



LEFT: Norfolk Coast fish soup.

The future's orange

Reviewed: The Orange Tree, High Street, Thornham, 01485 512213

January – diet time? Surely not, says our *food detective*. Combine lunch with a bracing walk and your conscience will be fine!

It's January and you need to get out there and get some fresh air and exercise. And a decent lunch, of course! Where else to head but our great coastline, and those wild salt marshes of north Norfolk.

It's an area well served by gastro pubs – just think of the White Horse at Brancaster Staithe, the Hoste at Burnham Market, and how about the Orange Tree at Thornham?

It's cool and contemporary, with wooden floor boards, gentle green walls, leather high-backed chairs and a genuinely relaxing, laid-back atmosphere. There's a cosy bar complete with TV area and open fire, then lots of other little rooms where you can dine in considerable comfort.

Philip Milner is head chef and has notched up a couple of decent awards and it's one of those definitely "on the up" places!

Plenty of smiling staff buzz around but don't go overboard, the wine list is good and then there's the food. As you'd expect, much use is made of local seafood and the meat comes from the Sandringham Estate, so you can't say better than that!

One of my ladies-wot-lunch friends and my daughter joined me for this trip on a very blustery day.

The pub's website is very good so I'd

had a little look and had already half made up my mind. There's a bar classics menu with old favourites like fish and chips, sausage and mash, curry, risotto and burgers.

The restaurant menu is fancier, and thus more expensive. It features plenty of fish, wood pigeon, duck breast, rack of lamb and an extremely decent sounding beef fillet at £26. Look out for Philip's signature chicken and wild mushroom pie, too.

I started with a decent bowl of mussels – well, you would, wouldn't you, given the location. Cooked with a cider, tarragon and bacon sauce for a change, they were thoroughly delicious.

My chum went for a fishy soup with plenty of chunky bits and bobs, including cockles and mussels. She loved it so much I wasn't even offered a quick spoonful!

Next saw me tackling cottage pie with a cheesy top, and served with three or four seasonal veggies.

My friend had posh ham, eggs and chips, which again hit the spot. The ham was thinly sliced and the chips were good and fat!

Purely in the interests of research, I managed a pudding; a very pleasant rhubarb crumble, only here the crumble is made from muesli so it's ultra crunchy. It also came with a toffee custard and a

hefty slice of millionaire's shortbread which gave a good choccie hit. We finished with a frothy latte each.

The mini food critic – brought along because the Orange Tree prides itself on being child friendly and it jolly well is too – was well served by one of the best children's menus I've yet come across.

She started with garlic dough balls and progressed to that old favourite of sausage, mash and all those aforementioned veggies. Great stuff. A dollop of home-made mint chocolate chip ice cream was probably a bit too sophisticated for her – so we helped her out! 🍦

What we ate

Brancaster mussels with smoked bacon, Aspall cider and tarragon cream, £6.50
Norfolk Coast fish soup, with Brancaster cockles and mussels, rouille, black mustard seed and Gruyere cheese straws and white truffle oil, £6.50
Cottage pie with a cheesy leek mash topping and Norfolk seasonal vegetables, £8

Ham and eggs, £8.50

Norfolk rhubarb, damson and muesli crumble, with millionaire's shortbread and toffee custard – £6

Children's menu

Starters, £2.50

Main courses (which include a choice of two side orders), £5.50

Scoop of mint chocolate chip ice cream, £2

Drinks

Latte, £2.50

Small glass of Pinot Grigio rose, £4.50

Small bottle of sparkling mineral water, £1.70

Glass of lemonade, £1.70

Verdict

Food and drink – 9/10

Service – 8/10

Value for money – 8/10

BELOW: The light and airy dining room has a contemporary feel to it.

