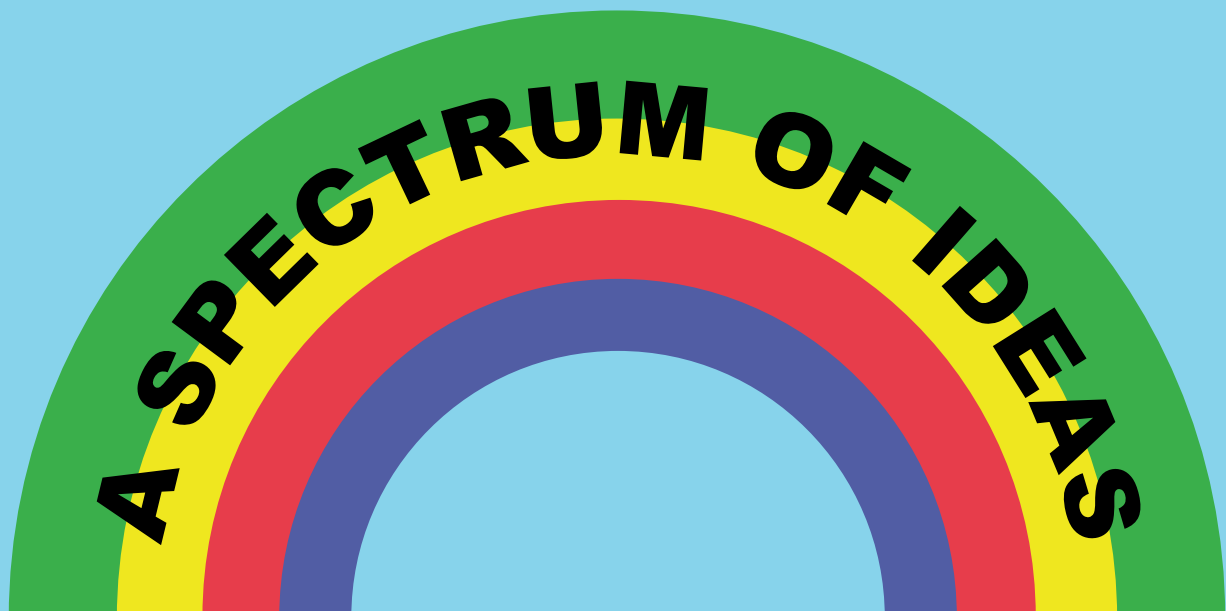




FAMILY DAYS OUT



**for families with a child on
the autistic spectrum**

Compiled by Shirley Ann Campbell

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FAMILY DAYS OUT: A SPECTRUM OF IDEAS

As a parent of children with autism, I felt isolated from other parents and their children. Standing in the playground surrounded by other mothers can be remarkably frustrating hearing them complain about insignificant misdemeanours of their children when at home you have to lock every door in the house to ensure your child doesn't decide to eat a tube of moisturizer because it smells nice or that you can not let them out to play at all unsupervised. There is no one to share your daily worries with or the tiny triumphs because they would seem all too trivial to them.

The answer to all this stress is to go out for a day or go on holiday. However this in itself can be as stressful if not more so than simply plodding on with the daily grind.

Holidays and days out mean changing routines and experiencing something new and unknown which is a real turn off for people on the autistic spectrum. So is it good to get them out there or should we simply admit defeat and let them stay in their safety zone?

My husband and I decided to be quite forceful early on in our children's lives and try and give them as many experiences as we could to allow them to decide what they did indeed like and dislike. This meant travelling on as many different forms of transport as we could, going shopping, going to new places and learning new pastimes. No matter how well you think you are prepared, children are unpredictable. Something accepted one week by the child may be unbearable the next. However, we did find far more rewarding experiences than bad ones and it did bring us a better understanding of our children, the effects of their autism on how they behaved and brought us closer together as a family.

An added bonus was that it helped my children deal with changes in their lives as they got the chance to experience new challenges and environments. This allowed them to be more flexible and likely to approach new tasks with less trepidation, especially if pre warned and prepared beforehand.

The best tips I got on this lonely journey had always been not from the professional but from other parents who over time had found the short cuts and the contacts through hard work and trial and error. So when, as part of my independent study module for my postgraduate certificate in autism, I had to

look at some area which I felt I wanted to explore deeper into, I decided that trying to make this booklet of ideas with the help of other parents might help lots of other parents in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City in preparing their family for a day out by doing some of the leg work and added stress. I hope it does.

All the information in the booklet is correct at time of publishing. However I have tried to add websites and telephone numbers so that you can check up to date information such as prices and time tables. Websites enable the child to see what is on offer so that hopefully it will reduce their stress levels by preparing them for what they will encounter.

Of course, not all the places or activities will be suitable or appropriate for all the children. The word spectrum itself tells us that their needs and capabilities can vary vastly. Sensory issues will undoubtedly affect the child's ability to cope within the environment and this will be a factor in planning a day out for many.

