

Southern England's little-known alternative to the Hamptons

This Swallows and Amazons world we had happened upon is Chichester Harbour AONB, a conservancy straddling West Sussex and Hampshire. The name is misleading – Chichester itself is just outside the area, and there's no harbour except in the natural sense. It is a sheltered estuary with a series of tidal inlets where rivers and streams meet the sea, and with great, flat expanses of wetlands, labyrinthine waterways and islands.

Where to stay

Bosham and its immediate surroundings are home to some extraordinary waterfront houses, many set in acres of unspoilt land that stretches right down to the water's edge. Terrarium is the dream holiday home of the future: a glass-fronted eco-house that has been featured on Grand Designs. It's got five bedrooms, airy interiors, a natural swimming pool and landscaped gardens (sleeps six adults and four children; family bookings only; from £6,995/week with uniquehomestays.com/self-catering/uk/west-sussex/chichester/terrarium).

