

GETAWAY

ADRIAN CAFFERY takes an action break in a tranquil corner of the Lake District

WANT the fun of a trampoline and a high ropes course without the fear of bouncing or falling to the ground?

The answer to your prayers lies at a UK first attraction in the Lake District.

Treetop Nets, near Windermere, is a mix of giant trampolines, bridges, walkways, slides and tunnels all made from ropes and nets traditionally used in trawling.

And it's suspended between trees, nine metres up.

The course was designed and built by Frenchman Cedric Chauvaud, a renowned sailor and rope expert who has helped researchers gain access to the highest canopies of the Amazon rainforest.

Having already created several treetop playgrounds in France, he brought a team of seven former sailors and fishermen to the Lake District to hand-sew the nets.

There's no need for a harness because you are completely surrounded by a three metre high wall of netting. So, while I bounced around like Tigger, my young daughter was a very happy Roo.

If this sounds a little tame for adrenaline junkies, they can get their fix at Treetop Trek, an adjacent Go Ape!-style high-ropes course with a series of rope bridges, daredevil leaps and zip wires.

Both Treetop attractions are at Brockhole, the Lake District Visitor Centre, where you can take your pick from boat trips, pony rides, trails, biking, archery, mini golf, an adventure playground or simply splashing around on the edge of Lake Windermere.

Our weekend in the Lakes got off to a frustrating start when delays on the M6 meant we didn't arrive at our holiday home, booked with The Good Life Cottage Company, until after nightfall.

But those pesky jams turned out to be a blessing in disguise because when we drew back the bedroom curtains in the morning we had a glorious surprise.

Holly Tree Cottage, in the village of Chapel Stile, a few miles north-west of Ambleside, has superb views across a mountain valley towards Lingmoor and The Langdale Pikes.



Cerys Caffery at Treetop Nets and (below) at the World of Beatrix Potter

Rope trick!



The waterfall and artists' Grotto at Rydal Hall

We had a similar kind of surprise at nearby Rydal Hall, a grand house dating back to 16th century with woodlands and gardens which are free for the public to explore.

Walking through the gardens,

alongside a stream, we found our way blocked by a simple little stone-built house which, unbeknown to us, held a magical secret.

With trepidation, we opened the door, stepped inside, and were gob-smacked by how a large window on the far wall so perfectly framed a waterfall and plunge pool.

The Grade II-listed summerhouse, called the Grotto, was built in 1668 to allow artists to paint in comfort, and became famous during the Picturesque movement (1780s to 1830s).

William Wordsworth, who lived at nearby Rydal Mount, mentioned it in verse and his friend described how he took "much pleasure in exhibiting this beautiful retreat".

Back at Holly Tree Cottage, the visitor's book revealed that a previous sale of the house was handled by the solicitor William Heelis, the husband of author Beatrix Potter.

There's no escaping Beatrix's lasting legacy in this part of the Lakes,

especially this year with many events planned to commemorate the 150th anniversary of her birth.

With Peter Rabbit-loving children aged five and two, we spent a day learning all about the children's author, who found inspiration in the stunning scenery.

First stop was the World of Beatrix Potter, in Bowness upon Windermere, which brilliantly recreates the sights, sounds and even smells of her celebrated characters.

Our kids were wild with excitement as they discovered Jemima Puddle-duck's woodland glade, Mr Tod's underground home and Mrs Tiggy-winkle's Kitchen.

In the Peter Rabbit Garden is a bronze statue of three children with Jemima which was unveiled by Bridget Jones actress Renée Zellweger, who played Beatrix in a 2006 film.

Visitors can also take a virtual walk of Beatrix's beloved Cumbrian countryside, 360-degree computer projections and narrations bringing each inspirational scene to life.

From the World of Beatrix Potter it was a short car ferry journey to the author's home, Hill Top Farm, in Sawrey, which she bequeathed to the National Trust.

As Beatrix requested, the 17th century house has remained untouched since she died in 1943, so you can easily imagine her working away at the writing desk.

Hill Top helped inspire Beatrix and copies of her books have been placed around the house, bookmarked at pages where a room, or items in the room, feature in the story.

Just down the road in Hawkshead is the Beatrix Potter Gallery where originals of her watercolour illustrations are on display in a building that was once her husband's office.

And five minutes from there is the mock medieval Wray Castle, on the shores of Lake Windermere, where Beatrix stayed on her first trip to the Lakes.

Rather than the paintings, furniture and antiques you might expect to find in a National Trust property, the tired-looking interior is now a playground for little explorers.

They can enter the Peter Rabbit Adventure rooms or they can dress up as princes and princesses and build a castle out of foam bricks.

After such a busy day on the trail of Beatrix Potter we were left panting more than her famous bunny after he's been chased by Mr McGregor!

NEED TO KNOW

■ **HOLLY** Tree Cottage is in Chapel Stile, which has a village store and inn. It's in a row of traditional quarryman cottages, built around 1870 to house workers in the nearby slate and gunpowder works. The wash houses over a mountain stream at the end of the row are still there. The love that owners John and Hazel have for the Lake District is clearly reflected in the cottage, which has a lounge with open fire, a newly fitted kitchen / dining room, main bathroom (with shower over), double bedroom with en suite toilet, twin

bedroom with en suite shower room, and a drying closet which comes in handy for the Lake District's occasional rainy days. There is private parking for one car directly outside the door and an outdoor seating area to enjoy the views across the valley over a meal or a coffee. It's very centrally located for the Lake District's many attractions Other must-sees include Dove Cottage & Wordsworth Museum (4.4 miles) and Coniston Gondola (7.3 miles). For more information visit www.thegoodlifecottagete.co.uk or call 015394 37417.



Holly Tree Cottage and the stunning view from the bedroom window