

Child's play

Entertaining children is not always easy, but get it right and you'll also please their paying parents. Five visitor attractions and accommodation providers demonstrate how it's done



Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre, Buckinghamshire

With interactive displays, fun and educational workshops and even talking toilets, there is plenty for young visitors to enjoy at the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre.

What the centre does really well is ensure that everything is as fun as it can possibly be, and this even extends to its café. Café Twit, which takes its name from one of Roald Dahl's most famous stories, *The Twits*, may offer standard food and drink, but it's the names it gives them that add to the atmosphere and keep alive the mischievous spirit for which the author was famous. From 'sanwiches' to drinks with names such as Swishwiffler and Whizzpopper, its kids' menu is full of silly-sounding treats that refer back to Roald Dahl's crazy creations.

"Café Twit does amazing whizzbanging food" Visitor



"It's very important to us that we're as family-friendly as possible, so we try to maintain that in everything we do," says Museum Director Amelia Foster. "Café Twit reflects our brand values perfectly, and the children love it."

The café also encourages children to be creative with food by running chocolate-decorating workshops. It has also recently launched a workshop called Dream Potions, which lets children 'create a dream that they can drink'.

www.roalddahlmuseum.org

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"Perfect in every aspect - we really couldn't ask for any more. The animal feeding has been a brilliant start to each day. Tim is fantastic with the kids" F, J and B, West Midlands



Tredethick Holiday Cottages, Cornwall

★★★★★ *Self-catering*

Targeting the pre-school market is the key to Tim Reed's success at Tredethick Farm. And although the farm is full of excellent facilities, Tim has no doubt what his little visitors like most. "Animal feeding is by far the most popular activity with the kids," he says. "It barely costs anything compared with the cost of putting in an indoor pool, and they get so much out of it."

Tim makes sure that he keeps parents and the health and safety inspector happy, by clearly stating in his welcome letters, information packs and verbally that children must wash their hands straight after feeding the animals. This attention to detail is evident throughout the business.

To ensure that his guests are satisfied, Tim regularly conducts surveys. "It makes sense to ask people what they want, rather than just making assumptions," he says. "Over the years, we've extended both our outdoor and indoor play areas, because our guests have suggested that we should."

Tim has added plenty of extra touches that make parents' holidays more enjoyable too, such as providing comfy chairs, newspapers and a Lavazza coffee machine in the soft play area, so they can relax while their children play. There is also a handy onsite farm shop that sells local produce and ready meals, which Tim says parents are incredibly grateful for after a long journey. And as the shop is run on an honesty-box system, it is open all hours.

www.tredethick.co.uk

Turner Contemporary, Margate

The Turner Contemporary art gallery in Margate has set up a schools-participation project that is so popular, some of the students have asked if they can carry on working on it during the holidays. The scheme, which trains students to be gallery guides known as 'Youth Navigators', started last year. So far, 135 students from seven local secondary schools have taken part, and there are plans to extend this further.

The idea behind the scheme is not only to awaken in young people an interest in art, but also to make them more curious about the world and confident in themselves. "The focus of the training is on helping the students explore ideas and hold conversations with visitors, instead of just providing information," says Head of Learning, Karen Eslea. "Our Youth Navigators have become advocates for the local area and have a real sense of civic pride. They have started making more formulated arguments and we've seen their confidence blossom."

"I think Youth Navigating is the contemporary way of tour guiding," says 15-year-old Youth Navigator Harley. "Not only am I expressing my views on the art, but I am also listening to other people's opinions and building a clearer view of the art displayed."

"I am grateful for the Youth Navigating programme, as it has led to bigger things for me. When Her Majesty the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh visited Turner Contemporary, I was privileged enough to meet them. Opportunities like that are scarce in a place like this and for a person like me. I have lived in Margate all my life, and since Turner Contemporary has been here, I have noticed a positive change in the area. The gallery has put Margate on the creative map and makes me proud of my home town."

www.turnercontemporary.org





"If I hadn't seen the crèche and kids' facilities on the website, I would not even have known they were there! It was very quiet and as a young couple with no children we loved every minute and are desperate to return"

A visitor review on TripAdvisor

Calcot Manor, Gloucestershire

★★★★★ Hotel

Offering both a luxury spa and Ofsted-registered crèche, Calcot Manor manages to make all of its guests feel at home – no matter what they are looking for.

