

Seeing the sights of The South

Head to Hampshire for a week on the south coast packed full of family-friendly entertainment

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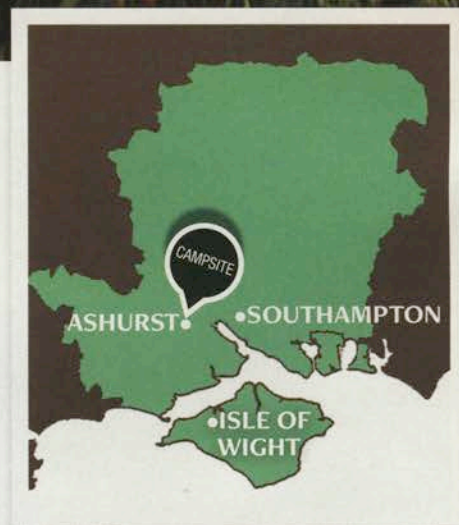
Certain areas along the south coast of the UK always rank highly on the camper's wish list. The New Forest, with its ancient beauty and canopied campsites invariably steals the show; head further west and the Jurassic history of Dorset's shoreline draws a crowd year after year.

However, there are plenty of other places available to stay along the coast. We had originally planned to venture just over the Hampshire border into West Sussex but, due to unseasonal amounts of rain in the preceding weeks, a last-minute change of plans was necessary as all of the potential sites we'd earmarked were waterlogged.

Not the best start to our holiday, then. However, I always think that the adventure of a family camping trip should begin well before you get to the campsite - so in that sense, we hit the ground running!

Scanning the area for available sites, we eventually ended up on the outskirts of Southampton. Whilst the campsite itself was not without its fair share of puddles, we knew from previous visits that it would be a good choice, offering everything we needed for a comfortable stay.

Portsmouth was agreed as our central point of reference and with the necessary research taken care of, we were all set to enjoy a week of activity based around a selection of attractions which fell



within about a one-hour drive of our base.

Arriving later than planned due to heavy traffic and even heavier rain, we set up our tent just in time for dinner. Thankfully, just a few minutes' walk up the road was a fish and chip shop and, along with a quick visit to an equally-local convenience store, we soon settled down for the evening.



Palace House at Beaulieu

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

STAY AT

Ashurst Campsite

Lyndhurst Road, Ashurst, Hampshire SO40 7AR
02380 292097

campingintheforest.co.uk

Facilities: Amenity block with free hot showers, dishwashing area, laundry room, battery charging.

Wicks Farm Holiday Park

Redlands Lane, West Wittering, Chichester,
West Sussex PO20 8QE

01243 513116

wicksfarm.co.uk

Long Meadow Campsite

New Park, Brockenhurst,
Hampshire SO42 7QH

01590 622489

longmeadowcampsite.com



NEED TO DO

Portsmouth Historic Dockyard

Victory Gate, HM Naval Base, Portsmouth,
Hampshire PO1 3LJ

02392 839766

historicdockyard.co.uk

Beaulieu

New Forest, Hampshire SO42 7ZN

01590 612345

beaulieu.co.uk

New Forest Wildlife Park

Develop Lane, Nr Ashurst, Southampton,
Hampshire SO40 4UH

02380 292408

newforestwildlifepark.co.uk

Weald & Downland Living Museum

Town Lane, Singleton, Chichester,
West Sussex PO18 0EU

01243 811363

wealddown.co.uk

Eling Tide Mill Experience

Eling Lane, Totton, Hampshire SO40 9HF
02380 869575

elingexperience.co.uk

Royal Armouries, Fort Nelson

Portsdown Hill Road, Farnham,
Hampshire PO17 6AN

01329 233734

royalarmouries.org



EATING OUT

For food on the go, here are a number of places we ate at during our days out.

The Little Friar

171 Lyndhurst Road, Ashurst, Southampton,
Hampshire SO40 7AR

02380 292002

The Tenth Hole

Eastern Parade, Southsea, Portsmouth,
Hampshire PO4 9RF

02392 830009

thetenthhole.co.uk

Eling Tide Mill Cafe

Eling Lane, Totton, Hampshire SO40 9HF
02380 869575

elingexperience.co.uk



NEED TO KNOW

Visit Hampshire: visit-hampshire.co.uk

Visit Portsmouth: visitportsmouth.co.uk

We always like to ease in gently to our camping trips, so the following morning saw us head east for Southsea seafont and the Tenth Hole Tearooms which adjoins a nine-hole pitch and putt golf course. The building was incredibly unassuming from the outside, especially in the persistent rain; inside, however, it was clear to see why the place

was full already - friendly staff, clean facilities, a range of decadently delicious cakes and other food and drinks. It was our first visit, but surely won't be our last.

A short six-minute walk up the road then took us to the modest Portsmouth Natural History Museum - an interesting, free-to-enter place featuring many exhibits including an A-to-Z of Natural History, a skull room, a clear-sided bee hive (very popular with young visitors) and a butterfly house which is 'occupied' between the months of May and September. Oh, and let's not forget Emily the Iguanodon dinosaur, which was made in the 1980s for the Southsea Carnival!

