

25 fun things to do this half term – for £10 or less

Make the trickiest of holidays fly by with this list of free or affordable activities

By Natalie Paris, TRAVEL WRITER

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Writer Natalie Paris's daughter Greta enjoying a Bristol Packet boat trip (tickets at £5.50 per child) | CREDIT: Clara Molden

With recent floods causing havoc and black ice adding danger to the school run, you'll be forgiven for not giving much thought to days out. However, the forthcoming half-term, which falls roughly in the middle of the month (dates vary), is notoriously tricky. My sincere congratulations to anyone who has a holiday booked, as it is too cold and too close to Christmas for most of us to manage it.

Yet, as inevitable as a downpour at forest school is the morning after you committed to cleaning their wellies, our children will need entertaining. Luckily, fun events for families are being planned up and down the country. Even better, many of them are either totally free – and those that aren't should cost £10 or less per ticket. So now is the time to book one and feel a little more like you're winning in 2023.

Fun

Butterflies, Warwickshire



Visit the Stratford Butterfly Farm for a hands-on brush with nature

Brighten up February by admiring the flutter of tiny spotted and streaked wings at the UK's largest tropical butterfly gardens. The Stratford Butterfly Farm maintains a rainforest-like climate, with colourful plants, fish and trickling ponds inside its glasshouses. On a sunny day especially, you can see butterflies from all over the world in flight, as well as minibeasts and insects, like leaf-cutting ants. Watch out for the free-roaming green iguanas too.

Daily, adults £8.95 (child £7.95), butterflyfarm.co.uk

Speed demons, Cumbria



There are more than 140 classic cars and motorbikes to examine at this former mill | CREDIT: Tony West

Children who love anything fast will be in their element at the Lakeland Motor Museum, in Backbarrow. It's not far from Coniston, where Sir Malcolm and Donald Campbell set records in their jet hydroplanes, so the museum has an exhibition dedicated to their achievements, including full-size replicas of the Bluebird K7 and other Bluebird vehicles. There are more than 140 classic cars and motorbikes to

can create their own space monsters or rockets in daily craft workshops and learn about how our senses work in space.

Feb 13-18, free, planetarium £2.50 (child £2), nms.ac.uk

Beeswax crafting, South Yorkshire



Draw inspiration from patterns in nature before crafting your own beeswax wrap | CREDIT: Annapurna Mellor

Beeswax wraps are a great reusable alternative to clingfilm and families can make their own at the National Trust's Wentworth Castle Garden. There is time to be inspired by patterns in nature first, on a wander around the Victorian conservatory and Grade I-listed gardens. Then, in the Blackbourn Room, design a fabric square to turn into a wrap to take home. There is a zipline and an adventure playground outside too.

Feb 14-16, workshop £2, entry adult £5 (child £2.50), [nationaltrust.org.uk](https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

Engines up close, Oxfordshire



Experience hands-on and immersive play at Didcot Railway Centre

Train-mad children can touch and climb on to vintage engines while they are stationary during Discovery Days at the Didcot Railway Centre. In an engine shed built in 1932, a number of locomotives have been preserved, including the splendid green Hall class steam locomotive Hinderton Hall. Didcot's signalling centre is set up for hands-on play, while there is also an air-raid shelter to experience.

Feb 16-17, adult £9.50 (child £9), didcotrailwaycentre.org.uk

Boating on the docks, Bristol



Travel writer Natalie Paris and her daughter Greta cruise around Bristol Docks | CREDIT: Clara Molden

Home to Brunel's SS Great Britain and with a rich industrial history, Bristol's Floating Harbour is a fascinating place for a guided sail. Passing boats decorated with bunting, strips of multicoloured houses and the tall masts of the SS Great Britain, the 45-minute city dock tour run by the Bristol Packet boat company is a glorious way of getting onto the water and a fun introduction to the city. The Packet is an icon on the docks, having lovingly restored its historic boats, including the gracious 1920s Tower Belle.

Multiple departures daily, adults £9.75 (child £5.50), bristolpacket.co.uk

Educational

Golden Mummies of Egypt, Manchester



Reopening after a £15million transformation, the Manchester Museum is offering brand new exhibits with artefacts from Egypt and Sudan

At more than 130 years old, the Manchester Museum is reopening after a £15million transformation. Taking pride of place in the brand-new exhibition hall are exhibits from Egypt and Sudan that include more than 100 objects and eight mummies. Learning is made easier for children via replica objects that, when touched, bring up information on digital displays. In the dinosaur gallery there is the newly acquired April the Tenontosaurus.

