

# Have baby, will travel



You and your tot can enjoy the best of British with our baby travel guide

There's no place like home – and the old saying is just as true when it comes to going on holiday. The UK is the perfect place for your first holiday with your baby. Why? It has everything you want in a destination, from brilliant beaches to stunning scenery and captivating city breaks.

But just as important is the convenience factor. It can be daunting going abroad with a baby, especially the first time you do it. But stay in the UK and you know you can buy the brands and medicines you usually use from a nearby supermarket. If you're going by car, you can take all the baby paraphernalia you can squeeze in (which is a lot) and travel at

*Just like with adults, there are no hard-and-fast rules for what will suit a baby of a certain age. Use your own judgement to decide what's most important to you and your family.*

a pace that suits you. Going by train? Your tot will love this 'treat' and you might even sneak in a bit of relaxation time.

OK, so our weather may not always be on your side. But take a tip from your tot. Everything on holiday is new and exciting to him – even if it is raining.

## WHEN TO GO

Going away soon after the birth probably isn't a good idea. Even if you do have the energy after the nonstop feeds and nappy changes, newborns are particularly vulnerable to bugs and viruses. Best to wait until your baby is at least three months when he'll be a bit more settled and robust, but still sleep a lot and won't be as routine-based as older babies. Three month olds are flexible, easy-going travellers, who'll often fall asleep in their infant carriers while you enjoy dinner in a restaurant. And going away after the first few months is a great way to celebrate having survived it all!

Once your baby starts rolling and crawling – probably

at around five or six months – travelling gets more tricky but, with proper planning, you can still have a great holiday. At this age, babies may take longer to get used to a new place, so it's a good idea to stay at one location and take familiar, comforting toys and blankets to settle him. Remember to slow down and try to do things at his pace.

Curious, excitable toddlers are great fun to take on holiday – when they're not driving you mad with their constant demands and inability to do anything you ask them to! Make a point of telling him

about your holiday before you go – the journey, where you're staying and a bit about what it will be like; knowing what to expect will help him feel secure. And once you get to your destination, help your toddler to settle in straight away. You might want to unpack and get organised, but take time to do something with your toddler first – a quick but energetic exploration of the surroundings is a good idea.

## TIMING YOUR TRIP

The great thing about going away with a baby is that you can go whenever you want. Make the most of not being tied down by school terms and book your break for early or late summer, when the schools aren't on holiday. Not only will you find it a lot cheaper (often

half the price or less) but it's more relaxing – even six year olds can seem like giants when they're jumping into a pool next to your baby. During termtime your fellow holidaymakers are likely to be couples with babies or toddlers who can be great companions for you and your tot, as you do the playground/pool/café circuit together.

If you're after sun, time your holiday to take place as near to the school holiday as possible

*At about three months, babies are generally pretty flexible and easy-going travellers – and going away is a great way to celebrate surviving the first few months!*

– early July or mid-September are good bets (but be aware that independent schools can break up surprisingly early). This also has the advantage that you won't be out and about so much with your tot during the hottest part of the year.

It's also good to avoid the half-terms, Easter and the like, as again you'll pay top whack for your trip. Be as creative as you like with your planning. Why not cheer up a grey week in November with a trip to Centerparcs, or enjoy the early spring blooms with a mini-break to a country hotel?

## Where to stay

### HOTEL

Staying at a hotel can offer you a much-needed break →

from your daily cooking and cleaning chores, which means more time to spend having fun with your tot. Hotels are becoming more baby-friendly, and a whole host of hotels, such as the Luxury Family Hotel Group ([luxuryfamilyhotels.co.uk](http://luxuryfamilyhotels.co.uk)), now offer 'luxury' babycare where they take care of everything you can think of, from Ofsted-registered childcare with eye-boggling equipment and great organised activities to organic high teas for children. These hotels will certainly make for a holiday to remember for all of you, but they don't come cheap.

