuary, airports and everywhere in-between, filming on location in our county has never been so in demand.

Audley End House

The Crown

Situated near the market town of Saffron Walden, Audley End House and Gardens has appeared in seasons one, three, four and six of the highly acclaimed Netflix series, 'The Crown'.

This stunning 17th century Jacobean mansion doubled as Balmoral Castle, Windsor Castle and Eton College.

Did you know that Chelmsford's Hylands House also appeared in 'The Crown' as 'The White House'?



Credit: English Heritage

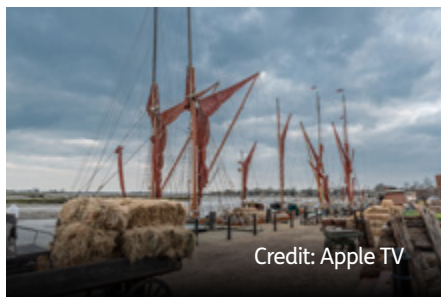
Epping Forest

The Witcher

The Belleteyn festival scene – a fan favourite event from season three of the fantasy drama series, 'The Witcher' - was filmed in Epping Forest around Strawberry Hill Pond and Jacks Hill Park.

Dating back to the Neolithic period and located on the Essex and London border, Epping Forest covers over 6,000 acres and was once a royal hunting ground.





Credit: Apple TV

Maldon district

The Essex Serpent

Adapted from the book written by Chelmsford born author Sarah Perry, the Apple TV series featured Claire Danes and Tom Hiddleston and was filmed in and around the Maldon district.

Start at Promenade Park and stroll along the quay to take in the stunning and unique Thames barges, you can even book a sail on the boats through Topsail Charters. Head up the hill, meander along the high street, take in the historic grade I listed Moot Hall and finish with a drink at the Blue Boar hotel.

You can extend your tour and discover other Essex Serpent filming locations such as North Fambridge, Tollesbury and the beach at Cudmore Grove, Mersea, which all featured in the series.



Shire Hall

The Post Office vs Mr Bates

The popular and acclaimed drama featuring Toby Stephens was filmed in the Chelmsford's grade II listed building, Shire Hall, where the courtrooms were used to film pivotal scenes.

Start at Bond Street, browse the high-end shops and stop at one of the places to eat. Head right out of Bond Street and approach Shire Hall from the angle used in the show and take in the cathedral that lurks behind this imposing Georgian building.

Currently closed to the public, Shire Hall served as the County Court for over 220 years after it opened in 1791. It replaced an earlier building that served as the county's court houses from the 12th century.



Credit: English Heritage

Tilbury Fort

Wonder Woman, Taboo

Tilbury Fort, the docks and the cruise terminals on the Thames Estuary have all featured in multiple films and TV series over the decades.

The fort was a key location in Christopher Nolan's 'Batman Begins', the BBC drama 'Taboo', starring Tom Hardy, and its parade ground was transformed for 'Wonder Woman' in 2017.

Protecting the seaward approach to London, a fort has been here since the 16th century until the Second World War. Henry VIII built the first fort on the site and Queen Elizabeth I famously rallied her army nearby to face the threat of the Spanish Armada. Today, you can visit the fort, explore the passages and enjoy the views.

Discover the new Essex Film Office 'Filmed in Essex Map' to inspire more visits:

www.essexfilloffice.co.uk/filmed-in-essex

Turn your property into a film set

Do you own a building, land or location that could be used for filming?

Locations of all sizes and types, from picturesque to industrial, can make the perfect site for filming.

