

Willows and Beeches, Powys

No expense has been spared in converting these cosy medieval barns into top-class holiday accommodation that you just won't want to leave

Many of the rooms in these two beautifully converted medieval barns in the grounds of Bettws Hall could easily grace the pages of *Country Living* magazine. Richly coloured velvety sofas, antique oak dressers, handmade Indian rugs, oil paintings and a wood-burning stove or open fire create a lovely homely feel in the generously proportioned reception rooms.

A wealth of handcrafted Welsh oak sourced from the owners' 500-acre estate is used to great effect on floors, low-beamed ceilings and grand staircases in these solidly built barns. The local blacksmith also made the wrought-iron bedsteads for some of the uncluttered ensuite bedrooms, while others feature oak four-posters.

Most of the double beds are king size or super king-sized; even the single beds in the two twin rooms aren't really singles – they're three-quarter size. As you'd expect, all of the bedrooms have ensuite bathrooms or shower rooms, a few with cast iron roll-top baths and huge shower roses.

The only downside to Willows and Beeches, which sleep 16 people each, is that the country-style kitchens aren't so well proportioned, making cooking for large groups a bit of a challenge. Of the two, Beeches' kitchen is slightly larger with a breakfast table seating up to eight. Both come with all the mod cons such as a five- or six-hob double oven, fridge/freezers, dishwashers and microwaves.

But you don't need to do any serious cooking if you stay here. The in-house chef, used to catering for shooting parties, can tailor a delicious four-course menu for a special occasion. And, if you take both properties, the 60ft living/dining room in Willows is large enough to allow 32 people to eat together.

If you want a more informal meal, step out of the door and you're right next to the village pub, which serves bar meals as well as traditional ales.

Before dinner, rest your weary bones in the Jacuzzi and sauna shared by both lodges; the perfect way to relax after a hard day's sightseeing, walking or game shooting. On warm summer evenings have a barbecue or picnic by the ornamental lake, or on the banks of the River Bechan in the three-acre grounds.

Between October and January Bettws Hall can arrange game shoots on four local estates while in summer the focus switches to fishing on the River Dovey and its tributary, the River Cleifion.

You get a magnificent backdrop for outdoor activities: Bettws Hall is in the heart of picture-postcard Wales with rolling hills in which to go horse riding or walking. The picturesque Snowdonia National Park and the coast are also within one hour's drive.

There's lots of culture nearby too. Visit the market town of Montgomery with its canal, cobbled streets and Georgian houses below the ruins of a 13th-century castle. The National Trust's Powis Castle and gardens, the Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway and Glansevern Hall gardens are all within 15 minutes' drive.

Built primarily as shooting lodges, Willows and Beeches can only be rented on a self-catering basis – and then only for week-long stays – between February and September. During the shooting season they are only let for half-board short breaks.

With a week's rental starting at about £100 per person and rising to less than £150, they really do offer great value for money for accommodation of this calibre.



WILLOWS AND BEECHES *at a glance*

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Sleeps: 16 in each or 32 if both lodges taken (each with six doubles and two twins, all ensuite). Two ground-floor bedrooms in Willows, three in Beeches.

Dining: enough space in Willows for 32 to eat together, or 16 in each. Self catering outside the shooting season, when rental is on a half-board basis. The in-house chef can prepare four-course menus from £28.50pp. A typical meal might include garlic prawn piri-piri with red onion marmalade, brochette of lamb, sticky toffee pudding with hot fudge sauce, and cheese. Wine from £18.50 a bottle.

Other facilities: Jacuzzi and sauna in separate lodge. Picnic tables and a BBQ in the grounds.

Children: cots and highchairs available. Babysitting can be arranged. Lake and river in the grounds.

Wedding licence: no but up to 150 for a reception in a marquee.

Local attractions/things to do: shooting, fishing, clay-pigeon shooting, horse riding, walking and golf. Snowdonia National Park and coast within an hour's drive; Montgomery Canal, Glansevern Hall gardens and the National Trust's Powis Castle are all within a short drive.

Transport: Newtown, just over four miles away, is the nearest train station. Trains from London Euston take about three and a half hours, the same time as by car.

Price: self-catering holidays between February 1 and October 1 start at £1,550 per lodge per week. Dinner, bed and breakfast and bar drinks during the shooting season (October to January) start at £220 plus VAT per night for a double room.

Note: maid service can be arranged. Two dogs allowed in each property. No smoking in bedrooms.