

TRAVEL



Escape the winter blues

➤ LEADING ferry operator Brittany Ferries is offering a Spanish bolthole for those keen to escape the chill – and the energy bills – of a long, hard winter in Britain

The French-owned carrier has two blocks of apartments in Estepona, above, (18 miles south west of Marbella on Spain's Costa del Sol) – one on the beach, the other slightly inland – for car customers leaving Portsmouth or Plymouth, arriving at Santander or Bilbao and then driving across Spain.

A one-month stay for each of four people sharing a two-bedroom apartment, including four berth cabins for ferry crossings, starts at £438 per person. All utilities plus a weekly cleaning service and linen change, are included in the monthly rental. For two sharing, a month's stay starts at £829 each. You can also stay less than a month.

Call 0871 244 0633 or visit www.brittany-ferries.co.uk



Ski deals

➤ HEAD to Norway, the birthplace of skiing and enjoy the uncrowded slopes, outstanding scenery, excellent snow conditions and wonderful crisp air in the resort of Geilo.

Stay seven nights in Geilo at the 3+ Geilolia Apartments in a 2 bedroom self-catering apartment for £489 per person, based on four sharing and including a free lift pass and transfers.

Price also includes flights and transfers.

Book by November 30.

Visit www.skisafari.com or call Ski Safari on 01273 224 060.

If you go down to the woods today you're sure of Sandy Balls. **ADRIAN CAFFERY** dodges the double entendres while enjoying the outdoor life

WHOEVER said you never forget how to ride a bike was a liar – and should be forced to sit on the thinnest of racing saddles for all eternity.

When I got my leg over, so to speak, for the first time in nigh on 30 years I was as wobbly as a plate of jelly operating a pneumatic drill.

I was shocked to discover that the hundreds of hours I'd spent on static exercise bikes between the ages of 13 and 42 counted for absolutely nothing.

My Bambi on ice theatrics raised a smile from staff at our holiday centre's cycle hire shop but my wife, Jayne, failed to see the funny side.

She was horrified at the thought of our two-year-old daughter Cerys being towed around in the trailer that was attached to my rear wheel.

And so at her insistence, before setting off on the open roads, we did a few practice laps around the holiday centre.

We were staying near Fordingbridge, on the western edge of the New Forest national park, in a 120-acre village called, ahem, Sandy Balls.

Yes, it may sound like a nudist camp from a Carry On film but, titter ye not, there's a perfectly sensible explanation for its smutty-sounding name.

It can be traced back to the 1400s when the word 'Sandyballas', describing the area's dome-shaped sand and gravel outcrops, appeared on maps.

You can still see a couple of balls today (stop laughing at the back!).

Management admit that over the years they have toyed with the idea of changing the name to something more representative of a five-star holiday centre.

But they've decided instead to embrace the memorable moniker and a cheeky TV advert in 2010 was featured on TV's Have I Got News For You.

Anyway, back to the bikes. Within a few minutes of leaving the gates of Sandy Balls we were pedalling along quiet country lanes.

Memories of joyful hours on my



■ Left, a holiday lodge at Sandy Balls and wild ponies found in the New Forest

Having a

old Grifter and Chopper bikes came flooding back and I began to wonder what I'd been missing all these years.

My daughter, oblivious to the danger my wife still seemed to think she was in, was happily taking in the views from the enclosed trailer.

After lunch in the beer garden of a friendly village pub, we joined a cycle-friendly path across heath land in search of the famous New Forest horses.

Our quest was over in no time and the horses happily posed for photos before we cycled safely back to our wooden lodge, nestled in tall trees.

We spent the following day

cruising all around the New Forest in our car.

It very much reminded me of a trip to a safari park, only without the fear of giraffes dribbling through the sunroof and monkeys ripping off your wipers.

Perhaps there's a drive-through attraction somewhere in Africa that's recreated the New Forest... but I digress.

Besides the horses here, there and everywhere, we came across donkeys in a car park and cows lazing beside a traffic island.

There were herds of deer, too, although they seemed much more familiar with the Green Cross Code than the horses, cows and donkeys.

The New Forest's wildlife is one of the many reasons Sandy Balls welcomes 70,000 guests a year.

Committed to protecting its environment, the holiday centre has won gold in the David Bellamy Conservation Awards for 16 years running.

