

# RETAIL DESTINATION

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FORTNIGHTLY DIGITAL EDITION



## MCFLYING HIGH: TOM FLETCHER'S CHRISTMASAURUS A BIG HIT AT CRIBBS

### BRINGING CHRISTMAS TO LIFE

Interactive's Jack Hanson shares Christmas tips

### SEASONAL SURGE

MRI Software reports biggest festive footfall boost since 2011

### LIGHTING UP SALES

CACI on how Christmas light switch-on events boost spending



CHRISTMAS

Cribbs MALL

↑ Cribbs VENUE

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## FESTIVE ROUND UP

Colleagues from leading destinations across the UK, report on how Christmas 2025 was for their scheme

**Lizzie Taylor**, head of marketing at Cribbs:

Last Christmas we were delighted to collaborate with founding McFly member and best-selling children's author, Tom Fletcher, to bring his Christmasaurus story to life at Cribbs. Our fun, festive and completely free interactive trail took families on a magical journey through eight beautifully crafted scenes, inspired by key moments from the story, and included Storytime with Santa and a chance to meet The Christmasaurus himself.

To help promote the trail we also partnered with Tom on a series of social media posts across Facebook and Instagram, which attracted eight million views. This social media interest encouraged families from across the South West and beyond to flock to Cribbs over the festive period with over 240,000 people taking part in the trail.

Providing free events throughout the year is a core part of our commitment to the community, and it's been incredibly rewarding to see Cribbs grow as a welcoming public space where people can come together, celebrate, and make memories. It was also great to once again partner with local events team Bakehouse Factory, who worked closely with our creative in-house marketing team to craft every element of the trail with attention to detail and festive flair. Our team have worked with Bakehouse Factory on our previous Mog and Stick Man trails, as well as the Paddington experience in 2021, and we look forward to working with them again on future activations.

## CHRISTMAS

■ **Steve Andrews**, manager at Hildreds Centre, Skegness:

"Footfall increased by just over 10% during the festive season to an impressive 579,929 visitors – not bad for a centre that is only 86,685 sqft in size.

This was mainly due to the beautiful interactive displays that were installed throughout the scheme.

Most displays are designed and hand-carved out of polystyrene by myself and installed by the Centre's staff but last year they had help from Fizzco Ltd and Creations by Inspire who provided the incredible Christmas trees and beautiful Christmas Wish Dragon that mesmerised customers as they walked through the centre, stopping to hear his Christmas story along with the comical Munchkins that adorned their Wizard of Oz-themed grotto.

The Hildreds staged 12 free events for the public in 2025 ranging from Star Wars Day to Character Car events, Pirate Day and even having the Premier League trophy on display, all of which have added to their success and helped to generate an annual footfall of 9,307,082 throughout 2025. And how has this impacted upon sales across the centre, you might ask? Well, the average sales spread across the centre for the year reached an impressive +8%. It is safe to say that Hildreds had a very good 2025.

■ **Beth McDonald**, managing director at Derbion:

The festive period at Derbion was as busy as ever as we introduced a number of immersive activations throughout November and December to enhance the experience for our shoppers. This started with



“Our creative marketing and promotional team understand the vital role immersive experiences play in driving footfall, sales and shopper satisfaction



The Christmas Wish Dragon was a big hit at Hildreds in Skegness

## CHRISTMAS

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the launch of The Snowman and Santa Experience where we welcomed thousands of visitors to relive the iconic story in an immersive theatrical performance before meeting Santa.

On the same weekend we promoted the highly anticipated *Wicked for Good* film with the introduction of two Elphaba and Glinda impersonators who joined us for live performances and photo opportunities. This was followed by three weekends of live acrobatic performances by aerial artists and performers which enhanced the Christmas experience and encouraged repeat visits to Derbion over the festive period.

As well as these activations, in November we hosted our third Style Lab event of the year – a one-day-only pop-up experience which supports our retailers and brings together our visitors' favourite Derbion fashion and beauty brands alongside exciting new activities and delicious treats. This event focused on winter styling and trends, acting as the perfect kick off for the Christmas shopping period.