Sign up for free to the Essex Film Office's locations database and your property could be featured on the big screen.

www.essexfilloffice.co.uk/register-your-property

Spring 2025



Credit: Adventure Island

Adventure Island

Dinosaur Takeover

Saturday 17 May

An unforgettable Jurassic experience for the whole family. Encounter dinosaurs in a way you've never imagined. No booking required. Suitable for the whole family. Price: See website. www.adventureisland.co.uk/event/dinosaur-takeover

Brentwood Brewing Company

St George's Beer Festival

Saturday April 26:
12.00pm to 5.00pm

Beer, homemade steak pies, live music. A celebration of everything English. Full bar and food options available. Suitable for all ages. Price: £15.00 including steak pie, chips and a pint. www.brentwoodbrewing.co.uk

Brightlingsea Museum

VE Day 80th anniversary exhibition

Saturday 19 April to Sunday
18 May: Saturday 11.00am to
5.00pm, Sunday: 2.00pm to
5.00pm

The museum reopens with a special

exhibition of local World War Two history to commemorate the 80th anniversary of VE Day. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.brightlingseamuseum.co.uk

Cammas Hall Farm

Easter Trail

Saturday 5 April to
Monday 21 April

Can you track down the hidden eggs and crack the seasonal clues? Suitable for all ages (recommended for children aged three to 11-years-old). Price: Adult: £3.00, child: £6.50, under 12 months, free. www.bookings.cammashall.co.uk/book

Beer Festival

Saturday 3 to Monday 5 May:
11.00am to 5.00pm

Join us over the bank holiday weekend for a great event for beer enthusiasts. Suitable for 16-years-old and over. Price: £5.75, under 16-years-old, free. www.bookings.cammashall.co.uk/book

Spring Craft Fair

Saturday 17 to Sunday 18 May

Discover local suppliers products, including plants, jewellery and homemade crafts. Live music, tapped beers and our BBQ and pizza

oven will be running. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.bookings.cammashall.co.uk/book

Colchester United Football Club

The Take That Show Tribute Dinner

Saturday 10 May 2025:
From 7.30pm

'The Take That Show' are one of the best loved British pop acts of all time. All tickets for this event include a two-course meal. Suitable for 16-years-old and over. Price: £45.00 per person. www.coluboxoffice.com

Combined Military Services Museum

10th Battalion Essex Regiment Living History Group

Saturday 26 April:
10.30am to 3.30pm

The 10th Essex is a World War One living history group who will be setting up a display of military life and will be carrying out drill displays during the day - including one blank firing demonstration. Suitable for all ages. Price: See website. www.cmsm.co.uk

Charter Hall

That Night in Manchester

Friday 11 April: 7.30pm

Experience the thrilling 'That Night in Manchester'. A journey through the vibrant Manchester indie scene. Suitable for six-years-old and over. Price: From £29.00. www.colchester-events.co.uk/event/that-night-in-manchester

Desperados: The Definitive Eagles Tribute

Sunday 13 April: 7.30pm

Discover a dynamic Eagles tribute band who deliver a rip-roaring set. Suitable for six-years-old and over. Price: From £29.00. www.colchester-events.co.uk/event/desperados

Cheesy Bingo Party

Friday 25 April: 7.45pm

A mix of bingo and cheesy party music. Win prizes, dance, sing and party. Suitable for sixteen-years-old and over. Price: From £20.00. www.colchester-events.co.uk/event/cheesy-bingo-party-2025

Chelmsford City Racecourse

Good Friday Festival

Friday 18 April: Gates open 11.00am. First race: 1.30pm. Last race: 5.00pm (subject to change)

Start your Easter weekend with a day full of racing, live entertainment and family fun. Suitable for: Two-years-old and over. Price: Price: See website. www.chelmsfordcityracecourse.com/good-friday-family-raceday

Cliffs Pavilion

The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe

Tuesday 15 to Saturday 19 April: 7.00pm

Thursday and Saturday matinees: 2.30pm (BSL: Thursday 17 April 7.00pm)

Get ready as C.S. Lewis' magical tale comes to life on stage. Suitable for all ages. Price: Tickets from £23.00. www.trafalgartickets.com/cliffs-pavilion-southend/en-GB/event/play/the-lion-the-witch-and-the-wardrobe-tickets

