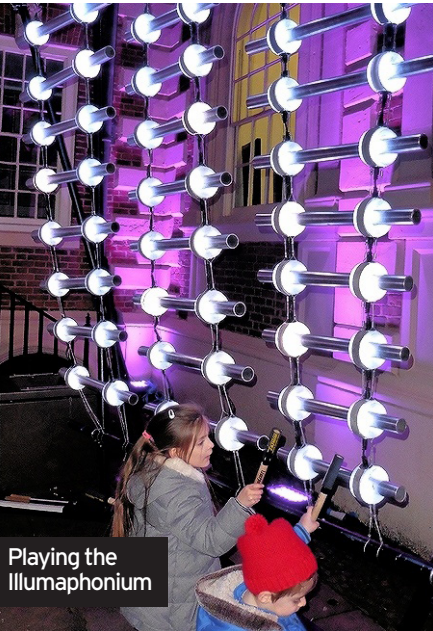


GETAWAY

SHREK the halls!



Playing the Illumaphonium



Santa's grotto at the Town Hall



On the reindeer roller coaster at Chavasse Park

Having conquered music, football and comedy, Liverpool now has Christmas all wrapped up too, as **ADRIAN CAFFERY** discovered on a weekend with his family in the North-west

FOR a truly Shrek-tacular Christmas there really is only one place to go this year. Liverpool has become the first UK city to host DreamWorks Lights, a Chinese lantern attraction featuring much-loved characters from the blockbuster animated films Shrek, Kung Fu Panda and Madagascar.

There are around 100 lanterns on display and our two youngsters, Cerys, aged six, and two-year-old Owen, were thrilled to be able to get up close to the likes of Puss In Boots, Po and King Julian.

We particularly enjoyed seeing Shrek and Princess Fiona in their swamp, Alex and his friends behind bars in Central Park Zoo and – suspended from the ceiling – the pink dragon from Shrek measuring a whopping 40ft.

It's located in the magnificent neoclassical St George's Hall which had a starring role in the recent Harry Potter blockbuster Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them.

It's next to Lime Street station and you can't miss it – there's a giant, inflatable Shrek on the roof! DreamWorks Lights is open daily from 10am to 7pm until January 15. Tickets cost £10 for adults and £8 for under-16s, with children under 12 months going free.

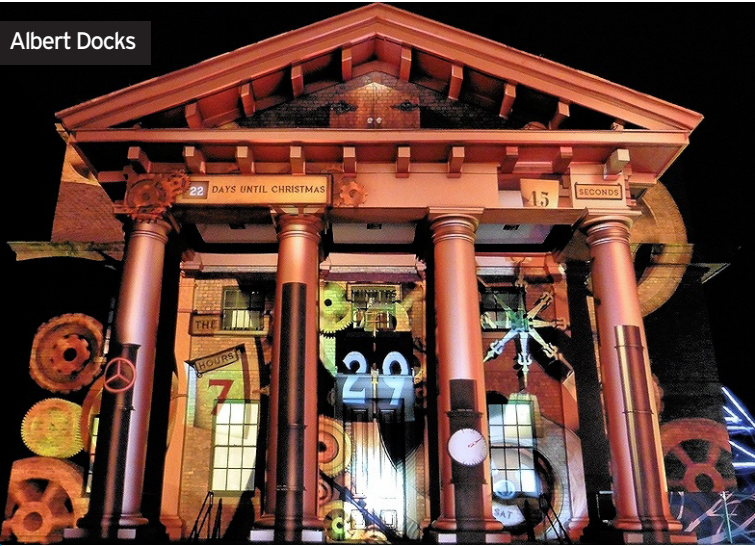
Strictly speaking, it's perhaps not the most festive of attractions, but if Christmas is supposed to be all about family time then this is definitely the place to spend it.

And, in any case, there's a Christmas market right outside plus loads of other festive attractions within walking distance, all part of Liverpool's One Magical City programme.

Here's what we got up to on our weekend...



Ice Bar



Albert Docks



Blackler's Santa



LEGO train

SANTA'S MAGICAL GROTTO

Santa's gone upmarket by setting up home in the crypt of Liverpool Town Hall. Everything is supersized in the grotto, with giant toadstools, snowmen, baubles and gingerbread people. There were plenty of elves to keep our children entertained during the wait to see Santa. Open this weekend then daily from December 16-23. Tickets are £7.50 per child and include a wrapped chocolate selection box plus entry for two accompanying adults.

