

MailOnline

jeudi, mars 25 2010

Holiday in France: Family fun in Languedoc

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Last updated at 11:27 AM on 18th February 2010

On seeing the planned children's activities at Languedoc's newest four-star offering in the South of France, my first thought was: they must be crazy.

Did the staff at Les Jardins De Saint Benoit really think they could persuade children to spend a morning 'discovering the vegetable plot' or 'fishing in the river'? Where was the action? Where were the go-karting and Playstation? Would demanding British youngsters have fun?



Hilltop heaven: The historic nearby city of Carcassonne makes for a wonderful day trip.

The answer was yes. My children, Humphrey, 12, and Millie and Michael, both eight, loved it.

This new, family-owned business, 40km south of Carcassonne, gets visitors into action with panache. The owner, Miguel Espada, has stamped a 'back to nature' philosophy on the place.

A local to the Languedoc area, which he describes as being 'completely unspoilt, like Tuscany or Provence 50 years ago', Espada encourages children to develop a strong relationship with nature - a Mediterranean tradition learnt from his father and grandfather.

The resort comprises 171 terrace homes, each with one to six bedrooms, and the majority with small swimming pools. Most holidaymakers come as self-catering guests, although the restaurant and bar operate a hotel service for reluctant cooks, and breakfast is served on the terrace overlooking the swimming pool.



Roped in for holiday fun: Millie and Michael get to grips with the children's play area

Such was the bonhomie of Julian, who runs the Children's Club, and the friendliness of the other children, that everyone bonded easily.

Not everyone is a tourist. We met the Morrisseys, from Norfolk, who bought a holiday home off-plan in the resort in 2007.

'We have it for six months a year, and it's rented out for the other six months,' says Paddy Morrissey, who lives with his wife and two young sons.

'We chose this area for the good weather and French way of life.'

Much is made of the 'French way of life'. On the first evening, a farmers' market filled the resort with the twanging Southern French accent as farmers jostled to offer the latest aperitifs, digestifs, wines, pates and cheese.

A dozen stalls were selling and tasting, with local varieties such as the green plums offered to us dubious foreigners.

While local produce was excellent, good restaurants were harder to find. We took the children to visit the local honey-maker, where the apiarist pointed out the queen bee. We came back with lemon-flavoured honey and honey toffee.

Another time, we left the children in the club and joined other couples to taste wine at the vineyard of Didier Roux. Several bottles of his crisp whites and fruity roses returned with us to England. Miguel plans to offer wine-blending classes in the future.

The children also enjoyed trips out. Julian regularly escorted a group to the lunar landscape of a 40ft-wide river. Large, smooth boulders allowed the children to walk across the river and fish in rock pools, where tiny Japanese perch swam.

Bigger trout needed to be tickled out of their habitat under the rocks, and Julian encouraged the children to work in a team to tease the fish downstream into a net. Everyone returned from the fishing trips triumphant.

Les Jardins De Saint Benoit has managed to combine the simple philosophy of 'back to nature' with pampering luxury. The location is so small and peaceful, you can hear dragonflies buzzing along the water's edge. The philosophy works.

Just don't tell the children before you bring them that they'll be doing a 'workshop on new flavours'. They'll never believe you.

Travel facts

Seven nights in a one-bedroom village house at Les Jardins De Saint Benoit costs from £935 (0871 218 7066, garrigaeresorts.com).

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-1251682/Holiday-France-Family-fun-Languedoc.html#ixzz0jCJvKfux>