

7 DAYS TRAVEL

A real Jurassic Park

ADRIAN CAFFERY enjoys family weekend at Britain's latest dinosaur destination

THE dinosaurs of the Jurassic Coast have woken from their 65 million year slumber to begin a new reign of terror in the nearby New Forest.

There have been sightings of fierce velociraptors, pterodactyls, triceratops and even a mighty tyrannosaurus rex, with the screams of children heard echoing around Hampshire.

But don't worry because, however realistic they may look, these creatures are all animatronic, forming part of a new £9 million prehistoric village called The Lost Kingdom at Paultons Park.

And the screams are from kids – and some adults – having the time of their lives on two white-knuckle rollercoasters that swoop around the 27 dinos, the largest creature being 12m high and 23m long.

The attraction opened its doors last month and is aimed at children aged over six years old, although they only need to be aged over four and taller than 1m to ride the two big coasters (and then with an adult).

The Flight of the Pterosaur is a sensational 395m suspended coaster which can hit speeds of 55km/h, while the Velociraptor is a unique 200m boomerang coaster which drops 20m and can reach 60 km/h.

Cerys, aged five, needed some persuading to join the queues and was still a little nervous the second time round, but she suddenly turned into a little thrill seeker, riding both coasters six times.

The Kingdom's other rollercoaster, the tamer Dino Chase, could also be ridden by her one-year-old brother Owen, but she loved that too, perhaps because she was able to go on without mum and dad.

Cerys and Owen were also able to 'drive' a 4x4 through a Jurassic World-type landscape. Then they stepped inside huge dinosaur eggs in a swirling, non-contact, demolition derby-type ride.

Owen was a little too short for the sixth and final new ride, a version of the Magic Carpet, but he did join his big sister in the fossil finders' sandpit in the themed outdoor playground.

The highlight for many families will be coming literally face to face with The Lost Kingdom's very own captive T-Rex, a frisky fella who threatens to leap out of his pen at any moment.

There's yet another dinosaur ride on the other side of Paultons Park, in the utterly adorable Peppa Pig World, which was designed around TV's most popular porky



pre-schooler and her family.

George's Dinosaur Adventure (George is Peppa's little brother and the dinosaur is his favourite toy) is one of seven rides – plus indoor and outdoor play areas – which were opened in 2011.

Aimed at children under seven, Cerys and Owen were equally excited as they travelled around the colourful land by train, car, helicopter, boat, balloon and even in a cloud.

But the most magical moment was when they got to give both Peppa and George a hug.

Besides the two themed areas there are plenty more coasters, water flumes and gentler rides around the park, plus playgrounds, a splash zone, a 4D cinema and trampolines.

The wildlife includes tropical birds, penguins, bugs, meerkats and giant tortoises, while the extensive, eye-catching gardens include

amazing topiary almost everywhere you look.

Paultons has also recently invested in a double decker Victorian carousel, plus the wonderfully weird Critter Creek and an entrance building/restaurant/gift shop that's an attraction in itself.

In fact, there is so much to do we were relieved we'd booked an overnight stay at the Holiday Inn near Winchester (just 20 minutes away up the M3) which included return tickets to the theme park.

Over an action-packed weekend, we added up that Cerys alone went on no fewer than 25 different rides – most more than once – as well as enjoying the park's more sedate attractions.

We came to the conclusion that while the new-look Paultons is fantastic for children of all ages, for five-year-olds like Cerys it really is unbeatable.

NEED TO KNOW

■ **ADRIAN CAFFERY** and family were guests of Paultons Park during a special preview of The Lost Kingdom. Paultons is located on the edge of the New Forest, close to Southampton, and is easily reached just a few minutes from the M27.

■ Tickets bought online start at £25.75. Children under 1m tall go free. Visitors can book overnight accommodation in a selection of nearby, family-friendly hotels and prices for a family of four start at £159, including breakfast and entry to the park for both days.

■ For further information on Paultons and to book tickets visit paultonspark.co.uk