From Feb 18, closed Mon, free, museum.manchester.ac.uk

Viking camp, York



Marauders approaching; visit York for the Jorvik Viking Festival

Marauders can be found on York's streets for the annual Jorvik Viking Festival. Expect lots to see for free across the city, from best beard competitions to storytelling and mock combat at St Helen's Square, plus Vikings to meet at their encampment on Parliament Street. Brooch, shield and pottery crafting sessions take place in the Guildhall, for £3 a go, where there is also a battle training bootcamp for £5.

Feb 11-19, free with some ticketed activities, jorvikvikingfestival.co.uk

Wild stories, Norfolk



Get some fresh air while immersing yourself in stories at Holkham Park | CREDIT: Holkham Estate

Bookworms can get some fresh air while immersing themselves in stories at Holkham Park. A trail around the park reveals the tales behind its landmarks, while in the main house, children can make a bookmark, design the cover for their autobiography and add a line to Holkham's "never-ending story". Outdoors, there is also a nature trail around the lake and an adventure playground.

Feb 11-19, adults £5.50 (child £2.50), holkham.co.uk



Completely undercover, the villa is perfect for rainy February days

Lullingstone Roman Villa is one of Britain's most remarkably intact villas and it is completely undercover, so perfect for rainy February days. The stones date back to AD100 and the villa was probably at its most magnificent during the 4th century. A light show will keep children's attention and there is plenty to see, from mosaics to rare wall paintings, various artefacts, a heated bath suite and a chapel.

Various dates, adult £9 (child £5.40), english-heritage.org.uk

Drones away, Shropshire



Explore life in the sky at the RAF Museum in Cosford | CREDIT: Bob Greaves

Bright young minds get airborne at the RAF Museum Midlands in Cosford, where a range of challenges have been devised to keep children busy. These could involve modifying a mini quadcopter drone so that it can track polar bears, launching rockets or using coding to guide a sphere through a maze. Regular exhibits tell the story of the RAF and the museum has a fine collection of aircraft, including Spitfires and Valiants, too.

Daily, free, [rafmuseum.org/midlands](https://www.rafmuseum.org/midlands)

Victorian life, South Yorkshire



Dress up and join in with interactive storytelling and games at this 1860s English Heritage property | CREDIT: Mike Harrington

Kids who enjoy dressing up can be a Victorian for the day at Brodsworth Hall. The 1860s English Heritage property will have would-be residents in Victorian attire walking the corridors, encouraging families to join in with interactive storytelling or games. Don't miss the pleasure gardens too, which have been fully restored and are listed, with a fern dell grotto and a gentrified garden loo.

Feb 18-26, adult £9 (child £5.30), [english-heritage.org.uk](https://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

Meet Dippy, Coventry



National treasure: Dippy the Diplodocus will call Herbert Art Gallery & Museum home for the next three years | CREDIT: National Museums

Dippy the Diplodocus's plod around the UK continues with the Natural History Museum's replica skeleton coming to rest in Coventry. The 85ft-long, 292-bone replica will be on show at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum for the next three years. The museum's permanent galleries detail the city's industrial and wartime history, while another explores the story of Lady Godiva, who may or may not have bared all on horseback.

From Feb 20, free, booking advised, theherbert.org

Lost in space, Bradford

Jet off for a hands-on learning event at the Science and Media Museum. Space travel and the planets are the inspiration for live experiments and fun workshops. The onsite IMAX cinema will be loaded up with starry films and documentaries, while the museum's permanent galleries include one dedicated to animation, with models and artwork, plus the interactive Wonderlab, filled with light and sound installations.

Feb 11-19, free, scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk

Would-be kings, Northumberland



Watch a swashbuckling theatre group or try on armour as you imagine life in 14th-century England | CREDIT: Kippa Matthews

Youngsters can imagine life as a child king of England at 14th-century Warkworth Castle, where the stories of young Medieval and Tudor monarchs will be told. An interactive theatre group will act out events in their reigns and reveal whether they were successful or not as kings. Weapons and armour from different periods of history can be tried on, though it's foam swords only in the mock fighting area.

Feb 18-26, adult £8.10 (child £4.80), english-heritage.org.uk

Culture

Imagine Children's Festival, London



Spark imaginations and unleash creativity with a host of captivating performances and activities

Half of the events at this arts festival on the Southbank are free, making it an unmissable stop for families. The author Michael Rosen is appearing, as is CBeebies presenter and saxophonist YolanDa. Arts and crafts sessions include drawing figures in the style of popular street artist Stik, or relax to an orchestral performance of Debussy and the Snow Elephant.

