

Small packages

Banish the toddler blues with a short break in the UK, says Stephanie Krahn

@stephaniekrahn

“Going to Butlin’s today, Mummy?” my two-and-a-half-year-old son asked excitedly. It was a question I’d heard daily for the past three months as I had made the mistake of telling Noah of our impending trip well in advance.

So it was a welcome relief when we arrived at Minehead’s seafront to see Sir Billy Butlin’s famous fairground come into view.

► SEASIDE STAYS

Once inside our spacious

third-floor Seaside apartment, Noah was so excited about his new bedroom – complete with candy floss cloud night light – that he clambered into bed and asked to sleep straightaway... music to the ears of many parents.

However, the nap was short-lived. Noah soon bounded out of bed to explore, immediately drawn to the magnetic pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey game, just one of a few nods to the seaside theme.

There are nice touches for little people, such as low-level coat hooks and a step in the bathroom. Highchairs, cots, bed rails, baby baths and buggies can be hired from £2 a day (and can be prebooked), so you can also cut down on the paraphernalia that comes with taking a toddler on holiday. Trikes and scooters can also be hired for the day.

There are three-bedroom options, and ground floor units can be reserved for an extra £15. The other bonus is they are set

at the heart of the resort, just a short stroll to the main Skyline Pavilion, swimming pool and activity centres, and Minehead’s sandy beach across the road.

► PLAY TIME

We were on a Butlin’s Just For Tots break, designed specifically for under-fives with a jam-packed schedule of events and activities from 9am until the evening show at 6.30pm, so no chance of hearing the dreaded “I’m bored”! There is so much →

3 OF THE BEST

Kids' activities in Minehead

West Somerset

Railway:

Take a steam train journey on the UK's longest heritage railway, and stop off in small harbour town of Watchet for lunch. Adult return £15; under-fives free.

west-somerset-railway.co.uk

Minehead

Beach:

Build sandcastles, take a stroll along the promenade and explore the traditional seaside town's small independent shops, crazy golf and amusement arcades.

visitsomerset.co.uk

Dunster: Set in Exmoor National Park, this pretty village has a doll museum with toys from the ages. Overlooking the village on a hill is the 11th-century Dunster Castle.

visitdunster.co.uk

to do we had trouble fitting everything in, but activities are repeated throughout the week so if you miss it one day, you can do it the next. But it's best to book in advance, as we found out on one rainy day!

There is everything from mini bow (crossbow), football and Play-Doh sessions to puppet shows, arts and crafts, and a tots' disco.

Noah tried the learn-to-cycle programme Balanceability, and while he was desperate to get going - though that might have been more to do with getting to wear a yellow helmet than getting in the saddle - he first had his balancing skills put to the test with two fun, friendly coaches.

Half of the 30-minute session was spent learning balancing and riding skills without a bike, imitating 'dinosaur steps' to encourage them to move their legs on the bike, stepping stones that increased in height, and the 'crocodile', where 'aeroplane arms' helped steady them.

The other big hit was the Little Stars Fairground, which opens at 8.30am (a bonus for early risers), where Noah was excited to try out his flying, driving and ladybug-steering skills, especially since the rides were adult-free zones. As was the adjacent soft play centre, where Noah learnt to hurl himself over spongy walls and squeeze through soft rollers without a helping hand from mummy or daddy. Most facilities close at 4pm, but soft play stays open until 7pm, which is a godsend for toddlers with a later bedtime.



Little Tikes Town is packed with Cozy Coupe cars in the form of fire engines, taxi cabs, police cars and monster trucks

WATER BABIES

After missing the swimming pool the first day, it was a must every day after that. The main pool is filled with floats, noodles and conical buckets, though Noah freestyled it and screamed with delight as he and his rubber ring were boosted by underwater

jets powering the not-so-lazy river at Splash Waterworld.

For kids at the older end of the scale, there's also the Blue Comet, Master Blaster, Black Hole and Space Bowl slides, so those who top the one-metre height requirement can have their fun without splashing younger siblings.

As well as the main pool, there is a shallow baby pool, heat-adjusted whirlpool and small pool where Puddle Ducks swimming lessons (£5) are held.

But car-mad Noah's favourite area of the resort was undoubtedly Little Tikes Town, where a race track is packed with Cozy Coupe cars in the form of fire engines, taxi cabs, police cars and even monster trucks. He loved it so much he even helped drive the different vehicles into the 'garage' when it closed.

A close second was this Just for Tots break's main attraction, kids' TV presenter and entertainer Justin Fletcher. The queue built up along with the excitement an hour before the show, but the wait was worth it. Noah stared open-mouthed, awestruck at seeing "real-life Justin" who worked Centre Stage with lively singing and dancing, wearing a glittery waistcoat and flashing shoes.

Tinky Winky, Dipsy, Laa-Laa and Po, aka the Teletubbies, took to the stage in the Skyline Pavilion, along with Mr Men and Little Miss Live, Danger Mouse and the Skyline Gang.

To avoid the queues, B-Line Fast Passes (£17.50 per person for four nights) give holders access to Centre Stage shows 15 minutes before the rest of the audience, so you can enjoy the resort until just before show starts.



PICTURE: STEPHANIE KRAHN

ABOVE: Seaside apartment

LEFT: Noah in the 'monster truck' at Little Tikes Town



LEFT:
Teletubbies show

RIGHT:
Stephanie, Noah and Martin at Pirate Falls Adventure Golf



➔ EASY EATS

Going on holiday is the chance to get away from everyday chores – not least cooking – so there are two dining plans that have this covered. The Premium Dining Plan (£27 a day for adults, £7 children aged two to five) and the Food Court Dining Plan (£20 adults, £5 children) offer buffet breakfast and dinner. Under-twos eat free.

Outside of that there's an

array of restaurants to try. The 1950s-style American diner was a big hit, serving classic hot dogs and burgers, plus desserts with names such as Be-Bop Brownie and Lemonade Pie. The ice cream milkshakes were a particular favourite – Noah and I slurped through all six flavours, purely in the name of research, to find Choco Loco was the winner.

A nice touch is that all the

restaurants have a 'baby feeding station', with a microwave, bottle-warming machine, plastic cutlery and free Ella's Kitchen food pouches. Plus, unlike most restaurants we visit, there was never a shortage of highchairs.

At every restaurant we went to, which included Ludo's Italian and the Firehouse Grill, Noah was greeted by friendly staff with crayons and colouring-in sheets.

This was a fun-filled, action-packed holiday and it was a hit with Noah, who now asks: "When are we going back to Butlin's, Mummy?". And the answer is simple: soon, very soon!

Book it: A four-night Just for Tots break at Butlin's Minehead Resort staying in a Seaside apartment starts from £420, based on a May 14 departure.

bourneleisure.co.uk

HOSEASONS

ROMANTIC HOT TUB BREAKS
from **£199***

NO TRICKS JUST TREATS!
10 DAYS LEFT TO ENTER OUR OCTOBER CAMPAIGN

FALL IN LOVE AGAIN

To book visit www.hoseasons.co.uk/agents or call **0345 498 6153**

Be social facebook.com/HollieHoseasons [@HollieHoseasons](https://twitter.com/HollieHoseasons)

*Price based on a 4 night stay between 06/11/17-10/11/17. Applies to selected UK lodge and holiday park locations and specific accommodation types, accommodation only. Featured prices are correct at time of going to print and may differ on the live website, which is updated on a frequent basis. All prices are subject to availability and may change. Final price will be verified at the point of booking. Image is representative of Hoseasons Hot Tub Breaks and not specific offer. Subject to availability.