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The Cotswolds of the North

[Evening Standard \(London\)](#), [Mar 26, 2003](#) by [NICK RYAN](#)

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IMAGINE the crisp spring morning, blanketing the patchwork of emerald and rust-coloured fields. The dew hangs heavy, masking the scent of the heather floating down from the moors.

Looking out of the farmhouse window, you watch the river flow silently past, then hear the stamp of hooves on granite, as stablehands take out the thoroughbreds for their morning gallop.

The city is only 30 minutes away, but here, you are already in another world. Affectionately known as "the Cotswolds of the North" – without the annoying glitz, as locals will say – Malton and Norton ([www.maltonnorton.com](#)) is a beautiful market town that sits at the centre of Ryedale, the vast expanse of countryside set in North Yorkshire.

To the west is the ancient Viking centre of York, home to one of the finest Gothic cathedrals in Europe.

Past that is Leeds and the lure of its unrivalled shopping (including a Harvey Nicks). South are the Yorkshire Wolds, tiny villages nestling amidst chalk hills.

The coast is just 20 minutes away: 40 miles of spectacular coves and inlets, and some of the best fossilhunting grounds in the country.

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From the sculpted steps of Whitby, the picturesque fishing town where Captain Cook set sail for Australia and Bram Stoker found inspiration for his novel Dracula, lurks the North Sea.

It is easy to imagine the land wild and untamed, as the Roman legionaries stationed here nearly 2,000 years ago must have seen it.

But now the only wild sounds come from the weekly livestock market, the hunting birds flitting across the heather, and the tramp of walkers heading into the moors.

Malton and Norton, with a population of 12,000, has been the historic centre of Ryedale since Roman times. In the centre of what used to be Old Malton (Malton and Norton are two villages now joined as one, although some say local rivalries still exist...), ancient stone houses surround one of the most beautiful Gilbertine Priors still in use in England, St Mary's (see [www.maltonnorton.com](#), under History & Heritage).

The town was bypassed in the Eighties and the loss of through traffic had an instant and beneficial effect. Many young families moved into the area.

Malton and Norton is now popular with commuters working in both Leeds

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and York.

Alongside farming, brewing remains a traditional industry. At one time nine breweries flourished below the main street, although now only one, the Malton Brewery Company survives. It used to be said that you could see two pubs from any point in the town. It is rumoured that an underground passage still links the crypt of The Cross Keys pub in Wheelgate with the Gilbertine Priory (see www.maltonnorton.com, under Shopping & Businesses).

The neighbouring centre of Norton is famous as a centre for training racehorses, which like the area also has a nickname, as "the Newmarket of the North".

Thoroughbreds are often seen on their way to and from the gallops on Langton Wold and the stables are soon to be open to the public, by appointment.

Around 2,000 years ago, the Romans built a fort where Malton now stands and many of the artifacts found at the site can be seen in Malton Museum, situated in the town square. There is a town trail, too (see www.maltonnorton.com, under Things to Do) taking you through Roman and Saxon remains, as well as the castle and Jacobean manor that once stood where the Old Lodge Hotel now sits.

Once out of town, you will head into a rich, agricultural landscape.

The town has the only train station in Ryedale, and so is perfect as a base for exploring the area.

Castle Howard is one of Britain's finest stately homes, located in the beautiful Howardian Hills, 15 miles north east of the famous city of York.

Built in 1699, it is still the private home of the Howard family. The magnificent house was built by the architect Sir John Vanbrugh, and is distinguished by its famous dome.

Not far away is the village and old railway line at Goathland, home of TV series *Hearbeat's Aidensfield*.

For more family fun, you could head to Flamingo Land, packed with rides, shows, attractions and the North's largest privately owned zoo.

A visit to the unique museum at Eden Camp will transport you back in time to wartime Britain. You will experience the sights, sounds, even the smells of those years. The museum is set in the grounds of an original prisoner-of-war camp.

Several cottage industries have recently sprung up in Ryedale, including lavender farms which welcome visitors, as well as the increasingly popular trend for farmers' markets.

Accommodation in Malton and Norton consists of a mix of B&Bs, hotels and converted farmhouses, as the farmers diversify following the foot-and-mouth crisis. These businesses are encouraged to offer the local produce, so do try the Wensleydale and goats cheeses, the fresh meats, cereals and other foodstuffs.

You'll find all these attractions, and more, listed at www.maltonnorton.com

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