

# Holidays at home

Family clients may be booking summer sun but don't forget to suggest a UK short break too, writes Joanna Booth

**A** drizzly February day may not seem like the best moment to suggest a domestic break. Clients are no doubt thinking of jetting off to warmer climes. But while you have their attention booking Corfu or the Costa del Sol, why not suggest a UK short break to spread out the fun? Families can slot them into weekends, or even use them to jazz up a stay-at-home half-term.

Ticketing specialists including Attraction World and Do Something Different can help you earn commission on activities, and Super Break's hotel and

attraction packages make short work of overnight stays.

But even if you can't earn commission on some attractions, they're still worth investigating as motivation for clients to book accommodation nearby. Pair Bewilderwood, the homespun Norfolk woodland adventure park based on Tom Blofeld's children's books, with a stay at one of Haven's nearby parks. Or send teens to try out the world's fastest zipline at Zip World Penrhyn Quarry, just a five-minute walk from Hoseasons' Ogwen Bank Country Park.

## UNDER-FIVES

Parents with toddlers may well have mixed feelings about flights, so tempt them with the rich pickings at home for younger kids. With no pesky school holidays to worry about, they can take advantage of quieter periods and avoid times when attractions will be overrun by older, more boisterous children.

At this age, favourite books and TV shows create perfect hooks to hang a trip off, from CBeebies Land at Alton Towers – great for fans of Octonauts, Go Jetters and Postman Pat

– to Drayton Manor, where budding train drivers who love a certain blue tank engine will be enchanted by the rides at Thomas Land.

Reassure parents that theme parks aren't all about vertical drops and supercharged rollercoasters. Parks work hard to cater for their youngest visitors too, and are particularly useful when siblings are spread across a large age range. Chessington World of Adventures has a downloadable Toddler Guide with helpful detail on suitable rides, height restrictions



PICTURE: ANDREW KAHUMBU

Bewilderwood





LEFT:  
Sea Life  
London  
Aquarium



RIGHT:  
The Wicker  
Man ride at  
Alton Towers

PICTURE: GARRY SAMUELS

and zoo shows. New last year was The Gruffalo River Ride Adventure, a gentle journey that brings Julia Donaldson's famous creation to life. Super Break offers a two-day pass for two adults and two under-fives at the park combined with two nights with breakfast at the De Vere Beaumont Estate, plus dinner on the first night, from £312 in May.

Yorkshire's Lightwater Valley has a host of mini-adventures suitable for under-fives, with an Angry Birds Activity Park, Lightwater Express mini railway,



**Theme parks strive to cater for younger visitors too – useful when siblings are of widely differing ages**

farm tractor tours and a large soft play area split up for different age groups – complete with a cafe to keep parents happy.

#### UNDER-12S

Every parent of primary school-age kids will know the impending dread of the school holidays. Filling each day with enough fun to keep the children happy – and tucker them out before bedtime – can seem impossible.

A visit to London delivers myriad activities to tire out even the most demanding son or daughter. Suggest a hotel stay and a West End show, and throw in a money-saver like Do Something Different's Big London Cluster Ticket. At £55 per adult and £45 per child between three and 15, it gives 50% savings on walk-up prices at Madame Tussauds, the London Eye, Shrek's Adventure and Sea Life Aquarium.

Perennial favourite Legoland Windsor is celebrating 60 years of the brick with three new areas to explore. Budding travellers can explore Miniland USA and Miniland Explore the World, ticking off the Statue of Liberty, the Taj Mahal and Sydney Opera House in one day. Lego Reef is packed with interactive fun: touchscreen technology lets kids build their own virtual lego fish and then send them swimming off into the sea.

For muddy, outdoor capers suggest Diggerland, where kids can have a go on vehicles from giant diggers to mini tractors. It has parks in Kent, Devon, Durham


and Yorkshire and is building another in Worcestershire.

#### TEENS

There's nothing like a rollercoaster to shake even the most truculent teen out of a grump, and happily the UK has plenty of parks more than happy to oblige.

Alton Towers has set the tone with rides like Nemesis and Oblivion, and the latest to scare the living daylights out of kids and parents alike is Wicker Man. It's the UK's first new wooden rollercoaster in 21 years, and the six-storey-high structure will appear to burst into flames as the wooden track races through it. Save a third on walk-up rates by booking early-bird tickets with Attraction World, from £36 per adult and £30 per child.

