



Tried & TESTED

A forest cabin, country manor, coastal cottage and an all-inclusive Greek resort are among the getaways sampled

Forest Holidays NORTH YORKSHIRE

'The. Best. Holiday. Ever,' wrote my eldest in her diary. This is our third annual outdoorsy UK retreat with a group of 12 friends (six adults, six children). Forest Holidays' combo of Scandie-style, open-plan chalet-cabins, with back-to-nature activities and a hot tub on your cabin deck have proven to be a winning formula. There are 59 cabins at Keldy — we booked three two-bedroom Silver Birch cabins side by side. Signposted walking and cycle trails lead from the main hub, the Forest Retreat, while nearby Dalby Forest features mountain biking trails. Onsite activities, range from pottery painting to forest ranger walks, building your own shelter, flying down the Keldy

Zipwire and air rifle shooting. We combined activities with day trips and managed a ride on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway as well as visits to Whitby and Pickering (the closest village). If all that sounds too strenuous, did I mention the hot tub? **WHY?:** Ideal for a back-to-nature break. **SUITS:** Big groups looking for space but also a chance to do activities together. **DID IT WORK?:** You can't go wrong on a forest getaway with a hot tub and cycling. **THE DETAILS:** Midweek four-night break for four, from £895, May half-term week (from 29 May) in a silver birch cabin, at Forest Holidays Keldy, North Yorkshire. forestholidays.co.uk
MARIA PIERI





Barsham Barns NORTH NORFOLK

Impossible to miss, resplendent in the North Norfolk countryside, you could easily picture Barsham Barns making a star turn in *Grand Designs*. The farm buildings have been impressively and lovingly converted; the Great East Barn is a striking blend of original features (wooden beams, stone walls), modern fittings and glass over three floors, with attention to design and detail at every level. Comfortably housing seven bedrooms, two lounge areas and a more than spacious kitchen/dining area, it's the perfect space for several families or a group of friends. Gardens are neatly landscaped — tidy lawns set against pretty wildflowers and dividing hedges — while the barbecue area and dining tables make a great option for sunny days (none in our case, sadly). Thankfully, the games room and spa area — with hot tub and steam room

— are ideal whatever the weather. And despite being surrounded in all directions by seemingly endless miles of farmland, there are a wealth of attractions nearby — stately homes, seaside towns, beaches, walks and kids' options.

WHY: Ideal weekend retreat with plenty of style and mod cons combined with plentiful surrounding activities and attractions.

SUITS: Large groups of friends and families in search of a countryside escape. The other barns would also work well for smaller numbers.

DID IT WORK?: Absolutely, highly recommended.

THE DETAILS: Barsham Barns offers The Great East Barn from £1,805 for three nights or £3,705 for seven nights, based on 14 sharing on a self-catering basis. barshambarns.co.uk

PAT RIDDELL

Huntsham Court DEVON

Douglas Adams, author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and a Russian spy are just two of Huntsham Court's many intriguing former guests, we learn as we're ushered inside the Grade II-listed manor house in the rolling Devon countryside, near Exmoor National Park. This recently refurbished property is full of wonderful surprises, so it's perfectly fitting when we're asked: "Do you want to go bell-ringing tomorrow?" We're soon happily signed up for archery, croquet, tennis and pistol shooting on the five-acre lawns. The ethos here is laid-back luxury: a huge, self-catering country house home-from-home with bags of character (unique art, high ceilings, snugs, an intricately panelled library full of antique books, 80 individually designed rooms) that's perfect for big family get-togethers. It's a rambling, unstuffy delight with lots of natural light where kids can run free and at night curl up by the fire in their PJs. Douglas Adams famously wrote that the answer to the ultimate question of life, the

IMAGES: MARIA PIERI; LEE BOICICCHIO



universe and everything was 42. Well, he may well also have concluded that the ultimate country retreat was Huntsham Court.

WHY: To go off-grid in spectacular surroundings; a luxury treat for families with an easy-going feel.

SUITS: The ideal place for tweens and teens to unplug, get back to nature and try different activities.

