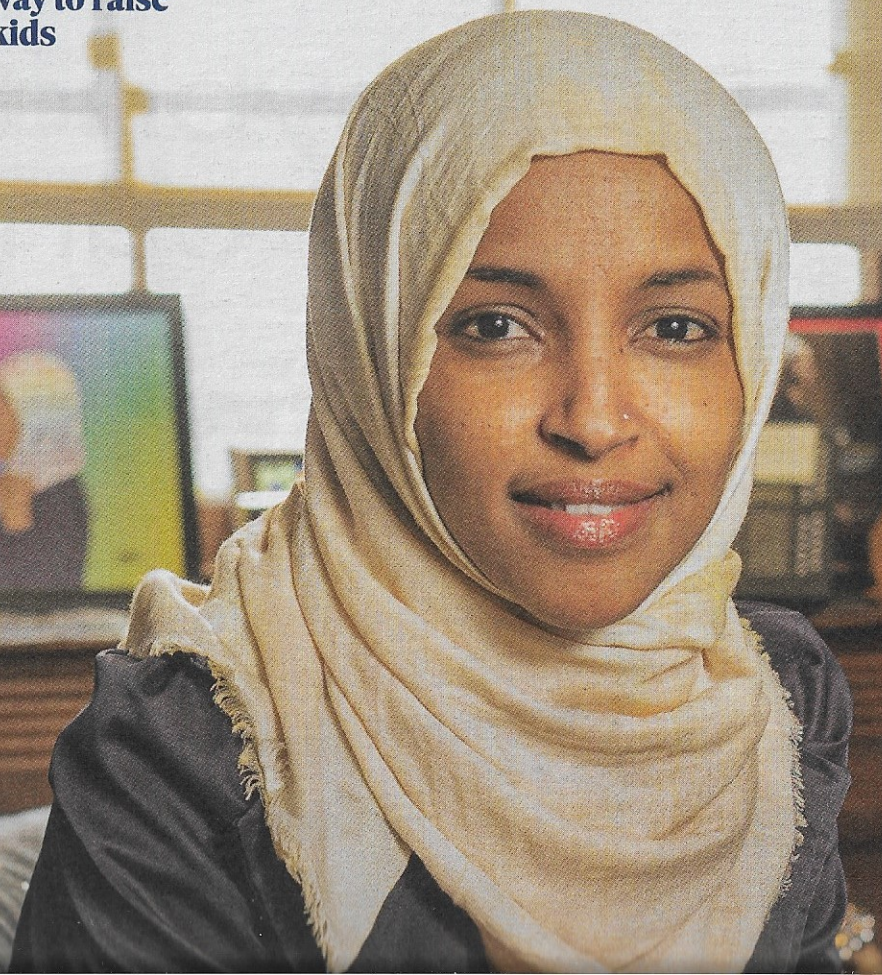


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# *The Observer Magazine*

**Marian Keyes: 'I used  
to mainline Mills & Boon'**  
**Rise of the rule-breaking,  
red-carpet dandy**  
**The smart way to raise  
successful kids**





here for the final time on his 100th birthday, stubbornly insisting on walking to his favourite room – a bit of a schlep down its long corridors. My single room was small and minimalist with 1960s modernist furniture and a balcony overlooking Lake Paranoá, which is used for watersports.

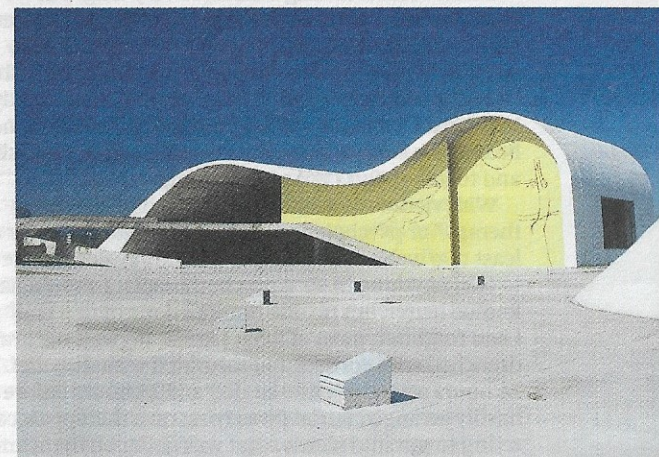
At the breakfast buffet I loved the tiny little pastries and pão francês (French rolls) to go with my pingado (coffee) and pineapple juice with mint, while watching the ostrich-like rhea birds walking around by the pool. At night, the hotel's pillars dissolve and the building seems to levitate.

