



Weekend away

AN ISOLATED-BUT-COSY CABIN WITH A WOOD-BURNING STOVE OFFERS A LONG-AWAITED BREAK, WHATEVER THE WEATHER

Words: **JO MATTOCK**

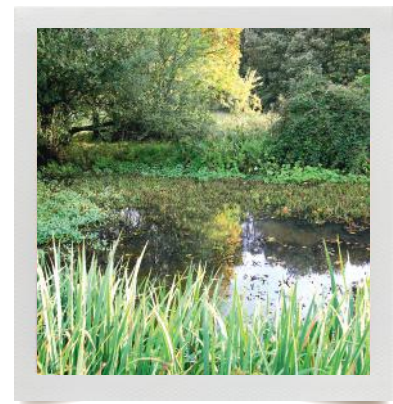
We didn't get a holiday away from home last summer. Planned trips with friends all had to be cancelled and by the time we could look at rebooking, the warm weather was well and truly over and the winter had set in. Keen to get outdoors anyway, despite the weather, we were looking for a rural retreat while also keeping warm.

A snug cabin, with a wood-burning stove, in a wildflower meadow seemed to fit the bill. In the Waveney Valley, on the Norfolk/Suffolk borders, it was well positioned to explore the Norfolk Broads and the coast. So, with warm, waterproof gear packed, we set off, determined to enjoy a few days outside whatever the weather threw at us.



Where we stayed

Albion Nights is a child-free retreat in Woodton, near Bungay, and was built by owner Helen and her husband. Set in a meadow, overlooking a pond, it's made from recycled or local materials, including old barn beams, corrugated iron from pigsties, and branches from their own woodland. There's also a composting toilet, solar panels to power the lights and the little fridge, and a wood-burning stove. All the wastewater is filtered through a reed bed (so only eco-friendly toiletries are allowed, all of which are provided). Even the smallest details have been considered – the toilet-roll holder, for instance, has been handmade from branches. With its larch cladding and lit stove, there's the feeling of being out in the wilderness and a pleasing sense of self-sufficiency.



What we ate

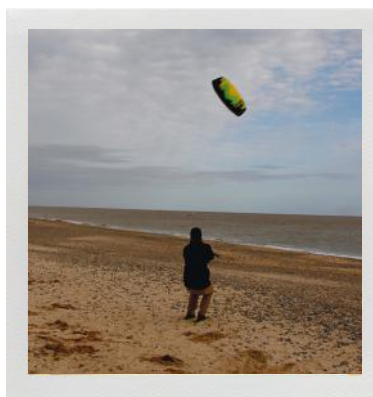
A Farmer's Breakfast was served up in the café at Old Hall Farm, next door to the cabin, and set us up for the day ahead. It included the farm's own bacon, sausages and eggs, as well as mushrooms, tomatoes and locally-baked sourdough toast. Afterwards, we wandered out to the farmyard to see the Jersey cows being milked and to say hello to the chickens, goats and, er, emu. We also stocked up on raw milk, eggs and meat from their excellent deli.

We ate dinner at The Wildebeest in nearby Stoke Holy Cross. A warm, welcoming pub, chef patron Daniel Smith favours seasonal, local ingredients. My starter was a dish of punchy green-currried Brancaster mussels with cucumber Martini, followed by pan-fried seabass, with basil quinoa, chorizo, buttered leeks and curly kale, and rounded off nicely by a cherry Bakewell tart.



What we did

Our first morning was cold but sunny – the kind of morning you have to make the most of in winter. It had been so long since we'd seen the sea, that we headed for the coast. Lowestoft, with its wide, sandy beach was in easy reach. Well wrapped up in coats, hats and scarves, we did some beachcombing for pretty pebbles, flew our kite and



refuelled with fish and chips afterwards. We didn't find much of interest in the town, but there was an excellent shop selling preloved kids' clothes called Way Up High, where we picked up some wellies and jumpers for our daughter.

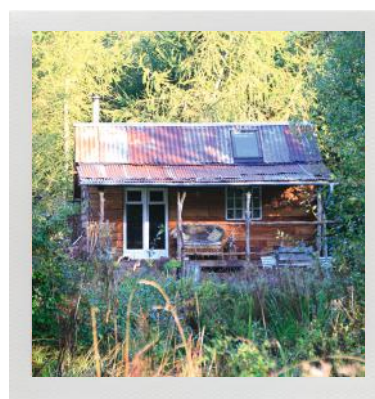
The following day was really wet, so after a leisurely morning and a breakfast of eggs and bacon kindly provided in a welcome hamper by Helen, we went to explore the small market town of Bungay, just a couple of miles away.

We spent rather a long time in No. 4, an antiques and bric-a-brac shop, hunting for treasures among homewares, decorations and collectibles (we were very tempted by a beautiful wall-mounted pendulum clock for our hallway). Afterwards, the weather was still not good enough for more than the briefest visit to Bungay's ruined castle, so we retreated to the lovely Earsham Street Café for coffee and carrot cake.

We also liked

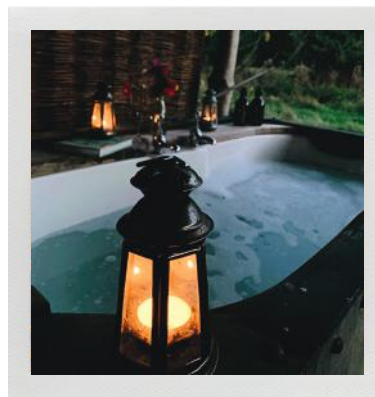
Spending the late afternoon on the cabin's veranda with a glass of wine – Old Hall Farm next door has its own vineyard (really, it was our one-stop shop), and Flint Vineyard, near Bungay, offers tours and tastings. We settled down on the sofa, wrapped in a handy blanket, and watched the crows and kestrels

coming and going. As it got dark, a barn owl swooped silently overhead – the first I'd ever seen in the wild. For those brave enough to try it, there's also a bath on the veranda (the cabin is very private!). On a slightly warmer evening, you could watch out for birds and other animals while soaking in the tub.



The best bit

Returning to the cabin at night, under a clear starry sky, lighting the stove and relaxing after a long but fun day. We read and played board games, and when it was time for bed, we drifted off to sleep to the sound of the wood crackling and settling in the stove.



A minimum 2-night stay at Albion Nights, in Woodton, Norfolk, starts from £270. albionnights.co.uk