

Get your tots out!

**Ideas for getting out
and about with children**



Introduction

Welcome to the 2009/10 edition of **Get Your Tots Out.**

Newcastle is a great place to be a parent. There's a lot going on for the under-5s. But unless you know lots of other parents, it's not always easy to find groups or activities which appeal to you and your baby.

There are days when being with the kids is about cuddles and giggles and having fun. There are also days when it is about counting the hours and minutes until the end of the day ('Only twelve hours and fifty two minutes until bedtime!').

Whichever sort of day it is, and whether you have one, two, three or more children to play with, this booklet is for you.

This booklet aims to be your first reference point whether you're looking to make new friends, try something new with your child or just fill in time on a rainy afternoon.

It's been written by two local mums, Nikki Wilkinson and Louise Wilson. Between us we have five children who all seem to enjoy different things, so we've tried LOTS of activities in and around Newcastle.

Thanks to the funding from Sure Start Children's Centres, there's no advertising or sponsorship so we're free to give you our honest opinions of the activities on offer. And we must stress that these are just our opinions. If you disagree, you know about an activity we haven't included or just want to get in touch, please make contact – we'd love to hear from you.

Nikki and Louise

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a purple patterned top, is smiling warmly while reading a book to a baby. The baby, wearing a light green sweater, is looking intently at the book. The background is a bright blue wall with white line-art illustrations of hands and other shapes.





For starters

Photo: courtesy of Seven Stories, the Centre for Children's Books.

For starters...

It's much more fun being a mum/dad if you have friends who are going through the same thing. And even if you're shy, it's easy to start a conversation with another parent – just ask how they're sleeping!

Ask your midwife and health visitor if they run any sessions where you can meet other mums. Some run regular coffee mornings – a great place to meet other new parents who live close to you. Others run advice sessions on feeding, sleeping, first aid and so on. Obviously this is all useful information- but you'll find they make it easy for you to get to know other mums too. You may feel shy, but GO! It really helps to have friends with kids the same age as yours!

Age group key	
	Babies
	Toddlers +2s
	3-5s
	5+ and older

Sure Start Children's Centres

Sure Start Children's Centres provide a range of high quality services and information to children under five and their families across the city, ensuring that every child gets the best start in life.

The vision in Newcastle's Children and Young People's Plan is that every child and young person should have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Sure Start Children's Centre Services are based upon the principles of Every Child Matters.

Key Principles

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a positive contribution
- Achieving economic wellbeing

The services Sure Start Children's Centres offer:

- Integrated early education and childcare
- Family support and parenting advice
- Child and family health services
- Training and employment opportunities for parents
- Support for local childminders
- Families Information Service (FIS)

Who can use Sure Start Children's Centres?

All mums-to-be, mums, dads, grandparents, brothers, sisters and carers of children under five years of age who live in Newcastle are all welcome to use our services.

For more information on Sure Start Children's Centres and what's going on in your local Children's Centre contact:

Newcastle Families Information Service

T: 0191 277 4133 E: fis@newcastle.gov.uk

www.newcastlefis.org.uk

The following Centres are open now:

● **Sure Start West Riverside**

Contact: Lin Simmonds, Sure Start Lead

Office address: Bridgewater, Delaval Road, Scotswood, Newcastle upon Tyne NE15 6NL

T: 0191 274 7308 F: 0191 275 3420 E: surestart@newcastle.gov.uk

www.westriversidecc.org.uk

● **Sure Start Cowgate and Blakelaw Children's Centre**

Contact: Anne Armstrong, Sure Start Lead

Families Matter, Lindfield Avenue, Blakelaw, Newcastle upon Tyne NE5 3PL

T: 0191 241 2460 F: 0191 286 8315 E: nesscb@actionforchildren.org.uk

Also at Cowgate and Blakelaw Neighbourhood Centre, Off Houghton Ave, Cowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne NE5 3UT

T: 0191 277 1771 F: 0191 277 1770 www.cowgateandblakelaw.surestart.org

● **Sure Start East Children's Centre**

Contact: Samantha Hood, Sure Start Lead

Office address: 2nd Floor, Cragside House, Heaton Road, Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 1SE

T: 0191 275 9636 F: 0191 265 8372 E: sure.start.east@barnardos.org.uk

www.newcastleeast.childrencentres.org

● **Sure Start Newbiggin Hall Children's Centre**

Contact: Paul Court, Sure Start Lead

Newbiggin Lane, Newbiggin Hall Estate, Newcastle upon Tyne NE5 1LZ

T: 0191 214 2470 F: 0191 214 6864 E: lisa.rayson@newcastle.gov.uk

www.newbigginhall.surestart.org

● **Sure Start North Moor Children's Centre**

Contact: Chris Forrester, Sure Start Lead

Halewood Avenue, Newcastle upon Tyne NE3 3RX

T: 0191 213 4100 E: chris.forrester@newcastle.gov.uk

www.northmoor.childrencentre.org

- **Sure Start Fenham Children’s Centre at Sacred Heart**

Contact: Lesley Wood, Children’s Centre Manager
Convent Road, Off Fenham Hall Drive, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 9XZ
T: 0191 274 8616 E: lesley.wood@newcastle.gov.uk

- **Sure Start Lemington Children’s Centre**

Contact: Fiona James, Children’s Centre Manager
The Lemington Centre, Tyne View, Lemington NE15 8DE
T: 0191 264 1959 E: fiona.james@newcastle.gov.uk

- **Sure Start Walkergate Early Years Centre**

Contact: Dee Teasdale, Head Teacher, Walkergate Early Years Centre
Shields Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 4XW
T: 0191 263 2411 E: admin@walkergate-nur.newcastle.sch.uk
www.newcastle-schools.or.uk/walkergatenursery

- **Sure Start North Fenham Children’s Centre**

Contact: Mary O’Sullivan, Children and Family Centre Officer
Harnham Gardens, Fenham, Newcastle upon Tyne NE5 2RU
T: 0191 275 0951 E: northfenhamchildrenscentre@englishmartyrs.newcastle.sch.uk

- **Sure Start Newburn Children’s Centre**

Contact: Mary Drury, Children’s Centre Manager
Walbottle Campus, Hexham Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE15 9TP
T: 0191 267 3839 E: mary.drury@newcastle.gov.uk

- **Sure Start Denton and Westerhope Children’s Centre**

Contact: Rebecca Budden, Children’s Centre Manager
c/o West Denton Primary School, Hillhead Road, West Denton NE5 1DN
T: 0191 277 2033 F: 0191 277 2030 E: rebecca.budden@newcastle.gov.uk

- **Sure Start Northern Villages Children’s Centre**

Contact: Karen Bunston, Children’s Centre Manager
Currently based at Sure Start North Moor
T: 0191 213 4100 E: karen.bunston@newcastle.gov.uk

Parent and toddler groups

Don't be put off by the name. Most toddler groups welcome babies and have toys and equipment which will be suitable for your child. There are hundreds of parent and toddler groups in Newcastle, mostly meeting in church halls, schools or community centres. These groups are usually managed and funded by the people who attend, so each one is slightly different. Try a few and you'll find one to suit you and your child.

Your young baby will certainly enjoy watching other children and babies, experiencing different toys and perhaps 'listening' to story time or songs. As they get bigger, you can let them experiment with paint or play dough without destroying your own home! The groups will also give you chance to have a coffee and talk to other parents, grandparents and carers.

Newcastle Action for Parent and Toddler Groups (NAPI) has an up-to-date list of all the groups in your area. They're really friendly and will also be able to tell you about any local sessions specifically for new babies.

The National Childbirth Trust (NCT) is a very well established network for families. They run great coffee mornings, really good nearly new sales and loads of other activities too.

Useful numbers

NAPI: 0191 265 6158 or email admin@napi.org.uk

NCT: 0845 120 1498 or visit www.nct.org.uk

Family Information Service 0191 277 4133 or email fis@newcastle.gov.uk for details about baby and toddler groups at a Sure Start Children's Centre near you.

Baby massage

There are loads of baby massage classes around the area, run by health visitors, leisure centres and private practitioners.

The sessions will teach you some basic massage techniques which help your baby as he learns about his hands, feet, toes and fingers. It's really relaxing for you and baby, and we've read that it's good for bonding. It can soothe colic too.

Our baby massage class was run by a local health visitor who also made sure we swapped telephone numbers with other mums in the group and after five weeks of your bare babies pooing everywhere, you definitely make friends with people! Ask your health visitor for details of a group near you.

Useful numbers

Michelle Blake runs the baby massage class at Jesmond Pool, 0788 777 4378

Contact your local health visitor for details of other classes.

Or ring the Family Information Service 0191 277 4133 or email fis@newcastle.gov.uk for details about baby massage at a Sure Start Children's Centre near you.

