



## CenterParcs in Elveden Forest - Better Than the Adverts!

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**I always used to think how set up the CenterParcs TV ads looked but after actually having been there for the third time now, I know that those adverts highlight exactly what it's like there.**

There really are laughing families cycling through the forest: there really are endless varieties of wildlife running around outside your lodge and there really do seem to be hundreds of kids sprinting around the pool with big smiles plastered on their faces, clearly enjoying themselves. Just like the ads!

The lodges are dotted around everywhere. Ours have always been situated in the perfect place. This time, our Woodland Lodge was secluded behind the trees in a quiet clearing. It was as if we were the only people there. One point I have to make here is that it can be very embarrassing when you ride your bike up the front path, in the evenings, only to find a completely different family sitting at the table. Come on, we've all done it.

The lodges are modern yet homely. They are open but not too big, which makes for a warm and inviting atmosphere. The kitchens are highly equipped and have everything you need to make any sort of meal, although lots of people just opt for the take-away / delivery service!



To wake up one morning to find some ants scurrying around the kitchen is one thing, it's to be expected really, I mean we are in the middle of a forest here. But to have your sister bellow 'ANT! ANT!' and then five minutes later, squeal 'ewww get it off me!' in

your ear every time one comes into view is another. That was just plain annoying. The ant problem was sorted, as if by magic, straight away, no fuss. The whole lodge was 'de-anted' by the time we had had an hour or so in the pool and they were never seen again. I think Mum would like to have such an efficient 'cure' for the ants we get at home in the Summer.

Even though some of the lodges are relatively far away from the bustle of the main centre, it's still good fun to jump on a bike and cycle over there. The wide variety of bikes offer the more experienced cyclists down to the less experienced the bike they are best suited to. (Unless you're like me and don't really care which one you have.) Mum and Helena opted for the more sedate, traditional type whereas the rest of us had the mountain bike type. By the way, Mums and Dads alike can use bikes without having to worry about their little ones as they can be pulled along behind in a little carriage contraption which even has a canopy for if it's raining. Not only are these very efficient, but they're also extremely cute with a big 'Awww factor'. They are a definite plus point for young families getting around the area easily whilst having more fun doing so.



Just walking around CenterParcs is enough to tire you out. There's so much going on all around you. You can hear people laughing and joking on the High-Ropes and watch as the brave ones do the big leap and smile triumphantly as they realise what they've just accomplished. Or as you walk through the Sports Piazza place, you can watch the many games going on of badminton or tennis and suppress as giggle as no matter how hard they try, the very tiny ones never seem to be able to hit the ball back. It must be the ball's fault.

The pool in **Elveden CenterParcs** is so much fun and good for both adults and children. The Rapids have got to be the best thing going but you may end up with a couple bumps and bruises along the way. As well as the rapids there're also slides, jacuzzis, a plunge pool, a lazy river and of course the massive pool, equipped with a wave machine. You can stay there for as long as you want as there are cafes where you can grab some lunch, and tables and sun beds are situated around so you can relax by the pool side. Whether you're the tiniest of babies or the oldest of Grandads, there's endless fun to be had.



On the Saturday night of our long weekend, we went to the Forester's Inn to eat. The food was very appetising and the service was good and welcoming. (Our poor waitress's baby daughter had just come down with Chickenpox so Mum and her ended up talking about calomine lotion and whatever!) The restaurant / gastro pub was so relaxing that we ended up staying for hours and ate loads. We certainly needed that cycle ride back to the Lodge to work off at least some of the Chocolate Fudge Cake.

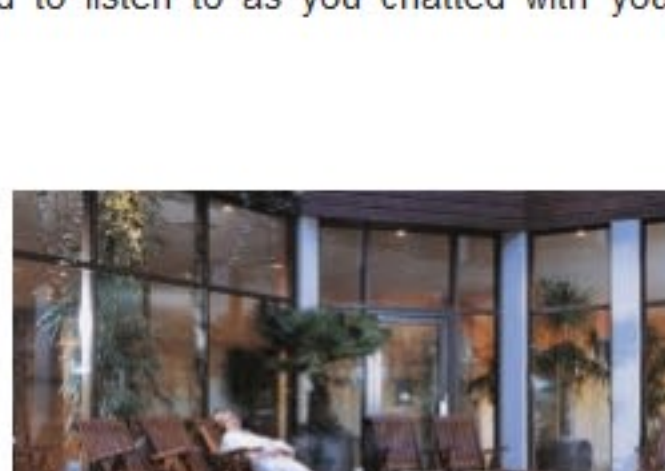
On the Sunday morning, we went to Huck's American Diner for their famous 'Jazz Brunch'. And oh my, was it a brunch! Doughnuts, muffins, full English, continental, chocolate fountain, just looking at it, put 2 stone on you. All the food was delicious and it was nice to sit down, relax with the Sunday papers and magazines and listen to the live jazz band. And eat of course. ....Eat and eat and eat.



