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# High style in Robin's hood

*A new breed of luxury treehouse, complete with hot tub and games room, has arrived in Sherwood Forest. Neville Hawcock reports*

When I was a lad growing up in south Nottinghamshire, the news that a holiday resort, Center Parcs, was mooted for the north of the county seemed ridiculous. Resorts were for the seaside, not chilly, humdrum Midlands woodland. Who would ever go there?

As it turned out, I would. Childish things must be put away; and, as I surveyed the morning view from "Acorn", my treehouse at Center Parcs Sherwood Forest, I mentally binned my callow pooh-poohing. All was calm; with snow still on the ground, all was bright too (well, it was nearly Christmas). The low winter sun sidelit sturdy pine trunks and sinuous birch saplings; the air was crisp with a tang of resin; a faint mist hazed the distance; the first tea of the day steamed satisfyingly in my cup.

Yes, Acorn had a kettle: my childhood concept of a treehouse was also out of date. When I was a lad, the only treehouse I frequented was rudimentary even by lad standards: two planks lashed with baler twine to an ancient willow. It did give you a certain degree of seclusion, though; I can recall at least one heroically disagreeable attempt to plough my way through a bottle of Liebfraumilch with an accomplice.

The Center Parcs treehouse bears the same relationship to that long-ago den that a Grand Cru does to the purloined plonk *d'antan*. The kettle is the least of it. That appliance sits on a shiny kitchen worktop, next to a toaster and a telephone and other, trendier gadgets: a docking station; one of those coffee machines that George Clooney seems to have a thing for. The kitchen adjoins a lofty living space with blond wood walls from which a spiral staircase of blonder wood, with a whole tree trunk at its core, ascends to a mezzanine balcony, off which opens a double bedroom with balcony, flat-screen television and en-suite bathroom.

There's more. Opposite the kitchen there's a fireplace and a flatscreen television, set in a chimney breast of rugged stone. Three more en-suited and balconied bedrooms open off the ground floor, as does



**Highlife** Neville Hawcock and his sons at their treehouse in Sherwood Forest Center Parcs  
Fabio de Paola

worry about such things, Center Parcs stresses that this accommodation is also extremely green, with sustainably sourced timber, low-energy lighting and the like.

Of course, there's something absurd about

with the televisions. Nicktoons boomed in surround sound in the living space; CBeebies squawked from one bedroom; Disney burbled from another. Multichannel television is proof that there is such a thing as

that much disposable income might not opt instead to jet off somewhere hot. But for those who live in the UK, there's a lot to be said for avoiding the hassles of flights and airports, especially with children in tow.



screen television and en-suite bathroom.

There's more. Opposite the kitchen there's a fireplace and a flatscreen television, set in a chimney breast of rugged stone. Three more en-suited and balconied bedrooms open off the ground floor, as does – seen through a rank of tall windows – another long and broad deck. This leads to the structure's two *pièces de résistance*: to the right, via a little causeway, a “games pod” – a separate little hut equipped with a big television, a Wii, board games such as Scrabble (deluxe version), and a pool table, a real one, flat and steady; and, to the left, a hot tub, from under whose insulating cover wisps of steam curl invitingly.

That would be a lot of weight for one poor tree to bear – but fortunately it's all carried by timber piles, which lift it seven or so feet off the forest floor. Whether this Xanadu on stilts then qualifies as a “treehouse” is for the philosophers to discuss. It certainly looks the part from outside, being oddly shaped, with cedar shingles and balustrades artfully crafted to appear rugged and ad hoc. The pines and birches that grow around and above complete the effect.

The treehouse vernacular is cleverly maintained inside. The timber walls are just lacquered enough to eliminate splinters but no more; fabrics – used for rugs and wall coverings – are coarse rather than satiny. The result is a very tactile environment, all the more so because of the underfloor heating (so good for the sole). The colour scheme is shades of brown; for visitors who

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## MORE DELUXE TREEHOUSES

### Take a bough

#### Treehotel, Sweden

Stylish treehouses suddenly seem to be en vogue all over the world but Sweden's Treehotel, opened in July last year, leads the way for dramatic design. It comprises six architect-designed treehouses in a forest outside Harads, a small town in northern Sweden. Each is unique – one covered with mirrors to reflect the forest around it, for example, another decked with branches to resemble a bird's nest. Treehouses sleeping two from SKr3,500 (£313) per night, including breakfast; [www.treehotel.se](http://www.treehotel.se)

#### Castle Cottage, England

In a sweet chestnut tree on the edge of a peaceful wood near

worry about such things. Center Parcs stresses that this accommodation is also extremely green, with sustainably sourced timber, low-energy lighting and the like.

