

# THE TIMES

BRITAIN

*Hi-de-Hi-tech: welcome to the Butlin's science festival*

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*April 30 2016, 1:01am,*

*The Times*

So here's something I never thought I'd say: "We're going to Butlin's." Call me a travel snob (and you'd be right) but just the word Butlin's sets off all sorts of negative images of holiday chalets, Redcoats and the very worst of Hi-de-Hi! Why would I ever want to go to a holiday park?

Yet here I am, in Bognor, no less, with three boys aged eight to ten and my friend Lucy for moral support. It's not the posh, self-catering apartment in the modern Wave Hotel that's lured us here, although it's very nice, thank you. Nor is it the free fairground rides and waterslides in the pool.

No, we're here for the Astonishing Family Science Weekend, which seems to have so many great things to do that we've had to draw up a military-style schedule to fit it all in. And I have to tell you — it's amazing. There's decoding on a real Enigma machine used in the Second World War and walking on custard (yes, you really do walk on it — it's something to do with the changing viscosity of the cornflour when pressure is applied). A team from Microsoft who are here teach the children to program their own games on a mini computer called a micro:bit, which isn't even on the market yet. There are lie detectors to solder, pinhole cameras to make, and lots of hands-on stuff from the Science Museum.

It's the very best of good educational fun. As Tom Briggs, the educational manager from Bletchley Park, tells us after the code-breaking session: "You have spent the last 45 minutes doing maths and having fun. Those two things aren't exclusive. Please remember that."

There's more learning at show time, with the excellent Braniacs blowing up microwaves and the Gastronomist Stefan Gates on the science of food. (...)

The snob in me wouldn't return for a normal weekend. Unless, that is, there's a science festival in the mix. In that case, it's an absolute no-brainer.

Full article:

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/travel/hi-de-hi-tech-welcome-to-the-butlins-science-festival-zndt55tlz>