

Check out

Family outings



Expert's tip

Swimming, tea and donkeys, Branscombe, Devon

Branscombe is a stunning village and the perfect bank holiday weekend destination, but its beauty remains quite a secret and it's easy to miss. In summer the water at Branscombe beach turns an enticing turquoise and offers great swimming for the kids. There's the Sea Shanty campsite with a beach cafe serving hot food and ice creams, so there's no excuse not to spend the weekend there. The village boasts two superb pubs, The Masons Arms and the old-fashioned Fountain Head, which holds a traditional hog roast every Sunday, rain or shine. The restored Old Bakery, Manor Mill and Forge is in full working order, serving arguably the best Devon cream teas, with milling memorabilia and a beautiful garden. A short walk out of Branscombe is The Donkey Sanctuary, a free of charge charity-run attraction. Manor Mill (01392 881 691, nationaltrust.org.uk), Sea Shanty (01297 680 577, theseashanty.co.uk), Donkey Sanctuary (01395 578 222). Julia Hart of letsgowiththechildren.co.uk, which also publishes guidebooks.

Readers' tips

Goodleaf Tree Climbing, Isle of Wight (pictured above)

These people teach recreational tree climbing. It's a great way to spend a morning - hanging in a harness off a rope, 30ft above the ground. It made me feel like a kid again! 0333 800 1188, goodleaf.co.uk; adults £35 for 2½ hours, children 8-16 £25 including tuition, equipment and refreshments. iwr

Sea kayaking, Cornwall

We stay in Polzeath every year, and for the last three years we have been sea kayaking with Sam from Cornish Coast Adventures in Port Quin - amazing scenery, great local guides, always different and exciting! The trips may include paddling into sea caves, mackerel fishing and rock jumping. 01208 880 280, 07971 071 437, cornishcoastadventures.com; a three-hour tour costs £30 per person. Ian Bristol

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Slow hands

Remember when writing involved quietly making marks in ink on paper instead of pressing buttons and keyboards in a flurry of beeps? Typing, texting and twittering are all put on hold at a Longhand weekend in Herefordshire, where guests are encouraged to appreciate the value of the old-fashioned approach to word-smithery, and apply themselves to creative writing and the "sensual pleasure of language" during workshops and storytelling sessions. The theme of the next weekend, running 26-28 June at Penrhos farm, 15 miles from Leominster, is food, and chef Daphne Lambeth will provide plenty of inspiration, while professional writers Maroulla Paul and Mandy Wheeler lead the sessions. It's the first of a series of courses that may also be held abroad, offering gentle pen strokes under the Spanish sun. £300pp based on two sharing or £325 for a single room, including full board, workshops and materials. 07920016203/07973835920, email bookings@thelonghandwebsite.com.

Get inn

Fancy some slow braised belly of Jimmy Butler's free range pork with wholegrain mustard mash and caramelised apples? Or grilled organic

Shetland sea trout with fennel and rocket, followed by ice cream from Bennet's Farm? These are three of the dishes on menus devised by double Michelin-starred chef Rob Clayton for Merchant Inns, including The Talbot in Surrey, The Lambert Arms in the Chilterns, The Horse and Groom Inn, Charlton, and the Carnarvon Arms in Burghclere, Berkshire. Until 30 June, you can get three nights for the price of two at any of Merchant Inns' restored country retreats around the UK, including a three-course dinner on the first night plus breakfast each morning. From £95pp for three nights (based on two sharing), merchant-inns.com.

Wet and wild

A new action-packed family break in Wales offers a double-whammy of feel-good factor - healthy outdoor pursuits with accommodation at an eco-lodge in the heart of Pembrokeshire Coastal National Park. Over five days your troop can attempt coasteering, sea kayaking, surfing, biking and horse-riding around the dramatic national park coastline, interspersed with chill-out time on the beach and dolphin-spotting trips. Preseli Venture (01348 837 709, preseliventure.co.uk), £419 per adult, under 16s £329, including four nights at the lodge, activities and most meals.

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