THE ICKWORTH

Suffolk

Set in the wing of a grand 18th-century house, within 1,800 acres of National Trust parkland, the Ickworth doesn’t have to work too hard at keeping families happy. There’s a free creche for under-9s, but what really counts here is the fleet of bicycles, the indoor pool and the lawns, where you can play badminton and footle, or throw a frisbee. The effect is miraculous. Tightly wound kids sense the space and suddenly seem to grow. Ours swam a length and rode a bike without stabilisers for the first time — then cried when it was time to go home. Mum and Dad weren’t too happy to leave, either. The bombproof furniture, easy atmosphere and big green endlessness of it all have a profoundly relaxing effect. The stress ran off us like water.

BEDRUTHAN STEPS

Cornwall

His ‘n’ hers hammans, an expert mixologist in the cocktail bar and two hours of free childcare in the middle of the day all offer parents the hope of ‘me time’. But the winning formula remains unchanged: happy kids mean happy mums and dads, and this complex above the beach at Mawgan Porth buzzes with under-10s en route to the next activity, whether it’s a singing class or a dip in one of the three pools.

Times+ offer: 25% off a two-night spa break.

Family rooms from £150, B&B;
bedruthan.com

ST MORITZ

Cornwall

Checking your family in at the St Moritz does not come with a sense of self-sacrifice. Sure, the kids will have a ball, thanks to the indoor and outdoor pools, and the 4x4 that whisks them to surfing lessons on Polzeath beach. But this sleek ocean liner of a place spoils the grown-ups, too, with a Cowshed spa and a talented head chef in the kitchen. Bucket and spade holidays don’t come much plusher than this.

Family suites from £210, B&B;
stmoritzhotel.co.uk

THE PIG NEAR BATH

Somerset NEW OPENING

It doesn’t have a pool or kids’ clubs, but it does have a kitchen garden, where children can learn about the land from the affable gardener, Ollie, and a chicken coop where they can collect eggs for breakfast. Tearing through
SUNDAY TIMES DIGITAL
Meet Alibi Hotels' Bothy, the robot butler who’ll serve your marini
thesundaytimes.co.uk/travel

14.09.2014 / 17

also feature a 650ft zip wire
and two high-ropes courses
for competitive dads.
Two interconnecting rooms
from £660, B&B;
ourseasons.com

THE GROVE
Hertfordshire
The Grove, near Watford,
starts as it means to go on.
At check-in, your children
get to rummage in a toy box
to pick a gift. Upstairs, you’ll
find modern interconnecting
family rooms with child-size
bathtubs. What next? Well,
you could burn off some
energy in the dedicated kids’
pool, or whizz through the
hotel’s 300 dappled acres
on a bike or tandem. It even
offers junior clubs for the
first round of golf, and there’s
a football pitch where England
and Barcelona have trained.
Family rooms from £340, B&B;
stayinacastle.com

GLENEAGLES
Pertshire
It has hosted a G8 summit, its
flagship restaurant has two
Michelin stars and it’s the
setting for this month’s Ryder
Cup. Surely Glen Eagles is too
grown-up to tolerate kids?
Wrong. The place is riddled
with them, scampering in and
out of the kids’ club and XBox
zone, welcome everywhere
from pool to patio to green,
and spoilt rotten with country
pursuits such as off-road
driving, fishing and falconry.
Family rooms from £345, B&B;
gleneagles.com

its 20 acres of countryside,
they might flush out the odd
deer, too. Furthermore, the
shabby-chic interiors of this
29-room manor, and the
informality of the service,
mean parents’ pulses
neatly rise every
time their offspring
reach for a chocolate
milkshake.
Two interconnecting
rooms from £318;
thepighotel.com

CALCOT MANOR
Gloucestershire
The strength of
the entire family. It has Wils
and PlayStations, and pays
close attention to the latest
crazes (loom band lessons,
this summer). For adults,
there’s a swanky spa and an
on-site pub. Rooms have
style as well as sterilisers,
and with everything from
pizza to peppered coquecous
on the menu, it also ticks the
fussy-eater box.
Family suites from £385,
B&B; calcotmanor.co.uk

NEW PARK MANOR
Hampshire
Catering for kids
without turning the
whole place into a
creche is an art, and the
Luxury Family Hotel Group
has mastered it. New Park
Manor, near the pretty village
of Lyndhurst, has a smart
spa, a heated outdoor pool,
a proper kids’ menu and all
the baby paraphernalia you
could wish for but couldn’t
be bothered to pack. Beyond
the gate is the New Forest, which
is so beautiful and flat, evenone-idle children will want
to explore.
Family rooms from £255, B&B;
newparkmanorhotel.co.uk

FOUR SEASONS
Hampshire
Given all the ancestral oil
paintings and cut-glass
chandeliers, you’d be forgiven
for thinking that this grand
Georgian manor outside
Basingstoke was strictly
adults-only. The truth is
quite the opposite. In the
wood-panelled reception,
there are steps so toddlers can
“check in”. The hotel has an
adventure playground, a pony
club and a laid-back black
labrador called Oliver to
borrow for walks. From autumn,
its woodland will
and crenellated towers,
backed by a moody wall of
Pennines. Kids will love the
court-free private cinema
screenings and cookery
classes, but it’s the sense of
freedom that is most
infectious. This is a family-run
place that doesn’t stand on
ceremony, and there are
20 acres of garden to be
roared around in while the
grown-ups are toasting by
the drawing room fire.
Family rooms from £240, B&B;
stayinacastle.com

AUGILL CASTLE
Cumbria
Whatever your age, Augill
Castle is the perfect gothic
fantasy, an artful mix of
richly coloured interiors
and crenellated towers,
backed by a moody wall of
Pennines. Kids will love the
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