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RELAX

SPRING 2020 | ISSUE 01

Events

at Center Parcs

Slice of the action

WHY TEAM BUILDING
ACTIVITIES WORK

Wellness at work

REDUCE ABSENCE AND
GROW PRODUCTIVITY

FREE THINKERS

How Center Parcs forests inspire business creativity

BUSINESS OR LEISURE?

As part of your event with us, you and your delegates will receive our exclusive Come Back Soon offer on your next short family break at Center Parcs.

(COME BACK SOON )

Book a short break within 31 days of returning home from your event and you'll get our lowest price guarantee, £25 Center Parcs vouchers and free cancellation insurance.

Book your event



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- Center Parcs Conferences and Events



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WELCOME

Martin Dalby
CEO of
Center
Parcs



Thousands of families choose Center Parcs for their break every year – perhaps yours is one of them. For the peaceful forest setting, huge variety of indoor and outdoor activities and delicious food and drink, they pick our villages for a real break away from the often busy pace of life and to take the opportunity to reconnect with each other.

The same qualities that unite and inspire family and friends at Center Parcs also help bring colleagues together to unlock new ideas for organisations. We have everything you need for your conference or event, from innovative dining experiences to high-quality accommodation and relaxing natural settings to help you take a fresh look at your projects. In this magazine you'll find out why business breaks at Center Parcs are truly unique.



WIN A SPA DAY FOR TWO!

We'd love to know what you think of our first issue of *Events at Center Parcs*. Take our survey at events.centerparcs.co.uk/magazine-survey to be entered into a prize draw to win a Spa Day for two at Aqua Sana.



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EVENTS AT CENTER PARCS MAGAZINE

Center Parcs Conferences & Events:
events.centerparcs.co.uk

Center Parcs Ltd, One Edison Rise,
New Ollerton, Newark, Notts NG22 9DP
Marketing Manager: Roxane Keightley

Corporate Events Commercial
Manager: Elisabeth Pilling
Marketing Executive, Corporate
Events: Charley Reeves

All rights reserved to Center Parcs Limited. Spring 2020 Events at Center Parcs magazine is produced and designed for Center Parcs by James Pembroke Media, 90 Walcot Street, Bath BA1 5BG.
Editor: Marianne Rawlins
Head of Design: Simon Goddard
Art Editor: Katrina Ravn
Publisher: James Houston

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FIND YOUR FLOW

Center Parcs – an event with a difference. Give delegates the space to think and network.

When you book an event at Center Parcs, you are planning a truly individual experience for your delegates. The forest setting of our villages gives you a break in nature. Away from the everyday stresses of the office, your colleagues will be able to make new bonds, boost their creativity and learn fresh skills. From the biggest ideas to the tiniest details, there are thousands of reasons to bring your team to Center Parcs – we've run the numbers for you...



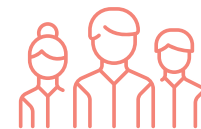
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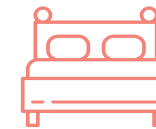
Our forest in figures

We're well-equipped for your business needs



600

We can accommodate up to 600 delegates for a gala dinner



2,000

On-site bedrooms in a choice of luxurious lodges or apartments



400

acres of beautiful forest to inspire creative thinking, networking and team building



1,000

free car parking spaces, making your stay as convenient as possible

EASY TO REACH

With quick and simple access from London



1 HOUR is the time it takes to get by train from London King's Cross to Flitwick, **Woburn Forest's** nearest station



1 HOUR 13 MINS is the time it takes to travel by train from London King's Cross to Newark North Gate, **Sherwood Forest's** nearest station



1 HOUR 25 MINS is the time it takes to get by train from London Paddington to Westbury, **Longleat Forest's** nearest station



1 HOUR 40 MINS is the time it takes to travel by train from London King's Cross to Brandon, **Elveden Forest's** nearest station

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The perfect fit for your team



from £45*

Our Day Delegate Rate includes meeting room hire, buffet lunch, access to the Subtropical Swimming Paradise, car parking, WiFi and more

from £189*

Our Residential Rate includes a three-course dinner, overnight accommodation, breakfast, cycle hire and more



*Per person rate (excluding VAT), subject to availability



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Squad goals

By Radhika Holmström

The wide range of fun activities and a unique forest setting make team building events at **Center Parcs** a breath of fresh air



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“We know that what you can achieve together as a team is very different from what you can achieve as an individual,” says Rachel Suff, Employee Relations Adviser at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Team building days out are a great way to reinforce team values and create goals. “They are also really good for creating opportunities to celebrate what’s gone well at work.”

