



The best family days out in the UK for spring 2018

Looking for inspiration for Easter - and beyond? Here's our pick of 25 places to visit, from new attractions to springtime gardens, adventure trails and, of course, egg hunts

● **Where will you be heading? Share your tips in the comments below**

Sally Coffey

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NEW OPENINGS

Hadrian's Wall, Northumberland

It may date back to around AD122 but that doesn't mean this landmark is immune to a makeover. The biggest news for this year is the £1.3m restoration and reopening of Birdoswald, the military fort near Housesteads. It now has lots of hands-on exhibits for kids, including an interactive Roman quest and a signalling game, which are reached through a gatehouse. The new museum at Corbridge Roman Town opens at the end of April.

● Adult £6.60, child (5-15) £3.90, family £16.90, english-heritage.org.uk

The Bear Trail, Devon





At this assault course near Exeter muddiness is encouraged - and mum and dad can join in, too. New for this year is the Leap of Faith, which involves climbing onto a five-metre-high platform, jumping to catch an airbag and swinging all the way down. The trail also includes zip wires and tunnels and is open throughout the school holidays and on weekends in term time.

● Online prices based on height, £6.75 for 1 metre and above; £4.05 under 1 metre. Family ticket £24.30, thebeartrail.co.uk

The Man Engine Resurrection Tour, nationwide



This year sees the return of the award-winning Man Engine, a huge mechanical puppet first constructed in 2016 to celebrate the Cornish mining world heritage site's 10th anniversary. Making its first appearance on 31 March at Geevor Tin Mine in west Cornwall, the 11-metre-high Man Engine will then tour other locations in the south-west, before heading to Ironbridge and South Yorkshire. Each venue will host a family-friendly afternoon event and an edgier pyrotechnic show at night.

● Advance daytime tickets, adult £10, child £6, themanengine.co.uk

InflataSpace, Newcastle





Sometimes, despite the best efforts of parents to extol the virtues of fresh air, all kids really want to do is throw themselves around a padded room for a couple of hours. For days like these there is InflataSpace, which opened this month. It has all manner of bouncy playthings, from toddler-friendly bouncy castles right up to gladiator-style podiums for the big kids (even adults). A good option for a rainy day.

● £12 (4+), £5 for toddlers, inflataspace.co.uk

The Bishop's Palace, Wells, Somerset



▲ Photograph: Alamy

For the first time in the palace's history kids can do their best king-of-the-castle impressions atop one of the turrets of this building that has been home to the bishops of Bath and Wells for 800 years. The new Prison Bastion Viewing Platform, opening on Good Friday, gives views of Wells Cathedral next door and allows access to some of the narrow walkways around the ramparts. The Dragon's Lair (activity centre) wears kids out but the most memorable part of a visit is witnessing the resident swans ring a bell in the moat when they want feeding - a practice passed down through generations.

● Adult £8.05, child (5-18) £3.55, family tickets from £14.40, bishopsalace.org.uk

SPRING REOPENINGS

Alnwick Castle, Northumberland





▲ Photograph: Alamy

This medieval castle, largely remodelled during the Victorian era, is a great place to fuel imaginations. It makes good use of its fantasy setting with the fiery Dragon Quest attraction, and Harry Potter fans flock to the Outer Bailey to partake in one of the Broomstick training sessions. Held throughout the day in the very place where Harry can be seen having a flying lesson in Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, sessions are free but must be booked on arrival.

● Open seven days a week from 29 March-28 October, online prices, adult £14.40, child (5-16) £7.65, alnwickcastle.com

National Show Caves Dinosaur Park, Brecon Beacons, Wales



▲ Photograph: Alamy

Purporting to be one of the biggest dinosaur parks in the world, with 220 life-size models, this fun attraction will appeal to any budding paleontologists. Kids can come face to tail with a brachiosaurus or cower in the shadow of a terrifying T rex. There are also three show caves, including Bone Cave where the remains of 42 skeletons dating back to the bronze age were found. Tickets also give access to an iron-age village, stone circle and play areas.

● Open seven days a week from 26 March until 4 November; adult £15, child (3-16) £11.50, showcaves.co.uk

Groombridge Place, East Sussex





▲ Photograph: Alamy

This forest adventure land on the East Sussex/Kent border has treetop walkways to brave, tepees to make believe in, and hidden treasure to hunt. It's so magical that little eyes can't help but search for fairies amid the ancient tree stumps on the woodland floor. In the expansive grounds of a 17th-century manor house, there are also English country house touches, such as a giant chessboard, a maze and wandering peacocks.

