When it is not possible to ship your little treasures to their doting grandparents for a few days or take time off work to run wild in the great outdoors with them or stay home learning to bake those time-tested family recipes, there are numerous holiday courses and camps available to help fill that void.

Without a doubt some are much better than others. Camps are all very different: they can run for a few hours, a few days, are purely fun or have a real focus. Probably the most important thing to take into account when considering a holiday course or camp is the age group it’s suited to. It may state ‘suitable for ages 6-16’ but in reality it may not work for anyone over 12.

Most tennis and football clubs run holiday programmes all year round, as do swimming schools. In my experience, intensive daily swimming lessons often achieve more than term-time weekly lessons. Multi-activity camps are particularly efficient for those with more than one child.

Your children can all be at the same location with each child participating in their preferred choice of activity. These camps have the option of just one discipline or a combined programme including such activities as drama, art, music, crafts and general games. Most multi-activity camps cater for children aged between five and 12 years with the flexibility of individual days or a week-long camp. The hours are more or less the same as school hours. Some however, also offer extended hours.

When booking a specific activity for an older child (10 years and over) it is advisable to check that there will be a core number of same-aged children attending. It doesn’t matter how great the course content is, if there are insufficient attendees of a similar age, your child will not get the most out of the course. In general, multi-activity camps are better suited to children doing the multi-activity option or for younger children (under 10 years) doing a single discipline.

Metro Golf in Hendon has a nine-hole golf course and driving range and they run camps from Monday to Thursday. It is a relatively short day (10.00-14.00) and lunch is eaten in the café. Children can either eat a packed lunch or buy reasonably priced pizza/pasta-type food. Children (six to 12 years) are coached in groups appropriate to their skill level, and those who can, play on the nine-hole course in the afternoons. It’s great for your child to go with a friend, but this is not essential.

Ballet holiday courses are provided by vocational ballet schools, local ballet schools, as well as The London Children’s Ballet (LCB). Lucille Briance established the LCB 20 years ago when she arrived in London from America and could not find a ballet school offering performance opportunities for her 10-year-old daughter. LCB holds an annual performance with 60 or so auditioned children. In addition, LCB runs a non-auditioned Summer School for nine to 16-year-old dancers. The Summer School is extremely well run, offering a week-long course of full days (9.30am–
of age, but works best for those 10 years and under. These camps are run from South Hampstead High School in Belsize Park and begin at 10am. Younger children have shorter days than the older ones. They are extremely well monitored and supervised and the activities are appropriate for their age. Children need to take a packed lunch to this very popular camp, which is full of regulars.

Lord’s Cricket Academy also runs courses for children from three years old. Admittedly the younger session is only 45 minutes, but it is based at the ‘Home of Cricket’ with car parking on-site and a viewing area for parents, offering a very painless and great introduction to the game. Courses for children seven years and over run from 10am-5pm. There are separate camps for Colts (12-16-year-olds). These camps are structured with skills sessions in the morning (including the use of a bowling machine) and a fun match in the afternoon. There is a café on-site or children can take a packed lunch.

Holiday camp courses tend to be either for one day or a one-off session. Both Leith’s and Jamie Oliver offer interesting courses. Street food for Kids, Teen Baker & Curries for Teenagers are some of the content at Leith’s and, in addition to pasta and pizza making, Jamie’s offer sushi and bread making classes. Classes are small so advance booking is a must.

Not so much a holiday camp, but activities on a more creative level, which do require adult participation or supervision can be found at Art 4 Fun and The Pottery Café. In a more active vein, trampolining at Oxygen Free Jumping in Acton offer one hour sessions.

The perpetually recurring school holidays can be filled with worthwhile holiday camps or courses. It just takes a little forward planning and early booking.

Holiday Camps websites

- **Ballet Train**
  - www.ballettrain.com
- **Central School of Ballet**
  - www.centralschoolofballet.co.uk
- **Drama**
  - www.dramarama.co.uk
  - www.stagecoach.co.uk
- **English National Ballet**
  - www.enbschool.org.uk
- **Football**
  - www.dgsoccer.co.uk
- **Jamie Oliver**
  - www.jamieolivercookeryschool.com
- **London Children’s Ballet**
  - www.londonchildfrensballet.com
- **Lord’s Cricket**: worldlords.org/Cricket_Academy/London
- **Leith’s Cookery**
  - www.leiths.com
- **Multi**
  - www.highgateschool.org.uk/about/mallinson-sports-centre
- **Activity**
  - www.activatecamps.co.uk
  - www.thehighlandgames.co.uk
- **Metro Golf**
  - www.metrogolfcentre.co.uk
- **Painting Pottery**
  - www.art4fun.com
  - www.pottery-cafe.com
- **Sewing**
  - littlehandsdesign.com
- **Trampolining**
  - oxygenfreejumping.co.uk

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