



A private treehouse hideaway at Chewton Glen



A wood-burning stove cosies up the sitting room



In the slick kitchenette, all palettes are catered for. The purring coffee machine sits next to retro jars stuffed with mini marshmallows and chocolate buttons and homemade hokey, a delicious honeycomb crunch. There's a wood-burning stove, huge tweed sofas and wraparound windows from which to admire the forest.

The sumptuous master bedroom and bathroom have panoramic views, too, although the kids were more excited by the flatscreen telly above the tub. This is rather more swish than Swiss Family Robinson.

Grace is first up a rather vertiginous Swedish ladder staircase, where she discovers the kids' bedroom tucked away under the eaves. The twin beds are perfectly positioned beneath skylights for stargazing and come with take-home teddies and a great edit of age-appropriate toys, storybooks and games to keep them entertained if great British weather gets the better of us.

After my husband manages to nearly glue his jaw shut on the hokey, we venture out onto our viewing deck, which is safety screened with a thick glass wall.

PHOTOGRAPHY: HELENE SANDBERG, ISTOCK



Olivia enjoys some quality time with daughters Grace and Georgia-Mae



There are more squeals of delight – this time my own – as we spot a steaming Jacuzzi or “Coocuzi” as Georgia named it. The Coocuzi is the perfect place to admire the forest and its creatures. We spot deer, a family of rabbits and try getting a visual of Woody woodpecker, who is hammering away in the woods beyond. The children root themselves like whelks in the bubbly water and I only manage to pry them out with the promise that we'll have another dip at dusk.

Although there is an excellent kids' club that offers all manner of fun: nature walks, cake decorating, mask making, and excursions

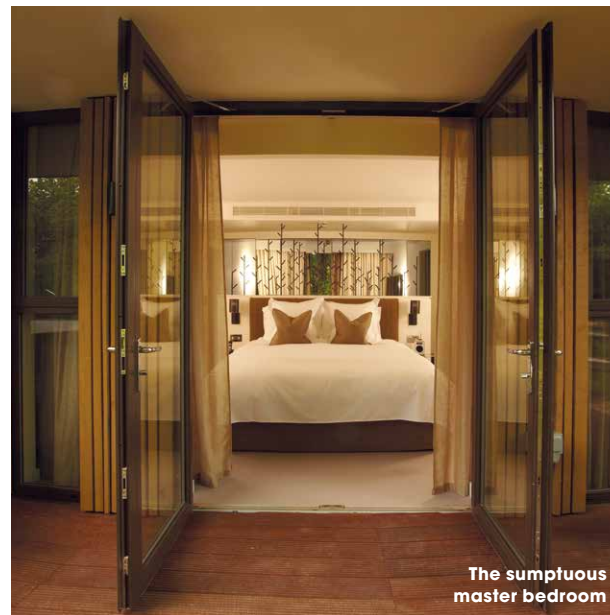
to the beach, which is a handy 10-minute walk away, we opt for a family bike ride to the walled garden to look for Peter Rabbit and admire the beehive.

Head gardener Darren is a master at educating city kids on the marvels of a working kitchen garden. We help him pick runner beans and courgette flowers for our supper and then let the kids run wild in the surrounding wild flower meadow, which houses a giant teepee used for epic storytelling sessions. It's a wonderfully simple and relaxed English country experience that makes me hanker after my own childhood and the time before electronic world domination.

Nature abounds, but despite the obvious charms of the Bug Hotel, a terrifying wood pile that houses all manner of creepy crawlies, the girls are keen to get back to the Coocuzi, so we head back to our treehouse for a forest feast (stuffed courgette flowers and lobster curry for the big people, mac 'n' cheese for the small people), which we order up on an iPad. Everyone is suitably impressed when it arrives piping hot in a hamper half an hour later.

I'm usually the first one to slink off to enjoy the spa – and Chewton Glen does have an exceptionally good one with Linda Meredith facials and Ila massages – but our treehouse is so relaxing. Everyone's in loving, rather than fighting, mode and I don't want to break the spell. ①

Treehouse for four from £1,150 per night. chewtonglen.com



The sumptuous master bedroom

TRAVEL



FURTHER AFIELD

To fulfil your wanderlust and experience a more exotic treehouse adventure, hop on a plane to one of these fantastic retreats:

• Watamu Treehouse, Kenya

Built high in the trees on the most picturesque stretch of Watamu beach in Kenya, this five-bedroom house offers a 360-degree panoramic view of the Indian Ocean and native forest. It also boasts its own private garden.

treehouse.co.ke

• Manzanillo Tree House, Costa Rica

Suspended 25m up in the middle of the Costa Rican jungle in the Gandoca Manzanillo Wildlife refuge, this two-bedroom retreat is the ultimate adventure treehouse. The experience starts with a 2km walk through the forest. Then, after a short climbing lesson, you'll be up among the canopies enjoying the view.

natureobservatorio.com

• Chale Luz, Brazil

Hidden off road among the rainforest foliage outside the town of Itamonte in Brazil, this remote one-bedroom chalet overlooks a river and features a wood bath and sauna. With sheer walls and some glass roofing, you'll feel at one with nature like never before.

airbnb.co.uk

Babes in the Wood

OLIVIA FALCON DISCOVERS A TREEHOUSE ADVENTURE IN THE NEW FOREST THAT DELIGHTS THE WHOLE FAMILY

High up among the oak trees, the wildlife is wincing as squeals of delight pierce the misty calm of the forest canopy. My daughters – Grace, four, and Georgia-Mae, three, are demolishing a plate of warm biscuits, lovingly iced with their names, with Cookie Monster gusto.

We're perched rather majestically 10m up in one of the most spectacular treehouses I've ever been in. If you're looking for a family adventure that's a treat rather than a trial, look no further than one of the 12 exclusive treehouse suites at Chewton Glen, a five-star hotel in the New Forest known for its

pampering pedigree and loved for its old-school charm.

Set a five-minute buggy drive from the main hotel, the treetop hideouts are approached down a leafy lane that winds up a steep bank to a clearing in the forest. From there, you stroll across sturdy bridges to reach them, preferable to taking on a rope ladder.

My kids are tough critics but this place had them at hello, or maybe even before, when we drove through the postcard-pretty villages of Burley and Beaulieu past old-fashioned sweet shops, wild ponies and fairy forests.

We opted for a two-bedroom Tree House Loft Suite, a genius mix of style and whimsy.