

## Hexham: for rainy days with children

Have no fears about treating children of all ages to a good time in Hexham, even when the weather is doing its best to keep you, and the children, indoors for too long. The children will burn off energy, be creative, use their imagination and just be entertained, all within easy reach.

**Arrive:** The Wentworth car park is easily accessed from the A69, the railway station or on foot from the town itself. Proceed to the northern corner of the car park, where the **Wentworth Leisure Centre** (NE46 3PJ) is located.

### **Arrive** Wentworth Leisure Centre

**Here's why:** Activity for all ages is on hand in 'the Wentworth', as it is known to locals. You have different choices for children of different ages. Jungle Jack's adventurous soft play is for under 8s, and seats where adults can enjoy a coffee and marvel at the children's bravery. The area has a section clearly marked for toddlers. Some children will want to go swimming – no problem, there are two pools in the leisure complex, and splash areas for the littlest. If in Hexham for a week in school holidays, make a prior contact with the Wentworth, as swimming lessons and special 'wet treats' can be available. Check the prices too. And then there's tenpin bowling, even with launchers for the quite little and buffers instead of gutters – but come back for a game of tenpin bowling at the end of the day, as a treat for everyone (£4 one game for children, £6.50 for two games in 2013).

**Depart** the Wentworth car park past the Tourist Information Centre (south side), go up the bank into the town, turn left after the Moot Hall arch into the Market Place, continue to the end of Fore Street, then cross the Cattle Market into Eastgate, to find **Inspired Pots** 50 metres up on the left.

### **Arrive** Inspired Pots

**Here's why:** Inspired Pots is great for all ages. You and the children can select ceramic items, plates or a mug for example, and make your own design, with unlimited access to colours and advice. Then leave it to be fired – something to take away and be proud of. Prices per session and for families. Do check beforehand if there is anything special happening, and check the prices too. There are Standard Studio and family fees. Open from 10.00am.

**Before you left home**, you should have rung **Hug-a-Doodle**, where you can have youngsters' doodles turned into huggable soft toys, 'each as unique as the child who drew it'. After an earlier contact to provide the doodle, now's probably the time to check it's ready and pick it up, to delight your little ones.

**Depart** I-Pots and retrace your steps to the Market Place, at the far end of Fore Street, then straight ahead, keeping the Moot Hall on your right.

### **Arrive** the Forum Cinema

**Here's why:** The Forum's matinee during school holidays may be something your young companions don't want to miss. The Forum, recently renovated but keeping the character of an old cinema, is full of awe and excitement. Check the schedule earlier. Good planning, and plenty of popcorn please.

**Depart** the Forum Cinema, go diagonally across the Market Place, and cross carefully to reach and enter the Abbey.

**Arrive** Hexham Abbey

**Here's why:** Why include the Abbey, you might ask. But the Abbey is an awe-inspiring places that your children should not miss. Help them consider the height and build of the wooden roof (would it float if turned the other way up?), go up the Night Stairs, notice how worn they are and wonder why, and look back down on the transepts. Try not to miss the chilly ambiance and importance of the Crypt, so plan to arrive around 3.30pm (or 11.00am if your plan is different, as the Crypt is normally opened twice daily). Then think about the age of the choir stalls and the Frith Stool – itself 7<sup>th</sup> Century. Consider too, please, a donation to the Abbey's future.

**Depart** Hexham Abbey, and in Hexham's Market Place, enter the mysterious little alley part-way down its right side, just before the Shambles, and 20 metres on the right is the Cogito bookshop.

**Arrive** Cogito Books

**Here's why:** take the opportunity to encourage the children's reading by letting them buy a little book, with the help of the knowledgeable staff.

**Depart** Cogito, and as you approach the alley, look up and to the right to see how this area was built onto the side of an old church. Turn right in the Market Place, go through the Moot Hall arch again and across to the Old Gaol.

**Arrive** at the Old Gaol (remember – 'jail')

**Here's why:** A small but really quite interactive museum recording the terrifying history of the Border Reivers, whose violent deeds defined two centuries of Border life. Try out the stocks for size, if the rain isn't too great a deterrent! There's a small entrance fee – in 2013 £2.10 for a child. Take the lift to the dungeon, understand why in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century this was our first purpose-built prison, and let the young ones check surnames for links to the Reivers themselves. There's a good short film that shows a Reivers' raid, too.

**Depart** the Old Gaol, going to the left and down the bank into and across the Wentworth car park.

**Arrive** the Wentworth Leisure Centre

**Here's why:** of course, you promised the children a game of tenpin bowling, to round off a good if rainy day in Hexham! Enjoy yourselves!

On normal fine days, in and around the Hexham town centre, there is more to do with children, of course. There is all of the above, plus ....

- Pigeons, ducks (take some bread, at least) and a really good playground at Tyne Green, Hexham's country park, along the river bank.
- Picnic tables are provided for you down on Tyne Green, beyond the playground. If you're an afternoon visitor in a school holiday, there may well be Rowing Club activity on the Tyne.
- The Sele, Hexham's town centre park, again with a well stocked playground, alongside a skateboard park, for watching or 'boarding.