The choice of foods on offer was enough to suit anyone's and everyone's taste or needs. There was everything from marshmallows covered in creamy chocolate to the more healthy Caesar Salad. The atmosphere was again very relaxing and homely and the jazz music was lovely to have in the background to listen to as you chatted with your

table. Or just to eat to.

Moving on from the endless amounts of delicious foods and restaurants (CenterParcs isn't just about food honest!), we also went to the Aqua Sana. The CenterParcs Aqua Sana is always a real treat and when you leave after your 3 hour session, you feel soooo clean and chilled, it's unbelievable.



The first floor consisted of different spa treatments which you could walk through at your own pace. The soothing atmosphere allowed you to just amble through the various rooms and do whatever you wanted to at your own pace. After a pummelling from the underwater jets in the Spa pool, we all lay back and relaxed on recliners with our faces covered in various gooey, conditioning face masks before moving into the Balinese room.

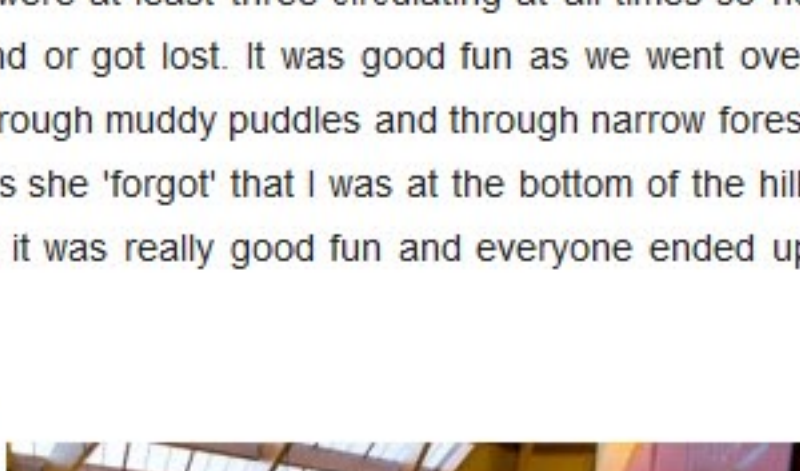
Upstairs was the more relaxation kind of thing. One of the relaxation rooms in particular, whose name escapes me, was pure heaven. A dark -not pitch black dark, just dimmed lighting - room lined with a comfy sofa and a calming water feature in the middle. So relaxing you could fall asleep. Relaxing, that is until your mum screams after having a very vivid dream of your sister getting decapitated and wakes you all up. Yeah, we weren't so relaxed after that either.

So as well as the relaxing activities and the pool and the restaurants, there are also more exciting and active things to do. On this particular occasion we went Quad-Biking while my mum had a facial in the spa. After one very traumatic incident on a go-karting ring a couple years ago I was actually feeling quite nervous but this wasn't helped when my sisters and Nigel (my Step-Dad) laughed as I drove into a bush. I don't really have an excuse for that either seeing as we were going at a very slow pace.



Quite embarrassing really. Anyway, the instructors were all very helpful and there were at least three circulating at all times so no one was left behind or got lost. It was good fun as we went over steep mud hills, through muddy puddles and through narrow forest pathways. After being shunted by Abbi, my sister Maddie's friend, as she 'forgot' that I was at the bottom of the hill, we headed back to take off our helmets and driving gear. All in all it was really good fun and everyone ended up having a great time.

Oh yeah, Mum, by the way, was 'glowing' when she came back from her hour and a half of pamper-time. Her Caritas Facial certainly did the trick as she was in a really good mood. She asked us all to feel how soft her face felt and although I'm not an expert on 46 year old women's faces, I'd say it did feel lovely.



**CenterParcs** is a really good place to go for a whole week or even just for a long weekend as we've done three times now. Or you can just go there as a day visitor to meet up with people already staying there. It's perfect for the whole family or a get together with friends. Despite the seemingly high costs, it's great fun and good value for money.

There's something for everybody and I can put my hand on my heart and say that you'd never get bored of the swimming pool and the rapids or the other fun activities you can do there.

So, to be fair, I guess the adverts were right after all.

**Megan Carr age 16, Cardiff**

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