The Big Picture – cinema trips

Loads of cinemas now run special baby or toddler cinema screenings, usually mid-week and often with the lights up a bit and the sound down a bit. With a newborn – especially one that feeds or sleeps loads – cinema can be perfect for getting out the house and enjoy sitting down!

At special 'Newbie' or 'Bringing in Baby' screenings, you can relax in the knowledge that everyone in the audience is in the same boat so no-one's going to get annoyed if you or the baby start howling (I sobbed at every movie I went to see for a year after giving birth).

Once your child is old enough to go to the cinema to see a kid's movie, Empire, Tyneside and Odeon cinemas have Kids Club-style screenings, often on Saturday mornings or in the school holidays. Tickets are often just a couple of pounds, and for some screenings, adults go free.

Useful numbers

Tyneside Cinema, 0845 217 9909 www.tynecine.org

Empire Cinema at The Gate, 08714 714 714, www.empirecinemas.co.uk

Odeon Cinema, Silverlink, 0871 22 44 007, www.odeon.co.uk

Swimming

Current advice suggests that there is no need to wait until your child has had all their jabs before going swimming. Lots of local swimming baths have special baby pools, and some even offer free sessions for mums and babies. These are another good way to get chatting to other mums, especially in the changing room and the coffee place afterwards. Be brave – asking “Fancy a coffee after?” usually gets a positive response from other mums, another opportunity to share those sleep horror stories!

There are benefits to the child and the grown-up – the earlier you start, the less likely your child is to be frightened of water. It’s often the peculiar and echo-y sounds that you can hear at a swimming pool that older toddlers don’t like, but getting them in the water early helps to avoid this. Learning to swim is essential for your child’s safety and a great way to stay fit!

Some local pools offer special pre-school sessions or lessons. For example, Jesmond Pool run pre-school swimming lessons for children aged 3+ who are not yet in full time school. There is also Aquababes on Thursdays at 10am – this is a parent and child class for children from 3months to 3 or 4 years with songs, toys and music in the water. Contact Jesmond Pool for times and prices of courses.

Most local authority swimming pools offer free sessions for under-5s and £3 per adult.

Useful numbers

City Pool, Newcastle, 0191 277 1844

East End Pool, Byker, 0191 278 8444

Elswick Pool, 0191 277 3456

Gosforth Pool, 0191 284 3696

Jesmond Pool, 0191 281 2482

Lakeside Centre, Killingworth, 0191 223 4177

Outer West Pool, West Denton, 0191 277 7980

Tynemouth Pool, 0191 200 6192

See www.newcastleleisure.co.uk for opening times, class details, directions and contact numbers for all City Council leisure centres.

Libraries

As well as offering a great selection of baby books that you can borrow for free, libraries offer all sorts of other activities too including story telling and toddler sessions. Babies might enjoy watching older brothers or sisters joining in craft time or singing songs.

Research has shown that babies benefit from being read to from birth, and it helps their language development as well as giving you an opportunity to do an activity which means you can sit down for a bit!

Check out your library notice board for what is on this week. The librarians can be very helpful in suggesting books suitable for your child's age. Remember, you'll need to take along some proof of your name and address to join the library.

Useful numbers

Blakelaw library, 0191 277 4185
Cruddas Park library, 0191 277 4280
Denton Burn library, 0191 277 4277
Dinnington library, 01661 825 079
East End library, 0191 278 8400
Fawdon Library Express, 0191 277 4255
Fenham library, 0191 277 4270
Gosforth library, 0191 277 1811
High Heaton library, 0191 277 4233
Jesmond library, 0191 278 4215
Kenton library, 0191 277 4310
Moorside library, 0191 277 4288
Newbiggin Hall library, 0191 277 4284
Newburn library, 0191 277 4260
Outer West library, 0191 277 7970
Walker library, 0191 278 4225
West End library, 0191 277 1500

If it's a Toy Library you're after then call the Family Information Service 0191 277 4133 or email fis@newcastle.gov.uk for details about toy libraries at a Sure Start Children's Centre near you.



Not the shops again...

Shopping with a baby sleeping in a comfy buggy can be a blissful way to get out the house, see that the world still exists (and there are other grown ups in it) and even enjoy a coffee in your favourite buggy-friendly cafe.

As snoozy babies grow into equally brilliant toddlers and preschoolers, shopping can become more of a challenge and there are some ideas for easing the way for essential shopping trips – whether for food, clothes or anything else.

- **Don't take your child with you.** Give your friends and family the gift of sharing time with your tots and head off alone to enjoy coffee at your other favourite cafe, the one with stairs and no baby change.
- **Practice.** If you want to know what supermarket shopping with a toddler is like, practise with a goat on a lead beforehand.
- **Get on line not in line.** Supermarkets will deliver your bulky shopping to your door, and all you have to do is put it away. It's worth knowing exactly what size nappies your baby is wearing because the descriptions on the website never seem to be straightforward 'size 3' or 'size 5' (I still don't know the difference between midi and maxi and which size that relates to). It's not just the supermarkets that deliver online shopping, Boots ([boots.com](https://www.boots.com)) and The Ethical Superstore ([ethicalsuperstore.com](https://www.ethicalsuperstore.com) – a Gateshead-based company) both do a range of nappies, wipes, baby products, gifts and clothes.
- **Bribery.** Of course, diversion and distraction is the best way of avoiding a meltdown or a tantrum, but if you can't face tap-dancing your way around Morrisons for the third time in a fortnight then maybe detaching a banana or packet of raisins (ok, who am I kidding – chocolate buttons) from the pack you are about to buy might just do it. Remember to pay for it though. Baby wipes are also handy. And the prospect of a trip to the park or swimming can also be negotiating cards.

- **Put a cool-box in the boot.** If a trip to the swings is the best bribery up your sleeve, stick your frozen food in an ice-box (and a homemade ice lolly!) to get 20 minutes extra time without losing your fish fingers.
- **I Spy...** Something that is yellow...Or furry... Or tall. It's a game as old as the hills, and no need to wait for Jolly Phonics to enjoy its brilliance as a diversion. I went shopping and I bought...
- **Keep talking or singing.** Even if your rendition of the Mamma Mia soundtrack doesn't calm the howling baby, it might help you (see note about tap-dancing). Sing your shopping list to a favourite tune and play I Spy with what's on the menu for tea.
- **Local shopping** can mean walking there and being able to carry things home in the bottom of the buggy. I find that local shop owners and staff are often really patient with the toddler who can't decide which sausages are for tea and can be brilliant at asking the kids questions about their shopping expedition. There is always the paper shop on the way home to get that activities magazine!
- **Bolting babes.** If your child really can't be persuaded to sit in the trolley or buggy, but is likely to make a dash for it, then have a pair of baby reins or a wrist strap in the bottom of your reusable hemp bag. Make a game of it if your child's reluctant – try pretending it's Bumpy Dog and Tessie Bear.
- **Have a bail out plan and go home.** Buy the essentials first and when it's all too much – get through the till, the rest of the shopping will wait.



Pushy Mothers

www.pushymothers.com

Various locations including Jesmond, Gosforth, Saltwell Park, Whitley Bay, Newbiggin Hall and Nunsmoor

Sessions

Contact Debbie Donaldson
Tel: 07846 237 855

Getting there

Various locations including Jesmond, Gosforth, Saltwell Park, Whitley Bay, Newbiggin Hall and Nunsmoor.

How much is it?

£5 per session and £15 for a joining pack.

What's there?

A structured walk out and work out with your baby or toddler in the pram or buggy.

Prams and buggies

That's the whole point! Debbie has worked out the best buggy friendly routes beforehand.

Food and changing

None but cafes nearby.

We thought...

Help (again)! It'll be Paula Radcliffe.
It wasn't. Wear trainers and tracksuit or similar– they do get a good pace going but you can go at your own speed and Debbie was very encouraging and lovely. The day I went, mostly it was babies under 2 and although my bigger toddler wasn't so keen to watch from the buggy, Debbie says lots do join in with slightly older kids – try it and see if it works for you. Pushy Mothers is perfect for getting out in the fresh air with other mums and doing some 'proper' exercise without feeling any pressure.

Opening times

Ring Debbie for times and prices.

Age group



Yoga Moves and Baby Play with Lynn Campbell

www.dancecity.co.uk

Dance City, Temple Street,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4BR
Tel: 01665 711646 (Lynn)
Tel: 0191 261 0505 (Dance City)



Getting there

Map and directions on the website – lots of nearby parking. Good Metro and bus access. A few minutes, walk from city centre.

How much is it?

£32 for 4 sessions.

What's there?

Yoga for mums – play and massage for the babies.

Prams and buggies

Fully accessible.

Food and changing

Yes.