Team building events can sometimes seem like a disposable luxury, when budgets are tight and everyone in the office is under pressure. But in reality, that’s precisely the time when the team does need to pull together – and when the people who make up the team feel appreciated and well-managed.

BETTER TOGETHER

There are two elements here: the individual team members’ wellbeing, and the effectiveness of the team as a whole. Yet, in reality, the two can’t be taken separately. “The importance of collective relationships

to people’s health and wellbeing is often overlooked, before we even start to talk about how effective teams contribute to organisational impact,” Rachel adds. “I don’t think enough organisations pay attention to the importance of building teams, or equip line managers to facilitate that.”

BREAK FROM THE NORM

Of course, team building is a continuous process. But an away-day can give your team an injection of energy to help fast-track that process. “It’s very valuable to see your staff interact in new environments,” explains Ashley Fuller, Head of Department, Outdoor Activities at Center Parcs, “and team building events can help you to identify this. We have activities that vary from an hour-and-a-half to four hours, and very different kinds of challenges, from short, sharp activities to those that require planning and detail [see box on page 9, for examples].”

BIG IDEAS

Ashley Fuller
Head of
Department,
Outdoor Activities,
Center Parcs



“We have activities that vary from an hour-and-a-half to four hours, and very different kinds of challenges, from short, sharp activities to those that require planning and detail”

“Getting out of the usual routine shakes things up. You’re able to see who likes detail, who likes a challenge, who thrives on the ‘headline information’ and so on”

UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT

The unique forest environment at Center Parcs makes it ideal for team building. Getting outside of the office and into nature adds a completely new dimension to your organisation’s event. Research has been piling up for decades about the benefits of being in the natural world and, in fact, research led by the University of Exeter (UAE), published earlier this year, found that people who spend at least two hours every week in nature report better physical and mental wellbeing than those who don’t.

Being among trees can boost the benefits even more. Successive studies have found that the Japanese practice of ‘shinrin-yoku’, or ‘forest bathing’

may help to lower stress and bring down blood pressure. And it’s not just ‘all in the mind’ either – the physical markers, such as the levels of cortisol (the so-called ‘stress hormone’) and pulse rate all demonstrate that something’s genuinely happening, while other researchers suggest that the trees may produce chemicals which help this process along too.

JOINED-UP THINKING

Of course, work groups are made up of diverse personalities, from the go-getting adrenaline junkie to the nervous newbie. Center Parcs has a range of activities to make sure everyone’s comfortable – although, as Ashley points out, sometimes the buzz comes from trying something new and enjoying it – whether they expected to or not.

“Work can be very intense, and when you are in the office your focus is going to be on work and deadlines,” Rachel concludes. “Giving people the space and time to stand back and have conversations that aren’t purely about work is important. It’s good to get that opportunity to interact in a different environment. And that can ultimately be reflected back at work too.”



FOREST FACT

‘Attention restoration theory’ asserts that people can concentrate better after spending time in nature. The theory was developed by Rachel and Stephen Kaplan in the 1980s in their book *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective*.



“Our best-ever conference”: one team’s experience

Hitachi Capital (UK) chose Center Parcs Elveden Forest as the venue for its two-day conference, which had 50 delegates. The organisation opted for Aqua Tree Trekking as its ‘all-attendee’ activity, because of its challenging nature and the fact that it aims to get teams working together to

achieve the best outcome. It was also a chance for team members to overcome any personal fears they might have, while creating opportunities for colleagues to support each other.

Delegates also participated in an indoor team challenge, giving colleagues who were less

comfortable with outdoor activities a chance to shine too. Colleagues could choose Laser Combat or Aerial Adventure as a second team building session, plus they had a free choice of an additional activity on the first day as a way to say ‘thank you’, which they really appreciated.

Delegate feedback on all aspects – from the facilities and activities to food and accommodation – was excellent: “Elveden Forest was a fantastic venue with great activities on offer. The good weather and supportive and enthusiastic staff ensured this was our best-ever conference.”