My Aspergers Syndrome and how it affects me

I constantly feel anxious and stressed out but few people who meet me will ever realise this. When I go out into the outside world, I “mask” my Aspergers Syndrome so my disability is kept a secret. I fear I will be picked on if people find out the truth about the real me. But the truth is the Aspergers is the core of what makes me the person I am. I experience the world differently from others.

Since I was young, I have experienced hypersensitivity in sound, taste and light. I am a big football fan and my parents wanted to take me to a football match but were concerned that I wouldn't be able to cope with the noise. I had trouble in the past with noises in the dinner hall and in the playground. However, they did take me and I not only coped, I enjoyed it!

I know that people with autism are totally different. However, if I had to give a message to all parents it would be not to underestimate us and give us a challenge now and again. Who knows we might actually enjoy it!

By Grant Campbell

ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

Doonies Farm, Cove

This city farm has lots of rare breeds. It has a large free car park beside the farm. Meet the animals, have a picnic and play on the play equipment. A family admittance costs £2! Toilets and hand washing are available on site.

More info: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk or or www.disabledgo.info

Fluff fields Donkey Sanctuary at Kirton, Milbrex, Fyvie (6 miles out of Fyvie).

Rescues donkeys from all over Britain (especially retired working seaside ones). Again, you just give a donation to look round the donkeys. It is run by a family at their farm. The donkeys, which are all up for adoption, are usually out grazing in the fields. The adoption fee helps with the cost of feeding, medical and farrier's bills. If you adopt a donkey you get regular newsletters and a Christmas card from the donkeys. They also have a small shop but no toilet facility. There is disabled access with assistance.

Contact: 01771 644770

Macduff Marine Aquarium

The aquarium shows us the marine life of the Moray Firth through splash pools, touch tanks, the ray pool and optional talks from the guides. You can also watch a diver enter the largest tank and feed the fish (see daily times). There is a shop and toilets onsite. Parents commented on the good wheelchair and buggy access here. Tickets last for the entire day so you can pop in and out as you please.

More info: www.macduff-aquarium.org.uk/

The North East Falconry Centre - Near Huntly

From Huntly take the A920 towards Dufftown and follow the signs. Good website shows you what is possible and how accessible it is for everyone. Prices start from £5.25 for adults, £4.25 for children and a £3.25 concessionary rate.

More info: www.huntly-falconry.co.uk

Contact: 01466 760328 or info@huntly-falconry.co.uk

The Willows animal sanctuary (Lambhill Farm, Strichen)

Situated on the B9093 between New Pitsligo and Strichen. The entrance fee is via donation at end of visit (payable in their small tea room). This sanctuary is good for all animal lovers (especially cats). As you arrive a multitude of furry visitors meet you looking for affection. Usually someone comes out to welcome you and give you safety advice (some electric fences, but well labelled). There are horses, donkeys, mules, cats, goats etc who have all been donated or rescued. A must see for my boys were the cats sleeping quarters! Stories about some of the animals are displayed round the farm. You can adopt animals to help with the feeding costs too. They have toilets, hand washing area and a small café/shop. Open Sat/Sun & Mon | 1.30-3.30pm.

More info: www.willowsanimals.com/

Contact: 01771 653112 or kate@willowsanimals.com

Hazlehead Park, Aberdeen

Pets Corner-visit the fish, birds and donkey's ect in this small animal area within Hazlehead Park. Prices are £1.50 for adults, 50p for children and £2 for families.

More info: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk (park facilities)

ARCHAEOLOGY / HISTORY

Archeolink - Oyne

Living history park in Aberdeenshire where children can learn to make and use artifacts from the past as well as learn all about history through the ages. There are activity sheets that you can download prior to your visit to get them in the mood.

There is not a overall disability rate. However if the child needs an adult in order to be able to participate and enjoy the experience, the carer will get in for free. I suggest you may need to take proof of identity. Prices from Adults £5.50, children over 3 yrs £3.55.

More info: www.archeolink.co.uk

Contact: 01464 851500

THE ART & MUSEUMS

The Aberdeen Art Gallery, Aberdeen

Free entrance for all. Café, shop and toilets on site. Quiet and relaxing. One of my children is very sensory and loves the acoustics here.

Aberdeen Maritime Museum, Shiprow

Free to enter it tells us all about Aberdeen's maritime history. It has a shop, toilets, café and baby changing facilities available. Nearest car parking via the Virginia street car park. Open Mon-Sat 10am-5pm, Sun 12pm-3pm.

More info: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk / <http://www.aagm.co.uk> or look in maritime museum building to get information

Contact: 01224 337700 or info@aagm.co.uk

BEACHES

Lots of parents recommended beaches, as they are usually quite quiet, have plenty of space for the children to roam and they are free!

Aberdeen

Good wide promenade for walking, scootering and biking and usually relatively quiet winter and summer. Just check for any local events being held there. The local press is a good source here.

Banff Links

This was recommended as it had a good play park with a nice beach.

Balmedie

Sliding down the dunes here seemed to be very popular. There is a visitors centre and toilets as well as picnic tables. Parking fee applies.

More info: www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Cullen

Mentioned but no specific information given.