DID IT WORK?: Yes, a relaxed, intimate family stay with wow factor.

THE DETAILS: Two-night exclusive weekend hire of Huntsman Court (all 19 bedrooms), from £11,100 to £12,600 (sleeps 44 plus six children). huntshamcourt.co.uk

MARK HENSHALL



OPPOSITE, LEFT: A Forest Holidays' silver birch cabin; exploring Keldy
THIS PAGE FROM TOP:
Barsham Barns; bedroom
at Barsham Barns; picnic at
Huntsham Court; library,
Huntsham Court



Family 2017 - 69



CLOCKWISE: Brighton Pier; Ivy Cottage; Sunnyside Cottage; having fun by the beach

Ivy Cottage BRIGHTON AND HOVE

Oh we do like to be beside the seaside — especially if it's just a stone's throw from the beach at Hove. Brighton's elegant annex is walking distance from all the main city sights but comes with smart restaurants and hipster delis along the ever-gentrifying Western Road, and quieter, residential streets with houses for holiday rental that are half the price of central hotels.

Ours (a smart, two-up/two-down mews cottage) comes with free wi-fi, a breakfast

hamper and a pretty patio. It's minutes from the newly opened i360, 'the world's first vertical cable-car'. With a glass pod to ride in, plus a 'skybar' and panoramic views, this is a winner for kids and adults. Sea Life Brighton has the new Secrets of the Reef exhibit: a colourful way to learn about marine conservation. And if the neon-lit pier snacks don't appeal, try sleek new seafood restaurant, The Salt Room, whose 'Taste of the Pier' dessert features mini candyfloss, chocolate



pebbles and doughnuts.

WHY: A cool, calm city break pad.

SUITS: All but babies and tots.

DOES IT WORK? Yes. Great location.

THE DETAILS: Ivy Cottage sleeps four in two double bedrooms, from £89 per night (two-night min), £625 a week. bestofbrighton.co.uk

SARAH BARRELL



Sunnyside Cottage KENT

Location is everything — and two-bedroom Sunnyside Cottage in Deal has it sussed. Just two streets back from the promenade, one street away from the shops, restaurants and pubs, and, I hate to say it, really usefully next to a Sainsbury's (especially as I'd forgotten to pack my daughter's underwear (Oops!)). The cottage is an anomaly in that it's small and packed full of ornaments, yet manages to feel homely and spacious, thanks to a very clever layout that includes two sofas in the living room and a compact galley kitchen. We walked along the promenade, skimmed stones into the sea on the pebble beach, ambled to both

Deal and Walmer Castles. Breakfast at The Lane was superb — OTT milkshakes and cakes — while dinner in a la carte-style Victorials & Co was the perfect ending.

WHY: Ideal coastal weekend break a few hours from London.

SUITS: For tweens and under. Sandwich and Canterbury are nearby too.

DID IT WORK? Thoroughly recommended, whatever the weather.

THE DETAILS: Sunnyside Cottage costs from £455 (Friday to Friday) during the February half-term and £595 during the May and October half-terms. kentandsussexcottages.co.uk

