

Upriver country

By ROSALIND LESTER



It takes little more than an hour to escape to the green and peaceful Ardennes for a long weekend. We took our baby daughter to the 'Pays de la Haute Lesse' and found plenty to discover in the area.

Wooded hills, tranquil streams and small slate villages make up the 'land of the upper Lesse' around the source of the River Lesse in the Belgian province of Luxembourg. My husband, our five-month-old daughter and I spent a long weekend there in mid-May last year. A relative lent us her cottage in the village of Daverdisse. We had never visited the area before, so set about exploring on our first day.

The weather in May was warm enough to go for a walk, but we took our rain jackets as you never know in Belgium! Our daughter was still small enough to be carried in the sling by my husband, and I carried a backpack with changing supplies. We did a few nappy changes in the forest, so a travel changing mat and plastic bag were very useful. A hat, sunscreen, warm and waterproof layers for baby were also a good idea.

Local walks

We chose to follow one of the many trails on a local map to the next village, **Redu**.

Also known as the *village du livre* (village of books), Redu is home to 15 bookshops and hosts a literary festival (*la fête du livre*) every Easter weekend.

Redu is also famous for its delicious raspberries. You can hand-pick your own in the summer at 'La Framboiserie', and buy produce there year-round.

Those with older children can follow 'Le Circuit de Tania': a two-hour, 5 km walk with riddles to solve along the way. The game booklet can be picked up at the Redu tourism office or downloaded as an app.

Options to walk with a buggy are more limited but 'Le Passage des Chèvres' (path of the goats) is a paved, buggy-friendly 4km trail starting and ending in Redu.

Sohier, one of the official 'most beautiful villages of Wallonia', is also worth a potter. There is a short 'flower walk' to follow around the village during the summer season.

Other outdoor activities

E-bikes and mountain bikes are available to hire and numerous mountain bike events are organised throughout the year. **Horse riding** is also popular, including a permanent 22km trail around Wellin. The river provides a beautiful location for **fishing** (www.maisondelapeche.be), while **kayaking** is possible from Daverdisse from October to March. **Wellness** centres in Libin or Redu allow for some relaxation after all the outdoor activity.

Museums

Walking back to Daverdisse, we spotted huge satellite dishes across the fields - the **Euro Space Centre** science museum is located at Transinne. Older children may also enjoy small **local museums** focusing on traditional tradecrafts, such as clog-making and a bell foundry.

Where to eat

We self-catered in our cottage and also ate out a couple of times. We found that local restaurants are used to young families. Several good restaurants in the villages offer local **seasonal produce**, including trout, game and the ham 'Jambon d'Ardennes'. We liked 'Le Fournil' in Redu. Try one of the many local **beers** including some of Belgium's best Trappist varieties (Rochefort, Chimay and Orval).

Nearby

The caves (*grottes*) and wildlife park at **Han-Sur-Lesse** are a must-see in Belgium. Toddlers and young children will also love the mini-farm and large adventure playground. The great forest of **Saint-Hubert** offers other beautiful walks. Both are approximately twenty minutes' drive.

Getting there

Easy access via the E411 from Brussels (one hour and twenty minutes). There is a train station at Libramont, but you will need a car to explore the area.

Where to stay

Hire one of the many good quality holiday homes (*gîtes*). Many have travel cots and high chairs, but check in advance. There are also campsites, guesthouses and hotels.

Planning your visit

The Haute Lesse tourism website is very comprehensive: www.haute-lesse.be (French only). Or visit their office on the main square in Redu (open every day).