

Traveller's Diary



Travel Lodge Kent - By Tim Saunders

Returning from a break feeling relaxed is something that's pretty hard to achieve in my experience. But it has happened following our stay at the newly opened Travelodge in Ashford, Kent.

The town centre located hotel constructed of metal is situated in a modernised part of the area surrounded by other modern structures that surprisingly blend in with more historic dwellings nearby. There's a pleasingly continental feel. Traditionally, Ashford has become associated with the Eurostar train and little else. But this is an attractive town with much to offer. We find out some interesting tales from the flagstones next to the Travelodge. We discover that the Queen of Romania was born in the town in 1875, that there's a local cycling superstar, Jamie Staff OBE and that the nearby river has claimed at least one life.

The redevelopment is still underway, which should go some way to rejuvenating the place and provide greater interest. Despite Brexit, during our stay we come across a variety of Europeans. We stay in a family room complete with en-suite bathroom. There's instant hot water. A small bath and shower allows each one of the Saunders family to relax in peace for a little while. Much appreciated as I am getting over a cold.

Usually a Travelodge family room will only accommodate four people but we're able to shoehorn little Henry (3) inside with an oversized cot, which works well until about 2am when he wakes up and comes into our bed. Harriett (8) and Heidi (6) are comfortable in their single beds. On the first night, despite new surroundings, the children sleep well.



Travelodge offers unlimited breakfasts. Adults pay £8.95 each and children go free. Served from 7am to 10am we amble down at around 8am. We all have fruit juices: apple or orange from the machine. The set up gives the children independence – they can serve themselves at the drinks machine and select their own breakfast from continental to full English. This truly sets you up for the day and I find that I can do without lunch as a result.

During our stay we park on a private driveway, just under a mile away. We book the space through Yourparkingspace.co.uk, which provides an extremely cost effective solution to expensive car parking in town centres. We also like the fact that as we park away from the town centre it gives us the luxury of exploring a little further afield than we would typically do if we parked in a central car park.

When away we try to do something every day. On our first day we visit Wildwood, the park and conservation charity at Herne Bay where there are 200 animals on 40 acres of woodland. No sooner are we through the gates and there's a make a mask activity, which all the children are keen to do. Heidi and Henry make hedgehog masks while Harriett creates a rabbit one. Henry races away; he suddenly has a burst of energy, which is great to see. There are many wonderful animals to see including polecats and wild boars. But the highlight for us all is seeing the bears and we climb along a high rope bridge to watch them. It's scary but memorable although Henry doesn't bat an eyelid. We learn about bees and how clever they are. Then the children run themselves ragged in the play area.

On the second day we head for Diggerland at Strood, not knowing what to expect, fretting that Henry won't be able to join in because he's so young. But how wrong we are. This is a truly amazing experience. One where little people operate diggers. Henry sits on my lap and is in his element as he looks out of the windscreen and nonchalantly moves the joysticks to lift the arm and bucket. We even manage to scoop up some earth. It's difficult to do. We try our hands at driving a dumper truck. Oh the fun of it. An elderly woman does this, too with a big smile on her face; it really is open to all ages. Then we discover the Robots where the girls drive themselves round a course, followed by Henry and me – these are vehicles the size of a small car and yet little Heidi (6) is able to drive one quite competently. It's amazing to see. The children have a blast driving the mini Land Rovers, too. We finish our day by racing the electric go karts.

Our final day is spent visiting the Debenhams opposite the hotel and making our way to Maidstone to watch Goldilocks & The Three Bears & The Mayor of Porridge-ton at Hazlitt Theatre. There's singing, dancing and scene changes, all of which grips our children for almost two hours. The show finishes with them being invited on stage.

A great experience. For more information visit:

www.travelodge.co.uk <https://wildwoodtrust.org> www.diggerland.com <https://www.parkwoodtheatres.co.uk/Hazlitt-Theatre>