We thought...

I haven't attended these classes but did an ante-natal active birth workshop with Lynn which was amazing (contact Lynn for ante-natal workshop information too).

Class times

Tuesdays, 10 to 11.15am

Contact Lynn to book a place and for more information.

Age group



Try also...

Hullabaloo Kids Toddler Yoga – contact Julie Garvin, 07532 138 324.

Or call the Family Information Service 0191 277 4133 or email fis@newcastle.gov.uk for details about baby yoga at a Sure Start Children's Centre near you.



David Lloyd Post Natal Exercise Class

David Lloyd Centre, Castle Farm Road
Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne
NE3 1SN Tel: 0191 284 1275

NB: You don't need to be a member

Getting there

Nearest Metro is Ilford Road. Walk down (over the bridge) to Matthew Bank. Turn left and walk round the bend. You'll have to cross to reach Castle's Farm Road (and it's busy). It's a bit hairy walking up the bank, too, as it's narrow with no pavement.

By car: Castles Farm Road is just off Matthew Bank in Jesmond. Or, if you're coming from the other end, just off Freeman Road (by the Freeman Hospital).

How much is it?

£4 or £5 (you don't need to be a member)

What's there?

Low impact cardio tone specifically for post-natal mums. Your baby watches from their car seat or mat, and you can feed when required.

Prams and buggies

Fully accessible.

Food and changing

The club has a large cafe with a wide range of food on offer. It also has a baby/toddler area so your kids can wander about safely – and an outdoor area with climbing frame/slide.

Baby changing is available on site and very clean.

We thought...

Our reviewer rated these classes as "good" and "flexible". We did the classes three years ago and found that we did very little exercise but met some lovely people and enjoyed the conversation and coffees afterwards.

Class times

Mondays 1.45–3.00pm (£5)
Fridays 2–3pm (£4)

Age group





Music and movement



Dancing Babies and Dizzy Kids

www.dancecity.co.uk

Dance City, Temple Street
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4BR
Te: 0191 261 0505

Getting there

Dance City is just behind the Tyne Theatre in Newcastle City Centre. Nearest Metro is Central Station, or park at Time Square.

How much is it?

£4

What's there?

Dancing and singing for the very young, with a different theme each week. Dancing Babies is for 0–3 years. Dizzy Kids is for 3–4 years.

Prams and buggies

You can get a pram through, although there are some stairs to negotiate and a lift.

Food and changing

Baby changing is allowed at the back of the dance room. There is a good cafe on site, too.

We thought...

Our reviewer ranked these sessions as “Excellent. Very enjoyable for parents and kids.”

We like the fact that these are drop-in sessions, with no need to book. Get there early, though. They're popular!

Opening times

Dancing Babies:

Wednesday 10–11am

Friday 10–11am; 11am–12noon

Saturday 10–11am; 11am–12noon

Dizzy Kids: Saturday 10–11am

Phone to confirm times.

Age groups



Piccolo Music

www.piccolomusic.co.uk

St Theresa's RC Church Hall,
Heaton Road, Heaton
(Next to Heaton Park)



Contact

Anna Scantlebury 0191 252 8765

Abigail Cotton 0191 234 0596

Getting there

By car: Heading up Heaton Road from the Corner House end ... continue straight along about 1/4 mile or less until you see the Church Hall on the right, just on a bend near a traffic island.

How much is it?

£3.75 per child and £2.25 for siblings over 4 months. Adults go free!

Refreshments included. There's even waitress service after the baby sessions, for those tired new parents, who can feed their babies and eat lunch in relative peace, with tea and coffee served by Anna and Abi!

What's there?

A friendly group singing traditional and new songs for babies and young children. Coffee, juice and biscuits between sessions. All sessions are 'drop in,' so you don't need to book in advance.

Prams and buggies

Access to the church hall is fine.

Food and changing

There's a changing station for babies in the hall. Biscuits and coffee are served between sessions.

We thought...

A very relaxed group and a great way to meet other parents. Babies seem to love it. They really enjoy the music and watching the other children. And for toddlers who enjoy the singing and dancing, piccolo is definitely their top choice.

It's well worth staying for coffee afterwards, too. We made loads of friends at Piccolo.

Opening times

Thursdays in term time:

9.45am 4 weeks to 4 years Best for older kids.

10.25am Coffee for both groups

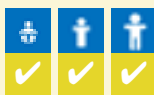
10.45am 4 weeks – 4 years. Best for tots who've outgrown baby group.

11.30am Newborns to crawlers/early walkers.

12noon Coffee. Bring baby's lunch.

Also sessions at St Mary's Church Hall, Claremont Gardens, Monkseaton on Wednesdays.

Age groups





Music making at The Sage Gateshead

www.thesagegateshead.org

The Sage Gateshead
PO Box 254, Gateshead NE8 2YR
Tel: 0191 443 4661

Getting there

Head across the Tyne Bridge, keep in left lane, follow the signs to The Sage.

How much is it?

£3 for children or adults of any age;
£1.50 for siblings.

What's there?

Music making – singing and instruments for the under 5s. You have to book in advance.

Prams and buggies

Access is very good with parking close by and lift access for pushchairs.

Food and changing

The queue for lunch at the cafe was huge, and it becomes an expensive trip if you're relying on on-site facilities for refreshments. There were plenty of high chairs and children are welcome.

We thought...

Having given up on some other music groups (my 4-year-old refuses to go – "Too noisy" or "Don't like it"), I was quite prepared to be there

for two minutes. In fact, we stayed for the full time and he's keen to go again. The light and airy room was full of the usual – and some unusual – instruments and the enthusiastic session leader (a professional singer) led us with some familiar and new songs. She even took requests! The number attending is limited, so it doesn't get too crowded. There were still enough people for us, less confident, singers to join in!

Make sure you book in plenty of time, and check the guide age as different sessions run for different ages.

Also, we'd recommend sessions from 10am onwards as getting over the Tyne Bridge for 9.30am is a nightmare.

Opening times

The Sage run lots of Under 5's sessions every week. Ring to confirm times.

Age groups



Some Sure Start Children's Centres also offer song time for the under 4's. Call the Family Information Service 0191 277 4133 or email fis@newcastle.gov.uk for details about singing sessions at a Sure Start Children's Centre near you.

Jo Jingles

[www.jojingles.com/
newcastleupontyne](http://www.jojingles.com/newcastleupontyne)

Newcastle upon Tyne

Tel: 01670 761480

Mob: 07859 105159

Email: helenjojingles@yahoo.co.uk



Getting there

Various locations across Newcastle, Tyneside and SE Northumberland including Heaton, Gosforth, Whitley Bay, Ponteland, Morpeth and Cramlington.

How much is it?

£4 per class plus £2 insurance fee per term course – there is no joining fee. Classes are booked half termly in advance.

What's there?

Fun music, movement, singing with a creative, educational, themed approach using well-known nursery rhymes and action songs.

Prams and buggies

All venues are buggy friendly.

Food and changing

Baby changing at all venues.

We thought...

We haven't been to these classes but Helen who runs Jo Jingles for this area got in touch with lots of information and the classes sound great – we like the range of venues and Helen's enthusiasm. There is a fun musical theory element to the Wednesday class for older children too. Mums, grans, nannies and children all welcome!

Opening times

Contact Helen for class times – most days in various locations and for different age groups.

Age groups



Animal crackers



Washington Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

www.wwt.org.uk

District 15, Washington
Tyne and Wear NE38 8LE

Tel: 0191 416 5454

Email: info.washington@wwt.org.uk



Getting there

East of Washington in District 15, four miles from A1(M), one mile from A19. Signposted off A195, A19, A182 and A1231.

By bike: River Wear trail passes the centre as does the C2C cycle route. Cycle racks provided.

How much is it?

Adult £7.30

Concessions £5.65

Child £3.70 (under 4s, free)

Family Ticket £19.80

What's there?

Free parking, cafe and terrace, Wetland Discovery Centre, picnic areas, gift/book shop, parent and baby room, binocular hire and children's play area.

Prams and buggies

A footpath route around the centre is ideal for prams and buggies.

Food and changing

Nice cafe, lots of high chairs and toys available. Homemade food and a varied menu – sandwiches, chips, quiche and more. Helpful staff.

The changing room was lovely – clean, smelt nice and enough room for two babies. Breastfeeding area if you want to use it.

We thought...

The entrance fees make it quite expensive unless you make a day of it – this is one for a whole day out.

We had a lovely day out and enjoyed feeding the birds – the packets of seed were cheap enough for one each.

However, if you have a child that makes a run for it, it was a bit stressful with all the open water areas.

Opening times

9.30am–5.30pm daily in summer.

9.30am–4.30pm in winter.

