

# FLYING visits

Just because your delegates are arriving from overseas, it doesn't mean you need to be stuck in an airport hotel. **Sarah Riches** suggests some grand alternatives nearby



Down Hall, Stansted

## STANSTED DOWN HALL COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL

Matching Road, Hatfield Heath,  
Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire; tel  
+44 (0)1279 731 441; [downhall.co.uk](http://downhall.co.uk)

With a history dating from 1322, when there was a monastery on the site, Down Hall's unique architecture is due to generations of families rebuilding the exterior and remodelling the original property. It is now a four-star hotel and conference centre, and is located just nine miles from Stansted airport and a short drive from Cambridge.

Set in 110 acres of woodland on the border of Hertfordshire and Essex, outdoor facilities include croquet and giant chess. Inside, there are 99 bedrooms, a swimming pool and a snooker table. The old house meeting rooms have woodwork and artwork dating from the 1800s, and the main lounge still has an original fireplace.

Down Hall has 26 training and event rooms, making it one of the largest conference venues in the area. Each room has high ceilings and large windows with heavy black-out curtains. The hotel can accommodate up to 13 people in a U-shape in the Liddell room and 200 delegates theatre/reception-style in the Bridgeman and Selwin halls. All rooms have free wifi for an hour – after that, 24 hours is charged at £15.

Day rates range from £59 to £76, depending on the room and layout chosen, and include screens, flip charts, stationery, lunch and light refreshments. A 24-hour package costs £189-£225, which includes a three-course dinner, overnight accommodation and breakfast, in addition to room hire, lunch and conference equipment.

## MANCHESTER MOTTRAM HALL DE VERE

Wilmslow Road, Mottram St Andrew,  
Prestbury, Cheshire; tel +44 (0)1625  
828 135; [devere.co.uk](http://devere.co.uk)

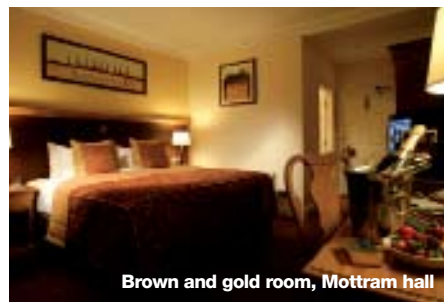
A 15-minute drive from Manchester airport takes you to Mottram Hall, a Georgian pile dating from 1721. The hotel is set in 270 acres of woodland and has landscaped gardens, a lake, and a par-72 golf course. In addition, the grounds are



Down Hall conference facilities



Mottram Hall, Manchester



Brown and gold room, Mottram hall

frequently used for professional football teams to practise their game on the FA-approved pitch, which is also available for hire by companies.

The hotel has 131 bedrooms and parking for 300 cars. Other facilities include a swimming pool, sauna, gym, and tennis and squash courts; clay-pigeon shooting can also be arranged. Catering is provided by three in-house restaurants: Nathaniel's serves modern cuisine in a traditional setting, while the Terrace Café Bar offers a more relaxed environment, and the Brasserie in the clubhouse has views over the golf course.

While many of the original features remain, the hotel has modern facilities to suit most business functions. Depending on the layout chosen, the business suites can accommodate small groups of delegates up to larger parties of 200 in the St Andrew's Suite. There are eight rooms available for hire in the style of a boardroom, classroom, U-shape or theatre. The daily delegate rate is £45 per person, and includes hot drinks, lunch, free wifi and an event organiser who is on hand all day. An overnight package is available for £145, which also covers dinner, accommodation and breakfast.

Mottram Hall is 30 minutes from Manchester city centre, and close to one of the UK's largest shopping malls, the Trafford Centre.

## BELFAST GALGORM RESORT AND SPA

136 Fenaghy Road, Ballymena,  
Northern Ireland; tel +44 (0)28 2588  
1001; galgorm.com

Only 20 minutes from Belfast International airport, this former country residence set in 163 acres of woodland is now a modern hotel and conference centre. The Galgorm estate is within walking distance of Galgorm Castle and its par-72 golf course, and a 35-minute drive from George Best Belfast City airport.

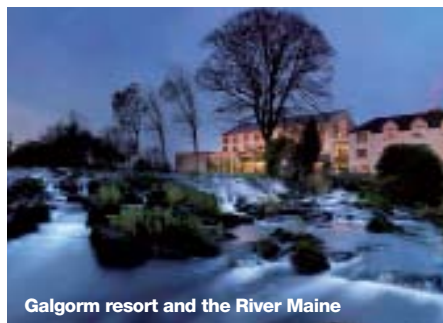
There are six self-catering cottages and four log cabins near the Maine river, which runs through the grounds for one and a half miles, and inside the hotel proper there are 75 contemporary-style bedrooms.

Large corporate events can be catered for at Galgorm – the Great Hall (Upper and Lower) covers 600 sqm over two floors and can fit a maximum of 600 delegates reception-style on the upper floor and 200 on the lower, while the purpose-built Auditorium is fully equipped with modern communication facilities and 62 seats.

