

Testimonial from Cawston Press Lodges Stay July 2017

Steve Kearns, Managing Director, Cawston Press Fruit Juices – a team of 25 employees from their London office stayed in 4 of the lodges for 2 nights in July 2017.

Stoke-by-Nayland

We were looking for a venue that gave us the chance to free ourselves of the shackles of London and the usual hotel or conference centre style and approach, but wasn't too far making the journey time and logistics unmanageable. Somewhere more inspirational, a break from the norm if you like, we wanted a venue that gave us the flexibility and the space to do something different and for the team to relax and to get to know one another better. Working on the principal that a team functions better as a unit when they know one another better and can understand what motivates and energises and if there are frustrations how they can be overcome simply and easily. With Stoke-By-Nayland we got all of this and more! Also Stoke by Nayland Hotel, Golf & Spa is still very much a family-owned and run business and the passion and commitment of the family seems to be shared by the staff throughout the resort.

Eco Lodges

The Eco Lodges were superb, not only are they great in terms of space, the layout, style, views and overall ambience is just stunning. We had to share rooms because of our large numbers, but this was no hardship given what the use of the lodges gave us, in fact it helped people to buddy up and to build that team ethic that we were looking for. The huge lounge areas also gave us additional break out space for smaller meetings if we needed it – and the big wooden decks also came in use. The lodges are all grouped together so popping back to your room to get anything or just to have a small amount of time to yourself during any breaks was easy. We had the meeting room right next to us and the hotel only a short walk or trip in the lodge mini bus a short distance away, we couldn't ask for any more.

Meeting Room

The Honey Tye meeting room is a great space as well that easily accommodated our group and allowed us a centre point to work from. The weather was stunning so we also used the outdoor spaces as much as we could to break out and then reconvene when we needed. Not only were the facilities perfect the food that was served in our buffet lunches was delicious and just what we wanted. The outdoor space worked so well we chose to BBQ outside on the first evening with the team preparing various courses in the lodges which was brilliant. The excellent large gas BBQs were set up for us by the Lodge Porter and staff, and it was another element of the team building approach that worked superbly. We wouldn't have had the opportunity to have all played a part in putting dinner together as a group in many other places, so not only did it all work out it was testament to the flexibility of the Team at Stoke-by-Nayland who couldn't have been any more accommodating. The service was absolutely impeccable throughout, nothing was too difficult and everyone that helped seemed to genuinely enjoy the 3 days (almost as much as we did), which also says a lot for the way that the whole business is managed and the quality of the staff that are on hand.



Gallery Restaurant

For our second night, we had a champagne reception at the Hotel and dinner in the Gallery restaurant which was simply stunning. The views over the golf course were breath-taking and everything worked beautifully. We wanted a sit-down meal and something to compliment the more informal BBQ that we'd had the night before and it worked a treat. As with everything we experienced the service was great and the food was delicious, another huge success.



Extra-Curricular Activities

I have mentioned the flexibility of the team at Stoke-by-Nayland and nothing highlights this more than the events that they helped us to stage both for the purposes of the team meetings and also team building activities. I have already mentioned the BBQ which worked perfectly as a way of bringing people together, but we also set up a game of rounders on the second evening in a lovely grassy area near the lodges which was great fun. We were also taken around the Orchards by the Farms Director on the Friday morning which was not only stunning to see but also incredibly well managed and informative. As a business that thrives on the knowledge and understanding of how the fruit is cultivated, grown, picked and pressed this was a vital piece of the jigsaw, although I do

believe that this would be a real interest to others who don't have as close an association. It's a lovely way to experience how a business adapts and evolves and makes the absolute best out of everything it can. The attention to detail is awe inspiring. Following that tour, we then set up in teams for what was a great team building exercise, creating our own unique juice blends using apples and an assortment of other ingredients that we pressed using an old hand apple press, all of which was managed perfectly by all from Stoke-by-Nayland.



Facilities

In addition to all of the extra activities that we organized it would be remiss of me not to mention the hotel and the facilities that are available there. We had breakfast on both mornings up at the hotel which was excellent, there were the same opportunities to sit and start the day on the terrace overlooking the golf course. It doesn't get much better. A number of the team also managed to venture into the swimming pool and to use the impressive new Technogym which again was a really nice way to unwind or to start the day. You would be hard pushed to find a hotel with as good a gym and exercise set up as this - all well thought through, laid out and looked after.

Golf

Some of the team had expressed an interest in use of the championship golf courses, the driving range and perhaps even having a short lesson with one of the Pros there to sharpen up their swing. We gave them some time in the evenings so the choice was all theirs and the feedback was that the courses were excellent and the standard of tuition was extremely high. It certainly seemed as if people got the most out of everything that Stoke-by-Nayland has to offer.

Summary

In summary, we were over the moon with our stay and what we managed to achieve as a team in just 3 days was amazing! A lot of this was made so much easier by the flexibility and willingness of the Stoke-by-Nayland team to do things a little differently but also by the facilities that they have lovingly developed. It certainly hasn't come together by chance and I would highly recommend it to anyone. With such a short train journey to London I cannot understand why anyone searching for this sort of event or even for something as simple as a one day conference would overlook this absolute gem, everything about it was simply perfect! We have had some fantastic feedback from the team about how well everything went and a large part of that was about how fabulous they felt the venue was, suffice to say we are already looking forward to our next visit.