Team spirit

Here’s a selection of some of the activities on offer*

1 Aqua Tree Trekking
In this team building challenge you will navigate from tree to tree on nerve-wracking suspended paths high up in the trees, tackling different obstacles along the way.

2 Laser Combat
Armed with state-of-the-art laser guns, you and your team will engage in battle around the field, manoeuvring past barricades in an attempt to beat your rivals.

3 Field Archery
Our field archery course combines archery skills with the thrill of the chase, so it’s an exciting way to practise your techniques.

4 Raft Building
At work, projects sink or swim on the strength of team skills. Put this to a literal test with our raft-building activity: we’ll provide a plan and materials, then it’s over to you!

5 Geocache
Time to put your navigation skills to the test. Teams take on our high-tech trail, working out clues and discovering hidden passwords along the way.

6 High Ropes Challenge
Fuel your taste for adventure in this combination of exhilarating high-rise challenges, bound to get you and your colleagues buzzing.

7 Paintball
You’ll be kitted out in a jumpsuit and protective equipment and given target practice at the firing range. Soon you’ll be marching into combat with a gleam in your eye and 400 paintballs in your armoury.

*Availability of activities varies by village



BOOK YOUR EVENT

For more details on ways you can nurture team spirit:
Visit events.centerparcs.co.uk
Call 03448 267 715
Email centerparcs.events@centerparcs.co.uk

Diary of a delegate

What can you expect when you book a Conquer the Forest package at Center Parcs?

8.30AM

HASSLE-FREE PARKING

Our villages are well-connected to local public transport, but if you are arriving by car you can take advantage of the free parking included in your package.

9AM

READY TO ROLL

Ensure you are primed for action with breakfast rolls of your choice on arrival. (For more on food see page 22.)



► Geocache promotes camaraderie and brings out competitive spirit



10AM
ON THE MAP

Well fuelled, you'll be ready for your first activity. Geocache is a high-tech forest trail that puts your sense of direction to the test as you navigate your way around the village. (For more on team building see page 6.)



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12PM

TIME TO REFUEL

Ready for lunch? Whether you opt for a Fork Buffet, Bowl Food or Sandwiches and Finger Buffet menu, there's a plan to suit your needs. Take a look at our menus: events.centerparcs.co.uk/food



3PM

HAVE A BLAST

On to Laser Combat. All the fun of paintballing but with none of the mess. Instead, you and your team will be armed with state-of-the-art laser guns, sneaking stealthily through the forest to avoid your rivals and solve your mission.



4PM

REST AND REGROUP

With the 'hard work' over, head back to The Venue to reflect on the day with your team – the perfect opportunity to cement the new bonds you've formed. If you have time, round things off with a relaxing dip in our Subtropical Swimming Paradise.



► Put delegates' teamworking and communication skills to the test

2PM

SAMPLE THE HIGH LIFE

Do you have a sense of adventure and a steady hand? It's time to test your mettle with the next activity – Aqua Tree Trekking. Navigate from tree to tree on nerve-wracking suspended paths high up in the trees, tackling different obstacles along the way.



Rejuvenate your team

Recharge at our award-winning Aqua Sana spas

Looking for something more relaxing? Reward and recharge your team with our **Rejuvenate package**.

What's included:

- Breakfast rolls on arrival
- Half-day meeting room hire
- Refreshments and lunch
- 3-hour Spa Session
- WiFi and access to the Subtropical Swimming Paradise

Being surrounded by nature boosts our outlook, lifts our spirits and helps us unwind, so our Aqua Sana spas are the perfect escape to help you and your colleagues reset and refocus.



► The forest locations make Aqua Sana spas extra special

- Find out more about Aqua Sana spas, including treatments: aquasana.co.uk
- Rejuvenate package rates are from £99 per person (exc.VAT), subject to availability. For more details visit events.centerparcs.co.uk, call 03448 267 715 or email centerparcs.events@centerparcs.co.uk



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Find out how about our varied corporate packages: Visit events.centerparcs.co.uk Call 03448 267 715 Email centerparcs.events@centerparcs.co.uk

MOTHER OF INVENTION



FOREST FACT

According to the Liverpool John Moores University and Center Parcs study 'Outdoor Learning and Corporate Health Project', access to nature in the workplace is associated with lower levels of perceived job stress and higher job satisfaction. It also increases trust, group awareness and interaction and problem-solving.

