SIXT

ROAD TRIPS WITH KIDS IN THE UK

FAMILY DAY TRIPS BY CAR

Day drives from UK cities, grouped by journey time and what the kids get out of each one.

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ROAD TRIPS WITH KIDS IN THE UK

Day drives from UK cities, grouped by journey time and what the kids get out of each one

IN SHORT

Day trips are by far the most common kind of trip in England: in 2025, GB residents took 928 million tourism day visits in England, against 87 million overnight trips (VisitBritain). For families, that means short drives with a big payoff: New Brighton beach is about 20 minutes from Liverpool, Warwick Castle about 50 minutes from Birmingham and the New Forest about 2 hours from London. This guide compares around 30 family day trips from UK cities by drive time, age suitability and what children get out of each one.

This guide is for parents planning road trips with kids in the UK. It covers family day trips from London, Liverpool, Newcastle, Bristol, Birmingham, Leeds, Cambridge, Southampton, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness and Belfast: beaches, wildlife parks, castles, theme parks and museums, including indoor options for rainy days.

Each chapter answers one question parents ask when planning a day out by car, from the shortest drives with toddlers to the theme parks that still work when it rains. Where an attraction has age, height or swimming rules, they are stated, so you can choose a trip that suits your children before you set off.

Explore the UK by car with SIXT, the car rental and mobility company, and use this guide to choose where to go.

Which day trip suits your family?

If you want…	Go to chapter	Typical drive
The shortest drives from English cities	2. Within 45 minutes of English cities	15 to 45 min
Day trips from Glasgow, Edinburgh or Inverness	3. Scottish cities	About 1 hour or less
Coast, castles and water parks near Belfast	4. Belfast	About 20 min to 1 h 5 min
Theme parks and attractions for rainy days	5. Rain or shine	Varies by city
A bigger day out with a bigger payoff	6. 40 to 90 minutes	40 to 90 min
Day trips from London	7. Within 2 hours of London	Up to about 2 h
Child seats, breaks, packing and road rules	8. Planning and common mistakes	All trips

SAFETY FIRST

Some attractions have minimum ages, heights or swimming tests, for example Let's Go Hydro near Belfast and The Gobbins cliff path. Check the rules in the chapter and on the official website before you promise the kids a visit.

How to use this guide

Every chapter answers one question parents ask when planning a day out by car, and follows the same structure:

- Quick answer: the short answer, with distances and drive times.
- Destinations: what each place offers families, with a table to compare them.
- FAQ: the follow-up questions parents ask most.
- Sources: every fact is marked [S#] (SIXT Magazine) or [W#] (web source) and listed at the end of the chapter.

Distances are given in miles with kilometres in brackets. Drive times are estimates from city centres and do not include traffic or stops.

1. WHY ARE DAY TRIPS THE GO-TO ROAD TRIP WITH KIDS IN THE UK?

Liverpool · Leeds · Bristol · Manchester · Inverness

QUICK ANSWER

Day trips are by far the most common kind of trip in England: in 2025, GB residents took 928 million tourism day visits in England against 87 million overnight trips [W1]. With children, a day trip usually means less packing, no hotel booking and fewer changes to bedtime routines. The family destinations in this chapter sit about 20 minutes to 1 hour from a major city, for example New Brighton, about 20 minutes from Liverpool, and Little Moreton Hall, just under 1 hour from Manchester [S8][W2].

How common are day trips in England?

In 2025, GB residents took 928 million tourism day visits in England, compared with 87 million overnight trips in England: more than ten day visits for every overnight trip [W1]. The figures cover all GB residents, not only families [W1].

For a family, a day trip has a simple format: leave after breakfast, spend the day at one place and be home for the evening. You only need three answers before you go: how long the drive is, what the children can do there and what the facilities are.

How long should the drive be?

Drive time is the first filter. The family destinations recommended in the SIXT Magazine day-trip guides used for this chapter range from about 20 minutes to about 1 hour one way from a major city [S2][S9][W2].

Destination	From	Distance	Drive time	Good for
New Brighton	Liverpool	about 7 mi (11 km) [W2]	about 20 min [W2]	Seaside, adventure golf, indoor play [S2]
Yorkshire Sculpture Park	Leeds	about 20 mi (32 km) [S6]	about 35 min via the M1, depending on traffic [W2]	Open-air sculptures across 500 acres, family learning events [S6]
Slimbridge Wetland Centre	Bristol	about 26 mi (42 km) [S7]	about 45 min via the M5 and A38 [W2]	Swans, ducks and talks on local birdlife [S7]
Little Moreton Hall	Manchester	about 30 mi (48 km) [S8]	just under 1 h via the A34 [S8]	A half-timbered house begun in the early 1500s,

Destination	From	Distance	Drive time	Good for
				children's events, tearoom [S8]
Highland Wildlife Park	Inverness	about 39 mi (63 km) [S9]	about 1 h on the A9 [W2]	Cold-climate animals such as an Amur tiger [S9]

Distances and drive times are one way from the city centre. Times are approximate and depend on traffic [W2].

This guide matches each destination to a drive time and a concrete activity for children, so you can decide quickly whether a place is worth the drive.

GOOD TO KNOW

Child car seat rules, breaks and other road rules for family trips are in chapter 8, "How do you plan a road trip with kids and avoid common mistakes?".

Frequently asked questions

How far should I plan to drive for a day trip with kids in the UK?
Plan for about 1 hour each way or less. That keeps the time in the car to about 2 hours for the whole day and leaves most of the day for the destination. All five examples in this chapter fit within that limit [S8][W2].

Are day trips becoming more or less popular in England?
Slightly more popular in the latest figures. Tourism day visits in England rose 2% in 2025, while overnight trips by GB residents fell 3% compared with 2024 [W1].

Can a longer drive, such as the Isle of Skye, still work as a day trip with kids?
Only with careful planning. SIXT Magazine calls the Isle of Skye one of its longer day trips and advises setting off early [S11]. From Inverness to Portree it is about 113 miles (182 km) and around 2 hours 40 minutes each way, so with young children an overnight stay may be the easier option [W2]. On the way, Loch Dùghaill (Loch Doule) by the A890 is a good place to stretch your legs [S11].

