



A long for the rides...

*When travel writing, researching the area can really enrich an article. In this piece, for the **Daily Star's** holiday pages, not only did I learn just how very old Blackpool's attractions are, my digging also threw up a quirky little fact to kickstart the piece – and a nice, unlikely little line about elephants....*

THERE'S a guy called Richard Rodriguez who once rode The Big One rollercoaster on Blackpool Pleasure Beach for 112 days. God knows why.

I mean, I get that he likes it – for a thrillseeker, what's not to love about a ride that hurtles you head first 235ft down an almost vertical drop at 74mph? It's brilliant, fantastic – but why spend three months doing that when Blackpool offers so, so much else to do?

I discovered just how much else when the Taylor-Whiffens enjoyed a brief but packed break there. In less than three days I, Mrs T-W and our kids Kallum and Charlotte went to the top of the famous tower, explored dungeons, marvelled at waxworks, saw a circus, rode a tram, visited an aquarium, went swimming, dropped in at a zoo, ate out a lot – oh, and went on nearly 30 funfair rides. And here's the thing – we didn't even scratch the surface.

But even if you're as busy as we were, you still need a good place to stay. You're spoilt for choice here (Blackpool famously has more hotel rooms than the whole of Portugal) but the best in town is the Big Blue Hotel, which is simply superb family accommodation. Aside from all the comforts you'd want – luxurious beds, wonderfully deep bath, hot and cold running

TV channels – the kids have their little alcove where each bunk bed has its own telly and there's even a PlayStation. They do a grand breakfast, too.



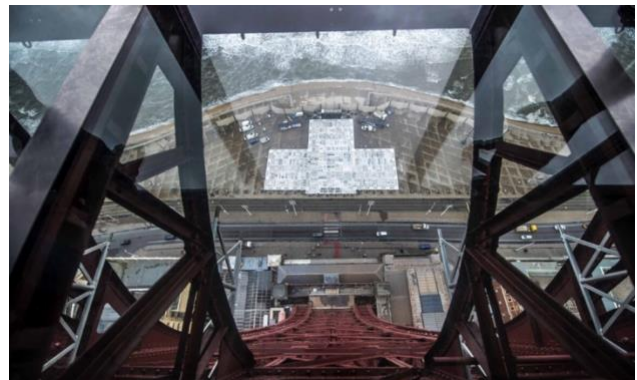
Big Blue guests even have their own gate into the Pleasure Beach, which really does have something for everyone. Twelve-year-old Kallum and I loved the Big One – not as much as Mr Rodriguez, but probably more than the large gentleman squeezed into the seat behind us who, during one breakneck descent, screamed: “My bosoms are slapping my face!”

There are other thrills, too – Infusion, the only inverted rollercoaster suspended over water; Valhalla, a Viking-inspired log flume in the dark; Avalanche, which literally comes off the rails to become a bobsled run. But if you or your kids don't do white-knuckle, there's a gentle but cracking Wallace and Gromit ride which eight-year-old Charlotte loved, and a host of character-based rides in Nickelodeon Land – although water's quite a theme so

prepare to get very wet!

There's nowhere quite like Blackpool for good old traditional fun. From the Pleasure Beach (which has stood for 121 years) you can ride a tram (operating for 130 years) to the Blackpool Tower (open 123 years). But traditional doesn't mean stuck in the past – the Tower has a fabulous 4D show, after which lifts take just over a minute to carry you to the top and a glass floor on which you can choose to stand and look between your feet to the golden sands 485 feet below. A nearby sign says the glass is super-safe, being five centimetres thick and able to take the weight of six elephants – although the sign neglects to say either how they got the elephants in the lift or how many pachyderms they wasted trying.

Just at the Tower there are a host of things to do. Once back on terra firma we loved being spooked by the hilarious Blackpool Tower Dungeons, in which actors take you on a scary but fun-filled journey back into the area's murky past. We loved the circus, which opened with the tower in 1894 and includes a spectacular finale in which the ring fills entirely with water. And then there's the ballroom – a magical place that's a must for Strictly fans who can dance in the famous arena from the BBC reality show.



All the Tower attractions are available on one ticket – which you can extend into a Blackpool Resort Pass which also gets you into the Pleasure Beach, Madame Tussauds, SeaLife, the spectacular Sandcastle Waterpark – the UK's largest swimming pool complex with 18 slides,



chutes, wave pool and other attractions – and Blackpool Zoo, with its 1,500 species of animals.

Then there are the arcades, the shops, the shows, the theatres, the three piers, the casino, the seafront attractions – and a massive seven miles of beautiful, golden sand. Want somewhere to eat? Try the glorious glass-fronted Beach House Bistro with its wonderful sea views, or Las Iguanas,

a Mexican themed restaurant where not only is the food sizzlingly hot but, so the female Taylor-Whiffens tell me, the waiters are too. If seaside for you means fish and chips, you must eat at Harry Ramsden's, or if your tastes are more Mediterranean, there's an excellent Nando's, too.

You'll never get bored in Blackpool, for there is always something new and different to do. Unless you're Richard Rodriguez. But honestly, he doesn't know what he's missing.