Soaking up the natural setting at **Center Parcs** will inspire you and your colleagues and ignite new ideas. We find out why this creativity is key to your organisation's success >

By Anna Scott

Nothing sparks free thought like getting out into nature, and trying new activities. But, if you're not working in a creative industry, why do you need to inspire your team to let their imaginations loose?

"Creativity is crucial for any organisation that wants to have a decent lifetime," says Professor Eddie Obeng, organisational theorist. "We have connected the whole world using technology and trade. The pace of change, the complexity, the interaction between people has risen. At the same time, we have allowed customers to build their expectations. Things quickly become obsolete and something else comes along."

For your organisation to keep ahead of the game, he says, you need to keep researching new products, coming up with new ideas and putting them in front of customers. "Creativity is really useful in this kind of innovation."

SET THE AGENDA

You may not feel creativity is central to your business, but it's a must if your organisation wants to lead the way, says entrepreneur, CEO and author, Dr Margaret Heffernan. "Creative companies are those that want to do more than follow. Sometimes they want to make their mark. Or they have an idea that

"Spending time in nature is a great way to get our creative juices flowing by boosting our memory and helping to overcome creative blocks"

won't let them go. Sometimes it is because they want to foster a culture that excites, stretches and develops the entire workforce."

CONNECT WITH CREATIVITY

Stepping away from the comfortable confines of the office allows you to become more connected with the creativity of the natural world.

It's not so much that creativity suffers from being indoors, but rather that the closer we are to our normal working environment, the more we will be constrained. For most of us, outdoor natural environments are the perfect catalyst for changing the way we think.

TIME TO INNOVATE

Another issue is that people feel pressure to be productive, rather than creative at work, according to organisational and performance



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psychologist Gemma Leigh Roberts. "Every organisation wants its employees to be creative, but only a few take the time to foster creativity," she says.

But having a good idea is not in itself creative, warns Margaret Heffernan. "Everyone has ideas, all the time. The hard part is refining, developing the idea, sticking with it if it starts to fall apart, finding the right people to contribute. These tasks are spectacularly difficult."

That's why organisations need to ensure they don't overwork people, she adds. "To be creative requires having a mind in good condition, and not distracted or exhausted."

Finding space for your team to be creative may be in the office, trying out alternative ways to think, learning from others, or it might be getting out into nature. Whichever way, being in a Center Parcs forest is a fantastic way to spark inspiration.



BOOK YOUR EVENT

Find out how to plan your creativity-building event:
Visit events.centerparcs.co.uk
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Why does being in nature make us more creative?



"Creativity is a thinking process which relies on inputs in people's brains – either previous

knowledge or experience, or new insights from complete disconnections. The environment can provide cues and change perceptions. Being active in the environment provides stimuli from different sights and sounds. In nature there are no straight lines and things are constantly changing (such as a stream) so your brain has to work harder to perceive things than in an indoors environment. This can lead to more creative thoughts." *Professor Eddie Obeng*



"Longer periods of time in nature add to creativity – the positive effects on our mind peaks after about three

days of really getting away, turning all devices off and being surrounded by a natural environment. Spending time in nature is a great way to get our creative juices flowing by boosting our memory and helping to overcome creative blocks." *Gemma Leigh Roberts*

WIN A SPA DAY FOR TWO!

We'd love to know what you think of our first issue of *Events at Center Parcs*. Take our survey at events.centerparcs.co.uk/magazine-survey to be entered into a prize draw to win a Spa Day for two at Aqua Sana.



Stay in nature

Welcome to our forest settings with a touch of luxury. From modern hotel rooms to Treehouses, and everything in between, at **Center Parcs** there's the right accommodation to suit your needs



1

1 TREEHOUSES
Our fabulous two-storey Treehouses are designed with the ultimate Center Parcs experience in mind. They feature a games den with bar area, en-suite bathrooms, private hot tub and dedicated parking spaces.

2 EXCLUSIVE LODGES
The two-storey Exclusive Lodges are designed for guests who want complete relaxation as well as privacy, featuring a sauna and enclosed garden with a hot tub as well as en-suite bathrooms. In some of our New Style Exclusive Lodges there are also games rooms.