Age groups





Whitehouse Farm Centre

www.whitehousefarmcentre.co.uk

North Whitehouse Farm
Northumberland NE61 6AW
Tel: 01670 789998 Email: enquiries@whitehousefarmcentre.co.uk

Getting there

Driving north, take the Morpeth turn off (A197) and turn immediately left following the signs to the Whitehouse Farm Centre.

How much is it?

Adults £6.95

Kids £5.95 (under 2s, free)

What's there?

Cows, sheep, ponies, pigs and lots of animals – big and small. There are also tractor rides, soft play, face painting, a huge toboggan slide and a chance to hold bunnies and see animals up close.

Prams and buggies

Buggy access is fine – although some bits might be a bit muddy if the weather is wet.

Food and changing

The cafe has a mix of homemade food, sandwiches and children's meals. Lots of high chairs and we liked the low sinks for hand-washing after the farm visit. Space for indoor and outdoor picnics too if the weather isn't too good.

The baby changing room is clean.

We thought...

We had a smashing time – the children loved holding the bunnies and feeding the goats. The sun was shining when we visited and we had a picnic as well as the visit to the cafe, enjoying the outside-ness of it all. We talked to other people with children too – a good sociable place to chat with other grown-ups as well as entertaining the little ones.

Opening times

Feb – April: Tues–Sun 10am–5pm

May – Aug: daily 10am–5pm

Sep – Dec: Tues–Sun 10am–5pm

Jan & Nov: weekends only 10am–4pm

Age groups



Pets' Corner

Jesmond Dene
Newcastle upon Tyne NE7 7BQ
Tel: 0191 281 0973



Getting there

From Newcastle City Centre: Come off the Central Motorway at Jesmond and continue straight ahead to the Cradlewell Bypass. Turn left at the traffic lights just before the underpass. Follow the road round to the right, the turn right after the church – down the hill, under Armstrong Bridge and into the Dene. There are usually parking spaces available here, about two minutes' walk from Pets' Corner.

From your car walk up towards Millfield House (on your right), the entrance to Pets' Corner is on your left.

How much is it?

Free. (Although donations are welcome and birdseed is 50p per bag.)

What's there?

Goats, sheep, pot-bellied pigs, a pony, chickens, ducks, geese, peacocks, rabbits, and loads of canaries, budgies etc.

Prams and buggies

Access is fine.

Food and changing

Millfield House has a decent cafe selling cakes, sandwiches etc. It also has baby change facilities and toilets where you can wash your children's hands properly if feeding the animals. At weekends they also have a resource centre open which is worth a look.

We thought...

Pets' Corner is a great facility for the city. If you take your kids during the week – outside of school holidays – most of the animals will come and eat from their hands (at busy times they're too well fed to bother). However, heed any signs pinned up requesting not to feed the animals at certain times. It's free, it's easy to get to, and we often go for a walk in the Dene or up to Paddy Freeman's Park afterwards.

Opening times

Apr–Oct 10am–5pm
Nov–Mar 10am–4pm.

Age groups





Blue Reef Aquarium

www.blureefaquarium.co.uk

Grand Parade
Tynemouth NE30 4JF
Tel: 0191 258 1031

Getting there

By Metro: Cullercoats is the nearest station. Turn right onto the sea front, and it's a good 10 minutes' walk.

By car: Take the new Coast Road and follow signs to Tynemouth and the sea front. The aquarium is on your left just before you drive into the sea... There is a large car park round the back.

How much is it?

Adults £7.75 (annual membership available)

Children £5.75 (from 3–14 years)

Under 3s free

Family ticket £24

What's there?

Fish! Sharks, ray fish, rock pools, Nemo look-alikes, some very cute otters and gorgeous seals. Every day there are talks, feeding demonstrations, fun activities and a seal show which the kids will love!

Prams and buggies

Access is excellent. Many of the tanks have been designed so that people using wheelchairs, (or children in pushchairs), can see the fish easily. They also have little steps you can

take round with you to ensure your toddler can see everything. Pick one up just before you go into the main exhibition.

Food and changing

The baby change is clean and airy. There is also a very child friendly cafe with lovely staff.

We thought...

It's amazing how much even tiny babies get from a visit here. The fish are such vivid colours that our children were mesmerised. The talks about the rock pools are great for older toddlers. Mine love stroking the starfish and holding a live crab. We could have spent all day watching the otters, too. In all, we enjoyed it so much that I became a member!

Opening times

Open daily 10am–5pm
(4pm November–February).

Age groups



The Sanctuary, Wildlife Care Centre

www.wildlife-sanctuary.co.uk

Crowden Hill Farm, Ulgham, Morpeth
NE61 3NH Tel: 01670 791778
Email: thesanctuarymorpeth@btoopenworld.com



Getting there

The Sanctuary is located in the village of Ulgham, 3 miles north of Morpeth. It is signposted from the village and on the coastal route (A1068).

How much is it?

Adults £5.00

2 yrs+ £4.50

Under 2s free

Family ticket £12

Fri and Mon half price for under 5's and their parent/carer (term time only)

What's there?

An animal sanctuary for all sorts of creatures – swans, foxes, badgers, tawny owls, rabbits. Also hungry goats to feed, pony rides (Saturdays and Sundays £2), toy tractor rides, arts and crafts (£1.50), a great play area, giftshop and a tearoom.

Prams and buggies

The Sanctuary is fully accessible to pushchairs.

Food and changing

We didn't actually eat during our visit, but food and drink were readily available. There's also a designated picnic area.

Baby change was also available on site.

We thought...

We found this by accident, and we were really glad we did. There's loads to do, and all the volunteers are really enthusiastic, as your entry fee helps to support the animals they care for. Once we'd fed the animals and played outside for hours, the kids really enjoyed the chance to do some painting in the craft centre.

Opening times

Fri, Sat, Sun and Mon 11am–4pm;
School holidays 11am–5pm.

Age groups





Bill Quay Community Farm

www.gateshead.gov.uk

Hainingwood Terrace,
Bill Quay, Gateshead
NE10 0UE
Tel: 0191 433 5780

Getting there

By car: Follow A185 (Shields Road) then into Station Road – Hainingwood Terrace is second exit on the left.

How much is it?

Free

What's there?

Rare breed farm animals and art trail.

Prams and buggies

Yes, but can be muddy so slings/backpacks might be better.

Food and changing

Yes – great cafe with a play area which had organic local produce for sale the day we were there. Cafe open 10am–2pm weekdays and 12–4pm at weekends.

We thought...

We had a lovely and very muddy time when we visited – wellies definitely required for toddlers! The staff were helpful and friendly, and the children were fascinated by the animals. Lots of dens and the creative art trail to follow too.

Opening times

Daily 9am–5pm (some areas restricted access until 12noon).

Age groups



Chain Bridge Honey Farm

www.chainbridgehoney.co.uk

Horncliffe, Berwick upon Tweed,
Northumberland, UK
TD15 2XT
Tel: 01289 386362



Getting there

By car: Take the A698 turn off the A1 near Berwick upon Tweed and follow the signs.

How much is it?

Admission to the visitor centre is free.

What's there?

There's a visitor centre all about bees, a vintage vehicle display, a shop selling every bee-related, honey or wax product you can think of and a cafe on a bus!

Prams and buggies

There's a ramp to the visitor centre.

Food and changing

Cafe selling lots of home-produced food and snacks.

We thought...

We really enjoyed our trip to the honey farm. The staff were friendly, and the quirky visitor centre was interesting and entertaining. The older children enjoyed the honey taste-testing and played for ages in the hundred-year old caravan, just like "Danny, Champion of the World". Lunch on the top deck of the cafe-bus was a great novelty and with the sun shining in the sky, we left with pots of honey as souvenirs of a lovely day out.

Opening times

November to March: weekdays,
9am–5pm;
April to October – every day,
10am–5pm.

Age groups



Free fun



Discovery Museum

www.twmuseums.org.uk/discovery

Blandford Square
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4JA
Tel: 0191 232 6789



Getting there

Nearest Metro is Central Station. Walk up past the Centre for Life and follow the signs. For bus info call the Nexus Travel line: 0870 608 2608.

By car: drive straight up past the Central Station, get in the right-hand lane and follow the signs. Parking is tricky.

How much is it?

Free

What's there?

Loads of different exhibitions, all with interactive displays. Our favourites are the water play and science maze.

Prams and buggies

Access is very good.

Food and changing

Cafe with baked potatoes, sandwiches etc.

The baby changing is very clean.

We thought...

Our favourite museum. The Play Tyne water play area is fantastic. (Take spare clothes – they'll get soaked, despite the aprons provided.)

