

Family friendly holidays

Family friendly holidays? For many the expression is an oxymoron, at the very least a complex issue. We want a holiday with our children but not to exhaust ourselves looking after them around the clock. We want to go somewhere beautiful but not pay through the nose for rooms, flights and extras/child. We want somewhere that is happy to host kids without being overrun by them. Essentially, we want a holiday that every member of the family can enjoy such that everyone goes home happy and recharged. There are various ways you can do it: hotel, self-catering or camping. We review three quality options available in the South West.

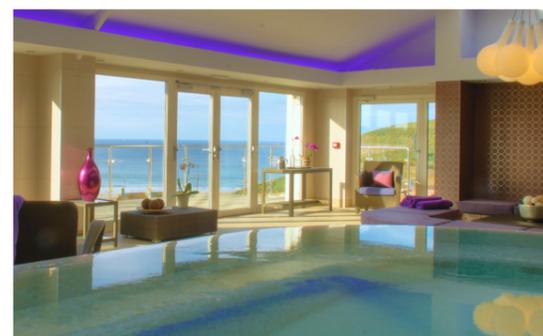
THE HOTEL OPTION BEDRUTHAN HOTEL & SPA, CORNWALL

It's no surprise that Bedruthan Hotel & Spa, located at Mawgan Porth, on the North Cornish Coast near Newquay, has scooped myriad awards over the years. Where holidaying families are concerned, Bedruthan has quite simply thought of everything. This has to be one of the best family-equipped hotels in the UK: everyone's need is catered for, even the need of grown-ups to sit back in a sophisticated, child-free lounge, sip a cocktail and feel, for a moment, like they did before children filled their lives.

The Bedruthan formula is to provide every form of entertainment possible for children of all ages, while not compromising on style. The genius of the hotel is how it's been designed, best described as immense, yet discrete. On approach,

it is somewhat underwhelming – a 1960's-looking single-storey block that's at the foot of the car park. On crossing the threshold, however, you realise you're entering something of a Tardis. The entrance leads directly to stairs down to the main floor that comprises a large, airy restaurant overlooking the bay, several open-plan lounges and a bar. Also looking out to sea is an enclosed 'Tranquil Space' with fireplace, sumptuous sofas and reading matter for those looking to peruse the dailies in peace within a calm, elegant environment.

Descend the stairs further and there's an additional floor that houses the spa, a fine-dining restaurant (The Herring, which is adult-only), conference rooms and the villa suites –



The Spa



A villa suite

beautiful spacious rooms with separate sleeping quarters for the children, and large French windows opening out onto tasteful but extensive play areas, beyond which lie the ocean.

This hotel is large, with 100 bedrooms, but doesn't feel it. Tiered into the hillside, the vast majority of rooms are sea-facing, the roof of the lower tier turfed, such that from above it blends into the grassy bank that leads to the ocean and doesn't taint the

view. The beach is a five-minute walk away.

What makes the hotel a great place for adults is that it's hard to spot the kids' stuff. The hotel is a haven of discovery. On the main floor, beyond a boutique stocking tasteful wares from local designers and artists (grown-up retail therapy), is a passageway along which are several doors. Behind the first is a soft-play area big enough to occupy several highly charged under 10s. Further along are doors that lead to nurseries and classrooms for children of different age bands. Childcare is available for all ages up to 12 during the day, and there is a baby-monitoring service or the hotel can organize babysitting at night.

There are games rooms, activity rooms, a spa with an indoor pool and two large outdoor pools. By the spring, the spa will have been further extended to incorporate outdoor treatment rooms and hot tubs. For the children there's an assault course, football pitch, an outdoor play area comprising frames, zip wire, Wendy houses and a digger pit, all well designed without an inch of plastic in sight.

There is a variety of quality dining options with or without children to choose from; should you fancy a change of scene, you can put your kids down and dine at the adjacent – and achingly stylish (and adult only) – Scarlet Hotel. As part of the monitoring service, the Bedruthan staff will page you should your children wake and need attention. Both hotels are run by the same three sisters so you could enjoy the best of each, but as a family you're unlikely to want to – Bedruthan Hotel & Spa pretty much has it all.

Price: The hotel works on a dynamic pricing structure, meaning the price varies in accordance with occupancy, but as a guide – seven nights in a sea-view family room sleeping four with allowances for meals is around £2,800 during high season.
bedruthan.com

THE GLAMPING OPTION LONGLANDS, COMBE MARTIN, DEVON

There is something uniquely cosy about sleeping under canvas, and children love nothing more than to camp. I, however, am too wedded to creature comforts and will never be a happy and consummate camper. As such, it is not given serious consideration as a holiday option in our house.

Until now. In Devon, someone has come up with classy camping for wusses like me. Longlands provides five spacious safari tents (lodges) set well apart on decked platforms that overlook large, lush swathes of North Devon countryside. You are sleeping under canvas, but on a proper bed, with crisp sheets. There is a stove you can cook on, a balcony where you can sup aperitifs while the stew simmers, and there's a box full of games to amuse the whole family, post-dessert.

