

Are British kids ready for American style residential camps? See our listing of the Top 15 camps in the UK at essentialsurrey.co.uk/kids-schools/best-summer-camps-for-kids



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Taking the plunge at Liquid Leisure

Play time

Sunny forecast? Time for a day out. Samantha Laurie looks at some of the best local family attractions where the water level is high

Liquid Leisure

What could possibly be more fun than pushing each other off a giant inflatable into a freezing lake? Water fun doesn't get more exciting than Liquid Leisure's Aqualand Windsor in Datchet. The largest aqua park in Europe, this huge lake-based complex of floating platforms, slides, wobbly stepping stones and trampolines opened three years ago and has proved a massive hit, with up to 200 visitors an hour in the summer months. It costs £15 for a session (including helmet for under 16s and a life vest), with wetsuits also available for hire for an additional £5. There is a minimum age of six.

Here you'll find both boat and cable wakeboarding, wakesurfing (riding the boat's wake on a surf board) and banana rides. There's even a sandy beach with deckchairs and a double-decker bus serving drinks and snacks.

■ liquidleisure.com

Thorpe Lakes

Thorpe Lakes Aqua Park is back for a second season with its floating obstacle course with flippers, slides, climbing walls, rope swings and floating islands.

Run by wakeboarding specialist, JB Ski at a lake next to Thorpe Park in Chertsey,

the course can hold up to 35 kids (or adults) at a time. It's £15 an hour including a life vest, plus £5 to hire a wetsuit (or you can bring your own). Minimum age is eight if unaccompanied (there's a decent café for cake and coffee while you watch), or six if you get stuck in with your child.

If that's not enough to fill the day, there's boat and cable wakeboarding too, while the lake is also home to the latest watersport craze: SUP (stand up paddle) polo, an adrenalin-pumping cross between water polo and lacrosse on inflatable paddleboards.

■ thorpelakesaquapark.co.uk

All aboard

The Great Nauticalia Raft Race, Shepperton

This amazing spectacle not only attracts an ever-increasing number of outlandish creations, but also brings thousands of spectators to Shepperton riverside.

Rafts must be homemade and constructed from second-hand materials, so expect plenty of drama along the mile-long route, while superb commentary keeps the party spirit flowing.

■ June 10, 1pm; shepperton-fair.org/raft-race.html

Guildford Lido

This beautifully landscaped 1930s pool with three slides – including a two-lane multislide on which kids can race each other – is heated to 24 degrees.

In July and August, the pool hosts five open-air cinema evenings, welcoming families at 7pm for an hour of turbo-charged water fun before the night's family classic. Kicking off the programme is *Shrek* on July 14, followed by *Top Gun*, *Jungle Book*, *Footloose* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

■ freedom-leisure.co.uk/centres/guildford-lido

Chobham Adventure Farm

You can never have too many children's farms – as any sleep-deprived new parent will testify – so it's great to welcome this new arrival. Its indoor play zone with 'death drop' slides, giant climbing frames and bouncy pillows is already up and running, while the outdoor area with timber forts, sandpits, donutting slide and waterplay should open this month. Animals to follow in the autumn.

■ chobhamadventurefarm.co.uk

HANDS ON WITH NATURE

Fruit picking at the farm and a spot of trout fishing, followed by a day out at Borough Market, armed with a shopping list for a picnic...

Sound like the perfect grown-up weekend? In fact, this is the itinerary for 6–11 year olds at Fulham's latest summer camp.

Connecting children to nature through food, gardening, natural crafts and music is the ethos of these week-long camps, where the unusual outings range from mudlarking on the Thames to guided wades along the River Wandle. Food is at the heart of the offer, and each day children make their own all-veggie lunches with the camp chef. There's also a more centre-based programme for little ones (3–5 years) at the education centre at Fulham Palace.

Prices start at £300 for a week (8.30am – 4.30pm), with a 20% discount for early bookers (use the coupon code 'riverwandle').

■ firsthandexperiences.co.uk



DIG OUT YOUR UNWANTED TREASURES

Finding out that your child has special needs is distressing enough, but what lies ahead is a confusing world of unpeeped phone calls, forms, assessments, appointments, solicitors and psychologists. Now, a group of parents and grandparents of children with special needs have come together to launch parentsinneed.org to give low-income families hands-on practical advice on navigating the system.

In November, the charity is fundraising with a Very Affordable Art Fair at Blossom House School in New Malden, and is thus on the hunt for any paintings, china, mirrors or *objets d'art* that you may have stashed away, which it will gladly collect.

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