



inspiring UK getaways

A 17th Century water mill is stirring up some valuable H2O in the Wiltshire waterways. It now generates enough energy to run as both an eco-retreat and a home. Sharon Henshall reports.

Littleton Mill is a 17th Century water mill which has recently been restored into a sustainable home and eco-retreat. Melissa and Richard Kendall are the inspiration behind the project, spotting Littleton Mill's potential a few years ago when searching for a new home. They wanted something which would allow them to live as sustainably as possible and could also be used for retreats throughout the year. Nestled in ten acres of woodland and meadows and perched on the banks of Semington Brook, Wiltshire, the Mill presented a great opportunity. The functioning turbine wheel had the ability to generate significant amounts of energy and the rural, peaceful location made it ideal for retreats.

Melissa and Richard have both been working in the field of sustainability for some time. Their background certainly helped prepare them for creating their own sustainable house. Melissa had also set up Jiva Healing, a wellness retreat company, which she has co-run for 4 years. Her experience with Jiva makes her well equipped for creating an idyllic escape. This is the first year they have been running a few retreats and she feels 2010 will see a real increase in numbers. "Next year I plan to do a lot more retreats from the Mill and I also hope to offer some courses on sustainable living and WWOOFing," enthuses Melissa.

Life is busy but rewarding for the Kendalls. Melissa is a full time mum and Richard is the Director of an environmental consulting firm, Beyond Green. Littleton Mill is their environmental project, their retreat centre and their home all wrapped in one. They've created a peaceful getaway with real love and care, without cutting any corners or compromising on their beliefs. It's been quite a journey so far. When dealing with a 17th Century building there are bound to be a few surprises! The new window openings

brought some unexpected issues with over 5 tonnes of rubble tumbling from some openings! Another challenge was getting the sluice gate acutators (motors) to work properly. It was imperative to keep the water level steady so they wouldn't flood their neighbours. "It was a steep learning curve," remembers Melissa, "and living in the mill when the work was going on with a baby was also tricky."

Her child, who is now aged 1 yr, has a wonderful and healthy environment in which to flourish. Melissa and Richard have worked hard to create this set-up and now they have the opportunity to share the atmosphere with guests. I asked Melissa how she chooses the retreats for the Mill. "I choose people I know well, either from having worked with them previously or having experienced their work first hand," she assured me. She has made some great connections over the years and can now host some Jiva Healing retreats in her new eco-home too.

The future certainly looks bright for Littleton Mill. Its new owners have lovingly brought it into the 21st Century without losing its essence. Melissa and Richard want to keep improving the sustainability of their lifestyle. "I would also like to get our woodland and land better managed so we can produce more of our own food needs on site," states Melissa, determined to make the most of every opportunity. Through the courses and other activities they offer they can spread the word about the benefits of this way of life too.

Melissa and Richard set their sights high and would like the Mill to be one of the most sustainable properties in the UK. With their determination, knowledge and passion, it's a definite possibility!

For further details on Littleton Mill, see www.littletonmill.co.uk



a break in the lakes

The Lake District is one of Britain's most spectacular natural landscapes. With over 2000 miles of rights of way and 12 of the largest lakes in England, this is a stunning place to explore. Home to Scafell Pike, England's highest mountain, and Wastwater, its deepest lake, this inspiring scenery will take your breath away. Whether you decide to explore by food, bike, sail or paddle, England's largest National Park will lavish your senses and refresh your spirit.

Lake Windermere is a fabulous location in the heart of the Lake District. For those after a challenge, long hikes are in abundance but you can also find many shorter, family-friendly routes. There is a wonderful family walk through the nearby Grizedale Forest. Explore the sculpture trail with stepping stone logs, sculpted tree instruments and hidden creatures lurking amongst the trees. The sculptures create a fabulous vibe which can really tap into your imagination as you hike through the forest. The walk ambles along the sculpture trail and then up and out of the forest for stunning views far and wide. Follow the forestry road as it circles round the top of the hill and keep your eyes peeled for the red sandstone fox which provides a great photo opportunity and a clamber point for the youngsters.

You'll soon stumble upon Grizedale Tarn, a natural mountain lake. A path leads off to the left which takes you along to the Tarn (only a short detour) and then reconnects you to the forestry road. What a perfect pit stop for a nibble on the sandwiches! Once you're feeling refreshed and raring to go, there are more delights in store. Continue along the path for the second half of the sculpture trail, complete with sequinned church and many fabulous carvings. The walk should take around 2 hours in total and is a wonderful way to spend a morning or afternoon.

Autumn is a great time to visit the Lakes. The warm glow of colour blanketing the landscape is a photographer's dream. So, get those hiking boots out of the cupboard, onto your feet and step into a scenic delight which holds something for everyone.

bum deals...

Whilst most of us relate sofa surfing to nomadic youths, the recession has unwittingly brought it into the mass domain. Why book into an expensive hotel when you can crash on someone's sofa? Comfort maybe? Privacy? Neither need to be foregone if you go about it the right way. The launch of sites like crashpadder.com and couchsurfing.com has made finding a sofa on which to crash even more practical and accessible than it was before.

Now you can even get private bathrooms and patios thrown into the mix! It's not just for youths and backpackers either, a lot of registered users offer beds and private rooms (not the uncomfortable flea-ridden sofas I remember). Commuters and business folk are finding it a great resource for a couple of nights accommodation each week whilst they're in the city. Every recession has a silver lining! Head over to one of these new websites and sofa-surf it up on your next getaway.



Cornish eco-travel

BioTravel is a pioneering company creating an eco-minded transport system in the South West. They began as a taxi and minibus company in Cornwall and soon recognised that with all the tooting-and-froing, their vehicles guzzled around 5000 litres of diesel per month. With an environmentally minded team of people who surfed and generally loved their Cornish environment, this news didn't sit at all well with their ethos. They felt they just couldn't continue as a taxi company which polluted the world so they decided something had to be done!

After much research and head-scratching, and a great deal of trial and error, they came up with the plan to use sustainably sourced biofuel instead of diesel. By converting used cooking oil from the Southwest's hotels and restaurants into biodiesel, this Cornish transport company has more than halved its carbon footprint. This innovation has helped BioTravel to become the most eco-friendly taxi company in Cornwall, maybe even the UK!

BioTravel didn't stop there. They have now teamed up with Explore South West, who provide activity breaks in Newquay. Everything from surf weekends, to tours around the Cornish sights, to walks and boat trips are on offer. BioTravel provide the eco-transport to and from London during the non-peak season (October-March) which ensures you keep your carbon footprint down on your travels. So keep green this winter and migrate south west!

To find out further information go to: www.biotravel.co.uk / www.exploresouthwest.com.

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