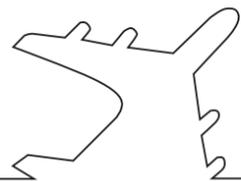


ESCAPE



TRAVEL // CULTURE // ADVENTURE



TAKE A HIKE!

Hills? We're all over them...

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YOU ESSEXY THING

AS TOWIE CELEBRATES ITS 10TH ANNIVERSARY, **LAURA MILLAR** LOOKS BEYOND THE FAKE TAN AND FLASHY BLING TO FIND A DIFFERENT SIDE OF BRITAIN'S MOST NOTORIOUS COUNTY



Coast with the most: Scenic Mersea harbour is one highlight

YES, I'm a proud Essex girl!' laughs Jane Mohan, who's greeting me at her property in Coggeshall wearing an elegant green top, tailored trousers, and - what's this? - a string of pearls. Essex girl surely she is not - where are the bodycon dress, the stilettos, the false eyelashes? But despite being, as she tells me, 'Essex born and bred', Jane is resolutely unlike some of the people you might associate with the E-word. For, on October 10, 2010, on ITV2, a whole new world was unveiled to an astounded nation. Sure, we've always had Essex girl jokes and Essex man stereotypes, but *The Only Way Is Essex* presented us with a running cast of affluent, clued-up entrepreneurs. Clad in designer duds, running their own beauty salon, nightclub or clothing boutique, they had money to burn, relationships to wreck, sizzling gossip to spill and unmentionables to vajazzle. *Towie* gave popular culture such inimitable characters as



Well-heeled: The cast of *The Only Way Is Essex* in 2011

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HOT LIST NEWS THIS WEEK

Protect your Bubble

Adventure travel company G Adventures has introduced a collection of trips for people who want only to holiday with people they know. The Book Your Bubble collection of 80 tours means you can travel with friends or family, and has additional benefits: if you book for eight people, the eighth place has a 50 per cent discount; if you book for 12, the 12th place is free. Tours include Sailing Croatia: Split To Dubrovnik (from £764pp for eight days) and Walking The Camino Santiago (from £679pp). gadventures.com



Designer masks

Funky new Clerkenwell hotel Yotel London has collaborated with hot designer Henry Holland to create a collection of fun, functional and fashionable face masks. 'With face masks a bigger part of everyday life, people shouldn't have to choose between safety and fashion so it's great to offer the solution,' says Holland, known for the witty slogan T-shirts that pay homage to fellow designers. Henry Holland x Yotel face masks are available in two colours and will be available while stocks last. Rooms at Yotel London from around £61pn. yotel.com/London



Wonderful Walkies!

Outdoors specialists Millets have teamed up with navigation experts Ordnance Survey to create a free-to-access directory of over 50 dog-friendly walks spanning the length of Britain. Every region features at least five walks perfect for you and your pup. For each you'll find information on walk length, duration and difficulty, as well as details of where you can purchase the paper map. The full directory can be found via the Millets blog at millets.co.uk/blog/50-best-dog-walks-across-the-uk. Now, where did you put that leash?



ESCAPE TRAVEL // CULTURE // ADVENTURE

'Essex could double for Tuscany'



History lesson:
The Firstsite gallery
and St Botolph's
Priory in Colchester



Tranquil: Lady Grace boats, above, West Street Vineyard, right, and beach huts at Mersea Island, below



» Continued from **Page 17**

Mark Wright, Joey Essex, the mighty Gemma Collins, and, er, Diags, who for better or worse emblazoned their crazy lifestyles – catfights, crooning sessions (mainly Arg, to be fair) and all – across our screens.

Ten years on and Essex would like to make the rest of the country aware that there's a lot more to it. Thanks to a new campaign, Visit Essex wants to transport us from the reem streets of Brentwood – where the show was largely focused – to some of the county's more overlooked environs.

Hence why I'm meeting Jane, one of several ambassadors for Visit Essex, in her pretty vineyard on West Street (weststreetvineyard.co.uk), established ten years ago. Here, in the quieter, more rural surrounds of



Delicacy: Laura ate oysters in Mersea

well with food. We've got a great climate here, with relatively little rainfall, and there are now around 38 wine producers in Essex, although we get a little forgotten in favour of areas like Sussex and Kent.'

