The Magnificent Seven... Norfolk Gardens

1. The Herb Garden, Congham Hall

Congham Hall’s renowned Herb Garden draws visitors from far and wide. First planted in 1982, it now features some 400 varieties of herbs – from basil to buckler leaf sorrel – including rare plants, such as goat’s rue, which was once used to treat the plague. This lovely collection is a working garden, too. Herbs are picked twice a day for use in the 2 AA Rosette restaurant, to flavour and garnish dishes and infuse oils and vinegars. Rosemary from the plot is one of the ingredients in the soothing signature treatment Rosemary Muscle Melt Massage in the hotel’s Secret Garden Spa. Plus, you can buy herbs to take home.

Congham Hall’s herb garden will be open to guests until 30th September 2018 and to the public from 1st April to 30th September 2018.

2. Gooderstone Water Gardens

In 1970, local farmer Billy Knights created the Gooderstone Water Gardens out of a wet meadow that was too damp for his cattle to graze. Until his death in 1994, Mr Knights refused to be a slave to fashion and added to the gardens according to his own tastes. Today, the naturalistic planting of native and cultivated varieties enhances the unspoiled surroundings. Plants of note include Astilbe, bamboos, daylilies, Eupatorium, Ligularia, loosestrife and mace sedges. Look out for kingfishers on the eight-acre nature trail and follow a sequence of 13 bridges to explore four ponds and a flowing stream.

Gooderstone Water Gardens are open year-round (please note credit cards are not accepted).
Gooderstone Water Gardens, The Street, Gooderstone, Norfolk PE33 9BP
www.gooderstonewatergardens.co.uk

3. West Acre Gardens

Old romantics will love this walled garden in the grounds of a Norfolk manor. It’s an inspiring place to gather ideas for home, blooming with popular and more unusual shrubs, trees and grasses. Check out the Mediterranean and Shade gardens and tell the time with the garden’s sun clock using your own shadow. There’s no tea shop here, but you’re welcome to bring a picnic, with seats positioned around the gardens to provide tranquil and relaxing flower-filled views. Stock up at the nursery to buy herbs to take home.

West Acre Gardens are open 1st February until 30th November.
West Acre Gardens, Tumbleyhill Road, West Acre, Norfolk PE32 1UJ
www.westaacregardens.co.uk

4. Pensthorpe Natural Park

The former home of BBC TV’s Springwatch, Pensthorpe Natural Park, near Fakenham, offers three of the county’s most spectacular gardens to view. In the Wave Garden, Chelsea Gold Medal-winning Julie Toll has created a lakeside retreat under a canopy of native oak and birch. In the Millennium Garden, plantsman Piet Oudolf reveals the colourful yet naturalistic design for which he is revered. Meanwhile, the Wildlife Habitat Garden, plantsman Piet Oudolf reveals the colourful yet naturalistic design for which he is revered. Meanwhile, the Wildlife Habitat Garden, forming a bridge between the formal gardens and the park, is where dragonflies, frogs and bats frolic. Join the Wensum Discovery Tour, an hour-long exploration by LandRover of the remote areas of this reserve.

Pensthorpe Natural Park is open year-round.
Pensthorpe Natural Park, Fakenham Road, Fakenham, Norfolk NR21 0LN
www.pensthorpe.com

5. Houghton Hall

Houghton Hall, built for Britain’s first prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole, is one of the country’s finest Palladian mansions. Yet, many of today’s visitors also come here to see the contemporary art gallery that has been created in the grounds by the current incumbent, the 7th Marquess of Cholmondeley. Lord Cholmondeley has spent 15 years commissioning sculptures from artists of world renown, such as Rachel Whiteread and Anya Gallaccio. His first commission, in 2000, was ‘Skyspace’ by the American artist James Turrell.

Houghton Hall is open Wednesdays, Thursdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays, 25th March to 30th September. Houghton Hall, Houghton, Norfolk PE31 6JE
www.houghtonhall.com

6. Norfolk Lavender

Close to the Wash, this 100-acre plot was but a dream back in 1932, when local florist Linn Chilvers ignored the sceptics and planted his first 13,000 plants. Now this is the home of the national collection of lavenders, run in association with conservation charity Plant Heritage. The deep purple fields of the heady-scented herb are a striking sight, especially when they’re in full bloom in summer. You can buy many rare and unusual varieties here, such as Lavender Hidcote, plus fragrant potions created from the oil at the on-site distillery.

Norfolk Lavender is open year-round, but the flowering season is June to August.
Norfolk Lavender, Caley Mill, Heacham, Norfolk PE31 7JE
www.norfolk-lavender.co.uk

7. Sandringham Gardens

Discover one of the finest royal gardens in the realm at the Queen’s Sandringham Estate. Since Edward VII bought this Georgian mansion in 1862, its gardens have been added to extensively, a study in changing tastes of horticultural design during the past 150 years. There are pleasched lime avenues, carrstone rockeries, romantic lakes and formal gardens to admire. For horticultural buffs, the Woodland Walk and Bog Gardens are examples of the work of Sir Eric Savill, famous for his creations at Windsor Castle in the 1960s. For an expert view, take one of the hour-long guided walks, which have changing themes to suit the seasons.

Sandringham Estate is open 31st March to 21st October 2018 (closed 23rd to 27th July).
The Sandringham Estate, Sandringham, Norfolk PE35 6EN
www.sandrighamestate.co.uk
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