SNOWFLAKE TRAIL

Trail maps (available throughout the city centre) will guide you to 12 snowflake sculptures designed by local and national artists, plus a giant story book and interactive window displays. But the best part for Cerys and Owen was finding and then playing the Illumaphonium – a music making sculpture with aluminium chime bars which respond to touch with patterns of light that spread out in ripples. Until January 3.

BLACKLER'S SANTA

Blackler's was a well-known and much-loved department store in Liverpool and this 18ft Santa was the centrepiece of its spectacular grotto from 1957 until its closure in 1988. After undergoing repairs the Santa is now standing proud in the atrium of the free to enter Museum of Liverpool, bringing back many happy memories for generations of Merseysiders. The museum also has

festive craft sessions for children. Until December 30.

HEART CHRISTMAS TREE

Liverpool's most famous sons once sang All You Need Is Love, so it seems appropriate that the city's landmark Christmas tree should be made entirely out of 280 heart-shaped lights. The hearts change their colours to dazzling effect and the 30m tree is topped by a twinkling star. There's also an Alpine-themed bar at the base of the tree, where visitors can indulge in a spot of "carol-oke". You'll find the tree at Liverpool ONE, one of Europe's leading open air retail destinations, boasting 160 stores, bars and restaurants and built around existing city centre streets. Until January 2.

LEGO SANTA EXPRESS

Close to the Christmas tree in Liverpool ONE is a train made entirely of LEGO bricks – half a



Po the Kung Fu Panda in one of the many scenes at DreamWorks Lights



Shrek peers over the roof of St George's Hall to the Christmas market below

million of them. It's being driven by an elf and the two carriages are filled with presents and a Christmas tree. There is no need to book tickets to this train, children can just join the queue to climb inside the driver's cabin for a free photo opportunity. Until December 29.

CHAVASSE PARK

Unusually, a park was included

in the Liverpool ONE development, and it has earned itself Green Flag status. This Christmas it is home to a festive-themed funfair which was just perfect for our little ones. Of the seven rides, they particularly enjoyed Santa's planes, the reindeer roller coaster and the elf swings. There's also a Bavarian house bar serving up mulled wine and bratwurts. Until January 5.

COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS

The famous Albert Docks is where you'll find possibly the most magical – and free – attraction in Liverpool this festive season. 4D projection mapping is used to transform the Dr Martin Luther King Jr building (originally the dock traffic office) into a Christmas clock, with turning cogs and a real-time display counting

WHERE TO STAY



CROWNE PLAZA, Princes Dock

Situated next door to the iconic Royal Liver Building, you can't get much more central than this. Every attraction we visited over the weekend was within walking distance, even with two young children in tow. Indeed, the Ice Festival is just a stone's throw away. Our smart and comfortable family room had a wonderful view of the ferries crossing River Mersey (stop me before I burst into song again!) plus complimentary wi-fi. The hotel has a leisure club with gym, pool, sauna and beauty therapy suite. There's also a lounge bar and restaurant where we enjoyed a top notch buffet breakfast. It's the only hotel in the city centre to have its own on-site parking (£11 per night) and check out is a civilised 11am. [www.ihg.com/crowneplaza](http://www.ihg.com/crowneplaza)

WHERE TO EAT

VIVA BRAZIL, Castle Street

The Brazilian-style steakhouse features a troop of passadors (meat carvers) who move from table to table offering 15 select cuts of beef, lamb, pork, chicken and sausages, all slowly roasted over a charcoal barbecue. I managed less than half of the meats but wished I'd had room for more. Perhaps surprisingly, my vegetarian wife and children were also well catered for. Diners can make unlimited visits to the extensive salad bar where over 50 dishes, including stews, pastas, vegetables and side dishes, are on rotation. There was a great atmosphere with very friendly staff and even a roaming magician whose trick left us gob-smacked. Children under 10 eat free with a paying adult. A branch opened in Birmingham earlier this year. [www.vivabrazilrestaurants.com](http://www.vivabrazilrestaurants.com)

WAHACA, College Lane

Taking inspiration from the markets of Mexico, this restaurant serves up tacos, burritos, salads and many more mouth-watering treats. Whether you're starving or just a bit peckish, it's perfect for a lunch stop while shopping in the very festive Liverpool One complex. There's also a rooftop bar where freshly blended cocktails with a Mexican twist are mixed and DJs play until midnight on Saturdays. It's a double winner of the Sustainable Restaurant Group of the Year award. [www.wahaca.co.uk](http://www.wahaca.co.uk)