



The Jennings Family with Steve Backshall and 'The Faraway Treehouse'

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Winner of Center Parcs UK's Top Treehouse Competition Revealed

'The Faraway Treehouse' in Norwich has gained the coveted title of UK's Top Treehouse, as judge and adventurer Steve Backshall has revealed the winner found as part of Center Parcs' nationwide search.

Launched to celebrate the arrival of four new treehouses at Center Parcs, Elveden Forest the contest saw fierce competition from entries across the UK. Coming out on top was 'The Faraway Treehouse', which won the hearts of the judging panel.

The winning treehouse was built by the Jennings' family, from Norwich, as a joint project between dad Matthew and his six-year-old daughter Ruby, with mum Becki acting as assistant.

The winner was dreamt up when Ruby thought she saw a fairy down at the bottom of the garden after reading the fantastical Enid Blyton series, 'The Faraway Tree', with her parents at bed times. She became so captivated by the tale, her dad Matthew, an Architectural Technologist, began to collect recycled wood from the local area to create Ruby's very own magical treehouse. What followed was two months of busy weekends, where Ruby – complete with her own hard hat and tools – and her father worked to build the treehouse that had only previously existed in Ruby's imagination.

A shortlist of ten was revealed earlier this summer, including treetop creations complete with double-length slides and climbing frames as well as family-made structures that has been passed down multiple generations. However the judging panel, comprised of Backshall; CEO of Center Parcs, Martin Dalby; and Center Parcs' 'Chief Treehouse Builder' Tom Courtney, were blown away by the imagination behind 'The Faraway Treehouse', the teamwork involved and the ongoing commitment to improving and evolving the treehouse as a space that the entire family can enjoy.

One such example of this is on the morning Ruby turned five, she visited the treehouse as normal to find a new addition – a new little blue wooden door, steps and windows at the base of the tree, for her favourite character 'Moonface' to live in. Since then Ruby has played in her treehouse through all seasons and all weather, eating her meals in there, birdwatching and imagining her own adventures.

QUOTES

Matthew Jennings said:

"We are so excited to have won the Center Parcs UK's Top Treehouse title. Ruby and I spent almost every weekend for three months working tirelessly to build something that matched her creativity and we're so proud of what we have made. Ruby is ecstatic that her treehouse has been chosen, and as a family we can't wait to visit a Center Parcs Treehouse. Not only does 'The Faraway Treehouse' give us so much joy as a family, it just shows that a small budget and quality time spent together can really turn into something special. This is just the beginning, if I have my way we will keep adding to the garden for years to come."

Steve Backshall said:

“I’ve loved seeing all the entries flood in from around the country and it was really tough deciding on a winner as there was such an array of structures submitted. As a judge the number one thing I was looking for was a project that involved the whole family. With The Faraway Treehouse you can see the input and creativity from the whole family, particularly Ruby who clearly has a passion for fairies.

“I think one of the coolest things about it is the little touches from fairy doors and windows, to a ships bell to announce your arrival and the signs that invite you in – it’s simply a place that is meant to make your imagination run wild. It’s not just a building, this treehouse tells a tale and in my opinion, any place that can do that is really very special.”

CEO of Center Parcs Martin Dalby said:

“The quality of ‘The Faraway Treehouse’ was absolutely fantastic and it was great to see the Jennings family spending time together building and decorating it. The story behind this particular treehouse really tied into one of the key Center Parcs focuses - spending time as a family – and we were really taken by the story of the build and Ruby’s imagination.”

Tom Courtney, Center Parcs Chief Treehouse Builder added

“I was particularly impressed with the small touches in ‘The Faraway Treehouse’ – from the recycled wood materials, decorations, planting and other little touches such as the blue wooden door. A lot of love has gone into it and there is still time for Ruby to be her own treehouse builder as she now has the coveted UK Top Treehouse title!”

TOP TIPS

For families that have been inspired by the UK’s Top Treehouse entries, and would like to have a go at creating their own, Steve Backshall has shared some top tips of key things to think about before starting out, no matter the size of garden or budgets:

Don’t worry too much about the height

Being just off the floor has as much of a magical feel as towering up high in the canopy so don’t concern yourself too much with the height – it’s about creating something you can enjoy together.

Consider the tree (if you have one)

If you’re lucky enough to have a number of big trees in your garden then pick one with a sturdy trunk and branches. If you’re opting for a lower treehouse, try to pick a tree or bush with low-hanging branches so you’re nestled in the leaves, creating the illusion of being up high.

Size and shape

Treehouses don't have to be a set size or even look like a house – go crazy with the design.

Celebrate the natural environment

Create a décor that's in line with the treetop adventures you want to have. The beauty of treehouses is their ability to encourage the imagination, so don't worry about it being perfect.

Entry (and exit!) is key

One of the most entertaining parts of a treehouse is how you get in and out, and it's also a fantastic opportunity to have some fun and think creatively.

It's not just for the kids

Don't forget about yourself in the design. Make sure it will be comfortable for you to get inside and play too. Also remember that kids will grow up, so make sure all ages can enjoy the space.

Consider what you're overlooking

Don't build a treehouse too close to a neighbour's house, or with all the windows looking in to their garden.

Don't forget your safety

Please consider safety throughout the design and construction phases – from a stable floor and durable access/exit to always having someone spotting you while you build.

The full collection of entries can be viewed on Center Parcs UK Facebook page.

For more information on the Treehouses at Center Parcs:

www.centerparcs.co.uk/accommodation/treehouses

Notes to Editors

1. Center Parcs has five Villages across the UK; Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire, Elveden Forest in Suffolk, Longleat Forest in Wiltshire, Whinfell Forest in Cumbria and Woburn Forest in Bedfordshire which opened to guests on 6 June 2014
2. As the leader in the UK short break holiday market, Center Parcs regularly achieves average annual occupancy in excess of 97%
3. Center Parcs offers weekend, (Friday to Monday) or midweek (Monday to Friday) breaks and welcomes over 2 million guests each

- year, with 96% of guests expressing an intention to return
4. The Center Parcs concept is to provide a range of high quality accommodation, shops, restaurants and exceptional leisure facilities, carefully nestled amongst 400 acres of protected forest environment
 5. This concept originated in Holland in 1967, with the first UK Center Parcs opening in 1987. Center Parcs is now a separate entity in the UK
 6. Center Parcs has been awarded the following accolades since 2008: the Green Business Award for Biodiversity Protection, Visit Britain 5 Star Rating, Hospitality Assured, Biodiversity Benchmark - Land Management, Carbon Trust Standard, Good Spa Guide Award, ISO14001, Investors in People
 7. Center Parcs has recently been announced '[Best Family Holiday Provider](#)' in the Tommy's Awards for the eleventh year in a row

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