



Summer Cost of Living Guide

2026

WHERE CAN KIDS EAT FREE / CHEAPLY?

Here you'll find all the restaurants and cafes where your kids can eat for free or £1 during the summer holidays.

Always make sure you read the TS&CS.

Supermarket & Retail Cafés

- Asda: Kids eat for just £1 all day, every day, with no minimum adult spend.
- Morrisons: One free kids' meal is available all day with every adult meal purchased for £5 or more.
- Sainsbury's: Buy one adult hot main meal and get a kids' hot meal or lunch bag for £1.
- Dunelm (Pausa Cafés): Kids eat free for every £4 spent in the café.
- IKEA: Kids' hot meals start from just 95p.
- Dobbies Garden Centres: Kids eat for £1 with the purchase of an adult main course.
- Tesco: Kids eat free in Tesco cafés with any adult purchase

Popular Restaurant Chains

- Bella Italia: Kids eat free on Thursdays, or for just £1 between 4:00 PM and 6:00 PM Sunday through Wednesday.
- Frankie & Benny's: Check specific in-store deals, which traditionally offer one free kids' meal with every adult main during holidays.
- Purezza: Kids under 10 get a free mini pizza with every adult meal purchased.
- Travelodge & Premier Inn: Up to two kids eat breakfast for free per full-paying adult.

(Note: Summer holidays officially run from late July to early September, but exact promotional dates and T&Cs vary by location. Always check with your local branch before visiting!) [\[1\]](#)

FREE FAMILY DAYS OUT NORTH EAST – some travel may be required

METRO TRAVEL: Up to three kids aged 11 and under can travel for free on the Metro and the Shields Ferry, all day, every day when accompanied by a fare-paying adult.

[Discovery Museum](#) (Newcastle)

The Discovery Museum is a science and local history museum. Expect a science maze, three floors of galleries showcasing Tyneside's history, a Red Arrows Flight Simulator (small charge) and regular free crafts. There is a cafe and indoor picnic tables too.

[BALTIC](#) (Newcastle)

Find BALTIC on NewcastleGateshead Quayside just over the Millennium Bridge. It is a Contemporary Art Gallery with ever changing exhibitions which are often hands-on/interactive and always thought-provoking. Facilities for children are fantastic with an indoor picnic area, free tea/coffee/juice and free toddler / children's activities at various times across the week (see their website for info)

[Laing Art Gallery](#) (Newcastle)

The Laing Art Gallery is in the centre of Newcastle, not far from the main shopping area around Northumberland Street. The gallery hosts regular changing historical and contemporary exhibitions and is also home to a small play area for under 5s.

[Great North Museum](#) (Newcastle)

Great North Museum is a museum of Natural History and Ancient Civilisations with permanent exhibitions, a planetarium and a large temporary exhibition space. The Museum is home to a popular 'Mouse House' area for under 5s and hosts regular free events across school holidays.

[Stephenson Railway Museum](#) (North Shields)

George and Robert Stephenson are North East icons pioneering Locomotives in North Tyneside. The Stephenson Railway Museum in North Tyneside displays some fascinating vehicles including George Stephens 'Billy' a fore-runner to the World Famous Rocket.

[Chain Bridge Honey Farm](#) (Berwick)

Chain Bridge Honey Farm is a family business in Berwick, the visitors centre was opened in the 90's to teach the public about bees and honey. There is information on Bee behaviour and Beehive products (such as honey, wax and propolis) as well as an observation hive so you can see the bees in actions.

[Durham Cathedral](#) (Durham)

Durham Cathedral is an icon of the North East appearing in films like Snow White and the Huntsman, Harry Potter and Avengers: Endgame. You can tour the Cathedral, visit the museum and participate in a service. The Cathedral also host live music events and the famous Durham Miners Gala.

[Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens](#) (Sunderland)

Discover the story of Sunderland, its people, its industries, acclaimed art exhibitions and tropical Winter Gardens– all under one roof. With a collection dating back to 1846, Sunderland's fascinating history is explored across four floors, with spaces dedicated to shipbuilding, coal mining, glass making and pottery, as well as many other aspects of the city's past. The Winter Gardens, a 21st Century addition to the museum is a tropical paradise and home to our

resident Koi Carp. Over 2,000 plants thrive in the glass rotunda and from the tree top walkway visitors have a bird's eye view of beautiful Mowbray Park. There are a number of exhibitions each year which change regularly.

[Seven Stories](#) (Ouseburn)

We love stories. From creating them, to protecting them to bringing them to life, we know them inside out - and it's our job to share as many as we can. We're a registered charity and accredited museum, and our teamwork with schools, communities and families to ensure every child has access to stories. Visit us for free in Newcastle upon Tyne and see original artworks, draft manuscripts, correspondence from bestselling authors and hear all about the stories *behind* the stories. We have events, workshops, and story times every week.

[Tynemouth Lifeboat Station](#) (Tynemouth)

The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea. Powered primarily by kind donations, our search and rescue service has been saving lives for nearly 200 years. Here you can find out more about who we are, what we do and how with your support, we can move closer to a world where no one drowns.

[Newbiggin Maritime Museum](#) (Newbiggin)

We are a volunteer run organisation providing the Breakwater Café, the Seashore Shop, a three gallery Museum and a large Latimer Function Room. We organise regular events such as the annual Kite Festival, Music Gigs, Film Shows (for members only - membership free), Children's Activities and much more. Keep up to date with what's going on via our Facebook page.

[Smaland Soft Play](#) (IKEA Gateshead)

THERE ARE MANY FREE COUNTRY PARKS / WALKS AVAILABLE AROUND THE NORTH EAST. THE FOLLOWING ARE WHERE YOU COULD SPEND MORE THAN AN HOUR.

[Rising Sun Country Park](#) (North Tyneside)

[Herrington Country Park](#) & [Penshaw Monument](#) (Sunderland)

[Seaglass Hunting at Seaham](#) (Durham)

[Minotaur Maze](#), [Salmon Centre](#), [Kielder Castle](#) & [Walks](#) (Kielder)

[Arbeia Roman Fort](#) (South Shields)

[Druridge Bay Country Park](#) (Northumberland Coast)

[Northumberlandia](#) (Cramlington)

[Ingram Valley](#) (Northumberland National Park)

[Allen Banks and Staward Gorge](#) (Hexham)

[Plessey Woods](#) (Morpeth)

[Hardwick Park](#) (Durham)

[Richardson Dees Park](#) (Wallsend)

[Wynyard Woodland Park](#) (Stockton on Tees)

[Ouseburn Farm](#) (Ouseburn)

[Pets Corner Jesmond Dene](#) (Jesmond)

[North & South Marine Parks](#) (South Shields)

[Carlisle Park & Steppy Stones](#) (Morpeth)

[Angel of the North](#) & [Saltwell Park](#) (Gateshead)

Splash Parks (Ridley Park/Chester le Street/Hirst Park)

[Preston Park Adventure Playground](#) (Stockton on Tees)

[Hylton Castle](#) (Sunderland)

[Cramlington Giant Spoon](#) (Cramlington)

[Seal Spotting / Rock Pooling](#) at St Mary's Island (North Tyneside) There is a fee to enter the lighthouse.

[Rainton Meadows](#) (Houghton-le-Spring)

[Holy Island](#) (Northumberland)

Check tide times before visiting.

Hadrian's Wall - [Temple of Mithras](#), [Walltown Crags](#) and [Sycamore Gap](#) (Northumberland)

COUNCIL RUN PROGRAMMES

Holiday Activities and Food Programme run by local council

This holiday provision is for school aged children from reception to year 11 (inclusive) who receive benefits-related free school meals.

Benefits-related free school meals (FSM) are available to pupils if their parents are in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits, and have a claim verified by their school or local authority.

