

Escapes

Edited by SASKA GRAVILLE

IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

A family getaway you can relax on, too – it's the holiday holy grail. Join Rosie Green and others, as they road-test trips that promise recreation for all ages



Mountain highs

Could Rosie Green's ski prejudice be cured

by a luxury-enough chalet and free bar? Indeed it could

When I had the funds (pre money-pit house), choosing between cold, blister-inducing skiing or tropical, piña colada-fuelled beaches was a no-brainer. The fact I've never skied and would look a dufus was almost insignificant* (*the real reason).

But there was this holiday in the offering. To Chalet Kashmir, by Meriski, a catered-chalet company aimed at the luxury family market at affordable prices. Which is handy, as if I search for a getaway, 'luxury' and 'family' are my keywords (and incompatible with my expenditure).

Sorry, I digress. Obviously I jump at the chance to take Family Green. We fly (on Easyjet, under £100 each) to Geneva and, after a two-and-a-half hour drive, arrive in Méribel.

Chalet Kashmir is, as promised, luxurious – and pretty much all-inclusive. Which I love. There's a sumptuous breakfast, afternoon tea and a four-course evening meal >>



Views from the Meriski chalets; the decor has an uber-luxe feel



RIGHT: Relaxing in the resort's hot tub after a morning of ski school



Suede and rubber boots, £130, Sorel



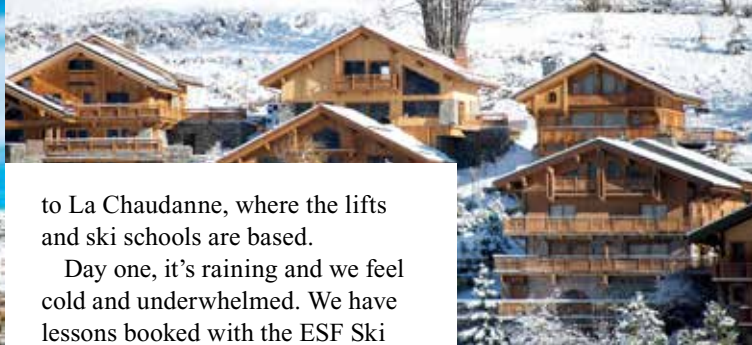
Clarins UV Plus, £32



Cotton-mix coat, £850, Moncler



Polycarbonate and gold-tone steel ski goggles, £250, YNIQ at Net-a-Porter



to La Chaudanne, where the lifts and ski schools are based.

Day one, it's raining and we feel cold and underwhelmed. We have lessons booked with the ESF Ski School. Some French instructors, who have more than a soupçon of Gallic hauteur, take the kids and they traipse away looking as apprehensive as turkeys on Christmas Eve. My husband and I join the beginner's class. As we travel up the mountain in the cable car I'm wishing I were reclining on a lilo with a piña colada.

By day three, we're much happier. Sunshine and fresh snow are a delight and we love the other guests in the chalet. Dinner is a raucous story-telling affair that gladdens the heart. The kids have adjusted to the French-style ski instruction and are instantly, and disturbingly, fabulously good. And we've sussed the great places for lunch. La Cantine D'Alvar does kid-friendly food and feels spacious; Les Castors (lescastors-meribel.com) is more authentic, with a fire (but is smaller).

By the last day I can ski down a green run without falling over (although I do have, I'm told, a face that suggests an egg-bound hen). We've had a brilliant time. Chalet Kashmir is divine and the holiday a triumph. Très fabuleux indeed.

TRIP NOTES

A week at Chalet Kashmir from £829 per person, based on two sharing (01285 648518; meriski.co.uk). Transfer from Geneva airport from around £73 per person through Meriski. Equipment from Meribel Ski Service (meribelskiservice.com) starts at around £104 per week. ESF ski school lessons (esf-uk.co.uk) from £154 per adult and £130 per child, based on five mornings per week. For more information about Méribel, visit meribel.net; for information on Les Trois Vallées region, visit les3vallees.com



The Green family take to the slopes



Alfresco-style living at North Star Club



FOUR GO WILD IN THE WOODS

If the sign of a successful family break is soggy, muddy trousers and socks, the North Star Club is a winner, says Clare Goldwin

North Star Club is a luxury woodland retreat with eight cabins in 500 acres of woodland in the Yorkshire Wolds. The clues that our stay is outdoors-based (in January!) are there from the start; on arrival, we are greeted by the smell of wood smoke from the communal fire pit.

Each suite is themed around a Yorkshire figure or place – Amy Johnson, Edith Sitwell, Castle Howard... Ours channels 15th-century queen and power player Elizabeth Woodville. Think natural tones, faux-fur throws, a large portrait of the woman herself and striking wood furniture.

The second clue is the layout. As well as a vast bathroom (more later) and huge master bedroom, there is a smaller bedroom with bunks and a small sitting area with fridge. A spacious veranda houses a big table, barbecue and seats.

The message is clear: unless you're sleeping, you should be outside. And we are, despite the drizzle. The woods are perfect

FROM TOP: Clare with daughter Ella; Alex enjoys the outdoors; the suites are chic and snug



for free-range exploring. My children – Ella, seven, and Alex, five – immediately run off to make dens.

Next morning after breakfast on the veranda they invent the 'jump the ditch' game, cause of the first wet trousers and socks. A muddy walk around the woods, re-enacting *The Gruffalo*, leads to a second.

Adults can enjoy spa treatments in the suite, hence the huge bathroom.