3 EXECUTIVE LODGES
Our range of Executive Lodge accommodation incorporates the very latest in modern design and includes the added luxuries of en-suite bathrooms and free WiFi. Some even have their own sauna, while some four-bed lodges have the addition of a games room.

4 HOTELS AND APARTMENTS
Enjoy a touch of luxury at the heart of the forest with a hotel room or apartment. You'll be at the centre of the action, close to amenities, with an en-suite shower room and a balcony or terrace.

**All lodges include free WiFi*



2

FIND OUT MORE

View all our accommodation options at events.centerparcs.co.uk/our-accommodation



3



4



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What makes Center Parcs accommodation different?

Escape the every day
All of our accommodation is surrounded by the tranquillity of the forest and natural wildlife. Immerse yourself in the woodlands; you could start your day off by sharing breakfast with the friendly ducks on your private patio.

Team get together
Some Executive, Exclusive and Treehouse accommodation also includes games rooms, pool tables and private gardens, so there are plenty of opportunities for you to network and build relationships.

Fresh air, green spaces
If you want a break from the hustle and bustle of a busy city hotel, then Center Parcs is the ideal venue for you. Find space to breathe, meet and create, away from city stress and air pollution.

Access to facilities
Delve into the many activities, shops and restaurants around the village. The mix of nature and top-class facilities right on your doorstep makes it the perfect environment for you and your delegates to unwind in.

A touch of luxury
If you are really looking to reward your teams then why not choose Executive or Exclusive accommodation, or even indulge with one of our lavish Treehouses? These offer special touches of luxury such as private saunas, hot tubs and steam rooms.



BOOK A SITE VISIT AT CENTER PARCS

The best way to fully appreciate the quality of Center Parcs accommodation is to experience it in person. The site visit will include a stop-off at one of more than 700 lodges so you can view the high standard for yourself. To arrange a visit call **03448 267 715** or email centerparcs.events@centerparcs.co.uk



Working well

Wellness strategies have never been so important in the workplace. We investigate the latest trends and find out how an event at **Center Parcs** can boost wellbeing for you and your team

By Charlie Lyon



► “The trend towards employee wellbeing over the past 10 years has been dramatic.”
Professor Sir Cary Cooper

Early in 2019, a trial took place at medical communications consultancy, Synergy Vision, to see how a four-day working week would affect staff wellbeing and productivity. After six months, directors made the initiative permanent, citing that as well as employee wellbeing soaring, clients did not notice any adverse effects.

While we can't all immediately start dreaming of relaxed 10am starts – picking up emails at home before heading into the office post-rush hour, then winding up at 4pm for group yoga – this is a good example of how seriously wellbeing is being taken by some organisations.

The trend for reducing stress and preventing burnout in the workplace is on the rise and, with a 2019 study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) finding that nearly two-fifths of UK businesses (37%) saw an increase in stress-related absence over the last year, it's about time.

“The trend towards employee wellbeing over the past 10 years has been dramatic,” explains Professor Sir Cary Cooper, CIPD president.

There are three main reasons wellbeing has now become so important in the workplace: to retain staff; to attract new staff, particularly millennials; and to reduce stress-related sickness

“Stress-related sickness absence is now the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK economy, taking over from muscular and skeletal back pain”

absence, which is now the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK economy, taking over from muscular and skeletal back pain.

TAKING ACTION

But increasing workplace wellbeing isn't about popping apples on employees desks, or offering sushi at lunchtime, stresses Professor Cooper. A strategic approach is necessary. “Wellbeing is when you look at your organisation strategically, and formulate how to create a good day at work,” he believes.

But while it's larger companies, such as Google and Apple, that are hitting the headlines for their wellbeing strategies, it's easy for smaller companies to make changes too, says Professor Cooper.

On the next page, we look at some of the key wellness trends for all organisations in 2020. ➤



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WELLNESS TRENDS FOR 2020

Taking your team away for a break from the office to Center Parcs is one way to give you all a mental reboot, but what happens when you head back to the workplace? Marteka Swaby, founder of Benevolent Health, an organisation that aims to improve access to mental health support at work, shares some of the key wellness trends that could help you and your colleagues have happier, healthier work lives.

PHYSICAL WORKSPACE

“Air quality and light have significant effects on productivity and brain function,” she

stresses. “Having an outdoor space or simply being able to open the window and let in some natural light can really help to increase productivity.