Seaton Valley Community Council [Youth and Leisure Activities - Seaton Valley Community Council](#)

We work in partnership with Northumberland County Council Sports Development Team to provide a range of activities for young people and adults in the Valley. There are regular weekly activities and **FREE** sports camps during the school holidays

SCHOOL HOLIDAY BUDGETING TIPS

[Vivup - Coping Financially With The School Holidays : Benefits Schemes](#)

[Budgeting for the school holidays | Equifax UK](#)

FOOD BANK INFORMATION

Blyth Food bank. We are a referral-based foodbank but there are many ways of getting a referral.

Most people call Northumberland Communities Together Hub on 01670 354904. If you don't have credit on your phone email them on nct@northumberland.gov.uk, explain what you need and leave a phone number. They will phone you back to discuss your needs before sending us your referral.

Other ways are to ask:

- any support workers or care staff assigned to you
- your Job Centre Plus contact
- any medical professionals working with you (Health Visitors, Doctors etc)
- your children's school or Surestart Centre
- Citizens Advice
- Probation Staff

In all cases make sure the referrer knows:

- about all the people living with you that you need food for. Include any cats and dogs.
- if claiming for children they must be living with you for the next few days
- any foods you can and can't eat for either religious or medical reasons

Once you have been told that they have sent the referral you can come to our next session to collect your parcel.

1 Seaforth Street

Blyth

Northumberland

Opening Times: Monday to Friday from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM.

Closures: Closed on weekends and bank holidays.

Access Requirements: It operates on a referral basis. Referrals can be obtained through professionals (such as a doctor, social worker, or school), by calling Northumberland Communities Together (01670 620015)

WELFARE ADVICE CENTRES

Citizens Advice Northumberland (Blyth)

Unit 9/10 Sextant House, Freehold Street
Blyth
Northumberland
NE24 2BA

Public phone: 0808 278 7944 / 0800 144 8848

Email:

Website URL: <http://www.citizensadvicenorthumberland.org.uk>

General information

Service offered: Service offered: Advice and information on a range of issues, including community care, housing rights, welfare rights and benefits, money and debt, consumer rights and employment rights. Specialist help in money and debt and welfare benefits.

Blyth Valley Children's Centre

103 Wright Street
Blyth
NE24 1HG

Public phone: 01670 798 800

Email:

Website URL: <http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/blyth-valley-childrens-centre>

CVA

Blyth Community Hub

14 Market Street, Blyth, NE24 1BQ - a community space for you to feel safe, have a chat and find out what's happening in the area

To see our free weekly events and drop ins [click here](#).

What's happening in the hub!

Helen and Gina are in the hub every Wednesday from 10am to 12pm for a free drop-in session - everyone welcome!

CVA Cramlington Warm Space

There is lots going on at our 'Cramlington Warm Space' in Manor Walks Shopping Centre:-

We currently have groups going on most days:-

To view our list of what's on [click here](#)

[For more detailed information on the groups running or changes to the sessions, please contact the group directly.](#)

If you are a community group or support service and would like to utilise any of our spaces for free, please email info@cvabv.org.uk for more information and a booking form. We would be more than happy to display any promotional materials, including posters, flyers, and booklets that you have, promoting your group or service. You can email flyers and posters to info@cvabv.org.uk, drop it into the Head Office in Blyth.

Summer savings for families

The Great British Summer Savings scheme is running from 25 June to 1 September 2026, helping families feel a bit less squeezed this summer.

The new scheme includes reduced VAT on days out, including tickets at attractions like soft play, adventure centres and theme parks, children's tickets for theatres and cinemas, and children's meals in restaurants. Children aged 5 to 15 in England will also be able to travel free on local bus services throughout August.

For further information about the scheme visit [Summer Savings](#). If helpful, please share this with parents, carers and families through your usual channels.

Children North East

Children North East services provide help for babies, children and young people in their families, communities and schools.

Through our services we work directly with children and parents through the whole process of growing up, supporting you from pregnancy through to young adulthood.

To find out more use our [contact us form](#), call on 0191 272 7824 or email newpip.info@children-ne.org.uk.

