

£2,756

Villa in Florida for a week

A self-catering villa, a short drive from Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida, is £2,756 for a family of four including flights from Gatwick and car hire. The price is for a bronze-category three-bedroom villa with private pool with US specialist Jetsave. The offer is for a six-night break starting on Monday, February 15. See www.jetsave.com

£889

One week in Antigua

A one-week, all inclusive holiday at three-star-plus Jolly Beach Resort and Spa, Antigua is £889 per person including flights. There are five restaurants, two pools and evening entertainment. Price is for May 1 departures and is based on two sharing.

For more information visit www.hayesandjarvis.com

£585

A week in Egypt

Three-sun Tropicana Tivoli in Egypt is a free shuttle bus ride from Sharm El Sheikh and Naama Bay. Prices for 14 nights' bed and breakfast start from £585 per person including flights from Gatwick on Sunday, February 21. Ring 0871 200 4455 or book online at www.firstchoice.co.uk

£460

Four nights in Cyprus

The Columbia Beach Resort, Pissouri, is a great base for a Cyprus walking holiday. A suite for four nights, which sleeps two, costs £460. Flights and transfers are not included. See www.columbia-hotels.com

£199

Family breaks at Butlins

The Spas at Butlins, Bognor Regis and Skegness offer adults the chance to chill out while the kids are kept busy. Skegness also has a 20m pool while Bognor Regis has one of only two SnowCaves in the UK as well as an outdoor hot tub. Breaks start at £199 for a family of four sharing a Silver self-catering apartment. Call 0845 070 4730 or visit www.butlins.com



● Headon Warren on the Isle of Wight, the head of the Alum Bay chair lift is in the background, as are the Needles, the rock formation on the western tip of the island

reserve and is a short walk from the cottage. The shingle path leads to a deserted 'Swallows and Amazons' type spot where seaweed creeps up to the high-tide mark and a shallow river leads out to sea. A heron is always on guard and seabirds mix with hissing swans, ducks and other inland birds.

As the river widens, there is an ancient stone sea wall with rickety wooden step ladders.

This is a peaceful place with only the occasional sound of the birds breaking the silence.

There are no tourists, just old fishing boats, many of them hoisted on to dry land years ago. Scraps of polythene provide makeshift shelters for one or two old men who tinker with bits of boat beneath.

This is no place for health and safety officers or for small noisy toddlers, but if you have no truck with either, park at the National Trust car park behind the New Inn, walk down the creek and see a little ramshackle world of messing about in boats history that you might not see again. Unlike me, you might remember to take some binoculars.

A more salubrious view of the island was enjoyed at nearby East Cowes, by Queen Victoria, who had Osborne House built between 1845 and 1851.

I suspect much of that time was spent putting gold leaf on the extravagant ceilings of this country retreat for herself and Prince Albert.

In a letter to Sir Robert Peel in 1845 she wrote "the sea, trees and air make it a perfect paradise".

Main house apart, there are some long walks around this English Heritage estate, where the terrace looks out across the Solent. Queen Victoria's bathing machine is on show here, but we made a beeline for the Swiss

ADVENTURES, BEACHES AND CASTLES

Don't miss the Robin Hill Countryside Adventure Park, near Arreton, sister park to Blackgang Chine. A nearby beach for Tuppence Cottage is shingled Colwell Bay, a popular beach for swimming.

We headed to neighbouring Totland Beach and had a very warm welcome on a breezy day at the Waterfront bar and restaurant.

One afternoon, we headed to the Isle of Wight Donkey Sanctuary, Wroxall. This sanctuary, with cats, dogs and geese, is guaranteed fun for small children. Carisbrooke Castle, near Newport, is a great run-around day out for children. A film gives a potted history of the castle, where people have lived since before the Norman Conquest.

Cottage, a grandiose 'wendy house' bigger than most real homes, where the royal children learned about keeping house and gardening.

But strangely it was the museum that really captivated my children. Stuffed animals, including a five-legged deer, budgies and a ptarmigan, stuffed crocodile and a shark's skull and butterflies on pins, some as big as your hand. A collection of odd gifts given to Victoria from around the empire.

A fur girdle, shell-decorated grass hats from the south seas, a coconut mounted on a silver base, fossils and examples of cotton manufacturing in a huge wooden case.

What on earth people thought her Majesty would do with all this stuff goodness only knows, but here it all still lurks, in a crazy kind of car boot sale of international history.

At nine and seven, Osborne House was a success for my children, but I'm not sure I could recommend the main house for much smaller children.

Toddlers would be much better off playing on the lawns amid huge cedar trees with one parent, while the other marvels at the opulent and stuffy grandeur of what poor Queen Victoria took to be a simple country retreat.

She would have been much cosier at Tuppence Cottage.