



TRAVELSMART

ASK THE EXPERTS:

Your questions

The best Disney rides, trips for tennis-lovers and how to get *really* close to wild otters



Q We're travelling to the south of France with our young daughter and her friend this summer. Will we have problems getting through passport control if her parents aren't present?
Dan Davis, Yorkshire

A If you are all UK citizens travelling on individual UK passports within the EU, you should be fine. However, the Identity & Passport Service – which is part of the Home Office – recommends that you carry a signed letter from the child's parents explaining that you are *in loco parentis*. It also suggests that you check with your airline to see if it has any specific rules covering the situation. BA, for example, advises passengers to obtain a signed declaration from the child's parents, stating the travel dates, passport numbers and the parents' contact details. It's also a good idea to do this if children are travelling alone or with one parent – just in case you get quizzed by immigration. In future, if you're travelling outside the EU, contact the embassy of the country you're visiting to check if they have any extra requirements. And don't forget that babies and toddlers need their own passports, too.
Mark Hodson



Q I've been to Walt Disney World in Florida, and this year my wife and I are doing a fly-drive trip to California. Is the Disneyland in LA a damp squib after having been to Orlando?
Susie Kilmurray, Gwynedd

A The Disneyland Resort (above) in Anaheim, California, is far smaller than the newer parks in Orlando, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, and it doesn't have the Epcot Centre, Hollywood Studios or Animal Kingdom. Even the iconic Disneyland Castle and the peaks of the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad rollercoaster are a tad titchier. But the theme park in California is the original, and it was designed by Walt Disney himself – more than 500 million visitors have strolled down Main Street since it

opened in 1955. Its smaller size makes it feel more intimate but also means you should avoid public holidays at all costs. You'll find some historic old rides that aren't replicated in any of the newer parks, such as the Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage (remodelled from the original 1950s' 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea ride). You'll also notice that The Pirates of the Caribbean ride here is longer – and, I'd say, much better – than the others; remember that the films were based on the original Disneyland ride, and not the other way round. To learn more about the park's history, take 'A Walk in Walt's Footsteps' – one of several tours operated by the park. It lasts three and a half hours and costs £43pp, including lunch (00 1 714 781 4400).
Richard Green >

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Our resident luxury travel queen



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Jonathan Elphick
Natural history boffin and wildlife author



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Q Where do I stand the best chance of seeing wild otters in Britain?
Susheel Abbasi, Nottingham

A In most parts of the British Isles, otters are shy and largely nocturnal, and therefore very difficult to see. If you want to get really good views rather than just a fleeting glimpse, you should head north and choose the wilder coasts of west Scotland – particularly the offshore islands. Here, these beautiful creatures are much easier to spot than river otters as their feeding is governed by the tides, so they're often active by day. There are around 500-600 otters in the Shetland Isles, so it's a great place to base yourself. For guided otter-watching tours contact Shetland Otters (01806 577358, www.shetlandotters.com; £125 for two people).

On the western mainland, the Morvern Peninsula, opposite the Hebridean island of Mull, is another good otter-watching spot. And the Isle of Skye has plenty of unspoilt beaches, as well as an otter haven at Kyleshea on the east coast (www.forestry.gov.uk).

You're most likely to see otters in late autumn and winter as there are fewer people around to disturb them. Look out for their broad, five-toed webbed footprints, as well as dark, oily droppings – their fishy diet means you might smell them before you see them – and a ring or trail of bubbles in the water, which may signal one is about to surface. Be careful not to disturb these bashful animals: avoid walking along the shoreline (they will hear your footsteps long before you see them); stay put in a quiet spot; and don't wear bright clothing.
Jonathan Elphick

Q Every Wimbledon, we plan to book a tennis holiday but this year we're going to do it! We don't fancy the big-group experience. Are there any stylish properties that offer a bespoke coaching experience?
Bret Faulkner, Surrey

A Active Away (0844 884 2344, www.activeaway.com) organises tennis holidays with the renowned David Lloyd Tennis Clubs and can be found in many Mediterranean resorts. Its most popular is the five-star Aldemar Royal Mare Village on Crete, where a week costs from £779pp, half board, including flights from Gatwick, five group coaching sessions and a champagne-fuelled tournament. The company can also arrange private lessons here from £55 an hour. Individual hotels that have excellent net potential include La Residencia in Mallorca (00 34 971 639011, www.hotel-laresidencia.com), which has three-night packages from £950pp, B&B, including one dinner and three hours of private lessons, but excluding flights. Or you could bring costs down by opting for its group clinics (£14pp for 60 mins; five students max).

The Sani Resort in Halkidiki, Greece (00 30 237 409 9400, www.sani-resort.com; doubles from £85, B&B), set on a nature reserve, also has a great tennis academy that offers instruction either individually or with up to three players; from £100pp for three 45-minute private sessions. A glam Caribbean alternative is the Pat Cash Tennis Academy at Buccament Bay Resort (www.harlequinhotelsandresorts.com; doubles from £199, B&B) on St Vincent, which opens in July. The former Wimbledon champ will host several clinics each year; prices vary depending on how much A-list tennis advice you require.
Susan d'Arcy



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