

# Peak condition

With family walking adventures proving popular in the Peak District this year, now's a good time to spur bookings for late summer and into 2023, says **Cathy Toogood**

As I place my feet down carefully, testing out whether the lump of rock I'm about to step on is stable, I can see my five-year-old's blonde curls bouncing as he merrily careers down the slope ahead.

I see him pause and assess two possible routes – one down a gloopy muddy path, the other over a collection of jagged limestone chunks. Normally, I'd shout and ask him to stop and wait for me. But I resist as he's surrounded by children who are all helping each other out, offering tips on the best places to bottom slide and holding

their hands out for the smallest members of the group.

We'd just taken a detour on a seven-mile walk in the Peak District's Dovedale with HF Holidays. After our guide, Malcolm, joked to the children about the possibility of spotting bears, we'd scrambled up to Reynard's Cave through the enormous limestone Reynard's Arch.

#### NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

In less than three miles, we'd already seen a shimmering iridescent rainbow perfectly framing the strangely symmetrical Thorpe Cloud hill, spotted ➤



**HF Holidays** has three-night family walking holidays in the Shropshire hills on August 5 and 12 from £479 per adult, £45 per child aged 11-17 and free for children under 11.

The price includes full-board accommodation in its country house hotel, experienced family-friendly leaders and all transport to and from walks. [hfholidays.co.uk](http://hfholidays.co.uk)

**Headwater** has a six-night self-guided Literary Walking in the Lake District family holiday from £1,099 based on daily departures between now and October 31, 2023. The trip is suitable for children aged eight-plus and includes accommodation, breakfasts, one evening meal, maps and route directions, luggage transfers between hotels, and arrival and departure transfers from Windermere station. [headwater.com](http://headwater.com)

**Exodus Travel** has a six-night self-guided Jewels of the Jurassic Coast family walking holiday from £929 based on dates this summer and beyond. The trip is suitable for children aged eight-plus and includes accommodation, breakfasts, luggage transfers and the Headwater Navigation app. [exodus.co.uk](http://exodus.co.uk)

Old Harry Rocks, Dorset



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Stanage Edge; lake-viewing platform near Buxton; Dovedale stepping stones

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Valdis Skudre, Lukasz Pajor, Andy Lyons, Wirestock Creators

fossils while crossing Dovedale's famous stepping stones, heard the story of a woman whose billowing skirt saved her from death at Lover's Leap, and were now heading up the River Dove towards Lion's Head Rock – which, according to my eight-year-old daughter, looks more like a baboon.

The walk was part of my four-night Peak District Family Walking Adventure with HF Holidays, on which I was accompanied by my husband, eight-year-old daughter, May, and five-year old son, Zac. It's the company's newest family trip but, despite being launched in 2021, Covid-19 restrictions meant that, by the time we visited in spring 2022, less than a handful of trips had run. The tour proved so popular, though, that last week – after its original 2022 dates had sold out – HF Holidays added more availability for the rest of the year and into 2023.

### COUNTRY HOUSE COMFORT

Our holiday was based at HF's Dovedale country house, The Peveril of the Peak, which has comfortable bedrooms, a lounge stocked with kids' games, a boot room in which to dry clothes, grounds for children to play in, a conference room that is used for evening entertainment, and a bar for a well-deserved post-walk G&T.

We stayed with around 40 other guests, all families, with children ranging from five to 17, accompanied by

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an assortment of parents and grandparents. The sociable formula of these trips – from meals around shared tables to daily games and activities – means that clients who are solo parents or grandparents with children will feel welcome and will have plenty of opportunities to talk to other adults and relax while the children play.

### INDEPENDENT ADVENTURING

My son's independence on our Dovedale walk was a theme of the trip, from the evening we arrived when he decided that he'd rather socialise and be on another family's quiz team to our final night when he sat with his new friends to watch the gala show and confidently performed a solo rendition of *White Christmas* – in April.

Despite being walking holiday newbies, we slipped into the rhythm of the trip quickly. Each evening, we'd choose the next day's route after a pre-dinner “walk talk”, putting our packed lunch orders in and taking ➤

## DESTINATIONS

### UK & IRELAND | PEAK DISTRICT



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The writer's daughter, May, on the Dovedale stepping stones; her son, Zac; Thorpe Cloud hill

PICTURES: Cathy Toogood; Shutterstock/Cally Robin



part in the entertainment, which ranged from skittles and the gala show to a kids' treasure hunt. Then each morning we'd meet our group to explore the local area.

Guided walks each day range from three-mile "family walks" to tougher routes of around 12 miles. With some of the youngest children on the trip, we'd assumed we'd mainly do family walks with perhaps one longer adventure – but after Zac enthusiastically signed us up for a seven-mile walk on day one (he'd heard there was an opportunity to feed ducks along the way), we stuck to longer walks and both children, impressively, clocked up more than 21 miles in three days.

Children are rewarded for their efforts with certificates, signed by the walk leaders, detailing the number of miles they have covered by the end of a trip.

#### WILD MOORS AND WILDER WEATHER

As well as setting off straight from The Peveril of the Peak on foot, we were picked up on day three and driven to the Cat & Fiddle Whisky Distillery near the borders of Cheshire and Derbyshire to begin a six-mile walk to the spa town of Buxton.

On a fine day, this walk over wild moorland and Burbage Edge would be a real treat, crammed with knock-out views over a patchwork of russet and emerald landscape. But, unluckily, as we stepped off the coach, we were greeted by horizontal hail, relentless rain and

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wind that whipped our faces. Despite these conditions, all of the children completed the full six miles and were smiling by the end, discovering the sheer joy of holding cups of steaming hot chocolate to thaw their hands.

Similarly, on a walk the following day to Ilam Park, the weather was temperamental, alternating between beautiful blue skies and torrential rain and wind. But, while the adults in the group huddled eating packed lunches, the children simply kept warm by playing tag around the park's pretty Italian Gardens.

If we'd tried to persuade our children to do these walks with just us, it would have been a disaster. But, spurred on by their peers and enthusiastic walk leaders, we all felt a sense of achievement as we removed several layers of mud from the children back at the house.

And looking back, my children remember fun, freedom and new friends, not hail and rain. Would they do it again? "Definitely, Mummy, there are lots more caves to discover," says May. "And more mud," adds Zac. **TW**

## SELLING TIPS

☀ Tell clients that they will be with like-minded travellers and there are plenty of opportunities to socialise, including on walks, during meals and through arranged activities. On our trip, there were as many grandparents travelling alone with grandchildren as parents.

☀ Reassure clients who are new to walking holidays that there are different levels of walk offered every day and walks are not compulsory.

☀ Under-11s currently go free on UK family trips with HF Holidays.

☀ Guests can relax as experienced walk leaders will plan routes and factor in time for lunch stops and coffee breaks, and all meals are provided.



## BOOK IT

**HF Holidays'** four-night Peak District family trip starts from £679 per adult and £59 per child over 11, with under-11s travelling free. Prices are based on travel in April and October 2023 and include full-board accommodation in HF Holidays' country house hotel, experienced family-friendly leaders and all transport to and from walks. [hfholidays.co.uk](http://hfholidays.co.uk)