



# Devon's hen heaven

by **Laura Armstrong**

**I HAVE a confession to make. Strippers scare me.**

And not just a little bit, either. So you can imagine my concern when I began planning my – whisper it – hen weekend.

I know what you're thinking. Glitter, L-plates, feather boas – all those things that give hens a very bad reputation.

But I wanted none of it. I wanted to spend an enjoyable weekend catching up with my friends and celebrating the fact that I was getting married.

So what are the options for a bride-to-be who wants a sophisticated take on the traditional hen party? Westaway Villa, Ilfracombe, North Devon, has a solution.

This country retreat is ideal for a hen weekend that is altogether calmer, while preserving the essential ingredients of friends, fun and, yes, just a little booze.

The elegant hallway, opening on to a sweeping staircase with chandeliers overhead, leads to two lounges – one with an open fire – and a dining room.

Our group of 14 file politely through, but as the front door shuts an atmosphere of childish excitement takes hold and we jog around the eight bedrooms.

Half an hour later, we gather in one of the sitting rooms. Someone plugs in an iPod and we flop out on the sofas,



**PARTY TIME:** In the villa's hot tub

swigging champagne and eating pizza until the early hours.

The next morning, with slightly sore heads, we brave the seaside cliffs for an early walk before heading to The Wellbeing Spa in nearby Torr's Park.

After a welcome glass of champagne, we are ushered into a stylish courtyard decorated with candles and wind chimes that chink gently in the winter breeze.

But despite the outdoor chill, as the girls gather, laughing in the jacuzzi and swapping stories about spa experiences, a relaxing sense of calm descends.

Leaving them to soak up the atmosphere, I have a 30-minute massage – which is so soothing I almost fall asleep – followed by a manicure.

As my fingers are painted a vampish scarlet, I have a vision of stilettoed, binge drinkers descending on London's bars in pink cowboy hats. It feels good to be 200 miles away from them.

I leave the treatment room just in time, as a waitress wheels in a table loaded with platters of mini sandwiches, strawberries and lemon drizzle cake.

As we all emerge with crinkled fingers and

tingling skin, we return to the villa to change before making our way to restaurant Seventy One.

Taking in the appropriately pink decor, we enjoy perfectly cooked Exmoor

lamb, sea bass and spinach and ricotta pancakes, followed by cheesecake and rich sorbets. Retrieving the bill several hours later, we teeter unsteadily through the steep cobbled streets and make a quick stop in a local pub before heading

back. Coats and heels strewn across the hallway, we are soon dancing in the living room, drinking, talking and laughing.

It feels like a slightly raucous sleepover from our teenage years, and as Lady Gaga's Bad Romance thumps from the speakers, I wonder why anyone would choose a stripper over this.

**FACTFILE:** Westaway Villa in Ilfracombe, North Devon, can be booked from £1,381 per week via [www.ownersdirect.co.uk](http://www.ownersdirect.co.uk). The Edwardian Villa sleeps 16, has a large car park and garden and is close to the beach, harbour and restaurants. Visit the Owners Direct website for further information and availability. The Wellbeing Spa is available to hire from £20 per head. For more information call 01271 863663. Restaurant Seventy One is at 71 Fore Street, Ilfracombe, North Devon. For opening times, menus and contact details to make a reservation, visit [www.seventyone.biz](http://www.seventyone.biz)



**GETAWAY:** The Westaway Villa



N°	: 110306	
Issue date	: 06 March 2011	
Circulation	: "	
Frequency	: "	
Size	: 100%	Page : 36



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PERFECT:  
Ilfracombe  
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