

TRAVEL

BRITISH BREAKS

■ **WALES:** Four-star country house hotel Llansantffraed Court, Monmouthshire (01873 840 678) offers two-night gourmet break for two for just £330, or £165 each, incl free upgrade to best available room, four-course dinner for two, a bottle of Champagne and a full Welsh breakfast, on stays until Nov 30.

■ **CORNWALL:** Daish's Holidays (01803 201 432) offers four-night early autumn break for £139 from Oct 16 or 20 at Barrowfield Hotel, Newquay (pictured), just 200 yards from



seafront. Hotel facilities include indoor pool, sauna, beauty salon and large dance floor.

■ **NORTH DEVON:** Woolacombe Bay Holiday Parks (0843 208 0368) offers three-night half-term break from Oct 26 for £139, saving £100. Facilities include heated indoor pools, cinema, fishing, tennis, mini-golf, plus children's clubs and nightly entertainment. Facilities, for supp, incl surfing simulator, high ropes course, climbing wall, 10-pin bowling and pottery painting.

■ **SCOTLAND:** Unique Cottages (01835 822 277) offers seven nights' self-catering from Sep 28 for £265, saving £120 in Dairy Cottage, a picture-book Highland property on 2,500-acre country estate of woodland, hills and sea-loch foreshore in Argyll. Cottage, eight miles from Oban, sleeps two and is an ideal base for walking, salmon fishing (chargeable) and trout fishing.

■ **CORNWALL:** Cornish Cottages (01326 240 333) offers seven nights' self-catering from Sep 28, Oct 5 and Oct 12 in Owl Hayes for £363, saving £41. Renovated three-bedroom farmhouse (sleeps six) on farm in Gweek, near Helston, has exposed beams, private enclosed garden, reverse level layout to enjoy countryside views and games room.

■ **CORNWALL:** Classic Cottages (01326 555 555) offers seven nights' self-catering from Oct 12 in Blue Horizon, apartment sleeping two, in sailing town of Fowey, for total £315, saving £78.

History and beauty amid the Dales

Claire Mooney and family enjoyed a cottage stay surrounded by splendid countryside – with the highlight of a castle visit

IT'S the perfect place to settle down in your twilight years – but how do the Yorkshire Dales measure up for those at the other end of the age scale? Skipton, Settle and the surrounding towns and villages of the Craven district of North Yorkshire were recently chosen as England's best place to retire to, thanks to their picture-perfect scenery, clean air, friendly neighbours and low crime rate.

But with our kids still at least 60 years off putting their feet up, our reason for picking the sleepy and quaint village of Giggleswick for a summer break was more of a reaction to our previous trip than planning for the future.

A 10-hour trip to Cornwall (the boy was sick three times) made a holiday within commuting distance – about an hour and a half – seem a desirable option, even if that survey also mentioned high rainfall and relatively little sunshine.

We were staying at Sunnybeck Cottage, a century-old stone-built house that's been updated with all mod cons such as under-floor heating, flat screen TVs, surround-sound and a zingy modern kitchen and bathrooms. Welcoming owner Carol



Robertson didn't bat an eyelid as Joe, six, pronounced it 'very clean and tidy' then belted past her to claim first dibs on the three bedrooms. "It's very child-friendly," she assured us, "and there's a great playground that's near enough to walk to carrying a glass of wine!"

We didn't quite go that far – you might have suspected it when I joined the kids on both the zip wire and a whizzy three-lane slide – although very pretty gardens at the back and front of Sunnybeck did tempt us outside with a glass or two after we'd exhausted them in the playground.

But our favourite thing was the shallow beck – stream – that gurgled past the rear gate and

provided endless opportunities for exploring and dabbling.

Sleeping with the window open, I woke every morning thinking it was raining, then found my spirits lifting to look out at the beck and the gorgeous green countryside beyond – miles and miles of lush fields and trees, punctuated by dry stone walls.

Of course, this being the summer of 2012 it was sometimes raining, too, and although the Dales are ideal for an outdoorsy walking, bike-riding sort of break, we found some good places to wait out the drizzle.

Skipton, about half an hour away, is well known for shopping and its market attracts visitors

from miles away but our choice was the incredibly well-preserved Skipton Castle.