● *Alice's Circus Adventures runs from 30 March- 14 April. Adult £12.95, child (3-12) £9.95, family £39.50, groombridgeplace.com*

Chatsworth, Derbyshire



▲ The adventure playground at Chatsworth House. Photograph: Daniel Bosworth/Getty Images/VisitBritain

This stately home is showing off the results of its biggest restoration in 200 years. Inside, inquisitive minds can learn about the skill required to upkeep such a house and hear secret stories about past residents. Outside, fidgety feet can be set free to clamber through the giant rope park, whizz down huge slides and jump on trampolines. In the working farmyard there's animal handling available with lambs and chicks. Easter activities include an Easter egg hunt, face-painting and crafts.

● *Open seven days a week from mid March to end of year; a dult £23, child £14.50, family ticket £65, chatsworth.org*

Barry's Amusements, Portrush, Northern Ireland





While most people visiting this stretch of the Antrim coastline are headed to or from the [Giant's Causeway](#) and nearby rope bridge of [Carrick-a-Rede](#), for under 16s a stop-off at this seaside resort is great fun. Family rides include dodgems, a carousel and big dipper. It's not the most cutting-edge theme park but for a slice of nostalgia and a car-full of happy kids, it's a no-brainer.

● Open weekends and during school holidays from mid-March to 2 September. Free entry, pay as you ride with tokens, barrysamusements.com

WHERE TO SEE SPRING FLOWERS

Trewidden, Cornwall



▲ Photograph: Alamy

Since Cornwall is traditionally the first place in Britain to declare spring each year - 26 February in 2018 - it seems only fair it should be top of the list when it comes to spring flowers. As with the [Lost Gardens of Heligan](#), Trewidden, in Penzance, is one of the 12 designated [Great Gardens of Cornwall](#) and despite March snowfall many of its magnolias and camellias are coming into bloom. There's also a dedicated children's trail.

● Adult £7, under 16s free, trewiddengarden.co.uk

Blickling Estate, Norfolk



▲ Bluebell woodland in the grounds of the Blickling Estate. Photograph: Alamy

While the Jacobean hall and its history are intriguing - Anne Boleyn is said to have been born here - Blickling's springtime gardens are a seasonal must. In the Great Wood, which dates back to medieval times, you can see carpets of bluebells from late April to May. Special bluebell walks will set off from the main car park at 10am on 26-28 April.

● *Adult £14.35, child £7.20, family £35.95, nationaltrust.org.uk*

Ullswater, Lake District



▲ Photograph: Alamy

Few flowers symbolise spring quite as brilliantly as daffodils. It was by this lake on an April day in 1802 that William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy happened upon a long belt of the spring blooms, no doubt inspiring the poet's most famous work: *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*. From now until the end of April the flowers will be out in full force and for an on-the-water view there are kayaks, dinghies and boats for hire at Glenridding Sailing centre.

● *Kayaks £10 an hour, dinghies £25, traditional boats £35, glenriddingsailingcentre.co.uk*

Hever Castle, Kent



The annual [Tulip Celebrations](#) (18-27 April) in the grounds of this moated castle

(the childhood home of Anne Boleyn) feature 20,000 of the colourful bulbs. Bright blooms sweep down from the Italian Garden all the way to the lake and loggia. Inside, the history of the tulip, introduced to England in the Elizabethan era, will be explored. Kids will love the adventure playground, the Tudor Garden - which features yew trees carved into giant chess pieces - and both the water and yew mazes.

● Online prices, adult £16.25, child (5-15) £9.20, family £42.95, hevercastle.co.uk

Benington Lordship Gardens, Stevenage



▲ Photograph: Alamy

This seven-acre garden set around a Georgian manor house feels very much like the Secret Garden. It's only open on set days (Easter Sunday and Monday midday-4pm and 28-29 May midday-5pm) but that makes it feel even more special. There is a formal rose garden, long double herbaceous borders, while wild flowers, such as cowslips and primroses, vie for space with spring bulbs on the banks of the two ponds. A trail leads to the ruined Norman motte and bailey castle.

● Adults £5, 12-16 £2, under 12s free, beningtonlordship.co.uk

ANIMAL ATTRACTIONS

Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, Wales



▲ Manx shearwater. Photograph: Alamy

As with its slightly better known neighbour, Skomer, this tiny island is in the Irish Sea, just a couple of miles off the Welsh coast. It is a hub for migrating marine

birds, including thousands of Manx shearwaters who return here each March from South America, and puffins. There aren't many crowds on Skokholm though: access is by a twice-weekly boat and there is only accommodation for up to 20 guests.