Still owned by the same family that established it 90 years ago, its facilities are all within the safe haven of a pedestrianised piazza.

There's a country store, a family pub and an Italian-style restaurant – with a large terrace – which operates a pizza takeaway service.

The leisure centre offers beauty

treatments and features an indoor pool, seasonal outdoor pool, whirlpool, sauna and gym.

There are three playgrounds plus an indoor soft play area and on summer evenings the entertainment includes magicians, family discos, live music and comedians. The cycle centre hires out mountains bikes, tandems, tagalongs and, as mentioned, trailers for children (dogs can also ride in them).

Activities on site and around the New Forest include pony trekking, fishing, windsurfing, kayaking, archery, bug hunts and combat games.

If it's beaches that you're after then Bournemouth's seven miles of golden sands are less than 20 miles away. Much closer to Sandy Balls are a couple of very popular, all-weather attractions – Beaulieu Motor Museum and Paultons Park, which is also home to Peppa Pig World.

Our daughter Cerys is a big fan of the cartoon porker famous for splashing in muddy puddles and was thrilled by the seven Peppa-themed rides.

You could say she was as happy as a pig in...

She was 90cm tall at the time, which meant she got in for free but was just about tall enough to go on

NEED TO KNOW

■ **ADRIAN CAFFERY was a guest of Sandy Balls and stayed in one of its 113 wooden lodges (sleeping 2, 4 or 6) each with personal barbecues and picnic areas. * There are a further 35 caravan holiday homes sleeping four plus 225 touring pitches for caravans and campers. Ready Tents – set up for you on arrival – are also offered. They feature individual beds and a dining area. Crockery, cutlery, a camping stove and even a fridge is included.**

■ **A mid-week lodge break in winter costs from £129 (sleeping two) to £179 (sleeping six). A seven-night lodge break in peak season costs from £1,199 (sleeping four). Call 0844 693 2949 or visit www.sandyballs.co.uk**

➤ 'Sandyballas', described the area's dome-shaped sand and gravel outcrops

BEST BREAK ABROAD . . .

► AIRTOURS (0844 412 5970) offers seven nights half-board at a three-star hotel in Corralejo, Fuerteventura, from £369, saving £127 per booking, ex-Newcastle November 16.

