



A DAY OUT AT WEST DEAN GARDENS

The children are now of an age where they can begin to appreciate the finer things in life... to a degree. It is still a great struggle at times with Henry (5) who likes to do what he wants when he wants and woe betide you if you try to interfere with this. It's all my fault, it's in the genes.

And so we venture to West Dean Gardens near Chichester; a botanist's delight and a place of tranquillity and beauty for the rest of us to thoroughly enjoy.

The grounds are vast and there are some magnificent tall trees, flowers and shrubs. As we arrive we are surprised to find a money plant, like the ones we have at home. But this one is absolutely enormous, stood outside and priced at £200. This is the great thing about visiting places like this; you pick up interesting ideas that you otherwise simply would not. There are also not that many people about so social distancing is not a problem at all. Adults are asked to wear facemasks in some of the greenhouses (but many don't bother) as well as the toilets where only two people are allowed at a time.

It's a changeable August day, one minute hot and the next threatening to rain. We arrive at lunchtime and thankfully there are plenty of benches from which to choose and we make our way towards one. We've brought some homemade cheese and tomato quiche and tuck into it. Henry does not though; he struggles with eating food that is mixed together. An apple and banana satisfies him. We hope that as the children grow up life will become easier. Heidi (8) and Henry (5) do enjoy a good argument about anything you care to imagine and it takes a good hour-and-a-half before the dynamic duo actually start appreciating the fact that they are on a family outing where we all hope to enjoy ourselves.

To encourage them in this endeavour we play a bit of catch, which then eases them into the idea of walking

round the gardens. We arrive at a grand pergola, which looks to be made from oak and covers a sizeable ornamental pond. "I love this," says Harriett (10), our placid eldest child, who generally manages to deal with the other two with ease until she has enough and then starts shouting the odds! The long pergola leads to a charming room with an etched glass window that bears a thought-provoking passage from a Wordsworth poem about how we are dust and yet bond to form society. Again something you don't expect to find and it's really refreshing. This building has a flint floor and the design can be found in what Henry calls the witches houses elsewhere in the gardens. These are wood structures with thatched roofs and provide an excellent hiding place for the children, who eventually tear about and let off steam. They're also somewhere for the adults to sit and admire the surroundings, briefly.

It is very relaxing just ambling around enjoying the scents from various brightly coloured flowers and plants. We spot some that we have in our own garden. The children decide that the sunken garden is an excellent place for hide and seek. There are benches for Caroline and I to rest. The children dash about thoroughly enjoying themselves. Success. We while away a happy half an hour. "I want to go to the toilet," Henry announces yet again so we all march back to them. Afterwards we explore the kitchen garden, which is brimming with wonderful produce.

When we return home Heidi puts one of her money plant cuttings outside in the hope that it will grow like the one at West Dean.

For more information visit:

www.westdean.org.uk/gardens

Watch the videos:

www.travelwriter.biz