New Aberdour

We love this beach but no toilet facilities. Nearby are Pennan and Fraserburgh. There are caves and rock pools to explore. This beach is for the more able bodied with lots of clambering over rocks and stones needed. In the summertime at the weekend the ice cream van sometimes appears too. There are picnic opportunities here and it is very peaceful.

FAIRY TALE ADVENTURES

Storybook Glen, Maryculter

Ideal especially for the young. See models of the storybook characters. This park has free parking. Picnics are allowed but only outside the actual park area. Open 10am-6pm March to October it also boasts a café. A garden centre is also next door. Prices are £5.25 for adults, under 2's go free and £3.75 up to £3.95 for children. Group booking gets a discounts of 10%.

More info: www.storybookglenaberdeen.co.uk

Contact: 01224 732941

PARKS

Auchinblae Park

Found by following the signposts from the main street. This has been in our experience a great place. Usually quite quiet, there is a small car park next to a tree adventure area complete with flying fox slide. A bridge takes you over the river (not fenced off) to a small playground with a chute and roundabout. There is also a putting green/bowling green and tennis court (some equipment is there but it is better to take your own if possible and small payment is via an honesty box). There are toilets also available. Past the bowling green there is a nature/floral walk (also some water areas). This place is a little suntrap and is a very pleasant place for a picnic if your child is well supervised and safe around water.

Aden Country Park, Mintlaw

Situated in Mintlaw it is accessed via the A950 New Pitsligo road. Again charge for car park (20p for 1hr). There is a large play park, with a variety of equipment, and a sensory garden. A duck pond and forest walks can also be found. There

are ruins of the original big house and in the square the Aberdeenshire farming museum and craft shop. It also boasts Hareshowe, an example of a working farm from the past with tours. A restaurant is available too as well as a multitude of picnicking and barbecue areas. For those with a dog there is an exercise area. Various events are on throughout the year. Toilet blocks are next to square and car parks.

More info

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/countryparks/locations/mintlaw.asp>

Banchory Park

In the centre of Banchory this park area has plenty of parking and toilets close by. Some play equipment, and further up there is a small arcade area. Across the road from the park are a putting green and tennis courts. Prices available on site.

Crathes Castle, Near Banchory.

Recommendations praised their café where the child can make up their lunchbox and the choices available are good. There is seating outside too but beware the wasps in August. If self-service is not your thing there is also a waitress service restaurant which is usually quiet. A large play park, walled gardens, nature centre, shop and the clean toilets also got the thumbs up here.

More info: www.nts.org.uk/Property/20/

(press visit and Aberdeen/Grampian to view all properties.)

The Duthie Park, Aberdeen

Home of the Winter Gardens, which is free to visit. There is a café, toilets, ponds, play equipment and lots and lots of open space. Again check to see if there are any events on.

More info: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk or www.disabledgo.info

Fyvie Castle between Oldmeldrum and Turriff

Another National Trust property. This castle stands in nice open grounds. It has a walk round the lake and is great in the autumn for collecting conkers! It is usually not too busy. However there are events held periodically so check ahead. The grounds are free but there is a charge for the castle tour.

More info: www.nts.org.uk/Property/20/

Haddo House Country Park

Found near Tarves this park is open all round the year and is free apart from the cost of the car park (starts at 20p for 2 hrs). There are a number of walks, ducks, swans and geese to feed (depending on the time of year), a small play park with swings, seesaw, helter skelter etc and plenty of running free space. It is usually very peaceful especially in the gardens. There is a ranger centre open at the weekends with information on the wildlife to be found. The house is open at certain times to the public (separate charge). There is a shop and tearoom also available. There are also plenty of picnic areas available. Dogs can also have fun in their own exercise area or they are welcome to walk with you on a lead. It has two toilet blocks.

More info: <http://aberdeenshire.gov.uk/locations/haddo.asp> or www.nts.org.uk/Property/20/ to tour the house

Haughton Country Park

Located at Alford this park boasts several play areas with equipment (to run off excess energy). It has good toilet facilities next to the two main park areas. Parking charge via meter. Picnic areas are available. There are woodland paths to explore and there is also an 18-hole putting green (payable at main reception next to caravan park). At time of printing a round cost 50p each. There is a small shop in the reception where sweets, ice cream etc can be purchased. Or why not take a trip on the Alford Valley Narrow Gauge Railway from the station in the park to Alford station. My own children particularly enjoyed waving to the driver and golfers as they pass by and the trains hooted. Ticket office booking details and times are available on their own website with pictures of the trains.

More info: <http://aberdeenshire.gov.uk/countryparks/locations/alford.asp> or www.alfordvalleyrailway.org.uk/

Hazlehead Park, Aberdeen

Lots of entertainment is available here. There is a play park, gardens, maze, Pitch & Putt and Pets Corner. Toilets are at the main entrance beside Pets Corner. Parking available beside the park.

More info: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

Turriff Park

Swings and play equipment in enclosed area, boating lake and plenty room to run around. Car parking available beside the Boating Lake.