A further two minutes up the road, you will find one of the area's most recognisable parks, Canoe Lake, which dates back to 1886. Featuring swan pedalos, a kids' play area and a café, on a fine day it would be lovely for a family picnic.

When was the last time you visited an amusement arcade? If the answer is "not since I was a child," you're in luck. Clarence Pier (open between March and late October) is also a few minutes' drive away and it was here that we spent an hour or so reliving happy memories on the 2p slot machines, using coins we had saved up for just such an occasion.

With rain on the cards for the following day, that evening we sat down to plan where we would go next. Luckily, many of the attractions on our list were either indoors or partially-covered - such as the New Forest Wildlife Park, just four minutes' drive from the campsite.



A secluded spot at Ashurst campsite



Exploring a path at New Forest Wildlife Park



Having kept ourselves busy in the morning, our first priority on arrival was to have lunch. As it happens, the Park were happy for visitors to enjoy picnics in their Forest Kitchen Restaurant. Given the weather, this was perfect as it was far too wet to sit outside at the time.

A network of paths wove its way around the site, with something to see at every turn. We first made our way through a large greenhouse which was home to animals of varying sizes. Personally, I was rather taken by the harvest mice darting around their enclosure - but pine martens sleeping in overturned milk churns also raised a smile.

Many of the enclosures featured small observation windows cut into them at the animals'

level - perfect for young eyes. It was also nice to hear the keepers explain a little about the animals during feeding time, too.

Other highlights of the day included seeing a wide range of otters, owls, wolves, wallabies and even mouflon (a breed of sheep, if you didn't know). If wildlife parks are something you'd enjoy with your family, it's definitely advisable to swap shoes for wellies if visiting this one in similar conditions as we did, due to the muddy nature of many of the footpaths.

A number of the places we explored during the week were centred around significant periods in history, with reference to the immediate area. Thankfully, our first dry day coincided with an outing to the Weald & Downland Living Museum, just under one hour's drive from the tent. A beautiful 40-acre site in West Sussex, it houses a collection of more than 50 buildings, the majority of which have been rescued and are now used to tell the stories of the people who lived and worked in them over a period of 1000 years.

A quick coffee overlooking the duck pond set us up nicely for a day of leisurely wandering. After some time spent enjoying the interactive displays of the

visitor centre, we headed outside and onto the easy-going terrain. If you are visiting with a push chair, as we have in the past, you shouldn't find access a problem, thanks to the well-maintained walkways. Equally, you can feel free to bring your dog, too - they are even welcome in the first section of the café (where we sat) and on the outer deck.

By far one of the nicest aspects of the Weald & Downland is its location, nestled cosily within the countryside. If you enjoy craft demonstrations, costumed interpreters and the like, you should definitely make a note of this place - there's plenty going on throughout the year, including the Living History Festival (2 - 3 June), a theatrical performance of David Walliams' *The Midnight Gang* (18 July) and the Vintage & Steam show (18 - 19 August).

My favourite building/display was the Plumber's workshop, as it conjured up fond memories of days spent with my grandfather, tinkering in his garage. Again, if you're a fan of nostalgia, a visit here is definitely worth factoring into your holiday.

One of the busiest - and sunniest - outings of our trip was to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. With 11 attractions to choose from, all covered by one



ABOUT

Hampshire shares its borders with five other counties - Dorset, Wiltshire, Berkshire, Surrey and West Sussex. It is the largest county in South East England and contains two national parks - the New Forest and the South Downs. There is much maritime history in the area, with Portsmouth and Southampton remaining active ports.

ticket, we really were spoiled for choice. It's worth noting that the Mary Rose (perhaps one of the area's biggest draws) requires a separate ticket - but it was here that we began our visit.

The Mary Rose, Henry VIII's flagship vessel which sank outside Portsmouth Harbour in 1545, has undergone extensive preservation since being raised from the sea bed in 1982 and now lives in its own bespoke building. The scale and depth of information on view were just incredible - far greater than the exterior might suggest. Multiple levels with atmospheric lighting, interactive information screens and superb views of the ship's remains kept us entertained throughout.

The staff were ever so helpful, offering nuggets





A New Forest pony at Ashurst campsite



The beach and South Parade Pier at Southsea, Portsmouth

of information as we stood in front of evocatively-lit display cases. There were even video sequences projected onto areas of the ship, giving a good sense of the history and action that must have occurred in its final minutes above water. Seeing the skeletons of Hatch the dog, and of an archer, also gave a sense of reality to what we were looking at.

After lunch, we headed over to another iconic ship - HMS Victory, which sits in a dry dock. Many readers will be aware of the history surrounding this vessel at the Battle of Trafalgar, but to see a plaque on the deck declaring "Here Nelson fell, 21 Oct 1805" really added additional poignancy. To get to that spot, we navigated our way through the confined quarters of the ship's interior. It's a fascinating journey, and there's plenty for young visitors to explore, too, in the way of steps up and down, windows to peep through etc.

