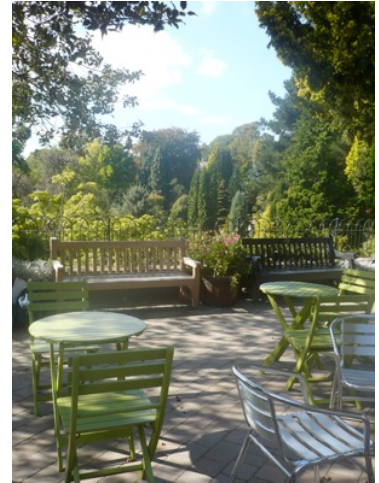


## Park life.

Ready for a bracing winter walk? Guest blogger and park lover, Kath Horwill leads us down the garden path. Find out about more things to do in Manchester at [www.creativetourist.com](http://www.creativetourist.com)

If you're looking for things to do in Manchester over Christmas, a trek round the park might not be your first choice. But if you've had your fill of eating, drinking and watching endless re-runs on TV (and the only winter garden you've seen lately is the one in the Arndale), a bit of green space might be just what you need. So grab your hat and scarf (and some family members, unless you're trying desperately to escape the inane chatter of your in-laws) and head outdoors.

For those who want to stay near the city centre, or fit in a leisurely stroll between tourist attractions, **Platt Fields Park** is ideal. It's a short hop down Oxford Road on the bus, or there's a car park that can be accessed via Cawdor Road. The park is large and flat, so it's easy for everyone to get around. And there are good play and leisure facilities, too: two playgrounds for young children, tennis and basketball courts, a BMX track and skateboard ramps.



Just four miles north of the city centre, **Heaton Park** is big, beautiful and absolutely free. It's easy to get to by road or public transport (it boasts its own tram stop), and there are stacks of paths to explore, all with signposts so you won't get lost. From the top end of the park you'll have fantastic views back towards the city, but head off in any direction and you're pretty much guaranteed to stumble across something interesting. There's an animal centre with farm animals, alpacas, rabbits, guinea pigs and a friendly peacock; you'll also see donkeys, horses, ponies and a highland cow grazing the fields nearby. The Lakeside cafe is a good place to stop for a rest, and if you're interested in architecture, there are historic buildings dotted around the park, including the partially restored Heaton Hall. For the youngsters there are two excellent playgrounds, one of which has a very scary looking slide – not for under 11's or, indeed, the faint hearted.

Still close to the city centre, but rather more tranquil, is **Fletcher Moss Gardens** in Didsbury. While incredibly picturesque and ideal for a family stroll, there is plenty of space to sit, relax and admire the beauty. Don't miss the botanical gardens, chock full of winding paths, streams and waterfalls. There's a lovely seating area outside the cosy cafe if the weather is suitable, with great views over the gardens – worth wrapping up for.

Heading further south to Stockport, **Bramall Hall and Park** offers a lot in a fairly compact space. The black and white timber-framed hall is surrounded by hilly grounds and woodland. You can head down the bank towards the lake for some duck feeding, before crossing the bridge and exploring the woods and stream. If it starts to rain, shelter under the trees or, if you time it right, pay to take a guided tour of the historic hall. There are also tearooms and a toddler playground.

Finally, if you want a park you can spend a whole day at, **Tatton Park** in nearby Cheshire is hard to beat. There are 50 acres of gardens, stunning whatever the season, from the zen-like Japanese Garden to an African Hut and Show House (the latter handy if the heavens open). The mansion is also open for tours, while the farm is open at weekends. If you don't fancy paying for all this (the mansion and gardens are free to National Trust members), let the kids loose on the adventure playground and then explore the thousand-acre park. Stick your wellies on and squelch your way through the mud and the orange leafy mulch on the Beech Walk – you may well see some deer and, if not, you'll definitely get some lovely views across the mere.

*Kath Horwill writes the blog [Parklover](#) and reviews for the [Manchester Literature Festival Blog](#). Image: Fletcher Moss, Kath Horwill*