

Great Higham Oast is a remote cottage that's perfect for short family visits

Great UK days out

ENGLAND

JANUARY 9: Learn how to make a kite at Montacute House in **Somerset** and then head to the hills to see if it will fly. The workshop is free, admittance to the house is £10 for adults, £4.70 for children. More information: www.national-trust.org.uk

JANUARY 13-15: Canary Wharf in **London** will be celebrating winter with an ice sculpting festival. More information: www.visitlondon.com

JANUARY 16: Head to the **Devon** village of Stoke Gabriel for its Wassail cider ceremony. Kids can make their own lanterns before the blessing of the cider apple trees. More information: www.stokegabriel.co.uk

JANUARY 22: Roundheads and Cavaliers will clash at Nantwich in **Cheshire** for Holly Holy Day, the annual Civil War battle re-enactment which ends with more fun in the town centre. More information: www.hollyhollyday.org

JANUARY 28: Take a special



Go kite-flying in Somerset

after-hours tour of **York** Minster. You'll have to be aged 16 or over but you'll get to see the Chapter House roof as well as other parts not usually on show to visitors. More information: www.yorkminster.org

SCOTLAND

JANUARY 8: Learn how to make your garden more friendly to wildlife in a talk at Greenbank Garden near **Glasgow**. Adults £5.50, children £4. More info: www.nts.org.uk

JANUARY 11: Head to Burghhead in **Morayshire** for the historic Burning of the Clavie. Dating back to pre-Roman times, this festival involves a tar-filled barrel being set alight and paraded around town. More information: www.hogmanay.net

WALES

TODAY AND TOMORROW: It's the last chance to get your skates on at **Cardiff** Winter Wonderland before it closes for the season. There's a huge ice rink, fairground rides and food and drink stalls. Ice skating costs from £5.50. For more information visit www.cardiffwinterwonderland.com

SARAH TURNER



By **FIONA WHITTY**

IT'S not easy to get away with the children and come back feeling chilled and pampered, but I reckon I have just found the perfect way to do it.

My stressed-out husband Tim and I would have loved a spa hotel break, yet with four children it was neither practical nor affordable.

So we decamped to a remote cottage with our friends John and Joanna and their kids... and shipped in therapists and caterers to add a touch of luxury.

The result? The adults went home feeling like they'd had a break for once while the young ones still had a ball.

Our holiday home was Great Higham Oast, a four-bedroom cottage in Doddington, Kent, set in stunning countryside between Sittingbourne and Faversham.

Our pre-ordered groceries arrived shortly after we did, so we were free for games on the private tennis court instead of having to search out the nearest supermarket.

My water-mad daughter Rosie, five, wanted us all to take a dip in the outdoor pool which, although heated, was a bit chilly for the adults' liking.

But we relented and took the plunge with Rosie's brothers Harvey, nine, Max, seven, and two-year-old Freddie, along with our friends' children, Laura, nine, James, seven, and Fraser, four.

A great thing about self-catering is that you can feed the children early, get them to bed and carry on enjoying the evening. So when Tim, Joanna, John and I woke from a late night and too many glasses of wine, we were ready to be pampered by mobile beautician Sally Kent and holistic massage therapist Suzanne Coldwell.

Sally and Suzanne are more used to hen parties and girlfriends' get-togethers but were unfazed by our lively little ones as they set up their treatment rooms with tranquil music and fluffy towels.

Suzanne gave each of us a stress-busting 40-minute back, neck and head massage. Tim nodded off and I felt so mellow I struggled to leave her cosy couch.

Sally then treated Joanna and I to a luxurious aromatherapy facial, a hand and foot massage and a toenail reshape and polish which left us both looking and feeling so much younger.

As we adults indulged ourselves, the children had their own winding-down time with a DVD in the lounge - so every one of us was happy and rested.

But nothing good can last forever and

CREATE YOUR OWN SPA BREAK ..ON A DIY BUDGET

Why pay full whack when you can save with friends?



Fiona and family had a relaxing low-cost stay



Outdoor heated pool was a hit with the children



Inside Great Higham Oast

What's the deal?

● A TWO-night break at Great Higham Oast starts at £396. Book through www.mulberrycottages.com or telephone 01233 813087.

● CONTACT beautician Sally Kent on 07770 680145 and holistic massage therapist Suzanne Coldwell on 07956 447814 or go to www.suzannecoldwelltherapies.co.uk (treatments £35pp)

● JOHN and Deborah Hill of Pumpkin Catering can be contacted at www.pumpkin-catering.co.uk or on 01227 263082.

● For more info go to www.visitkent.co.uk

tartlets, Spanish beef casserole with sweet potato mash and blackberry and apple crumble.

John runs Pumpkin with his wife Deborah from their Whitstable home. They cater for small dinner parties like ours up to cocktail bashes for 600. They have even cooked at events attended by the Queen.

At £50 a head it's not cheap - but when you think how much a restaurant meal and drinks would cost and add babysitters and cabs, like our whole DIY weekend, it was very reasonable.

It worked out that our stay at Great Higham Oast, with the massages, beauty therapy and meals we enjoyed, cost £191.50 per adult. A spa hotel with the therapy and meals we had would have cost us about £470 each.

After John packed up left, we headed off to bed. After all, an early-morning dip in the pool was on the agenda. Well, you can't relax all the time can you?

the kids were soon badgering us into heading back into the outdoor pool for some cold water therapy.

Having enjoyed the "spa" part of our weekend, we fancied a night off cooking. After whipping up a simple spaghetti bolognese for the children, we looked forward to local caterers Pumpkin arriving to make a tasty three-course meal for the four of us.

Boss John Hill came at 7pm armed with the ingredients, changed into his

black uniform and set to work in the kitchen.

From then on, he was our chef, waiter and washer-upper all in one. Luckily, the children had been up since 6am and we were able to get them to off bed early and enjoy our night of indulgence in peace.

We chatted over wine as John skillfully prepared smoked haddock