“A happy workspace should offer access to break-out areas where you can get away from your desk and are not forced to stare at your computer for eight hours of the day.”

TECHNOLOGY

While some blame technology for our ‘always-on’ existence and constant connection to work, Marteka says you can use screen time to give you downtime. “Technology is



▶ “Air quality and light have significant effects on productivity.”
Marteka Swaby,
founder of
Benevolent Health

“Access to outdoor space can really help to increase productivity”



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“Digital wellness means ensuring we have restorative downtime, away from work pressures”

being used to improve our mental fitness and enhance human connection,” she says.

She suggests using HeadSpace (headspace.com) for supporting meditation in workplaces, MindHub (mind-hub.org) for the screening of mental health and diagnostics, and Unmind (unmind.com) – a wellness platform that can be used by employees to track and assess their mental wellbeing, as well as map organisational pressures.

MINDFULNESS

More than just a buzzword, the practice of mindfulness is now well understood and more organisations are using it in the workplace. Mindful managers are better managers, too, says Marteka. “Research has shown mindfulness has the power to transform some regions of the brain and a more active prefrontal cortex can help managers respond to situations thoughtfully, improving relationships with colleagues.”

TRAINING AND AWARENESS

“Raising awareness of mental health is vital for all employees,” says Marteka. “Managers should be trained to recognise early warning signs and feel confident supporting their colleagues or employees.”

Marteka suggests all new employees should complete a basic awareness course during their induction and businesses should embed wellness into core competencies and values. Read how Center Parcs is achieving this with its Mental Health First Aiders scheme on page 26.

DIGITAL WELLNESS

Although technology has huge benefits, if you don't have digital downtime it can be hard to disconnect from work. “Digital wellness is a topic that is affecting all individuals and business as lines between work and home and between online and offline worlds become blurred,” explains Marteka. “It is important to create leaders who are attuned to the impact of digital distraction and who want to create positive digital experiences.”

Self-care at Center Parcs

Plenty of conference venues claim to be unique, but few offer the opportunity to boost wellness that Center Parcs does. Here's how you can use your Center Parcs event to take care of yourself

Reconnect with nature

Walking in our 400 acres of woodland is known to reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol, while lowering anxiety and improving mood. There are plenty of beautiful spaces to practise and improve mindfulness techniques at every village.



Breathe in fresh, clean air

Our vehicle-light roads and hundreds of pollutant-absorbing trees ensure you always have easy access to fresh, clean air, which improves brain function and boosts energy.



Bathe in healing waters

The mere sight and sound of water has restorative, calming effects – feel the benefits with a walk around one of our lakes. Some accommodation also features hot tubs to soothe away tensions, while you can also take a dip in the Subtropical Swimming Paradise. The outdoor pools at Aqua Sana Spa mean you can relax, surrounded by nature. See aquasana.co.uk



Dine on nutritious food

From morning granola, fresh fruit and herbal teas to teriyaki salmon on udon noodles and sharing salads, we offer nutritious dishes that will improve energy levels and aid memory. For more on conference dining, see page 22.



Sleep well

Sleep is vital for brain function and our hi-spec accommodation is designed to help you relax away from the stresses of everyday life. Wind down in comfort and prepare for a productive next day.



Experience the forest

The best way to find out how our events can boost wellbeing for your colleagues is to book a site visit. Visits include a tour of The Venue, our purpose-built event space, a stop-off at one of our lodges, a walk through the Village Square or Plaza, and a look at our indoor and outdoor activity areas.

Call now to arrange your site visit:
03448 267 715, or email
centerparcs.events@centerparcs.co.uk

Meeting & eating

By Charlie Lyon

Food brings people together, encouraging closeness between colleagues – and nowhere understands that better than Center Parcs

Good food creates a good mood. Whether it's lunch with loved ones or coffee and cake with colleagues, eating together helps people bond. When it comes to catering for corporate groups, Center Parcs Executive Chef James Haywood knows more than anyone the importance food plays. "The need for excellent food and drink is everywhere now," says James. "Everyone's more aware of what they're eating and at Center Parcs we've had to evolve."

