

Brooks Country House Hotel **HEREFORD**

It's not every day you get to stay in a vintage horsebox. And some might ask: why would you want to?

Ask my son and daughter, who spent most of the morning fighting over who got the top bunk bed. New to the 22-room Georgian Brooks House, these horseboxes are a pretty special addition,

an element of fun that children just seem to love. We'd stayed in the main house for a night which had already hit the spot — four-poster bed, two sofa bed singles, roll-top bath and open fire. Moving to one of three on-site horseboxes — two sleeping two and one sleeping four — created another mini adventure for

them. Inside, the boxes are thoughtfully furnished, with extra touches such as multicoloured lights in the shower room and ropes between the bunk beds. There's even a little deck that is a real suntrap in good weather. We visited just outside summer season and the weather was sunny and crisp although slightly too cold for the on-site outdoor pool.

WHY: For a fun night away in novel accommodation.

SUITS: Any family that doesn't mind close quarters for a while.

DID IT WORK: Yes, and the location's a great jumping-off-point for exploring the Wye Valley, Hay-on-Wye, Symonds Yat for cycling or canoeing, and both Goodrich Castle and the Gruffalo Trail at Beechenhurst in the Forest of Dean.

THE DETAILS: From £119 per night based on a family of four sharing a Courtyard King/Twin Room on a B&B basis, or from £130 per night sharing a large horsebox on a B&B basis. brookscountryhouse.com

MARIA PIERI



Lower Mill Estate **COTSWOLDS**

Set in the tranquil surroundings of the Cotswold Water Park — more than 150 lakes set across some 40 sq miles just south of Cirencester — Lower Mill Estate offers a variety of eco-friendly, lakeside accommodation. Most of the modern, waterfront houses are glass-fronted, with huge amounts of natural light flooding into the properties. Balconies front and back enable you to fully appreciate the setting of some 550 acres of countryside estate.

Our property for the week, The Swallows, was set over three floors with four bedrooms, three bathrooms and a more-than-spacious kitchen/dining/lounge area — perfect for two families. The minimal, stylish decor — combined with a games room offering the kids an Xbox 360, DVD, books, games and Lego — meant it was a struggle to leave the house some mornings.

But with plenty of lazy walks around the lakes, gentle cycling along the trails and an array of other activities, such as birdwatching and watersports (canoeing, kayaking, sailing, windsurfing, wakeboarding and waterskiing), there's no shortage of things to do. The Miss Mouse Adventure Trail, meanwhile, is great for smaller

children — a fun, learning experience incorporating lakeside walks, puzzles to solve, clues to follow and padlocked chests revealing rewards.

The on-site restaurant, Ballihoo, offers breakfast, lunch and dinner as well as takeaway, and the indoor/outdoor pool, spa and gym mean you're more than well catered for in most respects. And with Stow-on-the-Wold, Bourton-on-the-Water, and the Slaughters all within a 40-minute drive, there's easy access to the heart of the Cotswolds.

WHY: Tranquil, peaceful wilderness with luxurious surroundings.

SUITS: Families keen on watersports, walks and exploring the Cotswolds.

DID IT WORK: Combined with great weather, it was a perfect week away.

THE DETAILS: The Swallows is available from £1,200 for a one-week stay.

habitatescapes.com **PAT RIDDELL**