Audio guides were also available, although we chose not to use them - instead preferring to

approach the knowledgeable staff who were on hand to answer any questions as we went around.

Heading down from the highest point of the ship that visitors can access - the Poop Deck - we then saw where Nelson was taken and subsequently spent his final hours, on the Orlop Deck. Again, the atmospheric lighting (a single lantern) left its mark as we continued on and headed out of the ship.

As our trip came to an end, we took advantage of a 45-minute harbour tour, before popping into the Action Stations attraction back at the Dockyard. Perhaps more suited to older children, this was interesting nonetheless - containing flight simulators, marine/naval kit displays, a rotating climbing wall and more besides.

It's worth noting that to make things easier on the day, we took the train from Ashurst train station (just up the road from the campsite) to Portsmouth Harbour; from here, it's just a few minutes' walk to the entrance of the Dockyard.

With so much non-stop activity up until now, we decided to take advantage of a break in the weather and have a 'day off' in and around the campsite. It was nice taking a leisurely stroll through the woodland, up and over the railway bridge, slowing down the pace for a few hours. I always love these kinds of walks and they are a great way to regulate busy and exciting holidays built around sight-seeing.

By this point, we needed to stock up on a few supplies, which we did when visiting Lyndhurst. Conveniently, the village is also home to a shop called Leisure Fayre, which stocks a wide range of camping gear and clothing. There are also some lovely places to stop for tea and cake - our favourite being The Lyndhurst Tea House.

With a couple of days remaining, there were still a number of places we wanted to visit. One chance find was the Eling Tide Mill Experience at Totton, also less than 10 minutes' drive from the campsite. Free public parking was available a short walk away; we simply left the car then strolled across the toll bridge which is believed to have been in service since as far back as the 18th century.

Recently opened after three years of development thanks to Heritage Lottery funding, a Grade II* listed mill (c.1785) forms the centrepiece of the Experience (which comprises the mill itself, a very informative visitor centre, a café and even a two-mile walk around Eling).

Our timings were spot on, giving us the chance to see the mill in action. It still produces flour, powered by the tide, and it was very interesting to hear the ins-and-outs of this process thanks to a lively conversation with the current miller.

Access overall was fantastic with a clear, family-friendly layout. This made exploring the three floors

Poppies: Wave sculpture at Fort Nelson



particularly enjoyable, as we were able to see water rushing below our feet (through grated flooring) and the historical machinery turning in all its glory.

In the same way that the Historic Dockyard was a major attraction on our hit-list in the Portsmouth area, we also couldn't resist going to Beaulieu - home of the renowned National Motor Museum - further to the west. There was so much to see and enjoy that the recommendation here has to be to make an early start to your day; we arrived mid-morning, a little later than planned, but that in no way detracted from our visit.

After enjoying the mile-long monorail (which is, incidentally, the oldest in England), we spent a good couple of hours exploring the vast range of vehicles on show; there really was something for everyone and it was great to see plenty of interactive displays for youngsters to get involved with.

The day ended with a gentle wander around the grounds, taking in Palace House (providing a good insight into the lives of the Montagu family) and gardens, before heading back to the car and thinking about what was on the menu back at the tent.

Our trip rounded off, on the final day, with a quick visit to Fort Nelson in Fareham (free admission). With 19 acres of ramparts, outer fortifications, underground tunnels and ammunition bunkers to explore, it again offers much to the visitor. One of the biggest draws for us, though,

was the chance to see the Poppies: Wave sculpture commemorating the fallen soldiers of World War I. This was actually part of the bigger sculpture which you may remember appeared in London in 2014; it runs at Fort Nelson until 24 June 2018.

As you can probably tell, we took the decision to save our sanity by heading out from the tent

for the majority of each day on this trip. Whilst we're never short of things to keep us entertained on multiple days spent under canvas, we were determined not to be held captive by the weather this time around!

There is the budget side of things to consider, of course. Seeing so many attractions did increase our spend more than we might normally factor in, but we were able to temper this somewhat by choosing a mix of free-to-enter and modestly-priced places in the most part.

Ironically enough, the weather during the week after our stay was far nicer and certainly drier - with temperatures nudging their way into the much more reasonable figures of 20°C plus.

Do we begrudge this? Absolutely not! We took the opportunity to explore an area of the country that has much to offer and came away with yet another family camping holiday filled with those all-important memories.

DID YOU KNOW...?

Hampshire has laid claim to many famous residents over the years. Jane Austen and Charles Dickens called the county home and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote his first two Sherlock Holmes stories whilst living in Portsmouth.



HMS Victory sits alongside the Mary Rose Museum

Family friendly site in the heart of the New Forest



Long Meadow campsite

New Park, Brockenhurst, SO42 7QH



Book online now:

www.longmeadowcampsite.com

To enquire: Tel: 01590 622489

Open: March to October