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As judge rules families CAN take children out of school

CHAOS OVER HOLIDAYS IN TERM TIME

OFFICIALS are racing to close a legal loophole that lets families take children on holiday during term.

In a landmark case, the High Court said parents would not break the law if their child's attendance over

By **Eleanor Harding**
Education Correspondent

the rest of the academic year was sufficiently 'regular'.

The ruling could lead to a rush of families trying to find cheaper flights and hotels outside the school holidays.

It is also a big blow to the Government's

crackdown on unapproved absences. Amid warnings of chaos in schools:

■ Councils were braced for claims from parents who have paid fines for unauthorised absences;

■ School leaders begged parents not to take advantage of the ruling;

■ Holiday companies were expected to respond by hiking prices in term time.

The test case centred on Jon Platt, who

was fined £120 for taking his seven-year-old daughter to Disney World in Florida. The trip, in April 2015, made her miss seven days of lessons.

The 45-year-old businessman claimed he should not have been punished because his daughter's attendance record was otherwise exemplary – 92 per cent

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A PARENT'S PARADISE

by Fiona Hardcastle

SMASH! went the plates. Waah! went the cries. Sorry, said the mothers, bleary of eyes. Splat! went the porridge. Whoosh! went the fruit. 'Can I help with that?' smiled the man in the suit.

Breakfast at Cyprus's Almyra hotel in peak school holiday season. Mini Boden does slapstick. Not that the staff of this chic property set on the Paphos coastline were remotely fazed by the quantity and volatility of some of their youngest guests.

They may have juggled more infants than an over-stretched maternity ward but every demand was met with warmth and grace.

For while this boutique hotel has all the trappings of a lovers' hideaway — sleek spa with adults-only infinity pool, a smattering of double daybeds artfully arranged around a slate-lined pool, a grown-up Japanese fusion restaurant in a romantic setting — come the school holidays and all sophistication goes out the panoramic window.

Yet, unlike larger family resorts whose sprawling geographies demand orienteering skills worthy of a Duke of Edinburgh award, the Almyra's compact grounds (it has only 189 rooms) not only give children a heady taste of independence but enable parents to turn the anxiety dial down a notch.

So after a hearty yet healthy breakfast that ranged from a full English to plates of figs, we ambled all of twenty yards to the heated, outdoor pool from which we seldom strayed.

When the novelty of water guns had passed, our children — Rose, 10, Evie, eight, and Felix, four — explored unsupervised.

FOR the youngest two, who soon gathered a gang of like-minded adventurers, this meant looking for geckos on the herb-lined paths, a spot of table tennis or trips to the small but well-equipped playground.

For the eldest, the thrill of sole possession of the room key and the freedom to make as many outfit changes as she liked seemed to be the big draw.

For my husband and me, the daily highlight was lunch. The popular Ouzeri was a place to savour, not least because it was all of 16 steps from the pool.

Reserve sofa three if you can. From this shady spot overlook-



Pictures: HOTEL ALMYRA / REZ

Families come first at this buzzy and beautiful resort in Cyprus — so let your children off the leash



Fun for all: The Almyra in Cyprus keeps adults and children blissfully content

ing the Mediterranean, the crisp, unfussy salads, fresh fish and succulent kebabs were a slice of Olympian heaven — even when accompanied by the acoustic anomaly of Monty Python's *Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life*, sung each day in Greek.

It was a few days before we made our only excursion into

Paphos, shamefully propelled less by the prospect of ancient artefacts as by the rumour of fendishly good ice cream at the waterfront Pagotomania store.

For a city so rich in classical treasures, it is strange and more than a little sad that the town planners of Paphos do not do more to celebrate and safeguard

their priceless heritage. You'll have to pick your way around the back of Debenhams to find the pillar where St Paul was whipped, while classicists should avert their gaze from 'Eat all you like pizza for 6.95 euros!' signs before arriving at the archaeological zone to see some of the most exquisite mosaics in Cyprus.

Back at the Almyra, the only dilemma was how to make the delicious evening buffet last longer than 15 minutes. True to form, our children piled high their plates and were tucking in with alarming speed before my husband had ordered the wine.

Supper was saved by 20 similarly speedy young diners who joined our brood for an evening of hide and seek on the adjoining lawn —

and the evening stretched to the Bacchanalian hour of 8.30pm.

It was time for the delights of the Almyra to be enjoyed in peace by those who had come without children, those whose week of bliss had been snatched from their grasp. As I heard one elderly couple mutter: 'I thought they'd gone back to school by now.'

TRAVEL FACTS

SOVEREIGN (sovereign.com, 01293 762 003) offers a seven-night half-board holiday to Hotel Almyra in Cyprus from £3,289 per family of four — saving up to £750 per family. Includes accommodation in two interconnecting rooms, return flights from Gatwick, UK airport lounge access (where available), and private resort transfers.

THERE is nothing quite like pitching up somewhere you've never been before and shaking your head in wonderment. Saffron Walden does that for me — a charming market town in Essex with some thrilling medieval buildings. The one occupied by The Cross Keys is regarded as particularly important, dating back some 850 years, but done up a few years ago with great panache.

There are six rooms upstairs, reached via an airtless staircase and a smelly narrow corridor. There's not a lot you can do about that apart from squirling some air freshener.

Our room (£100 B&B) is small and sticky but the duvet and pillows are stuffed with Hungarian goose down feathers and there's a Nespresso machine and iPod docking station.

We can't find the switch to the bathroom. 'Look up,' Sir John Betjeman always advised. And so we do, and see a switch high above the door near the ceiling. Anyone under 5ft would need a chair to reach it.

The restaurant is buzzing — and so is our Portuguese waiter when we are indecisive about choosing a

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

His mission: To test hotel hospitality to the limit



wine. Swiftly, he has five bottles on the table and wants us to sample them all. Apparently the owner has an Australian wine-maker friend and so most of the cheap and cheerful options come from Down Under.

Some of the tables for two are divided off by doors hanging from the ceiling. We eat remarkably well and by the time we conk out I'm

banging on and on about the joys of Saffron Walden. 'You're repeating yourself,' says my wife.

At around 6am we are woken with a start by the street-cleaning vehicle going back and forth for 20 minutes.

Then, when we go down for breakfast in the adjoining Molly's Coffee and Cake Shop I order two boiled eggs, only to be told the chef can do every kind of egg except boiled. 'That can't be true,' I tell the waitress. 'Sorry,' she says.

Overall, there must be better places to stay in Saffron Walden but I would be surprised if there's a more genial option for dinner.

The Cross Keys, 32 High Street, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB10 1AX
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theoldcrosskeys.co.uk
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