● *Overnight stays from £140pp for 3 nights. Return boat fare £27.50, welshwildlife.org*

Moray Firth, Scotland



▲ Bottlenose dolphin. Photograph: Alamy

This inlet of the North Sea in north-east Scotland is renowned for its bottlenose dolphin population and it's estimated around 130 dolphins swim in its waters. For budgets that don't stretch to boat trips, it can be just as fruitful to find a patch of grass at Chanonry Point, Cromarty, lay out a picnic and wait. Patience is often rewarded with sightings as this is a popular feeding spot. Harbour seals can also be spotted on the mudbanks, while further out minke whales and the occasional killer whale are not unheard of.

● moraydolphins.co.uk

Port Lympne, Kent



▲ Photograph: Alamy

At this wildlife reserve near the south Kent coast, visitors can take a safari ride to

see roaming giraffes, zebras and the largest herd of black rhino in the UK. For teenagers interested in conservation, there's a chance to become a zoo keeper for the day, while younger kids can shadow staff on a behind-the-scenes tour. For short breaks, [New Beach Holiday Park](#) (from £129 for 3 nights) at nearby [Dymchurch](#) beach is an affordable choice, with an indoor pool, amusements and an adventure playground.

● Online, adult £22.50, child £18.90, family £82, animal courses from £156, aspinallfoundation.org

River Cam, Cambridgeshire

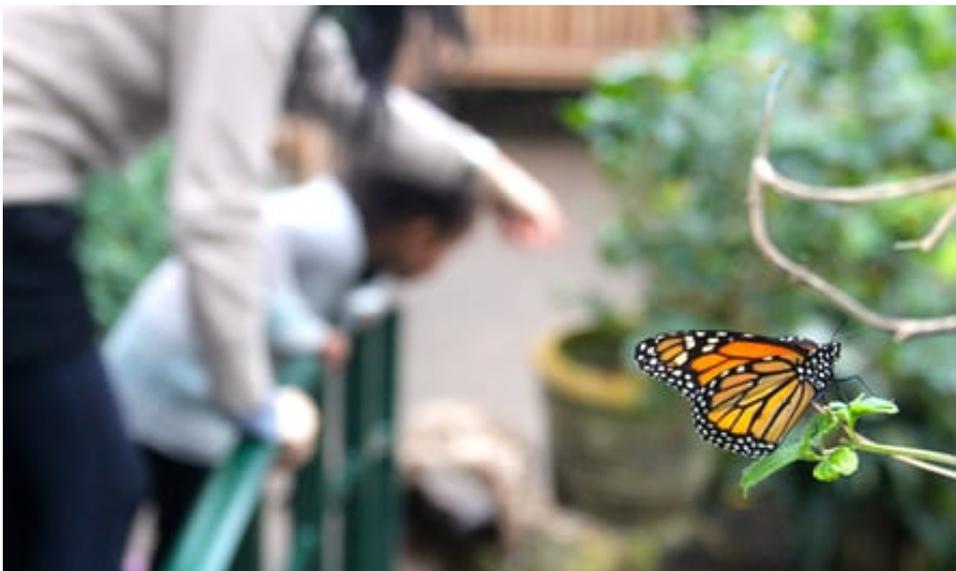


▲ Bat punt on the river Cam

From 11 May to 25 September, the Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust will be hosting its annual bat safaris to hear these nocturnal mammals fully woken from their winter slumber. The Friday tours set off aboard traditional punts from Cambridge just before dusk and drift downriver to the strange sounds of the riverbank (all of which will be fully explained). There will also be safaris on Saturday evenings from late July to September.

● Adult £20, child £15, wildlifebcn.org

Stratford-upon-Avon Butterfly Farm



▲ Photograph: Alamy

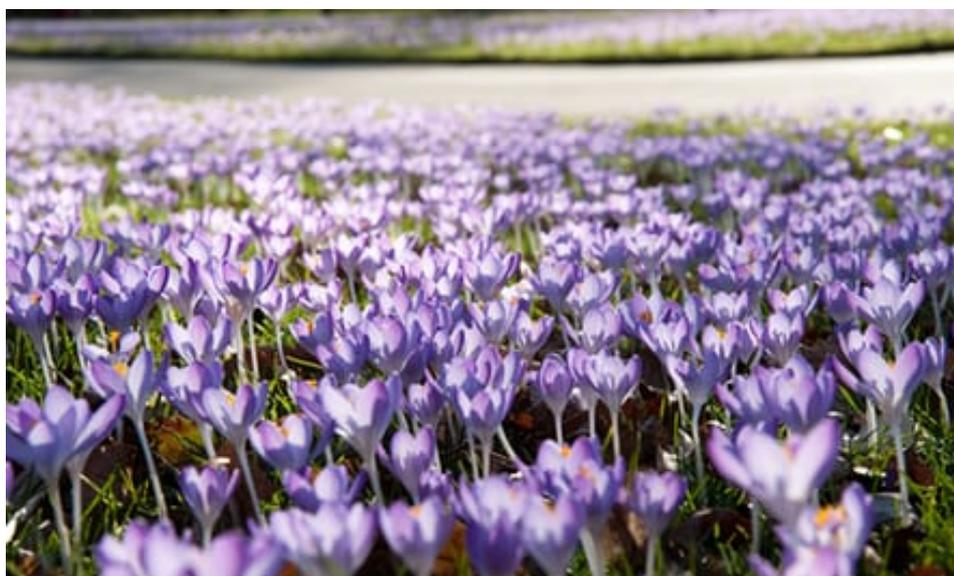
A welcome departure from all the Shakespeare-themed tourist draws, this tropical butterfly house features 250 species of the insect. From 3-15 April handling

