

Enjoy the natural charms of the British countryside in this rural hideaway

I'd never been glamping before, so I wasn't quite sure what to expect on my three-night Lanterns & Larks experience, **writes Daniel Bailey.**

A spot of 'luxury camping' in a rural hideaway at the end of September, what a great way to squeeze out the last few dregs of summer, I thought.

There are three Lantern & Larks sites in the UK and we plumped for Exton Park, just a short trip down the A1 nestled in the heart of picturesque Rutland, the smallest county in England.

It was a wonderful opportunity for my wife Laura and I (along with our pet pooch Snoopy) to sample some comfort under canvas while taking in the natural charms of the Midlands countryside.

Our 'Osprey' lodge was one of four in a sheltered five-acre garden which slopes down to a beautiful ornamental lake, allowing you to make the most of the local tranquillity and impressive views.

You can comfortably sleep six in the tents, which have three bedrooms, solid deck flooring, a dining area, kitchen and there's even a separate shower room and toilet.

A large wood-burning stove is the warming heart of the lodge, which can be kept burning all night thanks to the huge basket of firewood provided, helping us keep away the seasonal chills.

All the bedrooms are roomy and equipped with comfortable soft mattresses and plush duvets, and there is also ample storage space to put away your holiday clutter and clothes.

This cosy retreat provides the perfect opportunity to sit back and listen out for the sensuous sounds of nature. So elegant and peaceful, it's practical features and chic finesse is just part of the Lanterns & Larks experience.

Watching the sun go down with a glass of wine on



Cosy comfort under canvas

A view of our tent at Exton Park and, inset, the bedroom.



LANTERN & LARKS

The lodge lit up at night, above, and, left, wining and dining.



the terrace was pure bliss, with the only the sounds coming from the quacking and splashing of the local wildlife.

Hot candle-lit meals were

enjoyed in the comfort of the dining area shortly after testing our culinary skills on the kitchen's butane gas hob, where we were able to rustle up quick curry and pasta dishes and top up on copious cups of tea.

Away from the tent, you can use the Honesty Shop, which isn't always manned but somewhere you can stock up on any camping necessities and take away

'iced' bottles to use in your cooler box. Here you can also find the site's only electricity point if you feel the need to charge up your phone or iPad.

Outside the campsite, Exton Park is definitely worth exploring. Home to the Gainsborough family, the parkland has existed since the 12th Century and boasts around 14 miles of footpaths and bridleways, along with some wonderful scenic views and historical sites.

It's perfect for a peaceful break or activity-filled family holiday, but for us it was the chance to enjoy a weekend of long country walks in the sunshine.

Saturday was spent getting our bearings with a short out-and-back trip to Exton village, where we found the impressive Fox & Hounds pub with lovely beer garden.

On Sunday we walked along the Viking Trail to nearby Greetham, where we visited the Black Horse for a pit stop, filling up on a superb home-made pie and

Travel facts

Website - www.lanternandlarks.co.uk

Locations - Bleasdale, Lancashire; Exton Park, Rutland; Sweffling Hall, Suffolk

Prices - From £289 for a three-night stay (Friday to Monday) or a four-night stay (Monday to Friday)

Contact - 01638 563478

chips before trudging back pre-sunset. Back on site, it was time to kick off the walking boots and rest those weary limbs, picking up a board game from the Honesty Shop on the way for our evening's entertainment.

Also worth mentioning is the outdoor fire pit, which you can hire for barbecues or simply use to huddle round, keep warm and heat up marshmallows.

Whether it's activity-filled family fun or peace and tranquillity you're after, there's every reason to light a lantern on this place.

Holiday ideas...

Loch Ness

Soak up the glamping experience Scottish-style in an "Armadilla" - a custom-built eco camping pod overlooking Glenurquhart. They're all en-suite, with fridge, tea-making facilities, LCD TV and barbecue area - and even have underfloor heating. The Cairngorm mountains are a short drive away, but of course, the biggest attraction is right on your doorstep - Loch Ness. www.lochnessglamping.co.uk

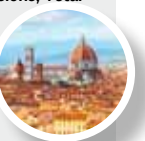
Wales

Channel your inner child with a treehouse holiday in Wales. Living Room Treehouses, in the heart of the Welsh mountains at Machynlleth, offer six individual tree houses - ranging from a height of 15ft to 30ft. There's no electricity - so you can enjoy romantic nights with lanterns and tea lights. www.living-room.co.uk

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