Sources for this chapter

Facts marked [S#] come from SIXT Magazine articles; facts marked [W#] come from the other sources below:

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	England 2025: tourism day visits reached 928m (up 2% on 2024); Britain residents took 87 million overnight trips in England (down 3% on 2024)	VisitBritain / VisitEngland (Great Britain Tourism Survey): Domestic tourism: latest annual results

Ref	Fact	Source
W2	Drive times: Liverpool to New Brighton about 6.8 mi / 17 to 28 min; Leeds to Yorkshire Sculpture Park 32 to 37 min; Bristol to Slimbridge 41 to 49 min; Inverness to Highland Wildlife Park 59 to 75 min; Inverness to Portree 113.6 mi / 2 h 40 min	Project OSRM / OpenStreetMap: OSRM route planner (OpenStreetMap data)
S2	New Brighton: seaside town, adventure golf, indoor play	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Liverpool
S6	Yorkshire Sculpture Park: 20 mi from Leeds, 500 acres, deer, Family Learning events	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Leeds
S7	Slimbridge: 26 mi from Bristol; swans, ducks, talks on birdlife	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Bristol
S8	Little Moreton Hall: 30 mi, just under 1 h via the A34; 1508 mansion, children's events, tearoom	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Manchester
S9	Highland Wildlife Park: 39 mi from Inverness; Amur tigers	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Inverness
S11	Isle of Skye: one of the longer day trips, set off early; stop at Loch Dughaill on the A890	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips in Scotland

2. WHAT ARE THE BEST ROAD TRIPS WITH KIDS WITHIN 45 MINUTES OF ENGLISH CITIES?

Newcastle · Liverpool · Bristol · Cambridge

QUICK ANSWER

The shortest family drives in England in this guide are Port Sunlight Village, about 15 minutes from Liverpool, New Brighton, about 20 minutes from Liverpool, and Washington Wetland Centre, about 22 minutes from Newcastle [S2][S3][W1]. Audley End is about 30 to 35 minutes from Cambridge and Slimbridge Wetland Centre about 45 minutes from Bristol [W1]. Each trip pairs a short drive with wildlife, the seaside or hands-on history.

Destination	From	Distance	Drive time	Good for
Port Sunlight Village	Liverpool	about 6 mi (10 km) [S2]	about 15 min via the Queensway Tunnel and A41 [S2]	Museum, art gallery, soap science [S2]
New Brighton	Liverpool	about 7 mi (11 km) [W1]	about 20 min via the Kingsway Tunnel (A59) [W1]	Seaside, adventure golf, indoor play [S2]
Washington Wetland Centre	Newcastle	about 10 mi (16 km) [S3]	about 22 min via the A184, A195 and A1231 [S3]	Otters, birds, play areas [S3]
Audley End House and Gardens	Cambridge	about 15 mi (25 km) [W1]	about 30 to 35 min via the M11 and A1301 [W1]	Jacobean house, horses, miniature railway [S12]
Slimbridge Wetland Centre	Bristol	about 26 mi (42 km) [S7]	about 45 min via the M5 and A38 [W1]	Swans, ducks, winter birds [S7]

Washington Wetland Centre from Newcastle

Washington Wetland Centre is about 10 miles (16 km) from Newcastle, about 22 minutes by car. Leave Newcastle on the A184 to Lingey Lane, follow the A195, then the A1231, where signs point to the centre [S3].

The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) site covers 103 acres (42 ha) [W2]. Children can see Asian short-clawed otters, birds and, in summer, dragonflies, and let off steam in the nature-based play areas [S3][W3].

The Waterside Café serves hot food, cakes and drinks. The centre now has seasonal opening days, so check the official website for which days it is open before you go [W4].

New Brighton from Liverpool

New Brighton is about 7 miles (11 km) from Liverpool city centre, about 20 minutes through the Kingsway Tunnel (A59) to the Wirral [W1]. It was developed as a seaside resort from 1830 [W5].

- Marine Point: a leisure area with restaurants, a cinema and an indoor play centre [S2][W6].
- Championship Adventure Golf: two 18-hole courses, one built around Wirral landmarks and one with miniature versions of world-famous holes [S2][W7].
- Wallasey Beach: about 2 miles (3 km) and about 6 minutes by car from New Brighton, with a long sandy beach; check tide times before you go [S2][W1].

Port Sunlight Village from Liverpool

Port Sunlight Village is about 6 miles (10 km) from Liverpool, about 15 minutes via the Queensway (Birkenhead) Tunnel and the A41 [S2]. Lever Brothers began building it in 1888 to house the workers of their soap factory, and it is now a preserved village with a museum, an art gallery and parks [S2][W8].

SoapWorks is an interactive experience about the science of soap, held in the village's former schoolroom [W9]. The Lady Lever Art Gallery is inside the village, a short walk away [W8].

Slimbridge Wetland Centre from Bristol

Slimbridge Wetland Centre is about 26 miles (42 km) from Bristol, about 45 minutes via the M5 and A38 [S7][W1]. The lakes are home to swans and many kinds of ducks [S7]. WWT runs talks, tours and seasonal family trails; check the events page for what is on during your visit [W10].

Audley End House and Gardens from Cambridge

Audley End is about 15 miles (25 km) from Cambridge, about 30 to 35 minutes via the M11 and A1301 [W1]. English Heritage describes the house as one of England's greatest Jacobean houses, with grounds designed by Capability Brown [S12][W11].

Children can see the resident horses in the stable yard and explore the Victorian Service Wing, which is brought to life with sights and sounds [W11]. Nearby, the Audley End Enchanted Railway (formerly the Audley End Miniature Railway) runs a 1.5-mile miniature train ride through private woodland [S12][W12].

Frequently asked questions

When is the best time to visit Slimbridge with kids?
Winter. Up to 30,000 wild ducks, geese and swans spend the winter at Slimbridge, with numbers peaking around January [W13].

Can you visit Port Sunlight and New Brighton on the same day from Liverpool?
Yes. Both are on the Wirral, and the drive between them is about 7.5 miles (12 km), around 20 to 25 minutes via the A41 and A554, so you do not need to go back through a tunnel [W1].

Can families just turn up at SoapWorks in Port Sunlight?
Not usually. SoapWorks is mainly booked by schools and opens to families at selected times, such as half-term activities, so check the dates on the Port Sunlight Village website first [W9].

Is the Audley End railway part of an English Heritage visit?
No. The Audley End Enchanted Railway is run separately from the English Heritage house, so check its own opening days and tickets [W12]. Diesel and electric trains also run, so a steam train is not guaranteed [W12].

Sources for this chapter

Facts marked [S#] come from SIXT Magazine articles; facts marked [W#] come from the other sources below:

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	Drive times: Liverpool to New Brighton 6.8 mi / 17 to 28 min; New Brighton to Wallasey Beach (Harrison Drive) 2.1 mi / 6 to 9 min; Bristol to Slimbridge 26.5 mi / 41 to 49 min; Cambridge to Audley End 15.4 mi / 27 to 38 min; Port Sunlight to New Brighton 7.5 to 7.6 mi / 20 to 27 min via the A41 and A554	Project OSRM / OpenStreetMap: OSRM route planner (OpenStreetMap data)
W2	WWT Washington is a 103-acre site	WWT: Happy birthday to us – WWT Washington turns 47
W3	Asian short-clawed otters and nature-based play areas at Washington	WWT: WWT Washington Wetland Centre
W4	Waterside Café (hot food, cakes, drinks); centre has moved to seasonal opening days and was closed on Wednesdays and Thursdays in October 2026	WWT: Eat, drink and shop – WWT Washington
W5	In 1830 James Atherton bought the land to develop New Brighton as a resort	Wikipedia: New Brighton, Merseyside
W6	Marine Point: cinema, restaurants and an indoor play centre	Wikipedia: Marine Point
W7	Two 18-hole courses (Landmark and World's Greatest)	Merseyrail: Championship Adventure Golf
W8	Land bought 1887, building began 1888 by Lever Brothers; the Lady Lever Art Gallery is in the village	Wikipedia: Port Sunlight
W9	SoapWorks: interactive experience about the science of soap in the former schoolroom; mainly schools, open to families at selected times such as half-term	Port Sunlight Village Trust: SoapWorks
W10	Talks and tours; family activities change by season	WWT: WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre
W11	One of England's greatest Jacobean houses; grounds designed by Capability Brown; resident horses in the stable yard; Victorian Service Wing with lifelike sights and sounds	English Heritage: Audley End House and Gardens

