

12s&Under

On a day centred on our younger visitors, we mix visits to the **Soft Bear Play Centre**, a traditional adventure playground and with the right timing, a ride on the **Royal Deeside Railway**. All visits are set in the lush Dee Valley so mum and dad will have more than a little to enjoy through the course of the day. Do it all on one day or expand it to fit your own timing!

Summary

Drive Distance :Ballater to Strachan 21 miles; Strachan to Banchory 5 miles; Banchory to Crathes 3 miles;
Crathes to Ballater 27 miles

:Total 56 miles

Drive time :1 hrs 45 mins

Accessibility :Be prepared for walking over short distances and for being outside.

Year round :Yes - see descriptions below for a guide to opening times.

Child friendly :Yes

Route

Depart Ballater on the A93 heading east. On arrival in Aboyne take the right hand turn into Bridgeview Road [B968]. After crossing the River Dee turn left onto B976. Continue for just under 10 miles and turn left at the brown 'Tourist' signpost for **Soft Bear Play Centre**. After leaving the centre, return to the main road and turn left towards Banchory on the B976 keeping to the left as you pass through the village of Strachan, now the B974. Cross the River Dee once again, and entering the riverside town of **Banchory**, the car park is on the right. On departure, turn right from the Car Park and then right at traffic lights. Travel through Banchory on the A93 heading east. After 3 miles you will see another brown 'Tourist' signpost for **Crathes Castle** directing you to turn left. Return to the main road after visit, **Milton of Crathes Centre** is almost directly opposite, and is home to the **Royal Deeside Railway**. Return to Ballater by driving west on the A93.

Soft Bear Play Centre. This is an innovative attraction and it is ALL for the young. The balance between outdoor and indoor playground areas ensures a fun time no matter what the weather. The indoor centre is a Scottish first from Canada with a ball blasting area. *[Dad's bring your Kleenex! You are too old to join in!]* Outdoors, there are traditional swings, a bouncy castle and trampolines which are guaranteed to please. Indoor and outdoor eating spaces also means that food is not far away if an energy boost is needed. This is available from their restaurant from which their eye is firmly on their key customers. All this plus feature events and BBQs in summer so call ahead to see what's happening. *[Open daily]*

Banchory. Alternative lunching is available in the town of Banchory with a host of child friendly restaurants or if you wish, create a picnic from the local delicatessens. *[Raemoir Garden Centre is signposted from the middle of Banchory on A93.]*

Crathes Castle Adventure Playground. Situated close to the castle car park you will find the adventure playground. There are climbing frames, slides, swings, monkey bars, tyre swings and an aerial slide, among other adventures for the young, which can keep children amused in magical entertainment for hours. Parent seating is available around the park or there is a large grassy slope leading to it, which is an alternative for parents having a break! The playground is free of charge although there is a charge for parking which is also waived for any National Trust members. Castle facilities are open to all visitors and include a self-service restaurant and a well-presented shop for all ages.

Royal Deeside Railway. The Royal Deeside Railway Preservation Society was formed in 1996 by enthusiasts who long had a dream to resurrect the Deeside railway line at least in part. Steam hauled trains are said to be *an imminent prospect* and certainly the line has made great progress since restarting with over 60 days of operation planned for 2010. In this very car bound culture, step back to the golden age of train travel! *[Starts 11am; Variable dates; Days of operation Wed, Sat, Sun & BH; Not Feb/Mar/Oct/Nov – 2010 timetable online]*

Contact Information *[we recommend checking opening times for your planned visit]*

Visits

Soft Bear Play Centre, Strachan, AB31 6NQ; 01330 850550

Crathes Castle, nr Banchory, AB31 5QJ; 0844 493 2166

The Royal Deeside Railway, Milton of Crathes, AB31 5QH

www.softbearplaycenter.co.uk

www.nts.org.uk/Property/20/

www.deeside-railway.co.uk

Refreshment Options

Soft Bear Play Centre, Strachan, AB31 6NQ; 01330 850550

Franco's Restaurant, 40, High St, Banchory, AB31 5SR; 01330 826093

The Burnett Arms Hotel, 25 High Street, Banchory, AB31 5TD; 01330 824944

The Banchory Lodge Hotel, Dee Street, Banchory, AB31 5HS; 01330 822625

Number 10 Tearoom & Winebar, 10, Dee St, Banchory, AB31 5ST; 01330 825747

Dudley's Restaurant & Coffee House, 14, Dee St, Banchory, AB31 5ST; 01330 822326

Raemoir Garden Centre, Raemoir Road, Banchory, AB31 4EJ; 01330 825059

www.softbearplaycenter.co.uk

www.francosrestaurant.biz

www.bw-burnettarms.co.uk

www.banchorylodge.co.uk

www.raemoirgardencentre.co.uk