

TRAVEL

Wiped out but buzzing

The seaside town that has everything for a family outdoor thrillcation

VICKY ALLAN

SO, it's not that we haven't been to Dunbar before. As a family we've been there many times, but mainly with the sole purpose of visiting their destination leisure pool. To us, the town was a wave machine, a water slide and a poke of chips afterwards. Several times we took a stroll round the historic harbour, with its castle ruins at the end, and more than a few of my children's birthdays have been celebrated with a trip to nearby Foxlake Adventures. But till now I had never fully realised the wonders of the beaches around Dunbar or quite how many other attractions there were for an active family.

This, of course, is the hometown of John Muir, "father of the National Parks" in the United States – host to a small museum about him as well as start of the John Muir Way – so it seems right that a visit to Dunbar should be all about the joys of the great outdoors. Since I have 11 and 14-year old sons, this list is slightly skewed towards young teen activity, but for younger kids there is plenty too – both of my kids still rave about visits to the East Links Family Park, and the playpark nearby, on the John Muir country park, is a great place to set them loose.

SURFING, BELHAVEN BAY

If I'm honest, I'm the one in the family that has been obsessing over learning to surf. I'm a frequent cold water swimmer and I had the ulterior motive of wanting my kids – who had been put off by me dragging them into too many bodies of chitter-inducing water – to really love being in the local sea with me. That's how we find ourselves meeting a man with some boards in a van at Linkfield car park. This happens to be Martin McQueenie of Momentum surf school, a pioneer of the surf world, the man who set up the first surf shop and school in Scotland, so an ideal tutor in the art of catching a wave.

The swells might not be huge – the biggest waves sweep the bay in October – but they're just enough for newbies like us to have a thrilling play in. There's nothing like the buzz of catching a wave, even if you barely get beyond kneeling before toppling off. Were my kids persuaded? Max, my youngest, finished the session with a huge grin plastered right across his face, declaring it, "Brilliant!" He was buzzing. "I'm even warm!"

Further info at www.momentumsurfshop.com. Coast 2 Coast surf school, whose centre is on the bay, also offers surf, paddle-boarding and coastering lessons.

ZIP TRAILING, FOXLAKE ADVENTURES

Foxlake Adventures always seems to me



like the Tardis of the outdoor activity world. Here (www.foxlake.co.uk), on a relatively small site, you can try wakeboarding, Segway, ziptrail, open water swimming, and other activities, including the incredible Foxfall, a climbing trail over water that ends up with a zip wire splash in the lake. This was so much fun when we did it the first time, we've never been able to look past this zipwire splash at any of the other thrills on offer. This time, however, we decided to go for their ziptrail through the trees. One of the things I loved about this was that it wasn't a course in which I (the one having a nervous wobbly about being in the trees), was supposed to be watching my kids (the confident ones) and checking they were safely clicked on the whole time (the Go Ape experience).

It turned out, I was the only adult clipping myself to a wire in a pine forest in the middle of what must have been the

Clockwise from above: A thrilling family day out at Foxlake, and thousands of northern gannets gather nest material as they prepare for the new breeding season on the Bass Rock

biggest downpour in months. The joke going round was that we should imagine ourselves adventurers in a tropical rain forest. Just ahead of us was a whole group of girls out for a birthday party, chirpy and cheerful, in spite of the rain, clipping on and clipping off with alacrity. Highly recommended, though, if I'm going to get wet, I'd still rather take an exhilarating dunk with Foxfall.

BOATING TO THE BASS ROCK

If you've never taken a trip out to the biggest gannet colony in northern Europe, then this has to be on your bucket list. There's something absolutely remarkable about floating right up to the rock and watching the gannets there on the cliffs, or swirling high in the air and diving. It feels like you are an alien, a foreigner, approaching some territory that belongs to another species. Cruises are run out of Dunbar Harbour by Blue Wild.

WILD SWIMMING, BRIDGE TO NOWHERE

There are various excellent locations to do this and I could start listing them all, but the truth is that one of the best ways to find out where a good wild swim spot is, is to go online, find a Facebook group and send them a message. I tracked down the Salty Sisters, who embraced me with their warm saltiness and took me on a swim out across Belhaven Bay, meeting at the famous Bridge to Nowhere, a footbridge over a tidal channel of water that, at high tide, is surrounded by sea, and detached from the land.