SCIENCE

Satrosphere

Hands on science museum where for once you don't have to hold them back! Toilets, café and shop on site. Situated at the old Tramsheds, 179 Constitution Street, Aberdeen. They open from 10am-5pm daily and prices start from children (3+) £4.50 and carers go free.

More info: www.satrosphere.net

SHOPPING

No specific places mentioned.

Yes, some of you out there did like shopping with your children! Remember if they have to get or look for something they want and have a list of where you are going (try to avoid window shopping or getting distracted as this may frustrate them) it can be a pleasant experience. Especially if there is a reward at the end of it!

SOFT PLAY FACILITIES

Most children and parents loved soft play as it let the children run off steam and the parents could get a breather knowing it was safe. It also has the added value of improving their motor skills and balance whilst having fun at the same time.

Boomerangs (Fraserburgh)

Found at 94 Commerce Street. This soft play facility allows children up to 12 years or 5ft in height freedom to have fun for one and a half hours. Prices are Under 2's free, 2's £1.50, 2-4yrs are £3.00 and 5yrs and over costs £4.00.

Contact: Mrs. Fiona Thompson on 01346 511234

More info: www.visitscotland.com

Codonas, Aberdeen Beach

Houses Rambo's soft play adventure area. Height and age restrictions apply here. Payment is via tokens but watch out for various deals on their website.

More info: www.codonas.com

Koko's Activity Centre, Victoria Road, Torry, Aberdeen

Activity soft play with slides for children up to 10 years old. Discounts for disabled children (if you ask them). Café available. Parental supervision may be needed. Good for running off excess energy. Prices for disabled child from £1.00 for first hour and 50p for any half hours after that.

More info: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

type in Koko's activity centre and follow the link to neighbourhood directory (info but no pictures available)

William Smith's Soft Bear Play Centre, Strachan near Banchory

Another soft play centre recommended to me. It can cater for 80 people inside dining and 60 outside. Prices of admission are £4.00 during the week and £4.50 at the weekend. No discounts here.

Contact: smithwill@aol.com or **01330 850550**

Williamsons Garden and Machinery Centre, Turriff

(Found off the B9025 Turriff - Aberchirder road it is around three and a half miles from Turriff.)

Not only a garden centre but it also boasts an indoor adventure centre (up to 145cm in height only), outdoor swings/chutes & climbing frame and an out door pedal cart track (from 8yrs-adult). They have a café too. Disabled sessions can be pre booked too to avoid disappointment. The pedal car sessions cost from a pound for a 15-minute session however on Saturday/Sunday there are half hour sessions at 10 am.

More info: www.williamsonsgardencentre.co.uk

SPORTS ACTIVITIES

Disability Sport

Various locations/venues around both Aberdeenshire and the city to help allow children and adults get into sport.

Contact: Claire Bonner is one of the co-coordinators for Aberdeenshire and can be contacted on **01467 628812**

More info: www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk or www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

Cycling

One family said that the cycle path along the old railway track from Aberdeen out towards Deeside was good.

Ice Skating

Aberdeen Beach Leisure Centre

More info: www.aberdeencity.gov

PUTTING

Fraserburgh

9-hole putting green was recommended (free as is the tennis apparently).

Albury (Albury Rd, Aberdeen)

Good fast eighteen hole putting green, tennis courts and bowling greens.

Telephone 01224 571683 for prices or Aberdeen city website. Open from 10am - 9.30pm Monday - Thursday, Friday 10 - 7pm and 12 noon to 5pm on Saturdays and Sundays

Torry's (Victoria Rd)

Putting green was also given the thumbs up, as it is very peaceful.

More info: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

Pirate Adventure (Codonas at the beach)

Brilliant, relaxing and each family group only gets on at one time so you are not overrun by other groups. Downside? Cost at £4.99 each.

Balnagask Golf Course, Aberdeen, found at St.Fittocks Rd,

Torry

This has a 9 hole Pitch and Putt which my boys enjoy to again use up all that pent up energy. Two adults and children can play for less than £7! Beware – need to be energetic and mobile for this one and the toilets are not the best (go before you play!).

Contact: 01224 876407

Swimming

Most Swimming pools have either a disabled swimming session when it is quieter and/or discounts for the disabled and carer. Below are some of the pools which have been recommended

For more information about pool facilities and time tables go to <http://aberdeenshire.gov.uk/recreation/swimleisure>

Aberdeen Beach and Leisure Centre, The Promenade

Offers swimming, ice-skating or other various activities.

More info: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

Ellon Pool

Disabled swimming time Tuesdays 6-7pm (no mixed changing here though).
Disabled child- 70p & Carer free.

Fraserburgh swimming pool

Disability concession of 75%

Inverurie Pool

Unisex changing room which helps enormously.

Northfield Pool

Unisex changing area.

Peterhead Pool

Recommended as it is usually pretty quiet and carers get a discount.

Westhill Pool

Has a unisex changing area. Quiet lessons are also available.

tip- build in plenty of time for drying and changing when planning your trip.

Tenpin Bowling

Leisure Centre at the North Links, Fraserburgh

If you are a social member there is a 50p discount.

