

# Go Slow England

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The Bookseller

- INTRODUCTION BY NIGEL SLATER
- First "coffee table" format book from Sawday's
- Stunning full colour photography throughout
- Includes 48 of England's most exquisite B&Bs, hotels, pubs and inns, all special, all Slow
- Features Slow days out and places to visit

The Slow Food revolution is upon us and this guide celebrates the Slow philosophy of life with a terrific selection of the places, recipes and people who take their time to enjoy life at its most enriching. In this beautiful book, that goes beyond the mere 'glossy', you will discover an unusual emphasis on the people who live in Special Slow Places and what they do. You will meet farmers, literary people, wine-makers and the craftsmen- all with rich stories to tell. Go Slow England celebrates fascinating people, fine architecture, history, landscape and real food. A counter-balance to our culture of haste

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# Go Slow England

Alastair  
*Sawday's*

Alastair Sawday

with Gail McKenzie

Special places to stay, slow travel and slow food



Foreword  
by Nigel Slater

# Lower Farm

SOMERSET



Four generations of Charles's family have cared for and worked this land. Some years ago he and Susie fell in love with, and restored, Lower Farm, and they've spun a little magic, conjuring up a gentle yet hard-working way of life in tune with everything around them. Apricots soak up the sun on old farmyard walls, Sweet Heart melons lie heavy in the hand, chickens strut in the orchard, children and pets roam free. There is something of France about Lower Farm, for Charles and Susie did the whole self-sufficiency thing there before being drawn back home with the children. There they had pigs, goats and vines, and totally immersed themselves in the life.

Reminders of their French days are here and there: massive wine barrels that contained their 1997 vintage, and a well-worn sign (fashioned out of old wallpaper using children's marker pens) now displayed in the guests' kitchen, gaily touting 'Les Produits Biologiques du Monsieur 'Anglais' Charles Dowding'.

Charles is a pioneering organic grower. He has practised the no-dig method for twenty-five years, started one of the first veg box schemes in England and has written two books, *Organic Gardening – the Natural No-Dig Way* and *Salad Leaves all Year Round*. More 'gardener' than 'farmer' these days, he also runs



courses at home on how to grow veg, so you can learn about the advantages of mulching over digging, the influences of the moon, how to choose the right seeds, and how to lessen slugs. His daily work revolves around growing award-winning salad leaves – Rouge Grenobloise, Bijou, Chartwell – creating a rich, glossy palette of greenish-purple plants on the compost-rich land, set against a backdrop of spelt wheat (using polytunnels in winter). November's leaves alone include radicchios, sugarloaf chicory, mixed endives, lettuce, lambs lettuce, chard, spinach and parsley.

As dawn breaks, Charles starts plucking his tender leaves and Susie prepares herself for breakfast. She's the artist in this partnership, applying imagination and talent to everything she does. As breakfast approaches, the table in the self-contained guest barn gathers homemade produce: pressed apple juice, thick strawberry jam, bittersweet marmalade, Susie's homemade cereal and Charles's wholesome bread. Their cooked breakfast is not resistible for a moment: eggs running gold from the Black Rock chickens that you can watch from the huge gallery window, thick, sweet, succulent bacon from Bill the local butcher. The day has only just begun.

As the sun warms the lime-



pointed walls and a slight breeze stirs the washing on the line (no tumble dryer, of course), Charles embarks on his 'patented' salad-spinning technique – involving a swinging crate and lots of muscle power. This charming man has a fine organic pedigree, and his

**“Charles's daily work revolves around growing award-winning salad leaves – Rouge Grenobloise, Bijou, Chartwell – creating a rich, glossy palette”**

pioneering veg box business grew from just six boxes in 1983 to ninety just seven years later, all travelling no further than five miles from the farm.

Charles's current main output is bags of mixed salad leaves; you'll find them at the Montague Inn down the road and in local shops and restaurants. He sees growing vegetables as a “dying art”, but is finally gaining the recognition he deserves, spreading the word as a writer and lecturer for the Royal Horticultural Society. (Even Raymond Blanc has applauded his salad leaves.) He enthuses about the new UK varieties that allow him to grow such good apricots and melons, reminding him of days in France.

Everything they learnt in France has been put to good use here. Horse manure and compost from the local recycling centre enrich the clay soil. Spent corn cobs and vegetables from the garden are fed to the chickens. It's a near-perfect cycle. Charles and Susie also keep alive the Somerset tradition of making cider and apple juice, in their case from fruit collected around the village. The day passes in a quiet, productive way: tending plants, making preserves to stack up in the original cheese room, sorting out the family and greeting and looking after guests. As the day draws to a close, Charles retires to what was once the old dairy to do something that distinguishes him from most of us: making flour by grinding wheat, ready to make another batch of bread.