Most hotels, however, will provide cots and highchairs and many will also arrange babysitting or have baby listening, so you can enjoy an adults-only dinner. This booklet offers hundreds of suggestions, but always check the feeding and sleeping arrangements before you book, and especially whether there are any restrictions on babies and toddlers eating in the restaurant. Be aware that you'll almost certainly have to child-proof your room against sharp table corners, windows, sockets, balconies and loose wires.

A downside to hotels is that the room you're given is likely to be a bit of a squeeze, what with the cot and all the baby equipment. This isn't so bad if your baby isn't walking yet, but it can get frustrating with a toddler tearing around the place. It might be worth



*There are plenty of positives about self-catering – more space, flexibility and you can feed your family whenever you like. But before you book, think about if you really want a holiday that involves just as much cooking and cleaning as at home...*

spending more to get the biggest room you can afford.

### SELF-CATERING

Staying in an apartment or holiday home can be a great option for travelling with a baby. They're often better value for money than hotels and are definitely more flexible – you don't have to worry if your baby's ready for breakfast at 6am, well before the hotel chef is, or screaming the house down at midnight. Many places offer a cot and highchair, or can hire them locally for you

for a small price, and have a microwave (which always makes life easier). Some even host a range of baby gear, like sterilisers, baby baths and toys.

Before you book, though, consider whether you really want a holiday that involves as much cooking and cleaning as you do at home. Find out about the eating-out options available nearby and check how child-friendly they are, in case you want a break.

Self-catering means more space than a cramped hotel room, but the downside is

there'll be more potential hazards for a curious tot. Make sure you familiarise yourself with these as soon as you arrive – particularly the stairs, windows which may not have child-proof locks, furniture with sharp edges, hot ovens and hobs that little hands can reach – and take some basic measures, such as removing chairs (or anything climbable on) from under windows. It's worth packing a travel child safety kit, with a portable stair gate and some socket covers, as you'll probably be

## Packing checklist

- Lightweight pushchair* – as small as is suitable for your tot's age.
- Carrier* – either front or back. Great for crowded or buggy-unfriendly places (such as a country path, beach or train carriage).
- Travel potty* – little ones often find unfamiliar 'grown-up' toilets alarming.
- Antibacterial wipes* – great on public transport and conveniences.
- Portable food warmer* – to fit both bottles and jars.
- Portable DVD player* – deals with those 'are-we-nearly-there-yet?' whines from the back seat.
- Child's personal stereo* – preschoolers will love it and you'll love not hearing *Bob the Builder* for the nth time.
- Portable steriliser* – crucial if your baby is bottle fed and under six months, or you're weaning.
- Nightlight* – comfort your tot and make night-time nappies and feeds easier.
- Monitor* – great if you're unsure how audible your little one will be otherwise.
- Blind* – a portable travel blind can help with summer evenings and mornings.
- Travel stairgate* – if you're worried about the stairs in a holiday cottage.
- Booster seat* – great if you're self-catering and don't have a highchair.
- Travel cot* – Essential if you visit relatives en route.

off your guard in these unusual surroundings.

One good way of going self-catering is to book a cottage with friends – this can work out well if they have a baby around the same age, like doing similar things and operate on a compatible schedule (you may not find it so relaxing if, for example, their baby stays up till 9pm if yours is tucked up by 7pm). You can share costs, chores and babysitting, with each couple taking it in turns for a precious night out. Getting up at 6am with your tot isn't nearly so bad if you're sharing that dawn cuppa with a good mate and her little one.

**CAMPING**

Camping has grown massively in popularity in recent years and it's easy to see why. Your toddler will love the freedom of running around the site and the adventure of sleeping out under the stars – and so will you! Plus modern camping equipment makes it a much easier experience, with huge family tents and gadgets to meet your every need. Taking

**Great toys for car and train journeys**

- Finger puppets
- Beads threaded on elastic (over threes)
- Books
- Small cuddly toys
- Fuzzy Felt
- Colouring books and washable pens
- Small cars
- Sing-along and story CDs



*Camping is flexible, sociable, affordable and surprisingly relaxing. And your tot will love the freedom of running around the site and sleeping under the stars.*

a baby camping isn't as hard as you might imagine, so long as you've plenty of warm clothes and blankets for night-time.