The criticism has been that Brasília is a city built not for pedestrians but cars, however I found it very walkable if you have enough time there and combine it with buses and taxis. The city doesn't disappoint – and not just in terms of its architecture. There are museums (the Banco do Brasil cultural centre is great), art galleries and parks (the botanical garden is a lovely picnic spot with its orquidário and Japanese garden) as well as lively and interesting places to eat and drink. Concrete jungle? Give me the concrete savannah any day. ■

**Essentials** Chris Hall's trip was organised by [visitbrasil.com](http://visitbrasil.com). He stayed at the Santa Teresa hotel [Mgallery](http://Mgallery.com) ([santateresahotelrio.com](http://santateresahotelrio.com)) and Mama Shelter ([mamashelter.com](http://mamashelter.com)) in Rio and the Palace Hotel in Brasília ([plazabrasilia.com.br](http://plazabrasilia.com.br)). Arrange bike tours of Brasília, from £33, at [camelobiketour.com](http://camelobiketour.com) and architecture tours, from £25, at [vipserviceclub.com.br](http://vipserviceclub.com.br). For details on flights from London Gatwick to Rio de Janeiro, go to [norwegian.com](http://norwegian.com). For details on carbon offsetting, go to [goldstandard.org](http://goldstandard.org). To calculate your carbon emissions, go to [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com)



Reflected glory: (clockwise from top) Brasília's Itamaraty palace; Popular Theatre in Rio; and Oscar Niemeyer Museum, Curitiba



## Wonderful weekends

### Hartwell House, Aylesbury Luxury and history rub shoulders in this country hotel

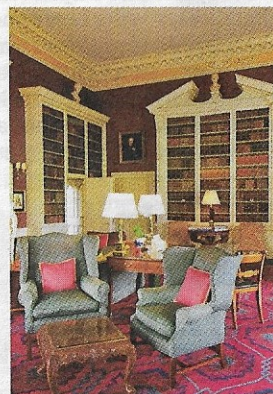
**Where is it?** Hartwell is a National Trust-owned Grade 1-listed Jacobean and Georgian house in Buckinghamshire, two miles from Aylesbury.

**What's the pull?** Set in 90 acres of grounds designed by a contemporary of Capability Brown, the hotel is just 40 miles northwest from London. Yet it's so peaceful and secluded, the stresses of city life quickly fall away. Behind the Jacobean façade, it has fine Georgian interiors,

decorative ceilings and a grand hall in baroque style.

**How to unwind?** There's aromatherapy, a peaceful swimming pool and a gym. Also tennis courts, croquet, fishing and magnificent tree-lined walks.

**Inside story?** The French royal family lived here in exile. In fact, it was in the ornate library that Louis XVIII signed his accession to return to the French throne. 'Why wouldst thou leave calm Hartwell's green



New leaf: leave the daily grind behind in this peaceful and secluded country house

abode?' asked Lord Byron of Louis's departure. Indeed.

**Star attractions?** The Royal Suites and Rooms. We stayed in the Duchess d'Angouleme room, once occupied by the daughter of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. It features a sumptuous four-poster bed and cosy window seats from which to view the parkland.

**Where's good to eat?** The dining room is formal, old-fashioned, and rather wonderful. For traditional

afternoon tea, head to the drawing room or library, for cakes and scones on a silver cake stand.

**Where to visit?** The Chiltern Hills are on your doorstep, plus Waddesdon Manor and Bicester Village. Oxford is just 20 miles away.

**The lowdown** B&B starts from £250 per night, but check online for special offers to coincide with the National Trust's 125th anniversary. ([hartwell-house.com](http://hartwell-house.com)) **Harriet Green**