

## The Times hotel guide

### Angel Inn Stoke-by- Nayland, Suffolk

**Food** ★★★★★  
**Location** ★★★★★★  
**Rooms** ★★★★★

#### What's the story?

Dedham Vale is an area of outstanding natural beauty teeming with single-track roads and askew Tudor buildings. Among them is fine-dining spot the Angel Inn in Stoke-by-Nayland. Independently owned, the former 16th-century travellers' pitstop and pub has undergone a two-year refurbishment. As well as renovating the existing restaurant and six rooms, Suffolk Country Inns bought and restored a stable next door, adding five bedrooms.

#### What do we like?

The head chef Ruben Aguilar Bel's sumptuous creations are the draw —



Hay Wain superior bedroom

when a tasting menu's curtain-raiser is sourdough this crusty and springy, you know you're in safe hands. The following nine courses are a whirl of Spanish-Anglo flair: Dedham Vale venison tartare with gooseberries; a thwacking, gamey hare risotto; and charcoal-grilled Iberico pork "secreto" (so called because Spanish butchers keep the cut for themselves). At the end comes a magnificent surprise: petits fours, featuring a black olive chocolate ganache — the most brilliantly confusing umami-but-sweet confection I've eaten.

The cosy bar, just behind the open fire, is perfect for a before-dinner old fashioned (£11) as you choose your wines.

While a wine-pairing flight is available (£55pp), the lure of sommelier Valerio Vallani's selections meant we plumped for a bottle of 2020 Fitou. Service from the general manager Sean and Georgia, at the front of house, is relaxed yet impeccable.

It was a short if wine-hindered wobble across a courtyard to Spire, our room in the annexe. Beams and wonky windows create charm, but there is also a free-standing bath behind a glass privacy panel that frosts at the touch of a button, USB sockets and underfloor air source heating in the bathroom.

A generous table-service full English breakfast is served in the Well Room,

Laura Jackson was a guest of the Angel Inn, which has B&B doubles from £325; tasting menu £85pp ([angelinnsuffolk.co.uk](http://angelinnsuffolk.co.uk))



The Angel Inn

named after its unexpected feature: a 100ft-deep well.

#### What's nearby?

This is Constable Country — the 18th-century landscape artist was born down the road in East Bergholt — and nine courses means a walk is a must. A circular route from the Angel takes in Stoke-by-Nayland's church, while marked paths lead to the ruins of Tendring Hall. Over the border in Essex is Dedham Village, with its snug pub the Sun. From there it's a 40-minute meander to Flatford, where Constable painted *The Hay Wain* in 1821. Laura Jackson