[Support and Grow North East - Home](#) Covers North Tyneside. Provides practical and emotional support

SANITARY PRODUCTS

Ask at school to get free products to last over the summer

Food banks stock sanitary products but you may need to be referred to access them

A new **Morrisons' initiative called "Ask for Sandy"** allows customers who menstruate to discreetly access sanitary products from selected stores. The note reads: "Please don't feel shy. If you are in need or struggling for sanitary products go to our customer service kiosk (Next to Timpsons) and ask for a package that SANDY has left for you. You will then be given a FREE discreet envelope with what you need no questions asked."

Use the following to help you work out the cheapest sanitary products out there.

Sanitary Pads.

If you avoid the bigger names like [Always](#) and [Tampax](#), and stick with supermarket-own brands instead, you could save a substantial amount of money.

Most people can't notice the difference when switching to own brands, but if you prefer to stick with what you know, the cheapest branded packs we've found are these [Always Sensitive Normal Ultra Sanitary Towels](#)

If you want the cheapest possible supermarket options, look at these:

Tesco Essentials maxi towels x10, Asda Protect Ultra Normal Sanitary towels without wings x16

Tesco Free Spirit Maxi Towels Regular x24, Morrisons Normal Ultra Towels without wings x 16

Sainsbury's Ultra Towels x16

The ones in the table don't have wings, but if you're looking for cheap sanitary pads with wings, you could try [these ones](#) from Sainsbury's.

Note that these prices don't take into account special offers, so look out for any discounts that could get you an even better deal. Don't forget to try other shops like Home Bargains and BM Bargains

Tampons

Tampons often work out slightly more expensive than pads, but for some, they're a necessity and a much more comfortable option.

However, our table reveals that if you know where to look, you can get them for pretty much the same price as pads.

Again, if you want to stick with a known brand, these [Tampax Cardboard Super Tampons with Applicator](#) come in at some of the cheapest.

However, the packs listed below will get you the best deal. Just note that all but one of these packs contain **non-applicator tampons** – although the own-brand versions with applicators still work out cheaper than the big brands.

Asda Protect Super Non Applicator Tampons, Tesco Super Plus Non Applicator Tampons, Asda Regular Applicator Tampons, Morrisons Non Applicator Tampons

RECIPES FOR LESS THAN £5

Please use the following links to get ideas on how to prepare family meals cheaply.

[5 easy family dinners for £25 | Tesco Real Food](#)

[Recipes for under £5 - Co-op \(coop.co.uk\)](#)

[Cheap family recipes | BBC Good Food](#)

[Budget dinners - BBC Food](#)

[Search | Tesco Real Food](#)

[35 Meals Under £5 - Netmums](#)

[Jack Monroe recipes - BBC Food](#)

[COOKING ON A BOOTSTRAP – by Jack Monroe, bestselling author of 'A Girl Called Jack'](#)

[21 Budget Family Meals and a £16 Aldi Meal Plan - Savings 4 Savvy Mums](#)

[4 Week Budget Meal Plan - Skint Chef](#)

FOOD SHOPPING TIPS

1. Plan your meals in advance and make a grocery list accordingly.

Meal planning is a great way to save money and achieve your financial goals. By taking the time to plan your meals in advance, you can avoid buying unnecessary items at the grocery store. This also allows you to budget your food expenses more effectively. Meal planning can help you stick to a healthy diet, as well. By choosing nutritious recipes and preparing them ahead of time, you can make sure that you and your family are eating healthy meals on a regular basis.

2. Stick to your grocery list.

Once you have created a grocery list, do your best to stick to it. It can be tempting to add impulse items to your cart, but these purchases can quickly add up and blow your budget. If you see an item that wasn't on your list but is too good to pass up, see if you can find a cheaper version of it elsewhere.

3. Compare prices and shop around.

Don't be afraid to comparison shop to get the best deal on groceries. Take advantage of sales and coupons and consider shopping at different stores in order to find the best prices on the items that you need. It may take a little bit of extra effort, but it's worth it if it means saving money on your groceries.

4. Purchase generic or store brand items.

In many cases, generic or store brand items are just as good as the name brand versions – but they cost less. When you're budgeting for your groceries, it's important to look for ways to save money where you can. Purchasing generic or store brand items is a great way to do this.

