

CENTERPARCS /2/ RIGHT ALL ALONG

At last, we **pulled up at** the village. **By then**, the rain **had eased up** to a **steady drizzle** which **kept up throughout** our stay. Perhaps I **would have enjoyed** the weekend more if the sun **had been shining**. But **I don't think so**.

At the guardhouse, a smiley lady gave us the keys to our "villa." All the **staff** at CenterParcs are incredibly smiley - **creepily so**, I began to think after two days in their care. We **were allowed to** drive up to our "villa" to **unload** our luggage, but then we had to leave the car in a **vast** car-park, **20 minutes' walk away from** the centre of the "village." (Rule book, page 109: "**Following** a recent **increase in** the unauthorised use of cars, we have **reluctantly** decided to introduce a **tow-away scheme**") A clever idea, because it **made** any escape **extremely** difficult.

On our first night, we **were treated to** a **free** meal at Lucianos, described in the booklet as "a **delightful** Mediterranean restaurant, with tables **both indoors** and **outdoors**." **In fact**, all of Lucianos is indoors, **since** it stands with other "themed" restaurants in the vast greenhouse in the middle of the "village."

This will sound **monstrously ungrateful**, but the meal was **easily** the most disgusting that I **have tasted** since my school days. I **opted for** steak, **thinking** that nobody could **go wrong with** that. But it was served in a sauce that reminded me of melted toffee. The **bill for the six of us came to** L126.

The smiley waitress seemed nice, **though**. She **picked up** quickly **on** our seven-year-old's first name, and **kept dropping** it into every sentence. I **wondered exactly how** nice she was, however, when we **were given a score-sheet at** the end of the meal, on which we had to **mark** her **performance**, from one (bad) to five (good). One category was "Learned and used guests' names **if appropriate**". So if she **had failed** to remember the seven-year-old's name, she **would probably have been marched off** to the cooler.

What can be said for CenterParcs? Well, the two youngest **loved** the "sub-tropical swimming paradise". I think that all of them **enjoyed riding** their bicycles on the **traffic-free** roads. And I know that lots of parents actively enjoy it, **coming back year after year, actually paying to surrender** their freedom and eat that **revolting** food. But I **loathed** every minute, **just as I had expected to**.

My wife, who **hated** it too, was suitably **ashamed, admitting** that I **had been right all along**. It was almost **worth it for that**.