

Turning over a new leaf at

Chewton Glen

Louise Alexander-O'Loughlin escapes reality to a magical world of sheer luxury... up a tree, in the forest!





I am constantly on the hunt for luxurious and unusual places to stay in the UK and The Treehouse Suites at Chewton Glen, Hampshire were a perfect choice.

Chewton Glen, part of the Relais & Châteaux group, invested £7 million on their stunning 12 Treehouse Suites overlooking a picturesque, secluded and peaceful wooded valley, just a short golf buggy ride from the main hotel.

I decided to head there for a break from the day-to-day rigours of juggling my four children and work. Two nights of 'me-time' was exactly what I needed to recharge the batteries.

I arrived with a growing sense of excitement as I parked at The Treehouses' own car park and called hotel reception to announce my arrival. Within two minutes a stretch limo version of a golf buggy pulled up. A charming driver greeted me and ferried me to the main building to check in.

I had toyed with the idea of taking a walk down to the sea, which was only ten minutes from the hotel, but given the horrid weather I didn't feel quite ready to brave the elements, so I headed to the luxury health spa.

The familiar smell of aromatherapy oils wafting through the winding corridors instantly made me feel relaxed. I was introduced to the spa's receptionists, who confirmed that I would soon be enjoying a



full body scrub and massage for 80 minutes. However, first on the agenda was lunch.

The spa restaurant overlooks the swimming pool where guests can recline in their white Chewton Glen bathrobes, complete with hotel-branded slippers, all terribly luxurious. Most of the guests were fast asleep on large white loungers, while others had their heads stuck into a book or a magazine, whilst some guests were gracefully swimming in the hotel's stunning pool.

Sitting at the restaurant table, I noticed that the hotel attracts many types of guest: ladies taking time together, sitting and chatting in

their robes, along with couples, families and singletons all eating a well-earned and healthy lunch. Perfect.

The spa buffet swarmed with culinary delights. I'd chosen a very healthy option, I might add, as well as a glass of lovely organic wine, which I'd convinced myself was non-alcoholic. I pretended to read a newspaper whilst actually eavesdropping on everyone's conversations. In good time I sashayed to the spa reception ready for my treatment.

I was ushered to my therapy room by a welcoming beauty therapist. Now, bearing in mind this spa is voted one of the top ten in the UK, there was no doubt I was going to have the best time.

It was indeed truly amazing – a full body scrub was underway, followed by a massage with the hotel's own delicate blend of oils. After my treatment, I couldn't help myself and bought Chewton Glen's very own candle in a beautiful white ceramic pot.

In a soporific daze, I was escorted to main reception, ready to be whisked away to my leafy hiding place. I have to admit I did feel a pang of anticipation about seeing my Treehouse.

At reception, I was greeted by both the head concierge of The Treehouses and the hotel director. I was feeling ever so slightly embarrassed at meeting them with greased back hair and a distinct lack of make-up, but



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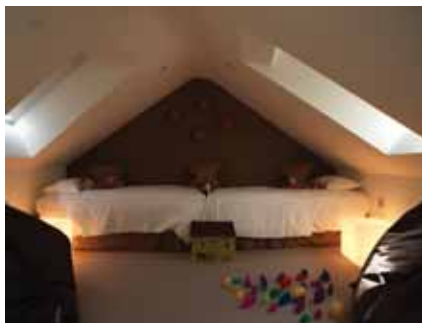
they were so welcoming. I'm not sure quite what they made of me, as I was utterly incoherent after that incredible treatment.

I was taken in my limo-buggy to 'Cedar', set on stilts, delicately balanced within the valley and tree canopy. I walked across a wide gangway, leaving land behind me, and headed towards my Treehouse suite. My phone was now well and truly switched off!

I may have actually gasped when the front door was opened. There were floor-to-ceiling glass windows and doors, providing panoramic views of the forest, and a gigantic hot tub situated on the balcony!

The Treehouse boasted a compact

"there are only two beds here – I have four children, so I don't feel bad any more." To which he responded by pointing out that the



kitchenette with a coffee machine and everything else you'd possibly want to find in a kitchen. There was a living room with wood-burning fire, a master bedroom with a luxurious bed overlooking the woods and a bathroom which, frankly, I could have lived in for the rest of my life, featuring a huge bathtub, double sink and an enormous walk-in shower that would have accommodated my entire family.

I was already feeling just a little guilty about leaving my family behind, and even more so when I made my way upstairs, past another bathroom, to a second bedroom containing two single beds: 'The Kids' Room'.

"Well," I quipped to the head concierge,

two single beds could be doubled up and sleep four. Oh well...

The living room, bedroom and bathroom each had a television, and the Treehouse offered Wi-Fi and wireless Bluetooth connectivity for playing music. I was looking forward to playing mine – and loudly, as there were not any neighbours!

The feature that fascinated me the most was the hamper hatch – it delivered an opportunity for the ultimate in tree-service dining for a hermit like me. I had planned on visiting the Vetiver restaurant, but decided to stay 'home' instead. All I needed was the wood-burning fire to curl up on the sofa with my music and thoughts.



The hamper hatch was next to the front door. I opened what looked like a cupboard that revealed a hatch where food could be delivered without the inconvenience of a knock at the door, the scrabbling for appropriate clothes or trying to make small talk with a waiter. I pre-ordered my supper on the hotel tablet for a specific time and the restaurant team delivered it via the hatch. It arrived to the second! It was just like Christmas – everything was wrapped, beautifully presented and tasted delicious.

In the morning the breakfast hamper magically appeared by 7.30am, containing fresh fruit, croissants and all manner of pastry delights, along with a baguette, butter and jams. The list of goodies was endless – I was sure to gain weight before my return.

My forest adventure was truly magical, an unforgettable experience and the perfect place to recharge depleted batteries, enabling a return to reality less unhinged and with a smile on my face. I am currently thinking up a valid excuse to escape once more to my now 'happy place' up a tree. ●

essence info

Chewton Glen, a five red star, luxury Hampshire country house hotel and spa is set in 130 acres of Hampshire countryside on the edge of the New Forest National Park. The hotel has 58 luxury rooms in the main hotel and 12 Treehouse suites in the grounds. A member of Relais & Châteaux, Chewton Glen is one of the finest luxury hotels in the UK, voted the 'Best Hotel for Service in the UK' and listed as one of the 'World's Best Hotels' by Conde Nast Traveller readers in 2012.

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