

GOING WILD AT WAKEHURST

By Tim Saunders, Travel Correspondent



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.

We arrive at quarter past eleven having wrongly anticipated how long it would take us to travel the 65 miles. So although we have printed out our ticket for the 10.30am slot, I smile sheepishly and hope that will suffice to gain entry. It is. Social distancing is easy here and facemasks only need to be worn in the toilets (although one gent doesn't bother) and the visitor centre. We have come prepared.

It is a hot day, 33 degrees Celsius to be precise, 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, uphill and down, and spot some wonderful reddy-brown dragonflies 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 are so lucky to have such a place to visit comparatively close to home. We, well I should say Caroline really, does worry, in fact it's her favourite pastime and her particular worry on this occasion is that 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 me of holidays in Italy and Bulgaria.

For more information, visit www.kew.org/wakehurst.

Watch the videos at www.travelwriter.biz