James knows his stuff – he's been overseeing the food and drink at Center Parcs for more than 14 years, and before that worked as Chef de Cuisine at Australia's InterContinental Hayman Island Resort. He says that when it comes to conference and events dining, Center Parcs has a stand-out offering. Don't just take his word for it – Michelin chef and restaurateur Raymond Blanc brings his Brasserie Blanc staff to Woburn Forest for their corporate days, and has done for the past four years. "You don't get much better proof than that," says James.



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"Michelin chef and restaurateur Raymond Blanc brings his Brasserie Blanc staff to Center Parcs for their corporate days, and has done for the last four years"



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FOOD REVOLUTION

When it comes to new trends, James ensures Center Parcs is in the forefront. As soon as smokehouse menus started to become popular a few years ago, for example, he took off on a whistle-stop research tour of US meat meccas Texas, Kansas and New York. "I thought that if our American offering was going to be taken seriously, we needed to start smoking our own meats, and I went and immersed myself in smoking," he explains.

"When I returned from the US, we enlisted a Pit Master Consultant and worked closely with him to get things like the best cuts of meat and the best wood chips. It was a great insight." The BBQ buffet is now a popular menu choice for events, he says.

QUALITY AND CARE

The number of delegates Center Parcs can cater for depends on the village, but it can be up to 600, with dietary requirements always considered. "And when it comes to events, no matter if it's a private party of six, or 600 people, the dishes will have the same excellent quality," ensures James. "Flavours are most important," he says. "They've got to be robust. And the presentation has to be excellent."

James also knows that drinks can add more pop to a party. "The guests who come to our events have very high standards and we can't let them down. We work closely with our wine supplier to make sure we have a reliable supply of high-quality wines."

As well as top-quality food, drink and bespoke, considered menus, James says it's the overall experience of a Center Parcs event that makes it unforgettable. "Working at Center Parcs is incredible," he enthuses. "The excellence comes from the commitment of the staff and it shows at every level."

► James Haywood, Center Parcs Executive Chef and Group Food & Beverage Innovation Manager



FOREST FACT

Research shows that, in business settings, food can heighten rapport: a 2016 study from the University of Chicago found that when pairs of strangers were negotiating over a meal, the people who ate similar foods came to agreements quicker than those who ate different foods.

Gala dinner favourites

The Gala Dinner menu combines fresh and delicate flavours with exquisite presentation. Favourites include:



Melon, avocado and pink grapefruit salad
Served with a raspberry vinaigrette

Oven-baked fillet of salmon

With a herb crust, sautéed freekeh, tenderstem broccoli, asparagus and a smoked garlic and tomato coulis



Plate of raspberry flavours
Raspberry mousse, raspberry cream, fresh raspberries and a raspberry sorbet



BOOK YOUR EVENT

Find out more about the perfect event package: Visit events.centerparcs.co.uk
Call 03448 267 715
Email centerparcs.events@centerparcs.co.uk

Green guardians

At **Center Parcs**, we want to protect the woodland that makes our villages so special. So when you choose us, you're choosing a supplier with sustainability at its core

Spend just a few hours at Center Parcs and you'll realise why we want to make sure we're taking care of our beautiful surroundings. We see ourselves as custodians of our woodlands, and we put sustainability and biodiversity at the heart of our values. So, when you visit Center Parcs, you can relax in the knowledge that we're working hard to manage our impact on the forest – as well as the wider environment.

Every time we begin a new project, we carefully consider energy consumption and environmental

impact. We explore all opportunities to reduce the impact of each project and, if necessary, offset the emissions elsewhere.

Woburn Forest, which opened in 2014, was designed to be our most energy-efficient village to date, with lodges built using sustainable materials, including low-carbon, high-performance insulation and with large windows to reduce need for artificial light; LED light bulbs; suppressed flush system in the WC facilities; and good rail links to encourage the use of public transport.



