

An offer too tasty to refuse



Kit Spring felt there had to be more to half term than Legoland again, so she took her daughters to Sicily to learn to make a proper pizza

As the bottles of olive oil and the tasting spoons were passed around the huge kitchen table, my daughters' eyes flickered but they kept their smiles. Albeit a little fixed. They weren't sitting close enough for me to attempt a rescue bid. In

any case, the humiliation of a motherly intervention in front of a roomful of grown-ups they'd only met the night before would not have been welcome.

Of course they're used to olive oil being used for cooking and salad



Kit Spring and her daughters Harriet, far left, and Abigail, far right, in the kitchen with fellow guest Johanne, centre.

dressing – being a little further along the evolutionary scale than I was at their age when I thought it was a medicine and, what's more, one you poured into your ear, not your mouth.

But despite this relative sophisti-

cation the idea of taking it neat was daunting. Harriet, who's 13, said as the first bottle reached her: 'Actually, I'm absolutely fine at the moment, thank you,' managing to imply she would have swigged the whole lot back in one had she not been so full from breakfast. Abigail, 11, took a spoon, downed the oil and went a little pink, but was obviously surprised and pleased by her culinary courage.

It was half term and we were a long, long way from Legoland. I had wanted to spend the break doing something with the girls that was a little bit different and which would mean experiencing something new that we could all share. And so there we were in the heart of Sicily on a cooking course run by Anna Tasca Lanza, daughter of a count, married to a marquis and determined to celebrate and pass on the old traditions of the local cuisine.

Almost everything used in the cooking is grown or raised on the family's 1,500-acre Regaleali estate,

which also has vineyards. The garden is a glorious profusion of herbs, vegetables, fruit and walnut trees. Swiss chard, fennel (a popular element in Sicilian cooking), quinces and pomegranates abound – they even grow their own saffron crocuses.

That morning we had sat down to a breakfast of persimmons and prickly pears, freshly laid eggs perfectly scrambled and sweet, soft rolls from the local bakery served with Anna's home-made fig jam and pink grapefruit preserve. The girls, who until the previous day had believed the words 'adventurous' and 'food' should never appear in the same sentence, were starting to broaden their horizons.

We had arrived the evening before a little later than planned, having overshot the station where we should have changed trains and carried on to Agrigento on the south side of the island. After flying into Palermo we'd had time to reach the city centre and grab our first 'proper' pizza before travelling

Factfile

For information about courses at Regaleali, contact Anna Tasca Lanza at Viale Principessa Giovanna, 9, Palermo 90149 (00 39 09 34 81 4654; email antalan@tin.it). Prices are £1,250 per person for a five-day course, £700 for three days, £390 per couple for an overnight stay. This includes lodging, meals and classes. A one-day lesson and lunch is £70 per person. (Based on current exchange rates. The prices in the brochure are in US dollars.)

