

BORED THIS EASTER? GO FLY A KITE ...



THE HOLIDAYS ARE UPON US BUT HOW CAN YOU MAKE SURE THE KIDS – AND THE ADULTS – DON'T GET BORED INDOORS? NEVER FEAR, MARISA DUFFY IS HERE WITH THE SUNDAY HERALD A-Z OF EXCITING THINGS TO DO THIS EASTER ...

A is for Abseiling

Going down? Abseiling is the opposite of climbing; it involves stepping backwards off a cliff and descending down rock faces – but then you knew that already. Nothing beats doing it against a stunning natural backdrop though. Torridon Abseiling offers the chance to lower yourself off the side of a mountain. Not for fearties. www.thetorridon.com

B is for Badger-Watching

Get up close to some foraging badgers at the ninth Dumfries & Galloway Wildlife Festival. From tomorrow, Monday, April 2, to Sunday, April 15, you can book a ringside seat at the night-time feeding sessions outside the observatory at the WWT Wetlands centre at Caerlaverock. Other festival highlights include a wild food forage in Langholm which ends with you eating what you've found. Sounds tasty! www.wildlifefestival.org.uk

C is for Cycling

The Highland Perthshire Cycling Festival kicks off next month and spans a diverse range of (mainly) free road and mountain bike events and includes races, guided rides with local enthusiasts, skills sessions and workshops which culminate in the Etape Caledonia Sportive weekend. Watch out for tacks. Cycling legend Graeme Obree will be at The Big Day in Aberfeldy on May 12. Events will include gravity-defying antics from The Clan stunt display team, a giant air bag to test jumping skills, races, an obstacle course and, naturally, a cycling polo competition. www.highlandperthshirecycling.co.uk

D is for Dark Sky Gazing

Gain a sense of perspective as you gaze heavenwards at Europe's first dark sky park – conveniently located in Dumfries and Galloway. This month provides a particular highlight; on April 21 and 22 stargazers will see the Lyrids, a strong meteor shower which averages around 10 meteors an hour. This is the first major shower in 15 months where the moon is absent allowing for good views of the meteors. www.darkskyscotland.org.uk

E is for Easter Egg hunt

Make the little darlings work for their Easter eggs. The National Trust for Scotland have egg trails at 44 properties next weekend. www.nts.org.uk

F is for Falconry

Take a hawk on the wild side and learn to fly a Parabuteo unicinctus (a Harris hawk, to you and me) with Falconry Scotland. The bird will fly free and follow you wherever you walk, swooping back onto the fist when called, in a satisfyingly King Arthur-type way. Hawk Walks last 45 minutes and are available at the Jedburgh and Bonnyrigg centres. Booking essential. www.falconryscotland.co.uk

G is for Glentroot

The 7stanes are seven mountain-biking trail centres spanning the south of Scotland, and Glentroot is one of the best. Visitors can set off on a number of family-friendly routes, including the Big Country Route, a 36-mile loop which follows minor public and forest roads. There are also two green routes, suitable for beginners

or those of us who don't live life to the max. www.7stanesmountainbiking.com

H is for Horse Trials

Horses on trial? What's the charge – jumping bale? The Central Scotland International Horse Trials at Scone Palace on April 28 and 29 include dressage, cross-country and show jumping. There is also a fun dog show, presumably for those who think horses are just too big. Free. www.centralscotlandhorsetrials.co.uk

I is for the Isle of May

Thanks to TV programmes such as Springwatch, birdwatching is becoming more popular. Every spring, nearly one million puffins appear from the open ocean to take up residence in their burrows around Scotland's coast. The beginning of April is the best time to take a wildlife cruise from Anstruther and North Berwick to the Isle of May nature reserve and watch as thousands of puffins spring clean their burrows for the arrival of their new chicks. www.nnr-scotland.org.uk/isle-of-may

J is for Jedforest

Stick Bambi into the car (the DVD, not the cute Disney character) and motor along to Jedforest Deer & Farm Park in the Borders. The centre opens at Easter and gives children the chance to see red, fallow and white deer as well as rare breeds of sheep, cattle, pigs and goats. www.jedforestdeerpark.co.uk

