



# Getting it all **together**

Feel like a holiday in a large, luxurious property with a huge pool, spacious gardens and fantastic facilities? Don't we all – but put a group together and the dream could become a reality, says **John Kerswill**





Partly it's that more people are getting together for big occasions like a wedding, major birthday or family reunion. Then there's the boom in stag and hen parties. But a large part of it is just family and friends increasingly deciding that when it comes to holidays, the more people the merrier.

Whatever the reason, one of the biggest trends noticed recently by owners and agencies letting out self-catering holiday properties is that many more groups are getting together to rent big properties, or a collection of smaller ones.

The benefits are clear. You generally get far bigger and better facilities, a lot more space and something quite different from your normal life. Sharing the cost often makes it cheaper, too. And as long as you choose the party members sensibly, there's a good chance you'll have a livelier, more sociable time.

In response to the bigger-is-better trend, owners and companies are seeking and converting suitable large properties to meet this new demand, both in the UK and overseas. One example in Britain is Suffolk-based holiday property company Ready to Travel Ltd (which incorporates Suffolk Cottage Holidays and Big House Holidays). They've just taken on Swilland Mill, a large Grade II listed former coal-powered flour mill near Woodbridge.

The Mill was a big industrial building, so the owners had lots of interesting space to play with. It could have slept about 30, but instead it's been divided into three independent apartments (in reality, three-storey houses) sleeping a comparatively modest total of 14, so each sub-group can have its own space, privacy and entertainment facilities.

When everyone wants to get together, the central apartment has a huge sitting room with log burning stove, sofas, armchairs and bean bags, coffee tables and lamps, 60 inch flat screen TV, and a Nintendo Wii. The equally large ground floor kitchen has a dining area with table and seating for 14, as well as a breakfast bar and all the usual fitted kitchen facilities, a range cooker with 4 ovens and double size ceramic hob.

This arrangement provides plenty of space and facilities for different people to do different things without getting in each other's way. Some of the most recent holiday-makers to sample the delights of Swilland Mill, with its views over the rolling fields of mid-Suffolk, were parents Carol and George and their children Jennifer and James. They were able to take full advantage of the facilities: James (6) was a dab hand with the integrated Nintendo Wii, which meant that whatever the weather the children were happily entertained all holiday. The outside hot tub was big enough for the whole family to relax in, and in the fenced-off garden area, Jennifer adored the Wendy house – a miniature wooden replica of the Mill.

The flexible accommodation enabled grandparents Geoff and Sue to join the family yet keep their distance next door in their own apartment. "We were able to enjoy days out together as a family as well as plenty of enjoyable separate time too. Mum and Dad were on hand for babysitting and happy too that they could come and go as they pleased during the day. And at night it was wonderful to all sit down together and relax as one big happy family," Carol concluded. ▶

#### Opposite

Once a flour mill, now stylish holiday accommodation – Swilland Mill in Suffolk

#### Above

Plenty of space for big groups at Swilland Mill – Jennifer and James (top right) loved it