Ref	Fact	Source
W12	Audley End Enchanted Railway (formerly Audley End Miniature Railway), run separately from English Heritage; 1.5-mile ride through private woodland; diesel and electric trains also run	Audley End Miniature Railway Ltd: Audley End Enchanted Railway – FAQs
W13	Up to 30,000 wild wintering ducks, geese and swans, peak around January	WWT: Slimbridge winter wildlife
S2	New Brighton (Marine Point, adventure golf, Wallasey Beach); Port Sunlight (6 mi, 15 min, Queensway Tunnel and A41; museum, gallery, parks)	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Liverpool
S3	Washington Wetland Centre: 10 mi, about 22 min, A184, A195 and A1231 route; otters, birds, dragonflies	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Newcastle
S7	Slimbridge: 26 mi from Bristol via the M5 and A38; swans and ducks	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Bristol
S12	Audley End: English Heritage, Jacobean manor, Capability Brown gardens; miniature railway through private woodland	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Cambridge

3. WHICH ROAD TRIPS WITH KIDS FROM SCOTTISH CITIES TAKE ABOUT AN HOUR OR LESS?

Glasgow · Edinburgh · Inverness

QUICK ANSWER

From Glasgow, M&D's Scotland's Theme Park is about 25 minutes away via the M74 and Lunderston Bay beach about 50 minutes [W1]. From Edinburgh, Five Sisters Zoo is about 45 minutes along the A71 [W1]. From Inverness, Landmark Forest Adventure Park is about 40 minutes and Highland Wildlife Park about 1 hour, both on the A9 [W1].

Destination	From	Distance	Drive time	Good for
M&D's Scotland's Theme Park	Glasgow	about 14 mi (23 km) [W1]	about 25 min via the M74 [S11][W1]	Rides, soft play, adventure golf [S11]
Lunderston Bay	Glasgow	about 31 mi (50 km) [W1]	about 50 min via the M8, A8 and A770 [W1]	Sandy beach, rock pools, playpark [S13][W2]
Five Sisters Zoo	Edinburgh	about 20 mi (32 km) [W1]	about 45 min via the A71 [W1]	Ex-circus lion, brown bears, soft play [W6]
Landmark Forest Adventure Park	Inverness	about 25 mi (40 km) [S9]	about 40 min via the A9 and A938 [W1]	Dinosaurs, water coasters, forest tower [S9]
Highland Wildlife Park	Inverness	about 39 mi (63 km) [S9]	about 1 h on the A9 [W1]	Amur tiger, polar bears, snow leopards [W3]

M&D's Scotland's Theme Park from Glasgow

M&D's Scotland's Theme Park is in Strathclyde Country Park, Motherwell, about 14 miles (23 km) from Glasgow city centre [W1][W4]. Take the M74 most of the way; the drive takes about 25 minutes [S11][W1].

The park has rides for a range of ages and heights, plus Krazy Congo soft play, a Game Zone and Devil's Island Adventure Golf [S11][W4]. There are several places to eat and drink in the park [S11][W4].

Lunderston Bay from Glasgow

Lunderston Bay is a sandy beach west of Glasgow, about 31 miles (50 km) and about 50 minutes away via the M8, A8 and the A770 coast road [S13][W1]. It lies on the Firth of Clyde, between Gourock and Inverkip [W5].

SIXT Magazine suggests exploring the rock pools and watching birds [S13]. The sandy north end has picnic tables, a wheelchair-accessible playground, toilets and a car park [W5]. Inverclyde Council opened a nautical playpark with a pirate ship there in 2022 [W2].

Five Sisters Zoo from Edinburgh

Five Sisters Zoo, in West Lothian, is about 20 miles (32 km) from Edinburgh, about 45 minutes along the A71 [W1]. Its animals include an ex-circus lion and rescued brown bears [W6].

The Leaping Lemurs Soft Play has a multi-tiered play frame with baby, toddler and junior zones for children up to 11, so younger children can burn off energy between animal visits [S11][W7].

Landmark Forest Adventure Park from Inverness

Landmark Forest Adventure Park, at Carrbridge, is about 25 miles (40 km) from Inverness, about 40 minutes south on the A9 and then the A938 [S9][W1]. Attractions include Dinosaur Kingdom, the Tropical Hot House, the Wild Water Coasters and the 105-step Forest Tower [S9][W8].

Highland Wildlife Park from Inverness

Highland Wildlife Park is about 39 miles (63 km) from Inverness, about 1 hour on the A9 [S9][W1]. It keeps cold-climate animals from around the world, such as an Amur tiger, polar bears, snow leopards and Japanese macaques; many are threatened species in conservation breeding programmes [W3].

Frequently asked questions

Are there lifeguards at Lunderston Bay?
No. Lunderston Bay is a designated bathing water with lifebuoy stations, but there are no lifeguards, so stay close to children in the water [W5].

Is M&D's Scotland's Theme Park open all year?
Not all of it. Opening times vary by attraction and season, so check the opening dates and times on the official website before you drive out [W4].

What is open at Landmark Forest Adventure Park in winter?

Dinosaur Kingdom and the Tropical Hot House are open all year, and the Forest Tower opens all year, weather permitting [W8]. The Wild Water Coasters run in the summer season only, so check the season dates before you go [W8].

Can children take part in a keeper experience at Five Sisters Zoo?
Yes, with planning. The zoo offers hands-on half-day keeper experiences that must be booked in advance [W7]. The full-day keeper experience is for ages 16 and over [W9].

Is Highland Wildlife Park worth visiting in winter?
Yes, but check conditions first. In winter, snow and ice can mean the drive-through areas stay closed for safety [W10].

