

ADVENTURES AT THE ZOO

by *Tim Saunders, Travel Correspondent*

With zoos opening up their outdoor environments, we hope this whets your appetite and provides some inspiration. Check the websites for full information on what is and isn't open.

A group of meerkats is called a mob, gang or clan.

We learned this last year during a trip to Chessington World of Adventures in Surrey where the zoo includes such animals as meerkats, lions, otters and giraffes.

It's feeding time for the penguins. They are such jolly creatures and a joy to watch all flapping about as each one is given a fish to chomp. They line up to get their fill and then take to the water. They're a delight and we're all mesmerised. When the seagulls swoop to try to catch the fish the penguins chase them off. The sea lions seem much larger than we imagined. And to think they eat small sharks, too.



It is the pig at the YooHoo children's zoo that helps Henry (3) to forget his awkward ways and regain composure. Even the smallest of actions for this strong minded little boy like going out of a door, brushing teeth or simply wearing shoes to go to the toilet, are often major ordeals. But you have to go along with it, gently coaxing along the way and "Oink," says the helpful pig as he waddles out of his house. "Can I get down?" asks Henry, who is sitting on my shoulders (his usual position during outings). Henry follows the pig's every move as he makes his way about. Nearby donkeys, goats and sheep are all busily munching on their hay.



Then the Tree Top Adventure keeps Henry and his sisters Harriett and Heidi occupied for quite some time as they race around letting off steam and going down the slide.

After our packed lunch which includes some light entertainment from Henry and Heidi playing 'it', we make our way to Sealife. This is a world of fascination for us all. There is so much underwater life



and Sealife does an absolutely fantastic job of introducing us to stingrays, sharks, fish of all different shapes and colours including seahorses which are incredible and so peaceful to watch as they move through the water. Mesmerising. Small children love the layout because everything is at their height; they can gaze into the glass and get up close to these superb creatures. They even swim overhead.

There is so much to learn and appreciate here including about how these creatures are being increasingly threatened and endangered by climate change and pollution. Food for thought and with that in mind we head to Prezzo Epsom, only a few miles away, where we discuss the day's events over a thoroughly enjoyable meal. The memories created today rekindle older ones of when the girls had a sleepover with grandma and granddad who then took them to Sealife in Bournemouth. Grandad recently passed away so while their grief is still raw, good memories help to ease the pain a little. Garlic bread starters and spaghetti carbonara accompanied by glasses of Peroni for Caroline and I. Salad starters for the children followed by margherita pizzas and ice cream and we are all sated. The friendly service and sophisticated surroundings always makes a meal at Prezzo a memorable occasion.



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