



The One For A Blended Family

WRITER KATHRYN FLETT AND HER KIDS, PLUS HER PARTNER AND HIS KIDS, WENT TO ST MAWES RETREATS, CORNWALL

‘As I sit on the terrace at our Cornish villa, nursing a glass of something cold and white while watching a glorious sunset over The Roseland Peninsula, I think, “Yup, this is probably how the other half lives.” Then I consider that old cliché. “Half? Ha! This is probably how the Beckhams live – if the Beckhams were to do a staycation...”

‘Our villa, called Moonrakers, is an immaculately luxurious five-bed, five-bath family home set in large gardens with wine o’clock views to die for. The biggest property in the St Mawes Retreats portfolio of sumptuous holiday homes, it sleeps 12 and can be configured to accommodate an extended family like ours, two or three sharing families, or even five mums and babies. From stairgates to sterilisers, it has everything you need to feel comfy and safe in the baby/toddler zone.

‘We’re theoretically only using half the house, but it’s amazing how quickly we fill it. My partner Julian and I each have two boys from our previous relationships, so our family break consists of myself, Julian and our four sons – Noah, 15, Archie, 12, Jackson, 11, and Rider, seven. The result is a typically busy, modern blended family – albeit heavy on the testosterone. Julian believes rain follows him around Britain whenever he attempts a staycation so, at the start of this maximalist mini-break, he declared (rather Eeyore-ishly) that we were bound to be rained-off as soon as we arrived – a shame, given the kind of holiday we’d planned. Or, more specifically, the one Moonrakers’ super-

‘This must be how the other half lives’



efficient owner-cum-concierge Amanda Selby had planned for us.

‘Whether it’s taking care of the childcare or the catering, hiring a babysitter or filling the fridge with an internet shop – plus, keeping the kids so busy that the perennial school holiday refrain of “Mummy, I’m bored...” never once crosses their lips – Amanda creates a thoroughly couture holiday. Obviously, the only thing for which she can’t be held responsible is the weather, but it ends up being so perfect that Julian concedes Amanda is probably in charge of St Mawes’ meteorology, too.

‘More than a mere self-catering holiday rental, Moonrakers is all about escapism. If the weather had been bad, we would have made more use of the five (count ‘em) TVs, the Wii, the pool table, the books and the DVD library but, happily, the trampoline and al fresco table tennis saw plenty of action.

‘During five action-packed days, Noah and Jackson had their first sailing lesson at low tide on the river estuary. Bob Warren, boss of Roseland Paddle & Sail (paddleandsail.com), provides everything needed for a perfect day messing around in boats. Meanwhile, Archie and Rider hijacked a pair of kayaks while we grown-ups nodded off (and got lightly sunburnt) on dry land. It was such a hit that, two days later, all four boys hired kayaks and ▶



It’s activities galore for the boys in Cornwall





whiled away another lovely afternoon. The following morning, Archie, who is a keen archer (yes, really) was delighted when Andrew German from Camelot Archers arrived in the garden with enough bows and targets for all of our boys to spend a morning getting in touch with their inner Robin Hood(ie)s. We adults had a go, too – all I will say is that it's harder than it looks.

Later, Julian whisked the boys down to St Mawes for pasties and a poke around the village, while I snuck off (only a little bit guiltily) for a blissful facial with locally-sourced products from Sarah Greenhough (pressuresofflife.co.uk). She's based just down the hill at Hotel Tresanton, the perfect destination for an adult's holiday date night, incidentally. In the evening, the boys did battle on the Wii and we poured ourselves a glass of wine as James and George from local cookery school Philleigh Way (philleighway.co.uk) rustled up a kid-friendly, but thoroughly un-boring, three-course dinner – fish starter, chicken main, brownie pudding – that catered brilliantly for six different and fussy palates. Under their expert instruction, Rider – who is a keen “cooker” – even filleted our fish. As even the most upscale self-catering is precisely that, the idea of having someone else cook supper in your own kitchen is the last word in relaxed holiday glamour for a busy mum like me.

A stay at St Mawes may not come cheap, but you get what you pay for: life in the lap of luxury in a stunning part of the country. We'll be back because this is the kind of holiday that creates special memories for both kids and adults, and you can't put a price on that.'

BOOK IT! A four-night stay at Moonrakers costs from £1350. The concierge can organise everything from a chef (£35 per person) to babysitting. Visit stmawesretreats.co.uk.

Kathryn is the author of *Separate Lives* (£7.99, Quercus)



Glam and relaxed – the perfect place to holiday



The One For A Single Mum

DEPUTY EDITOR JO BOUNDS AND HER DAUGHTERS, EVIE, SEVEN, AND FAWN, FOUR, WENT TO BELAMBRA LE VENDOME, COTE D'AZUR, FRANCE

'It was to be Evie and Fawn's most excellent adventure – a 12-hour train journey across Europe to a glamorous beach resort in the south of France. The holiday was also more emotional than most family vacations. After splitting up from my partner a year and a half ago, it was their first vacation with just mum, and no dad.

'Boarding the Eurostar to Paris was seamless – yay to the 30-minute pre-departure check-in. By the time the girls had breakfasted on croissants and perused their French books, we were in Paris, and on time to catch the French SNCF train. By 8pm, they were tired (and bored of my iPad), so everyone was glad it was just a 10-minute walk from Menton train station to Le Vendôme, our seafront hotel. After a dinner of paella and tarte tatin, we



hit the beach – in the dark. Paddling in the sea turned into kids jumping into the waves with all of their clothes on. French parents giggled at my bedraggled girls while Mummy hunted down a bottle of vin rouge from a café in the medieval streets. Although I had reservations about the three of us staying in one room, it worked perfectly. The heavy wooden shutters meant the girls snoozed till 9am every day and could stay up late for ice creams (and even a beach party!).

'Even better, the sea was just a few minutes away, and the town of Menton was brilliant for little ones – shady streets, cool water fountains – and we even took a trip to Monaco, just 15 minutes by train. It was the trip I'd dreamt of. And my kids raced back to school saying they'd had “the bestest time ever”. What better words for a mum to hear?'

BOOK IT A seven-night stay (half board) for three people at Belambra's Le Vendôme club, Menton, starts at £301. Visit belambra.co.uk.



Jo and her girls loved their French adventure

