



# FOOD WORTH TRAVELLING FOR

Charlotte Smith-Jarvis hails award-winning pub's beef the best she's ever had.

There's only one type of mini-break that interests me...and that's the kind involving food.

So when the opportunity came up to sample the wares of The Duke's Head at Somerleyton (recent Taste of Anglia winner in our tourism awards) I, of course, had to oblige.

Hubby and I took a jaunt up the sunny, daffodil-lined Suffolk coastline, landing first at the accommodation for our sojourn - Somerleyton Meadows. The boutique guest house, dating back to the 1820s, is owned by recruitment consultant Amanda and hubby and former ad bod Stuart. And boy they've got taste - a sweeping staircase leading upstairs to a Mad Men-esque suite, complete with its own decadent period bathroom.

The whole house can be hired depending on availability. But it wasn't the main body of the property we were there for. No, we were adventurers. The first guests ever to stay the night in their newly-installed shepherd's hut. Led by Stuart along a fairylight-strewn garden path (it felt like we were heading for a festival) we found the cutesy hut in their field, alongside its own authentic wood-fired Scandi hot tub (too cold to even contemplate on our visit) and Stuart's makings of a fire pit. She was a lovely little homestead for the evening. Her interior taking cue from the hot tub - all northern European prints and comfy touches, equipped with a decently-sized shower, princess

Insets and below: The Duke's Head, Somerleyton  
Pictures: SAM GEE



and the pea-esque bed (I had to use the step to get up to our sleeping quarters) and a barrel-load of biscuits.

Suitably impressed and layered up against the bitter early spring chill, we took hold of Stuart's kind lending of a torch, and set off on foot for our 10-minute stroll (in pure, black darkness) to the pub. There was something a bit Swallows and Amazons about navigating Slug Lane by battery operated light under a clouded sky. No sound but our fits of giggles, the bark of a nearby fox, the rattle of a passing train or, oddly, the toot of leisure boats calling from the river.

We tumbled into the rural pub absolutely ravenous, and instantly took a shine to the place. Landlords Tara and James (who've run the watering hole for three years) have created a remarkably welcoming inn, with a buzzing bar area, blazing fireplaces, and multiple nooks and crannies to snuggle into.

As we peeled off our coats and woollies I spotted the blackboard propped up by the open kitchen, scrawled with the cuts of the day and their cost. James specialises in preparing rare breed pork and beef on the bone, selling each by weight. It takes balls to do that. Especially

when catering en masse. Our wonderful waitress explained the concept and urged us to try the rib of beef - well, who were we to argue?

Before we sated our appetites there was time to explore the drinks menus, plentiful with interesting spirits, local beers and even East Anglian wines by the glass which is something of a rarity. I dipped into a bottle of nearby Chet Valley's Schonberger, redolent with grapefruit on the nose, and with a clean, flinty mouthfeel, a touch of peach and biscuity notes. Mr Jarvis gave a thumbs up to the malty, tropical-tasting Lacons Legacy.

And onto the food. Nibbles to begin. Tender nuggets of pigeon, pierced onto skewers and given a kick with a spicy jerk date puree. A melt-in-the-middle Scotch egg, all runny and unctuous. And warm Pennybun Bakehouse treacle bread with luscious house butter.

We shared a plate of James' in-house made charcuterie, kept at optimum temperature in his specialist fridge/cupboard off the kitchen. For someone who only started experimenting with cured meats recently, he's certainly taken to the craft. Served with remoulade, sourdough, more of that delicious house butter, pickles and a touch of mustard, the coppa, red wine and black pepper salami and chorizo were melt-in-the-mouth, not too saline, and had great maturity and depth of flavour. Just pure, no-mucking-about, salt-of-the-earth, proper cooking.

And this sentiment extended to the crowning glory of the experience - a plate of pan-sealed, oven-cooked, charcoal-finished rib of Belted Galloway beef to share. Cut from the bone, sliced, and lavished with butter and seasoning, I can hand-on-heart say it was the best beef I have ever had the pleasure of eating. Succulent, glossy, rich, meat-juice encrusted, the delicately pink blushed slices of sirloin fell apart in the mouth. And I couldn't resist gnawing on the bone either - when in Rome and all that.

As standard, steak comes with a

mountain of seasoned chips to mop up the juices, and a huge bowl of simple dressed salad leaves, adorned with salty Parmesan. We couldn't stop smiling across the table - and it wasn't for the company either. Without saying a word we'd both submitted the dish into our own running 'foodie hall of fame'.

To cut through the delectable richness of the beef I had a glass of Primitivo - a perky, violet-scented Italian off-dry number with a juicy tang and touch of spice. Mr Jarvis is a slight thing and rarely has room for pud, but I make up for that (believe me). The dessert menu is forgivably small, meaning the kitchen can concentrate on perfecting the main event. Local ice cream and affogato sit alongside plates such as the awesome ode to chocolate I dived into. A Pump Street 75% chocolate mousse, with a dainty baked chocolate mousse, salted caramel ice cream and two toffeetastic cubes of honeycomb - or as I like to call it, hokey pokey. One of the best desserts I've eaten so far in 2020.

Fit to burst, torch in hand, we bid adieu to the pub, on a promise to come back soon with our carnivorous children in tow no doubt (they did not appreciate our gushing beefy Instagram and Twitter posts having been lumbered with a homemade veggie curry for dinner).

A bracing, and much-needed, post prandial stroll back up the starlit lane helped burn off some (who am I kidding) of those calories, and we were grateful for the warmth of the cosy bed in the hut, whose head end cladding cradled our pillows, making us feel like we were in our own little nest.

In the morning, our hosts arrived with breakfast - a basket of freshly-baked pastries, warm linen-covered toast, preserves and coffee. We felt thoroughly spoilt. What a way to start the weekend.

**SOMERLEYTON MEADOWS:**  
somerleytonmeadows.co.uk

**THE DUKE'S HEAD:**  
somerleyton.co.uk/the-dukes-head

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1 and 3: The Duke's Head, Somerleyton  
Picture: SAM GEE



2: Rib of Belted Galloway beef cooked to perfection at The Duke's Head, Somerleyton  
Picture: CHARLOTTE SMITH-JARVIS



4 and 5: Somerleyton Meadows  
Pictures: SOMERLEYTON MEADOWS

