

TRAVEL

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BREAKAWAY



**HOLD ON TIGHT:** Action at The Great Big Tree Climbing Company. Flying high in treetop adventure

**Ellie Newton-Syms visits DORSET**

Miles of beautiful countryside, tremendous landscapes and vibrant nearby towns make Dorset a great place for a short getaway.

With so many holidays being about rest and recuperation, I decided that, due to this being a birthday surprise for my boyfriend, we should experience something a bit more adventurous and re-live a bit of the care-free attitude childhood provides. So, the perfect way to do this – tree climbing.

The Great Big Tree Climbing Company believes tree climbing is not just for kids, it's for adults, too. And they are right. Based in the picturesque Kingston Lacy National Trust park, this was an ideal opportunity to embrace the magnificent views of the national park.

With courage and childlike inner-strength, the big climb began. Buckled up with a safety harness and taught how to do our knots, we began to hoist ourselves up a huge 200-year-old, 100ft-high English oak tree. This wasn't



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HOLIDAYHEAVEN

PRINCESS CRUISE LEFT US HUNGRY FOR MORE

On the final leg of his culinary cruise, **Bryan Marshall** tucks into the main course onboard the Grand Princess ...

**A**s I explained last week, there are two sides to the cruising coin – the side where people simply allow their holiday to unfold around them, and the creative side where you have to look a little deeper into what the ship (in this case, the magnificent Grand Princess) and the ports of call have to offer to ensure you get the most out of it.

My mission on this voyage was to step away from the “been there, done that, bought several of the souvenir T-shirts” cruise and discover more about what interests me – food and drink.

Yes, we all know cruising is famous for its all-you-can-eat boast, but Princess positively encourages you to discover more about – and indulge in – the food and wine of the regions you’re visiting.

We’ll pick up where we left off last week, tasting wine at the family-run Clos Capitoro winery in Corsica, wondering if life gets any better. On a Princess cruise, the answer is, of course, most definitely.

**“I didn’t want a ‘been there, done that, bought the souvenir T-shirts’ cruise”**

You’d think by now we couldn’t think about eating another meal or sampling another wine. Really!

Trust me, there’s always something new to tempt you in these departments on a Princess cruise ship.

The Maitre ‘D wine tasting is a perfect example. Whatever you know (or think you know) about wine, chances are you’ll discover something new on this entertaining and informative tasting

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session. We sampled six wines; one sparkling, two white and three reds, each served with a different canapé to accentuate the flavours. As each wine is described, you are encouraged to taste and smell a variety of fruits, berries and spices arranged in the centre of the table, which help identify the subtle and unique characteristics of each grape or blend.

If I learned nothing else that day, I learned the final wine we tasted, Ornelata, is one I’ll be keeping my eye out for when I get home (although I doubt it will feature in the three for £10 offer at the supermarket).

If you only decide to stray away from the buffet restaurant or traditional dining room for one night, let me suggest it is to visit Grand Princess’s Sterling Steakhouse



**LET THE SHOW BEGIN:** Sommelier Steffano puts his expert palate to good use. Main image, executive chef Norbert Sommerhalter and Maitre ‘D Bruno Bogazzi add a little theatre to the Chef’s Table dinner.

(a small cover charge applies, but it’s more than worth it).

The perfect choice for meat lovers, it features special cuts of beef from the famous “Sterling Silver” brand, cooked to order, and other popular steakhouse favourites.

Then came the night I’d been looking forward to since we stepped onboard: The Chef’s Table – a unique Princess dining experience only served once per cruise.

It coincided with a formal

night – that’s smart suits or dinner jackets for men, while the ladies glam up in cocktail dresses and designer bling, making what happens first all the more amusing.

Because the evening involves a tour of the galley, health and safety is paramount, so, even though we were dressed to the nines, we were kitted out in pristine white lab coats – think doctors of gastronomy!

We were paraded through the dining room to the staterooms of our fellow passengers and taken behind the scenes to a quiet area of the kitchen. Here we were greeted by Maitre ‘D Bruno Bogazzi and introduced to executive chef Norbert Sommerhalter and



**EYE CANDY:** Every dish was a picture. his team of “menu engineers” before sampling some of the chef’s specially created hors d’ouvres.

Completing the set, sommelier Steffano provided the champagne as we tasted and chatted about the chef’s creations.

On then to the meal proper, and having been stripped of our white over-garments we were presented with a menu packed with exotic, decadent and down-right delicious dishes. Lobster margarita, salmon tartare with wasabi, gnocchi Parisienne and lip-smackin’ bloody Mary sorbet are not something you experience every day.

Nor is the star of the show, spiked trio of beef, veal and pork tenderloin, flambéed at your table and presented with a salsa verde, bearnaise sauce and Café de Paris butter.

No, it’s not every day a master chef takes the time to prepare such wonderful food which, in turn, is served by the man in charge of the ship’s entire serving staff, while a colleague who knows more about drink than Oddbins matches each course with a beautifully balanced glass of wine.

Thinking about it, it might not be every day things like this happen, but if you choose the more creative side of the cruise coin, it can be on a Princess cruise ship. So bon voyage and bon appetite!

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**P&O, Cunard & Princess:** are you contemplating a booking? If so, hurry, as prices are due to increase when the new edition brochures arrive at the end of the month. Travel from your door is available too!

**India:** See the famous sights of the Golden Triangle - Taj Mahal, the Amber Fort, Palace of the Winds etc plus a Tiger Safari - why not join Marion on her small tour of just 15 guests on 19th March 2011. This is a fabulous itinerary of sights and wildlife, just £1689 per person for 9 days. Call for full details.

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