

How does Cranmer Country Cottages minimise its impact on the environment and contribute to a sense of place?

Having been awarded Gold by the GTBS, Cranmer's efforts to minimise its impact on the environment are impressive. Each of the 3 new 'zero carbon' eco-cottages that were opened in 2009 rely solely on energy drawn from the site's renewable sources, namely a ground-source heat pump, 20kw wind turbine and solar panels. These south-facing solar panels heat the indoor salt-water swimming pool during the summer and supplement heating throughout the year. The cottages themselves are all extremely well insulated, boasting energy-efficient under floor heating, as well as energy-efficient lighting and appliances, green cleaning products and low flush toilets. You'll even find a locally sourced welcome hamper when you arrive. In terms of the natural environment, the apple orchard at Home Farm is home to many local varieties (we suggest trying a few), plus the owners sponsor the local nature reserve, and have planted some 12,000 trees around their farmland and gardens over the last decade. Cranmer has also invested in an innovative borehole and a UV treatment system, supplying all of the site's water needs, while extra water is collected through the harvesting of rainwater. All wastewater is recycled through a natural drainage system. The indoor swimming pool is also treated with a salt chlorination system, greatly reducing the amount of chlorine in the water. There's comprehensive recycling and composting facilities on-site, plus the site recycles building materials including brick, slate and timber. While the site itself is not close to train stations or bus routes, there's plenty of information once you arrive on using public transport, as well as where to hire bikes.

Review:

The Rooms

Eight self-catering cottages - five converted barns and three large new 'holiday homes' - line around a smart renovated paved courtyard. All have contemporary comfy furnishings (including leather sofas) and the living areas - especially in the large cottages - have plenty of light and space, with original beamed ceilings and innovative sensitive lighting (the owner designs specialist lighting for art galleries and museums). The large holiday homes have large dining areas and glazed doors where you can access the garden terrace and look out over the countryside. In the barns, there's ipod docking stations and free WIFI access, and plenty of cots and extra zed beds are available.

The Food

The cottages are all self-catering, with modern facilities, such as microwaves, gas cookers (the larger cottages have rayburns cookers

and one has an American-style fridge freezer). You can pre-order dinner, breakfast or a hamper delivered from a local supplier on Fridays (or on Mondays for a midweek break) - minimum £20 - to order and for a list of items, see this page on the owners' website: local produce.

The Activities

There's a games room with table tennis table and table football, a wonderful indoor swimming pool (below), two all-weather tennis courts and 175 acres of ground, including a fenced play area visible from most of the cottages with a timber playhouse with plenty of space for kicking a ball about and flying kites. The farm is close to Holkham Hall and the beautiful North Norfolk coast, including Holkham Beach (a perennial favourite with the Royal Family, and apparently Gwyneth Paltrow strolled across Holkham sands in the closing scene of the film *Shakespeare in Love*).

Green Accommodation

The new holiday homes at Home Farm are billed as 'zero carbon'. A dubious phrase, but if any place comes close to this then Cranmer does. The owners have gone to great effort to maximise alternative energy sources - there's under floor heating throughout the cottages, and hot water and space heating are supplemented by solar, wind power (there's a huge wind turbine on the farm's grounds), and a ground heat source pump. The buildings are highly insulated, rain water is harvested and all on-site water comes from the owner's own borehole. The swimming pool (right) is heated by solar collectors and is cleaned using salt-water chlorination. The entire operation has been awarded Gold by the Green Tourism Business Scheme. Carbon Neutrality is a much over-used (and abused) term, but Cranmer's three new cottages are an excellent example of how a luxurious accommodation can attempt to be carbon neutral. To have achieved this and offer a five-star service is exceptional. I can't think of another five-star self-catering accommodation in the UK that is as green as Cranmer. Come here to see how it's done!

Top Tip

Walk (or cycle) along the old Roman road all the way to Hockham Hall. Ask the owner for a map and directions - it's well worth the effort. Bike hire can be arranged directly via Norfolk Cycle Hire, tel 01328 853861 – bikes can be delivered to Cranmer Country Cottages for weekly hire only.

Getting there

Norfolk isn't the easiest county to travel around by public transport. The nearest train station to Cranmer Cottages is Kings Lynn from where you can either take the X8 bus to Fakenham (approx 45 mins) then a 10 minute taxi. Alternatively, take a taxi from outside Kings Lynn station all the way to Cranmer Cottages - it's just over 20 miles

and is about a three-quarters of an hour drive (it will cost about £35). The owners can order a taxi for you.

Verdict

It is a schlep to get to the heart of Norfolk by public transport, but Cranmer Country Cottages is well worth the effort - particularly for families/groups who want modern facilities, and anyone that likes somewhere that has a decent swimming pool. Plus it's in a great location so near to the wonderful Norfolk coast. Best for families/groups.

Green Traveller, Richard Hammond, 2010

<https://www.greentraveller.com/>

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