Sources for this chapter

Facts marked [S#] come from SIXT Magazine articles; facts marked [W#] come from the other sources below:

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	Drive times: Glasgow to M&D's (Strathclyde Country Park) 12.4 to 15.7 mi / 21 to 30 min; Glasgow to Lunderston Bay 30.6 to 31.2 mi / 48 to 50 min via the M8, A8 and A770; Inverness to Landmark 24.6 to 25.0 mi / 37 to 43 min; Inverness to Highland Wildlife Park 38.7 to 39.7 mi / 55 to 75 min; Edinburgh to Five Sisters Zoo 18.5 to 21.0 mi / 40 to 47 min	Project OSRM / OpenStreetMap: OSRM route planner (OpenStreetMap data)
W2	Nautical-themed playpark with a pirate ship opened at Lunderston Bay in October 2022	Inverclyde Council: New £200k playpark is looking ship-shape
W3	Cold-climate species, many IUCN listed; Amur tigers, polar bears, snow leopards, Japanese macaques	Wikipedia: Highland Wildlife Park
W4	Official name, location in Strathclyde Country Park; Krazy Congo soft play, Game Zone, Devil's Island Adventure Golf; seasonal opening	M&D's: M&D's Scotland's Theme Park
W5	Sandy north end with picnic tables, wheelchair-accessible playground, toilets and car park; designated bathing water, lifebuoys, no lifeguards; by the A770 between Gourock and Inverkip	Wikipedia: Lunderston Bay
W6	Rescued brown bears; one ex-circus lion remains	Five Sisters Zoo: Five Sisters Zoo
W7	Hands-on half-day zoo keeper experiences must be booked in advance; Leaping Lemurs four-level soft play frame	Visit West Lothian: Five Sisters Zoo
W8	Dinosaur Kingdom and Tropical Hot House open all year; Forest Tower 105 steps, all year weather permitting; Wild Water Coasters summer season only	Landmark Forest Adventure Park: Attractions
W9	Full Day Keeper experience: all participants must be aged 16+	Five Sisters Zoo: Full Day Keeper
W10	Over the winter, snow and ice may mean keeping the drive-through areas closed	Highland Wildlife Park (RZSS): FAQ

Ref	Fact	Source
S9	Landmark (25 mi, A9 and A938; Dinosaur Kingdom, Tropical Hot House, Wild Water Coaster, 105-step tower); Highland Wildlife Park (39 mi, A9)	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Inverness
S11	M&D's (M74, about 25 min; rides, soft play, gaming zones, crazy golf, food or picnic); Five Sisters Zoo (22 mi, A71, under 1 h; lions, bears; Leaping Lemurs Soft Play)	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips in Scotland
S13	Lunderston Bay: close sandy beach to Glasgow; rock pools, bird-watching	SIXT Magazine: Best Beaches Near Glasgow

4. WHAT ROAD TRIPS WITH KIDS FROM BELFAST WORK WELL BY CAR?

Belfast: Let's Go Hydro, The Gobbins, Exploris Aquarium

QUICK ANSWER

From Belfast, families can drive to Let's Go Hydro in about 20 minutes, The Gobbins in about 35 minutes and Exploris Aquarium in about 1 hour 5 minutes [W1][S14]. Let's Go Hydro and The Gobbins have strict age, height and fitness rules, so they suit older children; Exploris Aquarium suits all ages [W2][W3][S14].

Destination	Distance	Drive time	Route	Good for
Let's Go Hydro Aqua Park	5.5 mi (9 km) [W1]	About 20 min [W1]	A24 south towards Carryduff [S14]	Confident swimmers aged 7+ [W2]
The Gobbins	17 mi (27 km) [S14]	About 35 min [S14]	M2, M5, A2, B150 [S14]	Fit children over 1.2 m [W3]
Exploris Aquarium	30 mi (48 km) [S14]	About 1 h 5 min [S14]	A20 [S14]	Marine life, all ages [S14]

Let's Go Hydro: an aqua park for confident swimmers

Let's Go Hydro is an aqua park on Knockbracken Reservoir, near Carryduff, with inflatable slides on the water [S14][W1][W2]. It is about 5.5 miles (9 km) from Belfast city centre, about 20 minutes via the A24 [W1].

AQUA PARK SAFETY RULES

Children must be aged 7 or over, at least 110 cm tall and able to swim 25 m unaided. Children aged 8 and under need an adult with them on the aqua park, with 1 adult for every 3 children. Under-16s must stay with an adult on site. The aqua park opens seasonally and sessions are booked online, so check dates and rules on the official website before you go [W2].

The Gobbins: a guided cliff path for older children

The Gobbins is a cliff path on the Northern Irish coast north of Belfast, with caves, sea views and coastal wildlife along the route [S14]. It is 17 miles (27 km) from Belfast, about 35 minutes via the M2, a short stretch of the M5 towards Whiteabbey, the A2 and the B150 [S14]. On the way, Carrickfergus Castle is a Norman stronghold built from 1177 and a good stop for the whole family [S14][W4].

THE GOBBINS SAFETY RULES

Visits are by guided tour only. Anyone under 1.2 m (about 4 feet) is not allowed on the path, and the official site says the tour is unsuitable for young children. The walk is 3 miles (5 km) long, with 50 flights of narrow steps, some hand-carved and uneven, and needs a good level of fitness [W3].

Exploris Aquarium: sea life and a seal sanctuary

Exploris Aquarium and Seal Sanctuary is in Portaferry, on the shore of Strangford Lough [W5]. It is 30 miles (48 km) from Belfast, about 1 hour 5 minutes via the A20 [S14]. Exhibits include an ocean tank and the seal sanctuary, and there is somewhere to eat on site [W5][S14]. The first stretch to Newtownards is inland; after Newtownards, the A20 follows the shore of Strangford Lough to Portaferry [W6]. Helen's Tower, a 19th-century tower with walking trails, is a short detour from Newtownards [S14][W7].

Frequently asked questions

Can young children do The Gobbins with their parents?
No. Children cannot be carried on the path, and everyone under 18 must stay with an adult for the whole tour, including the safety briefing [W3]. With younger children, visit Carrickfergus Castle on the same coast road instead [S14].

Which Belfast day trip suits children under 7?
Exploris Aquarium is the best fit: SIXT Magazine calls it a great day out for kids and adults alike [S14]. Its exhibits also include an otter habitat and rainforest reptiles, and it stands on Strangford Lough, home to common seals and basking sharks [W5].

Can I combine these Belfast trips in one day?
It is easier to do one per day. Let's Go Hydro is south of Belfast, while The Gobbins is to the north and Exploris Aquarium is to the east, so combining them means a lot of extra driving [S14].

Where exactly is Helen's Tower?
Helen's Tower stands on a wooded hill between Bangor and Newtownards, the highest point of the Clandeboye Estate. It was built between 1848 and 1861 [W7].