& Juliet

Monday 5 to Saturday 10 May: 8.00pm

Wednesday and Saturday matinees: 2.30pm (BSL: Thursday 8 May 8.00pm)

This new musical asks, what would happen next if Juliet did not end it all over Romeo? Suitable for: See website. Price: Tickets from £21.00. www.trafalgartickets.com/cliffs-pavilion-southend/en-GB/event/musical/juliet-tickets#ticket-info

[pavilion-southend/en-GB/event/musical/juliet-tickets#ticket-info](http://www.trafalgartickets.com/cliffs-pavilion-southend/en-GB/event/musical/juliet-tickets#ticket-info)

Ghost Stories

Tuesday 13 to Saturday 17 May: 8.00pm

BSL interpreted performance Thursday 15 May: 8.00pm

Saturday matinee: 2.30pm

A theatrical experience mixing the very best of theatre with the buzz of a thrill-ride. Suitable for 15-years-old and over. Tickets from £26.00. www.trafalgartickets.com/cliffs-pavilion-southend/en-GB/event/play/ghost-stories-tickets

Colchester Visitor Information Centre

Camulodunum to Colchester Guided Tour

Every Saturday throughout the year: 11.00am

From the Romans to the modern day, a fun tour of Colchester city centre to discover the stories, buildings and people. Suitable for all ages. Price: Adult £9.00, children under 15-years-old free. www.visitcolchester.com/event/guided-walking-tour

Crossing Temple Barns

Charlie Owen's Essex Spring Fair

Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 April

Browse a huge range of exhibitors including arts, beauty, crafts, fashion, as well as the unique and uncategorised, and much more. Suitable for all ages. Price: Adults £6.00, concessions £5.00 and children free. www.charlieowenevents.co.uk/events/essex-spring-shopping-fair-3

Temple at War

Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 May

A two-day military and vintage event that offers the best in historical

re-enactment experience. As 2025 is the 80th anniversary of VE Day, join us in celebrating this landmark event. Suitable for all ages. Price: See website. www.templeatwar.co.uk/product/saturday-ticket

Delta Hotels by Marriott Colchester

Ryan Gooding Psychic Night

Wednesday 19 April: 7.00pm

Discover an evening demonstrating his mediumship and entertaining the crowd. Suitable for: 18-years-old and over. Price: £22.00. www.marksteyhotel.co.uk

Down Hall Hotel Spa and Estate

Wellness Breathwork Weekend

Friday 4 April

Breathwork improves mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing for all. Suitable for 18-years-old and over. Price: From £225 per person. www.downhall.co.uk/offers/breathwork-weekend/51-49

Easter Afternoon Tea

Monday 7 to Monday 21 April: From 1.00pm

Our springtime afternoon tea complete with an Easter twist. An assortment of sweet and savoury delicacies paired with tea or coffee. Easter egg hunt for children on Easter Sunday. Suitable for all ages. Price: Adults £45.00, children £22.50. www.downhall.co.uk/upcoming-events/easter-afternoon-tea

Crystal and Yoga Retreat

Friday 16 May

Guests will begin with a relaxing 25-minute spa treatment followed by a yoga session. The crystal workshop then takes place, followed by an evening meal in our garden room. Suitable for 18-years-old and over. Price: From £225 per person.

www.downhall.co.uk/offers/crystal-wellness-retreat/51-60

Princess Afternoon Tea

Thursday 29 May:
3.00pm to 5.30pm

Be transported to a world of fairy tales and dreams at this magical dining experience fit for royalty. Suitable for all ages. Price: £45.00 per adult, £25.00 per child aged two to 12-years-old, under two-years-old £10.00. www.downhall.co.uk/upcoming-events/spring-princess-afternoon-tea