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ENERGY EFFICIENT

12.5%

We achieved this saving in electricity through initiatives, including investing in new boilers, LED panels, VSDs and heat recovery

10%

We aim to produce this amount of energy from renewable sources by 2020



The facts:

RECYCLING

375 tonnes

Separate food waste collection for each of our villages has diverted this amount of food waste from landfill, helping us achieve a 12% reduction in waste to landfill

11%

We have increased our recycling by this amount

10%

We aim to reduce water consumption by this amount per guest by 2020 and have introduced new, efficient water appliances and sanitary ware

SUPPLY CHAIN

We aim to ensure that all of our vulnerable raw materials come from sustainable sources. Our Supplier Awards recognise suppliers that work across different areas of the business for their exceptional service and their impressive environmental credentials

VEHICLES

We ensure that our commercial vehicle fleet is the most efficient and least polluting option practically possible. We set a minimum green standard for vehicles and include Renault Kangoo electric vehicles in our fleet

Biodiversity at Center Parcs

We recognise the importance of protecting the forest environment in which we operate and, as such, Center Parcs is committed to:

Our wonderful wildlife

Maintaining and enhancing the wildlife and habitats on our villages, taking into account the characteristic biodiversity of the local area. The Wildlife Trusts are our appointed ecologists and support us to monitor and review the species and habitats at Center Parcs, applying their knowledge of local biodiversity and habitat against local and national standards.

Training and education

Training and educating staff in biodiversity conservation. Much of the annual survey work carried out in the villages is conducted by our Conservation Rangers with the support of the local Wildlife Trusts and volunteer groups. These external groups provide on-the-job training and educate our employees in biodiversity conservation. The Wildlife Trusts also visit our villages on a regular basis to promote biodiversity to guests and employees.

Knowledge sharing

Sharing information on natural biodiversity conservation with our guests. We give information to our guests and employees through our communications and the extensive range of activities available at each village.

Regular reviews

Monitoring and reviewing our performance against developing local and national standards, updating our actions as necessary. We hold The Wildlife Trusts' Biodiversity Benchmark for our villages, recognising the management of biodiversity and our woodlands. This is carried out through our Ten Year Forest Management Plans, against which we annually monitor our performance and update work plans and targets to reflect this.



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FIVE MINUTES WITH...

Interview by Anna Scott

Margaret Mitchell

Our Head of HR explains why the culture of Center Parcs makes it a great place to work

Who wouldn't want to work here? We have villages in beautiful woodland settings. We have an incredible diversity of roles, so our appeal is wide. We've got personality and strong, core family values. We're all about the natural – whether that's our settings or natural check-in conversations with colleagues. One of the main benefits of working here



CV: Margaret Mitchell joined Center Parcs in 2001 as a Senior HR Manager and has been Head of HR for five years



BOOK YOUR EVENT

Experience the first-class service of Center Parcs for yourself by booking your next event at one of our villages. For details, or to arrange a site visit, call **03448 267 715** or email centerparcs.events@centerparcs.co.uk

is being able to take advantage of the unique forest setting and working in a natural outdoor environment.

But the service industry is challenging. Our villages are vehicle light so there's lots of walking; our Housekeepers use bikes to get around! Like most hospitality employers we get a lot of transient employees. Some people join us when they are not sure what to do in life, but an emotional connection starts early on, development opportunities become visible and many people stay and grow a career.

A number of our people have worked here since the first Center Parcs opened, in July 1987. Some of them are even in the same jobs, but we've also got people who have moved roles. For example, someone who joined us aged 16 as a lifeguard is now a senior manager. More than 80 people are on our apprenticeship programme across areas such as IT, beauty therapy and general management. It wouldn't happen if we didn't have a culture that makes Center Parcs

“Colleagues experience what it's like to be a guest and this helps drive the service standards we are so proud of”

a great place to work. We look to bring people in and keep them happy – with the environment, culture and work.

When people join us they join a very special employment environment. Our Welcome Workshop enables new colleagues to get off to a good start so that they understand our core values and behaviours, and that service is crucial. They also mix with a variety of new starters – senior managers and bar staff all get the same introduction.

We stand out because of our amazing benefits package.

As well as the standard suite of benefits, colleagues can take heavily discounted breaks. They can bring their family in for the day for free and there are discounts on activities, restaurants and retail. They experience what it's like to be a guest and this helps to drive the service standards we are so proud of.

Colleagues struggling with any mental health issues can talk to one of our Mental Health First Aiders. We ran a pilot programme and 63 colleagues attended a one-day training course. Putting a more visible and formal structure around mental health raises much-needed awareness.

Seventy-eight per cent of colleagues say they are engaged in their work.

I don't think I've ever come across anyone who has said they are not proud to work at Center Parcs. It's really very easy to fall in love with working here.



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www.aquasana.co.uk

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