Sources for this chapter

Facts marked [S#] come from SIXT Magazine articles; facts marked [W#] come from the other sources below:

Ref	Fact	Source
S14	Distances, drive times and routes for The Gobbins and Exploris; Let's Go Hydro attractions, setting and route; Carrickfergus Castle stop; food on site at Exploris; Helen's Tower; directions of the three trips	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Belfast

Ref	Fact	Source
W1	Let's Go Hydro is about 5.5 mi (9 km) from Belfast city centre, about 20 min via the A24	Project OSRM / OpenStreetMap: OSRM route planner (OpenStreetMap data)
W2	Aqua Park rules: age 7+, min. 110 cm, must swim 25 m, under-9s need an adult in the water; seasonal, booked online	Let's Go Hydro: Aqua Park
W3	Guided tours only; under 1.2 m not permitted; unsuitable for young children; children may not be carried; under-18s with an adult; safety briefing; 5 km (3 mi) walk; 50 flights of steps; good fitness needed	The Gobbins: Health and Safety
W4	Carrickfergus Castle was built by John de Courcy from 1177	Wikipedia: Carrickfergus Castle
W5	Exploris Aquarium and Seal Sanctuary, Portaferry, on Strangford Lough; ocean tank, seal sanctuary, otter habitat, rainforest reptiles; Strangford Lough animals	Wikipedia: Exploris
W6	After Newtownards, the A20 follows the Strangford Lough shore to Portaferry	Wikipedia: A20 road (Northern Ireland)
W7	Helen's Tower: built 1848-1861 on the highest point of the Clandeboye Estate, between Bangor and Newtownards	Wikipedia: Helen's Tower

5. WHICH THEME PARKS AND FAMILY ATTRACTIONS WORK FOR A UK ROAD TRIP WITH KIDS, RAIN OR SHINE?

Birmingham, Newcastle, Southampton: Alton Towers, Cadbury World, Beamish, Splashdown

QUICK ANSWER

For rainy days, you stay mostly under cover at Cadbury World, 4.5 miles (7 km) from Birmingham, where most zones are indoors, and at the indoor slides of Alton Towers Waterpark and Splashdown [S5][W9][W2][W7]. Alton Towers, about 1 hour 15 minutes from Birmingham, has over 40 rides and attractions, and children under 90 cm go free [S5][W1]. Beamish, 11 miles (18 km) from Newcastle, is an open-air museum, so plan for the weather [S3][W6].

Attraction	From	Distance	Drive time	Under cover?
Alton Towers	Birmingham	48.5 mi (78 km) [S5]	About 1 h 15 min [S5]	Waterpark mostly indoors; theme park outdoors [W2]
Cadbury World	Birmingham	4.5 mi (7 km) [S5]	About 20 min [S5]	Most zones indoors [W9]
Beamish	Newcastle	11 mi (18 km) [S3]	About 30 min [S3]	Mostly open air [W6]
Splashdown	Southampton	33 mi (53 km) [S15]	About 50 min [S15]	Indoor and outdoor slides [W7]

Alton Towers: theme park and waterpark

Alton Towers is a large theme park with a waterpark attached, 48.5 miles (78 km) from Birmingham, about 1 hour 15 minutes via the M6 north [S5]. It has over 40 rides and attractions [W1]. On Battle Galleons, children fire water cannons at other boats, and Oblivion is one of its best-known rides [S5]. Check the accessibility information on the official website if anyone in your group needs support [S5].

Children under 90 cm tall go free [W1]. The waterpark has 10 slides and is mostly indoors, with some outdoor areas that close on selected dates [W2]. Check ticket rules and opening times on the official website before you go [W1].

Cadbury World: chocolate and history in Bournville

Cadbury World is in Bournville, 4.5 miles (7 km) from Birmingham, about 20 minutes [S5]. Visitors learn how chocolate is made and try their hand at it, and the café serves hot chocolate [S5]. Cadbury World

says its shop has the UK's biggest Cadbury range, with at least 350 product lines [W4]. A life-size recreation of Bull Street shows the grocer's shop where John Cadbury started the business in 1824 [W5].

Beamish: a living museum near Newcastle

Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, is 11 miles (18 km) from Newcastle, about 30 minutes via the A1 and A693 [S3]. It shows life in the North East in the 1820s, 1900s, 1940s and 1950s, with a pit village and school, a 1900s town and a sweet shop [W6]. Most of the site is open air, so bring rain gear and check which areas are open on the official website [W6].

Splashdown: a water park in Poole

Splashdown is at Tower Park in Poole, 33 miles (53 km) from Southampton, about 50 minutes via the A33, M271, M27, A31 and A347 [S15][W7]. It has 13 flumes, some indoors and some outdoors, and some slides open only in season [W7]. All tickets must be booked online in advance [W7].

Frequently asked questions

Can children go to Alton Towers without an adult?
No. Children under 12 must be with an adult aged 18 or over, even if they are under 90 cm and go free [W8].

How do I find Cadbury World by car from Birmingham?
Head south to Bournville on the A38 and follow the brown signs for Cadbury World and Bournville [W3].

How do you get around Beamish with children?
Heritage trams and buses run a circuit around the museum, which saves little legs between the different areas [W6].

Is Cadbury World a good choice on a rainy day?
Mostly, yes. Most zones, the shop and the café are reached through the main reception, but the 4D Chocolate Adventure is in a building at the rear, reached through the outdoor African Adventure play area, which may close in bad weather. Bring a waterproof for the short walk [W9].

Is Splashdown suitable for toddlers?
Yes. Splashdown has two splash zones for under-5s, one indoors and one outdoors [W7].

Sources for this chapter

Facts marked [S#] come from SIXT Magazine articles; facts marked [W#] come from the other sources below:

Ref	Fact	Source
S5	Alton Towers distance, time, route, water park, Battle Galleons, Oblivion, accessibility; Cadbury World distance, time, chocolate-making and café	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Birmingham
S3	Beamish distance, drive time and route	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Newcastle
S15	Splashdown distance, drive time and route	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Southampton
W1	Alton Towers: over 40 rides and attractions; children under 90 cm go free	Alton Towers Resort: Alton Towers Resort
W2	Alton Towers Waterpark: 10 slides, indoor and outdoor areas; outdoor areas closed on selected dates	Alton Towers Resort: Waterpark
W3	Cadbury World is signposted from the A38 in Bournville; follow brown signs	Cadbury World: Travelling by car
W4	Cadbury World shop: the UK's biggest Cadbury range, more than 350 product lines	Cadbury World: Shop 'til you choc: UK's biggest Cadbury range unveiled at Cadbury World's brand new shop
W5	John Cadbury opened his grocer's shop at 93 Bull Street, Birmingham, in 1824; life-size Bull Street recreation at Cadbury World	Cadbury World: History of Cadbury
W6	Beamish covers the 1820s, 1900s, 1940s and 1950s; pit village and school, 1900s town, sweet shop; heritage trams and buses; open-air museum	Beamish, The Living Museum of the North: Explore
W7	Splashdown at Tower Park, Poole; 13 flumes, indoor and outdoor; some slides seasonal; two under-5s splash zones; tickets online in advance only	Splashdown Water Parks: Splashdown Poole
W9	Most Cadbury World zones are indoors; the 4D Chocolate Adventure is reached through the outdoor African Adventure play area, which closes in bad weather	Cadbury World: FAQs
W8	Children under 12 cannot enter without an adult aged 18 or over	Alton Towers Resort: From what age can a child visit the Theme Park without an adult?

6. WHICH ROAD TRIPS WITH KIDS OF 40 TO 90 MINUTES HAVE THE BIGGEST PAYOFF?

Newcastle, Liverpool, Leeds: Alnwick Castle, Blackpool, Bolton Abbey, York

QUICK ANSWER

Four trips repay a drive of 40 to 90 minutes: York, about 40 minutes from Leeds; Bolton Abbey, about 55 minutes from Leeds; Alnwick Castle, about 50 minutes from Newcastle; and Blackpool, about 1 hour 15 minutes from Liverpool [S6][S3][S2]. Several of their attractions open only in season, so check dates before you set off [W1][W2][W5].