MARIA PIERI

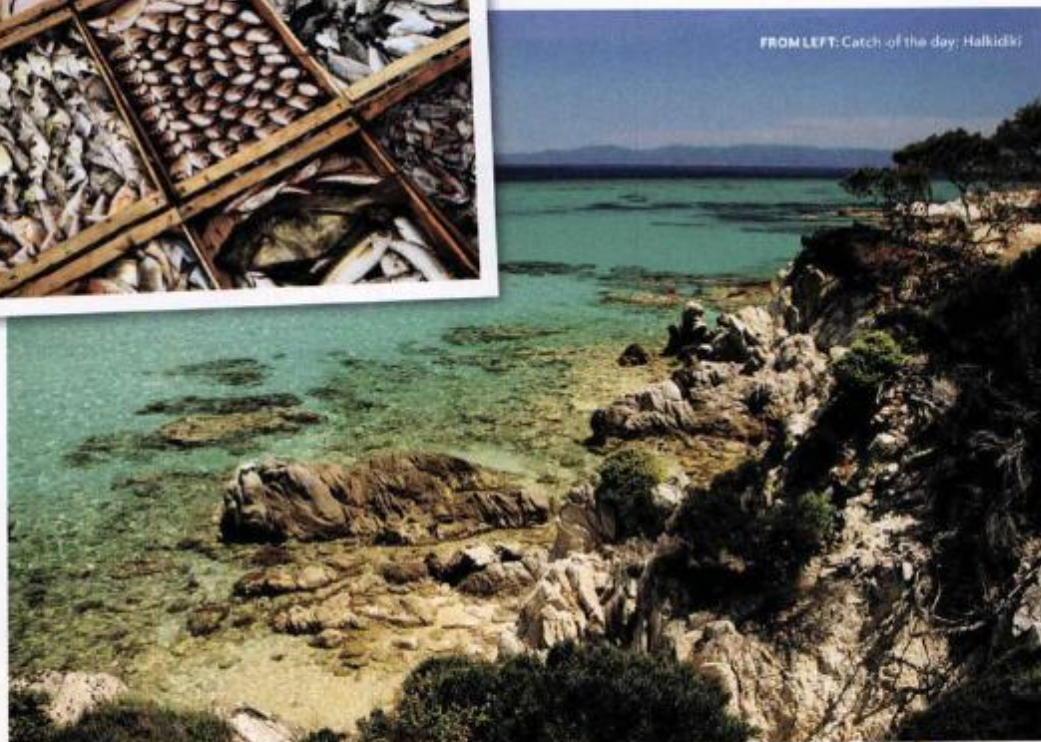


IMAGE: DAVID MATTHEWS; MARIA PIERI

TRIED & TESTED



FROM LEFT: Catch of the day; Halkidiki



IMAGES: GETTY

Ikos Olivia GREECE

WHAT: October half-term can be dark and gloomy — the days are getting shorter and colder and there are fewer opportunities to get the kids outdoors to burn off energy. So, what could be better than a five-night trip to Greece for some sun, swimming and, of course, a kids' club. The **Ikos Olivia resort** is making a bit of a name for itself by claiming to have ripped up the all-inclusive rulebook. From the chauffeur pick-up at the airport to the rooms, food and facilities, everything is included and it's all top quality. There are five restaurants on site serving up menus created by Michelin-starred chefs — four (Asian, Italian, Greek and French) offer a la carte menus. The other offers a buffet for breakfast, lunch and dinner but it's not the usual spread. Here, you'll find a huge range of goodies, from pancakes at breakfast, Greek salads and pulled pork for lunch to Moussaka at dinner — all delicious. And if you grow tired of all these options, you can even swap your meal at the resort

for one at a local taverna. Alcohol is also included at no extra cost. Then there's the 24/7 room service; mini-bar (topped up daily); kids' club run by Brits, sporting activities, including non-motorised watersports, football, basketball, tennis and beach volleyball; plus nightly entertainment. Other touches include being able to leave your kids for half an hour on the beach with qualified staff so you can go for a swim; all-day snacks laid on at the restaurants; and an in-room Nespresso machine. Apart from the last day, the weather wasn't great, but being typically British we sat by the pool in jeans and jumpers and watched our kids slowly turn blue as they jumped in and out of the water with friends they'd made at kids' club. Then we huddled under towels on the beach so the kids could build a sand city, before taking to the football pitch to warm up. But sunshine or not, Ikos has really provided with the Olivia and it's going to be hard to go back to anything else.



WHY: The all-inclusive experience really does live up to the hype.
SUITS: All ages — there's a creche for babies 4 months-plus (costs extra), kid's club for 4-11s and one for ages 12 and over.
DID IT WORK?: Despite the bad weather, we all loved it: the great food, our beautiful room, the beach setting and the facilities. There's also a lovely spa — treatments cost extra but adults can use the indoor pool whenever they like.
THE DETAILS: Western & Oriental has prices from £1,425 per person based on two adults sharing a Superior Double Room Inland View for seven nights, all-inclusive, in June 2017, including British Airways return flights and private transfers. westernoriental.com
KATIE REICH-STORER