When they came to this pretty, ramshackle 18th-century farm they determined to restore it with

consideration for the environment. They insulated the ceilings with recycled paper and sheep's wool and installed a wood-burning stove. Guests are gently encouraged to recycle; there are a compost bin and a recycling box behind check curtains in the kitchen; and, in the bathrooms, Great Elm Physick Garden's herbal cleanser and Susie's own bathsalts, organically made with English herbs and plants.

The Dowdings have converted the first floor of the old stone granary barn into a wonderful space for guests. Bedrooms are blessed with comfortable beds, views reach across the garden to fields, and the oak-floored, high-raftered sitting room, with wood-burner and extra beds, has a large collection of delicate artworks scattered across its limewashed walls. Susie spent a lot of time in the London art world and worked with and sat for John Ward CBE. These are mainly his works, even down to the specially commissioned image on their B&B card and her own cereal label.

Not far from Lower Farm are the gardens, follies and exotic trees of the Stourhead Estate, owned by the National Trust; you could spend a glorious morning strolling around the mansion and lake. Or, more vigorously, join the Leland Trail that runs from Alfred's Tower. Descend through forest, woodland and pastureland (dropping off for lunch and a real ale at the Bull at Hardway) before striding steeply back up to the tower, one of the finest follies in England.

You can return to the big, quiet barn and wish yourself into this life. There are chickens clucking below, swooping swallows, nodding sunflowers, golden fields of wheat and food straight from the field. It is an enviable life, but they have worked harder than we can imagine to create it.

### Susie & Charles Dowding

Lower Farm,  
Shepton Montague, Wincanton, BA9 8JG

- 2 rooms. Extra beds in sitting room.
- From £90.
- 01749 812253
- [enquiries@lowerfarm.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@lowerfarm.org.uk)
- [www.lowerfarm.org.uk](http://www.lowerfarm.org.uk)

# Slow travel

## 1 Denver Windmill

Downham Market (01366 384009)  
Lovingly restored working mill with guided tour, visitor centre, tearoom and bakery.  
[www.denvermill.co.uk](http://www.denvermill.co.uk)

## 2 Church of St Mary the Virgin

Houghton on the Hill (01760 440470)  
Personal guided tours by church warden Bob Davey MBE, who has devoted fourteen years to the rescue and revival of this remote hilltop church. It's as loved by visitors as by locals. Remarkable wall paintings go back to Saxon times.



## 3 Ecotech Environmental Centre

Swaffham (01760 726100)  
Wind turbine tours with fantastic views. Organic garden, shop and café.  
[www.ecotech.org.uk](http://www.ecotech.org.uk)

## 4 Great Massingham Walk

Easy two-hour walk along the long-distance Peddars Way. Begin at the



pretty village of Great Massingham, with its four large ponds on four greens. Tuck into fine seasonal food at the recently revived Dabbling Duck. The paths of the Peddars Way make it suitable for those of limited mobility. Much is open to cyclists, too.  
[www.walkingworld.com](http://www.walkingworld.com)

## 5 Norfolk Lavender

Heacham (01485 570384)  
Lavender farm of over 120 acres with tours and shop. In 1932 three men and a boy did the planting in eighteen days for a total cost of £15. Discover the secrets of distilling.  
[www.norfolklavender.co.uk](http://www.norfolklavender.co.uk)

## 6 Blakeney Coast

Beans Boat Trips (01263 740038)  
Pick up a boat from Blakeney or Morston Quay to Blakeney Point to see seals basking on the sands; if you're lucky they'll swim right by you. An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a haven for migratory birds and wildlife.  
[www.beansboattrips.co.uk](http://www.beansboattrips.co.uk)

## 7 Mundesley

Follow the cliff top path for breezes and views of the vibrant beach huts below. When the tide's out there's a sandy beach for safe swimming, tidal pools for toddlers and a beachside

café. Don't miss the beautifully restored Stow Windmill close by.