■ Corralejo beach, Fuerteventura



■ Berlin Cathedral, Berlin



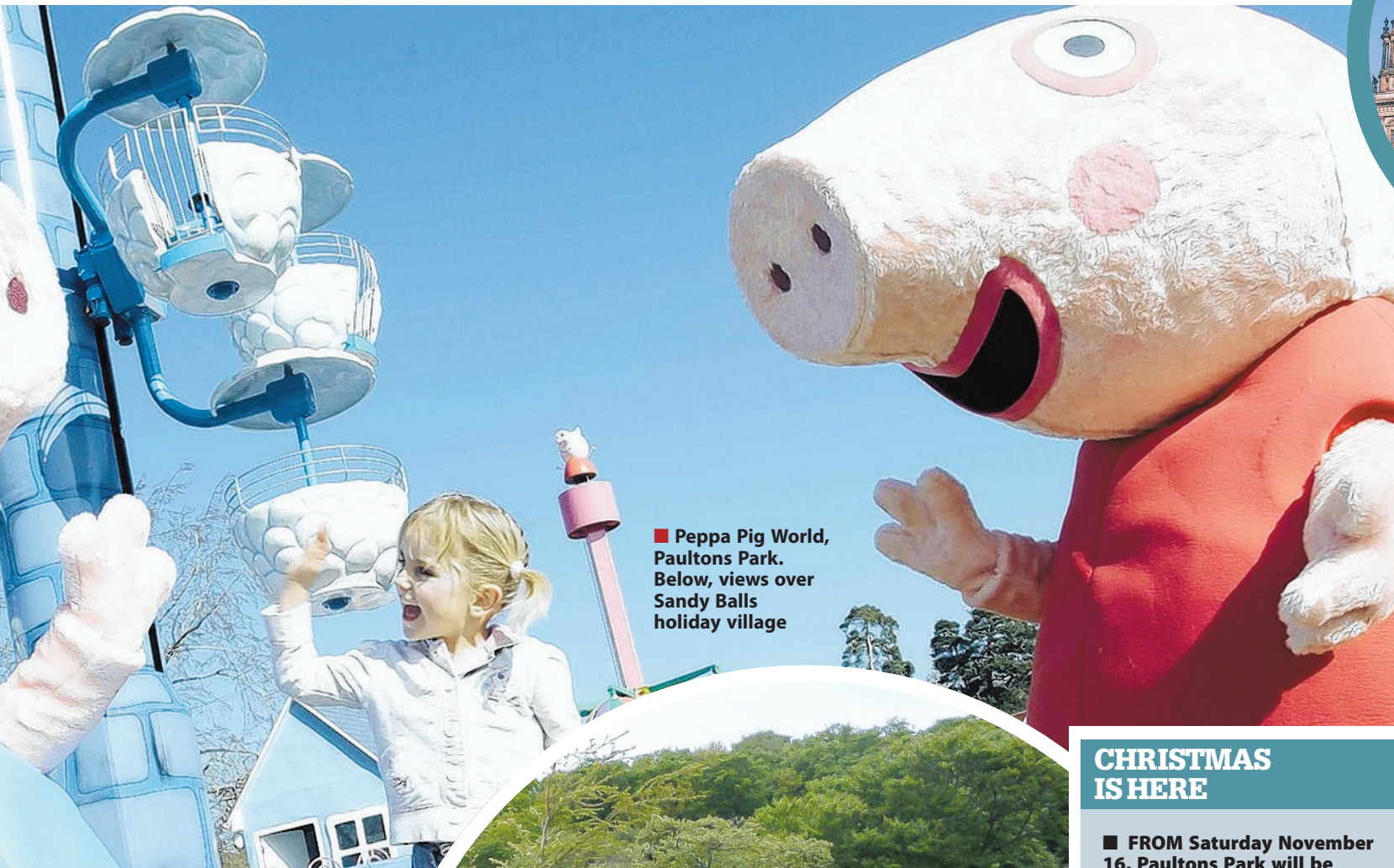
bargain breaks

► **UNDER £250**
CRESTA (0844 879 8014) offers two nights B&B at three-star Ecotel Berlin Charlottenburg, Berlin from £199, saving £75, ex-Manchester with easyJet December 1.

► **UNDER £350**
CRESTA (0844 879 8014) offers three nights B&B at three-star Ibis Brussels centre St Catherine Hotel from £255, saving £50 per couple, with free upgrade to Standard Premier Class on Eurostar ex-London St Pancras December 11.

FIRST Choice offers seven nights to Benidorm at the 4Sun Hotel Dynastic, all-inclusive from £329 per adult, first child travels from £319 and from £324 for the second. Price based on a family of four sharing. Departs London Gatwick November 16, 2013. Go to firstchoice.co.uk or call 0871 200 7799.

► **UNDER £550**
THOMSON offers seven night holidays to Cyprus staying at the 4T+ Couples Resort Hotel Atlantica Bay on a half board basis, from £454 per person (saving £85 per person). Price is based on two adults sharing, and includes flights departing from Manchester airport on November 17, 2013 and transfers. To find out more go to thomson.co.uk or call 0871 230 2555.



■ Peppa Pig World, Paultons Park. Below, views over Sandy Balls holiday village



CHRISTMAS IS HERE

■ **FROM Saturday November 16, Paultons Park will be home to an enchanted festive Wonderland complete with a snowy grotto. Children will meet Santa's elves in the toy factory, see Rudolph do a dance and watch a Christmas adventure film at the park's 4D cinema.**

■ **Tickets for Paultons Park and Santa's Christmas Wonderland cost from £20.75 and include a gift plus entrance to Peppa Pig World, which will feature festive illuminations. All visits must be pre-booked. Normal entrance to Paultons Park (when booked in advance online) is £22.50, saving £3, and £86 for a family of four, saving £12. Children under one metre tall are admitted free. See paultonspark.co.uk for details and opening times.**

ball

many of the bigger rides in the main park.

To my surprise, this included rollercoasters, the pirate ship and an exhilarating descent in a rubber dinghy which certainly turned my knuckles white. There were many more rides just for young children in the main park.

Of course, the highlight was meeting Peppa herself - very fitting for a holiday in which farmyard animals played such a major part.

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£699.00



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