

# HAMPSHIRE FUN DAYS OUT

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**D**ays out are a good way of spending time together, experiencing something new but also keeping the children occupied, taking some of the strain away from their addled parents.

With this in mind a day trip to the Isle of Wight sounds like just the ticket. Usually it can take around half an hour or so to get over to the island, which does eat into a day trip. We were excited to discover that Hover Travel flies passengers over this strip of water in just 10 minutes. We've never been on a hovercraft. It is a very similar experience to travelling by ferry but considerably quicker.

We board at 1030am. Our three children sit altogether while Caroline and I sit behind. When all passengers are seated the craft rises slightly and rotates speeding off towards Ryde on the Isle of Wight. The outward journey is pretty smooth. It's a fascinating mode of transport and if you don't look out of the window you don't even realise that you're above the water. Little Henry (3) is mesmerised by the fact that he is actually inside this craft that until now he had only experienced by watching Grampy Rabbit's Hovercraft on Peppa Pig.

Travelling as foot passengers is a rarity for us because we usually rely on a car. So the idea of queuing for a bus is an unusual activity. But this whole experience does us all the world of good. Realising that patience is a virtue. A bit of waiting does no one any harm in this rush dash world we live in.

On arrival we walk over the bridge and down to the bus station where we board the number 9 to Wootton Station. We all sit at the front on the top deck and the children love it. It takes about 20 minutes. This stop takes us to a station that is



serviced by the Isle of Wight Steam Railway, which operates four stations on the island.

We travel to Havenstreet, about 10 minutes away. It's an ingenious form of transport. Sitting in our third class carriage we are transported back in time and imagine what life was like then. Ah, no mobile phones. The puff of the steam, the whistle, the guards in their uniforms... There is such passion that has long since evaporated on the mainline electric trains. And of course this service is run and kept alive mainly by volunteers, who really love what they do.

If time allows you can spend all day riding the trains. However, unfortunately, time does not allow and so with one eye on the watch we have to prioritise.

We visit Haven Falconry, just a short stroll across from the station and in the field ahead of us there is a display. Some red kites are flying and their handler informs us that these African birds have a reputation for being able to eat in flight and also have the nickname of 'firestarters' due to their ability to pick up burning bits of wood and then drop them in order to capture fleeing animals. "Do not eat anything whatever you do," the handler warns us. "They have been known to even get food out of people's mouths."

No fear we won't eat our packed lunches then, until we know it's safe. We head into the centre and are advised to wait 15 minutes until the birds are back in their cages.

Meanwhile we walk around looking at the birds. Scops Owls are called Transformers because they can shrink to half their size or even double their size if they feel threatened. But it is the Great Grey Owl that really captures our attention as he turns his head all the way round. A lovely, wise creature, much like Daddy, I insist. There is an insect area, too which features large African snails and even Indian stick insects.