With 12 dedicated family bedrooms and suites away from the main house, a crèche and an area for older children that contains games consoles and a cinema, there is plenty to please parents and keep their kids entertained. The hotel also offers a baby-listening service and children's menus, and can cater to guests' requests if they have forgotten to bring anything from home.

Children are welcome to swim in the heated outdoor pool (open from May to September) at any time, but the hotel has also allocated special times for them to swim in the spa's indoor pool. By only letting children in the spa pool between 3.45pm and 5.15pm during the week and from 8.45am to 10.15am at the weekend, the hotel once again manages to satisfy the needs and requests of all its guests.

Managing Director Richard Ball is very proud of this fact. "Calcot Manor presents guests with various facets that are diverse yet in harmony," he says. "It is wonderful to be acknowledged for appealing to young families as well as couples, foodies seeking special value and spa aficionados alike."

As the hotel appeals to all sorts of people, it does good business all year round. The fact that guests with pre-school children are not restricted by school holidays is a major reason for this. "Having the crèche has definitely encouraged those with pre-school children to visit in the quieter periods during school terms, and has led to increased business," says Richard. "Over 15 years ago we identified the opportunities to welcome families whole-heartedly and we've never looked back."

www.calcotmanor.co.uk





"Fishers is always a special treat for our three girls and it was a brilliant added bonus for them to meet their favourite character Peppa Pig!" Visitor Jess Muddle



Fishers Farm Park, West Sussex

Fishers Farm Park ensures repeat business by continuing to offer new and different events and activities. It has recently started offering 'meet-and-greet' sessions with famous children's characters, just like they do at Disney theme parks.

To ensure that it books the most popular characters, the farm conducts polls of its customers on Facebook. As the farm is allowed to use the official character artwork up until the date of the event, it makes the most of this by advertising via local banners, newspapers, magazines, flyers and posters and online via its website and social media sites. It also sends a monthly mailshot to its annual membership holders.

In the past year, the farm has held sessions with a number of famous faces, including Fireman Sam and Peppa Pig, and everyone has been delighted by how well the events have gone. "The kids get so excited about meeting their favourite characters," says Marketing and Events Manager Kate Rollings. "It's really great to see their faces light up."

The meet-and-greet visits don't just make children smile; they are also good for business. "The characters not only increase footfall, they also draw in new customers who then come back," says Kate. "It's also nice to be able to provide annual membership holders with something different that they don't have to pay any extra for."

The farm books its 'meet-and-greet' sessions with the UK's official supplier of personal appearances of famous children's characters, Rainbow Productions. The company is one of only a handful that is licensed to reproduce the characters on behalf of film and television companies.

Helen Ede, the company's Marketing Manager, says that TV and

films both have an influence on which characters become popular, but a new film release tends to offer a short and more concentrated burst of consumer awareness and interest. To maximise the benefit of booking a character, visitor attractions must consider the age group of the children that they are hoping to attract, what type of event would suit the location and which brand matches their own.

"Each character appeals to a slightly different demographic," says Helen. "Many appeal to both boys and girls. Our team provides insight into what character choice could work well for a particular venue and which characters are current and popular. This is all based on product knowledge as well as feedback from previous events."

For more information, visit www.rainbowproductions.co.uk www.fishersfarmpark.co.uk ■

FUN AND GAMES

If you have children coming to stay, here are a few ideas to keep them entertained.

- Maintain a selection of toys, books and DVDs – it's a good idea to stay up to date with which characters are the most popular.
- Consider providing children's menus and meal times.
- Think about giving children a small gift, such as a colouring book, on arrival.
- Provide a children's guide to the local area.
- Team up with local attractions to offer reduced rates for families.