Essex Country Parks

Easter Trail

Various dates throughout the school holiday: 8.00am to dusk

Pick up or download an egg-cellent Easter Trail at the seven Essex Country Parks this school holiday. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.explore-essex.com/events

Forest School

Mondays, Saturdays
and term time

Enjoy term time and Family Forest School sessions run by our team of rangers. Sessions available for pre-schoolers, home educated, and families. Suitable for all ages. Price: See website. www.explore-essex.com/schools-and-groups/forest-schools

Essex Outdoors

School Holiday Activity Days

Various dates throughout the Easter school holiday

Children will enjoy four activities throughout the day in small groups of up to ten. Activities dependent on the day and centre you book. Running at Bradwell-on-Sea, Danbury, Harlow and Mersea. Suitable for children aged eight to 16-years-old. Price from £40.00 per child. www.essexoutdoors.com/

[school-holiday-activities](#)

All Ability Holiday Activity Days: Harlow

Specifically and sensitively designed for children with SEN, these activity days run at Essex Outdoors Harlow during school holidays. Suitable for eight to 16-years-old. From £40.00 a day. www.essexoutdoors.com/all-ability-adventure

Paddle Club: Harlow

From Saturday morning Paddle Club to Tuesday evening tasters, children and adults of all abilities are welcome. Canoe, kayaks and paddleboards supplied. Various dates and prices. Suitable for eight-years-old and above. Price: See website. www.essexoutdoors.com/individuals-and-families/family-paddlesports

Sailing and Powerboat Experience Days and Courses

Various dates from April

The team at Bradwell-on-Sea, a Royal Yacht Accredited training centre, offer days out and courses to suit your ability. Suitable for ages seven-years-old and above. Prices See website. www.essexoutdoors.com/our-centres/bradwell

The Lock

Adult Learn to Climb and Taster Courses

Thursday evenings or Sunday all day, various dates

These courses are recommended for those who want to learn the basics of climbing and give it a try in a safe and friendly environment. Suitable for adults. Price: From £22.00. www.essexoutdoors.com/the-lock-climbing-wall/first-time-climber

Youth Learn to Climb Courses

Various dates, Sunday all day

An introduction to indoor climbing focusing on the safety skills needed

to climb at an indoor climbing centre. Course covers basic technical skills and information about next steps. Suitable for ages 14 to 17-years-old. Price: £60.00. www.essexoutdoors.com/the-lock-climbing-wall/first-time-climber

Essex Record Office

ERO Presents

Various talks on a range of subjects presented by experts, taking place from April onwards. Suitable for: See website. For price and tickets see website. www.essexrecordoffice.co.uk/whats-on

Essex Wildlife Trust

Naze Seashore Discovery

Sunday 6 April:
1.00pm to 3.00pm

Seashore treasures, rocks, shells, and fascinating creatures, there's much to discover down by the sea. Suitable for four to 12-years-old. Price: £8.74 per child (including booking fee). www.essexwt.org.uk/events/2025-04-06-naze-seashore-discovery

Hanningfield Hoppy Easter

Monday 7 April: 10.30am to 4.00pm (drop-in event)

An Easter themed adventure full of natural crafts, exploring and fun for all the family. Suitable for four-years-old and over. Price: £12.94 per child (price excludes booking fee). www.essexwt.org.uk/events/2025-04-07-hanningfield-hoppy-easter

Ingrebourne Family Forest Fun

Friday 11 April:
10.30am to 12.30pm

Fun in the forest for all the family to enjoy. Suitable for two to nine-years-old. Price: £7.73 (price includes booking fee). www.essexwt.org.uk/events/2025-04-11-ingrebourne-family-forest-fun

Abbotts Hall Outdoor Cooking and Bushcraft for Adults

Saturday 12 April:
10.30am to 12.30pm

Set foot into spring with refreshing outdoor activities. Suitable for 18-years-old and over. Price: £16.09 (price inclusive of booking fee). www.essexwt.org.uk/events/2025-04-12-abbotts-hall-outdoor-cooking-and-bushcraft-adults

Thameside Pond Dipping

Wednesday 16 April: 10.00am to 11:30pm and 1.00pm to 2:30pm (drop-in event)

Explore a range of habitats with magnifying glasses, ID charts and sweep nets. Suitable for three-years-old and over. Price: £7.73 per child (price excludes booking fee). www.essexwt.org.uk/events/2025-04-16-thameside-pond-dipping

Grange Farm Egg-cellent Easter

Friday 18 April: various time slots from 10.00am to 4.00pm.