Twin towers welcome you into this 900-year-old fortress that withstood a three-year siege during the Civil War as the formidable Lady Anne Clifford battled for the Royalist cause.

It's not the biggest castle you'll ever visit but it is immaculately preserved, easy to get round and very welcoming to visitors. We caught it on one of the regular re-enactment days so enjoyed a blow by painful blow description of medieval weaponry as well as a look around army tents and a 12th century court hearing. The latter proved a bit too gruesome for Anna, four, so we retreated to admire Lady Anne's 400-year-old yew tree in the central courtyard while the boys enjoyed tales of crime and punishment medieval-style.

A sunnier day tempted us further afield to Harrogate and the glorious RHS garden at Harlow Carr. We've ticked off all the great gardens of Cornwall over the last decade but this went straight to the top of our list with its combination of inspiring planting, imaginative settings, sheer beauty – and a wealth of things for the children.

A tree house with climbing wall, tree stump staircase, rocking bridge and lookout post was the favourite but they were also thrilled by a log maze and the 'log ness' monster.

We'd arrived at opening time and were still exclaiming at new delights more than six hours later when a sudden cloudburst sent us diving for the fabulous onsite bookshop – a general one, with good children's section,



FACTFILE

The Mooneys were guests at Sunnybeck Cottage, Giggleswick (sunnybeck.com) booked through cottagesdirect.co.uk (0845 268 0873). For opening times and events at Skipton Castle see skiptoncastle.co.uk or call 01756 792442. For information about Harlow Carr see rhs.org.uk/Gardens/Harlow-Carr or call 01423 724690. Visit yorkshire.com for more info about the Dales.

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PAST TIMES Re-enactment at Skipton Castle. Below, Children play on the Log Ness Monster at RHS Harlow Carr, Harrogate. Facing page – Sunny Beck Cottage, Giggleswick, and Malham

rather than just a gardening one – and then dinner in Harlow Carr's Betty's Tea Room, the Yorkshire-Swiss institution that sets the standard for posh cafes everywhere.

Although a good many people had taken refuge at the same time, it lived up to its reputation with an exemplary fish and chips served with charm and easy efficiency.

We had a more mixed experience at one of Giggleswick's three pubs, the Craven Arms, where a Sunday dinner of roast

beef for the grown-ups and sausage and colcannon and salmon en papillote for the kids had hit all the right spots. The staff had been keen to offer child-sized portions of anything on the menu we wanted – there wasn't a separate children's menu – and made us feel really relaxed in the dining room, which appealed to the kids with its huge portraits of farmyard animals.

But a different waitress on our return visit said they couldn't downsize the main courses and then after hearing me explain

knickerbocker glories to two avid little ice-cream guzzlers ("It's ice cream and fruit and jelly and lots of it!") returned with ... two glasses of not very nice sorbet.

When she collected the still nearly full glasses I pointed out that we could have done with a warning, sorbet not being particularly child-friendly, she apologised but still charged us the full £4.75 a portion.

Another disappointment was the Dales visitor centre outside Malham. It cost £2.50 to park for

two hours so we were expecting a bit of an exhibition about the Dales landscape and wildlife but there was really only a small shop, some loos and a picnic area with a couple of small displays.

It didn't put us off visiting Malham Tarn, though – England's highest freshwater lake and a magnet for walkers and nature lovers. Water is always a magnet for my small boy so we had a sitcom moment where the water went over his wellies, his sister followed and got stuck in the mud, his attempt to pull her out just ended up with him pushing her onto her bum, and I had to wade in to rescue her – losing my sandals in the process.

This amused him so much that he took off his socks and wellies and waded waist deep into a puddle, laughing like a drain despite the chill factor.

I was tempted to see how much cold he could take by trying the open air swimming pool at Ingleton, heading north out of Giggleswick towards Kendal and the Lakes – it's also famous for its six waterfalls, though be warned there's an £11 charge for a family to trek the four and a half mile route around them.

Even he didn't want to swim in the drizzle, though, so instead they joined a tutored kids' fun and splash session at the lovely, friendly pool at Settle, a charity brilliantly supported by volunteers in the community.

It advertises senior swim sessions, too, for those who've reached retirement – but any age can appreciate the friendliness you get not just here but all around the beautiful Dales.



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