

# Here be dragons

Warwick Castle's new Zog activity trail gets a roar of approval from **Joanna Booth** and her five-year-old son, Dexter

Any parent with a preschool-age child knows the tale of Zog, the little dragon who 'tries his hardest every day to win a golden star'. Fans of Julia Donaldson's bestselling book, which champions the qualities of perseverance and kindness through the school adventures of an endearing orange dragon, can now bring their fire-breathing dreams to life at Warwick Castle.

Learning dragon skills might sound a little scary, but the new Zog and the Quest for the Golden Star activity trail starts gently. The first activity is branded as learning to fly, but really just involves a photo opportunity with a mid-flight Zog and the castle's crenellated towers in the background.

Things become more interactive at lesson two, where kids can jump on weight-activated buttons to make a whole class full of dragons roar. Parents of younger kids will have to get involved – at five years

old, my son Dexter needed to combine his weight with mine to make the buttons work!

It was the same at stop three too, where we used foot pads to squirt jets of water towards Zog, who is learning to breathe fire and needs some help putting his flames out.

Lesson four was all about capturing princesses, with a short obstacle course to run and jump around, overseen by scarecrows in pretty dresses. There's an accessible version too, which is a really nice touch.

The last activity was the most exciting, with a fully-costumed knight welcoming Dexter into an arena and teaching him to use his sword via a fun game of Simon – or should that be Sir Gadabout – Says. Dex was thrilled to be awarded his golden star, and then it was time for a socially distanced photo opportunity with Zog himself.

#### CASTLE CHARACTERS

The Zog activity trail is an absolute blast for the under-fives, and ➤



**OVERNIGHT BREAKS WITH THE KIDS**

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Families who love the outdoors can spend a night in nature on a Surf, Coasteering & Wild Camping Family Adventure in Cornwall from Not in the Guidebooks. Available every Tuesday from July 20 to August 31, it will see families enjoy two surf lessons, coasteering and a night's camping in the Cornish woodland. The two-day experience costs £169 per person, with a minimum of four. [notintheguidebooks.com](http://notintheguidebooks.com)

**A magical day out**

Stroll down Diagon Alley, walk across the Great Hall and marvel at the collection of costumes from the most-popular movie franchise in recent history with The Warner Bros Studio Tour London – The Making of Harry Potter. National Holidays offers a two-day coach break from £159 per adult and £128 per child under 12 between July and December 2021. [nationalholidays.com/agents](http://nationalholidays.com/agents)

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Lodge accommodation at Warwick Castle; Dexter completes the Zog and the Quest for the Golden Star activity trail; agility course; a resident peacock

PICTURES: Warwick Castle; Craig Frick; Joanna Booth



siblings won't be bored as Warwick Castle has plenty of other attractions suited to older kids too. For starters, its classic fairytale looks – hefty stone walls, lofty turrets and a giant trebuchet beside the beautiful, water-filled moat – are a thrill, and brought to vivid life by costumed characters.

Dexter enjoyed chatting to an armoured knight riding by on horseback, and gave his full and rapt attention to a noisy 'fight' that took place among the castle ramparts, with both sword-wielding opponents leaping around and shouting choice historical insults at one another. Conveniently, this was performed in full view of the large and spacious picnic area – the perfect lunchtime viewing.

We also adored the herd of screeching, exhibitionist peacocks that patrol the grounds, rustling their impressive tail feathers.

It's a brilliant visit for any child with an interest in the past. My

*Horrible Histories*-obsessed son was over the moon to discover a maze based on the books and CBBC series, scampering among the hedges to join the Gunpowder Plot criminal line-up, learn about gruesome Tudor punishments and walk through a mock-up of a First World War trench.

He also loved climbing up the original castle mound, following a trail of signs full of information about the Norman Conquest – I was fielding questions about shield shape and whether King Harold really got an arrow in his eye for days.

When we visited, the indoor elements of the castle were closed, but since reopening on May 17, it's back to business as usual. You can meet the castle torturer in the dungeons, see the gaol, climb the ramparts and even experience the sights, sounds and smells of the Wars of the Roses in the Kingmaker exhibition, which profiles the pivotal figure Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick.

Even without these extras we loved our day at Warwick Castle, and would unreservedly award it its very own gold star. **TW**

**BOOK IT**

One-day entry tickets, which include the Zog trail, start from £12 for visitors over 12, and £8 for kids aged three to 11. Under-threes are free, and there are Parent & Toddler tickets that admit an adult plus an under-five for £12. Short breaks, with entry to the castle and an overnight stay in the Knights Village, start from £47 per person. A Zog Play & Stay experience, including entry, overnight stay, evening entertainment with story time, a Zog meet-and-greet and souvenir Zog goodies, starts from £55 per person.

**Find out more:** [warwick-castle.com](http://warwick-castle.com)

**Book:** [merlinentertainments.biz](http://merlinentertainments.biz)