More info: www.fraserburghleisurecentre.co.uk

Contact: 01346 516663

One, Balgownie Road, Bridge of Don Aberdeen

Discounts available (£1.50 a game for child & carer). Relatively quiet before 2pm daily and early evenings.

More info: www.one-sports.com

Contact: 01224 828288

Codonas Amusement Park at Aberdeen Beach

Tenpin Bowling - Monday to Friday 10am - 6pm free shoe hire and game costs £1 each! (This may be liable to change).

Tubing, Alford Ski Centre, Greystone Rd

45 minute public sessions are available at the cost of Adults - £6.50, Juniors - £4.90.

More info: www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk

(Type in tubing which will take you to Alford ski centre and then press open session link for picture of tubing)

Contact: 019755 63024

Theatre - H.M.T Aberdeen

Discounts available for the disabled if you enquire.

WALKING

Bennachie Visitors Centre-Near Chapel of Garioch

Investigate all about our local landmark and the forests around it. Toilet and disabled access available. Open Tuesday - Sunday (Summertime 10.30 am til 5.00 pm & opens an hour earlier in the winter but closes an hour earlier.

More info: www.forest-education.org/visitaforest/sites/ab/centre/002.htm

Contact: 01467 681470 (to speak to a Warden)

CHILDREN'S CLUBS

Unfortunately from the replies I received very few children accessed clubs regularly. Of those that did, the majority attended clubs of a sporting nature e.g. Lawn Bowling, Golf, Tennis, and Football etc and who seemed to try and cater for the needs of some of the children. Unfortunately the less able children are still struggling to find suitable clubs with people who understand and can cater for their needs. The geography of Aberdeenshire is also a hurdle for some. Nowadays it seems to be assumed that everyone can access a car. This is not always the case. Travel costs mount up and using public transport may not be practical or appropriate especially if the child has sensory issues. School clubs such as Riding for the disabled and access to swimming were very much appreciated.

Aberdeen special needs football (Aberdeen)

Meet on a Monday night from 6.30 - 8.00pm. In the winter sessions are held at St Machar Academy and in the summertime the sessions are held at the pitches behind the fire station off the Mounthooly roundabout. It is free and for children between the ages of 8 - 18yrs. Aberdeen football club coaches are involved and it is run as part of Aberdeen's disability sports programme.

Contact: Andrinne Craig on 01224 814778 or acraig@aberdeencity.gov.uk to see if there are any places available.

Note: unfortunately after August the funding for this expires and there may be a small fee to pay.

Two other clubs that the Sports Development Team runs are

Kidz Multi Sports Club

Sundays during school term from 3.00 – 5.00 pm at the Alex Collie Sports and Community Centre, Bridge of Don. This costs £3.00 per session (paid upfront).

Contact: Andrinne Craig on 01224 814778 or acraig@aberdeencity.gov.uk

Run, Jump, Throw Thursday Club

At Kittybrewster Primary School from October to Easter and at the Chris Anderson Stadium from Easter to October during the school term. Costs £3.10 per session and is held at 7-8pm.

Contact: Daniel Parrott, Athletics Development Officer on 01224 814782 or dparrott@aberdeencity.gov.uk

Inverurie Under 12's youth club

Held at the Garioch Centre it meets the first and third Friday of the month (term time only) and is split into P1-3's (6.30-7.30pm) and P4-7's (7.45-9pm). There is a weekly fee of £1.50 and a yearly membership payment of £2.50. They may need some parental guidance on how best to help your individual child. They have various activities such as Art & Craft, Games and Sports. The children also have access to a tuck shop (upstairs) as is the pool and football tables.

Contact: Louise.Stewart@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

JIC Funhouse (Albert Street, Fraserburgh)

After school club held on Thursdays (3.15-4.45pm) for games, crafts, baking and outings. Cost £1.50 per session.

Contact: Mrs White on 01346 519249.

Powerhouse Funhouse (Fraserburgh)

Held on a Friday evening from 7-8.30pm it has games, crafts and painting and is free. They also have a Funhouse some Saturday mornings with bouncy castle and face painting this costs £1. A free bus service is provided on a Friday night.

Contact: Davis & Ashley Ritchie, Grattan Place, Fraserburgh Community Church, Fraserburgh or **telephone 01346 510199.**

Rainbow Rogues(Esslemont School, Ellon)

Surestart runs the Rainbow Rogues, which is aimed at children from 0 to 3yrs either diagnosed with special needs or awaiting assessment, which provides quality play sessions with experienced play workers. Held on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9.30 - 11.30 it also gives parents or carers the opportunity to access support from both Sally Sheehan (Surestart Community Learning Worker) and other parents.

Contact: 01358 729237 or 07879 434419

Salvation Army “Adventure Kidz”(Fraserburgh)

Is held on Mondays and Wednesdays (3.30pm-5pm) with crafts, games, stories and tuck shop in their hall at 66 Frith Street. Cost 50p.

