

The kids are all Wight

The Isle of Wight makes an ideal family escape, discovers Juliet Dennis

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It was only when we boarded our ferry bound for the Isle of Wight after two hours on the road, our two seven year-olds squashed in the back between food bags and buckets and spades, that the familiar holiday feeling kicked in.

Joe and Nina scrambled out of the car and bounded on deck, squealing with delight, while my husband and I watched the mainland disappear as our holiday destination came into view.

No doubt for Joe and Nina, a whole week of fun with the family – which included seeing their granddad, who lives on the island – will seal the memory of this trip in their young minds. And when

it comes to offering experiences for all the family, the Isle of Wight has them by the bucket-load.

Not only is the island hassle-free to get to and small enough to navigate, it is big enough to provide a range of activities to occupy little ones for a week or more.

The key ingredients are all there: sandy beaches, countryside, animal parks, adventure playgrounds and theme park rides. The choice of good-quality pubs, restaurants and teahouses is endless too, all oozing good, old-fashioned English charm.

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▶ STAY AND PLAY

Our days on the Isle of Wight were jam-packed, so recommend planning ahead if clients want to squeeze it all in.

We bought a joint park ticket

for Robin Hill Country Park near Newport and Blackgang Chine near Ventnor, each offering totally different experiences. The ticket lasted seven days and cost £148 in peak season for all four of us.

Robin Hill had everything from a canopy skywalk and toboggan run to a wooden maze, nature trails, falconry shows, pirate ship ride and 4D cinema.

Joe and Nina went in the maze so many times they virtually knew it off by heart, dragging grandad in too (who predictably got lost!). They climbed through the park's latest addition, The Squirrel Run tunnel in the sky above our →



heads. And they clung on for their lives as we all whizzed down the hillside on the toboggan ride.

Blackgang Chine offered a more traditional theme park experience for children. Divided into four areas – Pirate Cove, Cowboy Town, Nurseryland and Fairyland – it covered most bases.

For Nina, the Crooked House was a favourite. “Let’s go in again!” she shouted after making her way through its slanted, narrow corridors, winding past rooms filled with scary-looking characters. I was dizzy after going in once, but needless to say she went countless times and was still grinning when she came out.

Joe loved the pirate ship with water guns, and had to be dragged away, though not before giving us all a good soaking, naturally.

The dinosaurs got my vote. These life-sized, red-eyed models not only moved but made us shriek with surprise as they roared when we walked past.



Carisbrooke Castle and The Needles.

Of course no stay on the Isle of Wight is complete without a few trips to the beach – and there are plenty to choose from, including the unspoilt sands of Compton Beach and the traditional seafront at Ventnor.

We stopped to paddle at the sandy shores of Sandown, flew a kite at Freshwater Bay, and searched for shells at Whitecliff Bay holiday park’s private beach.

As we left Whitecliff Bay for the last time, the kids’ pockets weighed down with stones and shells, shoes full of sand and trousers dripping from paddling, the sun set in the distance, filling the sky with a harmony of pinks, reds and oranges.

“The Isle of Wight is famous for its sunsets,” my dad told us before we headed back home across the water.

He’s right, of course, and after getting a glimpse of all the fun activities this island has to offer, I have a feeling it won’t be the last time we watch that sunset. **TW**



Alice in Wonderland Afternoon Tea for Two at The Essex, High Street, Godshill, costs £69 for two people with [Attraction World.attractionworld.com](http://AttractionWorld.attractionworld.com).

Away Resorts offers four nights in a Jolly Nice Chalet from £697 in July and August. Agents can join Away Resorts’ new affiliates programme and add their commission to net rates. awayresorts.co.uk



LEFT: Nina in The Essex tea rooms

ABOVE LEFT: Juliet, with Joe at Robin Hill on the toboggan ride

ABOVE RIGHT: Model Village Godshill

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well-maintained model village. This includes a miniature version of the village’s actual high street, as well as an airfield, football match and train station.

Joe and Nina stayed busy with a questionnaire and ‘spot-the-squirrel’ quiz to find tiny versions of our furry friends dotted about the model village. This time it was my husband Nick we had to drag away; I think he would happily have spent the rest of the afternoon examining the tiny creations.

Luckily, we had the lure of a much-deserved and rather yummy cream tea just a few yards away in the The Essex tea rooms.

Staff immediately made sure our two live wires were treated like royalty during an Alice in Wonderland-themed afternoon treat, with special ice cream sundaes laid on for the kids and plenty of props to keep them occupied.

Booked through Attraction World, we fed ourselves silly on home-made sandwiches, scones, cakes and jelly, all washed down with tea, while wearing white-rabbit ears (Joe and Nina, that is, not us). It was a welcome treat for tired feet.

SHORE THING

Our week did not give us time to visit all the attractions we would have liked. On the list for our next visit are Tapnell Farm Park, Monkey Haven, Osborne House,

Tried & Tested

WHITECLIFF BAY HOLIDAY PARK, BEMBRIDGE AWAY RESORTS

This park has seen quite a significant renovation since we visited six years ago: seven-year-old twins Joe and Nina immediately spotted the gleaming new play area, while the clubhouse and accommodation have also been spruced up.

Our Jolly Nice Chalet was indeed jolly nice: the colourful and cosy two-bedroom chalet came with a compact kitchen, sofa, bathroom, TVs in all rooms, and outside decking with table and chairs.

Other accommodation – including new boutique-style caravan the Tribeca (pictured), which aims to do what glamping has done for camping – has been developed to offer more choice for families.



The park boasts its own beach, accessed via a path from its upper restaurant and play area, and daily activities, from cinema screenings under the stars (we watched *Aladdin* with a sea view) to archery and hoverboarding, as well as kids’ discos and an indoor pool and water slide. awayresorts.co.uk/whitecliff-bay

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