## 8 Fairhaven Woodland and Water Garden

South Walsham (01603 270449)  
Over three miles of walks, a 950-year-old King Oak and fifteen rustic bridges in organically managed woodland within fifty-three hectares. Come for candelabra primulas in May, brilliant colours in autumn, winter views of the Broads. Dogs love it.  
[www.fairhavengarden.co.uk](http://www.fairhavengarden.co.uk)

## 9 Shawsgate Vineyard

Framlingham (01728 724060)  
Vineyard tours, 'Experience Days', abundant wildlife. Free DIY tours and wine-tasting, too – information sheet and map provided so you don't get lost. Twelve varieties of wine are produced here.  
[www.shawsgate.co.uk](http://www.shawsgate.co.uk)



## 10 The Angles Way

Follow the river through lovely Somerleyton, stopping at the Duke's Head for lunch, then on to the estate (see page 174) and the Angles Way. Windmills, river, open skies, two memorials, one isolated church and the village of Lound.  
[www.walkingworld.com](http://www.walkingworld.com)

# Slow food

## 1 Icen Brewery

Ickburgh (01842 878922)  
Call to arrange a brewery tour; sniff the malt, rub the hops, taste the beers.  
[www.icenibrewery.co.uk](http://www.icenibrewery.co.uk)

## 2 Abbey Farm Organics

Flitcham (01485 609094)  
Growing over fifty different organic crops, selling locally and through a box scheme. Public bird hide open every day; who would guess six percent of the world's pink-footed geese visit Abbey Farm?  
[www.abbeyfarm.co.uk](http://www.abbeyfarm.co.uk)

## 3 Cookies Crab Shop

Salthouse (01263 740352)  
More than just a shellfish shop: as well as seafood straight from the boats there are soups, salads and sandwiches – to take away or eat in.  
[www.cookies.shopkeepers.co.uk](http://www.cookies.shopkeepers.co.uk)

## 4 Samphire

Aylsham (01263 734464)  
A treasure in the grounds of Blickling Hall (National Trust-owned), run with passion by Nell Montgomery. Breads, brownies, smoked mackerel, vegetables in season, perfect pies laced with onion marmalade.  
[www.samphireshop.co.uk](http://www.samphireshop.co.uk)

## 5 Norfolk Cider Company

Hoveton (01603 783040)  
Cider is made here from culinary and dessert, not cider, apples – quite different from the cider of the West Country. More like an apple wine and a little stronger at 7.5 percent. Pop in for a free tasting.  
[www.norfolkcider.co.uk](http://www.norfolkcider.co.uk)

## 6 Golden Triangle Farmers' Market

Earlham House Shopping Centre, Norwich (01603 250000)  
Second Sunday of the month.  
[www.thegreengrocers.co.uk](http://www.thegreengrocers.co.uk)

## 7 Beccles Farmers' Market

Beccles Heliport (01502 476240)  
First and third Saturday of the month.

## 8 Emmett's Stores

Peasenhall (01728 747717)  
Old-fashioned grocer's shop and smoke house. Pick up some Black Suffolk ham – dark, sticky, delicious.  
[www.emmettsham.co.uk](http://www.emmettsham.co.uk)

## 9 Eat Anglia

Earl Soham (01728 685557)  
Deli and café with local and organic food, wines, beers and gift shop. Earl Soham brewery handily next door.  
[www.eatanglia.co.uk](http://www.eatanglia.co.uk)

## 10 Aldeburgh Beach

Twice a day the boards announce the catch – crab, lobster, haddock, sole, skate.

## 11 Butley Orford Oysterage

Orford (01394 450277)  
Orford oysters – and salmon, prawns and sprats from their own smoke house. In the no-frills restaurant, smoked cod's roe comes with thin slices of hot white toast.  
[www.butleyorfordoysterage.co.uk](http://www.butleyorfordoysterage.co.uk)

## 12 High House Fruit Farm

Sudbourne (01394 450450)  
Buy or pick your own.  
[www.high-house.co.uk](http://www.high-house.co.uk)

## 13 Goslings Farm

Trimley St Martin (01394 273361)  
The biggest Pick Your Own in the country. The undercover strawberries are table-top grown (no bending!). Bees are imported as pollinators, dummy owls discourage birds.  
[www.goslingsfarm.co.uk](http://www.goslingsfarm.co.uk)

## 14 Jimmy's Farm

Wherstead (0870 950 0210)  
Ramshackle rare-breed pig farm and shop with woodland trail, winter weekend sausage barbecues, pig-keeping courses and farmers' market the first Saturday of the month.  
[www.essexpigcompany.com](http://www.essexpigcompany.com)

## 15 Hollow Trees Farm Shop

Semer (01449 741247)  
From beets to basil they grow it all, in fields divided by high hedges to encourage wildlife. New farm trails, coffee shop, wooden hill fort and animals to feed.  
[www.hollowtrees.co.uk](http://www.hollowtrees.co.uk)

## 16 Sudbury Farmers' Market

St Peter's, Market Hill (01787 372331)  
Last Friday of the month.

## 17 Oundle Farmers' Market

(01832 272055)  
Market Place, second Saturday of the month.

## 18 New Lodge Farm

Bulwick (01780 450493)  
Café and shop run by a family that has been here since 1870. Local cakes, and their own superb Aberdeen Angus beef. Open Saturday only.