Destination	From	Distance	Drive time	Route
York	Leeds	27.5 mi (44 km) [S6]	About 40 min [S6]	M1, A64 [S6]
Bolton Abbey	Leeds	23 mi (37 km) [S6]	About 55 min [S6]	A660, A65 [S6]
Alnwick Castle	Newcastle	38 mi (61 km) [S3]	About 50 min [S3]	A167, A1 north [S3]
Blackpool	Liverpool	55 mi (89 km) [S2]	About 1 h 15 min [S2]	A59, M58, M6, M55 [S2]

Alnwick Castle: broomsticks and dragons

Alnwick Castle is a well-known castle in the north-east of England and the home of the Duke of Northumberland; both its interior and grounds are open to visitors [S3]. Children can join Broomstick Training and Dragon Quest [W1]. From Newcastle, take the A167 and the A1 north, then follow the signs for the castle in Alnwick [S3].

Blackpool: rides, a tower and a ballroom

Blackpool is a well-known British seaside town [S2]. Its main family attraction is Blackpool Pleasure Beach, an amusement park founded in 1896, with roller coasters and family rides [S2][W2]. A lift takes visitors to the top of Blackpool Tower for 360-degree views, and the Blackpool Tower Ballroom is below [S2].

Bolton Abbey: priory ruins and riverside walks

Bolton Abbey is a large estate in North Yorkshire with a 12th-century Augustinian priory at its heart [S6]. Families can walk through the woods, have a picnic and visit Barden Tower, a ruined hunting lodge [S6].

York: a cathedral city with trains

York Minster, the city's gothic cathedral, has a Rose Window with stone tracery from about 1240 and rose glass from about 1500 [S6][W3]. The National Railway Museum has exhibitions and vintage trains [S6].

CHECK SEASONS AND EVENTS

Alnwick Castle opens from spring to autumn and closes in winter [W5]. Blackpool Pleasure Beach usually opens from around March to November [W2]. Bolton Abbey's programme of children's events, such as Welly Walks and Pumpkin Trails, changes every year, so check the official website [S6][W4].

Frequently asked questions

Why is Alnwick Castle popular with Harry Potter fans?
The castle was used in the filming of the Harry Potter films, and it has run Harry Potter-themed events, so check the events schedule before you go [S3].

What else is there near Blackpool for families?
Fleetwood is an 8-mile (13 km) drive north of Blackpool. It is a Victorian town with a seafront, two lighthouses and the Fleetwood Museum on the town's maritime history [S2].

Are the Bolton Abbey stepping stones safe for children?
There are 62 stepping stones across the River Wharfe. It is a spate river, so water levels can rise quickly and the stones can flood; a nearby bridge gives a safe, dry crossing, so use it with young children [W4].

What is there for younger children in York?
York Maze, on Elvington Lane outside the city, has mazes, rides, sand and water play and shows, but it opens only from July to September [W6]. In the centre, the Shambles is a medieval street to walk through [S6].

Sources for this chapter

Facts marked [S#] come from SIXT Magazine articles; facts marked [W#] come from the other sources below:

Ref	Fact	Source
S2	Blackpool distance, time, route, Pleasure Beach rides, Tower views and Ballroom; Fleetwood	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Liverpool
S3	Alnwick Castle distance, time, route, Duke of Northumberland, interior and exterior open; Harry Potter filming and events	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Newcastle
S6	York and Bolton Abbey distances, times, routes; Bolton Abbey priory, woods, picnic, Barden Tower, children's	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Leeds

Ref	Fact	Source
	events; York Minster, National Railway Museum, the Shambles	
W1	Broomstick Training and Dragon Quest for children at Alnwick Castle	Alnwick Castle: Broomstick Training
W2	Blackpool Pleasure Beach was founded in 1896; the season runs from March to November	Wikipedia: Blackpool Pleasure Beach
W3	York Minster Rose Window: stone tracery completed around 1240; rose glass from around 1500	York Minster: The Rose Window
W4	62 stepping stones; spate river, water levels rise quickly; bridge nearby; official site for events	Bolton Abbey Estate: Stepping Stones
W5	Alnwick Castle opening times; the castle opens seasonally and closes in winter	Alnwick Castle: Opening times and ticket prices
W6	York Maze: Elvington Lane, York; opens July to September; mazes, rides, sand and water play, shows	York Maze: York Maze

7. WHAT ARE THE BEST ROAD TRIPS WITH KIDS WITHIN 2 HOURS OF LONDON?

London: the New Forest, Margate and Marwell Zoo

QUICK ANSWER

Three family day trips from London take about 2 hours or less each way by car. The New Forest is about 85 to 90 miles (137 to 145 km) away, around 2 hours via the M3 and M27 [W1]. Margate is 76 miles (122 km) away, about 1 hour 45 minutes to 2 hours via the A2 and M2 [S4][W1]. Marwell Zoo, near Southampton, is about 75 miles (121 km) from London, around 1 hour 45 minutes via the M3 [W1].

SIXT Magazine rates the New Forest and Margate as good day trips from London for families [S4]. Marwell Zoo is listed as a day trip from Southampton and lies close to the M3, the motorway you also take towards the New Forest [S15][W1].

The New Forest: ponies, cattle and pigs

The New Forest is about 85 to 90 miles (137 to 145 km) from central London, around 2 hours via the M3 and M27 [W1]. You can walk through heathland where the famous ponies graze, and you may also see free-roaming cattle [S4][W6]. Deer and horses roam the countryside, and the village of Lyndhurst, in the heart of the forest, has pubs, cafés and a museum, the New Forest Heritage Centre [S15].

In autumn, during the pannage season, pigs are let out to eat the fallen acorns [W2]. Watch the pigs during pannage season, but don't feed or touch them; you can be fined [W2]. The same applies to the ponies and the other forest animals: keep your distance and do not feed or pet them [W6].

Margate: a seaside day with a retro amusement park

Margate is 76 miles (122 km) from London, about 1 hour 45 minutes to 2 hours via the A2 and M2 [S4][W1]. SIXT Magazine rates it a good seaside trip for families [S4]. The main family attraction is Dreamland, a retro amusement park with rides and a roller disco [W3].

Marwell Zoo: a day out off the M3

Marwell Zoo is about 75 miles (121 km) from London, around 1 hour 45 minutes via the M3 [W1]. From Southampton it is about 13 miles (21 km), about 25 to 30 minutes via the A33, M3, B3335 and B3354 [S15]. The zoo is home to giraffes, tigers, leopards and penguins [S15][W5]. Children can let off steam in 7 adventure playgrounds across the site [W4]. Allow at least 4 hours for a first visit and download the zoo's app before you arrive [S15][W5].

