

Oyster beds and vineyard tours

Mersea Island

Total distance of main route is 21.6km/13.4miles



Short walks

- A 8.9km/5.5miles
- B 5.2km/3.3miles

Attractions along this route

- 1 Mersea Island Museum
- 2 Mersea Island Vineyard
- 3 St Edmund, King and Martyr church in East Mersea
- 4 Cudmore Grove Country Park

Accommodation

for details see overleaf

- 1 The Victory at Mersea
- 2 Waldegraves Holiday Park
- 3 Vine Cottage
- 4 Bromans Farm
- 5 Rose Barn Cottage

Places to eat

- 1 The Company Shed
Tel: 01206 382700
- 2 The Coast Inn
Tel: 01206 383568
www.thecoastinn.co.uk
- 3 The Victory at Mersea
Tel: 01206 382907
www.victoryatmersea.com
- 4 The Art Café
Tel: 01206 385820
www.islandartcafe.co.uk

This map is intended as a guide only. Please refer to relevant OS Explorer maps for specific details.

Key

- Walking Route 3
- Short walks
- Place of worship
- Telephone in rural area
- Public House
- National Rail
- Accommodation
- Restaurants

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By Stephen Emms

Give a man an island, and he'll have an overwhelming desire to walk round it. With its scenically diverse 22km perimeter path, Mersea is a case in point: the most easterly inhabited island in England, it's connected by the only Anglo-Saxon causeway in England, the 'Strood', but still cut off a few times a month at high tide. And it reeks of history: Roman pavements lurk under its elegant St Peter and Paul church (itself built in 1046); it bagged itself a mention in the Domesday Book (as home of one hundred 'souls'); and, during the First World War, a zeppelin was even shot down here.

But it's only walking the perimeter can you grasp a true feel for a place. And so, on a glorious morning, we set off from the anchorage's attractive 'Old City' quarter

of white clapperboard houses, and acclaimed Company Shed restaurant where, the day before, we had schlurped down native oysters with BYO local wine. Blue sky smiled over the creeks, and the sun pinged off the mudflats, but the wind was already up, the boat masts clinking as noisily as a gorilla running over a xylophone.

The first stretch, along the wilds of Mersea beach, was a stunning vista of yachts, dilapidated houseboats, and the 'monkey steps' (where, in the 18th and 19th centuries, officials would guard against smugglers), the spectre of Bradwell Power Station looming meanwhile across the water. Parasurfers sped by and we passed hundreds of beach huts in every shade of green, blue and brown, followed by ice cream coloured novelty versions with scalloped edges and balustrades.

Pill boxes dotted the coastline and distant specks of old men dug on the mudflats for cockles and wheelks.

Passing along the sea wall at Cudmore Grove Country Park, at the Island's eastern tip, we met enthusiastic ranger Dougal Urquhart, who pointed out geese, flocks of golden plovers and widgeons grazing on fields behind. At the highest cliffs on the island, a mere fifteen feet, fallen oaks littered the beach below, signifying their retreat by a metre a year. Dougal showed us river gravel in the low cliffs that is 300,000 years old: this was where, early last century, bones of elephant tusk, narrow-nosed rhino, bears and giant deer were discovered.

We left Dougal near the Old Fort, the town of Brightlingsea shimmering opposite, just as a light drizzle started. Turning the corner into the Colne Estuary National Nature Reserve, the mortal purr of the sea beyond, blankets of cloud thickened. The wind picked up, and a mist descended, as smoke from a distant log fire wafted temptingly over.

Passing the Colchester Oyster Fishery (the island has had a tradition of oyster fishing since Roman times), the weather cleared and the scenery became increasingly epic: vast fields, god-defying skies, longshore mudflats that stretched for ever, and creeks that surely must conceal crocodiles. The landscape was biblical: it seemed unbelievable that we were (thanks to GPS) just 48 miles from home in North London.



4. Cudmore Grove Country Park

This Green Flag Award holder country park is located at the eastern end of the island. The fine views across the Colne and Blackwater estuaries are not to be missed. If you love sunsets this is the place to watch the sun slowly slip down through the hazy sky, casting a red glow as it drops lower and lower. Walk the sea wall, explore the shore and watch for wildlife. Behind the sandy beach is an area of cliff top and grassland providing a tranquil open landscape for picnics, flying kites and other outdoor activities. Tel: 01206 383868 www.essex.gov.uk/countryparks



Places to eat:

There are more country pubs offering a variety of fayre, we have highlighted just a few.