Cooking facilities are limited (it isn't self-catering), but as well as barbecues, there's a pizza oven and the fire pit is ideal for marshmallows. We dined like queens – and kings – at local pub The Star @ Sancton (thestaratsancton.co.uk).

We leave with glowing cheeks and full tummies. As Ella writes in the visitors book, "It was like camping in winter! I wish I could stay forever!"



What to pack

Polyester raincoat, £27.95, Gap

Cotton dungarees, £24.50, Boden

Rubber wellies, £24.95, Joules

Fujifilm Instax camera, £79, Urban Outfitters

TRIP NOTES

From £125 for a single Sunday-night break and £175 for a two-night midweek break. Suites sleep up to six. There's a 20% discount for two; northstarclub.co.uk, 01439 748457



"It's like having a holiday home – for free"

When children came along it was goodbye to long-haul holidays for jewellery designer Sasha Kamen. House swaps have saved the day, she says

"My husband and I used to travel long haul a lot – I'm a jeweller and he's an artist, so travel is a big inspiration for our work – but after the birth of our boy Jaffa, now six, and our twin girls, Juno and Talia, now 20 months, we had to change.

That's when we joined Love Home Swap, a website that allows users to stay in another's home by swapping it with their own, or spending points earned (think Boots but with houses not make-up.) There's a monthly fee, but other than that it's free.

Our new way of holidaying excelled when we found designer Francesca's place in the Cotswolds. Beautifully decorated, spacious and comfortable, we fell in love and have gone back many times.

After multiple visits, I feel like Francesca is my holiday soulmate, even though we've never met. Her house is more personal than a rental. We even look after her dog, taking along our own labradoodle, too. I'm often asked if there are downsides to Love Home Swap and I always say 'no'. There's reciprocal trust and respect." Visit lovehomeswap.com >>





LITTLE ITALY

You're never too

young to get a taste for truffle risotto, finds Sarah Bailey

A bit of luxe, peril (!), adventure, escapism, aesthetic delights... lots of greedy consumption of delicious cuisine... In all honesty, my recipe for a successful, spirit-restoring trip with my rambunctious boys isn't so different from my favourite travel à deux, or even solo. (Okay, time in a supine state ploughing through *Red's* literary editor Sarra Manning's reading list would be nice but I'm a realist.)

Our Umbrian adventure began in a cloak of rather romantic fog, which meant our plane couldn't actually land in Perugia (detour via Rome); but, frankly, we didn't care because as far as we were concerned we were now in Narnia. The beauty of the countryside with its hilltop storybook towns and medieval villages is ravishing.

We were staying in The Murlo Estate, with thousands of hectares of woods and olive groves dotted with ancient stone-built dwellings, which are being revamped as rustic-luxe villas and apartments, big enough to host large, rambling groups. We stayed in Torre, a former ruined medieval tower that had a particular enchantment for the boys. It was chilly, so we relished the chance to be cosy, lighting the log fire and 'picnicking' on antipasti at night. But it didn't stop us experimenting with the retractable roof (ta-da!) and taking in rays on the terrace (above the clouds the sun was dazzling).

TRIP NOTES

From £123 a night in a cottage for two on The Murlo Estate. Villa Torre from £1,920 for seven nights, sleeps six. Villas have a private pool and gardens, kitchen, alfresco dining and housekeeping. Spa treatments and private dining is available. Fly to Perugia or Rome, transfers on request; murlo.com, +39 335 682 8558

As the comments in the guest book attest, The Murlo Estate is perfect accommodation for summertime sybaritic lazing (our villa came with a pool and attentive staff who brought and cleared a delicious breakfast spread each day).

A winter trip urged us to explore our fascinating surroundings. Assisi, with the Basilica of St Francis, is a perfect historical and architectural gem. Seeing the sequence of Giotto frescoes, etched into my imagination from the Gombrich textbooks of my childhood, was utterly transporting.

In the Ristorante San Francesco (ristorantesanfrancesco.com), opposite the basilica, my youngest had his first saffron risotto with shaved truffle (and experienced something akin to religious ecstasy). Meringue lollipops from the Santa Monica tearooms (Via Portica 4/A) were right up there, too.

Also on our 'must-come-back' list was Gubbio village (with the remains of a 1st-century Roman theatre), which was like something out of a magical realist novel. Appealing to my nearly nine-year-old was a death-defying cable car that transports the bold up to the Basilica of St Ubaldo with its startling remains of the saint himself. Me? I'm still reliving the burrata-filled gnocchi at Il Bargello (Via dei Consoli, 37) where we ate when we came back to earth. Irresistible. 🍷



FROM TOP: The cable car up to the Basilica of St Ubaldo; the cobbled lanes of Assisi village



FROM TOP: Mists over the Murlo Estate; Basilica of St Francis; the boys enjoying meringue lollipops from Santa Monica tearooms; Villa Torre, a former ruined medieval tower on the Murlo Estate



What to pack



Denim jeans.
£159.95, NYDJ

Gold-plated sterling silver necklace.
£150, Thomas Sabo

Acrylic suitcase.
£270, Longchamp

Suede boots.
£160, UGG Australia

Book a Red-approved mini-break, at REDONLINE.CO.UK

Photographs Getty Images. "It's Like Having A Holiday Home - For Free," as told to Megan Sutton. sasha-kamen-jewellery.myshopify.com. Exchange rates on xecom using live rates at time of going to press. Red accepts no responsibility for prices having changed since then