Can you help the Easter Bunny find her missing eggs? Suitable for young children. Price: £7.73 (price includes booking fee). www.essexwt.org.uk/events/2025-04-18-grange-farm-eggcellent-easter

Fingringhoe Egg-citing Easter

Sunday 20 April:
10.00am to 3.00pm

Complete the Easter trail to claim your prize. Then use tools and natural materials to create an Easter craft to take home. Suitable for children. Price: £8.74 per child (including booking fee). www.essexwt.org.uk/events/2025-04-20-fingringhoe-egg-citing-easter

Abberton Egg-cellent Easter

Monday 21 April: 10.30am to 3.30pm (drop-in session)

Take the egg-cellent Easter trail and receive your Easter prize. Then

join us for a spot of pond dipping. Suitable for children. Price: £8.74 per child (including booking fee). www.essexwt.org.uk/events/2025-04-21-abberton-eggcellent-easter

Gibberd Gallery

Harlow Art Trust Open 2025

Now until Saturday 19 April.
Every day except Sundays and bank holidays:
11.00am to 4.00pm

The Harlow Open 2025 showcases an exciting range of artworks from artists of all ages and backgrounds. Suitable for all ages. Free admission. www.sculpturetown.uk/whats-on/big-team-challenge-harlow-sculpture-marathon

Great Easton Lodge

Garden Open Days

Sunday 13 April,
18 May, 15 June:
11.00am to 5.00pm

Adults £7.00 (£6.00 in advance) children free, dogs on a lead welcome. Refreshments available. www.eastonlodge.co.uk

Hedingham Castle

Easter Holiday Fun: From
Monday 7 April

Enjoy lots of egg-citing Easter activities including knight school, birds of prey and a magical egg hunt. Suitable for all ages. Price: From £9.00. Under three-years-old, free. www.hedinghamcastle.co.uk/events

Knights of Middle England Joust

Saturday 20 and Sunday 21 April

The ever-popular Knights of Middle England take to the battle ground, showcasing their skill, as they battle it out to be proclaimed champion. Suitable for all ages. Price: From £16.00, under four-years-old, free. www.hedinghamcastle.co.uk/events

Stand and Deliver! A Highwayman Stunt Show

Sunday 4 and Monday 5 May

Discover the famous highwaymen and women. Witness daring deeds, as the lost tales of highway legends are brought back to life. Suitable for all ages. Price: From £16.00, under four-years-old, free. www.hedinghamcastle.co.uk/events

Knights of Royal England Joust

Sunday 25 and Monday 26 May

Get ready for an epic battle of strength and valour as The Knights of Royal England return. Suitable for all ages. Price: From £16.00, under four-years-old, free. www.hedinghamcastle.co.uk/events

Firstsite

University Centre Colchester: Degree Show

Now until Sunday 8 June

This exhibition features multimedia works by second and third-year students from University Centre Colchester, celebrating creativity sparked by art education. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.firstsite.uk/whats-on

Elsa James: It Should Not Be Forgotten

Now until to Sunday 6 July

Elsa James presents an exhibition exploring her Black British heritage, using photography, print, neon, sound and mixed media. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.firstsite.uk/whats-on