K is for Kite-Surfing

Kite-surfing is an extreme sport which is a

cross between wakeboarding, surfing and paragliding with a bit of windsurfing thrown in to stop you getting bored. Before hitting the surf, it's probably best to get some basic tuition. Based in wind-blasted Troon, Trykitesurfing.com offers half-day taster sessions and a two-day course, which takes you from zero to hero. www.trykitesurfing.com

L is for Loch Morlich Water Sports

Windsurfing on the open sea can be a tad intimidating for a beginner so the relatively sheltered waters of Loch Morlich, near Aviemore, offer a far kinder introduction. www.lochmorlich.com

M is for the Melrose Sevens

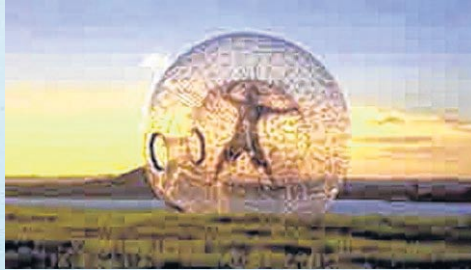
One of Scotland's biggest rugby events will be held at Melrose Rugby Football Club on April 14. You don't have to have oddly-shaped balls to enjoy it, but it helps. www.melrose7s.com

N is for Newtonmore

Forget stuffy, dusty rooms and glass cabinets, Newtonmore's Highland Folk Museum is an 80 acre, one-mile-long site with recreated buildings which evoke life in a Highland village. www.highlandfolk.com

O is for Orienteering

Active Spirit, based near Aviemore, offers a range of outdoor pursuits aimed at beginners and families, including orienteering. They will arm you with the basics before setting you free to boldly navigate your way across the wonderful Highland countryside. www.activespirit.co.uk



If kite-surfing, main picture, isn't your thing, you could always try, clockwise from top, snowboarding at Xscape, yachting, sphering, river bugging, puffin-watching on the Isle of May, dark sky gazing in Dumfries, or badger-watching



P is for Paddle Lochaber

Discover Scotland's coastline from the seat of a kayak. Sounds scary but specialist sea kayak guide Paddle Lochaber, based in Ballachulish, will take you on half or one-day trips, which are ideal for beginners. These wide stable boats can take up to three people so are fine for younger family members. www.paddlelochaber.co.uk

Q is for Queensferry

Boat trips on the Maid of the Forth start today. Regular tours leave from South Queensferry and head out under the Forth Bridge to Inchcolm Island where visitors can spend an hour or two exploring the island before heading back. www.maidoftheforth.co.uk

R is for River Bugging

River Bugging brings a new meaning to the phrase armchair sports fan. Practitioners don't need to leave the comfort of an inflatable chair to enjoy the thrill of white-water rafting. River Bugs are the latest things to hit our shores from New Zealand and are essentially one-person rafts shaped like giant inflatable armchairs. Splash runs river bugging trips on the River Tummel at Pitlochry and the Tay at Aberfeldy. <http://rafting.co.uk>

S is for Sphering

Another import from the Kiwis is sphering. It involves a 12ft inflatable ball into which the willing participants strap themselves before taking a wild and bouncy tumble down a hill. And why not? Perthshire is the only place

in Scotland where you can try sphering and it is available on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. www.activityscotland.com

T is for the Tree-Top Trail

Yell like Tarzan as you travel through the tree-tops at Treezone, an aerial adventure course set high in the ancient Pines of Rothiemurchus. Enjoy a squirrel's eye view of the amazing forest while tackling exhilarating challenges. www.treezone.co.uk

U is for Underground Pursuits

Scotland isn't a major caving area in the British Isles but the discovery of an 180m-long cave near Applecross, in Wester Ross, last summer may change that. Described as a "caver's dream", the Applecross cave, which has stalactites up to two metres long, was discovered by Grampian Speleological Group and is the first major cave to be found in Scotland for several years. www.gsg.org.uk