Of course, there's something absurd about so much luxury. “What is it?” sniffed a colleague when I mentioned the hot tub. “Pimp My Treehouse?” But the thing about luxury is that you get used to it; such impudent questions soon recede into the distance. And a shot of luxury certainly eases the stresses of family life. My six-strong party – three kids aged four, eight and 10, three adults – shuttled between the pod, the living space and the tub as if cocooned in cosiness. If we needed anything from the outside world – extra milk from the site shop, say – we had only to phone the Center Parcs host who had shown us round.

Only once did we feel frazzled. Just arrived after a snarled-up car journey, we carelessly gave the children a free hand

with the televisions. Nicktoons boomed in surround sound in the living space; CBeebies squawked from one bedroom; Disney burred from another. Multichannel television is proof that there is such a thing as too much choice. But then we wised up to the pod; with the kids distracted there, we regained the remotes and the upper hand. And though it was tempting not to venture out, we also took care to burn off the nippers' excess vim over the rest of the weekend with some of the numerous activities on offer. Trips to the swimming pool, an endlessly explorable tumult of slides, chutes, rapids and cascades, were a big hit.

So far there are only three of these treehouses in the UK, all at Sherwood, though Center Parcs plans more at its other sites (Elveden Forest in Suffolk, Whinell Forest in Cumbria, Longleat Forest in Wiltshire). It seems a bit of a gamble: they do not come cheap, and I wonder whether people with

that much disposable income might not opt instead to jet off somewhere hot. But for those who live in the UK, there's a lot to be said for avoiding the hassles of flights and airports, especially with children in tow; and the quality of service and accommodation was world-class.

As I tucked my sons into bed on the night of our return, one of them declared that he thought he'd dream of our little trip. And I realised that, weirdly, I had become not only the sort of person who would go to Sherwood Forest for a holiday, but the sort of person who would go again.

## Details

Three-night breaks in a treehouse sleeping eight at Center Parcs Sherwood Forest ([www.centerparcs.co.uk](http://www.centerparcs.co.uk)) cost from £2,249.

#### Spacious

The Hawcock family in their treehouse

Fabio de Paola



Fittleworth in West Sussex, this cabin is smart and spacious. The double bed is set between protruding tree branches, the shower room has a glass ceiling, and there is a large balcony with swing seats. From £140 per night including breakfast; [www.castlecottage.info](http://www.castlecottage.info)

#### Inkaterra Canopy Treehouse, Peru

Guests climb a series of rope walkways to reach this luxurious treehouse, 90ft above the Amazonian rainforest near Puerto Maldonado. It opened in August 2010, sleeps two and comes with a “treehouse butler” to serve dinner and drinks on your lofty perch. The real attraction, though, is the chance to watch birds and other fauna

from a privileged vantage point. From \$600 for two half-board, including airport transfers; [www.inkaterra.com](http://www.inkaterra.com)

#### Costa Rica Treehouse, Costa Rica

Just 150m from the beach on Costa Rica's Caribbean coast, this treehouse sleeps up to six. It is made of wood from fallen trees and the bathroom is built around the trunk of a 100 year Sangrillo tree. There's air conditioning and the lounge has a hammock and rocking chairs. From \$300 per night for two people, including breakfast; [www.costaricatreehouse.com](http://www.costaricatreehouse.com)

#### Sanctuary Sussi and Chuma, Zambia

Enjoy views over the Zambezi

from one of 12 luxury, air-conditioned tree houses built into the canopy of ebony trees and connected by stilted wooden walkways. The houses are in the heart of Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park, with abundant game viewing and Victoria Falls nearby. If you'd rather just relax, there's also a swimming pool to lounge by.



Treehotel 'Cube', Sweden

From \$2,165 per house (which sleeps up to four) per night, including meals and activities; [www.sanctuaryretreats.com](http://www.sanctuaryretreats.com)

#### Cedar Creek Treehouse, US

Perched 50ft up a 200-year-old Western Red Cedar near Mount Rainier National Park in Washington State, this treehouse comes with fabulous forest and mountain views. It is “off-the-grid”, powered by solar panels, and you can spend your days trout fishing and swimming. In a nearby fir tree is an observation platform 100ft high, perfect for bird watching. From \$300 for two per night, \$50 per extra person, maximum five; [www.cedarcreektreehouse.com](http://www.cedarcreektreehouse.com)

Susannah Butter