Holiday Fun

Tuesday 8 April to Saturday 12 April and Tuesday 15 April to Saturday 19 April

Get making, moving and munching this school holiday with daily drop-in creative activities, plus free bookable outdoor sports to keep kids

active and a hot, nutritious lunch in the canteen. Suitable for four to 11-years-old but all ages welcome. Price: Free. www.firstsite.uk/event_categories/holiday-fun

Harbour Ferry: Harwich, Shotley and Felixstowe

2025 Season Kick Off

Tuesday 1 April until Friday 31 October: 9.50am to 4.30pm and every day

Crossings between Harwich to Shotley and Felixstowe all day every day. Book your tickets to enjoy Harwich harbour and Felixstowe port from the water. Suitable for all ages. Price: £3.30 to £7.20. www.harwichharbourferry.com

Harlow Pet's Corner

Easter Holiday

Monday 7 April to Saturday 19 April

Join the Easter fun and meet the newly born lambs, snap a selfie with the Easter Bunny, experience keeper talks. Plus, Easter crafts, Easter egg hunt and more. No booking required. Suitable for all ages. Price: Free. www.harlow.gov.uk/parks-and-culture/pets-corner

Hylands Estate

Estate Open Day

Sunday 13 April and 11 May: 10.00am to 3.00pm

Discover the history of Hylands House. Browse the Essex Foodies Market, open artist studios and enjoy live music from Hot Box Events. Suitable for all the family. Price: Free. www.hylandsestate.co.uk/explore/openestate

All About Dogs

Sunday 4 and Monday 5 May: 9.30am to 5.00pm

Bring your dog for two days full of exciting arena displays and lots of fun activities. Suitable for all the family. Price: £7.00 to £13.50. www.hylandsestate.co.uk/events/all-about-dogs-show-2

The National Flower Show

Friday 16 to Sunday 18 May: 9.00am to 5.00pm

Back for its 10th anniversary year this show for gardening enthusiasts showcases ideas and inspiration, advice and the tools to help create your own garden haven. Suitable for all ages. Price: £4.00 to £29.00. www.nationalflowershow.co.uk

Glass, Jewellery and pottery workshops

Various dates, times and prices. See website for details. www.hylandsestate.co.uk

Maldon District

Bank Holiday Food and Drink Festival

Sunday 20 and Monday 21 April

Visit Promenade Park for family fun, with kids rides, music, street food and bars. Suitable for families. Price: Adults £8.00, under 16-years-old free. www.visitmaldondistrict.co.uk/whats-on

Maldon Mud Race

Sunday 4 May

Enjoy the world-famous competition where 300 fundraising participants drag themselves through the Maldon mud. Plus, there are attractions, street food, bars and a fair. Suitable for families. Price: Free. www.maldonmudrace.com

VE Day

Thursday 8 May

Celebrate VE Day with an evening event including a free film, formal speeches, vintage vehicles and a bonfire. Suitable

for families. Price: Free. www.visitmaldondistrict.co.uk/VEDay

Mercury Theatre

Whole

Wednesday 9 April

Emma has been looking for a way to fill the gaping hole her identical twin sister's death has left behind. Every night a volunteer from the audience will join Emma on stage to assist her. Suitable for 14-years-old and over. Price: £15.00. www.mercurytheatre.co.uk/event/whole

Mess

Saturday 12 April

Join Princess Olive on a thrilling quest to find the legendary Tidy Up Troll to help clean her room before the Troll Queen's palace party. Suitable for two-years-old and over. Price: £15.00. www.mercurytheatre.co.uk/event/mess

In Other Words

Friday 25 to Saturday 26 April

Connected by the music of Frank Sinatra, this moving drama examines the power of music and the nature of enduring love. Suitable for 12-years-old and over. Price: £15.50. www.mercurytheatre.co.uk/event/in-other-words-music-and-dementia

The Da Vinci Code

Wednesday 7 to Saturday 24 May

Dan Brown's bestselling thriller novel comes alive, in this electrifying stage adaptation. Suitable for 16-years-old and over. Price: From £15.50. www.mercurytheatre.co.uk/event/the-da-vinci-code