5. Buy in bulk.

If you have the storage space, buying in bulk can help you save money on groceries. Items such as rice, pasta, and cereal often cost less per unit when you purchase them in bulk. Just be sure that you're actually going to use all of the food before it goes bad.

6. Avoid pre-packaged or convenience foods.

Pre-packaged and convenience foods are generally more expensive than their unprocessed counterparts. In addition, they often contain unhealthy ingredients that you would be better off avoiding. Whenever possible, choose fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein sources instead of processed foods.

7. Bring your own reusable bags.

A lot of stores now charge for plastic bags, so it's definitely worth it to invest in some reusable bags. Not only will you save money, but you'll also be doing your part to help the environment.

8. Use cash instead of credit or debit cards.

When you use cash, you're more likely to stick to your budget than if you use a credit or debit card. This is because it's easier to visually see how much money you're spending when you use cash. If you find that you often overspend when using a credit or debit card, try switching to cash for a while and see if it makes a difference.

9. Shop alone if possible.

It can be tempting to bring your kids or spouse along with you when you go grocery shopping, but this isn't always the best idea. If possible, try to do your grocery shopping alone so that you can focus on sticking to your budget.

10. Avoid impulse purchases.

This one is definitely easier said than done, but it's important to avoid impulse purchases if you want to save money on groceries. If you see an item that wasn't on your list but is too good to pass up, see if you can find a cheaper version of it elsewhere.

11. Shop at the right time

If you are strategic about the time that you shop, you might be able to score some great bargains and save money. A great time to shop is in the early evening when many supermarkets reduce prices on fresh produce that is close to its sell-by date.

12. Check the reduced section

The reduced section is often filled with great bargains. Here, you might find cheap options that could be used to make a meal that day instead of one of the more expensive options on the shopping list.

TIPS FOR SAVING MONEY ON ENERGY BILLS

Be energy efficient in the kitchen

Dishwashers often use less water than washing dishes by hand – but only if they're run at full capacity. It's best to use your dishwasher when it's full. By waiting until it's fully loaded and only running it once a week, you could save around £14 every year.

If you're washing dishes by hand, use a bowl in the sink rather than keep your tap running.

When it comes to cooking, some small habits can help you save energy. For example, always put lids on pots and pans when boiling water, and avoid opening your oven door too often when checking food.

And when you boil your kettle, only boil the amount of water you'll need. By simply filling the kettle correctly, you could save £7 off your bills.

Change your laundry habits

Wash clothes at 30 degrees or lower, rather than 40 degrees. And like dishwashers, it's much more cost-effective to run fewer cycles, on fuller loads.

Try to cut down on using the tumble dryer. Instead, dry clothes outside during the sunnier months, or hang them on an airer in a warm, sunny room or near a window. As well as saving money on energy, it'll help your clothes last longer, too.

Use 'eco' mode

Washing machines and dishwashers often come with 'eco' mode, which typically means operating at a lower speed and heat.

If you're not dealing with extremely messy dishes or tough stains on your clothes, it's a good way to save some energy.

Switch off unused appliances

Large kitchen appliances are some of the most energy-hungry devices in your home. While you can't turn off your fridge or freezer, it's a good habit to switch off your dishwasher, microwave, washing machine and electric oven at the wall.

By switching these devices off, rather than leaving them on standby, it is estimated you could save around £30 a year.

Save money on electricity costs

These days, it's likely you're using an increasing number of electronics around the house, particularly if you work from home.

It's also likely that many of them will still be turned on or kept on standby 24 hours a day, even when not in use. While most modern electronics don't consume too much power when in standby mode, keeping loads of devices plugged in can certainly add up on your bills.

Switch to energy-saving lightbulbs

Replace old, inefficient lightbulbs with modern LED bulbs, as these will help you save on your energy bills. They use almost 90% less energy than traditional bulbs, and last longer too.

Turn off lights and devices when they're not in use

Get into the habit of turning lights off when you leave a room. Also remember to switch off electronics when you're not using them, rather than leave them on standby. Unplug devices and turn off plug sockets when not in use.

