

The logo for RHS Wakehurst, featuring the text 'RHS Wakehurst' in a white serif font with a red underline, set against a background of autumn foliage.

Travel Writer

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An hour-and-a-half from our Hampshire home is RHS Wakehurst in West Sussex. Having visited RHS Wisley we thought we knew what to expect; basically lots of inspiring formal gardens. Not so here. Wakehurst is 500 acres of wild botanic gardens, which is a lovely surprise. There are plants and trees from around the world, but probably the greatest aspect of a visit here is that you can relax. Yes, even with children.

Social distancing is easy here and facemasks only need to be worn in the toilets and the visitor centre. We have come prepared.

It is a hot day, 33 °C to be precise and so sweat is already dripping down us.

We head off in a straight line to the lakes and there are so many wonderful tall trees that we regularly find ourselves in welcome shade as we slowly stroll.



It feels as if you are walking down a country lane because the paths are tarmac but there is no traffic to worry about, which is ideal.

So, while the masses are crammed onto the beaches, we are able to roam at leisure without a care.

Along the way we marvel at the ever-changing landscape, up hill and down, and spot some wonderful reddy brown dragon flies that we have not seen elsewhere.

Lots of them in fact. There are pleasant scents and aromas and it is a joy to the senses. This is what the holidays are about. You don't need to jet off to some far flung destination, queuing in airport lounges and then suffering quarantine each way. Just get out and explore Britain.

We, well I should say Caroline really, does worry because we have been to a number of gardens over these holidays that the little people might get a bit bored of them. Thankfully she is proved wrong.

Yes, they do begin to wilt like the finest of summer blooms when they discover that every bench we come across is already taken. But the great thing about these trips is that you never know what you will find. So as we mooch around the lakes admiring the views, in time



we stumble upon a picnic area complete with benches in the shade that nobody else has found. Perfect and just in time for lunch. And as we sit, there is the welcome chirruping sound of crickets.

We don't really walk that far today but in the sheer heat it's quite an effort to do much walking reminding Caroline and I of holidays in Italy and Bulgaria.

After lunch we head back to another lake where we find a bench. Caroline and I are able to have a brief cuddle while the children watch the ducks. Harriett returns to us while Henry (4) and Heidi (7) amuse themselves by feeding the ducks with blackberries, which we discover are safe for them and very much loved.

This occupies the ducks and the children for the best part of half an hour, if not 45 minutes. A welcome break.

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Beside our bench is a large stone slope that Henry and Heidi enjoy throwing their empty drinks bottles down and racing against each other.



They'll make fun out of anything. And before you know it it's time to make our way back home. We walk past a brick maze, which Harriett enjoys completing.

As we head past the garden dedicated to plants from Japan we spy some beautiful maples with their autumnal looking leaves.

In the visitor centre, Caroline and I make our way out to the plant centre where it is impossible for us not to leave without buying some of these wonderful plants.