V is for Vertical Descent (rapid); aka Bungee

Who would want to bungee from a crane in a car park when you can leap into the heart of one of Scotland's historic highlights instead? The UK's first static bungee jumps take place near to the site of the Battle of Killiecrankie (which we won, back in 1689). The bungee jump platform is suspended below the Garry Bridge over the River Garry, near Pitlochry. It is operated by Highland Fling Bungee from the visitor centre in Killiecrankie. <http://bungeejumpsotland.co.uk>

W is for Whale-Watching

Clamp on your life-jacket and hop aboard one of the marine tours which leave from Easdale island, near Oban, for a chance to see minke whales, basking sharks and porpoise. Tours can also include the Corryvreckan whirlpool, the third-largest whirlpool in the world, as well as nearby lighthouses. www.seafari.co.uk/oban

X is for Xscape

Should the weather turn Scottish on us, Xscape at Braehead, near Glasgow, offers a good rainy-day solution with several "outdoor" activities under one roof. Head for the SNO!zone for a spot of ski-ing or snowboarding, get trigger happy at the laser station, enjoy an indoor climb or keep your feet on the ground with family-friendly 10-pin bowling. Throughout the Easter holidays there will also be free daily activities for children including treasure hunts and craft workshops. www.xscape.co.uk/braehead

Y is for Yachting

If you are serious about taking up yachting there are clubs aplenty around the coast where you can learn but if you'd like to enjoy the experience of yachting without the hard work you can hire a skippered yacht and pretend to be a rap star. Isle of Skye Yachts offers skippered charter, usually on a weekly basis. www.isleofskye-yachts.co.uk

Z is for Zzzzzz

If you've got this far, it's probably time for some well-earned shut eye. As granny used to say, you'll sleep well after all that fresh air.

WEEKEND BREAK



MAINS OF TAYMOUTH, PERTSHIRE

CHIRRUPING excitedly, the children burst through the doors of Mains Cottage, our home for the weekend. They bolted from room to room, emitting whoops of joy on discovering each of their bedrooms had its own TV and ensuite.

Nestled deep within Perthshire, Mains of Taymouth offers superior self-catering in an area renowned for its tranquility, but with plenty of scope for excitement. The Taymouth estate overlooks the village of Kenmore at the head of Loch Tay, and is fast building a reputation for its adventure breaks.

Our cottage had a modern interior, tastefully decorated, but our kids didn't really care about that; they were too busy trying to decide whether to use the hot tub or sauna, or play pool on the customised dining table.

The estate's deli is one of the best shops of its kind I've experienced. You'll find locally-sourced meats, cheeses and other produce, including some great craft beers.

Never resting on his laurels, Mains of Taymouth owner Robin Menzies is building a leisure centre within the grounds, and pony-trekking, golf and boating are just a few of the options. The estate has also teamed up with Aberfeldy-based Climb MTS, run by veteran mountain guide Stuart Johnston, to provide bespoke adventure breaks. Depending on the season, you can try a wide range of activities, from kayaking to ice-climbing, and mountain-biking to igloo-building.

We had arranged with Climb MTS to do something fairly child-friendly. We opted for rock-climbing and abseiling, and a stomp up Schiehallion. Thanks to our guide Paul's careful manner, my kids in turn shuffled closer to the top of a rockface and, with varying degrees of threats and bribes, went over the edge. Going up was completely different: rather than hesitant half-steps they bounded up the cliff.

After lunch, we made for Schiehallion. We couldn't see much of this famous mountain due to the afternoon drizzle. A pity, but with so little to see, Paul introduced us to the things we could: different types of lichen, mosses, insects, animal trails, etc.

Fatigue and the rain eventually got the better of us, and we returned weary but elated to the Mains. The mountain may have been elusive, but I still had the energy for a few bottles of Schiehallion ale.

Mains of Taymouth has a selection of holiday cottages and lodges. Also on the estate is The Courtyard Restaurant; boating centre; bike hire; stables; and nine-hole golf course. Short and weekly breaks start at £20 per person per night.

www.taymouth.co.uk 01887 830226

Colin Campbell