Other venues at Galgorm include the two boardrooms (accommodating 12 for a meeting), a drawing room, which can seat 50 for a lunch or dinner, and break-out areas. Conference and event rates at Galgorm vary because they are tailor-made to suit requirements – contact the resort for more information.

Galgorm can arrange various activities including archery, yacht racing, clay pigeon shooting, mountain biking, jogging, horse riding and ballooning (equipment and tuition can be provided, but reservations must be made in advance). If you're into fishing, salmon and brown trout can be caught from the estate's river at different times of the year, and there is even a resident gillie on hand to give advice.

Dining options include Gillies Bar and Grill, which has log fires and overlooks the stables, and the Bollinger Garden, which can cater for 200, and with its barbecue facilities is perfect for summer events. For more formal dining, the River Room restaurant – named for its views of the Maine – has just opened. It serves traditional Irish dishes and has an extensive wine list.



Galgorm resort and the River Maine

## HOTEL CHECK



### Luton Hoo

Ten years in the planning and with over £70 million pounds already spent, this five-star luxury hotel has finally opened and is only five minutes' drive from London Luton airport. Luton Hoo (as in "who would believe it?") is simply magnificent – a huge house dating back to 1767, designed by Robert Adam and overlooking the River Lea, with grounds laid out by Capability Brown. The views and surrounding landscape are the match of any five-star hotel in England, yet it is only three miles from junction 10 off the M1 and five minutes from Luton Parkway station, where there's a frequent 30-minute train service into London.

Previously privately-owned and home to the famous Wernher Collection of medieval and Renaissance masterpieces, it is the spirit of the former occupants which has informed the refurbishment of the Beaux Arts interiors. There's nothing minimalist here: silk-lined and panelled walls, marble fireplaces, ornately decorated ceilings, some three and a half miles of newly laid carpet, and many commissioned replica tapestries and paintings now hang in place of the originals (which have been moved to Greenwich, London).

The main mansion has 35 rooms and suites, including the Queen Elizabeth State Suite. (Luton Hoo was where the Queen and her new husband Prince Philip spent part of their honeymoon in 1947, and they have returned many times since to celebrate their anniversaries.) There are also Churchill connections – the great man visited the house on numerous occasions and addressed a rally of over 100,000 people here in 1948.

The hotel has an 18-hole golf course, and a state-of-the-art spa, gym and swimming pool in the Robert Adam-

designed stable block. As well as the Mansion, the rooms are in several areas of the grounds including the Parkland Wing (38 rooms and suites), the Robert Adam Wing (12 rooms and suites), the Flower Garden Wing (59 rooms and suites for golfers and spa guests), and the soon-to-open Warren Weir, which will be an 81-room conference and function complex. The hotel is very well thought-out, ensuring that the main restaurant and bar, as well as the bar and restaurant in the stable block, are bustling with both local business and guests from these four hotels in one.

The range of rooms for hire includes a former family chapel, complete with Russian decorations, and the Butler's Pantry. Each room is equipped with wifi broadband and audio-visual equipment such as projectors, TVs, screens and flip charts. Additional facilities such as translators and specialist technical equipment can be hired for an extra cost.

A typical day-delegate package costs £95 per person (based on a minimum of eight). As well as room hire and a two-course lunch, this price includes a flip chart, screens, stationery and refreshments. An overnight package costs £340 per person (also based on a minimum of eight) and includes a three-course dinner, accommodation and breakfast. Those staying overnight will also be able to take advantage of the hotel's leisure facilities, although spa treatments and green fees are extra. There is also a breakfast day-delegate package starting from around £100, and a half-day golf package for £99.

**CONTACT** The Mansion House, Luton Hoo, Luton, Bedfordshire; tel +44 (0)1582 734 437; lutonhoo.co.uk.

Tom Otley



**CARDIFF**  
**THE VALE HOTEL**

**Hensol, Hensol Park, Cardiff, Glamorgan; tel +44 (0)1443 667 800; vale-hotel.com**

This four-star resort is 15 minutes from Cardiff International airport and the city centre (a three-minute drive from junction 34 off the M4). The hotel building dates back to the 1600s and was formerly part of the Hensol Castle estate. Its grounds cover 650 acres of landscaped gardens, including the par-73 Wales National Golf Course, while other outdoor activities include archery and clay-pigeon shooting.

Inside the former stately home, which opened as a hotel in 1994, is the largest health spa in Wales, offering The Sanctuary treatments. There are also several F&B options, including the Mediterranean La Cucina restaurant, and the newly



opened Vale Bar and Grill, and Salamanca champagne bar and conservatory.

All 143 Standard, Superior, Executive and Junior suites are air conditioned and stylishly decorated, and some come with a balcony and views of the golf course. The new conference centre, which opened in December 2007 at a cost of £1 million, is one of the few venues in Wales which can accommodate up to 550 delegates.

The layout of each of the corporate suites can be tailored to specific needs. For smaller meetings the boardroom holds up to 14 people, while the Trecastell Suite is the largest meeting room, and seats a

maximum of 280. The main conference room can seat 520 delegates, 330 for a dance or 430 for dinner.

