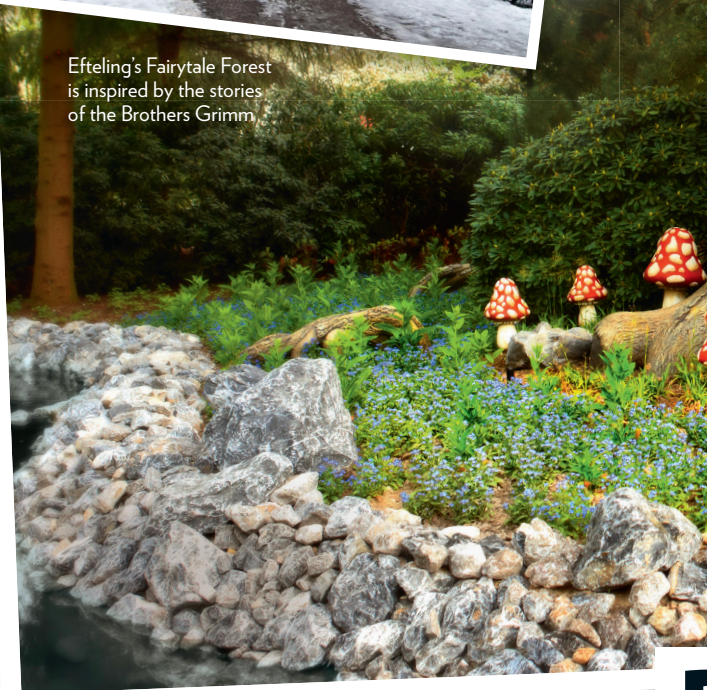




Efteling's Fairytale Forest is inspired by the stories of the Brothers Grimm.



TRAVEL

# PARKS AND RECREATION

Move over, Disneyland. From a fairy tale forest to a construction caper for budding truckers, the next trip you take with your tykes should feature one of these fanciful spots instead, suggests **Aarti Virani**

## Efteling KAATSHEUVEL, THE NETHERLANDS

Enchantment abounds at this pastoral getaway, inspired by the stories of the Brothers Grimm. As the Benelux region's largest theme park, this 65-year-old destination, just 90 minutes from Amsterdam, is an all-season attraction: enjoy its plentiful rides against the backdrop of bonfires and mulled wine in the winter; in the balmy months, wander its Fairytale Forest, which contains a gingerbread house that takes cues from *Hansel & Gretel*, and a snoozing Sleeping Beauty, among other picture-book celebrities. Even the dining options here (like their Pinocchio-themed pizzeria and a palace-inspired pancake house) are fairytale-flavoured.

**MUST-DO:** Ride the Joris en de Draak, a vintage double-track wooden racer rollercoaster.  
**STAY:** The Efteling Hotel (all stays here include admission to the park) is a five-minute walk from here and boasts 20 themed suites, styled after carousels and oceans.  
**MINIMUM DAYS:** Spend two days wandering this whimsical wonderland and explore every nook and cranny at a leisurely pace.  
**ADMISSION FEE:** ₹3,220

## Warner Bros. World ABU DHABI, UAE

Looney Tunes lovers shouldn't miss a day at this splashy indoor amusement park, the latest addition to the Emirates' already extensive entertainment menu. Visitors are welcomed by a golden Bugs Bunny statue before they venture into one of the six themed areas, or "lands," ranging from Gotham City to Cartoon Junction, complete with a Tweety Bird-themed carousel ride and an interactive laser pointer adventure. The billion-dollar playground is situated on Yas Island, a paradise whose other attractions include the world's first Ferrari-branded theme park and a water-filled wonderland.



The park features iconic characters from the Warner Bros universe

**MUST-DO:** Embark on the Knight Flight, a white-knuckle-inducing excursion on a Batmobile.  
**STAY:** With its supersize breakfast buffet and discounted tickets to area attractions, the Radisson Blu Hotel, Abu Dhabi, is the ideal place to hang your hat on this rollicking isle.  
**MINIMUM DAYS:** An entire day  
**ADMISSION FEE:** ₹5,689





Kids can experience life-sized diggers and excavators

## Diggerland, KENT/DEVON/DURHAM/ YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND

Adults and children (provided they meet the height requirements, of course) can steer excavators, dumpers, and other full-size machinery at this exceedingly hands-on destination, which has four separate outposts spread across England. Be sure to try your luck at uncovering buried treasure on a cluster of Komatsu P14 mini-diggers. In case of the occasional rain shower—this is England, after all—Diggerland is also equipped with an indoor section, a generous two-storey play space decked with pedal tractors and a bouncy castle. The park's southwestern Devon location, within easy distance of Dartmoor National Park, is the only one that also includes a campsite, should you decide to go the caravan route.

**MUST-DO:** Experience the Spindizzy, a gargantuan digger bucket that hoists and tosses riders around like specks of dirt.  
**STAY:** The Ship & Trades, a 15-room boutique hotel, located just 20 minutes away.  
**MINIMUM DAYS:** Kent, just over an hour's train ride (or drive) from London, makes a worthy side trip from the British capital, but an overnight stay should more than suffice—add another day for a visit to the Canterbury Cathedral.  
**ADMISSION FEE:** ₹2,240

**MUST-DO:** Squeeze through the hollow wooden pillar (about the same size as the giant Buddha's nostril) in the park's temple hall, which is said to grant instant enlightenment.  
**STAY:** Step back in time at the Nara Hotel, an Edo era-inspired stunner, just two kilometres from the park, once frequented by Audrey Hepburn and the Dalai Lama.  
**MINIMUM DAYS:** 24 hours is plenty of time to experience this culturally rich but compact city.  
**ADMISSION FEE:** Free

## Nara Park, NARA, JAPAN

Hundreds of mostly-tame deer, considered holy messengers by the Shinto faith, roam this lush 19th-century park (one of Japan's oldest) on the south-central portion of the country's main island. The sacred creatures often nuzzle up to visitors for a taste of shika senbei, or special rice crackers, sold throughout the area. Some even wander the grounds' northern portion for an awe-inspiring look at the resident 15-metre Daibutsu, one of Japan's largest bronze Buddha statues.

The park has been classified as a natural treasure owing to its variety of flora and fauna



The park grounds include the city zoo, a lake, museums and more



## Ciutadella Park, BARCELONA, SPAIN

Sprawled in the shadow of a 17th-century military citadel, this 2,80,000sqm green space is an oasis in the buzzy Catalan capital. It's also the site of a zoo—home to over 7,000 animals, dolphin shows and plenty of picnic patches—a monumental waterfall (its ornamental features were crafted by Antoni Gaudi himself), a giant stone mammoth, flower-flanked footpaths and one idyllic lake, which comes dotted with ducks, geese and rowboats. Bonus points for the oversize soap bubbles, courtesy of blowers, scattered throughout its verdant expanse. ■

**MUST-DO:** Explore the park's 128-year-old sculpture garden, replete with a global who's-who of plants such as hydrangeas, wax palms and gardenias.  
**STAY:** The Pullman Barcelona Skipper, a modern 239-key sleep within strolling distance of the park, offers great views as well as kid-friendly garnishes like cartoon-themed toiletry bags.  
**MINIMUM DAYS:** Devote a full day to the park, and at least another two or three to soak in Barcelona's architectural gems, tapas joints and hilltop vistas.  
**ADMISSION FEE:** Free