Contact: Andrew Buchan (Youth Worker) on 01346 513437

Satorishido Martial Arts Grampian (Fraserburgh)

Was recommended as it is a “fun way to learn, focus and let off steam”. It is held in the Broadsea Hall for 4 year olds and upward. It costs £2.50 for an hour session.

More info: www.smaa.co.uk

Contact: Albert Ross on 07792 986336

Sea Cadets (Fraserburgh)

Gowanlea, Balaclava Quay, Harbour buildings, Fraserburgh. Held on a Tuesday from 7-9pm. Costs £1.00.

Sooyang Do- Inverurie (North Street, Catholic Church)

Another martial art to help with co ordination and discipline, health and well being. There are clubs all over Aberdeen City and the Shire for juniors and adults.

More info: www.sooyangdo.com

ANGUS

Montrose Beach

Was recommended for their good variety of playthings. It has a pitch and putt too. Lots of car parking, toilets (do not know if there is a disabled one) and a café

The Caledonian railway- from Brechin to Bridge of Dun

Also runs most weekends with some special themed events (Thomas, costs from £7.00 for an adult, £6.00 for a child (3-15yrs) and £4.00 for 3 years and under (no disabled or carers discount here).

More info: www.caledonianrailway.co.uk

Contact: 01356 622992 for timetables and event dates (good pictures on website)

DUNDEE

Camperdown Park

Provides a good value day out. It has an excellent animal wildlife park that at less than £10 for a family must be a bargain. We have visited here year after year. The animals are well cared for, there are opportunities to stroke some of the animals (not Comet & Star the brown bears though!) and sometimes there are other animal experiences. The toilets inside the animal area are always well looked after and there are a couple of picnic tables too. It's worth getting down early (10.30 to 11.30) when the animals are getting fed and are usually wandering around.

Outside there are three play areas, an amusement arcade area and two equipment areas. They also have trampolines, electric cars/bikes and a boat lake. There are paved paths and it is billed as disabled friendly.

Toilets are not so good in the open play park areas. There are plenty of picnicking areas as well as a small shop. Further up the park there is a 9 hole Pitch and Putt & Putting.

Olympia Swimming Pool, Dundee (situated beside the Discovery and railway station) Earl Grey Place, Dundee DD1 4DF

Great for using up all that extra energy. There are 4 flumes at no extra cost, diving board, wave machine and a café.

Costs- child pays full price however carer gets in for a pound!

More info: www.dundee.gov.uk/olympia/main.htm on prices and good visual website go to

Contact: 01382 432331 / 01382 432300

Sensations, Dundee

Situated next to the railway station not far from the swimming pool at Greenmarket, Dundee. There are 80 hands-on exhibits to explore and regular shows.

Prices are £3.00 for a disabled child; £5.00 for a disabled adult and carers go free. Small Café and shop are also on site. It has a small car park. It is on two floors but there is a lift (if needed probably better to phone and check ahead).

More info: www.sensations.org.uk

Contact: staff@sensation.org.uk or 01382 228800

EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Zoo, Corstorphine.

Good website with plenty of information including opening times, pictures of the zoo and animals and even a menu for one of the cafes. Activities include the Hilltop Safari, play areas and hands on sessions. There are picnic areas and cafes available. There is a car parking charge but concessionary rates for child and free carer admission (with proof). There is also free wheelchair loan if needed (first come basis) and the Safari can accommodate wheelchairs.

More info: www.edinburghzoo.org.uk

Contact: 0131 334 9171 (for special needs info **0131 314 0326**) or e-mail info@rzss.org.uk.

FIFE

Craigtoun Country Park by St Andrews

Open from April to September from 10.30 am to 5.30 pm. Admission costs vary for activities. Car parking available outside the park. Lots of activities available

such as Crazy Golf, Boating, Miniature Railway, Bouncy Castle and a good old fashioned play area. Good paths around the park and small shop. Lots of toilets dotted about.

More info: www.visit-standrews.co.uk/craigtouncountrypark

Contact: 01334 473666

Deep Sea World-Queensferry

Aquarium fun with lots to see. Around two hours from Aberdeen. There are lots of activity weekends. Carers are free with valid I.D.

More info: www.deepseaworld.com

Contact: 01383 411880

St.Andrews Aquarium

Worth a wee visit if you are in the area. Smaller than the one in Queensferry but this means that it is quieter. Here they also rescue seals and you can see them getting fed. Car parking is nearby at a cost of £1 in the summer (free in the winter). There is a small café open at weekends. Tickets last the whole day so you can pop in and out.

More info: www.standrewsaquarium.co.uk with lots of fishy facts on it!

GLASGOW

Glasgow Science Centre- 50 Pacific Quay, Glasgow

Another Hands on science museum with huge Imax cinema and tower attached to it (at present prices are £4.95 / double attraction costs £7.95 with all carers getting in for free!).

More info: www.glasgowsciencecentre.org

Contact: 0871 540 1000

Highland, Invernesshire & The Black Isle

Highland Wildlife Park, Kingussie near Aviemore

You need a car here as part of the experience is a drive through and it would be quite difficult to get to the park without your own transport. Walking

paths good but hilly. Open times vary and it can be closed if the weather is bad (probably better phoning before setting off especially in the winter). You are given a free audio guide and guide book (to be returned at visitors centre). There is a gift shop and coffee shop on site as well as a walk round area. Child costs £8.00 with carers getting in for free.

