

GETAWAY

ADRIAN CAFFERY WITNESSES A ‘CRIME’ ON A BREAK IN NORTHUMBERLAND

CAT-NAPPED!

IT WAS like a scene from the classic but gory animated film Watership Down.

A large family of rabbits was happily hopping about and munching the grass around our holiday home when suddenly a cat appeared.

The rabbits scattered into the bushes but one baby bunny was too slow and was last seen flailing in the jaws of the savage kitty (as the chorus of Bright Eyes played in my head).

Luckily, the dawn raid was not witnessed by our two Bing, Miffy and Peter Rabbit-loving children, aged three and six.

For them, the abundance of bunnies meant it was like staying in Teletubby-land and they would have been quite happy to just stare out of the windows all week.

We were staying in a cosy, bright and comfortable “deluxe” lodge at Riverside Leisure Park, on the edge of Wooler in Northumberland.

It says a lot about the lodge that it could fail two of my all-important holiday home criteria (toaster too small for bagels and the toilet paper too flimsy) yet still earn a five-star rating from me.

My three other benchmarks are 1) an uncomplicated heating system; 2) showers that are not boiling one second and freezing the next; and 3) a TV in the bedroom you can watch without creaking your neck.

Tick, tick, tick!

In fact, the lodge was a million miles from what you would normally associate with mobile accommodation. For starters, it was big.... very big.

The luxurious living area had a kitchen larger than you’d find in most homes, a dining table that comfortably seated six, and two comfy sofas that three people could



Vincent the fox and a deluxe lodge at Riverside Leisure Park

NEED TO KNOW

■ **ADRIAN CAFFERY** and family were guests of Verdant Leisure at Riverside Leisure Park. Prices for a week in a deluxe caravan in January start from £199. Verdant Leisure operates six other holiday parks in County Durham, Berwickshire, Ayrshire and Dunbar. See verdantleisure.co.uk or call 03300 535524.



easily cosy up on.

There were two spacious shower rooms, two twin bedrooms and one double bedroom – both good sizes – and, the pièce de résistance for my wife, a walk-in dressing room.

Outside, decking wrapped around half the lodge, with a bench for eating al fresco (and bunny spotting).

As the name suggests, a shallow river runs through Riverside and there’s a fishing lake where we fed the ducks and swans, then fled from the rather threatening Canada geese.

There are two nice playgrounds on

site with a bar/restaurant, an amusement arcade, a swimming pool and a show room a short walk away, across a road.

During the week, our children took part in mosaic art, indoor archery and a coconut shy (actually a Haribo shy). We decided to give the “pie your folks” morning a miss!

There was also entertainment in the evenings, including children’s bingo and karaoke, plus dance and talent competitions, the winners for which were determined by the cheers from onlookers.

I’m not bitter but my daughter

only lost out in the dance final because the winner’s family was bigger and louder than ours. A proper judging panel would have said she was “fab-u-lous” in true Strictly style!

The mascot at Riverside (and its sister venues) is Vincent the fox, who must never, ever be confused with his foul-mouthed namesake, star of the hysterical BBC3 puppet show Mongrels. Vincent’s “V Stars” were led by “Baldy Brian” who had a great rapport with the children and – unusually in our experience – always remembered all of their names.



Wooler is well placed for a handful of day trips all within 30 minutes. Here’s what we got up to...

FARNE ISLANDS

WE took a 90-minute tour from the fishing village of Seahouses to these islands, which are two to three miles off the coast.

We saw hundreds of grey seals basking on the rocks and some of the 20 species of sea birds which nest here, including adorable puffins.

Around 100,000 birds make the islands their home each year (others include guillemots, razorbills, eider ducks and terns) and 1,000 seal pups are born there every autumn.

Our boat also passed Longstone Lighthouse, home in 1838 to 22-year-old Grace Darling, famed for rescuing nine people from a paddle steamer that ran aground in a storm.

There are plenty of other boat trips to choose from, including ones that land on the islands, which are popular with enthusiastic ornithologists and wildlife photographers.

If you’re lucky, as we were, you may also spot some dolphins.