sessions will give kids the chance to hold a variety of them, including African land snails, giant millipedes and Madagascan cockroaches. If the weather's nice the shaded wild flower garden is a pretty place for a picnic.

● *Adult £7.25, child (3-16) £6.25, family £22.50, butterflyfarm.co.uk*

EASTER ACTIVITIES

Peter Rabbit, Kew Gardens, London and Wakehurst, West Sussex



This Easter, not only is Beatrix Potter's most beloved character [lighting up the big screen](#), but Peter Rabbit is also making an appearance at two of Britain's most popular gardens: Kew and Wakehurst. From 30 March to 15 April, there will be storytelling, bunny ear decorating, a trail to follow and even the chance for kids to learn about growing their own vegetables (at both gardens; and included in entry price to the gardens).

● *Online, Kew: adult £16, child (4-16) £4; Wakehurst: adult £12.50, under 16s free, kew.org and kew.org/wakehurst*

Castle Ward, Northern Ireland



▲ Photograph: Alamy

This Easter holiday (until 8 April) at the real Winterfell (this was a Games of Thrones filming location) there will be the obligatory egg hunts plus the chance to honour one of the house's most prolific former residents, scientist Mary Ward, on a bug-detecting mission. The Easter Fair on 16-18 April will include egg rolling on

the lawn, while the Secret Shore Trail provides kids with plenty of fallen trees to scramble over, muddy puddles to jump in, and a fabulous viewpoint of the 18th-century stately home.

● *Adult £8.60, child £4.30, family £21.55, nationaltrust.org.uk*

Loch Katrine Eco Camping, Scotland



▲ Photograph: Alamy

The eight mini lodges at this campsite, which opened over winter, are cosy places to huddle up under a blanket for a spot of stargazing. From 31 March-1 April the Mad Hatter Easter Extravaganza will take place at the nearby Trossachs Pier and include an Easter egg hunt, plus a themed cruise aboard the century-old steamship Sir Walter Scott, which carried Victorian visitors encouraged by its namesake's lyricism.

● *Loch-side lodges from £80 a night for two guests. Mad Hatter sails adult £16, child (5-16) £12.50, under 5s £5 lochkatrine.com*

Morden Hall Park, London



▲ Rose garden at Morden Hall Park. Photograph: Alamy

While Wimbledon common just a couple of miles away may have found fame with the Wombles, this lesser-known green space is every bit as pretty, especially in the rose garden where theatre shows are performed in summer. Set along the river Wandle, there are 50 hectares to play in, with droopy willow trees to climb, streams to splash in and plenty of places to hide. From 30 March-2 April Easter egg

hunts start outside the historic snuff mill.

● £4 a child, nationaltrust.org.uk

Cannon Hall Farm, Barnsley, Yorkshire



▲ Meercat at Cannon Hall farm

In the foothills of the Pennines, this award-winning farm attraction is open year-round but spring is when it's at its peak. Until 8 April, the interactive Easter Adventure calls upon little helpers to fix the Easter Bunny's magic egg-making machine (for a reward, naturally) before meeting the bunny in person. There will also be sheep and ferret racing, milking demos and tractor trail rides.

● £9.95 in advance, tickets include entry to the farm, cannonhallfarm.co.uk

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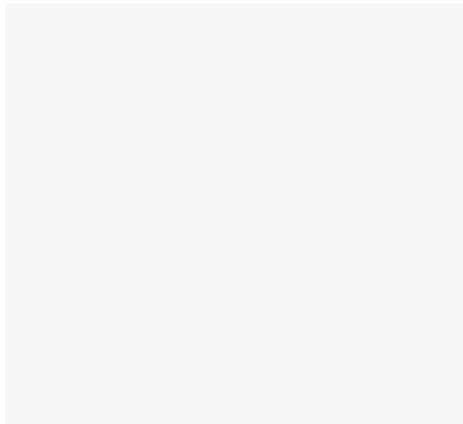


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