More info: www.highlandwildlifepark.org.uk

Contact: 01540 651270 or e-mail wildlife@rzss.org.uk

Landmark, Forest Theme Park, Carrbridge

Fun day out with lots of activities such as forest trails, Adventure Land, Water Coasters, Micro World and more. Open all year round but check times and activities open from website first to avoid disappointment. For children who enjoy climbing there are lots of dare devil activities (some height restrictions). Prices vary according to the time of year, so again check online. There are restaurants or take a picnic with you. Various areas are wheel chair accessible too.

More info: www.landmark-centre.co.uk (go on a visual tour first)

Contact: 0800 7313446 or landmarkcentre@btconnect.com

Strathspey railway – at Boat of Garten to Aviemore

They have theme days too. Some wheelchairs can be accommodated but I would contact them beforehand.

More info: www.strathspeyrailway.com

Contact: 01479 810725

Black Isle Wildlife and Country Park, Drumsmittal

This is a hidden gem, which we found by pure chance. It can be a bit difficult to find so watch out for the signposts. Over the Kessick Bridge, first right to Drumsmittal and one and a half miles up the road on the left.

They have lots of animals to see and some you can touch, a small play park, picnic tables, a shop and café. On the flat but some grass paths. Toilets and hand washing areas available. Open April- October.

Contact: 01463 731656

STIRLINGSHIRE

Blairdrummond Safari Park, by Stirling

Great day out with lots to do. They have a super website with lots of pictures to help plan your trip, information on how practical all the attractions are and educational information about animals. Picnics are welcome but there are several eating choices too. Although it can be busy there are always quieter areas. Arcades, climbing activities, face painting, play areas, Flying Fox, close up encounters boat trips and sea lion & bird of prey shows. Carers get in for just £2.00 (with ID) and children are £6.50 (one child free with token from website). Guidebooks cost £2.50. No convertible cars or vans are allowed through to drive area but there is a free bus. Do not fear because at present there are no monkeys to wreck your car! There are lots of toilets and three baby changing areas.

More info: www.blairdrummond.com/

Contact: 01786 841456.

The Falkirk Wheel, near Falkirk

Engineering at its best here. Lots to do for all the family such as the interactive exhibition, outdoor play area, walks, shop and café. The boat trip in the wheel takes around an hour and you have to be there for boarding the boat about 30 minutes before your allocated time. There is full wheelchair access but let them know at time of booking as there is limited wheelchair spaces. It is open from April to October from 9.50 a.m. (later out of season).

More info: www.thefalkirkwheel.co.uk

Contact: 08700 500 208 or info@thefalkirkwheel.co.uk

The National Trust-

A membership ticket for a family costs at most £65.00 (cheaper if a one parent family or if paid by direct debit) and gives unlimited access to their properties. They often have super play parks attached and picnic areas with plenty of running space and freedom.

More info: www.nts.org.uk

Toilet Facilities

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/visit/toilets/b.asp> locations and information about toilet opening times in Aberdeenshire. Good idea but not all toilets included. If your child also has a physical disability you may be able to apply for a RADAR key to allow access to locked toilets all around Britain. See www.radar.org.uk for more information. You may though need a big bag to hold the key!

Always take some spare 20p coins for pit stops. Often the paying facilities are cleaner too.

The Cinema Exhibitors Association Card

Allows the person accompanying a disabled person in for free to most cinemas. Application forms can be downloaded from www.ceacard.co.uk. Simply fill it in and send proof of disability, a passport photo of the child (signed on the back) and £5.00 to cover administration costs. It lasts for three years! Early bird sessions can be quieter.

www.disabledgo.info/Town.asp?TownID=28 and type in Aberdeen for information on facilities and disabled access in Aberdeen city.

Travel Costs

Your child may be eligible for a travel pass for the disabled if they are receiving disability allowance at the middle or higher rate. Check at you Social Work office or online at www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk or www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

Try and do a bit of research with the child if possible by getting out the map,

looking at leaflets or using the web before visiting a new place or trying a new activity. It can motivate the child and help them visualize a new place. This hopefully allows them to be less stressed by the visit/new experience so that everyone can enjoy the outings. Check opening times and book if necessary to avoid disappointment (and tantrums!).

I found Carol Gray's Social Stories and Cartoon Conversations were helpful in preparing a child for an outing and changes to their routine. You can find out more about writing them at www.thegraycenter.org/

Have an emergency travel kit with favourite toys, books, pens, paper, gameboy and food they will eat in case things go wrong. They undoubtedly do sometimes so it's better being one step in front.

Set off early to avoid queues and busy periods.

Avoid peak times at cafes and restaurants. Waiting for seats/service is not autistic friendly and neither is the extra noise and the bustle.

If going on a trip phone ahead or check online to see if there are any special events on (good or bad!).

