

Considering Building
Your *Sukkah* in a Tree?

Treehouses Beyond Child's Play

In centuries past many people lived up in trees, where they were beyond the reach of wild animals. Treetops also offered improved sanitary conditions over the grimy conditions on the ground. The *Mishna* in *Sukkah* (2:3-4) addresses various forms of treehouses and whether they are kosher for use as a *Sukkah*.

In time humans came back down to Earth and treehouses remained largely the domain of imaginative children. Now, though, we are witnessing a return to the arboreal experience. In the past decade or two a veritable revolution has occurred as adults are increasingly returning to building their homes in the treetops. Join us for a fascinating tour of treehouses around the world.

Construction remains a perennial favorite activity for many young boys. Let a neighbor renovate his basement, make an addition, remodel his kitchen or dispose of an old *sukkah*, and the young guys on the block are ready. The excess or unwanted boards, beams, bricks and odd pieces are eagerly scooped up and carted off. By the time the garbage truck shows up the next morning the pile has all but disappeared. Where did all that building material go?

To build a dream treehouse!

For days, even weeks on end, the kids will knock, saw, argue back and forth, and try every possible arrangement until they—at least some of them—are satisfied.

But treehouses are now moving up in the world. More and more adults have begun building their homes in the relative safety of the treetops. Many of these homes are equipped with all the standard amenities of a modern home and some are downright luxurious. There are treehouses boasting bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room and living room. And, believe it or not, there are treehouses the size of large buildings. An entire generation of treehouse architects, tree experts and engineers has grown up busy with constructing treehouses. There are even tree hotels and treehouse resorts.

Let us take a stroll up the trunk of some of them—starting with the most primitive...

The Tribe that Lives in Trees

The Korowai tribe lives in the thick forests of southeast Papua, an island in Indonesia. They began building their homes in the trees hundreds of years ago. The Korowai were forced to aim high in order to protect themselves from a nearby tribe of cannibals. They continued to build tree homes even after the danger passed.

Numbering around 3,000, they are extremely isolated. Until they were contacted by missionaries in the late 1970s they were unaware that there were any people living in the world beyond their immediate neighbors! The Korowai make their clothes from banana leaves, and their diet consists



One of the most popular treehouse rentals is in Burlingame, California, near the San Francisco Bay. It was originally built by the owner for his kids.



Tree homes have seen a marked rise in popularity in the past 10-20 years.



Many home offices, libraries and guest rooms have moved up into the branches in recent years.

of vegetables they plant and fish and animals they catch. They use primitive axes to cut down trees. The Korowai know nothing about continents, world history or anything going in the modern world.

Astonishingly, despite their complete lack of general knowledge or modern tools, the Korowai are amazing architects. They build their homes in ironwood, the strongest species of tree in the world. They make waterproof thatch roofs using thick palm branches. They create floors of rolled tree bark.

The methods for strengthening their structures are unique. For example, they know exactly which branches to cut so that the tree will not sway in the wind.

There are other tribes that build their homes on stilts to be safe from the snakes, scorpions and insects that occupy the swamplands. But the Korowai are the only ones who build their homes high up in the treetops. Really high up. Between 100 and 160 feet above the ground—about 10 stories high.

Because they live so high up, these tribesmen can survey everything below and see people approaching from a great distance. Their front steps consist of ladders made of soft branches that can be lifted quickly in case of emergency. They may need to use them soon. Many forest tribes around the world have lost their homes when logging companies or developers chopped down the forests where they lived. The Korowai have not lost theirs yet, but you can be sure that if the time comes, they will be prepared to defend their land and their homes high up in the trees.

Stayed in a Tree for Two Years!

Julia Hill lived in a tree for two years, not coming down once during the entire period. It was not because of the superior accommodations—but it was to save the tree from being chopped down.

Hill is an activist who works with Earth First, a group that fights for conservationist ideals. Its primary front is fighting companies that are clearing America's forests for profit. In 1984, a large logging company



Children around the world enjoy building treehouses.



Professionals now build treehouses as a full-time business, with tree experts and engineers consulted along the way.