After sampling her delicate, dry sparkling white and a plummy pinot noir, it's off for a drive. I'm not behind the wheel – rather it's another Essex ambassador, 27-year-old championship rally driver Nabila Tejpar. We weave through lovely villages, past endless green fields, through the dainty town of Tiptree (the one that produces all the jam)

and over the River Blackwater towards Maldon, where sea salt has been collected since Roman times.

'I don't think a lot of people know what Essex is really like,' muses Nabila of her home county. 'There's so much beautiful countryside and it's so coastal. I love walking along the water by Burnham-on-Crouch or strolling along Heybridge Basin.'

Essex boasts around 350 miles of coastline, to be exact – more than any other English county – and it's also home to 35 islands. I'm heading to one of them, Mersea, to sample another Roman-era delicacy: oysters.



Raising the jar: Tiptree is famed for its jams

Within minutes of meeting Tom Haward, part of an eighth-generation family of oyster producers, The Company Shed (thecompanyshed.co), I'm hopping aboard the Lady Grace (essexboattrips.co.uk) and heading to Salcot Creek to see where Mersea's world-renowned rock and native oysters mature.

I meet oysterman Owen on his dredger, sorting through a haul to keep those good enough to be taken back to Tom and packed off to places like Borough Market, to be sold to posh London restaurants like Scott's and The Wolseley. Then I get to scoff some at the West Mersea Oyster Bar (westmersea-oysterbar.co.uk). It's no Sheesh – the showy, Sir-Alan-Sugar-owned, Chigwell-based eatery – but boy, does this simple seaside shack dish up some fresh, delicious seafood.

I end my stay in Colchester, another Roman gem – in fact, it's known as Britain's first city, as it was founded by them in AD49. It's a handsome, elegant town crammed with cobbled streets, half-timbered houses, pastel-washed buildings, a baroque town hall and a Norman castle and priory.

Strolling back to my Georgian hotel, the Greyfriars, from the city's innovative modern art gallery, FirstSite (firstsite.uk), I walk past a beauty salon. Spray tans and false eyelashes are alive and well here. It seems the only way *is* Essex, after all.

*Rooms at Colchester's Greyfriars Hotel from £105pn, greyfriarscolchester.co.uk
Trains to Colchester leave from Liverpool Street Station, thetrainline.com. For more info, go to visitessex.com
The tenth anniversary series of Towie is currently airing on ITVBe*

ESSEX QUIRK



Grayson favour

In 2015, artist Grayson Perry redesigned a humble holiday home in Wrabness, near the River Stour, as a mausoleum for a fictional woman called Julie. The striking architecture of House For Essex – think green and white ceramic tiles and a gold roof – can be enjoyed by those lucky enough to win a ballot to book a stay there. living-architecture.co.uk



A hiss-tory of serpents

A story in a 1669 pamphlet, *Strange News Out Of Essex, or The Winged Serpent*, about the strange sighting of a long, scaly beast near Henham village, inspired author Sarah Perry to write 2016's award-winning *The Essex Serpent*. Now it's set to be made into a film for Apple TV+ with Keira Knightley as the novel's Victorian heroine, Cora Seaborne.



Bringing home the bacon

Essex is home to Britain's oldest recorded competition, the Flicht Trials, dating back to 1104. It sees married couples competing to prove who is the most devoted to each other. Each couple has to convince the judges they haven't regretted their marriage once in the past year and the winners get a flicht of bacon. dunmowflichttrials.co.uk

It boasts 350 miles of coastline, the most of any English county, and has 35 islands

north-eastern Essex, which in the soft, late-summer sunlight could double for anywhere from Tuscany to the Dordogne, locals come to sample her light, refreshing vintages and enjoy romantic dinners at tables set among the vines.

'My only background in wine before this was drinking it,' she laughs, immediately re-establishing her credentials, 'but I know what I like and I use Burgundian grapes, which pair