As a leading retail and leisure destination, our creative marketing and promotional team understand the vital role immersive experiences play in driving footfall, sales and shopper satisfaction, and this Christmas was certainly no exception. The Snowman and Santa Experience saw over 9,400 visitors, while the Wicked performers helped boost our cinema performance on the opening weekend of the film.

However, it wasn't just at Christmas where we hosted immersive experiences which provided lasting memories for our shoppers. Last year, we went all out with 114 days of 2025 activated by a Derbion event helping us to achieve an increase in event visitation compared to 2024. These events are always a hit with our visitors and offer even more reasons to visit Derbion throughout the year.



■ **Michelle D'Vaz-Plant**, head of marketing at London Designer Outlet (LDO):

At LDO we benefit from a diverse London audience and one of our core priorities is to bring families and communities together through our events programme. The festive period presents us with a fantastic opportunity to unite our growing community of shoppers and we place great importance in providing events which help educate visitors on different backgrounds to create a welcoming place for all.

While meeting Santa still plays a very big part of the festive months and continues to have universal

**“By continuing to adapt our offering to cater for our diverse audience, we are able to create an all-day destination for all Londoners**



appeal, drawing in big queues, Christmas is one of several cultural events we celebrate over the winter period. In fact, we start our activation quite early here, in October for the launch of our Discover Together winter trail, a family-friendly activity combining shopping discovery with educational interactive fun, following clues about global celebrations Diwali, Hanukkah and Christmas for rewards and sweet treats. In 2025, the winter trail drew in four times as many participants as we saw the previous year.

Our festive lighting strategy also embraces the warmth and lights of all celebrations – and we leave them up through Ramadan too. By continuing to adapt our offering to cater for our diverse audience we are able to create an all-day destination which makes us one of the best places to visit for all Londoners.

## CHRISTMAS



### ■ **David Pickett**, centre manager at Castlepoint

Like many retail destinations, the festive season is one of our busiest and most commercially important periods with Castlepoint welcoming over 19,000 shoppers on December 23rd alone. Since launching our first Christmas event in 2023 demand has grown, with our festive activations consistently selling out. Our focus has always been to offer shoppers something distinctive and memorable, while nodding to the Christmas traditions they value most.

Technology continues to play a key role in elevating these experiences. Our award-winning 2024 activation, 'Festive Flight', demonstrated how blending technology and well-thought-out staging can deliver immersive, memorable moments on a manageable budget. With the help of a virtual Father Christmas, visitors were taken on an educational, digital tour around the world, discovering international festive traditions and offering a great opportunity to partner with our retailer, TUI.

This year our event 'Candy Cane Lane – The Gingerbread Grotto' blended technology with storytelling to create a magical experience for our

younger visitors with a 'magic' snow globe featuring a talking gingerbread character.

We've also found that nostalgia remains a powerful driver of engagement. When we launched 'Candy Cane Lane – The Gingerbread Grotto' in 2025, our aim was to reimagine the classic Christmas grotto in a way that sparked excitement for children and rekindled warm memories for parents and carers.

Additionally, creating purposeful photo-opportunities throughout the journey ensured the experience felt 'Instagrammable' from the outset, something visitors now actively seek. We were blown away by the response from our shoppers with the event quickly selling out and 669 families enjoying the experience with a whopping 990 gifts given out to children.

Retail destinations sit at the heart of their communities and are uniquely positioned to deliver accessible and affordable festive events. When executed well, these activations not only drive footfall and brand loyalty – but they also create memorable moments that become an anticipated part of local families' Christmas traditions – something we can confidently attest to at Castlepoint. **RD**



## BRINGING CHRISTMAS TO LIFE

December is about more than just decorations, says **Jack Hanson**, founder and managing director at illuminations and grotto expert, Interactive

**C**hristmas magic rarely happens by accident. What visitors see is the sparkle: the lights, the baubles, the moments of wonder. What they don't see is the planning, logistics, risk management and creativity required to make those moments feel effortless.

At Interactive, we don't just put up Christmas decorations, we create experiences. And every experience is carefully designed to bring joy, build memories, and give people a reason to visit, return and share. But delivering festive magic is never as simple as it looks.