HOLY ISLAND

ALSO known as Lindisfarne, it was from this picturesque tidal island that St Aidan and St Cuthbert spread the Christian message in the seventh century. Places to visit include the castle, in the care of the National Trust (currently covered in scaffolding) and the evocative ruins of the priory, ransacked by Vikings.

You can drive to Holy Island but it is cut off twice daily by fast-moving tides (search “Holy Island stuck” on Youtube for an example as to why you should always check the safe crossing times).

We joined a fascinated crowd



Tide coming in at Holy Island



Alnwick Gardens

beating a retreat at one end of the causeway as the road was slowly submerged by water.

ALNWICK

ALNWICK Castle is the second largest inhabited castle in England and has been home to the Duke of Northumberland’s family, the Percys, for more than 700 years.

Its popularity grew when it became Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in the Harry Potter films. But with kids too

young to be impressed by that, we visited the gardens next door.

Alnwick Gardens, The Duchess of Northumberland’s vision for a forgotten plot, is full of imagination, inspiration, quirkiness and play – and the No.1 highlight of our week in the North-east.

It’s a truly magical place for the whole family, from the Grand Cascade with its dancing fountains to the mysterious Bamboo Labyrinth, and the Serpent Garden’s wondrous water sculptures.

Then there’s one of the world’s

largest tree houses, where you can either grab a snack or fine dine, and the Poison Garden full of plants that can kill (yes, we took two overly inquisitive children there).

And you never know who is around the corner in this “Garden of Fairy Tales” as it’s home to Little Red Riding Hood, Princess Beauty and a suitably creepy Wicked Queen, among many others.

BAMBURGH CASTLE

ONCE home to the kings of ancient Northumbria, the castle we see



The beach below Bamburgh Castle



Grey seals at the Farne Islands

today was built at great expense by famed industrialist Lord Armstrong in late Victorian times, and is still home to his family.

We didn’t go into the castle but paid a couple of visits to the dunes and beaches below its impressive ramparts.

COLDSTREAM

WE hopped across the border one afternoon to the small town of Coldstream, which lies on the north side of the River Tweed.

Coldstream gave its name to the

regiment which marched from there to London in 1660, an action that resulted in the restoration of Charles II.

The Coldstream Museum highlights the history of the regiment and is on the site of the original headquarters.

The town has a country park which is good for bird watching as well as pleasant river, lakeside and woodland walks.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the town rivalled Gretna as a popular centre for runaway marriages.

HOLIDAY DEALS

ESCAPE PLANS

Fancy getting away from it all? We’ve rounded up our pick of the top destinations on offer from travel agents



The White House in Washington DC

■ **YORK Christmas Market Break:** Join in the festive celebrations in the beautiful city of York with Superbreak (superbreak.com). Enjoy the festive lights and street performers at the Christmas Market or visit the Winter Wonder-

land at York Designer Outlet. Price is from £87.50 per person based on one night’s accommodation at the Doubletree by Hilton York Hotel. Valid for arrival on November 24, 2017.

■ **WASHINGTON DC and Chicago from £799pp:** Combine two great American cities on an eight-night, four-star trip with four nights in the Washington Court Hotel then four nights at the Doubletree Hotel Chicago Magnificent Mile, both on room only. Includes flights from Heathrow with United Airlines on November 29. Ring Hayes & Jarvis on 01293 762456 to book.

■ **CANARY Islands from £188pp:** Enjoy a week’s self-catering at the three-star Monte Feliz hotel in Bahía Feliz, Gran Canaria with

travelsupermarket.com. Includes flights from Leeds Bradford on November 19.

■ **10-NIGHT Orlando & Caribbean Cruise from £1,149pp:** Virgin Holidays Cruises offers three nights at the Doubletree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld (room only), before joining Oasis of the Seas for seven nights from Orlando, calling at Labadee, Falmouth and Cozumel, returning to Orlando. Price is per person based on two adults sharing an inside cabin (full-board) basis. Includes Virgin Atlantic flights from Manchester, car hire, and all gratuities. Based on departure December 7, 2017. To book go to virginholidayscruises.co.uk, call 0344 488 3084 or visit one of our stores nationwide. Subject to availability.



The Monte Feliz hotel in Gran Canaria