

# A storybook escape

From morning coffees watching otters play in the river to evenings spent under the stars, the secluded luxury of this New Forest holiday home gives it a fairytale feeling

**W**hen you're getting away from the rat race in the hope of switching off, a few things make a big difference: scenery, serenity and someone else doing all the thinking for you. Undercastle Cottage, the only 5-star, dog-friendly cottage in the New Forest, gets this bang on.

The welcome is thoroughly warm, thanks to its inviting cottage core interior, underfloor heating rising through chunky flagstone, and ready-waiting treats: think homemade scones and blackberry jam, sunny yellow butter, local cheeses, cider and ale. There's no squabbling about who forgot to bring the tea, only whether to take it fireside in the cosy oak-framed living room or potter a few steps to sip it by the water's edge.

Set on the banks of the Hampshire Avon river, this is an instantly soothing spot, with the only visitors being the woodland creatures going about their business: grazing ponies, drifting birds of prey – even playful otters slipping by in the morning. Bird feeders frame the wide windows

of the Fishing Lodge (which is separate to the main house), meaning you can watch for the swift blue flash of kingfishers from the comfort of your bed.

It's an angler's paradise here too. The river is home to some of the best coarse and fly fishing in the country, and the cottage has 2,500 metres of private fishing rights. Such is the draw, it was featured on the BBC's *Gone Fishing* with Bob Mortimer and Paul Whitehouse.

Walkers are equally well catered for, with maps and guides making easy work of vigorous hikes to short meanders. Just 15 minutes away is Woodgreen village, with a community shop for quickie supplies and a family-run pub, The Horse and Groom, which serves up a great atmosphere, real ale and generous portions (the venison pie was a favourite).

Eating, drinking, wandering and nature-watching – all you need to do is pause a moment to take it in. OcadoLife editor Jessie Lear stayed at the cottage with five friends and two very happy dogs.