There are campsites to suit every taste, from massive well-equipped sites with pools, restaurants, take-away meals and baby baths to simple, tent-only fields. If it's your first time, try a campsite where the tent is set up for you, such as Cornish Tipi Holidays (cornish-tipi-holidays.co.uk). It costs more than traditional camping but is still relatively cheap.

Camping is flexible, sociable, very affordable and – once

everything's out of the car, the tent's up and the kettle's on – surprisingly relaxing.

**HOLIDAY PARK**

If you're sociable and enjoy family-friendly entertainment, but on a budget, a holiday park could be the choice for you. You can stay in a caravan that's more 'apartment' than 'tent' – some even have verandas with sea views. Many have heated pools, kids' clubs and fun for all the family, like golf and fishing. Some even offer babysitting. Check out Haven Holidays (havenholidays.com)

or Hoseasons (hoseasons.co.uk) for more ideas and info. Butlins (butlinsonline.co.uk) has good-value themed family-friendly breaks, featuring fairs, TV characters, pools and more.

**How to get there**

**GOING BY CAR**

Although driving is not without its problems, when all is said and done it's probably the easiest way of going on holiday with a baby. The younger your baby, the easier

you are likely to find it, as most will be zonked out by the car's motion (unless you have a particularly feisty tot!). It will, however, take longer than in your pre-baby days – the key is to make the journey an exciting start to the holiday.

The day before leaving, check your car's tyre pressures, oil and water and fill up with petrol so you can leave promptly on the day. Plan your route (use an internet route planner and print it out), as map reading can be difficult with a screaming baby in the back. Check your breakdown

**Feeding**

WHATEVER THE AGE OF YOUR TOT, WHAT THEY'LL EAT ON HOLIDAY IS LIKELY TO BE ONE OF YOUR MAIN CONCERNS

- If you're breastfeeding, try to time your holiday before you start weaning – no need to take anything other than yourself.
- If you're bottle feeding, you'll need a steriliser, bottles, formula and washing-up liquid. Look for accommodation that has a microwave for warming up bottles or take a travel bottle warmer. Ready-made cartons are expensive but useful for days out.
- If you're weaning, you'll need to take some long-handled, soft-tip spoons and something for you to make purées, like a hand-held blender. Quick meals, like mashed banana and avocado, are a good bet. Get your tot used to jars served at room temperature and take a few favourites in case you need them.
- Disposable bibs are a great idea for day trips.
- If you've got a toddler, you'll generally be able to find some suitable food wherever you go, though it may not be cheap. Baked potatoes and pasta are a healthy alternative to the nonstop rounds of pizza, fish fingers and chips.
- Apple pieces are a cheap, portable snack and can top up your tot's daily fruit and veg portions – often overlooked on holiday.
- Remember, the wider the variety of foods your tot eats at home, the easier he'll be to please on holiday.

cover is up to date. If you do break down, tell the operator you've got a baby as they may make you a priority.

One of the best things about driving is that you can plan your own timescale. The more driving you do that overlaps with nap or sleep time the better, so you could leave before dawn or at bedtime. Do take a break regularly for a loo stop, run around, to warm bottles and let the driver rest.

Pack a bag of essentials to keep in the car – nappies, wipes, drink and snacks – and keep a carrier bag for rubbish or grubby bits. If you're driving alone, a child rearview mirror will stop you having to turn around to check on your tot. In hot weather make sure there's a shade on his window. You should give your little one lots to drink (if you're breastfeeding, stop to nurse him more frequently), rub in sun protection cream and keep him cool with a damp cloth.

