

## Travel

# Treasures in the flatlands

Lincolnshire and Leicestershire are two undiscovered counties with stunning castles, cathedrals – and pies, says **Ken Bennett**

**E**MMA, Duchess of Rutland, glides into the arched ceiling dining room with a beguiling smile.

"Excuse I'm a little late," she says, with a disarming frankness. "Been mucking out the horses with the children."

Not your average aristocrat, our Emma, she's a hands-on woman.

We are taking lunch (sublime pheasant and lordly sticky toffee pudding) at Belvoir Castle, in Leicestershire, the wonderful stately home she shares with husband, their four children and a heritage stretching back a thousand years.

From the noble heights of Belvoir – its French for beautiful view and they pronounce it Beaver here – you could, at one time, look out 38 miles in any direction and you'd still be viewing the Rutland estate.

We had arrived in gentle, unhurried style by coach from Lincolnshire which was our base for a three-day visit to appropriately titled Hidden England.

Coaches are restful havens where you chat to fellow travellers over a cup of coffee, safe

in the knowledge the cavern-sized boot has more than enough room for any amount of luggage.

Lincolnshire itself is one of those truly marvellous English counties just aching to be discovered.

And, despite being at the heart of Britain's iron-smoothed flatlands, the miles of beautifully manicured fields hold rare secrets.

There are picture-postcard, honey-stoned villages, oozing history alongside their pots of tangy homemade chutneys. Twinkling pristine towns to spend a dreamy afternoon musing over tea and crumpets.

Then, of course, there are legendary pubs, hotels and castles – just like Beaver – where you luxuriate in cosy rooms and immerse yourself in fine dining with a distinctly exclusive local flavour.

Because, alongside its burgeoning heritage, Lincoln's fair county is all about food: and lots of it.

It produces one-fifth of the nation's needs and hosts the area's distinctly different tastes of Lincoln Red beef, plum bread, Lincolnshire sausages, Lincolnshire Poacher cheese, fresh ostrich and an extraor-



**DELIGHTFUL CASTLE** The remains of Lincoln Castle, built by William the Conqueror and home to one of the four surviving copies of Magna Carta

inary selection of fresh vegetables.

Hone in on Lincoln itself and you'll find an enthralling, highly walkable destination city, steeped in English heritage and vibrant modern waterfront.

The imposing gothic Cathedral – one of the three largest in Britain – takes centre stage and featured in the Da Vinci Code. And the remains of Lincoln Castle, built by William the Conqueror, are home to one of the four surviving copies of Magna Carta.

There are events to tempt visitors most of the year with winter dominated by the leg-

endary Christmas Market a bewildering, but well-orchestrated shopping celebration.

Alternatively, glide to the land of pies, just a crust's crimp away, in Melton Mowbray across the border into Leicestershire.

Here you can feast your eyes on castles of another kind: giant, contented, hand raised pork pies with a sublime melt in the mouth taste.

With exquisite ease, master pie maker, Stephen Hallam, produces a rotund beauty at a demonstration at Dickinson & Morris' Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe, the oldest pork pie bakery in the town.

Back in Lincolnshire, The Olde Barn Hotel in Grantham features tapas of the local kind: fish balls, red beef faggots and curried roast parsnips, with toasted plumb bread, apple and cream for a memorable dessert.

That set us up for a guided walk through Stamford, a lovely old town that won favour with Sir Walter Scott and, more recently, featured in *Pride and Prejudice*, starring Keira Knightley.

## FACTFILE

**KEN Bennett** travelled as a guest of the Coach Tourism Council which promotes excursions, short breaks and holidays by coach on behalf of 150 coach tour operators who offer departures across the UK.

Visit: [coachtourismcouncil.co.uk](http://coachtourismcouncil.co.uk) to find a national or regional operator. Many operators feature tours to the region, combining a seaside break at Skegness.

He stayed at The Ramada, Grantham, just off the A1, which offers a choice of 89 en-suite bedrooms. Call: 01476 593000 or: [ramadagrantham.co.uk](http://ramadagrantham.co.uk)

He tried a unique selection of Lincolnshire tapas at The Olde Barn Hotel Marston, Grantham. Tel: 01400 250909,

[theoldebarnhotel.co.uk](http://theoldebarnhotel.co.uk). Belvoir Castle features in the Hidden England project, with exciting happenings in the castle and grounds ([belvoircastle.com](http://belvoircastle.com)).

He dined at the Manners Arms on the Belvoir Estate at Knipton. Tel: 01476 879222, [mannersarms.com](http://mannersarms.com)

Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe, 10 Nottingham Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire LE13 1NW Tel: 01664 562341, [porkpie.co.uk](http://porkpie.co.uk)

Information on the Hidden England project, visit: [hiddenengland.org](http://hiddenengland.org).

For comprehensive website and information, check out: [visitlincolnshire.com](http://visitlincolnshire.com), [lincolntourism.co.uk](http://lincolntourism.co.uk) or [enjoyengland.com/cities](http://enjoyengland.com/cities) (ends musts - ends all)

## GETAWAY GUIDE

### UK/IRELAND

**■ YORKSHIRE DALES:** HF Holidays (0845 470 7558) offers five nights' full-board from April 27 on Herriott Way, based at Thorns Hall Country House in Sedburgh, for £377, saving £62.

**■ EDINBURGH:** Superbreak (0871 222 3055) offers two nights' B&B at five-star Sheraton Grand Hotel & Spa for £139 per person until end of April, incl free dinner on first night.

**■ BOURNEMOUTH:** Superbreak (0871 222 3055) offers two nights' B&B at four-star Menzies East Cliff Hotel through May/June for £134.50 per person, incl dinner on first night.

**■ SPRINGSTEEN IN HYDE PARK:** Superbreak (0871 222 3055) offers B&B at four-star Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch for E street band concert on June 28 from £175, incl ticket to gig.

**■ SOUTHERN IRELAND:** Stena Line (08705 747 474) offers overnight midweek hotel break at four-star hotel in Wexford from £65 per adult per night, incl travel and full Irish breakfast. Up to two children sharing with two adults can travel, stay and eat for free.

**■ WALKING:** HF Holidays (0845 470 7558) offers 17 country house breaks dotted around the prime areas of England, Scotland and Wales with flexible arrival/dep dates in April/May, from £159 for two-night freedom break, incl full board, while five-night stay starts at £329.



**GOTHIC BEAUTY** Lincoln Cathedral, one of the three largest in Britain and setting for the film *The Da Vinci Code*

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