



COASTAL ESCAPE

What better way to escape than a break on the Suffolk Coast. **Lesley Rawlinson** heads for Dunwich where Essential Suffolk favourite The Ship is under new owners



We're living in uncertain times – I can't be the only person who's exhausted at how often I'm hearing these weary words. By the time you're reading this will everything be resolved? Highly unlikely – however if you're currently cowering on your sofa wondering what the months ahead will bring I can offer you some positive news. While giants of the holiday industry crash out of the game and our consciousness over the environmental costs of travel have never been higher, there's an opportunity to surround yourself with the beauty of nature, breathe the purest coastal air, rest and relax in style and comfort... oh and the food and drink is pretty great too.

The Ship at Dunwich has long been a firm favourite of mine, along with its 'sister' The Crown – just down the road at Westleton – and so news of a change of ownership for both last autumn, I have to admit now, was

there's also an extremely enjoyable route via Walberswick to Southwold – and of course the surrounding lanes are a perfect playground for cyclists too.

However the pub itself has some rather appealing attributes and I am pleased to report that its star continues to rise in my eyes. Booked in for a midweek stay I was greeted with the trademark relaxed but efficient informality of The Ship team. Some faces are new, some long established yet there's always an ease about the place. Stone floors and stripped furniture mean walking boots, dogs and children are commonplace and as temperatures fall the wood-burning stove will virtually be on 24 hour shifts.

But all that relaxed informality doesn't mean a lack of comfort where it's needed. The accommodation has recently been refurbished and I was shown to my room –

window, but with daylight in relatively short-supply and I laced up my trainers and headed out for a run. I've discovered it's a great alternative to walking (for the time-deprived individual) while still enjoying the open air and countryside. There was an added incentive too – I'd spied the evening menu. From experience the portions at The Ship have always been generous and I already had my eye on both a starter and a main... off out I go!

On return there was time for a well-earned soak in the bath before making my way down for another squint at that menu. I was pleasantly surprised by the buzz in the bar – walkers, locals and holiday makers, plus a varied collection of adorable dogs, all eating, drinking and chattering. And that's part of the inevitable charm of this place; it's a bit of a hub. But there's also plenty of space. In the summer the garden and patio add even more but when the outdoors is less inviting there's the traditional main bar, a relaxed but atmospheric dining room or the conservatory where I chose to settle for the evening.

A warming bowl of curried pumpkin soup with homemade seedy bread made a great first impression. Subtly swirled throughout with crème fraiche the delicate flavours balanced perfectly. But I needed to leave space for what was to follow; homemade pork, leek and mushroom pie with creamy mash, local greens and red wine gravy – autumn had arrived. There are always a number of delicious fish dishes on the menu but I also highly recommend the Scotch eggs. They're listed under Starters / Light Meal and there are three choices; Blythburgh pork and black pudding with homemade piccalilli, 'hot smoked' salmon and horseradish with sweet pickled cucumber or spiced mixed bean with homemade spice tomato chutney.

I slept like the proverbial log in my enormously comfortable bed and opted for the full English. Breakfast at The Ship is the perfect set up for a day exploring – quality local ingredients, loads of choice and the same friendly service that's on offer throughout your stay. So, all in all, I had no cause for worry – staying at one of my all-time favourites was just as enjoyable as I had hoped and with the new rooms, even lovelier than ever.



received with slight angst. New owners, Chestnut, already a stable of quality properties across East Anglia, might mean a change of formula? Would everything I loved about The Ship be swept along with the tide of change and end up as the wreckage of a treasured memory? I'll leave the coastal metaphors there but you get the picture.

So what makes The Ship so special? Number one must be the location. If you still haven't found your way to this gem of a hideaway on the Suffolk coast then head just north of RSPB Minsmere. The tiny village of Dunwich is nestled in the shelter of the cliffs and is a well-positioned base for exploring the surrounding heaths, forests and coast. We've mapped at least four Pub Walks with Darcy routes (see essentialsuffolk.com/pub-walks-with-darcy) over the years including the famous Inn to Inn route (see page 62) connecting the two pubs. For serious walkers

SeaFields. What an apt name. The view from the pretty window across Dingle Marsh reflected in the décor. A subtle, soft sea-green shade (some might say blue?) accented the crisp white bed linen and rustic painted furniture. Other rooms use a similar beach-inspired pallet but without being overtly 'coastal' - shades of coral, stone, sand and sea all feature. The quirky nature of the building has been creatively incorporated – on first impression this was a cosy double with ensuite bathroom but on further investigation a tiny staircase in the corner of the room led to a further twin space above making it a perfect room for families where everyone needs a bit of space for themselves. A good choice of quality refreshments, TV, radio, hairdryer – I was beginning to relax into this stay already.

I was blessed to arrive in late-afternoon October sunshine. Determined to take the chance to get out and enjoy the weather-

INFORMATION

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