Rather than keeping your appliances plugged in, unplug them and turn off the plug socket at the wall.

Phone chargers are a big culprit – instead of leaving your charging cable at the plug, remove it and turn off the plug socket. Additionally, there's no need to keep your device plugged in once it's fully charged.

Buy energy-efficient appliances

If you're in the market for a new home appliance, it's well worth getting one with a high energy-efficiency rating.

Energy efficiency is rated in seven bands ranging from A-G, with A being the most energy efficient and G being the least. Some appliances may use an older scale, from A+++ to G.

To give an example, an A+++ fridge freezer will save around £320 in energy bills over its lifetime compared to an A+ model.

Watch your water usage

Water usage goes hand-in-hand with energy usage, as hot water is needed for showers and washing up. And while you might only need heating during the colder months, you'll use hot water all year around.

Additionally, dishwashers, washing machines and tumble dryers are some of the most energy-intensive home appliances. By changing how you use these devices, you can make some huge savings on your utility bills. Overall, it pays to be both water and energy conscious.

Reduce water use in the bathroom

Look into replacing your current showerhead with a 'low-flow' one, as these significantly reduce the amount of water you use when you shower. Try taking a shorter shower, or replace baths with showers, too.

You might also want to think about changing your toilet cistern to a 'low-flush' version. If you have an older toilet, see if you can fit a 'dual flush.'

And if you have a dripping tap, get it fixed – leaky taps can drip around 90 litres of water every week.

Get water-saving gadgets

There are plenty of affordable, water-saving gadgets that are quick and simple to install in your home. What's more, water companies often offer these for free, depending on where you live and what's available.

You could get shower heads, tap inserts, garden hose nozzles and toilet cistern bags that all help to regulate water usage.

Consider long-term energy-saving measures

As well as things you can do immediately to help save money, you could make long-term energy-efficient changes to your home.

While some of these steps will involve more effort to install, plus a larger initial cost, over time it should pay off in terms of energy savings.

Check your eligibility for grants and financial support

Many households qualify for some help with their energy bills without realising it. Due to the current energy crisis, it's more important than ever to see what support is available.

There are schemes and grants available, particularly if you're old, on a low income, or receive certain benefits:

- **Government energy discount scheme** – due to the energy crisis, all domestic electricity households automatically get a £200 reduction in their electricity bills from October 2022 (although this will be repaid back over five years from 2023)
- **[Winter Fuel Payment](#)** – if you were born on or before 26 September 1955, you could get between £100-£300 to help pay your heating bills
- **[Warm Home Discount](#)** – a one-off £140 discount on your electricity bill, if you receive Guarantee Credit or you're on a low income
- **[Cold Weather Payment](#)** – if you're getting certain benefits, you can get a £25 payment for each seven-day period of extremely cold weather between 1 November and 31 March
- **[Boiler Upgrade scheme](#)** – a new scheme running from 2022 to 2025, homeowners can get funding to install energy-efficient low carbon heating systems
- **[Energy Company Obligation \(ECO\) scheme](#)** – depending on your eligibility, you could get help from your energy supplier to get free or discounted home improvements, such as cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, or boiler replacements

Even if you don't seem to qualify for anything, it's still worth checking with your energy supplier or local council to see what help you can get.

For example, if you're struggling to keep up with payments to your energy supplier, they can work with you to arrange a payment plan or offer a grant to help you pay off debts.

SCHOOL UNIFORM

[Community School Clothing Scheme - Information Now](#) This is a North East charity called 'Community School Clothing Scheme' which is based at the Cobalt Business Park near the Silverlink in North Tyneside but covers much of the North East region and all of our local schools. The scheme is run entirely by volunteers and specialises in pre-loved school uniform.

All families can access the scheme on a drop in basis (no forms/questionnaires/or referrals needed) and all uniform is free for anyone who needs it. The centre is open Mondays to Friday 10am - 2pm and alternative Saturdays 10am - 2pm. The telephone number is 07305 963706. They also have baby equipment, work wear and prom dress hire.