Destination	Distance from London	Drive time	Route	Good for
The New Forest	85 to 90 mi (137 to 145 km)	About 2 h	M3 and M27	Ponies, cattle, pigs in pannage season, heathland walks
Margate	76 mi (122 km)	About 1 h 45 min to 2 h	A2 and M2	Dreamland amusement park and roller disco, seaside
Marwell Zoo	About 75 mi (121 km); about 13 mi (21 km) from Southampton	About 1 h 45 min; about 25 to 30 min from Southampton	M3; from Southampton A33, M3, B3335, B3354	Giraffes, tigers, leopards, penguins, 7 adventure playgrounds

GOOD TO KNOW

Drive times are approximate and assume a start in central London; allow extra time for traffic at weekends and in school holidays [W1].

Frequently asked questions

When can you see the pigs in the New Forest?
Mainly during the pannage season, whose dates are set each year; in 2026 it runs from 14 September to 29 November [W2]. Check the current dates on the New Forest National Park Authority website before you go [W2].

How should you drive in the New Forest with ponies near the road?
Animals graze right next to the roads, so slow down and be ready to stop near livestock [W2]. Never stop to feed them from the car: feeding or petting the animals can lead to a fine [W2].

Can you visit the New Forest and Marwell Zoo on the same day from London?
It makes a very long day: about 2 hours' drive each way plus at least 4 hours at the zoo [W1][W5]. Lyndhurst is 10 miles (16 km), about 23 minutes, from Southampton via the A33 and A35, so both are easier to combine from a base near Southampton [S15].

Sources for this chapter

Facts marked [S#] come from SIXT Magazine articles; facts marked [W#] come from the other sources below:

Ref	Fact	Source
S4	New Forest and Margate rated for families; Margate distance and route (A2, M2); heathland with grazing ponies	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from London: 15+ Places to Go by Car

Ref	Fact	Source
S15	Marwell Zoo distance, time and route from Southampton; animals; 4-hour visit and app; Lyndhurst distance, route, deer, horses, pubs, cafés and museums	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Southampton
W1	Road distances and drive times: London to Lyndhurst about 89 mi / 2 h (Cadnam, forest edge, 86 mi); London to Margate 77 to 78 mi / 1 h 50 min to 2 h; London to Marwell Zoo 75 mi (121 km) / about 1 h 45 min	Project OSRM / OpenStreetMap: OSRM route planner (OpenStreetMap data)
W2	Pannage season and its 2026 dates; never feed or touch New Forest pigs; don't feed or pet the animals or you may be fined; slow down near livestock	New Forest National Park Authority: Pannage
W3	Dreamland is Margate's retro amusement park with rides and a roller disco	Dreamland: Dreamland Margate
W4	Marwell Zoo has 7 adventure playgrounds	Marwell Zoo: Adventure playgrounds
W5	Animals at Marwell (giraffe, Amur tiger, leopards, Humboldt penguins); about 4 hours needed on a first visit; zoo app	Marwell Zoo: Marwell Zoo
W6	Free-roaming livestock and ponies; keep your distance from the animals and don't feed or pet them; you may be fined	New Forest National Park Authority: The New Forest Essential Guide

8. HOW DO YOU PLAN A ROAD TRIP WITH KIDS AND AVOID COMMON MISTAKES?

Drive times, booking, child car seats, breaks, drink-drive limits, overnight stays and a packing checklist

QUICK ANSWER

Choose a destination whose drive suits your youngest child, and check opening times and booking rules before you leave [S6][W3]. Children must normally use the correct child car seat until they are 12 years old or 135 cm tall, whichever comes first [W4]. The Highway Code recommends a break of at least 15 minutes every 2 hours of driving [W5]. The drink-drive limit is 80 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and 50 mg in Scotland [W6].

Match the drive to your youngest passenger

The shorter the outbound drive, the more of the day you spend at the attraction. From Leeds, Yorkshire Sculpture Park is about 20 miles (32 km) away, around 35 minutes via the M1, depending on traffic [S6][W1]. Bolton Abbey is 23 miles (37 km) from Leeds, about 55 minutes via the A660 and A65, and SIXT Magazine rates both for families [S6]. From Birmingham, Warwick Castle is about 26 miles (42 km), around 50 minutes via the M42 and M40 [W1].

Longer trips need an early start. The Isle of Skye is about 105 to 113 miles (169 to 182 km) from Inverness, around 2 hours 30 minutes to 2 hours 40 minutes to Portree, so SIXT Magazine advises setting off early [S11][W1]. With about 5 hours of driving in a day, an overnight stay on the island is the easier option with young children [W1].

Destination	Drive from	Distance	Drive time	Check before you go
Yorkshire Sculpture Park	Leeds	About 20 mi (32 km)	About 35 min, depending on traffic	Seasonal events calendar
Bolton Abbey	Leeds	23 mi (37 km)	About 55 min	Seasonal events calendar
Warwick Castle	Birmingham	About 26 mi (42 km)	About 50 min	Opening times and tickets
Highland Wildlife Park	Inverness	39 mi (63 km)	About 1 h to 1 h 15 min	Shorter winter hours; snow can close drive-through areas
Let's Go Hydro Aqua Park	Belfast	About 5.5 mi (9 km)	About 20 min	Book ahead; age 7+, min. 110 cm,

Destination	Drive from	Distance	Drive time	Check before you go
				must swim 25 m unaided

Check opening times, bookings and age rules

Let's Go Hydro, south of Belfast via the A24, can get very busy, so book ahead [S14]. The Aqua Park is for children aged 7 and over who are at least 110 cm tall and can swim 25 m unaided; children aged 8 and under need an adult with them on the aqua park [W2]. The Highland Wildlife Park, 39 miles (63 km) from Inverness on the A9, has shorter opening hours in winter, and snow or ice can close the drive-through areas [W1][W3]. Bolton Abbey and Yorkshire Sculpture Park run seasonal events, so check their websites for what's on before the day [S6].

Child car seats and seat belts

In the UK, children must normally use a child car seat until they are 12 years old or 135 cm tall, whichever comes first [W4]. After that, they must wear a seat belt [W4]. You can choose a height-based seat (labelled R129) or a weight-based seat (labelled ECE R44) [W4]. Height-based seats must face backwards until the child is over 15 months old [W4]. The driver must make sure that every child under 14 wears a seat belt or sits in the correct child restraint [W5].

Breaks and tiredness

The Highway Code recommends a break of at least 15 minutes after every 2 hours of driving, and stopping in a safe place if you feel sleepy [W5]. Young children may need to stop more often, so plan stops where they can run around and burn off energy. Driving on the left and overtaking on the right is the rule across the UK [S10].

- Share the driving with another adult who is insured and allowed to drive the car.
- Fill up before you leave and do not wait until the tank is almost empty.
- In rain, fog or ice, leave a bigger gap to the car in front and stick to main roads; in very bad weather, stop at a services or fuel station and wait.
- Keep children entertained so the driver can concentrate on the road.

Drink-drive limits

The drink-drive limit is 80 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and 50 mg per 100 ml in Scotland [W6]. In England and Wales, driving over the limit can lead to an

unlimited fine, up to 6 months in prison and a driving ban of at least 1 year [W7]. Penalties differ in Scotland and Northern Ireland: in Northern Ireland, for example, the fine is up to £5,000 [W8]. If any adult in the group plans to drink, agree on a driver who will not drink before you set off.