The Science Maze is great too. Don't be put off by the name – it's always full of kids photographing their shadows, playing with mirrors and blasting balls around the room. All the staff are very child friendly, too. Every exhibition has interactive bits, from dressy ups to a see through flushing toilet. Like all museums it's easy to lose your children amongst the exhibits, so it's easier with one adult per child.

Opening times

Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 2–5pm.

Age groups





Laing Art Gallery

New Bridge Street
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8AG
Tel: 0191 211 2104

Getting there

The nearest Metro is Monument. Walk straight down New Bridge Street, cross John Dobson Street, and the Laing is on your left.

By car: Park in Durant Road or Holiday Inn car park.

How much is it?

Free

What's there?

Newcastle's main art gallery, with a separate children's area which has art-themes activities and a great playhouse.

Prams and buggies

Good access. Lifts and ramps throughout.

Food and changing

Cafe with high chairs and a range of food at a range of prices.

Baby change is available on site.

We thought...

The children's gallery is lovely, with loads of different activities. You can make a ribbon picture, play inside a giant picture, or learn about colour mixing with a fantastic bubble tube. There's plenty of space for little ones to crawl around and generally a very friendly atmosphere.

Children are welcome in the other galleries too – so it's worth keeping an eye out for what's on.

Opening times

Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 2–5pm.

Age groups



The Great North Museum

www.greatnorthmuseum.org

Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne
NE2 4PT Tel: 0191 222 6765
Textphone: 18001 0191 222 6765
Fax: 0191 261 7537



Getting there

Nearest Metro is Haymarket and the bus station is a couple of minutes' walk away.

How much is it?

Free.

Prams and buggies

Buggy access will be fine.

Food and changing

Two cafes and baby changing facilities.

What's there?

We haven't been yet (it opens in May 2009) but it seems the museum will have lots of interactive exhibits which should be fun. We asked about activities for the under 5's and they told us: "A dedicated under fives' play space, called *Mouse House*, will cater for the youngest visitors. At first sight, the room appears to be a Victorian library but on closer inspection all is not what it seems! What looks like a bookshelf

reveals doors that can be opened to reveal inhabitants of the natural world. Oversized furniture lends an 'Alice in Wonderland' feel to the space and children are encouraged to be the 'collectors of tomorrow' by carrying out a range of fun and investigative activities which echo the contents of the main galleries.

Children will also love the life-size T Rex skeleton, and the Living Planet display, which houses hundreds of creatures including live animal tanks and aquaria where visitors can see tropical fish, pythons, lizards and leaf cutting ants to name but a few!"

Opening times

Open from May 2009.

Age groups





BALTIC Busy Bs

www.balticmill.com

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts
Gateshead Quays, South Shore Road
Gateshead NE8 3BA
Telephone 0191 478 1810

Getting there

Really easy to get to – loads of buses go to the Quayside (phone Nexus for details) and there are several car parks along the Gateshead Quays. If in doubt, pay for an extra hour's parking – not only do I always spend longer at the Baltic than I expect, the traffic patrols are pretty nifty on expired car park tickets. We enjoy parking over the bridge and walking over too.

How much is it?

Entry to the BALTIC itself is free and the Busy Bs session is. Check prices for arts and crafts sessions.

What's there?

The BALTIC itself is worth a visit – great spaces for kids of all ages. It's very buggy friendly – go for just for a ride in the lift and the view from the landing stage! As well as a range of exhibitions, shop and that fantastic lift (hold on to your tummies and re-tell Charlie's great glass elevator story!), the Busy Bs sessions offer creative art sessions for under 13s at weekends. There are also pre-schooler creative sessions on Tuesdays.

Prams and buggies

Excellent access.

Food and changing

Yes.

We thought...

If you can drag your child away from imaginary picnics in the rowing boat in the Quay area, the Busy Bs session is great fun for creative play. Older children and preschoolers enjoy the structure, supported by one of the in-house artists while younger ones are just as welcome to splodge, stick and tear in their own happy way.

Opening times

BALTIC – open daily 10–6pm
(10.30am on Tuesdays)

Busy Bs – Tuesdays and weekends
(check for times).

Age groups



Parks and countryside ranger events



There are loads of parks, beaches, woods and open spaces around Newcastle, and you'll already have your own favourites. But it's only since having the kids that we've discovered all the events planned and run locally by the Parks and Countryside Ranger Service in Newcastle.

In the summer months (from May), they organise free activities specifically for the under 5's, including pond dips, mini beast hunts, painting, picnics and nature trails.

In addition, they put on all sorts of family days with bands, bouncy castles, magicians and community barbecues in most of the major Newcastle parks during the summer.

We've been along to quite a few, and always had really good fun. We've also discovered numerous nature reserves and parks we'd never been to before (and I've lived in Newcastle all my life).

The rangers produce information leaflets, letting you know what's coming up, and listing all their contact details. Also, look out for the free magazine 'Citylife,' which is produced by the Council. It often has listings for events in the local parks and nature reserves.

Useful numbers

Benwell Nature Park

Denton Dene, Hadrian's Way, Sugley Dene, Walbottle and Throckley Dene.
Tel: **0191 273 2983**

Big Waters

Walker Riverside, Havannah Nature Reserve/ Three Hills.
Tel: **0191 281 3833**

Jesmond Dene

Iris Brickfield and Armstrong Park.
Tel: **0191 281 0973**

Tyne Riverside

Newburn Walbottle Brickworks.
Tel: **0191 264 8501**



Not the park again...

Ideas to keep you sane on your 4,000th visit to the local park.

- **Have a treasure hunt.** Leave a friend to push the swings while you go off and hide/bury some treasure. You can either hide clues which lead to the goodies or draw a map and let the kids decipher it. Swear blind that you had nothing to do with it, but you just saw a pirate limping out of the gates.
- **Give them a list of things to find:** a twig, a red leaf, a yellow flower etc. Take a prize for the winner.
- **Pond dipping.** Take a fishing net and have a good swish around on the bottom of the pond / river. Empty into a Tupperware tub and admire the snails and grubs you've found. You can do this any time, but it's especially fun when the tadpoles have hatched. Take a few home, feed them frozen lettuce (honestly) and watch them grow legs. From experience, remember to take them back before they start hopping around your kitchen. (Pond dipping gets you really dirty. Take some spare clothes and antibacterial gel if you can.)
- **Go on a minibeast hunt.** How many different bugs, beetles and worms can you find?
- **Make a den.** This is more fun if you sit somewhere you can see the kids then just let them get on with it. Take a blanket or plastic bags for them to sit on and some snacks to enjoy in their secret house. Again, from experience, it's best to check their chosen site for glass, needles, dog poo or angry drunk people before they start building.

● **Forage for food.** You'll need to judge whether your kids can be trusted not to munch poisonous berries and leaves – but hunting for free food can entertain them for hours. Blackberries are the easiest to spot, but you could try sucking the sugar out of clover petals and keep an eye out for mushrooms, wild strawberries, dandelion leaves etc. Don't eat **anything** if you're not absolutely sure it's OK. The countryside rangers sometimes run 'food for free' sessions to help you identify the edible stuff.

● **Splash in puddles.** People will look at you like you're mad – but there's nothing our kids like more than putting on their wellies and getting truly filthy jumping in puddles. Join in. It's great stress relief!

● **Make a collage.** Take a bag and collect pretty leaves, twigs, flowers etc. Then go home and make a sticky picture.

● **Find out where the fairies live.** My kids will walk for miles if we're looking for fairy houses. Clumps of toadstools are fairy villages and the fairy princesses live in trees with little 'doors' in their bark.

● **Catch a happy day.** Catching falling leaves before they hit the ground is really tricky and really good exercise. Traditionally, each leaf you catch will give you a happy day.



Not the beach again...

Forgot your spade? Can't face building another castle? Too cold to paddle? Here's some other ideas:

- **Take a sledge.** Some of our local beaches have fantastic dunes – and sledges don't just work on snow you know...
- **Climb the highest dune then race down it.** Can you hop down, jump down, roll down? Don't forget to take some water. This gets hot and very sandy.
- **Rockpooling can be great fun.** Challenge your kids to spot a limpet, a crab, a hermit crab, a winkle, a sea anemone, a starfish or a fish. Count how many different sorts of seaweed you can find. (If you lift any living creatures out of a pool, please make sure you return them.) St Mary's Lighthouse, Whitley Bay, sometimes run fab rock pooling sessions for families. Call 0191 200 8650 or visit www.friendsofstmarysisland.co.uk for details.
- **Collect shells or pebbles.** There's nothing worse than stinking out your car with these little treasures, so it's best to put them to good use on the beach. Who can build the biggest pile of pebbles or make the longest line of shells? Can you draw a picture on the sand using things you find on the beach?
- **Limpet and nose races.** A more embarrassing version of egg and spoon racing. Everyone in the family finds a good sized, empty limpet shell. Then draw a start and finish line in the sand. Line up behind the start line, balance your shell on your nose and race to the finish.