Feb 8-17, some free, book in advance, southbankcentre.co.uk

Wildlife photography, Devon



Get up close and personal with the animal kingdom at the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition | CREDIT: Fernando Constantino Martínez Belmar, Wildlife Photographer of the Year

Both young animal lovers and older children will enjoy seeing the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition, on loan from the Natural History Museum. Seaton Tramway, which runs narrow gauge heritage trams, is displaying the collection.

From Feb 10, adult £6 (under-16s free), tram rides cost extra, tram.co.uk

Mr Magnolia, Bath



This live performance promises a wacky adventure | CREDIT: Folksy Theatre

With an old trumpet and a single boot, Quentin Blake's delightful creation is the subject of a show put on by visiting group Folksy Theatre at Bath's Mission Theatre. Taking younger children on a wacky adventure, the performance features live music, puppetry and bags of audience interaction.

Feb 17-18, tickets £10, folksytheatre.co.uk

Charcoal drawing, Gloucestershire



Nature study: make wilderness-inspired sketches with charcoal fresh from the kiln | CREDIT: Paul Groom

The National Arboretum at Westonbirt has its own kiln for making charcoal. Visiting families (with children aged five and above) can watch it in action before picking up their pieces of charcoal for a drawing workshop. Leaves from Westonbirt's trees can be studied to sketch or create shadow pictures.

Feb 14-16, free, forestryengland.uk

A patchwork elephant, London



Colourful display: the Elmer and Friends exhibition in London celebrates 30 years of the series

Step into the colourful world of Elmer the Patchwork Elephant, the star of the popular books for young children, at the Horniman Museum in south-east London. Aimed at the under-sevens, the Elmer and Friends exhibition celebrates 30 years of the series by David McKee.

Daily, adult £5 (child £2.50), horniman.ac.uk

Creating His Dark Materials, Swansea



View the alethiometer at Glynn Vivian Art Gallery | CREDIT: POLLY THOMAS

Many of the spectacular worlds that Lyra and Will travelled through in Philip Pullman's recently televised series were actually digitally-enhanced Welsh landscapes. Teens can discover secrets from the BBC and HBO's filming of the series at the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, which features props including the subtle knife and the alethiometer.

Closed Mon, free, glynnvivian.co.uk

Adventure

Peak appreciation, Cumbria



Enjoy a pub lunch and hot chocolate at Sticklebarn tavern in Ambleside | CREDIT: National Trust Images/Annapurna Mellor

There are dozens of walks to choose from in the Langdale Pikes. The circular route around Blea Tarn, with views of Little and Great Langdale, is a 10-minute drive from Sticklebarn tavern, in Ambleside, and a good choice for little legs. Back at Sticklebarn, kids can warm up and be inspired over hot chocolate during a family adventure film afternoon on Feb 11, part of the Kendal Mountain Festival.

Feb 11, tickets £5, booking essential, kendalmountaintour.com

Peddalling the Peregrine Path, Monmouthshire

Keen cyclists might want to check out Sustrans' suggestions for traffic-free, family bike rides. The National Cycle Network route beginning in the market town of Monmouth is a gentle pedal alongside the River Wye, past old-fashioned pubs and the ruins of Goodrich Castle. It should take roughly 40 minutes to cover 7.5 miles to Symonds Yat – look out for peregrine falcons flying from the top of the gorge.

Free, sustrans.org.uk

Indoor tobogganing, Somerset



Catch some speed at the Mendip Activity Centre | CREDIT: Richard Eddins

The Mendip Hills are known for their gorges and caves, but snowsports? It's been frosty enough lately to go sledging, but it's easier to take kids to the dry ski slope at the Mendip Activity Centre. While adults watch, children between four and 12 years old can grab toboggan seats that have steering sticks for a half-an-hour session on a wooded slope.

Daily, from £6, mendip.me

Geocaching, Bedfordshire

Put teens' phones to good use in search of geocache treasures hidden on Dunstable Downs, in the northern Chilterns. The chalk grasslands have sweeping views and are home to ancient sites – the Five Knolls burial place and some medieval rabbit warrens. An app, such as geocaching.com, will lead you close to one of six locations where the camouflaged geocaches can be spotted.

Free, nationaltrust.org.uk