Stay overnight instead of doubling back

If the day will run into the evening, SIXT Magazine suggests that families choose a hotel near the place they plan to visit the next day [S16]. For a more picturesque trip, choose a bed and breakfast in one of the villages on your route [S16].

Before you go

- Check the weather forecast for every area on your route, and again on the road; a weather app or local radio helps where phone signal is weak.
- Download your map so navigation keeps working where there is no phone signal.
- Check the official websites of the places you will visit for opening times, booking rules, age or height limits and seasonal road closures.
- Check the GOV.UK child car seat rules and make sure each child has the right seat fitted before the day.
- Look up family-friendly places to eat along your route.
- Plan where you will stop for breaks, at least every 2 hours.

What to pack

- A packing list, so nothing important stays at home.
- A packable waterproof jacket and a change of clothes for each child.
- Plastic bags for wet or dirty things, and resealable bags to keep food, toiletries and electronics dry.
- Cables, chargers and a power bank or car charger in one pouch within reach.
- A first aid kit and any medication you or the children take.
- Nappies or a portable potty for little ones.
- Snacks and water for everyone, bought at a supermarket before the trip, plus meals in a cool box: sandwiches, wraps and cold pasta travel well.
- Emergency kit in the boot: a torch, a blanket and extra water.
- Games, films, songs, podcasts or audiobooks downloaded before you leave, plus books and toys for younger children.

- Ideas for screen-free games: 20 questions, the animal name game, hangman and a scavenger hunt.

Frequently asked questions

Can a child sit in the front seat of a car in the UK?
Yes, if they use the correct child car seat for their age and height [W4]. If you fit a rear-facing baby seat in a front seat, you must deactivate any front airbags first [W4].

Can my child use a backless booster cushion?
Manufacturers can now only make booster cushions approved for group 3, the heaviest group [W4]. Group 2 booster cushions that you already own can still be used [W4].

What time of day is best to drive long distances with children?
The Highway Code advises against long journeys between midnight and 6 am, when natural alertness is at its lowest [W5]. Do not start a journey if you are tired, and get enough sleep beforehand [W5].

What happens if you are caught drink-driving twice?
A second conviction within 10 years brings a driving ban of at least 3 years [W7]. On a trip that crosses into Scotland, the lower Scottish limit of 50 mg per 100 ml applies as soon as you cross the border [W6].

Sources for this chapter

Facts marked [S#] come from SIXT Magazine articles; facts marked [W#] come from the other sources below:

Ref	Fact	Source
S6	Yorkshire Sculpture Park and Bolton Abbey distances, routes and family rating; Bolton Abbey drive time; seasonal events calendars	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Leeds
S10	Driving on the left and overtaking on the right in the UK	SIXT Magazine: Driving Tips for the UK
S11	Isle of Skye: 105 mi, around 2 h 30 min from Inverness; set off early	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips in Scotland
S14	Let's Go Hydro can get very busy; book ahead; A24 south of Belfast	SIXT Magazine: Best Day Trips from Belfast
S16	Families should choose a hotel near the next day's sight; a village bed and breakfast for a more picturesque trip	SIXT Magazine: The king of road trips: 8 legendary days in the south of England
W1	Road distances and drive times: Leeds to Yorkshire Sculpture Park 18 to 21 mi / 32 to 37 min; Birmingham to Warwick Castle 26 mi (42 km) / about 50 min via M42 and M40; Inverness to Portree 113 mi / 2 h 40 min; Inverness to Highland Wildlife Park 39 mi / 1 h to 1 h 15 min; Belfast to Let's Go Hydro 5.5 mi / 16 to 24 min	Project OSRM / OpenStreetMap: OSRM route planner (OpenStreetMap data)
W2	Let's Go Hydro Aqua Park: age 7+, minimum 110 cm, must swim 25 m unaided; under-9s need an adult in the water	Let's Go Hydro: Aqua Park

Ref	Fact	Source
W3	Highland Wildlife Park winter opening hours; snow or ice can close the drive-through areas	Highland Wildlife Park (RZSS): Opening hours
W4	Child car seats until age 12 or 135 cm, whichever comes first; seat belt after that; height-based (R129) and weight-based (ECE R44) seats; rear-facing until over 15 months; deactivate front airbags for a rear-facing seat in front; booster cushion rules	GOV.UK: Child car seats: the rules
W5	Rule 91: break of at least 15 minutes after every 2 hours of driving; avoid long journeys between midnight and 6 am; do not start a journey tired. Rule 100: driver must ensure children under 14 wear seat belts or use the correct child restraint	GOV.UK: The Highway Code: rules for drivers and motorcyclists (89 to 102)
W6	Drink-drive limit: 80 mg per 100 ml of blood in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; 50 mg in Scotland	GOV.UK: The drink drive limit
W7	Penalties: up to 6 months in prison, an unlimited fine and a ban of at least 1 year (3 years if convicted twice in 10 years)	GOV.UK: Drink-driving penalties
W8	Northern Ireland drink-driving penalties: a fine of up to £5,000, up to 6 months in prison and a ban of at least 12 months	NI Direct: Drink driving penalties

CONCLUSION

Short drives, big days out

A rewarding road trip with kids is within easy reach of every city in this guide. The shortest drives take about 15 to 20 minutes (Port Sunlight and New Brighton from Liverpool), and most trips sit within about an hour, from Washington Wetland Centre near Newcastle to Highland Wildlife Park near Inverness.

Choose the trip by drive time first, check the age and height rules of the attraction and plan a break at least every 2 hours on longer drives. For rainy days, indoor options such as Cadbury World and Alton Towers' water park keep the day on track.

Ready to go? Hit the road with SIXT, the car rental and mobility company, and make your next family day trip one to remember.

BEFORE YOU SET OFF

Opening times, prices and entry rules of attractions change often, and some close in winter. Check the official website of each attraction, and the road conditions, on the day you travel.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

How this guide was made

The destinations in this guide are based on SIXT Magazine's day-trip and road-trip articles for UK cities. Every fact was checked in October 2026 against official and credible sources: attraction websites, GOV.UK and the Highway Code, VisitBritain, national park authorities and routing data. The sources for each chapter are listed at the end of the chapter.

Distances and drive times are approximate and measured from city centres; actual times depend on your start point and traffic. Opening times, prices, entry rules and road rules can change, so check them again shortly before you travel.

AI transparency: this guide was drafted with the help of AI tools. Every chapter was reviewed, fact-checked and approved by the SIXT editorial team before publication.

About SIXT

Sixt SE, with its registered office in Pullach near Munich, is a leading international provider of high-quality mobility services. With its products SIXT rent, SIXT share, SIXT ride and SIXT+ car subscription, the company offers an integrated premium mobility service across vehicle and commercial vehicle rental, car sharing, ride hailing and car subscriptions. SIXT has a presence in more than 100 countries. For more information, visit about.sixt.com.