

**SUMMERTIME ACTIVITIES**

**ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE**

# Family fun that can cost less

Finding exciting things to do for the children in the summer holidays is a tough and expensive job at the best of times – but it's even harder during a recession. **Lisa Salmon** offers a way out...

IT'S not easy entertaining the kids during the school holidays, even if you've got plenty of cash to throw at the business of having fun. But when money's tight – as it is for many families during the credit crunch – the prospect of finding exciting things to do can be daunting. Although a National Lottery survey has found that the average spend on a day out is over £19 per family member, having a great day with the family doesn't have to be expensive – or, indeed, cost anything at all. Certainly, nearly half the parents questioned in the survey said that a typical family day out for them would be to the UK's beaches, woodlands and parks, at no cost at all. Just over half (53 per cent) of the children questioned said their ideal day out was an entertainment-based activity, such as a trip to the cinema or a games arcade. Such activities, of course, aren't cheap – a fact which wasn't lost on 36 per cent of the seven to 16-year-olds questioned, who admitted they were aware of the cost implications for their parents. And 71 per cent of those parents said money was a primary concern when planning a day out, followed by the weather (45 per cent). The National Lottery commissioned the survey to raise awareness of lottery-funded venues and activities throughout the UK. They are at the centre of the lottery's Love UK campaign, which celebrates the fact that since the lottery was launched, players have contributed £21billion to Good Causes, many of which provide low-cost family days out. TV presenter Lorraine Kelly, an ambassador for Love UK, says: "Planning a family day out can seem like an impossible task when considering time, money and effort. "But with a little investigation, there are actually a wealth of options on your doorstep – many of them free – and more importantly, many of them allowing families to spend quality time together." The research found that 95 per cent of families have at least a couple of quality days out together each year, and 73 per cent of children say they want to go out more. And recently-retired headteacher Sue Kirkham points out that a family day out can be educational as well as fun. As well as visiting the obvious educational venues like galleries and

museums, Sue points out there are also educational benefits from visiting historical sites, and even looking at the geography of rivers or coastlines. She says: "Even if you feel something isn't directly relevant to what a child is studying, the very fact that you're getting them to exercise their mind, look out for things and write about them is all helpful to a child's education. "The important thing is that the parent is involved, and discusses the day with the kids and asks them things about it afterwards." Another important thing can be that parents share tips on cheap, fun days out and pass on vouchers and discount codes or anything else that might help keep the cost down. Such sharing is often done by members of the Mumsnet parenting website – www.mumsnet.com – and their tips include:

- Try a day at the beach, woods or a country park, and turn it into a nature hunt – an ideal activity at this time of year.
- Check out your local toy library – they often run special events in the holidays for low or no cost, as does the local council.
- Go for a long walk after making nature trail sheets – you can use the sheets like a bingo game if you put things to spot on a grid and cross them off as you find them.

Mumsnet co-founder Carrie Longton suggests collecting tokens for theme parks, or 'kids get in free' offers as a great way to keep costs down and give children a special treat. She says it's a good idea to go early and stay late to make the most of the day. Take a packed lunch and water bottles to keep costs down. She points out that a family railcard can make getting to the seaside a cheap day out, particularly if you take a picnic. A railcard could also get the family to the nearest big city, and Longton says: "Lots of the city museums are free, and as long as you pack your food and stay strong in the museum shop, it should be a cheapish and educational day out." She adds: "With acres of holidays to fill every year and



**SIMPLE FARE:** A family picnic in the country is enjoyable and will not break the bank.

money getting tighter, Mumsnetters are always swapping tips on how to entertain their children without blowing the budget, whether it's sharing vouchers for major attractions or just letting others know

about a cost-free pastime that they've discovered will keep a child occupied happily for a few hours. "Most parents will usually plan at least one day out during the holidays at a special venue or event as a treat –

but it can sometimes feel as if you've spent your entire week's housekeeping on a day out." • For a list of the top 100 best Lottery-funded attractions and locations in the UK, visit [www.loveuk.org](http://www.loveuk.org).

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