1. The Company Shed

The Times Restaurant Guide has rated this small restaurant highly and sees customers come from afar to sample their food. Please make sure you arrive early as no bookings are taken. And don't forget to bring your own drinks and bread! Tel: 01206 382700

2. The Coast Inn

For a more formal setting and relaxed atmosphere this restaurant offers traditional fish and chips using the catch of the day, mussels and other local seafood using only the finest local produce. Tel: 01206 383568 www.thecoastinn.co.uk

3. The Victory at Mersea

Restaurant with large garden overlooking the waterfront and the oyster sheds. Tel 01206 382907 www.victoryatmersea.com

4. The Art Café

A modern café serving English and Continental dishes, all homemade. Anything from a bacon sandwich and a latte to a three course lunch. In the afternoon enjoy a fabulous coffee or a selection of homemade cakes and cream teas. All this served surrounded by paintings, ceramics, prints etc. by leading local artists. Tel: 01206 382682 www.islandartcafe.co.uk



The island continued to pull us round in trance-like pleasure, the blur of marshes relentless, gulls ululating high above, and, with no sight of The Strood I wondered whether it had swallowed us the way a toad gulps down a mosquito: but then, around the 15 kilometre mark, we climbed a ridge and – with a sigh of relief – spied cars crossing the distant Strood. The end was in sight!

The last few kilometres slipped by, after a hastily-gobbled lunch of sandwiches, juice, and squashed Jaffa Cakes. Balancing along a muddy ridge between two dykes, we crossed the main road and once again civilization dawned upon us.

Just five hours after our start, we collapsed on the mossy rocks of the anchorage, and grabbed a much-needed pint at The Coast Inn, a cosy waterfront pub once frequented by Winston Churchill. Never, it has to be said, did fish and chips taste so good.

Mersea is a very unique island offering a multitude of activities to the visitor. A variety of events including the annual regatta and food festival, the clean beaches and beach huts along with a number of holiday parks attract many for a short break to the island.

Other attractions to visit are:

1. Mersea Island Museum

This quality assured attraction allows the visitor to find out more about the traditional local activities such as fishing, oystering, wild fowling and boat building. A reconstruction within the museum of a typical weather-boarded fisherman's cottage provides an insight to the life during Victorian times. There are also exhibits of the island's social history, natural history and archaeology. Tel: 01206 385191 www.merseamuseum.org.uk

Getting to Mersea Island

Arriving by Road

If you are travelling from London or the south, take the A12 from junction 28 of the M25. Leave the A12 at junction 27 and take the A133 towards Colchester followed by the A134. Finally take the B1025 crossing the Strood Causeway onto the island.

Getting to Mersea Island by public transport

Colchester is served by a frequent rail National Express East Anglia rail service directly from London Liverpool Street. For more information please call 0845 600 7245 or visit www.nationalexpresseastanglia.com A regular bus service runs from Colchester to Mersea Island. Travel information can also be obtained by calling 0871 200 2233 or visiting www.traveline.org.uk

Essex

Accommodation

- 1 The Victory at Mersea**
★★★★ Inn
Mersea Island CO5 8LS
Tel: 01206 382907
www.victoryatmersea.com

2 Waldegraves Holiday Park
★★★★ Holiday Park
Mersea Island CO5 8SE
Tel: 01206 382898
www.waldegraves.co.uk

3 Vine Cottage
★★★★ Self-catering
Mersea Island CO5 8SX
Tel: 01206 385900
www.merseawine.com
- 4 Bromans Farm**
★★★★ B&B
Mersea Island CO5 8UE
Tel: 01206 383235
www.bromansfarm.co.uk

5 Rose Barn Cottage
★★★★ Self-catering
Peldon, nr Mersea Island CO5 7QJ
Tel: 01206 735317

Tourist information

Colchester Visitor Information Centre
Tel: 01206 282920
Email: vic@colchester.gov.uk
www.visitcolchester.com

Tides
For tidal information at Mersea Island, visit www.mersea-island.com/tide-tables.cfm

“Seeding”, nurturing and harvesting of the local oyster beds still remain as main industries of the island along with farming. The oysters from Mersea waters travel well and are appreciated worldwide. So whilst you are there you have to try out this local delicacy in one of the restaurants.

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