

# Savings for the summer

The Which? family take a break in the UK and discover ways to save money at two of the UK's biggest attractions



PHOTOGRAPHY UNP, NTI

Rising fuel, food and utility bills may force many of us to cut back on luxuries such as foreign holidays this year – so why not try a break in the UK instead?

We asked the Which? family – Toni and Darren and their two children Sam and Harriet – to visit two very different UK attractions and give us their opinions and a few money- and time-saving tips.

## Alton Towers

Even though Alton Towers in Staffordshire is the UK's most popular theme park, the family were initially a little reluctant to go there.

'We thought we'd have to queue, that food would be expensive, and there wouldn't be much for a five- and a three-year-old to do,' Toni said.

## Save money

Some attractions, such as Alton Towers, sell tickets through their websites – often with a good discount.

'We booked online and got 20% off the family ticket – £78 instead of £98,' Toni said. 'After calling the customer service department, which gave us lots of helpful advice about the best ticket for to buy for a family, we also decided to buy "Fastrack" tickets for an extra £4 each. These allowed us to jump the queue on some of the rides. There are more expensive Fastrack tickets available, but we decided against these as they were for rides not suitable for younger children.'

**MONEY-SAVING TIP** Book a family ticket in advance at [www.altontowers.com](http://www.altontowers.com). You can also book in advance by calling 0870 520 4060; however, the discount isn't as great, at 15% off.

**TIME-SAVING TIP** Buy a Fastrack ticket and jump the queues. 'We went straight to the front on some rides,' Darren said.

## No queues

The family were also pleased to find that booking in advance meant no lengthy queues to get into the park. However, they weren't so impressed with the £4 charge for the car park. 'It's a bit excessive,' Darren said, 'especially as it doesn't seem that easy to get to Alton Towers on public transport.'

## Kids love it

Once inside, any worries the family had about running out of things for the kids to do didn't last long. 'Harriet and Sam loved the driving school ride and the bouncy castle,' Toni said.

## Good food

The family also bought food at Alton Towers and found it cheaper than they'd expected. 'There was a wide selection on offer, including some healthy options like large pots of fruit for around £1.50,' Toni said. 'However, it would be better if places stayed open after the rides closed at 6pm so you could stay and have a meal while waiting for the queues to get out of the car park to clear.' For more on food at Alton Towers, check out the September issue of *Which? Holiday*.

**MONEY-SAVING TIP** Toni said: 'Although we didn't feel as if we were being ripped off, bringing a picnic would make things cheaper.'

**VERDICT** 'We had a great time,' Darren said. 'And I'd recommend the Fastrack ticket for anyone visiting at a busy time.'

## Chatsworth House

Next up for the Joneses, joined this time by Toni's parents John and Kath, was Chatsworth House and gardens in Derbyshire. Last year *Which? Holiday* described them as 'a top-notch stately home experience' (see *Which?*, August 2007, p18). Did our family agree?

## More savings

The family managed to get a discount for buying tickets in advance on Chatsworth's website ([www.chatsworth.org](http://www.chatsworth.org)). 'Six of us went along and we paid £68.20 for access to all of Chatsworth's attractions – saving almost £5 on the admission price at the gate,' Toni told us. Parking cost a further £2.

Like many attractions run as charities, Chatsworth has a Gift Aid scheme for UK taxpayers, where you pay 10% on top of the admission fee and the attraction gets to reclaim the tax. 'If you use Gift Aid,' Darren said, 'you also get a voucher worth 15% of the admission price to spend in the shops or restaurants, which seemed like a good deal.'

**MONEY-SAVING TIP** Book in advance and use Gift Aid to get a money-off voucher at Chatsworth. You don't always get something in return, but you do get to have a say in how your tax is spent.

## Fun for all ages

Chatsworth's many attractions went down well with



the family. 'It oozes quality,' Darren said. 'Although the house was fascinating for the adults, it wasn't that suitable for the children. The gardens were very child friendly – the kids could happily play in the fountains and we all loved trying to find our way around the maze. Visiting the old coal tunnel (pictured, left) was a real adventure for the kids and they loved the farmyard and playground.'

Chatsworth's restaurant also got the thumbs up for its choice of homemade food and the surroundings. A light lunch for everyone cost £30.40 with their 15% discount voucher. 'Not the cheapest, but good quality,' Darren said.

**VERDICT** 'We enjoyed it,' Darren said. 'We could have spent another day there.'

## CHEAP CLICKS

### We asked the family to put our best digital cameras under £150 to the test

If you want a good digital camera, don't pay over the odds. We asked the family to try out two of the cheaper models from our recent report (see *Which?*, June 2008, p42).

The Best Buy Panasonic DMC-FX33 (£150), pictured right, proved very popular. Darren called it 'stylish and well made'. 'It's easy to use,' he said, 'and the intelligent autofocus is a superb feature that lets the camera decide which settings to use. Picture quality was also very good.'

Although the family were less impressed with our 'best on a budget' Samsung S860 (£80), pictured far right, they liked it.

'It felt like the cheaper of the two cameras,' Darren said. 'It was slightly bulkier than the Panasonic. The built-in help function, which pops up as you navigate around the menu, was useful though, and the quality of pictures was very good in normal light – but the Panasonic took better photos in dimmer conditions.'

Visit [www.which.co.uk/digitalcameras](http://www.which.co.uk/digitalcameras) for more.

**VERDICT** 'If we had to choose, we'd go for the Panasonic's superior compactness and build quality,' Darren said. 'But taking the £70 price difference into account, the Samsung is still a great basic camera.'



## How you can do it

### Follow our family and make the most of your cash on days out in the UK this summer

- Find ideas and inspiration for days out on the website of VisitBritain ([www.visitbritain.co.uk](http://www.visitbritain.co.uk)), the UK's national tourist organisation.
- Buying tickets in advance can save you money, but make sure you can definitely go on the day.
- Find out about any visitor restrictions. Some attractions, particularly theme parks, may have height or age restrictions – useful to know if you're visiting with children.
- Family tickets cost less than buying a separate ticket for everyone, but as young children (usually under-fours) often get in free, make sure you're not paying for anyone unnecessarily.
- Entrance to many attractions in the UK can be paid for using supermarket loyalty card points. Tesco's Clubcard, for example, has deals on more than 180 days out in the UK – adult entrance to Alton Towers (normally £35 at the gate) costs just £8.50 in Clubcard Vouchers.
- Don't rule out going by public transport. The national journey planner, Transport Direct ([www.transport-direct.info](http://www.transport-direct.info)), can help you compare alternatives to travelling by car. Many train companies sell tickets that give you travel and entry to many attractions, usually at a discounted rate (visit [www.nationalrail.co.uk/times\\_fares/promotions](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/times_fares/promotions) or [www.daysoutguide.co.uk](http://www.daysoutguide.co.uk) for more information).

## FAMILY UPDATE

Darren and Toni visited the *Which?* office in London in June. 'It was fascinating to see behind the scenes – it was clear to us how committed everyone is to their work. The process of research through to final magazine is far more meticulous than we could have imagined before our visit.'