- **Hop scotch is easy to play on the beach.** Just draw your grid in the sand, pick up a pebble and start hopping. You'll soon remember the rules. Throw your pebble on to the number 1, miss out that square, hop the rest and pick up your pebble without falling over on the way back. Repeat for number 2,3,4 etc.
- **Draw circles in the sand.** Endlessly entertaining! Draw a line near the circles. Can your children throw a shell into each circle? Can they jump between the circles? My children always enjoy a spot of sumo wrestling... can you push your opponent out of the circle? But you know your own kids, don't do it if it's going to end in tears!
- **Build a dam.** Some of our beaches have little streams running down to the sea. Can your children build a dam across one of them. (Tynemouth beach has a stream just next to Crusoe's cafe which sells a good cup of coffee)...
- **Scavenger Hunts are fun.** Agree a search area which is within your line of vision, then challenge your children to find interesting things: a pretty shell, a feather, a shiny stone, a piece of driftwood etc. The trickier the list, the longer you get to sunbathe on your picnic rug.
- **If all else fails – bury someone up to their neck in sand.**
Just make sure it's not you!

Jump around



Adventurelands

www.adventurelands.com

Benton Road, Heaton
Newcastle upon Tyne NE7 7DT
Tel: 0191 259 9966



Getting there

Exit the Coast Road at the Chillingham Road roundabout and turn up Benton Road. Take the third exit at the roundabout and go past Sainsbury's – the turn is just after – and parking is at the top.

How much is it?

Off-peak (weekdays/term time):

50p babies; £2.95 1 year olds;
£4.15 2–3 years; £5.25 4–15 years;
£1 adults

Peak times (weekends/school hols):

50p babies; £3.95 1 year olds;
£5.45 2–3 years; £6.95 4–15 years;
£1 adults

What's there?

A big, themed soft play which is quite different to the other soft plays we know. Indoor football pitch, aquarium, 'space guns' which fire foam balls, interactive dance area, huge TV/cinema, tunnels and slides and indoor motorbikes!

Prams and buggies

Access is fine.

Food and changing

The cafe is so good that you might want to eat there even without the kids!

Baby change is available.

We thought...

Our children love Adventurelands. It's clean and chic with lots of variety and friendly staff. However, it's a bit more expensive than other soft plays we've visited and the lay out means you can't so easily keep your eye on the door if your child is a 'bolter' (the exit door is lock-controlled but out of view from the soft-play area).

Opening times

Term time:

Sunday to Thursday – 9am to 8pm

Friday and Saturday – 9am to 9pm

School holidays:

Open every day – 9am to 9pm

Age groups





Soft play at Concordia

Concordia
Manor Walks Shopping Centre
Cramlington NE23 6YB
Tel: 01670 542222

Getting there

Take any route you like into Cramlington then follow signs to town centre and Manor Walks Shopping Centre. Eventually you'll find it! Park in the shopping centre car park – spaces near Concordia are hard to find.

For bus info call Travel line:
0870 608 2608

How much is it?

£2 for each child.

What's there?

Soft/indoor play. (Also a lovely looking swimming pool which we didn't use.)

Prams and buggies

Access is fine. The soft play is upstairs, but there is a lift.

Food and changing

There is a fairly basic cafe selling chips, crisps etc.

Baby change is clean.

We thought...

The soft play area is ideal for the under 4s – bouncy castle, lots of Fisher Price style slides, climbing frames and play houses. In the summer they use a huge area which is great for running around. Watch the door though – it's easy for kids to get out.

The rest of the year, the soft play is a smaller room – more secure but, obviously, less equipment.

Not the soft play to choose when you want to drink coffee and read the papers. There's nowhere very comfortable to sit. This is one for interacting with your children (!)

Opening times

Phone for details – varies according to season/school holiday/day of week.

Age groups



Tumbleteds

Benfield Gymnasium, Benfield Road,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 4NU
Tel: 0191 265 6091



Getting there

Take the Benfield Road turn from the Coast Road and it is half a mile on your left.

How much is it?

£28.50 for a 10-week course.

What's there?

Big and small equipment. The session starts with a warm up and a song, then some time on a circuit of obstacles, beams, hoops and rolls. Then some time on the big equipment of beams, monkey hoops, a bouncy area and so on. Songs at the end too.

Prams and buggies

Access is fine and parking is a bit restricted but usually you can get a space.

Food and changing

Clean loos and baby changing is available on site.

There are some machines by reception selling snacks, water and juice.

We thought...

My three year old adores Tumbleteds and Paula who runs the classes is terrific – always happy to sing my son's favourite 'Moo Moo Jersey Cow' for the 80th time on the trot! It's a relaxed atmosphere where the children can play and enjoy the activities at their own pace. We've made friends with some lovely mums here – the kids enjoy it too! I wouldn't recommend taking 2 kids though, unless you're super mum. It's impossible to keep them both safe, happy and under control.

Opening times

Wednesday: 10.30–11.30am and 1.30–2.30pm

Friday: 9.30–10.30am, 10.30–11.30am, 1.30–2.30pm

Sunday: 10–11am and 11am–12noon

There is a waiting list for some sessions, so phone ahead.

Age groups





Cosmic Kids

Unit 34, Citadel West Centre,
Killingworth, Newcastle upon Tyne
NE12 6XT
Tel: 0191 256 6677

Getting there

Head for Killingworth Town Centre and the "Killingworth Centre" which has a big Morrisons and a Matalan. Park in the Morrisons car park (it's murder trying to get a parent & child space) and Cosmic Kids is next to the Ladbrokes shop. (It looks tiny from the front, so it's quite easy to miss it.)

How much is it?

Under 1 year: free

1–4 years: £3.95

4 years and older: £4.25

What's there?

A large soft play with a soft indoor football pitch, two 'space guns' which fire foam balls, a toddler area, the usual tunnels and slides and an area with play houses, cars and ride on fire engines.

Prams and buggies

Access is fine. The soft play area is all upstairs, but there is a lift.

Food and changing

There is a cafe selling burgers, chips etc. We said we didn't like the coffee and we have been told they have changed the machine!

Baby change is available in the ladies or disabled toilet. It's OK if you have a child who will stay still on one of those wall-mounted units.

We thought...

Our children like Cosmic Kids. It's clean and airy with loads of room to run around. The staff are all very friendly, too.

Opening times

Open daily 9.30am–5.30pm.

Age groups





Getting there

Ask for directions to your venue of choice.

How much is it?

£5.50 per week (pre-booking required).

What's there?

Structured play on gym equipment with songs and action rhymes. The activities and equipment change for each age group.

Prams and buggies

Access is fine.

Food and changing

There is a room available for changing your baby's nappy.

We thought...

Dads beware – gymbabes is not quite as exciting as it sounds... Our babies used to enjoy their sessions, and the staff were all very friendly and helpful. It is quite expensive though – and we missed quite a few classes, as the timing of the sessions meant our kids often fell asleep on the way there. We found that other mums were too intent on watching their children for us to make any new friends during the sessions.

As the children progress to become Tumble Tots, we know some who have loved every minute, and some who haven't enjoyed the structure – so it's probably worth asking for a taster session before you sign up for the term.

Opening times

Ring to arrange a £5 taster session and to check times.

Tel: Louise or Karen on 0191 236 6993 or 07885 404664.

Age groups





Getting there

The website has map – follow the link from the front page.

How much is it?

9.30am-3pm £2.75 for 2 hours.
Other times, £3.75 for 1–5 year olds.
Under 1s free

What's there?

A large soft play area, toddler area and cafe. Also TV and newspapers for hands-off Dads on a Sunday morning!

Prams and buggies

Access is fine, but there's not much room for prams or pushchairs.
TJ's gets busy!

Food and changing

The food at TJ's is good, and we reckon their coffee is the best of any soft play we've been to!

There is a separate, clean baby change room.

We thought...

This is our favourite soft play. The staff are really friendly and helpful, there's a good variety of soft play equipment and the whole place is fairly compact, so it's easy to see your kids while you have a swig of coffee. We've had – and been to – loads of birthday parties here too – always really well run and never with that 'conveyor belt' feeling. It's also one of the places I feel brave enough to take baby, pre-schooler and older child at the same time.

Opening times

Open 9.30am–7pm daily.

Age groups



Lil' Dragons

www.universalmartialarts.co.uk

67 Heaton Road, Heaton
Newcastle upon Tyne NE6 5HE
Tel: 01670 797478
Email: universalsws@talktalk.net



Getting there

Check with Nexus for bus times:
Byker is the nearest Metro.

How much is it?

