

Family adventures

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BEST FOR
AGES 6-16

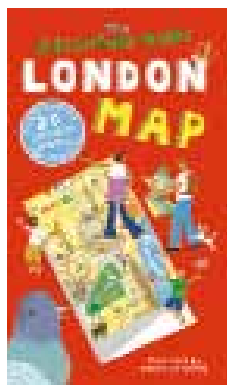
The Ranch at Rock Creek, Montana, USA

THIS PART OF THE STATES is getting busy, with extremely high-end adventure ranches opening up to families keen on cowboy experiences in the wild. This one has to be the most beautiful, not just because you're right on the river, but also because of where you stay: proper log cabins, or proper pitched tents if you'd prefer to be more low-key. Many hotels offer 'private accommodation', but this is different – a house in which you could very easily live, if you were crazily lucky. The kitchens have huge fridges, islands, and glasses in every cupboard; the sitting room has fires, books, and chairs covered in thick, red furs. You have your own garden, beautifully tended to, with yellow poppies and delphiniums, and daisies with heads as big as lampshades. Little ones spend hours catching butterflies or paddling at the river's edge, while the blond Montana grass chases itself across the hills behind. There

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is even a porch with rocking chairs, from which you can watch partridges flicking dust over themselves in the shade of a pine and the leaves of sage-green aspens fluttering like a million fans in the breeze. Even the horses are particularly handsome – patchwork and palomino, with strong noses, they're like proper Apache steeds. Riding, hiking, fishing – it's all here. And there's a pool. It feels like a real treat to swim and lie in the sun between wild bouts of activity. But then, this is a consummate place; girls in checked shirts rustle up pale ales, cute young guys play 40/40 with the children on the lawn, while you wait for the cookout. There's a shop, a spa, a bowling alley, a weekly rodeo. Yes, it's structured (activities tend to be in groups, and time-keeping is important), but it's fun whoever you are, even if you've never ridden a horse before. And most of all, of course, it's knockout beautiful. MELINDA STEVENS

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TOP MARKS... go to the enchanting new Adventure Walks London Map, illustrated by Robert Littleford. It's wonderfully child-friendly and colourful, and not only lists the best sightseeing walks but also includes where to buy the coolest ice creams, sweetest sweets and crispest chips. www.londonadventurewalks.co.uk, £4.95



JUST AROUND THE CORNER

It'll be upon you before you know it, so be sure to book in for a week of bucket-and-spade summer fun at **Hafod Cae Maen**, the only private house to rent within the Portmeirion Conservation Area in Wales. It's easy to forget how beautiful beaches close to home can be. In a truly magical setting, high above the village, this grand Edwardian villa has spectacular views over the Dwyryd Estuary and the remote Rhinogydd Mountains. When the tide is in, have picnics on gorgeous, deserted beaches; when it's out, you can literally walk across the sand from one headland village to the next. Explore the curious sub-tropical woodlands and, on sunny days, sit in the two acres of garden and eat alfresco, making as much noise as you like. There are two spacious bedrooms (one with a four-poster and balcony), two twin bedrooms and two family bathrooms, as well as two sitting rooms, a piano and space for travel cots and masses of toys. Daily housekeeping can be arranged, and the chef will cook homely meals on request, from lasagnes to casseroles. Portmeirion itself is like a fairy-tale village for children, with its own train and a pirate ship. 07776 259768; www.historichouseretreats.com. Sleeps eight, from £1,300 per week

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