All the rooms are air conditioned and fitted with audio-visual equipment, and some have black-out screens. The Morgannwg Suite on the first floor has impressive views of the lake and a balcony with a spiral staircase leading to a terrace.

Prices for conference and event packages at the Vale Hotel vary depending on the customer's requirements. Contact the events team on +44 (0)1443 665 083, or email sales@vale-hotel.com for more information or to book meeting.



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View from Cadbury House, Bristol



## BRISTOL CADBURY HOUSE HOTEL

Cadbury House, Frost Hill, Congresbury, Bristol; tel +44 (0)1934 834 343; [cadburyhouse.com](http://cadburyhouse.com)

Set in the countryside around Bristol, just a 25-minute drive from the airport, is this four-star hotel. There are two properties in the grounds – an 18th-century house and a new hotel. The house has passed through several incarnations, having been variously the home of the sixth Marquis of Ailesbury and a boys school, and underwent a £1.5 million refurbishment in 2006. It is now updated with modern technology and is well-equipped for corporate functions.

The hotel opened in May 2007 and has 72 rooms, all decorated with contemporary furnishings. There is free on-site parking and a chauffeur and valet service available. Dining options at Cadbury House include the formal Restaurant, the more informal Lounge, and a relaxed café-style eatery in the health club, which is open all day.

All but one of the ten rooms available for corporate hire is in the old house, and can accommodate two to 350 delegates, depending on the layout requested. More informal areas are also available, such as the lounge and the balcony, the latter of which has views of the grounds.

The Great Room is the largest facility, seating 180 cabaret-style or 350 for a banquet, and has a bar, a stage, a dance floor and a decked terrace outside. The Drawing room can accommodate 60 for a private dinner and has impressive views of the Bristol Channel, while at the other end of the scale is the Parlour, a small boardroom suitable for up to four.

All rooms have free wifi and stationery, and depending on the room, a TV or projector. The day delegate rate is £50 per person, which includes a two-course buffet lunch and drinks. An overnight package is available for £170, and covers a three-course dinner, accommodation and breakfast.

## EDINBURGH DALHOUSIE CASTLE

Dalhousie Castle, Bonnyrigg, Edinburgh; tel +44 (0)1875 820 153; [dalhousiecastle.co.uk](http://dalhousiecastle.co.uk)

Located 30 minutes from Edinburgh airport, this 13th-century castle, with its ancient dungeon, drum tower and open fires, is one of Scotland's more unique conference venues.

The medieval castle is set in woodland along the River Esk, and is now a four-star hotel with 29 bedrooms, nine of which are decorated in a historical theme.

The venue offers an extensive collection of books in the library, a hydrotherapy spa and falconry courses. There are also two restaurants in the castle – the more informal Orangery, which serves mostly Scottish dishes, and a fine-dining option in the stone dungeon.

The five conference rooms all have natural light and are equipped with wifi internet access. These facilities can hold from 12 to 150 delegates and can be arranged to suit theatre, classroom, banquet or reception-style events.

At 331 sqm, the Ramsay Room is the largest facility and can seat 90 people banquet-style, 120 theatre-style or 150 for a reception. Corporate packages are available for a daily rate of £55 per person – this includes an OHP, screen, flip chart, stationery and wifi internet access, as well as lunch, snacks and drinks.



Slaley Hall, Newcastle

The Dungeon, Dalhousie Castle



For an additional £140, the 24-hour package includes all of the above, as well as a three-course dinner, overnight accommodation, breakfast and unlimited use of the spa.

## NEWCASTLE SLALEY HALL

Slaley, Hexham, Near Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Northumberland; tel +44 (0)1434 673 350; [devere.co.uk](http://devere.co.uk)

This huge estate set in Northumberland forest is located 25 minutes from Newcastle International airport. The former Edwardian home is now a four-star hotel with a spa, gym, pool and two golf courses – the Hunting and Priestman. Guests can also enjoy outdoor activities such as archery, clay-pigeon shooting and quad biking.

The property has 142 bedrooms, but it's the seven Old Hall Junior suites which stand out, with their bespoke décor and private spa baths. Eating options at Slaley Hall include The Restaurant, which overlooks one of the golf courses, or the Claret Jug, which is more relaxed.

There are seven meeting rooms which can cater from ten to 350 people. The Kielder Suite is the largest space, and can host 150 boardroom-style, whereas the Business Suite is better suited to smaller-scale meetings of ten to 20 delegates. Wifi is available in meeting rooms at a charge, although it's free in public areas.

Slaley Hall offers a "blue sky, night sky" package, which is designed for two-day meetings. The price (£159 per person, based on a minimum of 15) includes dinner followed by a candlelit forest trek and dessert around a campfire, the use of a meeting room and overnight accommodation. The cheaper £59 package covers the use of a meeting room and lunch (again around a campfire).

The property, with 500 parking spaces, is 23 miles from the city centre and can be accessed by the A68 and the A1. ■