STAYING, DUNMUIR HOTEL

A lovely proper old-style family-run hotel, with staff with personality and warmth, good food and rooms that were just the kind of comfortableness we needed after a day getting buffeted around by all types of water. It doesn't look grand from the



outside, but it's testimony to how a hotel is about its people – enormously helpful and left me laughing after every exchange. Bookings at dunmuirhotel.co.uk

SHOPPING, HIGH STREET

Dunbar's wide high street is full of wonderful browsable distractions, shops that speak of real community. Among them are Flux, a wonderful cornucopia of gifts and cards; Green Cat Records, a treasure trove of second hand records and The Community Carrot, Dunbar's veg and wholefood shop, run by the community after they saved it from closure in 2019.

EATING, HECTOR'S ARTISAN PIZZERIA

For we who have surfed, swum and spent a few hours being drenched in the trees, and probably for plenty of other people as well, nothing seems more appropriate than a giant pizza and ice-cream feast. One of the distinctions of Hector's (hectorsdunbar.co.uk) is that its pizza-toppings come from local producers – meatballs and sausages from the Linton Butcher, Doddington's Berwick Edge cheese, bangers flavoured with Belhaven Best. Authentic Italian? Nah, more original East Lothian at its best.

WANDERING, THE ESPLANADE

Sunday morning, we wandered along the Esplanade to Winterfield Park, where my kids kicked a ball around on the football pitch. The Dunbar RBL pipe band happened to be practising on the grass by the tennis courts. A pigeon racing club van had pulled up, and two old fellas were standing around having their sandwiches. Suddenly they opened the doors and the air flapped with life, feathers whipped the air, and the birds flew off, homing to somewhere in Lanarkshire. It felt like wherever we wandered in Dunbar something interesting was happening, that this place was a breath of fresh air and life, in a pandemic.

WALKING, THE JOHN MUIR WAY

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MOTORING



AUDI'S NEW RS3: FIVE RIVALS RATED

Audi has finally revealed the new RS3 – a car which, for many years now, has delivered the kind of performance that'll put fear into many sports cars.

More potent than ever, the latest RS3 is quicker to accelerate than before, yet with quattro all-wheel-drive it should still be able to deploy this fierce power in all conditions – just like its predecessor could.

But the competition the RS3 faces has only got stronger, with many key competitors out for the hot-hatch crown.

Let's take a look at some of the rivals facing Audi's RS3...

1. VOLKSWAGEN GOLF R

The first rival that the RS3 has to face off against comes from within the Volkswagen Group itself. It's Volkswagen's ever-popular Golf R, which uses a turbocharged 2.0-litre petrol engine with 316bhp, bringing a 0-60mph time of 4.5 seconds and a 155mph top speed.

Though it can't quite match the RS3's acceleration time of 3.6 seconds, the Golf's all-weather ability does challenge the Audi's sure-footedness.

2. MERCEDES-AMG A45S

The A45 has consistently been a thorn in the RS3's side, with its hugely powerful 2.0-litre turbocharged petrol engine being one of the main challengers to the Audi's 2.5-litre unit. With 415bhp, the A45S will crack 0-60mph in 3.9 seconds – perilously close to the RS3.

The A45S also packs a striking interior and a raucous exhaust note, both of which add extra character to this punchy hot hatch.

3. CUPRA LEON

Cupra is already making a name for itself as a separate entity to Seat. However, one of its most famous

models – the Leon – is unashamedly based on one of the Spanish firm's cars, but this hasn't stopped Cupra from applying some of its go-faster touches.

The latest Cupra Leon uses much the same powertrain as you'll find in the Golf R, with a 2.0-litre turbocharged petrol engine producing 306bhp in estate models. It's enough power to send the Leon from 0-60mph in 4.7 seconds and onwards to a top speed of 155mph.

4. BMW M135i

BMW made a real switch for its latest 1 Series, migrating from its classic rear-wheel-drive setup to one which saw the front wheels powered for the first time. In the go-faster M135i, all wheels are driven courtesy of BMW's xDrive all-wheel-drive system, allowing for better traction.

With a 0-60mph time of 4.6 seconds it can't match the RS3 in a straight line, but thanks to well-judged suspension and excellent steering, the BMW should put up a real fight in the bends.

5. RENAULT MEGANE R.S

Renault's 'hot' Megane models have always erred on the side of driver engagement rather than outright performance, and this is certainly the case with the most recent model.

With a 1.8-litre turbocharged petrol engine kicking out 296bhp it's more than punchy enough – even though its 5.5-second 0-60mph time is one of the slowest here.

However, when it comes to driving the Megane R.S. really shines. In the UK, particularly, the Megane's nimble handling and excellent feedback resonate strongly and, as such, make it a fine competitor for the RS3.

JACK EVANS