



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The homely permanent tents at Featherdown Farm. The stylish Natural Retreats Residences at John O'Groats. One of the lakeside properties at Lower Mill Estate



FAMILY VALUES

With so many places in the world to explore, it's easy to overlook the gems on our doorstep. So, put the passports away and let us introduce you to some great, wholesome family breaks in the UK

Best for pre-schoolers Merlin Farm Eco Cottages, Mawgan Porth, Cornwall

Despite the name, there is nothing 'cottagey' about these high-ceilinged, glass-fronted, contemporary homes, part of the Sawdays Collection, which benefit from solar-generated hot water and geothermal under-floor heating. Equipped with everything from baby monitors and blackout blinds to sterilisers and pushchairs, they are a new parents' dream. There is an on-site play area, Horace the donkey to befriend and a sandy beach just 15-minutes' walk away. You could cater for yourselves, but with local companies delivering freshly prepared meals to the door, and some great beachside eateries (including Jamie Oliver's Fifteen) close-by, why would you? *Seven-night stay in a two-bedroom property (sleeps four), from £1,500. 01637-860236; www.merlin-farm-cottages-cornwall.co.uk*

Best for school-age children/teens Golden Oak Tree house in Blackwood Forest, Hampshire (Opens May 2013)

You'll find a wood-burning stove, stylish furnishings and all mod cons inside this spectacular tree house, but it is the outdoors that is the main attraction at Blackwood. So, while the kids are trying their hand at archery, or mountain biking through the forest, order a 'home' delivery of chocolates and bubbly and take to your private outdoor hot tub for a more laid-back view of your surroundings. After dark,

try out some of the best night-vision gear on the market and join a ranger in spotting some of the forest's nocturnal residents.

Seven-night stay in a five-bedroom tree house (sleeps 10), from £1,930. 0845-130 8223; www.forestholidays.co.uk

Best for school-age children/teens Natural Retreats Residences, John O'Groats, Scotland

The modern, minimalist, interiors of these properties are almost overshadowed by the drama of the landscape they overlook: the floor-to-ceiling glass wall in the living area gives spectacular, uninterrupted views of the coast and local birdlife. Sea safaris offer the opportunity for children to spot killer whales, seals, dolphins and puffins, whilst a little inland geocaching (twenty-first-century outdoor treasure hunting using smartphones) will have them uncovering hidden beaches and abandoned piers. If all that fresh air has made you hungry, check out the local co-operative shop for locally sourced and produced goodies. *Seven-night stay at John O'Groats in a three-bedroom apartment (sleeps six), from £1,020. 0843-636 4745; www.naturalretreats.co.uk*

Best for pre-teens Featherdown Glamping at Glanmor Isaf Farm, Bangor, Wales

Sandwiched between mountains and sea, this is North Wales at its very best. Experience old-world charm in these permanent tents,

complete with wood-burning stove, solid furniture and en-suite. Outside this home of yesteryear, guests are encouraged to get involved in lambing, shearing and other day-to-day activities on the organic working farm. Renting a coop gives children the opportunity to care for their own chickens: from feeding them each day to collecting fresh eggs (and eating them of course!). Den building in the woods and toasting marshmallows on the bonfire: this really is good old-fashioned outdoor living. *Seven-night stay in a permanent tent (sleeps six) at Glanmor Isaf Featherdown Farm, from £865. 01420-80804; www.featherdown.co.uk*

Best for multi-generation Lower Mill Estate, Cotswolds

The estate near Cirencester offers a wealth of outdoor activities for all ages, whilst the luxurious self-catering homes on site are spacious enough to prevent families from getting under each other's feet when indoors. For the energetic, there is swimming, cycling, tennis and watersports, although if you're just after R&R, you are welcome to indulge in the spa. Hides offer great wildlife viewing and you have a good chance of spotting otters, deer and beavers during your stay. Venture out into the Cotswolds, with its golden stonework, rolling hills, gurgling streams and pretty villages, for some great family days out. *Seven-night stay in a three-bedroom property (sleeps six), with use of pools and spa, from £914. 01285-869489; www.lmeluxuryholidays.com*