Set in 17 acres of rolling North Devon countryside, with woodland, streams and its own private lake stocked with Rainbow Trout, the grounds are well equipped for family adventure. There are skiffs – aptly named *Oxford* and *Cambridge* – that you can use to race around the island on the lake; fishing rods with which to catch dinner; spaces for badminton, cricket, and football; and



The Wild Café



Longlands is hooked up with the local surf schools at the pristine Woolacombe Bay (with 3.5 miles of sandy beach) and safari tour providers across Exmoor.

But, for me, it's the lodges that are the big draw – lantern-lit and warmed by a woodburner, they are the perfect end to an exhilarating day. The decks are furnished with sofas and chairs from which to study the galaxy – Longlands sits under Europe's first International Dark Sky Reserve – and the beds are arranged in such a way that each offers cosy seclusion, with a King bedroom, a separate Twin room, and the Double Cabin with a double bed fitted snugly into a four-poster cabin, the doors of which can be closed to offer complete privacy.

All tents come equipped with towels, tea, coffee, and basic groceries and condiments, plus there is The Larder at Longlands where you can buy bakery goods, wine (they are licensed), and meat from the local quality butcher. Should you not wish to cook, The Larder can provide home-cooked family meals, too – in fact, have one waiting when you arrive. Each lodge is stocked with wood and fuel for the wood-fired boiler (hot showers) and stove,



plus there's a gas ring should you wish to have a quick cuppa without firing up the stove. There is, need you ask, a flushing toilet. Longlands offers the adventure and outdoor charm of camping with all the warmth and luxury of an alpine log cabin.

To stay in a lodge sleeping six, the price ranges from £595 for a low-season weekend break to £1,425 for seven days in high season.
longlandsdevon.co.uk

THE SELF-CATERING OPTION MOONRAKERS, ST MAWES, CORNWALL

We came straight after school and arrived at Moonrakers by night. This is the kind of house at which you want to arrive after a long journey. Warm and enormous, it provided us with 20 minutes' worth of racing from one room to another and then another. Moonrakers is a family house that is fully equipped for a Brady bunch of 12 or three families of four. The ground floor opens up into a giant open-plan living/dining space with two reception areas, one looking out onto the garden, the other housing a massive flatscreen, a U-shaped sofa arrangement around a large expanse of glass coffee table and a standalone woodburner that adds both warmth and style. It took us a day to realise there was also a sizeable children's games room on the ground floor with TV and DVD library, mini snooker table and Wii.

There's a large twin with ensuite on the ground floor, and upstairs accommodates three large double bedrooms and a family room with a double bed and bunks. All have ensembles



except one, but there's also a separate bathroom. The style is best described as Kensington deluxe with colourful, high-end upholstery, oval sofas and a mirrored dressing table in each room. The master bedroom is the most jaw-dropping of all – the size of a small London flat, it has French windows the length of it with an endless balcony from which you can look out onto the topiaried garden (we discovered on opening the curtains the next day) and has a bathroom area at the far end sporting a freestanding bath and open shower.

Moonrakers was, I decided, how The Beckhams must live, which is rather nice to sample every now and then. There's plenty to keep you indoors if it weren't for the fact that St Mawes and its



surroundings has much to delight. St Mawes is highly stylish and, increasingly, the fashionable place to be. Set on a harbour, it has a highly tasteful range of eateries, steep cobbled streets lined with pretty shops and a medieval castle set into the cliff.

There are a handful of elegant hotels in which to dine, take lunch or tea. Olga Polizzi's Tresanton is not to be missed, with its beautiful décor and famous terrace overlooking the ocean. The Idle Rocks is another: set right on the harbour's edge, it blew us away with the quality of its food – special mention goes to the smoky fish crumble with melt-in-the-mouth parmesan gratin, and a perfectly cooked burger with the best hand-cut chips we have ever tasted. The ambience was airy, high-ceilinged elegance (yet welcoming to family diners) and waves lashed the French windows as we ate, much to the excitement of two six year olds.

For sights, the Roseland Peninsula has much to offer. Within St Mawes itself there is a woodland walk and nature trail, but 15 minutes' drive away is Pendower Beach, a wide stretch of golden sand. There are also The Lost Gardens of Heligan. From the town harbour you can take The King Harry Ferry across the Fal River to Trelissick Gardens – voted one of the most picturesque ferry journeys in the world. Alternatively, there's the St Mawes ferry to Falmouth to visit the National Maritime Museum and dine on Rick Stein's fish and chips.

Should you rather chill at base, the garden at Moonrakers is partitioned, with manicured hedges and a water fountain concealing a basketball hoop and football goal for target practice, a table tennis table, a large netted trampoline, or if legs are tired from all that bouncing and touring of the village, there's a sizeable terrace with barbecue to take sundowners and admire the picture-postcard sea view, before an alfresco supper.

Prices, for seven nights, from £1,595 to £5,795 in high season.
stmawesretreats.co.uk

