



Crumbs Cooks With...

BELLA GIVEN

HIDDEN AWAY IN THE DEPTHS OF NORTH DEVON IS A LUXURY GLAMPING SPOT MAKING THE MOST OF LOCAL PRODUCE, AS **MELISSA STEWART** DISCOVERED WHEN SHE COOKED UP A SUMMER SUPPER WITH ITS HAPPY HOSTESS...

PHOTOS: JOHNNIE WALKER

North Devon is awash with glorious hidden valleys, and the one I'm winding and weaving my way down to today is pretty spectacular. It's the location of Longlands, an award-winning luxury glamping site near Combe Martin. Five very cool safari lodges cling to the edge of the hillside with glorious views out to the mouth of the Bristol Channel. I'm here to meet Bella Given, the owner of Longlands, who has very kindly offered to cook supper and tell me a bit more about what food the site has to offer.

Bella, a warm and welcoming hostess, moved to North Devon from London a few years ago. Having worked in marketing and then as a landscape gardener, she was keen to relocate with her family to a more rural setting. As we wander through her kitchen garden picking chard, French sorrel and wild rocket for our summer soup, she tells me where the idea for Longlands came from: "We were always having friends down from London to stay, and I thought, 'Wouldn't it be nice to create somewhere where everyone could come, stay and have their own space?' The luxury safari lodges are ideal, as they sleep six and are great for families, friends, couples."

Each lodge has its own bathroom facilities, proper comfy beds, an indoor living space, wood burning stove and outdoor seating area, where you can take in those breath-taking views. Of course, being off the beaten track, it also made sense for the site to provide food for hungry guests.

"Food was always a really important part of our glamping offering, because it's not really a holiday if you have to cook. If you feel like you have to, it can take away some of the enjoyment from it. But, once you're





here, it's not always practical to go out the pub, particularly if you have kids or you want to have a couple of drinks," explains Bella, as we wander back to her farmhouse to prepare the first course.

Her solution was to create a menu of family-friendly meals that guests can pre-order the night before and then pick up the next day. The menu includes a range of seasonal soups, breakfast items, freshly-made scones for a Devon cream tea, plus meals like lasagne, chilli, curries and stews.

"We batch cook the meals and then freeze them, so when people order, we defrost them in the fridge overnight and then they just have to reheat it," explains Bella, as she stirs her herbs into the pot in her bustling farmhouse kitchen, teeming with shelves laden with ingredients. "We learned the hard way that it's not viable to deliver food hot to the lodges; it's much easier if they're in charge of the heating themselves."

Guests can also make their own pizzas, which Bella then fires in the outdoor wood-fired oven. Or, they can fish for trout in the Longlands lake and barbecue it for supper. Larger groups can also take over the 'party barn' so that they can dine together. The barn has its own kitchen and magnificent oak tables, which were specially made for Longlands by a local carpenter.

Soup simmering, Bella puts our roasted vegetable lasagne in the oven. This has been pre-made in advance by Pam, Longland's operations manager and Bella's right-hand woman, who cooks at Longlands one day a week.

"I'm queen of soups, curries, chillies and desserts," Bella explains, "and she's the queen of the lasagne and all things vegetarian. We try to cater for all dietary needs, so there's always veggie, vegan, gluten and dairy free options."

For breakfast, guests can order DIY breakfast kits, which includes fresh eggs from Longlands' chickens and



bacon and sausages from nearby Beeshill Farm Shop. Bella also makes her own pastries, such as croissants and pain au chocolat. Again, these can be picked up in the morning ready for you to prepare yourself in the luxury of your lodge. Longlands also has an on-site shop filled with local produce, and tipples like Wicked Wolf Gin made on nearby Exmoor. Guests can help themselves and just have to write down what they've taken, then settle up at the end of their stay.

"We try to keep things as relaxed and flexible as possible. We want our guests to be able to enjoy their stay and do things to their own timetables," says Bella.

As we head from the farmhouse over to the barn, soup terrine in hand, I coo over those solid oak tables, tastefully decorated with summer blooms in glass jars and vintage crockery. As we take our pews for supper, Bella pours us a glass of Cremant de Loire, the house fizz, which she sources from Bray Valley Wines in South Molton. This is followed soon after with a bowl of that refreshing summer soup and then a hearty helping of Pam's veggie lasagne, which is deliciously packed with aubergine, peppers and mozzarella, and served with mizuna, wild rocket and baby salad leaves, freshly picked earlier from the kitchen garden. We end with Bella's homemade gluten-free baked vanilla cheesecake. It's light and sweet, with a fluffy sponge bottom. The meal isn't overly fancy, just properly nice homecooked food using fresh, quality ingredients. Ideal family fodder.

Afterwards, as I wind my way back home across the rolling North Devon countryside, it strikes me that what makes Longlands special is that home-from-home vibe. Yes, it's a luxury glamping venue – but it's also totally relaxed and informal, and that's down to Bella and her stress-free approach to catering. ■

longlandsdevon.co.uk