Try to find activities that all the family can enjoy. If you cannot find something that all the family enjoys you may have to split into groups. If you like the activity too then everyone wins and you are more likely to relax.

Before going on a trip have a bad weather back up plan which you have already shown or talked to the child about.

Take the plunge and try something new with your child occasionally. You never know how they will react. I have spent hours preparing my children for trying something new with trepidation and they more often than not cope very well and enjoy the experience. The more experiences you try to give them the better. I'm not saying it's easy or without the occasional tantrum from hell. However it has been worth it. It is natural for them to be anxious but until they experience it for themselves they won't know how it feels.

Sensory hyper/hypo sensitivity can be a problem for a child. You know your child better than anyone. Think about what sensory experiences they might have to deal with prior to going on your trip e.g. may need ear protectors/own food/dark glasses etc.

Try to build in strategies for helping them if they start to get stressed or distressed.

Take a portable DVD player to help occupy child waiting for meals etc.

One lady used a wheelchair instead of a chair at a table when in a café to stop her child running away.

HOLIDAY TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tips

Security and space to allow their children some freedom was very important to the parents here.

Self-catering is often the best option for many families because they give the family more freedom to cater for everyone's needs (room for store of dinosaur & Thomas videos, the playstation, Lego and some refreshments for adults!) This seemed to be the preferred option in the questionnaires I sent out. Ideally they were situated with plenty of entertainment on tap.

Some parents prefer a holiday house with a garden and plenty of space while others prefer a caravan, as it is less “unfamiliar” than a strange house. Again sensory issues are often at the route of the child's ability to cope. Making the place smell familiar can help some children e.g taking your own towels and bed linen.

Short trips were also popular as these provided enough time to have some fun but not enough time to bore or stress the child.

We quite like going for a weekend to such hotels like a Premier Travel Lodge where you can get a family room and you know you can keep an eye on them at all times!

Holiday recommendations in Britain

Here are some of the places parents have recommended.

Burghead caravan site

No other information given.

Center Parcs

Was recommended, as there are lots to do and cars are not allowed past a certain area within the park.

More info: www.centerparcs.co.uk

Especially mentioned was the one near the Lake District (Whinfall).

Forres - Tulloch Lodges (8)

A parent said that they had found the owners very supportive and helpful.

More info: <http://tullochlodges.com/>

Grannies Heilen Home at Embo

Good beach and facilities.

More info: www.parkdeanholidays.co.uk/

Nairn Lochloy Caravan Park

Nice sandy beach for walking on and lots of other facilities available on site.

More info: www.parkdeanholidays.co.uk

The Scandinavian Village, Aviemore

Why not rent a house or flat. Lots to do around Aviemore if you have a car.

Open all year round.

More info: www.scandinavian-village.co.uk

Silver Sands at Lossiemouth

No further information given.

Turriff Caravan site

For lots of facilities near by and without travelling big distances this was recommended.

More info: www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk

HOLIDAYS FURTHER A FIELD

Spain

One parent commented on how good the Spanish people were with disabled children. They also recommended a smaller hotel and getting to know other holiday makers.

Jersey

We loved going here and have gone several times over the years, as have our friends. We found the Westhill Hotel in St.Helier, particularly good. Family run they have a couple of adjoining rooms. They have a big dog, which our lads love, a big garden with swimming pools, jacuzzi, table-tennis, swings and a sand pit. They also have an indoor games room. The staff are very friendly and the meals very good. Only downside it is on a steep hill but it does have a courtesy bus.

Top tips

Top tip for before visiting Disney Florida is to get a doctor's letter with your child's diagnosis which allows you to access fast passes for all the rides.

Take waterproof mattress cover and spare sheets.

At hotels it may be easier for some children if buffet style meals are available. This can encourage independence, give them the opportunity to try something new and cater for the rigid requirements of the child. Having said this some children love the experience of being served their dinner and the social experience of asking for their meal themselves.

Take visual symbols and blue tac with you to help with setting routines and planning day.

You may want tell the owners/hotel of your child difficulties so that any worries you have can be discussed.

Remember to take any medicines which you will need and any medical letters also if needed (abroad).

Check in online if possible. It saves time and sometimes you can book your seat numbers too.

THANKS

I would like to first thank J & K Transport who donated the money to initially allow me to send out all the questionnaires to parents via their service providers around Aberdeenshire and the city.

Secondly I would like to thank the parents who took the time to fill out their questionnaires who are connected with The Grampian Autistic Society, Take-A-Break, The Carers Centres at Peterhead, Fraserburgh and Banff, PAGES and the mums at Banchory. I had some lovely letters and phone calls from parents that helped spur me on.

Thanks also have to go to the organizations themselves for sending them out on my behalf. Aberdeenshire Council helped in producing the booklet and also the distribution of it too.

Finally, and by no means last, to my family who supported me in producing this booklet in different ways, Grant for the insight into the Autism Spectrum, Calum for his recommendations and my husband for chauffeuring me round the countryside.

Final Tips

Buy a big handbag and having a good sense of humour is essential. Life is full of junk and the above resources will kit you out for dealing with almost all occasions.