Mountfitchet Castle

Easter Bunny Trail

Saturday 12 to Monday 21 April:
10.00am to 5.00pm (last
admission 3.45pm)

Hop, skip and jump down to our Easter Bunny trail. Find the hidden stamps around the castle and claim a prize at the end of your visit. Suitable for all ages. Price: Adults (over 14-years-old) £18.00, children aged three to 13-years-old £14.00, senior citizens (65-years-old and over) £16.00. www.mountfitchetcastle.com

Saffron Walden Museum

Easter Family Activities

Monday 7 April to Monday 21
April: Thirty-minute sessions
from 10.10am to 2.30pm

Get hands on with our Easter crafting sessions. Materials and instructions provided. Suitable for children. Price: £2.40 per child. www.saffron-walden-museum.arttickets.org.uk

190th Birthday Party For All

Saturday 10 May:
11.00am to 3.00pm

Join us to celebrate the museum's 190th birthday. Suitable for all ages. Price: See website. www.saffron-walden-museum.arttickets.org.uk

Wonders of Saffron Walden Museum

Saturday 10 May to
Sunday 12 October

A special exhibition showcasing the wonders that the museum has collected over 190 years, chosen by the people of Uttlesford. Suitable for all ages. Price: See website. www.saffron-walden-museum.arttickets.org.uk

Saltmarsh Coast

Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival: Springtime Walks

Thursday 24 April to Sunday
27 April 2025

Bluebells, blossoms, and butterflies. Enjoy a mini-festival in April ahead of the main one which will take place in September and October. Suitable for various ages and abilities dependant on each walk. Price: free. www.saltmarshcoastwalkingfestival.co.uk

Talliston House and Gardens

The Annual Talliston Murder mystery

Friday 23 to Monday 26 May

Join author, John Tarrow, for his next annual murder mystery whodunnit. A dozen guests will be cast as a sinister suspect in a murder in this 1920s themed event. Opening times: See website. Suitable for adults. Price: £49.95 per person. www.talliston.com/murdermystery2025

Topsail Charters

Easter Cream Tea Cruises

Friday 18 April:
3.00pm to 5.00pm

Saturday 19 April:
3.45pm to 5.45pm

Sunday 20 April:
4.30pm to 6.00pm

A two-island cruise from Maldon quay past Northey Island to Osea Island and back. Choose to add on a cream tea. Suitable for all ages. Price: Adult £34.00, children £24.00. www.topsailcharters.co.uk

Palace Theatre

Death of a Salesman

Tuesday 8 to Saturday 12
April: 7.30pm

Thursday and Saturday
matinees: 2.30pm

Arthur Miller's powerful drama explores the expectations of a father set against the realities of his son. Suitable for: See website. Price: Tickets from £16.50. www.trafalgartickets.com/palace-theatre-southend

The Girl on the Train

Tuesday 6 to Saturday
10 May: 7.30pm

Thursday and Saturday
matinees: 2.30pm

Adapted from the international best seller, this gripping new play keeps you guessing until the final moment. Suitable for: See website. Price: Tickets from £17.60. www.trafalgartickets.com/palace-theatre-southend/en-GB/event/play/the-girl-on-the-train-tickets

West Cliff Theatre

Exciting Science

Sunday 6 April: 2.00pm

This brand new, exciting and educational show will amaze and astound all ages. Suitable for four-years-old and over. Price: £16.00. www.westcliffclacton.co.uk/kids/exciting-science

Danny Lee Grew 24K Magic

Sunday 13 April: 2.30pm

Join top magician Danny Lee Grew in his brand new mind boggling one man show 24K Magic. Suitable for all ages. Tickets: Adults £15.00, under 16-years-old £12.00. www.westcliffclacton.co.uk/kids/danny-lee-grew-24k-magic



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