The ticketing specialist offers even more of a discount at Thorpe Park in Surrey, where the £24 early-bird tickets are half the price of paying on the day, and rides include Derren Brown's Ghost Train, and Saw – The Ride, based on the horror movie.

If the teens are more in to riffs than rides, head for Liverpool and the British Music Experience. Memorabilia ranges from The Beatles and Bowie to Adele and *The X Factor*, plus there's a recording booth and studio where they can have a go with guitars, drum kits and keyboards. 



LEFT:  
Pirate  
Shores,  
Legoland  
Windsor

## Tried & Tested

### PEPPA PIG WORLD, HAMPSHIRE

UNDER  
FIVES

I never thought a huge pink pig in a red dress could bring such joy – until I had my son, aka the world's biggest Peppa Pig fan.

Arriving at Peppa Pig World at Paultons Park near Romsey, Hampshire, my 20-month-old son Noah was in heaven. Geared towards children under seven, it's the perfect destination for toddlers to meet Peppa and George, as well as Suzy Sheep and Mummy and Daddy Pig.

Rides reference their favourite characters, so we soared to heady heights in Miss Rabbit's Helicopter Flight and enjoyed a leisurely ride in Daddy Pig's Car, complete with 'speed camera' to capture the action! There are no height restrictions on any rides except George's Dinosaur Adventure, which requires riders to be at least 85cm.

As well as the seven themed rides – with two more opening in May – there is a fantastic water play

area, so pack swimwear and towels. Noah ran screaming into Muddy Puddles to jump up and down just like Peppa.

There's also a soft play centre and musical instrument area, plus a dedicated baby care area for younger siblings.

**Book it:** Entry to Paultons Park (including Peppa Pig World) is £34 for adults and children over a metre; smaller children free.  
[paultonspark.co.uk](http://paultonspark.co.uk)



Tested by Stephanie Krahn

## Tried & Tested

### WAR OF THE ROSES LIVE, WARWICK CASTLE

UNDER  
12s

As avid fans of CBeebies' *Mike the Knight* when they were small, my kids loved stepping back in time on a trip to Warwick Castle.

After climbing the motte built by William the Conqueror for views of Stratford and the River Avon, we headed to the jousting arena for War of the Roses Live, a new show bringing to life the 30-year civil war between the Houses of York and Lancaster. This heart-pumping hour-long



performance featured stunt riding, sword fighting, soaring eagles, pyrotechnics and special effects, and the kids – aged seven and 11 – were enthralled as hooves thundered, lances splintered and blood was spilt. This show is not to be missed!

We fitted in a few more activities – archery, jester school and kestrel holding (which must be booked ahead) – then settled down for a medieval banquet before bed in a small but brilliantly themed

Knight's Lodge. We couldn't have been happier, and even squeezed in the maze, armour room and falconry display the next morning – 'edutainment' at its best!

**Book it:** Wars of the Roses Live is daily in May half-term and summer holidays (and weekends in between) and costs £13 including castle entrance. A night in a Knight's Lodge starts at £181, bookable through Holiday Extras.  
[warwickcastlebreaks.com](http://warwickcastlebreaks.com)

Tested by Lucy Huxley

## Tried & Tested

### GAMES OF THRONES TOUR, BELFAST

TEENS

Iceland, Croatia, Canada, Morocco and, er, Belfast? As filming locations for *Game of Thrones* go, the Northern Ireland capital might not sound like the most exotic, but this tour will liven up a city break for teenage fans and bemused parents alike.

Given the show's base at Titanic Studios in Belfast, the coast and countryside of Northern Ireland have doubled as Westeros many a time, spawning several unofficial

tours. So despite never having seen an episode, I embarked on a full-day trip to see what all the fuss was about.

First came Cushendun and the cave where Melisandre gave birth to the shadow assassin, then Ballintoy Harbour where Theon Greyjoy came back to Pyke Harbour, and the spooky Dark Hedges, the most recognisable spot from the series. If all that makes as little sense to parents as it did to me, fear not – these scenic spots are beautiful



enough to merit a visit without knowledge of the show, and any excuse to get testy teens on a tour of natural landmarks must be something to celebrate. A stop at the Giant's Causeway and Carrick-a-Rede ropebridge is just the icing on the cake.

**Book it:** A night at Belfast's Europa Hotel and full-day Game of Thrones tour costs from £112 with Super Break.  
[superbreak.co.uk/agents](http://superbreak.co.uk/agents)

Tested by Katie McGonagle