Monthly subscription of about £35
which means you can go as often
as you want, that's up to six times
every week!

What's there?

Karate for kids from age 4.

Prams and buggies

Some space for buggies if taking
siblings to watch.

Food and changing

No.

We thought...

It's great fun and has my eldest child
enthralled. This class promises to
build confidence and help children
achieve their potential. Mr Savage
has the children totally engaged as
they have a good run round, learn
some new skills and practise them
safely. My friend reports that her little
girl has been transformed from a child
who didn't much like games to a
clip-winning, star-wearing enthusiast
for sporty activity – can't be bad!
We also like the fact that it's on six
days per week so if you miss one
night you can turn up another time.

Opening times

Monday and Wednesday at 4.30pm
Tuesday and Thursday at 4pm
Friday at 4.15pm
Saturday at 10am.

Age groups



Other ideas



Seven Stories

the Centre for the Children's Book
www.sevenstories.org.uk

30 Lime Street, Ouseburn Valley
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 2PQ
Tel: 0845 271 0777



Getting there

At Byker Bridge turn right at the traffic lights then first left down Stepney Bank which leads onto Lime Street. Seven Stories is along on the left-hand side.

How much is it?

£5.50 for adults or £20 annual pass
£4.50 for children or £15 annual pass
£16 for family or £49.50 annual pass
Under-4's are free.

What's there?

Seven floors of book-related activity, exhibition, events and amusement plus dressing up, story time, workshops and story-related play.

Story Party

Tuesdays and Wednesdays 11am to 12pm. Every week during term time
An active, fun way to introduce your pre schooler to some wonderful stories.
£2 per participating child + entry charge.
Suitable for children 18 mths–5 years

Bookworm Babies!

Tuesdays at 1.30–2.30pm
Thursdays at 10.15–11.15am
Six week course
Babies are never too young to have fun with books! Explore new ways to play with books, sing, move about and have lots of fun in a relaxed group.
£15 per participating baby per six week block & adult entry charge.
Suitable for babies until they can walk.

You need to book for all these sessions. Contact info is given above.

Prams and buggies

Lift access to each floor.

Food and changing

Good, clean changing rooms with lots of room.

We thought...

We love it here, and have taken out family memberships so it's a regular rainy-day home for us. We challenge you to get away without spending loads in the bookshop. The exhibitions change fairly regularly and boys and girls love the dressing up, the word play and the ever-present colouring activities. Works fine with a baby, a toddler and a pre-schooler – something for each one in the same space. The cafe is impressive too – not the cheapest – but healthy, classic combinations. The staff deserve a mention, not just for their enthusiastic story reading (daily at 11am) but for the atmosphere and positive attitude.

Opening times

10am–5pm Mon–Sat
11am–5pm Sunday

Age groups





La Jolie Ronde

www.lajolieronde.co.uk

Holy Name Church, 7 North Jesmond Avenue, Jesmond NE2 3JX
Tel: 0191 281 9514
Email: parujual2006@yahoo.co.uk

Getting there

Turn off Osborne Avenue into North Jesmond Avenue. There's parking round the corner in Towers Avenue by the entrance to the church hall. There is also a map on the website.

How much is it?

£3.75 per 1/2 hour payable by term.

What's there?

French and Spanish language classes for 3-11 year olds.

Prams and buggies

Access is fine.

Food and changing

No.

We thought...

There is something quite amazing about listening to your tot speak confidently in another language. The classes are structured and mix games, puppets, craft activities and songs to learn to a theme each week. The grown ups were listening just as carefully to pick up words and phrases too!

Opening times

Phone Ruth for details of pre-school classes.

Age groups



Shields Ferry and South Shields

Shields Ferry tel: 0191 454 8183
Nexus Travel line: 0870 608 2608



Getting there

Drive to North Shields and park on the quay. (The passenger ferry is well signposted.)

The nearest Metro Station is North Shields.

For bus info ring the travel line above.

How much is it?

Return trip on the ferry £2
Under 5s free

What's there?

A trip across the Tyne on the passenger ferry. (Optional extras – park with traditional swings etc, large lake with ducks and swans, mini train ride and fun fair.)

Prams and buggies

Access to the ferry is easy.

Food and changing

Not on the ferry! See below for fish and chips.

We thought...

Great fun. It can be cold outside on the ferry, but our kids loved watching the boats, birds and cranes on the river. Once in South Shields, we walked in a straight line from the ferry, through the market place and down the main shopping street. We stopped at Coleman's, a fantastic (and child friendly) fish and chip shop on Ocean Road. Continue down the road to the park. The mini train runs during the holidays and at weekends. The kids loved it. We never got to the Temple Park fun fair, but other mums told us it has a great bouncy castle and good rides for under 5s.

Opening times

The ferry leaves North Shields on the hour and at 30 minutes past.

Age groups





Getting there

Take the Chester-le-Street exit off the A1 and follow signs to Birtley. Beamish is well signposted from here.

How much is it?

Summer season (4 Apr – 1 Nov):
£16 adult/£10 child and under 5s free

Your ticket can then be reused, whenever you wish, for a year.

A family ticket for £46 is also valid for one year.

Winter season: £6 each and under 5s free

What's there?

Ride on trams, buses, vintage car, horse and cart, steam train. Fair ground; old fashioned street; park (often with brass bands); school house; farm; mansion house; coal mine (all from different eras).

Prams and buggies

Take a papoose or a lightweight buggy. You'll do lots of walking and a large pushchair is a nightmare on the trams etc.

Food and changing

Eating areas and cafes can be very busy – but there's loads of space for picnics.

Baby changing is available on site and very clean.

We thought...

It's expensive, so make a day of it. It's worth considering membership, especially if your first visit is with 2 or more adults – it works out loads cheaper from your second visit onwards. All the family enjoyed it – from the tiny baby upwards. The fair was a big hit, and, of course, the trams and buses. More surprisingly, the toddlers loved the old style shops and schoolroom.

Opening times

Summer season:
Open 10am–5pm every day.

Winter season:
Closed Monday and Friday.
Open 10am–4pm other days.

Age groups



The Alnwick Garden

www.alnwickgarden.com

Denwick Road, Alnwick,
Northumberland NE66 1YU
Tel: 01665 511350



Getting there

By car: From the A1 take the Denwick turning, just north of Alnwick and follow the brown signs to the gardens.

By bus: there are regular bus services from Newcastle to Alnwick town centre.

How much is it?

Including Gift Aid donation – Adult £10* Concession £7.50* Child 1p**

Excluding Gift Aid donation – Adult £9 Concession £6.50 Child 1p**

*Including an optional £1 charitable donation **For up to 4 children per adult, additional children £2.50 each

What's there?

Lots of wonderful gardens to explore, fantastic water features to splash in, a poison garden, a massive tree house and aerial walk ways, a woodland walk, gorgeous cafes, mini tractors and lots of great activities.

Prams and buggies

Access is very good throughout the garden. The only problems arise when you have an older child who runs off up the steps and you need to take the long way round with your buggy. A papoose might be better if you have one.

Food and changing

The tree house cafe and pavilion both serve lovely food. Or you can picnic in the gardens.

Baby changing is clean and airy.

We thought...

This is always a fun day out. The Alnwick Garden's are incredibly child friendly. Kids can splash up and down the waterways and get absolutely soaked in the fountains. Take at least 2 changes of clothes, a towel and a swimming costume if it's warm. They run all sorts of lovely events throughout the year – we think their Christmas activities and Santa are the best we've been to. It's always worth checking their website for what's on.

Opening times

Summer 10am–6pm

Winter 10am–4pm

Closed on Christmas Day.

Age groups





Bowling – XS Superbowl

Unit 3, Whitley Road, Longbenton
Newcastle upon Tyne NE12 9SR
Tel: 0191 215 0901

Getting there

From the Four Lane Ends roundabout, drive straight ahead down Whitley Road until you see the No Frills DIY store on your left. Turn left at this roundabout and the bowling alley is at the far end of the car park.

How much is it?

£3.85 per child, per game.

Families can play for 1 hour, at any time for £18. (2 adults and max 4 kids).

Earlybird Sundays 10am–12pm
£10 for 1 hour's play.

What's there?

A bowling alley and fast food restaurant.

Prams and buggies

Access is easy.

Food and changing

You can buy fast food or drinks if you wish.

We thought...

Bowling is great fun from about 2½ years. XS Superbowl have alleys with blocked gutters and special ramps for the ball – so it's impossible to miss the pins. We found one game was enough for our kids, but they really enjoyed the atmosphere in the bowling alley.

Opening times

Open 10am–11.30pm daily.

Age groups



Other bowling alleys can be found at the MetroCentre, on Westgate Road, beside Royal Quays in North Shields and at Whitley Bay Ice Rink.

