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# THE BEST FAMILY HOLIDAYS 2023

BRILLIANT BREAKS TO CONNECT THE GENERATIONS

EDITED BY LYDIA BELL



PORTO SANI, GREECE

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## THE BEST FAMILY HOLIDAYS



### APPENINE ADVENTURE OASYHOTEL, TUSCANY, ITALY

"There will be wolves," was all the incentive needed to stir enthusiasm in my perma-wired boys, aged 10 and 13, for a few nights at Oasyhotel, a new collection of sixteen Scandinavian-inspired wooden lodges perched 3,600 feet up a mountain in the Tuscan Apennines. As we sat around a campfire on our first evening, mesmerised by the crystal-clear sky, the wolves felt tantalisingly close, even if seeing these elusive animals in daylight is rare. Wolves spotted: zero, but the deep nature immersion had a magnetic pull regardless. The entire site is a World Wide Fund for Nature reserve, with regenerative principles at its core, so wildlife, including deer, wild boar and foxes, roams free. But the real magic was the thrill of whizzing up and down mountain trails at speed: we were kitted out with electric bikes on arrival. This former hunting estate is set in more than 2,470 acres of wild-flower meadows and beech and pine forests. We visited in deepest autumn, but in the summer a lake offers swimming, paddleboarding and kayaking. For grateful parents, there is yoga and an on-site spa offering transportative massages. And for kids, the young and utterly charming staff brought a relaxed and fun energy, even during the swanky dinners in Le Felci, one of two restaurants. The ecological ethos extends to the food: 70 per cent of the produce used at the hotel comes from the mountain, so breakfast included the estate's own organic yoghurts, cheeses, jams and juices, while dinners were mostly rich, hearty and meaty Tuscan dishes of pork, rabbit and beef. The younger and pickier guests among us were plied with fantastic burgers, cotoletta cutlets and fries on repeat. Less popular with my snowflakes was a morning spent making caciotta cheese in the dairy (my idea of heaven), but feeding the farm's Limousin cattle next door distracted them. It's hard to imagine cows having this transfixing effect at home, but on the mountain, nature wove its magic. CLARE COULSON *Doubles from £370; oasyhotel.com*



### ROYAL RETREAT EMIRATES PALACE, ABU DHABI, UAE

My teenage son Alfie and I are a little late to the game of padel, the tennis-meets-squash hybrid popping up in resorts around the world, but we're doing our best to catch up on a beach court on the Persian Gulf. Trying to volley the ball as it bounces off the glass walls, we're distracted by the white-marble domes of Qasr Al Watan palace in one direction and a month-old camel skittering around the sand in the other. It's the sort of surreal composition that's easy to get used to here. Coaxing my son around an Impressionism exhibition at Louvre Abu Dhabi later that day, we're struck by 19th-century paintings of the fledgling French seaside. What, I wondered, would Seurat have made of this Arabian riviera?

The Emirates Palace can be a place of supersized spectacle – a desert Versailles of gold leaf and triumphal arches – but it's also surprisingly intimate. Newly adopted by Mandarin Oriental, it runs at least three kids' camps a year, promising am-dram, painting, water balloons, a lazy river and glamping. Not everything is structured, though: one afternoon chef Luigi Stinga shoos my son and another teen into the kitchen for an impromptu pizza masterclass; the next morning Alex the falconer puts his gauntlet on Alfie's hand and films his hawk in slo-mo as it takes off, a majestic brown spectre of talons and beak.

A breakfast trip one day takes us out by speedboat to sit munching croissants on a sandbar, keeping watch for dolphins. A beach holiday with very few rainy days. RJ *Doubles from £600; mandarinoriental.com*

