

St Mawes,
Cornwall

BETTER *than* HOME...

For gorgeous sea views and plenty of tasty food, head to St Mawes Retreats in Cornwall, says Sarah Chalmers

Halfway through the wild sea bass, just as my glass was being topped up by the waiter, I glanced outside at the spectacular scenery and completely forgot I was not in fact in a hotel. It was an easy mistake to make considering the luxury we found ourselves in at Stargazers, one of a clutch of bespoke houses that form St Mawes Retreats on the Roseland Peninsula, Cornwall.

The five holiday homes, owned and managed by local resident Amanda Selby, succeed in pulling off that rare thing: being more comfortable than the home you leave behind. As we tucked into the crab bisque, then the sea bass, followed by crème brûlée, apple-and-blueberry crumble and orange-and-almond cake prepared by a personal chef, the children played happily on the Xbox. In fact, the only thing that gave them cause for concern during our weekend stay was that they would not be able to take the Xbox, games room or trampolene home with them.

Amanda came up with the concept when she longed for the luxury of a hotel break, but without the stress of having to constantly shush her children. She is insistent that no luxury be forgone just because there are youngsters in the party. And the old-world fishing village of St Mawes is the perfect place for indulgence. The picturesque spot was a favourite of the Queen Mother, and Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall have

visited in more recent times. The Olga Polizzi-designed Hotel Tresanton - a cluster of houses once a yachtsmen's club - is truly stylish, and every hotel and restaurant, including the chip shops and Cornish pasty shop, seems to sell lovely food.

When we weren't eating, we took a trip round St Mawes Castle, one of the best-preserved of Henry VIII's coastal fortresses. We spent a morning exploring the clover-leaf-shaped castle, then hit the beach for some crabbing. There is a year-round ferry to Falmouth and Truro, and in the former we visited Rick Stein's fish-and-chip shop and the National Mar-

(pudding, too!), and we could also have arranged for groceries to be left at the house - plus there was a babysitter on hand and fresh flowers.

In the end we opted for a masseuse, who visited one morning to pummel away any lingering city tension, and let ourselves simply kick back and relax. On the first night our three children were so cowed by the space available that rather than take a room each (there were four, all en-suite) they rearranged the beds in one into a circle and huddled together like agoraphobic prisoners.

By the third day they had become so accustomed to the finer things in

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itime Museum. The museum gives a fascinating insight into the hardships endured by those who live by the sea, and boasts a host of search-and-rescue vehicles - boats, quad bikes and helicopters you can clamber aboard.

I'm sure we could have packed in many more 'sights', but the truth is that Stargazers was just too big a pull. From the window seat overlooking the verdant garden to the fully equipped kitchen and cupboards packed with DVDs and board games, our every need had been anticipated.

We arrived to find an evening meal waiting in the fridge to be heated up

life that they challenged themselves to discover something amiss. Crabbing nets? In the games room. Buckets and spades? Ditto.

As we left they admitted defeat. And we realised the sign above the front door said it all: 'Relax, It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This.' ■

◆ From £399 for three or four nights in the two-bedroom Shellseekers, or £1,190 in Stargazers - readers can get a 10% discount by quoting 'Stargazers' (excludes July and August): 0800-088 6622, www.stmawesretreats.co.uk

◆ Travel writer Wendy Gomersall will be back next week.