### TAKING THE TRAIN

All toddlers love trains and, if your destination is relatively easy to reach by rail, you might

*Driving can be the easiest way to get to your destination – you can plan your route around nap times, stop whenever you like, and sing Bob the Builder as loudly as you like!*

find it a relaxing and enjoyable alternative to driving.

Children under five generally travel free by train. You may have to pay a small fee to book seats, but it's a good idea to do this – you can be in the family carriage if they have one, near the disabled toilet (where the baby changing will be) and the buffet, and by a corridor where you can leave the buggy. If your baby is too small to need his own seat, make sure you get a decent seat for yourself – you may find it difficult to nurse your baby in a fold-down seat.

And why not treat yourself to the first-class supplement? It's often available on the day of travel. Travel is more comfy, refreshments are free and you may find your tot will sleep for longer there, as it's quieter.



### Holiday childcare

- Even if you don't consider supervised childcare necessary while you're on holiday, don't rule it out: a couple of hours 'off' can make a big difference.
- Organised childcare will only work if your tot's happy – and only you know what's likely to suit him.
- Separation anxiety, at around nine months, can make babies clingy; you may find it hard to leave your tot if he's at this stage.
- Before you book a daycare or crèche place, make sure you know the child/carer ratio and the carers' qualifications, whether there are separate nap and outdoor areas, what the activities are and how far you can go while your tot is there.
- Booking a babysitter through your hotel is usually on an hourly rate, so it can be expensive. Check their qualifications and explain your tot's routine, comforters and allergies, and leave your contact number or location. If you do it more than once, try to get the same person.
- If you're going away with grandparents, don't assume they're happy to babysit. Try to discuss arrangements before you go – many grandparents find it hard to say 'no'.

## Mums' tips Take a tip from these been-there-done-that experts

*'I put a few of Joseph's favourite toys away a month before we went on holiday. When I unpacked them at the hotel, he was delighted and played with them all week.'*  
Marnie Millington, mum to Joseph, 18 months

*'Don't go overboard packing too many toys. Your tot will play with all the new things on holiday. When Jake wasn't*

*rolling in/throwing/eating sand at the beach, he spent hours playing with the brass ornaments in the cottage!'*  
Susie Watson, mum to Jake, 15 months

*'Even if you're staying in a hotel, take some washing-up liquid and washing powder. You'll need to wash up your child's bowl and cups, and if you have a leaky nappy, you'll*

*need to wash clothes, too. We learnt the hard way that you can't rely on hotel laundries!'*  
Sherrill Gwilliams, mum to Ella, eight months

*'Pack an extra top for you that you can easily get to during the journey. If you have to feed your baby on your lap, you'll probably get messy, too. A change of T-shirt will stop you having to go round*

*with carrot purée stains for the rest of the day.'*  
Bea Price, mum to Ruby, one

*'I stopped warming Louis's baby jars so he got used to them at room temperature. With lots of walking planned, I knew we wouldn't be able to warm his food every time.'*  
Diana Eason, mum to Louis, seven months

*'We had seats in the train's quiet carriage. It was stressful*

*as people glared when Leo made a sound. Next time we'll be in a 'regular' carriage.'*  
Annette Riley, mum to Leo, nine months

*'We got so fed up with Wheels on the Bus in the car that I made a CD of catchy songs I like for Lily. She loves singing along – and so do I!'*  
Hannah Lewis, mum to Lily, three

*'We drove to Cornwall last summer – a five-hour trip. To*

*make the journey bearable, I wrapped up some small toys and got one out every half an hour. Having to unwrap the toy made it more exciting for Georgie and kept her busy.'*  
Heidi Evans, mum to Georgie, 19 months

*'I bought some double-layered breastfeeding tops, so I felt confident about breastfeeding discreetly in unfamiliar places.'*  
Lucy Scorer, mum to Sonny, five months