Theatre and shows



There are lots of plays and shows for children in Newcastle every year – and there's something fantastic about watching your little one completely absorbed by what's happening on the stage. Children's theatre is usually very interactive, with lots of opportunities for singing, dancing, jumping about and general odd behaviour. If you're lucky the kids will join in too...

We find the under 5's shows at Northern Stage and the Live Theatre are generally excellent and good value for money. At these venues you're not bombarded with overpriced merchandise which can end up costing even more than the tickets.

The Theatre Royal, Newcastle usually has some great shows during the year. These can be more expensive, but my children are often as excited by the fabulous building as they are by the show itself! It's also worth checking the listings at the Tyne Theatre, Westgate Road; City Hall, City Road; Customs House, South Shields; and The Sage, Gateshead.

The Metro Radio Arena stages a number of big shows for children each year. These tend to be TV or Film spin offs and are often really spectacular. However, tickets are expensive and your children will pester you for £10 programmes, very expensive sweets, flashing lights, T shirts, balloons... The list is endless.

When we head off to a show I now tend to pack a drink and stop off at our local newsagents to choose a packet of sweets each. I also stock up on glow sticks at Halloween and Christmas (when they're really cheap in the supermarkets). To date my children have been just as happy waving these around in the dark as a £15 Mickey Mouse glow stick – although I presume they'll notice the difference at some point!

Keep checking your *Chronicle Extra* and *Citylife* magazine for forthcoming shows. The library often has posters or leaflets advertising shows, too.

Useful numbers

Northern Stage	T: 0191 230 5151	www.northernstage.co.uk
Live Theatre	T: 0191 232 1232	www.live.org.uk
Theatre Royal	T: 0844 811 2121	www.theatreroyal.co.uk
The Journal Tyne Theatre	T: 0844 493 9999	www.thejournaltynetheatre.co.uk
City Hall	T: 0191 261 2606	www.newcastle.gov.uk/cityhall
The Customs House	T: 0191 454 1234	www.customshouse.co.uk
The Sage Gateshead	T: 0191 443 4661	www.thesagegateshead.org
Metro Radio Arena	T: 0844 493 6666	www.metroradioarena.co.uk
The Bare Toed Dance Co.	T: 01665 711646	www.baretoed.co.uk

Transport

Metro

Most children love riding on the Metro – especially through the tunnels. Access for pushchairs is really good – lifts at every station where they're needed. Go to the beach, the city centre, Sunderland Winter Gardens, Central Station, the airport – or just ride around in circles until you've seen it all. It's something to do when you just want to get out of the house!

Buses

Buses are just as much fun as the Metro for the kids, (but a bit more work for you). Again, just go for a ride, anywhere you fancy – they'll love it. But make sure you choose a low loader with space for your pushchair. Collapsing your buggy and holding onto a couple of kids can be a nightmare!

Central Station

Once they hit the Thomas the Tank Engine stage, then you can easily spend a whole morning at the station – just watching the trains. You'll probably get bored before they do, but at least there's plenty of places to have coffee. We've found that most of the train drivers are lovely. They all wave to the kids as they leave, and if you look really keen, they may even invite you into their cab!

Directory

Adventurelands 0191 259 9966

The Alnwick Garden 01665 511350

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts
0191 478 1810

The Bare Toed Dance Company
01665 711646

Beamish – The North of England
Open Air Museum 0191 370 3131

Benfield Gymnasium 0191 265 6091

Bill Quay Community Farm
0191 433 5780

Blakelaw library 0191 277 4185

Blue Reef Aquarium 0191 258 1031

Chain Bridge Honey Farm
01289 386362

City Hall 0191 261 2606

City Pool, Newcastle 0191 277 1844

Concordia 01670 542222

Cosmic Kids 0191 256 6677

Cruddas Park library 0191 277 4280

Customs House 0191 454 1234

Dancing Babies and Dizzy Kids at
Dance City 0191 261 0505

David Lloyd Leisure Gosforth
0191 284 1275

Denton Burn library 0191 277 4277

Dinnington library 01661 825079

Discovery Museum 0191 261 0505

East End library 0191 232 6789

East End Pool, Byker 0191 278 8444

Elswick Pool 0191 277 3456

Empire Cinema at The Gate
08714 714714

Fawdon Library Express
0191 277 4255

Fenham library 0191 277 4270

Gosforth library 0191 277 1811

Gosforth Pool 0191 284 3696

Great North Museum 0191 222 6765

High Heaton library 0191 277 4233

Hullaballo Kids Toddler Yoga
07532 138 324

Jesmond library 0191 278 4215

Jesmond Pool 0191 281 2482

Jo Jingles Helen 01670 761480 or
07859 105159

Journal Tyne Theatre 0844 493 9999

Kenton library 0191 277 4310

La Jolie Ronde 0191 281 9514

Laing Art Gallery 0191 211 2104

Lakeside Centre, Killingworth
0191 223 4177

Lil' Dragons 01670 797478

Live Theatre 0191 232 1232

Directory (continued)

Lynn Campbell 01665 711646

Metro Radio Arena 0844 493 6666

Michelle Blake Baby Massage
0788 777 4378

Moorside library 0191 277 4288

Music Making at The Sage Gateshead
0191 443 4661

National Childbirth Trust
0845 120 1498

Newbiggin Hall library
0191 277 4284

Newburn library 0191 277 4260

Newcastle Action for Parent and
Toddler Groups (NAPI)
0191 265 6158

Newcastle Families Information
Service 0191 277 4133

Nexus Travel Line 0870 608 2608

Northern Stage 0191 230 5151

Odeon Cinema, Silverlink
0871 224 4007

Outer West library 0191 277 7970

Outer West Pool, West Denton
0191 2777 980

Pets' Corner 0191 281 0973

Piccolo Music
Anna Scantlebury (0191) 252 8765
or Abigail Cotton (0191) 234 0596

Pushy Mothers 07846 237 855

The Sage Gateshead 0191 443 4661

The Sanctuary Wildlife Care Centre
01670 791778

Seven Stories, Centre for the
Children's Book 0845 271 0777

Shields Ferry 0191 454 8183

St Mary's Lighthouse 0191 200 8650

Theatre Royal 0844 811 2121

TJ's Jungle 01670 738 002

Tumbleteds at Benfield Gymnasium
0191 265 6091

Tumbletots and Gymbabes Louise
or Karen on 0191 236 6993 or
07885 404 664

Tynemouth Pool 0191 200 6192

Tyneside Cinema 0845 217 9909

Walker library 0191 278 4225

Washington Wildfowl
0191 416 5454

West End library 0191 277 1500

Whitehouse Farm 01670 789998

XS Superbowl 0191 215 0901

Yoga Moves and Baby Play
at Dance City 0191 261 0505
01665 711646 (Lynn Campbell)

Before you go...

Your essential checklists (*before you get your tots out*)

Don't leave home without:

- Wipes (even if your child is potty trained)
- Nappies Nappy bags
- Change of clothes At least one plastic carrier bag
- Your child bribe of choice – we both use chocolate – you find what works!

To create illusions of control include:

- Elastoplasts Antihistamine cream – for bee and nettle stings.
- Antiseptic cream – for everything else.

Don't even think about going to the beach without adding:

- Towel Sunscreen A drink (*for washing sand out of mouth*)

Optional extras:

- Bucket and spade Ball Picnic

For country / park outings swap bucket and spade for: Welly boots

For cafes, restaurants, train journeys or anywhere they'll have to sit down and behave, choose from:

- Books Pens and paper Stickers / Magnet boards
- Play dough (*trust me*) Lego / mega blocks
- As many other toys as you can carry

For car journeys forget the play dough, books and pens. Swap for:

- Children's song tapes/CDs Talking books
- Magic doodle pad Drink
- Snack pack (*avoid anything potentially messy*)
- "I spy, with my little eye, something that is green." (*Repeat 1,000,000 times*)

Occasionally, stop to admire the muscles and incredible patience you've developed since giving birth.

Contacting us

Without other people telling us about the great places to visit and things to do that we have listed here, Rachel, James, Emma, Alistair and Fleur would have barely got beyond the front door on many days. If there is somewhere you know about which isn't listed here, please let us know for a future edition. And if you want to comment on the places we have talked about, please get in touch too!

Get Your Tots Out

PO Box 251

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE6 5YX

getyourtotsout@hotmail.com

The information in this booklet was correct and up to date at the time we went to print (March 2009).

Times of activities seem to change so frequently that we would suggest you ring in advance to check that our information is still right.

The 'How to get there' section has been the most difficult to get right! In all cases, if you're travelling by bus, you can call Nexus Travel line on 0870 6082608 for advice on the best route to take.

This guide is supported by Sure Start Children's Centres.

